Great Mosque of Mopti

MOPTI, MALI

The Great Mosque of Mopti is an earthen structure built in the traditional Sudanese style between 1936 and 1943 on the site of an earlier mosque dating from 1908, and is commonly called the Mosque of Komoguel. At the time the Mosque was constructed, the Komoguel neighbourhood was in development as a result of the decision by the French settlers to use Mopti as Mali's central hub for trade along the Niger River.

When it became apparent, after preliminary studies and surveys, that the seventy-year-old Great Mosque of Mopti was in danger of collapsing, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) was asked to assist in its rehabilitation. Like other earthen buildings in Mali, the Great Mosque of Mopti had been maintained by the community with a traditional plaster of mud and rice chaff, but in recent years an incompatible layer of cement had been applied.

The first phase of the work on this important landmark focused on repairing the roof and stabilizing the upper part of the building, which had been damaged by the use of cement in 1978. Because cement adds additional loads to the structure and integrates poorly with the traditional materials, earthen buildings clad with cement often suffer water infiltration and structural damage over time – a process which, in this case, had weakened and seriously compromised the stability of the monument. Fissures in the cement cladding had been infiltrated by water, which had led to structural damage.

Preserving this unique landmark could only be guaranteed by the return to traditional earthen architecture techniques. Works included restoration of earth masonry, carpentry, roofing and technical installations; together with earthen plaster these aimed to re-establish its historical condition.

Starting in 2004, local masons worked to remove the cement layer and replace damaged areas with traditional mortar and bricks, which are made by mixing earth with rice. Roofing timbers and other structural and aesthetic elements made of wood were replaced. Then a fresh application of the traditional earthen plaster returned the building to its historic condition. To ensure that the Mosque remains structurally sound and that it is properly maintained well into the future, training courses were offered in traditional building crafts – skills that risked being forgotten in the region – and contemporary conservation methods

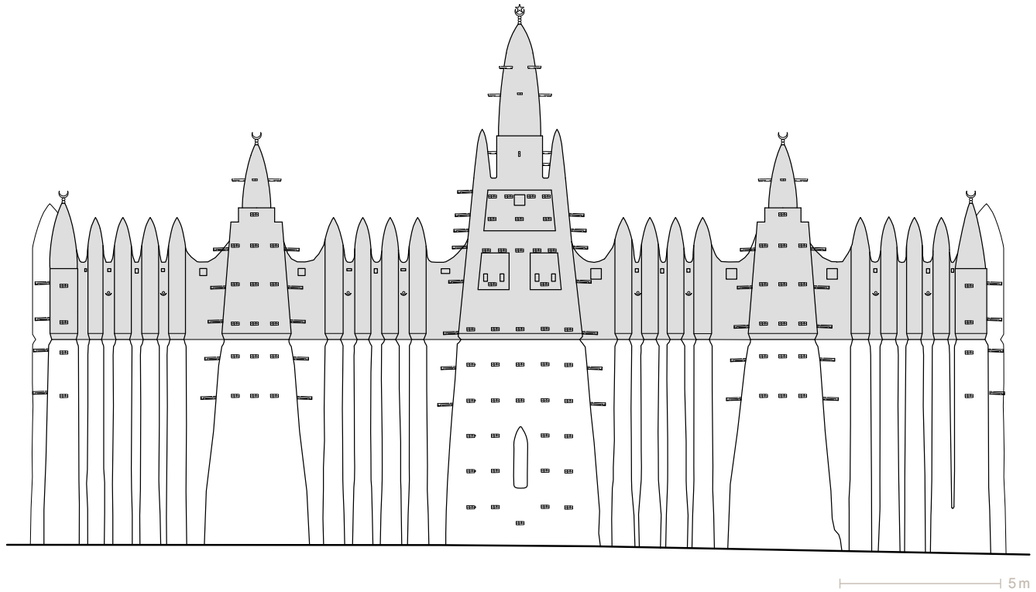
The Great Mosque serves the community of Komoguel in Mopti.

Opposite page:
Above, an aerial view of the Great Mosque after restoration.

Below, workmen intent on removing the detrimental cement render on the roof.

Project Scope / Objectives

Works on the Great Mosque included the restoration of earth masonry, carpentry, roofing and technical installations, together with earthen plaster. The aim was to help to re-establish Mopti Mosque's original condition and historic status.



The Mosque elevation showing the cement render that had to be removed.

Opposite page:
The AKTC intervention has restored the elegant lines of the Mosque after they had been deformed by many years of refacing.

to more than sixty local masons and craftsmen. Literacy classes were provided to all implementation crew and foremen were trained in basic computer skills.

The Trust strategy hinged on close cooperation with local institutions and stakeholders, as well as on the direct participation of experienced local masons and specialists in restoration activities, thus ensuring a practical, hands-on approach and providing much needed training and job opportunities for locals. Efforts in Mopti have expanded to include a 'Water and Sanitation Programme', in the Komoguel district surrounding the Mosque, that aims to raise the standard of living for residents. In the process the Centre for Earthen Architecture, a community centre and public toilets were constructed.

The rehabilitation of the Great Mosque of Mopti has in many ways become a model for AKTC's other interventions in earthen architecture in Mali. Much of the knowledge gained during AKTC's two years of work in Mopti found its way into the 'Memorandum of Understanding' that was drawn up between AKTC and the Mali Ministry of Culture that paved the way for expanded restoration and conservation activity at other sites in the country. The work on the Mosque was conducted in conjunction with the Direction Nationale du Patrimoine du Ministère de la Culture du Mali, regional authorities, the City of Mopti and the Mosque's Committee. The local authorities also helped with the selection of experienced masons and young apprentices who are being trained on the job. The model was replicated at Djenné and Timbuktu. Training is an important aspect of AKTC's international work and mission. In 2006, following the Mosque's restoration, the site was included in the National Heritage List of Mali.

Background

BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE
Mopti is one of Mali's larger cities, with a population of approximately 100,000. The Great Mosque of Mopti was built between 1936 and 1943 on the site of an earlier mosque dating to 1908. It is an earthen structure with similarities to the Great Mosque of Djenné. Komoguel neighbourhood, with its 10,000 residents, has developed around the Mosque since the beginning of the 20th century. In 2006, following Mopti Mosque's restoration, the site was included in the National Heritage List.

Challenges

SITE CONDITIONS
Preliminary studies performed in 2004 showed that the Mosque was subject to deterioration mainly due to the inappropriate application of cement plaster.

INFRASTRUCTURE
Mopti has no proper sanitation system and waste waters flow through its narrow streets before reaching the Bani River. Solid waste accumulates on the shores of the Bani River, forming a fill on top of which lives the poorest segment of the population. The district of Komoguel, surrounded by Lake Danawal, likewise lacks all basic infrastructure services, and consequently suffers from related health and environmental hazards. Prior to the project, sewage water flowed down the middle of streets leading to Lake Danawal, which acted as a filtration basin.

BUILDING CONDITIONS
The Mosque's wall-bearing system was weakened by the application of a cement coat. The roof leaked owing to defective slopes and accumulation of earth fill.

Significant Issues and Impact

DATA COLLECTION/SURVEYS
The AKTC project performed the first architectural surveys of the Mosque in 2004, followed by a topographic survey of its surroundings.

PLANNING ISSUES
It was determined that the Mosque's preservation could only be guaranteed by a return to traditional earthen architecture techniques.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS/MONUMENTS CONSERVED
Conservation of the historic Mosque was the main objective of the AKTC project in the period 2004–06.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING
A group of 150 community masons and labourers was trained in earthen conservation methods, plumbing, carpentry and street paving.

CONTRACTING METHODS
Due to a lack of qualified contractors for monument conservation in Mali, the work was entirely in-house managed. This also enabled direct quality control, flexibility in the resources and on-the-job training.

Partners

PUBLIC PARTNERS
Ministry of Culture, Municipality of Mopti, Republic of Mali.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS
Comité de gestion de Komoguel.

Authoritative Framework

'Memorandum of Understanding' signed in 2004 between AKTC and the Ministry of Culture, providing the framework for an Earthen Architecture Programme in Mali.