Five thousand years in the 'field of vision'

Every summer for the last 15 years, archaeologists from the American University of Beirut Museum have been toiling away in the barren landscape of Tell Kazel, a site on the Syrian coast. Until this year, the job was pretty basic. Ancient walls were measured manually stone by stone and architects had to climb up and down pits three meters deep to record the ancient architecture, pulling the tape tight against the wind. Not only was the method very slow, it was only as accurate as the human hand and eye: until the arrival of the Leica Geosystems' Total Station TCR703.

Usually found on major construction sites and modern projects, it revolutionised work at the archaeological site of Tell Kayel. Manned by a single architect at ground level, the instrument measured and recorded the ancient walls and structures in seconds. Results were then immediately slipped into the site's computer for exact and speedy mapping.

The American University of Beirut archaeological team is delighted by the new technology. "It's like going from the second Millennium BC to the third Millennium AD in a single leap," said the team's leader Dr Leila Badre.

Dr Badre thanked Mr Ghassan Ghattas, Head of Survey Department of Alpha-Tech, Beirut, for his support with the use of this modern technology.

The name of the millennia-old site being recorded by the Leica TCR703 is probably ancient Simyra, an Amorite and Phoenician city. At its height in the 14th Century BC, Simyra is referred to in the Bible as well as in the Tell Amarna Letters of Egypt.