



The Significance of Bagh-e Babur

Originally laid out without an enclosure wall with far reaching views across green fields and pastures, rapid urban growth and the construction of informal dwellings has resulted in the transformation of Babur's Garden into a green oasis in an otherwise overdeveloped landscape.



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Bagh-e Babur and the Mughal Era

Rehabilitating the Garden of Babur and Its Surroundings in Kabul

In the foothills of the snow-peaked Hindu Kush mountains and the fertile alluvial plains of the Kabul River basin, Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad (“Defender of the Faith”) commonly known by his nickname “Babur” (believed to be derived from *Babr* – Persian for “tiger”) – a young Uzbek prince exiled from his native Fergana region in present-day Uzbekistan – laid the foundations of an empire that subsequently became known as the Mughal dynasty: one of the greatest dynasties in world history. From humble beginnings in the outpost city of Kabul, at its height the Mughal dynasty stretched from Balkh in northern Afghanistan to the Deccan in India, with its kings ruling over an estimated 150 million subjects for a period of more than three and a half centuries.

At the age of twelve, in 1495 Babur ascended to the throne of the small principality of Fergana. He was the scion of distinguished families, descended from Timur on his father’s side and the Mongol emperor Ghengis Khan through his mother. Like his father, Babur set his sights on extending his rule over Timur’s capital, Samarkand, which he managed to occupy briefly on three occasions. Having unsuccessfully attempted to conquer Samarkand and losing control of his native Fergana in the process, Babur travelled south through the Hindu Kush with a small entourage of followers and captured Kabul in 1504 at the age of twenty-one. Over subsequent years, Babur consolidated his rule in Kabul and attempted on several occasions to recapture Samarkand and Bukhara from their Uzbek occupiers. Failing this, in 1519 he turned his attention to India, eventually capturing Delhi in 1526.



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- [1] Built on a plinth along the main latitudinal axis of the site, the 19th-century Garden Pavilion is surrounded by deep shaded verandas affording views down the length of the Garden.
- [2] The reconstruction of water channels and holding tanks along the central axis, a key aspect of the Mughal garden, was based on extensive archaeological and documentary evidence.
- [3] A view of the Queen’s Palace, a royal residence built in the late 19th century and reconstructed as part of the rehabilitation of Babur’s Garden in order to serve public functions.

Preoccupied with extending and consolidating his rule over Kabul and areas to the south and east of the city and as his Timurid predecessors before him had done in Herat, Babur focused his energy on designing and landscaping gardens. While his Memoirs describe having created several such gardens in and around Kabul, possibly including a garden in Istalif to the north of the city and the Nimla Gardens to the east near Jalalabad, his prized garden and the one in which he chose to be interred upon death was the site now known as Bagh-e Babur (Babur's Garden). Considering that Babur spent more than ten years based in Kabul, it can reasonably be asserted that this garden and the site of his grave can lay claim to being one of the first, oldest and most significant Mughal gardens in the region.

The Legacy of Babur: History and the Environment

A detailed account of Babur's life and conquests is provided in his Memoirs, *The Baburnama*, which offer a unique insight into the ideas of the founder of a dynasty that was to dominate the politics and culture of the region for three and a half centuries. These Memoirs also reveal the extent to which the natural landscape was central to the life of Babur's court, much of whose business was conducted in gardens that he visited or established during his travels. The Timurid gardens that he mentions visiting in Samarkand and Herat clearly had a lasting impression

on him, and probably influenced Babur's ideas about the sites that he identified soon after capturing Kabul. The garden now known as Bagh-e Babur was one such site, used by Babur to plan and launch military campaigns and celebrate victories, hold royal audiences, dispense punishments, read poetry and entertain.

Such was the significance of his favourite garden that Babur continued to issue instructions during his campaigns in India to ensure that it was properly maintained. For example, his directions regarding the upkeep of one garden were to:

"Plant beautiful trees, form regular orchards, and all around the orchards sow beautiful and sweet-smelling flowers and shrubs, according to some good plan."¹

In India, Babur adapted his ideas to the unfamiliar geography and climate, while making best use of the limited sources of running water. The area along the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra, where a series of gardens was set out during Babur's reign, came to be known as "Kabul" by the local population.

Outline History of Bagh-e Babur and Its Transformation

It was back in Kabul, on a fold that had captivated him on the south-western slopes of the Kuh-e Sher Darwaza foothills, that Babur set out what might be the 'avenue' garden he describes in





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The Baburnama. Situated above the fertile Chardeh plain, water was diverted to the site of the Garden through open-surface channels leading from the Logar River more than ten kilometres to the south-east. Running water had long been a central element in formal gardens in the region, due in part to religious and symbolic associations with paradise, which might also have influenced Babur's wish to be laid to rest on this site. The layout of the Garden included running water, flowers and fruit trees: most of the elements that came in time to be associated with later Mughal funerary gardens, such as those of Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

His body having been transported from Agra, where he died in 1530, to Kabul, Babur's remains were interred within a grave on an upper terrace of the Garden in around 1540. His

successors came to pay their respects at this grave, with Babur's grandson Akbar visiting in 1581 and 1589, and his great-grandson Jahangir instructing during the course of a visit in 1607 that a platform, or *chabutra*, be laid around the grave, an inscribed headstone be erected and that the Garden be enclosed by walls. Shah Jahan dedicated a marble mosque during a visit to the site in 1647, when he also gave instructions for the construction of a gateway at the base of the Garden, which later archeological evidence suggests was never built.

The site subsequently seems to have fallen into disrepair, as Kabul's political and economic importance in the region was inextricably linked to the rise and collapse of the Mughal dynasty. When Charles Masson visited the site in 1832, and prepared a drawing of Babur's Grave enclosure (see p.143), he

[4] The reconstructed carved marble enclosure surrounding Babur's Grave can be seen through the arched opening of a second brick masonry wall built in the late 19th century in order to protect the site.

[5] Marble required for the reconstruction of Babur's Grave enclosure was sourced from India, where the marble used in the original enclosure had been quarried, and carved there before being transported to Kabul and reassembled by local craftsmen.



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noted that the tombs had been left to decline and their stones had been taken and used in the enclosing walls.

Further damage was inflicted on the site during the severe earthquake that struck Kabul in 1842, when the perimeter walls reportedly collapsed. John Burke's photographs of the site in 1872 show fragments of various marble grave enclosures scattered over the terraces, with the marble mosque commissioned by Shah Jahan in a poor state of repair.

As part of a wider programme of investments in Kabul, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (r. 1880–1901) rebuilt the perimeter walls of the Garden and constructed a number of buildings for his court within the site, thereby transforming an environment that had until then been defined largely by trees and water. The area around Babur's Grave platform was encompassed by a low, arcaded, masonry enclosure and the level of the adjacent

terrace was raised. Archaeological excavations carried out during the course of the restoration revealed a system of water pipes supplying a series of fountains that were superimposed over original central water channels built during Babur's reign. Further transformations occurred in the 1930s, when Nadir Shah remodelled the 'central axis' of the Garden in a European style, with three fountains in stone pools. It was at this time that Babur's Garden was officially opened to the public, and a large swimming pool was constructed on the site of a graveyard north of the Shah Jahan Mosque.

Babur's Garden was much transformed and in a poor state of repair by the time that inter-factional fighting broke out in Kabul in 1992. The conflict quickly engulfed the area around the site, which lay at the front lines between factional fighters, who cut down trees to limit cover, stripped and set fire to buildings and

[6] Built by Amir Abdurrahman Khan at the end of the 19th century as a royal residence, this view shows the courtyard of the Queen's Palace, or *haremserai*, located in the upper terraces of the Garden directly opposite Babur's tomb.

[7] Located at the bottom of Babur's Garden, the Caravanserai building was reconstructed in 2005 using traditional materials and building techniques and houses a visitor centre, retail premises and the offices of the Babur Garden Trust, which manages and operates the site.

looted the water pumps. Most inhabitants of the neighbourhood around the Garden fled their homes. It was not until 1995 that mines and unexploded ordnance were cleared and water supplies to the area were restored, enabling some replanting to take place, under the auspices of UN-Habitat.

Selection Processes and Challenges

In March 2002, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the then Transitional Administration of Afghanistan for a comprehensive programme of rehabilitation of Bagh-e Babur. The decision to select Babur's Garden for rehabilitation was made on the basis of its importance as a public garden for the inhabitants of the city, together with the historic significance of the site as a key registered national monument and within the wider history of Afghanistan. The restoration project was funded and carried out through the Trust's Historic Cities Programme (HCP), with significant co-funding made available for work by the Federal Republic of

Germany. The goal of the work was to restore the original character of the landscape and conserve key buildings, while ensuring that the Garden, which is the largest public open space in Kabul, continues to be a focus for recreation for the inhabitants of the city. Significantly, the Garden has remained fully open to the public throughout the course of the rehabilitation work. Additional small-scale co-funding from the United States and Save the Children was used following the completion of restoration works in 2008 for improvements to visitor services and facilities.

As front lines between warring factions in the 1990s, the key challenges for the restoration project became evident at the start of work. Extensive efforts were required to clear the site of war debris and to mobilize and train a competent team of local professionals. De-mining and the removal of unexploded ordnance continued throughout the course of rehabilitation works. In support of counterpart institutions, including Kabul Municipality and the Ministry of Information and Culture, a joint coordinating committee was established and tasked with facilitating rehabilitation works. Concerted efforts were made at the start of works to reinforce the skills of local architects, landscaping professionals and the craftsmen required to implement restoration activities, and this remained an important objective throughout the project.

Surrounded by 'informal' hillside residential quarters built on public land over the course of three decades of war, another key challenge for the restoration team was to mobilize the local community and ensure their active participation in and support for the rehabilitation works. Neglected historically by formal planning processes undertaken by Afghan institutions, which had resulted in the provision of better infrastructure and public services in other parts of the city, the inclusion of the area surrounding the Garden into wider planning and urban upgrading initiatives was a critical aspect of the restoration works.

Project Description

Babur's Garden comprises a walled area of eleven and a half hectares, within which the principal historic structures are Babur's Grave and other historic graves, a marble mosque dedicated in the seventeenth century by Shah Jahan, and a *haremserai*,

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or Queen's Palace, and a small Pavilion that both date from the late nineteenth century. In parallel with clearance of rubble and waste from the site, the initial focus of the restoration works during 2002–03 was on architectural and topographic surveys of the landscape and of key buildings. Located at the base of the Kuh-e Sher Darwaza hills, there is a thirty-five-metre difference in height between the lower sections of the landscape and the upper areas of the site, divided into a 'stepped' terrace garden containing sixteen levels or terraces of various sizes, traversed by ramps and stairs. At its centre, extending from the lower entrance to the upper reaches of the site, the Garden is divided by a wide 'formal' avenue, known locally as the 'central axis'. This area is the organizational 'spine' of the site and contains the bulk of the archaeological remains of the Mughal garden, including water channels, tanks and chutes lined with marble. With the exception of the Queen's Palace and later 'modern' additions to the site, all other major historic constructions – including the reconstructed Caravanserai, the Pavilion, the Shah Jahan Mosque and Babur's Grave – are built along the central axis.

Project Results

Although it is not clear how Babur originally defined the extent of his Garden, the perimeter walls that now surround it follow the tradition of enclosure of formal Persian gardens. Jahangir's instruction in 1607 that walls be built around several gardens in Kabul included the construction of walls around Babur's Garden. The scale and alignment of these walls has doubtless changed, but surviving sections of *pakhsa* (compacted earth) walling were surveyed in 2002. With many sections found to be close to collapse, nearly 1.6 kilometres of walls (parts of which are nearly eight metres high and over two metres thick) were rebuilt or repaired by hand using traditional techniques and materials.

In order to understand the original nature of the landscape, six seasons of joint archaeological excavations were undertaken by the German Archaeological Institute and the Afghan Institute of Archaeology. Architectural elements, from gravestones to parapets and waterfalls, were found to have been altered and

reused in a random manner throughout the Garden, suggesting a subsequent disregard for their decorative or symbolic value. The archaeological excavations found items such as coins, glass, pottery, bones and even the remains of a crab in one of the lower tanks, thus shedding light on how the Garden had been used down the ages.

Following archaeological excavations in Babur's Grave precinct, in 2004 a marble-lined water channel (visible in late nineteenth-century photographs) was excavated west of the Shah Jahan Mosque. Between this and the large octagonal tank excavated on the ninth terrace (now reconstructed) lay the ten-metre-square tank which is partly covered by the veranda of the Pavilion, and whose shape is marked in the stone paving.

The dismantling of three twentieth-century fountains enabled excavation to take place along the length of the central axis, where remains of eight rectangular tanks linked by channels, sections of terracotta pipe and stone retaining walls at the edges of terraces were found. In places, Mughal elements were found beneath more than 2.5 metres of soil deposits; they had been partly destroyed during the digging of a deep trench for pipes to supply the modern fountains. Fragments of three carved, marble, waterfall elements of matching dimensions, which had been reused as gravestones, were also discovered. Together, these finds enabled the team to reconstruct the central axis and its main water channel, allowing water to flow once more through the site, as it did in Babur's time. This has been achieved without significantly disturbing the surviving archaeological remains, which were protected and backfilled after thorough documentation.

In addition to the archaeological evidence, historic descriptions and images of the Garden were used to restore the character of the landscape that originally captivated Babur. The focus has been on the key elements in the original concept – planting, grading and the restoration of running water along the 'spine' of the Garden.

Underlying these works was the intention to provide visitors with an exciting visual experience of the Garden, as they progress up through the site. Having passed through the lower entrance on the bank of the Chardeh River and entered the

[8] Preceding pages: the upper terraces of Babur's Garden contains some of the most important historic structures remaining in Kabul, including Babur's Grave enclosure (centre), the mid-17th-century marble summer mosque built by Shah Jahan (left), and the 19th-century Garden Pavilion (far left).



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courtyard of the new Caravanserai, the visitor glimpses the ascending Garden through an arched gate in the reconstructed stone wall of the Shah Jahan gateway. Passing through this gate, it is possible to perceive the full extent of the orchard terraces of the Garden, rising more than thirty-five metres up the hillside. On the outer edges of this lowest terrace, copses of walnuts and plane trees provide areas of deep shade, as shown in nineteenth-century prints of the site.

The visitor proceeds through the Garden by means of pathways and flights of stone stairs on either side of the central axis, along which water flows through a series of channels, waterfalls and pools. This central watercourse is flanked by an avenue of plane trees, as depicted in an early nineteenth-century watercolour painting of the area by James Atkinson (see p.149), directing

views up the spine of the Garden towards the Pavilion and providing the deep shade that has long characterized this Garden.

Each terrace along the central axis forms in itself a small garden, planted with pomegranates, roses and flowering shrubs between areas of stone paving around a pool of water fed from the terrace above. From each level, there are views and access to the lateral orchard terraces, on which some several thousand fruit trees have been planted. Babur's Memoirs have provided an invaluable source of information about the trees that he planted in gardens in and around Kabul. Based on this description, areas closest to the central axis contain pomegranates, apricots, apples, cherries (the wild *alu balu* being Babur's particular favourite) and peaches, between which are small grassy meadows. Outside the longitudinal paths that run parallel to the

[9] Located on a terrace beneath Babur's Grave, visible on the right, the marble summer mosque built on the instructions of Shah Jahan was carefully restored during the course of rehabilitation works and the area surrounding the structure was repaved in white marble.



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central axis, there is a denser planting of mulberry, apricot, fig and almond trees. At the outer edge of each terrace, copses of walnut trees have been planted along the perimeter walls, over which they will in time be visible from outside the Garden.

While the original watercourse along the 'central axis' would probably also have irrigated the orchard terraces through secondary channels, a separate system of underground pipes has now been installed to increase efficiency and reduce water loss by evaporation. Water is supplied through gravity-fed underground galvanized pipes from the upper reservoir, built by Nadir Shah, to small stone, holding tanks that regulate the flow into open-surface channels to the orchards.

At the source of the water channels along the 'central axis', a large octagonal tank (replicating the original that has been

preserved underground) is flanked by four large plane trees between which is an area of stone paving. From this level, there are views down the central avenue and across the plain of western Kabul towards the Paghman Mountains, identical to those that Babur himself must have enjoyed. The modern swimming pool that had encroached upon the terrace north of the Pavilion was removed and a new swimming pool facility was built outside the garden enclosure, near the lower entrance from the city. The new swimming pool has been used, on average, by over 50,000 young Afghans during the spring and summer months in the years immediately following its construction.

On the level above the Pavilion, the marble-clad western wall of the Shah Jahan Mosque represents an important visual element, as do the rebuilt dry-stone retaining walls that run across

[10] Since the completion of rehabilitation works in 2008, Babur's Garden has become a sanctuary for more than three million visitors and the deeply shaded areas reserved for family picnics has become popular with women and children.

[11] Visitors to the Garden enter at the bottom of the site through the Caravan-serai building before ascending the sixteen terraces through a network of paved paths and gentle slopes.

the width of this part of the Garden. Cypresses have been introduced to the north of the Mosque, while planes and indigenous roses have been replanted alongside the dry trunks of the massive plane trees that once provided shade at this level.

With the original level of Babur's Grave terrace restored, the platform is now approached by marble stairs leading up from a formal flower garden to the south, surrounded by a circle of *alubalu*, or wild cherry trees. Between the outer and inner grave enclosures, *arghawan* or Judas trees blossom once a year in spring, while plane trees have been planted around the outer enclosure and along the terrace above, where they provide shade near the grave of Ruqaiya Sultana Begum, against a backdrop of towering mud-plastered perimeter walls.

Conservation of Key Elements

Babur's Grave has seen significant transformations since his body was exhumed from Agra for reburial in Kabul, in accordance with his wishes. Apart from the carved headstone erected on the instructions of Jahangir in 1607, which contains an elaborate chronogram that confirms the date of Babur's death in AH 937 (AD 1530–31), few original elements of the grave seemed to have survived. The dedication on Babur's gravestone reads:

There is no deity but God;
 Mohammad is the messenger of God.
 The king from whose brow shone the light of God,
 that was Zahir-ud-Din Babur, the king.
 Glorious, wealthy, lucky, just, equitable and pious,

he had an army of divine grace and favour,
 of victory and conquest.
 He conquered the worldly realm and went brightly.
 For the conquest of the world of the spirits,
 quick as the light of an eye.
 When paradise became his abode,
 the gatekeeper of paradise asked for the date, I told him:
 'Paradise forever is the place of Babur the king'.²

The intricately carved marble grave enclosure recorded in Mason's drawing (see p.143) had apparently collapsed by the time of Godfrey Vigne's account of a visit to the Garden, published in 1840, while Burke's photographs from the 1870s show fragments scattered over the grave terrace. Later transformations in the grave area included the erection in the last years of the nineteenth century of an arcaded outer enclosure – subsequently demolished – and the levelling of the southern end of the grave terrace in the 1930s, when the swimming pool was built. In the ensuing years, Babur's headstone had been enclosed in a concrete frame and the grave itself embellished with coloured marble and onyx and covered by a framed shelter.

Based on archaeological excavations and a review of earlier documentation, the work undertaken over the course of the project aimed to re-establish the original character of the grave area in a manner that conformed to international conservation practice. The level of the southern end of the terrace was lowered to restore the original elevation of the grave platform, around which the late nineteenth-century outer arcaded





masonry enclosure has been reconstructed, on foundations of a seventeen-metre-square stone platform revealed by archaeological excavations, which indicated that this had been built around and above older graves.

The thirty-one marble fragments found in the grave area yielded important evidence as to the style and workmanship of the original enclosure around Babur's Grave. While it has long been held that the enclosure dates from the time of Shah Jahan, the craftsmanship and motifs on the recently rediscovered fragments suggest that it might, in fact, date from soon after Babur's burial. Together with documentary material, the fragments have enabled the reconstruction of the enclosure, carved from Indian Makrana marble used in the original structure, which has been erected *in situ* on the original grave platform. Measuring some 4.5 metres square, the elevations of the reconstructed enclosure comprise a central arched opening on the southern elevation flanked by pairs of marble lattice or *jali* screens. Now replanted with *arghawan* or Judas trees, the area between the marble screen and the outer masonry enclosure provides a tranquil space in which visitors can pay their respects; and here, among others, the grave of Babur's son Hindal also survives.

Immediately west of Babur's Grave enclosure and visible from the site of his tomb, the white marble Mosque dedicated by Shah Jahan during his visit to Babur's Grave in 1647 is arguably the most important surviving Islamic monument in Kabul. The building retains a fine inlaid marble inscription above its main elevation reading:

Only a mosque of this beauty, the temple of nobility, constructed for the prayer of saints and the epiphany of cherubs, was fit to stand in so venerable a sanctuary as this highway of archangels, this theatre of heaven, the light garden of the God-forgiven angel king who rests in the garden of heaven, Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur the conqueror.

By the order of one filled with gratitude and affection, and praise of the throne of God, Abdul Muzaffar Shihabuddin Din Muhammad, the victorious king Shah Jahan after the conquest of Balkh and Badakhshan and the flight of Nadir

Muhammed Khan from Balkh to Sheberghan pursued by an army of warriors in a battle of victorious troops on the battlefield.

And by the clemency of God, it fell to his indigent servant and the companions of this slave, who lives in awe of the munificence of God, that towards the end of the nineteenth year of his happy reign [had this mosque built] in two years, in the year one thousand and fifty-six *hijri* for a sum of forty thousand rupees.³

Historic photographs indicate that a number of other buildings were erected around the Shah Jahan Mosque during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, when the structure was covered with a traditional earth roof, later replaced by a pitched roof of steel sheeting. At the same time, the original parapet of the Mosque was removed and marble finials added. By the time the Italian Archaeological Mission began conservation in 1964, it was deemed necessary to erect a structure of reinforced concrete and brick, over which the marble facing was reassembled. Subsequent lack of maintenance, together with direct war damage, resulted in corrosion of the reinforcement and leaching of salts from the concrete, affecting both the structural marble elements and facing.

Following a detailed survey, conservation of the Mosque was initiated in 2003 with the removal of the modern roofing and laying of traditional lime concrete, and replacement of cracked marble structural elements. Missing sections of the parapet were replaced with original marble elements rediscovered elsewhere in the Garden, and the external elevation of the *mihrab* wall was refaced, using some of the original marble pieces that had been laid as paving around the Mosque. Staining on the marble elevations was cleaned and graffiti removed, but surface damage sustained during the fighting in the 1990s has been left visible.

The Garden Pavilion, built at the turn of the century as a place for the royal family to entertain guests, partially covered a large square tank that is mentioned in accounts of Shah Jahan's visit in 1638, and which also appears in nineteenth-century

[12] In addition to preserving the formal character of the original Mughal garden at the centre of the site, as seen in the image on the left, other areas of the landscape were designed according to local gardening traditions, entailing densely planted vegetation and meandering pathways.

illustrations of the Garden. Remnants of brick masonry beside the Pavilion foundations suggest that a platform might have adjoined the tank. Used as a residence for an English physician to the court of Amir Abdur Rahman, the Pavilion had fallen into disrepair by the 1970s. It was looted and burned during the factional fighting in 1992, and initial repairs were begun in 2003 by UN-Habitat and the Afghan organization DHSA. The restoration of the Pavilion was completed by AKTC in 2005, and since then it has been used for a range of official functions and cultural events.

While Babur might have camped on platforms similar to that found beside the Pavilion, the *haremserai*, or Queen's Palace, seems to have been the first permanent residential structure in the Garden. Built in the 1890s by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in a local style permeated by European influences, the complex provided secluded quarters for the royal family around a central courtyard open to the west, with sweeping views of the garden terraces below and across the western plains of Kabul to the Paghman Mountains. With the building occupying the south-east corner of the site, pedestrians and horse carriages entered across the upper terraces of the Garden. Historic photos show other buildings linking the Queen's Palace to the Mosque and an adjacent hammam, but these were demolished during the reign of Nadir Shah. Used as a residence for the German legation during World War I, the complex subsequently served as a school and a military store, before being looted and burned during fighting in 1992.

Following the clearing of unexploded ordnance and mines, the collapsed sections of the *haremserai* roof were removed and the entire complex surveyed. One space to have escaped destruction was a brick-domed hammam, whose decorated plaster was restored in 2004. Following consolidation of the ruined structure in 2005, work began on the preparation of designs for redevelopment, on the footprint of the original and with reference to historic photographs and surviving buildings of the same era. Reconstruction work began in early 2006. While respecting the architectural character of the original building, it has been possible to incorporate a range of alternative uses into the reconstructed complex and integrate new services and a

range of materials. Moreover, this has provided an opportunity to develop the skills of a sizeable team of Afghan craftsmen in a range of techniques, including brick vaulting, joinery, decorative plasterwork, marble flooring and stone carving. Since its restoration, the Queen's Palace, with its large courtyard, has become the focus for public and cultural events in the Garden, generating substantial revenue towards the upkeep of the site. In 2013 alone, more than sixty-five cultural and social functions were held in the building.

Photographs of the Garden from around 1915 identify a double-storey Caravanserai structure built around a courtyard at the base of the Garden adjacent to the river. Although there was no trace of this structure above ground, excavations in 2003 revealed foundations of earlier structures and water channels. Traces of extensive stone footings, aligned with the central axis of the Garden, were subsequently discovered and seem to correspond to the gateway "adorned with gilded cupolas, befitting that place" that, according to the account in the *Padshahnama*, was commissioned by Shah Jahan.

The same passage of the *Padshahnama* refers to a building in which the destitute and poor should "eat their food in those cells sheltered from the hardships of snow and rain".⁴ This was the inspiration for a new Caravanserai complex that houses the range of modern facilities required for contemporary visitors to Bagh-e Babur. Conveniently located at the bottom of the Garden, the Caravanserai building now serves as the main pedestrian entrance for visitors coming from the city side. Drawing on traditional built forms and brick-masonry techniques of the region, it houses an exhibition and information centre, offices, commercial outlets and public facilities.

Area Development Initiatives

In his Memoirs, Babur describes how he and his entourage would hunt in the forests that extended from below Kuh-e Sher Darwaza across to Paghman to the west. Early twentieth-century photographs of this plain show scattered clusters of traditional housing between market gardens, which were an important source of produce for the inhabitants of Kabul city which, until then, was largely confined within walled settlements further



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north, along the banks of the Kabul River. The transformation of the environment below Bagh-e Babur began with the development in the 1920s of a new administrative centre in Darulaman to the south-west. In time, the fields between Darulaman and the centre of Kabul gave way to newly built suburbs replacing the traditional villages that had long dotted the plain.

Areas such as these grew significantly during the 1980s, as families fleeing war-affected villages settled in the relative security of Kabul, where they had a chance of finding employment. For those unable to afford homes in established settlements, the only alternative was to build shelter on the hillsides that separate the different sectors of Kabul. By the early 1990s, the steep, rocky slopes above Bagh-e Babur were densely settled with homes, the bulk of which were built using traditional techniques of stone masonry and mud bricks, with flat roofs. The lives of those living in these homes, however, were disrupted by inter-factional fighting in 1992, resulting in widespread displacement and destruction of property and infrastructure.

By 1994, families gradually began to return to the ruins of their homes, to clear mines and ordnance, and to embark on reconstruction. Within five years, not only had most of the original residents around Bagh-e Babur reoccupied their reconstructed homes, but settlement had resumed higher up the slopes, on

illegally occupied government land, as demand for affordable housing in the city grew. Up to three quarters of the population of Kabul now lives outside the scope of the 1978 Master Plan, not eligible for official investments in infrastructure upgrading.

This is the context of an Area Development Project, initiated in early 2004, that aims to improve living conditions for the 10,000 or so people living in the immediate vicinity of Bagh-e Babur. Consultations were held with community representatives to identify priorities, on which basis investments have been made to improve storm-water drainage, water supplies and access. This has, over the past decade, been matched by widespread private investments in housing repairs and extensions, even by owners who have no legal title for the land on which they have built. The continuing construction of homes on perilously steep hillsides, however, has put additional pressure on the rudimentary infrastructure and increased risks to public health and the hazard of flash floods.

In parallel with the upgrading work, mapping and baseline surveys have been conducted in a wider area, extending over five *gozars* or sub-districts, currently inhabited by some 35,000 people. Although there are wide variations between the living conditions in the different *gozars*, these surveys reveal acute levels of overcrowding, with three quarters of families inhabiting

[13] Popular with local and international visitors alike, the Mughal "avenue" garden is defined by a formal network of terraces with water channels and tanks, planted with large plane trees, formal lawns and a variety of flowers and plants, and linked by paved pathways running the length of the Garden along a linear axis down the centre of the site.







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only one or two rooms and having precarious livelihoods, with a quarter of able-bodied men relying on intermittent, casual labour. Access to basic services is limited, with nine out of ten families living on the plain reliant on unsafe water from shallow wells and with access only to rudimentary sanitation.

The data provided by the baseline surveys, together with the mapping of the physical environment, have been used in a series of participatory initiatives aimed at identifying and analysing key 'pressure points' in the area. Involving residents, community representatives and municipal staff, this process has led to the formulation of a series of 'Plans of Action', leading to the negotiation of an 'Area Development Plan'. An important aspect of this work has been to build the skills of key municipal staff at the district level, so that they might be in a better position to

analyse the context and oversee current and future upgrading initiatives. It is envisaged that the 'Area Development Plan' might both leverage funding for upgrading on a larger scale and guide a broader process of physical, economic and social recovery in these *gozars*, while contributing to more effective urban governance.

Project Beneficiaries

The restoration of one of Afghanistan's most important historic sites and the largest public garden in Kabul has transformed the previously decaying and destroyed site into an authentic Mughal-era garden and a resource for the millions of inhabitants of the city. Following its conservation in 2008, Babur's Garden was added to the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

[14] Preceding pages: all the flora cultivated in Babur's Garden were sourced locally, and planted in accordance with detailed information contained in Babur's Memoirs about the types and species of trees and flowers that he had planted in his gardens.

[15] The 11.5-hectare walled garden and historic buildings complex includes the Caravanserai and a public swimming pool on lower terraces (right), linked to facilities on the upper terraces that include the Queen's Palace, the Garden Pavilion, the Shah Jahan Mosque and Babur's Grave (left).

While ensuring that the historic landscape and buildings are safeguarded for future generations, the Bagh-e Babur rehabilitation programme has also fostered a better understanding of the needs of present inhabitants. Investments in conservation and rehabilitation continue to attract Afghan and international visitors to the Garden and have generated significant employment among the neighbouring communities, whose own investments in self-built housing have been enhanced by infrastructure upgrading. In adopting an inclusive approach towards both the conservation and planning work, efforts have been made to foster appropriate development in this highly sensitive environment. An important secondary objective of this work has been the provision of over 735,000 work days of employment for on average 350 skilled and unskilled labourers from the surrounding communities.

Many visitors to Bagh-e Babur remark that the site represents a symbol of cultural recovery in Afghanistan. The challenge continues to be that of finding a balance between the symbolic and the actual, to retain the unique character of the landscape and monuments while ensuring access to the public for recreation and education and contributing to the recovery of the wider area around the Garden.

Ensuring the Sustainability of Bagh-e Babur

Conceived as royal property, the fortunes of Bagh-e Babur until the mid twentieth century depended on investments made by Afghanistan's rulers. After the era of royal patronage, when the site became a public park, its gradual degradation bears out the challenge of meeting the costs of its upkeep from public funds.

Realizing that the management and operations of the restored Garden posed further challenges, a tripartite 'Memorandum of Understanding' was signed in 2008 between Kabul Municipality, the Ministry of Information and Culture and AKTC, which established the independent Bagh-e Babur Trust (BBT). Tasked with the overall responsibility of effectively managing and maintaining the site, the seventy-five full-time staff of the BBT have ensured that Bagh-e Babur remains accessible to the more than 3.1 million Afghan and international visitors since 2008 and that revenue collected through visits and the hire of

facilities is reinvested towards the operation of the site – resulting in the financial self-sustainability of the operations since 2010. Revenue generated through these sources is crucial to the Garden's sustainability; the two-year period between 2008 and 2010, for instance, saw a forty-eight per cent increase in self-generated revenue for the Garden. Surplus of revenue coupled with additional investments by the US Embassy were used to upgrade visitor facilities and to make further investments towards the upkeep of the landscape and historic monuments. The establishment of the BBT and its successful management by an Afghan team with direct oversight by the Afghan authorities has provided an important precedent for the sustainable management and operations of historic sites across Afghanistan.

Ensuring that the historic landscape and buildings are safeguarded for future generations, the Bagh-e Babur rehabilitation programme has helped foster a better understanding of an integrated approach to cultural preservation and wider socio-economic regeneration.

Endnotes

- 1 Donald N. Wilber, *Persian Gardens & Garden Pavilions*, Tuttle, Rutland, 1962, p. 29.
- 2 L. Bogdanov, "The Tomb of the Emperor Babur near Kabul", in *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*, 1923/24, pp. 1–12.
- 3 Peter Levi, *The Light Garden of the Angel King: Travels in Afghanistan with Bruce Chatwin*, Pallas Athene, London, 1999.
- 4 Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Padshahnama*, Mawlawis Kabir Ai-Din Ahmad and Abd Al-Rahim (eds.), Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1868.