

Research & Method Standard

VERSION 1.0 EFFECTIVE DATE · 2 AUGUST 2026

THE ARCHIVE

An independent documentary archive of the history, archaeology and cultures of the Arabian Peninsula. What is made here is the research; the films are the form it takes. This document sets out how that research is done, so that the method can be read, and held to.

The Arabian Peninsula is the large landmass of south-west Asia bounded by the Red Sea to the west, the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean to the south, and the Gulf to the east. In the present day it takes in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait, with its northern edge shading into the deserts of the wider region rather than ending at a firm line.

What follows describes how the work is done. It is set out to be checked, not taken on trust: the evidence is given as it stands, disagreement is shown as disagreement, and nothing is claimed as more certain than the record allows.

SCOPE AND STANDPOINT

This project takes a position, and states it plainly rather than disguising it as neutrality. Its subject is the Arabian Peninsula, chosen because the place is understudied and heavily mythologized, and because it is worth understanding on the evidence rather than through the myths. That is the bias, and it is stated rather than hidden: it shapes what the films examine and what they treat as worth asking. The peninsula is treated as a subject of study, not as a protagonist and not as a cause. Origin is reported wherever the evidence places it: a thing found to be native to the peninsula is called so, and a thing found to be borrowed, shared, or brought from elsewhere is called that just as plainly. Where a practice proves to have come from a neighbouring culture rather than a local one, for instance, the films say so without hesitation. The aim is to learn what the record shows and to share it, not to make the place a hero. Nationalism is not the method here, and would corrupt it.

That even-handedness reaches small things as well as large. Contested names are given in neutral form: the body of water is called the Gulf, never the Persian Gulf and never the Arabian Gulf, and the same discipline is the rule for any name that carries a claim.

The scope is the deep history, archaeology and material culture of the peninsula, from the earliest evidence through to living traditions. The origins of Islam and the religious and political history of the early Islamic period are not the project's subject: that is a closely argued specialist field, and it is left to those equipped for it. Where a living tradition or a material practice runs back into that period, it is treated as what it is, an agricultural or cultural matter, and the films stay with the evidence for the practice rather than entering questions of doctrine or religious history.

WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE

Not all evidence is equal, and the films do not treat it as if it were. For every claim, the strongest available kind of evidence is preferred, in a standing order:

- Strongest is contemporary physical evidence: an inscription cut in stone, a coin, an object lifted from an excavation. Evidence from the time, of the time.
- Below it, contemporary written accounts: chronicles and reports written near the events, read with their author's purpose in mind.
- Below those, later accounts, written generations or centuries after what they describe. These are used, and valued, but always labelled with the gap stated in years. This measures distance from the event, not the culture or the subject of the source: a source is never ranked lower for being Arabic or Islamic than a Greek or Latin source written at the same remove.
- Lower still, modern scholarship, which interprets the evidence, with specialists preferred and disagreements noted.
- Last, encyclopedias and textbooks, used for orientation only, and never as the source of a claim.

The scholarship it draws on is read across languages. Work on the Arabian Peninsula has been written in Arabic, French, German, Russian, Italian and Chinese as well as English, and a question is not treated as settled by the English-language literature alone. Throughout, the peninsula is treated as the subject of its own history.

How confident the narration sounds is set chiefly by where a claim sits in this order. The aim is that no claim is stated more firmly than its evidence allows, or softened because a firmer statement would be more comfortable.

TESTING A SOURCE

Every source, whether an ancient inscription or a modern paper, is examined on four questions: is it authentic; is it credible, and what purpose shaped it; is it typical or exceptional; and what did it mean in its own time, before what it means now. A royal inscription serves its patron, and is read with that in mind; the record over-represents kings and the literate, and silence in the record is not the same as absence in the world. The films are made with this in mind.

CONFIRMING A CLAIM

No significant claim rests on a single source where two genuinely independent lines of evidence exist. Two modern books citing the same inscription are one line, not two. Where the strongest pattern is available, physical evidence, contemporary testimony, and modern analysis converge on the same point. Where sources genuinely conflict and the evidence does not settle the matter, the disagreement is shown as a disagreement, with both positions named, rather than resolved by preference or hidden. Where the record is silent, the narration remains silent: missing evidence is not filled with conjecture, and absence of evidence is not treated as evidence of absence.

The state of the scholarship is taken into account: which questions are open, where specialists disagree, and which positions are contested rather than established. The work that argues against a film's framing is sought out, not avoided, and a claim is not presented as settled where the field itself is still arguing.

BUILDING A FILM

Before a film is written, its history is broken into individual claims, and each claim is recorded on its own with its source, the kind of evidence behind it, and the degree of certainty that evidence carries. The script is written from that record, not from memory or open invention, and is then checked, in a separate pass, against it: every sentence must trace to a source, and no claim may appear in the narration more confidently, or more broadly, than the record allows. Where a claim cannot be supported at any level, it is cut rather than hedged.

Because a documentary cannot carry footnotes on screen, the rigour moves rather than disappears. The degree of certainty is carried in the words of the narration; the full workings and the sources sit with the film; and errors found after publication are corrected in the open.

HOW THE RESEARCH IS CHECKED

The research is recorded before it is written. Each film's claims are held in a record of their own, and every one carries its source, the kind of evidence behind it, and how directly that evidence was traced, from an original read in full down to a reference passed between later works. The script is built from that record, and the checking pass exists to catch any sentence that does not trace back through it to a source. A line that cannot be traced is cut.

The checking is a separate step. Each sentence of the draft is verified against the claim record built before the writing began, line by line, so that a fluent, confident sentence with no source behind it is caught by the record rather than trusted on the page. Because the record exists before the script, it is the fixed thing the writing is held against, not the writer's memory of it. The check also tests that a sentence's confidence matches its evidence: a claim resting on a single late account is not allowed to read as firmly as one where physical evidence, contemporary testimony and modern scholarship agree.

The published work is reviewed again over time. Each film records the date to which its research is current, and the catalogue is reviewed once a year against scholarship that has appeared since, so that a film can be corrected, or marked as overtaken by newer work, rather than left to age quietly. If the standard itself is raised, the existing films are reviewed against the higher bar, not held to the one in force when they were made; and where that review is substantial, new work is delayed or paused until the catalogue meets the standard it claims.

TRANSLATION

Where a passage of primary source is shown, a published scholarly translation is used and cited. The project translates a passage itself only where no published translation exists, or where rights require it, and never for passages whose meaning is contested, which are left to published scholarship. A term is not used until it has been reconciled against named scholarly reference works and read by a native speaker. A term is rendered the same way in every film, and a translation made in-house is labelled as such, never presented as a scholar's.

IMAGES

The images illustrate the research; they are never the evidence for it. Every factual claim would remain true if every image were removed from the film. No photograph appears in a film unless it is a real image of a real object, site, or document, and unless its origin and its licence have been verified and its credit recorded. Each film publishes the full list of its images with their sources and licences, so that any one can be checked against the record it came from, and where an image is used under licence, the terms of that licence are honoured and stated. Where the project draws a diagram or an illustration to explain something, it is plainly a drawing, and never passed off as a photograph or a historical source. Nothing on screen is a generated image presented as real, and no reenactment stands in for the historical thing.

MAPS

The maps are not illustrations either. They are generated by code from real coordinate and elevation data, so that coastlines, terrain, and the position of every place shown are plotted from the geographic record rather than drawn by hand.

MAKING THE FILMS

The films are built mainly from still images, maps, and text, with movement authored over stills. Where later or living subjects call for it, real filmed footage of the real world is used as well, and any footage is genuine footage of a real place or practice, never a dramatized reenactment.

THE VOICE AND THE TOOLS

The narration is spoken by a synthetic voice, and the listener should know it is not a person. Its tone and manner are a house register, not a claim: authority in the sound of a sentence confers none on its content. What a film asserts rests on the sourced record behind the words, and would rest there whoever, or whatever, spoke them.

The score is generated with artificial intelligence, and the scripts, too, are drafted with artificial intelligence assistance. But the boundary is fixed and it is the point: the machine drafts language only. It does not decide what the evidence shows, and it does not decide how certain a statement may be. Those are settled in the record beforehand, and enforced against the script afterwards, by a person, who is answerable for every claim that remains. These are the instruments that let an independent archive sustain sourced films at this depth; they are disclosed here plainly rather than left to be discovered.

INDEPENDENCE AND FUNDING

The project is independent and currently self-funded. Independence here is structural, not circumstantial, and it is the condition on which any funding would be taken.

The project is open to funding, including from public bodies, institutions and museums. A funder may commission a subject: an institution may fund a film on a particular place, period or theme, just as the project chooses its own subjects. That is where a funder's influence ends. No funder has any say over the method, the evidence, or the conclusions a film reaches; a commission sets what a film examines, never what it is permitted to find. Where the evidence on a commissioned subject runs against what a funder might have hoped, the film reports it as it stands.

Where a film is funded, its funder is named, and any connection between that funder and the film's subject is stated. What independence turns on is not the size of a contribution but the conditions attached to it, and the standing condition is that none bear on the research. Funding may support production, research, translation, licensing and archiving; it does not extend to editorial control of any kind. Funding offered on condition of a particular finding, a particular omission, or a particular framing is declined.

CORRECTIONS

The research is careful, and it is not infallible. It is offered as the best account the evidence currently supports, and it is held open to correction. Where an error is found after publication, in the project's own review or raised from outside, it is corrected, and the correction is noted with its date and supporting evidence. A failure to meet this standard is itself treated as an error to be corrected. Independence means no funder shapes the conclusions; it does not place the work beyond correction.

REVISION HISTORY

VERSION 1.0	2 August 2026. First published.
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This standard is effective 2 August 2026. Substantive changes are recorded here with their date; the version is raised when the method itself changes.