

# **Creating the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology and Underwater Cultural Heritage**

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## ***Abstract***

The most recent report published by UNESCO Section for Museums and Cultural Objects concerning Underwater Archaeology Courses at Universities and Other institutions mentioned more than thirty facilities around the world that provide education and training in aspects of Underwater Archaeology, most of which are located in Europe and the USA, with some programs in Asia, Australia and South America. However, there is an evident lack in underwater archaeology education and training facilities in many parts of the world, in particular in Africa and the Arab Region. So far, the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology and Underwater Cultural Heritage, based in the Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University is the only underwater archeology education centre in African and Arab countries. The centre was created in 2009 through a grant from the EU Trans European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (Tempus). The project was the result of collaboration between eight institutions from the UK France and Egypt, who provided the necessary academic, technical and administrative expertise required for achieving the project's objectives. The Tempus project aimed to create a specialised centre for postgraduate studies at the Alexandria University, which provides education and training at different levels in aspects of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage. It also aimed to develop and implement postgraduate Diploma and Master Programs in Maritime Archaeology and Underwater Cultural Heritage, designed and structured in accordance with EU standards.

Since its creation and until today, the centre has played a major role in the development of maritime and underwater archaeology in Egypt. It has also been a part of several international networks and projects with the aim of disseminating its activities and contributing to capacity building in the fast growing field of underwater archaeology.

## ***Underwater Archaeology in Egypt***

The development of underwater archaeology in Egypt can be divided into several phases, each of which has its nature and characteristics. The first of these phases started in the early twentieth century with the discovery of the ancient harbour at Pharos by the French engineer Gaston Jondet (1912). Then, in the years that followed, more underwater discoveries were made by explorers and amateur archaeologists. These included the discoveries made by Prince Omar Toussoun in the 1930s (Toussoun 1934) and those made in the Eastern Harbour of Alexandria by Kamel Abu El-Saadat in the 1960s (Morcos 1993). Moreover, the remains of the Napoleonic fleet were discovered east of Alexandria in the mid 1980s under the direction of the Société Française de Recherche Archéologique Sous-marines (Khalil & Mustafa 2002:520). In other words, this phase of underwater archaeology in Egypt was led primarily by non-specialists and it mainly included accidental discoveries and subsequent salvage operations. 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 1993: 42-5).

The second phase started in the mid 1990s with two significant projects which are considered to be a turning point in the history of underwater archaeology in Egypt. In 1994, the Centre d'Études Alexandrines (CEAlex) started the first systematic underwater archaeological survey in Egypt looking at the submerged remains of the ancient Lighthouse of Alexandria (La Riche

1996). In the same year, the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) launched 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 could be considered the true beginning of the practice of underwater archaeology as a scientific discipline in Egypt. Since then and until the present time, several archaeological projects were carried out in Egyptian waters and a number of archaeological missions surveyed and excavated many underwater sites in Egypt. This phase, however, was mostly led by European and American archaeological missions that belonged to different universities and institutions (Goddio *et al.* 1998; Gallo 2003; Tzalas 2003; Goddio 2007). Nevertheless, in 1996, and as a result of the significant underwater discoveries that were made by the French archaeological missions in Alexandria, the Egyptian government decided to establish a Department for Underwater Antiquities (DUA) as part of the Supreme Council for Antiquates (SCA), which is the main authority responsible for the exploration, conservation and management of archaeological sites in Egypt. The establishment of the DUA was the first governmental recognition of the importance of underwater archaeological research in Egypt. The main role that was assigned to the DUA was monitoring and regulating the work of the foreign archaeological missions, however, soon the DUA started conducting its own projects, utilising the experience its members acquired through collaborating with the foreign missions. Nevertheless, the bulk of work in terms of exploring, preserving and presenting Egypt's underwater cultural heritage was done by non-Egyptians. The reason behind this was the total lack of education and training in any aspect of underwater archaeology in Egypt, an issue that has hindered for years the development of that discipline, despite Egypt's extensive and rich maritime heritage.

This was recognised during the International Workshop on Underwater Archaeology and Coastal Management, organised in Egypt in 1997 under the patronage of UNESCO, which included amongst its recommendations that the Alexandria University should consider developing specialised courses at postgraduate and undergraduate levels in underwater archaeology, coastal zone management (Mostafa *et al.* 2000:192). However, the absence of education in maritime and underwater archaeology in Egypt was not only due to the lack of funds and expertise, but more importantly due to the lack of vision.

### ***Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology***

The creation of the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology & Underwater Cultural Heritage was a turning point in history of underwater archaeology in Egypt. The idea of creating the Centre was proposed to me by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts following my return from Southampton in 2005, where I obtained a PhD in Maritime Archaeology. The idea was to formulate a project to be submitted to the EU Tempus program for funding the creation of the centre. Moreover, according to the Tempus regulations, the project had to include a number of partners from Egypt and the EU. And while the beneficiary would be Alexandria University, the grant holder had to be a university from the EU. This is how the collaboration between Alexandria University and the University of Southampton started. Accordingly, in 2006 a

project proposal was formulated by the University of Southampton as the grant holder and the Alexandria University as the beneficiary and submitted to the Tempus program. In addition to those two institutions the project consortium included: the Nautical Archaeology Society, the Supreme Council for Antiquities, the Centre d'Études Alexandrines, the Arab Maritime Academy. That is in addition to two external reviewers from the University of Ulster, and Université de Provence. The project consortium would collaborate to provide the academic, technical and administrative expertise necessary for creating the centre.

The proposal aimed to create a new academic centre which 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 which would be structured closely into line with similar programs in European countries, in order to promote the mobility of students, graduates and staff members between compatible and comparable education and training programs.

In July 2007, a grant of about 250,000 Euros was awarded by the EU Tempus program for the creation of the Centre. However, there were some activities in the project that were not eligible for the EU funding, which included the renovation and furnishing of the building which would host the centre and the purchase of some equipment, such as a Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) and a Truck for the use of the centre. Therefore, private sponsorship was sought and hence a number of individuals and corporations agreed to fund different aspects of the project.

Between 2007 and 2009 the centre was created and incorporated into the structure of the Alexandria University. The establishment of the centre required the performance of various activities, which were carried out by the consortium members either in Egypt or the UK. This included obtaining the necessary approvals and accreditations from the Egyptian Ministry for Higher Education, the purchase of equipment, supplies and books, the formulation of the different education programs and courses that would be taught at the centre, visiting similar centres in a number of UK universities, developing a statute for the new centre, appointing the centre's main academic, administrative and technical staff members and decimating information about the newly established centres, its aims, objectives and activities.

In October 2008, the Faculty of Arts at Alexandria University celebrated the inauguration of the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology & Underwater Cultural Heritage, however, different activities related to the project were still being carried out until the centre was completely functioning by September 2009 when the first group of post-graduate students were admitted.

Since that date, the centre has been functioning as Africa and the Arab Region only education and training facility in maritime and underwater archaeology. The regional focus of its courses is 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 centre offers a The Graduate Diploma which aims to provide graduates from different backgrounds with a basic understanding of contemporary theory and practice in aspects of maritime and underwater archaeology. Its duration is for one year, therefore it

has been of a particular interest to professionals dealing with cultural heritage, such as antiquities inspectors and museum curators in order to promote and develop their careers and professional skills. Moreover, the centre offers a Master Degree in Maritime Archaeology, which lasts for two years and 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. In addition to the above-mentioned graduate programs, the centre started implementing an introductory course in Maritime Archaeology, which is taught at the undergraduate level in year four at the Archaeology Department. At present the centre has 20 Master students including fresh graduates, professional archaeologists and tour guides.

### ***Research and Extracurricular activities:***

During the past two years, since the centre started functioning, it has been involved in various activities, which are considered an integral part of the centre's mission and objectives. In March 2010 the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology & Underwater Cultural Heritage in collaboration with the University of Southampton, the University of Ulster and the British Museum organized a 10-days international workshop on maritime and underwater archaeology. This workshop was attended by 15 trainees from Egypt, Bahrain, Kenya, Libya, Somaliland & Tunisia. During the course, trainees were introduced to various theoretical and practical aspects of maritime and underwater archaeology including site management, finds handling, conservation & remote sensing.

And in April 2010, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina hosted an International Seminar on Maritime Cultural Heritage, which was organized by the Centre for Maritime Archaeology and the University of Southampton, the British Museum and the European Commission Tempus program. The seminar was held on the occasion of concluding the project of establishing the centre. The main themes of the seminar were preservation, presentation and education in Maritime Archaeology. The seminar aimed to provide opportunities for institutions to address issues of coastal heritage management, to encourage capacity building in the region and to establish networks of contact to support and inform with regard future initiatives and challenges. Over the two days of the seminar, 25 papers were presented by speakers from 15 countries: (Australia, Bahrain, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, France, Greece, Kenya, Libya Morocco, Somaliland, Tunisia, UK & USA). The seminar was divided into three sessions. The first day was dedicated to Management and Preservation, the second day was dedicated to Outreach, Presentation and Museums, and the final session to Education.

The Centre for Maritime Archaeology is recognized by the Egyptian Diving & Lifesaving Federation as the first Scientific Diving Training Facility in Egypt. The Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology has also been certified by the Egyptian Diving & Lifesaving Federation (EDLF), member of the Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques (CMAS), as a full SCUBA diving training facility authorized to teach all levels of sport and scientific diving according to the training system of the CMAS. It has also been authorized by the Nautical Archaeology Society (NAS), to provide NAS training course either to the university students or to the public at large. This

has enabled the centre to extend its mission to the general public and contribute to raising public awareness about underwater cultural heritage.

In an effort to make the centre for maritime archaeology into a regional and international education and training facility, the Alexandria University has proposed to the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) to develop a new Masters program in Maritime Cultural Heritage to be offered to the students of the EMUNI member universities. This proposal has been approved by the EMUNI senate and the program is expected to start in September 2012. This will be in addition to a free standing summer course in Underwater Archaeology which will be offered for EMUNI in June 2012.

On the other hand, the centre has been involved in two main research projects. The first one was an underwater archaeological survey of a number of shipwreck sites in the Red Sea. Two survey seasons have been carried out so far, in 2010 and 2011. This is a collaboration survey conducted between the British Museum, the University of Southampton and the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology. The other research project is the first one to be carried out entirely by the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology. It is the investigation on a number of shipwreck sites, which the Centre discovered during a scientific diving course 250km west of Alexandria. So far two survey seasons have been carried out by the students and staff of the Centre, which resulted in the discovery and mapping of over 2 hectares of seabed covered with early and late roman amphora which suggests the existence of more than one shipwreck. The project is funded by Alexandria University and it is expected to run for at least two more seasons.

### ***Conclusion***

It is expected that the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology and Underwater Cultural Heritage will play a significant role in the development of that field in Africa and the Arab Region. A number of students from different Arab and African countries have shown interest in joining the centre's education programs. Moreover, other Arab universities have expressed their interest in developing their own centers for maritime archaeology based in the Egyptian experience. It is also expected that the centre will continue its collaboration with different institutions around the world on both the academic and the research aspects aiming to contribute to capacity building and the development of generations of knowledgeable and skilful underwater archaeologists.

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