

SPACH LIBRARY SERIES

THE TOMB OF HAZRAT-E-ALI

Historical Background And Recent Events

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**Society for the Preservation of
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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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background of the Construction
Role of the Tomb in the Creation and Development of Mazar-i-Sharif
Endowments to the Sacred Tomb
Administration and Officeholders
Changes in Paintings and Inscriptions
The Madrassa Workshop for Tile-akers
Former Maintenance of the Tomb Complex
Reasons for Deterioration
Efforts by the Commission of Basic Repairs
Decorative Renovations
The People and the Parks
The Tomb, Gul-i-Surkh and Folksongs
Conclusions and Proposals

INTRODUCTION

The Tomb of Hazrat-e-Ali is an important architectural monument from the glorious Timurid Period. It has never been destroyed and therefore exists as an important part of Afghanistan's heritage. Except for the Masjid-i-Jami', other monuments of that period in Herat, such as the Musalla which was a masterpiece of 15th century architecture, are mostly in ruins. The reason for the preservation of the Tomb of Hazrat-e-Ali is its holiness and sanctity.

The Afghans extend much honor and respect to Hazrat-e-Ali. That is why the city of Mazar was created around the Tomb and named after it.

The main objectives for writing this booklet are to:

- a. offer some information about the history and role of this religious monument;
- b. mention the main historical factors for changes which compromised its originality;
- c. and finally, to suggest better ways for its conservation in the future.

As we shall see, during the continuous repairs in order to prevent the walls from further deterioration, little attention was paid to the integrity of the structure.

Previously Hafiz Noor Mohammad Kohgady carried out research regarding the Tomb and the creation of the city of Mazar-i-Sharif around it. The research was published in one of his books. The authors of this booklet have freely made use of his work in writing these lines.

But more of our information is based on our own experiences and interviews with local elders, as well as with Engineer Abdul Ali Samar, the Head of the Commission for Repairs from 1996 to 1998, to whom we offer our thanks.

Also, we have used another book written by Professor Mohebullah Rahmati called the *Geography of Afghanistan's Cities*. Based on the information reflected in this book we have also tried to offer some proposals on how to protect this valuable heritage, as well as its social and cultural roles, now and in the future. We hope to draw the kind attention of those who in the future will be charged with the preservation and repair of this famous monument.

Further scientific and specialized research may be needed in order to identify the main reasons for the deterioration, and for bringing changes to the structure, to the paintings and to the architectural form, as well as to the usage of the tile-work. We believe that paying more attention to these factors is very important now, as well as in the future. We hope that with the return of peace and security to our country this historical monument will again be the site of religious and national gatherings, fairs, ceremonies and celebrations, so that it may play its important role in marking our culture and national unity.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TOMB

According to the history books and as per narratives and traditions, the body of Hazrat-e-Ali, son of Abi Taleb, was brought secretly from Najaf to Balkh by Abu Muslim Khorasani at the end of the second Islamic century. The transfer took place in accordance with the wishes of Imam Jafer-e-Sadiq.

The body was buried at Khwaja Khairan Hill, 20 km east of Balkh. As this burial took place very secretly at least 500 years ago, no one knew about it until the time of Sultan Sanjar Saljuqi (513-552 A.H./A.D. 1119-1159) when some information was discovered from the diaries of Abu Muslim, including the testament of Imam Jafer-e-Sadiq in this regard.

Kohgady, basing his account on historical sources such as the *Tarikh-e-Akabar-e-Din* (History of Great Religious Men) and *Tazkerat-ul Mashayekh*, (Life of the Mashayekh (Sufi)) writes about this discovery which is briefly quoted here:

"... and during this time 400 Sadats, and great men of rank, simultaneously, on the same night, dreamt that Hazrat-e-Ali was standing on a high place in the village of Khairan. He informed the dreamers that he was buried there for many years but no one knew his burial place. Then he asked them to go and inform the governors that his grave should be discovered so that people from all over the world might visit his grave and thus be favoured and blessed."¹

The news of Abu Muslim's diary and the dream of the Sadats spread all over Merw and was reported to Sultan Sanjar. Amir Qumaj, the governor of Balkh, was ordered by Sultan Sanjar to conduct some research and collect more information in this regard.

Amir Qumaj, together with scholars, Sadats and men of rank, as well as a great number of people started towards Khairan Village and the hill called Tel-e-Ali. After digging at this place they discovered a dome with a small steel door with a silver lock. So all doubts and suspicions vanished. The elders of Balkh after *estekhara* (wishing for the best) were asked to open the Sacred Tomb. Thus they unlocked the door.

Inside the Tomb they found a steel box and a copy of the Holy Koran written in Kufic script on deer skin. They also found a large sword and a brick-shaped stone on which was written this sentence: this is Waliullah Ali Asadullah. (This is Allah's man of greater dignity, Ali, the Lion of God.) When they opened the steel box, with the permission of the religious and learned men, they saw Hazrat-e-Ali, who was asleep. His nails had grown and his hair touched the lower parts of his ears. A sword wound was clearly visible on the top of his head as well. Most of the people could not bear the sight, and fainted.

Outside the Tomb the people were weeping and shouting, reciting the name of Allah and offering prayers.

The rumour of the discovery spread throughout the world and Muslims from far and near marched in large groups, bringing copious quantities of offerings, in pilgrimage to this sacred place.

Historians who had written the history of the Sacred Tomb of Hazrat-e-Ali have different opinions about the brick-shaped stone found inside the Tomb. Some of them believe that it was a burnt brick, while others say it was of stone.

¹ Hafiz Noor Mohammad Kohgady, *History of the Sacred Tomb*, p. 34, quoted briefly from *Tarikh-e-Akabar-e-Din*.

There are differences of opinions about the "writing" on the brick also. But the tablet presently in the museum at the Tomb is a redish brick with the mentioned sentence on it, but because of cracks on the surface, parts of the sentence are not readable. This inscription is in accordance with that mentioned by Mohammad Momen in his book.

Some other writers who had done research believe that the original tablet that was put on the grave, as well as the other articles previously mentioned from the time of Abu Muslim, are kept in the basement under the dome and that the present tablet was copied from the original in the time of Sultan Sanjar.

After the discovery of the sacred grave, Amir Qumaj sent a letter to Sultan Sanjar describing the facts. Sultan Sanjar came to Balkh where he donated 15,000 golden dinars which were distributed among the poor. He wished to take the coffin to Balkh but the religious leaders would not permit him to do so. Then he decided to build the Tomb. As per his orders a marble dome was built inside the hill and another beautiful Tomb made of sun-dried bricks was erected over it.

In order to make it possible for men of rank and seniors to view the coffin, an underground passage was tunneled from the east of the Tomb measuring 100 steps in length. It was plastered with mortar. The entrance was located behind the *mehrab* of the Khwaja Khairan Mosque. It is said that from the entrance of this tunnel there are 100 steps down before reaching the flat surface that leads to the tomb (others say there are only 40 steps.). Most portions of this tunnel are in ruins and some parts are completely blocked.

Sultan Sanjar intended to build a large building over the Tomb but because of continuous battles he failed to do so.

When Chengiz Khan attacked the Islamic regions, including Balkh, everything was gone with the winds. The building over the Tomb also vanished and most of the inhabitants of Balkh were killed. So the Tomb of Hazrat-e-Ali was forgotten again.

In the time of Sultan Hussain Bayqara, the Timurid king of Herat and Balkh, a history book was found which gave detailed information about the transportation of the coffin from one place to another, and how it was discovered.

Shaikh Shamsuddin, a relative of Bayazid Bustami, found the history book in the Royal Library of Multan. It had been written in the time of Sultan Sanjar Saljuqi and contained detailed information about the transportation of the coffin to Balkh and its discovery in the year 530 A.H. /A.D. 1135-6. Shaikh Shamsuddin brought the book to Balkh and after comparing its contents with other history books offered it to the brother of Sultan Hussain Bayqara who began a search for the Tomb based upon the information in the text. He found the Tomb for the second time and reported the event to his brother, the Sultan, who sent Amir Ali Sher Nawayee to Balkh to carry out more investigations and collect more information.

After collecting enough information he built a great dome over the grave in the 885 A.H./A.D. 1480-81. This building still stands, with slight changes and differences.

Historians believe that the existing Tomb was constructed by the Master Architect, Mawlana Banayee. This famous building, with some later additions of domes and arches, is a masterpiece from the Timurid period.

ROLE OF THE TOMB IN THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MAZAR-I-SHARIF

In most Islamic countries cities have grown up around the tombs of very famous religious persons. Madina Munawara in Arabia, Najaf in Iraq. Mashhad and Qum in Iran and Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan are good examples.

Here a brief account is offered about the creation and development of Mazar city in various stages.

First Stage:

When the rumour about the discovery of Hazrat-e-Ali's tomb spread over the world, his devotees began pilgrimages to this holy place in large groups. Many of these pilgrims and their families decided to settle in the area near the Tomb.

According to history books, such as the *Rouzatu Safa*, Sultan Hussain Bayqara built a small bazaar, including shops and *hammams* (bathhouses), in the village of Khwaja Khairan. An inn was built outside the southern gate of the Tomb by Amir Ali Sher Nawayee.

After the 9th century A.H./15th century A.D., the number of residents increased until a large city was created. At first the city developed haphazardly; there were no plans for its development. During the early months of each year when pilgrims visited the city to take part in religious and national celebrations, the numbers that came were very large. In other seasons of the year, however, the numbers decreased.

Residential areas and bazaars spread around the Tomb. The roads and streets were neither wide nor regular. Most of the bazaars were covered with iron and copper sheeting and were called "Teem." These *Teems* had special rows or lines of warehouses, and a regular range of shops, such as the row of blacksmiths, of coppersmiths, cloth shops, hat makers, and tailors. The *Teems* opened out onto a larger bazaar called the Mandawee.

Second Stage:

In the year 1339/A.D. 1961 a city renewal plan was initiated. During the work most of the areas in the old city vanished and were replaced by new roads and parks. Along the roads and around these parks new buildings such as apartments, markets and hotels were built in the vicinity of the Tomb. According to the new plan, more parks, a sports stadium, industrial parks and educational centers were also to be built.

Third Stage:

As a result of the first five-year plan, Mazar, in addition to its religious fame, became an important industrial city of Afghanistan. Other services extended throughout the whole Province in the fields of social services, telecommunication, banking and educational and cultural centers.

Industrial units such as the Bakhtar Industrial Company, Balkh Textile Company, Mazar Grain Mills and Silo also came into existence. Power and fertilizer plants were built and explorations for oil and natural gas commenced. Trading companies were active. Ports, such as Hairatan, Kilift and

Tashgozar were functioning. The city limits of Mazar expanded to 48 square kilometers, and the number of its inhabitants increased to 200,000.

Based on the new plan, Mazar became a modern city. On the other hand, a few old madrassas and some traditional houses of historical value located in the areas around the Tomb all disappeared. Nawabi, one of the governors of Mazar, put iron fences around the parks and paved the paths.

Fourth Stage:

During the last ten years a number of people rushed to Mazar city on account of continuous fighting, unemployment due to a reduction of agricultural lands, and insecurity in the villages, districts, and even in other provinces.

After the Hairatan bridge was built the ports of Hairatan and Aqcha served as active trade centers. For political reasons secondary units within the administration were formed. In 1992 armed political parties opened offices in Mazar, while the fighting in Kabul led to mass migrations to Balkh. In addition, Tajik immigrants settled in the city and returning Afghan refugees from Iran also arrived. This increase in population, plus better security conditions, permitted the founding of Balkh University and other educational centers. Thus people were then able to find jobs.

In the summer of 1998 about two million people were living in this city. The residential areas in the city also expanded and new sections, such as Karte Aryana, Khorasan, Bakhter, Bakhdee, Noor-e-Khoda, Mehdi Abad, and Zaheer Faryabee were added. All were completed during the last six to seven years.

From the construction point of view Mazar is, no doubt, one of the best cities in Afghanistan. Modern multi-storied buildings built near the Tomb have changed the features of the city.

The Mazar Airport changed to an International Airport. Foreign consulates and other offices were active until 1998. More than 20 offices of foreign agencies and agencies of the United Nations, international and local NGOs were established throughout the city. Hundreds of trade unions were functioning. As a result of this rapid growth some negative developments also took place, for the green areas and parks which were included in the master plan for the city all vanished under the authority of the leaders of armed parties.

In addition, the canal system and water supply were ignored. Areas outside and inside the city, belonging to government institutions, were taken over by party leaders or distributed among others. The distributions of natural gas also took place in haste without respecting scientific methods with the result that large amounts of money collected for this purpose disappeared.

ENDOWMENTS TO THE SACRED TOMB

As soon as the tomb of Hazrat-e-Ali was discovered in Balkh, and the dome was built, nearly all the area around it was included in its endowments. This fact has been mentioned in the account of Subhan Quli Khan Tagha Timuri who describes its limits and boundaries.

In the time of Sultan Hussain Bayqara, Nahr-e Shahi was included in the endowments. It was repaired and all the fields irrigated by the canal that belonged to the Tomb. These endowments existed until the Shaibanian period early in the 16th century A.D.. At that time probably some of the lands and

gardens were given over to the possession of some other people. But Subhan Quli Khan, who governed Balkh during the later half of the 17th century A.D., transferred the lands back to the Tomb and added some more lands to it. The endowments continued to increase year by year as each king and governor added something to them.

The latest account of the Tomb is that of Mohammad Alam Khan who was governor of Mazar in the time of Amir Sher Ali Khan. This account is kept in the Mazar Museum. Later donations were also offered by the devotees of Hazrat-e-Ali.

According to the above accounts the madrassa at Balkh had 33 rooms. One classroom was also donated to the Tomb. In order to finance other expenses of the *mudareseen* (teachers) seventy-seven and a half shops and an inn having 56 rooms, plus one public *hammam*, were donated to finance the salaries of the Taliban studying and reciting the Holy Book during the holy month of Ramazan.

In the year 1306 A.H. /A.D. 1889 when Amir Abdur Rahman Khan came to Mazar and brought about some reforms, he also addressed the problems of the Tomb. Amir Abdur Rahman knew that much of the income of the Tomb and its endowments were being misused by the officeholders of the Tomb. He went to the Tomb where he addressed a group of attendants saying:

"When I was fighting to become king I promised that if I were successful I would make myself *mutawalli bashi* of Hazrat-e-Ali's Tomb, and would gain honour thereby. Today I am king and I come to keep my promise. Henceforth you will refer to me regarding all the votive offerings, the alms, the buildings, the pilgrims; and in all such matters you will obey me".

In this manner he collected all the documents and transferred all the cash to the main treasury of Mazar and carried out some repairs. He then issued a five-point *farman* (decree) to set things in order. According to the decree all the income, in cash, was divided into three portions from which one portion was kept in the treasury of Mazar for repairs, carpets and furnishings. The other two portions were divided into five parts.

One part was for the purchase of medicines for the clinic that would be built and for the burial of the poor. The remaining four parts were again divided into ten portions from which one portion was for buying candles and the remaining nine parts were again divided into ten portions accordingly: one portion to be paid to the *mutawalli* and the remaining nine parts were to be equally divided among the Shaikhs of the Tomb.

Other votive gifts from the devoted, such as carpets, rugs, covers for the Holy Grave, and articles in gold and silver were to be delivered to the treasurer of the Tomb and no one was allowed to take any of it for personal purposes.

The income from the rent of shops was also transferred to the treasury of Mazar-i-Sharif. The Decree also stated that no tomb should be raised by those who wished to bury the bodies of relatives near the grave of Hazrat-e-Ali. They should be interred in flat graves without markers because of space limitations. No one would agree to this, however.

According to Article 5 of the Decree, the right to distribute votive offerings was given only to the descendants of early *mutawalli*, Mirza Aziz Khan and Mirza Neimatullah Khan Ansari. The names of 57 sons and daughters of these Ansari were listed in the Decree so that there might be no question as

to who was eligible. As mentioned previously, a portion of the cash votive offerings was specifically set aside by the Amir himself for the monthly salaries of the Tomb's attendants.

Those whose salaries were not fixed were paid equally from the incomes of the Eight-Paykal (unit of irrigated land) lands in Deh Dadi, Sherabad, Joo-e Siyah Gird, Jughdak and Qalah-e-Qul Mohammad. But in recent years only a few shops remain and the endowment lands have been divided between the attendants of the Tomb and sold.

ADMINISTRATION AND OFFICEHOLDERS

The first *mutawalli bashi* of the Tomb was Sayed Tajuddin Andkhoy who was appointed by Sultan Hussain Bayqara. Khwaja Abdul Wahid, son of Khwaja Abdul Hadi, son of Khwaja Abdul Bari, son of Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, was appointed as the Sheikh of the Tomb.

One hundred families of Herati Khwajas were brought to Mazar-i-Sharif and one hundred slaves were freed to be the servants of this Holy Place.

The Ansari Khwajas of Herat who came to Mazar are still holding posts at the Tomb. In addition to the Ansari Khwajas, the Mirs are also officeholders. They are the descendants of Shaikh Marghelan of Bokhara. The present President of the Tomb, Mir Abdul Nafe, is one of these same Mirs.

Administration:

Until 1377/A.D. 1998 the administrative structure of the Tomb was as follows:

1. General President of the Tomb
2. Administrative Director
3. Conservation Director
4. Finance Director
5. Cultural Director

Once, the management of the Tomb was attached to the Directorate of Information and Culture of Mazar. Later on it was joined with the Directorate of Awqaf (Endowments) and later on, again, it was returned to the Directorate of Information and Culture. Finally, it was once again joined with the Directorate of Awqaf.

In the past the president was selected from the group of officeholders according to the wishes of his colleagues. From the year 1376/A.D. 1997 to the present, however, the president has been elected by direct and secret ballot.

CHANGES IN PAINTINGS AND INSCRIPTIONS

From the time of Sultan Hussain Bayqara (15th century A.D.), who was the founder of the Tomb, until the time of Amir Sher Ali Khan (late 19th century A.D.), it is not known what changes took place in the artistic decoration and inscriptions at the Tomb.

We only know that the second dome over the Tomb which is called the Jami 'Astana was built by order of Abdul Momen Khan Shaibani. These two domes are called Jorah Gombad-i-Kabood (Twin Blue Domes). In the time of Amir Sher Ali Khan the domes were tiled by the famous artisan and tiler, Usatad Abdul Same, in order to keep them from deteriorating.

Most of all, the Char Bagh was subjected to changes. Specifically, Hauz-e Saran to the north of the Tomb, Dakhma-e Sanjar to the south, Madrassa-e Khwaja Khairan to the west, Madrassa and mosque of Bahauddin Balaa Gardaan to the south, Madrassa-e Hauz-e Choqur or Hauz-e Sar Poshidah at the Shadiyan Gate, the rooms around the Tomb and the Hazhdah Chaman (Eighteen Green Parks) completely vanished.

Because of some tile-work and other repairs that took place in the time of Amir Sher Ali Khan by his governor, Mohammad Alam Khan, some new stone and tile tablets were placed on arches and other places. Some of these exist today, while others have disappeared and been replaced by others.

The old tablets on the twin domes contained verses as follows:

Based on Honesty and Purity, and with pleasure Built a Fortunate Building
over the dome of Hazrat-e-Ali,
Made a garden and spring flowers
on the glorious dome of the Shah (Ali),
The eyes of the universe have not seen such flowers
nor such a flower garden.
A garden free from autumn's winds,
It was so excellently decorated you would think it was
made by Peacock's feathers, used as quill.
I searched for the date of its establishment,
A voice from heaven told that it was "Ghamin".²
As his name is Mohammad Alam³ and his fame has
spread over the world,
On doomsday may be lie under the flag Mohammad
(the Prophet, Pbuh).

The tablet which was placed in the tile-work over the arch of the front porch has disappeared because Sardar Abdullah Khan Tokhi, the governor of Afghan Turkistan, replaced it with another tablet during renovations.

In the time of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, two new domes were raised over the graves of Amir Sher Ali Khan and Wazir Akbar Khan⁴ which were decorated with tile-work. In the arch of Amir Sher Ali Khan's tomb before its redecoration there was a stone tablet with the following poem:

Amir Sher Ali, King with good nature,
Who possessed the Throne, Seal Ring, Crown and Flag.
Finally beat the drum of the Kingdom to his own name,

² *Ghamin*, meaning sad. According to the Abjad arrangement of the Arabic alphabet based on the numerical value of each letter, from one to one thousand, the word *Ghamin* equals the year 1100 A.H. (A.Pazhwak).

³ Mohammad Alam established the tile workshop at the Tomb during the reign of Amir Sher Ali.

⁴ Amir Sher Ali (d.1879) and Wazir Akbar Khan (d.1845) were sons of Amir Dost Mohammad, (r.1826-1839;1843-d.1863)(N.H. Dupree)

Left his tribe and relations and traveled to the Nil-land.

Find his age and date of death in the word "Ghossah".

Wisdom tied his foot of life with the word "Ghossah".⁵

This tablet no longer exists. Instead, another is fixed to his grave. Similarly other changes that took place in 1374/A.D.1995 include:

1. Inside the room of Sayed Mir Barakat or the room of Bibi, some Uzbaki verses were recently added;
2. Uzbaki poetry was calligraphed on the walls of Wazir Akbar Khan's tomb;
3. While refurbishing the colours of the paintings, some lines that seemed slightly crooked were straightened;
4. Four tablets in Uzbaki, Dari, Pashto and English containing a short history of the Tomb and the recent activities of the Commission of Repairs were engraved and placed in four places on the inner surface of the courtyard wall.
5. Some Uzbaki poetry on two tablets were fixed on the eastern and northern walls;
6. According to an elder, 50 years ago when the brother of the Shah of Iran visited Mazar-i-Sharif he donated a fine carpet 250 meters long. This was laid outside the main door of the Tomb. Unfortunately this carpet was taken away by unknown persons to an unknown destination.

THE MADRASSA WORKSHOP FOR MOSAIC TILE-WORKERS

This madrassa was established during the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan. Naaeb Mohammad Alam Khan was governor of Balkh at this time and beside other reforms he opened the madrassa for tile-workers. A master artisan, Ustad Abdul Same Samarqandi, was chosen for this task.

It is worth mentioning that this kind of madrassa already existed in some other parts of Afghanistan, as at Balkh and Herat. But until that time no tile-work had been done on the Tomb at Mazar-e-Sharif. Perhaps the authorities wished to keep the Tomb in its original state. The brick exterior, attributed to the time of the Timurids, had been whitewashed every year using a type of white clay.

Master Abdul Same and his students worked for four years to revet the Tomb with mosaic tile-work (kashi kari). But first he constructed outer domes over each of the two main domes to weatherproof them and keep them safe from rain and snow. He also built the new domes higher so as to be able to build parapets on the arches. For the new domes he used tiles with a fresh, bright turquoise colour. Later he finished his project with tile-work on the north and south gates.

Ustad Abdul Same produced many kinds of tiles in many colours. It is said that 700 types of tiles were produced in his workshop. The workshop is still functioning and eight students are studying and working with Ustad Abdul Hakim of Balkh. According to him the materials used in making the tiles are as follows: khake rost (clay which is brought from Tangi Shafa, south-west of Mazar), a compound of tin, lead, powdered lapis lazuli, ashqar and powders of different colours.

⁵ *Ghossah*, meaning rage and sadness. According to the Abjad arrangement, the exact date is 1090 A.H. (A.Pazhwak).

FORMER MAINTENANCE OF THE TOMB COMPLEX

A part of the shrine income was used for repairs and conservation. The domes were repaired every year to protect them against erosion from wind, rain and snow. In the time of Mohammad Moqim Khan, the governor of Balkh, when the dome of the Khanaqa collapsed because of an earthquake, a new dome was built very quickly.

As mentioned above, Usatad Abdul Same Khan built new domes on top of the old ones to prevent them from being damaged by wind and rain. Most of the governors of Balkh, both for religious reasons and because they were conscious of their administrative responsibilities, regularly attended to the repairs. That is why the Tomb is in such good condition.

REASONS FOR DETERIORATION AND MAJOR CONSERVATION PROBLEMS

According to the history books, the architects of the Tomb did not follow scientific methods which are very important in the construction of such monuments. In the case of the Tomb, for instance, they simply used bricks without any kind of firm base for foundation, although the structure is 30 zara high (about 90 feet).⁶

Engineers also point out major problems:

1. Moisture around the Tomb. From a topographical point of view, the city of Mazar is located on the slopes of the Shadiyan Mountains. The Tomb itself is situated two or three meters lower than its surrounding parks allowing water to accumulate.
2. Changes in the nature of the main construction materials. The Tomb was not built according to modern engineering standards. Inside the walls they have used a compound of clay, lime and ash which has disintegrated to a soft dust.
3. Flooding. About forty years ago there was a flood that surrounded the Tomb. As the Tomb is built at a lower level, its enclosure was full of water.
4. Earthquakes, Earthquakes occurred in 1354/A.D.1975 and 1369/A.D.1980
5. Vibrations in the air. These are caused mostly by military jets and heavy explosions of mines and rockets.

DIFFICULTIES CONCERNING TAKING BASIC PRECAUTIONS

The lack of an original design is a major problem. A simple, superficial plan drawn by PAMA, a project design institution, was of no use. Before 1370/A.D. 1991 a team was appointed to undertake an engineering investigation, but it was opposed by the religious authorities and the officeholders.

Because the actual Tomb lies about 13 meters below the surface of the surrounding parks, some research must be done around the superstructure. A team of specialists advised that a ring of cement and iron should be added to the base of the Tomb.

⁶ *Ajaybul Tabaqat* and *Tarikh-e-Akabar-e-Din*, quoted from *Tarikh-i-Mazar-i-Sharif* by Hafiz Noor Mohammad Kohgady, Second printing, Peshawar 1370 A.H., p. 52.

PRECAUTIONS AND EFFORTS TAKEN BY THE COMMISSION OF BASIC REPAIRS FROM 1374-1377/A.D 1995-1998

The officeholders at the Tomb also opposed the establishment of the Commission of Basic Repairs. So the Commission was only able to do some repairs on the building of the Tomb itself, as follows:

1. Damaged and collapsed portions of the eastern wall of the building were repaired.
2. The walls were strengthened by adding cement and iron rings.
3. Cracks in the walls were repaired by placing cement and 20mm. iron bars in them to a depth of 40cms.
4. The upper portions of the inner doors were repaired.
5. The roofs were covered with iron sheets.
6. About 1300 square meters of the tiled surface, on both the interior and exterior surfaces, were renovated.

Additional work

1. Drains were cleaned and tarred.
2. Three deep wells were dug and the plumbing system was renewed.
3. 8500 square meters of the exterior courtyard was laid with marble.
4. Two high water tanks were built.
5. Two bathrooms and *ouzukhana* (lavatories) were built in the park.
6. 23 jeribs in the surrounding parks were landscaped and 5000 rose bushes were planted.
7. Five fountains were equipped with water pumps and plumbing systems.
8. All the window curtains in the Tomb and in the mosque were renewed.
9. Shelves for the shoes of visitors were built at all three entrances.
10. About 1700 cubic meters of paths in the parks were paved with concrete.
11. Three new septic tanks were dug.
12. A partially underground pigeon-house was constructed.
13. A clinic for pilgrims was constructed.
14. A museum was opened in a side room at the Tomb.
15. 630 three-person cement benches, 160 chairs, and 38 cement tables were located at various places within the gardens.
16. The door to the Tomb was faced with bronze engraved with the Holy Kalimah.
17. 448 meters of fencing around the Tomb, the silver lattices on windows and the decorative bulbs were renewed.
18. 12 new chandeliers were hung inside the Tomb.
19. Four tablets in Uzbeki, Dari, Pashto and English containing a brief history of the Tomb were mounted on the courtyard wall.
20. The *langer* (kitchen) where every Thursday night about 560kg of rice is cooked and distributed to the poor was rebuilt.
21. A 16-kilo golden plaque on which the Holy Kalimah is engraved was added.
22. The paintings and poems inside the Tomb building were renewed in the interior chamber.

According to the head of the Repairs Commission, during the last three years about 7.5 million Afghanis was spent on these renovations, from which 5.5 million Afghanis were donated by the people, while 1.3 million came from the income of the Tomb and 1.8 million was paid by the government.

DECORATIVE RENOVATIONS AGAINST ACCEPTED STANDARDS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF HISTORICAL MONUMENTS

It is said that during the first year of the recent renovation activities the Commission added new Uzbeki poems on the interior walls of the Bibi Room also known as the room of Mir Sayeed Barakat.

Also two tables containing engraved Uzbeki poems have been fixed to the walls, one on the eastern and the other on the northern gate, and some new poems have been engraved around Wazir Akbar Khan's grave.

Most disturbingly, some corrections and changes have been made to the paintings inside the Tomb in order to straighten crooked lines and leaves in the paintings.

In addition, some poems from the time of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan which were situated around the grave of Amir Sher Ali Khan have been substituted with new poems.

THE PEOPLE AND THE PARKS

When the domed building was erected, Sultan Hussain Bayqara laid out a Char Bagh around the four sides of the Tomb. A new Naghara Khana, where drums were beaten, was built on the southern gate leading to the Char Bagh, over the ruins of Sultan Sanjar's Naqarah Khana.

Wali Mohammad Khan, the son of Jani Khan, who governed from 1014 A.H./A.D. 1605-6, also laid out a Char Bagh. One part of this Char Bagh, Bagh-e Huzoor and Hazhdah Chaman, was embellished with flowers. Now only a small part of it, which is still called Bagh-i-Huzoor, many be seen.

In the year 1337/A.D. 1958 these parks came under the Master Plan for the city and were demolished, but the area is still called Hazhdah Chaman.

In 1311 A.H./A.D. 1893-4 a Salaam Khana was built by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. In 1994 some shops were built in this area.

Wali Mohammad Khan built a pond on the north side of the Char Bagh and planted plane trees around it. This pond was made of burnt bricks and was called Hauz-i-Saran. Fourteen of the plane trees survived until the beginning of Zahir Shah's reign. These plane trees were so big that at the time of celebrating the Gul-i-Surkh Mela people used to build platforms in them for drinking tea and watching the celebrations.

Local singers still sing songs in which the pond and the plane trees are mentioned. For instance;

There are fourteen plane trees round the pond of Sakhi,
And there are rows of flowers round his Tomb.

To the south of the Holy Tomb there is a mosque called Masjid-i-Hauz-e Choqur (Deep Pond). There was also a covered pond, the upper portion of which was also made of burnt brick. This pond and the mosque survived until the third decade of the 20th century. Both were located exactly where Mazar's Aryana Hotel stands today at the Shadiyan Gate.

The northern limit of the Char Bagh extended up to the modern telecommunications building and the Tomb of Mir Najmuddin Agha.

According to history books, such as *Bahr ul-Asrar*, *Ajayeb-ul Tabaqat*, and *Tarikh-e-Akabar-e-Din*, in olden times some endowments were given especially for some religious ceremonies in which a great number of people gathered, not only for Thursday nights, but during the whole month of Ramazan, the month of Rajab and during the Gul-i-Surkh Mela. People came to Mazar from far and near for pilgrimage, to pray, to receive solace, to cure their diseases, or simply for sight-seeing. All brought offerings for the Tomb. But at present we have only the Gul-i-Surkh to celebrate.

According to the elders, Gul-i-Surkh was celebrated for two months beginning at Nawroz, the first day of the Afghan year. In the time of Zahir Shah, Parmach, the governor, reduced it to forty days. Gul-i-Surkh begins with the ceremony of raising the Holy Alam, or as it is called the Holy Jandah (flag). It flies for forty days and when it is lowered a special ceremony to mark the end of the Mela takes place.

One week before Nawroz the coppersmiths polish the arches and vaults of the Tomb. The day before Nawroz a group of dancers accompany the coppersmiths on their rounds, walking around the Tomb.

In the old days people made special arrangements for theater and music performances. Singers came from other provinces also. The restaurants and teahouses busily entertained the visitors. There were also teams of wrestlers, groups of manqabat khwans reciting the good deeds of the Prophet (pbuh) and other religious personalities, jugglers, and storytellers to keep the people happy. Unfortunately for the last two decades no sign of these festive traditions can be seen because of continuous fighting and a general lack of security.

Every Wednesday, however, groups of women and children visit the Tomb.

THE TOMB, GUL-I-SURKH AND FOLKSONGS

The firm belief of Afghans in the tenets of such famous religious leaders such as Hazrat-e-Ali is reflected in our Dari and Pashto folklore, folksongs and poetry. One of the more popular folksongs is the song of Mullah Mohammad Jan. This song appears to be recited by an Afghan damsel who was in love with Mullah Mohammad Jan. In it she addresses her beloved thus:

Come and let us go to Mazar,
Oh, Mullah Mohammad Jan;
To see vast fields of Lala flowers,⁷
Oh, my beloved.

The following are some other Char Baiti, or quatrains:

In the main square of Mazar
I cried loudly for help and mercy.
I recalled Ali the Lion of God,
Ali the Master of Brave men.

⁷ *Lala* are tulips which bloom in the deserts around Mazar in the spring.

Please bring happiness and pleasure to our unhappy hearts.

I saw Ali, I saw him in my dreams.
I saw Ali on the *minbar* and on the *mihrab*,⁸
I saw Ali riding on Duldul,⁹
As Qambar,¹⁰ I was running by his stirrup.

Ali Sher-i-Khuda,¹¹ please cure my pains,
Pray for me and recommend me to God.
I will offer illuminated oil-lamps to you,
Everywhere a lover exists,
Please cure him of his pains.

Oh, you, who is walking on the upper path,
Please throw a glance down to me.
You, who is going to the Tomb,
Pray for me.
You, who is going to the Tomb by foot,
Come and put your foot to the stirrup of my horse.

CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS

As the city of Mazar-i-Sharif was built around the Holy Tomb, was named after it, and now has developed into a large city with a great number of residents, it has replaced ancient Balkh.

Our people firmly believe in famous religious persons, especially in Hazrat-e-Ali, and in cherished traditions which rise from Islam, so it is possible to use those beliefs in a beneficial way to help people, in many ways and respects.

Therefore, I have some proposals to suggest to government authorities, as well as to those international agencies which sincerely want to help Afghanistan.

1. Create a charitable foundation. With reasonable and active management, using the income of the Tomb properly, a small foundation can be created through which we can help the poor, orphans and the disabled in the fields of training, education and first-aid, as follows:
 - a) establish an orphanage;
 - b) help poor families and widows;
 - c) handle the management of some schools in the city and help them in all or in some respects;

⁸ *Minbar* is the pulpit from which a sermon is delivered at the Friday prayer; *mihrab*, a niche in the wall of a mosque indicating the direction of Mecca. (A.Pazhwak)

⁹ *Duldul* is the horse on which Hazrat-e-Ali rode to heaven. (A.Pazhwak)

¹⁰ *Qambar* was a freed slave who was the companion of Hazrat-e-Ali.

¹¹ *Sher-i-Khuda* meaning Lion of God.

- d) maintain contact and cooperate with the International Committee of the Red Cross and other institutions in order to help them and take help from them;
 - e) Create small, but productive, commercial institutes.
2. Prevent the Tomb from further deterioration. To realize this important goal, research should be undertaken by a specialized team of engineers.
 3. Rebuild the tomb of Sultan Sanjar near the south gate with the help of available pictures. Also rebuild the madrassa of Bahauddin Balaa Gardaan which was also by the south entrance, but of which nothing is at hand except the memories of elders.
 4. Restore the lost tablets. If they cannot be found make and affix new ones by the help of poems, and information mentioned in available history books.
 5. Prevent selfish additions and changes to the paintings, calligraphy, and tile-work inside the Tomb.
 6. Develop the madrassa and tile-workshop in order to keep this delicate art alive.