



## CONDITION ASSESSMENT – MATERIAL AND BUILDING PATHOLOGY

*This session was created by Tony Crosby and modified by Claudia Cancino.*

### ABSTRACT

The session on material and building pathology will build on the information covered in previous sessions on material analysis, characterization and construction techniques. It is of no value to consider the actual cause and effect mechanisms in isolation, without considering the nature of the materials and systems within the greater context in which considerations and decisions are made. By understanding something about the proper composition of soils, the appropriate mixture, and the placement of the raw material in a construction, much about the actual performance of the materials and systems is already known; and much of what is not known, is implied. By knowing about the history and background of a site and structure, its associated values, and its history of interventions, much about the decay mechanisms is already known.

This session includes first, a preliminary exercise for the students to identify the existing conditions of a site. This exercise is followed by a lecture in which different types of conditions are explained. Lastly, a very practical exercise will try to simulate the different types of conditions and their relationship to the specific characteristics of earthen materials.

The emphasis will be on the actual decay mechanisms that degrade the materials and the building systems. Excessive moisture in all its forms —rainfall, high and continual relative humidity, standing water, snow—is the single most important factor in the performance of an earthen structure, affecting both the material and building systems. Degradation of the material and the building system can also be affected by excessive winds, physical abrasion by animals and humans, other forms of human intervention, and ground motion. These factors will also be discussed, however the emphasis will be on the significance of the building pre-existing conditions and their effects on the performance of the materials and building system.

If excessive moisture is the most critical factor in decay mechanisms, then it is critical to understand how moisture gains access and is transported through the material. Does moisture move through earthen material by capillary action? Does moisture move through earth in a similar way as through other porous materials? What are the similarities of that vehicle and what are the differences? How does moisture actually affect the mechanical properties of the materials? What are the forces that cause moisture to be retained by the material? How similar and how different are the decay mechanisms of earth compared to other porous building materials? Is the presence of any moisture degrading and should the conservation goal be its complete elimination? These are some of the moisture related questions that will be raised and addressed during the sessions.

Moisture has a direct effect on the performance of earthen material and on earthen building systems, but it also helps provide a hospitable environment for other causes of decay. Soluble salts in themselves are not deleterious to earthen materials and to earthen building systems. In fact, salts can add to the mechanical strength of a material in some cases. As soluble salts that are normally found in an earthen building, however, crystallize and grow through the processes of hydration and dehydration, they exert tremendous pressures in the pores of the material. These pressures can easily break the material apart. Salts can also increase the amount of moisture in materials and can cause the direct decay of other materials that come in contact, such as metal reinforcing. Moisture can also provide a welcoming environment for insects and animals, which otherwise would not be attracted to the earthen structure.



Temperature and temperature changes in themselves have no practical effect on earthen materials. Yet the same temperatures and temperature fluctuations may impact other materials; when the two materials are in contact, the performance of the building material may well be compromised. The effect of temperature and temperature change in the presence of moisture can affect the performance of the earth materials. The most obvious example is the effect that occurs when moisture changes from a liquid to a solid.

This session is divided in three sub-sessions: A preliminary exercise, a classroom lecture, and a decay simulation exercise. The preliminary exercise will introduce the subject, particularly as it relates to the most obvious problems. In this case, "problems" will be primarily defined by the students as they observe previously built and damaged constructions and the site being used for this session. The objective is to look at the buildings and the site from the human scale, from the human perspective, and investigate the actual processes that result in what is observed.

The classroom lecture will present the issues and conditions that affect the performance of the material and earthen building systems—the causes and the effects of the decay process. The emphasis will be on the knowledge of the material and the systems, and will build on the topics already presented in earlier sessions.

As the third part of the session, the decay simulation exercise will pull together the earlier experience of discovery with the understanding of the actual decay mechanism covered by the lecture, with a field exercise that requires the students to "create" various failure patterns on constructions built for that purpose.

The sub-sessions, while drawing on materials presented by earlier sessions, will point ahead to the decay mapping and condition assessments of a future session. In this session, the relation of causes and effects will be direct and clearly presented as current knowledge allows.

### OBJECTIVES

As a result of this session, the participant should be able to:

#### ***Preliminary exercise:***

- Question the ability of earthen materials and building systems to perform under various potentially deleterious conditions.
- Understand the complexities of preserving a site and structures with often complex and numerous issues under the constraints of time, available resources, and staff.
- Value the effectiveness of a multidisciplinary approach, working together and taking advantage of the abilities and knowledge of others.

#### ***Classroom Lecture:***

- Understand the building/site performance in relationship to the distinctiveness of its material and systems.
- Identify the main factors that result in decay and understand the relative significance of each.
- Understand that the decay mechanisms are complex and interrelated.

#### ***Decay simulation exercise:***

- Identify the possible and probable causes of specific failure patterns.
- Understand the influence that the material characteristics (soil types, gradation, etc.) have on the building/site overall performance.
- Identify and prioritize the decay type and level depending on the sources of moisture.



- Describe specific failure patterns that will result from various loading and environmental conditions.
- Describe the effects of pre-existing conditions on earthen sites failure patterns.

## CONTENT

### *Preliminary exercise*

Four constructions will be used either from those built for other sessions or appropriate samples on specific sites. These constructions/sites will exhibit more obvious examples of different materials and construction techniques, deterioration mechanism and performance.

The specific requirements for the 4 constructions/site sections are:

- A variety of earth construction systems (earth, earth and wood, masonry and earth, load bearing, earth fill in a wood frame, incompatible materials and systems, rendered wall surfaces, non-rendered wall surfaces).
- Examples which can demonstrate surface erosion, poor drainage, potential and current structural failure, rising damp, insects, vegetation, etc. (Try to include macro decay issues as well).
- Constructions should be within close proximity, but not next to one another – approximately 8-10 meters apart.

The exercise will be to “discover” issues and problems in a controlled environment. The students will be divided in four groups but will review the conditions of four constructions/site sections. After, each section will be assigned to each group and will report briefly on what they discovered.

#### Introduction to the exercise:

The instructor will explain that the task is to identify what perceived problems related to:

1. Use and performance of materials
2. Use and performance of building systems.
3. Environmental decay (wind, humidity, temperature, vegetation).
4. External factors (earthquakes, abandonment).
5. External impact (human mechanical damage, inadequate interventions, insects).

#### Exercise methodology:

1. Each group will look at a construction/site section for 15 minutes and then rotate.
2. A resource person will be at each section; instructors will also be available to ask, not answer questions.
3. When all the rotations are complete, each group will be given 5-10 minutes to prepare to report on one section, leading a discussion for 5 minutes,
4. Groups present their observations and findings.
5. Resource people, instructors, etc. will comment on the discussions; they will add information where appropriate and continually relate the discussions to subject matter of earlier sessions (example: material performance) and to the next sessions on pathology.



Figure 4.2.1  
Students from PAT course investigating pathologies  
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust



Figure 4.2.2  
Student from PAT course  
presenting his findings in class  
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust

### ***Classroom Lecture:***

In support of the objectives of this section, the instructor will discuss:

#### Introduction:

1. The relationship of this session to earlier sessions emphasizing:
  - a. Knowledge of materials, the performance of materials
  - b. Knowledge of building systems
  - c. Importance of understanding decay in overall management planning
2. The relationship of this session to subsequent sessions emphasizing that:
  - a. It is important to understand the effects of decay at different scales
  - b. All information is collected for a comprehensive condition assessment to be developed later
  - c. The understanding of causes and effects leading to appropriate interventions
3. Emphasis of this session:
  - a. Effects of decay processes
  - b. Cause-effect relationships

#### Material Performance:

1. Characteristics of a material that will perform well:
  - a. Function as intended
  - b. Proper mix – gradation of particle size
  - c. Preparation of raw material
  - d. Formation of building units (mud bricks; rammed earth; puddled; formed; wattle and daub; etc.
2. Characteristics of systems that perform well:
  - a. Compatibility of materials
  - b. Protection from rain and ground water
  - c. Traditional seismic reinforcements
3. Materials that perform well in some conditions but not in others:
  - a. Organic materials added that provide nutrients for insects/microorganisms
  - b. High compressive strength of dry materials with inadequate clay fail quickly when subjected to moisture
  - c. Class input with others – saline water used in original mix; expansive clays; etc.



Deterioration mechanisms:

1. General failure patterns:
  - a. Series of slides of examples
  - b. Minimal discussions – numerous examples of all failure types
2. Environmental decay:
  - a. Wind
    - Direct
      - Abrasion
      - Displacement of surface materials
      - Differential loading
    - Indirect
      - Increasing evaporation
      - Deposition of deleterious materials
      - Air quality (urban centers); Sulfur and carbon oxides produce carbonic acid and sulfuric acids with water
  - b. Humidity
    - General physical properties – porous and permeable
    - Surface and internal moisture – raising damp
    - Conditions that affect moisture movement
      - Temperature (effects of temperature on condensation; show overhead of temperature wall gradient; differential movement of different materials)
      - Vapor pressure
      - Relative humidity
      - Hygroscopic materials
      - Structure and nature of capillaries
    - Salt crystallization
    - Effects on mechanical properties
  - c. Temperature and temperature change with moisture:
    - Freeze and freeze-thaw
    - Wet-dry cycles (number of cycles; presence of soluble salts)
  - d. Vegetation or biological decay:
    - Disruption from roots, etc. that displace and disrupt
    - Lichens produce acids that could be deleterious
    - Moulds
3. External factors for decay:
  - a. Earthquake and other natural disasters (rain, floods)
    - Building seismic performances
    - Identification of recognizable symptoms (compare with moisture failure symptoms)
  - b. Abandonment:
    - Loss of connections and collapse
    - Vertical loading
      - Normal strength and strength affected by moisture (loss)
      - Normal failure pattern by loss of compressive strength
      - What are the recognizable symptoms (crack patterns; plumbness; increase of width)
4. Human impact:
  - a. Human mechanical damage (i.e., graffiti)
  - b. Insects and/or animals mechanical damage
    - Termites seek nutrients, physical damage by tunneling



- Animal burrowing and undermining; abrasive action; depositing fetal waste; nesting birds
- c. Inadequate/non-compatible interventions
- d. Inadequate change of building function

Pathologies:

1. Non-structural damage:
  - a. Detachment
  - b. Disaggregation
  - c. Flaking and blistering
  - d. Cracking
2. Structural damage:
  - a. Cracking:
    - Horizontal
    - Vertical
    - Flexural
    - Diagonal
    - X-shaped
  - b. Settlement of walls
  - c. Lack of connections
  - d. Displacement:
    - Out-of-plane
    - In-plane
  - e. Partial and/or total collapse

Specific Case Studies:

The intent of this portion of the lecture is to show real examples of failure in the context of a structure—what are the “real life” effects of the conditions discussed above? This should be interactive, with class input on specific issues, but directed by the use of the specific examples.

1. Archeological Sites
  - a. Archaeological features unprotected from rain and surface erosion
  - b. Leaking roofs and gutters
  - c. Archeological excavations that turn into rapid drying; formation of salts; concentration of moisture; and/or, physical destruction
2. Structures that have failed from moisture at the foundation or ground level
  - a. Show examples of the conditions and interpret the evidence
  - b. List the possible causes based on the evidence
3. Plaster damage in general
4. Structures that have failed from earthquake and other differential loading
  - a. Show series of slides of earthquake damaged structures
  - b. Introduce the effects of “pre-existing” conditions and maintenance on site performances and show specific examples
5. Structures and sites showing a combination of failure systems

***Decay simulation exercise***

This session will be broken into two types of simulations. Both simulations should be interactive with discussions and exchange of ideas. At the end of each exercise, each group will present their findings to the other groups, instructors and observers.



Small scale simulation exercise:

This exercise will emphasize the movement of moisture through the earth material. Students will:

1. Measure the rate of capillary rise and describe factors that affect the rise, and
2. Record the movement of moisture from sources of moisture on a vertical wall surface, at the base of a wall and from the top.

*Sample construction specifications:*

1. Capillary Rise: for each of the five groups – three samples each of three different columns of pre-formed and cured earth material of different soil characteristics (specific soil types developed in conjunction with coordinator of sessions 2.2.1 – 2.3.3). columns shall be 5cm X 5cm X 10 cm high. Total of 45 samples.
2. Supplemental Capillary Rise demonstrations – 12 additional earth columns for overall class demonstrations to be treated by session coordinator and instructors the week of the session.
3. Vertical Surface Absorption: for each of five groups – two samples each of three different pre-formed blocks of different soil characteristics (specific soil types developed in conjunction with coordinator of sessions 2.2.1 – 2.3.3). Blocks shall be 10cm thick X 30cm long X 30 cm wide. Total of 30 samples.

*Exercise methodology:*

1. Capillary Rise Simulation
  - a. Small columns of previously molded earth units will be subjected to a constant source of moisture.
  - b. Columns will be made of material of different characteristics; each group will have three different material types.
  - c. The specific data of the material types will be revealed after the results of the experiment are known; discussion will follow about the effects on capillary rise of different material types.
  - d. There will be prepared samples of columns that have been treated and subjected to moisture previously.
  - e. These prepared samples will be described and the effects discussed:
    - i. Column surface coated with a waterproofing material;
    - ii. Column sitting in saline water;
    - iii. Column subjected to several wetting cycles;
    - iv. Sample saturated and then frozen.
2. Vertical Surface Moisture Absorption Simulation
  - a. Large mud brick size samples (vertical surface) will be subjected to:
    - i. Surface spray, replicating rain;
    - ii. Constant source of moisture replicating conditions often the result of the growth of microorganisms, fungi, and renderings.
  - b. Samples will again be made of material with different characteristics; each group will test the various samples:
    - i. One sample formed using saline water
    - ii. Another sample made primarily of silt and fine sand
    - iii. A third of an optimum mixture to produce the most resistant unit



- c. Spray will be applied until the surface appears wet; surface will then be scratched to determine depth of water penetration. Spraying will be repeated until the surface appears wet and then continued for another minute.
- d. Note differences or erosion of different material types.
- e. The specific data of the material types will be revealed after the results of the experiment are known. Discussion will follow about the effects of different material types.
- f. There will be prepared samples of units that have been treated and subjected to moisture previously; these samples will be described and the effects discussed.

Examples: Sponges or similar moisture retaining materials will be applied to the surface and covered with a plastic cover to restrict the evaporation for various periods of time – one full day; one week.

Large scale simulation exercise:

The second type of simulation will be at or near human scale. Walls will be constructed to replicate conditions that might be found in actual cases. After describing these “pre-existing conditions” students will be asked to:

1. Create specific failure patterns.
2. Record the decay phenomena and the effects of pre-existing conditions.

*Sample construction specifications:*

1. 5 constructions, each 4 meters long with a two meter intersecting wall, 1.5 meters high, and 40 cm wide, of dry-laid mud bricks and plastered with mud plaster.
2. Walls to be laid in a trench approximately 10 cm deep
3. The constructions are to be separated approximately 4-5 meters apart

*Exercise methodology:*

1. Each group will have a separate construction on which they will work.
2. The groups will describe and record the conditions of their construction: general form and size, material and condition
3. The groups will describe pre-existing conditions that might influence the performance of the construction
4. Each group will be given several structural failure patterns that they will replicate on their constructions; group determines how to “create” crack failure pattern; instructors emphasize creating conditions that are realistic and that might actually occur
5. Actual stresses will be applied and then stopped at the first signs of failure
6. Each group will record their observations: if failure pattern is different than expected, then method is reevaluated
7. After reevaluation, exercise continues – it is important that the instructors answer questions and offer suggestions, primarily by asking other questions and not giving the answers
8. Failures continue until the effects are created; instructors will advise when success is achieved; it is important to stop prior to complete collapse, as these same constructions will be used for the session on intervention; repairs will be made to the constructions, correcting some of the problems created
9. The groups will document the failures





10. Each group will explain the failure pattern: group participants describe what they did and their rationale; they will also describe what real world conditions could exert the forces used; instructors will encourage exploring the full range of possibilities
11. Instructors will preview the interventions of subsequent sessions by explaining that these constructions will be repaired during a future session.
12. The groups will discuss the various conditions and patterns.



Figure 4.2.3  
Large scale simulation exercise area  
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust



Figure 4.2.4  
PAT student simulating pathology  
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust



Figure 4.2.5  
PAT students simulating pathology  
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust



Figure 4.2.6  
PAT students presenting in class the decay  
mechanism on the large-scale sample after simulating  
pathology  
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust

**Session summary:**

1. Review the objectives for this session
2. Review the results of the field exercise – ask for student participation
3. Review the relationship of this session with both previous and subsequent sessions.

**SELECTED IMAGES**

**Unprotected archaeological site, Chan Chan Peru, Photographer: Giacomo Chiari**

The earthen archaeological site of Chan Chan was severely damaged by “El Niño” rains in 1985. A removable protective shelter was later installed in preparation for the rains of 1998, before the PAT courses. The image shows a flooded section at the Tschudi Palace. The rising damp caused salt crystallization in some of the decorated surfaces, which were later treated and removed.



**Leaking roof at earthen house in Cusco, Photographers: Amila Ferron and Sara Lardinois, ©J.Paul Getty Trust**

The images show the deterioration of a floor/roof structure in the house of Casa Arones in the historic center of Cusco. Water had percolated through the damaged roof and deposited on the floor. The floor lost its structural stability due to the rooting of the wooden beams and moisture damage of the earthen floor.



**Moisture decay at residential unite in Lima, Photographer: Claudia Cancino, ©J.Paul Getty Trust**

The image shows loss, detachment and erosion of material at this earthen house in the district of Miraflores in Lima, Peru. Most of the drainage in the historic center of Miraflores is from 1960 and in need of repair?, resulting in water being absorbed? into the soil and transferred to the base of the adobe walls.





### Wind decay at Cajamarquilla, Photographer: Claudia Cancino, ©J.Paul Getty Trust

The earthen archaeological site of Cajamarquilla has been unprotected for many years. Strong winds have affected the massive rammed earth walls as seen in the first image. With time, the upper sections of walls have collapsed.



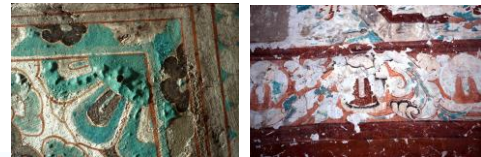
### Moroccan sites abandoned, Photographer: Claudia Cancino, ©J.Paul Getty Trust

The images show partial and total loss of sections of the rammed earth structure of the Ksour Aghlan Ibacha at the Draa Valley in southern Morocco. Several earthen sites were abandoned after Moroccan independence and they are suffering from severe structural decay.



### Plaster decay (blistering, cracking, flaking and detachment) at Cave 85, Mogao Grottoes, Photographer: Lorinda Wong, ©J.Paul Getty Trust

The images show different types of plaster decay at Cave 85 at the Mogao Grottoes in China, mostly due to the presence of moisture and salts. The first image shows blisters and detachment of plaster, and the second image shows cracking, flaking and detachment.



### Cracking at Huaca de La Luna, Trujillo Photographer: Giacomo Chiari

The image shows plaster cracking of the earthen decorated high relieves at the archaeological site of Huaca de La Luna in Trujillo, Peru. The cracking could have been produced during excavation.



### Cracking at Church of San Javier de Ingenio, Nazca; Photographer: Claudia Cancino, ©J.Paul Getty Trust

The Church of San Javier Ignacio shows severe cracking at its walls, vaults and domes. The site has been abandoned since the 18th century and many earthquakes have affected the site as well. Some of the cracking could be from seismic loads while others are just due to abandonment.



### Cracking at Church of San Juan in Ica, Peru Photographer: Claudia Cancino, ©J.Paul Getty Trust


The church was severely damaged by the 2007 Pisco earthquake, magnitude 7.9. The sacristy of the site shows x-shaped cracking typical of earthquake damage.








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