

# Transcript: Archaeology in Iraq

## A Conversation with Lanah Haddad - Part 2

Mehiyar 0:01 Welcome to the home network podcast series. Today we're with Lanah Haddad, regional director of TARI, this is podcast number two. Hello, Lanah

Lanah 0:11 Hello Mehiyar thank you very much.

Mehiyar 0:13 In the last podcast, we were speaking about the old rules of the game regarding cultural heritage in Iraq and how those could be reformed, updated and revised. We were speaking also about the role of local communities, foreign archaeologists could engage with communities in a more engaged more improved way. And we also spoke about certain practices that have lingered on for quite a few decades. When you speak about the old rules, what do you mean, exactly,

Lanah 0:44 so how Iraq is dealing with heritage, the rules where all the regulation, laws, etc, were not really updated to the challenges and problems we are facing. And when they were said, they are coming from a time where the topics of like decolonization were not, were not known, let's say, and these are things that need to be changed. Because Iraq with its modern borders, is a child of colonizing period, let's say, archeology is a child of colonization. And like we know, especially in the US, but also now more and more in Europe, the topic of decolonization, getting more and more present in different fields of academic work, but also like, in politics, and communities. And here in Iraq, this topic is actually not not being spoken about, people are not aware of it. While we are very much affected by it to this day, people have, unfortunately, what I find everywhere in the world, a very short memory, so many problems that we are facing in this country. Sourcing back to the Imperial time to the British Mandate in Iraq, of course, with all the times of like when the country got its independence, and then a state coup, and then again, another state coup. And then decades of war, one forgets these things, because one is so busy with so many problems that are actually existing in your living reality. But I always feel like sometimes you cannot solve a problem. If you only facing its facade, you need to go to the rules to understand, okay, how can I improve things, it's not about like only like pointing fingers or something like, it's about understanding the past and the root of issues that we have to see in which way we can improve things. So when we come to heritage, there needs to be a lot of big changes, because there was the first big change that when they set the rule to say, okay, all artifacts that are excavated, stay in the country, this was a very important rule that was set. But now we live in an era where we have so many excavations, objects stay in the country, but the information about what was actually excavate it at that site is taken away of the country. And it's not transferred really in a good way or in a friendly way to the community. Because we have like all these

international conferences, where I can just go and present their work and share their research with others. And then other archaeologists refer to this researchers and to more accumulation of knowledge in Iraq itself, like the community, or the academic field here, having all this access. So here is for example, where we need other regulations were like, okay, every project should have, for example, a budget to translate their publication to the local language of where the site is located. So with this, I'm speaking, either in Arabic or in Kurdish. And this is important to decolonize archaeological fieldwork, because otherwise, it's like, again, a foreign mission comes works and goes back and they have the big benefit. Because after an excavation season, what is left for the Iraqis? It's okay, we have a lot of objects. And because archaeological fieldwork has changed now it's more in working in detail than it used to be 100 years ago, 100 years ago, four people come and they have over 100, workman's and they have a long time season and they dig out all this big statues and amazing other objects where then half of it goes to their country. Half of it stays here. This was like how it was before. But nowadays, it's so different. So there are no big findings. They are not big statues, they are not physical, impressive things. And I'm saying physical impressive things before the view of an amateur, for example, net form for psychologists, I think many archaeologists get more excited when they see a shirt that has painting on it or an inscription on it. So there needs to be like, these are some examples of changing rules and being up to date and decolonizing rules, because sometimes it's not enough to say the objects stay in the country. Mehiyar 5:41 And just on the on this very important word decolonizing, that something that's been used in archaeology in relation to Africa, Middle East, do you think it's something that in Iraq itself that Iraqi archaeologists, the heritage experts, understand, do they? Do they understand the legacies of colonial influence? In the country? I mean, because in your unique experience, you're you Have you struggled different worlds, you're Iraqi you have you've lived in Europe, you can you can read multiple languages, speaking multiple languages, you know, these different cultures? So it's not easy is it for a country that has, as you said, experienced multiple worlds instability, to come to terms with decolonizing cultural heritage, it's something even new, in many ways as a concept. Is this something that you're actively working on in terms of your research and work? How do you deal with these issues when it comes to working with Iraqi archaeologists, Lanah 6:46 I have met very few colleagues who are aware of this topic, to be honest, most of colleagues are not very much aware of decolonization and the imbalance between them and international archaeologists, I have witnessed many times colleagues who were so happy to have the opportunity to work with foreign mission, and always admiring their discipline, their work, their knowledge, their efforts there, that they are actually willing to come from Europe to Iraq to work there and serve the Iraqi country. And I smile, when I hear this I can understand from where this comes from. And then I softly start to open up a dialogue to make also understand of like, yes, it is good. I love international work, I love exchanging I love people from different cultures and backgrounds come together and share their experience and work together. But sometimes there is a power imbalance. And this needs to be recognized because all of this important to value oneself and their own work. Because otherwise we cannot develop if we only look up without diffrenciating the actual work to Western

academics, Yanni, there needs to be in an equal balance in between the there needs to be more of the feeling of like we work together, because there are information that I can share with you and their information that you can share with me. And this is something where I always try to open up this dialogues and like, Yeah, but every mission coming to Iraq, they have like a goal. They have like a research question they are looking for, they are not coming here because they just have nothing else to do and like to help out Iraqi heritage. No, there is a goal. And they have like ambitions to do things to do work. And they have like interest in in specific fields, and they do their job. So I really try to make them understand this not into endanger the friendship and the colleague to co working but also like to just push for more having equal values, and having also the understanding of like, how, how does it come that an Italian mission, a German mission, a French mission, a British mission, American mission, come to our country and work? Where does this idea come from? So I build up a lot of dialogues. And this I every time when I open up these dialogues, and we talk about how actually axiology started, and how it changed and why it changed. Many of my colleagues are actually like I was aware of it, but I never thought about it. So because there are no dialogues or no conversations about this topic, so it's not it's not a big deal. But this is actually important when we talk about like If we want for the future having better regulation in the country, so our archeologists who currently work in the field, they need to have an understanding of how archaeology actually develop, how the rules developed, how the laws changed, to see for our current situation, how we need to change, again, the laws to improve the situation, not only the working with foreign mission, but also like having a site where a private business owner wants to do a project there and there is an archaeological site. There are laws that are not strong, and they are not simple to deal with. So again, these are things that needs to be discussed, and where the actual archaeologist now working in the fields, they need to be aware of that. So while they are developing themselves in getting more experience, being aware of all these subjects, and decolonization is a very, very big subject that needs to be worked on.

Mehiyar 11:00 You mentioned that there are some countries that are working in Iraq, those are more or less the same countries that were there working the 100 years ago, 90 years ago, during the colonial period, is it more or less the same countries that are there now that form the bulk of foreign archaeology interests in Iraq?

Lanah 11:19 Yes, we have a few more now. But like the core, the French, Italian, German, British and the American, so these are like the big ones. And then you have more countries coming in and being more involved into Iraqi heritage, and they are like, Poland, Czech Republic, but with very small projects. And you have also Iran being more involved in heritage in this country, especially when it comes to restoration projects with different ideas and ideologies that they bring in with.

Mehiyar 11:54 Would you say from your own experiences? As an archeologist? who's worked on the supervision projects in Iraq, but also in conservation, that there is a

significant amount of competition? Or is there? Is there more competition and coordination in partnership? Or is it the other way,

Lanah 12:10 I have witnessed some competitions between projects, it's not a lot, but there is existing, it's not always simple and peaceful, like territorial competition that I have seen of like, who gets the permission to work on the site and who not. And where also, like politics get involved into it, which is, which is very scary, to be honest, and a little bit disappointing. But again, it's when you don't have strong regulations, when you don't have strong policies in this field. It's, it's a very complicated and complex field for collaboration. There are projects who collaborate better than others. And I think this ends up on the individuals in running those projects who are more willing and interested in collaborating with other teams and sharing their information and knowledge. But again, it's not like all of them doing it. And I think any, it's a very complicated and complex thing. I think, also like the local antiquity Directorates, they need to understand that they need to create this space for this collaboration. Because there are specific time periods where excavation and surveys are happening, there needs to be space from the antiquity direct, right to bring these people together to share these informations more. Because it's more beneficial for them for the teams for everybody. And I really hope that in the future that the antiquity Directorates, the local directorates see their role and responsibility in this more to provide a space to bring these different researchers academics together, in like sharing their fieldwork, because this can improve and save time a lot in the field,

Mehiyar 14:10 on the note of knowledge production, which of course touches on quite a few things you've spoken about. What is the purpose of knowledge production when it comes to Iraq? Is it to reinforce certain understandings and approaches to Iraq to the Middle East? Or is it the search for new knowledge? does it feed into existing narratives, agendas? And how does it benefit, if any Iraq itself, you're saying also that, you know, before there was this kind of physical extraction? Now there's this kind of knowledge extraction? Are we just in this legacy now where it's just a continuation of less of the colonial period? And those are kind of things that I think are quite important because if it is, indeed a focus on knowledge, who's that knowledge for how do Iraqis benefit from any of this.

Lanah 15:01 If we look into the society, many people would think Iraqis are actually not interested into heritage and history in, in their local identity. But I say no, actually, it's very much the opposite side, people are actually here, very much willing and wanting to understand the past better than they are doing it now. And as we talked about before, there are not many resources to do it in the proper way, to have a nice resource where you can really like, read and understand things better. I have met many young people from documentary filmmakers to artists, who try in their work to deal a lot with the heritage of Iraq. Like if we, if we look at it was always there, this eager of like connecting with the heritage. If we look at the beginning of modern Iraqi artwork, there is a lot of references to the ancient time, or to the medieval time with architectural

elements, etc. And when we look at 2019, with the demonstration happening at the town, square, etc, that went along for months and months and months. And this was a generation that was born after 2003, who were not born in a time where they had access to better education materials, like other generations, like my mother's generation, my mother actually grew up with knowing a lot about Mesopotamia only because of her schoolbooks. And this and also like doing school trips to sites etc, which was very normal to at that time, but the generation after 2003, that the freedom to travel inside the country was restricted. The freedom sometimes any insight in specific periods in your own city to travel from one place to another was very much restricted. sectarianism was growing, like, depending on from where to where you go, you could have been killed just because you have the wrong name that is linked to a sectarian part. So you have a generation that have faced more violence than any other generation before in Iraq. And when I'm saying facing violence, I'm saying like direct violence in your private daily life, it's not like facing violence in the war that is in the borders of the city, no violence that is inside your environment, inside your city inside your neighborhood. So when you have this generation growing up with such violence, and being bombarded with information and propaganda, talking about secularism, making a difference between your faith between your language between anything of your identity, it does not build up a healthy society. But somehow when we look at this young people who were on the streets in 2019, they rejected this, they rejected the secularism, they rejected this violence they rejected, they rejected the government, they rejected the terrorism, they rejected all of this negativity. And then if we look at the street that was produced at that time, many, many of them are referring again to the heritage. So when we look at the protests in 2019, and the artwork, the street artwork that was done by these young people, and not only in Baghdad, but also in the South, in Basra, in Karbala, etc. When we look the artwork was against sectarianism. It's about coexisting it's about finding your identity in your heritage, where many, many symbols from cuniforms to specific statues, etc, were used to represent them. And also like many topics of empowering woman, etc. So you could see that this generation that has not seen a peaceful time in their lifetime, just growing up in a corrupted state, in one conflict after the other, that they were fed up how things were running. So this shows like the current situation of how the government is creating the identity of the country was rejected by the people by these young people, and they own claim of building up their identity has its roots in connecting with their heritage, and connecting with their heritage means for These young people also to live and love the diversity that goes along with it. And this is very important, because then you can see, okay, there is interest in having more understanding of heritage, because what are the resources that they have, there are other school books, and they are not the most entertaining parts. And then there is social media. And in social media, when we look at Facebook, we look at Instagram, we look at Twitter, there are many pages who talk about Mesopotamia, or heritage of Iraq, modern history of Iraq, where there are a lot of pictures shared, etc. But there's not a lot of information that is shared. It's more like visual, visual identity, of heritage and history that is shared and produced. And people like it. And this is the resource that they go back to, because how many times I have been in this in, in conversations, where people say, Yeah, I have read on Facebook,

this and this about Babylonia, I have read this and this on this social media platform, about Uruk. So the current resources that they are taking is from social media. And this is also like where all the discussions come from. But these sites are well visited, and people take them in their daily consumption. So there is the interest, and there is the world. And also if we look into, because in the beginning, I said there was no freedom in traveling inside the country before this changed again, because now you have tourism agencies who bring people to these ancient sites. So there are more accessible again, and these buses are booked out every time. So there are always like 40 people in one group going to a heritage site and people are interested. So there is a big interest. Because people want to know more people want to have to redefine their identity, and they want this rich heritage that they have being part of their identity. So this is where it's very, very important where we need actually to focus more in producing products that share this desire or this wish to have your heritage identity being clarified. And not having it as a propaganda tool to build up nationalism. Now to make understand, like, how rich and diverse the heritage here is, and that all of us are part of it and have also a responsibility in it. But this only can happen if we have educational material. And not only the school books that are existing, because this is not enough, because people need material that is outside of school to follow up something that they are interested in,

Mehiyar 23:00 I guess in let's call it a post ISIS, Iraq, we've had a lot of destruction in those three years. 14 15 16. And then you had the protests, the National protests in October 2019. Do you see any kind of demographic changes, and you're speaking about the uses of culture, heritage and protest in a way that's come from this kind of anti sectarianism, anti daesh, if you like even armed groups, and so on calling for a homeland? Could you tell us more about the generational change that you're witnessing and how it's affecting approaches or engagement in rites spoken about tourism and increasing interest in tourism? And I think we spoke about it before how there is hope. I guess it comes from the generational change, demographic change or youth based population. Could you tell us a bit more about that and how Iraq could potentially harness that as a resource for cultural heritage?

Lanah 24:01 That is actually one very important example that in my opinion, we do not talk about that much as it should be. Because when that was in Mosul, and their first attempt in putting explosions to Prohpet Yunis people gathered and stop them. They demonstrated against that knowing that they're actually putting their heads for knowing that they're putting their life in danger. They have saw like how serious Daesh is in distracting heritage sites, if it's a Sufi tomb or Shiaa shrine or whatever, they have seen like, they have no limitation if they want to be had a human being or if they want to distract and all Old heritage site, they do it. So the people in Mosul, when they saw that Daesh is approaching Prohpet Yunis and trying to install explosions, they went and demonstrated and stop them actually, for going further. Of course, as we know, that went again during nighttime on another day a few weeks later and finish that job in putting the explosions and destroying the site fully. But seeing that young people

knowing that they are actually putting their own life in danger in protecting a site that is important for the identity of the city, for all three big monolithic religions from Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and this shows how people actually are connected to their heritage and wanting to protect it. This is, I think, very, very important to see like they are actually Iraqis who would risk their own life to do this. It's not only about talking about saving heritage is really like risking their life against such a group. This is one thing. And we talked about the protests, how people use the artwork to connect with their heritage again, and also like being anti secularism. But we see here, we have a big, big chance now, because we see like there is this desire in building up a new identity, that is far away from propaganda, because during the Baath period, heritage was very much used as a propaganda material, where we can remember seeing pictures of Saddam Hussein that he puts himself in line with the old kings in building up this country, etc. And people are tired of propaganda. People want just like more an identity that is that is not taking sides, but that has roots in this area. So this is the differences. And if we look what happened after the Gulf War, and what happened after Daesh, there is a big difference in this country. And in this generation. When we look at the events after 2003, the State of Iraq became from year to year, weaker and weaker, the society became weaker and weaker. The society get separated from each other violence was a day to day thing where you could not trust anymore, your neighborhood because you don't know if somebody is working for the other side, etc. And there was so much of car explosions of destructions. The freedom of movement again, as I said before, was restricted. So there was no space to build up any hope. There was no space to build up independent identity from political sides. And there was no security but if we look now in what's happening after that period, there is a difference because after 2003, there was so much destruction going on inside cities, on sites, etc. And there was little effort to change these things or to save things and there was also like no real big international interest in stabilizing strength in the country. While after that, one could say that things changed. One saw what's happening with the country if you will leave it alone or not having specific measurements done to improve the situation, the security, the livelihood, etc, of people, it just cutting too weak and out of control after the period of damage, things change a lot. Especially if we look at the situation of Mosul now. And the situation of Baghdad after the Gulf War, they are like so, so different, because with defeating Daesh, directly the concentration and focus was okay we need to do something about the disrupted areas. So all the prominent heritage sites from Mosul got fundings to be restored again. So when people see this, this automatically unconsciously gives you a hope that there is interest to save your identity because this is part of your identity, your identity get valued with this and this gives more to people than we would actually think because when you only see distraction distraction distraction in your life, you have no hope. You don't have a perspective but then when you see okay, there is a efforts to rebuild what is gone not only like to build new things, but also to rebuild something that belongs to your past to your identity, something that you might have not known that well, but you have always passed by, and it comes back to its glory, as opposed to before, this is protecting your identity. This is building up your identity without taking sides of political ways, or religious ways. And this is very, very, very important. And this impacts this new generation that we

have, as we said, with the demonstrations in 2019, this generation does not want an identity that has not to do with their heritage and that diversity, because people take pride in heritage and in diversity, people are happy to have a neighborhood that is not very similar. People love when they have a neighborhood that is crowded with so many different languages and beliefs. I have never seen like a neighborhood here where people say like, Oh, we don't want to mix with other people or like that. Now people respect and accept each other more than what politics trying to tell us. So this year, a very, very important thing like these efforts that are done now currently in Iraq to safeguard heritage to rebuild restoration, especially when we look at most of our very, very important steps actually, to build up a healthy new identity of this new generation that have not seen a prosper Iraq before that has only saw violence and war. And we can see this also, like when we look at all these young people building up new startups, many of them taking the name of their brand from ancient languages, or their logos are related to heritage, or the products that they have, have like names or images that has to do with heritage. So even like in the free market business, young people are trying to have modern products that have their roots, or identity inherited. So the desire of creating this new identity, building on heritage, going away from conflict and politics is very much up to date now. And this is something that we need to continue feeding. So the desire of those young people to build up a new identity for themselves, that has roots in their heritage and is going away from the conflicts that politics is causing, is a very, very important thing, because we can see it everywhere. And it's our duty, who work in archaeology and heritage and all this, to serve this to feed this interest and this hunger of creating this new identity in a healthy way, in a not nationalistic way. Not valuing ethnic groups to each other, who is better or whatever, no, because this was done 100 years ago, and this is something that we need to break again, with decolonization, we need to create a more healthy connection, this new generation with their heritage.

Mehiyar 33:19 On that note, Lanah, thank you very much for your contribution to the Nahrein Network podcast series. There's a lot to think about. I'm sure that TARI work with you leading it be very effective going forward in Iran in light of both the challenges but also the nature of hopeful and aspirational change that I think, you know, effectively expressing Thank you, Lanah, and I hope to have another podcast with you in the near future, perhaps speak about some of your on the ground activities.

Lanah 33:51 Thank you very much my here. I'm very happy that I had the chance talking with you about these very, very important topics. And I hope some people get inspired by it to continue this mission in supporting communities in having a healthy relationship with their heritage to preserve it for the future generation. And your podcast is one of the contribution and I'm very, very happy to be part of it. Thank you very much Mehiyar. Thank you, Lanah.



