

Bardha‘a, Azerbaijan, a colloquium on the archaeology of the medieval city

27th – 28th February, 2020

To celebrate four years of investigations by the Archaeological Exploration of Bærdæ project (AEB), international specialists on the medieval archaeology of the region gathered together to present and discuss some of the key findings of the initiative so far. The event was organised at Ertegun House, the home of the Mica and Ahmet Ertegun Graduate Scholarship Programme in the Humanities, kindly hosted by the director of the Programme, and Chairman of the Board of the Oxford Nizami Ganjavi Centre, Prof. Edmund Herzig.

The colloquium was opened with a keynote lecture, delivered by Prof. Scott Redford (School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS], University of London), presenting “The medieval (11th-13th c.) Southern Caucasus in Context”. In his paper, Prof. Redford outlined some of the core issues of material culture and architecture in the world of Anatolia and the Caucasus, scrutinising the apparent “movement” of styles from east to west in the 11th-13th centuries, at the time Seljuq dominance in the region. This included case studies on the trade in ceramics, juxtaposed with local production, and a survey of comparative styles and changes in civic architecture, including monumental walls which were constructed at this time. The paper set the scene for the issues of urban life in Bardha‘a which would be discussed the following day, for which our richest corpus of archaeological material relates to this period.

The second day of the colloquium began with a welcome by the Head of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Prof. Ulrike Roesler, and by Prof. Nargiz Pashayeva, Rector of the Baku Branch of Moscow State University. The remaining papers of the day covered a broad range of topics, from Prof. Herzig’s discussion of the medieval historiography of Azerbaijan to the collections of previous excavations in Bærdæ housed in the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (Milli Azərbaycan Tarixi Muzeyi), presented by Dr. Aslan Qasimov. Eight of the ten papers of the day were presented by current team members of the AEB across their specialisations, drawing on the discoveries of the recent project to reconstruct the diet of the city’s inhabitants, the production of artefacts in around the urban centre, and a new history of the medieval landscape of Bardha‘a, as it changed from the tenth century onwards. Among the papers, a particular privilege was to be able to host the director of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Prof. Naila Valikhanli, to discuss the context of Azerbaijan’s recent interest in the topic of the Caucasus in the 10th-13th centuries.

Broader discussion of the results and the ongoing work of the AEB punctuated the whole day, and we were fortunate enough to have in attendance a number of Oxford and UK-based scholars with specialisms in the region and period. The colloquium paves the way for the forthcoming volume *Urban life at the edge of the Islamic World: Bardha‘a and the medieval province of Arran*, which presents the new archaeological results from the medieval city of Bardha‘a, to be published with Brepols Publishing.

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