Libyan Studies 48 (2017), pp 171–175 © The Society for Libyan Studies
doi:10.1017/lis.2017.2 First published online 15 September 2017

Notes from Libya

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Abstract

'Notes from Libya' is a new regular feature of *Libyan Studies* following the reports of the Society's Head of Mission. These reports were previously concerned with the organisation of fieldwork and administrative matters connected to obtaining permissions, visas and so on, and were recorded in the minutes of the Council meetings. However, they have recently taken on a new form, outlining the alarming developments in Libya, largely focusing on its heritage but also on the political and economic situation, which impacts on the management of Libya's ancient monuments and artefacts. The importance and historical interest of these reports now, however, merits a wider audience and a more formal record, so these accounts are now published in *Libyan Studies*.

تعتبر "ملاحظات من ليبيا" احدى المزايا الحديثة والدورية لمجلة "الدراسات الليبية". وهي تقوم بمتابعة تقارير رئيس بعثة الجمعية. وقد كانت هذه التقارير معنية فالسابق بتنظيم العمل الميداني وأمور الإدارة المتعلقة بالحصول على تصريحات وتأشيرات الدخول وغيرها. وكانت تُسجَّل في محاضر اجتماعات المجلس. غير أنها أخذت شكلاً جديداً مؤخراً، وذلك بإبراز للتطورات المثيرة للقلق في ليبيا وخاصة التركيز على تراثها بشكل كبير بالاضافة الى الوضع السياسي والإقتصادي والذي يؤثر على إدارة آثار ليبيا وقطعها الأثرية القديمة. ونظراً لأهمية هذه التقارير الآن وفائدتها التاريخية فانها تستحق جمهور على نطاق أوسع وتسجيل أكثر رسمية، ولهذا سيتم نشر تلك التفاصيل الآن في مجلة "الدراسات الليبية".

October 2016

Earlier in the year, from 9 to 11 May 2016, I attended an international expert meeting on behalf of the Society, on the 'Safeguarding of Libyan Cultural Heritage', held in Tunis. The event, organised by UNESCO and ICCROM with the support of the United States Embassy to Libya and the Department of Antiquities of Libya, was called to highlight the deteriorating political situation in Libya and increased threats to cultural heritage. Despite the efforts of UNESCO, ICCROM and others over the past five years, including the Society, to cooperate with Libyan institutions to provide training and support, the worsening situation now requires a wider framework to provide urgent and immediate protection for archaeological sites, even those with World Heritage status, a longer term strategy for cultural heritage generally, integrated into forthcoming national plans for the future of the country, and to establish heritage protection as a positive and meaningful contribution towards the promotion of peace and long-term security in Libya. The meeting was organised to further those aims with more than eighty participants including thirty Libyan representatives from the Ministry of Culture of Libya, a number of the municipalities, the western and eastern Departments of Antiquity, the Historic Cities Agency, the National Archives in Tripoli, the Directorate of Customs, the Tourist and Antiquities Police, representatives from Libyan universities, the Intangible Heritage Centre in Sabha and the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides Association of Libya. Other participants included INTERPOL, the World Customs Association, the World Bank, the Prince Claus Foundation, the Smithsonian Institute and archaeological missions from UK, USA, Italy, France, Germany and Poland. To reinforce the importance of the workshop, the UN Secretary General Special Representative for Libya, Dr Martin Kobler, took part in the closing session of the meeting.

Opening discussions sought to provide a situation analysis with presentations from Libyan institutions and international partners setting out the current status of heritage in the country, including damage, imminent threats, risk measures taken so far and an assessment of challenges and obstacles hampering the proper functioning of institutions seeking to protect and safeguard heritage. There were four themes to the discussion: inventories and site documentation, including steps towards the development of a Libyan Historic Environment Record (HER) and the use of satellite imagery for site location and condition assessment; protection and disaster measures on sites, in museums, archives and stores, principally mitigation measures for moveable and immoveable heritage; measures to fight against the illicit trade in cultural property; and finally, outreach and awareness raising, particularly with young people.

The second part of the workshop focused on four themes: archaeological sites, moveable heritage (museums and archives), built heritage and historic cities, and intangible heritage (e.g. oral heritage), with participants signing up to join one of the four themed groups. Each group was tasked to seek ways to strengthen national institutions, to better protect Libyan cultural heritage and to assess four

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https://doi.org/10.1017/lis.2017.2 Published online by Cambridge University Press

areas: data management, assessment and monitoring; capacity building and governance; security and protection; and finally, advocacy and outreach. The deliberations of each group were then taken forward and discussed in an open forum in a final session.

It is worth setting out some of the main outcomes:

Archaeological sites

Governance: A coordinated and informed national action plan is required for the safeguarding of archaeological sites nationwide, including investment in staff, equipment, funds to do the job and, most importantly, law enforcement.

Data management: It is crucial that Libya develops an HER and at the same time monitors, records and assesses damage, particularly by illegal development, using GIS mapping for locating sites and remote sensing for monitoring sites, whilst linking with other international agencies to develop a comprehensive action plan.

Capacity building: To harness the support of Libyan civil servants, professionals and university staff. To train these professionals in the assessment, monitoring, protection and security of archaeological sites, including the use of GIS and remote sensing. To include sites important for landscape features and bio-diversity and the marine environment and to develop from within these professional classes a cadre of knowledgeable and enthusiastic heritage champions.

Security and protection: To define and implement a short-term protection and security plan for key sites that are considered to be under threat, particularly Leptis Magna, Sabratha, Cyrene, Apollonia, Ptolemais and Tocra, with mapped boundaries and 'buffer zones' for all significant sites, nationwide, including sites in the desert zone and underwater sites.

Advocacy and outreach: There is an urgent need to rally local communities and particularly the young in support of Libya's cultural heritage and its protection in law. To develop local and national television and radio programmes, social media and the school curriculum, to educate, inform and encourage the present and coming generations to respect and treasure their inheritance. To use the same media to highlight the wilful and illegal destruction of heritage assets, and law enforcement.

Museums, collections and archives

Governance: To develop bilateral agreements with neighbouring and more distant countries to prevent and fight against the illegal trade in antiquities. To revise, simplify and strengthen Libyan laws, including the introduction of dissuasive sanctions. To train police, judges and prosecutors in cultural heritage protection and, over time, effective law enforcement.

Data management: To compile a list of missing or stolen artefacts and share that list with the international community. To complete and update site inventories with the help of archaeological missions.

Capacity building: To train law enforcement agencies, including tourist police and customs officials in the recognition of portable heritage. To develop the skills of National Archive staff in the conservation of archival documents.

Security and protection: To develop emergency evacuation plans for museums, stores and archives. To assess the condition of existing museums, stores and archives, improve security and environmental controls; to assess the condition of mosaics and frescoes in store and on display at archaeological sites.

Advocacy and outreach: To mount an awareness-raising campaign through national and social media, in schools and in museums at home and abroad, to inform the population and particularly youth, to mitigate the illicit trafficking of Libyan portable heritage.

Urban and built heritage

The group discussing the topic proposed the following actions:

To launch a new vision of urban heritage – a national project, to highlight the condition of historic cities and the need to adopt international standards to protect and restore them.

To commission studies of urban centres – to collate all existing data on urban heritage and analyse the way urban centres have developed since the nineteenth century as a basis for determining legal title to land and property.

To review Libyan law dealing with historic cities and property – to bring Libyan property law in line with those of other neighbouring countries.

To adopt the 'Libya Built Heritage Manual' produced by the World Bank – to provide a basis and a framework for capacity building.

To launch an awareness-raising campaign – based on the slogan 'The protection of heritage is a shared responsibility'. To use local institutions like the Boy Scouts and to develop school- and university-based initiatives and local workshops to promote the values of urban heritage.

To seek help from international organisations to develop a strategy for built heritage – to organise conferences, workshops and international expert

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meetings to develop a national strategy for built heritage and identify one or more pilot projects.

To launch a national inventory of built heritage – based on the use of GIS mapping, satellite imagery and documentary research.

To invest in people and job creation through a comprehensive programme of capacity building and training – to strengthen the professional and technical capabilities of the Historic Cities Authority in the conservation, management and enhancement of built heritage, particularly in historic urban areas, with investment in well-trained staff and equipment.

To implement one or more pilot projects – using the steps set out in the 'World Bank Heritage Manual', to test approaches to urban heritage conservation in Libya.

Intangible heritage

Data management: To safeguard the existing intangible heritage collections and place greater emphasis on data collection, the collation of inventories in all communities and to develop a local, regional and national data management plan.

Capacity building: To train new staff and volunteers in community-based inventorying and intangible cultural heritage collection. To develop safeguarding plans and recruit local champions for intangible heritage.

Security and peace: Intangible cultural heritage has an important role to play in fostering pride in community and place and for social cohesion. Adopting one or more pilot projects would be a useful way of developing methodologies and operating procedures and an important step towards a national strategy.

Advocacy and outreach: To use public and social media and events as part of a national campaign to safeguard intangible cultural heritage in Libya.

Of all the conferences and workshops I have attended in recent years, this event stands out as being one of the most meaningful, not only because it was attended by a wide spectrum of Libyan and international specialists, but for the way Libyan colleagues played a full and leading role in all aspects of discussion and decision-making. All the outcomes set out above represent the hopes and aspirations of our Libyan colleagues, and we hope with help from the international community, as we move towards peace and good governance in the country, all our colleagues' aspirations will become a reality.

The report on the workshop was slow in production, finally being published in January 2017, and for limited distribution. Placing a summary of the results here in my notes will hopefully inform a wider audience of this important event.

More recently, Professor David Mattingly attended another conference in Tunis. This was a meeting convened by the British Council in Libya based in Tunis. The aim was to encourage Libyans from different agencies or constituencies to work together for better heritage protection. The invited participants included representatives of the Departments of Antiquity, the Historic Cities Authority, Libyan universities, NGOs and societies with a heritage remit. David noted that the Department of Antiquities in Benghazi supported the initiative but did not send a representative, whilst the Department in Tripoli opposed it and sent three delegates. After a difficult start David also found that there was a sense of energy throughout the discussions with conversations crossing political boundaries with individuals and organisations looking to work together. A list of projects not dissimilar to those given above came out of the event.

During the May workshop I was able make a formal request to the Prince Claus Trust for a grant of 5,000 euros for the backfilling of the Haua Fteah cave, near Susa. The reader will remember Professor Graeme Barker's long-term project (the centrepiece of the Cyrenaican Prehistory Project) to empty the substantial and deep trench cut by Charles McBurney in the 1950s, and to throw science at the sections to refine and expand the results of over 60 years ago. The final stage of the excavation was successfully completed by Libyan colleagues led by Dr Ahmad Emrage of Benghazi University, following a period of training in Canterbury and Cambridge. Our plan is to carefully backfill the cave during August 2017.

Libya continues to suffer. Since August 2016 there have been over 200 airstrikes on Sirte alone. There are rumours that British and American support troops are on the ground around Sirte, with British and French troops near Derna. Enormous numbers of migrants continue to depart Libyan shores west of Sabratha. Unknown numbers have drowned. The situation around Benghazi remains critical, despite statements from the Libyan Army maintaining that conflict in and around the city will be sorted 'in a matter of days or weeks'. There seems to be no end to the bombardment of Benghazi and Derna is also under siege. To add to this toxic mess, despite an arms embargo, Russia appears ready to supply arms to the Libyan Army.

Elsewhere in the country murder and kidnapping is a common occurrence. The coast road from Tripoli to Tunis was open for a period but is now closed again. There is a new controller for the

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Fezzan who is well known to the Society, Lamin Al Houni, and we wish him well.

News from Cyrene is not good with reports of illegal development within the World Heritage Site, in the suburbs and further afield. Ancient cemeteries have been bulldozed for new fields and farm animals are being allowed to wander across the ruins. The Department of Antiquities decided they would intervene to try to protect a famous opus sectile pavement in the House of Jason Magnus by covering it with a simple tin-roofed structure. Whilst we commend their intention, the workmen forming the uprights for the shelter have driven stanchions through the edges of the floor, damaging what they are seeking to protect.

The Department of Antiquities in the east has transferred its base of operation from Cyrene to Benghazi, setting up new offices there.

November 2016

A plan to collect 300 copies of the Arabic edition of the *Tripolitania Guide* from the printer's warehouse in Tunis to bring them to the UK has sadly failed. We have been assured that the books are safe and in store waiting for us to collect. Other training workshops planned to take place in Tunis next year will afford another opportunity to collect the books.

Salah Subhi, former Deputy Director of the British Council in Tripoli and currently an MP based in Tobruk, contacted me by telephone recently. Salah has spoken to the Prime Minister and there is general concern amongst politicians for the safety and security of heritage sites in the east. He and others in the eastern government recognise an urgent need to strengthen Libyan heritage law and encourage enforcement. He has asked for advice and help and I have offered it.

Field Marshall Haftar has been to Russia seeking assistance for the Libyan Army. There is a ceasefire in Sirte, which has sustained 450 airstrikes to date. OPEC wants Libya to reduce oil production but the NOC say this is impossible as Libya is running out of money. People have been on the streets protesting about power cuts, a lack of work, irregular pay and shortages in the cash supply.

Sebha is now calm following a tribal dispute over a monkey, settled with tanks and leaving seven dead. In Shahat, a special department has been set up to monitor weapons and contraband, including antiquities, being offered for sale at the Friday market.

This month saw the official launch of an important initiative to support economic diversification and development in Libya. This is a four-year programme to promote the growth of small businesses for young men and women. One of the underlying causes of Libya's instability is a lack of meaningful full-time employment for young people, so this initiative is widely supported inside and outside Libya and we wish it well.

February 2017

The report on the UNESCO/ICCROM meeting in Tunis has been circulated and a summary of the outcomes is given above.

It is with great sadness that I report more widespread damage to archaeological sites in and around Cyrene to make way for the illegal construction of new houses, roads and agricultural fields. A local resident has placed photographs on Facebook of clandestine digging next to the Forum. Similar activities are taking place in the cemeteries that surround Cyrene. Pressure has been placed on the individual by others in the community to withdraw the images and this clearly demonstrates a need for the Society to develop a website that allows individuals to transfer such images anonymously, perhaps through an SLS Flickr account.

The first tranche payment from the Prince Claus Trust for the infilling of the Haua Fteah excavations has been paid and plans are being drawn up for the backfilling to start in August 2017. Ahmad Emrage has located a supply of geotextile in Egypt. The membrane will be fixed to the section walls of the excavation prior to backfilling, so that if the trench is ever emptied again, it can be achieved easily without damaging intact deposits.

The Italian and Turkish embassies are now open in Tripoli. The British Ambassador has been talking to the Libyan government about improving travel and transport to the country, and a British company has a contract to improve the power supply in the south. People are being encouraged to return and take up appointments in Libya – but there is a very slow take-up. There are still 70% power-outs in Tripoli. It is cold and people are burning charcoal. As a result, there are strikes and demonstrations in the streets and some mobs have been attacking the power plants, stripping them of plant, making a bad situation critical.

President Trump has produced quite a stir in Libya and there are many articles about him and the proposed embargo on Libyans travelling to America. There are also many articles in the Libyan press both condemning and praising Field Marshal Haftar and his closeness to Russia.

May 2017

I was in Iraq at the time of the May meeting but reported on the arrangements for the backfilling of

https://doi.org/10.1017/lis.2017.2 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Haua Fteah due to take place in August. During my proposed stay in Susa to assist with the start of backfilling, I hope to meet with Ahmed Hussain, Chairman of the Department of Antiquities based in Benghazi, and with Salah Subhi, now an MP based in Tobruk, to discuss the safeguarding of Libyan heritage and how the SLS might work with our Libyan colleagues in preparation for peace.

The situation in Libya is no easier. The Libyan Army, with Russian arms, is making progress on all fronts. There is still trouble in the suburbs of Benghazi, Derna and Tripoli and new strife in the south, with the Libyan Army increasingly involved, but all of this on a lesser scale than before. The money supply is a continuing major cause for concern together with electricity blackouts and problems with the water supply. There is no law and order and there have been terrible and distressing news headlines about migrant slavery, increased migrant boat activity and hundreds drowned.

There is still conflict between the two Departments of Antiquities and the situation between them is not encouraging at all, despite the reality of disintegrating archaeological sites, illegal development everywhere and a growing market in the trafficking of antiquities. Sites are decreasing daily and destruction is everywhere. We can only hope for better times, keep the faith and do all we can to support our friends and colleagues by working with them, albeit from our desks in the UK, to create a better future for Libya.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lis.2017.2 Published online by Cambridge University Press