

Heritage Hub of Tunisia Polo Patrimonio Tunisia Pôle Patrimoine Tunisie مركز التراث التونسي

Designing the Tunisia Training Plan on Conservation of Archaeological Heritage

Luigi Oliva, Eleonora Gasparini

INTRODUCTION

The *Heritage Hub of Tunisia* is a three-year initiative starting in 2026, that originates within the framework of Italian development cooperation and more specifically the Mattei Plan for Africa. This programmatic document is aimed at promoting equitable, inclusive and sustainable development of the African continent, in which Culture and Heritage are assessed as strategic drivers. Aligned with the priorities of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), the *Heritage Hub of Tunisia* is focused on Archaeological Heritage and targets three pilot sites in north-eastern Tunisia: Pupput (Fig. 1), Neapolis (Fig. 2) and Kerkouane (Fig. 3), the latter of which is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The initiative is distinguished by a multi-level and partnership-based approach. Alongside the leading role of the Central Institute for Restoration (ICR) and the partnership with the Institut National du Patrimoine de Tunisie (INP), the project involves other subjects, both public and private. They are the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the Central Institute for Archaeology (ICA), Santagata Foundation for the Economics of Culture (FS), ARCS Culture Solidali (ARCS). These actors with specific and complementary skills will work in synergy, supported by academic, institutional and civil society partners.

The project's impact will be pursued through the outcome of combining technical training, institutional strengthening, community engagement, and economic promotion of Heritage. It is structured around two Outputs, the first of which is the specific subject of this presentation:

Output 1. Training: strengthening technical and management skills for the conservation of Archaeological Heritage.

Output 2. Enhancement: strengthening tools, infrastructure and practices for the enhancement and participatory enjoyment of archaeological sites and their immaterial legacy.



Fig. 1: Pupput, Édifice du satyre et de la nymphe, marble column on the southern side of the building.

OBJECTIVES

The Output 1, focused on training, is grounded in the specific expertise of the ICR, particularly in the domain of international cooperation, as well as in the excellence of its Higher Training School, a national and international reference point for education in restoration and conservation of Cultural Heritage.

In this framework, the design activities of the *Heritage Hub of Tunisia* have focused on the development of a specific *Tunisia Training Plan*. It is conceived as a milestone of the project, as it is the instrument that will effectively support the achievement of Output 1. It is based on the harmonization of the ICR's training experience—whose theoretical principles, methodologies, contents and objectives it draws upon—with the specific needs determined by the characteristics and requirements of the local context, as well as by the project's duration and available resources. These elements make the *Tunisia Training Plan* an entirely new undertaking and one of significant strategic importance for Tunisia.

In fact, operations are developed in a context, the Cap Bon Region, that presents notable features in terms of Archaeological Heritage. Early settlements that predate the arrival of Phoenician communities (8th century BCE) are followed by the development of Punic civilization (4th–2nd centuries BCE) and Roman civilization (2nd century BCE–4th century CE). Traces of the latter extend into Late Antiquity, with subsequent developments during the Byzantine and Islamic periods.

This rich historical and archaeological background requires the strengthening of existing measures for conservation and enhancement, especially regarding the exceptional mosaic repertoire that characterizes imperial and late antique architecture of the region.

The *Tunisia Training Plan* is conceived as a highly structured and qualified proposal to be addressed to a selected group, composed of INP technicians and Tunisian students of Heritage Conservation. Within the INP, skills in archaeological conservation and restoration, as well as in the management of Heritage sites and related data, show room for growth and reinforcement. Furthermore, the project is aimed at the expansion of the pool of skilled professionals in conservation and restoration, focusing on long-term investment in youth. These distinctive characteristics ensure the strength and relevance of the proposed training programme.

The training is divided into three work packages. During the first year, after a preliminary intervention on the sites, a three-month basic course will take place. During both the second and the third year training will consist in a three-month advanced course and one-month mentoring to basic activity, with a module in Italy during the third year. Such approach focuses on theoretical training accompanied by practical field-training carried out at the three selected sites.



Fig. 2: Neapolis, Nymfarum Domus, eastern side of the courtyard with adjacent rooms.



Fig. 3: Kerkouane, housing quarters with private baths.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Heritage Hub of Tunisia* is designed as a platform for institutional dialogue to define both objectives and the methodologies and tools to achieve the development of Cultural Heritage of Tunisia.

In this frame, the *Tunisia Training Plan* aims at preserving the integrity and authenticity of the archaeological remains of the selected sites, ensuring their future-oriented development. Based on a linear path of study-planning-intervention, it will introduce conservation practices that will be maintained and further strengthened beyond the scope of the project.

Given these long-term objectives, this initiative is characterized by modularity and replicability, with significant potential for expansion well beyond the activities described here.

Particularly, the three-year experience on the pilot sites could culminate in the creation of permanent training pathways, both locally and at the Bardo Museum in Tunis. In fact, as leading institution in Tunisia—and internationally—for the knowledge of ancient mosaics, the Bardo Museum is naturally suited to host a Restoration Centre specialized in mosaics and other wall and floor revetments.

REFERENCES

G. Capponi, "I progetti internazionali dell'ISCR: esperienze di conservazione, restauro e formazione tra Mediterraneo e Medio Oriente", *XXI Edizione Salone dell'Arte del Restauro e della Conservazione dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali*, Ferrara, giovedì 27 marzo 2014.

D. Cavezzali (ed.), *ITP International Training Projects. Rapporto 2016-2019*, Roma 2019.

L. Oliva, E. Gasparini, *Progettare il Polo Patrimonio Tunisia: nuove prospettive di collaborazione per la formazione sul restauro e per la valorizzazione dei siti archeologici*, in A. Depalmas (ed.), *Journées d'étude tuniso-italiennes autour du thème des missions archéologiques italiennes en Tunisie*, Museo del Bardo, Tunisi 23-24/04/2025, pp. 56-65, Roma, forthcoming.



Fig. 4: Pupput, students during field-activity under the direction of INP.

CONTACTS: Luigi Oliva, Director of the Central Institute for Restoration, Ministry of Culture of Italy | icr.direttore@cultura.gov.it

Eleonora Gasparini, Archaeologist, Central Institute for Restoration, Ministry of Culture of Italy | eleonora.gasparini@cultura.gov.it