



Polish archaeologists to train tourist guides in Sudan

At Old Dongola, Sudan, Polish specialists are supporting local communities to explore how heritage conservation may also be a development opportunity as part of partnership building between the scholarly community and local inhabitants. The capital city of the Kingdom of Makuria, excavated by Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) teams for over 50 years, also has great tourist potential that is waiting to be discovered.



The problem with the preservation and management of archaeological sites is that they are often much more interesting for scholars – be it local or foreign – than for the local inhabitants. Building a shared understanding of the history and value of the cultural heritage with the local communities is key in preserving the archaeological heritage and ensuring its lasting survival. Also, moving forward together, rather than working separately, has become a priority for the head of an ERC grant project at Dongola and acting director of the PCMA UW, Dr. Artur Obłuski

Finding the right formula for developing such an inclusive attitude is not a straightforward task. And – even though it is often the archaeologists who are most closely involved with the local community during their excavation work – it is not a task that scholars concerned with digging up the past are best suited for tackling. What is needed is an in-depth knowledge of the needs and expectations of the local community. And – conversely – a clear message from the scholars to the local people on the potential benefits of heritage management on a local level, and on the means of turning them into tangible economic and developmental profits.

This approach is strongly encouraged by UNESCO guidelines on sustainable development policy. Managing this process is a job for a specialist who can link all the players in this game: the local inhabitants, local and central authorities, and the scholarly community. The PCMA UW has included such a task in one of its projects: *ArcheoCDN. Archaeological Centre of Scientific Excellence* supported by a DIALOG grant from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Poland.

The coordination of *Heritage and development planning for el-El-Ghaddar region* has been undertaken by Dr. Peter Bille Larsen (University of Geneva) who has extensive



experience in similar projects. Dr. Larsen has just returned from his second visit to Sudan, where he participated in numerous meetings and informal dialogues with local community members.

“In February, the Polish mission advanced discussions with the newly formed Heritage and Development Committee for Old Dongola. Group discussions involved identifying key themes, challenges and opportunities for action” – explains Dr. Larsen. – “The emphasis is on partnership building to promote locally-driven and small-scale tourism efforts. As a result, the Polish mission will help train local tourist guides in offering quality information to the growing number of visitors coming to the site every year.”



The first results of the community-oriented approach are already becoming apparent, judging by the interest in an Open Day organized by the archaeological team at the Dongola site during the last excavation season. It drew a crowd of about 1000 people who wanted to visit the dig, listen to lectures and meet the team members.

Another task in the *ArchaeoCDN...* grant is coordinated by Tomomi Fushiya, a heritage management expert, who is organizing meetings and workshops for schoolchildren and teachers in El-Ghaddar. – Local students at El-Ghaddar made a wonderful presentation about Old Dongola archaeological site – says Fushiya. – A new program was Object Open Day. We discussed about recently excavated objects with the residents of El-Ghaddar, to better understand them – she explains.

These activities are part of a collaborative effort to shift towards a more inclusive and community-oriented approach to archeology and heritage. It is also a move that, in the long run, can help reinforce the chances of the Dongola site's nomination to the World Heritage list.

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1959 (since 1990 under the present name). In recent years it broadened its scope of interest into the Arabian Peninsula and the Caucasus. Currently about 25 projects are ongoing in Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Cyprus, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Armenia and Tunisia. The PCMA also runs a Research Centre in Cairo and the Polish Archaeological Unit in Khartoum.

For more information on the PCMA go to: www.pcma.uw.edu.pl/en/ ; www.facebook.com/pcma.uw/

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