



Introduction

In 2004, when the excavations of the German-Afghan Archaeological Mission in Bagh-e Babur in Kabul, carried out between 2002 and 2005, were nearing completion, the partnering institutions, namely the German Archaeological Institute, the National Institute of Archaeology and the Department of Monuments and Sites in Kabul discussed further options for extending and widening their collaboration. In this discussion, not only the particular research interests, but also security issues and the traditional or intended research areas of other missions played a role. In addition, the projects were required to go beyond archaeological exploration: aspects such as cultural heritage protection, gathering information on sites and monuments for the National Afghan Site Register and the training of Afghan staff had to be integrated components.

At that time, in the spirit of optimism that followed the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, a multitude of efforts was taken by various governments and agencies between 2002 and 2006, and partly still thereafter, to push forward the protection of cultural heritage sites and, in this connection, to provide assistance to Afghan institutions in overcoming the gaps caused by the country's isolation and devastation during the past decades. Already in 2002 the International Coordination Committee (ICC) for the 'Safeguarding of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage' was formed to coordinate related international efforts in Afghanistan, and the Unesco was entrusted by the Afghan government with coordinating these activities.¹ In 2003, in a first plenary session, the ICC discussed, among others, the following issues and priorities:

- capacity building, archaeological research and conservation activities of various donor countries and organizations;
- preservation of the Bamiyan site;

- Kabul National Museum of Afghanistan and institutional capacity building of Afghan museums;
- implementation of the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, National Inventories and Documentation;
- rehabilitation of the Minaret of Jam and monuments in Herat.

Subsequently, the Unesco took over the coordination of some aspects and sites, including Bamiyan and, for a certain period of time and as long as security allowed, Jam and, from the monuments in Herat, the 5th minaret and the tomb in Gouhar Shad's complex. Yet, the target to bundle international aid for cultural heritage and the emerging national measures, focussing in the field on the protection of monuments, became increasingly difficult and could not be realised in view of the sheer number of activities conducted on uni- or bilateral levels. In cases, qualified expertise was not sufficiently available for dealing with the wave of incoming funds that needed to be spent. In this situation, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), who had been present in Afghanistan throughout the years, became instrumental in the field of preservation of historical buildings and the historic urban fabric (Fig. 1).²

From 2002 on, a couple of archaeological missions began or were about to start working again in- and outside Kabul.³ The Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA) had just re-established its permanent office⁴ and resumed work in northern Afghanistan, at Balkh, and soon after also in the neighbouring regions, as well as at al-Ghaita and Mes Aynak, large Buddhist sites in the Wardak and Loghar districts south of the capital (Fig. 5). The Italian mission planned to return to Ghazni, unfortunately without success as it turned out soon, for security reasons.⁵ It also carried out a short campaign at Jam,

¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/245/>, accessed in October 2016.

² Among the numerous AKTC projects are Bagh-e Babur, one of the first projects and conducted since 2003 in collaboration with the team of the German Archaeological Institute, which had taken up work there in 2002, Kabul Old City and the tomb of Timur Shah; see most recently Jodidio 2017.

³ For an overview of the archaeological research see still Ball/Gardin 1982; recently Franke 2016a, Ball 2008, Knobloch 2002, and the various editions of the exhibition catalogue 'Hidden Afghanistan' (Cambon/Jarrige 2007). The most recent overview of the numerous French projects in Central Asia is presented in Bendezu-Sarmiento 2013. The 'Archaeology of Afghanistan' volume, edited by F. Allchin and N. Hammond in 1978, is presently revised by W. Ball. Another comprehensive overview of different types of cultural heritage preservation projects – archaeological, architectural, conservational and intangible heritage included – is provided by Cassar/Noshadi 2015, edited for Unesco.

⁴ Headed first by R. Besenval, later by Ph. Marquis and J. Bendezu-Sarmiento.

⁵ Directed by G. Verardi and, subsequently, by A. Filigenzi. The Ghazni Project continues the publication of the excavations, see Filigenzi/Giunta 2009; Filigenzi/Giunta 2015.



Fig. 1 Namakdan pavillon in Gazorgah, after renovation by AKTC, 2008



Fig. 2 Minaret of Jam, Hari Rud valley (photographer unknown, wc-sa)



Fig. 3 View of the Mosalla Complex, from northeast (Photo: M. A. Mohammady)



Fig. 4 First visit to Herat, 2004

where a British team continued work in 2003 and 2004 (Fig. 2).⁶ Japanese and French missions were engaged in explorations and excavations as well as art-historical research and conservation projects in and around Bamiyan, where the Unesco-funded documentation and consolidation of the remains of the Great Buddhas was going on.⁷ Shahr-e Gholgola in the Bamiyan Valley was still heavily mined and hence inaccessible. The Unesco also coordinated a couple of assessment and consolidation missions, e.g. at the Gouhar Shad complex in Herat (Fig. 3) and the Minaret of Jam. Considering the emerging patterns of the archaeological landscape and the research interests of the German-Afghan Archaeological Mission to Afghanistan, the option of starting work in Nimruz or Helmand, where Lashkari Bazaar and Nad-e Ali are located, was evaluated. Apart from the French missions only minor excavations and a couple of surveys

have been conducted in this fascinating area with a history from the 4th millennium BCE through the Islamic era.⁸ These plans had to be abandoned due to the increasing political instability.

The proposal to work in Herat Province was formulated in spring 2004 by Nader Rassuli, Director of the National Institute of Archaeology, on behalf of the Ministry of Information and Culture. It has to be seen in connection with the general context outlined above and with plans of the Afghan Government to foster the



Fig. 5 Map of important archaeological sites in Afghanistan

nomination of Herat in the World Heritage List. Herat was, in fact, registered in the Tentative List on August 17th, 2004 with a very brief dossier⁹, but it was obvious already then that the regulations and requirements would become stricter in future; hence, the need for more substantial information was evident. Following a visit to Herat in spring 2004 (Figs. 4; 7) with N. Rassuli and the representative of the Department of Monuments and Sites, Mr. Vahidi, the involved institutions agreed to begin with an archaeological survey and a documentation of sites and monuments in Herat Province, generating data to be fed into the National Site Register. In a second step, excavations and explorations in Herat, should be conducted to explore the roots of the city.

Two components of the latter project, the city survey and excavations in Kuhandaz, were conducted in collaboration with the Délégation

Archéologique Française en Afghanistan. This cooperation was based on mutual interests and scientific as well as personal bonds that had developed over many years of work in Pakistan. However, the choice of Herat as location for the new project and this partnership also had a political background. The German embassy in Kabul had just opened an outpost in Herat, in view of the perspective that the German ISAF troops might be stationed there. The cultural attaché assigned to the German Office was the French diplomat J.-C. Voisin, who as a historian took active interest in the exploration of the region and fostered the beginning of an archaeological mission.¹⁰ When Kunduz became the base of the German ISAF and instead an Italian contingent was posted in Herat in 2005, the German Office and its diplomatic staff moved to Kunduz as well. Yet, despite these initially favourable administrative conditions, which eased matters in a situation that in 2004 was anything but stable (Fig. 6), it was foremost the lack of archaeological research in Herat and the scientific interest to fill this gap which prompted the choice of this region for a new project.

The 'Ancient Herat Project' started the survey in Herat Province already in summer 2004, after the Cultural Preservation Program of the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin had provided the required funds. The survey was supplemented by the Old City Project from 2005¹¹ to 2009. The third project,

⁶ Directed by D. C. Thomas (2012) and A. Gascoigne (2010).

⁷ Partly coordinated *inter alia* by M. Jansen from the RWTH Aachen.

⁸ Gardin 1985. - Dales 1972. - Fairservis 1961. - Hammond 1976. - Sistan: Fischer 1969; Fischer et al. 1976. - Klinkott 1982.

⁹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1927/>, accessed in October 2016.

¹⁰ See Voisin 2006 for his exploration of fortifications in the Herat area.

¹¹ August 15th, 2005.



Fig. 6 Herat under attack of commanders from Shindand and Farsi, 2004



Fig. 7 Illegal excavations in the 12th-/13th-century site Dara-e Takht, Chesht-e Sharif, 2004

the documentation and conservation of the museum collection and, ultimately, the refurbishment of the museum with new exhibition halls, conservation laboratory, stores and offices became an issue only in 2007, when options to convert the citadel from military usage to a cultural centre were discussed by the project, AKTC, Herat Municipality and the representative of the Ministry of Information and Culture. These plans could be realised in 2008, when funds were secured by the AKTC from the US-Embassy for the restoration of the citadel and by the German project from the German Federal Office for the museum project, commencing 2008 and completed in 2012 (Figs. 8; 9).¹² These three components supplemented each other in an ideal way, one providing spatial, the other contextual and chronological, and the latter historical and

art-historical information. All of them included long-term field training of staff from the National Institute of Archaeology and, later, the National Museum und National Archives in Kabul, and from the Department of Monuments and Sites in Herat.

While the geographic environment of Herat is only briefly addressed here¹³, the historical outline takes more room.¹⁴ Its purpose is to provide background information on the political conditions which are a determining factor for the economic and social settings in which the material culture exposed during the excavations and kept in museums is rooted. Both sources have their limitations; the excavations were limited in size and lack spatial contexts, the texts are vague, biased or based on hearsay and older sources. They nevertheless shed light on the effects of wars, earthquakes and famines, and illustrate the urban setting and development. The urban topography, as mirrored by the historic sources, is discussed and related to the archaeological evidence in the final chapter of this book.

Location and Historical Background

Herat, the westernmost province of Afghanistan, covers 55,000 km² and shares borders with Iran und Turkmenistan. Situated at an altitude of 920 m amsl at the foot of the Paropamisos in the fertile valley of the Hari Rud river (Fig. 10), it is located at the junction of major crossroads linking Central Asia and China with Arabia and the western empires. The favourable geographic conditions within a large riverine oasis setting and perennial water supply as well as the presence of major communication routes imply a long history of occupation, similar to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan, homelands of flourishing civilizations from the late 4th and 3rd millennium BCE onwards. On the Silk Road, in actuality an extensive network of route, exotic goods such as silk, textiles, spices, gem stones, porcelain, slaves and horses moved back and forth with political delegations and caravans. Times of political peace and prosperity were succeeded by invasions, destruction and

new beginnings. These processes triggered large-scale movements of people through deportation, warfare, 'labour migration', and colonisation. In their wake, craftsmen and artists traversed long distances, fostering thereby the transmission and merger of ideas, technologies and styles. The tangible cultural heritage is witness to this diffusion, but it reveals at the same time regional preferences and traditions.

That Herat played an important political and economic role in times of expanding empires, tribal confederations and shifting borders is reflected by historic sources since at least the Achaemenid era.¹⁵ It is mentioned as *Haraiva* in cuneiform inscriptions from the 6th century BCE e.g. in Bisotun¹⁶, and later from Persepolis¹⁷, and rendered *Areia* in Greek and *Aria* in Latin sources.¹⁸ *Haraiva*, most likely conquered under King Cyrus II (559–530 BCE), was the land south of *Margiana* and *Bactria*, east of *Parthia*, north of *Zranka/Drangiana* (Sistan) and northwest of *Arachosia* (Kandahar). The Greek historian Herodotus reports that Areians were part of an army led against Greece by King Xerxes I (r. 486–465) around 480 BCE, and *Areia* is named along with *Parthia*, *Choresmia* and *Sogdia* in his taxation list. The name is also mentioned in the Zoroastrian *Avesta* as the 6th land created by Ahura Mazda; tracing it back to an older oral tradition from the earlier 1st millennium BCE, however, remains hypothetical.

Its capital *Artacoana* was one of the three major Achaemenid cities in the east, along with *Bactra* and *Kandahar* (in *Arachosia*). It was conquered c. 330 BCE by Alexander the Great, who allegedly founded *Alexandria in Areia*, among other cities (Fig. 13).¹⁹ *Artacoana*

15 Vogelsang 1992; Vogelsang 2004, 205; 206.

16 Darius I, c. 520 BCE.

17 Artaxerxes II and III, c. 4th century BCE.

18 Calmeyer 2009. - Gropp 2009. - Schmitt 1987/2011. More details on the historic records are quoted in Franke 2016b.

19 Arrian, An. 3.25.2–6, and others, see Vogelsang (2004), Schmitt (1987), Altheim (1947, 166) and Bengtson (1960, 338; 350). Droysen (1898, 276) mentions that 13,000 armed men were murdered or enslaved. According to Vogelsang (2003), however, the first references to *Alexandria in Areia* date after Alexander's death in 323 BCE.



Fig. 8 Restoration work in progress, 2009



Fig. 9 Exhibition hall in the restored building, with niches and overhauled Iranian showcases for display, 2011

might have measured c. 530 m in perimeter and contained the royal fortress. According to the historic sources quoted by Altheim²⁰, also other cities existed in *Areia*, but none of them is identified.²¹

A similar dearth of evidence persists throughout the Parthian and Sasanian eras. The historic records mention Herat (*'Harēv*, *'Hariy*), just like Balkh and Merv, as one of twelve capital cities listed by Shapur I and in the Pahlavi catalogue of provincial capitals. It had a mint where gold coins were struck.²² From the 5th century onwards, the region was an important

20 Altheim 1947, 166.

21 Sometimes located at Herat, sometimes further to the west. One of the other cities named is *Susia* (Altheim 1947, 167; Arrian, An. 3.25.1; 3.26.4; 3.29.1; 5.25.1. - Diodorus 17.78.1. - Plinius, Nat. Hist. 6.93).

22 Markwart 1931, 11; 46. - Vogelsang 2004, 206. - Szuppe 2004, 206.

12 Published by Franke/Müller-Wiener 2016 (eds.).

13 Outlined in detail in Franke/Urban 2018.

14 Revised and shortened version from Franke 2016c.