

Historic Cities Support Programme

THE AZHAR PARK PROJECT IN CAIRO
AND THE CONSERVATION AND REVITALISATION OF DARB AL-AHMAR



THE AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Since its foundation by my ancestors the Fatimids in 969 (358h.), Cairo has been a vigorous hub of Islamic culture and civilisation. In spite of tremendous urban change and growth, it is still the richest treasure house of Islamic monuments anywhere in the world – a testimony to the generosity and variety of its cultural and architectural achievements.

My attachment to Cairo is, however, not based purely on its history. As one of the largest and most complex metropolises in the world, it provides dramatic insights into the full array of contemporary development problems. It also raises the question as to how to creatively re-connect an age-old heritage with the opportunities and demands of rapidly changing modern life, an issue which has been very much on my mind since the creation of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture over 20 years ago. More specifically, an increase in and improvement of scarce green surface within the city, one of the world's densest urban agglomerations, is an urgent priority. Often overlooked, public open spaces have a great role to play in historic cities. Their improvement and consistent use, besides enhancing the civic sense of the city's inhabitants, can often act as a catalyst for collateral private investments in urban rehabilitation.

Pursuing active urban revitalisation has become the main theme of the Historic Cities Support Programme (HCSP), another branch of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), established in 1991. From the beginning, the guiding principle behind this programme was to improve the quality of life of local communities through investment in their cultural heritage and through the rehabilitation of architecturally significant structures. This has been a goal in all earlier projects, from Baltit Fort and the surrounding settlements in Northern Pakistan to Zanzibar and its seafront. The sites in Cairo, which are the subject of this major HCSP project, offer a unique opportunity to implement the same principle on a much larger scale. Here, the Trust and the other donors involved in the project have the possibility to achieve something truly outstanding and fully commensurate with the potential of the place.

The history of this multi-faceted project, reaching back over a decade, has been an exhilarating process of discovery and opportunity. While at the beginning the idea was to provide the metropolis with a much-needed green space at the heart of its historic agglomeration, the progressive uncovering of 1.3 kilometres of historic wall led to another major task – giving a new “face” to the historic city as seen from the Park. Eventually, the conservation project for the wall itself, being inseparable from the abutting historic city fabric, led AKTC to consider a third, equally important priority, i.e., launching a combined physical and social rehabilitation process in the neighbouring area of the Park, the Darb



al-Ahmar district. In keeping with the general strategy for HCSP projects, it was clear that the Park construction, as well as the Historic Wall conservation, could and should also act as stimuli for the rehabilitation of Darb al-Ahmar. Accordingly, the Trust has initiated a range of community-based urban upgrading projects that contribute to the improvement of living conditions in the vicinity of the Park by providing cultural, social, economic and institutional support.

Through their interaction, these three projects, which will truly transform this significant area of Cairo, have called for a substantial increase in the human and financial resources invested by the Trust. For the work in Darb al-Ahmar, the Trust was fortunate to find committed partners such as the Ford Foundation and the Swiss-Egyptian Development Fund to support the ongoing rehabilitation process, which will have to be pursued on a long-term basis beyond the completion of the Park. Similarly, the comprehensive conservation of the Historic Wall is a five-to-eight year project. It has been established in cooperation with the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Cairo and will be managed by the Trust with the participation of other organisations, such as the French Institute for Archaeology. Substantial parts of the wall conservation and Darb al-Ahmar rehabilitation projects should be visible when the Park opens.

The implementation of the components of this complex undertaking would not have been possible without the active participation and support of the Egyptian authorities, under the leadership of Their Excellencies, President Hosni Mubarak and First Lady Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, who kindly agreed to lay the foundation stone of the Park. My thanks go to them and to His Excellency the Minister of Culture, Mr. Farouk Hosni, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Dr. Gaballa A. Gaballa, and particularly to His Excellency the Governor of Cairo, Dr. Abdel-Rehim Shehata, and his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Omar Abdel Akher, whose constant support and personal commitment have been essential to the work of the technical team in charge of implementing the project.

It is my wish that the new Azhar Park, with its central location, will become a major new resource for visitors to and residents of the city of Cairo, opening up new views onto the surrounding historic monuments of this unique area of this unique city. Moreover, I would like to express the hope that the citizens of Cairo, and in particular the residents of the old city, will take pride in the Park and, stimulated by the construction of the Park and the restoration of the historic Ayyubid wall, will participate in the ongoing rehabilitation process of Darb al-Ahmar and its historic monuments and spaces.



CHRONOLOGY OF CAIRO

Compiled by Seif al-Rashidi

EARLY ISLAMIC EGYPT (639-868)	TULUNIDS (868-904) AND IKHSHIDS (935-969)	FATIMIDS (969-1171)	AYYUBIDS (1171-1250)
639 <i>'Amr Ibn al-'As enters Egypt from Syria</i>	868 <i>Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tazz appoints Bakbak as governor to Egypt; Bakbak sends Ahmad Ibn Tulun instead</i>	969 <i>Fatimids enter Fustat with little resistance; Jawhar al-Siqili founds al-Qahira in anticipation of the arrival of the Fatimid Caliph al-Muizz from North Africa. Al-Qahira becomes the seat of the Fatimid empire</i>	1171 <i>Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi becomes sultan, extends Cairo's fortifications and constructs citadel</i>
640 <i>Byzantine forces defeated at Ain Shams</i>	869 <i>Ahmad Ibn Tulun rules independently from Abbasid caliphate, founds al-Qata'i</i>	973 <i>Al-Muizz arrives in Egypt</i>	1187 <i>Salah al-Din recaptures Jerusalem</i>
641 <i>Babylon (the Roman settlement near the later city of Cairo) capitulates and Muslim armies form the settlement known as Fustat (Tent City)</i>	905 <i>Tulunid dynasty collapses and Egypt reverts to direct Abbasid control</i>	989 <i>Al-Azhar becomes a centre for higher education under Ya'qub Ibn Killis</i>	1193 <i>Salah al-Din dies and Ayyubid empire is fragmented</i>
642 <i>Arab armies take Alexandria</i>	935 <i>Muhammad Ibn Tughj rules Egypt autonomously under the title of al-Ikhshidi given to him by the Abbasid Caliph</i>	1073 <i>Al-Mustansir summons Badr al-Jamali, governor of Acre, to quell violence in Egypt</i>	1199 <i>Al-Adil unites Ayyubid empire</i>
644-645 <i>Abortive attempt by Byzantine troops to reclaim Egypt</i>	968 <i>Kafur al-Ikhshidi dies; political and economic strife encourage Fatimid conquest of Egypt</i>	1087 <i>Badr al-Jamali, now the Fatimid vizier, consolidates Cairo's walls</i>	1240 <i>Al-Salih Ayyub builds up an army of Turkish slaves (the Bahri Mamluks)</i>
750 <i>Abbasids enter Egypt and found al-'Askar</i>		1096 <i>First crusade begins</i>	1249 <i>Louis IX captured by Ayyubid army in Mansourah; al-Salih Ayyub dies and is succeeded by his son Turan Shah</i>
		1099 <i>Fall of Jerusalem to the Franks</i>	
		1169 <i>Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi takes control of Egypt</i>	

BAHRI MAMLUKS (1250-1382)	CIRCASSIAN MAMLUKS (1383-1517)	OTTOMANS (1517-1805)	MODERN EGYPT (1805-1953)
<p>1250 <i>Brief reign of Shagaret El-Dorr as Sultana</i></p> <p>1258 <i>Mongols capture Baghdad</i></p> <p>1260 <i>Baybars defeats Mongols at Ain Jalut and reinstates Abbasid Caliph in Cairo</i></p> <p>1283 <i>Sultan Qalaun builds monumental complex including a maristan (hospital)</i></p> <p>1291 <i>Ashraf Khalil defeats crusaders, who retreat to Cyprus</i></p> <p>1294-1340 <i>Three reigns of al-Nasir Muhammed</i></p> <p>1340-1382 <i>Descendants of Qalaun remain in power</i></p>	<p>1383 <i>Sultan Barquq seizes power, establishing Circassian Mamluk dynasty</i></p> <p>1400 <i>Tamerlane sacks Damascus, and economy deteriorates, plague and famine are rife</i></p> <p>1412 <i>Mu'ayyad Sheikh retakes Syria, rules until his death in 1421</i></p> <p>1422 <i>Reign of Barsbay brings period of peace, cultural vitality and increased trade</i></p> <p>1468-1498 <i>Cultural revival under Sultan Qaytbay</i></p> <p>1488 <i>Discovery of Cape of Good Hope has an adverse effect on trade in Egypt</i></p> <p>1516 <i>Sultan al-Ghuri loses battle against Ottomans. Khayrbek, Governor of Aleppo, betrays the Mamluks</i></p> <p>1517 <i>Tumanbay II captured and hung, Ottomans take over Egypt</i></p>	<p>1517 <i>Khayrbek appointed first Ottoman governor</i></p> <p>1768 <i>Ali Bey al-Kabir revolts against the Ottomans, takes part of Arabia</i></p> <p>1772 <i>Revolt of Ali Bey al-Kabir suppressed</i></p> <p>1798-1801 <i>French expedition to Egypt</i></p> <p>1805 <i>Muhammad Ali expels Ottoman governor</i></p>	<p>1805-1848 <i>Muhammad Ali Pasha; virtual independence from the Ottoman court, comprehensive efforts to modernise Egypt</i></p> <p>1854-1863 <i>Said Pasha; grants concession to the French to construct the Suez Canal</i></p> <p>1863-1879 <i>Khedive Ismail; construction of European-style districts of Cairo in anticipation of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869</i></p> <p>1936-1952 <i>Farouk I; deposed and exiled by Revolutionary Command Council</i></p> <p>1952-1953 <i>Ahmad Fouad II; Regency Council rules until 1953, when a republic is declared</i></p>

