A Vision for the Management of Antiquities and Heritage in Libya

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Introduction

After the outbreak of the 17th of February Revolution, workers and those interested in the field of antiquities and heritage in Libya hoped for the best and for a positive change to reach the institutions sponsoring and supervising the Libyan heritage. Unfortunately, the few years that followed the revolution did not bring about any positive change, but rather the crises of antiquities and heritage management have been further complicated.

Prior the revolution, the heritage and antiquities suffered several problems, mainly the negligence at both the official and civil levels (the Gaddafi regime considered the cultural heritage as traces of the colonization, according to his strange philosophy) for this reason he created a gap between the people and their heritage.

We attribute the disappointment for the lack of the longed-for positive change, after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, to the following reasons:

1) The unstable political and security situation in the country, which made the matter of antiquities and heritage secondary and totally irrelevant to the decision makers.

2) The absence of a scientific vision.
3) The poor communication between the Libyan archaeologists (and academics working in the Department of Antiquities).

As well as the policy of resistance to change, that is rooted in the Libyan heritage institutions.

After about five years, now we have to ask how are the conditions of the antiquities and cultural heritage in Libya?

We can summarize the answer to this question by saying that the cultural heritage in Libya is going through the worst phase in its history. The abuses are no longer occurring secretly, but rather have become explicitly committed (such as demolishing the archaeological sites, robberies, and antiquities smuggling...etc).

During the critical phase the country is going through, the department of antiquities was divided into two departments (one in “Tripoli” and one in “Shahat”) each of them – unfortunately- has its own working system that is different from the other. Despite our discontent with their administrations and technical systems and the large criticism against them, we do not want to talk about this now – suffice it to say that both departments of “Tripoli” and “Shahat” were not able to elaborate a national vision for managing the crisis suffered by the Libyan heritage.
The Department of Antiquities in the Interim Government:

The interim government established the Department of Antiquities in the city of “Shahat”. The Department, which was initially a subsidiary of the Authority of Culture, Media and Antiquities, was later on separated from the Authority pursuant to the decree No. 320 for year 2015 issued by the interim government. Despite of the great efforts of the interim government in supporting the Department of Antiquities in “Shahat”, it was unfortunately unable to solve the problems of antiquities and heritage, but one can says that it has further complicated the scene. The main areas of vulnerability within the Department of Antiquities can be summarized as follow:

1. The ill-considered plans for changing the working system of the Antiquities Department (which exceeded 100 years).

2. The adoption a new work plan (or as called an administrative structure) that has many gaps.

It is claimed that this structure is emulated from what is called the World Bank Strategy. In reality, this strategy was prepared by a company called “ARS PROGETTI S.P.A” specialized in heritage and tourism, with the support of World Bank for the interest of the Libyan government during the Gaddafi rule. This implementation adopted by the Antiquities Department in the interim government raised the following criticisms:

- This structure that was emulated from the ARS PROGETTI S.P.A, was largely modified and changed.
The strategy emphasizes that the branches structure, “which has been in use for long time,” does not need a change and it can be counted on to improve the performance.

The strategy does not mention at all the establishment of new branches or offices, which comes in contradiction with the Department Chairman's inauguration of new offices and branches (based on no scientific or administrative criteria).

The strategy emphasizes that its implementation should be done in phases that are related to the implementation mechanisms and the nature of the phase. This was pointed out in the section addressing the Action Plan of the presented strategy.

Building capacities is definitely the first step – as emphasized by the strategy.

The strategy states that adopting its implementation is related to three main phases, which are:

- A one-year phase that focuses on building a consensus around it.
- A phase that ranges from 2 to 5 years and aims at enhancing the capacities.
- A phase that ranges from one to 5 years, during which developmental projects should be implemented.
3. The Negligence of the Libyan World Heritage Sites

Unfortunately, the deficient performance of the Antiquities department in the interim government has become obvious to everyone, at the local and international levels. In fact, the five Libyan World heritage sites were placed on the list of the World Heritage in Danger. In reality, when following the Libyan heritage affairs, one notices that there is a big deficiency in following up with the Libyan world heritage sites by the Department of Antiquities. This deficiency is represented in:

1. The frequent absences to attend the meetings of the World Heritage Committee.

2. Not submitting the State of Conservation report on the Libyan World Heritage sites and often we read in the meetings reports of the World Heritage Committee the phrase "Libya did not submit a report."

3. Unfortunately Libya is among the few countries which do not have a tentative list of the sites that are nominated to be on World Heritage List. Developing a tentative list is the duty of the Department of Antiquities.
As a result of this shortcoming, in its recent meeting in Istanbul on 10-29 of July, 2016, the World Heritage Committee placed the five Libyan world heritage sites (all at once) on the World Heritage in Danger list, in a historical precedent. This announcement was justified by the security instability in Libya and the presence of armed groups on these sites or in their direct surroundings, as stated in the official website of UNESCO.

In reality, this justification cannot be accepted for all the Libyan sites. The real reason and the common denominator between the five Libyan sites is the “lack of information about these Libyan world heritage sites”, which is again the duty of the Department of Antiquities.
A Proposal for Managing Antiquities and Heritage in Libya

Consequently, and as a desire from my part not to stand idly, I present to you this scientific consultation which views are “obligating” me as the only Libyan specialist in the field of managing antiquities and heritage, and it is as follow:

"The Libyan National Authority of Antiquities and Heritage"

First: A Libyan National Authority of Antiquities and Heritage shall be established that is independent from any Ministry or other bodies. It is neither logical, nor in the public interest that the department of antiquities is a subsidiary, for instance, of the Ministry (Authority) of Tourism or Ministry (Authority) of Culture and Media. Based on previous experiences, and not simply a theoretical analysis, when the department of antiquities is part of another Authority or Ministry the archaeological matter would be secondary within the interests of these Ministries or bodies (for example: the Ministry or Authority of Tourism view the heritage only as a source of attraction for tourists. In the same context, within the Ministry of Culture and Information, the heritage affairs would remain a secondary matter compared with the media and cultural affairs.
Second: The National Authority of Antiquities and Heritage will be the only authority that is in charge of the heritage affairs and manages all the Libyan institutions and stakeholders concerned with it. No other party or institution should compete over this responsibility and that is for the purpose of developing a national unified vision that incorporates all the Libyan antiquities and heritage.

Third: Forming the Authority of Antiquities and Heritage in accordance with the layout of establishing bodies and authorities. That is through appointing a Chairman who manages the entire administration, and designates the Chairmen of the affiliated administrations.

The Authority shall manage the following administrations:

1) The General Administration of Antiquities

According to this proposal the “Department of the Libyan Antiquities” is turned into a subsidiary administration to the proposed Authority, after re-examining its administration, divisions and branches (Murakabet). In fact, no “actual or real” change has been made for several years. This administration will be formed in a way that ensures: The distribution of specialties, and the dissolving of funding and also decision making centralization (a layout and structure of this administration will be attached to this proposal).
2) The General Administration of the Historic Cities and Buildings

The historic cities and buildings in Libya are run by the Management of Historic Cities Authority. The Authority’s work is focused on “Tripoli”, “Benghazi” and “Ghadames”. After the 17th of February Revolution, this authority has become affiliated to the Ministry of Local Governance (a strange and unjustified affiliation). This Ministry sought to open branches for the Management of Historic Cities Authority in several cities. However, the entire Authority does not have the required technical and scientific expertise necessary to manage the heritage. Hence, it has to be under the proposed Libyan National Authority of Antiquities and Heritage, so that it includes the historic buildings within a national vision. On another side, the Management of Historic Cities Authority would benefit from the wide experience of the Department of Antiquities.

3) The General Administration of Documents and Archives

Unfortunately the historic documents and manuscripts are dispersed in between several Libyan institutions. This is why, it is important to re-examine this matter and to establish an administration affiliated to the “proposed” Authority to include all the institutions concerned with the historical documents and manuscripts within its competence.
4) The General Administration for the Protection of Antiquities and Heritage

This administration is responsible for the security systems that guard and protect the antiquities in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior (this administration is the subject of the Authority Chairman's evaluation in terms of performance, planning and implementation, and developing security plans). This administration should be led by specialized expertise in antiquities and heritage. All this in order to avoid the "unsuccessful" experience of the tourist police and the protection of antiquities.

This administration is also responsible for the legal and legislative matters of the heritage and antiquities as well as it deals with the Libyan looted antiquities through preparing what it required for the follow up in order return them to the country.
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The Libyan Organization Of Policies & Strategies (LOOPS) is an independent, nonprofit and nongovernmental institution founded in December 2014 in Tripoli, Libya. A representative branch was founded in Istanbul in January 2015.

The organization carries out research and studies related to emerging policy and strategy issues with the aim of generating effective and successful policies and providing support to decision-makers. The organization devotes its efforts to improving the performance of Libyan institutions and advancing the economic and social welfare of the Libyan people. It seeks to spread the notions and concepts of quality, good governance, strategic planning and a culture of excellence so as to improve the performance of Libyan institutions.

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