

ICOA1934: STABILIZATION AND RECOVERY OF IRAQI CULTURAL HERITAGE IN POST-ISIS CONTEXTS: ONGOING EFFORTS AT THE IRAQI INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ANTIQUITIES AND HERITAGE

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 1: Heritage as Peace Builder, Tying and Benefitting Community

Location: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 13, 2017, 09:25 – 09:40

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Abstract: Active since 2009, the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage in Erbil, Iraq is a unique, global collaboration that trains Iraqi cultural heritage specialists in international-standard heritage conservation practice. In its earliest years, the Iraqi Institute partnered with American academic institutions to deliver long-form coursework in architectural conservation, collections conservation, and archaeological site preservation. The Institute has also hosted shorter courses offered by other nations and institutions, most notably the Italian Foreign Ministry and the World Monuments Fund.

After the spread of ISIS into Iraq in 2014, the Iraqi Institute expanded its mission to include emergency preparedness and disaster response approaches. In 2015, several organizations partnered to deliver a short course in the safeguarding and recovery of heritage in conflict areas. Based on their role in that successful course, the Smithsonian Institution returned to the Iraqi Institute in 2016 to deliver a 22-week program that focused on the heritage conservation fundamentals needed to effectively prepare for, and respond to conflict-driven damage to heritage.

A highlight of all coursework at the Institute is the importance of heritage in civil society in all contexts, including stabilization and recovery from disasters. Additionally, the Iraqi Institute welcomes students of all religious, ethnic and gender identities from across Iraq, and connects them to Iraqi and international experts who teach the courses. In this way, the Institute serves as a safe space for Iraqis to learn about each other while learning ways to improve the management of their own irreplaceable cultural heritage, and promotes peace and understanding between Iraqis and their international colleagues.

This paper will highlight the Institute's origins through the lens of its latest collaboration with the Smithsonian: an effort to directly support Iraqis in planning for the stabilization and recovery of the Nimrud archaeological site.

Key words: *peace, conflict, disaster, identity*

Overview of the Need for Heritage Conservation Education in Iraq

Practitioners may be aware of the recent challenges to supporting heritage education and practice in Iraq, such as terrorism and regional instability. Sadly, these challenges are not new. Prior to 1980, Iraq boasted a robust and internationally-recognized cultural heritage sector staffed by career professionals with advanced degrees and decades of experience in museum management and archaeology. The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, the 1991 and 2003 Gulf Wars, decades of disinterest in cultural heritage on the part of a repressive government, and the isolation and sanctions of the 1990's decimated this sector leaving a shrinking staff lacking basic skills to manage, interpret and preserve damaged, looted and deteriorating sites and collections. More recently, Iraq's heritage sector has been challenged by extremist terrorist action, such as the intentional, rampant destruction of cultural heritage by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS).

The Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage

In 2008, the United States (U.S.) Department of State and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad launched an ambitious effort, the “Iraq Cultural Heritage Project”. The project brought together the Iraqi Ministry of Culture’s State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and U.S. and international cultural heritage experts to enhance the capacity of the professional Iraqi cultural heritage sector. This remarkable U.S. – Iraqi partnership created the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage, a multi-institutional collaboration with the mission “to preserve the legacy of humanity contained in the unique cultural heritage of Iraq. It accomplishes this by bringing experts from around the world to Erbil, Iraq to train Iraqi museum and heritage professionals in the preservation and conservation of their own irreplaceable treasures”. The Institute’s state-of-the art educational facility is also place where Iraqis can come to learn about each other. Course participants are representative of all Iraq: men and women, Arabs and Kurds, Muslims and Christians, Sunni and Shia – all drawn together by a shared passion for preservation and a place that is home to some of humankind’s most important ancient sites and artefacts.



Fig.1– The Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (Photo: Brian Michael Lione).

Coursework at the Iraqi Institute 2009-2014

Since 2009, the Iraqi Institute has provided training and academic instruction for over 500 Iraqi heritage professionals in courses sponsored by the U.S. and other governments, foreign academic institutions, and international non-governmental heritage organizations. Students are drawn from the ranks of the SBAH and the KRG General Directorate of Antiquities, and university faculty and staff; they are already working in positions where they can apply their new skills and access to international networks. Topics of instruction are decided upon in consultation with Iraqi authorities to ensure that the lessons in the classroom support both the immediate and strategic needs of the Iraqi heritage establishment.

The Institute curriculum is taught by international expert instructors who work with students for one to four weeks as part of longer courses from ten to 24 weeks. These instructors have the highest qualifications and experience. In addition to teaching, the instructors also connect students to international conferences and research, and provide advice and contacts to assist them in continuing their education outside the Institute.

The language of instruction is English, the main international language of the conservation profession, with in-class interpretation to Arabic and Kurdish. Students travel from all eighteen Iraqi provinces to Erbil, and are in residence during the duration of their coursework. On-site dormitories, daily shared lunches, and team-based homework assignments encourage a collegial, collaborative atmosphere.

Between 2009-2014, regularly scheduled courses include Museum Collections Care and Conservation, Architectural Conservation, and Archaeological Site Preservation. All courses teach international-standard strategies and practical approaches for identification, evaluation, protection and conservation of antiquities and heritage. In addition to these longer-form courses, the Institute has hosted short trainings on specific topics, such as: 3D laser scanning, manuscripts conservation, cuneiform tablet conservation, and heritage site planning, among others, and has welcomed short workshops ranging from Iraqi university curriculum development to a needs assessment for protecting the cultural heritage of religious and ethnic minority communities.

The city of Erbil is an excellent living laboratory for students. The Erbil Citadel (a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] World Heritage site) is adjacent to the Institute, and offers an opportunity to see architectural and archaeological site conservation in action. Local museums, including the governmental Erbil Civilizations Museum, provide insight into collections conservation and management. Archaeological sites in Erbil and throughout the region are frequently visited to learn more about site mapping and protection.



Fig.2– The city of Erbil is a living laboratory for students at the Iraqi Institute (Photo: Iraqi Institute).

Key to the Institute’s success is the use of ‘Master Trainers’ – well-trained Iraqi teaching assistants who facilitate the implementation of courses by leading classroom exercises and practical projects, and providing basic instruction. As with the student body of the Institute, the makeup of the cadre of Master Trainers is a mix of genders, ethnicities, and religions – again, promoting unity and understanding across Iraq.

The Institute is managed by a five-member Iraqi Board of Directors, with support of an Advisory Council of Iraqi and international heritage experts. Current representatives on the Advisory Council include members from the SBAH, KRG, UNESCO, the Universities of Arizona, Delaware and Pennsylvania, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Smithsonian Institution.

A Change in Focus at the Iraqi Institute

Early in 2014, course directors and Institute staff began to notice an increased difficulty in obtaining students from western provinces bordering Syria. In many cases, the slow movement of ISIS into these provinces was causing disruption as villages were subsumed by the terrorist influx. By that Spring, as ISIS moved northward into Nineveh Province and towards Mosul, thousands of families surged into the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, seeking refuge with relatives, in rented accommodations, or in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). These IDP camps joined several refugee camps already in operation in the Region for Syrians fleeing from their own conflict. Still, coursework at the Institute continued. By July, Mosul had fallen, and many felt that Erbil would be next. The directors of a course in Archaeological Site Preservation, half complete by August, decided to cease operations and return the students home for their own safety.

Almost overnight, the focus and approach of the Institute changed from one of capacity-building for long-term skills development to supporting more immediate needs of disaster preparedness and emergency response. In May of 2015, a coalition of organizations, including the University of Pennsylvania, the Smithsonian Institution, and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) offered a short course to eighteen Iraqi heritage professionals using the “First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis” (FAC) methodology pioneered by ICCROM. The course, supported by the Prins Claus Fund in the Netherlands and the JM Kaplan Fund in the U.S., proved that the Institute could also be used to support immediate heritage management needs.



Fig.3– Participants in the 2015 ‘Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response’ course at the Iraqi Institute recover mock artefacts as part of a class exercise (Photo: Iraqi Institute).

The success of the initial ‘first aid’ course led the Smithsonian to seek additional funding to expand the Institute’s emergency course offerings. In early 2016, the Smithsonian began its first course in ‘Fundamentals of Heritage Conservation’ with eighteen students. In a departure from previous long-form, specialized courses, the new effort sought to teach the basic skills all Iraqi heritage professionals would need to manage antiquities and heritage threatened or affected by conflict. The course included much of the ICCROM FAC methodology of documentation, stabilization, recovery, and protection, and expanded on it by including disaster risk management strategies for protecting endangered heritage. As part of this preventative approach, the participants were encouraged to coordinate and work with those not traditionally affiliated with heritage management in Iraq (where heritage is predominantly state-run), like local citizens, municipalities, security and military forces, and religious communities – again, encouraging peace building and reconciliation through a shared interest in the past.



Fig.4– As with all courses at the Iraqi Institute, students in the ‘Fundamentals’ program in 2016 learned practical skills in the classroom (left) which they then immediately practiced in real-world field settings (Photos: Katharyn Hanson).

The Nimrud Rescue Project and the Future of Iraqi Institute Coursework

Near the close of the first ‘Fundamentals’ Course, Iraqi and coalition forces intensified their offensive against ISIS in and around Mosul. By mid-November 2016, ISIS had been pushed out of Nimrud, the ancient Assyrian city of Kalhu (the biblical Calah) located 20 miles (30 km) southeast of Mosul. More than a year earlier, ISIS had publicly detonated several reliefs and sculptures at the site, and used bulldozers to destroy the remains of a ziggurat, push destroyed sculptural pieces into large piles, and destroy all site support facilities. The infamous destruction was widely reported on by Iraqi and international media.

Early in 2017, representatives of the Smithsonian met with Mr. Qais Rashid, Deputy Minister of Culture and head of the SBAH. In this meeting, the Smithsonian offered their support to continue to focus their successful efforts of 2015 and 2016, this time working on an actual site with a dedicated team of SBAH employees. Deputy Minister Rashid indicated his willingness to accept the Smithsonian’s assistance, and suggested that Nimrud – once a popular destination for heritage tourism and a site of long-term archaeological investigation – be the first site considered in a new effort. The rescue of Nimrud would be an important first step in showing the people of Iraq and the world how Iraq continues to highly value its cultural heritage – and how terrorism fails to change those values.

Within a few months, and with funding from the U.S. Government and the Smithsonian secured, the Nimrud Rescue Project began in earnest with a team of 24 Iraqis, including eight Institute Master Trainers, plus several experts from the Smithsonian. The Nimrud Rescue project represents a continued evolution of collaboration between the Iraqi heritage establishment and international heritage organizations. The project focuses on devising and implementing a recovery plan for Nimrud while defining a transferrable process and protocol to use on other affected sites. To date, the Smithsonian has completed three mission trips to Erbil to work with the diverse Iraqi team. As part of the recovery plan, the team is working on improving mapping, documentation and condition assessment of the site in preparation for recovering artefacts and sculptural remains. Continuing an Institute tradition, local Erbil sites are used for practical exercises. In the most recent mission, the team learned heavy lifting techniques, and practiced a full recovery of mock artefacts from a construction debris field in the outskirts of Erbil. While the team practices recovery exercises, the Smithsonian is working to build covered, secure storage on site; once complete, the recovery will begin in earnest.



Fig.5– The Nimrud Rescue Project focuses on designing and implementing a recovery plan for the ancient city of Nimrud. Project participants learn key skills – like heavy lifting techniques– using mock sites in Erbil prior to working on the site itself. (Photo: Iraqi Institute).

Conclusion

Throughout the nine-year history of the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage, Iraqis have worked together in the interest of protecting their shared cultural heritage, despite differences in gender, ethnicity, or religion. The pluralistic, inclusive approach to heritage management taught in many courses at the Institute highlight best practices while fostering trust and encouraging mutual understanding. The ease with which the students overcome these various differences is a testament to the convening power of heritage, and is in stark contrast to the highly politicized religious and ethnic schisms reported on throughout Iraq. The Nimrud Rescue Project builds on the Institute’s success. In addition to evolving the curriculum to meet Iraqi needs, the project also supports the reconciliation of differences to promote peace.

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Sous-thème 02: Le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la construction de la paix et de la réconciliation

Session 1: Le Patrimoine En Tant Que Constructeur De Paix, Communautaire De Types Et De Bénéfices
Lieu: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre
Date et heure: 13 Décembre, 2017, 09:25 – 09:40

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Résumé: Actif depuis 2009, l'Institut irakien pour la conservation des antiquités et du patrimoine à Erbil, en Irak, est le fruit d'une collaboration mondiale unique qui forme des spécialistes du patrimoine culturel irakien à la pratique de la conservation du patrimoine selon les normes internationales. Dans les premières années, l'Institut irakien s'est associé à des institutions académiques américaines pour dispenser des cours de longue durée sur la conservation architecturale, la conservation des collections et la préservation des sites archéologiques. L'Institut a également accueilli des cours plus courts offerts par d'autres nations et institutions, notamment le ministère italien des Affaires étrangères et le World Monuments Fund.

Après la diffusion de l'EIIS¹ en Irak en 2014, l'Institut irakien a élargi sa mission pour inclure des mesures de préparation aux situations d'urgence et de réponse aux catastrophes. En 2015, plusieurs organisations se sont associées pour offrir un bref cours sur la sauvegarde et la récupération du patrimoine dans les zones de conflit. En se fondant sur le rôle qu'ils ont joué dans la réussite de ces cours, le Smithsonian Institute est revenu auprès de l'Institut irakien en 2016 pour réaliser un programme de 22 semaines axé sur les fondamentaux de la conservation du patrimoine nécessaires pour se préparer et répondre efficacement aux dommages causés au patrimoine à la suite du conflit.

L'une des caractéristiques des cours de l'Institut Irakien est l'importance du rôle joué par le patrimoine dans la société civile quel qu'en soit le contexte, y compris lors de la stabilisation et de la reconstruction après les catastrophes. En outre, cet Institut accueille des étudiants de tout l'Irak, quelle que soit leur appartenance religieuse, ethniques ou leur sexe, et les met en rapport avec les experts irakiens et internationaux qui prodiguent les cours. L'Institut sert ainsi d'espace sécurisé pour que les Irakiens apprennent les uns des autres, tout en acquérant les moyens d'améliorer la gestion de leur propre

patrimoine culturel irremplaçable, et en favorisant la paix et la compréhension entre les Irakiens et leurs collègues internationaux.

Cet article retracera les origines de l'Institut Irakien au vu de sa dernière collaboration avec le Smithsonian : un effort en vue d'aider directement les Irakiens dans la planification de la stabilisation et du rétablissement du site archéologique de Nimrud.

Mots clés: *paix, conflit, désastres, identité*

¹ EIIS, plus connu en France sous le nom de Daesh (*NDT*)