

THE IRAQ INSTITUTE: EDUCATING A NEW GENERATION OF HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS

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The Iraqi Institute for the Conservation and Antiquities and Heritage preserves the legacy of humanity contained in the unique cultural heritage of Iraq. It accomplishes this through educating people in conservation and preservation and by inviting professionals from around the world to share expertise.

The membership of TAARII well knows the damage and destruction that has occurred to cultural heritage in Iraq over the last decades. Iraqi archaeologists, artists, archivists, librarians, architects, engineers, and other professionals who care for the tangible cultural heritage of Iraq were cut off from their international counterparts. War, sanctions, and looting as well as little access to advances in the various fields of cultural heritage conservation have left artifacts, photographs, archives, books, architectural resources, and archaeological sites vulnerable to destruction and decay, with only a small core of trained Iraqi professionals to look after and manage these important resources. Beginning in late 2008, a project began that had as its focus a long-term, sustainable approach to education and training.

By September 2009, the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (Institute) began teaching artifact conservation to Iraqi heritage preservation professionals. The students — all employees in antiquities departments under the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) — attended these initial classes in a small rented house in Ainkawa, a suburb on the edge of the rapidly expanding northern Iraqi city of Erbil.

Since then, an unprecedented collaboration with the U.S. and Iraqi governments, and several academic and institutional partners, has expanded the

Institute into a sustainable institution hosting a variety of conservation and preservation educational programs for Iraq. Cooperative programs, giving students on-site practical experiences, are also being established as new and exciting international research projects are increasing in the region. Through this international collaboration, the Institute is working to expand the learning opportunities for students in Iraq so they can join the international community of scholars and practitioners working in heritage conservation.

ORIGINS

The Institute originated as part of the Iraq Cultural Heritage Project, a \$12.9 million initiative developed and funded in 2008 by the U.S. Department of State and implemented by the U.S.-based, non-governmental organization, International Relief and Development (IRD). Early in 2009, a delegation of representatives from the State Department, IRD, and institutional partners² made their first planning visit to Erbil. During this visit, the Prime Minister of the KRG pledged the renovation of the former Erbil central library for use as the long-term home for the Institute.

Throughout 2009, the project team worked with representatives from the

Iraqi government and several dedicated institutional partners in the U.S. to design and implement a full renovation of the 10,000 square foot facility. At the same time, intensive academic courses in artifact conservation and historic preservation were crafted by on-site program managers with assistance from U.S.-based advisors. Completed in 2010, the Institute includes classrooms, well-equipped conservation laboratories, dormitories, and kitchens that can accommodate up to fifty students. To date, more than 250 Iraqis have taken courses at the Institute (fig. 4.1).

In 2010, the management of the Institute was transferred to a newly established Iraqi Board of Directors. At present, the staff of the Institute is comprised of employees from both the SBAH and the KRG led by Dr. Abdullah Khorsheed, director of the Iraqi Institute, chairman of the Institute Board of Directors, and a professor of



Figure 4.1. The entrance to the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (Photo Credit: Sebastian Meyer)



Figure 4.2. Students and teachers in the Advanced Conservation course discussing ideas in one of two Iraqi Institute laboratories (Photo Credit: Jessica S. Johnson)

archaeology at Salahaddin University in Erbil.³

An international Advisory Council, comprised of leading academic advisors and partners was established in 2011. The Council is responsible for developing a sustainable management plan for the Institute, strengthening educational opportunities for its students, and securing funding to ensure the Institute's future.⁴

LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Academic programs at the Institute are designed to be long-term and sequential courses that strengthen critical thinking and communication skills, while building teamwork and knowledge in applied science, preventive conservation, history of materials and techniques, and practical applications for conservation and preservation. Newly learned theoretical knowledge is immediately practiced through mid-program home practicums or projects in Erbil with local historical resources. Students have worked at local archaeological sites, at the Erbil Citadel, and with collections from several museums in Erbil and Slemani.

The majority of academic programs at the Institute are managed by the University of Delaware's (UD) Institute for Global Studies. The Institute

currently offers three programs: Collections Care and Conservation, Architecture and Site Conservation, and Archaeological Site Preservation.

There are two courses in the Collections Care and Conservation program. Each course is thirty weeks long and runs once each year. The introductory course, Preventive Conservation for Museums and Archaeology, teaches students about the causes of deterioration and how to upgrade storage and exhibits for a wide range of materials including ceramics, stone, ivory, textiles, and human remains. The second year is an advanced course, entitled Laboratory Conservation for Archaeology and Museums offered to the best of the introductory students (fig. 4.2). Students in the class have upgraded mounts for ceramic figurines from the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad on exhibit at the Erbil Civilizations Museum and conserved human remains recovered from local archaeological sites. Alumni of this program are working on the enlargement and reopening of the Mousel Cultural Museum; other alumni have completely revamped the storage for artifacts in the Syriac Culture History Museum in Ainkawa.

The program in Architecture and Site Conservation provides students with an introduction to the theoretical and

practical aspects of preserving heritage buildings, monuments and sites. The eighteen-week course is divided into two modules of classroom instruction, plus a week-long field practicum project. The course introduces the theoretical framework of architectural conservation, and provides practical field experience in the documentation of historic buildings and structures using houses in the Erbil Citadel and lower town. The second module introduces students to temporary stabilization treatments and the concept of comprehensive site management for heritage sites. Students gain practical experience through building small structures with traditional features such as arches and domes made of mudbrick and other local materials. In 2014, the course will be extended to thirty weeks to match courses in the Collections Care and Conservation Program.

Archaeological Site Preservation was a new program for 2013 that introduces strategies for identification, evaluation, prioritization, and stabilization of archaeological sites. The ten-week course, which was offered twice in 2013, incorporates classroom and field components to ensure an equal balance of theoretical and practical learning experiences.⁵ Students have been practicing their skills at the site of Kilik Mishik. The course structure is designed to be highly flexible and dynamic to ensure that the archaeological theory and methodology keep pace with the rapidly changing landscape of archaeological investigations now happening across the country (fig. 4.3).

Most students also take English language courses as part of their educational program. Funding for these long-term programs comes from a mix of U.S. and Iraqi governmental sources and private U.S. foundations and organizations.⁶ In addition to the regular courses, UD staff work with Iraqis termed "master trainers," who

are being prepared to take over the management of programs in the future. Master trainers assist the UD staff, teach some of the lessons, and work alongside the international experts⁷ who provide most of the lectures and practical projects for each course.

Since early 2011, other international programs have also used the Institute facilities for training students and supporting research projects. These include the International Commission on Missing Persons; the Italian Superior Institute for Conservation and Restoration; the University of Athens, Greece; Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań and Warsaw University, Poland; the Technical University of Berlin and Leipzig University, Germany; Leiden University (the Netherlands); and the World Monuments Fund. These opportunities have included conservation short courses and archaeological field schools for students and research on cultural heritage assets across Iraq.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

As the Institute approaches the end of its fifth year, the Board of Directors, Advisory Council, and UD staff are working in partnership to ensure that the facility continues to provide a world-class conservation education to dedicated Iraqis. For example, in March 2013, the General Directors of



Figure 4.3. Students in the Archaeological Site Preservation program learning the basics of GIS
(Photo Credit: Sebastian Meyer)

Antiquities from all Iraqi provincial SBAH offices, archaeologists, and others from the KRG and SBAH, faculty from all the Iraqi collegiate archaeology programs, and select faculty from programs in engineering and architecture were invited to the Institute. In both meetings, participants learned about the capabilities of the Institute and the education programs that have taken place there. Staff from the Institute and UD led a guided discussion with the groups, and received input and recommendations on ways to continue to improve future academic offerings.

The Advisory Council is currently focused on drafting the Institute's first five-year plan to proactively lead the organization to a successful, sustainable future. Once finished, the plan will include guidance on academic programming, staff training and development, outreach and visibility, financial requirements, and operational management of the facility.

The dedication of the students, staff, managers and advisors of the Institute is immense. This place, built out of a passion for, and belief in, the importance of the preservation of cultural heritage as a cornerstone in the rebuilding of Iraq, is a center where people come from every province to share their ideas, their lives, their

problems and their vision of the future for their country. The Institute is a retreat where people can work together to learn new ideas and practical preservation methodologies. As development threatens archaeological and built heritage resources, as new museums are built, and as Iraqi heritage institutions continue to rebuild and expand, the Institute is

preparing graduates to help guide that change, bring new ideas to colleagues, and to be part of preserving their priceless cultural heritage. In the longer term, the goal is for the Institute to become a regional center of excellence in the conservation of cultural heritage throughout the Middle East.

The door of the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage is always open to visiting scholars. Please come and visit if you find yourself in Erbil.

¹ Jessica S. Johnson is the academic director of University of Delaware Programs, and Brian Lione is the director of Architectural and Site Conservation Programs at the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage.

² Founding advisors included individuals from the U.S. State Department, Walters Art Museum, University of Delaware Art Conservation Department, Winterthur Museum and Gardens, and the National Park Service.

³ Other Board of Directors members are: Butheina Muslim Abdhusein, director, Central Laboratory, Iraqi Museum Baghdad; Dr. Ali Alhyali Ghanim, head of Training Department for Archaeologists, Iraqi Museum, Baghdad; Dr. Numan J. Ibrahim, professor, Salahaddin University, Erbil; Thafir Sobhi Salih, director general of Restorations and Engineering Department, State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

⁴ A list of current Advisory Council members can be found here: <http://www.artcons.udel.edu/public-outreach/iraqi-institute/supporters>.

⁵ Katharyn Hanson, Ph.D., is the Visiting Program Coordinator for this course.

⁶ Current funding for the academic programs at the Iraqi Institute comes from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the Office of the Governor of Erbil, the U.S. State Department's Cultural Heritage Center, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Getty Foundation.

⁷ A list of visiting faculty who have taught at the Institute can be found at: <http://www.artcons.udel.edu/public-outreach/iraqi-institute/visiting-faculty>.



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TAARII AND THE IRAQI CULTURAL CENTER HOLD CONFERENCE ON BAGHDAD

On November 15–16, 2013, TAARII and the Iraqi Cultural Center (ICC) held a conference in Washington, D.C., on Baghdad in medieval and modern times. The inspiration for the conference was the designation by the Arab ministers of culture of Baghdad as the capital of Arab culture for 2013. Seventeen scholars presented on the economic, political, social, and cultural life in Baghdad from one thousand years ago to today. Presentations were geared for a general audience; participants and audience members appreciated the accessibility of the lectures and the chance to learn from the various kinds of expertise represented. In addition, the supportive environment of the ICC and its welcoming staff encouraged networking and informal exchanges.

The conference began with a morning session on the political, economic, and social life of medieval Baghdad. Five scholars — Chase F. Robinson, Stephen Humphreys, Sidney Griffith, Roy Mottahedeh, and Richard Bulliet — drew on their vast knowledge of medieval Baghdad to provide a broad historical foundation for the rest of the conference. In his presentation, Chase F. Robinson, the interim president

of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, focused on scale and plan to help make some sense of the economic, cultural, and political project that made and unmade Baghdad. He illustrated how eighth- and tenth-century Baghdad, ideological in original inspiration and design, was subordinated over the course of the ninth century to the political and economic forces that the Abbasid Empire had set in motion. His presentation illustrated how cities, as centers of production and consumption, and as nodes of political power, are barometers of broader economic and social change.

Stephen Humphreys, who until his retirement in 2012 held the King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud Chair in Islamic Studies at the University

of California, Santa Barbara, provided additional insights on the place of Baghdad in history. Humphreys recounted that Baghdad was founded both to symbolize and consolidate Abbasid imperial power. It was obviously not the first urban foundation in Islam, he said, but it was the first one expressly built to be the seat of the caliphate and the first one fully planned from its inception. In spite of Baghdad's imposing origins, however, its position within the Abbasid Empire was severely challenged even in its ninth-century heyday. It was besieged, half-ruined, and then abandoned to its fate during the long civil war from 194 A.H./810 C.E. to 203 A.H./819 C.E. In 221 A.H./836 C.E., al-Mu'tasim decided to erect a dedicated government city sixty miles up the Tigris in Samarra, and the caliphs did not permanently return until 279 A.H./892 C.E., a moment in which the empire was already subject to serious territorial fragmentation and rebellion — a process which only intensified after 295 A.H./908 C.E. In spite of such grave challenges, however, Baghdad remained a vibrant intellectual, cultural, and economic center throughout, the seedbed of Islam's self-



Figure 1.1. Sara Pursely (IJMES) analyzes gender images in Jawad Salim's Monument to Freedom in Baghdad (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)