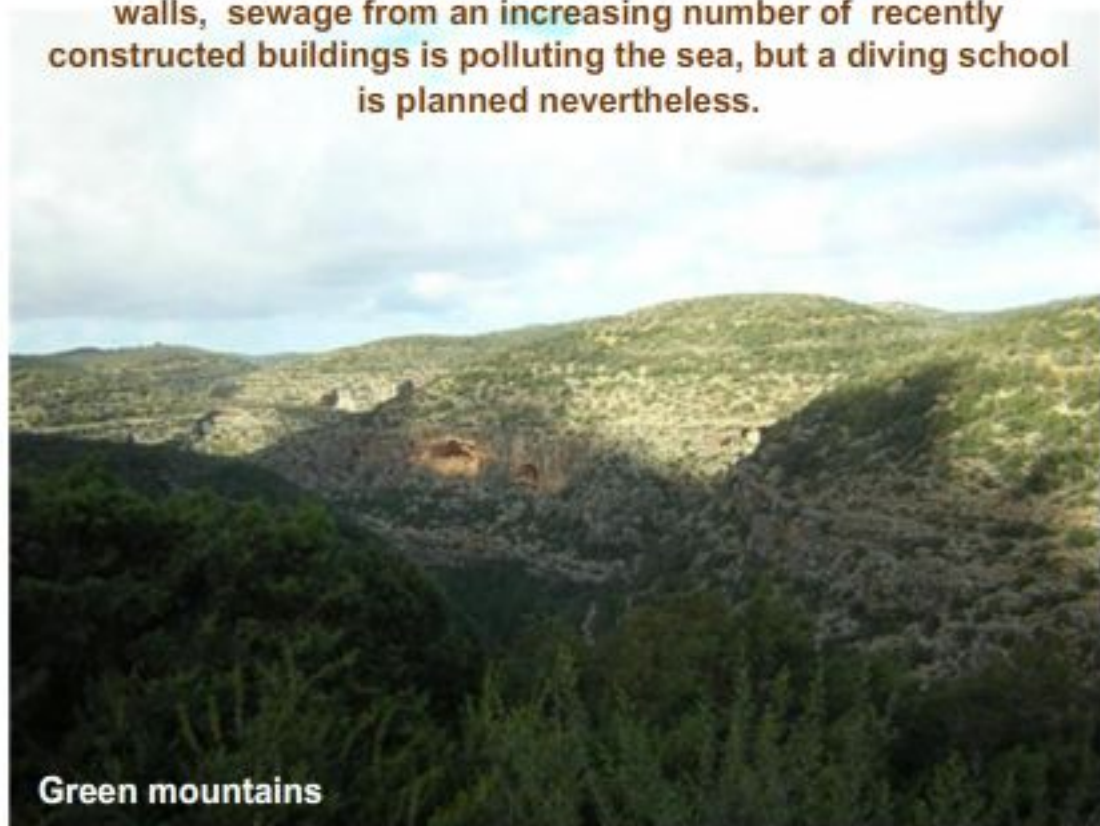


## Libya's heritage under threat

Libya: All you can and can't imagine a poster produced by the Department of Antiquities informs us. In Apollonia, where a stunning Greek theatre stands by the sea outside the old city walls, sewage from an increasing number of recently constructed buildings is polluting the sea, but a diving school is planned nevertheless.



**Green mountains**

This sad state of affairs provides a graphic illustration of the problem facing Libya's ancient sites: their preservation is taking second place to modern development which is prioritised by the state. "I want to keep Libya beautiful, but it is hell bent on destroying its assets", lamented one archaeologist.

From early prehistoric sites in the desert, including spectacular rock art to the ruins of the ancient cities of matchless size and splendour, Libya's archaeological heritage is truly spectacular, comparatively little studied and hugely under threat. The opening of Libya's doors to the world and particularly to the West has stimulated a huge amount of development, especially in the hydro-carbon and infrastructure sectors in the economy: there is a veritable

'gold rush' of over 100 oil companies and innumerable other companies from all over the world wanting to do business with Libya.

With one of the fastest growing populations in Africa, the Libyan government is attempting to develop a new way for its society and economy. Archaeology has not been high on Libya's agenda, taking second place to the development of the state. There has been little or no history of state funded

Leptus magna





Libya's national museum



archaeological research. The Department of Antiquities, has been poorly supported by the state and is poorly positioned to deal with the threats to the country's archaeological sites and monuments posed by the tidal wave of development. Libya has fantastic laws to protect antiquities - no development can be carried out with the consent of the Department of Antiquities, but these laws are not implemented.

Virtually all recent and current major development projects (water pipelines, urban construction, agricultural schemes, desalination plants, pipelines, power stations, power lines, roads and railways) have been and are still undertaken without archaeological impact assessment monitoring or mitigation. The Great Man-Made River project was undertaken without any archaeological assessment of its effects, new developments are planned in



## Sunset at apollonia

In September 2007, at a historic ceremony amongst the archaeological treasures of Cyrene in the Green Mountain region of eastern Libya, Qadhafi's son, Saif Al-Islam signed the Cyrene Declaration which marked the inception of the world's first regional-scale conservation and development project dedicated to responding to the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development.

In the past the state tended to see Libya's heritage as a landmark of colonial oppressors but this attitude has changed during the past five years. It is now increasingly viewed as a revenue generator which can provide meaningful employment

to Libyan men and women.

There is still not enough emphasis on heritage in the national school curriculum and knowledge of local history is poor. Only a new generation of Libyans, proud and aware, of their magnificent cultural heritage can ensure its preservation.

As the Department of Antiquities points out, all you can, and can't imagine is found in Libya. The country may well be on the way to resolving the dichotomy between the expansion of its tourist industry, seen in the construction of new hotels and the increasing numbers of travel agencies, and the degradation of its tourist sites.