

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 Türkiye, 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 Türkiye. 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/biaa2023.06

British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship: public understanding of archaeology in Türkiye

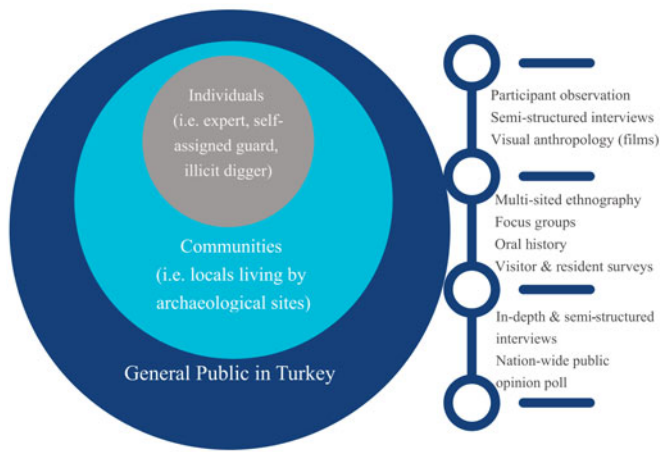
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Readers of *Heritage Türkiye* will be familiar with the BIAA's cultural heritage management research initiative and its affiliated projects, underway since 2013. Last year, I was appointed as the Institute's assistant director for cultural heritage following my involvement in these projects in different capacities. Around the same time, I received positive news from the British Academy about my 2022 Mid-Career Fellowship application. Although this meant that I would be on a one-year long sabbatical nine months into my assistant directorship, it was a great opportunity to dedicate all my time to bringing together the data, results and insights of the last decade's experience. The Fellowship currently buys out my full-time employment until the end of March 2024 and provides research assistance from Özlem Başdoğan. Together we are concentrating on finishing a significant piece of work, while Hakan Tarhan takes over my duties at the BIAA for this period.

The main output of the Fellowship is a scientific monograph dedicated to the public understanding of archaeology in Türkiye (PUNAT). This project is deeply embedded in an understanding of Turkish society at the intersection of politics, history, sociology, economy, archaeology, anthropology and psychology: it is a Herculean task that must be shouldered through the use of various methodologies, at different scales. PUNAT comprises an

assessment of different types of engagement with archaeological heritage, targeting four groups: (a) the general public; (b) local communities living near archaeological sites; (c) heritage experts; and (d) individuals who have exceptional relationships with particular archaeological sites and landscapes, for professional or personal reasons (see chart, next page).

Türkiye's cultural and archaeological heritage is a huge asset and resource for innumerable individuals, groups and organisations that lay claim to it through consumption and commodification. Some stakeholders literally live off this heritage, others destroy it, and a significant fraction do both at the same time. The speed at which archaeological heritage is being eroded demands not only urgent protective measures, but also comprehensive investigation of the underlying reasons for loss and destruction. Experts are usually aware of the need to build stronger ties with the public and specific communities, but few have devised effective measures to achieve this successfully, and overarching methodologies need to be developed. Published studies are mostly anecdotal, usually based on small datasets, and often lack proper discussion of their impact on communities. Because of the range of socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in which solutions need to be found, there is no one-size-fits-all solution in efforts to



Different methodologies used for different publics.

safeguard archaeological heritage. Public engagement and involvement are among the most viable options, and citizen science represents an underexploited opportunity to stimulate movements addressing these challenges.

Additionally, it is not uncommon to come across negative or dismissive comments regarding the public’s attitudes towards archaeology in Türkiye. To what extent do these comments reflect the reality? How interested and engaged is the public with Türkiye’s archaeological assets? What kind of values are assigned to historical assets and by whom? What are the components of the cognitive landscape of archaeology? What are the key emotions that dominate this landscape: anxiety, curiosity, fear, pride or resentment? To what extent do perceptions shape engagement with archaeological assets? Are the experts really alone in their quest to safeguard heritage and if so, how can they get more support? These are some of the questions that the book is trying to answer through the insights gained from the cultural heritage projects of the BIAA. These projects have generated a nuanced picture of how people are affected by, think about and behave toward archaeology, archaeologists and archaeological remains. The research has also investigated how archaeologists value engagement with the wider public, specifically in relation to heritage protection. The most important outcome of the initiative has been to demonstrate that while general knowledge about archaeology is low, Türkiye’s archaeological heritage triggers intense curiosity, spurs creative narratives about the past and is assigned a high intangible value. It is an urgent policy priority to channel this interest to safeguard heritage against serious threats, including a rapidly expanding construction industry, endemic illicit excavations, armed conflict and climate crisis. However, archaeologists and policymakers rarely turn to this implicit public support and interest because they are unaware it exists or they lack the tools to engage meaningfully with communities.

The BIAA initiative is currently the most comprehensive regional study in the eastern Mediterranean based on public understanding of and engagement with archaeology. It has turned the scientific spotlight onto the public body, underlining that this is never a monolithic entity, and that strategies and policies must be multivocal to reach their targets and have an effective impact. The initiative was based on an innovative methodological framework, used to create a flexible analytical framework that would be replicable in other contexts. It also generated a rich dataset that constitutes an indispensable resource to support a multi-layered assessment of national cultural heritage and to make the voice of the Turkish public heard in the national and international arena. The map opposite presents the total number of people reached via a nationwide public opinion poll and follow-up in-depth interviews, both conducted within the SARAT (Safeguarding Archaeological Assets of Turkey) project, the multi-sited ethnography data collected via semi-structured interviews within the Living Amid the Ruins project, and the results of resident surveys conducted as part of the Aspendos Sustainable Development Project. These numbers are updated as I write and reach out to more people in the process.

The PUNAT project reflects nuanced insights into the views and positions of multiple stakeholders and clarifies a complex topic by breaking down public perceptions of archaeology and heritage into quantifiable and intelligible components. The main argument of the book is to bring together all the information in favour of public involvement in the safeguarding of Türkiye’s archaeological assets. I believe that a monograph is the best platform for endorsing this cause. Over the course of the BIAA initiative, I have been involved in a series of public outreach events directed at audiences such as NGOs, academics, students, decision makers at local and national level, tourism representatives, funding bodies, heritage experts, and interested members of the public, both in Türkiye and in the UK. During these events, I have collected diverse feedback and taken note of differing perspectives on the issue of the involvement of public in safeguarding archaeological heritage. Although the topic has always raised interest, 30-minute talks or newspaper interviews could only highlight the most important research findings without a full methodological discussion of their implications and applicability. Fully grounded and thorough discussion and analysis are essential to trigger a shift in the mindsets of the experts, who are the potential facilitators of public involvement in the safeguarding of archaeological assets. The publication and dissemination of the results are aimed at building mutual trust between academics, practitioners and society, where public opinion becomes a resource for experts and policymakers rather than another obstacle to overcome.

