



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Historic Cities Programme



Photo: Matjaž Kačunik

CONSERVATION PROJECT OF THE
ASLAM AL-SILAH DAR MOSQUE

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

April – June 2008

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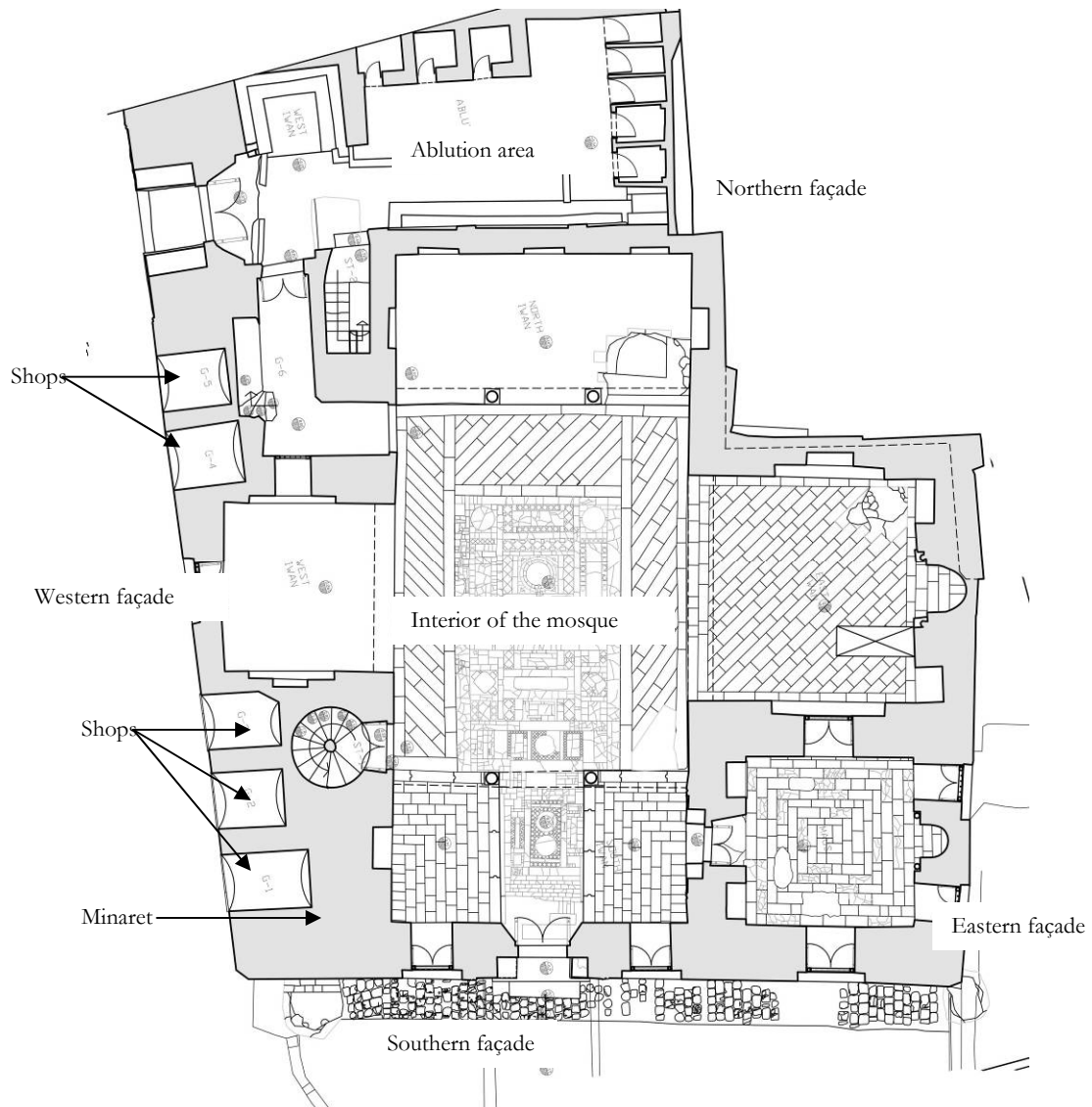
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1. Description of the Project's components

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| 1. The exterior elevations: | Southern façade, eastern façade, northern façade, western façade |
| 2. The roof : | Roof of the mosque's courtyard, iwans and rooms |
| 3. The minaret: | Minaret platforms and elevations |
| 4. The interior of the Mosque: | Interior floor, elevations and ceilings of the Mosque/mausoleum |
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2. TECHNICAL REPORT

Summary

The work is proceeding as planned in fine conservation activities in the interior of the mausoleum, the interior of the mosque's prayer area ASLAMOSQUE and in the construction of the ablution area ASLAMIDA.

The scaffolding on the western façade was removed; the part in front of the side entrance is kept for finishing activities of the marble entrance.

In the next phase, there are some design issues to work on such as the sound system and the shape of the tanour.

The contract with the Supreme Council of Antiquities was renewed for the following period from July08-June 09. There is a good cooperation with the inspectors responsible for the work; nevertheless, one issue is still pending and that is the gypsum windows. The recent SCA committee rejected the installation of the gypsum windows on the façades and the exterior of the dome and want to install the wire-mesh windows originally installed by the Comite. Discussion is taking place concerning the matter.

There is coordination with a the team working on the public spaces in Aga Khan Cultural Services-Egypt concerning the Aslam square in front of the mosque. Plans and design for the square are currently being studied and coordinated by the public spaces and the Aslam mosque teams.



View of the square in front of the mosque showing the swings, the trees and the cars

2.1. THE EXTERIOR ELEVATIONS

ASLAFACA

Work achievements during the period January – March 2008

- Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern facades

The dismantling of the scaffolding on the western façade took place. Only the part at the marble side-entrance portal was kept for finishing activities.



*The west façade after conservation & the removal of the scaffolding
Note: no gypsum nor wire-mesh grilles were placed in the openings yet.*



Some views before the intervention

2.2. THE ROOFS

ASLAROOOF

Work achievements during the period April-June 2008

None.

All roofs are insulated and no works are remaining on the roofs.

2.3. THE MINARET

ASLAMIN

Completed in September 2007.

2.4. THE MOSQUE AND MAUSOLEUM INTERIOR

ASLAM MOSQUE

Work achievements during the period April-June 2008

Mosque Interior

- Mezzanine, first floor and second floor rooms

- Painting of the wooden ceilings of the rooms is almost complete; the only one remaining to be painted is in room 1.4 currently used as site office.
- The wooden windows and doors of the rooms were restored, painted and work is proceeding in putting them in place.
- Applying the final finish plaster layer of the rooms is almost complete in most of the rooms; some finishing activities will take place before the final handing over.



Installing the wooden windows and doors of the rooms

- Mosque courtyard

The cleaning activities of the stucco decoration of the roundels, the lozenges and the inscriptions around the windows on the northern, southern and western walls of the courtyard were finalized. Some completions of the roundel and lozenge decoration are still proceeding. The lower arcades of the northern and southern iwan were cleaned; the red stones were cleaned either using the micro-steamer or poulticing. As for the white limestone molded part of the arch it was cleaned using the micro-sandblaster.

Currently, several options are being studied and tested to protect the stucco decoration and plaster surfaces. One of the options proposed by Erico Painter is to paint the surfaces with the water of the limewash and little pigments with limewash to retouch the newly completed stucco decoration. Work of injections, cleaning and conservation of the east façade started and is planned to finish end of July. This will be followed by the water-limewash protection of the surfaces and possible retouching if necessary.

The stone arch of the eastern façade: the red stones were cleaned using the micro-steamer; the white stones of the arch will be then cleaned with the micro-sandblaster.

The manufacturing of the gypsum windows on the higher level of the courtyard was finalized and all the stucco windows were put in place.

The wooden band around the courtyard was cleaned; no inscriptions were found on the band in the courtyard; only in the eastern and western iwans inscriptions remain.



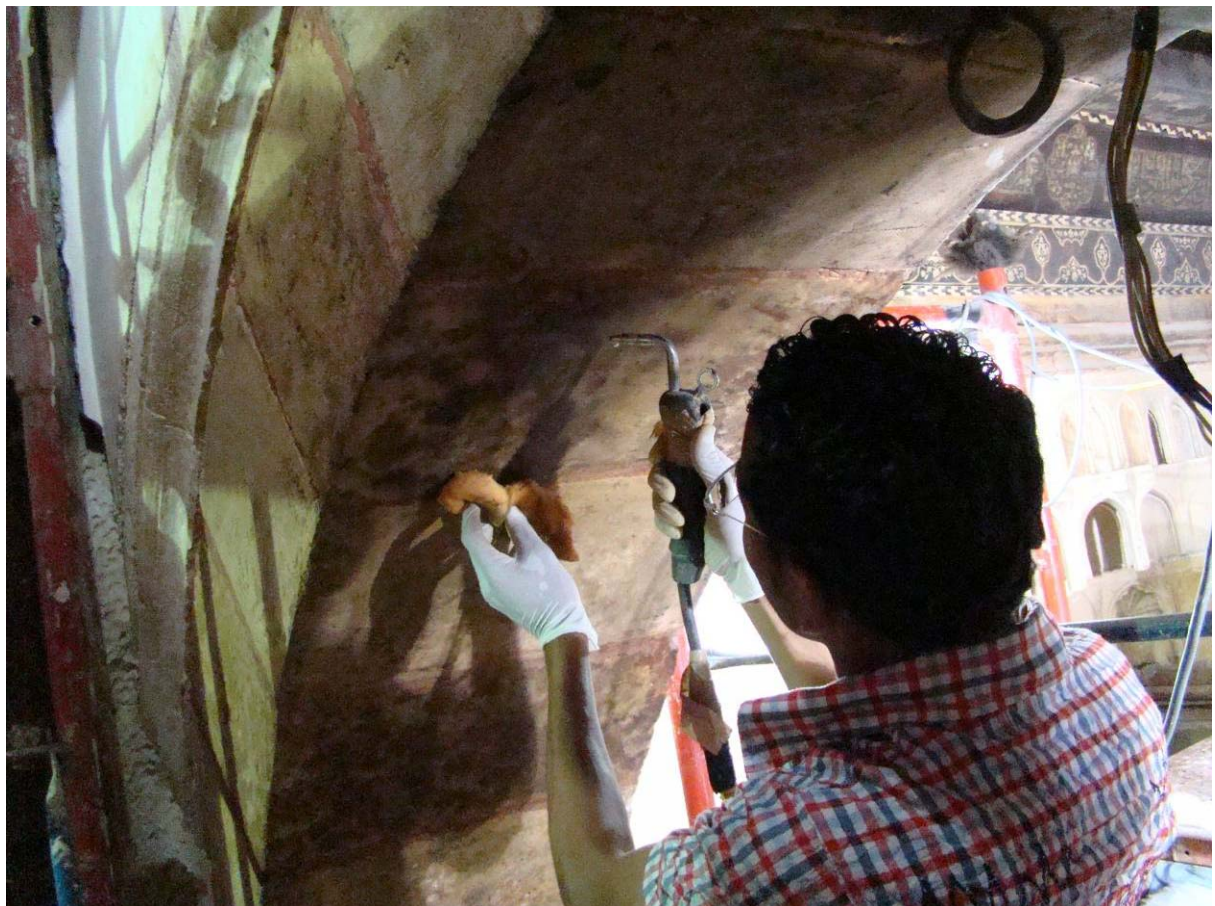
View of the western façade of the courtyard



Cleaning the arcades using the micro-sandblaster



Cleaning the stone arch using poulticing



Cleaning the stones using the micro-steamer

Mosque Iwans:

1. West iwan

The stucco decoration and plaster surfaces of the west iwan were cleaned and finalized. This was followed by conservation interventions of the wooden ceiling.

The ceiling was photographed in details and the photographs were then rectified to be used to draw the decoration and the inscriptions around the ceiling.

What is very valuable in this ceiling is that it was not restored earlier or at least recently (see picture below-before the intervention), as was the case in the other iwans (this will be discussed below). This ceiling had several layers of dust and spiders hanging from it and some areas were darkened. It was decided to carry out a minimum intervention on that ceiling and to preserve its original state and the fact that it was not restored earlier. A first phase of removing the dust using soft brushes was carried out in a very careful manner in order not to lose any flaking paint. The flaking parts were fixed using Paraloid (less than 2 %). After all the fixation was finalized a second phase of dust removal was carried out. The ceiling was then cleaned using the wishab; after applying some cleaning tests on the darkened areas, it was noted that the ceiling is losing its spirit of age and that the intervention is not necessary; therefore it was decided to limit the cleaning intervention to the use of the wishab. The gaps between the wooden beams and the shingles were filled using the balsa wood and these pieces were retouched using brown color to give visually a complete and non-disturbing view. Otherwise, no retouching of any missing decoration was carried out in order to preserve the fact that this ceiling was never restored or repainted earlier as in other ceilings in the mosque.

In brief the main measure taken in these ceiling was to prevent the flaking from continuing to take place and to fill the gaps where possible nesting and damage could take place.



Up: The ceiling of the west iwan before intervention; below: compiled photo of inscription band

Photos: Matjaž Kačičnik





Inserting the balsa wood in the gaps and painting it



2. Qibla iwan

The cleaning and injection activities of the stucco decoration and the plaster surfaces were completed and the cracks in the plaster layer were treated and filled. There was a big structural crack in the back wall of the qibla iwan. This was stitched, repaired and plastered.

As mentioned earlier, the part of the wooden inscription band of the qibla iwan is the only part remaining with inscriptions. Due to the relatively “bad” style of the script, it is not clear if it is the original design or a later intervention. What is clear though is that more recently the script was painted over with white that covered the earlier writing; this was cleaned revealing the earlier off-white color of the inscription. Activities of fixation and consolidation of the painting preparation layer and colors of the inscription band took place. Damaged wooden pieces were consolidated and missing ones re-manufactured and put in place.

The wires for the sound system and for the lighting of the qibla iwan were installed in duct trays.

The stones in the lower part of the qibla iwan were cleaned; first the salts were removed mechanically, then cleaning took place using the sand-blasting technique (note: in the lower parts of the walls, where there is a risk of humidity, mechanical means are used for cleaning and not wet methods such as poulticing).

The mihrab is in quite a bad condition with few marble pieces remaining; different solutions for dealing with this part are being considered and discussed at the moment.

A platform was erected to start activities of cleaning and conservation of the wooden ceiling of the qibla iwan. According to the visual inspection as well as inscriptions painted on the ceiling, the paintings were “restored” in 1996. Actually, the “restoration” that took place is repainting the wooden beams but the work was carried out with a very bad workmanship; several paints leaked on the sides of the wooden beams, too. What is worth mentioning though is that the side parts of the ceiling bearing inscriptions are in a relatively very good condition and were not repainted.

Several discussions took place concerning the intervention to take place in the wooden beams of the ceiling; to remove the 1996 paint might result in a complete plain ceiling with no decoration and a consequent shock to the users and visitors of the mosque. Therefore, there is an inclination towards keeping this earlier intervention while carrying out tests to understand if earlier paint layers still remain or not. The sides of the beams painted with a strong red-brown color could be removed along with the leaking paint.

The work started by removing the accumulated dust and nests. What was then very important was to fix flaking parts of the painting especially on the sides with the inscription band; this activity is currently proceeding. This will be followed by cleaning activities using the wish-ab and filling the cracks with balsa wood (as was carried out in the western iwan).



Activities of injecting the flaking parts of the inscription band



Cleaning the wooden inscription band



Fixing the edges of the flaking painting



View showing the good inscription of the inscription band and while the recent painting intervention of the beams is done with quite a bad workmanship

3. South iwan:

The south iwan, reached by the entrance of the mosque on Aslam square also has the intricate decorated portal to the mausoleum. Actually this elaborate decorated portal is one of the reasons that Dr. Chahinda Karim argues that the mausoleum was constructed earlier than the mosque.

Activities in this iwan started by removing the dust from the ceiling and also cleaning the walls; the ones in stone were cleaned using the sand-blaster and the ones in gypsum were cleaned by removing the dirty layer of recent limewash and applying a poultice whenever necessary. This was followed by activities of restoration and conservation of the portal to the mausoleum; the damaged stones on the lower parts were replaced; then cleaning activities of all the muqarnas decorations and the marble took place using mechanical cleaning and poulticing as per the condition of the stone.

The stone arches facing the courtyard were cleaned as described in the courtyard section.



Stone replacement activities of completely damaged marble pieces at the mausoleum entrance



Cleaning the muqarnas of the mausoleum portal



Activities of marble cleaning of the mausoleum entrance



4. North iwan:

The north iwan was used by the project for a period as a storage. The storage was moved to the west iwan in order to start the restoration activities. The scaffolding was erected and activities started also by removing the dust on the ceiling and from behind the wooden shingles. Unlike the other three iwans, the ceiling of the north iwan is in quite a bad condition and was not restored earlier.

The stone arches facing the courtyard were cleaned as described in the courtyard section.

Currently activities of cleaning the plaster walls started by removing the dust and poulticing. A group of young trainees came to the project and were assigned this activity under the supervision of a senior conservator on site.



The condition of the ceiling of the north iwan

Woodwork restoration

As mentioned in the previous reports, the woodwork restoration of doors, windows and shutters is currently in progress and will be proceeding during the following months. In general, depending on the state of conservation of the item, carpentry restoration takes place followed by fine cleaning and conservation of the wooden elements.

Electrico-mechanical activities and Sound Systems

The required sound system for the mosque was initially set and meetings with different sound system providers took place to explain them the concept and get them offers. The different suppliers provided different offers and these are being studied now and other offers are also tested.

The electrical wires for the sound system and the lighting of the mosque is taking place.

Interior of the dome

The activities in the dome took place on two levels; a group were working on the cleaning of the upper inscription band and another group were working on completing the gypsum windows.

The inscription band was completely cleaned; during the cleaning process, some colors were found in the background of the stucco band. Discussion is taking place among the conservators and with Erico Peintner concerning the retouching of the band. The argument is that the color scheme was revealed through the cleaning process and could be easily followed; also the inscription band without the colors would be hardly legible from below if all of it is white. The same applies to the roundel decorations in the mosque iwans, where remains of color were also found in the background; the retouching of the background would make the decoration and the inscription more legible and more understandable.

Activities of fixing the cracks in the brick started and will be taking place during the following period.



View of the interior of the dome during the cleaning of the inscription band

Photo: Matjaž Kačičnik



Detail of a the decorative roundel element before and after cleaning



Activities of finishing the newly carved stucco grilles



Activities of fixing the glass of the stucco windows

Scope of the work in the Mosque and Mausoleum during the period July-September 2008

Interior of mosque rooms (same as previous report)

Ongoing painting of the wooden ceilings, finishing of the plaster layer., design of glass shutters and their manufacturing. Ongoing installation of the wooden doors.

Interior of the mosque

Continue the conservation and restoration work of the gypsum plaster in the mosque courtyard and iwans. Ongoing cleaning of the wooden ceilings in the iwans.

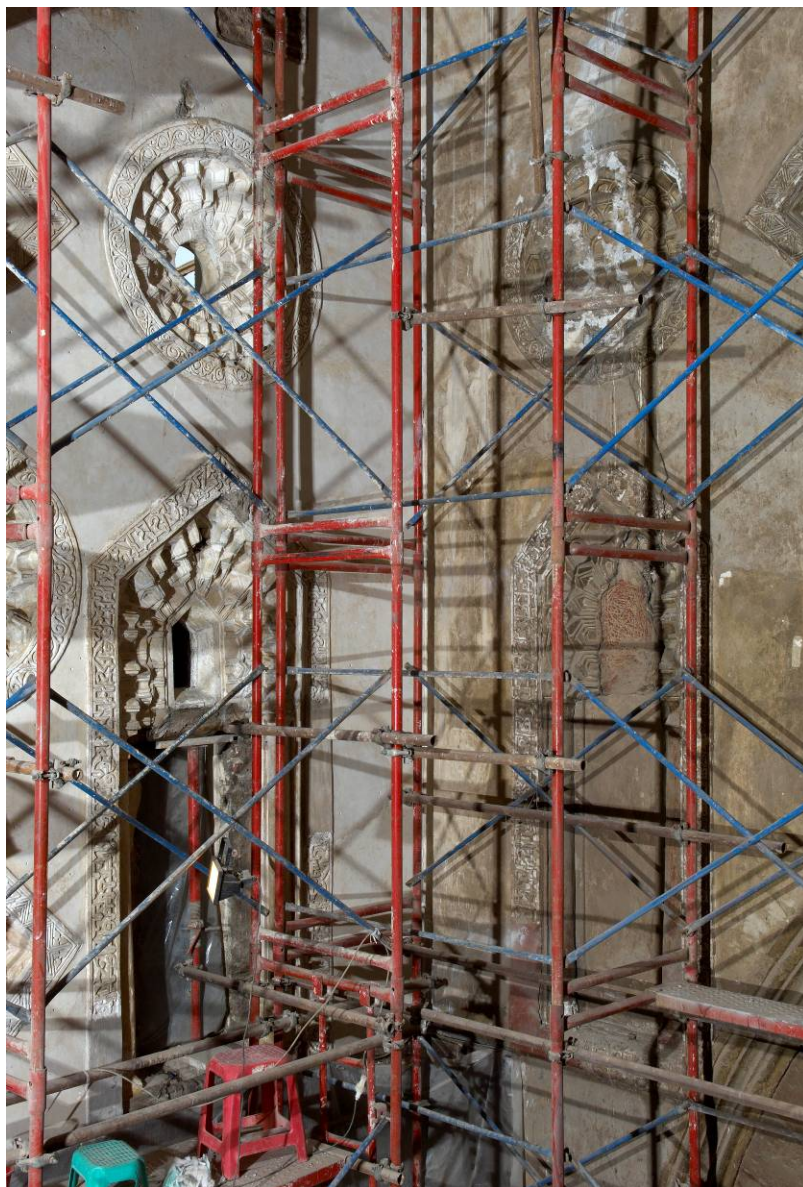
Start the cleaning of the marble columns.

Interior of the dome

Start cleaning of the lower decorative stucco roundels and windows.

Finalize all brick repair of cracks.

This period will mainly include continuation activities of works started this year; during and after September 2008 scaffolding removal activities will take place and work will concentrate on the restoration and conservation of the marble flooring (in the courtyard), the wooden minbar, the retouching of gypsum elements and the protection of wooden elements.



View showing part of the courtyard walls (left after cleaning; right before cleaning)

Photo: Matjaž Kačičnik

2.5. THE ABLUTION AREA

ASLAMIDA

Work achievements during the period April - June 2008

After the total demolition of the old ablution area, excavation took place to see if any remains still stand. Very few remains were found and these were well documented and backfilled. A safe soil was reached and this was well compressed. Foundations were carried out and then brick construction started. Currently, brick and stone construction activities are taking place as well as electrical connections, water supply and sewage for the toilets; those for the washing area will take place in the following period.

Scope of work during the period July-September 2008

Finalize the construction of the ablution area, the sanitary connections and start the finishing activities.



The excavations in the ablution area before constructing the new one

Photo: Matjaž Kačnik



Refilling activities



The foundations for the toilets area and sanitary works





The partitions of the toilets of the ablution area and the stone arches in front



2.6. THE SITE SUPERVISION TEAM

ASLASUPER

Work achievements in the period April-June 2008

Concerning documentation activities, intervention drawings are being carried out.
The daily site supervision activities are in progress.

Scope of work in the period July-September 2008

Continue on carrying on site supervision activities of architectural, structural and fine restoration activities.
Ongoing intervention drawings indicating stone replacement, new wooden elements, etc.

Composition of the team and responsibilities at end of December

The Aga-Khan Trust for Culture:

- Christophe Bouleau, Conservation architect – Project Manager
- Dina Bakhoun, Engineer - Site manager.
- Lara Iskander, Architect
- Mohamed Lashien, Architect
- Hamdi Sultan, Main Forman
- Reda al-Sayed, Site Supervisor
- Walid Omar, Procurement officer
- Mina William, Scaffolding specialist

Consultant (during the reported period)

- Erico Peintner, Conservator
- Matjaž Kačičnik, Photographer

Date: 10 July 2008

Signature: Christophe Bouleau

Dina Bakhoun

