

## **THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND THE DESTRUCTION OF URBAN HERITAGE. Three case studies: Palmyra, Damascus and Aleppo**

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### **Abstract**

*The Syrian crisis, which has turned into a civil war, has been devastating for the population, the country and cultural heritage. The destruction of urban heritage is presented through three case studies:*

- *Palmyra, a most renown antique city which has lost many of its monuments,*
- *Old Damascus, which was partly reconstructed after a heavy bombing in 1925 and which was provided with risk preparedness guidelines.*
- *Old Aleppo, which was a successful model of urban rehabilitation in the 1990s and 2000s, and which is now largely destroyed.*

*The current safeguarding actions by national and international stakeholders includes the DGAM, UNESCO, ICOMOS and many others.*

*Present ICOMOS projects are described as and some directions for future comprehensive urban revitalisation are outlined.*

**Key words:** *Syria – Urban Heritage – War - Destruction – Palmyra – Damascus - Aleppo*

### **Introduction**

The crisis in Syria and its devastating effects in terms of human suffering is almost daily raising the world attention since the beginning of 2011. Press articles and reports have also reported the damage to some of its best-known monuments as well as the ongoing illicit traffic of its ancient artefacts. No study has been yet devoted to its historic cities, whether ancient or traditional, as far as we know. Such a study may however give us a better understanding of what should be their risk preparedness and their restoration and perhaps reconstruction in the future, a subject where the expertise of ICOMOS would be needed.

### **Methodology**

Three case studies, all on the World Heritage list, were chosen for their diversity, the damage they experienced and the lessons they may provide: Palmyra, Damascus and Aleppo. An introduction is however provided to understand their situation in the general context of the cultural heritage in Syria during the crisis and war. A presentation of local and international stakeholders on the cultural heritage scene may then explain what ICOMOS and its Working group have been undertaking and what they may still have to develop. Some directions towards general and local conclusions may then be sketched.

## **1• Syrian Crisis and Cultural Heritage**

Syria is considered as a cradle of ancient civilisations. Its rich collection of monuments and cities is exceptionally diverse. They are witness to human arts and development through millennia, even if the country within its present international borders has only received its independence in 1946.

Authorities boast a number of 10,000 cultural sites. Six of them are on the world heritage list: Aleppo, Bosra, Damascus, Palmyra, the Krak des Chevaliers (plus Saladin's castle) and the northern antique villages. Nearly 180 Syrian and foreign archaeological missions worked in Syria before 2011 and about 38 museums were located in the country, the larger being the national museums of Damascus and Aleppo. Although weakened many traditional crafts were still practised in the country. The country is signatory of the Hague convention of 1954 (first protocol).

Syria is presently divided in between government-controlled areas, a Kurdish territory, and ISIS (or Daesh) area, and several rebel areas. Its original population of about 24 million has substantially decreased, with some 260,000 dead, about 5 millions refugees abroad (mainly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan) and nearly 7 million internally displaced among of a population of 23 millions before the eruption of the civil war. Some sectarian or ethnic cleansing occurred and IS-Daesh introduced slavery in the territory it controls.

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) reported in December 2014 that 290 Syrian cultural heritage sites have been damaged since fighting broke out in the country in 2011. Damage to cultural heritage is continuing on a wide scale. Its main reasons are war, lack of law and order, poorness and last but not least, intentional destruction.

- War and collateral damages may reach historical fortifications as the Krak des Chevaliers, al Madiq, Bosra or Aleppo citadel, like in medieval times. Even ancient tells can be damaged by the digging of army fortifications.
- Historic districts (Aleppo, Homs) and villages (Maaloula) are subject to major damages and deserted by their population
- Illegal constructions develop in other historic cities (Damascus) and rural areas (northern antique villages).
- Many archaeological sites are being illegally and systematically dug. Archaeological depots are being stolen, smuggling antiquities to neighbouring countries is organised by gangs.
- Intentional destruction are mainly due to Daesh and may concern some sculptures, tombs, shrines, churches as well as monuments such as the triumph arch and temples of in Palmyra.
- Natural heritage components are also threatened when people have no other solution than to cut trees to keep warm in the winter, when battles occur in forests or planted areas and when peasants can no more keep their farming or cattle breeding activity.
- Intangible heritage (building crafts, woodwork, jewellery, glass, rugs or textile making) is also fading when those who were practising it are moving elsewhere for a better security or income.

This is not to mention the disappearance of infrastructure and facilities that facilitates a sustainable living anywhere: water, sewage, electricity and road networks, hospitals, schools, etc. The economy is also totally disrupted and still subject to an international embargo. Reconstruction activity already evaluated with figures of tens and will soon hundreds of billions of dollars.

## **2• Destruction of Urban Heritage: Case studies.**

Urban historical districts suffered from some battles. This would be the case of Bosra or Deraa, for example. The Historical centres of Aleppo and Homs were the subjects of large-scale damages reminding those due to WWII in Europe. We will however concentrate on just three of them, Palmyra, Damascus and Aleppo, as they are typically representative of different sorts of heritage, damage or lessons. Whenever possible, it would be interesting to assess why the original inhabitants of Maaloula, or of Hawamdiya, a Homs central historic district, didn't largely come back home.

### **Palmyra**

#### *Presentation*

Palmyra got its importance from being the largest oasis in the Syrian desert between Mesopotamia and the NS string of cities parallel to the Mediterranean sea, including Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Damascus. Its Semitic name of Tadmor was already mentioned already in Mari archives (XVIIIth c. BC). A Hellenistic settlement developed before its age of splendour (I<sup>st</sup>-IIIrd c. AD) when caravan routes linked Parthian and Roman empires through the city. The Palmyrenian art and architecture were a blend between eastern and western civilisations. Inscriptions were written in Greek, Roman and Palmyrenian characters. Spoken language was Aramaic and some names are close to Arabic.

The urban development is fascinating as a first "roman" urban stretch was parallel to the Hellenistic one with a main axis in between. When the great colonnade was built along the other side of the stretch, it became the new major axis towards which buildings and streets were oriented. The colonnade itself was huge (1,100 m long). It ended in a tetrapylon one side and in a triumph arch on the other. This monumental arch was very interesting as its design allowed for a change of axis in the colonnade.

The Bel Temple allowed a Semitic conception of space and rites with a Roman architecture. The cella was surrounded an empty space surrounded by a portico and a closed wall. This layout was also found in Damascus and Jerusalem. This pattern is similar to the Kaaba in Mecca. The city also included other temples, an agora and a theatre, etc. Tombs were quite original too as they were built for families, either by underground hypogeum or by funerary towers.

After the defeat of Queen Zenobia (272 AD) Palmyra never really recovered the same status, even when temples were turned into churches and later into mosques. A souk was created inside the great colonnade and a castle dominating the city was built much later at the Ayyubid period (around 1230 AD). As the city gradually shrank and became a village, it retreated inside the walls of the previous Bel temple.

During French rule, in the early 1930s, the villagers were persuaded to leave the Bel Temple precinct and to dwell in a newly planned village to the North East of the archaeological site. Along the years, about 30 different foreign missions worked on the site (American, Austrian, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Swiss, Syrian, etc.). Restorations started long ago in the Bel temple (French architects) before WWII, and continued in the 1950s with the Tetrapylon and ended with the theatre a few dozen years ago.

The site was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1980 and measures 36 ha. It became a touristic destination and some projects became even worrying in the 2000s until the Syrian-

based EU Municipal Administration Modernisation Program (MAM) produced a Strategic Action Plan in 2008.

*Destructions*

At the outset of the conflict in 2011, the Syrian Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) took preventive measures to protect the site of Palmyra and the museum. This included backfilling exposed tombs, reinforcing gates on-site and at the museum, relocating artefacts from the museum to off-site Storage areas, and raising awareness about the importance of heritage within the local community. Limited access to the site has, however, allowed the DGAM few occasions to assess damage or initiate further preventive measures.

After an absence from Palmyra due to rebellion, military occupation at the site in 2103 and the construction of defensive earthworks, roads, and temporary structures reportedly escalated, and clashes with rebels in the oasis resulted in some of the earliest reported combat-related damage to monuments. This included bullet and shelling damage to exterior walls and the collapse of several columns within the Temple of Bel. Since 2012, illegal excavations and theft have also been reported.

In May 2015, after a brief battle, Daesh jihadists took over the city and the archaeological site. The museum was fortunately already mostly evacuated. Contrarily to promises, in August, Baalshamin temple and then the Bel temple cella were loaded with explosives and destroyed. Later on, the same fate happened to some funerary towers and later on to the triumph arch, which never carried any religious significance. Even Moslem shrines and cemeteries were destroyed in the vicinity. Captured government soldiers were executed in the theatre and other persons were attached to columns and dynamited. Illegal diggings were undertaken too. The fate of the site remains threatened by an eventual battle for its liberation.



*Palmyra. Remains of the triumph Arch, after destruction - DGAM*

As a city, Palmyra has lost its more emblematic architectural features as well as significant parts of its integrity as an urban ensemble. There are substantial archives of diggings and restoration works



*Palmyra. The monumental colonnade in the early 1960s - DGAM*



*Palmyra; The Bel Temple in the early 1960s - DGAM*

. Crowdrised photographs also allow some 3D models. Replicating some of Palmyra monuments completely or partially elsewhere, like proposed in London and New York does however raise concerns. It is not yet assessed how remaining rubble may be assembled again. Any in-situ reconstruction would probably face delicate technical and financial problems.

## **Damascus**

### *Presentation*

Damascus is located in the centre of the Ghouta oasis. As one of oldest and largest cities in the Middle East, the city is known to have been inhabited continuously from the 3rd millennium B.C. onwards. As early as the first Millennium B.C., it represented a mighty Aramean city-state and remained an important trade. In the Islamic period, from 661 until 750, it became the capital of the extensive Omayyad Empire. Since then it has maintained its political significance as a centre of the *Bilad As-Sham*, the cultural area that comprises the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine

Although the built heritage of the city includes extensive Roman remains, the Great Omayyad Mosque (A.D. 705) and numerous medieval monuments (mosques, churches, synagogues, madrassas, hospitals, hammams, khans, etc.). The overall residential texture of the city dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Examples include the residence of the governor's family, Qasr al-Azem, and the Khan Assaad Pasha. From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the influence of the *tanzimat* reforms can be seen, resulting from the increased security afforded to minorities. Traces of a former gridiron roman street pattern can still be seen. Different religious communities continue to live side by side in a rather homogeneous urban fabric.

Extramural neighbourhoods developed slowly. Some parts of these areas are of high architectural quality too. They include important monuments, such as mosques, hammams, madrassas and tombs dating from the 12th century onwards. In the late Ottoman-period, a new administrative centre developed between the Citadel and the Tekiyeh al Suleymaniyeh, aligned on one of the branches of the Barada, and a new street leading northeast connecting to the ancient suburb of Salhiyeh. As late as the 1920s, this was still substantially the form of the city, which was to acquire modern suburbs to the north and west in the following decades.

The ancient walled city was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1979 and included 86 ha. A proposed buffer zone measures 43 ha that includes some historical suburbs. In the 1960's the intramuros population peaked at 110.000 inhabitants when a poor rural population replaced a rich owners who went to live in newer neighbourhoods. By the 2000's the population had decreased to about 30.000 and more than 130 restaurants and hotels were set up in traditional houses. A special branch of Damascus municipality is in Charge of the walled city. It is known by the name of *Maktab Anbar* according to the name of the place where they are located. It is in charge with all the municipality technical services. The DGAM also have sub territorial section devoted to the ancient city. From 2006 to 2007 a EU cooperation program funded a Municipal Administration Modernisation (MAM) project for Old Damascus, which produced a better analysis of the situation, and a strategic project.

### *Past disaster experiences*

Most traditional houses are built with stone masonry at ground floor and with a wooden structure filled with dried bricks above. The nature of the buildings and their juxtaposition has formerly long facilitated fires and their spread from one house to the other, the reason being due to the old lighting or heating systems and even short-circuits in more recent times. Today,

the equipment is safer, fire hydrants crisscross the old quarters and fire became less frequent. The last major fire seems to have been that of souk el sagha (from jewellers) 30 years ago.

In 1925, a popular revolt had spread in town. The Azem Palace of the eighteenth century, the residence of General Sarraill had burned and the troops of the French mandate shelled the old town for three days. In the district of Sidi Amoud, south of the citadel, 250 houses were then destroyed, including the renown ones of Abdel Kader al Ajlani of the Kouatly family from which came the future President Shukri al Kouatly.

Lengthy and painstaking restoration work was undertaken during thirty years on exterior facades, interior decoration and the garden of the Azem Palace. It has since been converted into a museum of arts and popular traditions. An Aga Khan Award for Architecture was attributed in 1983 for this model achievement.

However, the residential district of Sidi Amoud was razed and was the subject of a land reorganisation based on an orthogonal grid road structure with a large square in the middle. It was perhaps a kind of compensation to affected owners profitable without being expensive for the state. The buildings that were constructed are four-storey business buildings, in the style of the 1940s, with reinforced concrete and stone cladding. They are individually different but rather homogeneous as a whole. This district is now called “Al Hariqa”, or the Fire.

The exclusively modern commercial reconstruction of the district has reduced the integrity and authenticity of the city. Furthermore, the orthogonal frame of the district is not only completely foreign to the urban traditional fabric, but it seems to threaten it with future extensions. Those designed extensions were still marked with dotted lines on tourist maps of the 1950s, with even a huge road square encircling the Omayyad mosque.



*Damascus. Al Hariqa district in 2008 - Abdulac*





*Damascus. Plan of the World Heritage site. Al Hariqa district is located on the western side of the ancient town – Bianca/UNESCO*

Many ancient suburbs of Damascus have disappeared, victims of road traffic and urban reorganization. A recent proposed enlargement of King Faisal Street was to result in the demolition of the remaining suburbs north of the walled city. The project deplored by UNESCO, and fought by intellectuals, professors and students of architecture, as well as many members of civil society was postponed indefinitely in 2007

#### *Present crisis*

The old walled city of Damascus is very close to the rebel held suburb of Jobar and receives occasional shelling that has already touched the Omayyad Mosque, the citadel, the Madrassa Jaqmaqia and schoolchildren. The traditional suburb of Midan in the south was the subject of clashes for several days in July 2012. According to photographs posted on the Internet, the fighting that took place in this suburb caused the demolition of some traditional houses. These are not localized and it is not sure whether located in the World Heritage buffer zone or not.

A situation of armed confrontation in urban can easily lead to damage and destruction. In old Damascus, the danger would be even higher than elsewhere, due to the nature of the building materials and the vulnerability to fire and their spread.

When a situation of peace will prevail, the pressure for rapid reconstruction will be felt in all Syrian Historic districts. One would have to remember an almost century old lessons of a century old soon, yet so contrasted the beautiful restoration of the Azem Palace and questionable disappearance of the entire Sidi Amoud residential neighborhood.

Based on the precedents of the cities of Aleppo and Homs, a set of recommendations was developed by ICOMOS, UNESCO and ICCROM provided in January 2014 to the



Municipality of Damascus and the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) under the title of Preparedness and response to a possible heritage emergency in the Old City of Damascus. Main proposals include:

*Preventive measures*

- Conduct a survey of the infrastructural networks (water, electricity) as well as shelters within the Old City and historic areas, together with the concerned agencies. Identify the most vulnerable zones.
- Check that shelters of the Old City are accessible and equipped for the safety of the inhabitants. Check that fire hydrants and fire extinguishers exist in key locations and are working; review procedures for their operations, if necessary through operational tests.
- Ensure that explosive material stored around the historic areas and old city are removed.
- Secure archival materials (all, but particularly those related to the heritage of the City, such as historic maps, surveys, architectural drawings, photographs etc.), establishing an order of priority, and digitalise them as much as possible. Make several copies and distribute them in different safe locations, including abroad;
- Identify possible safe storage areas where valuable movable items could be moved in case of emergency. Secure in these locations the most precious items that can be easily transported. Keep a record of what is where, make several copies of it and protect it in safe locations;
- Secure *in situ* heavy movable items that cannot be transported. Place anti-explosion films on glass surfaces near precious cultural objects (show-cases, windows). Screw plywood over windows or use tape to reduce shattering. Move objects away from windows. Also remove important items from underground storage, as this area might be filled with water. If possible, move outdoor cultural object indoors, or secure them.
- Protect important surfaces (such as mosaics, decorated surfaces, frescoes) by means of textile sheets, sand, sand bags, scaffolding and/or masonry walls, while ensuring the reversibility of those actions;
- Block access to Minarets or belfries, to prevent their possible use for military purposes, by means of masonry walls, ensuring the reversibility of preventive measures.
- Request to shop keepers within the Souk to clean their shops and remove as much as possible any flammable material and obsolete electrical equipment to reduce risk of fire and allow swift evacuation.
- Continue awareness raising initiatives among the population and also targeting the conflicting parties, including through radio and TV programmes, highlighting the importance of protecting all heritage resources since they are critical for the future sustainable development of the country and its cultural identity.

*Emergency Plans*

- Establish an Emergency Team from Maktab Anbar, including a Coordinator and specific teams responsible for each sector of the Old City and its historic areas, as well as for other areas of heritage significance
- Contact the army, the police, the fire brigades etc. to raise their awareness on the risks, and discuss with them what has to be undertaken in case of emergency, in the Old City and/or in sensitive sites. Establish a list of contacts of key persons working for external agencies that may be of assistance in case of emergency, such as fire brigades, police, civil protection, army etc.
- Make contact with local communities through community leaders, public appeals, and existing groups and associations – including shop-keepers within the souk through the local chamber of commerce - and sound their interest/availability to be involved, on a voluntary basis, in the emergency response for the protection of the inhabitants, their houses, shops and the historic areas and the Old City in general.
- Develop Emergency Response Plans, describing clear procedures and roles for each member of the teams for different emergency scenarios. Ensure the access for emergency service. All

roads and access points should be identified and chosen according to different scenarios. Water supplies also should be identified. The team should include as well someone in charge of dealing with communication among the members of the team as well as someone responsible for communication with the media and with documenting the events. Evacuation plan for collections and also heritage sites is necessary. Emergency exits should be also well identified. Make sure the emergency plans and the lists of contacts are known and available to all those concerned, and that they are aware of what are their roles and responsibilities;

- Acquire and stock essential supplies and materials for use in case of emergency to protect historic buildings and movable cultural objects. These may include basic materials for urgent repairs and consolidation of damaged built structures, as well as for the water-proofing of roofs and exposed areas, such as scaffolding, sand, lime, wooden structures etc
- Fallen debris from historic buildings should remain in place and protected whenever possible. If the debris are to be cleared, make sure that important architectural elements and precious decorative details are rescued, catalogues and stored in safe locations. Refer to Guidelines jointly prepared by ICOMOS and ICCROM in First-Aid Course materials already provided to the DGAM.

The worst will hopefully never happen, but the described list of action would however provide a better risk preparedness for less dramatic situations. The best protection would anyway be provided if all fighting parties would agree to avoid combat in and around Cultural Heritage sites and respect The Hague 1954 Convention.

## **Aleppo**

### *Presentation*

Located at the crossroads of several trade routes since the 2nd millennium B.C., Aleppo was ruled successively by the Hittites, Assyrians, Akkadians, Greeks, Romans, Omayyads, Ayyubids, Mameluks and Ottomans who left their stamp on the city. The Citadel, the 12th-century Great Mosque and various 16th and 17th-centuries madrassas, residences, khans and public baths, all form part of the city's cohesive, unique urban fabric.

The monumental Citadel of Aleppo, a former acropolis, rising above the souks, mosques and madrasas of the old walled city, is testament to Arab military might from the 12th to the 14th centuries. With evidence of past occupation by civilizations dating back to the 10th century B.C., the citadel contains the remains of mosques, palace and bath buildings. Excavations have uncovered a Hittite temple. The walled city that grew up around the citadel bears evidence of the early Greco-Roman street layout and contains remnants of 6th century Christian buildings, medieval walls and gates, mosques and madrasas relating to the Ayyubid and Mameluk development of the city, and later mosques and palaces of the Ottoman period. Outside the walls, the Bab al-Faraj quarter to the Northwest, the Jdeideh area to the north and other areas to the south and west, contemporary with these periods of occupation of the walled city contain important religious buildings and residences.

Late in the 19th century, new districts built according to western modes of planning began to take place outside the historical urban area. This building activity continued into the next century. Public officials and urban planning professionals believed that the courtyard house and the traditional neighborhood structure of the Old City were no longer adaptable to the living and planning demands of the 20th Century. The more affluent families wanted to move to the new areas. The old courtyard houses were not believed to be compatible with “modern lifestyle”.

New planning directives were imposed on the Old City successively as of 1899. In the early 1950s, a new master plan imposed major roads cutting through the historic fabric. This intervention caused considerable damage. Apart from the destruction and abandonment of historical buildings, whole neighbourhoods were isolated in between the new roads. Multi-story buildings sprang up alongside the new streets. Pollution and increased traffic were an immediate side effect. Furthermore, the integrity and privacy of the areas directly behind the multi-storey buildings was adversely affected. The decay and uncertainty of the future of the urban areas played into the devaluation of the real estate base as well as land speculations. The living environment of entire neighbourhoods was compromised and their social coherence was disrupted. The limited municipal funds available for development were channelled outside the Old City to create new areas planned according to European standards. Services within the Old City deteriorated, as funding was limited for the day to day upgrading and maintenance. The very existence of the historic fabric and the lifestyle it represented were in danger. In the last three decades of last century, the population within the demarcated historical zone decreased by about one third. The number of inhabitants was reduced to about 100,000 in historic districts. Negative effects also emerged in the form of structural decay and economic devaluation.

#### *Rehabilitation projects before the war*

In a bid to raise awareness of the importance of the living heritage of the City, Old Aleppo was registered as a World Heritage Site in 1986. It measures 364 ha. This international recognition increased public and private awareness of the social, economic, and cultural importance of preserving the Old City. The Committee for the Protection of the Old City of Aleppo was commissioned to advise and suggest actions directed towards heritage preservation. Two reports were prepared leading to the abandonment of the previous master plan within the historic zone. An interim new building code, designed to control and direct restoration and new construction, was subsequently adopted.

These steps proved insufficient to reverse the process of dilapidation. The historic continuity of the Old City in its traditional form relied on its economic and social vitality and the ability of its residents to maintain and revitalize their homes and neighbourhoods. The divestment of resources and out migration from the historic areas seriously reduced the day-to-day ability of the residents to care for their living spaces. A new concept of urban management had to be introduced to cope with the current situation.

A comprehensive overall strategy for the rehabilitation of the Old City was therefore prepared. The complex nature of urban rehabilitation, its inter-disciplinary approach, and its extensive finances prompted the City of Aleppo to seek assistance. The German Government and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development were asked to participate. Both responded favourably and the project was born.

Project objectives meant taking immediate steps to address the urgent needs of the Old City residents. These include: emergency home repair for lower income families, maintenance and rehabilitation of dilapidated public infrastructure. It is hoped that public investments will encourage the residents to actively participate in the rehabilitation process. The project included several phases:

- *Phase 0: (1992 – 1994)* Preparation and surveys: Charting the terrain. Detailed surveys were conducted to evaluate the existing conditions in the Old City and to identify priority intervention areas.

- *Phase I: (1994 – 1997)* Planning and pilot projects: Developing the rehabilitation instruments. General comprehensive planning was used to incorporate all aspects of urban management (land use, housing, traffic, infrastructure, social services, monument preservation, and public participation). The general plans were then elaborated on the local level in the Action areas. Early programs were initiated in the form of micro-credit loans to assist lower income families in the urgent restoration of their homes. Participatory measures were initiated in the Action Areas to identify needs, prioritize interventions and monitor results. Contacts to other involved institutions were established to initiate joint programs.

- *Phase II: (1997 – 2000)* Establishing institution and procedures: first implementation phase. The planning system was refined as a result of feed back from field implementation (infrastructure, social services, traffic, urban facades). Contact to other urban stakeholders enabled the elaboration of an urban economy outlook for the Old City. The micro-credit system was widened to incorporate complex house restoration and architectural preservation. The intensive and comprehensive work program necessitated the establishment of a more permanent institutional structure: The Directorate of the Old City.

- *Phase III: (2001 – 2004)* Developing sustainable management and financing tools: second implementation and consolidation phase. New funding schemes were being tested to encourage environmentally friendly enterprises. Housing programs were elaborated to include funding from other donors. Infrastructure maintenance is programmed to insure efficient management. Traffic was regulated with an eye to the general urban development of the City at large. Project staff assumes the managerial role within this complex and comprehensive approach to urban rehabilitation.

From the outset, the project took an integrative and complex planning approach. However, comprehensive planning is not limited to analysis and theoretical work, it also involves preliminary implementation. The comprehensive planning started as a 'top down' process and implementation follows a bottom-up approach. The Project's main objective was not to establish a specific system of urbanization or to define an architectural style. Indeed, the goal is to implement a sustainable institutional, technical and financial set-up to secure the long-term rehabilitation process. An impressive quantity of houses and infrastructure was already rehabilitated by the end of the 2000s. This urban rehabilitation project was one of the most successful in the Arab region.

The Aga Khan Heritage Cities Program (AKHCP) also added its own participation. In 2002, its major urban improvement project commenced in the perimeter area of Aleppo Citadel, which was devised in close collaboration with the Aleppo Old City office. The project included significant investment in landscaping around the Citadel, creation of a pedestrian zone at its entrance, traffic planning and conservation of key buildings. The objective was to enhance the Citadel's place in the city and realise its potential as a significant contributor to economic development in the old city.

As part of its then ongoing activities, AKHCP was in the early stages of a project to create a park in an area of waste ground just outside the city walls at Bab Qinnestrine. Social projects

were also being implemented in several adjacent, mostly low-income residential areas, around the proposed park site, with the aim of raising living standards. These included vocational training, education and health programmes. The thrust of these efforts in Aleppo was to enhance Aleppo's historic urban fabric and stitch together two attractive poles on the northern and southern end, thereby realising the potential for these projects to become significant contributors to urban regeneration projects in the historic centre, to the economic development of the Old City and to improve the overall quality of life.

The 'Urban Historic Archive and Documentation Center for Aleppo' (UHADCA) was established as a sub-section of the Old City Directorate (DOC) to be in charge of safeguarding and documenting historic and original records, as well as a documentation centre for any data available on the urban and architectural history of Aleppo. This was based on the fact that Aleppo, although it is one of the oldest continually inhabited urban centres of the world, has been painfully lacking an appropriate archival space to safeguard its written, drawn, and photographed heritage on urban history. Therefore, the establishment of a well managed 'Archive and Documentation Center' locally administered and open to a broad audience, was required.

With support from the former German Development Service (DED) and the association of the 'Friends of the Old City of Aleppo', the archive project was started in July 2008 as a cooperation project of the DOC and former GTZ (now GIZ) within the framework of the *Urban Development Programme (UDP)*.

The UHADCA consisted of two main sub-sections: 'Urban Development and Architecture' and 'Urban Life'.

The three main pillars of the UHADCA were:

1. Allocating and gathering all relevant and available data about the city's development of Aleppo,
2. Preserving and repairing this historic data appropriately and for long-term conservation,
3. Making data accessible for future research and education with the help of a database.

The UHADCA was established on the premises of the Shibani complex, a former Franciscan convent that was restored in the Framework of Syrian-German cooperation. It was located in the heart of the Old City and hosted several offices and facilities for social and cultural activities (Goethe Institute, AKTC), and vocational training activities.

The archive did not only collect physical data (originals), but aimed at digitizing and duplicating the collected documents. Therefore, one of the essential elements of the UHADCA was the set-up of a modern and well-maintained digital database, in collaboration with the Shoman Foundation, Amman. The larger amount of data between 2008-2011 was digital material, provided by different sources.





*Aleppo. The Omayyad mosque and ancient city in the early 1960s - DGAM*

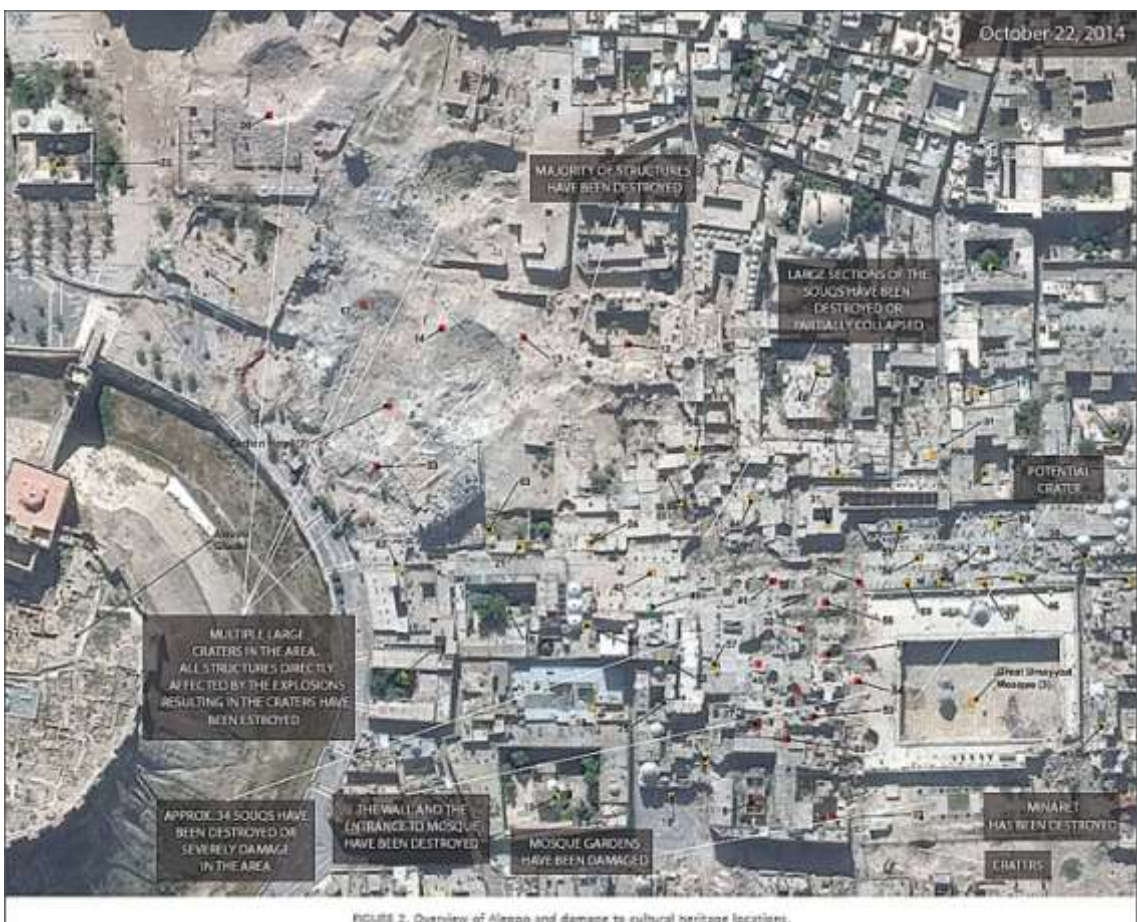


FIGURE 2. Overview of Aleppo and damage to cultural heritage locations.

*Aleppo. Destruction around the citadel and of the Omayyad mosque in 2014 - UNITAR*

During the initial and consolidation phase, the UHADCA allocated the following data:

- Plans and historical photos of Aleppo of any age,
- Cadastral plans of the City of Aleppo,
- Master Plans from the French period and afterwards,
- Architectural analysis and documentation.

Through the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2011, the city's UHADCA has been in extreme danger. Unfortunately, the hard copies of the collected documents are allegedly lost, which makes a comprehensive recovery of the archive's documents impossible. Fortunately, digital copies of the whole inventory are still available; safeguarding the 'Urban Historic Archive and Documentation Centre of Aleppo' is therefore an urgent task.

An UHADCA exhibition and systematic documentation resulted in a publication called 'The Aleppo Archive', funded by GIZ and the 'Association of the Friends of the Old City of Aleppo'. The publication serves as one of the basis for continuous research towards a future reconstruction of Aleppo's urban heritage. Current activities include a mapping of damage, but also of stakeholders who need to be considered in the course of the documentation process.

#### *Fighting inside the Old City*

Armed rebellion started in some Aleppo popular suburbs and in neighbouring rural areas during 2011. A major rebel offensive was later launched towards the centre of the city in July 2012. After minor fluctuations, the situation seems stabilized now, with a government held area to the West (1, 000,000 persons) and an opposition held area to the East (350,000 persons). The historic city became unfortunately a front line between warring parties. Every possible kind of weapon was used: small firearms, Molotov cocktails, Improvised Explosive Devices, rockets, mortar, "hellcannons", artillery, classical bombs, barrel bombs, booby-trapped cars, tunnels loaded with explosives and so on. Even how some monuments were destroyed is not clear, the narratives being too different. The old city is terribly damaged and its residents have flown away. The famous vaulted souks were burned and looted from the beginning. The Omayyad Mosque changed hands four times at least. The museum of Arts and Popular Traditions was looted. The citadel always remained in the loyalist army hands, but it constantly remained a major objective for rebel groups, for strategic as well as for symbolic reasons. It was often shelled and its entrance tower still bears the marks of a heavy attack. One of its towers collapsed in 2015 and the fate of the Hittite temple is unclear. In 2014, several tunnel explosions destroyed most historic buildings located at the entrance of the citadel: al-Otrush mosque, madrasa Khusruwiyeh, madrassa Sultaniyeh, khan al-Shouna, hammam Yalbugha as well as late ottoman buildings like the former serail and the Carlton hotel (an hospital previously). Craters indicate the location of the main explosions. The last one, right close to the entrance dates back to 2015.

According to the UNITAR published aerial survey of 2014, 22 Aleppo monuments are totally destroyed, 48 severely damaged, 33 moderately damaged and 32 possibly damaged. These figures have certainly increased ever since.

War had other consequences. A sniper shot an architect sent by the municipality to assess the damage to the Omayyad mosque. A free municipality was set up which tried to save manuscripts, and protect mihrabs and minbars together with activists. The DGAM digitized 1,500 plans of historical monuments in February 2014. Representatives of the DGAM and of the Opposition Task Force met at UNESCO in September 2014 to study how local frozen combat areas (“cultural protected zones”) promoted then by UN envoy Stefan de Mitsura, could be implemented in Aleppo. The Omayyad mosque and the national museum appeared as candidates. As this plan was not endorsed, the contents of the museum had to be evacuated to Damascus. Institutions in Germany are very active and UNESCO has convened a meeting on Aleppo in June 2015.

It appears that a complete assessment of remaining structures and infrastructures is necessary of course, but the infrastructure network may have to be largely redone, particularly where tunnel explosions occurred. Some archaeological surprises may be discovered and not only reconstruction, restoration and rehabilitation are to be taken into account but a balanced revitalisation process should be set up including housing, commerce and crafts with the participation of stakeholders, taking into account the experience of other countries with a post-trauma experience.

### **3• Safeguarding actions and stakeholders**

Many stakeholders are involved in the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Syria. Our aim here is not to review them all, nor to assess all their past and present activities. This would need substantial reports to be constantly updated. It is however important to mention the range of actors and their main domains of interest.



*Raising awareness campaign poster by the DGAM*

#### *DGAM*

First of all, the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) is to be mentioned. It exists since the independence of Syria and has about 2,500 agents with local directorates in every region. Its action is based on the Law of Antiquities of 1963, which is flexible enough for listing historical urban districts. Since the beginning of the crisis the DGAM has been able to evacuate the collection of most museums into safe places, to establish tens of thousand computer data files of museum artefacts with hundreds of digital photographs. Its website



publishes news and reports about damages to cultural sites and a GIS based programs allows to have an online monitoring. Restoration works or studies begin wherever possible, like at the Damascus Omayyad mosque, the Krak des Chevaliers or at a larger scale on Homs monuments. Training sessions are organized for the staff and raising awareness campaigns are directed towards the general public. The DGAM acts like a responsible state (not government) service and leaves all bridges open with its agents, specialists and communities wherever they are located in the country. Its DG, Maamoun Abdelkarim is often invited in to attend meetings in Europe (Berlin, Paris, London, Rome, etc.). He even delivered a speech at the Italian Parliament last autumn. The DGAM agents paid a heavy toll to the war with about 15 casualties; Most of them were killed while on duty. The horrific assassination of Khaled al Asaad by Daesh in Palmyra in August 2015 has been internationally condemned.



*Khaled al Asaad - DGAM*

#### *Other Stakeholders*

Other institutions in Syria are to be mentioned like the University of Damascus, the syndicate of architects and engineers and its different branches like in Homs. Syrian opposition in exile created an Heritage task force at its Interim Ministry of Cultural and Family Affairs. Activists with a professional background have also have made contributions like in Aleppo and Maarat al Nooman in the North and in Bosra to the South. Other groups abroad with a consistent Syrian participation provide participate in monitoring, information and sometime training, like Heritage for Peace in Spain, the Day After in the US, Association de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine (APSA), Patrimoine Archéologique Syrien en Danger (APSAD) and Ila Souria in France. This latter one has organized meetings about urban reconstruction in Paris and Montreal.

Most foreign archaeology institutions, which were active in Syria, remain interested directly or through their scholars. One would have to mention the Louvre and IREMMO in France, Qotbus University, Berlin Museum of Islamic Art and the Deutsche Archäologik Institute in Germany, La Sapienza university and Priorita Cultura in Italy, Oxford University (EAMENA, Manar al Athar) and BANFEA in the UK, ASOR, AIA, AAAS, Penn Cultural Heritage Center, the Smithsonian Institute, the Universities of Chicago, Harvard, Yale and UCL in the US.

Grants are provided by foreign governments or institutions, like in the United States (Department of State), the Netherlands (Prince Claus), Belgium and Sweden. Some Foundations are also to be mentioned like the World Monument Fund, the Getty, the Global Heritage Fund, etc.

### *UNESCO*

UNESCO has particularly been active through the involvement of its Director General and its statements. It spearheaded the combat against illicit trafficking of looted artefacts, particularly by contributing to the Security Council resolution 2199 adopted in February 2015.

Its Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage project is a European Union funded project, supported by the Flemish government, and aims to provide an operational response to halt the on-going loss of cultural heritage and prepare post-conflict priority actions in Syria.

The project is a first step to monitor the damage and loss of cultural heritage, to mitigate its destruction, and to prepare post-conflict priority actions, as well as establish medium and long-term actions to restore normalcy and social cohesion in the country.

- 1 Monitor and assess the cultural heritage situation in Syria through updated and continued knowledge and documentation shared by UNESCO, its partners and all stakeholders involved in safeguarding Syria's cultural heritage, which are widely disseminated on the Observatory of Syrian Cultural Heritage.
- 2 Mitigate the destruction and loss of Syrian cultural heritage through national and international awareness-raising efforts.
- 3 Protect and safeguard Syrian cultural heritage through enhanced technical assistance and capacity building for national stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Heritage Project was officially launched on 1 March 2014 for a period of three years. The UNESCO Project Management Unit is based in the UNESCO Field Office in Beirut (Lebanon) to ensure geographical proximity with Syria and readiness to undertake field missions, as well as swift communication with national partners and access to Syrian stakeholders.

UNESCO has also held at its Headquarter a dozen of restricted or general experts meetings, including one devoted to the case of Aleppo with participants from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Bosnia, Germany, etc.

It has also set up a campaign called “#Heritage4Peace” and tried to promote the concept of Cultural Protected Zones”. It has also privileged contacts with satellite imagery through UNITAR and has frequent contacts or partnerships with ICOMOS, ICOM, ICCROM, ARC/WH (Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage), Interpol or WCO (Western Customs).

### *ICOMOS*

ICOMOS, has no national committee in Syria yet, just individual members. An “ad hoc” working group emerged however in 2012, with members of CIVVIH (Historic Towns and Villages) and ICORP (Risk preparedness). Its activities included monitoring the situation of cultural heritage, in informing the media, in providing assistance to local authorities, in participating in the definition of international programmes and its pioneering initiative of conducting distance training for Syrian cultural heritage professionals in 2013, using the state of the art communication technology.

UNESCO regularly consulted the Working Group. Given their contributions ICOMOS and ICCROM became the official partners of UNESCO in its project for emergency safeguarding of Syrian heritage and its plan for Safeguarding of Iraq's Cultural Heritage.





*Damascus National Museum. Training course on risk preparedness by ICOMOS-ICORP and ICCROM in January 2013 for about 70 trainees – DGAM*

In November 2014, the 18th General Assembly of ICOMOS unanimously requested that ICOMOS “responds now to the cultural tragedy in Syria and Iraq among its priority areas of activity”. This resolution tasked the Working Group to “coordinate ICOMOS’ activities related to monitoring, studying, communicating, training, assisting and planning for the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq, as long as the present conflict and its subsequent consequences continue.”

The monitoring activities of the group implied not only following the general public news, but also assessing the activities of stakeholders for the benefit Syrian Heritage and identifying priority actions. Partners were UNESCO, ICCROM, ARC/WH, ASOR with the support of some ISCs, national committees and individual Syrian members. A memorandum of understanding was signed with CyArk, a non-for profit US organisation. The messages to the media are turning positive with the praise of Syria Monuments Women and Men. Training concentrated in the beginning on Risk preparedness. Tactical and strategical approaches were defined.

#### *ICOMOS ongoing projects*

As the collection and the digitisation of architectural archives appeared important, the Project ANQA (ICOMOS/CyArk) looks for financial partners and has already provided a first stage of training to architects and engineers from the DGAM in UNESCO Beirut premises. They will undertake 3D surveys of a selected set of Damascus monuments (a sort of Noah Ark) including: a palace, a hammam, a bimaristan, a madrassa, a mosque, a church and a synagogue. Offered equipment will later allow this group a sustained activity in Damascus and other parts of Syria.

Project AMAL undertaken with ICCROM, ARC/WH and the Global Heritage Fund (GHF° aims at creating an e-platform and keeping on developing distance training programmes as an alternative way for delivering knowledge and technical support to experts in conflict-afflicted areas,

A training project is proposed to the EU UNESCO Emergency Project in Beirut for two themes: risk preparedness and reconstruction in historic towns and villages. This last project would benefit from the ICOMOS colloquium about “Post-trauma reconstruction” in March 2016.



*Al madrasa al Jaqmaqia, Damascus. Some ANQA project trainees are beginning their survey exercises, February 2016 – DGAM*

No similar large scale urban destruction of historic districts was identified in Iraq. However the damage due to bombardment to over a 100 houses from Fuleiha district in World Heritage Old Sanaa raises serious concerns.

#### **4• Epilogue**

The situations are certainly different from conflict to conflict, from country to country as well as from city to city. There is however a lot to learn from WWI and WWII examples in Europe. Recent conflicts in the Balkans and Lebanon also carry a valuable teaching. The three above presented case studies may carry lessons, not only for Syria but also to other traumatic situations in terms of risk preparedness, restoration and reconstruction.

The Hague convention of 1954 that was set up after WWII was of no help to ensure a better protection of cultural sites, even if it already included a provision for “non international conflicts”. Would additions make it more adapted to civil wars as in Syria?

The restoration and possible reconstruction of monuments and towns in Syria will represent a formidable technical and financial challenge. Any Syrian government emerging from war will be pressed by an extraordinary array of competing demands.

General guidelines may have to be developed by ICOMOS before possibly developing case by case detailed planning proposals in the future.

Urban speculation would have to be kept at bay and strong institutions and regulations would be needed to advocate the cause of cultural heritage.

Urban Reconstruction should rely on coordinated multidisciplinary approach, within a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and heritage policy with the participation of inhabitants.

The actions of public and private stakeholders should be coordinated. Positive dynamics should be triggered and encouraged.

In any case, a good knowledge of local communities and of previous local achievements or concerns is needed together with an adequate architectural documentation.

Involved reconstruction processes may unfortunately still need decades of involvement and efforts.



*Palmyra. The author at the age of 16 in Bel temple.*

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