

NŪR

Winter 2022 - Vol 6, no. 2



The Magazine
of the Center for
Arab & Islamic
Studies

The Historical and
Cultural Legacy of
Afghanistan

مرکز الدراسات العربية والإسلامية

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Nur Magazine
Winter 2022 ©

From the Director's Desk...

Afghanistan has been derisively called the “graveyard of empires,” and characterized as a brutal and barren land. More accurately, however, it should be called the “desire of empires,” for many have coveted this strategically located land through which the Silk Road once passed. During its long history, Afghanistan has attracted ancient Persians and Hellenistic Greeks, Hindu kings, Buddhist monks, Christian missionaries, Zoroastrian kings, Muslim caliphs, Safavid and Mughal Shahs before the coming of the British, Soviets and Americans.

This issue of NŪR celebrates the rich historical and cultural legacies of Afghanistan. Although most of Afghanistan's works of art are housed in the National Museum in Kabul (where they have reportedly been secured by the Taliban government), many museums in Europe and North America have artefacts from Afghanistan in their collections. A selection of these treasures can be seen in this issue.

Readers can also explore the significance of Kabul for the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; visit the shrine of 'Abdullah Ansari of Herat, one of the great Muslim mystics of the 11th century; learn the importance of lapis lazuli – mined in Afghanistan – for the ancient Near East and for European painting in the Medieval Period and Renaissance; and travel to Balkh to see the Noh Gumbad Mosque, the earliest surviving Islamic structure in Afghanistan and one of the oldest in the region. Readers will find recommended reading in Afghan history and culture, in addition to new titles in Arab and Islamic Studies.

Five months have passed since American and coalition forces withdrew from Afghanistan after a twenty-year occupation and war – a war that resulted in what the US feared most: a Taliban-ruled country. Last August, we watched nervously as American and Afghan allies crowded into the Kabul Airport, waiting for flights out of the country now controlled by the Taliban. It was a heart-rending scene as desperation and terrorism continued to claim the lives of civilians and soldiers in the final hours of a twenty-year old conflict.

All this has quickly faded from the minds of many, however, and the State Department and Pentagon are eager to shake the dust of Afghanistan from their feet. Yet, for the Afghan people, the destruction due to war has only been replaced with the desperation caused by food shortages and famine. The United Nations estimates that nearly 23 million Afghans — about 55 percent of the population — are facing extreme levels of hunger, with nearly 9 million at risk of famine this winter (Reuters 12/30/21), a situation exacerbated by US-led sanctions against the Taliban government. Some families have even resorted to selling their children – particularly daughters - to support the others. A number of NGOs are working to alleviate crisis, and readers are urged to contact UNHCR, UNICEF and other reputable relief agencies organizations to make donations.

As this new year unfolds, and as we face challenges both at home and abroad, let us not forget Afghanistan which have given so much of itself to the world. With best wishes for a happy, healthy and peaceful new year,

Fr. Michael D. Calabria, OFM, PhD

السلام عليكم
peace be upon you



Imperial Kabul (1504-1738)

By Michael D. Calabria, OFM, Ph.D

Last summer, as Americans and their allies evacuated Afghanistan after a twenty-year occupation, many westerners got their first views of Kabul on television as some 120,000 soldiers, diplomats and refugees crowded into the airport awaiting flights out of the country. The disorder was exacerbated when members of ISIS-K launched attacks at the airport and a Kabul hotel, killing sixty Afghans and thirteen American service members. Like many other Afghan cities, the last twenty years has taken its toll on Kabul. Refugees from other parts of the country have poured into the city, swelling its population from 1.5 million in 2001 to six million currently, overwhelming its infrastructure, employment opportunities, food supplies, healthcare, and housing.

This is indeed a tragic episode in the country's capital which has had a far more illustrious and important history than the twenty-first century would indicate. During the period of the great Mughal emperors (1526-1707), Kabul was a city of considerable strategic importance. Located on the northwestern frontier of the empire, its imposing fortress-palace complex, the Bala Hissar, or "High Fort" (fig. 1), covering an area of

more than hundred acres, served as a bastion against the incursions of Safavid Persians, Afghans and Uzbeks. Along with Kandahar to the south, Kabul was one of the two "gates" connecting Khurasan (central Asia) to Hindustan (south Asia). The significance of Kabul is attested by the frequent references to the city in the royal chronicles and the numerous paintings depicting events in the history of the city and region. In many ways, the history of Kabul is the history of the Mughal Empire.

Babur (r. 1526-30)

It was the first Mughal emperor, Muhammad Zahir al-Din Babur who incorporated Kabul into his nascent kingdom. Babur was descended from the Central Asian conqueror Temür (1336-1405) and the Mongol ruler Chinggis Khan (1162-1227), and succeeded his father as ruler of the Ferganah Valley in what is today Uzbekistan. When he was driven from Ferganah by the Uzbeks, Babur fled south with his army and seized the city of Kabul in 1504 which previously had been under the rule of his uncle Ulugh Beg Kabuli (d. 1502).



Fig. 1. Bala Hissar, Kabul.



Fig. 2. *Babur Entering Kabul*. 16th century CE. Walters Art Museum (W.596.16A).

An illustrated version of Babur's memoir (*Baburnama*), now in the Walter's Art Museum, depicts his entrance into the city (fig. 2). In contrast to later paintings which show an epic battle, this version shows the surrender as Babur described: "Toward the end of Rabi' I [September], through God's grace and favor, I regained once more the kingdom of Kabul and Ghazni without bloodshed." We see him riding through the city gate, his leg kissed in obeisance by Qasim Beg, the city's *qadi* (judge). He is accompanied by standard bearers and musicians who herald his entry with trumpet blasts, clashing cymbals and the beat of drums. In a pavilion above the city gate, additional drummers announce his arrival.

In this chronicle, Babur describes Kabul at length:

As the entrepôt between Hindustan and Khurasan, this province is an excellent mercantile center...Every year seven, eight, or ten thousand horses comes to Kabul. From Hindustan,

caravans of ten, fifteen, twenty thousand pack animals bring slaves, textiles, rock sugar, refine sugar, and spices...Goods from Khurasan, Iraq, Anatolia, and China can be found in Kabul, which is the principal dept for Hindustan. (f. 128)

Kabul's far-reaching commerce was reflected by its linguistic diversity, as Babur notes, including "Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Mongolian, Hindi, Afghani, Pashai, Parachi, Gabari, Baraki, and Lamghani."

It was from Kabul that Babur launched his campaigns into northern India where he defeated the sultan Ibrahim Lodi at the Battle of Panipat in 1526. This marks the beginning of Mughal rule in South Asia. In time, the Mughal Empire would reach from Kabul in the west to Bengal in the east – a distance of some 1500



Fig. 3. *Babur supervising the laying out of the Garden of Fidelity*. Bishndas with portraits by Nanha. C. 1590 CE. Victoria and Albert Museum (IM 276-1913).



Fig. 4. Babur's burial place in the Babur-e Bagh, Kabul.

miles. During his time in Kabul, Babur oversaw the construction of at least ten gardens in the city. In a painting from a copy of the *Baburnama* (ca. 1590, fig. 3), we see the emperor personally supervising workers in the first of his gardens, the "Garden of Fidelity" (*Bagh-e Vafa*) divided into quarters by water channels, planted with oranges, citrons, and pomegranates, and surrounded by a red sandstone wall. It was in such a garden that Babur wished to be buried. Thus, when he died in Agra, more than 700 miles to the southeast, his remains were returned to Kabul (ca. 1544) and interred in a sprawling garden bisected by a water channel that cascades down 15 terraces (fig. 4). Although the *Babur-e Bagh* (Babur's Garden) was heavily damaged during the factional fighting in Kabul (1992-96), it was later restored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (2002-06). In recent years, it has drawn more than one million visitors annually.

Humayun (r. 1530-40 / 1555-56)

Babur's eldest son and successor was born in Kabul's citadel. He was twenty-four when he ascended the throne in Agra. As the empire was now centered in northern India, Humayun ruled from Delhi and gave his brother Kamran rule of Kabul while Askari ruled in Kandahar. Kamran and his brothers never accepted Humayun's sovereignty in Hindustan, however, and refused to come to Humayun's aid when he was driven from the throne by the Afghan nobleman Sher Khan Sur in 1539. Instead of offering Humayun sanctuary in Kabul, Kamran sent an army out against his brother who was then forced to seek refuge with the Safavid Persian Shah Tahmasp. With assistance from the Persians, Humayun was able to drive his brothers from Kandahar and Kabul in 1545.

Before crossing into Persian territory, Humayun had decided it was best to leave his infant son Akbar (b. 1544) in the care of his brother Mirza Askari in Kan-



Fig. 5. Madhava (attributed). *The Young Akbar Recognizes His Mother* (detail). Ca. 1596-1600 CE.
Freer Gallery of Art (F1939.57)

dahar. Before Humayun's return, Kamran had the child brought to Kabul. It was there that the child Akbar was reunited with his father and mother Hamida (Maryam-Makani). In order to demonstrate Akbar's intelligence to his court, Humayun had Hamida concealed among the other ladies of the household without any distinction:

The apple of the emperor's eye was then told to pick out his mother from among the ladies, and His Imperial Majesty [Akbar], by divine light and with no mistake or error, went straight to her and sat in her lap.

That scene is captured in a painting now in the Freer-Sackler collection (fig. 5). We see Humayun, easily identified by his distinctive pointed headgear, known as the *taj-e izzat*, which he introduced to the Mughal court after his stay at the Safavid court. Hamida sits opposite her husband ready to take her infant son into her arms.

Like the other ladies, she wears a traditional cap of eastern Uzbekistan, the Mughal homeland.

Although Humayun had been able to wrest Kabul from Kamran's control, Kamran continued to rebel against his brother and retook the city twice before being decisively defeated in 1553. The scene is captured in a painting from the *Akbarnama* (fig. 6), the royal chronicle of Akbar, Humayun's son and successor. Brandishing a spear, Humayun (center right) routs his brothers' forces as Kamran (upper right) hurriedly flees Kabul. The walled city can be seen in the upper left. Soon after his retreat, Kamran was captured, blinded and sent into exile in Mecca to contemplate his traitorous life until his death.

It was only after securing his position in Afghanistan that Humayun was in a position to lead an army into Hindustan to reclaim his throne; but tragically, just months returning to his former kingdom, he died after falling down the steps of his observatory in Delhi.

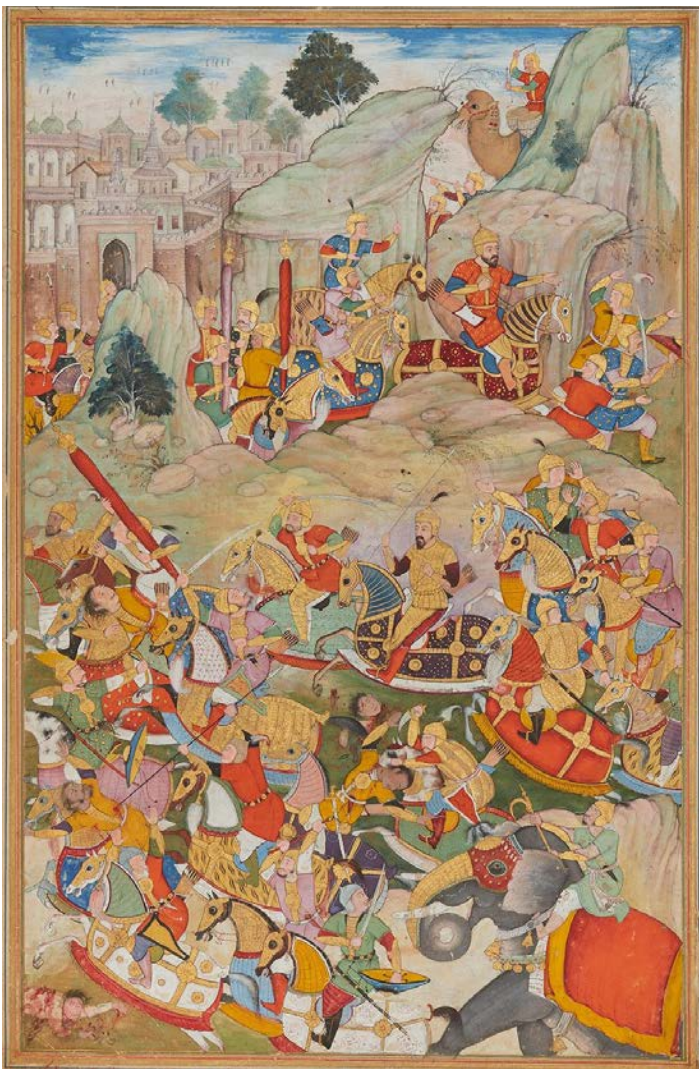


Fig. 6. Mahish, with portraits by Padarath. *Humayun defeats his rebellious brother Kamran at Kabul*. 1590-95 CE. Aga Khan Museum (AKM 133).

Akbar (r. 1556-1605)

Humayun was succeeded by his 13-year-old son Akbar in 1556. Akbar's younger half-brother, Mirza Muhammad Hakim (b. 1554), received the rule of Kabul province (like Kamran Mirza before him), but until he came of age, his mother Mah Chuchak Begum managed the affairs of state. Intent on protecting her son's rule of Kabul and her own position, she successfully led an army against the forces of Akbar and maintained Kabul province as an independent state. Once he came to maturity, Mirza Hakim proved to be a persistent threat to Akbar's rule of Hindustan just as Kamran Mirza had been to Humayun. Akbar finally brought his brother to heel in 1581, and appointed his sister, Bakht-un-nissa Begum, as ruler of Kabul. As Ruby Lal has commented, this "is a fact of no little significance. It portrays the extremely high profile of some of the senior Mughal wom-

en, and the power they could sometimes attain."¹ After Mirza Hakim's death in 1585, Akbar incorporated Kabul city and province into his realm and appointed his trusted Rajput general, Man Singh (d. 1614), as its first governor (subedar).

In a near contemporaneous portrait (fig. 7), we see the Raja, leaning on a staff, wearing a turban as was the practice for both Hindus and Muslims of the time. Over his orange trousers, he wears a diaphanous jama that is tied on the left side (visible under his left arm) according to Hindus custom, whereas Muslims tied on the right side. Tucked into his embroidered sash (*patka*) is a large push-dagger (*katar*) in its scabbard. The portrait was later inherited by Akbar's grandson Khurram, who later ascended the throne as Shah Jahan. Shah Jah-

¹ Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 207.



Fig. 7. *Raja Man Singh of Amber*. Ca. 1590. Metropolitan Museum of Art (1982.174).



Fig. 8. Silver rupee minted by Jahangir in Kabul. Dated 1027 AH (1617/18 CE).

an had a special connection to the raja: he later bought the raja's property in Agra to build the Taj Mahal.

Jahangir (r. 1605-1627)

Two years after Jahangir inherited Akbar's throne, he travelled from Lahore to Kabul which, he wrote, was "like a home for us," alluding the origins of the Mughal Empire in that city under Babur. Jahangir's presence in the city was a timely one for the Safavids had recently launched an attack on Kandahar. His presence in Kabul and the army sent to relieve Kandahar therefore also served as a show of strength to his Persian rival even as he enjoyed the change of scene. While in Kabul, Jahangir strolled through the seven gardens that had been made by various members of the royal family since Babur's time, including one built by his grandmother Hamida Banu Begum (Maryam-Makani), and even purchased land for his own garden. He visited Babur's grave where he "ordered a lot of money and much food, bread, and halvah distributed to the poor for the repose of the dead." Jahangir's munificence may have resulted in a cash-flow problem for the emperor as he had both gold and silver coins minted in Kabul (fig. 8).

Before leaving the city, he engaged in even more charity by performing the *tuladan* for his son Prince Khurram on his sixteenth (lunar) birthday. In this ceremony, the prince was weighed against gold and silver coins, and a variety of luxury items which were given as

gifts to courtiers, and as charity to the poor and needy. A painting made to accompany Jahangir's memoirs (Jahangirnama) records the event (fig. 9). In a palace courtyard, the ground covered with sumptuous carpets and shaded by a red canopy, Jahangir weighs his haloed son who sits cross-legged in a large scale decorated with gold, rubies and other precious gems. The emperor is assisted by his Commander-in-Chief (Khan-i Khanan), dressed in white, as courtiers look on, among them Abu'l Hasan Asaf Khan (wearing a striped jama) to whose daughter Shah Jahan had recently been betrothed.

While Kabul remained firmly within the boundaries of the Mughal Empire during Jahangir's reign, Kandahar did not as previous events had presaged. In 1622, the Safavid Shah 'Abbas attacked and seized the city which had been under Mughal control since Akbar's reign. Jahangir, who was vacationing in Kashmir, ordered his son Khurram, now dubbed Shah Jahan ("King of the World"), to head west and retake the city. Shah Jahan, however, urged caution and ultimately refused his father's request as he suspected that his father and the Empress Nur Jahan were plotting to designate one of Shah Jahan's (half-) brothers as heir to the throne. This marked the beginning of Shah Jahan's rebellion against his father and their estrangement which lasted until Jahangir's death in November 1627.



Fig. 9. *The Weighing of Prince Khurram*. Ca. 1625. British Museum (1948.10-9.069).



Fig. 10. Murar. *The Departure of Prince Shah-Shuja' for Kabul*. *Padshahnama*. Ca. 1640. Royal Library, Windsor Castle.

Shah Jahan (r. 1628-58)

The conflict between Jahangir and Shah Jahan had not gone unnoticed by those outside the empire, and emboldened the Uzbeks to attack Kabul as Shah Jahan ascended the Mughal throne in Agra. The assault was led by Nadir Muhammad Khan, the ruler of Balkh, located some two hundred miles northwest of Kabul. Although he fled back to Balkh rather than face the Mughal army, he remained a potential threat to the security of the empire and Shah Jahan would have to deal with him again later in his reign.

In March 1638, Shah Jahan received an unexpected gift: the city of Kandahar. As noted above, the Safavids had seized the city during Jahangir's reign. When the Safavid governor, Ali Mardan, ran afoul of Shah Safi (r. 1629-42), he defected to the Mughal Em-

pire and surrendered the city. Anticipating the Safavids might attempt to retake Kandahar, Shah Jahan sent his son Shah Shuja to Kabul with 20,000 horsemen to monitor the situation. This is depicted in painting from the *Padshahnama*, now in the Windsor Castle's Royal Collection Trust (fig. 10). We see members of court assembled in Agra before the king's balcony (jharoka) watching as he bids farewell to his son who bows before him. According to accompanying text, Shah Jahan sent with the prince:

a superb robe of honor with a gold embroidered vest; a turban ornament and sword and dagger with incised designs, all studded with gems; 100 horses, amongst which were two splendid chargers...a pair of stately elephants...and two lakhs of rupees.

Shah Safi was not in a position to launch a campaign to recover Kandahar, however, because he was already embroiled in a war with the Ottoman Empire. His death in May 1642 bought Shah Jahan a few more years before he would have to face the new shah, Abbas II.

With the situation in Kandahar settled for the time, Shah Jahan could give his attention to north and northeastern Afghanistan. Over the next couple of years, it was the Kingdom of Balkh and Badakhshan in northeastern Afghanistan that concerned Shah Jahan who regularly returned to Kabul to better monitor events. Shah Jahan's goal was, he claimed, to bring some stability to the region or, at the very least, to make a vassal of his old nemesis Nadir Muhammad Khan. Shah Jahan had neither forgiven nor forgotten the Khan's attack on Kabul at the beginning of his reign. In July 1646, Shah Jahan son, Murad Baksh, entered Balkh in

triumph, accompanied by 'Ali Mardan, the Persian who had earlier handed over Kandahar to the Mughals. Shah Jahan celebrated in Kabul with the construction of a small mosque of white marble adjacent to the gravesite of his great-great-grandfather Babur (fig. 11).

Murad Baksh soon grew tired of Balkh and returned to Kabul against his father's wishes. The Mughal hold on Balkh was tenuous at best, and Nadir Muhammad had fled to seek assistance from the Safavids. Although Shah Jahan sent his very capable soldier-son Aurangzeb to Balkh, the prince was unable to secure the city due to lack of food and resources, and he was forced to retreat to Kabul, beleaguered by the harsh winter and relentless Uzbek attacks. In the end, this disastrous and costly campaign extended the empire's border some 50 kilometers further north from Kabul than it was previously, and Nadir Muhammad returned to his city. Moreover, the defeat exposed to the empire to much



Fig. 11. Mosque of Shah Jahan, ca. 1646 CE. Babur-e Bagh, Kabul.



Fig. 12. Muhammad Panah. *Portrait of Nader Shah*. Ca. 1740. Victoria & Albert Museum (IM.237-1921).

(as emperor 'Alamgir, 1658-1707) faced several serious Afghan (Yusufzai and Afridi) revolts against Mughal rule early in his reign, between Kabul and Peshawar (1667-75). His successors, however, were less able to hold together such a vast and diverse empire, and resist the growing presence and power of the British. In June 1738, Nader Shah (fig. 12), who had seized power in Persia, occupied Kabul before marching on Delhi. Kabul served a new king now.

Recommended Reading

The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor. W.M. Thackston, trans. Modern Library, 2002

Michael H. Fisher. *A Short History of the Mughal Empire*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016.

Richard C. Foltz. *Mughal India and Central Asia*. Karachi: Oxford, 1998.

Kaushik Roy. *War and Society in Afghanistan: From the Mughals to the Americans, 1500-2013*. New Delhi: Oxford, 2015.

greater threats in Afghanistan.

In 1648, the young Shah 'Abbas II turned sixteen years of age, and assumed full authority of the Safavid Empire. That same year he set out with an army of 40,000 soldiers to retake Kandahar and, by February of the following year, after a siege of fifty-four days, he had secured the city. It was a devastating blow to Shah Jahan whose difficulties with his father had begun when the Safavids seized the city in 1622. When his son Aurangzeb failed to drive the Safavids from Kandahar in 1649 and 1651, he then sent his eldest son Dara Shikoh on a third attempt in 1653. This also failed. The territorial gains made a decade before with the defection of 'Ali Mardan had now been reversed. Kandahar would never again be under Mughal control.

Epilogue

Kabul remained critical for safeguarding the northwestern border of the empire, and Aurangzeb



The Blue Stone of Badakhshan

By Michael D. Calabria, OFM, Ph.D

It is called lapis lazuli – an odd combination of the Medieval Latin word for ‘stone’ (*lapis*) and a Latinized loan word from Persian meaning ‘heaven’ or ‘sky’ (*lajvard*). A stone of rich blue color, speckled with bits of gold (iron pyrite) or streaked with white (calcite), it appeared to be a bit of the firmament fallen to earth (fig. 1). It is mentioned in the earliest religious texts in the world – the ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts (ca. 2350 BCE) – and in the Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh (ca. 1700 BCE). It was highly valued in the ancient Near East where it was used for jewelry and amulets, cylinder seals, sculpture and inlay.

This heavenly stone was not, however, found in the Middle East. Remarkably, the stone fashioned by Mesopotamian and Egyptian craftsmen seems to have

come from northeastern Afghanistan, some 1500 miles from southern Iraq and 3000 miles from the Nile Delta. The lapis lazuli mines of Sar-e Sang are located in the rugged region of Badakhshan, some three hundred miles north of Kabul, and 1,100 feet above the Kokcha River on a steep mountainside (figs. 2 & 3). Since pre-history, this mountainous land has been mined for the semiprecious stone. In spite of the remoteness of the region and the difficult access to the mines, lapis lazuli became the single most profitable commodity in Asia in the fourth millennium BCE.

Although there are smaller deposits of lapis lazuli further east in Pakistan and Siberia, the examples discovered in archaeological sites in Egypt and Iraq almost certainly came from Afghanistan. Whether the

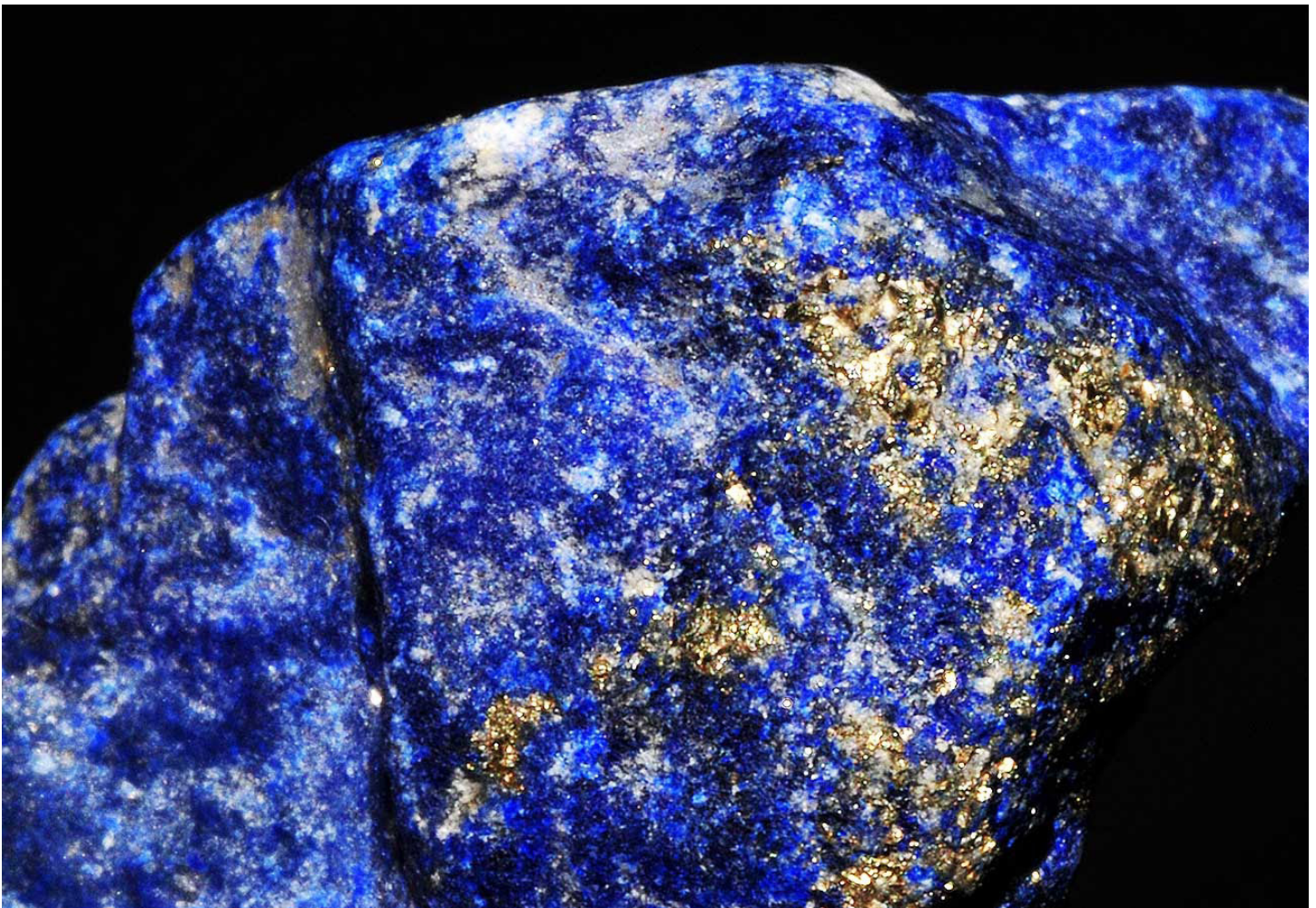


Fig. 1

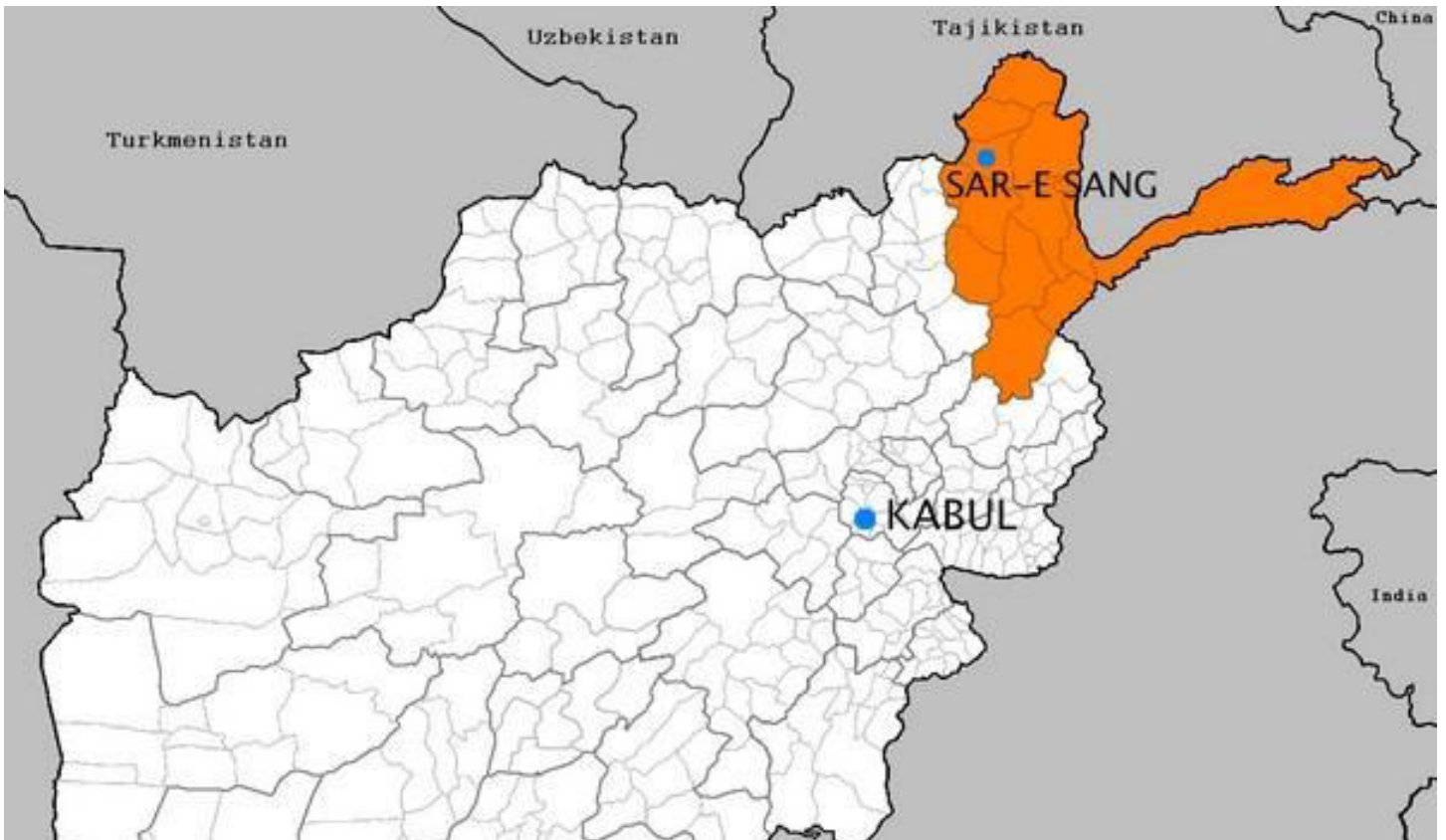


Fig. 2



Fig. 3. The lapis lazuli mines of Sar-e Sang, Badakhshan, Afghanistan.

lapis was transported westward overland from Badakhshan across Iran into Iraq, Syria-Palestine and down into Egypt, or southward via the Indus River and then by sea westward, its early appearance in Mesopotamia and Egypt indicates the extent of ancient trade networks in the formative stages of those civilizations.

Lapis lazuli figures prominently in the artefacts discovered in the royal tombs of Ur in southern Iraq (ca. 2550-2400 BCE), now divided between the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (figs. 4-7), and was ubiquitous in Egyptian burials from the Predynastic Period (ca. 3650-3100 BCE) down to the age of Cleopatra (ca. 69-30 BCE – see figs. 8-10). In the 14th century BCE, Ashur-uballit, the king of Assyria, sent a number

of diplomatic gifts to the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten among which was lapis lazuli (fig. 11). Some of this lapis may have been handed down to Akhenaten's son, Tutankhamun (r. ca. 1333-23 BCE) as his tomb contained numerous objects inlaid with prodigious amounts of lapis lazuli, including his coffins and gold mask (fig. 12). The king's mummy was adorned with a great number of pectorals, pendants and bracelets, many of them featuring lapis lazuli scarabs – a potent symbol of resurrection (figs. 13-16). In more recent centuries, through archaeology and art collecting, ancient artefacts made of lapis lazuli have found their way into the world's museums, including many in the United States. The blue stone of Badakhshan has now been scattered throughout the globe.



Fig. 4. String of beads with rosette. Gold and lapis lazuli. Tomb of Puabi, Ur, ca. 2550-2400 BCE. University of Pennsylvania Museum (B16694).



Fig. 5. (Left) Bull's head from the 'Great Lyre.' Gold and lapis lazuli. King's Grave, Ur, ca. 2550-2400 BCE. University of Pennsylvania Museum (B17694).

Fig. 6. (Above, Right) Rearing goat with a flowering plant (detail). Gold, silver, lapis lazuli, copper alloy, shell, etc. Great Death Pit, Ur, ca. 2550-2400 BCE. University of Pennsylvania Museum (30-12-702).



Fig. 7. Spouted cup. Lapis lazuli. Tomb of Puabi, Ur, ca. 2550-2400 BCE. University of Pennsylvania Museum (B17167).



Fig. 8. String of lapis lazuli and travertine (alabaster) beads. Northern Upper Egypt. Predynastic, ca. 3650-3100 BCE. L. 4.5 cm (1 3/4 in.). Metropolitan Museum of Art (99.4.54).



Fig. 9. Frog amulet. Lapis lazuli. Egypt, Late Period, ca. 664-332 BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art (04.2.378).



Fig. 10. Statuette of the goddess Sekhmet. Lapis lazuli. Abydos, Egypt. Ptolemaic Period, 305-30 BCE. Boston Museum of Fine Arts (04.1833).

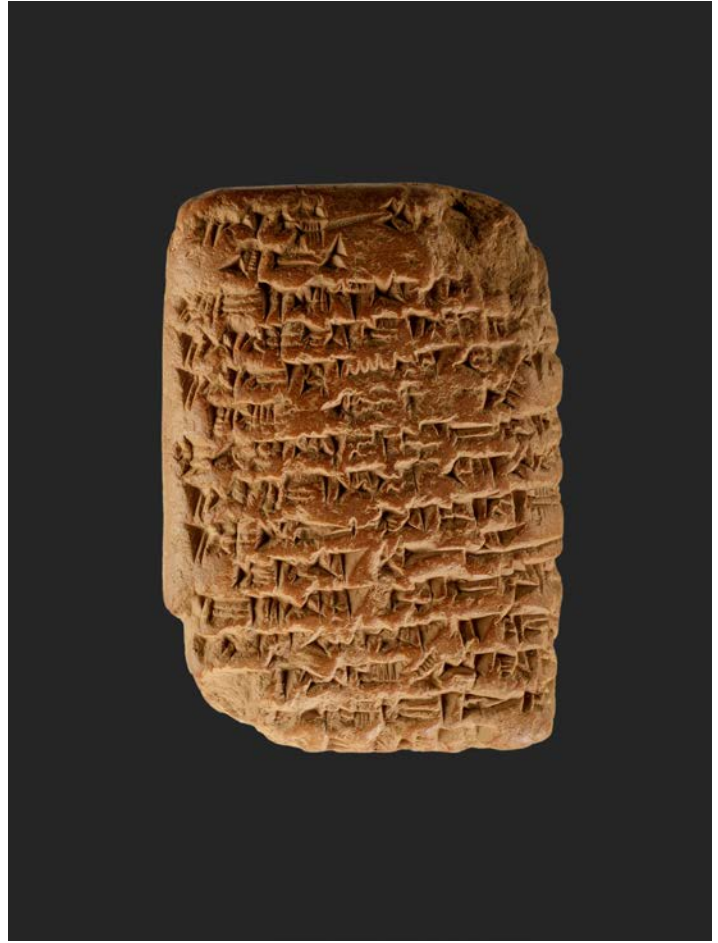


Fig. 11. Letter from Ashur-uballit I, King of Assyria to Akhenaten, King of Egypt, mentioning a gift of lapis lazuli. Clay. Probably Tell el-Amarna, Egypt, ca. 1353-1336 BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art (24.2.11).



Fig. 12. (Left) Gold mask of Tutankhamun. The eyes are made of quartz and outlined with lapis inlay. The vulture and cobra are also inlaid with lapis. The blue striping on the headdress is blue glass in imitation of lapis. Luxor, Egypt, ca. 1333-23 BCE. Grand Egyptian Museum, Giza (60672).



Figs. 13-15. Jewelry from the tomb of Tutankhamun, Luxor, Egypt, ca. 1333-23 (Grand Egyptian Museum, Giza)

Fig. 13. Pendant with winged lapis lazuli scarab. (61886)

Fig. 14. Gold bracelet with lapis lazuli scarab. (62360)

Fig. 15. Necklace of the sun rising on the horizon with lapis lazuli scarabs. (61896)

Fig. 16. Necklace of the rising sun adored by two baboons (lunar symbols). (61901)

From Lapis Lazuli to Ultramarine

Lapis lazuli was not, however, used only for carving or inlay. In antiquity, it was also ground into powder to produce blue pigment for painting. This was no easy task, however, for the blue lazurite mineral had to be separated from the impurities of iron pyrite and calcite, washed, and then ground precisely to produce the desired texture and color. The mineral powder was then mixed with substances such as beeswax, resin, water, and oils, and then kneaded by hand into a paste. This paste was then squeezed to release the vibrant blue pigment. Lapis pigment was used in the paintings in the Kizil caves in China (ca. 4th century CE – fig. 17) and – closer to its source in Badakhshan – in the caves and murals adjacent to the colossal Buddhas of Bamiyan (6/7th century CE) that the Taliban destroyed in 2001. Like lapis lazuli, the pigment derived from it travelled great distances. Arriving in the port of Venice from points east, it was called ultramarine – “from across the sea.” Although its cost equaled or exceeded that of gold, it was highly prized by medieval painters like Giotto (d. 1337) as seen especially in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (1303 CE), and in numerous Renaissance paintings such as Sassetto's *The Virgin at Prayer* (1640-50 – figs. 18-20). As the costliest of colors, ultramarine was used especially in representations of the Virgin Mary and blue became the color most associated with her – and all because of the blue stone of Badakhshan.

Ultramarine was also used in the illumination of religious books such as the *Belles Heures* of Jean de France, Duc de Berry, a prayer book created in the early 15th century with 172 sumptuous paintings of biblical themes (fig. 21). Some of the medieval artists who applied the pigment were apparently female judging from the remains of a woman who buried on the grounds of a convent in Dalheim, Germany sometime between the 10th- and 12th century. Scientists discovered lapis lazuli in the tartar adhering to her teeth, and concluded that the woman was either a painter who ingested the material while licking her brush to a point, or she breathed in the powder while preparing the pigment for herself or someone else.¹ Ultramarine was used in secular paintings as well, perhaps most famously by the Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) who used a great quantity of ultramarine of very high quality in paintings such as *The Milkmaid* and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (figs. 22-23) among others. It is indeed astonishing to think of

the amount of Afghan lapis that wound up on the canvases and pages of European artists over the centuries.

In Islamic lands, ultramarine was likewise used in painting and the illumination of manuscripts. A magnificent portrait of Abu al-Hsan Qutb Shahi (c. 1675), the last ruler of the Deccan kingdom of Golconda, is set against a shimmering blue background (fig. 24). Ultramarine was used especially in illuminating volumes of the Qur'an. The Ruzbihan Qur'an now in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin is a particularly fine example. The volume was produced in the mid-16th century in Shiraz in Safavid Iran. The calligrapher, Ruzbihan Muhammad al-Tab'i al-Shirazi, was one of the greatest calligraphers of his day. Throughout the volume, the text is sumptuously illuminated mainly in ultramarine and gold – the two materials most associated with the divine realm. The first chapter (surah) of the Qur'an, *al-Fatiha*, is spread over two ‘carpet’ pages, the text enclosed in two oval gold medallions on a lapis-blue field overlaid with floral arabesques (fig. 25).

In addition to using lapis lazuli for pigment, the Mughals used the stone in *pietra dura* – inlaid stone decoration – for both objets d'art and architecture. Even the most mundane objects, such as a footrest or a base for a huqqa (water pipe) might be inlaid with lapis lazuli (fig. 26-27). Within the walls of Delhi's Red Fort is Shah Jahan's Diwan-i-Khas, or private audience hall. The pavilion's white marble pillars are decorated with *pietra dura* flowers of lapis lazuli, carnelian and malachite (fig. 28a & b). More famously, lapis lazuli was used in the interior decoration of the Taj Mahal, the funerary monument Shah Jahan built for his wife Mumtaz Mahal and where he too was later interred.

Although smaller deposits of lapis lazuli have been discovered in the Americas, and synthetic ultramarine is now standard for artists, the blue stone of Badakhshan is still in high demand around the world as it has been for millennia. Since July 2019, when the Taliban seized control of the lapis lazuli mines in Badakhshan, they have earned some 20 million dollars per year from the stone. Now that the Taliban control the country, one can only hope that income generated from the lapis trade will be used to rebuild the country that has given so much of itself to the world.

1 Sarah Zhang, “Why a Medieval Woman Had Lapis Lazuli Hidden in Her Teeth,” *The Atlantic*, January 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/01/the-woman-with-lapis-lazuli-in-her-teeth/579760/>.



Fig. 17. Deity on a lapis-blue elephant. Kizil cave 14, Xinjiang, China, ca. 400 CE.



Fig. 18. (Left) Giotto. Scrovegni Chapel ceiling, Padua. Dedicated 1303 CE.
 Fig. 19. (Above) Scrovegni Chapel ceiling (detail).

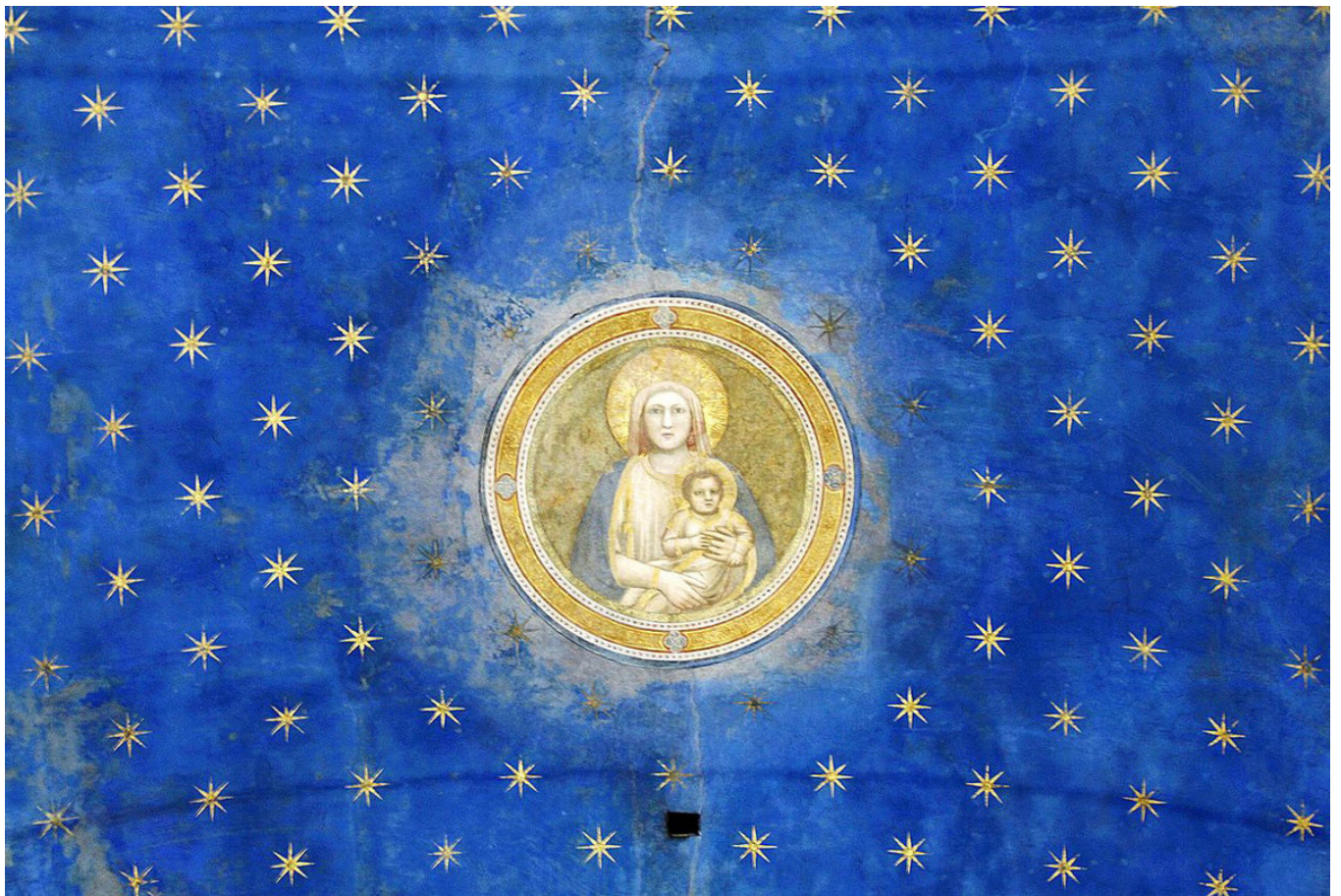




Fig. 20. (Above, Left) Sassoferrato. *Virgin at Prayer*, 1640-50. National Gallery, London (NG200).

Fig. 21. (Left) Limbourg Brothers. *Annunciation* from the *Belles Heures de Jean de France*, 1405-1408/9. Metropolitan Museum of Art (54.11a, b).

Fig. 22. (Above, Right) Johannes Vermeer. *The Milkmaid*. C. 1660. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (SK-A-2344).

Fig. 23. (Right) Johannes Vermeer. *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. C. 1665. Maritshuis, The Hague (670).



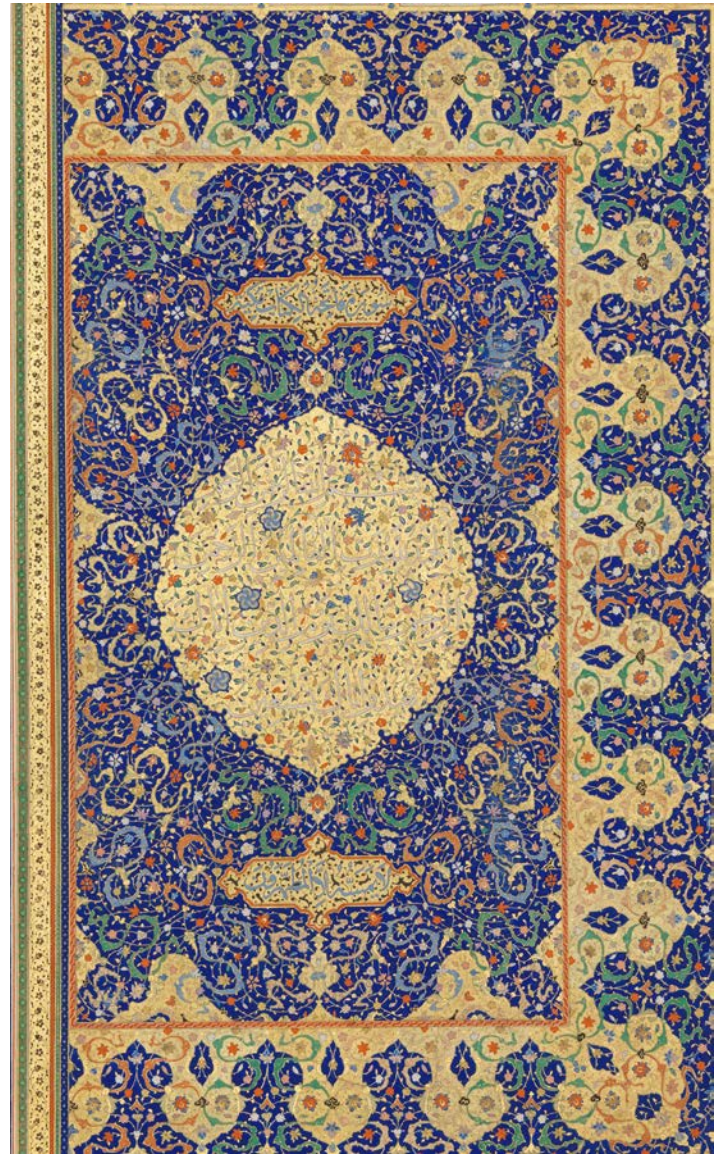


Fig. 24. (Above, Left) Portrait of Abu al-Hasan Qutb Shahi. India, Golconda, c. 1675. Louvre (S 1088 a).

Fig. 25. (Above, Right) Ruzbihan Muhammad al-Tab'i al-Shirazi, calligrapher. Qur'an (detail). Shiraz, mid-16th century CE. Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (Is 1558).



Fig. 26. (Left) Footrest with pietra dura decoration. Marble with lapis lazuli and other semiprecious stones. India, early 18th century CE. Louvre (MAO 769).



Fig. 27. (Above) Huqqa base. Nephrite jade, lapis lazuli, jade, rubies, and gold. India, ca. 1700 CE. Museum of Islamic Art, Doha (JE.044).



Fig. 28a (Above Right) & b (Right). Pietra Dura flower. Marble, lapis lazuli, malachite, and carnelian. Diwan-i-Khas, Red Fort, Delhi, 1648 CE.

Recommended Reading

Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus. Edited by Joan Aruz with Ronald Wallenfels. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003.

Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C. Edited by Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean M. Evans. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008.

Irina Diana Calu, "Lapis Lazuli – A Pigment More Precious than Gold," *Daily Art Magazine*, 23 November 2021: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/lapis-lazuli-pigment/>

Guido Frison and Giulia Brun, "Lapis Lazuli, lazurite, ultramarine 'blue', and the colour term 'azure' up to the 13th century." *Journal of the International Colour Association* 16 (2016): 41-55.

Tom Verde, "The Quest for Blue," *AramcoWorld*, March/April 2021: 6-5. of Art (99.4.54).



‘Abdullah Anṣārī of Herat (1006-1089 CE / 396-481 AH)

By Michael D. Calabria, OFM, Ph.D

Located in what is today western Afghanistan, Herat lies at the crossroads of the ancient trade routes that comprised the “Silk Road,” connecting China, Central and South Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Herat’s importance is indicated by its massive brick citadel, the Qala e Ikhtyaruddin, the foundations of which date back to Alexander the Great (ca 330 BCE). Like other commercial centers, Herat attracted scholars, among them those who studied the Qur’an and *hadith*, as well as those who followed the spiritual disciplines of Sufism. The most famous of Herat’s residents is undoubtedly ‘Abdullah Anṣārī, considered to be one of the greatest Islamic thinkers of the classical age, a foremost authority on the Qur’an and *hadith*, and one of the most prolific Sufi scholars writing in both Persian and Arabic.¹

One of his most well-known works is his *Munājāt Namah* (“invocations”), considered to be masterpiece of Persian literature. In these prayers, Ansari invokes God (*Allah*) in a deeply humble and intensely personal manner, trusting in God’s love, mercy and compassion and espousing a life of renunciation and restraint, gratitude, and generosity to the poor.

Another work of Anṣārī’s works is *One Hundred Fields* (*Sad maydān*), written ca. 1057, “the first treatise in the Persian language to be composed on the stations and states of the spiritual journey.”² He begins with repentance (*tawba*) which he describes as: “the key to the treasure, the intermediary that assists you to become united with God, the condition for being accepted to the divine presence, and the secret of all happiness.” Other stations or qualities to be cultivated include: patience, self-examination, abstinence, trust, sincerity, spiritual poverty, humility, ardent longing, tranquility, modesty, detachment, and submission. The one hundredth field is subsistence in God, but at the end of the treatise, Ansari concludes that “all these one hundred stations are dissolved in the field of love (*maḥabbat*).”

In the foreword to Jogendra Singh’s 1939-translation of *Munājāt* (published as *The Invocations of Sheikh ‘Abdullah Ansari of Herat*), Mahatma Gandhi wrote:



Islam has given the world mystics no less than Hinduism or Christianity. In these days when ir-religion masquerades as religion, it is well to remind ourselves of what the best mind of all the religions of the world has thought and said. We must not, like the frog in the well, who imagines that the universe ends with the wall surrounding his well, think that our religion alone represents the whole Truth and all the others are false. A reverent study of the other religions of the world would show that they are equally true as our own, though all are necessarily imperfect.

Anṣārī died at the age of eighty-three and was buried in Herat. To this day, hundreds of people from across Afghanistan visit his tomb (Gazur Gah, pictured above) on a weekly basis. In August 2021, the Taliban seized control of Herat. While is not yet clear if Herat’s cultural heritage will be preserved and protected, Anṣārī’s spirituality and scholarship have a permanent place in the hearts and minds of many Muslims in Afghanistan and beyond.

1 Nahid Angha in: *Ansari’s Stations of the Sufi Path* (Cambridge: Archetype, 2010), “introduction,” 17.

2 Ibid.



Praying at the grave of Anṣārī in Kabul





(Above) Munajat of Anṣārī, signed by ‘Imad al-Hasani. Ink on gold-sprinkled paper. Persia, Safavid Period, 994 AH / 1585 CE. Courtesy of Sotheby’s.

Recommended Reading

Ansari, ‘Abdullah. *Stations of the Sufi Path: The One Hundred Fields (Sad Maydan) of Abdullah Ansari of Herat*. Nahid Angha, trans. Cambridge: Archetype, 2010.

_____. *The Invocations of Sheikh ‘Abdullah Ansari of Herat*. Sardar Sir Jogendra Singh, trans. London: John Murray, 1939.

Chittick, William C. *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*. New Haven: Yale, 2013.

“O Lord, give me eyes
Which see nothing but Your glory.
Give me a mind
That finds delight in Your service.
Give me a soul
Drunk in the wine of Your wisdom.”
– Ansari of Herat

The Art of Afghanistan

By Michael D. Calabria, OFM, Ph.D

For many people in the West, Afghanistan continues to conjure up images of an arid, inhospitable land, of war, turbaned Taliban brandishing weapons, and women clad in blue burqas. It has been called the “graveyard of empires” as, throughout its long history, it has often proved resistant to rule by foreign powers – including most recently, the British Empire, the Soviet Union and the United States.

But Afghanistan is much more than a battlefield. If wars have often been fought on its soil, it is because the land occupies a strategic position in Central Asia. At the dawn of recorded history, it was already connected by trade to the civilizations that emerged in the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia and Egypt (see: “The Blue Stone of Badakhshan” in this issue). In later periods, the trade routes that comprised the “Silk Road” passed through Afghanistan which served as a conduit for the material, intellectual and spiritual riches that moved east and west across Asia. From Afghanistan, Zoroastrianism, the world’s earliest monotheistic religion, spread westward into Iran, and Buddhism moved eastward to China. It was a land ruled by kings such as Cyrus the Great of the Achaemenid Empire, Alexander the Great, and Ashoka of India.

Afghanistan’s diverse ancient heritage came under attack at the beginning of 2001 when the Taliban ordered that all “idols” – particularly human figures - be destroyed. This resulted in the destruction of some 2500 works in the National Museum in Kabul, and culminated in the dynamiting of the giant Buddha statues at Bamiyan in March 2001. With the (temporary) defeat of the Taliban later that year, the Museum was rebuilt, hidden treasures returned, and damaged objects repaired. In 2008-9, nearly 230 artifacts from the National Museum went on tour in North America, giving some one million viewers their first glimpse of Afghanistan’s rich history and culture.

Now that the Taliban are once again in power, there is great concern over the fate of this patrimony. Yet, since taking control of Kabul in August 2021, the Taliban have secured the National Museum, and allowed the staff to work although they have not yet been paid. Many Taliban members have in fact visited the collection recently and have expressed regret over the

destruction of artifacts in the past.

Although Kabul’s National Museum houses the most extensive collection of Afghan art, museums in North America and Europe also feature a variety of artefacts from Afghanistan’s pre-Islamic and Islamic past. Here we present a small sample of twenty-five objects spanning four millennia from Bronze Age Bactria to Safavid Herat. Additional information on the artefacts pictured below can be found on the websites for the collections indicated.



Figure 1 Seated Female Figure. Northern Afghanistan, Ancient Bactria, ca. 2500-1500 B.C. Chlorite and limestone. H. 12.7 cm (5 in.). Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.2000.1a-f).



Figure 2 Bowl. Northern Afghanistan, Ancient Bactria, ca. 2100-1900 BCE. Lapis lazuli. H. 4.1 cm. Diameter 8.4 cm. Louvre (AO 26477).



Figure 3 Vase. Northern Afghanistan, Ancient Bactria, ca. 2100-1900 BCE. Alabaster. H. 21.3 cm. Louvre (AO 28527).



Figure 4. Armlet, from the Oxus Treasure. Achaemenid, 5th-4th century BCE. Gold. H. 12.3 cm; W. 11.6 cm. British Museum. Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks (1897, 1231.116).



Figure 5. Jug, from the Oxus Treasure. Achaemenid, 5th-4th century BCE. Gold. H. 13 cm. British Museum. Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks (1897, 1231.17).



Figure 6. Coin with head of Alexander the Great. Indo-Greek. Afghanistan, Bactria, ca. 2nd-1st century BCE. Silver. Diameter: 3.2 x 0.5 cm (1 1/4 x 3/16 in.). Cleveland Museum of Art. Gift of Dr. Norman Zaworksi (2011.210).



Figure 7. Ewer with spout in the form of an elephant with a mahut. Afghanistan, Gandhara, probably Taxila or environs. Early Kushan Period, ca. 1st century-320 CE. Bronze. Overall: 21 cm (8 1/4 in.). Cleveland Museum of Art. John L. Severance Fund (1982.66).



Figure 8. Seated Buddha with attendants. Afghanistan, Gandhara, Hadda, late Kushan Period, 1st century-320 CE. Stucco. Overall: 36.9 cm (14 ½ in.) Cleveland Museum of Art. Edward L. Whittemore Fund (1967.39).

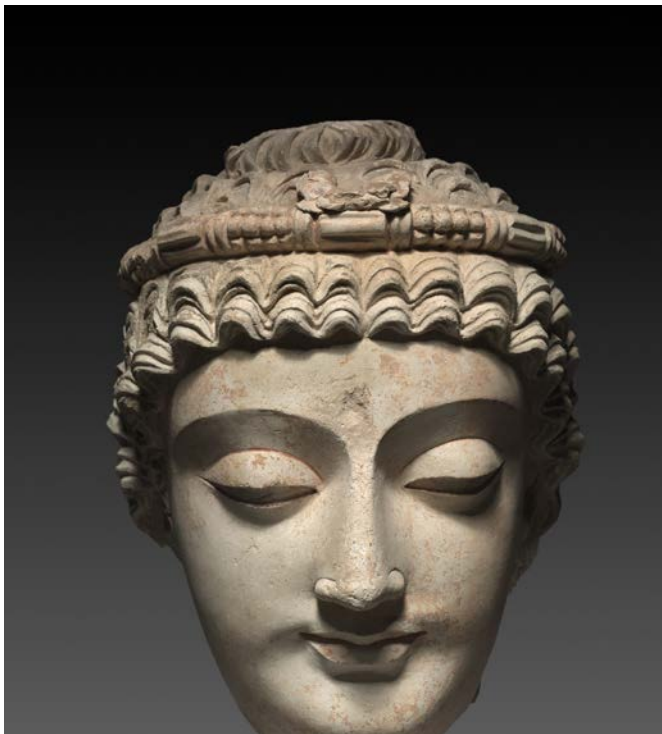


Figure 9. Head of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. Afghanistan or Pakistan, Gandhara, late Kushan Period, 1st century-320 CE. Stucco with traces of paint. Overall: 45.7 x 35.5 cm (18 x 14 in.). Cleveland Museum of Art. John L. Severance (1985.31).

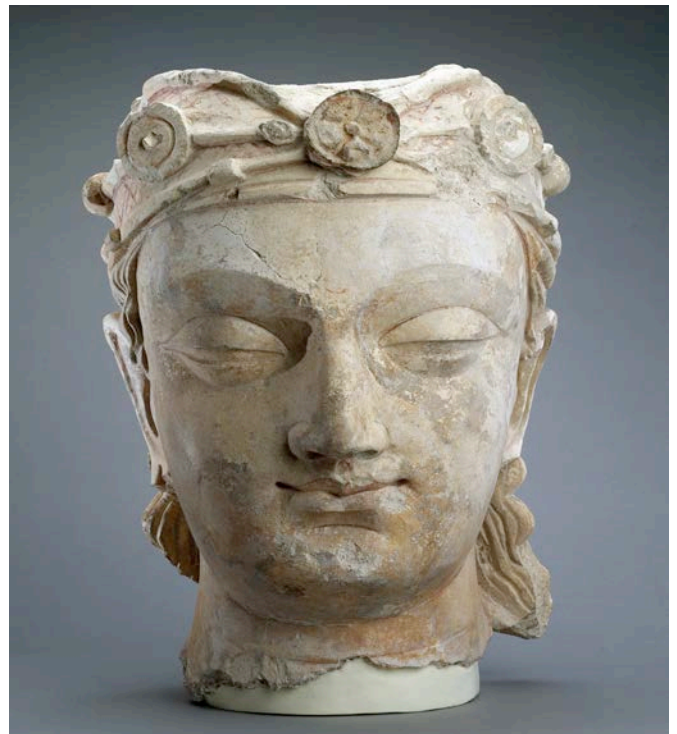


Figure 10 Head of Bodhisattva. Afghanistan, 3rd-5th century CE. Stucco with traces of pigment. H x W x D: 53 x 36.8 x 33.6 cm (20 7/8 x 14 1/2 x 13 1/4 in). Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. Gift of Arthur M. Sackler (S1987.951).

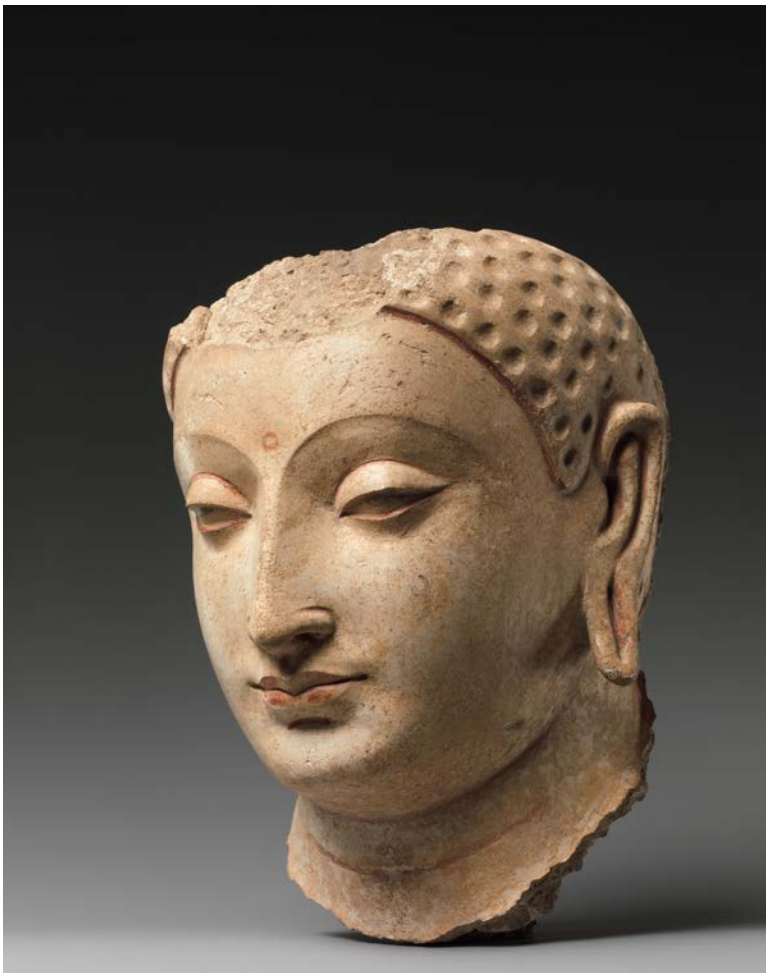


Figure 11 (Above, Left). Head of Buddha. 5th-6th century CE. Afghanistan (probably Hadda). Stucco with traces of paint. H. 19.1 cm (7 ½ in.). Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.32.5).

Figure 12. (Above, Right). Linga with face of Shiva (Ekamukhalinga). Afghanistan, Shai Period, 9th century CE. White marble. H. 22 7/16 in. (57 cm); W. 13 3/16 in. (33.5 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rogers Fund, 1980 (1980.415).

Figure 13. (Right). Seated Boddhisattva Maitreya (Buddha of the Future). 7th-8th century CE. Afghanistan (found near Kabul). Schist. H. 77.8 cm (30 5/8 in.) MMA. Rogers Fund, 1920 (20.58.15).





Figure 14 (Above). Bowl. Afghanistan, Bamiyan, Shahr-i Gholghola, 12th-13th century CE. Stonepaste, molded with a glaze. H. 8.3 cm; Diam. 16.6 cm. Louvre (MAO 703).



Figure 15 (Left). Ewer with inlaid decoration. Afghanistan (probably Herat), ca. 1200-1250 CE. Brass. H: 38 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum (592-1898).



Figure 16. Illustrations from a copy of al-Sarai's *Nahj al-Faradis* (The Paths of Paradise), commissioned by the Timurid ruler Abu Said (r. 1451-1469) and produced in Herat ca. 1465 CE.

The manuscript deals with the Prophet Muhammad's mystical ascension to heaven (miraj). Muhammad made the ascension on Buraq, a winged creature that is most often shown with a horse-like body and human face. He was accompanied on his journey by the angel Gabriel (Jibril).

In the left miniature, Muhammad (with his face unveiled as in other contemporary manuscripts) encounters a gigantic white rooster, whose head reaches God's throne and whose feet rest on the earth. Here Gabriel explains to the Prophet that the rooster is the angel that keep track of time and calls the faithful to prayer.

Leaf: 41.2 x 29.8 cm. David Collection, Copenhagen (Inv. No. 13/2102).

See: <https://www.davidmus.dk/en/collections/islamic/materials/miniatures/art/13-2012>



Figure 17. Illustrations from a copy of al-Sarai's *Nahj al-Faradis* (The Paths of Paradise), commissioned by the Timurid ruler Abu Said (r. 1451-1469) and produced in Herat ca. 1465 CE.

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Here, we see the Prophet and angel Gabriel at the pond of al-Kawthar before one of Paradise's richly ornamented gates. Beside the pond are countless vessels of gold and jade from which the righteous can quench their thirst in the Afterlife. Leaf: 41.2 x 29.8 cm. David Collection, Copenhagen (Inv. 15/2012).

See: <https://www.davidmus.dk/en/collections/islamic/materials/miniatures/art/15-2012>

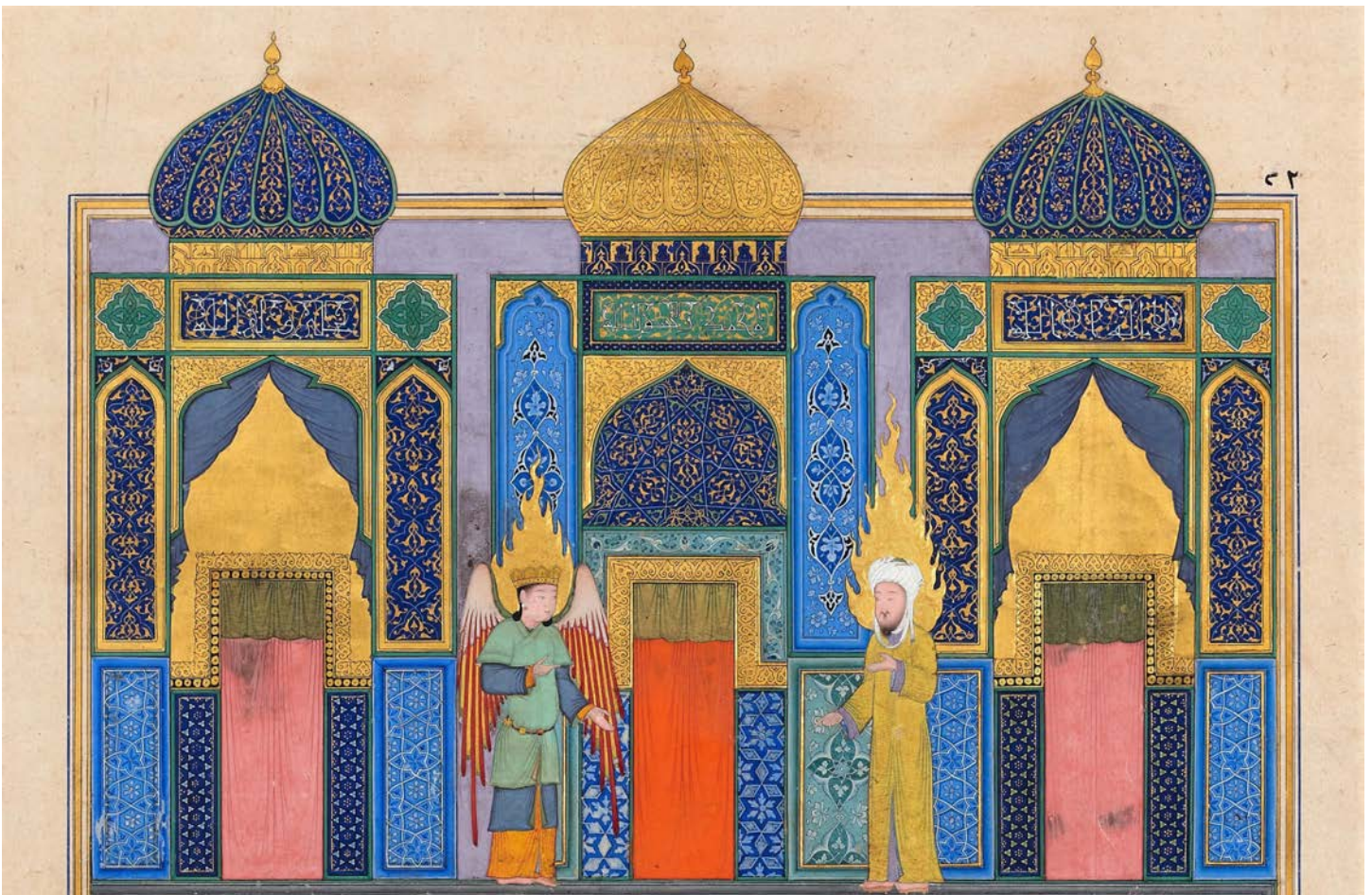




Figure 18. Dragon-handled jug inscribed with an invocation to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. Late 15th-first quarter 16th century CE. Afghanistan, probably Herat. Brass; cast and turned, engraved, and inlaid with silver, gold, and black organic compound. H. 5 5/8 in. (14.3 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art. Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.607).

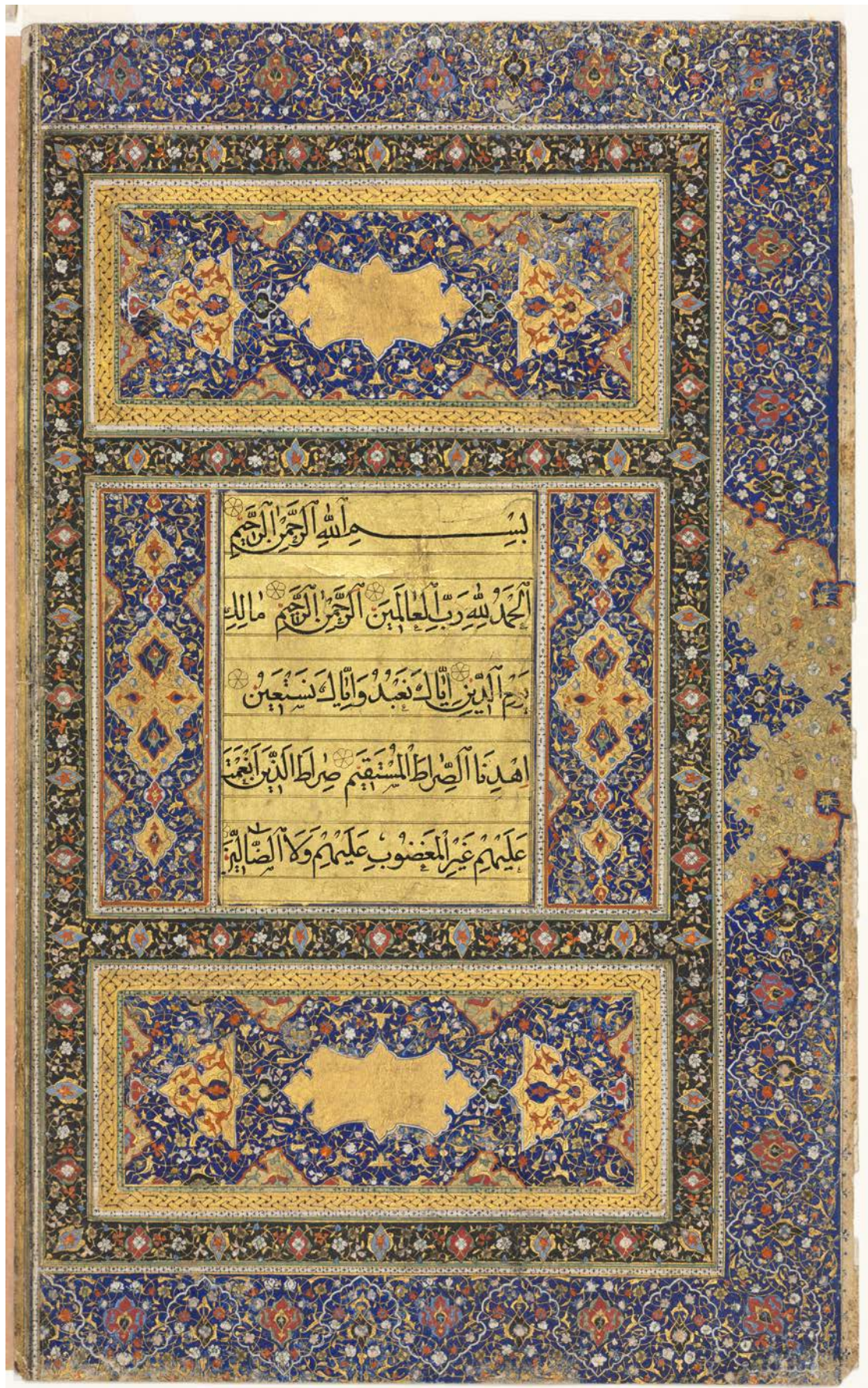


Figure 19. Qur'an manuscript folio. Surah al-Fatiha. 1500s. Afghanistan, Herat. Safavid Period. Ink, gold, and colors on paper. Sheet: 28 x 17.4 cm (11 x 6 7/8 in.). Cleveland Museum of Art. Purchase from the J.H. Wade Fund (1924.746).



Figure 20. Sufis in ecstatic dhikr (remembrance of God). Folio from a Divan (collected poems) by Hafiz (d. 1390). Safavid period, 1523-24 (930 A.H.). Afghanistan, Herat. Artist: Shaykhzade. Calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur. Opaque watercolor, ink, gold, and silver on paper. H x W (overall): 30.1 x 18.9 cm (11 7/8 x 7 7/16 in). Freer Gallery of Art. Charles Lang Freer Endowment (F1932.54).





Figure 21. Illuminated frontispiece of a copy of Sa'di's *Bustan*, one of the most widely admired works of Persian literature. 1514 CE / 920 AH. Afghanistan, Herat and Uzbekistan, probably Bukhara. Calligrapher: Sultan Muhammad Nur (ca. 1472–ca. 1536), Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. H. 11 in. (28 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art (1974.294.1).

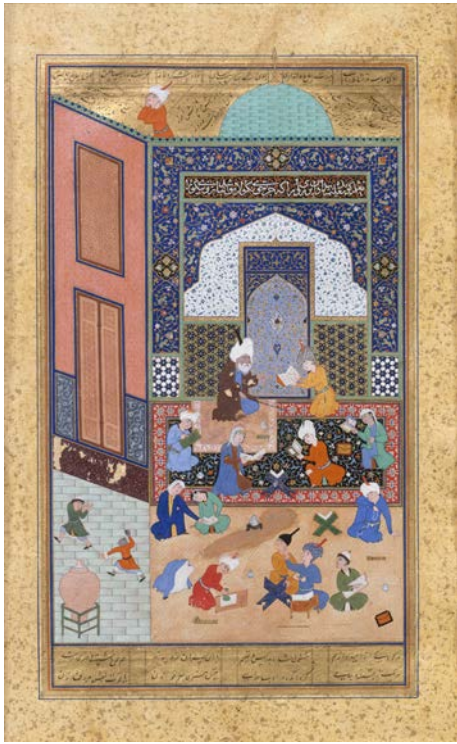


Figure 22. “Laila and Majnun in School”, from a Khamsa (Quintet) of Nizami (d. 1209). 1524-25 CE / 931 AH. Afghanistan, Herat. Painting by Shaikh Zada (Iranian, active 1510–1550). Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper. H. 7 1/2 in. (19.1 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913 (13.228.7.7).

The story of Laila and Majnun is one of the most beloved stories in Islamic societies. In the story, the two young people meet at school and fall desperately in love. In addition to its entertainment value, as well as serving as a mystical parable, it demonstrates that the education of boys and girls together in Islamic societies was not exceptional.





Figure 23. Portrait of the poet Hatefi (1454-1521). 1511, Afghanistan, Herat. Folio from an album assembled for Bahram Mirza. Attributed to Behzad. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. 11.8 x 7.8 cm. Aga Khan Museum (AKM 160).

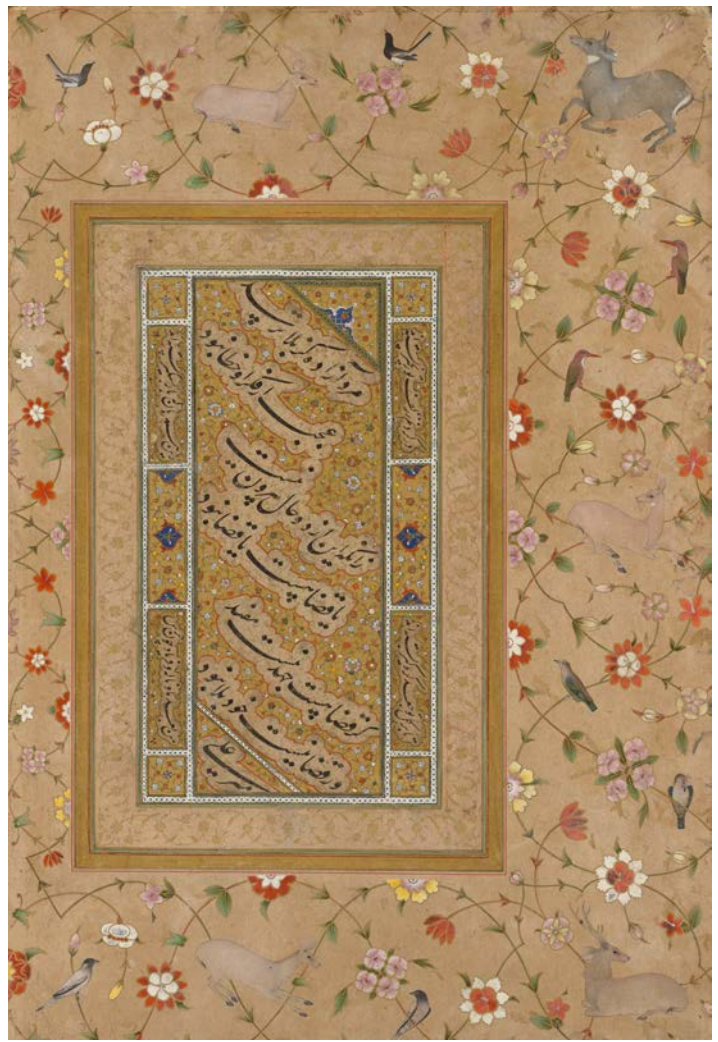


Figure 24. Persian calligraphy framed by an ornamental border of flowers and birds. From the Late Shah Jahan Album. Calligraphy: ca. 1500-1540 CE. Probably Afghanistan, Herat. Album page and borders: reign of Shah Jahan (1628-1658), Mughal India. Opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper. Overall: 36.8 x 25.2 (14 ½ x 9 15/16 in.). Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Hebert F. Leisy in memory of his wife, Helen Stamp Leisy (1977.207).



Figure 25. Portrait of a Lady Holding a Flower. Muhammad of Herat (Iranian, active Qazvin, ca. 1570–78; Herat, ca. 1578–87). Safavid Period, 1565–75. Attributed to present-day Afghanistan, Herat. Opaque watercolor, ink and gold on paper. H. 4 5/8 in. (11.7 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rogers Fund, 1955 (55.121.42).

An Architectural Treasure

By Michael D. Calabria, OFM, Ph.D

Built during the Abbasid Caliphate, around 794-5 CE, the Noh Gumbad (Nine-domed) Mosque is the oldest known Islamic building in Afghanistan, and one of the earliest structures in the eastern Islamic world. Located in Balkh, in northern Afghanistan, it was all but forgotten until 1966 when Lisa Golombek, then a graduate student at the University of Michigan, was led to the partially buried and ruined mosque by local residents. Square in plan, the mosque measures just sixty-five feet on each side and comprises nine arched bays, each originally topped with a dome which collapsed centuries ago. Particularly noteworthy is the intricately carved stucco ornamentation of swirling vine leaves that cover the column capitals and arches. The mosque was probably built by Fazl b. Yahya who was appointed the Abbasid governor of the region in 792/3.

Although the mosque's colors have long faded, architect Ugo Tonietti, from the University of Florence vividly describes its original state: "This is a masterpiece. You have to imagine how it looked like, fully decorated with lapis, some parts in red, it was all covered and painted: it was like a garden of paradise inside, with a sky above, the domes with white and blue decoration."¹ Since its rediscovery, a number of organizations have worked to conserve and restore this unique and important structure. These include the Institute of Archaeology of Afghanistan, UNESCO, the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan (DAFA) and, most recently, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

¹ "The mysterious, ancient Nine Domes Mosque of northern Afghanistan," Arab News, January 6, 2018. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1220016/art-culture>.





For more information on Noh Gumbad Mosque, see:

The Nine Domes of the Universe: The Ancient Noh Gumbad Mosque – The Study and Conservation of an Early Islamic Monument at Balkh. Aga Khan Trust for Culture et al., 2016.

<https://www.wmf.org/publication/nine-domes-universe-ancient-noh-gonbad-mosque-study-and-conservation-early-islamic>



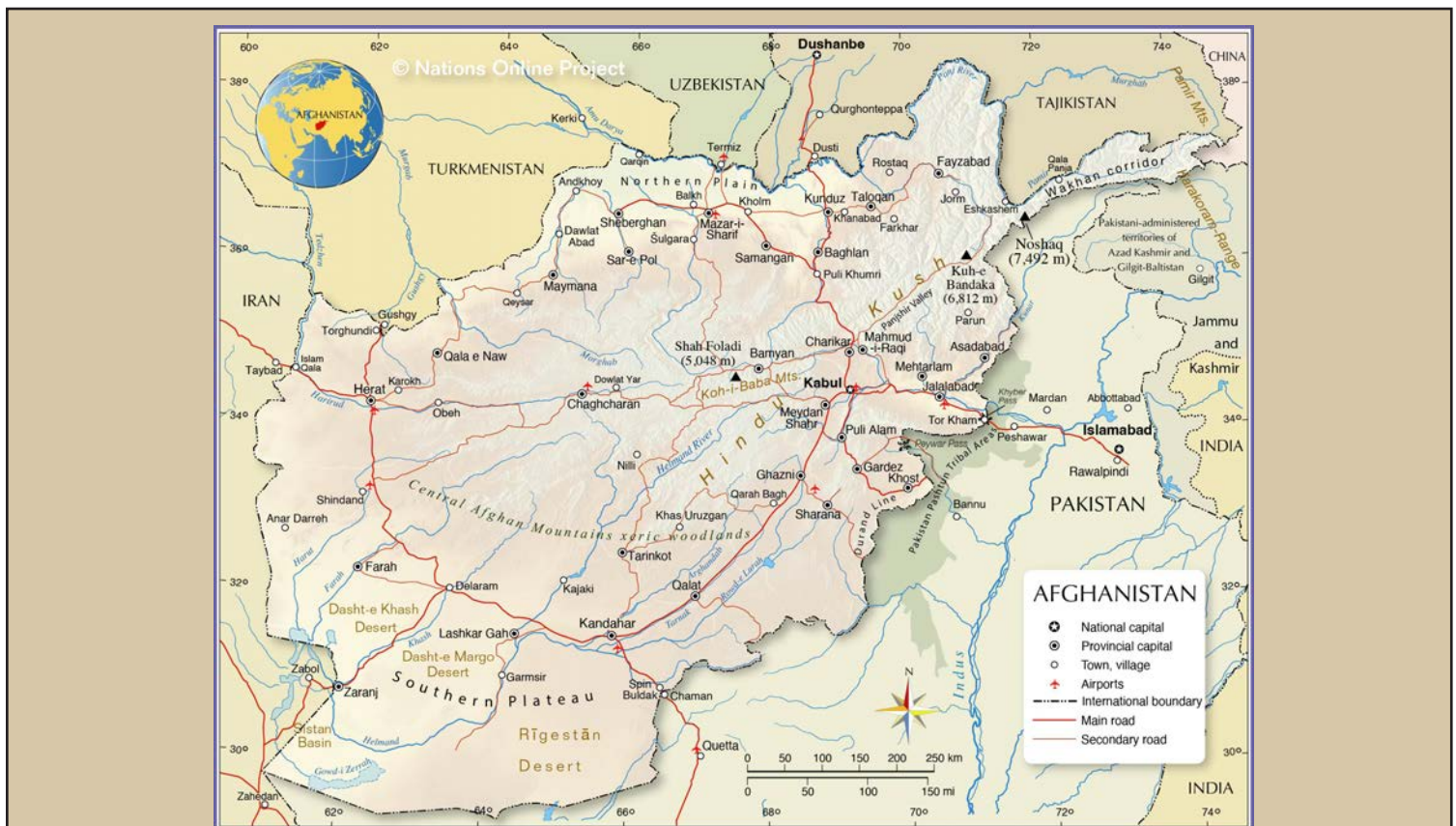
Matt Hoh on the Consequences of Violence

Jordan Fitch,
St. Bonaventure University Class of '22

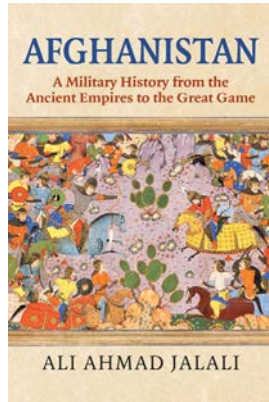
Matthew Hoh, former Marine and Senior State Department Official in Afghanistan, visited St. Bonaventure virtually via Zoom as a keynote speaker on September 22, 2021. Sponsored by the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, Hoh spoke about the U.S. government and foreign policy in his talk named, "The Consequences of Violence." Hoh spoke from his experience of both working and fighting in Afghanistan saying, "There is an idea, particularly in the American government, military, intelligence services and media; that violence is something you can inflict to achieve a desired goal, that the results can be controlled. This is, of course, a fallacy." Hoh's disagreements with the U.S. government's policies and decisions led to his resignation in 2009, after which he first spoke at St. Bonaventure. Hoh used the time to talk about American involvement in Afghanistan. He went into detail about why the American system simply wasn't working. Hoh said the U.S. didn't give the Afghan people very good options. They could be relegated to living under warlords, subject to a governmental theocracy, or other unstable and unsustainable systems of governance for the Afghan people. Hoh

said this was the result of the U.S.'s pursuit of victory. Their fight against the Taliban achieved a superficial "victory;" however, the end result only caused more problems. Hoh was asked what he thought about the events in Afghanistan this summer to which he simply replied, "This is what defeat looks like."

Hoh went on to delve into his personal struggles affiliated with his experiences as a Marine. He participated in the occupation of Iraq which had long-term effects on his physical and mental health. Hoh is 48 now and continues to be outspoken on social media and his blog.



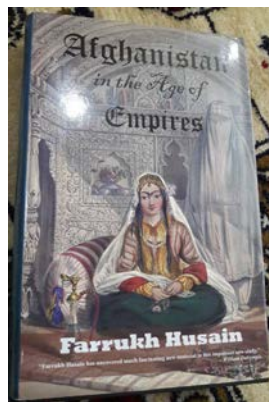
Recommended Reading on Afghanistan



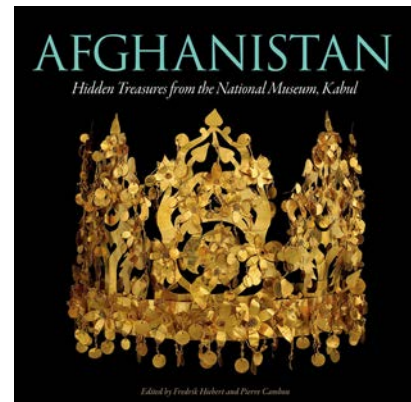
Ali Ahmad Jalali. *Afghanistan: A Military History from the Ancient Empires to the Great Game*. University of Kansas, 2021.



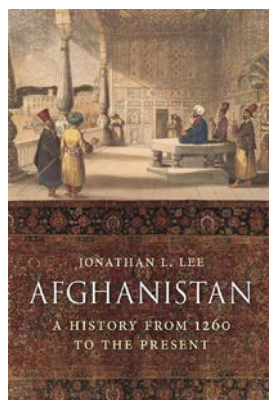
St John Simpson. *Afghanistan: A Cultural History*. Interlink Books, 2012.



Farrukh Husain. *Afghanistan in the Age of Empires*. Silk Road Books, 2018.

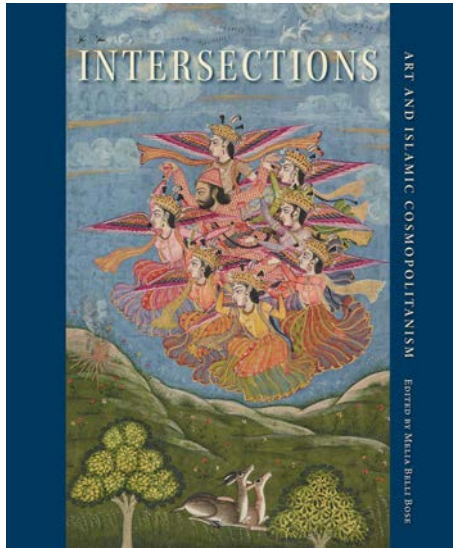


Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul. Edited by Fredrik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon. National Geographic Society, 2008.



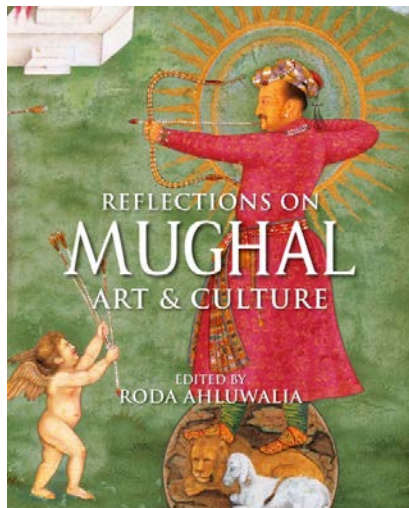
Jonathan L. Lee. *Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present*. Reaktion Books, 2018.

New Books in Islamic Studies



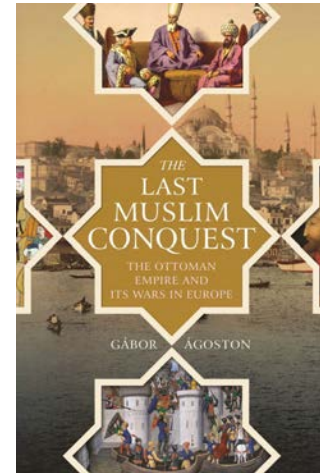
Intersections: Art and Islamic Cosmopolitanism. Edited by Melia Belli Rose. University of Florida Press, 2021.

This richly illustrated collection of essays examines the artistic exchange between Muslim and non-Muslim societies from the eighth century to the present, offering a visual and compelling testament to cultural connections and coexistence.



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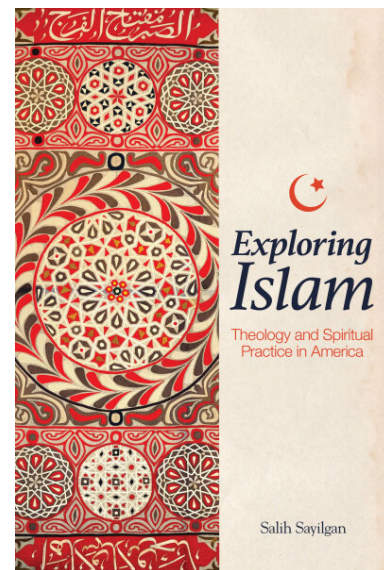


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Marc David Baer. *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesars, and Caliphs*. Basic Books, 2021.

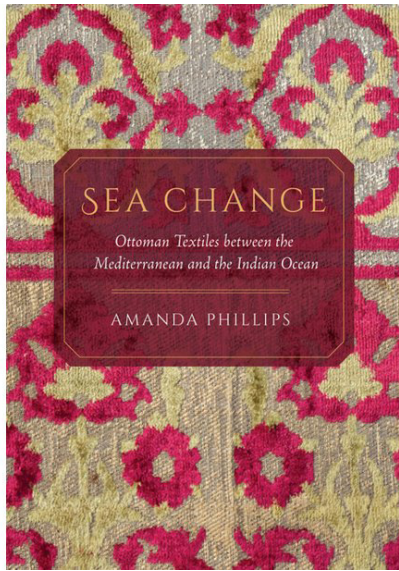
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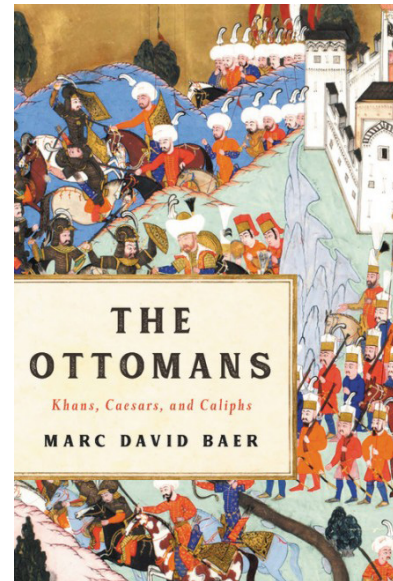
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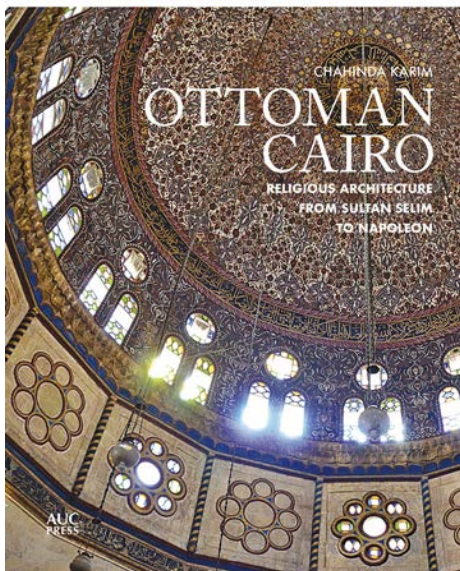
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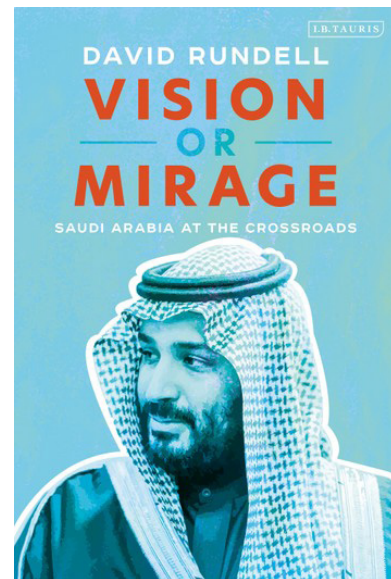
Marc David Baer. *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesars, and Caliphs*. Basic Books, 2021.

A new major and engaging history of the Ottoman dynasty from its origins in the 13th century to its collapse in the 20th century. An authoritative and engaging account for general readership.



Chahinda Karim. *Ottoman Cairo: Religious Architecture from Sultan Selim to Napoleon*. American University in Cairo Press, 2021.

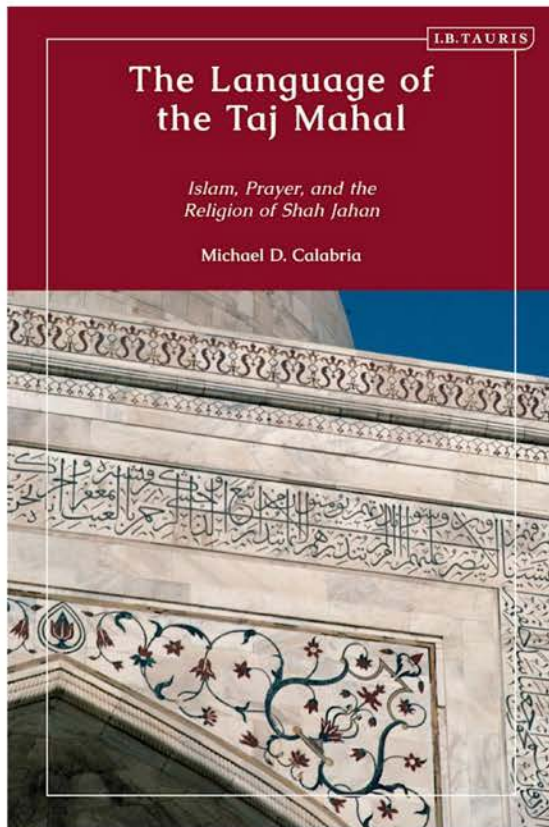
A much needed and revised study of Cairo's often-overlooked Ottoman mosques and mausolea from 1517 to the end of the eighteenth century.



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