On hearing for the first time, when we met, of my expressed attachment to Iranian studies, my future in-laws responded immediately with one of the family's typical conversational clichés. It is carried in the title of this article. My own shameless use of this pun here is a deliberate reflection back to those days when I had just come as a novice to attend class at the University of Michigan, where Oleg Grabar's enlightened lectures served to reveal to me that it was possible, even desirable, to challenge any of the theories previously propounded by the leading scholars in Islamic studies. As well, this figure of speech, distorted into a pun, serves as a useful reminder that, for the most part, many of today's acceptable theories in Islamic art and archaeology remain established largely because of persuasive arguments presented by scholars of the academic establishment. No doubt, in time, many of these so-called truths will be modified, if not rejected outright. And so the profession will advance, as it should, based on the interchange of ideas. One man's Mede in fact will become another man's Persian.

The same principle applies in the case of the field archaeologist who earnestly tries to provide a pedigree for a previously unknown site by frantically searching for this or that clue in the written texts. Yet it is often the circumstance of chance that has preserved the site in the first place over other originally equally significant ones, and additional chance — perhaps often almost fate — that has persuaded the archaeologist to select that particular site as appropriate for setting in motion the cumbersome process of a formal program of excavations. Given the amount of creative energy that such an initiative demands, it is natural that the archaeologist bends over backwards to apply to the chosen site an appropriate tag, in the form of a famous name, that it is hoped will give legitimacy to the work.

In that vein, and at the risk of beating the subject to death, it may be useful to refer to a discussion that I have already published concerning my suggestion that it might be possible to associate the original Parthian site of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird in western Iran, on the extreme edge of the Zagros mountains flanking Iraq, with the Madharistan of the Muslim geographers. These writers describe Madharistan as being just beyond Hulwan (which is situated on the plain just below Qal'eh-i Yazdigird). The significance of the debate revolves around the fact that Qazvini and Yaqut wrote: "Madharistan, a place on the road to Khurasan from Baghdad, situated two days' march from Hulwan towards Hamadan; and Marj-al Qal'a is one march from it. At this place there is a large iwan and a great terrace in front of it, and there are traces of a ruined garden built by Bahram Gur. They declare that the snow falls in the quarter of the hilly district; but never falls on the side which faces Iraq."

In response to my original suggestion, Klaus Schippmann presented an exhaustive review of the various possibilities for the location of Madharistan and concluded in no uncertain terms that Keall's tentative association of it with Qal'eh-i Yazdigird was implausible. Nonetheless, apart from the reference to Madharistan as being "on the road to Khurasan from Baghdad" and the fact of its straddling the zone between the snowy hills and the plains of Iraq, Schippmann's association of Madharistan in the texts with the isolated monument of Taqi Girra, or even with any of the other remains found in the pass through the Zagros above and below it, is less than satisfactory. In spite of the results of the excavations conducted by Kambakhsh-Fard, who cleared the area in front of Taqi Girra during a restoration program, by no stretch of the imagination could one consider the arch to be the backdrop to a great terrace and a garden in the then contemporary sense of the word, where a great deal of space was implied by "garden". On the other hand, the structures of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird fit the description perfectly. May one challenge the near sacred word of the geographers?

A veritable battery of "facts" were directed by Schippmann towards the readers to help convince them that Keall's argument was without foundation. But, in the end, it was Schippmann's conviction that seemed to carry the day, rather then the overwhelming superiority of his "facts". Yet Keall would argue, even now, that there
is an inherent danger in taking the word of medieval writers too literally. It is even conceivable that in their use of “after” and “thence” the geographers were not speaking in a strictly direct linear sense, especially if they were merely repeating an established formula and had not actually visited the area themselves. Without question they provide pointers without which we might have no idea at all which way to turn. I am aware that I am guilty of trying to associate “my” site, which was chosen and excavated largely through chance, with an isolated reference in a text which has been preserved, also by chance. But I believe that what the geographers had in mind when they spoke of Madharustan has not yet been fully resolved.

I am not trying to deny the significance of historical reports, but I wish to underline that, in the better developed discipline of the medieval archaeology of Europe, where far more sites have been excavated and where far more names are known from the texts, archaeologists accept the fact that a perfectly valid excavation program can be established without having the need to have a “name” site. Interpretation is based upon careful analysis of the excavated data, with background evidence — but not necessarily clues to understanding — provided by recorded history. The archaeologist must be prepared to have confidence in the validity of the excavation program itself and be less inclined to force the archaeological data to fit the textual reference, at all costs.

To underline the specious nature of much archaeological debate and interpretations of sites and how some have come to challenge the nature of traditional inquiry, I might even refer to a recent splinter movement in the profession which has tried to suggest that it is essential to develop an argument along strictly formal, mathematically logical lines. Known as “expert systems analysis,” a form of “artificial intelligence,” the technique requires that a number of answers to questions be provided before one can proceed to the next stage of the inquiry and, ultimately, to the conclusion of the argument. At times the technique appears to be no more than a formal expression of common sense, which its proponents argue eliminates the risk of bias. But at other times the system seems pathetically incapable of dealing with the unknown, which is what archaeology is mostly about. While this particular fad in archaeology may fade faster than most because it does not seem to be able to accommodate the imprecise nature of archaeological findings, it does serve to remind us of the thin ground upon which most interpretation in the archaeology of the Middle East stands.

At the same time that I propound the need for critical thinking in archaeology, I also wish to admit that it is much more exciting to speculate. To some extent, one of the most attractive aspects of archaeology in the Middle East is that one still has the luxury of playing the role of pioneer. Equally, however, it is irresponsible of the archaeologist not to give the readers the benefits of an insider’s own viewpoint through fear of offending the statistical purists. The archaeologist may, in fact, unearth a number of artifacts which have intrinsic information to offer, but which have no immediate significance until their discoverer invents a way to weave them into some logical form of explanation. Without the excavator’s own personal insights based on extensive familiarity with the raw data, it is probably fair to say that most excavated artifacts are not worth the considerable time, money, and effort it took to excavate them.

In that spirit, I would like to develop a line of argument that runs counter to anything that Expert Systems Analysis would countenance, and for which this writer’s conviction is the only basis of the argument. There is no reason why this particular explanation presented here should survive the test of time, but it makes for fun writing it, which is the most important lesson I learned at the University of Michigan. The justification, then, for this rather circuitous introduction is that it is entirely reasonable to reject the following argument as implausible. One man’s Mede may, in fact, be another’s Persian. The argument presented here is based upon some inescapable “archaeological facts,” although it must be admitted that there may be others in contradiction which simply have not yet been recognized as significant.

The subject presented revolves around interpretation of some modest artifacts from the work of the Royal Ontario Museum in Yemen. Recent advances made in the ability of the ROM Zabid Project to date artifacts excavated from different strata of the former medieval university city of Zabid have made it possible to present yet another interpretation for one of the most enigmatic artifacts that curators of Islamic art collections have come to know, mostly to ignore, and for which some have offered, as here yet again, the most extraordinary of explanations.

For years and years, museum curators of Islamic art collections have been aware of “sphero-conical” pottery vessels that have defied explanation of use, in spite of extremely imaginative theories (fig. 1). They have been found all over the Middle East — not in large quantities, but in sufficient numbers to suggest that they were in
the definitive explanation may still be elusive, the ROM
team of excavators of the sixteenth-seventeenth-century
layer in the citadel of Zabid in Yemen believe that they
have found yet another explanation, however implausible at first.

Excavations inside the citadel, where the ROM Project
has its headquarters, have resulted in the definition of a
delicate kind of white-bodied pottery, glazed in yellows and
greens, which can be dated to the short-lived Ottoman
Turkish domination of Yemen from around 1539–1636.13
The pottery was made at workshops in Hays, a
small town just to the south of Zabid.14 Since the pottery
includes smokers’ pipes made of the same material, one
may at first even narrow down the time period of the stratum
where the pipes occur to the years 1590–1636. For it is
generally held that smoking did not occur as a habit in the
Middle East much before the beginning of the seven-
teenth century (see below). The Turks had been driven
from Yemen, as a result of growing local opposition, by
the year 1636. By this line of reasoning, one can recog-
nize that the custom became widespread in Yemen in lit-
tle more than a quarter of a century — an interesting
sociological observation, but one paralleled in Japan and
Southeast Asia where smoking caught on literally like
wildfire, following its introduction by Europeans.

When the Portuguese introduced tobacco to Japan, in
the early sixteenth century, it caused a sensation.
Instantly it became a fashion to smoke. Tobacco leaf was
being traded there in considerable quantities by the
1590’s, and cultivation of the plant itself started at Nagas-
aki in 1605. In his diary, written in 1615, the British sea
captain Rich declared, “It is strange to see how these
Japons, men, women, and children are besotted in
drinking that herb [i.e., tobacco]; and not ten years
since it was in use first.”

Tobacco, of course, was originally a native plant of the
New World. Formal identification of the nicotiana family
of plants is attributed, as the name reveals, to Jean Nicot,
who cultivated seeds in France he brought back from
Portugal, where nicotiana rustica had been cultivated
since at least 1558. The domesticated version, nicotiana
tobaccum, may have been brought directly from Brazil a
little later.16 But some several centuries before that, a mil-
der variety of nicotiana than the strongly flavored wild
kind had been spread into North America through culti-
vation, beginning in the Andes. The use of pipes for
smoking tobacco was soon diffused throughout the Miss-
issippi River basin. The first European to record
tobacco smoking in the northeast, along the St. Law-
rence River, was Jacques Cartier in 1535.17
interest in the plant on the part of the Europeans appears to have preceded its actual use. There are grounds for suggesting that Sir John Hawkins may have brought back nicotiana seeds to England in 1565 from Florida at least a decade before the legendary dousing by a startled manservant of a smoking Sir Walter Raleigh. Pipe smoking was in full use in Europe by the 1580’s.\textsuperscript{18}

In the Middle East, too, it is also held that no one smoked anything before the idea caught on from the use of tobacco. Incense, of course, was widely used, and the ancient Persians may have inhaled the fumes of hallucinogenic plants which they called haoma.\textsuperscript{19} In ancient Egypt, it was listed (as śmśmt=hemp) as an ingredient of various compounds used in poultices or astringents. But there is no sense in these texts of the component of hashish even being thought of as a major active ingredient.\textsuperscript{20}

Archaeologists have never found artifacts in medieval contexts which they have been able to show convincingly indicated that substances were deliberately smoked with pipes. Ironically, in Iranian Kurdistan, what are sold in the bazaar — seemingly as elbow-shaped clay smoking pipes — are actually devices inserted into the bottom of a baby’s cradle to allow urine to drain out. One archaeologist known to the ROM bought one of these and was greeted by howts of laughter from his Kurdish bystanders when he was seen to put it in his mouth, adopting a smoker’s pose. Indeed, an archaeologist finding one of these on a site might easily be deceived into thinking that exceptionally early evidence of smoking had been unearthed. But they are not found in ancient Iranian contexts.

Genuine smokers’ pipes have been recovered from excavations — particularly from the Levant, where fourteenth- and fifteenth-century dates for the settlement have been ascribed to the site.\textsuperscript{21} It is clear, however, without exception in these instances, that the archaeologists have been careless in recovering pipes of much more recent date from contexts in the loose, top layer of the site and have erroneously attributed them to the earlier layers. They have relied too heavily upon historical accounts which speak of the abandonment of the site, and glossed over the fact that an ephemeral settlement may have occurred in much later times, for which the only tangible record now remains a few discarded pipes which have caught the archaeologist’s eye. Typological studies allow most of these pipes to be placed in their more appropriate eighteenth- and nineteenth-century time frames (figs. 2–3).\textsuperscript{22}

The improbability of their having been used in a pre-seventeenth-century era is normally supported by the fact that none of the contemporary texts speak openly of hashish being smoked before the habit of tobacco smoking was introduced in the seventeenth century. This meshes well with the experience in China, where in spite
of its long term use, it appears that opium was never smoked before the introduction of tobacco. It was the Dutch who were the first to prepare opium-watered tobacco there and introduce the Chinese to their smoking addiction. Previously, the Chinese had only taken opium in the form of pills or a liquid. Tobacco smoking acquired a special notoriety in Shansi province, during the early Ming period, because soldiers found that those who smoked it were less susceptible to malaria — obviously a reflection of smoke as a mosquito deterrent rather than of tobacco’s medicinal properties.

The presence of hashish, of course, is well attested in medieval Islam. At least by the thirteenth century the narcotic properties of the cannabis plant were well known to pharmacists in the Islamic world. In eleventh-century Iran, perhaps the most notorious “users” were the religious fanatics who are known to us as the hashashin. But we are led to believe that, in all of these cases, the commodity was always ingested in pellet or powder form. Hashish is listed as an import item into fourteenth-century Yemen, being subject to excise tax at Aden. Around the same time, too, the European traveler Marco Polo was aware of the stupefying properties of hashish. But the first circumstantial evidence which is usually cited for a Turk’s actually being aware of the smoking of a substance dates from 1599, when a Turkish sea captain is reported to have boarded a British ship in the Dardanelles and asked for a smoke (of tobacco). It is generally held that the smoking of hashish only followed after the introduction of tobacco smoking.

It is highly significant that a seventeenth-century Yemeni source speaks of the introduction of the tobacco plant to (Ottoman) Yemen in 1590, in other words ten years earlier than to Turkey. Did the Turks know of tobacco as result of this? Denying that notion, the fact that the Turkish governor in Yemen was reported smoking in 1604 meshes nicely with the other established Middle Eastern traditions for tobacco’s appearance. For there are no Turkish polemics against the use of tobacco before 1600. As for Yemen itself, it is conceivable that tobacco had already appeared in the country earlier than in Turkey, by way of the Indian Ocean. It is a matter of fact that the ceramic industry of Yemen underwent a marked change in the sixteenth century when yellow and green lead-glazed pottery replaced the previous underglaze painted wares. Curiously, yellow and green glazes are especially indicative of the first century of Spanish conquest and settlement in the New World.

It is, then, quite feasible that tobacco could have been brought to Madagascar and to the Indian Ocean per-haps even earlier than to Europe, by sailors, almost as soon as the Portuguese had rounded the Cape in 1498. It is difficult, however, to substantiate this idea, and there is no evidence to suggest that tobacco was known in any form in Africa before the voyages of discovery.

The sense that Middle Easterners did not smoke tobacco before the seventeenth century is supported by the number of Islamic fatwas expressed formally concerning the lawfulness of smoking. Beginning with his appointment as the supreme head of the Ottoman state in 1623, Sultan Murad expressed his opinion adamanently in opposition to the right to smoke, even though smoking had become relatively common in Turkey since around 1605. It is important to acknowledge that in the contemporaneous illustrations of gatherings of royal figures and other court dignitaries there is a consistent lack of any sign of smoking apparatuses being present. This is in spite of other obvious portrayals of dancing and, probably, wine bibbling. It is only in the coffeehouse illustrations of the eighteenth century and later that smoking seems to have become a moderately respectable pastime that could be freely illustrated. One must be careful, therefore, not to conclude too quickly that the lack of evidence of smoking must be read as evidence of no smoking.

There is a second vital piece of information that can be extracted from a Yemeni text referring to the early seventeenth century, and that is the statement that some people invented ways of smoking it “with water,” while others smoked it “dry.” This source, in fact, claims that smoking tobacco through a dry pipe was superior to the water method. That there were two different ways to smoke in seventeenth-century Yemen is not a comment to be underestimated. At first glance it may not seem very remarkable, since smoking the hookah pipe has become a Middle Eastern cliche, beginning with every child’s nursery book. But the important point to bear in mind is that there are no antecedents known for the water pipe outside of the Middle East. The Europeans, who smoked tobacco before the Turks, did not use the water pipe. It certainly was not in any way associated with native American traditions of smoking. Africa and the Far East have both adopted the water-pipe tradition, but as explained earlier, seem only to have acquired the habit after the introduction of tobacco. Tribesmen of southwest Africa were reported by the Dutch to be smoking hashish in the sixteenth century, from devices inserted into animal horns, but their use of a water pipe is more likely to have been due to the spread there of the habit from the Middle East.
The earliest illustrations from the Middle East which may be claimed to attest to the habit of smoking — and, in fact, to the smoking of a water pipe — are of a solitary male and of two females shown in private, in early-seventeenth-century Persian garden settings. The painting of the male figure\(^\text{35}\) is attributed to Rizâ-i Abbâsî around 1630 (fig. 4); the two female portraits\(^\text{34}\) are attributed to Muhammad Qasim-i Tabrizi, the former’s pupil, and can be dated to the period of his work between 1640–50 (fig. 5). Apart from remarking upon the very obvious special character of these Safavid portraits, as most commentators have done, it is vital to recognize how the smoking apparatus worked that all three are shown using.

The most important feature is the small device which is held on top of the globular water container, and through which the smoke is drawn by means of a reed (fig. 6). A subtle difference exists here between these pipes and those seen in Middle Eastern teahouses today, where the water containers have been manufactured specifically with a spout built in to accommodate the pipe stem (figs. 7 and 9, top left). It is a small, but significant difference. The act of smoking is just the same — it involves drawing smoke down from the burning substance, through the water which cools it, and up through the stem. But in the earlier versions any globular container could be used as the water carrier, while in the later versions a special vessel must be made. Many of the “village” pipes in use today in the Middle East still operate on the basis of the earlier, much more basic principle, because a gourd or a plain pottery bottle serves as the water container. There are even illustrations of nineteenth-century Turkish coffee-houses where the more basic type is shown — that is, where both reeds enter the water vessel together, by way of the neck (fig. 8 bottom).\(^\text{35}\)

If, in fact, the earliest pipes had been shown with the
builtin spout, it might have been reasonable to look, say, to Southeast Asia for a possible pre-tobacco era tradition of substance smoking. The distinctive so-called Asian **kendi** jug could have provided a suitable antecedent (fig. 9, top right). However, the specific Buddhist religious tradition of the **kendi** as a ritual drinking vessel precludes it from having provided a prototype for the hookah water container.\(^{36}\) In the absence of any other direct evidence that might have pointed to a Southeast Asian tradition of hashish or opium smoking, the **kendi** must also be discounted as playing any part in the early development of these Persian smoking devices. A recent paper reporting on the discovery of pipes from Thailand does muse about the possibility of hashish smoking in a pre-seventeenth-century context.\(^{37}\) But, typologically speaking, the pipes do look suspiciously like the later bona fide seventeenth-century ones, so that one must seriously question the validity of the earlier proposed date, as in the case of the so-called early Middle Eastern pipes from the Levant.

Returning now to the reality of the pipes excavated by the Zabid Project, it can be observed that there are actually three types attested from the seventeenth-century fort. In ashy, cannon-ball filled layers associated with the Ottoman occupation were found two kinds of water-pipe top (figs. 10–11, bottom) and one kind of dry pipe (fig. 11, top). The presence together of smoking devices based upon two completely different methods of use corresponds well with the comments of our Yemeni writer cited above. The dry pipe was glazed green, as was one kind of water-pipe device. The other water-pipe top was unglazed, but had a deeply incised surface decoration. It is this latter type whose shape suggests a similarity with the devices shown in the Safavid portraits — at least, their presumed function bears sufficient resemblance to that of the devices shown on top of the Persian water containers to warrant further study. Unfortunately, forensic analysis of the residues found inside the pipes failed to produce any trace which would have indicated whether a cannabis- or nicotine-based product was being
smoked. However, what is remarkable is that two completely different ways of smoking have been attested in the context of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Yemen where standard historical interpretation would have us believe that people were indulging in a habit that was only recently introduced to them.

Where, then, does the water container shown in the Persian paintings, and presumed for the Yemeni carved pipe tops, originate? It may be useful to turn to word etymologies at this point. Earlier in this article the cliche term "hookah" was used. Other Arabic terms used quite frequently, in different parts of the Middle East, include ghaliqan and, in Yemen, madā'ah. Ghaliqan (which has also been adopted as a Persian word, ghaliqōn) is derived from a verb stem in Arabic meaning "to boil or bubble," that can easily be associated with the familiar sound of someone taking a long draw of smoke from the water pipe. Another word, used now particularly in Turkey, but originally an Indian word, may well give us the unexpected clue to resolving the riddle.

The Turkish words, nārgīle, or Persian nārgīlah, now meaning simply water pipe, are both derived from a Hindi and originally Sanskrit word nāriyāl/nārikela. The original meaning of the Indian word is coconut. A word based on the same sounds is also used in India today for the smoking device, though it is not clear whether its use in the water-pipe sense is not the result of the word having done a complete circle and returned to India during the eighteenth-century Persian military occupations of
India. The significance of this use of the term coconut is heightened, however, when one looks as well at the Yemeni word for a water pipe. The term *mada\'ah* is connected with the idea of "to order," and it is this connotation which becomes associated with the "ordering [of a hookah] for smoking," since the post-eighteenth-century *mada\'ah* is very much part of an after-meal social gathering in Yemen. But it is interesting to note that its original meaning was also "coconut".

It is obvious that in both the Indian/Persian and Yemeni words, we have the sense that a coconut may well have been one of the earliest items used to provide a water container for a smoking pipe. This would be comparable to the village use, as described above, of a gourd as the water container for a hookah, rather than the fancier glass or metal containers sold in city markets. In fact, the globular shape of the fluted vessel with the seated female and the ceramic globe shown with the kneeling male of the seventeenth-century Persian miniature paintings illustrated here in figs. 4 and 5 bear a remarkable resemblance to that of a coconut, once the train of thought lies in that direction (cf. also figs. 7 left and 9 bottom).

Of course, if one may follow this line of speculative argument, and if in fact there was an indigenous tradition which had become established in the Middle East well before 1640 of using coconuts as the water containers for smoking pipes (for which the archaeological evidence might be rather slim), it seems to argue for the possibility that Persians (and perhaps Yemenis) did smoke substances, other than New World tobacco, before 1600. When the Portuguese, or others, brought tobacco, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to substitute the new product to smoke instead of what we may, by this line of reasoning, assume previously to have been hashish. Continuing the archaeological investigations in Zabid will give us the chance, possibly, to find out what no one was prepared to write about. For one other highly contentious explanation is that while there are religious polemics from the seventeenth century against the use of tobacco, and we have none against the smoking of hashish before that, conceivably it is because tobacco smoking became so much more popular and was being practiced in public. Dare one suggest that the earlier habit, in fact, was more popular with women, and that the male clerics did not care about females smoking hashish in private? Was it only when men began to smoke in public that the practice aroused attention?

As for our grenades — the enigmatic sphero-conical vessels — the line of reasoning presented above forces one to propose that these represent ceramic versions of the coconut, and as such do reflect a practice in the Middle East of smoking in private, three centuries before the introduction of tobacco. No doubt, in time, this idea will be swept under the carpet. But, for the moment, as a
final word of caution about taking the argument too seriously, or even changing museum labels to make all sphaero-conical vessels parts of early smoking devices, reference should be made to the globular (even coconut-shaped) vessel shown in a miniature painting attributed to fourteenth-century Tabriz which depicts the seated king Ardashir receiving a councillor. For, according to the associated text, the jar being presented to the king contained “the severed private parts” of its bearer. This provides new levels of plausible or implausible interpretation for the uses of these vessels, on which even the most advanced form of “expert systems analysis” will be unable to pass judgment.

Royal Ontario Museum
Toronto, Ontario

NOTES


20. I am indebted to Dr. David Berg, University of Toronto, for the reference and explanation of the significance of the listing of *šimš* by W. R. Dawson, “Studies in Egyptian Medical Texts III,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 20* (1934): 44–45. *Šimš* is not to be confused with Arabic *šm* or sesame. The article also refers to the Islamic pharmacology of Ibn al-Baitar (1197–1248) who speaks of hemp as a narcotic but does not mention the smoking of it.


35. R. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses* (Seattle, 1985), pl. 16.


38. I am grateful to K. L. Adamson, Addiction Research Foundation, Toronto, for analyses carried out in 1989 and 1990, but which regrettably produced negative information for the presence of cannabinoids, opiates, alkaloids, and amines.

39. I am grateful to Dr. Noba Sudek for commenting on the validity of the Arabic etymologies.


41. In the spirit of this article, now in press, I wish to acknowledge with delight the article that appeared in *Muqarnas* 9 by A. Gouchani and C. Adle. What more can one say than that the debate shall continue?