

**‘The Plant for the Heart Grows in Magan ... ’:  
Redefining Southeastern Arabia’s Role  
in Ancient Western Asia**

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The archaeological investigation of the four great riverine civilisations of the Old World—Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and Shang China—has been conducted on a scale which undeniably dwarfs research in the intervening areas of the Asian landmass. Yet attempts to understand the ancient world of Asia which are narrowly pre-occupied with these so-called core areas, and those which, in the newer jargon, focus on the articulation of so-called centres with their peripheries, are, in my opinion, doomed from the outset to failure. The study of Civilization with a capital C, like the study of centres and peripheries, fails to acknowledge the fact that ancient Asia was always a mosaic of inter-locking cultures, each important in its own right, and an understanding of each is necessary if we are to move beyond a simplistic, reductionist view of the past and confront the complexity of this part of the world in antiquity. I have chosen to focus on Western Asia, and to examine the archaeology and early history of southeastern Arabia, that part of the Arabian peninsula which is today comprised of the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman.<sup>1</sup> This area has often been considered marginal, peripheral, or irrelevant, in comparison with its better known neighbours. I hope to show, however, that this misconception is a product of certain historical conditions which have determined the course of Western Asiatic archaeology and Assyriology since the last century. For when we examine the archaeological and cuneiform evidence pertaining to this region, known in antiquity by various cognate names including Sumerian Magan, Akkadian Makkān, Elamite Makkash, and Old Persian Maka, then a very

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different picture of the region emerges. To begin with, however, some background information is necessary.

The intellectual history of ancient Western Asiatic studies is a subject which has attracted few serious devotees. The histories available of, for example, American archaeological research in Western Asia, or the 'Progress of Assyriology', are generally superficial and anecdotal rather than analytical. Yet, because of the geographical locus of these fields, it is undeniable that they have been profoundly influenced by contemporary political, social, economic and religious trends: from the Napoleonic Wars to the Gulf War, from the rise of radical Wahhabism in Arabia to the advent of Islamic Fundamentalism in Iran, from the disintegration of the Ottoman empire to the post-war creation of new nation states. To give a full account of these phenomena and their relationship to archaeological and Assyriological research would far exceed the limits of the present discussion, and I shall only highlight a few points which appear relevant to the progress of research in southeastern Arabia.

While the late eighteenth and nineteenth century emphasis on the classical, Greco-Roman roots of modern Western civilization sped many a European scholar on his way to Rome and Athens, the search for the physical manifestations of the Bible fostered a parallel interest amongst Victorians in the archaeology of the Holy Land, broadly defined. To the extent that the Assyrians and Babylonians also figured in the Bible, early travellers and explorers, beginning in the 1840s and with the permission of the Ottoman imperial authorities, also began undertaking investigations in the cities of Assyria and Babylonia in what is today Iraq. By 1877 this had led to Ernest de Sarzec's wholly unanticipated discovery of the Sumerians at Tello in southern Iraq, a people about whom the Bible knew nothing. In 1894, anticipating a politico-cultural policy which continues to this day in the region, the French government, in an effort to forge closer ties to the Shah of Persia, secured an agreement with Nasr ed-Din Shah which gave France a monopoly on archaeological excavation in Iran. The justification was transparently political. Similarly, German political pressure on Ottoman Turkey led, in 1905, to Germany's winning the concession to investigate Bögazköy, the capital of the Hittites.

Following the First World War, the architects of the Mandate imposed French directors of antiquities in Syria, and British directors in Iraq and Palestine. Archaeology followed the flag, and ancient Mesopotamia took the place of ancient Greece and Rome as the dominant super-culture against which the barbarians of the Zagros or the steppe could be measured. Long before anyone was talking about centre-periphery relations in Western Asia, the centre had been defined, full stop. Only the intervention of the German Archaeological Institute succeeded in making room for the equally dominant Persian Empire as a worthy object of research. The notion of centre and periphery as defined in the first century of archaeological research in Western Asia embodies an undercurrent of ethnocentrism which is striking. Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent the Indus Valley, were literate and therefore 'like us'. They were worthy objects of research, unlike the illiterate savages and barbarians on their borders. The more cuneiform parallels were found to the literature of the Old Testament, the clearer it became that ancient Mesopotamia was Europe's great, common ancestor, and the popularising works of a scholar like the late Samuel Noah Kramer, whose *History Begins at Sumer* appeared in the first of countless editions in 1956, helped to codify that belief.

Contemporary political conditions, meanwhile, institutionalised the incompleteness of archaeological exploration across large portions of Western Asia. When Loftus and Layard explored Nineveh and Babylon, they did so lawfully, with the permission of the Ottoman authorities. The vast Ottoman empire tolerated a large number of foreign Consuls, many of whom engaged in archaeological exploration at one time or another. For all its many faults, the Ottoman empire succeeded in bringing some kind of political authority and limited security to a vast region extending from the Tigris to the Mediterranean. Little archaeological work was done in Western Asia outside of the Ottoman Empire, however, with the exception of the work of the French Mission to Susa in Iran, and the extraordinary American expedition led by Raphael Pumpelly to Anau Tepe in Turkmenistan in 1904. For in those areas which were fortunate enough to lie outside the grasp of the Sublime Porte, such as southeastern Arabia, unstable, even anarchic, political conditions often obtained.

During the early nineteenth century the southern coast of the Gulf was a notorious area of piracy and smuggling, and after the reduction of the Qawasim pirates in 1819 by the Bombay Marine, few foreigners visited the region until the discovery of oil. In Oman proper, the situation was very different, but whereas the Al Bu Said dynasty generally controlled the coast, despite the constant challenge of the Qawasim, it had only nominal control of the interior, as a result of which few travellers were able to visit inner Oman in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, between 1913 and 1955, when the Jabal Akhdar war was fought by the British on behalf of the Sultan, the Al Bu Said dynasty lost control of the interior completely, and did not fully regain it until the early 1960s. Thus, the mechanisms which had permitted research in the Ottoman empire and the countries formed out of it following World War I did not apply at all in southeastern Arabia where political conditions dictated a very different form of research development.

It was, in fact, the search for oil which created the climate in which the earliest archaeological exploration of southeastern Arabia was undertaken. In 1958, the American Foundation for the Study of Man, a creation of the American oilman Wendell Phillips, undertook a short season of excavation at Sohar, in Oman, and in the same year Temple Hillyard, working for British Petroleum in Abu Dhabi, showed two Danish archaeologists visiting from Bahrain the island of Umm an-Nar, off the coast of Abu Dhabi, and today the site of the country's largest oil refinery, where he had observed a number of ruined graves. These were the very first archaeological investigations undertaken in southeastern Arabia.

Research remained sporadic right through the 1960s, until political conditions changed dramatically. In 1970 the young Sultan Qaboos deposed his conservative father, Sultan Said b. Taimur, in Oman, paving the way for the opening up of what was still essentially a medieval country. A year later, in 1971, when the General Treaty of Peace signed in 1820 between the Qawasim of the southern Gulf and the Government of India expired, the seven Trucial States of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah formed themselves into a new country called the United Arab Emirates. Following these two events, the stage was set for an upsurge in exploration, beginning with an Arab

mission sent out to the U.A.E. from Iraq, and with American and Danish explorations in Oman in 1973. After the 1978 Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, still more scholars who had been working in Iran turned their attentions to the Gulf region, and since that time American, Arab, Belgian, British, Danish, French, German, Italian, Swiss, and now Australian archaeologists have rapidly helped to re-write the early history and archaeology of southeastern Arabia. It may seem premature on my part to attempt to re-define southeastern Arabia's role in ancient Western Asia on the basis of little more than two decades of serious research, but the pace of work in the U.A.E. and Oman has been so rapid that a reappraisal of the region's archaeology and early history at this point seems justified.

If we begin in what is currently termed the Late Stone Age, then it is instructive to note that we know far more about hunter/gatherer and fisher subsistence and economy in southeastern Arabia during the eighth–fourth millennia B.C. than we do about this subject in, for example, Mesopotamia. The fishing and shell-fish gathering societies which inhabited both the Gulf and Indian Ocean coasts of southeastern Arabia are attested to by a virtually continuous thread of shell middens extending along both coasts. It is clear that, already at a very early date, southeastern Arabian fishermen were capable of achieving large catches in the rich fishing waters off their coasts, and that these groups were in contact, along the southern shores of the Gulf at least, with the late prehistoric culture of southern Mesopotamia known as the Ubaid. At least half a dozen sites in the U.A.E. have yielded imported pottery from the north, probably manufactured at Ur and the type site of al-'Ubaid itself, all of which can be dated between c. 4500 and 3800 B.C.

Mobile groups of hunters are attested to in the interior by their characteristic pressure-flaked tool-kit, but by the late fourth millennium we find the first indications of the establishment of the sedentary oasis regime which has come to dominate so much of arid Western Asia. Date palms were domesticated in southeastern Arabia by c. 3100 B.C., as demonstrated by palaeobotanical evidence from Hili 8 in the Al Ain oasis. This was an event of great importance since the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, and cereals in such an

arid environment was only possible in the shade created by the date palm.

Early on we see that a natural symbiosis was established between the interior and the coasts of southeastern Arabia. Small quantities of domesticated animals, such as sheep, goat, and cattle, as well as dates and copper, were brought from the interior oases to the coast where they were exchanged for dried fish.

Thus, by the very end of the fourth millennium B.C., as the evidence from Hili 8 has shown, the basic economy of oasis life in southeastern Arabia had been established. Architecturally, a distinctive settlement pattern was also emerging. This consisted of a central, fortified building which probably formed the focus of each settlement, accompanied by large, circular, extra-mural, communal graves. Evidence of domestic architecture in mudbrick and stone has been found, e.g. at Maysar, but it is not unlikely that many people lived in the same kinds of perishable palm-frond houses, called in Arabic *barasti*, which until the dramatic changes in the local economy brought on by the influx of petro-dollars, continued in use throughout the U.A.E. and Oman until quite recently. The central fortification was undoubtedly the locus of regional power, whether defined economically, politically, or in terms of the prestige of a particular family or lineage over time. At Hili 8 the earliest known example of this type of fortification, which dates back to c. 3100 B.C., was roughly square, measuring approximately 16 metres on a side. With time, these buildings became round. Examples have been excavated in many parts of the region, from Maysar in the Sharqiyah, to Bidya in the Northern Emirates. The largest example of this building type is currently under excavation at Tell Abraq by a team from this university. Not only does the building, with its 40 metre diameter, exceed all others in size by some 15 metres, more remarkable is the fact that it is preserved to a height of c. 8 metres, making it the largest Bronze Age building yet discovered in the Arabian peninsula. Built of mudbrick with a facing of stone, it has a 4.5 metre thick ringwall. This mammoth structure puts me in mind of the fifteenth-century Timurid historian al-Samarqandi, who wrote, 'If you have doubts about our grandeur, look at our edifice'. This same sentiment must have been shared by the builders of the fortress at Tell Abraq, the sheer size of which marks the site as one of the

more important centres of ancient Magan. The evidence of regional centres like Tell Abraq suggests that, by 2500 B.C., the Oman peninsula must have been a mosaic of small emirates, for lack of a better word. I doubt very much whether any one of these exercised hegemony over any other. There is such a general degree of parity in settlement pattern and material culture that it would seem nothing would justify speaking of true state formation at this point.

Following the contacts with Mesopotamia of fifth and early fourth millennia date mentioned earlier, we find the people of Magan again in contact with southern Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C. This can be inferred from the presence of a distinctive type of Mesopotamian polychrome pottery, appearing in graves in the interior of the region around Jabal Hafit, as well as unpainted vessels which find close parallels throughout the Early Dynastic period in Mesopotamia. In addition, half a dozen torpedo-based storage jars found in graves on Umm an-Nar island off the coast of Abu Dhabi are, as physico-chemical analyses have shown, Mesopotamian products datable to the Early Dynastic III period, or c. 2500–2350 B.C. These very likely contained some form of oil, such as the sesame oil which later texts inform us was exported from Ur to Magan in order to purchase copper. These relations, however, are indicated only by archaeological finds in the U.A.E. and Oman. Nothing has been found of comparable date in Mesopotamia which can be taken as an import from the region, unless one counts the shell used to make various objects, ranging from cylinder seals to lamps to jewellery, some of which could have originated off the shores of the southern Gulf. An obvious question arises, what was moving from Magan to Mesopotamia at this time? Apart from the most obvious resource, copper, it is also likely that wood was being sent. Two recently edited school texts from Nippur, dating to c. 2100–2000 B.C., contain the line, 'May Magan and Meluhha ship wood to you!' As Piotr Michalowski has pointed out, there are certain archaic signs used in the text which point to an Early Dynastic date for the original composition, although they could have been anachronistic usages as well. If the text does indeed go back to the Early Dynastic era, anytime between c. 2900 and 2350 B.C., it would be a precious piece of information on Magan's early role as a supplier of wood to Sumer. And while the Oman peninsula may not strike you today as

a verdant, forested region, there is a considerable amount of timber to be had, and Tell Abraq itself has produced such large quantities of charcoal that the Tell Abraq palaeobotanist, George Willcox, has expressed astonishment at the amount of wood for building and fuel that must have existed in the vicinity of the site during the third millennium B.C.

By the twenty-fourth century B.C., the balance of power in Mesopotamia had begun to change radically, and the old order of independent city-states rapidly gave way to a new order. As his own inscriptions tell us, Lugalzagesi of Umma sacked Lagash, conquered Uruk, and laid claim to a nascent empire extending 'From the Lower Sea along the Euphrates and the Tigris to the Upper Sea', i.e. from the Gulf to the Mediterranean. But as the laconic Sumerian King List records, after Lugalzagesi's reign of twenty-five years, 'Uruk was smitten with weapons' by the son of a date-grower, and cup-bearer to Ur-Zababa, King of Kish. This man, who founded the world's first empire, took the throne-name *Sharru-kin*, literally 'legitimate king', and founded a new capital city called Agade. Sargon of Agade reigned for fifty-six years, roughly from 2334 to 2279 B.C. according to the middle chronology, and seems to have fully deserved the title *shar kishshati*, 'king of the totality', which appears in the so-called Sargon Geography.<sup>2</sup> On a life-size statue of Sargon which stood in the temple of Enlil at Nippur, an Old Babylonian scribe several centuries later copied an original inscription of Sargon's in which he boasted that, after winning thirty-four battles, and destroying the city walls to the edge of the sea, ships from Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha made fast at the quay of Agade. Although he never made the kind of statement which would suggest that he himself conquered or looked down on these countries, Sargon was clearly proud of the fact that, after the hard-fought battles which established his hegemony, ships from the furthest lands on Mesopotamia's eastern horizon came up to Agade, his new capital in the centre of Babylonia, a city which lay far north of the traditional Gulf ports of Ur and Lagash to which trading vessels might be expected to come. Whether this was a unique event or not, we do not know. That it was noteworthy, however, is clear, and the prestige associated with the arrival of these vessels was so great that it warranted mention in Sargon's own royal inscriptions.

By the reign of Sargon's son, Manishtusu, however, the Akkadian attitude towards Magan seems to have changed. While Sargon must have had his hands full in conquering large portions of continental Mesopotamia, Manishtusu sought to extend the borders of the Akkadian empire beyond the Lower Sea, as the Gulf was routinely called. As his 'Standard Inscription' tells us, Manishtusu crossed the Lower Sea after attacking Anshan, the great mound of Tal-i Malyan near the later Persian capital Persepolis in the Marv Dasht plain of southwestern Iran, and defeated a coalition of forces drawn from no less than thirty-two cities. While we have yet to identify a single city in Bronze Age southeastern Arabia, the Akkadian term for city, *alu*, was a fairly elastic one applicable to everything from hamlets to metropolises, and it is logical to suppose, in view of the many Bronze Age sites with fortifications found throughout southeastern Arabia, that this refers to thirty-two such sites with their fortresses and outlying populations. Manishtusu refers to the 'lords' of Magan by the ancient Sumerian title *en*, a title originally applied to the early rulers of Uruk, and indeed in this he was followed by his son Naram-Sin. The use of this title is interesting, and while it is clearly a Mesopotamian usage in lieu of a native term for high political office in Magan, nothing forbids us from viewing these 'lords' as the local rulers of those emirates referred to earlier, centred each on one of the many round fortifications documented archaeologically. Moreover, it confirms that, from the Mesopotamian perspective, the rulers of the adversary in question, Magan, were subsumable under an august title of early Sumerian rule. Never was there a better illustration of the respect accorded in ancient Mesopotamia to the distant land of Magan, for not only did the country attract the personal military intervention of two of the world's first emperors, but in describing the defeat of that foe, the Akkadian scribes used a highly honorific title.

The case of Naram-Sin's (Sargon's grandson) intervention is more complicated, however. Naram-Sin's own Statue A inscription, engraved on a life-size statue of the king, only the feet of which are preserved, states: 'Naram-Sin the mighty, king of the four quarters, victorious in nine battles within one year. After he had won those battles, he also brought their three kings in fetters before Enlil ... He subjugated Magan, and captured Manium, the "lord" of Magan;

he quarried blocks of diorite in their mountains, transported (them) to his city Akkade, made a statue of himself and dedicated it to ... ', and here the inscription breaks off.

No doubt dedicated to Enlil, the statue in question was probably set up in Sippar to celebrate the crushing of a rebellion which is described in an Old Babylonian account composed several centuries later and originally published in 1919 by Alfred Boissier. The text is composed in the voice of the ultimately victorious Naram-Sin, and relates the uprising of a number of cities against the might of Naram-Sin. This is the so-called *insurrection générale*, which, while it was probably not a coordinated rebellion, was most definitely a period in which Naram-Sin faced spontaneous uprisings on many fronts. Significantly, after informing us that the rebel leaders elected one Iphur-Kishi, 'a man of Kish', as their leader, it goes on to name ten kings who might be considered the ring-leaders of the rebellion. Included among them is Manium, king of Magan. Recently, Wolfgang Heimpel has questioned whether Naram-Sin himself ever campaigned against Magan, or whether Manium was present on Babylonian soil during the uprising and whether his capture there did not in fact constitute the *de facto* defeat of Magan. Quite apart from the fact that Naram-Sin's own Statue A inscription, as we have seen, specifically mentions the quarrying of blocks of diorite in the mountains of Magan, there are a number of alabaster vessels which, in typical Mesopotamian fashion, were inscribed with a label which read, 'Naram-Sin, king of the four world quarters, vessel (from the) booty of Magan'. It was far from uncommon for Mesopotamian monarchs to celebrate their seizure of booty by this kind of act, and the existence of these fragmentary vessels suggests that Naram-Sin himself campaigned in Magan.

This belligerent state of affairs was, if nothing else, put to an end by the fall of the Old Akkadian empire. When the barbarous Guti invaders had at last been expelled, Ur-Nammu, the founder of a new dynasty based at the ancient city of Ur, turned almost immediately to the restoration of commercial ties with Magan. In a dedication to the Sumerian moon god, Nanna, we read, 'Ur Nammu, the mighty male, the king of Ur, the king of Sumer and Akkad, the king who built the temple of Nanna, caused the former state of affairs to appear—at the edge of the sea in the registry place [?] ... [Ur-Nammu] restored the

Magan trade [lit. 'boat'] into his [Nanna's] hands'. The same event is alluded to in the celebrated Law Code of Ur-Nammu, where 'the might of Nanna' is credited with returning the Magan-boat of Nanna to the 'registry place'. Quite clearly, the prominence given to Magan in the affairs of the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur is a reflection of Magan's more than merely provincial status. For roughly a thousand years Magan had been supplying much of the copper which reached southern Mesopotamia. Likewise, it was one of the few sources of diorite, a hard black stone favoured by Mesopotamian kings who wished to have statues of themselves fashioned and dedicated to their patron deities. And whereas the Old Akkadian kings may have tried their hands at the outright conquest of Magan, it would seem that Ur-Nammu was opting for a different approach, a commercial-diplomatic means of insuring the supply of Magan's much sought after raw materials.

It is, however, Shulgi, Ur-Nammu's son and successor, who is widely acknowledged as the true creator of the Ur III empire. As Piotr Steinkeller has recently stressed, 'In the second half of Shulgi's reign, which lasted forty-eight years, the Ur III state entered into a period of rapid territorial expansion', beginning with his destruction of Karhar in the year Shulgi 24 (2070 B.C.), and continuing virtually up until his death.<sup>3</sup> Did this territorial expansion swallow up Magan? I believe it did, temporarily at least. An economic text from Shulgi's twenty-sixth year (2068 B.C.) records the receipt of gold dust at Ur from a *lugal-Ma-gán<sup>ki</sup>* (*Ur Excavation Texts* III 299). This was almost certainly a gift of great respect from the king of Magan to the king of Ur. Lugal was the title most widely used in Mesopotamia to designate kings. As William Hallo noted many years ago, it is 'the royal title *par excellence*'. But a text from the year Shulgi 34 (*Materiali per il Vocabulario Neosumerico* 10: 149), on the other hand, refers to the transport of troops (*ugnim*) to Magan. It would seem, therefore, that Magan had been annexed in the interval, i.e. sometime between years Shulgi 26 and 34. Confirmation of this annexation can be found when we move into the reign of Shulgi's successor, Amar-Sin, for we find, from the fourth year of his reign, 2042 B.C., a text from Drehem in the Metropolitan Museum (Metropolitan Museum of Art 11.217.29, l. 84) which records the arrival of 'Wedum, the courier of Nadu-beli, *ensi* of Magan'. *Ensi*,

particularly in the Ur III period, was the title used for royally appointed provincial governors who, however, as Piotr Steinkeller has pointed out, 'stemmed by and large from the local population'. Whether or not he was a Maganite, the mention of Nadu-Beli as *ensi* implies that the Third Dynasty of Ur had indeed succeeded in incorporating part of southeastern Arabia into a Mesopotamian empire, a feat of which even Manishtusu and Naram-Sin had not been capable.

The inclusion of Magan by this time in the Ur III empire would help put two texts from the reign of Amar-Sin's successor Shu-Sin, in a clearer light. An undated text from his reign, which appears to define the limits of the Ur III empire, concludes by naming 'Subur on the shores of the Upper Sea (i.e. the Mediterranean), and Magan, with all their provinces ... on the other side of the sea'.<sup>4</sup> In light of the Metropolitan Museum text, it now seems certain that Magan was in fact part of the Ur III empire by the time this undated text was written. The second relevant text from the reign of Shu Sin dates to his eighth year (2030 B.C.) and records the disbursement of barley (70 or 600 *kor*) from the *ensi* of Girsu to one B/Pudu as the 'consignment of Magan'. Rather than viewing this as a major shipment for the purchase of copper as some scholars have done recently, I would suggest that this barley may have been destined for Ur III officials stationed in Magan.

Magan may not have remained under the control of the Ur III empire, however, beyond the reign of Shu-Sin, who died in the ninth year of his reign. The Ur III empire disintegrated rapidly during the early years of Shu-Sin's successor, Ibbi-Sin, as indicated by the fact that scribes stopped using his date formulae in rapid succession, beginning at Eshnunna in his second year, Susa in his third, Lagash in his fifth, etc. Little wonder, then, that the much more distant province of Magan should have ceased to acknowledge the authority of the king of Ur. Certainly the extant texts of Lu-enlilla, a merchant of Ur who purchased Magan copper for the Nanna temple in the years Ibbi-Sin 2 and 4, give not the slightest indication that Magan still belonged to the Ur III empire.

This rapid review of selected Old Akkadian through Ur III references to Magan in cuneiform sources has, I hope, demonstrated that Magan was far from an unimportant, anonymous grey area on

the Mesopotamian horizon. The personal intervention of Manishtusu, Naram-Sin, Ur-Nammu, and Shulgi in Maganite affairs would never have occurred had this been the case. The consistency with which Magan figures in the cuneiform sources from the reign of Sargon in the middle of the twenty-fourth century B.C. down to the fall of the Ur III dynasty around 2000 B.C. should warn us against viewing Sumer and Magan in simplistic, centre-periphery terms.

From the fall of the Ur III dynasty, c. 2000 B.C., until the reign of the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I in the thirteenth century B.C., cuneiform sources cease to mention Magan, except as an adjective describing certain types of trees, chairs, and jars. How are we to interpret this silence? From the Assyriologist's point of view, this has always been taken as a clear sign that the lines of communication which linked Ur and Magan in the twenty-first century B.C. were badly broken. Archaeologists working in southeastern Arabia, moreover, contributed to this misapprehension by positing a complete breakdown in settled life after about 1700 B.C. The notion of a Dark Age in Mesopotamia, extending from the conquest of Babylon by the Hittite king Murshili, around 1600 B.C., until the reign of Burnaburiash II, around 1359 B.C., in the middle of the Kassite era, was adumbrated by the great Sumerologist Benno Landsberger in 1954. The lack of cuneiform sources, combined with a perceived absence of archaeological remains of second millennium B.C. date in southeastern Arabia, seemed to mutually corroborate each other. In fact, as recent excavations at Tell Abraq and Shimal in the U.A.E. have shown, this reconstruction is proving to be badly mistaken, and a simple reflection of inadequate archaeological exploration.

Historians are, of course, well aware of the difference between what people do and what they say they do. Several dozen pieces of imported Mesopotamian pottery from Tell Abraq, datable to anywhere between c. 1900 and 1200 B.C., may not seem like a staggering amount of evidence, but it provides, for the first time, a clear indication that, while the texts make no mention of contact between Mesopotamia and Magan, there must have been some, and that must have extended over several centuries spanning the Old Babylonian and Kassite periods. Furthermore, the existence of pottery with clear parallels to sites in southwestern Iran, such as Susa and Choga Zambil, points to relations with the powerful Middle Elamite

state, the history of which is only lately beginning to come to light thanks to the efforts of scholars such as the French Elamologist, François Vallat. Ultimately, this may reveal something about the silence of the Mesopotamian sources. Up to this point we knew nothing about the existence of any links between Elam and Magan, but Tell Abraq has yielded not only sherds of what is demonstrably Middle Elamite pottery, of equal importance has been the discovery there of a clearly Middle Elamite cylinder seal. In fact, it is now clear that another Middle Elamite seal, though never recognised as such before, has long been known from eastern Saudi Arabia. We are likely to be witnessing the remains of a growing Elamite influence in the Gulf at the expense of Babylonia, and therein may lie the 'silence' of the Babylonian cuneiform sources.

But more importantly, it is now clear that sedentary settlement did not cease in southeastern Arabia around 1700 B.C. This idea was based on limited evidence and, when it was put forward in the late 1970s, was not incorrect. Today, a site like Tell Abraq shows us evidence of continuous occupation throughout the second millennium B.C., and while it is true that the absolute number of second millennium settlements in the region is still small, the large number of second millennium graves presupposes the existence of a sizeable population in the area prior to the Iron Age. Furthermore, the finds from Abraq confirm that contact between Magan and Dilmun, the area which took over the distribution of its copper following the end of the Ur III period and which we identify with modern Bahrain, were strong. Previously, it had been assumed that the Dilmun copper shipped to Babylonia during the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian periods, i.e. during the first four centuries of the second millennium, must have come from Magan, for Bahrain, i.e. Dilmun, has no copper sources of its own. Dilmun, it was said, eclipsed Magan in the trade, acting as a middle-man with Babylonia, while continuing to be supplied from Magan. While this seemed reasonable enough, little evidence had ever been found of ties between southeastern Arabia and Bahrain. Now, four seasons of excavation at Tell Abraq have brought to light over 650 fragments of a kind of pottery known to have been produced on Bahrain, as well as a stamp seal which, although a local Maganite product, was clearly carved under the influence of the well-known Dilmun glyptic

tradition. Taken together, this evidence suggests that Magan continued to serve as a supplier of copper to Dilmun and indirectly to Babylonia at least through the Old Babylonian period, after which, if the evidence of growing Middle Elamite contacts is taken into account, we may be witnessing the growth of ties with Elam, perhaps at Babylonia's expense.

Judging by the large numbers of Iron Age sites throughout the Oman peninsula, the late second and early first millennia B.C. was a period of great prosperity. Substantial settlements, like Tell Abraq with its massive mudbrick platform, and communal graves richly furnished with metal weaponry characterise the period. Yet scholars long believed that, by this point, Magan had slipped completely off the Mesopotamian horizon. In fact, two texts prove that this was not the case. The library of the great Assyrian king Assurbanipal, stored in his palace at Nineveh, contained a text listing medical prescriptions which includes mention of a 'plant for the heart' which grew in Magan. The text goes on, 'Sin (the Moon-god) ... , and Samas (the Sun-god) brought it [the plant for the heart] down from the mountains: its roots fill the earth, its horns pierce the sky, and it seizes on the "heart" of Moon, oxen, sheep, asses, dogs, pigs, men and women'. Published already in 1904 by the German Assyriologist Friedrich Kuehler, this important text has been overlooked in all recent discussions of Magan, yet it proves that the memory of Magan in far Assyria was not dead in the seventh century B.C.

The second text of relevance was discovered in 1931 by Reginald Campbell Thompson and Max Mallowan during their excavation of the temple of Ishtar at Nineveh. Dated to c. 640 B.C., the text records Assurbanipal's receipt of tribute from, among others, 'Pade, king of Qade, who dwelt in the city of Iske' and who, having undertaken a journey of six months, at the command of the gods Assur and Ninlil, finally reached Assurbanipal's capital. Other kings mentioned in the same context included Hundaru, king of Dilmun, modern Bahrain, and a king whose name was unfortunately broken from Kuppi, the same country known earlier as Gubin and often thought to have been located somewhere in the Gulf region. It is thus clear that we are dealing with three kings from the southern fringes of the Assyrian world. Several years ago, I pointed out that Iske, the capital of Pade, could be none other than the modern town of Izki in

the centre of Oman, a town which local Omani historians rank as the oldest in Oman. Furthermore, the Akkadian name here given to the region as a whole, Qadê, is listed in later trilingual Achaemenid Persian royal inscriptions as the equivalent of Old Persian Maka, the cognate of the earlier Sumerian Magan and Akkadian Makkan. Thus, we have here a precious reference which shows that the Oman peninsula, at this point, must have been divided up into one or more kingdoms, one of which was tributary to Assyria. Again, I would think that we were dealing with regional emirates rather than a hegemony which extended across the entire peninsula.

Finally, a soft-stone amulet discovered at Tell Abraq in 1990 may be a reflex of contact between Qadê or Magan and Assyria or Babylonia in this period. One side shows an anthropomorphic figure with three-pronged claws for its hands and feet which bears a remarkable similarity to depictions of the so-called *lamashtu* demoness in Mesopotamia. *Lamashtu* was thought to bring disease, and *lamashtu* amulets were routinely worn to ward off disease. The discovery of such similar amulets in southeastern Arabia, Babylonia and Assyria makes it not unlikely that the belief in this demoness was shared during the Iron Age, and if this is the case, then it represents the first instance of an ideological link between Mesopotamia and southeastern Arabia which has been established for this period.

Nothing suggests, however, that the Neo-Assyrian kings ever campaigned against Magan, as their Ur III and Old Akkadian forebears had, but by the Achaemenid period the region had once again fallen prey to an outside power. The Persepolis Fortification Texts, an archive of several thousand administrative texts written in Royal Achaemenid Elamite which were found by Erich Schmidt during the Oriental Institute's excavations at the Persian capital Persepolis, are relevant. Two texts record receipts by officials, salaries in kind, provided to 'Irdumasda, the satrap at Makkash', in 505/4 B.C., and Zamashba, likewise satrap at Makkash. Makkash, as has long been recognised, was the Elamite form of Old Persian Maka. Thus, by the end of the sixth century, Darius I had incorporated Maka into his empire. This is, moreover, confirmed by several other sources. The Egyptian statue of Darius excavated at Susa in 1972 bears the name Mag within a cartouche, and shows a kneeling

Maciya, or inhabitant of Maka, above it, while a similar representation is found on the Shallufa stele, which probably commemorated the construction of a canal linking the Nile with the Red Sea by Darius. Herodotus (3.93), moreover, lists the Mykoi, i.e. the inhabitants of Maka, as part of the population of the fourteenth satrapy of the Persian empire.

An additional four Persepolis Fortification texts, all dating to a five year interval between 500 and 495 B.C., record the disbursement of travel rations of beer and flour to men travelling between Susa, in southwestern Iran, and Makkash. One mentions Barnush the *karamarash* at Makkash, an Elamite title which may be translated as 'registrar'. It is interesting to note in this regard that the satraps and registrar in Makkash all bore good Old Persian, as opposed to Elamite or Semitic, names. It is clear that they were most probably ethnic Persians from Fars who were stationed in Makkash as provincial administrators.

At least one factor which must have contributed to the prosperity of the times was the development of *qanat* or *falaj* irrigation, that system of underground galleries which tap the huge sub-surface water reserves of southeastern Arabia after a fashion which has been likened to 'mining for water'. Qanats, which are thought to have originally developed in northwestern Iran and Urartu, spread quickly over the Iranian plateau and eventually, with the aid of the Muslim conquest, reached areas as far away as Spain and North Africa. It has been suggested that the Achaemenids introduced this technology into the Oman peninsula, and this may be true, although it would seem that, chronologically, much of the Iron Age remains discovered to date in the U.A.E. and Oman would pre-date any Achaemenid contact.

The first book of the *Kashf al-Gumma*, an anonymous history of Oman of which several copies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries A.D. are known, describes the expulsion of the Persians from Oman by Malik bin Fahm, leader of the Azd, and with this the modern, Arab occupation of the Oman peninsula was thought by traditional Arab historians to begin. But to follow the course of later cultural developments in the region would take too long. I would like to conclude by reviewing a few salient points. If southeastern Arabia has not been in the mainstream of ancient Western Asiatic

studies, that has been due to those historical reasons which I tried to outline at the beginning of this lecture, rather than to any sense of having been peripheral throughout history. Indeed, the evidence points to the integration of the Oman peninsula into the greater cultural mosaic of the ancient world from the fifth millennium onwards. The trade in copper and wood, which may have begun as early as 3000 B.C., was of considerable importance in southern Mesopotamia, where virtually all timber and metal had to be imported. The repeated attempts by Old Akkadian, Ur III and eventually Achaemenid rulers to incorporate Magan or Maka into their empires, perhaps more than anything else, show that, from the perspective of the so-called centre, Magan was far from peripheral. Magan might lie at the opposite end of the Lower Sea, but the repeated efforts to control it can only mean that it was seen as a prize well worth having.

Magan's importance left its mark on the body of water which we today call the Persian or Arabian Gulf. On several occasions, I have referred to it as the Lower Sea, as indeed it was often called in both royal and literary cuneiform sources. But towards the end of the Ur III period, in an exchange of letters between the last ruler of the empire, Ibbi-Sin, and the *ensi* of Kazallu, we find the Lower Sea referred to in Sumerian as *a -ab-ba-má-ga[n-na<sup>ki</sup>-shè]*, or 'sea of Magan'. This is the first time in history that the Gulf was given a more precise denomination than simply 'Lower Sea'. Remarkably, just over two thousand years later the Greek polymath Cl. Ptolemy identified the same body of water as *Magon kolpos* in his famous *Geography* (6.7.17), and while this has often been misconstrued as 'Gulf of the Magi', the great South Arabian explorer Eduard Glaser had already recognised in 1890 that the Greek *gamma* of Magon was in fact a transcription of Old Persian *k*, hence the true meaning of Ptolemy's hydronym was 'Gulf of the Maka'. From the twenty-fourth century B.C. to the second century A.D., Sum. Magan, Akk. Makkan, OP. Maka, El. Makkash were names which were respected by the so-called more advanced societies of the greater Mesopotamian world. That this should have been the case is finally becoming apparent as archaeological research advances throughout the length and breadth of southeastern Arabia, one of the most exciting frontiers of research in Old World archaeology today.

## Notes

1. For fuller details on the matters raised see D. T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, Vols. 1–2, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
2. J.-J. Glassner, 'La division quinaire de la terre', *Akkadica* 40 (1984): 24.
3. P. Steinkeller, 'The Administrative and Economic Organization of the Ur III State: The Core and the Periphery', in McG. Gibson and R. D. Biggs, eds, *The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, Chicago, SAOC 46, 1987, 20.
4. W. Heimpel, 'Das Untere Meer', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 77 (1987): 79.