

Image archives for the archaeology of Arabia: a race against time*

The following text is dedicated to a distinguished colleague, Walter Raunig, who gave his contemporaries a special open and broad scientific outlook. This combined with his empathetic, open and generous nature that inspired me and many others.

The image bank heidICON

The image database heidICON¹, is the virtual slide collection of the Heidelberg University Library. In addition to the acquisition of photographic material for current research and teaching, the conventional image banks already existing at Heidelberg facilities are being retrospectively digitised and imported. This is how the public image bank heidICON describes itself in its introduction.

Since 2005, the spirit of this undertaking has emerged from the Open Access Movement, making the literature and other sources accessible to all interested parties. HeidICON contains pictures from 43 different projects, initiatives and institutes of Heidelberg University. These can be neatly and effortlessly browsed or downloaded free of charge.

Development of our archival applications

Early in the early 1980s began with in South Asia, Oman, later in Yemen and Ethiopia my successive study groups to produce sets of original pictures. Many of them have become historical. It is about archaeological discoveries and findings, the personal equipment as well as the execution and history of our field projects. Public funding enabled these, which inevitably entailed an obligation for transparency. The main tool for my image archiving is the heidICON program. These archives began spontaneously out of the conviction that our publications would be easier to comprehend if they were complemented by all the images produced.

Prosperity, population growth and war of the last 40 years have a decidedly negative effect on the monument resources all over the world. Nowhere is this more serious than in the Near East, on the one hand as a result of the oil wealth, on the other by the geopolitical instability, especially since about 1990. The destruction in this short time equals that of the previous 1000 years, and has achieved a crescendo in the last three years with a drastic reduction and spatial encroachment of monuments, beset by new building. In Oman, the buildings, often barely three years old multiply at an explosive rate. The construction boom propagates first bulldozing directly followed by construction, for example at Ṭiwi on the coast, attractive for developers. Pictures, which are considered to be historical, reveal the faded monuments and building sprawling landscapes.

A good example of pressure on cultural resources is the Hasat Bani Salt ('Coleman's Rock', Yule 2001). Oman's best prehistoric relief is the victim of stone throwing and vandalising spray painting. The attribution of prehistoric monuments in al-Moyassar (up to 1995 "al-Maysar") and neighbouring Samad al-Shan is drastically the result of stone-robbing between 1977 and 1982. Only about 5% of the prehistoric Hafit tombs, counted at the time, still exist (see Figures 1 and 2). The same applies to the masonry of Oman's largest late-settlement in Ṭiwi (Figures 3 and 4). Oman is by no means unique (Yule 2015). However, there rapid population growth combined with prosperity. Thus, antique structures have been encroached on by buildings, especially in the last two or three years.

¹ <http://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/>

After completing a given research project, the images produced form a rich material which the funding policy of financial institutions rarely takes into account. Only a tiny percentage reaches publication. The foundations have, unfortunately, set other priorities and prioritise relatively little the publishing and archiving of image resources, since they are understood to be less urgent than field research. This leads to a loss of project-related image resources, a loss for the transparency of research. Especially the many unpublished and subpublished research projects are completely lost. Regular projects can usually publish only a small fraction of their resulting images conventionally. These are lost in an unmanageable patchwork of ephemeral lectures, posters, websites, articles, and, unfortunately, more and more rarely in books. Images are a direct, nuanced, valuable form of communication, especially in the systematic association with the metadata of their origin, i. e. Details including location, coordinates, direction, picture, date, author etc.

Over a period of 30 years, a professional researcher usually creates enormous numbers of pictures. Archaeologists are image-oriented. By the time of retirement, as a result of lack of storage facilities, the following colleagues at the workplace or the influence of the associated families, these data are imperiled.

Famous tragic cases of data loss in Arabian research are not just as distant as Carsten Niebuhr (1640s) or Hermann von Wissmann (about 1979). Other recent cases in Germany show a waste of public research funding, of expensive research materials, which are simply hidden, disseminated or disposed of. Everyone knows stories about extensive disposed of data collections. It is no wonder that archaeological research, e.g. In the Sultanate of Oman, frequently has a random development since the materials of the projects are seldom published in a complete form.

During my professional life I publicly archived many original drawings, maps and other archaeological documentation, especially from my Oman documentation. The materials, which were both published and unpublished, were scarcely recoverable even after a few months. They would have a great value if they had remained together since they reflect the concentrated thematic research structures and their conception.

| existing images | already archived in heidICON | land |
|-----------------|------------------------------|------------|
| 1938 | 1716 | Ethiopia |
| 97 | 0 | Bahrain |
| 6433 | 1496 | Oman |
| 1202 | 2 | Emirates |
| 32288 | 6134 | Yemen |
| 5786 | 182, s. Anm. 1 | South Asia |
| 41863 | 9530 | total |

Table 1. Links: the total number of available archaeology pictures; On the right, those of heidICON have been archived. State 01.03.2015.

Public archiving at the Harvard University Peabody Museum was effective for my research materials regarding the prehistoric metal production of South Asia, which I undertook in 1982-87. Likewise, various research papers of the Orissa focus project of the Kiel University (2001-2006) are stored in the analog and digital Heidelberg archive of the South Asia

Institute 'Savifa'². These are research travel documents and unpublished images, e.g. unpublished original drawings. All drawings, maps and other similar and digital documents of the Heidelberg Zafar Project (1996–2010) have been archived by the German Archaeological Institute–Orient Department in Yemen.

Welcome was the opportunity to archive extensive pictorial documentation of my projects at heidlCON. However, archiving requires considerable time investment (Table 1) and so far only about one-fifth of all images are publicly archived. They form analogue and digital corpora, which support my relevant publications (e.g., Yule 2013, 2014). Conventional publication, on the contrary, can only present limited images.

Of course the emphasis of the individual image collections results from my own research foci. Photos and graphics of all aspects of our work come to the fore. We focus on the selection of our own pictures and not on those of the entire specialist literature. Particularly with regard to Walter Raunig, who then supported my activities, it seems appropriate to draw attention to this little-known resource.

Paul A. Yule
Languages and Cultures of the Near East – Semitic Studies
Heidelberg University
Schulgasse 2
D-69117 Heidelberg
Email: paul.yule@t-online.de

*Source of the above text: Bildarchiv für die Archäologie Arabiens: ein Rennen gegen die Zeit, in: *Festschrift für Walter Raunig zum 80. Geburtstag*, C. Müller–M. Mergenthaler (eds.), Ethnographische Streifzüge, Dettelbach 2016, 163–8. ISBN 978-3-89754-475-8

Sources

Yule 2001 The Hasat Bani Salt in the al-Zahirah Province of the Sultanate of Oman, R.M. Boehmer–J. Maran (eds.), *Lux Orientis Archäologie zwischen Asien und Europa FS Harald Hauptmann*, Rahden 2001, 443–50, ISBN 3-89646-392-6.

URL: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeumdok/volltexte/2008/132/>

2006 *Early historic Sites in Orissa*, Delhi, 2006, ISBN 81-89645-44-7.

URL: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/volltexte/2008/147/>

appended image CD

URL: http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/frontdoor.php?source_opus=147&la=de

2013 *Late Antique Arabia Zafār, capital of Ḥimyar, rehabilitation of a 'decadent' society*, Excavations of the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg 1998–2010 in the Highlands of the Yemen, *Abhandlungen Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*, vol. 29, Wiesbaden 2013, ISSN 0417-2442, ISBN 978-3-447-06935-9.

2014 *Cross-roads – Early and Late Iron Age South-eastern Arabia*, *Abhandlungen Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*, vol. 30, Wiesbaden 2014, ISBN 978-3-447-10127-1

² <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok>

Paul A. Yule, a Race Against Time

2015 *Sisupalgarh/Bhubaneshwar, A nationally protected monument*

URL: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/volltexte/2014/3341>



Fig. 1. The defensive tower M25 at al-Moyassar built in the late third millennium. Its masonry is clearly recognisable. Photo German Mining Museum, Jürgen Heckes, Bochum, 1980.



Fig. 2. Tower M25. By 2012 less than half of the masonry was preserved. The villagers tell us that contractors removed the stones and sold them for road construction. Our wire fence was removed a few years after the work was finished in 1980. Photo Anne Mortimer, Durham, 2012.



Fig. 3. The late-settlement site Țivi photo taken toward NNW-NW. At that time the masonry stood over 1 m in height. Photo Lorenz Korn, Bamberg, 2002.



Fig. 4. Țivi TW0002 taken toward the north. Especially the rising stone layers have been severely plundered. In addition, unknown persons have bulldozed a road through the settlement to facilitate the transport of the stone. Photo Paul A. Yule, Heidelberg, 2015.