

The image shows the interior of a historic courtyard in Cairo. The architecture features stone walls, arches, and a large, ornate lantern hanging from the ceiling. The courtyard is illuminated by warm lights, creating a cozy atmosphere. The text 'Cairo' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Cairo

Renewing the
Historic City



A MODEL FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF HISTORIC URBAN CENTRES

LUIS MONREAL

His Highness the Aga Khan inaugurated al-Azhar Park on 25 March 2005. In the speech given on that occasion, he recalled the incremental approach that guided the interventions of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in what would become a template for future actions that bring together renovation, new construction, infrastructure development and socio-economic initiatives. He stated: "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 Darb al-Ahmar neighbourhood. All are tightly interconnected and have added to the body of knowledge we can share with others."

The multifaceted nature of the interventions of AKDN in the heart of Old Cairo was the result of a series of events that began in 1984. It was in that year that an international seminar, entitled "The Expanding Metropolis: Coping with the Urban Growth of Cairo", was organized by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Significantly, Ismael Serageldin, at that time Director for Programs in West Africa at the World Bank, spoke at the seminar of the need for architects, builders and urbanists to take into account historic and contemporary socio-economic, political and demographic factors in framing their actions in places such as Cairo.

During his visit to the 1984 seminar, the Aga Khan met with the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy in the architect's apartment. Located on the top floor of an eighteenth-century urban mansion called Beit al-Fann, this residence is in the area of the Citadel, close to the mosque of Sultan Hassan. From the broad terrace of Fathy's apartment, the great monuments of Islamic Cairo were clearly visible, but so, too, was an empty expanse of land, running along what was left of the Ayyubid Walls built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Salah al-Din and his successor. As the heir of the Fatimid founders of Cairo and Egypt's greatest modern architect looked out, a part of the city's future began to take form.

It was also in 1984 that the Aga Khan decided to donate a park to the citizens of Cairo. Two years later the thirty-hectare site on the Darassa Hills belonging to the Governorate of the city was selected. Because of its sheer size and site near the historic centre of Cairo, this location offered a unique opportunity to create a new "lung" for a megalopolis that is notably deficient in green spaces. What little greenery or park space may have existed in the city has been in large part consumed by the pressures of urbanization. His Highness the Aga Khan recognized from the outset that a park must not only be a space for leisure where residents can compensate for



Preceding pages, panoramic view over Cairo from al-Azhar Park.

Opposite page, Khayrbek minaret and mausoleum.

Above, Alin Aq Palace and the Khayrbek complex in the 1890s.



Above, a rampart walkway on top of the Historic City Wall.

Below, al-Darb al-Ahmar urban transformations.

next to one of the poorest areas in Cairo, the efforts of AKTC began to form a logical system whose conclusions would serve other projects shortly thereafter.

For several reasons, the construction of al-Azhar Park and related projects should be construed as symbols of hope. The first of these involves the rediscovery of Cairo itself. From the now green hills of the Park, Cairo, for the first time, has a vantage point that allows visitors to take in the heart of the Islamic city in a single glance. This metropolis offers one of the greatest concentrations of art and culture in the world, on a scale matched by very few other cities. A second symbol of hope is the impact of the Park on the polluted environment. This thirty-hectare stretch of greenery has created its own eco-system whose microclimatic influence on neighbouring areas can only be positive. Since it houses three great water tanks for the city, al-Azhar Park is also Cairo's symbolic fountain, a source of freshness in a city besieged by dryness. A third reason for hope is the cultural impact of the project. The Park and its influence in the area contribute to the development of a new perception of the city. Just as the renovation of Barcelona for the 1992 Olympics created civic pride, the inhabitants of Cairo can view this initiative as a source of inspiration. It is conceivable that the self-image of the city may evolve, and that other efforts to maintain and improve this great centre of learning and art will spring forth with no apparent link to what has gone on here, and yet al-Azhar Park will have quietly sown its seeds. Finally, it may be said that this project had an undeniable socio-economic impact. New job opportunities were created in the area, and new economic undertakings were launched if only because of the services required by the Park and the flow of visitors that it engenders.

With an average of two million visitors a year, the Park generates enough funds for its own maintenance through gate and restaurant receipts. The overall impact on the quality of life in this community has been palpable. Disposable family income in al-Darb al-Ahmar, for example, increased by 27% between 2003 and 2009 – one third faster than in the whole of Old Cairo. Literacy rates climbed by one fourth. Despite the notable successes of the project, it will be noted at various points in this volume that subsequent outside events have sometimes had a negative impact, notably on the Darb al-Ahmar community. In the wake of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, for example, less control was exerted on the urban development of the city and certain structures were built without sufficient documentation and design quality. However, it is certain that the initiatives that were set underway by His Highness the Aga Khan more than thirty years ago have had a positive impact on the life of thousands of Cairenes.

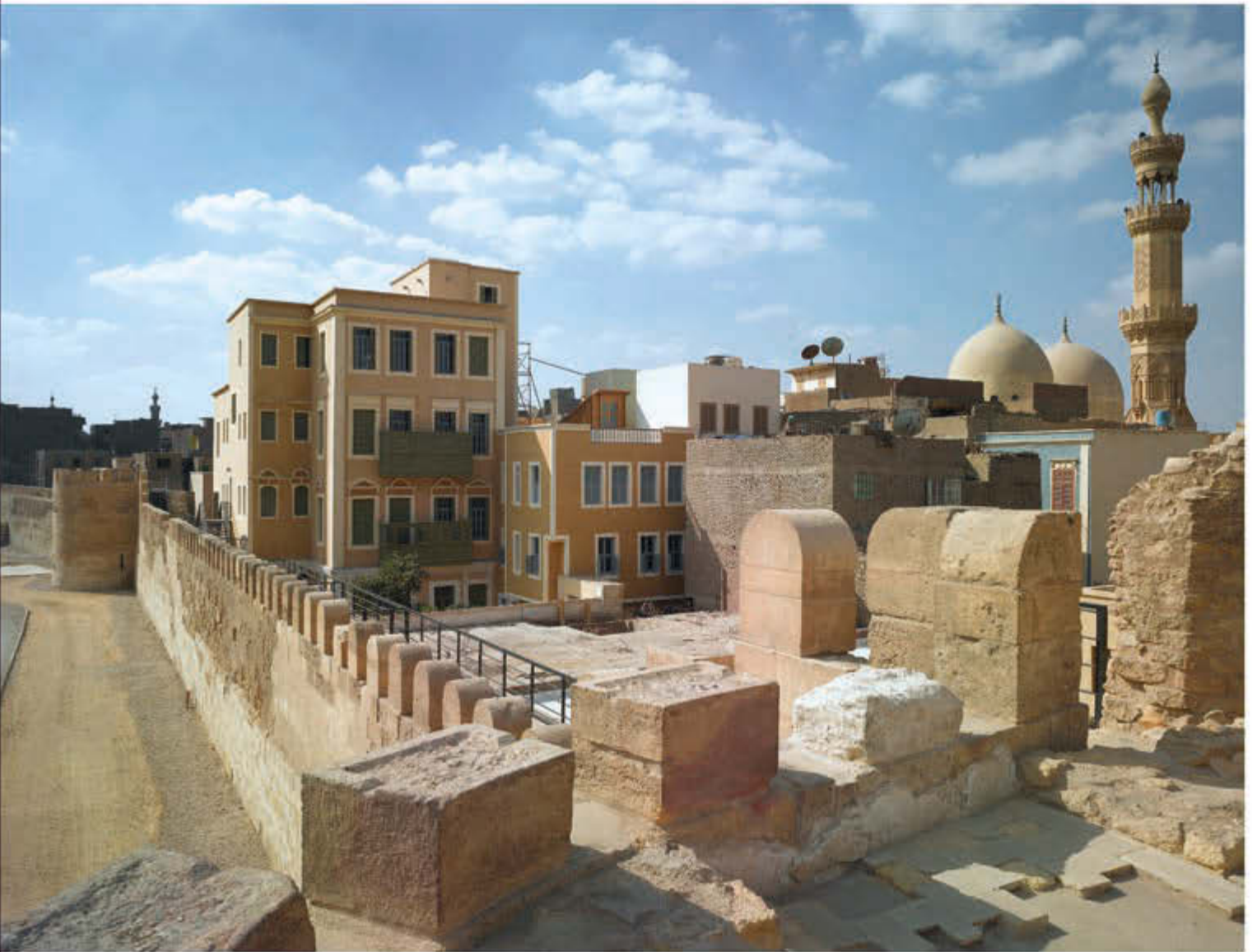
More, the entire experience of the interventions of AKTC in Cairo has been at the origin of the development of a system based on 'Public-Private Partnerships', and a multifaceted approach that combines respect for history with an investment in the future. The template thus created in Cairo responds in a practical way to the theory expounded by Ismael Seregeldin at the 1984 seminar when he called on all those with a stake in the renewal of old urban centres to work together. The system developed served AKTC's own later projects in Afghanistan and India, but it has also had an influence on historic urban renovation carried forward by other organizations.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Aga Khan Development Network as a whole did not come here simply to temporarily improve the landscape, but rather to bring forth a new growth and pride that will surely continue to flourish. When His Highness the Aga Khan looked out from the terrace of Beit al-Fann with Hassan Fathy in 1984, he saw the great monuments of Islamic Cairo, silent witnesses to a glorious past. The creation of al-Azhar Park, the restoration of the Ayyubid Wall and efforts in al-Darb al-Ahmar have been nothing other than an expression of confidence in the future of the metropolis and beyond, in the future of the great cities of Islam.



Above, the walkway along the Historic City Wall.

Below, circulation on the rampart walkway.



The Historic City Wall interface with al-Darb al-Ahmar urban fabric.

sub-optimal conditions, be they environmental, physical, or socio-economic, required first the definition of the same via two- and three-dimensional surveys, rectified photography, historic research and socio-economic surveys.

One unavoidable constraint in such an approach is the fact that in projects of complex scope not all the data required for decision-making are immediately available. Certain physical factors – the topography of the terrain, the chemical composition of the soil, the salt deposits on monuments or the rising water table in al-Darb al-Ahmar – were readily verifiable. Less immediately tangible were factors such as the compression of soils under conditions of flooding (locally testable but not generally susceptible to calculation), the structural stability of weakened minarets or the critical needs of the adjacent community in terms of proposals for improvement to their quality of life. These primary and secondary factors were very much contingent on each other – dependent on detailed field research and database development – and were, further, subject to the risk that enquiry and testing might alter the original conditions of the situation, a well-known risk to scientific enquiry in broader terms.

From the outset, due to its nature, the project approach was one of blended investigation – one that considered components both as stand-alone and as composite elements of a greater whole. The grain or scale of each component was specific to its type. The Park site called for a design and treatment that recognized its status as a micro-ecology in its own right. Thirty hectares of planted zones of varying species and types required the attention of numerous geotechnical engineers, soil scientists, irrigation engineers and horticultural engineers – all in support of a master landscape design. The Historic Wall and selected monuments in al-Darb al-Ahmar (Khayrbek Mosque, Aslam Mosque, and Umm al-Sultan Shaaban Mosque in earlier phases, and Alin Aq Palace, the Aqsunqur (or Blue) Mosque and the Tarabay al-Sharif complex in later phases) would call for a multi-year process of surveying, documentation and careful conservation in some cases, and restoration in others.³

Socio-economic research and baseline surveys in al-Darb al-Ahmar carried out by the project team led to the capture of the existing “Quality of Life” (QoL) indicators, in accordance with an AKDN-based format. Combined with detailed urban physical and socio-economic research, a valuable GIS-based database was developed that would later underpin AKTC’s proposals for a conservation master plan for al-Darb al-Ahmar.

His Highness’s remarks at the 1984 seminar underlined that Cairo had been the beneficiary of central urban planning; another conclusion that emerged was that a more granular and detailed conservation master plan that reflected the diversity of al-Darb al-Ahmar’s rich urban culture and living traditions was also critical. As a historic settlement, al-Darb al-Ahmar, when the project commenced, offered a rich tapestry of monuments and urban space that, with time and multiple phases of changed patterns of occupancy and use, had been subjected to severe physical and environmental stress.

Bab al-Wazir Street in the vicinity of the Khayrbek complex.





Top, the Citadel View Restaurant on the northern hilltop.

Middle, southern flower beds in bloom.

Bottom, the southern lake and the Lakeside Café.

had physical and mental attributes, only eventually worn down in later periods. An example of how stretches of the outlying city spaces can be reunited with the inner-city settlement in their post-medieval phase is illustrated by the development of al-Azhar Park.

THE HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE SITE

Since the founding of Cairo, the cyclical collapse and demolition of man-made structures have added vast amounts of debris to the overall fill that the city rests on. Large areas of Historic Cairo, itself, thus sit on fill from earlier periods. The large-scale deposit of such fill in physically discrete zones at the edges of the expanding city seems to have been an early practice. The cycle of building decay and demolition and subsequent removal as fill to adjacent heaps east of the built city, in the vicinity of the Citadel, is noted as having intensified, by one account,⁷ during the period following the end of the Mamluk era (1516).

A travelogue by the French voyager Jean de Thévenot (1633–67) describes, as early as 1658, the heights of debris, which nearly hid the high walls surrounding the Old City of Cairo. Urban growth during the Turkish era is described as having been vigorous on the western side of Cairo while decay was underway on the east. The attractions of the Nile on the west and the geological deterrents on the east, outlined above, have contributed to this pattern. Maps prepared by the French Expedition at the start of the nineteenth century graphically confirm large and well-established tracts of man-made hills immediately east of the Ayyubid Wall and north of the Citadel and Bab al-Wazir cemetery.

Reflections of this area are still visible today, in al-Azhar Park's topography. The Park site, known also as the "Darassa Hills", lies east of the Old City and is characterized by northwards running hills, where layers up to twenty to forty metres of fill have been found. Unique geological and man-made environmental pressures have jointly shaped over millennia, in the one case, and over centuries, in the other, the essential physical parameters of what was ultimately to become a park site.

THE RATIONALE FOR THE SITE'S DEVELOPMENT AS A PARK

While excluded from the Historic City, in recent years the proximity and size of the Park site had posed an interesting dilemma to would-be occupants. The disadvantages of its geotechnical 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 site for transformation. Opportunities to transform Cairo's edges have not gone unnoticed in the last few decades.

The inspired proposal put forth by His Highness the Aga Khan in 1990 to transform the rugged site into a municipal park can be singled out as the prime reason for its current integrity. The resultant use of it to contain a water reservoir as well as a park added complexity, but further underlined the civic function associated with the site, reinforcing its place in the public domain.

Parks have historically served well as buffer zones between competing urban uses as well as transitional devices in separating or differentiating various intensive districts. The surrounding inter-urban routes of al-Azhar Street and Salah Salem, which have, over time, become vital transport links, and the discontinuity between al-Darb al-Ahmar and the City of the Dead in the east-west direction, and al-Azhar and the Citadel to its south, have skirted the site, turning it into such a buffer zone with highly contrasting edges and vistas. The housing built on top of sections of the Historic Wall on its west, together with signs of squatter activity, signalled a situation that had



50 m

Above, plan of al-Azhar Park.

Following pages, the central formal garden
looking south towards the Citadel of Cairo.

reached a head in terms of urban pressures needing resolution in one form or another.

The initiative to develop a park on this large but hemmed-in site turned a corner in the evolution of this district, allowing the city to respect its past (the limits of the Old City, the more than 1300-metre-long Historic Wall, and the barren expanse of the site) while providing significant open space in which the pedestrian – resident or visitor – can move through a three-dimensional space in the absence of the ubiquitous car, that is, the chance to escape the predominant general urban experience. Surrounded on the north, east and part of the west by roadways, the site's Park space declares a local victory of nature and pedestrian movement over the vehicle.

THE PARK MASTER PLAN

Sasaki Associates was enlisted, in the earlier stages, to establish with the Trust the guiding principles for the Park's master planning process. In the mid-1990s, this included the careful insertion of a Park circulatory system and feature spaces around and above the constructed water reservoir. Due to its size, centrality and proximity to Historic Cairo, the Park site was assigned a value by its planners, which called for its treatment as a metropolitan park in scale.

Al-Darb al-Ahmar's need for green space was a clear priority from the start. The educational or informational value of a multi-purpose park, which could be a large gateway to Old Cairo and a platform from which to overlook the monumental skyline of the city, was a further objective. While containing walkways and amenities, parks are clearly intended to provide plentiful areas of green space. While small parks can

The Lakeside Café and its lake in the southern meadow.





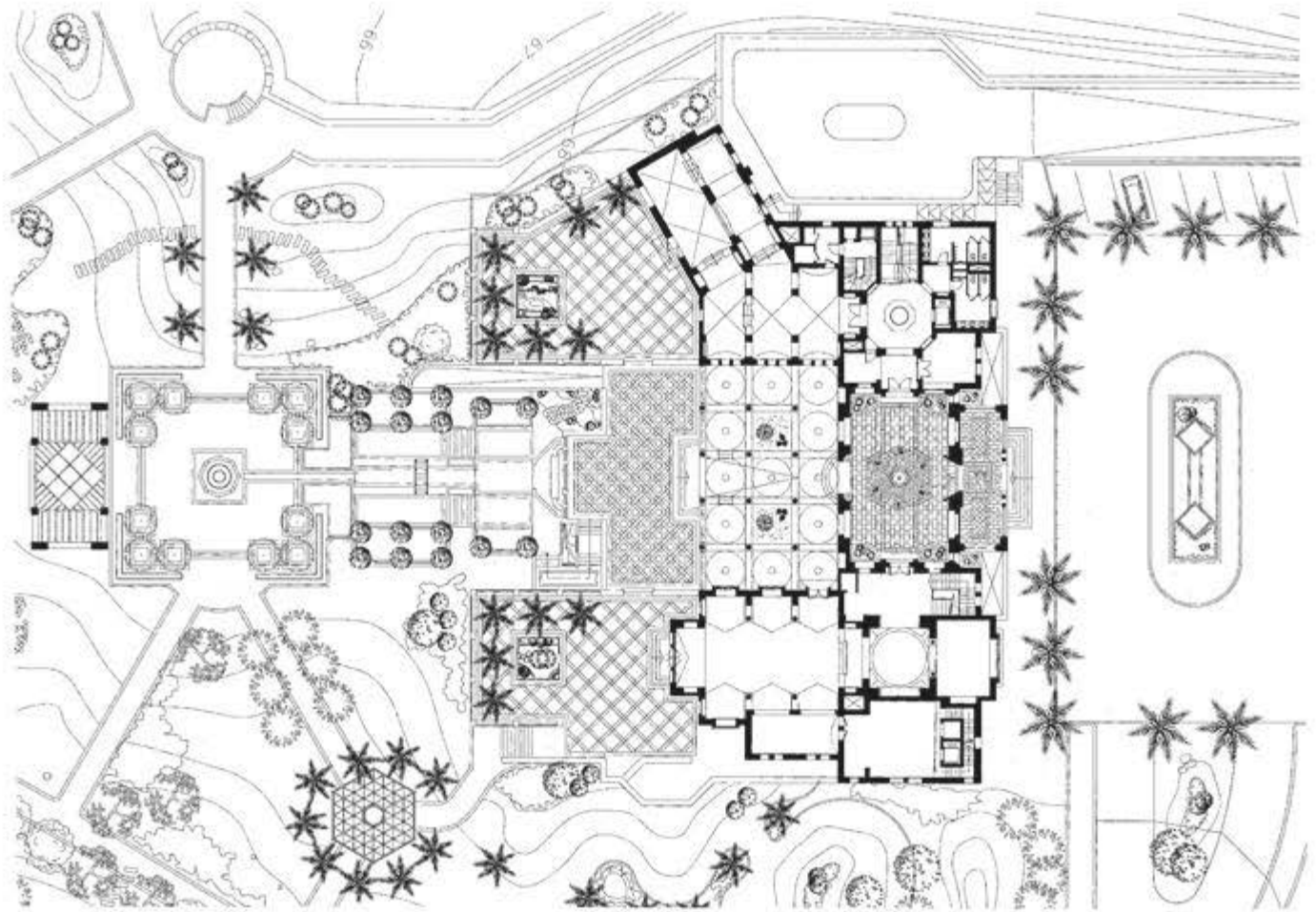
thrive on a narrow range of plant life, al-Azhar Park was viewed as a space that would encompass a wide diversity of plant form, serving as a central theme itself.

The Lakeside Café east entry.

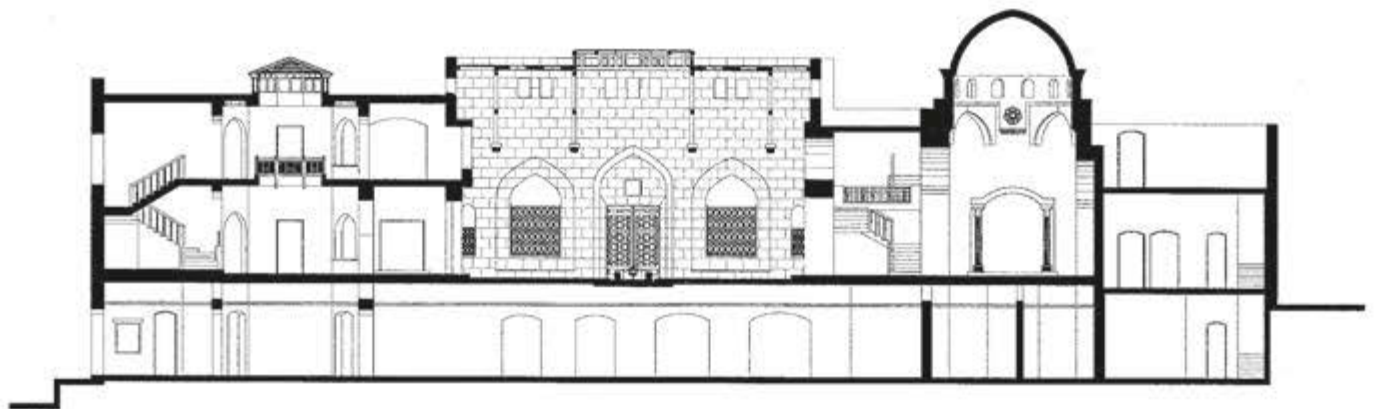
ADVANCING THE PROJECT DURING A FIRST WAVE OF DEVELOPMENT (1992-96)

The concept master plan had reached a clear level of definition as early as 1996, but the project's advance was delayed by a requisition from the General Organization of Greater Cairo (GOGCWS) to the Governorate of Cairo to use the same site for the construction of a municipal water reservoir complex, consisting of three large, circular reservoirs (each eighty metres in diameter) and a pump station to serve the adjacent district. In a comparatively short period, the site shifted from its historic derelict status to that of strategic importance with respect to the district infrastructure. The more "modern" real-estate pressure on the site had begun.

A multi-year programme of excavation, piling and grading works was set in motion to construct the reservoir system between 1991 and 1996. The superimposition of this water reservoir system on the site inevitably created an additional set of constraints in terms of safeguarding the investment value of the infrastructure and the necessity to provide maintenance access to the reservoir tanks and distribution lines (including a 1400-millimetre-diameter transmission line), which run the length of the Park. A set of design guidelines, prepared by the GOGCWS consultant team, established criteria for areas of interface between the Park design and the reservoir system. As the AKTC



10 m



5 m

Plan (above) and section (below) of the Citadel View Restaurant.



above-described horticultural testing and a larger, off-site nursery for propagation of the main stock. In an important example of cooperation, the American University of Cairo (AUC) made available to the project a plot of fifty *feddans* in their desert agricultural research centre in South Tahrir over a multi-year period for cultivation as a Park nursery. The Park's landscape varies from dry, succulent plants on the western slopes to lush, grassy meadows with shade trees, to formal gardens, and finally to *bustan*-like orchard space. The variety of species, particularly native Egyptian plants, aimed at establishing a new benchmark for park spaces in the region.

THE PARK'S FINAL DESIGN

Due to size and centrality, al-Azhar Park has, by all accounts, fulfilled a vital function in expanding park and green space available to the public in Greater Cairo, the population of which stood close to 17 million in 2002 and is closer to 20 million today (2017). The Park attracts visitors from other regions as well. Total annual visitor numbers have stabilized at the two million level. The Park design, of necessity, has needed to keep this large potential user group in perspective.

The design of the Park sought to make maximum and skilful use of the site's location, elevated topography and unique vistas overlooking Historic Cairo. Generously dimensioned pedestrian paths follow the contours in most areas, allowing comfortable circuits of the entire Park site. An important exception to the curvilinear path system occurs along the main promenade, off the eastern entry gate. Here a formal and linear promenade runs along a straight, but descending, course from the Citadel

Panoramic view over Cairo and al-Azhar Park from the *manzara* café in the Citadel View Restaurant.



Left, *shadirwan* from the Fatimid Western Palace, now in the restored *bimaristan* of Qalawun.

Right, an early 19th-century engraving by Pascal Coste: view of light structures along the *khalij* (canal), which he called *casins*.



of the once prosperous *bimaristan* (hospital) of Qalawun, built in 1284, where coffered wooden ceilings with painted animals and floral motifs and marble *shadirwan* (slanted wall fountains) still stand in what is believed to be original Fatimid *iwans*. Of the *Bustan al-Kafuri* itself, nothing remains.

The *Bustan al-Kafuri*, however, was not the only famous *bustan* in medieval Cairo. The proximity of the Nile River allowed the powerful and wealthy during the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods to exploit its eastern bank – and to a lesser extent its western one – and the borders of the several seasonal ponds that formed after its annual flood in the low land west of the city to establish huge *basatin* for their recreation. Most famed are the *basatin* of Sayf al-Islam (a brother of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi), which lay to the west of where the two magnificent mosques of Sultan Hassan and al-Rifa'i stand today and extended towards the no-longer-extant *Birkat al-Fil* (Pond of the Elephant). These *basatin* were called the gardens of Abbas in Fatimid times and were appropriated by Salah al-Din's family along with the majority of other Fatimid properties.

Other famous *basatin* existed on al-Rawda Island in the middle of the Nile facing al-Fustat, which developed in the early Mamluk period on the ruins of a short-lived late-Ayyubid citadel. The Rawda citadel was first built by the last Ayyubid sultan of Egypt, al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub (1240–49) as a place for him and his loyal troops to retreat to from the more official Citadel of Cairo. The majority of structures inside it and along its walls, including the towers that overlooked the Nile, were of a residential nature. The sources mention loggiaa (*maq'a'id*, sing. *maq'ad*), belvederes (*manazir*, sing. *manzara*) and halls (*qa'at*, sing. *qa'a*) located along the two sides of the Citadel facing the river.

Opposite the Citadel, and later on its site after its abandonment, many *basatin* were developed in the early Mamluk period. The memory of these *basatin* is preserved primarily in the *waqf* documents of buildings that were erected on their sites



and in the books of *Khitat*, especially the famous *Kitab al-Mawa'iz wa-l-I'tibar bi-Dhikr al-Khitat wa-l-Athar* (*The Book of Moral Sermons and Lessons Derived from the Remembrance of Cities' Traces and Building Remains*) of Taqiyy al-Din al-Maqrizi (1364–1442). Al-Maqrizi describes many of these *basatin* and reports the festive events held in them that had ceremonial, recreational, literary or amorous aims. From his and others' descriptions emerges an image of verdant gardens with various flowers (narcissus, jasmine, roses, dog roses), shrubs and trees (palm, vine, lemon, bitter orange, prune, pear, mulberry, moringa, privet, myrtle, sycamore), and some light pavilions and belvederes scattered across the landscape.

Another type of open space, the *maydan* (translated as hippodrome in this context), flourished in the medieval period, especially under the Ayyubids and the Mamluks. *Mayadin* became essential urban spaces in Cairo – there were eight of them at one time or another – as everywhere else in the Islamic world where Turkic horsemen ruled and established an equestrian military elite after the Seljuks rose to power in the eleventh century. Although they were all large, open and covered with grass (*najil* in medieval terminology), the *mayadin* were not meant for the use of the masses. They were royal establishments for polo games and equestrian exercises (*furusiyya*), the backbone of the Mamluk military organization upon which the new regime depended. Sultans Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (1176–93), al-Kamil Muhammad (1218–38), al-Zahir Baybars (1260–76), al-Nasir Muhammad (1293–1341), and Qansuh al-Ghawri (1501–16) are the most famous builders of *mayadin* in the history of Cairo.

The most important of these *mayadin*, and the only one that still exists today, is the *maydan* under the Citadel. Planned along with the Citadel by Sultan al-Kamil Muhammad for military parades and training, the *maydan* sits almost on the same site as the parade ground built by Ibn Tulun around 876, more than three centuries earlier. To judge from the chroniclers' reports, it had at least three different and interchangeable names: the Maydan al-Qal'a (Citadel Maydan), the Qaramaydan (Turkish

View of the Qaramaydan as depicted in the *Description de l'Égypte* in the early 19th century.







Above, the advanced level of deterioration in housing stock and open space.

Opposite page, the minaret of the Zawyet al-Hunud restoration, in the vicinity of Umm al-Sultan Shaaban Mosque.

Environment and Solid-Waste Management

The Revitalization Project made considerable progress in clearing the targeted open spaces, but maintenance was an uphill struggle. The quantity of waste produced in al-Darb al-Ahmar was not very attractive commercially and the private sector contract had changed hands four times. Residents pay for rubbish collection through their electricity bills but, at mid-project (2007), some collectors were still demanding *baksheesh*. The Project's other main environmental contribution was the encouragement of rooftop gardening. There were some three hundred rooftops suitable for "urban agriculture" and the Project targeted one hundred (while only budgeting for twenty). Residents were expected to renew compost, seeds and other requirements after the initial supply. This project was reinstated on a small scale in 2015.

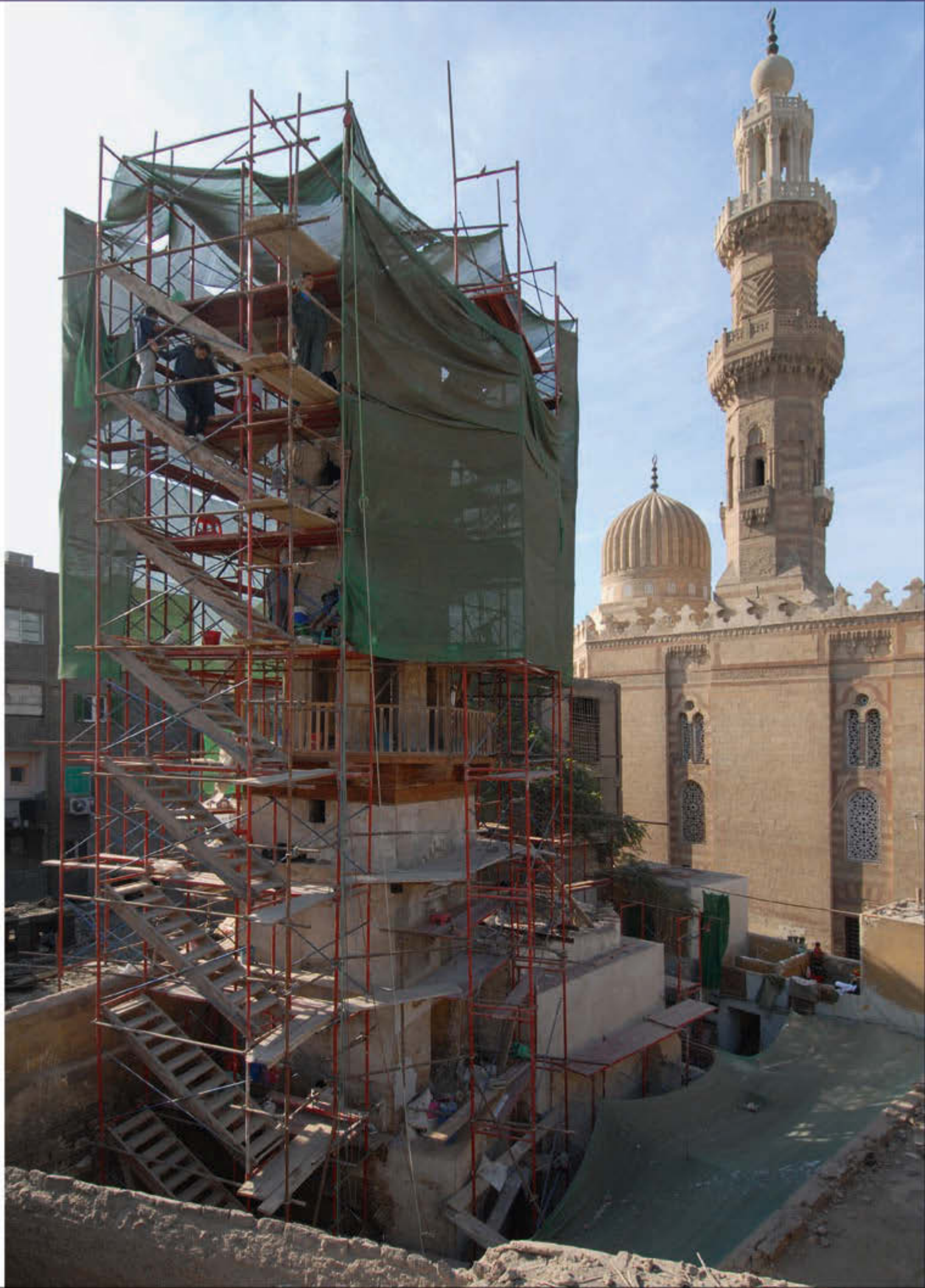
Economic Life

The Revitalization Project's reports from 2003 to 2011 present a mixed and not always consistent picture. While incomes for many households rose from their 2003 levels (even after allowing for inflation), the climate for workshops and small businesses was unfavourable. There was a slight increase in the proportion of economically active residents and the number of families with no income earner decreased. Overall unemployment dropped from 15% in 2003 to 8% in 2009. However, the Project's 2006 annual report observed that under- and low-skill employment were more serious problems than unemployment. By the time of the 2011 survey, mean monthly household income stood at EGP 1,037 (USD 174), double the 2003 figure and higher than that for 2009. After allowing for inflation from 2003 to 2009, real incomes rose by almost 20% during the first decade. However, very high food prices in 2010 and 2011 brought real purchasing power in 2011 back down to 2003 levels.

A high percentage of household expenditure on food can indicate poverty. Between 2003 and 2009, the average percentage of household expenditure on food dropped only slightly from 54% to a still high 51%. There was considerable variation between neighbourhoods. Percentage expenditure on food in al-Batniyya (within the Project area) rose from 44% in 2003 to 46% in 2009. There was significant change in al-Ghoriyya (outside the Project action area), where food expenditure was 63% in 2003, dropping to 46% in 2009. It is significant that the 2009 survey was conducted before the steep rise in food prices in 2010, suggesting an endemic poverty level in at least some of the neighbourhoods.

The Revitalization Project and the associated AKAM Microfinance service provided small loans, business advice, vocational education and employment services. In 2006, AKAM established the First Microfinance Foundation (FMF-Egypt), which took over the microfinance and business development component of the Project. The 2007 mid-term evaluation found that the microfinance programme was positively rated while there was criticism of the business development component. The employment service had enabled 676 job seekers to find work by 2007, against a target of 1440 for the second phase. Women job applicants had increased from 25% to 35%. The same report drew attention to concerns about the Revitalization Project's lack of policies and safeguards regarding workplace safety, facilities for women employees, child labour and harmful environmental practices.

In 2009: "...production-based businesses were suffering more of what they were suffering in 2003: competition from Chinese products, slow markets, no vision or access to new markets and limited vision regarding product development". The 2010 business survey of businesses in five neighbourhoods found that the majority of respondents felt that their economic status had declined – mainly due to high prices.





Youths watching a cultural event taking place in the plaza, located on the main spine inside the main entrance.

Maintaining the peacefulness and security of the Park has always been a top priority. This task is entrusted to competent security personnel together with external security companies, who cooperate to ensure the safety of visitors. This has been manifested in visits of VIPs and international personalities: repeated visits from the former first lady of Egypt, the presidential electoral conference of 2005, regular visits by ministers, visits by royalty and presidents, including His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, His Royal Highness the King of Spain, Her Royal Highness the Queen of Belgium and the President of the Czech Republic.

WEATHERING FINANCIAL CONDITIONS

Despite the economic challenges that Egypt has faced since 2011, the Park never relinquished its commitment to remain *the* place of recreation for the modest-income populations of Cairo and for Darb al-Ahmar residents in particular.



The curfews imposed between 2011 and 2013, lasting for nearly six months, caused a notable decrease in the Park's revenues. During this time, the Park management used the accumulated surpluses of previous periods to cover the deficit until the situation stabilized after the 30 June 2013 revolution. Since 2011, the economic situation obliged successive governments to increase the rate of the value-added tax together with a real-estate tax. In addition, subsidies on utilities have been reduced and hence prices of electricity, water and fuel increase regularly. Recently, at the end of 2016, the flotation of the Egyptian pound caused a surge in prices of all goods and services, raising all cost elements of the Park's operation by 30% to 50%. However, the Park has managed to overcome these issues by controlling expenses.

To overcome the limitation in resources and revenues, the Park management is capitalizing on these uniquely beautiful premises and on creative potential to generate income from diverse sources. It has contracted a specialized



URBAN REDEVELOPMENT LESSONS LEARNED

DINA K. SHEHAYEB

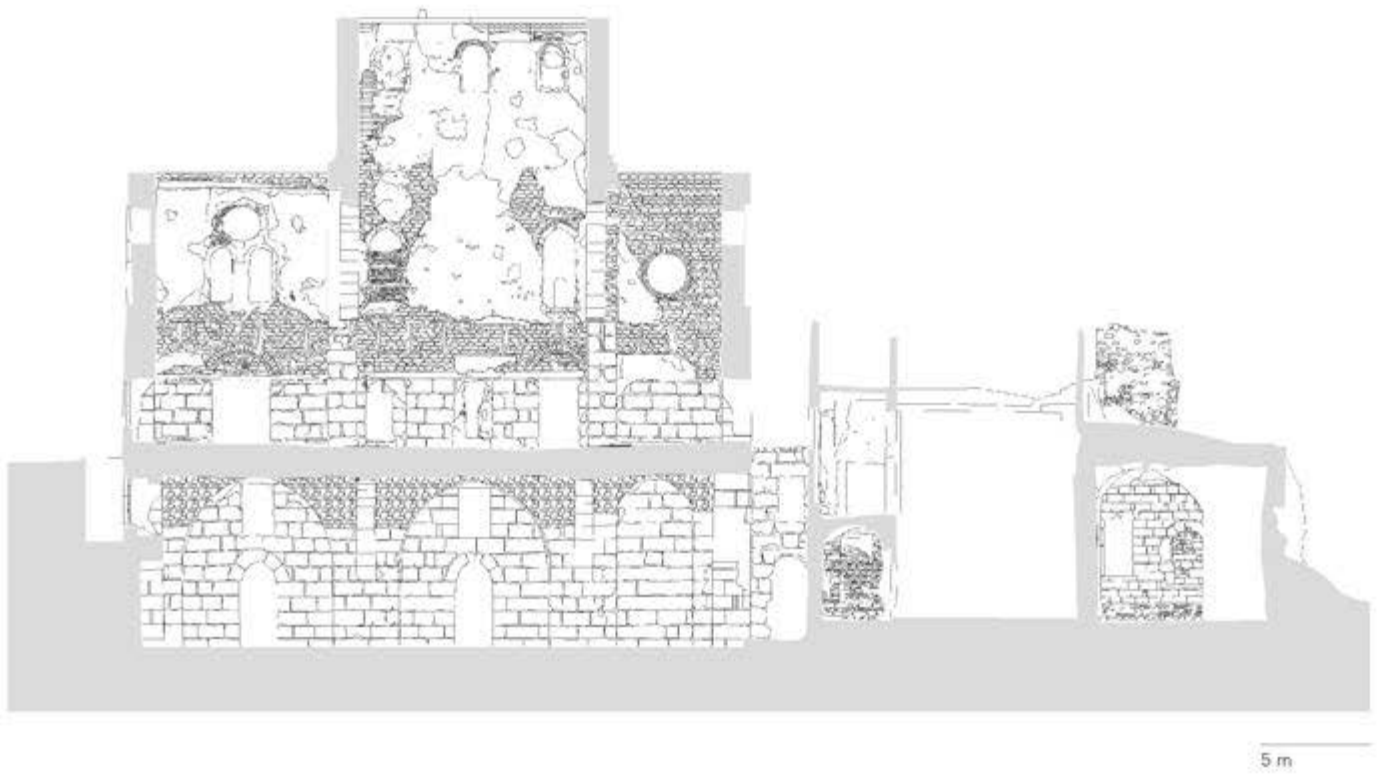
Through its project in Historic Cairo, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) offered a model for future interventions based on socio-economic sustainability of the intangible heritage instead of the more conventional approaches to heritage conservation. While most scenarios only see the modest residents and artisans as obstacles to urban growth, with gentrification as the only solution to economic revitalization, in this project the value of the historic area included people's vocation and lifestyle as part of the identity of the place: part of the "living" heritage. The synergy between people and place was considered an asset and one of the challenges was to make the local community realize that as a value. With hardly any visible societal appreciation of Historic Cairo's heritage, the local community perceives little more than the social value of the neighbourhood. Institutional support to safeguard the historic fabric was missing, and higher tiers of Egyptian society hardly ever visited al-Darb al-Ahmar (ADAA); the message to the local community was that both the people and the place were unworthy of attention. This was one of the biggest challenges facing the AKTC project; a challenge that could only be overcome by tangible evidence, and that is what the project provided to the local community.

The Housing Rehabilitation Programme (HRP) was one of the pioneer programmes in the area, aiming to secure tenure, improve living conditions and preserve the valuable urban fabric. The initial phase of research revealed that the project should aim to keep the existing community and attract back residents who had previously left, rather than adopt the more conventional compensation and relocation scenario followed in other parts of Historic Cairo. It taught us that economic and social sustainability depend greatly on keeping the higher-income tiers of the local community from moving out to remote areas, whether formal or informal neighbourhoods. Their presence – living and working in the area – sustains the livelihood of the more modest residents and preserves the shared lifestyle that all income tiers share together. The HRP was the most well-received and highly appreciated programme in the project.¹ Several reasons lay behind its success. It was founded on a solid scientific basis of studies that explored the lifestyle of the area's residents, revealing the everyday life activities of different age groups, as well as what residents value most in their homes and neighbourhood. This was important to know: first, so that none of the valued tenets would be accidentally disrupted by any intervention; and second, to reveal elements and activity patterns that residents would want to contribute to improving. The outcome of these studies sensitized the project team towards the integrative nature of the built environment and people's behaviour; and it permanently made the



Opposite page, a cabinetmaker engaged on polishing work in al-Darb al-Ahmar.

Above, post-2011 unauthorized apartment building in the proximity of the Historic Wall.



Above, longitudinal section through Alin Aq Palace.

Below, the north facade (left) and the ground floor (right) of Alin Aq Palace after conservation.



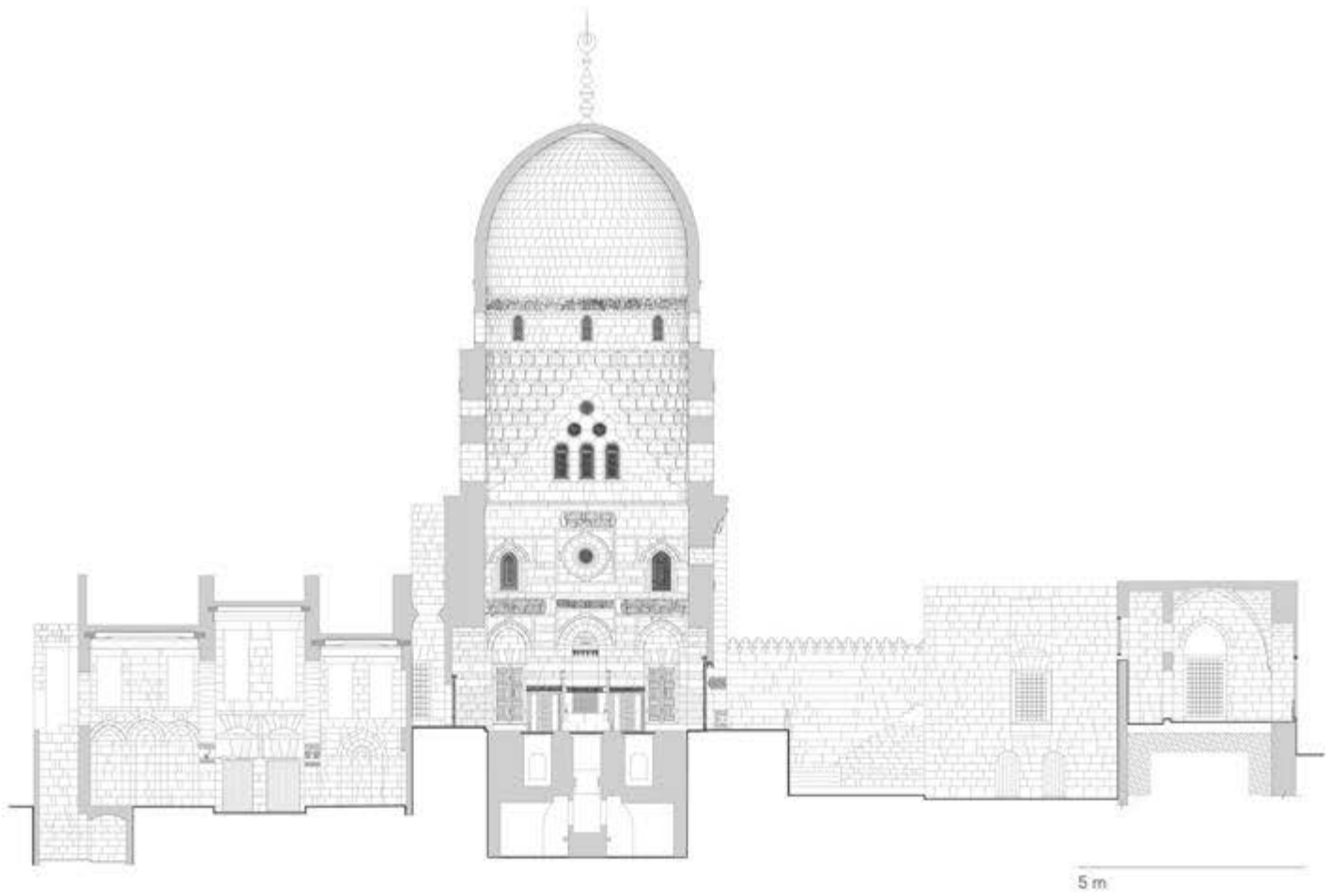


Alin Aq Palace and Khayrbek Mosque and Mausoleum after their restoration.

The completed scheme has ensured the future survival of this monumental residence, and rendered the building in a usable state.

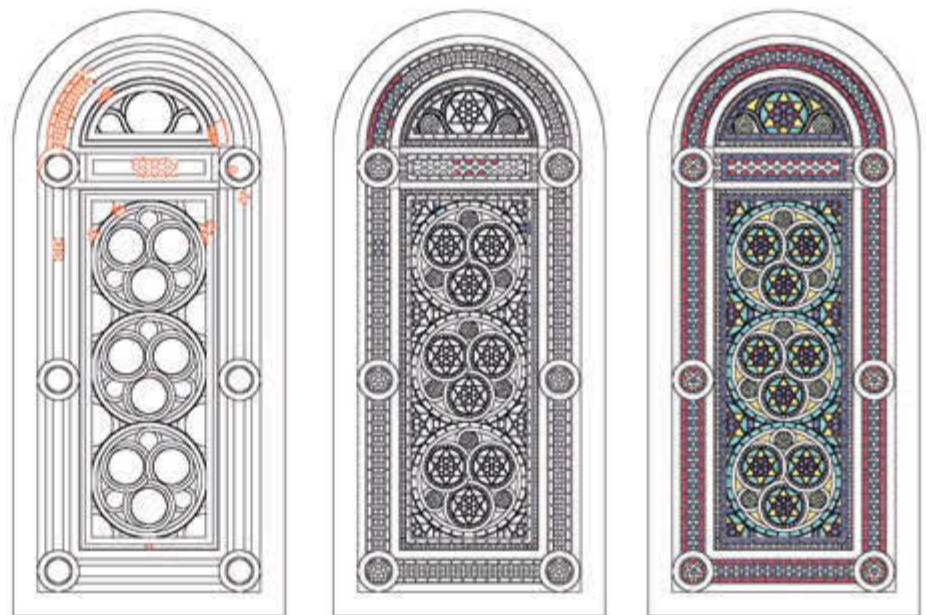
Conservation design and preliminary studies in Alin Aq Palace introduced the resident conservation team to the challenge of archaeological conservation of a built structure. The remains of the palace were not only ruined, roofless and had lost all decoration, but the monumental Mamluk stone structure was also in bad condition. The approach was based on the criteria of minimal intervention in the objective of bringing back its stability without compromising its archaeological authenticity. Structural stabilization of the remains was carried out using traditional techniques, such as stone masonry with local repairs using a similar type of stone materials, while a system of timber bracing was established at the wall tops to guarantee lateral stability. Historic plaster remains were stabilized via grout injection and no attempt was made to re-establish decoration. A gentle soft cleaning was finally implemented to visually integrate the repairs with historical parts.

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES



Above, cross section through the mausoleum and its adjacent spaces, drawing as built.

Right, existing conditions survey of the remains found of gypsum windows and stained-glass fragments followed by reconstruction shop drawings.





Above, Tarabay al-Sharif Mausoleum and its adjacent buildings after conservation.

Below, the interior of Tarabay al-Sharif Mausoleum and details of its south facade after conservation.