



Emerging
Conservation
Professionals
Network

Each month, ECPN is proud to introduce one of our amazing Specialty Group Liaisons. Specialty Group Liaisons are volunteers who serve as an intermediary between emerging conservation professionals who are interested in or part of the specialty group they represent. To learn more about ECPN liaisons, contact the ECPN Outreach Officers at ecpn.aic.outreach@gmail.com or visit ECPN's website.

For our May 2020 Liaison Highlight we welcome the new Archaeological Discussion Group (ADG) Liaison, Lauren Conway.

Lauren is a M.A. student with the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program, focusing on the conservation of archaeological and ethnographic materials. She also holds a BA in Anthropology from Barnard College, Columbia University. Prior to her appointment as a student with the UCLA/Getty program, Lauren has completed conservation internships at the New-York Historical Society, American Museum of Natural History, and Julia Ream Conservation. She has also participated in archaeological field work at the Gorge Project in New Mexico, Conservation and Restoration Field School in Bulgaria and Macedonia, as well as at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, Italy.



Photo: Lauren Conway Cleaning Greek pottery sherds from the site of Apollonia Pontica in Bulgaria.

1. Of all the specializations, why did you decide to pursue the conservation of archaeological materials?

I've always had an interest in history and science, so I studied archaeology in undergrad as a way of combining these topics. After discovering the field of conservation, I got experience working with a variety of materials including books, paper, paintings, and objects, but I found that I kept gravitating towards archaeological materials. This specialization is extremely important because archaeological materials, especially organic or painted artifacts, are very fragile and can deteriorate rapidly after excavation. Archaeological conservators are necessary to ensure the long-term preservation of artifacts so they can be studied and appreciated by future generations. Although the job postings for archaeological conservators are more limited than other specializations, there is a great variety of

different environments to work in – from museums to private practice to archaeological sites, or even a combination of these!

2. Are there any particular skills that you feel are important or unique to your discipline?

I'd say archaeological conservators need to be very flexible and resourceful with their treatments. When you're working in a field lab on an excavation, you will likely have limited supplies and it may be difficult to get exactly what you're looking for, especially if you're in a remote location, so you have to improvise and make do with what is available at the site. Also, collaboration and communication are important to any specialization, but I want to emphasize their importance for archaeological conservators because they often work very closely with archaeologists in addition to curators and other heritage professionals. It's important that you can clearly and effectively advocate for conservation at archaeological sites and describe the expected outcomes of treatments.

3. What has been your favorite treatment within your specialty?

My favorite treatment was actually my first experience with conservation, at the site of Hadrian's Villa in Italy. I was working on an excavation at the site and was able to assist in the conservation of wall paintings we had just uncovered. These wall paintings depicted beautiful floral motifs, and in some areas there was even Roman-era graffiti incised into the plaster! Treatment was urgently needed because the plaster holding the paintings to the walls was starting to dry out and delaminate after being excavated. I assisted in facing the wall paintings with gauze and Paraloid B72, and it was very rewarding to know that this treatment was saving the wall paintings so they could be preserved in situ, thus allowing them to be studied in the future with better context.

4. Do you have any advice for someone interested in specializing in your discipline?

I think it's important to get experience with as many aspects of the excavation process as possible - from digging to pottery washing to analyzing finds in the lab. When you're working on site as a conservator, it will be beneficial to understand the entire excavation process and what is happening with the finds during each step. Having this background knowledge will also help you communicate with archaeologists since you'll have more insight into their perspective and priorities, as well as use of a common vocabulary.

It can be difficult to find posted opportunities for archaeological conservation, so I would suggest finding some excavations that are of interest and contacting the site directors to see if there will be a conservation aspect to their project. The Archaeological Institute of America maintains a database on their website called the Archaeological Fieldwork Opportunities Bulletin– it's a great place to search for digs in the U.S. and around the world! Another possibility is to contact archaeology labs at local universities and see if they need any assistance. Once you start making solid connections in the field, someone may be able to offer you an opportunity!