

Conference Report

by J. Mark Kenoyer, AIPS President

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Cultural Heritage Issues in Pakistan: Archaeology, Museums and Conservation

Date: January 6-8, 2011 Venue: Margala Hotel, Islamabad

Sponsored by the
American Institute of Pakistan Studies
with support from the
US Embassy, Islamabad

In collaboration with the
Department of Archaeology and Museums
Ministry of Culture, Government of Pakistan

The Cultural Heritage of Pakistan is rich and diverse, with significant potential for further research, conservation and tourism development. This conference was organized to enhance the national and international profile of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage by bringing together US and Pakistani scholars who presented papers on a wide range of topics. Twenty-eight leading scholars from Pakistan and ten from the US were invited to present their new findings. These scholars have been involved in recent excavations and research in all major regions of Pakistan and represent all major periods in the history of the region.

The final actual program and abstracts of the papers are attached below and images, as well as some video from the conference will soon be posted on the AIPS website. <http://www.pakistanstudies-aips.org/>

Conference Overview

The main goal of the conference was to highlight the important new archaeological discoveries made over the past ten years, by both Pakistani and foreign scholars. The conference also had presentations on the state of current and new museums, and the conservation of important sites and monuments. Another important topic was on education and outreach to the general public, and the importance of cultural heritage in modern day Pakistan. Additional topics that were covered included the issues of managing cultural heritage in the face of natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, and man-made disasters such as bombings and attacks by people trying to destroy cultural heritage.

This conference was also a chance for US scholars who have been working on projects in Pakistan for many years to meet with Pakistani scholars to share the results of their research and exchange ideas on the major issues of Cultural Heritage research, preservation, conservation and education. Students from universities throughout Pakistan were invited to attend the conference and see the importance of cultural heritage. Most important was the fact that the conference was held in Islamabad and that members of the various ministries of

Education, Culture and Tourism were able attend to find out what the most important issues are. Between 125-150 people attended the conference on each of the three days of the conference.

The major result from this conference was a renewed dialogue between archaeologists within Pakistan, and between Pakistani and US based archaeologists. Many new connections were forged and many old connections were renewed. One main message that was repeated over and over by many speakers was the need to educate the general public and policy makers in Pakistan, the US and the world in general, about the importance of Pakistan's cultural heritage. The most urgent issue is the need to protect and conserve sites that are being destroyed by neglect or intentionally destroyed to pave way for new developments. Another important message was the need to collaborate with scholars in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India to share information and results of research, and to develop regional strategies for training in conservation and documentation.

Media

The entire conference was broadcast live on Radio Pakistan thanks to the keen interest of Mr. Murtaza Solangi, the Director General of Radio Pakistan. The English version of the broadcast was also dubbed with the local languages and presented with streaming video on Radio Pakistan. The entire sound recording of the conference will be archived by Radio Pakistan and used for later programs on the archaeology of various regions. Many of the major TV channels and Voice of America were also present and featured interviews with the many speakers and visitors.

Planned Publication

The conference will result in a significant edited volume that will be printed in Pakistan in order to make it available to the local schools and universities. In this way the results of the conference will be disseminated widely within the country as well as internationally.

Conference Organization

The steering committee for the conference included Dr. J. Mark Kenoyer, President of AIPS, Dr. Fazal Dad Kakar, Director General of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, Dr. Ihsan Ali, Vice Chancellor, Mardan University, Dr. Nilofer Shaikh, Vice Chancellor, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, and Dr. Kaleem Lashari, Secretary, Department of Antiquities, Sindh.

Due to unavoidable circumstances, Dr. Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture, Smithsonian Institution, was not able to attend and present the keynote address. The Honorable Minister of Culture was also not able to attend the inaugural session, but joined the conference on the second day. We were happy to be able to have the conference inaugurated by Mr. Walter Douglas, the Minister Counselor for Public Affairs., U S Embassy, Islamabad. We were also honored to have the His Excellency, Mr. Joost Reinjtes, Ambassador of

Holland join us for several sessions of the conference.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the US Embassy for providing support to the American Institute of Pakistan Studies for organizing this conference. I also want to thank the Pakistan Embassy in Washington DC for their assistance with visas for the US scholars. This conference has been organized in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Ministry of Culture, Government of Pakistan and I want to extend a special thanks to the Director General, Dr. Fazal Dad Kakar and to all the members of his staff who helped with the organization of the conference. I also want to thank the steering committee who helped in selecting and recommending papers, Dr. Fazal Dad Kakar, Dr. Ihsan Ali, Dr. Nilofer Sheikh, and Dr. Kaleem Lashari.

The implementation of this conference would not have been possible without the outstanding support of the AIPS staff in the US – Ms Laura Hammond and Salima Currimbhoy and the Islamabad staff – Nadeem Akbar, Ghulam Rasool, Asma Haider, and all the others who helped with transport and logistics. I also want to thank the student volunteers from Quaid-i-Azam, Punjab University, Peshawar University, Hazara University, Khairpur University. Most importantly I want to thank all of the participants who prepared papers and traveled to participate in the conference.

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