Libyan Studies 48 (2017), pp 5 © The Society for Libyan Studies
doi:10.1017/lis.2017.16

Editor's introduction

By Anna Leone

This year's issue is divided into two main parts: the first part addresses an important aspect of the recent archaeological work in Libya; the second includes two more general research papers.

The various phases of internal conflict that have occurred in Libya in recent years have created, as a priority, the need to record, manage and monitor the state of the archaeological sites/monuments/objects.

The danger posed and the need for immediate action in the territory has attracted the attention of several international communities which have been supporting the Department of Antiquities of Libya (DoA) in the fight against the destruction and illicit trafficking of antiquities.

The first part of this volume includes the proceedings of a conference which took place in London at the British Academy to discuss these issues. Some of the international missions which have been active in Libya after the 2011 revolution, and a few others still working under the increasing conflict after 2013, have been invited to report on their activities (see Mugnai et al. and Rayne et al.).

Museums (see the paper by Musso) and sites, in particular marabouts (see the paper by Munzi and Zocchi), have been under threat, especially since 2013. Some of the international missions have been supporting the DoA through the training of archaeologists in different aspects of archaeological recording (see this volume's report by Kane et al. as an example; other international missions not included in this volume have been active too). Among the sites under threat, Cyrene emerges as being in danger for different reasons. The first is certainly topographical: the city is in danger, besieged by the expansion of the modern settlement, which is progressively eroding portions of the ancient city (see, for instance, the paper by Menozzi et al.). The destruction is, however, not the only threat: the necropoleis surrounding the cities have uncovered a large number of funerary statues that are very characteristic. These (and other statues) from the site have been subjected to extensive looting and many of them have reached the international antiquarian market (see the paper by Belzic). The looting is followed by a very complex and systematically organised trading system, in different parts of the world, before the materials reach the antiquarian markets mostly in London, Paris and Switzerland (see the paper by Brodie). Certainly, all of these threats are an emergency for both the DoA and the international community.

The second part of the volume includes two research papers. They focus on two different periods and two different geographical areas. Mkacher's work, principally textually based, looks at the early Islamic period and references to Tripoli's triumphal arch addressed by the early Arab sources. The issue of the perception of Roman monuments after the Arab conquest is an emerging field of research; such an approach is essential to fully understand the issue of spolia and the use and reuse of Roman monuments in the early Islamic period. The analysis of the monument in Tripoli is of great interest as very little is known about the history of the city before the Italian colonial period due to intensive building activity and poor recording. The second paper, by Barthel, shifts the attention from Tripolitania to Cyrenaica, at Apollonia. As in the previous case, the study focuses primarily on textual evidence, with some support from the archaeological data in the discussion. The analysis focuses on the Late Antique period, offering a perspective on a phase of transition of an important harbour city.

These research papers offer proof of the importance of Libya through time and show that, despite the impossibility of running fieldwork, the region continues to offer new data and material for research. The proceedings of the conference provide an insight into the internal (and external) difficulties in managing and protecting the archaeological patrimony of the country; on the other hand, the detailed work on the looting and illicit trafficking provides evidence that the responsibility for these threats does not lie exclusively inside Libya, but often the same countries crying about the danger posed to the heritage of Libya are somehow also partially responsible for it.

This year's journal highlights the difficulties of the current situation in Libya, which makes it difficult to carry out work in the field in Libya and limits the opportunity to provide new data. However, there is a lot of work to be done to protect this heritage, and in the archives, and we welcome future articles that focus on these areas. In addition, the history of North Africa is intimately linked, and we would in future also welcome papers that look at other North African countries and their relationships with the Mediterranean.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lis.2017.16 Published online by Cambridge University Press