

LEGACY DATA: USING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

Legacy data present an immensely rich and varied body of largely unstudied information that allows present-day scientists and researchers further understanding of Turkey and the Black Sea region. The British Institute at Ankara's own historical collections, including paper and photographic archives as well as archaeological collections, offer insights into the evolution of the topic or material under study as well as information about assets now lost. The Institute owns collections of squeezes and ceramic sherds as well as large photographic collections and archives that offer excellent study material for scholars in many disciplines, including archaeologists, historians, anthropologists and specialists in epigraphy and ethnology. This strategic research initiative aims to promote interdisciplinary academic research that relates to legacy data concentrating on Turkey and the Black Sea region. Work on the Institute's collections will be an important focus, as will research on other legacy data available in Turkey and the Black Sea region.

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The British Institute at Ankara's digital repository

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Since 2017, the British Institute at Ankara has been working towards the establishment of a regional digital repository. The project really took off when the Institute hired a Digital Repository Manager, Nurdan Atalan Çayırezmez, about a year ago. The main aims of this initiative are to collect, store, manage and maintain the records of the BIAA collections and to build a digital repository for long-term preservation of digital data. The digital repository will store and preserve data related to the Institute's collections as well as material generated by other projects, which will pay for the service.

During her first year at the Institute, Nurdan has assessed the BIAA collections and archives, both physical and digitised. Although the BIAA had invested heavily in digitisation before the arrival of specialised staff, Nurdan's detailed examination revealed that further work needs to be done before a digital repository can be set up, for both internal and external reasons. Internally, the Institute's digital repository office has focused specifically on 'cleaning' and 'standardising' the data that have been digitised over the past 15 years by a number of people, who all worked in slightly different ways. FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) principles are key elements of a digital repository, and currently Nurdan and a number of volunteers and interns are checking the digitised material, especially the related metadata and excel files, and updating them according to Dublin Core headings (the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative is an open-source movement that aims to standardise data about digital objects). Meanwhile, a consultation process is taking place regarding software options to ensure OAI-PMH

standards (Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting: <https://www.openarchives.org/pmh/>).

Unfortunately, standards for digital cultural heritage and cultural memory in Turkey, such as standardised archaeological site names and terminology, are lacking. This is a major external hurdle that needs to be tackled before the Institute's digital repository can become fully operational. Work on a standardised terminology has started and will continue next year.

To provide Nurdan with the necessary context for her work and to make sure that the BIAA digital repository will comply with international standards, she took a customised intensive training course at the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. This focused on digital repository software and hardware, costing solutions and archiving, standards and guidelines, and management and accreditation. Her visit to the UK also gave Nurdan the opportunity to visit Historic England, the Society of Antiquaries and the British Library, together with the Institute's Honorary Secretary, Shahina Farid. During these visits, policies regarding the digitisation and collection of metadata for archives were discussed in detail.

A further element of this initiative is the BIAA's involvement in the SEADDA project ('Saving European Archaeology from the Digital Dark Age'). SEADDA is an EU COST Action (CA18128; <https://www.seadda.eu/>) that will run from March 2019 to March 2023. The project is primarily concerned with preventing digital data from becoming obsolete and tackling the lack of standards in the world of digitisation. Nurdan is vice-chair of Working Group 3: Preservation and Dissemination Best Practice.



Nurdan at work with the interns and her assistant, Sergio Russo.

As a first step towards internationally agreed standards, guidelines and terms and conditions regarding use of the physical and digital BIAA collections have been prepared alongside policy documents for the repository (including data types, data formats, copyrights, etc.). Nurdan, in collaboration with the Institute's Resource Manager, Burçak Delikan, has also thoroughly checked the data regarding the BIAA's seed reference collection and the herbarium. Furthermore, Nurdan has established links with other herbaria in Ankara and elsewhere in Turkey, and has presented the Institute's herbarium at a workshop in Düzce. It turns out that several of the Ankara herbaria hold specimens received from Mark Nesbitt and other researchers who have worked on the BIAA herbarium. Within the context of developing collaborations with other herbaria, Nurdan's visits to the Botany Department of University College London, which houses the 'sister collection' to the BIAA's seed collection, and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, where Mark Nesbitt currently works, provided more information about the background to and the collecting policies of the Institute's herbarium and seed collection. It is intended to collaborate further with both these UK institutions as well as with relevant herbaria in Turkey.

The BIAA's physical archives have also grown over the course of this past year. A total of 26 boxes of working notes, correspondence, archives and books, as well as a (large) number of maps, slides and negatives have arrived in Ankara. Preliminary archiving has been conducted and records have been created in Excel files to ensure that this newly arrived material is documented sufficiently ahead of digitisation. The books (ten boxes) have already been catalogued and are now accessible in the BIAA David French Library.

In terms of outreach activities, Nurdan and Burçak presented the botanical collections at a workshop entitled 'National Botanical Gardens, Arboretums, Herbariums and Botanical Museums', which took place in Düzce in April. This meeting resulted in the first tentative discussions of potential collaboration between the BIAA and the herbaria at Ankara University, Gazi University in Ankara and Duzce University. These talks continued when the directors of these institutions visited the Institute. Nurdan also presented a talk entitled 'Biocultural collections and digital cultural heritage: British Institute at Ankara (BIAA) collections' at the 'Seed Science and Archaeobotanical Research in Anatolia' conference, which took place at Ege University in Izmir.

Simultaneously, relations between the BIAA and several university departments of information and records management in Ankara have been developing. Not only have students from Hacettepe University visited the BIAA, they have also been offered the opportunity to do an internship at the Institute. We are delighted to report that several have already taken up intern positions. In addition, Nurdan has lectured on digital cultural heritage and archaeology at several universities and also presented a paper entitled 'Digital cultural heritage and photography collections: BIAA photographic collection' at E-Beyas 2019, an annual information management symposium. Last, but not least, she also gave a lecture on this topic at Ankara University when a group of students of library information from UCL Qatar were in Ankara, and it was a pleasure to welcome these students on a visit to the Institute.

So, all in all, it has been an extremely productive year. Awareness and knowledge about the Institute's digital and physical collections are clearly spreading!



Nurdan with Mark Nesbitt.