



Protecting Syria's Cultural Heritage the Local Way

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Syria today is going through a traumatic and destabilizing conflict that has strained the ethnic, sectarian and social fabric of the country - almost all that makes Syria a single unified state - to beyond breaking point. Much of the country lies in ruins today, and its cultural heritage a casualty of the war from its earliest days through systematic looting and deliberate destruction.

The greatest burden to protect Syria's cultural heritage during this conflict has fallen on local stakeholders and non-state actors. The majority of these non-state actors are centred on networks of local heritage professionals, civil society activists and NGO's. These local networks often work under desperate conditions to protect museums and heritage sites, finding creative and simple solutions to overcome daunting challenges. They are also at the forefront in promoting awareness and strengthening local communities' sense of ownership of their cultural heritage, in order to mobilize them against looters and trafficking in antiquities. Yet, because they are non-state actors, they are often denied any financial or technical support from international organisations and donors who traditionally deal only with member states and their institutions.