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IN CONSERVATION



The Arch of Triumph: Palmyra

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On April 19th a severely reduced scale impression of part of the Arch of Triumph in Palmyra was shown to the press in Trafalgar Square in London.

While we are pleased that the terrible damage to the original in Syria is being highlighted - and indeed the risk to all of our cultural heritage - we are concerned that this particular 'media spectacular' exhibited a very poor example of reproduction of part of the Arch structure. This replica was apparently routed in Egyptian marble using a 3D model which was derived from relatively low resolution photographs, resulting in the routed stone having a smoothed and even surface. We have tried, so far unsuccessfully, to get any real detail of the process and technology used in the recording or the accuracy of this work. We believe absolutely that anyone engaged in cultural preservation should share all their knowledge and technology openly, as we do, to help others who wish to do similar work or to advance our understanding of the process.

This lack of information, and what looks like poor quality in itself should not be too worrying - any recording is better than none - but we feel there are questions that need to be answered so that we fully can understand this process in order to evaluate it. We would also like to comment if we feel that there are elements, processes, connections and even hyperbole that we would question. You will find a brief analysis here based on the little data that has been made available, our inspection of the object and our knowledge of the issues - we have also reproduced a brief review (and Opinion piece) of the various technologies that have been mentioned by the presenters which we compiled when the first reports from IDA were surfacing about their intentions and the 'new' technology to be used.

We would also like to raise another question that is very important - the Mayor of London, who officially and very publicly hosted the event for the press said it 'shows two fingers to Isis' and the Institute for Digital Archaeology (whose work the impression is) are now proposing to stage the event again in New York. These people are linking the terrible events in Palmyra to the destruction of the twin towers. To make bellicose statements and to attract attention like this is, we feel, poor judgment - the recording of evidence of man's artistic and cultural depth will not be made easier by this sort of spectacular media event and nor will attracting people with skills, enthusiasm and also funding to the painstaking, accurate (and sometimes perilous) work of recording and preserving our heritage - which must be done using the most advanced technologies available. This is what the Foundation does.