

## SPACH NEWSLETTER

*The first of a proposed series of  
newsletters prepared and  
distributed by the Society for  
the Preservation of  
Afghanistan's Cultural  
Heritage*

# SPACH



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, Fariyab, Badghis, Ai-Khanoum; dissemination of the resulting reports and photographs to the relevant institutions in Afghanistan and abroad.

. In response to 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.



# **New STRATEGIES FOR THE KABUL MUSEUM**

**By Nancy hatch Dupree**

Afghanistan's Minister of Information and Culture is a philosopher. When discussing new strategies for the disastrously damaged and depleted Kabul Museum, Sayed Ishaq Deljo Hussaini quoted from the poetry of Hafiz and summed up his remarks by saying: Men have devoted their lives to preserve that beauty for the inspiration of others; but today men despoil that source of creativity for their own selfish gain. It is our responsibility to rescue the Museum, revive it, so that future generations may once again be inspired by the ingenuity of past generations.

Thus in April 1995, for the first time since it took over the powers of government in April 1992, the Islamic State of Afghanistan officially assumed responsibility for the protection of the Kabul Museum. The Museum sits in Darulaman, a wide open plain 6 miles south of the heart of Kabul city. Because its isolation, Darulaman became a battered front line between contenders for the capital. At times, the line dividing these battling antagonists is drawn at the Museum's very doorstep. Regretfully, with each change the collections are looted.

The Museum staff, being members of the central government, were frequently unable to visit the premises since it was so often in enemy hands. To remedy this, UN Secretary-General's Personal Representative in Afghanistan and Pakistan, met with leaders controlling the area in November 1993 and secured their cooperation in forming a joint committee to initiate remedial work. The committee, led by senior Museum staff member Najibullah Popal, began its task in December.

With the assistance of UNOCHA, funds graciously contributed by the governments of Greece, Portugal and Cyprus, the technical contributions from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT), the fire-broken building was weatherproofed for the winter, ground floor windows were bricked up against further pilferage, stout steel doors were affixed to storerooms and upwards of 3,000 broken and mangled objects were painstakingly rescued from the mounds of debris from the roof that was felled by a rocket in may 1993.

In June 1995, an expert from the Musée Guimet, Paris, visit Kabul as part of UNESCO's first mission to devise plans for conducting an inventory of objects which still remain in the building. But the war continues. The second mission scheduled to begin the inventory in September was aborted because of renewed hostilities. In November, another direct hit again exposed the collection to the depredation of man and nature.

Because the Museum is once more on the front line, work on the inventory is momentarily suspended. In the interim, advocacy efforts urging Afghans to protect their heritage, to curb illicit excavations and stop the sale of looted objects continue. Almost 100 artifacts have been returned during 1995. With heightened awareness it will be possible for the Kabul Museum to regain its reputation as one of the world's most opulent museums.



Mr. Sotirios Mousouris and Mr. Najib Popal, in the coin collection  
Photo by C. Belleau.

## LOST AND FOUND

By Jolyon Leslie

Stories of plunder from the Kabul Museum abound. Most are very difficult to verify, as those involved in the traffic or sale of stolen objects are, as elsewhere in the world, cautious. Those in Kabul who have been trying to identify stolen objects from the museum and other sources are therefore faced with a dilemma if we are to move beyond the wild rumours that have always characterised Afghanistan. We need somehow to "buy in" to a clearing-house that we know to be both illegal and, in some cases, dangerous.

Dealers are often more concerned about the goodwill (and wealth) of the potential buyer than they are of the provenance of an object. Photos are rarely allowed, especially if it is clear that the photographer is not likely to purchase. So an elaborate cloak-and-dagger game can ensue, often involving blurred polaroids of potentially-significant objects. Despite these difficulties (and any number of false trails) friends of SPACH have been able to find and return to the Ministry of Information and Culture in Kabul a total of 48 objects looted from the Museum. Despite the massive scale of the losses from the Museum collection, this is a significant achievement. The objects returned included several silver pieces from the Tepe Fullol hoard (dating from 2,500 BC), ivory and metalwork, as well

as schist and stucco sculptures from Hadda.

The exercise has allowed us to build up a picture of how objects pass from hand to hand in the city, before they reach dealers or collectors abroad. With additional resources, this might enable us to find those objects missing from the collection that have still not come to light. We know, for example that several of the exquisite stucco panels from Begram are “available”. It is only a matter of time before they find their way into the hand of dealers abroad.



Jolyon Leslie (left) Handing over artifacts to staff of the ministry of Information and Culture.  
Photo by C. Grissmann

It is clear that once the news of the state of the Museum surfaced, the demand abroad for pieces from the collection, to a large extent, drove the looting. From the very beginning, it was evident that the intruders knew exactly what they were looking for. As the most portable objects (coins) and those of the highest value (including ivories) disappeared, the looters have become ever-more audacious in their search for riches. Only months ago, a large schist Buddha (which we had presumed safe due to its

weight was hacked off the wall and spirited



out of the lobby of the Museum overnight.

Carla Grissmann

Photo by J.Leslie

Since then, security on the Museum site has been tightened.

We hope that the return of the first 48 objects from SPACH might pave the way for the discovery and return of more looted objects, before they leave Kabul for the international market.

# NEWS

## IN BRIEF

### GAWAR SHAD MAUSOLEUM

The Department of Historic Monuments of Herat, with support from private donors and the World Food Programme has undertaken much-needed repairs to the outside wall and the dome of the mausoleum of Queen **Gawar Shad**. Much of the glazed tile work from the

exterior of the dome was lost due to neglect and as result of direct damage during the conflict in this part of Herat.



GAWAR SHAD MAUSOLEUM Photo by B.Neubacher

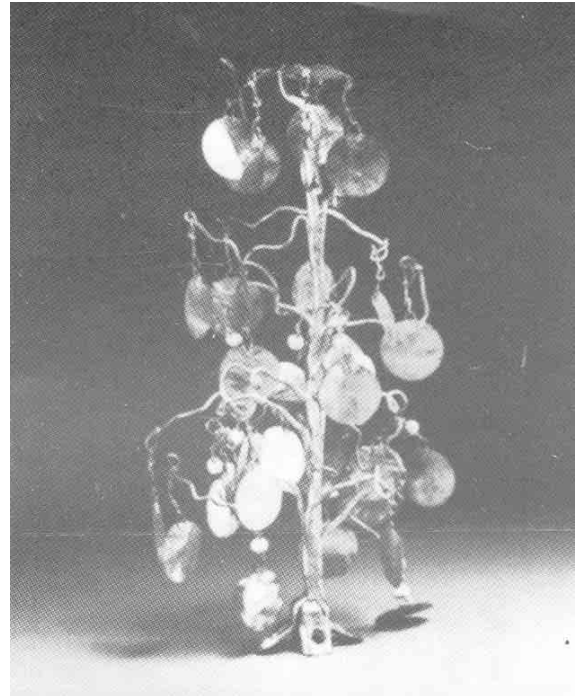
## SPACH LOGO



Bronze age bone seal dating 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC excavated from Shamshir Ghar cave near Kandahar in southern Afghanistan by Louis Dupree in 1950. Depicts a winged camel on obverse and a bird with outstretched wings on reverse.  
Diameter: 3cm.

## BACTRIAN GOLD

The fate of the fabulous collection of



22,000 pieces of gold from the Bactrian period, found in Tillya Tepe by Russian

### BACTRIAN GOLD

Archaeologists during the 1970's, has been the subject of much conjecture in past months. Together with other objects, they were reported to have been moved from the Kabul Museum by conscientious staff during 1992. SPACH has now been reliably informed that the collection, which has never been exhibited outside Afghanistan, is intact and safe in Kabul. Several museums in Europe, the USA and Japan have expressed an interest in mounting an exhibition of these priceless objects. It is hoped that such an exhibition might spread awareness of the cultural richness of the country.

## SPACH PHOTO BANK AND

## LIBRARY

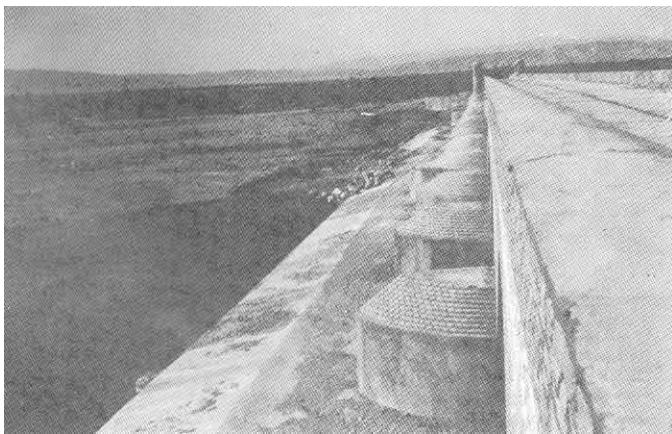
The collection in Peshawar continues to grow, with some 800 photos and slides and many articles and books, mainly contributed by private individuals.

Focussing principally on historic monuments and sites, the collection is intended to act as a resource for those researching or publishing about cultural issues in Afghanistan. Those interested in having access to material or wish to make contributions should contact Ms. Nancy Dupree at ACBAR/ARIC, 2 Rahman Babar Road, University Town or P.O. Box 1084, U. T., Peshawar, Pakistan.

## GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN TO PURCHASE ANTIQUITIES

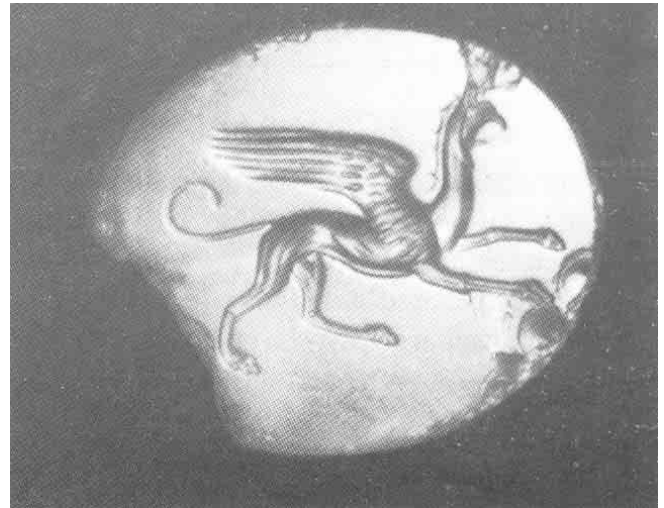
The Government of Pakistan has announced that it will set aside some \$1 million to purchase antiquities from Central Asia and Afghanistan with the purpose of preventing their illegal export. It is proposed that such. Objects will be returned to the relevant authorities in country of origin. SPACH has offered assistance to the Pakistani authorities in this regard.

## PUL E MALAN BRIDGE



Herat has been the focus for a number of

PUL E MALAN BRIDGE Photo by B. Neubacher  
restoration initiatives during 1995. Substantial repairs have been carried out by DACAAR, the Danish NGO, on flood damage sustained to the ancient brick bridge across the Hari Rud river, known as **Pul e Malan**.



BACTRIAN GOLD: Intaglio with representation of a griffin

## SPACH MEETING IN JALALABAD

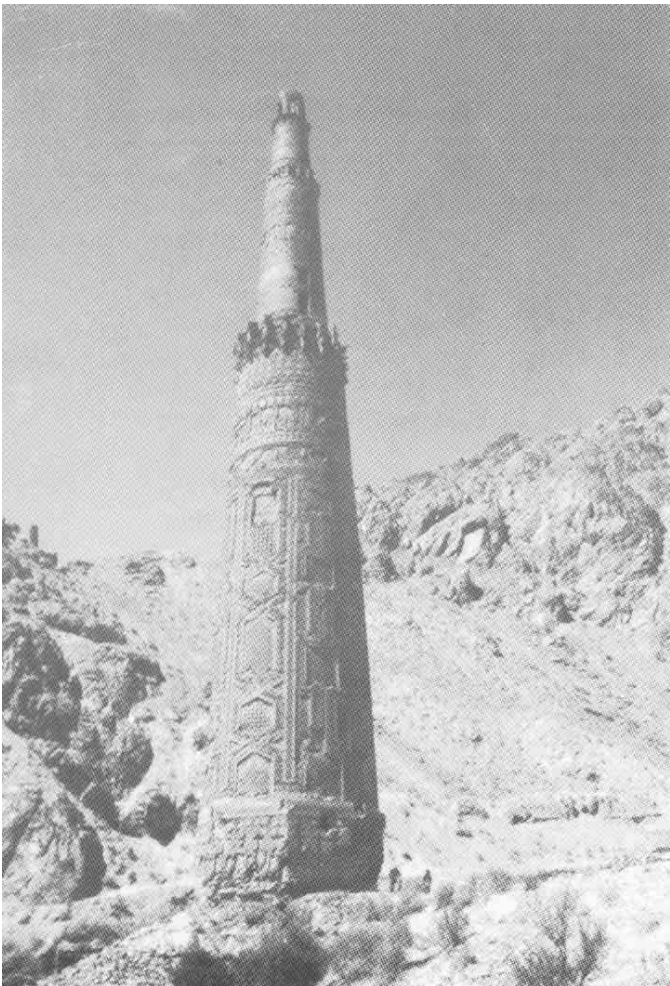
An important meeting was held in Jalalabad in January, bringing together representatives of all regions of the country (except Qandahar) under the auspices of SPACH to discuss the continued threat to the cultural heritage of Afghanistan. Opened by the Governor of Nangahar, Haji Qadir, the participants resolved to establish local committees to exchange information about the state of historic monuments, archaeological sites and other cultural issues in their area. It is hoped that the formation of local committees will help to prevent illegal excavations and control the traffic and sale of antiquities. In addition, committees will be expected to make inventories of historic

monuments and excavations in their respective areas.

It is planned that quarterly meetings will be held to exchange information and develop measures to protect the cultural heritage of the country.

## JAM MINARET

In Ghor, an assessment was made during August 1995 of the minaret that has so perplexed historians of Islamic architecture. Reports of the vulnerability of this isolated monument prompted Dr. A. W. Najimi to travel to the area to ascertain the state of the minaret. In his resulting report, he proposes that a



JAM MINARET

Photo by S. Gall

protective wall be built along the eastern bank of the Jam river to reduce the possibility of undermining of the foundations by flood waters. UNESCO has contributed resources for this work, which should take place in the course of 1996.

## KABUL MUSEUM

The parlous state of the Kabul Museum continues to attract media coverage. Articles have appeared in a range of journals during 1994 and 1995, both in Europe and the USA (MINERVA, Journal of Art, Giornale dell'Arte, The Independent, The Daily Telegraph, Afghanistan NYTT, Sweden, Archaeology) and in the region (Far Eastern Economic Review, Tehran Times, Gulf News, The News, Herald, The Nation, The Muslim, etc.) Work continues on tracing missing items. Bob Mc Kerrow of the IFRCS has agreed to act as the representative for SPACH in Kabul, and will be working closely with staff of the Ministry of Culture on this and other issues.



KABUL MUSEUM