

COVID-19 and the British Institute at Ankara

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The first COVID-19 case in Turkey was announced on 11 March 2020. Soon after, the Turkish presidency declared that schools and universities were to be closed for three weeks. Accordingly, the BIAA's premises were closed to the public. All fellows were advised to work from home, while only a skeletal staff remained present in the Institute's offices. Due to rapidly increasing case numbers, it was decided that even these core staff should also work from home from 17 March to 15 June. During this period, the Institute was visited for maintenance purposes only and by individual staff members as and when required. On 15 June, key staff resumed a skeletal presence at the Institute, but under strict precautions. All offices were limited to a single occupant and staff were obligated to wear a mask and galoshes or indoor shoes. A new glass partition was installed in the reception area on the first floor and cooking in the kitchen was no longer permitted. Special filters were installed in the vacuum cleaners and a great quantity of bleach was used for cleaning. That said, staff and fellows have kept in contact via weekly virtual teatimes, at which we exchange news and update one another on our activities.

Alongside the offices, the Institute's collections also closed in March. After much discussion, it was decided to reopen the library to the public on a limited basis from mid-November. Since the library closed in March, we have received several hundred new books for our archaeology, history and contemporary Turkey collections, and these will soon be available for consultation. Under the new library regulations, appointments to visit the library must be booked between one and seven days in advance. Contact details and a government-provided health code (*HES Kodu*) are required from each reader. Only two readers are allowed to use the library each day. They are seated at opposite corners of the reading room, with desks disinfected between visits. Books are delivered by the librarians and set aside for 72 hours after use, before being returned to the stacks. Researchers are allowed to consult the other physical collections under the same restrictions. In this way, we hope to make the BIAA's resources available to the academic community, while maintaining the highest degree of protection for both users and staff.

As far as archaeological fieldwork in Turkey is concerned, the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the body responsible for the provision of permits, has issued two circulars (*genelge*) in line with the instructions and recommendations of the Ministry of Health. The first, dated 1 March 2020, stipulated that archaeological work could take



Tea time at the BIAA, 2020 style.

place with small and separately operating teams of experts focusing on necessary work in depots at excavation sites or in museums, and then only in accordance with a range of precautions, such as frequent disinfection. Work requiring labourers was to be postponed, except where absolutely necessary. Visitors were not allowed and contact with local communities was to be minimised.

This circular was followed by a second on 10 April which expanded the range of fieldwork that the first *genelge* had deemed acceptable. It stated that, provided the measures enumerated in the first circular were implemented, tasks such as conservation, restoration, cleaning and environmental planning could be undertaken. Such work was to be executed by small teams, composed of Turkish team members and foreign team members living in Turkey, under the supervision of the assistant excavation director.

Needless to say, these measures had a severe impact on fieldwork activities by British as well as other foreign academics working in Turkey. British scholars were prevented from travelling to Turkey by their home institutions, and this meant that only limited work was carried out at Boncuklu and Aphrodisias, led by the projects' respective assistant directors (see pages 37–39 and 42–43). The Konya Regional Archaeological Survey did take place, however, because the project's director, Michele Massa, lived in Turkey until recently (see pages 40–41).

In May, the Institute's Research Committee had the regulations of the Turkish authorities very much in mind as it made its decisions regarding project funding for the remainder of the year. Nevertheless, the pandemic has since developed in such a way that even fewer projects than projected were able to carry out their planned research, and so the Institute will roll over some of the grants awarded.

Naturally, we hope to be able to report a very different situation in the next edition of *Heritage Turkey*!