
ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF AFGHANISTAN

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ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF AFGHANISTAN



ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF AFGHANISTAN

Its Fall and Survival

A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

EDITED BY

JULIETTE VAN KRIEKEN-PIETERS



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How wonderful that people show interest in our past, it means there is hope for the future.

(quote from an Afghan refugee in Peshawar, 1994)

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PREFACE

Martin de la Bey
The Netherlands' Ambassador to Afghanistan

... the museum is my house ...

In a 22 October 2005 article in the leading Dutch financial newspaper 'Het Financieele Dagblad', the courage of Omara Khan Massoudi, Director of the Kabul Museum was vividly depicted. The reporter, Chris Reinewald, interviewed Massoudi whilst the latter was on an official visit to the Netherlands during which he received the prestigious Prins Claus Prize for his continuous efforts in promoting and safeguarding Afghanistan's cultural heritage. Massoudi describes the recent rise of his museum as a scholar; he displays a Till Eulenspiegel-like shrewdness whilst explaining how he was able to hide the masterpieces of the Museum during the Taliban years; and he is the perfect negotiator whilst humbly begging for support for the Kabul Museum.

Massoudi is perfectly able to stress the relevance and importance of a well-functioning museum for post-conflict Afghanistan, for building a new, proud conscientiousness reminiscent of the past, and marked for the present and the future. Massoudi who can be looked upon as an indefatigable promotor of his museum and Afghan art in general, has travelled the world with his message of hope and reconstruction. Fear does not appear to be part of his vocabulary. He proudly tells story upon story of how he managed to safeguard the many treasures:

... In Afghanistan everyone lived under constant fear. There were multiple problems everywhere and on all levels. Afghans have a saying that if there is fire somewhere, everything burns down. But what should one be afraid of? Should one give priority to personal or rather to cultural interests? The museum is my house. If I would have perished, it would have been God's will. ...

Massoudi is truly happy when he recalls the reopening of his museum in September 2004 and the exposition of wooden statues from Nuristan.

Its is probably no coincidence that Massoudi names in this interview only three persons by name, three women who helped him and the museum during the civil war and continue to do so. The three are Nancy Dupree, Carla Grissmann and Juliette (Jet) van Krieken. He also pays tribute to SPACH of which the three were among the founding members:

. . . we are most grateful to them. Also during the various negotiations to bring an end to the political conflict, SPACH continued to stress the importance of our cultural heritage. Mousouris, a special envoy of the UN got us on UNESCO's agenda . . .

It is against the background of this interview that I am delighted to write the preface to a Volume that so splendidly illustrates the various dilemma's, the archeological aspects, the legal subtleties but that displays above all the utter beauty of the many artefacts that have meanwhile been unearthed, once again showing Afghanistan's special and rich history.

Mrs Juliette van Krieken-Pieters has managed to bring the state of the art and archaeology in this field together in this book. The many photographs enlighten the various contributions, but also tell a story of their own: the despair and hope, the destruction and construction, and last but not least, the sheer beauty and the positive message for the global village as a whole: Afghan's cultural heritage is worth being treasured. In this respect this Volume makes a strong case indeed.

Martin de la Bey
Kabul, Spring 2006

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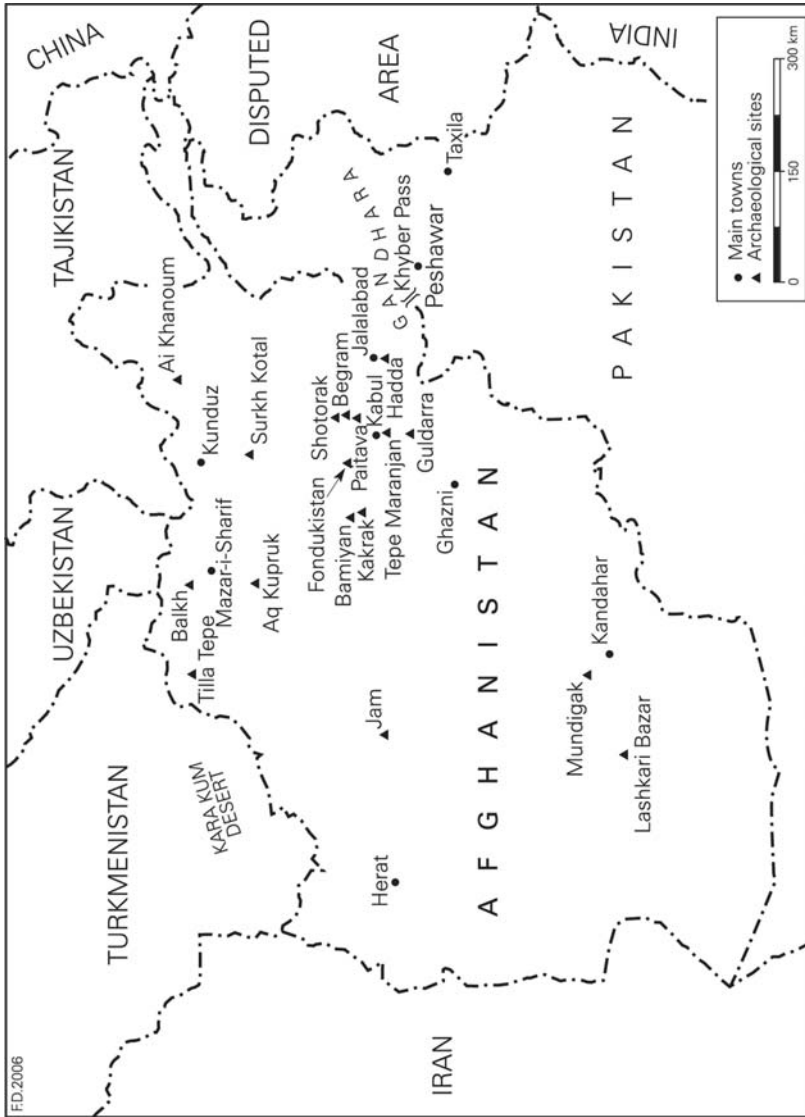
First of all, I would like to thank the contributors to this book. They all succeeded to find time to convey their many experiences, although each of them already had a heavy workload. And a special word of thanks to Nancy Dupree who is a continuous source of inspiration. Missing among the contributors, due to personal circumstances, is Brigitte Neubacher. She did an incredible job for SPACH during the difficult early years, while employed by UNOCHA. I would like to thank her for her immense efforts. In this context I would also like to thank Martin de la Bey, the Dutch Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, for his foreword. Furthermore, Renee Otto, Patricia Radder and Albert Hoffstädt from Brill Academic Publishers deserve my thanks for their patience, enthusiasm and stimulating words at the right moment.

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Juliette van Krieken-Pieters
Oegstgeest/Vientiane, Spring 2006



INTRODUCTION

Juliette van Krieken-Pieters

This Volume is first and foremost a homage to all who have devoted time and energy, often with immense efforts under very harsh and dangerous circumstances, towards the same cause: to preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the rich cultural heritage of Afghanistan.

During the last couple of decades Afghanistan has faced exceptional challenges. Not only did it fall victim to war caused by an occupying force, but upon the occupier's departure it was also subjected to civil wars of various kinds. Moreover, its cultural heritage suffered tremendously. Monuments were damaged by attacks and looted as a result, most notably the National Museum of Afghanistan, better known as the Kabul Museum.¹ Furthermore, many monuments were neglected because of a lack of attention or funds. Besides that, illegal excavations and the looting of already excavated sites took and still takes part on a large scale.

Many were aware of what was going on and they did try to prevent the worse from taking place. However, what was really an awakening call for the world at large was the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in March 2001. Suddenly, the fate of Afghanistan's cultural heritage occupied centre stage.² The frustration which emanated from not being able to prevent the Taliban rulers from carrying out their wrongdoing was widespread and this was irrespective of cultural or religious divides. Monuments that had survived for 1500 years were destroyed in a matter of days. The utterly destructive

¹ The official name of the museum is the National Museum of Afghanistan. In this book, however, I have chosen to refer to the museum by its better known names 'the Kabul Museum' or 'the National Museum'.

² An illustration of this can be found in the way in which Washington D.C. received President Karzai, May 23, 2005. A special event was organized by the State Department, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Smithsonian Institution's Freer and Sackler galleries. There was great interest on the part of many museum officials, who all indicated that they would be more than happy to host a travelling exhibition from the Kabul Museum.

side of the Taliban regime and the role of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda became apparent on September 11th, 2001, a mere six months after the destruction of the Buddhas.

Following the autumn 2001 events, Afghanistan became an oasis for journalists and others to pen their spectacular stories. The positive outcome of this development is that the knowledge of Afghanistan's history has increased enormously. But the other side of the coin is the fact that for many people it seemed as if Afghanistan, from a cultural point of view, had almost ceased to exist. Yet, many positive developments can be noted.³

It is in this context that the idea emerged to compile a Volume focusing on Afghanistan's cultural heritage and to bring together the available experiences and knowledge from various parts of the globe. Indeed, in-depth knowledge is fairly scattered among many different persons and organizations. By bringing that widespread knowledge and experience together in one Volume might benefit all those involved and will in particular give relative outsiders the unique opportunity to gain a structured insight into the matter, so as to form a somewhat more balanced opinion and to be able to extract the rights and wrongs in the field of the protection of Afghanistan's cultural heritage.

This aim seems to be somewhat easier than it actually is. Also in this field the aid world is a complex one. Many (short-term) projects have been launched, with different goals, by various states, organizations and persons with sometimes minimum and sometimes larger financial support. As a result, many projects are being commenced, but without an overall masterplan. Bridges need to be built between the many players and stakeholders involved, between the various views and opinions, between archaeologists and lawyers, and between people actually digging, on the one hand, and organizations like UNESCO on the other.

³ F.e. Afghanistan's acceptance of the 1970 Unesco Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property on September 8, 2005. It also accessed the 1995 Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects on September 23, 2005. This Convention did enter into force for Afghanistan on March 1st 2006. Note also the discovery of a Sassanid rock relief at Shamarq, Baghlan, in 2003, see <http://spach.info/Report%20for%20dissemination.pdf> and Plates 61a and 61b.

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