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Afghanistan:
Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul
Begins U.S. Tour at National Gallery of Art,
Washington,
May 25 through September 7, 2008



A folding gold crown from one of the six graves of Bactrian nomads discovered at Tillya Tepe in northern Afghanistan in 1978. The crown, dating from the first century A.D. and wrought of solid gold, was collapsible for easy transport by the ancient nomads. This item will be on display as part of the exhibition **Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul** organized by the National Geographic Society and National Gallery of Art, in cooperation with the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul. ©Thierry Ollivier / Musée Guimet

Washington, DC (Updated: May 14, 2008)—Extraordinary artifacts uncovered in modern-day Afghanistan—once the heart of the Silk Road linking cultures from Asia to the Mediterranean—long thought stolen or destroyed during some 25 years of conflict until the dramatic announcement of their existence in 2003, begin their United States

tour at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, May 25 through September 7, 2008.

Tour

The exhibition, co-organized by the National Geographic Society and the National Gallery of Art, will travel to the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, October 24, 2008 through January 25, 2009; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, February 22 through May 17, 2009; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, June 23 through September 20, 2009. After its tour through Paris, Turin, and Amsterdam, the show was reorganized for the United States and accompanied by a new catalogue and a video documentary produced by National Geographic and narrated by the celebrated author, Khaled Hosseini.

Overview

Revealing Afghanistan's multicultural heritage are some 228 objects ranging in date from 2200 BC to the second century AD. Drawn from four archaeological sites, they belong to the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul and include fragmentary gold bowls with artistic links to Mesopotamia and Indus valley cultures (modern-day Pakistan) from the Bronze Age site of Tepe Fullol; bronze and stone sculptures and a gilded silver plaque from the former Greek colony at Ai Khanum ("Lady Moon"); bronzes, ivories, and painted glassware that had been imported from Roman Egypt, China, and India, and excavated from ancient storerooms discovered in the 1930s and 1940s in Begram; and more than 100 gold ornaments from the "Bactrian Hoard," found in 1978 in Tillya Tepe, the site of six nomad graves, and revealing a synthesis of Greek, Roman, Persian, Indian, Chinese, and Siberian styles.

Partners

The exhibition is organized by the National Geographic Society and the National Gallery of Art, Washington in association with the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

It is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

At the National Gallery of Art the exhibition is made possible by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. It is also supported by The Charles Engelhard Foundation.

Corporate support is provided by National Construction & Logistics and Hamed Wardak.

The works in the exhibition are the sole property of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Spokespersons

Terry Garcia, executive vice president for Mission Programs, National Geographic:

“We are delighted to partner with the National Gallery of Art and the National Museum of Afghanistan in bringing these rare and precious items to the United States. Our goal is to introduce this unique collection of objects to a broad audience and raise awareness and understanding about the little-known ancient cultures of modern-day Afghanistan. We also want to tell the heroic story of the Afghans who risked their own safety to hide and protect these treasures.”

His Excellency Said Tayeb Jawad, Ambassador of Afghanistan to the United States:

“Afghanistan has always been the heart of Asia. Afghanistan’s centrality in the Silk Road created a rich mosaic of cultures and civilizations. Although this mosaic was shattered by war and terror, both the spirit of the Afghan people and our cultural heritage survived. These priceless artifacts are a testament to the Afghan people and to the heroism of the brave and selfless Afghans who preserved and protected them. This exhibition is a celebration of Afghanistan as much as it is an expression of our appreciation for the global partnership between our ancient nation, the international community, and our friends in the United States.”

Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art:

“The National Gallery of Art has a long tradition of bringing works of exceptional quality and merit from other cultures and periods to the United States. We are very pleased to be working closely with National Geographic and the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul, to introduce the American public to these archaeological treasures, their history,

and their legacy.”

Bruce Cole, chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities:

"The artifacts featured in this collection are more than dazzling exhibition pieces; they serve as primary documents recording the vitality of Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage. The National Endowment for the Humanities is proud to have supported the preservation, cataloging, and exhibition of these treasures as part of our broader 'Rediscovering Afghanistan' initiative, and we are delighted to play a part in bringing this collection to citizens across our nation."

Hamed Wardak, president, NCL:

“National Construction & Logistics is honored to sponsor this historic exhibition of *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul*. The emergence of these objects after 25 years of struggle is emblematic of the beauty of Afghanistan and the resilient spirit of its people. This exhibition brings the rich and diverse culture of Afghanistan to the Washington area, and we are proud to help make that possible.”

Fredrik Hiebert, exhibition curator and National Geographic Archaeology Fellow:

“This exhibition is the culmination of many years of work by the Afghans. Without their courage and commitment, these objects would not exist today. Having worked closely with Afghan officials since 2003 on the preservation and inventory of the objects, I am honored to be part of the effort to share these treasures with audiences in the United States and ultimately to enhance the understanding of Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage.”

Exhibition Layout and Object Highlights

The exhibition will begin with a new map of modern Afghanistan created by National Geographic, which highlights the four archaeological sites featured in the show. Specially commissioned maps will be on display throughout the exhibition, including one that illustrates more than 1,500 archaeological sites, known to be in Afghanistan, which range in date from the prehistoric era through the 17th century.

The exhibition is organized by site, beginning with objects from Tepe Fullol in northern Afghanistan. In 1966, farmers near the Afghan village of Fullol discovered the first

evidence of a Bronze Age civilization in the region. Gold from the nearby Oxus riverbed most likely provided the gold for several bowls—part of a burial cache—found at the site, including a *fragment of a bowl depicting bearded bulls from 2200 to 1900 BC*.

The second group of artifacts, from the site of the former Greek city Ai Khanum in a region that was conquered by Alexander the Great, reflects the Mediterranean influence in the area between the fourth and second centuries BC. The works include Corinthian capitals from before 145 BC, similar to one shown to the late Afghan King Zahir Shah in 1961, which led to the discovery of the site of Ai Khanum. They also include bronze and ivory sculptures representing Greek figures, as well as images of Central Asian figures carved in a Hellenistic style. The oldest artifact found is a ceremonial plaque made of gilded silver depicting Cybele, the Greek goddess of nature presiding within an orderly cosmos. There will be a digital reconstruction of the city of Ai Khanum as well as a site map.

Items of trade from the third site, at Begram, date from between the first and second centuries AD. Elaborately carved Indian ivory reliefs and figurines used as decorative elements on furniture will be digitally reconstructed and shown on a monitor in the gallery with a site map of Begram. A painted goblet depicting figures harvesting dates and a bronze mask of Silenus are just a few of the artifacts discovered that shed light on the role of Afghanistan in the network of trade along the Silk Road.

The fourth group consists of some 100 gold objects dating from the first century BC to the first century AD, they were among those discovered in 1978 by a Soviet-Afghan team led by Viktor Sarianidi at Tillya Tepe in northern Afghanistan. The site contained jewelry and gold ornaments from the graves of six nomads who overran Bactria in about 145 BC and brought an end to the Greco-Bactrian kingdoms that had flourished there. The graves contained thousands of gold objects sewn onto the burial shrouds and clothing of the deceased. On view will be an exquisite crown, as well as necklaces, belts, rings, and headdresses—most made of solid gold with insets of semiprecious stones such as turquoise and garnets. Many of the Bactrian objects reflect local artisans' distinctive blend of motifs known from Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese art.

Catalogue, Documentary, and Web Sites

Catalogue:

Published by National Geographic Books, the fully illustrated, 304-page catalogue is edited by Fredrik Hiebert, exhibition curator and National Geographic Archaeology Fellow, and Pierre Cambon, scientific researcher, Laboratoire d'archéologie, ENS Ulm-CNRS, Paris.

Available in late May 2008 from the Gallery Shops for \$30 (softcover): to order, call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

Documentary Film:

The documentary *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul* (National Geographic, 2008, 28 mins.) is narrated by Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It features footage of the 2004 recovery of the collections of the National Museum, Kabul, which had been hidden in the vaults of the Central Bank in the Presidential Palace. The film also includes interviews with exhibition curator Fredrik Hiebert and National Museum director Omara Khan Masoudi. A 12-minute version of the film will be shown in the exhibition.

Web Sites:

On the National Gallery of Art Web site, a short trailer for the documentary film highlights the dramatic 2004 recovery of ancient objects hidden during the decades of turmoil in the country. The video is also available via Apple iTunes™. The 28-minute version of the National Geographic documentary will air later in the year on public broadcasting stations. A "timeline of treasures" highlights close-ups of artifacts from the Bronze Age (2200 BC) through the rise of trade along the Silk Road from c. 300 BC to c. 200 AD. The timeline includes descriptions of the areas where the artifacts (on view in the exhibition) were originally found. The site will also offer a print-friendly PDF of a special Family Guide to the exhibition, available in late May.

Visit www.nga.gov/afghanistan (<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/afghanistaninfo.shtm>) .

In addition to the short trailer, the National Geographic Web site provides video, maps, and six audio slideshows featuring historical and cultural information from many important archaeological and cultural sites in Afghanistan. Included are the Kabul Museum, Tillya Tepe, Bamian, Aī Khanum, and Begram, as well as other information

about Silk Road cultures. Stories about how the artifacts in this exhibition were hidden for some 25 years—from just before the Soviet invasion in 1979, through the Afghan civil wars, and during Taliban rule—and contemporary stories about the country shed new light on this former heart of the Silk Road. Visit www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/afghanistan-treasures/.

Related Programs

The Gallery will offer a diverse program of lectures, films, gallery talks, and family activities related to the exhibition. All programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For more information, call (202) 737-4215, visit the Web site at www.nga.gov/afghanistan (<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/afghanistaninfo.shtm>) or inquire at the Information Desks.

National Geographic Society

The National Geographic Society is one of the world's largest nonprofit scientific and educational organizations. Founded in 1888 to "increase and diffuse geographic knowledge," the Society works to inspire people to care about the planet. It reaches more than 300 million people worldwide each month through its official journal, *National Geographic*, and other magazines; National Geographic Channel; television documentaries; music; radio; films; books; DVDs; maps; school publishing programs; interactive media; and merchandise.

The Society has funded more than 8,800 scientific research, conservation and exploration projects and supports an education program combating geographic illiteracy. For more information, visit www.nationalgeographic.com.

National Gallery of Art

Masterworks by the most renowned European and American artists await visitors to the National Gallery of Art, one of the world's preeminent art museums. The Gallery's collection of more than 116,000 paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, sculptures, medals, and decorative arts trace the development of Western art from the Middle Ages to the present. Created for the people of the United States of America by a joint

resolution of Congress accepting the gift of Andrew W. Mellon in 1937, the Gallery today includes the original neoclassical West Building designed by John Russell Pope, the modern East Building designed by I.M. Pei, and a 6.1-acre Sculpture Garden. Augmenting its own collections are temporary special exhibitions presenting materials from around the world. Guided tours, audio tours, lectures, concerts, family programs, and films are also offered. Educational resources for all ages are available through the Gallery's Web site.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>).

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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