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Primarily Criteria for the Architectural Treatment of Archaeological Sites' Boundaries in Sensitive Landscapes

Case Study: Luxor's Western Bank

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Abstract:

Archaeological sites need to be enclosed for many reasons. Usually they are integral to their surrounding landscapes that are usually sensitive from ecological, visual, and/or cultural viewpoints. The architectural treatment of such enclosures or boundaries in such cases becomes a very delicate matter with conflicting aspects. Internationally, there are very positive cases based on strong guidelines. In Egypt, with archaeological sites needing protection without affecting their relation with their surrounding sensitive landscapes a manner is needed where boundaries are designed in ways that do not affect the site or the landscape or even their mutual relation. The case study of the Western bank of Luxor is presented as an offensive wall being built around the largest mortuary temple destroying the visual and cultural aspects of the place.

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Introduction:

Many archaeological sites are located in landscapes with unique nature and history and sometimes socio-cultural values. In Many cases at least the ecological and scenic settings resemble a reminiscent background of what used to encompass them in the past, thus, forming not only a background, but usually an inseparable component of the monument itself and its premises or enclosure. The archaeological site's need for delineation and enclosure for many reason e.g. security, visiting arrangements, or property dictates the presence of a means for definition for the

boundaries. Such boundaries resemble an interface between the monument and the surrounding landscape. In the more fortunate cases around the world, there are specific rules or at least guidelines to determine the type of action to be taken to do that through a well formalized written code or guidelines. Unfortunately, and despite its richness in archeological sites either in urban locations or in natural or manmade landscapes, and despite the presence of a law for antiquities, Egypt suffers the absence of any of such codes. Naturally, certain norms are present and indeed "The Antiquities" protection law 117 of 1983 and Amendment No. 3 of 2010 " (The Official Gazette, 2010) provide some guidance, but they are usually on the general side defining frameworks not detailed applicable written rules. Either small or major decisions are decided by a supreme committee. Although this might seem a very transparent and just, but the applied practice shows very grave flaws that cannot be accepted to continue as will be demonstrated later concerning the case study and more.

A great deal of literature can be found on the guidelines for the treatment of archaeological site, many of which are directed to specific areas with local identity and history. England for example with its long heritage since early history has this heritage of all sort of sites and structures from primitive sites to palaces and castles distributed all over its rich green landscape with well formalized design guidelines for site design, treatment and management including visiting arrangements as those stated by the Heritage Branch of the Department of Planning in the State of Wales (2009). The United States with its ancient sites of early Americans and Indians scattered in its variable landscapes has strong well formalized guidelines too (South, 2002). This indicates and asserts the need to create general guidelines for Egypt's heritage and detailed local ones for every region with uniform ecological, cultural and visual aspects. Defiantly, some sites might need further tailored ones conforming to the general ones but treating certain individual characteristics of certain sites with unique condition or qualities.

As the paper's title suggests, addressing the subject of creating guidelines or at least addressing it through the design criteria that is dealt with through the boundaries of archaeological sites from an architectural viewpoint being a grey area concerning presenting solutions and materials with current technologies and concepts but can have a very negative or positive effect on the site and its landscape. It also discusses sensitive landscapes. Moreover, the local condition and practice needs to be approached. Finally, the study area should be examined.

Archaeological sites and historic places are fragile and non-renewable resources, they are unique and irreplaceable; destruction of a site is permanent and irreversible as stated in 'A guide to Best Practices for Archaeological tourism'. According to the Scottish Natural Heritage Council, they are constructed through time and they exist within a larger setting that includes both the environment and the local communities (Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland, 2004). (Colaranceschi, 2010) asserts that archeological sites are considered sensitive landscapes, possessing specific natural and geographical conditions associated with certain cultural and historic traits that need to be conserved. Setting boundaries to these sites is sometimes difficult as they are integrated with adjacent landscape and sites (Mosler, 2005), but is a much needed process in light of the fact that these sites are vulnerable to exposure to elements, looting, irresponsible re-use and unrestricted tourism (Matero, 2008). The layout of the boundary should follow certain guidelines set by archeological site management plans concerning the addition or removal of items (Historic Scotland, 2010) , (Anshuetz; Wilshusen; and Scheick, 2001).), (Kalman, 2014) and (Steiner, 2000).

Egypt is among the countries where history is encountered in every step, archeological and historic sites are scattered all over the landscape (Abulnour, (2013). No part of Egypt is immune to the attacks on its heritage in the Eastern desert, along the Red Sea coast, in several oases and in Upper Egypt (Tully; Hanna, 2013). Although several international conferences and acts addressed this topic, as the Law of Protection of Antiquities, the International Codifying of Archaeological Site Conservation principles and procedures, Athens 1931, the UNESCO General Conference on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations, New Delhi 1956, the ICOMOS Venice Charter 1964, in Australia 1979, and finally ICOMOS, Larsen, Switzerland 1990, all present in The Getty Conservation Institute policy documents, proper site protection and delineation is still lacking in archaeological sites in Egypt, at least as far as the boundaries are concerned . A Study at (Yarmouk University, 2004) was conducted on similar sites in Abila, Jordan, and guidelines on boundary setting were drawn. Although there are good examples of treating the issue of boundaries but case study presented by the paper points out the foul and irrational practices carried out sometimes in and around archaeological sites in Egypt even on the richest area in Egypt and its integral landscape with very negative effects on both, calling for an immediate drawing and application of proper transparent site preservation regulations in Egypt through a written code and guidelines.

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