About the journal

Hadeeth ad-Dar is a publication of the Dar al-Athar al-Isamiyyah. Every year, the Dar al-Athar al-Isamiyyah organises a series of lectures known as the Cultural Season. Hadeeth ad-Dar was created to share these lectures with academic and cultural institutions and Friends of the Dar al-Athar al-Isamiyyah around the world. Cultural Season 19 will get underway in September 2013 and, as with previous years, will present scholars in a wide variety of fields related to arts and culture in the Islamic world.

The Dar al-Athar al-Isamiyyah (DAI) is a government cultural organisation based on a Kuwaiti private art collection. Since its inception in 1983, DAI has grown from a single focus organisation created to manage the loan of the prestigious al-Sabah Collection of art from the Islamic world to the State of Kuwait to become an internationally recognised cultural organisation.

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This object was selected by the Children’s Art Workshop participants to be the icon for Long Ago Zoo: Animals in The al-Sabah Collection, an exhibition curated by children.
Muslim Communities in Christian Spain: The recovery of an Islamic heritage

At the time the Umayyad caliphate of Al-Andalus was abolished in the Iberian Peninsula (1031), the Northern Christian kingdoms were still small units that had almost no impact in the morale of Al-Andalusi population. Until the 1060’s, reorganisation and the division of power was the main concern of the rulers who called themselves “kings”, and whom we know as “the kings of Taifas (muluk al-tawa’īf)”. Their courtly culture still represented the ideals fostered by al-Hakam II in his construction of the caliphate. Only when the waves of Almoravids and Almohads swept the south of Al-Andalus, while the advances of Castile and Aragon were impossible to stop from the North, did large groups of people from Al-Andalus migrate to Aljamas (al-ŷamā’a). An aljama is also easier to relate to the local areas of Al-Andalus, which were already organised in mòrāri (andalusín). This population was combined with the remnants of those who had stayed after the extensive Christian conquests of the 11th and 13th centuries (which involved the great Taifas of the Banu Dhil Nun in Toledo, and the Abbadíds in Seville). This is the story of their development and survival for the next five hundred years.

Until recently, Muslim communities living in the Northern part of the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages were thought to be a marginal group that lost its religious identity, political power and even literary tradition. By the end of this, I hope you will have a completely different idea of their significance to the survival of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula for the “classical Islamic period” (four centuries) in Spain.

First, the evolution of their settlements:

Evolution from morerías to aljamas

al-jāma’a (Spanish: ajalma) referred to a “meeting or assembly of the whole body of believers united by their common faith”. The term comes into the Spanish language through the influence of the conquest of large areas of Al-Andalus, which were already organised in aljamas. An aljama is also easier to relate to the local town council, so even under Christian standards, it should be good for administration.

The creation of a distinct group identity is usually based on a feeling of shared origins and of common beliefs and values, and on an instinct for survival as a community. Among the Muslims of Castile these feelings were channelled and stimulated particularly through religious institutions. Although religious authorities recommended emigration to the dar al-Islam, practicing the Islamic precepts that are summarised in the five pillars of Islam came to be considered an indispensable “religious minimum.” These actions, together with the right to be judged by their own religious laws and to pray in their mosques, were the basic conditions that the Mudejars had to fulfill in order to be considered part of the larger Islamic community. A few years later, when there was a need to justify the Mudejars’ remaining in infidel lands, an Egyptian legal scholar was to define that community as follows:

“They have mosques in which they pray and [they] are also allowed to fast during the month of Ramadan. [They] are also allowed to speak the language of conversation, at home and in public, must make them [the sultans] victorious and to destroy their enemies.’

The Muslims of Castile fulfilled these conditions, although they suffered from the same disadvantage as experienced by Muslims of other regions: their leaders were not recognised by scholars from the international Islamic community.

The transmission and transformation of traditional legal models by the Islamic community living under Christian domain are traceable through the Arabic and Spanish written sources. They were authorised to use their own local qadd-s, who had the last word in all legal cases and controlled the legal system for the Christian kings. Therefore, Muslim faqih-s were regarded as real “guardians of the faith”, as they have recently been named. They continued to dictate fatwas, and they backed their opinions with some of the most popular legal works in Al-Andalus for centuries, such as the Kitāb al-Tafrī’ by Ibn al-Ŷallāb al-Basrī (10th c.), the Risāla fi l-īfaq by Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 996). The transmission of legal manuscripts took place in three scripts/two languages: Arabic, Castilian translation and Aljamaydī.

The mention of these Arabic treatises also means that their use of Arabic – at least passive knowledge, i.e., reading - by the learned elite was not completely lost until well into the 15th century. This is also proved by recent study of the private records of their meetings, written by their own scribes instead of Christian ones. Name chains were far from lost, and wherever a prestigious Arabic genealogy was not found, it might be “constructed”, based on some well-known nisbas.

There are also significant numbers of books and other volumes that were more private in their usage. These include Qur’an and commentaries, breviaries, books of prayers and books on Arabic grammar.

This community’s way of life left little scope for original creation, and instead privileged a ‘conservative’ transmission of its own identity. Therefore the figure of the mufti from nearby Segovia, Ḥusn ibn Jābir (Yağa Gidelli or Yeye de Gebrí in Christian sources), is exceptional. His Brevario summi, written at the request of the leaders of other aljamas, was composed in Castilian as part of this project of transmission. The work was conceived as a summary of Islamic doctrine, of the ethical norms that a good Muslim should follow, and of the fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence needed to guide a community in Castile. It also contains passages that can be viewed as a direct response to the dangers of (increasingly) xenophobic Castillian Muslims.

Until recently it was thought that the Castillian Muslims had essentially lost the Arabic language, except in a few cases, but there is increasing evidence that the elites maintained it, particularly in documents internal to their community that have not come down to us. Progressive loss of Arabic as a language of conversation, at home and in public, must...
have occurred fairly early in Castile; but for the elite classes the capacity to study and learn the language was one way of distinguishing themselves from the rest of the community. Members of the chief Muslim families of each city travelled to Valencia or Granada and learned enough Arabic to read the Qur’an and works of jurisprudence; they could then pass on the basic religious import of their manuscripts, and record the minutes of their meetings. Castilian Mudejar alfauquis also maintained Arabic for writing certain notarial documents, normally marriage contracts or inheritance settlements, between the 12th and the 16th centuries. Most often they would try to write them in Classical Arabic with the help of a formulary, so as to avoid incorporating colloquial or Romance elements; but in fact the literary language appeared only occasionally amid abundant Andalusian dialectal features and Romance forms.

To these can be added two more, awaiting dating and study, since extant manuscripts belong to the 16th century, but more could be found from the 15th. These include books of Hadith, legends, magic and medicine.

Medieval Christian cities in the Iberian Peninsula could house one or more mosques. Some may have remained after the Christian conquest of the city, while others were authorised by the city’s leaders when the Christian community living there asked for permission that was denied by legal codes, both ecclesiastical and royal, but which in fact was given for practical reasons. As happened elsewhere, these buildings framed the public space in which the Muslim community would circulate and communicate, since they were attached to normal places of assembly: the market and the public square.

The city of Ávila housed an important Muslim community from the 12th to the 16th century. It left the most complete collection of records about Mudejars to be found in Castile for the time being.

As the number of slaves who had come to Ávila increased, and especially if free Muslims were present in the city, we may assume that they were ceded a number of properties that would form the basis of the mudejar quarter. First of all they were granted a mosque in which to pray. The building was undoubtedly given by the Church itself with the approval of the city council, for it was located within the walls, on a site both favourable and controllable. It was close to the cathedral and to the castle, but also in an area that could be closed off and isolated in case of trouble. The first community mosque, the one called ‘del Solarejo’ (‘on the small plot of land’), was next to the church of San Esteban in the very centre of the walled town, at a time when Mudejars preferred to have their houses and shops around the Little Market. This mosque remained in use until the end of the 15th century, probably until measures were begun to create a Muslim quarter outside the walls.

In documents the mosque is called ‘of San Esteban’ or ‘the almaxi (for al-masjid) of the town which is inside the city.’ It was maintained by alms from its congregation, as well as by properties dedicated to its upkeep that the mosque held within the city. These properties were usually houses given in perpetual leasehold to the neediest Muslims of the community; if the occupant died without heirs or if the leaseholder decided to sell the dwelling, the aljama could buy it back. The location of both the principal mosque and the synagogue near the cathedral and within the city walls also suggests a need – as in other Castilian cities such as Burgos – to protect the minority communities.

The second area where Mudejars lived was around La Solana Mosque, which stood next to the city wall, close to the church of Santa María Magdalena and the Great Market. Its congregation would have consisted of the faithful who lived around the market and the squares of San Pedro and Santo Tomé, both of them in the most densely populated central district. From there, these buildings framed the public space in which the Muslim community would circulate and communicate, since they were attached to normal places of assembly: the market and the public square.

The first graveyard was substantially enlarged in the following centuries to house up to 5000 burials, as the demands of the Muslim population increased. That makes it the biggest Mudejar cemetery known in the Iberian Peninsula. It has been the object of several archaeological campaigns, but the anthropological study of the remains is still in the project stage. Streets and corridors were maintained, but lack of space caused the concentration of burials, using the space in three subsequent layers, something we believe might show a family use of certain burial spaces.

A substantial effort was made not to alter the older burials. Only three cases show previous bones moved carefully aside. The rest just have a fine layer of earth over the corpses, so that they would fulfil the canonical order of being in direct contact with it. To keep the body or the head in their canonical position, stones, stone walls or argile walls were used, thus avoiding chalk, gypsum or cooked brick, inside or outside the graves. Wooden covers were used sometimes, but always over earth basements. These elements have also been found in other Mudejar cemeteries such as Valladolid, Murcia or Valencia.

From the 13th century, probably having to do with the beginning of social differentiation of the members of the growing Islamic group, external signs started to be used for the location of burials. The monuments or funerary slabs shared the patterns of contemporary
memorial stones found in other places in Dar al-Islam: three stones, two of them stuck in the ground, and a third one in between, horizontally, with inscriptions or vegetal designs. The more complex monuments were used to mark the existence of an outstanding member of the community, or else the pantheon of a family group. Islamic law discouraged ostentation in public cemeteries, but allowed for external marks to surround the surface of the burial, such as the uncovered walls surrounding several burials in Ávila.

Slabs (rujâma, lauh) were not forbidden by Maliki jurists, but they recommended they not have inscriptions, for then the social status of the deceased would not be proclaimed by his tomb. However, this recommendation was systematically overlooked by political and religious figures alike. There was also place for Qur’anic, religious or poetic inscriptions on their tombstones.

Ávila was no exception. It seems that the very rich Muslims living in Ávila cared for their effective religious differentiation. The symbolic status of Arabic as a sacred language, and the fact that Christian authorities respected the status of the Islamic graveyard, has resulted in a remarkable preservation of Qur’anic scripts in the 15th century slabs of the cemetery. Despite the lack of written copies of the Qur’an in the area - there must have been, but they have not reached us - the suras were transmitted in cursive writing, with diacritical marks.

Muslim contributions to architecture and art in all the territory controlled by Castile are outstanding. First, they were renowned for their skills as carpenters and woodcarvers, to the extent that their work was demanded for the ceilings of the most important palaces and churches in the kingdom.

The study of the heritage left to us by the Muslims of Christian Spain remains incomplete. Its first objective should be to identify their mosques and the limits of the neighbourhoods they occupied, together with the remaining traces of their residence in the cities. Systematic research has begun into the buildings that Muslim architects and masons worked on, and into Andalusi and Mudejar methods of construction — the latter to be understood as preserving the aesthetics of Al-Andalus while adapting it to the new background of Christian customs, and to two different groups of users: Muslims living under Christian lords and Christians who sought fashionable Muslim handicrafts. It is still necessary, however, to explore it in greater depth, placing the works of art in connection to their creators and to the latters’ patrons, for the links between the Muslims and their Christian neighbours that arise out of such relationships. As for the written tradition, further research is needed into documentary and bibliographic sources in the libraries.

In the period of 1958 to 1963 Danish archaeological missions from the Moesgaard Museum in Denmark conducted excavations on Failaka. As a result of these missions a large number of soft stone vessels and fragments were uncovered along with other 2nd millennium BCE material and architecture. Until now, only the ceramic and stamp seals have been published, whereas the stone vessels have remained largely unpublished and untreated.

Soft Stone Vessels from the 2nd Millennium BCE Settlements on Failaka, Kuwait: Results from the Danish archaeological excavations (1958-1963)

Anna Hilton Soria
Presented in English
26 November 2012

In 2008 a Kuwaiti-Danish team reinitiated excavations on Failaka and as a part of these missions was the analysis and study of the stone vessels from the 1958-1963 excavations. The assemblage, consisting of 1,455 stone vessels and fragments stored at the Kuwait National Museum, Kuwait and the Moesgaard Museum, Denmark

Historical and geographical setting of the material
Failaka enters the historical scene in the Bronze Age, around 2000 BCE, when it becomes associated with an expansion phase and economic flourish of the cultural entity of Dilmun. From the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE, Dilmun was a civilisation consisting of seafaring merchants that shipped copper, ceramic, camelian, ivory, stones and other goods from the Oman peninsula, Iran and Indus to the large cities of Mesopotamia.

The Dilmun culture was situated in the Arabian Gulf, namely on the islands of Bahrain and Tarut. From around 2000 BCE, Failaka was embedded in the Dilmun domain, as a trading outpost, due to the island’s strategic location, ideal for transfer and redistribution of goods, and its fresh water supplies.

The island of Failaka is situated in the bay of Kuwait some 15 km from mainland Kuwait. On the south-western shore the three tells of F3, F5 and F6 are located. F3 is a settlement dating back to the early second millennium BCE and contains several occupation phases with the latest circa 1300 BCE. The architecture includes small and a few large-scale houses, as well as a temple structure. F6 contains a large structure that is called the ‘Palace’ and has a completely different architectural layout than the domestic quarters on F3. The ‘Palace’ was likely a production unit, as it contained several installations, including large-scale cisterns and storage facilities. The ‘palace’ dates from the early second millennium BCE to around 1400 BCE. The tell of F5 contained second millennium material, but no associated architecture has been excavated. F5 is dominated by overlying Hellenistic layers.

The archaeological contexts of the stone vessels are sometimes vague, as stone plunders have disturbed the sites both in antiquity and in modern times. Given these circumstances the stone vessels from Failaka were primarily dated by stylistic comparisons with material deriving from sites in the Near East.
Bronze Age stone vessels

Different styles of carved soft stone vessels were in circulation during the Bronze Age (2300-1200 BCE) and have been found widely distributed on sites in Iran, Mesopotamia, along the Arabian Gulf and on the Oman peninsula. Although the Bronze Age stone vessels were a mixed group of undecorated, figurative decorated and geometric decorated vessels, it was not until 1973 that Pierre de Miroschedji conducted the first actual studies of stone vessel styles dating to the 3rd and 2nd millennium BCE.

The past 40 years additional scholars, such as P. Kohl, J. Zarins, H. David and C. Velde, have elaborated this work, constructing typologies and labelling the different styles, which made them able to distinguish chronological and regional differences within the stone vessel repertoire. These include: Figurative style, 3rd millennium BCE undecorated style, Umm an-Nar, Wadi Suq and Late Bronze Age vessel styles. In the Bronze Age layers on Failaka, all of these styles were identified and are discussed below.

Stone types and provenience

A wide range of stones was used to manufacture these vessels, though the vast majority were produced from so-called soft stones that include talc, chlorite and steatite. The remaining types include harder stones such as calcite, basalt, dolerite and limestone with fossil corals. The variation of stones reflects not only a diversity of taste, but also reveal the different workshops in Iran. This makes them able to distinguish chronological and regional differences within the stone vessel repertoire. These include: Figurative style, 3rd millennium BCE undecorated style, Umm an-Nar, Wadi Suq and Late Bronze Age vessel styles. In the Bronze Age layers on Failaka, all of these styles were identified and are discussed below.

Undecorated vessels (2600-2300 BCE)

A small number of undecorated 3rd millennium BCE vessels categorised as bell-shaped, calcite and black and white spotted vessels originally manufactured in Iran, were also excavated on Failaka. All three vessel-groups have been found in mortuary contexts in Iran, e.g. Shahdad, but have also turned up in south Mesopotamian burials like the royal tombs of Ur. These vessels have been uncovered in Iranian and Mesopotamian temples and graves and on the island Tarut, but are otherwise little represented at sites situated on the eastern side of the Gulf waters. This vessel style was, however, represented with a significant number of sherds on Failaka. The wide distribution of this style throughout the Near East has been used as an example to explain interregional communication and long-distant trade of high-status items between ancient empires and elites.

Figurative style (2600-2300 BCE)

A figurative style of vessels was produced in workshops in Iran. This style is also known as Intercultural style, Série Ancienne or Jiroft style. Figurative style vessels are beautifully carved with specific motifs including: a hut or temple façade, combat scenes, scorpions, date palm trees or imitations of basketry, textile and masonry.

In Iran no undecorated vessels have cuneiform inscriptions and this practice seems only to apply for vessels imported into Mesopotamia. One calcite sherd from Failaka carries an inscription, but sadly too little remains to be read. Many vessels were taken as booty from the land of Elam by the kings of Mesopotamia and later donated to deities and deposited in temples, such as Nippur, Girisu, Adab and Ur. Cuneiform inscriptions describe these actions. From 2300 BCE a new style of soft stone vessels known as Umm an-Nar emerged. Previously it was assumed that the figurative style and the Umm an-Nar style were related and that the latter, also known as Série Recente, succeeded the previous in a uniform development. This has proven not to be the case, as the two styles overlapped in time and productions of vessels were shifted to the Oman Peninsula instead of the previous production-centres in Iran, suggesting two distinct styles.

Furthermore, the decoration of Umm an-Nar was incised into the surface, in simple geometric patterns including horizontal lines and circles. The previous figurative vessels had the surface removed around the motifs making the decoration stand out in a high relief. A change of stone types was also noted as a departure from the characteristic greenish soft stone favoured in the figurative style or the calcite and lime-stones used for the plain vessels to greyish stones was now preferred for this style. A number of Umm an-Nar vessels were identified in the Failaka assemblage.

Wadi Suq (2000-1600 BCE)

A new type of geometric soft stone vessels was produced on the Oman peninsula from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE. This style is called Wadi Suq. In general Wadi Suq developed from Umm an-Nar, but these two styles also differed as Wadi Suq included more variation, extensive decoration and different forms. Vessels from Failaka showed marks of being used in household contexts. A rather different context is recorded for similar vessels on the Oman Peninsula, where Wadi Suq vessels like the Umm an-Nar vessels, were primarily found in collective tombs, such as Hili North tomb A.

The distribution of Wadi Suq vessels rarely extends beyond the Oman Peninsula and this decrease could reflect the declining trade between the northern and southern part of the Gulf in the first part of the 2nd millennium BCE. It is known that from c. 1800 BCE the Dilmun culture endured a downfall likely due to the collapse of the Indus civilization and the shift of trade routes and suppliers of copper. This notion is interesting as quantities of Wadi Suq vessels discovered by far exceed any other vessel styles identified on Failaka, which suggest some connections were maintained.

Late Bronze Age (1600-1250 BCE)

A few geometric and undecorated sherds belonging to the Late Bronze Age (LBA) repertoire were found on Failaka. The LBA style was developed from Wadi Suq but included fare more extensive decoration that covered the entire exterior surface of the vessels. This style was also produced on the Oman Peninsula.

Unknown styles

A number of vessels could not be fitted into the established stone vessel styles as they are unique and without parallels in the Near East. This makes the establishment of provenance and dating rather challenging. Scholars such as Theresa Howard-Carter and Branwen Denton have previously mentioned a number of vessels could not be fitted into the established stone vessel styles as they are unique and without parallels in the Near East. This makes the establishment of provenance and dating rather challenging. Scholars such as Theresa Howard-Carter and Branwen Denton have previously mentioned a number of vessels could not be fitted into the established stone vessel styles as they are unique and without parallels in the Near East.
The face is suggested to be a male deity although his identity is presently unknown. A few possible parallels for the unknown deity are available from Failaka, including faces occurring on a number of Style III seals and a small clay head with similar features.

One unique and mysterious vessel has a depiction of a large bearded face with a disk on top of his head. In a repeated pattern three persons with arms raised, walk in procession towards the face and between the worshippers’ heads are low-lying crescent moons. The face is suggested to be a male deity although his identity is presently unknown. A few possible parallels for the unknown deity are available from Failaka, including faces occurring on a number of Style III seals and a small clay head with similar features.

It is clear that some of the images are more fictional than real and must be understood as symbols or metaphors. From Mesopotamian iconography we know that astral symbols represent different deities; the sun represents the god of justice, Shamash, who was the heroic conqueror of night and death. He was the son of the moon god Sin, who was represented by a full moon or a crescent moon, but could also be depicted as a bull or a cattle-herder. He was worshipped in the marshy areas of southern Mesopotamia. Sin’s daughter was the goddess Inanna, a fertility goddess, whose symbol was the star of Venus. Together these three gods formed an astral triad of divinities worshipped in the 3rd and 2nd millennium BCE. It is most interesting and noteworthy that these three symbols are present on several of the Figurative Failaka vessels (figure 5).

Combining the notion of people worshipping astral symbols and astral symbols representing specific deities might suggest which deities were worshipped and the practices behind this worship. The Figurative Failaka vessels offer a small but unique glimpse into forgotten rituals and belief systems of the past. As no comparative vessels could be used to date the Figurative Failaka Style a number of other objects, including Dilmun stamp seals in Style III, clay figurines and altars from the Gulf region were used.

The Style III seals and the Figurative Failaka style vessels share a number of iconographic similarities, such as worship scenes, humans with identical features such as clothes and faces, standards, astral symbols, birds and bull-men. Style III seals have exclusively been excavated on Bahrain and Failaka. As some of the Style III seals were inscribed with cuneiform, specialists such as J.J. Glassner and B. Denton have suggested a date spanning from the late Old Babylonian period to the early Kassite period for these seals (c. 1700-1450 BCE). These period coincide with period 3A-3B (c. 1725-1550 BCE) on Failaka. Based on the strong iconographic similarities, as well as the fact that Figurative Failaka vessels were predominantly found in 3A-3B layers, it is suggested that a dating of this unknown style be around 1700-1500 BCE.

Cuneiform and Undecorated (2nd millennium BCE)

A number of vessel forms are present in this category from which two shapes are pronounced and unique. One is a group of bowls with characteristic conical stepped ridges near the base found both on plain, cuneiform and Figurative Failaka vessels. A few tentative parallels are available for this vessel shape, which suggest a date of 18th - 14th century BCE.

The second group is a type of plate or small altar. Some are plain while others are inscribed in cuneiform. One bears an inscription, which Glassner suggests to be the name of a temple. Several of these altar plates have additionally turned up in the French and Kuwaiti-Danish excavations of the temple on F6. These altar plates have some affiliations with Mesopotamia and one similar plate in the British Museum was dedicated to Enmahgalanna, the high priestess of the moon god at Ur dating to around 2043 BCE.

A number of cuneiform inscribed vessels seem to have been used in cultic settings as the writing mentions local deities such as Inzak of Agarum, the patron god of Dilmun. Furthermore, a big temple and the temple of Inzak, is mentioned on these sherds.

Cuneiform inscribed vessels are not known south of Failaik except for one sherd found on the surface of Qal’a-at-al-Bahrain on the northern coast of Bahrain. Interestingly, this sherd also mentions the Dilmun deity Inzak. It is worth noting that none of the sherds found in the Dilmun orbit have any statements of being achieved by looting, unlike the previously mentioned 3rd millennium BCE vessels recovered in Mesopotamia. So, why this difference? Was it because statements of looting exclusively related to a particular fashion conducted by Mesopotamian kings in the 3rd millennium BCE? Or was it simply because these vessels were manufactured within Dilmun territory and therefore did not have to be claimed as booty?

Stone vessels from Failaka demonstrated diverse vessel shapes and types of decoration that were produced from a variety of soft stones that could be grouped into the seven styles just discussed. These different styles were dated on stylistic comparisons and this section provides a brief discussion on how they relate to the settlement phases on Failaka.

The 3rd millennium BCE styles, that of the Figurative Style, the undecorated groups and the Umm An-Nar style, all date prior to the first settlement phases (Period 1, c. 1950 BCE) on tell F3, F6 and F5. These styles were nonetheless found scattered in all Bronze Age layers, but with the greatest concentration in period 3A to 4A layers (c. 1725-1450 BCE). That 3rd millennium BCE vessels were found in later and completely different contexts, far from their original production sites, suggests a different and secondary use on Failaka.

The lack of extensive wear-marks suggests that 3rd millennium BCE vessels were not used on a domestic level, but might be related to contexts of reuse on Failaka, as sherds occasionally had secondary cutting marks and intentional breaks. The reworking of stone vessels into new objects, e.g. beads, pendants, spindle-whorls,loom-weights and fishnet-sinkers, could explain the presence of this early material on Failaka. It is suggested that the 3rd millennium vessels arrived on the island after they fell out of use in the Gulf region for a period before they arrived on Failaka in 2nd millennium BCE contexts to serve as raw material for new objects.

The Wadi Suq and Late Bronze Age styles dating to the 2nd millennium BCE, as well as the new identified styles date contemporary with the settlement phases on Failaka. It is not surprising to find Wadi Suq vessels in all settlement layers or that the Late Bronze Age vessels appears from period 4A (c.1450 BCE) Wadi Suq vessels were used on a household level, as traces of soot, heat, residue and wear marks are present. Vessels were not immediately discarded when broken, but mended and further utilised.

The new style groups, i.e. Figurative Failaka Style and 2nd millennium undecorated and cuneiform inscribed vessels, were found in layers dating from period 3A to 4B (c. 1725-1300 BCE). These vessels were used differently than the contemporary Wadi Suq vessels, as they lacked domestic marks. Judging from their decoration that often depicts worship and procession scenes and the cuneiform references, these vessels should likely be associated with cultic practices.

It is possible that these newly identified 2nd millennium BCE styles were produced in the Arabian Gulf, but whether they were purely of a local origin is still under discussion. There are clear influences from the southern Dilmun traditions (e.g. iconography and references to local deities) and the choices of stone types used for these vessels are similar to vessels manufactured on the Oman Peninsula. Nevertheless, Mesopotamian iconography and cuneiform are also present.
It is most interesting that the dating of these vessels (c.1700-1500 BCE) is contemporary with the 1st Sealand Dynasty lying just north of Failaka in the marshy areas of southern Mesopotamia. This legendary kingdom has not yet been located and is only known from cuneiform texts. Generally very little is known about this period in South Mesopotamia. It is known that trade and merchants from the Gulf had to pass through these areas belonging to the kings of the Sealand dynasty in order to reach Babylon and the other great cities of Mesopotamia. The ceramic tradition on Failaka in these periods also shows influences from the north, but as the southern Mesopotamia falls under a dark age during this period, this connection still remains on a speculative level.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the fascination with ornament as an abstract language of form and color triggered an enthusiastic appreciation of Islamic art, which became conceptualised as a purely decorative tradition. The nebulous notion of the decorative was, however, scarcely informed by discourses on the arts and crafts generated from within the Islamic lands. Simplistic typological classifications of ornament under the overarching category of the eternal “arabesque” underestimated the diversity and historical specificity of distinctive languages of ornament, like those of the Ottomans and Safavids.

These two rival Islamic empires dialogically developed their own “classical” languages of ornament in conversation with one another, during the reigns of Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520-66) and Shah Tahmasb I (r. 1524-76). Medieval Islamic theories of visual perception and aesthetics were reformulated in early modern Ottoman and Safavid texts on the visual arts. After briefly discussing relevant concepts in the written sources, I shall concentrate on the aesthetics and cultural politics of sixteenth-century Ottoman ornament, with some comparative remarks on its counterpart in Safavid Iran. By comparing the modalities of decorative design in these two interrelated “regimes of visuality,” I hope to elucidate the problematic nature of the modernist notion of pure decoration, generally assumed to be merely aimed at triggering pleasurable delight.

Let me begin by drawing attention to the intimate connection between sight and insight in medieval Islamic texts, a connection that underlines the cognitive potential of abstract visual designs going beyond pleasure. Medieval texts emphasising the combined mental and bodily dimension of sensual perception and artistic creation accorded a high stature to skilled craftsmanship, particularly in arts addressing the highest “external senses” of sight and hearing. Stressing the capacity of the five “internal senses” to penetrate the beauty of the inner world, these texts assimilated the perceptual theories of medieval philosophers into a framework of mystical love, whose highest goal is the intuitive perception of divine beauty. The love of beauty, then, allowed for both the formal autonomy of aesthetic value and its place within a cosmos that opened on to the transcendent and sublime.

Abstract ornamental designs, mediating between viewers and objects, could trigger a combination of sensuous and spiritual/intellectual pleasures. Ibn al-Haytham’s (d. 1040) treatise on optics, celebrated for its analysis of the perception of beauty, defines “glancing perception” as an instantaneous recognition of familiar forms firmly embedded in visual memory. By contrast, “contemplative perception” is a longer operation involving the inspection of complex visual forms by the mental faculty of judgment. According to Ibn al-Haytham, the fine details of minute designs such as those found in Islamic art, particularly the intricate patterns found in Ottoman and Safavid ornament, are products of a contemplative process that allows the viewer to gain deeper insights into the beauty of the divine world.

Figure 1: A figurative style vessel produced in an Iranian workshop
Figure 2: A black and white spotted vessel originally manufactured in Iran
Figure 3: A Wadi Suq type of geometric soft stone vessels produced on the Oman peninsula
Figure 4: A Figurative Failaka vessel with detailed carvings
Figure 5: The symbols of three Gods of an astral triad present on a Figurative Failaka vessel

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as the painted decorations and ornaments (naqūṣ) of a wall, the letters of a script, and the difference between closely similar colors is perceived only after scrutiny and contemplation.

The evocative power of abstract designs, often accompanied by inscriptions providing textual cues, enhanced this type of contemplative vision, which is often referred to in Ottoman sources as the "scrutinizing gaze" (imám-i naz̄ar). Ornamental patterns could potentially induce "contemplative perception" and engage the subjectivity of attentive beholders like seductive visual magnets by inviting a close-up way of viewing. They were partly designed to stimulate the cognitive faculties of aesthetic perception, rather than responding to an allegedly Islamic "horror vacui" (fear of the void), or to an equally pathological "cosmophilia" (love of ornament).

The integration of medieval perceptual theories into discourses on the visual arts is exemplified by the twelfth-century Sufi poet Nizāmī's well-known references to the mental origin of images, painted from the "mirror of the imagination." It was so often prepared designs on paper for multiple media. The Amir Ghayb Beg Album indicates that modes of ornament could carry symbolic and sectarian associations in specific contexts, which were not universally shared throughout the Islamic lands. The transmutation of the split palmette vegetal scroll derived from the vine and acanthus. The second mode known as khatā'ī is the Chinese floral lotus and peony scroll, sometimes inhabited by dragons and auspicious creatures, which became domesticated in the Islamic lands by the Mongols after the 1250s. The transformation of a wall, the letters of a script, and the difference in multiple media often feature courtly and hunting scenes of Ottoman Empire. The term rūmī may allude to the predominance of abstract vegetal scrolls—often accompanied by geometric interface patterns—in the ornamental repertoires of the Rum Seljuq sultanate and successor principalities, including the early Ottomans, that initially ruled in Anatolia (Rum). If so, this geographical term assigns a territorial identity to the international islāmī motif, thereby indigenizing it.

The early twentieth-century Western classification of Islamic ornament within four genres of the so-called arabesque (vegetal, geometric, epigraphic, and figurative) is overly simplistic. By contrast, Safavid and Ottoman texts refer to "seven modes of decorative design" (haft aspī or naqūṣī). The earliest reference to these seven modes as a typological repertoire parallels the six or seven "pens" in calligraphy appears in the prefaces of Safavid albums from the 1550s and 1560s. The seven modes consist of: islāmī or îslāmī (vegetal scroll), khatā'ī (Cathayan), farangi (Frankish, European), fassālī (patched-up), aẖr (cloud pattern, or marbled), waq (vegetal scroll with human and animal heads), and giriḥ (knotted, or geometric interlace). This term is sometimes substituted in Safavid sources with "bandī rūmī" (Anatolian knot), which assigns a regionally affiliated to geometric ornament.

Though not always easy to identify, the seven fundamental modes (aspī) with infinite derivative variants or branches (farangi) are the basis for the Ottoman classification of the arts of the book. The Amir Ghayb Beg Album's preface interprets these seven modes and the figural images of painters as mimetic abstractions modeled on the divine artist's wondrous creation: "They follow God's craft from the compass of the spheres to the surface of the earth. / With their gazes fixed on creation, they take an image from every prototype." No clear separation is made here between figural painting and decorative design, in keeping with the preface's agenda to legitimize the depiction of animate beings through a genealogical connection with calligraphy and illumination. This connection was articulated by the theory of the "two pens," formulated in the court of Shah Tahmasb. The theory in question, which linked the scribe's "vegetal" pen with the painter's "animal" pen-brush, found its visual expression in the specimens assembled within Safavid albums.

Sixteenth-century Safavid decorative designs in multiple media often feature courtly hunting scenes as well as inscriptions, demonstrating their intimate connection with the arts of the book. The frequent amalgamation of figural and non-figural designs in Safavid ornamental compositions in diverse media reflects the fluidity of boundaries between decorative design and figurative painting. As we shall see, these boundaries became more rigidly defined in the Ottoman regime of visuality, which was characterized from the 1550s onwards by predominantly non-figural designs in the decorative arts, with the exception of the arts of the book.

The complementary theories of the "seven modes" and "two pens" also appear in Safavid biographical treatises on calligraphers and painters. Various, however, these theories are not always evident in an Ottoman treatise on calligraphers and painters written in 1587. Its author, the polymath Mustafa 'Āli, marginalizes the prominence given in Safavid texts on the visual arts to the first Shi'i Imam 'Ali, in accordance with the Ottoman court's Sunni orientation. There is no mention of his invention of the so-called îslāmī motif, and his competition with artists from China replaced by a different story: the contrast between Shi'i and Sunni circles. In any case, the Shi'i heritage of the Safavid regime of visuality, which was characterized from the 1550s onwards by predominantly non-figural designs in the decorative arts, with the exception of the arts of the book.

The ideal of mimetic abstraction occupies a central position in Ottoman writings on the arts, in which the divinely bestowed power of artistic invention is a key concept. The chief architect Sinan's autobiographies, existing in different versions, are a prime example. The importance of innovation is also stressed in Mustafa 'Āli's aforementioned biographical treatise, which stresses some Safavid artist, the "inventors" (mūcid) of new styles differing from the "Iranian manner" (îslāmī). In my view, this heightened self-consciousness of regional artistic identity, closely associated with dynastic court culture, contributed to the emergence of increasingly differentiated visual regimes in the Ottoman and Safavid territorial empires. The interrelated yet easily distinguishable languages of ornament codified in each neighboring dynasty did not evolve in isolation, but rather in conversation with one another, as these court cultures gradually drifted away from their formerly shared Timurid-Turkmen artistic heritage.
of the sixteenth century, which deliberately departed from previously favored Timurid-Turkmen models. Designs on paper prepared by late fifteenth-century painter-decorators affiliated with the Ottoman court scriptorium had played a decisive role in indigenizing the international Timurid-Turkmen idiom, dominated by abstract islimi (or rumi) and khatâ’i patterns in diverse media. However, this international Persianate aesthetic would fall out of fashion with changing cultural politics in the course of Sultan Süleyman’s reign, around the 1550s.

Archival documents I have published confirm that the Ottoman court scriptorium continued to supply designs and loaned painter-decorators to other imperial workshops, including those of tentmakers, tentmakers, and carpetweavers. In a register of royal expenses from the early 1530s, I came across a revealing reference to drawings made for a patterned court carpet by the leading court painter-designer (naqqâş) Shah Quli, who also refurbished and illuminated a Yusuf and Zulaykha manuscript at that time. This multitalented Ottoman artist had been deported from Safavid Tabriz after its conquest by Sultan Selim I in 1514. Shah Quli officially joined the “royal corps of painter-decorators” in Istanbul in 1520, after initially being paid from the private royal purse. Becoming the chief of that corps in the 1540s, he held this post until his death in 1557. I have argued elsewhere, on the basis of an archival document, that the unrivaled masterpieces of the “Cathayan” (khatâ’i) manner in blue, white, and turquoise ceramic tile panels—later reassembled at the Sünnet Odası in the Topkapi Palace—were based on stencils designed by Shah Quli in 1527-28 for a new kiosk commissioned by Sultan Süleyman.

Shah Quli is now renowned for his ink drawings in the “Cathayan” manner, referred to by modern scholars as the “saz style”. This style evokes an imaginary world of lush vegetation with bold serrated leaves, often inhabited by dragons, phoenixes, birds, qilins, and winged fairies. Although he was a specialist of drawing and design, a biographical dictionary of Ottoman poets (composed in 1568–69) testifies to his wider-ranging skills. According to this source, Shah Quli, who composed Persian poetry under the penname Penahi, was nicknamed the “second Mani of the lands of Rum”. His unsurpassed talent in “figural painting,” rivaling that of Bihzad, was equaled by his expertise in the “seven modes of decorative design” (heft aṣl-i naqqâş) that aroused the jealousy of the “eight paradises.” This account accords well with the absence of rigid boundaries between figural and decorative design in Safavid artistic practice, which had shaped Shah Quli’s training under the master Aqa Mirak.

Given his expertise in decorative design, it is not surprising that Shah Quli’s own pupil and successor, Kara Memi, was a specialist of illumination. Born in Istanbul, the latter would revolutionize the Safavid paradigm of the “seven modes” with manuscript illuminations featuring unprecedentedly naturalistic bouquets of flowers. The naturalism of this new floral style injected new life into traditional abstract floral sprays in the “Cathayan” manner. The “classical” Ottoman decorative repertoire, distinguished by ubiquitous groupings of identifiable flowers, rose to prominence during Karamemi’s tenure as chief court painter-decorator in the 1550s and 1560s.

The new aesthetic that came into full bloom during the third quarter of the sixteenth century found its paradigmatic expression in brocaded silk textiles, Iznik tiles and court carpets. It subordinated the bookish “seven modes” of Safavid decorative design to a selected repertoire of mixed flowers (dominated by tulips, rosebuds, hyacinths, and carnations), often accompanied by eternally blooming plum blossoms. Yet old motifs, such as vegetal scrolls, geometric interlaces, stars, vases, Chinese cloud bands, wavy tiger stripes, triple dots, rosettes and lotus palmettes were not abandoned. The uninhibited fusion of recognizable species of flowers with traditional motifs, excerpted from the “seven modes” of ornament, engendered a remarkably expressive visual language with an unmistakable identity of its own (figure 4). Pushing the ideal of mimetic abstraction to its utmost limits, the selective naturalism of this innovative aesthetic mediated between nature and convention, the real and the imaginary.

The transcultural potential of Ottoman ornament increased with the disappearance of animate forms in the public realm of the decorative arts from the 1550s onward. Thereafter, the restricted use of figural imagery in Ottoman court culture became largely confined to the arts of the book. In my view, this development sharpened the fluid boundaries between “decorative” and “representational” art that
characterized the Safavid regime of visuality. The augmented autonomy of “decorative” design from the arts of the book, and the breakdown of clear-cut ornamental modes encouraged original abstract experiments with form, color, and scale.

The Ottoman preference for legibility and monumentality contrasted with the visual density of Safavid ornament, comprising less naturalistic small-scale patterns rendered with the miniaturist’s attention to detail. The dramatically magnified motifs and contrasting radiant colors of the new Ottoman aesthetic moved away from intricate designs to produce a powerful impact from a distance. Compared to the bold patterns of Ottoman textiles, for instance, those of the Safavids are often saturated with inscriptions and narrative figural imagery, consisting of contemporary themes or excerpts from Persian literature (figure 5). Characterized by greater cultural specificity, Safavid ornament was primarily intended for internal consumption, unlike its Ottoman counterpart that more easily crossed intercultural boundaries. Generally lacking inscriptions, Ottoman luxury products were widely consumed by non-Muslims both within the empire and beyond. The taste for inscriptionless, non-figural Ottoman textiles and carpets in the Balkans, Poland, Hungary and Russia was enhanced by the intentional ambiguity of their sensually appealing large-scale patterns. Ottoman export carpets were also a staple in upper class Italian Renaissance households and decorated the whitewashed Protestant churches of Transylvania.

The implicit parasiticasociations of floral Iznik tiles were in some cases made explicit by accompanying inscriptions. However, such metaphorical interpretations were not readily apparent in Iznik wares, featuring freehand versions of comparable designs invented by potters. These joyful ceramic objects without any inscriptions or intrinsic symbolism appealed to Muslim and non-Muslim customers alike. A set of dishes with coat of arms, commissioned by a European customer, for example, points to the semi-commercial character of the Iznik workshops.

Ottoman ornament not only negotiated intercultural boundaries but also defined the empire’s territorial borders with a cohesive system of canonical signs. The new aesthetic canon helped cement the hegemonic collective identity and taste of the empire’s multiethnic ruling elite. It made visible the augmented magnificence of an increasingly centralized vast empire extending over three continents. With the seventeenth-century decentralization of the Ottoman regime, its elitist visual order would be gradually transformed into a premodern mass culture, governed by the market forces of consumerism and international commerce. By the seventeenth century, the increasingly floral and larger scale ornaments of Safavid portable objects followed suit, when Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) began to search international markets for them. The so-called Polonnaise carpets, for instance, lack inscriptions and are dominated by nonfigural designs with enlarged floral motifs appealing to Western tastes. Thus coming closer to Ottoman precedents, the luxury products of the Safavid court workshops aesthetically adapted themselves to the international demands of export trade in an ever more globalized early modern world.

Since winter 2009 fieldwork has been taking place on mainland Kuwait, specifically between Jahra and Sabiya, examining the development of Islamic settlements from the late-pre Islamic period until the 11th century CE. This project is collaboration between the Kuwait National Council for Culture Arts and Letters and Durham University, Department of Archaeology. Work over the first four seasons is starting to provide an increasingly clear insight into the development of Kuwait through the early centuries of Islam and the development of the earliest Muslim communities in the Kuwait area.

The archaeological record suggests that it is possible to define a five-phase outline of Kuwait’s development from about the 4th or 5th century CE through to the 10th or 11th century CE. This begins with the Hellenistic/Parthian period, although it could also have included the Iron Age and Achaemenid periods (c 1300-300 BCE) about which very little is known in North East Arabia, aside from a few minor finds on Failaka. This paper will set out the key characteristics of each of the stages in this development.

Hellenistic/Parthian (4th century BCE – 3rd century CE)

No definite evidence for activity during this period has come to light to date, although some sherds of Torpedo Jars scattered around the coastal plain might have been deposited at this time and a number of possible cist tombs (none of which have been excavated or reliably dated) might have been created. This period is therefore very much a mystery in this area at the moment and requires further thought and work. In other parts of Eastern Arabia such as Bahrain, Qatar, Eastern Saudi Arabia and the Oman Peninsula material of this period is very dense and it seems that this was a time of high populations and fairly intense activity over much of the region, including southern Iraq. It is possible that some of the so-called Torpedo Jar sites of the later Sassanian period (see below) may have their origins at this time. It is also known that Akkaz and Umm al-Namel islands were both the locations of significant settlements at this time, as was Failaka F6. It seems strange therefore that there is no evidence so far from the Kadhima area for occupation at this time and it seems likely that some evidence will eventually come to light as the survey is extended in future seasons.

Sassanian (3rd – 7th centuries CE)

It is thought that many if not all of the Torpedo Jar sites that have been discovered along the coast can be dated to this period, although some may date earlier (Parthian) and later (8th century). These sites are always located close to the edge of the sea or sabkha and consist predominantly of...
torpedo jar fragments associated with occasional sherds of glazed bowls or jars (usually with a yellow-tinted rather than a blue glaze) and sherds of large storage/transport jars in a thick, creamy white fabric. These sites appear to be quite densely scattered in some parts of the coast (e.g. between Mughaira and Subiyah) and clearly represent a significant amount of activity and an important part of the coast’s history.

A number of new sites came to light in the 2011-12 season in the Mughaira/Subiyha area and two key sites were located further away; one on Miskan Island that was identified during a visit there and a further site which came to light at al-Khidr on Failaka Island during a visit there on the same day. This site was actually first discovered by the Slovak mission during their excavations, when they uncovered two torpedo jar bases buried in a shallow pit in trench 22T on the top of the Bronze-age mound labelled KH1 on the west side of al-Khidr Bay, although, of course, they were unable to understand the significance of this find at the time. This is the first and only torpedo jar site known from Failaka Island - although it seems quite likely that others existed. Its existence, along with the example on Miskan Island, indicates these sites were perhaps quite widely spread across the whole of the northern Gulf and also shows that they cannot all have been solely engaged with the decanting of liquid goods for overland transport into the Arabian interior and that other activities must therefore have been involved.

Although only one such site has been investigated so far, it is possible to suggest that they are all linked to a similar activity or range of activities as their locations and configurations are all very similar. What this activity might have been is not certain but it certainly involved contact with southern Mesopotamia - either through travel to the area or through contact with travellers from that area - because that is the probable origin of the torpedo jars. It seems unlikely that the occupants of the sites stayed on them for long periods of time as there is a very limited cultural assemblage, there is no evidence of structures or domestic activity and in some cases the sites are located on the sabkha which would have been soft, damp or even flooded at many points of the year. The most likely interpretation is therefore that these were temporary trading camps to which Iraqi maritime traders brought goods in torpedo jars from Iraq to be traded further inland via nomadic populations along the coast, or alternatively where locally-produced products were collected and put into torpedo jars ready for ‘export’ via sea to Iraq. Such products might have included dried and salted fish, shell fish, fish oils and paste and bitumen or material brought from the interior such as cheese or incense.

The Early Islamic Period (late 7th and 8th centuries CE)

Many of the ‘Torpedo jar’ sites of the Sasanian period appear to have been abandoned by the later 7th or 8th century although it seems that some also may have continued to be used, as sherds of 8th century glazed wares have been found on some of the larger examples. The precise date of this apparently mass abandonment is not known as our understanding of the Sasanian pottery chronology is not yet good enough and this is one of the questions that the project will need to answer in the coming seasons. It may have occurred during the Sasanian period, at its end, or even some time after it during the early Islamic period. As the date of this change is not known, it is not possible to be certain whether or not there was a period of inactivity along the coastline before the development of the next significant phase of archaeological evidence.

At some point during the later 7th or early 8th centuries we can trace the development of groups of stone houses clustered into small, loosely agglomerated settlements all along the coast. The settlement excavated in Area E is a good example of one of these. The sites recorded and studied at Mughaira are others and it is certain that there are more, for example in the Mudaira area and possibly in the large area between Mughaira and Mudaira where little systematic survey has yet been undertaken. Many of these settlements are made up of small, stone, sub-circular huts with a diameter of less than 3 m. They are not sophisticated structures by any means; they are perhaps the sort of structures that a semi-nomadic population might construct during a yearly sojourn along the coast. Their superstructures would have been made of either mud-brick or wood and their confined space would have been capable of sheltering a small family only for sleeping whilst many daily activities such as cooking would have taken place outside.

Despite their modest accommodation, the people who lived in these structures were not poor. They were using large amounts of imported Iraqi glazed pottery and glass suggesting that they traded with Iraq, either directly or through travelling merchants who visited the coast. In addition to the pottery and glass it is likely that they used other traded commodities that have not survived in the archaeological record, such as textiles and foodstuffs. It is not known what they traded in return for these items; perhaps locally-produced goods such as leather, dairy and meat products or bitumen or perhaps products that had travelled overland from other parts of Arabia. The Kadhimah Project has been able to gain a good insight into the lives of these people through the excavations in Area E and at Mughairah and more will be known once the study of the material evidence has been completed next season.

The way that the larger settlement at Mughairah is laid out, with isolated clusters of structures being separated by two or three hundred metres of empty space, reminds one very much of the way in which a Bedouin encampment is organised. This fact strengthens the interpretation that these settlements represent nomadic communities who...
were in the first stages of giving up their mobile existence.

Close to the Area E stone huts a much more elaborate domestic structure came to light during the excavations in trench EX027 at Area ABC in the 11/12 season. There is no mistaking the difference in architecture, the house in trench EX027 is rectangular, it had three rooms and measures about 7 m by 3.5 m, it is built of stone and mud brick, had stone and clay floors and may even have had a second storey or a rooftop. A small attached room may have been used for cooking or other preparations and a large open area next to the house shows evidence of cooking and other domestic activities. In comparison to the Area E and Mughairah structures this is a veritable palace and must reflect, in its architecture, influence from outside the immediate region - probably Iraq. How then did this structure and its inhabitants relate to the occupants of the Area E stone huts located just 200 metres away? One possibility is that the two areas were not contemporary and that Area ABC came into existence only after the Area E settlement was abandoned. Another possibility is that the two areas were contemporary but that Area ABC was the residence of a trader, possibly an outsider from Iraq, who resided here close to an already-established local community in order to conduct trade with them. As has been demonstrated above, the pottery and chlorite assemblages from the two areas show very marked differences, with Area ABC showing much more marked evidence of trade with places such as India and the Hijaz. Resolving this chronological/social question is something that the Kadhima Project needs to address.

One interesting point is that underneath the Area ABC house there is evidence that a small wooden structure once stood in exactly the same place. A few sherds of 7th/8th century material were found associated with this structure as was a crude millefiori-type glass bead. One possible scenario is that the wooden hut represents the remains of an early mercantile settlement, perhaps a small group of Iraqi merchants who landed here next to a well and perhaps a small local community in order to trade with them (figure 4). Perhaps, as time went by and as the trading relationship developed, the merchants decided to construct a better, more comfortable and secure residence and that is what we see in the rectangular mud-brick house. Alternatively, there may be a chronological development between the two locations with perhaps the Area E huts representing the first steps towards a sedentary lifestyle that were taken by local nomadic community for whom trading contact with Iraqi merchants was an increasingly important part of their yearly cycle. The construction of the ABC house might then reflect a further step towards a fully sedentary lifestyle for part of this same community at a later stage. There are other possible scenarios but at present more evidence, both for the relative date of the two sites and about their material culture assemblages, is needed before more can be said. Clearly though, these two sites have already provided a unique and important insight into the development of the early Islamic community along this stretch of coastline and into the development of the early Abbasid trading network.

The 9th -10th centuries CE

By the early 9th century (c 835 CE) all of the 8th century settlements along the coastline had been abandoned and any trading activities that were going on had either ceased or were taking place elsewhere. Only a few sherds of the distinctive glazed pottery of the 9th century (the ‘Samarra Horizon’ wares) have been found during the survey activity of the Kadhima Project, suggesting that there was in fact a small residual human presence in the area - probably of nomadic people - who were still in contact with Iraq but only on a much reduced scale compared to a century earlier.

What then had happened to the apparently burgeoning trade that was described above? One...
possibility is that it was diverted elsewhere and in this context the site at Shiqaqa in the Wadi al-Batin might provide some vital clues. Not only is Shiqaqa a large site with an unusual and very distinctive plastered building at its core, but it also shows evidence of very high levels of consumption of pottery and chlorite, certainly much higher than is known from all the 8th century settlements along the Kadhimah coast. This is demonstrated by the fact that during a short 40-minute stay, the archaeological team picked up over 900 sherds of pottery from the surface of the site. This can be compared to less than 600 sherds that were retrieved from the excavated trenches in Area E in the 2010-11 season. Most of the material from Shiqaqa is imported from Iraq, and still more appears to have come from other locations, perhaps Iran, perhaps deeper into the Arabian interior. In additions, kilns at the site manufactured fired bricks to line the large cistern that was probably intended to provide water for merchants and pilgrims passing along the route to the Hijaz.

One possible explanation for this configuration of the evidence is that the deliberate development of the trade/pilgrimage infrastructure along the Wadi al-Batin by the Abbasids (contemporary with the Dar Zubayda) might have diverted traffic away from the coastal route leading to a decline in trade and settlement along the coast and a concentration of activity at a few sites such as Shiqaqa in the Wadi al-Batin. In addition, pilgrim traffic may have been increasing as the proportion of Muslim converts in Iraq grew ever higher during the 9th and 10th centuries. This might not be the whole story though, as it is known that a similar disjuncture in settlement occurred at most locations along the coast of Eastern Arabia at some time around the end of the 8th century suggesting that regional political and economic factors may also have been at play in these developments.

It is hoped that further survey along the Wadi al-Batin in the future, together with a more detailed investigation of the Shiqaqa site, will provide further insights into these developments. It is also hoped that this will help to resolve the mystery of this apparently dynamic but highly unstable trading system and the lives of its local participants.

The 11th-13th centuries CE

With the exception of a single sherd of eroded monochrome sgraffito that was retrieved from the excavations in trench EX028 at Area ABC and some possible coins retrieved by Sultan al-Duwish from Area E, no evidence of this period has yet come to light anywhere in Kuwait or indeed, in the immediately surrounding region. It is generally acknowledged that this was a period of decline and limited activity across much of Eastern Arabia and in this respect the absence of any evidence is not a surprise. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that there was no human activity at all. The limited evidence listed above suggests that there was probably a restricted nomadic population in the area who were not consuming and depositing pottery and other material culture in a way that allows their activities to be recognised by archaeologists. It is hoped that further investigation of the archaeological remains of nomadic/seasonal activity will provide further insights into this period.

I was a journalist for 40 years, a foreign correspondent whose job it was to report from distant corners of the world to readers far away. I tried to do this honestly. I won't say “objectively,” because “objective” reporting is something taught in journalism schools but non-existent in practice. Every journalist brings with him or her a certain package – family roots and upbringing, national culture, educational background, religious beliefs or no religious belief, an ability to speak foreign languages or not, a variable degree of curiosity, a natural courage or perhaps an inclination to be wary or even fearful, and yes, also prejudices, of which even they may be unaware. But, like it or not, this is the prism through which they approach the world. So when I say I tried to do my job honestly, I am fully aware that my reporting was inevitably subjective. My “honest” interpretation was inseparable from whom I was. Just as someone carrying a different life package would interpret the same events differently – not more or less honestly, just differently.

I make this confession with certain humility because not infrequently I was wrong. Some reporting is fairly straightforward because everyone has more or less the same facts: there’s been a plane crash or an earthquake, there are victims, there’s a rescue operation, there’s perhaps an investigation. Follow-up reporting may add important details: the plane was badly maintained or the batteries were dodgy; or the earthquake was deadly because, say, schools were built on the cheap. But when it comes to politics, the facts often only make sense when they are interpreted. And they are interpreted to conform not only to the vision of the reporter but also to the values of the readers and even the editors back home. Give us the facts, my bosses would say, then tell us what they mean. Believe me, that is easier said than done.

I spent most of my career as a correspondent in Latin America and Western Europe. Latin America was the more interesting because, when I was there in the 1970s and 1980s, the continent was gripped by instability: American-backed military dictatorships, Cuban-backed guerrilla movements, human rights abuses, economic disarray, drug trafficking, you name it. But it was also more interesting because we were few foreign correspondents covering this. Western Europe is packed with good journalists and good newspapers, but in a sense in Latin America we had a bigger responsibility to get the news out, particularly in countries with censorship and death threats against, even murders of, local reporters. In my case, writing for The New York Times, I really felt I was shaping American opinion about what was happening south of the border.
But was I getting it right? Naturally most right-wing dictatures did not like what I wrote: the nastier ones wrote to me directly, the milder ones would hire American PR companies to denounce my inaccurate reporting. And of course left-wing opponents of these regimes applauded me. But I often wondered, first, would ordinary people – whatever that means – would they recognize their countries in my reporting? And secondly, if someone, say, in New York or Kuwait who had read everything I had written about a country and they then visited it, would they arrive well informed, would they understand the country as a result of my reporting?

These are questions that in practice apply to all foreign correspondents in all parts of the world. But rarely are they more pertinent than right here in the Middle East.

As it happens, my first foreign posting was at the United Nations in New York in 1967, immediately after the Six-Day War. I was a tender 23-year-old in the journalists’ booth when the Security Council adopted its famous Resolution 242 – or rather not resolution, as we were told, it was a draft resolution. Whose objectivity? Who’s to say? There was a long debate, and the political clout in Washington of the pro-Israeli Jewish lobby. So, to put it simply, whatever The Times said, was considered the most challenging foreign posting, and the political clout in Washington of the pro-Israeli lobby. Most of the foreign correspondents were more concerned with what Western governments think and do than what foreign correspondents write, although the irony is that Western policies may be influenced by what reporters file from the region, not least because correspondents have contacts and go places unavailable or unreachable to diplomats for security reasons. Put differently, if a correspondent is killed on assignment, sorry, folks, he was a fine reporter, adios. But if a diplomat is killed, God forbid, an ambassador, now that’s a matter of state.

At The Times, I remember being cautioned against making predictions. Wise advice, no doubt, yet wasn’t it our job to prepare our readers for what might happen, to indicate the way things seemed to be going? Well, certainly over the past two years and on many other earlier occasions, the Arab world has caught us off guard. Revolutions have occurred – and are still occurring – which we did not see coming, leaving us chasing after the facts and struggling to interpret them – even as the facts keep changing.

If it is our job to clarify confusion, all too often our analysis is quickly overtaken by more confusion. We did not anticipate the Arab Spring. We then told our readers – perhaps not in so many words but implicitly – that the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya were a good thing, getting rid of despots, bringing freedom, paving the way for democracy. We also applauded those who were bravely challenging the Assad regime in Syria. And now? We see the future no clearer than anyone else.

It is hardly the fault of journalists when things go wrong. But readers are understandably confused when we get things wrong. Let me give you a small example. I’ve actually been to Kuwait before, in 2003, on my way into Iraq on two days’ notice over Saddam Hussein. And that was when I first had the pleasure of meeting Sheikhha Hussah [Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah, DAI director general] who briefed me on the cultural atrocities committed by Iraq in Kuwait more than a decade earlier. By then I had given up war reporting and was writing about culture and was sent off to follow the story of the ransacking of the Baghdad Museum. Our first story had said the museum had been virtually emptied, that evidence of our oldest civilization had been wiped out. The story made headlines around the world, but, it transpired, it was a tad hyperbolic. What I found when I got there was that, yes, the museum had certainly been looted and some of the most important treasures as well as ancient documents had been hidden and saved. Yet in the minds of many readers, it was the first story that stuck. My story saying, yes, it was bad, but not as bad as we thought was... well, a bit boring.

Perhaps more pertinently, while I was in Iraq, the increasingly-desperate American effort to find weapons of mass destruction was still underway. And of course the American newspapers, including my own, played a significant role in propagating this justification for the invasion of Iraq. But all too soon this untruth was forgotten in the violent chaos that followed. Correspondents found themselves covering a different kind of war in which everyone was some new horror had to be reported. And in the minds of readers and journalists alike, they just piled up, with one day almost indistinguishable from the next. It reminded me of the Vietnam War where, every afternoon, American military spokesmen would announce the day’s body count of dead Viet Cong. These were the facts and they were duly reported; obviously the United States was winning. But in hindsight it is apparent that all those “facts” were meaningless.

The reality is that unending conflicts produce reader fatigue. You have probably heard of a parallel phenomenon: compassion fatigue. That is, when there is a sudden spate of man-made or natural disasters, from wars to tsunamis, and the Western public is bombarded by requests for money by aid agencies, whether NGO’s or international organizations like UNICEF. At a certain point, generosity fatigue or compassion fatigue set in and donations begin to fall away. Well, readers have a similar reaction when newspapers, radio, television and on-line news outlets serve up an unwavering fare of riots, bombings, assassinations, massacres and the like. Journalists have a duty to report them all, but readers feel helpless, they become numbed, they may read the first few lines, then think: Oh, more of the same. This is why journalists leap on stories that, strictly speaking, are anecdotal, yet will grab the public’s attention.

One recent example: the Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousaflzai who was shot by the Taliban last October because she had been campaigning for girls’ education. Hundreds of people have been killed in Pakistan since then by bombs or drones, but she came to personify an entire nation’s struggle against extremism. Her fight for life and her subsequent gradual recovery have been followed closely because we can all identify with a single teenager more easily than an anonymous victim. We’re not being heartless or cynical; it’s simply something we can understand, something that touches us emotionally.

Unsurprisingly, these journalists yearn to stand back from the noise in the belief that they may be better heard. And this yearning has only intensified as the speed of news reporting has accelerated. Twenty years ago, people were happy to get yesterday’s news in today’s newspaper. No longer. Today reporters have to keep writing for their 247 websites, plus they must tweet and blog to show they are first with everything. And at the end of the day, they must write a coherent story for print. Sometimes they are so tied up feeding this new media monster that they have no time to go out reporting.

So how can they escape what has come to resemble a hamster’s exercise wheel? When they can, they write books. They are not the only ones to do so. Hundreds of soldiers who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan have also penned their accounts, often very personal, sometimes dramatic, frequently harrowing, but rarely analytical. That has been left to journalists. I could mention a dozen books written by reporters that throw much more light on these wars than the news reports that they themselves may have filed. If I could perhaps add a personal immodest note: I reported from Mexico for 13 years, then I wrote a book about Mexico. The many hundreds of stories I wrote from Mexico have long been forgotten. The book is still alive.

Yet non-fiction books are also not altogether satisfying. Yes, they have facts, ideas and analysis, but they rarely carry the emotional clout of fiction, they rarely absorb a reader as intimately as a good novel. It is perhaps for this reason that some reporters have engaged in what has become known as literary journalism. That is, the reporter approaches his story in a much more descriptive, personal, well, literary style. Two who were very successful at this were Bruce Chatwin, an Englishman, and Ryszard Kapuscinski, a Pole. A number of writers in The New Yorker have also developed this technique. But while these books and essays are often very well written and entertaining to read, they have a problem: writing that is too literary loses credibility as true reporting. And while Chatwin and Kapuscinski are no longer around to defend themselves, both are now viewed...
with skepticism by old-fashioned reporters like myself. They have come to represent the perils of first-person journalism.

The alternative is to write fiction, pure and simple. And it is very tempting to do so. But, alas, not many novelists by journalists go beyond pulp fiction. And few are successful, though one exception is a French writer, Gérard de Villiers, a former journalist whose sexy thrillers delve into – and sometimes anticipate – real life political or terrorist dramas. He calls his books “faction” and he churns them out, four or five per year, some 200 so far, with close to 100 million in print. And he obviously has good sources in the CIA, M6, Mossad, the ex-KGB or whatever because, amidst all the sex and violence, he usually gets things right. John Le Carré gets the mood right, but Gérard de Villiers gets dangerously close to the bone.

In practice, the worlds of journalism and fiction overlap a great deal. There’s a nice quote from Matthew Arnold: “Journalism is literature in a hurry.” Another aphorism says “Where journalism stops, literature begins.” And yet another that makes us feel good: “Journalism is the first draft of history.” But there are also more disturbing comparisons: “Journalists use the truth to tell lies, novelists use real life political or terrorist dramas. He calls his War I novel, Erich Maria Remarque’s

A result, some reporters writing what are known as extensive research into real situations so that their characters and dramas seem credible. But in the end, the novelist is a free agent, the journalist is not.

There is still another big difference. A journalist has to deal with the “now,” while novelists have no such pressure. Just looking back at wars, the most immediate kind of news, it is rare for writers to tackle them in fiction while the conflicts are still raging. There are exceptions. For the First World War, Wikipedia lists no fewer than 53 British poets, among them Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves, who wrote from the trenches of northern France and whose words are still used to evoke the horrors of all wars. On the other hand, the best known World War I novel, Erich Maria Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front was first published in 1918. And if the First World War seems a long time ago, it was brought to life again by an acclaimed trilogy by an English author, Pat Barker, in the 1990s.

Yes, wars provide fertile material, not only for journalists. The Spanish Civil War brought Hemingway’s For Whom the Bell Tolls, which, unusually, came out just one year after Franco’s victory. For the Second World War, Joseph Heller’s Catch 22 is perhaps the most acclaimed American novel, although Norman Mailer’s The Naked and the Dead and Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five also deserve mention, all published years after V-E Day. Another remarkable book written secretly during the German occupation of France is Irène Némirovsky’s Suite Française. Némirovsky herself, a Russian-born Jew, was arrested and died in Auschwitz, but her manuscript was kept by her daughters and was published only in 2004 and became an international best-seller. You could say that, by then, scholars had explored every imaginable aspect of the German occupation of France, yet, revisited in fiction, Suite Française demonstrated how much more was left to be said.

Then there are Holocaust novels, usually fictionalized memoirs, like Fatelessness by the Nobel prize-winner Imre Kertész, The Long Voyage by Jorge Semprun and Vasily Grossman’s Life and Fate, which use literature to bring an individual human dimension to what was basically industrialized genocide. They too are usually the result of long years of reflection. And of course in non-fiction there are The Diary of Anne Frank and Primo Levi’s If This is a Man, personal accounts which stand apart from any historical study of the Holocaust.

I could go on, but let me pause with one favorite writer, Graham Greene, who made the switch from journalism to fiction early in his career. For many British foreign correspondents, Greene was the novelist we all yearned to be. He had the eye of a journalist, he traveled to the same places we visited, he spoke to the same people and saw the same things, yet he wrote great works of fiction that said more about a place than any number of our stories. I mentioned my time in Mexico. Greene traveled to Mexico in 1938 and spent just six weeks there. Yet from this voyage, he wrote The Power and the Glory and a travel journal, Another Mexico. When I read them more than 40 years later, they revealed to me a great deal about the country I was covering. And much the same could be said of other Greene novels, such as The Quiet American; set during France’s Indochina war, Our Man in Havana, set in Cuba’s Batista dictatorship, and The Comedians, set in Papa Doc Duvalier’s dictatorship.

In that sense, Greene belonged to an earlier generation of writers more concerned with situations than specific events. But they were no less political for doing so. Charles Dickens, who also began life as a journalist, frequently used his pen to denounce the miserable life of Victorian London’s urban poor, never more effectively than in Oliver Twist. And, interestingly, most of his novels were first published as monthly excerpts in newspapers. Emile Zola was another 19th century writer with a strong social conscience, as demonstrated in his masterpiece Germinal, which denounced the struggle for survival of the brutally-exploited coal miners of northern France.

Moving into the 20th century, two British writers extrapolated dark futures for mankind from the world taking shape around them. In 1932, Aldous Huxley published Brave New World, set in the year 2540 when the technological revolution set in motion by Henry Ford’s assembly lines had created a World State. Then in 1945, George Orwell’s Animal Farm: A Fairy Story used allegory to satirize Stalinist totalitarianism where “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” It was, Orwell wrote at the time, an attempt “to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole,” an objective many writers have shared. Four years later, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, he went further, imagining a tyrannical society headed by Big Brother and bringing into our language such contemporary concepts as doublespeak, thoughtcrime and Newspeak.

Over the years, I have had the good fortune of meeting many leading writers, including Greene. And while all were essentially literary figures, most also had strong political opinions which they were eager to express. Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet and Nobel laureate, never wrote political poetry, but whenever we met, we talked politics. The same could be said of Harold Pinter, another Nobel laureate: he didn’t write political theater, but every lunch or dinner we shared was dominated by, in his case, his obssesive dislike for the foreign policy of successive American governments. Still another Nobel laureate, the Portuguese writer José Saramago, was a lifelong dissident, who in 1974, set in the year 2540.

Of course, there is nothing like repression or dictatorship to awaken a writer’s political instincts or, still more, his or her political responsibilities. In the United States, Arthur Miller denounced McCarthyism through his play The Crucible. Norman Mailer denounced the Vietnam War in his novelistic reportage Armies of the Night. But that was then. Now it would be hard to name an American novelist with a strong political profile. And the same is true for Britain and the rest of Western Europe. Our recent wars seem to have gone unnoticed by prominent novelists.

Turn back to lands of oppression, though, and the story changes. Even the Soviet bloc was evidence of that. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag Archipelago, which was smuggled out of the Soviet Union and published in English in 1974, remains the defining literary work of the long Soviet nightmare. In Africa, Nadine Gordimer stood up to South Africa’s apartheid regime, Wole Soyinka confronted Nigeria’s military dictatorships. And both were recognized with Nobel prizes. In Turkey, Orhan Pamuk, another Nobel laureate, has faced persecution for daring to mention the Armenian genocide.goodbye to that regime, Wole Soyinka confronted Nigeria’s military dictatorships. And both were recognized with Nobel prizes. In Turkey, Orhan Pamuk, another Nobel laureate, has faced persecution for daring to mention the Armenian genocide. Therefore, it would be hard to name an American novelist with a strong political profile. And the same is true for Britain and the rest of Western Europe. Our recent wars seem to have gone unnoticed by prominent novelists.

One option is exile. And when we look at internationally-known Arab writers, many have also chosen to live abroad even when they are not prohibited from returning home. I can name several who live in Paris, among them the Moroccan Tahar Ben Jelloun, the Lebanese Amin Maalouf and Mohammed Mousli, a former Algerian army officer who wrote under the pen name of Yasmina Khadra for security reasons when he lived in Algeria and retained it after he moved to France. All have Arabic as their native language and all write in French. Also now living in France, is the great Syrian poet Adonis. And he has been recently joined in Paris by the young Syrian novelist Samar Yazbek, who was forced to flee the Assad regime. Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian novelist who in 1988 became the first Arab-language Nobel laureate, learned of the perils of staying at home: because of his stand against Islamic fundamentalism, notably around the controversy stirred by Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses, he suffered an assassination attempt which almost cost him his life.
Arab writers – and I should add Iranian writers – often face special difficulties. They write in Arabic – or Persian – but find it almost impossible to be published in their home countries if they touch on sensitive political, religious or social issues. At the same time, few have the option of being published abroad because few are the Western publishers able and ready to work; translated into, say, English or French. I have come across the names of a half-dozen Kuwaiti writers but have struggled to find their works in translation. For the West, this is also a great loss because novelists would give us greater insights into the workings of North African and Middle Eastern societies, insights that not even the most experienced foreign correspondent can provide. The proof is that, two Israeli writers, Amos Oz and David Grossman, who are widely read in translation in the West and sympathize with the plight of the Palestinians, have contributed enormously to Western understanding of that intractable problem.

Of course, the difference between leading journalists and prominent novelists goes beyond the way they write. A novelist is an artist whose principal tool is his imagination. And this creative dimension gives him a special aura, a certain mystique, even a unique authority. You might argue that this should also be true of, say, painters, composers, movie directors, choreographers and perhaps even architects. They too may be blessed by a mysterious gift of creativity. And yet writers are different.

My most recent book, _And The Show Went On_, explored cultural life in Paris during the German occupation between 1940 and 1944. And in it, I covered all the arts along with a galaxy of famous artists, from painters like Picasso and Matisse to writers, poets, composers, movie directors, choreographers and perhaps even architects. They may be blessed by a mysterious gift of creativity. And yet writers are different.

Writers are different. In many countries, once a novelist or intellectual has won public recognition, he or she is expected to opine on the hot issues of the day. Some are surprised to find themselves in this role. In a recent interview in _The New York Times_, Orhan Pamuk said: “I am never motivated by political ideas. I am interested in human situations and funny stories.” But he went on to say that he had been pulled into politics and he had become resigned to this. He added: “I perhaps learned that political questions are a sort of destiny for literary writers, especially if you come from the non-Western world.” Yet many others are happy to use the pulpit of newspaper interviews or columns to express political views. And, ironically, these opinions may draw more readers than their novels. They have become celebrity writers. Fame has given them a new audience.

This was certainly my experience in Latin America. And in the dark years I covered that region, the opinions of these writers carried weight. After all, most were opposed to the repressive military regimes in power. And while many were forced to flee and publish abroad, their prestige served to draw attention to the murders, disappearances and abuses taking place in their home countries. One Peruvian writer, Mario Vargas Llosa, who won the Nobel literature prize in 2010, was no exception. In 1989, with Peru close to becoming a failed state because of a violent Maoist revolutionary movement, rampant inflation and a dysfunctional government, he ran for the presidency. He lost to a man who quickly took on the trappings of a dictator, yet Vargas Llosa demonstrated that he was willing to put his prestige as a writer on the line in the name of a political cause.

I’d like to mention another Latin American, a Mexican, Carlos Fuentes, who died last year, not only because he was a close friend, but also because he too personified the writer with a clear political voice. As a novelist, his subject was Mexico. In fact, long before I reached Mexico, my first understanding of the complexity of that country came from one of Carlos Fuentes’s early novels, _The Death of Artemio Cruz_. And by good fortune, within months of arriving in Mexico, I met the writer I had admired from afar. But I soon also discovered his fascination with politics and here his subject was all of Latin America. And he was in a privileged position because, thanks to his fluency in English, he could speak for all of Latin America in the United States. He and Gabriel Garcia Márquez, the great Colombian writer, were even invited to lunch by President Clinton to discuss American policy towards Cuba.

As a foreign correspondent, I also sought out the likes of Fuentes, Garcia Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Octavio Paz and a host of other writers as sources. This wasn’t the same as talking to politicians, but it was an insight into politics and intelligence agents who might share information selectively and spin it to suit their immediate interest. No, these were true conversations with thinkers who stood away from the cacophony of breaking news. They talked about literature, history, religion, ideology, the psychology of their own compatriots, the ancient roots of political struggles and, yes, also the politics of the day. They didn’t give me stories as such – although occasionally I interviewed them for _The Times_. Rather, they gave me a deeper understanding of how their societies worked. And that was invaluable.

What was it in them? Well, like Graham Greene, other leading novelists began life as journalists, although most escaped before the formulaic nature of journalism damaged their writing forever. But their circles of close friends invariably included many journalists. The truth is that journalists and novelists have affection, even admiration, for each other. Journalists are often in awe at how novelists can reinvent the world, but through journalists, novelists can also feel in touch with the real world. So there’s a two-way flow of information and ideas.

I am of course talking about a certain kind of novelist. A fiction writer who devotes himself or herself to the job, the detached style, you know like those French films where Pierre is married to Marie but loves Chantal who is married to Jean-Paul who loves Marie, well, that sort of writer is a long way from the rough-and-tumble of journalism. But if you scan the names of the great writers of history, they usually have more to say because even their family dramas are set in far broader contexts. You might say that War and Peace is basically an extended love story, yet is there a greater account of the Napoleonic war in Russia? In today’s new media age, however, the question of how we feed our minds has become more urgent and perhaps more alarming than ever. It is no secret that newspaper circulation is falling everywhere. Many newspapers are in trouble, a good many in the United States have closed. Even newspapers like _The New York Times_ have been forced to emphasize their websites. Yet, even though the number of people reading _The Times_ on-line continues to grow, the paper faces a problem common to all other papers. Advertising in the printed press has tumbled dramatically and, while on-line advertising may be growing, it generates much less revenue than print. Put bluntly, _The Times_ has less money to devote to reporting. And I’m talking about a paper that still has the best journalists, correspondents and journalists. As the great papers like the _Washington Post_ and the _Los Angeles Times_ have closed almost all their foreign bureaus, France’s three leading dailies, _Le Monde_, _Liberation_ and _Le Figaro_ are struggling to survive; in Germany, Spain, Italy, elsewhere, it’s the same story.

And how about books? Across the West, book sales are also falling, the advances given to well-known writers have been cut in half, and up-and-coming writers have a hard time finding agents and publishers. As it happens, my American publisher is doing well at the moment. And why is that? Well, it published E. L. James’s erotic sado-masochistic trilogy, beginning with _Fifty Shades of Grey_, which has sold some 80 million copies worldwide in barely one year. So, yes, junk still sells. But serious fiction and non-fiction have been badly hit. And it’s not just because of the general economic crisis or even the growing popularity of e-books. Because e-books are cheaper, they generate less income for both publishers and authors. But they are also easier to buy and, in theory at least, as e-books become popular across the world, total sales might level off.

In 1989, with Peru close to becoming a failed state because of a violent Maoist revolutionary movement, rampant inflation and a dysfunctional government,
No, the real problem is the Internet. It is a remarkable tool of communication, so remarkable that it has altered the way a good part of humanity uses its mind. In other words, the time spent on emailing, surfing, social networking and buying online includes time that might once have been spent reading print newspapers and books. I’d add that those who read on-line newspapers also do so differently, grabbing the news but less frequently plunging into long analytical articles which, frankly, are not much fun reading on a screen. So, paradoxically, while never before has so much information been so easily accessible, people are not necessarily better informed. The attraction of easy communication and the very speed of information mean we have less time to think. As Robert Silvers, the legendary editor of The New York Review of Books, put it recently:

“Few seem concerned about the influence of the Internet and new media on thought, feelings, human relations and political responsibility.”

Journalists and novelists are not going to disappear as long as we need information and imagination. But when we prefer the instant gratification of movies, television and the Internet, we are the losers. Fifty years ago, Marshall McLuhan proclaimed: “The medium is the message.” Now it is time to fight back, to escape new media’s giant maw, to recover our freedom to read, think and dream. To do so, we must examine, first, how we educate our children and, secondly, how we continue to educate ourselves. We are at a watershed. Only by turning back to the message can we hope to understand the world around us and our place within it.

Historically the Balkans was full of isolated towns which had their own distinct costume, music, language, silver and decorative designs and motifs. The arms making towns were too small to absorb all the arms produced and weapons were taken across the Balkans to sell at fairs. Sometimes arms were bought from the makers and taken to another town to be decorated and then sold in a third town. This enormously complicates attribution. Furthermore Greek, Slav, Vlach, and Albanian craftsmen were scattered across the Balkans and indeed the Ottoman Empire. It became apparent that arms production in the Balkans was one of the biggest industries in the Islamic world turning out weapons not only for local consumption but also for export across the whole Islamic World.

Warriors were immensely proud of their weapons and added silver decoration whenever funds permitted, so the silver is not always of one date. Arms were worn in a bensilah or selachi, a belt with compartments in front of the stomach into which were thrust pistols, separate ramrod, yataghan and often a kalamdan or pen box. These were kept polished to suggest frequent use and the amount of silver was an indicator to all of a man’s prosperity, since the silver represented his portable wealth. In addition there was always a pair of silver ammunition boxes and an oil box containing mutton fat scented with herbs. The mutton fat was used on the weapons but was also put on the hair to make the warrior especially attractive.

The relationship between a warrior and his weapons was very close, the arms being treated as personalities. In Albania and Greece weapons were given names; Theodoros Grivas’s gun was called Theodoroula, the female version of his name with an affectionate suffix. The silver sword of the hero Odysseus Androutsos was called Asemo, a woman’s name meaning silver. It was claimed he could jump over seven horses and he was famous for...
women in the mountains and their ballads were of men whose swords were their sisters and their guns their wives. A Greek ballad sadly refers to: 'my hand as a pillow, my sword as a mattress and my little flintlock hugged like a wife.' Another song describes how ‘pistols were their brothers and sisters and guns their mothers and fathers. There was no disgrace in being a bandit but it was a hard life in the mountains and the slightest wound meant that one could not outrun the pursuing Turks with fatal consequences.

That said, the mountain men saw themselves as free as birds. In Bosnia and Montenegro the warriors often wore a silver plume in their fur cap called a chelenka, set with stones, said to represent a bird’s wing. These were given for valor and a number might be worn at the same time. An undated Serbian poem ‘Old Vuyadin’ describes with admiration a captured haiduk with ‘a fur hat with twelve feathers in a ring; each feather made of gold, a pound in weight.’ In Montenegro and Serbia, the word soko meaning falcon was commonly used to mean brave warrior. Albanian refer to their country as the land of eagles and themselves as sons of eagles.

The chief warriors in Bosnia Herzegovina also wore silver breastplates called toké which varied from region to region, obviously vestigial armour. These were sometimes worn by Greek Chiefs; and were still being worn at weddings in the early twentieth century.

Before combat promises were made to weapons by their owners and there was talk of feeding them or rewarding them with silver:

My proud gun, my praised sword,
How many times have you saved my life?
Help me now
And I will cover you with gold and
I will cover you with silver.

The haiduks and klephts, robbers from the northern and southern Balkans respectively, lived without running eight leagues through the mountains without stopping when his band was defeated by the Turks. There was no shame in running away. Ottoman and southern Balkans respectively, lived without armies invariably outnumbered the rebels and stopping when his band was defeated by the Turks.

rewarding them with silver:

running eight leagues through the mountains without
stopping when his band was defeated by the Turks.

The manufacture and ownership of firearms became an Ottoman state monopoly under laws passed by Suleiman the Lawgiver in 1524. His Grand Vizier drew up the first law on handguns in an effort to control them. Handguns were to be made by cebeci, or state armourers, paid for by the Treasury. There were armouries with armourers in all the major castles and state workshops at Adrianople and Ezerum and Istanbul.

In 1610 gunsmiths and dagger makers from the guilds in Sofia, Skopje and Plovdiv were ordered to Istanbul to work in the State workshops. But though the law was vigorously enforced in some Ottoman regions it proved ineffectual in many areas, even in Ottoman Turkey where bands of peasants with tufenk or matchlocks terrorised much of the country in the sixteenth century.

The market in arms in the Ottoman Empire rapidly became international. In a list of arms from a Viziers poem ‘Old Vuyadin’ describes with admiration a captured haiduk with ‘a fur hat with twelve feathers in a ring; each feather made of gold, a pound in weight.’ In Montenegro and Serbia, the word soko meaning falcon was commonly used to mean brave warrior. Albanian refer to their country as the land of eagles and themselves as sons of eagles.

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The Turkish gun barrels of the latter half of the 16th century with dragon head muzzles, which they called ejderhan after ejder, a dragon, were replaced in favour of barrels with swollen muzzles which they called karanfil, a name that by extension meant the whole gun. In Turkish, the word means a carnation (or a clove) as it does with minor amendments in Albanian and Serbo-Croat. The carnation, Dianthus caryophyllus, was popular on Isnik pottery and Ottoman textiles in the 16th century. The swollen muzzle on the gun resembles the carnation in bud. Some even have the carnation chiselled as decoration on the metal barrel. These barrels were later copied in Brescia in northern Italy, termed alla Greca and sold in the Balkans. A Venetian contract dated 1680 for alla Greca barrels shows the very low unit price, indicative of poor quality and an impoverished end market.

The market in arms in the Ottoman Empire rapidly became international. In a list of arms from a Viziers armoury dated 1009 AH/1600 CE we find 75 guns or tufenkler from Algiers, Frengi from western Europe, Rūmī or Ottoman, Istanbul, Macări from Hungary, and Alaman from Germany. Elsewhere we find references to Talyan tufenkler, Italian guns. At this time according to Sir Thomas Sherley who was ransomed in Istanbul in 1605, the English had three shops selling arms and munitions in Istanbul.

Throughout their history the Turks had very considerable support from various European states, acting in their own political interests, in the supply and development of firearms. The Dutch and English were considered to have been overtaken by the French in the sale of arms to Turkey in 1738. The same year the Sultan received a shipload of muskets and gunpowder from Charles XII of Sweden in payment for Ottoman support against the Russians.

The Ottomans encouraged a trading network that stretched from the Danube to the Euphrates. Take the town of Sarajevo in Bosnia as an example of what happened in practice. As a point of local interest Sarajevo was the most northerly town in the Ottoman Balkans to which camel trains were taken. Following the Turkish occupation of Bosnia in the mid-fifteenth century the town developed quickly as a result of Ottoman state funding, particularly the construction of ‘Sultān mosques’ and we can assume an immediate need for armourers. The first town defter or record dates from 1480 and records workers in 17 crafts including three resident swordsmiths and by 1526 there was a bazaar of swordsmiths. Sarajevo made yataghans and the kılıd, the Turkish short sword and sabre respectively and Sarajevo watered steel sword blades were exported to Damascus where they were sold as Damascus blades A Muslim gun maker or Tufedžija is mentioned in an archival document or defter from 1528-1536. A sidžil or court record from Sarajevo of 1555/57 mentions cutlers (bičakdžije). There are also scabbard makers listed.

Because it was a frontier region and also close to Italy and adjacent to Venetian overseas territory in the Balkans, called Venetia Ultra Mare, with its capital at Kotor, new firearms technology reached the town earlier than many other more isolated Balkan arms centres. Đorđija, a ‘tabandžija’ (pistol maker) is recorded working in Sarajevo in 1682 but it is likely that pistols were being made in Sarajevo earlier than this.

Sarajevo had a population of 50,000 by the 17th century and Evliya Čelebi describes the city as an emporium for wares from India, Arabia, Persia,
Poland and Czechoslovakia. The arms industry grew as a result of the almost continuous wars fought by the Turks on the Austrian frontier in the 16th and 17th centuries, becoming fixed in the late 17th century due to the second siege of Vienna in 1683.

There were no private gunsmiths in Sarajevo until the 17th century when the protection of the guild or esnaf system allowed them to develop, though curiously, many of the Bosnian gunsmiths were Christian Serbs. Many others were Albanian who worked in their own area by the wooden bridge and made Albanian style guns known locally as arnautke or tančice meaning ‘T’ shaped because of the shape of the butt. Elsewhere, these guns are referred to as roga meaning ‘horned’ because of the shape of the butt. These guns were much lighter than the shishana used by the Janissaries because the Albanians were used to fighting in the mountains and needed an accurate but very portable weapon. This gun illustrates the tendency in the Balkans for very similar guns in appearance to have different linguistic names depending on who owned it and where they lived.

Often retired Janissaries became craftsmen and virtually all the Muslim artisans of Sarajevo, as in other Balkan cities, termed themselves Janissaries. This gave them tax privileges and immunity from arrest. From surviving esnaf documents it is possible to learn many of the names of the actual gunsmiths from the 18th and 19th centuries working in Sarajevo, most but not all in the Gunsmith’s bazaar. The first recorded was Risto Milanović who died in 1709.

The development of gunmaking in the Balkans in the early 18th century can be seen in the life of the founder of one great Bosnian gunsmithing family, Simić-Tufe who was first recorded in the early 18th century. He learnt his trade in Istanbul, settled in Sarajevo and later moved to Zvornik in north east Bosnia and where they lived.

Besides Sarajevo there were many other major arms making towns in Bosnia: Foča, Mostar, Trebinje, Travnik, Fojnica and Konjic, for example. In part these supplied local needs. No peasant or shepherd ever went out to work without two pistols, a yataghan [Ottoman knife or short sword] and a gun for his own protection.

The Balkans was famous for its blood feuds as well as its bandits. Arms from this region were regularly taken by caravan and ship for sale in Asia and Africa. In the early 19th century a caravan of at least 300 horses carrying arms left Sarajevo for Skopje and on to Salonica every year for shipment to Istanbul. Other caravans went from Sarajevo to the port of Split on the Adriatic coast for shipment by sea, two caravans a month in the summer and one a month in the winter. Split received 2,000 guns, about 3,500 gun barrels, 1,000 pairs of pistols and equal numbers of yataghans every year. Amongst this number were about 100 highly decorated guns and pistols destined for the top end of the market. Similar quantities of arms were annually shipped to Rumelia and the Austrian frontier.

This is very substantial for the time and it should be remembered that there were many other towns across the Balkans that were exporting to the Ottoman Empire in similar fashion. Furthermore, there was competition from European arms makers like Liege and St Etienne. Clearly Sarajevo, Fojnica, Dupovo and Foča supplied the Istanbul market with many of their high quality Damascus twist faceted barrels. This raises questions about how many were actually being made in Istanbul and how many were merely assembled and improved by decoration for resale there.

However we must recognise that the demand for arms was enormous. In Montenegro one of the most dreadful curses that could be made was: ‘May you be without arms in your house.’

A number of Balkan guns evolve from the firearms in use in the Ottoman army at that time. For example there were gold or silver decorated barrels called dzeverdani or dzeverdja found in Herzegovina, Montenegro, including the northern Albanian guns from towns like Shkodra that attempted to copy the highly decorated Siege of Vienna Ottoman barrels.

There is a comparatively rare flintlock long gun from Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina, the distinctive feature being the long curved wooden butt. The name, čibukljia is used in Serbo, Croat and Turkish which probably reflects a change of ownership rather than the actual date of the stock.

The most spectacular Balkan gun is the džeferdar. The stock derives from late seventeenth century Turkish guns with inlaid mother-of-pearl stocks while the name comes from Turkish cevherdar and from Arabic jaubhar meaning lustre or jewel. These ‘jewelled’ mother of pearl inlaid guns are the work of gunmakers in Kotor, Risan, Herceg-Novi and Foča, an area comprising Eastern Herzegovina and Boka Kotorska. The mother of pearl came from Italy and was reputedly cut in the town of Risan, the designs initially from Istanbul where work in mother of pearl was a major craft in the 15th -17th centuries.

There appears to have been a large number of Venetian export barrels and locks sent to to Boka Kotorska. The lock on a džeferdar in the Stephanis Collection is signed ‘Chinelli’, the Brescian maker. In the first half of 19th century, as a result of the struggle of the Montenegro people for freedom, which Kotor supported, the town regained its leading gunmaking role with 29 gunsmiths working there. Arms were also made in Perast and other small towns on the bay, home to wealthy sea captains, rich from trade voyages in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

The džeferdars were considered hugely expensive and desirable in northern Albania and were often copied. The The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini which provided the tribal legal code in Albania from the 14th century to this day allowed for fines of various...
amounts to compensate victims. In late editions, the blood price for a death was either 1000 ducats or a déziérdar. It would appear that the value of the gun was based not on its construction cost but on its rarity which inflated its value. Mother of pearl has no Muslim value other than aesthetic but it has a very important association in the Christian world, being associated with the Virgin Mary and the Immaculate Conception. This would have been of great significance to the Christian Bokelians and also to the Christian northern Albanian tribes.

Mother of pearl plaques appear on typical Albanian guns and also on a gun called paragun. Both have diamond shaped mother of pearl plaques with dots, circles and lines cut into the surface which are filled with red or black pigment. These plaques are to be found on 19th century déziérdars, indicating the common regional origin of the work. The déziérdar barrel decoration evolves so that the original Turkish style is scarcely recognisable by the 19th century, though the very distinctive silver barrel inlay continued to be used.

The paragun is essentially a provincial version of the shishana, but of uncertain regional origin. (figure 10) The name comes from a type of fabric used at Christian Bokelians and also to the Christian northern available was used, velvet being common. To this value other than aesthetic but it has a very important

Many of the most important arms making towns were in the central Balkans, Prizren, Tetovo, Peć, Dikova, Shkodra, Elbasan, Berat, Delvino and Dibra, all of which employed Albanian gunsmiths. Prizren was described by a number of people as the most important arms producing town in the Balkans with over 100 gunsmiths shops in the mid nineteenth century. It made guns until the 1950s.

Arms from Prizren were carried by caravan to Salonica and then went to Turkey, Egypt, Asia Minor, Persia, Arabia, and India. The African market was the most important, demonstrated by the fact that the early use of paraguna fabric was a cheap means of copying the elaborate bands of ivory and brass decoration that are a characteristic of the Turkish shishana, both in Istanbul and in Bosnia where the shishana was copied. Later it seems that any fabric available was used, velvet being common. To this was added embroidery or gold braid in arabesques, a design probably faithful to the Byzantine original. Most of the dated versions seen by the author are 19th century. There are two guns in the Benaki Museum with owners and makers names dated 1830 and 1831.

The paragun has a long smoothbore barrel (like the use of fabric testifying to the cheapness and lack of technical sophistication of production). The lock is also unique in its form, being a type of miquelet [a distinctive form of snaplock] of unusual proportions, known as a boylia lock. The origin of the gun remains uncertain but the relative rarity suggests that the area of production was small. The Ottoman influence design of the gun suggests a desire for lightness and its obvious attempts to cut the cost of production suggest an impoverished remote area under Ottoman influence. Evidence points to Bulgaria rather than the north west Balkans as their market but the variety of decoration on these guns suggests they were taken by their owners, probably mercenaries or bashi bazouks, to gunsmiths throughout the Ottoman Empire where local decoration was added to the basic form.

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