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WORLD MONUMENTS FUND LAUNCHES “THE FUTURE OF BABYLON” PROJECT

WMF COLLABORATES WITH IRAQ’S STATE BOARD OF ANTIQUITIES TO DEVELOP A MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION PLAN FOR BABYLON WITH FUNDING FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

For Immediate Release—New York, NY, January 7, 2009 . . . Bonnie Burnham, president of the World Monuments Fund (WMF), announced today that WMF, with funding of nearly \$700,000 from the U.S. Department of State, is launching “The Future of Babylon,” a major new project at the famed ancient city that lies in modern Iraq. Continuing its collaboration with Iraq’s State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), WMF will work closely with a core team of SBAH professionals to assess and map the current conditions of Babylon and develop a master plan for its conservation, study, and tourism. As part of this project, WMF will train the SBAH team in up-to-date methodologies and technologies in the field.

Deteriorating from neglect, insensitive reconstructions, and use of the site as a military base, Babylon was returned to the control of the SBAH in January 2005, although a number of competing interests continue to threaten the site with unregulated development. The WMF-SBAH Babylon project will develop a comprehensive management plan for the site that will address all of these issues. The project will include mapping of the site’s archaeological features and conditions, focusing on urgent needs, and provide guidelines for future uses of Babylon and its ongoing stewardship for future generations.

“Babylon is an iconic site that holds deep meaning for many cultures,” said **World Monuments Fund President Bonnie Burnham**. “The legendary city of Nebuchadnezzar, known for its famous hanging gardens and considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, Babylon is also an extraordinarily important archaeological site, a place where some of the earliest laws were written and where Alexander the Great spent his final days. It is now a place in desperate need of help. The conservation and management plan that we are creating with the SBAH is the critical first step in rescuing Babylon.”

“The government of Iraq is committed to preserving Babylon, one of the world’s greatest historic sites, for the enjoyment and education of future generations,” said **H. E. Ambassador Samir**

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Sumaida'ie, Ambassador of Iraq to the United States. "Iraqi heritage belongs to all humanity. In the immense task of caring for its world heritage, Iraq welcomes help from and collaborations with the international preservation community. I thank the World Monuments Fund for collaborating with Iraq on the preservation of Babylon, and the State Department for funding this project. Such help and collaboration, in addition to preserving the heritage of humanity, bring our two peoples closer together and provide a foundation for future cooperation."

"As one of Iraq's most familiar and important ancient sites, Babylon stands out among Iraq's rich contributions to humanity," said **Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Goli Ameri.** "This project exemplifies the American people's commitment to the preservation of human heritage, and their profound respect for the cultural heritage of Iraq. The Babylon project is being carried out in full partnership with the Iraq State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, which has dedicated a group of professional staff to collaborate on the planning and fieldwork tasks. This planning process will produce methodologies for site management to benefit heritage sites throughout Iraq."

The core team from the SBAH for the Babylon project is taking an active role in developing the management plan and has been training with WMF in aspects of site management planning, documentation, and assessment. Several of them participated in a May 2008 WMF-led workshop in Amman, Jordan, where they received training in digital surveying techniques to be used at Babylon. WMF will also work closely with other Iraqi stakeholders, including the Ministry of Culture, the State Ministry for Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Education, and the al-Hilla municipal and Babil governorate administrations, as well as with international organizations involved with Babylon.

In recent years, the World Monuments Fund, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have collaborated to provide the SBAH with a range of material, including electronic surveying equipment, computers, mapping and architectural software, laser distance meters, additional field surveying gear, and digital cameras. This equipment will be used in the course of the Babylon project for a variety of tasks. The GCI has provided WMF with essential research materials that will advance work at Babylon and other sites. One of the immediate tasks of the SBAH team will be updating the Babylon site maps, in coordination with members of the Babylon Subcommittee of UNESCO's International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq and institutions including Stony Brook University and the Centro di Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino (CRAST) that have collected satellite imagery and developed digital base maps of the site. Other upcoming activities include the organization of an international team of conservation and site management planning professionals who will work with the SBAH team to collect data and propose solutions for the sustainable use of the site and its surroundings.

The SBAH team will concentrate on four specific areas:

- Archaeological research and scholarship, with a focus on the future of Babylon as a site for fieldwork and study

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- Conservation planning to assess needs, identify emergency interventions, suggest and prioritize conservation activities, identify areas for implementing plans, and establish a monitoring and maintenance plan
- Tourism development and management to assess tourism potential and develop plans for appropriate infrastructure and visitor facilities and services
- Education and interpretation, focused on developing plans for the exhibition and educational use of the site and creating programming for local schools

A coordination meeting for all the groups developing the management plan will be held in early 2009. Additional workshops and meetings will be held over the next 18 to 24 months. The final conservation management plan will be available in English and Arabic.

Cultural Heritage in Iraq

Within the borders of modern Iraq—long considered the “cradle of human civilization”—are some of the world’s most significant archaeological and architectural sites. These include tens of thousands of identified cultural heritage sites, only a small fraction of which have been investigated. These sites range from the cities of ancient Sumer, where early evidence of writing and complex social organization are preserved, to sites and monuments of Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian cultures. The great achievements of these early civilizations and the monuments they left behind have been the focus of extensive study and excavation since the beginnings of archaeological investigation in the early 19th century. Iraq’s rich cultural heritage extends well beyond the ancient world: Baghdad and other cities in Iraq have been centers of culture and learning for hundreds of years, from the early Islamic period through the 20th century. Iraq’s architectural and artistic heritage spans the entire history of human civilization—from its earliest designs to the innovations of modern architects.

Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative

The World Monuments Fund is helping conserve and safeguard Iraq’s cultural heritage through two major programs: this new project at Babylon, which is funded by the U.S. Department of State, and an initiative that was launched in October 2003, following the invasion of Iraq, in partnership with GCI and with support from several donors, including the J.M. Kaplan Fund and the Annenberg Foundation.

WMF and GCI, the two leading independent organizations in the United States dedicated to cultural heritage preservation around the globe, developed the Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative in close cooperation with the SBAH, the national governmental body in charge of conservation and management of archaeological and historic sites and museums in Iraq, to address the catastrophic damage sustained by Iraq’s cultural heritage since the 1990s. The initiative has created a key working partnership between WMF, GCI, and the SBAH that gives Iraq access to the international conservation community, expertise, and support in its effort to protect its heritage. In December 2007, WMF and GCI gathered—for the first time—the leadership of the SBAH, including the chairman and heads of its four major departments and the directors of each province, in a workshop in Amman, Jordan. SBAH

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leadership and its provincial directors, who are working on the ground, reported on their working conditions, the state of sites and monuments in different areas of the country, and their priorities and goals for the coming years.

From the outset, the Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative has focused on building Iraqi capacity to protect, preserve, and care for its cultural heritage and to reestablish connections between Iraqi cultural heritage professionals and the international conservation community. Since the inception of the initiative, WMF and GCI have supported awareness and on-site protective measures at the ancient Assyrian cities of Nineveh and Nimrud; called international attention to threats to cultural heritage in Iraq through outreach efforts, including the listing of the entire country of Iraq on the 2006 and 2008 World Monuments Watch lists of 100 most endangered sites; and led a series of training courses for SBAH personnel. Several of the SBAH provincial directors have reported that they are already using this training to survey their provinces and document new sites, assess damage to known sites, and prioritize salvage excavations and conservation efforts.

One of the most important tools being developed by the WMF-GCI initiative is a national database for recording, mapping, and managing Iraq's thousands of cultural heritage sites. This database, which takes advantage of a range of digital technologies and satellite imagery, is web-based and can be used by scholars and archaeologists both inside and outside Iraq. This will assist the SBAH in protecting Iraq's cultural heritage sites from threats posed by looting as well as potential new construction.

World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund 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. Headquartered in New York, WMF has offices and affiliates worldwide. For more information, please visit www.wmf.org.

Cultural Heritage Center, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State

The Cultural Heritage Center of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs supports foreign affairs functions related to the preservation of cultural heritage. In addition to administering U.S. responsibilities relating to the 1970 UNESCO Convention, the Center administers the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation. Since 2003, the Center has supported numerous projects directed at safeguarding Iraq's cultural heritage and is currently engaged in the Iraq Cultural Heritage Project to assist in the preservation of the ancient history of Iraq. For more information, please visit <http://exchanges.state.gov/chc.html>.