

ETHICAL OVERVIEW OF LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVISM

Experiences from an Archaeological Survey on Jebel Bishri in Syria

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Abstract

Jebel Bishri forms a table-like mountain in the Palmyride range of Central Syria. The area belongs to the arid zone and consists of desert-steppe and steppe limited with the Euphrates irrigated agricultural valley to the north and the Syrian Desert to the south. The archaeological traces of human impact in the area reaches from ca. 500.000 years to recently abandoned Bedouin sites. Nowadays nomadic pastoralists are the major population living in the area, partly leading semi-sedentary way of life on the fringes of wadies and on the piedmonts of the mountain. Since the year 2000 the Finnish archaeological survey and mapping project SYGIS (Syrian Geographic Information Systems) has been working in this archaeologically largely unexplored as well as environmentally endangered area towards a basic inventory of archaeological sites. Ethically this paper tries to emphasize the importance of building a basic inventory of sites in archaeologically unexplored and endangered areas before any surveys concentrating on single period/culture/site type or focusing on another particular phenomenon will be carried out. Basic general survey which gives objective and balanced value for each archaeological period and sites is the best one to protect the area and preserve its cultural development and diversity throughout the ages from a long-term perspective. This is scientifically justified for the future research and protection as well as preservation of the sites. As the area of Jebel Bishri covers ca. 1 million hectares remote-sensing methods have been vital in covering such a large region which is endangered by looting and rapid environmental change. Environmental change is taking place through expanding desertification caused both by global warming and direct human impact, especially with the speedily increasing population growth. Beside looting and traffic heavy winds increase erosion with sand accumulation and therefore disappearance of ancient sites in the area.
