All Things Arabia: Arabian Identity and Material Culture, edited by Ileana Baird and Hülya Yağcıoğlu. Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World, volume 16. Brill, 2020. xvi, 269 pp., 105 colour illus. €149.00/\$179.00. Hb. ISBN-13: 9789004435919. e-book ISBN-13: 9789004435926.

Reviewed by Robert Carter, Institute of Archaeology, UCL Qatar, robert.carter@ucl.ac.uk

This timely and well-written book results from a research grant from the Office of Research at Zayed University, UAE, and covers Arabian culture in both academic and popular discourse, broadly but not exclusively expressed through iconic Arabian objects. It contains 12 chapters (14 including the extensive Introduction by Ileana Baird and Afterword by Hülya Yağcıoğlu, the editors), and is well illustrated with over 90 colour and black and white images. The research is exhaustively documented, with 27 pages of bibliography and a detailed index of 12 pages that includes objects, substances, places and concepts as well as notable individuals and researchers mentioned in the text.

This volume breaks new ground in Arabian studies, though archaeologists and earlier generations of antiquarians and orientalists would question the claim in the Introduction that “the Arabian Peninsula has only recently gained scholarly attention.” One of its chief strengths is that it does not simply take a documentary or antiquarian approach to its subject matter, but expressly sets out to discuss and analyse the meaning and associations of Arabian things, in both foreign (western) and local (Arabian) minds. The exposition of subject matter in each chapter nonetheless provides a sound and well-referenced basis for academic study of the given thing or topic, whether objects, products, film, or perceptions of Arabian culture through time. Alongside cultural feedback, another major theme and theoretical perspective in the book is “Thing Theory” with various references to work by Bill Brown, Appadurai and Heidegger. It is made explicit that objects are replete with meaning, and that their meanings are changeable, contextual and dependent on interactions with the human subject.

Objects and emblems are dealt with chapter by chapter, having been selected for their iconic status, and include frankincense and associated burners (William Zimmerle); pearls (Victoria Hightower Penziner); dates (Eran Segal); the falcon (Yannis Hadjinicolaou); *sadu* weaving (Rana Al-Ogayyel and Ceyda Oskay); head coverings, especially the *keffiyah* or *shemagh* (Joseph Donica); protective silver medallions (James Redman); and jewellery (Marie-Claire Bakker and Kara McKeown). Other contributions cover film (Chrysavgi Papagianni), and the reception and elaboration of Arabian material culture in the west (especially Part 2, in chapters by Ileana Baird, Jennie Macdonald and Holly Edwards).

Part 1, a section on traded things, begins with Zimmerle’s chapter on frankincense, which gives a scholarly review of the very long history of incense burners and the incense trade, going back to the 3rd millennium BC, as well as an account of how burners are made and decorated today in Dhofar, the main source region for frankincense. Two other products, pearls and dates, are laden with more recent economic significance as well as symbolism. Penziner Hightower describes the operation of the pearl fishery in the Lower Gulf, making the point that pearl fishing, rather than pearls themselves, looms large in the collective memory of the Gulf. The

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chapter on dates (Segal) provides an important reminder that the stories of the Gulf were not limited to desert life and pearls, but also to agriculture. Discussions of orientalism run through all the chapters of Part 2; the reception of Arabian culture, and cultural dialogue, are keystone themes of the whole volume. This is strongly apparent in Baird's Introduction, and also her Chapter 4 (on stereotypes and representations of Arabia), where the magic lamps and flying carpets of western popular culture are discussed, and where a challenge is made to aspects of the postcolonial discourse that has prevailed since Said's *Orientalism*. Baird highlights not contempt for the orient and assumptions of superiority in the western reception of these things, but curiosity, wonder, wealth and adventure, observing that stereotypes prevalent until today "are still based on a distant origin of truth." The exotic western fantasy of the east, as expressed in plays, paintings, books and films since the translation of the *Arabian Nights* into French and English in the early 18th century, is comprehensively discussed in Jennie Macdonald's entertaining chapter on Aladdin and his wonderful lamp (Chapter 5), where three centuries-worth of iterations of the fantastical tale are explored. The next chapter, by Holly Edwards, examines orientalist paintings, a 1904 novel *The Garden of Allah* which was transformed into a popular play, and the bizarre story of a faux-Muslim branch of the Freemasons in the USA known as the Ancient Arabic Order of the Mystic Shrine. These Shriners conducted theatrical "pilgrimages" in 1900 and 1923 across the USA, at around the time that real Islam was entering the country, and in the same year (1923) that eastern art was introduced to the American public in the Freer Gallery of Washington DC. Such perceptions of wonder and exoticism endure in the 21st century, and are capitalized upon by the GCC states of today as they encourage tourism in their programmes of economic diversification. To a certain extent, they now inform local perceptions of Arabian culture and identity: Edwards cites Volait in remarking that "orientalism has become orientalized." In this process of self-orientalization, the romanticized version of the orient that was elaborated upon by 18th to 20th century western observers and artists has been reabsorbed by the people of the region, for whom the pre-oil period, despite being within living memory of the oldest members of society, is almost as remote as the mysterious orient was to 18th century westerners. This is fed back once again to international audiences and tourists as commodified culture, and also internalized by local people as the "true customs and traditions" of their vanished past. While much orientalist art clearly combines fact with fantasy (the example is given by Edwards of Gérôme's *Snake Charmer*) some of its content, and the iconic objects and emblems presented in this book, can be recognized as experienced reality grounded in historical and anthropological facts, and many are accepted as the building blocks of local identities today. This contributes to "the emergence of a distinctive Arabian identity" (Baird).

Part 3 examines emblems of identity, and begins with Yannis Hadjinicolaou's chapter on falconry, with a focus on the UAE. Hadjinicolaou explains how the image of the falcon, associated with royalty and nobility in both the east and the west, has been adopted as a symbol of unity and identity in the UAE, while representations and actual birds are frequently exchanged as diplomatic gifts. *Sadu* weaving (Chapter 8, by Al-Ogayyel and Oskay) also transmitted aspects of identity, as well as providing essentials of life (tents, saddlery, carpets and hangings), and commercial opportunities. The role of women is highlighted in passing on information in symbolic form, including encoding the changing surroundings of the weavers. The adaptation of motifs is notable as the physical, religious, economic and social surroundings of the weavers

have changed. For example, human figures were once common but have disappeared since the 1970s due to increased religious strictures, while the modern cityscape of Kuwait is shown on contemporary weavings. Meanwhile the tribal symbol, *wasm*, is now used more as a logo than a mark of ownership. Identity is also a focus of Donica's following chapter on headdresses, where the author explores how the *keffiyah* or *shemagh* first symbolized desert life, and then became politicized as a broader marker of Arab identity, and finally was exported worldwide, taking on new meanings and political connotations far removed from the original context.

The chapters in Part 4 discuss how the meaning and usage of certain iconic objects have changed in the post-oil period. The inscribed *kirsh kitab* medallions described by Redman, now valued more by collectors, tourists and museums than by Omanis, were used by women to avert the evil intentions of the *jiniyya* Umm Al-Subyan, and were engraved with words from the *Aya al-Kursi* (Throne Verse) of the *Surat Al-Baqarah*, along with a representation of the bound and helpless demoness. Redman emphasizes how the virtues of the craftsman and his spiritual engagement were considered essential while engraving the relevant sections of the Quran, however imperfectly this was reproduced in practice. The chapter by Bakker and McKeown on traditional jewellery explores how modern women of the region (mainly UAE and Bahrain) use jewellery today. The complete loss of the indigenous silver jewellery tradition is perhaps of little concern to the women themselves, who routinely trade old jewellery for new so that they can display their latest acquisitions to friends and family. While traditional forms of jewellery are still popular, albeit now made in gold by Indian craftsmen, the younger generations reserve them for certain occasions such as National Day and weddings, when there is a heavy emphasis on tradition and heritage. The preference is for modern designer jewellery in other social contexts.

A modern image maker is discussed by Chrysavgi Papagianni in Chapter 12. Papagianni investigates Nojoom Alghanem's film *Hamama*, which explores the life of a 93 year old healer who still practices aspects of daily life long since abandoned by other Emiratis, such as raising animals and making cheese. In her hands Hamama's objects are not inert items which have ceased working and become merely exhibits, but are imbued with life and meaning, thus offering possibilities for "the salvation of Emirati memory." Papagianni acknowledges the nostalgia inherent in this approach, and makes a stark contrast between oil, representing the modern state with all its excesses and superlatives, and Hamama and her memory-objects as emblems of the past. In summary, this is a well-balanced book with fascinating subject matter, easy to read yet with a high level of academic analysis. It is relatively comprehensive, given that not every country and not every iconic object can be fully covered. The UAE-based editors largely avoid bias towards that country, with chapters based on research in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Yemen as well as the Arabian Peninsula as a whole. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are less frequently mentioned. Regarding subject matter one may note the omission of coffee, along with its associated pots, cups, mortars and traditions of hospitality; the *batula* (face mask) and other means of covering the female face and head; the *dhow*; and of course the emblematic camel. It would be unfair to criticize the book on the basis of those omissions, however: no survey of material culture can be wholly complete, and most such items are mentioned and contextualized in the Introduction and chapters in Part 2. The book is an entertaining and scholarly addition to the literature on Arabian material culture and its reception, and on the study of orientalism.