INTERVIEW

THE ORIGINS OF DOHA

British archaeologist Dr Robert Carter

Interviewed in Doha for Oryx Premium by Frances Gillespie

British archaeologist Dr Robert Carter was investigating a neolithic site in Kuwait when he came across a single, tiny pierced pearl. At 7,000 years old it was among the oldest ever discovered.

That set him thinking about the origins of pearl fishing in the Arabian Gulf. The result was the publication in 2012 of a massive scholarly volume on pearl fishing. But it had a spin-off. Carter found himself intrigued, not just by the epic story of pearl fishing but by the pearling ports themselves. When were they founded? What happened to them when the trade in Gulf pearls crashed some 80 years ago, resulting in severe hardship until the almost miraculous discovery of oil brought about an entirely new lifestyle? Many of these ports now lie buried under the gleaming new buildings and busy roads of the modern capitals of the Gulf states.

A senior lecturer in archaeology at the Qatar campus of University College London [UCL Qatar], part of Qatar Foundation, Carter and his colleagues, supported by the Qatar National Research Fund, have set out to explore the foundations and the historic growth of Doha.

He explains, “The earliest cities in the world are in the Middle East, and people have been living in towns on the Gulf Coast for at least 5,000 years. But the pearling ports, with the exception of Julfar in Ras al Khaimah [UAE] and one in Bahrain, mainly developed in the 18th and 19th centuries when demand for Gulf pearls from India, Europe, and the United States created a huge industry in the Gulf. By the end of the 19th century, most able-bodied men in the Gulf were involved in pearl hunting: it dominated the thoughts and way of life of all the coastal inhabitants.”

Doha rapidly expanded in the 19th century, he went on, from three little fishing villages – Bida, Jasra, and Doha – strung along the wide Doha Bay, into one urban sprawl. A description in 1801 refers to a fortified northern and southern hillock with defensive towers. Named as Bida on early British naval maps, it seems that originally this village was the more important, but by the late 19th century the name Doha had come to refer to the whole settlement. People poured in from all over the Middle East, attracted by the money to be made from pearls. In a country like Qatar, with very little soil suitable for agriculture, pearling was the most lucrative industry. Internal and external competition took a toll. By about 1910, pearl production in the Gulf had dropped to almost nothing, with the pearling ports becoming mainly fishing ports.

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An aerial photograph of Doha, 1947.

In the 1940s donkeys were still used as transport in Doha, and boys delivered water in kerosene tins.

Pearling dhows drawn up on the shore. Doha, 1904.
HIDDEN IN THE SANDS: UNCOVERING QATAR’S PAST
Hidden beneath Qatar’s sand and sea, and revealed on its rocks, are the clues which explain why this ancient land has played a significant role in the history of civilisations in the region and beyond. The much-awaited new book on this fascinating story, Hidden in the Sands: Uncovering Qatar’s Past, for young readers and adults has just been published, with Arabic and English editions now available in Qatari bookshops and on Amazon. Colourfully and richly illustrated with more than 300 photographs, maps, and diagrams, Hidden in the Sands is embellished by vivid and evocative artistic recreations. Told simply but with in-depth and up-to-date detail, it leads readers through the fascinating world of archaeology.

Sponsored by Maersk Oil Qatar, the book is co-authored by Frances Gillespie, an experienced author on Qatar, and Faisal Abdulla Al-Naimi, Head of the Department of Antiquities of the Qatar Museums Authority.

Typical street of little lock-up shops, Doha, late 1940s to early 1950s.
“After the huge changes brought about by the coming of the oil era, cities along the Gulf Coast grew so rapidly that, in many cases, little or no recording took place as old buildings were pulled down to make room for the new.”

agriculture, and minimal rainfall, the inhabitants looked to the sea, not the land, for their living.

Interestingly, Carter commented, the urban layout was very similar to those of other contemporary Gulf cities. Densely packed, high-walled houses with narrow lanes between them cast welcome shade, essential in a region with searing summer temperatures. These coastal towns were divided into districts (fareej) surrounded by a wall, with a central market area bordering the sea. Houses with no external windows and rooms opening onto a central courtyard ensured privacy. Until the advent of air-conditioning, he said, there was no reason to change an urban planning system that had worked well in the Gulf climate for centuries, and it was still in use in Doha until the 1950s.

The recent history of Doha can be summed up simply as boom, bust, and then boom again. The golden age of pearling reached a peak between the 1890s and the early 1900s. Then in the 1920s the industry hit lean years, caused partly by overfishing but also by a changing taste in Western fashion, global economic recession, and the development in Japan of the cultured pearl.

“From years of rapid expansion,” said Carter, “Doha begins to shrink. The centre was maintained, but houses on the outskirts fell into decay as many people abandoned the city. Aerial photos taken in the 1940s show areas of ruins. Less than 10 years later, when oil exports began, the city began to expand again and has continued to do so ever since.

“AAfter the huge changes brought about by the coming of the oil era, cities along the Gulf Coast grew so rapidly that, in many cases, little or no recording took place as old buildings were pulled down to make room for the new. The Origins of Doha Project aims to explore the foundation and historic growth of the city, and its transformation to a modern city. It will also study the daily
lives of the people. We plan to trace the physical extent and urban configuration of Bida and Doha, using historical maps, aerial photos, and archaeological excavations. In addition, we’ll compile a comprehensive historical record of the settlement from both European and Arabic sources, and conduct interviews with elderly people who can remember the most recent changes taking place. This last is very important, because families that have lived in Doha for two or more generations can provide much valuable data.

Archaeological excavations began last year, in the downtown area of Msheireb, now under massive reconstruction. The remains of part of an early-20th-century house known as the Al Radwani House were uncovered. It featured gypsum-plastered walls, a central well in the courtyard, and an enormous sunken bath, perhaps dating from the time when piped water was first introduced. Archaeological material built up in the floors, which were raised several times. Botanical samples now being analysed at UCL Qatar will yield evidence of diet and everyday life.

Also being studied at UCL are the fragments of ceramics, ranging from incense burners to fine transfer-printed china cups. Intriguingly, a few potsherds were found which predate the most recent settlement by 1,500 years. Is there an ancient Doha waiting to be discovered? Hopefully, the next few years will tell.

The Origins of Doha website is regularly updated: originsofdoha.wordpress.com
من حيث الناحية، فإن استخدام التكنولوجيا الحديثة في مجال الطيران يمكن أن يوفر فوائد كثيرة، مثل تحسين الأمان، زيادة الكفاءة، وتحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة. ومع ذلك، فإن الاستخدام المفرط للتكنولوجيا يمكن أن يؤدي إلى تحديات، مثل الفوضى في الملاحة الجوية، وزيادة التكلفة، وازدياد الاعتماد على الأنظمة الرقمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن التكنولوجيا الحديثة يمكن أن تثير 우려ات بشأن الخصوصية والأمان.

حيث أن استخدام التكنولوجيا الحديثة في مجال الطيران يمكن أن يوفر فوائد كثيرة، مثل تحسين الأمان، زيادة الكفاءة، وتحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة. ومع ذلك، فإن الاستخدام المفرط للتكنولوجيا يمكن أن يؤدي إلى تحديات، مثل الفوضى في الملاحة الجوية، وزيادة التكلفة، وازدياد الاعتماد على الأنظمة الرقمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن التكنولوجيا الحديثة يمكن أن تثير 우려ات بشأن الخصوصية والأمان.
صورة جوية لمدينة الدوحة عام 1947.

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أصول وجذور مدينة الدوحة

في البدء كانت اللؤلؤة

أدرجت المقالة لمجلة "المها بريديم" فرانسيس جيلانيسي في الدوحة

كان عام التأصيل البريطاني للكاتب دوريت كارتر ينتمي في موقع أثر كوبتي بعده تاريخا إلى العصر الجريحي الحديث، حين عثر على حجرة لؤلؤة صغيرة للغاية ومفتوحة في عمرها نحو 2,000 عام لتكون بذلك من بين أقدم اللؤلؤات الأثرية التي تم العثور عليها حتى الآن.

ووفق هذا الاكتشاف عام التأصيل البريطاني إلى التفكير بوجود نشاط صيد اللؤلؤ في مياه الخليج العربي، واستمر هذا التفكير عن طريق نشر كتاب أكاديمي ضخم. حوالى صيد اللؤلؤ عام 1930، وأثار ذلك الكتاب تساؤلات أخرى لدى الدكتور كارتر حول تجاوز القوة المدنية لصيف اللؤلؤ ليتم باستمرار بالموانئ التي كانت تتطلة سفن صيد.

ومن هنا يبدأ الدكتور كارتر، كبير المحاصرين في علم الآثار في كلية لندن، يدخل المنطقة الخليج العربي، ويجيد أن معظم جزء المنطقة القبرصي على العمل كانوا يعملون في صيد اللؤلؤ بحلول نهاية القرن التاسع عشر، حيث يمكن هذا القطاع على نظرية إفراز وتشكل وإنتاج عمليات التنقيب عن أصول وجوهر مدينة الدوحة وتطورها عبر التاريخ.

وفي سياق موضوع طبيعة مصري، قال الدكتور كارتر: "نبع أقدم مدن العالم، رسم لمتنطقنة البناء والدوحة وقبلهما، عام 1823".

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