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Series Archaeologica

## Text and Image

Proceedings of the 61<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale,  
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# Strategies for restoration and reconstruction

## Museums, heritage sites and archaeological parks in post-war countries

Cynthia Dunning, Mohamad Fakhro, Denis Genequand, Mirko Novák

There are many initiatives concerning strategies for restoration and reconstruction in war-torn countries.

The extraordinary session “Strategies for Restoration and Reconstruction. Museums, Heritage Sites and Archaeological Parks in Post-War Countries” held in Bern in the frame of the 61<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale was one of the first to develop the subject with archaeologists and museum curators from two such countries, Syria and Iraq. Therefore, it gave the possibility to these specialists to clearly express their needs in presence of major international actors in near-eastern archaeology. It was meant to be a starting point for developing respective strategies.

The extraordinary session took place on Thursday 25 June 2015, 2–6pm, Bern University, Universität Schanze (UniS), Room A003 and was preceded by the Statutory Meeting of shirín (Syrian Heritage in Danger: an International Research Initiative and Network) from 9–12:30pm. It was organized commonly by the Institute for Archaeological Sciences (IAW) of the Bern University<sup>1</sup>, shirín international<sup>2</sup>, and Archaeoconcept<sup>3</sup>, and made possible by the generous support of the Swiss Federal Office for Culture (Eidgenössisches Bundesamt für Kultur, BAK)<sup>4</sup>, the Swiss Federal Office for Civil Protection (Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz, BABS)<sup>5</sup> and the Foundation Johanna Dürmüller-Bol<sup>6</sup>.

It was intended to initiate a dialogue between the international community of scholars working on the Ancient Near East and colleagues from Syria and Iraq, which should lead to announce the requirements within the countries that suffer from civil war and vast destructions of their heritage. Moreover, an outcome should have been the development of concrete relief measures and their financing. Particular attention was given to the current events in the regions controlled by the “Islamic State” or those affected by massive fighting.

1 <http://www.iaw.unibe.ch>.

2 <http://www.shirin-international.org>.

3 <http://www.archaeoconcept.com>.

4 <http://www.bak.admin.ch>.

5 <http://www.babs.admin.ch>.

6 <http://www.fjdb.ch>.

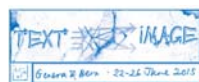
### shirín: Syrian Heritage in Danger: an International Research Initiative and Network

shirín is an initiative of the global community of scholars, active in the fields 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. shirín is a privileged partner of UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, ICOM and BLUE SHIELD. Its committee was created in response to a request articulated by the participants at the 9<sup>th</sup> *International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, in Basel, Switzerland, on 10 June 2014. Representing the major institutions, universities and research centres in Europe, North America, Oceania, Eastern and Western Asia, its main purpose is to support governmental bodies and non-governmental organisations in their efforts to preserve and safeguard the heritage of Syria (sites, monuments & museums).

The first official statutory meeting of the international committee took place on 25 June 2015 in Bern and elected its president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. The minutes have been made public on the shirín website.

### The extraordinary session on strategies

Vast destructions resulting from the civil wars in Syria and Iraq affect both museums and archaeological sites, either as collateral effects of fighting or through lootings and conscious damages. Many governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations started initiatives to protect heritage sites, to register destructions and lootings, and to prevent trade of stolen artefacts on the international art market. Less developed



**EXTRAORDINARY SESSION.  
61<sup>ST</sup> RENCONTRE ASSYRIOLOGIQUE INTERNATIONALE**

University of Bern - UniS, Schanzeneckstr 1, Room A003 - Thursday, 25th June 2015

**STRATEGIES FOR RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION:  
MUSEUMS, HERITAGE SITES AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARKS IN  
POST-WAR COUNTRIES**

11:30-11:45

Cynthia Dunning,  
Denis Genequand,  
Mohamad Fakhro,  
Mirko Novák:  
Introduction.

11:45-12:00

Jean-Bernard Münch  
(President of the  
Swiss UNESCO com-  
mission): Welcome  
address.

**PART I  
STATUS OF THE  
IRAQI AND  
SYRIAN HERITAGE**

12:00-12:20

Maamoun Abdul-  
karim, Lina Qutifan  
(DGAM Damascus):  
Protecting Heritage  
Sites in Syria. Tasks  
and Perspectives.

12:20-12:40

Ahmad Deeb (DGAM  
Damascus): The  
Status of Syrian Mu-  
seums.

12:40-13:40

Lunch Break

13:40-14:00

Ahmad Kamil (SBOA  
Baghdad): The Iraqi  
Museum between  
2003 and 2014:  
Experiences in Re-  
creation. The Status of  
Mossul Museum.

14:00-14:20

Qais Hussein Rashid  
(SBOA Baghdad): The  
Status of Archaeologi-  
cal Sites in Iraq under  
ISIS Occupation.

14:20-14:40

Youssef Kanjou,  
Mohamad Fakhro  
(National Museum of  
Aleppo): The National  
Museum of Aleppo.  
Threats and Strategies  
for Safekeeping.

14:40-15:00

Marc-André Renold  
(UNESCO Chair,  
Univ. of Geneva): Illicit  
Art Object Trade: The  
Legal Answer.

15:00-15:30

Karin Pütt, Diana Miz-  
nazi (Syrian Heritage  
Archive Project):

In Preparation for  
Post-Conflict Syria:  
Archiving, Dama-  
ge Mapping and  
Engaging in the Local  
Community.

15:30-16:00

Coffee break

**PART II STRATEGIES  
FOR RESTORATION  
AND  
RECONSTRUCTION**

16:00-16:10

Cheikhmous Ali  
(APSAprotect SYR):  
Alep d'hier et  
d'aujourd'hui: quelle  
stratégie pour la  
reconstruction?

16:10-16:30

Michel Al-Maqdissi  
(University St-Joseph,  
Beirut): Site Recreat-  
ion and Management  
Strategies. Require-  
ments and Resources.

16:30-17:00

Lutz Martin (Vice  
Director VAM Berlin):  
Vorderasiatisches Mu-  
seum Berlin and the

Tell Halaf Museum:  
Reconstructions After  
World War II Dama-  
ges

17:00-17:20

Hiba al-Bassir (Free-  
lancer Restaurator  
and Conservator,  
Damascus/Berlin):  
Museum Object  
Restoration.

17:20-17:40

Marc Lebeau (Eu-  
ropean Centre for  
Upper Mesopotamian  
Studies): The Shirin  
Initiative: Science vs.  
Darkness - A Utopian  
view?

17:40-18:00

Carine Simoes  
(Federal Office of  
Culture):  
La restitution de biens  
culturels illégalement  
sortis du pays.

18:00-19:30

Discussion: Creating  
Strategies: How, Who  
and Where?

**u<sup>b</sup>**

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ARCHAEOCONCEPT



are the initiatives to train experts and specialists that will be required in both countries after the war is over. Museums have to be reconstructed and recreated, artefacts restored, archaeological sites cleaned from mines and other traces of the war, heritage sites relaunched and prepared for visitors.

The aim of the workshop was to collect information on requirements, develop ideas on strategies, and figure out possibilities for the scientific community to support these activities.

## Preliminary outcome

During the extraordinary session, a considerable quantity of information on the current situation of the preservation of the cultural heritage in Syria and in Iraq was harvested. This led to develop strategies for the phase of restoration and reconstruction on different levels: international, national and regional.

Five themes were particularly addressed:

1. Mapping – data bases and inventories. Many projects concerning data bases and inventories have been developed throughout Europe and the USA concerning the documentation and objects which are stored in different universities, research institutions and museums throughout Europe, Asia and America. The need for collaboration between these projects and for communication concerning them was announced. It was decided that shirín could take the responsibility for the coordination between these innumerable projects.
2. Training. The first question was to know what kind of training is needed. A key point is the demand of training in conservation techniques, not only in rebuilding but also for objects of all kinds. The difficulty of knowing who should receive training was also mentioned. The fragmentation not only of the Iraqi and Syrian societies but also of the scientific communities of these countries builds up high barriers for any kind of collaboration.
3. Location of training. The third point was about knowing where training can happen. Most speakers wished training in nearby countries as much as this is possible. No question that these wishes face diplomatic and political difficulties, starting with visa issues for scholars from different parts of Syria and ending with the difficult matter of funding and providing training camps. Regarding higher education, it was pointed out that European countries (or the EU) could offer much better conditions and more open possibilities, following the example of Erasmus mundus. Another ques-

tion arose during the discussion, without bringing forth many answers: how can one make it visible that training is a high priority and that it is necessary? How can the support of funding organisations and politicians can be gained?

4. Illicit trade. The question of illicit trade is an extraordinary important one. It depends much on laws and legislations of the different countries involved and is quite complex. Therefore, the roles and responsibilities of each partner country must be defined and communicated. During the conference, it was asked that the Syrian Department of Antiquities (Direction Générale des Antiquités et Musées, DGAM) provide a list of valuable pieces which may particularly serve in the case of illicit trade of objects stolen in its museums during the conflict.
5. Assessment, protection and on-site reconstruction. Four elements were addressed under this theme: a) legislation, b) information and consultation in prioritising of projects and developing possibilities for reconstruction, c) financing, and d) active collaboration.

The importance on working on a master plan in collaboration with the governmental institutions in Syria and Iraq was considered a high priority.

One of the most important outcomes of the extraordinary session was an attempt to break the barriers created by the war within the community of Syrian archaeologists, which is divided into members of governmental institutions and of non-governmental groups, by giving the scholars the opportunity to meet and share information in order to protect together the Syrian heritage.

It was emphasized that there is an urgent need to activate the local communities in Syria and Iraq for taking their part in the protection of their cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the consciousness of the own responsibility and the own role in the protection was largely neglected and thus very often absent before the war. Stimulating the awareness and knowledge about the importance of the cultural heritage for future generations is the most promising way of protection.

It is clear that the session was only the beginning of a series of long-term actions, that still must be decided upon.

It helped to identify the needs of the specialists on an international scale, allowing thus other associations and non-governmental organisations to act, since it is essential that all of them propose coordinated efforts for protection, reconstruction, recuperation of disappeared objects and above all training for the future of the archaeology and museum sciences in the war-torn countries of Iraq and Syria.