

# Restoring Palmyra: Yes! Hastily: No!!!

A motion aimed to encourage UNESCO to act  
as a neutral organization



The hereunder mentioned signatories and the members of the Board of **shirīn-international**, a NGO composed of Directors of Excavations active in Syria until 2010/11, address to all concerned organizations, institutions, and individuals, members of the international scientific community, the following motion :

*The conflict in Syria has lasted five years, having the whole appearance of a civil war, fuelled by foreign powers and interests, with no clear global resolution in sight.*

*To the tragic and huge human toll must be added the unintended, collateral or targeted destruction of the cultural heritage: religious or historical buildings and monuments, libraries, archaeological sites, remembrance places, symbols of a shared identity, inherited from a multimillenary history.*

*We, members of **shirīn**, pay full respect to all the Syrian citizens who have courageously acted for defending their heritage, individually or collectively, in Syria or abroad, under difficult and sometimes highly risky conditions, including unaffiliated Syrian heritage professionals.*

*We remain as well respectful of the considerable work already accomplished with determination and total commitment, in the same tragic circumstances, by the members of the (Syrian) Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums, and its Director-General.*

*This motion has been issued in order to support the Syrian people and our Syrian colleagues, and their independence in the action and in their choices.*

*A recent statement by the UNESCO Director-General expressing a specific commitment with the President of Russia for the reconstruction of Palmyra aroused concern in international newspaper articles and in a petition posted on the web.*

*Even if we are aware of the recent presence at Palmyra of experts from further countries, the reconstruction of Syria's cultural heritage cannot be claimed unilaterally and must result first from a national consensus. A World Heritage site means moreover that the international*

*community should equally be involved. It will therefore be a long process that includes political, social, scientific, technical input and coordination. The study, the preservation and the presentation of Syrian heritage were managed in a context of close international scientific collaboration organized by Syrian authorities over decades. We are convinced that the damage assessment process, the scientific analysis, the research for the best options for the development of an international rescue archaeology must begin now within a neutral framework.*

*We all know that "reconstruction" is a long and multifaceted transition period that will start before the end of the conflict and continue long after peace is achieved. The transition has already begun, but it is not just the technical tasks that should be prioritized. Syria will become a huge reconstruction zone: rebuilding of buildings and structures, heritage restoration, construction of new buildings, road networks, urban infrastructure, agriculture redevelopment, etc. Emerging threats to the archaeological heritage may become even more numerous than during the conflict, while often less visible.*

*The entire territory of Syria requires the creation and implementation, wherever possible, of an international archaeological rescue framework. This archaeological system must be designed primarily as a means to assess damage and prioritize the direction of resources within an overall scientific framework.*

*With respect to Palmyra, the recent recovery by Syrian government forces has allowed us to measure the extent of damage inflicted on the ancient monuments as well as on the contents of the Museum. With the exception of those situations where emergency consolidation is necessary, there is no need to hasten thoughtlessly the restoration process. The international community of concerned scholars should consider, in the light of such an assessment, how best to help our Syrian colleagues in preserving and restoring what can be salvaged from the destruction.*

*Everything that will be done in the future for restoring the historical monuments, buildings and archaeological sites of Syria will be decided by the Syrians, and the Syrians only. The international community of scholars will be happy to contribute to the reconstruction of the cultural heritage of this wonderful country and its people, in collaboration with and the support of the international organizations, under the guidance of the antiquities service of Syria, at the appropriate time.*

*It should be a point of honour for all of us to help in this enormous undertaking. This is true particularly of the members of those missions who excavated in Palmyra in the recent past.*

Michel al-Maqdissi, Frank Braemer, Michał Gawlikowski, Marc Lebeau,  
Andreas Schmidt-Colinet, and the Members of the Board of **shirín**-international,  
Directors of Excavations.

Brussels, April 19, 2016



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# SHIRĪN MOTION / PALMYRA / ENDORSEMENT

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Collart Archive/Fonds Paul Collart (fouilles Temple Baalshamîn, 1954–56), IASA, Université de Lausanne, Suisse.

The Day After – Heritage Protection Initiative, Syria.

European Centre for Upper Mesopotamian Studies, Brussels, Belgium.

Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at the Free University Berlin, Germany.

The International Association for Assyriology, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire / Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis, Bruxelles/Brussel, Belgium.

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Swiss Society for Ancient Oriental Studies (SGOA), Bern, Switzerland.

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