

Report on the South Caucasus Archaeological Research Forum (SCARF)

Ertegun House, University of Oxford, 29th February 2020

On the 29th February we were pleased to host the first South Caucasus Archaeological Research Forum (SCARF), bringing together scholars working on diverse themes of the pre-modern Caucasus region. We were particularly honoured to invite six early career academics from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to present papers on aspects of their research alongside international academics studying this region. A total of twelve papers spanned the fourth millennium BCE to heritage management issues in the present day, from aspects of metalworking and wine production, to landscape survey and settlement patterns. Edmund Herzig, director of Ertegun House, opened the day with a welcome and some details on the Mica and Ahmet Ertegun Graduate Scholarship Programme in the Humanities, which was a particularly fitting host institution for this event with a directly international and interdisciplinary focus.

The papers in each of the four panels of the day were roughly grouped by topic but were more marked by their diversity, showcasing the range of research and different archaeological techniques currently being applied in the region. A few consistent themes emerged, first and foremost the desire by many scholars to have comprehensive heritage databases, but which have the capacity incorporate the nuances of the existing archaeological documentation and can be used for heritage management (for example as presented by Giorgi Khaburzania from The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia). Secondly, there were a number of papers looking to reconstruct technological and production practices in greater detail, particularly for Bronze and Iron Age cultures in the region. The impression given is that this is the area of greatest recent growth, particularly through partnerships with European Universities who are piloting innovative techniques for material analysis of samples from the region. Finally, several talks touched on the need for diachronic assessments of archaeological remains, particularly where the scale of enquiry involves whole landscapes. Again, the solution proposed for this issue came back to the need for greater collaboration and exchange of specialist knowledge across different periods, something which is happily occurring frequently in the region, but rarely across political boundaries.

The elephant in the room, so to speak, was how to take forward the ideas and appeals presented in the papers, in order to facilitate research across the region. A substantial amount of time was set aside at the end of the day to discuss next steps and what might be useful tools to develop for all of us working in this area. There was ubiquitous agreement that SCARF provided a useful forum for scholars to gather together and its location in the UK provided a platform to showcase ongoing work on the Caucasus to academics and students unfamiliar with this area and generate greater interest. With this in mind, a second SCARF has been provisionally planned for 2021, to be held at Durham University. Likewise, there was a consensus that a regional network would be beneficial for all, and that the starting point for this should be those who came together for this workshop. One of the core aspects of this network will be an online digital bibliography where members can share their individual bibliographies for works their own languages and specialisms to contribute to a comprehensive database of archaeological works. An already emerging separate initiative was presented in detail in a paper by Ashleigh Haruda, who along with her colleagues has

established a network for women working in archaeology of the post-Soviet region (broadly construed), entitled *Steppe Sisters* (<https://twitter.com/SteppeSistersNt>). Her presentation outlined some of the current achievements of that network and what it can offer to women scholars in terms of their research and career development, which was enthusiastically supported by the attendees of the workshop.

Overall, it is hoped that thanks to the initial financial support of the Oxford Nizami Ganjavi Centre (ONGC) for this meeting, SCARF will become a regular fixture for early career archaeologists in the region and an active network to facilitate research across the South Caucasus. In addition to the generous funding from the Oxford Nizami Ganjavi Centre, SCARF was also supported by the Friends of Academic Research in Georgia (FARiG) and the American Research Institute of the South Caucasus (ARISC). Thanks are also due to the Mica and Ahmet Ertegun Graduate Scholarship Programme in the Humanities for hosting the event at Ertegun House.