

TARIMI MANSIONS PRESERVATION PROJECT:  
DOCUMENTATION OF THE TARIMI MANSIONS  
2004-05: HAMTUT AND AL-RIYAD

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## **TARIMI MANSIONS PRESERVATION PROJECT:**

### **Documentation of the Tarimi Mansions 2004-05: Hamtut and al-Riyad**

Pamela Jerome, James Conlon and Selma Al-Radi

#### ***Introduction***

An American team with support from the American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS), the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and the Social Fund for Development (SFD) worked for a third season in collaboration with the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums (GOAM) on documenting the mudbrick mansions of Tarim. Hamtut, a circa 1870s Mughal-style mansion, and al-Riyad, an Art Deco mansion dating to the 1930s designed by Sayid Alawi Abu Bakr al-Kaf, an architect and cousin of 'Umar bin Sheikh al-Kaf, were recorded from December 27, 2004 through January 11, 2005.

The American team consisted of co-directors Prof. Pamela Jerome (adjunct associate professor, Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation) and Dr. Selma Al-Radi (research fellow, New York University's Institute of Fine Arts). James Conlon (director of interdisciplinary projects, Columbia University's Visual Media Center) collaborated for a third season. In addition, Rene Fan (architectural conservator), Sara Lardinois (architect), Nuha Ansari (Columbia University post-graduate student), Joselito Corpus (Columbia University graduate student), and Lindsay Smith (Columbia University graduate student) participated in the documentation project. GOAM colleagues included Abdullah al-Saqqaf (architect) and Hussain al-Aidarous (archaeologist).

#### ***Related Work***

The Tarimi Mansions Preservation Project's work of the previous two years was to document Qasr al-'Ishshah<sup>1</sup> and Dar al-Salam.<sup>2</sup> Both mansions belong to the al-Kafs, a prominent family of merchants who made their fortune in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Singapore. Al-'Ishshah was the family seat under 'Umar bin Sheikh al-Kaf; Dar-al-Salam, an Art Deco masterpiece, was originally owned by Muhammad Hussain al-Kaf. The architect Abu Bakr al-Kaf designed the later additions to al-'Ishshah, and Dar al-Salam in its entirety.

This season saw great progress in emergency stabilization repairs to al-'Ishshah supported by funding from the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and the

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<sup>1</sup> James Conlon, Pamela Jerome and Selma Al-Radi, "Documentation of the Tarimi palaces, 2002-03: Qasr al-'Ishshah," *Bulletin of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies*, No. 45, 2003, pp 9-22.

<sup>2</sup> For a copy of the season report on the documentation of the Dar al-Salam, refer to [www.learn.columbia.edu/tarim/html/conservation.html](http://www.learn.columbia.edu/tarim/html/conservation.html).

Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation of the US State Department. The work was performed under the direction of master mason Awad Ramadan Ba Mu'min. Both the collapsed northwest and northeast wings of Dar Dawil, the oldest building in the 'Ishshah complex, were reconstructed, as well as the northwest kitchen wing. In addition, the leaning pier and the camel ramp (*manzahah*) above it were rebuilt. More work remains to be performed: the Gatehouse roof is in deplorable condition and could soon collapse. One of the Garage roofs has already collapsed. The roof of the Pigeonaire has not yet been assessed but appears to be in very poor condition. All of the roofs, in general, require lime waterproofing. However, the work that has been performed thus far has given credibility to the Tarimi Mansions Preservation Project (TMPP).

Al-'Ishshah is currently under long-term lease to the Tarim branch of the Yemeni Society History and Heritage Protection (YSHHP) who present the building to the public as a house museum. The YSHHP are paying 35,000 YR/month (\$189) for the southeast and southwest sections of the main mansion but require an additional 15,000 YR/month (\$81) to rent the contiguous northeast section, previously occupied by a poor family.

The YSHHP have been collaborating with our team and are supervising the construction work. Additionally, Dr. Chris Edens, resident director of the AIYS made periodic visits to report on the progress of the work to our funders, the US Embassy and the SFD. The YSHHP have also been cost estimating restoration of the interior of Qasr al-'Ishshah. 120,000 YR (\$649) was the quote from a master lime craftsman to complete the plaster decorations in one of the bathrooms damaged by the collapse of the west elevation.

Since the reconstruction of the load-bearing west wall of al-'Ishshah, completed in January 2004, the southwest wing has been opened to the public as a gallery (Fig. 1), and the team participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for an exhibit of historic photographs taken by Hamza bin Yahyah, the original owner of the adjacent al-Munaysurah mansion. Hamza is considered the first native Tarimi photographer. Of major interest was a photograph showing the main wing of al-'Ishshah under construction. Photographs of illustrated pages from the collection of the Manuscript Library were also included in the exhibit.

The YSHHP has converted the ground floor level of the southeast wing into a boy's club. Once the Gatehouse roof is stabilized, it will be reused as a women's center to support traditional crafts. We cannot underestimate the importance of the YSHHP's efforts. The work of these stakeholders has demonstrated the potential of adaptive reuse in Tarim and the overall viability of grassroots conservation. What is more, we consistently face the problem of vandalism to many of the abandoned villas. Much of the damage is caused by young boys, and the YSHHP's efforts to include these boys in their program is especially sensitive. Likewise, there have been few efforts to include women in general

conservation efforts in Tarim. The proposed women's center is another example of the advantage of working with local stakeholders who are attuned to these issues. Enhancing and expanding their future role in the project is essential to the long-term conservation of historic Tarim.

Al-Fijr, the mansion designed and originally owned by the architect Abu Bakr al-Kaf, suffered the collapse of the northwest section of the roof, which went down through three stories in October 2004 (Fig. 2). The collapse included a highly decorated room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. In January 2004 with the execution of the updated feasibility study requested by UNESCO,<sup>3</sup> the extensively termite-damaged beam on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor directly below this area was identified as requiring immediate emergency shoring. Unfortunately, funding was not secured in time to save the three-story area of collapse. The building still requires emergency stabilization and is a candidate for documentation and adaptive reuse. Muhammad Hasan al-Kaf is the caretaker of al-Fijr.

The team also investigated five other expropriated mansions, two of which were identified for the first time in the updated feasibility study. Al-Haywar (Dar Leila), one of the Art Deco al-Kaf family mansions, is in reasonably good condition, because although the family that owns it does not live in it, they continue to maintain it and occupy it occasionally (Fig. 3). Most of the wood joists on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor have been replaced with plumbing pipes. According to Hussain Mihdhar al-Kaf, son of the original owner, his father, Sayid 'Umar al-Mihdhar bin Alawi al-Kaf, received a medal from King George VI in 1947 for famine relief in the Hadhramaut (refer to Appendix).

Muhammad bil Samayit is the family member responsible for Dar bin Sahil al-Kaf (Fig. 4). Although rented up until four years ago, this mansion is currently abandoned and in fair condition. We were told that the family moved to Saudi Arabia in 1967 at the time of South Yemen's independence from the British. Dar bin Sahil was then expropriated by the Marxist government in the early 1970s. The southeast wing has partially collapsed and roofs and terraces range from good to poor condition (Fig. 5). The mansion is quite large and has some interesting Art Deco details (Fig. 6), including decorative carved plaster window inserts (Fig. 7). Dar bin Sahil requires some emergency work to roofs and terraces to stabilize it and is a candidate for documentation and adaptive reuse. Both Al-Haywar and Dar bin Sahil may have been designed by Abu Bakr al-Kaf, as they are stylistically similar to other buildings known to be his work.

Hussain Mihdhar al-Kaf is responsible for Dar Mihdhar as well as Bir Yimani. Dar Mihdhar (Fig. 8), a traditional Hadhrami-style mansion, was the home of Abd al-

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<sup>3</sup> Pamela Jerome, Updated Feasibility Study: Preservation of the Mudbrick Mansions of Tarim, Yemen, unpublished report submitted to UNESCO, Unit of Arab Countries, Division of Cultural Heritage, Paris, France, issued 15 March 2004.

Rahman al-Kaf, grandfather of 'Umar, thus making it a very significant structure. 'Umar's father, Sheikh and his brother Abdallah, were both born in this mansion. It is probable that Sheikh's children were born in this house as well, including 'Umar. The building, also known as Dar Sahil, is in fair-to-poor condition and presently abandoned. The southeast area of the building has collapsed through three stories (Fig. 9). The interior exhibits unusual early decorations not seen before in other mansions (Fig. 10). This house was the first to be electrified in Tarim. The remains of the generator room are still present across the street. Hussain's father, 'Umar al-Mihdhar, was also the first person to bring a radio into the Valley. Dar Mihdhar requires emergency stabilization and is a candidate for documentation and adaptive reuse.

Bayt Abd al-Rahman bin Sheikh al-Kaf is a monumental Neoclassical-style mansion located in the Aydid district of Tarim. It has suffered considerable structural damage due to termites and the southwest wing has partially collapsed. The mansion has been leased to the Society for Heritage Service for 15,000 YR/month (\$81) and is also being interpreted as a house museum (Fig. 11). On the north side, the structure boasts an impressive walled formal garden in poor condition (Fig. 12). This mansion requires emergency stabilization and is a candidate for documentation.

Bir Yimani was revisited. This structure is located in the palm groves on the outskirts of Tarim and was used by the al-Kafs as a guest house for visiting British officials and others. It was identified as beyond repair in the original feasibility study performed in November of 2000.<sup>4</sup> It continues to deteriorate (Figs. 13 and 14).

Al-Haddad, an Art Deco mansion designed by Abu Bakr al-Kaf and located in the Aydid district, was also reviewed. This building is in relatively good condition. Unfortunately, a change from last year is that the balcony doors at the upper floor have fallen down (Fig. 15). With minor investment, a carpenter could reinstall the doors.

Aydid, a mansion in good condition that had been adaptively reused as a religious school, was purchased and restored since last season. The religious school moved into the intact section of an adjacent mansion, Al-Majaff. Interestingly, the portion of al-Majaff that was bulldozed in 2003, has been rebuilt as a mudbrick structure separated from the original building with a property wall.

Our studies of these mansions were part of a preliminary survey of the historic core of Tarim. The objectives of this side of the project is to reevaluate other

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<sup>4</sup> Pamela Jerome and Selma Al-Radi, Feasibility Study for the Mudbrick Palaces of Tarim, Yemen, unpublished report submitted to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York, NY, issued 5 April 2001.

significant villas that we had identified in previous years, tentatively define the borders of the historic core of Tarim, and conduct a preliminary evaluation of the general building stock and overall fabric of the historic city. While the historic villas have been the focus of our documentation project, and will continue to play an important role in the implementation of future conservation work, identifying the general condition and extent of Tarim's culturally significant urban environment is an equally essential aspect of our efforts. To this end, we conducted a walking survey in several areas. Of particular interest is the neighborhood reaching from Qasr Aydid in the east to Qasr Buq Buq at the edge of the escarpment to the west. Dar al-Mihdhar, Dar bin Sahil, and several other villas are located in this area as well as the Ba Yaqub, al-Kaf, Sarjis, Surur, and Sheikh Ali mosques. The built fabric in this area is in fair-to-poor condition (Fig. 16), including unsympathetic new construction and many abandoned buildings concentrated on the main thoroughfares of the area.

The zone between the al-Mihdhar Mosque and Qasr al-Ranad is also of particular interest. Although no other significant villas are located in this area, this neighborhood is the traditional heart of historic Tarim. The building stock in this neighborhood was in similar condition to the previously stated area, although there are substantially more abandoned buildings falling into a ruinous state (Fig. 17). Al-Ranad, the Kathiri sultans' palace, was recorded this year by a team from the General Organization for the Preservation of Historic Cities of Yemen (GOPHCY). Currently reused as the police station, it too has suffered collapse of a northeast section of the building (Fig. 18). There is also substantial new construction on the main square itself facing Qasr al-Ranad.

In addition to these two neighborhoods, we also surveyed the neighborhood of Qasr al-Shatry, the al-Hawi Quarter further west, and areas just south of Qasr al-Tawahi. Although these areas were originally not a part of the urban core of historic Tarim, they constitute significant suburbs as well as areas of date palm farming that once surrounded the city. A substantial amount of this agricultural area has fallen victim to unchecked urban expansion (Fig. 19). This has placed a number of the villas in unsympathetic urban contexts.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Relations with Community Partners***

The Tarimi Mansions Preservation Project continues to collaborate with various stakeholders concerned with the preservation of historic Tarim. The director of the Municipality of Tarim, Muhammad al-Sha'iri, remains a supporter. Muhammad and Alawi al-Juneid, who operate al-'Ishshah and are members of

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<sup>5</sup> For a map of this preliminary evaluation of the urban fabric, go to [www.learn.columbia.edu/tarim/](http://www.learn.columbia.edu/tarim/) and open the link to the interactive map. The geographic information system for Tarim is located under the "urbanism" link.

the YSHHP, are major collaborators. Sahil 'Umar bin Sahil and the Society for Heritage Service are newly identified stakeholders.

This season we were also contacted by Abdallah bin Shahab, caretaker responsible for al-Mihdhar Mosque. He was concerned about some cracks that have appeared in the mosque. These were reviewed by Dr. Al-Radi, but did not appear to be significant. However, it is important that we are being approached by stakeholders for our technical expertise.

Our work continues to be supported by the American Institute for Yemeni Studies. This year we also received support from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation for the participation of Columbia University graduate students, marking the first time students were involved with the project. In addition to funding for emergency repairs, the SFD provided support for some of the team's expenses. Minor contributions came from the William Kinne Traveling Fellowship through Columbia University, and Superstructures, a NYC-based architectural firm.

We remain interested in organizing community workshops to promote preservation planning and to identify adaptive reuse needs. The Shibam Historic Housing Project (SHHP), a collaboration between GTZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*) and GOPHCY, has also expressed an interest in our documentation training program. If we expand our training program to include digital technology, GTZ will commit the participation of some of their trainees. In addition, discussions occurred with Dr. Burkhard von Rabenau, developer of the economic model for the SHHP, and he is willing to consult for the Tarimi Mansions Preservation Project to provide an economic development plan for Tarim. In the meantime, we have recommended members of the Society for Heritage Service and the YSHHP to GTZ so they may take part in workshops planned for the spring and summer of this year.

Concern continues for the incursions of new concrete construction in the historic core of Tarim. Already, inappropriate concrete construction has risen in front of Dar al-Salam (Fig. 20) and al-Tawahi (Fig. 21), another significant mansion, with major consequences to the context of these two buildings. Without legal protection, Tarim is doomed to suffer the same fate that Seyoun is currently undergoing: the loss of historic fabric in favor of ill-conceived concrete construction (Fig. 22). We remain committed to the need for legal protection, not only to preserve the historic monuments and traditional fabric, but also to legislate the aesthetics of new concrete construction (Fig. 23).

### ***Documentation of Hamtut and al-Riyad***

Like many of the mansions in Tarim, Hamtut and al-Riyad are al-Kaf family villas. The buildings were documented with conventional and digital photography.

Approximately 300 color slides and 2,000 digital photographs were shot. Surveys throughout the structures resulted in sketches that were used to produce scaled architectural plans in AutoCAD (computer-aided drafting; refer to Appendix). Condition assessments were performed and both abandoned buildings were found to be in poor condition, with large holes in many of the roofs. Both are candidates for adaptive reuse.

The Hamtut is an impressive Mughal-style structure, and a significant monument in a prominent position on one of the main thoroughfares into Tarim (Fig. 24). According to Hussain Sayid al-Kaf of Seyoun, caretaker of the mansion, the Hamtut and al-Riyad are the only two of the expropriated villas in which the families were still occupying the buildings when they were removed by the former Marxist government. Hussain indicated that he lived in the Hamtut with his 70 relatives at the time.

The Hamtut has an elongated entrance structure on its south elevation, which is accessed by semi-circular steps. Once inside the building, a large doughnut-shaped corridor on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor (Fig. 25) surrounds a swimming pool (Fig. 26) that is a copy of the pool found in an earlier al-Juneid villa, Ba Hawash. Major reception rooms flank the east (Fig. 27) and west (Fig. 28) sides of the pool area. These adjoin balconies to the south. An addition at the west elevation provided a separate entrance for the ladies of the household and culminates in a large terrace on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor.

A central courtyard is ringed by stairwells to the east and west, and corridors to the south and north. On the ground floor level, the courtyard served as the original kitchen surrounded by storerooms. To the north, a kitchen addition to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor suffered partial collapse in 2002 (Fig. 29). In this area, a larger courtyard is framed by the massive piers, which support the kitchen wing, and secondary rooms in poor condition along the north and east courtyard walls. The piers are severely undermined (Fig. 30) and the remainder of the kitchen wing threatens to pull down part of the north elevation of the original building with it.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Hamtut exhibits greater deterioration because of the precarious condition of the roofs. Comparison of photographs taken in November 2000 of a highly decorated 2<sup>nd</sup> floor room in the Hamtut are also proof that extensive damage has occurred in the intervening years (Figs. 31 and 32). A bid for emergency stabilization from Ba Mumin came in at \$52,000 with an escalation factor of 15% if the contract is not executed for a year.

Al-Riyad was designed by Abu Bakr al-Kaf in the Art Deco style. Although relatively small in floor plan, Al-Riyad still manages to have an imposing and carefully articulated façade (Fig. 33). The building was apparently reused under the Marxists as a cooperative for agricultural equipment. Remnants remain in



the front and side yards of this former use. A single story addition on the north side of al-Riyad contains classrooms.

The main entrance to the mansion is located in the southwest corner. Side-to-side stairwells lead to the two sides of the house. A central lightwell divides the north and south portions of this three-story structure. Rooms display restrained Art Deco decoration (Fig. 34) very similar to that of Dar al-Salam mansion. All of the roofs are in deplorable condition with sink holes (Fig. 35). A 1<sup>st</sup> floor room in the northwest corner of al-Riyad is on the verge of collapse with its stone columns sinking into the floor. Other rooms are in precarious condition as a result of leaks through the roofs (Fig. 36).

### ***Conclusion***

Immediate emergency repairs to the roofs of the Hamtut and al-Riyad are required if these two buildings are to be saved. In addition, funding for emergency stabilization of al-Fijr is being sought to prevent further collapse. For the upcoming season, al-Fijr is a priority for documentation. If the team is large enough, it is possible that we may tackle one of the other large mansions, probably Dar Mihdhar.

Clearly, there is much left to document and we are concerned for the survival of several of the abandoned mansions. We were unable to access three other abandoned buildings in questionable condition: Ba Kheita, al-Shatiry and Bayt Hasan Abdallah al-Haddad.

A logical next step is to commission Dr. Rabenau to perform an economic development study for the town of Tarim. This would give us a clearer picture of the town's needs and help to define an adaptive reuse strategy for significant abandoned structures that could be accomplished through long-term lease agreements. Reusing the abandoned monuments in the public domain will not only save them, but help to define Tarim as a cultural destination.

Likewise, we also propose to translate all versions of our reports—both conventional and electronic—and the project website into Arabic. Translating these resources would go far towards increasing our visibility in Tarim and engaging the public. An Arabic version of our materials would also prove to be valuable resources to the nascent conservation movement perhaps best represented by Sahil 'Umar bin Sahil and the Society for Heritage Service. The AIYS's support in this area would be greatly appreciated.

Five years have passed since the tentative beginnings of the Tarimi Mansions Preservation Project. At this point, we are beginning to see the impact of our efforts on the community. With emergency stabilization activities requiring more frequent visits by Dr. Al-Radi, it is our belief that we must now establish a visible

presence in Tarim. We are proposing to rent the unoccupied half of al-Munaysurah mansion as working and living accommodations for visiting scholars associated with the TMPP. This would ensure accessibility of local stakeholders to the technical expertise provided by the TMPP.



Fig. 1: The restored southwest wing of the 'Ishshah palace is being reused as a gallery space.



Fig. 2: An area of al-Fijr collapsed as a result of a termite-infested beam.



Fig. 3: Al-Haywar, also known as Dar Leila, is relatively good condition.



Fig. 4: Dar bin Sahil is an impressive abandoned mansion in fair condition.



Fig. 5: Some of Dar bin Sahil's terraces are in extremely poor condition.



Fig. 6: Art Deco interiors grace Dar bin Sahil.



Fig. 7: Lime plaster window inserts are an interesting detail of Dar bin Sahil.



Fig. 8: Dar Mihdhar is another significant abandoned mansion in fair-to-poor condition.



Fig. 9: The northeast area of Dar Mihdhar has collapsed.



Fig. 10: Unusual early decorations are found in Dar Mihdhar.



Fig. 11: Bayt Abd al-Rahman bin Sheikh al-Kaf has recently been opened to the public as a house museum.



Fig. 12: Bayt Abd al-Rahman bin Sheikh al-Kaf also boasts a formal garden on its north elevation.



Fig. 13: Bir Yimani is an al-Kaf mansion located in the palm groves on the outskirts of Tarim. The 2000 feasibility study assessed it as beyond repair.



Fig. 14: Bir Yimani has highly articulated decorative details.



Fig. 15: Al-Haddad, an Art Deco mansion, has suffered the collapse of its balcony doors.



Fig. 16: The area around the Sarjis Mosque is part of the historic core of Tarim, but is in fair-to-poor condition.



Fig. 17: In the historic core of Tarim, near al-Ranad palace, there are many abandoned and collapsing traditional buildings.



Fig. 18: A portion of the northeast wing of al-Ranad palace has collapsed.



Fig. 19: Unregulated concrete construction across from al-Tawahi in a former palm grove.



Fig. 20: New unsympathetic concrete construction has compromised the context of Dar al-Salam mansion.

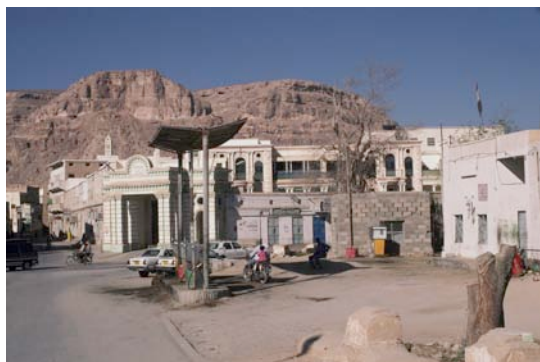


Fig. 21: New concrete construction in front of al-Tawahi compromises the context of the mansion within the historic core of Tarim.



Fig. 22: Unregulated concrete construction inserted into traditional neighborhoods of Seyoun is out of context in both scale and aesthetics.



Fig. 23: The historic core of Tarim requires legal protection and regulation of aesthetics of new concrete construction.



Fig. 24: The Hamtut is an impressive Mughal-style mansion.





Fig. 25: The main entrance of Hamtut leads to generously sized 1<sup>st</sup> floor corridor that rings the interior swimming pool.

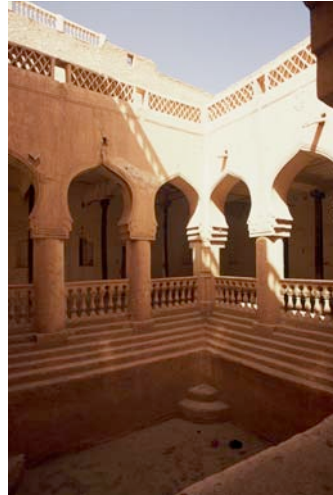


Fig. 26: The Hamtut's swimming pool is a copy of an earlier pool in the Ba Hawash mansion.



Fig. 27: The Hamtut's reception room to the east of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor corridor Has built-in cabinets.



Fig. 28: The Hamtut's 1<sup>st</sup> floor west reception room leads to a large terrace with a separate ground floor entrance for the women. Both reception rooms have been remodeled with Art Deco doors.



Fig. 29: The northwest kitchen wing of the Hamtut collapsed in 2003.



Fig. 30: The massive piers supporting the Hamtut's northwest kitchen wing are severely undermined, risking further collapse.



Fig. 31: A 2<sup>nd</sup> floor room in Hamtut photographed in 2000.

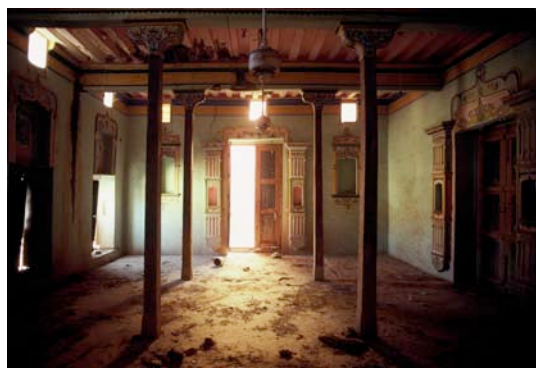


Fig. 32: The same room as documented in December 2004. The roof over this room is now in precarious condition with several gaping holes.



Fig. 33: Al-Riyad mansion has an imposing Art Deco façade designed by Sayid Alawi Abu Bakr al-Kaf and dates to more or less the same period as Dar al-Salam mansion.



Fig. 34: The interiors of al-Riyad are graced by simple Art Deco decorative motifs very similar to those in Dar al-Salam mansion.



Fig. 35: The roofs of al-Riyad are in dangerous condition as exhibited by these sink holes.



Fig. 36: The interiors of al-Riyad exhibit extensive damage as a result of leaking roofs.