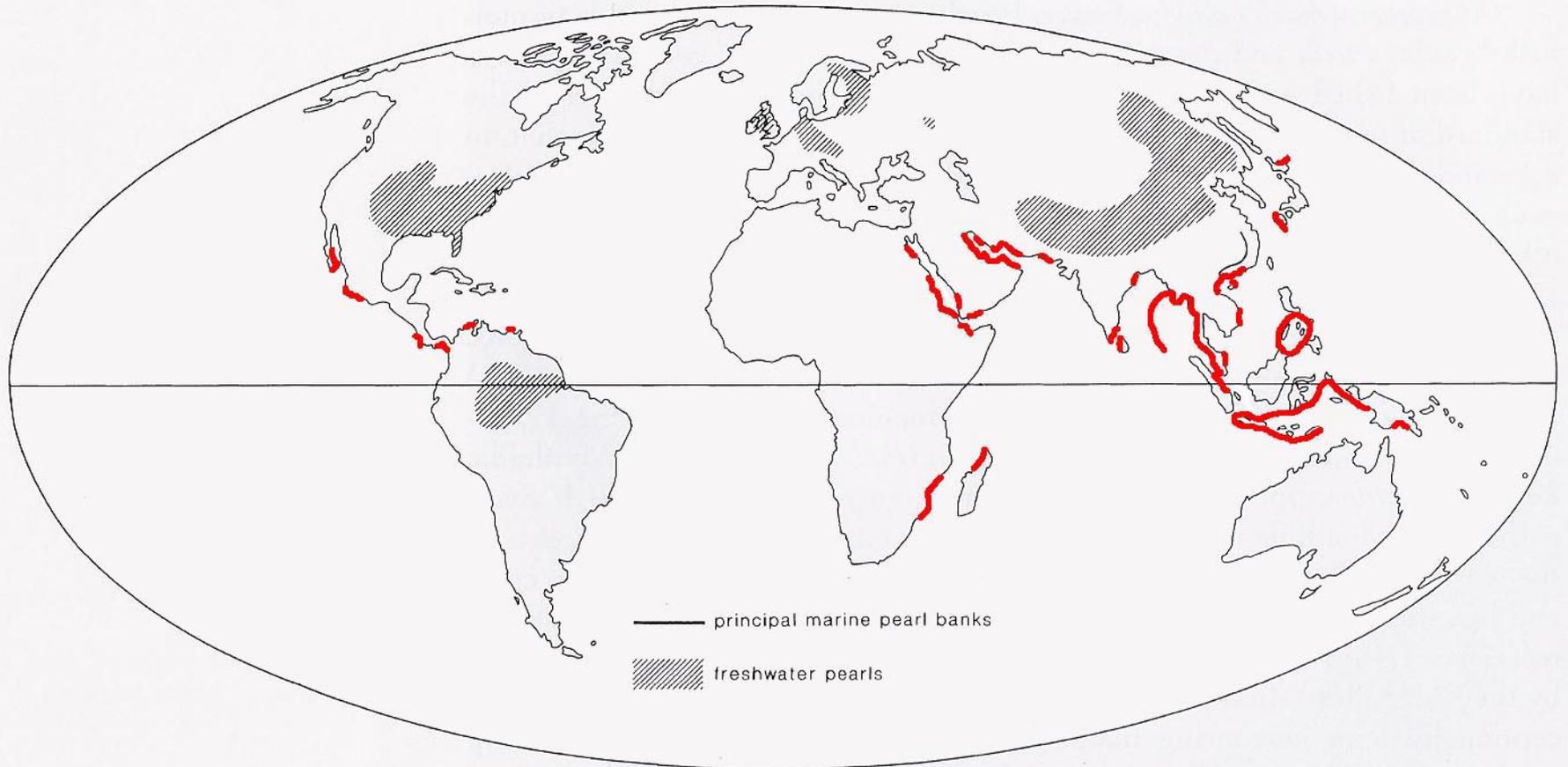


# The History and Archaeology of Pearl Fishing in Bahrain and the Gulf, 5500 BC to 1950 AD

Professor Robert Carter



# Pearl Banks of the World



# An Ancient Tradition

Pearling has been practised in the Gulf for well over 7000 years – since the Stone Age



Pearl from Marawah, Abu Dhabi, ca. 580-5600 BC



Pearl from As-Sabiyah, Kuwait, ca. 5300-5000 BC



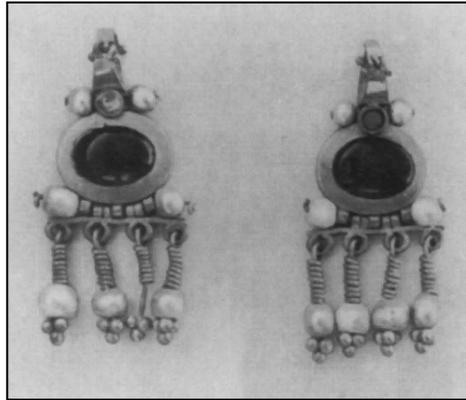
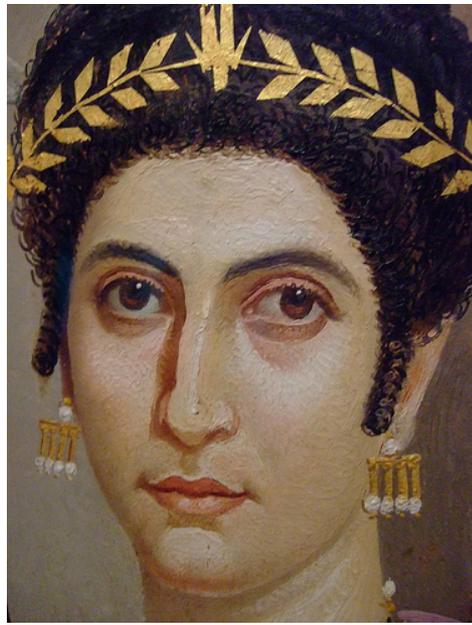
60 pearls from al-Buhais 18

# The Pearl Trade under the Greeks and Romans

- Persian demand under the Achaemenids
- Greek knowledge of fisheries
- Huge demand by the Roman period
- Sasanian and Byzantine markets

*There is an island in the Persian Sea where large numbers of pearls are found. The island is therefore surrounded by rafts made of reeds; they dive 20 fathoms down into the sea from them and bring up bivalve shells. They say that when there is constant thunder and downpours of rain, the pinnas [oysters] reproduce most, and the pearls are the most numerous and largest*

Isidore of Charax, ca. 26 BC



Tell Omar (Seleucia), Iraq

*"The first place, therefore and the topmost rank of all things of price is held by pearls"*

Pliny, ca. 79 BC



Shakhoura, Bahrain



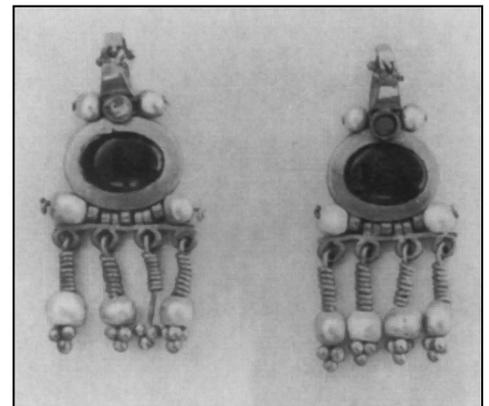
Thaj, Saudi Arabia



# Pliny the Elder

Women glory in hanging these on their fingers and using two or three for a single earring, and foreign names for these luxuries occur, names invented by abandoned extravagance, inasmuch as when they have done this they call them “castanets” [*crotalia*], as if they enjoyed even the sound and the mere rattling together of the pearls; and nowadays even the poor covet them.

The first place, therefore and the topmost rank of all things of price is held by pearls.



*Crotalia* ear-rings from  
Tell Umar (Seleucia)

# Stoidis and Tylos

**Stoidis** is described by Nearchus (4<sup>th</sup> c. BC): a pearl fishery off an island in the Lower Gulf

Ed-Dur, Umm al-Quwain



**Tylos** (Bahrain) is described as a pearl fishery by Pliny. First explored under Antiochus IV (r. 175-162 BC)

Shakhoura, Bahrain. 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> c. BC



# Christian Pearl Fishers

- Bishop Ezekiel's mission for Khusrau I (mid 6<sup>th</sup> c. AD)
- Island monasteries of the Church of the East (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> c. AD)
- Message from Ishoyahb I to Jabob, Bishop of Darai (Tarut), on how pearl fishers should respect Sunday (585 AD):

If they are constrained by involuntary necessity, you other leaders who are present and know the business should prescribe for their conduct what is beneficial and not prejudicial, in such a manner that they avoid, if possible, those two things [work and travel], as well as sin and harmfulness.

Cross from the church at Jubayl,  
Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia



# Empress Theodora



Ravenna  
(mid 6<sup>th</sup> c. AD)

# Pearling in the Islamic Period

The best *maghasat* are in the Persian Gulf. The pearl banks of **Bahrain** are especially of high quality, as they promise more profit and less loss, and are superior to the others. Next are those banks that are close to them, and are situated between them and Siraf. Their pearls are known as *qatari*.

al-Biruni, 1048 AD



## DE LAPIDIBUS ACATIS

Quando artifices querunt margaritam praeuenerunt eam in grossiorem reticulum dimittere eam in mare. Venit ergo acathes super margaritam & non mouetur. Statim ergo oritur et sic uentus resiliens & inueniunt margaritam. Conchos uocantur pisces qui in mari aperit ostium & suscipit auram & a die solis simul & lune. Sic concipit margaritam. Acatas ergo qui inuenit margaritam accipitur iohannes ostendit preciosa margaritam dominum in christum de quo dixit. Ecce agnus dei ecce qui tollit peccata mundi. haec uera margarita. quae si homo uoluerit habere uende bonitatem & dicitur in superibus & inueniunt eam.

# The Catalan Atlas 1375 AD



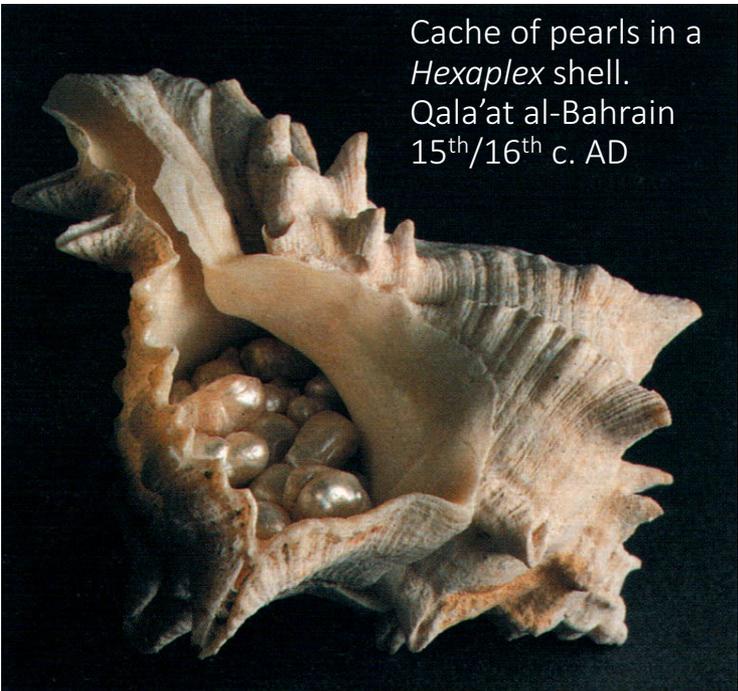
# MEDIEVAL TRADE NETWORKS VIA THE GULF AND RED SEA



This Medieval arrangement of trading routes was reconfigured upon the arrival of the Portuguese, who pioneered the direct sea route around Africa. From this time onwards, the Indian Ocean region became progressively more integrated with the western world, through the enterprises of European colonial powers



Cache of pearls in a  
*Hexaplex* shell.  
Qala'at al-Bahrain  
15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> c. AD



Pearl fishing around Bahrain, according to Thevet 1575  
Appears to use non-local techniques developed in the New World  
(dredging, boiling)

New World sources became extremely important,  
16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c. AD, but were progressively fished out

# Total Specialization

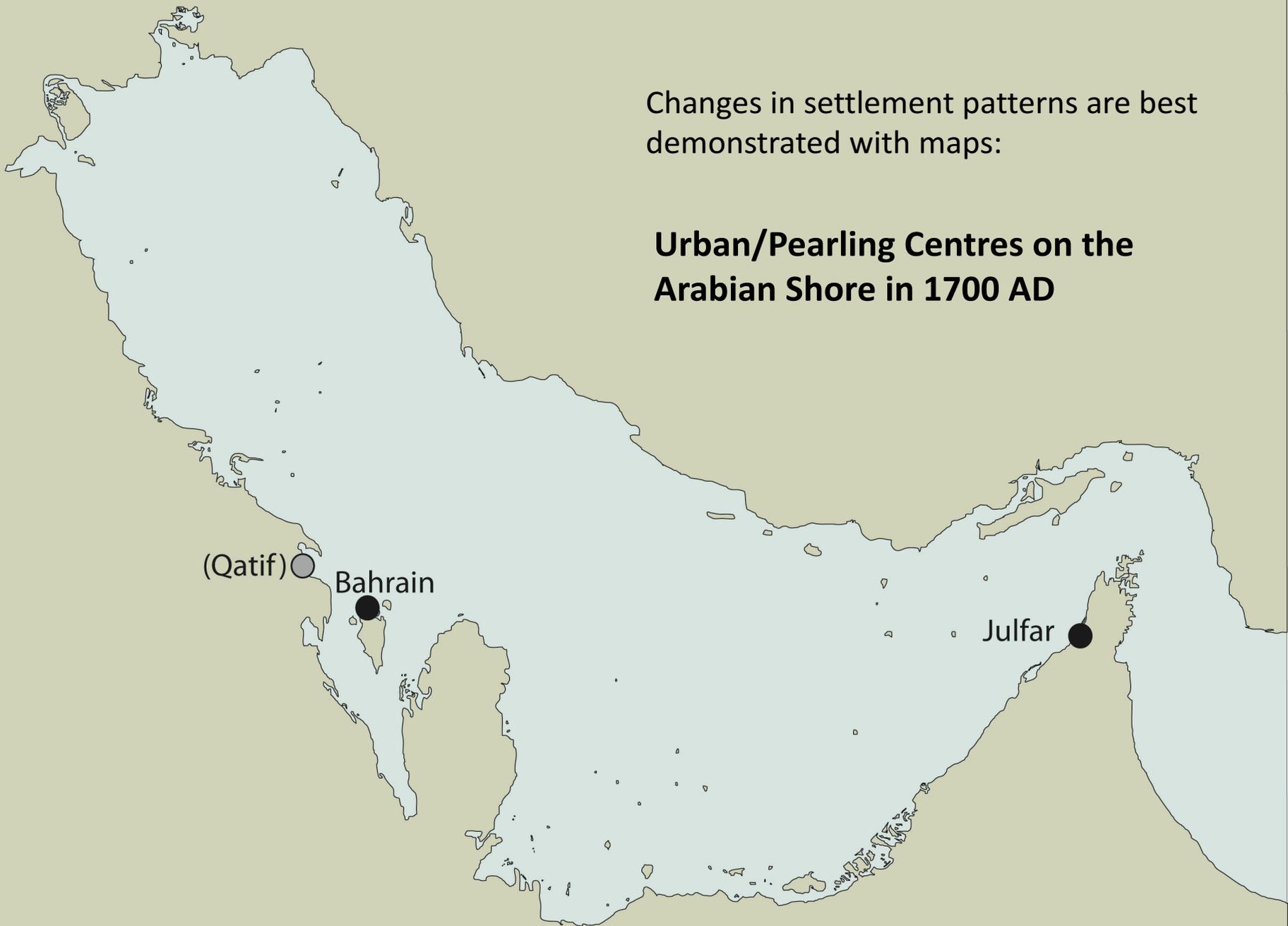
Pearl fishing is the premier industry of the Persian Gulf; it is, besides being the occupation most peculiar to that region, the principal or only source of wealth among the residents of the Arabian side. **Were the supply of pearls to fail, the trade of Kuwait would be severely crippled, while that of Bahrain might - it is estimated - be reduced to about one-fifth of its present dimensions and the ports of Trucial 'Oman, which have no other resources, would practically cease to exist;** in other words, the purchasing power of the inhabitants of the eastern coast of Arabia depends very largely upon the pearl fisheries.

(Lorimer 1915 p. 2252, footnote to Annexure 1)

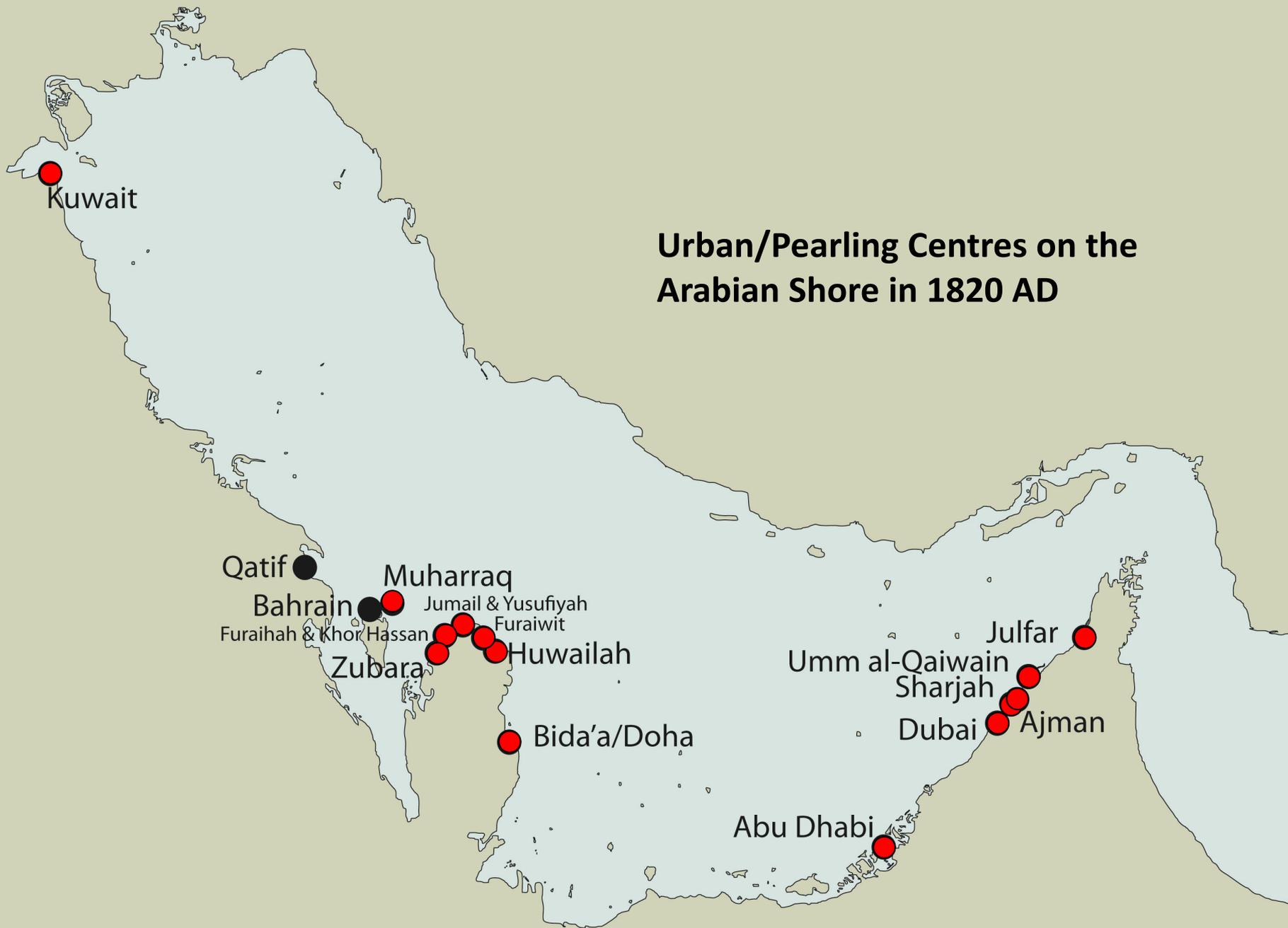
In the end it was the **demand** not the supply that failed

Changes in settlement patterns are best demonstrated with maps:

### **Urban/Pearling Centres on the Arabian Shore in 1700 AD**



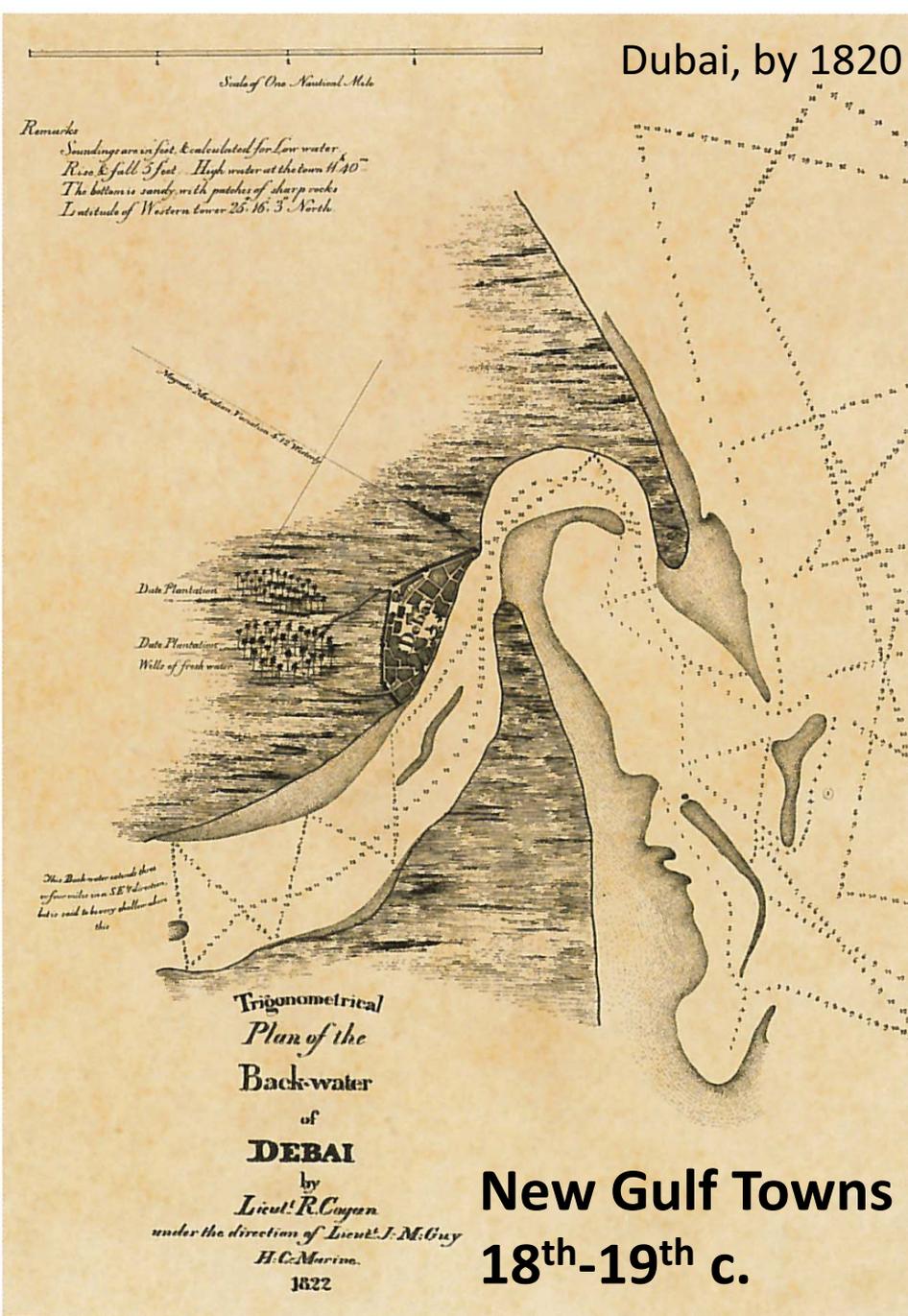
## Urban/Pearling Centres on the Arabian Shore in 1820 AD



Sharjah, by 1820



Dubai, by 1820

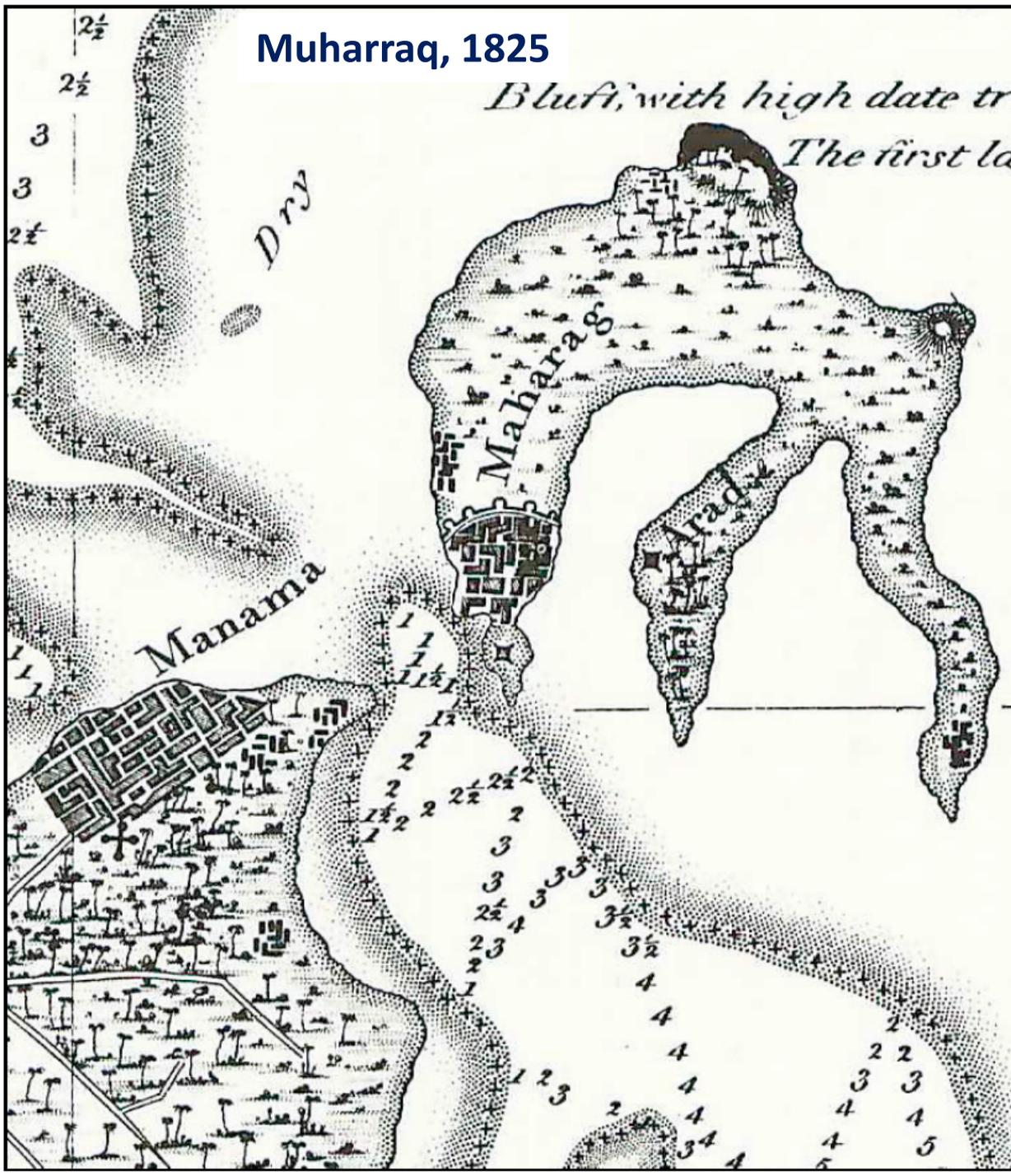


Zubara, ca. 1762



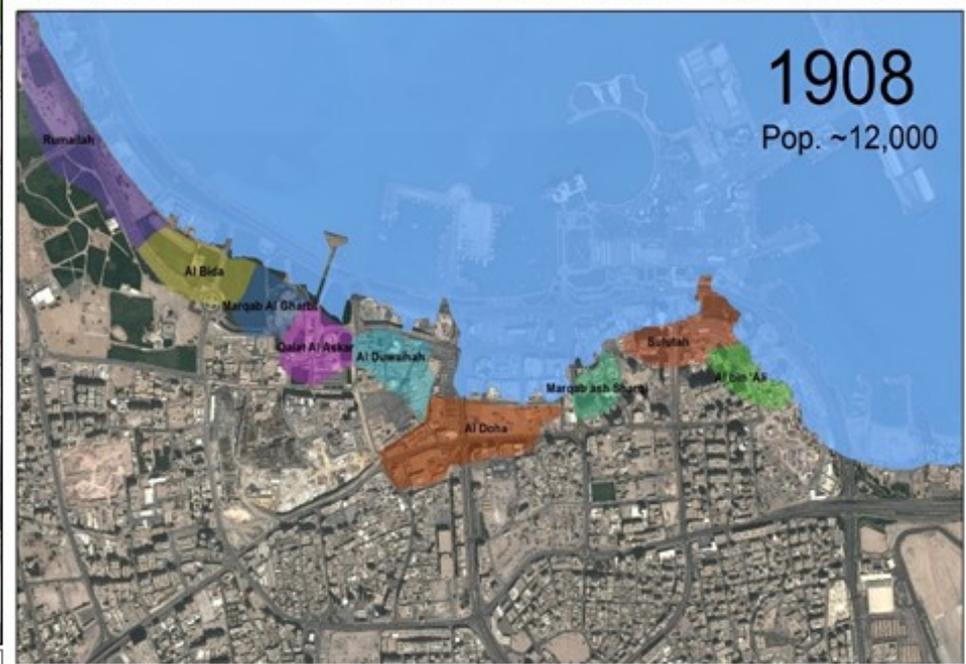
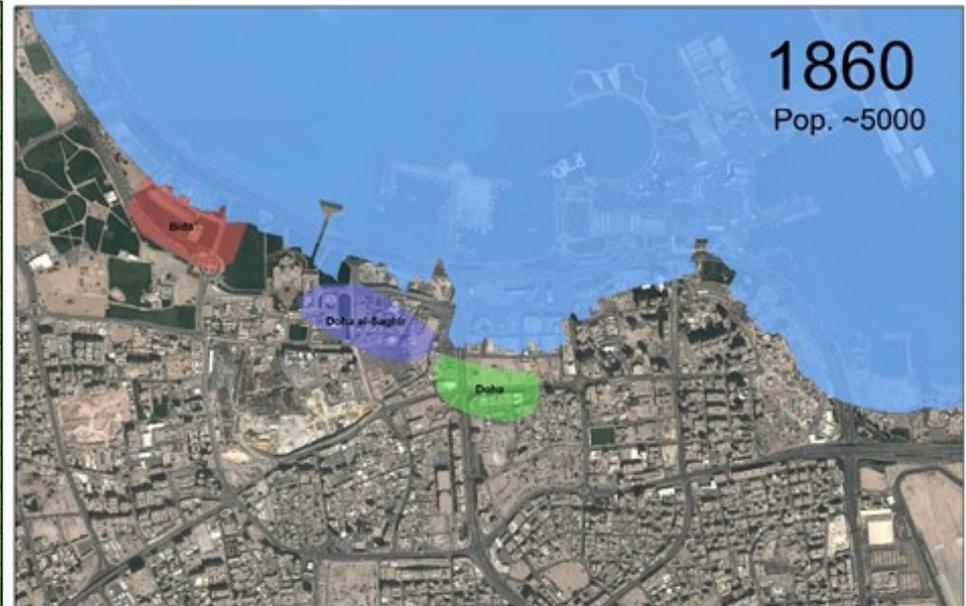
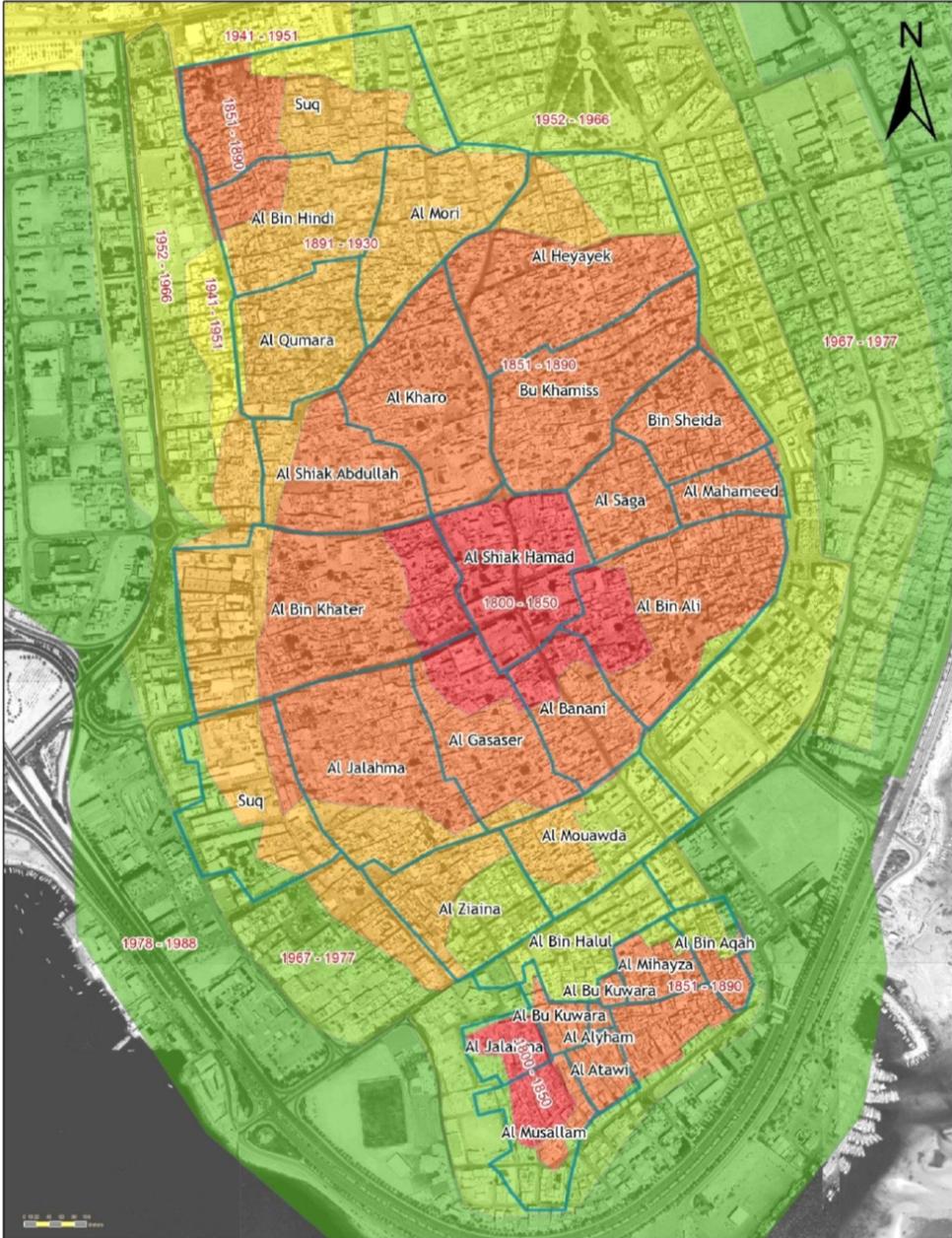
New Gulf Towns 18th-19th c.

Muharraq, 1825

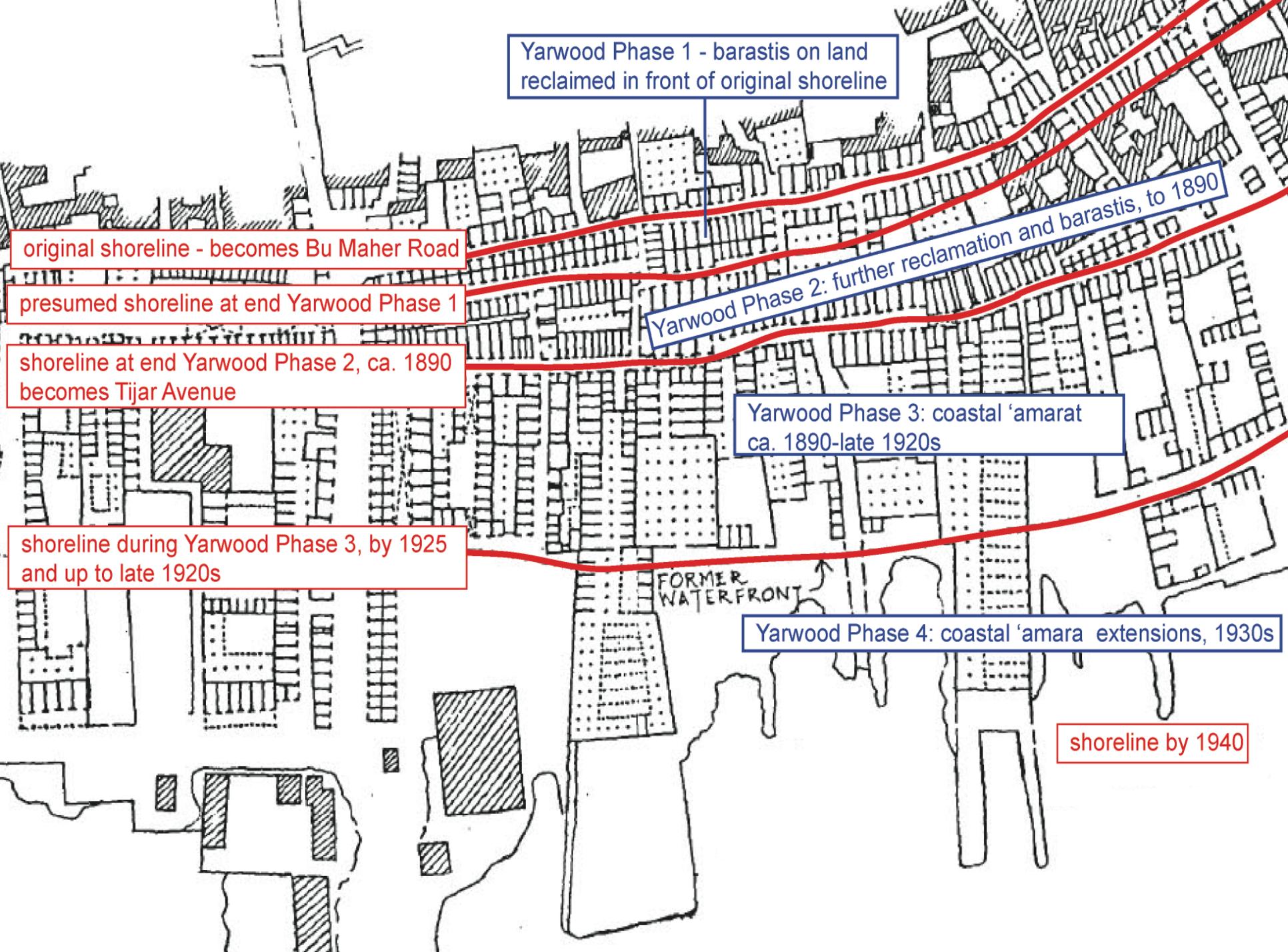


# Expansion of the Towns

Muharraq  
(founded 1801)



## Growth of Muharraq and Doha



Yarwood Phase 1 - barastis on land reclaimed in front of original shoreline

original shoreline - becomes Bu Maher Road

presumed shoreline at end Yarwood Phase 1

shoreline at end Yarwood Phase 2, ca. 1890 becomes Tjar Avenue

Yarwood Phase 2: further reclamation and barastis, to 1890

Yarwood Phase 3: coastal 'amarat ca. 1890-late 1920s

shoreline during Yarwood Phase 3, by 1925 and up to late 1920s

FORMER WATERFRONT

Yarwood Phase 4: coastal 'amara extensions, 1930s

shoreline by 1940



1958



2008

We were able to explore the shoreline development further by excavation at the Yusuf Addurrahman Fakhro 'Amara, on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Bahrain

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
حكومة البحرين



العدد  
سنة المذبح والسنه تقامه قانس والذويعين الطابع

لقد تبعت على اذنه وادعته عن يمينه كريم  
الى من عمره شهر شعبان سنة الف وثمان مائة وتسع وعشرين

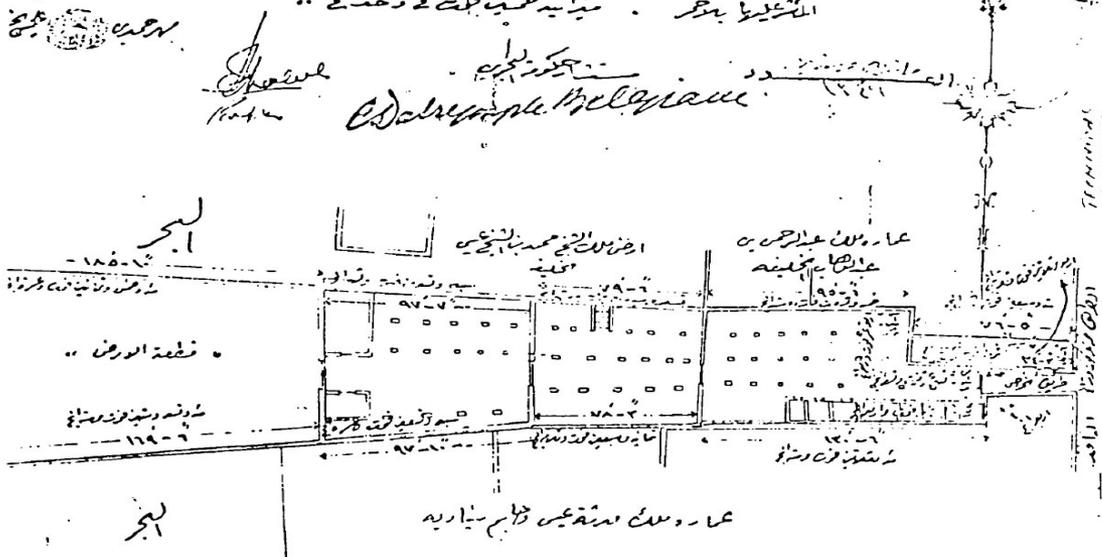
من حكومة البحرين  
C. Dalrymple Meloyane

وجرى البرقة . هوان الحاج يوسف بن عبد الرحمن قرو طام من حكومة البحرين لانه لم يسلح  
قطعة الارض التي تليها من الغرب . الكائن بقصره في طريق . لهذا يوجبها من اسناد عمارة ملك الشيخ  
عبد الرحمن بن عبد الوهاب خليفة وارث الشيخ محمد بن الشيخ حسين خليفة البحر ومن الغريب البحر ومن الغريب  
لبحر وعمارة وورثه حسين وشيخ سياريه ومن اسرقه الزبير بن النافذ . وبنها من زمانه من بحر طام من حكومة  
بظهور هذه البرقة مما اشتملت عليه الخارطة . وبنها على طولها من اسناد عمارة الملك يوسف بن  
مؤدته شهر ومن بعد شهرنا المدة المذكورة في المراسلة المراسلة المراسلة المراسلة المراسلة  
واعطيه هذه البرقة المأهولة من قبله في سنة الف وثمان مائة وتسع وعشرين . وبنها من زمانه من بحر طام من حكومة  
لما تبعت كذا من زمانه من بحر طام من حكومة البحرين . وبنها من زمانه من بحر طام من حكومة البحرين .  
خارطة لبيان مع قطعة الارض التي تليها من الغرب الكائن من زمانه في طريق الذي هو ملك الحاج كريم بن  
المستعربا به . من زمانه من بحر طام من حكومة البحرين .

Fig 8.23 COPY OF DEED.

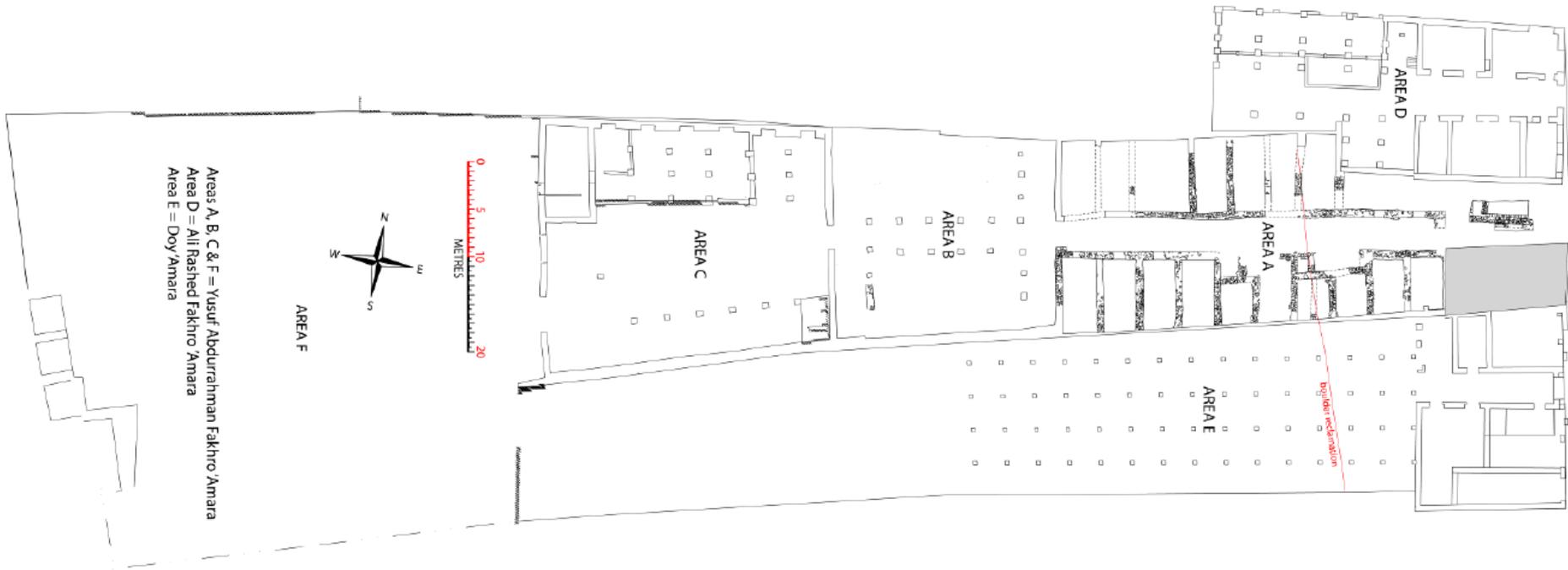
1349 AH (1930/1931 AD)  
land deed for the Y.A. Fakhro  
'Amara

Graffiti in Ali Rashid 'Amara dated  
to 1351 AH (1932/1933 AD)



Older buildings underlie the Y.A. Fakhro 'Amara

Yarwood's advancing waterfront, coupled with this evidence, indicates rapid phases of building, land reclamation and rebuilding between ca. 1890-1930, but starting some time before this date





Examples of Global Ceramics from Muharraq Excavations: Transfer-printed wares (Toko, Goudkust et al.)

A limited range of European semi-porcelains ("*chinaware*", aka *Refined White Earthenware* by archaeologists)

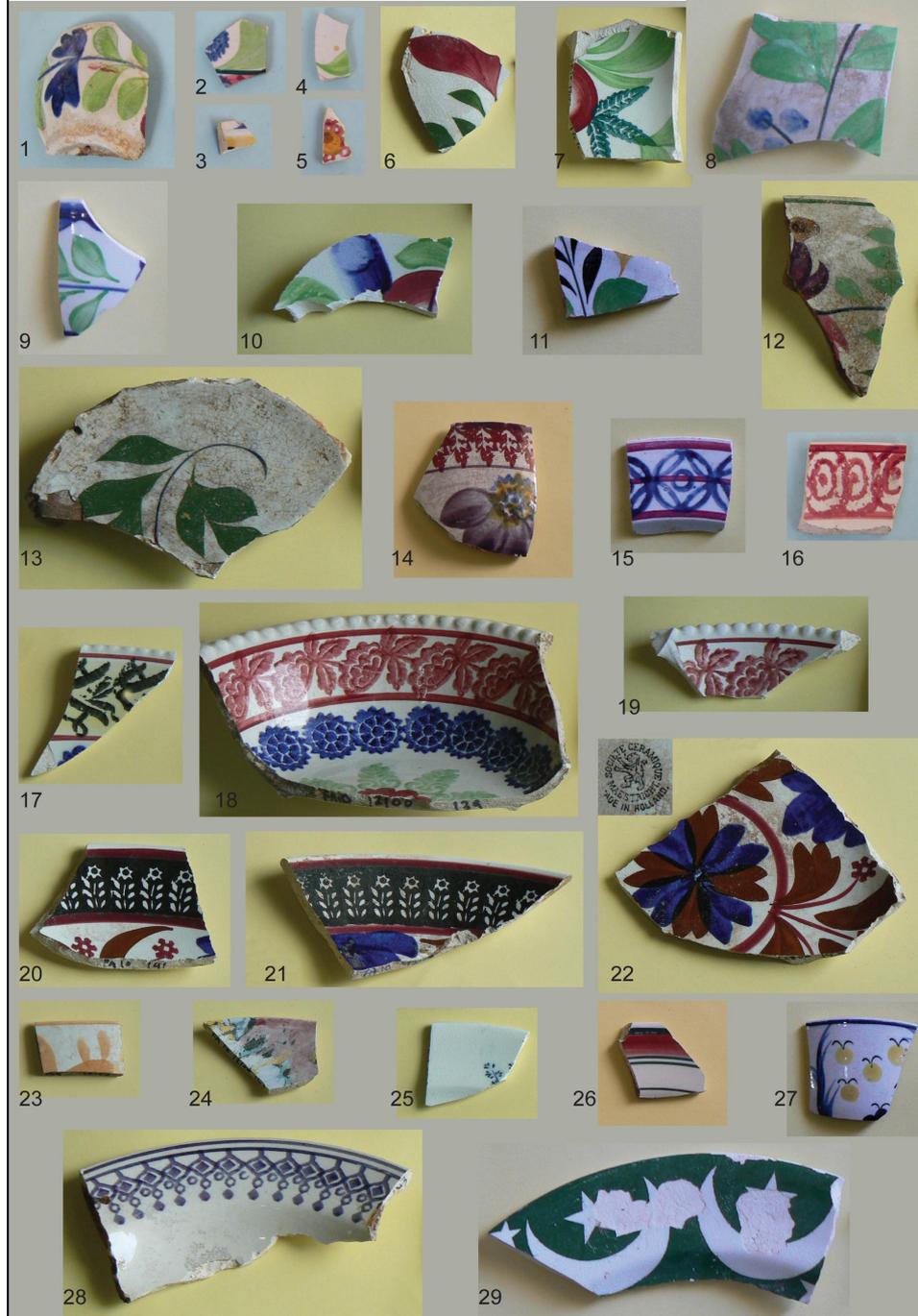
- Painted & Sponge-printed
- Transfer-printed
- Porcelain coffee cups

Potential range of ca. 1875-late 1930s

Mainly Dutch, also English, German, French, Italian et al.

Japanese versions appearing (in Qatar) from 1920s

# Examples of Global Ceramics from Muharraq Excavations: painted and sponge-printed wares, coffee-cups

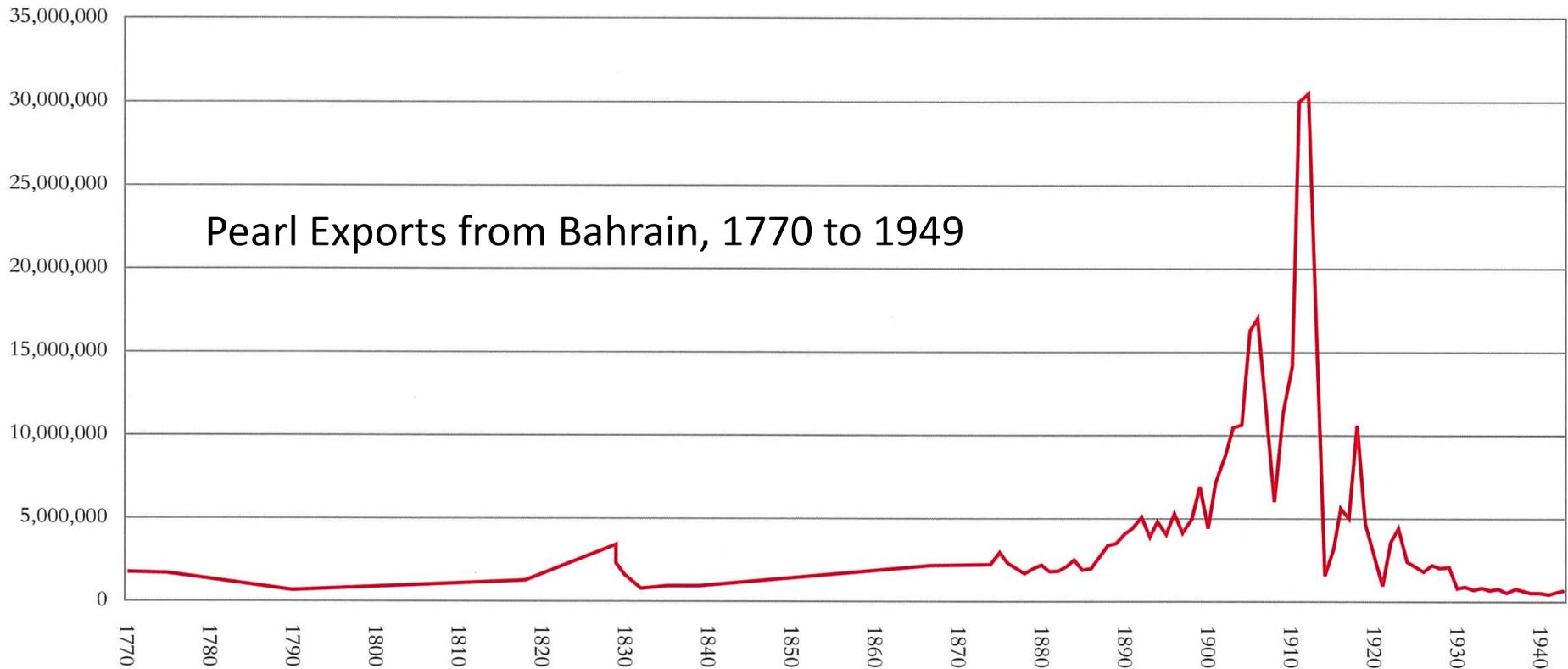


More than 100 silver rupees from a nearby excavation trench in Muharraq, dating to 1852-1912



1. Increase pearl revenues is a local impact of the **globalization process**
2. The major spike 1880-1929 coincides with a spurt of growth in the Gulf towns

Pearl Exports from Bahrain, 1770 to 1949



About 80% of the world's pearls came from the Gulf, and about half of those from Bahrain

# Pearling: A Transformative Influence

1. **Pearling is responsible for the modern urban configuration of the Gulf**
2. **This was intimately connected to growth in the extent and value of the global market for pearls.**
3. **The size of the towns and their populations was directly affected by the value of the international pearl market.**
4. **The pearling economy encouraged the integration of local people into global markets**



# THANK YOU

HH Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa  
HE Sheikha Mai bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa  
Ms Noora Jamsheer and DANAT  
Ms Layal Bushehri and the organisers of the conference  
Dr Nadine Boksmati-Fattouh  
The pearl fishers and merchants of Bahrain

