



The history of human dwelling on plains coincides with the chronicle of the recognition and utilization of mud for building the primal human habitats. Water and soil as the most accessible materials and the mélange of these two - the mud - has made it possible for the ancient communities of human to reside on plains.

The first tokens of such settlements in the central plateau of Iran dates back to 8000 BC. Shaped-up masses of mud set beside each other to construct the first human habitats.

*Ganj-Darreh* in Kermanshah, *Ozbaki* near Tehran and *Zagheh* in Dashteh-Ghazvin are places in which proofs of remnants of such endeavors to primitive dwelling places have been found. Although ten thousand years has passed since the first settlements were constructed, the mud is still used as the suitable bonding agent, inexpensive and available material which has materialized the comfort and repose of the Iranians in a span of millennia.

The result of such continuity in the usage of mud and sun-dried mud-bricks in a period of ten thousand years has been houses, temples, prayer-houses, castles, palaces, and several towns which still exist in this land. These are the symbols of the history of this nation. Over %60 of the residential space of village and city limits of the Iranian plateau are still made up of mud. Such density of usable mud area is a national wealth which is not easily replaceable.

Application of mud and dried mud-brick in buildings is a confinement. Mud-brick lacks traction resistance and can only bear weight forces to a limited extent. How can such a material be used for setting up of any coverings or ceiling? Employment of vaults was the Iranian remedy to alter this confinement to a possibility: an incredible grand possibility that helped creatinf wonderful and admirable architectural spaces. Arch of Kesra (the seat of the Sassanid kings in *Tissfun*) of mud-brick and mud at a 26 meter wide entrance is a sign of such prudence which amazingly enough is still up and about in its place. Thus, despite all the limitations, mud and mud-brick, thanks to the human genius, will be lasting and immortal through utilization of the form. Kashan, Yazd, Meybod, and scores of other Iranian cities display this kind of creativity, manifested throughout centuries, resulting in foundation

of mud-brick urban fabrics and towns in the country, a precious affluence that is not to be created again.

Studying the processes of deterioration and the methods of restoration, consolidation, and preservation of earthen heritage has been among the main research and executive projects of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization during the past decades. Existence of great mud brick towns and large number of historical monuments highlights the necessity of continued research in the field in Iran. Accordingly in past three decades, three international conferences on the study and conservation of mud-brick structures have been held in Iran; the latest of them being the 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Studying and Conservation of Earthen Architecture (Terra 2003) convened in last December in Yazd. Unexpected and noteworthy response from the scholars, scientists, and researchers from around the world was indicative of the universal attention to the notion of conservation of earthen heritage. Moreover, Iran now enjoys from the exceptional experience of the Project on Conservation of Chogha Zanbil, a World Heritage Site in Khuzistan in South-western part of the country.

We should not forget the fact that apart from all the dangers threatening earthen heritage, the scattering and diversity of mud brick sites in different corners of the Iranian plateau exacerbate the task of their conservation and protection.

After the *Tabas* earthquake in 1979 which resulted in the destruction of one of the most beautiful earthen towns and its dreamy gardens, now we have witnessed another catastrophe destroying *Bam* and its valuable earthen remains and architectures. On the early morning of December 26, 2003 the city of Bam shivered by a horrendous earthquake. Many of houses were ruined, over 40,000 lives were lost, and the historical citadel of the town, *Arg-e Bam*, the meeting place of the tourists, scholars and culture-lovers was seriously damaged, some of its parts collapsing due to

the strong quake. The bazaar, holy places and private houses which have been nationally registered as historic monuments were also damaged. Almost all of these important heritage resources are built in traditional earthen architecture. Along with the ever present date plantations and their ancient irrigation system, the traditional earthen architecture shapes Bam's urban landscape.

The effect of the earthquake has been felt for all types of cultural heritage. Consequently, the recovery process raises a number of questions and issues relating to the general approach to earthen architecture in seismic conditions and to the specific approach for conservation, repair or other treatment of individual archaeological sites, historic buildings and the global urban landscape of Bam as part of recovery plans.

The destruction of the Bam Citadel aggravated deep sorrow and provoked the sympathy of the fellow-countrymen and the international community, so much so that a myriad of cultural enthusiasts flooded the city straight away after the news of immense tragedy spread over.

The Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization set up a Task Force, headed by the Director of the Organization, in order to coordinate all the works and measures related to cultural heritage of Bam immediately after the earthquake the following day. Several committees (technical, executive, documentation, information, international relations, administration, protection and public relations) were formed within the Task Force. Documentation, special crisis management, responding to global requests, visits, and technical interviews, and preparation of various pre- and post-earthquake reports were among the responsibilities of the Task Force. In Bam a temporary base was established outside the Citadel.

International community and institutions reacted to the tragic event from the beginning. UNESCO, ICOMOS and ICCROM offered their sympathies and supports. Various teams of experts from ICOMOS and UNESCO, other international organizations, as well as national experts visited the site and prepared technical reports.

Together with international partners, since the day of the earthquake, the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO) has been quickly taking actions to address the emergency and long-term conservation challenges facing the rich cultural heritage of Bam.

ICHO, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) are co-organizing an in situ workshop next month to learn from the earthquake, its effects on the cultural heritage in Bam, conservation interventions required, and to establish sound guiding principles for the medium and long term conservation, rehabilitation, and sustainable utilization of the cultural resources in Bam, within the overall recovery process of the city of Bam. The workshop will provide a key-opportunity for experts from Iran and abroad as well as international organizations representatives to review the phenomenon of seismic damage using the diversity of earthen architecture in Bam, the influence of traditional building know-how and maintenance or of weakening factors, in order to define, for Bam and other similar sites in Iran and elsewhere, guidelines for preventive measures that would be just as useful in seismic context as they'd be respectful of that particular heritage. The workshop will also provide an opportunity to review specific issues related to the future treatment of Bam's cultural heritage, in particular the Arg-e-Bam ensemble.

The workshop's dates (17-20 April) were chosen to coincide with the International Day of Monuments and Sites which ICOMOS dedicated this year to earthen architecture in solidarity with Bam.

It also fits in a very tight sequence of emergency response planning exercise to define needs and priority for international help for the recovery of Bam after the devastation of the 26 December earthquake.