

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 Türkiye 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 Türkiye 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 Türkiye and the Black Sea region.

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The British Institute at Ankara's collections and digital repository

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The British Institute at Ankara (BIAA) continues to receive donations and to archive them, physically and digitally, with the help of interns and volunteers. The team has been working to reorganise and rearrange its physical archives as well as the digital collections to better align with the principles of FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable). In addition, the work of conservation and restoration continues for organic and inorganic materials in our historical collections. Significantly, this analogue archiving represents the foundation of the digitisation process. Data verification from the physical collections is ongoing.



Intern Sena Ayar (left) and Digital Repository Assistant Gonca Özger (right) cataloguing part of the photographic collection (Photo © British Institute at Ankara-PH15399 (CC BY NC SA 4.0)).

We are pleased to report that the BIAA's Digital Repository (<https://digitalrepository.biaa.ac.uk>) was launched on 21 March 2023. We offer in this article a brief description of what the Digital Repository is and highlight a few of the collections that can now be accessed through it. The Digital Repository is an open access database which includes digitised records from the BIAA collections and archives, as well as born-digital data from BIAA projects.

The first collection we would like to highlight is the biological collection, which consists of the animal bone and botanical reference collections. The latter was first established by Gordon Charles Hillman and other scholars in the 1970s, and includes herbarium, seed, wood and charcoal specimens. Information about the Herbarium Digitisation Project (2021–2022) can be found in *Heritage Turkey* 2022. The Botanical Reference Collection is fully digitised and accessible online (<https://digitalrepository.biaa.ac.uk/botanical-reference-collection>). The Animal Bone Reference Collection was created by Sebastian Payne in the 1970s, with improvements undertaken by Evangelia Pişkin at the beginning of the 2000s. The collection mainly consists of domestic mammals, as well as a few birds and reptiles. The Digital Repository has undertaken and completed a process of re-assessment, updating of the database, metadata standardisation, and linking the specimens with the standard authority sources. The full metadata for the Animal Bone Reference Collection catalogue has been published and is accessible online (<https://digitalrepository.biaa.ac.uk/animal-bone-reference-collection>).

The Feriköy Protestant Cemetery Collection (<https://digitalrepository.biaa.ac.uk/ferikoy-protestant-cemetery-collection>) and the SARAT Online Certificate Program (<https://digitalrepository.biaa.ac.uk/sarat-arsiv-sarat-archive>) are now both available online. The Digital Repository Office is digitising and cataloguing materials upon request, alongside official documents and archaeological records.

Apart from the work of cataloguing and archiving new and legacy donations, the BIAA has been working on the Connecting Archives, Connecting People project, an AHRC/UKRI-funded Imagining Futures Phase II Commissioned Project, in collaboration with the British Institute of Libyan and North African Studies (BILNAS) and the Wikimedia Community User Group Turkey. This ongoing digital repository initiative aims to widen access to archives by focusing on the concept of ‘creators’: the people who collect, create and interpret archival material. Once completed, the project will provide guidance and recommendations on best practices in collecting and linking person data for GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) institutions using Wikidata. Moving forward, we aim to use the same methodology for linking the archives of all eight British International Research Institutes (BIRI). The BIRI Digitisation Initiative continues, and an in-person workshop about data curation was held at the BIAA on 20–21 March 2023. The aim of this workshop was to share know-how, discuss the various challenges and get some hands-on data curation practice.

The BIAA continues to prioritize collaboration with national and international partners for sharing know-how and improving knowledge. Collaborations with the Archaeology Data Service, SEADDA and the Imagining Futures (IF) Project have allowed us to bring partners and researchers together and to organise several workshops. These initiatives include Imagining Futures Gathering II:



Participants at the BIRI Digitisation Initiative Workshop, 20–21 March 2023, in Ankara (Photo ©British Institute at Ankara-PH15595 (CC BY NC SA 4.0)).

Strategic Use of Archives in Contexts of Displacement and Post-Conflict (21–23 February 2023, BIAA, Ankara), organised by the IF Team. More information about these activities can be found online:

<https://digitalrepository.biaa.ac.uk/resources>.

Looking ahead to 2024, the BIAA has been awarded a grant from the Modern Endangered Archives Program (MEAP) (<https://meap.library.ucla.edu/about/news/meap-awards-cohortfive/>). The grant will make it possible to undertake the Lost Villages of the Upper Euphrates: A Digital Archive project which will preserve some 2,400 photographic slides that comprise an ethnographic record of life in the Upper Euphrates region from 1970 to 1990. The project is one not only of preservation but also of recovery of ethnographic information that has since been ‘lost’ due to the construction of the Keban and Karakaya dams.

We would like to thank all the staff, consultants, scholars, interns and volunteers who have contributed to the work of archiving, cataloguing and digitising over the past 12 months. Through their work and the generous donations that have been provided to the BIAA, the Digital Repository can continue to update and refine its systems. The BIAA is also supporting several interns and volunteers from several different academic disciplines. They are Sena Zeynep Ayar, Buse Gürkan, Buse Kayar, Umut Özdemir, Utku Uğurlu, Zehra İlke Yıldız, Fatma Betül Gögüş, Pelin Su Uzuncagil and Christopher Jaques Dolphin (interns) and Natalie Stuart, Catherine Rashid, Doğa Aydın, Deniz Ballanlı, Putri Ayesha, Öykü Ortakçı, Sophie Young, Mehmet Eren Girgin and Emrah Dinç (volunteers). Many thanks to Chris Dolphin for editing this document.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge digital archivist Orhun Uğur, whose work on the Digital Repository from 1 October 2021 to 15 July 2023 was instrumental. He has now started in a new position at the University of Exeter.



Digital Repository Manager, Nurdan Atalan Çayırmez launches the BIAA’s Digital Repository System.