



مجلة إيسن للآثار والتاريخ واللغات القديمة

Isin Journal for Archaeology, History and Ancient Languages

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدرها كلية الآثار في جامعة القادسية



Peer-reviewed journal issued by the Faculty of Archaeology at the University of Al-Qadisiyah

ISSN 2709-0227 (Online) | Special Issue (2026)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70230/wb40df58>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Locating Ishan Hâfudh during the project “Rural Babylonia” (RUBAB) 2024

Bernhard Schneider, University of Wrocław

Correspondent author: bernhard.schneider@uwr.edu.pl

Received: 19 September 2025 | Revised: 12 June 2026 | Accepted: 23 June 2026 | Published online: 17 August 2026

ABSTRACT

As part of the RuBab project—a phonetic acronym for Rural Babylonian Settlements—co-funded by the National Science Center (Polish NCN) and Horizon Europe 2020, an archaeological survey was conducted in the area east and southeast of Nippur. One of the survey's objectives was to rediscover Ishan Hâfudh, a rural settlement inhabited from the Early Dynastic period to the mid-first millennium BCE. Raymond Dougherty had visited a site by this name during his archaeological survey in January 1926, but its coordinates and location had since been lost to history. This article aims solely to present the correct geographical location of Ishan Hâfudh to the wider scientific community by publishing it electronically in open access format without delay.

Keywords: *RuBab project, Rural Babylonian Settlements, National Science Center, Horizon Europe 2020, archaeological survey, Nippur, Ishan Hafud, rural settlement, geographical location, Early Dynastic period, first millennium BCE, Raymond Dougherty, 1926, open access, and electronic publication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the project RuBab (acronym of short title: Rural Babylonian settlements)¹ co-funded by the National Centre of Science (NCN) and Horizon Europe 2020, a survey of the region to the East and Southeast of Nippur was conducted. One of the goals was to rediscover Ishan Hâfudh², a rural site occupied roughly from Early Dynastic times until the middle of the 1st millennium BC. A site of this name was visited by Raymond Dougherty during his survey in January 1926 and since then its position was lost in the fog of history.³ It is the sole aim of this article to present the proper geographical position of Ishan Hâfudh to the wider scientific community via open access publication without further delay.⁴

2. Towards a Re-identification of Ishan Hâfudh

The basis for research within the RuBab project is formed by the pioneering work published over 40 years ago by Robert McCormick Adams at the Oriental Institute Chicago (now ISAC) and the more recent, state-of-the-art broadband survey conducted by the QADIS project led by Nicolò Marchetti based at the University of Bologna.⁵ During the preliminary reconnaissance campaign of project RuBab in Spring 2024, the location of the site of Ishan Hafudh had to be re-established as neither Adams nor Nicolò Marchetti during his QADIS survey 2016-18 mentioned a site of this name.

¹ Acknowledgements: The author wants to thank Ali Obeid Shalgham (Director-General of SBAH), Ahmad Abdul Jabbar Khamas and Luma Juda of SBAH as well as Rajwan Faisal al-Mayaliand and Jaafar Jotheri, University of Al-Qadisiyah, for their invaluable help during the fieldwork in 2024. Work would have not been as successful in this early stage of the project without the friendship and help of local people from 'Afak, including Mustafa Ziara Abdul Sada and Haider Luaibi (SBAH) as well as Jawad Kazim Al-Jubouri. During this campaign the drone work and surveying was done by Kourosh Mohammandkhani (Shahid Beheshti University) and Ali Al-Gburi (SBAH Diwaniyah/Newcastle University). This research is part of the project No. No. 2022/45/P/HS3/03924 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 945339. For the purpose of Open Access, the author has applied a CC-BY public copyright license to any Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version arising from this submission.

Full title: "Rural settlements in Southern Babylonia during the early "Age of Empires" (ca. 720-150 BC)". To conduct archaeological research on countryside during the early age of empires was inspired also by the surprisingly continuous occupation of traditional Sumerian sanctuaries like the Ekur temple after the Neo-Assyrian period (until at least the late Seleucid period) which could be shown now also according to the archaeological evidence (Schneider 2023). For further results from the 2024 campaign see Schneider 2025 and Schneider forthcoming.

² The chosen variant of transcription preserves the historical writing of the site as recorded by Raymond Dougherty, although without the voiceless pharyngeal fricative Ḥ to preserve compatibility within the fields of Assyriology and Mesopotamian Archaeology. The full historical version of the name would therefore be Ishān Ḥâfudh with a modern transcription Ishān Hâfudh.

³ Dougherty 1926.

⁴ More in-depth analyses will follow.

⁵ Adams 1981. Marchetti et al 2017; Marchetti et al 2020.

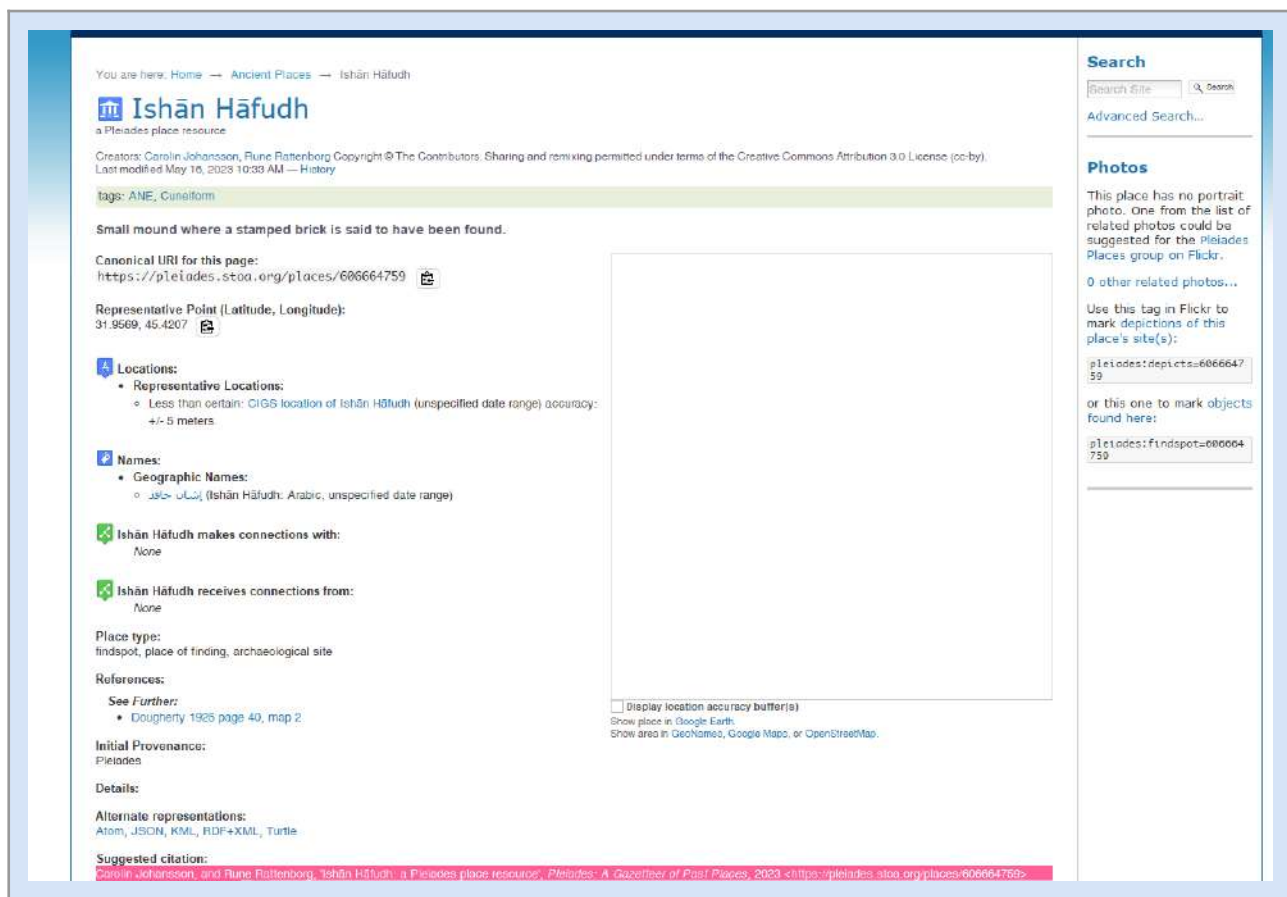


Fig. 2: Carolin Johansson, and Rune Rattenborg, 'Ishān Hāfudh: a Pleiades place resource', Pleiades: A Gazetteer of Past Places, 2023 <<https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/606664759>> [accessed: 05 March 2024].

A supposed position⁶ was approximated ahead of the start of project RuBab in the same environs as the point which was published online at the Pleiades gazetteer of ancient sites.⁷ Obviously, similar parameters had been used by the authors of this entry which led to wrong conclusions without ground-truthing. This included the wrong combination of the “Badr” of Dougherty with modern Al-Budair which is a more modern designation of an agglomeration adjoining the former ‘Ibra and absorbing the latter as a mere quarter of the settlement.

⁶ UTM (WGS 84, 38 S) 539756.10 E, 3535735.65 N.

⁷ Carolin Johansson, and Rune Rattenborg, 'Ishān Hāfudh: a Pleiades place resource', Pleiades: A Gazetteer of Past Places, 2023 <<https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/606664759>> [accessed: 05 March 2024]. See Fig. 2

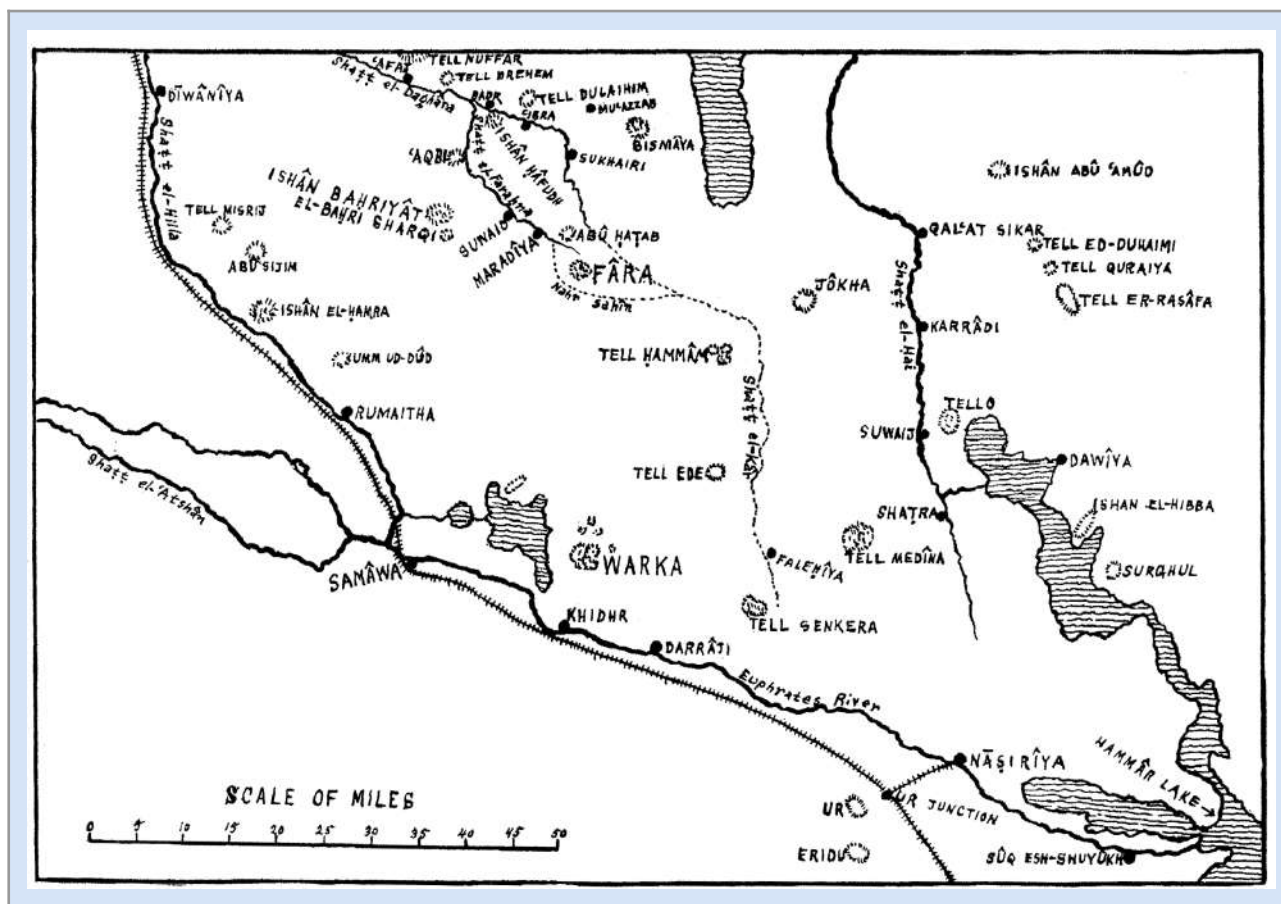


Fig. 1: Position of ISHÂN HÂFUDH indicated below BADR on detail from the plan of surveyed sites by Dougherty 1925-26.

Dougherty located Ishan Hâfudh “less than a mile south of Badr”.⁸

After establishing the correct position of the village (Sheikh) Badr,⁹ not to be confused with Al-Budair, the latter a relatively new designation which nowadays includes the site called 'Ibra mapped by Dougherty in 1926 (Fig. 1).¹⁰ The approximate center between the mounds that comprise the site of Ishan Hâfudh lies at **UTM (WGS 84, 38 R) 535110.04 E, 3536856.69 N.** and therefore nearly 5 km to the West from the position of the current entry in Pleiades.

The area which comprised the mounds known to Dougherty as Ishan Hâfudh in 1926 was later known from the cadastre maps of 1970ies as Ishan Abu Hayayah (“father of the snakes”) and was more recently designated as “Ishan Abu Hayan” within the QADIS Survey project led by Nicolo Marchetti (Bologna) ca. 2016-18.¹¹ Mounds of Ishan Hâfudh include as well Ishan Joha from the same cadastre, designated as Ishan Jokha by the QADIS team.

⁸ Dougherty 1925-26, 41.

⁹ German transcription “Bedr”. Not to be confused with Al-Budair, a modern settlement which incorporates the earlier toponym of Ibra/’Ebre. A cadastre map was thankfully provided to me by Ali Adnan, a civil engineer from the region, on the initiative of Haider Luaibi (SBAH ‘Afak). Haider provided also invaluable help to get to the different sites visited in 2024.

¹⁰ This most probably also confused the position in the Pleiades gazetteer of ancient sites (entry by Johannson and Rattenborg 2023).

¹¹ The latter might be a mistaken reading of “Ishan Hayat” by the compilers of historical map material, according to personal communication with Riyadh Hatem (SBAH Baghdad).

The Legend of Ishan Joha (after Hadi Abd el-Hussein from the region of Bolan, Al-Budair)

Once, a well perfumed man came to Ishan Jokha and was attacked by a snake which was strangling him. When it tried to bite him, it smelled the perfume and let go of the man. The next year, another well perfumed man came to Ishan Jokha and was attacked again by a snake. And again, it was strangling him until it smelled the perfume and let go of the man. Another year happened the same thing, until a man came and killed the snake! Then he was offered the treasure of Ishan Joha, tablets (kitab i. e. cuneiform tablets). He took the tablets and sold them to an English man.

It is possible, that this story carries some memories from the time when a local man sold to an English (speaking) man the bullae. The latter can be most probably identified with Raymond P. Dougherty (American) who bought an inscribed brick and 80 partly inscribed bullae, plus three additional ones bearing several lines of inscriptions in replacement of unfinished stamps, thus providing the evidence for the tablets mentioned in this story.

3. Some preliminary conclusions concerning the newly established geographic setting of Ishan Hâfudh

With a position of only ca. 12 km distance to Isin, it is much more understandable why at Ishan Hafudh existed a well of burnt bricks during the time of Ur-Ninurta of the first dynasty of Isin.¹² The site had strategic value, lying on the bend of an ancient channel, probably deriving from the Euphrates of Nippur (ca. 22 km to the NW), with Puzrish-Dagan/Drehem (ca. 12 km to NW), only a short distance from the probable position of Tummal/Dlehim (ca. 5 km to NE) leading to the capital Isin (ca. 12 km to the SW). The probable existence of public buildings already during Ur III/Isin-Larsa times witness the early importance of this rural area, probably shaped by agriculture, as is shown by the scatter of earlier clay sickles. On the Northeast Mound a large rectangular structure of ca. 240 x 160 m, probably to be identified as a temple, is badly affected by looting pits and cut by a modern canal.

The statement of Dougherty is still valid that in all likelihood the early 5th century bullae derived from the “Neo-Babylonian” occupation at the mounds which comprise what the locals called Ishan Hâfudh.¹³ However, it remains to be shown, if the bullae which are according to Ehrenberg datable roughly to the beginning of the 5th century BC derive from a smaller mound in the South East of Ishan Hâfudh or from South Mound (Ishan Joha).¹⁴ Coming back to the tale, preserved in local lore, the snake could very well be a hint pointing to a mound at Ishan Hâfudh.¹⁵

Any historization of the period dominated by the first dynasty of Isin can now include Ishan Hâfudh in its proper geographic position. The early 5th century BC bullae derive from a local administration center, probably to be found in the mounds of Ishan Hâfudh (i. e. Ishan Abu

¹² Frayne 1990, 64-65 (E4.1.6.1 Ex. 43). The whereabouts of this brick are unknown. It is not in Yale as other objects from Dougherty's survey of 1925-26. Therefore, it probably went to the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad.

¹³ Dougherty 1925-26.

¹⁴ Ehrenberg 2000. Also the broader definition of Ishan Hâfudh keeps open this possibility.

¹⁵ From preliminary observations concerning the pottery on the surface of Ishan Joha, a major first millennium BC occupation seems to be rather unlikely. This mound shows predominantly Middle Babylonian material and perhaps some more limited Ur III until Isin/Larsa material.

Hayyayah and Ishan Joha). The ongoing research on the rural Babylonian countryside within project RuBab will bear further information from a still understudied area inclusive the geomorphology.

Bibliography

- Adams, Robert McCormick 1981. *Heartland of Cities: Surveys of Ancient Settlements and Land Use on the Central Floodplain of the Euphrates*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Dougherty, Raymond. 1925-26. "Searching for Ancient Remains in Lower 'Irâq: Report of an Archaeological Survey Made in Southern Babylonia during the First Quarter of 1926." *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 7: 1-93.
- Ehrenberg, Erica 2000. A Corpus of Early Fifth Century Seal Impressions in the Yale Babylonian Collection. *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 31: 155-188.
- Frayne, Douglas E. 1990. *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods Volume 4 (RIME 4)*.
- Johansson, Carolin and Rattenborg, Rune 2023, 'Ishān Hāfudh: a Pleiades place resource', *Pleiades: A Gazetteer of Past Places* <<https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/606664759>> [accessed: 05 March 2024].
- Marchetti, Nicolò (et al.), Einwag, Berthold, al-Hussainy, Abbas, Leoni, Elena, Luglio, Giampaolo, Marchesi, Gianni, Otto, Adelheid, Scazzosi, Giulia, Valeri, Marco, and Zaina, Federico. 2017. "QADIS. The 2016 Iraqi-Italian survey season in the Southeastern Region of Qadisiyah." *Sumer* 63: 63–92.
- Marchetti, Nicolò (et al.), Campeggi, Michael, D'Orazio, Claudia, Gallerani, Valentina, Giacosa, Gabriele, Al-Hussainy, Abbas, Luglio, Giampaolo, Mantellini, Simone, Mariani, Eleonora, Monastero, Jacopo, Valeri, Marco and Zaina, Federico. 2020. "The Iraqi-Italian QADIS Project: Report on Six Seasons of Integrated Survey." *Sumer* 66: 177-217.
- Schneider, Bernhard 2023. *Die Ziqqurat von Nippur im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr. Marru 12*. Münster: Zaphon Verlag.
- Schneider, Bernhard. 2025. "Bricks for the Gods? Archaeological Evidence for the Production of Neo-Babylonian Stamped Bricks in Rural Southern Iraq". In *Serving the Gods. Artists, Craftsmen and Ritual Specialists in the Ancient World*. Edited by Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider and Bernhard Schneider. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz: 333-348.
- Schneider, Bernhard forthcoming. *The Nippur Region: From the "Heartland of the Cities" to a Rural Imperial Landscape?* Edited by Robert Rollinger et al. *Proceedings of the Achworks II Conference in Obergurgl 2023*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

تحديد موقع إيشان حافظ خلال مشروع "بابل الريفية" (RuBab) 2024

برنهارد شنايدر، جامعة فروتسواف.

المؤلف المراسل: bernhard.schneider@uwr.edu.pl

الملخص

في إطار مشروع "روباب" (RuBab) - وهو الاختصار الصوتي للعنوان المقتضب: المستوطنات البابلية الريفية - والممول تمويلاً مشتركاً من المركز الوطني للعلوم (NCN البولندي) وبرنامج أفق أوروبا 2020 (Horizon Europe 2020)، أُجري مسح أثري للمنطقة الواقعة إلى الشرق والجنوب الشرقي من مدينة نيبور (Nippur). وقد تمثل أحد أهداف هذا المسح في إعادة اكتشاف موقع "إيشان حافظ"، وهو موقع ريفي استوطن تقريباً من عصور فجر السلالات حتى منتصف الألف الأول قبل الميلاد. وكان راي몬드 دوغرتي (Raymond Dougherty) قد زار موقعاً يحمل هذا الاسم خلال مسح الأثري في شهر كانون الثاني/يناير من عام 1926، ومنذ ذلك الحين تاهت إحدائيات الموقع وجغرافيته في غياهب التاريخ. لذا، فإن هذا المقال يهدف حصراً إلى تقديم الموقع الجغرافي الصحيح لـ "إيشان حافظ" إلى المجتمع العلمي الموسع، وذلك عبر نشره إلكترونياً وبصيغة الوصول المفتوح (Open Access) دون أي تأخير.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مشروع "روباب" (RuBab)، المستوطنات البابلية الريفية، المركز الوطني للعلوم، برنامج هورايزون أوروبا 2020، مسح أثري، نيبور، إيشان حافظ، مستوطنة ريفية، موقع جغرافي، فترة الأسر المبكرة، الألفية الأولى قبل الميلاد، ريموند دوهرتي، 1926، الوصول المفتوح، والنشر الإلكتروني.



The Isin journal dedicated a special issue to honour Abdulmir Al-Hamdani (1967–2022), recognising his significant contributions to preserving and promoting Iraqi heritage.

Dr. Abdulmir Al-Hamdani, who died on April 29, 2022, in Nasiriyah, Iraq, at age 55, was among the most influential Iraqi archaeologists of his generation. His life's work was deeply intertwined with Iraqi archaeology—so much so that he named one of his sons 'Uruk'. His commitment to the field ultimately led to his role as Minister of Culture. His passion for Iraqi art and culture, together with his accomplishments, motivated many Iraqi archaeologists and local communities to actively protect Iraq's vulnerable cultural heritage. More about his life and work can be found here: Jotheri, J., & Lawrence, D. (2022). OBITUARY ABDULMIR AL-HAMDANI (1967–2022). *Iraq*, 84, 3–5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/irq.2022.14>

تم تخصيص هذا العدد من مجلة إيسن للآثار والتاريخ واللغات القديمة احياء لذكرى الدكتور عبد الأمير الحمداني (1967–2022)، تقديراً لمساهمته البارزة في التعريف بالتراث العراقي والحفاظ عليه.

كان الدكتور عبد الأمير الحمداني، الذي توفي في 29 نيسان/أبريل 2022 في مدينة الناصرية بالعراق عن عمر ناهز 55 عاماً، من بين أكثر علماء الآثار العراقيين تأثيراً في جيله. وكان مولعاً وشغوفاً بآثار العراق وتراثه لدرجة أنه سمى أحد أبنائه "أوروك" مما أدى في نهاية المطاف إلى توليه منصب وزير الثقافة والسياحة والآثار. يمكن قراءة المزيد حول حياته وعمله في هذا التعزية المنشورة في مجلة عراق التي تصدر عن دار نشر جامعة كامبردج:

Jotheri, J., & Lawrence, D. (2022). OBITUARY ABDULMIR AL-HAMDANI (1967–2022). *Iraq*, 84, 3–5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/irq.2022.14>