

Protecting Deep-Time Heritage in the Sahara, Nile Valley, and Mediterranean Africa: Sustainable Management, Capacity Building, and Cultural Diplomacy

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Main Organizer:

Giulio Lucarini

Institute of Heritage Science, National Research Council of Italy (ISPC-CNR), Rome

Co-Organizers:

Lotfi Belhouchet

Institut National du Patrimoine (INP), Tunis, Tunisia

Jacek Kabaciński

Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences (IAE-PAN), Poznan

Alice Leplongeon

National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), UMR 7194 HNHP CNRS -MNHN-UPVD, Tautavel, France

Giuseppina Mutri

University of Florence, Italy

Latifa Sari

Centre National de Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques (CNRPAH), Algiers, Algeria

Abstract:

Prehistoric heritage across Saharan and Mediterranean Africa—from the Atlantic to the Red Sea—represents one of the most profound records of early human adaptation, innovation, and cultural expression. Yet, this deep-time legacy remains relatively under-recognised and undervalued, particularly when compared to the monumental and historically later archaeological evidence that dominate research agendas, public discourse, and tourism promotion. This imbalance has resulted in a persistent gap in the protection, documentation, and visibility of prehistoric cultural landscapes and sites.

This session aims to foster a critical and multidisciplinary dialogue on strategies for managing, conserving, and promoting prehistoric heritage in the Sahara, the Nile Valley and Mediterranean Africa, recognising heritage management as not only a scientific and technical endeavour but also a field of scientific and cultural diplomacy. The management and protection of deep-time heritage can serve as a platform for dialogue and cooperation among institutions, communities, and nations, offering opportunities for shared responsibility and the exchange of expertise beyond political and cultural boundaries.

A particular focus will be placed on training and capacity building as essential instruments for sustainable heritage management. Empowering local researchers, technicians, and

communities through dedicated educational programmes, field schools, and digital initiatives ensures long-term preservation and strengthens local engagement. At the same time, collaborative heritage projects can act as powerful tools of scientific and cultural diplomacy, fostering mutual understanding and trust through shared research, co-management, and outreach activities.

By integrating scientific research, policy debate, and field-based experience, this session seeks to enhance the visibility, protection, and appreciation of North Africa's and Mediterranean Africa's prehistoric heritage—advocating for its rightful place within global narratives of world heritage and human history.