



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Historic Cities Programme



## REVITALISING THE CITADELS OF SYRIA

**PROJECT BRIEF**

2008



## CITADEL CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Syria boasts an astonishing array of archaeological sites dating as far back as 8000 BC, but a rich heritage can also be a burden when governments are faced with significant maintenance costs. In 1999, the Syrian Government approached the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) for assistance in the restoration of the three Citadels of Salah ad-Din, Masyaf, and Aleppo. Founded by His Highness the Aga Khan in 1988, the Trust had already established a reputation as one of the world's foremost conservation organisations. Moreover, AKTC had been working in several sites in the Muslim world, from Cairo to Mali, Afghanistan to Zanzibar, to strike an appropriate balance between tourism and conservation and between development and cultural preservation.



A partnership agreement was signed with the Syrian General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in 1999. Consistent with the area development approach developed by AKTC in Egypt, Pakistan and elsewhere, under the agreement AKTC would also work to improve the area around the citadels.

During the first phase under the partnership, work focused in three main areas: conservation of the Citadels; training of antiquities staff, local craftsmen and building professionals in modern conservation practice (while the conservation projects were carried out); and development of re-utilisation plans for the Citadels, including management guidelines and investments in visitor infrastructure such as visitor centres, pathways, signage, etc.

The scope of conservation work at each site has varied, but at each site, as at other sites in the Muslim world where AKTC works, the conservation work was closely linked to the generation of socio-economic benefits, particularly through the creation of culturally and environmentally appropriate tourism infrastructure.



The first phase was successfully completed in 2007. The work to prepare the "Visitor's Centres" for the three citadels of Aleppo, Salah ad-Din, and Masyaf was completed in May 2008. A Citadel Operations and Maintenance Manual has been prepared. A publication entitled *Syria Medieval Castles Between East and West* and a guidebook on the Citadel of Aleppo were also produced in 2007. In 2008, guidebooks for Masyaf and Salah ad-Din were printed.

### *Citadel of Aleppo*

In 2000, AKTC initiated a conservation project at the Aleppo Citadel, focusing on three historically and architecturally coherent elements. These included the surrounding walls and the Ayyubid Palace Complex. The Palace, with its fine marble-mosaic floors and elaborately carved entrance, is a major monument of Islamic architecture.

AKTC completed the rehabilitation of sections of the Citadel walls, several towers and the Ayyubid Palace complex in 2007. In the process, it unearthed and conserved large areas of Ottoman structures. It also restored the Ottoman barracks, adapting them for use as a visitor's centre that includes a cafeteria.

AKTC also completed tourist paths and signage, and prepared documentation materials for tourists. It worked on the conservation of the Ayyubid cistern, the *Satura* and the furnishing of a new museum in the armoury. Largely

*The Citadel of Aleppo, where the Aga Khan Trust for Culture has rehabilitated walls, several towers and the Ayyubid Palace complex.*

*Cover: An aerial view of the Citadel of Salah ad-Din.*

funded by AKTC, certain elements of the rehabilitation were funded by the World Monuments Fund.

## *Citadel of Masyaf*

The Citadel of Masyaf is the smallest and least well-known of the three sites. It lies on the edge of the old town of Masyaf in a dramatic natural setting at the foot of the coastal mountains. Although its construction reveals elements from Byzantine and other periods, much of what remains was built under the leadership of Sinan, in the twelfth century.

When AKTC began restoration, the castle's superstructure was largely intact, but it had been damaged by armed assault and earthquakes. In recent times, townspeople had used it as a home and a place to tether goats. Illegally built houses on the approaches to the Citadel highlighted several urban planning issues, including zoning, the resolution of land-use conflicts, unregulated construction and the question of what we preserve and how it should be done.

AKTC's conservation work at the Citadel began in 2000 on a section of the outer wall, which had partially collapsed. Part of the wall had to be rebuilt to make it structurally sound, using stones identical to the original taken from a quarry nearby. A more comprehensive consolidation and restoration programme for the entire structure, developed in close consultation with the Directorate of Antiquities, commenced in early 2001 and finished in 2007.

In physical terms, the intervention was limited to strict conservation, that is, consolidating ruins to arrest the process of deterioration, and where necessary, minor reconstruction to avert the threat of collapse. Visitors were provided with a minimum infrastructure to guide them around the site, including signage, information panels, lighting and improved access. The objective was to maintain the basic integrity of the site as a ruin whilst assisting visitors to gain as much from a visit as possible.

In addition to conservation of the castle, the project worked to improve the urban context, with a view to conserving and enhancing the historic remains of the adjacent old city of Masyaf, upgrading the markets and pedestrian areas in the old city centre, and creating more attractive facilities for visitors.

A rehabilitation project for the city's local market, the "Souk Saghir", was carried out in collaboration with shop owners and local authorities. A number of other rehabilitation projects were carried out in the city to create a critical mass of activities intended to encourage tourists to stay longer in the town.

As it has in Cairo, Samarkand, Delhi and Zanzibar, AKTC also offered support for improving current building regulations. This effort was underpinned by granting free design assistance to land owners and house owners who intended to build in the central area. A number of pilot rehabilitation projects for sensitive buildings were also prepared in the interest of promoting new, adapted designs for the inner city.

In addition, a strategic urban-planning concept was developed in order to resolve anticipated land-use conflicts around the Citadel and to prevent encroachment on the Citadel—a measure intended to preserve what is expected to be a major economic asset for the city in the future.



*The work on the Citadel of Masyaf was limited to strict conservation, that is, consolidating ruins to arrest the process of deterioration and, where necessary, minor reconstruction to avert collapse. In contrast, Souk al-Saghir was an urban rehabilitation project that intervened through partial restoration of existing buildings and their adjoining open spaces.*

*"We are looking at how to develop economic results from the restoration of historic buildings and to bring out new knowledge and create new knowledge, which then can be used by communities to change, and to change positively... What I am hoping to achieve is the notion that these historic sites are potential economic and social dynamos. They are not frozen, paralysed, historic assets. They are assets that can actually contribute to the quality of life of the people who live in those contexts."*

*--His Highness the Aga Khan,  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2007*



## *Citadel of Salah ad-Din*

The Citadel of Salah ad-Din is located high in the coastal mountain range, some 24 kilometres east of Lattakia. Its natural setting is spectacular, resting high on a ridge between two deep ravines, and surrounded by forest. Like many sites in Syria, its history reaches back possibly to the Phoenician period (early first millennium BC). Much of what remains visible today dates from the Crusaders, who occupied the site around 1100 AD. The Crusader walls were breached by the armies of Salah ad-Din in July 1188, and it is from this victory that the castle takes its present name. Over the next hundred years, the new Muslim rulers built a mosque and a fine palace and baths at the heart of the castle complex. Later, a madrasa was also constructed.



*The mosque and palace of the Citadel of Salah ad-Din, both AKTC projects, were restored using materials and techniques identical to those employed by medieval craftsmen.*

It is these Ayyubid and Mamluk sections of the Citadel that AKTC selected for its conservation efforts. AKTC began conservation work in 1999 with an extensive survey of the site. In 2000, restoration of the mosque and its minaret and the adjacent madrasa began. An earthquake had broken the top of the minaret apart, causing it to partially collapse, so the AKTC team painstakingly recorded the position of each stone, slowly took the top apart, then re-built the minaret using the original stones and other stones found on site to form a stable and durable structure.

Different problems were tackled in the madrasa and mosque. Both buildings were structurally stable, but successive phases of modern repairs using inappropriate materials had altered and damaged the historic fabric. Where feasible, the modern interventions were carefully removed, and walls, ceilings and roofs were then repaired and finished using materials and techniques identical to those employed by the original Medieval craftsmen, making the buildings sound without detracting from their historic character. The restoration process was successfully completed in the autumn of 2000.

## **ALEPPO CITADEL PERIMETER PROJECT**

The second phase for these projects builds upon the work successfully completed in the first, but links it to the wider urban environment. Started in 2006, the second phase focused primarily on the urban centre of Aleppo in the vicinity of the Citadel entrance. Developed in close collaboration with the Directorate of the Old City of Aleppo, projects, included landscaping around the Citadel entrance, creation of a pedestrian zone, traffic planning and lighting. AKTC involvement in this project encompasses landscaping the critical open spaces in front of the entrance to the Citadel, including the rehabilitation of the outer moat walls and slopes on both sides of the citadel entrance. Social projects are planned for poor residential neighbourhoods in adjacent areas.



*Landscaping and newly created pedestrian zones in front of Aleppo's Citadel are part of the wider perimeter project.*

AKTC also played a lead role in developing a master plan and preparing detailed studies for the entire Citadel Perimeter zone, an effort which involved several partners, including the Aleppo Municipal Council, the German government and GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation).

As in most places where it works, AKTC was also assisted by other agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). In Aleppo, the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance (AKAM) has provided loans for housing rehabilitation in the Old City since 2007. AKAM also works with the Healthy Villages Programme (HVP), an initiative of the Syrian Government, in more than a dozen such villages in Afrin, Azaz and Maskan.

For more information about the AKDN or its agencies, please see the website: [www.akdn.org](http://www.akdn.org)