



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Inauguration of the Ayyubid wall and Tarabay al-Sherif Complex projects in Cairo



Cairo, Egypt, 16 June 2015 - The restoration of the Tarabay al-Sherif Complex and 1.5 kilometres of the historic Ayyubid wall were inaugurated today by the Minister of Antiquities, Mamdouh El Damaty, the Governor of Cairo, Galal Said, and Luis Monreal, General Manager of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

Both projects are part of the much larger urban regeneration programme undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture with the support of the Egyptian government, the Governorate of Cairo, the Supreme Council of Antiquities and other partners. The larger urban regeneration project includes the 30-hectare (74-acre) Azhar Park, a number of restored mosques, schools and public spaces, training programmes for the youth of the area, health and education initiatives and improvements to water and sanitation, among other programmes.

The Ayyubid wall, once buried under centuries of rubble, was excavated by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Begun in 1176 by Salah al-Din, the walls were built to contain the former Fatimid palace-city and its suburbs, the pre-Fatimid city of Fustat and the pre-existing fortifications within a single system.

In the centuries that followed, Cairo's rapid urban expansion went well beyond Salah al-Din's boundaries, rendering the old walls virtually obsolete. When the eastern part of the city went into decline, the "Darassa" site, where Azhar Park now stands, became a rubble dump, starting in the 15th century. By the 20th century, the Ayyubid wall had largely been covered in rubble and lost to history.

Today, after the excavation and grading works for the Azhar Park, 1.5 kilometres of the remaining Ayyubid wall – from Bab al-Wazir to al-Azhar Street – has been restored to international standards. It now forms the boundary between the Darb al-Ahmar district and the Park.

The Tarabay al-Sherif complex, built in 1503, lies on the southern side of Azhar Park, just outside the Ayyubid wall. The project included the removal of several meters of rubbish that had accumulated around the monument, structural consolidation, and conservation of both interior and exterior surfaces of the mausoleum, madrassa, and sabil-kuttab, and the organization of exterior spaces in order to prepare the area as the southern entry point to Azhar Park.

Tarabay al-Sherif was purchased as a slave by Mamluk Sultan Qaytbay, and subsequently freed and appointed Amir in the late 15th century. Azdumur was also purchased by Qaytbay, and appointed to a number of governmental positions. He built his tomb on the

northern side of the mausoleum of Tarabay. There is no documentation regarding the relationship between Tarabay and Azdumur to explain why their mausoleums were constructed in such proximity.

The restoration of Tarabay al-Sherif was supported by the World Monuments Fund® Robert W. Wilson Challenge to Conserve Our Heritage.

Both the Ayyubid wall and the Tarabay al-Sherif monuments are part of the broader urban generation projects begun in 1984 when the Aga Khan Award for Architecture sponsored a symposium in Cairo entitled “The Expanding Metropolis: Coping with the Urban Growth of Cairo”. At that time, His Highness the Aga Khan offered to create a park for the citizens of the Egyptian capital. The creation of Azhar Park and the numerous urban regeneration projects around it, including the Ayyubid wall and the restoration of the Tarabay complex, speak to the possibilities of rejuvenating areas that once appeared to be in terminal decline.

Another example is the restoration of the 14th century Amir Aqsunqur “Blue Mosque” in Al-Darb al-Ahmar, which was inaugurated earlier this year by His Highness the Aga Khan, the Minister of Antiquities, Mamdouh El Damaty, and the Governor of Cairo, Galal Said. The Mosque had been closed since 1992 due to damage it had suffered from an earthquake in the same year. It is now open.

In all of its restoration and regeneration work, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture has an ultimate objective: to leverage culture in ways that lead to the alleviation of poverty. In Darb al-Ahmar, one of the poorest districts in Cairo, the Trust consciously worked to create a critical mass of activities that not only focused on the restoration of monuments, but the creation of public spaces, water and sanitation improvements, education and health initiatives, microfinance, employment generation and training.

When His Highness the Aga Khan visited Cairo in 1984, the “Darassa” site was a rubble dump. This has now become Azhar Park, which is visited by close to two million people a year, but the programme extended to socioeconomic initiatives in the neighbouring Darb al-Ahmar district, including housing rehabilitation, microfinance, apprenticeships and healthcare. Local housing was renovated and returned to their owners. Job training and employment opportunities were offered in different sectors such as shoemaking, furniture manufacturing and tourist goods production. Apprenticeships were made available for automobile electronics, mobile telephones, computers, masonry, carpentry and office skills. Micro-credit loans enabled residents to open small businesses such as carpentry shops and a drycleaner. Hundreds of young men and women in Darb Al Ahmar found work in the park, in horticulture and on project teams restoring the Ayyubid wall.

For more information:

Sam Pickens
Aga Khan Development Network
Email: info@akdn.org
Website: <http://www.akdn.org/hcp/egypt.asp>

NOTE

The *Aga Khan Trust for Culture* promotes the conservation and re-use of buildings and public spaces in historic cities in the Muslim World. It undertakes the restoration and rehabilitation of historic structures and public spaces in ways that can spur social,

economic and cultural development. Individual project briefs go beyond mere technical restoration to address the questions of the social and environmental context, adaptive reuse, institutional sustainability and training. The work of the Trust is underpinned by the ethical principles of Islam – particularly consultation, self-reliance and human dignity – but the Trust does not restrict its work to a particular community, religion, country or region. Its focus is on poor areas of the developing world. In Egypt, as elsewhere, its programmes are designed to benefit all.

Read online at: <http://www.akdn.org/press-release/inauguration-ayyubid-wall-and-tarabay-al-sherif-complex-projects-cairo>