

# 'Living Amid the Ruins' at the British Academy Summer Showcase

Lutgarde Vandepuit & Işıl Gürsu | British Institute at Ankara

The 2019 British Academy Summer Showcase took place on 21 and 22 June, and was also open to the public on the evening of 21 June. The evening before, on 20 June, there was a private-view event for invited guests. Over 1,900 visitors, including more than 200 schoolchildren, visited the Academy during the Showcase and took part in the event, which was promoted as 'a free festival of ideas for curious minds'. The Showcase comprised 15 exhibits arranged throughout the splendid rooms of the Academy's building in Carlton House Terrace, London. Each presented research conducted by current or recent British Academy grant holders, and the exhibits were framed by a programme of pop-up talks and performances. The showcased research projects were selected from among a number of applications and the exhibits were designed to communicate cutting-edge research in the humanities and social sciences to the general public in fun and interactive ways.

One of the exhibits was staged by the British Institute at Ankara and showcased the results of the project 'Living Amid the Ruins: Archaeological Sites as Hubs of Sustainable Development for Local Communities in Southwest Turkey'. This programme was realised thanks to a grant from the British Academy's GCRF Sustainable Development Programme and ran between December 2016 and March 2018. It was one of two projects showcased by researchers linked to the British International Research Institutes (BIRI).

The concept behind the BIAA exhibit was the sharing of answers to a range of questions related to cultural heritage. What is the relationship between archaeology and the public? How can this relationship be improved to ensure the safeguarding of archaeological assets? What are the socio-economic benefits that can be generated thanks to archaeological assets for present-day local communities? How can we make archaeological data relevant to non-academic audiences? These are central among the principal questions addressed by the BIAA's research focused on cultural heritage management – not only the 'Living Amid the Ruins' project, but also the 'BIAA Cultural Heritage Management' project and equally the ongoing 'Safeguarding Archaeological Assets of Turkey' project (see page 5 in this issue). Since all these programmes are very much interwoven, elements of all three were presented at the Showcase.

The exhibit underlined and clarified the entire journey from initial archaeological survey in Pisidia (southwest Turkey) to public engagement with a variety of audiences: from local communities to heritage professionals, tourists, authorities and academics. To this effect, a short promotional video highlighted the Pisidia Heritage Trail, which has been established by the BIAA in order to link archaeological sites



Attendees arriving at the British Academy (© Alastair Fyfe).

to the landscape and present-day communities, and generate opportunities for eco-tourism. The film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8i7JTwt0kw&list=PLbei-sAWFFVrq78ZpEDv-vXahucsf0JAc>.

Building on the results of this initial programme, 'Living Amid the Ruins' investigated how cultural heritage and the heritage trail could generate socio-economic benefits for local communities living by or amid these ruins, with the aim of realising increased sustainability for both the communities and the heritage. A short documentary shown at the Showcase illustrated how members of these local communities themselves envisage development focused on the presence of the heritage and, consequently, preserving it (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PykH0Dc-ytE>).

The 'Safeguarding Archaeological Assets of Turkey' project aims to raise awareness and building capacity on a larger, national scale. A crucial instrument for realising these aims is an online training programme, entitled 'Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets', that has been developed by the BIAA. A third film brought the course – which is presented in Turkish and open to all interested individuals – to life for visitors to the Showcase. In addition to this promotional film for the course itself, two short films shot at the BIAA-funded projects being conducted at Boncuklu and Aphrodisias, both directed by UK HEI researchers, detailed how these excavations are working towards the principles taught in the training programme (Boncuklu: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7Ve4lGR\\_eI&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7Ve4lGR_eI&feature=youtu.be); Aphrodisias: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOK4Bq6Zg3M&list=PLbei-sAWFFVqiQHA-HaHDAgug2ZoC1OuU&index=9>).

This series of brief films informed the visitors to the Showcase about the fieldwork behind the Institute's heritage management research; however, the 3D virtual-reality glasses that we also made available at the event enabled them to be part of it. Thus, in order to bring the trail and, particularly, the archaeological fieldwork to life, the glasses displayed reconstructions of a number of carefully chosen monuments located at archaeological sites along the trail. The reconstructions were generated by Lithodomos VR in collaboration with the archaeologists who led the Pisidia Survey Project and incorporate the project's results. These reconstructions are normally intended for viewing by tourists visiting an archaeological site along the trail. At carefully chosen and marked spots at a given site, visitors are invited to put on the glasses and are then transported to the very same spot in antiquity, when the present-day ruins of the heritage location were part of a bustling town. Although the visitors to the Summer Showcase remained inside the British Academy's premises in London, the glasses enabled them to visualise specific spots at the sites in Turkey as they would have been in antiquity. These glasses bring to life the beauty of the landscape as well as the heritage itself, and were the absolute highlight of the exhibit for both younger and older visitors. In particular, the images illustrated the need for the protection of the landscape and the archaeological remains.

Leaflets on the various British Institute at Ankara projects were made available for those visitors who wanted further information. There was also a final visual display. This showcased the guidebook that will accompany the walking trail, titled *Pisidia Heritage Trail: An Interpretive Guidebook of Ancient Pisidia*. Although the book has yet to be finalised, the completed chapters were put together as an e-book and shared with the audience at the event.



The virtual-reality glasses in use (© Benedict Johnson).

The Showcase was a wonderful opportunity for the research team behind the various cultural heritage projects of the Institute to share their results with a large and varied public audience in the UK, and it has surely raised their visibility. The 3D glasses were an obviously overwhelming success with all visitors, across all age groups and educational backgrounds. In addition, many people engaged in conversation, asking additional questions or wanting to know more about the possibilities for visiting the highlighted areas of Turkey. As such, the Showcase offered an excellent opportunity to gauge the opinion of the general public in the UK on the presented research in a very short period of time. This was a unique experience that has brought us many new and valuable insights.



Reconstruction of ancient Ariassos (Lithodomos VR).