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THE STUDY OF IRAQ  
(GERTRUDE BELL MEMORIAL)

المعهد البريطاني لدراسة العراق

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## CHAIR OF COUNCIL'S INTRODUCTION



In what is a very positive development, the past year has seen a continuing expansion in opportunities for the Institute to support academic research and public engagement within Iraq; the range and diversity of this work is reflected in the reports and summaries you will find on the following pages.

We have, of course, a long and proud history of archaeological research in the country and, after many years when excavation wasn't possible, BISI is now regularly funding work at sites being explored by UK based institutions. Recently, for example, a major project by the Universities of Cambridge and Pennsylvania, supported by a BISI research grant, was initiated at the site of Lagash (modern al-Hiba, about 22 kilometres east of Ash Shatrah in Dhi Qar Province). During the second half of the third millennium BC Lagash was the capital city of a powerful Sumerian city-state and the excavations have already produced some exciting results. Some of these discoveries were discussed this April at a major two-day conference held at the University of Kufa and also sponsored by the BISI. It focused on raising awareness of the challenges in protecting,

conserving and understanding Iraq's precious tangible and intangible cultural heritage. A short report on this conference is included below but it is worth noting that this was the second time it had been held in as many years and it is already being recognised as an important event in the academic calendar, attracting speakers from across Iraq and internationally.

Work continues in supporting the Basrah Museum which opened its final three public galleries in March, raising further the importance of the Museum as a major cultural heritage resource for southern Iraq and the wider region. We continue to partner with the Friends of Basrah Museum who are leading the final phases of the development following the award of further funding from the UK government's Cultural Protection Fund. Currently this involves completing a learning centre and library on the upper floor of the Museum, which will eventually house among other books the British School of Archaeology in Iraq's library which has been in storage at the British Embassy in Baghdad since 1990, as well as provide digital access to publications and archives.

Building on and establishing new partnerships and collaborations with colleagues in the State Board of Antiquities as well as at universities across Iraq will be the Institute's principal means of maintaining an active research agenda over the coming years. For this we can draw on our existing network of relationships built up over the last 80 years but it is of course very important that this is actively maintained and expanded. One way in which we build new friendships and identify future research relationships is through our Visiting Scholars

Programme. Run in collaboration with UCL's Nahrein Network, over the past twelve months this scheme has enabled 5 Iraqi heritage professionals to visit the UK for a few months of research in a partner institution. The success of the Programme is due in no small part to the energy and hard work of the Programme Coordinator Isobel Ransome for which she deserves much thanks.

There is no doubt, however, that our most exciting project this year has been the international conference *Jews of Iraq - Engagement with modernities* held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, 16-18 September. This was an important academic event that highlights how the Institute remains at the forefront of supporting research on and dissemination of the history and societies of Iraq across all periods. The conference could not have been realized without the enormous energy and commitment of our Vice-Chair, Joan Porter MacIver, whose concept it was, as well as the hard work of our Executive Officer, Ali Khadr; my thanks and congratulations to them both.

Many thanks are also due to our Vice-President, H.E. Dr Salih Ali Husain, Iraqi Ambassador to the UK, who has completed his term of office. I am extremely grateful to him, as well as his team, for the great support he offered BISI over a number of years and wish him well for the future. We look forward to welcoming Dr Salih's successor in due course.

Closer to home, there are important changes taking place at the British Academy. We are currently in discussion with the Academy to be readmitted as a member of the British International Research Institutes (BIRI) – further announcements about this will follow. Finally, there have been some changes to our Council members since the last Newsletter. Dr Sarah Savant has stepped down as a Trustee because of her expanding research commitments; I want to record my gratitude to her for the valuable contribution she has made to BISI over the years. At the last Council meeting I was delighted to welcome Dr Moudhy al-Rashid (Oxford University) and Dr Eva Miller (UCL) as co-opted members. I know that they are both looking forward to meeting members at future BISI events.

*Dr Paul Collins*  
*Chair of Council*

## In Memory of Dr Lamia Al-Gailani Werr (1938-2019)



Dr Lamia Al-Gailani Werr in Amman, 2018  
Photo: Zainab Bahrani

When, Dr Lamia Al-Gailani Werr died very unexpectedly in Amman on 18 January 2019, the world lost one of its formidable Mesopotamian scholars and activist committed to the protection of Iraq and its cultural heritage. The coverage of her death in the New York Times, The Economist, the Art Newspaper and other newspapers and publications will be the start of many tributes and obituaries in scholarly journals still to come, including in the BISI 2019 Journal Iraq written by John Curtis. For those who knew her well – friends and family – we all miss her humour, generosity, wisdom, advice, kindness and special turn of phrase. She would rarely say no and as a result found herself involved in far too many projects, articles, festschrifts, training programmes, speech giving and mentoring. Up to the last at the time of her sudden passing, she was involved in a training programme in Amman helping curators from many Iraqi museums.

Lamia came from a distinguished old Baghdadi family and seemed to be related to or know everyone. She persuaded her family to let her pursue archaeology and after initially studying in Baghdad, she attended Cambridge University for her BA and has many life-long friends from that time. She then obtained her MA from Edinburgh

and her PhD from the Institute of Archaeology at London University writing on Old Babylonian Seals. She was one of the world's experts on cylinder seals. In 2003, when she was liaising in an official capacity on behalf of the Iraq Museum with the occupying forces, she felt the loss of 5,000 cylinder seals that had been stolen from the collection particularly keenly. That era crystallised much of her work over the following years on Iraq actively promoting the protection of its heritage and helping cultural heritage professionals. Fifteen years later, she was in the Iraq Museum on a positive mission to work with the committees from the Basrah and Iraq Museums to select objects for the three new galleries in the new Basrah Museum, to be opened in March 2019. She wrote to me "We chose over 800 objects... I am now allowed to look at all the seal collection. I am in heaven."

Her crucial role in supporting the work of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq and subsequently BISI was recognised when she received the Gertrude Bell Memorial Gold Medal 'for outstanding services to Mesopotamian Archaeology' in 2009. She was actively involved in establishing the Friends of Basrah Museum (FOBM) and was a founding Trustee, one of many concrete manifestations of her major commitment to protect Iraq's heritage – ancient and modern. The establishment of the Museum in Basrah, which opened fully on 19 March 2019 would have been extremely difficult if not impossible without her. As Qahtan Alabeed, Director of Basrah Heritage and Antiquities, wrote "Lamia was the person who gave me the passion for my work and shared many ideas. She inspired and pushed me and was behind me all the way – She changed my life.... She will be with us forever."

Many of us will have talked to her at length about protecting monuments and buildings of

the more recent and difficult past. She helped to build capacity by supporting training initiatives in Iraq and for Iraqis to come to the UK. She was a member of the BISI (BSAI) Committee directing its Iraqi Visiting Scholarship Programme that started in 2004. She contributed greatly to the success of this programme and its legacy continues with the current BISI Nahrein Network Scholarships, which she was also involved with as a BISI Assessor.

One can watch Lamia's vision and passion through her wide digital presence as many of her talks have been recorded. I have listened to some of her inspiring presentations about the looting and later protection of Iraqi sites. She enjoyed her active role as an advisor to the film directors of *Letters from Baghdad* and contributed to the joint BISI - British Academy 2013 conference on *Gertrude Bell, A life and legacy* and its publication. Regretfully, she did not complete her book on the history of the Iraq Museum – it was most definitely written in her head. She was able to present the story to the trainees at the FOBM Museum Training Programme in Basrah in 2018, which she took part in along with her daughter Noorah Al Gailani and Paul Collins. In December 2018 she was in Amman at ACOR (American Center of Oriental Research) with Noorah and fellow FOBM Trustee and Chairman John Curtis for another FOBM training programme. She had to rush off at the end so we had a quick farewell but luckily we did talk in London about the Basrah Museum Library project. She told me how important it was and her comment provides impetus to our focus on the remaining aspects of this wonderful project. I did not see her before she returned a month or so later to ACOR in Amman for the Iraqi curator's programme led by The Metropolitan Museum for publication training.



Lamia's last lecture as given in Amman at ACOR on January 15th, 2019 to the Iraqi cultural heritage participants Photo:: Barbara A Porter

Through Qahtan, I learned of her death and could not believe it at first. I shared it with the Iraqi group in ACOR through my sister, Barbara Porter, the Director of ACOR and also a cylinder seal scholar, who shared much with Lamia. The news was too hard to take in as they had all just been together and it still remains too hard. The shocking news reverberated around the world of her unexpected death. Her body was flown to Baghdad and a special gathering was held at the Iraq Museum organized by Abdel Amir Al Hamdani, the Minister of Culture, and her close friend Maysoon Al Damluji, the President's Cultural Advisor, before her coffin was laid to rest in the Gailani Shrine.

The British Institute of the Study of Iraq held a private event at the British Academy in memory of Lamia on 3 April 2019 with her family and colleagues. We thank all those who took part and who

brought her life and accomplishments so vividly to mind. (See Past Events on the BISI Website to hear the recordings and view the programme.)

We all miss her profoundly and our thoughts and prayers are with her three daughters and her all her family and friends.

*Joan Porter MacIver, Vice Chair of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq & UK Project Coordinator for the Friends of Basrah Museum CPF grant*

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Like all her many friends, I was shocked and saddened by the sudden and unexpected passing of Lamia. I had known her and many members of her distinguished family for so long that she seemed a permanent fixture in the world of Mesopotamian archaeology. It was typical of her that she passed away on the job, giving of her unparalleled knowledge and experience to her aspiring successors. I came to know her best through her many years' unstinting participation in the Board of Trustees of the Friends of the Basrah Museum, where she was always ready not only to contribute to the formulation of decisions with her encyclopedic knowledge of the present archaeological scene and its personalities in Iraq but also to follow through on the ground in Iraq with courage and determination. My deep regret is that she did not live quite long enough to see the opening of the Museum in March this year; but for all of us who knew the extent of her personal commitment to the success of the project, it will stand for always as a tangible part of her huge legacy.

*Sir Terence Clark KBE CMG CVO, BISI Patron & Founding Chairman and current Trustee of the Friends of Basrah Museum*



Dr Lamia Al-Gailani Werr with Qahtan Alabeed to her left and many other friends and colleagues at the opening of the Basrah Museum's first gallery in September 2016. Photo: Joan Porter MacIver

## ACADEMIC GRANT & CONFERENCE REPORTS

### Literatures from the Other Iraq – Laying the Foundations for Translating Kurdish Literatures in the UK



Exeter Literary Festival Photo: Clemence Scalbert Yücel

The literature of Iraq has ancient roots and is extremely rich and diverse, yet remains largely unknown to the wider Anglophone readership. An important component of this literature is Kurdish literature written in various dialects of Kurdish such as Bahdini, Sorani, or Gorani, but also in Arabic. The purpose of this outreach project was to bring this literature out of the shadows by producing, publishing, and publicly reading original translations of selected Kurdish literature from Iraq in translation.

The BISI Outreach grant supported a series of translation and literary activities aimed at contributing to the emergence of a community of translators and developing awareness of Iraqi and Kurdish literatures in the UK. A translation workshop “Literatures from the other Iraq – Translating Kurdish Literature in the UK” was held on 17-18 May 2018 in Exeter, bringing together experts of translation studies (Dr. Eliana Maestri and Prof. Michelle Bolduc), of Kurdish and Arabic literatures (Yunus Abakay, Yaser Ali, Jaber Alahmari, Mohammed Asiri Faia, Marouf Cabi, Dr. Farangis Ghaderi, Dr. Kaveh Ghobadi, Allan Hassaniyan, Alana Levinson Labrosse, Asmaa Meftah, Karwan Osman, Aba Oudeh, Dr. Christina

Phillips, Prof. Christine Robins, Dr. Clemence Scalbert Yücel) and creative writing (Rinat Harel). The workshop included a series of lectures: “Translation practice” (Alana Levinson Labrosse), “Introduction to Source Text analysis” (Eliana Maestri), and “Introduction to Target Text evaluation and editing” (Michelle Bolduc). Following the lectures, the participants worked in small groups and pairs to produce original translations of Kurdish poetry written in Sorani, Bahdini, Kurmanci, and Arabic into English. The texts selected included poems from Tîroj, Trifa Doskî, Hero Kurda, Fayiq Bêkes, Hemin, and Goran. The poems were chosen to represent the diversity of languages used in Kurdish poetry from Iraq and particularly highlighted the way poets and poetesses have dealt with the topics of women, gender in sexuality in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries Iraq.

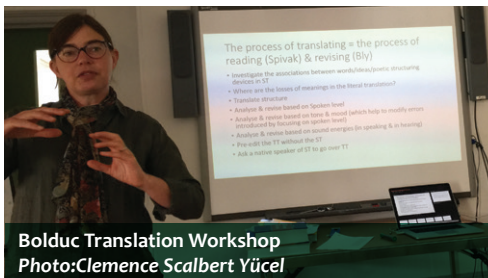
The workshop led to the creation of the Exeter Kurdish Translation Initiative and was followed by further translation work in pairs and small groups in 2018 and 2019 in Exeter. The poetry translated during the workshop and in the follow-up meetings was read at different occasions and in different venues. The translated poetry was read at the Respect Festival in June 2018 and June 2019 (Stephen Lawrence Stage, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies Programme). The poetry was also read in an event we organised as part of the Exeter Literary Festival on Friday 16th November. This event, entitled “Women Voices in Kurdish Poetry”, included short talks about Kurdish poetry, women and gender, the issue of translation, and readings of the poetry translated. Poems were read in original languages and in English by Yaser Ali, Kerrie Bramhall, Rinat Harel, Allan Hassaniyan, Farangis Ghaderi, and Clémence Scalbert Yücel.

We are currently planning a reading in London to take place in autumn 2019 and a publication of the translated works as a book. Some of the project's participants will also participate in the Translating Poetries Symposium organised by the Poetry Translation Centre (London, September 2019) and in the conference “Translating Women: breaking borders and building bridges in the English-language book industry” (London, 31 October and 1 November 2019).

*Dr Clemence Scalbert Yücel*



**Exeter Literary Festival Photo: Clemence Scalbert Yücel**



**Bolduc Translation Workshop  
Photo: Clemence Scalbert Yücel**

## A Century of State Making in Iraq: The Middle East in Transition

The conference, entitled *A century of State making in Iraq: The Middle East in transition*, was welcomed by the Iraqi Ambassador in London and took place at the University of Leicester on April 24th 2019. This one-day conference, in cooperation with the British University in Cairo and the new British Research Centre in Egypt, was funded by the British Institute for the Study of Iraq.



**Conference Programme Photo: Marianna Charountaki**

On the occasion of the anniversary of Woodrow Wilson's 'fourteen points' speech, I proposed an inter-disciplinary scholarly activity focused on the history, law and politics of Iraq. The conference, because of its interesting inclusion of both academics and expert practitioners, was open to both an academic and non-academic audience.

This grant was particularly helpful for the progress of my research work on Iraq as it supported me bridge the gap between regional and international scholarship. It also reinforced my inter-disciplinary approach looking at a combination of inter-related aspects of the subject-matter. Iraq, in the centre of regional developments today, is an increasingly important subject in need of further examination due to its constant evolution. Finally, it facilitated my initiatives for further institutional interactions, which are necessary to promote collaboration with other colleagues that share similar research interests.

The conference, divided into three interesting panels, looked at issues of statehood, constitutional developments and federalism. The trajectory of the British parliament's perceptions in the 1920s regarding the prospective establishment of a Kurdish state was analysed in the first panel. The reference in the British policy papers to a provision of a confederation with direct UK supervision of Kurdistan was particularly striking, though the 1920's British policy of home rule was never clearly defined. However, unresolved matters

of security and failed successive Kurdish revolts shaped a different British policy. Aspects of the historical trajectory of Iraq were also debated, alongside the nexus of heroic figures and nationalism and whether the former played a role in the formation of the state. However, heroes (with a focus on Salahuddin al-Ayyubi) or the use of symbols appears not to have played any critical role in the nation-building. Connections between Wilson and whether the 14 points intended to institute or move towards any kind of self-determination were discussed. It was interestingly noted that the Kurds were primarily perceived through the prism of the fate of the Armenians. It was further argued that Wilson and his cabinet never really applied the Wilsonian principles to the Kurds vis-à-vis Woodrow Wilson's politics in 1919. But there is a link – even though not direct – between the Kurdish issue and the Wilsonian principles in a broader sense.

The specifics of the Iraqi constitutional history were understood to be prerequisite for the implementation of the Iraqi constitutional values and political necessities. Given the inconsistent development between the nation and the state, the need for a new Republic was raised as a necessary basis for the system to evolve. The reconsideration of the state structure appears inherently problematic, and a new constitution instead was suggested as the condition for further development, as marked in the second panel. Finally, different modes of governance as a remedy to current political fallacies were also debated, though it was acknowledged that any constitutional change would require political will and flexibility.

The polity's phobia to a potential transformation of the Iraqi mode of governance into other forms was argued to be the basis of stalemate. Panel three suggested that a further unification of Iraq could be only based on mutual co-existence in a self-determined context which would further strengthen regionalism. Thus, deepening

federalism, through wider decentralisation, was presented as a possible mechanism for upholding voluntary union that allows a unified co-existence in void of conflicts and further irregularities.

The disseminated results of this conference are currently in progress but given the importance of the research topic for a wider audience beyond academia, the research findings will be broadly available. The findings of the research will be accessible to the public through a volume of the conference's proceedings (co-edited by Dr. James Moore). Thus, the results will be accessible to a wide audience and enable scholarly expertise to further build-up the understanding of Iraq within a multi-disciplinary, theoretical frame.

I am thus thankful to BISI as, following my successful Conference Grant proposal, I was given the opportunity to organise an informative and inspiring event. I do believe that this event constitutes stimulus for further substantial research on Iraq.

*Dr Charountaki Marianna*

*Former Lecturer in Kurdish politics and International Relations, University of Leicester and Research Fellow at Soran University Iraq*



Conference Panel Photo: Marianna Charountaki

## Fierce Lions, angry mice and fat-tailed sheep: Animal encounters in the ancient Near East

On the 22-23 March 2019, we held the conference 'Fierce lions, angry mice and fat-tailed sheep: Animal encounters in the ancient Near East' at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge. The main sponsor of the conference was the BISI, and the McDonald Institute and Marie Skłodowska-Curie also provided funding for the event. We are extremely grateful for these contributions, without which the conference could not have taken place. We had an overwhelmingly positive response to the call for papers, and a total of 33 presentations were given, with speakers joining us from 15 different countries and four different continents. The speakers included both well-established experts in their field, young researchers and PhD-students, with a roughly equal gender balance. The full programme with paper titles and speakers can be found on the conference website: <https://aneanimalencounters.wordpress.com/programme/>

The theme of this conference was the relationships between humans and the environment, with particular focus on interactions with other animals. Animals have always been an integral part of human existence; in the ancient Near East, this is evident in the record of excavated assemblages of faunal remains, iconography and texts. Domesticated animals had great impact on social, political and economic structures – for example cattle in agriculture and diet, or donkeys and horses in transport, trade and war. Fantastic mythological beasts such as lion-headed eagles or lamassu were part of religious

beliefs and myths, while exotic creatures such as lions were part of elite symbolising from the 4th millennium BC onward. In some cases, animals also intruded on human lives in unwanted ways by scavenging or entering the household; this especially applies to small or wild animals. The aim of the conference was to explore some of these many ways in which humans and animals interacted. It was also important to us that a range of perspectives would be represented, with researchers focusing on faunal remains, ancient texts, material culture and/or theoretical approaches.

We are very pleased to say that the papers presented in fact offered an even greater variety of material and approaches than expected, with many wonderful insights and discussions of many different species of animals. The conference was divided into ten thematic sessions, each chaired by a Cambridge scholar who works on the ancient Near East and/or animals in the past. We started with two sessions about animal agency and human-animal interactions, where we were told of intriguing ways in which boundaries between humans and animals can be blurred, and how humans take on animal characteristics. We then proceeded to have sessions dedicated to specific animal species: equids, canines, felines and birds. Each type of animal was investigated in their different roles and symbolic meanings in society. Animals and animal ingredients also appeared in healing practices and in the cult of Gula. The final sessions were dedicated to iconographic and faunal studies, animals in ritual and animal management.

The conference was attended by over 70 participants, and enjoyed a strong social media presence. Colleagues from around the world could follow live updates on Twitter as each talk proceeded, with over 70 tweets using the

conference-specific hashtag #aneAnimalEncounters. The papers showed how important animals were in shaping human lifeways, social structures, ritual and religious beliefs, trade, healing, consumption strategies, and ideology. We saw how a multitude of species from air, sea and land featured in the daily lives and imagination of the peoples of the ancient Near East.

Given the topic and diversity and quality of papers, along with great enthusiasm among the speakers to publish, we think this will make a very good volume. We are therefore now making preparations for publication of the conference.

*Dr. Laerke Recht and Dr. Augusta McMahon*

## BISI ACADEMIC CONFERENCE

### The Jews of Iraq – Engagement with modernities

16 – 18 September 2019 at SOAS, London

The conference on *The Jews of Iraq – Engagement with modernities*, sponsored by BISI, took place in mid-September after over a year and half of planning. BISI thanks its partner institutions in organising the conference - the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago and the Department of History, Religions and Philosophies at SOAS. This conference set out to explore the contributions of the Jewish community in Iraq within the spheres of the arts and culture, social policy, education, government and the economy in the early modern and modern periods. The conference brought together over 100 attendees, 8 Steering Committee members and 26 speakers covering diverse fields of research.

Iraqi Jews constituted one of the world's oldest and most historically significant Jewish communities. Their presence in Iraq lasted for over 2,600 years and constituted c. 130,000 members in 1951. The widening academic interest in the history and contributions of the Jewish community as well as growing interest in Jewish history in contemporary Iraq prompted the organisation of the conference. This conference succeeded in assembling many of the top scholars in the field both as part of the steering committee, the memory panel and as speakers at the three-day conference to explore both their research and memories. A central aim was to bridge the gap between scholars from diverse backgrounds and countries, in order to foster potential future collaborations.

The conference began with a panel on memoirs, memories and histories, moderated by Ella Shohat, providing an opportunity for recording the personal reflections of Avi Shlaim, David Basson, Linda Menuhin Abdel Aziz and Sami Zubaida. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite and Orit Bashkin provided the opening historical overview, launching the two days of an intense academic programme, with twenty two papers broken up into six panels, chaired by Orit, Zvi, Ella and Joseph Sassoon. The range of the papers was impressive including the Aramaic-

speaking Jewish communities of Northern Iraq/ Kurdistan, Judeo-Arabic literature, Baghdadi transnational networks, the Jewish medical profession in the Hashemite era, Jewish education, literature, film and music. One particular star of the conference was Dafna Dori of Uppsala University who sang during her talk on 'Şālih al-Kuwaytī as a modern Iraqi composer' and brought a very enthusiastic response from the audience.



**Dafna Dori presenting her paper at the conference.**  
**Photo:Joan Porter MacIver**

Daniel Monterescu and Joel Hart's talk 'The Diasporic Social Life of Amba: Culinary Schismogenesis among Iraqi Jews in London and Israel' elicited a quite unexpected heated and personal debate and discussion.

The film *Remember Baghdad* was screened on Day 2 at the conference with David Dangoor taking part in a Q & A session, moderated by Orit. For many it was the first time to see this poignant film, prompting moving discussions. The conference concluded with a panel 'Painful dislocation and exile and future' that dealt with many of the difficulties that the

community encountered. Khairuldeen Al Makhzoomi's talk 'The Forgotten Minorities: The History of Iraqi Jews from 1948-1971' covered the draconian laws that were instituted and that in part prompted the departures and accompanying violence. The overall conference discussions did bring up the painful and violent experiences that many other ethnic and religious groups in Iraq have suffered over the past decades and continue to suffer.

The conference programme is on the BISI website and shows the full range of talks and topics – too many to mention individually but we thank all the speakers for their involvement. We also thank Thabit A.J. Abdullah of York University who chaired the closing panel with reflections by Orit, Zvi and Ella.

BISI will put the film of the conference on its website and will let our members know when it is available. The proceedings of the conference will also be published and Professor Bashkin will be the main Editor of the publication.

The Institute wishes to express its particular gratitude to the Conference Steering Committee members from outside BISI without whom this conference would not have been possible. They all provided strong and critical guidance both before and during the conference: Orit Bashkin (University of Chicago), Zvi Ben-Dor Benite (New York University), Ella Shohat (New York University), and Joseph Sassoon (Georgetown University). The BISI steering committee members were: Joan Porter MacIver (BISI Vice-Chair/Conference Coordinator), Daniel Lowe (British Library), Glen Rangwala (Cambridge University), and Ali Khadr (BISI Executive Officer). Erica C D Hunter (SOAS) was the Academic Host.



**Ella Shohat chairing Panel 5 discussions:  
Representing the Past: Archival, Literary and  
Culinary Dimensions with Hana Morgenstern, Sigal  
Goorgi, Joel Hart and Daniel Monterescu**  
*Photo:Joan Porter MacIver*



**Pelle Valentin Olsen presenting his talk 'Iraqi Jews and  
the Production and Consumption of Leisure'**  
*Photo:Joan Porter MacIver*



**Group Photo of Steering Committee Members and Speakers**  
*Photo courtesy of Michele de Gruchy*

Front Row (L to R): Orit Bashkin, David Dangoor, Sami Zubaida, Ella Shohat, Avi Shlaim and Joan MacIver. Standing - Second & Third Rows (L to R): Glen Rangwala, Sara Manasseh, Lital Levy, Daniel Lowe, Joel Hart, Dafna Dori, Sigal Goorji, Daniel Monterescu, Sasha R. Goldstein-Sabbah, Hana Morgenstern, David Basson, Annie Geene, Pelle Valentin Olsen, Gadi Algazi, Emile Cohen, Yaron Shemer, Ronan Zeidel, Linda Menuhin Abdul Aziz, Thabit Abdullah, Khairuldeen Al Makhzoomi, Joseph Sassoon, Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Liliana Carizzo, Ali Khadr. (Missing: Geoffrey Khan, Sara Farhan, Yuval Evri, Hanaw Mohammed Taqi Mohammed Amin, and Erica Hunter)

*Joan Porter MacIver & Glen Rangwala, BISI Council Members*

## VISITING IRAQI SCHOLARSHIPS

The Visiting Iraqi Scholarship programme, designed to provide Iraqi academics and heritage professionals with the skills and knowledge to protect and further historical and cultural research on their country, continues to be a fundamental way in which the Institute encourages engagement and collaboration.

Over the last eighteen-months the Institute has partnered with the UCL based Nahrein Network to help develop the capacity of Middle Eastern universities, museums, archives and heritage sites to enable cultural and economic growth in the region. With the generous support of the Nahrein Network, we have hosted five visiting scholars from Iraq.

Mr Ali Al Makhzomy, Founder of Bil Weekend Tour Company in Baghdad – to undertake research on developing new methods to strengthen Iraq's tourism infrastructure.

Dr Rozhen Mohammed-Amin, Head of the Digital Cultural Heritage Research Group, Research Centre Coordinator and a Lecturer at the City Planning Department at Sulaimani Polytechnic University, Iraq – awarded a scholarship to assist with work on the EMOTIVE project at the University of Glasgow

Dr Alaa Hamdon, Lecturer and Researcher with the Remote Sensing Center at the University of Mosul – to work with Oxford University's Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa (EAMENA), with the aim of updating and obtaining a better understanding of the present condition of the archaeological site of Hatra

Dr Maher Al-Helli, Professor at the History Department, Al Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad – to revitalise the teaching of medieval history in Iraq, through observation and discussion with UK colleagues and through visits to universities, libraries and medieval heritage sites across the UK.

Mr Mohammed Jasim, former Director of Mosul University Libraries – to help develop a management plan for the Mosul Library. Mr Jasim will be researching digitisation and documentation of the surviving collection, acquisition strategies, and staff training.



Dr Maher Al-Helli at the British Academy  
Photo: Ali Khadr



Dr Rozhen Kama Mohammed-Amin completed a two-month scholarship at the University of Glasgow

## OUTREACH GRANT REPORTS

### The Zipang Recording Project

[www.listentoMesopotamianstories.com](http://www.listentoMesopotamianstories.com)

Storytellers June Peters, Fiona Collins and Fran Hazelton began to give oral storytelling performances of stories from Mesopotamian literature in 1997. Their performances were closely based on academic translations by Assyriologists including Jeremy Black, Eleanor Robson, Andrew George and Stephanie Dalley. When Jeremy Black attended one of their performances in London they asked him to suggest a name for their storytelling trio. They were glad to adopt his suggestion of 'Zipang', the Sumerian word for 'breath'.

For the next 20 years Zipang storytellers breathed new life into the long-lost stories of ancient Iraq at countless oral storytelling events. In 2003 an education charity named the Enheduanna Society was registered to fulfil the Zipang mission. In 2007, the Iraqi actress Badia Obaid joined Zipang and they began to tell Mesopotamian stories in Arabic as well as in English.

Zipang told Mesopotamian stories to a wide variety of audiences at many different venues. These included private parties, storytelling clubs, the Kufa Gallery, the October Gallery, the Hayward Gallery, the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London, the British Museum, the Poetry Café in Covent Garden, the Reel Iraq festival at the Rich Mix arts centre in Shoreditch, a forest storytelling festival in Morocco, the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London, the Stories-in-Transit project in Palermo, and the UK Parliament Week festival November 2017.

In October 2017 the Enheduanna Society launched the Zipang Recording Project with an outreach grant from BISI. The purpose of this project is to record the Zipang repertoire

of stories developed during 20 years of oral storytelling performances. The stories will be available online in English and in Arabic as a free and easily accessible introduction to Mesopotamian literature.

The first few stories were recorded by the Iraqi film-maker Arij al-Soltan. They included a reading of The Moon-God's Journey to Nibru by veteran British actor John Levitt. The Enheduanna Society then launched the Sponsor-a-Story fund-raising scheme to enable more stories to be recorded and put online. Sponsors chose their favourite stories. These included The Dialogue of Pessimism, Etana, Enki and Ninmah and Ereshkigal and Nergal.

In 2019 the role of executive producer for the Zipang Recording Project was taken on by James Ware of Purple Patch music, a long-time patron and benefactor of the Enheduanna Society. More stories were recorded by Colin Rae, a retired BBC sound engineer. They included Shukaletuda and Adapa.

Thanks to initial encouragement and funding from BISI, the website

[www.listentoMesopotamianstories.com](http://www.listentoMesopotamianstories.com)

now provides 20 stories from ancient Iraq told in English and in Arabic to be listened to and downloaded. More stories will be added.

*Fran Hazelton*

## Art Activities with Refugee and IDP Children in Arbat Refugee Camp in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq



Photo: Page Tussen Vrijheid en Geluksience

We began working on our project on the 17th of July 2018 in coordination with the Kurdish NGO Civil Development Organization (CDO) in Ashti Camp. The Camp is sadly home to IDPs from both Yezidi and Arab backgrounds, predominantly from Salahaddin and Mosul. The aim of the project was to encourage the coexistence between the two groups. In the past, there have been numerous conflicts between them due to religious, ethnic and cultural differences. These issues led to a division in the Camp and pushed the groups to limit themselves to their own sections of the Camp. This unfortunately affected the children's daily interactions and began to influence the children's behaviour towards one another.

Therefore, with our project, we aimed to reduce these problems and build awareness and communication between the groups. In the beginning we faced a lot of resistance because it was not easy to bring them together in the project room, where we first introduced the

workshop; but thanks to the help of four CDO staff members, we were able to build better relations between the forty-five children who participated, of which there were fifteen Yezidis and twenty-six Arabs. Below we explain the program of our workshop, the duration of which was three weeks, in addition to an extra week of finalizing the project.



Photo: Safen Muhammad

We decided to divide the children into three groups. Each week we worked with a group, comprising of varying numbers of children. In the first week, we worked with sixteen children, a mix between the two different ethnic groups. We used the first day, the 15th of July, for introductions.

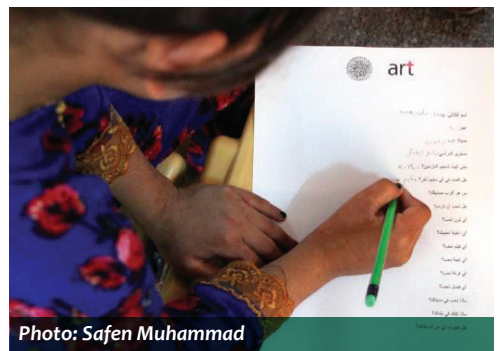


Photo: Safen Muhammad

The following day, we gave each of the children a personal form to fill out which collected general background information about their age, education, hobbies, etc.

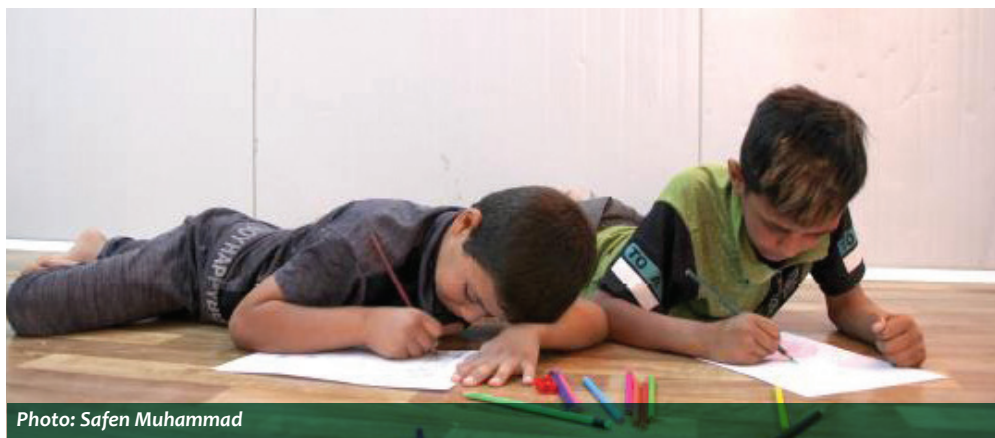


Photo: Safen Muhammad

We also began our first activity, where we introduced the children to the basics of painting before they painted for the first time.



Photo: Safen Muhammad

On the third day, they began mixing colours.



Photo: Safen Muhammad

The fourth day consisted of demonstrating how to paint on a canvas before the children each completed one of their own.



Photo: Safen Muhammad

After the first group finished their painted canvases, we distributed certificates to thank them for their participation in the workshop. This same procedure was repeated for the following weeks with the remaining groups: group two consisting of thirteen members and group three consisting of sixteen. The three groups of children painted on two large canvases, which were six meters long each. In the fourth and last week, we cut the canvases into individual paintings.

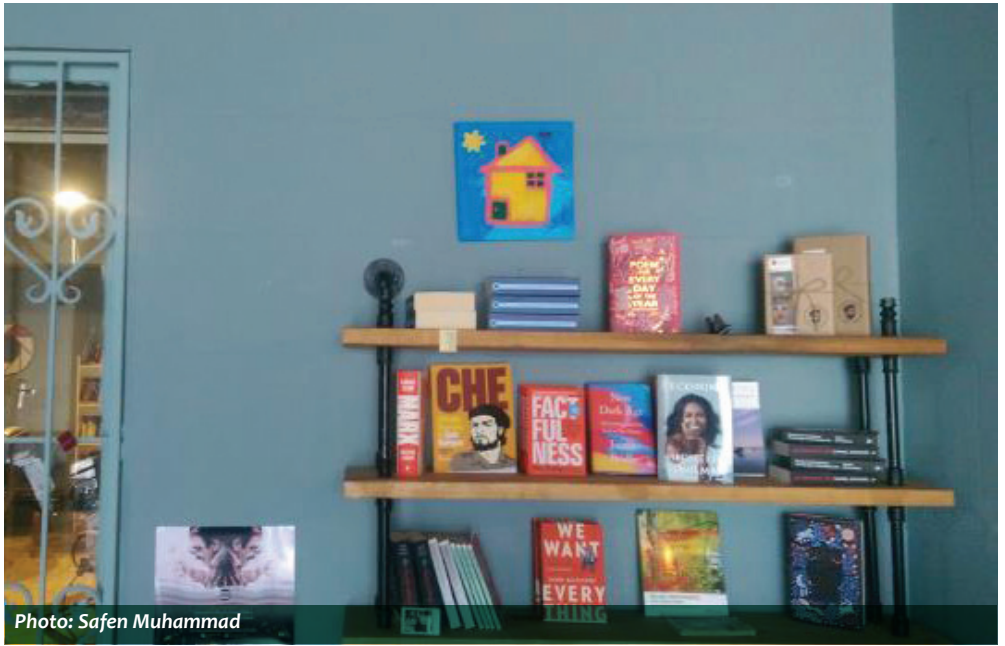


Photo: Safen Muhammad

Then, we framed a selected group of paintings which were distributed amongst a number of local and international institutions to raise awareness and help raise funding for future projects.

One of the painting is now housed at the offices of the BISI at the British Academy. Special thanks to The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI) for funding this project

*Shenah Abdullah and Safen Muhammad*

## The Second International Conference for Research and Protection on the Archaeological Heritage of Iraq

The second International Conference for Research and Protection on the Archaeological Heritage of Iraq (ICRPAHI) was held at the University of Kufa campus in Najaf between April 28-29, 2019. This year BISI was delighted to be one of the sponsoring institutions and I was invited to join the Steering Committee along with colleagues from the universities of Cambridge, Chicago and Pennsylvania, headed by Dr Haydar Al Hamdany of Kufa University.

The conference focused on the archaeology and social history of Mesopotamia during the 4th through 3rd millennia BC, or the Late Ubaid through Ur III Periods: archaeological research in South Iraq is currently undergoing dynamic growth, with new excavations and surveys already changing our reconstruction of the origins of Mesopotamian urban life. We received a large number of submissions to give papers from colleagues across Iraq as well as internationally, including Turkey and the USA. This meant it was possible to hold two full days with parallel sessions exploring the early cities and states of Mesopotamia, through aspects such as art, architecture, material culture and texts. Other panels examined scientific techniques to explore the Mesopotamian past (e.g., isotope studies, UAV mapping, or geoarchaeology). There was also a strong focus on cultural heritage and its protection, through conservation and public presentation; papers examined museums, exhibits, and their interaction with diverse audiences. In addition to academic sessions, one of the highlights of my time in Najaf was an opportunity to revisit the spectacular Imam Ali Mosque as well as some of the heritage buildings in the city.

It was a marvellous event and I would like to thank the President of Kufa University Professor Muhsin Al-Dhalimi for his generous hospitality as well as Dr Hayder Al Hamdany for his hard work in enabling the conference to take place.

*Dr Paul Collins*



Conference Attendees

## New Publication – Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud, Vol. VI

### Documents from the Nabu Temple and from private houses on the citadel.

Edited by S. Herbordt, R. Mattila, B. Parker (†), J.N. Postgate and D.J. Wiseman (†)

British Institute for the Study of Iraq 2019

ISBN-10 0-903472-34-0

pp. i-viii, 340 including Plates I-VI, 1-44

This penultimate volume of CTN provides an up-to-date edition and commentary on two major archives from the Kalhu acropolis, from the field seasons of 1953-1956: the business documents (mostly grain loans on triangular dockets) and a few administrative texts from the Nabu Temple (Part I: texts Nos. 1-59) and the legal documents from the household of Šamaš-šarru-uṣur (Part II: Nos. 60-115); also included are three texts from the “Town Wall Palace” (Part III: Nos. 116-118). S. Herbordt provides a new study of the seal impressions based on drawings and photos, and photographs of both the impressions and unsealed tablets are included where available. The handcopies on Plates 1-44 are from Wiseman, Parker, Postgate and Mattila.

Many of these texts were edited previously by Wiseman and Parker in articles in Iraq, but some were only catalogued and others had lain for years uncopied in both the Iraq Museum and the British Museum. Bringing them all together has enabled a more detailed study of the two main archives with the benefit of the advances in our understanding of Neo-Assyrian over the last half century. This gives a valuable insight into the activities of both a major temple and an elite household in the 8th-7th centuries BC.

**£45.00** – General Public

**£30.00** – BISI Members

**If you are interested in pre-ordering a copy please contact Ali Khadr on  
[bisi@britac.ac.uk](mailto:bisi@britac.ac.uk)**

## BISI GRANT NOTICES & DEADLINES

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

### BISI ACADEMIC GRANTS Research and Conference Grants (normally 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.



Donations can be made to the BISI from the BISI Website's home page ([www.bisi.ac.uk](http://www.bisi.ac.uk)).

Your support is important to our work. Thank you.

### VISITING IRAQI SCHOLARSHIPS

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Nahrein Network will be financially supporting BISI's Visiting Iraqi Scholarships over the next year. BISI and the Nahrein Network will be offering four to six Visiting Scholarships each year to enable academics, cultural heritage professionals and NGO workers from Iraq to visit the UK for 1-2 months for training and research. We welcome applications from Iraq-based scholars if their project relates to one or more of the Nahrein Network's five aims. Applicants must currently reside in Iraq and be able to converse and understand English to a working level to ensure that visits are a success. **Annual Deadlines:** 15 February and 15 August.

On an exception basis, BISI may consider funding a separate Visiting Scholar whose research is not covered by the Nahrein Network's aim. Only exceptional applications with developed research proposals and pre-established links to a UK academic sponsor or university will be assessed.

## BISI SUPPORTERS 2019

BISI is very grateful for donations, both large and small.  
Here we would like to thank all those who donated to us in 2019.

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Sir Harold Walker

Anonymous x 13

## FUTURE BISI LECTURES – SAVE THE DATE

**Matthew Vincent and Chance Coughenour**

***Democratising Access and Public Engagement in the Cultural Heritage Sector***

Wednesday 13 November 2019, 6.00 p.m. at the British Academy

Technological advancements provide unique opportunities across the public and private sectors for documentation, dissemination and public engagement. Founders of Rekrei.org, Matthew Vincent and Chance Coughenour, will discuss the creation of the platform and volunteer community which utilised photogrammetry and prompted new dialogues on the cultural value of digital data, particularly regarding lost or destroyed heritage. Examples will be presented on the challenges facing the heritage sector today across the heritage sector with recommendations from their own experiences.

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Jane Weeks (Fundraising Committee)

### Volunteers 2019

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

Amal Al-Jubouri  
Helen Maloigne  
Zainab Mehdi  
Anne-Marie Misconi  
Lauren Mulvee  
Alan Sandall

# 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.

Any donation, no matter how small, makes a huge difference to the work we are able to do.

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