

# Preserving Heritage through Publishing Archives;

## The North African Heritage Archives Network (NAHAN)

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Fig. 1. The preliminary home page

NAHAN is a new international project aimed at creating a platform for documents from archaeological archives held in a series of European and North African institutions. Initiated in February 2016, the partnership is a loose network, linked initially by a Memorandum of Understanding. The project functions under the international 'umbrella' of ICCROM-Athar, while Elizabeth Fentress acts as scientific co-ordinator. A platform is now being created jointly by the CNRS laboratories of the Centre Camille Jullian (CCJ) and Archéologie & Philologie d'Orient et d'Occident (AOrOc) (<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03096422>). The platform will be an open-access resource, and will both harvest data from other sites where documents are already online, and provide sustainable space to hold digitized documents. It would also allow the posting of catalogue entries rather than documents, in the case of an institution holding documents catalogued but not yet digitized. Finally, it will serve as a resource for those who need advice on how to go about managing their archives: to say that not all archives are stored according to best practice is a massive understatement. One of the major challenges, of course, will be the normalizing of the metadata in each archive, in order to achieve efficient searching and reuse. This will respond to the FAIR principles, based on Dublin Core, and will use the tPactols and DAI thesauri. All the data will be georeferenced, and a map tool may be used to search them.

Our aim is to provide a resource for all those who hold archives on North African archaeology and wish to make them public, or to provide for their long-term preservation, as well as for scholars who wish to study them. We are working on a 'proof of concept' that will unite the archives already online of the CCJ and then, as decided in the initial meeting, to concentrate on the archives of 5 major North African cities: Volubilis, Cherchel, Carthage, Leptis Magna, and Cyrene. We hope that the existence of the site will provide leverage for partners to make major funding requests, not only from the EU but also from various national ministries involved in overseas development. However, our deliberately loose network structure makes it impossible to raise funding ourselves.

On a smaller scale, we are providing help to our North African partners in the cataloguing of their collections and the training of their personnel, as well as seeking funding for infrastructure for archives such as those in Tripoli. It is proposed that one method of support might come in the form of subventions for North African scholars who wish to study archives in European countries, or to receive more formal archival training, and who would be willing to catalogue the archives they are studying. What is desperately needed is to train archaeologists in archiving: a first step will be taken this September when a Moroccan with an MA in archaeology will enter the master's program in archiving at the University of Marseilles, with a scholarship provided by our member organizations.

There are of course numerous obstacles to this effort: many of those who hold archives are reluctant to share them online, while in some cases they are protected by privacy laws until many years after the death of the owner. However, most of these are archives that produced by public initiatives, such as university or national institutions carrying out research excavations paid for with public money – and should as such be made public. Then, there is a lack of interest at the level of the EU in subsidizing digitalization, insofar as they believe the job is largely done. However, there is still a large number of resources that have already been acquired, and are available for consultation. A first step for many archives would be that taken by the Society for Libyan Studies, which has catalogued its entire archive and put the catalogue online ([https://slsgazetteer.org/cat\\_search/](https://slsgazetteer.org/cat_search/)): in this way the documents may be found and requested. The DAI has also created a complementary site, The North African Research Archive (NARA) that will be available for harvesting by NAHAN (<https://arachne.dainst.org/project/nara?lang=fr>). Other archives will take longer to acquire, but the hope is that, served at no charge on the French National Server NAKALA, NAHAN will be sustainable enough to wait for these. In the meantime, those already available will provide an ever-growing resource for archaeologists and those interested in the historiography of North African archaeology as a whole. A splendid example is provided by the archives of the White Fathers, whose members, particularly Father Alfred Louis Delattre, left rich and well-organized archives, that are now being scanned and put online. The enormous number of archives held by the two branches of the CNRS responsible for the platform, AOrOc in Paris and CCJ at Aix-en-Provence, will be appreciated both by international scholars and by those in the countries in which they were created, who quite naturally feel that they should have access to them. A meeting in March 2023 in Rome will refound the project with, we hope, new partners to join the 22 who have already signed an MoU.

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