

GHAZNI

REPORT ON A VISIT BY ROBERT KLUYVER ON 29 AND 30 APRIL 2000

OBJECT OF THE VISIT :

To meet Mr. Naqshbandi, visit Tepe Sardar, discuss the nature and the cost of the protective works to be undertaken at Tepe Sardar under Mr. Naqshbandi's supervision, and plan them.

Diary:

We left on Saturday 29 at seven o'clock in the morning, our convoy consisting of two cars: our rented Toyota 4wd with Joyenda, his friend and owner of the car Said Mohammed, Nasrullah the driver and me, and the BBC car with Kate Clark, Sabor her assistant and a driver. We had agreed to travel together, Kate thus having a chance to make use of our contacts in Ghazni, while SPACH can always use some extra media coverage. Not that this was part of the agreement, and in the end Kate did not interview us (but some other journalists did).

The road to Ghazni has been remade, and it now only takes 3-4 hours to get there, whereas before it took 5-6.

On the way, some 5 km after Salar, we visited a high mound, maybe the "Patanak" surveyed by Fischer in 1966 - Warwick Ball site 807). It evidently resembles a fortress/monastery, and most likely is a Kushan-Sassanian site like Tepe Sardar. There were not many signs of illegal excavation (only one major digging) or other forms of deterioration of the site.

On the last pass to Ghazni we were tailed by what seemed to be highwaymen, masked people in a car without numberplates... on this stretch of road the ICRC escaped a robbery attempt not long ago, and a MSF car forced its way through a bandit's barrage. It was fortunate there were two cars, otherwise they undoubtedly would have tried to stop us.

In Ghazni we stayed at MSF-France, who very kindly received us. We met two French journalists (Olivier Weber and Francois...) who had obtained an authorization to visit all local sites from the governor of Ghazni.

We didn't have any letter from the government backing us, Hotaki had refused to grant us one. Foreigners are clearly in disfavor again with the Taleban government since the UN has decided to step up its sanctions. Nothing personal, SPACH has better relations with the Ministry of Information and Culture than ever before (according to Joyenda), but Hotaki is clearly afraid of losing his own job, and has let us know he was too busy to receive us foreigners for the coming month. And he's not signing any authorizations. For the time being we'll either have to do without, or try to arrange things at a higher level, with Qaidratullah for example.

That afternoon we visited some shrines (that of Sana'i, of Shamsi, of Khwaja Laikhar, and of Khwaja Bulgar). Our group of three cars, two video cameras, two sound-recorders and 13 people was too conspicuous and at the last shrine the deputy governor caught up with us and while menacing our translators with eternal damnation for "assisting evil" sent us all packing.

Only the shrine of Khwaja Laikhar was interesting from an architectural point of view. This small Timurid building was restored by Mohammad Sharif (who's currently working for SPACH in Balkh) and is still in a very good condition. They seem to have done a good job both on the vault of the entrance-iwan, on the main dome and the external walls of the building.

This being said, the Sana'i shrine erected by Habibullah is a good expression of his style and in well-kept condition.

That afternoon we initiated a discussion with Naqshbandi about the nature and cost of the works to be realized at Tepe Sardar (exactly those recommendations that Taddei made), and established a list of required inputs for which he brought the prices the following morning. Please find a budget attached to this report. We also discussed the modalities. Naqshbandi warned that nothing could be done without the presence of two or three local government people who would "supervise" the work - and we'll have to pay "incentives" for them too - for accepting the presence of these people would be a prerequisite for local authorization, which we need in addition to the national one.

It is becoming clear that nothing can be done without bakshishing all authorities involved. As if they were doing SPACH a pleasure by cooperating with us in preserving their cultural heritage... I find this situation totally disheartening and each time have the instinctive reaction to simply cancel the planned activity. This doesn't help anyone either. Luckily the amounts of bakshish required are usually quite small.

Likewise we had to bakshish the guard of Tepe Sardar the next morning. I went there with the French journalists the next morning, making use of their authorization. The guard wouldn't let us in but we simply passed him and made things good later by paying him 200 paki rupees. For that price he even accepted to talk about his job.

I found that the 15-meter lying Parinirvana Buddha was even more damaged than Taddei described it in his report. It is now completely unrecognizable. For the rest the site is in the sorry condition that poor old Taddei found it in. Frankly speaking I do not even see the point in protecting the small stumps of votive stupas left over by all the looting and iconoclastic destruction. To my eyes it's a symbolic burial *in memoriam* Taddei. We must also remember there are probably at least two other chapels still uncovered.

Later that day Naqshbandi, Joyenda and I visited several other historic sites of Ghazni: the Palace of Sultan Mas'ud III, his Minar, the Mausoleum of Abdur Razzaq in which the IsMEO had organized a small museum, and the Mausoleum of Sultan Mahmud.

Taddei suggests in his report that the mudbrick structures at the Palace be protected in a similar way to those of Tapa Sardar, i.e. with kahgil (mix of clayish earth and straw). I suggest that the same technique plus one or two square meters of fired bricks be used to patch up a few holes at the Mausoleum of Abdur Razzaq. It is still in good condition but the lack of the maintenance that kahgil requires has caused infiltrations which are damaging the stucco inside; and some holes in the roof expose the building, notably its domes, to further environmental deterioration.

I will ask Naqshbandi to budget these works as soon as Tepe Sardar is being taken care of.

The Minar and all the shrines we saw are still in a good condition and need no, or minor repairs. On the Minar of Mas'ud III one panel of decorative patterns was starting to fall off, some plaster (and scaffolding) would be needed to fix that. The shrines seem to be upkept by the local communities visiting them.

We returned to Kabul in the early afternoon, and had an uneventful trip home.