Lost treasures of Syria's Palmyra rise again in new 3D show

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Part of the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra taken on March 27, 2016, after government troops recaptured the UNESCO world heritage site from Islamic State group

Palmyra may just have fallen yet again to the Islamic State group, but a new "immersive" 3D show in Paris lets you walk through the Syrian city's classical colonnades as they were before the jihadists blew them to bits.

The "Eternal Sites" exhibition uses high-definition images often shot by

drones to allow the public to visit four of the most threatened heritage sites in the world in war-torn Syria and Iraq.

The eighth-century Umayyad Mosque in Damascus—regarded by many as the fourth holiest place in Islam—and the Krak des Chevaliers Crusader castle near the ravaged city of Homs have also been virtually recreated under the dome of the Grand Palais in Paris.

The show, which has been organised with the nearby Louvre museum, is part of a global push to digitalise spectacular archaeological sites that are at risk.

The remains of the ancient Iraqi city of Khorsabad, which dates from the 7th century BC, has also been recreated using images captured by French company Iconem.

Like the other three sites, the 3D images are matched with real artefacts from the city from the Louvre's collections.

The museum's director Jean-Luc Martinez, who curated the show, said that they wanted to "show sites that are no longer accessible and the beauty of their art."

Palmyra fell for a second time to the jihadists at the weekend despite heavy Russian bombing to prevent the extremists entering the city.

Temples razed

Islamic State fighters ravaged the Roman-era ruins during the 10 months it held the ancient oasis city from May 2015 to March 2016, systematically blowing up temples and columns in attacks that provoked worldwide outrage.

Photogrammetric technology developed by Iconem has also been used to record the Roman theatre in the Syrian coastal city of Jableh and the Phoenician [site](#) in the ancient port of Ugarit, where evidence of the world's oldest alphabet was found.

Its technicians have also been working alongside 15 specialists from the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) to digitalise some of the country's major museum collections.

Hundreds of important heritage sites have been sacked or destroyed during the five-year conflict, with the destruction of the first-century temples of Bel and Baalshamin in Palmyra making most headlines.

IS has made a point of razing ancient shrines and statues it considers as idolatry and is also suspected of involvement in the illegal sale of antiquities.

Work on the "Syrian Heritage" database, the biggest 3D record of the country's monuments and treasures, began last December and includes a large number of Ottoman-era buildings in Damascus as well as its 11th-century citadel, which looms over the city.

The head of DGAM, Maamoun Abdulkarim, said the operation was essential to "avoid an irreplaceable loss to humanity" given "the dramatic situation in our country".

The drive, carried out with the help of the French grande ecole ENS and the research institute INRIA, is one of a number trying to catalogue sites in danger of falling into the line of fire.

The Institute for Digital Archaeology, created by Oxford and Harvard universities and Dubai's Museum of the Future, is also compiling a record of many vulnerable sites in Syria and neighbouring Iraq.

It has handed out 5,000 low-cost 3D cameras to archaeologists and NGOs with the hope of gathering a million images of threatened sites.

A two-thirds scale replica of Palmyra's destroyed triumphal arch was unveiled in New York's Times Square and London's Trafalgar Square in April before being displayed in Dubai.

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