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The Maritime Archaeology Outreach Project (MAOP), Alexandria, Egypt

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Abstract

The Maritime Archaeology Outreach Project (MAOP) 2019 is an outreach project carried out by a team from the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology & Underwater Cultural Heritage and generously funded by the Honor Frost Foundation. The MAOP seeks to raise the profile of maritime archaeology in Egypt by targeting children at different venues and events. This article aims to introduce MAOP's outreach activities and discuss the preliminary results.

Keywords: Egypt, maritime archaeology, children's programs, public-awareness, outreach.

Egypt possesses a profound and quite unique underwater cultural heritage; however, the lack of public knowledge and awareness regarding maritime archaeology has created an unfortunate paradox in the world's epicentre of archaeology. While much of the world is in awe of Egypt's rich cultural history — evident in the popularity of Netflix's recent Saqara documentary — the people of Egypt remain largely unaware or unfazed by their own incredible cultural heritage.

To protect the rich heritage of Egypt and support future projects, it is crucial that Egyptians recognize that their own distinct archaeological and cultural heritage extends beyond the sands and under the water. To establish legislation to protect heritage sites a concerted effort is first required to increase public awareness via media campaigns. Hence, a project was needed which works and communicates with the general public to raise interest in and knowledge about the role of maritime archaeology within

the community and the broader spectrum of Egypt's cultural heritage. Public awareness, fostered by outreach projects and media campaigns, can encourage a local community to be involved and thus raise the profile of cultural heritage and its importance within that community. This paper describes and discusses the framework and methods used in the Maritime Archaeology Outreach Project (MAOP) and addresses the following questions:

- How do Egyptian children perceive maritime archaeology?
 - How does the MAOP contribute to raising the profile of the maritime archaeology in Egypt?
 - What methods does the MAOP use to increase knowledge, interest, and retention?
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Project target audience

The project seeks to target children within the ages of six and twelve and introduce them to the field of maritime archaeology. In 2019, six events were held — four in-schools and two outside of schools — at which 737 students answered questionnaires, both before and after the activities, to assess their knowledge of maritime archaeology. Notably, 74% of the children reported some knowledge of archaeology before attending a workshop; comparatively, a mere 11% had encountered the idea of maritime archaeology (Fig 1).

To ensure a high degree of success, the MAOP implemented age-appropriate techniques and methods which sought to capture the interest of a young audience and their parents, whilst simultaneously stimulating their imagination. Based on the principles of hands-on activity and storytelling, the MAOP aims to introduce and familiarize its audience with maritime archaeology via a relatable children's book. *The Adventures of Bahar and Nejma* is a story in Arabic, the first of its kind. It was designed to reach a wide range of students by publishing a book in the community's native language. The inclusive and multi-faceted approach of MAOP strives to develop a student's sense of cultural stewardship and appreciation of submerged remains. Over time, the continuation of the project will lead to greater public awareness of UCH.

Project methods

To achieve the aforementioned aims, MAOP delivers a hands-on and proactive experience to its participants. The following activities aim to provide a basic introduction to what is Underwater Cultural Heritage, what kinds of equipment and tools are used in maritime archaeology; and what methods are used to record and preserve submerged cultural heritage resources. To initiate the discussion of UCH and maritime archaeology the previous concepts were presented within an amusing

storyline and the children attending the workshops are encourage to participate in four tangible work stations:

- A. An interactive introduction to the necessary diving equipment maritime archaeologists needs to access underwater remains (Fig. 2). The equipment is displayed, explained, demonstrated, and, in some cases, tried on for size.
- B. A miniature simulation of the seabed with an underwater archaeological site. The station uses a large box filled with sand and contains replicas of artefacts waiting for the children to discover. Students are able to explore a shipwreck model, and discover pottery fragments and coins while learning the concepts of UCH (Fig. 3).
- C. A third station introduces the participants to basic hands-on record keeping and the documentation methods employed by archaeologists to preserve and collect data from cultural heritage sites (Fig. 4). The concept of the data collection station is to introduce children to the challenging responsibilities of recording (Fig 5) and handling artefacts. During this activity, participants the chances of discovering undisturbed artefacts is discussed and the importance of leaving artefacts in place — *in situ*—and reported to the correct authorities underlined. In accordance with the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, MAOP promotes that if a member of the public comes across UCH it is best left *in situ* and reported to the responsible national heritage agency. A simulated archaeological site covered with artificial sea grass was presented to teach children that when archaeological sites are preserved *in situ* for a long period, they become part of the living environment (Fig. 6). The concept of *in situ* preservation is reinforced by showing how amphorae can facilitate the growth of coral reefs, postulating how removing archaeological artefacts can have a degenerative effect on the ecosystem and the cultural heritage itself.
- D. The last MAOP work station utilizes Virtual Reality (VR) to enable participants to experience a SCUBA dive. This station targets technologically literate or curious people, VR enthusiasts, and anyone who is eager to experience Egypt’s underwater environment via an immersive and highly interactive virtual encounter (Fig. 7). The children virtually explore the famous *Thistlegorm* shipwreck through the eyes of archaeologists and experience UCH in an *in situ* state (Merchant, 2014: 119).

Communication media

In order to develop a sustainable outreach program, the MAOP continuously directs its participants to the project's social media pages. Keeping the importance of media in mind to foster a cohesive campaign, the protagonist from *The Adventures of Bahar and Nejma* was chosen to be a mascot and symbol for the MAOP; Bahar, which means 'sailor' in Arabic, was designed by Nada Kamil to promote the project on a broader scale than the workshops can provide (Fig. 8).

The storyline introduces various terms and educates children about other subjects pertaining to maritime archaeology such as: the underwater environment, fish, corals, and history of the Mediterranean Sea. To achieve this, *The Adventures of Bahar and Nejma* exhibit the most well-known archaeological sites of Alexandria to the wider public, such as the ancient lighthouse. The story also evaluates some of the current issues affecting the underwater environment (Fig. 9). Throughout the story, Bahar and Nejma address issues such as plastic pollution and its detrimental effects on archaeological sites and the underwater environment as a whole. The concept is to raise awareness among the wider public regarding current issues, whilst incorporating archaeology in the 'sphere of relevance'. From a technical perspective, Bahar aspires to introduce children to archaeological surveys, documentation and excavation techniques available to the wider public. The programme also charts the methodological development and beginnings of maritime archaeology, led by pioneers such as Honor Frost, to new methods applied both in shallow and deep-water excavations.

Results

The data collected before and after the MAOP workshop showed that of a total of 737 students present at six events, a staggering 98% of participants gained some sort of knowledge about maritime archaeology, whilst only 2% seemed unresponsive to MAOP's activities (Fig. 1).

Considering the quantifiable success of the MAOP, we surmise that a coordinated approach of Arabic publications, a strong social media campaign, additional workstations, and future events will continue to raise awareness of UCH. With reference to long term goals, the MAOP offers a sustainable method to involve the community in UCH; when a community invests in their own culture, everyone benefits. UCH is a valuable resource which, when preserved and managed properly, can bring in enduring economic stimulation via tourism revenue.

Future outreach efforts will allow the MAOP to reach many more children and introduce maritime archaeology in a fun and imaginative manner alongside its technical and methodological framework. We hope that demonstrating the extent of the study as a multi-disciplinary pursuit will reiterate to

participants the variety of issues affecting preservation such as: climate change, theft, ocean pollution, and marine life.

Conclusion

I have presented MAOP's preliminary results from its first year of operation. The continued success of the project will depend on the team's motivation to develop its workstations and maintain communication with its audience by directing them to continue an online experience. The new activities and *Bahar* story-lines are inspired by personal observations and the outcome of the workshops. After reviewing the research, the MAOP has much to contribute towards enhancing the education of Egypt's youth. The fascinating, exciting, and relevant sub-discipline of maritime archaeology is a culturally relevant and prominent component of Egypt's heritage; by educating the public about the cultural treasure they possess, we can hope to facilitate future archaeological endeavours and garner public support. With the help of the *Honor Frost Foundation* we aim to continue our educational prospects and to ensure that the youths of today are a part of the scholars of tomorrow.

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[Further reading](#)

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Figures

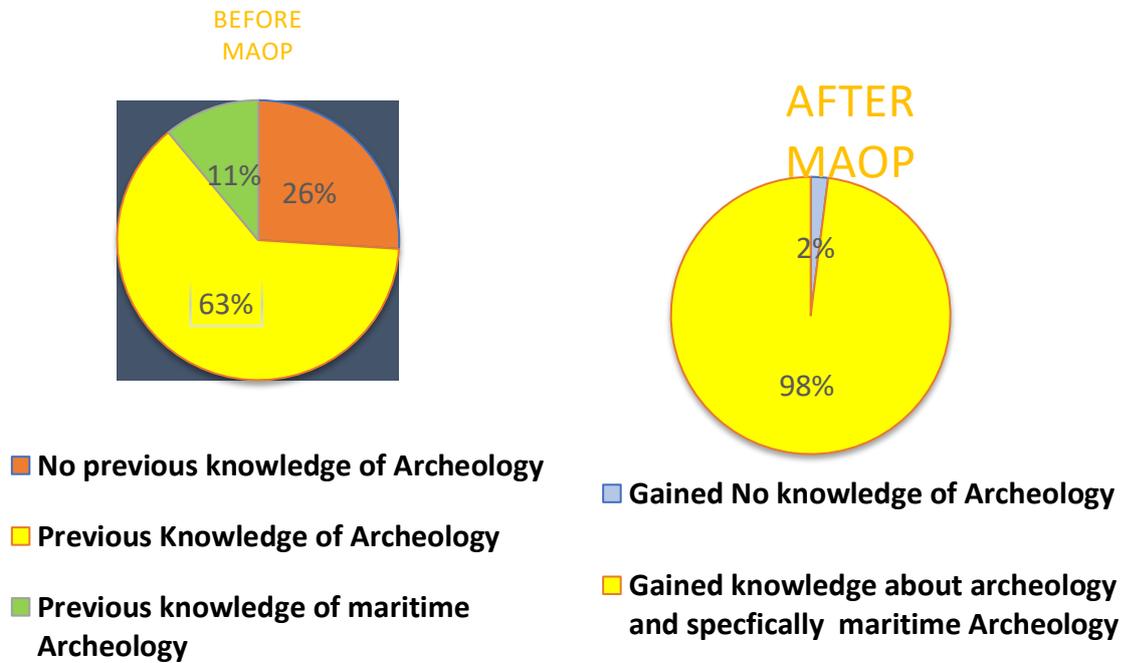


Figure 1: Results of MOAP surveys



Figure 2: Introducing diving equipment by one of MOAP team member Nada Kamel (Photo by: Alicia Johnson)

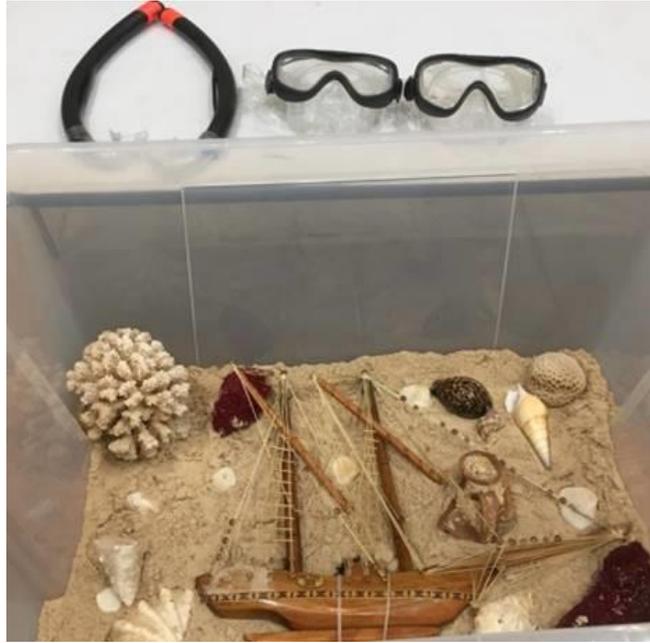


Figure 3: A simulated seabed station (Photo by: Alicia Johnson)



Figure 4: A recording and documentation station explained by one of MOAP team Mirette Magdy (Photo by: Alicia Johnson)

	اسم الفريق	اتار البحر
	الموقع	مدرسته على عالم
	التاريخ	2019-12-12 و



رقم القطعة	3 قطع
مغاس القطعة	كيفية قيادة انقذرة الجفاس؛ 12 و قطعة ايضا من خذارة القاسم؛ 14 و قطعة من عظام 14
صورة القطعة	
تعليق الفريق	القطعة من قلمة النورة ومن يتصور أو قطعة من الصبر اليعوني ومن مقوشة و قطعة ايضا من النارة مسورة ومنقوشة من صبر اعرضي الحديث و قطعة فيها صليب اصور و ايضا من النارة من المعدن على الشاطئ وتطليه و قطعة ليس نعمة وفيها اضم

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Figure 5:Recording sheet for Bahar events (Photo By: Alicia Johnson)



Figure 6:Simulation of an archaeological underwater site (Photo by: Alicia Johnson)



Figure 7: Students were introduced to a Virtual SCUBA dive by one of MOAP team, : Sarah Ibrahim (Photo by: Alicia Johnson)



Figure 8: Bahar with his friends at Bibliotheca Alexandrina (Photo By: Alicia Johnson)



Figure 9: Cover art for the story "Adventures of Bahar and Nejma" (Drawing by: Osama Aly)