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WORLD MONUMENTS FUND TAKES ACTION IN EARTHQUAKE-STRICKEN REGION OF ITALY

U.S.-BASED ORGANIZATION MAKES THE FIRST COMMITMENT TO RESTORE THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF ABRUZZO

ABBAY OF SAN CLEMENTE A CASAURIA, EXTRAORDINARY MEDIEVAL CHURCH IN ABRUZZO, WILL BE RESTORED

For Immediate Release—New York, July 1, 2009 . . . Bonnie Burnham, president of the World Monuments Fund (WMF), announced today that WMF has taken on a multimillion-dollar project at the medieval Abbey of San Clemente a Casauria, which was badly damaged in the April 6, 2009, earthquake that struck the Abruzzo region of central Italy. Located in the Pescara province of Abruzzo, the abbey is a magnificent example of Romanesque architecture that holds deep historical significance for the local people.

The first organization to make a commitment to restoring the historic fabric of Abruzzo, WMF is well positioned to assist in disaster recovery, with years of experience—WMF’s disaster-recovery efforts in Italy date back to the 1966 floods in Venice—and the expertise necessary to coordinate such efforts. The conservation work, which will cost more than \$2 million, is expected to begin in early fall 2009 and take about a year to complete.

“We are pleased to be able to take some small measure to help the people of the Abruzzo region recover from this terrible catastrophe,” said Ms. Burnham. “Heritage is an integral part of a community’s identity, and the Abbey of San Clemente a Casauria is treasured by the local community. We hope its restoration will, in turn, restore a shaken sense of place.”

“The Abbey of San Clemente a Casauria is a masterpiece of Italian heritage that needs urgent safety measures and immediate conservation,” said Bertrand du Vignaud, president of WMF Europe. “WMF offered challenge funds for the project and I am particularly glad that the Fondazione Pescaraabruzzo responded so quickly and so positively to our call for help. The Soprintendenza will closely monitor the conservation work, which will begin very soon and be managed by WMF’s team of local, national, and international experts.”

(more)

The conservation of the abbey is being overseen by WMF Europe, based in Paris, working in collaboration with the Fondazione Pescarabruzzo, the Commissario per la ricostruzione in Abruzzo, and the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici per l'Abruzzo.

Abbey of San Clemente a Casauria

The abbey was founded in 871 by Holy Roman Emperor Louis II. The year after its founding, the abbey received the remains of Saint Clement, a late-1st-century pope and martyr. During the 12th century the church was rebuilt with its remarkable Romanesque façade and its sculpted tympanum representing apostles and animals. This original façade with an oratory above the portico is quite rare in Italy.

The main doors of the church, created in 1191, are fine examples of medieval bronzework with a strong Byzantine influence and traces of polychrome on the surfaces. The doors are divided into square panels featuring religious iconography, decorative patterns, and images of abbots and castles.

The earthquake of April 6, 2009, caused the collapse of a tympanum into the nave, damaging an ambon (pulpit) and a large medieval stone candlestick used to hold the Paschal candle. This collapse occurred over the grave of Pope Saint Clement, but his relics were retrieved from the rubble.

Disaster Recovery

WMF was eager to lend its expertise to the recovery efforts in the Abruzzo region and, three weeks after the earthquake, identified the abbey as both significant and in danger. With matching funds from the Fondazione Pescarabruzzo, temporary metal scaffolding has already been installed in order to protect the ambon and Paschal candlestick from the possible collapse of more stones. WMF will address the urgent repairs required to prevent further damage, and then create a master plan and coordinate restoration work.

World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund (WMF) is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world's most treasured places. For over 40 years, working in more than 90 countries, our 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, we inspire an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations.

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