



BIWEEKLY COLLOQUIUM
Monday, July 4th, 4:15 p.m.

**HISTORY OF WATER MANAGEMENT IN YEMEN:
CASE STUDIES FROM ANCIENT TO PREMODERN TIMES**

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Since ancient times, humans have lived and even prospered in the arid regions of South Arabia, where the pre-eminent factor limiting life is water. What kinds of strategies did people in the past use in order to deal with the scarce water resources? How did they interact with a natural environment that seems so uninviting, indeed hostile towards humans? Did their practices change over time, or did the natural conditions restrict the options?

There are numerous sites in South Arabia from ancient to premodern times that can serve as examples for skillful hydraulic engineering and water management. The lecture will present three case studies, and the methodological approaches include archaeological excavations, ethno-archaeological studies, geomorphological field work, building restoration and a critical evaluation of the written sources.

The ancient oasis of Marib flourished during the first millennium BCE and was abandoned around 600 CE, just before the coming of Islam. Marib was a major halting place along the frankincense route; both the local population and the caravans depended on successful farming in the oasis.

The city of Zabid, founded in the ninth century CE, was a renowned centre of learning and scholarship in medieval Islamic times. The agricultural hinterland was irrigated from flood barrages in the wadi that also fed water into underground conduits supplying the city.

A different approach can be observed in the western highlands of Yemen, in the town of al-Jabin, where even today surface run-off is collected during the short rainy seasons in open cisterns that originate in the seventeenth century. The common element of the three case studies is reliance on renewable water resources, a prerequisite for long-term sustainability.

Venue: Leibnizstraße 1, Seminar Room 204