Africa's Fragile Heritages: Introduction

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Published online: 22 March 2011
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African cultural heritage is of immediate concern to those of us who work on the archaeology of the continent. In comparison with the situation elsewhere, heritage infrastructure in African countries is often in its early stages; as archaeologists, we have a moral and practical interest in seeing that infrastructure develop (Alexander 2011; Lozny 2006). In addition, attention to African heritage reveals insights that can allow a re-evaluation of principles and best practice developed elsewhere, giving a crucial perspective on supposedly universal discourses of global heritage.

It was with this in mind that 'Africa's Fragile Heritages: Future Challenges' was designed. The workshop was held at the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, October 1–3, 2009. The problems of conserving the sites and landscapes on which archaeologists depend, as well as conserving remains and artefacts for the future, fall into a sphere of work that can sometimes be isolated from the work of archaeologists. It was hoped that dialogue between heritage and archaeological professionals would encourage engagement from each side with the concerns and priorities of the other. Attention to heritage also necessitates consideration of other interest groups, including the public to whom the past is being presented (both tourists and local communities), the international heritage infrastructure, and the politics and priorities of individual countries.

We deliberately chose to draw attention to the fragility of Africa's diverse heritages. As many of the participants at the workshop underlined, heritage and culture are rarely among the top priorities of national and international policy; this is particularly the case for many African countries. As emphasised by Phillipson (2003: 3):

In the developing nations of today's Africa, archaeology per se cannot be a top priority. It does however help with understanding and determining policies for

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those priorities: health, food, sustainable exploitation of natural resources, and in fostering a sense of pride and self-reliance in a world which all too often seems to be forgetting Africa, albeit that it is believed to be the continent whence we all ultimately derive.

These considerations urge us, as archaeologists, to make explicit the relevance of our research to current debates on Africa's top priorities, as listed above. All of the participants of the workshop took up the challenge of addressing this issue, exploring from different perspectives the nature of and potential remedies for this sense of fragility.

The five papers in this special issue of the *African Archaeological Review* and the concluding editorial essay reflect the topics of debate at the workshop, and offer case studies relating to the following themes: threats to Africa's heritage (Barker and Bennett; Arazi); collaborating locally and presenting globally (Sørensen and Evans; Diamitani); and future approaches (Mire; Alexander). As ever, they cannot represent the full range of debate. Nor is there any attempt to be comprehensive: the papers presented at the workshop reinforced the sheer diversity of both heritages and heritage agendas at inter- and intra-regional scales in Africa, rendering any such attempt well beyond the scope of this project. Rather, in the spirit of the original workshop, we hope that the papers will offer a basis for reflection and debate. A full list of the original speakers and papers can be found below.

The workshop was conceived as an opportunity for dialogue and consideration of best practice and as such we saw it as crucial to invite both Western researchers working on African heritage and key representatives of heritage organisations in Africa. Unfortunately, this latter aim was severely hampered by the fact that none of our invited speakers based in Africa—including our intended keynote speaker—was able to gain a visa for the conference. A source of great embarrassment and disruption to us, the issues we encountered were also a telling reminder of the ongoing complications of international collaboration for our African colleagues, and the many everyday obstacles that can prevent them from being part of international dialogue. Another disappointment for us was our inability to involve a representative from UNESCO in the workshop despite long communication with their delegates from Paris and from their bases in Africa. Nevertheless, we hope that the publication of these papers and commitment to ongoing dialogue will allow us to engage with our UNESCO colleagues in the future.

The popularity of the African Heritage workshop demonstrated beyond doubt the importance of these issues in our engagement with the African past, as well as the dynamic and positive nature of cultural heritage developments in this region. We are very pleased to present this selection of papers, and hope that our colleagues will find them useful and inspiring. It was clear from the discussion that there are multiple ways the heritages of Africa can be understood, studied and conserved, and that this will be a continuing dialogue over the years to come. We see great cause for optimism that researchers, heritage agencies and local communities are increasingly working together to produce a mutually satisfying way to preserve these multiple heritages.

The workshop was made possible through generous grants from the British Academy and from the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge, and with assistance provided by the British Institute in Eastern Africa. We are extremely grateful for their support. We would like to express our gratitude to all the participants at the

workshop, to the contributors to this volume and to the journal's editor-in-chief, Adria LaViolette, for welcoming and supporting the development of this special issue. Particular thanks are due to David W. Phillipson and the late John Alexander for offering valuable comments and unfailing support throughout.

John Alexander left us on August 17, 2010, during the interval between the workshop and the publication of these papers. We humbly, gratefully and affectionately dedicate this special issue to him.

Dedication

'You show them the secret of the day
and they do the rest
they leave until sunrise
clasping your gifts in their hands'
(al-Saddiq al-Raddi, *Horizon*)

List of the papers presented at the workshop

African archaeology, tourism and site management: Two case-studies from Ethiopia

David W. Phillipson (University of Cambridge, UK)

Africa out of Africa: Repatriation, free movement and exchange

Kiprop Lagat (National Museum of Kenya/University of East Anglia, UK)

Postcolonial approaches to African heritage

John Mack (School of World Art and Museology, University of East Anglia, UK)

Twenty-two years of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in North East Africa

Michael Mallison (Mallison Architects and Engineers, UK)

Collaboration and cult: Recent research in Uganda

Ceri Ashley (Institute of Archaeology, University College London, UK)

Jilius Lejju (Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda)

Dismas Ongwen (Uganda Museum)

Future urban growth and archaeological heritage management: Some implications for research activity in Africa

Paul Lane (Department of Archaeology, University of York, UK)

Sudan: Heritage in danger

Shadia Taha (Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, UK)

Heritage in Central Africa: An endangered species

Pierre de Maret (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium)

Critical approaches to the archaeological heritage?

David Edwards (School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester, UK)

Digital heritage: Challenge and opportunity for Africa

Stephanie Wynne-Jones (Department of Archaeology, University of York, UK)

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- Lozny, L. R. (2006). Place, historical ecology and cultural landscape: New definition for applied archaeology. In L. R. Lozny (Ed.), *Landscape under pressure* (pp. 15–25). New York: Springer.
- Phillipson, D. W. (2003). *Archaeology in Africa and its museums: An inaugural lecture given at the University of Cambridge, 22 October 2002*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.