

Foreword

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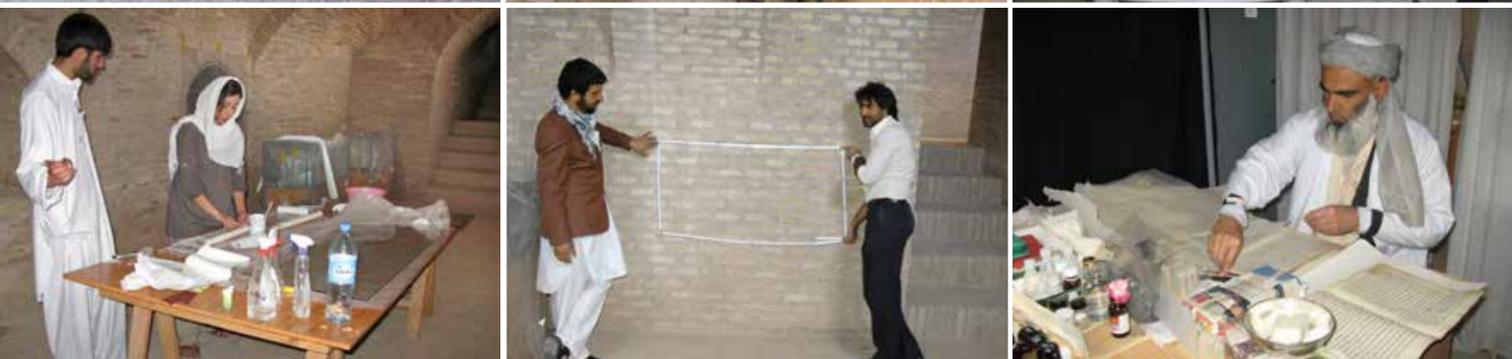
Herat is a city well known to historians of Islamic art and architecture alike. The artistic legacy of its metal workshops and *kitab khanes*, praised in historical records, is on display in museums throughout the world. Master craftsmen, calligraphers and painters working for the courts and affluent customers proudly signed their masterpieces with their names and local affiliations. Next to Samarqand, Herat also epitomises the formation and climax of Timurid architecture: while more ancient testimonies have been buried by a steadily expanding town, the Timurid era is present until today visually and in collective remembrance.

Hence, not surprisingly, Herat - within easy reach from Iran and en route to India or Central Asia - was a popular destination in the lively decades from the 1950s to the 1970s, when international teams explored Afghanistan by four-wheel drives, on horseback or by foot. The focus was, for obvious reasons, on Timurid architecture. Although older assets came to light during restoration work in the citadel, the Friday Mosque and other buildings in the city, and were on display in the museum, little information was widely publicised. It is therefore a great pleasure to write a foreword for a catalogue that presents the collection of the Herat Museum in great detail and discusses the objects, and hence Herat and its hinterland, in a wider cultural-historical context.

This book is the outcome of a project that took place from 2008 to 2012, directed by Ute Franke in the frame of her German-Afghan Archaeological Research Missions under the auspices of the Eurasia-Department of the German Archaeological Institute and, later on, the Museum of Islamic Art, National Museums Berlin.

Initially, the work focussed on the documentation and conservation of the objects, conducted in conjunction with long-term training of staff from Herat and Kabul. When the refurbishment of the citadel by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture provided a chance to install a full-fledged museum with spacious exhibition halls, depots, and a laboratory, the project grasped the opportunity, supported by the Afghan and German cooperation partners and funding agencies. The new exhibition opened in October 2011 as the first newly established provincial museum in Afghanistan in the frame of the inauguration of the citadel as Cultural Centre of Herat. Since then, it has attracted many visitors to get into touch with their past, showcased in a historic ambiance and transmitted by educational material and booklets.

The catalogue makes this heritage available to a wider audience and for future research. Presented in a chronological order, the essays and catalogue sections are devoted to a wide range of topics and address various aspects. This wide scope was achieved through the collaboration network with a number of scholars who covered topics of their particular expertise. Richly illustrated, the book presents material from a region that has kept its historical significance for a long time, but stays beyond reach for scholars and interested people alike.



Acknowledgements

Ute Franke

The project and this book owe their existence to the work and combined efforts of many institutions and persons. As the Project Director, it is my great pleasure to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to the following institutions and personalities, and to the many people who supported the project in various ways throughout these years.

I am extremely grateful for the invaluable support and assistance that we experienced from 2008 to 2015, and for the friendship and hospitality that we enjoyed during this time on the professional and also on the personal level. It is not possible to name all these friends here, but their company is surely remembered and acknowledged. The close collaboration in the long and tedious documentation and conservation process and the joint re-building of the museum until its inauguration in a beautiful ambiente will always be a tight bond to Herat and its people.

Funding Agencies

German Federal Foreign Office, Directorate-General for Culture and Communication, Cultural Preservation Programme

The project would not have been possible in such a wide frame without the generous funding we received from the Cultural Preservation Programme of the German Federal Foreign Office, Berlin. Additional funds came from the 'Stability Pact Afghanistan'. This support provided the opportunity to realise the vision of a museum that is attractive for a general public and, at the same time, provides the best security and climatic conditions for the objects under local possibilities. It also enabled us to run annual six-month training programmes in Herat from 2009 to 2011, and print brochures and postcards, as well as this catalogue. We are extremely grateful for the enduring support and advice, particularly to Dr H.-U. Seidt, Dr A. Görden, I. Fellner, C. Cullas Skrijinskai, R. Reichardt, S. Nissen-Hülse, S. Kobrosly, and K. Kalinowski.

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Gerda Henkel Foundation, Düsseldorf

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Co-operation Partners

Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Information and Culture

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