

*In the Desert Margins: The Settlement Process in Ancient South and East Arabia.* By MICHEL MOUTON and JÉRÉMIE SCHIETTECATTE. Arabia Antica, vol. 9. Pp. 334, illus. Rome: BRETSCHNEIDER, 2014. €250.

No book yet has attempted to summarize the late pre-Islamic archaeology of all of Arabia. The survey by Dan Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity* (1992), deals with the Gulf states from prehistory to the coming of Islam. The reviewer's *Die Gräberfelder in Samad al Shan* (2001) focusses on the Samad Late Iron Age (LIA, 150 BCE–300 CE), centered in the Sharqiyah province of the Sultanate. Both are in need of updating; therefore the reviewer's monograph, *Cross-Roads: Early and Late Iron Age South-Eastern Arabia* (2014), updates several points. In recent years both Schiettecatte and Mouton have made significant written contributions to the archaeology of Arabia. Their new book is written for archaeologists interested in a broader view of late pre-Islamic Arabia settlement archaeology than that from specialist works. This production is nicely printed, attractive with many excellent black-and-white illustrations, on very good paper, and with a stiff price, typical of the publisher.

Two halves, Eastern and Southern Arabia, make up the book. The first focusses geographically on the middle Gulf western littoral to central Oman, and in addition includes a chapter on the settlement archaeology of this region. The second part deals with the settlement of southern Arabia, its urbanization, urbanism and urban functions, social structure, and concludes with a discussion of the settlement process in this region. Considering the large format, the second half of the book at best downplays the importance of the Ḥimyarite Period (notwithstanding pp. 138, 157, 227, 277–78), for whatever reason.

The text regarding southeastern Arabia is uneven, picking up certain topics while ignoring others. We must be grateful that Mouton discusses the Samad LIA at all, since from 2001 till now substantive discussion of this topic has been surprisingly rare (exception: Schreiber 2007) as a result of a lack of new contexts. Obviously Mouton's information is stronger where he himself has worked, i.e., in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In Oman his basis is insecure. For example, he terms the cemetery at al-Fuwaydah as belonging to "Samad Culture" (pp. 78–79 fig. 63), which the reviewer (and excavator) has never written or said and would never accept (Yule 1999: 119–86). While balsamaria are in fact common to both the Samad assemblage and the *Préislamique récent* (PIR), at al-Fuwaydah the other pottery shows a close relation to that of the PIR, but *not* to the Samad LIA.

On p. 81 (also pp. 82, 95) Mouton emphasizes a "morphological and technical continuity" which the excavators in the Samad/Moyassar oases articulated in relative but not absolute chronological fashion in regard to the settlement nurtured by the underground *falaj* channel, M46, i.e., in horizontal stratigraphic (chorological) fashion. J. Schreiber believes in this intimate transition at EIA/LIA Ibra (p. 95) and this certainly seems logical for some irrigation settlements (e.g., Izki), but rarely can excavated remains really prove it. Archaeologists make this leap intuitively.

Somehow Mouton mistakenly believes (p. 82) that his German colleagues of many years in Oman are from Bochum University. The reviewer gave the artifacts and sites which he studied alphanumeric codes which Mouton freely alters. He ignores recent literature and lectures, some of which he attended (e.g., Schreiber 2007) and dwells on the literature from the late 1980s and 1990s. Obsolete concepts which the reviewer abandoned nine or more years ago as unsuitable (e.g., the term "Samad Culture") are employed as if current. The fort M34 is falsely described as of Early Iron Age (EIA) type (p. 86; for such forts, see Yule 2014: 36 fig. 14.1–5), as is the published pottery. In fact, the latter is early Samad LIA, mixed with a few EIA sherds.

Mouton cavils the stratigraphy of a thermoluminescence dating (p. 86) of the late EIA settlement M42, explaining that it is based on a single sherd that perhaps fell out of a nearby grave. Obviously he did not bother to read the report which he cites in notes 143 and 144, which depicts the large pithos used for the TL dating *in situ*. My favorite description, however, is the so-called "one sherd" (p. 86) which supposedly represents the pre-Islamic cemetery at al-Akhdar. In reality this partially excavated cemetery is known from diverse publications (e.g., Yule 2001: I: 363–64; excavation report: Yule in press). In fact, J. Häser and J. Schreiber did not discover the LIA Izki graves (p. 87), nor did el-Mahi and al-Jahwari discover Mahaliya (p. 86), as is clear from the literature (e.g., Yule–Weisgerber 1996: 141). Such mistakes are too numerous to list fully here.

For this part of the book we can summarize: The cultural assemblages spatially are mixed in the late period. In central Oman about 75% of the finds can be attributed to the Samad LIA, others to the PIR and some to neither. The PIR exists mainly in the UAE, where Samad-type objects have not occurred. Seventy-two Samad LIA sites at thirty localities are insufficient to define a model settlement pattern (pp. 113, 280) over the 80,000 km<sup>2</sup> of their distribution. The absolute dating of the Samad LIA sites can still easily telescope upward or downward.

Our sources do not permit a real history of Persian invaders in southeastern Arabia, aside from at obvious places such as Bahrain and sites such as Rustaq. Suhar is a problem since it could have been a Sasanian town, but it is now understood to show no Sasanian pottery, which makes one wonder how politics and sherds interface. The chronology of late settlement and cemetery sites in the UAE has far more definition than that of central Oman cemeteries.

The second half of the book contains a detailed study of the settlement archaeology. A curious factoid is the description of my counting eighty Himyarite dams (p. 159 n. 166). Actually, K. Lewis and I criticized this old chestnut from Hamdāni and M. Barceló (e.g., Yule 2013: 5) as not documented. The section on what archaeologists call urbanization devotes pp. 169–83 to Makaynun. On the other hand, there is no real discussion of Zafār, capital of the Himyarite confederacy, arguably more important, larger, and with much more data available from twelve field campaigns, all of which are published on the internet and conventionally.

What follows thereafter is a discussion of urbanism and urban functions (pp. 163–241), the social structure and identity of south Arabian populations (pp. 243–53), and a discussion of the settlement process in south Arabia (pp. 255–78). The authors summarize in the final chapter (pp. 279–82).

This book goes further than Mouton's *Mleiha I Environnement* (1999) and Schiettecatte's rewritten dissertation, *D'Aden à Zafar* (2011), upon which it builds. It articulates in detail the settlement processes for most of Arabia. In light of the current state of research, the strength of this book is its updating of the literature and its new synthesis with regard to settlement archaeology.

PAUL A. YULE  
UNIVERSITY OF HEIDELBERG

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*A Corpus of Syriac Incantation Bowls*. By MARCO MORIGGI. Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity, vol. 3. Leiden: BRILL, 2014. Pp. xvii + 257, illus. \$163.

Aramaic incantation texts written on ceramic bowls are an important source for the linguistic and cultural history of Mesopotamia at the end of Late Antiquity. There are three varieties of Aramaic