

IRAQ CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

 THE GETTY CONSERVATION INSTITUTE

WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

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WORLD MONUMENTS FUND AND GETTY CONSERVATION INSTITUTE CREATE INITIATIVE TO CONSERVE IRAQI CULTURAL HERITAGE

*With support of Iraq's Minister of Culture and State Board of Antiquities and Heritage,
leading international preservation organizations form
GCI-WMF Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative*

*March 15, 2004, New York City and Los Angeles—***Bonnie Burnham, president, World Monuments Fund (WMF), and Timothy P. Whalen, director, Getty Conservation Institute (GCI),** today announced the formation of the **GCI-WMF Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative**. Established with lead funding from the **J.M. Kaplan Fund**, the Initiative seeks to address the catastrophic damage sustained by Iraq's cultural heritage during and in the aftermath of the 2003 war.

Working in collaboration with the **Iraqi Ministry of Culture and State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH)**, and coordinating with the United National Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), the Initiative will mobilize international resources and attention in support of the Iraqi cultural authorities and their objectives: the cessation of threats to and repair of damage sustained by Iraq's cultural heritage, and rebuilding the country's professional conservation and heritage-management capacity.

Ms. Burnham states, "Many crucial ancient sites in Iraq are severely damaged, and some are threatened with extinction. The World Monuments Fund has a long record of directing targeted assistance to sites facing emergencies. Working together with the Getty Conservation Institute and our Iraqi colleagues, we believe that we can help protect endangered buildings and archaeological sites in the immediate future, as well as develop appropriate methodologies and tools for the long-term recovery of the country."

Mr. Whalen said, "So much of Iraq's archaeological record, going back to the very dawn of civilization, has been and is being ravaged by war and looting. In recent times, Iraqi

professionals responsible for conservation and management of these sites have been isolated and demoralized. We are resolved, through this joint initiative with the World Monuments Fund, to provide our expertise and resources, as necessary; to work with Iraqi colleagues and others on projects selected to ensure maximum impact. We are under no illusions about the difficulties and dangers involved, but this is something that we can do, where we can and will make a difference. We owe this to the future.”

Iraqi Minister of Culture Mufeed Al Jazairi states, “The Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative will provide the instruments needed to reduce the threats to our cultural heritage, and to monitor redevelopment activities that have the potential to damage archaeological and historic sites. We welcome the prospect of collaborating with the World Monuments Fund and the Getty Conservation Institute to ensure the long-term sustainability of this initiative.”

Cultural Heritage in Iraq

Known as the “cradle of civilization,” Iraq contains literally tens of thousands of identified cultural-heritage sites; additionally, many thousands of archaeological sites have not been excavated. Following the 1991 Gulf War, widespread looting decimated hundreds of archaeological sites, and the sanctions imposed on the country prohibited international preservation assistance, leaving Iraq’s cultural patrimony in the hands of a severely depleted antiquities staff with wholly inadequate expertise and funding. Today, following the recent war, looting is again responsible for the destruction and endangerment of untold cultural-heritage sites, including such important ones as the ancient cities of Larsa, Isin, and Fara and the great Sumerian city of Umma

In addition, a number of important historic buildings have been endangered as a result of the conflict. These include the Qushla Administrative complex—a group of Ottoman buildings in central Baghdad that served as the seat of government agencies, including ministries and courts. The complex represents the largest group of historical urban buildings in the capital city. All were severely looted in the civil unrest following the war, and all are needed immediately for the renewal of government functions. Another is Erbil, an ancient city in Iraqi Kurdistan whose citadel has been continuously occupied for 5,000 years. Although not badly damaged in the war, the citadel remains at risk from unmanaged urban development and encroachment on ancient archaeological areas.

Two other high priorities for the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) are the leaning minaret of the twelfth-century al-Nuri mosque in Mosul, and the arch

of Ctesiphon, in reality the ruin of a huge vault over an audience or banqueting hall built by Parthian Kings in the fourth century AD.

Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative

In all areas of its work, the newly formed Initiative will collaborate with Iraqi officials and colleagues, and will coordinate its own efforts with those of Iraqi museums and other cultural institutions. Two emergency grants have been awarded by the Initiative for site protection—one to the Massachusetts College of Art, for the reinstallation of protective roofing over the archaeological site at Nineveh, which was looted during the recent war; another to the American Association for Research in Baghdad, for protection of archaeological sites in central Iraq, which are being actively looted by local villagers.

To address long-term cultural-heritage management, the World Monuments Fund and the Getty Conservation Institute will work with the SBAH to develop a **National Cultural Heritage Information-System and Database**, which will be used as a tool to document site conditions and needs, set priorities, and address threats to cultural resources. The system will take advantage of Geographic Information System (GIS) and Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies to provide the SBAH with appropriate monitoring and assessment tools to evaluate risk to, and minimize negative impact on, cultural resources. The information system—which has received substantial support from ESRI, the leading developer of GIS software—will be modeled after a similar program already in use in Jordan. A planning meeting for the Iraqi version will be held in Amman, Jordan, in March 2004.

Future work includes:

- **training and advanced-degree courses** for Iraqi professionals;
- **emergency work** at sites;
- **conservation projects**, undertaken either as pilot programs, as part of training courses, or as part of larger-scale initiatives;
- **planning assistance** to advance projects receiving international support.

The **CGI-WMF Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative** is intended to complement financial pledges made by governments through UNESCO by providing expertise, technical support, training, and quick, flexible funding to plan the projects that will be governmentally financed over a longer term. It is hoped that the Initiative's collaboration

and assistance will help build confidence among peers working in concert to reestablish shared values—an enduring reward for a hazardous investment.

The **Getty Conservation Institute**, a program of the J. Paul Getty Trust, works internationally to advance conservation and to enhance and encourage the preservation and understanding of the visual arts in all of their dimensions—objects, collections, architecture, and sites. The Institute serves the conservation community through scientific research, education and training, field projects, and the dissemination of the results of both its own work and the work of others in the field. In all its endeavors, the Institute is committed to addressing unanswered questions and promoting the highest possible standards of conservation practice.

The **World Monuments Fund**, an international organization with headquarters in New York City, is among the foremost private, nonprofit organizations devoted to onsite conservation of monuments and sites worldwide. Since its founding in 1965, WMF has achieved an unmatched record of successful international conservation projects in more than eighty countries. The organization brings together public and private support to implement comprehensive conservation efforts. These include project planning, field surveys, fieldwork, on-site training in the building crafts, advocacy, and the development of long-term strategies for the protection of monuments and sites.

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