

# LAaR – Libyan Antiquities at Risk

## Project Report, February-May 2017

The first phase of the pilot project 'LAaR – Libyan Antiquities at Risk' took place in September 2015 – June 2016, funded by the Society for Libyan Studies and the AHRC Cultural Engagement Fellowship scheme. The project received additional funding from the Society for Libyan Studies for a four-month extension, February-May 2017. We are very grateful to the Society for Libyan Studies for funding these two phases of our project. This report describes the activities we carried out in this second phase and the intended future developments. The project is based at the University of Leicester, supervised by David Mattingly and Susan Walker. Niccolò Mugnai and Julia Nikolaus are employed as part-time Research Assistants (0.3 FTE = 1.5 days per week).

### 1. DATABASE/WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT AND REQUIRED ACTIONS

The LAaR database is fully functional and its structure has been carefully refined. Data are being entered on a regular basis; we currently have 180 entries and we envisage an approximate total of 300 entries by the end of May 2017. Parts of the photographic materials are being sourced from the SLS Archive, mainly from the Brogan and Thorn collections. A substantial set of additional photographs has been kindly made available by two of our Libyan colleagues, Mohamed Abdrbba (University of Leicester) and Muftah Alhddad (University of Az-Zaytouna).

The LAaR website has been set up under this temporary web-address: <http://archeodb.600net.de>. It is currently not 'live', and therefore not accessible to the public. Before we can officially launch it, hopefully by the end of May, it is essential to resolve the following issues: (1) Clear copyright rules must be stated on the website for each image regarding online use of photographs held in the collections of the SLS Archive. We would appreciate the advice of the SLS Council on whether we have full copyright permissions for all the images in the various collections; (2) A web-domain and server storage space must be obtained. We outline two possibilities for achieving this, which can be evaluated by the SLS Council:

- **LAaR website and database integrated into the SLS digital platform.** We have met with Charlotte Roueché to preliminarily discuss the potential and advantages of this choice. The feasibility of this option is dependent on how advanced the plans for setting up the SLS digital platform are, and whether it would be ready to host the LAaR website by the end of May 2017.
- **Independent LAaR website with link from/to SLS website.** Currently the website is visible through *ProcessWire*, an open-source PHP CMS and Content Management Framework serving as the back-end structure of the database/website. While the website can be constructed with *ProcessWire*, we will have to purchase a web-domain (max £30 per year) and server storage (e.g. Amazon S3: max £40 per month for large and very frequently accessed websites, which in our case would probably not exceed £20/£25 per month).

We are currently in the process of watermarking each image with the SLS logo or the photographer's name. Images currently in the database and visible on archeodb.600 will be replaced with the watermarked image before going live. New entries are currently not visible on archeodb.600 and will be published once the watermarked image has been uploaded.

### 2. NETWORKING, COLLABORATIONS, AND EVENTS

As indicated in our previous report (September 2016), in the first phase of the project we established a solid network of scholars, cultural heritage operators, professional antiquities dealers, experts, as well as

the general public. These collaborations have been maintained and information regularly exchanged.

In March 2017, the LAaR team was invited to illustrate the database/website to the Art and Antiques Unit of the Metropolitan Police in London. The MET team was able to try out our website/database and found the structure of the search options very useful and intuitive. They are keen to stay in touch and will contact us if any suspicious items come to their attention. The MET team was quite unaware about the scale of the antiquities trade coming out of Libya. Consequently, they would appreciate any information on dealers who sell Libyan materials internationally, to flag them up should they be trading in the UK market. We contacted Morgan Belzic (France) to obtain more information on this. He is very happy to collaborate with us, and we forwarded his information to the MET Police.

The LAaR team gave a lecture for the Society for Libyan Studies at UCL in February 2017, describing the progress of the project and discussing issues and potential developments with the audience. On 10 June 2017, we will present a paper about our project at a two-day conference which will be held at the University of Mainz, Germany. The conference focuses in particular on new and innovative projects that concentrate on the illegal antiquities trade.

### **3. PUBLICATIONS UPDATE**

The LAaR team submitted a paper detailing the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, as part of a special issue of *Libyan Studies* 2017 which will include eight papers developed out of the presentations given at the Libyan Antiquities at Risk Workshop (British Academy, March 2016). The paper was reviewed and accepted for publication, and is now undergoing final typesetting. We are currently preparing a second paper, which will describe the events attended/organized by LAaR and the training offered to our Libyan colleagues in Oxford and Leicester in March 2016. This paper will be published in the newly re-launched, peer-reviewed journal *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia* ('L'Erma' di Bretschneider).

### **4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

A significant part of our work in this period has been focused on how to further develop the LAaR project and secure the necessary financial means. At the end of March 2017 we submitted an Expression of Interest form to the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund (CPF), with the University of Leicester as the lead applicant organization. The response from the British Council was positive and we were invited to submit a full application by the end of June 2017.

Funding is being sought to undertake a number of key activities over a period of two years (2018-2020): 1) Translating the LAaR database and website into Arabic to enhance its usability as a tool for combatting illicit antiquities trafficking; 2) Directly involving Libyan partners and colleagues in recording and entering data into the LAaR database; 3) Providing an intensive training programme for Libyan archaeologists, university and school teachers, and customs officials on how to use the database/website; 4) Starting a series of initiatives to raise public awareness of the importance of Libyan cultural heritage.

Leicester and Oxford, 11 April 2017

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