Safeguarding Syrian archaeological Heritage: humanities and natural sciences

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Recent efforts to mitigate the on-going, relentless destruction of archaeological and historical heritage in the countries of the Middle East emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary work involving both the humanities and the natural sciences. Typically, projects bring a broad spectre of state-of-the-art technologies into play, often involving advanced analytical tools for virtual reconstruction. On the other hand, researchers acknowledge that it is vital to understand issues of identity, power and socio-economic development as a necessary condition to the success of any heritage initiative. We discuss these connections using as case studies two heritage projects recently concluded. The project *Scanning for Syria* involved producing virtual reproductions of Late Bronze Age (1200 BCE) cuneiform texts. The project *Focus Raqqa* began an assessment of the archaeological treasures lost from the archaeological museum in the city of Raqqa and a digital inventory for international police organizations. Both projects looked beyond the contemporary bays towards future reconstruction, had a tremendous public outreach, posed methodological challenges as well as ethical questions and paved the way for inspiring future work.