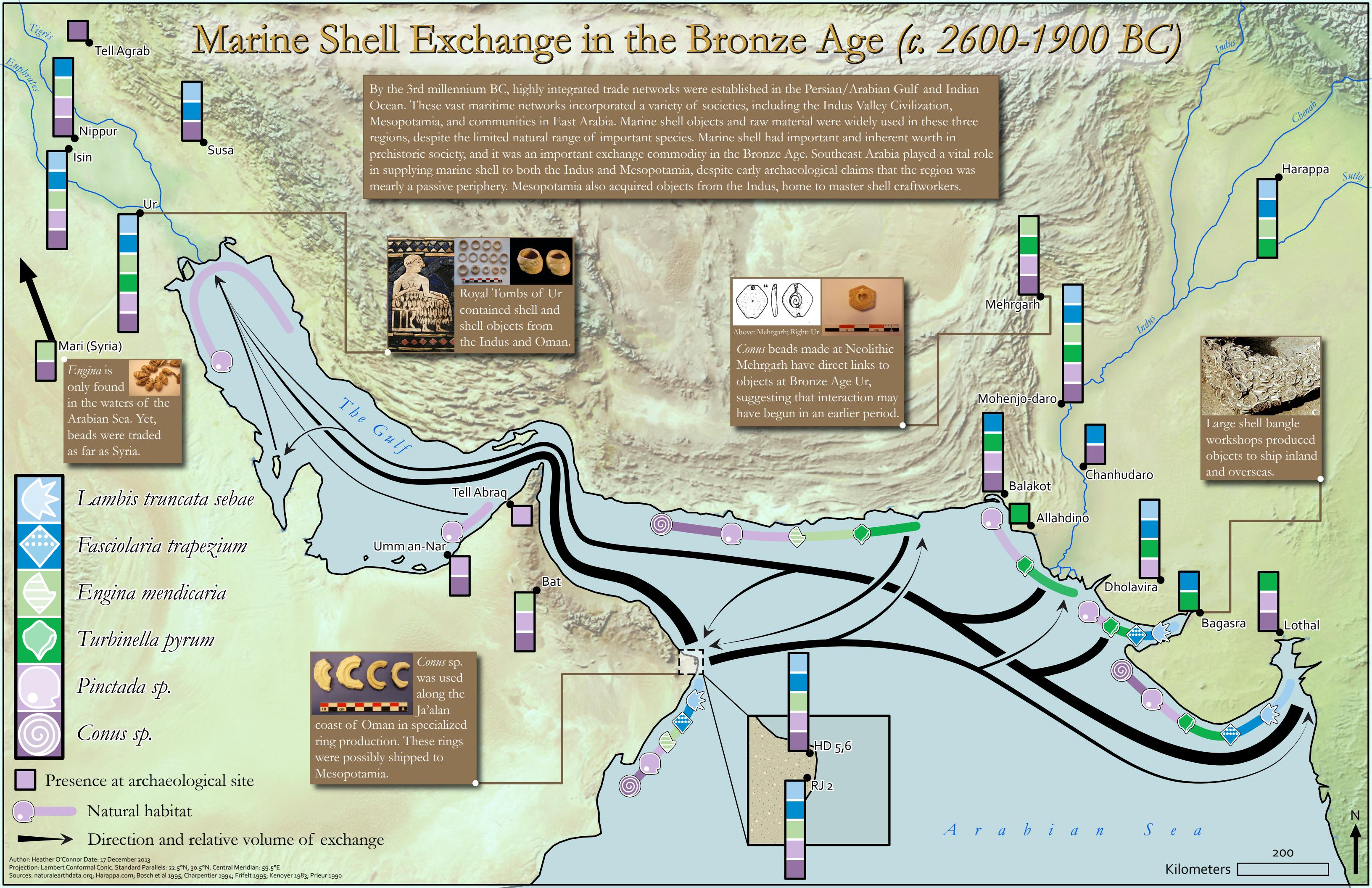


Marine Shell Exchange in the Bronze Age (c. 2600-1900 BC)



By the 3rd millennium BC, highly integrated trade networks were established in the Persian/Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean. These vast maritime networks incorporated a variety of societies, including the Indus Valley Civilization, Mesopotamia, and communities in East Arabia. Marine shell objects and raw material were widely used in these three regions, despite the limited natural range of important species. Marine shell had important and inherent worth in prehistoric society, and it was an important exchange commodity in the Bronze Age. Southeast Arabia played a vital role in supplying marine shell to both the Indus and Mesopotamia, despite early archaeological claims that the region was merely a passive periphery. Mesopotamia also acquired objects from the Indus, home to master shell craftworkers.

Tell Agrab

■

Euphrates
Tigris

Nippur

■

Isin

■

Ur

■

Susa

■

Mari (Syria)

■

Engina is only found in the waters of the Arabian Sea. Yet, beads were traded as far as Syria.

■

Lambis truncata sebae

Fasciolaria trapezium

Engina mendicaria

Turbinella pyrum

Pinctada sp.

Conus sp.

■ Presence at archaeological site

■ Natural habitat

→ Direction and relative volume of exchange



Royal Tombs of Ur contained shell and shell objects from the Indus and Oman.



Above: Mehrgarh; Right: Ur

Conus beads made at Neolithic Mehrgarh have direct links to objects at Bronze Age Ur, suggesting that interaction may have begun in an earlier period.

Harappa

■

Indus

Chenab

Sutlej

Mehrgarh

■

Indus

■

Mohenjo-daro

■

Balakot

■

Chanhu-daro

■

Allahdino

■

Dholavira

■

Bagasra

■

Lothal

■

HD 5,6

■

RJ 2

■



Large shell bangle workshops produced objects to ship inland and overseas.



Conus sp. was used along the Ja'alan coast of Oman in specialized ring production. These rings were possibly shipped to Mesopotamia.

■

■

■

■

■

■

■

Arabian Sea

200

Kilometers

