Introduction

1 Introduction to the Project

This book presents a catalogue of the Islamic funerary inscriptions of Bahrain dating to before 1317 AH/1900 AD (all dates are specified as either AH or AD. Where both dates are cited these are in the format AH/AD). It results from fieldwork completed between 2013 and 2015 undertaken in co-operation with the Bahraini Shi’a Jaffaria Waqf and the Sunni Waqf authorities who provided information on the locations of relevant gravestones, personnel to participate in the recording, and ethical clearance and research authorisation (along with the Directorate of Archaeology and Heritage of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities). 150 gravestones were recorded in 26 locations: in 23 cemeteries, mosques, and shrines (136 gravestones), two museums (13 gravestones), and one private house (1 gravestone) (Table 1.1; Figure 1.1). Of these, 38 gravestones were exposed through archaeological excavation and 106 have inscriptions.

TABLE 1.1 Gravestone locations, abbreviations, and numbers

Name	Location Type	Number of Gravestones
A‘ali (AAL)	Mosque	1
Abu Anbra (ABN)	Originally urban now village cemetery	50
Abu Saiba (ABS)	Village cemetery	1
Askar (ASK)	Village cemetery, mosque and shrine	2
Barbar (BAR)	Private house	1
Beit al-Quran (BEIT)	Museum	1
Bilad al-Qadim (BAQ)	Mosque	1
Daih (DAI)	Village cemetery	1
Hoorah (HOO)	Urban cemetery	12
Hunaniyah (HUN)	Urban cemetery	1
Jebel al-Habshi (JBH)	Village cemetery	13
Jidhafs (JID)	Village cemetery	1
Jidhafs al-Imam (JAI)	Village cemetery	3
Karranah (KAR)	Village cemetery	5
Al-Khamis (KHA)	Urban cemetery	25
Mahooz (MAH)	Urban cemetery	2

TABLE 1.1 Gravestone locations, abbreviations, and numbers (*cont.*)

Name	Location Type	Number of Gravestones
Malkiya (MAL)	Mosque	1
Al Maqsha (MAQ)	Village cemetery	3
Bahrain National Museum (MUS)	Museum	12
Noaim (NOA)	Urban cemetery	4
Al-Qadem (QAD)	Village cemetery	2
Sh. Abd al-Rauf al-Bahrani (Sh. AB)	Shrine in mosque	1
Sh. Latfulla (Sh. LA)	Shrine in mosque	1
Sh. Ahmed bin Muhammad al-Khalifa (SHAM-ALK)	Tomb	1
Sayed Yahya Al Husseini (SYA)	Shrine in mosque	1
Tubli (TUB)	Village cemetery, mosque	4

The excavations and surveys, and the ethnographic recording of contemporary cemetery visitation practices, cemetery material culture, and uses of the gravestones was directed by Professor Timothy Insoll, assisted by Dr Salman Almahari and Dr Rachel MacLean and Mr Jassim Al-Abbas. Following the advice of Professor Robert Hoyland, New York University, that the inscriptions should be transcribed into modern Arabic by those familiar with the formulae used, this was completed in Bahrain by Dr Salman Almahari of the Directorate of Archaeology and Heritage, Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, with Sheikh Bashar abd Alhadi Al-Ali, religious scholar, and Mr Jassim Al-Abbas, Head of Research at the Jaffaria Waqf Authority. Dr Salman Almahari completed the translation from modern Arabic to English, and additional crosschecking of the translations was completed by Dr Xavier Luffin of the Département de Langues et Lettres, Université Libre de Bruxelles, and Dr Abdelghani Mimouni, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter.

2 The Contents of the Book

This chapter considers the history of Islamic burial, gravestone, and cemetery research on Bahrain, and discusses the gravestone chronology, gravestone and cemetery types, stone sources and gravestone manufacture, the gravestone inscriptions, content, iconography and decoration, and the archaeology of the shrines and cemeteries in which some of the gravestones were found. Chapter 2 presents the gravestones in the form of a catalogue. It provides detail on each location where gravestones were recorded, and individual reference numbers, co-ordinates,

dimensions, orientations, and descriptions for every gravestone, as well as an Arabic transcription and translation for all gravestone inscriptions. Chapter 3 concludes this study by providing a discussion of contemporary practices relating to cemeteries, graves, and gravestones, the threats facing the gravestones, and management options for protecting and presenting the gravestones.

No attempt is made to add historical context to the epitaphs and texts, the individuals commemorated, or to the places mentioned on the gravestones. This is to permit others to explore these themes, add this detail and to use this epigraphic corpus for the purposes of their research unsullied by previous study.

3 Previous Research on Islamic Burials, Gravestones, and Funerary Inscriptions on Bahrain

Comparatively little scholarly attention has been given to the Islamic cemeteries, gravestones, and funerary inscriptions on Bahrain. They are not referred to by the early European travellers who visited Bahrain such as Captain E. L. Durand (1880; Rice 1984) who excavated burial mounds at A'ali in 1878, or Theodore and Mabel Bent who were in Bahrain in February 1889 for the same purpose (Bent 2010: 13–27). The omission is interesting as both Captain Durand and the Bents do refer to the Al-Khamis Mosque, albeit as the “Madresseh-i-abu-Zeidán” (Bent 1984: 78) or the “Meshed-i-Abú-Zeidán” (Durand 1984: 20), and this is a site where many gravestones have been recorded. Ernst Diez (1925: 105), the German Oriental scholar who visited the Al-Khamis Mosque in 1914, does refer to the mosque being surrounded by graves but gives no further detail.

The cemetery at the village of Saar is described by Hansen (1968: 129) based on her ethnographic study in 1960, as “barren and unplanted”, with the north-south oriented graves marked at the head and foot with “two oblong rough slabs of coral chalk”. One grave of “some outstanding member of the small village community” was differentiated with “a flat rectangular resting stone slab” (*ibid*). This might be a reference to the type of rectangular grave marker repeatedly recorded during the survey but the absence of detail denies precise identification. James Belgrave (1973: 91), in his otherwise reasonably detailed consideration of the antiquities of Bahrain, focuses on examples of Arabic inscriptions not in funerary contexts such as those from the Al-Khamis Mosque and describes the gravestones, erroneously, as “comparatively modern and therefore are of little archaeological importance”.

More recently, Islamic tombs and gravestones have been uncovered during archaeological investigation. Kervran (1996, 2005) completed excavations of Muslim burials at three locations, Saar, Qala'at al-Bahrain, and the Al-Khamis Mosque. The Saar cemetery is described as associated with a village and located within a raised area formed of the ruins of a Bronze Age temple (Kervran 1996: 58). Three tombs, oriented north-south, with dimensions of 180 cm × 90 cm were investigated.

Two were within a small structure with a *mihrab*, and thus appear to resemble a shrine excavated in the Abu Anbra cemetery discussed below. The tombs were finished in stucco and it is possible, but not certain, that the two stucco panels from Saar catalogued as MUS7 in Chapter 2 are from one or more of these tombs, as unfortunately the illustrations provided by Kervran (1996: 64–65) are not clear enough to confirm this. The texts are described as containing “pious formulas and verses from the Coran (sic)” (Kervran 2005: 340). The style of the letters used in the Saar gypsum panels is suggested as of 12th–13th centuries AD date (Kervran 1996: 61), and as such would agree with the dates given in the interpretive panel associated with MUS7 in the Bahrain National Museum (see Chapter 2).

The tombs excavated at Qala’at al-Bahrain were given a later date range of the 14th to 16th centuries AD, and were part of a cemetery of 3000m² containing between 100 and 120 tombs (Kervran 1996: 61–63, 2005: 334–335). Sixty human burials were exhumed. Two types of Muslim tombs were encountered; simple pits oriented north-south, and pits lined with gypsum plaster, one with a coffin containing a young child dressed in a white cotton shroud or robe that disintegrated on contact with the air (Kervran 1996: 66). Some burials also contained grave goods such as a female with a glass bracelet around the arm and a carnelian bead, and another female burial with a clay Shi’a prayer tablet placed under one elbow.

All these graves lacked above ground funerary monuments but it was suggested that they were “probably covered with cenotaphs and often built inside funerary chapels” (Kervran 2005: 337) which had not survived. An exception was provided by a funerary chapel (*chapelle funéraire*) containing four intact tomb structures of a rectangular stepped design, seemingly undecorated, and made from gypsum plaster and stone (Kervran 2005: 338–339). A 14th century AD date was suggested for this structure based on its stratigraphic position (Kervran 1996: 68). Frifelt (2001: 42, 45–46) also refers to Muslim burials encountered during excavations at Qala’at al-Bahrain but no gravestones are described.

The burials at the Al-Khamis Mosque are assigned to two phases by Kervran (1996: 69, 2005: 339–340); Umayyad/Abbasid for those under the walls and floors of the Mosque, and later for those with inscribed rectangular stone grave markers of the type classified under the code KHA (Al-Khamis) in Chapter 2. The Umayyad dates can be discounted (cf. Insoll et al 2016: 238). It is possible that a few burials under the mosque might be Abbasid and unconnected with the Mosque, but it is likely that the vast majority are 13th century AD or later, reflecting the chronology of the Mosque itself (cf. Insoll et al. 2016: 240). No detail is provided on the burials recorded, but the gravestones of the types considered in detail in Chapter 2 are briefly described as associated with the Shi’a, of between 130 cm and 180 cm length and 30 cm to 60 cm height, inscribed on four sides, and with a *mihrab* image carved on the upper surface (Kervran 1996: 69). A cemetery is also referred to several hundred

meters away from the Al-Khamis Mosque. It is not given a name by Kervran but is said to be called locally, “Little Kerbala” (*ibid*), an appellation not encountered during the fieldwork. It is likely that the cemetery is in fact Abu Anbra, where there is a significant concentration of historical gravestones.

The most detailed study of the gravestones prior to this one was by Ludvik Kalus (1990, 1996). It was completed as part of an overall survey of all the then known Arabic inscriptions of Bahrain and includes 36 examples of inscribed gravestones in nine locations. Some of these gravestones appear to have been moved or to have disappeared in the intervening 25 to 30 years since Kalus (*ibid*) completed his research. Where it has been possible to locate and identify the gravestones discussed by Kalus (1990, 1995) these are cross-referenced in Chapter 2 and new translations are provided.

4 The Chronology of the Bahraini Gravestones and Cemeteries

Blair (1998:196) makes the point that “the speed with which tombstones were introduced depended in part on the strength of local customs of burial”. Kervran (1996: 71) has drawn parallels between the tombs with masonry walls recorded in Islamic contexts and pre-Islamic sepulchres, particularly Hellenistic ones. This is important, for in Bahrain there was a pre-Islamic tradition of commemorating the dead beginning c.2300–2000 BC, with the Early Dilmun burial tumuli (cf. Breuil 1999: 49; Lombard 1999a: 56–57). Thus, there was pre-adaptation to using physical markers for graves but there exists a gap of seven centuries from the last pre-Islamic grave stelae, with a probable date of the 2nd–3rd centuries AD for the so-called Tylos or Hellenistic period figurative grave stelae from sites such as the Al-Maqsha, Al-Hajjar, and Shakhura necropolis, and Qala’at al-Bahrain north-western Palm Grove (cf. Lombard 1999b: 212–216; Salman and Fredslund Andersen 2009: 98–99, 171–173), and the first dated Muslim gravestone on Bahrain, KHA6, with a date of 407/1016 (Table 1.2).

If the tradition that some of the people of Bahrain converted to Islam after receiving a letter inviting their conversion from the Prophet Muhammad in 7/628 is accepted (Kanoo 1993: 281–283), there is an absence of dated gravestones for a period of nearly 400 years. Four reasons could explain this. First, gravestones from this period have not survived. Second, gravestones from this period have not been found. Third, the dead were uncommemorated, or fourth, the dead were commemorated with un-engraved stones, pebbles, enclosures of low-walls, palm-fronds, branches, or objects such as pots, all of which have been recorded as grave markers elsewhere in the Islamic Middle East (e.g. Granqvist 1965: 110; Sourdel-Thomine and Linant de Bellefonds 1978: 352; Simpson 1995: 247–248; Bittar 2003: 16; Mershen 2004: 165–167; Gorzalczy 2009: 225–226).

TABLE 1.2 Chronological order of the dated gravestones

Reference Number	Date
KHA6	407/1016
DAI1	650/1252
ABN5	707/1307
ABN11	707/1307
ABN10	746/1345
ABN45	754/1353
ABN9	765/1363
KHA20	846/1442
KAR3	847/1443
MUS3	854/1450
JID1	903/1497
ABN7	904/1498
KAR5	965/1557
ABN34	984/1576
MUS4	985/1577
KHA5	997/1588
JBH12	1002/1593
JBH11	1003/1594
TUB3	1008/1599
MUS2	1014/1605
ABN6	1046/1636
JA13	1046/1636
ABN16	1047/1637
ASK1	1066/1655
ABN47	1067/1656
NOA1	1076/1665
BEIT1	1089/1678
ABN32	1090/1679
SYA1	1093/1682
TUB4	1093/1682
ABN18	1094/1683
TUB1	1095/1684
JBH7	1098/1687
JBH10	1100/1689
MUS5	1100/1689
ABN50	1102/1691
MUS10	1102/1691
ABN1	1103/1692
KHA7	1105/1694

TABLE 1.2 Chronological order of the dated gravestones (*cont.*)

Reference Number	Date
MUS9	1106/1695
HOO5	1107/1696
ABN40	1108/1697
MAQ2	1112/1701
ABN4	1113/1702
KHA18	1138/1726
Sh.LA1	1150/1738
SHAM-ALK	1209/1795
HOO2	1210/1796
HUN1	1236/1821

Forty-nine gravestones have dates and these are presented in chronological order in Table 1.2 and Charts 1.1. and 1.2. They span the period between 407/1016 and 1236/1821. It is possible that the use of inscribed gravestones might be linked with the growth of Shi’ism in Bahrain. The phrasing used on the earliest gravestone, KHA6, clearly indicates a link to Shi’a belief. However, the date of 407/1016 on this gravestone suggests that the growth in funerary epigraphy in the Bahraini context was not linked with what Taylor (1992: 7) has described as “the rise of major Shi’i empires, such as the Fatimids, Qarmita, Buyids and Hamdanids” in the tenth century. The number of dated gravestones gradually increase in quantity from one each in the 5th and 7th centuries AH, to five in the 8th, three in the 9th, six in the 10th, and 17 in the

CHART 1.1 Number of dated gravestones by century (AH)

CHART 1.2 Number of dated gravestones by century (CE)

11th century, before declining to 13 dated gravestones in the 12th century, and three dated gravestones in the 13th century AH. It is interesting that the period with the largest number of gravestones, the 11th/17th century, correlates in large part with Safavid rule of Bahrain between 1602–1717 AD (Cole 1987: 186), a dynasty known to have patronised and encouraged Shi'a arts in the shrines of Iran, and until its loss to the Ottomans, in Iraq as well (Allan 2012: 41).

It is probable that the Shi'a communities using gravestones such as KHA6 co-existed with Sunni Muslims who might not have commemorated their dead in the same way. Some modern inscribed gravestones were seen in the largest contemporary Bahraini Sunni cemeteries that were surveyed, at Manama and Hunaniyah (East Riffa) (Figure 1.1), but in many instances uninscribed head and foot marker stones were used as grave markers. These could be formed of unworked slabs of *faroush*, a natural seabed crust composed of sand, lime muds, shells, and carbonate cement (Judd and Hovland 2009: 88), or pointed cement markers (Figure 1.2). Two definitely Sunni gravestones were recorded with inscriptions pre-dating AD 1900 and both are for members of the Al-Khalifa ruling family (HUN1 and SHAM-ALK). Their rarity likely reflects doctrinal proscription on the commemoration of the dead (cf. Sourdél-Thomine and Linant de Bellefonds 1978; Leisten 1990; Schöller 2004: 261–262, 271–275; Allan 2012: 5), though how this has been considered and implemented has varied (Schöller 2004), and numerous exceptions exist indicating the use of inscribed gravestones in what are likely to be Sunni or almost exclusively Sunni contexts throughout the Islamic world (e.g. Sourdél-Thomine and Linant de Bellefonds 1978: 355; Ory 1989: 57–59; Moraes Farias 2003; Bittar 2003; Mershen 2004: 165; Bauden 2011).

FIGURE 1.1 The locations of the cemeteries surveyed in Bahrain

FIGURE 1.2 Variety of gravestones in the Sunni cemetery, Manama. These include *faroush* and cement head and foot marker stones and modern inscribed marble gravestones.

5 The Types of Gravestones and Cemeteries

5.1 *The Types of Gravestones*

Of the 150 gravestones recorded, 139 are of a rectangular form. Those for which the length was measurable indicated that the majority (68 examples) were between 100–149 cm, followed by 44 examples of between 150–199 cm length. Three gravestones were between 200–249 cm and five between 50–99 cm length. Of the latter, three could have formed half of a double slab gravestone configuration but could not be classified as such because they are very eroded. Where the width was measurable of either single or one of the parts of double slab gravestones (see below), it was found that 63 gravestones were between 31–40 cm, 60 between 21–30 cm, 15 between 41–50 cm, three between 51–60 cm, and five between 10–20 cm maximum width. Maximum height measurements indicated that 60 gravestones were between 31–40 cm, 45 between 41–50 cm, 20 between 51–60 cm, 16 between 21–30 cm, three between 61–70 cm, and one between 10–20 cm height. On all the finished rectangular gravestones inscriptions were found on five surfaces unless they were eroded, incomplete, or damaged (Chapter 2).

The gravestones were either produced as single or double slabs (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). Single slab gravestones predominated at 90 examples with 30 double slab gravestones, 17 half double gravestones, and five fragments classified as part of two

FIGURE 1.3 Example of a single slab gravestone, ABN18

FIGURE 1.4 Example of a double slab gravestone, ABN5

further rectangular gravestones found. It is not known if the fragments were from single or double slab gravestones. The remaining ten gravestones were composed of one concrete block, two gypsum examples, one double slab gravestone carved only on one face and fixed to a hollow cement structure, and six flat gravestones. Three of the flat gravestones are modern laser etched marble slabs that commemorate individuals pre-dating AD 1900 (ABN34, HUN1, SHAM-ALK). The other three are pre-modern, with one possibly imported (H009), as it is seemingly made of sandstone, which is not local to Bahrain, and the other two were described by local informants as of Iranian origin (H002, H007) (see Chapter 2 for full details).

The criteria for why some gravestones were carved as a single slab and others using double slabs is not known, but might be related to size. The largest single slab gravestone (ABN45, Figure 2.162) measures 227 cm length by 57 cm width by 21 cm height, and the combined maximum dimensions of the largest double slab gravestone (ABN21, Figure 2.84) are 202 cm length by 51 cm width by 31 cm height. Generally, the slabs that compose a double gravestone are of broadly comparable size, but disparities were recorded. ABN48, for example, was formed of two slabs of exactly 98 cm length, and of comparable width at 48 cm and 47 cm, but the height of each slab varied at 54 cm and 35 cm (Figure 2.169). Disparities could also exist in slab length as with ABN11 that was formed of two slabs of 109 cm and 82 cm, whereas the widths of the slabs at 50 cm and 49.5 cm and their heights of 41 cm and 39–40 cm are comparable (Figure 2.54). In all the double slab gravestones, the two slabs were joined by simply butting against each other except for ABN12 which was connected, uniquely, by a carved mortise and tenon type joint that served to link the two slabs together (Figure 2.55).

Thirteen hollow gravestones were recorded. Hollow gravestones can be defined as “cenotaphs” following Blair’s (1998: 196) description of these as “empty rectangular boxes”. The hollow gravestones, and all the rectangular gravestones more generally, can also be described as “grave covers”, following Lowick (1985: 79). As such, besides the sectarian considerations discussed earlier in this chapter, this prevalent type of above-ground rectangular gravestone or grave cover would have not been universally acceptable in some Muslim communities for cultural reasons. Ali (1994: 398), for instance, describes how Malay Muslims would not use a sarcophagus-type gravestone as it was “too reminiscent of a Hindu platform where a pyre was set to burn the dead” and thus “any suggestion that the body was entombed above the ground, as in a sarcophagus, was unacceptable”.

It is likely that many more of the Bahraini gravestones are hollow as this could only be ascertained when the gravestone position had shifted to allow a view of the underneath, where they were cracked (e.g. ABN26, Figure 2.97), or of double form and had been separated or partially separated, or where they were excavated and this permitted a view underneath. Similarly, whether a gravestone was solid could only be identified based on the same criteria and three solid examples were recorded (e.g. ABN5, Figure 2.25). Presumably, gravestones were hollowed out to reduce

weight during transport. Circular holes were also found drilled into five gravestones with one each on JBH4, KHA15, MUS6, and MUS12, and several on TUB1. Initially, it was thought that this might also be linked with transport and they were for the insertion of a rod to ease carrying (e.g. MUS6, Figure 2.406). This interpretation was subsequently discounted on the basis that these holes would be expected to continue through both sides of the gravestone, which they did not, and not disfigure the epigraphy. The purpose of the holes remains unknown.

The dominant gravestone orientation, in 60 instances, was northwest to south-east. This was followed by 48 gravestones oriented north-northwest to south-south-east, 12 oriented north to south, two northeast to southwest, and one each oriented west-northwest to east-southeast and west-southwest to east-northeast. Based on comparison with contemporary practice the graves should, ideally, be oriented with the head to the north and face directed towards the Qibla in the west, and the feet to the south. A close approximation of this ideal is thus manifest by many of the gravestone orientations.

Twenty-seven gravestones were found in an unfinished form. This ranged from the gravestone having only been cut into the basic rectangular shape with blocks for where the raised decoration would be (e.g. ABN 35, Figure 2.131) to small areas left unfinished, as with the rear of the raised decoration on ABN26 (Figure 2.99). The style of the unfinished gravestones, the similarities in materials used (limestone), and their sizes, all serve to indicate their contemporaneity with the finished examples. It can only be hypothesized as to why unfinished gravestones were sometimes used as funerary markers. This could be due to cost, death of the commissioning party, death of the writer or engraver, a variety of circumstances could be responsible. Factors of cost might explain the use of what are best described as 'sub-standard' gravestones, i.e. where surface flaws are likely to have precluded effective carving (e.g. ABN35, Figure 2.131). It also has to be acknowledged that some of the unfinished gravestones may have been found and appropriated more recently as commemorative markers. This could explain why seven of the 12 gravestones in Hoora cemetery are unfinished, as they were collected elsewhere and re-used in this large urban cemetery.

In other instances, unfinished gravestones had clearly been abandoned and were not apparently associated with the deceased (e.g. ABN46, Figure 2.163). However, it appears unlikely that the presence of the unfinished gravestones indicates that they were manufactured or carved in the cemeteries themselves. The absence of stone debitage from cutting or carving in all excavated gravestone contexts, and the likely venerated status of cemeteries, based on contemporary analogies (Chapter 3), does not suggest in-situ manufacture and carving. Further implications of the unfinished gravestones for our understanding of gravestone manufacture are discussed below.

Only two gypsum grave markers were recorded (ASK2 and MUS7 [2 panels]). These are supplemented by the three gypsum tombs recorded by Kervran (1996), previously described, one or two of which might correlate with MUS7. The rarity

in the use of gypsum could relate to beliefs described by Schöller (2004: 259) that “everything which has been touched by fire is disliked because it is a bad omen with regard to (Hell-) Fire” and because materials such as brick and lime that had been exposed to fire were believed to “dry out the grave” (Leisten 1991: 15–16). More prosaically, the prevalent use of stone for the Bahrain gravestones might also be connected with understandings of material longevity, i.e. that stone is a long-lasting material and limestone is suited to taking on carving, as well as to the relative availability of stone in the Jiddah Island quarry, discussed below.

Comparative material for the Bahraini rectangular gravestones is rare and perhaps the closest parallels can be drawn with the gravestones from Siraf on the southern Iranian coast. Functional similarities exist in that both the Bahraini and Sirafi groups can be described as ‘grave covers’, as defined by Lowick (1985: 79). In other ways, they differ. The Siraf gravestones are generally earlier, dated to between 364/975 and 735/1334, made of sandstone, or in three instances stucco, carved in floriated Kufic script, and often incorporate a stepped crest running the length of the upper surface (cf. Lowick 1985: 80, 85, 112–113; Bittar 2003: 157–160). The approximate length of the Siraf gravestones (excluding fragments and a child’s gravestone) varies between 163 cm and 114 cm with several of around 130–150 cm length, width ranges between approximately 28 cm and 45 cm with most around 30–45 cm, and in height between 25 cm and 57 cm, with most between 40 cm and 50 cm (Lowick 1985: 90–114). As such they are generally comparable in size to the dominant rectangular Bahraini gravestone form.

5.2 *Types of Cemeteries*

The cemetery types can be divided into two categories, urban and village. Of the 16 cemeteries in which gravestones were recorded, five can be classified as urban, and the remaining 11 as village cemeteries (Table 1.1), though one of the latter (Abu Anbra) was formerly urban, indicating that cemeteries can change status over time dependent on population growth and decline. Figure 1.1 indicates a clear clustering of cemeteries and shrines in the northeast of the main island of Awal correlating with the villages in this area. The general absence of cemeteries and shrines with inscribed gravestones pre-dating 1900 AD in the south and centre of Awal can be explained by differences in population composition in the centre of the island (predominantly Sunni and/or expatriate), and lack of population and settlement in the south. The latter compounded by an absence of relevant archaeological investigation as this is currently a restricted area. The total absence of relevant gravestones on the island of Muharraq with its indications of Islamic settlement back to the Umayyad period, as well as later occupation attesting the urban expansion of Muharraq in the late 19th and 20th centuries (cf. Carter and Naranjo-Santana 2011) is less understandable.

It is not possible to reconstruct the past spatial reasoning, if any, behind the location of the gravestones within the cemeteries themselves, for in most instances they have become part of a palimpsest of graves in multi-period contexts, as already

considered in the discussion of chronology above. Patterns of contemporary cemetery usage indicate that today all the cemeteries in which the gravestones were recorded are essentially unplanned, but a degree of planning is utilised in plotting where burials will go based on the availability of space. In the Abu Anbra cemetery, for example, graves are re-used. Old graves are re-opened and the bones of the previous occupant are placed in a corner of the grave trench and the new corpse added or the older bones are removed, the corpse interred and the bones of the previous occupant are then placed back into a corner of the grave.

Whether specific areas within cemeteries are linked with particular families also depends on the availability of space. For example, in the two Janusan village cemeteries (lacking inscribed gravestones dating from before AD 1900) there is considerable space and burial can, essentially, occur wherever desired. As a correlate, particular family areas have developed. In contrast, in the Deir village cemetery on Muharraq Island, (again lacking funerary inscriptions relevant for this study), where space is limited, there are no family areas and place of burial is based on the date you died in sequence. Further detail on the cemetery locations is provided in Chapter 2.

6 Stone Sources and Gravestone Manufacture

6.1 *Stone Sources*

The principal, if not the sole source of the limestone used for the gravestones was likely Jiddah Island, approximately 4km north-west of the main island of Awal (Figure 1.1). The quarries on Jiddah are of significant antiquity but the only published survey of them is a brief but valuable report by Højlund (2013: 176) who suggests they were exploited as early as the Bronze Age, c. the second-millennium BC. Permission was not forthcoming from the Bahraini authorities to revisit Jiddah Island as part of the research described here. This would have permitted provenance studies to be completed comparing the gravestones with the oolitic limestone from the quarry at Jiddah, but must await future access.

A photograph of an Arabic inscription from Jiddah Island is also provided by Belgrave (1973: 80), which he describes as “the scratching of a slave” referring to “the name of the Governor of Bahrain at a certain date, the age of the quarries and the date of the mending of the fort” (ibid: 91). No translation is given but one in French is provided by Kalus (1990: 72) and this is translated into English by Højlund (2013: 174). This is quoted below and a new Arabic transcription presented based on the photograph provided by Belgrave (1973: 91).

وفي ضمن شهر شعبان سنة 968 هجرية تم الفراغ من من قطع مائة ألف صخرة
لتجديد بروج قلعة البحرين في وزارة الوزير الأعظم جلال الدين مراد
محمود شاه... على يد العبد...

During the month of Shaban of the year 968, ended the cutting of 100,000 stones for the construction of the towers of Bahrain Fortress. By the hand of the slave, under the government of the Grand Minister Jalal Al-Deen Morad Mahmood Shah.

The inscription indicates that the quarries were certainly in operation in 968/1560, a period from which several of the inscribed gravestones date (Table 1.2).

6.2 Gravestone Manufacture

Entirely hand carved inscribed gravestones of the type recorded in the survey are no longer made in Bahrain. Gypsum is still hand carved, but the craftsmen practicing this stated that it is a completely different material to stone and requires different technical skills to work it. Hence reconstructing the processes and time involved in producing a fully inscribed gravestone of the rectangular types recorded in the survey is difficult because of the absence of contemporary parallels.

A Bahraini artist who does stone carving was interviewed regarding the production of these gravestones. He was then carving a marble gravestone with calligraphy on five faces, and estimated that to complete a fully carved gravestone comparable to those recorded with inscriptions on five faces by hand alone would take him two years including preparing the stone block, designing and marking out the calligraphy, and cutting the lettering (Khalil Almadhoon pers. comm. 20/4/17). This is probably a significant over-estimation of the time it took earlier masons as he does not specialise in the production of gravestones and he uses electric powered chisels for the bulk of the work so is probably not so quick in the use of hand chisels as earlier craftspeople would likely have been.

The literature on gravestone cutting and carving in the Gulf and Iran is very limited, though a summary of the processes, but not the time involved in producing a carved gravestone in Iran sometime in the period between 1937 to 1941 is provided by Wulff (1966: 129–130). This is useful for insights into a comparable *chaîne opératoire*. First the raw block was trimmed and the surfaces brought to a “bright shine” by the stonemason. The drawing was then copied onto the stone by tracing the lines with Indian ink and the outlines chased with a sharp chisel. The background was next cut away with various profiled hollow chisels and the cut-out background smoothed with a set of bent, profiled files. The final polishing was then completed with emery cloth. Similar processes were likely involved in the production of the Bahraini gravestones.

Several stages of manufacture are apparent in the 27 unfinished gravestones that were recorded. First the stone block would have been cut from the quarry. This first stage cannot be identified in the gravestone corpus as all the blocks have been further worked. The tools that appear to have been used, based on marks left on some gravestones, were saws and chisels. The clearest example of this is provided by ABN35 where what appear to be chisel marks are present on the top surface (E)

and chisel and saw marks on the long side surfaces (A and B) (Figure 2.131). Next, the block would be cut into a more refined basic shape probably including, where used, the rectangular blocks for raised decoration at each end (e.g. ABN46, Figure 2.163), and if these were a feature of the design, the rectangular plinths that might support them. It is possible that much of the roughing out and rudimentary carving of features such as the rectangular block for the ubiquitous raised decoration (e.g. MUS8, Figure 2.413) was completed by apprentices and other craftspeople not involved in the final letter carving. The standardisation apparent in the gravestone design, rectangular shape, range of similar sizes, and repetitive design elements, would have facilitated production.

The raised decoration would then appear to have been cut. ABN8, a gravestone formed of two limestone slabs, has been cut into shape but left uncarved possibly because the surface of the stone would have precluded effective carving. At one end is the rectangular block awaiting carving into raised decoration but at the other end this has been further cut into a basic shape of three flattened faceted cubes (Figure 2.36). Finally, the inscriptions and any other decoration such as the shallow carved niche design often found on the upper surface seem to have been carved after they were marked onto the surface (see below). The order in which the surfaces were carved, if this followed a repeat pattern, is unknown. One gravestone (ABN5) has three sides fully carved but sides C and D left uncarved (Figures 2.26 and 2.27), suggesting that one side at a time was worked on. No evidence for re-carving to obliterate or over carve/change mistakes was found on any gravestone, but the quality of the carving could vary significantly from somewhat crudely carved examples (e.g. ABN2) (Figure 2.12) to outstanding masterpieces (e.g. QAD2, Figure 2.454). The likelihood that gravestones were manufactured and carved outside the cemetery context has already been discussed.

Schöller (2004: 278) describes the naming of the “sculptor” as only occurring in “rare cases” in Arabic funerary epitaphs, a point echoed by Bittar (2003: 10). The Bahraini corpus would thus appear to be exceptional in having both the names of the writers and/or engravers present on 32 gravestones (Table 1.3). In 22 examples the names of both the writer and engraver are included, in two examples only the writer’s name is present, and on six gravestones the name of the engraver alone is found. This patterning of single writer’s or engraver’s names on the gravestones is unlikely to be meaningful as in all eight instances it is probable that the other name is missing because of damage or erosion to the relevant section of the inscription. Hence it is likely that the intention was to include both the writer’s and the engraver’s names as part of the inscription in all instances where they are found singularly.

Patterns emerge in the writer’s and engraver’s names. Fifteen individual writer’s names appear to be signed on the gravestones. The most prolific writer is Husayn bin ‘Ali bin Zayn al-Din al-Bahrani who is named on six gravestones, though without the addition of ‘al-Bahrani’ in four instances. Five of these gravestones are dated (ABN1, ABN32, JBH10, JBH12, TUB1) and these indicate that he was working between

TABLE 1.3 The writers and engravers named on the gravestones, e = engraver, w = writer
(*see Table 1.2 for further detail on the dates of the gravestones)

Gravestone	Date*	Writer	Engraver
ABN1	1103 AH	Husayn bin 'Ali bin Zayn al-Din	al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni
ABN3			al-Sayyid Naser
ABN4	1113 AH	'Ali bin Abdullah bin 'Abd al-Samad al-Asba'i al-Bahrani	al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim al-Asba'i al-Bahrani
ABN16	1047 AH	Sa'ud	al-Sayyid Hashim
ABN32	1090 AH	Husayn bin 'Ali bin Zayn al-Din al-Bahrani	al-Sayyid Naser bin Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni
ABN36		'Ali bin Husayn al-Bahrani	al-Sayyid Salih bin al-Sayyid Hashim
ABN37		Mas'ud	al-Sayyid Hashim
ABN38			al-Sayyid Hashim
ABN40	e. 1110 AH	'Ali bin Husayn bin Zayn al-Din	al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid
ABN41		'Ali bin Abdullah bin 'Abd al-Samad	al-Sayyid Naser bin Hashim
ABN47	1067 AH	'Abd Muhammad bin Ahmad ... Al-Asba'i	
ABS1		'Abd al-Nabi bin Ahmad	al-Sayyid Naser
BEIT1	1089 AH	'Abd Allah bin 'Ali al-Biladi al-Bahrani	al-Sayyid 'Alawi son of the good and the pious al-Sayyid Salih
HOO5	1107 AH		al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Habr ... al-Sayyid Hashim Abdalhussain Alsyed
JBH4			
JBH7	1098 AH	al-Sayyid	
JBH10	1100 AH	Husayn bin 'Ali bin Zayn al-Din al-Bahrani	(Side C) Muhammad Sa'id, (Side E) al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim
JBH11	e. 1007 AH	'Abd al-Husayn bin Muhammad	Salman bin 'Ali
JBH12	1002 AH	Husayn bin 'Ali bin Zayn al-Din	al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni
KHA7	1105 AH		al-Sayyid Naser Bin the late al-Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni
KHA10			al-Sayyid Hashim

TABLE 1.3 The writers and engravers named on the gravestones, e = engraver, w = writer (*cont.*)

Gravestone	Date*	Writer	Engraver
KHA15		Husayn bin 'Ali bin Zayn al-Din	Husayn bin 'Ali Bin Fardan al-Manami
KHA18	1138 AH		al-Sayyid
MAQ2	e. 1121 AH		al-Sayyid 'Alawi bin al-Sayyid Naser al-Asba'i
MUS4	985 AH	Mas'ud	al-Sayyid Hashim
MUS6		Ahmad bin Faraj al-M ...	al-Sayyid Hashim bin al-Sayyid Ali
MUS9	1106 AH	'Ali bin Abdullah ... al-Bahrani	al-Sayyid 'Alawi bin al-Sayyid Naser
MUS10	1102 AH	Ali bin Abdullah bin 'Abd al-Samad Alosbai	Sayed Hashem bin Sayed Naser Alhussaini Al-Bahrani
NOA1	1076 AH	'Ali bin Husayn bin Zayn al-Din	al-Sayyid Hashim bin al-Sayyid Naser
Sh.AB1		Sheikh ... Lutf Allah Lut Allah Bin Ali Lut Allah Aljedhafsi Al-Bahrani	... Ali Bin ...
SYA1	w. 1093 AH	'Ali bin Husayn	al-Sayyid Salih bin al-Sayyid Hashim
TUB1	1095 AH	Husayn bin 'Ali bin Zayn al-Din	al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni

at least 1090/1679 and 1103/1691. All five of the dated gravestones also bear the name of the same engraver, al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni, though, unusually (and uniquely), on gravestone JBH10, side E is signed by al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim, and side C by another engraver, Muhammad Sa'id. Gravestone JBH12 which is signed by both craftsmen raises a conundrum as it is dated 1002/1593 which is considerably earlier than the dates on the other gravestones these two worked on. It is impossible that their working life extended for nearly a century and unlikely that two craftsmen with identical names were working 100 years earlier. It thus appears that this gravestone was commissioned and carved to commemorate someone a significant period after their date of death. A hypothesis supported by the stylistic affinities and carving of JBH12 (Figure 2.253) which are in accord with the other four gravestones attributed to these two craftsmen.

The next most frequently named writer, on three gravestones, is 'Ali bin Abdullah bin 'Abd al-Samad al-Asba'i al-Bahrani, who in two instances (ABN41, MUS9) is signed by shorter or incomplete versions of the same name. Two of his gravestones

are dated to 1106/1694 and 1113/1701. One other writer's name, Mas'ud, is signed on two gravestones, one dated to 985/1577 (MUS4), and it is possible that another writer also appears on two gravestones as the writer's name 'Ali bin Husayn bin Zayn al-Din on ABN40 is likely the same as the shorter 'Ali bin Husayn found on SYA1. All other writer's names on the gravestones are singular instances.

The engraver's names on the gravestones are complicated to interpret because of the affinities between many of them (Table 1.3), the various versions of the names used, and the fragmentary nature of some of the inscriptions. Interpretation of the engraver's names will thus be omitted except in relation to one engraver's name that is especially prominent, and which is that of the previously mentioned craftsman, al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni. His full name is carved on six gravestones (ABN1, ABN32, JBH10, JBH12, KHA7, TUB1) and he is described as the engraver/inscriber on five of these gravestones. On the sixth (ABN32), the engraver attribution is missing, but based on stylistic criteria it is certainly his work. He is also likely represented by the shorter 'al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid' (ABN40), 'al-Sayyid Naser bin Hashim' (ABN41), and 'al-Sayyid Naser' (ABN3, ABS1). Only one of the four gravestones bearing shorter names (ABN40) is dated, to 1110/1698. This would extend the working life of al-Sayyid Naser by a further seven years to that already discussed, giving an overall duration recorded on his signed gravestones of 19 or 20 years (1090/1679 to 1110/1698), which is not an unrealistic length of time for his having been an engraver.

The stylistic affinities of the four gravestones bearing the shortened versions of his name, with their well-defined raised decoration, good overall proportions, and crisp carving, further link them to the six examples with his full signature. Based on the exceptional quality of his work, it is appropriate to describe al-Sayyid Naser bin al-Sayyid Hashim al-Husayni as a master carver (e.g. ABN1, Figure 2.7, ABN3, Figure 2.14, ABN32, Figure 2.122, ABN40, Figure 2.145, ABN41, Figure 2.150, ABS1, Figure 2.179, JBH10, Figure 2.244, JBH12, Figure 2.253, KHA7, Figure 2.300, TUB1, Figure 2.467). Perhaps this was why he carved the gravestone (KHA7) for the incumbent of a shrine excavated in the Al-Khamis mosque precincts (see below). The distribution of the gravestones produced by Husayn bin 'Ali, as writer, and al-Sayyid Naser, as engraver, indicates a quite tight clustering in northwest Awal with their gravestones found in cemeteries at Abu Anbra, Abu Saiba, Jebelat Habshi, Al-Khamis, and Tubli (Figure 1.1).

In the 22 examples where both the writer's and engraver's names are present, precedence is given to the name of the writer on 14 gravestones and the engraver on the remaining eight gravestones (ABS1, BEIT1, KHA15, MUS6, MUS9, MUS10, SYA1, TUB1). It is not known if this indicates greater prestige was accorded the writer or if it merely reflects the order of work completed, i.e. writing then engraving. The separation of writers and carvers apparent in the Bahrain corpus has been described in relation to Muslim funerary inscriptions elsewhere. In mid-15th century AD Malaysia, for example, it seems that after a ruler or high official had stipulated

the basic details of a text, a secretary would precisely draft it and write it on palm leaves or, in some instances, trace the inscription with paint or chalk onto the stone which was then cut by a letter carver (De Casparis 1980: 21). In other contexts, both the writer and the engraver seem to have been one and the same. El-Hawary (1930: 330) describes how, in an unspecified location in the “first five centuries A.H.” the engraver would, after levelling the block he was going to use, draw straight parallel lines, then paint the lettering in black ink, and then carefully engrave it.

It is not known if all of the engravers and writers recorded in the Bahrain corpus were local to Bahrain. Artisans, including stone carvers, travelled widely, as attested by the lapicide Mubarak al-Makki who appears to have been of Hijazi origin but seems to have worked, perhaps as Master of a workshop, carving funerary inscriptions in Egypt in the mid-3rd century AH/mid-9th century AD (Schneider 1986: 96–97). A proportion of the surnames do seemingly indicate that at least some of the writers and engravers were local to Bahrain. The surname “al-Bahrani”, suggests Bahrain, and is found associated with both writers (e.g. ABN32) and engravers (e.g. MUS10), as well as associated with the name “al-Asbai” (ABN4, writer and engraver). “Al-Asbai” is a specific reference to the Bahraini village of Abu Saiba. “Al-Asbai” is also found as a singular surname for writers (ABN47), and engravers (MAQ2). Other Bahraini affiliations are indicated by the name “Aljedhafi” (Ah.AB1, writer) which is a reference to the village of Jidhafs, and “al-Manami” (KHA15, engraver) which is possibly a reference to Manama, the current capital.

7 Script, Epigraphy, and Content

All the inscriptions are carved in cursive Thuluth script. This was first formulated in the 7th century AD but was not fully developed until the late 9th century AD (Safadi 1986: 52). It is widely found used on a variety of materials other than stone including, for example, earthenware, stucco, metals such as brass and bronze, and paper and parchment (cf. *ibid*: 52–61).

The gravestones essentially follow the standardised formula described by Blair (1998: 198), with the addition on various gravestones of the writer’s and engraver’s names, as described. They attest or witness the dead through:

- The invocation or *basmala*.
- Introductory phrases such as Quranic verses dealing with judgement and resurrection.
- The deceased’s name.
- Eulogies.

Certain Quranic chapters and verses recur on the gravestones (Table 1.4). Five are used ten or more times, with the most popular *Surat Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), and particularly the *Ayat Al-Kursi* (The Throne Verse) (2:255) which recurs 68 times, thus, replicating patterns noted elsewhere (cf. Blair 1998: 198). This is followed by

TABLE 1.4 The number of uses of Quranic chapters and verses

Surah and Ayah	Number of Uses
2:255	68
5:55–56	1
7:56	1
9:21–22	23
10:62	1
13:23–24	10
15:46	1
16: 31–32	1
21:101–103	2
21:255	1
22:37	1
25:10	1
28:83	1
28:88	1
32:16–17	2
33:56	1
35:28	1
35:33	1
36:55–58	3
38:50–54	28
39:42	1
39:73	1
41:30–32	42
43:68–73	4
44:51–56	1
48:1–3	6
52:19–20	2
55:26–27	5
56:11–26	3
89:27–30	1
97:1–5	2
99:7	1

42 uses of part of the *Surat Fussilat* (41:30–32), 28 of part of *Surat Sâd* (38:50–54), 23 uses of part of *Surat Al-Tawbah* (The Repentance) (9:21–22), and 10 uses of part of *Surat Ar-Ra'd* (The Thunder) (13:23–24).

Fifteen gravestones commemorated females and 36 males based on the names and/or references to the deceased as 'he' or 'she' in the inscriptions. There was no

discernible difference in gravestone size, epigraphic style or decoration based on gender. The size of the rectangular gravestones can be seen to vary, as previously described, but the content of the inscriptions suggests they were only made for and used by adults.

TABLE 1.5 References to economic data and geographical locations in the inscriptions

Gravestone	Economic Data	Locations
ABN1	Six <i>Muhammadi qirans</i>	Barburah in al-Sahramuw
ABN3	15 <i>mann</i> of palm dates	al-Shatba Palm trees, Alnaboud, Sayhat, al-Bahrayn
ABN4	One <i>Muhammadiyyah</i>	Mina
ABN6	Six <i>qirans</i>	
ABN18		Sufala Garden, Sitra, al-Khawariyah
ABN31		Al-Ukul Island
ABN32	Baskets weighing 20 <i>mann</i>	Abu Naser palm trees, Sitra
ABN36		Unspecified palm gardens
ABN40	Two baskets, one basket, half basket	al-Kharajat garden, al-Sabkha
ABN41	Three big baskets, two baskets	Hillat al-Sayf, Sihāt Albalad garden, Awal
ABN47	Unspecified crop	
ABN50	Big basket	Mani
BAR1		Um Al-Suli Garden, Jid Alhaj
BEIT1		Palm garden at al-Bilad
HOO5	80 <i>mann</i>	Abu Mandah field
JBH8	Unspecified crop	Unspecified land
JBH10	16 <i>Muhammadiyyah</i> , baskets, shares, zakat	
JBH12		al-Bahrayn
KAR5	Endowment, crop	
KHA7	15 <i>Muhammadiyyah</i>	Mani in al-Bahrayn, al-Mahall palms
KHA12		Awal Island
KHA15		Katkatan
MAQ2	One third of the palms	Sar in al-Bahrayn
MUS4	34 shares, 1 share	Garden of bin al-Zayid, Hilal Mosque, southern garden of al-Kharajat
MUS5		Unspecified palm garden
MUS9	20 <i>mann</i> dates, crops	
MUS10	20 <i>mann</i> , fruits	Basanj at Awal
NOA1	Dates, palms	

TABLE 1.5 References to economic data and geographical locations in the inscriptions (*cont.*)

Gravestone	Economic Data	Locations
Sh.LA1	Two baskets of palm dates	Unspecified palm gardens, Mena land in al-Bahrayn
SYA1	Dates, crops	Sanj in al-Bahrayn, al-Ghara palms
TUB1	20 <i>mann</i> of al-Ghara palms	al-Kharajat at Katkan in al-Bahrayn, al-Ghara palms
TUB4	Palm crop	Al-Kharajat, al-Shatib al-Kabir at the Katkan area near the sea

The inscriptions on 32 gravestones refer to economic data and/or geographical locations. Of these, 17 gravestones mentioned both categories, six economic data alone, and nine geographical locations alone (Table 1.5). Both categories of information seem to relate predominantly to endowments and their returns. In some instances, these are precisely described (e.g. ABN3 or TUB1), in others (e.g. MUS5 or KAR5) they are vague and unspecific. Examples of where precise instructions are found include on ABN3 where it is stated that the proceeds (15 *mann* of dates) from the endowment (al-Shatba palm trees) should be spent on reading the Quran every day. Similarly, on ABN40 it is stated that two baskets (presumably of dates), should be spent on reading two parts of the Quran daily with one basket coming from the al-Kharajat garden, half a basket from the western garden and another half from the “eastern” and “al-sabkha”.

Besides *mann* and baskets, other measures of weight referred to are the *Muhammadiyah*, used for the same purpose of supporting Quran reading, and mentioned on KHA7 where it is stated that 15 *Muhammadiyah* from the income of al-Mahall palms should be used, and the *qiran* (ABN6) or *Muhammadi qiran* (ABN1). The *mann* is described by Rebstock (2008: 2261) as a unit of weight that was important throughout the Islamic world but particularly “in the Persian East”, and where its weight varied between 816.5g and 6656g. References to the *qiran*, *Muhammadi qiran*, or *Muhammadiyah* as measures of weight have not been found. Varied geographical locations are referred to, for example, ABN31 refers to the people of al-Ukul Island which is now identified as Nabi Salih Island, in the Tubli Bay area, east of Awal, but for the reasons described at the beginning of the chapter, this locational data will not be interpreted here.

A major change apparent in comparing the content and length of the epigraphy of the historical gravestones with contemporary gravestones is in the limitations imposed by the decline in size of the available working area on the latter. Modern, usually marble, gravestones have only a single small panel available for carving, by

machine, compared to the earlier larger rectangular gravestones with five faces that can potentially be used. The difference in available epigraphic space is manifest in, for example, the frequently lengthier ancestry expressed by the names carved on the historical gravestones or in the poems and eulogies present, which would be impossible to include on the smaller modern gravestones.

8 Iconography and Decoration

The dominant use of deep carving in relief in the Bahrain corpus has, undoubtedly, contributed to the survival of the inscriptions and associated decoration, and has been described as a preservation factor in other Islamic epigraphic contexts (e.g. De Casparis 1980: 21). On 35 gravestones, a shallow carved recessed niche was recorded on the upper surface. These were of rounded (13 examples) or pointed (21 examples) form, and only in one instance terminated in a dome (ABN48). On a further 17 gravestones a probable niche design was also present on the upper surface represented by a partial shallow carved rectangular panel design but lacking the defining niche terminal due to either erosion or damage of the relevant surface (e.g. ABN12) (Figure 2.55).

The complexity of the niche design varied with most simply defined by a single (ABN40) (Figure 2.149), or double carved border line (ABN47) (Figure 2.168). More rarely, supplementary ornate elements were incorporated such as an arrow carved within a small rectangle above the rounded end of the niche (KAR5), or a flower or abstract symbol in the point of the niche (MUS6) (Figure 2.410). The niche is probably a representation of a *mihrab*, as previously suggested by Kervran (1996: 69), and is a motif found on other Shi'a gravestones. Parsayi et al (2014: 126) describe its common use in the Dar al-Salam cemetery at Shiraz in southern Iran where the *mihrab* functioned as "a metaphor for a window toward the divine light". Miles (1939: 155, Fig. 9) also illustrates a similar niche/mihrab decorated rectangular flat gravestone dated to the early 8th century AH from Isfahan.

There is remarkable continuity in the design of the rectangular gravestones over the approximately 680 years they were made, encompassing the period from the date of KHA6 (407/1016) to ABN4 (1113/1702) (Table 1.2). This is indicated not only by the rectangular form itself, but by the continued use of the rectangular recessed design on the top surface and by similar forms of raised decoration found over the time span represented by KHA6 (407/1016) to ABN40 (1108/1697), the last completely intact example recorded (Figures 2.296 and 2.145). Three element raised decoration was identifiable on 60 gravestones usually at both ends unless it was broken or cut off at one end. On 49 gravestones, this was formed of two faceted cubes with a central rounded arch of varying thickness, with the raised decoration set on a supplementary rectangular plinth on 25 gravestones (Figure 1.5).

FIGURE 1.5 Example of raised decoration formed of two faceted cubes with a central rounded arch set on a supplementary rectangular plinth, ABN15

Other variants of the three-element raised decoration included three faceted cubes (ABN6, Figure 2.32), two short rounded collared cylinders with a central rounded arch (ABN11, Figure 2.52), two faceted cubes with a central thin raised point (ABN29, Figure 2.110), two faceted cubes and a central flat slab (HO08, Figure 2.213), two faceted cubes with cup marks carved on top and a central rounded arch (KHA23, Figure 2.357), and two triangles and a central point (MUS2, Figure 2.389). Additional carving was also present on the exceptionally well carved gravestone QAD2 which had star motifs cut into the top surfaces of the faceted cubes and calligraphy on the rear of all three elements of the raised decoration at each end (Figure 2.455). Comparable three-element raised decoration has not been found elsewhere. A partial exception is provided by Dhofar in Oman where a central flattened point with a flattened half point either side, or a central semi-circle with a half semi-circle either side were used as decoration on the top of flat slab gravestones, but the only similarity is in the use of three decorative elements (cf. Oman 1983: 289).

The cutting off of the raised decoration on some gravestones might reflect a change in fashion, deliberate iconoclasm, or a change in funerary traditions with the removal of the solely decorative elements. Fifteen gravestones had definitely had the raised decoration cut off one or both ends (e.g. ABN4, Figure 2.19), and on nine gravestones it was unclear if the raised decoration had been broken or cut off (e.g. ABN9, Figure 2.37). A further 19 gravestones had the remains of eroded and unidentifiable raised decoration at one or both ends (e.g. KHA24, Figure 2.359). Five of the 15 gravestones that had their raised decoration cut off were dated (ABN1, ABN4, KHA18, MAQ2, MUS10, Table 1.2). All of these were from the early 12th century AH (late 17th to early 18th centuries AD). This tight chronological patterning might be historically significant, but how, is unknown.

Colour was also used to enhance the lettering on five gravestones. Red pigment was recorded on one face on two gravestones (DA11 and KHA23), two faces on one gravestone (KAR3), and on three faces on two gravestones (KHA6, Figure 2.296, and MUS11). It is not known if these five recorded examples represent fortuitous survival or the total sample of gravestones with coloured epigraphy and thus whether red and/or other colours were used more widely to decorate the gravestones. However, the seemingly random nature of the faces coloured red suggests it is preservation factors rather than conscious decision that has influenced the numbers found. The red colourant used is haematite or iron oxide. Haematite is a material found in Qala'at al-Bahrain as early as the Middle Dilmun/Kassite period (c. 1450 BC). It appears to have been used to coat floors possibly along with small blocks of iron oxide, and as a constituent in external slip applied to the so-called 'Kassite goblets' (P. Lombard pers. comm. 29/8/17). It was also used in the Tylos period (c. 300 BC–600 AD) to colour figurative grave stelae (cf. Lombard 1999b: 216). The latter usage indicating a pre-Islamic connection between funerary commemoration and iron oxide.

Haematite is also known from Islamic archaeological contexts in Bahrain. A single haematite bead was recovered from levels dated to the mid-11th to 12th centuries AD in the Al-Khamis Mosque precincts, along with six other fragments of haematite, two dated to the 11th century, and the other four to the late 12th to 14th centuries AD (Insoll 2005: 295–296). Two haematite weights, suggested as antique objects based on their forms, but found in Islamic layers dated to the 12th to 15th centuries AD, were also found in the ‘Merchant Quarter’ at Qala’at al-Bahrain (Frifelt 2001: 151).

Five sets of cup marks carved on gravestones were also recorded. On MUS8, four shallow linear circular depressions were found on the upper surface of the gravestone (Figure 2.413). The purpose of this and three, similar, shallow circular depressions on the upper surface of KHA16 (Figure 2.333) is unknown. Similarly, the function of two large circular cup marks, one carved on the top surface and the other on one side of HOO4 (Figure 2.205) is unclear. The other two sets of cup marks appear to have been used for playing mancala games. These are defined by de Voogt (1997: 14) as involving, “one basic movement which involves ‘sowing’ and ‘capturing’ playing pieces, or ‘seeds’, using a board comprising rows of holes”. Gravestone NOA3 has four rows of 15 individual cup marks neatly carved at one end of the upper surface (Figure 2.446). The cup marks on ABN46 are less distinct and evenly placed but two rows of smaller cup marks and a third row of three larger randomly spaced and two smaller cup marks can be identified (Figure 2.446). The first two rows appear to be the remains of the rock-cut mancala board. The position of ABN46, lying on its side with the game board on the uppermost surface, suggests it was found as it had been left, and had not been subsequently moved.

Mancala was widely played in Africa and Arabia (cf. Townshend 1979; de Voogt 2010, 2012; Charpentier et al. 2014). For example, the double linear arrangement of cup marks on ABN46 is very similar to the rock cut mancala boards of northern Ghana (cf. Insoll, MacLean, and Kankpeyeng 2013: 34, 36). Whilst both the two-row and four-row arrangements are similar to the mancala games from eastern and southern Africa discussed by Townshend (1979: 111, 117, 119). Four row boards of the type represented by ABN46 are described by de Voogt (1997: 14) as “found mainly on the East African coast”. Other rock-cut mancala boards have been recorded archaeologically in the Arabian Peninsula and the Near East, including configurations of two lines of seven cup marks at Al-Dahariz in Dhofar, Oman (Charpentier et al. 2014: 116), and similar two rows by seven boards at Palmyra in Syria (de Voogt 2010: 1065).

9 The Archaeology of the Gravestones and Shrines

In total, two shrines and 38 gravestones were located and excavated in cemeteries. Gravestone ABN47 was found inside a small shrine in the Abu Anbra cemetery (N26.21060° E050.55135°). This building had maximum dimensions of c.340 cm × 520 cm (not 430 cm × 520 cm as previously stated [Insoll et al. 2016: 237]). Built of rough stone blocks with mud mortar and plastered on the inside walls, a paved stone

threshold gave access to the building in the eastern wall, and there was a small plain mihrab niche in the western wall (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). The shrine was filled with a loose sandy deposit containing no artefacts, but with a particular concentration of structural debris at the southern end of the building. The roof had collapsed leaving pieces of roofing arches in situ next to the gravestone where they had fallen. These were removed to define the building plan and it was seen that shaped coral blocks had been extensively used for the dome structural elements (Figure 1.8), probably

FIGURE 1.6 Plan of the shrine containing ABN47

FIGURE 1.7 The excavated shrine containing ABN47 with mihrab in the wall on the right

FIGURE 1.8 Parts of the collapsed dome structure, excavated shrine containing ABN47

as they are comparatively light (M. Al-Mearaj pers. comm. 1/3/15). The name of the shrine occupant is only partially legible on the gravestone, 'Al ... al-Bahir' who died in 1067/1656, and was a Haji.

Four gravestones (KHA4, KHA5, KHA6, KHA7) were found in and around a second shrine excavated in the cemetery east of the extant Al-Khamis Mosque (N26.20843° E050.54847°). This structure was excavated by Dr Muhammad Al-Mearaj as part of rescue excavations in advance of the construction of the Al-Khamis Mosque Visitor Centre. The shrine was built of rough blocks of stone and mortar and was formed of an approximately square room with internal dimensions of c.400 cm × 390 cm. Attached to this was a rectangular arcade with maximum dimensions of 1035 cm × 365 cm (Al-Mearaj 2012: 14–15) (Figure 1.9). As with the Abu Anbra shrine, collapsed arches were preserved where they had fallen from the roof to the north and east of the shrine room (Figure 1.10).

Gravestone KHA7 was inside the main room of the shrine, the other three gravestones were outside the main shrine and KHA5 was possibly associated with a further smaller shrine room (Al-Mearaj 2012: 15). KHA7 provided a date of 1105/1694, KHA5 of 997/1589, and KHA6 of 407/1017. KHA4 was undated. KHA5 and KHA7 date to the period of shrine construction and KHA6 is linked with earlier occupation recorded around the Al-Khamis Mosque (Insoll et al. 2016: 236). The inscription on KHA7 commemorates the late Shaikh Muhammad bin al-Mabrur Shaikh Majid and states that it is his shrine. It is possible that the shrine was linked with the later commemorative role of the Al-Khamis Mosque, within a *mashad*-type function, as proposed by Kervran and Kalus (1990: 39).

Parallels for the shrines that were excavated are scarce as this is an understudied category of monument (Insoll et al. 2016: 236–237), and those that are described differ in form. Survey in 1976 by an Italian team of the al-Khidr shrine on Failaka Island, Kuwait, for example, indicated that it was built on an oblong ground plan, with an “egg-shaped dome” but was then roofless (Patitucci and Uggeri 1984: 419). The photograph provided (ibid) indicates that the main part of the shrine was circular in form on rectangular foundations, built on a low mound and accessed by a flight of steps. Patitucci and Uggeri describe the shrine (1984: 419) as dedicated to the god Khidr, protector of fishermen and barren women. Bibby (1996: 154) also briefly refers to the same shrine in the context of it being repeatedly pulled down, as the Kuwaiti authorities did not agree with the ritual practices performed there. Similarly, the shrines surveyed by Costa (1994) on the former course of the Sat al-Nil in Iraq differ from the Bahrain examples. Although comparable in size (e.g. Abu Hatab and Umm Al Awlad), they are earlier (8th to 12th century), and built of fired brick often finished with elaborate stucco work (e.g. Abu Hatab) (see Costa 1994: 4–5, pls. 1 and 5).

Gravestones were excavated where it was not possible to see their full form and/or position (10 examples), where their inscriptions were obscured (22 examples), or when local information indicated that there was the possibility of a buried

FIGURE 1.9 Plan of the excavated shrine containing KHA7

FIGURE 1.10 Collapsed arches, excavated shrine containing KHA7

gravestone but it could not be seen on the surface (six examples). All ten gravestones that comprise the first category were uninscribed, of the second category of 22 gravestones, excavation of four of these wholly exposed their inscriptions as, though they could be seen above the surface, all their above ground faces were eroded (e.g. JBH8, Figure 2.236). The six gravestones comprising the third category have already been described (KHA 4 to 7, ABN46 and ABN47).

Besides those gravestones inside or beside their shrine buildings, excavation provided significant new information in other ways. The presence of ABN49, for example, was only indicated above the ground surface by the raised decoration at one end but excavation indicated it was a completely buried fully carved double slab gravestone which had been dislodged and the raised decoration pushed above ground by a white plastic water pipe that had been laid directly over it (Figure 1.11). The presence of some of the gravestones in sub-surface archaeological contexts (e.g. ABN47 and H005) suggests that they could be subject to what Osman and Edwards (2011: 201) have described in relation to Nubian Islamic cemeteries as a “life-cycle”; whereby, they might be abandoned and forgotten as the lineages or figures they were associated with or commemorated slipped out of memory.

FIGURE 1.11 ABN49 after excavation with plastic water pipe in-situ