THE AGA KHAN HISTORIC CITIES PROGRAMME
The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme

Created in 1991, the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP) is a branch of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture that was until spring 2006 under the leadership of Stefano Bianca and is now directed by Cameron Rashti. Although some restoration work (Zafra House, Granada, 1991) had been carried out earlier under the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, once established in the early 1990s the AKHCP provided a dedicated team of professionals and a methodology and policy that enabled exemplary restoration, urban and environmental planning, and construction projects across the Muslim world. The recent Azhar Park in Cairo, which includes new architecture and landscape design, as well as historic preservation work and other aspects (see the following pages), is a measure of the scale and success of AKHCP projects. As described by the organization itself: “The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP) undertakes conservation, restoration and adaptive reuse of significant monuments in Islamic countries in the context of wider area development projects which aim at integrated and holistic rehabilitation of selected urban districts or developing rural areas. Together with conservation, Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme projects focus on the operation and maintenance aspects of completed restoration projects, to keep historic buildings alive and ensure their sustainability. Moreover, the Programme engages in the revitalization of the traditional urban fabric around landmark buildings, including housing, social facilities and public open spaces. Through collateral activities, the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme contributes to the improvement of socio-economic living conditions in the project area and beyond, mobilizes local awareness and participation, and assists in local capacity- and institution-building. So far, the Programme has been – and for the moment continues to be – active in northern Pakistan (Hunza and Baltistan), Cairo, Zanzibar, Samarkand, Delhi, Mostar, Aleppo and other sites in Syria, as well as in Kabul, Herat and Mopti.”

In Cairo, Kabul and elsewhere, the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme has increasingly participated in a multiple approach together with other Aga Khan organizations that form the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), such as the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) and the Tourism Promotion Services (TPS) that controls the Serena Hotels and Inns. The goal of ongoing AKHCP/AKDN interventions is never to simply restore a building and then leave; rather, a much more profound impact is sought. In 2005, referring to initiatives in Afghanistan, the Aga Khan stated: “It is heartening that a recent external evaluation, commissioned by the World Bank, found this AKDN approach innovative and effective in forming credible, legitimate and self-reliant institutions. The report commended the outcome as a significant contribution to democratic governance and civil society development in the country. This observation corresponds to our experience in many countries, similar to that of the United Nations, that a healthy civil society is indispensable to fostering and legitimizing pluralism which itself is the foundation of democratic government. This remains a paramount challenge … Our experience in situations as diverse as remote parts of northern Pakistan, to Delhi, Zanzibar and central Cairo, is that the restoration of historic communities and important cultural assets serves as a trampoline for economic development. The restoration activ-
ity is a source of direct employment for workers and skilled craftsmen, many of whom live in adjacent neighbourhoods. The refurbished facilities themselves become an attraction for tourists, generating more opportunity. And as the residents of surrounding areas find themselves with new sources of income, they spend some of it improving their own homes and neighbourhoods."

And yet even this broad picture of the activities of the Aga Khan, frequently spearheaded by the Historic Cities Programme, does not paint the full picture of the underlying goals. The success of a local programme in creating jobs, pride and sustainable development is certainly laudable, but it does not necessarily speak to the even greater problems that separate the Muslim world from the West. In 2003, the Aga Khan declared: “In the troubled times in which we live, it is important to remember, and honour, a vision of a pluralistic society. Tolerance, openness and understanding toward other peoples’ cultures, social structures, values and faiths are now essential to the very survival of an interdependent world. Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development, it is vital to our existence. Never perhaps more so than at the present time must we renew with vigour our creative engagement in revitalizing shared heritage through collaborative ventures such as the project we are inaugurating today.”

Many of the locations where the AKHCP has intervened, such as Zanzibar or Kabul, are rich in history and architecture precisely because they have been located at the crossroads between civilizations. Rather than in any sense rejecting the implicit cross-fertilization of cultures, the Aga Khan clearly embraces the pluralism which he sees as “vital to our existence.” The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme thus has a mission to build bridges between the past and the present, but also between cultures and civilizations.

Some of the projects undertaken by the Historic Cities Programme are briefly outlined on the following pages.
Azhar Park

CAIRO, EGYPT

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Aga Khan Cultural Services (AKCS-E); Sasaki Associates; Sites International Landscape Architects
Funding Agency: Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Owner: Cairo Governorate
Date of Intervention: 1997 for site access, start of enabling works and master grading; 2000 for all other construction contracts
Completed: 2004

In 1984, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture organized an international seminar entitled ‘The Expanding Metropolis: Coping with the Urban Growth of Cairo’. During that year, the Aga Khan met Hassan Fathy in the architect’s apartment on the top floor of an eighteenth-century urban mansion called Beit al-Fann, in the area of the Citadel, close to the Mosque of Sultan Hasan. From the terrace of Fathy’s apartment, the monuments of Islamic Cairo were clearly visible, but so too was an empty area running along the remains of the Ayyubid Walls, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Salah al-Din and his successors. The land was vacant because it had served since the late Mamluk period as the city’s rubbish dump. More than five centuries of refuse, in places over forty-five-metres deep, had all but engulfed the historic walls. Two years later, the thirty-hectare site on the Darassa Hills belonging to the Governate of the city was selected for the creation of Azhar Park, one of the most ambitious and far-reaching projects undertaken by the Aga Khan.

Within clear view of the Citadel, Azhar Park is adjacent to Khayrbek Mosque near both the Sultan Hasan Mosque and madrasa built for Sultan Hasan bin Mohammad bin Qala’un in 1256 and the Aqsunqur, or Blue Mosque, built by one of al-Nasir Muhammad’s Emirs, Shams al-Din Aqsunqur, in 1346. A more recent monument visible from the Park on the same axis as the Sultan Hasan Mosque is the Rifa’i Mosque designed by Mustapha Fahmi at the order of Khushyar, mother of the Khedive Ismail, and...
completed in 1912 by Max Herz Pasha. The Park is named after the great al-Azhar Mosque, located slightly to the north of the neighbouring al-Darb al-Ahmar area. Al-Azhar was created by Jawhar the Sicilian, Fatimid founder of Cairo just after his conquest in 970. Al-Azhar, meaning “the most flourishing and shining” in Arabic, was dedicated to Sayeda Fatima al-Zahra’, daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, from whom His Highness the Aga Khan descends. It is thus in the heart of Islamic Cairo that the Aga Khan stood in the completed Park in 2005 and declared: “Twenty-one years ago we had a vision that launched us on a journey of inquiry, exploration and discovery that took us through some one thousand years of history of this extraordinary city.”2

Turning the dusty, uninhabited sediment of Cairo into a living park was a task of vast proportions involving many people. Project leaders such as Stefano Bianca and Cameron Rashti of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP) led the way, but the architects and landscape designers formed Azhar Park as it exists today. Maher Stino and Laila Elmasry Stino of Sites International assumed the task of the landscape design after the essentially axial layout, pointing toward the Citadel in particular, was conceived by the Watertown (Massachusetts) firm Sasaki Associates. Much of the peripheral architecture of the Park (kiosks, administrative offices, and so on) was designed by Maher Stino and his group, who are based in Cairo. “We have sixteen million people,” he declared while working on the project, “and we have almost no open space – nothing. We want to help the public understand what a park is and how to appreciate plants and nature. We also want something unique to Cairo. We do not want a copy of London’s Regent’s Park.” Limestone-block retaining walls that call on the expertise of local masons are a recurring element throughout the design and great attention has been paid to the particularities of the site, where water supply and run-off are sensitive issues. On the eastern side, where the topography is given to gentle slopes and there are no neighbouring residential areas, a design with large grass areas and flowers gives an oasis-like feeling of freshness and greenery. But the steeper western facade, near al-Darb al-Ahmar and the Ayyubid Wall, posed the problem of potential water accumulation and was thus planted with more desert varieties, including cacti whose seeds were brought from Arizona by project horticulturalist El-Saady Mohamed Badawy. Numerous fountains, especially near the two restaurants, recall the traditions of the
Islamic garden, but here, too, Maher Stino avoids direct citations, preferring to allow modernity to be the guiding rule. The very scale of the landscape and horticulture effort speaks of the courage and will necessary to turn these hills into a real contemporary garden. 1.5 million cubic metres of rubble and soil, the equivalent of more than 80,000 truckloads, were moved to accomplish the task and more than 655,000 plants and trees now grow where the Aga Khan saw only barren mounds of refuse in 1984.

The two restaurants in the park were designed respectively by the Egyptian architects Rami El Dahan with Soheir Farid, and the French architect Serge Santelli. Winner of an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in the Second Cycle, Santelli created the Lakeside Café, while Dahan fashioned the more substantial Hilltop Restaur-

ant, inspired by Fatimid and Mamluk building traditions. Rami El Dahan has since gone on to design the new Ismaili Centre in Dubai, another arched, stone building (see page 190).

Summing up the intervention, AKHCP’s present director, Cameron Rashti, explains: “While excluded from the historic city, the proximity and size of the park site have in recent years posed a dilemma for would-be occupants. The disadvantages of its geo-technical properties have been significant enough to create a quasi ‘frontier’ to urban growth, while its proximity to the historic core and offer of large open space has made it a natural zone for transformation, and the opportunities to transform Cairo’s edges have not gone unnoticed in the last few decades.” As the Aga Khan explained in his inaugural speech, creating this great new green space in the heart of Cairo was not all that his organizations undertook, because “what started as one project actually turned into three: the design and construction of a park, the restoration of the Ayyubid Wall, and the community redevelopment of the historically important al-Darb al-Ahmar neighbourhood. All,” he concluded, “are tightly interconnected and have added to the body of knowledge we can share with others.”

1 The Burji Mamluks ruled Egypt until their defeat by the Ottoman Turks in 1517 under Selim I.
2 Speech by His Highness the Aga Khan at the inauguration of Azhar Park, Cairo, Egypt, 25 March 2005.
4 Speech by His Highness the Aga Khan at the inauguration of Azhar Park, Cairo, Egypt, 25 March 2005.

Pictures of Azhar Park show its central location in Islamic Cairo, with the Citadel in the distance. The aerial view top left shows the site before the intervention of the Aga Khan. As the images imply, the Park has come today to be considered a veritable oasis in the city for many residents.
Views of the Hilltop Restaurant in Azhar Park, Cairo, by Rami El Dahan with Soheir Farid. Calling on Fatimid tradition, the architecture is intended to respond both to its location and to the history of the Egyptian capital.
The Lakeside Café in Azhar Park, Cairo, by French architect Serge Santelli strikes a somewhat more modern note than the Hilltop Restaurant. It is situated on an artificial lake created to assist with the irrigation of the Park itself.
Al-Darb al-Ahmar Projects

CAIRO, EGYPT

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Aga Khan Cultural Services AKCS-E

Funding Agency: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Social Fund for Development of Egypt; Egyptian Swiss Development Fund; Ford Foundation; World Monuments Fund; Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance; US State Department

Owner: Ministry of Awkaf

Date of Intervention: 2000

Completed: ongoing

The work of the Aga Khan's organizations in the Darb al-Ahmar district of Cairo, located near the former Ayyubid Wall and Azhar Park, "encompasses an extensive social development programme, including apprenticeship arrangements, housing rehabilitation, microcredit and health care facilities. Several mosques, old palaces, historic houses and public open spaces are being rehabilitated in an effort to make them accessible to

Views of the Darb al-Ahmar district in Cairo, Egypt. The aerial picture to the right was taken during restoration work on the Ayyubid Wall, visible, together with a green band inside Azhar Park, at the bottom of the photograph.
The most prominent of these are the sixteenth-century Khayrbek Mosque with the adjacent sabil kuttab and an attached eighteenth-century house, the fourteenth-century Alin Aq Palace, the Umm al-Sultan Shaaban Mosque and madrasa and Aslam Square. Housing rehabilitation activities undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in the area averaged about fifty houses per year through 2007 and a housing credit plan has also assisted individuals in rehabilitating their own homes.

Stefano Bianca, former head of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP), outlines the unusual multi-pronged, ongoing nature of the intervention of the organizations of the Aga Khan, and others, in the Darb-al-Ahmar district of Cairo in terms of seven related priorities:

1. **Architectural Analysis.** The morphology of the historic urban form, in most cases ‘organically’ grown over many centuries, must be recorded, analyzed and creatively interpreted to provide a suitable framework not only for conservation, but also for careful repair and substitution of individual components, whenever needed.

2. **Appropriate Planning Technologies.** Sustainable ways of introducing modern infrastructure must be assessed, and existing tools and techniques must be adapted in order to provide an optimum level of viability without disrupting the essential features of the historic urban form.

3. **Improvement of Housing Conditions.** Introducing or improving water supply, sewerage and electricity networks is essential, but requires the corresponding networks to be adjusted to the constraints of the given urban form and the particular housing typology.

4. **Public Open Space Improvement.** Often public open spaces – whether streets, squares or barren land – are neglected because they are seen as residual spaces unrelated to responsible social groups or individuals. Re-establishing a sense of ownership and responsibility by involving the local community in corresponding upgrading projects is a tool to foster civic pride and solidarity.

5. **Conservation and Adaptive Reuse of Historic Buildings.** When funding is short, it may not always be possible to conserve or restore the complete architectural heritage. Priority must be given to projects that can foster a sense of ownership and solidarity in the local community, and that can become catalysts for corollary urban conservation and renewal processes.

6. **Socio-Economic Development.** Raising existing living standards is essential in order to back up parallel conservation and rehabilitation projects and to ensure that local community and visitors.

Work carried out by the AKHCP in al-Darb al-Ahmar, including the training of local craftsmen and assistance given to workshops.

Right, the Khayrbek Mosque complex in Cairo, Egypt, being restored.
communities stand behind the overall rehabilitation effort.

7 Institutional Support. An appropriate local institutional system has to be built up (or strengthened) in order to coordinate, drive and sustain the rehabilitation efforts, drawing both on internal resources and external contributions and incentives.¹

Although it was until recent years a centre for the drug trade, the Darb al-Ahmar district is home to a deeply rooted community. Approximately 200,000 people, many of them related by marriage, live and work in this area where real unemployment rates may not be as high as estimates imply. Studies done by the AKCS-E showed that contrary to many assumptions the population of al-Darb al-Ahmar consists mostly of people born in the area (72%) with only seven per cent having been born outside Cairo. Their illiteracy rate (19%) is lower than the Egyptian urban average (26%), and the male unemployment rate was about eighteen per cent before the opening of the Park. Household income, on average USD 1052 per year (based on the exchange rate of LE 4.65 to the US dollar in June 2002) appears to be considerably lower than known averages for the city of Cairo, USD 2570 in 1993, when the exchange rate was then LE 3.50 to the US dollar.² As the AKHCP explains: “The Azhar Park Project is a catalyst for social, economic and cultural renewal and improvement and will have far-reaching consequences for the residents of the neighbouring al-Darb al-Ahmar district.” The obvious fact that the residents of the area live in the very heart of Cairo, and not at its abandoned edge, has been underlined not only by the historic preservation work done on the Ayyubid Wall and within the community, but also by the creation of the highly symbolic park at their doorstep. Rather than living in squalor as was largely the case before the interventions of the organizations of the Aga Khan, the residents of al-Darb-al-Ahmar have been offered a place in Cairo’s future.

¹ Stefano Bianca, in: Stefano Bianca and Philip Jodidio (eds.), Cairo, Revitalising a Historic Metropolis, Turin 2004.

Top, the restored interior of the mosque / madrasa of Umm al-Sultan Shaaban, Cairo, Egypt, and left, its entrance corridor.

Above, the restored interior of Khayrbek Mosque, Cairo, Egypt.
Ayyubid Wall

Francesco Siravo recalls that the construction of the Ayyubid Wall “was begun in 1176 by Salah al-Din, a Kurd of the Ayyubid clan who came to Cairo from Syria and overthrew the Fatimid caliphate in 1171. Salah al-Din’s fortifications were built to contain Cairo, his citadel and the pre-Fatimid settlements (Fustat, al-Askar and al-Qata’i) within a single system.” With the expansion of the city, these walls were rendered useless and the present area of Azhar Park turned over to refuse beginning in the sixteenth century. The proud walls gradually disappeared under the accumulated debris of the city, but it was along this line that the edge of the new Park was determined, with the largely run-down area of al-Darb al-Ahmar just beyond. In fact, through the centuries, al-Darb al-Ahmar encroached on the wall itself in some places, with buildings rising from its stones. Although it was not originally part of the AKTC scheme for Azhar Park, it became apparent in the course of the work that an effort to excavate and renovate at least part of the fortifications would make eminent good sense. A length of approximately 1500 metres from Bab al-Wazir to al-Azhar Street, forming the boundary between the Darb al-Ahmar district and the Park, was thus completely unearthed and restored. The ‘Philosophy and Guidelines for Intervention’ outlined by the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP) for work on the Eastern Ayyubid Wall makes clear the careful respect for the site and for international conventions that was a basis for the work. “The methodologies and guidelines offered in this report are designed to achieve maximum integrity of the wall with the least possible physical intervention. The importance of place, as expressed by cultural value and significance, and a respect for history as continuous change are critical to the future development and continued life of the wall and neighbourhood. Altogether, these proposals advocate the conservation and integration of the Ayyubid Wall within the traditional urban fabric and contemporary life of al-Darb al-Ahmar, as well as the provision of tourist opportunities of the city’s fortifications to park visitors.” It should be noted in passing that alternative schemes would have involved the removal of the slums and workshops of al-Darb al-Ahmar and its conversion into an open-air museum of sorts. The intervention of the AKTC in al-Darb al-Ahmar obviously does not espouse the view of the historic area as “open-air museum.” Rather, a substantial effort has been made to reintegrate monuments as complex as the long-buried
Ayyubid Wall into the life of the community. This was done not only by opening connections into the new Azhar Park, but also by renewing housing and monuments that abut the Wall or even sit partially on top of it at one point. And rather than seeking to move residents and local workshops to some distant new location, this project takes on the training of local craftsmen in the traditional arts of carpentry and stonework that they no longer fully master. Rather than being considered as a barrier between al-Darb al-Ahmar and the new Park, the Ayyubid Wall, thanks to the organizations of the Aga Khan, has in a sense been reintegrated as a living part of the city and a true sense of historic continuity has been created between Islamic Cairo’s past and its future.

Richard Hughes, a conservation engineer who worked on the restoration of Baltit Fort in the Hunza Valley in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, describes the site as “the most rugged area in the world,” in the midst of the Karakoram Mountains, with thirty-two mountain peaks ranging from 5500 to 7500 metres in height within 100 kilometres. He says: “Prior to the late 1960s, there was no access to the region and tracking overland on foot from the villages of Gilgit to Baltit used to take up to four days.” The Fort sits above the town of Karimabad (formerly Baltit) renamed for His Highness the Aga Khan. According to the surveys done on the structure, which had fallen into disrepair, construction occurred over a period of 700 years in seventy distinct phases. As reported by Hughes and fellow consultant Didier Lefort: “When visited in 1979, Baltit Fort seemed a labyrinth of dark, smelly and dusty rooms. All the roofs were decayed and pierced by holes, renders were full of cracks and walls were leaning precariously outside the foundation lines. Yet the fort had an undeniably unique and distinctive character. The massive structure remained delicately poised on top of the soil cliff, and revealed wood construction detailing purposely arranged to better resist earthquakes. The archaeological value of the site and structure was important, yielding strong evidence of a continuous historical past and very little evidence of modernity. More importantly, the building still dominated and controlled contemporary life in Karimabad and Hunza.”

Before restoration work on the Fort could begin, its ownership was generously transferred from Ghazanfar Ali Khan II, a descendent of the Mirs of Hunza, to a new public foundation, the Baltit Heritage Trust. A programme calling for reuse of the Fort as a museum was approved and complementary funding obtained from the Getty Grant Foundation in 1991. Five years of intensive restoration work using both modern and traditional methods and numerous locally trained workers and young Pakistani architects, often from the Northern Areas, have allowed the Baltit Fort to return to its former splendour as a museum and cultural centre receiving as many as 20,000 visitors a year. The first project carried out by the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, the exemplary Baltit Fort restoration has encouraged other revitalization efforts in Karimabad and proven the value of carefully planned, ongoing interventions. In a 27 June 2005 issue, *Time Magazine* dubbed the project “the most amazing fort ever rebuilt.”

1 Historic Cities Support Programme, ‘Conservation and Development in Hunza and Baltistan’. 

The restored Baltit Fort against the dramatic background of the Karakoram Mountains in the Northern Areas of Pakistan.
Left, the former Queen’s apartment on the first floor of Baltit Fort; this space is now used to exhibit traditional wooden furniture and utensils.

Right, the restored Baltit Fort with the western bay window on the facade in evidence, the interior of which is shown lower left.
The success of the work of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Karimabad led to other projects in the area. As Masood Khan, a planning consultant working in the area, writes: "The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme community-based village planning and rehabilitation efforts in Karimabad ... have had an effect far beyond their immediate area of application. Other villages in the area, such as Altit and Ganish, realized the positive change achieved and requested similar types of assistance from the AKCS-P and its donors, in particular NORAD (Norwegian Development Agency) and the Japanese Embassy.\(^1\) Ganish, located on a plateau on the edge of the main river gorge, and Altit are two other original settlements in the Hunza Valley. The old village of Ganish contains approximately thirty-two houses built in the traditional Hunza style. The main ceremonial and public space of the town called the jataq is surrounded by four wooden mosques, but the use of the space had been abandoned and the mosques were in an advanced state of dilapidation. As Masood Khan points out, however, "the village elders were conscious of the assets of their village. They knew of its ancient past and had a notion of the value of its heritage. This was an authentic traditional village untouched by bad repair or alterations and endowed with a rich mixture of traditional urban spaces, defensive structures and religious and residential architecture of considerable artistic value. With magnificent views of surrounding mountains, the village was, potentially, a major attraction for visitors."\(^2\) The work of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP) consisted in the restoration of the mosques and public space using methods developed for Baltit Fort and Karimabad. The community pond (pharee) was rebuilt as were the towers and gates of the original fortifications. As has been the case elsewhere subsequent to AKHCP interventions, work on the public spaces of Ganish encouraged a number of house owners to follow suit. The thirty-three households of Ganish met in the restored jataq space in the spring of 2001 and created the Ganish Khun Heritage Social and Welfare Society to manage the conservation and rehabilitation of the village together with a number of social projects. Entrance tickets to the area generate income for the use of the community.

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\(^{1}\) Masood Khan, in: Historic Cities Support Programme, 'Conservation and Development in Hunza and Baltistan'.

\(^{2}\) Ibid.
Restoration of Shigar Fort Complex

BALTISTAN, NORTHERN AREAS, PAKISTAN

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Aga Khan Cultural Services (AKCS-P)
Funding Agency: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Government of Norway; Japanese Embassy (in Islamabad); Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC); Spanish, German, Greek and French Embassies (in Islamabad); Sumitomo Foundation; American Express International
Owner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Date of Intervention: 1998
Completed: 2004

Set at an altitude of 2250 metres, Shigar Fort is located thirty kilometres from Skardu, the capital of Baltistan, on the Shigar River in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme documentation explains: “The broader development project in Shigar includes restoration of mosques and rehabilitation of the settlements of Shilpa, Halpapa and Khilingrong, including upgrading of water and sanitation systems. The fourteenth-century Amburiq Mosque was restored to demonstrate that conservation of badly damaged monuments was feasible.” The three structures of the Shigar Fort/Palace, today including a twenty-room guest house, are set on a thirty by nine metre stone platform. The original Shigar Fort Palace (known as Fong-Khar, which in the Balti language signifies “Palace on the Rock”) was built by Hassan Khan, the twentieth ruler of the Amacha dynasty, in the early seventeenth century. Fong-Khar is the last remaining structure associated with the ruling Amacha family. Hassan Khan brought artisans from Kashmir to Shigar to build his palace. The result is a blend of Kashmiri-influenced carving and details with local Balti architecture. In 1999, Fong-Khar was given to the people of Baltistan by Raja Sahib Mohammad Ali Shah Saba of Shigar and the AKTC was entrusted with its restoration. In a painstaking six-year process, the entire site was brought back to life according to a strategy of adaptive reuse and restoration. This tri-partite strategy forms the concept behind work on the Shigar Fort Residence: preservation of cultural heritage; socially responsible tourism and economic development; and self-sustaining operations. A major goal of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme restoration was that the “project remain true to the original character and architecture of the buildings as much as possible.” The project specifically encouraged the upgrading and rehabilitation of the village with microfinance methods. As AKHCP documents describe the project: “The reuse concept for Shigar Fort Residence strikes a balance between, on the one hand, a museal site and, on the other, a very special resort-type guest house offering the unique experience of authentic guest rooms in a historic palace. The ongoing operations of Shigar Fort Residence strive toward long-term self-sustainability providing continuing economic and tourism development for the entire Shigar Valley.”

Since the AKTC remains the owner of the Shigar Fort/Palace, the organization ventures here into new territory, not only restoring buildings, but seeing to their ongoing use in a style that is respectful of the original monuments and of the need for the development of responsible tourism. The necessity of continued involvement in day-to-day operations of facilities like the Shigar Fort/Palace highlights the evolving nature of AKHCP programmes, where it has been clearly recognized that ‘one-shot’ interventions are rarely successful over the longer term.

1 See: http://www.shigarfort.com/aboutus.html#The%20Vision%20for%20Shigar%20Fort%20Residence.
Founded in the late fifteenth century, Mostar was the chief administrative city for the Ottoman Empire in the Herzegovina region. The Austro-Hungarian Empire absorbed Mostar in 1878 and it became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after World War I, and in 1939 part of the Banovina of Croatia. Restoration of Mostar Old Town had received an Aga Khan Award in 1986 for work done by the agency Stari-Grad prior to the war, beginning in 1978. The city’s symbol, called the Old Bridge or Stari Most, a twenty-nine-metre stone arch built high above the Neretva River in 1566 by the Ottoman architect Mimar Hajrudin, a student of Sinan, was destroyed (1993) like much of the Old City in the conflict of the early 1990s. A Pilot Cultural Heritage Project to restore the bridge and the Old City was launched in 1995 in a collaborative international assistance operation involving the World Bank, UNESCO, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and the World Monuments Fund (WMF), in partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the city of Mostar. The reconstruction of the bridge was completed in the spring of 2004 by a World Bank/UNESCO team. In parallel with this restoration of the Old Bridge, the AKTC and the WMF undertook a five-year restoration and rehabilitation effort in historic Mostar. As the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme describes events: “To lay the ground for this comprehensive urban conservation effort, the AKTC/WMF team began in 1998 the preparation of a ‘Conservation and Development Plan for the Old Town’. This Plan was formally adopted by the authorities on 15 May 2001. It includes plans, regulations and guidelines for the protection of the historic core of Mostar, detailed proposals for the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood areas, and a series of adaptive reuse schemes for priority buildings, as well as provisions to support institutional strengthening and active management of the historic city’s future.”

Recognizing the success of the combined efforts of the organizations involved, UNESCO formally included the historic centre of Mostar on its World Heritage List (2005, ref: 946rev). As the UNESCO inscription for Mostar reads: “The Old Bridge area, with its pre-Ottoman, eastern Ottoman, Mediterranean and western European architectural features, is an outstanding example of a multicultural urban settlement. The reconstructed Old Bridge and Old City of Mostar are a symbol of reconciliation, international cooperation and of the coexistence of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious communities. Justification for In-scription. Criterion vi. With the ‘renaissance’ of the Old Bridge and its surroundings, the symbolic power and meaning of the City of Mostar – as an exceptional and universal symbol of coexistence of communities from diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds – has been reinforced and strengthened, underlining the unlimited efforts of human solidarity for peace and powerful cooperation in the face of overwhelming catastrophes.”

Left, the restored Hindo Han with the minaret of the Neziraga Mosque to the rear.

Right, the Stari Most or Old Bridge of Mostar, not restored by the AKTC but by a World Bank/UNESCO team in 2004.

Below right, the entry side of the restored Muslibegovic house.
Conservation of Zanzibar
Stone Town

ZANZIBAR, TANZANIA

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Aga Khan Cultural Services (AKCS-Z)
Funding Agency: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development; Tourism Promotion Services; European Union; UNCDF; UNCHS; UNDP; UNESCO; Governments of Finland, Germany and Italy
Owner: Zanzibar Government; Waqf and Trust Commission
Date of Conservation Plans: 1992
Completed: ongoing

Stone Town is the old section of Zanzibar City, the capital of the island of Zanzibar, Tanzania. Although Tanzania as a whole has a minority Muslim population (35%), Zanzibar is more than ninety-nine per cent Muslim. Stone buildings have been erected in the area since the 1830s, but the earliest settlements date back about 300 years. Extensive spice and slave trade with Asia and Africa passed through Zanzibar before Mombasa and Dar es Salaam took over these functions in the late nineteenth century. The influences generated through trade left their mark on local architecture that has Arab, Persian, Indian, Swahili and European elements. The Stone Town of Zanzibar became part of the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2000 (ref: 173rev). The organization’s Justification for Inscrition reads as follows:

Criterion II. The Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization.

Criterion III. For many centuries there was intense seaborne trading activity between Asia and Africa, and this is illustrated in an exceptional manner by the architecture and urban structure of the Stone Town.

Criterion VI. Zanzibar has great symbolic importance in the suppression of slavery, since it was one of the main slave-trading ports in East Africa and also the base from which its opponents such as David Livingstone conducted their campaign.¹

Two panoramic views of the Stone Town area of Zanzibar, Tanzania. The top image shows a view over Omani Fort.
Stone Town Cultural Centre

ZANZIBAR, TANZANIA

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Aga Khan
Cultural Services (AKCS-Z)
Date of Intervention: 1994
Completed: 1997

Converted in 1997 into the Stone Town Cultural Centre, this structure was built as the Tharia Topan Jubilee Hospital, with its foundation stone having been laid on 8 July 1887 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the reign of Queen Victoria. Long used as a pharmacy and dispensary with a resident doctor, the structure was called the Old Dispensary. As Stephen Battle, the site architect, explains, the building was in poor condition when the AKTC took possession of it in 1991, due to thirty years of neglect and the difficult climate of Zanzibar. Stephen Battle writes: “The first stage of the conservation process involved the reconstruction of an idea of the original building through patient research and recording. A detailed assessment of the materials and construction methods was a critical part of the research process. The internal anatomy of the building was systematically examined in order to establish which materials were originally used and the methods and techniques by which they had been applied. This became the basis for an appropriate and effective conservation process.”

Given its dominant location, the building was clearly the object of particular attention in its construction and decoration. Classical plaster mouldings designed by the architect Hashem Virjee Patel were carefully preserved or replaced where necessary. The woodwork of the building is another of its highlights. Battle writes: “The timber carving is unlike any other in the Stone Town in its sheer abundance and vivacity, and contrasts with the more restrained plaster work. Carved tendrils and stalks twist and curl through gables, flowers erupt from the brackets, and pineapples sprout from the ridges. Amidst the carved foliage, bright red, green, and blue panes of glass glitter like jewels. Eight massive columns, each one a single piece of timber forty centimetres square and over five metres long, support the principal beams running perpendicular and parallel to the facade.”

In methods typical of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, traditional craft skills were taught to local workers for this project, in the hope that their expertise would be usefully employed elsewhere in Zanzibar. Given that the interventions of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Zanzibar were numerous and remain a current priority for the organization, the influence of this exemplary restoration beyond the structure itself seems more than assured.

One unusual aspect of the comprehensive involvement of the organizations of the Aga Khan in Zanzibar was that a hotel, the Zanzibar Serena Inn, was an integral part of the scheme. The former Telecommunications building, an abandoned 1930s structure in a prominent location on the seashore, was thus converted into a hotel with the same painstaking approach employed for the Old Dispensary. The Zanzibar Serena Inn is actually lodged in two historic seashore buildings that were joined together at the time of the restoration work. Next to the 1930s Telecommunications building, an eighteenth-century house was also integrated into the hotel. The hotel has fifty-one rooms and a swimming pool overlooking the ocean. Excursions into the Stone Town or to the Jozani Forest are organized by the hotel for its guests. The facility was inaugurated in 1997, at the same time as the restored Stone Town Cultural Centre. The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP) declared: “Both projects constitute models for the wide range of interventions needed in the ongoing conservation and revitalization process of the Stone Town.”

A branch of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) called Tourism Promotion Services (TPS) “seeks to develop tourism potential in selected areas in the developing world, particularly in under-served regions. It builds, rehabilitates and manages hotels and lodges that contribute to economic growth and the overall investment climate in an environmentally and culturally sensitive manner.” Under the Serena name, AKFED owns and manages properties in Afghanistan, Kenya, Mozambique, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Tanzania and Uganda. The Serena hotels and lodges concerned place an emphasis on the training and hiring of local residents, and make extensive studies on their impact on the natural or urban environments into which they are to be inserted. Although Serena hotels and lodges are operated as profit-making enterprises, their presence and methods in a number of areas served by ongoing Aga Khan projects assure a source of revenue for those areas, an aspect of ‘sustainable’ restoration and development which is often overlooked by NGOs engaged in work similar to that of the AKHCP for example. Where the spice trade of another era left Zanzibar with a considerable architectural patrimony, the AKTC and related organizations have not only restored, but, in a broader sense, brought the Stone Town to life.
All fifty-one rooms of the Zanzibar Serena Inn look out onto the Indian Ocean. The hotel is housed in two restored historic buildings, both on the seafront. As an integral part of the other historic preservation projects carried out by the AKHCP in Zanzibar, the Serena Inn offers a viable, durable way to develop and preserve the area.
Left, the restored entrance to the upper mosque and madrasa of the Citadel of Salah al-Din.

Right, an aerial view of the Citadel of Salah al-Din, Lattakia, Syria.
The Citadel of Salah al-Din is located twenty-four kilometres east of Lattakia, Syria, in high mountainous terrain, on a ridge between two deep ravines, surrounded by forest. The castle was originally built in ancient times, possibly during the Phoenician period (early first millennium BC). The Phoenicians are said to have surrendered it to Alexander the Great about 334 BC. In the tenth century the Byzantines gained control of it, following which the castle was occupied by the Crusader Principality of Antioch. The Principality of Antioch, including parts of modern-day Turkey and Syria, was one of the states created during the First Crusade. Much of what remains visible today dates from the occupation of the Crusaders, which began around 1100. As the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme report states: “They were responsible for constructing the high stone walls and defensive towers, and cutting a deep moat into the rocks. In the middle of the moat rises a thin needle of remaining natural rock, twenty-eight-metres high, on which rested a bridge, once the only entry into the Citadel.” The Crusader walls were breached by the armies of Salah al-Din in July 1188, and it is from this victory that the citadel takes its present name. Salah al-Din (Saladin, c. 1138–93) was a Kurdish Muslim general and warrior from Tikrit. He founded the Ayyubid dynasty of Egypt, Syria, Yemen (except for the Northern Mountains), Iraq, Mecca, Hejaz and Diyarbakir. Salah al-Din is an honorific title meaning “the Righteousness of the Faith” in Arabic. As it happens, the Ayyubid Wall restored by the AKHCP in Cairo (see page 102) was in part the work of Salah al-Din. The work of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture on the site began in 1999 with a detailed survey undertaken in cooperation with the Syrian authorities. The efforts of the AKHCP focused on the Palace complex, a part of the Citadel built beginning in 1188. This area is comprised of a mosque, a vaulted gallery, the Qala’un hammam and a palace complex with a hammam. One of a number of AKHCP projects in Syria, including work on the Citadel of Aleppo, the intervention on the Citadel of Salah al-Din was carried out using the tried and proven methods of the organization including the training of local professionals and craftsmen, investment in visitor infrastructure and the use of international standards of conservation practice and appropriate methodologies. The project at Salah al-Din will also include “the provision of a new visitors’ centre and exhibition space in the restored mosque and madrasa buildings, and the AKTC will invest in other aspects of tourism infrastructure at the site such as toilet facilities, signage and pathways for visitors.”
Humayun’s Tomb Complex
Gardens

DELHI, INDIA

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Funding Agency: Aga Khan Trust for Culture; Archaeological Survey of India (ASI); National Culture Fund; Indo-British Fiftieth Anniversary Trust; Oberoi Group of Hotels

Date of Intervention: 2000
Completed: 2003

The Tomb of the Mughal Emperor Humayun in Delhi was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1993 (ref: 232). Nasiruddin Humayun (1508–56) was the second Mughal Emperor and ruled northern parts of India from 1530 to 1540 and again from 1555 to 1556. The entry in the UNESCO list for his tomb states: “Built in 1570, [it] is of particular cultural significance as it was the first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent. It inspired several major architectural innovations, culminating in the construction of the Taj Mahal.” On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of India, the AKTC decided to sponsor the rehabilitation of Humayun’s Garden. This was the first private restoration initiative involving a World Heritage Site in India. “The objective of the project,” explains the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, “was to restore the gardens, pathways, fountains and water channels of the garden surrounding Humayun’s Tomb according to the original plans of the builders. The preservation of historic elements required archival and archaeological research, as well as close attention to the living and renewable landscape elements. Site works encompassed a variety of disciplines, including archaeological excavation, the application of conservation science and hydraulic engineering. As part of the implementation process, a management plan was established to ensure proper long-term maintenance.” Twelve hectares of lawn were planted, as well as 2500 trees in the course of the work. In his speech marking the inauguration of the gardens in 2003, the Aga Khan stated: “These restored gardens are the first chahar-bagh, or four-part paradise garden, to surround a Mughal tomb on the sub-continent. Built nearly a century before the Taj Mahal, the Tomb and its gardens were an expression of the love and respect borne toward the Emperor Humayun by his son, Akbar, and widow, Haji Begum. The chahar-bagh was more than a pleasure garden. In the discipline and order of its landscaped geometry, its octagonal or rectangular pools, its selection of favourite plants and trees, it was an attempt to create transcendent perfection – a glimpse of paradise on earth.” More than a simple restoration, the work undertaken at Humayun’s Tomb can be seen as emblematic of the initiatives of the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme – initiatives described by the Aga Khan himself in Delhi: “Speaking of civil society, central to my broader concern is the fact that investing in such cultural initiatives represents an opportunity to improve the quality of life for the people who live around these remarkable inheritances of past great civilizations. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture insists that each of its conservation and restoration projects should be able to have an important positive impact on that quality of life. We are keen that our investments create a multiplier effect in the local economy. Accordingly, we monitor their impact on the physical environment as well as on disposable income and other indices of better living conditions. We also emphasize self-sustainability … These restored gardens can thus become the fulcrum and catalyst for socio-economic development as well as an irreplaceable resource for education.”

1 See: http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=232.
2 Speech by His Highness the Aga Khan at the ceremony to inaugurate the restored Humayun’s Tomb Gardens, New Delhi, India, 15 April 2003.
M O P T I, M A L I

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Funding Agency: Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Date of Intervention: 2004
Completed: 2006

Mopti is the fourth largest city in Mali with a population of 118,000. It is located at the confluence of the Niger and Bani Rivers, between Timbuktu and Ségué, about a hundred kilometres from the border of Burkina Faso. It is the landlocked country’s most important port but was founded only in the nineteenth century. The population of Mali is ninety per cent Muslim. The Grand Mosque of Mopti is an earthen structure built in the traditional Sudanese style between 1936 and 1943 on the site of an earlier mosque built in 1903. The first phase of AKTC work involved the repair of the roof and the stabilization of the upper part of the building. A poor restoration carried out with cement in 1978 had weakened the structure. On 14 October 2004, the monument was formally inscribed as an official landmark in the nation’s cultural heritage by the Minister for Culture. Beginning in November 2004 local masons working under AKHCP supervision removed the cement and replaced it with traditional mortar and bricks in strict observance of traditional construction techniques. The work was carried out under the supervision of the Direction Nationale du Patrimoine du Ministère de la Culture du Mali, regional authorities, the city of Mopti and the Mosque’s committee. During a visit in the course of restoration in 2005, the Aga Khan declared: “Mopti’s mosque is an outstanding example of the traditional Muslim architecture of the Sahel. We hope that our restoration efforts, which include an important training component, will develop appropriate restoration guidelines and solutions that will be used in other projects in Mali and in the region.”

As a result of the project, certificates were awarded to two master builders, seventeen bricklayers, eighteen skilled labourers, five carpenters and eleven craft workers amongst other professionals. On 19 June 2006, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) formally handed over the keys of the Great Mosque of Mopti to the Malian Minister of Culture, who in turn gave them to Kissima Touré, head of the village of Mopti. Like the Great Mosque in Niono, Mali, which received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (1983 Cycle), this structure calls on techniques and architectural forms that clearly have their roots in periods that date from before the actual twentieth-century construction. The efforts of the organizations of the Aga Khan give value to what must be termed local traditions that have surely been undervalued by Western specialists of architectural history. With similar efforts undertaken in Djenné, or Timbuktu, the AKTC has shown its commitment to ongoing efforts concentrated in specific regions selected because of the importance of local architectural patrimony. On the occasion of the visit to Mopti of the Aga Khan in 2005, Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, declared: “On behalf of the people of Mali and the government, I would like to say we are honoured that the AKDN is contributing to the preservation of the country’s cultural heritage.” This statement underlines the fully collaborative nature of the interventions of organizations like the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, spearheaded by the Aga Khan himself.

2 Ibid.
View of the restoration work.

Mopti is set on three islands linked by dykes: the New Town, the Old Town and Bani.
A facade of the mosque and ongoing restoration work. Djingareyber, or the Great Mosque, is Timbuktu's oldest monument and its major landmark. Located at the western corner of the old town, the mosque is almost entirely built in raw earth which is used for mud bricks and rendering.
Restoration of Djingareyber Mosque

TIMBUKTU, MALI

Architect/Planner: Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Funding Agency: Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Date of intervention: 2006
Planned completion: 2010

One of the most recent restoration projects undertaken by the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP) concerns the Djingareyber Mosque, one of the three great mosques (with Sankore and Sidi Yahia) of Timbuktu. The city of Timbuktu is located in Mali, about fifteen kilometres north of the northernmost loop of the Niger River. It was established by Tuareg nomads as a seasonal camp in about AD 1100. At its height, Timbuktu was at the crossroads of three major trading routes between West Africa and Tripoli, Alexandria and Cairo to the northeast. As early as the fourteenth century, significant books were written and copied in Timbuktu, establishing the city as a centre of written tradition in Africa. By the time of the reign of the Askias (1494–1591) Timbuktu had become an important centre of Koranic studies with the University of Sankore and as many as 180 madrasas with 25,000 students from numerous Muslim countries.

Built in 1325 or 1327, the Djingareyber Mosque was designed by Abu Isahp Es-Saheli, who was paid 200 kilos of gold for his efforts by Kankan Moussa, Emperor of the Mali Empire. Francesco Siravo of the AKTC explains: “All of the walls of the mosque are made of local limestone, called alhore bound with earthen mortar and covered with plaster (banco). In this respect, Timbuktu’s construction materials differ from those of Mopti and Djenné where walls are constructed with earthen brick. The mosque was entirely rebuilt between 1570 and 1583 by the Imam al-Aqib, Cadi of Timbuktu, who enlarged the structure and created the exterior wall around the courtyard and the cemetery to the west.” It has three inner courts and two minarets, a pyramidal central one and another conical one along the seventy-metre-long eastern facade. The mosque has prayer space for approximately 2000 people.

The region of Timbuktu, including such monuments as Djingareyber Mosque, was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1988 (ref:119rev). The description associated with this listing explains that as the “home of the prestigious Koranic Sankore University and other madrasas, Timbuktu was an intellectual and spiritual capital and a centre for the propagation of Islam throughout Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its three great mosques, Djingareyber, Sankore and Sidi Yahia, recall Timbuktu’s golden age. Although continuously restored, these monuments are today under threat from desertification.” In 1989, the building was included in the list of World Heritage sites in danger and five years later the World Heritage Committee responded favourably to the local Cultural Mission’s request for assistance. Funds were provided for training and emergency interventions carried out by a team from CRATerre-EAG. In 2000, the building was removed from the list of World Heritage sites in danger.

Although voyagers commented about the degraded state of some walls of the mosque as early as the 1830s, the structure has been continually shored up or resurfaced in a local practice involving the participation of the faithful. Analysis carried out by the AKHCP revealed problems associated with the quality of construction materials used in relatively recent times, with the evacuation of water, and with the presence of animals within the mosque. The southern facade, in particular, shows substantial signs of erosion by water and wind. Plans for the restoration of the mosque imply the respect of the existing context including alterations made subsequent to construction, the need to conserve or restore elements rather than replacing them, and the return to the use of the higher quality materials which analysis of the building shows were used in earlier times. As in the case of other AKHCP projects, the programme will identify and make use of local skilled labourers and train others. Work on the environment of the mosque, its walls and foundations, the reconstruction of the roof and drainage system, and intervention on the interior and exterior wall coatings is planned over a series of four yearly campaigns to be completed in 2010.

1 E-mail from Francesco Siravo, 29 January 2007.
The city of Kabul has been in the news frequently in recent years because of conflicts. It might be said that war and conquest is inscribed in its history. Founded over 3000 years ago, Kabul became the capital of the Mughal Empire in 1504, under the rule of Zahir al-Din Mohammad (Babur, 1483–1530). Timur Shah Durrani, Shah of Afghanistan from 1776 to his death in 1793, made it the capital of what would become modern Afghanistan. Long before these events, in 674, the Islamic invasions conquered Kabul, and then it was successively ruled by the Samanids, the Hindu Shahi dynasty, the Ghaznavids, Ghurids and Timurids, before the arrival of the Mughals and the Durrans. In part because of this history, Kabul is today a multicultural and multi-ethnic city. The engagement of the Aga Khan in the restoration of the Old City of Kabul in 2000 was an early and significant step toward the rehabilitation programme of the country. After the end of the war, an agreement was concluded between the Interim Administration and the AKTC “to restore, rehabilitate and upgrade a number of significant historic buildings and public open spaces in the city. The first building selected was the Timur Shah Mausoleum, in the heart of the bazaar district.” The dome was restored in 2004, with the consolidation of the rest of the building and the enhancement of “the former public garden in front of it by providing alternative premises for the squatting tradesmen” as the subsequent goals of the AKTC team lead by Jolyon Leslie. The site of AKTC intervention is the Bagh-i Babur (Babur Gardens), originally laid out by the founder of the Mughal dynasty. The Bagh-i Babur is a terraced and walled open space containing the tomb of the sixteenth-century emperor, and features the remains of what was the first Mughal ‘paradise garden’ and the predecessor of many famous imperial gardens in the South Asian sub-continent. As presented by the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (AKHCP): “This garden is one of the most important public open spaces of Kabul and its rehabilitation will not only re-establish the historic character of the site with its water channels, planted terraces and pavilions, but also provide a much appreciated space for leisure, meetings, celebrations, open-air receptions and cultural events.” The organizations are also working in the Ashqan-i Arefan neighbourhood to aid with the repair of historic houses and the restoration of monuments such as the Uzbeka Mosque. Given the unsettled political situation in Afghanistan, the early and continued aid efforts of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, through its HCP branch, demonstrate the commitment of the Aga Khan to the culture and architecture of Muslim cities. The depth of this effort is indicated by other indicatives such as the participation of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) in the creation of Afghanistan’s GSM telecommunications system, the creation of a training programme for nurses by the Aga Khan University (Karachi), which counted eighty-nine graduates in 2006, and the participation of the Aga Khan Development Network in the management and supervision of the French Medical Institute for Children in Kabul.
Two images of pavement and drain works (after restoration, top) in the Old City of Kabul near the Babur Gardens.
The Bagh-i Babur (Babur Gardens) in Kabul, Afghanistan, before and after restoration work undertaken by the AKHCP.
Kabul Serena Hotel

KABUL, afghanistan

Architect: Ramesh Khosla
Funding Agency: Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED)
Owner: Tourism Promotion Services (TPS)
Date of Intervention: 2002
Completed: 2005

The Kabul Serena Hotel is located in the centre of the city overlooking Zanegar Park. Built in 1945, amid landscaped gardens, the former Kabul Hotel, destroyed during the war, underwent a complete refurbishment, through the rehabilitation of the existing building and the addition of a completely new section. The phased upgrading of the original structure at a cost of USD 35 million, has yielded 177 guest rooms, two restaurants and a shopping arcade. A spokesman for the Aga Khan Foundation for Economic Development, Aly Mawji, was quoted by Time Magazine as saying: “Mainstream tourism is still years away, but we hope the hotel will encourage some more adventurous travellers.” Explaining this intervention and indeed the overall presence of his organizations in the country, the Aga Khan asked an obvious, but still surprising, question: “Ladies and gentlemen, there are some who will ask: why build a hotel in Afghanistan at this stage of its struggle for development? And why build one of a five star level?” His explanation has to do with local circumstances, but also with the concept of collaboration with local authorities that has governed AKTC action around the Muslim world: “In 2002, the government of Afghanistan asked the Aga Khan Development Network – the AKDN – to help in restoring Kabul’s hotel capacity, which had been almost totally destroyed by the civil war … The government wanted to ensure that state visitors, diplomats, government officials, foreign and local investors, donor agency representatives and tourists travelling to Kabul would have acceptable accommodation. The Kabul Hotel had been a notable landmark and centre of activity in the city since it was built in 1945; hence it was an obvious candidate for restoration.” Finally, how does the Kabul Serena Hotel fit into the overall scheme of intervention by other AKDN organizations? In the words of the Aga Khan: “As a significant development asset, the Kabul Serena Hotel is a major commitment within the broader mission of the Aga Khan Development Network’s nine development agencies which work in concert on the many facets of human development. Regardless of gender, origin or faith, the Aga Khan Development Network strives to help the weakest in society to achieve self-reliance in improving their lives, guided by the Koranic ethic of a common humanity and the dignity of all mankind. Aga Khan Development Network affiliate agencies began that mission in Afghanistan in 1995 with refugee resettlement and emergency humanitarian assistance. Since 2001, our agencies have been engaged in longer term development across the full spectrum of human need: economic, social and cultural.”

1 Speech by His Highness the Aga Khan at the opening of the Kabul Serena Hotel, Afghanistan, 8 November 2005.
The creation of the Kabul Serena Hotel is part of a coherent series of projects launched by the agencies of the Aga Khan in the immediate wake of the end of hostilities in 2002. The work of the Historic Cities Programme is thus just one part of this multi-tiered intervention.