

TAKIYYAT IBRAHIM AL-GULSHANI

CAIRO, EGYPT

June 2019 Update



Watch Day participants gathered for a group photo, including members of the US Embassy in Cairo, the MoA, Art Jameel Institute, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Turath Community Group, some of the takiya's neighbors, along with the World Monuments Fund team.

Although April to June marks the start of the second year for the Takkiyat Ibrahim al-Gulshani project, it is only the second quarter since the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities (MoA) provided official access for us. To make up time, World Monuments Fund (WMF) employed a laser scanner consultancy out of Cairo University. Their three-dimensional point cloud model supports documentation and assessment activities that will underpin a forthcoming Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) grant application for conservation of the sheikh's mausoleum. Among those, a set of architectural drawings has finally started to take shape, and the collected 3D data is also supporting structural studies and materials research. This quarter, the takiya also hosted an inspiring Watch Day event, which was an opportunity to open the project up to the community, and have more representation and understanding of our activities in the area.

SITE CLEANING

Takkiyat Ibrahim al-Gulshani was surrounded by heaps of garbage. Decades of decay in polluted and often insensitive Cairo, had taken their toll. When we arrived, we found the courtyard was strewn with the victims of past earthquakes and old age, a crisscross of fallen dead palm tree trunks and collapsed walls.

In this quarter alone, WMF and the MoA's sanitation crew shifted more than twenty truckloads of garbage off-site.

With the big trash piles nearly all gone, other types of site organization are taking place. The courtyard stone pavers, previously buried in the dust, are now seen for the first time in decades, and revealing patterns suggesting the tops of tombs. Our documentation team began following these traces, and others of vanished walls and floor paving of buildings long ago collapsed or demolished to understand better how Takiyyat al-Gulshani looked in the past. With the sondages dug for the geotechnical study, this evidence suggests the entire mausoleum seems to be sitting in at least two meters deep of backfill—mainly a combination of later Sufi graves infilled between with Ottoman garbage (i.e., building rubble, broken potsherds, smoking pipes, etc.). How this historic fill affects the Sheikh's mausoleum, and whether it needs to be excavated or at least stabilized, is still difficult to tell.



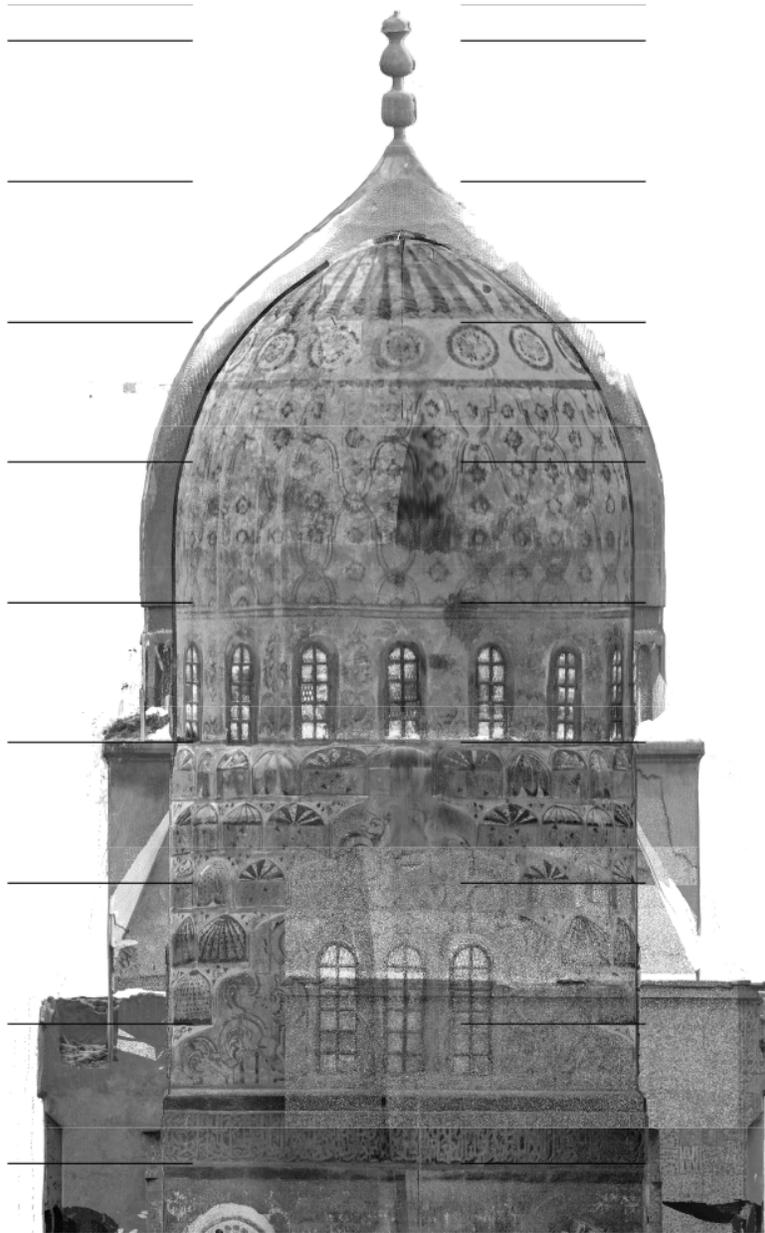
The Ministry of Antiquities provided workers and helped WMF arrange trucks to haul away 20 truckloads of refuse and dust.

PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

After receiving several offers for laser scanning Sheikh al-Gulshani's mausoleum, Cairo University was selected at the recommendation of the MoA. They are more specialized than the other candidates, they also had the added benefit of providing software training for the Gulshani project team.

The goal was to have a 3-D point cloud for the mausoleum's interior, but Cairo University provided far more, including data about the mausoleum's surroundings, such as its exterior elevations, its platform paving, the courtyard outline, Sufi living quarters, the extended back rooms, and the backside of the entrance building. Based on the point cloud and our previously collected total-station GPS points, al-Gulshani project documentation specialist Abeer Saed al-Din produced an architecture site plan and drawings for three structures around the mausoleum—the mosque, cells and extended back rooms. These drawings were later submitted to structural engineering consultant Sherif Mourad to help him build a structural assessment model.

Laser scanning allowed mapping the dome's shape and documenting the intricate interior of the Sheikh's mausoleum, a far too complicated architectural form to record via traditional documentation means. Working with project manager Amr Atta, Saed al-Din completed the dome for the four exterior elevations. Thanks to the point cloud, and its flood of new survey data, to hasten our drawing progress part-time architect Youmna Ghanem, joined the project team. She is currently drawing the first cross-section of the mausoleum.



A 'first pull' orthographic image of Sheikh al-Gulshani's mausoleum seen in cross-section. With the help of Cairo University, WMF's documentation specialist Saed al-Din is learning new software to create cleaned-up digital files. Utilized as image underlays in AutoCAD, these orthographic images aid in completing the basic architectural drawing set for the monument.

GEO-TECHNICAL STUDY AND STRUCTURAL ASSESSMENT

After a long process of letters submitted to various governmental infrastructure entities, laborers completed digging a sondage and borehole in front of Takiyyat al-Gulshani (*see* the WMF-AFCP March 2019 TAGU Update). In the follow-up, the draft geotechnical report by consultant Mourad was submitted and reviewed by the Gulshani team. It includes soil investigation results, geo-technical interpretations, and recommendations for further action. An important conclusion is that the groundwater level under the site is only 1.35 meters below street level. That information confirms similar groundwater levels now found at nearby al-Salih Tala'i Mosque (where USAID-funded groundwater systems in the late 1990s

were not maintained, failed, and flooding has returned). The next phase of the Gulshani project should include further investigations to know more about the hidden tombs and fill surrounding the mausoleum. Meanwhile, with the AutoCAD drawings and laser scanning point cloud, Mourad began a series of 3-D modeling calculations to understand the mausoleum's stability. For one, the laser scanning model illustrated something not noticed with the human eye: the mausoleum is tilting to one side. Slated for completion in July 2019, the final geotechnical and structural reports are critical components in defining a conservation plan for the mausoleum.

BUILDING MATERIAL SCIENCE STUDIES

During the quarter, material analyses and conservation studies picked up speed. Josephine D'Ilario and Mostafa Maher advised the project on strategies. Later, with the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities oversight, Maher collected 36 samples (mortar, stone, wood, metals, and surface colors) for laboratory testing. The results from X-ray diffraction, FT-IR spectroscopy, scanning electron microscope (SEM), microbiology, and wood fiber investigations undertaken at four Cairo laboratories, are summarized in a new report on building materials that defines not only reasons of decay, but also future interventions.



(Left) the unstable condition of the exterior entry stairs before the project began; and (right) architect Amr Atta works with carpenters to install temporary access improvements in the courtyard.

SHORING STAIRCASE AND SAFETY ARRANGEMENTS

Before the project, al-Gulshani site staircases were a mess, to the point they required challenging two-steps-forward-one-step-back scramble up rubble. The large external entry staircase is missing several tread pavers and does not have a handrail along its outside edge. The main vestibule staircase is inaccessible and the auxiliary staircase around the corner from it is half-buried in the trash. With Watch Day approaching and knowing access needs to improve for site work, the project team made temporary improvements—loose slabs are now stabilized, pipes put in place as temporary railings, and the inaccessible big vestibule staircase is now equipped with a superimposed set of wooden steps. We are also encouraging our neighbors and the MoA to improve cleanliness around the exterior entrance. The forthcoming structural assessment will provide priority list of temporary shoring and bracing.



World Monuments Fund brought together several existing and potential stakeholders for Watch Day.

WATCH DAY AT TAKIYYAT IBRAHIM AL-GULSHANI

The biennial World Monuments Watch aims to protect history, preserve memory, and strengthen social bonds by bringing selected sites and their challenges to an international stage and identifying opportunities for local communities to collaborate with preservation agencies, governments, and corporate sponsors. Watch Day—a public event sponsored by WMF at all Watch sites—promotes community engagement and empowers local partners to leverage and capitalize on the national and international attention drawn from being included on the World Monuments Watch. Planning for Takkiyyat Ibrahim al-Gulshani’s Watch Day began late in 2018, with the project team looking to utilize Watch Day to bolster our development of the site’s future. Long-term, the success of WMF’s conservation work will only be sustainable if we can identify adaptive reuse that engages not only Egyptian community support, but its commitment as well.

Watch Day at Takkiyyat Ibrahim al-Gulshani brought together several possible future project actors, with representatives from the surrounding community, a local NGO, students, artists, and the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities (MoA). WMF invited neighbors, and the event kept an open door policy all day towards any others who wished to join. Their presence sent a message to the MoA about the kind of socio-economics WMF intends to build into the physical intervention process and adaptive reuse of the site.

To show the multi-dimensional qualities of our thinking, Turath Community Group (TCG), an al-Darb al-Ahmar neighborhood NGO attended. Their co-director, joined by two board members who are community activists, served as another reminder to the MoA about community input. Another stakeholder category included two schools, one, academic architecture students from the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, and the other, post-graduates practicing traditional crafts at Art Jameel Institute, an Egyptian branch of the Saudi-London-based Princes School. Lastly, and no less important, was a sizeable delegation from the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities’ local Darb al-Ahmar Inspectorate and Historic Cairo Office, and in the morning representatives from the US Embassy in Cairo—WMF’s two important working partners in the Gulshani project.

Watch Day activities were organized over a six and a half-hour program and unfolded in three modules with breaks in between. The first module was the most official and included introductions, speeches by the three project partners, a video, and a presentation from the MoA al-Darb al-Ahmar Inspectorate documentation team. Program Director Jeff Allen provided a general outline of WMF's current project, US Embassy in Cairo Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs Helen LaFave explained the US State Department's commitment to Egypt's heritage through the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP), and MoA al-Darb al-Ahmar Inspector Mohamed Rashid expressed his organizations hope for the preservation of the site.



(Left) a Watch Day break-out group of workshop owners and employees who explain their trades to Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities staff members; and (right) the US Embassy's Helen LaFave reviews Abeer Saed al-Din's documentation work with Jeff Allen.

The second module was a dynamic interchange between the participant stakeholders focusing on the artistic expressions, crafts, and trades that built Takiyyat al-Gulshani, and future reuses for it. Watch Day attendees broke into groups connected to several topics. A representative from each group then presented their group's ideas to the entire cast of participants. Of importance for many was finding a future, where the surrounding crafts economy links to the complex's preservation.

The last section was a wrap-up summary followed by a superb Sufi chant performance by *al-Halaqa* (Arabic for the ring, as in a series of chain links), a musical group composed of Egyptian and international students studying at al-Azhar University. Their moving and passionate performance attracted Watch Day attendees through their religious songs known as *tawasheeh* and some praises of prophet Mohamed *madh*.

Preparations tailored for the future conservation and reuse of Takiyyat al-Gulshani were made, and sneak-previewed at Watch Day. Hayam Ahmed of the MoA al-Darb al-Ahmar Inspectorate documentation team presented their recently completed Kaplan Fund-backed project to document Sheikh Gulshani's mausoleum tiles. The project was also supported by WMF, which arranged and provided several training workshops for Ahmed's MoA team. Using the new north elevation AutoCAD drawing by Saed al-Din, architect Heba Hosny is up-linking the MoA database into GIS-based software.

Filmmaker Mostafa Naguib showed a short documentary movie about the site and its integrated relationship with the surrounding community. Many owners of small businesses located around the takiya, spoke in the documentary about intimate connections to place. Their reflections on close-knit relationships going back three or four generations to the area were revealing. The takeaway most impressing on all of us was people referencing their identity through a special pride of place rooted in a historical connection to Takyyat al-Gulshani.

Basma Khalil, an artist with a startup project called *Tawriq (Road)*, was inspired by its spiritual environment to render some of its Islamic patterns to her new ceramic creations. Thanks to the MoA al-Darb al-Ahmar Inspectorate's documentation team, she transferred Ibrahim al-Gulshani's mausoleum tile designs into ceramic forms as decorative finger food dishes and table coasters. The dishes, given to Watch Day VIP visitors, were hand-made tiles as gifts to the MoA documentation team and inspectors, who partner with WMF on the Gulshani project.

As Ibrahim al-Gulshani was born in Azerbaijan, the day was an opportunity for Saymor Nasirof, an al-Azhar academic and the head of country's community in Egypt, to speak about the sheikh's historical importance and his sect. Moreover, he expressed his thankfulness and happiness to have such a project that will change what he termed "the miserable condition of the takiya."

During the coffee break, embassy representatives Helen LaFave, Katherine Jernigan, Dina Abdel-Hafez, and Michelle Angulo, enjoyed a guided tour of the project site that covered WMF's ongoing studies and assessments, as well as our plans to submit a proposal for the conservation of the mausoleum and its surrounding platform at the end of this year.



Al-Halaqa, a musical group composed of Egyptian and international students studying at al-Azhar University, was the Watch Day grand finale. Their successful performance in the takiya's former mosque providing ideas about future uses for space.



(Left) Filmmaker Mostafa Naguib (seen at right) interviews a shop owner in front of Takiyyat al-Gulshani for Watch Day; and (right) some of the materials developed explicitly for Watch Day, including ceramic tiles, dishes, notepads, badges, photo albums, posters and hand-delivered invitations for VIPs.