The historic urban Wall is the south-eastern segment of Cairo’s Ayyubid fortifications, which were partially exposed during the works to create the new Azhar Park. The Wall measures over 1500 metres in length, running north from Bab al-Wazir to al-Azhar Street, and forms the boundary between the Darb al-Ahmar district of Historic Cairo and the new Park. It is the longest and best-preserved portion of Cairo’s old fortifications. Following preliminary investigations, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) began restoration works in 2000. Most of the work along the side facing the Park was completed in 2008.

Built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Salah al-Din and his successors, this portion of the city wall was Cairo’s eastern boundary for centuries. Over time, its role changed although it continued to be a defining element for the city, it long ago ceased to be a defensive structure. This shift in function meant that the city gradually spread to and into the very edge of the Wall, following an accretive process common to historic cities everywhere. From the fifteenth century onwards, the area just outside the Wall began to be used as a dumping ground and the Wall gradually disappeared under the debris, where, in fact, it remained protected from the ravages of time and weather.

Today, following the interventions to create the Park, the outer face of the Historic Wall is once again exposed to view and to the elements, while, on the city side, private development pressures as well as institutional requirements raise complex urban development issues. The interventions considered not only the preservation of the Wall, but also how best to intervene in the surrounding urban context. Thus, comprehensive restoration, planning and design policies were established with regard to the monument itself, as well as the residential fabric abutting the Wall, the historic gates and the pedestrian promenade along the western edge of the new Park.

History

Construction of the Historic Wall was begun in 1176 by Salah al-Din, a Kurd of the Ayyubid clan who came to Cairo from Syria and overthrew the Fatimid caliphate in 1171. Salah al-Din’s idea of a single wall surrounding the entire city of Cairo would prove a long-lasting legacy. The new fortifications encircled...
within a single system the Citadel and the Fatimid city, as well as the pre-Fatimid settlements of Fustat, al-Askar and al-Qata'ii. The new city walls were built entirely of stone and made use of new advanced defensive techniques imported from Syria, with bent entrances and arrow slits reaching to the floor.

The east Wall was built as part of the new fortification and seems to have remained important for two centuries after its construction. Soon after, as the threat posed by crusader armies and other invaders declined, so did the importance of maintaining the defensive walls. On the eastern side, urban expansion virtually stopped. Already during the late Mamluk and early Ottoman periods, although the walls continued to mark the limits of the Old City, the area outside the fortifications became a dumping ground, a practice that continued unabated during the following centuries.

The maps drawn at the time of the French occupation, around 1800, in fact show that buildings in Darb al-Ahmar were generally built right up to the edge of the city. During the rest of the nineteenth century an increasing number of travellers came to Egypt, who sketched and photographed what they saw. A series of panoramas taken by French photographer Pascal Sebah in 1880 provides one of the most valuable visual documents of the eastern Historic Wall, showing that much of the original stonework, including the crenellations, still existed at that time.

In 1882 the government established the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe to preserve Egypt’s Islamic and Christian architectural heritage. Although the Comité repaired the city walls from time to time during the first half of the twentieth century, it was not until 1950 that they undertook a major campaign along the eastern Historic Wall. This consisted of the reconstruction of two towers along with extensive replacement of the missing facing stonework in several areas of the flank wall. For the next fifty years no further repairs or restoration were undertaken.
The Historic Wall remained, as it had been for centuries, the eastern boundary of the densely built-up Darb al-Ahmar district of Historic Cairo. The continuous dumping of rubbish meant that the mounds of debris, now known as the Darassa Hills, had buried the outer face of the Wall all the way up to the level of the crenelations. It was only after AKTC began moving earth for the future Azhar Park that the accumulated debris was removed. The regrading brought to light not only the buried section of the Wall known through early photographs and historic maps, but also the northern section, unreco...
Background

**BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE**

The eastern portion of the Historic Wall is part of the city wall of Cairo built by Salah al-Din in the later part of the 12th century to contain the Fatimid city and its suburbs, as well as the pre-Fatimid city of Fustat, within a single fortification system. In the following centuries, the area outside the eastern wall became a dumping ground, rising to a height of some 30 metres and eventually burying the fortifications under the debris. The accumulation of black crust or carbon soot, cracking, delamination, distinguished cases of surface erosion, and the presence of salts and metal stains. In addition, housing encroachments were classified by type and included houses built along the back face of the Wall; over part of the rampart within the interior galleries; and to replace, in part or in full, entire sections of the Wall.

**SITE CONDITIONS**

The poor state of conservation and unstable conditions of some portions of the Historic Wall required extensive shoring. Also housing encroachments against the walls, as well as inside and on top of the one-time fortifications, posed an additional challenge and greatly complicated restoration work. New water and sewer connections had to be established for the houses abutting the Wall to avoid infiltration of water and rising damp. New concealed electrical installations for electrical works, all restoration activities were carried out with direct labour recruited by AKTC, often from the resident community, and supervised by the project’s professional staff.

**BUILDING CONDITIONS**

The recording of the Wall’s general conditions (Level 1) distinguished between total loss (core and facing stones), partial loss (facing stones and parts of the core walls), loss of facing stones, abutment instability, presence of earlier repairs, base erosion, and loss of planking along the ramparts. The detailed survey (Level 2) recorded the conditions of the individual stones and distinguished cases of surface erosion, and the presence of black crust or carbon soil, cracking, delamination, detachment, disaggregation, displacement, falling, loss and the presence of salts and metal stains. In addition, housing encroachments were classified by type and included houses built along the back face of the Wall; over part of the rampart within the interior galleries; and to replace, in part or in full, entire sections of the Wall. New concealed electrical installations for electrical works, all restoration activities were carried out with direct labour recruited by AKTC, often from the resident community, and supervised by the project’s professional staff.

**PLANNING ISSUES**

Public participation was a key aspect of the project. This was done through a comprehensive public awareness campaign and the establishment of presentation circuits, rehabilitation of houses encroaching on the Wall, promenades on the ramparts and at the base of the Wall and rehabilitation of interior galleries and passages.

**VOCATIONAL TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING**

In order to disseminate and reinforce local expertise in architectural conservation, the Historic Wall restoration served as a training ground for the development of skills among Egyptian professionals and craftsmen. On-the-job training activities included the cutting, dressing and leveling of stones, preparation and use of mortars and renders, stone masonry repair and cleaning, and stone masonry construction.

**CONTRACTING METHODS**

With the acceptance of a limited number of subcontracts for electrical works, all restoration activities were carried out with direct labour recruited by AKTC, often from the resident community, and supervised by the project’s professional staff.

**SIGNIFICANT ISSUES AND IMPACT**

**DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS**

The documentation prepared before the interventions included architectural, archaeological and condition surveys. In addition, laboratory analyses on existing mortars and stones were carried out throughout the restoration work to identify best matches and compatible materials.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The materials and techniques were based on documented examples of similar types of interventions carried out elsewhere in the region.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Techniques and guidelines for the treatment, repair and replacement of interventions in traditional construction, as well as the characterization and matching of traditional mortars, were thoroughly investigated and tested during the course of the project. This work provides lessons which can be applied to similar AKTC HCP projects carried out in the surrounding region and elsewhere.

**PHASING**

**1999**

Excavation of eastern section completed, start of archaeological excavation on Urban Triangle

**2000**

Opening of Bab al-Mahruq Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Opening of Darb al-Barquiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Opening of Darb al-Qanawiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

**2001**

Completion of the Historic Wall restoration

**2002**

Reopening of Bab al-Qanawiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Reopening of Bab al-Mahruq Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Reopening of Darb al-Barquiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

**2003**

Reopening of Bab al-Qanawiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Reopening of Bab al-Mahruq Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Reopening of Darb al-Barquiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

**2004**

Reopening of Bab al-Qanawiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Reopening of Bab al-Mahruq Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

Reopening of Darb al-Barquiyya Gate from Darb al-Ahmar

**RELEVANT CODES/STANDARDS ADOPTED**

All conservation work was undertaken in accordance with the relevant international charters and in keeping with Egyptian antiquities laws and procedures. The formulation of standards and operational guidelines drew on documented examples of similar types of interventions carried out elsewhere in the region.