Museums in Afghanistan – A Roadmap into the Future

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A place for memory

Writing just after the fall of the Taliban government, Jean-Pierre Perrin lamented (2002, pp. 21-22):

> Memory suffers most at Kabul's museum. It used to be one of Asia's most beautiful and rich. But behind its façade, riddled by bullets, galleries do not have more than five artefacts on show. "The destruction of the museum by the Taliban lasted over five months, from February to June 2001. What could be saved was saved by its employees, who hid whatever they could. The museum owned one hundred thousand pieces. Now we could recover about thirty thousand of them," explains Omara Khan Massudi, its new director. What was spared is hoarded topsy-turvy in boxes, kept in the twenty two rooms of the upper floor.

But things have changed. Though Afghanistan has by no means recovered from its thirty-something past years of turmoil and conflict, and still has to be considered unsafe for tourism, conditions have improved incredibly. The *Framework for the Rehabilitation of the National Museum and Provincial Museums of Afghanistan* (hereafter, *Framework*), jointly issued in Summer 2008 by the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture, and the UNESCO office in Kabul, stated that over 41,000 artefacts of the National Museum were already described in the inventory database of the museum in both English and Dari — the Afghan version of Persian, pretty similar to Tajik. Today, the database is even more comprehensive, and most artefacts' data are accompanied by pictures [Figs. 1, 2]. Moreover, in 2004 some of the most important collections of the National Museum were rediscovered in the vaults of the Presidential Palace in Kabul. Both the Bactrian Gold and the Ai Khanoum collections have since been documented, reordered, and organized for the great exhibition still touring the world. Not only do these collections strongly contribute to disseminate a positive image of Afghanistan to

Fig. 1. A Gandhara head being restored at the National Museum of Afghanistan lab (Kabul).

Fig. 2. Non-Islamic ethnographic artefacts from Nuristan at the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. This exhibition has been substantially changed in the last two years.

foreign countries, but the role of the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul has been recognized, together with its potential as a successful export earner.

Nonetheless, the same *Framework* stressed that "most significant pieces are stored separately at different locations throughout the city and are thus more or less inaccessible as required for regular inspection." Moreover, "locations in which these objects/collections are stored are … neither well organized nor safe in terms of meeting minimum conservation standards" (UNESCO 2008, p. 5). Given this fact, it is more than reasonable that cultural heritage management activities in Afghanistan should have Kabul's National Museum as their keystone. Improving conditions there, and step by step introduction of a curator-based structure in the museum's organization, have been considered — by the Afghan Government, UNESCO, and international partners alike — as the prerequisite to reform the museum sector in the whole country. "Ideally," wrote the *Framework*, "the National Museum should function as a hub for the sector; training provincial managers, conservators etc., and using its capacity to send experts from the centre to address issues in provincial museums and perform regular assessments of standards and needs at that level" (UNESCO 2008, p. 13). This explains why most capacity building workshops organized by UNESCO in the last few years took place in Kabul, some calling together professionals coming from far off provincial institutions.

At the International Conference for the Safeguarding of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage, which took place in Kabul 18 – 20 October 2010, Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi, UNESCO Representative to Afghanistan, stressed that the conference was to be a turning point for the re-commitment of all stakeholders to join efforts for the safeguarding of the Afghan cultural heritage. And in fact, UNESCO's pleading for funds has been very effective, if we consider that at the beginning of the year 2011 a large budget — USD$5 million, in fact, as I was told in March at UNESCO's Headquarter in Paris — had been set aside by the US to finance the further development of Kabul's National Museum of Afghanistan and the construction of its annex.

The broader picture

Though the lion's share of all funding, and most national as well as international activity, has been strategically set aside for the National Museum in Kabul, Afghanistan's cultural heritage counts many more players. Without considering institutions taking care of smaller or very specialized museums — like the Land Mines Museum set up by the Organisation for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR), or the private Sultani Museum — Kabul hosts also the National Gallery of Fine Arts, a small museum and an art gallery at Babur's Garden, and the National Archives. Other, even smaller, but by far not less interesting sites are only waiting for a little more attention and some infrastructure, and could then very well contribute significantly to focusing attention on important archaeological areas. An example is the Tepe Naranj site museum, on a steep hill where Buddhist stupas and Graeco-Buddhist sculpted groups are still being brought to light [Figs. 3, 4].

Figs. 3, 4. Buddhist remains at Tepe Naranj archaeological site in Kabul.

This notwithstanding, the *Framework* stated in 2008: "Afghanistan currently has 4 Museums in 3 different Provinces (Kabul: National Museum of Afghanistan; Herat: Herat Museum; Ghazni: Ghazni Museum, Rawza Museum of Islamic Art). Only two of these museums are actually functioning, the National Museum and the Herat Museum…" (UNESCO 2008, p. 13). In fact, the museum in Herat is a rather recent one. Nancy Hatch Dupree, whose *Historical Guide to Afghanistan* (1977) still is about the best companion one may choose to get around in the country, does not mention it. The area it was established in was donated to the Ministry of Information and Culture by the Army only in 2005, and it was first opened only two years later. Further renovation is still underway, and it should finally reopen this autumn. However, Dupree does mention (ibid., pp. 287–88) the Kandahar Museum and what she declares is its "most outstanding object," "a large metal receptacle consisting of two bronze coffins, possibly of Achaemenid style, joined into one large receptacle at a later period […] accidentally discovered in 1934 on the western edge of the Shahr-i-Naw," the new part of town.

As so often happens, many an Afghan oasis developing into an extremely civilized town could well be considered a museum in itself. "Under the civilized reign of its last important ruler, Sultan Husayn Mirza Bayqarah," writes Jean-Pierre Perrin about Herat, quoting Mike Barry, "this oasis of Khorasan was transformed, by a destiny peculiarly similar to that of Italy during the same time, into something like The Florence of Asian Islam: with a forever dwindling political relevance, but still representing a most brilliant lighthouse in that civilization" (Perrin 2002, p. 67). In fact, when Muhammad Babur, the founder of the Moghul dynasty in India, visited Herat — or Heri, as it was known at his time — he listed 69 sites and buildings he had seen: "During the twenty days that I stayed in Heri, I every day rode out to visit some new place that I had not seen before. My guide and provider in these visits was Yusef Ali Gokultash, who always got ready a sort of collation, in some suitable place where we stopped. In the course of these twenty days, I saw perhaps everything worthy of notice, except the Khanekah (or monastery) of Sultan Hussain Mirza…" (King 1993, vol. II, p. 14). However, much of it is lost now, not only due to the civil war, the Soviet-Afghan war, or the latest fights. In 1885, Herat's Musalla Complex, defined by Byron as "the most beautiful example in colour in architecture ever devised by man to the glory of his God and himself," was to a great extent destroyed under the direction of British officers to clear a good line of fire for their artillery, as they feared a Russian attack that, however, never came (Dupree 1977, p. 250–51).

Ghazni

Ghazni shares with Kandahar the distant presence of Alexander the Great and his troops. Either city could be Alexandria in Arachosia — a town in the Achaemenid satrapy located at the eastern end of the Iranian plateau — repopulated

Fig. 5. This little mosque from Ghazni has been remounted at the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul, but due to space constraints its mihrab (the niche pointing to the direction Muslims should face when praying) is in the wrong direction. Since the function of this space has been kept even in the museum, prayer rugs have been turned in the proper direction, regardless of the ancient mihrab.

and kept as one of the Macedonian strongholds along the main road leading further north and east towards the Hindu Kush. But at the same time, it is certainly the area of Ghazni that can boast a continuity of human presence through a remarkably long time: though in Ghazni itself no proof of human presence is attested before the Iron Age, in Dasht-e Nawar, about 55 km to the NW, were found the first Lower Palaeolithic tools to be identified in Afghanistan, dated maybe 100,000 years ago. In that important archaeological site, exhibiting intact stratigraphic sequences, several mounds representing early dwellings have been discovered with accompanying artefacts, which suggest occupation from Palaeolithic to Buddhist times (Shank and Rodenburg, 1977).

Located on the main route connecting East and West, the region of Ghazni was used to mobility and dialogue between civilizations even before Alexander the Great (Alexander III of Macedon) brought Graeco-Macedonian culture to that area. When the region of Ghazni came under the influence of the Mauryan dynasty (321–185 BCE), Buddhism and Hinduism came into the area. They were to stay well after the Sakas and Kushans had come and gone, until the 7th century and the dawn of Islam (683 CE). Located between the Persian plateau and the Indus River valley at an elevation of 2200 m above sea level, the city of Ghazni itself has witnessed civilizations and cultures intermingle (and sometimes coexist) over a time span of 30 centuries.

Ghazni's layout shows a certain continuity through the ages. Both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic urban centers were built on a hill, located east of the river and not far away from it. The old one was south, the new one is north of the route still leading from Kabul to Kandahar. From 683 on, the region of Ghazni was a key stronghold — sometimes even a kingmaker — facing the Indian subcontinent. The famous scholar from Central Asia, Al-Biruni, wrote that no Muslim conqueror passed beyond the frontier of Kabul until the days when the Turks seized the power in Ghazni, under the Samanid dynasty, and the supreme power fell to Sabuktagin (Sachau 1978). Sacked by the Ghurids in 1151, Ghazni was hit again by Chingis Khan's armies in 1221. Ibn Battuta, who visited it about 110 years later, writes: "...we left for Ghaznah, capital of the famous Mahmud, the fighting Sultan who was a son of Sabuktigin… The vast majority of [it] is destroyed and only a small part still exists; it used nevertheless to be a noticeable city" (Battuta 1997, p. 319). Even in the 16th century, Ghazni — still of significant strategic value in the region — had not returned to the old splendour, as we can read in Babur's *Memoirs* (King 1993). However, some of its most beautiful monuments survive — though some of them severely damaged.

Starting from 1957, the Italian orientalist Giuseppe Tucci, head of the Italian archaeological mission of IsMEO (named IsIAO after 1995) in Afghanistan, had been active in archaeological sites in Ghazni. The mission's present head, Anna Filigenzi, strongly advocates both excavation and restoration projects, in cooperation with other partners, among which are DAFA — the French Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan — and the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul [Figs. 5, 6]. The Timurid

Fig. 6. A 1:10 scale reproduction of the Ghaznevid arch in Lashkar Gah (Bost), prepared for the Ghazni exhibition at the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul (September 2010).

Mausoleum of Sultan Abdul Razaq (15th century) was restored by IsMEO in 1966 and has been adapted to host a small museum. Long before the Soviet-Afghan war broke out, to use Nancy Hatch Dupree's words (Dupree 1977, p. 188), it was already "highly recommended to all visitors to Ghazni," who would wish to see the peculiar animal ornamentation of Ghazni, under strong influence of Central Asian and Sasanian art styles. Though presently still closed to visitors, Abdul Razaq's Mausoleum and Rawza's Museum of Islamic Art are undergoing renovation, while UNESCO has fostered focused training in Kabul for museum personnel from Ghazni, in order to get ready for their new opening. Designated by ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, based in Morocco) the Capital of Islamic Civilization for the year 2013, Ghazni could thus become in the next years — should conflict conditions be eased — an important cultural pole, a little over 100 miles from the capital of Afghanistan.

To be AND not to be

Khost, Jalalabad, Panjsher — and then, again, Samangan, Tashkurgan, Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh. Or Bamiyan, and Jam. And then Kapisa, and Logar. From most of them people have come during these last few years to the workshops that UNESCO has been organizing in Kabul at the National Museum of Afghanistan for museum professionals and archaeologists alike [Fig. 7]. From 2009 onwards, participants in the workshops I have been giving have included elderly men — among them the longest serving collaborator of the Italian archaeological mission in Ghazni — or very young men, only recently involved in managing, or at least starting to consider their own national cultural heritage.

Fig. 7. Afghan museum professionals and archaeologists sipping tea under a tent at Tepe Naranj archaeological site in Kabul (author in green, centre-left).

Workshops organized in Kabul by UNESCO are not only meant to transfer know-how and knowledge. They are also meant to obtain first-hand information about the situation of cultural institutions far back in the provinces, and to allow some professional networking to all participants. Showing to younger members of the company how Jahangir's Mosque at Babur Gardens in Kabul has been restored, letting a senior member of that restoration team, now fellow member of the workshop, point out how some of its marble panels were restored, dated, and numbered, provides practical knowledge which never could be conveyed in the classroom. "I am old now", one of them told me, "and it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to sit in the trenches, to stand for hours a day… That is why I would like these young men here, that came along with me, to learn, in order that there be someone to go on working as I did, when I will no longer be able to do so…" "When I was a child," another one told me, "we used to dig out artefacts from graves, and other archaeological areas, selling them to visitors… Only when I became an adult I understood that this wasn't well done…".

Foreign visitors? Not necessarily so. As Rory Stewart (2006) describes, Jam and nearby Firoz Koh were being plundered just as he was traveling through on the difficult central route that emperor Babur used to reach Kabul from Herat — passing near the wonderful Band-e Amir lakes in the heart of Hazarajat's highlands and then through the valley of Bamiyan. The locals had already damaged the area to such an extent that the site will probably never reveal much

Photo courtesy and © Habib Mohammad Mandozai, 2009 or 2010.

Fig. 8 (left). An exhibition space at Khost Museum, with its director Habib Mohammad Mandozai.

Fig. 9 (above). Tashkurgan (now Khulm), royal summer seat.

of its history. Though this area has not directly been an area of military operations of the Western Coalition, utter lack of control has made much easier this pillage and transportation of artefacts down to Herat, and out of Afghanistan. Shortly after, writes Stewart (see particularly the book's Part 4), these artefacts could be found on the art market of London — marked as Seljuk or Persian artefacts, to disguise their real origin — while requests and funds for purchases primarily came from a rather limited customer niche of mostly American, British, and Japanese collectors and marketeers.

Nevertheless, artefacts have been preserved and stored, even in locations where no museum is open on a regular basis, or where there might be no official museum at all, yet. In Khost, in a mountainous region locked between the Afghan province of Paktia and the Pakistan border, where turmoil is still a daily occurrence, the director of the local museum succeeded in organizing a small but nice exhibition of some traditional artefacts and ethnic dresses [Fig. 8]. In Khulm, on the contrary, a small, new museum in the seriously damaged royal summer seat [Fig. 9], though obtaining an award at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montréal this year, is not open to the public and has no artefacts to display.

Balkh, a city not far away from Mazar-e Sharif almost at the northern border of Afghanistan near the Amu Darya river, was already very old when Zoroastrianism emerged from it in the 6th century BCE. Conquered by Alexander the Great, and changing its name to Bactra, it became the main seat of the Indo-Greek Bactria region, then an important Buddhist centre, and subsequently the location of the Noh Gonbad Masjid (Nine Domes Mosque), perhaps the oldest Islamic building in the country to survive to our day [Fig. 10]. Since the city was utterly destroyed by Chingis Khan in 1220, and again, two centuries later, by Amir Timur (Tamerlane) [Fig. 11, next page], the vastness of its extent but sketchily emerges from a view of the ancient city walls, a discontinuous line of about 7 miles length. What

Fig. 10. Nine Domes Mosque at Balkh.

Fig. 11. The Green Mosque [the Khwaja Abu Nasr Parsa Shrine] at Balkh, built in the late Timurid period when the city revived after Tamerlane's conquest.

used to be the Mother of All Towns, as the Arabs defined it, is now a vast expanse of fields and grazing land, between the steppe on the northern edge and a cannabis plantation on the south. The local museum, which could boast artefacts of Achaemenid, Greek, Buddhist, and Islamic origin, is closed. Though its proximity to Mazar could make it a pleasant day's excursion from the main urban centre, local conditions appear to mitigate against it.

As for Mazar-e Sharif itself — where the shrine of Hazrat Ali, in the large central square, is considered perhaps "the most beautiful building in Afghanistan" (Dupree 1977, p. 392) [Fig. 12] — there is a small museum in the shrine complex near the mosque, with specimens of different calligraphy styles on documents and books. However, It is not acknowledged either by Dupree nor, much more recently, by the Ministry for Information and Culture and UNESCO's *Framework*. Probably, being located in the Sanctuary itself, it might fall under control of local religious institutions, or of the Ministry for Hajj and Religious Affairs, and is not considered strictly speaking as a proper museum. It is, nevertheless, interesting, and would deserve being more widely promoted.

The area of Bamiyan, of course, is deserving of similar interest [Fig. 13]. Though famous primarily for what is now missing — the two giant Buddha statues destroyed under the Taliban government in March 2001 — and for what is still to be found (a third, reclining giant Buddha statue supposedly buried somewhere at the foot of the sandstone cliff hosting the previous two), Bamiyan's older part also shows interesting examples of earthen architecture [Fig. 14]. The caves themselves [Fig. 15] and some of the nearby sites show archaeological evidence of pre-13th century buildings. Many fragments of the Buddhas, as well as from wall paintings, and some artefacts could be extremely interesting to visit, once a proper museum is built. Though the first ten years of activity in the area

Fig. 12. Hazrat Ali Shrine and Mosque at sunset in Mazar-e Sharif.

Fig. 13. Sunrise in Bamiyan.

have been dedicated primarily to consolidate the caves where the Buddhas stood, to safeguard the fragments of the statues — some weighing as much as a few tons — and to de-mine the whole area, it seems that now new sponsors could facilitate the process of making local cultural heritage both more secure and more visible. This, in turn, could boost a region that, already relatively safe, could only benefit from a certain degree of sustainable cultural and alpine tourism.

Blueprints for further development

Drawing a detailed map of provincial and national museums, of their collections, and of their potential to attract tourism and a certain degree of related economic growth is certainly a priority the country and many foreign institutions and individuals interested in its revival should have, both to disseminate knowledge about Afghan cultural heritage and to protect it. This, however, would hardly exhaust the possibilities. Scattered among the hills and high valleys, many vast structures — forts [Fig. 16], mosques,

Fig. 14 (upper left). The Qala (earthen fort) in Bamiyan.

Fig. 15 (lower left). Buddhist caves re-used in Bamiyan.

Fig. 16 (below). The Bala Hissar Fort in Kabul.

Fig. 17. Buddhist monastery near Samangan.

and other buildings — some of them nominally controlled by the Ministry of Defence as possible strongholds and sensitive military areas, would deserve attention.

Samangan's hills, along the main Mazar-e Sharif to Kabul route, boast a gigantic Buddhist stupa, and the remains of a Buddhist monastery dug into the rock [Fig. 17; appendix below]. The valley of Bamiyan hosts the impressive Shahr-e Gholghola citadel — the City of Screams, which dominates the now empty Buddha's niches across the valley [Fig. 18] — that Chingis Khan sacked and burned in 1221, and also the much larger Shahr-e Zohak, the "Red City," still used as an observation post and air defense installation as recently as ten years ago. In many provinces, even some of the older city districts, built in the old vernacular architecture, using carved wood, mud, and plaster, urgently deserve conservation work and protection, as has been done, for

Fig. 18. The City of Screams citadel in Bamiyan.

instance, in the case of Murad Khane district in Kabul [Figs. 19, 20]. Part of this process involves also dissemination of knowledge about building techniques, handicrafts, and iconographic style [Fig. 21]. That is to say, they would need at least

Fig. 19 (top). Peacock House, Murad Khane district.

Fig. 20 (middle). Restoration work in a traditional building, Murad Khane district.

Fig. 21 (bottom). Modern artefact in a traditional style, Peacock House.

a minimal program of preparing the artistic heritage for museum display.

No blueprint for fostering the further development of cultural heritage in Afghanistan would be complete if, apart from archaeological areas, most of which have been already known and mapped since long before the Soviet-Afghan war, it didn't consider at least other two elements.

On one hand, there is a wealth of sanctuaries old and new alike. Some of them are of only local relevance, while others, mostly tied into the local Islamic tradition of *pirs* — the Sufi leaders and teachers, to whom the Taliban government used to be strongly adverse — are widely renowned and honored. More recently, many other graves have acquired or are in the process of acquiring a particularly significant status: over thirty years of war meant that particularly famous commanders or fighters where honored as *shaheeds*, martyrs and witnesses. Of these, some have received greater attention — this is the case of Ahmad Shah Massoud in Panjsher, whose great mausoleum is visible from far away in the valley [Figs. 22, 23] — and some are marked only by a green flag, over a humble earthen grave. All of them, however, have the potential to serve as memory, model, and education to a vast array of audiences. To transform these into museum sites would probably be going too far, but they do certainly represent a complex ideal map of events and historical actors that is already well rooted in the local consciousness and that would merit at least some of them being located on geographical maps.

On the other hand, there seems to be an almost complete lack of a kind of museum that has been very widely adopted, for instance, in nearby Uzbekistan. In Chékéba Hachemi and Marie-Francoise Colombani's *Pour l'amour de Massoud*, Ahmad Shah Massoud's widow, Sediqua, speaks of her desire to establish a museum in the house she had been living in, with her husband and family, during the Soviet-Afghan war and later on, while fighting the Taliban government (Hachemi and Colombani 2005). There, she said, one could see how the famous Tajik commander had lived, by looking at his books, at the maps he had used, at documents and pictures, and at some of the artefacts and tools that had been of common use at that time. It is a sound perspective.

House-museums, dedicated to writers or artists, scientists or commanders, are likely to be strongly rooted in a local community and thus to be more easily recognized as one's "own" place. They are also the occasion to preserve and document a way of living and building, the *civilization matérielle*, as Braudel would have named it (Braudel 1979), and to hand down to younger generations a tradition of both material and immaterial cultural heritage, safeguarding it for the future. Last but not least, they are a means of disseminating a deeper knowledge built on already more or less existing awareness, attracting visitors who would possibly never have the thought (or the opportunity) to step into a "regular" museum in the first place. This might prepare them, through things more or less well known to them, to experience the distinct koine proper of a museum's environment.

Fig. 22 (top left). Ahmed Shah Massoudi's mausoleum complex being built in Panjsher (October 2008).

Fig. 23 (bottom left). Panjsher, Ahmed Shah Massoudi's tomb.

Exactly this — connecting knowledge and places, making communities aware of continuity, change, and cultural wealth, enabling storytelling on one's own lore and traditions, and learning from those less closely related to one's own — is a strong tool not only to disseminate local knowledge and culture to potential foreign visitors, but also, and maybe even more, to facilitate coexistence and harmony in a given community [Fig. 24]. In a war ravaged country like Afghanistan, this could not but be a very desirable outcome of the museum profession.

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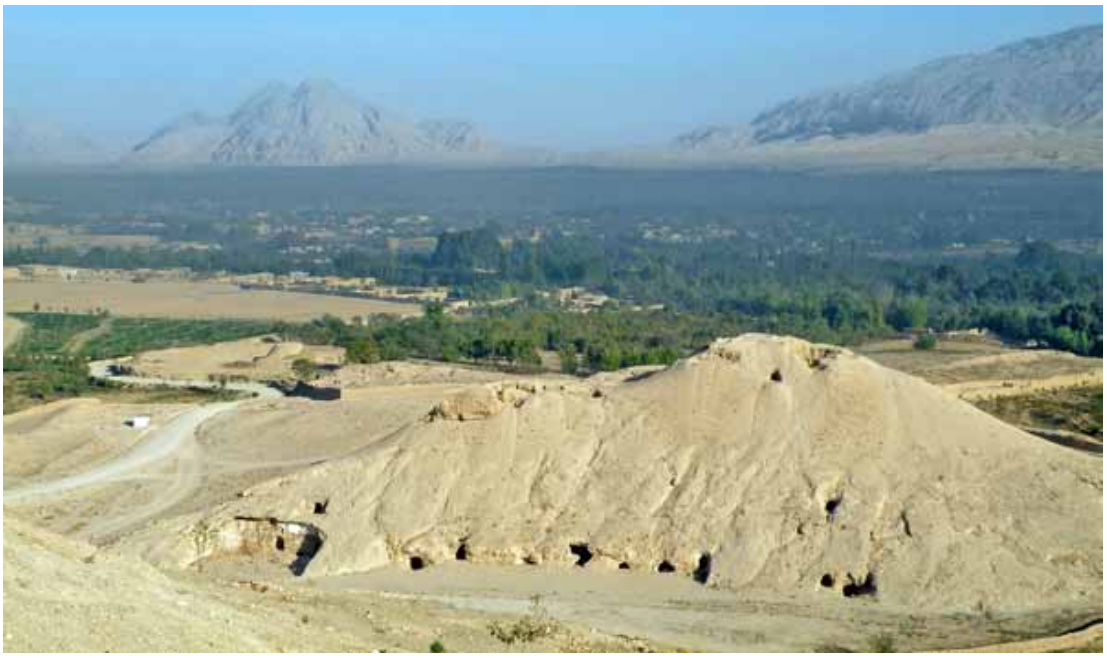
Fig. 24. Restored by Turquoise Mountain, the Peacock House now hosts also an arts centre for children in Murad Khane (Kabul).

Samangan / Takht-e Rostam

A dirt road leading uphill from Samangan, an ancient provincial city in northeastern Afghanistan called Aybak at the time of the caravans traveling along the Silk Road, brings one in a couple of miles to the Buddhist archaeological area known as Takht-e Rostam. This name ("Throne of Rostam") — linked as it is to Persian mythology — was perhaps one of the reasons why the Buddhist monastery dug into the hill, and the great stupa carved in the mountain rock on a slightly higher hill nearby, were spared in subsequent times. Another misbelief, claiming that the meditation cells of the monks were vendors' stalls in an ancient covered bazaar, has also greatly helped in the survival to our day of this impressive 4th to 5th century archaeological site. This erroneous belief must have been confirmed by a hoard of Ghaznavid coins (11th to 12th century) found in one of the caves.

When I visited it in autumn 2008, the general conditions of the area where pretty good, although some rocks seemed to have slid down from the top of the hill without hindering access to the monastery's many caves. However, the situation has changed more recently, as difficult conditions in at least two refugee camps located nearby — one further up north, the second one near Pul-e Khumri, the capital of Baghlan Province — have made the security in the whole area more precarious. Also, a strong earthquake in April 2010 could have affected the caves.

The stupa itself — surrounded by a few caves up the slope, and by a circumambulation path at its base that is accessible from the outer side of the hill through a corridor — is surmounted by a square *harmika*. The monastery has a large assembly hall on its left, decorated by lotus leaves, two other smaller halls, and a long row of cells, raised above the level of two corridors bordering them (one in front with a few openings towards the higher stupa-hill, the other in back). Some other halls open on the side of the hill on a higher level, but access to them seemed rather difficult. At the other end of the monastery, there is a bathroom with a small pool. Just a little over a dozen yards away, a rivulet flows under low trees along the base of the slope, and an earthen wall beyond borders some cultivated fields.



Above: the road to Takht-e Rostam. Right and below, the hill with its stupa, seen from the monastery, and the circumambulation path.

Views of the monastery complex, its architecture and decoration.

The rivulet at the base of the monastery hill.