



Art Conservation *and preserving cultures*

For centuries, the Kurdish people made and enjoyed objects that helped support their nomadic tribal lifestyle. The most beautiful of these are the colorful textiles woven by Kurdish women from the wool of domestic animals like goats and sheep that their families tended as they roamed through what now are the modern states of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. Today, however, the weaving of Kurdish tribal textiles is considered a dying art.

The skills have disappeared due to an abundance of imported cheap synthetics and the difficulties associated with living in the midst of an almost constant state of war in the Middle East. And because the textiles made in the past were used for everything from food bags to rugs to sit on, they did not last and are now especially rare.

In 2016, a desire to better understand and document the rich history of Kurdish textiles led Reyhane Mirabootalebi, an Iranian objects and textiles conservator who was working in Australia, to the Ph.D. program in Preservation Studies at the University of Delaware. Her topic is the *Preservation of Traditional Textiles Among War-Affected Communities*, which, like Kurdish textiles generally, has not been well studied. Reyhane is especially interested in the oldest existing textiles, which were made between the 17 and 19th centuries and today are found primarily in private and public collections.

This summer, Reyhane began her travels in the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Iran in search of a community that is still weaving textiles in the traditional manner. If she finds such a community, she hopes to spend as long as 12 months with their weavers, using the information she has gathered through her initial research to help her understand what happens to traditional cultural arts during difficult time periods. Reyhane knows that finding such a community will be difficult. She began her search in Erbil, the Iraqi city that is the capital of the geo-cultural area known as Kurdistan, where she met Mr. Lolan Sipan, the director of the Kurdish Textile Museum which established in 2004. Although the museum's focus is on more modern textiles, it is also helping to preserve the weaving tradition by teaching the skills to younger generations.

Reyhane hopes she will be able to build on the museum's work as she searches for a community to study. She also hopes her research will help bring a better understanding and appreciation for Kurdish tribal textiles and the important role they have played in Kurdish culture and history.



ARTC Spotlight—October 2018

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: University of Delaware Preservation Studies Program doctoral candidate Reyhane Mirabootalebi assessing the condition of an Afghani shawl in Iran. Above: Reyhane undertaking a condition assessment of a university rug collection, and instructing students in a Care and Preservation of Cultural Materials course. Right, top down: Reyhane examining a Kurdish Jajim from Iraqi Kurdistan, and the weaving details of a Kurdish gelim.