

SPACH LIBRARY SERIES

*Status of  
Afghanistan's Cultural  
Heritage*

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**Review of the Status of  
Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage**

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Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage  
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## **SPACH LIBRARY SERIES**

The Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage, based in Kabul, was formed in 1994. SPACH aims to share information and foster contacts with organizations, institutions and individuals inside and outside Afghanistan.

With the cooperation of its members, SPACH maintains a Photo Catalogue on the Status of Museums, Sites, Monuments, Artifacts and Architecture. A Newsletter and Website describing SPACH activities is published for its Afghan and international members. It promotes extensive public relations through liaison with the media and public lectures.

As part of its advocacy efforts, the SPACH LIBRARY SERIES is designed to acquaint readers with the diversity of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. Each volume is devoted to one monument, one archaeological site, one region, or, occasionally, to other cultural subjects. Articles by experts selected by an Editorial Board appear in Dari, Pashto and English. The intent is to enhance the knowledge of all levels of readers.

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# **Review of the Status of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage**

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## **Abstract**

Afghanistan's cultural heritage, from its monuments to its lyric poetry, celebrates the glories of nature. Now that heritage with its surrounding environment is threatened. This paper traces the beginnings of cultural development in the area, explores existing problems and resources, and suggests steps which can be taken to contain the threats, emphasizing individual and community action.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The roots of Afghanistan's cultural heritage reach back 100,000 years to the time when men and women made the earliest stone tools yet discovered in the region. These Lower Palaeolithic tools now lie scattered about one-time camp sites located on terraces leading into the Dasht-i-Nawar, a large basin in Central Afghanistan with perennial lakes and vast grasslands that provide breeding and nesting areas for large numbers of migrating waterfowl. The most beautiful stone tools were recovered in northern Balkh Province, from caves and rock shelters overlooking the Balkh River rushing past the modern village of Aq Kupruk. The Aq Kupruk flint tool makers of the Upper Palaeolithic working around 15,000 B.C. have been called the Michelangelo's of the Palaeolithic.

Prehistoric man chose to live near sources of water which attracted the wildlife on which the survival of their hunting and gathering communities depended. Then, about 7,000 years ago, they learned to control their food supplies through the domestication of plants and animals, particularly sheep and goats. Permanent settlements came into being as proficiency in agriculture and herding increased; villages emerged; cities followed.

By the Bronze Age, that is around 2,500 B.C., the villages were able to supply the cities with basic food requirements, thus freeing artisans to apply their talents to newly developed materials, such as metals and pottery, from which they fashioned a greater variety of artifacts, including religious sculptures, weapons, and domestic wares, as well as many types of ornaments for personal adornment. This encouraged a far-flung trade with other civilizations also emerging at this time along the Nile River in Egypt, the Tigris-Euphrates rivers in southern Iraq, and the Indus River in India. The trade, based on lapis lazuli from Badakhshan, was brisk, and later, in the early centuries A.D., expanded along the famous Silk Route eastward to China, westward to Rome and further south in India.

Afghanistan lay at the centre of this intercommunicating zone where not only traders, but conquerors seeking empires, men of intellect, missionaries, pilgrims, artisans, nomads and political exiles mingled. No matter what the manner of their coming - for power, for money, for ideas or for safe haven - all contributed to Afghanistan's heritage. It is in this reciprocal interaction of new and varied ideas with those already indigenous to the area that the medley of Afghan culture germinated.

Evidence of this fruitful synthesis may be seen on the Afghan landscape in many different forms. Some still lie buried in mounds; some are in ruins, some are neglected, some are still part of living communities; some are Islamic, some are of other once practiced religions; some are grandiose, some are humble; some are new, some are ancient; some are monuments, some are artifacts; some are written, some are painted; some are woven, some embroidered; some are sung, some are plucked from instruments; some are worn, some are lived in; some are decorative, some are utilitarian.

A common overarching feature amongst all these variations in the material culture, however, is the celebration of nature's beauty. Afghan poetry, folktales, songs, paintings, embroideries and carpets

each extol nature's gifts, its mountains, rivers, birds, animals, trees and flowers. Palaces and shrines standing in islands of greenery were made all the more appealing by their garden settings in an otherwise bleak and rugged landscape. Afghan enthusiasm for picnicking in gardens and on river banks is an enduring national characteristic celebrated throughout the centuries by Afghanistan's most revered poets.

The present political turmoil has had a devastating effect on such hallowed cultural traditions, but this of course is nothing unique. Similar upheavals have often been repeated during the course of its long history. One need only recall the decimation of the splendors of the Ghaznavid capital by Alauddin Ghori in 1151, followed shortly by the onslaught of Genghis Khan in 1221. Ancient Ghazni's palaces and gardens were left permanently devastated.

Conflict produces irredeemable physical damage, no doubt, yet the massive displacements accompanying such conflicts call for strengthening traditions so that identities may be affirmed in the midst of the disruptions. The meticulous attentions paid by various refugee groups in maintaining high artistry in their creation of distinctive embroideries and other sartorial distinctions are strong artistic statements confirming this.

It must also be remembered that war is not the only factor responsible for the degradation of artistic expressions. Urbanization diminishes traditions. Changes in fashion result in the deterioration of no longer sought after traditional crafts. For example, the architectural carved stucco and wood decoration which enjoyed continuous popularity throughout the Afghan area for many centuries had all but disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century. The already neglected examples that still existed before the war now lie abandoned amidst the rubble that is Kabul's old city today. That creativity will undoubtedly be replaced with the dull uniformity of cement, unless the rebuilders can be otherwise inspired.

Ideally, the vibrancy of a society is maintained by keeping a balance between welcoming the new while treasuring the past, innovation and continuity running parallel to imbue each and every member of the society with that sense of identity which is essential to keep a nation strong.

Today, perceptions of continuity have been replaced by a disregard for many symbols of the past. Museums have been massively looted, archaeological sites ruthlessly plundered, art and music banned; significant historical buildings have been destroyed, left without maintenance, or crassly mistreated.

Even a cursory glance at the listing of the current status of a selection of fifty priority sites and monuments that concludes this paper, provides sad evidence that, with notable exceptions, physical wartime damage is relatively minimal compared to that inflicted by human avarice, negligence, inattention and indifference.

## **WHAT TO DO?**

What should be done to ameliorate this situation? Or, more appropriately, what can be done? The following discussion is based primarily on my personal observations and, for want of space, is limited to museum, architectural and archaeological issues although, as I have indicated above, I am fully aware that these aspects represent only one portion of the totality of Afghanistan's splendid cultural heritage.

Prerequisites for the formulation of any realistic action plan for immediate emergency as well as for long-term protection and conservation measure consist of four basic essentials, each interlinked and dependent one upon the other.

- First,** sensitive authorities, *i.e.*, effective policy-setting, governing bodies and institutions;
- Second,** capable professionals, *i.e.*, effective trained, motivated human resources;
- Third,** concerned communities, *i.e.*, effective grassroots awareness;
- Fourth,** adequate jurisdiction; *i.e.*, effective laws and enforcement;

### ***Governing Institutions***

Little capacity for introducing national systems for the preservation of cultural properties exists under current situations, although official departments and organizations within the de facto governments at Kabul, Herat, Mazar-i -Sharif, and Bamiyan technically exist and do provide a semblance of institutional structure. Nevertheless, these departments, with the exception of the General Office for the Preservation of Historical Sites in Hazarajat, Bamiyan, formed only in 1997, are but shadows of those that existed in 1978 when the conflict began. They now have no authority, no financial status, and are prey to frequent, arbitrary policy changes, controversies and contradictions that encroach on their effectiveness.

An outstanding example of these vacillations and inconsistencies is the Kabul Museum which has been looted of 80% of what remained in the Darulaman building in 1992. While illegal trade in Afghan artifacts has always existed, the Kabul Museum had a remarkable security record. Objects from the museum were never traded before the war; the flood began after 1992, although little has as yet gone missing since the coming of the Taliban. The government of President Rabbani instructed that an inventory be prepared and that the artifacts be removed from Darulaman for safe storage at the Kabul Hotel.

The present Taliban authorities disapprove of this move and wish to return the artifacts to Darulaman after the damage caused by rocketing has been repaired. Since remedial work would be excessively expensive, requiring sizeable funds which neither the authorities nor international sources are prepared to provide, work on the museum collections has ceased. Yet, the museum staff has been instructed to attend their offices in Darulaman although no transportation is provided for the daily eight-kilometer trip to Darulaman. In addition, abysmally low salaries are only intermittently paid and office supplies, electricity, heating, meals and other standard facilities are not forthcoming. The Kabul Museum therefore receives little institutional, financial or technical support.

This indifference to the plight of the museum extends as well to the city's architectural heritage which daily deteriorates through misappropriation and simple inattention to maintenance. Nor is there an appreciation that heritage issues, in conjunction with those of their surrounding environments, have links to and should be incorporated into a Master Plan for the socio-economic revitalization of this devastated city. A prime potential for this would be the restoration of Timur Shah's mausoleum and its garden located at the heart of the city, but the authorities express little enthusiasm for this suggestion. For the present it is clear that cultural conservation is not an official priority in Kabul.

Not surprisingly, Herat, with its abundance of priority monuments, some of which are in precarious condition requiring immediate emergency attention, presents more encouraging possibilities. The Herat Department for the Protection of Historical Monuments of Ancient Herat is more active, but again a shortage of funds, poor coordination and controversies are inhibiting factors, compounded by the

absence of a clear strategy. Haphazard ill-planned reconstruction has been ineffective. The tile mosaic workshop at the Masjid-i-Jami', established when an ambitious restoration programme was initiated in 1943, still functions, albeit with much-reduced activities. The reorganized Herat Museum opened in 1994 in the courtyard at the foot of the imposing Citadel where UNESCO initiated an ambitious restoration project in 1976. It survived the war in good condition. The museum is well taken care of but the manuscripts and objects desperately need conservation and cataloguing, a task for which no trained staff is available.

Numbers of stellar monuments were once the pride of Herat's famed bustling bazaars. The potential for returning these structures to an active role is not appreciated. The Hauz-i-Chahr Suq in the heart of the old city could easily be restored for any number of civic purposes, but it is empty, neglected and crumbling. The barrel-vaulted caravanserais, centers of exotic trade through many centuries, have been replaced by mundane multi-storied shopping centers because of the current poverty of artistic vision. Creative variety has thus been obliterated.

It is hard to say what motivated the initiation of the vigorous redecoration project that was in progress in the summer of 1996 at the Shrine of Hazrat Ali in Mazar-i-Sharif. The work was being supervised by a high military officer, and the professional conservationists on the staff seemed to have little authority to carry out their work according to professional standards. Space for a museum had been allocated, but there was no expertise to carry out its proper organization.

### ***Trained Human Resources***

There is an acute shortage of trained specialists to carry out preservation and conservation work according to accepted international standards. Those who received training before the war have either left Afghanistan, been dismissed, or remain on the payroll without administrative, financial or technical support; unqualified staff fills vacancies. The relevant department at Kabul University is closed. Nevertheless, since there has so far been no concerted attempt to thoroughly identify the availability or, above all, the capability of personnel in various related fields, it is difficult to assess the potential which may in fact exist. This is an important task which should - and could - be undertaken.

Follow-up on offers for training outside Afghanistan has been thwarted by the fact that potential students are seldom able to study in English. The feasibility of setting up practical training courses inside Afghanistan is therefore being explored. The authorities agree to this in principle, but evidence little intention to contribute basic requirements. Such indifference raises the question of what the trainees will be able to do on the completion of their studies.

### ***Concerned Communities***

Since sincere official commitment to address heritage issues seems to be highly questionable at this time when political solutions remain elusive and the business of conflict remains the paramount priority, one must examine what potentials exist within the public at large.

Numbers of religious shrines are being well-maintained and repaired by local communities throughout the country as noted in the appended list of monuments. In Herat, where there is much wealth, the building or repair of mosques and shrines is a popular means of expressing religious piety and fulfilling community obligations. However, individuals without the necessary knowledge of scientific preservation and renovation techniques often do more harm than good. Recycling materials from one ancient building for the repair of another and spreading about vast amounts of cement is not the answer. What is needed is the establishment of some organized structure equipped with the necessary expertise to incorporate these admirable initiatives into a comprehensive plan of action.

Examples of citizen action in the recovery of stolen objects can also be noted. In 1994 an inscribed marble plaque stolen from the tomb of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni was recovered ten days later just before it crossed the Pakistani border solely through the initiative of concerned citizens. Similarly, numbers of individuals responded to the 1995 appeal of the Minister of Information and Culture for the return of looted museum objects. Speaking eloquently over Radio Kabul he noted that men had laboured all their lives to create beauty while others had devoted their lives to preserving that beauty for the inspiration of others, but now men were despoiling that creativity for their own selfish gain. It was the duty of all good citizens, he announced, to assume responsibility for the return of looted objects, and he urged them to hand over artifacts to the newly established National Commission for Return and Preservation of Cultural and Historical Heritage of Afghanistan which offered a small reward in token of good citizenship. Over 1500 objects were thus recovered.

These were of course only a small portion of the missing objects, but it indicated that such appeals can be effective and are definitely worthwhile because many pieces are being spirited away from archaeological sites systematically plundered by clandestine excavators. Ai Khanoum in Takhar Province, the old city of Balkh, and Hadda in Ningrahar are but three prime examples.

Fantastic rumours of massive quantities of gold being wrenched from hitherto unreported sites also circulate. One such near Qaisar in Faryab Province is reputed to have been the seat of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Sultan Sanjar where his golden crown set with jewels, a jewelled silver decanter, a plethora of statues, vessels, lapis lazuli and two kilograms of gold dust were reported to have been taken from diggings that probed twenty five meters below the surface. True? We do not know.

Of inestimable value to scholars, however, is the 1993 Bactrian inscription dug up at Rabatak north of Pul-i-Khumri. Experts say this 2<sup>nd</sup> century stone inscription naming King Kanishka contains information on history and religion that will lead to a fundamental reassessment of the Kushan era.

We shall never know what exactly has disappeared from all these sites, but even more worrisome is the fact that the wanton pillaging destroys scientific evidence that can never be recovered. This is a serious loss because works of art are not produced in a vacuum. If the dynamics of ancient cultures are to be understood, artifacts must be studied in situ. This is no longer possible at many sites in Afghanistan and scholarship will suffer as a result. One of the unique features of the Kabul Museum was the fact that its collections had been scientifically excavated and thus contributed not only to the fuller understanding of Afghan history and culture but, because many pieces had no parallels elsewhere, to the heritage of the world.

The looters and plunderers evidence no feelings of guilt or remorse. They are consumed with a lust for money, an obsession fuelled by outsiders who do have a highly developed appreciation for Afghanistan's artistic heritage, as well as for its commercial value. Unprincipled dealers catering to the desires of international collectors operate in concert with the newly developed selfish greed of the looters and their Afghan agents who are linked to tightly organized and dangerous international stolen art networks, which include corrupt officials, on many different levels, from top to bottom, operating from Pakistan to Europe, Japan and the USA.

Contributing to the root of this problem is the fact that Afghan institutions seldom encourage ordinary citizens to take pride in their heritage. Scholars seldom share their knowledge with the general public; school children are nowhere taught about the richness of their past; few mature adults ever thought of visiting the Kabul Museum before the war and now a whole generation has grown up in exile without the slightest conception of the wonders that once existed in their country.

This is a serious failing for no national strategy, nor any number of trained professionals can hope to improve the current situation without an understanding and sympathetic public. In many ways, the need to raise the attention of the public is more challenging than the need to find resources. Diverse teams of

concerned individuals and groups have been formed to combat the deterioration of cultural and historic environment in other countries when rapid economic development, urbanization and civil strife diverted attention away from cultural sites. Can we learn from them? The possibility of holding a series of meetings and workshops to identify options for action at all levels needs to be actively considered.

Raising public awareness will involve bringing concerned local residents together with building, planning, and environment professionals, as well as government officials, NGOs, deminers, international donors and experts. If awareness translates into an interest for action, then trained personnel must be ready to keep up the momentum.

Obstacles will undoubtedly surface, however, for numbers of individuals within government, NGO and donor communities, equally unaware of the seriousness of the threats to the vanishing heritage, tend to regard culture as a low key issue; some are openly hostile to the idea of expending funds on cultural properties when emergency humanitarian needs already exceed dwindling funds. It is a pleasure, therefore, to acknowledge notable exceptions, such as the supportive cooperation frequently extended by the demining agencies and the UN Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS/HABITAT).

Nevertheless, Afghans with vision and charisma must be found not only in Afghanistan but also in Europe, the United States, and Pakistan who are willing to lead vigorous campaigns on behalf of these cultural issues. This is an important requirement for neither advocacy nor training will be effective without enthusiastic leadership.

One positive factor is that international bodies are primed, ready and anxious to assist. These include UNESCO, ICOM (International Council of Museums), ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites), ICCROM (International Centre of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), in addition to a group of professional associations in Japan. Similarly, on 8 December 1997, the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO adopted a *Resolution on Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan* expressing concern about threats to Afghan cultural heritage, inviting the authorities to safeguard that heritage, and calling upon the international community to provide all possible assistance. Ways must be found to follow up, harness and utilize this interest.

Advocacy in diverse directions, therefore, becomes a paramount necessity. To this end the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) was formed in 1994 in Islamabad with international and Afghan membership. SPACH aims primarily to share information and foster contacts with organizations, institutions and individuals inside and outside Afghanistan. With the cooperation of its members it maintains a Photo Catalogue on the Status of Museums, Sites, Monuments, Artifacts, and Architecture. It installed emergency security facilities at the Kabul Museum and assists in the preparation of an inventory of remaining artifacts. It supports assessment missions and surveys. It promotes extensive public relations through liaison with the media and public lectures. In 1997 the Association for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan (APHCHA), composed of Afghan professionals, was registered with the Ministry of Planning in Kabul.

### ***Law Enforcement***

International statements calling for protection of cultural properties in Afghanistan are frequently fielded. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan reporting to the UN Commission on Human Rights consistently equates looting and plundering among the nation's basic human rights violations. The 13 February 1997 UN General Assembly Resolution draws a link between cultural property and peace, and repeats earlier appeals calling on "all Afghan parties to take appropriate steps to prohibit, prevent and put a stop to any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of, and any acts of vandalism directed against cultural property of the Afghan nation."

Past Afghan governments did quite well in this regard. The Kabul Museum was a supporting institutional member of the International Council of Museums and abided by the international standards set by that body, particularly with respect to customs regulations authorizing confiscation without compensation of proscribed objects of doubtful or undocumented origin. The antiquities law unequivocally stated that movable and immovable cultural property, excavated or still beneath the soil, belonged to the people of Afghanistan and that it was the responsibility of the people as well as government to protect that heritage. The laws prohibited structural changes to historical buildings, provided for the cessation of construction projects if it was found that they endangered ancient sites. The grand Kushan temple at Surkh Kotal near Pul-i-Khumri was saved for scientific excavation in this manner after road builders unearthed blocks bearing Greek lettering.

Furthermore, the law decreed that antiquities found on private land were the property of the nation, not individuals. For small objects this could not always be enforced, but a dramatic enforcement success is provided by the case of the Mir Zakah Hoard. However, Mir Zakah also illustrates how enforcement of law against illegal activities has broken down; it also provides insights into the unscrupulousness of stolen art trading.

Word of the accidental discovery of masses of coins recovered from a well in the village of Mir Zakah, 53 kilometers north-east of Gardez, Paktya Province, reached Kabul in May 1947. Sent to investigate, representatives of the Kabul Museum recovered over 13,000 Indian, Greek, Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian, Indo-Parthian and Kushan coins dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the early centuries A.D.. Application of the antiquities law effectively terminated illegal collecting at Mir Zakah.

The second assault on Mir Zakah was made in 1992 when the tribe inhabiting the area collectively decided to resume excavations in a more systematic manner. A 12-member committee was formed to supervise excavations, carry out negotiations with Pakistani dealers and oversee the equitable distribution of profits. Individual tribal members invested Rs. 50,000 each to cover the costs which included the purchase and operation of a generator and a water pump, in addition to a large labour force.

The results were more than spectacular. According to a leading British numismatist, the Mir Zakah hoard is one of the largest ancient coin deposits in the history of mankind. It is composed of an estimated two to three tons of gold, silver and bronze coins, in addition to a reported 200 kilograms of silver and gold objects such as jewellery, cups and statues which quickly disappeared into the hands of foreign collectors before they could be properly identified or studied by scholars. These finds were sold at enormous prices by dealers in Peshawar and Islamabad, but little of this money has returned to Mir Zakah. In fact, the original investors have yet to recover even their expenses, much less enjoyed a profit. This has caused considerable friction throughout the tribe.

Official intervention such as that which took place in 1947 was not even remotely possible in and after 1992 although President Rabbani's government did instruct the institute of Archaeology to send a team to stop the digging. But, as the Director wryly noted, government's authority in Paktya at that time was so weak that even a regiment of soldiers could not have protected the archaeologists should they have gone on such a mission. By 1997 the excavations had ceased. The Taliban take credit for this, but the investors more accurately attribute the stoppage to the shortage of funds to run the generator and hire labour, and particularly to the potentially dangerous tensions that developed in association with the finds.

To return to the problem of how to apply legal action in stanching the haemorrhaging of objects and minimizing the insensate spoliation of sites. Sadly one has to face the reality that Afghan authorities simply have no control over illegal activities in areas outside their immediate jurisdictions, successive public announcements reiterating official commitment to the protection of cultural properties notwithstanding. The Taliban have abrogated all laws proclaimed by previous governments, but their edicts prohibiting possession of looted artifacts and announcements declaring ancient sites national treasures, echo the spirit of the former laws. A few items have been confiscated, but there has been no

response to their edict demanding the return of objects. It promises punishment by Shariat Law, rather than a reward.

And the rapacity of the diggers continues. The mere articulation of edicts without recognized enforcement capabilities can be counterproductive. The Kabul authorities responded to a recent BBC report of new illegal digging at Ghauchak, near Jalalabad, by reminding all citizens over Radio Shariat that ancient objects belong to the nation and consequently new finds must be turned over to the authorities. A week later everything had disappeared from the site.

Furthermore, difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that the poorly educated Taliban militia do not understand the distinction between edicts banning modern human images and the equally binding edict promising punishment for theft, possession or damage to the nation's heritage. A case in point is the statement made on 16 April 1997 by a Taliban commander besieging Bamiyan vowing to blow up the Buddha "idols" after conquering the valley. Responding to vociferous international protests led by the UN Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNESCO, the Taliban high command in Kandahar issued a statement on 28 April denying any intention of harming the Buddhas, and confirming their commitment to protect all vestiges of the ancient heritage. Whether the rank and file in the militia fully understand the purport of their message is another, and worrisome, matter.

So it is clear the absence of effective responsible authority within Afghanistan causes immense and baffling problems almost impossible to solve until a recognized stable government is established. Therefore one must ask what can be done after the objects leave the country. Equally difficult hurdles exist internationally. Numbers of organizations and government departments specializing in the recovery of missing objects are ready to assist, but are unable to do so because Afghanistan has not signed the *1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural property*. Efforts urging the Rabbani Government to sign this instrument had not succeeded by the time the Taliban arrived on the scene. And now the Taliban are not recognized by the UN so these efforts can no longer move forward.

Even without this important legal support, much needs to be done to sensitize foreign lawyers, judges and customs officials to what is happening in Afghanistan. The sophisticated minutiae of western law are used with confounding results. In October 1997 a British court ruled that if two Begram ivories held up by customs entered Britain, they would be liable for seizure under a European Union trade ban designed to protect elephant populations. No mention was made of the fact that these almost one thousand year old works of art were stolen from the Kabul Museum. The Pakistani owner took back the pieces and returned them to Pakistan so as to explore other means of cashing in on his ill-gotten loot.

Thus, for the short-term at least the burden to initiate a wide variety of actions among a wide variety of actors falls squarely on communities and concerned individuals, by motivated Afghans. Despite the generally gloomy tenor of this discussion there are immediate steps that can be taken to lay the foundation on which subsequent substantive programmes may be built. These are summarized in the following list of priorities.

## **PRIORITIES**

- \*\* **ADVOCACY** among
  - **Afghan officials** on all levels through
    - a - individual contact
    - b - seminars and workshops
    - c - publications on specific aspects.
  - **Afghan official departments** to encourage them to
    - a - accept their responsibilities to

- b - provide their concerned sections with basic amenities
- c - formulate innovative criteria and policies assuring the preparation of strategies with creative solutions, based on reliable data
- d - facilitate constructive action according to the formulated criteria and policies
- e - prevent misappropriation of cultural properties as accommodation for troops and depots for supplies
- f - incorporate heritage themes in school curricula
- g - encourage training of their personnel so as to enhance conservation and protection services.

- **Afghan communities inside Afghanistan to:**

- a - organize structured action groups to mobilize grassroots interest and initiatives
- b - foster intellectual cooperation and action groups through workshops, public lectures, exhibitions, radio programmes, and publication of simple to read booklets.

- **Afghan communities abroad to:**

- a - identify Afghans with vision and charisma willing to lead vigorous campaigns in countries where Afghan stolen art is sold
- b - encourage links with investigative authorities for the recovery of objects illegally imported by Afghans as well as foreign dealers

- **International governments, NGOs and donors to:**

- a - follow up on interest already expressed by international cultural organizations
- b - consolidate networks fostering links between cultural and environmental preservation
- c - stimulate an awareness that attention to the cultural heritage enhances the quality of life

**\*\* INFORMATION GATHERING**

- a - identify skilled, motivated individuals
- b - collect reliable data on sites and properties
- c - assess urgent conservation needs
- d - prepare inventories and registers
- e - replace lost library resources.

**\*\* INFORMATION DISSEMINATION**

- a - employ all types of media, magazines, journals, posters, TV, radio, public lectures, seminars and workshops to reach wide ranges of audiences worldwide.
- b - publish simple, well-illustrated, informative reading materials in Dari and Pashto

**\*\* TRAINING**

- a - identify, assess and register trained personnel
- b - design basic conservation, museum, archives, survey team courses
- c - encourage English language study for selected personnel to provide access to advanced training and

- d - research materials.
- instruct community advocacy groups in organization and mobilization techniques.

**\*\* EXCHANGE EXPERTIES**

- a - through international networks to gain broader perspectives on the significance of conservation work
- b - develop a roster of resource persons and documentation

**\*\* FUND RAISING** for all of the above.

Attention to these priorities will go a long way toward dispelling the shadow of indifference which now dims the thinking of a majority who see the obstacles as being so overwhelmingly insurmountable that individual efforts are useless. The challenges are indeed monumental, yet even small efforts can create friendly environments where the past may continue to inspire individuals for the benefit of future cultural achievement. Inculcating positive attitudes toward the care of cultural properties will stimulate concomitant care in preserving surrounding environments, leading ultimately to a nation strong in its awareness of the rich diversity of nature and culture exemplified by the following selection.

## CURRENT STATUS OF MAJOR PRIORITY SITES AND MONUMENTS

Information from the SPACH Photo Catalogue  
of Monuments, Sites, Artifacts, Architecture

### MUSEUMS<sup>1</sup>

**Kabul Museum:** Massively looted 1992-1996

**Hadda Site Museum:** War damaged in 1981; totally plundered since.

**Islamic Art at Ghazni,** in 16<sup>th</sup> century Timurid mausoleum; artifacts shifted to Kabul

Museum during the war; building deteriorating through neglect

**Herat:** Reopened 1994 in citadel; good condition; collections unorganized.

### CENTRAL

**BAMIYAN,** 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Buddhist complex: monumental statues, normal; paintings, serious natural deterioration requiring immediate stabilization

### **GHAZNI**

**Tepe Sardar,** 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Buddhist complex; Italian excavations, deteriorating

**Mausoleum Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi** (r.998-1030): well-maintained

**Palace Sultan Masud III,** 12<sup>th</sup> c. A.D., Ghaznavid: French excavations, plundered

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial note: the information contained in this section was accurate at the time of original publication in 1998. The status of many monuments and sites has since changed or deteriorated. Updated information can be obtained elsewhere on the SPACH website and through links to other sites.

**Minarets**, 12<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Ghaznavid: natural deterioration requires immediate attention

**JAM MINARET**, Ghor Prov., late 12<sup>th</sup> c. Ghorid: natural deterioration; stabilization, protection against river erosion urgently required.

#### KABUL CITY

**Mausoleum Timur Shah** (d.1793): Timurid-style building seriously deteriorating; gardens obliterated; urgent structural repairs required

**Bagh-i-Babur**, 17<sup>th</sup> c. Moghul: tomb of Emperor Babur (d.1530) + marble mosque (1646). Minor war damage; 1883 pavilion, major war damage and Vandalism: haramserai, destroyed by bombing/rockets; gardens, denuded for firewood

**Old City**: 18-19<sup>th</sup> century serais and residences with ornamental stucco and wood carvings mostly reduced to rubble

**National Archives**, 1891 palace restored for Archives 1973-1978: minor war damage repaired; well-maintained

**Boston Serai**, 1892 palace converted 1901 to Amir Abdur Rahaman mausoleum: major deterioration since 1992 through neglect and occupancy by security personnel

**Gulistan Serai**, 1892 haremserai for Bostan Serai: poor maintenance while used as Transport Depot; 1996 ill-advised repairs by Municipality without consulting Historical Monuments Department; carved stucco and wood exterior decoration in good condition, some interior features obliterated

**Bagh-i-Bala**, 1893 palace restored 1966; minor war damage repaired; increasing deterioration under occupancy as Sayyaf guest house and Taliban militia headquarters

**Qasre Stor**, 1901, with 1912 +1915 additions, adjunct to Foreign Office: audience hall extensively renovated June 1995

**Shah-do-Shamshira Mosque**, 1920s construction on site of 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque; well-maintained

#### KABUL VICINITY

**Minar-i-Chakari**, early A.D. Buddhist pillar: war damaged from rocket; collapsed for as yet unknown reason March 1998

**Guldara**, 4<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Buddhist stupa – monastery complex: extensively damaged by local commander in search of plunder

**Chihlsitoon**, 1988 palace remodeled ca. 1905 + 1950s: heavy war damage, mostly rubble

**Qasre Darulaman**, 1923 government centre: extensive war damage

**Tepe Taj Beg**, 1924 palace: undamaged

**Paghman**, 1920s summer resort: villas, theatre, hotel purposefully razed to the round for reasons still unclear; Taqi Zafar (Victory Arch), major war damage; mosque, under reconstruction by local community

#### WEST

##### HERAT

**Masjid-i-Jami'**, 1200 A.D. Ghoriid portal + 15<sup>th</sup> c. Timurid restoration + redecoration since 1943: minor war damage repaired; well-maintained

**Pul-i-Malan**, extant in 1506: war damaged; controversial restoration 1994-1996

**Mosque/Mazar-i-Imam Fikhri Raza**, 13<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.: war damaged; inappropriate restoration by wealthy individual abandoned

**Musalla Complex**, 15<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Timurid: Gawhar Shad mausoleum, extensive

loss of tilework on dome due to purposeful wartime felling of trees planted in the 1940s as a protective shield against destructive 120-day winds that blow from June-September; of six minarets, one destroyed by rocket, two survived direct hits by rockets, but all list dangerously; urgent remedial work delayed due to controversies

**Gazargah**, 15<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Timurid tile-decorated shrine dedicated to 11<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet/philosopher Khwaja Abdullah Ansari: well-maintained by Brotherhood; marble stone animal figure at entrance removed by Taliban

**Hauzi-i-Karbaz**, Ghalwar village, w. /Herat, Timurid interior decoration: restored by DACAAR (Danish NGO)

**Ziarat-i-Muhaddis**, 15<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Timurid mosque/madrassa dedicated to 9<sup>th</sup> c. scholar Khwaja Abdu Walid: totally destroyed by war damage; restoration of dome over grave was considered in 1994 by DACAAR as a community service

**Takht-i-Safar**, late 15<sup>th</sup> c. Timurid pleasure garden: still flourishing 1966; totally barren 1994; plans for renewal by mujahideen Governor Ismail Khan not realized before arrival of Taliban September 1995.

**Hauz-i-Chahar Suq**, 17<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. public reservoir: dry, deteriorating

## NORTH

**AI KHANOUM**, nr. Khwaja Ghar, Takhar Prov., 4<sup>th</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. B.C. Greek city: French exactions; systematic looting using bulldozers, tunnels

**TELA TAPA**, nr. Shibarghan, 100 A.D. Kushan necropolis: Afghan-Russian excavation of six graves recovered 20,000 pieces gold; looting of two unexcavated, graves began 1980

**SURKH KOTAL**, nr. Pul-i-Khumri, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. A.D. religious complex: no information

**RABATAK**, nr. Pul-i-Khumri, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. A.D. royal sanctuary: 1993 accidental finds in possession of Governor of Baghlan

**TAKHT-I-RUSTAM**, nr. Aibak, Samangan Prov., 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Buddhist stupa/monastery complex: not looted or plundered

## **BALKH**

**Old City**: 1995 clandestine digging uncovered fluted columns similar to Greek columns at Ai Khanoum, taken for construction private dwelling; unconfirmed reports many other finds

**Masjid-i-Noh Gumbad**, 9<sup>th</sup> c. Samanid: protective roof deteriorating, carved stucco weather-worn, one arch dangerously cracked; remedial attention urgently needed

**Shrine of Khwaja Abu Nasr Parsa**, late Timurid: small section tiles on dome displaced by rocket hit; 1974 restoration suffering from lack of maintenance, interior satisfactory; unauthorized construction of new mosque attached to south facade destroys original design

**Madrassa of Sayid Subban Quli Khan**, late 17<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. severely deteriorated.

## **MAZAR-I-SHARIF**

**Shrines of Hazrat Ali**, 15<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Timurid structure, modern tile redecoration: ill-conceived restoration work in progress since 1994; spacious lawns filled with cumbersome cement tables, chairs and benches.

**Takht-i-Pul**, w. / Mazar, 19<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. mosque: exterior in tolerable condition; elaborate painted interior rapidly deteriorating

**HAUZ-I-AQUNA**, n. /Andkhai, ca. 16<sup>th</sup> c.: 16 m. stepped dome over 16 m. deep circular reservoir; newly whitewashed, good condition.

**IMAM-I-KHORD**, Sari-i-Pul, 11<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Seljuk: very elaborate interior decoration and inscriptions; well-maintained

**ZIARAT-I-BABA HATEM**, w. /Balkh, 12<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.: good condition

### EAST

**HADDA**, nr. Jalalabad, 2<sup>nd</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Buddhist stupa/monastery complex: war damaged 1981; constantly plundered since; totally denuded of all statuary left in situ as site museum

**GHAUCHAK**, nr. Hadda, Buddhist: most recently reported extensive clandestine digging at unexcavated site.

**NIMLA**, w. /Jalalabad, 1610 A.D. Moghul garden + 20<sup>th</sup> c. Amir Habibullah bungalow; garden cascades + bungalow restored 1994 by MARUF (Afghan NGO) with FAO assistance.

### SOUTH

**HILMAND VALLEY**, 12<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. Ghaznavid winter citadel and palaces at Bost and Lashkargah: ceremonial Bost arch restored pre-war; no serious disturbance reported.

### **KANDAHAR**

**Ashoka Rock Edict**, Old City Kandahar, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. B.C. bi-lingual Greek-Aramaic inscription left in situ; no information.

**Chihlzina**, Old City Kandahar, 16<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.: forty steps leading to rock-cut chamber with inscription ordered by Emperor Babur; no information.

**Mausoleum Ahmad Shah Durrani** (d.1772): elaborate exterior and painted interior; well-maintained.

**Mausoleum Mir Wais Baba** (d.1715); 1930s building Modeled on Ahmad Shah mausoleum; exterior + elaborate interior painting + surrounding Kohkaran gardens well maintained.