

# At the Source of Illicit Trade in the Middle East

Centre for  
Global  
Heritage  
and  
Development

Understanding the destruction of the past

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# Middle East: Heritage of all kinds



Aleppo souq, Syria, before the current crisis

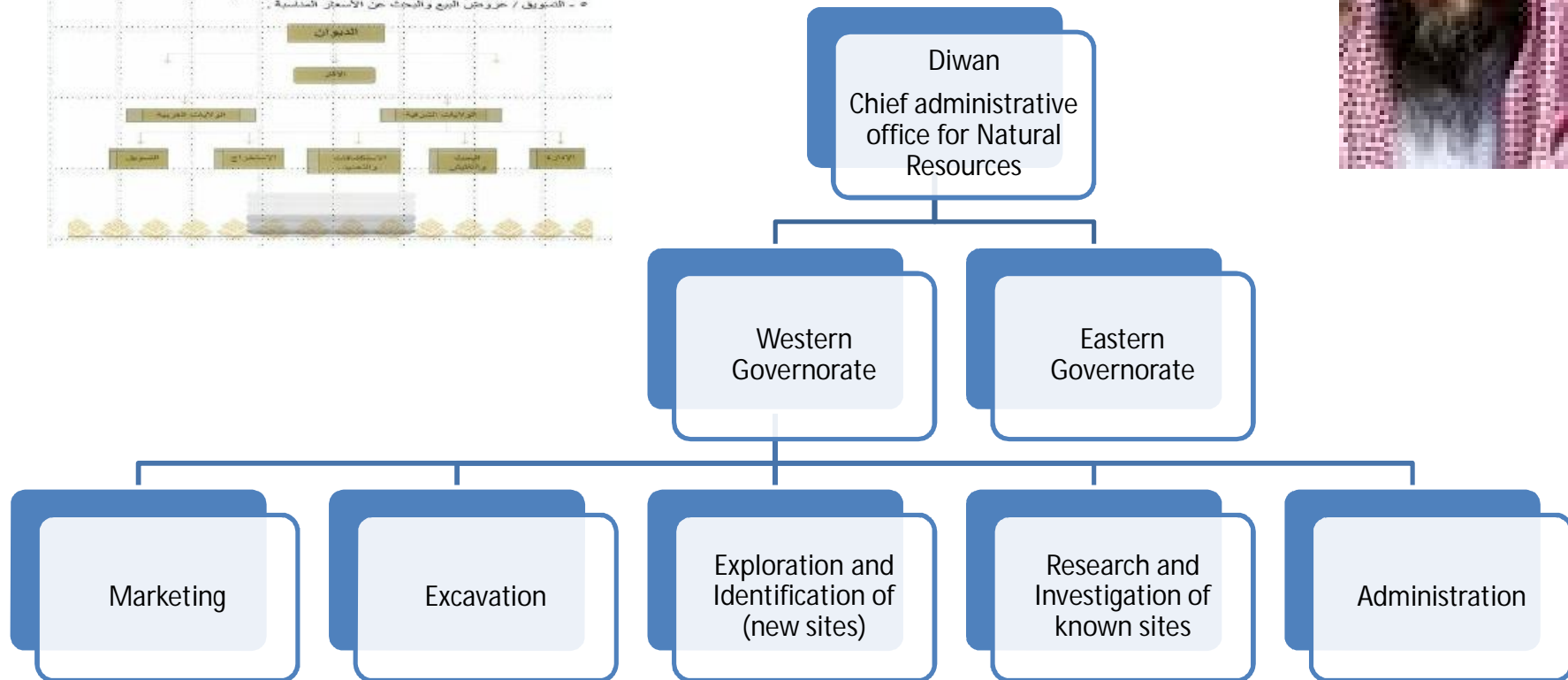


# Daily news: Iconoclasm, 'cultural cleansing'



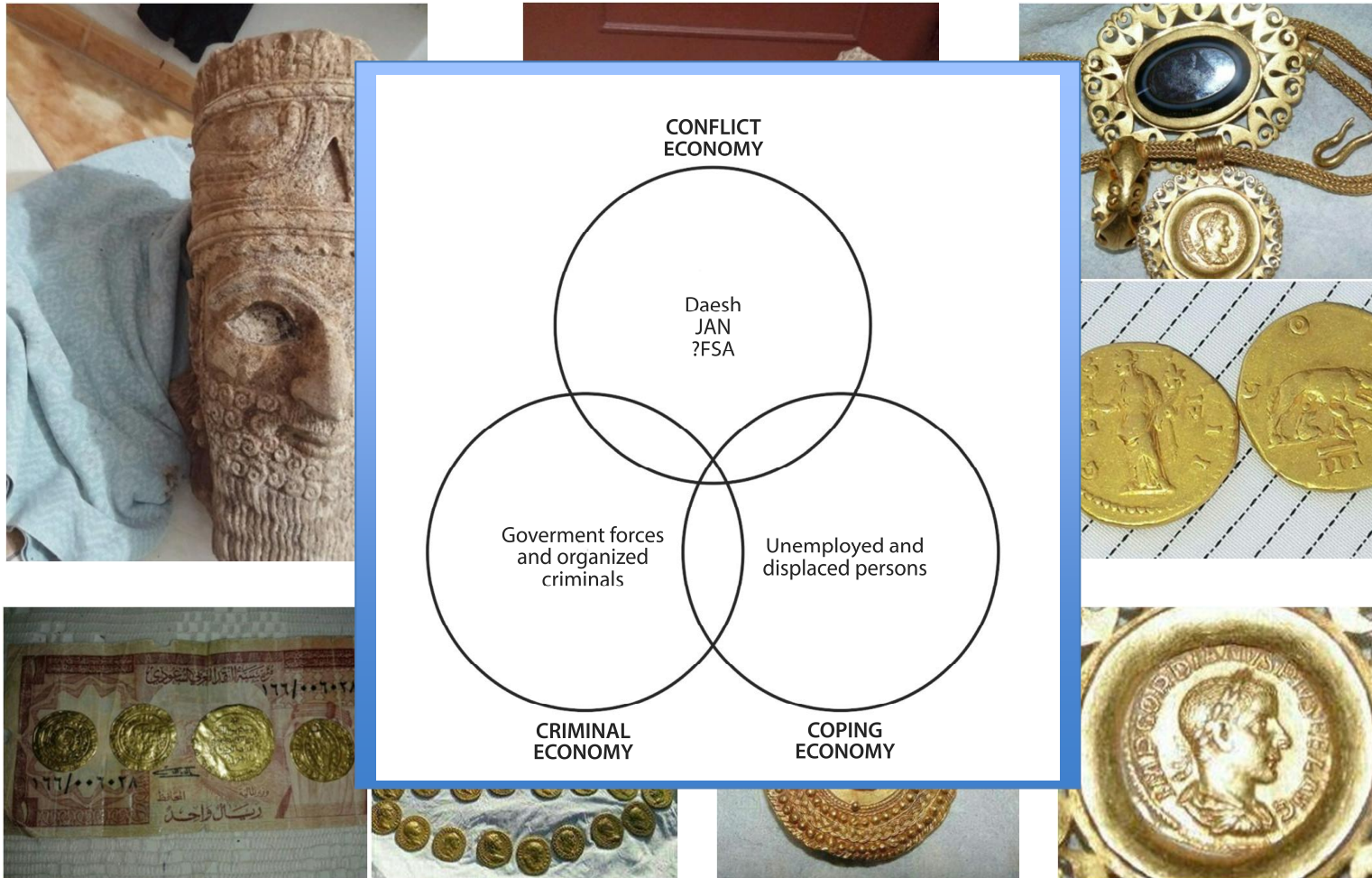
▶ The proud city of Queen Zenobia sacked again

# We hear: Heritage can make money...



American raid on Abu Sayyaf, May 16, 2015

# ... but how much money exactly?



Neil Brodie & Isber Sabrine, 2017. The Illegal Excavation and Trade of Syrian Cultural Objects: A View from the Ground. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 43: 74-84 (fig. 3).

Abu Sayyaf: his handy



# Silent dangers

## Long before the current crisis:

- Rapid economic development of poor rural areas
- Expanding cities
- ‘Souvenir hunting’ by local groups
- Insufficient *resources* local authorities
- Insufficient *information* local authorities

## To which the crisis adds:

- Anarchy, societal collapse
- Poverty: ‘subsistence looting’
- Violence, destruction archaeological sites
- Theft and illicit trafficking of heritage – by *all* parties
- Ideological cleansing, ‘cultural cleansing’



# Lake projects everywhere since the 1950's



Threats to heritage and people



# Economic development: irrigation projects

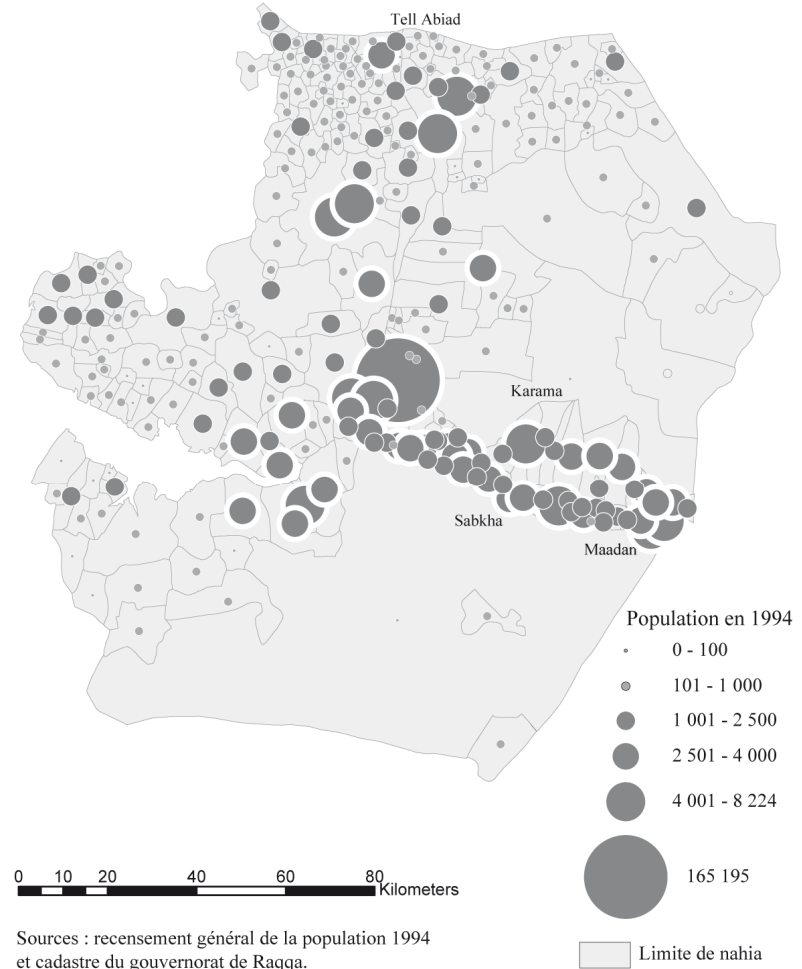
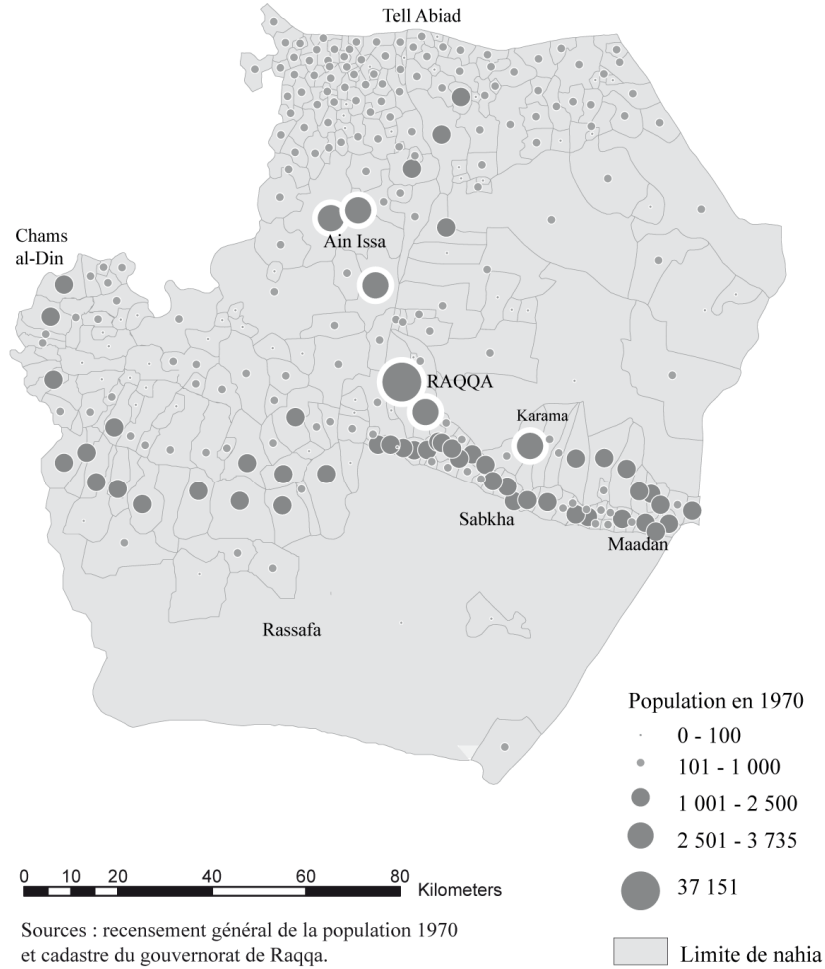


Northern Syria ca. 1995: massive irrigation project





# Economic development, population growth, expanding cities



Northern Syria 1970 - 1994



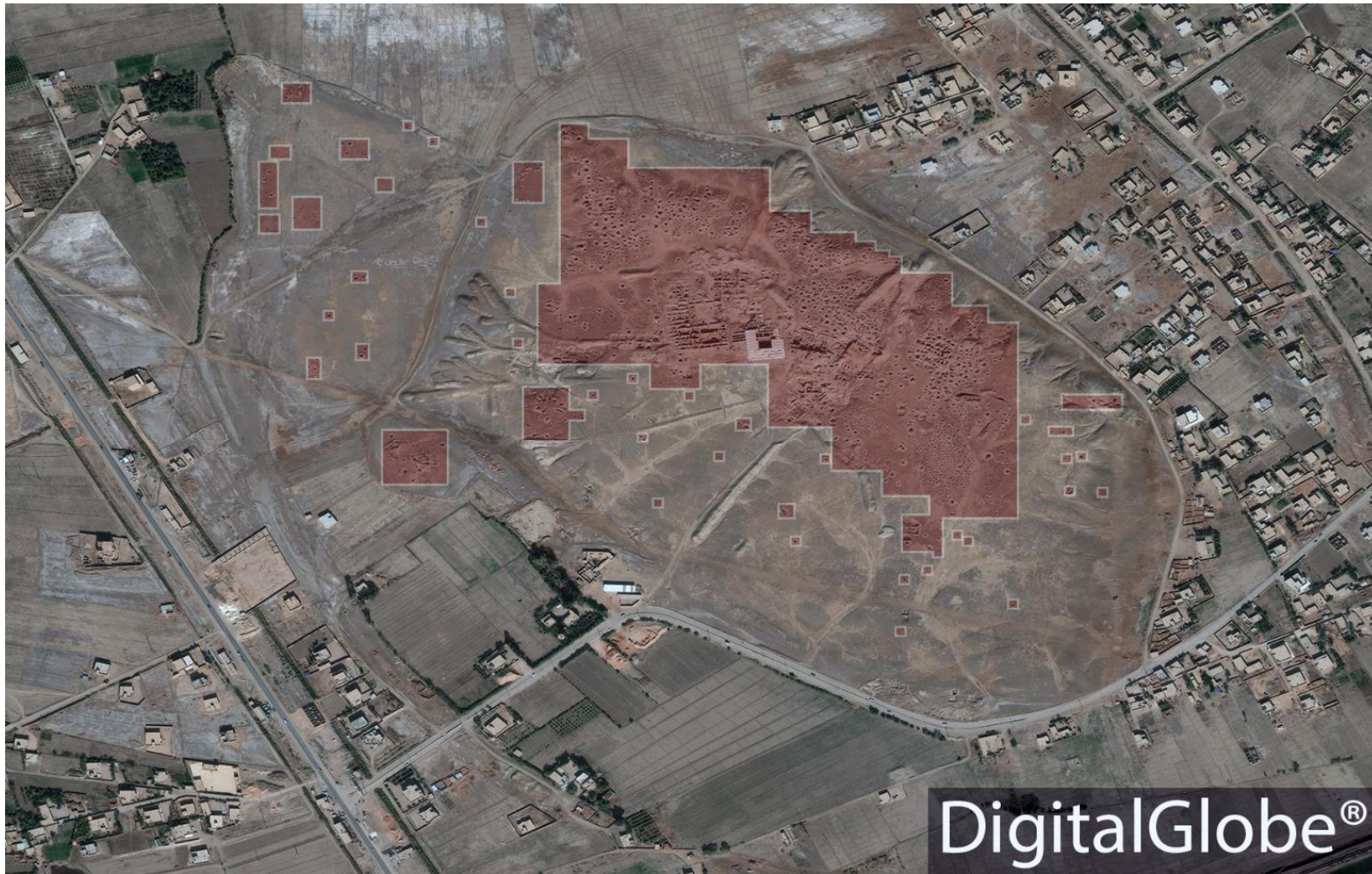
# Insufficient local resources



Northern Syria: the unique site of Jebel Aruda (ca. 3200 v. Chr.)



# Poverty and 'subsistence looting'



Syria, Mari (Tell Hariri), November 11, 2014



# When people and communities disappear...

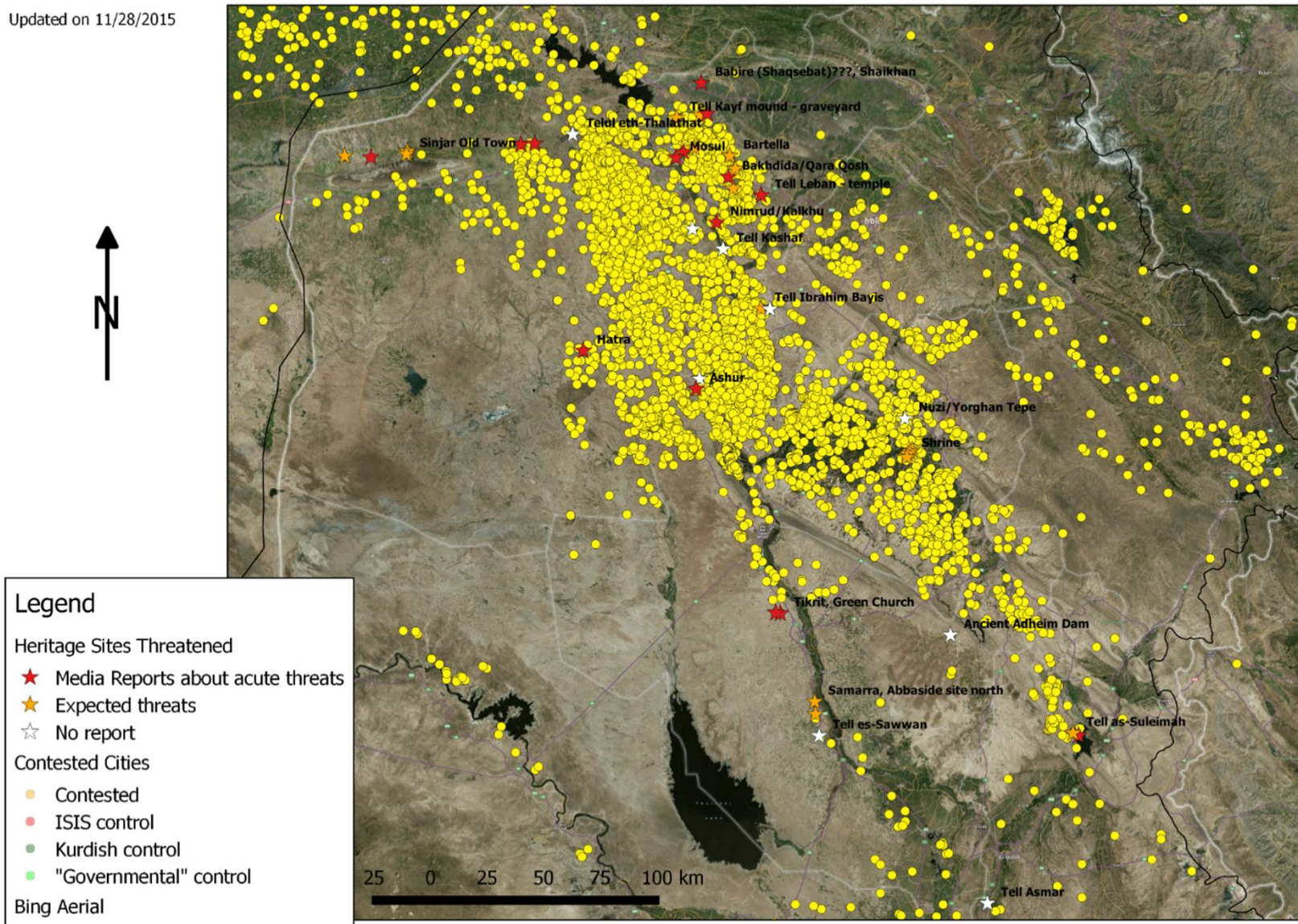


Aleppo souq - Today

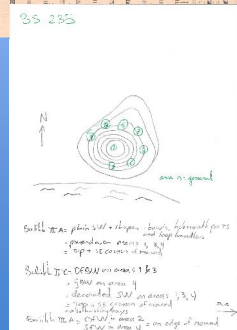
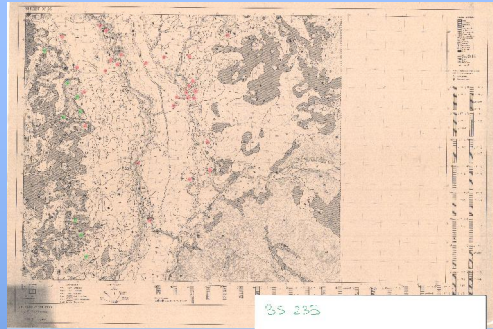


# Archaeological heritage in danger

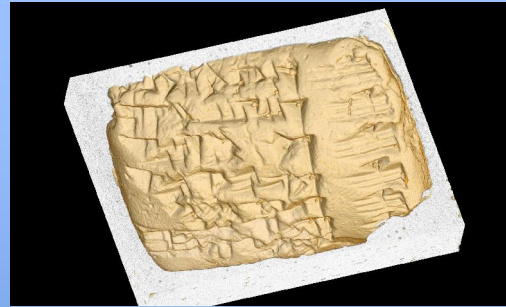
Updated on 11/28/2015



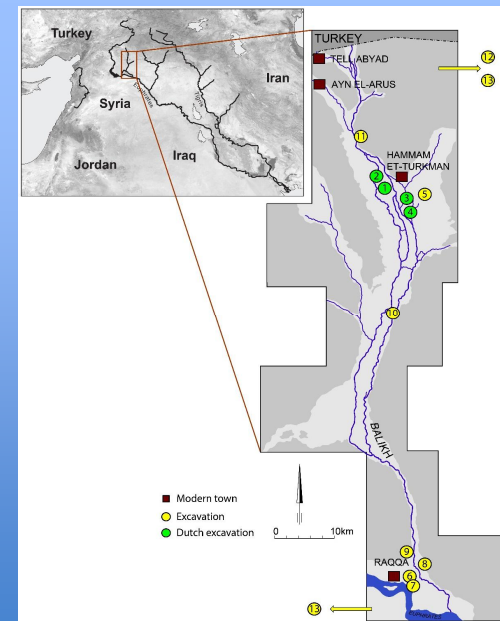
# Archaeologists going back to the future: taking stock of archives, research traditions



*Balikh Hinterland*



*Scanning for Syria*



*Focus Raqqa*



Centre for Global Heritage and Development



Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development



Leiden University

# Archaeologists going back to the future: investing in civil societies



Hashim Hama  
Director of the Sulaimaniya Museum



# Ways forward: Archaeological perspectives

## **Focus on European contexts:**

- Strengthen legal frameworks for combatting illicit trade
- Uphold existing legal frameworks
- Take stock of archives, research histories, inaccessible resources
- Provide alternative perspectives – Middle East is not ‘terrorism’

## **Focus on source regions:**

- Understand the bizarre complexity of source contexts
- Invest in local, equal partnerships
- Invest in local education (academic and public)
- Emphasize civil society
- Empower local authorities: let them do their work!

