



ONGOING ACTIVITIES



■ ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION IN HERAT

Probably built in the 1940's, the Arbabzadeh serai (above) follows the form of earlier brick-vaulted bazaars for which the city of Herat was once renowned throughout the region. The few remaining serais of this type in Herat are fast being replaced by multi-storey concrete shopping malls. The distinctive vaulted roof of the Arbabzadeh serai uses an ingenious lightweight timber structure to span more than 10 metres over a large courtyard around which are grouped shops and workshops on two floors. The lanterns in the vaulted roof contribute to creating a protected internal environment in the courtyard for traders and customers alike, and the space remains comfortable even during the legendary 120-day hot summer wind that sweeps the region. A phased programme of conservation has begun on the timber structure of the roof of the serai, which was found to be close to collapse during the course of surveys. Building on the experience of conservation of the nearby Abresham bazaar (see AKTC Newsletter # 6 March/April 2007), where silk-traders and weavers have now re-established their businesses, work on the Arbabzadeh serai will both safeguard a distinctive structure and contribute to economic recovery of the old city.

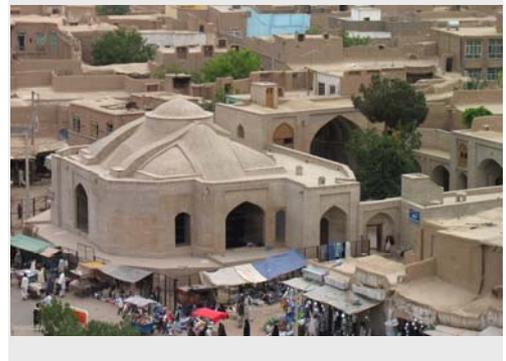
■ HAJI MUSA MOSQUE, QUTBE CHAQ

Conservation of the Haji Musa mosque in the old city is now complete. Dating from the 19th century, the mosque complex includes an historic graveyard and a large courtyard garden, and is also home to several religious students (below). Repairs to the main dome over the prayer space will help to ensure that the fine painted internal decoration is safeguarded.



■ HERAT CONSERVATION WINS REGIONAL AWARD

A group of AKTC conservation initiatives in the old city of Herat have received the first Award of Excellence in the 2008 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. Selected from 45 entries in 13 countries, the conservation of the Malik mosque and cistern complex, the Karbasi House and the Abresham serai were found to 'display a high level of craftsmanship and a commitment to the use of traditional materials, leading to a positive impact in reviving the traditional construction system as well as local building trades'. Undertaken in close collaboration with the community representatives and staff of the department of Historic Monuments, whom are mentioned in the citation, it is hoped that this Award will further raise awareness concerning the need for the safeguarding of historic property in the old city of Herat and elsewhere in Afghanistan.





■ SURVEY OF HISTORIC CITY WALLS

As part of a wider process of registration of historic monuments in Kabul and environs, work is under way on survey and documentation of the defensive wall (above) that stretches for more than 5 kilometers along the ridge of the Sher Darwaza mountain above the old city. Built using the traditional technique of *pakhsa* on stone foundations, the wall is thought to date in part from the Hephthalite period (c.520 A.D.). Legend has it that inhabitants of the city were required to contribute labour for their construction - and those failing to do so had a member of the family built into the *pakhsa*. Surveys are being undertaken jointly with staff of the department of Historic Monuments, as part of training for Afghan professionals.

Right: Members of the survey team up on the Sher Darwaza walls in demanding conditions.



■ WAKHI MYTHS AND LEGENDS

The ongoing collaboration between AKTC and AKF saw a small team travel during August to Badakhshan to contribute to the Wakhan Cultural Initiative. Talking to local storytellers in villages throughout the Wakhan, it was possible to explore the rich oral folklore by collecting some 30 short folk tales, including 'The Shy Wizard of Ishkashim' and 'Malek and Mehran' (a tale of love, endurance – and parrots). These stories will be included in a booklet to be produced by AKF, also highlighting key heritage sites in the region. The Wakhan Cultural Initiative, which is supported by Norwegian government, aims to promote cultural tourism in this beautiful yet remote region of Afghanistan.



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.

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■ HAND-OVER OF THE CHARDA MASOOM SHRINE

With funds made available by the British Embassy, the restoration of the historic shrine of Chaharda Masoom was initiated in late 2007. Situated in the musicians' quarter of Kuche Gharabat, the shrine remains an important place of pilgrimage. It was badly damaged during the conflict in 1993, but the fine timber lattice screens (below) that protect 4 childrens' graves fortunately survived. Following structural repairs, the screens were carefully cleaned and repaired, as with those on the main elevation. At a ceremony in August, the restored shrine was formally handed back to the community, in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Information & Culture, Haj & Awqaf, the Municipality and the British Embassy.



■ OPEN AIR THEATRE IN BAGHE BABUR



A special theatre performance for families took place on 27th August in the courtyard of the caravanserai in Baghe Babur. Part of the Kabul International Theatre Festival, actors from the Roy Sabs Theatre Group, under the direction of Corinne Jaber, performed in front of some 100 Afghan

and international guests. This performance was one of a series of cultural events that have taken place through the summer in Baghe Babur, which continues to be popular with family visitors. More than 60,000 people were recorded to have visited the garden in August, many of whom were children.