

Critical Reflection on Afghan Star

Afghan Star is a look into Afghan society and culture via music. However, it is necessary to have knowledge of history (See Chronology, Document 4) and geography (Images, document 5; Maps, Document 6) in order to have critical discussions of Afghanistan and its internal dimensions. Primary sources can be wonderful starting points – some of the artifacts and poems provided in the associated documents detailed below connect to *Afghan Star* in interesting ways and may challenge our initial interpretations. In reflecting on interactions in another culture, insights into our culture abound as well. At minutes 6:39, 17:00 and 35:00 of the film, fundamental aspects of democracy, such as voting and representation (mobile phone voting), accountability and preventing corruption, and means for representation could be discussed.

Ahmad Zahir, singer of one of the opening songs of *Afghan Star*, helped to popularize Sufi poetry through music (See “Ahmad Zahir,” Document 2). Popular music in Afghanistan uses the same lyrics as classical music. One can hear a Greek influence in the song – this is appropriate as Balkh was the center of the Greco-Baktrian Empire which was an outpost of Ancient Greek culture. While Afghanistan’s mountainous terrain has made it more conducive to nomadic and semi-nomadic cultures, it has had pockets of settled civilization for thousands of years. These cultures enjoyed great wealth from trade and were centers of learning and spirituality. Recently, treasures from ancient civilizations which existed in Afghanistan, were uncovered from their hiding places, where they had been protected from Taliban destruction. These artifacts provide a sense of the cultural richness, and the many layers of culture in Afghanistan (For an explanation of the artifacts, see “Afghan National Treasures,” Documents 7-9).

The major branches of Central Asian Sufism originated in Balkh (See Sufism today, Document 3). It is fitting that we study *Afghan Star* with Sufism and traditional values in mind. In order to understand the meaning of the songs, the way they are valued by Afghans, and the reactions to their performance, it is necessary to understand the values of Afghan society. Values in Afghanistan are based on Islam, local honor codes, and local ways of life. As an example, one well-known pre-Islamic honor code is Pashtunwali, which is the particular code used in Pashtun communities. Each ethnicity in Afghanistan has its own version. In Arabic-speaking countries there is also a pre-Islamic honor code, called Muruwah. It is not unique to Afghanistan because communities develop codes based on universal needs for human survival and happiness. A critical aspect of these codes is the relationship between the individual and the community. The individual is accountable to the community and must stay within the norms of expected behavior. In return, individuals are entitled to protection by the community and other benefits. Community life is essential for survival in many human contexts, and a collective sense of local identity tends to come with that. Individualism and national identities are fairly late developments in human history. These aspects of culture need to be understood before evaluating the reactions to Setara’s performance, and other interactions in *Afghan Star*.

Ahmad Zahir, 1946 – 1979, major Afghan Pop Star

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Zahir

“Even now, he and friends listen to Mr. Zahir's 22 albums and ponder their meanings. The singer set great Persian poets like Rumi, Hafiz, Maulana Jami; the Afghan poet Khalilullah Khalili; and traditional folkloric songs, to music. He sang of love, pain and God. Never formally trained as a musician, he played the accordion, the piano, the organ, and the guitar and he absorbed the Western music spilling from radios in the 1960's and 70's. Some songs sound, instrumentally at least, vaguely like the Beatles or surf music. “

- New York Times article on Ahmad Zahir

Ahmad Zahir Bio: <http://www.ahmadzahir.com/sub/biography.html>

Sufism Today

By Melinda Wightman

Introduction

Sufism, or in Arabic, *tassawwuf*, is an umbrella term which refers to Islamic mystic traditions. It is a highly diverse set of traditions, with adherents from many different walks of life and with different levels of involvement. The same linguistic root also generates from the word for wool in Arabic; hence, a sufi is one who wears a wool garment. There is an antinomial aspect of sufism that relates to sufi mystics who lived life on the margins of society and often went against cultural norms. Many of them were ascetics who wore austere clothing, such as the aforementioned rough wool garments. However, adherents to an inner path that harmonizes with codes for daily life were among the prophet's companions and the earliest Muslims, before Orthodox Islam was established. This makes it impossible to understand Sufism as a purely antinomial phenomenon. It has always been and continues to be an integral part of Islam as it is practiced, both in its inner journeys, and in its outward prescriptions for living life in accordance to God's will.

Its mainstream aspect is confirmed by the fact that it is considered to be a path to spiritual enlightenment by many in the Muslim world (though *not all*¹), and that it has been responsible for much of the conversion in the Muslim world. It has become intertwined with local traditions and folk practices of Islam, which often reflect pre-Islamic traditions of the area. Its inclusive nature, and its focus on the Qur'an as the primary source for religious interpretation, creates a more flexible and open stance toward other religious frameworks which may be seen as having emerged from the same source, the one God, or *Allah*.

There is a lot of press given to Sufism these days, whether focusing in on whirling dervishes, or citing their founder Rumi as an exemplar of ecumenical tolerance and spiritual transcendence. And it is largely due to Rumi, in fact, that sufism provides such potent imagery and ideas and has captured the popular imagination. Sufism consists of much more than the order founded by Rumi and the whirling dervishes, of course, and its practices are as diverse as the regions in which it thrives. From West and North Africa, to Turkey, to Iran and Afghanistan, sufism has many interfaces with average people and mystics alike. These include the maintenance and visitation to shrines and tombs of deceased saints, *waqfs*, buildings intended for sufi practice, and the passing on of the traditions (called by many different names: *khanakat*), as well as the many daily manifestations which occur in sayings, references, concepts in literature and popular culture, and deeply held values of average people.

Epistemology

In addition to the Islamic sciences of legal interpretation, or *fiqh*, and histories and accounts of the prophet and the early companions, or *Hadi>th*, the Sufis added a third pillar to their epistemological structure, the science of the interior world, or *'ilm al-batan*. This is, perhaps, what is so remarkable about sufism, and possibly what makes it so appealing across cultures. Individualist cultures, in particular, may find this to be an attractive concept as it focuses on the unique experience, inner experience, of an individual. However, it is important not to overemphasize the importance of this romantic notion; Sufism is integrated with mainstream Islam in most

places, particularly in connection to Islamic endowments, or *waqfs*, and over time Sufi movements have tended to place continually more emphasis on the greater good of the umma, and on practices in accordance with Islamic Law, or *shar'iyah*, rather than on individual, possibly anti-establishment, practices. Lodges continue to take members and promote their particular practices for achieving closeness to God.

Major Sufi Orders and Their Founders

Chishtiyya, The Chishti Order

Abu Ishaq Shami> "The Syrian" brought Sufism to Chisht in the early 10th century (near Herat, or modern day Afghanistan), which is how the order originally received its name. Through Abu Ish{aq, the lineage, or *silsila*, of this order can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad, and includes such notables as 'Ali bin Abi Talib, and Ibrahim Adham al-Balkhi. Sheikh Mu'i>n ad-Din of Ajmir established the order in India in the 12th century where it spread and cultivated a significant following until today.

Qadiriyya, The Qadiri Order

'Abd al-Qadir of Gilan, member of the H{anbali School of Islamic Law, started the order in Baghdad during the 12th century, though later followers did not necessarily adhere to that school. The order proliferated in Northern Africa, established a presence in Asia Minor, and a Qadiri lodge existed in Mecca as late as the 18th century. Many distinct orders derived from Qadiriyya exist now within its geographical domain across nearly every Islamic country.

Suhrawardiyya, The Suhrawardi Order

'Abu al-Naji>b Suhrawardi was the founder, and his nephew Shihab ad-Di>n 'Umar Suhrawardi propagated the order in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. Their activities occurred in Baghdad under the 'Abbasids, and many disciples founded orders upon returning to their homelands. The decentralized nature of the order allowed many of these sub-orders to take shape on their own terms. It is the most orthodox of the major orders, with emphasis on prayer, chanting, and fasting during Ramadan.

Naqshbandiyya, The Naqshabandi Order

Khoja Baha ad-Di>n Naqshband was born in the 14th century in Bukhara. He studied under both Persian-speaking and Turkish-speaking spiritual masters, and the order became widespread in both Turkish and Persian-speaking territories; this order is second only to the Qadiriyya in its geographical spread. Fidelity to Islamic law is emphasized, and there is a large degree of alignment with orthodox Islam.

¹Members of the Salafiyya movement, from the 19th century until today, condemn sufism. They consider it to be derived from superstition and connected to folk practices of Islam that they strongly disapprove of, such as ritual tomb visits and shrines to *walis* (literally "friends of God"); i.e., deceased spiritual masters or mystics. Ibn Tamiyya, an important theologian of the 13th and 14th centuries, was the first to vehemently oppose tomb worship and is the source of inspiration for this aspect of the modern salafiyya movement.

Poetry & the Literature of Sufism

The languages of Sufism include Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. The oldest languages are, of course, Arabic, the original language of Islam, and Persian, which was used by many great Sufi poets starting in the 10th century. Sufi poetry of later Islamic Empires was composed in Turkish and Urdu as well. Here are some examples that were shared during our Sufi Poetry Night on March 4, 2009.

Persian

My Soul is Like an Eagle Soaring High

Written and translated by Alam Payind

At daybreak, I heard someone groaning
Saying: we have seen from these narrow-minded
akhunds and *mullahs*, nothing but evil
In this commotion, religion has become an instrument,
And I ran away when I saw the cloak of a *mullah*

For years these *mullahs* and *akhunds* have found their ways to torture my body
But they did not capture my soul and it is still like an eagle soaring high
By closing the doors of the Sufi lodges² what have they (*mullahs* and *akhunds*) achieved?
There will come new cupbearers bearing sweet wine³
They have confiscated from Sufis their string instruments and *nay*⁴,
not knowing that the water will flow again where it used to flow before.
Day and night I long for seeing my beloved freedom,
expecting that she will return to me without her veil.
For how long should I suffer separation?
Oh Payind, come and sing your new song.

² *khanakat*

³ Wine means intoxication through closeness to God.

⁴ Flute

Sources

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Useful links

metmuseum.org/special, click "Past Exhibitions," click "February 2008"

encyislam.brill.nl/subscriber/uid=1509/entry?entry=islam_COM-1188

Arabic

Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd Al-Būsīrī

(1213–1296)

Muhammad, leader of the two worlds
and of Man and the jinn,
Leader also of the Arabs and
non Arabs and their kin.

Our Prophet, Commander of right,
prohibits evil's way,
Yet no one's speech more gentle could be
than his *nay* or *yea*.

Beloved by Allah is he upon
whose pleading we depend
From terrors of the Day of Judgment,
which on us descend.

He summoned people unto Allah,
they to him did adhere,
And clung fast to the rope that none
could ever rent or tear.

In morals and features
he, all prophets did exceed,
None could approach his knowledge,
or his bounty e'er precede.

And thus from Allah's Apostle
they acquired and did gain,
A handful of the vast sea
or a sip of gen'rous rain.

So other prophets in their rightful place
before him stand,
Regarding knowledge and the wisdom
that they understand.

He perfect is in traits concealed,
and features bright and clear,
And Man's Creator chose him
as His most beloved and dear.

Too far above all men is he
to have a partner who
Has equal qualities, because
the essence of virtue
That in him lies is indivisible,
and wholly true.

Turkish

O BELOVED

Written by Sezai Karakoç (b. 1933)

Transl. by Snjezana Buzov

First I was exiled from Your heart
All my exiles are, in a way, but a season of this exile
Outside of all rituals, parties, ceremonies, festivals
I came to you I came to fall over your feet
I came to ask for forgiveness although I don't deserve forgiveness
Do not prolong my worldly exile
To my heart hurling in the air
Like a cloud of salt
Breaking off this most incurable of loves
Ah do not prolong my worldly exile
It is from my feet, not my shoes
That one can see how tired I am

Lamps are bent
Mirrors are the angel of Scorpio
The last dream of the time-struck horse
House is not heritage it is the illusion of it
Rising like a monument to humanity
In days and nights
From the feathers and milk of the bird
That gave birth to my heart
Brought it up, nursed it
Beloved
Most Beloved
O beloved
Do not prolong my worldly exile

You are what I speak of in all poems
If I say Suna that is you, if I say Leyla that is you
From Salome, from Belkis' shadows I benefited to hide You
In vain was my effort to hide You, You are so very evident so obvious
Birds fly to imitate your heart
From Your hands spring gathers its flowers
From Your eyes the sea takes the knowledge of its infinity
O the softest, the deepest of hearts
Beloved
Most beloved
O beloved
Do not prolong my worldly exile

Years passed they left a deviating immortal trace on earth
Reaching to the stars I kept asking for you at midnights

In attics in basements
The matchless lamp illuminating my night was Your shadow
Always at Kanlica at Emirgan
On lead-colored morning twilights of Kandilli
I remained conversant with you in a life's spring, summer
Now in its sudden autumn
I came to you I came to fall over your feet
I came to ask for forgiveness even though I do not deserve forgiveness
O Jerusalem (Mary) of the time
O Egypt (Zuleyha) carrying her secret in her heart
O heart of mercy granting softness to silks
Beloved
Most Beloved
O Beloved
Do not prolong my worldly exile

In a Venus cup I saw the collapse of mountains
At the market of markets I was sold like a slave
On Constantine's wall I saw the sun turning pale
I burned in dreams with visions of You
It was Your shadow reflected always in the fountain of life
In that moment when thoughts of death overwhelmed me
With the fear of unsettled accounts
I came to You I came to fall over Your feet
I came to beg forgiveness even though I do not deserve forgiveness
Beloved
Most Beloved
O beloved
Do not prolong my worldly exile

What news there is of the birds in your homeland
There is a spring rising even from tombs
What is the use of love's executioner when there is beloved
There is an Existence on the other side of non-existence and of existence
The guilt is not always mine there is an omen that burns and ruins me
There are verses that make that poem longed for and sang
Just don't say fate there is a fate above fate
Whatever they do there is a predictability coming from the empty skies
If sun sets there is, in any case, an architect who restores the night
If I burn there is a fortress made of my ashes
There is a victory growing on defeat after defeat
With you is the key to arrive at the secret of secrets
There is a vein summoning exile in its own heart
I will not give up on you there is a plane tree in your heart called mercy
Beloved
Most Beloved
O beloved

**A Chronology of Russian/Soviet-Afghan Relations
Recent Developments in Afghanistan
Prepared by
Alam Payind**

1830's - 1917 The period of the "Great Game." The term refers to the British and Russian rivalry for paramount influence in the entire region between Russia and India – a region that includes all of Afghanistan.

1839 – British forces invaded Afghanistan. In 1842 the British forces were defeated in Afghanistan and only one soldier out of over 16,000 survived.

1885 - Russian forces occupy the Panjdeh Oasis, a province of Afghanistan. Afghans put up fierce resistance. In 1921, the Soviets under Lenin promise to return the area to Afghanistan. The promise is never fulfilled.

1893 - The British Empire imposed the Durand Line and brought a section of Afghanistan under its control

1919 – Lenin recognizes Amanullah the King of Afghanistan and supports his anti-British activities.

1921 - Afghan-Soviet treaty of friendship signed

1925 – Soviets annex an Afghan island in Amu Drya. Afghans protest. Later the Soviets withdraw from the island

1929 – Soviets support and take part in the invasion of Afghanistan to reestablish Amanullah. When Amanullah abdicates, the Soviets withdraw

1930 – Soviet troops enter Afghan territory in pursuit of Central Asian resistance groups

1933 – 1950 Soviets busy with internal purges and World War II; not much activity towards Afghanistan

1950 – When Pakistan closes its borders to Afghan transport, Soviet-Afghan trade agreement is signed

1955 – Pakistan and Iran join the Baghdad Pact (later CENTO), US refuses economic and military assistance to Afghanistan, Prime Minister Daoud turns to Soviets

1963 – After border clashes, Pakistan for the third time closes borders, Afghanistan becomes more dependent on the Soviet Union for economic relations

1965 – A pro-Soviet Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) formed

1967 – PDPA splits into two groups – Khalq (pronounced 'kalk'), led by Taraki; and Parcham, led by Babrak. Split caused by ethnic and linguistic conflicts, both were loyal to the Kremlin

1973 – Daoud stages coup and overthrows King Zahirshah. Most military supporters were Soviet-educated junior officers.

1975 – Daoud removes many pro-Soviet members of the government as he tries to shift toward non-alignment.

1977 – Under Soviet influence Khalq and Parcham factions reunite under the PDPA.

1977 – 1978 Daoud continues his move toward genuine non-alignment and the repairing of relations with Pakistan and Iran, two pro-US countries in the region

April 27, 1978 – The military and PDPA stage a coup and execute Daoud. Taraki, Amin and Karmal become new leaders of the PDPA regime

Summer 1978 – Religious and tribal people take up arms against the PDPA regime because of its links with the Soviet Union and its misguided policies of land reform, atheism, imprisonment and execution.

December 1978 – Soviet-Afghan treaty of cooperation is signed.

February 1979 – U.S. Ambassador Adolf Dubs kidnapped and killed in a rescue effort by PDPA police supported by Soviet advisors.

March 1979 – Afghan soldiers join revolt in Herat

April 1979 – Afghan army becomes ineffective and demoralized

October 1979 – Taraki is murdered by his comrade, Prime Minister Amin.

November 1979 – Soviets mobilize divisions in Central Asia. Some 4,500 Soviet advisors in Afghanistan and Soviet helicopters start combat missions.

December 24-26, 1979 – Soviets deploy 105 Airborne Division to Kabul

December 27, 1979 – Soviet troops occupy Afghanistan, Amin is murdered by Soviet Airborne and KGB forces. Karmal, who came with Soviet troops to Afghanistan, is put at the head of the PDPA regime by Soviets. As soon as the Soviet troops occupy Afghanistan, the civil war becomes a war of liberation, a jihad against the non-believers.

Early 1980 – Central Asian troops replaced by more politically reliable troops.

Spring 1980 – First of the six-failed Soviet offensive in the Panjshir Valley

1982 – First Geneva talks. PDPA, Pakistan, the Soviets, and Iran involved. The Afghan resistance not involved in talks.

1984 – Additional Soviet troops enter Afghanistan. There are 120,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

February 1986 – Gorbachev labels the Afghan crisis as a “bleeding wound.”

May 1986 – Under the Soviet occupation, Karmal is replaced by his fellow Parchami, Dr. Najibullah, former head of the Afghan Secret Police, who was trained by the KGB.

Second half of 1986 – The U.S. supplies stingers anti-aircraft missiles, deprives the Soviet ground forces of their air protection.

April 14, 1988 – Under the provisions of the Geneva Accords, Gorbachev opts to cut the Soviets' military and political losses and withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

May 15, 1988 – Soviet troop withdrawal started

February 15, 1989 – Soviet troop withdrawal complete by the flow of weapons and advisors never stops

1991 – Both the United States and the Commonwealth of Independent States stop weapon deliveries to Afghans.

March 1992 – Najibullah's government suffers from lack of military and economic support from its supporters.

April 16, 1992 – Najibullah is ousted by his former pro-Soviet communist fellows

April 25, 1992 – Kabul fell to Mujahidin after 14 years of war including 10 years of Soviet occupation (1979-1989) and after estimated 1.5 million deaths and more than five million refugees.

1992-94- Battles among corrupt Mujahidin groups reduce much of Kabul to rubble. Mullah Muhammad Omar with the support of Pakistan sets up Taliban movement.

1996- Leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, who had fought with mujahidin groups against Soviet occupation in 1980s, returns to Afghanistan.

September 1996 – Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, fell to the Pakistan-supported Taliban movement. The Civil War between the Taliban and Mujahidin continues. In approximately 90% of

Afghanistan, there is no active resistance against the Taliban. In 10% of Afghanistan, there is active resistance – by the Northern Alliance.

September 9, 2001 Ahmad Shah Masud the leader and commander of opposition to the Taliban is assassinated by two Arab suicide bombers posing as journalists.

September 11, 2001 Al-Qa'eda terrorist attacks on the United States.

October 7, 2001 – U.S.-lead attack on Al-Qaeda and Taliban positions began.

December 22, 2001 – Under the U.N. mediated decision in Bonn, Germany, an interim Afghan government was formed in Post-Taliban Afghanistan headed by Abdul Hamid Karzai.

June 19, 2002 – A nationwide Loya Jirgah chose Hamid Karzai to head the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan.

November 3, 2003- Draft constitution presented after 11 months of work by a 35 member commission, with local meetings for public input.

Dec.14, 2003- 502-member Loya Jirgah convenes to debate constitutional draft.

January 4, 2004 – After almost one month of deliberations a constitutional Loya Jirgah ratified the final draft of 162-item constitution creating an Islamic state under a presidential system, opening the way for presidential and parliamentary elections.

August 20, 2004- After a nearly year-long process during which 12 election workers killed, about 10.6 million Afghans are registered to vote.

Sept. 7, 2004- 30 days of campaigning starts for presidential election.

October 9, - Under the terms of this new constitution, presidential elections were held in all 34 provinces of the country. After addressing some complains by other candidates, the Joint Election Management Body declared Hamid Karzai as winner. He received 55.4% of the

8,024,538 votes. Yonus Qanooni held the second position with only 16.3% of the votes

Dec. 7, 2004- Karzai sworn in for 5 years as the elected president of Afghanistan.

Sept. 18, 2005- 12.5 million registered Afghans elected 249 members for the Wolesi Jirga (House of Representatives) and 102 members for the Mishrano Jirga (Senate) of the parliament.

April 2006 – Resurgence of the Taliban in Southern and Eastern parts of Afghanistan.

Images

There are many different ethnicities in Afghanistan, who can be recognized by the way they dress, their facial features and other characteristics. These images include very good portraits which give some idea of the cultural diversity of Afghanistan. In addition, there are scenes related to the Sufi traditions of Afghanistan.

NYT, Kabul piece:

http://www.nytimes.com/packages/khtml/2007/01/19/travel/20070121_KABUL_FEATURE.html

Key aspects of geography, daily life, and historical sites are represented in this selection of photos taken in 2007.

Photos by Tom McClimans:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Melinda.Wightman/AfghanistanPhotos?feat=directlink>

Political maps of Afghanistan, what is considered the Modern Middle East (West Asia/North Africa), and Central Asia.







Uncovering Rich and Complex Layers of Afghan National Identity

By Melinda Wightman

The Middle East Studies Center staff and interested community members took a trip to the National Gallery in Washington last August to take advantage of the unique opportunity to view “Afghan National Treasures,” an exhibit organized by National Geographic. These artifacts are, indeed, national in their significance, representative of many parts of the multi-faceted Afghan identity, and testament to the richness and complexity of the country’s historical and contemporary culture. Understanding of the country’s Greek past gains new clarity when looking at artifacts that could have been taken from a dig near Athens, such as a statue of a Greek warrior (see photo, right), one of the objects re-discovered when the contents of the museum were found in their place of safekeeping in the presidential palace.

Ai Khanum, where many of the artifacts were originally uncovered, was a Greek colony far from the center of the Empire, but quite pure in its keeping of Greek customs and arts. (In addition, Tepe Fullol provides insights into a past culture of the area that is more elusive for contemporary archeologists, exhibiting exchanges with Indus and Mesopotamian cultures. One gets a sense of the hybrid nature of Tilla Tepe and Begram just by looking at the wide cultural variety of the treasures found in those two excavations. In the words of the Tilla Tepe site’s discoverer, Viktor Sarianidi:

“Nowhere in antiquity have so many different objects from so many different cultures—Chinese-inspired boot buckles; Roman coins; daggers in a Siberian style—been found together in situ (i.e., in the context in which they were left.)” (“Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul” exhibit catalogue, p. 215).

In fact, the owners of the gold, who wore many of the most interesting pieces found, were nomads who had made their settlement on a prior Bactrian structure. They were most likely nobles of the Kushan who formed their empire on the ruins they had made of the Greco-Bactrian civilization which had previously resided there. Among many of the individual objects at Tilla Tepe, one finds a cultural hybrid that evokes a combination of Greek, Indian, and Chinese impressions, as well as an aesthetic all its own.

If you would like to learn more about the history of these discoveries, as well as other facets of Afghan culture today, the Middle East Studies Center now has the following additions in the lending library:

“Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul,” edited by Fredrik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon (The Official Companion to the Exhibition)

“Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures,” DVD companion to the exhibition, narrated by Khaled Hosseini

“Afghanistan Untouched,” a two-CD set of Afghan folk tunes, all recorded in the field by ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin prior to the Soviet invasion

“Children’s Songs from Afghanistan: Qu Qu Qu Barg-e-Chinaar,” by Louise M. Pascale, book and CD of songs



Related Articles

On the treasure:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bactrian_Gold
news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/11/photogalleries/afghan_treasure/
news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/11/1117_041117_afghan_treasure.html
nytimes.com/2008/05/23/arts/design/23afgh.html?_r=1

On the Bactrian Empire:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bactria
On the Bronze Age and its Ecological Effects:
<https://www.geology.ucdavis.edu/~cowen/~GEL115/115CH4.html>

A time line of Post-Soviet and Taliban period

End of 10-year Soviet Occupation/
four years of Nagib government

National Museum personnel placed
on non-active status late in the year

December 31 - Two major
works from Shotorak are stolen

Museum struck by a rocket
while being used as a military base

Roof is destroyed
and more treasures perish after steel
doors are installed

1992

1993

1994

1995

Items on Display:

Treasures Unearthed from Tilla Tepe

Treasures were unearthed in the midst of a project in northern Afghanistan lead by archeologist Viktor Sarianidi to gain further information about the Greco-Bactrian civilization during the 2nd millennium BC. The project was abruptly ended in 1979 when the Soviets invaded, just as the treasures were found at Tilla Tepe (near Sheberghan, in Northern Afghanistan, from the Turkic *Tilla Tepe*, meaning hill of gold). The treasures contained the contents of tombs of wealthy nomads dating from early in the Common Era (around 100 CE, including gold and silver jewelry from a number of civilizations, Bactrian crafts, and Roman, Parthian, and Greek coins. The site had been a Bactrian structure, thought to be a temple by Sarianidi, with a later settlement on top and burial area for a nomadic people, possibly of the Kushan Kingdom, created in the second century when Kushan nomads from what is now western China and Scythian nomads united to conquer the Greco-Bactrian culture.

The central figure of this belt decoration (below, left) presents a mystery to archeologists and other scholars, as it seems to depict Dionysus, but has the features of some of the local goddesses at the time. It looks like a man in most respects, wearing a Greek hair knot, but he seems to be drawing milk from his breast into the vessel he is holding.

This phial, or bowl (below, center), provided a resting place for the male noble's head in the tomb at Tilla Tepe. Herodotus regarded such phials as symbolizing royal authority among the Scythians, but each of the deceased had similar headrests, so it may be that they had no particular significance other than to display the headdresses and make a more honorable burial arrangement.

The animal figure (below) is a depiction of a Marco Polo ram, described by Marco Polo in an account from 1273. The horns on this sculpture are not exaggerated; it is a species that still exists in Afghanistan, though it is threatened with extinction.



Recent History

Another amazing aspect of these treasures is their history in the 20th and 21st centuries. Thought to be lost for 25 years, the treasures had been hidden for safekeeping from the Soviets and, later, the Taliban. They had been placed in the vaults of the central Bank of Afghanistan in 1988 by the curators of the National Museum who kept silent until it was deemed safe to reveal the location. In 2003, President Karzai confirmed that the precious artifacts had remained safe. In 2004, an inventory project, the data kept in English and Dari, began in partnership with the National Geographic Society (22,607 objects were listed, 20,587 from Tilla Tepe).

A detailed history can be read here: spach.info/ehistoryplan.htm#2



Treasures Found at Begram

Other treasures from the national museum at Kabul include items from Begram, aesthetically representing exchange with Indian and Chinese culture as well as Greek and Roman. The carved decorative plaque (below) is Indian in origin and is one of several which depict life in women's quarters. The glass vessel (above) shows the story of the battle between Hector and Achilles, according to some scholars. The blue glass vessel shown on the back cover is Roman in origin.



Sources: "Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul"; Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures DVD; interview with biologist George Schaller on "Saving the Marco Polo Sheep," NPR: npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5300762

Photos: Ra'uf Mehrpour

Ministry of Cultural Works & Information removes the remaining contents of the museum

Some items are moved to the Kabul Hotel and spared, but items placed in the museum's storerooms are looted by the Taliban

Taliban decided all representational art must be destroyed: 2,500 pieces of art were destroyed in the country, including the world's largest Buddha statues at Bamiyan

1996

1997

1998

1999

2000

2001

Afghan Treasures unearthed

Afghan cultural identity has connections to the treasures of Tilla Tepe and other archeological sites. As a crossroad of migration and trade, Afghanistan's artifacts reveal exchange with travelers and merchants from the Mediterranean to China.



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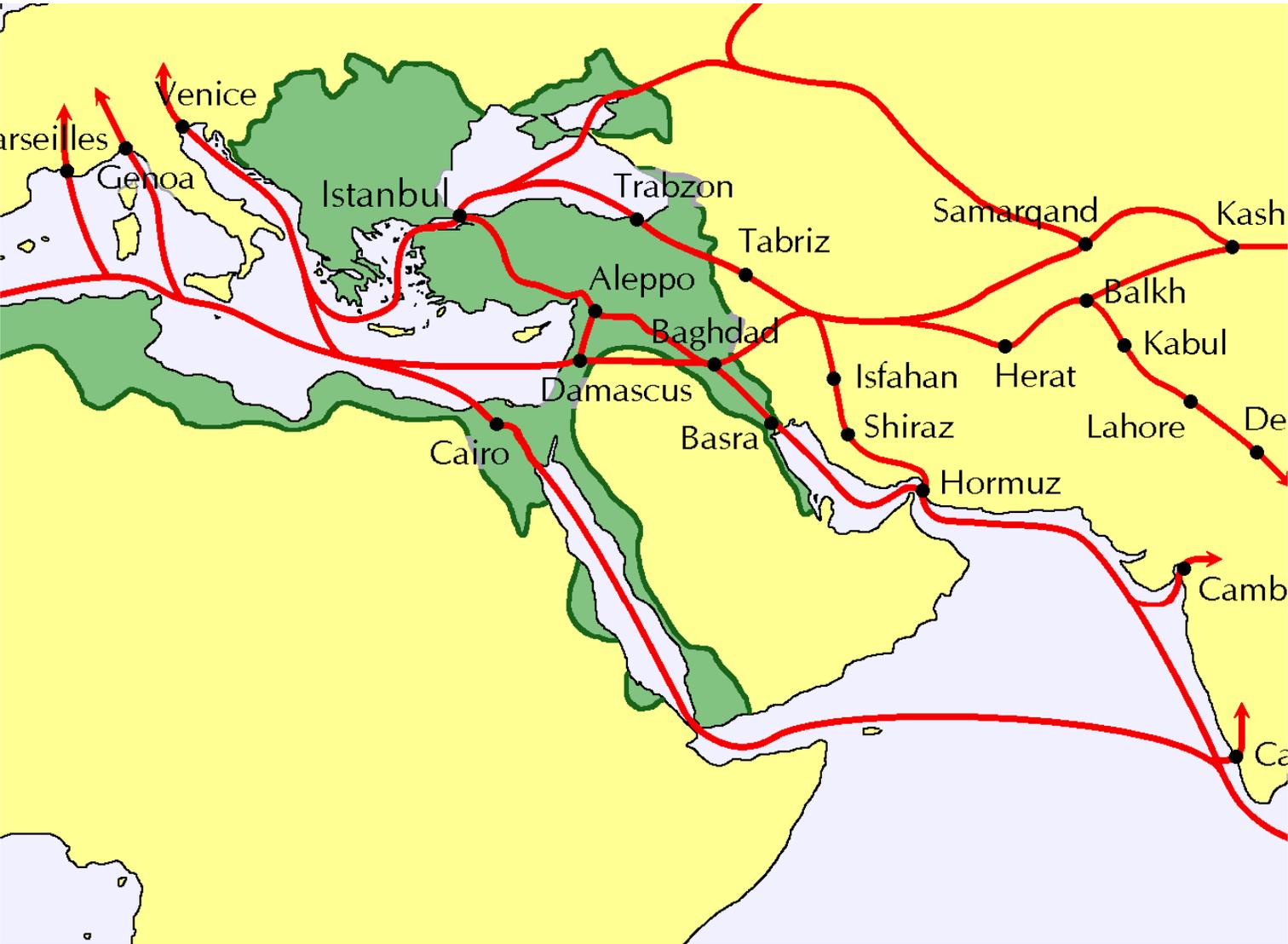
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Afghan National Treasures

Bactrian Civilization

- Ai Khanum was a Greek colony, far from the center of the Empire, founded by Alexander the Great.
- The Greco-Bactrian civilization grew from that settlement, became powerful.
- Modern day Balkh was the city of Bactra during Greco-Bactrian times.

Balkh Remained Significant on the Traditional Trade Routes



Treasures Timeline

A time line of Post-Soviet and Taliban period

End of 10-year Soviet Occupation/
four years of Nagib government

National Museum personnel placed
on non-active status late in the year

December 31 - Two major
works from Shotorak are stolen

Museum struck by a rocket
while being used as a military base

Roof is destroyed
and more treasures perish after steel
doors are installed

1992

1993

1994

1995

Treasures Timeline



Sources/Further Reading

Bactria:

Alexander the Great and Bactria: The Formation of the Greek Frontier in Central Asia. New York: E.J. Brill. 1988

Bactria: An Ancient Oasis Civilisation From the Sands of Afghanistan," edited by Giancarlo Ligabue and Sandro Salvasori.

Treasure:

"Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul," edited by Fredrik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon (The Official Companion to the Exhibition)

"Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures," DVD companion to the exhibition, narrated by Khaled Hosseini

History of the Treasures:

The treasures were unearthed in the midst of a project to gain further information about the Greco-Bactrian civilization during the 2nd millennium BC. The treasures found at Tillya Tepe (from the Uzbek *Tilla Tepe*, meaning hill of gold) were the contents of tombs of wealthy nomads dating from the early in the Common Era (around 100AD); they included gold & silver jewelry from a number of civilizations, Bactrian crafts, and Roman, Parthian and Greek coins. The site had been a Bactrian structure - thought to be a temple by Sarianidi, the archeologist who discovered it - with a later settlement on top and burial area for a nomadic people, possibly of the Kushan Kingdom.

Source: [Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul](#) (for sale at the National Gallery - we will bring a copy)

Related Articles:

On the treasure:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bactrian_Gold

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/11/photogalleries/afghan_treasure/

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/11/1117_041117_afghan_treasure.html

[New York Times article](#)

On the Bactrian Empire:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bactria>

Recent History:

Another amazing aspect of these treasures is their history in the 20th and 21st century. Thought to be lost for 25 years, they had been hidden for safekeeping from the Soviets and later the Taliban. They had been placed in the vaults of the central Bank of Afghanistan in 1988 by the curators of the National Museum. They kept silent until it was deemed safe to reveal their location. In 2003 President Karzai confirmed that the precious artifacts had remained safe. In 2004 an inventory project, the data kept in English and Dari, began in partnership with the National Geographic Society. 22,607 objects were listed, 20,587 from Tillya Tepe.

A time line covering the Post-Soviet and Taliban period:

1992 - End of Soviet Occupation

1992 - late in the year the personnel of the National Museum placed on non-active status

1992 - December 31st - 2 major works from Shotorak were stolen

1994 - Museum was being used as a military base, struck by a rocket

1994 - after steel doors had been installed the roof was destroyed and more treasures perished

1996 - Ministry of Cultural Works & Information removed the remaining contents of the Museum

1996 - some items were moved to the Kabul Hotel and were spared, but the items placed in the Museum's storerooms were looted by the Taliban.

2001 - Taliban decided all representational art must be destroyed - 2500 pieces of art were destroyed in the country, including the Buddha statues at Bamiyan.

A detailed history can be read here: <http://spach.info/ehistoryplan.htm#2>