

AFGHANISTAN CULTURAL PROFILE

The Afghanistan Cultural Profile, a comprehensive English-language online guide to cultural development in Afghanistan, was updated in partnership with the UK-based organization Visiting Arts. Targeting cultural professionals, attentive readers, and cultural tourists, the ACP offers a sector-by-sector guide to the arts, media, libraries, archives, and tourism sectors in Afghanistan. Thematic overviews are linked with a database of over 700 contact organizations working in Afghanistan, promoting interaction and the sharing of knowledge while fostering development and growth of cultural networks. Since its launch in March 2011, there have been over 40,000 visitors to the ACP site and more than 100,000 page views.

With initial funding from the British Council Afghanistan, long-term support for developing and maintaining the site has been provided by the Government of Norway through the Afghan Cultural Initiative.

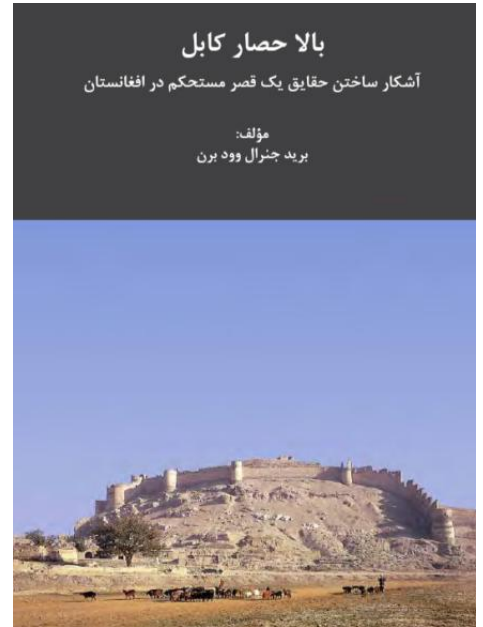
► www.afghanistan.culturalprofiles.net

NASIR KHUSRAW SHRINE

The *ziarat* or shrine of Nasir Khusraw stands on an exposed conglomerate rock outcrop overlooking the Yumgan valley in southern Badakhshan. Located above the remote village of Hazrat Sayyid, where Nasir Khusraw wrote the works for which he is famous, the modest shrine marks the site where the 11th century poet-philosopher is believed to have been buried. Built soon after his death, sometime between 1072-76, the shrine today is made up of four small, flat-roofed rooms clustered together, two of which have open verandas. The shrine is an important example of the rich vernacular building traditions of the remote mountain region.

Earlier modifications to the shrine are believed to have been made in the 12th century and during the Chaghatai period in the 14th century. During the comprehensive renovation and expansion of the building in the late 17th century, the verandas, supported by carved wooden columns, were constructed and the main tomb chamber was re-roofed with cedar wood beams on which verses from the Holy Koran are delicately inscribed in *naskh* script. Renovations carried out in the second half of the 18th century included the re-plastering of the inner walls of the shrine in a typical Mughal-era motif, which together with previous renovations span nine centuries of architectural development and ornamentation.

The shrine was initially surveyed as part of the Wakhan-Badakhshan Heritage Inventory exercise conducted by AKTC in 2007-09. In late 2010, AKTC signed an agreement of cooperation with the Ministry of Information and Culture aimed at undertaking the comprehensive restoration of the shrine and the rehabilitation of the surrounding gardens. During the course of 2011, topographic and a detailed architectural survey of the building were carried out, followed by extensive geotechnical investigations of the conglomerate rock outcrop (above left). Over the coming months, stabilization and conservation measures will be designed and implemented during the course of 2012.



BALA HISSAR PUBLICATION

The *Bala Hissar* or citadel of Kabul is one of the largest and most prominent monuments and archaeological sites in the city and of international historic significance. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, many of the most dramatic events of Afghan and regional history have unfolded within its high fortified walls, as the citadel was connected with both the rise of the Mughal dynasty and the Anglo-Afghan wars. While little remains above ground today that identifies the citadel's heritage and glorious past, modern constructions recently built on the site risk further destruction of the archaeological remains from earlier periods of occupation, dating possibly as far back as the 2nd century B.C.

The translation of Brigadier Woodburn's valuable report on the history of the *Bala Hissar* into Dari and its publication in Afghanistan, undertaken with support from the Norwegian Government, makes research based on important archives in the United Kingdom and Switzerland more accessible to Afghan students, government officials, cultural heritage professionals, academics, or other potential stakeholders.

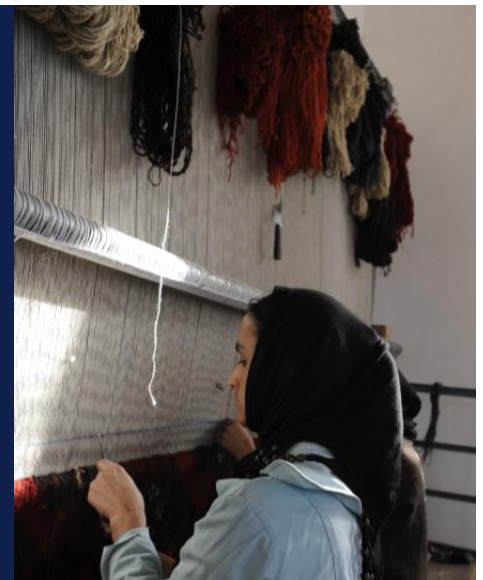
DEDICATED NEW PREMISES FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING COURSES IN KABUL

AKTC vocational training activities in Kabul's District 7 were consolidated into one site following the restoration of the second *burj* (tower) attached to the historic residential fort built by Moeen Afzal Khan in the beginning of the 20th century in Gozargah near Baghe Babur. The restored three-story building originally constructed using mud bricks (above left, before-after restoration), provides much needed additional space with ample natural light for the tailoring, embroidery, and weaving courses in which 85 female and 5 male students are currently enrolled. Building works were undertaken with resources provided by the German Embassy in Kabul.

Experienced local masons previously employed by AKTC on restoration projects in the Old City of Kabul were engaged in May to establish a new course in masonry, thereby transferring skills gained through years of working on conservation projects

to a younger generation of craftsmen. During the course of the year, 20 students received training in the construction of stone and brick masonry, mixing and preparing different types of mortar, and techniques for plastering and pointing various surfaces. As part of their final training, these students, with support from their *ustaad* (teacher), were required to participate in a building exercise entailing the construction of a small cross-vaulted pavilion structure using traditional materials and building techniques (above right).

By the end of 2011, more than 920 young men and women will have benefitted from vocational training courses provided in carpentry, masonry, tailoring, embroidery and weaving. These courses in Kabul's Districts 1 and 7 were made possible with co-funding provided by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kabul.



For more information about AKTC's programme in Afghanistan, contact us at aktc.afg@akdn.org