



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Historic Cities Programme

AKTC - AFGHANISTAN NEWSLETTER # 22

November / December 2009

REVIVING SKILLS IN KABUL

The improvement of livelihoods is an important aspect of AKTC's ongoing urban conservation programme in historic quarters of the old city of Kabul. Since 2002, more than 150 masons, plasterers and carpenters (see detail of timber screen below right) have served apprenticeships on conservation sites in the old city. In an area where home-based enterprises are widespread, since 2007 support has been provided for courses for more than 500 women to develop skills in tailoring, embroidery and kelim-weaving (right), while also improving literacy. Held in a restored house, the courses last for 6 months, after which the successful graduates are provided with equipment to enable them to continue production at home. An ongoing survey aims to assess how women make use of their new-found skills, so as to ensure that the training can enhance the livelihoods of some of the poorest and most marginal households in Kabul.



RECLAIMING AFGHAN HERITAGE

Omara Khan Masoudi, director of the National Museum of Afghanistan, spoke about 'Reclaiming Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage' on Wednesday 2nd December 2009 in the restored Timur Shah mausoleum in Kabul. Part of a series of lectures by Afghan and international specialists, Mr. Masoudi outlined efforts being made to rehabilitate the National Museum and improve systems of collection management, including such pieces as the exquisite serpent bracelets (below) excavated in 1978 at Tillya Tepe in northern Afghanistan.



© National Museum of Afghanistan

TALES FROM THE WAKHAN

In December, 'Tales From The Wakhan: Folklore and Archaeology of the Wakhan Corridor' will be published by AKTC and AKF. Funded by the Norwegian Embassy, the book draws on fieldwork undertaken in the Wakhan and the Little Pamir between 2007-9. The first part of the book presents several folktales recounted by members of the pastoral Wakhi and nomadic Kyrgyz communities. A second section provides illustrated summaries of some of the key archaeological and architectural sites that were recorded as part of the Wakhan Heritage Inventory. Intended to document aspects of the rich cultural heritage of one of the most remote yet beautiful regions of Afghanistan, copies of 'Tales From The Wakhan' are available from AKTC or AKF in Kabul or Geneva.



© AKTC

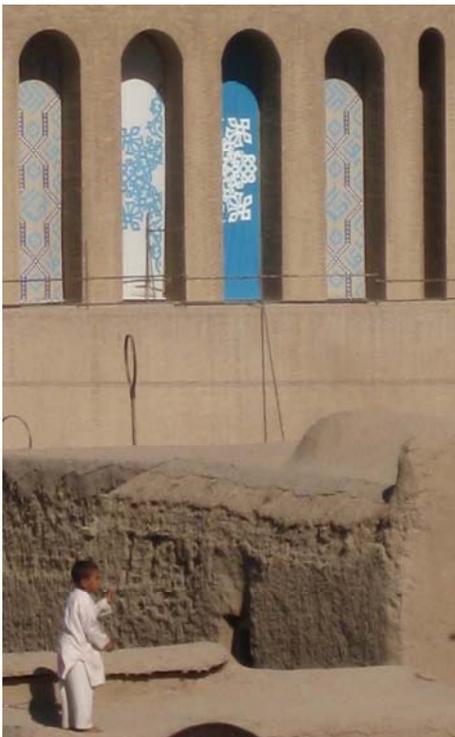
HERAT

ROOF REPAIRS ON GODAM

Emergency repairs were recently carried out by AKTC to the roof of the *godam* in the centre of the old city. Built in the 19th century to store grain and other supplies for the military garrison, the brick structure comprises some 152 domed bays, each of which has a distinctive *badgir* (right) to direct the north wind to internal spaces during hot summer months. Now largely empty, the building will be at risk if regular maintenance is not carried out. In a context where many traditional buildings are being demolished, there seems to be potential for the adaptive re-use of the *godam*, which extends over some 5,600 metres², and could, once restored, be used for educational, cultural, recreational or commercial purposes.



QALA IKHTYARUDDIN



As conservation work proceeds on the historic citadel of Qala Ikhtyaruddin, a series of huge banners (above) have been hung in the niches facing the old city. Designed and painted by staff of the faculty of Fine Arts of Herat University, the banners are inspired by the patterns in Timurid tile-work and carved stone that have since 2007 been the focus of an AKTC documentation initiative.

IBN OMAR MOSQUE

With 15 historic mosques conserved by AKTC and handed back to communities in the old city, work is continuing on the Ibn Omar mosque in Qutbe Chaq quarter. Typical of the community mosques in the historic fabric, the complex comprises a domed prayer-space facing a courtyard, and was regularly used for religious instruction. During the course of surveys, it was found that sections of the mud-brick structure had collapsed due to rising damp and lack of maintenance, and that encroachments had been made by

the owners of neighbouring homes. After repairs to drains in the immediate vicinity, it was deemed necessary to reconstruct the western range of domes on new stone foundations that follow the original footprint of the building. Structural repairs were then undertaken on the parallel range of domed spaces, which retain characteristic fired brick decoration (below) on the east elevation. Work continues on the construction of an ablution block and landscaping of the courtyard, with a hand-over foreseen by early spring 2010.



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