

# Understanding Ancient Tripolitania: Research, Partnerships, and Knowledge Sharing

British School at Rome (BSR) – British Institute for Libyan and Northern African Studies (BILNAS)

**International Workshop, Tuesday 18 October 2022**

## Abstract

This international workshop is organized jointly by the British School at Rome (BSR) and the British Institute for Libyan and Northern African Studies (BILNAS – formerly the Society for Libyan Studies). Set within the framework of collaborations among the British International Research Institutes (BIRI) and the sponsorship of the British Academy, it will highlight ongoing partnerships and research between these two institutions with a particular focus on ancient Tripolitania.

Research on this North African region has created deep rooted connections between the BSR and BILNAS, which have in turn involved a range of institutions and scholars from Libya, Italy, the UK, and beyond. The first part of the workshop will focus on the recent online publication of the *Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania 2021 (IRT2021)*, presenting and discussing the work around this venture, and how this has prepared the ground for broader collaborations and digital projects in the years to come. In the second part, attention will be paid to the importance of archival resources (such as those held by the BSR and BILNAS) for past, present, and future archaeological research in the region, demonstrating how such collections can enrich our comprehension of Tripolitania across the Roman, Late Antique, and Islamic periods. The workshop aims to stimulate open discussion and will be closed by a synthesis incorporating the themes and directions discussed.

## Program

09:00-09:15 Registration

09:15-09:30 Welcome by Abigail Brundin (BSR), Emlyn Dodd (BSR), Niccolò Mugnai (Oxford-BILNAS)

### Session 1: *IRT2021* and other collaborative digital projects (BSR, BILNAS, and beyond)

09:30-09:50 *Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania: an exercise in collaboration* (Caroline Barron, Durham University; Charlotte Roueché, KCL-BILNAS)

In the late 1940s, Joyce Reynolds and John Bryan Ward-Perkins took on the preparation of a corpus of inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania; they worked closely with Italian scholars, restoring some of the damage of war (IRT 1952). The volume, published in the limited circumstances of the period, included very few photographs from the rich collection assembled by Ward-Perkins; the next collaboration was between the BSR and King's College London to produce a second online edition, with no revisions, but with maps, translations and the full illustration enabled by online publication ([IRT 2009](#)). In 2021, the Society for Libyan Studies (now BILNAS) funded the preparation of a new, fuller edition; this drew on the support of scholars in France, Germany, Italy, the UK and elsewhere in adding all the texts reported since 1952 and providing far fuller illustration. [IRT 2021](#) now contains nearly 1700 inscriptions, and there are plans for further online editions which will seek to build on existing collaborations and the creation of new ones. Online publication makes collaboration far easier; it can be argued that it makes it essential for modern scholarship.

09:50-10:10 *From Paper to Digital: the mechanics and challenges of modern archiving* (Alessandra Giovenco, BSR; Roberta Cascino, BSR; Francesca Bigi, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali)

This paper will explore the work carried out on the Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania (IRT) [photographic collection](#), started in Autumn 2021, providing insight into the practical and theoretical issues to make this valuable resource accessible online. The importance of contextual information, such as the cards on which the photographs have been glued, and the need to question the physical objects, which provide information about their provenance and dates, have posed some challenges in the

cataloguing phase. These have been resolved by analysing the arrangement of the collection and its links to other resources, with a particular focus on the recent publication of the [IRT 2021 digital edition](#). Collaborations anchored in the past and projected into the future, such as that with BILNAS and other researchers, are core to this work. Francesca Bigi will retrace the longstanding association of this collection with numerous research projects and initiatives by bestowing proper honour on the IRT volume published in 1952 by John Bryan Ward-Perkins and Joyce Reynolds.

- 10:10-10:30 Discussion  
10:30-10:50 Coffee break

## **Session 2: Archive resources and research on Tripolitania**

- 10:50-11:05 *The BILNAS Archive: history, development, and potential for new research* (Niccolò Mugnai, University of Oxford-BILNAS)

The archive of BILNAS (formerly SLS) was established in 1988 at the University of Newcastle by gathering materials that had been donated by scholars working on the archaeology, heritage, and history of Libya and North Africa. These collections are now housed at the University of Leicester, where they have been catalogued and are accessible to researchers and students. This paper will outline a brief history of this archive and how its usability has been enhanced in recent years to respond to the needs of the present-day, interconnected world. Part of these materials have already been put to good use for study and publication purposes – some of which will be briefly described here – and much more can be achieved in years to come. One of BILNAS' priorities is to make its archival resources more visible to an international audience, using them to foster research and collaborations through an active dialogue with partner institutions and a range of stakeholders.

- 11:05-11:30 *A collaborative project: reorganization, cataloguing, and study of the architectural drawings of the Maps and Drawings Office of the Department of Antiquities of Libya, Tripoli. State of the research and potential for interaction with other archives and institutions* (Department of Antiquities of Libya – Missione Archeologica a Leptis Magna e a Tripoli della Fondazione MedA Mediterraneo Antico ETS)

The Department of Antiquities of Libya (DoA) and the Archaeological Mission at Lepcis Magna and Tripoli directed by Luisa Musso, Roma Tre University, started a collaboration in 2015-16 to catalogue and study the maps and technical drawings of Tripolitanian archaeological sites housed in the DoA Archive (Red Castle, Tripoli). This collaboration is part of an overall reorganization conducted by the DoA, which includes the digitization and the appropriate conservation of its archival documentation that comprises about 3,000 documents produced between the 1920s and 1970s. Up to now more than 600 documents related to Lepcis Magna and its environs have been catalogued and reordered: the research group has developed a cataloguing model following international standards, which is easy to use and transferable, and is intended to be applied to the documentation of other Tripolitanian sites. This workshop is an important opportunity to discuss the possibility of comparing these data with the graphic and photographic documentary heritage preserved both in the BSR and BILNAS Archives.

- 11:30-11:50 Discussion  
11:50-12:00 'Joyce Reynolds in conversation, July 2022'. Memories of Libya and the BSR, 1947 – 2022

## **Conclusion: Tripolitania's past, present, and future**

- 12:00-12:20 *From a film and paper research tradition to a digital present and future: reflections on Tripolitania* (David Mattingly, University of Leicester)

Looking back on a more than 40-year engagement with ancient Tripolitania, I am struck by the huge changes that have taken place in the nature of research. One may note for instance the massive efforts expended in the 1980s to survey small sectors of the Libyan Valleys compared with the relative facility of mapping the same wadis from high-resolution satellite imagery today. These new methodologies have emerged in a period that has introduced major new constraints for working on the ground in Libya with our local colleagues. It is no surprise then that since 2011 much of the work of international

missions to Libya has focused on remote methods and creating digital resources. The translation of hard-copy publications like *IRT* into online versions, or turning project archives into digital resources, is a major undertaking as the sessions in this workshop reveal. In this contribution I shall reflect on how we may best seek to capitalize on these valuable new resources and the sort of questions they can be deployed to answer.

12:20-12:40 Final discussion

13:00-14:00 Lunch