

## **“New Research on Old Collections in Southwest Asian Archaeology”**

Student organised workshop at the British Museum, 31<sup>st</sup> of July – 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2023

In recent years, sustainability has increasingly become a topic of debate in regard to how our societies can tackle climate change and improve our future. Proposed solutions often conflict with economic or other personal or social interests, which means that a fundamental rethinking is necessary in many areas. This also applies to academia and archaeological research. We must therefore ask ourselves what contribution archaeology can make towards a more sustainable world.

On the one hand, sustainability itself could become the subject of archaeological research: How were resources managed in ancient societies and what can we learn from it today? On the other hand, we also need to reflect on how archaeological practices themselves can become more sustainable. This includes ensuring that sites are not only excavated, but also properly researched and published. In this workshop we will focus on the latter part, by looking into what can be gained from already existing material as an alternative to always initiating new and resource-demanding fieldwork projects. Museum collections and archives are suitable starting points in this matter, as they contain a wealth of archaeological material accumulated over the last centuries of work in Southwest Asia. Yet, there has been a prevalent notion that old collections are too difficult to study due to the lack of adequate documentation, which leaves a significant amount of data understudied.

Based on different case studies presented by early career researchers, this workshop will discuss how to tackle such issues and show how the re-evaluation of old collections in museums and archives can be a valuable resource to our understanding of past societies in the light of new research. The aim is to compare different methodological approaches to these kinds of collections and to discuss the future prospects of collection-oriented research towards a more sustainable archaeology.

## **Preliminary programme**

31<sup>st</sup> July

**9:00 – 9:30 Greetings and welcome by Dr. Paul Collins and the organising team**

**9:30 – 10:30 Session I Museum collections in New Research** (Chair: Alex Rodzinka)

Mette Bangsborg Thuesen “Finding meaning in the mundane - revisiting the pottery from Takht-e Suleiman”

Charlotte Nash “Gaining clarity from old glass: some surprising results from historic and unregistered collections at the British Museum”

**10:30 – 11:00** Tea break

**11:00 – 12:30 Session II Archaeological science** (Chair: Giulia Russo)

Mark Davis “New contents for old ladles: Revisiting alloy choices in the Middle East and western Asia in late Antiquity”

Antonia Höhne “Evaluating different methods for the analysis of survey-pottery from the middle-Euphrates (N-Syria)”

Alex Rodzinka “Neutron Tomography analysis of bimetallic swords from Northwestern Iran – forensic investigation of trafficked finds”

**12:30-14:00** Lunch break

**14:00-15:30** Tour of the Near East galleries with curator Dr. Paul Collins

**15:30-15:50** Tea break

**15:50-17:00** Visit to the stores

1<sup>st</sup> August

**9:00-10:30 Session III Archives and statuary** (Chair: Mette Bangsborg Thuesen)

Imane Achouche “The Many Lives of a Mesopotamian Statue - To write the Biography of Artefacts retired in Museums”

Enrica Inversi “A multidisciplinary approach to the study of zoomorphic figurines from Ur”

Robert Schulz “Persistence behind the sustainability: Approaches towards a better understanding of Central Asian archives”

**10:30-11:00** Tea break

**11:00-12:30 Session IV Pottery and sustainable practices** (Chair: Enrica Inversi)

Lisa Wolff-Heger “After the ‘Ubaid: The Late Chalcolithic Pottery from Tell Beydar III”

Giulia Russo “It’s crazy the things we let go of” – Archaeological collections and museums depots: some thoughts on sustainability

**12:30-14:00** Lunch break

**14:00-15:30** Talk by curator, Dr. St John Simpson “The importance of sherd collections”

**15:30-15:50** Tea break

**15:50-17:00** Talk by curator, Dr. Irving Finkel (title to be announced)

2<sup>nd</sup> August

**9:00-10:30** Visit to stores

**10:30-10:50** Tea break

**10:50-12:30** Visit to Scientific Research labs

**12:30-14:00** Lunch break

**14:00-15:30** Final discussion/Round table (Moderator: Lisa Wolff-Heger)

**15:30-17:00** Visit to Luxury & Power exhibition, tour by curator Dr. James Fraser