Managing Archaeological Collections in Middle Eastern Countries

A Good Practice Guide

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Contents

Aims and Objectives 1
Artefacts Recovered from Archaeological Excavation and Fieldwork 1
Records and Documents 1
Background 3
Pre-Excavation Project Design 4
Excavation 6
Post-Excavation 8
Preservation and Re-Use 9

Archaeological Collections Management Practice 13
What is Archaeological Collections Management Practice? 13
Planning for the Creation of Collections 13
Governance 13
Collections Management Strategies 15
Phases of Archaeological Process 16
Written or Formal Policies 17
Conserving and Caring for Archaeological Collections 17
Specialised Environmental Storage 17

Archaeological Collections Management 19
Governance and Principles 19
Current Management, Strategies and Approaches 22
Artefacts in Archaeologial Collections 23
Documentation System and Digital Archive 24
Storage Provision and Future Expansion Needs 24
Levels of Use of the Collections 25
Archaeological Collections Management Practices in Middle Eastern Countries 27
Forward Planning 27

Recording Archaeological Collections 28
Management System for Collecting, Processing, Analysing and Curating 28
General Requirements 28
Management Structure 29
Collections Management Responsibilities 29
Regulatory Responsibilities 30
Management Planning and System Review 30
Documentation 30
General 31
Operational Procedures 31
Control of Documents 31
Control of Records 33
Resource Management 33
Provision of Resources 33

Human Resources 34
Infrastructure 34
Artefact Types and Characteristics 34
Collections Assessment 35
Estimation of Collections Scope and Size for New Sites 35
Collections Scope and Size for Existing Sites 35
Description of Collections 35
Storage Crates, Boxes, Shelving Facilities 36
Condition of Archaeological Collections 36
Conservation and Preservation 36
Storage Facilities 36
Buildings: Shelters, Laboratories, Storage, Site Museum 37
Collections Management 37
Collections Management Objectives 37
Collections Management Policies 37
Field Collection 37
Salvage Excavation 37
Field Conservation And Preservation 38
Registration 38
Laboratory Sampling and Management 38
Laboratory Conservation 39
Discard 39
Cataloguing 39
Labelling 39
Packing 39
Storage Environment 39
Conservation and Preservation 40
Inventory 40
Records and Data Management Systems 40
Data Storage and Retrieval System 41
Paper Archive 41
Publications 41
Electronic, Film and Photographic Archives 41
Access and Use of Collections 41

Short-Term: Registration, Analysis And Access 43
The Collections Management System 43
Policies and Procedures 43
Loans 44
Researcher Access 44
Destructive Analysis 44
Legal 44
Inventory Management 44
Annual Inventory of Collections 44
Object Locations 45
Collections Annual Report 45

Collections Significance Criteria 45
Security and Succession Planning 45
Emergency Planning/Disaster Response 45
Threats to Archaeological Collections 46
Threats to Documentary Archive 46
Role of Registrars 46
Role of Conservators 47
Role of Archaeological Specialists 47
Assessing Significance 48
Access to On-Site Collections 50

Long-Term: Archaeological Collections Storage 51
Standard for Storing and Curating On-Site Archaeological Collections 51
International Charters and Conventions 51
United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) 51
International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) 53
International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) 53
International Council of Museums (ICOM) 55
Archaeological Site Management and Conservation 56
Estimating Storage Provision and Future Expansion Needs 56
On-Site Storage Facilities for Archaeological Collections 58
Funding 59
Directorates and Museums 60
Accessing Archaeological Collections in Museums, On-Site and Remotely 61

Implementing Archaeological Collections Management Strategies 63
Recommendations for Governments 63
Recommendations for Funding Bodies 64
Recommendations for Archaeologists 64

Summary 66
Reasons for Managing Archaeological Collections 66
Code for Managing Archaeological Collections Into the Future 66

Glossary 69

Bibliography 71

Appendix 1: Field Study: Syria and Turkey 85

Appendix 2: Survey: Archaeologists, Conservators and Curators 105

List of Figures

Figure 1: Phases of English Heritage (MoRPHE) model 7
Figure 2: Conservation considerations 11
Figure 3: Preparation for long-term storage 12
Figure 4: Archaeological collections management system 14
Figure 5: Recommendations for post-examination artefact treatment and storage 18
Figure 6 International minimum standards for documenting archaeological collections 20
Figure 7: Research categories and participating specialists 2003-2012 26
Figure 8: Tell Ta'yinat 'object' triage process 47
Figure 9: Most to least 'useful' rating 49
Figure 10: ICOM/CIDOC Standards and Guidelines 56
Figure 11: On-site storage space projection 57
Figure 12: Elements of an archaeological collections management plan 68

Figure 1.1 Syrian Arab Republic governance structure 85
Figure 1.2 Organisational structure of Jebel Khalid in 2010 86
Figure 1.3 Breakdown of human resources, work hours and quantities excavated 87
Figure 1.4 Inventoried (registered) objects from Area A Trench 502 87
Figure 1.5 Organisational structure of Tell Ahmar in 2010 88
Figure 1.6 Breakdown of human resources, work hours and quantities excavated in 2010 89
Figure 1.7 Total hours worked to re-pack TAH archaeological collections 89
Figure 1.8 Turkish government central organisation 90
Figure 1.9 Turkish government provincial organization 91
Figure 1.10 Organisational structure of Çatalhöyük in 2010 92
Figure 1.11 Collecting strategy at Çatalhöyük 93
Figure 1.12 Overview of research categories and participating specialists from 2003 to 2012 94
Figure 1.13 Çatalhöyük artefact categories and crate quantities 95
Figure 1.14 Quantities of core artefact categories and percentage of collection 96
Figure 1.15 Çatalhöyük storage depot measurements and crate capacities 96
Figure 1.16 Estimation of capacity 96
Figure 1.17 Çatalhöyük storage depot cost 96
Figure 1.18 Organisational structure of Tell Ta'yinat in 2012 97
Figure 1.19 Tell Ta'yinat 'Triage' system 98
Figure 1.20 Policies, processes and procedures in the TAP Field Manual 99
Figure 1.21 Total storage expressed as crates 99
Figure 1.22 TAP annual crate accumulation 100
Figure 1.23 Tell Ta'yinat storage depot measurements and crate capacities 100
Figure 1.24 Estimation of capacity 100
Figure 1.25 Number of artefacts accessioned 2006 to 2011 100
Figure 1.26 Organisational structure of Antiochia ad Cragum in 2013 101
Figure 1.27 Antiochia ad Cragum artefact categories and quantities 102
Figure 1.28 Configuration of metal shelving units 103
Figure 1.29 Crate accumulations 2009 to 2012 104

Figure 2.1: Site types directed by survey participants. 105
Figure 2.2: Key groups and survey categories. 105
Figure 2.3: Countries in which archaeologists were working or had worked. 106
Figure 2.4: Duration of archaeological projects 106
Figure 2.5: Duration of project directorships. 106
Figure 2.6: Relationships of archaeological project stakeholders 106
Figure 2.7: Duration of funding for archaeological projects. 106
Figure 2.8: Specifications for objectives and resources are included in project designs. 106
Figure 2.9: Specifications for aims and costs are included in project designs. 107
Figure 2.10: Specifications for strategies and resources are included in project designs. 107
Figure 2.11: Specifications for assignations are included in project designs. 107
Figure 2.12: Specifications for archive recipients are included in project designs. 107
Figure 2.13: Annual updates of project designs are provided. 107
Figure 2.14: IT systems are used for pre-excavation management. 107
Figure 2.15: IT systems are used for on-site management. 108
Figure 2.16: IT systems are used for post-excavation management. 108
Figure 2.17: Types of programs and software used throughout project phases. 108
Figure 2.18: Specialists identify work needing to be carried out on-site. 108
Figure 2.19: Timetables and budgets allow for visits by conservators and specialists. 108
Figure 2.20: Projects arrange long-term care with museums in the planning stage. 108
Figure 2.21: Projects budget for long-term care of non-artefactual material. 108
Figure 2.22: Projects provide written training manuals for students and/or volunteers. 109
Figure 2.23: Archaeologists are in favour of keeping a collection in perpetuity. 109
Figure 2.24: Projects specify an artefact collecting policy. 109
Figure 2.25: Projects specify an artefact sampling policy. 109
Figure 2.26: Projects specify an artefact discard policy. 109
Figure 2.27: Projects specify a sampling strategy for redundant objects. 109
Figure 2.28: Archaeologists' rating of significance criteria in order of most to least useful. 109
Figure 2.29: Projects brief relevant consultants on data collection policies. 110
Figure 2.30: Projects explain on-site procedures to excavators. 110
Figure 2.31: Projects undertake individual training. 110
Figure 2.32: Projects have a system for detecting errors made during fieldwork. 110
Figure 2.33: Documents and records comprising the primary data archive. 110
Figure 2.34: Numbers of inventoried (registered) objects per season. 110
Figure 2.35: Percentage of inventoried objects accessioned by museums. 111
Figure 2.36: Approximate numbers of objects requiring conservation. 111
Figure 2.37: Written notification of conservation treatments is provided. 111
Figure 2.38: Written notification of further conservation work required is provided. 111
Figure 2.39: Approximate (kg) amount of excavated material each season. 111
Figure 2.40: Archaeological projects have storage facilities on-site or nearby. 111
Figure 2.41: Duration of adequacy and availability of storage space. 111
Figure 2.42: Total space (m3) occupied by artefacts and collections. 112
Figure 2.43: Archaeologists access archaeological collections for research. 112

Figure 2.44: Artefacts and collections are easily accessible. 112
Figure 2.45: Artefacts and collections are in good condition. 112
Figure 2.46: Artefacts and collections have an accompanying archive. 112
Figure 2.47: Countries in which conservators worked or had worked. 112
Figure 2.48: Conservators' rating of significance criteria in order of most to least useful. 113
Figure 2.49: Conservators give advice about conservation interventions performed..... 113
Figure 2.50: Conservators give advice for long-term care of objects/collections..... 113
Figure 2.51: Conservators are satisfied with on-site resources. 113
Figure 2.52: Conservators are trained in archaeological excavation techniques..... 113
Figure 2.53: Conservators believe archaeologists have a good understanding of conservation. 113
Figure 2.54: Countries in which curators worked or had worked..... 114
Figure 2.55: Curators' rating of significance criteria in order of most to least useful..... 114
Figure 2.56: Archaeological collections are held in museums/repositories. 114
Figure 2.57: Museums/repositories have written guidelines for packing artefacts and collections. 114
Figure 2.58: Museums/repositories specify expectations upon delivery of artefacts/collections..... 114
Figure 2.59: Museums/repositories request objects in a stabilised and/or conserved condition..... 114
Figure 2.60: Museums/repositories receive advice detailing conservation treatments needed. .. 115
Figure 2.61: Museums/repositories have a curation agreement. 115
Figure 2.62: Museums/repositories receive advice detailing long-term plans for collections. ... 115
Figure 2.63: Museums/repositories are involved in the excavation process..... 115
Figure 2.64: Museums/repositories specify ownership of artefacts/collections..... 115

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Their contributions to the study provided invaluable insight into current archaeological collections management practice in the Middle East.

Aims and Objectives

Artefacts Recovered from Archaeological Excavation and Fieldwork

One of the outcomes of conducting archaeological survey and/or excavation or other study is the recovery of large quantities of archaeological material each year from sites. In the Middle East recovered artefacts fall into several categories. An artefact could be somewhat unique or rarer compared to all others so that it is registered with a special catalogue number, and commonly called a 'special find.' It may have historic, aesthetic, scientific or social value and is considered to be a 'value' of the site from where it was recovered. In many countries very small quantities of unique or characteristically diagnostic objects are accessioned by museums with the remaining artefacts kept in storage depots at archaeological sites. Diagnostic artefacts such as vessel rims, pot handles or bone elements are another category which may provide archaeologists with statistical data for analyses. Bulk and non-diagnostic artefacts are other categories, for instance soil samples, which may provide pollen samples or other data suitable for archaeometric testing or scientific analyses. In many cases these are stored on-site. It is a legal requirement in some countries that at the end of each excavation season, a selection of registered artefacts is accessioned into a regional or national museum, while in other countries all registered artefacts are accessioned by museums or stored in governmental depots. As much legislation in many countries does not contain specifics for how on-site archaeological collections should be managed in the short and long-term a need exists for sustainable means for preserving and caring for artefacts which are either put into storage or discarded.

Records and Documents

In addition to recovering quantities of physical artefacts another outcome of archaeological fieldwork is the production of records and documents which constitute a primary project archive. According to archaeologists who work or have worked in the Middle East, their project archive consists of paper and/or digital context records; maps, plans, sections; photographic records; datasets for artefacts and samples; finds records, registers, catalogues, inventories; field notebooks and diaries; computer discs and print-outs; survey and GIS (Global Information System) records; and conservation, sample, skeleton and x-ray records. Hence artefacts, or material remains that are excavated or removed during a survey, excavation or other study of a prehistoric or historic resource, and the associated records that are prepared or assembled in connection with the survey, excavation or other study represent 'archaeological collections'. Managing and caring for archaeological collections with concern for their long-term physical well-being and safety is a specific activity known as 'archaeological collections management

practice.' On-site archaeological collections management practice is governed by site policies and procedures. Conveying the site policy and conducting the archaeological collections management procedures is in many cases performed by a site registrar or conservator. Documenting the organisational and operational activities which includes issues of conservation, access and use and inventory may be carried out by a site registrar or collections management team.[1]

Instigating long-term measures for care and preservation of on-site archaeological collections is not a traditional practice amongst all archaeological project directors. Consequently, vast amounts of archaeological material stored at sites in the Middle East are now at risk of deterioration and destruction. Increasingly, regional governments and international cultural heritage bodies are seeking ways to better mitigate risks that threaten archaeological sites and thus the collections stored there. Therefore, the aim of this monograph entitled, *Managing Archaeological Collections in Middle Eastern Countries: A Good Practice Guide* is to propose sustainable measures that seek to assist invested stakeholders in managing artefact collections. The greatest area of concern for archaeological project directors, conservators and curators is the lack of formal policies for managing archaeological collections (Appendix 1 Field study: Syria and Turkey; Appendix 2 Survey: Archaeologists, Conservators and Curators).[2] Hence this *Good Practice Guide* is intended to assist:

- Governmental bodies which permit international archaeological projects to conduct survey or excavation projects (see recommendation 63).
- Institutional and private funding bodies that grant monies for conducting archaeological research and fieldwork (see recommendation 64).
- Archaeological project directors who conduct archaeological surveys, or excavations or other studies in the Middle East (see recommendation 64).

[1] US National Park Service 2015. Glossary Website: http://.nps.gov/archeology/collections/glossary.htm (10/09/2015).

[2] Fitzpatrick 2015. *Collections at Risk: An examination of archaeological collections management practice in the Near East.* PhD diss., University of Melbourne. The doctoral research was conducted at the Classics and Archaeology Program at the University of Melbourne 2009-2015. The study involved a literature review of cultural heritage legislation and models for managing archaeological collections, a survey of archaeologists, conservators and curators and field study at archaeological sites in Syria and Turkey 2010-2013. The case studies were Jebel Khalid, Syria, a Hellenistic site (University of Melbourne; Australian National University); Tell Ahmar, Syria, a Neo-Assyrian site (Liege University); Çatalhöyük, Turkey, a Neolithic site (Stanford University); Tell Ta'yinat, Turkey, a Bronze Age/Iron Age site (University of Toronto); and Antiochia ad Cragum, Turkey, a Roman site (University of Nebraska-Lincoln). The author wishes to thank the project directors for their permission to conduct this study and to the collections management staff for their help during the field seasons. The survey involved archaeologists, conservators and curators who currently work or had worked in Afghanistan, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Sicily, Syria, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.