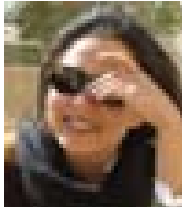


The Conservation work of the Great Mosque of Timbuktu, Mali: Survey, Plasters and Bas-relief



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ABSTRACT

The restoration of the Great Mosque in Timbuktu, Djingarei Ber, part of “Earthen Architecture Rehabilitation Programme”, carried out by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Mali, highlighted through surveys made during the restoration work, materials and techniques which were lost during the years, and that were clearly stronger and more efficacious than those used in Timbuktu’s contemporary earthen buildings. A kind of soil, coming from the north of Timbuktu, the town of Bourem, used for bas-relief decoration in the interior east wall of the mosque and that has been also used for many interior plasters of houses disseminated in the Old Medina. The plasters are still intact since the Fifties. Also in remains of buildings, where part of the walls are still standing, big portions of the plaster in good conditions are still visible. The nature of this excellent soil and the use of natural additives along with the suitable technique gave the ideal results to the masons. This technique was going to be lost being subject to the oral transmission. The restoration of the basrelief gave the opportunity to research, through the knowledge of the wise old masons of the city, the procedure to prepare the mix of mud and additives used with this yellowish soil coming from the north. Surveys on the floor of the Mosque highlighted the ruins of an older Mosque, on which has been built the visible one. Besides the wonderment for the discover, the quality of the ancient earthen building (probably the old mosque of Abu Ishaq al Saheli) looks like to be excellent, for what concerns the parts of pillars still standing, in term of masonry, plastering and decorations. Environmental, economical and social reasons is the base for technique’s quality deterioration in Timbuktu.

Keywords: Conservation, survey, plasters, bas-relief