



## Showcasing History: Realisation of a Vision

Ute Franke

### Emerging Ideas

While the German-Afghan Archaeological Mission to Herat carried out its field mission in 2005, we were informed by our colleagues from the Department of Monuments and Sites that at the end of 2004 the National Museum and Archive of Herat<sup>1</sup> had reopened. Impressed by the extent and importance of the collection, we asked permission from the Regional Office of the Ministry of Information and Culture in Herat to prepare a brief documentation of the collection and take photographs. During two days, the objects and manuscripts on display in 52 showcases and arranged on tables and boards in the open were recorded, c. 150 of about 1000 objects in total.

This cursory documentation and the images taken under difficult conditions formed the base of the publication of a booklet in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Its target was to bring to the attention of a wider scientific and popular audience that an important collection of Pre-Islamic and Islamic Art is still preserved in Herat and supplements the collections kept in the National Museum in Kabul. While much international support went to the museum in Kabul, the provincial museums and archives did not receive financial or logistic aid. One of the major perspectives of the booklet was thus also to support fund raising for a proper documentation and conservation project.

It was clear from the beginning that such an endeavour had to go hand in hand with improving the conditions under which the objects are kept and displayed. These include climatic and lighting conditions, dust and pest control, and require the installation of a small conservation laboratory, and the training of staff.

These needs became more urgent with the shift of the museum objects and manuscripts from the Shar-e Now to Qala'-e Ekhtyaruddin at the end of 2005 for security reasons. Although the citadel as the most outstanding historic building in Herat is an appropriate ambience, it was in a poor state when vacated by the military earlier that year. The two buildings designed as museum space already in the 1970s by the UNESCO-Mission that worked on the structural refurbishment<sup>3</sup>, suffered from humidity and the lack of ventilation. An evaluation conducted in 2007 revealed that the objects were damaged during the shift and that the humidity in the damp buildings in the courtyard fostered the spread of bacteria and mold, while wooden showcases and frames were infested with termites and insects.

The assessment of the buildings with the conservation architects of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), represented with an office in Herat since 2004, revealed that the idea developed in 2005 provided the optimal solution for these problems: the development of a masterplan for setting up a full-fledged museum with the required facilities in the frame of a structural refurbishment of the built architecture in the citadel, which in future should be used as the Cultural Centre of Herat. In 2007 the masterplan was elaborated by AKTC, in co-operation with the team of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) as the responsible institution for museum- and object-related aspects<sup>4</sup>, and, foremost, the concerned governmental agencies, the Ministry of Information and Culture with its Department of Sites and Monuments and the Directorates General of Museums and Archives, and the municipality of Herat (Fig. 1).

### A Lucky Chance: Realisation of a Vision

These plans could be realised when in 2008 the German Foreign Office and its Ambassador Dr H.-U. Seidt in Kabul, agreed to provide funds for the documentation and conservation of the objects and the setting up of a museum with exhibition halls, a conservation laboratory, offices, magazines and storage facilities, and when AKTC received the US Ambassador's Fund for the structural redevelopment and restoration of the citadel soon after. The work started in the same year.

The German focus was on the documentation and conservation of the objects and their presentation in newly designed exhibition halls in a way that would attract the general public. In addition, the training of staff was a major target for all involved agencies. Thus, from the very beginning, the team included staff from the Herat Museum and Archive, and the Kabul National Museum and, in 2011, also from the National Archive (Fig. 3). In total, the

<sup>1</sup> The names was changed in 2010 from Herat National Museum to Herat Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Franke 2008d. The production of the booklet was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno 1981.

<sup>4</sup> In 2009, the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, became the leading executive agency for the Herat Museum & Archive Project, under the continued direction of the author.

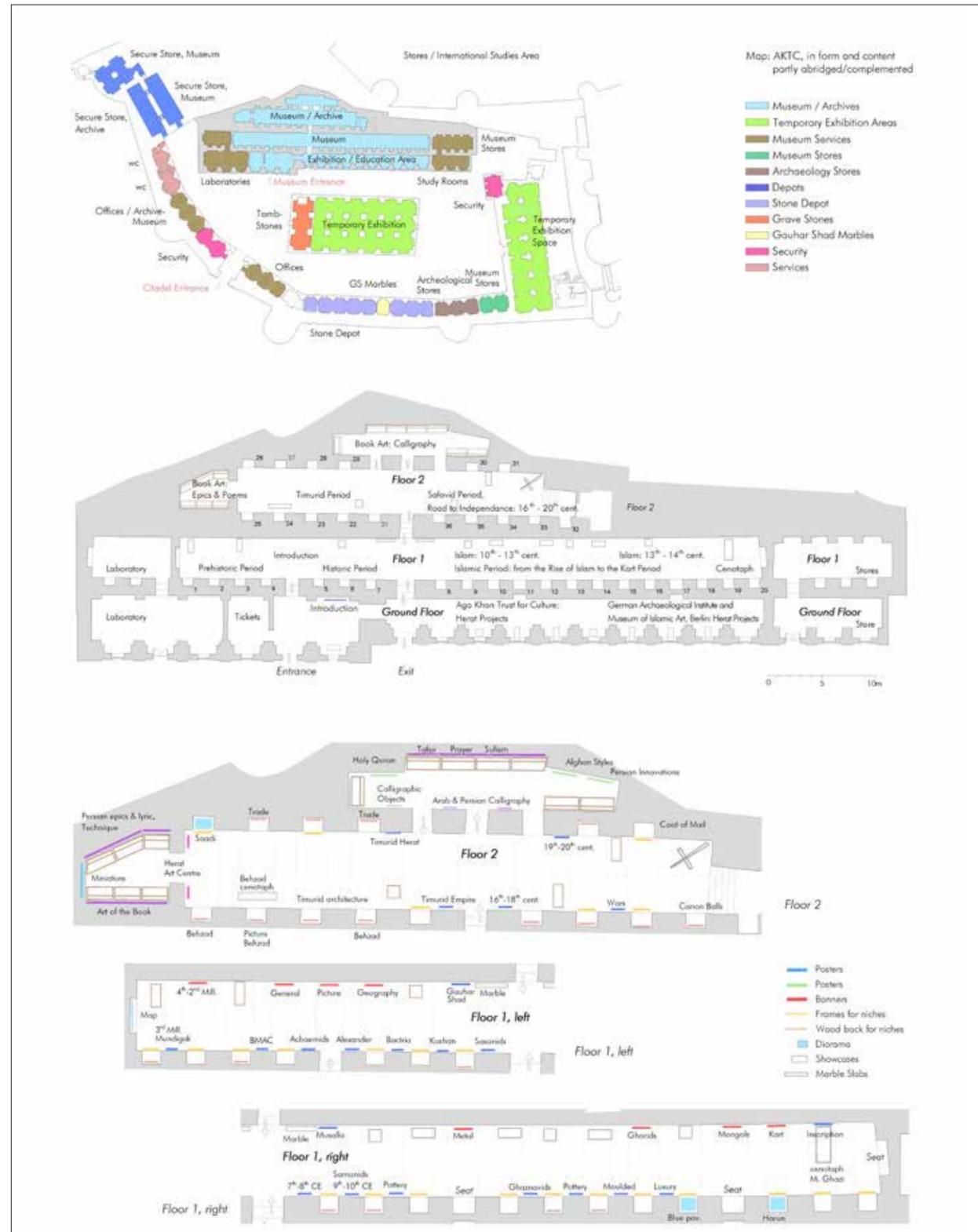


Fig. 1 Masterplan of lower courtyard (above) and exhibition halls (grey)

training for the local team and conservators from Kabul and Herat took place for 17 months, supplemented by altogether nine months long internships in Berlin.<sup>5</sup>

The project started with the documentation and damage assessment of the objects on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008, still in the old building and beginning with the archaeological objects.<sup>6</sup> The work was severely interrupted on September 25<sup>th</sup>, when a theft into the museum hall led to the robbery of 22 objects.<sup>7</sup>

When the first documentation was completed, the objects were packed in 300 boxes and stored in a safe facility to prepare for the beginning of the structural works by AKTC, following demining and the clearance of the area from debris and military shrubs.

As in the overall space, in the museum tracts structural consolidation and conservation had to be done, along with damp protection through insulation layers and an improved drainage of the area. Further necessary measures were the implementation of new electric fuselage, an improved ventilation system, dust protection, new window frames with security glass and UV protection (Figs. 4; 5). Priority was given to the 95 m<sup>2</sup> large conservation laboratory, which opened fully equipped with all facilities suitable for working under local conditions in March 2009.<sup>8</sup> As works on the buildings proceeded, the offices and magazines were furnished with tables, chairs, cupboards and shelves. In July 2010, with the completion of the structural improvements of three exhibition halls on a space of 610 m<sup>2</sup>, work on the exhibition architecture and display started. 36 existing structural niches were prepared for display by fitting in backs, floors, and appropriate lighting and lockable glass doors. 35 existing showcases required repair and 13 new vitrines for the book art cabinets had to be specifically built. The museum halls were handed over by AKTC in June 2011.

5 The training in Berlin was funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

6 See Khushbeen/Ahmady, Figs. 1–3; Gütschow, Cultural Heritage, Figs. 1–4, both this volume.

7 Fortunately retrieved by the police in 2014 and given back to the museum.

8 See in this volume: Gütschow, Cultural Heritage, and Keller, Conservation of Manuscripts.



Fig. 2 View across the museum tract



Fig. 3 Conservation laboratory

The final preparation of the showcases and the objects took place from August to October 2011 (Fig. 6). In this, the climatic conditions, particularly the constant fight against dust intrusion and the heat, posed continuous and sometimes unforeseen problems, for example during the mounting of glass casings, sockets and graphic display carriers (Fig. 7).<sup>9</sup> For the graphic displays about 45 banners, posters, text and labels as well as mounting systems were designed and prepared in Herat and Germany. When the official opening of the citadel as cultural centre took place on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 almost 450 objects and 37 manuscripts and books were on display.

9 Even special glues, attested to withstand temperatures of up to 80° C, used for banners and sockets, dissolved overnight.



Fig. 4 Structural improvement in progress

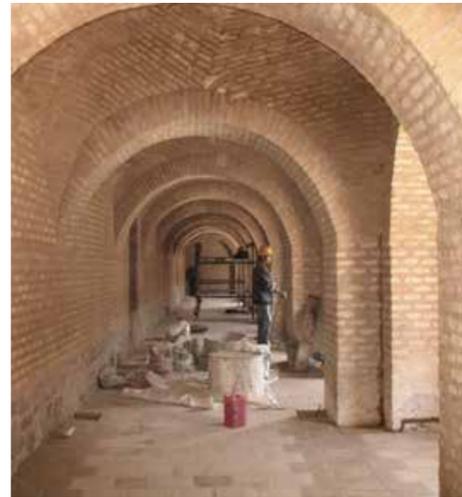


Fig. 5 Ground floor: work in progress



Fig. 8 Removal of a wall in the magazine



Fig. 9 3D-diorama (Gulistan, Sa'adi, Behzad 891/1486, after Barry 2004, 341)



Fig. 6 Magazin, documentation of objects

In 2012, during our final season and in conclusion of the building works of AKTC, first the right (eastern) wing of the security depot was renovated and then the left wing, used as a store by AKTC until then, was re-connected with the eastern part (Fig. 8). The magazines were subsequently re-arranged as permanent stores, the objects not on display packed and their positions marked in the database. At the same time, objects donated to the museum or confiscated by the police and customs since 2010 were recorded.

### Setting up the Exhibition – Herat Through Time

Set into a historic building, the space governs the setting of the exhibition. In addition, the customary behaviour and demands of often large crowds of visitors and the need to ensure the protection of people and objects had to be taken into account.

While the three halls on different levels provide ample space in plan, options are limited through shallow room heights and a narrow system of vaults, arches and 36 niches (Fig. 11). It was therefore decided to utilise the niches as additional showcases, displaying objects, graphics or visualisations of miniatures (Fig. 9). 20 existing showcases of different dimensions, donated to the museum by the Iranian Government in the 1970s, could only be placed along the opposite walls (Fig. 10). Free standing glass casings were built for the cenotaph, the marbles from the Gauhar Shad Complex and Behzad's tombstone.



Fig. 7 Floor 1, with the cenotaph in front

Due to access options, the projects carried out by the German-Afghan Archaeological Mission and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture are put on display in nine showcases on the ground floor, east of the exit. The museum collections are presented on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor in a chronological and thematic sequence, starting from Prehistory in Part 1, walking through History, Early Islam and the Ghurid and Kart periods, and proceeding to the Timurid era and modernity on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level. The book art is presented according to selected topics in two small cabinets without natural light attached to the main hall (Fig. 1).

The different eras and themes are explained by short English and Dari texts, illustrated by photographs, drawings and maps printed on banners hanging on the walls, on posters mounted on boards in the niches, or above the showcases along the walls in the book art cabinets. This explanatory material was also used to print booklets in Dari and English, available at the cashier desk along with the 2008 brochure, postcards and mugs.

### Documentation

The museum has a historical collection of objects set up in 1925. The old records are not preserved, but Y. Khushbeen, the long-time director, and Sheikh Abdul Ghafur kept records for the past three decades and remember much of the museum's history. Although often incomplete and selective, this is the only information that survived its turbulent past since 1979. As



Fig. 10 Fitting of marbles from the Gauhar Shad Complex



Fig. 11 Floor 1, exhibition hall

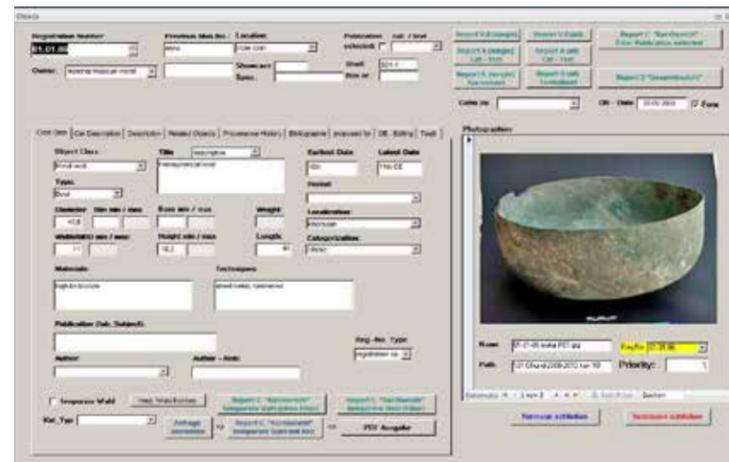


Fig. 12 Object database



Fig. 13 Production of bollards

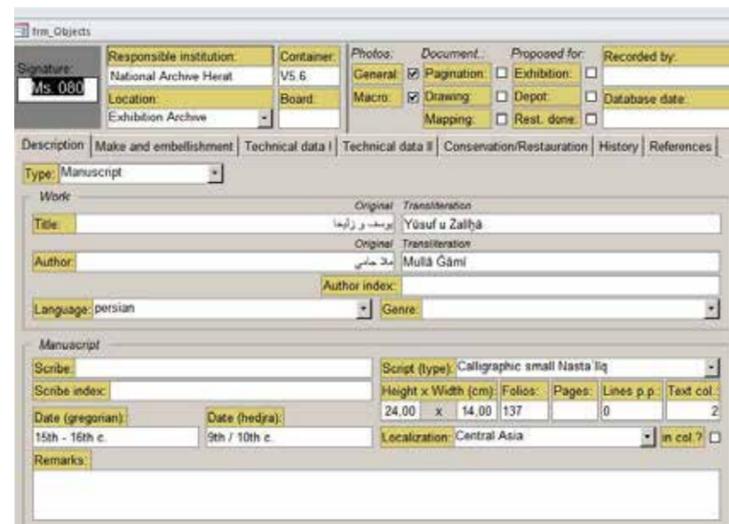


Fig. 14 Manuscript database

outlined in Y. Khushbeen's and H. Ahmady's paper, the museum has since then lost large parts of its holdings. Older publications referring to the collection provide valuable information on this loss, but are limited in number and scope.<sup>10</sup>

Fortunately enough, in 2007 the Ministry of Information and Culture sent a team from the National Museum in Kabul, the supreme responsible authority for the museums, and the Institute of Archaeology to prepare an inventory, based on form sheets in Dari with images. The team covered much of the old collection and continued its work in 2008 and 2010 with objects that came as new arrivals to the museum, mostly from confiscated assemblages. During these three campaigns, different inventory systems were used. Since these numbers are also found in our catalogue, they are briefly explained below.

### Inventory numbers

Most inventory numbers refer to the system used in 2007. It has three parts, each comprising two digits and separated by a dot: 01.40.86 or 02.40.86 (Fig. 12). The first two digits refer to the date of the object, e.g. 01 = Ghurid, 02 = Ghaznavid and so on. The next two digits are the number of the object, or a group of objects, while the last two digits, e.g. 86, provide the year of the inventory according to the Persian calendar (1386).

The second system has six digits, also separated by a dot: 010.2.95. The first three digits (010) refer to the date of registry after the Christian calendar = 2010, the second number to the date of the objects, and the last to the ID of the object, or a group of objects. The same system was used for objects registered in 2011 (011.8.41), while in 2012 a slightly different system was used (012.01.54).<sup>11</sup>

Since these numbering systems with multiple entries under one number were frequently used, but posed problems for the inventory, we allotted individual numbers by adding alpha-numericals, so that all objects have their own ID.

This system, however, is unsuitable for a continuous annual, easy recording process since it includes a date of the object which is not usually apparent to the local staff. After all parties agreed to use a continuous numbering system relying on the year of inventory (Persian

calendar) and a running number (e.g. 88.010 or 91.100), we successively re-numbered the newly accessioned objects with e.g. 010, 011 or 012 numbers available to us between 2009 (87 items) and February 2012 (91 items), keeping of course the old number in our form sheets and database.

When we noted, however, that the National Museum Kabul team preferred to nevertheless use the old system, we dropped this numbering system and used it only for objects without a previously assigned number. Hence, three systems can be found in the catalogue: 04.13.86a, 88.100, and 011.8.41.

### Provenance

Another important issue is the recording of the provenance. If this information once was present, it is now lost, at least in Herat. However, in the documentation sheets prepared in 2007 by the team from Kabul, a field for 'provenance' (*tasjil*) is present on the form. It has turned out, however, that, if provided, this information is rather an alleged or assumed attribution and thus highly unreliable. Ghoriyan is mentioned as provenance for 30 objects, Herat for 11, and Murghab for 42, while all other objects have no entry or are 'unknown'. A look to the objects reveals that these attributions usually refer to collective entries:

Herat: 11 objects, of them 10 Moulded Wares, one plain zoomorphic plain vessel (camel with vessels, HNM 03.23.86)

Ghoriyan: 30 objects, only metal work

Murghab: 42 objects, only pottery, including the following wares: 'Bamiyan', Fritwares, Slip-Painted, Incised, Monochrome Green-Glazed, Moulded, Unglazed Painted, Plain Pottery, including prehistoric to recent vessels.

The assemblages that came to the museum after 2007 also have general attributions, usually given by the police or antiquity dealers, for example 'from Badghis'. This might, as a general regional provenance, provide an idea about the origin. Considering the long history of the museum, it cannot be excluded that it received in its early days objects from Kabul or as a gift from elsewhere. But, taking into account the role of the National Museum and Archive in Kabul as the leading institutions where the precious objects and also many

excavated finds were kept<sup>12</sup>, the provincial museums were in general keepers of regional collections. This is also clearly reflected by the differences in the nature of the collections in Herat and Kabul. Hence we consider the collection in Herat by and large as a regional assemblage.

The present documentation of the objects includes descriptions, photographs, and conservation assessments and reports. Photography had to be done under local conditions, inside the rooms or outside, without additional lighting. Selected objects were graphically recorded. Conservation was carried out according to materials and importance for the future exhibition. The descriptions, images, conservation data<sup>13</sup> and the previously recorded information on the formsheets by other teams were administered by a database which in 2010 and 2011 was translated from English into Dari. At the end of the project, the database contained 1640 objects and nearly 16,000 images. Of these, 340 are small objects, predominantly sherds kept in trunks that were recorded more briefly.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the objects owned by the Herat Museum, the tomb- and inscription stones brought into the citadel by the Department of Monuments and Sites after 2010 for security reasons were recorded.<sup>15</sup>

A separate database was developed for the documentation of the 245 manuscripts, which are under the auspices of the Directorate General Archives in Kabul (Fig. 14). Photography here was a more difficult issue, since access was limited in the beginning and at certain times later on. 11 manuscripts were fully photographed, while the others were documented more briefly.<sup>16</sup>

The purpose of this book is to present the Herat collections to readers and researchers interested in this region that for a long time played an important role in history. Based on the records and descriptions gathered by the team members between 2008 and 2012, the catalogue entries were thoroughly revised and updated during the publication process by the editors and the authors of the accompanying texts. These are in addition to the editors and Claus-Peter Haase, Ruth Keller and Carmen Gütschow as team members, Michael Alram, Jens Kröger, Judith A. Lerner, Christine Noelle-Karimi, and Filiz Çakır Phillip. We truly appreciate their scholarly input to this volume and for covering important periods and aspects that otherwise would have been lacking in this overview.

<sup>10</sup> For example Torrens 1842; Melikian-Chirvani 1974; MacDowall/Ibrahim 1979.

<sup>11</sup> In 2011 and 2012 carried out by the local Herat team, following the guidelines from Kabul.

<sup>12</sup> Excavated finds were kept also in the Institute of Archaeology or in site museums, such as for example in Ghazni and Kandahar. No official excavations took place in Herat Province before 2004, in Herat city only in the frame of the UNESCO citadel project (Bruno 1981) and by an Afghan team in the Hussayn Bayqara Complex, with unknown whereabouts of the documentation and finds.

<sup>13</sup> The conservation database and photography was managed by C. Gütschow, the responsible conservator for all objects except books and manuscripts; see her paper in this volume.

<sup>14</sup> Some are illustrated in the text, e.g. Franke, Glazed and Painted Earthenware, marked by numbers such as B73.xx or 200x.xx.

<sup>15</sup> These objects will be published by C.-P. Haase in volume 2 of the series 'Ancient Herat' (Franke/Urban 2016). The same applies to the plain pottery kept in the museum, which will also be published by U. Franke.

<sup>16</sup> HNA 4; 7; 9; 23; 49; 72; 74; 83; 98; 114. The documentation was managed by R. Keller, who was in charge of paper conservation, see her papers in this volume.