

Report on the Training Workshops Provided by ifpo Erbil for AUIS Students

By [Tobin Hartnell](#), Assistant Professor at American University of Iraq, Sulaimani

Background

In March, [ifpo Erbil](#) and The American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS) both expressed intentions to support each other's work and explore the possibility of signing a Memorandum of Understanding together. As a sign of good will, each side committed to supporting the other in April and May, when the outlines of this agreement were still being worked out. Dr. Tobin Hartnell requested accommodation for the French Archaeological Survey Mission to Sulaimani, a project headed by [Dr. Jessica Giraud](#), research fellow and resident archaeologist at ifpo Erbil. In return, Jessica Giraud and [Cécile Verdellet](#) (ifpo) promised to deliver three training workshops to the students as a trial of a potential field training school in archaeological survey. The workshops were held on three successive Saturdays starting on May 2, 2015.

Archaeological Workshop on Principles of Landscape Archaeology

Led by [Dr. Jessica Giraud](#) (ifpo Erbil)

May 2nd, 2015

In the morning session, Dr. Giraud explained in great detail the theoretical concepts behind landscape archaeology. Students learnt about the social production of landscapes, as each culture collectively creates the environmental landscape it prefers. As such, landscapes function as long-term reflections of the social and economic ideas current in any given society. Landscape management strategies tend to survive for centuries, providing a window on long-term social change invisible to a study of short-term historical events. As such, landscape archaeology can provide a great complement to historical research.

Over the lunch break, students learned about geographic co-ordinate systems, how they are used and what they are used for. Students were then challenged to find the geographic location of sites in

modern Paris using the modern metric UTM co-ordinate system that is common to almost all computer-based geographic studies.

After lunch, students then learned how to synchronize a Garmin handheld GPS unit to the relevant GPS satellites, record points, and identify their points on the map. They were then tasked with using only the handheld GPS to detect a point on campus; this exercise proved challenging to some students who mixed up North and East as they were not used to seeing direction expressed in metric units.

On reflection, this exercise was both challenging and instructive. Dr. Giraud made a very precise and detailed instruction concerning how a professional will investigate both the environmental and social dimensions of past societies. Many students at AUIS do not commonly use maps in their daily lives but all attendees are now more familiar with how maps are produced and how co-ordinate systems work.

Archaeological Workshop on Studying Ceramics

Led by [Cécile Verdellet](#) (ifpo Erbil)

May 9th, 2015

Cécile Verdellet hosted an all-day workshop on pottery analysis. In the morning session, students learned about how pottery is produced. In particular, they were introduced to the concept of *chaîne opératoire*, which describes the steps that a producer takes in order to create their artworks. The students learned about the special properties of clay that make it one of the most valuable artistic mediums of the pre-modern world. They learned how specialists would collect clay, shape vessels, fire vessels, and what ancient residents would use these vessels for.

One of the key insights is that archaeologists don't collect pottery at random; instead they select particular pieces of pottery based on its ability to provide information about the past. For example, the different shapes of rims for pottery vessels are often sensitive to fashion or style, whereas the body of the vessel is more often related to function. They learned about the difficulty of firing clay and how to identify a well-fired versus poorly fired pot. Finally they learned about the relationship of design to human communities in the past.

Overall, Verdellet's workshop provided an in-depth overview of how archaeologists look at pottery. In order to use the knowledge they gained, students should spend more time (up to a week) learning to draw and describe pottery in detail.

Archaeological Field Trip to Ranya Plain to study Landscape Archaeology

Led by Dr. Jessica Giraud (ifpo Erbil)

May 16th, 2015

In this final workshop, students went to the field with Dr. Giraud to see how an archaeologist sees and documents the landscape.

At the first stage, students went to the western edge of Ranya Plain where they could see Dukkan Dam, the plain, the mountains, and some archaeological sites. Since many students are unfamiliar with the nature of archaeological remains, Giraud first asked to identify ancient places that they could see. After a few minutes, students could identify 4 tell sites, ancient mounds with long-term occupations.

In the second stage, Giraud took the students to the largest tell site in the Ranya Plain. Here she explained to students how an archaeologist must study these sites in order to map the historical places of the region. Students soon realized how important diagnostic pottery is to archaeological fieldwork. However, because it was late spring and the grass and weeds had grown, students at first had trouble finding suitable ceramics. Giraud advised some students to collect from the eroding walls of the tell and soon we had a small collection ready for review. After Giraud explained how an archaeologist would use these ceramics in practice, we returned the artifacts to the site and left to our next stop.

In the third stage, Giraud showed the students the floor of an important Neo-Assyrian cliff-top structure. Unfortunately, the structure itself had eroded, leaving behind only the traces of ancient post-holes. However, students could observe traces of ancient structures still visible in the landscape, in particular, traces of modern and older terrace structures. The original site was much larger than what we saw, and Giraud took us to the ancient Neo-Assyrian graveyard. Few students ventured up to the graves because it is currently being used as an animal pen and the smell was overwhelming.

The final site was a large, flat site located geographically in Ranya Plain but controlled the pass between Ranya and Peshdar. This site was significant mainly because it differed dramatically from the tell sites by having almost no associated mounding. However, ancient structures in the form of ancient walls could be traced by the discoloration of the landscape caused by different vegetation growing on the wall as compared to that growing beside the wall. Giraud showed the students how these type of discolorations show up on the old B&W CORONA photographs.

Overall, this workshop was arguably the best. Dr. Giraud was a very good guide and the site she chose systematically dealt with different issues of landscape archaeology to provide a very good introduction of archaeological survey for our students. I would recommend repeating this style of workshop with every incoming archaeology class.

Summary

The French workshops show the need for professional training of AUIS students and local museum staff. Unfortunately because of space limitations, not all students could take all workshops. I recommend exploring the possibility of creating a more systematic training program with ifpo Erbil as a good foundation for archaeological fieldwork. Ideally, such an initiative should occur in the winter term, when this training program would have the full attention of our students.

Thank you to everyone who supported these initiatives.

See [photos of the workshop](#) here.