

LIBYA'S CULTURAL GEMS IN DANGER



It started with Tunisia and spread all across the region. Overthrowing dictators seems to be on the agenda, and while civilians fight for their freedom, the cultural treasures of their countries are in danger.

Attention turns to Libya where Colonel Gaddafi fights to stay in power. The situation is very dire with hundreds of people dying and the instability is making life in Lybia extremely dangerous for all. **Only a few weeks ago, the last of the team of archaeologists working on one of local UNESCO heritage sites was evacuated** and while the latest news on the state of these is not tragic, many fear the worst is yet to come.

According to news relayed from Salah Agab, a chairman of the Libyan Department of Antiquities, the situation was relatively under control during the first week of March and **all the five UNESCO World Heritage sites located in Libya were unharmed**. However, a lot has changed since then. Many archaeologists remember the fate of many recently looted and vandalized sites in neighbouring Egypt, such as the ancient tomb of Impy near the Great Sphinx at Giza.

UNESCO has selected five heritage sites in Libya, featuring Leptis Magna, a once prominent Roman city whose golden era dates back to 120 AD; Sabratha, a former Phoenician trading post which eventually became an important Roman settlement with well-preserved ruins of an ancient amphitheatre with the capacity of 5,000 seats, is another Libyan heritage treasure in question. The Hellenic city of Cyrene with a famous necropolis complex, the rock art sites of Tadrart Acacus (dating back to 12,000 BC) and the 'pearl of the desert', once famous trading town of Ghadames complete the list.

Historians and archaeologists have no other choice but to wait quietly, and hope the fighting will soon be over, the regime will come to an end, and Libya's priceless cultural heritage will be left standing.

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