

SPACH NEWSLETTER 2

Dear friends of Afghanistan,

The second issue of SPACH's Newsletter reports on the current status of the collection of the Kabul Museum and its packing and shifting in early September 1996 to Kabul Hotel.

On 27 September 1996 the Taliban took control of Kabul. On 7 November Radio Shariat(Kabul) announced that" all people are called on to give back items from the Kabul Museum in their possession. It is illegal to have such items and Shariat- or Islamic- law will apply to those who violate this rule".

Mr. Jean-Pierre Dufranc, SPACH's representative in Kabul, reported in October: the doors at Darulaman have recently been closed and locked one more time; SPACH was asked to support the repair of the roof above the Lashkari Bazaar in the Kabul Museum which has been damaged by a rocket last summer; Maulvi Rabiq has been nominated Director General of Museums.

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RECENT HAPPENINGS AT THE KABUL MUSEUM

Nancy Hatch Dupree
August 1996

When last I wrote about the looted Kabul museum in April 1995, the Afghan Government had for the first time declared its intention to assume responsibility of the museum's glorious collection. A 25-member Commission for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural and Heritage was established. They estimated then that 70% was gone, but the stores were in such chaos that it was impossible to say precisely what was missing.

In October 1995, peace around Kabul was shattered by the reappearance of the Taliban on its southern outskirts. Rockets peppered the museum garden and, because the museum once again sat at the centre of the battleground, looting continued. A large seated Buddha disappeared. The government's final decision to shift the museum to the centre of Kabul dates from this period of uneasiness. In early 1996 the Kabul Hotel was selected as the site.

It took some time to convince the management of the Kabul Hotel to set aside space for museum offices and stores. Their concerns must now be doubled for the spacious arches of the main dining room on the first floor have been filled with brick from storerooms secured by the steel doors originally installed at the Darulaman building in 1994. Hopefully it will be possible to restore the beautiful pink-marble flooring





once peace returns and the museum finds a permanent home. The cavernous vaulted basement is also being utilized.

The dispiriting chore of packing objects at the museum was carried out by a dedicated staff periodically shaken by incoming rockets and the ominous thunder of outgoing artillery. It was not only hazardous, it was also hard to maintain any semblance of morale in the gloom and dust as the full extent of loss became starkly apparent.

Recollections of my visit in 1996 are like a fantasy. From the side doorway the long, high-vaulted hallway stretches endlessly into darkness and in the only pool of light at the foot of a few steps inside the door eight men in unbleached cotton dusters hover over a table like surgeons in an army field hospital. One measures and describes, one records, two packages in tin boxes, while two observers, from the Commission “witness” the process to make sure no piece goes astray. Off to the left at the entrance to an alcove the photographer works in his makeshift studio on a rickety wooden trestle set against a black cloth tacked to the wall. All rise like wraiths from the hanging curtain of dust.

The storeroom on the left is but dimly lighted from slits over the tops of the bricked-up windows. It seems empty until cheerful words of welcome drift down from a murky corner of ceiling. Here Najibullah Popal is perched precariously, one leg on the top a cabinet, the other resting on a shaky column of carrying the inscription which once adorned a terrace beside the monumental staircase leading to Kushan King Kanishka’s temple at Surkh Kotal, north of the Hindu Kush.

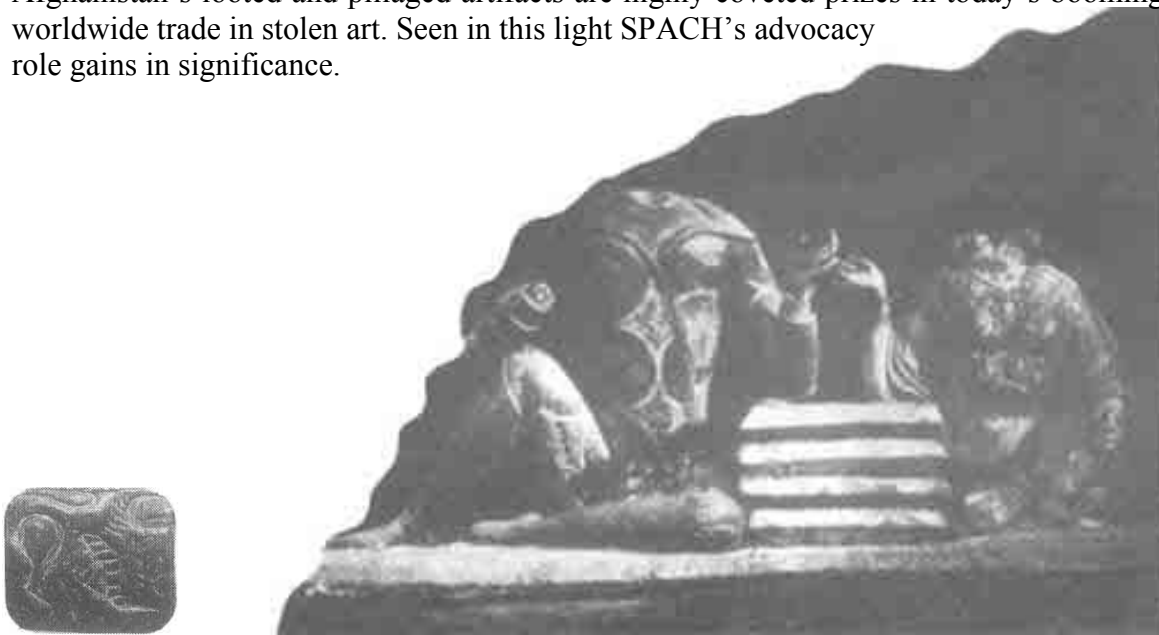


The massive, painstaking task of preparing an inventory was undertaken by Carla Grissmann who worked at the museum before the war. The reality emerging from this inventory is sad. Many of the objects are fragments. Pieces worthy of exhibition are distressingly few.

Hopes turn more and more, therefore to the tantalizing twenty boxes full of quality removed from the museum before the Mujahideen government came to power in April in 1992. They are still unopened, their contents still a mystery. They will probably not be unpacked until Kabul finds peace. There is also the golden hoard from Telya Tepa which has been guarded in the vaults of the National Bank inside the presidential palace since the end of president Najibullah's regime. Government authorities say this 20,000-piece collection is intact, but repeated requests to examine it have been consistently sidetracked.

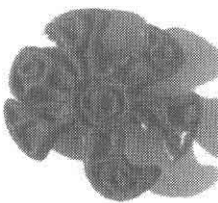
There is one positive note. More than one thousand looted artifacts have been recovered. Some were confiscated by security forces, some purchased at nominal prices by the Commission with government funds, and some donated by private individuals. Nevertheless, any optimism this may raise must be tempered by the fact that the most superior pieces are being spirited away into the hands of international dealers and collectors because we are unable and unwilling to pay the astronomical prices, amounting in some cases to nearly a quarter of a million US dollars. As long as there are acquisitive collectors driven by their obsession to own what no one else can obtain, the uniqueness of items from the Kabul Museum make them irresistible and thus a source of inestimable value to the well-organized, avaricious looters and their agents.

Already even the modest recovery successes in Kabul have been met with acts of violence and character-damaging whispering campaigns clearly indicating that Afghanistan's looted and pillaged artifacts are highly coveted prizes in today's booming worldwide trade in stolen art. Seen in this light SPACH's advocacy role gains in significance.



THE KABUL MUSEUM MOVES TO KABUL HOTEL

Carla Grissmann
October 1996



Following the second UNESCO mission to Kabul in September 1995 which had to be canceled due to security problems, the Ministry of Information and Culture and the staff of the National Museum of Kabul were increasingly anxious to carry out the intended shifting of the remaining objects from the Kabul museum to the Kabul Hotel in the city for safekeeping. UNESCO and SPACH agreed to facilitate this plan by providing a working budget for packing materials, office supplies, fuel and other expenses, as well as a SPACH Kabul liaison to oversee the activities. Carla Grissmann worked with the Museum staff from May 20 until September 26, 1996, and wrote the following report on the move:

After a year of indecision, the Kabul Hotel was finally and officially chosen in early 1996 to temporarily house the remaining objects of the Kabul Museum, as well as the 71 museum staff members. A sum of 50 million Afs was allocated by former President Rabbani for construction work to turn the basement and ground floor into storerooms and secure areas. All the windows were bricked up, with space at the top for light to enter. Along the dining area on the ground floor, brick walls were built between all the wide arches and the arches themselves bricked up, each with a steel door brought from the Museum at Darulaman. Three other large individual stores and two very spacious halls were also prepared on the ground floor, in addition to the two extensive low-ceilinged storerooms in the basement. Nine hotel rooms on the first floor serves as offices and an area will be partitioned off to as a library.

The registration and packing of objects began on April 20, 1996. Work was began in the large basement Hadda storeroom by the light of kerosene lamps, as the generator donated by HABITAT had been stolen by the museum security guards a few weeks earlier. The rooms were without air, thick with dust, dimly lit by one or two lamps, and crowded with people trying to manoeuvre around each other and keep the large and small, packed and to-be-packed objects in order. Morale was often low; many of the staff developed allergies to the dust and worked with their heads swathed in strips of cloth. Tow old Babas heated

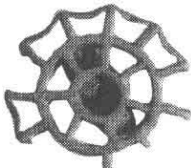
water for tea and cooked lunch for the staff on a fire built directly on the floor in a corner of the museum entrance, the flames licking up the soot-blackened wall.

As of September 26, 1996, the museum staff had worked almost six months instead of the one month estimated by the UNESCO mission last summer. The storerooms had been pilfered yet again since Pierre Cambon, Musee Guimet, and the staff cleaned them in July 1995 in preparation for making a systematic inventory, and the floors were littered anew with potsherds and objects flung randomly in all the directions. The staff worked heroically, encouraged daily by Najibullah Popal, Deputy Director of the Kabul Museum.

The museum inventory are written by hand in Persian on separate sheets of paper with two carbon copies, held together with numerous pins, and then clipped into folders. The inventory in English was written on cards with entries for type of object, accession number, original museum registration number, material, trunk/box number, date of packing, and a space for a small photograph.

Amidst all the destruction and ruin, it was a happy surprise to see that 99% of the remaining objects had registration numbers and were intact, albeit fragments. The majority of objects, in fact, were fragments, with very few exceptions. The marble herm from Ai Khanum was found headless, but later the head was uncovered in another store and the figure is now complete. The ivory throne back from Begram was demolished to remove the 13 small carved panels; splinters of the frame were found strewn over the floor. Countless fragments of smashed Greek plaster emblems were swept up from the Begram storeroom.





Of the schist figure of a worshipping child from Paitava, only the left hand remains as a small solitary fragment. The painted clay seated Bodhisattva from Tepe Maranjan is intact. The Islamic bronzes and grave effigies from the Nuristan are undamaged. Much of the Nuristani pieces from the ethnographic collection remains, although many of the sculptured columns, chairs and door panels were cut up for firewood. All the manuscripts and miniature paintings are said to be safe in the National Archives.

Of the famous coin collections numbering over 35,000 coins, nothing remains except the hope that the gold and silver coins from Tepe Maranjan excavated by DAFA in 1933 and transferred in 1993 to the bank vault of the Presidential palace are indeed still safe.

Shifting began on 1 September and continued for seven days. The truck, a massive flatbed hooked onto a cabin, was provided by the Darulaman garrison the young commander in charge of security at the Museum. The truck turned out to be the ideal vehicle of the purpose. They drove it flat up against the small side entrance of the Museum, lowered a side flap and placed a steel door as a bridge between the top of the steps and the truck, so that objects could be carried straight down the museum hallway and onto the truck. The same system was used unloading at the Kabul Hotel, the truck driving up on the sidewalk and flat against the wide front entrance of the hotel, completely blocking from view the unloading process going on inside. Pictures taken show people going by without any interest.

Between September 1 and 8, 1996, 275 metal trunks, wooden boxes, cartons and crates, and 258 individual objects and the wooden figures and objects from Nuristan were shifted from the Kabul Museum in Darulaman to the Kabul Hotel.

Still remaining in various storerooms in Darulaman to be registered and packed, as of September 26, are:

- All prehistoric objects: Mundigak, Shamshir Ghar, Tele Fullol, Aq Kupruk, and seven other sites,
- Approximately 50 clay objects from the Ghazni Museum,
- Approximately 20 large stone pieces from Surkh Kotal,
- All ceramics/pottery (thousands of sherds strewn ankle deep); in the entrance hall:

The much-loved headless standing figure of Kanishka, the Kushan noble, the massive black marble basin from Kandahar, the 25-line

inscription in Greek script in the Bactrian language from Surkh Kotal and the fire altar from Surkh Kotal, and in the hallway:

- The ca. 11th century Islamic calligraphic frieze.
- The ca. 12th century reconstruction mosque and mihrab, both from Lashkari Bazaar.



Outside in the no man's land near the left wing of the museum there also remains one locomotive from King Amanullah's railway, the second one having already been stripped down for scrap metal. None of the collection of the king's cars remains.

There were several periods during the summer when the staff was unable to go to Darulaman because of shelling and rocket fire. In early July the ancient bus that took them out to the museum every morning was fired on from the crest of the hills beyond Darulaman. One another day, I was there myself standing outside when a jet streaked by so close that stones suddenly began sizzling through the air all around me. The Lashkari Bazaar mosque got a direct hit one August 18, which tore a 3-foot diameter hole in mosque floor, yet the shattered wooden beams lying at all angles on the mosque floor, yet miraculously with no real damage to the extremely fragile plaster mihrab or walls, except for another coating of thick dust.



In early July UNESCO agreed to bring three Iranian experts from the Bastan Museum in Teheran to remove the large early Islamic calligraphic frieze and the reconstructed mosque both on the ground floor. But by September the security situation around Darulaman had deteriorated and Kabul became off-limits for expatriate consultants and experts.



As of September 26, when I had to leave Kabul, it was estimated that 80% of the objects had been inventoried, successfully shifted and safely placed in their various storeroom at the Kabul Hotel.



SPACH NEWS

Brigitte Neubacher

SPACH ON INTERNET

SPACH'S newsletters and other information can be accessed on SPACH's WEB PAGE as follows: <http://www.col.com.pk/testing/clients>.

JAM MINARET

In view of military activities and resulting security problems, the planned work at the Jam Minaret could not be undertaken this summer.

LECTURES BY NANCY DUPREE

While in the USA in June 1996, Ms. Dupree gave lectures to the Asia Society in Washington and New York and at the Queens Council on the Arts Program. As a result of her lecture in Sweden in April 1996, the Swedish Committee made a donation of \$1,500 to SPACH.

LECTURE BY PROF. TADDEI, IsMEO

After spending almost a month in Swat where IsMEO is carrying out excavations, Prof. Taddei gave a SPACH-sponsored lecture in Islamabad in October on IsMEO's excavations in Swat and Ghazni in the 1970's. SPACH urged Prof. Taddei to encourage international archaeologists to return to Afghanistan.





SPACH SUPPORTS BOOK PUBLICATION

Associate Professor M.R. Bawary published in July 1996 his book "Museology and the Development of Museums in Afghanistan" in Dari. Copies may be obtained from the Ministry of Information and Culture, Kabul.

MEDIA COVERAGE

THE TIMES, London, 22 October 1996, NHK (Japanese TV) made a portrait of Prof. Dari and Ms. Dupree in July 1996; translations of Ms. Dupree's article in ARCHAEOLOGY were published in local Dari and Urdu publications.

SECOND NATIONAL SPACH MEETING IN MAZAR

On 8/9 May SPACH held its second national meeting in Mazar-i-Sharif with representatives from Kabul and the Northern provinces. Unfortunately the participants from Herat were not allowed to attend.

REPORTS FROM FARYAB, BADGHIS AND HADDA

SPACH received reports of widespread illegal excavations and pilferage of historic sites in Faryab and Badghis. Trucks are removing stones from Hadda-to be used as building materials.



NEWS IN BRIEF

Carla Crissmann

BAMIYAN

“The Blind Buddhas of Bamiyan” appeared as a feature story in the French weekly magazine L’Express of 1-7 August 1996, the second in a series of articles appealing to the World to preserve endangered World Heritage properties.

From afar, the lush green valley of Bamiyan with its sweeping cliff wall seems much the same as it must have to the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien in 400 AD when he described this “marvelous valley” as a haven to pilgrims, scholars and devotees, and resting place for the camel caravans laden with riches following the Silk Route from Rome to China.

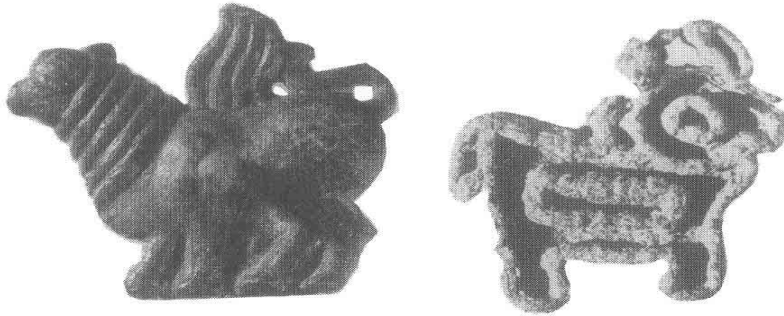
Two hundred years later another pilgrim, Hsuan Tsang, wrote of the ten monasteries with over a thousand priests whose chanting echoed through the long green valley. The two colossal Buddhas of 55 and 38 meters still stand silent within their sheltering niches carved out of the sheer sandstone wall. A vast network of grottos, sanctuaries and cells dug out of the cliff housed the thousand of disciples and their teachers. The ceiling and walls were later painted in formalized Sasanian art forms from Iran and the sumptuous style of India’s Gupta dynasty. The earliest known examples of the cosmic mandala, which later became the focus of tantric Buddhism of Tibet and Nepal, were found in the side valley of Kakrak.

But today, a traveller will find that approaching hills around the Buddhas are mined, the monastic cells serve as barracks for the mujahideen, their Kalashnikovs thrown against walls that still bear the clear colors of the ancient mural paintings, the grotto under the feet of the large Buddha is used to store rocket launchers and munitions: “Here they are safe, nobody can bomb this place.” The most poignant photograph in the L’Express article shows one of the magnificent vaulted cave paintings, its fragile surface blacked by soot from cooking fires and scarred forever by a long glaring autograph gauged into the painted wall, “Commander Din Mohammad and Commander Homayun from Jauzjan Province were here, April 20, 1995.”



UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

In 1982, the Government of Afghanistan proposed nine sites to be included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage cultural properties. Of these, four were considered by the UNESCO Bureau of the Committee: Bamiyan, Herat, the Minaret of Jam, and Ai Khanum. The remaining five, Ghazni, Guldarra, Lashkari Bazaar and Nu Gumband, were not able to be visited at that time, and Surkh Kotal was not recommended.



There has been no follow up to these earlier initiatives and now most the site are within the territories of rival mujahideen factions and out of government control. From eye witness reports Surkh Kotal has been destroyed, Ai Khanum has been raked flat with bulldozers and tractors to facilitate individual diggers with their shovels and pick axes. Other sites, including Tela Tepe, the burial mounds near Shebergan which yielded the spectacular 'Bactrian Gold' hoard, have suffered the same fate at the same time, many hitherto unknown sites have come to light, unearthed in the course of the fighting and destroyed by rockets and bombing. These also are being systematically destroyed by the local population incited by the prospect of finding gold.

UNESCO CONVENTION

SPACH has been urging the Afghan Government authorities to resume discussions with UNESCO and to sign the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage before Afghanistan's history is irrevocably destroyed.





TEPE MARANJAN

The Buddhist monastic site of Tepe Maranjan, on the eastern outskirts of Kabul lying in the shadow of Nadir Shah's mausoleum, was first surveyed by DAFA in 1934. The Afghan Institute of Archaeology took up the work in 1980 and continued excavation and restoration activities until 1993.

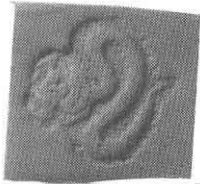
In 1987, the Institute of Archaeology uncovered four small stone reliquaries and seven copper coins from a small burial niche covered by numerous huge stone slabs in the paved center terrace of the main stupa. These objects were sent two years later to the Institute of Restoration of Antiquities of the Ministry of Culture in Moscow for cleaning.

In August of this year a team from Kabul, including Najibullah Popal, Deputy Director of the Kabul Museum, and Abdul Wassey Ferozi, Director of the Afghan Institute of Archaeology, went to Moscow to recover the reliquaries and coins. The objects were officially turned over to the Kabul Museum on September, 25, 1996.

Each of the four polished schist reliquaries contained two reliquaries one within the other, the second one in silver and the smallest in gold. Within the gold urns were splinters of bone and wood, tiny beads, and chips of turquoise and precious stones. One of the silver reliquaries was shaped like a miniature stupa with four minuscule charkas rising from its cover. The cover of one of the gold urns bore three minute round pellets of gold, perfectly surmounted by a fourth. A rough fragment of baked clay 1 cm long and shaped like an olive pit found within the larger schist urn showed an oval depression made by a stamp or seal with what seemed to the microscopic upper body of a man elegantly turning his head and shoulders. A small rolled scroll of paper found by the Afghan Institute within one gold urn was too fragile to handle and was later lost in the laboratories of the Moscow Institute of Restoration.

Similar to the other reliquaries found during earlier excavations in the smaller stupas surrounding the main stupa, each gold urn which was fitted into the large silver one was protected by strips of cloth and cotton.

The reliquaries are thought to date from the 1st -2nd century AD and the copper coins, the history books of antiquity, to be from the reign of Kajula Kadphises, the great-grandfather of Kanishka the Great.



This could place the Tepe Maranjan site a good 200 years earlier than previously date; at a time before the stupa of Kanishka as it is known today was constructed.

The spectacular Tepe Maranjan coin treasure excavated by DAFA in 1933 consisted of 12 gold coins from the 4th-century Kushano-Sasanian period, using Kushan motifs and the Bactrian language written in cursive Greek script, and 368, Sasanian silver drachmas. These gold and silver coins were taken for safekeeping to the Da Afghanistan Bank in 1993; the Governor of the bank assured SPACH in September 1996 that the coins were safe.





CURRENT MEMBERS OF SPACH'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- H.E. Mr. Pierre Lafrance, Ambassador of France
- H.E. Mr. Eleftherios Karayannis, Ambassador of Greece
- Ms. Nancy Dupree, ACBR/ARIC
- Prof. A. H. Dani
- Mr. Daniel Bellamy, UNHCR Afghanistan
- Ms. Brigitte Neubacher, UNOCHA.



