

# The UCL Institute of Archaeology and Qatar

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Qatar, a relatively small but oil- and gas-rich state in the centre of the Arabian Gulf (**Fig. 1**), is increasingly playing a strong and highly visible role in the wider region. Home to Al Jazeera, it allows an outspoken voice to flourish both in Arab and English, free of government influence. Politically, both behind the scenes and very visibly on the world stage, Qatar assumes an increasingly effective role as a broker and mediator in the Arab world. It is famous both for its (successful) ambitions to host major sports events and as a major investor in real estate and industry assets across Europe. Similarly, it has put a lot of thought and resources into the modernisation of its own educational system, from nurseries to higher education reform. Much of this development is driven by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development and its charismatic chairperson, Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned. Its flagship project, Education City, is a major investment to bring western higher education institutions to Doha in order to develop a regional top-level education and research culture, as part of its bid to prepare Qatar for the post-carbon economy.

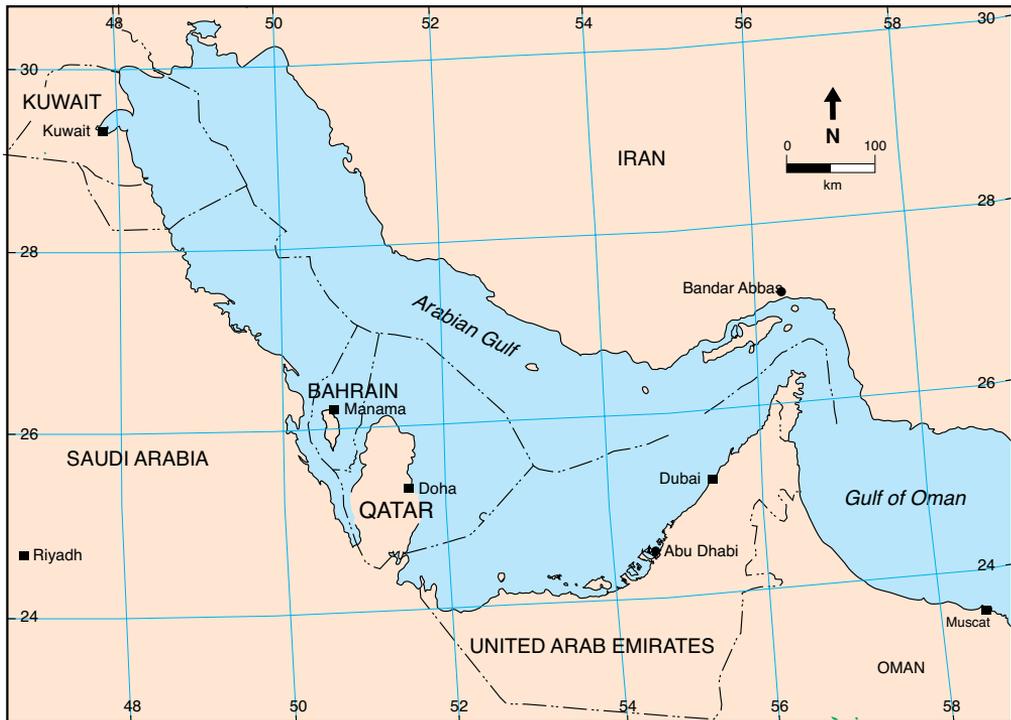
The most recent addition to Education City is UCL Qatar, formally established this August (2011) as a new department of UCL focusing on postgraduate teaching and research in Cultural Heritage, Museum Studies, and Archaeology. Academically driven by UCL, it is jointly sponsored by the Qatar Founda-

tion and the Qatar Museum Authority, which oversees one of the region's most ambitious programmes to establish new museums. UCL Qatar is part of UCL's International Strategy, building on the experience which UCL has acquired through the creation of its School for Energy and Resources in Australia, as well as its engagement with Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University in Astana. Michael Worton, UCL's Vice-Provost (International), sees this ambitious project as 'a bridge between the Arab world and the West in terms of discussions and debates about cultural heritage, the relationship between the past and present, and the nature of national and individual identities'.

For the Institute of Archaeology, UCL Qatar offers a unique opportunity to strengthen its research and teaching links in the Middle East – a region where the Institute has traditionally been very strong and can build on much successful work. Accordingly, there are very close links from the outset between the two departments, with the majority of academic and related appointments being filled by former Institute members. The founding director of UCL Qatar, Thilo Rehren, has been Professor for Archaeological Materials and Technologies at the Institute since 1999, and will maintain a strong presence there through ongoing supervision of doctoral students and joint research projects. Other examples include Dr Rob Carter, Senior Lecturer for Arab Archaeology, who has worked for many years with Prof. Harriet Crawford in the Institute's Kuwait project before joining Oxford Brookes University, and Dr Voula Goufomitsoy, Lecturer for Conservation, a former PhD student of the Institute who has subsequently taught conservation in Malta.

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**Fig. 1:** Location of Qatar in the Arabian Gulf.

Further links exist through close cooperation in one of the Institute's main archaeological field-projects, the excavation of Islamic Merv in Turkmenistan directed by Tim Williams, and the involvement of UCL's Museums and Collections in the development of UCL Qatar, with the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology offering a major connection between the three sister departments.

From late 2011 onwards, UCL Qatar will offer a wide range of Continuing Professional Development courses in Museum Practice, Conservation, and Archaeology, aimed at professionals in the Gulf region who want to increase their general skills level or specialise in a particular area of their discipline. In late August 2012, two taught postgraduate degree courses are scheduled to start, leading to an MA in the Archaeology of the Arab and Islamic World and an MA in Conservation and Museum Studies. These courses, designed to complement existing programmes at the Institute of Archaeology and built on the experience the Institute has in these areas,

focus on the specific conditions and requirements of the wider region. The combination of rapid economic development and sustained investment in new museums and cultural heritage projects across the Arab world renders this a major area in need of high-quality professional training and education, as well as offering unique research opportunities across a wide range of topics, from the effect of newly-established museums on visitors and resident populations to conservation issues of historic buildings in high-saline environments, to archaeological materials science studies of the production of glass and pottery, to name but a few. An outreach programme, aimed not only at schools and families, whilst also actively engaging with often marginalised and less traditional audiences in this multi-cultural and ethnographically complex country, will further distinguish UCL Qatar as part of a liberal and modern institution in the tradition of UCL's founding ethos and the Institute of Archaeology's mission statement.