Introduction

Ute Franke

When the Bagh-e Babur Training Programme we were running in Kabul came close to its end in 2005, it was not easy to find new fieldwork opportunities. Afghanistan has a rich cultural heritage and a large number of archaeological sites, and in 2004 there was great interest from archaeological teams to return to the country after more than 20 years of isolation. The Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA) had reopened its office in Kabul in 2002, providing a base for missions that had previously worked in the country and for newcomers looking for promising opportunities.[1] Coupled with readily available funding from embassies and international agencies for cultural projects, this gradually led to an 'archaeological gold rush' and often uncoordinated missions due to the lack of official guidelines. As time went on, more than a few of these plans had to be abandoned due to logistic challenges, such as communication, technical issues, accommodation, transport and an increasing insecurity in some regions. This also affected our original priority areas, such as Helmand and Sistan - they were closed to foreigners already in 2004.[2]

Genesis of the Project – Why Herat?

The Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture's proposal to start work in Herat was probably based on its intension to apply for UNESCO World Heritage status for the city.[3] With virtually no comprehensive catalogue of sites available for Herat Province at the time, the government was looking for data to supplement the National Register of Monuments, a tool for assessing the deterioration and destruction of cultural sites and for monitoring the increasing scale of illegal excavations, and to support the application and also the work of the Department of Monuments and Sites.

For reasons that can only be guessed at, Herat had never been the focus of serious archaeological interest, either during the first wave of research that ended in 1979, or after the 'reopening' of Afghanistan in December 2001. Having reached the tangible peak of its long history as part of the historic province of Khorasan and as the capital of the Timurid Empire in the 15th century, it was the destination of historians, art historians and architectural scholars[4] rather than of archaeologists.

Up to 2004, archaeological on-ground exploration was limited to trips made in the 1960s and 1970s by W. Ball and other members of the British Institute of Afghan Studies, and by the DAFA, especially J.-C. Gardin and M. Le Berre. They had assembled an archaeological collection in the early 1950s, which was lost during the civil war of 1978–83 and had not been relocated by 2012; their notes remained unpublished.[5] The Russian archaeologists I.T. Kruglikova and V.I. Sarianidi, who have been working in northern Afghanistan, visited Herat province, but were disappointed by the lack of prehistoric sites: *'The westernmost area investigated by the expedition is in the Iran-Afghan border zone - the Herirud riverbed (Herat Oasis). It was not possible to find sites here that date earlier than ancient or medieval. On the*

1 For a more detailed summary of the history of archaeological research in Afghanistan see Franke 2016a; Ball 2008; Ball 2019; Ball/Hammond 2019 and Trousdale/Allen 2022. See also the review of Ball 2019, Archaeological Gazetteer, and Ball/Hammond 2019, by N. Boroffka (2022), with important additions.

2 Except for military personnel see Abramiuk 2019. Trousdale/Allen 2022 present in great detail the results of the Helmand-Sistan Project, carried out between 1971 and 1975. This first volume includes references to work done in Afghan Sistan before, at the same time or afterwards by other missions (pp. 22–26) and to related publications. Iran Sistan and neighbouring regions of Afghanistan are also briefly covered (pp. 27–28). The project website provides access to 19th-century travelogues, project publications and presentations: http://www.sistanarchaeology.org. The second volume on the finds is in preparation.

3 Accepted on August 17th, 2004; https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/?action=listtentative&tpattern=herat&date_start=&date_end=. The preservation and rehabilitation of the Old City of Herat, especially the citadel, and the Musalla Area had been selected in 1976 as a UNESCO Pilot and Training Project, directed by A. Bruno (1981). Its third component, an inventory of monuments in and around Herat, could not be implemented due to armed conflicts in 1979 (Han 2015).

4 The monuments were most extensively studied and documented in the field by D. Wilber (from the 1930s on), L. Golombek (from 1966 on; published Golombek/Wilber 1988); G.A. Pougachenkova (1968; 1969/70; 1970; published 1981) and B. O'Kane (in the 1970s; published 1987). T. Allen published a map with 678 Kart and Timurid sites and other features, based on historical sources (Allen 1981, with site descriptions and larger maps than in Allen 1983; see below Tab. 1). H. Gaube made a documentation of the cenotaphs in the Herat region, published briefly in 1981; he planned a more extensive evaluation in Hanaway 1977 (not available to me). Ch. Noelle-Karimi (2014) provided the most recent comprehensive evaluation of historiographic evidence within a wider context, with a focus on Timurid and post-Timurid Herat, but drawing on pre-Islamic sources for the early history of Khorasan as well. See also Subtelny 2002; 2007.

5 They are probably kept in the DAFA Kabul archive and are incorporated in Ball/Gardin 1982. See also Ball 2019; for the DAFA also B. Lyonnet 1997b.

◀ *Cistern in the Central Afghan Mountains south of Herat (Houz-e Kafer Borj, Gz 14)*

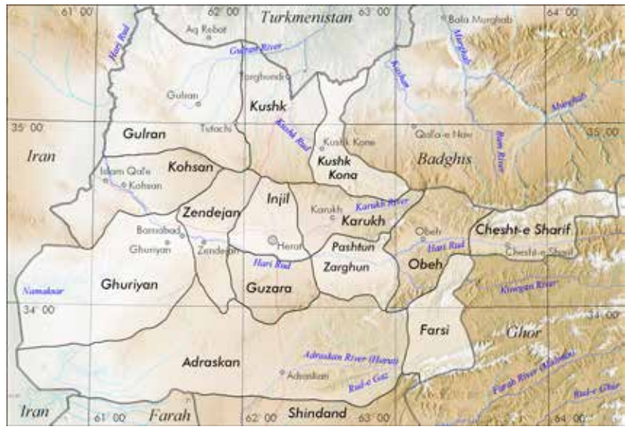

Fig. 1 The districts of Herat Province

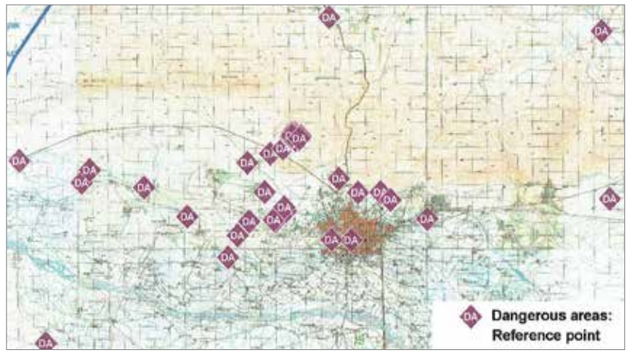

Fig. 2 Mine Assessment (2003 OMAR mine clearing), detail

other hand, in the southeastern region of Turkmenistan, in the riverbed of the Tedžen, many sites from the 4th and 3rd millennia BC have been found. Since the Tedžen is the lower course of the Herirud, prehistoric sites in the Herat Valley are to be assumed. Further surveys will help to clarify this question. … From the Herirud Valley to the Murgab Valley stretches a mountain range that is difficult to access and still requires special archaeological investigation.' [6]

This statement is still true today. These trips and discoveries did not lead to a major project, and no further archaeological research has been published from Herat Province since then, apart from recent 'remote sensing' studies of selected areas and on particular aspects.[7] The fact that shallow archaeological sites in the Hari Rud alluvial plain and in Herat city may be buried under metres of sediment and debris, while elsewhere they lie directly on the surface, may have been another reason why the archaeological 'rush' bypassed Herat.

6 Kruglikova/Sarianidi 1976, 22 (in Russian, translated into German by A. Drujinina), published in a revised, but much abbreviated English version by Gaibov et al. 2010.

7 Thomas 2018, 286; 342 Fig. 2.14. - Kristy 2018. - Franklin/Boak 2019. - Padwa 2017. - Kauracak et al. 2021 (Kandahar).

Nevertheless, despite doubts about the archaeological potential of Herat city[8] and the opportunities in the province, we decided to start a project there. This decision was reinforced by the generally welcoming situation and by plans to establish a branch office of the German Embassy and to station the German ISAF contingent in Herat. This would have offered logistical and administrative advantages, a pragmatic, but important aspect; yet, these plans were abandoned soon after we began our work.

Above all, however, it was curiosity and the hope of discovering more than we already knew that prompted us to seize the opportunity. After all, the Archaeological Gazetteer of Afghanistan published by W. Ball and J.-C. Gardin in 1982 (the version available at that time), had made it clear that the *hinterland* of Herat was not a blank spot in the cultural landscape. However, while the Gazetteer provides the basic site data and detailed information on research and archival sources, it lacks a visual representation of sites, buildings (except plans) and finds, as no photographs or drawings are included.[9] This is understandable given the focus of the book and the wealth of data, but the result is that the regional material culture remained invisible. Furthermore, the datings based on pottery or architectural details, cannot be cross-checked and compared, a problem that also has an impact on the information value of the chronological distribution maps.[10] In the hope that extended stays in Herat would provide new data and tangible evidence about its history and material culture, a main aim was to document as many sites and finds as possible and to make the data available for further research. We started with the survey of archaeological sites and monuments in 2004, but options for the two other components, the archaeological explorations and excavations in Herat city and the Herat Museum Project, emerged soon after and were implemented in 2005 and 2008, respectively.

8 Summarised in the introduction to Ancient Herat Vol. 2, Franke 2017h.

9 This applies also to the re-edited version (Ball 2019). It is now supplemented by the revised and richly illustrated book of W. Ball and N. Hammond 2019. See note 5 on the original documents.

10 This topic is discussed in more detail in the chapter on methodology, pp. 53–55.

Objectives and Limitations

Even when it was still unclear whether and to what extent a provincial survey would be possible, one point was evident from the very beginning: a systematic survey with random sampling in selected areas was out of question, given the size of the province, its topography, the lack of roads, the vagaries of overland travel, mined areas (Fig. 2), security, logistics and a limited number of staff. Faced with the choice of surveying a small area systematically, if possible at all, or a large area with a reduced methodological approach, we opted for the latter as it seemed more reasonable to carry out systematic surveys at a later stage.

The project was therefore planned as an archaeological reconnaissance expedition, coupled, at the request of our partners, with a capacity-building programme for the documentation of historical buildings, archaeological sites and surface finds in the under-explored *hinterland* of Herat. Its components included map-, image- and ground-based site locations, GPS recording of tracks, GPS- and tape-based measurements of sites and monuments, standardised descriptions, condition assessments, photography, archival research, data management and analysis.

The historical buildings in Herat city and its immediate environs were excluded as they had already been surveyed and documented by architectural experts and historians.[11] However, as mentioned above, we opened archaeological excavations in Herat city in 2005, augmented by the inspection of building sites, protected archaeological areas and by small-scale excavations at Gazorgah and the Gawhar Shad complex.[12] The publication of the material recorded during that and the Museum Project, finalised prior to this one, has been extremely helpful in the evaluation and interpretation of the survey material and in linking Herat with its *hinterland.*

11 UNESCO focused on the fifth minaret and the tomb of Gawhar Shad in the Musalla, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture began its Old City Project, which later included the documentation and conservation of important monuments outside Herat in 2004. See Samizay 1981; Najimi 2018; 1988; Jodidio 2017; Hansen et al. 2015; Stevens 2015 and other contributions in Cassar/Noshadi 2015. - Asim/Anzo 2020. See also note 4.

12 Mutin/Besenval 2017. - Franke 2017e. - Franke et al. 2017b. - Franke et al. 2020.

Fig. 3 The Hari Rud River, Chesht-e Sharif district

The considerable delay in the finalisation of the present volume had also the advantage that important new data and publications were available when we resumed work on this book in 2021. Particularly helpful were the revised Archaeological Gazetteer (Ball 2029), the Archaeology of Afghanistan (Ball/Hammond 2019) and, as primary research presentations, Trousdale/Allen 2022 for Sistan, and Thomas (2018) and others for Ghur.[13] These publications are further discussed in the methodology chapter and the final remarks.

The following summaries of the topographical setting and the historical information on the pre-Islamic periods, for which we have few and mostly rather general sources, and no or very limited archaeological evidence, and, in short, on the Islamic periods, provide a framework within which the results of the survey were interpreted.

The Terrain

Herat, the northwestern province of Afghanistan, covers today an area of nearly 55,000 km² and measures approximately 350 km east–west and 280 km north–south.[14] In the 15th century, the Herat Oasis, comprising the land watered by the Hari Rud and the canals (Fig. 5), was divided into 10 districts *(buluk)*, seven north and three south of the Hari Rud. Herat then administered 15 'provinces' *(vilayat)* that extended as far as Zava Mahvilat and Ghur, Gharjestan and Murghab.[15] Today, it has 15 districts (Fig. 1).

13 A new publication on Kandahar by M. Minardi is still in progress (pers. communication).

14 According to current borders. Herat Province was at times much larger and included parts of present-day Badghis; at other times, however, the northeasternmost districts belonged to Badghis. For details, see the introductions to the districts and Barthold 1984, 47. Hafez-e Abru, for example, writing in the 15th century, called the land from the Hari Rud to the Murghab 'Badghis'. Noelle-Karimi (2014, 24–43) describes the shifting borders of Herat province and its districts *(buluk)* during the Timurid period as documented by Hafez-e Abru and Esfezari, and until to the 19th century.

15 Noelle-Karimi 2014, 24–43 Maps 2 and 3.

Fig. 4 The Hari Rud River, Obeh district

Fig. 5 Hari Rud channel, Obeh district

The lifeline of the province, the Hari Rud (Figs. 3; 4), rises from the Koh-e Baba in eastern Ghur, passes through Jam, Chesht-e Sharif and Obeh, runs south of Herat and on to the west. It turns north after a sharp bend at Islam Qal'e, marking the current border with Iran (Fig. 61). It continues north and dries out in the desert near Tedjen. Its behaviour and flow changed drastically with the completion of the Salma Dam east of Chesht-e Sharif town in 2009.

The Herat Oasis basin, with its fertile sedimentary soils and extensive hydraulic system, is one of the most productive agricultural areas in Afghanistan (Fig. 4). It is bounded to the north by the foothills of the Paropamisus and to the south by the Central Afghan Mountain Ranges (Title image; Fig. 6). The Koh-e Diwandar/Sinjao and the Koh-e Kaftar Khan (near In 11), 31 km west of Herat, mark the western boundary of the fertile oasis belt, which is about 115 km long and up to 25 km wide.[16] Up to this point, several tributaries drain the mountain runoff into the Hari Rud, which therefore carries much water until July. Further west, the fertile belt is narrower and interrupted by dry and barren sandy plains *(dasht)*. The latter are also vast in the south, criss-crossed by lower reaches and wadis where only occasional traces of human presence have been found. To the north, the river is bounded by narrower *dasht* zones and the lower ridges of the Paropamisus, which continue northwest towards the Kopet Dagh and Ashqabat.

Situated in this fertile environment, Herat was not always directly on one of the main routes of the Silk Road leading to China - these ran in earlier periods from Nishapur via Sarakhs and Merv, and from Merv to Balkh to connect with the Indian trade. Herat was the trade hub for Sistan and Fars, and a producer of costly gold-thread garments in the Mongol period, from about 1236 on.[17] Barthold (1984, 54) argues that the city flourished at this time because Merv and Balkh were still in ruins after the Mongol raids[18], and the routes from China and India to western Asia then passed through Herat (Fig. 7).[19] The journey from Herat to Merv al-Rud, located near present-day Bala Murghab, took six days, and to Sarakhs five, the same time as to the much closer Obeh, where the mountain ranges slowed travel down.[20]

Each of the main environmental zones - the river oasis, the mountains and the *dasht* - poses particular problems for movement and the topography determines the routes as well as the range of journeys. These difficulties were encountered and described by early Arab and Persian geographers, travellers and the Afghan Boundary Commission of 1884–86. Coupled with the lack of motorable tracks, petrol, accommodation, supplies and security issues, they are major obstacles until today.

The plains stretching from the northern foothills to the Murghab basin are rich pastures that have historically attracted not only seasonally migrating nomads, especially the Jamshidis, but also raids by Turkmen tribes from across the northern borders (Fig. 8).[21] The land is criss-crossed by dry riverbeds and sand dunes, but it receives more annual rainfall, supplemented by mountain runoff especially in spring, than any other region in the province, where precipitation varies from 50 mm to 500 mm.[22]

Dry farming requires more than 250 mm of annual rainfall, otherwise irrigation is necessary, usually through canals. Large *qanat* systems are concentrated in the westernmost parts of the province and south of the Hari Rud, but also occur further to the east and north of the river where the valley widens. In the 1970s, 137 *qanats*, with a depth of at least 4 m, were in operation, but they irrigated only 608 ha of land. This is only 1.1% of the 55,000 ha of intensively used fields and 0.4% of the total 158,000 ha of arable land.[23] This minimal contribution suggests that the *qanats* mainly supplied the settlements with drinking water.

The abandonment of the agricultural zones along the outer fringes of the arable land over the past 70 years is evident from old aerial photographs and maps.[24] However, historical records, although often ambiguous and difficult to compare in terms of numerical information, look further back in time and reveal changes in the subsistence economy. These are often linked to political or climatic events, droughts and earthquakes, and depend on the level of government and civic investment.

Fig. 6 The Central Afghan Mountain Range

Population fluctuations were a recurring feature until pre-modern times. Ibn Rusta, writing in the 10th century, listed *'400 villages, 47 of them dastkaras with 20 to 40 souls, and 324 mills.'*[25] After the Mongol invasions of Djinghiz Khan, and later of Timur, this number decreased dramatically. Although Herat and its irrigation systems were rebuilt from 1236[26] on, Mostawfi (1281–1339/40) mentioned only 18 villages[27], in the early 15th century 200 were counted.[28] The number of 600,000 people who died from a plague in 838|1435, followed by another one with 400,000 dead in the province, seems slightly exaggerated (Subtelny 2007, 120). The city and its immediate *hinterland* recovered under the Timurids and under Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1588–1629), who was born and raised in Herat. It was further boosted by the involvement of local families of high standing in administration, endowment management and civic welfare.[29]

Long and recurrent episodes of political instability and neglect in the early 16th century and beyond, marked by armed conflicts amidst Uzbek, Persian and Afghan claims to supremacy and coupled with raids not only on nomads migrating along the pastures north of the Paropamisus, but far into the Hari Rud Oasis, caused large-scale migrations of urban, rural and nomadic or semi-nomadic populations and a lasting degradation of the agricultural oasis (Fig. 8).[30] Archaeological witnesses of these movements are not only campsites, but also towers and forts where people sought shelter.

16 See Knitter, this volume, pp. 23–27, for an introduction to the environment.

17 Barthold 1984, 50–51. - Spuler (1939, 368 note 9) mentions gifts of robes of honour from the ruler to the vassals and vice versa; Herat, however, is not cited as producer.

18 According to Spuler (1939, 449) both were in ruins when Ibn Battuta passed by.

19 Maps 2 and 3 in Noelle-Karimi 2014 show the Timurid *buluk* and *vilayat* road network.

20 Estakhri (d. 952), in Barthold 1984, 47; 61 note 61. Detailed descriptions can be found in *Ḥamd-Allāh Mustawfī of Qazwīn* (740|1340), The Geographical Part of the *Nuzhat al-Qulub',* transl. by Guy Le Strange 1919, 169–172; https://archive.org/details/TheGeographicalPartofTheNuzhatAlQulub/mode/2up. It remains unclear how far from Herat the villages are included in his count.

21 Barthold 1984, 48.

22 See Knitter, this volume, pp. 23–27.

23 According to Reindke (1976, 132) 255,000 ha in the Hari Rud Valley were pasture (61%) and 158,000 ha agricultural land (38.2% of the total area), of which 55,000 ha was intensively farmed; see p. 25.

24 Noted as well by Barthold (1984, 49).

25 Barthold 1984, note 58.

26 According to Allen (1983, nos. 18; 26; 29) the Jui-ye Injil in 635|1237, and the Jui-ye Malan and Jui-ye Now in 637|1239; the work was allegedly carried out by returning weavers (Szuppe 2004, 209).

27 *Ḥamd-Allāh Mustawfī of Qazwīn* (740|1340), transl. by Guy Le Strange, 1919, 150; see note 20.

28 Szuppe 2004, 208.

29 Among the various sources see especially Allen 1981; 1983; Noelle-Karimi 2014; 2016; Szuppe 1992; 2017; 2021; Ball 2008, 203.

30 See Noelle-Karini (2014, 57–69; 181–190) on 15th- to 19th-century mobility patterns of the court, armies, and nomads; she also addresses strategic aspects such as bridges, impacts on the economy and the urban and rural population, and the composition of the local population since the Mongol period.

Fig. 7 Map of Khorasan (Le Strange 1905, Map VIII)

However, campsites are difficult to locate and to date due to their temporary nature and use by different groups.[31] As a result, the understanding of human land use before the 20th century, mobility and settlement patterns in relation to water and the fertile land across these vast landscapes is still limited and needs to take into account issues such as climatic and anthropogenic impacts on the environment. Another major problem in reconstructing settlement patterns through time is dating. Based on pottery, other objects and architectural features, it often remains open or inconclusive due to the dearth of local or regional comparative evidence, true to the rule that you cannot date what you do not know. Textual sources cannot replace this evidence[32], but they do provide information, albeit often elusive, about the context of material culture. The textual and comparative archaeological evidence for the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods is therefore briefly summarised below.

The Pre-Islamic Eras – Material and Historical Evidence [33]

The oldest and only pre-Achaemenid site recorded for Herat province in the 1982 Archaeological Gazetteer is Shahrabad (Gh 4), dated to the late 2nd/early 1st millennium BC.[34] Given the favourable living conditions summarised above and in the subsequent chapter, and in more detail in the district introductions, the almost complete absence of earlier human settlement requires explanation and highlights the need for further fieldwork. This impression is reinforced by the presence of highly developed urban civilisations as early as in the later 3rd/early 2nd millennium BC in nearby regions such as Sistan, Helmand, western Pakistan and the historical Bactria and Margiana. These areas were linked by major routes on which traders, caravans, armies, delegations and deportees moved along with resources, such as semi-precious stones, especially lapis lazuli, metals, pigments and pottery, prestigious and everyday objects, but also knowledge and expertise. In Afghanistan, Mundigak and Shortughai, located near the lapis lazuli mines of Sar-e Sang, are the best-known witnesses to these ancient networks.[35]

The routes must have passed, at least in part, through the Herat region, suggesting the presence of older sites there as well, an assumption confirmed by the discovery of a late 3rd millennium site in Gulran (Gu 4). The cylinder seal published by Torrens (1842), which has now been dated to the early 2nd millennium BC Old Babylonian period[36] does not, however, give a corresponding date for Herat[37] since Pottinger bought it from an *Aymak* (?) woman, who claimed to have found it *'in the mountains north of Herat.'* Its provenance is therefore diffuse and it may have come from a distant place, as the woman belonged to a nomadic tribe. In any case, it is an unusual piece to be found even in the wider region, at a time when the previously flourishing civilisations had already passed their zenith or disappeared, while Mesopotamia was seeking new markets in the West. In any case, the diagnostic features of the Indus, Oxus and southeastern Iranian civilisations end or fade out with the transition to the Late Bronze Age Namazga VI horizon.

The picture remains diffuse for much of the 2nd and early 1st millennium BC. However, recent research has replaced what was thought to be a long gap between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age in southern Central Asia with transformative processes.[38] These seemingly regional developments, which in Central Asia are marked by the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze and Iron Ages and characterised by the Yaz-I, Yaz-II and Yaz-III cultural complexes, are in part still difficult to fit into a transregional picture.

It is only during the Yaz-III horizon, dating from about the 6th to the 4th century BC and covering the expansion, consolidation and end of the Achaemenid Empire, that some diagnostic cultural features can be observed on a broader regional scale.[39] The characteristics of and the distinctions between these phases and their transformations have been studied in Central Asia, eastern Iran and northwestern Pakistan[40], but the archaeological evidence from Afghanistan is still patchy, except for certain regions. However, long-term research in Bactria, especially in Balkh, where the large Achaemenid site of Cheshmeh Shafa is located, in Kunduz, Ai Khanoum and Kandahar, has produced evidence for this period.[41] Equally important is Afghan Sistan, the historic Zranka or Drangiana, a now barren and arid desert region, but then a rich area with a large number of sites, extending across the modern border to Iranian Sistan.[42] This evidence is now

Fig. 8 Turkmen raid on an unnamed refuge tower and village in Persia or Afghanistan. Illustrated London News 1885/1, 448

31 This theme has been addressed and exploited for the Ghur province, and beyond, with a focus on the Ghurid period, by D.C. Thomas 2012; 2018; Thomas/Gascoigne 2016.

32 Except for Central Asia, esp. Bendezú-Sarmiento 2013; Baumer/Novák 2019; Baumer et al. 2022; Rante et al. 2022.

33 This summary is based on what was written in the other two Ancient Herat volumes, but has been updated and adapted. Further details, with appropriate references, can be found there. The most comprehensive and up-to-date publication on the history and archaeology of Afghanistan, including neighbouring regions, is Ball/Hammond 2019, supplemented by the Ball's 2019 Archaeological Gazetteer.

34 Ball/Gardin 1982, no. 1030: Iron Age I; here: Gh 4 in the Ghuriyan site catalogue.

35 Plus some evidence from Sistan. There is a vast amount of information on this topic; the best recent synthesis, with many details, illustrations, and extensive references is provided by chapters 3 and 4 in Ball/Hammond 2019, and by Lyonnet/Dubova 2021. For a focus on Herat see Franke 2016a, 22–24 and Franke 2017h, 12–14.

36 Illustrated in Franke 2017h, 14. The seal has now been dated to the Old Babylonian period by D. Bonatz, L. Martin, J. Marzahn and R. Bernbeck (pers. communication). That it was not found in Herat proper has been made clear by Torrens (1842). That passage is cited by Ball (2019, 166, no. 428 Herat), along with a translation of the inscription by J. Macginnis, but he still records Herat as a possible Bronze Age site, based on this seal: *'In the early 19th century a cylinder seal and some Sasanian seals and gems were found by chance in or near Herat. The cylinder seal is Old Babylonian in style and includes an inscription in cuneiform. The empty space to the right of the inscription suggests that the seal was prefabricated and waiting for a customer to add a few motifs of his own choice. The signs are proper cuneiform signs but do not make obvious sense: gir en zi.ga / šu x me bi el / ki ti gar ir na. Possibly it is a magical. The seal has since been lost.'*

37 The 3rd-millennium artefacts deposited on Islamic tombs and the objects in the Herat Museum may have come in part from there, or from illegal excavations in neighbouring regions, such as Badghis. These objects, mostly confiscated by the police, were not known to us before 2007.

38 These periods are dated between c. 1800/1700 BC and the mid-2nd millennium BC, or from about 1500 BC onwards, but regional variations appear to be considerable; there is a large body of literature, see *inter alia* Lyonnet/Dubova 2021; Bendezú-Sarmiento/Lhuillier 2022 and Lhuillier/Boroffka 2018.

39 See Ball et al., chapter 5, in Ball/Hammond 2019, esp. 267–343, for a comprehensive overview, also beyond the modern borders of Afghanistan.

40 See in particular Boroffka/Sverchkov 2013; Lhuillier 2013 and the articles in Lhuillier/Boroffka 2018; for Akra (Pakistan) see Petrie/Magee 2020.

41 Ball et al., chapter 5, in Ball/Hammond 2019, 267–275, with extensive references to recent research.

42 Allen/Trousdale 2019. - Trousdale/Allen 2022. - Ball et al., chapter 5, in Ball/Hammond 2019, 276–277; but also Fischer 1973; Fischer 1976 and Klinkott 1982.