

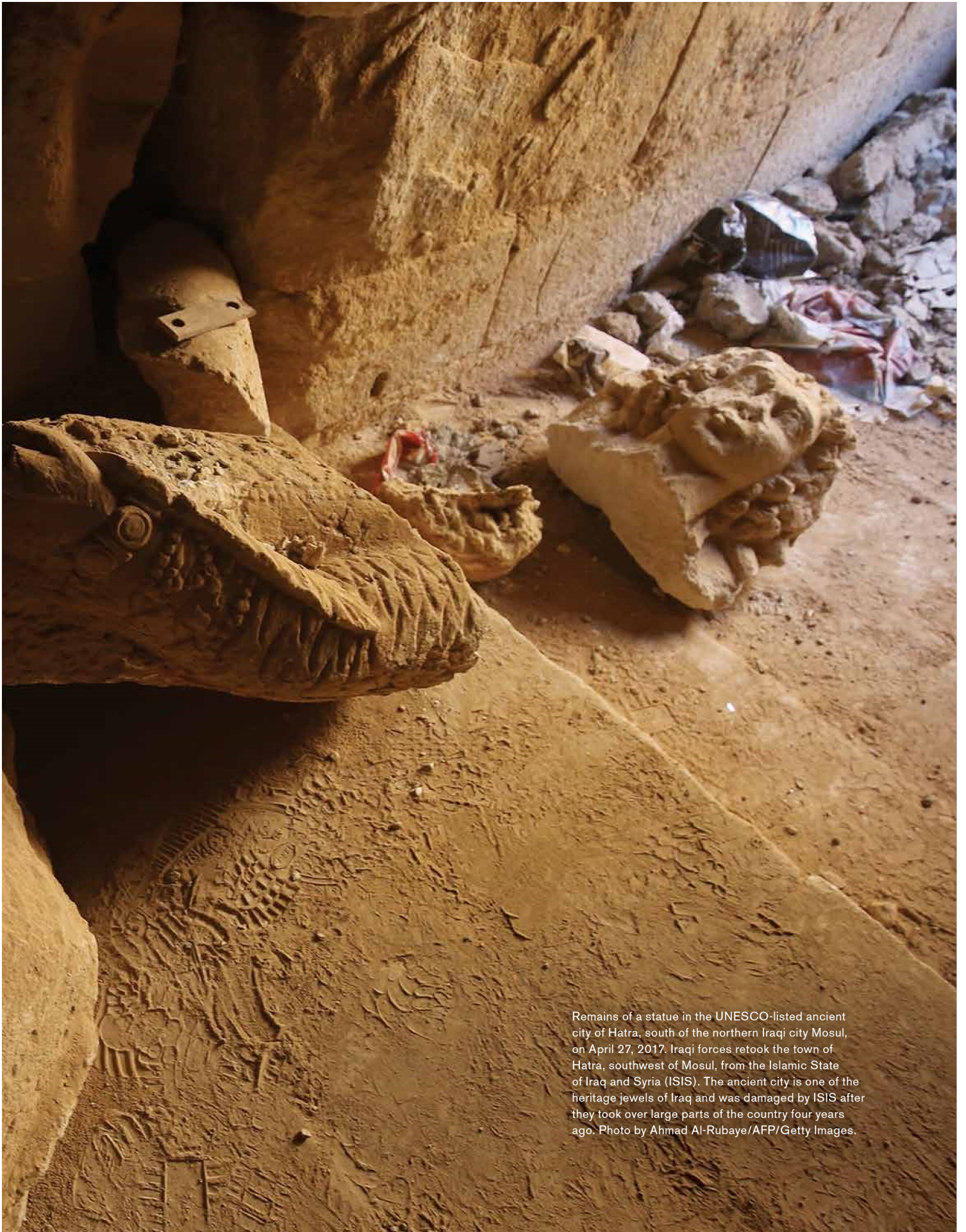


Saving Iraq's Cultural Heritage

TRAINING IRAQI CONSERVATORS
AT GORDION, TURKEY

BY JESSICA S. JOHNSON

OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS, the Penn Museum's Gordion Archaeological Project has hosted three Iraqi cultural heritage professionals during our summer field seasons in Turkey. The Gordion team provides archaeological conservation training, including the conservation of objects that have just been excavated as well as objects of all types currently in the Gordion Museum. This training will help the Iraqis save their own ancient artifacts when they return to their country.



Remains of a statue in the UNESCO-listed ancient city of Hatra, south of the northern Iraqi city Mosul, on April 27, 2017. Iraqi forces retook the town of Hatra, southwest of Mosul, from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The ancient city is one of the heritage jewels of Iraq and was damaged by ISIS after they took over large parts of the country four years ago. Photo by Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images.



Destructive Forces

As seen in April 2017, the site of Nineveh, Iraq was heavily destroyed by ISIS. Destruction of cultural heritage and archaeological looting is a global issue that threatens the preservation of our shared cultural heritage. The opportunities provided by the Gordion team will give Iraqi conservation professionals the skills they need to help rectify this damage, when they return home. Photo by UNESCO, Wikimedia.

Our First Summer Trainee

Nihayet Abdullah was the first Iraqi conservator to join the Gordion team, in summer 2014. Nihayet is one of a new generation of Iraqi heritage professionals who are determined to learn what is needed to save and restore their cultural heritage. While she was working at Gordion, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) invaded Mosul just one hour away from her home in the city of Erbil in northern Iraq. Though mostly pushed out of Iraq now, ISIS destroyed many cultural and religious heritage sites such as Nimrud, Nebi Yunus, and the Mosul Museum. Archaeologists, conservators, and others like Nihayet are



quietly working to preserve what they can—for a safer and more stable future.

Nihayet, who has a degree in Ancient History from the University of Mosul, served as director of the Erbil Civilizations

LEFT: Cotton bags used for bulk pottery storage at Gordion are prepared by Nihayet Abdullah.

Museum, and now works for the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage. The Iraqi Institute is an organization born from the collaboration of American and Iraqi colleagues who believe that cultural heritage and its preservation can bring people together and help rebuild communities after war and tragedy. Initiated in 2008 by the U.S. Department of State, the Iraqi Institute has hosted educational, research, and training programs for over 400 Iraqi cultural heritage professionals. Currently, the Smithsonian Institution, the Department of State, and other partners are collaborating with the Iraqi Institute and the Iraq Ministry of Culture's State Board of Antiquities and Heritage on the Nimrud Rescue Project to stabilize and recover ancient neo-Assyrian architecture and sculpture blown up by ISIS.

The participants in programs at the Iraqi Institute come from many towns in Iraq, such as Basra near the World Heritage-listed marshes in the south, the central capital Baghdad, and from Suleymania near the Iranian border. All participants are working in heritage preservation—many in governmental departments, others in universities. They leave their families for eight to ten weeks at a time (sometimes more than once) to live together in the dormitory facilities at the Iraqi Institute. Together each day in class, sharing meals, and working on home-

Hands-on Restoration Experience

RIGHT: Nihayet Abdullah and Pshtiwan Ahmed work in the laboratory of the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage in Erbil, Iraq.

FAR RIGHT: Nihayet Abdullah practicing her pottery restoration skills on a trefoil mouth jug from the Gordion Museum.



work every night, they are creating a strong community of educated leaders who take their new-found conservation skills and knowledge back to their professional colleagues and home communities.

A New Generation of Iraqi Heritage Professionals

Nihayet was in the first class of students in the Iraqi Institute's Collection Care and Conservation Program in 2009. As one of its top students, she was invited to participate in the first Advanced Conservation Program in 2011. Excelling again, she was asked to continue on with the Iraqi Institute as a "master trainer," a teaching assistant who is gaining the skills and experience to take over teaching and managing conservation courses. Nihayet, along with eight other master trainer colleagues, teaches laboratory practicals, organizes and manages the laboratories, and, in a pinch, translates English to Arabic or Kurdish for other participants. She also supports international faculty who teach at the Iraqi Institute. These master trainers come to Turkey to work with the

Gordion Project to gain the experience in archaeological field conservation that is difficult to obtain in Iraq.

In 2015, a second Iraqi, Pshtiwan Ahmed, came to Gordion to work with the Gordion Objects Conservation Program. When not working as a master trainer, Pshtiwan works for the Erbil Civilizations Museum and, along with Nihayet, set up the first conservation lab at the museum in 2017. (At night, Pshtiwan also works for his family's tailoring shop, creating beautiful traditional women's clothing.) At Gordion, Pshtiwan



RIGHT: Gordion Archaeological Project Director C. Brian Rose (center) looks on while the author (right) and Pshtiwan Ahmed (left) work on the Gordion pebble mosaic. Photo by Gebhard Bieg.

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FAR LEFT: Ako Lashkri (left) works with conservators Cricket Harbeck (center) and the author to clear surrounding soil from juniper logs found in excavations in 2017 at the Gordion Citadel. Photo by Simon Greenslade.

LEFT: Ako helps on the restoration of stones from a Hellenistic tomb chamber (4th–3rd century BCE) being restored at the Gordion Museum. Photo by Elisa Del Bono.

OPPOSITE: Ako Lashkri sorts, cleans, and examines fragments of bronze at Gordion. Photo by Gebhard Bieg.

worked alongside the author and a Turkish student on the restoration of a segment of the earliest colored pebble mosaic floor known in the world (dated *ca.* 850–800 BCE, excavated 1956). This mosaic panel travelled to the Penn Museum for the 2016 exhibition, *The Golden Age of King Midas*. Using 1956 excavation photographs and a watercolor floorplan from the Gordion Archives, gaps in the geometric pattern of the mosaic were filled with similar stones found in quarries nearby—probably the same quarries used by the ancient Phrygians who originally laid the decorative floor. Pshtiwan also practiced conservation treatment on a variety of artifacts made of bone, stone, and metal, and helped on maintenance projects that ensure the stability of the collections in storage.

In 2017, Ako Lashkri was the third Iraqi to join the Gordion team. Ako and his wife Diman are master trainers at the Iraqi Institute who also work for the Kurdistan Regional Government Department of Antiquities. In the past, Ako participated in excavations at the ancient Erbil Citadel, one of the oldest continually occupied cities in the world. He also helped with surveying ancient sites in and around the city with Harvard University's Erbil Plain Archaeological Survey run by Dr. Jason Ur. Just before coming to Gordion, Ako (along with Nihayet and Pshtiwan) worked with the Smithsonian Institution/Department of State Nimrud Rescue Project, teaching Iraqi archaeologists from Mosul new ways to document damage and salvage the ancient stone statues at the recently liberated site of Nimrud. In his first day at Gordion, Ako worked with conservators and archaeologists to lift amazingly preserved, large juniper logs found within the rubble core of the Phrygian citadel's fortification wall. Later, he helped to take the dendrochronological samples from the logs that will be used to verify the

date of the construction. Ako also worked on a number of “small finds,” cleaning bronze and iron artifacts, but most importantly, perhaps, he worked with the Gordion Architectural Conservation Team, learning how to move and repair large stone artifacts of the size found at Nimrud. Plans are underway to bring another Iraqi from the Nimrud Rescue team to Gordion in the next field season, to learn more techniques for dealing with the very large stone sculptures they plan to restore in the future.

Although the master trainers each have had several years of theoretical courses and lots of laboratory and practical experiences with archaeological excavation and survey, archaeological field conservation has been a gap in their experience. Working with the Gordion Objects Conservation team, these Iraqis are able to see how conservators work on-site with archaeologists, and they can practice their conservation skills on material excavated just days before.

The Gordion Objects Conservation Program

Since its inception in 1950, the Gordion Archaeological Project has had a long history of conserving its artifacts and collections and serving as a training ground for the conservation field in general. The late Ellen Kohler, Gordion Archivist at the Penn Museum, carried out treatments on many of the ceramic and metal artifacts following early techniques developed at the British Museum. The author first came to Gordion as a conservation intern in 1989. Since then, the project has trained over 30 object conservation interns giving them first-hand experience in field conservation.

Archaeological field conservation is focused on minimizing the damage to artifacts caused by the rapid environmental changes that occur upon excavation, and



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on ensuring that as much research information as possible is retained in the artifacts. Excavations at Gordion over more than 60 years have produced more than a million pottery sherds, and thousands of iron and copper alloy, bone, ivory, shell, stone, and wooden artifacts. All of these are carefully stored so that researchers now and in the future can examine them, to learn more about the people who lived and worked at Gordion. As archaeology changes and new ideas and techniques are developed, these collections can be re-examined to expand our knowledge of the history of the site and the region in antiquity.

Learning Conservation Techniques in the Field

Just like owning a home, a lot of good conservation is basic repair and maintenance. Without such maintenance and careful documentation, the most beautiful conservation treatment or restoration will eventually fail. Gordion, with its enormous assemblage of finds, has a variety of regular projects to ensure that artifacts remain intact for (and during) research and exhibition projects. The Iraqi interns help with these projects and learn how to take these skills back to their own jobs. Nihayet, Pshtiwan, and Ako have all practiced techniques of pottery stabilization first developed at Gordion. Each year, all the objects on display in the Gordion Museum at Yassıhöyük village are surveyed, and any found actively deteriorating are treated. The silica gel that keeps copper alloy objects from developing the horribly damaging corrosion known as “bronze disease” is regenerated (dried in an oven) annually. And there is always a visit to the monumental “Midas Tumulus,” the largest royal burial mound in the region (dated *ca.* 740 BCE), to learn about the long-term program of documentation, cleaning, and monitoring that is helping to ensure the ancient wooden tomb chamber’s stability.

Before they leave Turkey, the Iraqis visit the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara, where many of the artifacts from inside the Midas tomb chamber are on display. One of these, a bronze lion-headed *situla* or bucket for serving alcoholic beverages, may actually have come from ancient Iraq. Stone reliefs found in the palace of the contemporary Assyrian king, Sargon II, at Khorsabad in northern Iraq, about two hours’ drive from Nihayet’s home in Erbil, show attendants carrying identical vessels. It seems fitting that individuals who now live

in what was once ancient Assyria can come to the ancient Phrygian capital of Gordion and learn more about saving their own cultural heritage. •

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE IRAQI INSTITUTE

For more information on current Smithsonian Institution projects at the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage see: <https://global.si.edu/projects/smithsonian-and-iraqi-institute-conservation-antiquities-and-heritage>. To make donations to support this work through the Smithsonian Fund for the Iraqi Institute see: <https://www.si.edu/mci/english/research/conservation/IraqiCulturalHeritage.html> or contact MCIWeb@si.edu. For more information on the history and development of the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage see: <https://www.artcons.udel.edu/outreach/global-engagement/iraqi-institute>

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FURTHER READING

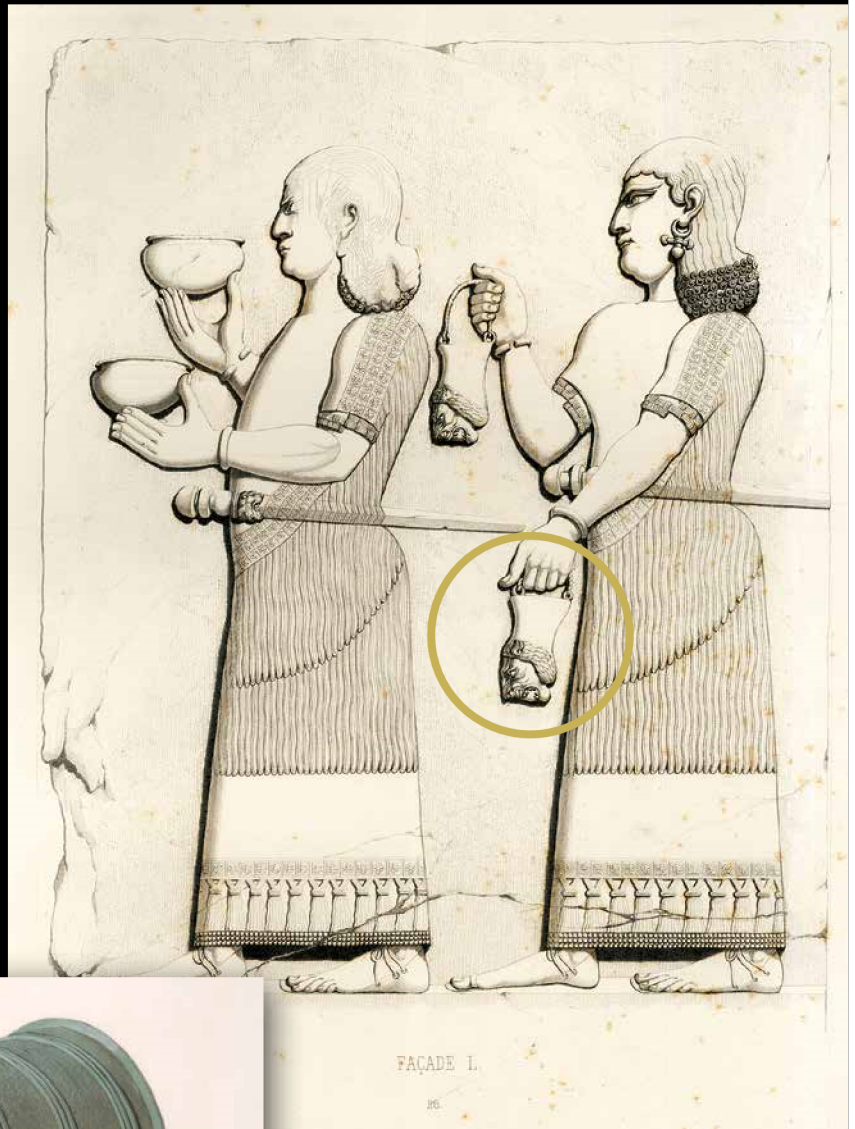
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An Ancient Gordion–Iraq Connection

WHEN THE MIDAS MOUND at Gordion, dated to *ca.* 740 BCE, was excavated in 1957, two wonderful bronze situlae were recovered. These ancient vessels, shaped like small buckets with handles, were in the form of a lion and a ram, and were probably used to serve drinks at a funerary banquet.

The lion is especially intriguing as a very close parallel has been found on a stone relief at Khorsabad in northern Iraq. This indicates that at least the lion-headed situla may have been a gift from an Assyrian ruler to Gordios, the father of Midas and the occupant of the tomb.

BELOW: The famous archaeological illustrator, Piet de Jong (1887–1967) worked at Gordion at the invitation of the excavator, Rodney Young. Among his paintings was the lion-headed situla shown here. PM image 153691.



ABOVE: A wall relief from the palace of Sargon II, dated to *ca.* 710 BCE, depicts male attendants serving a beverage. Notice the snarling lion-headed situla, virtually identical to the vessel found at Gordion. From P.E. Botta and E.N. Flandin, *Monument de Ninive I*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1849, Façade L, 26, Museum Library Rare Books.