

# Restoring Antiquities in Islamic Cairo

## Challenge

Built in 1092 as the southern gateway of the walled city, Bab Zuweila became over time a site for commerce, religious devotion, processions, celebrations and justice. Easily identified by its famous twin minarets, the landmark is one of the finest extant examples of fortified architecture predating the Crusades. With the passage of time, however, moisture, air pollution, and traffic wore away the structure and urban development obscured its original layout. Vibrations and emissions from vehicular traffic and rainwater seeping through roof terraces caused major damage. The construction of nearby shops aggravated damage to the masonry and obscured the historic layout.



Photo: USAID/Egypt

## Initiative

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded a £E 2.8 million project for the American Research Center in Egypt to restore and protect the monument in cooperation with Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. An international team led by an Egyptian expert began the renovation in 1998 and a completion ceremony was held September 14, 2003.

The project was designed to preserve, protect and reveal existing historic material with minimal replacement. Using modern technology, the team emphasized traditional materials and techniques including crafts preserved in the neighborhood for centuries.

## Results

The doors of Bab Zuweila can now open for the first time in 500 years. Today, the main access to the tower is a once-hidden entrance which was revealed during the project. The entire structure was cleaned of accumulated dirt and harmful pollutants. The roof terraces were repaired and waterproofed to protect the structure from rainwater, and an underground aeration system was installed around the foundation to reduce groundwater leakage. Shops in the gate's lower floor dating to the Middle Ages were renovated and given new fronts. Visitors can learn about the history of the landmark and conservation project through an exhibit now established on the grounds. This and other conservation activities funded by USAID and other donors will increase tourism and benefit the small shopkeepers and artisans in the area.

For more information, please visit [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov).

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