

9. The Restoration of Baltit Fort

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For centuries, the construction, maintenance and repair of buildings in the Northern Areas was a purely local undertaking. People of the Karakoram are ‘natural’ builders, and they were only supported by itinerant craftsmen when available or for special jobs. Dark and cold winter months provided the ideal time for carving elements such as columns and panels, thus making each building a personalised structure. This has resulted in a great variety of buildings types and a fascinating wealth of ornamental features.

While the local approach to building tasks (as described in chapter 5) was often adequate, it also explains occasional structural and material problems we find when analysing historic buildings from a modern structural conservation point of view. To begin with, the later changes and repairs of originally well constructed historic buildings were commonly inadequate. Usually, the maintenance was conceived as a ‘quick fix’ – a short-term and temporary patch-up, cheaply done by unskilled workers, with a focus on materials and



Fig. 181. Enveloped in scaffolding: Baltit fort under restoration, seen from Ghulwating mosque (fig. 105).

not on structure, no recognition of heritage value and using poor quality locally made tools. Often the maintenance of religious buildings was neglected, perhaps because community motivation to carry out repairs was not sufficiently strong until a dangerous situation or an important religious occasion arose.

The principal cause for the loss of historic buildings is lack of proper maintenance related to progressive decay of structural timber components beyond a point when effective repair is still possible. Sometimes, their location and constricted spaces made them unsuitable for modern living styles. In stages of advanced decay, structural failures can no longer be handled in such a way as to recreate long-term stability. Further steps in this scenario of decay are the loss of the roof's integrity and walls being undermined at ground level, allowing water to seep in and accelerate the destructive process at critical structural connections, eventually resulting in the collapse of the whole building. The owner would not normally provide the right investment for new materials, for quality design and for large-scale structural intervention at the right time. Decayed buildings therefore are the 'norm' and once they have become ruins they serve as quarries of easily won materials for recycling.

A NEW CONSERVATION APPROACH

The creation of the Historic Cities Support Programme within the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in 1992 and the establishment of its Cultural Services company in Pakistan (AKCS-P), opened a new chapter with regard to conservation activities in the Northern Areas. For the first time, a consistent international conservation approach was applied to an increasing number of landmark monuments in the region. And, what is more, conservation became part of an all-embracing planning and socio-economic development strategy based on strong community involvement, training of local skills and building local institutional capacity (see chapters 12 and 13 in this book).

The conservation approach as such implied a few basic goals. The first goal was to stop further loss of historic buildings, since these now come under 'endangered species' in the region and constitute a finite and unique cultural resource. There are but a few monuments left, as compared with fifty years ago, and most of them have become untenable, unfashionable and too decayed for the modern living standards of their owners. Traditional houses are under considerable threat for replacement, with larger ones built from modern materials, especially reinforced concrete. The second goal, therefore, was to use conservation as a catalyst for upgrading traditional housing, ensuring a healthier environment with added modern facilities. The third goal was to utilise and extend the building skills of the local inhabitants and professionals, considering that restoration of historic buildings requires the use of the best conservation techniques – whether local and traditional or modern and imported.

The AKCS-P is committed to following conservation charters proposed by well-known international organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites), which recommend retaining the authenticity, character and charm of monuments and traditional housing and retaining the historic context. Within this context, the AKCS-P develops acceptable local solutions and promotes technical, management and maintenance skills that are implementable in the long term by the local inhabitants. The implemented projects are to provide a vehicle for the promotion of the physical heritage of the Northern Areas in the rest of Pakistan and overseas – as an educational asset, for cultural exchange, for tourism and for scientific research.

The aim of the conservation methods developed for the region has been to ensure high-quality work, as required to give the monuments and important traditional buildings a new life for the next hundred and more years. This means there should be no need for new major interventions that would tend to degrade authenticity. The practical measures to achieve this objective have been based on the following processes. Before intervening there is a project design period often resulting in a master plan for the whole intervention. This is accompanied by a programme of staff training in Pakistan (and sometimes abroad), as well as by practical training workshops on site. For each project, specific conservation techniques are experimented and tested in advance, in order to ensure that quality procedures are in place before applying them to the monument. Simultaneously, there is a period of thorough survey and monument documentation followed by engineering and architectural analysis. The documentation and conservation design is then reviewed by peers to ensure the highest standards of conservation work.

Key elements of conservation interventions include temporary work to ensure the safety of people and prevent the monuments from being damaged. The interventions are designed to be as simple and as minimal as possible, with the aim of providing structural continuity, that is, to let the building work and move about in the same way as the structural system already in place. This principle recognises that the building has usually been operating successfully for a long time, but also anticipates weaknesses that may cause future distress. The interventions leave as much original fabric in place as possible. As far as timber is concerned, the methods involve chemical treatment of active decay, local replacement in cases where timber splicing can result in restoring the respective elements' structural capacities, and replacement where timbers are highly decayed and are no longer working. With stone, the main interventions are fixing them in position and applying proper (but not excessive) cleaning, as stone is a strong and robust material. However, a stone wall may need stabilisation and selective stone substitution. Where a stone wall requires full replacement, the technique is to record and catalogue each stone so it is replaced in the same location and position.



Figs. 182, 183. Repairing the terraces below the fort by placing 'cators' and anchors to consolidate the steep slope.



Fig. 184. The old central staircase leading up from the lower floor entrance gate to the intermediate level and from there up to the main upper floor.

conservation aims to retain the dirt and smoke residue crusts attached to beams and walls, and in so doing retain smells, for example of fire tar residues.

A particular challenge is the replacement of many highly ornate window traceries and roof edge mouldings. It has taken many experimental trials to achieve the right level of consolidation and replacement, that is, to retain authenticity and consistency with regard to pattern regularity, accuracy of geometry, and the precision of chisel-cut textures. This is always achieved via the archaeological evidence of the original carved and turned elements. Each pattern has a story relating to its style, derivation and cultural meaning. Generally, timber floors have been found to have no great heritage value, as they are replaced every few years. However, some, when archaeologically investigated, prove to be multi-layered with older surfaces buried below new ones. The aim here is to retain these by protecting them and adding new wearing surfaces above.

The final stage of the conservation programme is the production of drawings and other documents tracking the intervention, setting suitable programmes for managing and maintaining the building and providing reference information for possible future interventions. The project is then shared with the public through access and publications.

BALTIT FORT: THE SITE AND THE BUILDING

Baltit fort is dramatically located at the top of a natural amphitheatre formed by terraced slopes, and the site was carefully chosen to control water extraction routes from the Ultar (*nullah*) behind (fig. 272). Water discharge from this catchment is distributed throughout the district, sustaining agriculture and habitation. Today, as always, water is carefully controlled and monitored by appointed village committees. Hereditary rights on water are complex, and have become more so as systems of secondary and tertiary channels have been added to the primary routes and as inheritances have repeatedly divided the surrounding fields into a jigsaw puzzle of ownership.

Mud mortar can hardly ever be retained where structural work occurs and cannot be reused, for it would lose some of its cementing characteristics. Often this also applies to the conservation of mud bricks. Most problematic is the conservation of renders when they are hiding structural and material defects. In such cases, the renders cannot be taken off and then reattached. However, in case renders are loose and there are no structural problems involved, special techniques are available for their reattachment, including the dribbling in of cementitious grouts in the hollow interstices. This is a most delicate task, as the grout can cause the soil renders to soften and dramatically slump off the wall. Wherever possible on the most important monuments,

Baltit village, now named Karimabad, is a very old settlement, and the size of the fort which dominates the village grew in response to the expansion and importance of the settlement. The villages of Ganish and Altit, the other two historic settlements of Hunza, are said to share a common ancestry with Baltit, resulting from migration into Hunza from Gor, an extremely old village located south of Gilgit, high up in the hills facing Chilas. Ganish village is situated on a plateau on the edge of the main river gorge, surrounded by large, fertile fields, and still today retains much of its original form. Altit village also developed around a fort and stands in a commanding position on a white marble bluff six hundred to seven hundred metres above the main river. Yet the focal point of the valley has always been the fort at Baltit.

Baltit fort is a remarkably complex building resulting from more than seven hundred years of 'organic' growth. When first inspected in 1980, the fort had been empty and not maintained for decades – hence the leaning walls, roof holes and graffiti all over the mud-stained, white-washed renders. Most possessions of monetary value had long ago been transferred to the *mir's* present palace, given away or stolen. Only a number of faded photographs and a range of local items, all in battered condition, remained within the deserted shell of the fort, providing some charm for the occasional visitors. It took more than ten years to unravel how the labyrinth of spaces and passageways evolved, with the restoration team becoming archaeological investigators and examining the finer details of how each wall was related to adjoining elements, both horizontally and vertically. More than sixty structural phases have been unravelled by forensic archaeology.

The fort is entered through a highly defendable small door, set in the main west façade. The route to it changed many times, originally being a footpath up loose scree slopes and then passing up between two grand flanking towers and bastioned curtain-wall. The outer wall seen today is a composite of two-storey rooms and spaces created in several phases less than two hundred years ago outside the older defences. Some added rooms created extra space but on the whole their main justification was to buttress older rooms inside the fort that were under threat of sliding down the hillside. The suspended and highly ornate veran-



Fig. 185. View of the restored roof, with a Tibetan-type lantern above the old reception room (see fig. 201).



Fig. 186. The restored projecting bay window and veranda. The bay window is a 'colonial' addition from the 1920s.

das (figs. 186, 195) are more recent elements and add to the imposing image of a fort turned into a palace. As they cantilever considerably off the façade they had later to be supported by a series of tall posts.

Within the entrance of the fort, an older defensive wall can be seen, as well as the distance between it and the subsequent latest enclosure (fig. 189). This gap was the fort's weakest area, to be watched over by the garrison. The stairs then lead up to the main reception area (fig. 184). Turning to the right, the arrangement of spaces illustrates the strategy adopted for defence against attackers. Turning to the left, one can see the oldest part of the fort, a base room of a once three- or four-storey *shikari* tower – but then chopped off, as at some point it had dramatically tilted to the south (fig. 87). A later tower used for storing armaments is located just beyond the top of the stairs, and next to this is a suite of rooms used by guests in the summer (now the library) (fig. 199). Off the reception area is the fort's kitchen and one of the oldest winter rooms, surviving with all its highly ornate columns and capitals.

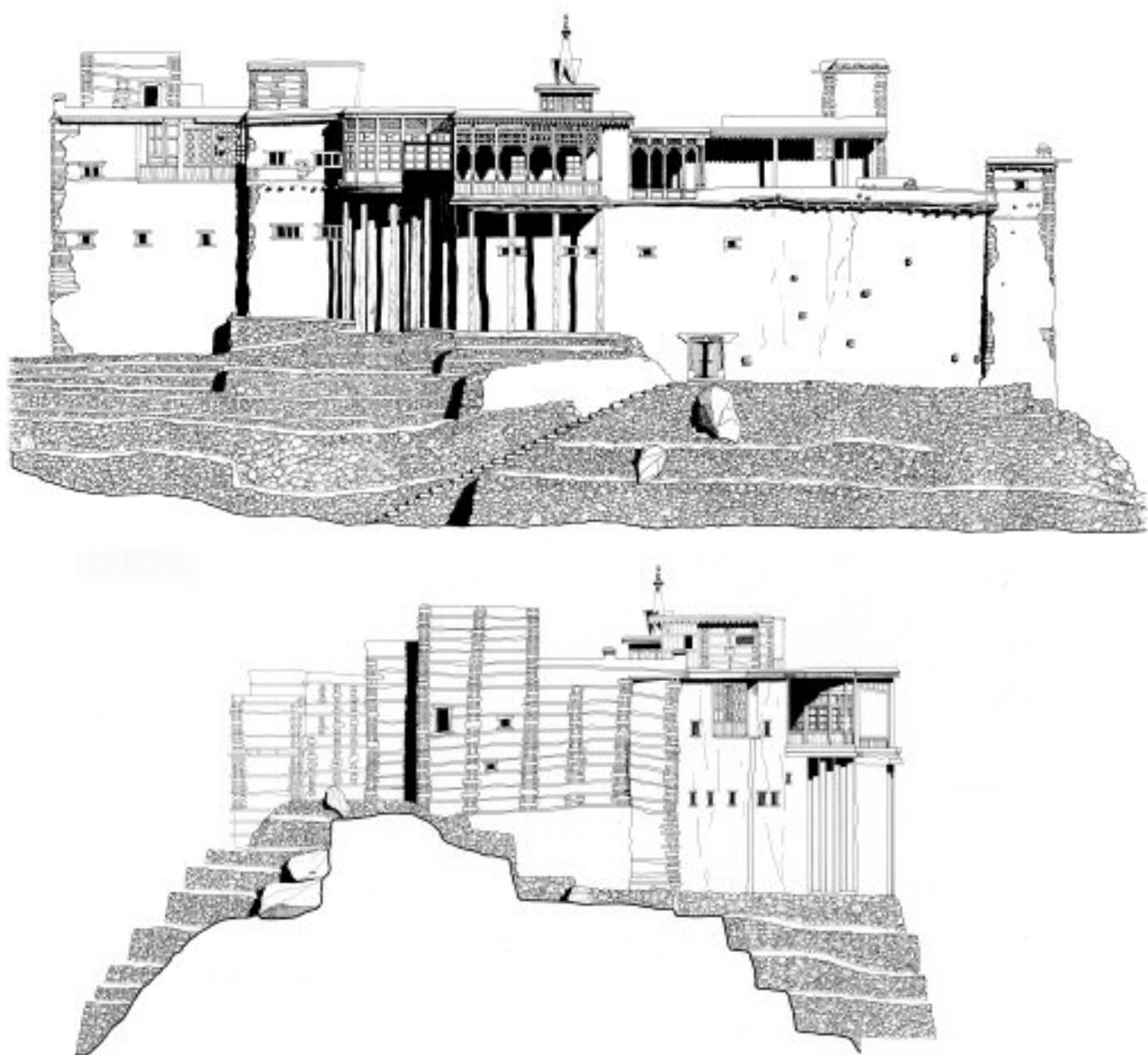
The south end of the fort is linked to the *rani's* (queen's) winter rooms (fig. 200) on the north end by a tunnel-like passage way. This illustrates how two, then three, original building complexes became joined (see plan fig. 193). The northern suite of rooms also illustrates the structures of a 'Type 1 fort' (see chapter 5), inasmuch as it was originally a *shikari* tower with dark and low single-storey rooms. (It now accommodates the emergency exit route.) Along the west side, the phased additional rooms became a series of guardrooms each with small shooting windows.

The second storey rooms were added to the older rooms below, often not on the same wall alignments, sometimes requiring the lower walls to be repositioned. Often walls also had to be suspended on beams in order to allow for bigger and nicer spaces above, mainly for summer use. Some of these rooms were then modified to create the *mir's* private rooms, reflecting influences of colonial architecture and furnishings (figs. 195, 197). The old bedrooms (fig. 196), however, were left in the traditional *ha* arrangement. The semi-round royal dais (fig. 202), the scene of so many royal receptions of internationally important guests and local festivities (fig. 300), was added after 1895. Attached to the *mir's* rooms, around an internal courtyard, additional quarters were arranged, used for servants (for example for the milk mothers) or as summer guest rooms. On the roof, the *mir* had his private mosque and stores. One can assume that here there was much summer activity, very similar to what still occurs down in the village.

THE CONSERVATION PROCESS

In 1992, when the physical restoration work started, Baltit fort was in a state of advanced decay, the roof resembling a patchwork of holes. Rainwater was able to flow freely into all parts of the building and even down to the foundations. Not surprisingly, the timberwork had absorbed humidity like a sponge and the renders were reduced to piles of soil mounded on the floors. Many walls were tilting to the point where collapse was imminent. Others had settled by half a metre, because they did not have foundations or sat on loose soil slopes.

Based on the principles stated in the introduction of this chapter, the AKCS-P was able to set up a comprehensive work plan, as initiated in 1989 with the appointment of the site architect and engineer. The building was divided up into a series of 'work stations', these reflecting the construction phases and how sub-units of the building worked as independent engineering entities. This was important, because if a cator-



Figs. 187, 188. Above, the western elevation facing the village and the valley. Below, the northern elevation showing the tip of the precarious hill on which Baltit fort is sitting.

and-cribbage-framed building deforms at one location this can easily transfer damage elsewhere. The conservation work was planned in stages. First, it was necessary to determine and then remedy the structural problems around the foundations and load bearing walls. This reinstatement then allowed for conservation of the architectural fabric and finishes, followed by the insertion of new elements required for the new uses and safety of the existing structure. In practice, however, the reinstatement phase was often amalgamated with the engineering repairs.

The major engineering works were along the front façade, especially around the south end. Here, the stabilisation of the foundations (fig. 191) and structural frame took nearly three years, requiring sophisticated engineering designs and construction techniques. During this work, older archaeological remains were found and successfully incorporated into the conservation project. This had to be done first, as it was essential to guarantee foundation stability before repairing the walls and then the roof. At each work station, the structural unit was thus repaired from the bottom upwards, with the overall roof and wall finishes completing the conservation sequence.

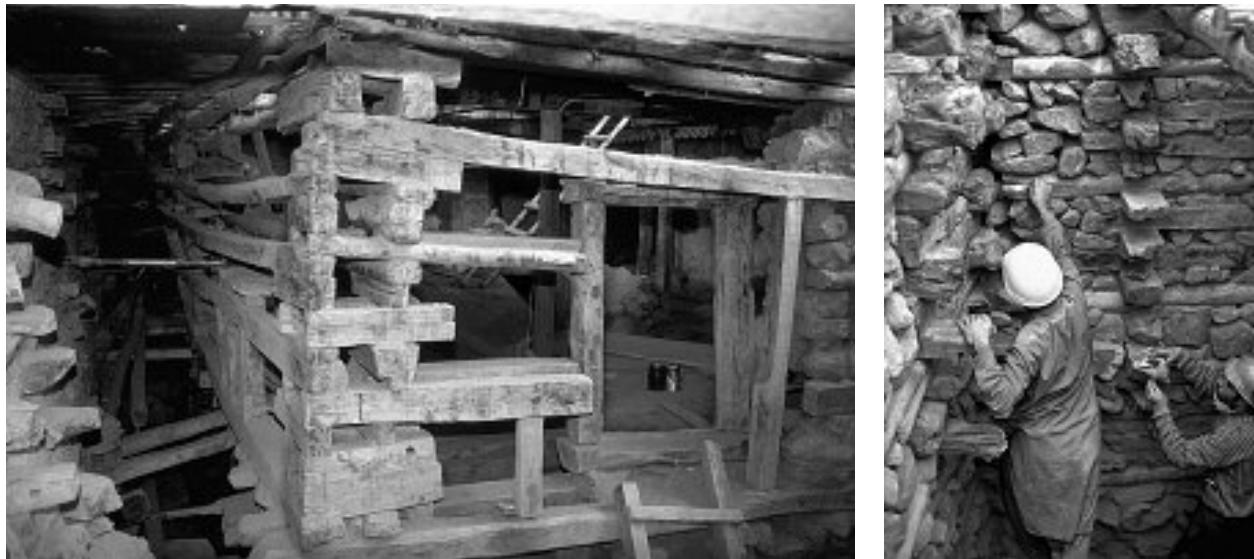
As the work at the south end took longer than anticipated, planned interventions at the north end were brought forward – so effectively conservation was occurring simultaneously all over the fort, requiring considerable orchestration. Fortunately, at the north end most surfaces of the structural units, the foundations and the timber framing were found to be in a much better condition. Thus more of the original features could be retained. In the kitchen it was even possible to preserve the sooty fire residue crusts on the roof beams. In the north part of the fort, great attention was given to the character of the new render, the old one having generally fallen off. Here it became necessary to skilfully create new surfaces that reflected on the underlying structure and construction fabric – which meant many days were given to experimentation and testing.

Whenever possible, traditional building techniques were used to conserve the fort. However, on certain occasions modern interventions were needed and appropriate. For the first time anywhere, synthetic poly-ethaline reinforcement meshes ('geotextiles') and ('kelvar') polymer anchor cables (fig. 189) were used for giving extra structural support. Boron-based wood preservatives were also applied. In many places, following exhaustive experimentation and field testing, stabilised soils were used – for example, to produce hard wearing floor surfaces where visitors would be tracking through the museum display rooms. Attention to detail is also evidenced in the case of coloured glass windows, where the materials were matched to the original French source and replacement panes were imported.

A major achievement of the fort restoration lies in the high quality carpentry work and especially in the skilfully restored carved wood features (as seen today in the veranda canopies along the top of the main façade looking over Karimabad), all executed by local master craftsmen. The project's carpentry workshop gave a big boost to the revival of local building techniques which triggered a 'snow-ball effect' with regard to the renovation and upgrading of houses in the historic settlements of Hunza (see chapter 12). Finally, the way in which engineering and restoration techniques have been implemented and left visible – whether traditional or modern – is of great interest as a testament to a successful conservation campaign.

GIVING NEW LIFE TO THE BUILDING

Apart from its importance as a historic monument, Baltit fort has great cultural and symbolic value for the local community and constitutes a major economic resource for tourism. The adaptive reuse project for the fort thus had to respond to a variety of concerns: it needed to meet the constraints imposed by architectural conservation; it needed to illustrate the long history of the fort in the context of evolving local traditions; it needed to contribute to the economic opportunities for the residents of the village; and it needed to generate sufficient income to sustain its operation and maintenance costs. Accordingly, the main function selected for the restored fort was those of a museum of local history, combined with an active cultural centre



Figs. 189, 190. Left, the original 'cage' construction of two subsequent layers of outer walls being stripped of defective stone and mud infill to be restored in the traditional manner. In the background a tensile cable tying the leaning walls together can be seen. Right, workers monitoring structural movements during the restoration process.

with associated facilities. The fort is expected to act as a focal point for renewed civic pride, as well as a centre for exchange between international institutions interested in the Northern Areas.

Converting a former private residence into a public facility always entails functional and architectural problems. This is particularly true in the case of a historic building, and even more so with a structure that has grown as an accretion of narrow fortified houses, with constricted interior passages and low doorways. Installing a museum and cultural centre at Baltit fort therefore required a certain number of difficult decisions (and occasional compromises), in order to adapt the traditional structure to contemporary needs. For the purpose of creating viable circuits for visitors, it was necessary to open a few new connecting doors, to add an emergency stair, and to introduce plumbing and lighting for basic facilities. A small kitchen was also created in a side room of the former women's quarters to enable special functions to be held in the *rani*'s summer courtyard, which can accommodate up to twenty-five people for concerts of traditional music and similar events. Such functions have been introduced without causing harm to the original structure.

The reuse project – conceived in cooperation with the architect and designer Didier Lefort – was facilitated by the fact that five old houses adjacent to the fort had been acquired by the Aga Khan Foundation to provide space for ancillary facilities. One of the houses close to the street leading up to the fort has been transformed into a ticket office, another into a small coffee house

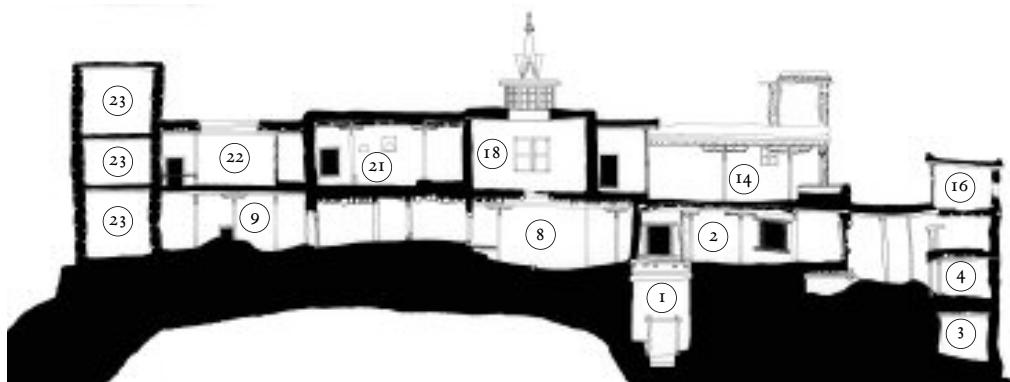
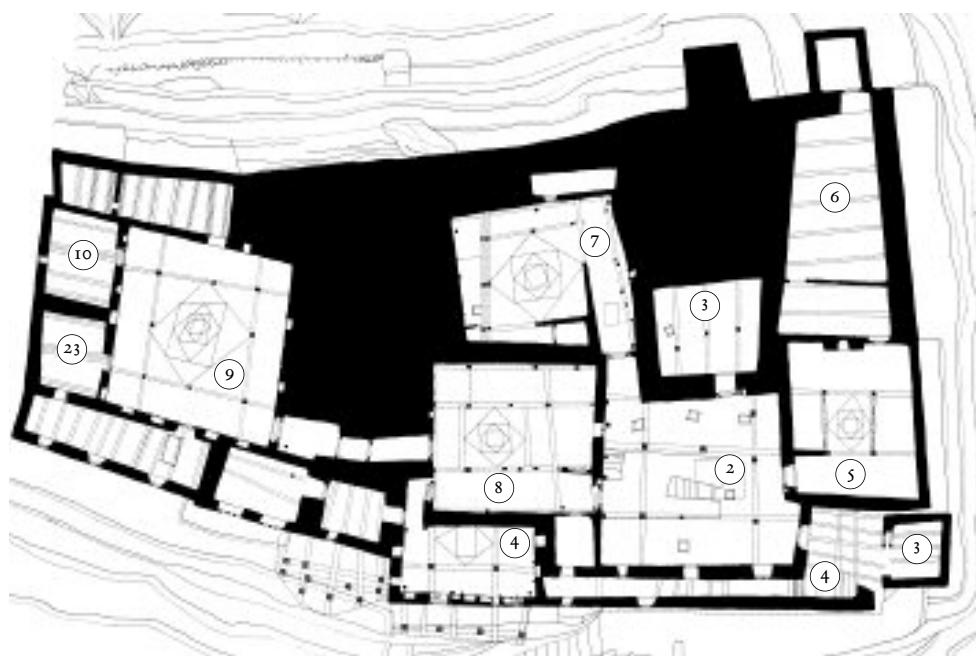


Fig. 191. Repairing the foundations after emptying the basement of rubble from collapsed older structures.



Legend:

1. Entrance staircase
2. First floor arrival lobby (fig. 184) and grain storage
3. Prison
4. Guard's rooms and guard's gallery (pl. 72)
5. Court room (now office)
6. Guest room (now library, fig. 199)
7. Kitchen
8. Living-room in former old tower, now audio-visual room
9. Queen's apartment (fig. 200)
10. Old tower, with new emergency staircase
11. Staircase landing
12. Royal dais (fig. 202)
13. *Wazir's* dais
14. Musicians' veranda
15. Armoury
16. Guard room
17. Open terraces
18. Waiting room with 'Tibetan' lantern (figs. 185, 201)
19. *Mir's* drawing and reception room (fig. 197)
20. *Mir's* living room and veranda (fig. 195)
21. *Mir's* bedroom (fig. 196)
22. Queen's summer apartment with courtyard (fig. 198)
23. Store rooms
24. Queen's summer bedroom
25. Guest rooms
26. Apartment for newly married couples
27. Living room
28. Toilet



Figs. 192-194. Plans of the second upper floor (above) and the first floor (below), as well as the longitudinal north-south section.



Figs. 195-200. Views of various interiors in the restored Baltit Fort.

Fig. 195: The *mir*'s 'colonial' living room, with projecting veranda on the second floor.

Fig. 196: The adjacent traditional bedroom of the *mir*.

Fig. 197: The *mir*'s drawing and reception room on the second floor with embroidered ceremonial carpet on the wall.

Fig. 198: The *rani*'s (queen's) summer room and courtyard on the second floor.

Fig. 199: The former guest room (now the library) on the first floor.

Fig. 200: The *rani*'s bedroom on the first floor.



Fig. 201. The old reception room and the interior of the Tibetan-type lantern (see fig. 185).

with public toilet facilities, and the remaining ones into storerooms and additional showrooms and workshop facilities. As in the case of the fort itself, these functional changes have been carried out with a preference for 'minimum intervention' and utmost respect for the historic features of the buildings, which have not been altered in substantial ways.

The planning of the museum and the research facilities in the fort was undertaken with the intention of enhancing, rather than overshadowing, the architectural features, which constitute the main focus of attention. In most cases they can be removed with no effects to the conserved structure. Thus, the traditional rooms on the lower floor, with their attractive carved timber columns and beams, have been kept as they were and highlighted by integrated light fixtures (fig. 200). No modern showcases or modern exhibition items were foreseen except artefacts which relate to the traditional functions of the fort, such as wooden trunks and various utensils. Meanwhile, the more neutral and less decorated rooms, such as those along the defensive gallery between the two subsequent front walls of the fort, are used to exhibit documents relating to the history of the area and the building, including the conservation of the

fort. The gentrified, more palatial rooms on the second floor provide the ideal setting to exhibit what was left of the *mir's* private collections (figs. 195, 197). Special features are some of the old carpets used in the fort (partly of Kashgar origin), furniture, ceremonial robes, and weapons. Wherever possible, existing niches and shelves have been adapted for exhibition purposes, complemented by a number of newly designed showcases providing security and good lighting. The massive timber frames of the new showcases respond to the predominance of wooden elements in the structure of the fort.



Figs. 202, 203. The restored dais on the main upper floor, and a local craftsman completing the missing ornamental timber features.





68.

Previous page

67. Interior of Altit fort before restoration, with temporary shoring.

68. View of Baltit fort, before restoration.

69, 70. The first floor entry hall with the stair leading to the upper terrace (figs. 192, 193) before and after restoration.

71. Baltit fort under restoration, including the terraces, retaining walls and houses below.

72. The restored first-floor former guard rooms along the western front elevation, now part of the museum exhibition.

73. The *mir's* drawing/reception room, restored, with ceremonial embroidery on the wall.

74. The waiting room, with a showcase containing the *mir's* ceremonial robe.



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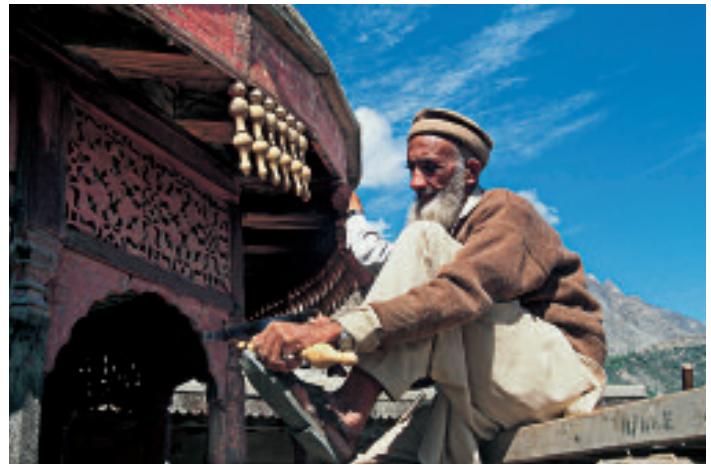


75. The restored and illuminated Baltit fort.

76. The *rani's* (queen's) summer quarters on the second floor, a part of the museum which can also be used for visitors' entertainment.

77. Old master carpenter repairing timber decoration of the dais of Baltit fort.

78. The former *mir's* bedroom, restored, with historic utensils.



77.



78.



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80.



81.

79. Shigar fort/palace as found in 1999.
Left, the Old House; right, the steps
leading up to the Garden House.

80. Traces of the old audience hall of the fort,
buried in more recent construction (see figs. 228-233).

81. The *raja*'s room on the second floor,
as found (see also figs. 246, 254).



82.



83.



84.



85.

82. The courtyard of the fort on the raised platform during works, after stripping all dilapidated structures and before restoring missing elements (compare with pl. 88). On the left side, the remains of Module I, with the fragmented audience hall on the ground floor.

83. Rendering interior walls with stabilised soil plaster.

84. Mounting new *jali* screens on the restored bay window of the *rāja's* room on the second floor.

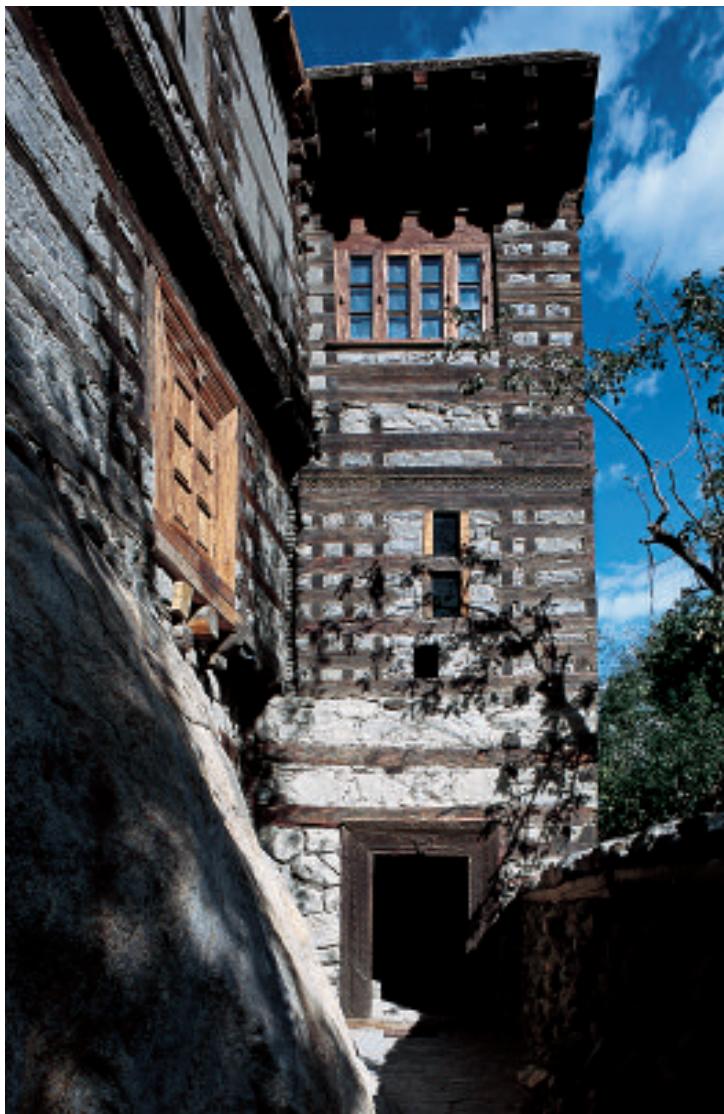
85. The on-site carpentry and joinery workshop of the Shigar fort project.



86.



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87.



88.

86. The first floor vestibule of Module II giving access to the guest rooms of the new Shigar Fort Residence.

87. The ground level entrance to the 'fort on the rock' giving access to a new staircase built into the old watchtower.

88. The courtyard of the restored Shigar fort/palace, now Shigar Fort Residence, at night.

89, 90. Two typical guest rooms in Module II maintaining the essential architectural features of the old fort/palace and complementing them with light and unobtrusive contemporary furniture, as well as historic objects.



89.



90.



91.



92.

91. The restored audience hall of Shigar fort, now a museum of Balti woodcarving, with the reinstated central column and the reclaimed original room size (see also fig. 232).

92. Night view of the restaurant in the ground floor of the Old House adjacent to the fort (see plans in figs. 234-237) with 'cyclopean' stone masonry on the left wall.

93, 94. The lounge on the first floor of the Old House and the adjacent veranda overlooking the river.

95. View of the restored Old House and the entry courtyard to Shigar Fort Residence.



93.



94.



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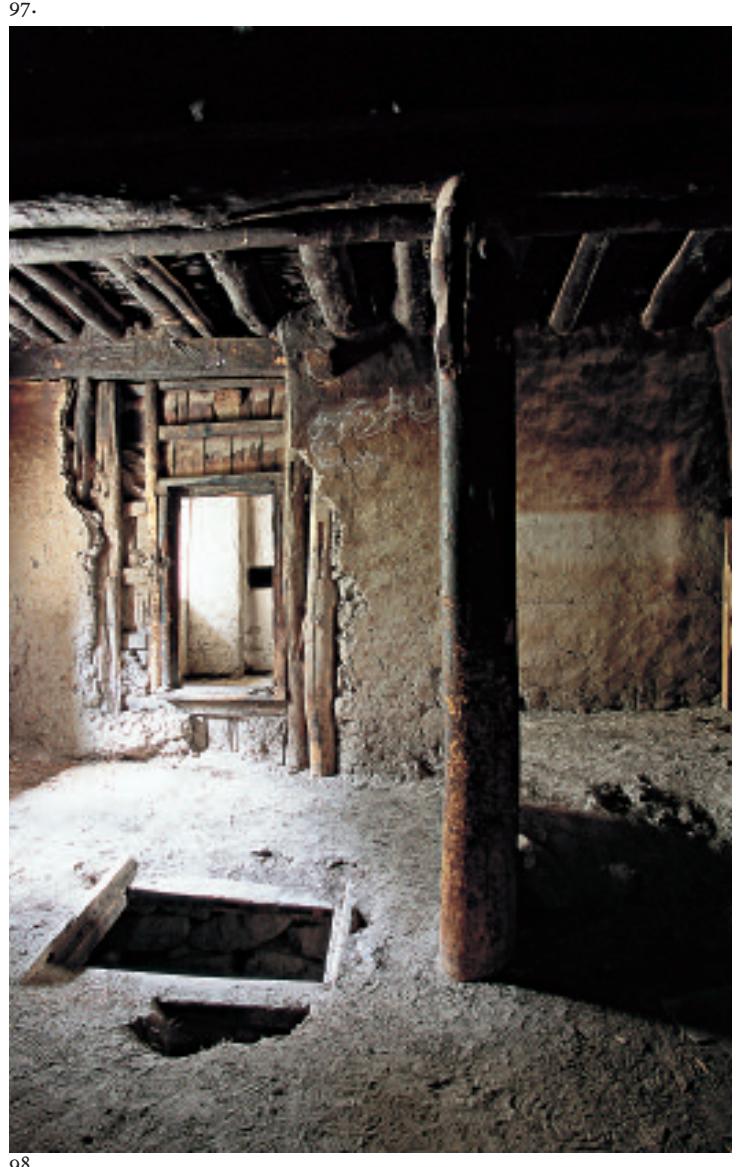


96.

96. View of the back side of Khaplu palace (for front side see pl. 44) in its present condition. This building is another candidate for restoration and adaptive reuse.

97. The former reception area inside the courtyard of Khaplu palace.

98. A room of Khaplu palace in its typical present condition.





99.

99. The Sayyed Mohammad shrine and tomb (*astana*) in Khaplu before restoration. It had to be completely dismantled and rebuilt by using as much as possible of the old timber components (see also fig. 294).

100. The restored enclosure of the shrine, inside the veranda (for interior see pl. 53).

101. The reconstructed roof spire.



100.



101.



102.



103.

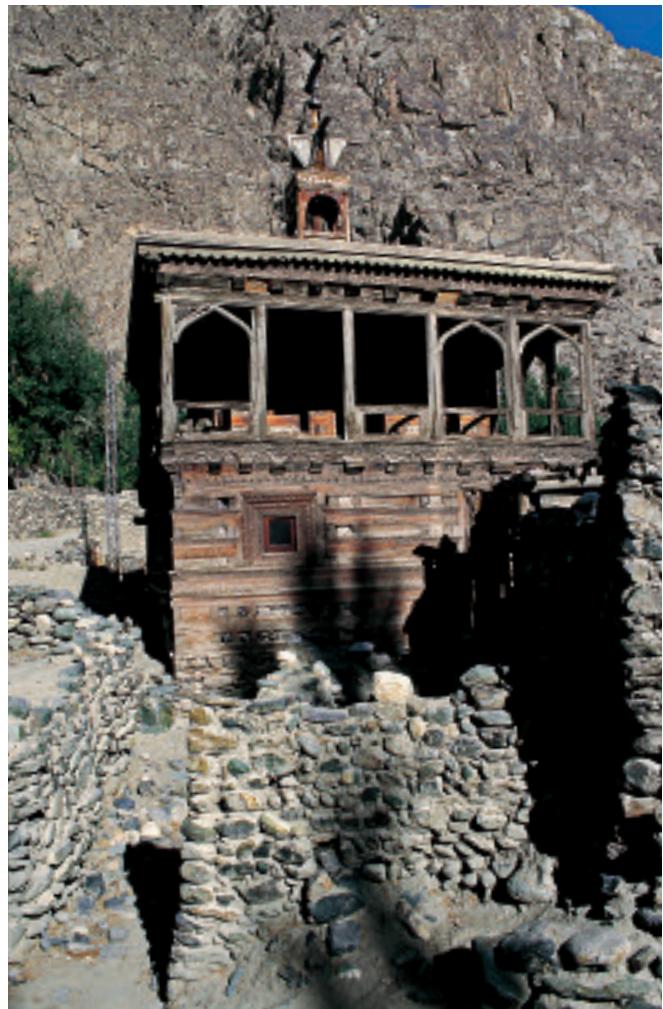




105.

105. The simple prayer room
in Shigar fort/palace, after restoration.

106. The restored Khilingrong mosque
near Shigar fort/palace.



106.

An important part of the collection, particularly the vernacular artefacts of daily use such as stone vessels, wooden utensils, metalwork, furniture items, and clothing, was donated by the residents of Karimabad, following an appeal launched in autumn 1994. Other items have been purchased from the local bazaar or from individual owners. When not on display, these artefacts have become part of a major stored collection available for research purposes. However, the cultural centre will not only preserve and exhibit items of the traditional crafts, but will also endeavour to create new development opportunities for local crafts people. A new initiative in this domain was begun in spring 1995 by the AKCS-P with the new Karakoram Handicraft Development Centre. The first products of this craft promotion project were the *sharma* weavings used to cover the floors of the museum and cultural centre.

The main rooms of the cultural centre have been accommodated on the first floor, around the small courtyard which is reached by the stairway leading up from the main entrance. A traditional living-room (*ha*) with a covered roof opening serves for audio-visual presentations, while on the other side of the courtyard, on the southern end of the building, a library and study centre have been accommodated, with their floors suspended above the excavated archaeological areas of the fort. The library will contain a basic stock of publications relevant to Hunza and the fort, and is expected to become a study centre and field base for national and international research missions.

The conservation and adaptive reuse of Baltit fort was completed in the spring of 1996. The restored building was officially opened by His Highness and the then President of Pakistan and handed over to the Baltit Heritage Trust (see chapter 13). The quality of the conservation can be judged by the fact that today, almost ten years after completion, the amount of maintenance has been minimal. In 2004, the fort was honoured with the highest conservation award of UNESCO.

THE FUTURE RESTORATION OF ALSTIT FORT

Altit fort is another of the great monuments of the Northern Areas. Indeed, the *shikari* tower is some three hundred years older than the first phase of Baltit fort, making it the oldest surviving standing structure in the western Himalayas (see also chapter 5). Arguably, it is also the most spectacularly sited fort, built on the very edge of the main Hunza gorge and with 200-metre-high sheer cliffs before precipitous slopes cascade down towards the river (pl. 40). Its importance stems from the control it exercised on the local farming community and especially on the whole valley and the upstream communication routes. It participated in creating a safe environment, allowing agriculture to flourish in the natural Karimabad amphitheatre.



Fig. 204. On the gallery of unrestored Altit fort, close to the entrance to the *shikari* tower.



Figs. 205, 206. D. Lorimer's 1935 photographs of the main room in Altit fort, with elaborate woodcarving.

Like all other forts, Altit is abandoned and decaying. Some stabilisation measures on the roof were applied by the AKCS-P team a few years ago to keep out rain, and some walls were supported by temporary structural devices, as they were teetering on the edge of the cliff. Such failing is the result of wood decay, related to poorly formed stone and adobe walls, and is also due to the high level of exposure of the fort to strong drying winds and occasional storms.

The conservation strategy for Altit fort developed in 2004 is to preserve it 'as found', that is, basically as an empty shell. Most conservation works therefore will relate to mending structural defects, stabilising existing walls, reattaching render to the wall substrate, replacing some roofs, treating wood decay and providing a nominal amount of lighting. However, there are some walls that current investigation shows as being too unstable. Here the infill will be removed to allow the walls to be jacked back to more vertical positions. The stone and/or adobe soil blocks will be replaced in their original positions – making use of survey drawings and photographs. There will be virtually no works related to new functions, as any adaptive reuse has been discarded. This rather purist concept, an exciting objective in its own right, will significantly differ from solutions applied to Baltit fort, Ganish village and Shigar palace. Together, these buildings and the respective interventions exemplify the wide range of conservation approaches which can be pursued according to different circumstances.