

# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ AND ADJACENT REGIONS

Edited by

**Konstantinos Kopanias and  
John MacGinnis**

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# The Iraqi Institute: Education for Archaeological Research and Conservation

Jessica JOHNSON, Abdullah KHORSHEED and Brian Michael LIONE

## Introduction

The Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (referred to in short as the Iraqi Institute, or IICAH) is an important institution in the establishment of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a center of modern archaeological research of the highest quality and importance. This paper describes the basic history and the long-term mission of the Iraqi Institute. At its core is the goal of a obtaining a sustainable, capacity-building Institute – and not just a place where short-term training occurs.

There can be no significant preservation of the wealth of ancient and historic material culture in Iraq unless there are people who are educated in current theoretical approaches, and skilled in practical application of those theories. There can be no long-term, significant support of foreign and local research without people who understand how that research is organized and framed. There can be no long-term political strategy for saving heritage in the face of conflict, development and disinterest in the past without people who have the knowledge to take and adapt international ideas and strategies that have worked elsewhere and frame them for the needs and challenges of Iraq. New experience and knowledge brought by the Iraqi Institute helps Iraqi people begin to recover from continuing, horrific destruction of their communities and the physical remnants of Iraq's important history.

## History

The Iraqi Institute was established by the United States Department of State via a Targeted Development Program Grant issued and administered by the US Embassy in Baghdad from 2008-2011. Under this grant, a US-based non-governmental organization worked with Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) representatives to establish the Institute in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Work began in Iraq in earnest in early 2009, and by the fall of that year, the first classes in object and artifact conservation were being delivered to a small class of eight Iraqi heritage professionals.

These first classes were taught in a rented house in Ainkawa, a suburb of Erbil, while renovations were underway to transform the former Central Library

building in Erbil into a modern teaching and residential facility. The Institute and the current building opened in March 2010 (Fig. 1).

Since January 2011, the Iraqi Institute has been managed by a board of five Iraqis – three who work for the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage; and two, including the Director, Dr. Abdullah Khorsheed, who work for the KRG on the archaeology faculty at Salahaddin University. During the management handover to the Iraqi board in 2011, academic partners from the original grant worked to establish an Advisory Council. This body includes 20 Iraqi and international experts with decades of experience in working in the Government of Iraq, the KRG and in the academic, management and education sectors of international heritage conservation.

These advisors and others oversee the development of three basic areas of conservation education that have been taught at the Institute since 2009 and managed by the University of Delaware since 2011.<sup>1</sup> All courses are taught by a series of Visiting Lecturers, outstanding scholars and practitioners with decades of experience in their fields who teach from one to four weeks as part of larger 'modules' of education which last about ten weeks (Johnson and Lione 2014). Other organizations and governments have offered shorter-term training opportunities since 2011.

Participants in the courses are generally drawn from the cadre of heritage specialists in the employ of the SBAH or the KRG (a few from private museums have also attended). The participant pool to date has included hundreds of Iraqi men and women from all 18 provinces, representing a mix of ethnic and religious backgrounds.

## Programs at the Iraqi Institute

The Archaeological Site Preservation Program (ASP) began in 2013. The key topics in the ASP course include strategies for identification, evaluation, prioritization, and stabilization of archaeological sites. The course has classroom and field components to ensure an equal balance of theoretical and practical learning experiences.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.artcons.udel.edu/public-outreach/iraq-institute> for a more complete description of University of Delaware programs at the Iraqi Institute and a listing of the current Advisory Council.

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FIGURE 1. IRAQI INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ANTIQUITIES AND HERITAGE.

Dr. Katharyn Hanson served as the Program Director of this course.

Throughout the ASP Course, students learn about the theory of archaeological survey, methods to identify and evaluate sites, applications in remote sensing, GPS and GIS techniques, and how to employ them in support of field work. This technical approach also includes methods to understand and apply documentation skills to photograph artifacts and sites. The main goal of the ASP course is to provide students with knowledge that they can use to preserve archaeological sites. To do this, students learn about the types of threats to archaeological sites; ways to identify, classify and prioritize threats to sites; and approaches and techniques to physically protect and preserve sites. Students also practice ways to communicate ideas and how to organize and present data on site preservation priorities to support decision making processes and influence management decisions.

The Collections Care and Conservation program (CCC) is the oldest and largest of the courses at the Institute. The CCC teaches people how to care for artifacts in museums (Cassman *et. al.* 2010). The focus to date has been on exhibit-quality artifacts; recent additions to the

coursework include the care of what are often termed ‘repository’ or ‘archaeological archive’ collections. Repository collections include the often less beautiful, but research important, collections and archives that archaeological projects create during excavation and research. Jessica Johnson, in addition to her role as Academic Director, served as the CCC Program Director.

Two specific topics always included in the Collections Care and Conservation Program courses are preservation of human remains and the lifting of very fragile artifacts. In early planning courses SBAH colleagues specifically asked that students be trained in the recovery and care of human remains because they saw this as an area where there was little expertise in Iraq.

Whenever possible, CCC courses collaborate with local museums (such as the Slemani Museum and the Erbil Civilizations Museum), the KRG antiquities departments, and more recently new excavations, so that student participants can work on real artifacts – and these partners get information or materials that can be used for their own research projects. The Institute also has permission to work on artifacts owned by SBAH that are on exhibit in museums in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.



The Architectural and Site Conservation (ASC) course focuses on the conservation of built heritage – buildings, monuments, and structures. The ASC course provides students with an education in the theoretical and practical aspects of preserving built heritage, from legal frameworks to field work, and everything in between. Working with the support of management at the High Commission for the Erbil Citadel Revitalization (HCECR), students are able to learn and practice new skills using the architectural resources on the Citadel, a newly-inscribed World Heritage Site. Prior to his transition to Executive Director of the Institute, Brian Michael Lione was the ASC Program Director.

The ASC course is split into two parts. In the first part, students receive instruction in the history of architectural conservation, as well as the legal and policy frameworks for international conservation work. Students learn how to conduct photographic documentation of buildings to record their condition and document conservation efforts. Students also learn how to document built heritage using measured drawings and historical research. The ASC students have to become computer literate, and technology savvy very quickly. In the first module they progress from hand measurement and survey to electronic documentation using electronic distance measurement (Total Station) equipment and photogrammetry and computer aided drafting (CAD) software.

The second part of the ASC Course introduces students to the concepts of basic stabilization treatments for historic buildings and structures, and the concepts of comprehensive site management for heritage sites. Students also gain an understanding of the structures, systems, and materials of traditional architecture. They are taught to identify agents of deterioration in materials, and causes of structural failure. Students learn emergency stabilization techniques and methods to prevent further damage and deterioration through site protection efforts. Comprehensive site management strategies are discussed as the final topic of the module, pulling together all the other ideas and lessons from the whole of the ASC Course.

### Common Aspects of All Courses

These courses teach theoretical approaches and international standards that allow Iraqi heritage specialists to understand what is possible. However, courses are designed to teach methods and techniques that are realistic in local contexts using materials and equipment readily available in Iraq. Technology plays an important role in all programs, but courses also teach ‘no-tech’ approaches. For example: the ASP course teaches GPS use in documenting and managing archaeological sites. However, in some parts of Iraq it may be illegal to use a GPS device, much less own one. So, the course is designed to teach tried-and-true approaches to map

reading, and compass use. This example – and others like it in the ASC and CCC courses – illustrates the sort of skills that can be easily shared with others in the workplace when students return to their jobs back home.

A solid understanding of the English language is another important skill taught at the Iraqi Institute. Most of the Institute courses include English language training; students have 60 to 90 minutes of language instruction each day they are in class. In this way, student participants are encouraged to continue their learning and improve their skills through interaction with specialized literature, the internet, and in conferences and workshops around the globe. An ability in English also facilitates connections between Iraqi Institute graduates and the international community of academics and practitioners in their field.

The University of Delaware programs also work with a small group of Institute graduates each year to develop their skills as teaching assistants and assistant lecturers. These Iraqis – termed Master Trainers – are already proving their abilities. They support all the Visiting Lecturers that come to work with the Institute and are beginning to teach in the laboratory and classroom. In time, they will take over the management of the programs (Johnson and Lione 2014; Johnson *et al.* 2014).

### Other programs at the Iraqi Institute

Since the transition to Iraqi leadership, other programs have used the Iraqi Institute facilities (Table 1). These opportunities – often short, technical courses – have been arranged by governments, academic organizations and non-profits. Working through the Director of the Institute, the course directors schedule their efforts and request a number of student participants. Each course pays a standard set of ‘usage fees’ that are charged for classroom use, translators, dormitory use, etc.

This broad range of projects at the Institute gives the staff wider experience while providing students with more opportunities to interact with other archaeologists and heritage professionals from around the world.

In January and April 2014, the University of Arizona (a partnering organization on the Advisory Council) taught a course titled ‘Collection Management Systems for Archaeology: Repositories, Inventories, Archives and Data Management’. This course was developed by Arizona and others to prepare Iraqi heritage managers to better prepare for and manage a response to the recent expansion of archaeological work in Kurdistan and throughout Iraq. Material recovered and produced in new excavations threatens to overwhelm museums and antiquities directorates as artifacts, samples, maps, photographs, and many new kinds of data are collected. The University of Arizona course shared an approach

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Organization	Project Description	Year
International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP)	Training programs	2011
Superior Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Italy	Training programs	2011-2013
University of Athens, Greece	Archaeological research	2011
Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań and Warsaw University, Poland	Archaeological field school	2012
Technical University of Berlin, Germany	Architectural conservation	2012
World Monuments Fund	Training programs	2013-2014
Leiden and Leipzig Universities	Archaeological research	2013
University of Arizona	Training program	2014
Boston University	Training program	2014

TABLE 1. OTHER PROGRAMS AT THE IRAQI INSTITUTE.

to management of archaeological collections that is used in North America and Europe, one that considers archaeological research collections as archives and not just as a set of objects. It also produced several training videos with English, Arabic and Kurdish versions that describe some of the techniques and ideas from the course that make the information more widely available.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion

Beyond learning about heritage preservation and archaeology, the Institute is a place where people come from around Iraq – from every one of the 18 provinces – and become friends. Through a wide variety of activities, students learn more about their country’s heritage and build strong bonds with each other that continue when they return to their homes and professions. The resultant alumni network is another way that the Institute is helping to rebuild a strong community of archaeologists and other professionals in the country.

With the invasion of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) in 2014, plans to begin revised programs were put on hold. However, as of this writing, new and expanded programs are being planned with a new international collaborations and it is clear programs will return in 2015. Despite these recent challenges, the Iraqi Institute – and Kurdistan – remains a safe place where people from around the world can come together and learn from each other about archaeology and heritage. The friendships that are made, and the community of students and teachers that is developing at the Institute, will go a long way to rebuild and restore the expertise that is needed to protect Iraq’s heritage, to build new museums and parks to educate all Iraqi people about their heritage; and of course, to work with the international archaeological community in expanding the knowledge and understanding of Mesopotamia.

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <http://capla.arizona.edu/management-museum-collections>.

### Acknowledgements

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