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PRESS RELEASE

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Generaldirektion, Stauffenbergstr. 41, 10785 Berlin

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supports Berlin's Museum für Islamische Kunst in the archiving of and educating about Syrian cultural heritage

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has made a significant grant to the Museum für Islamische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen Berlin in support of a participatory project to archive, and educate about, Syrian cultural heritage.

This project builds on the *Syrian Heritage Archive Project*, an archive of the country's architectural and archaeological heritage before the war, which since 2013 is being compiled jointly by the German Archaeological Institute and the Museum of Islamic Art. To date, Syrian and German experts have included more than 100,000 digital representations in this digital archive, entering them with geo-references into a geographical information system. The *Syrian Heritage Archive Project* is sponsored by the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Since 2017, the Gerda Henkel Foundation also sponsors a major component of the *Syrian Heritage Archive Project*, which focusses on documenting the destruction and cataloguing the structures and monuments in the old city of Aleppo. In addition to an online catalogue, short films are produced, which will also include personal memories. Through the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, these efforts are now expanded in innovative ways to include participatory approaches: together with two bloggers, two Syrian scholars develop an interactive cultural heritage map linking immaterial heritage, local knowledge, and personal memories and experiences with the material heritage of the data base. In this way a direct connection is created between the user community and the archived material. The members of the community tell their stories, which the scholars include in the interactive map and complement with data on immaterial cultural heritage.

In this way, the successful participatory approach of the award-winning project *Multaka — Museum as Meeting Point* is carried over from the museum into active built heritage preservation: as a "community archive", the Syrian women and men co-write their history and appropriate their own heritage. Hence the plan is to interlink *Multaka* with the interactive map.

"We are very pleased with the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation," says Stefan Weber, the director of the Museum für Islamische Kunst. "It allows us to make the participatory approach of the *Syrian Heritage Archive Project* and *Multaka* more sustainable. Rather than remaining an abstract concept of a few experts, cultural heritage will become very real due to the personal connection with the buildings and sites, especially for locals."

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For five decades, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which is based in New York City, has supported higher educational institutions and cultural organizations. As its Executive Vice President, Mariët Westermann, explains: “The digital archive and map of Syria’s rich cultural history, produced collaboratively by Syrian citizens and refugees with scholars of Syria’s history, offers an innovative approach to the preservation of culture even when so much has been destroyed. It is also a wonderful extension of the *Multaka* project, which has shown how much refugees contribute to their host countries and to rebuilding their communities.”

More information about the *Syrian Heritage Archive Project* is available online at www.syrian-heritage.org. Additional information about *Multaka — Museum as Meeting Point* can be found online at www.multaka.de.

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