



CONSERVATION, MUSIC & ART



■ HISTORIC BATH-HOUSES

Building on the experience gained during 2005/6 in the rehabilitation of a communal bath-house or *hammam* in the Asheqan wa Arefan neighbourhood (see AKTC Newsletter #11), surveys were undertaken of other historic facilities in the old cities of Kabul and Herat.

In early 2008, agreement was reached with the owner of the *Shanansazi hammam* in the old city of Kabul to reconstruct and re-commission the derelict property. Excavations revealed two brick domed spaces surrounded by smaller rooms for private bathing and services. Once cleared of waste and rubble, the system of under-floor ducts for heating the *hammam* was found to be largely intact. Along with ancillary spaces, the main brick domes (above) have now been reconstructed. The complex, which will be operated as a community enterprise whose revenue is invested in further upgrading works, will re-open to the public by early spring 2009.



At the core of the *Qand o Nabat hammam* in the densely-populated Momandha quarter in the old city of Herat was a traditional brick-domed space, around which efforts had in the past been made - unsuccessfully - to extend and modernize the facility. In addition to upgrading the historic part of the *hammam* complex, the focus of investments has been on completion of part-finished spaces (above) and improvements in the system for heating water. The aim is to ensure that the expanded facility is able to meet the anticipated demand from families in the area, few of whom have adequate spaces for bathing at home. 145 metres of drain have been repaired, linking the *hammam* to the underground drainage system in this quarter.

The restoration of the Shansazi and Qand o Nabat *hammams* is co-funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

■ CONFERENCE ON BOWED INSTRUMENTS

Between 21st and 28th September, members of the the Aga Khan Music Initiative for Central Asia (AKMICA) attended an international conference and workshop on bowed instruments organised by Académie Musicale de Villecroze, France. The event, entitled *Fiddles of Central and Inner Asia, Siberia, China and the Middle East* brought together professional musicians and ethnomusicologists from some 24 countries. Supported by the AKMICA Coordinator Mirwaiss Siddiqi, *Ustad Abdul Qader* (below) demonstrated to the participants the traditional Afghan *sarenda* as part of a master-class, and gave a well-attended recital. The event provided an opportunity for musicians and scholars to interact and learn more about the diverse range of bowed musical instruments that are played across the region.



■ LIVING TRADITIONS, BAGHE BABUR

On 10th October 2008, the opening took place in the Queen's Palace in Baghe Babur of an exhibition that brings together work by artists from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Organised by the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, the exhibition is the latest in a series of cultural events to take place in the restored garden. Since its opening, the exhibition has seen more than 2,000 visitors, many of whom were students from local schools.





■ QALA IKHTYARUDDIN

Work began in October on the transformation of rooms in Qala Ikhtyaruddin into secure stores for objects from the archaeological museum and archives presently housed elsewhere in the historic citadel of Herat. These activities represent the first stage of a joint conservation initiative by the department of Historic Monuments of the Ministry of Information & Culture and AKTC, co-funded by the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation of the US State department.

This project involves a range of interventions aimed at safeguarding a complex that is believed to date from Alexander's military campaigns in the region around 300BC. Destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1225, the citadel was re-built after 1415 by Timur's son, Shah Rukh, who commissioned the glazed tile inscriptions, parts of which can still be seen on one of the western towers.

Building on extensive restoration work carried out under UNESCO project between 1976-9, the present initiative foresees the adaptive re-use of existing buildings in the lower enclosure as an archaeological museum/archives, and spaces for exhibitions and cultural events. Additional conservation work will be undertaken out on critical parts of what is one of the most iconic monuments in Afghanistan



■ NAQASHI MOSQUE CONSERVATION

The Naqashi mosque in Momandha quarter retains a finely-carved marble *mihrab* (below) that has been cleaned and conserved during the course of ongoing repairs to the main prayer space and courtyard.



Work began in October to transform the traditional cistern that adjoins the mosque into a study space. The brick masonry structure over the cistern was found to be in a poor state of repair, and the reservoir that had originally served as the principal source of water for the surrounding neighbourhood was filled with waste. Once emptied and cleaned, an intermediate structure of brick vaults was built inside the reservoir to create a raised floor so that the central domed space can serve as a study area, readily accessible from the mosque courtyard.

As with the restoration of other historic mosques in the old city since the start of AKTC's programme in 2005, improvements have been made to the water supply in the Naqashi complex, as well as to ablution and sanitation facilities, which are used both by those praying or studying at the mosque and by residents of the neighbourhood.

For more information about the AKTC programme in Afghanistan contact us at Qala Moeen Afzal Khan, Gozargah street, District 3, Kabul or Qala Ikhtyaruddin, Herat. shafiq.mashal@akdn.org



■ DESTRUCTION OF SADIYEH MOSQUE

Despite assurances from the authorities in Herat that historic property in the old city will be safeguarded, and that the provisions of the Law on Cultural Heritage respected, yet another listed historic building was illegally demolished in early October. Situated on the site of an older building - all traces of which have now been destroyed, along with its dedication - the Sadiyeh mosque was built in 1931 AD. Comprising a series of domed spaces built around a large courtyard, with a fine glazed tile inscription on the west façade (above), this was typical of community mosques in the old city, many of which have disappeared or been radically altered. Despite efforts by staff of the department of Historic Monuments and others to preserve the mosque, it was demolished with haste during the 'Eid holiday, since when the entire site has since been excavated, using heavy machinery, to a depth of two storeys (see below), destroying valuable archaeological evidence.

The fact that the design for the 'redevelopment' of the Sadiyeh mosque - which was first proposed during the Taliban era - was prepared by civil servants who participate in the Old City Commission, through which they are mandated to safeguard historic property, highlights the threats that continue to face the unique fabric of the historic quarters of the old city.

