



## Rural Archaeological Sites in Cyrenaica at Risk

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*Cultural Heritage: Preservation, Presentation, and Management*

*Friday, November 20, 2020*

Numerous rural settlements and fortified structures exist in the countryside of Cyrenaica (Libya). Although the earliest of such settlements date back to the Greek period, most of them were constructed and used for agricultural industrial and perhaps defensive purposes during the Roman and late Roman periods.

In the recent years, many of these rural sites have faced different types of threats ranging from agricultural activity to urban encroachment to looting and vandalism. Following a brief introduction to the typology of these sites and their archaeological and historical importance across a wide range of chronological periods, the paper will discuss and analyze the types of threats this archaeological heritage is currently facing. Attention will then be given to analysis of efforts by local authorities and nongovernmental organizations that are working to identify, monitor, and mitigate the damage and looting of this heritage. Finally, the paper concludes by showing how efforts to raise awareness of the importance of this heritage among the local population is critical to mitigating and preventing all of these threats. It will also highlight how does the trend towards fortification of rural sites in Cyrenaica compare with similar phenomena observed in some other areas of the late Roman Empire.

In general, the paper summarizes a comprehensive research that I have conducted for my PhD dissertation over three years (2011-2014) to document and analyze the architecture, typology, chronology and function of the rural Roman fortified sites in Cyrenaica.