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FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
IN CONSERVATION



Accord in Lebanon

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I was in Beirut last week to sign an accord with APSAD - as we show in the Header on this page. To those who know what Lebanon holds and some of its history signing such an accord will be completely understandable. This crossroads of the world - the Levant, which witnessed the trade between the Orient and the Occident - the Eastern Mediterranean littoral, the end of the Silk Road. It saw the first spring of civilisation and is made up of regions of what are now countries that include Jordan, Cyprus, Syria, Turkey and of course, at the centre, Lebanon.

But, as one arrives in Beirut the most obvious initial image is of highways and massive construction. This is a modern city, a city that is spreading both sideways and upwards. And amongst this sprawl are some extraordinary things, houses, buildings, sights and ideas.

The National Museum is a spectacular example of quiet, low key, sophisticated display of some of the most beautiful reliefs and mosaics in existence. The Sarcophagus of Ahirom, King of Jbeil in the C10th BC - representing as it does part of the history of the region lies centre stage. It was found in Byblos by Pierre Montet in 1923 partly by luck as the land shifted and revealed it. It is a key to our understanding of the early iron age civilisation and their culture - it is breathtaking - the deep relief images of weeping women, fantastical animals and, of course, the script. The script has its own story - it not only carries a curse but also the key to our understanding of the journey of language.

This is just one example of the vast heritage that this region has - a heritage that includes Baalbek, the Stelae of Nahr el Kalb, the Horsh Arz al-Rab and much more - recognised in many cases by UNESCO but still in danger.

This danger is not just the risk of damage from war, itself sadly still significant but also from natural and man-made intervention of all sorts. We want to help if we can - we want to record these objects and places in extremely high resolution and with an understanding of the materials and the construction and the techniques that went into making them so that we record in ways that are most valuable. We are the first generation to have the tools, to have the technology and skills to do this. The Foundation is lucky in its association with Factum Arte - the development of these processes is what they do - and they do it in extraordinary ways and with extraordinary results - and we have access to them as they evolve. It is our duty to use what we have as soon as we have it - and that means now. That is why we signed the accord.