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Guest editors' foreword

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Abstract

This special issue of *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* is the result of the conference 'Archaeological Failaka, Recent and Ongoing Investigations' organised at the National Library of Kuwait by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) of the State of Kuwait and the French Research Center of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA, formerly known as CEFAS) between 26 and 28 November 2019. Not less than 13 articles on the archaeology of Failaka offer an overview of the most recent works on sites dating from its first occupation in the Bronze Age to the late Islamic period. It provides a new insight into the rich history of Failaka – an island explored by Kuwaiti and international teams since the 1950's and that was connected with Mesopotamia, Iran, the Near East and India – and begin to fill in some gaps, in particular concerning the late Islamic period, the pottery studies, the long-distance trade and the geomorphology of the island.

In the frame of the conferences organised each year by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) of the State of Kuwait and the CEFREPA (French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula, formerly known as CEFAS), a conference took place at the National Library of Kuwait, completed by a meeting at the CEFREPA and a workshop on Failaka Island between 26 and 28 November 2019. The conference was entitled 'Archaeological Failaka, Recent and Ongoing Investigations'. It gathered 30 participants who delivered 20-minute communications to an attendance of a broader audience (Fig. 1). This three-day meeting offered a very special opportunity for most of the archaeological teams currently excavating on Failaka to share their most recent results and to show each other their archaeological materials. This special issue of *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* is the result of this conference, presenting 13 articles on the archaeology of Failaka, all having been peer reviewed and edited by the guest co-editors and external reviewers. Rather than an exhaustive synthesis on the archaeological research of Failaka, this special issue offers an overview of the most recent works on sites dating from its first occupation to the late Islamic period. To the east of Kuwait's coastline, the island of Failaka remains a fantastic place for historians and archaeologists, and its rich ancient heritage has made it famous among scholars. Since the end of the 1950's, this island has been explored by Kuwaiti and

international teams. Archaeologists have identified a long and dense occupation, as well as monumental architecture (temples, a fortress, a church, mosques), and connections with Mesopotamia, Iran, the Near East and India.

If only a few and still rare remains from the Palaeolithic are known from Kuwait's mainland, the later prehistoric periods are better known, especially with the important Neolithic settlements (5500–4200 BCE) in the area of al-Sabiyah (Carter & Crawford, 2010; Bieliński, 2017, 2018). On Failaka Island itself (Fig. 2), the first traces of human occupation date to a later period: the Bronze Age. The island was home to the Dilmun Culture, as suggested by the public buildings, in particular a temple (Calvet & Gachet, 1990; Calvet & Pic, 2008), perhaps two (Højlund & Hagelquist, 2019), a monumental building (Calvet & Salles, 1986) still designed as 'the palace' but probably related to food processing (Højlund & Abu-Laban, 2016), and a domestic area (Kjærum & Højlund, 2013). At that time, the island was said to be called Agarum, but this name is now debated. All these buildings are located in the south-west area of Failaka, around the areas of tells F6 and F3 (Tell Sa'ad). On the northern coast, the Bronze Age site of al-Khidr revealed another type of settlement and a population living mainly from fishing (Benediková, 2010b; and in this volume: Ashkanani & Kovár, 2021; Kovár et al., 2021). After an apparent abandonment of about seven centuries, Failaka Island



FIGURE 1 Some of the participants at the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL)–French Research Centre of the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA) Conference on the Archaeology of Failaka held in Kuwait City, Kuwait, 26–28 November 2019. (from left to right) Rémi Perregon, Flemming Højlund, Hasan Ashkanani, Damien Arhan, Farah al-Sabah, Jean-Baptiste Houal, Jean-Michel Gelin, Rémy Crassard, Julie Bonnéric, Éric Fouache, Marie Masdupuis, Ahmed Saied, Giorgio Rascaglia, Kamel al Abdul Jalil, Andrea Di Micheli, Tahani S. Al-Adwani, Branislav Kovár, Fahad al-Wahaibi, Yahya Manhal, Sultan Al-Duwaish, Abd Al-Aziz Al-Suwalih, Magdalena Nowakowska, Marta Mierzejewska, Marek Truszkowski, Matej Ruttkay and Hamed Almutairi

was repopulated during the Achaemenid period (c.550–330 BCE): a temple, perhaps dedicated to Shamash or Nabu, was discovered at Tell Khazneh and yielded specific terracotta figurines and inscriptions (Calvet & Salles, 1986). Failaka Island, named Ikaros by Alexander the Great, was then occupied during the Hellenistic period, which saw the erection of one of the most famous buildings in Kuwait: the fortress of Tell Sa'īd or tell F5 (Jeppesen, 1990; Gelin, 2012; and in this volume: Durand, 2021), which hosted a Seleucid garrison, and its Doric and Ionic temples. After the fall of the Seleucid Empire, the fortress became a village inhabited until the end of the second century CE. Afterward, the island seems to have been abandoned again, or at least no archaeological remains are known before the end of the Sassanian period, even if new discoveries at al-Qurainiyah may offer a more complete stratigraphic sequence (in this volume: Di Miceli, 2021). At the end of the Sassanian period, a monastery, nowadays called al-Qusur, was built in the centre part of Failaka. Mainly occupied during the early Islamic period, it consisted of a monumental church (Bernard & Salles, 1991; Salles & Callot, 2013) and conventual buildings, as well as courtyard buildings that may have been cells or hermitages for monks (in this volume: Bonnéric, 2021). Contemporaneous fishing populations were living to the north of this site along the coast at al-Qurainiyah (in this volume: Di Miceli, 2021) and probably at Sa'ida (in this volume: Almutairi, 2021), but their

religion is not yet known. Furnaces discovered on the north-eastern coast of the island, to the south of al-Awazim, may also be contemporaneous (Makharadze et al., 2017). Once again, Failaka Island seemed to be uninhabited from the ninth century CE to the re-occupation of the island at the late Islamic period, from the seventeenth century CE. Recent excavations revealed two kinds of settlements: villages, such as al-Qurainiyah (Grassigli & Di Miceli, 2018), Kharab al-Dasht (in this volume: Pieńkowska & Truszkowski, 2021) and Sa'ida (in this volume: Almutairi, 2021); and seasonal occupations (in this volume: Chkhvimiani et al., 2021), where the inhabitants were mainly living from fishing and farming.

Archaeology is the main source when writing the history of Failaka Island. The first excavation there took place in 1957, after the incidental finding of the Soteles stela, and was undertaken by a Danish team led by G. T. Bibby and P. V. Globb. A few years later, in 1960, Kuwait was the first Gulf country to enact a law protecting its heritage and antiquities and regulating archaeological activities. Since then, there has always been much and active scientific research. The Danish Archaeological Expedition to Kuwait unearthed vestiges of Dilmun at tells F3 and F6 and discovered the Hellenistic fortress at tell F5, in particular its two temples (Mathiesen, 1982; Hannestad, 1983; Kjærøum, 1983; Højlund, 1987; Jeppesen, 1990; Kjærøum & Højlund, 2013).

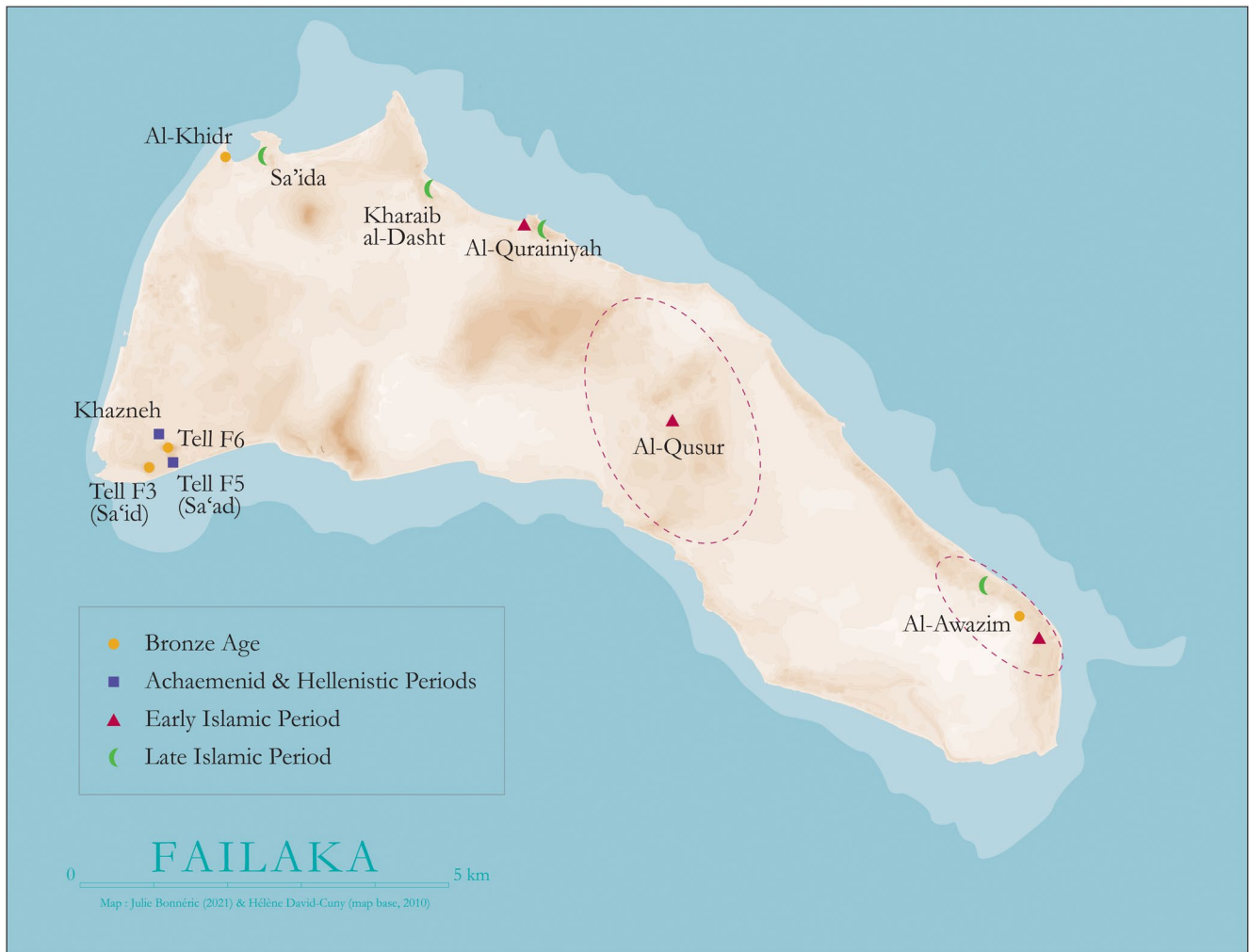


FIGURE 2 Map of Failaka Island, Kuwait, and the archaeological sites mentioned in the issue

The Department of Antiquities and Museums of Kuwait also carried out excavations and restoration work between 1958 and 1964 (Archaeological Investigations, 1965). In 1973–74, the Johns Hopkins University Expedition to Failaka Island, an American team led by T. Howard-Carter (Howard-Carter 1972), carried out a survey and the excavation of the fortress. Then, in 1975–76, an Italian joint team from the universities of Bologna and Venice, the Archaeological Mission in the Arabic Gulf, conducted a survey across the western and central parts of the island, and were the first to excavate at al-Qusur (Patitucci & Uggeri, 1984). In 1983, the French Mission to Kuwait began extensive work on the island, which led, under the direction of J.-F. Salles, Y. Calvet or O. Callot, to the discovery of the Dilmun temple under tell F6, the Achaemenid temple at Tell Khazneh, al-Qusur church, and continued excavations at the Hellenistic fortress (Salles, 1984; Calvet & Salles, 1986; Calvet & Gachet, 1990; Calvet & Pic, 2008). Archaeological operations were interrupted during the Gulf War, which unfortunately saw the looting and destruction of many antiquities, particularly during the great fire of the Kuwait National Museum where the most

iconic artefacts of Kuwait were kept, such as the Soteles stela from the Hellenistic fortress and stucco panels showing cross motifs from al-Qusur.

International archaeological exploration of Failaka Island only resumed in 2001 with the return of the French Mission to Kuwait which focused on the Tell Sa'id fortress and al-Qusur sites and the creation of the Kuwaiti-Gulf Mission that focused on the excavation of Sa'ida on the northern coast. The 2000s were characterised by the multiplication of international teams. Since 2005, the Kuwaiti-Slovak Archaeological Mission, led by L. Benediková, then M. Ruttkay, undertook surveys as well as excavations at al-Khidr and al-Qusur (Benediková, 2010a, 2010b; Kovár et al., 2019; Pieta et al., 2019; Ruttkay et al., 2019). In 2007 and 2009, a Greek Archaeological Mission, directed by A. Kottaridi, conducted some soundings inside and outside the fortress. Since 2008, a new Danish team, directed by F. Højlund, the Kuwaiti-Danish Archaeological Mission in Failaka, focused on Dilmun sites and completed work on tells F6 then F3 (Hilton, 2014; Højlund & Abu-Laban, 2016; Højlund & Hagelquist, 2019). Three missions were created in 2011

and still explore Failaka heritage. A new French–Kuwaiti Archaeological Mission in Failaka, led by M. Gelin (Gelin 2012) then J. Bonnéric (Bonnéric 2019, 2020), conducts research on the Hellenistic fortress and al-Qusur monastery. A Kuwaiti–Georgian Archaeological Mission, led by D. Lordkipanidze, explores the north-eastern part of the island. It revealed the island's occupation during the Bronze Age, as well as the early and late Islamic periods (Makharadze et al., 2017; Makharadze & Kvirkvelia, 2019). A new Kuwaiti–Italian Mission, directed by G. Grassigli then A. Di Miceli, excavates al-Qurayniyya on the northern coast (Grassigli & Di Miceli, 2018; Di Miceli, 2019). In 2011 and 2013, the Kuwaiti–Polish Archaeological Mission, which was already working on the mainland at al-Sabiyah, excavated to the north of al-Qusur under the supervision of M. Żurek (Żurek 2015). Since 2013, this mission has been working on Failaka at the site of Kharaiab al-Dasht under the supervision of A. Pieńkowska (Pieńkowska 2017) and on a survey of the coast under the supervision of M. Nowakowska.

This brief overview of the archaeological operations, past and present, on Failaka Island illustrates Kuwait's efforts and interest in international scientific cooperation for better documenting, understanding and preserving its national history and heritage. Currently, nine settlements are still under excavation or under final publication work: the Bronze Age sites of al-Khidr and Tell Sa'ad (tell F3); the Hellenistic fortress of Tell Sa'id (tell F5); the early Islamic sites of al-Qusur and al-Qurainiyah; and the late Islamic sites of Sa'ida, Kharaiab al-Dasht, al-Awazim and al-Qurainiyah. These excavations offer the possibility of considerably enriching the history of the island, Kuwait and the Gulf.

This *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* special issue provides a new insight into the history of Failaka and offers the opportunity to begin filling in some gaps, in particular concerning the geomorphology of the island (Arhan et al., 2021; Chagelishvili et al., 2021), the late Islamic period (Chkhvimiani et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2021; Pieńkowska & Truskowski, 2021), long-distance trade (Mahfouz et al., 2021; Durand, 2021), and on pottery studies (Ashkanani & Kovár, 2021; Durand, 2021; Mierzejewska, 2021; Perrogon & Bonnéric, 2021). In parallel, many questions approached in these articles still have to be solved. Was Failaka playing a central role in the Gulf trade or was it simply a stopover on the road? How to define its relationship with and connections to the mainland? What raw materials were available on the island and which products were imported? How did the environment and the landscape of the island change and influence the human occupation? We hope this special issue will be a first step to answering these questions, highlighting and proposing new research topics.

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