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GETTY CONSERVATION INSTITUTE AND AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH ANNOUNCE COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENT TO ADVANCE CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Collaboration includes enhancements to software used to monitor and map cultural heritage sites in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere

LOS ANGELES – The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) announced today a collaborative agreement with the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) to advance the protection of cultural heritage in the Middle East. The collaboration includes plans to aid in the coordination of regional documentation efforts and enhancements to Arches, a free, open-source, geospatially enabled software platform for cultural heritage inventory and management. Arches is currently being deployed by the ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiative (ASOR CHI) in Syria and Iraq. The collaboration and technological enhancements will make ASOR and other related organizations more effective in the face of threats to cultural heritage sites.

"The ability to quickly and securely assess the condition of cultural heritage sites that are endangered by conflict is an absolute necessity, especially in the wake of the destruction of places such of significance as the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria," says Tim Whalen, director of the GCI. "This collaboration is yet another way in which the international community can work together to promote cultural security and protect the world's cultural heritage."

With an emphasis on coordination, the collaboration and subsequent software enhancements address the significant challenges associated with cultural heritage monitoring in conflict zones: the need for satellite monitoring when it is too dangerous for staff, a mobile application that field surveyors can use to quickly collect current on-the-ground information when the situations in conflict zones stabilize, and protection of information from data breach. Key enhancements to Arches include the ability to capture and organize satellite imagery, rapid assessment capabilities for mobile data collection, and increased security for the submission of data.

Since May 2015, ASOR's preservation planning team has been implementing Arches for damage documentation in Syria. The collaboration extends the impact of ASOR's work and advances cooperation and coordination of many parties working in the same sector to similar ends.

"The work of the GCI and ASOR demonstrates the role humanities play in the broader discussion of international relations and cultural security," says Andrew Vaughn, ASOR Executive Director. "Arches is the only software that serves the needs of the cultural heritage community when it comes to this kind of data gathering, organization, and analysis."

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Arches was developed jointly by the Getty Conservation Institute and World Monuments Fund in 2013. In addition to ASOR, customizations of the software have been used by the [City of Los Angeles](#), [Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa](#), the [Philippine Heritage Map](#), and other organizations concerned with cultural heritage worldwide.

The software enhancements are set to be fully implemented by 2017.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

The Getty Conservation Institute works to advance conservation practice in the visual arts, broadly interpreted to include objects, collections, architecture, and sites. It serves the conservation community through scientific research, education and training, model field projects, and the broad dissemination of the results of both its own work and the work of others in the field. In all its endeavors, the Conservation Institute focuses on the creation and dissemination of knowledge that will benefit the professionals and organizations responsible for the conservation of the world's cultural heritage.

The American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to initiate, encourage, and support research into, and public understanding of, the history and cultures of the Near East and wider Mediterranean world, from the earliest times. ASOR is apolitical and has no religious affiliation.