



King Faisal
PRIZE



Trade Routes in the Islamic World

Professor Moh'd Wahib Hussein

Professor Moh'd Wahib Hussein was born in Jordan on July 7, 1962. He received his primary, middle, and secondary education in Amman, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. He then pursued his higher education at the University of Jordan in Amman, earning his bachelor's degree in Archaeology in 1980 and his master's degree in the same field in 1985. In 1988, he obtained his Ph.D. from Turkey, specializing in ancient metallurgy in Wadi Araba, Jordan. Upon returning to Jordan, he initially worked at the Department of Antiquities within the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism. In 2002, he transitioned to the Hashemite University in the city of Zarqa, joining the Queen Rania Faculty of Tourism and Heritage as an Assistant Professor. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 2008 and achieved full Professorship in 2015, embarking on a brilliant trajectory of rigorous, fruitful scientific research, excavation, and academic excellence that continues to define his career today.

Professor Hussein is among the rare academic archaeologists who have masterfully combined the technical skill of field excavation with the academic research capacity to make these discoveries "speak." He expertly analyzes and scientifically contextualizes his findings to serve human history, advancing human knowledge of archaeological sites in his homeland, uncovering the authentic ancestral heritage buried within its historical soil, and highlighting the historical, civilizational, social, and economic significance of these regions during their golden ages before their decline.

Regardless of innate talent, one cannot successfully combine the skills of archaeological excavation and rigorous scientific analysis without the refinement of extensive field experience, a crucible that has shaped Professor Hussein over many years. From an early stage, he received intensive training in exploration and excavation alongside both national and international teams. During his time as a college student, he participated in the University of Jordan's excavation campaign at Tell El-Mazar in the central Jordan Valley. In 1984, he joined the Canadian archaeological mission at Tell Safut near Sweileh, Jordan, and contributed to excavations at the Dolmen tombs and the Al-Maqass archaeological site in Aqaba.

The most significant leap in his excavation career coincided with his return from Turkey and his tenure at the Department of Antiquities. There, he formed a national fieldwork team, initiating preliminary excavations at the Al-Muwaqqar Palace in the Jordanian Desert (Badia). This effort led to his discovery of the largest known Umayyad palace in the deserts of Jordan and Syria. In 1996, Professor Hussein and his team successfully uncovered the Nymphaeum in the heart of the Jordanian capital, a rare global architectural marvel and a key component of ancient Philadelphia. This excavation also yielded highly significant stone and animal statues.



After joining the Hashemite University, Professor Hussein led excavations at the largest cemetery in the history of the ancient Near East, located in the southern Jordan Valley, aimed at uncovering the dwellings of Prophet Lot, Peace Be Upon Him. This was followed by the discovery of the first Roman port at Zara on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. In 1996, the Jordanian national excavation team, led by Professor Hussein, made the monumental discovery of the Baptism Site of Jesus Christ (Al-Maghtas) in the Southern Shuna region on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. This discovery holds immense significance both in the Middle East and globally, leading to its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This breakthrough unveiled new scientific facts that corrected prevailing historical misconceptions. Subsequently, he discovered the Christian pilgrimage route leading from Jerusalem to the Baptism Site and extending to the archaeological site of Tell Hesban. Additionally, he has led numerous cultural, scientific, and field projects, including the documentation of the Iraq Al-Amir tourist site, the specific documentation of the discovery of the Cave of Jesus Christ, and the aforementioned project uncovering the dwellings of Prophet Lot in Al-Naqa in the Jordan Valley, a profound endeavor that significantly links Quranic miracles with modern archaeology.

His monumental field projects also include the discovery of the world's largest flying reptile, *Arambourgiania philadelphiae*, and the discovery of the Cave of Al-Raqim mentioned in verse 9 of Surah Al-Kahf, located southeast of Amman, alongside various other research projects scattered across the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Professor Hussein is highly credited for his distinguished contributions to numerous archaeological surveys in Jordan, including the Tafila surveys in the southern Jordan Valley, the Ras Al-Naqab surveys in Aqaba, as well as surveys in Tasan, Sweimeh, Dabbat Hanout, Al-Muzaffar, and others

This extensive journey of excavations and surveys has culminated in a wealth of valuable research and studies. His output includes dozens of peer-reviewed papers published in local, regional, and international scientific journals, and fifty books published in Arabic, English, and Italian. In these works, he addresses diverse topics across archaeology, tourism, and both tangible and intangible heritage. Notable titles include *The Discovery of the Baptism Site of Christ (Al-Maghtas)*, *The Discovery of the Dwellings of Prophet Lot in the Southern Ghor*, *The Discovery of the Cave of Al-Raqim*, *Tourism from the Bus Window*, *The Folk Tale*, and *The Discovery of the Nymphaeum* in Amman (Philadelphia).

He capped his bibliography of fifty books with his renowned masterpiece: *The Meccan Elaf Route: The Winter and Summer Journey in Jordan*. This pivotal work addresses a subject immortalized in a Quranic Surah that will be recited until the Day of Judgment. Any researcher, scholar, or eager reader exploring the history of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula will find the topic of Elaf at the forefront. Professor Hussein masterfully structured this book into six chapters. Chapter one explores the historical and commercial conditions, caravan routes, and neighboring states prior to the emergence of the Elaf; chapter two details the physical geography of the routes and their trajectories in the Levant, alongside references to the Elaf in historical sources; chapter three analyzes the linguistic concept of Elaf and its profound economic and social dimensions; chapter four maps the stations, paths, and trajectories of the Elaf route in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Palestine; chapter five is exclusively dedicated to documenting the three trajectories of the Elaf route within Jordan, distributed across its Badia, highlands, and valleys; and chapter six contains the conclusion and recommendations, notably proposing the nomination of the Elaf route for the UNESCO World Heritage



List. He enriched the book with highly significant appendices, featuring numerous maps, field photographs, and tables of the archaeological sites relevant to the study.

Professor Hussein is widely commended for his academic integrity and his acknowledgment of those who assisted him in compiling this work. This is evident in his extensive acknowledgments, where he specifically praises researchers and scholars at King Saud University for their efforts in publishing research on Mecca, the Elaf route, and pre-Islamic Arabian history, noting how his communication with them greatly benefited his own research. He also praises the Saudi Heritage Commission for its dedication to developing, protecting, and preserving the heritage sector, and its support for road, inscription, and epigraphy projects. Furthermore, his comprehensive review of previous literature regarding the Elaf route reflects the rigor of a committed researcher, honoring the rights of predecessors while identifying the research gaps his work successfully fills. Indeed, his study added immense new value to the understanding of the Elaf route and its paths within Jordan.

The Meccan Elaf Route was highly praised by prominent specialized scholars who reviewed it for King Faisal Prize for Islamic Studies. They unanimously praised its contents, the immense effort behind it, and its methodological rigor. One reviewer noted in their report:

“1. The book reintroduces the Qurayshi Elaf within a geographical-archaeological field perspective that goes beyond traditional texts, representing a novel scientific contribution. It also provides the first systematic documentation of the Elaf routes inside Jordan, linking historical geography with contemporary tourism planning.

2. The book successfully merges the Quranic text with material history, affirming that the Elaf was not merely an economic phenomenon, but a principle and social system that helped pave the way for the emergence of Islam, leading to a fresh contribution to Islamic studies.

3. It presents a vision to revive the Elaf as a heritage, tourism, and developmental project through cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Jordan, aligning with initiatives such as NEOM, generating applied and practical value.

4. The book serves as a foundational reference for studying the Elaf route from a modern scientific perspective. It is an essential aid for projects reviving cultural and natural heritage in the Arabian Peninsula, a basis for future studies on the historical geography of early Islam, and a pillar for documenting intangible heritage in Jordan and Saudi Arabia under the umbrella of UNESCO.” The same reviewer states regarding the scientific methodology of the book, “The author adopted a multi-disciplinary approach. He used an analytical method by reviewing Arabic and Islamic sources and Quranic Tafseer (Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, Al-Baghawi). He employed an archaeological field method through surveys and selective excavations, alongside the geographical documentation of route stations inside Jordan. He also utilized an applied geographical method using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), aerial photography, and virtual reality techniques. Finally, he used a comparative method, contrasting the Elaf route with ancient global trade routes such as the Silk Road and the Incense Route. [...] This work is a pioneering contribution in linking the Quranic text to geographical and archaeological data, presenting an authentic Arab model in field research on ancient trade routes.”



Another reviewer added, “The book represents a field and semi-historical study attempting to define the landmarks of a commercial-religious route that passed through Jordan. It reflects a new triumph in linking Islamic texts with geography and archaeology, serving as a robust foundational source for developing Islamic heritage tourism. It provides a precise description of commercial caravan routes in Jordan and can be considered a dedicated attempt to begin collecting, documenting, and preserving the heritage of the Elaf route, offering researchers an invaluable resource for writing about intangible heritage not only in Jordan but across all Arab countries traversed by the Elaf route.”

Professor Hussein is highly regarded for his active public engagement, his service to his university and community, and his dynamic presence at conferences, symposia, lectures, and workshops. He has actively participated in over 50 international conferences. In his city of Zarqa, he founded the Islamic-Christian Harmony Conference and the Zarqa History and Archaeology Conference. He has organized dozens of scientific and cultural workshops in collaboration with local entities and delivered countless lectures across the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. He is also an active member of numerous non-governmental organizations.

Throughout his career, Professor Hussein has earned several local and international awards, including The Abdul Hameed Shoman Award for Young Arab Researchers, The Renaissance Project Award for the Rescue of Jerusalem from the Jordanian Writers Association, 2008, The Distinguished Researcher Award from Italian tourism organizations in Piacenza, The Creativity and Excellence Award from the Hashemite University The Best of Jordan Medal and Award in 2013, and ultimately, King Faisal Prize for Islamic Studies in 2026, which he received for “his reflects recognition of the high scientific value and evident field-based originality of his work. His research is grounded in direct archaeological surveys supported by precise spatial documentation using Global Positioning Systems (GPS), in addition to detailed analytical maps that enhance the reliability of his findings. His methodology is further distinguished by its scientific rigor, manifested in the systematic correlation between Qur’anic texts and geographical and field data. This approach offers a balanced scholarly interpretation of the Route of Al-Īlāf within its spatial and historical context and represents a significant qualitative contribution to the documentation of early trade routes in the Arabian Peninsula.” This prestigious prize serves as the crowning achievement of a career brimming with earnest and fruitful work in the fields he chose to champion, standing out through his diverse and immortal intellectual contributions.