



Abraham Path

# CELEBRATING CONNECTIONS

ABRAHAM PATH INITIATIVE  
2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friend of the Path,

We're celebrating API's 17th year of dusting off the ancient footsteps of Abraham and his family, exploring the combined power of story, walking, and hospitality.

In 2023, the Zagros Mountain Trail in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was formally launched. With this latest addition to the network of trails, travelers may now walk on 1500 miles of trails in the region we call "the Middle East."

In these turbulent times, the Abraham Path Initiative steadfastly promotes connections and inspires hope. As our cultural heritage

and trail development work show, we're making a difference in post-conflict areas, bringing recognition and economic opportunities to local communities.

Against all odds, API invites you to be part of a more welcoming, hospitable world.

We thank retiring executive director Anisa Mehdi for her effective and creative leadership since 2017. And we welcome the enthusiastic Christopher McLaurin as executive director in 2024.

With gratitude for your support,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Will Ury".

**William Ury**

Founder and Chair Emeritus



# ABRAHAM PATH INITIATIVE (API)

**VISION:** Abraham Path Initiative (API) envisions Southwest Asia as a global destination for world class walking trails, hospitality, and a place of transformative connections.

**MISSION:** We empower vibrant growth through trail development, storytelling, education, and heritage preservation.

LEFT: Ruwanduz Gorge, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Photo by L. Mohammad

RIGHT: Ezidi women celebrating the New Year in Lalish, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Photo by A. Mehdi

# KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2023

## ON THE GROUND:

- Launched! The **Zagros Mountain Trail** in Iraqi Kurdistan
- Part of Abraham's Path in Turkey is re-waymarked
- Cultural heritage filming completed in Nineveh, Iraq

## NEWS & BOOKS:

- Two Abraham Path Fellows published books based on research funded by API
- API Fellow Emily Garthwaite won the first **Goldziher Prize** for journalists from around the world. Her photos focus on Iraq's Tigris River
- Ezidi filmmaker Fahed Shamo was nominated as a *National Geographic* Young Explorer

## IN THE WORKS:

- API's new Three-Year Plan will focus on empowering people in the region with a sustainable model for growth
- We launch a Senior Fellows program expanding arts, culture, and trail development
- Educational programs will pair early career individuals with mentors, to create new projects
- Partnerships with local organizations toward long term success
- 2024 will bring us a new executive director, chosen in a collaborative process with board, staff, and Anisa Mehdi
- Release of films on historic minority cultures in Iraq's Nineveh province

PHOTO: A view of Kherdas Village, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. By P. Zimmermann



PHOTO: Christopher McLaurin, Mt. Massive, Colorado. By M. Ploguez.

## **A NOTE FROM INCOMING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER McLAURIN**

Dear Friends and Supporters,

API has spent 2023 thinking deeply about how we can serve the communities of the path and how our work can best empower the people who live there. Beyond the 1,500 miles of trails we have helped to develop, API is gratified that jobs and an uptick in the quality of life for colleagues in the experiential tourism sector are results of our engagement.

We are excited to continue to expand the Path, lend our expertise to support their continued management, and tell the stories of the people who live there. We aim to inspire others to visit, contribute to local economies, and create memories that will last a lifetime.

As API's incoming executive director, I am both thankful to Anisa for the strong organization she has built and excited to join with you to make our ambitious vision a reality!

Sincerely,

**Christopher McLaurin**

Executive Director (2024 and onward)

# ON THE GROUND IN TURKEY



PHOTO: Turkey relief effort. By Ö. Tanık.



## EARTHQUAKE RELIEF AND TRAIL WORK:

A major earthquake shook central Turkey in February. API partners, and the trail they have stewarded, were at the epicenter. API quickly raised funds to help these communities survive and rebuild.

As the emergency abated, our long-time partner **Ömer Tanık** became an API Fellow. Ömer led a team to re-waymark **Abraham's Path** from Yuvacali to Kisas, so that people may walk there again for the first time since the start of the Syrian civil war.

PHOTO: Ömer Tanık on the trail. By D. Landis



# LAUNCHING THE ZAGROS MOUNTAIN TRAIL IN THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

At 215 km, the Zagros Mountain Trail is now officially on the map of Iraqi Kurdistan. API has supported the development of this trail since 2018, supplying expertise and funding for homestay host and guide trainings, through-hikes, and the creation of a [website](#).

At the [launch event](#) in Erbil, Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs and Climate Change, noted, "the objectives of the trail align with the Kurdistan Regional Government's goal to diversify the economy." Congratulations, ZMT!

PHOTO: Shush region, Zagros Mountain Trail. By P. Zimmermann




# CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION

## TRADITIONAL EMBROIDERY IN BAKHDEDA, IRAQ

Colorful threads in the hands of skilled embroiderers tell stories of the town of Bakhdeda. Once part of ancient Assyria, Bakhdeda is located between today's Mosul and Erbil. It's renowned for exquisite handmade *shals*, or aprons, that are the outermost layer of traditional attire for women. Films about this heritage, which is now imperiled by inexpensive imports and modernization, will be released in 2024.

PHOTO: A dress at the Palm Sunday parade, Bakhdeda, 2023. By A. Mehdi



## XÊR: AN EZIDI TRADITION OF BLESSING

Ezidi culture and religion is transmitted orally and in action. It is based on an economy of "xêr," or blessing, which can look like almsgiving, sacrifice, or pious rituals. The Ezidi way of life on Mount Shingal is little known outside of the region and, due to generations of displacement and the ISIS genocide, is under threat. We are working with a young Ezidi filmmaker in Shingal to bring an understanding of xêr to the big screen.

PHOTO: Fahed Shamo filming in Shingal with API researcher, Makrina Finlay. By A. Mehdi



# CONNECTING IN CYBERSPACE: TOGETHER ONLINE



## TRADITIONAL MOTIFS IN TODAY'S TOGS

**Natalie Tahhan**

*"Palestinian embroidery could signify a woman's background, her marital status, her interests, and so much more."*



## STORIES WITH IMPACT

**Mohanad Salahat**

*"I always had the nagging feeling that the written word wasn't showing the whole picture."*

*On location in Zawat village, Nablus*



## TOURISM IN TURKEY

**Iffet Özgönül**

*"I didn't make any plans. I just let the paths take me on the trails of the early hunters and gatherers on foot."*

*On location in Karahantepe*



## GEMS OF TURQUOISE MOUNTAIN

**Shoshana Stewart**

*"The thing to be positive about is that young people are embracing the connection that arts and culture bring to us all."*



## COURAGEOUS WOMEN/ PROTECTIVE MOUNTAINS

**Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman**

*"Kurdistan may be [a patriarchal society] in a socially conservative part of the world, but women will not accept second-class status."*

Since 2020, API has introduced global audiences to the people and places of Southwest Asia with online programming.

See more videos and postcards at: [www.abrahampath.org/stories/](http://www.abrahampath.org/stories/)

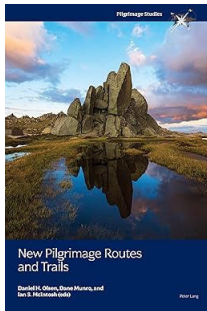
# BOOKS PUBLISHED WITH API SUPPORT:

Abraham Path continues to light the imagination of walkers, wanderers, writers, and cinematographers worldwide.

In 2023, important books were published bringing life and cultures of Southwest Asia to global audiences.

**FOR MORE ON API IN THE MEDIA:**

[www.abrahampath.org/about-us/media/](http://www.abrahampath.org/about-us/media/)

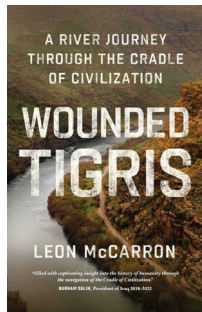


## NEW PILGRIMAGE ROUTES AND TRAILS

*Daniel H. Olsen, Dane Munro, and Ian S. McIntosh (Editors)*

"The Abraham Path: A Pilgrimage in Time" is Anisa Mehdi's chapter in this collection of essays on travel.

Anisa writes, "The idea of walking in an area internationally known for conflict and hostility was audacious, a wildly creative new approach to peacebuilding thrown onto a dry and crumbling court of failed diplomacy."



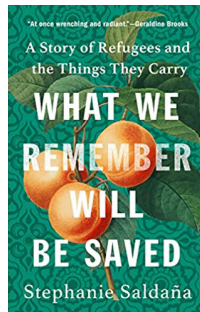
## WOUNDED TIGRIS: A RIVER JOURNEY THROUGH THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION

By Leon McCarron

In 2021, API Fellow **Leon McCarron** traveled the length of the Tigris River from Turkey through Syria and into Iraq. In his biography of the Tigris and the people along its banks, Leon reveals an ecological disaster in the making. This expedition was the first of its kind in decades.

Photos in the book are by API Fellow **Emily Garthwaite** and others on the journey.

With gratitude to the Prior Family Foundation for supporting this research.



## WHAT WE REMEMBER WILL BE SAVED: A STORY OF REFUGEES AND THE THINGS THEY CARRY

By Stephanie Saldaña

With a grant from API in 2016, API Fellow **Stephanie Saldaña** began researching the lives of people forced to flee their homes due to conflict and climate change. She writes, "I have come to believe that a lost neighborhood can be salvaged in a song and that an entire city can be carried in a dress." These are portraits of Iraqis and Syrians holding onto home and identity when all else is lost.

Dear Friends,

What a year! In 2023 we helped revive Abraham's Path in Turkey, and celebrated the launch of the Zagros Mountain Trail. I'm proud that during my tenure, walking trails in Jordan, Palestine, Egypt's Sinai, Turkey and Iraq were proven sustainable.

Thanks to the **ALIPH Foundation** we filmed imperiled cultural traditions with Syriac and Ezidi communities in Nineveh, Iraq. These survivors of the genocide attempt by ISIS are among the kindest people I have ever met. They, like you, hope for a world of hospitality. You'll meet them in upcoming films.

You and I have met on the trails, in our webinars, and in conversations about the Abraham Path. My thanks to you, and to the board of directors and team, for our many productive years together. Here's to the future!

With gratitude,



Anisa Mehdi

Executive Director (2017-2023)



PHOTO: Anisa Mehdi with API project manager Lawin Mohammad on the Zagros Mountain Trail. By P. Zimmermann

## OUR THANKS TO API'S GENEROUS 2023 SUPPORTERS

### TRAIL BLAZERS (\$5,000 and above)

Kenneth Baca & Isabelle Guy  
Peggy Dulany  
Roger Low  
Prem & Susan Manjooan<sup>1</sup>  
Anisa Mehdi & Peter Zimmermann\*<sup>2</sup>  
Lionel Sauvage  
William Ury<sup>3</sup>

### EXPLORERS (\$500-\$4,999)

Anonymous  
Ann & Vaughn Andrus\*<sup>4</sup>  
Cynda & Marcel Arsenault<sup>5</sup>  
David Baum  
Mark & Karen Biddle  
Deidre Combs  
John Farkas, Sr.  
James Patrick Finerty<sup>6</sup>  
Randy Goodman  
Benina Gould<sup>7</sup>  
Marcia Greenblatt & Bob Kovacs  
Susan Hackley  
Belle Linda Halpern  
Tim & Frances Hester  
Laila Hilfinger  
Raymond Jallow Family Foundation  
Melissa Lane  
David Lesch  
Katie Lunday  
John & Susan Collin Marks  
Jean McCreary & Greg Franklin  
Matthew McGowan  
Dulce Murphy<sup>8</sup>  
Melanie Nezer  
David Ophel  
Oliver Pospisil  
Elizabeth Rhodes & Mazen Al-Derzi

Robert Ronus  
Alba Sari  
James Sebenius  
Allison Shapira  
Ross & Kathleen Sherbrooke  
Mike Stevenson  
Stefan Szepesi<sup>9</sup>  
Elaine Teo  
Mark & Elizabeth Tinglof  
Carl & Tinbet Tinstman  
Elizabeth Ury<sup>10</sup>  
Joshua Weiss & Adina Elfant\*<sup>11</sup>  
Barry Wind\*

### WALKERS (\$50-\$499)

Anonymous  
Elias Amidon (Sufi Way)\*  
Liz Antunovic  
Sarah Antunovic  
Sergio Atallah  
Brett Atkinson  
Marc Atkinson  
Jon Autiello  
Penny Baker  
Joe Bamberg  
Pat Barnes  
Alison Bason  
Leonardo Batalha de Oliveira  
Julian Bender  
Clark & Susana Bernard  
Clara Bernhardt  
Laura Bogardus\*  
Sarah Bottomley  
Lionel Brard  
Alexandra Brown  
Dbudicha Budicha  
Arlene Burrows

James Carty\*  
Fanny Castel  
Janan & Paul Chandler  
Linda Cohen  
Steven Coppens<sup>12</sup>  
Mike Curtis  
Dave D'Angelo  
Donna Daigle  
Mary DeBorde  
Robert Deborde  
Paul & Sally Dobinson\*  
Karen Donelson & Bob Benno  
Diane Dulin\*  
Tarek Eldin & Helene Sroat  
Clair Embry  
Mina Eom  
Carolyn Erickson  
Margaret & Pablo Escobar\*  
Fotine Fahouris  
Pamina Firchow  
Caroline Firstbrook & Ian Smith  
Mia Forbes Pirie  
Amy Rebecca Gay  
Stephen Goldberg & Jeanne Brett  
Morton Goldfein<sup>13</sup>  
MM Golten  
Michael & Anne Gorman  
William Gourlay  
Zachary Graham  
Naomi Grobstein  
Delinda C. Hanley\*  
Lisa Hart  
Stewart Herman  
Elizabeth Hester  
Helen Hill  
Courtney Hillesheim  
Brenda Hines

Alix Hopkins  
Carla Houben  
Cheryl Hunter  
John Jarvis  
Joanne Jones Jennings  
Monique Jouanin  
Renee Karadsheh  
Greg & Mary Keys  
Avery Kintner  
Neil Douglas Klotz  
Norman Kulla  
Anna Kunzler & Bruce Scott  
Tatyana Kurbanov  
Sara Laschever  
Guy Lasnier\*  
Marisa Lau  
Teresa Legregni & Dan Swanson\*<sup>14</sup>  
Dmitry Levin  
Steven Lewis  
Jen Lin  
Miriam Lorie  
Benjamin Manig  
Elizabeth Mann  
Melissa Manwaring  
Miriam & Nabil Marshood  
Jane Maxey  
Geraldyn McGuire  
Christopher McLaurin  
Philip Merrell  
Jim Metzger & Deborah Baldwin  
Eva Milkowski  
Felix Miller  
Brian Mockenhaupt  
Matthew Moore  
Margareta Morin  
Mariia Morozova  
Bettina Müller

BACKGROUND: Palm Sunday celebration in Bakhdeda, Iraq. By A. Mehdi

Diane Neil Mills  
Paul Newfield  
Cheow Siang Ng  
Rembrandt & Catherine Niessen  
Rachel Nordlinger  
David Norminton<sup>15</sup>  
Tyler Norris  
Lucy Nusseibeh  
Alyssa O'Driscoll  
Iffet Özgönül  
Martha Patrick\*  
Geoff Patterson & Elizabeth Farry  
David Paul  
Lilian Peters  
David Pill  
Christie Platt<sup>16</sup>  
Beth Powmesamy  
Robert Price  
Carol Pucci  
Zeyba Rahman  
Judy Raiffa  
David Rapkin\*  
Lynn Reyman & David Campeas<sup>17</sup>  
Tara Reynolds  
Marcia & Tim Roebuck  
Alex Ros  
Bruce Rosen  
Robert Rosenberg<sup>18</sup>  
Margreet Rotte  
Jennifer Rowe  
Shelley Ruddock\*  
Elish Sari\*  
Claudia Schurr  
Judith Stark  
Jennifer Steele  
Christopher Stephens  
Iain Stewart

Patricia Stocker<sup>19</sup>  
Ömer Tanik  
Feteri Tapia  
Celeste Taylor  
Virginia Thomson  
Kate Veys  
Sarah Virden  
Mary Waddell  
Ben Walker  
Kathlena Walther  
Ilana Weiss  
Jerry White\*  
Mark & Shirley Yolleck\*  
Craig Zelizer

### DEDICATION IN MEMORY OF:

<sup>7</sup>Casi Kushel  
<sup>8</sup>Joseph Montville  
<sup>12</sup>Vicki Weiss

### DEDICATION IN HONOR OF:

<sup>1,3,5,6,13,14,15,16,17</sup>Anisa Mehdi  
<sup>2</sup>Miran Dizayee  
<sup>2</sup>Lawin Mohammad  
<sup>4</sup>John W. Porter  
<sup>9</sup>Alison Tanik  
<sup>9</sup>Ömer Tanik  
<sup>10,19</sup>William Ury  
<sup>11</sup>Dr. Earle Weiss  
<sup>12</sup>Yoad Gilad  
<sup>18</sup>Family and Friends

\*Monthly donor

# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

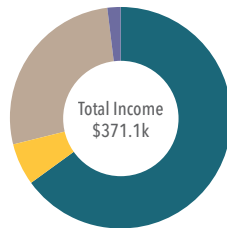
## SUMMARY OF 2023

We end 2023 in a strong financial position. This year, our board undertook a generous matching campaign. Your response to the campaign helped us raise funds above and beyond API's 2023 budget. You humble us.

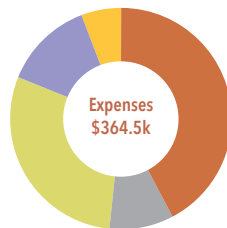
Your response to our call for emergency funds, to assist victims of the earthquake in Turkey, was outstanding. We raised over \$21,000 in two weeks, and sent emergency shelters, food, and blankets to affected communities along Abraham's Path at the earthquake's epicenter.

We remain the primary financial sponsor of the Zagros Mountain Trail, and assist the ZMT team in finding additional funding.

In 2023, more than 60% of our budget went to programs, directly making a difference in Iraq and Turkey. We will continue to increase program funding per our 2024-2026 strategic plan.



**INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS: 65%**  
**FOUNDATIONS & GRANTS: 27%**  
**TURKEY EMERGENCY RELIEF: 6%**  
**OTHER PARTNERSHIPS: 2%**



**OUTREACH & EDUCATION: 42%**  
**ADMINISTRATION: 29%**  
**TRAIL DEVELOPMENT: 13%**  
**FUND DEVELOPMENT: 10%**  
**TURKEY EMERGENCY RELIEF: 6%**



Our financials are audited annually. Details available on [GuideStar](#) and at: [www.abrahampath.org/giving](http://www.abrahampath.org/giving)

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**William Ury, Founder & Chair Emeritus**

**Anisa Mehdi, President & Executive Director**

**Lionel Sauvage, Chair**

**Samia Bahsoun, Vice Chair**

**Oliver Pospisil, Secretary**

**Marcia Greenblatt, Treasurer**

**David Baum**

**Deidre Combs**

**Leo D'Acierno**

**Dave D'Angelo**

**Susan Hackley**

**David Lesch**

**Joshua Weiss**

PHOTO: Ruwanduz Gorge, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. By A. Mehdi

API PARTNERS:



WITH GRATITUDE FOR FOUNDATION SUPPORT FROM:



*"We look forward to the many benefits the trail will bring to our people and to the international visitors that will come and walk with us."*

*-Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman*



The Abraham Path Initiative is a US based nonprofit, non-religious and non-political international NGO registered as a 501(c)(3) organization.

FIND US AT: [www.abrahampath.org](http://www.abrahampath.org)

**USA MAILING ADDRESS:**

Abraham Path Initiative  
14 South State Street,  
Suite #2  
Newtown, PA 18940

**SCAN ME AND DONATE!**



FRONT COVER: Prayer at Sheikh Mand shrine, Shingal, Iraq. By A. Mehdi

BACK COVER: Ibrahim Meer Omar, Qamyran, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. By A. Mehdi

PONTIUS-COURTNEY  
GRAPHIC DESIGN