

a better starter than a finisher (though that may seem a harsh verdict on a man who published 10 books and well over 100 articles), and he too readily made promises that were impossible to keep when there were only 26 hours in his day. But whilst he might sometimes disappoint and infuriate by his lateness, absence, or sins of omission, when he was around he was always charming and sparkling company, giving purpose and direction to many people's lives. He was always generous with his knowledge and with his data, helping many of his students and collaborators get a start in their publishing careers. Above all, he made life exciting and unpredictable, leaving a rich stock of stories and unforgettable memories for all who worked closely with him. He lacked any shred of malice and was always deeply interested in others, and excelled in making them see a potential in themselves they had not suspected. At the same time he was guarded about his own private life, which was not always easy or happy (he was twice married and twice divorced). His archaeological preoccupations and his willingness to subsidise his work from his own pocket did not sit easily with family life, though he was in truth a devoted father and always talked of his children with pride. Yet in his last months he seemed to have found a new equilibrium: a new partner and impending retirement had rejuvenated him. When I saw him last at a meeting in Paris three weeks before his death, he was full of optimism and plans and looked in excellent health. Even his other great passion in life, Welsh Rugby Union, was on the up again. How ironic and tragic then that he should be snatched away from us by a sudden heart attack as he reached the summit of one of his beloved Welsh mountains.

*David Mattingly*

## **OBITUARY: Shaik Kilani Baba**

The death of Shaik al-Haj Kilani Baba in December 1998, probably approaching his hundredth birthday (he was unsure of his exact date of birth), marks the end of an era for the Libyan pre-desert. Shaik Kilani Baba was chief of the Cabila Manassala bedouin tribe based around Ghirza and over a 50-year period he was a loyal and much loved friend of archaeologists working in the area. By local reputation and in the practical experience of many whom he helped as guide, he knew the geography of the pre-desert area better than anyone. When drought affected the grazing of Syrtica and the Sofeggin/ZemZem wadi basins, he had been known to lead his flocks as far afield as Algeria. He worked with Olwen Brogan and David Smith at Ghirza in the 1950s (and features in several photographs in their book, *Ghirza*, pl. 9b, 11a), and he was a lynchpin of the Anglo-Libyan UNESCO Libyan Valleys team (see *Farming the Desert* vol 1, fig. 12.7). In the early years we would have been completely lost without his guidance, though the senior members of the British team were required to develop and show advanced knowledge of the supremely difficult topography to gain his full acceptance. Even in the later seasons when satellite images and tarmac roads were creating a new framework of spatial reference points, his knowledge of desert lore and survival instincts continued to serve us all well.

There is a host of wonderful stories to remember him by. He had a habit of singing continuously while we drove across the desert, only faltering if he was not sure where we were, which was virtually never. In celebratory mood, on more than one occasion he discharged his rifle through the roof of the tent in which he and our Libyan colleagues slept. Once when he was clearing out a catchment channel leading into one of his tribe's isolated water cisterns, we saw a horned viper strike at him. Even at 80 years plus, his reflexes were up to the challenge and the snake lost the encounter. On another occasion,



*Shaik Kilani Baba*

when we were stuck in a sandstorm, he abandoned the vehicle and lay under a nearby bush with his burnous wrapped round his head. While he slept tolerably well, we sat and suffered a torrid and dusty few hours in oven-like conditions. Although he always reckoned his wealth lay in his camels, he was known to carry a body belt with a substantial cash sum in it. This allowed him to be adaptable to modern ways. He secured a young bride late in his life, by including a refrigerator in the bride price and agreeing that she could live in a house rather than a tent!

Successive generations of British archaeologists owe him a great deal. We shall remember his kindness, his good humour, his wonderful songs of desert life, but perhaps most of all his ability to get us safely back to camp!

*Barri Jones and Graeme Barker*

*Editorial note: Barri was in the last stages of revising this obituary with Graeme Barker when he himself died. It seems all the more appropriate now to publish his tribute to his Libyan friend.*