

BIAA Masters Dissertation Prize

Catherine M. Draycott | Durham University

In 2022–2023 the British Institute at Ankara ran its inaugural Masters Dissertation Prize. The competition is open on an annual basis to taught postgraduate students of a UK-based university, for dissertations submitted in the past academic year. The second annual call for submissions was issued in September 2023 with a deadline of December 1.

The dissertation competition was developed to promote, recognise and encourage excellent research by scholars engaged in the study of Türkiye and the Black Sea in any period or discipline. Numerous BIAA members generously contributed to a fund-raising drive to support an annual prize of £500 plus membership of the BIAA.

The quality of entries in the first year was impressively high, and the judges found it difficult to select a winner, but Cathy Graham's dissertation *Plaster as a Vital Material: The Agency of Plaster in the Curation of the Çatalhöyük Skull* showed exceptional intellectual sophistication and ingenuity, and was felt to make a significant impact on the understanding of plastered skulls, uses of plaster and approaches to materials in general far beyond Çatalhöyük. The dissertation reconfigured the approach to long-known artefacts previously archaeologically assessed in a rational materialist framework, employing theories of ontology and materiality in an accessible and lucid discussion of how plaster, used in artefacts such as the Çatalhöyük skull, can be understood as a living material that could 'magically' bring such skulls to life as beings in the world and networks of those who lived with them.

Cathy Graham said,

I am delighted to have been awarded the BIAA dissertation prize for my interpretation of a Neolithic plastered skull discovered in Çatalhöyük. This skull, found in the arms of a female skeleton, has gripped my imagination ever since I learned about it in my Ancient Religions course at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The BIAA prize money has enabled me to go on a field trip for my PhD to study the 'Ain Ghazal statues, which share certain stylistic similarities to the Çatalhöyük skull, and I hope to further my knowledge of plaster as the Neolithic material of symbolic resonance by visiting Türkiye in the near future.

Other dissertations submitted covered a wide variety of topics, disciplines and time periods from Ottoman women to cutting-edge GIS techniques. In view of the excellence of the work, the panel felt that all of the authors deserved congratulations, and all eight were awarded Institute memberships.

If you would like to make a donation to the BIAA Masters Dissertation Prize Fund to ensure its long-term support, please contact biaa@britac.ac.uk, or use the form here: <https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/TheBritishInstituteofArchaeol/DonateMasters.html>.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Institution</i>
Zhara Adal	Queen Mary, University of London
Oscar Beighton	Durham University
Tom Gavin	Wolfson College, University of Oxford
Cathy Graham	University of Wales, Trinity St David
Selin Gücüm	London School of Economics
Sólveig Hilmarsdóttir	University of Cambridge
Ibrahim Ince	University College London
Fiona Philips	University of Oxford

The list of entrants, all of whom were highly commended.



Cathy Graham