

BANEA 2024 ANNUAL MEETING

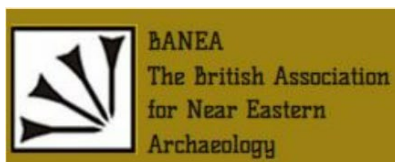
Archaeological and heritage practice in Southwest Asia: towards equitable futures

Whose Heritage Is it?

A Discussion on Community Engagement and Local Counter-narratives in Archaeology of Southwest Asia

Time	Speaker and Paper Title
8.30-8.40	Greetings and Introduction
8.40-8.55	Lanah Haddad <i>Tackling the Challenges of Heritage Ownership and Its Complexity: A View from Iraq and the Kurdistan Region</i>
8.55-9.10	Muntadher Aloda <i>Lack of Community Engagement in International Projects: Ur as A Case Study</i>
9.10-9.25	Allison Mickel <i>They Eat Too Much Mansaf to Care about the Stones: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Community Archaeology in Jordan</i>
9.25-9.40	Michael Campeggi* , Valentina Oselini , Claire Padovani , Luca Peyronel , Mohammed (Ako) Lashkri <i>Rewinding Traditions: An Ethnoarchaeological Enquiry on Ceramic Manufacturing in the Erbil Plain, Iraqi Kurdistan</i>
9.40-9.55	Nicolò Marchetti , Gabriele Giacosa* , Licia Proserpio <i>Rebuilding a Connection: Community Engagement Activities at Nineveh, Mosul</i>
9.55-10.10	Kirsten Hopper* , Bijan Rouhani , Nichole Sheldrick <i>Reflecting On Participation, Practice, and Progress in Digital Cultural Heritage Projects: Critical Look at the EAMENA-CPF Training Programme</i>
10.10-10.30	Q & A
10.30-10.45	Coffee break
10.50-11.05	Jaafar Jotheri <i>To What Extent Do Local Archaeologists Have the Right of Coauthorship?</i>
11.05-11.20	Ana Silkatcheva <i>Breaking Ground, Breaking (Language) Barriers: 'Colloquial Arabic for Archaeologists' as a Decolonial Initiative</i>
11.20-11.35	Yağmur Heffron <i>Staying in the Conversation: Archaeologists Learning Field Languages as a Baseline for Engaged Field Practice</i>
11.35-11.45	Short internal break
11.45-12.45	Q & A - Panel discussion using Speed Boat method

Main Speakers are indicated by [*] symbol.



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Tackling the Challenges of Heritage Ownership and Its Complexity: A View from Iraq and the Kurdistan Region

Lanah Haddad (Regional Director of TARIH in Erbil, Iraq)

How can one claim heritage when there is a disconnection from it and limited knowledge? Before discussing to whom heritage belongs, we need to understand that there is an imbalance of power in claiming heritage on several levels.

In the case of Iraq, the country was a pioneer in decolonizing its heritage on legal bases and asserting ownership, this path was abruptly halted by the international embargo imposed on the country in the 1990s. Up until then, the Iraqi government had made significant investments in the preservation of famous heritage sites and established numerous museums across the country with the goal of decentralizing the museum system. These efforts laid the foundation for organizing field trips for schools and integrating the country's heritage into the education system and knowledge production. These substantial investments and strategies were crucial in connecting the local community with its heritage, fostering interaction, and cultivating a sense of connection and ownership.

However, over four decades of continuous conflicts and destabilization have eroded these foundations, leaving the Iraqi community proud of its heritage but lacking a fundamental connection to it. This paper will discuss both the challenges and initiatives aimed at addressing these problems. Sharing experiences of bottom-up initiatives for building bridges and increasing knowledge within communities about heritage like production of physical games related to heritage and culture as well establishing public tours to heritage sites. Most importantly, it will advocate for changing the status quo of international heritage work in Iraq to improve the situation in a sustainable manner.



Lack Of Community Engagement in International Projects: Ur as A Case Study

Muntadher Aloda (State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Dhi Qar Governorate, Iraq)

Ur is one of Iraq's world's heritage sites and one of the few to attract earlier international excavations and projects. With the beginning of the Western excavations and discovery missions in Iraq in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Ur was one of their principal destinations. The international projects have continued their work at Ur during most political situations in Iraq; they started during the Ottoman period, the British mandate, the independent Kingdom of Iraq, the Republic of Iraq, and even after 2003. However, these international teams failed to conduct any community engagement during these long periods. They held the ideology of colonization during all that time. No Arabic publication or dissemination about Ur, no seminars or workshops for the local people of Ur, no plans for developing the site to attract tourists, no involvement of the local Iraqi archaeologist etc. The lack of this community engagement has resulted in a lack of knowledge about Ur among Iraqi archaeologists and local communities. In this paper, I will take Ur as an example of colonization and then talk about how the Iraqi heritage authority, known as the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), works on different levels to develop and enhance how international teams implement their excavations in Iraq and how important to engage the Iraqi archaeologists and local communities.



They Eat Too Much Mansaf to Care about the Stones: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Community Archaeology in Jordan

Allison Mickel (Lehigh University, United States of America)

Many discussions about decolonizing archaeology in postcolonial contexts emphasize the need for greater national sovereignty and stewardship over cultural heritage and patrimony. Repatriation processes, for instance, and UNESCO best practices tend to center the nation-state as key decision-maker for site and collection management. But a nation-state is hardly homogeneous, containing its own internal diversity and inequalities. This multiscalar tension within it must be considered when asking the question, “Whose Heritage is it?”

Cultural heritage in Jordan operates within a context of profound patriotism, deep regionalism, and fervent familial loyalty. Archaeological sites like Petra can function concurrently as a symbol of the unified nation as a whole and also a site of ardent contestation between, for instance, Bedouins and fellahin. Debates about conservation, access, and economic benefit from archaeological sites and assemblages often draw out divisions between North and South, or between urban and rural communities.

It is in this context that two Jordanian startup companies, Sela and Hand by Hand, work to build local capacity in archaeological management. In order to do so, they navigate not only the colonial legacy of foreign-dominated archaeology in the Near East, but also sometimes competing national and regional interests in cultural heritage management. Here, I present some of the means by which these companies work to support strong archaeological governance at the national level while also protecting local, provincial interests in archaeological sites and artifacts. I argue that pursuing both of these ends simultaneously, flexibly, and creatively, has made these companies most successful in pursuing their goal of community-led archaeology in Jordan.



Rewinding Traditions: An Ethnoarchaeological Enquiry on Ceramic Manufacturing in the Erbil Plain, Iraqi Kurdistan

Michael Campeggi*, **Valentina Oselini**, **Claire Padovani**, **Luca Peyronel** (Univerisy of Milan, Italy), **Mohammed (AKO) Lashkri** (Director of Archaeological Affairs in the General Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage, Kurdistan, Iraq)

Since Prehistory, the south-western Erbil Plain has been an important area of ceramic manufacturing. The discovery by the Italian Archaeological Expedition in the Erbil Plain (MAIPE) of production facilities dating back to the 5th and 3rd millennia BC at the sites of Helawa and Aliawa, together with the wide availability of clay sources in the landscape and the presence of nearby modern brick factories and pottery ateliers, indeed testifies to the persistence of this tradition.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the results of the first pilot season of MAIPE's ethnoarchaeological project, carried out in the framework of a series of public archaeology initiatives which are being implemented together with the Directorate of Antiquities and the Erbil Civilization Museum. During the fieldwork, the team aimed at documenting contemporary practices of brick and pottery making through a bottom-up approach. Thanks to the interaction with local actors (potters, brick workers) who are active in the neighboring area, we explore the artisans' knowledge and their perception of the archaeological landscape in relation to ancient traditions, co-establishing a narrative which sees cooperation and intangible heritage as pivotal to the reconstruction of the history of this area.

Main Speakers are indicated by [*] symbol.



Rebuilding a Connection: Community Engagement Activities at Nineveh, Mosul

Nicolò Marchetti, Gabriele Giacosa*, Licia Proserpio (University of
Bologna, Italy)

The historic city of Nineveh, located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in northern Iraq, represents a key site for the study of ancient Mesopotamia and southwestern Asia at large. However, its preservation is constantly under threat: the political instability experienced by the region in the last decades (culminated in the 2014-2017 occupation by the Islamic State) entailed somewhat poorly-coordinated actions by national and international institutions and widespread damages to the ancient site. Moreover, the urban expansion of the modern city of Mosul (with its Nebi Yunus sector) has greatly affected the archaeological area, with a constant encroachment of buildings and infrastructures over it. Against this backdrop, in 2021, the KALAM project, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and coordinated by the University of Bologna, has carried out an anthropological preliminary study involving the local communities living near and on the archaeological site of Nineveh. Our study aimed at collecting the communities' perceptions and narratives, and discussing current issues and possible future solutions for the preservation and enhancement of Nineveh according to its original keepers. The paper presents the qualitative data collected shedding light on the complex relation between the tangible heritage of Nineveh and its living communities.



Reflecting On Participation, Practice, and Progress in Digital Cultural Heritage Projects: a Critical Look at the EAMENA-CPF Training Programme

Kristen Hopper* (Durham University, United Kingdom), **Bijan Rouhani** (Oxford University, United Kingdom), **Nichole Sheldrick** (University of Leicester, United Kingdom)

Since 2016, the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA) Project has been involved in delivering training in methodologies for recording and monitoring endangered cultural heritage sites to national heritage agencies and civil society groups across the Middle East and North Africa. With this paper, we want to reflect on the design and delivery, successes, challenges, and shortcomings of the project from the perspectives of the training teams and those of our local collaborators. We will touch on topics such as the drivers of 'development' and 'impact' funding, systemic barriers (including social, political, financial, and technical) to the use and sustainable implementation of digital approaches to cultural heritage research and management in MENA and digital colonialism, community participation and inclusion, data access vs. community rights, and project sustainability. Ultimately, we want to provide a critical review of a long-running capacity-building project in SW Asia and beyond and consider how we can better shape future projects.



To What Extent Do Local Archaeologists Have the Right of Coauthorship?

Jaafar Jotheri (University of Al-Qadisiyah, Iraq)

This paper will discuss why the local archaeologists feel they have been left behind and ignored by their international counterparts regarding coauthorship. I interviewed several local and international archaeologists and debated the reasons and consequences of the lack of involvement of the locals in publications.

It is evident, especially for international archaeologists, that publications are vital at individual and institutional levels. They (I mean here, international archaeologists with colonized ideology) knew very well about how publications increase researchers' visibility and credibility and promote career opportunities. They keep reminding each other that the more often you write in prestigious journals, the more credibility you have. They know that publication may also bring more funding for the institute as it brings attention to scholars and their institutions. However, they do not see the same case with the local archaeologists and institutions.

Many local archaeologists knew that coauthorship is not an automatic right and cannot be gifted; however, in many cases, they were working hard and made themselves eligible for it, and that is why they still believe that internationals are deliberately and discriminately prevented the locals from their right to coauthorship.

Local and international archaeologists may have followed the related rules and regulations of copywriting in their countries, allowing the international to publish without local involvement. However, the international should look at the morality side of teamwork and discuss coauthorship with the locals before starting the work, agree in writing and modify the agreement through the project stages.



Breaking Ground, Breaking (Language) Barriers: 'Colloquial Arabic for Archaeologists' as a Decolonial Initiative

Ana Silkatcheva (University of Oxford, United Kingdom)

Amongst discussion of the decolonial efforts required in archaeological practice in Southwest Asia, the capacity of visiting archaeologists to use local languages has only recently, and still only informally, emerged as a topic. Yet choices in language use – and specifically, choices against the use of certain languages – are fundamental to continuing colonial practice and the perpetuation of power imbalances.

In the Arabic-speaking countries of Southwest Asia, visiting archaeologists still overwhelmingly lack skill and proficiency in Arabic. On one hand, this unfairly places the burden of communication on the professional archaeologists of the host countries. But even more significantly, it also short-changes local archaeological labourers on a basic, human level. These individuals, both the most crucial to the progress of archaeological projects and the least able to communicate in foreign languages, are most affected by their interactions with foreign archaeologists. The rudimentary 'Dig Arabic' shared by visiting archaeologists is limited to greetings, instructions, and exclamations: expressions without expectation of meaningful response. Through this one-sided, top-down communicative strategy, local staff of archaeological projects are prevented from fully expressing their own needs and personalities or meeting their desires to be understood on a human level. And with foreign archaeologists as de facto 'cultural ambassadors' (whether this role is desired or not), the communication barrier hinders cross-cultural understanding on both sides.

Negative individual and collective attitudes towards language learning, certainly in the English-speaking world, are only partly to blame for this status quo. More significantly, the nature of Arabic as a diglossic language has led to socio-cultural circumstances that complicate language acquisition. Arabic exists broadly in two divergent varieties: elevated Modern Standard



Arabic for rare formal contexts and the colloquial dialects of everyday life. Despite the use of the latter as the medium of daily communication, pedagogical practice exclusively favours the former. As a result, resources for learning colloquial Arabic are exceedingly scarce, thwarting an easy solution to the problem even if archaeological training were to begin to include the acquisition of local languages.

How then to conceptualise a remedy for this complex situation? In 2014 the author created a professional development course, 'Colloquial Arabic for Archaeologists', for the Centre for Classical and Near Eastern Studies of Australia at the University of Sydney. It was taught there in 2014, 2016 and 2018, and at the University of Oxford in 2023. Designed to empower archaeologists to move away from a colonialist dictation of orders and instructions, the course aims to build capacity towards meaningful two-way communication. Eschewing simple lists of phrases and vocabulary items, its approach emphasises grammar and sentence formation as well as understanding of the cultural context. This paper presents 'Colloquial Arabic for Archaeologists' as an example of a language-based tool of decolonisation and considers its challenges and prospects for future wider implementation.



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Staying in the Conversation: Archaeologists Learning Field Languages as a Baseline for Engaged Field Practice

Yağmur Heffron (University College London, United Kingdom)

In this paper I will offer a series of brief observations on how foregrounding field language acquisition can be a powerful means of establishing genuine and long-lasting engagement between foreign archaeological teams and local communities.

Taking an ethnobiographical approach to illustrate broader patterns, I will draw from my own experiences of closing the language gap for others as a native Turkish speaker on primarily Anglophone projects in Türkiye over the past 20 years. The key questions I will raise for discussion revolve around distributing the responsibility of language-learning more equally among international teams, paying special attention to formal strategies on the part of institutions, grant awarding bodies, as well as grant holders to incorporate field language acquisition as a fundamental skill for conducting long-term fieldwork in a host country.



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