



## MOROCCO'S ANCIENT CITY OF VOLUBILIS RISES AGAIN

Situated in a fertile plain at the foot of Mount Zerhoun, the sprawling remains of Morocco's oldest Roman site—Volubilis—have survived pillage and long periods of neglect. After decades of decay, however, custodians of the now closely guarded ancient city have turned the page and are bringing back the tourists. The site, nestled among olive groves near the city of Meknes, boasts a new museum and visitor center and has been attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors. They stroll along the main artery lined with porticoes and the remnants of vast mansions, whose mosaic floors testify to a prosperous past.

A triumphal arch, a classic symbol of Roman

### Bacchus gone missing

At the end of the 17th century, Sultan Moulay Ismail sent thousands of slaves to plunder Volubilis's marble columns for the construction of his palace in Meknes. "On the track leading from Volubilis to Meknes, we found capitals (of columns) abandoned by slaves, who fled when they learnt that Moulay Ismail was dead," said Alilou, who has been watching over the site for more than 30 years. Excavations at Volubilis began in 1915, along with research programs and restoration

'The site is fenced off and well-guarded'

work. But renewed interest in the site brought with it looting, especially during the period of French colonial rule from 1912 to 1956.

One particularly striking case in 1982 made headlines when a marble statue of Bacchus—the Roman god of wine—disappeared. In a desperate bid to find the relic, King Hassan II dispatched gendarmes who "interrogated, abused and beat" peasants who "didn't know Bacchus from Adam and Eve", according to Moroccan press reports. The effort was in vain and the statue was never found. "The people here are still traumatized," said a resident of nearby Moulay Driss Zerhoun.

Moroccan media frequently warn that the country's heritage—archeological finds, mosaics and ancient coins—is being looted. But in Volubilis, Alilou says that looting is a thing of the past. Today "the site is fenced off and well-guarded", he said. "We have a team of 14 guards who work day and night, cameras are everywhere." Mustafa Atki, another Volubilis conservator, said the whole issue of looting was "sometimes exaggerated".



Since the opening of its museum in 2013, the ancient city has attracted several hundred thousand visitors a year. "In 2017, for the first time we past the 300,000 mark," said Atki. Alilou said the ancient city covering 42 acres (17 hectares) has yet to reveal all of its secrets. "A third of the site, especially the western quarter built in the Islamic era, has not been excavated," he said. — AFP

Photos shows tourists walk through the ruins of the ancient Roman site of Volubilis, near the town of Moulay Idriss Zerhoun in Morocco's north central Meknes region. — AFP photos

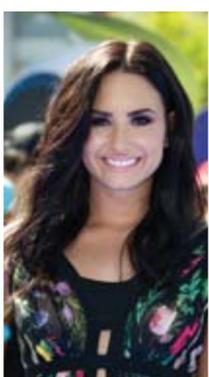


architecture, sits at the top of what once was the main compound. Known in Arabic as "Oualili", the city was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997. The ancient city has "known several civilizations, from the Mauritanian era to the Romans through the Islamic period", according to Mohamed Alilou, topographer and assistant conservator of the site. Volubilis was founded in the third century BC by a Moorish community, before being annexed by the Roman Empire in 42 AD.

At its peak, it would have counted up to 15,000 inhabitants. Threatened by civil wars across the empire, the Romans evacuated the city in 285. It didn't regain its splendor until the arrival of Arab conquerors in the seventh century. In the eighth century when the Idrisid dynasty erected the city of Fez as its new capital, Volubilis fell once more into disuse.



## DEMI LOVATO THANKFUL TO BE ALIVE AFTER OVERDOSE



Singer/actress Demi Lovato

Pop star Demi Lovato said Sunday she was thankful to be alive and needed time to recover in her first remarks since an overdose nearly two weeks ago. Writing to her more than 70 million followers on Instagram, Lovato gave few details on her July 24 hospitalization but noted that she has long been open about her struggles with addiction. "What I've learned is that this illness is not something that disappears or fades with time," the 25-year-old star wrote. "It is something that I must continue to overcome and have not done yet," she wrote.

"I want to thank God for keeping me alive and well," she said, adding that she was "forever grateful" for the support of her fans and crediting the staff of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles with saving her life.

Lovato, who canceled a show in Atlantic City that had been planned for two days after her hospitalization, suggested that she may not be returning to the public eye soon. "I now need time to heal and focus on my sobriety and road to recovery," she wrote.

Lovato has long spoken of her struggles with depression, eating disorders and addiction, belying her happy persona as a smiling star of the children's show "Barney and Friends." A 2012 documentary, "Demi Lovato: Stay Strong," showed how she used to snort cocaine several times a day before finding her way into rehab and reviving her career. In June, Lovato released a song entitled "Sober" in which she indicated a relapse and apologizes in verse to her parents. The singer, whose hits include "Sorry Not Sorry," was rushed from her home to a hospital by emergency responders. It remains unclear on which drug she overdosed. Her overdose prompted a flurry of statements of solidarity from fellow stars who praised her personality—although the attention also triggered a backlash by social media users, who noted that many non-celebrities suffer from drugs with little fanfare. — AFP

## 'Zorba' composer Mikis Theodorakis in hospital after heart attack

Renowned Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, who wrote the music for the 1964 classic film "Zorba the Greek", has been hospitalized after suffering a heart attack, the state agency ANA reported Sunday. Doctors said the 93-year-old was "out of immediate danger" but was being kept in hospital in Athens as a precaution given his advanced age. Theodorakis penned what is probably the best-known piece of Greek music, the theme tune to Zorba, an instrumental which is still played and danced to around the world.

He is also known in Greece as an icon of resistance against World War II Nazi Germany, as a militant communist in Greece's 1946-49 civil war and as an activist against the military junta that ruled Greece from 1967-74. Theodorakis has

remained a high-profile political campaigner and in February this year was out on the streets again, urging the Greek government not to compromise in the festering name row with neighboring Macedonia. In 2012 riot police used tear gas against him during an anti-austerity demonstration outside parliament. — AFP



Mikis Theodorakis