



Updating the report on the status of Syrian antiquities and their protection measures (since the beginning of the crisis until June 15, 2013)

The painful events taking place in Syria all through the current crisis have reflected negatively on the Syrian cultural heritage; that some archaeological sites in conflict zones have been subjected to acts of vandalism and plunder. In addition, operations of smuggling antiquities and artifacts as well as acts of antiquities forgery have been active recently. As well, some historic buildings were damaged in different governorates .

In response, the DGAM has been making relentless efforts to reduce the impact of the current crisis on the antiquities and sites. Furthermore, it has, in actual fact, achieved a lot of success in protecting all Syrian museums nationwide and securing their holdings; reclaiming part of the stolen artifacts by means of border seizures and most importantly bringing about positive results as regards the protection of several sites owing to cooperation with the local community.



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The following is an up-to-date version of the report, documenting the damage and violations at the different Syrian museums and archaeological sites since the beginning of the crisis until the 15th of June, 2013, which was prepared relying on reports and information obtained from the DGAM through departments of antiquities in the different governorates:

Assessing the Status Quo

a. The Syrian museums

All museums were emptied of antiquities which were wrapped and transferred to safe places; additional iron gates were installed to all museums, and all the important historic documents and manuscripts were transferred to special and secure storehouses to be protected against theft, arson and humidity. Generally speaking, the Syrian museums are all in good condition set aside some damages to the following:

- Thefts were limited to two historic pieces: one of them is a gilt bronze statue, dating back to the Aramaic period, from Hama Museum, and the other is a piece of marble stone from Apamea Museum.
- The DGAM, in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Raqqa and the staff in charge of the Museum of Raqqa, has



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confirmed that antiquities of the museum are intact and in good condition, and that the most significant antiquities have been transferred to a safe place. In addition, all museum halls have been emptied, and the antiquities are kept in fortified and secure warehouses.

- The storehouse of Hergla archaeological building, Raqqa, has been subjected to a series of violations by some armed men specialized in antiquities theft. However, the storehouse is still protected thanks to the efforts of the guards of the site and the employees of the Directorate of Antiquities in addition to the local community in the surrounding region who are assisting the guards and the employees.

So, in order to ensure the safety and protection of the objects in the storehouse, the workers of Raqqa Department of Antiquities emptied out the storehouse and transferred its objects to a safer place having coordinated with and gotten the permission of the central administration of the DGAM in Damascus to do that.

- the Aleppo Museum of Folk Traditions has been subjected to theft seeing that thieves took advantage of the fact that guards were not present due to violent clashes in the region. Hence, the thieves made use of one of the houses adjacent to the museum, made a hole in one of its walls, sneaked into the museum and managed to steal some traditional pieces of art such as glassware, Baghdadi daggers, six spears and some garments.



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- The National Museum of Aleppo along with Deir ez-Zor Museum suffered from losses such as windows and doors smashing due to bombings in neighboring areas.
- Department of Antiquities in Maarrat al-Nu'man confirms that all Maarrat Museum halls are sound and intact, and its holdings are safe. However, the building was subjected to some damages caused by clashes nearby. Media reports have been discussing the loss of potteries and some other antiquities, which cannot be confirmed without conducting a full inventory, bearing in mind that the Department of Antiquities in Maarrat is more inclined to disagree with the news.
- Taibat *al*-Imam Museum, Hama, has recently suffered from some damages to its windows and doors. Nonetheless, the mosaic panel is in good condition.
- Folk art museums in Aleppo, Homs and Deir ez-Zor were subjected to minor damages. However, all archeological pieces of art were transferred to a safe place.
- Seventeen pieces of pottery as well as some clay dolls were stolen from the exhibition hall in Jaabar Castle.
- The collections of Doura Europos Museum were stolen (replicas not originals). Moreover, the security room in addition to the tickets office were sabotaged.



b. The archaeological buildings and sites

1st- Clashes

- the Directorate of Antiquities of Aleppo has confirmed the destruction of the minaret of the Great Umayyad Mosque of Aleppo, one of the most important archaeological mosques in Syria. The minaret is considered one of the most amazing Islamic minarets in the old city of Aleppo inscribed under the UNESCO World Heritage List. Nevertheless, the DGAM has not been able to obtain more details or information in this respect down to difficulty in accessing and inspecting the place. Furthermore, an armed group disassembled the wooden minbar (a raised platform) of Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo and claimed to be transferring it to another safe place even though that happened without any prior knowledge of the archaeological authorities involved in protecting the cultural heritage in Aleppo.
- Due to clashes, hundreds of historic antique shops as well as goods and new wooden doors were burned down in old Aleppo souks such as Al-zerb, Al-Obbi, Al-Atme, Al-Attareen, Al-Niswan, Al-Soof, Al-Sagha.
- Pictures published by some news agencies have shown that Bimaristan Arghun, Aleppo, (also known as the Museum of Medicine and Science) suffered from some damages – which was confirmed by the Directorate of Antiquities in Aleppo. Nevertheless, it seems impossible to determine the nature and



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extent of the damage due to difficulty in accessing the place for the time being.

- Some buildings in Old Aleppo were damaged as a result of the clashes.
- Some castles (Madiq Castle, Krak des Chevaliers, the entrance to the Citadel of Aleppo and its northern tower, Shayzar Castle, Rahba Castle) have undergone minor damages in certain positions.
- Um al-Zennar Church in addition to other churches and some old souks in Homs were damaged due to clashes.
- Al-Omari Mosque, Daraa, was subjected to damage as a result of shells affecting its sahn (i.e. courtyard), minaret and surroundings, according to a report by the Daraa Department of Antiquities clarifying the difficulty in documenting and inspecting the damage directly due to the current situation.
- Historic Hrak Mosque in Izraa suffered from damages in its western wall, northern wall and part of its roof. As well, the minarets of both the old mosque in the city of Sheik Meskeen and the old mosque in the town of Mahajja were damaged. Those two latter mosques are registered as traditional non-historic buildings.
- Mabrak el-Naqa building and Nymph Temple (also publicly known as King's Daughter's Bed) in Bosra were damaged.



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Furthermore, the only remaining lintel above the columns was damaged as well as some old houses in Bosra.

- Some old houses in the town of Nawa were subjected to destruction because of clashes.
- Clashes in Palmyra are taking place in orchards outside the city. The damage was minor, specifically, the inner wall of the west façade of the Temple of Bel.

2nd- Construction violations

Unlike practices such as secret excavations, vandalism and looting which receive high resistance and are fought against by the local people of the areas surrounding the archaeological sites, the local community does not show the same degree of cooperation with regard to recent construction violations that are prevalent as some people are taking advantage of the state of chaos and due to difficulties in controlling these violations taking place around the archaeological sites.

3rd- Excavating and vandalizing archaeological sites

Antiquities thieves have become active at the far-off archeological sites, taking advantage of the difficulty in ensuring protection and the few



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number of guards. The followings are the most serious violations:

1- Hasaka:

- The Hasaka Directorate of Antiquities pointed out in a report that the archeological sites north of the governorate have so far been in good condition as no illegal excavations took place, especially the important sites where Syrian and foreign missions have been conducting explorations for years. Those sites are (Tell Mozan, Tell Leilan, Tell Beydar, and Tell Arbeed), and they include some of the most significant ancient kingdoms in the region. The directorate also asserted that Hamokar archaeological site is fine; however, nearby hills suffered from secret excavations. As for (Tell Berry, Tell Brak, and Tell Halaf), they have not been subjected to attacks or sabotage.

The report showed that the absence of vandalism acts at these important sites is the result of the cooperation of the locals and popular protection units in the area.

- There are no specific details or information as regards the archaeological sites south of the governorate seeing that archaeologists and guards cannot access the area. However, some residents of the southern region have reported noticing illegal excavation at some archaeological sites like Tell Ajaja.



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2- Raqqa:

- The Directorate of Antiquities in Raqqa indicated in a report that Jaabar Castel is safe but closed for the time being due to the presence of gunmen in the area and the neighboring villages.
- Some archaeological sites in Raqqa have been suffering from illegal excavation, on which the DGAM has not been able to obtain any detailed information since the guards cannot access the place down to the violent clashes. Thus, the DGAM has relied on information received from some members of the local community in the region regarding the situation at these sites.

3- Deir ez-Zor:

- Both Mari and Doura Europos sites are subject to systematic acts of looting, vandalism and destruction violating their sanctity by means of fierce and secret excavations using heavy machinery. Moreover, according to reports received from Deir ez-Zor last April, the number of pits resulting from illegal excavations in search of archaeological finds at Doura Europos site has amounted to 300 different-sized pits all over the site, particularly Bait Lysias, the markets, the baths and the synagogue as well as the archaeological buildings within the site. What is more, unconfirmed information received by the department has referred to the discovery of a white stone statue of a two-winged lady carrying a child. In addition, the number of pits at Mari site



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has totaled about 50 since April. Illegal excavations have focused on the Royal Palace, the southern gate, the baths, Temple of Ishtar, Temple of Dagan and the Temple of the Goddess of Spring. Besides, the accommodations of the expedition as well as the visitors' center have been burgled, and some violations have taken place at al-Sayal site.

- Tell Sheikh Hamad site, Deir ez-Zor, has been subject to blatant and illegal excavations. In addition, the accommodations of the mission working at the site have been burgled. Also dignitaries in the village have intervened to put an end to the digs and the resulting damage.
- Illegal excavations have affected Tell es-Sin site, and the number of pits has exceeded 280 pits leading to uncovering a Roman burial chamber containing five whole skulls and skeletons. Consequently, the Department of Antiquities of Deir ez-Zor asked the guard at the site to close this burial chamber.
- Halbia site witnessed blatant excavations using heavy machinery in the area of the north tower cemeteries adjacent to al-Harbi Bridge, to the east along the Euphrates River and next to the basilica located in the middle of the site to the west along the basalt plateau. The thieves stole the protective doors of the entrances to the gates of the towers and the entrances to Halbia archaeological site, Deir ez-Zor. Furthermore, the excavation tools of the Syrian-French archaeological mission working at the site were stolen as well as one of the Directorate of Tourism caravans servicing at the site. In addition, illegal excavations



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stopped long ago since they were in vain according to those conducting them.

- There are 70 1-to-4-meter-deep holes resulting from illegal excavations at al-Busayrah site.
- Excavations using heavy machinery at al-Marwanyia hills, state property and al-Masayeh stopped a month ago.
- Some people from the city of Ashara violated a part of Tell Ashara/Terqa which was settled next to the bridge with 7 meters deep and 15 meters long.

4- Idlib:

○ **Ebla:**

Illegal digging operations became active at Ebla archeological site by the end of December 2012 after a drop in such activities at an earlier time according to reports by the Directorate of Antiquities in Idlib. The reports also showed that the illegal explorations that Ebla suffered from for months are receding due to the nature of the site on the one hand as it is not easy to detect the places of treasures, and thanks to the endeavors of the villagers that put an end to those acts on the other hand.

Idlib Directorate of Antiquities provided detailed information on the acts of antiquities thieves in Ebla, which caused a lot of damage to the modern facilities of the site such as the cafeteria at the entrance to the



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northern hill and the newly constructed building southwest the site, which was supposed to be a center to receive visitors, in addition to the service room and its facilities.

As for the damages at the historic site and its relics, they, for the most part, were caused by weather conditions in winter which affected some walls, annually restored by the archaeological mission working at the site.

As well, the site suffered from damages caused by some people who focused their attention on the following sectors:

-The *Acropolis*: Random holes spread all over the courtyards of the Royal Palace (G) especially around the archive room. Thieves attempted to enter by means of digging holes below some walls in order to reach older levels not explored yet. Moreover, they partly destroyed the basalt staircase in the administrative suite of the palace with the purpose of penetrating the layers; a number of wells were searched again despite being previously excavated by the expedition there. More historic levels were sabotaged in parts of the Palace (E). Besides, some insignificant diggings took place at the top of the Acropolis.

-The Northern Palace (P) and the Great Temple of Ishtar were subjected to digging operations in some halls, but that posed no real threat. Also, some wells were searched again despite being previously excavated.

-The Southern Palace (FF), located in the slope of the Acropolis,



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suffered from vandalism and minor diggings which did not affect the building and can be repaired later.

-The perpetrators excavated several sectors in the Temple of the Rock (HH) which was a significant temple in Ebla during the ancient Bronze Age (the middle of the 3rd millennium BC). Only one hole was dug there, and one well was searched.

-The Royal Palace (Q) in addition to the fences, gates and other sectors of the historic hill were not subjected to any damage.

o **The dead cities:**

❖ Kafr Oqab site of Gebel al-Woastani: it has been subjected to destruction and damage by antiquities thieves. Moreover, information has confirmed that Kafr Oqab is the most damaged and most affected site in the region in that large and deep pits spread all over the place. Some of these pits contain virgin cemeteries which have been looted and destroyed; in addition, the southern tower has been knocked down and the nave of the church has suffered from secret digs and damage.

❖ Banassra site of Gebel al-Woastani: a large number of pits have spread all over the site; a 2 x 2m and a depth of 90cm pit has been seen in the Martirio (martyrdom) Chamber in the northern church and a similar one in the southern church. Besides, damage to the southern church has caused all the stone columns to topple down and some parts of mosaic floors to appear. In addition, a



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large sarcophagus east of the church has been destroyed.

- ❖ Qalb Lozeh of Gebel al-Aala: the church is completely intact apart from breaking four stones of the apse. In addition, a carved stone in an embossed and distorted human shape has been found at the west end of the church.
- ❖ Qarqabiza site of Gebel al-Aala: a number of archaeological walls have been damaged; moreover, the eastern wall of a house east of the church has been destroyed and several digs have been spotted.
- ❖ Kfeire site of Gebel al-Aala: excavation pits have spread all over the place; the most dangerous of which has been in the Martirio Chamber of the church. Furthermore, a small burial ground has been discovered in the bottom as a result of breaking the stone slabs.

Idlib Department of Antiquities has declared that the nature and places of excavations suggest that the thieves have contacted antiquities and excavation experts seeing that the digs are taking place in an orderly fashion focused, in general, on specific places inside the churches and underneath and around sarcophagi searching for treasures and archaeological finds. Furthermore, information obtained from the local community has confirmed that a lot of antique dealers and smugglers, Syrians and non-Syrians, Turkish in particular, are in the region.

1- Gebel az-Zawiya Park/al-Bara, which includes (al-Bara, Wadi



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Martahun, Magelya, Batirsa, Bshilla, Baoudeh, Sergella, DeLozeh, Shanshrah, and Rabeea), suffered from violations and vandalism in some parts:

Al-Bara site:

- Three stone sarcophagi inside the pyramid tomb were broken as well as a gate lintel and the door of an olive oil mill. Moreover, four historic crowns were stolen.
- Some local people are living in around 15 caves and refurbishing some others in addition to rock engraved Byzantine tombs.
- Some front parts at the site were tarnished due to clashes. These are the front parts of Abi Sufyan Castel, the pyramidal burial chamber (known as Sawmaa), the eastern façade of one of the five churches, the pyramidal burial chamber (known as Mazuqa) north and south, and the eastern façade of the Monastery.

Sergella site:

- Sign boards were broken as well as the sarcophagus at the entrance of Sergella site.
- Some villagers from Kafr Roma dwell in about 10 historic houses in



Sergella.

- The doors, windows, and switches of the entrance to the site were broken. Moreover, the office, the electricity room and the tickets office were broken into.

Wadi Martahun, Magelya, Batirsa, Bshilla, Baoudeh, and DeLozeh sites:

Some people have lived and refurbished 7 caves; in addition, secret excavation took place in scattered spots.

- 2- Gebel al-Zawyia/al-Maara Park, which includes (Jerade and Ruwiha), suffered from secret excavation, and recent building violations reached Jerada site; some façades in Jerade site were tarnished. Furthermore, the headquarters and homes of foreign expeditions were burgled in Idlib.

5- Aleppo:

- Al-Deidariya cave in Mount Simeon suffered from acts of sabotage, which included the excavation area and archaeological sectors previously explored by the mission working there; in addition, the equipment of excavations, wooden columns and boards were looted.
- Some archaeological sites in the regions surrounding Aleppo have



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been subject to damage that cannot be identified due to escalating violence. Nonetheless, according to reports, Simeon Citadel and the archaeological sites inscribed on the World Heritage List are in good condition.

6- Hama:

- Apamea site ranks as one of the most affected sites due to the ongoing secret digging operations in the east, northeast and west of the city. A comparison between two photos of Apamea archaeological site taken by satellite (the first of which was taken on July 20th, 2011, while the second was taken on April 4th, 2012), shows the amount of looting and destruction the site was subject to due to secret excavation.
- A lot of construction stones were stolen from al-Andrine historic site.

7- Homs:

- The Department of Antiquities of Palmyra has indicated that due to violent clashes in the orchards of Palmyra oasis, the archaeological area is not accessible as well as the guest house in the Temple of Bel and the storehouse located between the temple and the Triumphal Arch which houses a custodian center in



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addition to other storehouses utilized by the department and some archaeological missions to keep their equipment and some scientific samples that are not museum pieces.

- there is no information on the damage affecting the archaeological sites and hills in Hawdhit al-Kom. In addition, the department cannot exclude the accommodations of the archaeological missions from being burgled or destroyed.
- Tell al-Nabi Mando has been subject to various violations; however, there no details regarding the illegal digs or the extent of the damage caused by clashes in the region.

8- Damascus and its countryside:

- Al-Suhl site, Yabroud, has been subjected to illegal digs by some antiquities thieves in the surrounding area, who are collaborating with Syrian and Lebanese antiques dealers.
- The accommodation of the Syrian national mission working at archaeological Tell Saka site was burgled.
- Khan Atna was burgled.

9- Daraa:

- another episode of the series of fierce excavation repeats itself at Tell al-Ash'ari in Daraa; digs are taking place up the hill around its eastern and southwestern sides. Also the number of pits exceeds



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10 ones reaching a depth of 3 meters and a diameter of 5 meters, which might cause great damage later if these operations continue at this pace.

- The cultural scene in Lajat site, an open-air museum for Safaitic inscriptions, was distorted.
- Secret and limited excavation works are taking place in other places. For example, a report by the department has added that there were secret digs at Kafr Shams site (Kherbit al-Muleha) in addition to Mzerib archaeological citadel. Some historic stones were removed from the entrance to the western staircase and around the citadel by anonymous individuals, as well.

10- Lattakia, Tartus, and Sweida:

There are no damages according to reports from those cities.

11- Quneitra:

There were no damages there except for some construction violations at al-Rafid site which were dealt with together with some other construction violations.



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The DGAM through this report seeks to provide an accurate account of the archaeological and historic sites which were subjected to damages during the current crisis. Nevertheless, we would like to assert that other sites might have suffered from damages that were not documented by the antiquities departments of the governorates due to violent clashes in their surroundings.

4th- Antiquities forgery phenomenon

By way of examining samples from some confiscations, it is evident that artifacts forgery has been active lately as antiquities thieves tend to forge pieces of art and sell them as genuine ones such as mosaic panels and Palmyra statues. Antiques forgery has been around for years and it is punishable by the law.

Protection procedures



- Precautionary measures

- ❖ All archaeological and historic pieces of art were amassed in safe and secure places, and burglar alarms were installed in some museums and fortresses. In addition, the number of guards was increased.
- ❖ The Interpol was informed about the missing pieces and all the widespread mobile phone pictures believed to be of Syrian historic undiscovered and unregistered treasures thieves dug up illegally.
- ❖ Cooperation with international organizations for the purpose of exchanging ideas and visions regarding the current situation of the Syrian cultural heritage has been achieved. Moreover, ICOMOS has organized an e-learning course aiming at enhancing the skills of the Syrian national cadres in “Ways and Techniques for Protecting Cultural Heritage in Times of Conflict” with the participation of international experts from ICOMOS and ICCROM.
- ❖ The Ministry of Culture/DGAM and the specialized authorities (the army, riot forces, police, customs, governorate, municipalities, etc) have taken several measures to protect the historic sites. Thanks to this cooperation, stolen antiques were returned through confiscations in Damascus, Tartus, Palmyra, Homs, Hama, Deir ez-Zor, etc. The number of the confiscated items amounted to 4000 including beads, coins, statues and mosaic panels, though some of them were fake.
- ❖ Cooperating with the Lebanese archaeological authorities as well as



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international organizations such as the INTERPOL in the fight against trafficking in Syrian antiquities has resulted in the confiscation of 18 Syrian mosaic panels on the Lebanese borders and 73 Syrian antiquities smuggled to Lebanon, which were displayed for sale by antiques dealers. Moreover, the British Sunday Times has participated in shedding light on the issue by reporting that to the INTERPOL, which in turn has provided the DGAM with all the detailed data and photographs, which have been examined by the DGAM's experts to reveal and verify the genuineness of those antiquities. Furthermore, the DGAM is working with the Lebanese archaeological authorities in order to return these pieces officially to their country of origin after completing the necessary procedures.

- ❖ Completing the Emergency Red List on Syrian cultural objects which is used as a guiding tool contributing to shedding light on samples of the Syrian cultural heritage representing the Syrian cultural identity in order to facilitate the identification process of Syrian antiquities in addition to their protection and the restitution of the stolen ones.
- ❖ Participating in the international workshop, held in Amman, on "Regional training on Syrian cultural heritage: addressing the issue of illicit trafficking", initiated by UNESCO and contributed to by the Swiss government with the participation of representatives of heritage departments from neighboring countries, the World Customs and the International Police. The workshop has come up with numerous recommendations such as setting an international



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plan by all parties to work with the DGAM on defending and safeguarding the Syrian cultural heritage in addition to giving top priority to the completion of the Emergency Red List on Syrian cultural objects which will be developed by ICOM.

- ❖ Organizing a workshop on (capacity-building and awareness-raising on the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property), May 12-13, 2013, for the purpose of enriching the issue of Syrian antiquities smuggled illegally in terms of their cultural and historical significance to Syria, discussing the effectiveness of the local and international laws and regulations and highlighting the role of the state in raising intellectual and cognitive awareness between the segments of society as regards the national antiquities and heritage. Besides, representatives of all ministries and authorities involved in the protection of the Syrian cultural heritage as well as members of NGOs and local community, researchers, artists and writers were amongst the participants.
- ❖ Informing the UNESCO of the damage the Syrian archaeological sites have been subject to and calling upon the organization to urge the neighboring countries to prohibit illicit trafficking in Syrian cultural property.



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- Launching a national campaign to involve the local community in protecting Syrian antiquities:

Within the framework of the campaign of the Ministry of Culture "Syria – my homeland", the DGAM has launched a national campaign targeting 23 million Syrians to engage them all in protecting ancient Syrian antiquities and cultural heritage, which they take pride in, against theft, vandalism and distortion as it is everyone's responsibility, and they should work together to protect those antiquities.

The national campaign started its activities on 15-10-2012 by means of putting up road advertisements in all Syrian cities and governorates and showing films on national televisions encouraging Syrians to defend their Syrian cultural identity.

As for interaction with the local community, workers in all directorates of antiquities are collaborating on protecting Syrian antiquities with volunteers, interested people, opinion leaders and intellectual, cultural and religious elites in order to create a feeling in every Syrian that damaging antiquities is an assault against their civilization, national identity and history.

The key issue for the DGAM is to play its role in protecting the



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Syrian cultural heritage and all its components seeing that it belongs to all Syrians regardless of their political views, which do not concern the DGAM at all since the battle is about safeguarding the history and heritage of a nation.

Thus, the DGAM has been seeking to unify the visions of all Syrians concerning the antiquities so as to defend and protect them given that they represent the thing which has always brought our people together. Thanks to that, the DGAM's performance has been professional, scientific and effective, and its cadres have remained united in all governorates.

**The General Director of Antiquities and Museums
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