ITP 2018 Final Report

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I had the chance to be selected for this year’s British Museum International Training Programme and while I certainly had high expectations, I have to point out that my stay in the British Museum and in the TWAM (Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums) surpassed my most optimistic hopes. Quite naturally, as a professional archaeologist and museum curator, being given the opportunity for training in one of the world’s most prestigious museums as well as one of the leading institutions in archaeological research would be in any case a dream that has come true. I was aware that the programme is meant to show us all the different aspects of museum’s everyday work and I was looking forward to seeing both the similarities and the differences, as well as to learn practices which could be applied in my own institution. My plan was to learn as much as possible and I knew that the British Museum must be the right place for my professional development. What I could not foretell is the kindness, friendliness and openness displayed by the staff of the BM and the TWAM.

Hadrian’s Wall with Jackie Bland, Bill Griffiths and Mao Lei

I have been working in a museum for 19 years, I started as an intern in 1999 and I am now Head of the Greek and Roman Department as well as the Deputy Director in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. Thus, I am well aware how busy a museum employee can be, especially when you are also a researcher. Therefore, I really would not have minded if colleagues from the British Museum had less time for us. Well, I was totally wrong. I could easily see how busy they are but they nonetheless displayed such a courteous patience and
devoted a lot of effort to make us feel welcome. They answered all our questions, discussed any issue we might have raised, showed us whatever we wanted to see, while being well mannered hosts and perfect professionals.

All of the ITP fellows were deeply impressed with the warm personal contact we established with British Museum employees. The ITP programme is however not only about becoming friends with colleagues in the BM. We were also given a thorough overview of British Museum activities in basically every aspect of museum work through lectures and workshops. This was also impressive, besides being very instructive. Not a single lecturer seemed out of place or uneasy, I really enjoyed all the presentations. Obviously, I did not share the same level of interest for every lecture. All of us are specialised in a certain field and nobody expects that a group of ITP fellows composed of curators, documentalists, educators and conservators, most of them with different backgrounds ranging from art history and archaeology to natural sciences, may be equally interested in every subject. Nonetheless, the quality of the lecturers was such that I could also enjoy lectures about topics that I am not usually dealing with in my everyday work. As a matter of fact, some lectures even raised my interest for subjects and aspects of museum work I never really cared much about previously.
I enjoyed long discussions with my fellow archaeologists from the Greece and Rome, the Ancient Egypt and Sudan as well as Middle East Departments but also with colleagues from the Conservation and Scientific Research Department, illustrators from the Greece and Rome and Ancient Egypt and Soudan departments as well as the photographers.

The library of the Greece and Rome Department with Rosario Rovira Guardiola and Mustafa Okan Cinemre

It was an enriching experience, even more so since we work in the same field and share common interests but I was also deeply impressed by the courses about management, archives, collections care, loans, security, audiences and fundraising.

Learning more about the Portable Antiquity Scheme, of which I only had vague ideas, was tremendously useful since we face more and more issues with metal detector users in my country and we are still far from reaching a consensus how to deal with that pressing matter. Fundraising is another issue we are far from dealing with efficiently in Croatia as we still try to depend as much as possible on tax payers’ money. We are nonetheless well aware that public funding is less and less available for cultural heritage preservation as well as archaeological research. This is an unfortunate fact but we cannot just hope and wait for
funding to increase again. Thus, putting into practice certain ideas and suggestions I was given at the British Museum would be a good start. I’ve already had a meeting with our PR and marketing staff about this and I hope we might implement some ideas quite soon. I also had discussions with my colleagues in the Zagreb Archaeological Museum about some novelties we might implement in the education and outreach practice, also following suggestions I was given in the British Museum.

While I learned a lot during the ITP programme, it is not something I consider over and done. I made great contacts, both with colleagues in the British Museum and Newcastle as well as with colleagues from all over the world. I strongly believe that taking part in the ITP provides opportunities for future work, for cultural exchanges and scientific research. For instance, informal discussions about exhibition exchanges have already started while we were all in London and e-mails are still being exchanged, certain ideas are slowly but steadily taking shape and I certainly hope that some interesting projects might be realised in the forthcoming years. I travelled extensively and took part in different training and professional education programs in several European countries. While I certainly enjoyed those programmes and
found them very useful, the ITP is definitely a level above anything I have experienced before. This is both due to the fact that the programme puts together people from many different countries – which is in itself an enriching and enjoyable experience – and to the high professionalism of the British Museum staff.

Undoubtedly, the British Museum has one of the richest and most impressive collections in the world, but what defines the quality and proficiency of a museum is its staff.

And the British Museum certainly has a staff just as impressive as its collections.

I would definitely like to praise all the colleagues I met in the British Museum but this report cannot be that long. Thus, I will only point out how much I am indebted to the ITP team, i.e. to Claire Messenger, Rebecca Horton and Jessica Juckes as well as to Ross Thomas and Ian Jenkins from the Department of Greece and Rome. Being a competent professional is one thing but being also a kind and warm human being is far more. They made my stay in the British Museum a wonderful experience and I will never forget it.