

Education in Maritime Archaeology: The Egyptian Case Study

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Abstract The investigation of archaeological sites of maritime nature started in Egypt more than a century ago, with the discovery of the Dahshur boats (Haldane 1998) and the ancient harbour of Pharos (Jondet 1912); however, education in maritime and underwater archaeology in Egypt is still in its infancy. This paper will look at the development of maritime archaeology in Egypt as a scientific discipline and the progress achieved to date in providing Egyptian archaeologists with education and training in aspects of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage.

Keywords Egypt · Education · Maritime archaeology · Alexandria · Tempus · Cultural heritage

Maritime Archaeology in Egypt

In 1994, the French Centre for Alexandrian Studies started the first organised underwater archaeological excavation in Egypt, studying the submerged remains of the ancient Lighthouse of Alexandria (La Riche 1996). During the same year, the Institute of Nautical Archaeology started the first underwater archaeological survey along the Egyptian Red Sea coast, which led to the discovery and the subsequent excavation of the Sadana Island shipwreck during the period from 1995 until 1998 (Haldane 1994; Ward 2001). Those two events are considered a turning point in the history of maritime archaeology in Egypt, since they marked the true beginning of the practice of archaeology underwater as a scientific discipline. However, similar to many other countries around the world, underwater archaeological exploration in Egypt started at a much earlier date with individual efforts from divers and amateur archaeologists. Therefore, it is reasonable to divide the history of maritime and underwater archaeology in Egypt into two main phases; before and after the

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mid nineties (Khalil and Mostafa 2002). The first phase was mostly led by non-specialists and it mainly included the accidental discovery of underwater archaeological sites in the Alexandria region, and hence the subsequent salvage operations which were carried out at those sites. The Egyptian role in the projects that took place during this phase was quite limited, it was mainly through the contribution of the Egyptian Navy in addition to some professional and sport divers (Morcos 2000, pp. 42–45).

The second phase of maritime archaeological research in Egypt started, as mentioned earlier, in the mid nineties and it is still on going today. This phase is mainly led by European and American archaeologists, which belong to different universities and institutions. During the past decade more than ten different teams carried out archaeological projects of a maritime nature in Egypt (Goddio et al. 1998; Rodziewicz 1998; Gallo 2003; Tzalas 2003; Goddio 2007; Peacock and Blue 2006; Blue et al. 2005; Khalil 2008). Accordingly, a number of new archaeological sites were discovered and excavated, and it became evident that Egypt has unique potential for maritime and underwater archaeological exploration and research. However, the discovery of numerous sites and the excavation of hundreds of artefacts made it obvious that Egypt is facing some issues and problems related to the study and management of its maritime and underwater cultural heritage. Among the main issues is the total absence of education and training programmes that can be offered to Egyptian archaeologists in aspects of maritime and underwater archaeology. As a result Egypt relies almost entirely for the study of its maritime and underwater cultural heritage on the limited work carried out by foreign archaeological missions. In other words, the Egyptian contribution to the exploration, preservation and presentation of the country's maritime and underwater cultural heritage is quite limited, if not insignificant in some cases. Even despite the governmental recognition of the significance of underwater archaeological research in Egypt, and hence the establishment of the Department for Underwater Archaeology in 1996 as part of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, its mission has been largely related to monitoring and organising underwater archaeological projects carried out by foreign missions in Egypt (Darwish 2005). Although, the work of foreign archaeological missions represented a great opportunity for training a number of Egyptian archaeologists within the Supreme Council of Antiquities on the technical aspects of practicing archaeology underwater; nevertheless, the knowledge behind the practice remained unappreciated.

Another significant problem which resulted from the lack of education and training in maritime archaeology in Egypt is a general misconception, even among academics and officials, about the true identity and nature of this discipline. This misconception has its consequences for the way archaeological sites in Egypt are perceived. For example, ship remains and harbours which are found on land are not considered by many Egyptian archaeologists and officials to be of a maritime nature, simply because they are not located underwater. This perspective has its implications for the way those sites are studied and appreciated. Equally, the relationship between maritime archaeology and other disciplines such as anthropology, history, ethnography, and oceanography, is not very well appreciated, accordingly the potential collaboration between researchers and scholars from these disciplines is not visualized.

Moreover, it became evident during the numerous meetings and workshops that have been organised in Egypt during the past ten years, under the patronage of UNESCO, to discuss the establishment of a museum for underwater archaeology in Alexandria (Alpozen and Henderson 2003), that the Egyptian perspective on the nature and role of a museum for underwater archaeology is not very well defined, or even agreed upon by the different

Egyptian parties involved. This problem can be largely attributed to the lack of education in aspects of maritime archaeology in the Egyptian higher education curricula.

Finally, the lack of public education and awareness of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage in Egypt has contributed to the aggravation of other problems, such as the extensive reclamation of coastal archaeological sites along the Egyptian coasts and the looting of underwater sites by sport and commercial divers. Such problems have even more serious effects in a country like Egypt, where cultural heritage is not just an element in its history and identity, but also has various economic and social implications; tourism being the most obvious as one of the country's major resources for national income.

Education and Training in Maritime Archaeology

Maritime and Underwater Archaeology, as scientific disciplines, have been offered in academic institutions around the world for several decades. According to a report published recently by the UNESCO Section for Museums and Cultural Objects (UNESCO 2008), education and training programs in maritime and underwater archaeology are offered in twenty-five countries around the world, eleven of which are European countries. However, there is a total absence of education and training in maritime and underwater archaeology in the Arab Region. Despite the fact that there have been numerous efforts by foreign and Arab archaeologists and historians to study aspects of maritime history, archaeology and ethnography of some Arab countries (Abdel Aleem 1979; Shehab 1987; Sayed 1993; Hourani 1995; Agius 2002), there is no proper education or training offered in those aspects. As a result, there has been no chance for capacity building or the development of generations of Arab maritime archaeologists who would be capable, not only of carrying out research, but also of managing and preserving their countries' maritime and underwater cultural heritage.

The need for education and training in maritime archaeology, in the Arab world in general and in Egypt in particular, was recognised more than a decade ago. During the International Workshop on Underwater Archaeology and Coastal Management, organised in Egypt in 1997 by UNESCO, the Alexandria University and the Supreme Council of Antiquities, it became evident that education and training in maritime archaeology are not available at any level in any academic institution in Egypt. Therefore, amongst the recommendations of the workshop was that the Alexandria University, the third largest governmental university in Egypt, should consider developing specialised courses at postgraduate and undergraduate levels in underwater archaeology, coastal zone management and related disciplines (Mostafa et al. 2000, p. 192).

However, two main factors contributed to the postponement of creating a specialised education programme in maritime archaeology in Egypt. The first was the lack of local expertise required for designing, formulating and running such a programme, and the second was the lack of funding needed to provide the necessary facilities and equipment. Therefore, in 2001 the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education, in an attempt to begin to resolve part of the problem and to produce an Egyptian academic educated and trained in maritime archaeology, funded a scholarship for a postgraduate student of archaeology at the Alexandria University to obtain MA and PhD degrees in Maritime Archaeology at the University of Southampton, UK. This event is considered a major governmental recognition of the importance of introducing specialised studies in maritime and underwater archaeology into the Egyptian higher education curricula. At the same time, a few

archaeologists from the Supreme Council of Antiquities were awarded scholarships from some European universities particularly in France, Belgium and Greece in order to study some aspects of maritime and underwater archaeology. This, in fact, influenced the future role that was to be played by the EU in the introduction of such disciplines into higher education in Egypt.

The second part of the problem, which was the lack of funding, was largely resolved through an EU grant. The grant was awarded for the creation of an educational centre for maritime archaeology at the Alexandria University as part of the Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (Tempus). In 2006 a project proposal was formulated by the University of Southampton and the Alexandria University and submitted to the Tempus program to apply for the resources to create a specialised centre for postgraduate studies at the Alexandria University. The proposed centre would provide education and training at different levels in aspects of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage. In doing so, it would develop and implement a new postgraduate Diploma and Master programs in Maritime Archaeology (Tempus 2006, p. 44). Besides the two universities, the project also included other partners: the Nautical Archaeology Society, the Supreme Council for Antiquities, the French Centre for Alexandrian Studies and the Arab Maritime Academy. These project partners would collaborate to provide the academic, technical and administrative expertise necessary for creating the centre.

In July 2007 a grant of about a quarter of a million Euros was awarded by the EU Tempus program for the creation of the centre. The EU grant also intrigued some Egyptian individuals and European corporations operating in Egypt, and inspired them to sponsor other aspects of the project which were not eligible for the Tempus funding (such as the renovation of the building which would host the centre and the purchase of some equipment). Private sponsorship of archaeology education in Egypt is almost unprecedented, which emphasises the significance of the project.

Structure and Target Groups

In January 2006, the Ministers of Higher Education of thirteen Euro-Mediterranean countries, including Egypt, signed what is known as the Catania Declaration in Italy. The Catania Declaration aims to create a Euro-Mediterranean area of Higher Education and Research (Catania 2006). Accordingly, the declaration promotes comparability and readability of higher education systems in the Euro-Mediterranean region and seeks to establish common education and training paths and networks of interlinked universities and centres for high quality education and research. Therefore, it was decided that the structure of the new education programme in maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage would be brought closely into line with similar programmes in European countries, which would promote the mobility of students, graduates and staff members between compatible and comparable education and training programmes. Accordingly, the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology and Underwater Cultural Heritage will offer a Graduate Diploma and a Master of Arts in Maritime Archaeology. The regional focus of the courses will be the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, while the temporal focus will extend from the Pre-Classical period to Late Antiquity.

The Graduate Diploma aims to provide graduates from different backgrounds with a basic understanding of contemporary theory and practice in aspects of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage and its role in the wider context of cultures. Its duration will be one year, and, therefore, it is expected that this programme will be of a

particular interest to professionals dealing with cultural heritage, such as antiquities inspectors and museum curators as a means to advance and develop their professional skills and career. In addition, with widespread sports diving and the sports diving industry in Egypt, alongside the utilisation of some underwater archaeological sites as diving attractions, it is expected that this programme will be of interest to dive guides and tour leaders involved in the diving business.

In contrast, the Master Degree in Maritime Archaeology, which will last for two years, aims to provide graduates in archaeology and related disciplines with a sound theoretical and methodological grounding in the investigation, interpretation and management of maritime and underwater archaeological resources. Hence it will provide the basis for a professional career in this field or a sound foundation of the skills and knowledge required for further research.

In addition to these complimentary graduate programmes, the centre will implement an introductory course in Maritime Archaeology which will be incorporated into the undergraduate syllabus for the Archaeology Department at the Alexandria University. The centre will also collaborate with the Supreme Council for Antiquities and the archaeological missions working in maritime and underwater archaeological sites in Egypt to run field schools for local and international students.

Moreover, it is a common practice for students from different Arab countries to seek education in Egypt in disciplines where there are no education programmes in their home countries. Therefore, it is expected that the education programmes offered through the centre, due to its uniqueness in Arab academia and its location in a culturally rich region, will be of particular interest to those archaeology students, as well as professionals, in different Arab countries seeking education in aspects of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage.

Beyond the strictly-defined academic field, other activities that will be carried out as part of the project are directed towards the public at large with the aim of promoting public awareness of maritime and underwater cultural heritage. These include the translation of the Nautical Archaeology Society training program to Arabic, thereby, enabling and promoting public education in underwater archaeology in Arabic speaking countries. The centre will also collaborate with organisations such as the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and the Egyptian Diving Federation to hold seminars and give public lectures and presentations on the exploration, preservation and presentation of maritime and underwater archaeological resources, and the educational and recreational benefits of non-intrusive access to underwater archaeological sites.

Preservation Through Education

The development of the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology and Underwater Cultural Heritage required formulating the syllabi and the contents of the courses that will be taught through the centre. During that process, maritime programmes offered in a number of universities and institutions around the world were referred to, and the contents of the courses they offer were reviewed. As a result of this review, the great diversity in the contents and the individual character of these education programmes became evident.

A number of factors appear to influence the nature and contents of the courses that are taught within the maritime and underwater archaeology programmes at different institutions. Those factors include the general approaches of the different programmes, whether they were economically-driven programmes aiming to fulfil the needs of the commercial

archaeology sector, or more academically and research influenced programmes. Similarly, certain programmes have a more practical approach, focusing on the technical aspects of conducting archaeological research, while others have a more theoretical approach, focusing on the theoretical and methodological contexts of maritime archaeology. Moreover, the regions in which the different institutions are located often influence the geographical areas and the time periods which are covered in their courses. For example, while certain programmes generally focus on the ancient Mediterranean, others focus on the New World or Scandinavia. Therefore, a significant difference can be seen in this respect between the maritime programmes which are offered in the USA, Europe and Australia. Finally, the availability of academic staff members and their fields of expertise clearly also play a major role in determining the nature and contents of the taught courses.

The variation between courses and programmes offered in maritime archaeology around the world has its evident advantages as well as disadvantages. On the one hand, it complies with the different needs and meets the different requirements of students and trainees. It is also clearly a response to the difference in local and regional research interests. Moreover, it represents an excellent opportunity for collaboration between institutions in different aspects of education and training, and hence, gives the opportunity for students, graduates and staff members to benefit from the diversity of programmes and courses.

On the other hand, the fact that some programmes are very regional and almost disregard certain geographical areas and time periods from their courses could be considered a gap in these programmes. Furthermore, certain programmes, often those which are technically and practically oriented, tend to overlook offering courses that provide the theoretical and historical context of maritime archaeology. This might well be acceptable if students of maritime archaeology were originally archaeology graduates. However, this can be problematic since many programmes are in fact open to graduate students from different backgrounds, and not necessarily from archaeology or related disciplines. This trend is related to the interdisciplinary nature of maritime and underwater archaeology, and the interdisciplinary character of maritime archaeology is a positive aspect of the discipline, as a result of which graduates of different disciplines are encouraged to study maritime archaeology. However, in most cases, those graduates are not required to study any extra courses related to broader archaeology or history, which could result in a certain deficiency in their knowledge and ability to understand maritime archaeology from a wider perspective.

In my view, the general aim of education and training in maritime archaeology is to provide students and trainees with the tools necessary for them to pursue their professional or academic careers, which should contribute to the protection and preservation of the maritime and underwater cultural heritage. In other words, putting the specific strengths and weaknesses of different courses aside, the ultimate objective of education in maritime archaeology ought to be the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, regardless of the geographic region where this heritage is located or the time period to which it dates. Moreover, whether the education programme is technically-led or theoretically-based, its particular approach should be utilised to provide students and trainees with different means of protecting and preserving such heritage. Therefore, if there is one course that needs to be included in every maritime programme, it should be related to the management, preservation and presentation of cultural heritage. This would enable education and training in aspects of maritime archaeology to have a more global effect; and in the long run, it would facilitate and encourage governmental and official collaboration in different aspects of managing cultural heritage. Moreover, as a consequence, despite the many differences of the various maritime education programmes, the preservation of maritime and underwater

cultural heritage could become the common language between maritime archaeologists around the world.

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