

CHALLENGING LEGACIES

The Kingdom of Iraq and Gertrude Bell

Exhibition Talk (15:30 – 17:00) & Launch (17:00 – 18:30)

6th December 2023



FOREWORD

I'm delighted to welcome this exciting new exhibition '*Challenging Legacies: The Kingdom of Iraq and Gertrude Bell*' to the Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies (IAIS) on behalf of the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Exeter. This exhibition represents the first collaborative venture between Newcastle University Archives & Special Collections, which hosts the Gertrude Bell Archive, and IAIS, which holds the greatest concentration of expertise in Middle East studies in the UK. The exhibition gives form to our shared interest in promoting research, education and public dialogue with wide global audiences. It also presents an exciting opportunity to raise awareness of the connections between the newly-digitised collections relating to Gertrude Bell at Newcastle University and the Digital Archives of the Middle East (DAME) project hosted in IAIS with Tsinghua University.

The controversial and charismatic figure of Gertrude Bell has long held a fascination for me as a historian formerly based in the North East of England, where Bell's grandfather, Sir Isaac Lowthian Bell, founded an industrial Empire. Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) had a number of 'firsts' to her name: she was the first woman to earn a degree in Modern History from the University of Oxford, she was the first woman to climb ten new ascents in the Bernese Alps and to have a summit named after her; she was the only woman on the payroll of the British diplomatic service's Cairo Office during the momentous upheaval of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Archaeologist, explorer, photographer, diplomat and founder of the Baghdad Museum of Antiquities, Bell's achievements are remarkable. She was also a contrarian whose name until recent years was not widely known. Her legacy as a British imperialist who neglected Kurdish identity in per preoccupation with Iraqi nation-building and 'kingmaking' is highly controversial and rightly questioned today.

On a personal note, it is a pleasure warmly to welcome former colleagues of mine from Newcastle University to Exeter. In IAIS, we look forward to many more opportunities for future collaboration. There is a longer legacy in prospect of joining up the rich archival resources of the DAME project with the Gertrude Bell archive, which will be freely available from October 2023 to researchers, students and public users alike. These are extraordinarily rich archives that will enable a deeper understanding of today's politics in the Middle East and brilliantly illustrate how collaborative working and digital tools are enabling Humanities and Social Science research and education to flourish on a global scale.

Professor Helen Berry

Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences)

EVENT PROGRAM



PROFESSOR HELEN BERRY

15:30 - 15:45

Welcome and Introduction - 'Challenging Legacies'

Professor of History and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (University of Exeter). Helen specialises in British history from around 1660 to 1830, and is passionate about encouraging people to think more broadly about history in a global and comparative context.



DR SANA AL-NAIMI

15:45 - 16:15

Multiple Perspectives

Sana is a chartered architect (ARB and RIBA member), a Lecturer at the School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape - Newcastle University, and the sole director of Archisana Ltd. Her talk will highlight the research opportunities afforded by the digitalised Gertrude Bell Archive. Once this archive's content is juxtaposed against other textual and visual archives, a complex web of differing and contrasting perspectives emerge.



VALENTINA FLEX

16:15 - 16:25

Discussing the impetus, curation and execution of the initial Newcastle University exhibition

Valentina is a Stillman Project Archivist working on Gertrude Bell Archive: Bell and the Kingdom of Iraq at 100, working on cataloguing and enhancing discoverability of the Gertrude Bell archive. They have worked in the cultural heritage sector for over five years and has previously been in post at the University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections in a variety of roles, including Project Archivist scoping Polar collections.

EVENT PROGRAM

DR JAMES DOWNS

16:25 - 16:35

Archives and Adaptation: The Obstacles & Opportunities presented in bringing 'Challenging Legacies' from Newcastle to Exeter

As well as a member of the team here at IAIS with responsibilities of looking after the Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU), James is also a Project Manager for the Digital Archive of the Middle East (DAME) project. James received his Ph.D. in 2019 for his doctoral thesis entitled 'Ministers of "the Black Art": the engagement of British clergy with photography, 1839-1914.'



DR SEMIH CELIK

16:35 - 16:45

Gertrude Bell according to the Ottomans

Lecturer in the History of Science & Citizenship (Education and Research) at the University of Exeter. Semih's academic interests fall under the rubric of environmental history and history of science in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East. His research aims on the one hand to locate the Ottoman Empire within global history, on the other hand to contribute to historiography and curricula with non-colonial histories of the environment and science.



Q&A SESSION TO THE PANEL

16:45 - 17:00

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

text and images for the exhibition panels are the work of Newcastle University Special Collections & Archives and Newcastle University School of History, Classics and Archaeology, with additional material for the Exeter exhibition contributed by Dr Farangis Ghaderi, Lecturer in Gender and Kurdish Studies, Principal Investigator of the Kurdish Digital Archives project, & Joint Director of the Centre for Kurdish Studies, IAIS ('Kurdish Resistance and Kurdish Newspapers') and Dr Semih Celik, Lecturer in History of Science and Citizenship, Department of Archaeology and History ('Bell and the Ottomans').

Curation of the exhibition materials was by Dr James Downs, Archivist of the Middle East collections and Project Manager for DAME (Digital Archive of the Middle East), with overall administration of the project provided by Sarah Wood (Project Coordinator for DAME). Thanks are also due to Professor Tim Insoll of the Centre for Islamic Archaeology, for the kind loan of archaeological artefacts, and Alexandra Warminski for assistance with this and other exhibition matters. Hosting of the exhibition has been funded by the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, and we are grateful to its Director, Professor Christina Phillips, for her encouragement and support.

We would also like to acknowledge the role of DAME (the Digital Archive of the Middle East) in providing financial and logistical resources for this exhibition. The DAME project involves the digitising of material from both the Middle East archives held in Special Collections and the Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU), as well as partnerships with other archives and digital collections. The newly-established DAME website can be found at <https://dame.exeter.ac.uk>.