

The Missing Link: Examining the supraregional role of Mleiha
in the realm of the Seleucids following the Anabasis of
Antiochus III.

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Aerial photograph of the excavations in Kalba. (SAA/K. Kamyab)¹

¹ <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/oeai/research/prehistory-wana-archaeology/prehistoric-phenomena/kalba>

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Abstract

Ptolemy's map provides a range of coastal settlements on the Gulf of Oman that have not yet been located with the port of Cryptus being of interest to this dissertation and likely to be located either at Kalba or Dibba al Hisn. Hellenistic material provides evidence for Dibba but as I argue Kalba also would have made a suitable port, although this remains speculative. Further investigations could be directed via the Tell Abraq and Ed Dur sites by considering the likely geography required vis-à-vis adjacent to a sabka and near to mangroves.

There is no extant ancient literature on the Gulf of Oman coast and Mleiha site during the 2nd century BCE. The expedition of Antiochus and the campaign of Numenius provide the most extensive accounts of Greek interaction with NE Arabia. Antiochus' interactions with Gerrha provides the point at which Gerrhaen dominance of the region ceases and a site at Mleiha gains prominence. The role of Mleiha is explored in this dissertation as well as considering which of two scenarios unfolds next:

- 1) Gerrha ceases to hold the Arabian monopoly and an offshoot independent kingdom emerges centred on Mleiha.
- 2) Seleucid influence is invigorated in the Persian Gulf and Mleiha is sponsored to provide an anchor of power in controlling the flow of trade on the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf coasts.

The seminal evidence now is the Mleiha coin hoard, a succinct understanding of the coinage discovered will undoubtedly lead to a greater depth of understanding on the populace of the 2nd century BCE. It is a pivotal element as coinage is one of the most direct forms of evidence for understanding the economic and political landscape of ancient societies. Beyond this new depth of knowledge will be a further acceptance of the fundamental and integral role of Mleiha as the key component in the supraregional interactions between the Gulf of Oman and wider Indian ocean sphere of exchange operating in conjunction with the Persian Gulf.

Introduction

Northeastern Arabia continues to yield a range of archaeological intrigue as to its ancient civilisations, further consideration towards some of the major sites in the region remains with the sites at Mleiha, Ed Dur and a potential site at Kalba being of focus in this dissertation along with the recent numismatic discovery at Mleiha. The main point of intrigue remains the lack of a site at Kalba, particularly as its location on the Gulf of Oman provides an entrepot from not only Socotra and Barygaza but also from the south-west and Indian Ocean networks. “There is another range shown by Ptolemy a long way to the west and described as the ‘mountains above [or beyond] the Asabon mountains’”. In reality such a range does not exist. It is placed just east of a promontory called, in a direct translation from the Greek, the “Sacred Sun Promontory”.² Nigel Groom in his 1994 analysis of Ptolemy’s map (Figure 1) opens the door towards filling some of the missing links that exist in northeastern Arabia and prominent scholars on the region can each offer their own perspectives as to the cultural and supraregional growth. This dissertation explores the post Iron Age (so-called Hellenistic) settlements that began to flourish between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE and questions whether this is a result of reinvigorated Seleucid leadership under Antiochus III in the region and the subjection of Gerrha leading to new supraregional nodes centred on Mleiha.

One such scholar, for whom the region held a particular affiliation, is the late Ernie Haerinck. The excavations at Ed Dur and Mleiha were spearheaded and developed by Haerinck and his teams across the 1980s and 90s of last century, revolutionising understanding on the role of SE Arabia at the critical juncture between the Hellenistic and Pre-Islamic eras. Haerinck argued for an independent kingdom establishing itself as the new interjuncture following the demise of the NE Gerrha caravan trade route via dromedary camel and intertwined with the ambition of Charecenian expansionism. For this he cites the lack of a harbour location that contains similar Hellenistic material to that of Mleiha on the Persian Gulf (PG) and the use of locally minted coinage on the

² Groom, 1994, 203.

Gulf of Oman.³ Figure 2 from Sharjah Archaeological Authority provides an overview of the main Hellenistic/Pre-Islamic sites from the Persian Gulf to the inland Mleiha, yet it remains curious that there is no established site on the other coastal region of the UAE on the Gulf of Oman. There is no lack of support for a thriving trade from the region to the south west as attested by ancient sources as to the influx of spice and incense that arrived from the *Frankincense Region* (Figure 1). Considering the wealth of trade then it seems extremely curious that such trade was conducted by sailing around the Straits and then moving inland from the PG coastal side to Mleiha (Figure 2), this is especially so when one notes the locality of Cryptus (Figure 1) according to Groom's interpretations of Claudius Ptolemy.

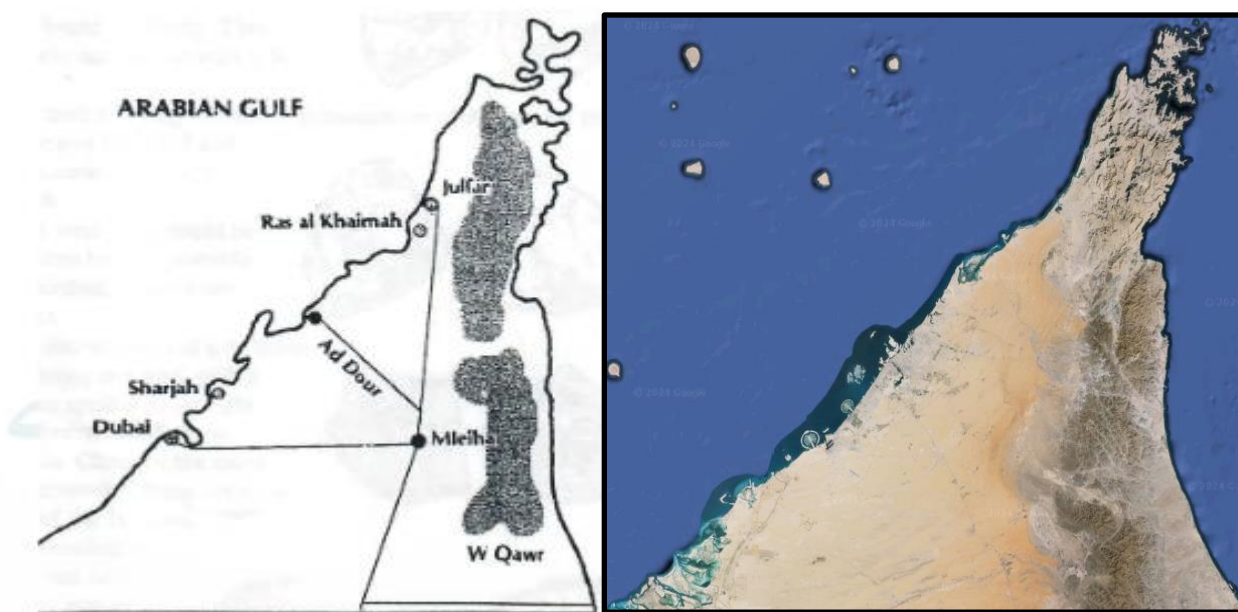
Figure 1: Map region showing sphere of investigation



Groom, 1994, 200. Circle showing the main sphere for investigation.

³ Haerinck, 2003, 196-200.

Figure 2: Sharjah Archaeological Authority Map and Google Maps Satellite image



Sharjah Archaeological Authority, 194. Google Maps Satellite image:

<https://www.google.ae/maps/@25.2711462,55.8787464,314789m/data=!3m1!1e3!5m1!1e4?hl=en&entry=ttu>

Ancient sources provide us with an outline of the trade potential that existed in the region, by considering the locations identified by ancient authors it is possible to further our understanding of sites within this network by suggesting the potential expansion of likely sites for archaeological excavation such as exists at Kalba. Herodotus provides confirmation of the wealth of the region under Persian rule, one has to consider this report as being an important aspect of the ambitions of Alexander and the subsequent Seleucid rulers in their politiká Arabia : “The Arabians rendered a thousand talents’ weight of frankincense yearly. Such were the gifts of these peoples to the king, besides the tribute”.⁴ There are several ongoing investigations into UAE archaeology that are pertinent to consider with the recent discovery of the Mleiha coin hoard in 2021 currently awaiting to be published.⁵ Further to this, the renewed excavations at Tell Abraq between 2023-24 have developed the extensivity of occupation and importance of the

⁴ Herodotus, 3.97.5

⁵ Sharjah Archaeological Authority, <https://saa.shj.ae/en/news/mleiha-discloses-its-silver-coin-treasures/>.

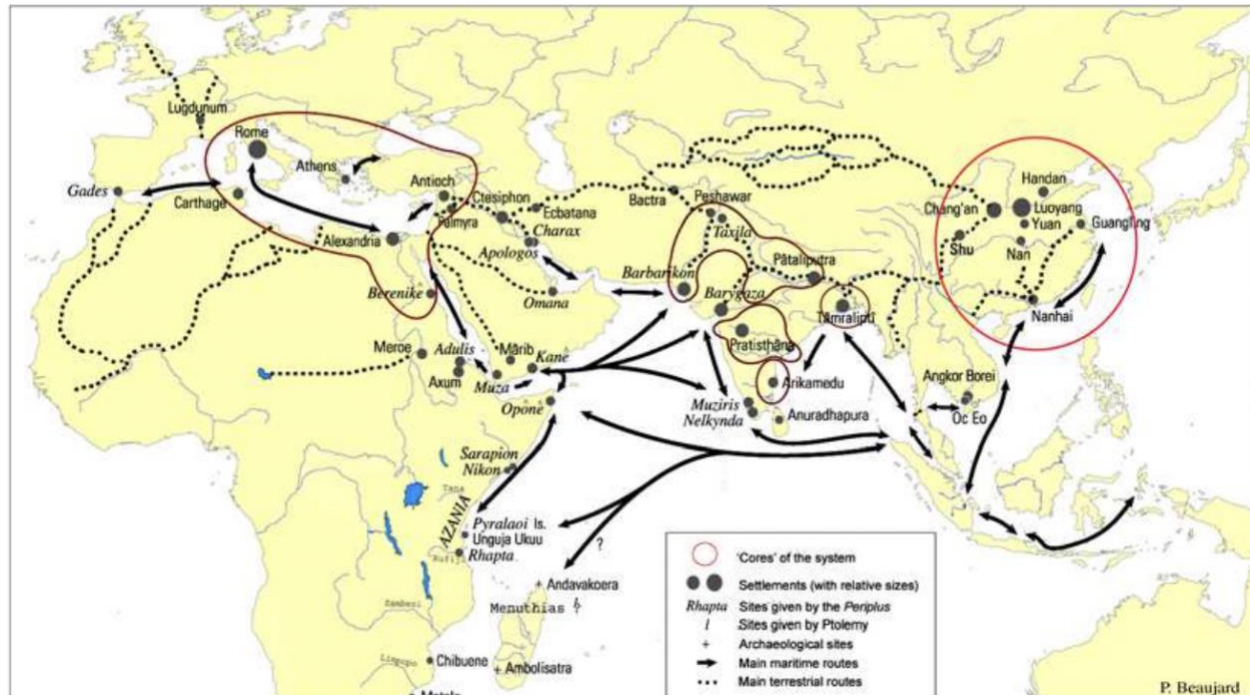
PG coastal location.⁶ The final ‘active’ site of significance to gaining a perspective as to the development of Mleiha into a supraregional entity with the availability of trading connections on both coasts is the site of Kalba, again an archaeological site that has undergone recent excavations.⁷ The work undertaken thus far has revealed its significance in the Iron Age era and as of yet not provided a Hellenistic discourse. With an increased understanding as to the *modus operandi* of the site at Kalba it will be possible to elaborate significantly on the view that the kingdom that existed had interactivity with Seleucid realms emanating from the era of Antiochus III. Following the conclusion of his Anabasis and subsequent mission to Gerrha he was presented with “five hundred talents of silver, one thousand of frankincense, and two hundred of oil of cinnamon”, a significant sum.⁸ It is now perhaps more important than it has been for a generation to reassess the North Arabian region, the connections it bolstered and how they might relate to ancient sources as well as Ptolemy’s map. This need for reassessment can be considered as significantly highlighted in Beaujard’s interpretation (Figure 3) of the core system in the region where he has misplaced Omana and excluded Gerrha, Ed Dur and Mleiha and the Gulf of Oman coast.

⁶ Numismatic News, <https://www.numismaticnews.net/world-coins/archaeological-excavation-at-tell-abraq-in-the-uae-unearths-possible-religious-site-1800-year-old-roman-coins-and-other-artifacts>.

⁷ Sharjah Archaeology Authority (SAA) and the Institute of Oriental and European Archaeology (OREA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ASS).

⁸ Polybius, 13.9.

Figure 3: The Eurasian and African World-System from the 1st to the 3rd century according to Beaujard.



Beaujard, (2007).

1.Literature Review: Ancient Sources

1.1 Arrian

The voyage of Nearchus from India following on from the conclusion of Alexander's campaign in the Indus Valley provides a valuable first point of contact when considering the Western perspective and ancient sources on northeastern Arabia. It is during this voyage back towards Babylon that an assessment of the Persian Gulf is carried out by Alexander's fleet commander Nearchus. This voyage is of course delivered unto us via Arrian's *Indica*, a source that can be considered somewhat reliable as the author can be considered Nearchus' epitomator.⁹ There are few instances within the *Indica* where Arrian puts forth his own perspectives on the events but of interest here are his thoughts on Nearchus's rejection of the proposal of *Onesicritus* to investigate *Maceta* (Ras Musandam). Arrian goes so far as to state that it is "abundantly clear that Nearchus saved the expedition by this decision" before continuing with what would appear to be his own reports on the region, from whom it is unknown. This provides some further intrigue as to the understanding of north eastern Arabia by the time of Arrian in the 2nd century CE as he states: "it is generally reported that this promontory and the surrounding country are completely desert and devoid of water."¹⁰ Can we therefore confirm a lack of knowledge on the region in the time of Arrian and relate this to the Persian Gulf being missing even in the anonymous *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*? It is in *Chapter 32* of the *Indica* then whereby the first logged interaction with northeastern Arabia can be attested in a western source, and it is there that some considerations about knowledge on the region and its fame in the 4th century BCE can be gauged with limited interactivity.

From the outset of Chapter 32 we can see the tribulations connected with the sea-faring conditions that can be experienced in the region around the narrow Straits of Hormuz.

⁹ Atkinson in Arrian, (2013), xxxvii.

¹⁰ Arrian, *Indica*, 32.13

This is evident in Nearchus's passage being compounded by rough surf extending out to sea whilst at anchor:

“The fleet now passed Fish-Eater country and put in to the Carmanian coast, though where they first stopped in Carmania there was a long line of rough surf extending out to sea, and they had to ride it out at anchor”¹¹

Here at the outset of this passage into the PG we can consider the navigation of the straits as being fairly fraught with challenge for a seasoned mariner, let alone a fleet commander sailing in the region for the first time. We begin to see possible trepidation with sailing via the straits and particularly the entrypoint moving east via the Gulf of Oman. One could consider how this might be compounded by being laden with a valuable cargo of significance such as might be brought from the Frankincense region or Socotra and beyond in the Azanian sea (archaeological evidence from Ed Dur/Mleiha can attest to such cargo).¹² Henceforth from the very outset of this entry into the PG the value of an overland route that avoids the possible peril of unpredictable conditions and swells can be imagined, particularly in the winter months. Oceanographic and climatic factors aside, there is the human factor to consider with the admittedly unattested threat of some form of piracy whether that be by virtue or chance. An enterprise opportunity is an entirely plausible occurrence that could be mitigated or advanced via the use of a strategic overland route navigated via the use of the readily available dromedary camel. The use of dromedary camels by the 3rd century CE is well-embedded in the region as evidenced by the finds at the Iron Age site at Muweilah, the well-crafted figurine forming the main display at Sharjah Archaeological Museum today, leaving little doubt in their use for local importance in traversing the inner desert regions towards Mleiha and perhaps onwards towards a ‘missing link’ at Kalba.¹³

¹¹ Arrian, *Indica*, 32.2.

¹² Haerinck, (2003).

¹³ <https://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/en-us/museums/sharjah-archaeology-museum#group=collection&photo=id-1>

The sighting of “a long promontory” by Nearchus and consequently being informed of the name “*Maceta*” (Modern Ras Musandam/Asabon in Figure 1) by locals provides some intrigue towards the growth of understanding on the region that would follow-on from the exploration of the PG.¹⁴ This region appears again in the later works of Pliny the Elder: “*Macae*; a cape... A remarkable event is said to have occurred there: Numenius, here won a battle against the Persians with his fleet and after the tide had gone out a second battle with his cavalry, and set up a couple of trophies, to Jupiter and to Neptune, on the same spot.”¹⁵ Ras Musandam apparently continues to be a region of some importance into the Seleucid era, so much so that a naval expedition is launched to quell the so-called “*Persian*” influence there and re-establish control of the strategic straits. It is possible that a fleet existed in the PG that could be chartered and tasked for such missions as assigned to Numenius. Can we consider this site then to be well-known in the Seleucid sphere and would an increase in regional volatility necessitate an alternative to transport via the straits and a more-suited overland route that would mitigate the threats posed? Inland Mleiha and onwards towards the Gulf of Oman could provide such a relief route. The site of Julfar near Ras Al Khaimah (Figure 2) provides intrigue as another site of regional significance, as identified by SAA, and perhaps the potential location of Numenius’ trophies and low tide battle. The site and locality of Rhegama (Figure 1) in Groom’s interpretation of Claudius Ptolemy is Hasab/Khasab and his Capsina location as at Ras al Khaimah. It would appear more likely that Rhegama would fit with the profile of the important settlement that existed at Julfar, although the archaeological evidence is sporadic for the Hellenistic era there is a clear chronology for occupation in the region from the Ubaid period.¹⁶ This interpretation could shift the sites of Ptolemy further along the coast with Capsina being Ed Dur and Cauana being Tell Abraq.

Chapter 32 of the *Indica* concludes with Arrian reminding the reader of the *raison d’être* for the voyage of Nearchus to fulfil the most human of desires to explore: “the whole

¹⁴ Arrian, *Indica*, 32.6-8.

¹⁵ Pliny the Elder 6.26-28.

¹⁶ Government of RAK, <https://rakheritage.rak.ae/en/pages/intro.aspx>

coastline along the route, the harbours and the islets, to sail around every indenting bay, to gather information about all coastal settlements and to find out what land was fertile and what was desert.”¹⁷ We can only imagine what such an expedition would have uncovered if the proposals of Onesicritus had been entertained, and whether they were in another similar voyage along the southern PG coast is unknown or unrecorded. It is possible therefore to speculate as to what would have been encountered from our modern knowledge of the region and by applying the archaeological evidence as it continues to emerge. In terms of harbours, islets and fertile land there would only have been areas for design and potential development, areas that are not desert but rather lush mangroves and strategic locations correlating with the sites identified in Claudius Ptolemy, importantly sites that are still in existence today. The sites mentioned at Julfar and Ed Dur both boast significant Mangrove ecosystems and of most intrigue to the missing link on the Gulf of Oman, the only region with a significant Mangrove ecosystem is Kalba (Figure 4-spot 1).

It is without doubt that we can view the voyage of Nearchus as being a turning point in the role of the PG as an intermediary in trade between India, Mesopotamia and the spice regions of Arabia. Growing interactions between three world systems are at the core of growth in trade, facilitated by the intermediaries of Arabia via Mesopotamia prior to the emergent Red Sea route being able to dominate western markets. A significant point of contention and consideration here is following on from Nearchus's voyage. The subsequent designs on expansion and limited expeditions of the PG prior to the death of Alexander is questionable. Therefore, the role of Seleucid policy in the wake of his death and whether the maritime routes of the PG are “strengthened by the active Seleucid policy” as suggested by Beaujard provides an opportunity for the northeastern Arabian region to either be an aspect of such policy or an independent entity seeking to capitalise on geostrategic-political opportunities.¹⁸ The key question is whether Mleiha was a Seleucid installation or a break-away from Gerrha's monopoly in order to take

¹⁷ Arrian, *Indica*, 32.11.

¹⁸ Beaujard, (2019), 309.

advantage of the opportunity offered by the region and by virtue counter or evade Seleucid dominion.

1.2 Strabo

Strabo informs us of Alexander's plans beyond his return to Babylon as he "contemplated making himself master" of Arabia, even "to make Arabia the seat of empire" with preparations afoot via the construction of a fleet in the Levant as well as at Babylon itself. This desire and preparation is confirmed to us by Arrian yet presented as it was in his "mind to colonize the coast of the Persian Gulf and the outlying islands, thinking that this area had the potential to match the prosperity of Phoenicia."¹⁹ Upon consideration of the two accounts, it is clear that the southern coast of the PG held wealth and ambition as the voyage of Nearchus had revealed the northern coast. Strabo tells us of Arabia, its riches and some of the key locations, writing in an era when it can be considered that Ed Dur and Mleiha had been a well-established presence in the region. Knowledge of Maceta is again confirmed via Strabo as "*Macæ*" and a measurement of 10,000 stadia (1250 miles according to 8 stadion being 1 mile) established for the length of the Gulf, somewhat overestimated by Androstenes of Thasos.²⁰ Strabo makes mention of navigation of the PG with a fleet by Androstenes following his accompaniment of Nearchus, thereby providing some acknowledgement of a PG fleet in operation following the return to Babylon.²¹

As shown by Figure 5 the northeastern Arabian region contains no known settlements beyond the Makai (Maceta/Macæ) promontory providing some conflicting views on how the Gerrhaens ply their trade. The prominent role of Gerrha that is confirmed by Strabo during his era, which is of interest to this dissertation. Strabo is of the view that the use of overland carriages is the main means by which the transportation of "Arabian

¹⁹ Strabo, 16.1.11, Arrian, Anab. 7.19.5-6.

²⁰ Strabo, 16.3.2, Roller, (2010), 272.

²¹ Strabo, 16.3.2.

merchandise and aromatics” is carried out. However he informs us that Aristobulus is of the view that merchants are sailing along the coastal PG to Babylon.²² Upon consideration of these two somewhat contradictory views on how the city of Gerrha operates its trading node, we can see a reflection of the role of Mleiha and its associated coastal sites. It is clear from Strabo and Aristobulus that the network in NE Arabia is well-established both overland and via the PG. The Gerrha site is positioned (Figure 5) to take advantage of the trade overland from south and west with only one suggested coastal outlet for this, potentially at Uqair. Yet we can see in Groom’s interpretation of Ptolemy that the coastal site is Gerrha itself (contradicting Strabo’s account of it being an inland city).

Mouton’s analysis of the region provides an intriguing point in relation to coastal sites by recalling Polanyi’s concept of the role of the port as an intermediary between two or more cultures.²³ Consideration of Arabian ports having a minor role in the grand scheme of operations with another significant site being of more importance assists when considering overland caravan routes. A site attuned to more favourable conditions in terms of both climate and connectivity is a point that is explored by Mouton and applied to the region. Mouton cites early 20th century reports as evidence for this where the port site at Uqair contains little more than a customs house rather than a substantive settlement with a range of significant structures. This aligns with a traditional Arabian system whereby control is centralised such as at Gerrha and leading to the societal norm that “each community built up its own fractioned urban space, reflecting the main stages of its mobility.”²⁴ This view from Mouton then would go somewhat against the ancient account of Strabo as on the one hand it does confirm the importance of the overland trade yet does not account for the importance Aristobulus places on the maritime route into Babylonia.²⁵

²² Strabo, 16.3.3.

²³ Mouton, (2009), 186.

²⁴ Mouton, (2009), 187.

²⁵ Strabo, 16.3.3.

In contrast to Gerrha, Mleiha enables and facilitates trade from India and south from the *Frankincense Region* (Figure 1) and even from locations further afield such as Azania, acting as an overland intermediary via dromedary camel. A key point of consideration is whether we can view Mleiha operating in conjunction with its coastal nodes as similar to Gerrha or whether we have something quite dissimilar that is influenced by Seleucid ambitions for the region.

An important regional feature for understanding the locations of Strabo are the mangrove systems that existed in the region and remain a prominent coastal characteristic. Further linking towards the importance of mangrove ecosystems in the region is the description from Eratosthenes relayed to us by Strabo:vb

“[a]long the whole coast of the Red Sea, in the deep part of the water grow trees resembling the laurel and the olive. When the tide ebbs, the whole trees are visible above the water, and at the full tide they are sometimes entirely covered. This is the more singular because the coast inland has no trees.”²⁶

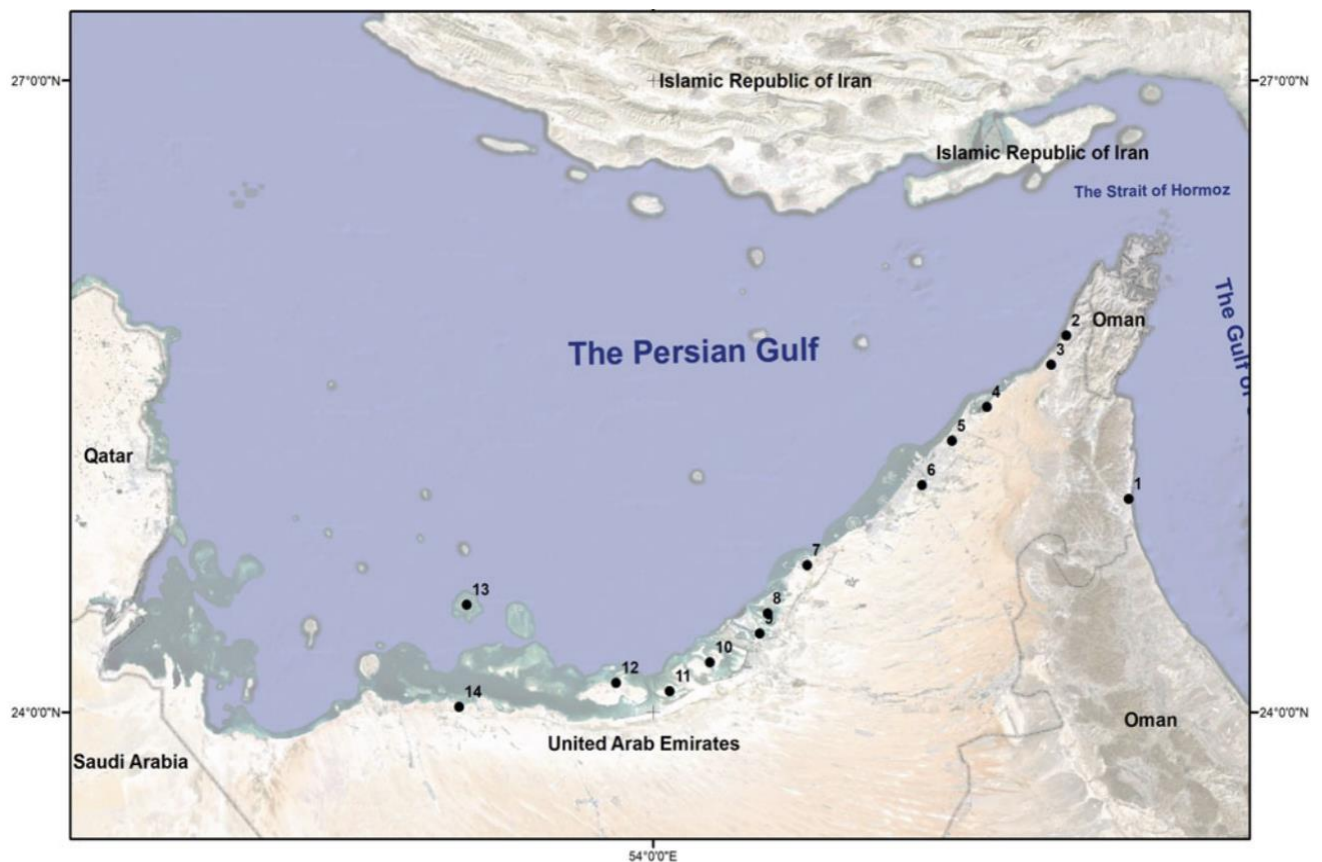
Here then via Eratosthenes is some evidence to compound the idea that mangroves were of significance to sailors along the coast as their importance is affirmed upon comparison with the inland areas that are devoid of trees, by this we must assume that it was meant in reference to a great number as would occur in a forest. Figure 4 confirms the abundance of mangroves along the coast of the PG in the modern era, but this is certainly not the case “Along the whole coast”. Mangrove locations can be assumed to have provided a range of desirable factors that would be conducive towards more permanent settlement such as: brackish water, fish, fowl, shade, shelter and protection. In a hot and arid climate like Arabia Felix the respite that a harbour locality near to a mangrove could provide is certainly worthy of consideration to the coastal sailor. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that an aspect of the establishment of harbour locations would be adjacent to mangroves. This is furthered by the archaeological record via carbon analysis

²⁶ Strabo, 16.3.6.

in the recovery of *middens* of a type such as *Saccostrea* in the northern emirates that are known to attach in clumps to the air roots of mangrove trees at low tide.²⁷

Overall, when we consider the impression that Strabo provides towards Arabia Felix it is one that highlights the exotic riches, the wealth and hospitality of the inhabitants as well as the prospects that exist. Strabo's account conjures images of pearls and scents of perfumes at the close of the section on Arabia.

Figure 4: United Arab Emirate mangrove forest locations in The Persian Gulf and The Gulf of Oman.



Milani, (2019), 60.

²⁷ Magee et al, 2009, 26.

1.3 Pliny, Periplus and Ptolemy

It is appropriate to group together Pliny, Periplus of Erythrean Sea and Ptolemy's map as they provide a view of Arabia and the surrounding region in the Roman era. This is in contrast to the previously discussed era of Arrian when Greek exploration of the region was underway to an extent following on from the conquest of Alexander, this difference in grouping can also be applied to Strabo as his work is from the later transitional era in the first century BCE.

Pliny considers Arabia as resembling "very much the form and size of Italy " as well as beyond surrounded by an ocean, having a similar climate and equal levels of fertility. Pliny's interpretations of Arabia unveils some other juxtapositions with both modern scholarship and the evidence on the ground. The first of these can be confirmed upon Pliny turning attention to Arabia: "On leaving Petra we come to the Omani, who dwell as far as Charax".²⁸ The use of "Omani" referring to those beyond Petra could be interpreted as Pliny's knowledge of Arabia being without substantive clarity. Pliny further confirms to us the locality of Gerrha and also adds to the city having a substantial coastal presence:

"and then the gulf of Gerra. Here we find the city of Gerra, five miles in circumference... Fifty miles from the coast, lying in the interior, is the region of At-tene, and opposite to Gerra is the island of Tylos... it is famous for the vast number of its pearls."²⁹

The location of Gerrha again sheds some light on the regional importance of the coast as a trading locale and entrepôt with the growing body of evidence for the PG coast being highly significant in the Hellenistic era and beyond it is possible to consider how Mleiha superseded Gerrha to become the powerhouse of the region due to its ability to

²⁸ Pliny, 32.28

²⁹ Pliny, 32.28

utilise both the PG coast, as well as the easterly corridor through the Hajar mountains to the modern Gulf of Oman.

Pliny's account of Arabia continues to be fraught within misconception as he references Juba's understanding of the coastal region of the PG towards Musandam:

“[T]he navigation is impracticable on that side, according to Juba, on account of the rocks; and he has omitted all mention of Batrasave, a town of the Omani, and of the city of Omana, which former writers have made out to be a famous port of Carmania”³⁰.

Here then is further reference to the Omani people in the region that we would associate with Ed Dur and Mleiha during an era when the sites were flourishing and possibly at the height of their existence. A consideration is whether via another mention of the people in the region being “Omani” as to the extent we can assume a level of control across the PG, yet it remains to be established where the centre of this power base is situated can we consider it as being Mleiha, Gerrha or beyond? Perhaps by establishing whether Mleiha was multifaceted in its direction of trade via the PG and coastal region on the other side of the Hajar range then we can begin to really appreciate its prowess as a supraregional entity in the final centuries of the first millennium BCE.

The Periplus of the Erythraen sea offers a differing glimpse of the region with some initial consideration as to the nature of the sailing and settlement on the Gulf of Oman coast of Arabia. The unknown author informs us of some of the sites that can be corroborated by Ptolemy, but the final stretch towards the entrance to the PG on approach to the *Asabon Promontory/Macae/Maceta cape* offers some points of contention:

³⁰ Pliny, 32.28

“If sailing onward you wind round with the adjacent coast to the north, then as you approach the entrance of the Persian Gulf you fall in with a group of islands which lie in a range along the coast for 2,000 stadia, and are called the islands of Kalaïou. The inhabitants of the adjacent coast are cruel and treacherous, and see imperfectly in the daytime.”³¹

The interpretation of this region is of interest here as the mention of islands is of some debate with an inability to accurately locate such a feature along the coast aside from the Deymâniyeh islands near modern Muscat which Müller, according to McCrindle, has interpreted as an error on the part of the ancient author and instead should be attested to the modern Omani/UAE coast as seen in Ptolemy north of the Corodamum promontory (Figure 1). This region of islands associated with Kalaïou could be of some interest with regards to “*the missing link*” as what is not identified in the ancient texts is the passage that exists to the PG coast from the locality. The acknowledgement in the Periplus that the region is occupied by a populace is also of some significance, further to this their identification as being unsavoury in nature provides intrigue and a point to be considered. With the existence of this disreputable population in the coastal region stretching towards the PG entrance it is possible to entertain the motive for such a reputation as being conducive towards maintaining the inland trade monopoly via caravan to Mleiha and onwards to the PG coastal region at site of Omana later described in the Periplus:

“If you coast along the mouth of the gulf you are conducted by a six days’ voyage to another seat of trade belonging to Persia, called Omana. Barugaza maintains a regular commercial intercourse with both these Persian ports, despatching thither large vessels freighted with copper, sandalwood, beams for rafters, horn, and logs of sasamina and ebony. Omana imports also frankincense from Kanê, while it exports to Arabia a particular species of vessels called madara, which have their planks sewn together. But both from Apologos and Omana there are

³¹ Periplus, 34.

exported to Barugaza and to Arabia great quantities of pearl, of mean quality however compared with the Indian sort, together with purple, cloth for the natives, wine, dates in great quantity, and gold and slaves.”³²

It is possible that the Kalaïou of the Periplus, Cryptus of Ptolemy and modern Kalba are one in the same. Ptolemy does indeed report Cryptus as a harbour location that would fit well with the modern site: “At the entrance to the Persian Gulf Cryptus harbor 92 40 21 30 Melanes mountains which are called Asabon, the middle part of which is located near the sea 93 22.”³³ The map interpretation by Stevenson seen in Figure 8 serves to highlight the Hajar mountain range that forms the backdrop to the coastal plain.

Groom’s interpretation of Ptolemy (Figure 1) does shed some confusion on the matter as his placement of *Chabuata* inland contradicts the connections with the site at Cryptus as it is positioned significantly south on the Gulf coast. This placement is attested to the revised interpretation of the location of Omanum Emporium and the placement of modern Muscat as Cyptus (informed as ‘hidden harbour’, a name perhaps befitting of a mangrove locality).³⁴ Groom does inform us in his analysis that the Chabuata locale remains problematic:

“This seems likely to have been somewhere on a route from Milayha through the mountains towards the east coast, most probably the route through Wadi Sifuni leading to Fugayra. It may have been on the eastern side of the Hajar mountains. I can find no place name in the area having any obvious affinity with ‘Chabuata’.”³⁵

This admission by Groom certainly infers there is a missing link somewhere on the route from Mleiha whether that is within the Hajar mountain range, on the coastal plain following exit from the mountain pass or at the coast remains to be concluded upon.

³² Periplus, 36.

³³ Ptolemy, 6.7.12. <https://topostext.org/work/209>

³⁴ Groom, 1994, 206.

³⁵ Groom, 1994, 203.

Further archaeological exploration in the Kalba mangrove area could enhance our understanding of this.

With this in mind the reports of Omana and the activities being carried out there during the era of the Periplus in the 1st century CE serves to highlight the thriving trade network that existed along the Gulf coast but also via the PG. The trade items listed in the Periplus provide an image of the region acting as somewhat of a middleman with two exports being of local origin in reality i.e. pearls and dates. In terms of the other exports listed in the Periplus one could speculate as to their arrival from further afield via the ability to navigate the monsoon winds. Sources of gold and slaves could be speculated as coming from beyond the shores of Arabia and this is, as shall be discussed, somewhat supported in the archaeological records bead ware at Ed Dur and Mleiha.

[Figure 5: Eratosthenes' Toponyms in Southern Arabia and Upper Egypt](#)



Roller, (2010), 258, (based on the appropriate maps in BA and drawn by the Ancient World Mapping Center).

2. Archaeological Evidence

The search for the “*missing link*” in the region of the modern UAE is in many ways the search for the influence of the successors of Alexander. Modern scholarship would allude to Hellenisation in the near east, the world of Arabia appears as an entity that did not succumb to the same consistency of influence as existed in the other subjugated territories of the Seleucids. The emerging archaeological picture continues to illuminate the region and nowhere is this more so than at Tell Abraq, along with other established sites at Al Hamriyah, Ed Dur, Mleiha, Kalba and Dibba. The recent work of Pavan and Esposti at Tell Abraq serves to highlight the exchange of objects in the region going beyond mere diplomacy and instead being pervasive in the exertion of Graeco-Roman tastes.³⁶ It is without doubt that the region had a prominent footprint from the 3rd millennium BCE as can be attested by the increasing understanding of the ancient land of Macae (Greeks), Makka (Akaddians), Maka (Achaemenids), Magan (Sumeians). This has been developed by excavation work in the later stages of the 20th century by Daniel Potts through his initial excavations at the Tell Abraq site in 1986, continuing 1989-1998 by the University of Copenhagen and resumed in the modern era by Potts in conjunction with an Italian team.³⁷

2.1 Tell Abraq

Potts’ five seasons of excavations at Tell Abraq uncovered the 2000 years of occupancy and ended with Potts intriguingly admitting that “One could go on and on digging at Tell Abraq, and one would probably keep finding interesting things, provided one knew what to do with them”.³⁸ In recent years the excavations at the site have picked up again and “interesting things” are once again the order of the day at Tell Abraq. Potts uncovered

³⁶ Pavan & Esposti, 2023, 94.

³⁷ Potts, 2000, 13, <https://www.numismaticnews.net/world-coins/archaeological-excavation-at-tell-abraq-in-the-uae-unearths-possible-religious-site-1800-year-old-roman-coins-and-other-artifacts>.

³⁸ Potts, 2000, 29.

an occupation spanning up until the emergence of the Hellenistic era, most recently. This data has now been extended into the final phases of the first millennium BCE and beyond into the Roman era with the discovery of numismatic evidence relating to Tiberius.³⁹ Potts attributes the longevity of occupation at Tell Abra q to its consistent water supply whereas other regional sites might have a finite availability of water. The water table at Tell Abra q is stable.⁴⁰ The availability of fresh water is a key component in the search for the missing link on the GO coast; the different topological and meteorological factors at play are certainly worth considering. The distribution of mangroves, as previously noted, could be a significant component of settlement; the Kalba site provides this valuable resource along with potential runoff from the backdrop of the Hagar mountains. Potts suggests that the Tell Abra q site had ceased significant habitation by the commencement of the Hellenistic era with perhaps only a few families remaining in occupation at the site.⁴¹ Indeed Potts identified similarities with material evidence from excavations at the later Ed Dur site in the form of pottery, glass and jewellery, certainly an allusion to the connection between the two sites that was left unattested by Potts' work.⁴² In recent years however, Potts and a team have returned to the site for a reinvigorated investigation of other aspects of the site that straddles two of the seven emirates of the UAE with an Italian team leading on the Umm al Quwain side of the border and Potts leading on the Sharjah side. The issues of sites on borders could play somewhat of a role in the search for the missing link as similar such issues could be raised at the Kalba location due to its close proximity to the modern Omani border. This proximity could explain the reason for limited archaeological exploration at this stage.

The Iron Age III era can be considered as an enigmatic era in the run-up to Hellenistic and Seleucid influence on the region as the archaeological record provides some outstanding examples of the culture that existed such as the Muweilah camel and yet is

³⁹ <https://www.numismaticnews.net/world-coins/archaeological-excavation-at-tell-abraq-in-the-uae-unearths-possible-religious-site-1800-year-old-roman-coins-and-other-artifacts>

⁴⁰ Potts, 2000, 45.

⁴¹ Potts, 2000, 111.

⁴² Potts, 2000, 111.

problematic in terms of the diminishment of this society and how this then evolves in to the subsequent Hellenistic era that can be best exemplified by the Ed Dur and Mleiha sites.⁴³ Summarised by Magee as: “The Iron Age III period is very poorly known throughout south-eastern Arabia and the recovery of deposits of this period is of immense significance”.⁴⁴ The excavation of pottery from this era provides insight to this significance as although locally produced burnished marooned slipware produced using a fast wheel is evident it is the intrigue about the technological progression required in production as well as the possibility from petrochemical analysis that they originate as imports from Mesopotamia or Iran.⁴⁵ Therefore with further excavation of such material the understanding of changes that could be interwoven with wider regional transition to the north with the Persian satrapies could be better understood and beyond the era towards that of the successors.

Excavations at Tell Abraq were restarted in 2019 and expanded understanding on the site into the early centuries CE. The site poses some collaborative issues as it straddles the border between the emirate of Sharjah and Umm al Quwain necessitating effective coordination amongst two different archaeological authorities, thus providing a point of contention in striving for the advancement of overall understanding of the site. The recent discoveries of copper alloy figurines at the site expands the connections with Mleiha and also establishes parallels in terms of cultic practice with the adjacent site at Ed Dur. The recent evidence from Tell Abraq questions whether the sites operated in tandem rather than in their own epoch.⁴⁶ Pavan and Esposti draw comparisons to the locally produced and original statuette with a find from Mleiha that provides an association with the deity Shams. The discovery of the statuette suggests a cultic function in relation to the worship of the sun god at Tell Abraq (Figure 6). This can be considered as a sound assumption as evidence from Mleiha and Ed Dur can further attest to this.⁴⁷ The discovery of a copper alloy ibex statuette during the recent

⁴³ Magee, 1996, Daems, 2004.

⁴⁴ Magee et al, 2017, 231.

⁴⁵ Magee et al, 2017, 231.

⁴⁶ Pavan & Esposti, 2023, 87-88.

⁴⁷ Pavan & Esposti, 2023, 89-91.

campaigns has furthered discussion of Hellenistic influence in the region. Perhaps controversially, as suggested by Costa is that the manufacture of such statuettes along with the importation of moulds in order to replicate established standards was undertaken from Hellenistic centres outside of the region and destined for markets on the Red sea, Indian Ocean and beyond.⁴⁸ This view was alluded to in the recent work of Pavan and Esposti, one has to consider how far modern scholarship can expand the picture of the region when resurfacing the thoughts of scholars from an era when the archaeological picture was significantly obscured by a lack of excavation and a mindset where intrinsic creativity was not considered in NE Arabia. With the ongoing emergence of the Tell Abraq site what is now becoming clearer is the importance not only of the PG coastal sites but the inland site of Mleiha as operating within a supraregional trade environment. The question now is whether this was a local ambition or one exerted upon the locality by a wider transregional power such as existed during the Seleucid era and perhaps more specifically following the anabasis of Antiochus III.

Consideration of whether the Hellenisation of Arabia was pervasive is of some interest as it contravenes the model of Alexander and his successors to some extent whereby influence was exerted intrinsically. Pavan provides the example of Sumhuram on the Dhofar coast in modern southern Oman as an area where a “Hellenised taste” is evident in the assemblage via the discovery of oil lamps and human busts.⁴⁹ The comparison of Pavan and Esposti with the evidence from eastern Arabian sites holds limited weight as archaeological material is more extensive to support a strong connection with the Hellenistic world of the successors. Beyond merely a connection via trading links it could be safe to assume that substantive immigration took place towards the region in order to consolidate and secure access to resources. With the emergence of the understanding that Tell Abraq was also a site of significance in conjunction with Ed Dur and Mleiha one must surely question where the site that links the other coastal region with these sites of substantial commerce is? This is especially of interest when considering the argument of whether this shift towards “Hellenised taste” is without an

⁴⁸ Costa, 1989, 483.

⁴⁹ Pavan, 2023, 15.

established Hellenistic settlement but rather is because of pervasion of Hellenistic items over diplomacy as suggested by the recent scholarly publications. Further to this is the consideration of whether the male statuette is Heracles and whether its unstratified context at Tell Abraq points towards a temple function, paralleling Ed Dur, or whether the object was a grave good later the subject of a robbery in the search for items of higher worth and thus then redeposited in a surface context (Figure 6).⁵⁰ Pavan and Esposti attempt to draw a conclusion on the presence of the artefact as being because of the pervasion of Hellenistic culture and motifs from South Arabia (Yemen) and suggesting “the communities occupying the area acted as the possible middlemen in the transmission of...motifs, specifically towards South East Arabia”.⁵¹

Concluding that the caravan route from the south is the source of such influence can be considered as problematic on multiple fronts, of which some consideration of a “missing link” on the Omani coast becomes more relevant. Firstly, the conclusion of South Arabia being the source of influence completely discounts the role of the PG trade routes from Falaika and the influence of Gerrha, as discussed ancient literature can attest to upon the return of Antiochus III on his Anabasis. The second issue relates to the lack of evidence that exists from the southern coast of modern Iran (ancient Carmania) as previously discussed the role of the “fish eaters” could certainly have had substantial impact on Hellenistic trade towards Tell Abraq, that is also without consideration of the role of northern Indian entrepôts such as Barygaza. Thirdly and most relevant to this investigation is that the conclusion of such items arriving from southern regions suggests that maritime expedition was the main means of transmission towards the region which would mean that sailors would travel around the peninsula through the straits as no established site exists on the coast that could offer onward transport of goods inland. We can therefore either consider that the argument for a Hellenistic era harbour location at Kalba is strengthened by the conclusions of the recent campaigns at Tell Abraq or alternatively discount South Arabia as being the source of such pervasive

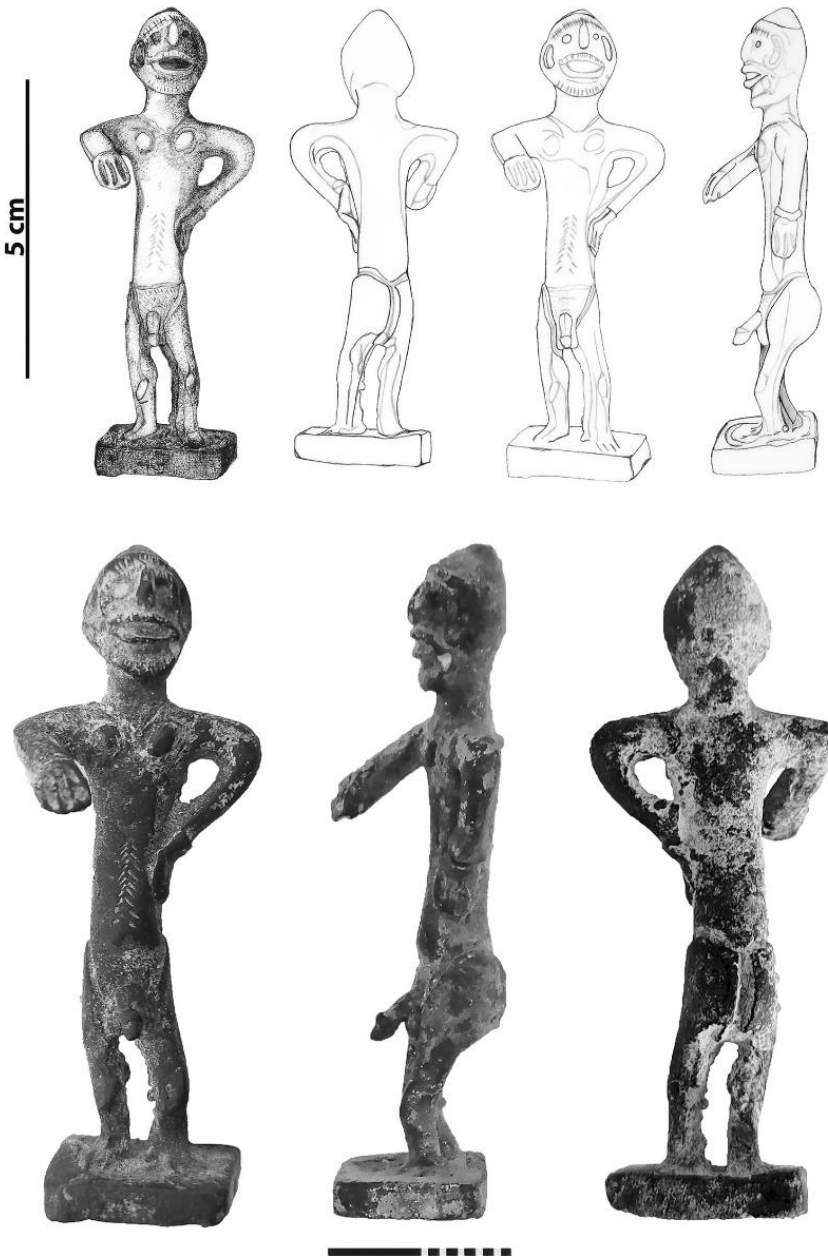
⁵⁰ Pavan & Esposti, 2023, 95-96.

⁵¹ Pavan & Esposti, 2023, 99.

trade and instead should consider the role of the PG more carefully in patterns of exchange.

Figure 6: The naked man figurine F256 from Tell Abraq.

The naked man figurine F256 from Tell Abraq. Copper alloy: h. 7,6 cm; w. max 2.9 cm. Drawing: N. Gilbert. Photo N. Gilbert/ Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain.
⁵²



⁵² Pavan and Esposti, 2023, 91.

2.2 Al-Hamriya

Magee's excavations at the site in the 2000s to 2017 have further developed our understanding as the ancient settlement has been discovered to have been "much larger than assessed by the earlier excavators" and even such an "assessment probably masks a more complicated picture of the ancient settlement."⁵³ The excavations of Magee focussed on the occupation to the Iron Age III era (300 BCE) and thus were not consistent with occupation in the era following the Anabasis of Antiochus III, with only limited evidence of later habitation uncovered by Magee's work.⁵⁴ Indeed 21st century excavation and interest has identified the region as an "important nexus for past human activity" yet one that Magee alludes to having been potentially affected by human alterations, sea level fluctuation and "other palaeoclimatic events".⁵⁵ The importance of *sabka* is a key component of archaeological survey in the region as they provide evidence of areas of previous inundation and therefore likely sites of occupation occur adjacent to these areas, this is true of the range of sites under discussion on the PG coastal region of the modern day northern emirates. This feature could be considered at Kalba as an aspect of future survey as there is a clear *sabka* located near to the Kalba-Oman border. The site at Al-Hamriya provides an interesting case study when considering the *missing link* Magee and his team with the issues surrounding modern archaeology exemplified at the site. Al-Hamriya provides an intriguing juncture as it is in the midst of several significant sites: to the south Tell Abra, to the north Ed-dur, the east Muweilah and to the northwest the emerging sites at al-Siniyah Island.

The extent of the ancient site remains problematic due to a range of human and natural activities, similar such parallels can perhaps be drawn between Hamriya and Kalba as obstacles to overcome in furthering our understanding of the interactivity of the region and wider region. Dune activity is the first such issue identified by Magee et al followed

⁵³ Magee et al, 2017, 210.

⁵⁴ Magee, 2017, 224.

⁵⁵ Magee et al, 2009, 19.

by construction and roads and further to this modern *sabka*.⁵⁶ In the search for Hellenistic influence upon Kalba in conjunction with the Mleiha site then Hamriya must be considered as pertinent to any such investigation. Further to the natural and human factors that Magee highlights, the academic predilections must also be overcome in comparing settlements with those in neighbouring regions such as could be found in Mesopotamia or the 'Fertile Crescent'. The structure of settlements can be considered as more sparse than regional contemporaries according to Magee with evidence for this being the UAE society that existed in the 1930s. Yet surely one must consider that if a foreign entity were to project influence and seek to integrate its own citizens and customs to an extent then this would also be evident within the archaeological structures uncovered.⁵⁷ Perhaps now then, with this emerging further at the range of sites alluded to earlier, it is time to reassess an image of the 1930s CE UAE paralleling with the societal fabric that was present in the final three centuries BCE. Drawing such a scholarly comparison is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

2.3 Ed Dur

The site at Ed Dur became a possible candidate for ancient Omana since its discovery and excavation by the team from Ghent University at a location again adjacent to *sabka* and an ancient lagoon system, similar to Tell Abraq and suggesting a potential such locale blueprint for a site at Kalba. The emergence of other sites as well as further development of established locales means that an evolution of thinking about the role and context of Ed Dur is now required. Twenty years ago scholars such as Weeks remained under the initial assumptions of the previous generation that the site operated at the same time as the emergence of the Roman empire yet this view discounts the complexity of society that existed in the Iron Age phases and does little to explain the move from the IA III phase towards the Hellenistic world that Ed Dur can consider itself

⁵⁶ Magee et al, 2009, 20.

⁵⁷ Magee et al, 2009, 20.

to be a part of.⁵⁸ Potts has also considered the site to be occupied during the first centuries CE, again without considering the transition from IA III and the influence that the Gerrhaean kingdom to the north and burgeoning Seleucid empire could have had on the site and rather drawing comparisons with statuary from Pre-Islamic Hatra.⁵⁹ Potts also attests to the centre of the site being contemporaneous with the flourishing of the Parthians in the east and Romans in the west and the emergence of the site being the product of this crossroads, it is my ambition to establish further depth to this image of opportunism as a pivot between two greater spheres of power.⁶⁰ The site could and should be envisaged as an entrepôt towards an outright regional power that flourished either due to local expansion or prior installation during the post IA III phase.

Funerary Evidence

The funerary evidence from Ed Dur can be considered as perhaps being indicative of the arguments against the site merely existing from the 1st century CE. Additionally, this date does not align with the stratigraphic evidence recovered by Potts along with the more recent excavation activity.⁶¹ The range of goods from a funerary context could be described as somewhat eclectic as they offer a glimpse of a settlement that was well-connected across the region. Items of carved ivory, Roman glassware, a wine-set with cast bull's head, decorated ceramics that suggest a Zoroastrian origin as well as a range of precious/semi-precious beads represent some of the funerary finds shedding some light on to a complex settlement that is well-known from the Iron Age to Roman eras and engaged with worlds outside of the PG sphere of influence.⁶² This extension of interactivity into the Mediterranean either via the caravan routes through Thaj (Gerrha?) or perhaps more likely by shipping along the coast towards Falaika and beyond, alongside trading into the Indian Ocean world through the straits displays the adeptness and knowledge of the settlement at Ed Dur and its potential administration

⁵⁸ Weeks, 2004, 240.

⁵⁹ Potts, 1990, 281.

⁶⁰ Potts, 1990, 288.

⁶¹ Potts, 1990, 288.

⁶² Potts, 1990, 283-284.

from an inland command. Potts' assertion of the appearance and presence of iron metallurgy during the Seleucid period should identify the significance of the site from the 3rd century BCE. As can be evidenced from the wide variety of finds from Ed Dur: nails, rivets, weapons (swords and daggers), and tools.⁶³ Yet even though there is clear evidence of iron working during the Seleucid era, scholars have been reluctant to place the activities of Ed Dur in the post IA III era from the beginning of the 3rd century BCE, therefore a parallel site such as could exist at Kalba and would shed further light on an understanding of this clearly prominent local-transregional power.

Pottery Evidence

Considering Rutten's analysis of local pottery offers further insight as to the network that the site operated within. Potts had identified that dating of 'local pottery' is based on proposed dates for imported wares from southern Mesopotamia ranging from the beginning of 2nd century BCE to the final quarter of the 1st century BCE. The more recent analysis by Rutten is convincing as to a revised date to an earlier occupation and operation of the Ed Dur site as a node within a trade network that is of local importance, in conjunction with the other established sites discussed, and experiences substantial international growth in the 2nd century BCE. Pottery evidence is a key aspect in establishing that the era of significant operation of Ed Dur, suggested by previous scholars such as Potts, is incorrect and the occupation of the site is more fitting with the post Anabasis time frame following Antiochus III's interactions at Gerrha. The key point to this is that scholars have based site dating on the estimates of imported wares. According to Rutten, the extensivity of wares at the site has been somewhat overlooked with too much focus put on 1st century imported wares rather than establishing a chronological sequence that utilises all available material, most crucially for connections with Mleiha are the local wares.⁶⁴

⁶³ Potts, 1990, 287.

⁶⁴ Rutten, 2009, 360.

Pottery production did not occur at the site itself according to excavations and several surveys conducted thus far along with geological analysis concluding the area being uncondusive to such activity.⁶⁵ Instead manufacture took place in an area connected to Ed Dur where resources were abundant, Rutten suggests a northern locality within the region of modern UAE and northern Oman, furthering this into three regional locations and admits that local wares remain little known due to limited excavation thus far. Rutten's publication of this analysis 20 years after the work of the team from Ghent at Ed Dur attests to some delays on the investigation and publication of recovered local wares from the site. This delay has meant that the wider context of the site is a negated aspect of scholarly ambition with a tendency to focus on Ed Dur as a site in isolation and as an intermediary of Roman trade with India rather than placing it in as suggested in this dissertation as a supraregional node.⁶⁶ Reddy suggests that there is a clear parameter for the establishment and embellishment of Indo-Arab trade in the 3rd century BCE with Ed Dur (Omana?) being amongst the sites to corroborate this along with Mleiha and a later coastal site at Dibba (Apologos?) with "numerous quantities of Indian pottery unearthed".⁶⁷ Evidence for the Dibba site remains problematic as it lies under the modern city and has only been partially excavated. However, Reddy suggests it was in operation from at least the 1st century CE based on the dating of Mouton and Cuny.⁶⁸ It is possible therefore, in lieu of the lack of available evidence from Dibba to speculate about the site at Kalba, operating in conjunction with inland Mleiha and PG coastal Ed Dur, as being a significant component of earlier trade towards Barygaza, southern Arabia and beyond towards east Africa.

The variety of local wares offers evidence to connect the site at Ed Dur with other regional centres, firstly the black/buff/orange wares (68.1% of assemblage) offer a connection to the northern region, brown slipped/orange wares (31.1 % of assemblage) offer a connection to the central region and potentially most integral in the search for a

⁶⁵ Rutten, 2009, 359.

⁶⁶ Reddy, 2020, 53-54.

⁶⁷ Reddy, 2020, 54.

⁶⁸ Reddy, 2020, 57.

site in the south east are the yellow-pink/pinkish brown/grey wares (0.7 %). The central wares are more abundant at Mleiha which would suggest a production centre associated with the site.⁶⁹ Returning the focus towards the assemblage found at Ed Dur, what is clear is that local production is much less than imports (72.4 % of material being imported wares).⁷⁰ The fact that southern Mesopotamian ware is readily available from the second century suggests the extensivity of maritime operations in the PG according to Rutten. This raises the perspective that the availability of such wares negated the requirement for local production and therefore reveals the prominence of the region and its Seleucid era connections.⁷¹ The work of Mouton at Mleiha in terms of the associations of excavated wares with Ed Dur has been unravelled by Rutten's analysis as the debate centres on whether the origin of wares are the 2nd century BCE versus the first centuries CE (Period IIIB as suggested by Mouton).⁷² Rutten and the more recent work at Mleiha bring into view the dates of Mouton's assemblage for similar wares from Ed Dur and Mleiha to have been inaccurate as with the realisation that the occupation of the inland site extended beyond initial estimates. This has subsequently subsumed the chronological sequence established by Potts.⁷³ This realisation surely then adds weight towards the post IA III era during the propagation of transregional Seleucid power as being more complex than previously understood. According to Rutten, local pottery is a key indicator as to our understanding of the interconnected nature of inland and coast in terms of the reliance on local pottery manufacture to facilitate the exchange of agricultural products as well as the multitude of other goods that could be exchanged in the PG/Indian Ocean spheres.⁷⁴ Perhaps then if such pottery shards or even manufacture are uncovered at Kalba then this network of exchange will move further into focus.

⁶⁹ Rutten, 2009, 361.

⁷⁰ Rutten, 2009, 361.

⁷¹ Rutten, 2009, 367.

⁷² Mouton, 1999, 17-18.

⁷³ Rutten, 2009, 367.

⁷⁴ Rutten, 2009, 369.

Transregional Connections

Evidence for the wide range of connections can be considered at Ed Dur via the beads that were uncovered in the initial excavations by the Ghent team. The bead ware identified by the MA geological analyses work of Katrien De Corte is of particular significance with 505 beads analysed out of 1228 excavated. Beads BQ 130 and BQ 103 are particular examples of the wider trading network that the site was a part of.⁷⁵ Both beads are from the excavated haul at Ed Dur, yet they are the only two to have the rock crystal Almandine present. The Almandine from BQ 130 was assessed by De Corte to have originated in Sri Lanka (Taprobane, PES) whilst that of BQ 103 was assessed to have originated in “the region nowadays known as Tanzania”. Haerinck (lead in the Ed Dur excavations) in his assessment of the usefulness of the Ed Dur beads for reconstructing ancient trade routes makes mention of “other stones” coming from Tanzania where they were likely exported from the lost ancient city of Rhapta, implying other examples exist from the site aside from BQ 103.⁷⁶ Indeed the ancient city of Rhapta provides an intrigue outside the bounds of investigation here, yet it does uphold some of the enigma of Kalba and provides some parallels in that it is a missing link in the scale of trading relationships and is an aspect of the Periplus as a part of the land of Azania. It has been suggested by Felix Chami to be submerged off the coast of modern Mafia island whilst also holding inland connections with the Rufiji delta, yet this can be considered as contentious owing to a lack of significant archaeological evidence with Chami basing this conclusion on limited Roman pottery finds and unproven underwater structures on Mafia island.⁷⁷ De Corte’s assessment of the bead ware differs to Haerinck as with the suggestion that the quartzes and garnets found at the site could have been handed down from earlier inhabitants/generations of the Arabian Peninsula, one would most likely assume this, due to the available evidence, as being from the Iron Age III era prior to the conquests of Alexander. Yet there is some link between the two here as Haerinck identifies that Muza (Mocha) from PES controlled Azania thus inferring a trade link, possibly overland or via Kalba and inland Mleiha with

⁷⁵ De Corte, K, 1993-1994: 144, 146.

⁷⁶ Haerinck, (2003), 205.

⁷⁷ Chami, (1995, 1999, 2000).

the peoples from the region being the reason for the presence of such Almandine crystals at Ed Dur.

Bead ware

Indeed, the bead ware from Ed Dur offers evidence of the potential role of the coastal site in the sphere of the Indian Ocean network yet also poses further questions about the microcosm of the PG. The mineral composition of the bead ware, a majority from a funerary context, provides insight into their origins as out of the 222 recovered: 64 are agate and 69 are carnelian forming the majority of those excavated.⁷⁸ Ancient sources attest to Roman trade from Egypt with Barygaza concerning Indian agate and carnelian (PME 48:16.15, 49: 16.29) we can envisage then that Ed Dur was a part of the trade with the Indian subcontinent yet this can somewhat contradict the role of Roman trade from the Red Sea by the first century as there would be little requirement to enter the PG to facilitate this. Therefore, whether the PG trade in such items remains a separate entity by the Roman era remains problematic as that is the role scholars have assigned to the Ed Dur coastal site.⁷⁹ We could imagine the role of a coastal site on the Gulf of Oman at a location such as Kalba or further north at Dibba as being strategically important as an intermediary in connections with India, particularly in the later uptick in trade from the Red Sea corridor. However, we surely should now consider the post Iron Age III era as hosting significant trade throughout the PG and this could have swelled significantly following the realisation of the wealth of the Gerrhaeans by Antiochus III at the conclusion of his Anabasis. Subsequently to this the establishment of a franchise to coalesce and take advantage of the uniquely strategic NE Arabia region as one that could be advantageous to both PG and Indian Ocean trade could now be a point of contention with the continued emergence of archaeological evidence to support such a scenario.

⁷⁸ De Wael, 2007, 300.

⁷⁹ Cobb, 2018.

2.4 Mleiha

Potts' seminal work on the history of the Arabia identifies Mleiha as being of key significance with the strategic position of the site allowing access to both coasts via "a number of natural passages generally wadis, and it would surely be mistaken to assume Mleiha was isolated from its neighbours."⁸⁰ With over 30 years of hindsight and a range of new material it is clear that Potts did not go far enough in his estimation of the importance of Mleiha, yet what still remains missing from the picture is the coastal connection to the east through the Hajar mountain wadis. There are four phases to the site with Level II commencing from third to mid second century BCE, matching with the Anabasis of Antiochus III and expedition to Gerrha.⁸¹ The range of material excavated at Mleiha could possibly be interpreted as the site being occupied as an expansion of Seleucid power following on from the resurrection of the empire by Antiochus III.

The most striking structure at Mleiha is the fort, built entirely of mudbrick and square in shape with 55m walls at a thickness of 1.9m, a substantial structure indeed that indicates the importance of the site and can draw possible examples with forts at Falaika, Ed-Dur and Qal'at in Bahrain.⁸² The discovery of coin mould fragments during the initial excavations of the fort add a further layer of significance to the material culture of the site and in the wider region during the last centuries BCE and beyond. The mould fragments finds "point to the metallurgical activities in the fort" whereby the western portion could be suggested as having been dedicated to the craft and storage activities.⁸³ The coins that were moulded at the site have been the source of much debate as not only do they bear the name of *Abie'l*, perhaps a local ruler but also are stylistically similar to coins minted following the conquests of Alexander, hence they have been dubbed the 'Arabian Alexanders' by scholars such as Potts and are suggested as appearing from the 3rd century BCE as discussed in chapter three in this

⁸⁰ Potts, 1990, 265.

⁸¹ Boucharlat and Mouton, 1994, 13.

⁸² Boucharlat and Mouton, 1994, 15,22.

⁸³ Boucharlat and Mouton, 1994, 18.

dissertation.⁸⁴ The recent discovery of a substantial hoard of such silver coins at the site has only added to the picture of the importance of this site as a centre of power and could draw allusions to Antiochus' visit to the Gerrhaens and the trove of silver that he departed with.⁸⁵

Boucharlat and Mouton suggested in 1994 that the functionality of the fort could be twofold both as an administrative centre and warehouse on the caravan route from presumably Ed Dur through the Hajar range towards another coastal site on the Gulf of Oman.⁸⁶ If we consider that Mleiha has that primary function, yet is a regional political centre, then it is undeniable that there is a significant missing link within the trade triangle. The open question from the earlier investigations at Mleiha is “why this important settlement flourished for a short period and then disappeared without any successor.”⁸⁷ The answer that perhaps regional archaeology is moving towards could indeed be linked with the fate of the Seleucid empire and upheaval in established trade routes that a new power would need to reestablish and secure. Indeed, there are clear trade links with the Greek world through the discovery in the vicinity of tower tomb P5 of stamped Rhodian amphora handles that can be dated to Jason I (180/178 BCE) and Antigonous (187-185 BCE).⁸⁸ Thus indicating, as deduced by Overlaet et al, that the overall use of the graveyard C portion of the site to have been during the first part of the second century.⁸⁹

The transition from Iron Age in to the early Pre-Islamic phases (Hellenistic) at Mleiha is not as clear cut as a mere evolution of the local populace. This is conceded by Potts in that the pattern of burials alongside new foreign orientations, based on the quantity of imports at the site, indicates that the “essentially local community, practising traditions (such as pottery manufacture) as their ancestors had done for centuries before them,

⁸⁴ Boucharlat and Mouton, 1994, 22.

⁸⁵ <https://saa.shj.ae/en/news/mleiha-discloses-its-silver-coin-treasures/>

⁸⁶ Boucharlat and Mouton, 1994, 24.

⁸⁷ Boucharlat and Mouton, 1994, 24.

⁸⁸ Overlaet et al, 2024, 153.

⁸⁹ Overlaet et al, 2024, 160.

came to be ruled by a new elite originating in another area” or alternatively “by a local elite emulating displays of power and prestige by foreign rulers.”⁹⁰ Evidence for this departure from the Iron Age can be seen in the tower tombs that become the norm for burials in this era alongside the inscriptions that were found during excavation that indicates a cultural origin from beyond the region due to the tomb style and use of Aramaic language, albeit with south Arabian script.⁹¹ Potts suggests that an Arabic tribe could have moved in to the area but falls short of going beyond this and offering an explanation that could align with political motives such as that of Antiochus III with his potential for the fulfilment of Alexander’s ambitions after witnessing first hand the wealth offered to him at Gerrha. Indeed this possible foreign ruler that initiates the uplift in the fortunes of Mleiha and beyond can be found in the numismatic evidence and can be identified as the enigmatic Ab’iel meaning ‘(my) father is God’, a possible personal or dynastic name.

2.5 Kalba Vs. Dibba

Archaeological understanding at Kalba can be considered as developing following on from initial excavations at the beginning of the 21st century a somewhat reinvigorated campaign has emerged in recent years. This can perhaps best be considered to have been spurred on by discoveries at Dibba that could shed new insight on to whether Ed Dur is ancient Omana or if it was in fact a site on the Gulf of Oman, perhaps a more geo-strategic location for such a crossroads. described by Moutoun and Cuny as “North of the eastern coastal plain, Dibba is one of the best harbours along the Arabian coast of the Gulf of Oman”.⁹² Indeed Dibba has yielded Parthian, Roman, and Indian materials from funerary settings of the same period as Ed-Dur, making it an alternative location for ancient Omana, albeit occupied from the 1st century BCE according to evidence attained thus far and the interpretations of Jasim.⁹³ It is with this in mind that the site at

⁹⁰ Potts, 2012, 109-110.

⁹¹ Potts 2012, 111-112.

⁹² Mouton and Cuny, 2012, 181.

⁹³ Jasim, 2006.

Kalba is of most interest as the regional topography and natural environment can be considered as conducive towards such a settlement. With continued excavation and exploration of the site a substantive link within the local and wider sphere of influence could be integrated into our understanding.

In the summary of the recent fieldwork undertaken at Kalba, Schwall and Jasim offer the image of the Early Bronze Age forming “Extended supra-regional networks reaching from the Aegean to the Indus region...due to its geostrategic location, the Arabian Peninsula offers optimal conditions for nodes of these networks and probably functioned as a mediator.”⁹⁴ The focus of the site in recent excavations and analysis has been based upon the chronological context of the site in relation to the occupation layers of the 2nd and 1st millennium BCE. This is therefore a significantly different era of focus when compared to the latter part of the 1st millennium BCE particularly as the image of the region can be considered as more complete with a greater body of evidence. The site is a part of ancient Magan operating in conjunction with the commencement of settlement at Tell Abra q, as carbon dated by Potts to 2200 BCE and continuing into the Iron Age (and beyond as the most recent excavations have discovered).⁹⁵ Yet this continued chronological sequence remains incomplete for Kalba and it can therefore be speculated upon how important the site was into the Iron Age era and beyond in a Hellenistic context. An integral question as to the missing link on the Gulf of Oman is whether it is the more southerly location at Kalba that offers the most geo-strategic location or is it the site at Dibba closer to the PG entry straits.

Indeed, evidence from Dibba provides a significant array of finds, albeit from an isolated location discovered during the digging of housing foundations.⁹⁶ This discovery perhaps typifies the state of play with regards to archaeological understanding in Dibba as a lack of professional investigation can attest to a convoluted understanding of its significance in the ancient era. The area is in fact more well-known in the early Islamic era as the

⁹⁴ Schwall and Jasim, 2020, 321.

⁹⁵ Potts, 2000, 21-25.

⁹⁶ Jasim, 2006, 214.

site for a battle of the war of apostasy in 633 CE, clearly its ancient origins have further evidence to yield under the direction of Sharjah Archaeological Authority.⁹⁷ The excavations that have taken place revealed a site that is of such importance that Jasim has suggested that it is in fact ancient Omana, based on the finds from one burial site. The summary of evidence to support this hypothesis from a funerary context can be considered as: carnelian beads, ivory combs/plaques (geometrical shapes similar to Ed Dur), fine ware bowls, glass jars, a range of glazed ware (light yellow/green), well-fired buff ware, grey ware, thick black ware and red ware.⁹⁸ The range of finds certainly places the Dibba site in the midst of a range of active trade routes in the 1st century BCE and beyond, considering where Dibba fits in to the connectivity of the sites across the region provides intrigue as to whether the PG coast of Gulf of Oman can be considered as the most accessible and integral for trans-regional connectivity. On the one hand the northerly site provides a final coastal entrepôt prior to arrival at the region around the straits that is characterised by more mountainous terrain and lacking the inland connectivity that Dibba can offer. On the other hand, the site is perhaps too far north to have an ease of access to the regional power at Mleiha, Kalba would offer such access yet remains more opaque to likely trade from the Indian subcontinent and would serve the corridor to southern Arabia with more effect, thus providing a convincing argument as the ‘missing link’.

Further finds from Dibba add to the weight of evidence for the importance and transregional significance of the site: other ivory artefacts in the form of spindle whorls, pins and a cosmetic container, “Scythian point” iron arrowheads (a late Hellenistic development and paralleled at Ed Dur), limited gold and silver in the form of rings depicting Athena/Minerva and Roman busts in profile, beads of a variety of minerals.⁹⁹ Etched carnelian is perhaps of most interest due to its regional rarity with parallels at Mleiha and Ed Dur as well as a nearby site at Khor Fakkan indicating a close relationship with the Indus Valley and specifically the Gulf of Cambay region.¹⁰⁰ Jasim

⁹⁷Jasim, 2006, 214.

⁹⁸ Jasim, 2006, 215-225.

⁹⁹ Jasim, 2006, 225-228.

¹⁰⁰ Jasim, 2006, 229.

suggests that one of the most interesting finds at Dibba is an open-mouthed steatite bowl with a rolled rim and ring base dated as originating in the 2nd century BCE. The bowl is comparable with finds at Mleiha and most intriguingly with finds at a funerary site in the area of Al Taraif in Kalba during a 1992 excavation season within a tomb.¹⁰¹ Details of this Kalba excavation are scant with the 1992 report of Jasim being published in 2019 in the 7th Annual Sharjah Archaeology as second edition, Figure 6 shows the area excavated revealing a platform some 70m in size and described by Jasim in the 1992 report as “one of the most important and most completed platforms stone alignments, as yet uncovered in Arabia and the peninsula of Oman.”¹⁰² The investigations of the area are clearly incomplete, similarly to Dibba, in that the excavation of the tombs revealed that the area formed a significant settlement within the region, suggesting that the *missing link* might have already been discovered. Yet since its initial discovery no further details have emerged about the role of this site within the context of the Hellenistic era; this therefore remains a significant region for further study that could enhance understanding of the overall role of NE Arabia within the supraregional setting.

¹⁰¹ Jasim, 1992, 22.

¹⁰² Jasim, 1992, 27.

Figure 7: Kalba Excavation Map

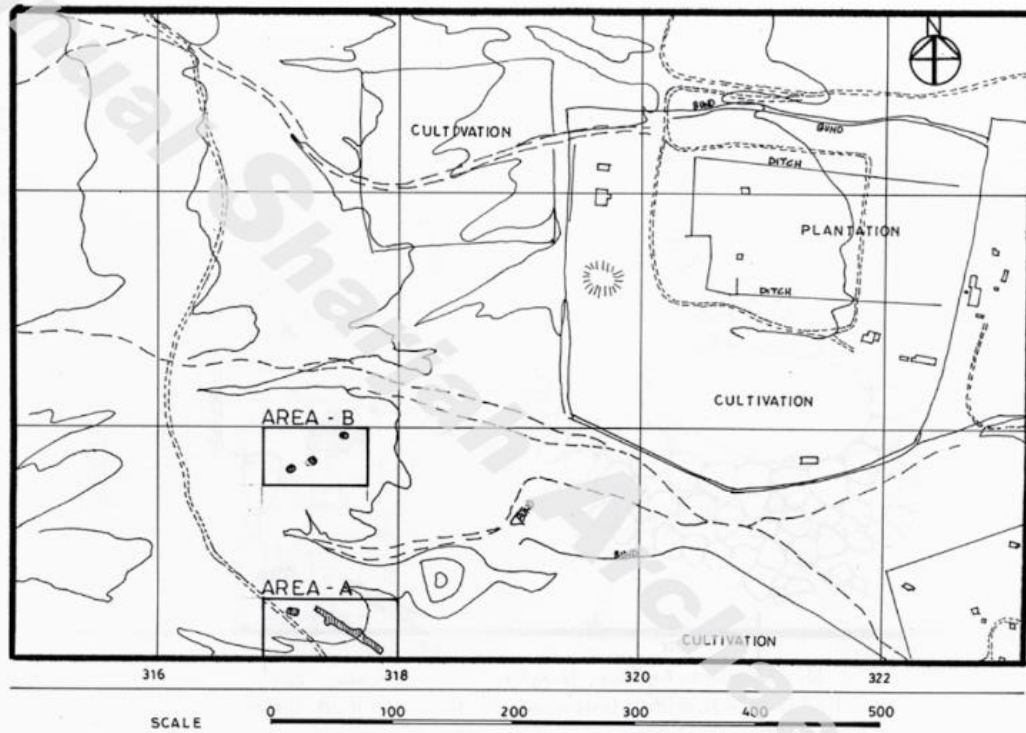


Fig. 4. Map showing the location of the platform and the two areas of excavations

Jasim, (1992), Sharjah archaeological authority, Vol. 7.

Figure 8: Map of Ptolemy's locations along the Gulf of Oman in Arabia Felix.



Stevenson, (1912), 167.

3. Numismatic Evidence

The Pre-islamic coinage of south east Arabia came to prominence in the fairly recent past (1980s) following the initial excavations at Ed Dur and Mleiha.¹⁰³ The coins have remained a source of debate ever since as not only do they provide evidence for an advanced economy in the region but also enlighten us on the kingdom that existed and the Hellenistic influence that they clearly portray. The question that remains is as to the extent that this numismatic evidence can be considered as wealth derived from the position of the region as an intermediary of trade between the spheres of the Indian Ocean via a site on the Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf via the site at Ed Dur and long established caravan routes towards northerly neighbours, perhaps previously located at Thaj. Indeed a similar image of Gerrha (Thaj) has been suggested by Huth, Potts and Hoover as a “crossing point of the trade routes to and from South Arabia and between India, Babylonia and Nabatea.”¹⁰⁴ With the discovery of the missing Hellenistic link at Kalba then it could become convincing that the north eastern region could have superseded Gerrha with Antiochus III realising this potential following on from his expedition. Expansion into the region would realise Alexander’s Arabian ambitions by spearheading a Seleucid interest and henceforth nullifying the Gerrheans monopolistic grip on the available wealth through trade. Perhaps then it is the numismatic evidence that is most convincing in the argument for the missing link with the regional power centre at Mleiha being the commercial facilitator between the coastal entrepôts.

3.1 The Search for Ab’iel

We can perhaps consider that conclusively understanding who Ab’iel was and the regional power upheld as being of central importance in drawing an overall conclusion about the supraregional role of Mleiha from the 3rd century BCE. The Ab’iel coinage is

¹⁰³ Delrue, 2007, 79.

¹⁰⁴ Huth, Potts and Hoover, 2002, 76.

the most abundant found throughout the sites at Ed Dur and Mleiha and has been labelled by scholars as a sequence within the so-called 'Arabian Alexanders'.¹⁰⁵ There is much scholarly work to sift through in relation to this coinage yet amongst the most intriguing are the thoughts of Callot in his attempts to establish a 'New Chronology for the Arabian Alexanders'.¹⁰⁶ The chronology builds upon the initial work of Potts and Haerinck in seeking to fill in some of the fundamental unknowns in the numismatic sequence. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt allude to Alexander and the Seleucids establishing local mints in order to increase the usage of coinage within a region.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, considering that Mleiha's growth to prominence was such an instance of economic expansion, Seleucid involvement can be considered as a possibility. The alternative to this is also evaluated by Sherwin-White and Kuhrt in that the very proximity of Mleiha to the empire facilitated a change in methods of exchange, albeit on a temporary basis as a result of a surge in Seleucid trade activity within a region.¹⁰⁸ Both instances would suggest that Seleucid interest in the region had emerged, yet whether we can classify Mleiha as a pocket of Seleucid power or that of a local ruler remains a fundamental question. The answer to this missing link could emerge via the consolidation of recent numismatic evidence alongside strengthening the archaeological picture on the Gulf of Oman coast.

A significant point of note in the establishment of Callot's "New Chronology" is that the expedition to Gerrha/Thaj should not be considered a part of his Anabasis but rather a separate expedition, as first suggested by Sherwin-White and Kuhrt.¹⁰⁹ Antiochus' presence for the New Year in 205 BCE at Babylon as can be ascertained by the king's participation in the April celebration according to Astronomical Diary 204 C.¹¹⁰ The expedition to Arabia was therefore then of a separate significance and facilitated by the availability of naval power at Falaika and possibly Bahrain suggesting that Antiochus

¹⁰⁵ Potts et al.

¹⁰⁶ Callot, 2010, 383.

¹⁰⁷ Sherwin-White and Kurt, 1994, 64

¹⁰⁸ Sherwin-White and Kurt, 1994, 64-65.

¹⁰⁹ Shewin-White and Kuhrt, 1994, 200.

¹¹⁰ Sachs/Hunger, 1989, 14-18.

had intended military conquest but instead settled to treaty with Gerrha upon the realisation of the potential wealth available.¹¹¹ What this makes clear is the Seleucid ambition to control and sustain trade in the PG region, securing trade routes (maritime and overland) towards India, the establishment then of minting at Mleiha could achieve a new centre of control that would circumnavigate the traditional role of Gerrha and expand Seleucid power into the NE Arabian region as well as providing access to new possible Indian Ocean entrepôts. The success of the Mleiha enterprise, or possible franchise, can be seen in the recent discovery of a hoard of silver tetradrachm Arabian Alexanders bearing 409 coins, more extensive than any other such hoard in the region to date (Figure 12).¹¹² A significant academic publication on the Mleiha coin hoard is unfortunately unavailable in 2024 with a thorough analysis of the coins incomplete. It is therefore only possible to utilise the “New Chronology” of Callot to consider where the typologies fit in.

3.2 The Mleiha Hoard

Understanding the origins of the Abyatha coinage could be of central importance in the series’ that follow-on. The Bahrain hoard is most similar to that from Mleiha in this extensivity, being 215 coins and explained by Morkholm in his 1972 analysis as “These 215 coins are closely related and undoubtedly derive from a single mint”.¹¹³ Morkholm however does not have evidence for the prototype(s) from which the Bahrain hoard derived; the hoard at Mleiha could now potentially offer that answer.

Fortunately the Sharjah Archaeological Authority has compiled 3D scans of all of the coins of a high quality that are readily available via an online platform.¹¹⁴ Upon review of the collection it is strikingly apparent that most examples fit with Callot’s Abi’el bar

¹¹¹ Sherwin-White and Kuhrt, 1994, 200.

¹¹² <https://saa.shj.ae/en/news/mleiha-discloses-its-silver-coin-treasures/>

¹¹³ Morkholm, 1972.

¹¹⁴ <https://sketchfab.com/GlobalDigitalHeritage/collections/pre-islamic-silver-coin-hoard-mleiha-sharjah-uae-e2db2587badf45ee83a7ce20b55d650a>

Tblgln series, dated as 'early 2nd century' by Potts and end of 3rd or beginning of 2nd c. BCE by Callot.¹¹⁵ Aligning the Mleiha hoard with this series is clear from the vertical shin (see figure 13 below) on the left hand side of the coins, significantly distinct from the horizontal shin that is prevalent in examples from Gerrha (Thaj) and Tylos (Bahrain). Stylistically the coins from the hoard can be very different (see Figure 14 below) perhaps indicating the diversity in moulds used and different rulers or varying standards of artists/craftsmen on site, therefore perhaps indicating the transient nature of Mleiha. A significant difference in the aesthetics of the coins is the clear disparity in suggestions around the gender represented with the indication being that Ab'iel was a female ruler as suggested by at least three of the Aramaic names on the coinage ('b'l brt Nšyl(w) 'b'l brt M'smš, and 'b'l brt Lbš).¹¹⁶ The range of coins within the Mleiha hoard contains both the female form (Figure 13) as well as male (Figure 14) displaying some considerable longevity within the accumulated hoard and thereby confirming the continued importance of Mleiha from the 2nd century BCE.

The use of Aramaic is of some consideration here as Macdonald has suggested that the use of this imported language emphasises that Mleiha was seeking to assert its independence from the realms of the Seleucids.¹¹⁷ Yet Macdonald also acknowledges that the Abi'el coinage is more ambitious than merely seeking to feign or imply independence but rather is actively embodying the ruler of the region as Alexander himself thus "naturalising one aspect of the Seleucid *status quo*".¹¹⁸ The use of this "Language of Power" then can either be considered, as envisaged by Macdonald, as an attempt to craft statehood or alternatively can we see the ambitions of Alexander fulfilled and the conquest of Arabia complete following the expedition of Antiochus to Gerrha and expansion in to NE Arabia either by implication or by intent.¹¹⁹ Since Macdonald crafted his conclusions on the coinage of Ab'iel, the discovery of the Mleiha hoard could quite possibly signify a watershed in our understanding of the kingdom of the rulers of

¹¹⁵ Callot, 2010, 400.

¹¹⁶ Macdonald, 2010, 483.

¹¹⁷ Macdonald, 2010, 408.

¹¹⁸ Macdonald, 2010, 408.

¹¹⁹ Levine, 2003, 267.

the region as its significant extent sheds new light on the wealth and importance of Mleiha as a supraregional power.

What is perhaps of most intrigue with regards to the Mleiha coin hoard is the lack of both sides being moulded/struck. In the majority of coins only one side is moulded, as can be seen in the figures below, without the classic head of Alexander/Herakles on the reverse. The coins without the reverse are of Callot's early series which has been dated as PIR A strata at Mleiha (Mid. 3rd to beginning of 2nd century BCE).¹²⁰ There are 17 coins within the hoard that have both sides (obverse/reverse), however on most of these the reverse mould of the head is of poor quality. At the present time the only method of ascertaining an understanding about which coins have both sides or not is through the use of SAA's rendered models. The obverse of these coins reveals that they are of Callot's "recent series", of crude fabric and abstract style with the seated figure holding a horse and a palm tree motif, being a new addition on the left side. Callot is of the mind that this series was exclusively for trade within the territories of Mleiha rather than being used on the international markets.¹²¹ When we consider this conclusion with the coinage of the hoard in mind then one must surely question two main points of contention:

- 1) Why are 17 recent series' coins interspersed with a hoard containing 392 early series coins?
- 2) Why do all of the early series coins only have an obverse?

The diversity of early series coins within the hoard is certainly beyond the bounds of discussion here yet the lack of an obverse mould is shared by all of the examples except for several with some cross marks and dotted holes. Callot's conclusion that the latest series as being for internal use within the kingdom, could be open to further discussion and new interpretations. It could be that the early series coins are in fact the international currency owing to the substantially improved clarity of production and the

¹²⁰ Callot, 2010, 391.

¹²¹ Callot, 2010, 393.

reason that the examples from the Mleiha hoard are without an obverse is due to their intended use at a local level. This is supported by moulding/striking the obverse being problematic, therefore Callot's premise of the use of this coinage at a local level is correct yet requires some further consideration towards the type of coinage. Instead of utilising the coins with both obverse and reverse being struck we could consider that the Mleiha hoard provides the example of local currency with only the local ruler/deity being present. The lack of Herakles/Alexander/Seleucid connections on the reverse could provide an indication of the lack of respect or requirement for this connection to be present for trade at a local level. However for markets further afield providing such legitimacy was an essential component and would aid in negating the undermining of Seleucid regional power.

Callot has envisaged the demise of Gerrha as being intertwined with the coinage shifting from a south Arabian script to north Arabian as evidence for the more prominent role of Mleiha. Yet Callot also dates Mleiha's coinage as being issued at the same time that Gerrha was the most prominent in the region after the revolt of Molon in 223 BCE. Following Antiochus' expedition Callot then suggests that Mleiha reduces its production, it is therefore a possibility that the coinage in the Mleiha hoard is evidence of this production declining with the obverse being incomplete. Callot's chronology has a gap between the possible establishment of Seleucid interests in Arabia up until the death of Antiochus IV in 164 BCE. The first 35 years of the 2nd century BCE is where the 'missing link' could lie, just as it is indeed missing in Callot's new chronology. The three decades at the start of the 2nd century mark a critical juncture where Seleucid enterprise in the PG and northern Arabia could have seen a significant shift away from the control of Gerrha and towards a more consolidated centre of Seleucid power at Mleiha that would achieve success that can be measured as threefold:

- 1) The superseding of the role of the Gerrha as the dominant regional power
- 2) Provide effective control of trade with India via PG and south via the Oman Gulf;
- 3) Realise the ambitions of Alexander for Arabia and reassert Seleucid legitimacy.

Figure 9: Mleiha Coin Hoard



UAE's 2,300-year-old Mleiha Coin Hoard Reveals International Trade,
<https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/mleiha-0015732>

Figure 10: Pre-Islamic Silver Coin SAA396N



<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/pre-islamic-silver-coin-saa396n-068f99c98f1c431fb51d50935dff41d0>

Figure 11: Pre-Islamic Silver Coin SAA334N



<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/pre-islamic-silver-coin-saa334n-7b32f64779e647c88034c594a00973f2>

Figure 12: Tetradrachm comparisons



Left to right: Tetradrachm of Alexander the Great, 1962, excavated under the direction of David Stronach, on behalf of the British Institute of Persian Studies, struck at the mint at Susa in southwestern Iran. The Earliest Coin from Saudi Arabia, One of Seven Known, From the Martin Huth Collection. Ex Frankfurter Münzhandlung E. Button 109 (2 December 1963). Pre-Islamic Silver Coin SAA334N, SAA, Mleiha hoard.

Conclusion

When considering the supraregional role of Mleiha at the turn of the 2nd century BCE, it is pertinent to look at the setting in which the ancient site finds itself today. It is possible to draw similarities between the economic powerhouse of Dubai as a regional crossroads facilitating global transit and logistics and the powerbase at Abu Dhabi for control of the overall regional operations. Considering this central role of the UAE in the global economy as a reflection of the ancient civilisation that held power at the nexus of Mleiha goes some way towards filling the blanks at the outset of the 2nd century BCE. The facilitation of PG logistics via Ed Dur by way of control at Mleiha provides synchronism, yet although these two sites are the most prominent yet discovered it is without question that the GO coast is missing that significant site to bring overall perspective to the trading relationships across the region in order to truly understand the supraregional power that existed.

The range of evidence for a 'missing link' can be summarised as: Ptolemy's map locations, Antiochus' voyage to Gerrha, excavations at Dibba/Kalba and the Mleiha coin hoard. The most important of these going forward is a published analysis of the Mleiha coin hoard. The ordering of the coin types to ensure that the stylistic differences are ascertained within the chronological sequence is critical to ensuring a consensus as to the reason for the lack of a reverse on the coins being reached by scholars. In order to achieve this consensus a revised version of Callot's *New Chronology* will be required to answer the use of the coinage at a local versus at an international level. Burstein's analysis of the Satrap Stela in relation to Egypt's southern border in terms of the geographical legacy of Alexander stated that "without it being intended, the limits of Alexander's conquests became the borders of the empire beyond which lay other powers with which the Diadochi would have to deal."¹²² With Burstein's thoughts on Alexander's unintended legacy in mind, the further the evidence that UAE archaeology reveals with each season of discovery then the more consensus emerges for the

¹²² Burstein, 2015, 118.

possibility of an expanded empire in the NE Arabian region in the final years of the 3rd century BCE. This is particularly convincing following on from the Anabasis of Antiochus III, an era that not only reconsolidated Seleucid legitimacy in the region but went beyond merely border security and held an imperial ambition to achieve something in line with what Alexander sought to do next. With this interpretation in mind Antiochus Megas not only established dominion over Gerrha but recognised the significant hub that existed and could exist elsewhere in order to truly facilitate control of transregional trade.

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