The garden now known as Baghe Babur is thought to have been developed around 1528 AD (935 AH) when Babur gave orders for the construction of an "avenue Garden" in Kabul, which is described in some detail in his memoirs, the Babur-nama. It was part of the tradition of Moghul princes to develop sites for recreation and pleasure during their lifetime, and choose one of these as a last resting-place. The site continued to be of significance to Babur's successors, and Jehangir made a pilgrimage to the site in 1607 AD (1016 AH) when he ordered that all gardens in Kabul be surrounded by walls, that a prayer platform be laid in front of Babur's grave, and an inscribed headstone placed at its head. During the visit of the Emperor Shah Jahan in 1638 (1047 AH) a marble screen was erected around the group of tombs, and a mosque built on the terrace below. There are accounts from that time of water running from the terrace below the mosque along the line of an avenue, with small reservoirs being built at each terrace, between falls, with larger pools at intervals.

In around 1528 AD (935 AH) by order of Babur, an "avenue Garden" was laid out in Kabul. This was part of the tradition of Moghul princes to develop sites for recreation and pleasure during their lifetime, and choose one of these as a last resting-place. Jehangir ordered in 1607 AD (1016 AH) that all gardens in Kabul were to be surrounded by walls, and specifically that a prayer platform be laid in front of Babur's grave, and an inscribed headstone placed at its head. A marble screen was erected around the group of tombs, and a mosque built on the terrace below. Accounts at the time of the visit to the site of Shah-Jahan in 1638 (1047AH) indicate that a stone water-channel, fed by water diverted from the Logar river to the east, ran from the level of the mosque along the central axis of the garden, with small reservoirs on each terrace and larger pools at key intervals.

An earthquake in 1842 reportedly damaged both the garden walls and mosque. Subsequent repairs and development during the reign of Amir Abdurahman Khan at the end of the 19th century were influenced more by the European...
garden tradition than the Moghul scheme that had guided Babur, Jehangir and Shah Jahan. It was either during this period or in the subsequent reign of Amir Habibullah that the pavilion and the palace (or haremserai) were built. It was in the 1930s, during the reign of Nadir Shah that the garden was transformed into a public place, with the construction of a large water reservoir, and new planting. By this stage, the flow of water down the central avenue had been replaced by a series of flower gardens around pools with fountains. The garden has subsequently seen the installation of a large swimming pool on the north side, the construction of a greenhouse, as well as the creation of new retaining walls, which might have altered the original levels of some terraces.

After 1992, the garden was effectively on the front-line between warring factions, and the water supply was cut, resulting in the loss of the surviving trees. Both the pavilion and the haremserai were badly damaged in fighting, as was the mosque.

REHABILITATION

Even before the recent destruction wrought to the site and buildings, what was left of Baghe Babur probably bore little relation to the original Moghul layout. While some initial rehabilitation work was carried out during the mid-1990s with support from UNCHS Habitah, it was not possible at that stage to ensure any degree of historical accuracy. There is now an opportunity to adopt a more systematic approach, if what is left of this important Moghul site is to be preserved, and the maintenance of the garden is to be ensured for future generations of Kabulis. It will also be important to ensure that the contemporary needs of the people of Kabul are taken into account, so that the role of Baghe Babur as a public social space is enhanced for future generations.

Initial efforts by AKTC/HSCP to plan for the rehabilitation of the garden and wider area were formalized through the signature of a memorandum of Agreement between Kabul Municipality, the Ministry of Information and Culture of the Transitional Administration of Afghanistan and AKTC/HSCP in early 2002. Building on the capacities of the departments who have formal responsibility for management and conservation, and international organizations with an interest in the site, a Baghe Babur Steering Group was formed in late March 2002. This involves representatives from the Ministry of Information & Culture, Kabul Municipality, AKTC, UNESCO, UNDP, DHSA and several donors. The purpose has been to facilitate the coordination both of rehabilitation initiatives and scholarship, and to develop a management plan to ensure the sustainability of interventions that are made to this important site. Discussions within this group during 2002 centred on a range of priority activities within the garden, as follows:

1 Topographical surveys

Building upon the investigations carried out by IsMEO during the 1970s, AKTC/HSCP has collaborated during 2002 with the department of Historical

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Monuments, the Institute of Archaeology and the German Archaeological Institute to undertake an initial topographical survey of the garden. This process, which has continued into the summer of 2003, is proving invaluable in establishing the characteristics of the Moghul elements of the garden, where these survive, as the basis for conservation or rehabilitation.

2 Survey and repair of the perimeter walls

A detailed survey of the earthen perimeter walls of the garden, parts of which are thought to date from the late 19th century has been undertaken, in close collaboration with staff from the department of Historic Monuments of the Ministry of Information & Culture. The walls are built of a mix of rammed earth (pakhsa) and sun-dried bricks (khesht e kham) on stone foundations, for which skills exist among rural communities in the country. The walls along the entire southern and western sides have been replaced by lower and cruder earthen construction, some sections of which seem to be in danger of collapse. Work on the repairing the entire perimeter walls is now ongoing, with support from the government of Germany, and this work should be complete by the end of 2002. A labour-intensive approach towards repairs/re-building has been adopted, in order to provide much-needed employment opportunities in the area. It is envisaged that support for a proportion of the unskilled labour will be provided through the UNDP/REAP programme.

3 Documentation review

Efforts are being made by AKTC/HSCP and others to identify key documentation on the evolution of the layout of Baghe Babur, in order to ensure an appropriate degree of accuracy in the ongoing conservation and rehabilitation work. In addition to specific references to this garden, contemporary accounts of types of trees that might have been planted, and arrangements for the distribution of water, will be reviewed by a range of Afghan and international specialists. In addition, technical advice will be sought from those who have studied and undertaken rehabilitation work on other Moghul gardens in the region.
4 Building surveys & remedial works

A range of remedial conservation measures on key structures within Baghe Babur have been identified, including Babur’s tomb, the adjacent mosque built by Jehangir, the haremserai and the pavilion. Planning for this work has taken place in the context of the Steering Group, with reference to available images and documentation of the original state of the buildings concerned. The priorities for this joint programme of building conservation work in 2003 will include:

- Partial reconstruction of the original marble "charbutra" screen around the tomb of Babur, and removal of the damaged roof structure and piers, to be supported by AKTC/HSCP.
- Repairs to the marble facing and finials of the mosque, and waterproofing of the roof of the building, to be supported by AKTC/HCSP.
- Completion of the ongoing rehabilitation of the pavilion structure, being implemented by DHSA with support from the US Embassy.
- Clearance of rubble and weatherproofing of the ruined haremserai complex in the south-eastern corner of the garden was completed during 2002, and the physical survey of the complex is ongoing. A study of the options for possible adaptive re-use of the site will be undertaken by AKTC/HCSP during 2003.

While conservation activities will require expert advice from international specialists in some cases, it is envisaged that the work will draw also upon the skills of experienced Afghan stonemasons, bricklayers, joiners and plasterers as appropriate.
5 Garden rehabilitation and maintenance

Among the measures required for the rehabilitation of the garden itself are:

a) Irrigation
The future of Baghe Babur as a garden and the surrounding communities will depend on a sustainable source of water for residents, as well as trees and other plants. The original source of water for the garden, via a channel from the Logar River to the east, has long since been replaced by a pumped system from a number of wells at the base of the slope, within the perimeter of the garden itself. This system is currently operated and maintained by Kabul Municipality. It is envisaged that a strategy will be developed for improving the production (perhaps by pumping from the river below to supplement the supply from the wells) and storage (in the stone-lined reservoir to the north of Babur's tomb) of water, while limiting losses to the garden as a result of evaporation.

b) Replanting
Following the interruption of water supplies to the remaining trees in the garden, as a result of the looting of the water-pump during 1992, the garden became a source of firewood for families living in the area. By 1994, there was little evidence that the space had been a garden at all. The lower terraces were partially re-planted, but apart from the two plane trees below the mosque, however, little of the planting in Baghe Babur seems to reflect the original intention of the garden. AKTC/HSCP is working closely with the greenery department of Kabul Municipality to re-introduce the range of indigenous flora that characterized the original garden, including planes, cypresses, hawthorn, wild cherry (alubalu - allegedly introduced by Babur from the north of Kabul) and other fruits trees, as well as roses and jasmine.

c) Paths and stairs
While many of the retaining walls (probably dating from the 19th century) survive on the upper levels of the garden, there is now little trace of such structures from the 10th terrace downwards. The stairs along the main axis leading to the pavilion were restored and re-laid as part of the rehabilitation undertaken during 1995. If the rehabilitation is to attempt to restore something approximating the Moghul layout, however, this might entail significant changes in both the configuration of irrigation channels, and circulation. Once the research is completed and designs agreed, this work will be implemented with local skilled masons.