

# Crossing Ancient Sacred Landscapes

**Contacts and Continuities in the Ancient  
Desert Cults and Beliefs of Northern Arabia  
and the Arid Southern Levant**

**Seminar of the Faculty of Asian  
and Middle Eastern Studies  
University of Oxford**

**5th - 6th December 2023  
Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies  
University of Oxford**

**Pusey Lane Oxford, OX1 2LE  
[www.ames.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ames.ox.ac.uk)**

**This will be a hybrid seminar, with in-person attendance and stream on Zoom.  
In-person and online attendees should register with Ms Lev Cosijns at [lev.cosijns@arch.ox.ac.uk](mailto:lev.cosijns@arch.ox.ac.uk)**

## Crossing Ancient Sacred Landscapes Contacts and Continuities in the Ancient Desert Cults and Beliefs of Northern Arabia and the Arid Southern Levant

### Conveners:

**Juan Manuel Tebes** (British Academy Visiting Fellow)  
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**Michael C.A. Macdonald** (Fellow of the British Academy)  
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*I rose and climbed a mountain dry, the  
greenery there had still not shown;  
So putting shoes to both my feet, I sought a  
spot where pasture had grown.  
When I came to high Ghadir, that mountain  
thick with shrubbery lay;  
So we broke camp, got under way, and  
stopped at Asbah's tomb to pray.  
Bedouin poem*

Crossing different landscapes and periods has been a major feature of the desert cults and beliefs of the Middle East, from prehistory to modern times. This seminar aims to study the sacred landscapes of northern Arabia and the southern arid margins of the Levant in ancient times throughout the *longue durée*, adopting an interdisciplinary approach at the intersection between archaeology, history, epigraphy, rock art research, and digital humanities. Scholars will present several case-studies with synchronic and diachronic analyses of the cultic and mortuary traditions of the region from the Neolithic to the Early Islamic period. The seminar is particularly interested in phenomena of cultural continuity of cultic and ritual manifestations throughout large geographical spaces. These cults and beliefs cut across different landscapes and periods. Crossings were synchronic, with religious traditions, oral narratives, cultic material culture, and funerary architecture, crossing diverse geographical landscapes and socio-cultural entities of different complexity. Crossings were also diachronic, with certain features of the material culture and architecture crossing through different temporal periods.

This seminar is particularly timely, as the archaeology of Arabia and the southern Levant, two fields that have developed for a long time in parallel without contact, are increasingly communicating thematically and personally. This Oxford seminar, therefore, aims to provide an opportunity to develop further the dialogue between these fields.

## Tuesday 5th December 2023

09:00-09:20 *Welcome Address: The Archaeology and Epigraphy of Northwest Arabia and the Arid Southern Levant: From Old Paradigms to Digital Humanities*  
**Juan Manuel Tebes & Michael C.A. Macdonald**

**Panel 1: The Archaeology of Cult and Death I**  
Session chair: Nicolai Sinai

09:25-09:45 *Not at rest in the Neolithic: Active Roles for the Dead*  
**Bill Finlayson** (University of Oxford)

09:50-10:10 *Continuities and Convergences in Negev Cult Sites over the Long Term*  
**Steven Rosen** (Ben Gurion University of the Negev)

10:15-10:35 Discussion | 10:35-10:55 Coffee Break

10:55-11:15 *The Religious Topography of Dadan in the 1st Millennium BCE: Sanctuaries, Deities, Communities*  
**Jérôme Rohmer** (French National Centre for Scientific Research) &  
**Josselin Pinot** (University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)

11:20-11:40 *The Politics of Death and the Rise of Desert Cult in the Neolithic of Northwest Arabia*  
**Melissa Kennedy** (University of Sydney)

11:45-12:05 *Cultic "Eruption" in the Desert, 8th-6th Millennia BCE*  
**Uzi Avner** (Dead Sea & Arava Science Center)

12:10-12:30 Discussion | 12:30-14:00 Lunch

**Panel 2: The Rock Art Iconography of Cults and Beliefs**  
Session Chair: Michael Fradley

14:00-14:20 *On the Crossroads between Arabia and the Levant: Evidence for Ancient Beliefs and the Movement of Individuals from Monumental Rock Art*  
**Maria Guagnin** (Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology)

14:25-14:45 *Technological Signatures in Rock Art: Insights from Timna, Israel*  
**Lena Dubinsky** (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

14:50-15:10 *Iconography and Chronology of Rock Art at selected Sites in Northern Arabia*  
**Meinrat O. Andreae** (Max Planck Institute for Chemistry)

15:15-15:35 Discussion

**Wednesday 6th December 2023**

**Panel 3: The Epigraphic Evidence for Cults and Beliefs**

Session chair: Michael Macdonald

09:00-09:20 *Ritual Continuities: The Safaitic Inscriptions and Memories of Arabian Paganism in Islamic-period Sources*

**Ahmad Al-Jallad** (Ohio State University)

09:25-09:45 *The Evolution of the Theophoric Onomasticon in pre-Islamic Northwest Arabia according to the Epigraphic Evidence*

**Jérôme Norris** (University of Lorraine)

09:50-10:10 *From the Valley to the Mountains: A Survey of the Dadanitic Epigraphic Material from Different Types of Cultic Spaces associated with Ancient Dadan*

**Fokelien Kootstra** (Ghent University)

10:15-10:35 Discussion | 10:35-10:55 Coffee Break

**Panel 4: Continuities from the Late Pre-Islamic Cults to Christianity and Early Islam**

Session chair: Maria Guagnin

10:55-11:15 *Sacred Locales in the Qur'an*

**Nicolai Sinai** (University of Oxford)

11:20-11:40 *Ethico-religious Vocabulary on the Eve of Islam in light of Inscriptions from near Tabuk (HRahDA 4 and HRahDA 5b) and Arabic Poetry*

**Ilkka Lindstedt** (University of Helsinki)

11:45-12:05 *Medina as a Late Antique Arabian Sacred Space*

**Harry Munt** (University of York)

12:10-12:30 Discussion | 12:30-14:00 Lunch

**Panel 5: The Archaeology of Cult and Death II**

Session chair: Juan Manuel Tebes

14:00-14:20 *Allat and the Desert. Geographic Approach to the Ancient Religions*

**Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider** (University of Wrocław)

14:25-14:45 *EAMENA on the Edge: A Remote Sensing Perspective on Funerary Monuments in the Arid Regions of Northern Arabia*

**Michael Fradley** (University of Oxford)

14:50-15:10 *Neolithic Desert Cults of Pastoral Nomads in Northern Arabia: The Horn Chamber Mustatil*

**Wael Abu Azizeh** (Lumière University Lyon 2, Archéorient)

15:15-15:35 *The Making of Cultic and Funerary Landscapes in Qurayyah, Northwest Arabia*

**Marta Luciani** (University of Vienna)

15:40-16:00 Discussion | 16:00-16:05 Final Remarks