

## *Our Works Point to Us: Restoration and the Award*

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**I**t is a real pleasure to return to the hospitable walls of Yazd where many years ago I began to study the secrets, wonders and curiosities of Iran's architectural heritage. My study had been aided not only by local officials and families but also by the prevailing attitude of respect for, and use of, the built environment, and by the live memories invested in these walls. These in turn were supported by the ongoing tradition of local histories, beginning with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ones such as the *Ta'rikh- i Yazd* and the *Ta'rikh- i Jadid- i Yazd*, and the *Jami'-i Mufidi* to Iraj Afshar's *Yadigarha-ye Yazd* of the 1970's.<sup>1</sup>

Today, Yazd looks very different. The urban sprawl reaches far into the historic hinterland of formerly far-off gardens and Zoroastrian memorial complexes, and the historic city proper within its walls and with its fifteenth-century extensions seems small, overwhelmed and half-empty. On the other hand, areas that were far beyond the pedestrian extent of the old town, such as the major gardens, are today the main recreation areas and lungs of the conurbation. Thus, it is most appropriate to have Yazd be the place for a seminar that takes stock of the uses of the past, and the future of buildings and environments so carefully remembered and celebrated by past writers and users.

A reassessment for all uses and strategies connected with conservation and restoration is critical. It comes at a time when the present-day urban sprawl has dwarfed the area of the historic zone to a fraction of the built-up area. The result has distanced the inhabitants of every city from the historic fabric in actual and emotional investment. Historic centres have emptied of the families and social networks that had ensured continuity, rebuilding and repair to be replaced by new populations and over-densification in the best of circumstances, or to be left to complete abandon and ruin.

*Inna atharna tadalla 'alaina; fa 'anzuru ba'adna illa al-athari*  
"Thus our works point to us; gaze after us at our works"

These are words from Arabic wisdom literature but also pertain very much to the topic of my talk today. The saying crops up commonly in a variety of popular literature and circumstances.<sup>2</sup> It has also been recorded as being used in this very region of Yazd and its province. The historian Mohammad Mufid Mostawfi Bafghi mentions it in his interesting and important digest of historical works, the *Jami'-i Mufidi*, written in 1671-1679 (later half of the eleventh century AH). This is the

very text of the inscriptions, which Khanish Begum, a sister of Shah Tahmasb and the wife of Nu'aym ad-in Ni'amatullah Baqi ordered written for remembrance of her and her deeds. The words were repeated in four corner galleries (*ghorafah*).<sup>3</sup> Built unusually large to hold her with her attendants, these form the second storey in the mosque that was appended to the *khanaqah* of the Sufi Sheikh Shah Ni'amatullah Vali Kirmani. In pursuing her programme of enlargement and radical change of the *khanaqah*, Khanish Begum (and her master builders) would not have worried much about the propriety of altering the physical fabric of the previous building nor about retaining all of its aspects. In fact, so encrusted is this complex with additions and accretions that it is difficult to make out all aspects of even this addition. These challenging words of Khanish Begum are nowhere to be seen presently under the many layers of whitewash. Yet all this change happened in the flow of time when the systems of knowledge and meaning were continuous and continuously refreshed from the same sources.

Today, the luxury of adding and changing built environments at will without self-consciousness of time past and present simply does not and cannot exist. Our approach to this monument and similar complexes comes at a moment when there is no longer an assumed continuity of building practice; in fact, rupture and discontinuity of practice must be taken as real. Those who work in and with historic environments must grab at the tattered strings of local building knowledge and learn its orders. To impose today's needs and to utilise today's tools directly on the remnants of the delicate historical fabric is to help, if not speed up, the process of its disappearance. Single monument or urban matrix, the development and application of restoration, conservation and reuse programmes are fraught with difficulties and frustration.

It is, therefore, with a full realisation that heroic efforts were necessary to carry out even the smallest restoration and conservation project that the Aga Khan Award for Architecture created a place in its system of recognition and awards for projects of restoration, conservation and reuse. Thus, in another sense, the individual awarded projects and the sum of the recognised projects also point to the Award. The road travelled towards their recognition, and the development of its own criteria for excellence in these sectors of the built environment of the Islamic world have formed the history of thinking about the historical built environment within the Award itself. Beginning with the first Awards in 1980, the key approaches to historic structures and environments were recognised: restoration, restoration and adaptive reuse, reconstruction and conservation strategies.

What follows is a review of the awarded projects with a summary of their achievements. In passing, aspects of the projects, which deserve further notice, which reveal some shortcomings, or which have remained unanswered must be mentioned as well. Initially, we at the Award were so pleased to find any successful project that, perhaps, achievements were highlighted and spotlighted, and shortcomings shaded or diminished. But, in the stretch of twenty-five years and eight Award cycles, the

scope of the projects (both considered and awarded) has expanded, while criteria for evaluating them have been sharpened and refined. In sum, the strict criteria for recognising restoration projects were kept, while the category of the reuse of historic fabric was expanded to include projects that could be best described as reconstruction and conservation initiatives, with attention to programming reuse in the historic fabric, with community engagement and support as well as institutional involvement.

As always, the pursuit of restoration remains a highly skilled and technical process. Only three restoration projects have been awarded: monuments in Isfahan, Multan, and Jerusalem. Archaeological study (and publication), the careful use of reversible processes, a clear definition of the old and new fabrics, the multiplier effect of on-the-job training for craftsmen and technicians were clearly programmed into the long-term efforts to save these major monuments.

In the case of Isfahan, the generative effect of the restoration has extended well beyond the monuments themselves (pls. 1-3, 89, 90). They have been published in an exemplary manner, and the record of their construction process has contributed immeasurably to our knowledge of the practices of building of the Safavid period and of early modern Iran in general.<sup>4</sup> The process of restoration of the individual pavilions with their structural complexities and complex decorative programmes has generated a group of artisanal professional specialists whose skills have been applied to other, similar buildings. The restoration project has reached into the entire complex of the Maidan-i Shah, and from it into the historic urban fabric of Isfahan.

The result has been the safeguarding of the Safavid centre. Much after the recognition of the restorations in 1980 by the Award, one of the recommendations of the original programme was implemented, namely the pedestrianisation of the *maidan*, and the removal of the inappropriate garden layout in its centre. The blocking of traffic circulation from the *maidan* has meant that the structural well-being of the Safavid monuments has been safeguarded. The reintroduction of the open ground on the *maidan* brings it closer to its original urban concept of a large multi-purpose space where a variety of temporary events and structures could be staged. The historic city area has been expanded further to include more of the original territory of the Safavid palace zone. By moving government offices to other venues, additional pavilions have become available for public uses like, for example, the Museum of Natural History, or Gallery for Contemporary Art. Such an expansion has provided a historic park/conservation zone within the heart of a rapidly expanding and densifying metropolis that now stretches several miles beyond the furthest reaches of the great Safavid gardens of the Hezar Jarib and that also includes newer industrial suburbs and developments. The creation of a historic park has meant that the function of the great bazaar must be rethought as it no longer continues to operate as the main commercial centre of this conurbation. This historic area, nevertheless, should be seen in contradistinction to the virtual erasure of much

of the medieval city fabric in Isfahan through the continued insertion of large avenues through it, and the rapid destruction of the housing stock within it. The restoration of the Safavid palaces and the safeguarding of their physical context, then, is a signal example. It deserves worldwide continuous study and recognition for its large scale as well as detailed successes.

Shrines, whether urban, suburban or rural, have marked the landscape of all the regions of the Islamic world. Many have become derelict when their popularity diminished or when they lost incomes from their *waqfs*. Many have survived and flourished to this very day, supported by endowments and individual gifts. Their continued existence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is evidence of their hold on popular piety and imagination. The Shrine of Rukn-i-'Alam, the Suhrawardiya saint of the eighth/fourteenth century, standing in Multan, Pakistan, fell on bad times when the income from its endowments diminished and when its maintenance was no longer carried out (pls. 92, 93). The restoration campaign of 1971-1977 differed from the previous repairs in important ways.<sup>5</sup> In addition to stabilising the platform on top of which the mausoleum sits, special care was taken to drain the site properly and to replace rotting timbers. New industrial materials were used very sparingly. Significantly, the campaign revived or recreated fourteen different building and decorating crafts, among them the tile mosaicists. The practitioners of these crafts have gone on to work on other historic monuments controlled by the Awqaf, or into the private sector. The restoration was funded through a special fundraising campaign initiated by the conservation branch of the Awqaf Administration, and carried out through the governorate of Punjab. A major monument has been restored and returned to use.

There is no question that the Haram al-Sharif and its great monuments are the focus of continuous attention in Muslim piety and imagination. The Masjid al-Aqsa, as important as the Dome of the Rock, has undergone many more structural changes and repairs, the last of which in the 1950s and 1960s created adverse conditions for the monument itself through the introduction of concrete and anodized aluminium in the dome. The disaster of an explosion and fire in 1969 threatened the integrity of the dome and destroyed much of the painted decoration. An expert restoration was initiated by the Al-Aqsa and Dome of the Rock Restoration Committee with the support of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).<sup>6</sup> The campaign succeeded in restoring the damaged parts of the building to the highest restoration standards, being careful to distinguish any new infill work from the original (pls. 40, 91). The process of the project also produced two crucial generative effects. First, it resulted in the training of restoration workers. Secondly and significantly, the restoration committee expanded its purview to include all areas of the Haram al-Sharif, with work continuing in subsidiary areas and plans to engage in similar high quality restorations there. It is still hoped that a full account of the restoration work on the Masjid al-Aqsa as well as on the Shrine of Rukn-i-'Alam will be presented in print.

Finally, these two latter awarded projects are important demonstrations of the fact that major religious shrines and centres can be repaired and rebuilt with careful attention to their historic features. The urge to repair need not result in covering everything with new materials and green paint.

Such is the press of the new, and such are the casualties of the present day that often the pure restoration process with its stringent requirements is not enough or is not possible. In those cases, other intermediate strategies could yield positive results.

The conflicts in Lebanon of the late 1970s and 1980s resulted in many victims, including much of the built environment. A notable example was the Great Omari Mosque at Sidon, shelled and bombed by the Israeli forces (pls. 87, 88). The will and the resources to rebuild its shattered fabric came specifically from Rafiq al-Hariri. The building had been in a poor state of repair and had undergone many previous repairs, many of those in the 1950s-1970s ultimately damaging its historic fabric due to the use of inappropriate materials, but the 1982 destruction rendered it unusable. This reconstruction, undertaken under the conditions of military occupation, was understood to be as much resistance to this occupation as it was repair of the severely damaged building.<sup>7</sup>

The fate of many residences of past elites has been an unhappy one, and few have escaped intact. One such example has been the Azem Palace in Damascus. Originally built in the mid-eighteenth century for Assad al-Azem, one of the last great Ottoman governors of the province, it was arranged around three courts. Its representative function was recognised by the French as well, and during resistance to the French occupying forces in the 1920s it was severely damaged.

Wholesale or partial reconstruction for emotional reasons must be recognised, while it cannot be deemed restoration because little of the original fabric survives. Memory of place and function is then paramount in returning meaning or even reinventing it for an important location.

All regions within the Islamic world are left with old capitals and their palaces; should these remain as museums alone? Or should their very existence, given their considerable open grounds and generous public spaces, be harnessed for present uses for the ever increasing populations that surround them: recreational park space, educational programmes, training courses or simply lungs for the city?

The generative effect of individual efforts to recuperate something of the historical fabric were recognised: whether it is the anchoring of a view of a bay for a vacation house, or the much more involved and ambitious energising of an entire small community around the creation of an Art Festival, the result can radiate beyond the individual project.

From the onset, large scale conservation efforts were brought to the attention of the Award process. Through these projects, it is clear that the validation and valuation of the historic built environment is a very difficult, complex and never ending process requiring constant attention and watchfulness.

The following must be asked when considering strategies for the conservation of the urban fabric:

- local ordinances: long-term?
- development short-term gain, long-term loss?
- cooperation among participating agencies?
- restoration and/or adaptive reuse?
- urban fabric and/or monuments?
- living entity or museum town?
- government programmes and/or private sector investment?
- rediscovering the old house?

All these and more strategies and tactics must be constantly in use. The most successful projects are never perfect, while even partially realised ones have something to contribute to our kit of tools.

*For illustrations of Award-winning projects of restoration, the reader is referred to pls. 1-3, 40 and 87-93.*

<sup>1</sup> The results of this study are partially available in my dissertation and in entries on Yazd in Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber, *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, Princeton 1988.

<sup>2</sup> For example, it is also found in the preface to the album of Bahram Mirza, composed by Dust Muhammad, see the translation by Wheeler Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters*, vol X, Muqarnas Supplements, Leiden 2001, p. 11. The saying has also been attributed to Imam Ja'afar Sadiq and/or Jabir ibn al-Hayyan, see Syed Nomanul Haq, *Names, Natures and Things*, pp. 5-6, 15.

<sup>3</sup> The habit of writing on walls of interiors may also be a reference to the Hermetic tradition of inscriptions in caves, as reported through Jabir ibn al-Hayyan, see Nomanul Haq, *Names* cit., p. 206.

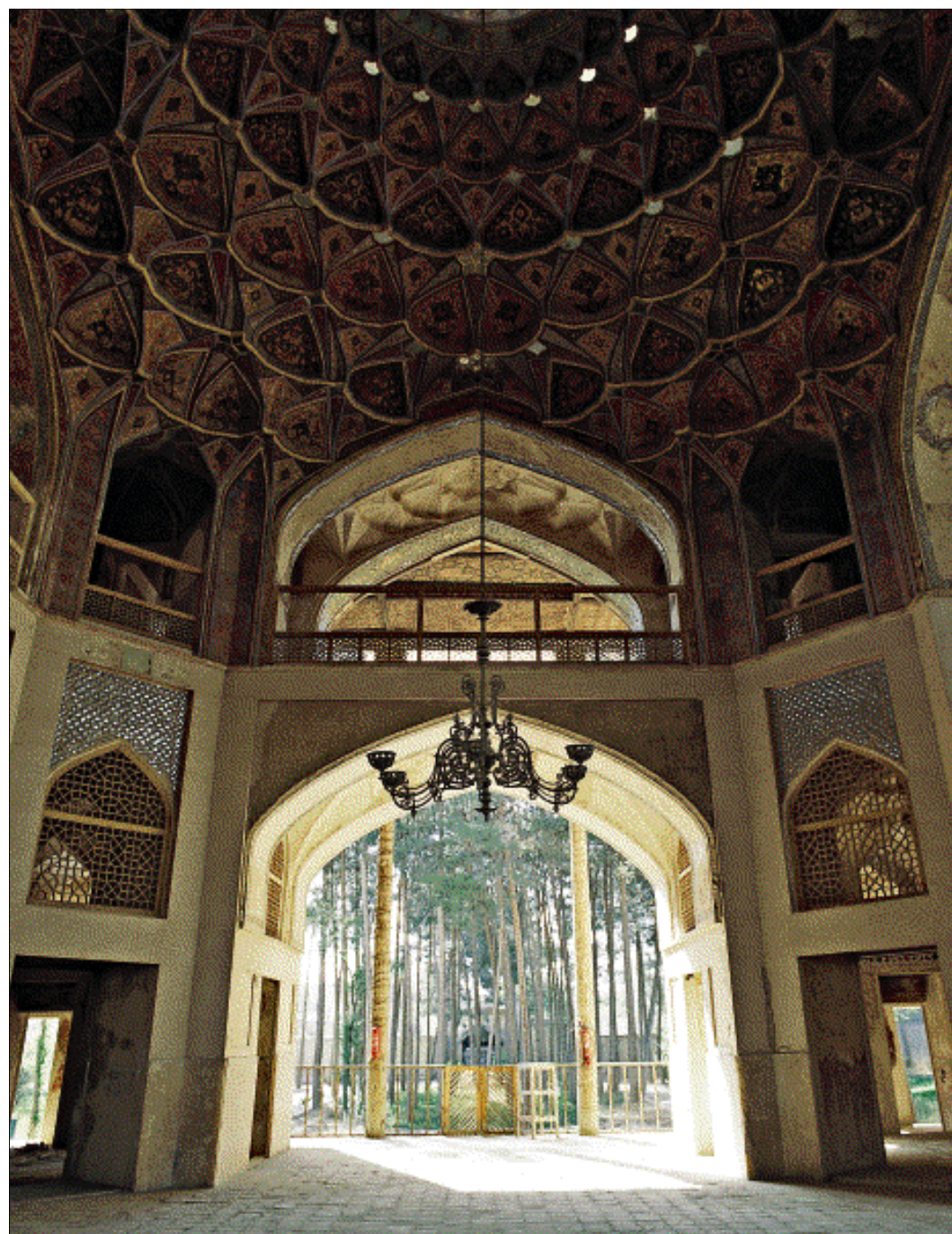
<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of the restoration project see the 1980 Awards in Renata Holod and Darl Rastorfer, *Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic World Today*, Aperture, New York 1983, pp. 184-197. The Isfahan project was undertaken by the combined forces of the National Organ-

isation for the Conservation of Historic Monuments of Iran (NOCHMI) and the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (ISMEO) beginning in 1964. Occupancy for Ali Qapu was 1975, for Chehel Sutun and Hasht Behesht, 1975-1980. The following publications present the first results of the restoration: Eugenio Galdieri and Roberto Orazi, *Progetto di sistemazione del Maydan-i Shah di Isfahan*, Rome 1969; Eugenio Galdieri, *Apparenze e realtà nell'architettura Safavide*, Venice 1978; Giuseppe Zander (ed.), *Travaux de restauration des monuments historiques en Iran*, Rome 1969. Subsequent impact studies have yet to be done.

<sup>5</sup> For details of the restoration work see the publication of the 1983 Awards, Sherban Cantacuzino (ed.), *Architecture in Continuity: Building in the Islamic World Today*, Aperture, New York 1985, pp. 173-177.

<sup>6</sup> Awarded in 1986. For details see Ismail Serageldin, *Space for Freedom*, Butterworth, London 1989, pp. 118-131.

<sup>7</sup> Awarded in 1989. For details see James Steele, *Architecture for Islamic Societies Today*, Academy Editions, London 1994, pp. 39-45.







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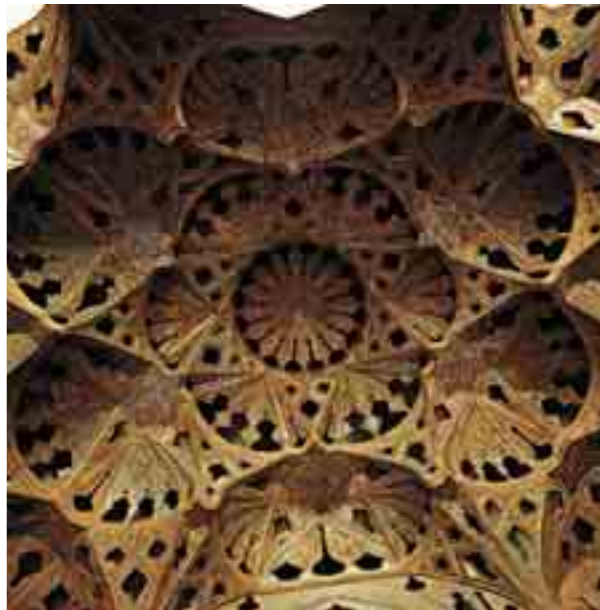
1-3. Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (ISMEO; Eugenio Galdieri) and the National Organisation for the Conservation of Historic Monuments of Iran (NOCHMI; Bagher Shirazi), restoration of Hasht Behesht, Chehel Sutun and Ali Qapu, Isfahan, Iran, 1977.

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1. Hasht Behesht (1699), Isfahan, Iran, restored in 1977.

2. Chehel Sutun (1667), Isfahan, Iran, restored in 1977.

3. Ali Qapu (1660), Isfahan, Iran, restored in 1977.



3.



4.

4, 5. Daz/Kamran Diba, Shushtar New Town, Shushtar, Iran, 1974-1978.



5.



37.

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36. Suq al-Qattaneen, Old City, Jerusalem.

37. Al Madrasa al-Ashrafiyyah, Old City, Jerusalem.

38. The Dome of the Rock (7th century), Jerusalem.

39. Dar al-Aytam Complex, Old City, Jerusalem.

40. Al-Aqsa Mosque (8th century), Jerusalem.

41. The Old City, Jerusalem.



38.



39.



40.



41.





87.



89.



90.

87, 88. Saleh Lamei-Mostafa, Great Omari Mosque (late 13th century), Sidon, Lebanon, restored in 1986.

89, 90. Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (ISMEO; Eugenio Galdieri) and the National Organisation for the Conservation of Historic Monuments of Iran (NOCHMI; Bagher Shirazi), Ali Qapu (1660), Isfahan, Iran, restored in 1977.

91. Isam Awwad and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), Al-Aqsa Mosque (14th-century paintwork), Jerusalem, restored in 1983.



88.

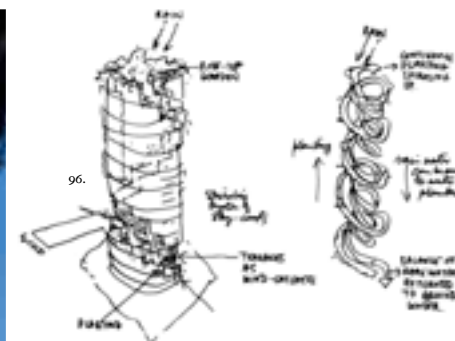


91.





92, 93. Awqaf Department, Tomb of Shah Rukn-i-'Alam (14th century), Multan, Pakistan, restored in 1977.



94. Atelier Frei Otto, Buro Happold,  
Omrania, Tuwaiq Palace, Riyadh,  
Saudi Arabia, 1985.

95. Hamzah and Yeang, Menara Mesiniaga,  
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, 1992.

96. Drawing by Ken Yeang.