



**WORLD MONUMENTS FUND ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP
FOR CONSERVATION PROJECTS AT ALBI CATHEDRAL IN FRANCE AND
THE SALON RICO IN THE MEDINA AL-ZAHRA IN CORDOBA, SPAIN**

For Immediate Release—Paris, June 8, 2011. . . World Monuments Fund announced today two new projects: the conservation of the choir of the renowned Albi Cathedral in France and of the Salon Rico in the Medina Al-Zahra in Cordoba, Spain.

Bertrand du Vignaud, President of World Monuments Fund Europe, stated: “We are pleased to announce today two new initiatives in Europe: the conservation of the exceptional choir of Albi Cathedral, a masterpiece of Gothic art and architecture, and of the Salon Rico in the Medina Al-Zahra, famous for its remarkable Moorish reliefs. The conservation of the choir in Albi Cathedral and of the Salon Rico will result in even greater appreciation of the importance of these sites by art enthusiasts around the world. These two projects are made possible with support from the Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation, under the aegis of the Foundation of France. World Monuments Fund is delighted to inaugurate a new funding partnership with such exceptional project sites. ”

Juan Carlos Fierro, President of World Monuments Fund Spain, praised the announcement of the project at the Salon Rico, noting: “this exceptional international support will benefit a new project emblematic of WMF’s dedication to the heritage of that region.”

The Choir of Albi Cathedral

A jewel of Gothic architecture, Albi Cathedral is one of the largest brick buildings in the world. Construction began following the suppression of the Albigensian Heresy, centered in Albi, in order to convey the power of the Church to the populace. The cathedral has a fortress-like appearance, with windows placed high up between the buttresses, entrances guarded by a moat, and extremely thick walls around the base to deter siege engines. The massive buttresses of the church have been compressed into the structure, functioning also as piers separating the chapels lining the nave, giving Albi Cathedral a distinctive appearance from most Gothic cathedrals.

Constructed over a period of some 200 years, beginning in the 1280s, the cathedral’s nave is the widest in France at 60 feet and is notable for a diverse range of styles in the interior,

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including a fresco of the Last Judgment by Flemish artists and a large collection of Italian Renaissance ceiling paintings in the vault.

The *jube* (a construction made up of a screen, loft, and crucifix) and choir were commissioned by Louis I of Amboise, Archbishop of Albi, at the end of the fifteenth century. The ensemble—a Gothic masterpiece enriched by the sumptuous polychrome statues by French and Burgundian ateliers—is a rare survival, as many jubes and choirs in France were destroyed during the French Revolution.

The iconographic program in the area of conservation consists of statues of Old Testament prophets on the side of the ambulatory and statues of Apostles at the interior of the choir, followed by a procession of musician angels, all admirably individualized, as well as the family arms of the sponsor.

Conservation Project

The canonical choir was the object of a preliminary study in 1998, but work was not able to proceed until funds could be secured. Since 1987, the state of France, owner of the monument, financed and carried out critical structural work on certain parts: the bell tower, the *baldaquin* (canopy), the treasury, and two tribunes. Until now, the choir has not been the focus of conservation programs.

In a number of areas on the stalls of the choir paint is flaking under layers of dust, and in other places statuary is deteriorating. The primary objective of this project is to return the ensemble of the enclosure of the choir and its sculpture to its original state.

The work will be carried out under the direction of M. Patrice Calvel, *Architecte en chef des Monuments historiques* (chief architect in historic monuments), and under the direction of Mme. Marianne Sire, primary inspector of historic monuments, and Mr. Philippe Mercier, regional conservator of historic monuments.

The Salon Rico of the Palace of the Medina Al-Zahra

Medina Al-Zahra was founded by Abd-ar-Rahman III al-Nasir (c. 890–961, r. 912–961) after proclaiming himself Caliph of Cordoba in 929. Abd-ar-Rahman followed the eastern Islamic tradition of sovereigns founding medinas, or urban centers, and work began between 936 and 940. The vast palace-city, much of which is still unexcavated, comprised houses, gardens, a mosque, basins, courtyards, and reception rooms, or salons. Two reception rooms, the East and

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West Hall, were used to receive official delegations to the caliphate. The eastern reception room, constructed between 953 and 957, is today known as the Salon Rico for the extraordinary decoration of the walls.

Medina Al-Zahra was briefly the capital of Al-Andalus, but was abandoned following internal strife that led to the destruction and plundering of the city in the years after 1010. The scale of the damage and subsequent pillaging meant that positive identification of the site as the Medina Al-Zahra founded by Abd-ar-Rahman was not confirmed until the nineteenth century.

Even in a ruined state, Medina Al-Zahra is one of the most important ensembles of medieval Islamic architecture in Spain. Largely open to the public, the archaeological site, owned by the government of Andalusia, contains a museum that allows visitors to understand the organization of buildings and to view objects discovered during excavations.

Conservation Project

During the excavations in the 1940s under the direction of archaeologist Felix Hernandez, millions of fragments of decorative elements were found at the site. More recent work at the site has included reintegrating decorative elements into the walls of certain rooms. However, in the wake of new research, it has been discovered that many of these reconstructions were done incorrectly. WMF's project will consolidate fragile elements in the Salon Rico over a period of 24 months. In addition, the areas missing decoration will be treated in a way that will harmonize with the restored sections. Consolidation work and the protection of certain parts will be implemented as well.

The work will commence later this year and be directed by architects Pau Soler Serratosa and Jorge Forne Leon, as well as archaeologists Antonio Vallejo Traino and Irene Montilla Torres. WMF will coordinate all activities with the government of Andalusia, through Margarita Sánchez Romero, Director General of Cultural Property.

World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world's most treasured places. For over 45 years, working in more than 90 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to preserve important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through partnerships with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF inspires an enduring commitment to stewardship for future

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generations. Headquartered in New York, WMF has offices and affiliates worldwide, including WMF Europe, based in Paris and headed by Bertrand du Vignaud, and WMF Spain, based in Madrid and headed by Juan Carlos Fierro. www.wmf.org, www.twitter.com/worldmonuments, and www.facebook.com/worldmonuments.

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