

**University of Vienna / Gerda Henkel Stiftung
Kabul Museum Project**

Art History and Curatorial Workshop in Japan

December 1-14, 2019

A cooperation between the University of Vienna, Kyoto University,
and the National Museum of Afghanistan
with financing from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung's Funding Initiative "Patrimonies"
and Kyoto University's Institute for Research in Humanities

**Background of the University of Vienna / Gerda Henkel Stiftung (Vienna/GHS) Kabul
Museum Project and Curatorial Training Program**

During more than thirty years of war, the entire infrastructure in Afghanistan was destroyed. Desperate poverty and deepening social divisions driven by outside interests continue to challenge economic and political stability. But what has largely survived, to the astonishment of longtime observers of Afghan society, are the basic cultural values as recently described in a cover story in the International New York Times ("Meeting Crisis with Kindness," 2 April 2020). Many educated Afghans believe that maintaining their culture is central to the peace-building process. The long civil war had deepened the ethnic fault lines in society, but the National Museum of Afghanistan's ("Kabul Museum") narrative of the pre-historic, ancient, and medieval cultures of Afghanistan is presented as the common heritage of all Afghans. As custodians of Afghanistan's long and glorious cultural history, the dedicated men and women in the Kabul Museum believe that their work is essential to the revitalization of a national identity.

The war left the Kabul Museum in a desperate state (**Fig. 1**). The then director Dr. Omara Khan Masoudi and his staff were confronted by a seemingly insurmountable task. In 1993, a bomb destroyed the roof and top floor of the museum and caused a fire which reached the archive, destroying all the museum's records including the complete collections' inventory—every museum official's worst nightmare (**Fig. 2**). In the initial phase of recovery, several international governments contributed considerable sums to rebuild the burned-out museum and provided the expensive equipment needed for a modern museum. In addition to this substantial governmental

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financing for rebuilding the museum, UNESCO initiated the urgent first step—a re-inventory of the most precious collections which had been hidden for more than 20 years in a dramatic and courageous clandestine rescue initiated by the museum staff (Figs 2, 3).¹ At that time, the emphasis had to be on rebuilding the essential infrastructure of the museum. Masoudi was also forming his young curatorial team.

It is impossible for someone who had not visited the Kabul Museum before the war to realize that at that time it was considered one of the most important archaeological museums in Asia. The historical collections of the museum were all obtained from excavations conducted by distinguished international archaeological teams in collaboration with Afghan archaeologists. During the 1950s, mostly French experts, sponsored by UNESCO and coordinated by the successive directors A. Khozad and A. A. Motamadi, prepared the beautiful installation of each collection in modern cases.² Also during the 1950s, UNESCO-financed experts finalized the catalogue and inventory of the collections following the then prevalent international model. It was this system that Masoudi, together with UNESCO, initially adapted during the UNESCO-funded re-inventory.

Prior to the beginning of the Afghan war most of the curators had either been trained abroad or had worked together with specialists in Kabul for many years, so they were able to continue the scientific inventory as new finds entered the museum. But this generation died out during the long war. Therefore, it was necessary, wherever possible, to invite foreign experts to inventory the collections. Fortunately, they were able in most cases either to invite the excavator or their successor. It was Klimburg-Salter's good fortune to be asked to assist in this rescue action (Klimburg-Salter 2006) and to have been able to work with Dr. Masanori Nagaoka, the UNESCO culture official who coordinated this project "on the ground" (Fig. 4).

At the same time, the museum began the long process of capacity building—particularly the curatorial staff. Some staff, such as Masoudi, had remained in the museum throughout the war and were instrumental in the revitalization of the museum. However, most of the curators were

¹ For this dramatic story, see "*Twice Buried, Twice Found*" (Klimburg-Salter 2006).

² For a plan of the museum and description of the collections at that time, see A. Dupree, L. Dupree, A.A. Motamadi, *A Guide to the Kabul Museum* (Kabul, 1968, 2nd ed.). The preface explains that the guide was a translation of a 1961 French guide, plus a description of the newly installed ethnographic collections room (installed and catalogued by UNESCO 1964-67).

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born during the war and were among the first graduates of the newly re-constituted Kabul University. Within the context of the UNESCO Afghanistan Funds-in-Trust Program, different governments began training the museum conservators. But there were no capacity building programs for the curators and general staff.

During the initial phase of the UNESCO initiative begun in 2004,³ Univ. Prof. Klimburg-Salter and Susanne Novotny, then a Master's student at the University of Vienna, were able to assist the museum in the initial documentation and inventory process. Each inventory team included, in addition to the foreign expert, several high-ranking Afghan officials and a young Kabul Museum curator (**Fig. 5**). In 2005, Klimburg-Salter and Novotny participated in the re-inventory of the Hindu Kush collections (Klimburg-Salter 2006). UNESCO generously financed the first two University of Vienna missions, although Austria is not a member of the UNESCO Afghanistan Funds-in-Trust Program. With these limitations in mind, Masoudi and Klimburg-Salter designed a training program open to all curators but by necessity with a limited budget. None of the specialists—foreign or Afghan—received honoraria. The limited funds were meant to be directly applied to the training of the Afghan staff.

From 2005 to 2014, the University of Vienna Kabul Museum Project Capacity Building Program was generously supported by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung whose extraordinary flexibility and commitment continued to help the Capacity Building Program adapt to the evolving needs of the staff. The University of Vienna provided continuous training at the Kabul Museum, extending the scope to encompass computer literacy, exhibition design and management. Fortunately, this core University of Vienna Capacity Building Program could be augmented from 2007 by the Barakat Trust, Oxford, which provided intensive English language and computer training courses in the museum for all the staff. From the large number of staff members who began the program, eight curators demonstrated the necessary competence to go on to a more advanced level of curatorial training. The next phase of training held in Delhi, India, in 2008, with the support of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung and in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University's School of Arts and Aesthetics and the National Museum New Delhi. The capacity building program continued in

³ The program is documented in part at <https://www.univie.ac.at/cirdis/research/kabul-museum-project> and <https://www.univie.ac.at/cirdis/2006-2015/index.php/en/kabul-museum-project.html>. The full background of the Kabul Museum project will soon be collated and available on a new website.

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Kabul, by this time emphasizing art history and numismatics. The Kabul Museum curators also traveled to the University of Vienna in 2010 and 2011, to attend training programs in cooperation with the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (KHM) Coins Collection emphasizing academic presentation, art history, archaeology, numismatics, database management, and museum studies as well as participation in several international conferences (New Delhi, 2008; Vienna, 2010, 2011). Finally, a joint workshop was held in Japan in 2013, co-financed with Kyoto University. Senior scholars from both Austria, Japan, and Afghanistan—including the Kabul Museum Director Dr. Masoudi—as well as members of the curatorial and conservation staff participated. At the same time, various governments continued with infrastructure projects to rebuild the museum structures and facilities at an impressive rate.⁴ Unfortunately, in 2013, due to the ongoing violence and challenging political situation, many young people decided to flee the country with their families, including five of the curators trained by the first Vienna/GHS program.

In 2017, Dr. Masoudi requested assistance for a focused training program for the new young curators and senior conservation experts on the study of sculpture in different materials, production techniques, and an exploration of the authenticity of recently obtained sculpture. Objects have been entering the collection not only from legal excavations but through confiscation, nationally and internationally, and donation from abroad (**Fig. 6**). Their authenticity has become a serious and expanding problem. The newly-appointed museum Director Fahim Rahimi who participated in the first phase of the Vienna/GHS curatorial training program, joined Dr. Masoudi, the University of Vienna, and UNESCO Culture Unit, directed by Masanori Nagaoka (now returned to Kabul on his second UNESCO mission), in intensive consultation on designing the program, since the unstable security situation in Kabul prevented us from continuing to run the program onsite at the museum. With the valuable support and partnership of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, an online training program was developed in 2017/2018, focusing on art history and museum studies, instructed by Dr. Natasha Kimmet and directed by Klimburg-Salter. The program was successful beyond our expectations and culminated in an engaging training workshop in Japan

⁴ In 2012, the U.S. Embassy very generously financed the University of Chicago to implement a numerical inventory of the museum's collections. They also trained the Museology department to implement this digital inventory.

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in 2019 with the collaboration of premier research institutions in Kyoto and Tokyo and the ongoing largesse of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung.

Japan Workshop Description

The Kabul Museum Project “Art History and Curatorial Workshop in Japan” held in December 2019 was an intensive two-week capacity building program aimed at strengthening the skills, expertise, and networks of the Kabul Museum’s young custodians of Afghanistan’s invaluable and at-risk cultural heritage. The program was built on, and complemented, the successful Kabul Museum Kyoto program in 2013 (also funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung). The study of Afghanistan’s material culture—its art, archaeology, numismatics, and conservation science—was the focus of this workshop. Emphasis was placed on training in the use of proper research methods, particularly critical examination and evaluation of original objects at renowned Japanese museums and research institutions, including Kyoto University, the Ryukoku Museum, and Tokyo University of the Arts.

The program was a cooperation between individuals and institutions in Austria, Japan, and Afghanistan that have successfully worked together for many years: the University of Vienna, Kyoto University (host institution), and the Kabul Museum. Japan was selected as the optimal location for the workshop for its unparalleled quality of research facilities, museums, object collections, and the expertise of the six participating experts. The financial support for this bilateral project was provided by Kyoto University’s Institute for Research in Humanities and the Gerda Henkel Stiftung’s Funding Initiative “Patrimones.” We were all grateful for the extraordinary access to the museums, archives, temples, and palaces that the Japanese scholars facilitated.

The collaborative workshop proved highly successful because of the quality of the participants—it brought Director Rahimi and three curators together with extremely committed international experts in art history, archaeology, history, numismatics, and conservation science; the senior scholars are all leading experts in their field in the study of Afghanistan (**Fig. 7**). As a result of their active participation in the 2018 online Curator Training Program and English language classes at the American University of Afghanistan (financed by the Vienna/GHS Kabul Museum Project), the Kabul Museum curators demonstrated substantial and surprising improvement in the quality of their preparation and motivation for this workshop. Particularly

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impressive was their initiative to share the benefits of this training with other curators in Kabul. The effectiveness of this workshop further confirms the value and importance of ongoing investment in their education and professional networking.

Core Workshop Participants and Cooperations

Austria

1. Univ.-Prof. em. Dr. Deborah Klimburg-Salter (University of Vienna)
2. HR. Doz. Dr. Michael Alram (Austrian Academy of Sciences / Art History Museum, Vienna)
3. Dr. Natasha Kimmert (University of Vienna)

Japan

1. Prof. Dr. Minoru Inaba (Kyoto University)
2. Asst.-Prof. Satoshi Naiki (Kyoto University)
3. Assoc.-Prof. Dr. Shumpei Iwai (Ryukoku University and Museum)
4. Prof. Dr. Yoko Taniguchi (University of Tsukuba)
5. Prof. Dr. Inoue (Tokyo University of the Arts)
6. Dr. Noémie Verdon (Kyoto University / Lausanne University)

Afghanistan

1. Director Fahim Rahimi (National Museum of Afghanistan)
2. Basir Kamjo, Curator of the Kushan period (National Museum of Afghanistan)
3. Mayel Karimy, Curator of Numismatics (National Museum of Afghanistan)
4. Hosnia Namak Mohsini, Assistant Curator of pre-Islamic period (National Museum of Afghanistan)

Workshop Outcomes

- Following the success of the 2018 Online Curator Training Program and English language classes (financed by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung) and this workshop in Japan, this group of colleagues in Kabul, Kyoto, and Vienna will continue to collaborate in the exchange of information and resources on Afghan art and material culture. The quality of the participating experts cannot be overstated—the group is highly motivated and committed

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to ongoing support of the Kabul Museum team. The Kabul Museum team is quick to learn and has demonstrated tremendous initiative.

- The Japan workshop solidified and expanded institutional connections and academic networking in four core areas as requested and outlined by Kabul Museum Director Rahimi: (1) Conservation research [cooperation with the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo/Nara; Tokyo University of the Arts; University of Tsukuba; University of Vienna] (**Fig. 8**); (2) Museology and the study of ceramics through measurement and documentation [cooperation with Kyoto University Graduate School of Letters using equipment donated by this institution] (**Fig. 9**); (3) Research on materials and production techniques of clay objects and mural painting [cooperation with University of Tsukuba; University of Vienna] (**Fig. 10**); (4) Historical sources, including numismatics, inscriptions, and contemporary literature [cooperation with Kyoto University; Austrian Academy of Sciences; University of Vienna] (**Fig. 11**). The emphasis in this work on the unique technical innovations that occurred in pre-Islamic Afghan art helps the Kabul Museum staff to better understand materials and to study the objects in their collection. Crucially, this enables the museum staff to make important contributions to the history and technologies of their culture, hence the strong emphasis on technical aspects and conservation.
- At the final meeting, the Afghan staff proposed a program for transferring the information they had learned to their colleagues in Kabul.
- In January 2020, the three participating Kabul Museum curators presented a final oral report to their colleagues at the museum to share the skills and strategies they learned, particularly comparative art historical analysis (**Figs 12, 13**). They have continued to share this knowledge during scheduled sessions in the Kabul Museum (until the interruption of COVID-19 quarantine).
- In order for the Kabul Museum curators to continue to develop the skills and research methods addressed during this workshop, we decided to initiate a Kabul Museum Project “Research Mentorship Program.” Each curator selected a research topic relevant to the collections under their care at the museum. We will identify mentors with relevant

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expertise to consult with each curator to: (1) Carefully study the objects in the museum collection on the selected topic; (2) Create a catalogue of these objects; (3) Study the relevant scientific literature on the topic; and (4) Write short articles on the topic for the museum journal as well as didactic materials for gallery installations.

- Kabul Museum publication plan: The Kabul Museum recently published the first issue of its new journal “Museums” under the initiative of Director Rahimi. All participants agreed that this is the optimal format for the curators to present their research on selected topics related to the museum collections. The Japan workshop’s participating instructors based in Austria and Japan will offer the curators guidance and feedback throughout the writing and publication process.
- The three Kabul Museum curators continue to take English language classes at the American University of Afghanistan (financed by the Vienna/GHS Kabul Museum Project).
- After COVID-19 lock-down began, each curator wrote asking for an intensification of the reading list and online teaching, as they were at home and wanted to use their time to study. Naturally we were delighted and obliged.
- Director Rahimi is in discussion with conservation experts at the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties’ Japan Center for International Cooperation in Conservation, Tokyo University of the Arts, and the University of Tsukuba to outline and implement recommendations for object care and conservation in the Kabul Museum.
- Director Rahimi, Prof. Taniguchi, and Prof. Klimburg-Salter are evaluating the in-progress findings of scientific tests being conducted on three Kabul Museum clay-based Buddhist sculptures that were examined together as a group at Tokyo University of the Arts during the workshop. This research will be expanded to include comparative art historical and scientific results from objects in the collection of the Harvard Art Museums. This will be jointly presented at the next conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeology and Art (EASAA). Kimmet will present a paper on Akhnur and comparative red clay heads (all financed by FWF Project P-31246). This work provides a foundation

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for future collaboration into the unique materials and production techniques of Afghan Buddhist art.

NEXT STEPS

Director Rahimi and his curatorial staff have requested that the capacity building program within the auspices of the Kabul Museum Project be continued and expanded. We plan to divide the remaining project funds provided by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung evenly between two core aspects of the capacity building program:

(1) Ongoing English language training for four curators with the intention of assisting them in writing didactic materials in English for the museum.

(2) “Research Mentorship Program” and 2020 online course: an expansion of the 2018 online Curator Training program. It aims to further the institutional connections and academic networking in the four core areas requested by Director Rahimi.

The results of the workshop in Japan were so important that we are now discussing with the participating institutions and a potential new partner—a major university museum in the USA—plans for the next level of these capacity building activities in art, archaeology, conservation research and technical studies, and museology. At present in discussion is a second two-week intensive workshop to be held, funding permitting, with the same group of participants in addition to experts from our potential new university museum partner. We all feel that this is an essential next step in achieving a professional level of curatorial competence at the Kabul Museum.

Project website: *forthcoming*

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Figures



Fig. 1. The halls of the Kabul Museum devastated by the war. (Photo courtesy of O. K. Masoudi)



Fig. 2. All the records in the museum archive were destroyed by a fire caused by a bomb in 1993. (Photo courtesy of O. K. Masoudi)

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Fig. 3. Remnants of the museum's inventory cards after the 1993 bombing and fire. (Photos courtesy of Jolyon Leslie, SPACH Photocatalogue)



Fig. 4. Univ. Prof. Deborah Klimburg-Salter and UNESCO Culture Officer Dr. Masanori Nagaoka collaborate with Afghan colleagues to re-inventory objects in the Kabul Museum. (Photo: Novotny, 2004, WHAV)

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Fig. 5. Conducting inventory in the Ministry of Information and Culture, 2005. (Photo: Novotny/Klimburg-Salter, 2005, WHAV)



Fig. 6. Objects confiscated in Logar province and brought to the museum, 2004. (Photo courtesy of O. K. Masoudi)

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Fig. 7. Kabul Museum Project Workshop participants gathered at the Miho Museum. From left to right: Assist.-Prof. Satoshi Naiki, Kabul Museum Director Fahim Rahimi, KM Curator Hosnia Namak, Univ.-Prof. Deborah Klimburg-Salter, Prof. Minoru Inaba, KM Curator Mayel Karimy, Doz. Dr. Michael Alram, Dr. Natasha Kimmet, Dr. Noémie Verdon, KM Curator Basir Kamjo. (Photo courtesy of Eva Alram)



Fig. 8. Prof. Yoko Taniguchi lectures on “Constituent Materials and Painting Techniques of Bamiyan Buddhist Wall Paintings” at Tokyo University of the Arts. (Photo: Natasha Kimmet)

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Fig. 9. Assistant-Prof. Satoshi Naiki guides Kabul Museum team in a hands-on session to measure and draw pottery sherds. (Photo: Natasha Kimmet)



Fig. 10. Workshop participants study Buddhist clay and stucco heads from Afghanistan with conservation experts at Tokyo University of the Arts. Pictured in foreground, from left to right: Kabul Museum curators Hosnia Namak and Mayel Karimy, Director Fahim Rahimi, Prof. Deborah Klimburg-Salter, Prof. Inoue, Prof. Minoru Inaba, Assist.-Prof. Satoshi Naiki, curator Basir Kamjo. (Photo: Natasha Kimmet)

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Fig. 11. HR. Doz. Michael Alram guides Kabul Museum Director Fahim Rahimi and curators in the study of coins at the Miho Museum. (Photo: Natasha Kimmet)



Fig. 12. Curator Basir Kamjo presents what he learned during the Japan workshop to his colleagues at the Kabul Museum. (Photo courtesy of the Kabul Museum)

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Fig. 13. Curator Hosnia Namak shares the archaeological documentation techniques she learned in Japan with her colleagues at the Kabul Museum. (Photo courtesy of the Kabul Museum)

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