SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED IN NORTH AFRICAN ARTS AND
ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

The huge scale of destruction going on in regards to rock art and architectural forms within the North African region is alarming. These cultural heritages were efforts of ancient civilizations, thus it is necessary to develop strategies to remedy this large scale destruction going on. Therefore, solutions are preferred in this paper on how to stop this menace, including: establishment of a pan-Saharan agency, increased funding and capacity building mechanism, establishment of viable tourists conservation agency, community-based cultural heritage management, establishment of cultural Ministry and lastly, joint-effort and co-operation with the international community. Amongst the whole, conservation is perhaps the most enduring of all identified solutions. Hence, it is recommended as the most sustainable to all countries within the North African region.

Keywords: Arts, architecture, heritage

Introduction

North Africa is well known for its magnificent traditional arts and architectural forms which are distinctively and uniquely aligned with the cultural and religious beliefs of the people. The landmarks range from the Atlas Mountains of the Maghreb and cut across the Sahara, to the land of the Nile. Just as it was admitted that the arts and architecture of the North African region is huge and diversified, so also the problems associated with it. The problems are huge ranging from simple to complex matters across the faces of the central Sahara to Egypt and northern Sudan. However, reputable scholars have proffered numerous solutions and many have already been adopted by several countries concerned. Amongst recent efforts in tackling prominent issues bedeviling traditional African art and architecture are contributions from Subils (2010), Clottes (2007), Agnew (1993), Kenaan (2003), Suleiman (2003), UNESCO (2003) and Illies & Lanjouw (2004). As rightly observed by Clottes (2007), in regards to the issues confronting rock art in North Africa:

- The desperate shortage of resources, the gaps in our knowledge, the non-application of existing legislation, and the threats of all kinds facing the preservation of the rock art and its archaeological and natural context (and their gradual attrition), together on the other hand with the devoted efforts and active involvement of many rock art enthusiasts in furthering our knowledge of, and protecting rock art, are common features which exist, and which will probably continue to exist, in all the regions concerned.

In lieu to the above statement, the intensity of the problems highlighted could be tackled if only countries within the region are sincerely committed. Therefore, amongst several solutions proposed include- Establishment of a pan-Saharan Agency, Increase funding and Capacity Building Mechanism, Establishment of Viable Tourists' Conservation Agency, Community-Based Cultural Heritage Management, Establishment of Cultural Ministry and lastly, Joint-Effort and Co-operation with International Community. These proposed solutions could go a long way in resolving identified threats against ancient arts and architecture of North Africa.

Establishment of a Pan-Saharan Agency.
With the daunting tasks involved in contemplating measures to tackling problems bedeviling cultural heritage, it is necessary to establish first, a pan-Saharan agency within the region. A regional agency with international support to cater for several issues identified. Issues ranging from the acute shortage of resources, lack of viable and enduring concessions between mining corporations and conservation agencies, extensive efforts committed to the protection of valuable sites distributed across the deserts by authorities concerned against activities of treasure hunters/ graffiti-vandals, to the inevitable occurrence of natural disasters.

Moreover, the lack of viable entrepreneur/local markets participants in the sustenance of the sector, and the inefficiencies of several cultural ministries in checkmating the unh尔斯ome activities of some ill-faith and dubious professionals engaged to safe guard these sites, contribute to the deplorable current situation being witnessed today. Therefore, major works to be conducted by the agency will be to create an interface for dialogues between contending issues, for example- as mentioned earlier, monitoring concessions between mining corporations and conservation agencies within these countries and as well, supervises activities of conservation and tourism agencies. As well as liaising with government agencies in charge of cultural matters against the sophisticated approaches adopted by treasure looters from Europe and other parts of the globe. All these efforts would go a long way in checkmating the unh尔斯ome activities against conservation works in North Africa.

**Increased funding and capacity building**

Increased funding as proposed, from pan-Saharan governments and International donor agencies is required to remedy the shortage of resources in the field of cultural conservation of rock art and architectural sites, scattered across North Africa. The shortage of resource is a critical aspect undermining efforts across the pan-Saharan countries in restoration exercises on identified sites; containing cultural heritage-rock art and ancient architectural sites. Thus, the need for increased funding from both governments and other donor agencies allied to the restoration of cultural heritage is paramount.

These cultural heritage/ antiquities ranging from the rock art of the Sahara to the ancient architectural masterpieces of the Tingad (Algeria), Quirouan (Tunisia), and the magnificent Egyptian pyramids and funerary complex. In this regard, UNESCO could engage experts from reputable scientific and technical institutions (multidisciplinary professions) from Europe and America, to collaborate with the pan-Saharan educational institutions in capacity building and as well as engaging them in restoration of heritage sites across the region. A
good example of past collaboration of this kind was between the Egyptian Antiquities Organization and the Getty Conservation Institute in the United States from 1986-1992. The task involved works was the Nefertari wall paintings conservation in Egypt. However, the UNESCO should exposed dubious efforts in the past, by some foreign archaeologists who robbed Africa of her treasuries.

Figure 2: Nefertari new look-Egypt: Wikipedia 2014

As rightly observed by Kenaan (2002), several experiments undertaken by UNESCO’S scientists to preserve the Sahara’s cultural heritage—particularly, rock art have resulted in damaging it. Best known example, in regards to this, was probably the use of synthetic resins, reputedly by scientists, in the Tassil- n- Ajjer; in or before 1968. The author also stated similar studies of Larocca in 2003 which documented appalling damage on archaeology- sites in Morocco, and the infamous case of damage to petroglyphs in Libya’s Acacus Mountain in the 1980’s- by the Castiglioni brothers from Italy, the case of Dabous in Niger by Jean Clottes; jointly supported by TARA (Trust for African Rock Art) and the Bradshaw Foundation, Henri Lhote- '1958 method' which advocated the "washing" of paintings before photographs influenced many photographers/ guides to use his method. Lhote as reported by Kenaan (2002), is the worst offender linked to several looting; many sites excavated for studies in the Algeria- Tassili Plateau have not been published nor made available for analysis. Despite persisted requests from colleagues to do so.

Similarly, the dubious roles of professional archaeologists and ethnologists who explored the Sahara and took advantage to collect illegally 'specimens' for the museums/ institutions that sponsored them. This scenario is aptly captured by Kenaan (2003), an Oxford academician named Dr. Kenneth Sandford, kept collecting and sorting specimens for the museums in Cairo, Khartoum, Oxford and Chicago, around the 'scrap of desert on the borders of Libya with the Sudan and Chad. Therefore, data on these past criminal efforts should be made available and warrant of arrests placed on them; (archaeologists and ethnographers) from France, Spain, Italy and Germany. They operated in countries like Morocco, Western Sahara, Algeria, Libya and Niger, where serious damages/ lootings of rock art and associated antiquities, were reported. All these measures would go a long way to deter other dubious minds from continuing these infamous activities across Africa as a whole.

Another identified solution is capacity building; it involves the training of staff in the use of
specialized and innovative methods in the preservation and documentation of rock art and ancient architectural heritage. This method will digitalize and disseminate heritage collections and conservation management skills. Similarly, another method (solution) is the reconnaissance of this vast region-recording (coverage by means of specialized air craft) to cover potential fields for future preservation efforts. All these methods are supported by Suleiman (2003), who observes that, an African perspective on preservation ought not to be different from other perspectives. Digital preservation as opined by the author is motivated by different factors in different parts of the world. This is supported by UNESCO (2003) in its chapter of preservation of digital heritage, that access to heritage is one of the motivators for preservation and that cultural heritage should be made accessible to all the people of the world. Therefore, the need for pan-Saharan countries to redouble their efforts in covering large areas containing cultural heritage (antiquities) for recognition as world heritage sites by UNESCO.

Establishment of viable tourists conservation agencies

According to Lhote in Kenaan (2002), the Saharan countries are the World's largest collection of prehistoric art, and the size of this collection is almost beyond imagination. It is still not fully understood or appreciated, yet the scale of destruction over the years cannot be overestimated. Not to be mentioned is the case of hidden funerary complex and graves of past pharaohs kept away from robbers. Therefore, amongst the several identified factors responsible for this menace include tourists and indigenous people, who are perceived to be parts of the problem. This is also the same with other ancient architectural sites in the northern parts of Africa. Therefore, the need to develop the tourism industry alongside with the establishment of a strong conservation management policy is necessary.

In support to the above statement, Illies and Lanjouw (2004), highlight the significance of the 'Threat Abatement and Conservation' measures in tackling this menace. Most importantly, as observed by the authors, "All Threat Abatement strategies require Survey and Mapping to identify key sites for protection or conservation interventions". It is only when important cultural heritage sites are identified, studied and analyzed, before conservatory measures could be articulated. The authors added further that, knowing about these sites carries with it the shared and global responsibility of conserving them.

However, travel and tourism, according to Kenaan (2002), is the world largest industry; accounting for 10 percent of world GDP (Growth Domestic Product). A viable tourism can play a major role in the overall conservation management of these cultural heritage sites in these countries. Regardless, the negative sides of tourism if properly managed and strictly monitored by a robust pan-Saharan agency, it could develop local markets and other associated entrepreneurial/business activities of the local communities within these sites and countries as a whole. In support of the above, Illies and Lanjouw (2004) identify tourism as the fastest growing industry world-wide and it is equally inevitable that it will grow in the Sahara over time. Hence, the need to involve local people in its management. According to the authors, unless it is managed by local participants and contributes to their livelihood, it will never be sustainable, nor will the sites be protected by the local people.

Community-based cultural heritage management

In regards to solutions stated above, a community based resource management model can also be proposed within these countries. This initiative works to strengthen locally accountable communities, hence the transfer of authority over cultural heritage/antiquities to the custodians of these heritage sites, is paramount. It is co-management of resources between central authorities, local governments and local communities with shared rights and responsibilities. Hence, there is the need to empower local communities to adequately monitor professional looters who disguised as tourists and use national borders for the convenience to loot cultural heritage/antiquities.

According to Smith (2006), this participatory management system can be implemented through a partnership between community members and heritage professionals. The author observes that, the local communities bring knowledge of the significance and meaning of the sites and a
wealth of experience as to how the sites were protected in the past. While, the heritage professionals bring broad experience of practices that have worked effectively in other places and complex scientific skills that can help to conserve the significance of these sites.

Along this line, there is also, the need to monitor entrepreneurs in tourism sector and local markets’ activities from encouraging illicit sales/smuggling of cultural items out of these countries. Additionally, henceforth, proceeds generated from a 'suitable visitor charging policy' as proposed by Kenaan (2002), as a sustainable measure could go a long way to fund the protection of these sites under various communities-based initiatives.

Establishment of culture ministry

The establishment of Culture Ministries manned by knowledgeable personnel within the pan-Saharan countries would go a long way in curtailing mistakes of the past. A good example of such mistakes was a case of the 'French Culture Ministry', which after the discovery of the 'Chauvet Cave' by Jean-Marie Chauvet in 1994 at a cliff in Southeastern France condoned the area. The Ministry placed the Chauvet Cave off-limits to all but a handful of anthropologists and other experts. Incidentally, they learned a lesson from a similar discovery (some years earlier) in Spain. A cave discovered at Altamira, due to early unrestricted access to this Spanish Cave obliterated archaeological clues and led to the rapid deterioration of artworks found therein. What a wise decision offered only by a wise counsel in the field of archaeology and antiquity in the French Culture Ministry (Chauvet, 1994).

Joint-effort and co-operation

In support of some of these measures in tackling issues militating against North African arts and architecture, Kenaan (2002) states that, for the successful implementation of any proposed solution, there is the need to seek co-operation from the International Community towards assisting the pan-Saharan countries, in curtailing activities of unwholesome trading in cultural items acquired illegally. The author reiterated that, for the International community, commitment goes beyond the mere contribution of financial resources. It involves also the provision and encouragement, transfer of necessary technical expertise coupled with frequent training on skills required for the latest conservation management in these countries.

Conclusion

In retrospect, one of the most enduring solutions in tackling problems of North African art and architecture is conservation. This according to Matero (2008), concerns the protection of cultural heritage from loss and damage, and it is accomplished through both preventive and remedial types of intervention. The author observes further that, conservation embraces the technical means by which heritage may be studied, displayed, and made accessible to the public. This measure along with others identified in this paper would go a long way to remedy problems in North African art and architecture.

Regardless, the huge problems bedeviling these countries, it is still not too late to tackle issues rating to conservation of cultural heritage of past civilization. All that is needed is strong commitment and total support from the International Community in fulfilling their obligations to the pan-Saharan countries.

Reference


