

CULTURAL HERITAGE, SOCIETY & ECONOMY

The promotion, management and regulation of cultural heritage is a complex process involving many different agents and stakeholders on local, national and international levels. This is a critical area of public policy involving a range of actors that includes international organisations, government ministries and agencies, political parties, businesses, museums and local communities. How cultural heritage is produced, interpreted and understood can have a profound impact on social and economic activity and decision-making. It influences the formation of social values and ideas as well as notions of common identity and history, and also affects management of the economy and infrastructure. The importance of cultural heritage management is increasingly recognised and acknowledged in Turkey, and the field is developing rapidly. New issues and problems have emerged, for which solutions that comply with and enhance the highest international standards have to be found within Turkey. This strategic research initiative sets out to examine the relationships between the many agents and actors in the field of cultural heritage in the Turkish context.

doi:10.18866/biaa2022.03

Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets (SARAA): a cultural heritage collaboration between Turkey and Lebanon

Gül Pulhan, Özlem Başdoğan, Martyn Weeds & Lutgarde Vandeput | British Institute at Ankara
Joanne Farchakh Bajjalay | BILADI

In September 2021, the BIAA – in partnership with Lebanese cultural heritage NGO Biladi – launched ‘Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets’ (SARAA), a six-month project funded by the Cultural Protection Fund. SARAA built on the outcomes of the BIAA-led, Europa Nostra Award-winning, Safeguarding Archaeological Assets of Turkey (SARAT) project by translating and adapting cultural heritage protection materials and resources to the Lebanese context, capacity-building among Lebanese professionals, and facilitating knowledge exchange between practitioners in Turkey and Lebanon.

The new project took its name from the title of SARAT’s primary output: a popular Turkish-language online course on disaster risk management and emergency preparedness for cultural heritage. This course, the first of its kind in Turkey, was developed by a small team from the BIAA, Koç University ANAMED and ICOM UK. It was delivered by Gül Pulhan and accredited by Koç University.

Delivering cultural heritage first aid in response to emergencies has, unfortunately, been a recurring experience for Lebanon due to the long-running civil war (1975–90), the ongoing conflict with Israel, and the devastating Beirut blast

of 4 August 2020. In the aftermath of the blast – after securing people’s lives – the Lebanese Armed Forces, Directorate General of Antiquities, university staff and students, NGO workers and many others rushed to give emergency care to damaged cultural heritage. These efforts saved many buildings from collapse and removed irreplaceable collections to safe locations; however, fundamental emergency response concepts and skills were missing. As a result, Joanne Farchakh Bajjalay, Director of the Lebanese cultural heritage NGO Biladi, concluded that SARAT’s Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets course – to which she had contributed – could help address a systemic knowledge gap by building the disaster risk management capacities of people working in cultural heritage in Lebanon.

Beginning in September 2021, the materials from the original Turkish course were translated into English and then Arabic. The structure (five units, 20 episodes) and general introduction to the course (covering the importance of archaeological heritage and threats to its existence, looting and the illicit antiquities trade, international and national organisations working to safeguard cultural heritage, and legal protection mechanisms and international conventions)

were retained in the Arabic version, with the addition of Lebanon-specific information and examples. As with the Turkish version, the Lebanese course utilises the ‘before-during-after’ disaster risk management cycle and promotes risk-mitigation and recovery procedures developed by ICCROM. While the original course was delivered via pre-recorded videos, the frequent power cuts and unstable internet access in Lebanon – combined with the time constraints of the project and the preferences expressed by stakeholders – meant that written course materials for use in face-to-face training were favoured for SARAA.

The final unit of the course gives country-specific information on cultural heritage. In the Turkish version, this unit was dominated by the tangible and intangible UNESCO World Heritage assets of Turkey. In Lebanon, a very different approach was taken, with academics from the Lebanese University producing original contributions on efforts to save or restore cultural heritage following the numerous disasters that the country has suffered since 1955. In the opening chapter, Wissam Khalil and Ziad Al-Aridi present an overview of ‘Archaeological assets in Lebanon’. In the second chapter, ‘Safeguarding archaeological buildings in Tripoli’, Rawia Majzoub describes the 1955 river flood in Tripoli and subsequent efforts to preserve the historic buildings of the city. In ‘Innovative emergency responses to the various hazards of war: the case of the National Museum of Beirut’, Nada Kallas and Leila Abou Zeid document the heroic efforts to safeguard the National Museum’s collections under the most difficult of

circumstances. In the fourth chapter, Habib Sadek details the destruction caused by the 2006 Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon and the architectural reconstruction of the village of Bint Jbeil that followed. The fifth chapter, written by Rana Dubeissy, approaches the tragedy of the Beirut Blast through the case study ‘Protection of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs historical headquarters Bustros Palace: collaboration between civilians and military’. In the final chapter, Ali Badawi discusses the Directorate General of Antiquities’ experience of preserving heritage during armed conflict and their work at Beaufort Castle, Tyre and Chamaa Castle.

The course was piloted via a three-day training workshop held in Beirut in February 2022. Participants included academics, museum and heritage specialists, Lebanese Directorate of Antiquities representatives, architects, students, representatives from NGOs and senior military personnel from across Lebanon. The training was highly successful, with pre- and post-workshop evaluations indicating a clear rise in participant knowledge across all topics. One participant commented that ‘this training will help us improve our capabilities in safeguarding our heritage’, while another added that ‘the knowledge will be shared with my colleagues at university and the course materials integrated into the curriculum to give future generations the opportunity to learn more about safeguarding and rescuing archaeological and architectural assets in Lebanon’. It was particularly significant that all Lebanese Armed Forces representatives emphasised their intent to share the knowledge they had gained with their regiments.



One of the training sessions during the in-person workshop in February 2022 in Beirut.

Given the military's role during disasters and emergencies and in their immediate aftermath in Lebanon, this has the potential to be a particularly strong legacy of the project.

Parallel to the work in Lebanon, an online survey and series of telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 493 of the 5,497 graduates who completed the SARAT programme in 2019. The aims were to understand if and how they had used what they learnt during the course in their professional and academic lives and to collect examples of best practice. Video interviews were then conducted with selected graduates in order to produce a short film (<https://biaa.ac.uk/saraa-film-showcasing-the-best-practices-in-cultural-heritage-protection>), with English and Arabic subtitles, to share with heritage professionals in Lebanon and more widely. As the film illustrates, the impact of the course was significant – not only for museum staff and other heritage professionals, but also for high school teachers, local government representatives, engineers, firefighters and many others with a role in safeguarding and protecting cultural heritage.

A final element of the SARAA project (which was actually the first to take place) involved organising an online international knowledge-exchange workshop called 'Comparing Notes: Cultural Protection Fund Projects in Lebanon and Turkey'. This event, which was held in November 2021, was reported on in *Heritage Turkey* 11.

While SARAA formally came to an end in February 2022, it continues to have an impact, primarily through the ongoing use of the materials generated and integration of the shared practices. An unanticipated – but highly welcome – outcome was the adoption by the British Council in Lebanon of the methodology used in the public opinion poll conducted across Turkey as part of the SARAT project to carry out a similar exercise in Lebanon (see *Heritage Turkey* 8 for a report on the Turkish poll). There is a great deal of interest in further adapting the outcomes and methods of SARAA and SARAT to other countries and contexts, as well as in collaborating on new cultural heritage protection courses and materials. It is hoped that this interest can be explored via future projects and partnerships.

The Safeguarding and Rescuing Archaeological Assets (SARAA) project was a collaboration between the British Institute at Ankara (BIAA) and Lebanese cultural heritage NGO Biladi. It was funded by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund (CPF), in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. SARAA built on the outcomes of the CPF-funded Safeguarding Archaeological Assets of Turkey (SARAT) project, which ran from 2017–2020 and was a partnership between the BIAA, Koç University Research Centre for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED) and the UK branch of ICOM.

