We can summarise the first half of the book thus: the cultural assemblages of pre-Islamic Arabia are spatially mixed. In central Oman about 75 per cent of finds can be attributed to the Samad LIA, others to the PIR and some to neither. In the UAE, by contrast, PIR material dominates and Samad-type objects are absent. Seventy-two Samad LIA sites distributed across 80 000km² are insufficient to define a settlement model. There also remain problems with the absolute dating of the Samad LIA sites. Our textual sources do not permit a coherent history of Persian invasions of south-eastern Arabia, aside from places such as Bahrain and Rustaq. Moreover, sites such as Suhar are a problem as it was probably a Sasanian town, but investigations have revealed no Sasanian sherds, which makes one wonder exactly how politics and pottery interfaced and therefore how text and material culture can be brought into alignment.

The second half of the book deals with South Arabia, presenting five chapters including a discussion of ‘Urbanism and urban functions’, ‘The social structure and identity of South Arabian populations’ and a ‘Discussion of the settlement process in South Arabia’. In the latter concluding chapter, the authors summarise the main themes, including the distribution of water and the processes of urbanisation. Notwithstanding a few mentions, this second half of the book downplays the importance of the Himyarite confederacy, centred in the south-western corner of the Arabian Peninsula during the first half of the first millennium AD. For example, the section on urbanisation devotes whole case studies to sites such as Makaynūn and Qānī, but there is little discussion of Ṭafār—the Himyaritic capital— which is larger, better documented and arguably far more important for our understanding of the wider organisation of Himyarite society than sites such as Makaynun (see Yule 2013).

This book builds on the two authors’ previous publications. It articulates in detail the pre-Islamic settlement processes across eastern and southern Arabia. Although some aspects of the treatment of the material can be questioned, the value of the book lies in its updating of the literature and original synthesis of settlement evidence drawn from a vast and still little-known region.

References


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The Nabataean temple at Khirbet et-Tannur is a sanctuary site known to all classical archaeologists. Located in southern Jordan, on the road to Petra, it occupies a secluded hilltop close to the more extensive settlement site of Khirbet edh-Dhairh. The sanctuary's famous sculptures, now displayed in the splendid new National Museum of Amman, will be recognised by anyone with an interest in the Roman Near East. Study of the architecture and historical development of the temple, however, has been relatively neglected since Nelson Glueck undertook excavations at the site in 1937. Furthermore, comprehensive publication of the finds contextualised by architectural phasing has until now been missing. The authors of the two volumes under review stress it is high time that Glueck's work was made fully available to the wider scholarly community. The resulting substantial, multi-authored and richly illustrated volumes have been compiled under the competent guidance of Judith S. McKenzie, who has also written large parts of both volumes. The publication is based on the material excavated by Glueck during his 1937 campaign and extensive work has been done in order to contextualise as much of the material as possible. McKenzie observes that, although much could be learned through new excavations, the material left by Glueck is so plentiful that it deserved a publication of its own. Sifting through these rich volumes, one can only agree.

Volume 1, on architecture and religion, is divided into five chapters: an introduction to the site and its discovery as well as an outline of the authors' agenda; the architecture and its phases; the iconographic programme; religious practice; and, finally, a chapter on iconoclasm at Khirbet et-Tannur and Petra. Volume 2 is structured into three chapters pertaining to Glueck's excavation records followed by ten specialist reports: Nabataean inscriptions, altars, animal bones, plant remains, metals, lamps, pottery, two reports on glassware (typology and chemical analysis) and a contribution on an ultra-high carbon steel door hinge. Both volumes are richly illustrated with black and white as well as colour illustrations, and are supplied with indices. In addition, Volume 1 has a glossary and a large bibliography.

Volume 1 focuses on Glueck's work, the sanctuary and its development, the architecture and sculpture, as well as the finds related to the religious practices undertaken at the site over centuries of use, with the main phases of activity being between the second century BC and the mid fourth century AD. The volume includes transcriptions of Glueck's letters (Appendix 1.2), which describe the dramatic circumstances in which the finds were shipped to the USA, highlighting the political and military tensions of the period that were to change the Middle East profoundly. The architectural development of the sanctuary is described in great detail in Chapter 2, and it is impressive just how much information the authors have been able to extract from the archives, excavation diaries and Glueck's personal communications. This chapter is followed by a detailed appendix listing the sculptural and architectural fragments and other finds now in the Cincinnati Art Museum. Chapter 3, concerning the sculptural programme, is richly illustrated and presents descriptions and interpretations of all the fragments. The chapter on religious practice is based on the architecture of the sanctuary and comparisons with other cult sites, as well as drawing on the finds that relate to cultic practice at the site, such as foodstuffs, the enigmatic offertory boxes cut into the paving surrounding the Altar Platform, stelai, altars and lamps. Chapter 5 on iconoclasm shows that we must revise the assumed interpretation that iconoclasts were at work at Khirbet et-Tannur before the mid fourth century AD. McKenzie shows that this was not the case and that destruction only took place after this date.

Volume 2 is devoted to analysis of Glueck's excavation records, through which McKenzie shows just how much information is still to be gained from this archive. Part II of the volume concentrates on specialist reports on the excavated materials and finds, offering new interpretations or insights based on re-study or the use of new methods. Examples of the latter include electron microprobe analysis of glass finds, providing new information about provenance and possible phases of glass recycling. Chapter 18, on the pottery, is accompanied by a well-illustrated catalogue with high-quality drawings.
These two well-produced volumes present a wonderful and much-needed overview of the material from Glueck’s excavations at Khirbet et-Tannur. Thanks to the work of Judith McKenzie and her collaborators, the results of this important excavation are, for the first time, available in a compact and comprehensive format. It is impossible to underline just how important this publication will be to scholars who take an interest in the Near East during the late Hellenistic and Roman periods. Anyone who wants to know anything about Khirbet et-Tannur must now start by consulting these volumes.

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Small fragments of Roman vessel glass, unobtrusive and often overlooked, take centre stage in Dominic Ingemark’s comprehensive study of drinking and power in Roman Iron Age Scotland and northern England. Specifically, this material forms the core evidence for a model of society that is focused on the maintenance of elite power through conspicuous displays of alcohol consumption.

The study examines all recorded finds of Roman vessel glass from securely non-Roman contexts. Iron Age Scotland did not have a tradition of inhumation burial with associated grave goods, as seen on the Continent; much of the material for this study therefore comes from settlement sites and is fragmentary in nature. The Introduction outlines the variety of techniques for determining the vessel types that these small fragments represent. The fruition and success of this approach is demonstrated in the next section—and the core—of the book, which contains a detailed catalogue of all the finds, organised by vessel type. This section is well structured and well illustrated (including useful distribution maps), and it helpfully supplies drawings and photographs of examples of complete vessels found elsewhere in, or beyond, the Roman Empire. This catalogue is an invaluable resource for those interested in Roman vessel glass or with an interest in Roman finds from non-Roman contexts beyond the frontier.

The study continues the long-established tradition in Scotland of studying Roman finds from indigenous contexts, or ‘Roman drift’ to use the term coined by James Curle in his pioneering study of the subject (Curle 1932a; see also Curle 1913, 1932b; Robertson 1970; Hunter 2001). This paradigm has shaped the way that studies of Roman and native interaction have been framed in the study of Roman Iron Age Scotland. Ingemark’s novel contribution to this has again highlighted the often fine examples of Roman objects that were circulating beyond the Roman frontier. Indeed, the vessel types are impressive and diverse and, while limited in quantity, the distribution of the material is geographically broad.

It is particularly good to read a volume that provides such a thorough review of the basic material, and the typological format of the catalogue is especially useful. Yet the following section goes further, avoiding the common trap of artefact studies where the focus is on the object rather than what the object represents, evaluating the social implications of these glass finds and, specifically, what they would have contained. Discussion of the study’s implications is divided into three main sections: wealth, generosity and knowledge. The first of these deals with how these glass vessels arrived at non-Roman sites, reviewing the arguments surrounding exchange beyond the frontier and helpfully challenging the idea that much of this material was looted from Roman forts. Instead, Ingemark views Roman material as part of a prestige goods network, whereby social power was achieved through the redistribution of this ‘wealth’. In this model, the indigenous societies of Scotland and northern England were active agents and discerning consumers in an exchange that was demand driven. While the case for this model is well made and very convincing, the Roman empire’s role in the supply of this material, and how it might relate to Roman prejudices and preconceptions of ‘barbarian’ non-Roman society beyond the frontier, should not be forgotten.

Elites and generosity are themes with which Ingemark continues in the next section by highlighting that most of the Roman glass found in Scotland is associated with drinking vessels and is probably connected to the role of alcohol in group feasting. Such acts are argued to be one of the main mechanisms

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