Bagram Room

High ruined ramparts encircle a long mound rising above the confluence of the Ghorband and Panjshier Rivers near the village of Bagram, some 40 miles north-east of Kabul. This was Kapisa, the famed summer capital of the mighty king of the Kushans, Kanishka.

Kanishka’s empire extended across northern India, through the Afghan mountains and east into Central Asia. Though detailed specifics of this ruler are strangely lacking, a rich, varied panorama of his era can be painted by the mind’s eye with the aid of such finds as the Bagram treasure.

During the early part of the 2nd Century A.D., when the Kushan Empire reached its greatest heights under Kanishka, peace reigned from Rome to China and for more than two centuries commerce, art, and religion moved freely by land and by sea along the caravan trade highway known as the Silk Route. The Caesars of Rome and the Han Emperors of China avidly exchanged their most exotic products while bargaining for the spices, gems and cosmetics of India and Ceylon and the gems and furs of Central Asia. At the heart of this trade, the Kushan aristocracy of Kapisa pursued a life of high sophistication. A patrician elegance characterizes their portraits on the bas reliefs from Shotorak.

The vast accumulation of objects contained in the Bagram treasure further testifies to the refined and elaborate taste of Kapisa’s citizens. It represents, in capsule form, the extent and richness of the commercial activity along the Silk Route.
Here are Chinese lacquers, Graeco-Roman bronzes, plaster plaques, and vessels of porphyry and alabaster, Roman glassware and exquisite ivories from India. Together they form the most spectacular archaeological find of the 20th Century.

The DAFA excavations were undertaken in the high citadel of the city of Kapisa, which was built in three periods, beginning with the Indo-Greeks during the 2nd Century B.C. This early metropolis was enlarged by the Kushans in the 2nd Century A.D. and there is evidence that this second city was destroyed by a great fire, set, perhaps, by the invading Sasanian Persians on their advance eastward ca. 241. A final city was erected on the ruins of the fabulous Kushan capital and in turn destroyed probably by yet another group of invaders, the Hephthalites or White Huns from Central Asia, in the 5th Century.

Only a minute portion of the vast citadel has felt the bite of the archaeologist’s spade, although DAFA excavations extended from 1936 through 1942 (J. Hackin and R. Ghirshman) and again in 1946 (J. Meunié). In 1973 the Indian Archaeological Mission (R. Sengupta) signed a contract with the Republic of Afghanistan to reopen excavations in 1974. The treasure itself, excavated by J. Hackin in 1937 and 1939, was found in two small rooms lying at the foot of a tower in the outer wall. Both had been hastily walled up. Until the new excavators bring additional data to light, one is left to imagine whether these were perhaps the storerooms of some well-to-do merchant or a frantically secreted treasure belonging to a wealthy household. Again, since these objects date from the 1st to the early 3rd Century A.D., could it be that Kapisa also had a national museum? Or, was this a royal collection formed over a period of at least one hundred years which once belonged to the Great King himself?

**CASE NUMBER 1—IVORIES, GLASSWARE, PLASTER MEDALLION**

*This case contains a sampling of various types of artifacts from the Begram treasure:*

1. Console of sculptured ivory from India. This very fine piece is carved on both sides and probably supported the arm of a chair or throne. A bejeweled lady riding a leoglyph emerges from the open jaws of a makara, a mythical crocodile. An attendant stands in the mouth of the makara supporting the rider’s foot with the top of his head. (See Case Number 3 for discussion of the Begram ivories.)

2. Fragments of a Chinese lacquer bowl. These are analogous to Chinese lacquers of the Han Dynasty excavated from Korea and probably date no later than the 1st Century A.D.

3. The Pharos of Alexandria, carved glass. This transparent glass vase was molded out of molten glass and a variety of details were then attached to the exterior. It belongs to a rare technique of glass carving in which effects of relief were obtained by drilling and cutting the surface of the glass. The decorations depict the Pharos of Alexandria, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The towered light house appears on one side, surmounted by the nude figure of the
 god of the sea, Poseidon, between flanking tritons projecting from the base of the statue. On the other side, at the top, is a war-galley with two banks of oars, a merchant ship with a large sail, and a small fishing boat at the bottom. Possibly made in Alexandria itself, no earlier than the 3rd Century A.D. (III. 23)

4. Glass vase with faceted hexagons arranged in a honeycomb pattern. Examples of this technique were found in Cyprus and Pompeii. The suggested date for this style is 1st Century A.D.

5. Section of a carved ivory panel from India. Two scantily robed ladies with elaborate hairdress, jeweled girdles and heavy bracelets and anklets stand beneath a portal surmounted by an intricately decorated architrave. Note the leoglyph brackets similar to the console, Number 1, above. Such plaques were originally parts of boxes or pieces of furniture. (Color Ill. 6)

6. Incised ivory jewel casket. This is one of the most complex and beautiful pieces in the Bagram collection. The cover and side decoration of this ivory jewel box presents a courtesan with her handmaidens. On the left she sits with a parrot perched on her hand while a maid stands before her with a bowl of fruit. On the right, the maid kneels before her lady holding out a bowl. The courtesan holds a mirror in her left hand and applies her make-up with the right. An empty parrot cage is to the right. The sunken relief and heavy shadows of the contours give the figures a warm, sensuous appearance seemingly independent from the surface. These central figures are surrounded by an acanthus scroll entwined around alternating flowers and duck-like birds in various postures. Most unusual human faces crowned with animal heads—a horse in the lower right, an elephant and lion in the upper right, a lion in the upper left—fill the four corners of the lid. On the side, below, are three small square panels, separated by a spindle-balustrade. These contain lively, extremely engaging composite animals: a little man with a lion’s body, wearing a pillbox hat at a rakish angle, unaccountably clutches at his breast with his right hand; a bull skips along on his hind legs in the center panel; a smiling ram with a lion’s body crooks his tail provocatively on the right. An extraordinary feeling for animals is seen throughout the Bagram ivories. Two sinuous dancing girls frame the sides, and a line of makaras disgorging human heads somewhat incongruously dot the bottom band. Ca. 2nd-3rd Century A.D. (III. 10)

7. Plaster medallion representing Winged Eros holding Psyche in the shape of a butterfly, a favorite mythological motif of Hellenistic art. (See Case Number 11 for discussion of plaster plaques from Bagram.)

8. Triton in carved ivory. One of a number of panels depicting a motif frequently found at Mathura in the eastern Kushan Empire during the 2nd-3rd Century A.D. The snake-legs of the triton are being swallowed by makaras. The usual piscine bodies of the Indian crocodiles have been converted into decorative foliate forms, a specifically Gupta transformation which dates this piece during the early 3rd Century. (III. 17)

CASE NUMBER 2—Bronzes
The Hellenistic bronzes from the Bagram collection may be assigned to a period no later than the 1st Century A.D.

1. Gallic cavalier, holding a stick or whip in his right hand and possibly reins in his left, riding a horse or a chariot. (III. 15)

2. Mask of Silenus, with horse’s ears and crowned with ivy. A minor woodland deity, companion of Dionysus. This piece was probably intended as an ornament for furniture. (III. 18)

3. Bust of Mars. A steelyard weight. Three small rings on the helmet originally were attached to the chains that supported the weight from the arm of the scale. (III. 16)

4. Rhyton or beaker in the shape of a female head. Terracotta versions of the same shape were recovered from Rhodes and Cyprus, dating from the 7th-5th Century B.C. This example is from the 1st Century A.D.

5. Bronze pitcher with a handle in the form of a snake. It is similar to many examples found in wealthy Roman homes.


7. Mobile. This object (suspended above) is unique to the whole repertoire of classical artifacts. It consists of a round
plaque which allowed for the free movement of little weights hanging on the reverse side and attached to tiny fins belonging to a variety of fish on the obverse. A winged Eros is seen in the upper right and the mobile tresses and face of Medusa, Poseidon’s lover, in the center. The scene also includes dolphins, a tortoise at the lower left, a pier with a fisherman upper right, and two swimmers near Eros at the upper right. When the plaque was gently moved in water, the many little mobile fins would suddenly bring the watery scene to life. This object was probably used as a table ornament or fountain for the amusement of guests.

8. The Cybele Plaque from Ai Khanoum. This unique piece of gilded silver was found in 1969 in the temple of Ai Khanoum, the easternmost Greek outpost in Asia, probably established by Alexander the Great. The golden-robed goddess is shown crossing a mountainous terrain in a gold chariot drawn by a pair of lions which identify her as Cybele, an Asiatic mother goddess who presided over orgiastic rites. The chariot is driven by Victory, identified by a wing on the left shoulder, and they are escorted by a priest wearing a conical hat and carrying a long staff topped with a flared tuft. The sweeping gold crescent above this group may represent a mountain grotto from which the chariot emerges and proceeds toward a high altar attended by another priest in a long robe. In the heavens a golden-rayed bust in high relief of the sun-god Helios hangs beside a gold crescent moon and a gold star. Greek hair and dress fashion, combined with the oriental costume of the eunuch priests and hieratic style lead to the conclusion that this piece was made in northern Syria. Similar plaques ornamented with religious subjects hung on the walls of sanctuaries and private dwellings during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The presence of this plaque at Ai Khanoum provides evidence of the trade which existed between the royal Greek dynasties in Syria and Mesopotamia and their eastern satrapies. Probable date, early 3rd Century B.C. (Cover III.)


10. Cock with a human head.

11. Serapis-Hercules. The syncretic combination of the Egyptian god Serapis and Hercules is otherwise unknown. The figure carries the familiar emblems of Hercules, the club and golden apples of Hesperides, and wears a crown of grain, symbol of the fertility of the Nile and also the sacred basket of mysteries appropriate for a god embodying both Life and Death. (III. 14)

12. Shallow vessel with two handles. Similar examples were found at Pompeii.

13. Harpocrates, the Egyptian god of Silence, son of Isis. Of Alexandrian origin. (III. 17)

14. Copy of a bronze statue of Harpocrates found at Taxila, another important Kushan site in Pakistan.

CASE NUMBER 3—Ivories
The Begram ivories decorated various pieces of furniture such as thrones, beds, stools and small boxes. The figures are primarily women, shown in the women’s quarters of a royal palace, at their dressing tables, playing or relaxing in their rooms and gardens. Covered with ornate jewelry, full bosoms bare, tiny waists and overly ample hips swathed in transparent veils, they represent the aesthetic ideal of India. These unique pieces belong to a number of different periods, from the 1st to the middle-3rd Century A.D.

The three figures are Yakshi, or river goddesses, each standing over 40 cm, the largest examples of ancient ivory in the world. Their identification as river goddesses is suggested by the makaras and ducks at their feet. (Color III. 8)

CASE NUMBER 4—Ivories, glassware
1. Section of a long ivory panel. A series of panels depicting ladies framed in gateways with three architraves, very similar to the famous gateways of Sanchi in Central India, ca. 1st Century B.C. In one scene a Yakshi stands holding the branch of a tree in the classic pose noted in the Shotonak bas reliefs. Another feeds a child from full breasts with one foot cocked behind her. Another is gracefully grooming her long tresses.

2. Fragment of an ivory panel.

3. Carved ivory panel.

4. Bowl of iridescent ribbed glass.
5. Carved ivory panel. A triton with elaborate makaras. Note the intricately carved scales. Stylized ducks stand between them.

6. Millefiore glass bowl. A superb example of the millefiore technique in which a mold is lined with sections of multicolored glass rods packed side by side and then heated until the rods melt and fuse to make a variegated pattern. (Back cover)

7. Carved ivory panel.

8. Elephant masks of repoussé gold. These masks with raised trunks formed the spouts of a now-lost glass vessel.

CASE NUMBER 5—Ivories, glassware

1. Glass rhyton or drinking vessel. This brownish glass rhyton terminates in a bull's head. Similar shapes are known from Greek ceramics. It bears striking similarities to the gold and silver drinking horns used by the Achae menid Persians in the 6th-4th Century B.C.

2. Bronze handle inlaid with silver and copper in a floral design, ending in bearded and horned faun heads.

3. Shallow glass bowl with wavy brown and white stripes in imitation of agate.

4. Carved ivory panel fragments. Crowded hunting scenes with hunters wearing crowns, quivers full of arrows strapped to their backs, carrying bows. Their quarry of various winged felines twists through a dense forest background. There is a marvellous sense of movement. In one fragment a rampant beast thrashes against the noose of a lasso held by two hunters seated in a stylized rocky grotto surrounded by a maze of twining branches. Traces of red and black pigment reinforce the contours. These fragments were parts of a very long frieze presumably decorating one of the elaborate thrones found in the treasure room.

5. Hollow white glass flask. This ichthyomorphic dolphin flask was probably a perfume container. Similar specimens were popular throughout the Graeco-Roman period from the 1st-3rd Century A.D. and many were found at Bagram.

6. Carved ivory panel fragment.

7. Carved ivory panel. Crowded scene of palace life. Note the different items of furniture, door designs, etc., and woman on horseback. (III. 12)

CASE NUMBER 6—Ivories, bronze

1. Carved ivory panels. A series of small square panels showing women at their toilette.

2. Carved ivory sections for inlay. Reticulated reliefs with no background were made to be applied or inlaid on a wooden surface. The subject again is the leisurely life of ladies in their palace quarters.

3. Carved ivory panels. A frieze of winged beasts alternating with chubby children, or dwarf-demons, wearing necklaces and jeweled girdles.

4. Gilded bronze pendant in the shape of a grape leaf.

5. Carved ivory frieze. Mythical beasts with human and bird faces and leonine bodies entwined within a foliated scroll.

CASE NUMBER 7—Kushan pottery and figurines, 1st-3rd Century A.D.

1. Water whistle in the shape of a horse.

2. One-handed jug with ribbed design and applied tear-drops, made from a mold.

3. Fragment of a horse, with the still visible legs of the rider on either side.

4. Large red clay goblet.

5. Small jug.


7. Fragment of a vessel in the shape of a stylized ram.

8. Tall goblet with a handle, small ring foot and painted design of tapering plants.

9. Goblet, with a painted design of stylized triangles with parallel lines.

10. Small goblet.

11. Flat black bowl with turned rim.

12. Cylindrical water whistle with double figurines, horse head and stylized face below. Double figurines are characteristic Central Asian motifs.

13. Two-handled bowl with decorations on inside of undulating
incised lines enclosing punctate dots. Appliqued studs on handle.

CASE NUMBER 8—*Alexandrian glass, 1st-2nd Century A.D.*
1. Footed white glass goblet, with faceted hexagons in honeycomb pattern. This technique continued into the glass ware of the Sasanian period and later.
2. Small white glass rim-base saucer or salver.
3. Two fragments of a painted, clear glass bowl: the lower panel shows a woman’s head ringed with a pink halo; the two sections of the upper panel show a combat between horsemen and foot soldiers. Similar subjects can be found in Roman mosaics.
4. Fragment of a painted glass bowl. A bronzed, bearded satyr in right profile grasps an outraged nymph by the throat.
5. Fragment of a painted clear glass bowl. Hind quarters of a leopard, slinking through a stylized forest. The enamelled colors are remarkably well preserved.
6. Large bulbous white glass goblet on a foot, decorated with faceted rondelles.
7. Fragment of a large white glass platter with hexagonal honeycomb pattern, a border of parallel lines.
8. Fragment of a large clear glass bowl. Traces of iridescence.

CASE NUMBER 9—*Ivories, 1st-2nd Century A.D.*
1. Incised plaque showing a bulbous vase filled with lotus blossoms on a stepped platform. The central blossom is in full bloom, the others still buds. A scarf is knotted around the shoulder of the vase. Note the traces of red and black polychromy.
2. Elaborate incised plaque showing an elephant kneeling in front of an ashoka tree. It is richly caparisoned with rings around its ankles, a bell hanging from its midsection, a crossed halter and a decorative blanket. The body is covered with small dots representing the colored paints with which ceremonial animals were decorated. The mahout, or keeper, prepares to mount, holding a forked goad, an instrument traditionally used to prod or guide the elephant.

3. Four plaques. From left to right: 1) Incised flowering tree, ringed at the base. The subtle shading gives it depth. 2) Lady seated on a round wicker stool, on a cushion, a cup in her left hand. She wears nothing but jewelry: two large, heavy ankle bracelets, many bracelets on her arms, heavy coiled earrings and a girdle of two ropes of pearls. Her hairdo ending in a stiffly protruding chignon is most striking. 3) Peacock in front of a budding tree. 4) Fragment of a plaque with undulating branch of the ashoka tree.
4. Flatly incised plaque of a feline animal, with snub nose outstretched, mouth open, chasing a flustered bird scurrying along with wings upraised, feathers ruffled, and one wary eye on its pursuer.
5. Plaque showing a woman facing right, seated on a round wicker stool and cushion. She is nude except for ornaments similar to those worn by the lady in plaque Number 3.
6. Fragments of four incised plaques. From left to right: 1) A young duck in flight; palmettes. 2) A parrot seated on a branch. 3) Branch with the head of a parrot to the right. 4) A parrot flying past branches of a tree.
7. Three plaques. From left to right: 1) Lady seated on a stool, looking over her right shoulder. Her left arm rests on her knee, with the hand languidly pointing downward; the right is raised to her bosom. She wears a cloth girdle. 2) Lady with ornamented hairstyle facing front, with a parrot on her shoulder. The bird picks up a pearl in its beak; she crooks her left arm to help support him. She smiles and flutters her eyelids at the bird. 3) Lady seated on a stool facing left, with legs crossed, left hand placed on the hip and right raised with elbow placed on the thigh.
8. Four incised plaques, used as furniture decoration. From left to right: 1-3) Elongated ducks. 4) Makara.
9. Fragment of an incised plaque showing leaves, and four stalks of flowers, each with six petals.

CASE NUMBER 10—*Plaster medallions, 2nd Century A.D.*
1. Bust of a Youth (Pan?). The hair of this handsome youth, rendered in fairly high relief, is gathered at the front; from a side lock a small horn seems to emerge. Behind him, the
end of a shepherd’s crook, which, with the possible budding horn, permits a tentative identification with Pan, the Greek god of flocks, pastures and shepherds.

2. Bacchanalian Procession. The procession is led by a woman, arms uplifted holding an instrument (lyre?). She is followed by a flute-player who supports the unsteady progress of an inebriated friend clutching his shoulder. Bringing up the rear is a drunken horseman, careening precariously, leaning on a companion walking beside the horse.

3. Bust of a Sleeping Maenad. The head of this figure in high relief rests upon her right arm, which is placed behind the head. The left breast is uncovered; the right covered with a diaphanous material fastened at the right shoulder. The rather abandoned, dishevelled look could support an identification as a companion of Dionysus. (Ill. 27)

4. Youth with Nursling. A young boy offers a bunch of grapes to a baby lying in a hammock cradle, perhaps supported by the grape vine held by the youth in his left hand.

5. Male bust. Most realistic treatment in high relief of a rugged, aging man apparently in need of a shave. The hair is caught by a crown of leaves tied at the back with ribbons which fall down the back of the neck.


7. Erotic tableau, sometimes identified as Selene and Endymion. An ithyphallic figure, nude, with hands behind his head, lies asleep on a cloak, a sword and shield placed beside him. A winged female, also nude, descends from heaven onto the entranced male. She holds a lyre in her left hand which is languidly lowered toward the ground. A small Eros hovers above; a tree spreads gnarled branches in the background. (Ill. 20)

8. Reclining lady, emblema of Tyche or Fortune of Alexandria. A lady dressed in flowing classical gown, lies on a bed leaning against high pillows. She wears a basket crown. The bed stands in a portico placed between two columns supporting a triangular pediment ornamented with a medallion in high relief and culminating in a palmette. A small altar is placed in front of the bed; an oak, her attribute, leans against the side.

9. Woman wearing a masked head-dress, emblema. The curly hair is partially covered by a mantle lifted from the shoulders and draped toward the back of the neck. This noblewoman has been identified with the Empress Livia, wearing a diadem in the form of the aegis of Athena.

CASE NUMBER 11, Side A—Plaster medallions and bronzes
About fifty plaster casts taken from the central disks of classical Greek silver salvers are included in the Bagram treasure. There was a great demand for replicas of Greek silverware and the easiest way to reproduce them was to first make a plaster cast and then a metal or clay mold, from which the reproductions could be cast in plaster or silver. Many of the classical Hellenistic and early Roman originals of these replicas have never been found. These plaster medallions, examples of Roman workmanship of Greek facsimiles, date mostly from the 1st Century A.D.

1. Youthful hero in a plummed helmet. Possibly an idealized portrait of Alexander the Great in the guise of Aries, the God of War.

2. Ganymede, cupbearer of the gods, offering water to the eagle of Zeus. (Color Ill. 7)

3. Aphrodite holding the Golden Apple. Probably taken from a mold for a bronze appliqué for a piece of furniture. (Ill. 19)

4. A poet and his muse with a zither.

5. Bust of a poet, sometimes identified as Menander, a famous Indo-Greek king of Kapisa (Bagram), ca. 155 B.C. Very high relief with the head in the complete round. An emblem for a very large silver dish or plaque to be used as a wall decoration. (Ill. 22)

6. Pompeian trivet shaped like a small round table, with griffin feet.

7. Small winged bronze sphinx.

8. Horseman. This Greek horseman resembles an equestrian statuette from Herculaneum believed to represent Alexander the Great.

9. The young Mercury.

10. Eros with his bow.
CASE NUMBER 11, Side B—Ivories, crystal
1. Carved ivory in the round, figure of a crouched humped bull or zebu.
2. Carved ivory plaque. Two ladies with elaborate headdresses carved in relief so high it is almost in the round. Note the Persepolian capital with back-to-back zebras. A similar example carved from limestone may be seen in the Hadda Room (Room 1, Case Number 6). On the detailed architrave may be seen bands of flying ducks, lines of elephants and, at the top, a softly incised cat and bird. (Ill. 13)
3. Carved ivory panels. A long series of panels with hunters in a complex jungle background. One horseman spears his prey, a hunter on foot with spear and shield in hand lances a lion in the rump, another horseman gallops through the trees with his hunting dog beside him, and an elephant bows before a lady.
4. Engraved crystal skyphos, or two-handled cup. The delicate design of trailing vines is ornamented with traces of gold leaf. This piece has been described by Professor B. Rowland as "a masterpiece of workmanship, unsurpassed in its great beauty of design and delicacy of execution."
5. Carved ivory head of an old elephant. Probably the leg of a stool.
6, 7, and 8. Carved ivory plaques. Scenes from the Jataka Tales, a collection of legends about the former lives of the Buddha. These pieces are the only ivories that depict religious scenes and are in a notably different technique.
9. Incised ivory plaques. To the left, two women, one playing the flute. To the right, a dancer and musician with a drum.

CASE NUMBER 12—Glassware
The collection of ancient glass recovered from Begram is unequaled. Most of the pieces date ca. 1st-2nd Century A.D., although some, such as the Pharos in Case Number 1, may date as late as the 3rd. These examples were imported from Alexandria, Egypt, and most of them reached India via the maritime trade routes.
1. White glass perfume flask in the shape of a dolphin. The fins and eyes of blue glass were attached separately.
2. Blue glass goblet with filigree case of glass ribbons.
3. Blue glass vase with vertical ribbing.
4. Blue glass vase with one handle. Pear-shaped decorated with faceted hexagons in a honeycomb pattern.
5. Blue glass vase with two handles, filigree case.
6. Dark blue glass perfume flask in the shape of a dolphin.
7. Dark blue glass vase with two handles, glass filigree case.
8. Large painted glass goblet, with scenes from the struggle between Achilles and Hector.
9. Large painted glass goblet, with a hunting scene in the upper section and fishing scene below.
10. Glass pitcher with one handle. An oenochoe, or wine flask.
11. Small glass vase, with faceted hexagons in a honeycomb pattern.
12. White glass vase.
13. Painted glass goblet. Microscopic examinations have established that the color decorations were painted on and then fired into place. They may, therefore, be truly regarded as enamels, and the pieces here are very early examples of this technique. Chemical analysis proves conclusively that these painted glasses were not made in Afghanistan, and this would be consistent with an attribution to Alexandria. (Color Ill. 5)

CASE NUMBER 13—Pottery, glass, marble
1. Bird-woman, a human-headed bird pottery vessel, covered with a blue-green iridescent glaze. The technique is Hellenistic but the facial characteristics and jewelry are Indian in style, which suggests that this exotic object was made especially for export to the east. (Color Ill. 9)
2. Porphyry plate. An import from Roman Egypt, confirmed by the fact that this stone was only quarried in lower Egypt.
3. Porphyry beaker.
4. Blue-black glass oenochoe, or wine flask. A classic shape which is also found in bronze.
5. Alabaster dish with a ram-head handle. Copied from similar shapes in bronze.
6. Alabaster two-handled jug.
7. Alabaster wine flask.
CASE NUMBER 14—Ivories
Ivory throne back. (Ill. 9)

CASE NUMBER 15—Sculpture
A bearded, cloaked herma, or statue in the form of a stone pillar surmounted by a bust. The right hand holds the folds of the cloak. The statue may represent Hermes, one of the two divine patrons of the Greek gymnasium where both mental and physical activities were necessary for a well-rounded Greek education. Hermes betokened the intellectual aspect of learning and Hercules, the second patron, the physical, athletic element. Marble, from Ai Khanoum, 3rd Century B.C. (Ill. 9)
Prehistoric Room

Afghan prehistory had been largely neglected by archaeologists until after the Second World War. Since 1949 French, American, Italian and Russian delegations, in association with Afghan archaeologists, have concentrated on identifying prehistoric sites. To date these prehistorians have only scratched the surface and no definite conclusions can be made, yet from the evidence found certain inferences can be drawn. The terminology used in this brief account does not necessarily imply contemporaneity with other Eurasian and African archaeological periods, but simply pigeonholes the industries typologically.

MIDDLE PALAEOLITHIC

The Middle Palaeolithic (Mousterian) period of northern Afghanistan is dated from 30–50,000 years ago. In 1959 L. Dupree (American Universities Field Staff, American Museum of Natural History, Pennsylvania State University) and A. Wardak (National Museum of Afghanistan) found many flint Mousterian-type flake tools at Darra Dadil and nearby Darra Chaqmaq, Balkh Province. Subsequently, more Mousterian industries were uncovered in stratigraphic context at Baba Darwesh (Darra-yi-Kur) in Badakhshan Province and at Ghar-i-Gusfand Mordeh, Faryab Province. Stone tools included cores, Levallois flakes and points (struck from a prepared core), hand-axe types, various scraper types, and flake blades. At Darra-yi-Kur the excava-
tors also found a large fragmentary human temporal bone, which appears to be transitional between Neanderthal Man and modern man. Therefore it is possible that northern Afghanistan may be a transitional zone where a variety of modern man developed physically, and, with the advent of an Upper Palaeolithic blade industry, began to revolutionize Stone Age technology.

**Upper Palaeolithic**

Archaeologists have identified two areas with Upper Palaeolithic blade industries, dating 11–30,000 years ago: Aq Kupruk, Balkh Province, and Kara Kamar and Tepe Kalan, Samangan Province. Of the 82 Aurignacian flint implements uncovered at Kara Kamar, dating about 30,000 years ago, 52 were nose scrapers, the rest blades, bladelets, and one drill. About 20,000 flint implements of the Kupru-Khan Upper Palaeolithic were excavated from three localities near Aq Kupruk, dating 11–20,000 years ago. The assemblage consists of two stone-working traditions: a blade-flake tradition with cores, utilized and retouched blades and flakes, side and end scrapers, keeled and nose scrapers, points, burins and combination tools, such as end scrapers-burins; and a micro-industry with cores, points, burins and bladelets. The excavators also found a sculptured object, an oblong pebble with incisions apparently meant to represent a human face, possibly the oldest sculptured piece found in Asia, dating ca. 15,000 years ago (see Case Number 1).

**Mesolithic**

Mesolithic industries, transitional between Palaeolithic and Neolithic, have been recorded at Kara Kamar and the dunes north of Khulm, Samangan Province, both dating about 7–9,000 years ago. Objects from this period are not represented in the present collection.

**Neolithic**

An early two-phase Neolithic had been reported from Aq Kupruk (see Case Number 2): a non-Ceramic Neolithic, about 9–11,000 years ago, with remains of domesticated animals and plants in association with flint blades, points, burins and polished bone points; a Ceramic Neolithic, about 7–9,000 years ago, with crude pottery, flint tools, stone hoes, grinders and grinding stones, polished stone axes, in addition to domesticated animals and plants. In light of the present evidence, the foothills of northern Afghanistan may be one of the early centers for the development of the wheat-barley-sheep-goat, and possibly cattle, complex of the Neolithic revolution, which permitted man to control his food supply, and ultimately, for better or for worse, led to the creation of urban civilization. A much later Neolithic, about 4,000 years ago, and in fact a possible variant of an earlier Bronze Age culture, occurred at Darra-yi-Kur, which greatly resembled similar assemblages in South Siberia, Central Asia, Kashmir and Swat (see Case Number 2). An isolated find, a polished stone axe from Darra-yi-Nur, on the edge of Nuristan, probably relates to the later Neolithic.

**Bronze Age and Civilization**

Between 4–5,000 years ago, as urban civilization rose in the major river valleys of the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates and Indus, peasant farming-herding villages served as the backbone of the economy. Control of a relatively guaranteed food surplus was necessary to support the growing cities and towns with their multitudes of fulltime religio-artisan-political specialists. Three sites in southern Afghanistan probably relate to the evolution of the elaborate complex of rural communities which supported the urban scene: Mundigak (J.-M. Casal), Deh Morasi Ghundai (L. Dupree) and Said Qala (J. Shaffer and M. Hoffman) in Kandahar Province. These three sites
tend to complement each other. Mundigak evolved from an agricultural village (with some evidence of early semi-sedentization) to a genuine town, including a granary and a Massive Monument complex. The other two sites remained farming-herding villages.

Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age objects, about 2-3,000 years ago, have been reported in northern Afghanistan and Sistan.

CASE NUMBER 1—Sculptured object
Sculptured limestone object, probably a human head, discovered by a team of Afghan and American archaeologists. The oldest sculptured specimen found in Asia, predating an absolute radiocarbon determination of 14,665 ± 215 B.C. From Aq Kupruk, Balkh Province.

CASE NUMBER 2—Bone, pottery and stone objects
1. Middle Palaeolithic of North Afghanistan: from Darra Dadil, Balkh Province, 50,000 years ago.
   1. Flint cleaver.
   2. Scraper types, probably used to flesh skins, scrape bone and wood.
   3. Burin, or engraver, to work wood and bone.
   4. Flint scraper.

II. Upper Palaeolithic: from Kara Kamar, Samangan Province, 30,000 years ago.
   1. Flint blades and steep keeled scrapers.

III. Upper Palaeolithic of Afghan Turkestan: from Aq Kupruk, Balkh Province, 15-20,000 years ago.
   1. Flint blades, cores, scrapers, burins, points, microliths.
   2. Bone tools including decorated point and spatulas.

IV. Early Neolithic: from Aq Kupruk, 9-11,000 years ago.
   1. Flint tools.
   2. Perforated stones.
   4. Hollow bone object, polished.
   5. Bone needle.
   6. Perforated pottery object.
   7. Pottery fragments.

V. Late Neolithic: from Baba Darwesh, Badakhshan Province, 4,000 years ago.
   1. Polished stone axe.
   2. Distinctive channelled and incised red and black pottery.

CASE NUMBER 3—Bronze Age, Mundigak, 3rd-2nd Millennium B.C.
1. Painted sherds, with geometric, animal and floral designs.
2. Bone implements: spatulas, awls, points.
3. “Mother Goddess” figurines, terracotta.
4. Limestone vases (?).
5. Flint and quartz projectile points, willow-leaf shape.
6. Flint bladelets.
7. Steatite stamp seals with geometric impressions.
8. Awl or spike, two spring balances or pendants.

CASE NUMBER 4—Bronze Age, 3rd-2nd Millennium B.C.
1. Copper implements: knives, points, adzes, axes, awls, chisels, hoes; needles, pins with decorated heads. From Mundigak.
2. Bronze knife and bronze awl, with bone handles. From Mundigak.
3. Baked clay Mother Goddess figurines, Zhob Valley style. From Mundigak. (Ill. 1, right) From Deh Morasi. (Ill. 1, left)
4. Fragments of bone stamp seals with geometric design. From Mundigak.
6. Seals, from Shamshir Ghar:
   a) Blackish-green, triangular steatite seal. Hole drilled through the apex above the heads of the figures. An attenuated winged creature hovers in front of an attenuated man, who appears to be drinking from a pot through a tube (copper?, see Number 10). Ca. 3rd Millennium B.C.
   b) Bone seal, one side with a winged camel, the reverse an incised bird with outstretched wings. 2nd-1st Millennium B.C. (Color Ill. 4)
   c) Bone seal, a cross on one side, the reverse snakes and a lizard.
7. Copper mirrors, from Mundigak.
9. Copper seals with geometric design. From Mundigak.

CASE NUMBER 5—Iron Age grave furniture
Ten human skeletons were uncovered in Aq Kupruk IV (Skull Cave). Many cultural items—pottery, jewelry, bronze mirrors and projectile points, iron points, knives and horse trappings—had been buried with the bodies. A representative sample of the grave furniture, plus specimens from the same period from Aq Kupruk I (Snake Cave) are exhibited below. From Aq Kupruk, ca. 2,000 years ago.
1. Copper rings, one with lapis setting still intact. Skull and Snake Cave.
2. Steatite bowl fragment with spouts. Skull Cave.
3. Bronze (?) fish hook (?). Snake Cave.
4. Copper pin head in bird shape. Skull Cave.
5. Bronze pin with rounded head. Skull Cave.
6. Polished bone point or needle. Snake Cave.
7. Two carnelian beads (Snake Cave), lapis lazuli and rock crystal beads (Skull Cave).
8. Bone pendant (?) fragment. Snake Cave.
10. Unguent jar (?). Skull Cave.
11. Incised, smoke-blackened quartzite bowl fragment. Snake Cave.
15. Terracotta male figure. Snake Cave.
16. Partly burnished goat (?) figure. handle. Snake Cave.
17. Pottery goat figure. Snake Cave.
18. Trilobate iron projectile point. Iron dagger or knife. Skull Cave.

NUMBER 6—Jars
Two large pottery storage jars, with painted designs. From Mundigak, 2nd Millennium B.C.

CASE NUMBER 7—Bronze Age objects, from Mundigak
1. Black stone handle with a step design, similar to those of the Massive Monument. Early 2nd Millennium B.C.
2. Sculptured head of a man. Limestone, ca. 2100 B.C. (Ill. 2)
3. Head of a cow or bull. Terracotta, 3rd Millennium B.C.
4. Seated man. Terracotta, 3rd Millennium B.C.
5. Headless mother goddess figurines. Terracotta, ca. 2nd Millennium B.C.
8. Enigmatic black stone object, hourglass shape. One of the oldest objects found at Mundigak, possibly pre-3000 B.C.
Examples of plain pottery fragments and objects are scattered throughout the case.

CASE NUMBER 8—Mundigak pottery
Two animal figurines; a variety of objects in different shapes (cups, bowls, vases, goblets, jars) and designs (animals, geometrics, zigzags, parallels, leaves) on red and buff pasteware. 3rd-2nd Millennium B.C. (Color Ill. 2)

Shotorak Room

The ruins of the Buddhist monastery of Shotorak sit on a steep bluff overlooking the Panjsher River, about 40 miles north-east of Kabul. The crumbling remains of seven or eight other monasteries dot the landscape nearby, silently affirming the supposition that this was an important religious center of Kapisa (Begram), the rich administrative and secular summer capital of the Kushans, two miles further north.

The monastery at Shotorak is said to have been built for a Chinese hostage prince taken by King Kanishka in the 2nd Century A.D. Although it was at its peak during the 2nd-4th Century, the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang reported nearly 300 priests still resident at Shotorak in the 7th Century. It was a large complex consisting of two spacious courtyards and ten stupas faced with schist bas reliefs depicting a series of miraculous events in the life of the Buddha. Shotorak is unusually rich in schist reliefs, a rare material not readily found in the Afghan area. It would seem likely that this monastery was patronized by Kapisa’s wealthier citizens who could afford to commission bas reliefs from this costly imported material. A number of unfinished reliefs and rough carvings indicates that the art work of Shotorak was produced locally.

Although belonging to a local school of Gandhara art, the later style of Shotorak is heavier, more rigid and schematic. The Gandhara school served the cause of the Buddhist revival begun by Kanishka and its art forms spread as Buddhism was carried from India into Central Asia and
eventually into China, changing to conform to the artistic ideals of the various regions it passed through. Most of the bas reliefs from Shotorak probably date from the 3rd-5th Century, and represent the stylistic canons of the last phase of Gandhara art.

The extremely fine exhibits from Shotorak were excavated by DAFA (J. Meunier) in 1937. The National Museum collection also includes pieces excavated by DAFA from the adjacent monastic complexes of Paitava, 1924, Qol-i-Nader, 1939, and Tepe Kalan, 1940.

NUMBER 2—Yakshi, a tree deity
Her left hand rests on a branch of the Sal tree, which blooms at her touch. An ancient Indian folk deity symbolizing fertility, Yakshi were assimilated into early Buddhist iconography where they later came to represent guardian spirits, or merely served as ornamental motifs. This example differs from Yakshi found in Indian Buddhist art by being fully draped in a diaphanous gown. (See smaller figure for contrast.) Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 3—Meditating Buddha with halo and flaming aureole
Flames rising from the shoulders symbolize the Supreme Wisdom which filled the Buddha’s body with a divine radiance at the moment of his Enlightenment. This concept may have derived from the ancient Indo-Iranian beliefs regarding the sacred fire. Brahma, left, and Indra, right, with diadem, two of Hinduism’s most prominent deities, float toward the Buddha holding umbrellas, tokens of royalty, over his head. Their presence symbolizes the subservience of Hinduism to Buddhism. Schist, from Paitava.

NUMBER 4—Penitent Buddha
After leaving his princely life in order to seek a way to free humanity from its sufferings, the Buddha sought knowledge from a group of Hindu ascetics with whom he endured six years of austere fasting and other physical punishments. At last he was reduced to a mere skeleton. Finding that this did not lead to the Supreme Truth, but only to the “realm of nothingness,” he left the ascetics and devised the Way of Truth, Buddhism. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 5—Child devotee
According to one source, this is part of a scene from the Epic of Ashoka. The Buddha Shakyamuni searching for food met two small boys playing on the ground. One of the boys, on seeing the Buddha, reverently offered him the simple gift of a handful of earth. The Buddha then predicted that the child would be reborn as the great emperor Ashoka. The figure here wears his hair in the typical style of young boys of that period, the head shaved around several long locks of hair. Schist, from Paitava. (III, 25)
NUMBER 6—Lion throne base
A standing lion with the same expression as Number 7, his tail lifted over his back. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 7—Lion throne
Sometimes used as pedestals for the Buddha figure, this throne was probably used by important monks of the Shotorak monastery. The back rest consists of a central panel in relatively low relief, depicting various floral designs and foliated scrolls. At either end nude male Yaksha stand in relief. Two seated lions with paws neatly placed before them support the seat. The small ears, small eyes and wide open mouths recall lions found in Hittite, Assyrian and Achaemenid art where they represent power and royalty. In the early Buddhist art of India, especially under the Mauryan king, Ashoka, and later popularly carried into Gandhara art during the early centuries A.D., the lion symbolized the power and majesty of the Buddha’s teaching, as well as his royal origins. “As with a kindly lion’s roar, he shall start Truth’s wheel,” says one ancient sacred Sanskrit text. The expressions of these lions, and of others in the Hadda Room, convey an attitude of friendly good humor. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 8—Lion stair step
(See Number 7 for discussion.) Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 9—Lion stair step
The pair to Number 8. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 10—Reliquary pedestal, the Buddha entering Nirvana
Nirvana expresses the Ultimate Reality, a state of release from all passion, desire and delusion and consequently from future transmigrations. The Buddha entered Nirvana at the age of 80, after 44 years of teaching (ca. 480 B.C.). Vajrapani, his bodyguard and faithful companion, kneels at the head of the reclining Buddha, one hand on the thunderbolt, his attribute, the other raised in a gesture of anguish. Ananda, his cousin and favorite companion for 25 years, kneels at the foot of the lion-paw couch in quiet adoration. He exhibits no sign of grief for he understands that Nirvana is not the dying of the soul but salvation and emancipation won through perfect wisdom. Subhadra, the last convert, identified by a stack of tripods to his left, sits in meditation under the couch. A messenger laments beside him. Three nobles from Malla, the kingdom in which the Buddha entered Nirvana, stand behind the couch, flanked by Sal trees under which his final deliverance came. Worshippers holding palm fronds frame the scene. Schist, from Shotorak. (III. 26)

NUMBER 11—Reliquary pedestal, the Buddha entering Nirvana
The iconography is almost identical to Number 10, but the treatment is more linear and schematic, a characteristic of finds from Khum Zargar, north of Begram, excavated by the Afghan Institute of Archaeology in 1966. Here Vajrapani wears Kushan dress with tunic and long boots. Subhadra’s tripod is prominently opened below the couch. A Yaksha peers out through the leaves of a Sal tree. Schist, from Khum Zargar.

NUMBER 12—Reliquary pedestal, the Maitreya Bodhisattva
The Maitreya Bodhisattva is the Future Buddha who resides in the Tushita Heaven, the Paradise of Pleasure, where Buddhas dwell prior to their appearance on earth. The concept of a Paradise of Pleasure was lavishly portrayed by the followers of Mahayana Buddhism, although the monks of the Shotorak monastery adhered to the older and intellectually more austere school of Hinayana Buddhism. The mass of people, however, was attracted to the elaborateness of the Maitreya cult which promised salvation through the medium of this Bodhisattva, without the necessity of becoming a monk. To assure the Maitreya of their devotion, many laymen commissioned decorative panels showing themselves in association with him. In this scene the Maitreya Bodhisattva stands in the attitude of reassurance, flanked by male and female donors and their children. The men on the left wear typical Indianized Kushan dress with belted tunics and full trousers tucked into high boots, while their lady companion is dressed in a flowing Kushan gown. The ladies to the right, however, wear knee-length tunics and pantaloons, still worn today in eastern countries. All the ladies wear costly jewelry and ornate hair styles. These are undoubtedly portraits of Kapisa’s wealthier citizens. Schist, from Paitava.
NUMBER 13—Maitreya Bodhisattva with donor families
Note the distinctive Kushan costumes. Schist, from Khum Zargar.

NUMBER 14—Seated Maitreya Bodhisattva
Badly weathered. Note the elaborate necklace and jeweled arm bands, the lions at the corners of the base. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 15—Seated Maitreya Bodhisattva
Mutilated, however the hand in the gesture of reassurance is well preserved. Note the wheel, symbolizing the teachings of the Buddha, or the Law of Buddhism, on the palm. The water vessel, an attribute of the Maitreya Bodhisattva, in the left hand is also well preserved. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 16—Standing Buddha with halo
The Buddha is standing in the attitude of reassurance. Note the bouquet of lotus blossoms between his feet. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 17—Maitreya Bodhisattva, stele and pedestal
Only the two feet of the standing figure remain. To the right, the corner fragment of this scene still glows warmly, polished by the touch and kiss of countless devotees standing before it in reverent supplication. A finely executed soldier in Roman warrior dress stands to the left, wearing a long broad sword attached to a belt, high-lined thonged sandals and a draped cloak thrown off the shoulders, a unique costume combining Roman and Kushan fashions. In the plinth the Maitreya Bodhisattva sits on a lion throne with legs crossed at the ankles, his hands held in the gesture of teaching. The elaborate details of the arched doorway are reminiscent of Indian rock-cave architecture found at such sites as Ajanta. Griffins adorn the capitals of the central pilasters, peacocks perch on the roof, and two celestial beings, one holding a fly whisk (symbol of royalty) and the other a musical instrument, fill the arch. Four other heavenly beings stand on lotus pedestals in the background. To the left of the archway two small male donors dressed in Kushan tunics and high boots balance two female donors in short tunics and full pantaloons. On the far left and right large figures of Yakshi stand guard, gracefully holding on to Sal trees. Ten female figures sit in a balcony above this scene, listening to the Bodhisattva preach. Such crowded, complex scenes are characteristic of the Maitreya cult of Mahayana Buddhism. Possibly this piece is of a later date than most of the Shotorak finds. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 18—Capital with four scenes
a) The Assault of Mara (Evil). Mara attempts to distract the Buddha from his meditations which brought Enlightenment and the destruction of Evil.
b) The First Sermon. The wheel symbolizes the Law or the teachings of the Buddha. His right hand reaches down to start the wheel turning.
c) Buddha meditating between two donors, one in Kushan dress.
d) Teaching Bodhisattva with female donor. Schist, from Shotorak.

Additional finds from Shotorak and Paitava are exhibited in the corridor outside the Shotorak Room.

NUMBER 1—Adoration of the Kasyapa
The Kasyapa were three distinguished Brahmin teachers who presided over a thousand ascetic disciples, a powerful order much opposed to the Buddha who labelled them hypocrites and charlatans. Their conversion was essential to the establishment of the Buddha's power, however, and he spent three months with them during which time he worked several miracles before affecting their final conversion. This scene depicting the adoration of the Kasyapa brothers symbolizes therefore the submission of Brahminical Hinduism to Buddhism. The Kasyapa, in ascetic Indian dress, flank the Buddha, seated in the attitude of reassurance. Their attendants stand beside them. Above them nine small divinities also offer homage. Two figures on the far right stand facing slightly forward. Their frontal position, the delineation of their features, patrician bearing, fashionable costume and jewelry detach them from the narrative scene. These realistic portraits represent the aristocratic Kushan couple who commissioned this extremely fine relief for the monastery. Schist, from Shotorak. (Ill. 27)
NUMBER 2—The Great Miracle of Sravasti
Although the Buddha cautioned his disciples against performing miracles in order to impress unbelievers, he himself resorted to them on a few occasions when conversion proved difficult. On the occasion depicted here he caused flames to rise from his shoulders and rivers of water (mutated lower section, not visible) to issue from his body at the same time. Brahma and Indra float toward the central Buddha figure rendered in the squat, foreshortened style typical of Shotorak. To the left a separate detail shows the Buddha delivering the first sermon. To the right the emaciated fasting Buddha sits between two devotees. At the bottom right, the Maitreya Buddha sits beneath a tree. Schist, from Shotorak.

NUMBER 3—Head of the Buddha
The head is covered with lime plaster and painted reddish-brown. The hair was modelled and added separately. An example of the late Buddhist art of Afghanistan as represented by Fondukistan, and Tepe Sardar near Ghazni now being excavated by IsMEO. Painted clay, from Tepe Kalan, 6th-7th Century A.D.

NUMBER 4—The Dipankara Jataka
The Jataka Tales, of which there are some 550, are mythological stories about the former lives of the Buddha before his final incarnation on earth as the Buddha Gautama. In the Dipankara Jataka, the Buddha Gautama had been born as a young Hindu Brahmin ascetic named Sumedha. He went to pay his respects to Dipankara, a past Buddha, with an offering of five lotus blossoms he had purchased from a young girl on his way. On seeing Dipankara approach he threw the flowers onto the path but instead of lying at his feet the flowers flew into the air to form a canopy over the holy one. Seeing the miracle, Sumedha bowed down and spread his hair as a carpet before the feet of Dipankara who then predicted that Sumedha would be born as the Buddha Gautama. The central figure of this finely executed piece is stiff, frontal and hierarchical, qualities typical of the school of Shotorak. The very large right hand with a wheel, depicting the Law or teachings of Buddha, on the palm is raised in the gesture of reassurance. Its size emphasizes the importance of the gesture and stresses the miraculous aspect of the Buddha. Flames rise from the shoulders to symbolize a divine radiance; the five lotus blossoms float overhead. To the left are three figures of Sumedha, wearing only a dhoti, the dress of Hindu ascetics, in narrative sculpture. The standing figure holds the lotus ready to throw into the path of the Buddha. Below this, another figure of Sumedha kneels with hair outspread beneath the foot of the Buddha. Above, near the head of the Buddha, Sumedha in adoration being raised in mid-air by another miracle. A haloed Bodhisattva standing at the lower right represents the Buddha Gautama in his final incarnation. In the plinth a Maitreya Bodhisattva sits in the attitude of teaching, flanked by male and female listeners carrying palm fronds and lotus blossoms. Note the extremely schematic and static treatment of this lower panel in contrast to the flowing movement of the narrative scene above, in which one feels the very thrust of Sumedha's arm as he bends back in the act of throwing the bouquet of flowers. Schist, from Shotorak. (III. 28)

NUMBER 5—The Purchase of Flowers by Sumedha
A fragment of a Dipankara Jataka relief, showing Sumedha buying lotus blossoms from the young girl, Bhadara. She sells them on condition that he promises she should be reborn as his wife for ever after. He is depicted in ascetic dress, as in Number 4. She is draped in a modest gown but smiles coquettishly, holding the prized blossoms in her right hand. Schist, from Shotorak.
Islamic Room

THE ANTIQUITIES OF EARLY ISLAMIC TIMES, PRE-1220 A.D.

Two early Islamic periods can be distinguished in Afghanistan. The first is the period of Islamic penetration. Within 30 years after the death of the Prophet Mohammad in 632 A.D. the Arabs had reached Herat by way of Sistan. At the beginning of the 8th Century Arab armies had crossed the Oxus River into what is now Soviet Central Asia. The conquest of Kabul and Kandahar came later, during the Ghaznavid Period, in the second half of the 10th Century, when the ruling kings in Kabul, the Hindu Shahis, were driven beyond the Indus River.

The second period which lasted from the final decades of the 10th Century through the 11th and 12th Century covers a time when Afghanistan was the seat of powerful kingdoms: first and foremost the glorious Ghaznavid Dynasty, which took its name from its capital Ghazni; then the Ghurid Dynasty, with its capital in Ghor in the central area of the Hindu Kush mountains. During this period Islam became firmly established in Afghanistan, and Afghanistan was a springboard for many raids into India. Each winter while Mahmud of Ghazni reigned (998–1030), Muslim armies poured from its high mountains into the plains of India, a politically divided region ill-equipped to withstand organized onslaughts from the north. The raiders usually returned from India laden with loot, which they accumulated at Ghazni or at such secondary capitals as Lashkari Bazaar and Bost, situated at the confluence of the Hilmand and Arghandab Rivers.

Of the two Early Islamic periods the first is barely represented in the museum collection. Most of the important objects in the Room of Islamic Arts date from the second period, beginning in the late 10th Century. From Ghazni come many excellent bronzes, some of the finest ever produced. Ghazni, for 150 years before its destruction by the Ghurid king Ala-ud-Din Jahansoz, in 1150, was one of the greatest cities of the Muslim world. The bronzes include plates, dishes, water jugs; stirrups and many other items; bronze plaques and panels were often decorated on both sides, not only with calligraphy and floral motifs but with human figures engaged in hunting, dancing and fighting, apparently a continuation of the artistic tradition so popular in pre-Islamic Sasanian times. The museum has an excellent collection of “Seljuk” bronzes, or so they are called in most major American and European museums. However, since the so-called “Seljuk” style post-dates the Ghaznavid period, and since there is little difference between the two styles, the term “Ghaznavid” could better be applied to both.

To the Ghaznavid bronzes and some marble sculpture from the palaces that had been collected hit or miss for years can now be added the specimens excavated by the Italian Archaeological Mission since 1959. In particular, many fine pieces of metallic lusterware, a major ceramic export from Iraq and Iran in early Islamic times, have been uncovered.

The excavations of the French Archaeological Delegation at Lashkari Bazaar (1949–52) added greatly to our knowledge of early Islamic Afghanistan. In the central cases of the Islamic Arts Room can be seen an excellent pottery cup and other fine examples of Ghaznavid ceramic styles.

In the winter palace of the Ghaznavid sovereigns, excavations have uncovered the audience hall and its iwan, small portico, with walls of baked bricks. Two large panels with
epigraphic borders and with an interlacing of cut brick around some sculptured stucco, framed the south door. One of these is on display on the ground floor of the museum, in the left wing.

The hall was decorated with paintings coated with a lime mortar. They most likely formed a frieze on the interior walls all around the iwán. These paintings probably date from the beginning of the 11th Century and represent the Turkish slaves of the Sultan’s guards. Some fragments of these paintings are on display in the Islamic Arts Room, including the top of a pillar decorated with pictorial motifs, and most particularly with a figure of an adolescent with slanted eyes and turbaned head surrounded by a sort of aureole.

After it was first destroyed, the palace was apparently rebuilt by the Ghorid dynasty. At that time, some additions were made at the extreme southern end of the audience hall. Of the two small additional rooms, one was made into a mosque which most probably served as the private room for the king. Its walls were richly decorated with sculptured stucco. This mosque has been reconstructed at the museum in its original size and with its rich decorations.

The Antiquities of the Later Muslim Periods, post-1220 A.D.

The years 1220–1221 A.D. mark the date of the greatest catastrophe in Afghanistan’s history, an event which still haunts Afghanistan and the entire Muslim world. Just prior to this date Afghanistan was one of the most civilized nations in the world: large cities developed and passed on culture, and prosperity reached down to the lowest village level. Into this area of high culture came the Mongol hordes of Ghengiz Khan to devastate the countryside and the cities. The systematic massacres of the population and the destruction of the massive irrigation systems responsible for regional prosperity dealt the eastern part of the Muslim world a fatal blow. Ghengiz Khan only destroyed; no construction testifies to his fleeting glory in Afghanistan. Although the Ghaznavid and Ghorid dynasties are represented by large collections in the museum and the landscape is cluttered with their architectural monuments, one searches in vain for some tangible achievements of the 13th Century, a century of death and destruction.

But Afghan culture slowly regained its glory. The Renaissance of the Timurid Dynasty in the 15th Century centered in Herat and produced some of the greatest artistic achievements of Medieval Islam. The architectural monuments of Herat and the school of miniature painting led by Behzad are two exquisite examples of Timurid art.

By Daniel Schlumberger
Director of DAF/DAFA, 1945–1966

CASE NUMBER 1—Ghaznavid bronzes, 10th-12th Century

1. Engraved bronze ewer, with Kufic script (an early angular Arabic calligraphy without vowel indications), repoussé lions on the neck and on the side medallions with mythical animals. These sphinx-like animals may possibly represent early Islamic versions of the Boraq, the winged horse with a
woman's face that carried the Prophet Mohammad to Paradise.
2. Engraved fluted jar, with Kufic script.
3. Engraved jar, inlaid with copper, Kufic script, bird, geometric and floral designs.
4. Engraved repoussé bowl, Kufic script, animal designs and teardrop motif. (Ill. 50)
5. Ewer with an elaborate handle. From Khurasan (?), 9th-10th Century.
6. Engraved ewer, Kufic script, and a mythical two-headed animal below the handle.
7. Engraved spout, with a repoussé mythical animal. These spouts were fitted on large ewers such as the one in Case Number 2, Number 1.
8. Cast bronze and engraved candlestick base, covered with elaborate design of foliate and animal forms. On the dome are four medallions of hunters or horsemen. It may have also served as an incense burner.

CASE NUMBER 2—Lusterware, bronze
1. Large engraved, fluted bronze ewer, with Kufic script and animal design. Ghaznavid, 12th Century.
2. Engraved bronze scale pan (?), suspended. Note the three holes for suspension, Kufic script, signs of the zodiac, a mythical animal (sphinx?) in the center medallion. Ghaznavid (Ghorid?), 13th Century.
3. Lusterware bowl, with green-brown glaze on white. Naskhi script (the later curvilinear Arabic calligraphy) and an ornate design of medallions of flying birds in the inside. Lusterware is made by applying metallic pigment on a previously glazed surface which gives an iridescent film when fired. This technique was developed in Egypt and Mesopotamia as early as the 9th Century A.D. It spread to Rayy and Kashan in Iran in the 13th Century, and their kilns became famous. This piece possibly imported from Rayy, 13th Century.
4. Lusterware bowl, with greenish-sepia glaze, with both Kufic and Naskhi script; two rubaiyat poems around the rim. In the center there is a graphic scene of a nobleman entering his palace gate with his court entourage, accompanied by lancers and a dog. Four veiled ladies, at the left, and two richly dressed gentlemen watch from the upper walls of the palace compound. Found at Ghazni, but possibly manufactured in Rayy, 13th Century. (Ill. 57)
5. Large bronze lampstand with traces of red lacquer. From Maimana, Khurasan school, 12th Century.
6. Bronze ewer, Kufic inscription, lozenge-shaped incisions, with ornate design around the base of the neck. Traces of red lacquer. From Maimana, Khurasan school, 12th Century.
7. Ornate bronze box-stirrup, with traces of red lacquer. Decoration of studs and animal motifs on top of the arch. From Ghazni, 11th Century.
8. Astrolabe, with inlaid turquoise around rim. How this early navigational instrument came to landlocked Afghanistan is a mystery, but we do know that the Arabs were pioneers in deep-water navigation and occasionally used astrolabes in the desert. Provenance unknown, Medieval Islamic period, possibly pre-15th Century.

NUMBER 3—Mural painting
A guard of Sultan Mahmud's bodyguard. Painting on plaster, from the Audience Hall of the Great Palace at Lashkari Bazaar, 11th-12th Century.

CASE NUMBER 4—Mural Painting
One of the guards of Sultan Mahmud, from the Audience Hall of the Great Palace at Lashkari Bazaar. Painting on plaster, 11th-12th Century.

CASE NUMBER 5—Painting
Head of a prince (?), a pillar from the Audience Hall of the Great Palace at Lashkari Bazaar. Painting on plaster, ca. 12th Century.

CASE NUMBER 6—Bronzes, from Ghazni
2. Ewer fragment, engraved and inlaid with silver, Kufic script. 11th-12th Century.
3. Small flagon, repoussé, with teardrop motif. 11th-12th Century.
4. Engraved oil lamp. 12th Century. (ILL. 49)
5. Oil lamp. 12th Century.

CASE NUMBER 7—Ceramics, marbles
1. Small green glazed ceramic tile. From Ghazni, 10th-12th Century.
2. Glazed bowl with stylized brown Kufic inscription on yellowish-green ground with green cross-hatchings. From Shahr-i-Gholghola, a city near Bamian destroyed by Ghengiz Khan in 1221 A.D. Early 13th Century.
3. Green glazed ceramic tile, with geometric floral design. From Ghazni, 10th-12th Century.
4. Small sepia glazed ceramic tile, with mythical animal. From Ghazni, 10th-12th Century.
5. Sepia-yellow glazed ceramic tile, with mythical animal. From Ghazni, 10th-12th Century.
6. Green glazed ceramic tile, with mythical animal. From Ghazni, 10th-12th Century.
7. Fragment of sculptured alabaster from a mihrab, the prayer niche of a mosque. From Ghazni, 12th Century.
9. Marble fragment, lion or gargoyle head. From Ghazni, 12th Century.

CASE NUMBER 8—Bronzes, from Ghazni, all 12th-13th Century
1. Engraved oil lamp.
2. Engraved flat candleholder (?), with Kufic script and mythical animals.
3. Engraved incense burner with three legs, Kufic script.
4. Small lid, with Kufic script, zodiac signs inlaid in silver.
5. Large engraved and copper-inlaid lid, with Kufic script. Khurasan school.
6. Engraved bowl, with Kufic script and mythical animals.
7. Part of a lamp base, with ornate design.
8. Small incised inkpot.

CASE NUMBER 9—Ghaznavid ceramics, from Lashkari Bazaar, all 10th-12th Century
1. Decorated glazed bowl, ornamented with white rosettes on a sepia background.
2. Unglazed white earthenware jug, with molded geometric designs.
4. Polychrome glazed bowl, decorated with triangles and fretwork.
5. Large black glazed terracotta bowl, with white stylized botanical motifs.
6. Enamelled bowl, ornamented with cobalt blue lines in the interior, champlévé.
7. Pale green glazed bowl, graffito.
8. Glazed polychrome bowl with stylized epigraphic decoration.
9. Unglazed white earthenware jug.
10. Large glazed black and brown polychrome bowl with a large bird motif.
11. Wooden tile, painted and gilded mythical animal.
12. Decorated glazed bowl, medallions ornamented with white flowers.

CASE NUMBER 10—Pottery
1. Painted clay pot, possibly a precursor of the elaborate Seljuk pottery. Three small horizontal handles on rim. Spiral designs with ornate floral variations of curvilinear lines. Early Islamic potters attempted to copy the intricate vessels of precious metals (gold, silver, electrum) favored by the Sasanians, but forbidden in early Islam. At first the potters copied the shapes and designs on unglazed clay, and by the 9th Century A.D. the fine glazed wares of the Early Islamic period had reached a high peak of perfection. From Ghazni, ca. 12th Century.

ANNEX ROOM CASE NUMBER 1—Miniatures
1. Scene showing two princes drinking at the foot of a mountain after a battle. Their groom holds a horse by the bridle. School of Sultan Hussein Mirza, Herat, 15th Century. (Ill. 53)

ISLAMIC ROOM

5. Four women offering gifts to a Muslim saint. Moghul Indian School, 16th-18th Century.
6. Portrait of a man holding a cup in one hand, a pitcher in the other. By Riza Abassi, 18th Century. (Ill. 52)
7. Portrait of a man in Central Asian dress, holding a falcon in his right hand, a belt in his left. School of Sultan Hussein Mirza, Herat, 15th Century.

CASE NUMBER 2—Miniatures
Six miniatures from the Herat School, 15th-16th Century.

CASE NUMBER 3—Miniatures
Six miniatures from the Moghul School, 16th-18th Century.

At the end of the corridor outside the Room of Islamic Art is another display area with objects from the Ghaznavid and Ghurid periods.

NUMBER 1-8—Marbles, wood sculpture
1. Bas relief, with a lion on one side, arabesque decoration on the other. Marble, from Ghazni, 11th-12th Century.
2. Bas relief, a Turkish page on one side, three Turkish dancers on the other. Marble, from Ghazni, 11th-12th Century. (Ill. 47)
4. Bas relief, with Kufic script, geometric and floral designs. Provenance unknown, ca. 11th Century.
5. Statue of the Hindu god, Brahma, a unique find by the Italian Archaeological Delegation (G. Tucci). Sultan Mahmud brought back many idols from Hindu temples in India during his repeated invasions of that country. Possibly, the idols were placed in or near mosques and palaces so that devout Muslims would walk over their faces, slowly obliterating the features. Found in Ghazni, ca. 12th Century.
6. Bas relief, a narrow band of rosettes and a frieze of different
running animals, above a broad band of ornate floral arabesques. Marble, from Ghazni, 11th-12th Century.

7. Window, with Naskhi script, floral and animal motifs. Marble, from Ghazni, early 13th Century.

8. Bas relief. On one side a hunting scene, showing a horseman with a large halo (possibly the son of Sultan Mahmud), striking at a lion attacking from behind. An antelope flees in front of his horse. On the other side, an arabesque plant motif, a frieze of running animals and an upper band of Naskhi script reading, "... sufficiency, and perfection, and beauty and elevation..." Marble, from Ghazni, 11th-12th Century.

CASE NUMBER 9—Pottery, from Ghazni, late 12th-early 13th Century

1. Blue glazed bowl. A characteristic feature of early Islamic pottery is the partial glazing of the outer surface, with the glaze seldom reaching the base.

2. Small flat dish with greenish over-glaze, graffito designs incised before application of the glaze.

3. Small bowl with greenish glaze, green dots on the inside rim.

4. Unglazed earthenware jar, with incised comb-marked design and three appliqued bosses with punctate design.

5. Small enamelled bowl of whitish glaze with cobalt blue lines in the interior. The paste is removed from several parts of the exterior surface to allow the light to shine through the glaze.

6. Unglazed earthenware ewer, with incised geometric designs.

7. Lusterware ewer in greenish-sepia glaze, with floral medallions and Naskhi script.

8. Lusterware bowl, the inner rim covered with Kufic script and floral designs, two men on horseback in the center. Possibly imported from Rayy, Iran, early 13th Century.

9. Lusterware bowl. The inner Kufic script is separated by two lines of Shekaste, a broken-line Arabic script. Two women in the center. Possibly Gurgan or Kashan ware, early 13th Century.


In the other wing of the second floor corridor are three wall cases.

CASE NUMBER 1—Sculpture
Standing Bodhisattva. From the Buddhist monastery of Tepe Maranjan, near Kabul, unbaked clay with traces of polychromy, ca. 4th Century A.D.

CASE NUMBER 2—Sculpture
A seated Bodhisattva, in Graeco-Buddhist style. Bodhisattvas were beings who compassionately delayed entering Nirvana to succour mankind. Unbaked clay with traces of polychromy, from the Buddhist monastery of Tepe Maranjan near Kabul, ca. 4th Century A.D. (Ill. 45)

CASE NUMBER 3—Sculpture
Standing Buddha. The soft folds of the drapery perpetuate the style of early Gandhara statues in stone. From Hadda, stucco, 2nd-5th Century A.D.