

## **Transcript: Archaeology in Iraq - Mehiyar Kathem interviews Lanah Haddad archaeologist and Regional Director of the Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TARII)**

Mehiyar 0:00 Welcome to the home network podcast series. Today we're with Lanah Haddad, an archaeologist based in Iraq, and regional director of TARII, the the Academic Research Institute in Iraq. Hello, Lanah, how are you?

Lanah 0:15 Hello, my here. Thank you very much for having me and inviting me to this beautiful Podcast. I'm very humbly honored to be part of this.

Mehiyar 0:24 It's a pleasure. Let's start with TARII. TARII is an institute that was established in the 19, late 1980s. Could you tell us what it does today in Iraq? Yes,

Lanah 0:34 yeah, it was, as you said, established long time ago, but it could not really be in the field, because afterwards, there was the Kuwait war, and so the office needed to close down again. So since then, they were kind of working remotely. And because of all the political situation, they could not do any programs and projects in the ground. This changed in the past years, and especially now, TARII is more active and reviving again, in the diversity of its projects and programs. One of the most known actions that carried us is this financial support or small fellowship for researchers for US citizen is around \$7,000, because they have like more cost in traveling inside to the country. And then for Iraqi researchers, it's around \$2,500. It is a small financial support for any research that they are doing that has to do with ancient Mesopotamia or Iraq, and modern history of Iraq. But also like any other subject that has to do with research for the country, it can be in geology, or in Modern Arts, whatever you can. So we try like to give this financial support to support the academic work in Iraq. For TARII, it is also very, very important to be the connecting part for international and national academics in Iraq. Because we know because of the conflicts that were in the past decades, Iraq got very much isolated, especially academic work would not get into the stage or international stage of researchers, because of the isolation of the country. So we try to support this connection again, to build up new networks, improving the networks with universities, institutions, archives, and ministries also. So currently, our focus is like the American institutions and universities with the Iraqi ones. But we are trying to open up also for other international universities to not make it only exclusively relationship or network between American and Iraqis. But like broaden it into an international way. We also like to partner and conduct our own programs and projects, but also like with others, like foster projects to support their ways to apply for funding or to have people on the ground to implement these projects. And especially like for our Iraqi partners, it is easier for them if they have an international partner to apply for the big fundings because this is what developed what is developing currently in Iraq, that smaller NGOs, civil societies having projects in their local communities, and they are they have the desire to apply for bigger fundings. But it's very difficult to get international fundings when there is no partner on the other side with whom they can apply for it. So in this part, we are trying to support these local NGOs and civil societies to get this support. And also like money transferring is a very complicated things from outside into the country because of the recent history for terrorism and financial support of terrorist groups that so one needs to be cautious about these things and see how the regulations are. Another very important thing for us is bringing Iraqi experts more into the spotlight so that more international academics are aware of what our Iraqi colleagues are doing for this. We have like several webinars where we do discussions and exchange ideas or present their work. And our recent webinar workshop was about research

agenda and source materials for Iraqi history. So we had American and Iraqi colleagues working on modern history and talking about the challenges that they are having with having access to resources. So every part had different challenges like the American researches and the Iraqi researchers, and this is where we come in to give this platforms and giving the possibility to connect these different sides and see how we can improve these problems that exist. The next upcoming webinar will be about modern art with Iraqi artists inside and outside the country. So it's it's very, very diverse of like, who we are inviting what topics we are talking about. So we are not focusing only on heritage, but trying to improve as much as we can. And this is important, and I think COVID has this good side on it, that webinars became something became popular, because not every Iraqi scholar has the financial ability, or the white papers to go to a conference or a workshop that is outside the country. This is also again, like part of this isolation of Iraqi scholars to the international academic. So webinars are actually something very, very useful for changing this. And we try really to involve as much Iraqi scholars as scholars as possible. And in this way, when more acknowledging what current work is doing, as more networks and exchange can be done through this, this is our hope, of course, and we will have also conference at November, in Washington, DC, but they will be also part online. So still try to hope that as many Iraqi scholars can participate. And the topic will be from ancient to modern, the current state of research on Iraq, and it will be in the Smithsonian National Museum. It's a lot, we are we are trying really to do it step by step and let it grow slowly. But our hope is that our both both offices in Baghdad, and Erbil, it'll be will be very soon accessible and used by researchers in Baghdad, we already have a library that is growing. And we hope that these academic books and journals will be useful for the Iraqi researchers. And we have also accommodation for visiting scholars in Baghdad. And these resources will be also available soon in Erbil.

Mehiyar 7:27 If we can just go back to some of the things you've just said regarding the small grants. How effective have they been? I mean, we understand that there isn't much funding from the state or even internationally for Iraqi researchers, and you spoke about the need to elevate those voices. Obviously, that involves supporting Iraqi academics. So how receptive have Iraqi academics been to your programs? I understand, as you've said, that the grants are small, but in the context of an absence of funding to be quite successful, haven't you? You've you've said how much were the the small grants, you spoke about? they go a long way, don't they, in terms of supporting Iraqi academics to conduct research and also to advance in their own career interests relating to their expertise?

Janah 8:30 Exactly, exactly. So this research grant is not part of project, it's just for a research. So we are not demanding that when they get the money, the funding, that they show us a final result, no, it is a support to do the research. So they don't need to finish and give us the result. It's a support to, to, to conduct the research or when they are already in the middle of it. And they are in need of the money to buy specific supplies to do the research because as I said, it's not only about heritage or history, and it's a it's a bright branch for any academic in Iraq. And this financial support in a way can be a big help to, to to have the research done that you need, where it's also already costly to later on, apply for a bigger project, for example, and it's not a must every academic can come with their own ideas. And if it's convincing, we are supporting them to do this part. But the research grant is really like very much giving freedom for the for the researcher, it's not like that there is this pressure of like, you need to have an idea and make the research with this little amount of money and then show us the result. It's like a support to conduct the research to be able to have specific resources that are not available and are costly. So the goal of this funding of this fellowship is not really like to, to run a project or something like this. It's really like focused on doing research. And hopefully, above this research if the academic is interested to conduct project with it, or just getting it published, whatever.

Mehiyar 10:21 Tarii is a non governmental organization. Yes, exactly. And it's work in in Baghdad and Erbil, this is something that has been planned for some time, or is it something that has just come up now in the past two years, what is the kind of presence you've had since 2003.

Lanah 10:41 It is planned already way longer. So it was also before COVID COVID, slowed down the process, of course. And first of all, the focus was like to establish the office in Baghdad and then in a deal, but to establish your NGO status in Baghdad is a little bit longer process and complex in compared to the KRG the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. So this is why it was a little bit slow. But it didn't mean that we did stop working or something like this. Because we could continue giving the fellowship and establishing the relationships with the archives with the museum with them, SBAH, ministerie, etc. So we came here already visited several universities to introduce ourselves, because not many people are aware of TARI work. And this is like what we did in the past to have more awareness to see like who are potential partners for the future, and trying to focus of like, okay, here, there is the potential of making project, applying it together or just supporting them. So there are like, now, smaller projects growing. And in the next year, of course, there will be more programs. But we are also like, open to be reached out by others, if there are ideas, and they need support. And we are always like welcoming these ideas and trying to see if it goes along with our values to conduct them.

Mehiyar 12:18 And of course, you're an archaeologist. So that's helped you enormously. You're an archaeologist that focuses on Iraqi ation passed, is that correct?

Lanah 12:27 Yes, yes, exactly. And I have been working in this field now for any if I count it with my first year of studying, or my first fieldwork, I've been working in this field for 12 years now and focusing in Iraq, of course.

Mehiyar 12:42 And of course, that background has helped you understand the needs of archaeology in general, but also academics and heritage experts who are working in the country or trying it was struggling, really, under enormous challenges that they are facing.

Lanah 12:57 Yeah, to be very honest knowing the language, first of all, knowing the culture and knowing also the complexity of like the past 10 past 20 years or 30 years, one can understand why does the archaeology in the local field struggle? Why why are there problems, why things do not go smooth? And it's not easy to answer? And there is not one answer, because from region to region is it's different. And I'm lucky enough that in the past 10 years, I have been working with several antiquity Directorates, and archaeologists, and see not only the challenges that they are they were facing, but also the development because it's not like that the status quo is the same as 10 years ago, things changed. And there is improvement, there are new challenges. So it's very dynamic. It's never easy, but it's good to have a better sense of like, okay, there are people who are seriously involved in these fields, and they want to make a difference. And I'm very happy to be now in a position where I can see, okay, how can we get the resources to support such an project and trying to improve the situation. So this is good because I have built up my own network in the past 10 years and have seen people develop and doing great job without having big support. So where I can have like, okay, that is the person I can trust that they can work things out, even if the budget is small.

Mehiyar 14:38 You've spent some time in Germany where you completed a master's in archaeology, I believe. Now you've you've returned you live in Iraq. So you spent some time in Germany, and then when did you come back to Iraq?

Lanah 14:53 I was born in at being I was six or seven when we left to Germany. So my whole idea occasion is actually based in Germany. And I started to study engineers and archaeology at the

University of Frankfurt. At that time, there was no bachelor and master, I'm one of the last generation who did Magister. This was like a five years program any without doing the bachelor, like five years and then get the Masters, I started at the same university, also my PhD, this was in 2016. But I paused it because I felt like, Okay, if I continue this classical academic way, I do not have a lot of impact on the heritage in Iraq. Because since 2010, I have been going back and forward to Iraq, every year, for two, three months in sometimes I can't, I was going twice to work in, in the field for excavation projects, or restoration projects, and, or for surveys. So as more I have been into the field and talking with colleagues and seeing the challenges and seeing the big differences of being an archaeologist in Iraq, and being an archaeologist on an international place, that is a big disadvantage. And because as I said, before, Iraq was isolated so much from the world and from the academic world, of course to so there was a lot for the Iraqi scholars to, to follow up. And when I was doing my PhD, I was feeling like, Okay, if I continue this journey, and spending all my time and my energy in the library, doing research, and having the final result of a PhD, and publishing it, how many people will benefit from it? How many people will gain information out of this research? How useful is this information actually, for the community, because my own interest is very much to make the Iraqi community being more involved in their heritage as they used to. And the problem is like resources, there is not a lot of accessibility, to their own heritage in their language, and in a consumer friendly way. So I was like, Okay, if I produce more and more academic papers to just improve my academic skills, were only a handful of people or a dozen of people will read this papers, I didn't feel that it is just to what I actually want to have as a goal for my profession. Because why we do archaeology, we don't do it to satisfy our own self to say, we are good in writing academic papers, because archaeology for me is something that is, okay, we need to do the work to understand what was going on in the past? And how can we translate this to the community so that they have a better understanding, and then value it and protect it? Because if there is no value from the community to its heritage, there is also no protection to the heritage, in my opinion, this was something that drove me to say, Okay, I stopped my PhD program, I will do it. Maybe when I'm 40, I would like to go back actually, and see what is the best way to serve the community to make this connection of heritage and community to protect it better. So this was like, for me the big motivation to come back because I felt being an academic in Germany, I do not have that much impact and effect from my goal.

Mehiyar 19:05 And that journey has led you to produce materials for public education and knowledge. Could you tell us a bit about the board game that you created, Urbilum

Lanah 19:18 So I wish I would have more time to make more of these board games and also having more people around me to do this. So I had this idea in 2015. This was the time when that was very much on its peak and publishing these videos of distracting heritage sites. I was like okay, there is again another period of how heritage get physically distracted, but also as archaeologists when we excavate we destruct heritage we because to go to all the layers we need to destroy the upper layers. So we are also part of destroying heritage actually to to get access to the information that each project has in mind. And because I have been involved in so many excavation projects I have seen, okay, there is so much work that is going on in archaeology. But there is so little that is actually transformed to the community. I wanted to do this different. So I came to the idea, okay, Iraq has a culture that loves to play games. If you go around in this country, you see tea houses full of people playing cards, playing domino playing backgammon. So we have like this big tradition on for entertaining ourselves to play games. So people play here everyday games. And I grew up in Germany, and Germany is the country for strategy board games. And I love playing strategy board games. And this was like in 2015, where I was like, Okay, I don't want to be in this situation in my life, where I only complain of like, oh, heritage is getting distracted. Now I want to do something that makes a difference. So at that time, me and my friends were playing a lot of board games, and we

came like, Okay, let's do our own board game that can be used as a tool to educate people to make them having an easy access to knowledge to heritage to history. So we made this strategy board game, it's a two player board game called the Assyrian Empire, I realized that as a physical board game in 2019, when I got financial support from the German institute, the theme, the Assyrian Empire is about two kings traveling around five cities, the five cities are the very prominent Neo Assyrian sites, starting with Assur Nimrud, Dur-Sharrukin and Arbail. So the first four one are the capital and then Arbail, because the Temple of Ishtar was located there. So the idea is like the king travels around the cities, settles people, and then build the settlement like from a village to capital. And then the war starts the conflicts, like you can steal building materials from your opponent, or you can destroy their settlement, you can deport the people, or you can convince the people of the opponent to come to your site. So there are several actions that actually exist in the history of the Neo Assyrian Empire. In the booklet that comes along with the game, you can read about how to play the game, like how it's set up, etc. And then you can read about each of these cities that you're actually settling. And then you can read about the history and the development of the Neo Assyrian Empire, and all of this in a very simple way of describing things, but also in several languages. So it's produced in English, in Arabic, in Kurdish, and in Syriac in new Aramaic, we want i My idea was like to be inclusive as much as possible to let people play without them feeling that they need to learn something about history, because many people think history is boring. And, but I want them when they play, to be eager to have more information. And then the booklet provides this input these informations

Mehiyar 23:43 Is there a particular age group that this game is targeting

Lanah 23:47 the youngest players I have played with, they were like around 10. So like 9-10 is the age where they can really get excited and played very, very well. And then going upwards, there is no limitation. But for younger, I do not recommend it. But really, I played with many 10 year old children, and they were fascinated by it. And they were very good in implementing very quickly after one two turns all the rules

Mehiyar 24:19 and work in one, use it or buy it.

Lanah 24:23 It sold out. I am planning to make a redesign, and I hope like next year to publish a second edition. For now I have published a different game. It's called DTM. It's a card game like spotted or double which exists already in the west but with Iraqi themes. It's more culture based than archaeology based. The idea is like okay producing one game selling it with the money to produce another game. The whole idea is like to produced several games in the coming years that have like themes with culture or heritage, to have like an entertainment product that builds on the identity that is diverse and rich in many ways.

Mehiyar 25:16 And of course, Iraq is has a rich history where one could use a lot of resources in its past to produce his games or books. And as you've seen, it's there's a dearth of learning materials in Iraq. And so this is something that could be scaled up as you've as you've noticed, are there any other sort of resources for children or young adults in when it comes to archaeology, cultural heritage in Iraq? Or is that a sector that hasn't yet been developed? It's still in its infancy.

Lanah 25:55 It has, unfortunately, not being touched, really. I know that every time when I go to Baghdad, and I go to Al-Mutannabi street, I see all these old publications from the 70s and 80s, that actually have historical archaeological topics in comic ways were in a very nice way, part of the history or inventors from the Islamic period, or ancient times, etc, are presented. So in the 80s, and in the 70s, the education ministry actually invested a lot to producing materials that introduce you to

the local heritage. But this is missing, to be honest. The only day in general, there is no big investment in producing educational material for children in the local language. And it despite from talking about heritage, there is just very, very little, actually not existing funding for doing these things and the Ministry of Education. They only have their schoolbooks that they are producing, but there are no other extra materials that are produced.

Mehiyar 27:14 And that's the case also for not just archaeology, heritage, but for all the range of subjects. It's Yes, something that needs to be looked at by some of these educational institutions, just to go back to your journey. And so you have this amazing experience working in Iraq. What else are you planning to do, whether in terms of your work with TARIQ but more in terms of your personal contribution, your interest in supporting culture heritage in Iraq,

Lanah 27:46 so I have the I feel myself lucky enough that I can move in several areas of the society etc. And not only doing one thing, and I have been participating in the past years and conservation project of the Columbia University, where we are working on the Mosul gate to restore it to get it back to its former glory, let's say Mehiyar 28:18 this is in the province of Duhok. Yes, exactly.

Lanah 28:21 Very close to the Turkish borders. Um, so this is like one thing that I do I get many times invited to specific talks, etc, where I focusing on talking about heritage. And there is also like, of course, sometimes training projects where I go and implement the training in there was one for example that I did for the Smithsonian, in Mosul Museum, to give them a training, how to digitalize their work. It is a very complicated thing, because it's a slow process it needs all time, I was lucky enough to not only work in Iraq, but also in Jordan, in Syria, in Iran, not in Iran, I just visited and saw the sights and in Egypt. So I have seen different countries, working in heritage and the difference of experiences of people. So when I started to work in Iraq and see the challenges that they are facing, but then also the development and like, Okay, we have a long way to work to improve the situation of heritage. But I see it's possible, and it's just about time and fundings actually to improve the situation, but is going better. So what I like to do as my own contribution is to share up my experience as much as I can sometimes I get invited to universities where I try to remind the students also that it's not about you get one degree and you are an archaeologist? No, actually, your journey just starts after your degree because then it's about getting as much experience as possible to understand what is the thing that one likes to do, if one is eager to have a specific specialty in their work or not. And this is something that we we need to remind all these new students who go into the field of heritage, that is about working a lot to gain as much experience as possible. Because what we learn at university, despite if it's in Iraq, or in Europe, it is just like giving the spark of building up your foundation. But it's the experience that gets you the real knowledge to understand what is it actually, when you excavate? How do you interpretate interpret the findings, you cannot learn this from books you need to be in the field. And this is something very, very important. So I really try to push these young people to not being afraid of like going already to the field work before they have experienced to expose themselves to make them understand, do they really want to do this job. Because many Iraqis feel like, okay, when I finish study, I do this job. And this will be the rest of my life. But I want to show like you have possibilities to move around. You don't need to be stuck in one way. And you need to discover what you want to do. Because heritage is a very tiring job, because it's never ending. And it takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of energy. And when one is not passionate about it, it's very difficult to continue in this field and being happy. So I really, really try to, to bring this understanding to these young people. To make them understand the responsibility also that they will take when they take this journey.

Mehiyar 32:15 We know that there are less and less students interested in archaeology at university level, the archaeology departments are having less interest from students joining them are actually

going for more secure or possibly more secure jobs, such as engineering and in medicine, is that something you've you've seen, because from my own experience, I've seen that in several of the universities in Iraq, because there isn't much government support, funding. And also there is an issue of what happens after you graduate, which is what you're speaking about or so. Could you tell us about your own experience in some of these areas?

Lanah 32:53 So this phenomena happening all around the world? Archaeology is not the dream job that many people do. Actually, it is a dream job, how many times I have met people to say, Oh, you're an archaeologist, I always wanted to study archaeology. But then yeah, I decided to study something that actually makes money. So I think I'm not the first one and not the last one who's hearing this. And this is the actual truth that many people decide to study something different, that gives them a perspective of financial security, which is very much understandable, and which is okay, because I feel like we do not need mass of students studying psychology in Europe are here in Iraq itself. We need people who really, really are passionate about it, and do it because they believe in it and, and, and have the patient for it. Looking at the history of being an archaeologist in Iraq, we can see that in the early beginnings, like in the 50s, or 60s, being an archaeologist was something that had a reputation in the country, because people were taking pride in their heritage and in working in this field. And those archeologists at that time. They were also like internationally recognized and have done a lot of work. Because when we look at Iraq now, all the sites that are well preserved, more or less, they're all from that time, like in the starting from the 60s and the 70s. And then there was like this big time of restoration work in the 80s. So those were people that was a time where being an archaeologist had a high reputation, but when the country went down with with the oil for food action, etc, and the isolation of the country and where all occupations that are exist in this country had a reduction of payment, where most people in the country struggled to make their day to day, income, everything that had to do with education. And I would count arcology with to it, the quality went down, the financial support went down completely. And to this day, we are struggling to convince the government to improve this, to set higher budgets for heritage sites, higher budget for universities working in heritage fields, having a budget for tourism on heritage sites. So this is something that we are now need to rebuild, again, that existed before, but it broke down completely in the past 30 years. So we need now to push and convince the government to have this specific budget to improve the situation to improve the education of new generations of archaeologists. And also like the opportunities of working in this field, we have so many sites, there is a never ending supply of being an archaeologist in this country. But we need to be cautious of like, how sustainable can this be? Because if you want to excavate somewhere, you need to have a plan what you do with the site afterwards? Will you just fill it back? And then leave it? Or will you introduce it to the community? If you want to do this? How much money do you have to preserve it? And then how many experts do you have in your team to do this work. So this is like something that will be the focus for the future for currently. Now, it's archaeology is not the place that people feel encouraged to work in, because there is no budget, no perspective or vision from the state of how to support this very, very important sector of this country to thrive again. So that's why for now I can understand everybody who would not like to study archaeology, because you don't have the vision of like, what will be the future, but I think it will change. And I think when other problems getting solved, more focus will be from the state side of like, okay, we need to improve these things, we need to empower SBAH. Again, we need to have better regulation we have, we need budget for implementing rules and ideas and visions.

Mehiyar 37:34 And of course, that would need major transformation of at a state level. So in terms of regulation, laws, frameworks, but also the approach that the country has towards its own history, it's a major major ask, particularly because, in a way, we still live with the legacies of the sanctions of

the 1990s. And the following following was, and so I mean, that the in many ways, it's it's a very difficult task for anyone, or any single institution, it needs a sort of a multifaceted, long term strategy. But of course, have you seen any of that in motion or in emerging,

Lanah 38:22 I don't see that there is like this cooperation from all the different sides, I would I see as always, like, there are small projects, ideas, etc, that are done, alone and isolated. And I think it could be improving much more if everybody is collaborating more communicating more in what they are doing. So I also hope like with our work in theory, we can being connected more to all the other institutions working in Iraq, that we all have more dialogues with each other and understanding what are the others are doing to not repeat work that is already done, because as you know, there is so much to do, so we don't need to compete and repeat each other's work trying to like Okay, here is a lack this needs to be done. So to navigate these developments together in a way that more benefits comes out of any project that is done here. So yeah, this is like this one problem that I see that either many people say, Oh, we are communicating way more better than before, but I don't see it really that it is very strong. In a way I feel like there needs to be more exchanges. There needs to be more transparency in the works because also like when there are international projects in the country, there are no publications available in the country itself there. I like these small reports after the field but when they do the research later words and the publication, it's an English and it's outside the country. It's not accessible for the local As archeologists and professions, so there is not again, this transformation of information and knowledge between the academics. So this needs to be to be changed to improve these things. But I also see like, as I said, 10 years, I have been working in the country back and forward. I remember many colleagues that I met 10 years ago or eight years ago, the very little was their English and very little was their experience in the field. And now, because every year they are working with these international teams, their English improved their health, their their experience in, in actually, excavations, or restoration work improved extremely. And I see like many of them have this interest of like learning more and doing better in their in their job. So there is this development. So for the Kurdistan Region, they have a longer term of having this exchange with international teams in Iraq. It is more like the past five years where it's improving, and they are coming more teams up into the country, Iraqi archaeologists can have more access to work with international archaeologists improving their language having more experience in the field to do better in their work.

Mehiyar 41:18 Just on that note. Is it the intention of non Iraqi archaeology archaeologists working in Iraq to strengthen to improve the skill set of archaeologists in the country? Or is it just a byproduct of working on site? Is it the intention of foreign excavation projects to focus and strengthen Iraqi archaeologists? Or is it just something that happens because of the work experience,

Lanah 41:45 Most of the projects, in my opinion, that the Iraqi colleagues getting better in their work experience and in English, etc, is a byproduct. There are very, very few projects who really like take time and effort to support the Iraqi colleagues to be more involved in improving their work. They are compared to all the projects that I have seen and visited and known and worked with, most of them do not intend to do this. I don't know if they don't want to do it, or they not having the idea of doing it. Because I feel it's actually more helpful for you, if the Iraqi colleague who was sent by the integrity Directorate is more involved and understanding the work and feeling being more part of the team will improve the work way more than if you just see this person as it's a representative from the antiquity directorate, and this is his job, and he must be here, but there is not real investment into this person.

Mehiyar 42:56 That would require I mean, some of the archaeologists that I've spoken with in Europe and US say that if we were to focus on education and skills training, this will just add to costs in the



country will be difficult for foreign excavation projects to work in the country if they had to focus on things like on the job training, and you know, just supporting Iraqi academics to you know, improve the skill set, and what do you think about that argument,

Lanah 43:32 I can understand this argument, but also like, it depends on like, how you want to do it, because like every excavation, there is a must that you have representative from the antiquity directorates with you. And if you involve this person more into your work, then this person becomes more productive team member, then if he is only the representative, because I have seen projects where the representative is just around watches and writes his notes. And then I have seen projects where those people are very much involved, they get teach in how to draw the ceramic or they got taught in excavating with them and it's not like that, you have one person taking off from your projects and sitting there and teaching this person now it's in the field work practicing while you are together in a you know, when for example, when you excavate. You have a lot of time where you need to wait till a specific amount of Earth is removed till you can actually do something physically or make make your drawings or photographs or whatever. So there's always time to sit with the colleague and explain explain things and make things clear. And the thing is, also I have heard many people complain that the representative of the antiquity directors are not interested. Yes, this is also reality. But also, if you don't understand what's going on, how can you build interest? Because I have seen like, there's always like a big communication problem, there is not this involvement, many do not feel they are part of the team. And this makes this increase the disinterest. So I think you always if there is the will you always find the time and the way to make these people being more involved. And this is where I see these examples of, of those colleagues who in the past 10 years develop extremely well. There was not such an extra budget for this project to to improve their skills now. From year to year from season to season. This people got more involved in a specific thing. There was one said, Okay, I'm interested in working on ceramics. So they were sat down with a ceramicist. And they got taught while working on it. So this argument that it would cost more money is very weak argument, because you can teach and involve these people while you're working without stopping. It might slow you down a little bit. But you have also weather conditions that slows you down that you cannot predict or your plan your season. So this is normal. So I would I would not give this argument, a lot of weight, to be honest.

Mehiyar 46:23 And I would also would like to ask you, what about the role of the communities are they been engaged with, obviously, not all sites are close to settlements, basically, people living close to the sites, many sites are. And there are farmers or local communities or different types of workers, what has been your experience in terms of how we can strengthen let's call it the, for want of a better word ownership, improved engagement from local communities, particularly in terms of public education or knowledge. I understand that a lot of excavation projects in the country are just focused on the excavation. Rather than having a component which focuses on public education.

Lanah 47:11 This is actually a very sensitive topic, and very, very important that has not get a lot of attention, unfortunately, here in my experience of seeing several projects working on a very, very, very few focus on this, and it's again, what is your goal in doing this work? Because I feel like in some projects that I worked with, there is not the time and interest in introducing what actually is going on, on the excavation to those who live around. We involve the local community who live close by to the site as workers, but they have gotten they're not getting involved in understanding what's going on. And this is a big, weak point. I have like the first excavation project I have worked in was in Syria in Tell Mozan from the family at that time, because it was my first excavation, I think I did not understand the power of what they're doing there. And now, after the years and seeing the conflict in Syria, I really do appreciate what they did, because they very much involved the community, the

village that is next to the site. The ceramic expert was somebody from the village, those who do the drawings from findings are from the village, the washers for ceramic are from the village, the professional photographer is from the village. Yeah, and the workmen's are from the village. And again, it was like my first excavation, so seeing them working so professionally, I thought this is normal. This is how it is. And then later on in the years, I discovered that is the only site that is working in this way. And then when we remember with the war in Syria, this is one of the sites that was completely protected, there was no looting going on. And even to this day, and in the past years, I have seen that the villagers organizing tours for the schools close by that the children come and visit the site. And because this, the people from this village were so involved in the project, they know about it, because they grew up there they were involved into the work, they knew how to explain things. So without having the team being on site, the village had the autonomy to preserve the site and to continue telling the story and the information to now for a generation, and this is actually what I wish more projects would do, because it shows you like even in a war, this site was being protected by the community because they have this feeling of ownership. And not like that this is theirs, but it's their honor to protect it to protecting it. And I remember myself when I was working here in the area, the work one of the workmen asked me, Do this foreigners take the objects with them to their country? And I was very young, I was telling them no, no, it's staying in our local museums, it's not going out of the country. This used to be in the past, but not anymore like this. Again, continuing working in these international projects, I have discovered, yes, they might not take the physical objects with them. But they take all the information with them. The workman's do not get real explanation, what's going on, the only thing that they get is like, Please excavate this corner, this part, go deeper for 10 centimeters, clean this, do this. And that's it. But there is no real explanation of like, you know, there are different layers, there are strategies, they like different communities, we used to live here. This is why we excavate. This is what we interpretate, this wall, blah, blah, blah, etc, etc, etc. There is no real communication with the local community. I have been working on one site, what happened the year in the next season, we had a huge looting pit on the site. Why? Because nobody felt that they have ownership that they need to protect the site, because of this mysterious thing of like, ah, there are people coming and there are foreigners who are coming and they're excavating on this one side, and you have no understanding of what's going on, it becomes something mysterious, it becomes like, oh, there must be a treasure. Why should they spend so much time and money in excavating this hill, if there is no treasure? So this is when the engagement with the community is lacking? The in danger of getting more looting pits is getting higher. So that's why I feel like the Tell Mozan an project is actually giving us a beautiful example how even in what times community engagement is the best thing to protect sites. And when you do not do this, you cannot be surprised if the next season you have a looting pit again.

Mehiyar 53:01 And do you think psychologists are concerned about the impact they may have? I mean, they come they go season after season some of these things that you're referring to need government regulation. They need stipulations clauses in the contracts and agreements with the foreign archeology teams, there needs to be a system in place. It's not just the the idea that the psychologist or foreign psychologist will do this from the good heart that they have. Is that something that you think is also important in terms of developing institutionalized practices that are part and parcel of the state itself? Or the regulatory systems in place?

Lanah 53:46 Definitely, definitely, definitely. I agree with you on this 100%. The problem is that we still have steep weak states if we are talking about Iraq, or if we talk about KRG. And there are so many issues and problems that they are dealing with that the last investment that they're doing is in history, education and heritage, unfortunately, and this needs definitely to change because we need stronger regulations. The issue is like on the one side, the state wants more foreign mission to come

to get out new findings that can be presented, but at the same time, they don't have the vision and program in like, okay, but if you continue excavating more sites, you need storage, you need better museums, you need laboratories. So there is a lot that you need actually to invest to build up the facility for more excavations and this is not given and you need regulations to see like okay, if a foreign mission comes what are the rules set. And these rules are yet to week. So there needs to be like more, more understanding of like, report alone is not enough. There needs to be a publication in the local language in Arabic or in Kurdish, so that this information is really shared with the with the local antiquity directorate, with the libraries of the universities, so that they can continue also their own research on these new results. But this is, again, as you said, where the government needs to make new rules and policies into this. But again, we have we have not yet reached the situation where we have a strong country, or strong state that is good in regulating and managing, administrating all its ministries in a way how it should be. And this is something where we again, need to face a lot of challenges, having a lot of problems to come to the point where we say, okay, we learned our lesson. Now we need to implement these new rules.

Mehiyar 56:06 On that note, Lana we'll conclude for the first session. We'll come back with session number two after this one. Thank you for your contribution, and we'll be back in for a second podcast. Thank you very much Lana for that.

Lanah 56:22 Thank you, Mehiyar, thank you.