Integrate an archaeological site inside an urban environment. The case of the excavated forum area of Cherchell, Algeria

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ABSTRACT
The first surveys of the company building a cinema hall, in Cherchell, on the site located between Rue du Théâtre Romain and Rue Aberrezak, in 1977 led to the discovery of the north-eastern corner of the Caesarea Forum. The excavations carried out by the Algerian-British missions brought to light important remains. Despite its cultural importance and strategic location on the axis connecting the north of the city to its south, this monumental and idyllic central part of the capital of Caesarian Mauretania, although closed, is today in an advanced state of degradation, meaningless, isolated, and abandoned. This paper proposes key actions aimed at the knowledge and documentation, conservation, and enhancement of these important testimonies of Cherchell’s history, which only if properly safeguarded and integrated into its contemporary urban environment, would become the hub of a sustainable, accessible, and attractive tourism system for the general public.

Keywords: Cherchell Forum Area, Actions, Conservation, Enhancement, Accessibility.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present-day Cherchell is a rapidly growing Mediterranean city, situated at the foot of a natural amphitheatre of limestone hills and ridges. It sits on a plateau of relatively flat land parallel to the shore (Figure 1). The modern city is concentrated around its natural harbour, reinforced by a very characteristic coastline with several good anchorages. Cherchell offers a rich historical, urban, and archaeological stratification (Aoudia Benali, 2008, p. 5). The oldest traces date back to the 5th century BC, from the pre-Roman period (Iol; capital of a Moorish kingdom), Roman (Caesarea; capital of Caesarian Mauritania), and Medieval Arab, French colonial and finally contemporary period. The central part of the modern city was the core of the Roman city, whose street pattern is still apparent in the present-day plan, including several public buildings (the Forum, the Theatre, the Baths, the Queen’s baths, and the Punic temple). Other remains outside this area (such as a Temple, the Theatre, and the Circus). All these buildings and the collections of inscriptions, mosaics and statues were of remarkable richness.
The excavated area of the Forum (Figure 2) is one of the outstanding testimonies of this long and rich history of the city. Benseddik (1980, p. 2) wrote in The Forum Classification Proposal Document that “the whole constituted by existing structures, sculptures, architectural elements, pottery and coins allow us to say that the town of Cherchell was occupied from the 7th century BC to the present day”. However, despite this extraordinary evidence, the Forum area is heavily damaged by the inevitable passage of time, the lack of effective urban and architectural integration practices, and the absence of preservation. This is why the question that needs to be solved is quite complex: How to sustainably preserve this excavated Forum area of Cherchell by ensuring its best integration into the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of the city?

Figure 1: Location of the city of Cherchell in its regional context

![Location of the city of Cherchell in its regional context](source)

The basic hypothesis of this work is that the Forum area has real opportunities for integrated development, enabling it to participate in the socio-cultural and economic dynamism of the city, but these opportunities are not sufficiently exploited. We, therefore, propose solutions aiming to open it up to the city and give it a new lease of life.
This work is structured in two main stages. The first is the ancient Forum’s exploratory analysis and its surrounding context. The exercise involves approaching the site, exploring it, understanding it, and extracting its significance. The data examined is based on several types of knowledge: urban, architectural, and conservation constraints, archaeological and scientific knowledge. The second stage corresponds to the ‘project proposal’, which includes the key actions relating to the different areas of the conservation and enhancement project for this site\(^1\), namely: 1) the urban and architectural integration of the site, 2) the conservation of the site as a whole and its values, 3) its interpretation and enhancement, and 4) the needs of its management.

2 METHODS

The exploration of the case study was established based on a careful and in-depth examination of different sources of information: iconographic, historical, and archaeological (the oldest of which are: Gsell, 1926; Leveau, 1984; Benseddik and Potter, 1986) and documents obtained from the ANAPMSH archives (Agence Nationale d'Archéologie et de Protection des Monuments et Sites Historiques). Then, the on-site production of a recent illustrative section (sketches, surveys, and photographs) associated with in-situ observation and the critical reading of the archaeological site and its urban context allowed us to establish a full diagnosis of the current state of their conservation and presentation.

In addition, a review of the literature on the subject (Chennaoui, 1993; PISA, 2002; Lefert; Teller, 2004; Le Bouëtté; Diaz Pedregal, 2004; DELTA Project, 2002-2005; Aquilué et al., 2005, p. 113-124; Tricoll; Germana, 2013; ICOMOS, 2017; Orbaşlı; Cesaro, 2021) consolidated the methodological and the operational know-how establishing a general framework applicable to our case study. The site’s

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\(^1\) The proposals are given as a specialised call for ideas (technical, architectural and communicational) by the authorities concerned.
physical vulnerability analysis was carried out using a model sheet established in the framework of the APPEAR project (Le Bouëtté; Diaz Pedregal, 2004, p. 13).

Finally, to address the current concerns of integration and sustainability, we adopted an integrated, holistic and strategic approach widely described in several studies (PISA, 2002; Lefert and Teller, 2004; Le Bouëtté; Diaz Pedregal, 2004; DELTA Project, 2002–2005; ICOMOC, 2017; Di Ruocco; Nesticò, 2018: William, 2018; Orbaşlı; Cesaro, 2021). This allowed us to consider, in the proposed responses, all the multidisciplinary fields that make up the global environment of the enhancement of archaeological sites following a future vision.

2.1 PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

The Excavated Forum Area of Cherchell is located in the city centre, 50 m south of the main street (Rue Caesaréa, now Rue Abdelhak), and at the intersection of Rue du Théâtre (now Rue Youcef Khodja) with Rue Abderrazak (the first street parallel to Rue Césaréa). It is located some 150 m from the ancient Theatre on the same axis (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Location of the Forum Area in the city of Cherchell

DESIGNATION:
- Name: the Area Forum
- Management body:
  * Department of Culture, province of Tipasa
  * OGERC, Algiers

LOCATION:
- Province: Tipasa
- Municipality: Cherchell
- Surface: 0.16 ha
- Map coordinates: (UTM, Lambert, or GPS)
  * X = 3196.722
  * Y = 5029.446

PROTECTION:
- Legal situation: Public
- Registration: National Heritage
  * JORA N° 37/38 of 04.09.85, page 869

Source: CNERU 2012, Actualised by the Author in 2018

The excavations revealed three main structures: the Basilica, the Apsidal Building and the Forum area (Figure 4).
2.2 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE STRUCTURES OF THE EXCAVATED FORUM AREA

Based on the excavation report of April 1977 and the final report containing the results of the 1978–1981 seasons of excavation, we can describe these structures as follows:

1. **the Basilica.** A long rectangular building was on the eastern side of the site, accessed by a double colonnade on the western side, with a mosaic floor. The building extended the full length of the site, over 33 m, and may have continued into the Theatre: this could therefore imply a total length of 130 m. It can be identified as a basilica. The contractor’s construction section provides further information on the presence of a series of earlier levels extending to a depth of at least 1 m below the mosaic. The basilica floor consisted of a black and white mosaic, decorated with geometric patterns based on the circle; it was surrounded by a plain black border 90 cm wide. A wall of beautiful limestone, 1 m thick and almost 14.5 m long, forms the north-western edge of this mosaic. The date of construction of the basilica remains uncertain, but it should have been built at the same time as the Forum, probably in the first century AD. However, the excavated area yielded several columns, two-column shafts, and two-column bases. Others elements were found among the collapsed masonry: a small column base, a capital of equivalent size, and a fragment of a monumental inscription; all these finds probably fell from the superstructure of the entrance;

2. **the Forum Area.** Not far from the Rue du Théâtre, from the west to the south of the site, there was the northeast corner of a paved courtyard surrounded by two steps and a colonnade and interrupted by a cemented surface on which can be supported a Podium;
• Pre-Forum levels: Below the Forum level was a 60 cm deep layer of dark brown silt, containing numerous small sherds, which is explained as a plough soil probably belonging to the period of Cherchell’s Punic predecessor, Iol;

• the Forum pavement and the podium: In the northeast corner, nearly 100 m² of Forum pavement have been uncovered, as well as steps and a colonnade. The entire arcade on the east side of the ambulatory has disappeared. In contrast, the one on the north side of the Forum is much better preserved, with three of the four-column bases in situ resting on limestone pedestals (85-95 cm²). The arcade was raised above the Forum floor by two limestone blocks, forming two steps. Underneath was a simple gutter consisting of a U-shaped channel. No pottery appears to be later than the middle of the first century. The entire material recovered from the pavement make-up has been dated to between 30 BC and 50 AD. This implies - but does not prove - a first century AD date for laying this pavement. On the other hand, the paving of the podium had been patched with a small fragment of inscription and two pieces of marble of the same type as those used as a threshold in the apse at the end of the fourth century. At that time, the podium was an original feature of the Forum. Its total width was probably 10.70 m, but its total length has not been established;

• the timber stalls of the Forum: along the north side of the Forum pavement, a series of wear marks, where the surface pavement had been roughened and grooved, were identified as three timber buildings. The middle one is the best-preserved, consisting of a simple rectangular structure measuring 3.5 x 3 m. To the east was the second, 3.5 m long and 2 m wide, while to the west was a third, the largest at 4 m long. All these timber stalls appear to have been attached to the arcade columns. A rectangular area immediately in front of the door of the apse building probably marks a passageway between the shops. Neither the Red Slip wares of the Forum dating from the 6th century nor the group of 17 coins slipped in the cracks between the paving stones around the stalls, dated between 330 AD and the beginning of the 5th century, allow a correct dating of these buildings. These deposits could not be associated with them and cannot be directly related to their use;

• Post-Roman deposits in the Forum: Traces of a wall built entirely of reused masonry, including a stone with an engaged capital, were identified. This wall was part of a post-Roman building that rested on about 20 cm of rubble and soil overlying the Forum pavement. A solid footing of clay and rubble, placed in a 20 cm deep trench, had been laid for the wall;

3. **the apsidal building and other elements to the north of the Forum.** To the north of the site and against the first structure (the basilica) was a third structure built in the late Roman period. Only
part of its plan has been revealed: a semi-circular apse and a nave and traces of earlier walls; it is possible that it was a church;

- the ambulatory: this was probably a covered passage that separated the northern arcade of the Forum from the southern wall of the apsidal building. This space, 4.5 m wide, has an Opus Signinum floor. The floor is dated later than the apsidal building and must have been laid after the second half of the 4th century;

- the apsidal building: the excavated part of this building has two main elements: a semi-circular apse and the main hall, separated by a cross-wall. Based on the assumption that the present Rue du Théâtre marks the line of the main entrance to the Forum, the total extent of the hall could not exceed 14 m in length. This would give a total length of about 20 m for the building. The hall was entered through a double doorway, each 1 m wide, in the south wall. The hall floor appears to have been repaired at least once, and its mortar surface was laid on a thin layer of concrete. The south wall was built of reused irregular limestone blocks and rested on the stumps of older walls to a depth of over 1 m. The apse was built of good quality yellow-white concrete with numerous limestone inclusions. The general layout of the building has much in common with Christian churches of the 4th century;

- structures predating the apsidal building: an earlier wall footing and a series of superimposed floor levels were identified, extending to a depth of 1.60 m below the ambulatory Forum floor. Within the apse, two earlier features were also identified: a rectangular pillar measuring 1.80 x 2.90 m and a partly recessed wall footing, slightly inclined to the general building orientation of the site. These deposits and some of the earlier materials do not allow a precise idea of their date of construction and installation.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE FORUM AND ITS SURROUNDING CONTEXT

3.1.1 A degraded site disconnected from its external environment

It is commonly accepted that the surrounding context constitutes a display for the site itself. The development project of the archaeological site would therefore be incomplete and unsustainable if the reflection does not positively affect its global context, environment, and the economy as argued by ICOMOS (2017), Di Ruocco and Nesticò (2018, p. 3-5), Koren-Lawrence, Collins-Kreinera and Israeliab (2020).
The study of the relationship between the Forum remains and their external environment is summarised in Table 1.

### Table 1. Types of relationships between the Forum and its global context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship type</th>
<th>How does it present?</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Accessibility** | - The site is not in use, not visited, not enhanced, without any animation to bring it to life.  
- Absence of any signage in the streets and the visitor reception areas in the city. | - The physical and intellectual accessibility of the forum is non-existent. |
| **Visibility**    | - It is a single incomplete entity at a depth of more than 2 m below the current city level,  
- Only through the bars of its fence can we see the abandoned remains. Otherwise, one can pass by the site without even becoming aware of its existence.  
- Visual contact with the site is not valorised.  
- The ruins are completely illegible: a neglected place and a set of inverted and incomprehensible fragments. | |
| **Use (ancient and current)** | - A centre of roman life, collective space where the ancient city’s commercial, civil, religious, and political activities are concentrated.  
- In the Andalusian-Turkish period and during the French occupation: a space buried and occupied by old houses.  
- Since its discovery in 1977 until today: a non-aedificandi area, isolated, fenced and devoid of any activity. | - Once lived by excellence, the site is currently in functional discontinuity with its environment. |
| **Environmental and economic impact** | - Strategic location in the city, a moment of articulation between the lower part and the upper part of the city: a function far from being achieved at present. | - Its conservation and enhancement project will create a structural urban and tourist node. |

Source: Author, 2021

### 3.1.2 Conservation status of the site: a very high degree of danger

The on-site investigation revealed that the remains are basically in ruins. From 1981 to date, no excavation programme has been launched, and no consolidation or restoration work has been carried out. There is no regular maintenance, and deweeding is only occasional. More precisely, the site vulnerability sheet (Table 2) suggests that several risks associated with the various factors of degradation of the site are present with variable intensity (such as mechanical alteration related to climatic factors). The others are foreseeable (such as those that will come from the technical and museographic arrangements of the future enhancement project).

As it appears in its current state, the entire site reflects an impression of confusion (Figure 5), and it is undergoing a serious degradation process. The strong presence of these mechanisms of degradation processes

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1 Risk is a danger that threatens or compromises the safety or existence of the site in a tangible way (Le Bouëtté and Diaz Pedregal, 2004, p.7).
can be explained by the direct exposure of the Forum to atmospheric agents (precipitation, sea air, solar irradiation), which negatively affect its degree of conservation by producing a disturbance of the thermal balance, a disturbance of the hydric balance, a mechanical and photochemical alteration of the remains. In addition, the earthquakes that the city has experienced (in particular the one in October 1989, 5.7 degrees on the Richter scale) have probably aggravated this degradation process. In addition, we noted that:

- the mosaics have been damaged in several places due to weathering and lack of maintenance. The humid air favours the development of fungi that cause the tesserae to detach and the patterns to disappear;
- the vegetation that invades the site through their root development produces mechanical and chemical deterioration and biological pollution of the material;
- animals droppings and insects, nesting, also cause mechanical, chemical, and biological degradation.

Table 2. The excavated Area Forum vulnerability sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degradation factors</th>
<th>Some associated mechanisms</th>
<th>Associated risks*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Precipitation</td>
<td>Runoff, infiltration</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind (sea air)</td>
<td>Mechanical stress, transfer of particles, gas</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vapour pressure</td>
<td>Water transfer</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar irradiation</td>
<td>Energy transfer, photochemical activation</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geological substrate</td>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban activities</td>
<td>Transfer of particles, gas, vibrations</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Charge transfer, energy transfer, radiative transfer, water transfer</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Particulate emission, gas emission</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Nesting, dejection</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>Root development</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors</td>
<td>Energy transfer, radiative transfer, theft, vandalism</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical arrangements</td>
<td>Water transfer, biological transfer, theft, vandalism</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangements</td>
<td>Energy transfer, fire, flood, water transfer, biological transfer, particle transfer</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* TBD: To Be Determined; WBD: Water Body Deposition; MAL: Mechanical Alteration; PAL: Photochemical Alteration; CAL: Climatic Alteration; PPO: Physical Pollution; CPO: Chemical Pollution; BPO: Biological Pollution; DES: Diurnal and Seasonal Effect; VHR: Visitor Handling Request.
Therefore, the greatest architectural value of the Forum lies in the organisation and characteristics of the three structures that constitute it, described and given in the figure 4.

Indeed, the harmony and variety of the decoration of the numerous finds and the details of the building elements revealed once again reflect the architectural and constructive importance of the site.
These various elements and groups of materials (listed in Table 3) are exquisitely elegant and delicate in their craft. Thus, these rich and varied decorative qualities reveal their great aesthetic, archaeological and scientific value. The Forum is considered to be of tremendous value because it is one of the remains that tell us about the prestige of the great and rich capital of Caesarean Mauretania.

Table 3. Inventory of archaeological material collected during the forum excavations (Seasons 1977–1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The finds of the excavated forum area of Cherchell</th>
<th>Statues</th>
<th>Column bases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A female statue in white marble, 2 m high, was amputated in several places. She is dressed in folded peplos, falling in kolpos on a belt she hides. The tilted head gives the face a maternal affection, the left forearm crippled, the folds on the left shoulder interrupted; tell us that she was holding an infant that the search did not deliver.</td>
<td>Diameter = 0.80 m Height = 0.33 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Column base of the east portico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diameter = 0.86 m Height = 0.32 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Statue of a Mithraic figure or Ganymede?</td>
<td>3. Column base with stonecutter’s mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The statue is made of white and grey marble. After the composition of the three fragments, the arms and legs are missing. Its height is 1.04 m. The character is dressed in a tunic tight with a double belt, one hidden and the other appearing under the chest. It resembles that of the Ganymede of the Sperlonga Museum in Italy.</td>
<td>Diameter = 0.63 m Height = 0.31 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Column base of the entrance of the basilica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diameter = 0.70 m Height = 0.36 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. White marble column base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diameter = 0.90 m Height = 0.44 m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 Benseddik N. supposed that it was a replica of the famous work of Cephisodotus the Elder (Peace nourishing wealth).
3 It is Voimant G.P. who pointed out to Benseddik the existence, at the museum of Sperlonga in Italy, of a Ganymede of the same grey-veined marble, dressed in a costume similar to that of our statue and who carries an eagle on his left shoulder, (see Photo of this statue, pl. 3c, BAA, ANPSMH).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column shafts</th>
<th>Chapiteaux</th>
<th>Epigraphy</th>
<th>Antiquated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Two-column shafts were made in limestone and a dark Chenoua breccia.</td>
<td>**1. Corinthian capital in white marble. Base diameter = 0.54 m Height = 0.75 m **&lt;br&gt;It was found mutilated on the forum paving, left in situ.</td>
<td><strong>1. Mark D on white marble fragment.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The numismatic material collected excavation embankments is of very quality. It has 23 pieces, very worn illegible except five on which we read the inscriptions classified in the following table.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Several shafts of columns were found either north or south of the basilica, all transported to Parc Pocquet.</td>
<td><strong>2. Corinthian capital in white marble. Base diameter = 0.52 m Height = 0.73 m</strong>&lt;br&gt;It is also mutilated, also coming from the paving, moved to Parc Pocquet.</td>
<td><strong>2. Stonecutter’s Marks on Column Base #3 (BEA ou ABE)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. AE, Constance II (rem. P. Salama)</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Rev. FEL Temp. ou REIPUBLI</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>AE, Valesbien III, Theodosius ou Arcadius.</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Rev. VOT ? MLT. XX</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>AE, Arcadius</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Av. DN ARCADIUS P F AVG</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Rev. SALLIS REIPUBLI</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>AE, piec medieval christienne</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>AE, piec musulmane</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Broken bronze medal</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 SAVING THE FORUM AREA: KEY ACTIONS FOR ITS INTEGRATED CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

Today, the accessibility of heritage sites is considered an integral part of sustainable development (CNERU, 2012, p.155). Recognising all the absolute values discussed above can only commit us to a perspective of its rescue and enhancement. Allowing the Forum to regain its original function as a building open to the public is not limited to an immediate sense of giving the possibility of entering it physically. Still, it requires in-depth reflection to facilitate intellectual, scientific and social access (Aoudia Benali, 2008, p.102). Its integrated accessibility project will include, in addition to the urban and architectural proposals, the conservation requirements, the actions necessary for the interpretation and presentation of the site, as well as the procedures for the management and regular maintenance of the site and its new infrastructures.

3.2.1 Urban and architectural proposals

At the urban level, the fundamental actions to be undertaken to insert this project into an integrated approach (Figure 6) are described as follows:

1. integrate the Theatre, the Forum, the 100 Columns Mosque, the Arrahmane Mosque, and the Place des Martyrs and the Port into a cultural and commercial circuit;
2. requalification of the Rue du Théâtre (now, Rue Youcef Khodja) connected with the port (with its pedestrianisation, greening and integration of accommodation, commercial and cultural activities);
3. establish an effective urban signage system and enhance the degree of visual perception of the site from the external public space;
4. regulate car traffic around cultural and natural sites and provide parking areas outside the historic centre;
5. to give a harmonious and uniform treatment to the facades to ensure the continuity of the architectural language, reflecting therefore the stratification of the city of Cherchell.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pottery</th>
<th>The pottery collected does not belong to a stratified context, making its ceramological study very difficult. This is why Lisa Fentress only catalogued the earthen pieces and the fragments of carved stone. Metal and glass objects have not been catalogued due to their small, unrepresentative quantity (BAA, 25).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Here are the five categories of pottery:

1. Red African item with trim.
2. Coarse articles.
3. The Amphorae.
5. Articles in *Terra Sigillata*.

Source: Author, 2021, based on ANPSMH archives photographs (1977a).
3.2.2 Conservation Proposals

The presentation and enhancement of the urban archaeological site from a heritage perspective necessarily involves the conservation function (Aoudia Benali, 2008, 105). Intervention must not be limited to the reconstruction and presentation of the image of the remains. Still, it must be taken care of by properly carrying out all the necessary restoration, reinforcement and maintenance operations. As William (2018, p. 8) noted, over the last two decades, we have seen major advances in the scientific techniques of conservation practices, but also in the methods used to address deterioration. There are mainly five key actions to improve the state of conservation of the site and prevent the different risks mentioned above:

1. conserve the mosaic in the north-eastern side of the site and protect it with a geotextile membrane. It is also interesting to cover the room’s surface with a mosaic facsimile to better appreciate the repetitive geometric shapes as they once appeared;
2. restore archaeological finds (particularly the architectural fragments: capitals, bases, and column shafts) because its state of conservation is very poor;
3. consolidate the paving, restore the missing parts, and study the possibility to protect the whole with a transparent roof. It necessary to see if the roofing could create a microclimate that would damage the archaeological remains that it is intended to conserve and protect. Innovative glass (low emissivity, as in Sueno’s Stone and enamelled or screen-printed as in Château Legnano) responds to the needs of conservation and sustainability concerns (Valope, 2013, p. 277-306);
4. reinforce the retaining walls around the site, around the foundations bordering the three sides of the Forum, with:
   • consolidation by cementing or ‘repointing’, a technique that consists of filling all the voids, cracks and crevices in masonry walls with a cement mixture - cement milk (cement-water) or cement mortar (cement, very fine sand and water);
   • to prevent rising damp, resin-based waterproofing products are injected into these masonries;
5. Study and implement a rainwater protection system. The site is more than 2 m below the current level, and the lack of drainage affects the state of conservation of the paving, mosaics, and masonry.

3.2.3 “Museumification” and interpretative actions

The options of museumification aim to create a strong cultural connection between visitors and the site. But to do this, it is first necessary to understand the site deeply. Then, make the resulting information more accessible to the visitors by putting them in a more coherent narrative which is easy to be understood:

1. the presentation of excavated material (or replicas) in an interpretation centre can be realised partly in the multi-functional space proposed above. Foster and Jones (2019, p.1 - 24) have shown that "replicas are important objects in their own right, acquiring value, authenticity and aura". They recommend that these reproductions not be treated as mere substitutes for the original objects because they have a “life”. This "life generates networks of relationships between people and things, including the original historical object":
   • explanatory panels must accompany the exhibition of these pieces or their replicas;
   • accompany this exhibition with a complimentary presentation using sound and light (e.g., a video of the site accompanied by a narrative text that describes the site, its history, its elements, and the events surrounding its discovery). This video can be shown at the beginning of the visit;
2. it is important to enrich the presentation by putting up informative and explanatory panels inside the site (useful in particular for the hearing impaired):
3. place them along the walkway, close to the objects on display and the areas described, so that this route forms a conclusive and well-articulated interpretative unit;

3. consider the quality of the content (the message) and the container (the sign material);

3. enhance the specific structures of the site: provide indirect lighting to ensure better legibility of these elements: mosaics, capitals and column bases (this can be inspired by the example of the Antiquarium in Seville and Spain: LED technology lanterns, less harmful for the objects on display);

3. the actors who will define the site’s interpretation programme must work together and ensure the harmony, coherence, and clarity of the message to be transmitted.

3.2.4 Key actions for the strategic management of the Forum

In this field, it must: 1) regularly maintain the site and its remains; 2) ensure adequate monitoring of the site and visitors, through investigate the carrying capacity of the proposed gateway and manage the number of visitors per visit; and 3) ensure the implementation of this project and its follow-up while guaranteeing the involvement of the different stakeholder groups. This participatory approach has been effectively adopted in many examples (William, 2018, p. 6; Orbaşlı; Cesaro, 2021).

4 CONCLUSION

This work demonstrated that the strategic diagnosis of the urban context of the Forum as it is currently presented is not favourable to attract visitors. We can note a lack of legibility and visibility, absence of animation, and less attractiveness. However, its archaeological potential and historical, architectural, and aesthetic values, highlighted in this paper, encourage us to develop its conservation and enhancement project. Moreover, it is a request made more than fifteen years ago by the local authorities, the developers, and Cherchell’s heritage managers during the symposium organised in April 2005. Unfortunately, to date, this desire has not been fulfilled.

Our contribution is in line with this perspective and leads to the proposal of a project for the development of this important space with a very high degree of permanence to integrate it into the cycle of contemporary life in Cherchell: first of all, it is a question of preserving and restoring it, and then attributing to it a recreational, tourist and economic value by its animation and continuous maintenance. The objective is to make its environment a place of life par excellence, a centre of activity for the city. The project’s principal points can be summarised as follows:

1. a development plan for the site including urban and architectural integration solutions;
2. a set of proactive measures to prolong the life of the remains and reconcile the preservation of the site while opening it to the public;

3. guidelines for an interpretation scheme with a harmonious, attractive and effective interpretation programme that will be adapted to different audiences;

4. an operational conservation management plan for the site to ensure the remains and visitors’ safety.

The final product, which is the superposition of these four groups of proposals, aims to balance the solutions adopted at each level. The Accessibility Project of the Forum is fundamental to improving its state of conservation, enhancing its values, re integrating it into the present, and passing it on to future generations in good conditions.
REFERENCES


