

Field Trip Report

Project: Mosaics conservation in situ

Tunisia: Tunis, Utica, Carthage

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Utica, Maison de la cascade, main entrance.



Institut National du Patrimoine, interior courtyard.



Institut National du Patrimoine, library.

Summary

In summary, the first campaign of this training course is highly appreciated by Mr. Boubaker Ben Fraj, Director of the Institut National du Patrimoine (INP), Aicha Ben Abed and the trainees themselves. Praise was given to the GCI's consultants Tom Roby and Livia Alberti for the quality of their teaching and their commitment and to Kathy Dardes and Bettina Lucherini for the quality of the project management and organization.

I believe that I have established a very good rapport with the INP Director, Boubaker Ben Fraj, Aicha Ben Abed, Denis Lesage and Ben Romdhane (newly appointed director of the Bardo Museum). The fact that we could have lengthy conversations in French I believe went a long way to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences.

Several areas for possible future collaboration between the GCI and Organizations or Institutions from the North Africa Arab world were brought forward and are detailed further on. Some of these areas include:

- Workshop on mosaic conservation in situ for site managers
- Strategic approach to resolve fundamental issues and question concerning the conservation, maintenance and presentation of mosaics
- Development of low-cost, low-tech solutions for the care and maintenance of mosaics, in collaboration with the Bardo museum
- The long term sustainability and development of the North Africa Arab States architectural conservation training program
- Working with the Tunisian Education and Tourism departments to find innovative ways of defining and presenting the "message" of archeological sites to ensure that it reaches the local population, young and old, as well as visitors
- Maintenance of historic buildings: identifying and making available to the population simple solutions for the care and maintenance of historic buildings and exploring innovative long-term appropriate solutions for maintenance such as the Dutch experience with the MonumentVan
- Integration of infrastructure works into historic quarters rehabilitation work.
- Actively involve the Arab countries in some aspects of the Terra project

Details

Sunday, April 01, 2001

Mr. Boubaker Ben Fraj, the Director of the Institut National Du Patrimoine in Tunisia, invited me to dinner. Aicha Ben Abed was also present.

This invitation was considered to be very special because Mr. Ben Fraj was currently under great pressure from the office of the President of Tunisia to finalize an exhibition honoring the former President of Tunisia and scheduled for official opening on April 4.



Bardo Museum. Deposited Mosaic. Dust accumulation problem, cleaning once a week by specialized staff.



Bardo Museum. Mosaic protected by wax. Details and colors are no longer visible due to wax and dust accumulations.



Figure 1 Statuary from Roman period. Museum curators are searching for appropriate cleaning techniques.



Bardo Museum. Mosaic collection for which training of curators is required.

The discussions were very cordial and Mr. Ben Fraj reiterated his willingness to work closely with The Getty Conservation Institute in every area of heritage conservation that was mutually agreeable. Of particular interest is the architectural conservation course to which the Getty Grant program contributed \$120,000 two years ago and that is under the direction of Mr. Denis Lesage. Also of high interest is the continuation of the GCI's involvement with the INP in the area of mosaic conservation. His personal efforts are currently focused on trying to obtain a major financial loan from the World Bank to bring several important museums in Tunisia to current international standards. Aicha shared with me that she is not very much in support of this initiative. She believes that more up front studies should have been done to define what appropriate solutions are required before major funding from the World Bank is requested.

When the subject turned to urban revitalization and cultural tourism, Mr. Ben Fraj was very interested to learn more about the North American experiences with Main Street Revitalization and the French approach of Parcs Naturels Régionaux. Later on, I agreed with Aicha that during my next visit, I would bring slide presentations on these approaches and share the information with an audience of her choice.

Monday April 02

I Met with Denis Lesage from the INP to discuss the Architectural Conservation Program needs. The importance of training young professionals from the North Africa Arab States in conservation is obviously essential to the appropriate care and preservation of their heritage. The course has received financial support from the Getty Grant program a few years ago to the amount of \$120,000. Additional financial support came from various sources.

The INP had an initial budget of approximately \$500,000 to begin training young professionals from the North Africa Arab States. It costs approximately \$10,000 per trainee to bring them to Tunis and provide for their support for the duration of the training program. ICCROM was involved in managing the funds for this program, but according to them, did not contribute any. The organizers have great difficulty in finding a way to sustain such a program on a long-term basis. The organizers realize that it is relatively easy to get start-up grant funding to put together such a curriculum, but unless a solution is found to support the participation of young professionals in the long term, then all this effort will go to waste.

We discussed the curriculum and I was shown "conservation reports" prepared by trainees of the first promotion. These were of high quality.

I suggested that further discussions on this architectural training program be held with Jeanne Marie Teutonico when she comes in May. At that time, we may have a better idea of the direction that our Training and Education Program will take.

I then met with Mr. Khaled Ben Romdhane the newly appointed director of the Bardo Museum. Our discussions focused on the fact that even though this museum houses a collection of the most outstanding mosaics in the world, the staff responsible for their maintenance is not fully trained. The tools, products and equipment available to them for long term care and maintenance are inadequate.

Mr. Ben Romdhane suggested that the GCI could help in the following area: Third World countries have great difficulty acquiring products and technologies



Carthage. What message and how it is presented to visitors needs development.



Utica. Site office prepared by INP. Meeting room, washrooms, kitchenette.



Utica. Trainees at work on site.



Utica. Trainees, trainers, organizers.

that must be purchased with convertible currencies. Therefore, having his staff trained in foreign countries where they are taught how to do conservation in the most appropriate way, by using products and equipment that are not available to them in their country, is of very limited use.

With the support of the GCI, commonly available, off-the-shelf products and equipment available in Tunisia could be analyzed and tested in our labs to see if they can be used for maintenance of mosaics and statuary from the antiquity. The idea is that they would like to have the assurance that if they use commonly available products for the cleaning and maintenance of mosaics and statuary, that they will not endanger their conservation. Simple questions such as “can we use water for cleaning?” remains unanswered scientifically from their point of view. A review and laboratory analysis of the impact of commonly available maintenance products in Tunisia for the purpose of maintaining mosaics and statuary from the antiquity would go a long way in helping them to do the “right thing”. The results of such a research would find immediate application in other Third World countries. Mr. Romdhane suggested that if the Getty was interested in collaborating with the Bardo Museum, that he would make four newly hired maintenance staff available to us for training.

I met with Abedlaziz Daoulatti, the former Director of INP and the current President of the Board of ICCROM and Ezzedine Hosni, a teacher in town planning at a Paris university who is also considered by UNESCO to be an expert in cultural tourism. He was asked by UNESCO to prepare a program and budget proposal for holding an international seminar in Tunisia on the subject of Sustainable Development Strategies for Tourism in the Sahara. Fifty participants will be invited to attend this seminar that is aimed at developing tourism activities in the Sahara without destroying the existing heritage while helping local populations to improve their situation. I have a confidential copy of this proposal for those who would be interested in finding out more about this initiative.

Tuesday April 3

I met with Livia, Tom, Aicha, Bettina and the trainees at Utica. Aicha, the trainees and our consultants expressed unanimous satisfaction for the course organization and delivery. Aicha gave praise to our consultants, Bettina and Kathy for their professionalism, their dedication and their handling of all matters pertaining to the course.

We reviewed the current situation and discussed the program of activities that should take place during the period, in between the current campaign and the next one scheduled for May 21 to June 29:

- The trainees will be assigned practical work to do on site. This work will take place at Utica and will be reviewed by Tom and Livia at the beginning of the next campaign.
- The GCI team prepared Mosaic Documentation & Maintenance Tool Kits. One will be assigned to each participant. But the kits will remain the property of the INP and the trainees will be responsible for their care.
- The trainees will be organized in groups of three. A leader will be identified for each team.

Aicha raised a few questions that were discussed with our consultants. She wanted to know if anyone of the trainees was showing overall leadership qualities. If that individual was nurtured, could he eventually become the INP mosaic team captain? Our consultants identified one individual who had been working for many years with Aicha, but she did not agree with their suggestion.

Other individuals were discussed, and in the end, it was agreed that the subject should be brought up again during the next campaign, when the trainees will have been exposed to practical conservation work.

The topic of conserving mosaics in situ versus their lifting was also discussed. Aicha pointed out that during our dinner the previous evening with Mr. Ben Fraj, he had brought to our attention a recent incident. He had agreed to the conservation in situ of an important mosaic and to its reburial according to the most appropriate techniques. But then, thieves and vandals came to the site and completely destroyed the mosaic. Now, this important mosaic is gone forever.

Mr. Ben Fraj said that the conservation community must come up with practical solutions that work in Third World countries for conserving mosaics in situ not only from a technical point of view but also taking into consideration broader issues of security and protection. Otherwise, it should be flexible in its philosophy for conserving mosaics in situ. In certain circumstances, it is preferable to lift mosaics than to leave them in situ. These circumstances should be clearly identified.

The idea of creating a "Mosaics Van" was also discussed. It appears that Mr. Ben Fraj would have agreed that when the trainees have completed their training course that he would approve the purchase of a "van", fully equipped with tools and materials necessary for the documentation and conservation of mosaics in situ. This "Mosaics Van" would be called upon to help with emergency situations when important mosaics are exposed or when they are threatened.

I then discussed in private with Aicha several broad conservation issues and questions that could be considered as priorities for heritage conservation in the North Africa Arab States.

1. **Mosaics:** The care and maintenance of mosaics around the Mediterranean basin is certainly an area of immediate concern. A strategic plan that defines the areas of research and development most needed at this time should be prepared. It would be based on what has already been identified as priorities by various groups of professionals and would include issues of security and protection.

Aicha mentioned that she would be delighted to work with the GCI to prepare this plan. She suggested the names of other persons that she thought would contribute positively to such an initiative. Other than key GCI staff, they are Dimitri Michaeledis, Gerry Podany, Evelyne Chantrillot, John Stewart and Federico Guidobaldi. On the basis of this strategic plan, the GCI could chose the issues or questions it wants to be involved in, identify potential partners, and position itself clearly in the mosaic conservation community as a partner involved in specific issues and with specific goals to reach.

2. **Messaging Archeological Sites:** There are a great number of archeological sites of high significance in the Arab countries of North Africa. There appears to be a need to help the authorities and communities responsible for these sites with how the important archeological and historical messages are defined and shared with the public, whether school children or visitors.
 - What exactly is the message that we want the visitor to go away with at this site?
 - Has this message been clearly understood by the visitors?
 - Has the visitor experience been of quality?
 - How can this be assessed?

- What can we do to improve things considering our specific socio-political situation?
- Can a program of reflection and action be developed in partnership with the departments of education and tourism in our countries?

3. **Maintenance of Historic Buildings:** Regular and appropriate maintenance is recognized universally as being the most important way of preserving built heritage in the long term. Finding an approach that works in the context of North Africa certainly requires research and development.

The specific example of the Dutch MonumentVan was discussed. In a few words, the Dutch concept implemented more than 20 years ago works as follows: the state purchased and equipped 5 or 6 vans with tools, materials and two well trained “generalist” conservation workmen. The owner of a registered historic building is entitled to one free visit per year by the MonumentVan. The workers come and inspect the property, prepare an inspection report and discuss it with the owner before they leave. It tells the owner what maintenance work should be done and what, if any, more significant work requiring restoration should be undertaken.

An estimate for this work is left with the owner along with the name of qualified contractors to do the work. While on the premises, the workmen will fix simple things such as a few displaced tiles, adjust a door, and repoint a few joints. The Dutch have demonstrated that this approach is very cost efficient for their government. But most importantly, the approach has removed from the building owner the necessity to become a “building expert”, to understand construction and restoration techniques. The owner is also left with an independent estimate that gives him the upper hand in negotiations with contractors and to search for additional financial support for important work.

The point here is that the Dutch developed an approach that fits and works in their socio-political environment. Similarly, an approach to maintenance of historic buildings, custom tailored for North Africa, needs to be developed.

4. **Low-tech, Low-cost :** The Arab countries of North Africa do not have convertible currencies. The purchase of goods and services from abroad is a constant issue for them. The development and broad dissemination of appropriate low-tech, low-cost conservation and maintenance technology that uses readily available tools and products would go a long way in helping them to care for their heritage. For instance, how should delicate plasterwork be cleaned and repaired? How should rendering be repaired? What type of paint should & should not be used on rendering? How to maintain and repair roofs, tile work, metal ornamentation, etc. What is the most efficient way of disseminating this information: TV, video, Internet, leaflets, posters in public places, schools, places where materials are purchased, etc.?
5. **Earthen Architecture:** There is a great deal of earthen architecture in North Africa. How can the Arab countries of North Africa be more active and benefit from the work being done within the framework of the Terra Project?
6. **Urban Infrastructures:** Urban renewal and development is happening at a fast pace in this region of the world. More and more infrastructure projects are created every year: roads, sewers, power, communications etc. These works cause major disturbance to the urban fabric, especially when they occur in historic quarters. Very large investments are made. How these

works impact on the historic fabric, including historic buildings and unexcavated remains could be the subject of research and development.

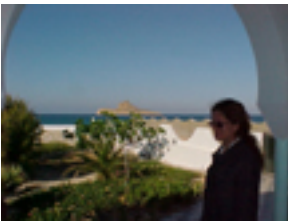
Those concerned with the conservation of historic towns in North Africa could greatly benefit from research and development that would help them work with public works authorities to integrate new amenities in a way that is compatible with this sensitive environment. Furthermore, important foundation damproofing and restoration work could be programmed and funded in conjunction with major public infrastructure works.



Raf Raf. Rented house for trainers and GCI staff, trainers quarters.



Raf Raf Rented house for trainers and GCI staff, GCI's quarters.



Raf Raf. View from house on private garden and sea.

Project House rented in Raf Raf

I met with Mr. Machta, owner of the house that we rent in Raf Raf. I handed over to him the equivalent of \$2000 in TD for the rent as per the agreement. It was very easy to change the traveler's checks at the airport. There are no limits for changing dollars to dinars.

The house is comfortable, though modestly furnished. The consultants appreciate being in a space where they can spread out their teaching material while preparing the courses, and are next to the sea to relax.

The downside is that it is relatively far from the site in Utica (20mi.) and approximately 45mi. to 55mi. from Tunis. There is always the tension of being together all the time, during the day and at night, but the team members did not seem to mind this very much at this time.

There are no telephone and Internet connections. The use of a cellular phone has made a positive contribution. Should we acquire a roaming telephone number for the Internet, this would also facilitate communications.



Mosaics 2001 First Campaign: Trainees, trainers, organizers