

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Copper-alloy figurines from Tell Abraq (Umm al-Quwain, UAE) and the circulation of Hellenistic motifs in late pre-Islamic Arabia (300 BC–300 AD)

Alexia Pavan¹ | Michele Degli Esposti²¹Independent Researcher²Division for the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, Department of Ancient Egyptian and Near East Cultures, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

Correspondence

Alexia Pavan, Independent Researcher.
Email: alepavan@yahoo.com**Abstract**

Four copper-base figurines recently discovered at the site of Tell Abraq (Umm al-Quwain, UAE) illustrate the circulation of allochthonous artistic motifs across the Arabian Peninsula during the late pre-Islamic period (broadly, 300 BC–300 AD). It is argued that these motifs were adopted by the local communities even in the absence of a full understanding of their genuine meaning and consequently, possibly adapted for the representation of local deities or elite members. These derivative artefacts travelled alongside high-quality local products, both kinds of objects being witnessed at Tell Abraq. There, a unique figurine of a standing naked man additionally fosters some considerations about the diffusion of Herakles' iconography in the region. The finds presented here might be generally indicative of the presence of high-rank burials extensively looted in antiquity, while so far, the presence of other structures to which they could be related has to be discarded.

KEYWORDS

bronze figurines, Hellenistic models, Herakles' iconography, late pre-Islamic Arabia, Umm al-Quwain

1 | INTRODUCTION¹

Since the early 1990s, Tell Abraq has been a key reference site for South East Arabian archaeology owing to its substantial stratigraphic sequence, which bears witness to prolonged human activity spanning roughly 2500 BC–300 AD, and the prompt publication of the first step trenches' results (Potts, 1990, 1991, 1993). The site's mound is located in the western coastal strip of the United Arab Emirates, facing the Arabian Gulf, and it is split between the Emirates of Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain (Figure 1). At the time of the site's foundation, around the mid-third millennium BC, the *sabkha* currently standing a few tens of

metres from the site was in all likelihood part of the Umm al-Quwain lagoon, if not an actual inlet of the main Gulf (see Magee et al., 2017; for the evolution of the whole lagoon, see, e.g., Bernier et al., 1995).

More recently, an international team has been working at the site for 10 years (2007–2017), building up on the results of the previous excavation, but focussed its effort on the Sharjah side of the mound (Magee et al., 2017). Since 2019, the Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain (IAMUQ), directed by one of us (M. Degli Esposti) has resumed investigation in the eastern part of the site, within Umm al-Quwain territory (Degli Esposti & Borgi, 2020). While the earliest levels of the substantial stratigraphic sequence were not reached so far, the new trenches have revealed unexpected evidence well beyond the simple confirmation of the results achieved on the western side of the mound (Degli Esposti et al., 2022).

Relevant to the present work is the discovery, in late 2021, of a remarkably rich assemblage of materials that can be dated to the first centuries AD, thus to the later part of

¹The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: MDE, AP; data collection and contextualisation: MDE; study and interpretation of the finds: AP; draft manuscript preparation: AP, MDE. Both authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript. Merely for the sake of institutional evaluation – the ways of which the authors strongly disagree with – the “Finds” and large part of the “Discussion” sections, are to be attributed to AP, the “Introduction” and the “Tell Abraq context” to MDE.



FIGURE 1 Location of Tell Abraaq, the main sites mentioned in the text, and an aerial view of the site at the end of the 2021 campaign, looking southwest. The black line marks the border between Umm al-Quwain (in the foreground) and Sharjah. Photo Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

the late pre-Islamic (LPI) period as defined in the region (broadly 300 BC–300 AD).² Numerous terracotta figurines³ of camels, horses and humans were found alongside two small-sized statues made in locally available limestone. On the one hand, these statues can be generally compared to the two famous eagle statues discovered at the close-by site of ed-Dur (Lecomte, 1993, p. 205, fig. 2); on the other hand, they are unique examples of human representation in this media in the UAE.⁴

From the same context, unfortunately corresponding to the uppermost sand deposit, unrelated to any ancient structure, came the four copper alloys,⁵ complete or fragmentary figurines, which will be discussed in the following pages.

2 | THE FINDS

The four artefacts are notably different from one another in terms of subject and level of craftsmanship. They comprise a human leg and foot (F258), the fragment of an object of uncertain interpretation (F259), one complete and well-preserved statuette representing a naked masculine figure (F256) and another one portraying a standing ibex (F257). The artefacts generally indicate the reception of prestige items and/or iconographies coming in some cases from far afield.

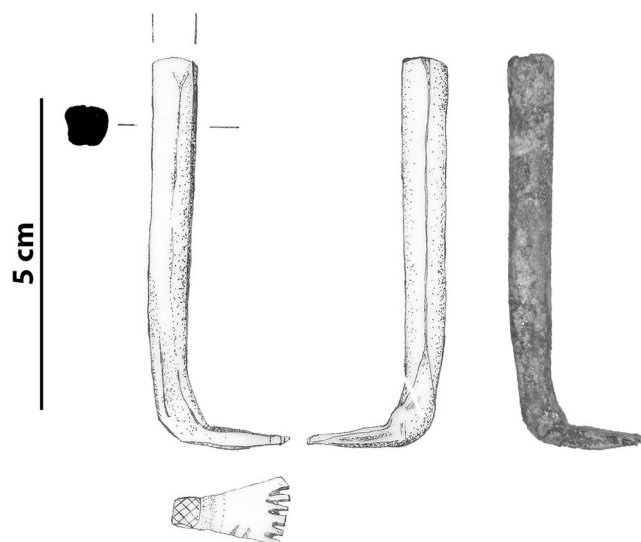


FIGURE 2 The human leg figurine F258, Tell Abraaq. Copper alloy; h. 6.4 cm; th. 0.75 cm. Drawing N. Gilbert. Photo N. Gilbert/Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain.

2.1 | F258—Human leg

F258 depicts part of a leg with the foot, well-characterised in the definition of the toes, six of which, however, are represented (Figure 2). The object is the result of a full cast and it can be interpreted alternatively as part of a figurine of a standing person or a self-standing anatomical element. The leg, which has an irregularly square section tapering towards the foot, has indeed a flat upper end with no signs of breakage, thus

²See Mouton and Schiettecatte (2014, p. 55).

³Currently under study by C. Abric, M. P. Pellegrino and M. Degli Esposti.

⁴A fragmentary smaller female figurine was discovered at Mleiha by the French mission (Méry & Mouton, 2013, p. 47).

⁵In the absence of compositional analysis, this general locution is here preferred over 'bronze'.

appearing to be a finished object. It shows no indication of the knee, so one might assume it was meant to represent the tibia and foot. The most likely interpretation for this item is it was an anatomical ex-voto, a rather rare but not unreported category of objects in South Arabia. A peculiar grid motif incised on the frontal part of the ankle could further indicate that this, in particular, was the body part for which healing was sought.

Votive objects from South Arabia depicting body parts find their most famous example in the bronze hand with a dedicatory inscription from Zafar, now on display at the British Museum in London (de Maigret, 2000, p. 283, no. 35). More recently, two hands from a private collection in Yemen, originally coming from the Jawf area, were published by Antonini and Agostini (2016). Both hands, meant to be hung on a wall and jutting out from it, hold a receptacle, one being a bowl and the other a *pecten* shell. The bowl bears a dedicatory inscription that, just like the British Museum example, indicates the hand itself as the subject of the dedication, thus unrelated to a healing request.⁶ The same applies to an inscribed plaque with a lamp-hand attached coming from Tamna' (de Maigret, 2000, p. 322, no. 170). Votive offerings depicting anatomical elements, more likely connected to healing or gratitude for a past recovery, are nevertheless reported, such as the limestone hand, foot and two busts discovered in the necropolis of Shuka', near al-Dāli' (de Maigret, 2000, pp. 352, 354, nos. 259–262). In particular, one of the busts, showing the female breast, has been interpreted as a clear anatomical ex-voto related to the female sphere and motherhood (Antonini, 2013, p. 12).

2.2 | F259—Branch/horn fragment

The interpretation of this fragment (Figure 3) is dubious, as it can recall either the branch of a naked tree or part of animal antlers. In either case, however, it would be a rare item, for which direct comparisons are lacking as far as the writers are aware. Within the iconographic repertoire of South Arabia, palms, rosettes, trees of life and later—in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman period—vine scrolls and acanthus leaves predominate, but the presence of an arboreal branch is unusual. A possible suggestion is that the vegetal element could belong to a frankincense tree, which usually presents dense and gnarly branches, or to a very stylised vine plant, which would find its closest comparison in the vegetal element represented on a bronze brazier (Figure 4) belonging to a private collection and acquired in the market of Ṣan'ā'. The artefact displays a frieze comprising a series of mythological characters including maenads, winged cherubs and Heracles, interspersed with vegetal elements such as

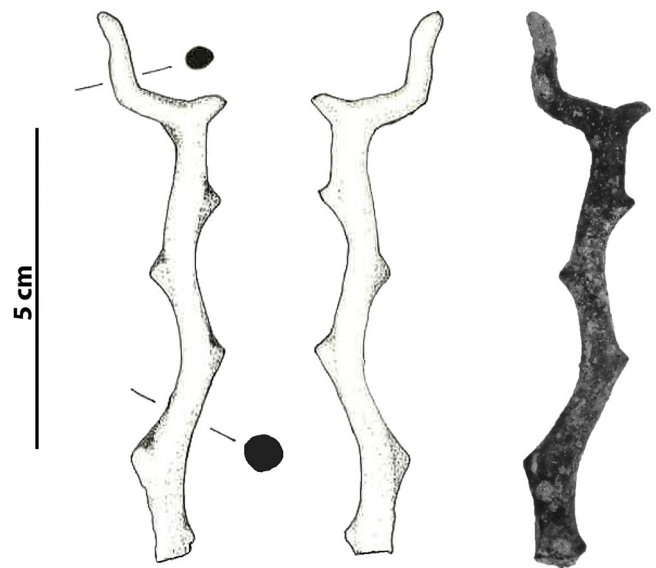


FIGURE 3 The possible branch F259, Tell Abraq. Copper alloy: h. 8.6 cm; th. max. 0.65 cm. Drawing N. Gilbert. Photo N. Gilbert/Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain.

vine, myrrh, palms, incense trees and wild animals such as a lion and a panther (Costa, 1989).

The animal antler interpretation appears indeed less tenable, despite the remarkable presence of statuettes depicting horned animals in other regions of the Near East (see, e.g., Muscarella, 1988, pp. 23, 93, 94–95, 142–143, 163, 263–264, cat. nos. 3, 153, 154–156, 215–217, 255, 325). The branching that characterises the item rules out the possibility that it represents part of the horns of an ibex, which are usually curved—at least at the end) or an oryx. Antlers of this kind could conversely belong to some deer species, such as the axis deer. However, while ibexes are almost ubiquitous in South Arabian art, the deer does not belong to its figurative repertoire, consistently with its not-belonging in the regional fauna. On the other hand, representations of stags are known from the Parthian repertoire of which the gilt silver rhyton of the Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California, is one of the most famous and elaborated samples (Pfrommer, 1993, pp. 192–193, no. 74). An import or an influence from that region would be more than plausible given the chronological context of these figurines.

2.3 | F256—Anthropomorphic figurine

The anthropomorphic figurine F256 (Figure 5) depicts a virile personage, nude, standing on a low parallelepiped-shaped plinth cast together with the statuette. The right arm is stretched forward as if leaning against a now-lost object; the left has a bent elbow and the forearm resting on the waist. Both hands are cursorily depicted, the fingers being rendered with simple lines incised on the flat

⁶For a discussion of the poli-semantic meaning of the hand in South Arabia, see de Maigret and Agostini (2016, pp. 219–220).



FIGURE 4 Brazier with Bacchic scenes including maenads, Heracles and cherubs alternating to vegetal elements and animals. Details of plants (vine trees) that recall the shape of F259. Private collection. Bronze: diam. max. 27.2; h. 11 cm; frieze h. 6.5 cm (after Costa, 1989; plates 6 [right] and 11 [left]).

surface, only four of them recognisable in each hand. The weight of the body seems to rest on the right leg, while the left one is flexed, with the knee slightly bent, suggesting a resting position. The feet are roughly made, lacking the indication of the fingers, only barely visible on the right foot.

The care placed in the characterisation of the genital area, with the accurate rendering of pubic hair and the realistic depiction of the penis, contrasts with the general inaccuracy of the figurine. Several incisions, arranged according to a herringbone pattern, suggest the presence of a strong and pronounced musculature on the abdomen. The pectorals are highlighted by two sub-circular protuberances in relief, which are, however, placed too close to the neck, to the detriment of the realism of the representation.⁷

Greater care is reserved for the head: the personage has a short radial beard, rendered with thin vertical incisions, as well as the moustache that occupies the whole width of the face, above the wide-open mouth. The nose is prominent, considerably long, placed at the centre of the face and it also occupies part of the forehead. Circular cavities represent the eyes. The ears are wide, rather elongated and slightly protruding. It is not clear if the male figure wears a headdress, a sort of adherent turban actually similar to a *kippah*, or if the vertical incisions visible on the top of the forehead can allude to the hair or even to a bandage of the type shown in the Greco-Roman statues of victorious athletes (*vitta*). The back of the figurine is smooth and devoid of details except for an incision in the pelvis area that could allude to the presence of a loincloth. This, however, would be incompatible with frontal nudity and could rather derive

from an improper rendering of the pelvis and hips musculature. The scarce attention paid to the decoration of the posterior part of the figurine might indicate it was meant to be almost exclusively seen from a frontal point of view.

Anthropomorphic statuettes in copper alloy/bronze have been discovered in large numbers in South Arabia, mainly on its western side (Yemen and, to a lesser extent, the South-Western region of Saudi Arabia).

They were mostly produced in the Arabian Peninsula by local craftsmen and are recognisable on the one hand by the style, which shows a high of level standardisation, and, on the other hand, by the technique of execution, based on the process of lost wax, in most cases in its 'hollow direct'⁸ variant. These figurines have standardised dimensions, usually below 10 cm in height. The personages are generally represented with the arms raised or stretched forward, into the act of praying or performing some kind of celebration. Gender is often doubtful, due to the poor realism of the representations.

The function is supposed to be, in most cases, that of ex-voto, therefore, linked to a religious or more generally cultic sphere ('Alī 'Aqīl & Antonini, 2007, p. 30) while the connection with the funerary context has apparently to be excluded.

The rare figurines known from the UAE include an original statuette depicting a male figure standing on a low plinth, as is the case for figurine F256, and holding a bird in his right hand (Figure 6), found on the surface of the LPI site of Mleiha, in the Emirate of Sharjah. Although the gesture could generally remind the practice of falconry, still widely practised today in the Gulf region, M. Mouton (2008, p. 251, fig. 121.1) underlined that the most significant comparisons are those with the

⁷ A similar rendering of the pectorals, although not easily readable from the picture, occurs in the statuette from the antiquary market (Bayhān area) labelled as MIFT.00/86 (Antonini, 2002, p. 27, pl. 21.a) and donated to the Museum of 'Ataq (Yemen) by the Italian-French Archaeological Mission in Tamna' (Yemen).

⁸ This procedure involved the use of a core of the earth that was then left inside the statuette (Degli Esposti, 2009).

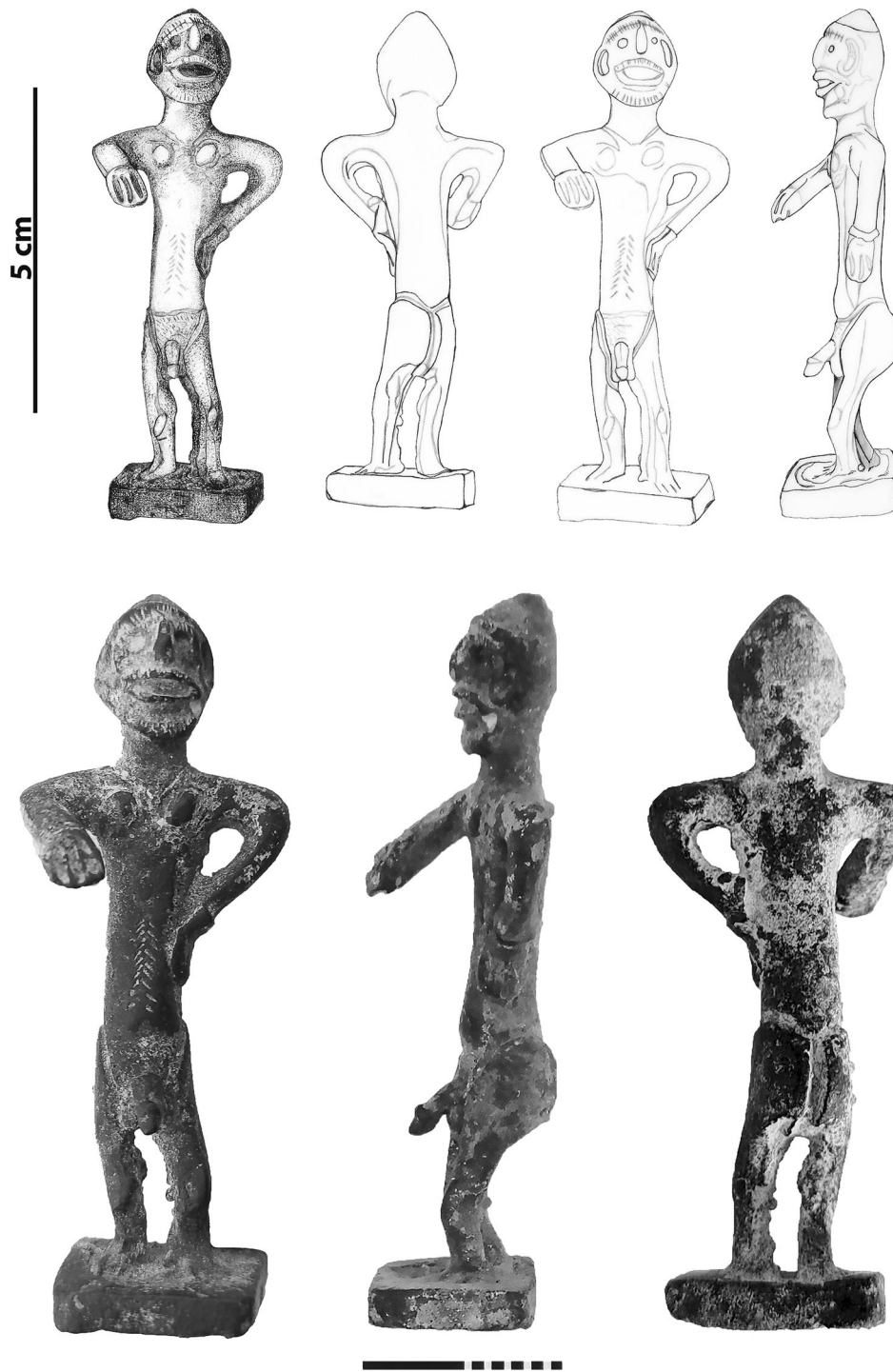


FIGURE 5 The naked man figurine F256 from Tell Abraç. Copper alloy: h. 7,6 cm; w. max 2,9 cm. Drawing: N. Gilbert. Photo N. Gilbert/Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain.

depiction of the solar god Shams occurring on North-Arabian coins and with some, albeit rare, representations of the South Arabian goddess Dhāt Ḥimyam.

Recent fieldwork at Sarūq al-Ḥadīd, in the Dubai desert, uncovered a cluster of 23 copper anthropomorphic figurines which have been associated with ritual or ceremonial activities (Contreras Rodrigo et al., 2017).

The figurines are represented in the typical votive position and they are extremely stylised, the gender barely evinced by the presence of engraved marks. A production by local artisans has been suggested, also supported by the abundant evidence of copper smelting and findings related to melting/recycling processes at the site (Contreras Rodrigo et al., 2017).

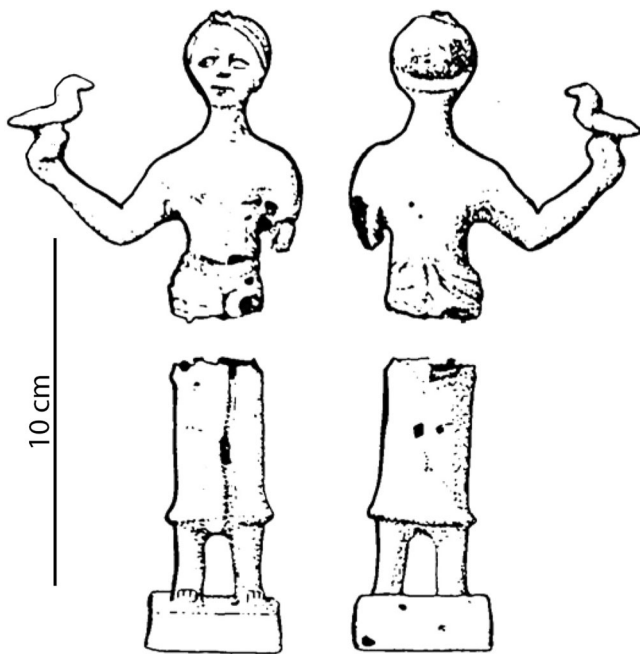


FIGURE 6 Copper-alloy figurine of a man holding a bird was discovered on the surface of Mleiha (estimated h. 18.5 cm; after Mouton, 2008, fig. 121,1).

Larger metal statuettes, ranging between 10 and 30 cm, are not attested from South East Arabia.

2.4 | F257—Ibex figurine

Contrary to the technically poor realisation of the masculine figurine F256, the ibex figurine F257 mirrors a remarkably skilled manufacturer (Figure 7). The animal is depicted standing, with legs and hooves joined together in pairs (front/rear). The body of the animal is defined by lines that highlight the powerful muscular structure. The tail is small and upright. An accurate manufacturer characterises the snout, realised in an extremely realistic way through a meticulous characterisation of the fleece and the anatomical details (ears, nose and eyes). The curved horns are well-defined in the frontal part, with vertical incisions indicating the growth rings. The right horn is partially lost. Of great originality and considerable technical skill is the decoration visible at the base of the neck, looking like a necklace with spaced circular beads. It is not clear whether the large element in the frontal part of the neck represents a peculiarly thick and hairy chin strap or a leaf/leaf-shaped pendant, part of the possible necklace.

Ibex depictions are extremely common in Southern Arabia where they are made in a variety of material supports. Carved in stone, they often decorate architectural friezes on alabaster stelae or thrones, but they are also commonly found on metal plates, used as sockets, or as endings of oil-lamp handles (Avanzini, 2005; Japp, 2021;

Pavan, 2007). Small figurines also often portray standing or, less often, crouching ibexes. These are likely connected with an offertory and/or dedicatory function, given the association of this animal with the Sabaean god Almaqah—also referred to, in fact, as the ‘Lord of the Ibexes’. Generally, animal figurines are interpretable as a replacement gift for the living animal, but also as a token of gratitude for a granted favour or request.

The evolution of ibex depictions is evident throughout the history of South Arabian art. The earliest examples comprise geometric blocks with pure lines in which the animals are entirely abstract beings with just a few emphasised details (horns and eyes), to the detriment of the overall realism of the representation. The species is only guessed at and interest in details is completely lacking. In these early examples, the ibex is inevitably characterised by a formal rigidity enhanced by its placing on a plinth, while in the later representations (e.g., the decorations of oil lamp’s handles) the animal is unlocked from this immobility and becomes rampant, suspended in mid-air, alive (Japp, 2021). The figurine F257 can be placed towards the end of this trajectory for, although with a rigid general scheme, it shows a skilful execution more in line with the late examples, coherently with the late date of its discovery context.

Although in general terms it is the most frequently represented animal in South Arabian art, it is also true that the discovery of free-standing ibex figurines is not very common. Only a dozen or so examples are known that come, in most cases, from the antiquarian market (Pavan, 2007). They are generally small, with a maximum height of 10 cm, but a few exceptions are known. One is a statue of about 1 m which is part of the Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, and depicts a standing ibex with a dedicatory inscription to the Qatabanian deity Ḥawkam (*Ḥwkm*) cast in relief (Carter & Goldstein, 2013, pp. 187–188). The Al-Thani collection hosts another example of a large-size statue (1.12 m high) of a standing ibex in almost the same position as the previous one (Droguet, 2018, pp. 74–77). The dimensions of these examples hint at the possible existence of life-sized ibex statues, as we know there were of horses and bulls (‘Alī ‘Aqīl & Antonini, 2007, pp. 53–56).

At the same time, attestations of ibexes in figurative works from South East Arabia are extremely rare, a situation that suggests the figurine discovered at Tell Abraq is an import from the Yemenite area.

3 | DISCUSSION

3.1 | The circulation of allochthonous artistic motifs in Arabia

From the 2nd century BC and especially between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD, a continuous flow of imported bronze objects from the Greco-Roman world

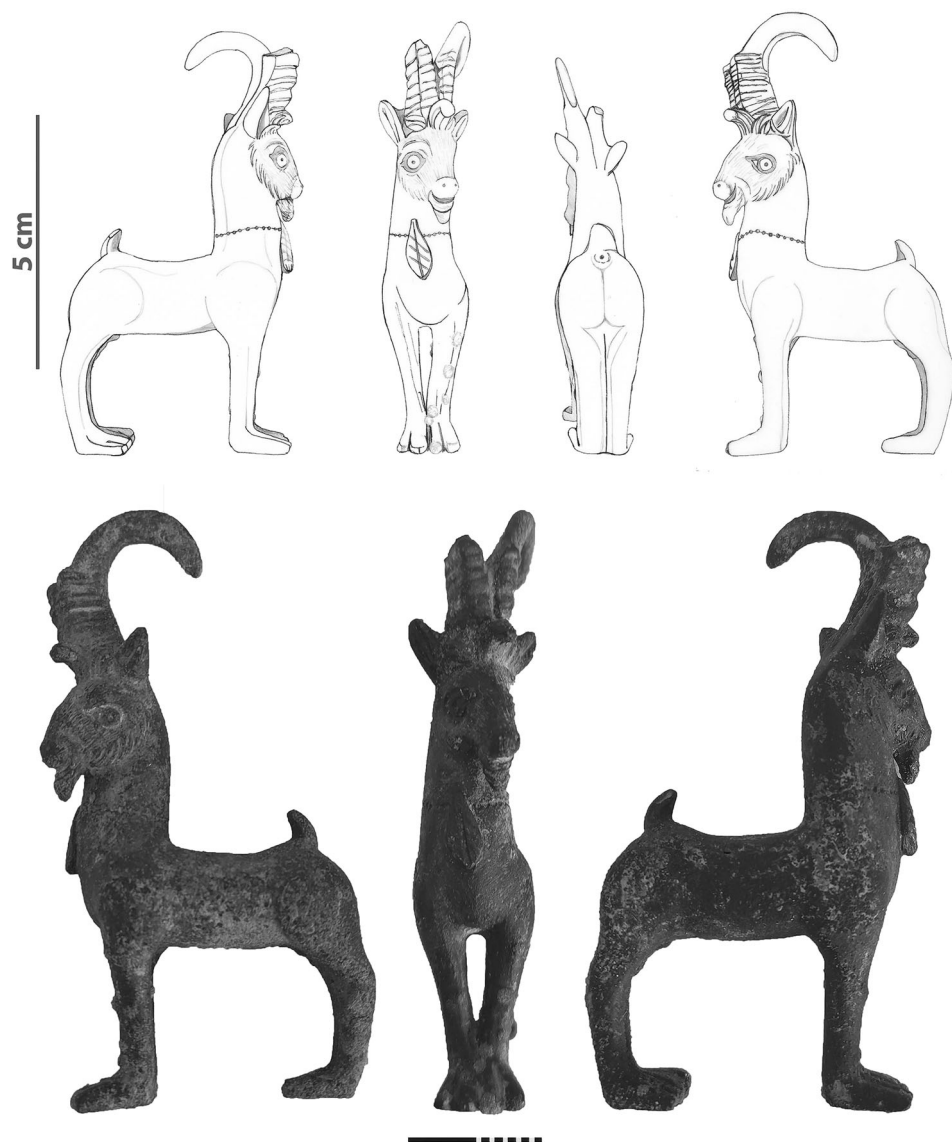


FIGURE 7 The ibex statuette F257. Copper alloy: h. 8.4 cm; l. 4.8 cm; w. 1.8 cm. Drawing: N. Gilbert. Photo N. Gilbert/Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain.

reached the capitals and peripheral centres of the Arabian Peninsula (e.g., Japp, 2013). Ancient texts such as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (Casson, 1989), mention the *chalkurgemata*, that is, bronze artefacts, among the goods intended for the ports on the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, for which there is abundant archaeological evidence (De Romanis, 2009, p. 70). Metal vessels, cultic items often bearing incised inscriptions in South Arabic script added by the local owners,⁹ and statues, even large ones, which however, seem to be exclusively intended for the kings of Ḥaḍramawt (Casson, 1989), are clear evidence of this trade.

Some scholars, such as Costa (1989, p. 483), have gone so far as to speculate that some of these imported objects were produced by ateliers in the Hellenistic world expressly for the South Arabian market, as it would be confirmed by the bronze brazier mentioned above (Figure 4). The circulation of bronzes, however, was not limited to finished objects; moulds from the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman world were also imported to replicate artistic motifs or compositions as in the case of the Tamna' riders (Antonini, 2012, pp. 108–109).

Starting from the 1st century AD, the movement of itinerant craftsmen offering their services at the courts of the caravan kingdoms also began to be recorded. Outstanding evidence of such a practice is the two monumental statues of the kings of Ḥimyar Dhamar'alī

⁹ It is the case of the splendid vases discovered at Wādī Dura', discussed in several publications (Antonini de Maigret & Robin, 2015; Baratte, 2019; Baratte & Antonini de Maigret, 2017; Breton & Bāfaqīh, 1993).

Yuhabir and Tha'rān that bear the double signatures of a Greek and a South Arabian craftsman, respectively, named Phokas and Laḥay'amm (among others, Avanzini, 1996; Stupperich & Yule, 2014).

The presence of different kinds of imported objects also in the small peripheral centres shows how the Hellenisation of the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula was a pervasive phenomenon, not limited to diplomatic exchanges between the ruling elites. In Sumhuram, along the coast of Dhofar overlooking the Indian Ocean, several objects were found that reflect a deeply Hellenised taste, including oil lamps and small appliques in the form of human busts (Pavan, 2023b).

Eastern Arabia too was influenced by this markedly Hellenised and Greco-Roman taste and by the demand for imported objects: numerous bronze artefacts including mirrors, lamps, busts, socles for statuettes and statuettes were discovered at the sites of ed-Dur (Haerinck, 2003, pp. 197, 201–202) and Mleiha (Unity, 2020, p. 75). At the latter, moreover, coins were minted following Hellenistic and Greco-Roman models which bore motifs like the seated Zeus or the head of Heracles wearing the pelt of a Nemean lion, alternatively interpreted as the head of Alexander the Great (Haerinck, 1994).

3.2 | Imported statues and religious syncretism

Excluding the few examples from the UAE territory mentioned above, the great majority of bronze statues discovered in South Arabia were imported from abroad and witness the introduction in South Arabia of characters, styles and motifs belonging to a Hellenistic and Greco-Roman milieu, as shown, in an exemplar way, by the statuette of a Spartan warrior from the antiquary market (see 'Alī 'Aqīl & Antonini, 2007, p. 144 for a summary of the references), the statuette of an athlete from Wādī 'Irma (Pirenne, 1965, p. 539, pl. 134/1) or the very well-known lion-rider cherubs from Tamna' (see Antonini, 2012, pp. 108–109 for a discussion of the appliques).

That this phenomenon exceeded the artistic sphere and affected other aspects of social life is suggested by the discovery of several imported statuettes of deities foreign to the South Arabian pantheon. The Nike on display at the National Museum of Ṣan'ā' ('Alī 'Aqīl & Antonini, 2007, p. 136), the statuettes of Artemis, Heracles and Harpocrates from Qaryat al-Fāw (Al-Ansari, 2011, p. 164) and the splendid collection of bronzes discovered at Jabal al-'Awd, including busts, helmets and different statuettes representing Athena, Isis-Fortuna and sphinxes (Fleischer & Schulz, 2012; Hitgen, 2014), are just a few, perfect examples of this class of imported artefacts.

The presence of these representations strongly supports the hypothesis that the South Arabians welcomed into their pantheon foreign gods, assimilating them to locally worshipped deities, a hypothesis already put forward in the 1970s.

At that time, G. Garbini (1974) and J. Pirenne (1972) raised the issue of the possible identification of the local god Almaḡah with Heracles/Melqart in light of the discovery, during the excavations of the Awām temple in Marib, of the statue of a male personage with walking attitude, dressed in a short skirt with a dagger inserted in the belt, the iconic leopard skin covering the back and with the paws crossed on the upper part of the bust (*leontè*). The inscriptions on the statue itself provide the name of the man (Ma'dīkarib) and that of the god to whom the statue was dedicated (Almaḡah). This led the two scholars to think that the artefact might be a depiction of the national Sabaeen god represented according to two possible allochthonous influences: the Phoenician iconography for the god Melqart, or, conversely, Heracles with the lion skin, according to the typical iconographic style adopted in Greece during the late 6th- and early 5th century BCE. Although the identification and the interpretation of the depicted character is still a matter of debate, the authors opt for the interpretation put forward by 'Alī 'Aqīl and Antonini (2007, p. 141) that the statue belonged to a public figure (an important personality or a warrior) portrayed in the guise of a hero, confirming the reception of the cult of Hercules, albeit not the identification with Almaḡah.

The identification between deities of different pantheons (South Arabian/Greek) would find a striking confirmation in the presence, among the bronzes from Jabal al-'Awd, of a beautiful bust of Athena, bearing on the neck an inscription that was initially translated in a way which could allude to her identification with the South Arabian goddess Shams (Y. 'Abdallāh in Simpson, 2002, p. 133; about this issue see also 'Alī 'Aqīl & Antonini, 2007, pp. 31–32). This interpretation, however, has been more recently refuted by N. Nebes (in Jändl, 2009, p. 149), who proposed a translation not mentioning the goddess' name.

This example epitomises the fact that elements supporting the existence of this process of assimilation are still few and not univocal.¹⁰ Speaking of religious syncretism, therefore, may be hazardous, but certainly, the South Arabians adopted and sometimes adapted a large number of motifs connected to the Hellenistic and later Greco-Roman iconography both in the religious and secular spheres.

¹⁰We owe gratitude to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out the presence in the Al-Sabah collection of an unpublished, inscribed statue of Athena that was offered to the male god of [the temple] Yaghrū in Wādī Shuḡayf, that is, the god dhu-Samāwī.

3.3 | A 'local' Heracles at Tell Abraq?

In light of this cultural climate characterising the southern part of the Peninsula at the turn of the Christian era, the interpretation of the statuette from Tell Abraq becomes an intriguing topic.

As outlined above, despite generally fitting the *corpora* of figurines from South East and South Arabia, it is nonetheless distinguished by two features: the nudity and the position of the arms, with the right one stretched forward as if leaning on a not-preserved object and the left one awkwardly bent at the elbow with the hand resting on the waist. The cursory style and a certain naivety in the execution have to be ascribed to local craftsmen of modest skills, yet the two features characterising the composition allow one to suggest that the artefact could be a local, re-elaborated version of Heracles iconography.

The representation of the nude male is an uncommon motif in South Arabian iconographic language where the figurines, both in metal and stone, are mostly dressed in long tunics or *futah* that generally leave the torso uncovered. Exceptional examples of male statues wearing a *lorica* only underline the issue of foreign cultural influence discussed above (i.e., Antonini, 2021).

The rare models of naked figurines locally produced in Arabia seem to follow the Greek model of heroic nudity, although in a very imprecise way as in the case of the statuette of a standing man in the Military Museum of Şan'ā' (MŞM B9551), recently published by F. Betti (2018, pp. 22–25), or the figurine from the Museum of Baynūn (BynM 243), restored and recently exhibited in Pisa (Pavan, 2009, p. 117).¹¹

The most significant comparison for the figure from Tell Abraq is found, however, on an alabaster stela from Shabwa (Figure 8), now in the 'Ataq Museum (Dentzer-Feydy, 2009, pp. 142–143, fig. 39).

The stela, to be connected with the funerary sphere despite being a surface find, depicts a male personage with a large crown, leaning on a vertical element—a club—with the right hand, framed below an arch supported by channelled columns, an architectural element common in many Sabaean 'images' (*šwr*) (Lombardi, 2016, pp. 88–89, fig. 103). The left arm, bent at the elbow, is leaning on the waist and, draped over it, is the lion skin. The nudity and the arm's position constitute a significant comparison with the bronze figurine under consideration, which, it is suggested, should be interpreted as a depiction of Heracles at rest.

Although replicated inaccurately and without a full understanding of the actual position of the



FIGURE 8 Stela from Shabwa, representing Heracles framed by an architectural element. 'Ataq Museum (ATM 162). Alabaster: h. 21; w. 21.5 cm (after Dentzer-Feydy, 2009, p. 142). Copyright-free image retrieved from the DASI website, <http://dasi.cnr.it/csai-epi-2158>. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

original representation, the model taken as a reference both for the Tell Abraq statuette and for the stela seem to be the one of the resting Heracles, the most famous example of which being the Heracles of the Farnese collection (Figure 9). In its version at rest, Hercules is represented leaning on his club, after stealing the apples of the Hesperides that he keeps hidden in the hand behind his back. The prototype for this version was a bronze statue, life-sized or probably larger, cast by Lysippus around the 4th century BC. It was later copied for centuries in various media, coins included, at scales varying from colossal to miniature (Huskell & Penny, 1981, pp. 229–232, no. 46).

Abiding by this iconographic scheme, the element visible on the head of the Tell Abraq figurine should therefore be a crown, an accessory that frequently appears to hold the hair on the forehead on the representation of the semigod.

The local craftsmen were almost certainly not familiar with the narrative of the myth of Heracles and were, therefore, unable to correctly replicate a misunderstood model—hence the hand ends up resting along the side and not behind the body holding the apples.

Archaeological evidence tells us that depictions of Heracles widely circulated in the whole Arabian Peninsula (e.g., Al-Ghabban et al., 2010, p. 334, no. 155 and p. 157, no. 157; Connelly, 1989, pp. 151–155). According to the hypothesis by G. Garbini and J. Pirenne discussed above, its first attestation could be as early as the 6th century BC. The most common iconography appears to be that with the semigod holding his club and with the skin of the Nemean lion draped over the arm. A specimen of remarkably high quality is known from Qaryat al-Fāw (Al-Ansari, 2011, p. 164, no. 157), but a miniaturist example comes, interestingly, from a tomb recently excavated

¹¹The exhibition was organised within the frame of the project 'Cataloguing and Fruition of South Arabian Inscriptions through an Informatic Support—CASIS'.



FIGURE 9 The Farnese Heracles. Marble: 3.17 m. Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (Naples National Archaeological Museum, CC BY 2.5, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5>, via Wikimedia Commons).

by the Tourism and Archaeology Department of Umm al-Quwain at ed-Dur.¹²

While a more in-depth discussion of the fortune that the figure of Heracles encountered in Arabia is currently being prepared and will be presented elsewhere (Pavan, 2023a), another example deserves mention here, as it further indicates how mythological scenes were rendered by local craftsmen without a proper understanding. On a stone slab from Shabwa, Heracles is depicted in the act of subduing the Nemean lion, whose snout is trapped under the hero's strong grip (Simpson, 2002, pp. 150–151, no. 193).

The semigod, however, is represented wearing the skin of the same lion he is still fighting.

3.4 | The figurines and the Tell Abraaq context

The presence at Tell Abraaq of these exotic metal objects, together with the terracotta figurines and stone statues briefly mentioned above, prompts some consideration of their significance and possible implications. The essential background to this is the description of the context of their discovery. Strikingly, all these items cannot be safely associated with any of the structures discovered so far, the latest surviving features being datable to the Early Iron Age—broadly meaning, in this specific case, the mid-first millennium BC (Degli Esposti et al., 2022). Conversely, they come from the thick, loosely compact sand accumulation excavated along the eastern slope of the mound (inside the so-called Trench 4; Figure 10), sitting immediately below a few centimetres of superficial, wind-blown sand (Figure 11).

It is, therefore, evident that they stood nowhere close to their original position. Stratigraphic evidence is of no help in trying to reconstruct what the latter could be. However, the nature of such a rich assemblage, when considered against the background of comparable finds from the nearby LPI site of ed-Dur, can help narrow down the range of hypotheses to, essentially, two plausible options: grave goods, or temple furnishings.

On the one hand, the latter option finds its stronger support in the presence of the mentioned stone statues, given the parallel provided by the badly preserved statue of a standing eagle discovered inside the temple of the sun god Shamash at ed-Dur (Haerinck, 2011, p. 10, pls. 54–55). This is in turn strictly comparable with the two statues mentioned above that, however, were discovered during the excavation of the so-called Fort in area F, possibly originally placed at both sides of its entrance (Lecomte, 1993, p. 195). An additional point in favour of the cultic interpretation would be the alleged favourite correlation of bronze figurines with votive offerings rather than funerary contexts (‘Alī ‘Aqīl & Antonini, 2007, p. 30). However, no trace of a possible temple was as yet found at Tell Abraaq, although a large area along the eastern flank remains to be excavated. Speculative explanations such as the intentional destruction of such a building by late newcomers seem as well untenable.

On the other hand, LPI graves are reported from Tell Abraaq, notably scattered on the eastern and northern parts of the site. A few such graves were excavated in 1990 by the team led by Potts (1991, pp. 105–119) and other possible, extremely decayed graves were lately investigated by the Italian Mission (Degli Esposti et al., 2022, pp. 145–146). Tell Abraaq was surely used as a burial ground during the early centuries AD. At the same time, excavation by the Italian

¹²The statue, currently under study by Pavan and Degli Esposti (2023), was displayed in Kuwait at the Sixth Joint Exhibition for the Antiquities of the Gulf Countries Council (Unity, 2020, p. 75, top right).

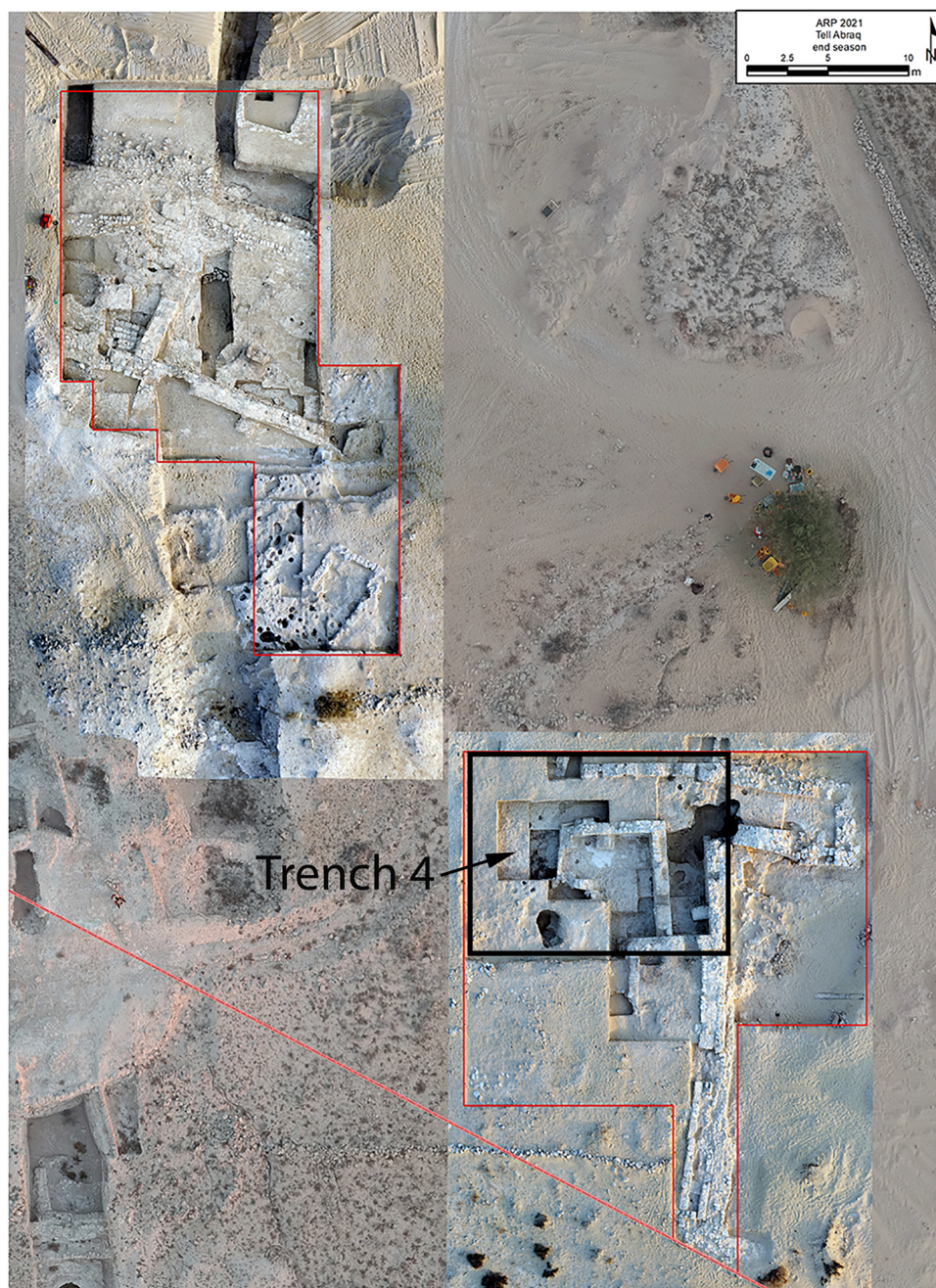


FIGURE 10 The areas excavated by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain (IAMUQ) as of December 2021, with the indication of Trench 4's extension. Orthophotograph F. Borgi/IAMUQ. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Mission has documented a non-negligible amount of characteristic, thick grey LPI ware that is not usually associated with burials, thus confirming a previous remark by Potts (1991, pp. 109–110) and indicating the possible existence of nonfunerary structures around the mound. The presence of ancient graves was likely known to people in later times and, as it happens, it might have spurred excavations aimed at looting precious objects. Extensive ancient robbing was, in fact, documented during the excavation of the funerary areas of ed-Dur and Mleiha (e.g., Haerinck, 2001, p. 7; Overlaet, 2015, p. 253).

During the renewed fieldwork on the eastern flank of Tell Abraq, several large and very large pits cut through the ancient deposits were identified, in some instances also involving all the necessary efforts to dismantle substantial stone walls bound with a remarkably strong, gypsum-based mortar (Figure 12). Explanations for their presence are to be sought. Unless one is willing to link them to the quarrying for stones (but the dismantled stones were abandoned there in several cases), they might be consistent with grave robbing, which would have in turn caused the breakage and shuffling of unwanted



FIGURE 11 View of Trench 4 at an early stage of the 2021 season, looking east. The area where the bronze objects discussed here were discovered is highlighted. Photo F. Borgi/Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

items. The discovery of the objects presented here explicitly suggests that the robbers were not interested in metal for remelting.

What was then the robbers' target? Gold and jewellery seem to be the right answer. Gold working is attested at the not far site of Sarūq al-Ḥadīd, in the Dubai desert, already during the Iron Age (e.g., Soriano et al., 2018; Weeks et al., 2017, pp. 51–52, fig. 22), with the produced objects being paralleled at other sites in later contexts as well, including graves (e.g., Mouton, 2008, *passim*; Overlaet et al., 2018, fig. 7) and residential sites (Méry & Mouton, 2013, p. 44). The general scarcity of gold items recovered from the graves, and the extent of the robbing they underwent, are reckoned as the best evidence for the original richness of the burials.

At Tell Abraç, significantly, only one very small gold bead was discovered by the Italian Mission and it comes from the reworked fill of one of the large pits mentioned above.¹³ Its placing would be consistent with it having escaped the robbers' hands, while the search for gold would explain the considerable effort placed in the excavation of such huge pits.

Another interesting point about these pits is their date. Generally, it is difficult to suggest a specific period for their excavation, since their content only consists of a mixture of material from the cut-out deposits, with no artefacts that can be correlated with their realisation. Nevertheless, two dates from charcoal recovered from contexts in two different areas of the site—including one

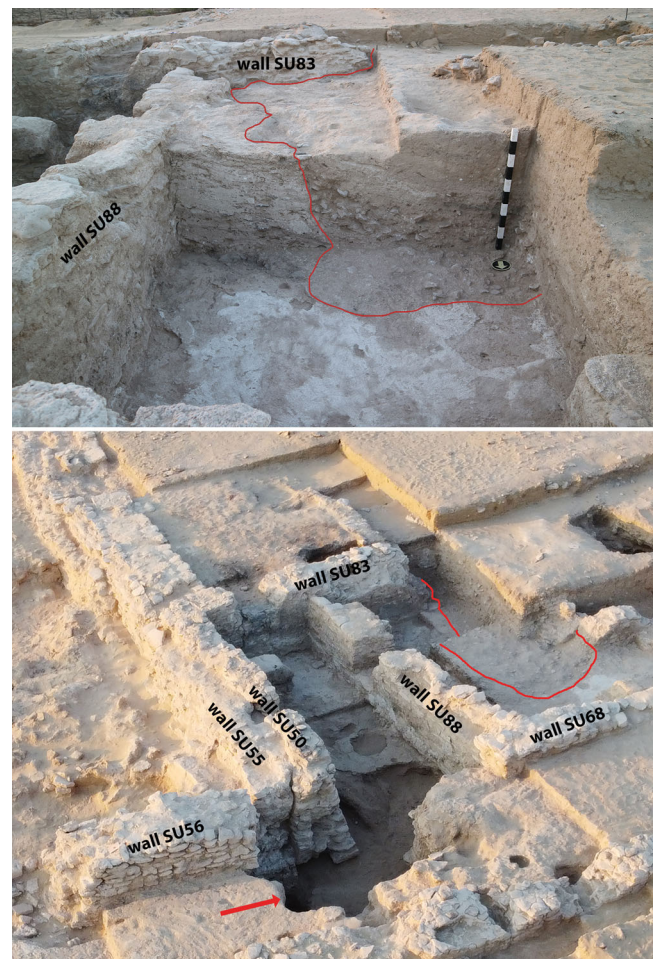


FIGURE 12 Two examples of the large pits cutting through the archaeological stratigraphy in the area of Trench 4. The red line marks the same pit in the two pictures; the red arrow indicates a huge pit that dismantled a massive mortar-bound stone wall. Photos M. Degli Esposti/F. Borgi/Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

¹³ Apart from several gold objects discovered in a third millennium grave, not robbed owing to the cover provided by later deposits (Potts, 1993, pp. 119–120, 2000, pp. 54, 83–89), 'a few gold beads' are reported from the settlement, although with no further detail about their context (Potts, 2000, p. 54).

TABLE 1 The radiocarbon dates obtained for two late contexts cutting through the ancient deposits can be indicative of the chronology of the large robber's pits identified during the excavation.

Sample/lab code	Context	Description	Calibrated date (2 σ)	Radiocarbon age	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (‰) ^a
#74 LTL20647	Trench 4, SU 150	Backfill of a large, irregular pit cutting through the archaeological deposits from just below the loose topsoil sand. Charcoal.	1398 AD (90.4%) 1515 AD 1590 AD (5.0%) 1620 AD	458 ± 45	-30.6 ± 0.1
#39 LTL20651	Trench 1, SU 114	One of several pits of medium/small size (30–100 cm in diameter), often cutting through one another. Charcoal	1455 AD (95.4%) 1640 AD	351 ± 45	-27.7 ± 0.8

Note: Radiocarbon data calibrated with OxCal v. 4.4.4 (Bronk Ramsey, 2021), atmospheric curve IntCal 20 (Reimer et al., 2020).

^aThe listed values of the carbon stable isotopes fractionation term ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$) are measured by AMS. These values can differ from the natural fractionation and from those measured by IRMS.

for the largest pit in area 4—support a chronology into the 15th century AD (Table 1).

4 | CONCLUSIONS

The bronze objects from Tell Abraq discussed here represent a small cluster of exceptional finds for South East Arabia (the UAE and the northern Sultanate of Oman). Alongside their stylistic analyses, their discovery provided the basis to discuss a few broader issues.

During the LPI period, and in particular, between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD, the import of high-quality artefacts of foreign manufacture resulted not only in the circulation of artistic motifs of Hellenistic and Greco-Roman derivation but also in their reception by local craftsmen. This reception lacks, however, the support of a real comprehension of the represented themes, as well as it is based on a notably poorer execution than the originals. As a consequence, the final objects can sometimes only retain a vague reflection of the prototype, which can be difficult to recognise. A relevant aspect of this phenomenon is the adoption of iconography of foreign deities was adopted to portray Arabian gods.

Given the considerable evidence for this process available from South Arabia (Yemen), it can be suggested that the communities occupying that area acted as the possible middle-men in the transmission of these motifs, specifically towards South East Arabia, as would further be suggested by the presence of the ibex figurine F257 at Tell Abraq.

Finally, at the intrasite level, standing the available results from the renewed excavations; the only possible original context for the presence of these items at Tell Abraq would be some prestige LPI graves, although the presence of a cultic structure cannot be definitely dismissed until more of the site is investigated. The presence of these graves triggered, in a much later time (possibly in the 15th–16th century AD), the interest of

grave robbers primarily looking for gold and jewellery, an interest which resulted in the excavation of large pits strongly impacting the archaeological stratigraphy and scattering around the unwanted goods, as reported from other LPI necropolises in the region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Excavations at Tell Abraq are currently conducted by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain (IAMUQ), within the scope of the Abraq Research Project, in collaboration with the Tourism and Archaeology Department of Umm al-Quwain (TAD-UAQ). The authors would like to warmly thank HH Sheikh Majid bin Saud al-Mualla, chair of the TAD-UAQ, for the constant support of the project and authorisation to publish this work. Mrs. Rania Houssein Kannouma, Head of Archaeology, and all the staff at TAD-UAQ are acknowledged for their help with the fieldwork and logistics. The work of the IAMUQ during the 2020, 2021 and 2022 seasons would have not achieved the same rewarding results without the generous funding by the de Cardi Award, granted to M. Degli Esposti by the Society of Antiquaries of London. The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the original manuscript for their precious comments and suggestions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as all the relevant documentation about the discussed finds is presented. Additional pictures can, however, be requested at M. Degli Esposti.

REFERENCES

- Al-Ansari, A. M. T. (2011). Qaryat al-Faw. In U. Franke & J. Gierlichs (Eds.), *Roads of Arabia. The archaeological treasures of Saudi Arabia* (pp. 150–161). Ernst Wasmuth Verlag.

- Al-Ghabban, A. I., André-Salvini, B., Demange, F., Juvin, C., & Cotty, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Routes d'Arabie* (Louvre ed.). Archéologie et histoire du Royaume d'Arabie Saoudite.
- 'Alī 'Aqīl, A., & Antonini, S. (2007). *I bronzi sudarabici di periodo pre-islamico* (Repertorio Iconografico Sudarabico, Tomo 3). Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres and Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente. https://www.monumentaorientalia.org/PDF%20PPT%20DOC/YEMEN/2007_Antonini_Sabina_Ali_Aqil_Azza_I_compressed.pdf
- Antonini, S., & Agostini, A. (2016). Due tipi di offerte a mano in bronzo di una collezione privata yemenita. *Semitica et Classica*, 9, 215–222. <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.SEC.5.112736>.
- Antonini, S. (2002). Le collezioni. In S. Antonini, M. Arbach & A. V. Sedov (Eds.), *Collezioni sudarabiche inedite: Gli oggetti acquisiti dalla missione archeologica italo-francese a Tanna' (Yemen) (Annali—Istituto Universitario Orientale, Supplementi 91)* (pp. 1–53). Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli.
- Antonini, S. (2012). *South Arabian art: Art and history in pre-Islamic Yemen*. De Bockard.
- Antonini, S. (2013). New sculptures of the “Lady of Aḍ-Ḍali” Style. *Raydan*, 8, 9–24.
- Antonini, S. (2021). La rappresentazione del potere in Arabia Meridionale nei primi secolo d.C. In Ch. Darles, L. Khalidi, & M. Arbach (Eds.), *Contacts between South Arabia and the Horn of Africa, from the Bronze Age to Islam. In Honor of Rémy Audouin* (pp. 17–28). Presses Universitaires du Midi.
- Antonini de Maigret, S., & Robin, C. (2015). Two silver vases of Greco-Roman style from the ‘treasure of wādī Ḍura’ (Yemen). In M. Arbach & J. Schiettecatte (Eds.), *Pre-Islamic South Arabia and its neighbours: New developments of Research. Proceedings of the 17th Rencontres Sabéennes held in Paris, 6–8 June 2013* (pp. 3–12). Archaeopress.
- Avanzini, A. (1996). Cultura greco-romana e Arabia: Le statue di Dhamar‘ali Yuhabirr e suo figlio Tha‘ran. In E. Acquaro (Ed.), *Alle soglie della classicità. Il Mediterraneo tra tradizione e innovazione. Studi in onore di Sabatino Moscati* (pp. 11–20). Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali.
- Avanzini, A. (2005). Some thoughts on ibex on plinths in early South Arabian art. *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 16, 144–153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0471.2005.00250.x>
- Baratte, F. (2019). Une gigantomachie dans la péninsule arabique. *Monuments et Mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot*, 97, 5–37. <https://doi.org/10.3406/piot.2018.2156>
- Baratte, F., & Antonini de Maigret, E. (2017). La Grèce dans les profondeurs de l'Arabie: Nouveaux documents figurés provenant du Yémen. *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 161(2), 753–780. <https://doi.org/10.3406/crai.2017.96241>
- Bernier, P., Dalongeville, R., Dupuis, B., & de Medwecki, V. (1995). Holocene shoreline variations in the Persian Gulf: Example of the Umm al-Qowayn lagoon (UAE). *Quaternary International*, 29/30, 95–103. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1040-6182\(95\)00011-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/1040-6182(95)00011-7)
- Betti, F. (2018). *Bronzi sudarabici dal Museo Militare di Sana*. L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Breton, J. F., & Bāfaqīh, M. (1993). *Trésors du Wādī Ḍura' (République du Yémen). Fouilles franco-yéménites de sauvetage de la nécropole Hajar am-Dhaybiyya*. Paul Geuthner.
- Bronk Ramsey, C. Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates. *Radiocarbon*, 51(1), 337–360. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033822200033865>
- Carter, M. L., & Goldstein, S. (2013). *Splendors of the Ancient East: Antiquities from the Al Sabah collection*. Thames and Hudson.
- Casson, L. (1989). *The Periplus Maris Erythraei. Text with introduction, translation and commentary*. Princeton University Press.
- Connelly, J. B. (1989). Votive Offerings from Hellenistic Failaka: Evidence for Herakles Cult. In T. Fahd (Ed.), *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement culturel. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 24–27 Juin 1987* (pp. 145–158). Brill.
- Contreras Rodrigo, F., Vila, B., Albarracín, P., Bukhash, R. M., Al-Abbar, S. O., Karim, M. B. R., & Zein, H. M. (2017). Excavations in Area 2A at Sarooq al-Hadid: Iron Age II evidence of copper production and ceremonial activities. *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 47, 57–66.
- Costa, P. M. (1989). A bronze brazier with bacchic scenes from Sana'a. In T. Fahd (Ed.), *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement culturel. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 24–27 Juin 1987* (pp. 479–484). Brill.
- De Romanis, F. (2009). Bronze in Ancient Yemen: Trade, manufacture and mintage. In A. Avanzini (Ed.), *Art and technique in Yemen. The bronzes from the Museum of Baynūn* (pp. 67–72). MB Vision.
- Degli Esposti, M. (2009). Bronze manufacturing technique. In A. Avanzini, (Ed.), *Art and technique in Yemen. The Bronzes from the museum of Baynūn* (pp. 93–105). MB Vision.
- Degli Esposti, M., & Borgi, F. (2020). The Umm al-Quwain Abraa Research Project. *Bulletin of the International Association for the Study of Arabia*, 25, 20–22.
- Degli Esposti, M., Borgi, F., Pellegrino, M. P., Spano, S., Abric, C., & Houssein Kannouma, R. (2022). Renewed excavations at Tell Abraa, Umm al-Quwain, 2019–2020—Insights into the site's occupation from the mid-second millennium BC to the late pre-Islamic period. *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 51, 141–156.
- Dentzer-Feydy, J. (2009). Le décor sculpté en pierre. In J.-F. Breton (Ed.), *Fouilles de Shabwa IV. Shabwa et son contexte architectural et artistique du I^{er} siècle avant J.-C. au IV^e siècle après J.-C.* (pp. 131–164). CEFAS, IFPO.
- Droguet, V., (Ed.). (2018). *Rois du monde: Art et pouvoir royal à travers les chefs-d'oeuvre de la collection Al Thani*. Réunion des musées nationaux.
- Fleischer, R., & Schulz, R. (2012). Figurale Bronzen ägyptischer und griechisch-römischer Art vom Jabal al-'Awd, Jemen. *Archäologische Berichte aus dem Yemen*, 13, 1–90.
- Garbini, G. (1974). Il dio sabeo Almaqah. *Rivista di Studi Orientali*, 48, 15–22.
- Haerincq, E. (1994). Héraclès dans l'iconographie des monnaies arabes pré-islamiques d'Arabie du Sud-Est? *Akkadica*, 89–90, 9–13.
- Haerincq, E. (2001). *The University of Ghent South-East Arabian Archaeological Project. Excavations at ed-Dur (Umm al-Qaiwain, United Arab Emirates). Vol. II. The Tombs*. Peters.
- Haerincq, E. (2003). Internationalization and business in SE-Arabia during the late 1st. c. B.C./1st. c. AD. Archaeological evidence from ed-Dur (Umm al-Qaiwain, U.A.E.). In D. T. Potts, H. Al-Naboodah & P. Hellyer (Eds.), *Archaeology of the United Arab Emirates. Proceedings of the First International Conference on the archaeology of the U.A.E.* (pp. 195–242). Trident Press.
- Haerincq, E. (2011). *The University of Ghent South-East Arabian Archaeological Project. Excavations at ed-Dur (Umm al-Qaiwain, United Arab Emirates), Vol. III. A Temple of the sun-god and other occupational remains at Ed-Dur*. Peters.
- Hitgen, H. (2014). Ġabal al-'Awd—Some remarks on the art and types of buildings during early Himyarite times. In A. V. Sedov (Ed.), *Arabian and Islamic studies. A collection of papers in honour of Mikhail Borisovich Piotrovskij on the occasion of his 70th birthday* (pp. 245–265). Moscow.
- Huskell, F., & Penny, N. (1981). *Taste and the antique: The lure of classical sculpture* (pp. 1500–1900). Yale University Press.
- Jändl, B. (2009). *Altsüdarabische Inschriften auf Metall (Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, 4)*. Ernst Wasmuth Verlag.
- Japp, S. (2013). Cultural transfer in South Arabia during the first half of the first millennium CE. *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie*, 6, 300–319.
- Japp, S. (2021). Bronzelampen mit Steinbockdekor in Südarabien—mediterranean oder doch persischer Einfluss? In C. Bührig (Ed.), *Klänge der Archäologie. Festschrift für Ricardo Eichmann* (pp. 215–222). Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Lecomte, O. (1993). Ed-Dur, les occupations des 3e et 4e s. ap. J.-C.: Contexte des trouvailles et matériel diagnostique. In U. Finkbeiner, (Ed.), *Materialien zur Archäologie der Seleukiden-*

- und Partherzeit im südlichen Babylonien und im Golfgebiet (pp. 195–217). Ernst Wasmuth Verlag.
- Lombardi, A. (2016). *South Arabian funerary stelae from the British Museum Collection*. L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Magee, P., Händel, M., Karacic, S., Uerpmann, M., & Uerpmann, H.-P. (2017). Tell Abraq during the second and first millennia BC: Site layout, spatial organisation, and economy. *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 28, 209–237. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12103>
- de Maigret, A. (Ed.). (2000). *Yemen. Nel paese della regina di Saba*. Skira.
- Méry, S., & Mouton, M. (2013). The French archaeological expedition in the United Arab Emirates: Excavations at Mleiha—Emirate of Sharjah 2010. *Sharjah Antiquities*, 13, 38–47.
- Mouton, M. (2008). *La péninsule d'Oman de la fin de l'Âge du fer au début de la période sassanide (250 av.-350 ap. J.C.)* [British Archaeological Reports International Series, 1776; Society for Arabian Studies Monographs, 6]. Archaeopress.
- Mouton, M., & Schiettecatte, J. (2014). *In the desert margins. The settlement process in ancient South and East Arabia* [Arabia Antica, 9] L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Muscarella, O. (1988). *Bronze and iron. Ancient near eastern artifacts*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Overlaet, B. (2015). Belgian excavations at Mleiha, Sharjah (UAE) 2009–2013. *Bulletin de Séances de l'Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer—Mededelingen der Zittingen van de Academie voor Overzeese Wetenschappen*, 61(2–3), 249–267.
- Overlaet, B., Haerinck, E., De Prez, B., Pince, P., Van Goethem, L., & Monsieur, P. (2018). Preliminary report on the 2014 Belgian excavations at Mleiha area AV, Sharjah (UAE). *Annual Sharjah Archaeology* (2nd ed, Vol. 15, pp. 35–44).
- Pavan, A. (2023a). L'eroe dei due mondi: la fortuna di Eracle nell'Arabia ellenistica. *Etudes & Travaux*. Submitted.
- Pavan, A. (2023b). Hellenized taste at the periphery of the Arabian Peninsula: Some new bronze objects from Sumhuram. *Etudes & Travaux*. Submitted.
- Pavan, A. (2007). *La produzione sudarabica in bronzo. Aspetti della cultura dell'Arabia meridionale attraverso lo studio degli oggetti con rappresentazioni animali ed elementi zoomorfi* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Pisa.
- Pavan, A. (2009). Catalogue. In A. Avanzini (Ed.), *Art and technique in Yemen. The bronzes from the Museum of Baynūn* (pp. 113–131). MB Vision.
- Pavan, A., & Degli Esposti, M. (2023). Herakles in Arabia: A new bronze figurine from ed-Dur. *Egitto e Vicino Oriente*. Submitted.
- Pfrommer, M. (1993). *Metalwork from the Hellenized East: Catalogue of the collections*. The J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Pirenne, J. (1965). Les phases de l'hellénisation dans l'art sud-arabe. In *Le rayonnement des civilisations grecque et romaine sur les cultures périphériques (Huitième congrès international d'archéologie classique, Paris 1963)* (pp. 535–541, pls. 133–135). De Boccard.
- Pirenne, J. (1972). Notes d'archéologie sud-arabe. *Syria*, 49, 193–217. <https://doi.org/10.3406/syria.1972.6303>
- Potts, D. T. (1990). *A prehistoric mound in the Emirate of Umm al-Qaiwain, U.A.E.: Excavations at Tell Abraq in 1989*. Munksgaard.
- Potts, D. T. (1991). *Further excavations at Tell Abraq: The 1990 season*. Munksgaard.
- Potts, D. T. (1993). Four seasons of excavation at Tell Abraq (1989–1993). *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 23, 117–126.
- Potts, D. T. (2000). *Ancient Magan. The secrets of Tell Abraq*. Trident Press.
- Reimer, P., Austin, W., Bard, E., Bayliss, A., Blackwell, P. G., Ramsey, C. B., Butzin, M., Cheng, H., Edwards, R. L., Friedrich, M., Grootes, P. M., Guilderson, T. P., Hajdas, I., Heaton, T. J., Hughen, K. A., Kromer, B., Manning, S. W., Muscheler, R., Palmer, J. G., ... Pearson, C. (2020). The IntCal20 Northern Hemisphere radiocarbon age calibration curve (0–55 cal kBP). *Radiocarbon*, 62(4), 725–757. <https://doi.org/10.1017/RDC.2020.41>
- Simpson, S. J. (Ed.). (2002). *Queen of Sheba. Treasures of ancient Yemen*. British Museum Press.
- Soriano, I., Perea, A., Escanilla, N., Contreras Rodrigo, F., Al Ali, Y. Y. A., Karim, M. B. R., & Zein, H. (2018). Goldwork technology at the Arabian Peninsula. First data from Saruq al Hadid Iron Age site (Dubai, United Arab Emirates). *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, 22, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2018.08.030>
- Stupperich, R., & Yule, P. (2014). Himyarite period bronze sculptural groups from the Yemenite highlands. In A. V. Sedov (Ed.), *Arabian and Islamic studies. A collection of papers in honour of Mikhail Borisovich Piotrovskij on the occasion of his 70th birthday* (pp. 338–367). Moscow.
- Unity. (2020). *Unity within cultural diversity: Sixth joint exhibition for the antiquities of the Gulf Countries Council*.
- Weeks, L., Cable, C., Franke, K., Newton, C., Karacic, S., Roberts, J., Stepanov, I., David-Cuny, H., Price, D., Bukhash, R. M., Radwan, M. B., & Zein, H. (2017). Recent archaeological research at Saruq al-Hadid, Dubai, UAE. *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 28, 31–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12082>

How to cite this article: Pavan, A., & Degli Esposti, M. (2023). Copper-alloy figurines from Tell Abraq (Umm al-Quwain, UAE) and the circulation of Hellenistic motifs in late pre-Islamic Arabia (300 BC–300 AD). *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aae.12228>