Training, Partnerships, and New Methodologies for Protecting Libya's Cultural Heritage

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Training, Partnerships, and New Methodologies for Protecting Libya's Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

The article reports on two initiatives aimed at helping Libyan heritage professionals better protect Libya's cultural heritage in a time of massively increased threats. The Libyan Antiquities at Risk Project (LAaR) involves the illicit trade in portable heritage. It has focused on the development of a database of distinctively Libyan cultural artefacts, so that the provenance of similar items which appear on the antiquities market can be identified as Libyan. The project has also attempted to foster networks and discussion among a range of stakeholders, including police engaged in investigating illicit trade, customs agencies, museum professionals, antiquities dealers, academics, and Libyan archaeologists. The Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa Project (EAMENA) has a different main focus, relating to the mapping, recording and monitoring of archaeological sites across multiple MENA countries, including Libya. It is hoped that the tools for remote mapping and interpretation will prove useful in capacity building in Libya's antiquities service and that the database structure that we have developed can be of use to Libya in developing the next stage of a national record of heritage assets and in monitoring threats and damage.

Introduction: the LAaR and EAMENA Projects

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, Libya's cultural heritage has been under increased threat of destruction and looting. Damage to Libyan heritage already occurred before the revolution, but it is the aftermath of civil war which presents the most serious menace to the archaeology of Libya. Political instability led to a lack of official governance and legislation in the country; for instance, private housing developments are growing in an uncontrolled manner and on an alarming scale as a reaction to Gaddafi's restrictive policies.[1] The urgency of protecting Libyan cultural heritage is highlighted by the numerous actions undertaken by international agencies. During the civil war, no-strike lists were compiled by experts for NATO to try and avert the sort of damage to key heritage assets that had occurred in the US invasion of Iraq. Afterwards, inspection tours of Libya's World Heritage Sites and major museums were organized by the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield, revealing that damage had indeed been minimized.[2] ICOM also put together a Red List for the country in 2015.[3]

A number of projects have focused on capacity building,[4] training programmes, and on developing tools to protect sites and monuments in Libya and across the Middle East and North Africa. "Libyan Antiquities at Risk (LAaR)" and "Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa

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[1] FITZGERALD-MEGERISI 2015.
[2] KILA 2013, pp. 24-27.
[3] http://icom.museum/resources/red-lists-database/red-list/libya/.
[4] See, for instance KANE 2015; NEBBIA et al. 2016.

(EAMENA)" are two such projects that have as their goal the enhanced protection of cultural heritage in the MENA region.[5] This article highlights the collaborative work, the series of events, and the training organized by LAaR and EAMENA on the subject of Libya's cultural heritage in 2016.

LAaR was established in 2015 because of a sharp increase in looting and trafficking of Libyan portable antiquities. The first objective was to develop a reference database and website recording artefacts that are recognizably Libyan in appearance (web-link here). LAaR is primarily aimed at customs officials, international agencies, museum curators, researchers working for professional art dealers, police officers, and the cultural heritage sector in Libya. The majority of the photographic documentation used for the LAaR database has been sourced so far from the archive of the Society for Libyan Studies and from the personal collections of Libyan colleagues.[6]

EAMENA (www.eamena.org) was also established in 2015 to develop tools for remote mapping and monitoring of damage, and to provide a database that records and disseminates information about archaeological sites of all periods across the MENA region. The database is mainly designed for people responsible for cultural heritage protection and preservation in each of the countries involved.[7] This project uses an interdisciplinary methodology to identify and record disturbances and threats affecting sites, such as remote sensing and image interpretation, and the incorporation of field survey, aerial photography, and data from published and unpublished material.[8]

Building international networks and engaging with the public

Networking and the exchange of information with specialists and the public alike have been two top priorities shaping the direction of our work from the very beginning (Fig. 1). A key element of LAaR's first phase was the organization of the international workshop "*Libyan Antiquities at Risk*" at the British Academy, London, in March 2016. In the morning we ran a round-table discussion with academics, cultural heritage operators (British Museum, UNESCO, ICOM, and the Art Loss Register), professional antiquities dealers, and officers of the Metropolitan Police. The aim was to highlight the existing issues of illicit trafficking of antiquities, with a particular focus on Libyan artefacts. This dialogue was crucial for us to understand the need for better communication and co-ordination among all the stakeholders who participate in cultural protection initiatives, and to discuss the nature and growing scale of the illicit trade of antiquities worldwide.

The afternoon session featured a series of presentations from academics from the UK, USA, Europe and Libya, including representatives of the EAMENA team, all of them being involved in a range of research and training programmes for monitoring and preserving Libyan archaeological heritage. The proceedings of this workshop are published as a thematic issue of the journal *Libyan Studies* (48, 2017). The principal outcome of this event was the better understanding of the main threats to Libyan heritage in the post-revolution period, which has enabled us to develop ideas on how to combat these problems. The unstable political climate of the country, the lack of governance, the unawareness of most local people about the importance of their own heritage, and the widespread

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[5] For details of the funding and staff associated with these two projects, see 'acknowledgements' below.
[6] MUGNAI *et al*. 2017.
[7] BEWLEY *et al*. 2016.
[8] BEWLEY *et al*. 2016; RAYNE-SHELDRICK-NIKOLAUS 2017.

diffusion of unregulated building activities and agricultural developments have become extremely alarming. While archaeological sites deep in the hinterland of Libya are particularly affected, World Heritage Sites such as Cyrene are also facing unprecedented risks which are causing a sharp rise of destruction and looting of ancient monuments.[9]

[Fig. 1]

In addition to the exchange of information with academics and experts, the general public also plays an important role in culture-related projects. For this reason we organized an event at the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery in Leicester, entitled "*Antiquities at Risk: North Africa and the Middle East*" (May 2016), which was mainly targeted at the Libyan community of Leicester and other groups of migrants and refugees from Middle Eastern countries. We succeeded in bringing together people with very diverse backgrounds and differing levels of engagement with their own heritage, who all had the opportunity to offer their views during an open debate on perception of local cultural heritage. This was illuminating for understanding how the archaeological heritage of Libya and other areas of the MENA zone is still not valued, or is misunderstood, by the majority of local people, with particular regard to pre-Islamic monuments and antiquities. The pre-Islamic heritage is often considered a legacy of (ancient and modern) western colonizing powers, the only value ascribed to it being financial in terms of tourism – though with the current suspension of tourism even that argument lacks purchase. This lack of attachment, therefore, is one of the factors which contribute to the growing frequency of looting and destruction, and to the general indifference of local people when such events occur. To ameliorate the situation in the long-term, improvement of education of the younger generations is a necessary step, building upon initiatives at local level that are being carried out by some of our Libyan colleagues.[10]

Presentation of the work of the LAaR and EAMENA projects at a series of other workshops dealing with Libyan heritage at which Libyans were also attending has enriched this discussion further. David Mattingly attended a British Council Workshop in Tunis in September 2016, and Susan Walker and David Mattingly both spoke at the one-day workshop '*Libya Matters*' at King's College London in October 2016. David Mattingly also made a presentation of Heritage and Peacebuilding in Libya at the British Council in London in May 2017, highlighting the missed opportunities to protect heritage and the urgent efforts aimed at limiting damage.

A clear request articulated by the audiences at all these events is the need for an efficient translation into Arabic of digital resources aimed at protecting cultural heritage and preventing illicit trafficking of antiquities and other heritage crime – such as the wilful destruction of ancient sites. This view is unanimously shared by all Libyan scholars, archaeologists and friends who are collaborating with us. During LAaR's next phase, we intend to prioritize translation of the content of our database and website making them more widely accessible. As a response to similar requests, EAMENA has already undertaken translation of its database into Arabic (see section below). This approach facilitates new partnerships with colleagues based in Libya who will then be able to record and enter data themselves, thus actively contributing to the preservation of their own cultural heritage.

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[9] MATTINGLY 2012; KANE 2015, pp. 208-211.
[10] For example, ABDULKARIEM 2013.

Delivering training on the use of the EAMENA database

From June 2015, the EAMENA project has been adapting the open-source Arches v.3 heritage management platform to build a database of threatened heritage sites across the Middle East and North Africa. Developed by the Getty Conservation Institute and the World Monuments Fund, Arches is quickly becoming one of the most widely spread heritage inventory packages in the world.[11] EAMENA has substantially developed the original Arches package, including changes to support a multilingual user interface, encryption of geospatial data, and an advanced search toolkit. At present, the EAMENA database includes over 155,000 resources, of which ca. 105,000 are heritage sites, the rest being information resources such as bibliography, ground imagery, etc. Site reports include: site names; cultural periods; morphological and archaeological descriptions; condition and threat assessments.

To facilitate the uptake of the EAMENA database as a monuments record we are delivering training to familiarize heritage professionals working in the MENA region in its use. So far, we have delivered two training courses: the first was held in March 2016 in connection with the British Academy workshop organized by LAaR, while the second was held at the American University of Iraq in Sulaimaniyeh (Iraqi Kurdistan) in October 2016. Future training courses aimed at Jordanian, Lebanese, Iraqi, Libyan, Palestinian and Tunisian stakeholders are planned for November 2017 onwards.

Our first training course was held on 7-10 March 2016 at the University of Leicester and aimed to familiarize a group of four Libyan trainees in the basic techniques of satellite imagery interpretation for archaeology and in the use of the EAMENA database to record their imagery assessments (Fig. 2). The course concluded with a discussion session dealing with an evaluation of the database and training which informed our plans for future training. The course was attended by Libyan archaeologists Dr Muftah Alhaddad, Dr Ahmad Emrage, Ahmed Buzaian, and Mohamed Abdrbba. It was delivered by Dr Louise Rayne (EAMENA, Leicester) and Dr Andrea Zerbini (EAMENA, Oxford), with support from David Mattingly. The aims of the course were:

- To introduce the trainees to the principles of satellite imagery interpretation for archaeology.
- To familiarize the visiting archaeologists with the database and how the data entry workflow is undertaken.
- To provide the visiting archaeologists with the skills they need for using the EAMENA database as a monuments record.
- To discuss ideas and feedback about how we can work with archaeologists in Libya to best facilitate the recording of their data.

[Fig. 2]

The first day of the course was used to introduce the main features of the EAMENA database. Previously loaded heritage resource data were used to provide a demonstration of the database, showing how to log data pertaining to site morphologies, archaeological interpretation, and condition assessment.[12] Tuition was also provided in the use of Google Earth for archaeological

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[11] MYERS-DALGITY-AVRAMIDES 2016.
[12] See discussion in RAYNE-SHELDRICK-NIKOLAUS 2017.

prospection. The trainees were then able to make their own assessments of satellite imagery and to log data under the guidance of the tutors. To facilitate the training, all participants were given printed copies of a how-to guide to entering data into the EAMENA database, the EAMENA master glossary (outlining the taxonomies used to describe cultural heritage resources), and a chronology list.

On the second day of training, the focus shifted to the trainees' personal areas of expertise in Libya (Fig. 3). Trainees were asked to select an area which reflected their own research. Using the how-to guide, glossary and chronology document, each trainee successfully created new database records for sites. Throughout the entire training course, over 50 sites were entered into the database (Fig. 4). Given the trainees' expertise in Libyan archaeology, they were able to enter many details about the interpretations of the site as well as listing instances of damage. With support from EAMENA staff, they gained the necessary skills for using the database in conjunction with Google Earth and with their own fieldwork data.

[Fig. 3]

[Fig. 4]

During a feedback session held at the end of the course, the participants were enthusiastic about the importance of the database for recording monuments in Libya and its suitability and ease of use. They thought that EAMENA should continue to facilitate its uptake, through similar training programmes and collaboration with the Libyan Department of Antiquities. The trainees also provided ideas and suggestions for how the database and the how-to guide could be enhanced. In particular, the trainees emphasized the need for the EAMENA database and its supporting documentation to be translated into Arabic to be effectively used by archaeologists in Libya and the wider region. Following this training event, EAMENA concentrated on addressing this key requirement and by the time of our second training event in Sulaimaniyeh (Iraq), we were able to demonstrate our database in Arabic, and rely on an Arabic-translated guidebook on entering site records.

The planned training workshops for 20 Libyan archaeologists to be held from late 2017 as part of the Cultural Protection Fund element of the EAMENA project will advance the work by broadening the base of capacity training for staff from different regions of Libya.

Conclusions

The initiatives described here represent the first steps in a potentially long process of damage limitation and capacity building that lies ahead of us if we are to help Libyan heritage professionals overcome the many challenges they currently face. The threats faced by Libya's heritage are multiple and unprecedented in terms of the scale and extent of damage and destruction that can be documented. More worrying is the fact that much remains as yet unreported or imperfectly monitored. The projects that have been presented above are responses to a still-evolving crisis and will no doubt need to develop in new ways in response to further turns of events.

Beyond the immediate crisis in heritage protection in Libya, we believe that heritage needs to be at the centre of thinking about peacebuilding in Libya. This involves the formulation of new ideas about Libyan identity and the cultural aspects that unite the diverse populations of Libya, as well as those that also underscore the regional divisions currently promoting fragmentation of the country. To accomplish this we need a much broader level of public engagement and a suite of educational initiatives working across all levels of Libyan society. At the same time, foreign missions need to revisit the traditional agendas of study of Libya's past and consider how these can be realigned to engage more of the modern population with their remarkable heritage assets.

Acknowledgements

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