FIRST ISSUE
knowledge ... the future of our heritage
ATHAR is a regional conservation centre in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, established in 2012 by ICCROM and the Government of Sharjah. The Decision to establish ATHAR was made at ICCROM’s 27th General Assembly in November 2011. ATHAR focuses on architectural and archaeological tangible heritage in the Arab region, hence the name that means traces, vestiges, ruins, or archeology in Arabic. This includes heritage collections, rich and varied historic places, sites and monuments. ATHAR aspires to protect the cultural heritage of the Arab region and to broaden access, appreciation and understanding of its history. It primarily aims to enhance the capacity of official heritage institutions to manage heritage sites and museum collections on sustainable basis. This is achieved through a series of local and regional educational and field activities including:

* Capacity building and training: ATHAR professional courses leading to enhancement of conservation practice, and recognition / accreditation of student accomplishments, through affiliation with university programmes.

* Consultation: support, coordination, facilitation and provision of technical advice when requested by the Arab States.

* Dissemination of information: sharing the results of the Centre’s activities including research, experiences, publications from seminars, teaching kits and training manuals for professionals and for teachers of the young.

* Symposia, workshops, and seminars: explorations of current themes important in and for the region, and bringing together the best conservation thinkers to advance knowledge in the field.

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INTRODUCTION: ATHAR AT A GLANCE

ATHAR is a regional conservation centre in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, established in 2012 by ICCROM and the Government of Sharjah. The Decision to establish ATHAR was made at ICCROM’s 27th General Assembly in November 2011. ATHAR focuses on architectural and archaeological tangible heritage in the Arab region, hence the name that means traces, vestiges, ruins, or archeology in Arabic. This includes heritage collections, rich and varied historic places, sites and monuments. ATHAR aspires to protect the cultural heritage of the Arab region and to broaden access, appreciation and understanding of its history. It primarily aims to enhance the capacity of official heritage institutions to manage heritage sites and museum collections on sustainable basis. This is achieved through a series of local and regional educational and field activities including:

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* Symposia, workshops, and seminars: explorations of current themes important in and for the region, and bringing together the best conservation thinkers to advance knowledge in the field.
It is with great pleasure that we, at the newly established ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre, initiate the first issue of this newsletter. The past six months have witnessed a number of activities that harvested what we had implemented last year and beyond. In fact, since the decision to establish the ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre at ICCROM’s 27th General Assembly (November, 2011) and the commencement of staff engagement in Sharjah at the Centre in early 2012, several visits by the Director General, Dr. Stefano De Caro, took place in January, April, June, and December 2012, ensuring a solid partnership with both Governments of Sharjah and UAE (as a host country).

Thanks to the gracious support of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammad Al-Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, that several activities were implemented, including the setting of the corner-stone for the building of the ATHAR Centre premises at the Sharjah University City. The new construction of the ATHAR Centre is due to open its doors by the beginning of next year (see p. 13). Thus, last year marked the time when the ATHAR Programme efforts were sustained in the region to serve all the Arab Member States.

The new Centre, from its location at University City, will continue its efforts to address emerging needs of the region. For example, addressing the need to protect cultural heritage in times of crisis, the “Sharjah Initiative” provides a strategic framework for the Arab States to take actions in this field. This was taken further at a workshop led by ATHAR at the World Archaeology Congress (WAC) last January, addressing needs that the professional community can develop for the safeguard and recovery of endangered cultural patrimony in the region (see p. 5 and p. 7).

Our efforts at the ATHAR Centre have continued to update the knowledge of mid-career professionals and help develop their skills, as we concluded last December the fourth version of the “Regional Course on Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage: Sites and Museums Collections”. The reader of this issue will note our aim to ensure that acquired skills of participants are put into practice in the realm of their institutional work in their home countries. In fact, participants have been engaged in applied projects they will re-convene to report on at the Centre by the end of this year. Results achieved on the ground by participants continue to illustrate the impact of our educational activities in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage in the region.

These efforts were crowned by the announcement of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammad Al-Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, to establishment a post-graduate programme in Conservation. This is in order to achieve the ATHAR Centre’s goals not only related to the actual impact of the programme but also relevant to needed recognition of professional qualifications by higher educational systems. Thus, past and future participants will greatly benefit from this initiative.

Those who have been following our activities since 2004 will appreciate our persistence to build strategic partnerships with institutions of higher education. These strategic directions aimed at consolidating the role of higher education in the field of heritage education, as addressed in the former four ATHAR workshops on the subject, have begun to resonate through initiatives and requests by the Member States of Yemen and Libya. Our experts are enthusiastic to integrate heritage in university curricula whereby these efforts will provide good models and didactic resources for other national educational institutions to consider and follow.

Sustaining the achievements of ATHAR by addressing priority needs will eventually ensure long-term protection of heritage assets through capacity development work for professionals working at various heritage institutions in the region. These professionals have also the task to work inter-sectorally to integrate heritage as an essential vector for development.

Finally, our publications series are progressing to reach wider audiences to help advance knowledge in the field. This is in line to what our new slogan stipulates: “knowledge … the future of our heritage”.

Zaki Aslan
Director, ATHAR Centre
ATHAR participants of the course on Management and Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Sites and Museum Collections (CRC4) learning about first aid to cultural heritage in times of crisis.

November, 2012 - Sharjah, UAE
Recent social and political upheaval in parts of the Arab region have damaged and threatened cultural heritage resources. Thus, the newly established ICCROM-Sharjah ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre hosted an international symposium on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis, the first of its kind in the region. The objective was to develop an Arab regional framework to guide national policies for heritage protection in relation to emergency planning, infrastructure, law and public awareness. During three days of intensive deliberations in Sharjah, from 22 to 24 May 2012, specialist participants representing institutions from 12 Arab countries together with international organizations and other experts working in this field, addressed the following critical issues:

* Types of cultural heritage that have been most vulnerable, threatened or damaged;
* Weaknesses in current heritage protection systems including legislation, inadequate records, lack of manpower, emergency preparedness and physical protection;
* Roles to be played by governmental and non-governmental organizations to minimize damage to cultural heritage; and
* Opportunities that cultural heritage and its protection can provide for recovery and reconciliation.

The participants expressed their gratitude for this significant and timely initiative, under the patronage of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah, Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, and agreed on the following actions to be led by the ICCROM-Sharjah ATHAR Regional Centre, to:

* Review existing national laws and assist to develop model legislations on the conservation of cultural heritage in the region, and most importantly, to include provisions for emergency planning;

* Develop guiding principles for the Arab region in relation to relevant international conventions, especially where countries may not yet be signatories to them;

The meeting participants proposed the following overarching principles as part of an Arab States comprehensive framework addressing cultural heritage in times of crisis:

* **Call upon** all governments and parties to conflict to respect and observe the Hague Convention and its protocols as well as other relevant international conventions and regional declarations during these transitional times.

* **Encourage and amplify** efforts to document and develop national inventories of all cultural assets, starting at the local and district levels in order to ultimately develop a regional database covering all cultural heritage assets.

* **Survey and document** at the local level the impact of conflict and political transition on the cultural heritage of the region. Where possible, such surveys should be shared nationally and regionally in order to develop a comprehensive inventory of damaged and lost heritage assets.

* **Undertake** detailed conflict and risk assessment with the aim of establishing potential direct and indirect impacts of crisis on cultural heritage. The assessment should address the three interrelated areas of conservation and protection needs, capacities to respond and changes in the operational institutional context.
* Recommend and advise on the establishment of mandatory GIS-based inventories of all cultural assets on a national basis;

* Conduct courses and training modules for risk preparedness, assessment and emergency planning, to provide the means to protect cultural heritage in times of crisis; and,

* Disseminate and publish the symposium proceedings together with other relevant material to governments and other cultural organizations in all member states.

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**The Sharjah Initiative**

(Continuation)

* Develop local and national risk reduction, preparedness and emergency response plans, starting with cultural heritage assets of high value that are at high risk.

* Pilot response and recovery initiatives, and monitor them carefully in order to learn lessons that can be utilized in scaling up interventions.

* Build capacity of professionals, and designate appropriate representatives of local communities, to assess, prepare for and respond after crisis at all levels in a multidisciplinary approach. In addition to heritage management, capacities are required in areas of conflict analysis, risk assessment, impact analysis, and recovery planning and management.

* Ensure effective participation of communities and local decision-makers as well as other humanitarian and development actors in the protection of cultural heritage in times of crisis as well as in devising emergency response plans.

* Establish national institutional frameworks for effective crisis response in partnership with relevant regional and international agencies.
At the 7th World Archaeological Congress (WAC-7) held between 14th to 18th of January 2013, in the Dead Sea, Jordan, the ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre, co-organized with the University of Vienna a session titled “Archaeology as A Target: Preservation and Heritage Identities in Times of Conflict”. The session included a number of topics that focused on methodologies developed to-date by specialist organizations, with regards to the protection of archaeological heritage in times of crisis. ICCROM and its ATHAR Regional Centre in Sharjah organized a final session of this theme aimed to follow up on the Sharjah Initiative of May, 2012, and to formulate an action plan focusing initially on key questions identified for this WAC theme. The workshop session organized by ATHAR titled: “where do we go from here?” shed light on challenges in protecting cultural heritage in times of crisis, with special reference to the Arab Region, building on the practical experiences and lessons learnt. It devised a number of recommendations presented at the final session of WAC7, aimed at highlighting the role of professionals working in the fields of Archaeology and Heritage. These recommendations included:

* The need to enhance the national legislative measures aimed at the protection of cultural heritage in times of crisis, and to promote the importance to ratify and observe the Hague Convention and its protocols as well as other relevant international conventions, recommendations and regional declarations during transitional times.

* The need to develop institutional and communal Capacity Building programmes for preparedness, response and recovery that are inclusive engaging a wide range of actors. These programmes should take into consideration the need to provide a working framework which then would be decentralised and adapted to particular scenarios and local situations.

* The need to work with authorities and NGOs to provide standardized baseline information aimed to make informed decisions concerning required technical assistance; combat illicit trafficking of artifacts; and, understand the patterns of conflict. It is advisable that professionals work in non-crisis times in cooperation with local authorities and professionals to promote the importance of capacity building in this field and to standardize the format of data collection for the development of long term strategies.
As part of the ATHAR Centre activities, this five-week course aimed at establishing and developing professional qualifications and building the capacity of conservation professionals in the Arab Region in the field of conservation and management of sites and museum collections. The course hosted more than twenty international and regional experts in the fields of archeology, architecture, planning, and museum management who guided the participants coming from more than 15 Arab countries and assisted them to further understand the field of cultural heritage.

The course also helped participants in assessing conditions within different types of materials in historic buildings and Museum collections; and developing strategies for achieving appropriate conditions for heritage materials. It contained five units in which several topics were explored including introduction to regional and international protection methods and doctrine, documentation and risk management, material deterioration and preventive conservation, and heritage management. The course was interesting to participants as it involved hands-on exercises such as basic laboratory tests, illustrations on some of the most common conservation equipment, and explanations on the specific role of each scientific method of investigation. Furthermore, the course involved several seminars and study visits to significant sites and museums in Sharjah, UAE and Qatar, one of which was Al Zubarah Archaeological site in Qatar which was recently added to World Heritage Sites by UNESCO (refer to p. 19).

In response to the current political instability in more than one Arab country, and to the Sharjah Initiative that focused on the conservation of cultural heritage in times of crisis, the course also focused on threat mitigation and first aid to cultural heritage in such times. So far, this topic was not adequately taken into account in long term policies of heritage institutions in the Arab World; however, one of the recommendations of the initiative was to conduct courses and training modules for Risk Preparedness, Assessment and Emergency Planning to provide the means to protect cultural heritage in times of crisis. This specific training aimed at providing the Arab experts with required knowledge and background information to address the particular need of capacity in emergency planning.

Participants Feedback

“ATHAR is a programme which aims at encouraging Arab professionals to understand the best methodologies to protect and manage cultural heritage. It helps us diagnose problems, propose solutions and think more deeply about the future of heritage in the Arab region. Personally, the regional course on ‘Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage’ was an extraordinary experience which allowed me to fill gaps in my training in conservation and management of cultural heritage.”

Hager Karimi.
Tunisia

“Coming from a heritage building background, we felt that the course content, which also included archaeology and museums, was helpful in obtaining a wider perspective of conservation as a subject. The distinct quality of teaching material and the innovative teaching methods adopted were really engaging. The projects and assignments helped us understand our potentials besides architecture. The intermingling of trainees with different experiences and capacities has proven to be beneficial in building a unified thought process and an information and facility sharing system in the Arab region in the future. … Overall an excellent experience!”

Kamyar Kamyab, & Shubha Varma.
Sharjah, UAE
ATHAR participants learning about tools in aerial photography and documentation in Sharjah.

November 2012 - Sharjah, UAE
Main achievements of the course:

Participants acquired a critical approach to the management and conservation of heritage sites and museum collections in Arab countries by familiarizing themselves with:

* Conservation in the context of broader heritage management issues such as tourism, site presentation and development pressures, and assessing legal and institutional contexts;

* The basic international principles of heritage conservation processes in order to devise informed conservation strategies for heritage sites and museum collections;

* Methodologies of assessing conditions within the different types of materials in historic buildings and museum collections, and developing strategies for achieving appropriate conditions for heritage materials and collections;

* Exploration of conceptual and practical tools of risk and management assessments, and the principles of surveying and monitoring collections as well as historic structures in their environment;

* Promoting discussion among specialists in these fields;

ICCROM Member States represented: Bahrain, Canada, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Spain, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Yemen.
ATHAR Mission to Sana’a, Yemen, to advise on a university programme, led by the Social Fund for Development, Ministries of Higher Education & Culture, and ICCROM through its ATHAR Regional Centre in Sharjah.
April 2013 - Sana’a, Yemen
At the official closing ceremony of the course on “management and conservation of cultural heritage: sites and museum collections”, the certificates of participation were distributed to the participants by H.H. Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council of UAE and Ruler of Sharjah. The end of the ceremony witnessed a significant announcement from His Highness for a new diploma to be integrated within University of Sharjah’s curriculum led by the ATHAR Regional Centre. Since then, preparations have been undergoing to launch the degree in association with the University of Sharjah to encourage previous ATHAR participants in completing their higher education at the premises of ATHAR, and get their qualifications recognised in the systems of higher education in the region - an ATHAR main objective of the programmes. Students who wish to continue their studies can apply to a Masters degree in the field based on supervised research/thesis work.

HIGHLIGHTS

About the higher diploma /masters Degree

Why? The economic and social developments in the region over the last decades have inevitably led to increased pressure on resources, including cultural ones. Demand for land for development projects, a massive increase in leisure tourism, as well as regional conflicts, have all combined to place an extraordinary burden on heritage conservation sector. The most pressing obstacles to heritage preservation in the region include inadequacy of trained and qualified staff. Conservation professionals require an increasingly wide range of skills to function effectively both at an interdisciplinary level, and intersectorally with professionals from other government.

What? The Higher Diploma in Cultural Heritage Conservation Management will consist of three main modules separated by periods of assignments and home projects. These include: The Essence of Cultural Heritage and its Conservation; Assessment Methodologies for Cultural Heritage; and, Cultural Heritage Management.

When? The diploma will come into effect at the beginning of the academic year 2014-2015.

Who? This is a joint collaboration among ICCROM-ATHAR, University of Sharjah (UoS) and ALECSO (Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization)
Thanks to the gracious support of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammad Al-Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, the construction work for the building of ATHAR Centre in Sharjah University City, started in May, 2012. The new construction of the ATHAR Regional Centre is due to open its doors by the beginning of next year in an official opening to be honored by the presence of His Highness. The new building will host all future activities of the ATHAR Centre including courses, workshops, seminars, and the classes of the newly established Conservation Higher Diploma (see p.12).

The approximate area of the new building is 1750 square meters. The building has modern training facilities, two laboratories, a library with a large collection of cultural heritage publications, an auditorium, and several classrooms to be used when training courses are held at ATHAR.

The heart of the building, where the exhibition hall lies, will grow vibrant with the inauguration of the building. This 246 square meters space will house an exhibition, where each Arab state will shed light on the significance of its cultural heritage expressions. In addition, the previous participants of ATHAR will exhibit their home projects.
As part of the ATHAR Centre knowledge dissemination strategy for the year 2013, the first series of “Conservation of Cultural Heritage in the Arab Region: Issues in the Conservation and Management of Heritage Sites” is currently underway to be published in English and Arabic. A third publication is being currently printed on Reports of previous courses implemented by ATHAR. These reports will give insight to the work and dedication the centre takes upon itself to achieve its mission in capacity development of conservation specialists in the Arab Region. Another publication that is being developed at ATHAR is a Glossary for conservation specialists who mainly use Arabic for communication. This project is the first of its kind in translating conservation terms into Arabic.

“Following several ATHAR Programme’s foundation courses in Byblos and Tripoli (Lebanon), in Amman (Jordan), and in Sharjah (United Arab Emirates), it was deemed necessary to put some of the experiences learned in the hands of a wider audience beyond the direct benefit of course participants. “Selected Readings from ATHAR” is a result of valuable contributions from instructors who took part in the ATHAR core regional courses and who were invited to submit scientific material relevant to the topics they covered during the ATHAR courses. It is thanks to the Governments of Sharjah, Italy and ALECSO who financially have supported the ATHAR Programme and this particular publication series. The subjects included in this first series range from theoretical approaches to the conservation of cultural heritage sites to the implementation of techniques and management approaches for the safeguard of immovable heritage for future generations. It is our aim to disseminate this knowledge for the effective benefit of practitioners and educators working in this specialist field and the Arab Region.”

Zaki Aslan
Director, ATHAR Centre
Our Monuments Narrate Our History

The management of Sharjah Museums Department and Sharjah Archaeology Museum organised an exhibition titled “Our Monuments Narrate Our History” in partnership with the Directory of Antiquities. This collaboration was driven by the strong faith in the scientific and moral values archaeological heritage holds for the conscious and identity of humankind and in the significant role archaeological scientists play in documenting the unwritten history of Sharjah by their archaeological excavations. This paramount exhibition took place in Mleiha exhibitions hall in Sharjah Archaeology Museum from April till October 2013, significantly marking the opening of this hall. The exhibition celebrates the commencement of the work of the local excavation mission which initiated its first efforts in 1993, the same year which marked Sharjah Archaeology Museum’s establishment of the Sharjah museums network which constitutes 16 different museums. The newly established Museum is the first of its kind specializing in archaeological collections in the Gulf region. The exhibition presents more than 100 distinct archaeological items found in several excavation sites in Sharjah. The exhibition displays a collection of small statues, metal and flint tools, weapons, and stamps, in addition to models of unique cemeteries and architectural buildings which date back to the early beginnings of human existence before more than 120,000 years until the emergence of Islam in the seventh century A.C.

To effectively communicate its idea to the visitors and to grant them the chance to appreciate the invaluable exhibited collections, the exhibition sheds light on the history of Sharjah by presenting a plot which takes its audience through a historical journey of four stages, each of a story illustrated by the exhibited archaeological items. The first story depicts the early traces of human existence, substantiated by the flint tools found in Al Faya Mountain which are thought to date back to more than 120,000 years. This has altered so many conceptions regarding the modern human flows of immigration from Africa to the Arabian Peninsula.
The second story is a recount of Shajah’s old residents’ perceptions of life and death which entertained the existence of an afterlife. These people prepared their deceased for the afterlife by burying with their bodies many of their personal belongings, such as: unique flint tools, jewelry, and distinct pottery from various different countries and civilizations. The hall was ornamented with phenomenal items excavated from Mleiha and Dibba AlHusn, which date back to the Hellenistic period and beyond. These items narrate the third and fourth stories of the historic plot the exhibition presents. The third tale takes the audience on board for the commercial convoys which embody the different universal cultures pervading the city of Sharjah before Christ, introducing them to Mleiha, a chief convoy station, whose archaeological remains unveil the secrets of the Arabian peninsula’s prosperity at that time.

The exhibition concludes its journey in Dibba AlHusn on the east coast of Sharjah. In this final stop, the archaeological remains of Dibba demonstrate the struggle of the residents of Sharjah for survival in the early years after Christ and their establishment of strong relations with an array of countries and civilizations extending from India in the east to the Mediterranean cities in the west.
ATHAR Centre conducted visits to the Arab States to assess their needs in Capacity Building of professionals in the field of Cultural Heritage

In Yemen, the ICCROM ATHAR Centre was invited by the Social Fund for Development (SFD) of Yemen in order to plan and discuss the development of a project aimed at Capacity Building. The mission, undertaken by Dr. Zaki Aslan and Dr. Jukka Jokilehto took place from 30 March to 4 April, 2013. Contacts were also taken with Mr. Hisham Sharaf Abdullah, Minister of Higher Education and Research (MOHESR), Dr. Abdullah Awbal, Minister of Culture (MOC), Dr. Nagi Saleh, GOPHCY (General Organisation for the Preservation of the Historic Cities of Yemen), and Ms. Aziza Nafei, CATS representative (Center for Architectural Training and Studies), in addition to Mr. Hamoud Muhammed Ou’bad, the Minister of Endowment (WAQF). The principle focus was on the education and training of professionals whose work would be related to the conservation of the built heritage.

ICCROM through its ATHAR Centre was requested to help establish a higher education initiative, following an official agreement signed between the Yemeni Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. It is to be noted that this initiative is a result of strategic workshops held in the past few years by the ATHAR Centre aimed at the advancement of higher education in the Arab Region, in which Yemen was represented. ATHAR therefore considers this action by the Government of Yemen a great achievement and major result of efforts stemming from the workshops and contacts held in the past few years.

During the visit, it was noted that while the University of Sana’a had introduced conservation training for students of architecture. This curriculum should be updated, and eventually expanded as specialisation and/or master degree in the long-term. It was also decided to expand the initial focus to practicing professionals, in order to emphasise the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required to guarantee the conservation of the built heritage. Subsequently, the intention is to expand to schools of architecture in other regions; for example, Aden, Ebb, and Hadramawt.
In Libya, the ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre (represented by Dr. Zaki Aslan) conducted a mission organized by the UNESCO Project office in Tripoli during 21-24 of April, 2013. The mission aimed at exploring the nature of courses to be delivered by ICCROM’s ATHAR Regional Centre in Sharjah to Libyan conservation professionals, in the framework of a capacity building programme agreed between UNESCO and the Government of Libya to be led by ATHAR.

Meetings were held with HE Dr. Habib Mohammad Al Amin the Libyan Minister of Culture and Civil Society, Dr. Saleh Agab Director of Antiquities, Dr. Adel El-Turki advisor at the Directorate of Antiquities, Mr. Hussam Bash Imam Director of the Historic City of Tripoli.

HIGHLIGHTS

VISIT: LIBYA

UNESCO-ICCROM meeting with his excellency the minister of Culture in Libya.

The site of Leptis Magna, Libya.
HIGHLIGHTS
THE LATEST ON WORLD HERITAGE IN THE ARAB REGION

Based on the latest decisions by the World Heritage Committee’s 37th session in Cambodia, ATHAR Centre expresses its readiness to cooperate with relevant institutions for the safeguard of World Cultural Heritage in Syria. ATHAR also extends its congratulations to the State of Qatar for listing its first World Heritage Site. The site was a subject of a study visit of ATHAR’s latest regional course.

The 37th session of the World Heritage Committee was held in the Kingdom of Cambodia, in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap-Angkor, from 16th to 27th June 2013. The 37th session was organized by UNESCO and the National Commission of Cambodia with the support of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The committee has undertaken important decisions in reference to World Heritage Sites in the Arab Region, one of which is inscribing Syria’s six sites on the list of “World Heritage Sites in Danger” (see p.22).

The listing of endangered sites is intended to mobilize all possible support for the safeguarding of these properties at risk, which are recognized by the international community as being of outstanding universal value for humanity as a whole.

The other decision made by the committee is inscribing Al-Zubarah Archaeological Site in Qatar on the World Heritage List, making Al-Zubarah the first site in Qatar to be designated as a World Heritage Site.

ATHAR former participants have already been to the site of Al-Zubarah in December, 2012. The site visit introduced the participants of the course on “Management and Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Sites and Museum Collections” to the processes of inscribing a site on the World Heritage List; and discussed latest methods to mitigate the risks to maintain the Outstanding Universal Values the site embodies (refer to p.8).

ATHAR Centre extends its congratulations to Qatar on this significant event, and will be delighted to provide any support needed to maintain the site and establish it as a well-managed attraction in Qatar. Furthermore, ATHAR team has been working on possibilities of cooperating with international and national bodies for the protection of the Cultural Heritage of Syria, especially in light of the ongoing crisis.
Is it possible to physically secure cultural heritage amidst a conflict situation? Especially, when the endangered cultural heritage symbolizes the identity of one of parties involved in the conflict? Questions such as these have led to the development of ICCROM’s international training on First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Conflict. Between 2010-2012, three international courses were organized in Rome.

Targeted at mid-career professionals working in the fields of cultural heritage, civil defense, humanitarian assistance and development aid this training aims to strengthen capacity for providing emergency response to safeguard cultural heritage in times of conflict. Based on a growing body of knowledge, it supports the idea that cultural heritage can heal war-torn communities, and contribute substantially in post-war recovery and nation building processes.

While disaster preparedness and response have always been at the core of ICCROM’s training on preventive conservation, a specific focus on responding to cultural emergencies stemming from violent conflicts necessitated a different approach. The result was an intensive course programme divided into three key themes: Culture and Conflict; First Aid to Cultural Heritage; and Communication, Logistics and Planning. Collecting testimonies directly from the field, discussing the possible ways of protecting cultural heritage in areas of civil unrest and exploring culture’s potential role in promoting peace and recovery were some of the main features of this training. Central to this training initiative was the idea that culture cannot wait until “normalcy” or civil order is restored.

In addition, hands-on training sessions and numerous exercises simulating emergency conditions – held during the course – sought to prepare proactive cultural first aiders who would have the ability to secure cultural heritage in highly volatile situations. The overall pedagogy however, relied heavily on the varied case studies brought by the participants. As a majority of them had been living in conflict-afflicted areas, their first-hand experiences were crucial in analyzing how conflicts affect cultural heritage as well as in identifying the challenges of working in tense situations.
After three courses, several follow-up workshops and seminars were held by the trainees in their respective countries including Egypt and Lebanon.

Incorporating some of the practical elements of the First Aid training and keeping view the ongoing crises in the Arab region, Sharjah-ICCROM ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre hosted an international symposium on Protection of Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis, the first of its kind in the region.

The action plan developed during the Sharjah Symposium was detailed further in the 7th World Archaeological Congress held in Jordan, later in December 2012 (see p. 5-7). ATHAR centre incorporated training for risk management and first aid to cultural heritage for both, natural disasters and conflict in the latest regional course (see p. 8-10).

Recently, ATHAR centre collaborated with ICOMOS to provide Arabic translations of the course materials of the ICOMOS-ICCROM online courses for providing first aid to cultural heritage in Syria.
Syria is home for some of the most ancient civilizations in the world. Its land witnessed the birth of human settlement, urban planning, agriculture, domestication of animals, and the invention of Alphabet. As widely acknowledged in scientific spheres, its landscape thoroughly encompasses incomparable archaeological sites which are among the wealthiest, and most diverse in the Middle East.

These extraordinary wealth and diversity are now endangered by the crisis which has been pervading the country for the past two years, exposing several aspects of the Syrian archaeological heritage to many recurrences of abuse and violation. Archaeological sites were excavated, stolen and distorted. Gangs specializing in illicit trafficking and forging archaeological heritage became increasingly active. Some archaeological buildings in some provinces were adversely damaged and castles and buildings of prominent historic value were distorted. Architectural violation proliferated through illegal construction of modern buildings in archaeological areas and buffer zones, due to which some archaeological structures were either partially or completely eradicated.

The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) undertook unremitting efforts to decrease the effects of the current crisis on archeology, exhibiting commendable success on different levels, thanks to the efforts of its staff operating in all provinces. Those efforts were initiated by securing the protection of all museum collections in Syria, relocating them in safe places and recovering stolen archaeological items. The most prominent of these efforts were the positive results achieved in cooperation with the local communities, instigating the protection and conservation of several archaeological sites.

The views expressed in ATHARnet section are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of, and should not be attributed to, ICCROM or ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre.
On the other hand, some archaeological sites were subject to serious violation and severe illegal excavation activities, which were, in some cases, carried out in a systematic manner and in collaboration with armed gangs, especially in borderline areas or in places of fierce clashes, such as Mari, Dura Europos, Apamea, Ebla. Other severely damaged sites are those found in dead cities in Idleb, which are inscribed on the World Heritage list, in addition to archaeological tells which date back to different historical eras. Archaeological castles, buildings, old neighborhoods and sites in Aleppo, Homs, Deir ez-zor, Daraa’ and others also fell victims to such clashes and conflicts and suffered the aggressive consequences of them. Albeit the institution’s success to protect museum collections from theft, architectural structure still could not escape physical damage, as in the case of the buildings of Aleppo, Homs, Deir ez-zor, Daraa’ museums. These damages require reconstruction and rehabilitation of cracked areas and distorted walls.

The biggest challenge the DGAM faces is the protection of immovable heritage across all provinces, especially the archaeological properties in areas where conflict is at its peak. Due to the security and safety situation in such areas, sending staff for direct assessment of damages is putting their lives in great jeopardy. Therefore, the DGAM, settles for information obtained by its staff and the local community, which in turn, is fully documented.

Documentation includes a comparison between the past and present conditions of archaeological sites and buildings, as a team of DGAM experts digitally archives the files, as a source of information about the pre-crisis conditions of the sites (previous inventory, surveys, drawings, historic documents, photographs, descriptive information, maps, … etc). A list of all damaged sites and buildings in all provinces is set up, integrating basic information about their current conditions and the damages they have sustained. The team utilizes photos, online video clips and information provided by the local community in damaged areas. Given the lack of security and the severity of situation in such sites, the staff has to resort to these sources instead of firsthand site conditions assessment. The team of experts is currently mapping damaged cultural heritage in Syria, utilizing GIS. This will enable specialists to prioritize interventions for maintenance and reconstruction processes at a post crisis stage according to a work plan which abides by international standards. This plan will ensure cooperation among governments whose work involves archeology, the future participation of civil society institutions and NGOs in the rehabilitation of archaeological sites and national museums, and the consolidation of partnership with respective international partners, local and foreign institutions and excavation missions in targeted sites.

The main aim the DGAM is keen on achieving is the protection of Syrian cultural heritage in its entirety and safeguarding it as much as possible, for it belongs to all Syrians regardless of their views and political orientations, which the Directorate never interferes in. This detachment the Directorate maintains is because, in its eyes, the real battle more than anything is to fight for the protection of the nation’s history, heritage and memory.
Based on that notion, the DGAM thrived, at all levels, to promote a unified Syrian vision regarding cultural heritage, whose goal is to defend it and prevent political exploitation of archaeological wealth, for it has long been the focal point at which our people have always united. It also aims at urging the Syrian people to hold the collective responsibility towards their cultural heritage and to participate in protecting it from looting, destruction or obliteration. Its target is to heighten, in 23 Million Syrians, a sense of belonging to and ownership of their archaeological wealth, whereby any damage to it is a direct abuse of their civilization, national identity and their shared memory.

Thanks to the vision adopted by the Directorate for the success manifested in sustaining its performance professionally and scientifically and maintaining a uniform staff fabric across all provinces.
FROM ATHAR.net
An ATHAR Project Inaugurated

Conservation of Wall Paintings at the Church of Mar Tadros (St. Theodore) in Behdaidat
Byblos, Lebanon
Isabelle Skaf, ATHAR Expert, Director Conservation Sarl

Upon the completion of the restoration project of the mural paintings at the church of Mar Tadros in Behdaidat (Jbeil district), an inauguration ceremony of the church took place on Friday, the 13th of September, in the presence of H.E Mr. Gabi Layoun, Minister of Culture.

The church of Behdaidat, which dates back to the 11th century, has been inscribed on the list of national historic monuments since 1966, sheltering the most complete collection of medieval mural paintings. These fresco paintings, which have adorned the church since the 13th century, represent themes from the Old and New Testaments. They reflect the rich tradition of church ornamentation in Mount Lebanon at the time of the Crusades. According to written sources, the church was decorated between 1240 and 1260.

Under the supervision of the Directorate General of Antiquities and in agreement with the Maronite diocese of Byblos, this conservation project started in 2009 as an initiative by Ms. Isabelle Doumet Skaf, the Director of Conservation Sarl. At the beginning of the restoration work, the state of conservation of the murals was alarming, despite efforts to prevent water infiltration into the building. The paint layer was significantly fragile due to salt efflorescence. Surface details were in some areas completely covered by a veil of white calcite resulting from seepage of water on the inner walls of the church for long periods of time. Varnishes and waxes applied over the years, as well as cement gap fills, contributed to darkening the surface and obscuring the paintings in many places. Interventions included simple cleaning (i.e. scalpel, brushes), chemical cleaning using organic solutions, consolidation by injection, and treatment of micro-organisms, dried soluble and insoluble salts. Waterproofing of the roof was also redone and repointing of the façade was executed to reduce water seepage and ensure long-term protection of the paintings in the church.
Graphic and detailed photographic documentation was conducted, providing a valuable database for future research. Mortars and pigments were analyzed to obtain additional information on the ancient techniques used by local painters in medieval times. The result of these analyses may also be used as a benchmark for future research on murals of the same period in other churches of the region.

The project was funded by the AG Leventis Foundation based in Cyprus, the United States Embassy in Beirut (United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation) the Philippe Jabre Association, Carol and Antoine Kareh Alice and Roger Edde and CONSERVATION SARL which also managed the project. The project was implemented in the framework of ICCROM’s ATHAR Programme. The team was composed of Isabelle Skaf, Nathalie Hanna, Badr Jabbour Gedeon and Ghada Salem; the latter two were former ATHAR programme participants. Also working with the team were three Italian Conservators: Giorgio Capriotti, Caterina Michelini Tocci, Sylvia Tribolati.

A documentary showing the different phases of the project and its impact on the local community, as well as the iconographic interpretation of the frescoes, were presented at the opening of the church.

Today, the church, occasionally visited by tourists, is primarily a place of worship frequented daily by the local community. In this regard, it can be considered as the symbol of a living heritage, where traditions, rites and customs are still perpetuated at an exceptional historical site that symbolizes preserved cultural heritage.
Located in Rue du Dey, “DAR AL-DEY” was founded at the beginning of the seventeenth century by Youssef Dey. Some of the remodeling works carried out between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has created an extension which was later converted into the headquarters of the Tunisian Institute of Music Rachidya.

La Rachidia is a cultural and artistic association specialized in Tunisian music. It was created in November 1934, thanks to an elite group of politicians, intellectuals, writers and artists. It was the first musical institution established in Tunisia and one of the oldest institutions of Arabic music.

The monument has suffered many alarming damages to the floor and walls, especially since part of the wooden beams started to crumble and buckle. This damage has affected the safety of the occupants of the place who, in turn, have abandoned the structure. The proposed scheme of conservation will include the following:

** Restoration and rehabilitation of the structure.
** Valorizing and developing spaces to exhibit traditional arts.
** Compiling a file to inscribe the monument on the national list.

Belhassan Kinbi
National Heritage Institute
ATHAR courses have impacted my work at the Kuwait National Museum because they have added expert knowledge to my work with organic materials and with conservation of buildings.

The organic materials course in Sharjah helped me and a colleague offer a complete risk assessment and conservation plan for one of the most important and traditional historic houses, Bayt al Bader. The resulting renovation has helped restore the house, and it is now being used as a model traditional home and an events center for the Museum.

The Core Regional Course on Management and Conservation of sites helped me understand the importance of using traditional and authentic materials when conserving buildings. Learning how to mix organic concrete aggregate, and injecting the concrete into the Amman Citadel was one of my favorite memories of the course.

The hands-on experience under the supervision of world-class professors and experts meant that each participant in the ATHAR courses would be able to return home and implement what they learned. Most importantly, the ATHAR courses are beneficial because they present a network of fellow colleagues and instructors who gladly offer their input and expertise.

Farah Al Sabah
Kuwait National Museum
The fourth regional course CRC4 conducted by ATHAR in Sharjah and Doha offered a variety of lectures and training sessions, which collectively contributed to developing the participants’ skills and a thorough understanding of cultural heritage. I was mostly interested in the material focusing on dissemination and public awareness, as it addressed a pressing need prevalent in the area of Gaza Strip in Palestine, where awareness of the importance of the cultural heritage is poorly present. Hence, the concept of this project, which aims at promoting interest in cultural heritage in its entirety, was a step towards mobilizing voluntary work to serve heritage and develop educational methods to introduce cultural heritage to the public.

The concept of my project was very well received by the Islamic University of Gaza, Iwan Centre, and Al-Kattan Children institution. The project was designed to train a team of 18 volunteering college students to introduce and spread awareness of conservation of cultural heritage. Team members were trained to devise drama as a teaching approach. The project varied the age groups it targeted, training a team of 10-14 year old school students.

After the success achieved with the first institution, a new partnership was established with another community institution which deals with boys whose ages range from 14-17. The activities of the project were customized to best suit the needs of the age group and to best realize its vision.

The impact of this project goes beyond the scope of the specific teams involved. It was adopted by the co-institution as a strategic theme to be included in its annual program. The project’s impact becomes more evident in the number of partnerships formed towards its success and finally, in the results it bore on the local level.

Mahmoud Balawi
Iwan Centre for Architectural Heritage, Islamic University of Gaza
Participants in the Fourth Regional ATHAR Course; Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Sites and Museum Collections (CRC4)

November, 2012 - Sharjah, UAE
INVITATION

ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre would like to extend to its network an invitation in early 2014 to the Grand Opening of the centre in its new location in University City, Sharjah. The Centre will be honored by the presence of His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council of UAE and Ruler of Sharjah.

Join us for outstanding performances and heritage on display from different parts of the Arab World, including an exhibition of the rich Cultural Heritage in the UAE and the Arab States. Follow us on Twitter and Facebook, and keep an eye on our website to know all about the upcoming events:

Website
www.iccrom.org/athar-centre

Twitter
https://twitter.com/ATHARsharjah

Facebook
ATHAR Regional Conservation Centre

ANNOUNCEMENT : HIGHER DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

Place: Sharjah, United Arab Emirates at the premises of ATHAR Centre.

Time: Fall, 2014.

What? The Cultural Heritage Conservation Management Higher Diploma is a joint ICCROM-University of Sharjah programme that will consist of three main modules separated by periods of assignments and home projects. Former ATHAR participants will have priority in admission.

To know more about the specifics of the course, the exact dates, and the application process, please follow the link: http://athar-centre.org/?p=2515
ATHAR is a regional conservation centre in Sharjah – UAE established in 2012 by ICCROM and the Government of Sharjah to protect the cultural heritage of the Arab region and to broaden access, appreciation and understanding of its history. ATHAR focuses on architectural and archaeological tangible heritage in the Arab region. This includes heritage collections, rich and varied historic places, sites and monuments. ATHAR primarily aims to enhance the capacity of official heritage institutions to manage heritage sites and museum collections on a sustainable basis.


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