



# TAARII NEWSLETTER

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## TAARII AND THE IRAQI CULTURAL CENTER HOLD CONFERENCE ON BAGHDAD

On November 15–16, 2013, TAARII and the Iraqi Cultural Center (ICC) held a conference in Washington, D.C., on Baghdad in medieval and modern times. The inspiration for the conference was the designation by the Arab ministers of culture of Baghdad as the capital of Arab culture for 2013. Seventeen scholars presented on the economic, political, social, and cultural life in Baghdad from one thousand years ago to today. Presentations were geared for a general audience; participants and audience members appreciated the accessibility of the lectures and the chance to learn from the various kinds of expertise represented. In addition, the supportive environment of the ICC and its welcoming staff encouraged networking and informal exchanges.

The conference began with a morning session on the political, economic, and social life of medieval Baghdad. Five scholars — Chase F. Robinson, Stephen Humphreys, Sidney Griffith, Roy Mottahedeh, and Richard Bulliet — drew on their vast knowledge of medieval Baghdad to provide a broad historical foundation for the rest of the conference. In his presentation, Chase F. Robinson, the interim president

of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, focused on scale and plan to help make some sense of the economic, cultural, and political project that made and unmade Baghdad. He illustrated how eighth- and tenth-century Baghdad, ideological in original inspiration and design, was subordinated over the course of the ninth century to the political and economic forces that the Abbasid Empire had set in motion. His presentation illustrated how cities, as centers of production and consumption, and as nodes of political power, are barometers of broader economic and social change.

Stephen Humphreys, who until his retirement in 2012 held the King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud Chair in Islamic Studies at the University

of California, Santa Barbara, provided additional insights on the place of Baghdad in history. Humphreys recounted that Baghdad was founded both to symbolize and consolidate Abbasid imperial power. It was obviously not the first urban foundation in Islam, he said, but it was the first one expressly built to be the seat of the caliphate and the first one fully planned from its inception. In spite of Baghdad's imposing origins, however, its position within the Abbasid Empire was severely challenged even in its ninth-century heyday. It was besieged, half-ruined, and then abandoned to its fate during the long civil war from 194 A.H./810 C.E. to 203 A.H./819 C.E. In 221 A.H./836 C.E., al-Mu'tasim decided to erect a dedicated government

city sixty miles up the Tigris in Samarra, and the caliphs did not permanently return until 279 A.H./892 C.E., a moment in which the empire was already subject to serious territorial fragmentation and rebellion — a process which only intensified after 295 A.H./908 C.E. In spite of such grave challenges, however, Baghdad remained a vibrant intellectual, cultural, and economic center throughout, the seedbed of Islam's self-



Figure 1.1. Sara Pursely (IJMES) analyzes gender images in Jawad Salim's Monument to Freedom in Baghdad (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)



Figure 1.2. Five scholars of medieval Baghdad (from left to right): Stephen Humphreys, Chase Robinson, Sidney Griffith, Richard Bulliet, and Roy Mottahedeh. Together they provided a broad historical foundation for the conference on Baghdad in medieval and modern times (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)

definition as a sophisticated and enduring cultural system.

Sidney Griffith, professor in the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures at The Catholic University of America, described how cosmopolitan Baghdad from the ninth to the mid-eleventh centuries was not only an Islamic city, but the interreligious metropolis where Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious leaders and scholars engaged with one another in controversy and constructive philosophical and theological

discourse. His presentation highlighted this state of intercommunal affairs by briefly describing the networking careers of several leading intellectuals including: Patriarch Timothy I, Hunayn ibn Ishaq, Saadia ha-Ga'on, Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus, Al-Farabi, Yahya ibn 'Adi, and 'Isa ibn Zur'a.

Roy P. Mottahedeh, the Gurney professor of History at Harvard University, illustrated various aspects of Baghdad in 1013. For example, a coin minted in Baghdad exactly a thousand years ago shows the configuration of

political life at that time. The tombs of Abu Hanifah and Sharif ar-Radi, visible a thousand years ago, can still be seen in modern Baghdad. Other important sites from medieval Baghdad, such as the tombs of the Sufi saints, have also survived. The chronicles, written by Ibn al-Athir and Ibn al-Jawzi, include the year 1013 (403/04 A.H.).

They record some sectarian strife and the efforts of both the Sunni Abbasid caliph and the Shi'i Buyid ruler of Iraq to stop such strife. These chronicles also depict the Sunni caliph's appreciation of leading Shi'i intellectuals of the period. Several figures of the first half of the fifth/eleventh centuries, such as the jurist Mawardi and the mathematician Abu al-Wafa' al-Mantiqi, are still recognized as great intellectuals one thousand years later.

In the final presentation of the morning, Richard W. Bulliet, professor of Middle Eastern History at Columbia University, demonstrated that, despite its political and cultural centrality, the prosperity of Baghdad varied greatly over a period of three hundred years. He offered a close look at the economic data pertaining to the rural areas around Baghdad that reflected this variation. Bulliet argued that although the reasons for the economic deterioration of Iraq in the tenth and eleventh centuries are often ascribed to political factors, a climate change that adversely affected agricultural production must also be considered.

The Friday afternoon session of the conference explored the making of modern Baghdad. Abbas Kadhim,



Figure 1.3. Mary Ellen Lane (left), the Executive Director of CAORC, talks with Julian Raby (right), the Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)



senior fellow at Boston University's Institute for Iraqi Studies, shed light on the period of Midhat Pasha, the wali of Baghdad, between 1869 and 1871. Before Midhat Pasha's arrival, Baghdad — as the rest of Iraq — was plagued by corruption, backwardness, and poverty. Midhat Pasha initiated an ambitious reform program that involved reforming the administration, activating the laws, improving agriculture and transportation, and establishing better services. He also established the first government schools in Baghdad and imported a printing press. Soon thereafter, he founded the first modern newspaper (*az-Zawra'*), whose anniversary is still celebrated in Iraq as the "Day of Journalism."

Sara Pursley, associate editor of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, drew on images related to gender in Jawad Salim's famous Monument to Freedom in Baghdad, built to commemorate the 1958 Revolution, to explore how new global ideas about an economically developed future drove the increasing restriction of Iraqi girls' education to domestic skills. During the 1940s and 1950s, in the context of the growing nationalist and communist movements against the Hashemite monarchy, Baghdadi women were increasingly visible in the

public sphere, especially in urban street demonstrations and uprisings, and a diverse feminist movement demanded women's rights across a range of social and political domains. At the same time, the spread of modernization theory and ideas about economic development in the years after World War II fueled the increasing differentiation of the Iraqi public school curriculum along the lines of gender, as female students were required to spend more and more of their school time in home economics classes. This process was driven in part by American education experts invited to Iraq by the Hashemite government, who sharply criticized the Iraqi public school curriculum for providing girls and boys with the same education.

In his presentation, Eric Davis, professor of Political Science at Rutgers University, explored the contradiction between Baghdad as a site for cultural pluralism and civil society building, on the one hand, and, after 1968, as a site for sectarian identities and violence, on the other. Davis stated that Baghdad is conceptualized in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries as material space — manifested in its literary salons (*majalis al-'adab*), coffee houses, professional associations (*al-niqabat al-mihniya*), artist ateliers, newspaper offices, labor unions, and programmatic political parties (e.g.,

*Jama'at al-Ahali*, *al-Hizb al-Watani*) — that established a vibrant civil society and promoted democratic impulses. However, Davis continued, this civic space was transformed during the 1960s. As the Ba'th Party consolidated its control of Iraqi society after 1968 and, under Saddam

Hussein's rule during the 1980s and 1990s, Baghdad became, at least at the level of the ruling elite, a site for the creation of sectarian identities. The rapid growth of Iraq's oil wealth during the 1970s allowed the state to co-opt the intelligentsia and completely suppress Iraq's civil society. After 2003, sectarian identities have come to occupy a central place in Baghdad, as symbolized by the separation of its formerly multi-ethnic and multi-confessional quarters and their reconstruction as "ethnically cleansed" neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are built on fear and lack of trust by one ethnic or confessional group in others that are not their own. Davis used the concept of crisis to explain development and change in Iraqi political space over time. As Davis' recent research with Iraqi youth indicates, the new generation — especially educated middle class youth — decisively reject sectarianism. Davis asked, among other questions, whether this new "generation in waiting" is aware of and affected by the historical memory of the pre-Ba'thist era. He also asked what role the main religious institution of Iraqi Shi'ism (*al-Hawza al-'Ilmiya*), tribal leaders who emphasize Shi'i-Sunni unity within Iraq's tribal structure, and the secular intelligentsia (both Arab and Kurdish) play in the struggle over Iraq's political identity. And, he asked, what does this analysis suggest about Iraq's future political development: pluralism or sectarianism?

The first session of Saturday morning explored the literary and cultural life in medieval and modern Baghdad. Samer Ali, associate professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, illustrated how Baghdad, the ninth-century City of Peace, was a global hub that brought together Muslims, Jews, and Nestorians, as well as Black Africans, Greeks, and Turks from Central Asia. Within this global niche, men and



Figure 1.4. Fawzi Karim, Iraqi poet, writer, and painter residing in London, listens to a presentation on Baghdad (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)



Figure 1.5. Suzanne Stetkevych (Georgetown University) interacts with audience members following her panel (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)

women gathered in salons around poetry, songs, and stories. These salons enabled men and women to compete, bond, and form communities of love, despite differences of religion and ethnicity. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, as of January 2014, the Sultan Qaboos Chair in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, used examples of poetry from the caliphal court at Baghdad, as well as later Arabic poetry, to show how the master poets of the Abbasid period were responsible for creating the enduring image, in both the East and the West, of the Abbasid age with its capital at Baghdad as the Golden Age of Arab-Islamic civilization.

Continuing the session, Fawzi Karim, an Iraqi poet, writer, and painter residing in London, provided brief notes about what happened to the modern poem in the cafes of Baghdad at the hands of the young poets in the 1940s and 1950s, and again at the hands of the young poets of the sixties. His presentation illuminated how Baghdad was free in the forties from, in the words of Karim, the impact of the so-called left-wing political awareness and revolutionary slogans, which began after the establishment of left-wing parties: internationalist, pan-Arab, nationalist, and Islamist. Karim stated that the parties did not want the poem to wander inside the maze and

illusion, the higher it would rise. The presentation showed how the vital spirit of the two generations was embodied in two poets, who were not the most mature voices.

In the final presentation of the session, Fatima Ali, the co-director of Social Cases Performing Arts Company, a trans-disciplinary and international company based in the U.K., France, and Greece, focused on theater in Iraq after 2003. As an artist following an anthropological theater approach, Ali conducted fieldwork in Baghdad in 2012 based on several semi-structured interviews and participant observation in the Iraqi Forum Theatre and the National Iraqi Theatre. Ali's presentation offered a brief summary of performing arts in Iraq before the fall of Saddam's regime and then gave an

ask questions. They wanted the poem to answer, because, as Karim explained, the poem must know what it wants! Karim described how the wings of "socialist realism" began to overshadow the Iraqi poet. Poetic dreams became a huge balloon; the more puffed with the smoke of

overview of theater in Baghdad after 2003, highlighting its challenges and realities in a context marked by the rise of conservatism, the outbreak of sectarian violence, and the crisis of the Iraqi educational system as well as state institutions.

The second session of Saturday morning explored the remembering and depicting of modern Baghdad. Magnus T. Bernhardsson, professor of Middle Eastern History and Gaudino Scholar at Williams College in Massachusetts, asked whether the 1950s in Baghdad were a Golden Age. His presentation considered the role of nostalgia in Iraqi historical memory and how that impacts the interpretation of the past, especially about the late Hashemite Monarchy. The 1950s were a time of considerable economic growth and exciting artistic output and experimentation. At the same time, it was also a time of political corruption and revolutionary zeal. Considering the contradictory memories of this era, Bernhardsson asked whether the 1950s offered some form of template for the current political challenges. Muhsin al-Musawi, professor of Classical and Modern Arabic and



Figure 1.6. The Director of the Iraqi Cultural Center, Mohammad Alturaihi (right), presents a gift to Magnus Berhardsson (Williams College, left), as well as other participants, as TAARII President McGuire Gibson (center) looks on (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)



Comparative Studies at Columbia University, used a late nineteenth century cultural reconstruction of Baghdad in its heyday to suggest how seductive memories compel writers, artists, and historians to keep up to an image that has never lost its luster despite the ravages of occupations and wars. His presentation attempted to locate the topographical details of cultural life in a broad imaginary that has its far-reaching impact on every recollection of the city, and its ultimate evocation in art and writing throughout history. As crisis is pivotal to this reconstruction, the sense of urgency and surrender to a cherished memory often involve cultural production in anxiety and rupture.

The final session of the conference, on Saturday afternoon, explored the modern city of Baghdad. Mina Marefat, principal of Design Research, practicing architecture, urban design, and revitalization, described how in the 1950s as the world was embracing progress, Baghdad was at the forefront of a global experiment that has since become the norm in almost every major city. Inviting five of the world's most famous architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Gropius from the U.S., Le Corbusier from France, Alvar Aalto from Finland, and Gio Ponti from Italy, the city was poised to become an international architectural showcase with an iconic opera house, a university, an Olympic sports center, museums, and an office headquarters. In Hashemite Iraq, these projects represented the collective aspirations of an educated elite, but the political upheaval that ended the kingdom also sealed the fate of each of these projects differently.

Caecilia Pieri, head of the Urban Observatory at the French Institute of the Near East, Beirut, Lebanon, began with the recalling of 1988 Baghdad by the famous critic Jabra Ibrahim Jabra as "the city of pluralities," a city



Figure 1.7. Audience members listen to panelists (from left to right) Fatima Ali, Samer Ali, Suzanne Stetkevych, and Fawzi Karim present on literary and cultural life in medieval and modern Baghdad (Photo Credit: Raad Ali, Iraqi Cultural Center)

where crossing references and melting of people and cultures had given modernization an interesting synthesis that would absorb tradition into new creativity and fruitful thinking. Evidence of it was (among others) the various phases of architectural development throughout the twentieth century, until the 1990s. Currently, Pieri continued, the city faces a contrasted situation: Despite some projects in the shape of isolated architectural icons, the modern urban heritage and social fabric are deteriorating under the pressure of various factors. These factors include the cropping of the city into territorialized communities, as in the pre-modern city, and the temptation of eradicating the "modern past" which, until now, bring uncertainty in the writing of a new urban history.

In her presentation, Abeer Shaheen, a doctoral student in the Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies department at Columbia University, highlighted various aspects of the occupation of Baghdad. Although the 2003 war and its aftermath signaled a continuity in the American project in Iraq since 1990, Shaheen argued,

it nonetheless opened the terrain of Iraq for new conditions, rooted in the pre-war discourse, strategies, and techniques of control and dominance. The occupation authority sought to build the conditions by which long-term distinctive powers could be defined and secured in Iraq. The law, as a violent instrument of control in the Iraqi context, was the first condition. Horizontal and vertical re-imagining of Iraq's space in its entirety, and of Baghdad in its specificity, was the second condition. Shaheen's presentation investigated these two conditions and their role in producing new legal categories, modes of sociality, fortified urbanism, and a new vocabulary in which Iraq's collective memory is rewritten.

TAARII is grateful to all the participants, as well as the staff at the Iraqi Cultural Center, for their interest in and support of the Baghdad conference. We look forward to continuing to co-organize events with the ICC and to broadening and strengthening the Iraqi/Mesopotamian Studies communities through such intellectual and social exchanges.

## TAARII AT MESA IN NEW ORLEANS

At the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in New Orleans in October 2013, TAARII held its board meeting, sponsored a roundtable discussion on conducting research on Iraq and a panel on minorities in Iraq, and hosted a reception (see p. 27 for reception photos).

### BOARD MEETING

At its annual board meeting, board members approved the request of Stanford University's Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies to become an institutional member of TAARII. TAARII's new officers, who were elected by e-mail ballot, were introduced: Peter Wien (University of Maryland, College Park), president; Eric Davis (Rutgers University), vice president; Jason Ur (Harvard University), secretary; and Waiel Hindo, treasurer. They will take office on July 1, 2014. The board thanked TAARII's outgoing officers: Magnus Bernhardsson (Williams College), vice president; and James Armstrong, secretary. The board recognized McGuire Gibson (University of Chicago), who is retiring as president of the board, and thanked him for founding TAARII, helping to establish the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC), and serving the board and the study of Iraq.

### ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION:

**Researching Iraq Today: Archives, Oral Histories, and Ethnographies**  
(Report by Mona Damluji, Roundtable Organizer and Chair)

Iraq has weathered one of the longest periods of ongoing and active combat in its history over the last decade. Simultaneously, the country has witnessed a resurgence of historical, ethnographic, and politically engaged

research by international scholars. Ten years after the American-led coalition invasion, this interdisciplinary roundtable offered an opportunity to discuss the methodologies, difficulties, and possibilities of conducting scholarly research on Iraq today.

The roundtable aimed to outline the potential for and limits of historical and ethnographic fieldwork on — and in — Iraq. Drawing from a range of historical and contemporary contexts that span environmentalism, political movements, media representations, and urban transformations, the presentations of four panelists considered four fundamental questions:

- What kinds of historical research and ethnographic engagement can be sustained in Iraq today?
- How do the successes and challenges of qualitative research influence both the quality of original scholarship on Iraq and the integrity of knowledge about Iraq itself?
- What role do archives and communities outside of Iraq play in these processes?
- How might the politically problematic relationships and uncomfortable alignments of the present moment come to be embraced, negotiated, or refused by the researcher?

The roundtable was chaired by Mona Damluji, the Mellon postdoctoral fellow in Islamic and Asian Visual Culture at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. Her research examines the intersection of histories of petroleum, urban development, and documentary film production in Iraq, Iran, and other oil-producing countries during the twentieth century. In the roundtable, Arbella Bet-Shlimon (assistant professor, History, University

of Washington, Seattle) discussed her approach to writing a provincial history of Iraq. Invested in moving beyond the familiar store of colonial and postcolonial documents housed in Britain's National Archive, Bet-Shlimon shared the obstacles and opportunities she encountered while writing a history of Kirkuk. This project ultimately entailed an innovative approach using maps, architectural documentation, oil company records, creative writing, and interviews. Alda Benjamin (Ph.D. candidate, University of Maryland, College Park) shared her experience of researching and writing a minority history of Iraq, rooted in the experience of the Assyrian community. She detailed her strategy of weaving together a socio-intellectual history that is sensitive to women and gender issues, drawing from less conventional sources that ranged from government records held in the Iraqi National Library and Archive in Baghdad to cultural works such as poetry and music. Zainab Saleh (visiting assistant professor, Anthropology, Haverford College) discussed various ethical and empirical considerations she encountered in the context of conducting ethnographic work within a community of Iraqi exiles based in the U.K. For example, as an Iraqi, the complexities of conducting ethnographic research, including participant observation and oral histories, were shaped to a significant degree by informants' perceptions of Saleh's "Iraqiness" — an issue that many Iraqi scholars contend with while working inside of Iraq as well as among Iraqi diasporas. Bridget Guarasci (visiting assistant professor, Anthropology, Franklin & Marshall College) presented her strategies for conducting an ethnographic study of empire through the lens of environmentalism in the Iraqi Marshes.

Guarasci's multi-sited and transnational approach establishes imperialist ideology as the field of inquiry, which challenges more traditional definitions of the anthropologist's field in terms of a bound geographical or cultural space.

Building on provocations and details raised by the four panelists, the second half of the session opened up a spirited roundtable discussion. Several critical currents of inquiry shaped discussion around the themes of responsibility and access. Notably, Nadjé Al-Ali posed questions related to the matter of scholarship and privilege. What are the opportunities, but also the responsibilities, of scholars who work on Iraq while based in Europe and the United States in terms of the production of knowledge and in particular collaboration with researchers inside of Iraq? How might we better facilitate collaborative work and support academic initiatives from within the country? Orit Bashkin approached the question of methodology from a pedagogical perspective. What have we learned that can better inform how we train the next generation of scholars working in and on Iraq? She suggests that singular focus on Arabic language training precludes opportunities for original inquiry rooted in transnational approaches to Iraq's historical and contemporary life. Juan Cole pointed to the problematic erasure of certain histories vis-à-vis the wholesale destruction of parts of Iraq's National Archive in the context of the conflict. As a result, roundtable participants with varying experience in archives inside and outside of Iraq generated a rich inventory of existing archives around the world, noting the specific limitations, rules, and strategies for accessing and navigating databases and documents based on first-hand experience. This list included underutilized archives located in Washington, D.C., France, Israel, Russia, and Germany, as well as the

League of Nations archive and the oral history project of the UNHCR.

In summary, the MESA roundtable "Researching Iraq Today" cultivated a fresh space for scholarship on Iraq that centered around two main inquiries. First, the roundtable acted as a forum to generate a collective knowledge base for information related to sources and data, and more specifically to discuss strategies for how scholars can more effectively and ethically conduct archival research, oral histories, and ethnographic fieldwork. Second, the discussion raised important issues related to key responsibilities that current scholars have towards future generations of researchers working inside Iraq as well as those with the opportunity to take on transnational approaches from outside of Iraq.

#### PANEL:

#### Minorities, Identities and the Modern Iraqi State (Report by Fadi Dawood and Alda Benjamin, co-organizers)

Minorities have featured prominently in the debates surrounding the establishment of the modern Iraqi state. During the period between 1920–2003, colonial and local officials played an important and influential role in shaping the place of minorities

within the social, political, and cultural institutions of the state. Various pieces of legislations and decrees were passed during the colonial and post-colonial periods that led to massive communalist struggles, tensions, and hostilities that defined the interactions between the state and minority communities well into the post-colonial period. Leaders of various minority populations were also involved in carving a place for their own communities within the social and political spaces of the modern Iraqi state. Minority identities were influenced greatly by both state and community based activities. Historians and social scientists have devoted a great deal of attention to the study of Iraq's minority populations; however, contextualizing the social and political histories of the various minority communities within the history of the modern Iraqi state is still lacking.

The goal for this panel was to contextualize Iraq's minority communities within the social and political history of the modern state, and to highlight the ways in which minorities and the Iraqi state interacted with each other. The panel intended to help scholars better understand the historical developments that led to the creation of Iraq's multiple identities.



Figure 2.1. A TAARII-sponsored panel at MESA 2013 explored the relations among minorities, identities, and the modern Iraqi state (Photo Credit: TAARII)



In order to accomplish these goals the panel highlighted three minority communities: Assyrians, Kurds, and Shi'as.

The following questions were addressed: how did the colonial and post-colonial Iraqi state influence the identity of minority populations? How did various minorities view themselves in the context of the newly created state? What role did the transnational nature of Iraq's minority communities play in the way they perceived themselves within the social and political apparatuses of the state? What role did war and violence play in creating minority identities in Iraq?

Alda Benjamin (Ph.D. candidate, University of Maryland, College Park) explored early Ba'thist policies of co-optation and "generosity" towards the Assyrians in the 1970s. She examined the development of Assyrian intellectualism resulting from the cultural and literary rights issued by the government in 1972 and the impact of such policies on the Assyrian identity. Fadi Dawood (Ph.D. candidate, SOAS, University of London) dealt with the formation of a collective Assyrian identity in the Ba'qubah Refugee Camp, and highlighted some of the ways in which minorities were viewed by both the colonial and Iraqi governments



Figure 2.2. Panelists (from left to right) Sam Helfont, Joseph Sassoon (discussant), Hilla Peled-Shapira, Alda Benjamin, and Fadi Dawood explored minorities, identities, and the modern Iraqi state in a TAARII-sponsored panel at MESA 2013 (Photo Credit: TAARII)

during the British mandate. Sam Helfont (Ph.D. candidate, Princeton University) presented a paper on Shi'a identity formation, and Shi'a-state relations in the years of Ba'thist rule in Iraq. Helfont, focused on the formation and development of official religious institutions and its impact on Shi'a identity. Hilla Peled-Shapira (assistant professor, Bar-Ilan University) presented a paper on Buland al-Haydari, and the negotiation of Arab and Kurdish identities during the Ba'thist era. The papers were all concerned with the ways in which the colonial and post-colonial Iraqi state influenced the identity of minority

populations and the way various ethnic and religious minorities perceived themselves within the social and political apparatuses of the state.

The four presentations are part of a larger collection the organizers intend to publish. The panelists were fortunate to have Professor Joseph Sassoon as a discussant and express their appreciation for his time. Sassoon's comments and suggestions helped nuance the papers further as they become ready for publication. On behalf of the panel, the organizers wish to extend their gratitude for TAARII's support and sponsorship of this panel.

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## TAARII AWARDS BEST DISSERTATIONS ON ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL/MODERN IRAQ

TAARII awarded its two biennial awards for the best U.S. doctoral dissertations on Iraq to three recipients. The award for the best dissertation on modern or medieval Iraq went to Arbella Bet-Shlimon from Harvard University for her dissertation, "Kirkuk, 1918–1968: Oil and the Politics of Identity in an Iraqi City." Two recipients shared The Donny George Youkhana Dissertation Prize, TAARII's award for the best dissertation on ancient Iraq: Kim Benzel from Columbia University, for her dissertation entitled, "Puabi's Adornment for the Afterlife: Materials and Technologies of Jewelry at Ur in Mesopotamia," and Katharyn Hanson from the University of Chicago for her dissertation, "Considerations of Cultural Heritage: Threats to Mesopotamian Archaeological Sites."

The full abstracts of the three award-winning dissertations (and those of past recipients) are available on the TAARII website ([www.taarii.org/dissertationprizes](http://www.taarii.org/dissertationprizes)).

TAARII will hold its next dissertation award competition in 2015 for dissertations defended during the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 academic years. Submissions are invited from any discipline for the study of any time period. The competitions are open to U.S. citizens at any university worldwide and any student at a U.S. university. The amount of each award is \$1,500.



Arbella Bet-Shlimon, Harvard University

### "Kirkuk, 1918–1968: Oil and the Politics of Identity in an Iraqi City"

policies with spatial factors and oil. Reviewers of the modern/medieval dissertation submissions appreciated that Bet-Shlimon's writing style is highly accessible and contains narratives of people and events to emphasize the broader points that she makes.

Among other things, reviewers stated that Bet-Shlimon employs two innovations to study the changes in Kirkuk's ethno-sectarian rivalries. She utilizes urban geography for clues to understand the conflict and explores the effects of hydrocarbon extraction, the "oil complex" (p. 11), and goes beyond its limited fiscal role of revenue generator or even employer. This allows her to avoid the dichotomy of whether the proclaimed organic or cultural attachments to a region (on the part of ethnicities) are more salient than the material aspects of oil as income. Reviewers found the dissertation to be a careful

and critical analysis of politics, ideology, and oil. As such, it will disappoint those looking to buttress their own particular ethnicity's claim (whether Turcoman, Kurdish, Chaldo-Assyrian, or Arab) to Kirkuk with academic rigor and authority. Bet-Shlimon shows that identities are not predetermined but molded by a "complex and shifting interaction of class, language and religion" (p. 67). Reviewers suspect that the work will be widely read in the academy on Iraq and the politics of identity formation in general, especially if the author is successful at turning it into a book.

Arbella Bet-Shlimon, now an assistant professor of History at the University of Washington, Seattle, is in the process of converting the dissertation project into a book manuscript. Along with her revisions of the original version of the work, she is doing additional research on Kirkuk in the Ba'th era.

Reviewers noted that in her dissertation, Arbella Bet-Shlimon offers a nuanced and analytically dynamic alternative to the stale ethno-sectarian paradigm that is often used to analyze conflict in the Iraqi city of Kirkuk (and Iraq and the Middle East more broadly). She explores how ethnic identities that were weakly formed in the early twentieth century evolved and solidified through the interaction of British and later Iraqi government



Kim Benzel, Columbia University

**“Puabi’s Adornment for the Afterlife:  
Materials and Technologies of Jewelry at Ur in Mesopotamia”**

Reviewers recommended Kim Benzel’s dissertation on the jewelry of Puabi, a female buried in the so-called Royal Cemetery at the site of Ur in southern Mesopotamia, for the way it brings together hitherto unobserved features of technological style within a larger theoretical and textual framework. Benzel argues that the jewelry from Puabi’s tomb was purposefully made for the burial and

should be seen as part of an active ritual and display. Reviewers observed that, for the most part, past studies have focused on the wealth found in these burials as proxies of a social and political history of royal power. Benzel’s meticulous presentation of the “seamless technology” used by the goldsmiths in particular reinforces the conclusions drawn from a philological study of the textual references to the material that both the material and its crafting were part of the larger funerary ritual. The photos and illustrations are outstanding and add weight to the arguments presented. The methods and microphotography used to study the technology of this jewelry will lead to further similar studies of material from Ur and other sites, now that their potential has been made evident.

Kim Benzel currently works as a curator in ancient Near Eastern art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. At the moment, she is helping to prepare a special exhibition that opens in September of 2014, titled “Assyria to Iberia: Crossing Continents at the Dawn of the Classical Age.” The show will act as a sequel to the two previous major shows: “Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus” (2003) and “Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.” (2008). This new project will offer a compelling picture of the origins and development of artistic traditions in the Western world and their deep roots in the interaction between the ancient Near East and the lands along the shores of the Mediterranean.

Katharyn Hanson, University of Chicago

**“Considerations of Cultural Heritage: Threats to  
Mesopotamian Archaeological Sites”**

Katharyn Hanson’s dissertation seeks to explore the questions inherent in the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria: What type of damage is occurring? How can we measure the extent of destruction? Why are these sites threatened? And ultimately, what can we do to better prevent the continued destruction of cultural heritage at Mesopotamian archaeological sites? In addition to its scholarship, reviewers recommended Hanson’s dissertation for its relevancy. Many would benefit, reviewers stated, from gaining an understanding of how the problems addressed by Hanson are much more complicated than the “looting” covered in popular publications and even scholarship.

When published in book form, they said, Hanson’s research surely will influence the discourse on cultural heritage and archaeological sites and potentially will raise the awareness for allowing new oversight.

Katharyn Hanson is currently in Iraq working as the manager and lead instructor for the Archaeological Site Preservation Program in the University of Delaware Institute for Global Studies’ Academic Programs at the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage in Erbil, Iraq (see p. 15). She is also a Consulting Scholar at the Cultural Heritage Center of the University of Pennsylvania, where her research continues to combine archaeology, remote sensing,



and cultural heritage policy. Dr. Hanson serves as a board member for the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield working on the protection of cultural heritage in times of conflict and crisis. She recently updated a special exhibit entitled: “Catastrophe! The Looting and Destruction of Iraq’s Past,” on display at the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute Museum and at the Royal Ontario Museum.



## LEVERAGING SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS IN IRAQ

LORNA MIDDLEBROUGH,  
EDUCATION SPECIALIST FOR IRAQ, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

**“What do you want your relationship with Iraqi universities to look like 15 years from now?”**

That is the question I ask U.S. universities that are interested in recruiting Iraqi scholarship students and building relationships with Iraqi institutions. Choosing to interact with the two higher education systems in Iraq and the three official scholarship programs requires taking the long view of the relationship as Iraqi institutions race to catch up with their international colleagues after decades of isolation. But, it certainly poses new challenges to many U.S. institutions hoping to leverage the hundreds of millions of dollars available each year in scholarship funding to send Iraqis abroad.

It is an important question for the U.S. Government as well. In 2008, the Government of Iraq and the U.S. Government signed the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) that outlined areas of mutual cooperation and engagement as the two countries transitioned into a relationship based on mutual respect and partnership. Education and scientific research are key components of the SFA and include a wide range of activities that have the potential to link the countries together over the long term.

One example of that shared cooperation is the desire to increase the number of exchange opportunities to promote people-to-people interactions between Iraqis and Americans. While current conditions make it difficult for large numbers of American citizens to travel, study, or teach in Iraq, events on the ground have facilitated significant numbers of bright Iraqi researchers and academics to visit our university

campuses and join our research communities.

To promote these opportunities, the U.S. Government has provided resources in Iraq to help pave the way. EducationUSA, a program funded by the Department of State to promote U.S. higher education around the world, assists Iraqi students who want to study at U.S. universities. Four EducationUSA advisors in Iraq at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the U.S. consulates in Erbil and Basrah work directly with Iraqi scholarship students to help them identify suitable programs and apply for admission using a combination of outreach methods. Advisors use social media, such as the StudyUSAIraq Facebook page, websites in English and Arabic, and email advising in English, Arabic, and Kurdish to maximize outreach. Group and individual advising, combined with telephone advising in all three languages, allows students in every part of the country to have access to an EducationUSA Advisor and accurate information about studying in the United States. EducationUSA Iraq also reaches students through a network of volunteer Iraqi Student Advisors (ISAs) and cultural advisors who are familiar with the U.S. higher education system. In Iraq, there are also nine American Corners or small resource centers funded by the U.S. Department of State that provide information on American culture, education, history, and current events, multiplying

EducationUSA Iraq's outreach efforts.

EducationUSA Advisors also work closely with education and higher education officials in Iraq to help them understand the U.S. higher education system and develop initiatives that lead to greater cooperation with U.S. universities.

To illustrate the importance of strengthening educational cooperation between the two countries, the Department of State also created a new position in Washington, D.C., to increase the capacity of the scholarship programs. As the Education Specialist for Iraq, I work to increase the number of Iraqi students studying in the United States, strengthen the scholarship programs, and assist U.S. universities in recruiting and retaining Iraqi scholarship students. Much of my time is spent helping the scholarship programs and their representative offices in Washington, D.C., design policies and identify partnerships that will benefit institutions in both countries. I also act as a resource for U.S. universities that want to recruit Iraqi scholarship students and engage with Iraqi universities, but need support to make that happen.



Figure 3.1. U.S. universities recruit Iraqi scholarship students at EducationUSA Fair in Sulaymaniyah  
(Photo Credit: Lorna Middlebrough)

To understand some of the challenges we face today in strengthening connections between higher education institutions in the two countries, we need to look backwards before we can look forward. The higher education system in Iraq was modeled after the British system. In the 1920s, Iraq began sending students abroad to earn advanced degrees, mostly in medicine and related fields. Not surprisingly, most of them turned to U.K. universities where they continued their medical studies and earned British credentials before returning to Iraq to become leaders in academia, government, and medicine. That pattern continued until the 1970s and 1980s when many Iraqi students remained in the United Kingdom to practice medicine, teach at their alma mater, and wait for the country to become safer and more welcoming. While students continued to go abroad over the next three decades, the cumulative effect of wars, sanctions, and economic decline took its toll on the higher education system in Iraq. Since 2003, many Iraqi expatriates educated abroad have returned home where they play an important role in helping rebuild the country. Their presence has been felt in higher education. University faculty familiar with U.K. universities can directly influence a student's academic choices and ultimately their future. Relationships and connections with old colleagues help faculty obtain admissions for bright Iraqi students. The cycle of relationship building with U.K. institutions continues at a brisk pace.

U.S. universities might rightly ask where American institutions fit into this narrative. Certainly, a few Iraqi students over the decades have studied in the United States, but the number has been comparatively small over the years. In the mid-1980s, participation peaked with about 1,500 Iraqis studying in the United States

each year, at a time when there were over 51,000 students from the Middle East at U.S. institutions.<sup>1</sup> Even recently, only 1,074 Iraqis were studying at U.S. universities in 2012–2013, according to the Open Doors Report 2012, a 33% increase over the previous year.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, I estimate that about 3,000 Iraqi students are currently enrolled at U.K. universities.

With few alumni to promote the U.S. higher education system and explain the benefits of its unique, decentralized structure, Iraqi university leaders and higher education officials are unfamiliar with our processes. The choices, size, and complexity of the U.S. system overwhelms, as the parents of any high school aged student bound for college can attest. The breadth and depth of our higher education system, with its vibrancy and diversity, are beyond the understanding of most Iraqi students and their faculty advisors, university leaders, and higher education officials. It is easy to understand why students and administrators turn to either simpler systems with fewer choices or focus on a narrow slice of famous American universities.

An old adage attests to the strong commitment Iraqis have to education: Cairo writes, Beirut prints, Baghdad reads. In the last few years, those efforts have intensified and today there are three major programs awarding thousands of scholarships each year to send top students abroad. The goals of the three programs are similar: to improve the capacity of the higher education systems in Iraq by ensuring top students and university faculty earn advanced degrees abroad; build connections with the international



Figure 3.2. Higher education officials from Iraq (front row) participated in the U.S.–Iraq Higher Education Conference with more than 100 U.S. university representatives (Photo Credit: Emily Nice)

academic community; and translate their knowledge and experience to the next generation of Iraqi academics and researchers. Scholarship programs are generously funded and include: tuition and fees for the academic program and six to twelve months of English language instruction; health insurance; a monthly stipend; and travel expenses to the United States. Scholarship recipients also receive funding to bring their families with them.

The Higher Committee for Education Development in Iraq (HCED) scholarship program was launched in 2009 with funding through the Prime Minister's Office. HCED awards 1,000 scholarships each year in a competitive application process that ensures the number of scholarships awarded in each province is proportional to the national population. Most scholarships are for master's and doctorate degrees, with a small number of undergraduate scholarships awarded. HCED has awarded more than 3,000 scholarships and placed over 2,100 students at universities in the United States, U.K., and Australia. About 75% of these students have been admitted to U.S. universities. Dr. Zuhair Humadi, general director of HCED, has a doctorate degree from Southern Illinois University Carbondale and many



years of experience in the U.S. higher education system. With his background and network, Dr. Humadi has successfully steered many scholarship recipients to U.S. universities. Another 1,000 scholarships are on track to be awarded in 2014. Most scholarships are awarded in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields, with a smaller number awarded for English Language, Agriculture, Social Sciences, and Humanities.

In 2010, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced \$100 million of annual funding to send students abroad for graduate degrees in all fields of study. The Human Capacity Development Program (HCDP) reflects the KRG's desire not only to improve the capacity of its higher education system, but also to increase the skills and abilities of governmental service and civil society. While the primary focus is on STEM fields, HCDP also awards scholarships in such diverse fields as Fine Arts, Dance, Archaeology and Museum Studies, in addition to Civil Engineering, Computer Science, and Microbiology. With about 4,500 scholarships awarded to date, nearly half of the recipients have been admitted to universities abroad. Of this, more than 95% are at U.K. universities. Fewer than 100 HCDP students have been admitted to U.S. institutions.

Without aggressive action to recruit and admit more HCDP students to U.S. universities, the U.K. will continue to be the English-language destination of choice for these scholarship students.

In recent years, the Government of Iraq Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) has dramatically increased its funding to send students and faculty abroad in a variety of programs. In 2011, Minister Ali Al Adeeb announced the Iraqi Scholarships Scheme/Future Capacity Building Program to send thousands of students abroad over the next three years to earn master's and doctorate degrees. University faculty are also eligible for Study Leave to earn advanced degrees abroad. In addition, MoHESR is funding Faculty Sabbaticals/Post-Doc Research, Short-Term Student Research for students who cannot do their research in Iraq, and short-term Faculty Training Programs.

So what about the Iraqi students? All three programs are focused on sending more of their scholarship recipients to U.S. universities. They recognize the outstanding research opportunities available to Iraqi students who study in the United States, and they are eager to build partnerships with U.S. institutions. A combined total of 5,000 scholarship holders still need admission for graduate programs, creating an incredible opportunity, as well as a challenge for U.S. universities, not only to recruit fully funded students, but to leverage that funding to create linkages with Iraqi institutions.

Most Iraqi students have weak English language skills, and scholarship recipients are no exception. All three scholarships include

funding to study English as a Second Language at an overseas university before starting the academic program. Most Iraqi scholarship holders request Conditional Admission from U.S. universities for the graduate program. While many universities can consider Conditional Admission for undergraduate students, providing this same consideration for graduate students is a new challenge for many U.S. institutions.

However, the number of U.S. universities that can consider offering Conditional Admission to Iraqi scholarship students is increasing. EducationUSA Iraq works with more than 200 institutions that can consider Conditional Admission for at least one graduate program. The U.S. Government has organized or participated in four university fairs in Iraq since 2011 that have brought together thousands of scholarship holders with more than 100 U.S. universities interested in recruiting Iraqi students. More than thirty U.S. universities registered for the Iraq University Fair in Baghdad (September 28–30, 2013), an event organized in partnership with the Government of Iraq Ministry of Higher Education, the Prime Minister's Office, and U.S. Embassy Baghdad. And, as reported in TAARII President Professor McGuire Gibson's blog in June 2013, the U.S.–Iraq Higher Education Conference in Washington, D.C., brought together more than 100 university representatives with higher education officials from Baghdad and Erbil.<sup>3</sup>

The scholarship programs are also taking steps to improve students' levels of English. The English Language Institute opened in October 2013 in Baghdad to provide language instruction to 500 HCED and MoHESR scholarship recipients each year. With a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Government, Ball State University is developing the curriculum, training



Figure 3.3. An Iraqi scholarship student prepares his document for admission (Photo Credit: Lorna Middlebrough)



Figure 3.4. A U.S. university admissions official discusses doctorate research proposals with scholarship recipients (Photo Credit: Lorna Middlebrough)

Iraqi English language teachers, and teaching ESL to scholarship students. The Prime Minister's Office is rehabilitating the facilities inside the International Zone.

HCDP in Erbil is funding six months of intensive ESL instruction for scholarship holders at six English language programs in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Students who score less than 5.0 on the IELTS test (or about 50 on the TOEFL Internet-based Test) will not be approved to study abroad. HCDP scholarship recipients are eligible for another six months of ESL at their university overseas.

Aside from language issues, most Iraqi students do not have the experience and skills needed to step directly and confidently into an American graduate classroom. Many of those missing skills can and should be taught during the Intensive English Language program. Other

lessons must be taught by U.S. university faculty who need to be able to recognize the difference between intellect and experience and provide direct instruction, feedback, and modeling to help students overcome the experiential gap.

So while these efforts can assist in getting more Iraqi students accepted to U.S. universities (the short-term goal), the larger efforts need to include building networks

of connections and relationships that Iraqi students will bring back with them and develop when they return to the classrooms, laboratories, and administration offices in Iraq.

For example, the University of Missouri-Columbia recently signed an agreement with the MoHESR that will eventually include partnerships with more than ten Iraqi universities and the opportunity for some innovative undergraduate programming. The scholarship programs brought UMC and Iraqi higher education officials together, but their shared goals and visions allowed them to find creative ways to work together. Managed correctly, the partnership will have long-term benefits for the relationship on both sides.

Universities that admit Iraqi scholarship students can lay a foundation of cooperation and

collaboration that has the potential to span decades and create unexpected opportunities. Departments that host Iraqi faculty on sabbatical or Ph.D. candidates who need a well-equipped laboratory to do research for their theses can build on areas of mutual interest and exchange. University researchers working in partnership with Iraqi colleagues can develop activities, lectures, and joint research projects that might be virtual today — but can lead to personal exchanges and travel to Iraq in the future.

Which brings me back to my original question. What do you want your relationship with Iraq to look like in the future? Where should the next generation of talented young Iraqis study to develop their full potential, academically and socially? Which institutions will they turn to internationally for joint research projects and institutional partnerships in the future? And perhaps most importantly, fifteen years from now, where will they advise their young students to study abroad?

<sup>1</sup> Open Doors Report 1950–2000. <http://iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/All-Places-of-Origin/1950-2000>.

<sup>2</sup> Open Doors Report 2012. <http://iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/All-Places-of-Origin/2010-12>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S.–Iraq Higher Education Conference. TAARII Blog Posting (<http://taarii.org/blog/?p=222>).

### TAARII PROGRAM: RESEARCH AFFILIATES IN JORDAN

TAARII invites applications for a Research Affiliate status for U.S. scholars working on Iraq while based in Amman, Jordan. As American researchers undertake Iraq-related research in Jordan, TAARII aims to support their needs and work and to include them in the broader TAARII community. To apply for Research Affiliate status, please submit a brief project statement, together with a CV, to [beth@taarii.org](mailto:beth@taarii.org). There is no deadline and scholars can apply for Affiliate status on a short-term or long-term basis.



## THE IRAQ INSTITUTE: EDUCATING A NEW GENERATION OF HERITAGE PROFESSIONALS

JESSICA S. JOHNSON AND BRIAN MICHAEL LIONE,<sup>1</sup>  
INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

*The Iraqi Institute for the Conservation and Antiquities and Heritage preserves the legacy of humanity contained in the unique cultural heritage of Iraq. It accomplishes this through educating people in conservation and preservation and by inviting professionals from around the world to share expertise.*

The membership of TAARII well knows the damage and destruction that has occurred to cultural heritage in Iraq over the last decades. Iraqi archaeologists, artists, archivists, librarians, architects, engineers, and other professionals who care for the tangible cultural heritage of Iraq were cut off from their international counterparts. War, sanctions, and looting as well as little access to advances in the various fields of cultural heritage conservation have left artifacts, photographs, archives, books, architectural resources, and archaeological sites vulnerable to destruction and decay, with only a small core of trained Iraqi professionals to look after and manage these important resources. Beginning in late 2008, a project began that had as its focus a long-term, sustainable approach to education and training.

By September 2009, the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (Institute) began teaching artifact conservation to Iraqi heritage preservation professionals. The students — all employees in antiquities departments under the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) — attended these initial classes in a small rented house in Ainkawa, a suburb on the edge of the rapidly expanding northern Iraqi city of Erbil.

Since then, an unprecedented collaboration with the U.S. and Iraqi governments, and several academic and institutional partners, has expanded the

Institute into a sustainable institution hosting a variety of conservation and preservation educational programs for Iraq. Cooperative programs, giving students on-site practical experiences, are also being established as new and exciting international research projects are increasing in the region. Through this international collaboration, the Institute is working to expand the learning opportunities for students in Iraq so they can join the international community of scholars and practitioners working in heritage conservation.

### ORIGINS

The Institute originated as part of the Iraq Cultural Heritage Project, a \$12.9 million initiative developed and funded in 2008 by the U.S. Department of State and implemented by the U.S.-based, non-governmental organization, International Relief and Development (IRD). Early in 2009, a delegation of representatives from the State Department, IRD, and institutional partners<sup>2</sup> made their first planning visit to Erbil. During this visit, the Prime Minister of the KRG pledged the renovation of the former Erbil central library for use as the long-term home for the Institute.

Throughout 2009, the project team worked with representatives from the

Iraqi government and several dedicated institutional partners in the U.S. to design and implement a full renovation of the 10,000 square foot facility. At the same time, intensive academic courses in artifact conservation and historic preservation were crafted by on-site program managers with assistance from U.S.-based advisors. Completed in 2010, the Institute includes classrooms, well-equipped conservation laboratories, dormitories, and kitchens that can accommodate up to fifty students. To date, more than 250 Iraqis have taken courses at the Institute (fig. 4.1).

In 2010, the management of the Institute was transferred to a newly established Iraqi Board of Directors. At present, the staff of the Institute is comprised of employees from both the SBAH and the KRG led by Dr. Abdullah Khorsheed, director of the Iraqi Institute, chairman of the Institute Board of Directors, and a professor of



Figure 4.1. The entrance to the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage  
(Photo Credit: Sebastian Meyer)



Figure 4.2. Students and teachers in the Advanced Conservation course discussing ideas in one of two Iraqi Institute laboratories (Photo Credit: Jessica S. Johnson)

archaeology at Salahaddin University in Erbil.<sup>3</sup>

An international Advisory Council, comprised of leading academic advisors and partners was established in 2011. The Council is responsible for developing a sustainable management plan for the Institute, strengthening educational opportunities for its students, and securing funding to ensure the Institute's future.<sup>4</sup>

#### LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Academic programs at the Institute are designed to be long-term and sequential courses that strengthen critical thinking and communication skills, while building teamwork and knowledge in applied science, preventive conservation, history of materials and techniques, and practical applications for conservation and preservation. Newly learned theoretical knowledge is immediately practiced through mid-program home practicums or projects in Erbil with local historical resources. Students have worked at local archaeological sites, at the Erbil Citadel, and with collections from several museums in Erbil and Slemani.

The majority of academic programs at the Institute are managed by the University of Delaware's (UD) Institute for Global Studies. The Institute

currently offers three programs: Collections Care and Conservation, Architecture and Site Conservation, and Archaeological Site Preservation.

There are two courses in the [Collections Care and Conservation](#) program. Each course is thirty weeks long and runs once each year. The introductory course, Preventive Conservation for Museums and Archaeology, teaches students about the causes of deterioration and how to upgrade storage and exhibits for a wide range of materials including ceramics, stone, ivory, textiles, and human remains. The second year is an advanced course, entitled Laboratory Conservation for Archaeology and Museums offered to the best of the introductory students (fig. 4.2). Students in the class have upgraded mounts for ceramic figurines from the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad on exhibit at the Erbil Civilizations Museum and conserved human remains recovered from local archaeological sites. Alumni of this program are working on the enlargement and reopening of the Mousel Cultural Museum; other alumni have completely revamped the storage for artifacts in the Syriac Culture History Museum in Ainkawa.

The program in [Architecture and Site Conservation](#) provides students with an introduction to the theoretical and

practical aspects of preserving heritage buildings, monuments and sites. The eighteen-week course is divided into two modules of classroom instruction, plus a week-long field practicum project. The course introduces the theoretical framework of architectural conservation, and provides practical field experience in the documentation of historic buildings and structures using houses in the Erbil Citadel and lower town. The second module introduces students to temporary stabilization treatments and the concept of comprehensive site management for heritage sites. Students gain practical experience through building small structures with traditional features such as arches and domes made of mudbrick and other local materials. In 2014, the course will be extended to thirty weeks to match courses in the Collections Care and Conservation Program.

[Archaeological Site Preservation](#) was a new program for 2013 that introduces strategies for identification, evaluation, prioritization, and stabilization of archaeological sites. The ten-week course, which was offered twice in 2013, incorporates classroom and field components to ensure an equal balance of theoretical and practical learning experiences.<sup>5</sup> Students have been practicing their skills at the site of Kilik Mishik. The course structure is designed to be highly flexible and dynamic to ensure that the archaeological theory and methodology keep pace with the rapidly changing landscape of archaeological investigations now happening across the country (fig. 4.3).

Most students also take English language courses as part of their educational program. Funding for these long-term programs comes from a mix of U.S. and Iraqi governmental sources and private U.S. foundations and organizations.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the regular courses, UD staff work with Iraqis termed "master trainers," who



are being prepared to take over the management of programs in the future. Master trainers assist the UD staff, teach some of the lessons, and work alongside the international experts<sup>7</sup> who provide most of the lectures and practical projects for each course.

Since early 2011, other international programs have also used the Institute facilities for training students and supporting research projects. These include the International Commission on Missing Persons; the Italian Superior Institute for Conservation and Restoration; the University of Athens, Greece; Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań and Warsaw University, Poland; the Technical University of Berlin and Leipzig University, Germany; Leiden University (the Netherlands); and the World Monuments Fund. These opportunities have included conservation short courses and archaeological field schools for students and research on cultural heritage assets across Iraq.

#### PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

As the Institute approaches the end of its fifth year, the Board of Directors, Advisory Council, and UD staff are working in partnership to ensure that the facility continues to provide a world-class conservation education to dedicated Iraqis. For example, in March 2013, the General Directors of

Antiquities from all Iraqi provincial SBAH offices, archaeologists, and others from the KRG and SBAH, faculty from all the Iraqi collegiate archaeology programs, and select faculty from programs in engineering and architecture were invited to the Institute. In both meetings, participants learned about the capabilities of the Institute and the education programs that have taken place there. Staff from the Institute and UD led a guided discussion with the groups, and received input and recommendations on ways to continue to improve future academic offerings.

The Advisory Council is currently focused on drafting the Institute's first five-year plan to proactively lead the organization to a successful, sustainable future. Once finished, the plan will include guidance on academic programming, staff training and development, outreach and visibility, financial requirements, and operational management of the facility.

The dedication of the students, staff, managers and advisors of the Institute is immense. This place, built out of a passion for, and belief in, the importance of the preservation of cultural heritage as a cornerstone in the rebuilding of Iraq, is a center where people come from every province to share their ideas, their lives, their

problems and their vision of the future for their country. The Institute is a retreat where people can work together to learn new ideas and practical preservation methodologies. As development threatens archaeological and built heritage resources, as new museums are built, and as Iraqi heritage institutions continue to rebuild and expand, the Institute is

preparing graduates to help guide that change, bring new ideas to colleagues, and to be part of preserving their priceless cultural heritage. In the longer term, the goal is for the Institute to become a regional center of excellence in the conservation of cultural heritage throughout the Middle East.

The door of the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage is always open to visiting scholars. Please come and visit if you find yourself in Erbil.

<sup>1</sup> Jessica S. Johnson is the academic director of University of Delaware Programs, and Brian Lione is the director of Architectural and Site Conservation Programs at the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> Founding advisors included individuals from the U.S. State Department, Walters Art Museum, University of Delaware Art Conservation Department, Winterthur Museum and Gardens, and the National Park Service.

<sup>3</sup> Other Board of Directors members are: Butheina Muslim Abdhusein, director, Central Laboratory, Iraqi Museum Baghdad; Dr. Ali Alhyali Ghanim, head of Training Department for Archaeologists, Iraqi Museum, Baghdad; Dr. Numan J. Ibrahim, professor, Salahaddin University, Erbil; Thafir Sobhi Salih, director general of Restorations and Engineering Department, State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

<sup>4</sup> A list of current Advisory Council members can be found here: <http://www.artcons.udel.edu/public-outreach/iraqi-institute/supporters>.

<sup>5</sup> Katharyn Hanson, Ph.D., is the Visiting Program Coordinator for this course.

<sup>6</sup> Current funding for the academic programs at the Iraqi Institute comes from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the Office of the Governor of Erbil, the U.S. State Department's Cultural Heritage Center, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Getty Foundation.

<sup>7</sup> A list of visiting faculty who have taught at the Institute can be found at: <http://www.artcons.udel.edu/public-outreach/iraqi-institute/visiting-faculty>.



Figure 4.3. Students in the Archaeological Site Preservation program learning the basics of GIS  
(Photo Credit: Sebastian Meyer)

## BOOK REVIEW

Stacy E. Holden. *A Documentary History of Modern Iraq*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012. 397 pp. \$74.95. ISBN 978-0-8130-4016-5.

Reviewed by Peter Wien, University of Maryland

Stacey E. Holden's *A Documentary History of Modern Iraq* is a crucial contribution for those who teach about Iraq. It makes dozens of documents available for use in the undergraduate classroom. Teaching Iraq is complicated. First, perceptions about the country are determined by ethnicity and class, gender and age, religion and sect, power and lack of power, geographic origin, and profession. While all national societies in the world deal with diversity and plurality, forging a level of national cohesion has been particularly difficult in Iraq since the inception of the state after World War I. Changing political elites never found it necessary to build common ground within society. Instead, they abused the state for the promotion of group interests. The daunting task of the teacher is therefore to explain how a precarious society such as that of Iraq may have developed momentum to shape a just and pluralistic society, or failed to do so.

Second, the scarcity of printed primary and secondary literature about modern Iraq makes teaching even more difficult. Iraq has been one of the least accessible parts of the Middle East region for Western researchers, even though the number of publications and Ph.D. theses that are currently being written promises a greater output in the near future. There has been an increase in publications in Arabic since the downfall of the Ba'ath regime, too, but the material is still difficult to access overseas, and is not fit for use in the classroom due to the language barrier.

The documents that Stacey Holden brings together are therefore an important tool to trace the history of Iraq from the period of the late

Ottoman Mesopotamian provinces to the immediate aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and the dawn of the bloody years of insurrection. There is a general introduction at the beginning of the book for historical context. Separate introductions to individual chapters divide the book chronologically into pre-World War I, Monarchy, Revolutionary, Ba'athist, and post-Ba'athist periods, with some useful subdivisions. Some inaccuracies in these accounts are insignificant and do not distract from the impressive variety of primary sources. The book will be used alongside other survey texts anyway, such as Charles Tripp's *A History of Iraq* (3rd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

For the first time, the collection brings together important documents such as a pre-World War I petition that Baghdad notables sent to Istanbul to complain about the local Young Turk governor, a fatwa banning Shi'is from participating in elections to the constituent assembly in 1922, a British officer's observations of the Assyrian massacres in 1933, anthropological texts about rural life in Iraq, speeches by political figures from Faysal I to Saddam Hussein, important legal texts, poetry, a religious treatise by Shi'i cleric and dissident Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, accounts of the atrocities of the Iran-Iraq war, and of the effects of the Regime of Sanctions in the 1990s — in brief, almost everything printed that was available in English, it seems.

The focus on texts originally in English and on existing translations from Arabic and other languages is the only problematic aspect of the collection. Texts stem from collections of diplomatic correspondences,

memoirs, biographies, and ethnographies, from anthologies that cover particular topics, or from the appendices of monographs. Many users of the collection will find material of which they had not been aware. It is a great service to all who teach about Iraq to make these primary sources available.

However, the overall image that emerges from these texts is quite conventional. There is very little that runs against the grain of a vision of Iraq shaped by Western perceptions and according to Western interests. There is a fair deal of Gertrude Bell-style diplomatic dispatches, eyewitness accounts by British officers, American travelers and researchers, as well as journalists, and memoirs that were written for European and North American audiences. The number of documents from the other side is quite limited, like the fatwa or the treatise by al-Sadr mentioned above, or the report by a Kurdish officer about the Shawaf rebellion in Mosul in 1959, adopted from Masoud Barzani's biography of his father Mullah Mustafa Barzani. There is a higher density of reports written by Iraqis in the sections that cover the period after 1970.

Many of the diplomatic and journalistic reports are good reads and thus help to illustrate problems of Iraqi history. Some selections are, however, too long, which will make it difficult for students to identify their significance. Some texts are quite descriptive, following the course of events or presenting personal experiences without offering clear hinges for deep analytical understanding. For example, documents that list in graphic detail the regime violence of the Ba'athist

period illustrate the vile nature of Saddam Hussein's regime, which is important, but they offer little in terms of historical depth or the socio-political context that would help to analyze and understand the reasons for the emergence of such a regime. Instead, they cement the image of an essential barbarity that characterized Iraqi politics in the twentieth century, and that was used to justify military action in 2003.

Where there is only little archival or other authentic material that is available in Iraq, novels and memoirs published in the West are certainly an important source, though they need to be treated with caution and source critique. The short introductions to every document provide some

background and context, and each individual text is introduced by a few questions for students to keep in mind when they read. In some cases, however, these questions should provide more guidance about the genres of texts and the reasons for writing, or the impact of the amount of time that lapses between actual experiences and the time of writing them down, or about agendas that might have driven authors. For example, some Jewish memories about experiences of persecution in Iraq were written down decades after the events, and long after the forced emigration of Iraqi Jews to Israel. The context of group experiences, and particular narratives of the society that the authors live in, has to be taken

into account when these sources are interpreted.

At the end of the day, it is the teacher who has to guide students in such criticism. Moreover, it is quite easy, if not cheap, for a reviewer to criticize that the editor of the collection did not take up the harrowing task of gathering hardly accessible documents in Arabic and to translate them into English. In spite of the few shortcomings, the *Documentary History* remains a highly recommendable teaching tool with a broad selection of very accessible texts that help illustrate many complex issues of Iraqi history. At circa USD 75, the book is quite expensive, though. To assign it for mandatory reading in times of cost inflation in textbook purchases could prove difficult.

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## LITERARY LEGACIES OF THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR IN ARABIC AND PERSIAN FICTION

AMIR MOOSAVI, 2013 TAARII AFFILIATE

During the eight long and brutal years of the Iran-Iraq War, governments of both countries manufactured cultures centered on the glorification of war and violence. These “cultures of war” sanctified violence through the construction of official narratives of the war. The narratives were developed through government-sponsored, official discourses that stressed heroism and victimhood, drew heavily from Islamic symbolism, and often claimed to be fighting for similar anti-imperialist causes, the most prominent perhaps being Palestine. Each side strove to exploit nationalist and sometimes even racist and religious sentiments to the utmost. Of course, this was greatly aided by the implementation of heavy censorship, and the crushing of any attempt at internal dialogue. Only

one voice was to be heard during the war as the official narrative of each regime allowed no room for discord. In retrospect, we can now see that among the tragedies of the war — the longest between two-states in the twentieth century — was the attempt at the total manipulation of Iranian and Iraqi national and religious identities for the sole purpose of each government's wartime goals.

Literature played a salient role in the formation of each government's war culture. By the end of the war, each side was left with a plethora of literary works that formed an essential component of the home front war machine. This process has been documented well in the Iraqi context by critics such as Salam Abbud, Muhammad Mazlum, and Abbas Khidr<sup>1</sup>

who have taken highly critical positions towards the vast majority of literary productions of the 1980s and 1990s in Iraq as well as in the diaspora. In recent years, other critics have taken another look at Iraqi literary production at the time, in an attempt to examine the formal characteristics of writing produced under the auspices of Saddam Hussein's Ba'th regime.<sup>2</sup> In the Iranian context, relatively few secondary works exist that discuss the official literary output of the wartime years and, due to the degree of control that the Iranian government exercises in the continued production of war-themed literature, no serious study as critical as the abovementioned works by Iraqis exist.

My dissertation, “Reimagining a War: Negotiating Ideology and Disenchantment in Literary Narratives



of the Iran-Iraq War,” which I am currently writing, takes the literary legacy of the Iran-Iraq War, written in Arabic and Persian, and places it into comparative perspective. In doing so, I am attempting to forge new connections between the studies of modern Arabic and Persian literatures, two literatures that are seldom brought together in a comparative context, particularly in the modern period. I use the shared experiences of writing under ideologically charged dictatorships and cultural hegemony during the war years as a starting point to discuss how writers unaffiliated with the Iraqi Ba‘thist regime or the Islamic Republic have been able to challenge the official, government-sponsored narratives of the war. While the years of the war saw, at best, the nascent beginnings of polyphonic war literature, the postwar years have proven to be far more vibrant on the literary-front. Both Iraqi and Iranian writers have revisited the traumatic wartime years of the 1980s, penning alternative narratives of the war in both literatures.

With a fellowship from the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad program, I spent the first seven months of 2013 conducting research for my dissertation in multiple locations. TAARII enabled the first leg of my research period by providing support in Amman for over two months. I used the time to collect Iraqi literary works and journals from the 1980s, primarily held at the University of Jordan. Alongside prior research that I had conducted in Tehran, Beirut, and various university libraries in the U.S., I was able to use these resources to write the first chapter of my dissertation, which charts out the vast reach of both governments in using the cultural sphere, and literature specifically, in the promotion and reinforcement of their wartime ideologies. Perhaps more importantly, however, TAARII was able to put

me in touch with a number of Iraqi writers, most notably Haider Saeed and Lutfiyya al-Dulaimi, who, on a number of occasions during my stay in Amman, provided invaluable insight into the Iraqi cultural scenes, inside the country and abroad, during the years of the war with Iran and during the 1990s.

The remainder of my dissertation focuses on the postwar period and the construction of alternative war narratives in Iranian and Iraqi prose fiction. I explore the 1990s as a period where literature from both countries begins to take a new approach toward the war. I address the literary evolution and formal changes witnessed since the end of the war in both literatures in the backdrop of sanctions and more wars in Iraq, and the development of a lively culture of war-commemoration in Iran. In both cases, writers adopted melancholic tones towards the war, often avoiding direct ideological confrontation with the state, choosing rather to mourn the dead or, in the Iranian case, subtly challenge the commemorative efforts of the Islamic Republic that emphasized the righteousness of a specifically “Islamic” wartime cause. More precisely, I look at the short stories of Basran writers Lu‘ay Hamza Abbas and Muhammad Khudayyir and Iranian short story writers Marjan Riahi and Fereshteh Sari.

In the final chapters of the dissertation, I focus on two themes with which prose writers in both countries have generally been concerned since the end of hostilities: the issue of martyrdom and the narration of the war from the setting of the home front. In the latter case, I focus particularly on the retelling of the war from the perspective of women, children and veterans, and especially in the Iraqi case, draft evaders and those who ran away from the warfront. The writers who employ these tactics are predominantly independent and,

ideologically and demographically speaking, have been far more diverse than those who wrote for the Iraqi regime before 2003 or continue to write with government-affiliated publishing houses in Iran.

My research has led me to view the concept of martyrdom and the figure of the martyr within postwar Iranian and Iraqi fiction not as an object of national unification, as the official narratives of the war assume, but as a flashpoint. Viewed through a literary lens, I contend that many Iranian and Iraqi writers have used martyrdom as a site of resistance against the discourse of the state. Here, I examine Iranian writers Hussein Mortazaiyan Abkenar and Ahmad Dehqan, and Iraqi novelist Janan Jasim Hilawi who use martyrdom as a counter-discursive technique of “subversive affirmation,” a term that I borrow from Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse. They define it as “a tactic that allows artists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them.”<sup>3</sup> In the case of the novels and short stories with which I am concerned, writers posit a highly critical view of the aestheticization of violence and depiction of supposedly meaningful death in opposition to the official narrative. The ubiquity of martyrdom in some of these novels is often jarringly slowed down, defamiliarized, and stripped of any religious or nationalistic connotations.

On the other hand, home front narratives, far from focusing solely on the fighting and destruction that the war caused, have drawn attention away from battlefield glory and highlighted the larger human catastrophe that the war created and continues to produce for Iranian and Iraqi civilians and veterans. As opposed to the official literature of the war, which primarily centered on the experience of combat, home front

writings have tended to focus on the innocent victims of senseless fighting. Home front narratives, particularly those written in the postwar period in both literatures, successfully prompt readers to consider the long-term consequences of this conflict much more than many of the action-packed, violent narratives of the war-front. Here, the literary depiction of the war contrasts most starkly with that of wartime literature that was concerned primarily with portraying patriotism, heroism and spiritual vindication in dying at war. In this way, I put into conversation novels by Iraqi authors Betoool al-Khedairi and Muhsin al-Ramli with short stories by Iranian authors Hushang Gulshiri and Amir Hasan Cheheltan.

In bringing together war literature from Iran and Iraq I hope to shed light on some of the thematic preoccupations and aesthetic practices that have resulted from corresponding historical experiences that have been defining factors for the cultural production of these two countries. In doing so, I hope to add another voice to a small group of scholars who have attempted

to approach literary traditions of the global south in a way that goes beyond conventional East-West and center-periphery models of comparing literature and culture. At the same time, I hope that it is clear that I am attempting to address these two significant literatures on their own terms, rather than simply lumping them together into anthologized, Orientalist categories of “literatures of the Middle East” or “literatures of the Muslim World” in a way that effaces important differences between the two. I hope that this dissertation will contribute to a better understanding of the way that war has affected cultural productions in Iran and Iraq, as well as demonstrate how literature, specifically, has been used a medium of resistance to modes of cultural hegemony that have been heaped upon the people of Iran, Iraq, and beyond.

<sup>1</sup> See Salam Abbud, *Thaqāfat al-‘Unf fī al-‘Irāq* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2002); Abbas Khidr, *Al-Khaktīyah* (Colongne: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2005); Muhammad Mazlum, *Ḥaṭab Ibrāhīm aw*

*al-jīl al-Badawī* (Damascus: al-Takwīn lil-Ta’līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See recent articles in Stephan Milich, Friederike Pannewick, and Leslie Tramontini (eds.), *Conflicting Narratives: War, Trauma and Memory in Iraqi Culture* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, “Subversive Affirmation. On Mimesis as Strategy of Resistance,” 2005, available at [http://www.inkearns.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2006\\_Arns-Sasse-EAM-final-book.pdf](http://www.inkearns.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2006_Arns-Sasse-EAM-final-book.pdf), last date of access 01/12/2013.

### NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS, COMMENTS, & SUGGESTIONS

To submit articles, images, or announcements in either *English or Arabic*, please email Katie Johnson at [katie@taarii.org](mailto:katie@taarii.org) for submission details.

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## CONFERENCE REPORT: “KURDS AND KURDISTAN IN [THE] OTTOMAN PERIOD” AT SALAHADDIN UNIVERSITY, ERBIL, 16–18 APRIL 2013

STEFAN WINTER, DÉPARTEMENT D'HISTOIRE, UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL (UQÀM)

Billed as the first-ever international academic event on the subject and co-organized by Salahaddin University of Erbil and Artuklu University of Mardin, Turkey, the conference entitled “Kurds and Kurdistan in [the] Ottoman Period” was held in Erbil, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraq, 16–18 April 2013. International it was, with participants from over fifteen different countries including host Kurdistan giving a total of seventy-three papers on Ottoman Kurdish history as well as another five seminars on related subjects (the Zanganeh dynasty and the Safavids, modern Kurdish nationalism, etc.).

The opening session was held at the Ministry of Culture and Youth and featured welcoming remarks by Ibrahim Hamarash, the conference's able and ever helpful organizer, the consul of Turkey in Erbil, and various officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government, as well as keynote addresses by Hakan Özoğlu of the University of Central Florida and Salah Haridi of Cairo University.

The panels held at the Salahaddin University campus over the next days were organized both thematically and by language, with presentations in Kurdish, English, Turkish, and Arabic on very diverse subjects covering Ottoman and Western travel literature on Kurdistan, Diyarbakir



Figure 5.1. Opening ceremony, “Kurds and Kurdistan” conference, Salahaddin University, Erbil, 16 April 2013 (Photo Credit: Salahaddin University)

and the rise of Kurdish nationalism, Kurds and nineteenth-century Ottoman reformism, early Kurdish press and literature, Bediü’z-zaman, Kurdish–Russian relations, regional Kurdish emirates under Ottoman rule, and much more.

For foreign participants, this conference was a valuable opportunity

to learn more of the work of their Kurdish and non-Kurdish colleagues based in Iraq and using sources only available there, such as ‘Usama ‘Abd al-Rahman Nu‘man al-Dawri’s examination of Ottoman–Sorani relations or especially Nermin ‘Ali Mihemed Emin’s brilliantly illustrated lecture on the old merchant khans of Kirkuk.

When not partaking in the generous daily lunches, conference dinners, and closing ceremonies all provided by our gracious hosts, participants were free to roam the famous

minaret park, the citadel rising above the city and whose Ottoman-era houses are currently being restored to their historic splendour, the French research institute (Ifpo) established in one of these houses, and the modern neighbourhoods that have made Erbil into a bustling metropolis of nearly two million and administrative capital of the KRG, or to venture on side trips to the countryside east of Erbil or the Dohuk region.

Both the organizers and sponsors are to be commended for providing this unique occasion to further the field of Ottoman Kurdish studies; the success of their efforts is shown by the fact that preparations are already under way for the second academic conference on Kurds and Kurdistan in the Ottoman period to be convened at Mardin Artuklu University in 2014.



Figure 5.2. Erbil market, 15 April 2013 (Photo Credit: Stefan Winter)



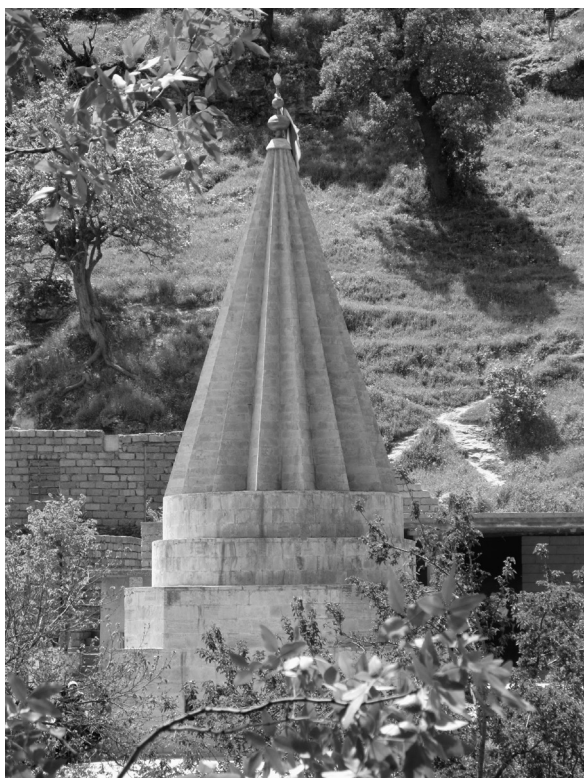


Figure 5.3. (Above) Renovation work, Erbil citadel,  
15 April 2013 (Photo Credit: Stefan Winter)

Figure 5.4. (Left) Shrine of Shaykh 'Adi, Lalesh,  
19 April 2013 (Photo Credit: Stefan Winter)

Figure 5.5. (Below) Tomb at Shaykh 'Adi shrine, Lalesh,  
19 April 2013 (Photo Credit: Stefan Winter)



## DISCALCED FRIARS: SECULAR PERFUME OF MODERNITY — THE CULTURAL ROLE OF CARMELITES IN MODERN IRAQ

FALIH HASAN FEZEA, 2012 TAARII IRAQ FELLOW<sup>1</sup>

For the 500 years of the Ottoman era, education in Mesopotamia was mainly in *madrasas*, according to a traditional religious model of both Sunni and Shi'ite sects; Christians also followed such a model. This type of teaching contributed to greater ethnic and sectarian division, at the expense of possible inter-community harmony. The Ottomans assigned the main settlements within the three regions of the country — Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra — as the administrative centers of the *vilayets*, which fostered geographic and cultural isolation in the country.<sup>2</sup> Within the Ottoman world, Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra were poor and marginal regions. They were also culturally distinct, divided, and isolated from each other by their separate attitudes and understandings towards each other. The three cultural regions also suffered from religious divisions.

Due to this regionalism, there was a trend to write local histories rather than a “national” one.<sup>3</sup> However, traditional teaching places, *madrasas*, mostly in the holy cities, played the role of the guards of the Arabic language.<sup>4</sup> *Madrasas* deepened the ethnic and sectarian divide just as much as they were maintaining Arabic. And it was in the Arabic and the secular aspect of old Arabic literary works that the Carmelite fathers made investments to assimilate themselves into the nation of Mesopotamia to gain hearts and minds.

When British Major Humphrey Bowman arrived in Baghdad in August 1918 to assume the Directorate of Education at the request of the occupying British authorities, there were very few scholastic bodies. The language of instruction was Turkish. And, since all Muslim state schools were Sunni, Shi'i students did not

attend them.<sup>5</sup> So, the following June, Bowman decided to ask Father Anistas Mari El-Kermeli to write a national history in Arabic, with the assistance of the leading Salafi cleric, Mahmoud Shukri Effendi Al Aaloosi, and Monsignor Louis Martin, the Carmelite vice president of the mission in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula.

Bowman tried to create a base for a national educational system to bring together the diverse religious and ethnic communities, whose educational system until then had been “missionary and denominational.” In Baghdad, the *Ez-Zawraa* weekly, which ceased to appear after 1917, had informed its readers that those who could read and write were only five per thousand, or even one per thousand if the tribal regions were included.<sup>6</sup>

In order to explore the role Carmelite Friars had in encouraging literary interest across denominations and ethnic groups, we will try to highlight the cultural trends in Mesopotamia during the last three centuries of Ottoman domination.

### FIRST CARMELITES

The presence of the Carmelites in Iraq began with the departure of Carmelite fathers from Isfahan in 1623; they had brought the first printing press to Iran. Coming from Persia, Father Basil founded the Mission of Mesopotamia in Basra. In 1632, Father Jean-Thaddé, a discalced Carmelite, archbishop of Isfahan and primate of Persia, asked Pope Urban VIII to send a coadjutor to assist him in his work and succeed him on his death. He had been officially named head of Catholics of Babylon.<sup>7</sup> Thus, they established a high missionary post in Baghdad tied with the mission of Basra. The Baghdad

mission began in 1721, on the arrival of Father Marie-Joseph de Jésus, who came from Basra as apostolic vicar. In 1728, his assistant, P. Emmanuel de Saint-Albert, equipped with a *firman* of Ahmed Pasha, built a chapel.<sup>8</sup>

Missionaries, notably Catholic, began to focus on education early on. In the seventeenth century, educational institutions were set up following the French educational system, *le collège*, in Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. Over time, these schools became a place where students from different religious backgrounds received a secular education and began to learn French, English, and Latin along with math. The educational process was under the supervision of the Fathers. These schools were the first bases of secular education in Iraq. Father Emmanuel de Saint-Albert greatly strengthened the mission in Baghdad both with medicine and apostolate activities, while two new missionaries opened a school in 1731. The first Carmelite Father to arrive in Basra, Marie-Joseph de Jésus, was prominent headmaster of the Latin School in Baghdad, which had opened in 1735 in Souk El-Ghazil; its name was later changed to the Saint Joseph School. At the dawn of the twentieth century, it was an important school in Baghdad with 250 pupils and fifteen teachers, including Carmelite Fathers, Marist brothers, and native teachers of Turkish and Arabic. This college was the most important work of the Mission, as described by Father du Sacré Cœur. The language of instruction was mainly French, along with Arabic and Turkish; English was optional.

The Carmelites conformed their teaching to the needs of the country, particularly those of ordinary people.<sup>9</sup> The Discalced Fathers opened a school

for poor children. Former pupils, who graduated as physicians from the French Faculty of Medicine of Beirut, provided medical care for fifty patients per day, regardless of religious background. The “father of the poor,” a nickname given by the locals to one missionary, opened a school for the blind and an orphanage for boys. Orphans over twelve were taught metal engraving, shoemaking, cabinetmaking, and other skills.<sup>10</sup>

Graduates of the Carmelite schools became doctors, lawyers, and journalists, as well as holding important positions with the Ottoman Bank, local governments, and commercial European houses in Iraq. British policy opted to depend on military elites to run the emerging Iraqi kingdom. The political opposition during the first half of the twentieth century consisted of secular intellectuals, especially leftists, who were educated in Carmelite schools or studied in France.

### MODERN CULTURE

Missionaries were so focused on education in Iraq that some critics have questioned their ultimate aims, calling them tools of political influence, spies of foreign forces, and intellectual invaders. However, some writers found that “these missionary schools had a major impact on the cultural and intellectual conditions, especially if we look at their educational curricula, the way of distributing Arabic language courses” and this was “because they [missionaries] realized that Arabic was the most important tributary feeding the region with authentic Arab heritage.”<sup>11</sup>

The Carmelite fathers contributed to the foundation of secular education by drawing attention to a non-religious conception of history, literature, and human activities. Discalced Friars were aware of the sacredness of Arabic language for Arab locals and preserved its original rules of expression and

grammar. Dominicans in Mosul, for example, presented French plays in translation. In this case, Arabic was an instrument for communicating secular themes while it remained sacred. This policy was effective in reaching a broader public and allowed a cultural formation process that departed from the traditional religious schools and their limited horizon within a multi-religious society.

Father El-Kermali realized from the experiences of his predecessors that non-religious linguistic elevation was the basis of modernization and an efficient tool for bringing disparate communities together. The Carmelite order made their monastery in the ancient district of Souk el-Ghezil in the center of Baghdad a real cultural forum. Every Friday, they held a cultural meeting in the monastery from eight in the morning until noon. Doctors, journalists, poets, writers, historians, and others of all ages and various religious and cultural backgrounds attended to discuss literary works, historical matters, and current newspaper articles.

The magazine *Loghat El-Arab* clearly illustrated three cultural trends that had been dominating Iraq during the second decade of the twentieth century. The first was traditional Arab culture that was far from modern (Western) methods of education with a clear absence of foreign languages; traditional religious schools, mosques, and *Katateeb* provide examples. The second was official culture, which was a mixture of Arabic and Turkish, along with Persian. The last was a culture trying to find a place between the two, carried by French, English, American, and German missionaries, who had paid great attention to standard Arabic and secular aspects of its culture.

The library of the Mosul Museum was formed exclusively from the library offered personally by Father El-Kermali. The Carmelite Fathers of

Baghdad donated the library of Father El-Kermali to the Iraqi Museum in 1949, although it did not include his own writings. After 2003, several Iraqi researchers took the initiative to publish some of his writings. The linguistic efforts of El-Kermali reached a level that some researchers considered the “Language School of the Carmelites” as equivalent to historical language schools in Kufa and Basra.<sup>12</sup>

The attention the Carmelite fathers gave to Arabic was a question of self-integration and a tool for removing religious and denominational fault lines. The pro-Arab nationalistic trend dominated education in monarchic Iraq, as students were “taught some of the ancient history of Mesopotamia in school, [and] the emphasis was on Arab history and Muslim achievements. There was no mention of the presence of Christians on Iraqi soil before Islam, nor was their role in the emergence of the Arab Abbasid civilization that was established in Iraq ever raised.”<sup>13</sup> As a result, the non-Arab ethnic groups did not feel a belonging to a nation called Iraq: “It caused in Christians a feeling of tension regarding our identity as Iraqis.”<sup>14</sup> Missionaries, long accused of fomenting intra-Christian discord,<sup>15</sup> actually encouraged a sense of Iraqi affiliation through their cultural and educational activities.

### THE CARMELITES & IRAQI IDENTITY

When Ba’thist authorities asked the Carmelites in the 1990s to choose between leaving or staying in Iraq on the condition of renouncing their national origins, they replied officially by confirming their Iraqi identity; a large group abandoned their original nationalities. When the late Father Robert Beulay was asked about his nationality, he confirmed he was an “Iraqi, son of [an] Iraqi!”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the identification with being Iraqi was so strong in Christian communities that



“They in fact felt more Iraqi than us and wanted to die in Iraq.”<sup>17</sup>

The Iraqi Carmelites exercised an interesting “soft” cultural role, but they were very influential in the hearts and minds of Iraqis. They were religious and missionaries in a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational society; they realized the necessity of secular formation to bring together disparate communities. Their efforts were pivotal in modernizing literature and journalism in Iraq. Their part in renovating and modernizing the form and subject of traditional Arabic poetry was remarkable, which was illustrated when they published translated poems from French and English.

In 1978, Baghdadi Discalced Friars celebrated the “two hundred and fifty anniversary of the continued presence of the Carmelite friary in Baghdad” with a book entitled *The Carmel*, written by Albert Abbouna. In it, Abbouna wrote about the history of Carmelite monasticism, its inner life, and a brief history of their presence in Iraq. The book does not speak about their civil efforts in education and cultural modernization, but ends with a paragraph perhaps reflecting sorrow:

“Finally, our Lord showed his compassion on the Mission deeply rooted in Baghdad as He put in the heart of one of the Chaldean priests the wish to join the Carmelite monastic community. This has been achieved when Albert Abbouna said his first vows in Baghdad on September 15, 1977. He is the first Iraqi to join us over more than 50 years. We hope the new generation of Iraqi Carmelites will replace by number and holiness the old one, today in recession.”

“The old generation today in recession” is still true for the situation of the Carmelite Order in Iraq. Despite their intelligent and nuanced efforts, their contribution to the modernization of the Iraqi culture is even more forgotten in an era where the first national *History*

*of the Iraq since Origins* of Father Al-Kermeli has been republished (Baghdad, 2011), as if readers today Iraq feel the need to have an inclusive narrative that transcends ethnic and religious fault lines.

<sup>1</sup> Without the support and trust of TAARII, this work would not be done. I thank them for this great opportunity. I would also like to thank the Carmelite Fathers, friends, and professors whose help and advice were essential. Additional thanks go to: Carmelite Fathers Thomas Behnam, Abbouna Ghadeer, and Albert Abbouna; Abbas Kadhum (Naval University); Salam Yousef (San Bernardino University); Rachad Antonius (Université du Québec à Montréal); Sadiq El-Hilo (formerly of Baghdad University); Thabit A. Abdullah (York University); Suha Rassam, Lucine Taminian; and Géraldine Chatelard. Thanks go also to the library of Iraqi National Museum and to all kind workers in their archives.

<sup>2</sup> This administrative system is rooted in the cultural heritage of the Islamic Caliphate as any conquered *misr* (country, land) was to be put under a ruler from the conquerors with relatively no great intervention in the cultural life of conquered population.

<sup>3</sup> In post-2003 Iraq, histories about Hilla, Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad along with historical genealogies of some communities such as Turkmens, Kurds, and Faily Kurds are being republished.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., Yousif Izzedien, *Poetry and Iraqi Society, 1900–1945* (Baghdad: Matba’at al-‘Ani, 1962), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country, 1914–1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 179.

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Dr. I’Inad Ismael El-Kubaisi, *El-Kermali Wa Majalat Loghat El-Arabe Wa dorahuma Fi El-Hadatha* (Baghdad, 2002), 36.

<sup>7</sup> The ancient Catholic religious tradition used to consider Baghdad as Babylone; see Christian Lochon, *Une Mythe Catholique de Babylone*, Colloque Sorbonne Abu Dhabi, November 17, 2009. For a source in English, see Hermann Gollancz, *Chronicle of Events between the Years 1623 and 1733, Relating to the Settlement of the Order*

*of Carmelites in Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927).

<sup>8</sup> See P. Marie-Joseph du Sacré-Cœur, “La mission des Carmes a Bagdad et l’influence Française en Orient,” *Etudes Carmelitaines*, July 1913.

<sup>9</sup> See Marie-Joseph, “La mission des Carmes,” 22–23. The Mission published a journal in Baghdad but did not last more than a year. *Zuhairat Baghdad* (Baghdad Floret) in 1905; see Salem Al-Alousi, *Fi Thikra El-Ab El-Kermeli: El-Rahib Wa El-Aalamma* (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture & Information, nd), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Marie-Joseph, “La mission des Carmes,” 24.

<sup>11</sup> Salama Hussein Kazem, “At Tabsheer Fi Al Iraq: Wasailahu Wa Ahdafahu” (“Missionary in Iraq: Methods and Objectives”), unpublished MA thesis, Kuliyyat Al Sharia, Baghdad University, April 1991, p. 202.

<sup>12</sup> Several books appeared in Iraq speaking about the linguistic efforts of Father Marie Anastas El-Kermali, and his dictionary “El Musaed” (The Helper), never published in his lifetime, which is regarded by researchers as the most important dictionary for modern Arabic as well as the largest effort of the Father. See, for example, El-Kubaisi, *El-Kermali; El-Kermali Min Ulamaa El-Lughah fi El-Iraq* (Baghdad, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Suha Rassam, *Christianity in Iraq: Its Origins and Development to the Present Day* (Leominster: Gracewing Publishing, 2005), 4–5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> John Thomas Hamel, “Ja’far al-Khalili and the Modern Iraqi Story,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1972; Arabic translation by Wadie Falestine and Safaa Khaloussi (Baghdad, 1976), 27. Cf., *Al Aqaliyat Al Qumyah Wa Ed-Diniyah Wa Tathiruha Ala Al Waqi’ Es-Syassi Wa I’ijtimai’i Fi Muhafazat Ninawa*.

<sup>16</sup> During the 1990s, nearly all of the Carmelite Fathers in Baghdad abandoned their nationalities of origin in order to stay in Iraq; interview with Carmelite Father Thomas Behnam in the Carmelite Convent in Baghdad, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Comments of Dr. Suha Rassam sent by e-mail to the researcher, August 2012.



### TAARII RECEPTIONS: MESA & ASOR

TAARII hosted receptions for individuals interested in Iraqi/Mesopotamian Studies at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) annual meetings. As always, TAARII welcomes the opportunity to meet with its members and to help build a network among those interested in studies on Iraq. TAARII continues to be impressed by the growing Iraqi and Mesopotamian studies community and appreciates the continued support of its members. The pictures shown here are from the MESA reception in New Orleans in October 2013 (Photo Credits: TAARII).

If you have photos and/or details from activities related to Iraqi/Mesopotamian Studies, please send them to [katie@taarii.org](mailto:katie@taarii.org) so we can feature them on our blog (<http://taarii.org/blog/>).



# TAARII

The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq  
3923 28th St., #389 • Grand Rapids, MI 49512  
Ph. (773) 844-9658 • [www.taarii.org](http://www.taarii.org)



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