



The Situation of the Archaeological Heritage in Post-Storm Daniel Cyrenaica: A Comprehensive Assessment

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A report by Heritage for Peace Organization and the Arab Network to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH) with collaboration and assistance from civil society organizations (CSOs) and individuals in Libya.

Collaborators

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Acknowledgments

Heritage for Peace

Founded in February 2013, Heritage for Peace's mission is to support heritage workers as they work to protect their collections, monuments and archaeological sites during armed conflict. Heritage for Peace is a NGO based in Girona, Spain.

ANSCH

The Arab Network of Civil Society Organizations to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH) represents a collaborative effort between the non-governmental organization (NGO) Heritage for Peace (H4P) and numerous Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) across various Arab countries. Established with financial support from the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), ANSCH operates as a dedicated heritage initiative. Its mission revolves around working in partnership with government agencies, CSOs, and non-profit organizations to identify, manage, plan, and conserve cultural heritage resources, including archaeological sites, historical monuments, museums, and other invaluable cultural assets. Currently, ANSCH focuses its efforts on regions facing significant heritage challenges, including Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. (<https://ansch.heritageforpeace.org/network-of-csos/>).





World Heritage Union of Five Libyan Municipalities (WHU5LM)

The World Heritage Union of Five Libyan Municipalities (WHU5LM) comprises five Libyan municipalities strategically situated near the administrative borders of World Heritage Sites. These municipalities, namely Al-khums (Leptis Magna), Sabratha, Shahat (Cyrene), Ghadems (Cydamus), and Ghat, have a vital role in upholding the principles outlined in the World Heritage Convention of 1972. According to this convention, the state party bears the responsibility for the protection and management of World Heritage Sites within its territory.

Motivated by the decision of the World Heritage Committee to designate Libya's five World Heritage Sites as "World Heritage in Danger" due to the conflict's adverse impact and the ongoing threat it poses, these Libyan municipalities came together to establish the World Heritage Union in Libya. This collaborative initiative directly responds to the World Heritage Committee's repeated calls for local involvement in heritage preservation efforts.

The core objectives of this foundation are twofold: first, to ensure the preservation of Libya's World Heritage Sites and, second, to actively work towards the addition of new sites to the World Heritage List. Ultimately, the foundation aspires to facilitate the removal of Libyan World Heritage Sites from the list of "World Heritage in Danger" as swiftly as possible.

To achieve its mission, the foundation has engaged in extensive dialogues with key stakeholders within the Libyan government, including the departments of antiquity, buildings, and ancient cities. It offers support and submits proposals and studies on these





sites through local authorities. In addition, the foundation organizes symposia and workshops to promote cultural awareness within the local community, emphasizing the significance of heritage preservation. Collaborating closely with municipal authorities, WHU5LM is committed to the protection and safeguarding of ancient sites and cultural heritage resources in Libya.

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Also, we would like to acknowledge those professionals from Libya who played an important role to provide us with information:

Information and images about the archaeological heritage **in Derna** come from **Dr. Yonis Alshaloi and Mr. Abdelsalam Elkawash.**

Apollonia: Talal Louairi Al-Hassi

Cyrene: Archaeological Heritage Assessment Committee After Daniel's Storm for Superintendence of Cyrene Antiquities





Introduction

Libya, with its storied history and diverse cultural heritage, has long been a repository of human civilization's rich tapestry. Among its treasured regions, Cyrenaica, situated along the eastern coast, stands as a testament to the ancient legacies that have flourished on this land. The Cyrenaica region has borne witness to countless chapters in history, from the prehistoric era to the heights of classical civilization and beyond. However, in recent times, this historical and cultural landscape faced a formidable adversary in the form of Storm Daniel, a natural disaster that unleashed its fury upon this ancient land.

In this comprehensive report, we undertake the solemn task of assessing the state of Cyrenaica's archaeological heritage in the aftermath of the recent Storm Daniel. This devastating storm, born of the Mediterranean Sea and amplified by the elements, brought heavy rains and tumultuous floods that swept across the region, leaving in their wake profound destruction and irreplaceable losses. Our mission is twofold: to document the impact of the storm on the archaeological and cultural heritage of Cyrenaica and to present a vision for managing the situation, striving to safeguard what remains and to glean insights from the discoveries made in its wake.

As we embark on this journey through Cyrenaica's storied past and its tumultuous present, we will navigate through the various heritage sites, including the iconic Cyrene World Heritage Site, the ancient city of Apollonia, the coastal city of Derna, and prehistoric sites in Wadi Derna. Each location reveals a unique facet of the cultural heritage that this





region has contributed to humanity. While the storm has left scars, it has also unveiled hidden treasures and posed new challenges.

Through diligent assessment and careful consideration, we aim to honor the resilience of Cyrenaica's cultural heritage and recognize the collective efforts required to preserve it. As we delve into the details of the storm's impact on each site, we acknowledge the urgency of conservation and restoration efforts. Furthermore, we recognize the potential for new archaeological discoveries that this disaster has brought to light.

This report serves as a testament to the enduring value of cultural heritage and the importance of safeguarding it for future generations. In the face of nature's wrath, the indomitable spirit of preservation and exploration perseveres. It is our hope that the insights gleaned from this assessment will guide us in charting a path towards the restoration, protection, and continued study of Cyrenaica's rich archaeological heritage.

Cyrene World Heritage Site

The Cyrene World Heritage Site, a jewel of Libya's cultural heritage, faced varying degrees of damage due to Storm Daniel. Thankfully, some sections of the site, including the Agora, Forum, Acropolis, Temple of Zeus, and the East Church, remained largely unaffected. However, our assessment has identified specific issues:





House of Jason Magnus: Part of the wall in one of the rooms of this historical house experienced the collapse of some stones. This wall, characterized by irregular stone fragments, requires restoration.

House of Hesychios: Although this structure, situated on higher ground, largely survived the storm, we observed water-induced damage, including holes in the northern end of the house. These holes, potentially indicating underground cavities, require further investigation to prevent expansion or soil collapse. We suggest enclosing the walls protecting the mosaic floors and allowing external viewing instead of visitor foot traffic.

Infrastructure: The road leading to the northern Necropolis has sustained damage, with some limited effects on the cliff. Urgent evaluation and study of newly emerging landmarks in this area are necessary. Additionally, large, unstable pine trees need removal to prevent further damage.

Valley Street towards the Sanctuary of Apollo: This street experienced significant bulldozing due to torrential rainwater from higher areas. Although key buildings like the Arch of Marcus Aurelius and the walls opposite the Baths of Paris survived, substantial rocks were carried into the valley stream. The floods revealed previously hidden water drainage channels, necessitating evaluation by a specialized scientific team.







Aqua Augusta: Canals and streams within the site were heavily affected, with many parts filled with rocks carried by floodwaters. Extensive work is required to remove these rocks, clear the canals, and establish efficient water drainage pathways.





Sanctuary of Apollo: This area suffered from a heavy torrential flow originating from Al-Wadi Street, the Spring of Apollo, and Kura. The mixing of floodwater with sewage pollution, resulting from modern town drainage, inundated significant portions of the site. While this flooding revealed previously hidden architectural features and foundations, it also highlighted the urgent need for a scientific team to study and propose strategies for preservation. Unfortunately, due to sewage contamination, the site can no longer be opened to visitors, demanding immediate solutions.





Wadi Belghader: This valley, housing the Sanctuary of Demeter at its entrance and the Western Necropolis on its western side, is rich in archaeological sites. It serves as a crucial rainwater drainage path and, regrettably, the main sewage channel for the modern city of Shahat. The floods caused significant erosion, revealing new landmarks, foundations, and architectural details. Urgent action is required to evaluate the situation, study new landmarks, and make informed decisions regarding their presentation, restoration, reinforcement, or backfilling.





Additionally, the floods exposed three funerary statue torsos and two marble tombstones at the bottom of the valley, necessitating considerable effort and equipment for retrieval.

Sites between Cyrene and Apollonia

The region between Cyrene and Apollonia, known for its olive and wine presses, witnessed significant discoveries following the storm. In 2010, approximately 25 olive oil production sites were recorded in this area, with the number increasing due to findings from Storm Daniel. Many monuments and ruins, including walls and building foundations, appeared for the first time, requiring thorough study and interpretation.





Apollonia

Apollonia, a historical treasure on the Libyan coast, was remarkably fortunate to have escaped significant damage during the onslaught of Storm Daniel. However, it is important to note that even in its relative resilience, Apollonia did not emerge completely unscathed. Our comprehensive assessment has identified several areas where the effects of the storm were evident:





- **Collapse of Simple Walls:** Within the archaeological site, a few simple walls experienced partial collapse. These walls, characterized by their sides-and-core construction, were among the affected structures. While the damage was not extensive, it serves as a reminder of the forces of nature that continue to shape and challenge the preservation of Apollonia.
- **Landmarks Near the Beach:** The proximity of Apollonia to the sea exposed some of its landmarks to the power of high wave levels during the storm. Portions of these landmarks, which hold historical significance, sustained damage due to the ferocity of the waves. These incidents underscore the need for ongoing monitoring and protective measures to safeguard the coastal elements of Apollonia's cultural heritage.
- **Damage to Administrative Spaces:** The storm's impact extended beyond the boundaries of the archaeological site itself. Within the nearby Sousse Antiquities Office, significant quantities of water entered the premises, resulting in the destruction of valuable equipment, furniture, and administrative documents. This disruption posed challenges to the ongoing management and preservation efforts at Apollonia.
- **Sousse Museum:** The Sousse Museum, which plays a pivotal role in preserving and showcasing the cultural heritage of the region, also faced the consequences of Storm Daniel. Water leakage through the ceiling and windows presented a





concerning issue. The structural integrity of the museum and its holdings were tested during the storm, necessitating immediate attention and restoration efforts.



While Apollonia's overall resilience is commendable, it is important to acknowledge these specific challenges and damages caused by the storm. These events serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing need for vigilance, maintenance, and preparedness to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of this ancient site.

Derna

Derna, a coastal city situated at the end of a long, narrow valley known as a wadi, was among the areas most severely impacted by the destructive forces of Storm Daniel. This ancient city, with its rich historical and cultural significance, experienced extensive flooding and suffered significant losses as a result of the storm. The storm's effects were





profound and far-reaching, impacting not only the modern city but also the archaeological heritage that has deep roots in the region.

Flash Floods and Dam Failures: During the height of the storm, flash floods ravaged Derna. The city's unique geographical location, nestled at the convergence of a wadi, proved particularly vulnerable. As the storm unleashed its fury, two dams along the wadi collapsed. The failure of the second dam, situated just a kilometer inland of Derna, resulted in the release of a torrent of floodwaters measuring between 3 to 7 meters in height. This deluge surged through the city, causing immense destruction in its wake.

Impact on Historical Buildings: The devastating impact of Storm Daniel extended to many historically significant buildings that had adorned the ancient region known as Al-blad. Among the casualties, the most prominent was the ancient mosque. Regrettably, nothing remains of this historically significant religious structure. The loss of such an ancient and culturally meaningful building is deeply felt, emphasizing the irreplaceable nature of cultural heritage.

This is a video link to the Libya Al-Ahrar Press Channel explaining:

<https://shorturl.at/qIKQ4>

Al-Jaraba Mosque: Al-Jaraba Mosque, now known as the Abdullah bin Omar Mosque, occupied a location in the eastern Maghar neighborhood, in close proximity to Wadi Derna. Named after its founders who arrived from the Tunisian island of Djerba during the Ottoman era, this mosque held historical significance dating back centuries. It had





been mentioned in numerous historical accounts and manuscripts dating as far back as the early eighteenth century (Shaban 1116 AH/1703 AD). In 2001, a new mosque was constructed nearby, which opened in 2003. The old Al-Jaraba Mosque remained abandoned until it underwent maintenance in 2010, at which point it was repurposed as a Quran memorization center. Tragically, in 2023, this mosque was completely destroyed by the floodwaters, marking the loss of yet another historical and cultural landmark.



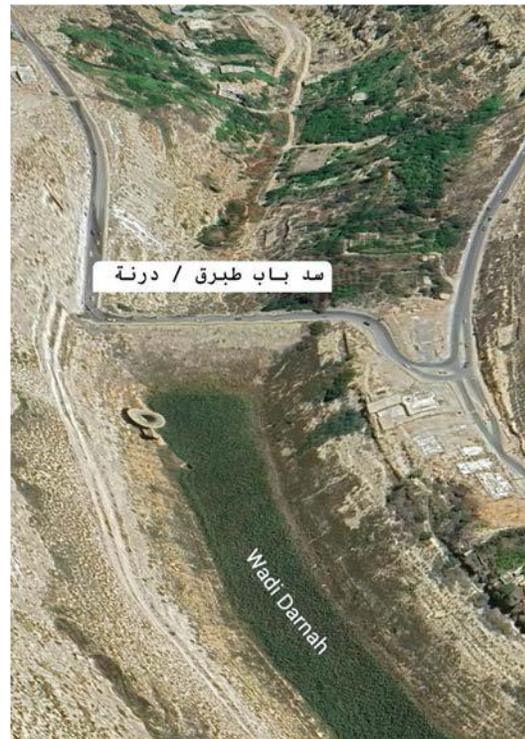
Prehistoric Sites in Wadi Derna: The terraces of Wadi Derna were previously known for their historical significance, particularly in the study of the prehistoric period. Initial surveys conducted by Gregory J.W. in 1916, followed by field excavations by McBurney between 1947-1948, revealed a remarkably well-preserved industrial settlement. McBurney's findings presented a model of an integrated industrial complex along the





North African coast. The site yielded a wealth of organic materials and stone tools, including various animal bones such as buffalo horns, the bones of wild turtles, and the skulls of sheep.

Destruction of Prehistoric Sites: Unfortunately, the prehistoric sites in Wadi Derna were entirely lost following the catastrophic collapse of the Bou Mansour and Al-Bilad dams. The force of the massive torrents altered the valley's topography, erasing its previous archaeological content. The loss of these prehistoric sites represents a tragic setback in our understanding of the region's prehistoric past and highlights the critical importance of disaster preparedness and heritage preservation measures.





New Discoveries and Challenges: Despite the devastating impact of the floods, they did bring some unexpected discoveries to light. Foundations of walls and structures previously unknown to us emerged, possibly of classical antiquity, with indications pointing towards Greek or Roman origins. These findings necessitate further study and confirmation, offering the potential to shed new light on the city's fortifications and ancient history. Notably, the block of maritime concrete, possibly used to protect the city from flooding, stands as a remarkable feature that deserves careful examination.



The catastrophic events in Derna serve as a poignant reminder of the vulnerability of cultural heritage in the face of natural disasters. While they have brought immense challenges, they have also uncovered new opportunities for archaeological exploration and interpretation. Urgent action and collaborative efforts are imperative to mitigate future risks and preserve the rich cultural heritage of this ancient coastal city.





Summary and Conclusion

In the wake of Storm Daniel's destructive impact on Cyrenaica, the cultural heritage of this historically rich region faces both significant challenges and newfound opportunities. The Arab Network of Civil Society Organizations to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH) stands as a testament to the collective efforts dedicated to preserving these treasures. Working in collaboration with Heritage for Peace (H4P) and various Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) across Arab nations, ANSCH strives to protect and conserve archaeological sites, historical monuments, and cultural heritage resources in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.

Similarly, the World Heritage Union of Five Libyan Municipalities (WHU5LM) exemplifies the commitment to safeguarding Libya's World Heritage Sites. Established in response to the World Heritage Committee's concerns and the importance of involving local communities in preservation efforts, WHU5LM is dedicated to preserving Libyan World Heritage Sites, adding new ones to the World Heritage List, and ultimately removing Libyan sites from the "World Heritage in Danger" list.

As we navigate the challenges posed by natural disasters and conflict, the resilience and determination of individuals and organizations working tirelessly to protect our shared cultural heritage shine through. These initiatives underscore the enduring value of cultural heritage and the critical importance of its preservation. By fostering collaboration between governments, CSOs, and local communities, we can continue to safeguard these irreplaceable treasures, fostering a legacy for future generations to cherish and learn from. Our collective commitment to cultural heritage ensures that the stories of our past





endure and thrive in the face of adversity, reminding us of the beauty and resilience of the human spirit.

