Libya's Cultural Heritage Sites at Risk: Problems, Challenges and Risks After the 2011 Revolution

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Abstract
Libya has numerous heritage sites dating back to different historical eras in many regions, of which five are included in the World Heritage List. These sites suffer from a wide range of human threats, which increased after the Libyan revolution in 2011. UNESCO urgently called for the protection of several sites in Libya. This paper will focus on the increased human risks to heritage sites in Libya after its liberation. We aim to determine the damage caused to Libyan heritage sites and to what extent the war contributed to the emergence of these risks. This research builds on first-hand data gathered from governmental and institutional reports concerned with Antiquities in Libya and published reports of international organisations that worked in Libya during and after the war. The paper concludes that the lack of authority, the weakness of its administrative institutions, and human dangers are some of the challenges facing heritage sites in Libya.
Keywords: Cultural Heritage Sites; Human Risks; Post-War; Libya.

1. Introduction
Cultural heritage represents what the current generations inherited from previous generations in historical, architectural, religious and other fields. This reflects the identity of the communities and represents their lifestyle and behaviours . (Aziz Amen, 2017, Amen & Kuzovic, 2018, Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018, Amen & Nia, 2021)   Arab countries enjoy an abundant presence of cultural heritage on their lands, and this reflects their Arab civilisation, which is represented in its historical and archaeological features, such as the pyramids in Egypt, the city of Petra in Jordan, the castle of Ashur in Iraq, the city of Shibam in Yemen, the city of Aleppo in Syria and, the city of Leptis in Libya.

However, the cultural heritage in the Arab world is exposed to many threats and challenges, which the Arab Spring revolutions significantly contributed to, during which wars led to the destruction of some sites. The Secretary-General of the Union of Arab Archaeologists confirmed that the Arab heritage in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria had lost 40% of its value in recent years due to several factors, including destruction during the conflict (Al-Duqail, 2019). However, this occurs in most wars in the world. Cultural heritage has always been a victim of wars, and cultural property has been deliberately looted, damaged and destroyed in Afghanistan and Yugoslavia (Marojevic, 2017; Madrigal, 2021).

Wars may not cause direct damage to cultural heritage, but they may contribute to its aggravation and expansion. This occurred in Libya during its revolution, which began in 2011. International organisations confirmed the protection of heritage sites and that they were not targeted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during its raids in Libya while supporting the 2011 revolution (The University of Leicester, 2014; Kane, 2015; Fitzgerald & Megerisi, 2015). The residents also protected the sites to avoid being used as hideouts or exposing them to theft and vandalism (Kane, 2015; The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018; Munasinghe, 2022).

However, this matter does not negate the indirect damage of the war, which caused civil conflicts and political instability in the state, which caused weakness and a lack of respect for the authority of law. It also had a negative impact on cultural heritage and threatened its protection and conservation.

Therefore, to start restoring the cultural heritage and benefiting from it in developing the country's national income and using it to reunite Libyan people, the threats it faces, and their causes must be identified. Moreover, the challenges it is exposed to should be confronted, and the role of the conflict in that should be defined. This is what this paper aims to highlight.

2. Brief History of Cultural Heritage in Libya
Libya is located in North Africa. It occupies an area of 1,760,000 km2, extending from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the middle of the Sahara Desert (Di Lernia & Gallinaro, 2014). This has given Libya a diverse climate and nature, which makes its cultural heritage stand out. It has a desert heritage that penetrates deep into the desert, such as the Acacus Mountains and the old city of Ghadames, in addition to its heritage centred on the coasts, such as the city of Shahat and Lebda. It also has a heritage submerged in water, and the central regions of Libya are also not devoid of heritage sites.

It has also abounded with cultural heritage and deep roots in the past. This is due to the fact that numerous human cultures and civilisations emerged as a result of multiple waves of human colonisation in the area. For example, Libya was inhabited by the Romans and the Phoenicians, and Muslims entered under the rule of the Ottomans and the Italian occupation.

This momentum of human settlement and civilised dialogue with all the cultures of the Mediterranean Basin shows its archaeological and historical components in the form of cities and historical and archaeological sites. Immovable heritage includes all archaeological sites, centres, historical cities, distinctive architectural landmarks, places of worship and cave dwellings. At the same time, movable heritage includes archaeological finds, traditional industries, manuscripts and documents. Intangible heritage includes music, folklore, literature, religious rites, and traditions. In contrast, natural heritage includes natural reserves, geological formations, picturesque nature sites, bone fossils, etc., which, unfortunately, have not been exploited as a source of national income.

During the era of the Kingdom of Libya, cultural heritage received little attention as a source of income for the state because Libya was a rich country that relied mainly on oil, the matter that continued during the era of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya under the rule of Gaddafi, which marginalised some heritage sites and did not give them sufficient attention as a result of colonialism (Fitzgerald & Megerisi, 2015; Kane,2015). Despite this, between 1982 and 1986, five different Libyan heritage sites were included on the World Heritage List (Figure 1).

Furthermore, the heritage sites did not witness any perceived renewal in terms of their protection and preservation during the Libyan government after the revolution. Only some efforts to promote heritage resulted in 2020, including three sites in the Tentative World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2020).

Figure (1) Map showing Libya's location and its five world heritage sites (Author, 2023) .

3. The State of Cultural Heritage During the Successive Governments of Libya

Libya has experienced many political eras that have caused damage and posed various threats to heritage sites. Throughout all these periods, cultural heritage did not play an effective role in the country's development, nor was it a focus of attention for the people living there.

3.1. Italian Occupation and the Kingdom of Libya (1911-1969)

During the era of the Italian occupation and the conflict that took place in Libya, the war destroyed some heritage sites. Moreover, during the attempts of the Italian army forces to pave the way for their military vehicles by levelling the earth's terrain, tombs and excavations buried under the ground were damaged (Munzi & Zocchi, 2017). Damage to heritage sites also continued during the era of the Libyan Kingdom but in a different way. During the state's attempts at development and urban expansion, antiquities or heritage sites were not considered. Their borders were transgressed through the construction of houses, industrial and commercial buildings, and the accompanying infrastructure. This happened in the site of Lepits, Sabratha, and Cyrene. Moreover, damage occurred through the

exploitation of agricultural lands, the consequent destruction of buried antiquities and the encroachment on the safe area of heritage sites (Munzi & Zocchi, 2017; Abdulkariem, 2014).

3.2. The Arab Jamahiriya and Gaddafi's Rule (1969-2011)

Gaddafi's rule, which lasted for a long time, was characterised by a lack of interest in cultural heritage, as was mentioned previously, as it neglected some important non-Islamic sites in Libya on the grounds that they belonged to the colonial era, such as Leptis, Sabratha and Cyrene which are listed as World Heritage Sites.

The state continued to pay attention to development through oil extraction and neglected any other source of national income, which caused them to ignore the maintenance and restoration of heritage sites. Even the documentation of heritage or the threats it was going through was not a focus of concern. For example, reports about the Libyan World Heritage sites on the UNESCO website are almost non-existent, and if they exist, they are brief and lack detailed information. (World heritage union of Five Libyan Municipalities, 2018). Moreover, this era exposed cultural heritage to many natural and human threats.

The natural threats, which varied amongst the regions of the country and increased with climate change, took place in the desert sites as a result of sand encroaching on the sites, which hid the archaeological features, in addition to the factors of erosion, bacterial damage and insects on the sites. Heavy rain also caused damage to heritage buildings, which happened in the mud city of Ghadames when several buildings collapsed (Abdulkariem, 2013; The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018). Drought and sudden high temperatures also caused damage to coastal sites, and they also suffered from rising sea levels, which caused erosion to the surfaces that came into contact with them (Mugnai, Nikolaus, Mattingly & Walker, 2017).

Three main human dangers to cultural heritage emerged during this time: oil exploration, infrastructure and tourism (Di Lernia, Gallinaro, & Zerboni, 2010; Di Lernia & Gallinaro, 2014). The oil locations are distributed in many areas in Libya, and oil exploration was a priority for the government, as indicated earlier. Hence, the exploration operations and the establishment of oil fields caused damage to the heritage sites and the antiquities buried under the ground. Furthermore, heavy machinery was used, which had an impact on buildings and monuments, and the infrastructure accompanying these fields and oil pipelines also caused damage to the heritage sites. The other side of the state's infrastructure projects, which damaged the heritage sites, is the water transport pipes for the Great Man-Made River project, which was the largest Gaddafi era project. It transported fresh water from the south of Libya to the north, which resulted in the installation of damage to heritage sites and moisture leakage (Munzi & Zocchi, 2017).

The uncontrolled tourism boom and the attempt to develop it in the last years of Gaddafi's rule contributed to the damage to heritage sites. Proper plans have not been made to monitor visitors, avoid the defacement of sites, theft of artefacts, and disposal of rubbish.

For example, uncontrolled tourism caused the obliteration of the ancient paintings at the Acacus site by scraping and moistening the inscriptions for photography. In some cases, the ancient paintings were removed and stolen (Di Lernia & Gallinaro, 2014). Moreover, providing services to tourists, such as accommodations, restaurants and cafes near the tourist sites, contributed to the damage to the surroundings of the heritage and the distortion of the general view of them. For example, this occurred in the Apollonia region when a port and large hotel were built. However, the antiquities department was not consulted, and the impact of modern construction on the heritage site was not considered (Mugnai, et al., 2017; Marzano, 2006).

Negligence and failure to follow up on the sites also caused deliberate destruction in some exceptional cases, as what happened, for example, in the destruction of several rocky sites in the south by spraying them (Di Lernia & Gallinaro, 2014; The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018).

The consequences of the lack of interest in cultural heritage accumulated in the neglect of monitoring and periodic maintenance of heritage sites. In addition to failing to form a qualified Libyan scientific and technical cadre to engage in maintenance operations. All of this led to the creation of weak administrative institutions for cultural heritage management.

3.3. The New Governments After the Revolution (From 2011 Onwards)

As mentioned previously, the heritage sites were not exposed to direct damage from the bombing during the revolution. Still, the civil conflicts that occurred caused the demolition of some buildings, such as the Al-Qarmali Mosque in Tripoli (Kane, 2015), and a castle in the city of Sebha was also subjected to destruction as a result of the conflict between the Arabs and the Tabu in the south of Libya (Kane, 2015), in addition to the exposure of some sites to some fragments and light damage (Figure 2) (Di Lernia & Gallinaro, 2014; Mugnai et al., 2017; The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018).

Figure (2). The effects of the bombing on the Archaeological site of Sabratha. (Auther-2022).

However, the most significant damage was affected at some sites as a result of the emergence of extremist religious groups, which demolished many heritage sites in most Libyan cities, such as the destruction of seven historical cemeteries in the city of Zuweila and the tomb of Murad Agha (Figure 3), as well as the demolition of Abu Madi (Figure 4) (Al-Duqail, 2019). Other threats also appeared that have caused much damage to the Libyan cultural heritage, such as the theft, looting and trafficking of antiquities. For example, thousands of artefacts, jewellery, and various coins, which the Antiquities Authority placed in a bank in Benghazi, were stolen (Al-Duqail, 2019; Brown, 2011). Cultural heritage was also stolen through illegal excavations in heritage sites and the theft of artefacts and smuggling them out of the country (Mugnai et al., 2017).

Figure (3) The bombing of the tomb of Murad Agha, which was built in the sixteenth century.
Taken by Hisham Al-Jarbi (2013).

Figure (4) Abu Madi cemetery before the attack (Left). Abu Madi cemetery after the attack (Right). Taken by
Hisham Al-Jarbi (2014).

The increasing frequency and expansion of the threats resulted in the dissatisfaction of international organisations in terms of the adequate protection of Libya's global sites, which led to its inclusion on the World Heritage in Danger List in 2016 due to the war, in an attempt to draw attention to it and increase local and international protection for it (UNESCO, 2016).

After the decline in the frequency of civil conflicts in Libya and the start of the post-revolutionary stability phase, threats to heritage sites continued. The few reports on cultural heritage indicate that it still needs to receive more attention to change its status back to how it was before the revolution. However, it still suffers from the negativity surrounding it. For example, the impact of natural threats is still the same, and no measures have been taken to reduce or avoid their influence.

As for human dangers, they have increased dramatically. Such as the urban expansion and attacks on buffer zones of heritage sites to build houses, which was confirmed by the World Heritage Committee by monitoring many

violations in the world heritage sites in the city of Shahat, Leptis and Sabratha (The Libyan World Heritage Sites Committee, 2017). In addition, modern buildings have been constructed around the ancient tombs (Fig. 5).

Figure (5). Illegal construction in a Libyan archaeological site (Bennett & Barker, 2011).

However, some of these violations were considered unintentional and were not included as a threat to some websites in the reports of government institutions. However, it was reported to distort the general view of the site (Department of Antiquities, 2021).

Furthermore, the damage of urban expansion includes construction consequences from levelling the land and the consequent destruction of antiquities buried under the ground, in addition to the infrastructure of new buildings and their penetration into sites. Moreover, construction waste not removed or transported near heritage sites leads the sites to become dumps.

One of the increasing threats is the exploitation of the lands of heritage sites for animal grazing, which damages the mosaic floors of some sites (The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018). Animals also loosen old walls' foundations, weakening their interdependence and leading to their collapse (Figure 6). Moreover, there is a reclamation of lands around the heritage sites, as they are the private property of some individuals, which leads to the use of heavy machinery and the soil's moisture increases (The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018).

Figure (6). Heavy grazing in the Archaeological Site of Leptis Magna (The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018)

The ineffectiveness of administrative institutions caused by a lack of experienced staff, a lack of monitoring and follow-up, and a lack of state finance are among the risks that remain after the revolution. (Abdulkariem, 2014; Di Lernia & Gallinaro, 2014; Kane, 2015; Munzi & Zocchi, 2017; Mugnai et al., 2017; The University of Leicester, 2014).

4. The Impact of The Revolution Increasing Cultural Heritage Threats
Given the main threats and risks before the revolution, it was found that most of them, such as urban expansion, oil exploration, agriculture and tourism, were all threats that arose because of the attempt to develop the country.

However, the damage arose from the lack of interest in heritage sites, which were not considered symbols of the country's identity.

After the revolution in 2011, the vast cultural heritage of the country was still exposed to many violations and risks that threatened the status of the human cultural heritage in Libya and put the Libyan state in an embarrassing situation in front of international institutions concerned with the conserving cultural heritage, especially since Libya has world heritage sites. It is one of the countries that has the precedence in signing most of the agreements, conventions and laws issued by UNESCO and its affiliated institutions.

However, the increase in these dangers after the revolution occurred for several reasons, as a result of the chaos the country experienced, the absence of a constitution, and the lack of a clear legal system (Kane, 2015). The first of these reasons was the rapid succession of governments during the years of the revolution, each of which was trying to highlight its achievements and satisfy citizens' satisfaction with their performance without considering the heritage sites. Of course, it could be argued that some of them did not have time to consider the heritage sites (Mugnai et al., 2017). In addition, the existence of two governments for the state during an extended period, the conflict of its decisions, and the lack of clarity of the affiliation of the sites to any government or to which judicial body to resort led to the citizens exceeding the authority of the law and attacking some archaeological sites in their favour (Mugnai et al., 2017).

Furthermore, after the revolution, the government lost control of the state. It did not have the power to impose the rule of law. Many problems were solved by customary methods, which were not subject to the state's authority but instead to the authority of the tribe, which considers most of Libya's regions to be tribal and favours tribal's law over the state's law.

This is what happened, for example, in the city of Shahat, which is considered the heritage site most threatened by urban expansion, characterised by a large spread of heritage sites on its lands. Because of the customs, the citizens owned many lands in the safe areas of the heritage sites for two reasons: the first is that in this city, each tribe has an area of land to expand into for habitation. Therefore, it is protected by the customs' power. These lands are also spread over by heritage sites, which makes the residents indifferent to them because there is no authority to prevent them from doing so. There are no alternative lands in suitable places to build on. Customary methods resolved another matter, which is what the Gaddafi government did in distributing agricultural land to the population without considering that it contained buried traces; Agriculture Law protected it. However, after the revolution and without the rule of law, the population customarily recovered the lands, which were cultivated and built randomly (Abdulkariem, 2014; The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018).

Indiscriminate construction also spread through the seizure of lands without concern for their containment of archaeological remains or their location within the scope of archaeological sites due to the need for more specific ownership rights to land (Kane, 2015).

The increase in threats, such as theft of antiquities and the deliberate destruction of them, whether from extremist groups or indiscriminate destruction by the people, was caused primarily by the absence of the prestige of the state and the lack of enforcement of the rule of law (The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018). In addition, after the revolution, in attempts to activate tourism, the Ministry of Tourism was keen to start domestic tourism. However, it was not adequately monitored and followed up, and with some people's lack of awareness of the importance of cultural heritage, some sites have been vandalised, and their belongings were stolen (The Libyan Department of Antiquities, 2018; Antiquity Department, 2021).

The danger of the poor performance of state institutions and the lack of qualified employees and expertise to manage and follow up on business, it is fair to return to the real reason for all those issues, which is Gaddafi's rule of Libya for 42 years, who relied on an individual rule and deliberately weakened administrative institutions and did not build them properly to impose his control and his domination over it. Libya suffered from weak government institutions in all fields, which also bequeathed the citizens' lack of confidence in these institutions. When the revolution broke out, many citizens tried to recover their rights without waiting for the state to do so (Fitzgerald & Megerisi, 2015; Mugnai et al., 2017).

5. Conclusion

The cultural heritage embodies the different cultures and identities represented by the regions of Libya, and conserving it for the next generations is the responsibility of all members of society. However, the state is the legally empowered authority to do so.

However, after the 2011 revolution, the Libyan state suffered from deficiencies in its performance (Kane, 2015; Mugnai et al., 2017), which resulted in increased threats to cultural heritage and the emergence of some other dangers. Current hazards include urban expansion, agriculture, grazing, theft, deliberate destruction and neglect. As for the threats to the cultural heritage related to the functional performance of state institutions, they are

represented in their poor performance in terms of lack of documentation, improper maintenance, neglect of monitoring and following up on the status of sites, and the lack of technical personnel.

This leads to the Libyan government facing complex challenges; when confronted and resolved, it may be able to advance the Libyan cultural heritage and benefit from it appropriately. However, to advance the state in all fields, it must first restore its prestige, impose the rule of law, and gain the citizen's respect for all the legislation it enacts.

Regarding threats to cultural heritage, documentation must begin, which will ensure the preservation of the memory of the heritage, even if it is eroded with time, which will help restore it. Moreover, documentation is for the works carried out to benefit from previous experiences or to avoid repeating mistakes if they occur.

Moreover, to protect the heritage, one must focus on educating citizens about the importance of heritage and linking it to national and regional identity, which will ensure individuals' support in conserving heritage and avoiding the harm caused by them.

Furthermore, the state must build strong institutions for cultural heritage management, which can be done by training technical cadres and qualifying them to carry out the work properly. This will ensure the safety of the works and avoid recurring maintenance, which will save the state a great deal of money, which can be used for other works. In addition, there is a tendency to benefit from international experiences and all new technologies in conserving cultural heritage.

Moreover, further studies on the best ways to confront human threats to cultural heritage are much needed to discover how to manage heritage sites properly and thus ensure their best protection.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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