The Crowded Desert: a multi-phase archaeological survey in the north-west of Qatar

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Summary
This paper introduces the conception, development, and results of the first campaign of the Crowded Desert Project, an archaeological survey of the area of Mulayḥah (aka Mleiha), Umm al-Mā’ in north-west Qatar. The project aims to develop basic research on desert settlement and on processes of nomadism and sedentarization over a long timescale in Qatar. The first season has focused on two areas, the most important of which is the Mulayḥah Depression, a geological silt trap with a well, around which there is documented occupation ranging from the Hellenistic period up to the present day. As expected, the seasonal flooding of the depression can offer potential stratigraphic sequences that can be combined with other methods of dating to establish a basic sequence of occupation of the area. In the survey more than 600 features were mapped, including campsites, Islamic and pre-Islamic cemeteries, and mosques of different sizes. This is the first multi-phasic intensive survey of the area in which an attempt to offer a long-term interpretation of settlement patterns has been undertaken.

Keywords: survey, desert settlement patterns, nomadism, sedentarism, archaeology of Qatar

Introduction
The past of Qatar is marked by nomadic pastoralists and townspeople at the limits between the desert and the sea. This makes it an ideal place to research one of the most relevant questions of anthropology and archaeology of our time, namely, understanding the social, economic, and cultural processes at work in the interplay between nomadic and urban life, and in the dynamics that make people settle more or less permanently or return to an itinerant life. This paper introduces the Crowded Desert, a project of archaeological research in a desert area of northern Qatar, looking at patterns of nomadic life, which include, in some cases, early signs of sedentarization.

Nomadic heritage
There is no doubt that the Gulf is a place rich in heritage, but research on the history and archaeology of its nomadic people and more particularly, their relation with the sedentary communities, has been largely overlooked. This lack of attention produces a great gap in the historical narrative of the Gulf, because issues such as inland connectivity and migrations of the workforce — key themes in the region — cannot be understood without considering the role of mobile communities, both nomadic and semi-nomadic.

For example, nomadic communities in Qatar have played an important role in politics, military activities, and economic life, despite being comparatively few in number, amounting to a maximum of about 7200 people who lived there permanently, seasonally, or sporadically in the early twentieth century, comprising up to 22% of the total population (Lorimer 1908). Although sometimes regarded with suspicion by townsfolk because of their raiding activities, these nomadic peoples also provided military power to the rulers of Qatar and its towns. This was effected through strategic alliances backed by monetary incentives, and strong social ties with the ruling family of the country whose shykh surrounded themselves with Bedouin retainers and would spend significant amounts of time in the desert pursuing a Bedouin lifestyle (Ferdinand 1993: 81–82, 351). The word ‘Bedouin’ comes from the Arabic ‘badawi’, which is used to refer to the inhabitants of the desert. Therefore, we will use ‘Bedouin’ and ‘Nomad’ interchangeably in this text.

Economic integration between nomadic and settled communities was high. Not only did the Bedouin bring their produce (including livestock, textiles, skins, animal
nomadic pastoralists have had a fundamental role in history, as their interaction with sedentary societies has been a constant element of the political and social conditions that marked the rise and fall of different states since the establishment of the earliest urbanized civilizations. Nomadic pastoralists living beyond the limits of or in marginal areas of sedentary societies were sometimes considered a threat to political stability or, when they were used as military forces, were seen as supporters of particular political establishments. It is also common, throughout history, to find dynasties emerging from a nomadic pastoralist background that have then formed their own states, as is the case of the Amorites in Mesopotamia between 2100 and 1700 BC or the Mongols of the twelfth to thirteenth century AD across the Middle East; or gained control of already established polities, as did the Seljuqs of the eleventh century AD who established a powerfulTurko-Persian empire. In these cases, the complicated political links between nomads and townspeople are usually interpreted using concepts presented in the fourteenth century AD by Ibn Khaldûn (1967).

There is wide agreement among scholars that nomadic pastoralism emerges in history as a consequence of the development of irrigation-based agriculture in some areas of the Middle East and its pressure on the pre-existing model of subsistence based on mixed dry farming and subsistence pastoralism (Abdi 2003; Adams 1974; Bates & Lees 1977; Buccellati 2008; Flannery 1972; Gilbert 1983; Hole 1977; Irons 1975; Lees & Bates 1974; Spooner 1972; Wright 1977). According to R. Cribb (1991: 13–14), this is a systematic approach that makes nomadic pastoralism an alternative specialization to irrigated agriculture with its specific socio-economic developments. Cribb does not question the model of alternative specialization, but he believes that there were always points of contact between the two economic models and that in fact there was a growing interdependence between nomadic and settled societies over time. It is fair to agree with Cribb’s suggestion that the internal dynamics of nomadic societies with respect to the development of links with sedentary societies are still not understood, but he makes the mistake of considering a single line of development in nomadic-sedentary relations. In our opinion, the hypothesis of growing interdependence between communities needs to be tested against solid archaeological data because the possibility of alternative paths of historical development might arguably be possible. It is therefore important to consider the development of nomads and sedentary communities in parallel and not just part of an integrated system.

This is precisely the proposal of A. Porter (2012), who has taken her criticism of these approaches to a new level. According to her, the Khaldûnian separation between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary societies is hindering the advance of the knowledge of past societies. She notes that all these social groups were ‘integral components of the same social entities and political systems’ (2012: 24) and that the categorization of their economies should not be looked at as the ultimate aim of archaeological research, but as a necessary step in order to grasp the cultural concepts that shaped the social system. Against the model of growing interdependence, Porter therefore suggests that nomadic and sedentary communities have always been strongly interlinked. She also argues,
However, against the model of alternative specializations, because she conceives of nomads and sedentary people as being complementary communities with a common history. In search of an analytical tool to address the analysis of these societies, she turns to a concept that had been abandoned by anthropologists and archaeologists in the late twentieth century, one that is starting to be reused again in a different epistemological framework — the tribe.

The concept of the tribe was part of the original configuration of the discipline of anthropology. The tribe refers to social organization based on blood relations that were maintained in societies considered ‘primitive’ or with a ‘low degree of complexity’ (Morgan 1944). Given the fact that the concept of tribe is almost impossible to define without raising much controversy nowadays (Colson 1986; Majefe 1971), many anthropologists, for example in Africa, decided to abandon the word, which in itself had taken on a pejorative meaning in the post-colonial era (Eke 1990; Lentz 1995; Southall 1970). The concept of the ‘tribe’ should not necessarily be considered problematic nowadays.

Against a colonial background studies on tribal societies were undertaken, which provided solid scientific knowledge of social systems that were based on kinship patterns. Perhaps the most influential of these studies was Evans-Pritchard’s ethnographic work on the Nuer in southern Sudan (1940). Evans-Pritchard recognized separate public and domestic spheres of kinship that define the vertical and horizontal relationships of every individual in a tribe. The vertical relations (lineages) connect the individual with familial groups from the past and give an individual member of that group a public identity. The horizontal ties defined in the domestic sphere set the context of daily life and relations between the different sections of the same tribe. Evans-Pritchard developed his ‘segmentary lineage theory’ as an explanation of the social system that he observed, namely a stateless society without any central authority but with strong institutions in place. This theory connects the territorial and social structure of a society, at least ideologically. It provides an explanation for many elements that can be found across many preindustrial and particularly, stateless societies. For this reason, the theory started to be used to explain the social structures of many of these societies all over the world (e.g. Barth 1961; Cole 1975; Peters 1967) although challenges soon emerged. The validity of the model as an analytical tool for interpreting the socio-political organization of stateless societies was questioned by other scholars (Hammoudi 1996; Holy 1996; Kuper 1982; Munson 1989). Hart (1976) endorsed the model but later criticized it (1994; 1996).

From the 1960s attempts have been made to address the inconsistencies in segmentary lineage theory using ethnographic research. Support for segmentary lineage theory usually focuses on the existence of a constraining factor of behaviour and/or of an expression of social relations in tribal societies, which acts independently of the real shape that those relations take (Caton 1987; Dresch 1986; Kraus 1998; Maynard 1988; Peters 1967; Salzmann 1978a; 1978b; for review and reflection see Tobolka 2003).

The redefinition of the segmentary theory and the concept of a ‘tribe’, from a social model to a constraining social factor, and the recognition of the validity of the concept of the ‘tribe’ even in materialistic approaches to the study of nomadic pastoralism, have opened new possibilities of thinking about these societies for archaeologists. Kinship can be understood not only in terms of blood relations but also in terms of relatedness, that is, in terms of sharing substances which include blood, but are not limited to it; the sharing of food, hearths, or other resources can create the social relations on which tribal organization might be based (Carsten 2000; 2004; Parkes 2003; Peletz 1995; Porter 2012: 8–64; Weismantel 1995). This vision of kinship relations serves to rescue the concept of the ‘tribe’ and, to a certain extent, the segmentary lineage theory, as useful analytical tools for the understanding of nomadic pastoralist societies from an archaeological point of view.

Since the concept of the ‘tribe’ is no longer limited to a narrow conception of kinship relations, there is no sense in applying it only to nomadic pastoralist social groups either. It follows that when debating the concept of a ‘tribe’, one does not need to worry about the position of the social groups under discussion in the continuum between nomads and sedentary people or in that between pastoralists and agriculturalists. The kinship relations, in the extended sense, that form the base of a tribe can easily connect people in different dimensions of a society through sharing resources to ensure the reproduction of those social relations. It is worth reiterating here that, for Porter, nomadic pastoralists and sedentary people should be conceived as living within different dimensions of the same society. The concept of the ‘tribe’ is thus ‘multidimensional’ (Porter 2012: 47), and it becomes an extremely useful analytical tool for understanding the possibilities of nomadic pastoralists in establishing and nurturing relations with townspeople within a common social and economic framework. This
vision, which will be adopted in this project, allows one to revisit the centuries-old Khaldūnian conceptions of social change and history, which are also so relevant to the understanding of the processes that occurred in the early Islamic period.

The archaeological approach of the Crowded Desert Project

Archaeologists have strived for a long time with the question of how to study nomads through their material culture. Unlike sedentary peoples, nomads do not provide architectural remains to serve as basic indicators of settlements for archaeologists. In such places, it is possible to find an accumulated stratigraphy that provides abundant materials in context, the minimum required elements in traditional archaeological theory. It is for this reason that many archaeologists since V.G. Childe (1936) have considered it futile to search for traces of nomads in the archaeological record (e.g. Ascher 1968; Cranstone 1971; Deetz 1968; Evans 1983: 77; Heider 1967), whereas ethno-archaeologists have emphasized the low resilience of nomad material culture (Gifford 1978; Robbins 1973). This situation creates a paradox, since archaeologists are forced to suggest hypotheses on nomadic pastoralist societies, which cannot be tested with archaeological evidence (Cribb 1991: 66; see also the debate in Finkelstein & Perevolotsky 1990; Rosen 1992; Finkelstein 1992). The problem must be looked at from a different perspective in future. As with any other human group, nomads leave traces that can be archaeologically studied. The challenge is to develop adequate methods and appropriate techniques to do so (Cribb 1991: 68).

Within the territory under its scope, the Crowded Desert Project takes as a premise the configuration of a society based on tribal links that encompass both nomadic and sedentary communities at the same time. These tribal links are expressed through a combination of shared social practices and material interests that result in horizontal relations between communities. They are also manifested through conceptual maps of common vertical relations that serve as a discursive explanation and manifestation of the above-mentioned horizontal relations. Tribal links serve to regulate both intra- and inter-community relations. A community is a more or less well-established social group that has a certain resilience (i.e. it tends to stay together) and can be taken as a unit of analysis, although ultimately the boundaries of a community should be a matter for discussion. Flexibility and fluidity are key concepts in the understanding and developing of these connections. Flexibility accounts for the wide variety of forms that established social relations can take, with frequent changes of place, activity, hierarchy, and even status (i.e. nomadic to sedentary and vice versa) and the composition of communities. Fluidity is the capacity of social elements — individual and in groups — to alter their discourses about social relations with the aim of achieving political and economic benefits. Although the degrees of flexibility and fluidity are variable between different groups or individuals and situations, they are one of the main ways to exert agency in the society under consideration, and therefore we should consider them as having a high degree of both flexibility and fluidity in general terms. It is in the interest of the project to keep these concepts as open as possible, as the results will generate models that can potentially serve to test or to modify this premise, and enable the team to present a more concrete set of definitions in the future.

Flexibility and fluidity can be addressed by the archaeological study of particular patterns of material culture. For example, flexibility should correspond with a high variability of technological strategies. Fluidity will reflect a wide range of connections between communities that should leave marks in the material record, particularly artefacts with traceable origins. The aims of the Crowded Desert Project include analysing historical changes in flexibility and the fluidity of nomadic and sedentary communities within a chosen area, described below. This analysis will be undertaken through the study of intra-group technological variability and its variation through time and by documenting the patterning of connections of the communities under study through time. Given the specific focus in a territory, the effects of conditions such as seasonal migration and historical developments in potentially connected areas will have to be modelled according to ethnographic and historical studies. Climatic variations in the area will also be part of the study, along with patterns of material culture.

The final aim of the project is to provide a historical narrative of the conditions of life of communities living in the area under study from the earliest remains of human activity up to the present, with the caveat that many (or perhaps all) of these communities are nomadic. The methodologies used will therefore need to be adapted to the particular conditions of location of the material remains of these societies, which offer challenges, particularly in the creation of typologies of settlements and in the dating procedures.
Area of study

We have chosen a study area in Qatar that is known for its abundance of structures and its presence in the collective memory of a wide number of Qataris. The Mulayḩah area is a sizeable silt basin with a well in the centre, situated in the north-western desert of Qatar (Figs 1 & 2). The number of structures that can be found around it is high. The silt basin gets flooded periodically as we observed in the winter-spring of 2014. This suggests the possibility of a stratigraphy being conserved in some areas.

Using the Mulayḩah area as a centre, we delimitied a wider area of research that could give us a more general perspective on the modes of life of the nomads. The total area of survey is a square of 25 km². For the first season, the area of survey was reduced and limited to a strip of land 5 km long — linking the area of Umm al-Mā’ on the coast with Mulayḩah — and 1 km wide (cf. de Cardi 1978).

The Qatari land surface consists of limestone (the Dammām Formation) overlain in places by calcareous beach sands, saline and gypsiferous sands and silts.

Figure 1. The location of the general area of the Crowded Desert Survey in the Qatari peninsula.
(sabkha), silty alluvium (rawdah soils), and aeolian siliceous sands (Hunting Geology and Geophysics Ltd 1980). Aeolian siliceous sands are lacking in the study area, where the majority of the land consists of an undulating stony, gravelly, and sandy surface comprising thin lithosol. This overlies limestone bedrock of low relief, frequently exposed in higher areas, and intersected by shallow wadis and interspersed with rawdah (i.e. silt-floored close basin) — silty depressions sometimes several hundred metres across. Flint is available in some areas in the form of small nodules and flakes, perhaps originating locally from limestone outcroppings, though this remains to be demonstrated. The coastal zone exhibits beach sands, some conglomerated into tabular beach-rock (farūsh), as well as salt flats (sabkha) and exposed limestone bedrock. Vegetation cover consists of grasses with some scrubby vegetation, with woody elements concentrated in the rawdah areas (typically Acacia sp.). The rawdahs also provide good grass for grazing. Seasonal vegetation cover (especially grass) is said to be significant after good winter rains. Water resources are said to be good in the study area. It lies within a ‘shallow well zone’ in north-west Qatar where good-quality water lies at an accessible depth as the height of the land declines towards the sea (Macumber 2011). This aquifer discharge is easily accessed by hand-dug wells.

**Methodology and results of the 2015 season**

In the season of 2015, an intensive survey was carried out in two areas (Fig. 2): Area 1 is located in the north-west corner of the wider area of the survey, and was used as a location where the methodology could be tested. Area 2 covers part of the silt basin of Mulayḥah, in particular the north-western parts, and it is where most of the structures and finds discussed here were found. The areas of intensive survey were divided into a grid of squares measuring 100 m along each side. It was linked to the Qatari National Grid. Each square under analysis was field-walked by surveyors separated by a 10 m space. Every element of interest was documented with a feature number. Structures were described and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Suggested Chronology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cairn</td>
<td>Burial. Mound made of stones, usually of circular shape and 2 to 3 metres diameter (Fig. 4).</td>
<td>Pre-Islamic, probably between third century BC and fourth century AD (cf. Cuttler et al. 2013; Schreiber et al. 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic tomb</td>
<td>Burial. Small oval mound large enough to contain at least one person. The burial is longitudinally orientated N-S, thus allowing the deceased to be buried in supine position facing W, the direction of Mecca.</td>
<td>Islamic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tent</td>
<td>Dwelling space made of perishable materials which leaves non-architectural but visible imprint in the landscape. The imprint may consist of stone lines, stone piles for the pegs of the tents, cleared spaces for the installation of the tent and sometimes even conserved floors. With some frequency abandoned elements of modern tents may be found: pegs, strings, textiles, poles, etc.</td>
<td>Unknown, but as a general principle these types of dwelling can be located because they are not very old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td>Dwelling space that is totally or partially delimited by architectural elements, usually walls made of stone or pisé. The dimensions and even duration of this type of dwelling are not necessarily much longer than those of a tent (Fig. 5).</td>
<td>Unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall</td>
<td>Structures made of stone or pisé that are apparently found in isolation in the landscape (Fig. 6).</td>
<td>Unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musallā</td>
<td>Sacred space which is indicated by a structure consisting of a qiblah wall with a miḥrāb, clearly orientated towards Mecca. The wall is usually made of stones lined up. The structure is not closed.</td>
<td>Islamic period. Their weak architectural outline and the fact that many Qataris remember the use of these structures suggest that in many cases they are not very old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>Sacred space delimited by walls, one of them being a qiblah with a miḥrāb. These structures are scarcer than the musallās, they appear to be closed or almost closed and they have been documented in several sizes, usually more regular when bigger. At least square mosques measuring approximately 7 x 14 m have been documented, as well as a larger one of 14 x 20 m (Fig. 6). All the mosques have their longitudinal axis orientated towards Mecca (W). The large mosque has been suggested to be an open-air religious space designed for large festivals, in parallel with a similar structure documented nearby Zubārah (R. Cuttler, personal communication).</td>
<td>Islamic period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireplaces</td>
<td>Some abandoned fireplaces have been documented, most of them fairly recent, surrounded by modern rubbish that includes glass bottles, cans, etc.</td>
<td>Most of them are recent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>A few workspaces for flint have been identified. They are located next to the source outcrop.</td>
<td>Unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trash pit</td>
<td>One trash pit was located. A surface collection of ceramic materials that had been removed from inside allowed a preliminary dating between the fourth and early twentieth centuries CE.</td>
<td>Early twentieth century, because of the presence of ‘Ali Ware (cf. Carter 2011: 33).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>A number of features have been described without being assigned a denomination.</td>
<td>Unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campsite</td>
<td>Campsite should be considered a special denomination which consists of a cluster of densely packed structures. These clusters can be dated to one or several periods, and their extension in these periods is different, as it corresponds to different camps.</td>
<td>Multiple chronologies, even in the same campsite.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** A list of denominations used in the Crowded Desert Project, with brief descriptors, comments on cases, and identified chronologies.
photographed while finds were collected. The features (structures or finds) were geo-located with a hand-held global positioning system (GPS), and from this device the coordinates were inserted in a geographical information system (GIS) platform and mapped. The accuracy of the hand-held GPS is less reliable than that of a total station theodolite (TST) or a differential global positioning system (DGPS), but for the purposes of this project it was sufficient and only minor corrections were required. When a number of structures were found in close proximity, they were clustered together in a special feature called a ‘campsite’, which was then recorded as a polygon. Within a ‘campsite’, only particularly relevant features were marked individually. The ‘campsites’ will be mapped with more accurate methods in future seasons. The extensive survey was carried out over two strips of land near the silt basin. The survey only mapped structures, tombs and cemeteries in particular. Finally, a ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey was conducted in selected areas of the Mulayḥah basin. The aim of these surveys was to find out more about the geology of the silt deposits and to see if it is possible to detect sections of the stratigraphy that might be worth excavating.

The 2015 season should be considered as a pilot project with limited funding, staff, and means. It showed a particularly important density of features in the main area of interest, the Mulayḥah Depression. Although it is still too soon to offer solid results through the application to the data collected of the theoretical standpoint defined above, these findings allow the researchers to establish a few initial results and to clarify some particular targets for future seasons.

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1 Technical terms used in the survey are marked with inverted commas to make them stand out, in contrast with less specific uses of the same word (i.e. ‘campsite’ is part of our technical terminology, whereas we can use the word without marks to refer to campsites in general). Note, however, that following the custom in archaeological projects, we use the unmarked word with an initial capital followed by a reference number or letter to refer to particular features identified during work: e.g. Campsite 8 (see below).
Structures

Figure 3 shows the variety of structures identified in the survey, most of them concentrated in Survey Area 2, where intensive methods were used (Fig. 4). An effort has been made to keep the terms as neutral as possible, but they carry an interpretative load that has been adjusted to the material element they categorize. It is important to consider, however, that these terms have been chosen to help classification, comparison, and interpretation and not to hinder it with terminological problems. The question of denominations applied to material elements must be considered open and in permanent revision. This may seem of little relevance for terms such as ‘Islamic tombs’ or ‘trash pits’, but it is important to consider some concepts in light of this principle.

It is relevant here to highlight the issue of the difference between ‘tent’ and ‘house’. The terms have been chosen because they represent different forms of organizing space in which the ‘house’ is delimited with solid architectural features in opposition to the ‘tent’, which is delimited with less durable sets of materials. The differences, however, should not be taken beyond that. As far as we know, the structures that we have termed ‘houses’ could be as temporary as the ‘tents’ that stand in contrast to them. It would be erroneous to assume an unfettered parallelism between ‘houses’ and sedentary people and between ‘tents’ and nomads.

Another equally important advice concerns the term ‘campsite’. As used in this framework, a ‘campsite’ is merely a cluster of structures that are considered densely packed. These structures, however, may belong

**Figure 5.** A cairn located in the area of Mulayḥah, to the north of the silt basin. The range rod points northwards.
A house located in Campsite 6, in the northwestern limit of the Mulayhah Depression. This structure has the layout of a large tent, but the presence of architectural features leads us to include it in the category of houses. The bottom range rod points northwards.

Wall remains located in the silty area of the Mulayhah Depression. The range rod points northwards.
to different periods and it is important to bear in mind the notion that a ‘campsite’ should be considered multidimensional unless research proves otherwise. The case of Campsite 8 is provided as an example below.

**Finds**

Another type of feature identified in the survey concerns the finds — portable elements that have been documented and collected. The most abundant of them is pottery, although a large amount of glass, metals, lithics, and other materials has been recovered. At this stage of the project the main information that these materials provide is chronological, but once they have been analysed in detail and new assemblages located and used for comparison, these materials will be key to determine variations in connectivity and variability, as explained above.

**Dating**

One of the challenges of this season was to find dating evidence to show that it is possible to build sequences on which narratives of change can be grounded. In general the results have been positive.

**Stratigraphy**

The selection of the Mulayḥah Depression as a starting point was made precisely because its seasonal flooding made possible the existence of stratigraphic sequences. The GPR survey showed that there is superimposition of structures in particular places. Excavations can now target these and similar spots in order to provide sequences.

**Spot dating by materials**

Dating of materials can be applied to all artefacts, but efforts have been focused mostly on the pottery because this is the most abundant and resilient material from past periods. The materials collected in the survey can be dated by establishing parallels with other well-known and stratified finds, which allows some insights into the connectivity of the societies that have inhabited the area. The superficial distribution of dated artefacts also allows a more detailed picture of the occupation of the territory, and in particular sheds some light on the multidimensional phenomena that are the ‘campsites’. A good example here is Campsite 8. Figure 9/A shows the distribution of the dates of the pottery located inside this campsite in terms...
Figure 9. Graphs showing the distribution of pottery from Campsite 8 and from key Survey Units. Every item counted represents an identified and dated category of ceramics within a feature (identification of pottery follows Carter 2011; 2005; Kennet 2004).

Figure 10. A map of Campsite 8 divided into Survey Units, with an indication of the chronology of the concentrations of pottery in each Survey Unit.
of centuries. Each datable pottery feature documented in the survey of the area covered by Campsite 8 has been counted as an item related to each century in the graphic (with the exception of BC, which includes a longer period in which there are very few counts). The number of counts recorded for each century has been plotted in the bar graphic, showing peaks in the periods BC, the fourth to seventh century AD, and the fourteenth to twentieth century AD, with a particular concentration around the nineteenth and twentieth centuries AD. The picture is different, however, if we consider each one of the Survey Units (SUs) over which Campsite 8 spreads (Fig. 9). Then it is clear that each one of the three periods considered above has a different distribution over the same area, with the BC period being more abundant in SUs 34 and 31 (Figs 9/B & 10), the fourth- to seventh-century period in SUs 30, 33, 22, and 24 (Figs 9/C & 10), and the later Islamic period all over the area with the exception of a few SUs (Figs 9/D & 10), which seem to be separating two potential concentrations of finds. This example thus highlights the multidimensionality of the features that we are considering and how there is a need to find a historical narrative that explains these changes in the landscape.

Conclusions: future approaches

The results of the 2015 season show that even relatively minor work can offer abundant material to reconsider the approach (or lack of it) taken so far with regard to the study of nomadic societies in the light of the above-mentioned theoretical approaches. The next stages of research of this project will focus on making the most of the materials already recovered and on using, adapting, and devising methods that can provide new data and types of analysis that will serve to test the theoretical considerations about the type of society under study. The challenge will consist in providing historical narratives that are consistent both with well-established social and cultural theories and with the existing historical, ethnographical, and archaeological information. At the same time, it is important that the results of this research are distributed widely and contribute to ensure that Qataris are aware of the relevance of their nomadic heritage.

The future work of this project will develop along three main lines:

First: expanding information about historical societies that occupied the area currently under study. This will require the widening of the intensive, extensive, and geophysical survey areas and the inclusion of new methods, in particular excavations, aerial photography, and environmental research. New assemblages of materials will be gathered, some of them from stratified sequences, and will be studied from more points of view than the strictly chronological;

Second: there will be a focus on dating methods. This will require a complex and complementary approach of the techniques that have already been used (stratigraphy and material parallels) with strategies based on the opportunities that scientific methods such as radiocarbon dating and perhaps optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) provide for the material conditions of the area under study;

Third: a robust strategy of communicating the results of the research will be devised in order to keep the scientific community updated on the advances of the project; a channel of communication to the Qatari and general public will also be kept open, with the aim of fostering the importance of a nomad heritage as a project that is relevant and worthy of study and conservation.

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