

Safeguarding the archaeological assets of Turkey

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In spring 2017, the British Institute at Ankara was granted a Large Award by the Cultural Protection Fund (CPF). This fund is administered and managed by the British Council (<https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development/cultural-protection-fund>), in partnership with the British government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The Institute will lead a three-year project – 'Safeguarding archaeological assets of Turkey (SARAT)' – in partnership with the International Council of Museums UK, Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations and Anadolu Kültür (<https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development/cultural-protection-fund/projects/safeguarding-archaeological-assets>). SARAT aims to build capacity and raise awareness concerning the safeguarding of archaeological assets in Turkey via case studies in the southeastern provinces, Antalya and Istanbul.

Southeastern Turkey is rich in cultural heritage, ranging in date from prehistoric times through to the present day. The area possesses archaeological remains that represent pivotal stages in human history: from the earliest centres of the Neolithic period (for example Göbeklitepe) through to well-preserved cities of the Roman imperial period (such as Zeugma) and unique Muslim and Christian monuments (including those of Diyarbakır). Southeastern Anatolia is an internationally significant region, which is well represented on the UNESCO World Heritage List and has a number of newly opened venues which house unique and priceless regional archaeological collections.

Istanbul and Antalya each host museums with stunning collections offering overviews of the development of these regions from the earliest periods of human activity up to recent times. Istanbul, itself a UNESCO World Heritage Site, hosts unique remains, ranging from the Alexander Sarcophagus to significant archaeological sites like the early harbour at Yenikapı, for instance. The archaeological museum at Antalya displays stunning statues from the ancient city of Perge as well as Palaeolithic artefacts from the Karain cave. Both cities are major Turkish touristic hubs, and potential emergencies at the museums themselves or the archaeological sites under their auspices might take a variety of forms. It is, therefore, important to prepare these museums and their personnel to deal with emergency situations and to protect them against the threats that affect the whole region. The SARAT project thus consists of three components, each focused on a different aspect of safeguarding archaeological heritage and working with different target groups.

(1) Emergency training for protecting archaeological assets. A first aim of the project is to provide customised training in both risk management and rescue. This five-day

intensive training programme will address the specific needs of eight regional museums in safeguarding archaeological heritage. Training will be based on state-of-the-art international courses, that will be adapted to the particular circumstances of these Turkish museums. These courses will cover essential methodologies of risk and damage assessment in response to a variety of emergencies and will involve discussion of a range of preventive measures that will, in the event of an emergency, simplify damage assessment. This training will result in tangible outcomes for safeguarding local archaeological assets through a practical, hands-on approach. The courses will take place in the museums themselves, but will not involve handling or disturbing in any way the collections held in depots or on display. In addition, emergency training at archaeological sites will form part of the training package.

(2) Secondly, a nationwide survey to map public perceptions of heritage and the value it holds will be undertaken. The questionnaire for the public survey will be prepared following the receipt of feedback from stakeholder meetings which will be held in a number of cities and will be implemented by a polling firm. The results will be evaluated by SARAT team members, in collaboration with an experienced social scientist. This survey will be a first in the country and will fill a major knowledge gap in Turkey to benefit policy makers, academics and heritage professionals.

The region- and province-specific results of this nationwide public survey will inform the development of workshops for heritage professionals and local authorities. The workshops will focus on using heritage assets to build economic and social capacity within communities and will also contribute to increased protection and appreciation of archaeological assets in Turkey. Indeed, the regionally specific data will provide guidance on how best to improve cultural tourism while helping to determine the causes of heritage loss.

(3) Finally, activities to raise awareness about the looting of antiquities and the damage it causes to archaeological heritage will take place, targeting two specific groups: journalists and other members of the media who shape public views and the registered (by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism) antiquities collectors who might find themselves at the receiving end of the illicit market. Through a series of workshops, seminars and interviews, SARAT plans to discuss these issues and work towards building a critical awareness of cultural heritage and the long-term impact of looting and the illicit trade in antiquities amongst these key groups. SARAT will also establish an 'ask-an-expert' online tool in order to improve the quality and accuracy of archaeology-related media reporting.

The results of these programmes will be put into the service of local communities and cultural workers by contributing to the development of better policies and solutions for safeguarding the archaeological assets of Turkey.