



ON-GOING ACTIVITIES



CELEBRATING HERAT'S RICH CULTURE

On a wonderful autumn evening during August, the courtyard garden of Qala Moeen Afzal Khan in southern Kabul was filled with the strains of the living cultural heritage of Herat, as six master-musicians from the city performed in front of an audience of Afghan and international guests. The event was organised by the Aga Khan Music Initiative in Central Asia (AKMICA) to mark the imminent opening of a branch in Herat of its school of traditional music. AKMICA's folk band 'Guldasta e Kharabat', whose members are drawn from across Afghanistan, also played, and the walled garden provided a backdrop for an exhibition of the surviving architectural treasures in and around the old city of Herat, some of which are being conserved by AKTC.



Detail of a miniature by Behzad

For more information about AKTC's programme in Afghanistan, contact us in Qala Moeen Afzal Khan, Gozargah Street, District 3, Kabul or Qala Ikhtyaruddin, Herat. information@aktc.akdn-afg.org

REVIVING TRADITIONAL BUILDING CRAFTS IN THE OLD CITY OF HERAT

One such initiative is the conservation of the Chaharsuq cistern, which lies at the junction of the historic bazaar in the old city of Herat. Built in 1634 (1045 AH), the cistern comprises a brick dome spanning some 20 metres over an underground tank that, until the 1970s, was the principal source of water for the inhabitants of this quarter. Originally supplied via a system of covered water channels that led from the ancient Jui Nau, that runs along the ridge north of the old city, the cistern is the largest of those that enabled the population of the old city to withstand long sieges.



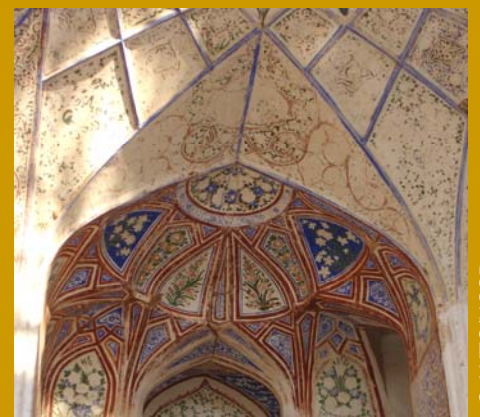
The damage sections of the huge brick dome were the initial focus for conservation, after removal of more than a metre of accumulated earth. Having repaired the brick masonry structure, the entire roof surface was finished with fired bricks, creating a wonderful rooftop space in the heart of the old city, extending over the adjacent bazaars. After carefully documenting the surviving fragments of Safavid brickwork on the main external elevation of the cistern, masons are now reconstructing the karbandi geometry in the squinches, using specially-made fired bricks and glazed tile slips to match the original work.



Since its inception in 2005, AKTC's programme in Herat has been co-funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.



Upon completion of this painstaking conservation work, it is envisaged that the shops that have been built across the entrance of the cistern will be re-located, so that the small square in front of the monument can be reclaimed for public use. Ideas are being solicited from Heratis as to the eventual use of the restored cistern – ideas so far include a space for music, theatre, cinema and other cultural events, a library or a community centre.



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The community of Imam Shish Noor

The countryside around Herat is dotted with historic shrines, many of which are in a poor state of repair. One of the most popular is the shrine of Imam Shish Noor (or 'Imam of Six Lights') whose central dome retains fine geometric plaster decoration. Having heard about our conservation work in the old city of Herat, a group of citizens who were concerned at the state of the building approached AKTC for technical advice. Using funds collected by the group from private sources, the shrine is now the scene of regular Friday morning breakfast meetings to review the ongoing community-managed repairs.

ISSUES & CONCERNS



Vendor selling sanjit along the river – in the background, the Shah do Shamshira mosque

■ KABUL'S ELEGANT RIVERFRONT

Built in the early 20th century by Amanullah Khan, the range of two-storey riverfront buildings that adjoin the now-restored mausoleum of Timur Shah in the city centre, are an iconic part of Kabul's architecture. Now occupied by everything from photo studios to small tailoring workshops and centres for body-building, the roofs of these buildings are in a poor state of repair, with many sections close to collapse. In 2003, on hearing a rumour that buildings on both sides of the river would be bulldozed as part of a proposed road-widening scheme, AKTC surveyed the entire range of buildings and registered an official request for them to be registered as historic monuments. A single bay was repaired in 2004, to try to encourage the private owners to invest in their property, but resources did not allow further works.

Linking the popular Shah do Shamshira ('Two Swords') mosque and shrine – where legend has it a valiant Muslim warrior fell while fighting with a sword in each hand – and what is now the Lycee Ayesha Durrani, the largest girl's school in the country, these riverfront buildings constituted an unique ensemble that should be preserved. Along with the cleaning of the bed of Kabul river (see AKTC July 2006 Newsletter) they could become the focus of a long-overdue revitalization initiative for the city centre. The challenge now is to secure the funds to realize what could be an important initiative for the population of Kabul.



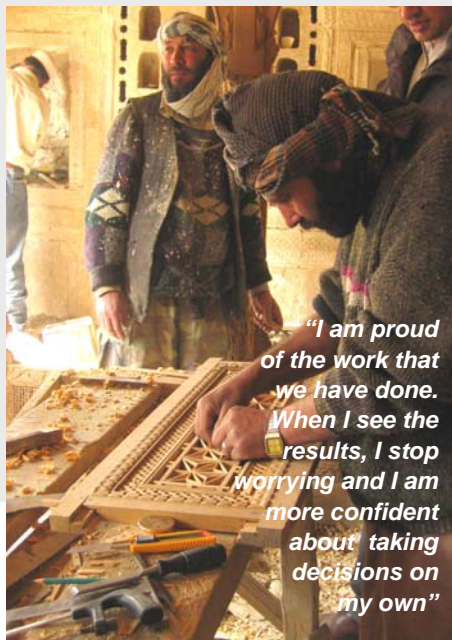
Joblyn Leslie

■ KABUL OLD CITY: A CRAFTSMAN'S STORY

An important goal of AKTC's ongoing conservation work in the old city of Kabul is the revival of traditional building crafts. The handful of craftsmen who started work in the spring of 2002 has now grown to 48, and includes specialist brick masons, stone layers, plasterers and carpenters. Through a system of in-house apprenticeships, these master-craftsmen have in turn trained 24 younger men who, it is hoped, will keep these traditional techniques alive.



One of the most difficult and critical moments of my work is preparing to jack up a structure – we need to be very careful"



"I am proud of the work that we have done. When I see the results, I stop worrying and I am more confident about taking decisions on my own"

"I want to work in all stages of conservation, so as to learn more"



Sher Mohammad is a master-carpenter from Kapisa, who has worked in the old city since late 2002:

"I learned my skills from my father who was a carpenter, but had no prior experience in conservation..."

"The work is both more interesting and challenging than ordinary building, as it takes both time and quality materials to stabilise historic structures - and also costs more..."

VISITS

H.E. Ahmad Zia Masood, first deputy President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, visited Baghe Babur, the mausoleum of Timur Shah and Park e Zarnegar on 22nd August, accompanied by Mr Bahram, the deputy Mayor of Kabul.

The visiting Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, **Frank-Walter Steinmeier**, inspected on 21st August the ongoing conservation work in Baghe Babur, which is part-funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The Kabul riverfront, during a seasonal flood in 1994