

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE CULTURAL HERITAGE WORK IN AFGHANISTAN

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In 2017–18 the Oriental Institute continued its cultural heritage preservation work in Afghanistan. We completed the sixth full year of the partnership between the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute (OI) and the National Museum of Afghanistan (NMA). This partnership and its related projects are funded by the US Department of State and the US Embassy in Kabul, with several key goals: a) developing a bilingual objects management database, b) conducting a full inventory of the NMA’s holdings, c) doing conservation assessments for the objects, d) rehousing the objects in archival quality containers, e) restoration of sculptures from the early Buddhist monastic complex of Hadda (fig. 1), e) museum outreach programming (the “Mobile Museum” grant), and f) training the NMA staff in conservation, database management, and artifact curation procedures. The inventory of all objects in the museum and other storage areas is now essentially complete. However, we are continuing with the Hadda sculptural restoration project, with our “Mobile Museum” outreach project, and in training and capacity building for the staff of the National Museum in object conservation, database management, and best practices for object curation.

In addition to our work with the National Museum, the OI is also conducting the “Afghan Heritage Mapping Project” (AHMP) in partnership with the Afghan Institute of Archaeology to train the staff and concurrently develop a geospatial database whose ultimate goal is to use remote sensing data to document all the main archaeological sites in Afghanistan.



RIGHT: Figure 1. Partially restored Gandharan style early Buddhist sculptures from Hadda. Photo by Gil Stein.



ABOVE: Figure 2. The OI Kabul and Chicago team: (left to right) Gil Stein, Ahmed Bilal, Alison Whyte, Alejandro Gallego-Lopez, Amanda Watts, Fabio Colombo, and Brendan Bulger. Photo by Gil Stein.

RIGHT: Figure 3. Bilingual Dari-English publication of *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at Kabul University, November 2014*.

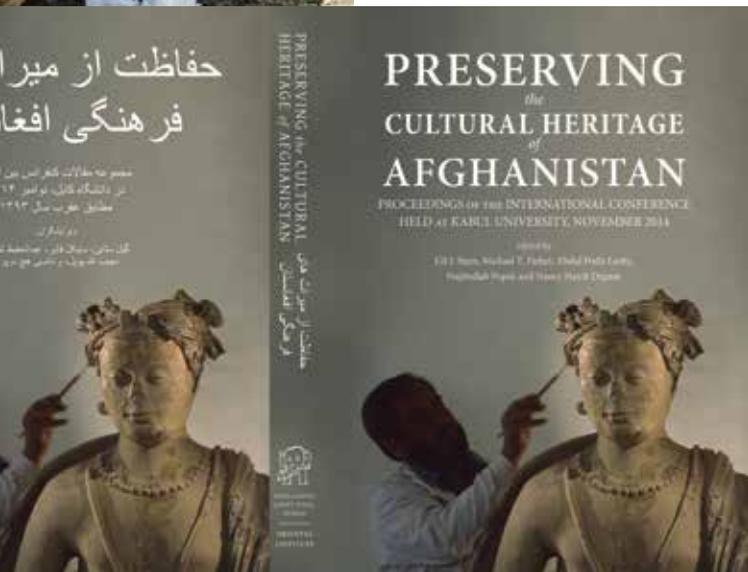




The OI component of the partnership with the NMA consists of two parts. The “Chicago team” consists of Gil Stein (PI), Brendan Bulger (grant planning, administration, and budgeting), and Alison Whyte (conservation). Our “Kabul team” consists of Field Director Alejandro Gallego-Lopez, Head Conservator Fabio Colombo, and Assistant Conservator Amanda Watts (fig. 2). We have worked closely not only with the National Museum of Afghanistan and its Director Fahim Rahimi, but also with local partners, and most importantly, with the US State Department and the US Embassy-Kabul. Local logistical support for our project is provided by ACHCO (a Kabul-based non-governmental organization that specializes in cultural heritage projects in Afghanistan); our close partners have been ACHCO founder Jolyon Leslie, and Ahmad Bilal, who has worked closely with Brendan Bulger on accounting, budgets, and logistics. At the US State Department, our key partners have been Laura Tedesco, the Cultural Heritage program manager at the Office of Press and Public Diplomacy, responsible for Afghanistan and Pakistan, while the State Department’s financial management of the grant is overseen by Grachelle Javellana. At the US Embassy-Kabul, we especially thank Cultural Affairs Specialist Alia Sharifi.

This past year, the work of our partnership with the National Museum was highlighted in the publication in 2017 of the OI co-sponsored conference *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Afghanistan: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at Kabul University, November 2014*; Gil J. Stein, Michael T. Fisher, Abdul Hafiz Latify, Najibullah Popal, and Nancy

Hatch Dupree (eds.), Chicago: The Oriental Institute (fig. 3). The book was published bilingually in Dari (one of the two national languages of Afghanistan) and English. It is available as a free downloadable PDF on the OI website to make it accessible to readers everywhere, especially in Afghanistan.



THE OI-NMA INVENTORY

Our main priority for the past six years has been to conduct the first full inventory of all the holdings of the National Museum. The museum had been devastated by the Afghan civil war (1989–95). During the subsequent period of Taliban rule, Taliban forces entered the museum in March 2001 and smashed hundreds of priceless sculptures and figurines, including some of the world’s most important examples of Early Buddhist (second–seventh centuries CE) Gandharan art from the Buddhist Monastery complex of Hadda in southeast Afghanistan near the Khyber Pass. An estimated 70% of the museum’s holdings were either looted or destroyed, and 90% of the museum’s artifact registration records were burned. The OI-NMA Partnership’s inventory is now complete, with 136,131 pieces inventoried in 45,795 records. These figures include both the objects in the museum and the highest value objects stored in the vaults of the Presidential Palace. The inventory continues to grow as the museum acquires new objects — most notably from the ongoing rescue excavations by the Afghan Institute of Archaeology at the ancient city of Mes Aynak in nearby Logar province.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES AND THE HADDA SCULPTURAL RESTORATION PROJECT

Object conservation and conservation training form a second key element in the OI-NMA Partnership. Our project conservators in Kabul, Fabio Colombo and Amanda Watts, worked closely with the staff conservators of the National Museum to train and assist them in condition assessment, stabilization, and restoration of museum objects. Much of the hands-on conservation training in the past year has taken place as an integral part of our Hadda Sculptural Restoration Project (fig. 4).

The 1,500 year-old sculptures from Hadda in the NMA’s holdings were recovered in excavations conducted by DAFA (Delegation Archeologique Francaise en Afghanistan) in several periods of fieldwork from 1926 to 1978. The approximately 3,000 sculptures Hadda at the National Museum of Afghanistan and in the Musée Guimet in Paris form one of the most important collections of Early Buddhist (Gandharan) art in the world. The sculptures at the National Museum were systematically smashed by the Taliban over three months from January to March 2001. At great personal risk, the NMA staff secretly collected and stored the smashed fragments of these sculptures. The Hadda Sculptural Restoration Project is designed to assess, stabilize, and restore as many as possible of the Hadda sculptures in the National Museum. Last year, our Kabul team Head Conservator Fabio Colombo, assisted by Amanda Watts and OI Museum Conservator Alison Whyte, conducted a one-year program of assessment, analysis, and documentation of the Hadda fragments to develop a detailed work plan for their conservation, restoration, and eventual public display. Based on that initial assessment, we have started the actual work of sorting, stabilizing, and starting to re-assemble the sculptural fragments.

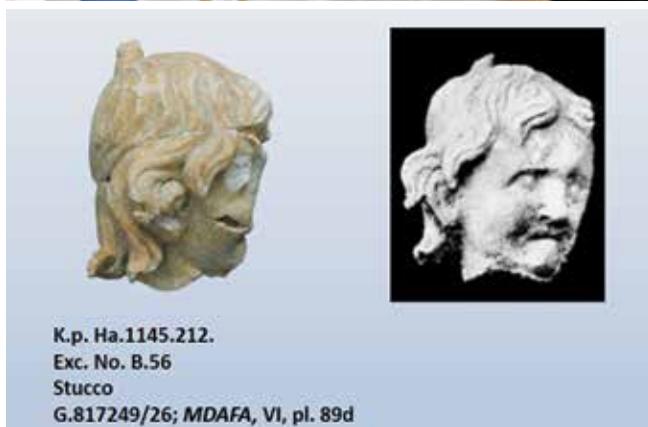
In the first stage of this process, Fabio and his team have been working to determine how many original sculptures are represented by the 6000 plus preserved fragments. In the past year, the team was able to locate 332 pieces with fully preserved catalog numbers written on them, indicating that — at a minimum — 332 sculptures from Hadda were smashed.

Once the fragments had been laid out as a group in the National Museum’s Conservation Laboratory, they were cleaned and the reconstruction phase of the project could begin. In spring 2018 we were able to find multiple joins between fragments and at least partially re-assemble our first seven sculptures. This definitively proves the feasibility of the overall project, and we can expect an increasing number of joins. Better still, Fabio and OI Kabul Field Director Alejandro Gallego Lopez were able to match the partially re-assembled fragments with specific catalog entries in Fancine Tissot’s 2006 partial catalog of objects in the National Museum (fig. 5).

THE MOBILE MUSEUM GRANT

The National Museum of Afghanistan Outreach Initiative (NMAOI, also known as the “Mobile Museum Project”) is a three-year collaboration between the Oriental Institute and the National Museum. This project will develop the first national-scale program of outreach education to raise awareness of the National Museum among school children (grades 6–12) through in-class presentations in twenty-four schools in six cities across Afghanistan — Kabul, Herat, Mazar-I Sharif, Bamiyan, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. Presentations materials will also be made at five of the US Embassy’s Lincoln Learning Centers across the country, and at two orphanages in Herat. The grant combines innovative digital technology, “object-based learning,” and traditional educational tools in multiple pathways of engagement with students to create a “Mobile Museum.” In this past year, we focused on developing three aspects of the in-school program for the Mobile Museum: a) the introductory video, b) 3-D scanning, and c) developing a curriculum/lesson plan for the program.

Project Manager Jalil Yousufi worked with Kabul Field Director Alejandro Gallego Lopez to produce the introductory video for the in-school programs. The video is intended to introduce students to the National Museum — what it is, why it is important, what kinds of objects are represented in its collections, and what these can tell us about the history of civilizations in Afghanistan. Most importantly, the video emphasizes that the museum and its collections are public property that belongs to the people of Afghanistan (fig. 6). The video will set the stage for the interactive and object-based learning part of the classroom program.



ABOVE: Figure 4. National Museum of Afghanistan conservators stabilizing sculptural fragments from the early Buddhist monastery complex of Hadda. Photo by Fabio Colombo.

MIDDLE: Figure 5. Partial reconstruction of seven Hadda sculptural fragments (left) allowed them to be matched to entries in Francine Tissot’s 2006 catalog of selected holdings of the National Museum of Afghanistan (right). These matches enabled the OI project to determine that the sculptures in question had been smashed by the Taliban, and not looted, as had previously been believed. Photo at left: Alejandro Gallego Lopez. Photo at right: Francine Tissot/UNESCO.

BOTTOM: Figure 6. Screenshot from the introductory video produced for the “Mobile Museum” project, showing of NMA Director Fahim Rahimi describing the museum and its significance for Afghanistan.

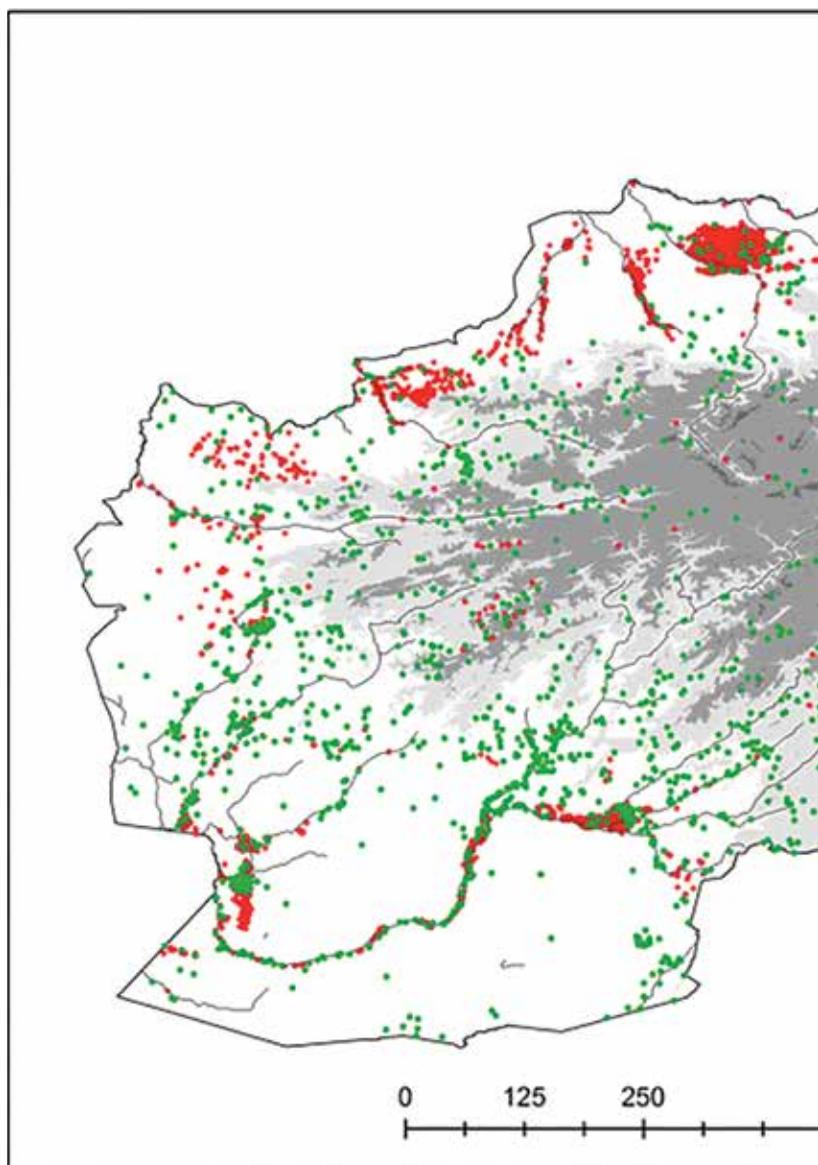
Alejandro used the OI-NMA computer-based inventory to select twenty-five objects from the NMA collections for 3-D scanning. Once completed, the scans will be used to produce 3-D prints of the objects. Including these replicas of actual artifacts from the NMA in the school program will enable us to bring the museum to the provincial cities through object-based learning. Students will be able to handle objects and compare them in order discover a) what is in the NMA, b) what were the main civilizations that characterize the history of Afghanistan, and c) how they can use these objects to better understand the history of their country.

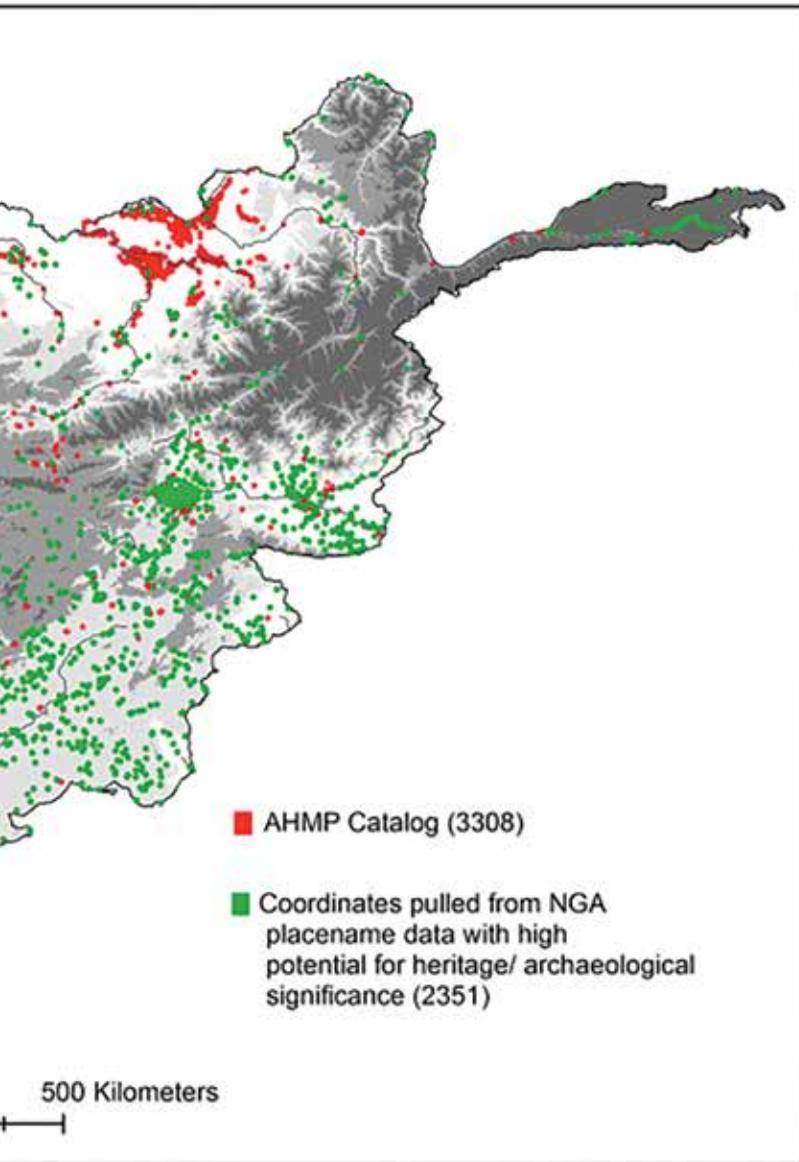
In spring 2018, Alejandro and Jalil met with representatives of the Afghan education consulting company “Hikmet Research and Scientific Studies Organization” to work cooperatively in developing the actual curriculum and lesson plan for the school program.

THE AFGHAN HERITAGE MAPPING PROJECT (AHMP)

Our third heritage preservation grant supports the “Afghan Heritage Mapping Partnership” (AHMP). The work of the AHMP is conducted in parallel in Chicago and in Kabul. In Chicago, the project draws on satellite imagery and other geospatial technologies to build a comprehensive geographic information systems (GIS) database of identifiable archaeological sites across Afghanistan. The goals in creating this database are to:

1. Inventory and map known and previously unknown archaeological heritage sites, especially in areas threatened by future mining development, urban expansion, and looting;
2. Document the current state of archaeological site preservation and analyze spatial and temporal patterns in looting;
3. Create a planning tool that will allow heritage protection to be incorporated into mining, economic, and urban development projects.





ABOVE: Figure 7. Afghan Heritage Mapping Project (AHMP) map of confirmed (red) and probable (green) archaeological sites in Afghanistan located by analysis of remote sensing images. The project now has over 6,000 heritage sites in its database. Image courtesy of Oriental Institute Afghan Heritage Mapping Project.

In Kabul, AHMP focuses on building capacity and infrastructure. We have developed a partnership with Kabul Polytechnic University (KPU), where KPU faculty and foreign archaeologists have been teaching intensive classes to train a cohort of Afghan heritage professionals at the Afghan Institute of Archaeology (AIA) and other organizations in the use of GIS technology for cultural heritage management and especially the location and documentation of archaeological sites.

Under the supervision of Project Manager K. Franklin, the Afghan Heritage Mapping Project (AHMP) continued with a two-pronged mission: a) the use of satellite imagery, historical maps, and other geospatial technologies to build a comprehensive GIS database of identified archaeological sites and monuments across Afghanistan, and b) capacity building through the construction of training modules and management tools (including a spatial data archive), and the training of local Afghan heritage professionals in the use of these tools. As of the end of June 2018, the AHMP databases contained confirmed or potential coordinates for nearly 6,000 places in Afghanistan (fig. 7).

CONCLUSION

The OI's cultural heritage preservation projects in Afghanistan are conducting outreach programs, documentation, and training Afghan heritage professionals through hands-on work in conservation, object curation, database management, and the use of GIS technology. Our ongoing efforts focus on developing a well trained, well equipped cohort of Afghan professionals who will be responsible for the stewardship of the unique historical treasures of their rich history of civilizations.