



ON-GOING ACTIVITIES



OLD CITY TALES, KABUL

Even in its partially-collapsed state during surveys in 2004, Haji Ruhullah's house stood out from the surrounding fabric, with its large courtyard and decorated timber screens – some of which retain their original coloured glass – and fine internal plasterwork. Like many other merchant houses in the old city, most of which have disappeared, the dozen or so rooms of Rohullah's house were built in different times, and show the evolution of decorative styles over the past 70 years or more. The grandfather of the present owner, who might have been the original builder, served as an imam in Nader Shah's court, and is said to have commuted from the old city to the Arq by elephant. The distinction of the owners of the house is further borne out by the domed *hammam*, or bathroom – complete with ingenious system of water supply. Rohullah recalls weekly family bath days in this tiny space. Animals too were an important part of the life in the house, for Haji's father kept two horses in the basement, and raced a flock of pigeons from the roof.



The courtyard of the house served for 2 years as AKTC's joinery workshop, in which 20 apprentices were trained.

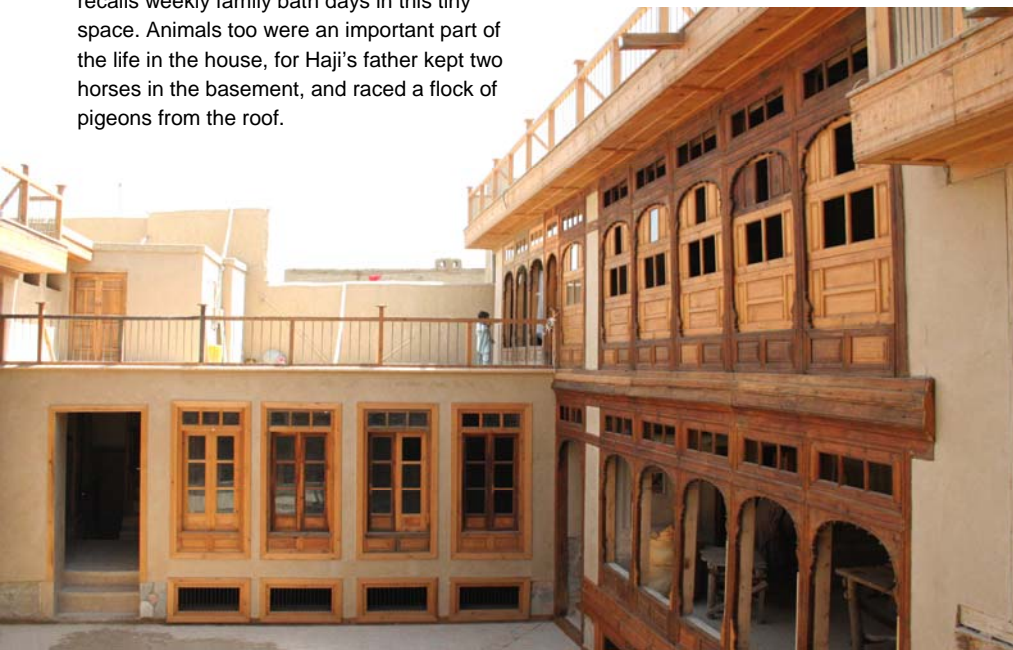
Like most other inhabitants of the neighbourhood, the family were forced to flee their home during the inter-factional fighting, when the house was looted and partially collapsed. Displaced to the house of a relative in north-western Kabul where they still live, the family is now looking forward to returning to their home in the old city. Now ready to be handed back to Haji Ruhullah, the restored house lives up to the proverb about the old city being a '*gul zer-i jul*', or a concealed flower. Following the tradition of the region, the true beauty of Rohullah's house is only revealed from within its walls.



BAGHE BABUR VISIT

AKTC hosted a lunch for the new Mayor of Kabul, H.E. Ruhullah Aman on 30th November in Baghe Babur, to familiarize him with the ongoing rehabilitation programme in the garden. Before paying their respects at Babur's grave, the Mayor and his entourage toured the new caravanse-rai complex and inspected ongoing works in the Queen's Palace.

The focus of subsequent discussions with the Baghe Babur team centred on appropriate ways of raising revenue from the facilities in the garden to ensure that the operation is, in time, sustainable. Consultations continue about arrangements for the joint management of the site in the future.







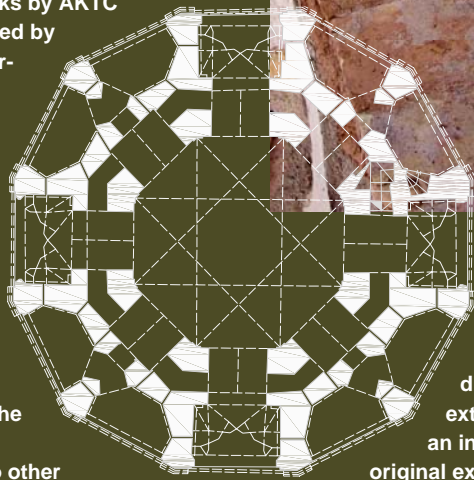
The Namakdan once stood at the centre of a formal Persian garden

## ■ REDISCOVERING A TIMURID GEM IN GAZORGAH, HERAT

The superb skills of Timurid masons are being revealed during the course of conservation of the Namakdan pavilion, part of the shrine complex of Abdullah Ansari in Gazorghah, north of Herat, which dates from around 1425 and is still an important place of pilgrimage. The complex has been the focus of remedial works by AKTC since early 2005, funded by the government of Germany.

The Namakdan - whose name derives from the resemblance of the 12-sided brick structure to traditional salt cellars - once stood in the midst of formal gardens that lay between Gazorghah and the walled old city to the south-west. As on two other buildings in the shrine complex, layers of concrete, earth and rubble have been removed from the central dome of the Namakdan, whose delicate ribs have now been exposed and repaired. A system of tensile steel ring-ties has been inserted in place of the original timber reinforcement of the delicate brick structure, which had been altered at the turn of the century and was in a precarious state.

The restoration of the brick domes entailed cleaning of the roof, strengthening the structure, and the repair of damage caused by lack of maintenance.



A handful of turquoise and cobalt blue tiles, uncovered (above) during removal of the external plaster, provide an intriguing clue as to the original external decoration.

On the main axis, traces have been found of the water channel that once ran through the central double-height space of the Namakdan, around which a more formal style of landscaping will be restored in 2007.



For more information about AKTC's programme in Afghanistan, contact us in Qala Moeen Afzal Khan, Gozargah Street, District 3, Kabul or Qala Ikhtyaruddin, Herat [information@aktc.akdn-afg.org](mailto:information@aktc.akdn-afg.org)

## ■ WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS IN OLD CITY OF HERAT?

The illegal demolition of shops close to Darwaza Malik, the northern entrance to the walled city, has further altered what remains of the historic fabric of Herat. Having built a large commercial building (which bears little resemblance to the scheme approved by local planners), the developer defied the instructions of the Old City Commission to retain the existing street frontage, which was demolished overnight at the end of May.



Improving facade design

As in many other cases, no action has been taken by either the municipality or the local planning department to enforce building controls. Intriguingly, the developer has now begun to replace the trendy steel frames on the elevations of the new building with brickwork that is more in keeping with the context. Could this signal a change in heart on the part of Herat's growing number of developers?

## EVENTS



The celebrated Afghan composer and vocalist, **Wahid Qassimi**, received a standing ovation from delegates at a Trudeau Foundation conference on Public Policy in Vancouver, for whom he performed on 17th November. Arranged by AKMICA and the Aga Khan Foundation, the recital was preceded by a lecture on architectural conservation in Afghanistan by Jolyon Leslie.

Staff from AKTC contributed to a series of seminars on **Planning issues in Kabul** has been held by USAID/LTERA between August and December 2006, attended by senior staff, district heads and engineers of Kabul Municipality. The focus was on on-going participatory work in Kabul and lessons learned from upgrading initiatives elsewhere in the world.