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Syria's UNESCO World Heritage Sites under Threat

ICRS deplores destruction of Aleppo Bazar and other historic sites

Some twelve years ago the *International Castle Research Society (ICRS)*, established in Aachen in 1996 under its president Bernhard Siepen decided to complement their exhibition of *French Donjons* by producing another travelling exhibition of historical models on *Castles & Bazars*. It was to feature two large-scale models: a section of the largest bazar worldwide, *Aleppo Bazar*, and a reconstruction of *Crac des Chevaliers* castle shown under siege by sultan Baibars. Both sites are in present-day Syria and had been given world heritage site status by UNESCO.

Measurements were taken by Syrian architects based in Aleppo in 2002 to be used by *ICRS*. A monument conservator from Luxembourg was kind enough to provide construction plans of the *Crac des Chevaliers*. *Castles and Bazars* premiered at the Frankfurt Archaeology Museum in late 2005 and its models along with some 3,000 figurines were admired by old and young alike. Some months later the models were on show at the Washington DC National Geographic Society Museum, and in 2009 at the LVR Landesmuseum in Bonn. Altogether more than 100,000 visitors came to see the exhibition.

The *ICRS* team's intention had been to use their small models at 1:25 reduction to showcase the artistic and historical importance of the originals hoping they would be looked upon and looked after with due respect to their historical past in Syria. Unfortunately this does not seem to be the case seeing that the unique *Aleppo Souk* did not escape destruction in the course of the present civil war. We learn some 750 shops were devastated by fire – such a loss of quality of life that cannot be restored even after eventual restoration. Equally the *Crac des Chevaliers* has been said to be damaged in fierce fighting, with tanks being deployed in its yards. Similarly Sayoun, Palmyra and Apameia are said to have been damaged. We only have internet testimony and reports of these catastrophes so far, with little information value to go on. What are we to expect in the future ?

ICRS's new plans centre on an intercultural exhibition, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem – Orient and Occident Meeting*, to present models of the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, these being world heritage sites as well. To gain sponsorship, a model of the Dome of the Rock has been produced by Michael Siepen

and his father to serve as a pointer to the final, more elaborate model yet to be constructed. This project was covered by the German Muslim Central Council as well as by Al-Jazeera. For a promotional film of this project visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCMoAL9aRy8>.

In this context a double-feature programme will be offered in auditorium F0 8 of Karman-Forum, at 15 Eilfschornsteinstrasse in Aachen on December 7, 2012, starting at 18:00 hours. On the general theme of Temple Mount - Castle of the Rock – Al-Aqsa Mosque, the ICRS team consisting of Dr. Ulrich Aertz, Bernhard and Michael Siepen will present their 3D-visualisation of the Castle of the Rock. This will be followed by a talk given by Dr. Bilgehan-Köhler, archaeologist from Zurich, Switzerland, who is the daughter of a former president of the German Muslim Central Council, the topic being *Castle of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque – witnesses of Omayyad times*. For more information visit www.burgenkunde.de or phone 0049-(0)241-60 45 00.

Translation by Dr. phil. Jürgen Jansen

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