

PRESS RELEASE

## **Iraqi House of Manuscripts Launches Major Initiative to Safeguard the Largest Manuscripts Collection in the Country**

**Baghdad, 17 October, 2022.** The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage's (SBAH) Iraqi House of Manuscripts launched a major multi-year initiative today titled the 'Iraqi Manuscripts Initiative', aimed at building the capacities of its technical teams working to conserve valuable manuscripts and rare books.

The programme is being launched in partnership with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) with the support of the Geneva-based International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH Foundation). Liwan Organisation for Culture and Development, which works to conserve Iraqi heritage, will act as an implementing partner.

"The Iraqi House of Manuscripts holds unmatched and diverse collections – one of the most important at the national and regional levels. We are thrilled to team up with our international and local partners in launching this initiative in view of providing much-needed and comprehensive support to our specialised staff to continue protecting and conserving Iraqi written heritage for generations to come", explains Dr Ahmed Alalyawee, Director of the Iraqi House of Manuscripts.

The partnership with BnF will provide SBAH with technical support and offer opportunities for Iraqi conservation and other specialists to share experiences and lessons learned with their international peers. France and Italy's joint effort to accompany SBAH staff in the exchange of expertise on written heritage will build capacities with a view to developing long-term cultural relations. Work to date includes a BnF supported capacity-building programme in Lebanon in June 2022 and now the commencement of training in Baghdad in October and December 2022, supported by the Italian Embassy and French Embassy.

Decades of conflict and violent extremism have taken a toll on Iraq's rich manuscript and rare book heritage and conservation techniques remain constrained by limited materials and resources. "Since our creation in 2017, the protection and the rehabilitation of Iraqi cultural heritage has been an absolute priority for us. ALIPH has been working tirelessly alongside Iraqis to contribute to the preservation of their priceless heritage, which is unique in its diversity and richness. The exemplary cooperation between the SBAH, Liwan and the BnF to protect this distinct collection of manuscripts and rare books is a concrete example of how Iraqis and all those interested in the contents of these collections can be brought together around shared values", adds Valéry Freland, Executive Director of ALIPH.

Through this partnership, the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) will be investing in a long-term relationship with SBAH to assess and study manuscript collections in Baghdad and provide training led by leading experts in the field of conservation, cataloguing, indexing and digitisation. SBAH teams will also benefit from regional and international conferences, forums and shared publications in the field.



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“BnF aims to build up on the long history of the cultural partnership between Iraq and France in order to exchange skills, experiences, and lessons learned in the field of cultural heritage with our colleagues at the House of Manuscripts in Baghdad. This initiative is a pioneering programme where we can team-up to save and conserve a truly unique collection of over 47,000 manuscripts and rare books, by providing the needed capacity building, expertise, and resources to achieve significant change”, says Laurence Engel, President of the BnF.

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*About SBAH Iraqi House of Manuscripts:*

The Iraqi House of Manuscripts was established in 1940 in Baghdad and holds precious manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Syriac, Kurdish, German, Hindi, English, Urdu, and other languages. The manuscripts collection include themes of linguistics, jurisprudence, philosophy, mysticism, theology, agriculture, politics, literature, poetry, song, music, geography and history, as well as other topics. Currently the Iraqi House of Manuscripts seeks to establish a new permanent headquarters building, which will ensure that its collections are adequately safeguarded and where researchers and the wider society will have access to them.

*Media Outreach Contact:*

*General Manager of the Iraqi House of Manuscripts:*

*Almaleky78@hotmail.com*

*The Iraqi House of Manuscripts:*

*iraqmanuscripts@sbah.gov.iq*

