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New challenges in research on heritage preservation; a comprehensive experiment in the Pech Merle cave.

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Preservation of remains in prehistoric painted caves is associated with the stability of karstic environments that maintain the steadiness of air/water/rock interfaces on cave walls. Since the nineties, public policies have supported cave monitoring operations that provided an efficient alert system and a decision-making support for protection or remediation.

However, over the past few years, significant drifts of key underground characteristics and climate parameters have emerged in records. Such growing evidences of a changing environment under combined local and global constraints imply to define a reference to a stable natural system for conservation purposes. In anthropized and complex sites, new research and additional information to monitoring are urgently needed to maintain the quality of preservation.

In the Pech Merle cave (South France), in addition to the monitoring funded by the Ministry of Culture since 1998, a team of researchers from private and public research institutions have decided, two years ago, to contribute, all from their own funds, to a comprehensive data acquisition, still ongoing. Logistic support to 3D scan acquisition was provided by the cave owner.

The first results of this multidisciplinary reveal that strong additional complexity to natural behavior originates from cave tourism and surface land use.

Key words: prehistoric painted cave, climate drift, conservation, monitoring, 3D scan, experiments

