

III ICOMOS ACTIVITIES 2002–2009

2002

In the years of the war and under the Taliban regime the rich cultural heritage of Afghanistan met with tremendous losses. Many monuments and sites could only be saved from total decay if rescue operations were started immediately. For that reason UNESCO and the Ministry of Information and Culture of Afghanistan organised a first International Seminar on the Rehabilitation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (Kabul, 27–29 May 2002), the conclusions and recommendations of which, among other things, dealt with the state of conservation of the monuments of the Bamiyan valley: *The eyes of the world have been on the Bamiyan Valley since early 2001 since the destruction of the great Buddhist statues, a dominant feature of that famous place. It was noted that much discussion has taken place in Afghanistan and around the world about the future of this great site. The Seminar participants clearly recognized that the first emergency priority is the stabilization of the cliff face and the niches and caves carved into it, which are in a serious state of conservation and a matter of grave immediate concern. The decision to engage in reconstruction of the Buddhist statues of Bamiyan is a matter to be settled by the Government and people in Afghanistan, a point clearly recognized by the Seminar participants. In any case, the Seminar participants underscored that such work could be undertaken only after major stabilization work on the cliffs at Bamiyan has been completed, a process which is an essential first step in any conservation process at the Bamiyan Valley site.**

Under the guidance of UNESCO and thanks to the funds of 500.000 euros provided by the German Foreign Office in 2002 for the safeguarding of endangered cultural properties in Afghanistan, ICOMOS was able to work successfully despite difficult circumstances and used these financial means for a number of projects.

The Babur Park project, which could only be realised together with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), was a very extensive restoration measure. The park is a much visited place of recreation for the people of Kabul, in a spectacular location and very suitable for providing a German contribution to the rehabilitation of this city so terribly affected by years of war. The most essential parts of the park's surrounding walls were restored in 2002, and

the palace ruin (the former German embassy) was cleared of rubble and – in preparation of the restoration – newly measured by the ICOMOS team, using this work to train Afghan architectural students.

In Kabul, apart from the Babur Park some project funds were used to rehabilitate the quarter of Ashekan wa Arefan, a severely dilapidated quarter with four mosques and very interesting historic building structures spared by the war. This measure in a very densely populated town quarter, also carried out together with AKTC, may be considered a pilot project and possible example for similar historic quarters in other towns in Afghanistan. From the conservation point of view, it is of great importance that not only some outstanding monuments are saved, but that for the sake of the population this unique historic stock of buildings in Kabul is preserved, i.e. as an example of 'town repair' instead of the usual total renewal (see also p. 43).

In connection with the first ICOMOS mission to Kabul and Bamiyan from 12–21 July (see report, pp. 43) a new concept for securing the remains of the Buddhas of Bamiyan (anastylosis in the sense of article 15 of the Venice Charter) was developed (cf. pp. 46–51). During the second ICOMOS mission in October 2002 the ICOMOS funds were used for cleaning the drainage system on the hill above the Buddha niches, for hiring men to guard the historic sites and for repairing a group of buildings, including a small mosque, next to the Western Buddha as well as for covering the fragments of the giant statues, - all in preparation of further safeguarding measures, such as stabilising those parts of the rock that are threatened to fall off and securing fragments endangered by decay.

Furthermore, ICOMOS in cooperation with the Technical University of Aachen started a databank of all monuments and historic sites in Afghanistan (first presented to the Expert Working Group workshop in Munich at the end of November, see p. 54). The databank will be established on the basis of all available written sources. This material, crucial for all future conservation work in Afghanistan, is meant to be complemented on the spot by checking and documenting the present state of the sites (see also pp. 44/45).

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* International Seminar in Kabul, 27–29 May 2002, conclusions IV/14.



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Fig. a-c Kabul, views of the Babur Park, 2002

Fig. d Babur Park, restoration of the surrounding walls

Fig. e Babur Park, ruins of the palace

Fig. f Babur Park, magnetometer prospection carried out by Jörg Faßbinder

Fig. g Kabul, historic quarter Ashekan wa Arefan



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