
SPACH NEWSLETTER 3

Established in September 1994, in response to a growing awareness of the vulnerability of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan, **SPACH** aims primarily to share information about the state of collections, historic monuments, archaeological sites and scholarships that have affected by the years of conflicts.

SPACH has fostered contact with both cultural organizations and individuals inside Afghanistan and institutions abroad with a proven interest in the culture of the country, with a view to sharing information about measures to limit destruction of this important part of the world's cultural heritage. To date, the activities undertaken by SPACH members have included:

. Dissemination of regular updates to the press and relevant international group concerning the state of the National Museum in Kabul, which suffered severe damage in 1993. Remedial works on the building were undertaken during 1994 to weatherproof the ruins and provide a degree of security for the surviving stores. At the same time, museum staff were able to retrieve hundreds of objects from the debris. More than 1,500 objects were recovered in Kabul by the National Commission for the Preservation and Retrieval of Afghanistan's Cultural and Historical Heritage and individuals; a limited number of objects have been recovered in Pakistan. In support of this, SPACH is working closely with the staff of the Ministry of Information and Culture and UNESCO to prepare a preliminary photo inventory of items that survived. By making available accurate information about missing objects, it is hoped to facilitate their recovery, either from within the country or abroad, with the support of relevant international organizations.

. Support for assessment missions to sites of historic importance in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-I Sharif, Jalalabad (Hadda), Ghazni, Ghor (Jam Minaret), Baghlan, Bamiyan, Faryab, Badghis, Ai-Khanoum; dissemination of the resulting reports and photographs to the relevant institutions in Afghanistan and abroad.

. In response to the loss of important documents related to historic sites in the country preparation of a photo catalogue of such sites, made up both of pre-war scholarship and updated material from site visits. Dissemination of this information to interested individuals and institutions in Afghanistan and abroad, as a means of developing an understanding of the priorities for remedial works and possible lobbying.

. Support for lectures and exhibitions, as a means of raising awareness about the richness and vulnerability of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan. SPACH members continue to work closely with representatives of the Ministry of Information and Culture, the National Commission for the Preservation and Retrieval of Afghanistan's Cultural and Historical Heritage, the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and other cultural institutions worldwide in order to solicit advice and support for the preservation of the threatened culture of the country. Support for activities has come from concerned individuals, from the Afghanistan Emergency Trust Fund and from the governments of Greece, Cyprus and Portugal and recently Netherlands.



SPACH BUYS SEALS, IVORIES AND BEGRAM MEDALLIONS



Kabul Museum used to have some 50 plaster medallions, taken from the central disks of classical Greek silver salvers, as part of the Begram treasure. Begram, the summer capital of king Kanishka(2nd C. A. D., 60 km north of Kabul)was excavated in 1939 by DAFA, the French archaeological mission.

To quote Nancy Dupree's pictorial guide on the Kabul Museum: 'There was a great demand for replicas of Greek silverware and the easiest way to reproduce them was to first make a plaster cast and then a metal or clay mold, from which the reproductions could be cast in plaster or silver. Many of the classical Hellenistic and early Roman originals of these replicas have never been found. These plaster medallions examples of Roman workmanship of Greek facsimiles, date mostly from the 1st Century A.D " After several months of hard bargaining SPACH managed to secure in May 1997 the following objects, all looted from the Kabul Museum:

- Six of these most valuable Begram medallions,
- One seal with rhinoceros motif: excavated in 1975/76 in Shortugai near Ai Khanoum, Takhar Province, being a Harappan trader's seal,
- A post-Harappan gypsum seal, with engraved stylized ibex (diameter 5cm), also excavated in Shortugai, and
- Two small ivory pieces: sculptured bull's and boar's heads, excavated in Ai Khanoum, Takhar, by DAFA, begun in 1965.

The Shortugai seal provides rare material evidence of trade between northern Afghanistan and the Harappan civilization on the Indus River in Pakistan. The seals date back to the Bronze Age, ca. end of 3rd, beginning of 2nd millennium B.C.

SPACH will hold these items until the Kabul Museum is reactivated.

BACTRIAN DOCUMENTS ON LEATHER AND CLOTH



Prof. Nicholas Sims-Williams, London, reported to SPACH that a large number of Bactrian documents have recently emerged from Afghanistan –see illustration. About a hundred of these have reached London, partly via dealers in Peshawar. Some perfectly preserved and looking almost new – but are nevertheless genuine. But, many forged documents are also in circulation. If any such documents are sighted, please inform Prof. Sims-Williams, c/o SPACH.

CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTION – REAL OR FAKE?

In early 1997, SPACH was asked by officials from the Ministry of Information and Culture in Kabul to help in identifying a cuneiform inscription .this marble slab was confiscated from a smuggler who was also arrested at the Pakistan–Afghan border; and returned to Kabul. The initial reaction was that it could be a sensational scientific discovery –the first cuneiform inscription ever found in Afghanistan. SPACH consulted local and international expert in London – and as it turned out, the marble slab appears to be a fake .the production of fakes seems to be flourishing. SPACH is constantly approached by dealers in the Peshawar region, offering objects, but most of them turn out to be fakes – even with fake Kabul museum numbers.



Photo: Darla Milne



SPACH PURCHASES BUDDHA HEADS FROM HADDA

SPACH succeeded after lengthy negotiations to recover two Buddha heads originating from Hadda and looted from the Kabul Museum. An additional eight Hadda heads had been purchased two years ago. Peshawar dealers have recently offered SPACH some 500 pieces, of which only four were considered genuine.



Photos: Ingo guhr

WORKSHOPS IN KABUL AND BAMİYAN

Officials from the Ministry of Information and Culture are preparing a workshop on Afghanistan's cultural heritage to be held at Kabul University in the near future. The purpose of the workshop is to discuss short and long-term revival programmes and current problems faced. Visits to sites in Kabul region are also envisaged.

The Department of Historic Sites in Hazarajat in Bamiyan has also announced plans to hold a workshop on the preservation of cultural sites in its region.

REHABILITATION OF BABUR'S GARDEN

The badly damaged Babur's Garden is to be revitalized: UNCHS (HABITAT) has started replanting trees, has shored up the pavilion, repaired some walls and replaced gates. UNOCHA has demined the area. The water supply is being restored, enabling irrigation and more planting in 1998. The rehabilitation is carried out according to original designs. UNCHS (HABITAT) is committed for the next three years to bring gardens back to life.

BACTRIAN GOLD

Wild rumors persist around the whereabouts of the Bactrian golden hoard consisting of 20,000 pieces. Some say that items are for sale in Islamabad, others say in Peshawar. According to the Government of Afghanistan the excavated pieces were officially turned over to the Kabul Museum in November 1978 and still in a vault in the National Bank in the Presidential palace (Arg). These gold pieces come from a series of seven grave mounds west of Mazar-i-Sharif excavated by Soviet archaeologists. Only six graves were opened before the war brought excavations to a halt. The pieces being sighted may therefore be from new illegal digging in the seventh tomb.



Photo: B. Neubacher/SPACH card

INVENTORY OF KABUL MUSEUM

SPACH continues to pursue the difficult and arduous task of establishing the inventory of the remaining collection of the Kabul Museum. Ms. Josephine Powell, Istanbul, has kindly provided SPACH with contact sheets of some 560 photographs of Kabul Museum objects she took before the war. This invaluable documentation will help Ms. Carla Grissmann, again in Kabul this summer and Mr. Najib Popal, Director, Kabul Museum, to determine what is missing, presumed missing, definitely missing ... SPACH hopes to publish the results on its website by the fall.

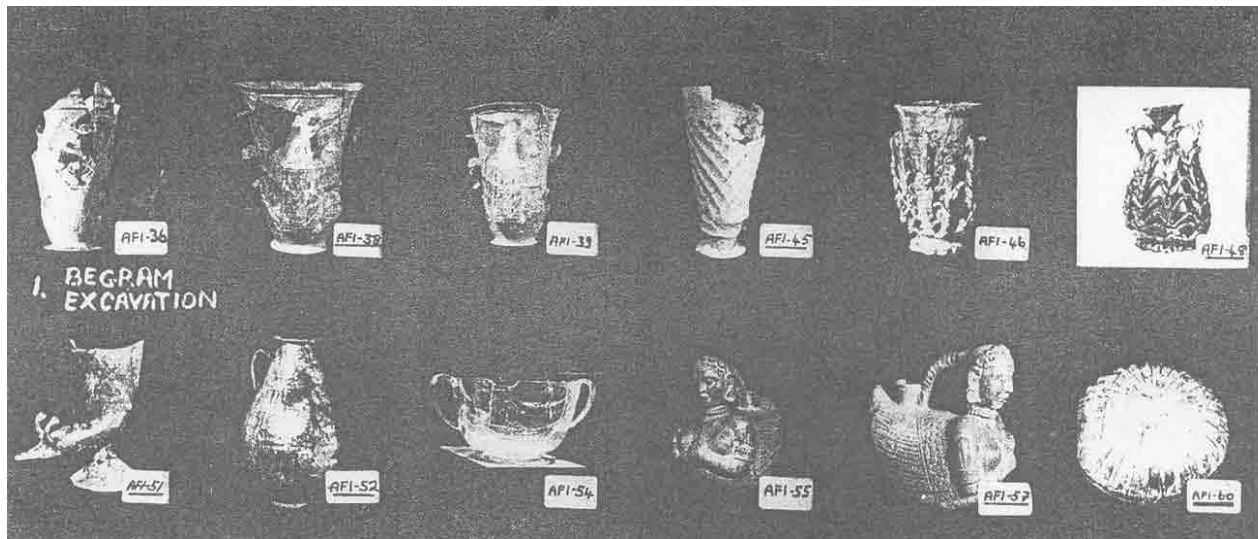


Photo: Josephine Powell

REMAINING BURNING QUESTIONS

None of the larger, stellar schist relief, and stucco sculptures missing from the Museum have been sighted.

Where are they? Are they being hidden by dealers in Pakistan? Are they still in Afghanistan? Have they left Pakistan? If so, who has them? SPACH constantly receives reports that such pieces are being offered for sale in London, Switzerland and Japan. But we are given no specific information. How can SPACH persuade those spreading such rumors to come forth with specific details?

VISIT TO AIBAK (TAKHT-I RUSTAM), SAMANGAN

An aid worker recently reported on his impressions of the stupa and monastery dating from 4th -5th centuries A.D. Each of the four main cave complexes had at least one gaping whole high in the rock wall, as a result of which some of the caves were flooded from the spring rains. The lotus blossom decorations are still discernible. The Afghan NGO DANA) Development Association of Northern Afghanistan) has carried out reforestation in the area.



Photo: Inger and Erik Hansen

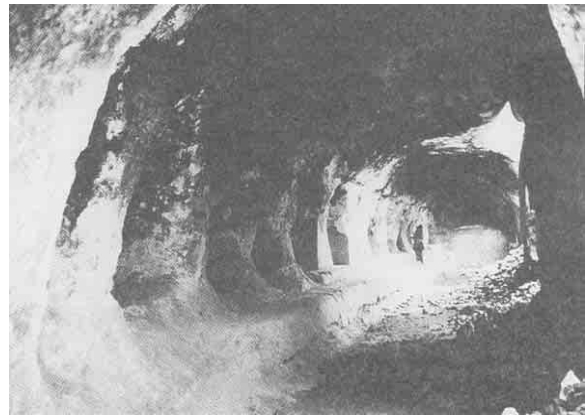


Photo: Denis de Poerck

The stupa of Aibak is caved out of a limestone mountain. From cutting in the slope to the south a tunnel leads to the ditch around the stupa where ritual procession might have taken place. The dome is 92 feet in diameter and 29 feet high. Popularly the stupa is called Takht-i-Rustam, the throne of Rustam, the great hero from the legendary history of Afghanistan.

PLUNDER IN AI KHANOUM

In Taqhar, in the north-east of Afghanistan, close to the border with Tajikistan, is the eastern most Greek city yet discovered? It continues to be systematically looted. Marble pieces are removed and recycled for construction purposes. SPACH is most concerned about this ongoing destruction, but appeals to commanders in charge have gone unheeded. Visitors since 1995 have provided SPACH with photographic evidence of this continuing plunder. Most recently, SPACH is very grateful to two Afghan UN staff for their report and for their appeals to the local population to stop the destruction. Another report will follow in the next issue.



Photo: Shah M. Zadir/ Ahmad Shah

NEW SITE IN YAKOALANG, HAZARAJAT



A German visitor was shown a new site in Pan-e-Kera, possibly of Greco-Bactrian origin: a square stone structure (about 9 x 9 ft) below the surface where coins, rings and a book were found. The book's paper is reportedly made of tree thin layers of date bark- and therefore certainly not from that region. The owner of that piece of land has employed a permanent guard and thinks there may have been a larger settlement nearby, as human bones have been found while plowing fields.

Photo: B. Neubacher

THREAT TO BAMMIAN BUDDHAS

A news item which received enormously wide media coverage was Commander Wahid's statement on 17 April to AFP that he would "blow up" the Bamiyan Buddhas once the Taliban had conquered Bamiyan. The Governments of India and Sri Lanka, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Director-General Mayor of UNESCO and many others reacted in dismay. SPACH also appealed to the Afghan authorities in this regard. Soon after the initial threat, Mullah Omar, The

Taliban leader issued a statement in Kandahar that the Buddhas would not be touched, as "the statues are not worshipped".

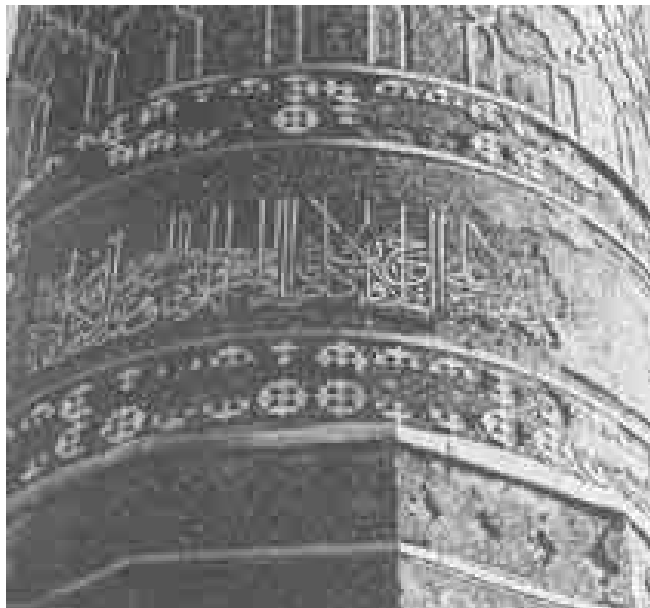
SPACH has been very much concerned about another threat: in the caves at the feet of the large Buddha (55 m high) ammunition has been stored for many years. Upon an appeal by SPACH, we are happy to report that the local authorities have responded with full cooperation and have relocated the ammunition depot to another site.



Photo: B. Neubacher/SPACH card

INGER AND ERIK HANSEN PHOTOGRAPHS

SPACH is very pleased to report that its photo library has been greatly enriched by more than 100 b/w photographs taken by Inger and Erik Hansen in 1964/65 during a UNESCO-sponsored mission. The SPACH Newsletters will publish some of them from now on. We now have most valuable documentation of some 34 sites some of which are unfortunately completely destroyed, while others are in reasonable condition. SPACH would be very keen to further enlarge its collection. Any other sources?



Photos: Inger and Erik Hansen

Of the Musalla of Gawar Shad in Herat only one of the four corner minarets remains. This building was erected in 1417-1437 by the great architect Qavam-ad-din who had also built the Friday Mosque in Mashad, Iran. The decoration here was superb with intricate faience mosaics framed by white marble and covering the entire building like a magnificent Persian carpet. Unfortunately, the minaret shown in the photo above was completely destroyed, when directly hit by a rocket during the war.

DUTCH GOVERNMENT PROVIDES GENEROUS GRANT TO SPACH

As a result of the UN conference in Ashgabat and Minister Pronk's keen interest in Afghanistan, his government has decided to support SPACH's efforts. The contribution of \$28,100 will be used to hire an international archaeologist, to be based in Kabul, whose task will be to monitor illegal excavations and make a survey of Afghanistan's sites. These funds will also help SPACH in publishing site catalogues, publish its newsletter, support workshops and continue its public awareness campaign. SPACH is most grateful to Minister Pronk and the Dutch Government for its support.

SPACH ARCHAEOLOGIST

SPACH has received some offers, but is still looking an international expert. Any advice and help will be much appreciated.

SPACH GREETING CARDS

SPACH greeting cards with photographs of the large Bamiyan Buddha, Shrine of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari (Herat), Shrine of Hazart Ali (Mazar-i-Sharif), Kabul Museum, Masjid-i-No Gumbad (Balkh), Shrine of Khwaja Parsa (Balkh) and Ghorid Portal/Friday Mosque (Herat) can be ordered from Brigitte Neubacher, UNOCHA, Islamabad. A pack of ten cards with envelopes costs Rs200 or US\$5.



Photo: B. Neubacher/SPACH card

SPACH REPRESENTATIVE S IN KABUL

SPACH continues to have its dedicated representatives in Kabul: Mr. Jean-Pierre Dufranc, AFRANE (October/November 1996), Ms. Darla Milne, IAM (December 1996 – March 1997, May/June 1997) and Ms. Carla Grissmann (June until September 1997). SPACH is most grateful to its representatives for their keen interest in and commitment to furthering SPACH's goals.

MONITORING OF AUCTION HOSES

We are working on a suggestion by a concerned SPACH member who has kindly offered to check activities of auction houses. He also suggests SPACH to establish a network of volunteers to do likewise. Any interested readers should please contact SPACH.

SPACH ON THE WEBSITE

Due to a regrettable error, SPACH published an incorrect Website in its Newsletter2.

The correct one is:
SPACH NEWSLETTER
<http://www.col.com.pk/clients/Afghan/news.htm>

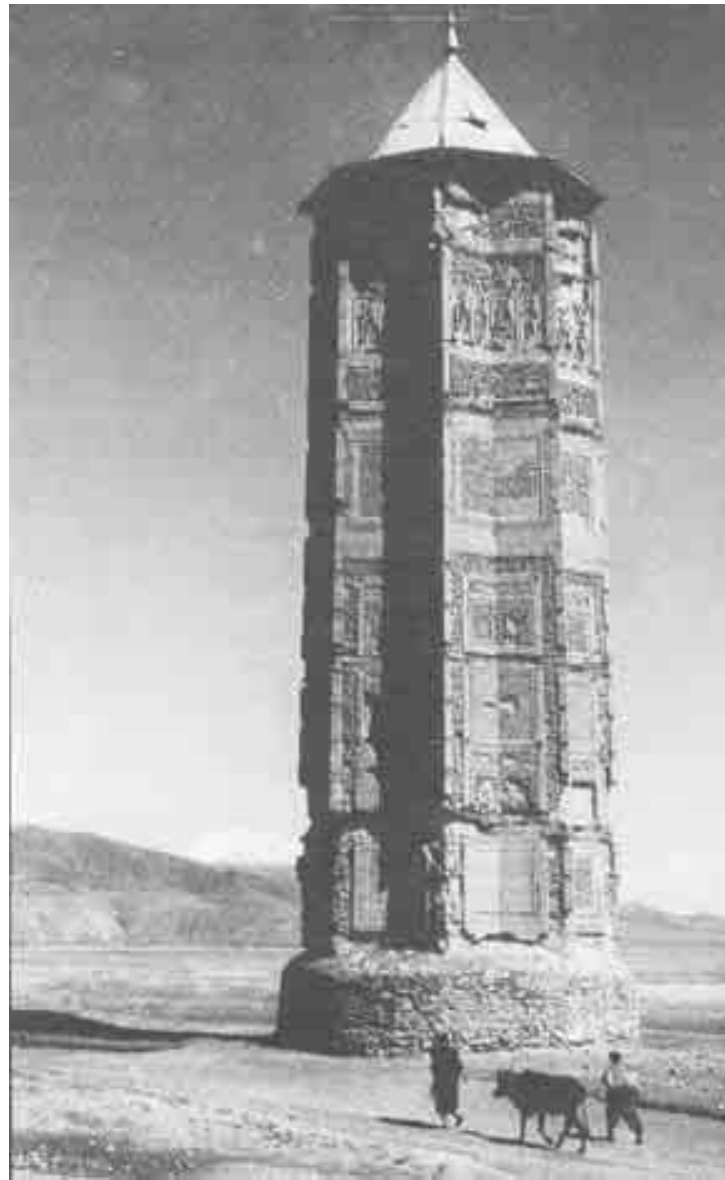


Photo: Inger and Erik Hansen

The tower of Ghaznavid Sultan Masoud III (1099-1114) was originally more than twice as high. The eight-pointed star-shaped plan of the lower part brings forth a rich variation of light and Kufic inscription frame panels with geometric and floral patterns executed in small specially formed fired tiled. A rocket damaged the tower during the war.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF SPACH'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

H.E. Mr. Enrico Gerardo de Maio, Ambassador of Italy, Chairman
Ms. Nancy Hatch Dupree, ACBAR/ARIC, Vice-chair
Mr. Alfredo Witschi-Cestari, UNOCHA/UNDP, Treasure
Mrs. Heidi Kawakami, Embassy of Japan
Prof. A.H. Dani, Quaid-i-Azam University
Ms. Brigitte Neubacher, UNOCHA

H.E. Mr. Pierre Lafrance, Ambassador of France, SPACH's Chairman since its establishment, is leaving Pakistan during this summer. SPACH is extremely grateful to Ambassador Lafrance for his support. His guidance and leadership will be greatly missed.

SPACH also wishes to thank ambassador Karayannis, who has left Pakistan, for his personal and active support of SPACH and in particular for the generous contributions to SPACH made by the Government of Greece.



Photo; Inger and Erik Hansen

Minar-i-Chakari (2nd century A.D.). This tall column, more than 72 feet height, is placed as a big landmark in a saddle in the mountains about 12 miles south of Kabul, and is visible from far away. Here the caravans used to pass in the spring on their way from the Indus Valley to the central highland of Afghanistan. Such columns were venerated as religious monuments.