

SPACH

NEWSLETTER 5

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 scholarship that have been affected by the years of conflict. SPACH has fostered contacts 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 groups 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 was able to retrieve hundreds of objects from the debris. More than 1,500 objects in Kabul were recovered 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 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, exhibitions and seminars, 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 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA), UNESCO, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and other cultural institutions world-wide in order to solicit advice and support for the preservation of the threatened culture of Afghanistan. Support of activities has come from a growing number of concerned individuals and organizations, and from the Governments of Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Norway and The Netherlands.

Cover: Minar-I-Chakari
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1965

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Editor: Brigitte Neubacher

MINAR-I-CHAKARI

AFGHANISTAN LOST AN UNSOLVED ARCHITECTURAL ENIGMA OF GREAT ANTIQUITY

By: Chris M. Dorn'eich
Berlin, January 1999

In a moonless night, end of March 1998, the Minar-i-Chakari tumbled to the ground. The noise of the collapse, described as *explosion-like*, woke up the villagers at the foot of the mountain crest where the pillar had stood. Some two weeks later, Brigitte Neubacher, editor of the SPACH Newsletter, sent me an e-mail: "*I have terrible news: the Minar-i-Chakari is gone... you must feel absolutely shattered, and so do we all here... Afghans say they lost their history. I am so sorry I never saw it in its eternal beauty...*"

With the first documentary photographs of the column's saddening remains came the question whether I would be interested in writing an article about it. Already preparing a monograph on the Minar-i-Chakari - to be published with a State great in 1999- I said it was an honor and pleasure for me to comply.

Ever since it had become known to the world in the 19th century, the column had tilted some four degrees to the south - the mountain side - where rain, ice and snow had eroded the pedestal much more than on the valley side. During the 80s, or the years of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, thoughtlessness and ignorance had made the conspicuous monument on the mountain ridge south-east of Kabul a target for practice shooting.

With the Minar-i-Chakari the world's cultural heritage lost its last great example of an incomparable piece of architecture. Most of its enigmatic features have had no chance to be fully understood. It is, however, universally accepted that the Minar was a Buddhist monument and a giant masterpiece of Gandharan art - the rare and exceptional mix of Persian, Greek, and Indian cultural traits which flourished for but a few centuries in the north-western corner of the Indian subcontinent and neighboring regions. How did such divergent elements - Persian-Greek and Indian art and the Buddhist religion - come to combine in one grand monument?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Persistently, the Minar-i-Chakari has been called "Alexander's Pillar" by the local population.

This would make the column another four centuries older than it really is. One reason for this misconception could be found in the fact that Alexander's appearance in Afghanistan is well known, whereas the time of the Minar's construction is not.

For all of the third century B.C. the regions of modern Kabul, Ghazni and Kandahar became part of the Indian Empire of the Mauryans. This change was crucial, for now early Hinayana Buddhism started its peaceful penetration of the area - and continued to do so for the next 700 years, enriching the existing Greek culture with a new and challenging outlook on life.

By 100 B.C. the conquering nomads had divided Bactria between themselves: The Yue-zhi to the east, the Sakai to the west. The Greeks managed to block the Hindukush passes, but it was now only a matter of time when the fierce nomad hordes would appear also in the south.



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April 1998



Map of distribution of ancient Buddhist monuments in the Begram near Charikar region
S.Kuwayama: The Horizon of Begram III and beyond [Journal "East and West 41/1-4, 1991]

© Jolyon Leslie
December 1997

In a parallel development, the Yue-zhi's nomad rivals, the Sakai, had fought their way west and south from Bactria and had managed to settle in Drangiana, the country of the lower Helmand river which now became known as *Sakastene*, modern Sistan. From this base, mounted Sakai armies attacked the Greek dominions in the Indus valley and were in due time able to establish themselves in *Taxils*. They were driven back by the Greeks for a short period of time, but in about 55 B.C., the Sakai king Azes I had definitely become the new master of much of the *Panjab*; only in the easternmost corner of this province, a tiny Greek dominion survived into the opening decades of the Christian era.

For the next one hundred years, military governors of the Yue-zhi ruled the former Paropanisadai - the court of their king remaining in Bactria's capital Bactra. We see then that the former Greek satrapy of the *Paropanisadai* was renamed Kabulistan

under the Yue-zhi and that the administrative center was moved from Alexandria ad Caucasum to this new town of *Kabul*.

The region's apogee of wealth and power was reached under the fourth Kushana king *Kanishka I*, the great-grandson of Kujula Kadphises. This famous king came to the throne early in the second century A.D. Kanishka commissioned dynastic architectural projects of the grandest scale - such as the *Great Stupa* near Peshawar (*Purushapura*) and the temple of Surkh Kotal in the Hindukush.

As internal evidence shows, it was under Vima (II) Kadphises that the new provincial capital of the Kushanas, *Kabul* (*Gao-fu*; *Kabura basileion*), began to grow in importance - reflected in the construction of Buddhist settlements in its surroundings. The most conspicuous single structure of these was the *stambha* or pillar which is called "Minar-i-Chakari" today.

ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT

The **Minar-i-Chakari** was the last surviving example of at least two similar monumental stambhas which were part of the Buddhist remains near Kabul.

Modern exploration of these ruins began in 1833. It occasioned a first notice in the July 1834 issue of James PRINSEP's *"Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal"* (JASB), published in Calcutta: *"In one of the recesses or glens deeply locked within the mountains, stands a Grecian pillar called "Surkh Minar"..."*

Another Grecian monument or Minar appears perched upon the crest of the ridge at a great elevation..."

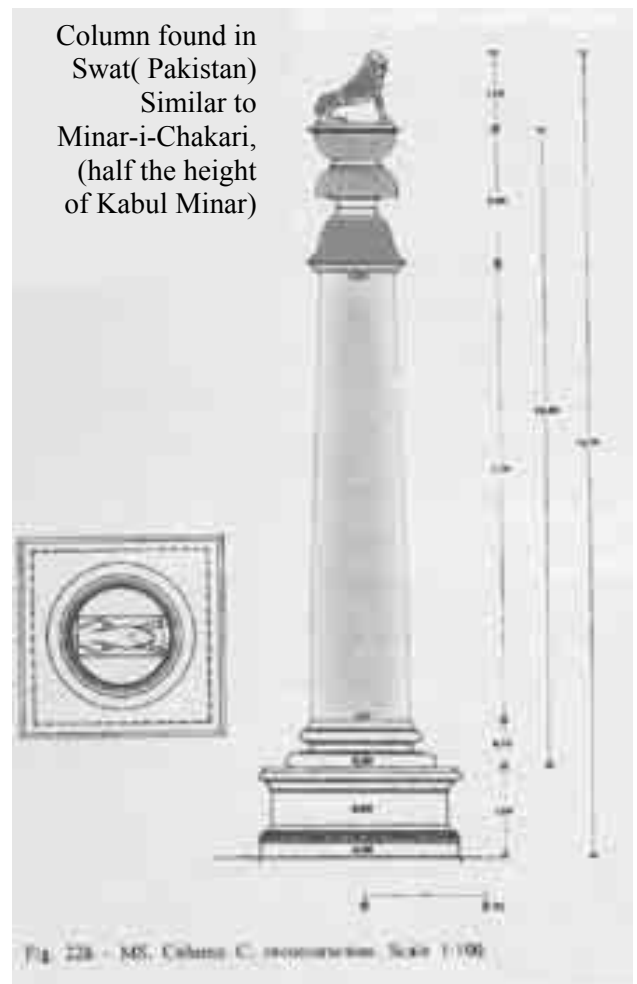
The author, J.G. GERARD, a British surgeon in the services of the East India Company, had just returned from a clandestine mission to Bukhara, north of the Oxus river, accompanying Lieut. A. BURNES. In the 19th century, scientific studies in Afghanistan were a by-product of military exploits.

In Kabul, GERARD had met two other Europeans in late 1833: CHARLES MASSON (alias James Lewis) who had escaped from military service in India in 1826 and was now living in Kabul; and Dr. Martin HONIGBERGER, court physician to the last powerful Indian maharaja RUNJIT SINGH of Lahore, now on the way to his native Transsylvania (Siebenbuergen). To MASSON we are indebted for the oldest surviving sketch of the Minar-i-Chakari [see page. 11]. HONIGBERGER brought his valuable knowledge of Buddhist stupas to Afghanistan. HONIGBERGER and MASSON extracted Kushana and Roman gold coins from some of the Buddhist stupas near Kamari, Shewaki and in the Guldara valley.

They provide helpful evidence for dating these structures – and with them the Minars. At least pedestal and foundations of the Minar-i-Chakari have also been tunneled in search for similar deposits. But Buddhist

stambhas, due to the difference in religious meaning, do not normally

conceal relic chambers like all Buddhist stupas.



©D. Faccenna: Saidu Sharif I (Swat, Pakistan) The Buddhist Sacred Area. The Stupa Terrace Rome 1995

In the beginning and later on, most observers were satisfied with a visit to the lower column, called *Surkh Minar* or "Red Tower" shunning the arduous climb to the column much higher up, called at times *Minareh Syah* or "Black Tower". It was only after his return to England that MASSON gave a first reliable account of the two *Minars*, published in 1841: "*Amongst the topes of the Shevaki group... is a column of masonry called Surkh Minar, or the red pillar... it is clearly of the same age as the topes... On the crest of the (mountain) range also above the principal tope of Shevaki is another column called Minar Chakari, superior in altitude and in preservation. Of this I annex a sketch... The original form of Surkh Minar was probably identical, but its upper parts have fallen beneath the injuries of time.*"

Two soldiers were the next to report. Lieut. A. BURNES visited the lower column in 1838. He mentions the *minarets of Chukreea (Chakri)* in his book *Cabool* (1842) and correctly remarks: "*These buildings are evidently not minarets, but more probably of a monumental nature.*" Lieut. V.EYRE – one of only 122 lucky survivors of the British army massacred in Afghanistan in January 1842 and now a prisoner of Akbar Khan – was marched past the Minar-i-Chakari on 24 May 1842. in his diary we read: "*We took the direct road towards Cabul, having Alexander the Great's column in view nearly the whole way.... We halted for half an hour... Resuming our way, we again entered some hills, the road making a continuous ascent for about a couple of miles to Alexander's pillar, one of the most ancient relics of antiquity in the East... As we reached this classical spot, a view of almost unrivalled magnificence burst suddenly upon our sight.... On the way down another Grecian pillar was discernible among the hills on the left.*"

A first and most beautiful lithograph of the Minar-i-Chakari is based on a professionally done drawing by Lieute. STURT of 1841. It served as the frontispiece in *The Defense of Jellalabad* by SIR ROBERT SALE. Lady Sale wrote in 1846; "*Alexander's Column (the Title Page). I had frequently expressed a wish to visit this spot... I had often with a field glass looked at this column from our encampment on the Siah Sung, near Cabul, and parties were sometimes made by gentlemen to visit it.... Those who went there, generally asked permission of the chief, one of the robber tribes, who would then, it was said, kill a sheep and make feast for the guests... When the prisoners were removed from Zaudek to the neighborhood of Cabul, it was found impossible for us to pass through the Cabul Pass, and the road of the pillar was adopted; It was rugged in the extreme, and very steep. The pillar itself... is much defaced and broken at the base, and since the celebrated earthquake of our captivity it has lost its equilibrium, and will probably fall in a few years...."*

SCENERY

The **Minar-i-Chakari** was built on the foremost crest of the Shakh Baranta range, about 16km (10 miles) southeast of Kabul, as *the crow flies*. The three-dimensional coordinates of the column's position are N. Lat. 34°25' and E. Long. 69°17'30", at an altitude of 2,530m. (8,300ft).

Right in front of the north face of the monument, the mountain side drops sharply some 600m (2,000ft) into the wide Kabul plain, the Kohdaman and, further on, the Kohistan. The often snow-capped peaks of the Hindukush serve as a splendid backdrop. To the south of the column, there is a stretch of flat ground, followed by the rise of another mountain ridge with peaks more than 3000m (9,900ft) high, in the surroundings, ruins of "Buddhist" masonry have been discovered, indicating that the *stambha* once formed part of a monastery, lost in the clouds of this rocky solitude.

As the British prisoners found out, the Miar-i-Chakari for long centuries has marked the mountain pass of the shortest connection from ancient Kabul (present *Begran* or *Bagrami* on the Logar) to Khurd Kabul and Buddhist *Nagarahara* (Jelalabad) – for pilgrims and caravans

The modern name Minar-i-Chakari is often interpreted as meaning "Tower of the Wheel" – deriving from Sanskrit *cakra* or "the wheel" which the Buddha had set in motion with teaching the *dharma*.

With the advent of Islam in Afghanistan, Buddhist propagation came to an end. Since then, old Indian *Sanskrit* names have been forgotten. Today, every *tope* or *tepe* (*stupa*) in Afghanistan is known by a generic name descriptive of its location or situation. The two columns south-east of Kabul have simply been called *Surkh Minar* and *Minareh Siah* in the last centuries – "Red Tower" and "Black Tower".



After restoration work done by British Institute of Afghan Studies with Afghan Institute of Archeology 1975-76 Photo©D. Meyer- Oehme 1978

DESCRIPTION

The two Kabul Minars were most probably identical, free-standing columns of an unparalleled, truly monumental scale. They were composed of three major parts: the rectangular pedestal, the cylindrical column - with base, shaft and capital – and an uppermost crowning of unknown shape. The Surkh Minar, built much closer to the foot of the same mountain slope and having lost the upper part of its capital and all crowning long ago, finally collapsed into a pile of rubble – due to an earthquake – in the springtime of 1965.

In the summer of the same year, 1965, my on-the-spot calculations of the Minar-i-Chakari's total height, measured at the central axis, showed slightly more than 27 meters (88ft). A careful survey, carried out by the *Afghan Institute of Archaeology and the British Institute of Afghan Studies* in 1975/76, fixed the total height at 28,6m (93,8ft.) – by taking the shopping ground into account.

As only a very small portion of its North or valley facade had survived, the dimensions of the pedestal were difficult to reconstruct. It can only be said with confidence that it was of a cubic shape and covered a square of about 8mx8m (26, 2ft sq.) On three sides, the pedestal had been so dangerously reduced – to not much more than the diameter of the column shaft itself – that a collapse seemed imminent. A first attempt at stabilizing the Minar, undertaken in 1923 and using unskilled local labor had been of very limited value as not much of it was left in 1965. The Afghan/British restoration work of 1974 and 1975/76 was successful in stabilizing the Minar with a stone-and-concrete pedestal of cone-shape and a hidden reinforced concrete ring beam immediately above it. This changed the outer appearance of the Minar

considerably, and the last traces of the Greek column base were lost in the process. A genuine restoration of the pedestal was not attempted – it must have become clear at the time that we were utterly unable to rebuild

larger tracts of so - called "Buddhist" (*diaper*) masonry in its original, highly sophisticated quality today - particularly in a remote place like that of the Minar-i-Chakari.

The column base of the Minars was of the Attic order – very familiar to the Graeco-Bactrian and Gandharan art and architecture, as can be seen in Ai Khanum and Surkh Kotal. The Black Tower had only faint traces left, barely visible in the column's contour lines. In this instance the Red Tower had preserved more: the clearly visible channel between the bulges of the Attic *torus-scotia-torus* base, the upper torus protruding less than the lower.

The Minar-i-Chakari's shaft showed one peculiarity: a lean of slightly more than four degrees visible best from the south-west. Thus, the top of the Minar was about 2m (6,6ft) off the vertical axis. This tilt was not straight, but curved, and more pronounced on the outer side, the inner side being almost straight. This twist is said to have been caused by a stronger erosion on the south side due to the prevailing wind, rain, and ice from that direction scouring out the mortar between the facing stones. But the Minars were not hollow. Instead, their interiors were solidly filled up with well-cemented rubble masonry. My own impression, therefore, is that the Black Tower was in fact built that way – that the enormous stone masses of the column shaft somehow went out of control during construction time. The Red Tower did not show any such congenital defects.

That the Minars of Kabul once carried a crowning element on top has never been doubted. Some of the *lats* of Ashoka had sculptures preserved on their capitals, crowned with a Buddhist symbol: so the world-famous. *Siha Stambha* of Sarnath – the place of the Buddha's First Sermon in India had four lions with the *dharma cakra on top*, the spoked solar wheel and Buddhist symbol of the good law.

On top of the Minar-i-Chakari only a pile of rubble was left. The Black Tower's monumental height and its position in the splendid isolation of a harsh mountain world, accessible only on foot, prevented any closer examination. Most widely accepted, however,

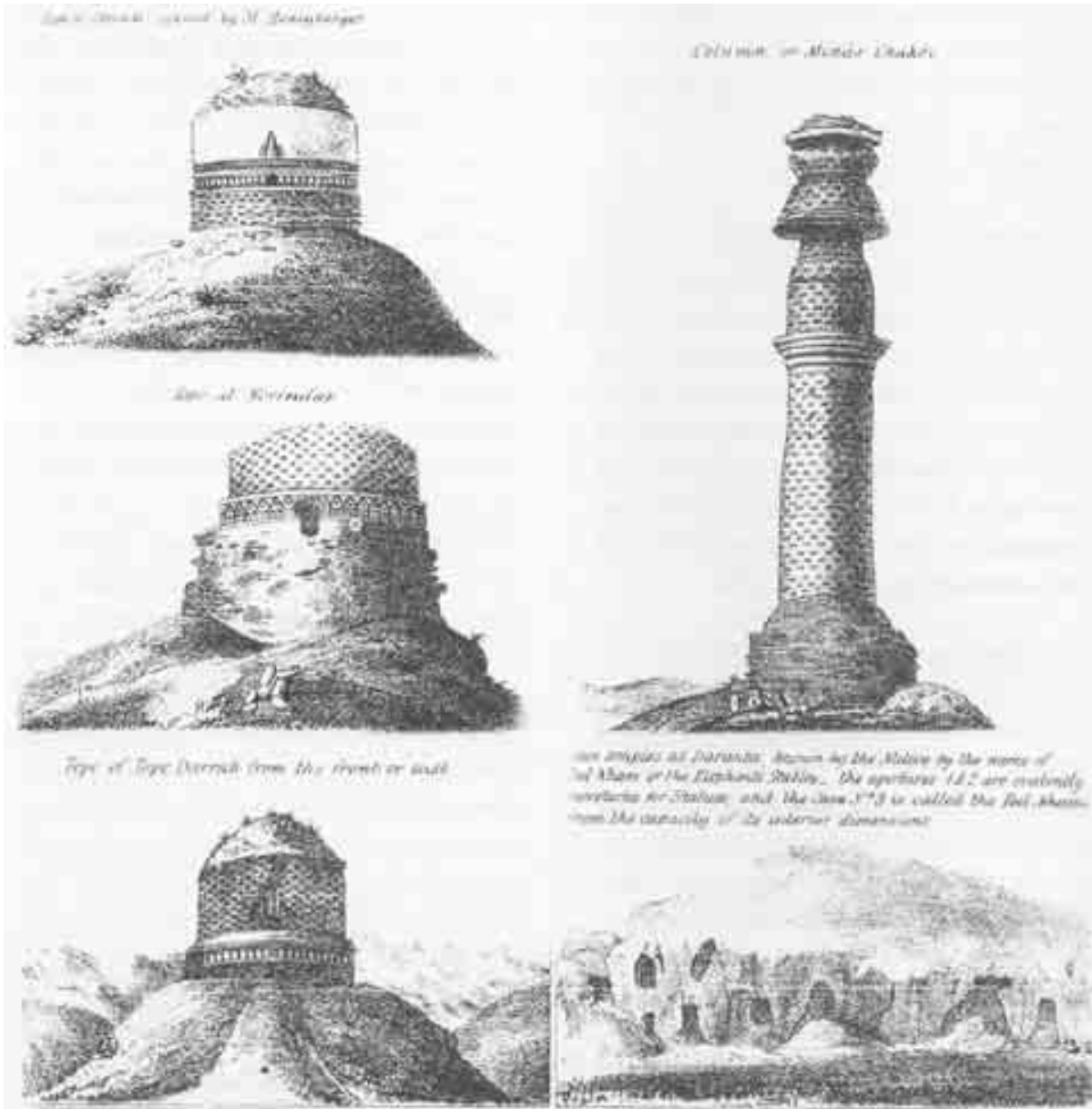
was the idea that it once carried this "wheel of the good law" as its crown - as its name seemed to prove so convincingly. But the etymology of such names has been called deceptive.

In 1975/76, an iron pipe scaffolding was erected for restoration work and a closer scrutiny became possible for the first time. What a unique chance for a photographic survey of all the vexing details of the Minar's complex capital from close distance! And how

tantalizing that G. K. RAO in *Afghanistan Archaeological Review 1 (1979)* only wrote: "*The debris on top of the abacus was cleared and a rectangular platform revealed.*" More revealing was what, in her *Historical Guide to Afghanistan (1977)*, NANCY H. DUPREE had to say about it: "*During the conservation project carried out by the British Institute of Afghan Studies in cooperation with the Afghan Institute of Archaeology, in 1975-76, the remains of a further structure of undetermined nature were discovered on the very top of the Minar; it was, perhaps, the 'umbrella mast' common to Buddhist structures in many countries.*"

Such an oblong crowning would make so much better sense: a *high* "umbrella mast" (*chattravali*) – on a tall column – in an elevated place. One impressive example of such a column crowning has, in fact, been preserved in a votive stupa, surrounded by four slender stambhas, each carrying a tiny chattravali- crowned stupa on its capital. It is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

CONSTRUCTION



H.H Wilson: Ariana Antiqua, London 1841 Earliest sketch of Minar-i-Chakari by Charles Masson, alias: James Lewis

Unlike their distant Indian prototypes – the monolithic Mauryan *lats* – the *stambhas* near Kabul were built in a particular type of masonry. The building material for it was close at hand anywhere in Afghanistan; living rock or, to be more precise, white quartz and green schist.

Resistance against wind forces, particularly important in the case of the elevated, exposed location of the Minar-i-Chakari, was greatly enhanced by the cylindrical shapes of column shaft and capital. The highest and most exposed element, the crowing – whatever it may have been, was obviously to a much lesser degree 'streamlined' and did not withstand that harsh weather conditions. Also, the lowest structural element, the pedestal, eroded much faster for at least two reasons. It was not of cylindrical, but cubic shape; and it had to take the onslaught of snow, ice and water. Hence, it is easy to understand why, on a sloping round, the mountain side of the cubic pedestal was washed away while a small section in the middle of the opposite (valley) side had survived – protected by the column itself.

The type of masonry of both Kabul Minars is that of all the *stupas* in the vicinity. It is the product of a very sophisticated building technique which was developed to suit one particular building material; that of schist. It is generally called *diaper masonry*, due to the chequered appearance of its outer surfaces. At times, it was simply called "Buddhist", because it could be seen on all the Buddhist monuments of ancient Gandhara, i.e. in Kabul, Swat, and middle Indus valley in southeastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan.

The diaper-type masonry consists of a form-giving outer casing and an inner core. The outer casing some 30-50cm (1-1,6ft) thick, is made up of very regular layers of about 3cm (1,2in.) thin schist laminae of a reddish to bluish-grey color, their visible face carefully hewn. They were fitted so tightly together that hardly any bonding mortar was needed. The core consists of a coarse, irregular rubble masonry in a thick mortar bed. These two heterogeneous parts were connected in short, rather regular intervals by slabs of whitish quartz, square in section (c. 20x20cm), and up to one meter (3,3ft.) long. Their heads protrude to the surface of the wall and give it its peculiar chequered appearance – very pleasing to the eye. Yet, in Buddhist times, all structural parts were hidden (and protected) behind at least two different layers of a very strong plaster.

For the construction of the Minars, a large amount of manpower was required, no doubt, both on the ground and on the scaffolding which probably went up with the towers in sections of some 3m (10ft) each. The scaffolding holes could best be seen on the Red Tower.

ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION

Beyond the Black Tower's well-preserved capital, not much of the two Minars architectonic embellishment had survived. What we saw in our days was just the bare skeleton. In the course of their extraordinarily long life span, the two towers had been stripped to their bones. Of their soft skin, i.e. all decorative mouldings in plaster and stucco, nothing at all had been left. Here similar, coeval monuments of culturally related regions serve to help us out with the details for missing parts.

One of these areas in the ancient city of Taxila; another – somewhat closer – the Swat valley. Near Mingora, on the south bank of the Swat River, the Italian Archaeological Mission has excavated free-standing Buddhist *stambhas* about one half and one quarter the size of our Kabul Minars. Considerably smaller in size, they served a more decorative purpose, surrounding large main stupas. Careful and intelligent hypothetical reconstructions of these Gandharan-style columns – complete with all component parts such as pedestal, base, composite capital and crowning – provide us with many details of the architectural decor, long ago lost on our Minars. Hence, the cubic pedestal, square in plan, was decorated with base and cornice mouldings. The column proper had an attic base, composed of scotia (which had still been visible on the Red Tower) with fillets between two toruses, and stood on a plain square plinth or directly on the pedestal. Also, the decorations of our Minars Indo-Persepolitan capitals were fashioned completely in stucco: acanthus leaves in low relief on the Iranian bell, lotus leaves on the Indian (Gandharan) dome and bowl – as is very clearly visible on analogous columns, found in many Gandharan low relief scenes. And whereas the uniform, homogeneous coats of plaster, covering all surfaces, were generally kept in white, parts of the architectural decoration were sometime highlighted in color - which in exceptional cases served as an undercoat for gilding.

DATING

The age of the two Kabul Minars depends on the hotly debated question of Kushana genealogy and chronology. The more Gandharan art and Kushan history have been discussed in the last 150 years. The less it seemed possible to agree on relative, let alone absolute dates. Unlike *Ashoka's Lats*, our two Minars stood uninscribed. Also, they did not yield any relics. At least in the latter respect, the neighboring stupas were of greater help. A. CUNNINGHAM noted in *Archaeological Survey of India 5 (1875)*: "*Mr. Fergusson also thinks that the pillars are coeval with the topes, an opinion in which I fully agree... Now, the age of this group of topes can be ascertained, within very narrow limits, from their contents, which were extracted by Dr. Honigberger. Only two of these topes yielded any results: but these were a gold coin of Wema Kadphises, and an ink inscription in Arian letters on a steatite vase.*"

With regard to another important piece of evidence, MASSON wrote in *Ariana Antiqua (1841)*: "*The man employed by M. Honigberger, some year and a half after that gentleman had left Kabul, brought to me for sale two or three gold Indo-Scythic [Kushan] coins, of the same species as those found in these topes, with a gold coin of Trajan.*"

HONIGBERGER's vase from the Shewaki stupa disappeared and its Kharoshthi inscriptions have never been read. But the Kushana and Roman gold coins have survived in the famous London and Paris collections and have carefully been studied since. While coin deposits of stupas have been questioned by some scholars as valid dating evidence, the reasoning of D.W. MACDOWALL is convincing when he remarked during a Berlin symposium (1986) "*Before we reject the 'prima face' date suggested by a coin deposit we need strong evidence that it is inconsistent with other data*" Today it is acceptable what A.F.R. HOERNLE wrote long ago in *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1879)* : "*It follows that the coins which are found in the Topes must have been placed in them, as being contemporary and current, whether native and common... or foreign and rare.*"

After the coins of stupa deposits, further evidence for the question of dating is the type of masonry of the Minars themselves. It can best be compared with what J. MARSHALL in Taxila (1951) described as "*early fine diaper*". He assigned this type to the last quarter of the first century A.D. This dating has been challenged since, but the latest revelations in Kushana chronology show that Sir John was not too far off the truth after all.

And a last help for a relative dating can be found in an architectural detail. This is the bracketed type cornice which occurs both on the stambhas and the stupas. On the Kabul Minars, the finely-cut double brackets were part of the lower cornice of the capital's Persepolitan bell - totally destroyed at the Red Tower, well preserved way up on the Minar-i-Chakari. A certain evolution of this recurring architectural feature allows us to place the monuments in a relative chronological order.

We can see that the double brackets of the Minars best resembled those of the Guldara stupa (7 gold coins of Vimala and one of Kanishka), but clearly antedate the heavy consoles of the Shewaki stupa (one gold coin each of Vima II, Kanishka, and Trajan) where this detail may already be called a dental cornice.

All told, we are tempted to place the erection of the two Minars near Kabul broadly into the reign of the third Kushana emperor, Vima (II) Kadphises – or from the very last years of the first into the dawning of the second century A.D.

ORIGIN, PURPOSE, AND MEANING

Buddhist stambhas, excavated by Dr. D. FACCENNA and his Italian Archaeological Mission at Saidu Sharif and Panr near Mingora and painstakingly restored, could be taken as genuine replicas of our Minars. Yet, the smaller Swat stambhas are a generation or *so older*. We are, therefore, inclined to assume that this hybrid type of column traveled with the first Kushanas from the Swat and Gandhara regions up the Kabul valley to the Kohistan.

In the Minar-i-Chakari were only an isolated monument, its erection could indeed glorify a historic event. But ruins in the vicinity signify that the stambha once was part of a monastery – as yet unexcavated as all Buddhist settlements near Kabul, with the sole exception of the one in the "Vale of Flowers" Guldara. Hence, the glorification can only be that of one historic person: of the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama who had become the Buddha's some 500 years previous.

In early Buddhism, the significance of the stambha was that of an aniconic symbol of the Enlightened One who, for so many centuries, remained beyond any representation in human form. This religious concept, translated into suitable architectonic expression, became closely related to *Hinayana* Buddhism. When out of the many monasteries of the Swat region the new "Great Vehicle" doctrine emerged, the stambha as a Hinayanist symbol of aniconic worship was doomed. In *Mahayana* Buddhism that stupa was removed to the very center and assumed overpowering dimensions. Such research will now be a posthumous effort. Through natural agents and man-made calamities, Afghanistan's and also the world's cultural heritage has, in the year 1998, lost one last grandiose symbol of spiritual enlightenment.

Yet, the high historic value of the Kabul Minars has survived in the guise of *another* extremely beautiful form. As an architectural achievement, it was again employed to fulfill its inherent purpose in the service of *another* world religion. Here, it has witnessed an evolution which led to spectacular heights – in the true sense of the word.

In *Pharos* (1909), his fundamental monograph on towers, H. THIERSCH remarked:
"The Islamic countries of the East are characterized by minarets... which are circular in plan and cylindrical or conical in elevation. The origin of this round minaret remains in the dark.... Not the tower of Samarra, and less even the one of Delhi, can be considered the source... The origin.... Must be looked for in other regions and in older times... in those borderlands between India and Persia which today form part of Afghanistan. Here we find the oldest cylindrical towers I know... it is certainly not proof, but a welcome indication... of their congeniality with mosque towers that the local Muslims call them "minar".

Hence, all the column-shaped minarets in East and West from lofty heights call out the inspiring message of enlightenment the Minars had once conveyed to the people of Kabul.



The Informal Experts ' Meeting on Afghan Cultural Heritage

By: Nancy Hatch Dupree, November 1998

The meeting of experts on the Afghan Cultural Heritage organized by the International Committee of the Blue Shield, in close collaboration with UNESCO, met on 30 September 1998 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Mme. Marie-Therese Varlamoff from the international Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (FLA) chaired the sessions.

Participants included member representatives of ICBS and several experts familiar with Afghanistan: Ambassador Pierre Lafrance (formerly Chairman of SPACH), Prof. A.D.H. Bivar (specialist in ancient inscriptions and coins), Mr. Andrea Bruno (conservation architect), Mr. Chahryar Adle (President of the Scientific Committee, Central Asia), Mr. Zamaryalai Tarzi (formerly Director, Afghan Institute of Archaeology), and Mme Francine Tissot. Representing SPACH were Nancy Hatch Dupree, Brigitte Neubacher and Carla Grissmann.

ICBS members presented a useful review of resources. Support of local initiatives was emphasized, as was the value of awareness raising.

A summary of conclusions of the meeting can be grouped under three main focus areas as follows.

After discussions exploring the difficulties and possibilities of initiating practical actions, the participants recommended that:

An international mechanism for the systematic coordination and cooperation be

1. established, perhaps through an Ad Hoc UNESCO Advisory Committee and Task Force;
2. Information on and inventories of existing international and national initiatives be consolidated;
3. A permanent coordinator to maintain liaison with bodies and personalities interested in the preservation of the Afghan cultural heritage be appointed.

Mindful of the need to fight against the extensive traffic of looted and plundered cultural properties which has resulted in the dispersion of the Afghan cultural heritage, the participants recommended that:

1. The Government of Pakistan and other Governments be requested to stop the transit and commerce of Afghan cultural properties in their territories, and UNESCO coordinates such actions.
2. UNESCO undertake a survey on all legal aspects connected to the recovery of stolen cultural properties, in consultation with appropriately qualified Afghan and international experts;
3. UNESCO identifies safe depositories for any recovered objects;
4. UNESCO establishes a cultural officer in Islamabad to facilitate the implementation of these recommendations.

To enhance public awareness, local and international, about the status and urgent priority needs of the Afghan cultural heritage, the participants recommended that:

1. Afghan monuments, sites and libraries, be included on the list of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and in the International Register for the Memory of the World;
2. UNESCO encourage the introduction of Bamiyan, Jam and possibly other Afghan monuments at the upcoming World Heritage Committee meeting in Kyoto;
3. ICBS accompany such awareness efforts with international fund-raising and resource mobilization.

At the conclusion of the meeting, SPACH was invited to prepare articles on various aspects of Afghanistan's cultural heritage for publication in relevant ICBS newsletters.

The Paris recommendations set out laudable goals. How they are to be translated into practical programmes is another matter. As one participant pointed out, raising expectations can have negative effects unless prudent action on specific issues can be demonstrated. SPACH appreciates this, and welcomes the opportunity to strengthen personal contacts at the international level so as to be better able to act effectively. We look forward to fruitful cooperation.

KABUL MUSEUM UPDATE

On 7 July 1998, SPACH representatives Brigitte Neubacher and Carla Grissmann were invited by Deputy Minister of Culture Hotaki to a ceremony at the Kabul Museum in Darulaman to inaugurate the repair of the Museum building. The ceremony took place in the newly renovated former library of the Museum and was attended by more than 50 Afghans, including members of the Academy of Science, the Afghan Institute of Archaeology and Kabul University. A UNESCO grant is being used for the repair work and SPACH committed funds for continuing the work on the inventory and packing of remaining objects.

The Ministry authorities established several commissions to deal with different aspects of the work to be done, namely construction, purchasing, the inventory and packing of remaining objects, as well as a supervisory commission to oversee the classification of objects. Since July 1998 work has progressed, with a number of storerooms cleaned out and many objects classified and packed.

In October 1998 the part of the Museum collection, which had been shifted to Kabul Hotel in September 1996, was moved to the Ministry of information and Culture, where it appears to have found a secure temporary home.



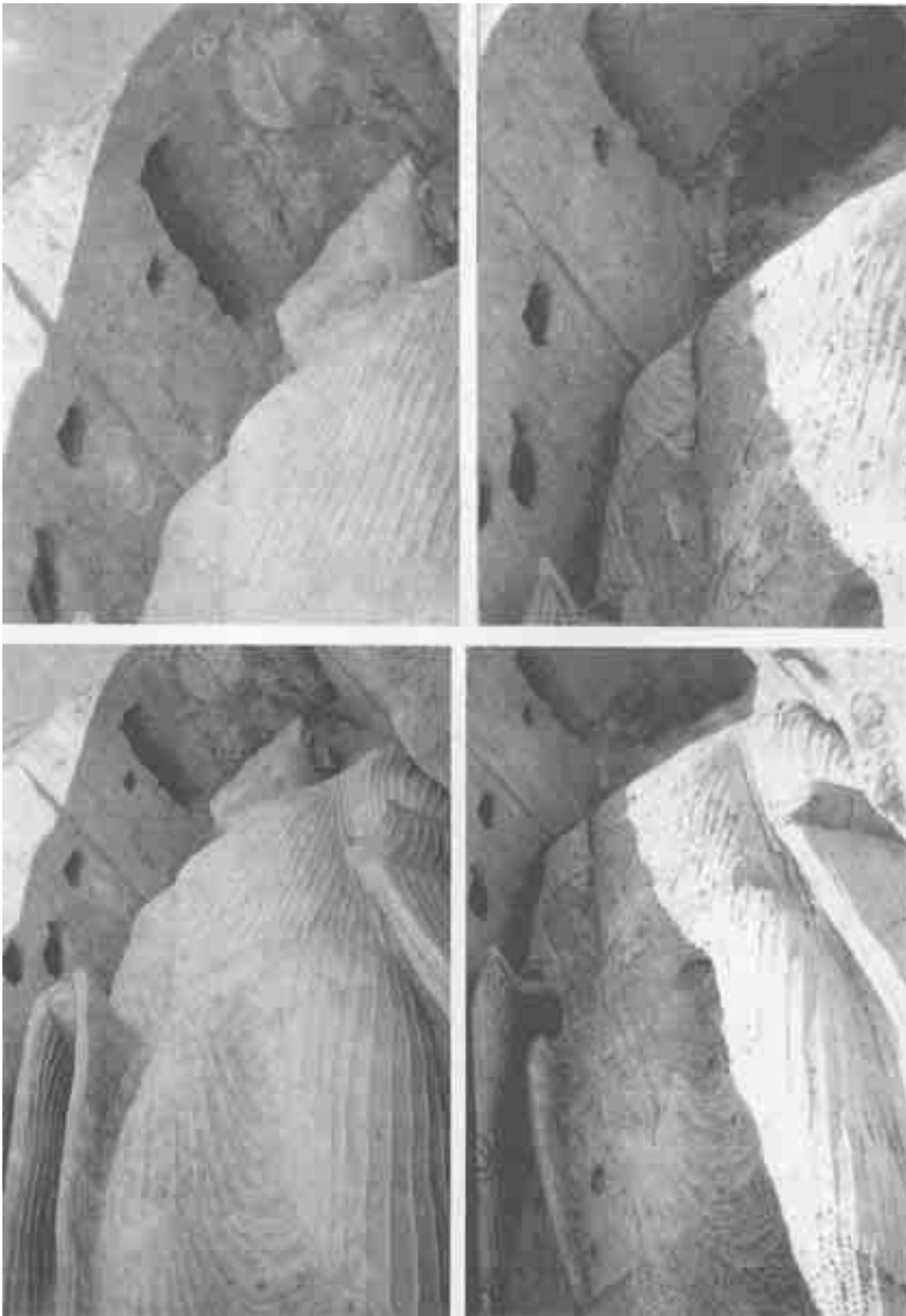
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May 1998

SPACH's efforts will continue. Carla Grissmann, a friend of Kabul Museum for literally decades, had yet again to be evacuated in August 1998, but expects to return to Kabul soon to continue working on the inventory of what is left of the museum collections and to support any efforts on the part of the Ministry of information and Culture on behalf of the Kabul Museum.



Bodhisattva, Fondukistan, 7th Century
Whereabouts unknown
© Alain Marigo, 1972

BAMIYAN BUDDHA DAMAGED



In September 1998, the small (35 meters high) Bamiyan Buddha became victim of devastating cultural vandalism at a time of political and military turmoil in the ancient valley of Bamiyan: the statue was deliberately damaged by inflicting major damage to its groin which resulted in a substantial hole. A fair amount of the stucco folds have fallen off. Some damage was also done to the left sleeve -a large chunk is now missing. But what is worse, the head which did not have a face for the last few centuries, seems to have been blown away possibly with explosives. Most of the frescoes above the head are gone. It was extremely difficult for SPACH to establish the truth of persistent rumors, but we now have photographic evidence. SPACH had urged the authorities on several occasions to ensure the protection of the Buddhas and we were assured that this would be done. But most unfortunately our appeals did not reach the soldiers on the frontlines.

DRAINAGE ABOVE LARGE BAMIYAN BUDDHA REPAIRED

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July 1998





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The frescoes in the niches above the large Buddha have suffered considerably in the last twenty years from rain water seeping through the rocks. Large pieces of the frescoes have fallen off and other sections appear fragile - threatening to fall off, unless they are solidified. Such damage control is as urgent as ever. The drainage canal, built to divert rain water away from above the colossal Buddha, has not been maintained for years and needed urgent repair.

In the course of summer 1998, Mr. Paul Bucherer-Dietschi, Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica (Liestal, Switzerland) with financial support from the Swiss Government, started the repair, together with local engineers and workers and much progress has been made. Existing canals were cleaned and slipped mud and gravel was

removed. Canals were mended, sealed and underpinned. Work was interrupted in September 1998.

Mr. Bucherer-Dietschi also recommends the following measures for the small Buddha: demining above the statue, cleaning and mending of drainage canals, cleaning of grottos from waste and providing security installations on hatches and stairs.

For the Kakrak Valley Buddha he proposes similar measures: maintenance of canals and in particular underpinning and supporting the statue by two brick pillars as some treasure hunters reportedly removed the feet and part of the legs. Now the statue "hangs" on the back wall of the niche.

An Appeal for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage and the Restoration of Peace in Afghanistan

Proposed at the 3rd General Assembly of the Japanese Society for West Asian Archaeology by Prof. Kiyohiko Sakurai

June 6, 1998, Tsukuba, Japan

Almost two decades have passed since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Afghan people's resistance against the invaders transformed into a civil war throughout the country after the Soviet evacuation in 1989. Unstable political conditions caused the lives of the people to become truly tragic. It is deplorable that their lives, health and property are destroyed and threatened everyday by the flames of war. We all cannot help wishing for an immediate ceasefire and the restoration of peace in this beleaguered country. At the same time, we are deeply apprehensive because the irreplaceable historical and cultural heritage of Afghanistan is at a critical moment. Kabul, Herat and other cities filled with historical treasures and attractions have suffered severe damage from the battles. Ai Khanum, the easternmost Greek city in ancient times, was robbed again and again. The world-famous Buddhist sites in Bamiyan valley praised by the early Chinese pilgrims have been damaged by bombings and were once even threatened by blasting. Other archaeological and historical sites and monuments have also been illegally excavated and plundered on large and small scales.



Masjid-i-No-Gumbad, Balkh
©Brigitter Neubacher 1997

We have been terribly shocked at the reported disasters at the National Museum in Kabul since its rocketing by an armed force in May of 1993 followed by intermittent and repeated plunders, destruction and stealing of the art works housed there by soldiers and dealers. Some of the objects stolen from the museums and illegally excavated at the archaeological sites are currently traded in markets outside of Afghanistan, including those in Pakistan, Europe and even in Japan. It is anticipated that even more items will be taken from storage to be sold.

We, the Japanese Society for West Asian Archaeology, should look squarely at reality of this disastrous situation in which Afghanistan's cultural heritage has been placed and should make a possible contribution towards the prevention of more widespread damage, as well as the restoration of its already injured parts. To achieve our aim, we should cooperate with the people in the world who share the same outrage and concern with us, the international organizations and societies which have made large contributions to this significant purpose, the academic institutes, the learned societies and the people in and outside of our country who love peace and who promote the progress of culture and science.

We confirm here that the cultural heritage of Afghanistan is an irreplaceable property of the nation of this country as well as a part of the property shared by the whole of mankind in the world to be inherited for the future. Convinced that the respect for a nation's culture and heritage and their scientific studies are important means for the realization of peace in the world, we declare a firm resolution against whatever hinders this path.

This appeal was carried at the 3rd General Assembly of the Society and should be promptly transmitted to our friends, amicable societies and organizations in and outside Japan.

**Founded in January 1997, the Society's
President in Prof. Kiyohiko Sakurai.
It has a membership of 165 persons.**

LAUNCH OF SPACH LIBRARY SERIES

SPACH started its SPACH LIBRARY SERIES with its first volume; "Status of Afghanistan Cultural Heritage" written by Ms. Nancy Hatch Dupree.

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 will be devoted to one monument, one archaeological site, one region, or, occasionally to other related subjects related to policy and conservation. Articles by experts selected by an Editorial Board appear in Dari, Pashto and English. The intent is to enhance the knowledge at all levels of readers.

The first volume covers the following issues:

1- WHAT TO DO?

Governing institutions
Need for trained Human Resources
Concerned Communities
Law Enforcement

2- PRIORITIES

Advocacy
Information Gathering
Information Dissemination
Training
Exchange Expertise
Fund Raising

3- CURRENT STATUS OF MAJOR PRIORITY SITES AND MONUMENTS

DONATION TO SPACH

Mr. Richard W.R. Cook, who used to work for an international organization in Kabul, donated to SPACH a leather Bactrian Book, some ten flint blades and two white stone beads all carrying Kabul Museum numbers. SPACH would like to express its gratitude to Mr. Cook for this generous gesture.

An Afghanistan Museum in Switzerland

A project to safeguard and preserve the Afghan cultural heritage

Encouraged by Afghan leaders and intellectuals from different political camps, the Swiss Foundation BIBLIOTHECA AFGHANICA intends to install an Afghanistan Museum.

The main aim of the project is to collect the remains of the Afghan cultural heritage at a safe place in Switzerland, to preserve and show them in a specific museum in order to make the public aware of the cultural importance of Afghanistan's past.

As soon as the civil-war situation in Afghanistan has stabilized, and as soon as the technical security problems for a new National Museum in Kabul are solved, the holdings of the Afghanistan Museum will be re-transferred under the umbrella of the National UNESCO Commissions of both countries back to the country of their origin.

Mr. Bucherer-Dietschi informed SPACH that the Swiss governments as well as the local authorities are ready to support the project. Afghan architects and craftsmen have offered help as well. But more help is needed!

For any further information please contact Mr. Paul Bucherer-Dietschi, Foundation Bibliotheca Afghanica, Benzburgweg 5, CH-4410 Liestal, Switzerland. Tel/Fax 41-61-9219838.

