

Training for Babylon staff, April – May 2005

Three Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage staff, Dr. Maryam O. M Al-Adee, Mr. Haidar A. Urebi and Mr. Raad H. Al-Amari attended eight weeks of training between April 1st and May 26th. Dr. Maryam is responsible for the ancient site of Babylon and is currently the Archaeological Inspector for the entire district of Babil. Raad and Haidar are both archaeologists who are based at the site of Babylon.

This training opportunity arose as result of the visit in December 2004 to Babylon by Dr. John Curtis, keeper of the Ancient Near East department, British Museum (at the invitation of the Minister of Culture for Iraq) and his subsequent preliminary assessment and report on the damage at the archaeological site of Babylon as a result of the occupation of the site by the Coalition forces. Funding was provided by the Department of Culture Media and Sport and all of the trainers and specialists offered their time on a *pro bono* basis.

For the duration of their training the three interns were based at the Department of the Ancient Near East at the British Museum.

The main subjects covered during the training were:

1. Site assessment, particularly in regard to condition assessment of damage at sites. A comprehensive detailed report on the damage to the archaeological site of Babylon needs to be undertaken in the future
2. Site management. A site management plan for Babylon is to be compiled by Dr. Maryam and her team.
3. World Heritage Status nomination procedures.
4. Site development. The management and organisation of displays, museums, visitors centres and education facilities at archaeological sites. Babylon has great potential regarding tourism and education.
5. Care of collections. Objects storage, conservation and display issues. There have been museums at Babylon displaying objects and information and these should be restored and developed.

With those aims in mind Sarah Collins organised a variety of courses, visits and talks in order to provide as wide a range of training as possible in the available time. Many people helped with this and offered their expertise in particular the following: Sue Cole of English Heritage, Gaetano Palumbo and Mario Santana Quintero of the World Monuments Fund and Tim Williams of the Institute of Archaeology, UCL

In order for the trainees to see different types of archaeological sites and to learn about how archaeological sites and World Heritage sites are managed in Britain, a series of visits to British sites was organised including Hadrian's Wall, Stonehenge, Sutton Hoo, and Ironbridge. At all of the places they visited site experts and English Heritage specialists spoke to them with particular emphasis on site management and development issues.

In regard to site assessment, particularly rapid site assessment of damage at sites and documentation, a one week training course was organised with the World Monuments Fund who specialize in this type of training. World Monuments Fund are currently training and working with archaeologists in Iraq in carrying out a database inventory of the archaeological sites in Iraq. The assessment criteria and information required for this database with its associated documentation (photography, cartography etc.) is very relevant for Babylon and in particular for the compilation of a management plan. Also in regard to site management an intensive week of lectures at the Institute of Archaeology was organised as this is one of the subjects taught there.

World Heritage nomination procedures were also concentrated on during the WMF course and at the Institute of Archaeology because if Babylon is to be nominated by the Ministry of Culture of Iraq, the stringent criteria (the least of which is a management plan) for nomination need to be understood and followed by Dr. Maryam and her team.

An introduction to issues relating to object storage, display and conservation of objects was carried out in the British Museum, V&A, Museum of London, Institute of Archaeology and all of the other museums visited. The trainees were particularly interested in conservation as at present there are no conservators at Babylon.

A variety of other subjects of relevance to the current situation in Iraq such as illicit antiquities issues were also covered. In two cases (ceramics conservation and illicit antiquities) the trainees asked for a second session on the subject.

In order for the trainees to get the maximum benefit from the training, during most of the visits and talks a translator was with them. Wajdan Majeed an Iraqi with an MA in British Archaeology and Fatma Marii, a Jordanian PhD student of conservation at the Institute of Archaeology gave up a lot of their time to help with translating.

Assessment

At the end of the training the Iraqis were encouraged to give their opinions. They were very impressed by British archaeological and heritage sites and said that the variety of visits that they went on, ranging from the prehistoric sites to the Mary Rose was a very good selection.

They felt that they benefited from seeing well managed sites with visitors centres, museums and also with educational facilities. Education programs at sites and museums (for students, schools & the public) have not been developed in Iraq and they would like to know more about this in the future. They were also very impressed by the National Monuments Record Centre and wished there could be such an organisation in Iraq in the future. They enjoyed their week at the Institute of Archaeology and would have liked more courses there.

They were keen to start compiling information on Babylon for a management plan and to start filling in the forms for the WMF database when they return and they will have some further training with the WMF in Jordan in September.

Dr. Maryam says that she wants Babylon to be an example and to set the standards for all other archaeological sites in Iraq to follow.