



Short communication

Funerary Monuments of Oued Chbeika (Tan-Tan Province, Western Morocco): A Threatened Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: Moroccan territory enjoys abundant funerary monuments dating from the proto-historic period and the beginning of history. Despite these buildings are well identified by local people, few studies have been done on them as far.

Keywords: Funerary Monuments, Prehistory, Archaeological Heritage, Geotourism, Tan-Tan, Morocco

DISCUSSIONS

Morocco has a strategic location and since ancient times, its territory was a meeting place for different civilizations, which left an diverse and authentic archaeological heritage (Abioui, 2013; Abioui *et al.*, 2014). This feature is strongly supported by its diverse geological heritage, manifesting in the form of different geological formations and extending over the whole of its vast territory. Preserving and sustaining Moroccan geoheritage is a challenge and responsible for different Moroccan

stakeholders, including government, private sector, NGO's, and local community.

This study seeks to explore the culture of the builders of these funerary elements with the aim to identify potential sites to study their distribution, architecture and analyze the funeral rites of this population which are still unknown in the Moroccan Sahara. By surveying the local people, it could be stated that smuggling searchers looking for valuables such as gold, copper, precious stones, etc., are a constant presence in these areas. The gold seekers disembowel the tumuli crudely hoping to find buried treasures. Furthermore, it is common practice among locals to use stone blocks on this tumuli and recycle their personal use. This is another major source of degradation of local heritage.

The funerary monuments are located on garas and gours bordering Oued Chbeika (Province of Tan-Tan, Morocco) about 20 km. These proto-historic monuments show a variety of forms (single tumulus with or

without crater, crescent, keyhole, circular, bleachers, antennas, allies fly, medusa, antennas, etc.) and size (1m to 165m). These data contribute to a better knowledge of the cultures of the builders of these monuments in the Moroccan Sahara. The richness and diversity of Moroccan funerary monuments are threatened by the rapid anthropogenic degradation and vandalism of the sites. The unplanned development of the country is one of the main causes of this dramatic decline in recent years.

An effective and efficient management of these attractions is the wish of the elected officials and the local population for their preservation of the degradation caused by both nature and people. As each destroyed vestige is a part of the memory of the world disappearing, will we let this historic and archeological legend preserved for thousands of years to disappear? What are the measures taken, or to be taken as appropriate for the protection and valorization of these funerary monuments?

It is suggested that to promote the funerary monuments of the Oued chbeika as open an air museum. This is based on the involvement of local communities through encouraging them for participating in the tourism development and developing socio-economic aspects of the region in a sustainable and ongoing process. Moreover, geotourism could help to enhance the local geoheritage and support the efforts to sustain different heritages in the area.

According to Allan (2015, p.25), "Geotourism (tourism with a geological purpose) has great potential to sustain and conserve our geological heritage".

To better promote this heritage and participate in developing sustainability in the province of Tan-Tan (Morocco), this study provides a cultural tourism circuit focusing on the visit of the prehistoric

funerary monuments of the Moroccan Sahara.

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