

## = Larabanga Mosque =

The Larabanga Mosque is a historic mosque , built in the Sudanese architectural style in the village of Larabanga , Ghana . It is the oldest mosque in the country and one of the oldest in West Africa , and has been referred to as the " Mecca of West Africa " . It has undergone restoration several times since it was originally founded in 1421 ( 17th century according to some ) . The World Monuments Fund ( WMF ) has contributed substantially to its restoration , and lists it as one of the 100 Most Endangered Sites . The restoration works have revived the knowledge of mud @-@ plaster maintenance .

The mosque has an old Quran , believed by the locals to have been given as a gift from heaven in 1650 to Yidan Barimah Bramah , the Imam at the time , as a result of his prayers . The mosque , built with mud and reeds , has two tall towers in pyramidal shape , one for the mihrab which faces towards Mecca forming the facade on the east and the other as a minaret in the northeast corner . These are buttressed by twelve bulbous shaped structures , which are fitted with timber elements .

## = = Location = =

The mosque is located in the Islamic town of Larabanga , close to Damongo in the West Gonja District of the Northern Region of Ghana . The town is situated about 15 kilometers north of Damongo , and 4 kilometers south of the Mole National Park entrance .

## = = History = =

According to a legend , in 1421 an Islamic trader named Ayuba had a dream while staying here , near a " Mystic Stone " , instructing him to build a mosque . Strangely , when he awoke , he found that the foundations were already in place and he proceeded to construct the mosque until it was completed . It is believed that Ayuba 's remains are buried under a baobab tree , next to the mosque .

Unlike mosques situated in urban settings in West Africa , the Larabanga Mosque is comparatively small . Rural mosques , like Larabanga 's , were usually conceived by a single marabout and loosely based on styles seen elsewhere such as in the Great Mosque of Djenné . In order to achieve a physical resemblance to the architecture used elsewhere , the Larabanga Mosque had to incorporate large buttresses in order to compensate for the poorer quality of building materials .

Larabanga is one of the eight ancient and highly revered mosques in Ghana and is also its oldest . It is a place of pilgrimage and is considered the Mecca of West Africa .

In the 1970s , a mixture of sand and cement was applied to the external faces of the mosque hoping that it would protect the mosque from getting damaged in the wind and rain . However , this treatment resulted in substantial damage to the building as moisture became trapped in the walls built of mud and started a deterioration process of the structure , with termites infesting the wooden supports under humid conditions . This resulted in part of the mosque collapsing and during the repair work it caused some distortions of the structural elements and the exterior of the mosque .

Owing to the effect of prevailing winds and rains on the walls , the mosque has needed several renovations and restoration work which over the years have altered some of its exterior designs . In September 2002 , a severe storm destroyed the mihrab and the minaret . As a result , the World Monuments Fund ( WMF ) placed the mosque on the 2002 World Monuments Watch , also considering the damage sustained after an inappropriate restoration from the 1970s . The Ghana Museums and Monuments Board decided to fully restore the mosque and sought advice from CRAterre , an architectural firm based in Grenoble , France which has expertise in building earthen structures . The renovation work was supported by a WMF , with a grant fund of US \$ 50 @, @ 000 from American Express . The local community also provided support . The conservation process involved removal of the earlier cement plaster from the surfaces of the mosque , the wooden structural components were replaced , the minaret and the mihrab were reconstructed , the portal was redone , and the interior and exterior surfaces were plastered in the traditional way . The

renovation resulted in reassessing the state of conservation of the site , involving a team of local artisans and labourers . It helped to restore the monument with special emphasis on reviving the knowledge of mud @-@ plaster maintenance .

= = Features = =

Like other mosques in Northern Region of Ghana , Larabanga Mosque is built in the traditional Sudanic @-@ Sahelian architectural style , using local materials and construction techniques . The mosque is built with mud and reeds , and measures about 8 metres ( 26 ft ) by 8 metres ( 26 ft ) . It has two towers in pyramidal shape , one for the mihrab which faces towards Mecca forming the facade on the east and the other as a minaret in the northeast corner . In addition , 12 buttresses of conical shape on the external walls are strengthened by horizontally @-@ aligned timber elements . The architectural style is also known as " flat @-@ footed adobe architecture " . All the structures are given a white wash . The mosque has an old Quran , believed by the locals to have been given as a gift from heaven in 1650 to Bramah , the Imam at the time , as a result of his prayers . The local community has also been supported in a handicraft and tourism project to generate funds not only for meeting the maintenance expenses of the mosque but also improve the economic conditions of the people .