

Endangered Archaeology in Syria and Beyond: An International Perspective

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Abstract: There are a number of ways in which the international community can help to protect the cultural heritage of countries affected by conflict. The aim of this paper is to highlight some of these approaches, primarily focusing on Syria, as that is where the most information is available, and to introduce the work of the Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa project (EAMENA),³ which was established in 2015, covering over 20 countries from Mauritania to Iran. The broader approaches addressed in this paper fall into three main areas: awareness-raising; legislative changes; and actions, and then an introduction to the EAMENA project follows these approaches. Much of the information comes from a series of reports compiled by the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Heritage for Peace.⁴ The reports provide information on national and international actions undertaken to protect Syrian heritage since 2011, and they are intended to promote collaboration between the different agencies acting in Syria, and reduce duplication of effort. The reports were collated from numerous websites, five mailing lists, 78 social media feeds, and regular news searches conducted via Google. Almost all information reviewed was in English or Arabic, with occasional mentions of German, Dutch and Spanish events, all of which are locations where other members of Heritage for Peace are located. They have been widely circulated, with key links shared by UNESCO.⁵ This has been a ‘one-way’ communication, and we welcome a dialogue so we can better understand the efficacy and usefulness of the reports for the international community.

Keywords: archaeology; Syria; endangered sites; organisations; international actions; dialogue

Problems Faced by Syria’s Heritage Workers

It is perhaps important to start by highlighting the problems facing Syria’s heritage workers, as they are significant, and contextualise all other issues noted in this paper. They also extend beyond the areas that the Syrian Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) can reach. Without addressing these problems (where it is possible), the international community – and, of course, the Syrians themselves – face many problems in heritage protection. Nor are these issues unique to Syria, but unfortunately they are representative of countries in conflict in general (and in some cases may have existed prior to the conflict). In addition to speaking to government heritage workers, Heritage for Peace spoke with a number of people in northern and central Idlib – areas outside of government control – identifying the following problems:

- Limited resources and money available;
- Limited access to transport (of all types) to visit sites;

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³ See the project’s website <<https://eamena.org/>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020); Bewley et al. 2016a; Bewley et al. 2016b.

⁴ Cf. the Heritage for Peace website <<http://www.heritageforpeace.org>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020); see Perini – Cunliffe 2014a; Perini – Cunliffe 2014b; Perini – Cunliffe 2015; Leckie et al. 2017.

⁵ UNESCO, Observatory of Syrian Heritage, Reports. Online <<https://en.unesco.org/syrian-observatory/damage-assessment-reports?>> (last accessed 18 May 2020).

- Issues in obtaining looted items from local people (many of whom are resident in the same areas as the heritage workers);
- Language barriers that limit access to foreign aid;
- International systems that prevent NGOs from sending support;
- Lack of official documentation (e.g. passports, visas), whilst passports are more of an issue in areas without government facilities, visas are an ongoing problem;
- Lack of organisational affiliation, leading to a lack of external support or even recognition, and
- Lack of a place to work (using homes).

The problems faced by heritage workers in conflict areas were also highlighted in the report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, which examined cultural heritage destruction.⁶ The problem of getting aid to heritage workers in conflict zones, given safety concerns, political complexities, and international sanctions, remains an enduring challenge. This was one of the reasons the Special Rapporteur called them ‘Heritage Heroes’.

Raising Awareness

The most obvious activity conducted by the international community is awareness-raising about the importance of cultural heritage, as well as the damage and destruction occurring in conflict. Such opportunities are enormous; especially via social media, but also television and radio. However, other outlets include exhibitions, talks, lectures, conferences, appeals, petitions, statements and podcasts; as well as newspaper articles and opinion pieces, both printed and online.

The first detailed report listing the damage to Syria’s heritage was released in May 2012⁷ and sought to collate the work of activists and NGOs who were trying to highlight the increasing problems. This report revealed just how few people were aware of the scale and impact of the damage taking place in Syria. It would be four years before Robert Bevan issued a revised edition of his book *The Destruction of Memory*,⁸ incorporating recent heritage destruction. In 2016, a film of the book was released, receiving multiple awards, and reaching public awareness.

Since those early beginnings, the reporting of damage to Syrian cultural property has been a regular, often headline, feature for many media. In response, between 15 September 2015 and 12 April 2016 the international archaeological/heritage community has held the following events:

- 3 workshops
- 27 conferences
- 10 symposia
- 21 talks
- 9 discussions / panels
- 6 forums
- 3 seminars
- 1 roundtable

These 80 events (of which only four were not advertised in English) aimed to raise awareness, find solutions to the problems, and improve collaboration between colleagues. Whilst this is an indication of the increased interest in the topic, few were subsequently made available online for those who could not attend, and even then, these represent a large investment of time to view

⁶ Bennoune 2016.

⁷ Cunliffe 2012.

⁸ Bevan 2016.

podcasts. Whilst the ability to work with colleagues in person is invaluable, sharing of key information could be improved.

The Heritage for Peace reports also show that there have been many petitions calling for the protection of heritage in some form or another. The most successful was one of several to help save Palmyra;⁹ it attracted 14,800 signatures – almost double that of any petition asking to save all of Syria’s heritage, but still 200 short of its target. Although there may be some small impact for a short period of time, few petitions are ever delivered, and most express a sentiment, rather than a solution.

At this point, it is worth noting the biases that can occur in awareness-raising. The international community has issued multiple statements and petitions on the World Heritage site of Palmyra, many stating a desire for a more representative view of heritage, and not focusing overly on Palmyra. Yet there is an inherent contradiction in this, as much less attention is paid to the other sites. The Department of Antiquities of Bosra (a World Heritage site of somewhat comparable importance to Palmyra), for example, requested help;¹⁰ few organisations responded initially. Shirin conducted a damage assessment in 2015,¹¹ and Heritage for Peace attempted to contact it and carry out a needs assessment. It was not until August 2016 that ASOR’s Cultural Heritage Initiative (CHI) was reported to be assisting with restoration work.¹² Nonetheless, the Heritage for Peace 2017 report¹³ demonstrates a continued focus on Palmyra. This presumably reflects the intense publicity in western media arising from the destructive actions of the Islamic State group at the site.

If raising awareness is to be successful, it must encourage an understanding of the wider context of the issues, and positive action must flow from it. For example, funding, especially grants, large enough to employ staff to tackle problems and obtain equipment or imagery, does not usually become available until the issues affecting the destruction of cultural property are better understood, and there is a greater and more general awareness of the scale of damage. The University of Oxford was extremely fortunate to be approached by the Arcadia Fund in 2014 to explore endangered archaeology; to a small extent, this must be considered a result of the awareness-raising regarding heritage destruction. Certainly, the development of the Cultural Protection Fund, also generously supporting the EAMENA project, is a direct response to the increased awareness of the problem.

Legislation

The second type of approach involves legislative changes by nations that may be involved in activities in countries affected by conflict, or that are concerned that they may be unwittingly receiving looted objects.

The Hague Convention 1954

Currently, many of the approaches, and even responsibilities for improving the protection of the cultural heritage are falling on, and being developed, by NGOs. ‘The international organisation tasked with advising UNESCO regarding Cultural Property Protection is the Blue Shield.’¹⁴ A “Blue Shield” approach is being drafted that will provide a framework for 25 existing national committees, from

⁹ A petition from the campaign to #SavePalmyra <<https://www.causes.com/actions/1778720-sign-the-petition-to-savepalmyra>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

¹⁰ Letter published on their now removed Facebook page by Bosra Sham Antiquities Department on 3 April 2016. A copy of the letter is available from the authors.

¹¹ Fournet et al. 2015.

¹² Ancient Near East Today 2016.

¹³ Leckie et al. 2017.

¹⁴ See the organisation’s website <<https://theblueshield.org/>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

Argentina to Austria, and others under construction.’¹⁵ This framework will advise local Blue Shield Committees on ways in which they can work to protect heritage in conflict. It will be one of the first international overarching frameworks of its kind, and one of its key goals is promoting ratification and implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its First and Second Protocols (1954 and 1999).

Largely resulting from the work of Professor Peter Stone, Chair of Blue Shield UK and Vice-President of Blue Shield International, the UK ratified the 1954 Hague Convention in December 2017, becoming the second permanent member of the UN Security Council (after France earlier in the year) to ratify the Convention and both Protocols. As 2019 comes to a close, over 130 countries around the world have ratified the main Convention, more than 100 the First Protocol, and more than 80 the Second Protocol, with more every year.

So, what will change as a result? For countries that have ratified the 1954 Hague Convention, the production of ‘no-strike lists’ (i.e. lists of cultural property that should be safeguarded, in any country or region of a country) are legally mandated under Article 3 of the main convention, and more explicitly in Article 5 of the Second Protocol (our focus): Safeguarding of cultural property.

Article 3. The High Contracting Parties undertake to prepare in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property situated within their own territory against the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict.

Article 5. Preparatory measures taken in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property against the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict pursuant to Article 3 of the Convention shall include, as appropriate, the preparation of inventories, the planning of emergency measures for protection against fire or structural collapse, the preparation for the removal of movable cultural property or the provision for adequate in situ protection of such property, and the designation of competent authorities responsible for the safeguarding of cultural property.

It is simply not possible to safeguard heritage without knowing what there is and where it is: site registers are therefore essential.¹⁶ Such lists form part of a body of legally mandated instructions for safeguarding measures to be undertaken by State Parties (usually Ministries of Culture, or their equivalents) in peacetime – seen, for example, in the creation of the UK’s safeguarding list once they became a signatory state.¹⁷ Preliminary guidance stipulates that if it has not been done, armed forces must endeavour to collect the information as best they can from any who will assist them,¹⁸ resulting in value determinations that may not reflect the priorities of those whose heritage it is (a less than desirable situation). International guidelines are being drawn up by Blue Shield International¹⁹ for the creation and management of such registers. The EAMENA project is also documenting sites to internationally agreed standards, as will be explained later. However, inventories are just one of a wide body of stipulated proactive preparatory measures to be undertaken by both cultural organisations and armed forces in peacetime. Other work in the UK, for example, includes the creation of a Cultural Protection Unit (as stipulated under Article 7.2 of the main convention) within the armed forces,²⁰ and the design of specialist cultural property protection training courses to meet the obligations of article 7.1.²¹ Similar measures are underway elsewhere, e.g., in the US, Austrian, and Swiss Armed Forces.

¹⁵ Stone 2017, 30.

¹⁶ Cunliffe et al. 2018.

¹⁷ See the policy paper on <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protection-of-cultural-property-in-the-event-of-armed-conflict>> (last accessed 18 Oct. 2020).

¹⁸ O’Keefe et al. 2016.

¹⁹ Cf. the Blue Shield International website <<https://theblueshield.org/>> (last accessed 18 Oct. 2020).

²⁰ Purbrick 2016–2017.

²¹ For example, the Cultural Property Protection in Armed Conflict course <<https://militaryethics.uk/en/course>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020); the UK Cultural Property Protection Special to Arms staff training course, running October 2019; or the training courses that Blue Shield International attends or runs <<https://theblueshield.org/news-and-activities/>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

Other Recent Legislative Changes

Several countries are also working to tighten their laws regarding illicit trafficking. Germany is notably leading the way here with its Cultural Property Protection Law,²² and the USA has now passed H.R.5703 and 1493 Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act²³ (passed 1 June 2015) and USA H.R.2285 – Prevent Trafficking in Cultural Property Act (passed House amended 22 September 2016).²⁴ These laws are – at least in part – a response to UN Security Council resolutions banning the illicit trafficking of cultural property from countries like Syria and Iraq, and which require states to refrain from supporting terrorist financing (e.g. UNSCR 2199, 2253, 2368).

Actions

The third type of action works directly to protect heritage, through the documentation of the sites and the damage that has taken place. The following is a rough count of the types of actions taken:

According to the Heritage for Peace reports, between September 2014 and September 2015 there were 11 training events (four at national and seven at international level); there were ten international projects covering looting and trafficking, and an unknown number of national projects; nine projects examining inventories and digitisation; as well as nine events, groups and projects exploring the topic of restoration.

One of the most common activities is recording damage to sites. Twenty-three international organisations are reporting damage (with many more national groups), ranging from small organisations publishing updates on social media accounts to large organisations such as UNOSAT, who publish comprehensive damage reports,²⁵ or the ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (ASOR CHI), who publish regular detailed reports online.²⁶ Whilst the majority of these use social media, at least six have databases or publish pdfs.

Despite the extensive amount of data collected, problems remain. There have been few analyses of the information (although notable exceptions include the special volume of *Near Eastern Archaeology*, sponsored by ASOR CHI²⁷). Nor, despite the extensive discussions about the prosecution of cultural heritage crimes, is information always collected to the standards required for prosecution – although a number of institutions signed the Vienna Statement at ICAANE 10,²⁸ which stated that ‘Criminal investigations into the illegal trade in antiquities must be facilitated, and supported by professional expertise’. Also see, for example, the United Nations and OHCHR’s *Guidance and Practice for Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-Finding Missions on International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law 2015*,²⁹ which recommends chains of custody of documentation, amongst other key metadata. Similarly, photographic documentation is rarely of the standard needed to aid in reconstruction. At best, information of this nature can only aid a basic needs assessment.

Lastly, the data are rarely prioritised, providing an almost-overwhelming picture of damage to Syria’s heritage, and hindering heritage aid work in the country. The EAMENA project, on the other hand, operates at an international level, using freely available satellite imagery to record sites and site damage at a scale that can elucidate regional damage trends, and is also developing

²² Puhze – Henker 2015; Hickley 2016.

²³ The White House 2016.

²⁴ Congress 2016; Jarus 2016; Sputnik 2016.

²⁵ UNOSAT 2014.

²⁶ ASOR CHI Weekly Reports <<http://www.asor.org/chi/reports/weekly-monthly>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

²⁷ The Cultural Heritage Crisis in the Middle East. Special Issue, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 78, 3, 2015.

²⁸ Vienna Statement 2016, 10th ICAANE. Statement about the Threat to Cultural Heritage in the Near East and North Africa. Online <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/fileadmin/Institute/OREA/pdf/Publikationen/Vienna_Statement_Online.pdf> (last accessed 18 Oct. 2020).

²⁹ United Nations OHCHR 2015.

the capacity to record sites down to the level of individual features such as walls or windows – the level needed for reconstruction. However, given the variable standards operating, work remains to be done in both the collection and the analysis of heritage damage information.

An International Rescue Framework: A Way Forward?

One recent suggestion for how to approach the provision of aid and allocation of the limited resources was the creation of an International Rescue Framework, to aid organisations operating in conflict.³⁰

The primary goals are assumed to be:

- Equitable direction of resources for reconstruction;
- Assessment of damage trends to prevent re-occurrence, and
- Identification of likely threats during reconstruction.

In order to fully realise such a proposal, the following questions need to be answered for data collection, and what, again, is rarely dealt with is current recording standards:

- What and where are the sites? This requires a definition of ‘what is a site’, encompassing not only the consideration of when something becomes ‘heritage’, but also the extent of the site – something that is frequently hard to define. This is necessary to understand the scale of work that may be required – for example,
- does the ‘site’ encompass multiple damaged buildings like at Apamea in Syria, or is it a single building, like Qalb Lozeh?
- How damaged is the site? For example, is 100% of the site is affected, or is damage restricted to a small area?
- How significant is the site? For example, is it a World Heritage site or a single cairn, and how many other sites of a similar nature are known?
- How significant is the damage? For example, has the site completely collapsed or is the damage just cosmetic shrapnel scarring?³¹
- To whom is it significant? Is this a parish church or the only church in the region?
- Does it have only archaeological value; wider scientific importance; or local, national or international significance? For example, is it a single site in an archaeological survey, an important human evolution site, a local shrine, a historic palace?

Recording in this level of detail has additional benefits for heritage management outside or after conflict. In addition to direct conflict-based damage, significant damage has also been, and will continue to be, caused by increasing agriculture, and the development of villages, towns and cities, which becomes even more urgent in the post-conflict period, hence the EAMENA project work (see below). Development like this is noticeable not only at small, surveyed sites, but also at some Tentative and World Heritage sites, like Bosra and Raqqa. Archaeologists stand ready not only to provide significant support to the DGAM in securing sites and paying site guards,³² but also to consider a wider outreach programme, working with those who will be supplying materials for rebuilding, for example, to raise awareness of the damage being done.

A new framework could have multiple dimensions. Cultural heritage is used in state building, peace building, military ethics and doctrine, law, political science, and countless other spheres. If we want to facilitate prosecutions, we need to record the data needed by law. To facilitate peace

³⁰ Shirin 2016.

³¹ Although see Mol et al. 2017, who argue that even apparently cosmetic damage can have major implications for site stability.

³² Ali 2013.

building, we need to understand the ethnic dimensions of heritage, and focus on local community heritage, rather than state-level projects.³³ To facilitate reconstruction, we will need to find a way to prioritise. For example, a lot of attention has been given to the World Heritage Site of Crac des Chevaliers, but significantly less to the historic al-Saraya Mosque in the surrounding town, which was still in use, but which has been shelled in the fighting. Archaeologists may need to develop better ways of understanding the communities amongst whom they have worked for so long. But this task is not easy: ‘With the halt of archaeological fieldwork in Syria and the difficulty of finding new archaeological projects in the Middle East generally, heritage studies has presented itself as a novel area of research and field work for many international archaeologists. As a result, archaeologists have been forced to grapple with the specialised theoretical literature and research methodologies of the robust field of heritage studies for the first time.’³⁴

The Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa Project

The second part of this paper details the work of the EAMENA project, the aims of which are to provide information on archaeological sites that will be useful for all countries affected by conflict, and especially after the conflict is over.³⁵

Funded by the Arcadia Fund, the EAMENA project records and documents archaeological sites across twenty countries from Mauritania to Iran by interpreting satellite imagery and creating records in a bespoke ARCHES database, so that the basic forms of the site are recorded as well as an assessment of threats to it. Noting the issues identified in the first half of this paper, the EAMENA project has been pragmatic in ensuring it does not duplicate the work of others, for example the ASOR (American Schools of Oriental Research) Cultural Heritage Initiatives³⁶ or others who have worked in the same field³⁷ or in the same region.³⁸ Through our partnership between the Universities of Oxford, Leicester, and Durham, we are able to collaborate with many of the fieldwork projects (past and current) that have taken place in the region over the past decades. The stated aims of the project are to:

- Identify, understand and monitor the endangered archaeology of the MENA region;
- Create a record of sites and monuments for each country in the MENA region that includes an assessment of the threats to sites (similar to the Historic Environment Records in the UK and parts of Europe);
- Help to protect and conserve MENA’s archaeological heritage;
- Raise awareness and encourage informed debate about heritage in the region;
- Assist customs and law enforcement agencies in tackling looting and the illegal trade in antiquities, and
- Train heritage professionals in our methods and techniques to monitor the condition of archaeological sites in as many countries as possible.

The EAMENA project is the only one working at the scale of the whole MENA region. By collating and interpreting information from satellite imagery, we assess levels and types of threats to sites in a standardised manner. Our project combines primary satellite imagery analysis with collation of existing data and sources. Although we utilise a variety of cartographic sources (e.g. 1:25,000 maps), aerial photographs (e.g. Hunting Aerosurveys) and satellite data (e.g. declassified

³³ Lostal – Cunliffe 2016.

³⁴ Quntar – Daniels 2016, 382.

³⁵ Bewley et al. 2016a; Vafadari et al. 2017.

³⁶ Casana – Panahipour 2014; Casana 2015.

³⁷ Contreras – Brodie 2010; Brodie – Contreras 2012.

³⁸ Parcak 2015.

CORONA photographs), the majority of initial data collection is carried out using imagery available in Google Earth. This approach has a number of distinct advantages: although the imagery is of variable resolutions, it is freely available; and large parts of the MENA region are also covered by more than one set of imagery, meaning that it is possible to look at change over time.

Ground survey and excavation data, however, are also vital. In this respect, the experience, contacts, and connections developed by individual EAMENA team members has allowed us to integrate both published and unpublished datasets into our analyses and data collection. Whether entering data from existing surveys or from satellite imagery, each potential or confirmed archaeological feature is recorded in our project database³⁹ using a set of standardised, controlled vocabularies. The database uses ARCHES, an open source platform implemented by the Getty Conservation Institute and World Monuments Fund, and is designed to conform to CIDOC CRM standards.

The project also makes its information freely accessible, via an online database, and through professional networks. Not all the information is made available to everyone; by giving too much access to sensitive data that might end up in the wrong hands we could be at risk of making the situation worse.

The EAMENA database aims to facilitate research and heritage management on both a local as well as a broad scale. The database currently contains over 150,000 records, including information about the archaeological sites themselves and the data sources (e.g. satellite imagery, articles, books and photographs) used to create these records. As we further enhance existing records and add new sites to the database it will be possible to explore the main disturbances and threats affecting sites across the whole MENA region, as well as how patterns of disturbance may vary from area to area and between different types of sites. However, based on preliminary data, we estimate that circa 20,000 sites are at risk from one or more of the agents of destruction we are recording – be it looting, agriculture, conflict, urban expansion, construction activities, or natural erosion.

Avoiding duplication, the project's approach towards data collection in Syria has aimed at filling in existing gaps in knowledge, given the extent of previous surveys.⁴⁰ Two main areas have so far been targeted by the EAMENA project: the Halabiya Plateau and the coastal strip, from the Turkish border in the north to the Lebanese border in the south.

The Halabiya region (c. 2,500km²), prior to the ongoing conflict in Syria, was marked for a dam project that was intended to affect more than 2,000km². This region is particularly rich in archaeological sites, particularly cairn fields and enclosures: in addition to the known sites, the EAMENA team identified more than 3,000 potential sites in the zone expected to be submerged or destroyed during construction using Google Earth imagery. Rescue excavations and surveys had been planned by the Syrian authorities for nine sites (some of which were already recorded), in addition to a study of the plateau area, but neither these investigations nor the dam project itself could be conducted once the conflict started, making surveys such as EAMENA's essential.

The coastal strip, c. 9,000km², in contrast, has been heavily developed since the mid-20th century. Our mapping here has focused on using a variety of different imagery and map sources, e.g. CORONA and Google Earth, to explore the changes and threats to archaeological sites along this coastline since the 1950s. Detailed records currently exist for over 1,600 potential archaeological sites from this region.

Other sites in Syria have remained untouched, remarkably, and we are also investigating these further, so that a better record can be made of them, just in case they do become targets for looters. In Syria 6,094 sites have been recorded, in an area of c. 11,200km².

³⁹ EAMENA Database v3.0 <<https://eamena.org/database>> (last accessed 18 Oct. 2020).

⁴⁰ E.g. Poidebard 1934; Geyer 2001; Lönnqvist – Törmä 2003; Wilkinson 2003; Casana – Wilkinson 2005; Castel 2007; Ur – Wilkinson 2008; Braemer et al. 2009; Lönnqvist et al. 2011; Wilkinson et al. 2012; Matthiae – Marchetti 2013; Meyer 2013; Wilkinson et al. 2014.

Utilising these records, we have been working with a small number of countries to assist in the development of their national historic environment records, especially for Yemen (through the Oxford team) as a test case, and we hope this will be developed for Syria (through the Durham team⁴¹). If these initiatives are successful we will expand their scope through the training activities (already planned to take place in Tunis, Beirut and Amman over the next three years), to other interested countries through training courses funded by the UK government's Cultural Protection Fund. In many ways the EAMENA project is just at the beginning; further grant applications and fund-raising are planned for the next five years and it is hoped that the project will continue to expand and develop. Key to this is building up new collaborations. We are already working with several existing field projects or initiatives within the region (e.g. the Kūbbā Coastal Survey in Lebanon, in Morocco with the Wadi Draa project at Leicester University), and hope to develop more initiatives and collaborations for fieldwork and monitoring in the future.

Although the project is still in its data collection phase, it is already starting to develop a training component, building on initial success in Iraq.⁴² Therefore it was very fortunate that the Cultural Protection Fund was launched in June 2016 by the British Council in partnership with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.⁴³ This £30m fund was set up to protect cultural heritage at risk due to conflict in nine countries, mainly in the MENA region. We applied for a project to train up to 120 heritage professionals in the EAMENA methodology; interpreting satellite imagery, creating records and monitoring the condition of sites. The focus was on six countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestinian territories, Tunisia, and Syria) and funding for this was approved in late 2016. The 'Training in Endangered Archaeology Methodology with Middle East and North African Heritage Stakeholders' project is now well underway and the first training course is expected to take place in Tunis in late 2017 with subsequent ones in Beirut and Amman in early 2018.

The last facet of EAMENA's work involves the trade in illicit antiquities. There is no question that the archaeological sites of Syria, many of them World Heritage sites,⁴⁴ are under the greatest threat because of the five-year long conflict there. At the time of writing, very important sites and individual temples and structures in Palmyra have been destroyed as part of the so-called Islamic State's publicity programme. In addition we have also seen many large, important sites, and other smaller sites, subject to systematic looting for artefacts.⁴⁵ EAMENA is conducting essential research on the timing and stimuli for the illicit trade in artefacts, but there can be no doubt that as state control diminishes, or is totally absent, looting of archaeological sites increases.⁴⁶ We have seen significant changes to sites in connection with looting activities in Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen. In Syria, the most often quoted example has been the illegal excavations at the Roman city of Apamea, although Dura Europos has also received significant attention.⁴⁷

Conclusions

As professional archaeologists we strive to minimise the amount of damage done to fragile archaeological remains. We know we cannot save everything, but we can aim to document and study as many sites as possible. As more and more sites are threatened by conflict, natural disasters and the development pressures of an increasing population, archaeologists must grapple with

⁴¹ See Vafadari et al. 2017.

⁴² Bewley et al. 2016b.

⁴³ Cf. <<https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development/cultural-protection-fund>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

⁴⁴ Burns 1999.

⁴⁵ Stone 2015.

⁴⁶ See the website of Trafficking Culture for more information <<https://traffickingculture.org>> (last accessed 18 Feb. 2020).

⁴⁷ See UNOSAT 2014; Casana 2015.

the complexities of heritage management to develop the tools to understand the threats and tackle them. The approaches showcased here demonstrate the potential to utilise new technologies in ways that were inconceivable a decade ago. Now the challenge becomes how best to utilise them rather than suffering from information overload. To this end we have also made it a significant aim to allow the EAMENA database to be used as a basis for national heritage inventories. These national records (see MEGA-J, for example⁴⁸) can provide the necessary information for planners, those rebuilding the countries after conflict and those responsible for the cultural heritage in their countries to better protect their cultural heritage. Through our training programmes we are hoping to develop the necessary expertise across the whole region so that these digital inventories can be used and maintained by staff working in each country, placing the responsibility for their heritage in their own hands.

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