

## **“Pearls and the Making of the Arabian Gulf”**

**Speaker:** Dr. Robert Carter, Senior Lecturer in Archaeology of the Arab World, University College London, Qatar campus

### **Summary of presentation:**

For centuries, pearl fishing was the primary industry of the Arabian Gulf until its collapse in the mid 20th century. Nearly all the capitals and major towns of the Gulf states were founded on pearls, including Doha, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Kuwait and Muharraq (Bahrain). Pearl fishing provided the main employment and source of cash for the townspeople and merchants, but also for bedouin and immigrant labour from the far reaches of Arabia and neighbouring regions. During its boom years the industry provided a hard but financially rewarding way of life, though most of the divers lived permanently in a state of debt. This presentation will look at the practice of pearling in Qatar and the Gulf, from its ancient origins in the stone age (seven thousand years ago), through the boom centuries in the 18th to early 20th centuries AD, up to its demise between the 1930s and early 1960s. It will show how the menfolk of the region toiled for long months at sea each summer, how pearls were distributed throughout the world, and how pearling dominated the lives of those who lived in the Gulf, and formed it into the configuration we see today.

### **Brief bio:**

Robert Carter is an archaeologist and historian who specialises in Arabia and the Gulf, who also has interests in the archaeology of Mesopotamia and Iran. He has worked for nearly 20 years in the region, in Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah, though sadly not yet Oman, Yemen or Iraq. His interests are broad, including the Neolithic of Arabia, the Ubaid/Chalcolithic of Mesopotamia, ancient seafaring, the Bronze Age of the Gulf, archaeological ceramics, Christianity in the Gulf and the Early Islamic period, Late Islamic archaeology, urbanism and state formation, and, of course, the history and prehistory of pearl fishing. He has numerous publications on these topics, including a major forthcoming book on pearl-fishing in the Gulf, published in full colour by Arabian Publishing (London), and generously sponsored by Mr Hussein Fardan of Doha. Dr Carter has recently taken up a new position as Senior Lecturer in the Archaeology of the Arab World, at UCL Qatar, a new campus of University College London, and part of Hamad bin Khalifa University (Education City, Doha).