

Conference report

**Terra 2003—The ninth international conference on the study
and conservation of earthen architecture
Yazd, Iran, November–December 2003**

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Over 350 participants, from 47 countries, attended the Ninth International Conference on the Study and Conservation of Earthen Architecture held in Yazd, Iran from 29th November to 2nd December 2003. The conference was organised by the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation, the Governorship of Yazd Province, ICOMOS and UNESCO, in collaboration with the Art University of Isfahan (Iran), CRATerre (France), Cultural Heritage Centre of Yazd, Endowed Trusteeship of Dowlatabad Historical Garden, ICCROM, ICOMOS-Iran, Iran Touring and Travelling Organisation, Iranian National Commission for UNSECO, Municipality of Yazd, Research Centre for Conservation of Cultural Relics, and the School of Art and Architecture, Yazd University.

The ninth conference represented the return of the international conference on the study and conservation of earthen architecture to the beautiful and historic mud brick city of Yazd, the venue of the first and second conferences held in 1972 and 1976, respectively. Objectives of the ninth conference were:

1. Preparation of a list of techniques for building and designing in earthen architecture.
2. Emphasis on training, the processes and materials in earthen architecture, to be included in university courses in architecture, archaeology and conservation.
3. Attracting public awareness to the values and architecture of earthen architecture.
4. Creating local bases for the transfer of conservation information and the encouragement of a continued use of adobe in construction.
5. Evaluation of past activities in view of the development of durable and appropriate conservation processes.

The conference focused on the changes and environmental continuity of earthen heritage in relation to earthen settlements, architectural monuments, and archaeological and cultural sites. Forty-four oral paper presentations, supported by poster sessions, dealt with three aspects of the conference themes:

1. History, tradition, change and continuity.
2. Decay and conservation: research and practice.
3. Documentation, values and management planning.

During the afternoon sessions participants joined three working groups around these themes.

A total of 12 papers were presented under the theme history, tradition, change and continuity. Presentations included papers on mud brick architecture of Sarazm, work on an earthen palace near St Petersburg, Japanese clay-walling houses, review of structural design procedures for earth buildings and need for standards for industrial earth construction.

A further 22 oral presentations were delivered under the theme decay and conservation. Papers covered a wide range of topics in this field, including rehabilitation of mud brick architecture in Egypt, overview of research in earthen architecture conservation, physiochemical properties of earthen materials for conservation, including work on Chogha Zanbil Ziggurat in Iran. Other presentations included the review of structural underpinning of adobe buildings in New Mexico and durability of mud block buildings in southern India.

Under the third theme, documentation, values and management planning, a further 10 papers were presented orally. Case studies presented included projects in Iran, Peru, Yemen, Mali and Chile.

On completion, the conference declaration included recommendations to establish a centre for conservation of earthen architecture in Yazd, as well as the need to increase community involvement in process of earthen

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architecture conservation. However, the most poignant recommendation, in light of the tragic events in Bam three weeks later, was '*Special attention should also be given to the continuation of education and training in the mitigation of seismic risks in earthquake prone areas*'. Mud-brick architecture was widely, and largely wrongly, blamed as the primary cause of the tragic huge loss of live

in Bam; photographs of the city presented at the conference clearly show many of the mud-brick houses blamed already in ruins. The Terra 2003 declarations and resulting actions must now provide the platform to ensure that the Bam earthquake does not result in further tragedy through the unnecessary loss, by demolition, of vernacular earthen architecture around the world.