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Figure 1: Consolidation of Late Bronze Age copper ingot prior to lifting from the Uluburun shipwreck. Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Bodrum, Turkey.

Credit: © Institute of Nautical Archaeology / Sualtı Arkeoloji Enstitüsü

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The intention of this Field Note is to describe the state of conservation in Turkey and offer guidelines that archaeological conservators may follow to achieve the best results during the field season and while working in museums. It is important for foreign conservators to realize that there is both a fundamental need for more conservation professionals in Turkey and a better understanding of the services that conservators provide.

With the exceptions of the Bodrum Museum of Underwater Archaeology, the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, and the Anatolian Civilizations Museum in Ankara, most Turkish museums have neither conservation laboratories nor workshops to perform even basic treatments. As recommended by the Ministry of Culture, the only authorized institution for the conservation of museum collections other than those of the already mentioned state museums above, is the Central Conservation-Restoration Laboratory in Istanbul. Despite current academic efforts and developments in the field (see Field Note Number 7, Educational Opportunities for Turkish Conservators), there is a lack of positions for conservation professionals in the state museums. The Ministry of Culture has yet to develop a definition for the positions of professional conservator, conservation scientist, and conservation technician in Turkey.

Many of these problems are the result of a directive issued in 1983 by the General Directorate of Monuments and Museums that is sorely in need of revision to include better descriptions and job qualifications for museum specialists and conservators. Article 4 of the directive states that objects in storage will be preserved properly and storage areas will be arranged to enable scientific research; however, the directive does not specify that this responsibility should be given to qualified professionals.

According to the definitions made in Article 10, the "museum specialist" is in charge of collecting, excavating, classifying, and certifying objects, as well as making inventories and catalogues. The description of his or her duties further includes the repair of exhibits, arrangement of storage areas, and preservation and mechanical cleaning of museum objects. As stated in Article 10 g, the museum specialist will observe the condition of the museum objects and report those that need treatment in the laboratory, in addition to the responsibility for the maintenance and preservation of museum objects. Museum specialists are appointed from the graduates of programs of archaeology, prehistory, art, history, ethnology, anthropology, history, classical eastern languages, epigraphy, and museum studies. However, the curriculum of none of these programs includes active and/or passive conservation techniques for museum objects. Therefore, most museum specialists charged with the control, maintenance, preservation, and even mechanical cleaning of the collections are not qualified for such activities. The need for more trained Turkish conservation professionals is vital.

Due to these problems, foreign conservators working on archaeological excavations in Turkey could benefit from the following recommendations.
1. The conservation treatments you apply to an object during excavation are probably all it will ever receive; plan your treatments accordingly.

2. The staff of the local museum is likely to have very limited knowledge about preventive conservation methods. Establish good communication with the director and other museum staff members to inform them about the necessity and means of long-term preservation and maintenance.

3. Submit a copy of your treatment records to the local museum, including lists of treated and untreated objects, their current condition, and suggestions for their future preservation, to indicate how much you care about the objects. This will also help you share the responsibility of object conservation both before and after treatment.

4. Assist museum staff in improving the conditions in storage and display areas. Remember that objects from your site will be stored and displayed with other objects, and you cannot separate your objects from the rest of the museum’s collection. Better storage and display conditions for your objects can be obtained only with an overall improvement in the storage system.

5. If your local museum receives objects from other excavations as well, always try to cooperate with your colleagues from other sites to arrange applicable and practical solutions for better preservation of your objects while you are away.

6. Provide basic instruments to measure, control, and maintain humidity and temperature levels in storage and exhibition areas. It is especially useful to ask for the assistance of...
the museum staff in keeping records of daily or monthly variations of temperature and relative humidity inside the museum during the course of a year. Records of seasonal changes in climate, as well as the density and content of air pollution, will also provide a useful database, since most museums have outdoor exhibits of some stone sculptures and architectural items in their museum gardens (examples include museums in Izmir, Istanbul, Ankara, Fethiye, Bursa, and Manisa).

7. If there are object depots on site, always remember that they will be locked and sealed at the end of the excavation campaign, which makes it impossible to monitor or control the indoor environment. Proper packaging of objects, as well as effective protection within the depot building from leaking windows, roofs, and plumbing, will be vital for long-term preservation of your objects.

8. Whether your finds are stored on site or in the local museums, always plan enough time to check the current condition of objects from previous excavation seasons.

9. If the local museum requires your supervision for the training of a staff member as a conservator, remember that standard treatment recipes without proper background in materials science may become destructive interventions. Therefore, it will be more useful to limit the information provided to preventive conservation methods and their application to unstable and vulnerable objects, such as metals.

1. Müzeleader İştirak Yönetime, 1990. Copies of the Turkish directive may be obtained from the General Directorate of the Museums and Monuments in Ankara, as well as the National Library and A.U. Başkent Meslek Yüksekokulu.

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Field Notes is a series of essays written by professional conservators and archaeologists. They are intended for archaeologists, conservators and students as resource guides for the stabilization and preservation of excavated materials and archaeological sites.

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