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MILANO 1863

27 December, 2016

**SHORT REPORT ON THE EXPLORATORY TRIP TO THE KHARGA OASIS  
TO FINALISE THE CREATION OF A PROTECTED AREA AROUND UMM AL-  
DABADIB  
December 18-21, 2016**

**Dr Corinna Rossi and Dr Ashraf Salem**

*An extended version of this report was submitted to HE the Minister Dr Khaled Fahmy  
and Dr Fatma Mohsen, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA)*

### **Introduction**

The authors of this report have been working together since 2015 on the possibility to implement the Protected Area (PA) in the Kharga Oasis around the archaeological site of Umm al-Dabadib. The idea of a local PA is not new and has been included among the EEAA potential projects for a while, but the archaeological and environmental research carried out in the area in recent years offers now fresh material, able to boost this project and bring it to completion.

Since 2015 the authors explored the area together, discussed at length the possible outline of the PA, involved in the discussion the General Manager of the Kharga Antiquities Mr Bahgat Ahmed Ibrahim, and in April 2016 presented the project to the Governor of the Wadi al-Gedid HE General Mahmoud Abdel Rahman Ashmawy, who gave his approval. In November 2016 Dr Rossi presented the project to HE Dr Khaled al-Enani, Minister of the Antiquities, and received his approval.

At the end of November, together with Mr Ahmed Moussa, CEO of Pan Arab Tours, General Manager of Al-Wadi Co. and founder of the award-winning eco-friendly Desert Lodge Hotel in Dakhla, the authors had the pleasure of meeting EEAA Assistant Minister Dr Fatma Mohsen, General Omar Hassan, Mr Mahmoud Ismail and Mr Tarek al-Qanawayat at the Cairo House, and discuss the details of the project. The decision was taken to organise a short expedition to the area under investigation for an up-to-date assessment of the local flora and fauna and to check the proposed boundaries of the potential PA.

### **The 2016 expedition**

The team of the 2016 expedition consisted of Dr Corinna Rossi, Dr Ashraf Salem, Mr Ahmed Moussa, Dr Francesco Fassi and the *ghaffir* Ahmed Farrag, with the assistance of the drivers Essam Harby Salah and Salah Mohammad, and the



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policeman Bahaa Eddin Fatih. The team met Mr Bahgat Ahmed Ibrahim, General Manager of the Kharga Antiquities and started their short tour.

On Sunday 18 the team checked the northern area of the oasis, where the eastern boundary of the proposed PA should run, and took note of the situation. The area is punctuated by small patches of new cultivations, that lay scattered among the archaeological remains. The buildings themselves are not directly affected (although both Qasr al-Gib and Qasr al-Sumayra suffered minor damages), but the archaeological area as a whole is suffering for this situation: the ancient sites are connected by a network of subterranean aqueducts, that are not officially protected by any institution and are thus exposed to encroachment and damages.

On Monday 19 the team headed to Ain Amur, to check the situation in the westernmost portion of the proposed PA. The area showed no trace of recent human activities, and no fresh damage to the antiquities was recorded. It must be noted that the archaeological site of Ain Amur was full of plastic bags and containers entangled in the local vegetation. We removed some rubbish but a more substantial cleaning operation will be necessary in the near future. The team focussed on the spring, that had not been maintained for at least 5 years. The *ghaffir* Ahmed Farrag cut all the tall grass that had grown into and immediately around it, and removed several buckets of water to allow a minimum of fresh re-charge.

On the way back the team stopped to check the remains of the ephemeral lake near Aa's Rock, and check the conditions of the vegetation. Dr Ashraf performed a quick survey of the local flora, that grew after the 2013 downpour of rain.

On Tuesday 20 we visited the area around Umm al-Dabadib, the core of the proposed PA. We encountered two gazelles in the desert to the east of the site. We checked the conditions of the important natural features of the site, in particular a huge acacia tree, estimated to be between 1,000 and 1,500 years old. There the underwood is also full of plastic bags blown around by the wind; they are stuck and unlikely to move around, but will have to be removed at some point. We recorded the presence of a falcon (*Falco Tinniculus*) and several passerins. Fresh gazelle pawprints and droppings were also recorded. In the afternoon the team went back to Kharga and then returned to Cairo on the following day.

### **Results and final remarks**

This trip to Kharga confirmed the result of our previous work: the area stretching between Ain Amur to the west and Ain al-Lebekha to the east (ca 75 km along an east-west direction and 26 in a north-south direction) is intact and void of human activities, apart from acts of vandalism and illegal hunting; these unlawful and despicable activities will be hopefully terminated by the creation of the PA.



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Minor doubts remain on the north-eastern boundary of the proposed PA around the site of Ain Gib, along a small area of about 12 x 5 km, due to the presence of modern patches of cultivations. We did not detect any reason to avoid the creation of a smaller portion of the PA to the east of the main road, around the site of Deir al-Mounira; the area is void of human activities and distant from the areas under development.

In conclusion, we verified that the area centred on Umm al-Dabadib and stretching from Ain Amur to Ain al-Lebekha is absolutely fit and ready to be declared a Protected Area.

We submitted a detailed report to EEAA and suggested to the Ministry of the Antiquities to extend their control over the entire length of the ancient aqueducts in the area of Qasr al-Gib and Qasr al-Sumayra, with the hope that our work can help the Egyptian authorities in their efforts to protect both the cultural heritage and the environment of the Kharga Oasis.

**Dr Corinna Rossi**

Associate Professor of Egyptology  
Director of the Italian Mission to Umm al-Dabadib  
Politecnico di Milano  
email: corinna.rossi@polimi.it

**Dr Ashraf Salem**

General Manager of the Gebel Elba National Park  
EEAA  
email: ashraf2404@yahoo.com