

THE BRITISH INSTITUTE FOR  
THE STUDY OF IRAQ  
(GERTRUDE BELL MEMORIAL)

المعهد البريطاني لدراسة العراق

NEWSLETTER NO. 34  
2016



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## CHAIR OF COUNCIL'S INTRODUCTION

It's now over two years since ISIS/Da'esh invaded northern and western Iraq. Although liberation of occupied areas is now making good progress, many people's lives and freedoms are still at risk. This year we have been having preliminary conversations with the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, and with UNESCO Iraq, about ways in which BISI can support the post-ISIS rebuilding of cultural heritage, and the individuals and institutions involved in that work.

As a first step we have agreed with the British Museum (who now hold the relevant records) a plan to digitise and release online as much as possible of the BSAI's old excavation documentation from Nimrud (1948–1963), so that decisions can be made about the badly damaged site with the fullest information to hand. We hope that the project can begin over the winter.

Relatedly I'm sad to report the death in November 2015 of Jeffrey Orchard, Deputy Director (resident in Baghdad) of our predecessor organisation, the British School of Archaeology in Iraq from 1965 to 1971, and director of the 1963 season of work at Nimrud.

Meanwhile, we can celebrate the success of our long-running joint campaign with UK Blue Shield for government ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The relevant Bill is now going through Parliament and should pass into law in mid-September, mid-October at the latest. Peter Stone and Phil Deans of UKBS have been indefatigable in their efforts and it has been a real pleasure to work with them on this.

Another cause for celebration is the official opening of Basrah Museum on 27 September 2016. The project began over a decade ago, as a British Army legacy project of the post-war period. A new British charity, Friends of Basrah Museum, was then created to raise funds and offer long-term support. BISI has also helped in various ways over the years. We marked the opening with a two-day workshop on 28–29 September 2016, bringing together museum curators and historians of the region to Basrah from all over the world, to help our Basrah colleagues make the most of their resources and visitor base. The event was also a chance to formally congratulate Museum Director, Mr Qahtan Al-Abeed, for his success in achieving UNESCO World Heritage status for the southern Iraqi marshes and their associated archaeological sites.



The official opening of Basrah Museum took place on 27 September 2016



In early 2017, the British Academy will publish the papers of the 2013 BISI Conference exploring the life and legacy of Gertrude Bell

Photo: the Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University A\_340

A third reason to rejoice is the British Academy's imminent publication of *Gertrude Bell - A Life and Legacy*, edited by BISI Council members Paul Collins and Charles Tripp with a great deal of assistance from Joan Porter MacIver and Lauren Mulvee. You may remember the excellent conference of this name, which we held three years ago, and which provided the papers for this volume. If you would like to listen again you can find recordings of all the talks—and indeed all recent BISI lectures—on our beautifully revamped new website.

That new website, designed by Pedalo/Allsund and put together by Lauren Mulvee and a host of volunteer contributors, is just one outward sign of a busy year for BISI's staff. As our Administrator, Lauren has always been at the heart of everything we do. However, at the end of 2016 after almost five years of brilliant work for BISI, Lauren will be leaving us to start a family. I have hugely enjoyed working with

her, and it is a real pleasure to thank her for everything she has done for all of us, and to wish her and her husband Rich well on their new adventure. We will have a new administrator in post for the start of the new year.

Karon Cook of Infinity Accountants continues to keep our financial affairs in impeccable order. Ali Khadr and Phoebe Walker have proved excellent Development Co-ordinators, and though Phoebe is leaving us to take up a full-time post with the Poetry Society I am delighted that she will continue to be available for consultations.

We have been without a Visiting Scholars Co-ordinator for most of the past 12 months, since Kristian Girling moved on to focus on finishing his PhD, but we are currently recruiting a new incumbent, ahead of the next round of scholarships this coming spring. Planning for the Basrah workshop would have been impossible without administrative help from volunteer conference organiser Agnes Henriksen. Energetic and enthusiastic Social Media Volunteer, Jen Hicks, leaves us to begin teacher training at the University of Oxford, and we thank her for all she has done to keep our Facebook and Twitter pages active and engaging.

There have also been changes at Patron and Trustee level. We offer a warm welcome to Nadhim Zahawi MP and Sir Terence Clark as new Patrons of the Institute. Alasdair Watson has stepped down from Council after several years of service, and former Council member (and current co-editor of *IRAQ*) Paul Collins has returned through co-option. Council have elected him and Nelida Fuccaro to replace me and Charles Tripp as their Chair and Vice-Chair when our terms of office end in February 2017. Both have already been busy shadowing our roles and making exciting plans for the future. As I sign off my final Newsletter introduction, I have every confidence that Paul and Nelida will lead BISI effectively and imaginatively in fulfilling its charitable role, and that you will give them your fullest support.

*Eleanor Robson*



**Another view of the new Basrah Museum on the shore of the Shatt Al-Arab**  
*Photo: Eleanor Robson*

## ACADEMIC GRANT REPORTS

### Investigations at Alexandria-on-the-Tigris, Charax Spasinou



Along the ramparts at Charax Spasinou

Photo: Robert Killick

Few names from the ancient world resonate quite so loudly in the modern era as that of Alexander the Great. When in spring 2015 we were invited by the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage to work at a city founded by Alexander, we could scarcely refuse. One year on, we have just completed our first season of survey at Alexandria-on-the-Tigris, known later as Charax Spasinou. That we were able to respond so swiftly to the request is entirely due to the generous support of, among others, Baron Lorne Thyssen-Bornemisza at The Augustus Foundation, the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and, of course, BISI itself.

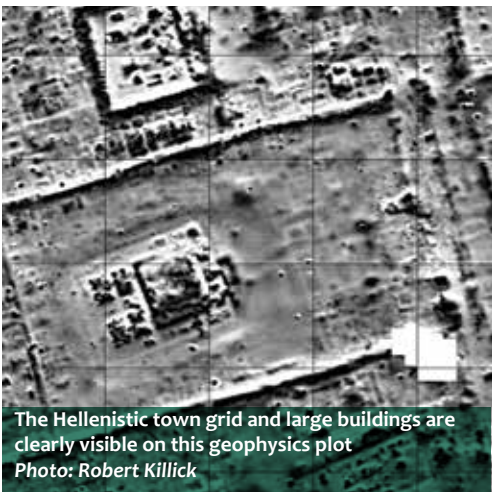
Alexander sailed down the Eulaeus River from Susa in 324BC, and came to its confluence with the Tigris. At that time, access to open water and the Gulf was also close by. The strategic advantage of the place was obvious, and so Alexandria-on-the-Tigris was founded. Unfortunately, Alexander didn't realise just how prone to flooding the entire

region was (and in fact remained so until the construction of the Hindiya Barrage in the 1950s). After devastating floods, the city was twice re-founded, once as Antiochia in 166BC and again in 141BC as Charax Spasinou. As the latter, it became the capital of the Kingdom of Characene and a major trading emporium, exchanging goods with India, Palmyra, Petra, and onwards to Rome.

The remains of Charax Spasinou (modern Khayaber) lie some 40 km north of Basrah. The ramparts rise to four metres above the plain, complete with bastions at regular intervals. To the south, the old course of the Eulaeus River is clearly visible and we estimate that the remains of the city are spread over an area of about five square kilometres. Debris from the Iraq-Iran war still litters the archaeological site and some areas have been badly disturbed by old military installations. Erosion, agricultural activity and looting continue to be threats.

Working at such a large site presents some interesting challenges. How do you survey and map such a large area, for example? Even with our modern surveying instruments, this would be a lengthy and arduous task. Fortunately, the use of a drone combined with mapping software provided a solution. Flying at a height of 100 metres, our drone took 5,000 photographs over nine days, covering an area of some eight square kilometres. These images are now being compiled into a digital elevation model which will be used to generate topographical maps, including a contour map and shaded relief maps.

Finding out how much archaeology is left at Charax after two thousand years of repeated flooding was another challenge. Here geophysics came to our rescue: armed with a caesium magnetometer, one of the world's leading experts, Dr Joerg Fassbinder, with his team from the University of Munich, surveyed over eight hectares in ten days. The results were beyond expectations: entire districts of the city were revealed below the surface, including substantial public buildings and residential houses. The orthogonal plan produced by the survey clearly reflects the original lay-out of the Hellenistic city, one which was retained in succeeding periods.



An evaluation trench placed across one of the district boundaries found a ditch with mud-brick walls running parallel on both sides. A puzzling feature was a row of Parthian torpedo jars set upside-down in a solid layer of clay. The tips of the bases had been deliberately and neatly cut away, leaving entry holes at the top. Two further evaluation trenches found walls belonging to two of the large buildings that showed most clearly in the magnetometer survey.



A row of Parthian torpedo jars lining a ditch  
Photo: Robert Killick

The logistical challenges of working at Charax are substantial, but these preliminary results have more than repaid the effort. Our mission for the future will be to implement a comprehensive research and excavation strategy that will do justice to this important Alexandrian city.

*Dr Robert Killick*  
Honorary Fellow, Manchester University

## Central Zagros Archaeological Project: Excavations at the Early Neolithic Site of Bestansur March – April 2016 Fieldwork Report

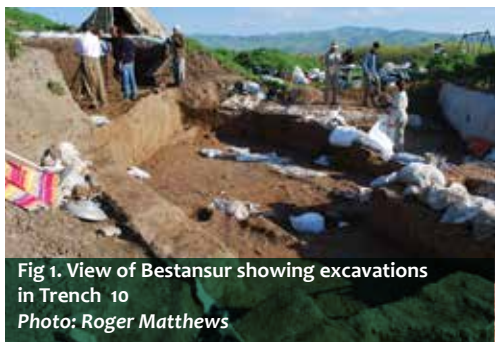


Fig 1. View of Bestansur showing excavations in Trench 10  
Photo: Roger Matthews

### BACKGROUND

The overall aim of the Central Zagros Archaeological Project (CZAP), within which excavations at Bestansur are situated, is to investigate the important transition from mobile hunting and foraging to sedentary farming and animal herding in one of the key heartlands of these changes, the ‘hilly flanks’ of the eastern Fertile Crescent. Five field seasons at Bestansur, Sulaimaniyah province, Iraqi Kurdistan, have established that the site is one of the most important Early Neolithic sites excavated in Iraq, with a series of neighbourhoods of clustered rectilinear buildings and materials from local and trans-regional networks spanning >1500km. The settlement was situated next to the second largest spring on the fertile Shahrizor Plain, and had access to rich biodiverse wild and managed food resources that included land-snails, fish, freshwater crab and molluscs, birds, pig, sheep, goat, deer and cattle.

During the spring 2016 excavations at Bestansur we aimed to complete excavation of an extraordinary Early Neolithic building, radiocarbon dated to 7650 cal BC.

This structure has multiple rooms with a large main room, 7.8 x 4.7m, approached through an impressive stone-lined threshold and ante-chamber. In the 2012-2015 excavations we recovered the remains of at least 28 human individuals, of whom 20 were aged 0-8 years and the remainder adults, male and female. Associated with the burials were beads of clay, shell and carnelian.

## REPORT OF 2016 EXCAVATIONS AT BESTANSUR 26 MARCH – 15 APRIL 2016



Fig 2. Drone image of Trench 10, Building 5  
Image courtesy of Dr Tobin Hartnell, American University of Iraq, Sulaimaniyah

Excavations at Bestansur in spring 2016 focused on Trench 10 (Fig. 1). We expanded Trench 10 to an area of 18 x 14m, which enabled us to expose a significant area of Neolithic architecture on the lower eastern slopes of the mound (Fig. 2).

Excavations concentrated firstly on investigation and analysis of the human burials below the floors of Space 50 and the stratigraphic context of these, and secondly on defining the extent of the building in which they were placed, Building 5, dated to c. 9700 BC.



We established that there are an exceptional number of human remains interred within Space 50. The excavations this season increased the number of individuals identified from 28 to at least 55 individuals, with more remains detected but left preserved in the ground for future seasons. This number of individuals is higher than that found in many houses from other Neolithic sites, which at Tell Halula in Syria, for example, is c. 5-15 within single buildings. The high number within Building 5 is larger than expected for a single household and suggests that there were extensive and long-lived relations between communities of individuals at Bestansur.

Four principal groups of human remains were investigated in the south and east of Space 50. All of these represent selective burial of particular skeletal parts, predominantly of skulls, long bones and ribs. Two of these groups were of mixed age, C1804 and C1810. C1804 included a spread of red-pigment between clusters of bones (Fig. 3) and C1810 included traces of white mineral material on many bones and a skull as well as red pigment (Fig. 4). A third group predominantly comprised juveniles and infants, C1812. The fourth group comprised scattered remains of human bone in the fill below the floors associated with scattered beads of shell.



**Fig 3. Red pigment on bones adjacent to two skulls, C1804**  
Photo: Roger Matthews



**Fig. 4. Red pigment and white plaster adhering to bones, C1810**  
Photo: Roger Matthews

As the walls of Space 50 slope inwards, c. 10 cm of deposits have been left against the base and lower sections of the walls. These microstratigraphic sequences were carefully cleaned with an artist's palette knife, photographed and drawn at 1:5 and 1:10 to investigate the history of the construction and use of Building 5 and the complex burial sequence throughout the foundation, occupation and infill of the Building.

The north of Building 5, the western narrow rooms and the northwest corner of Space 50 and adjacent buildings were defined by extending trench 10 to the northwest.

We will continue excavation of this extraordinary deposit and building in spring 2017 and beyond.

## Human remains

Recording of human remains was conducted in the field and the laboratory by osteoarchaeologist Dr Sam Walsh. We are very grateful for permission to export human bones and teeth for analysis, including diet, health and mobility.

## Small finds

A total of 74 small finds were catalogued over the course of the season, almost all from Space 50. Finds predominantly included beads

of shell, stone, and dentalium, as well as two cowrie shells. We also had some metal finds from later levels.

## Later levels

We excavated several stone walls, pits and ovens which were situated above the Neolithic levels. According to associated pottery these levels date principally to the Iron Age.

## Heavy residue processing and lithic analysis

A total of 22 flotation samples were processed, including sorting of heavy residues. All chipped stone materials from this season were fully recorded.

## Outreach

We continued a programme of outreach activities, including engagement with many media and TV companies from across Iraq.

## Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Sulaimaniyah Directorate of Antiquities for all their support, in particular to the Director, Kamal Rasheed Raheem, the Director of the Museum, Hashim Hama, and our government representatives, Kamal Raof Aziz and Sami Jamil Hama Rashid, who have helped us in many ways and have contributed greatly to the success of the season. The excavation team comprised staff of the University of Reading and other UK universities, including Dr Sam Walsh, osteoarchaeologist, along with team members from Sulaimaniyah Directorate of Antiquities. We are grateful to them all for their hard work all season.

The excavations were financially supported by generous grants from the Gerald Averay Wainwright Fund of the University of Oxford and BISI. We are very grateful to these bodies for their kind support.

*Professor Roger Matthews and Dr Wendy Matthews  
Reading University*

## Ur Region Archaeology Project



The start of the 2016 excavations: the fortified public building at Tell Khaiber, c. 1,500 BC Photo: URAP

Since we last reported in the 2014 BISI newsletter on the activities of the Ur Region Archaeology Project, three more seasons of excavation and research have taken place. It is a pleasure and a privilege to bring BISI members up to date on the latest results.<sup>1</sup>

While we now know a lot more about Tell Khaiber, it continues to intrigue and challenge us. It was settled around the turn of the third millennium, as quantities of re-deposited solid-footed goblets and Jemdet Nasr artefacts attest,<sup>2</sup> but the occupation accessible for investigation dates to the time of the Sealand Dynasty, in the middle of the second millennium BC. The major feature of this is the large building (henceforth the ‘Public Building’) first spotted in satellite photos, which dominates the low mound, occupying over 4,000 square metres. This has duly been the main focus of our research. To date, we have recovered the plan of about three-quarters of the building by surface clearance and have excavated fourteen rooms, in whole or in part.

The southern third of the Public Building is the oldest part. This was originally free standing. It had a substantial perimeter wall, nearly 4m thick, with external towers all the way round,

and a single entrance on the north-eastern side. Elements of the internal plan of this part of the building are typical of Old Babylonian domestic architecture, even if we cannot find parallels for the whole. An antechamber restricts access to the central courtyard. On the opposite side of the courtyard from the antechamber is a candidate for the main reception room. Excavation has concentrated on the rooms along the eastern side of the courtyard where we have found an archive of over 150 inscribed tablets, the majority being tabular accounts of collection and disbursement of quantities of grain. From these we can piece together a picture of an administrative centre in the middle of the countryside, regulating production and distribution of agricultural produce, including ‘to the palace’. There are school texts as well as the occasional letter, and a court case. Best of all, one has a date from the thirteenth year of Sealand Dynasty king Ayardaragalama, which places our administrative activities firmly in the years around 1,500 BC.<sup>3</sup> There are otherwise no provenanced documents from this time, and no significant archaeological exposure of remains either, so these discoveries become all the more exciting.

In 2016, we reached the lowest extant floor level in the southern part of the building, and found underneath a series of six parallel vaults. These sub-floor structures, at least 12 m long, run from the main external wall as far as, and possibly into and beyond, the central courtyard. Suggestions for their function include suspended flooring for aerating grain stores or perhaps terracing. Meanwhile, surface scraping has revealed the plan of much of the later northern addition. As it survives, the plan is surprisingly irregular when compared with the southern part, but this may be because we are seeing a later phase on the highest part of the mound, dating to a time when the function of the building had changed. An exception is the row of at least ten identical rooms along the eastern edge where perhaps the original lay-out was retained. These are curious. Most have an oven next to the doorway. Perhaps we should think of accommodation for soldiers, slaves, or other personnel. Investigation of nearby private houses, broadly contemporary with the very latest preserved levels of the Public Building, yielded finds indicative of wealthy status, such as a mirror, spearheads and other implements of copper. An intramural double-pot burial in the corner of one house, cut from levels now eroded, is probably early Kassite in date. The settlement has barely any other indications of Kassite occupation such as the characteristic heavy goblets, so abundant at nearby Tell Khaiber 2, so we conclude that occupation ceased around the time the double-pot grave was dug.



**Iraqi archaeologist Ahlam Jabbar works on a double-pot burial Photo: URAP**

A formal interim report will appear in *IRAQ* 79: S. Campbell *et al*, 'Tell Khaiber: an administrative centre of the Sealand period'.

Dr Jane Moon  
Honorary Fellow, Manchester University

<sup>1</sup> A full list of all our supporters is available on our website [www.urarchaeology.org](http://www.urarchaeology.org) as are annual illustrated summary reports.

<sup>2</sup> D Calderbank, and J. Moon 2016, 'A Ceramic Assemblage of the Early Literate Periods from Sumer', in Y. Heffron, A.B. Stone and M.J. Worthington (eds.): *At the Dawn of History: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of J. Nicholas Postgate*. Winona Lake.

<sup>3</sup> On the Middle Chronology.

## 'Returning Home': Transnational Mobility and Social Networks among Highly Skilled British-Kurdish Young People

In March 2015, I was generously awarded the annual 2015 pilot grant by BISI to conduct a study on the influence of the internet on the pathways of British-Kurdish highly skilled young people who are looking for an employment opportunity in Kurdistan-Iraq.

I interviewed 29 British-Kurdish young people of diverse ages (18-35), gender, income, political affiliation, occupation, religious background and length of residency concerning return migration and social networks. The occupational background of the young people were: teachers, including two English language teachers, four university lecturers, four oil and civil engineers, a researcher who worked with Serin - the European Centre for Nuclear Research - three IT workers including a web-designer, two medical scientists, two humanitarian aid workers, two local government service providers, two media workers, two young entrepreneurs, five students and three key informants. In total 32 people including ten living in the UK (six males, four females) and 22 living in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (14 males, eight females) were interviewed. Alongside all this, I undertook a virtual ethnography for this study. Virtual ethnography, as a "new" form of research method, is the process of conducting and constructing an ethnography using the virtual, online environment as the site of the research. I examined conversations about return migration on certain virtual networks over a

period of 4 months to understand how the young people construct their identities and sense of belonging across the national borders and build social capital to access overseas employment through computer-mediated social interaction. Virtual ethnography was important for this study to reach and interact with a larger number of highly skilled young people with diverse backgrounds including class, gender, ethnicity, age, different geographical spaces and to understand their sense of identity, social interactions with the homeland, pattern of economic and social behaviours gaining and accumulating social capital within the virtual communities.

The outcome of this research shows that the internet and its application plays a central role in the everyday life of British-Kurdish young people in informing Kurdish identity formation in diaspora and communication with the homeland. It offers the British-Kurdish highly skilled young people connectivity, circularity, continuity and familiarity with the ongoing political, cultural and economic development within the Kurdish community in the UK but also in Kurdistan-Iraq and provides some substantial employment opportunities to them to get in touch with the public and private sectors in Kurdistan-Iraq including foreign companies, operating in Kurdistan. These virtual networks, along with family and political ties, are an effective means of producing social capital, contributing to the decision made by highly skilled European Kurds to move to Kurdistan, whilst enabling them to keep their social ties with their friends and families back in the UK. More information about the research findings can be found at <https://goo.gl/i32aQX>

The outcome of the research has been presented to 35 policy makers, MPs, academics and local authorities through a workshop and round table discussion at the Kurdistan Parliamentarian Union in Erbil, Kurdistan-Iraq to look at the evidence base for the impact of the online and offline networks on the motivations and the decision-making of the British-Kurdish young people to return and participate in the re-construction process in Kurdistan through transferring knowledge and expertise into the region. The workshop addressed the challenges that the returnees face and how to develop a holistic policy to engage with, and support highly skilled returnees for mutual benefits.



**The workshop and round table discussion at the Kurdistan Parliamentarian Union in Erbil**  
*Photo: Janroj Keles*

As part of the research dissemination, the BISI grant enabled me to organise the 1st Kurdish Migration Conference to bring together researchers from multiple disciplines working on Kurdish migration to exchange and share their research findings and experiences about all aspects of migration in, from and to Kurdistan. The conference was held at Middlesex University on 27 May 2016 and 25 academics from Europe, the United States, Australia and the Middle East presented their research and 80 academics, British and Kurdish policy makers and other stakeholders

including Mr Karwan Jamal Tahir, Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative to the UK, attended the conference. For further information, please visit <https://goo.gl/GYxfP3>

The research results have also been disseminated through one forthcoming refereed journal article and two further articles are in preparation, three papers at national and international academic conferences, two seminars at Kurdish Universities. Public engagement took place through media reports on Australian SBS radio, Kurdish NRT TV and 'Yeni Ozgur Politika', a Kurdish daily Newspaper in Europe.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank BISI for its generous support.

*Dr Janroj Yilmaz Keles*  
*Middlesex University*

*BISI Pilot Project Grant Award-Holder 2015*

## VISITING IRAQI SCHOLARSHIPS

### Cuneiform Tablets at Tell Al-Wilayah September-December 2015

Abather Saadoon of Baghdad University spent two months working with Dr Mark Weeden at SOAS on his PhD project to publish cuneiform tablets from the Old Akkadian Period in Tell Al-Wilayah. His research assessed the ancient geographical nature of the site such as the pathways of watercourses, and new analysis on this subject in Iraqi academia.

Abather met and exchanged research with some of the UK's leading Assyriologists and archaeologists from the Universities of London, Oxford, Cambridge, Reading and Liverpool, and from the British Museum. At a special workshop organised in his honour he was able to discuss his archaeological investigations with the UK specialists who have made the most significant contributions to the debates concerning Tell Al-Wilayah: J.N. Postgate, M. Altaweel, A.R. George, R. Matthews and J. Jotheri.

“ I would like to express my deep thanks to all the members of the BISI Council for granting me this invaluable opportunity. I really appreciate their help and support as this scholarship was so vital to my PhD project.



Abather Saadoon exploring the Ashmolean Museum with curator and BISI Trustee Paul Collins

## OUTREACH GRANT REPORTS

### Communities in Crisis in Iraq and Syria

A series of events entitled, *Communities in Crisis in Iraq and Syria*, took place on Friday April 22 and Saturday April 23 2016 at the Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. Under the auspices of the Centre of World Christianity, Dept. of Religions and Philosophies, these explored the situation of the Christian, Yezidi and Mandaean communities of Iraq, analysing their trajectories since 2003 and addressing the impact of activities in 2014 by ISIS/ Da’esh on the Christian and Yezidi communities – and the particular implications on ritual.

All three ethno-religious groups, that are indigenous to Iraq, have been seriously damaged and their existence in their traditional homelands is endangered. Christians, who lived in Mosul and nearby villages for almost two millennia, have been forced to flee and seek refuge in Erbil and other locations in the KRG. Today there are no Christians living in Mosul and the villages of the Nineveh plains. Grave concerns have been expressed whether they will be able to return to their homes. The destruction of churches and monasteries, including that of Mar Behnam, a 4th century foundation, has profound implications for the cultural heritage of Iraq.



Dr Erica Hunter giving a lecture on cultural destruction at the public conference, SOAS  
Photo: Erica Hunter

The plight of the Yezidi community in Sinjar during June and July 2014, at the hands of Da’esh, received worldwide attention. As with the Christians, there

are grave fears that the Yezidi communities will not return to their ancestral homes. The dislocation of the Yezidi communities has also meant that the ancient rituals, which were largely transmitted orally through certain families, have been severely disrupted, threatening the transmission of faith.

The Mandaean community, that was based for two millennia in southern Iraq, has - to date - not been targeted by Da’esh. However, persecutions since 2003 have meant that it has suffered a 90% decline in population; either through death or dispersal, with large-scale emigration to ‘the West’. Today, only an estimated 5,000 Mandeans remain in Iraq, again with major implications for the retention of their ancient and unique traditions.

Each of the three ethno-religious communities has endured major dislocation and dispersal with grave consequences, raising the real possibility that they will maintain only an historical presence in Iraq and Syria. As part of a global faith, Christian IDP’s in Kurdistan have received the recognition and support of international organisations, including the Vatican, but with an on-going exodus to Europe, north America and Australia, it is as yet unclear whether Christianity will survive in its Mesopotamian homeland. The communities of the Mandeans and Yezidis are much smaller and have particular problems. Their strictly endogamous nature threatens their continuity, since they accept no converts or inter-marriage – the dispersal of families having severe implications. Furthermore, both the Yezidis and Mandeans are deeply rooted within the topography of southern and northern Iraq respectively. The dislocation experienced by both communities means that they are being obliged to undertake a ‘rethinking’ of their religious rituals, i.e. adapting them to the new physical circumstances in which they find themselves.

A workshop that took place on 22 April 2016 addressed questions surrounding the survival and challenges faced by the communities. As a closed discussion session, the workshop was restricted to 25 persons and was attended



by a range of invited representatives from the clergy, including Mor Polycarpus (Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan and Patriarchal Vicar for the Archdiocese of The Netherlands) and Rev. Tony Malham (Assyrian Church of the East). NGO representatives included Dr John Newton (Aid to the Church in Need) and Rev. Nadeem Nassar (Awareness Foundation). Robert Halaf (MP of Kristdemokraterna Södertälje, Sweden) also attended, as did Dr Johann Marte (Pro Oriente, Vienna). Dr Layla al Roomi and Dr Ezster Spät spoke respectively on behalf of the Mandaean and Yazidi communities. The Director of SOAS, Baroness Valerie Amos joined the participants for lunch.

The evening of 22 April 2016 was devoted to the launch of a specially commissioned volume, *Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim: Pluralism, Dialogue and Co-existence* (Modern Aramaic Press, 2016) edited by Mikael Oez and Aziz Abdel-Nourto to remember the third anniversary of the abduction of Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, together with his fellow Metropolitan Paul Yazigi of the Greek Orthodox Church. The two senior clergy were on their way to negotiate the release of several abducted clergy when unknown persons stopped their car and killed their driver. Reports suggest that the two men are alive, somewhere in north Syria, but the identity of their abductors is not known. No ransom has been requested for their release. Contributors to the volume included William Dalrymple and the Grand Mufti of Aleppo, both of whom recalled their personal experiences with Mor Gregorios.

The public launch of the Mor Gregorios volume was accompanied by key-note speakers, each drawing on the great heritage of the Syrian Orthodox Church and the current real threats to its existence in its traditional Syrian homeland. Invited speakers included Dr Rowan Williams (Master, Magdalene College, Cambridge and erstwhile Archbishop of Canterbury), Dr Sebastian Brock (Oxford University) and Mor Clemis Daniel Malak Kourieh (Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Beirut). Messages from Prince Hassan bin Talaf (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) and Cardinal Sandrini (President, East Catholic Churches Dept. The Vatican) were also read. A reception and an exhibition of images from Syriac manuscripts followed the book-launch.



A line-up of clergy, from the Syrian Orthodox and other Oriental Orthodox churches, who attended the launch of the Mor Gregorios volume *Photo: Erica Hunter*

The international conference *Communities in Crisis: the aftermath of 2003 in Syria and Iraq for the Christian, Mandaean and Yezidi communities*, which was also open to the public, was held on Saturday 23 April 2016. Papers were given by a variety of experts and scholars. Dr Eszter Spät (Bochum, Germany) related about her field-work in April 2015, imparting valuable on-the-ground insight into the current situation of the Yezidis. Dr Jorunn Buckley (Bowdoin College, Maine, USA) spoke on the challenges facing the Mandaean, drawing on her extensive fieldwork experience and expertise. Dr Suha Rassam (Iraqi Christians in Need), who had only returned from the Middle East the previous day, investigated the question of genocide and its application to the events of 2014 perpetrated by Da'esh against the Christian communities. Dr Aho Shemunkasho (Salzburg, Austria) gave a presentation on the newly inaugurated Seminary at Salzburg, which aims to meet the needs of the ever-growing Syrian Orthodox diaspora. Dr Erica C D Hunter explored the effects of cultural damage, i.e. destruction of holy places, churches and monasteries on the communities.

These various events were of intrinsic importance and interest to various bodies including NGOs and government policy makers (both UK/EU, USA, and Australia) where there are large diasporas, allowing them to be aware of the major challenges affecting communities, and facilitating their responses to needs, especially in matters of maintaining faith. This aspect is frequently overlooked with the ongoing concern to meet education, health and employment needs. However, faith assumes a dynamic dimension, not the least because it has formed – and continues to form – an intrinsic role in the shaping of the identities of the Christian, Mandaean and Yezidi communities.

Dr Erica C.D. Hunter  
SOAS

## THE GB Project



Kate Craddock in *The GB Project*, Live Theatre Newcastle Photo: Steve Gilroy

The Outreach Grant from BISI that I very gratefully received supported the costs involved in remounting a week of performances at Live Theatre in Newcastle upon Tyne (March 2014) of *The GB Project*, a one woman theatre performance that I co-created with writer and director Steve Gilroy.

*The GB Project* is an exploration of the complex life of Gertrude Bell, but more widely, the relationship between Great Britain and Iraq, as the title perhaps suggests. The performance incorporates autobiographical storytelling techniques as a lens through which to explore biographical material related to Gertrude Bell. In addition it explores the role of women in international politics. The script of the performance is made up of a combination of original writing by myself and my collaborator Steve, along with text gathered from Gertrude Bell's letters and diary entries and testimony from interviews that I carried out with various individuals involved in the Gertrude Bell Archive

at Newcastle University. It also includes extracts of famous speeches by contemporary politicians including Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice, and much of the performance contains original music composed by the musician Richard Dawson.

The style of the performance is direct address, which means I speak directly to the audience, and includes verbatim theatre techniques with modes of contemporary performance. The main item of set on stage in the performance is a chalk board onto which I project a number of still images including a number of photographs from the Gertrude Bell Archive, as well as maps, stills from films, and text. Much of the show's original creation came from immersing myself in the Gertrude Bell Archive, as well as the many biographies written about Bell, and the performance begins with me explaining my passion for Bell, but my frustration at how 'hidden' she is as a person, largely because she was a woman, with the suggestion that she should be re-considered a North East hero.

*The GB Project* purposefully collapses notions of time in order to make comment on the ongoing intricate and cyclical nature of the relationship between Great Britain and Iraq; in particular it draws comparisons between the relationship post-WWI and post the Iraq War (2003 – 2011). Although the work problematises Britain's and Bell's involvements in Iraq, it is also a celebration of Bell's life and achievements, and in particular, emphasises the fact that she remains an unknown figure to many in the North East, despite this being her birthplace and ancestral home.

The performances supported by BISl at Live Theatre were extremely successful. The venue seated 60 people, and the four night run sold out, so an additional matinee performance was also staged to accommodate demand. The audiences were predominantly made up of individuals who knew very little about Gertrude Bell, and audience members repeatedly commented on how much new knowledge they had acquired through experiencing the work. Comments from audience members included: "Stunning, engaging and vibrant performance. So glad this woman's incredible story was unearthed and re-told with such passion".

One of the real highlights of being able to remount the performance for North East audiences was the inclusion of a post-show discussion after one of the performances, which included the full creative team behind the show, along with key individuals I had interviewed in the creative process: Dr Mark Jackson, the current keeper of the Gertrude Bell Archive, and Lynne Ritchie, one of the original team who worked on establishing the Gertrude Bell Archive, both of whom I portray in the performance. Their inclusion in this event allowed audiences to gain deeper insight into not only the creative processes behind the creation of the performance, but also the broader legacy of Bell and helped to raise awareness of the Archive.

The funding received from BISl enabled me to cover the costs involved in remounting the production. Specifically, the funding enabled me to create publicity materials for the performances; to document the performance on video; and to cover the technical costs of the production. The video of this performance is now available to watch online <https://vimeo.com/126682220>

The first version of *The GB Project* was originally created for Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2013, and due to its success, was subsequently invited for performances at the Camden People's Theatre in London in October 2013, and Live Theatre, Newcastle in March 2014. A particularly insightful review of the original performance is available to read <http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/the-gb-project/>

This was an extraordinary opportunity to remount the show in 2014 supported by BISl in which we were able to work collaboratively with a technical team to fully realise the technical elements of the production, and to create publicity materials that can be used for future revivals, and plans for future performances are underway.

*Kate Craddock*  
Creator, writer and performer of *The GB Project*

## FUTURE BISI LECTURES – SAVE THE DATES

**Professor Wathiq Ismail al-Salihi**

***Hatra: An Arab Kingdom in Roman Times***

Wednesday 16 November 2016, 6.00pm at the British Academy

A lecture in memory of Mohammed Ali Mustafa Umo Ali the Shaikh of excavators in Iraq, sponsored by Sabah Zangana

**Professor Graeme Barker FBA**

***Neanderthals and Modern Humans in the Zagros Mountains: New Investigations at Shanidar Cave***

Wednesday 22 February 2017, 6.00pm at the British Academy

Annual Mallowan Lecture

**Dr Caecilia Pieri**

***Rethinking Baghdad's Built Identity and Strategies (1915-2015)***

Wednesday 14 June 2017, 6.00pm at the British Academy

Annual Bonham-Carter Lecture



Hatra Photo: taken by Eleanor Robson in 2001

All of the above events are free of charge. BISI members will be notified as soon as bookings open.

Audio recordings of past BISI events can be listened to at:

<http://www.bisi.ac.uk/>

## BISI GRANTS & PRIZES

BISI offers a range of annual grants to assist academic work and education on Iraq.

### BISI OUTREACH GRANTS (up to £1,000 per grant)

BISI Outreach Grants support public engagement projects that promote a greater understanding of Iraq's history, society and culture. Past activities sponsored through the scheme have ranged from lectures and publications to arts projects. Applicants should normally be residents of the UK. Preference is given to activities taking place in the UK or Iraq. **Annual Deadline:** 1 October.

### BISI ACADEMIC GRANTS Research and Conference Grants (up to £4,000 per grant)

BISI provides funding to support Research and Conferences that concentrate principally on the lands and peoples of Iraq. We welcome applications from the full range of arts, humanities and social sciences subjects, and topics can cover any time period from prehistory to the medieval period to the present day. **Annual Deadline:** 1 February.

### Annual Pilot Project Grant (up to £8,000)

BISI's Pilot Project Grant scheme is designed to support a short period of preliminary research - up to one year - that has the potential to grow into a longer-term, larger-scale project supported by a Research Council or other large funding body. Only one project per year will be funded under this scheme. **Annual Deadline:** 1 February.

To be eligible for BISI Academic Grants, applicants should normally be employed by or have an official connection with a UK Higher Education Institution.

### VISITING IRAQI SCHOLARSHIPS

BISI offers two to three Visiting Iraqi Scholarships each year to enable Iraqi scholars and cultural heritage professionals to engage in research, training and collaborative projects in the UK. We welcome applications from Iraq-based scholars involved in the following fields: anthropology, archaeology, history, geography, languages and other areas in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Applicants must be able to converse and understand English to a working level to ensure that visits are a success. **Annual Deadline:** 1 February.



BISI research grant-holder Lana Askari filming in Kurdistan Photo: Lana Askari

## BISI SUPPORTERS 2016

BISI is very grateful for donations, both large and small.  
Here we would like to thank all those who donated to us in 2016.

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### Volunteers 2016

The following have volunteered their time to help BISI this year, and we are sincerely grateful for their support:

Mirjam Brusius (Academia Volunteer)  
Jennifer Hicks (Social Media Volunteer until July 2016)  
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Agnes Henriksen (Basrah Conference Volunteer)  
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# DONATION FORM

The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI) is the UK's only institution dedicated to advancing research and public education on Iraq, with an exclusive focus on Iraq's cultural heritage.

At BISI, we know that the fate of Iraq's extraordinary cultural heritage cannot be separated from its current human tragedy. It is this heritage that we seek to preserve and rehabilitate, in a variety of ways, in order to shape Iraq's future.

## But we can't do it alone.

With your support, we can continue the vital work of protecting and rehabilitating Iraq's history and heritage, in order to help rebuild its future. We can work towards a public understanding and celebration of Iraq, both within the country and internationally, which goes beyond the newspaper headlines to reach the thousands of real, human stories Iraq holds.

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