



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Historic Cities Programme

## AKTC - AFGHANISTAN NEWSLETTER # 24

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### AFGHANISTAN OBSERVED 1830-1920

An exhibition of drawings prints and photographs of Afghanistan from the collection of the British Library was opened on 24th April in Kabul in the presence of H.E. The Minister for Information and Culture, Sayyed Makdoom Raheen, the British Ambassador and some 200 Afghan and international guests. Reflecting the observations of European visitors to the country between 1830 and 1920, the material in the exhibition ranges from landscapes and views of historic monuments to portraits of key personalities during a critical period of Afghanistan's history. The collection of 150 prints will subsequently be exhibited in Herat, after which it will be housed in the National Archives in Kabul. Supported by the World Collections Programme and the Royal Norwegian Embassy, through AKTC's Afghan Cultural Initiative, the exhibition had over 2,500 visitors in the week after its opening. The exhibition, which is in the Queen's Palace in Baghe Babur, is open to the public from 9am to 4.30pm daily, until the 25th May.



John Burke: Afghan Police, Kabul, 1830

### LECTURE ON ARCHAEOLOGY



© Z. Païman

On the 7th April, the Afghan archaeologist Zafar Païman gave a public lecture in the mausoleum of Timur Shah concerning excavations at Tapa Narenj, south east of Kabul. Over the past seven years, a team from the Institute of Archaeology has unearthed an extensive Sassanian-Khushan monastery complex, comprising a series of stepped platforms along a natural ridge, on which several stone stupas have been found, along with remains of stucco Buddhas and other figures (see above).

### NAWRUZ 1389 BAGHE BABUR & MAZAR I SHARIF

Following a tradition that dates back to Mughal times, Baghe Babur was again the focus of celebrations of the spring holiday of Nawruz, the Persian New Year. With some 40,000 visitors between 21st and 23rd March, the garden this year saw an unprecedented number of family groups.

As part of celebrations of Nawruz in Mazar i Sharif, ten musicians from the Aga Khan Music Initiative for Central Asia (AKMICA) participated in the 7th International Festival of Gul e Surkh. This event included musicians from Iran, America, Turkey and Tajikistan, who performed in front of several thousand visitors.



## HERAT

### QALA IKHTYARUDDIN

Work is nearing completion on the laying of brick paving on the western platform of the historic citadel, adjoining the Timurid tower. This follows structural repairs to a large vaulted space, which was probably used for storage of ammunition, underneath the platform. As part of the goal to encourage the use of the citadel for cultural events, it was agreed with the department of Historic Monuments to protect the earth platform with fired brick paving, laid to form a shallow amphitheatre-like area that could be used for music recitals or theatre performances. During the course of this work, de-miners had to be called in several times to clear unexploded ordnance left over from the 1980s, when it seems that the platform had been used for heavy artillery.



### DEMOLITION AT DARB AL MALIK

As the principal northern gate to the old city, the historic area of Darb al Malik represents an important part of the surviving historic fabric of Herat. Recent investments by AKTC in the conservation of the Malik cistern and mosque complex, and the ongoing work on the citadel of Qala Ikhtyaruddin and the adjoining Shish Nal mosque are intended to safeguard the major public buildings in this area. Despite this conservation work, and repeated assurances by Herat municipality and others that any new construction will conform to agreed guidelines, an area of historic residential property adjoining the Malik cistern was demolished overnight in late April. The Old City Commission, which is responsible for overseeing new construction, has been asked to investigate this incident, which is the latest in an accelerating pace of illegal demolition in the old city.



### CALLIGRAPHY TRAINING

As part of AKTC's ongoing Afghan Cultural Initiative, courses in traditional calligraphy have been initiated in the restored Karbasi house in the old city of Herat. Overseen by the distinguished master-calligrapher Ustad Saberi, 19 young Heratis are enrolled in the initial 6-month course, which aims to expose the students to the theory and history of classical calligraphy, and to provide them with an opportunity to develop their skills in writing in the established styles, and also to explore contemporary types of written expression. The class includes novices as well as those with some prior experience of calligraphy.

For more information about AKTC's programme in Afghanistan, contact us at Qala Moeen Afzal Khan, Gozargah Street, District 3, Kabul or Qala Ikhtyaruddin, Herat. [aktc.afg@akdn.org](mailto:aktc.afg@akdn.org)



### MUSIC EXAMINATIONS

Four senior instructors from the Aga Khan Music Initiative for Central Asia (AKMICA) travelled from Kabul in early April to examine students enrolled in music courses in Herat. A total of 58 students who receive instruction in dutar, dilnawaz, rubab, tabla and voice passed the examinations and were therefore eligible to proceed to the next stage of the course. The students recently embarked on a programme of outreach to local schools and other institutions, aimed at fostering an interest amongst the younger generation of Heratis about their musical heritage.