

شبكة النهدين



UCL



Figure 1 Professor Eleanor Robson and Dr. Mehiyar Kathem welcomed esteemed guests from the University of Mosul; president Dr. Kossay Al-Ahmady, and Dr. Rawa Qasha, Assistant Professor

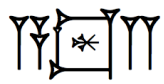
The Nahrein Network: Annual report

Start-up + Year 1: 1 June 2021 – 30 September 2022

17 January 2023 • OB, MK, RMA, ZM and ER

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1. Introduction and overview

The Nahrein Network conducts and supports interdisciplinary research, capacity building and policy work on sustainable development of Iraqi history, heritage and related fields. Working with well-established partnership and creating new ones, we foster:

- an integrated approach to natural and cultural heritage;
- youth-focused solutions, both within and outside the state;
- reparative approaches to the past

to create long-term benefits to Iraqi society, economy and culture.

We were funded by AHRC-GCRF in 2017-21 and are now continuing our mission until 2031, thanks to this generous philanthropic gift. We are based in the History Department of University College London and, for the duration of this reporting period, at the Ashmolean Museum Oxford and Sulaimani Polytechnic University in the Kurdish Region of Iraq.

1.1. Start-up (1 June – 30 September 2021)

This gift was originally intended to be spent from October 2021 onwards, following the completion of a four-year project funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)'s Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). However, in February 2021 the UK government announced immediate cuts to its Official Development Assistance budget, of which GCRF was a part. As a result, the Nahrein Network lost the final five months of its AHRC funding. In order to keep continuity, and to avoid making staff redundant, we needed to start drawing on the gift funding earlier than anticipated, from June 2021. This allowed us to keep the project administrator and deputy director in post while adding a part-time Social Media and Communications Officer to help manage the Network's website, social media and expand the range of our public engagement. We also started the recruitment process for our first UCL-Nahrein Network Graduate Student.

1.2. Year 1 (1 October 2021 – 30 September 2022)

1.2.1. Governance and administration

During the first year of the new funding, we undertook a major review of our governance procedures to ensure that they remained robustly independent, fair and transparent. We established new terms of reference for the Management Committee and started to build closer relationships with relevant Iraqi ministries and directorates. In spring 2022 Dr Jaafar Jotheri stepped down from his role as Co-Director in order to focus on his own research projects.

1.2.2. Devolved projects

1.2.2.1. *Research Grants Scheme*

Under the old AHRC-GCRF funding, our devolved Research Grants scheme was both a flagship and a headache, as AHRC rules and expectations were often at odds with the realities of working in Iraq. In this context we decided to rethink the scheme and how to make it more accessible to applicants, less labour-intensive for the Network team, and more clearly aligned with the rules and expectations of the relevant Iraqi Ministries. Consultation and planning took the whole of this period and beyond.

1.2.3. Capacity building

1.2.3.1. *Joint Nahrein Network-BISI Visiting Scholars Scheme*

By contrast, the Visiting Scholars Scheme, organized jointly with the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI), was able to continue much as it had done pre-pandemic under AHRC funding. Of the six

scholars awarded placements in 2022, one was able to take up their offer in the 21–22 financial year. The remaining five are expected to arrive in the UK in 2022–23.

1.2.3.2. UCL Graduate Studentships Scheme

In 2021 we initiated a new MA/MSc + PhD graduate studentship scheme, in collaboration with UCL's Institute of Archaeology, Institute for Sustainable Heritage, and History Department. The first place was awarded for September 2021 but the successful applicant was unable to take up their offer. The following year, the awardee started an MA in Sustainable Heritage at UCL in September 2022.



Figure 2 Logo for Cultural Heritage Organisation

1.2.3.3. Research Skills Programme

AcademiQ, led by Dr Mehiyar Kathem, is a multi-year programme designed to support Iraqi researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences with academic skills development. It builds on the British Academy-funded [Iraq Writing Workshop project](#) that we implemented in Iraq in 2019. AcademiQ consists of online research courses, hosted for free on the platform UCL Extend; in-person academic writing workshops; and 1:1 academic mentoring. The first programmes launched in September 2022.

1.2.4. Core team's research projects

1.2.4.1. Cultural Heritage Organisation

In summer 2021, Dr Rozhen Mohammed-Amin reconstituted her Kurdish Digital Cultural Heritage Network as an NGO, named Cultural Heritage Organisation (CHO), in order to facilitate payments and secure continuity of work. It aims to address the gap in and need for digital cultural heritage research and practice in Iraq, through three Work Packages. The first creates and conducts impact assessments of mobile Augmented Reality apps to deliver immersive, emotive and empathetic responses to aspects of Iraq's 'difficult' heritage, from the Mandate-era Serai Building in Sulaimani to the Yazidi genocide of 2017. Second, the "Reconstruct Mesopotamia" virtual (online) annual internship program trains interdisciplinary teams across Iraq in digital cultural heritage reconstruction, preservation and interpretation of their cultural heritage. The third delivers monthly professional development workshops and webinars to cultural heritage professionals and scholars from local museums, libraries, NGOs, and universities.

1.2.4.2. The Kish project: reparative history and knowledge repatriation

The Nahrein Network has begun to help the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) to recover lost archaeological and historical knowledge of the great Babylonian city of Kish, and render it useful to Iraq with open-access, online editions in English, Arabic and other Middle Eastern scripts and languages. In collaboration with Oracc.org and UCL's Advanced Research Computing Centre (ARC), Professor Eleanor Robson and Dr Parsa Daneshmand have started to create an open-access multilingual catalogue and edition of the 600 cuneiform tablets from Kish now housed in the Ashmolean Museum, using ARC's new cuneiform editor, Nisaba. In May 2022, she and Dr Mehiyar Kathem spent a day at Kish with Mr Ammar Al-Tae of SBAH, to learning more about the site's current state and immediate conservation needs. Meanwhile at the Ashmolean Museum, Dr Paul Collins began to research the impact of the Mandate-era Kish excavations (and by association, the University of Oxford and Field Museum) in contemporary popular reception as well as on the attitudes and decisions of the UK and Iraqi administrations during the Mandate period.

2. Governance and administration

2.1. Staffing

The Network runs day-to-day from the History Department at UCL. This is where the Director Professor Eleanor Robson is based, together with Deputy Director Dr Mehiyar Kathem, Administrator Mrs Oana Borlea-Stancioi, and Communications and Social Media Officer Mrs Zainab Mahdi. Eleanor devotes a day a week to the Network, while Mehiyar works on it full-time. Oana and Zainab are each employed 50% FTE.

Since the departure of Dr Jaafar Jotheri in spring 2022 to concentrate on his personal research, the Network has had two Co-Directors. During the reporting period, Dr Paul Collins was Jalah Hearn Keeper of the Ancient Near East at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, while Dr Rozhen Mohammed-Amin directed the Digital Heritage Research Centre at Sulaimani Polytechnic University (SPU) in the Kurdish Region of Iraq.

Two new collaboration agreements were drawn up in spring 2021: one extending the Joint Visiting Scholarships Scheme with BISI, signed in June 2021; and the other governing the relationship between UCL, Oxford, SPU and CHO, finally signed in May 2022. Updates and adjustments were also made to the templates for contracts issued to the awardees of devolved funding for research grants.



Figure 3 Nahrein Network team in London. From left, Eleanor Robson, Zainab Mahdi, Oana Borlea-Stancioi, Mehiyar Kathem

2.2. Management Committee

The Network's Management Committee meets every three months to ensure that the Nahrein Network delivers work that is of high academic quality; is appropriately governed, ethically and financially; and meets the research remit agreed with the funder. The committee includes representatives from the Network's main partners in Iraq, and academics in the field from Iraq, the UK and elsewhere.

In order to strengthen the governance of the Network, and clarify the expectations on individual Management Committee members, in spring 2022 the committee adopted new terms of reference (see Appendix 1) and updated its conflicts of interest policy (Appendix 2). Most importantly,

Management Committee members now serve a renewable two-year term of office, and may neither apply for nor review applications for Nahrein Network funding.

We are very grateful to the following people who served on the Management Committee during the reporting period:

- Dr Kozad Ahmed of the Department of Archaeology, University of Sulaimani (to June 2022)
- Dr Abdulameer Al-Hamdani, independent (to December 2021)
- Dr Dhirgham Alobaydi of the Department of Architecture, University of Baghdad
- Dr Beverley Butler of the Institute of Archaeology, UCL (to September 2021)
- Professor Bill Finlayson, representing the EAMENA Project, University of Oxford
- Dr Laith Hussein of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (to June 2022)
- Dr Maja Kominko, representing ALIPH (from June 2022)
- Dr Ula Merie of the Department of Architecture, University of Babylon
- Dr Sana Murrani of the School of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Plymouth (to June 2022)
- Dr Rawaa Qasha of the Cultural Relations Department, University of Mosul (to June 2022)
- Dr Bijan Rouhani, of the Department of Archaeology, University of Oxford
- Dr David Selway, AHRC case officer (to September 2021)
- Dr Nawrast Sabah of the Geology Department, University of Basrah (January–June 2022)



Figure 4 Professor Eleanor meets with Cultural Attaché in London, January 2022

2.3. Formal relationships with external bodies

In order to strengthen ties, facilitate collaborations and avoid duplication of work, the Network's Management Committee now has spaces for representatives from projects and organisations with related missions. During the reporting period, this comprised the EAMENA project based at the University of Oxford and the Swiss funding body ALIPH (see section 2.3). Reciprocally, Eleanor serves on the advisory boards of both bodies, while Paul continues to serve as voluntary Chair of Trustees of BISI, our Visiting Scholarships partner.

In addition, Mehiyar and Rozhen renewed the Network's relationships with relevant Iraqi authorities. In January 2022, Mehiyar organized a first meeting with the new Iraqi Cultural Attaché in London, and drafted new co-operation agreements with the Ministry of Culture (including SBAH) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Baghdad. Rozhen facilitated a meeting with the Deputy Minister for Higher Education in Erbil, and prepared a co-operation agreement with the KRI's Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage. Useful discussions with ministries and directorates were held during short visits to Iraq, in February and May 2022.


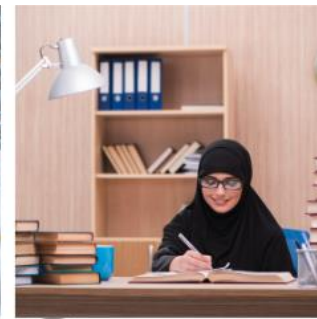



Figure 5 Professor Eleanor Robson, Dr Rozhen Mohammed-Amin and Dr Mehiyar Kathem meeting the Deputy Minister of Higher Education for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, during their visit to Iraq, May 2022

3. Devolved Research

3.1. Research Aims

In order to foster the sustainable development of history, heritage and the humanities in post-conflict Iraq, the Network has six clearly defined research aims, each linked to one of the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#). All the work we conduct and fund must address at least one of these aims:

 <p>1 To better understand the current situation</p> <p>Why, and how, have local experts and audiences been excluded from the production and consumption of knowledge about the past of Iraq and its neighbours? We aim to develop a fuller historical and political understanding of this problem.</p> <p>See UN SDG 10: Reduce inequalities between and within countries</p>	 <p>2 To raise the profile of local expertise</p> <p>We aim to support Iraq humanities academics and heritage professionals to engage with regional and global academic communities, as producers of research for international consumption.</p> <p>See UN SDG 17: Strengthen partnerships for sustainable development</p>	 <p>3 To improve the job prospects of the region's youth</p> <p>We aim to improve employability and leadership potential for humanities graduates from Iraqi universities.</p> <p>See UN SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</p>
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4

To help heritage organisations better serve local needs

We aim to enable Iraqi museums, archives, cultural heritage sites, and registered NGOs to contribute to, and diversify, local tourism and knowledge economies.



5

To help post-conflict healing and reconciliation

We aim to develop the role of Iraqi history and heritage in repairing past injustices, and in building inclusive communities and a fairer, more cohesive society.



6

To address Iraq's climate emergency

We aim to foster an integrated, holistic approach to heritage and the environment, in order to mitigate against the effects of impending natural disaster.

See [UN SDG 8](#): Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

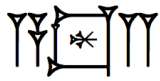
See [UN SDG 16](#): Promote peace, justice and strong institutions

See [UN SDG 13](#): Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

- *Research Grant Awards Scheme*

Under AHRC-GCRF funding in 2018–21, we ran a funding scheme for research projects in Iraq. It was operationally challenging, for three reasons. First, AHRC's rules and expectations about the management of research finances were at odds with those of the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR), which forbids universities from receiving international funds. Second, ongoing international financial sanctions against neighbouring Iran made it very difficult to transfer money to the Iraqi NGO partners who acted as intermediaries. Third, while Covid had relatively little impact on the work of devolved projects, compared to these financial difficulties and ongoing political instability, the UK team's inability to travel to Iraq for so long meant that key pre-pandemic relationships with colleagues in ministries and embassies were lost.

In 2021 we made a first attempt to relaunch the Research Grants scheme, with minimal changes to its structure. A first call for proposals closed in October of that year, attracting 28 applications (Table 1). Fourteen were deemed to be of sufficient quality to be peer reviewed and assessed by the Management Committee in December 2021. However, this process proved very burdensome for committee members, and presented several conflicts of interest. At the same time, the overall quality of applications was low and none was considered fundable as submitted. Five were shortlisted for further development in early 2022, only one of which made significant progress towards fundability.



Grant Type	Received	Eligible	Longlisted	Shortlisted	Fundable
Large (< £100,000)	3	1	0	0	0
Small (< £30,000)	16	10	7	3	1
Starter (< £10,000)	9	9	7	2	0
Total	28	20	14	5	1

Table 1: Applications to the 2021 Research Grant Awards scheme

In March 2022, the Management Committee therefore decided to pause the scheme and undertake a root and branch review. With the agreement of the applicant, the one fundable project was rolled over to the 2022 round.

The new scheme, approved by the Management Committee in June 2022, has the following features (see Appendix 3 for more details):

- It is supported by formal agreements (under development) with the Ministry of Culture (including SBAH) and MoHESR in Baghdad, and by the General Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage (GDAH) in Erbil. The Ministry of Higher Education in Erbil confirmed that it did not need formal approvals for the scheme to operate with universities in KRI.
- All payments to Iraq are now made through Stars Orbit, a reputable Jordanian services company that works closely with many international agencies across the Middle East.
- There is an annual, two-stage application process, with Expressions of Interest (Eols) submitted each October. Eligible Eols are reviewed and scored by an independent, international peer review college and members of the Core Team, and the best ten are shortlisted for further development.
- To avoid conflicts of interest, Management Committee members are no longer eligible to apply for grants (as they were under AHRC rules) and nor do they peer review Eols. However, at the December meeting they scrutinize the shortlist for geographical and thematic spread, and are invited to give constructive feedback on Eols in their areas of expertise.
- The Core Team then supports shortlisted applicants to develop full project documentation, budgeting and permissions over the following months, with deadlines in February and May. Projects that can meet these deadlines start as soon as all necessary paperwork is in place.
- We expect to fund 5–6 projects a year, of up to 48 months' duration.

4. Capacity building

4.1. Visiting Scholars Scheme

The Visiting Scholars Scheme, in collaboration with BISI, was one of the great successes of our AHRC-GCRF funding period. Its aim is to support Iraqi academics, cultural heritage professionals, NGO workers, and now also research students to visit the UK for 1–2 months for training and research, and/or (post-Covid) to take up an online placement.

We have made three small but significant changes to the old scheme. First, it now contributes to the costs of BISI's Visiting Scholarships Co-ordinator (VSC), whereas under AHRC funding BISI paid for the post in its entirety. Second, Iraqi graduate students are now also eligible to apply for placements to further their MA or PhD research. Third, we hope that allowing scholars to take up hybrid or remote placements will increase accessibility and allow more women to benefit from the scheme by making it easier to fit around family responsibilities.

We held two calls in 2022, with deadlines in February and May (Table 2, Table 3). Applications were assessed by a joint committee of Core Team members and representatives of BISI, and approved by the Management Committee meetings of March and June. Once approved, the placements themselves are organised by BISI's VSC.

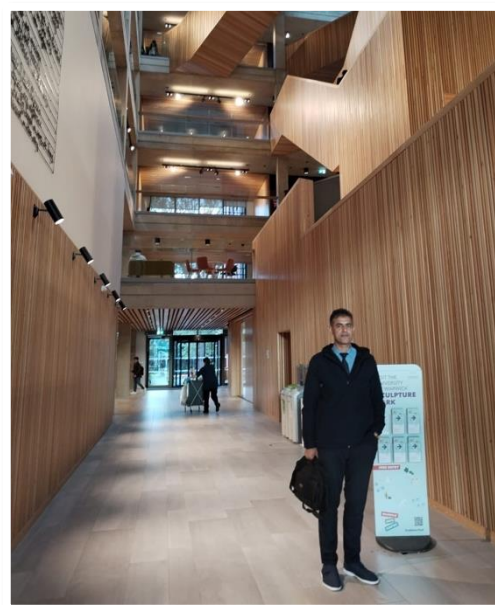


Figure 6 Dilshad Oumar Abdul Aziz, Visiting Scholar at the University of Warwick

<i>Applications</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Non-Academic</i>	<i>ECR*</i>	<i>non-ECR</i>
Received	8	7	1	7	1	0	8
Eligible	4	4	0	3	1	0	4
Awarded	2	2	0	2	0	0	2

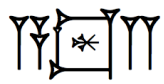
Table 2: Applications for Visiting Scholarships in February 2022

* ECR = Early career researcher

<i>Applications</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Non-Academic</i>	<i>ECR</i>	<i>non-ECR</i>
Received	12	9	3	8	4	5	7
Eligible	10	9	1	6	4	4	6
Awarded	4	4	0	2	2	2	2

Table 3: Applications for Visiting Scholarships in May 2022

In total, six placements were awarded in 2022, all to male applicants (Table 4). We will continue to promote the scheme to female applicants in 2023, for instance by holding a webinar and highlighting



women who have been awarded in the past. All awardees complete a short report, published on our blog and linked here in the table below.

Name	Home institution	Host institution	Title of research project	Scholarship dates	Status
Dilshad Oumar Abdul Aziz	University of Kirkuk	BP Archive at the University of Warwick	BP Archive: A source for the study of the contemporary economic, social and cultural history of Kirkuk	23 August – 14 October 2022	Completed
Mabast Amin	Garmian University	University of Liverpool	Preserving the early prehistoric sites in northern Iraq	January 2023	In preparation
Abdulkareem Yaseen	Al-Yarmouk University College	University of Leicester	Rising from the rubble: towards safeguarding Christian cultural heritage in Mosul	July-August 2023	In preparation
Hamed Samir	University of Basra	University of Bradford	Reviving the local identity of Basra City	March 2023	In Preparation
Zaid Isam	Independent	University of Wales, Trinity St David	The heritage infrastructure of the British administration of Iraq (1916–1921): a study of public works and their legacies	February-March 2023	In preparation
Shazad Jaseem	Directorate of Antiquities, Sulaimani	The British Museum	Contemporary approaches to museum design and interpretation	March-April 2023	In preparation

Table 4: Visiting Scholars awarded placements in 2022

4.2. Graduate Studentships Scheme

The UCL Graduate Studentship is a new initiative, funded by this gift. In collaboration with UCL's History Department, Institute of Archaeology, and Bartlett Institute for Sustainable Heritage, it offers one fully funded place each academic year on one of eighteen MA/MSc programmes. Subject to satisfactory progress, the scholarship may be extended for a further three years to support full-time PhD research at UCL on a project related to the Nahrein Network's research aims.

There are two sets of eligibility criteria: we require applicants to be citizens and residents of Iraq/KRI, who have not lived or studied in the UK, while UCL's Graduate Admissions Office sets minimum academic qualifications and English language standards for acceptance onto each programme.

Applicants complete a short online form ahead of an annual deadline, several months before UCL admissions close. Eligible applications are considered by the relevant programme tutors and shortlisted candidates are interviewed online. The Network then supports the successful candidate(s) to make and pay for a formal application to their UCL Masters programme, including any necessary English language tests.

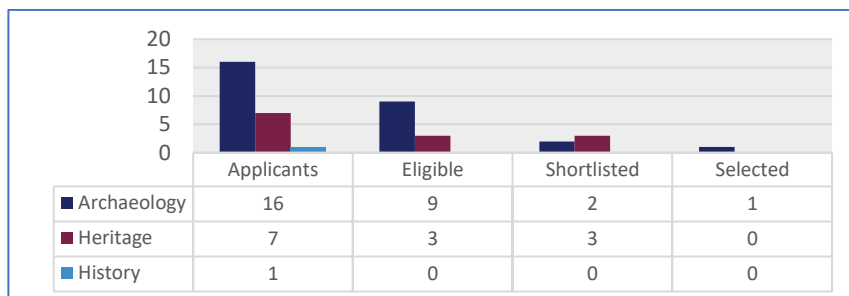


Table 5: Applications for the UCL Graduate Studentship in 2021

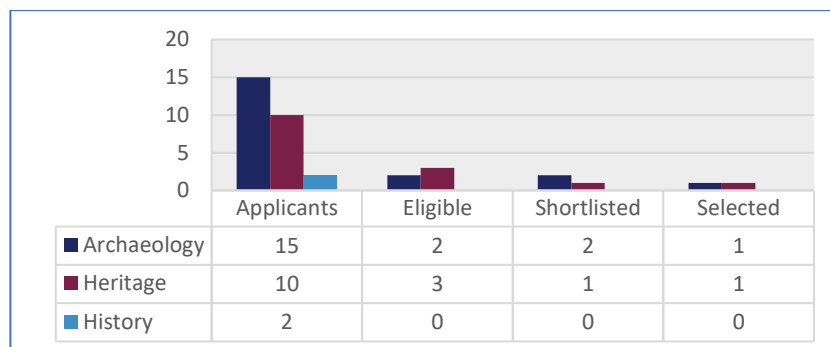
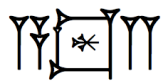


Table 6: Applications for the UCL Graduate Studentship in 2022

In 2021 the strongest candidate was offered the scholarship conditional on passing UCL's formal English language requirements (Table 5). Though his spoken English was excellent he failed to pass an appropriate test within 12 months of the award, so we were forced to withdraw the studentship. We therefore offered two places for graduate students in 2022 (Table 6). Again, one awardee was unable to qualify for UCL's English language summer programme and had to withdraw. Fortunately, the other, Mrs Niyan Hussein Ibrahim, already had suitable certification in hand and commenced the



Figure 7 Nahrein Network Graduate Student, Mrs Niyan Hussein Ibrahim at UCL



MA in Sustainable Heritage in September 2022. Her family have been able to accompany her to the UK, and a short interview with her featured in our October 2022 Newsletter.

4.3. AcademiQ Research Skills Programme

AcademiQ is a multi-year programme, led by Dr Mehiyar Kathem, designed to support Iraqi researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences with academic skills development. It builds on a British Academy funded [Iraq Writing Workshop project](#) which was implemented in Iraq in 2019 and is the first such nationwide initiative in Iraq. AcademiQ consists of online research courses, provision of academic writing workshops and 1:1 academic mentoring. AcademiQ's courses and activities are not UCL credit-bearing.

4.3.1. Academic Research Course

This free online course is hosted on the platform UCL Extend. It consists of 15 thematic units of 2–3 hours of independent study, released fortnightly fortnightly, offering conceptual insights, videos, readings, quizzes, and other activities on the following topics:

- Writing Research in English
- Features of Academic Writing
- Developing Writing Skills
- Structuring Your Paper
- Expressing Your Ideas
- Writing An Abstract for a Paper
- Theory
- Argument & Research Questions
- Research Design & Methodology
- Data Collection
- Ethics
- Journal Practices & Choosing a Journal
- Sharing Resources
- Social Media for Academics
- Fundraising for Research Projects

The programme was designed over the course of 2021–22 by three expert consultants working with Mehiyar: Dr Julia Molinari, a Lecturer in Professional Academic Communication in English at the Open University in the UK and the author of *What Makes Writing Academic: Rethinking Theory for Practice* (Bloomsbury 2022); Ms Sharon Pointer, a specialist in teaching language teaching to adults; and Dr Ariane Smart, an Associate Professor at UCL's Academic Communication Centre.

The first iteration of the programme attracted over 200 eligible applicants in summer and autumn 2022, fifty of whom were accepted to start in November.

4.3.2. Academic Writing Workshops

This free training programme is designed and led by Dr Ersun Kurtulus, Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations, Social Sciences University of Ankara. It offers in-depth training and group-work support for up to ten Iraqi academics in the arts, humanities and social sciences, in research and academic writing. Participants develop and complete a research project starting with formulation of a research question (or a paradox or hypothesis), exploring the available

literature in relation to the research topic, choosing a suitable research design, choosing appropriate research techniques dictated by the research design and collecting necessary data, and finally reporting their research results in the form of a publishable research article.

The programme aims to create an intellectually stimulating framework which will guide, encourage and support participants through constructive criticism and feedback from fellow participants and the course instructor. The problems related to writing an academic article in the English language will be discussed in the context of publishing in recognised academic journals. Participants also write an abstract as one of the first steps in the publication process. Specific attention is paid to the writing conventions that generally inform social scientific publications.

The first annual programme was advertised in summer 2022 and attracted 28 applications, ten of whom were offered places

Table 7). It began in October and will consist of at least five online and two in-person workshops in Iraq.

	<i>Applicants</i>	<i>Eligible</i>	<i>Shortlisted</i>	<i>Selected</i>
Male	15	14	7	6
Female	13	10	5	4
Total	28	24	12	10

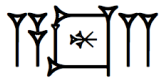
Table 7: Applicants for the Academic Writing Workshops, summer 2022



Figure 8 Pictures from the AcademiQ workshop held in Baghdad with Dr Ersun Kurtulus

4.3.3. Research Mentorship

The Research Mentorship programme is designed to provide peer-to-peer support to Iraqi academics involved in teaching arts, humanities or social sciences research methodologies in their respective



universities. The aim of this component of the programme is to disseminate good practice and tailor support to where it is needed. This programme will be open to Academic Writing Workshop alumni in 2023.

5. Core team research projects

5.1. Cultural Heritage Organisation

In this funding cycle, our team experienced administrative and logistical challenges and delays caused by the change in the leadership of the Sulaimani Polytechnic University (SPU) that eventually led to Rozhen's transfer from SPU to the Kurdistan Institution for Strategic Studies & Scientific Research (KISSR). Aside from terminating the Nahrein Network agreement with SPU and the need to postpone the launch of some of our activities (webinars and the launch of the "Feel like me" project), this change added extra workload for the team from physical and virtual moves of our workplace, files, and data. Nevertheless, we achieved the following:

5.1.1. Virtual and Augmented Reality (WP2)

The massive success of our Nahrein Network team's USAID-IOM-funded comprehensive assessment for the "Nobody's Listening" Virtual Reality Exhibition in early 2021 and the subsequent publicizing of high-profile events across Iraq and KRI led to the development of our unplanned, but promising, "Feel like me" project and the development of additional local and international partnerships. Inspired by the success of our assessment and motivated by our team's tech-based projects and skills, a UK-based Human Rights NGO (Minority Rights Group International or MRG) approached us to develop a digital cultural heritage project that encounters hate speech against an ethnoreligious minority in Iraq and encourages peacebuilding. Since the requested project perfectly fits the Nahrein Network's 5th aim (to help post-conflict healing and reconciliation) and to achieve some of the objectives of our belated WP1 (from an extended delay in receiving the NN fund's instalments between October 2021 and August 2022), we designed, developed, and (will soon) assess the impact the "Feel like me" mobile Augmented Reality (AR) application and campaign (online and in-person). We undertook the mobile application development with a 10,000 GBP fund from MRG and its REID (Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development) partner (based at the Institute of the Development Studies Library Road University of Sussex) and are continuing the campaign, assessment, and mobile application upgrading up to one year with in-kind support from the Nahrein Network and Cultural Heritage Organization (CHO).



Figure 9 Display of project in Hewri's Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development Day"

5.1.2. Webinars and community engagement (WP3)

- Organized and delivered four international online webinars/workshops (total duration of 10 hours) that attracted a total attendance of 1047 from 17 countries (12 cities and 10 towns within Iraq).
- Organized and delivered three in-person workshops (total duration of over 19 hours) that attracted a total of 390 attendance.
- Delivered three internal training workshops (total duration of 55 hours) for related team members on key technical skills for new projects with a total of 55 hours.
- Organized, co-organized, or participated in seven community engagement activities (total duration of over 74 hours) in Sulaimani and Erbil cities that attracted a total of 5250 attendance. In the activities that were organized by others (such as TECHFEST), the organizers and feedback from others made us realize that our digital cultural heritage projects could successfully attract and engage the largest number of enthusiastic visitors from different age groups and backgrounds. This resulted in being invited to other high-profile events inside and outside Sulaimani such as HITEX 2022, the biggest Iraqi Technology exhibition in Erbil, without needing to pay for our booth. Our team members and projects also received certificates of appreciation for their contributions, including one from the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government who also posted about our "Talk to Sarai" project on his social media.
- We also gave a total of 10 media interviews on various channels about our projects and activities.



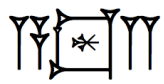
Figure 10 Photos from joint workshop held at Tishk University "XR Technologies for Preserving and Re-Imagining Our Past"

Beyond numbers, the impact and reach of our projects and training are far bigger and more diverse than what we planned for and could quantify. The quality and quantity of our projects and activities have gained us the trust of a growing number of local and international stakeholders and partners. We are increasingly becoming a “go-to” team for leading and/or participating in high-profile cultural heritage projects, activities, and initiatives (including giving consultation about related draft laws in the Kurdistan Region’s Parliament, speaking at local and international events, undertaking/contributing to new or existing cultural heritage projects, and providing various consultation to museums and cultural heritage organizations). Between October 2021 and September 2022, we were invited to and delivered over 10 lectures and seminars, and several consultations to various local, USA, UK, and European institutions. Aside from the many positive written feedback, we get on our survey forms, email, and social media accounts on the benefits of our online and in-person training, we also receive a much positive verbal feedback and many requests to continue and expand our training.

5.1.3. Publications

During the 2021-2022 Nahrein Network Co-I funding cycle, we also worked on and/or (co)published two journal papers, a conference paper, and a book chapter:

- Alizadeh, H., Bork-Hüffer, T., Kohlbacher, J., **Mohammed-Amin, R. K.**, & Naimi, K. (2022). The contribution of urban public space to the social interactions and empowerment of women. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 1-24.
- **Mohammed-Amin, R. K.**, Radha, R. A., Ibrahim, N. H., & Raouf, T. L. (2022, August). Extending the Realities of Genocide Memorialization. In *Proceedings of the International Conference of Peacebuilding and Genocide Prevention*.
- Guenat, S., Purnell, P., Davies, Z. G., Nawrath, M., Stringer, L. C., Babu, G. R., Dallimer, M., ... & **Mohammed-Amin, R.** (2022). Meeting sustainable development goals via robotics and autonomous systems. *Nature Communications*, 13(1), 1-10.



- **Mohammed-Amin, R. K. (2022)**, *New Realities for New Museum Experiences: Virtual and Augmented Realities for Difficult Heritage in Iraq*. In T. Stylianou-Lambert, A. Heraclidou & A. Bounia (Eds.), *Museum Media(ting): Emerging Technologies and Difficult Heritage*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

We have co-authored two more papers that are accepted for publication or under review and are in the process of writing four additional papers.

5.2. Kish Project: reparative history and knowledge repatriation

The large archaeological site of Kish, 15 km northeast of Babylon, comprises the ruins of the greatest cities of ancient Babylonia. Since the mid 19th century, several international antiquarian and archaeological expeditions have worked there. Most of their finds were taken to museums in Paris, Istanbul, Oxford, and Chicago so it is now impossible to study them together, and few artefacts are in Iraq itself. The few archaeological and historical studies of Kish are in French and English, not Arabic. Visitors to the site today see only filled-in traces of long-ago excavation pits and the collapsing remains of mud-brick buildings, which SBAH are working hard to conserve. The Nahrein Network has begun to help SBAH to recover lost and dispersed knowledge of Kish, and render it useful to Iraq.

5.2.1. Reparative history: decolonizing Kish

The mandated occupation and administration of Iraq by the British Empire between 1920 and 1932 witnessed two major excavations sponsored by joint UK/US institutions: Ur (British Museum/University of Pennsylvania Museum) and Kish (University of Oxford/Field Museum, Chicago). Although these excavations were widely covered by the press in both countries, Kish failed to enter popular reception, overshadowed by Leonard Woolley's accessible accounts of the spectacular discoveries at Ur, as well as the reconstruction and display of these objects at the two sponsoring museums. At the Ashmolean, Dr Paul Collins has begun to explore the impact of the Kish excavations (and by association, the University of Oxford and Field Museum) in contemporary popular reception as well as on the attitudes and decisions of the UK and Iraqi administrations during the mandate period. He has identified relevant archival materials in Oxford, London and Chicago.

He has also established contact with the Field Museum to enquire after the current status of the collaborative project undertaken by the Ashmolean and Field Museums in 2004–06 to create a unified online catalogue of the OFME's finds and to produce a definitive site report.

5.2.2. Knowledge repatriation: the cuneiform record of Kish

Fortunately, new technologies make it possible to reverse this long-term dispersal of knowledge from Iraq. [Oracc](#), the Open, Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus, houses millions of words of historical resources, edited and translated by researchers all over the world — except, ironically, the Middle East. So, for the past few years, Professor Eleanor Robson has worked with UCL's Research Software Development Group (now UCL Advanced Research Computing Centre, ARC) to design simple software that Assyriologists can use to edit cuneiform texts and translate them into any modern European or Middle Eastern language.

A freely available cuneiform editor, called [Nisaba](#) after the Sumerian goddess of writing, was launched in January 2022 (replacing an earlier app called Nammu). ARC are also updating the Oracc website, to make the whole corpus fully searchable, and to display the results nicely on small screens running on 3G or 4G phone signals. It has been available for beta-testing at <https://build-oracc.museum.upenn.edu/new> since spring 2022. A stable, public release is due in early 2023.

In November 2021, Dr Parsa Daneshmand joined the Kish project as postdoctoral researcher. In London and Oxford, he is using Nisaba to create an online, open-access multilingual catalogue and edition of the 2000 cuneiform tablets from Kish, focusing on the 600 tablets now housed in the Ashmolean Museum. They include official and personal letters, administrative documents, literary works and school exercises, from the third to the first millennia BC, translated into English, Arabic and Farsi. By the end of the reporting period the draft corpus contained over 200 texts, at <https://build-oracc.museum.upenn.edu/kish>.

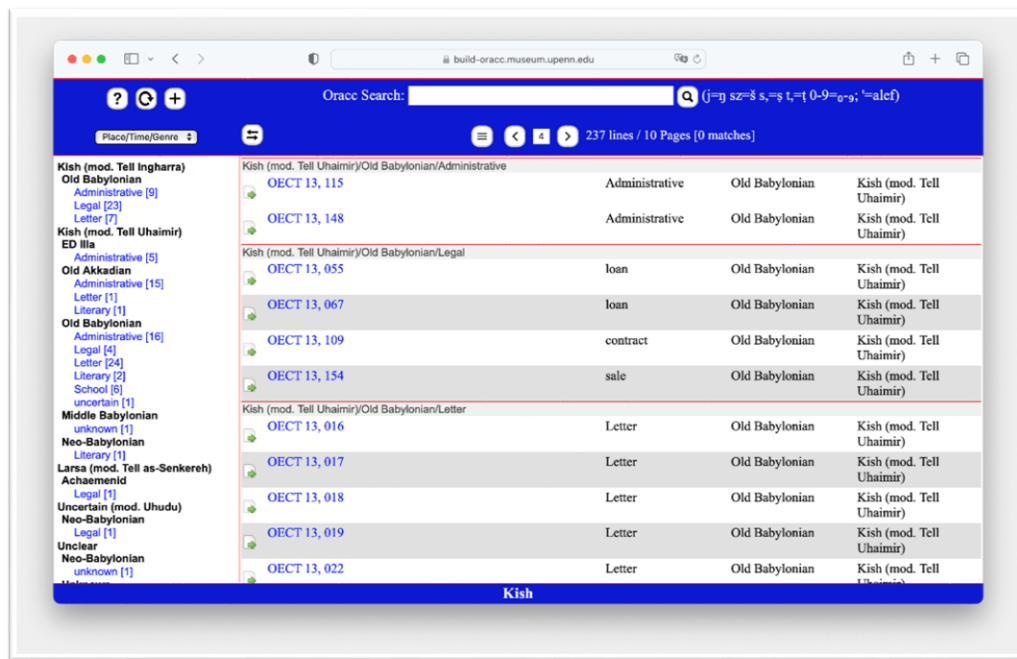


Figure 11 Screenshot of the Kish corpus under development on Oracc

5.2.3. In the field: site visit to Kish

In May 2022, Eleanor and Mehiyar visited the site of Kish with SBAH employee Ammar Al-Tae, who is responsible for its upkeep. Together we walked the southeastern mounds of Ingharra (Hursagkalama) and Tell Bandar. Ammar showed us the dire state of the standing remains, excavated a century ago by OFME and exposed to increasingly harsh climatic conditions ever since. The Neo-Babylonian façade of the goddess Ishtar's temple is in particularly bad condition and needs urgent intervention, which ALIPH has offered to support.

We hope that within the next few years visitors to Kish will be able to read or hear the words and listen to the stories of its ancient inhabitants, in Arabic, English, Farsi or Kurdish, as they walk around the better-managed site, using the resources and software created by this project and CHO.



Figure 12 Mr Ammar Altaee with Dr Mehiyar Kathem at Kish in May

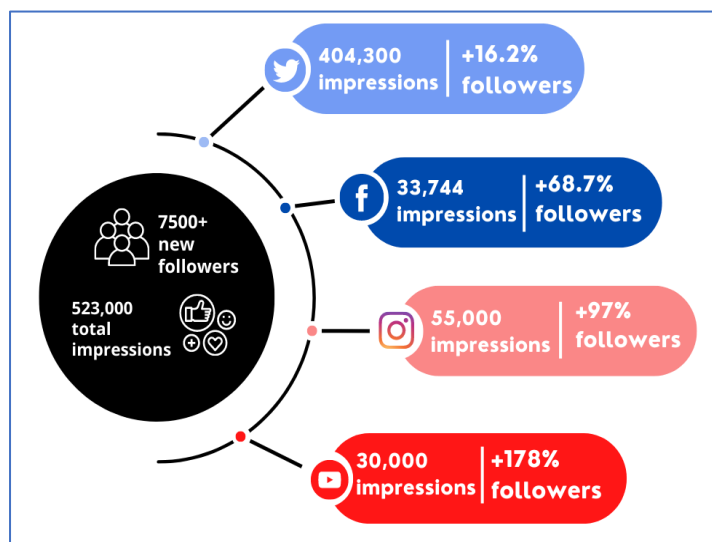
6. Communications, publicity and media

6.1. Staffing

Mrs Zainab Mahdi took up the new part-time position of Communications and Social Media Officer on 1 June 2021. She has been a brilliant addition to the London team, transforming our profile, reach and accessibility.

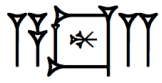
6.2. Social media

Thanks to Zainab's efforts, the Nahrein Network's social media channels did exceptionally well during 2021–22. We are active and regularly share and post online. This has strengthened our relationship with our audience. Our engagement and impression levels are consistently high. Followers have increased impressively. Across all platforms — Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube — we gained over 7,500 followers in one year.

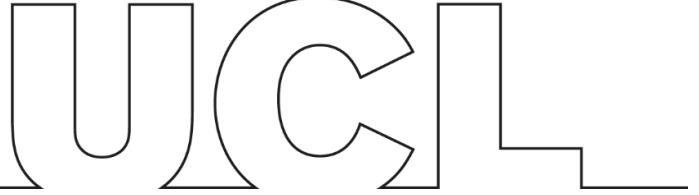


6.3. Website

The Nahrein Network website has been extensively updated, with simplified navigation providing easier access to pages and links to social media channels. We have increased visual elements and



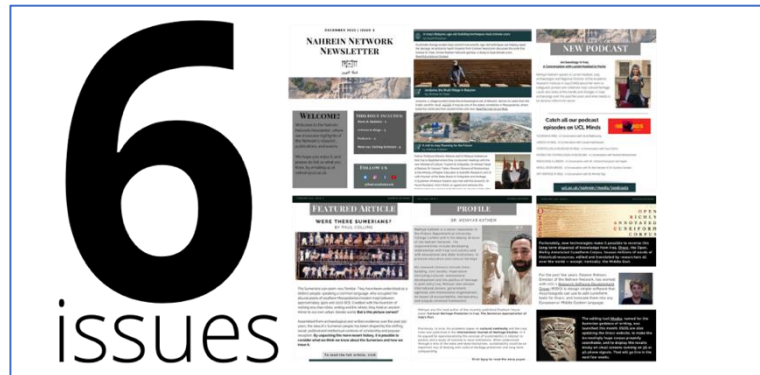
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optimized site layout, making a clear separation between our current project and previous AHRC-funded work. This has improved user experience and led to a significant increase in page views.

6.4. Newsletter

In January 2022, Zainab developed and launched the Network's first ever email Newsletter. This bi-monthly circular includes news, updates, and advertises upcoming events. It also features profiles with members of the core team, visiting scholars and funded graduate students.



57.1%
avg
campaign
performance

14.5%
more
effective
than peers

These campaigns have been extremely successful, where on average, open rates hover around 57% compared to our peers' performance of 28%. Within one year, the email list has reached 760 unique subscribers.

6.5. Webinars

The Nahrein Network organized several webinars with Visiting Scholars on Zoom. Dr Dhiaa Kareem Ali and Dr Dilshad Oumar Abdul Aziz both chaired webinars discussing project details and outcomes of their scholarships in the UK. All our videos and webinars can be found on our [YouTube page](#).

6.6. Podcasts

A great new initiative has been the ability to upload Nahrein Network podcasts to [UCL Minds](#), UCL's podcast channel. It shares the knowledge, insights, and ideas of the UCL community, reaching over 532,000 followers and accessible on several applications. The uploaded podcasts, transcribed by student volunteers, include the complete archives of Dr Mehiyar Kathem's interviews with important members in the history and archaeology world, as well as several new episodes.

10,600
plays overall

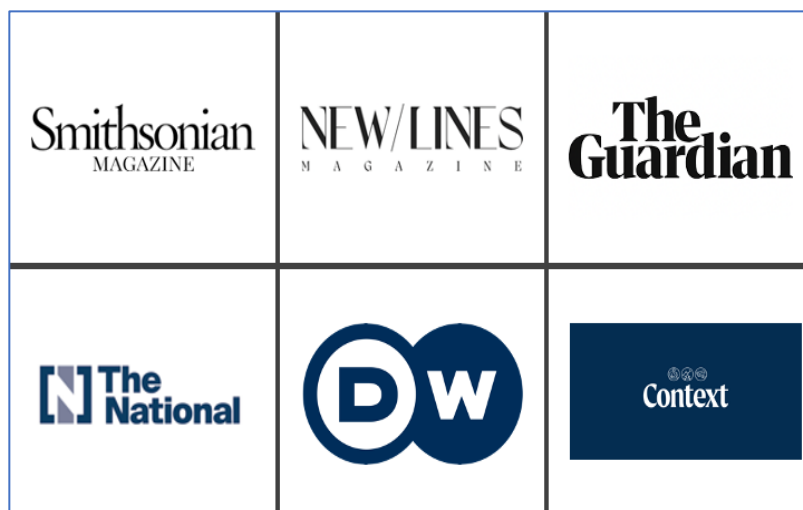
1,196
most played
Tourism in Iraq

UCL Minds Podcasts

Release date: 28 February 2022

- 1 TOURISM IN IRAQ - A Conversation with A
- 2 UNESCO IN IRAQ - A Conversation with Lo
- 3 STORYTELLING & MUSEUMS IN IRAQ - A C
- 4 INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN MUSEU
- 5 REBUILDING A LIBRARY - A Conversat'
- 6 MOSUL BOOK BRIDGE - A Conver
- 7 ART HERITAGE IN IRAQ - A
- 8 ARCHAEO

6.7. News media



The activities of the Network and its affiliates have also stirred the interest of journalists worldwide. Over the past year, reporters have reached out to Project Investigators, interviewing them and highlighted their contributions in the field via news outlets such as Deutsche Welle, New Lines Magazine, Thomson Reuters Foundation, Smithsonian Magazine amongst others. A list of all articles can be found on our Nahrein

Network website's [News Page](#).

7. Looking ahead to Year 2 (October 2022 – September 2023)

7.1. Devolved projects

Year 2 of the project will see the roll-out of the new, improved **Research Grant Awards** Scheme, in which we expect to fund up to six devolved projects to conduct research in Iraq for periods of up to two years, starting in the first half of 2023.

7.2. Capacity building

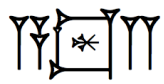
We expect to recruit a second UCL **Graduate Student** for September 2023.

We will offer six new placements in the joint **Visiting Scholars** programme with BISI, and welcome the five who were awarded scholarships last year.

For **AcademiQ**, Dr Ersun Kurtulus will complete the intensive workshop programme for the first cohort of advanced trainees and review its overall success with Mehiyar. Adaptations will be made for the following year.

Meanwhile, Sharon, Ariane and Julia will continue to create content for the online Academic Research Course until the final unit is released in May 2023. In February 2023 the team will start to review the success of the programme so far, and begin to plan additional materials on topics such as ethics and methodology where there is a major skills/knowledge dearth in Iraq. These could be added as options to the Research Academic Course or developed into a new course altogether that builds on the existing one. From May 2023, we plan to hire someone to manage the UCL Extend platform (and liaise and support learners) to prepare for the Academic Research Course being opened to a larger number of students from June 2023.

We are also in conversation with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Baghdad, concerning an expanded set of activities, so any remaining funding from year 1 will be ringfenced to accommodate their needs.



7.3. Core research projects

The **Cultural Heritage Organisation's** Work Packages 1 (Digital Heritage Internship Programme) and 2 (Monthly Training) will launch as soon as the new collaboration agreement with KISSR is signed. The pause allowed us to revise and expand the internship programme, based on new feedback we recently received. It will engage and train interdisciplinary teams in designing, developing, promoting, and fundraising for digital heritage projects. Aside from local capacity building and networking in the research and practice of digital heritage (as a type of creative industry), the team's participatory projects will provide state-of-the-art heritage experiences and will be made accessible to the public and related cultural and heritage institutions. Work Package 2 consists of monthly online or in-person workshops/seminars on topics such as digital heritage, creative cities, and fundraising. They will be open to the public, but will specifically target cultural heritage professionals and scholars from local museums, libraries, organizations, NGOs, and universities. As in the past, we will also stay open to any emerging opportunity that helps with achieving and/or exceeding the objectives, outputs, and outcomes we described in the proposal.

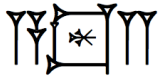
The CHO team is already continuing and exceeding with Work Package 3: impact assessments and community outreach. This package involves promoting and assessing the cognitive and emotional impacts of our digital heritage projects (Talk to Sarai, Virtual Sarai, and Feel like me) in community outreach and engagement activities. We also started the online campaign and promotion for our new "Feel like me" project and are collecting statistics about the reactions for an in-depth assessment of the project. WP3 also includes evaluating WP1 and WP2.

Over the coming 12 months, the **Kish Project** will gather momentum, especially once Eleanor finishes her five-year stint as Head of UCL History and begins a two-year period of sabbatical leave. Planned activities include:

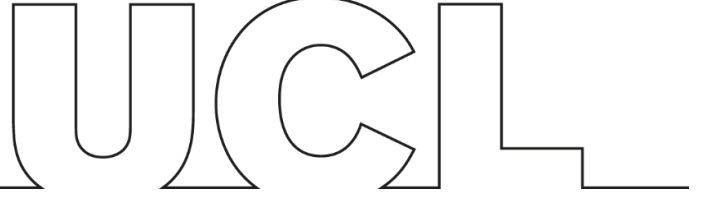
- The launch of the next version of Nisaba, the cuneiform text editor, and the public release of the redesigned Oracc website, in winter 2022-23
- Near-completion of the online corpus of cuneiform tablets from Kish now housed in Oxford
- The development of training activities and guidance documentation for Arabophone cuneiformists
- Collaboration with the Field Museum to revive and republish the Kish finds database and field records, in an open-access online format
- Further archival research on the history of excavation and public reception of Kish
- The initiation of a multilingual website, modelled on <https://oracc.org/nimrud>, that will bring together all known material on the site
- A social media campaign, beginning in March 2023, to mark the centenary of the start of the OFME fieldwork
- Keynote lectures and the drafting of an article outlining the concept and practice of knowledge repatriation as a complement/alternative to artefact repatriation

7.4. Other activities

In Autumn Term 2022, Mehiyar will offer an optional module for UCL History's new MA Public History, titled 'New Public Histories in Conflict-Affected Contexts'. Drawing on Mehiyar's research for the Network, and other case studies, it will examine the ways in which heritage is exploited, appropriated, transformed and sometimes destroyed in contexts of political contestation and competition for legitimacy and resources. The module will examine the impact of these dynamics on



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public history. It will run as a 2-hour weekly seminar over ten weeks, and be examined by a 4000-word essay or project of the students' own design.