

# Wazir Khan Mosque

LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Wazir Khan Mosque is the centrepiece of a historic urban ensemble in the Walled City of Lahore. The Mosque was built in 1634 by Hakim Alimuddin who was granted the title of Wazir Khan on Shah Jahan's accession to the Mughal throne in 1628. It is founded on the site of an old Sufi convent – associated with the saint Syed Ishaq Gazruni (d. AD 1284/AH 786) – between the limits of the Old City and the new city walls built a century earlier by Shah Jahan's grandfather, Emperor Akbar. In this still developing space, the Mosque complex was an ambitious and unprecedented piece of urban design. The grave of Syed Ishaq Gazruni was included in the fabric of the Mosque. At the time of its construction it was considered the largest mosque within the fortifications of Lahore and superseded the Begum Shahi Mosque (constructed by Emperor Jahangir in 1614) as the congregational mosque of the city.

Wazir Khan Mosque is located at a distance of about 260 metres from the Delhi Gate on the route to Lahore Fort and is surrounded by the thick urban fabric of the Walled City. The physical context comprises the Chowk (a square urban open space), Chitta Gate and the buildings fronting the square and the bazaar. The houses on the south side define the southern limits of the Mosque and street defines the border between the Mosque and the urban fabric on the west side. On the northern side the bazaar opens up at a fork to form the Kotwali Chowk, which was the space in front of the Mughal-period city police station, the *kotwali*, no longer existing. Historically, as part of the thoroughfare connecting Delhi Gate and Lahore Fort, Wazir Khan Mosque, together with its square, formed a singularly important element punctuating the urban fabric of the Walled City.

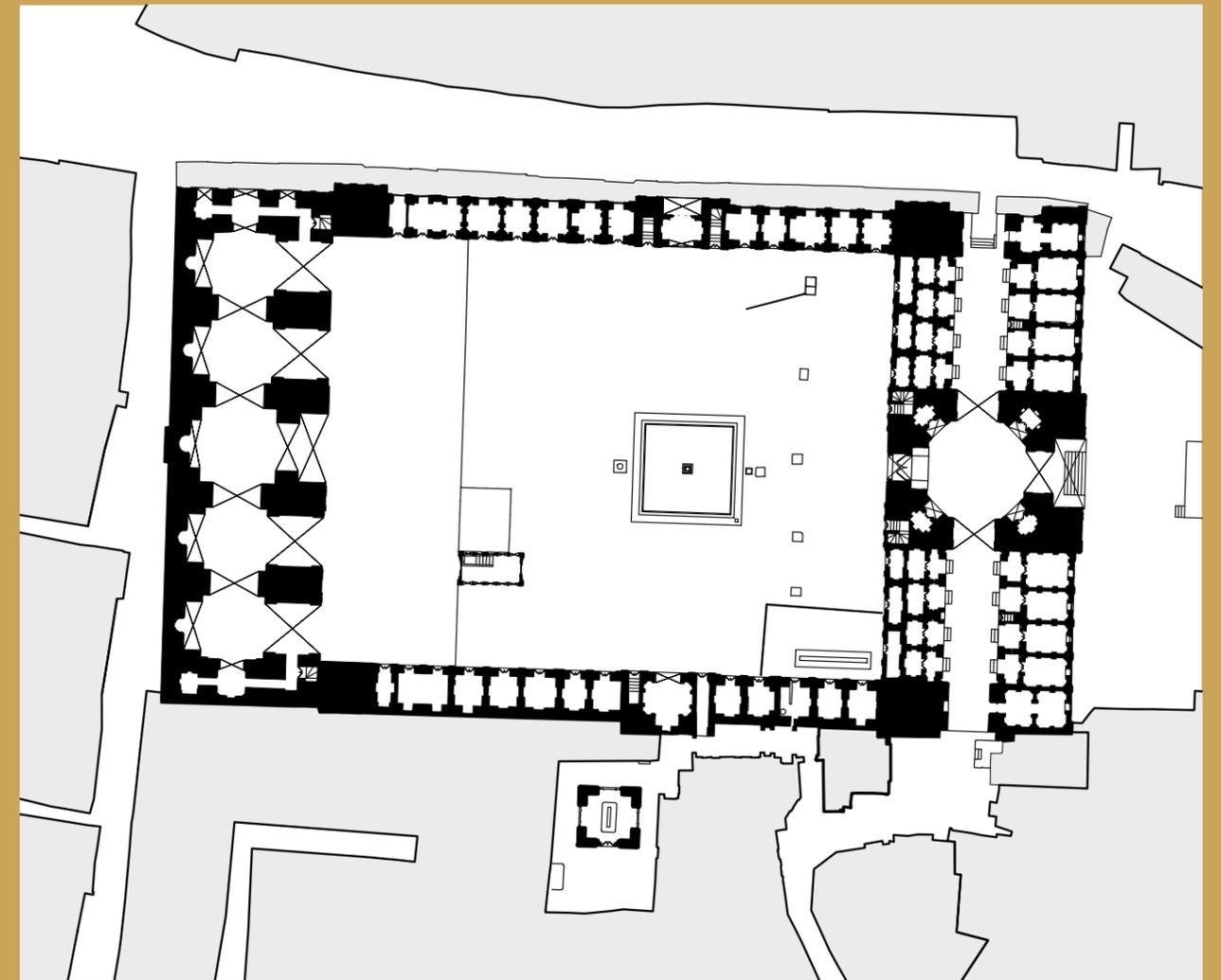
Of the fourteenth-century Sufi establishment nothing but three grave sites remain. Of these the grave of Syed Ishaq Gazruni was made part of the fabric of the Mosque, and is accessed by a staircase in the main courtyard, marked by an elaborate pavilion. The original level of his grave is about 2.5 metres below the level of the Mosque's courtyard.

The Mosque's layout comprises a large quadrangular plan, with the heavily built prayer chamber housing five in-line domed cells located at the *qibla* end of the courtyard. The main building of the Mosque and its inner courtyard is supplemented by a bazaar with two rows of shops – intended for calligraphers and



The eastern facade of the main prayer chamber of Wazir Khan Mosque, seen from the courtyard.

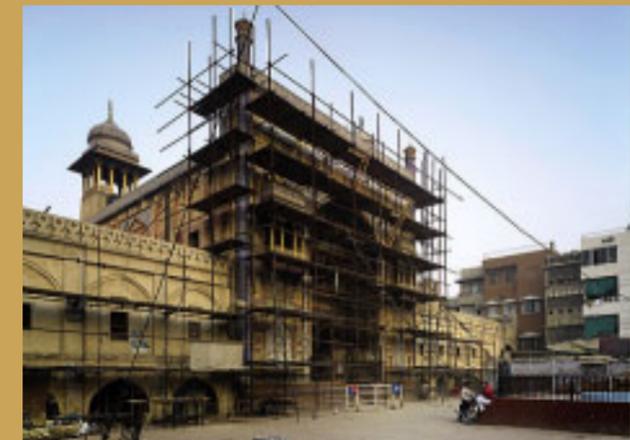
Opposite page:  
Scaffolding has been erected to enable a thorough documentation of the building.



N  
10m

## Project Scope/ Objectives

AKTC is working on the conservation of Wazir Khan Mosque and providing planning assistance towards the reorganization of the space in front of the Mosque with the objective of improving the quality of the urban environment. Goals are the relocation of infrastructure underground and the return of the Mosque to its original urban setting.





Above right, the eastern facade of the main prayer chamber of Wazir Khan Mosque while a detail, on the left, shows the intricate tile-work on the same facade.

book binders – at right angles to the axial direction upon entering the courtyard. The Chowk, a square open forecourt outside the Mosque, was part of a conscious attempt at formal urban design and an immediate precursor to other great urban compositions of Shah Jahan's time.

The chief architectural and artistic characteristic of the Mosque resides in its profuse surface decoration both on the exterior and in the interior. On the exterior, the decoration comprises a combination of fine exposed brickwork and a framework of plaster render with a thin layer of *faux* brickwork. This forms the overriding frame for dramatically coloured glazed-tile mosaics in floral and arboreal motifs as well as depicting calligraphic quotations from the Qur'an, the Hadith and other verses. Interior surfaces, entirely covered by fresco-work, have been touched up or painted over down the centuries by successive attempts at 'restoration', so much so that no original work appears to exist any longer. Of the delicate Mughal surface ornaments and decorative techniques, the most vividly displayed are the glazed-tile mural decoration and calligraphy which, despite its chromatic exuberance, recalls Safavid monuments in Isfahan (Iran), built only a few years before, and earlier Timurid architectural antecedents.

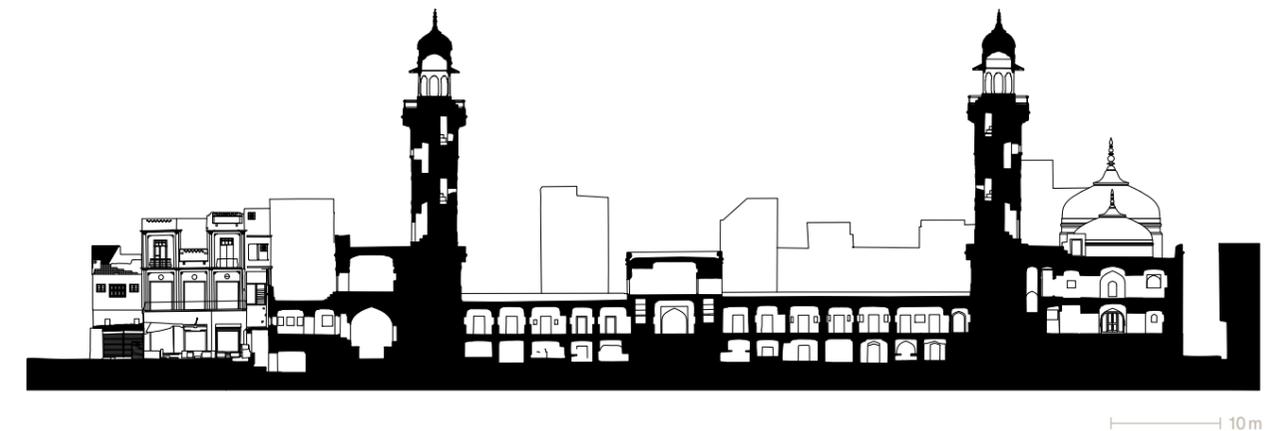
The Mosque has undergone serious damage. Heavy ingress of rain and waste water has damaged the floor of the rooms and the courtyard. Inappropriate commercial activity in the shops on the main facade poses a hazard to the building's fabric.

The four minarets, thirty-six metres in height from the street, have leaned out to varying but not alarming degrees. The movement of the two minarets adjacent to the main prayer chamber has caused cracks in the arches and roof structure of the end bays. Structural investigations suggest successive earthquakes as the cause of this behaviour. That the cracks existed prior to 1971 is confirmed from the record of repair work begun at that time.

Since March 2009 major architectural and damage documentation of the Mosque complex has been under way. Detailed electronic documentation of the building provides the basis for examining the nature and extent of damage and for assessing the extent of conservation measures. Geotechnical investigations have been completed and measures to carry out structural consolidation of the monument are being designed. Assessment of the building and the condition of its foundations indicate that major structural cracks are not related to ongoing structural behaviour. A programme for the conservation of the Mosque, to be implemented in several stages, is being developed.

Above, Wazir Khan Mosque is located in a heavily built-up environment.

Below, the east-west section of the Mosque.



10 m



## Background

### BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE

Wazir Khan Mosque was built in 1634 by Hakim Alimuddin Ansari, the famous governor of the region under Emperor Shah Jahan. When still Prince Khurram, Shah Jahan had employed Hakim Alimuddin as his court physician. Upon ascending the throne, Shah Jahan appointed him governor of Lahore with the title Wazir Khan. A 14th-century Sufi convent associated with Syed Ishaq Gazruni existed on the site of the Mosque. The monument is noteworthy for its rich glazed-tile decorations.

## Challenges

### PROJECT RISKS

The minarets of the Mosque have leaned outwards. The base of the two western minarets, attached to the main prayer chamber, have induced structural cracks in the chamber. Structural investigations suggest that in all likelihood the cracks developed as a result of successive earthquakes. The conservation and restoration of the surface decorations in the Mosque, including its tile revetments, are costly and time-intensive operations and will require sustainable development of the appropriate skills. Pilot projects for key decorative crafts are proposed to be initiated. These are fresco murals, ceramic tiles and lime plasters. For post-conservation monitoring and maintenance, appropriate capacity in the maintenance agency is proposed to be developed.

### SITE CONDITIONS

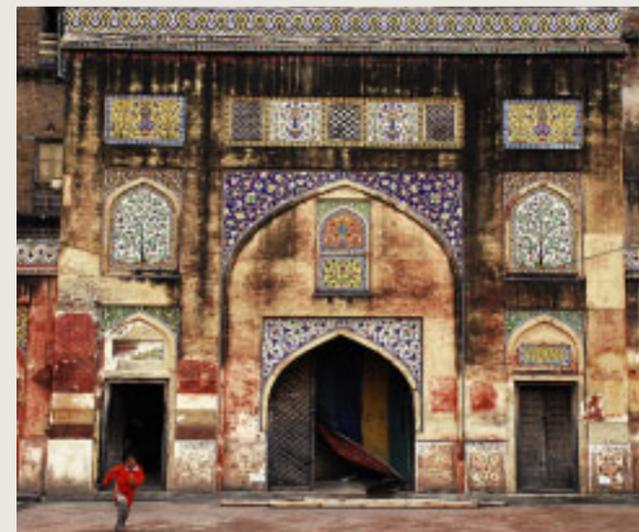
The diagonal connection from Chitta Gate to the gate leading out of the square on the north-eastern corner of the Mosque has now been transformed into a bazaar as a result of encroaching shops. A detailed survey has revealed that most of the shops, fronting the square on its eastern and northern sides, have encroached into the square. Some fragments of the original 17th-century shops on the perimeter of the square are nested deep within the new structures. The historical openness of the square has been seriously sacrificed to low-value structures. Increasing presence of commercial activities during the last four decades has resulted in ill-maintained shops and structures that have ultimately distorted the form of the open space and the monument.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

The project aims to improve the existing infrastructure in the Mosque complex. Water supply, rain and waste water disposal, gas supply and electrification have all created serious problems since their introduction during past restoration efforts. An example of the negative impact is the settlement in the courtyard floor in various locations due to the heavy ingress of water resulting from inadequate drainage.

### BUILDING CONDITIONS

As the street level has risen over the centuries most of the original shops on the northern side, rented out to an assortment of businesses, have lost accessibility from the street and currently exist as storage space for shops built onto the face of the Mosque and encroach into the street space. Commercial activity, such as steel fabrication in the shops (on the main facade on the eastern side), is a huge threat to the structure of the Mosque. The Mosque has undergone serious damage due to inadequate maintenance and care.



Opposite page:  
The interior of the main prayer chamber, looking north, and, on the left, a detail of a courtyard facade.

## Significant Issues and Impact

### DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS

Since March 2009 major architectural and damage documentation of the Mosque complex is underway. Geotechnical investigations have been completed and measures to carry out structural consolidation of the monument are being designed.

### MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

At the end of the documentation and analysis stage a master conservation plan is being prepared.

### PLANNING ISSUES

The problems of building control and the regulation of the urban fabric, widespread in the Walled City, are equally applicable to the Wazir Khan Mosque complex. Equally important is how the present capacities for the protection and administration of the architectural heritage and levels of conservation skills presently available can be made more effective and sustainable.

### HISTORIC BUILDINGS/MONUMENTS CONSERVED

A conservation programme for the Mosque is being developed and will be implemented over several stages. In the first stage structural and architectural investigations have been carried out.

### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/PROGRAMME

An initiative to involve the local community in the process of documentation and enhancing building skills has already been started and will be extended during the restoration of the Mosque.

### CONTRACTING METHODS

The work will be carried out by employing skilled and unskilled workers, and the project management will be carried out by AKTC staff. Building contractors in the field of conservation do not exist in Pakistan.

### NEW TECHNOLOGIES INTRODUCED

Real-time EDM/CAD documentation and photo-rectification software has been used for the first time in a protected monument in Pakistan.

### RELEVANT CODES/STANDARDS ADOPTED

The 'International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites' (the Venice Charter), 1964, is the principal document for the documentation and restoration of the monumental complex.

### LESSONS LEARNED

The conservation of Wazir Khan Mosque and the rehabilitation of its Chowk are part of a larger Area Development Project in the Walled City of Lahore. It is part of a local development framework comprising the rehabilitation of the surrounding urban fabric and open space. The thrust of the project is aimed at urban regeneration and the economic uplift of the residential communities living in the neighbourhood of the project and offers lessons in conservation planning and methodology and capacity building.

## Partners

### PUBLIC PARTNERS

Government of the Punjab, Planning and Development Department, Sustainable Development of the Walled City of Lahore Project, Awqaf Department.

### Donors

Kaplan Foundation Fund.

## Authoritative Framework

'Public-Private Partnership Framework Agreement' was signed between AKTC and the Government of the Punjab in 2007. In 2009 formal permission to proceed was obtained from the Awqaf Department – the custodian of the property.