

World Archaeological Congress 7

The World Archaeological Congress (WAC) is an international organization for practicing archaeologists consisting of elected representatives. It is the only such organization in existence. WAC, founded in 1986, encourages open dialogue among all people concerned about the past, including scholars from under-represented parts of the world, First Nations people, and descendent communities whose pasts are told by archaeologists.

One of WAC's most important functions is its quadrennial international congress in which new archaeological research, policy, and practice are introduced and discussed. Cultural Heritage and questions relating to indigenous peoples and the ownership of the past generally dominate the discussion. Previous WAC Congresses have been held in the United States, South Africa, India, Venezuela, and Ireland.

The WAC 7 conference was held in the Dead Sea, Jordan, January 13-18, 2013. This massive conference brought together over 1000 people from 70 different countries. Held in the King Hussein convention center, WAC seven was sponsored by His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn al Hussein, and featured an opening address by His Royal Highness Prince Al Hassan Bin Talal. The conference also featured keynote addresses by Lynn Meskell, Gustavo Politis, Kristian Kristiansen, H. Martin Wobst, Eduardo Góes Neves, and Hisham Khatib. Filled with interesting and relevant sessions and talks, the congress was in session Monday-Tuesday and Thursday-Friday with both Wednesday and the following weekend reserved for excursions and tours. Touring locations included, Petra, Jerash, Ajlun Castle, and Wadi Rum among others. These tours were exceptional in that they not only included the visit to the sites, but a tour by the site's excavator as well. This provided an opportunity for an in-depth experience not otherwise available.

WAC 7 also introduced a Student Ethics Debate (inspired by the SAA's). Dozens of graduate students from across the world volunteered to participate in the debate. The students gathered in Madaba, Jordan over the weekend before the congress, where they were divided into teams of around 5-7 people each. Each team was itself an international affair and it was rare for a team to have more than two people from the same country. The teams were all given a number of case studies to study from which the debate questions were drawn. This debate, while suffering mildly from standard first-time hitches, was an amazing experience overall. The international quality of the teams ensured a variety of opinions as students from different cultures and backgrounds tried to reach a consensus on important archaeological ethical conundrums. The close interaction with both teammates and opponents allowed for the development of many friendships as well as professional contacts, and was the highlight of the conference from a graduate student's perspective.

WAC 7 also has two sources of funding to aid attendance. Grants are available through both the WAC travel funding committee, and through the Peter Ucko Archaeological Trust. These grants are available to professionals from low and middle-income countries as well as indigenous groups and students from all countries. This support ranges from conference registration fees, to accommodations, and in some cases, airfare support is included. WAC travel grants are only available to WAC members.

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