



Review Article

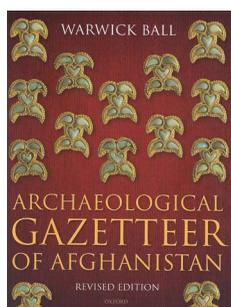
The archaeology of Afghanistan revisited

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WARWICK BALL. 2019. *Archaeological gazetteer of Afghanistan* (revised edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-927758-2 hardback £120.

RAYMOND ALLCHIN, WARWICK BALL & NORMAN HAMMOND (ed.). 2019. *The archaeology of Afghanistan* (new edition). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 978-0-7486-9917-9 hardback £175.



The discipline of archaeology in Afghanistan was at a turning point when the original editions of *The archaeology of Afghanistan* and the *Archaeological gazetteer of Afghanistan* were published in 1978 and 1982, respectively. The first three decades of modern archaeological activity in Afghanistan (1920s–1940s) were dominated by French archaeologists who primarily focused on the pre-Islamic past, particularly the Buddhist period. Following the Second World War, however, Afghanistan gradually opened archaeological practice to a more international community. Consequently, the scope of archaeological exploration expanded to include more robust studies of the prehistoric, pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. In the 1960s, the Afghan Institute of Archaeology began conducting its own excavations, and by the late 1970s, national and international excavations were uncovering exciting new discoveries across the country. These archaeological activities largely halted as Afghanistan descended into chaos during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989) and the Afghan Civil War (1989–2001); the Afghan Institute of Archaeology was the only archaeological institute continuing operations. The original editions of the volumes under review were therefore timely and poignant publications that captured the peak of archaeological activity in twentieth-century Afghanistan and became classic texts on the subject.

With the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan witnessed a resurgence of archaeological activities by both Afghan and international specialists, ushering in a new era of discovery. The Minaret and archaeological remains of Djam were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2002, followed by the cultural landscape of the Bamiyan Valley in 2003. The National Museum of Afghanistan, which once housed over 100 000 artefacts discovered within the country's modern borders, was rehabilitated. In 2004, a travelling exhibition of some of the country's prized archaeological collections went on tour to many of the world's most renowned museums. New excavations began across the countryside. Numerous publications and looted antiquities that had found their way onto the

black market—although stripped of their context—also enriched the knowledge of Afghanistan's archaeological record. With this expansion of archaeological practice and information, the time was ripe for new comprehensive publications. The revised editions of the *Archaeological gazetteer of Afghanistan* and *The archaeology of Afghanistan* are thus equally timely updates to the original editions published some four decades ago.

The revised *Archaeological gazetteer of Afghanistan* is published as one large volume as opposed to the original 1982 edition, which was in two volumes. The book is divided into several sections, largely following the structure of the original edition: Site Catalogues, Maps, Appendices and Bibliographies.

The Site Catalogues include archaeological sites dating from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Timurid period, which are listed in alphabetical order. The revised edition lists approximately 1600 entries, covering some 2100 individual sites. Each entry in the Site Catalogues includes, where applicable or available, the site's geographic coordinates, date(s) and description, the location of collections derived from the site, a summary of fieldwork undertaken and key publications on the site. The coordinates are provided by the Afghan Heritage Mapping Partnership (AHMP) at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago; the coordinates from the 1982 edition are still listed. Sketches of some of the sites (historic and modern) are also included. There are two catalogues: the entries included in the original edition (numbering 1–1271) and a supplementary section for new sites (numbering 2000–2292). As Warwick Ball indicates in the introduction, this supplement was added to the revised edition reluctantly as the catalogue numbers from the first edition are commonly used by researchers. Regrettably, the division makes it more difficult to search the catalogue. One wonders if the revised edition may have been better served by listing all the sites alphabetically in one catalogue, with researchers encouraged simply to indicate the edition being referenced.

The following sections, Maps and Appendices, provide a range of useful research tools. The Maps section includes a Map Concordance, which comprises the original 1982 map numbers along with corresponding updated map numbers, followed by 22 period maps and 76 regional maps. The updated section also benefits from the latest satellite imagery available from AHMP. Five appendices detail the Chronological Concordance, Concordance of Collections, Concordance of Fieldwork, Glossary and Subject Index, which are all of potential value for researchers. The Bibliography is divided into two parts: Subject Bibliography and General Bibliography, the latter of which is a welcome and useful addition. The Bibliography is extensive, boasting over 500 more references than the original edition.

The purpose of the *Gazetteer*, as stated in Ball's introduction, is to combine material into a format that is comprehensive but also accessible. On both counts the volume is successful. Despite a few missing or misdated references in the Bibliography, which is perhaps understandable given the vast scope of the book, the *Gazetteer* is an extremely useful reference tool. It will be most easily navigable to those already familiar with the material, but ultimately, the *Gazetteer* will be the key reference work on the archaeology of Afghanistan.

The second volume under review, *The archaeology of Afghanistan*, comprises eight chapters written by scholars who are leaders in their respective fields. These chapters are well structured and packed with new material, but presented in an accessible style for non-specialists. This revised volume benefits from the considerable amount of research published since the first edition. Indeed, the revised edition has a much more extensive bibliography than its

predecessor. More than 350 colour photographs are another welcome addition that enliven the text, although some of the older maps, notably on the location and geographical features in Chapter 1, could have been updated.

In addition to the introduction to the new edition, the book also retains the introduction to the first edition by the original editors Norman Hammond and Raymond Allchin, which lays out the history of archaeological research in Afghanistan. It is worth noting that the development of archaeology as a discipline in Afghanistan during the twentieth century was shaped not only by international interest, as the introduction suggests, but also by the successive Afghan governments, which recognised the importance of developing the practice of archaeology and strategically reached out for support from the international community. In the introduction to the new edition, Warwick Ball sets the stage by describing the extensive discoveries and developments since the publication of the first edition, which are expanded on in the following chapters. The chapters unfold chronologically with three devoted to pre-history and four to the historic periods.

In Chapter 1, Sophia Bowlby and Kevin White provide an updated geographical background including information about climate, natural resources, patterns of subsistence and opportunities for trade. In Chapter 2, Richard Davis, while emphasising the preliminary nature of research on the Palaeolithic, presents the possibility of a Lower Palaeolithic and strong evidence for a Middle, Late and Epi-Palaeolithic in Afghanistan. The most dramatic update is to be found in Chapters 3–4, which address the development of stratified societies north and south of the Hindu Kush, respectively. These have been expanded from one chapter in the original edition in order to accommodate the growing research on the later prehistoric period. Chapter 3, by Henri-Paul Francfort, Bertille Lyonnet, Cameron Petrie and Jim Shaffer, discusses the limited evidence for the earliest phases of sedentary occupation across Afghanistan; it then presents and analyses evidence for the development of the Oxus Civilization with material from important excavations in Afghanistan conducted prior to 1979, notably at Shortugāi. In Chapter 4, Cameron Petrie and Jim Shaffer introduce evidence for the development of a civilisation recently named the ‘Helmand Civilisation’, drawing on evidence from excavations in Afghanistan, principally the *Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan* excavations at Mundigak in the 1950s; the analysis makes connections with excavations in surrounding regions, notably in eastern Iran and the broader region of the Indus Civilisation. While these chapters provide considerably more data and analysis on the prehistoric period compared with the first edition, they also highlight the need for further excavations at Afghan sites given their reliance on material from only a handful of locations.

Chapters 5–6 present the pre-Islamic past, and as this period has been prioritised in archaeological activity since the advent of the modern discipline in Afghanistan in 1922, these chapters draw on far more available material compared with chapters on the prehistoric and Islamic periods. Chapter 5 marks the shift to the Iron Age, followed by the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods by authors Warwick Ball, Simon Glenn, Bertille Lyonnet, David Mac Dowall and Maurizio Taddei. The chapter provides updated assessments of settlements, material culture, architecture and art, epigraphy and numismatics. It includes a range of new evidence uncovered over the past four decades, notably the second Mir Zakah coin hoard, Aramaic Achaemenid documents possibly from Balkh, satellite imagery, new excavations, including at Balkh and Herat, as well as older excavations, such as at Tillya Tepe.

Chapter 6, 'From the Kushans to the Shahis', by contributors Warwick Ball, Olivier Bordeaux, Nicholas Sims-Williams, David Mac Dowall and Maurizio Taddei, follows the same structure as the previous chapter, with an additional section on Buddhist art and architecture. The chapter provides extensively updated material on this period, drawing on evidence from exciting new discoveries, such as the Rag-i Bibi rock relief and Bactrian documents, and extensive excavations at Mes Aynak.

The Islamic period is addressed in the updated Chapters 7–8 by Warwick Ball and Klaus Fischer. Chapter 7, 'From the rise of Islam to the Mongol invasion', focuses heavily on the art and architecture, notably standing monuments, of the Ghurid and Ghaznavid periods, with much less evidence drawn from archaeological excavations. Chapter 8, 'From the Mongols to the Mughals', similarly focuses on architecture and art, and provides updated material, such as a description of the recently restored Bagh-i Babur, an historic park in Kabul containing the tomb of Babur, the first Mughal Emperor. In the conclusion, Warwick Ball and Norman Hammond summarise the findings, identify some of the problems and emphasise the tantalising areas of research yet to be undertaken on the archaeology of Afghanistan.

Together, the revised editions of the *Archaeological gazetteer of Afghanistan* and *The archaeology of Afghanistan* are essential references for researchers interested in the archaeology, heritage and history of Afghanistan and the surrounding regions. Yet the volumes are weighty given the addition of extensive new material and a larger font size compared with the originals, and are therefore better suited to a bookshelf than a travel bag. While the original editions marked the end of a rich archaeological era, the revised editions capture another period of relative progress, one that this time may continue to hold promise depending on the ongoing conflict and negotiations with the Taliban insurgents, for building on the fascinating material and questions that these volumes present.