

RED LIST OF  
**AFGHANISTAN**  
**ANTIQUITIES AT RISK**



**RedList**  
**ListeRouge**  
**ICOM**

# RED LIST

## OF AFGHANISTAN ANTIQUITIES AT RISK

The people of Afghanistan suffered great loss in human lives, personal property, and the deliberate destruction of monuments, museums, and artifact collections during the wars of the 1980s and 1990s. They are now witnessing the slow dispossession of their cultural heritage by looters who are pillaging archaeological sites and traffickers who are smuggling artifacts out of the country, frequently, it is believed, in connection with other criminal activities. This situation will continue as long as these traffickers have access to foreign markets of buyers of illicit antiquities.

To assist in stopping the looting and destruction of Afghan archaeological sites, the International Council of Museums has published this *Red List of Afghanistan Antiquities at Risk*, as a tool for law enforcement authorities, and to raise public awareness and encourage international cooperation in the protection of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan.

This *Red List* is the fourth in the series of ICOM *Red Lists of Antiquities at Risk*. The *Red Lists* are representative lists of general types or categories of objects, generally protected by national legislation and international agreements, which are subjected to illicit international trafficking. They are drawn up by teams of international experts in the archaeology and ethnology of the countries or regions of origin. The objects illustrated are not, to the best of the experts' knowledge, stolen or illicitly acquired. The *Red Lists* are intended to protect cultural heritage at risk by helping customs officials, police officers, art dealers, museums, and collectors recognize objects of possible illicit provenance. Potential buyers are advised not to purchase them unless they are accompanied by verifiable ownership and provenance documentation, and authorities are urged to take appropriate action when there is presumption of illicit provenance, pending further enquiries.

## *Introduction*

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The great archaeological heritage of Afghanistan is of universal importance. It is now at serious risk from organized destruction and plundering at the hands of criminals. The National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul has been looted and is missing a great part of its collection, much of which has found its way into the art market. Ancient sites and monuments, ranging from the Old Stone Age to the 20<sup>th</sup> century are being attacked and systematically looted.

Objects of all types and materials, from prehistoric times to the Indo-Greek, Buddhist and Islamic periods are being lost. Sculptures, architectural elements, ancient manuscripts, bronzes, wooden objects and ceramics are being illegally exported at an unrelenting rate. It is the duty of the international community to unite in protecting this unique cultural heritage.

## *Purpose*

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This document has been designed as a tool for museums, art dealers and collectors, customs officials and police officers to help them to recognize objects that could originate illegally from Afghanistan. This *Red List* describes under various categories, the general types of artefacts most likely to appear illicitly on the antiquities market so that these may be identified. Such objects are protected by Afghan legislation, which bans their export and sale. An appeal is being made to museums, auction houses, art dealers and collectors not to acquire such objects without clear title and established provenance.

The *Red List of Afghanistan Antiquities at Risk* is in no way exhaustive, and any antiquity for sale said to be from Afghanistan should be treated with great caution and suspicion.

Afghanistan cultural heritage is protected under:

*Law on the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Heritage*  
Issue No. 828, *Sawar* 31: 1383, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2004

*On 20 March 1979, Afghanistan ratified the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*

*On 8 September 2005, Afghanistan accepted the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*

# RED LIST OF AFGHANIST

THE RED LIST INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES OF OBJECTS:

(The images do not, at the date of this printing, reproduce stolen objects. They serve only to illustrate the categories of objects which are the target of illicit traffic.)

## PRE ISLAMIC PERIOD

### Ancient pottery / ceramics

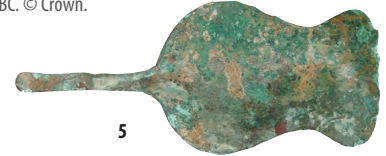
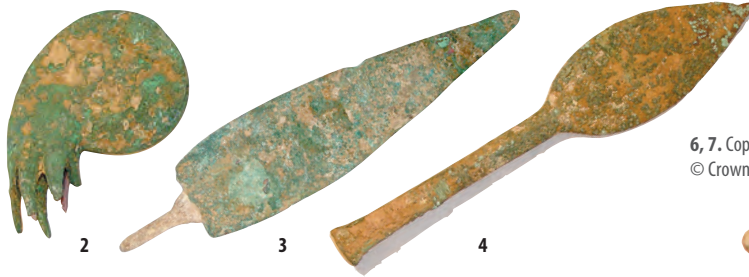
The shapes and floral motifs identify this kind of pottery as characteristic of the oldest proto-historic site of Afghanistan. [illus. 1]



1. Pottery goblets with pipal leaf design, from Mundigak, 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, ht. 9 to 19 cm. © Guimet Museum, photo Thierry Ollivier.

### Early metal artefacts

Copper tools often show signs of heavy corrosion. The tools include flat blades, arrowheads, axe heads, fringed axes, awls and blades of varying shapes and lengths. [illus. 2, 3, 4, 5]



2 to 5. Copper arrow, spear and fringed axe heads, 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC. © Crown.

### Cosmetic jars of metal

Small jars that may also have three legs, and may be in the shape of an animal. The jars sometimes contain a rod for applying the cosmetics. [illus. 6, 7]



6, 7. Copper alloy cosmetic bottles, probably 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC. © Crown.

### Bactrian statuettes

These composite statuettes made of chlorite and calcite (usually with an exceedingly small head and elaborate dress) are said to come from a very broad area covering northern Afghanistan, but also eastern Iran, and southern Turkmenistan. Size: maximum 14 cm high. [illus. 8]



8. Small statuette, Bactria, max. ht. 14 cm, chlorite and calcite, 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. © Agence photographique de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux (RMN) – Chuzeville.

## Reliquaries

Containers, most often in the form of pellet-shaped boxes with lids or miniature stupas. Usually made from stone (often steatite) though many are made of bronze or precious metals (gold or silver). Size: 2 to 50 cm high. [illus. 9]

9. Gold stupa-shaped reliquary, 1<sup>st</sup> century, ht. ca. 4 cm.  
© Trustees of the British Museum.



9

## Stone batons (sceptres)

Finely worked stone rods or poles, they are sometimes carved at one end in the shape of a horse's hoof. Size: 50 cm to nearly 2 meters long. [illus. 10]



10

10. Polished stone sceptres, ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC. © Crown.

## Stone weights

Made from hard granite-like stone and limestone, they are of several types: teardrop, handbag, ball-shapes sometimes with a small ring. Size: from ca. 20 cm to 30 cm high. [illus. 11]



11

11. Granite and limestone weights, ht. 20 cm to 30 cm, ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC. © Crown.

## Seals

In metal, hardstone, shell, bone and other materials. The commonest of these are 'compartmented seals', usually round, and bearing images in deep relief of geometric figures, swastikas, birds or animals. Size: 2 or 3 cm in diameter. [illus. 12, 13]



12



13

12, 13. Copper compartmented seals, Bactria, 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC.  
© Victor Sarianidi.

## Ivories

Ivory panels with carved decoration. Originally affixed as decoration to wooden luxury goods such as a jewel box. [illus. 14, 15]



14

14. Ivory decorative element from Begram. © Kabul Museum.

15. Ivory panel from Begram.  
© Dominique Dubois.



15

# RED LIST OF AFGHANIST

## Coins

Antique coins, of bronze, silver and gold, are hand stamped. Pre-Islamic coins usually include the portraits of the king on one side and the divinities on the reverse. Islamic examples are decorated only with Arabic script. [illus. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21]

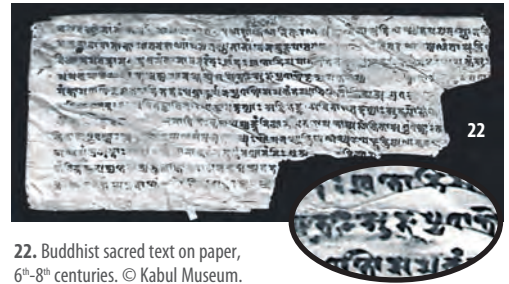


- 16. Silver 'bent-bar' with floral punches (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC).
- 17. Kushan coins: bronze coin of Huvisshka, son of Kanishka I (153-191 AD).
- 18. Indo-Scythian coins: silver coin of Azes I (57-20 BC).
- 19. Indo-Greek coins: silver coin of Menander I (165-130 BC).
- 20. Ghaznavid coins (962-1186 AD): gold coin of Qiwam-al-Daulah Tughrid (444 AH).
- 21. Sasanian coins: silver coin of Shapur II (226-642 AD).

© Kabul National Museum & French National Library.

## Manuscripts

Ancient manuscripts written usually in Indic scripts or occasionally Bactrian. Usually of palm leaf paper, birch bark or vellum. [illus. 22]



22. Buddhist sacred text on paper, 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries. © Kabul Museum.

## Fragments of wall paintings

Wall painting fragments have mostly thin pigment in primary colors (red, blue, green, yellow). The figures are usually outlined in black. The paintings have a white base on a ground of clay mixed with small stones and vegetal matter. Subjects vary but are often Buddha figures. [illus. 23]



23. Buddha, fragment from Kakrak. © Kabul Museum.

## Buddhist sculpture

**A/ Stone heads and reliefs:** the schist reliefs in the Gandhara style sometimes have narrative subjects. [illus. 24, 25]

**B/ Stucco:** with strong reminiscences from Hellenism in the elegant definition of the Buddhist types. [illus. 26]

**C/ Painted clay:** fragments of sculpture in stone (usually schist but sometimes limestone), stucco, and clay. The objects are often single images, usually a Buddha or Bodhisattva, but sometime also male or female donor figures. [illus. 24, 25, 26, 27]



24



25



26



27

- 24. Stone head. © Guimet Museum, photo Thierry Ollivier.
- 25. The life of the Buddha, schist from Hadda, 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, ht. 78 cm, w. 36 cm. © Guimet Museum, photo Thierry Ollivier.
- 26. Stucco head of a woman, from Hadda, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries, ht. 10,7 cm, w. 6 cm. © Guimet Museum, photo Thierry Ollivier.
- 27. Painted clay torso of a woman, 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries. © Kabul Museum.

## ISLAMIC PERIOD

### Manuscripts

Islamic paper manuscripts are found singly or sewed together as books. They contain ornamental calligraphy usually in Persian but also Arabic, the pages are often decorated with floral designs in various colors and gilding. Occasionally there are illustrations in full color or drawings of single figures, rarely also portraits in black ink. [illus. 28]

28. Page of a manuscript, ca. 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
© Kabul Museum.



### Metalwork

The great bronze products inlaid with gold and silver are rarely seen on the market, but lesser quality copper alloy objects in many shapes are common. They are decorated with incised motifs, sometimes inlaid in brass. [illus. 29, 30]



29



30

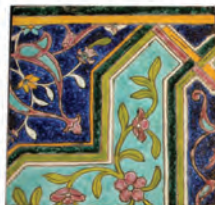
29. Copper alloy ewer, ca. 13<sup>th</sup> century.  
30. Copper alloy ewer inlaid with copper, ca. 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries.  
© Crown.

### Tiles

Moulded and glazed ceramic tiles, mostly square but some polygonal, molded in relief with animals or vegetal decor, or inscriptions. [illus. 31, 32, 33]



31



33

32

31. Glazed ceramic tile, ca. 17<sup>th</sup> century.  
32. Glazed ceramic tiles, probably from Ghazni, ca. 11<sup>th</sup> century.  
33. Glazed ceramic tile of Persian Qajar type, ca. 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
© Crown.

### Pottery / Ceramics

They include the green and yellow 'Bamyan' bowls with sgraffiato (incised) decoration. [illus. 34, 35]



34



35

34, 35. Pottery bowls from Afghanistan, ca. 13<sup>th</sup> century. © Crown.

### Architectural elements

Pieces of superbly worked stone, usually flat white marble panels carved with Islamic inscriptions or decorative motifs. Often associated with architectural fragments dating to every period of Afghan history. [illus. 36, 37]



36



37

36, 37. Islamic decorative carved marble panels, ca. 12<sup>th</sup> century. © Crown.

## ICOM AND THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The International Council of Museums (ICOM), created in 1946 to represent museums and museum professionals worldwide, is committed to the promotion and protection of natural and cultural heritage, present and future, tangible and intangible. With a unique network of over 40,000 members in 138 countries and territories (2018), ICOM is active in a wide range of museum-and heritage-related disciplines.

ICOM maintains formal relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and has a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as an expert in the fight against illicit traffic in cultural goods. ICOM also works in collaboration with organisations such as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to carry out some of its international public service missions.

The protection of heritage in the event of natural disaster or armed conflict is also at the core of ICOM's work, thanks to its Disaster Risk Management Committee (DRMC) and through its strong involvement in the international Blue Shield. ICOM has the ability to mobilise expert networks in the field of cultural heritage from all over the world thanks to its numerous programmes.

In 2013, ICOM created the first International Observatory on Illicit Traffic in Cultural Goods in order to reinforce its action in fighting illicit traffic.

The Red Lists have been designed as practical tools to curb the illegal trade in cultural objects. ICOM is grateful for the unwavering commitment of the experts and institutions who generously contribute to the success of the Red Lists.

The Red Lists are available at the following address: <http://redlist.icom.museum>

*This Red List was developed with the generous support of:*



*U.S. Department of State  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
Washington D.C.*

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