



The Program in Islamic Studies at the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES)

and

The Anis Makdisi Program in Literature



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Auditorium B, West Hall

The Archaeology of Beth Qatraye: New Evidence on Eastern Christianity in the Arabian Gulf during the First Centuries of Islam

By

Professor Robert Carter

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Archaeological and historical work over the last ten years has significantly advanced our understanding of the ancient Christian communities of Eastern Arabia and the islands of the Gulf, a region known as Beth Qatraye. In particular there is now a recognition that the church and monastery sites of the Church of the East excavated in Kuwait, Iran, UAE and Saudi Arabia date to the late 7th-9th centuries rather than the pre-Islamic period. This talk will outline the archaeological evidence for these sites and their dating, thereby casting new light on our understanding of early Christian-Muslim relations, and the persistence of Christianity in the region beyond the conventionally accepted timeframe. The lecture will additionally address a conspicuous gap in the geographical map of known Christian sites in Qatar, the peninsula after which Beth Qatraye was named. So far the evidence consists only of a remarkable cross-mould found at a site in central Qatar which has not shown other archaeological remains of an appropriate date. The northern deserts of Qatar, however, are rich in sites of the 7th-9th century, some of which show architectural and artefactual features which hint at the presence of Christian communities. Evidence of a Muslim presence by the 9th century is also shown in some places. The first results of a new survey project targeting these sites will be shown in this lecture. This work, and perhaps future excavations, will clarify the lives and religious identities of Qatar's inhabitants in the 7th-9th centuries.

Biography

Robert Carter has been working on the archaeology of Arabia, the Gulf, Iran and Iraq for more than 25 years, with particular interests in prehistoric maritime trade, early Christianity, pearl fishing and the historical archaeology of the Gulf towns. Recent projects include the *Origins of Doha and Qatar*, a QNRF-funded project which explores the urban heritage of Qatar using archaeology and multidisciplinary techniques, and *Landscapes of Faith*, a new survey of 7th-9th century AD sites in northern Qatar. He is currently Professorial Research Fellow in Arabian and Middle Eastern Archaeology at UCL Qatar, Doha.