s h i r ī n : what place for science and scientists during wartime?

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Abstract: s h i r ī n is an initiative from the global community of scholars active in the field of archaeology, art and history of the Ancient Near East. It brings together a significant proportion of those international research groups that were working in Syria prior to 2011, with the purpose of making their expertise available to wider heritage protection efforts. It seeks to represent the broad sweep of archaeological and historical research in Syria.

s h i r ī n collects information on damage resulting from the current conflict and identifies those cases in which emergency repairs or protective action may be required. s h i r ī n also collaborates on the creation of comprehensive databases of elements of Syrian heritage(sites, museum catalogues). By involving the international research community now, s h i r ī n intends that this capability will be fully formed and thus ready to support the local authorities and communities when the emphasis shifts from safeguarding and the documentation of damage, towards restoration and reconstruction.

Keywords: Syrian Heritage, Damage assessment, Sites database, Digitalized inventories of Museums

Introduction

The community of archaeologists is probably the most important and numerous of all the collaborating scientific communities intervening in Syria during the last 50 years: in 2011 there were 109 field projects over 107 sites, 51 joint missions, 6 Syrian national missions including foreign partners, plus dozens of surveys joint projects and at least 20 museums artifact study projects, that is about 1000 researchers working in collaboration with approximately 100 Syrian researchers. This international collaboration made Syria an essential and major "knowledge zone" for Human History and Oriental civilizations from Lower Palaeolithic to the 19th century.

This international scientific cooperation has a long history. After a period of reproduction of the mandate's model since the Syrian independence in 1946, the sixties opens a new era. The archaeological survey since 1963, and five new excavations since 1965 in the area of the Tabqa dam allow a new generation of foreign researchers to take part of the international community working on the field in Syria. The 9th International Congress of Classical Studies held in Damascus in 1969 was the occasion of a second large call to international collaboration launched by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria (DGAMS). Then the rescue excavations on the Tabqa dam site, with the support from UNESCO since 1971, represent a considerable change by initiating 25 new projects.

The scientific policy choices made at that time by Syrian authorities were followed with a great consistency by successive officials DGAMS until today. This policy can be characterized as follow:

the opening to international cooperation with the objective to build joint research teams (field projects and study of museum collections)

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a new development of doctoral training of young Syrians abroad – already initiated in the fifties- by establishing an increasing number (more or less 10 each year during the last decade) of scholarships associated to a pre-recruitment in universities and DGAMS services.

Obviously, the importance of collaborations initiated in the last decades creates obligations and responsibilities that need to be defined. The scientific memory and archives of the Syrian Heritage is for a large part abroad where it must be managed and protected; it must be accessible and available to Syrian authorities and researchers. Many Syrian colleagues and students live abroad because of the war: we must facilitate by any means there life and safety in our countries. The DGAMS was at work without any break since 2011: we must carry on continuously the cooperation and develop new ways for future projects.

We think that s h i r ī n may be a part of the solution for present and future projects.

s h i r ī n (Syrian Heritage in Danger: an International Research Initiative & Network <http://shirin-international.org>) is an initiative from the global community of scholars active in the field of archaeology, art and history of the Ancient Near East. It brings together a significant proportion of those international research groups that were working in Syria prior to 2011, with the purpose of making their expertise available to wider heritage protection efforts. Accordingly, its International Committee includes the directors of a number of long-term international research programmes, and others who share their strong commitment to the effective protection of the heritage of Syria.

This s h i r ī n committee was created in response to a request by the participants at the *9th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, in Basel, Switzerland, on June 10th, 2014, during a special workshop. It seeks to represent the broad sweep of archaeological and historical research in Syria and is supported by the directors of research programmes active in neighbouring countries.

s h i r ī n National Committees now exist in 7 countries (Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Poland): they allow enlarging s h i r ī n audience at a national level. Their main common aims are : 1) Facilitating national initiatives for welcoming and training Syrian colleagues in foreign countries; 2) Collecting, maintaining and bringing out scientific archives of Syrian Heritage in each country; 3) Bringing out scientific expertise on artefacts of the illicit traffic; 4) Maintaining research projects on Syrian History and archaeology.

Representing the major institutions, universities and research centres in Europe, North America, Oceania, Eastern and Western Asia, the main purpose of s h i r ī n is to support governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations in their efforts to preserve and safeguard the heritage of Syria (sites, monuments and museums). It takes account of, and respond to, the needs of Syrian colleagues and authorities regardless of their political, religious or ethnic affiliation, in particular with respect to emergency steps and measures. s h i r ī n also includes members with long and deep experience of architectural and artefactual restoration, and specialists in all the periods of the history and prehistory of Syria. We must consider the constant and remarkable action of the DGAMS since the conflict began. Continuing to pursue its fundamental mission of public service of the State, the management team of the DGAMS has not only kept the institution in operation by its own means, but it has also ensured the preservation of a large number of objects in museums and the protection of some sites and monuments. This has been aided by DGAMS's own development of new methods to manage and analyze heritage through the computerization of inventories and GIS mapping. It also ensured communication with the Syrian public, and internationally, both in "mainstream" media and through the scientific community. It is also noted that in recent years DGAMS officers have continued their field research wherever possible. The directorate has always kept its communication channels with foreign teams open in order to share information and this should be commended. We must at the same time emphasize the presence and strong involvement of Syrian colleagues in many initiatives outside Syria – an involvement maintained in constant cooperation with research stakeholders.

These collaborations are essential to the continued participation of the Syrian team in global discussions.

By involving the international research community now, we intend that this capability will be fully formed and thus ready to support the local authorities and communities when the emphasis shifts from safeguarding and the documentation of damage, towards restoration and reconstruction.

Composed of scholars who have, individually, a deep knowledge of the field, and collectively cover all regions of Syria, it will activate local networks in order to collect information on damage primarily on excavated sites resulting from the current conflict and identify those cases in which emergency repairs or protective action may be required.

s h i r ī n collaborates on the creation of comprehensive databases of elements of Syrian heritage: the archaeological sites database Historic Environment Record (HER) and the Digital Inventories of Museums of Syria (DIMS) . This will provide a basic core of knowledge to which evidence of damage can be added on a case-by-case basis, and will allow the evaluation of the overall pattern and scale of damage resulting from the conflict, as it presents across different regions of Syria and the various classes of monument. It will thus propose a key source of information that can be made available to those involved in heritage protection at a local level, so that they have the necessary knowledge to prioritize heritage protection efforts in a systematic manner.

s h i r ī n prepares the post war period building cooperative tools which will facilitate the archaeological heritage management after the war.

Damage assessment on excavated sites.

We know the long term damage assessment work made by the DGAMS and few NGOs APSA and Heritage for Peace, and the damage assessment projects funded by states in the USA (ASOR SHI) and Germany (Syr Her). We complete these initiatives by a specific survey on excavated sites because we are convinced that the best experts on excavated sites are the projects directors. A simple and confidential questionnaire was sent to 120 directors.

A first campaign for collecting information (Sept.-Nov. 2014) received 56 answers reporting various types of damages on 20 sites and 14 dig houses. A second campaign launched in April-Aug. 2016 received 31 answers.

To complement this information, a s h i r ī n volunteer made a systematic control of damages on sites by analizing satellite imagery: the review of 103 images provided by a cooperation agreement with UNOSAT, and the online imagery (Google Earth and Bing) allows a long term (2010 – 2016) assessment of the situation on the sites describing the history of major damages on 32 ones.

A global assessment document is in preparation. The information is shared with DGAMS; the way in which it can be shared with emerging international damage assessment databases (i.e. SyrHer in Germany) is being explored.

Historic Environment Record of National Sites and Monuments for Syria

The project aims to hold basic information on each known site: name(s), nature of the remains, the different components of the site, periods present, history of work and publications, location (coordinates) and extent, outlined through a GIS layer over maps or satellite imagery. An HER would be of real value in tracking damage to heritage during the current conflict. It is conceived as a basic tool for providing up-to-date information on known heritage sites that is used in time of rescue excavations when proposed developments become known through the

planning system in post-conflict time : it must be ready as soon as possible. When conflict ends a single central record will make it easier to review the situation, and the to undertake the protection efforts that will be essential during the period of reconstruction. Without such a resource, efforts to manage, protect and prioritize Syria's heritage, and to deal effectively with threats (development, looting, and neglect) are held-back.

The existing databases will not work as HERs because they were designed as research projects, not as heritage management tools. DGAM develops a sites inventory and needs to complete it massively: a close cooperation must allow sharing information in good operating conditions.

Existing Datasets provide regular information on $\pm$ 5000 sites: it is the main set used by DGAMS and other databases.

An HER would provide:

a list of known heritage sites that should be monitored for damage assessment purposes.

a valuable tool that would help with the management heritage during post-war redevelopment – you would know What was Where?

the ability to identify areas which have no sites because they have not been surveyed – it tells you where you still need to look.

It will also help meet the expectation of international donor organizations that suitable mechanisms of heritage protection are in place when possible developments are assessed by international funding bodies.

A good part of the information required to create a HER for Syria already exists. An international initiative to use the archaeological survey data collected by research projects working in Syria in recent decades is the basis of a sites and monuments record.

A Franco-British Initiative since December 2012, was associated with SHIRIN in 2014. It seeks to create a database containing, in a first phase, around 15000-20000 site across Syria

It is Based on the fusion of the data from 1) *Fragile Crescent Project* (FCP) (2008-13 – UK Arts & Humanities Research Council) T. J.Wilkinson, G. Philip et D. Donoghue Durham University, UK; 2) *Projet PaléoSYR / PaléoLIB*, (2010 – 2014 Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR) France) F. Braemer (CNRS, Nice) & B. Geyer (CNRS MOM Lyon); 3) and additional of data given by colleagues from surveys in other regions such as the Euphrates and Balikh Valleys, western Jazirah etc.

HER today is approximatively 12000 sites. A pilot version was made in 2014 by extracting data under Oracle. It integrates in a single interpretative GIS/database framework filed data, imagery data and cartographic data. To prepare the data, we have agreed to inform 8 fields (Site name(s), Original data source and id, Location, Features, Size, Period, Certainty, Co-ordinates); we have agreed a convention for site names (more than one could be held), for date-periods, and for site-certainty

Everybody knows that combining data from different sources adds its own problems. Now we undertake a data checking/cleansing process to remove inconsistencies and possible duplication, and to apply agreed conventions. This is where the real work begins – data checking and verification.

After trying different softwares, we propose to use ARCHES V.3 <http://archesproject.org/>. A working example is Megajordan <http://megajordan.org/>: this runs under an earlier and more basic version of ARCHES but gives a very rough idea of what will be possible. But all Megajordan users know that the question of data control is crucial: input of surveys data was done without preparation to eliminate duplicates and control the exact locations

The pilot project exists managed by the Durham University team. The aim is now to build a general site database and gazetteer open to the international scientific community that is independent of the DGAMS one, but sharing information with it will still be a necessity. The Durham team is now co-investigator for phase 2 of the EAMENA Oxford project <http://eamena.arch.ox.ac.uk>/. They are then in charge of data from Syria and Iraq.

<center>**Digital Inventories of Museums of Syria (DIMS)**</center>

It is an initiative for creating a General Inventory of Artefacts in the Museum. In a world of conflict, war, looting, and total destruction, inventories of immovable, movable, and intangible cultural heritage are indispensable. Over centuries these inventories were written by hand on perishable materials; they were often destroyed even if they had been deposited apart of the objects they listed.

Nowadays it is possible to create digital inventories. Their advantages are clear: they may not perish so easily like the analogue ones; they can be disseminated quickly to involved authorities and institutions; they can be made accessible to a large audience under controlled conditions; they are useful identifying and tracing looted or robbed items; they are a useful tool for restoration and reconstruction after the end of any given conflict. Without such a resource, efforts to manage, protect and prioritize Syria's heritage, and to deal effectively with threats (loss, looting, neglect) are held-back.

During the past sixty years Syria has created an impressively decentralized landscape of Museums: 36 in total number, the National Museums of Damascus, Aleppo, and Palmyra are known worldwide.

During the past five years of conflict these Museums have been and still are threatened by destruction and/or looting and a few of them have been destroyed and/or looted already.

The DGAMS has done a fabulous job preserving and protecting the country's cultural heritage. DGAM has evacuated objects of threatened Museums and started a database of inventories of all Syrian Museums.

Since 2015, s h i r ī n in cooperation with UNESCO and DGAMS, encourages a joint ventures digitizing the official registers of the Museums of Syria. These registers list all the objects which have received a Museum Inventory Number [ID]. DGAMS and Free University of Berlin have agreed to conduct a pilot project digitizing the inventory of the National Museum of Deir ez-Zor. This joint venture is sponsored by the Foreign Ministry of Germany. It cooperates with the "UNESCO-Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Heritage Project", the "Syrian Heritage Archive Project" (SHA) of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), and with ICOM-Comité International pour la Documentation (CIDOC).

To understand the project we remind a Short History of the National Museum of Deir-ez-Zor. The Museum was founded in 1974. A new building was completed in 1990/1991 and inaugurated in April 1996 ith a permanent exhibition (Syrian/DGAM-German/FU Berlin joint venture). The museum contents 21,867 objects officially registered objects (Museum ID) and non-quantified number (probably more than 100 000) of items from Syrian and international excavation missions in the districts Deir ez-Zor and Hassaka (the new Museum in Hassaka was not completed until 2010). Since 2013, the museum is threatened by IS conquest. DGAMS rescued 25,000 objects in 2014 and 2015.

Essentially the inventory consists of objects with and without a Museum ID.

In a first step the data of the 21,867 officially registered objects, that is those which have a Museum ID, are transferred into a database. The denomination of the data fields follows the Object-ID-standard. The aim is to produce an illustrated list with diagnostic data. In a second step the database will be complemented by those objects that are kept in the Museum but have not received a Museum ID. The lists will be produced in English and Arabic. Some of the problems that have to be solved along this way is the compatibility of the used data systems. Ways of exchanging data on a meta level have to be developed. In the end the target system will be based at the DGAM.

The project began in July 2015. In August and November 2015 two workshops on IT procedures, workflow, and improvement of cooperation were conducted. By the end of 2015 the database contains 4,000 entries, same number of scanned photographs from file cards.

The procedure of allocation of Museum IDs in Syria is as follows. The major input of the collections of Syrian Museums comes from national and international excavation missions. According to Syrian law all the excavated objects have to stay in the country. Usually the respon-

sible office is the regional Museum. Under the responsibility of the Director of Excavation, the object is discovered and receives an Excavation Inventory Number = Excavation ID; the Syrian representative decides which objects are to be delivered to the Museum; they get registered in the mission's find listings; objects are delivered to the Museum accompanied by a finds listing.

Under the Responsibility of the Museum Director, the Current number of the mission's find listings becomes the Museum Entry Number; the Museum Director selects objects for a Museum Registration and give a Number that is Museum ID.

Then there is an Official registration of selected objects (Museum ID), and the unregistered delivered objects are stored in official repositories. Taking the example of a Find Listings page of the German Mission of Tell Sheikh Hamad, we note that out of the 32 delivered objects only 4 received a Museum ID!

That is why a full knowledge of the Museum collections by confronting both sources of inventories involves a very close cooperation between the foreign teams and the DGAMS in each museum in Syria. Aside the Deir ez Zor Museum project, a Raqqa Museum inventory project is currently initiated.

s h i r ī n actions bear two features which are not fully shared by other NGO's:

1) In its origins , s h i r ī n is the outcome of the concern of former excavation directors about their sites. These colleagues usually have premium information at their disposal which is crucial for analyzing the present situation but will be even more important for reconstruction once peace will have returned to Syria in close cooperation with Syrian authorities.

2) , s h i r ī n aims to build tools facilitating the integration of data dispersed in many countries and teams. These data will be crucial for future preventive or rescue archaeology in Syria and for a full verification report of Museum collections

Syrian archaeology was built for 50 years on the basis of close international collaboration with Syrian Research: the same mutual recognition will be a powerful way of initiating and fostering the future.