

All the fourteen figures of the collection existing in the 1950s (see Edelberg 1960) have survived and could be fully restored with the exception of some which lack a few parts. However, of the effigies which were given to or were acquired by the Museum more recently, only four appear to exist - three figures among the fourteen restored by Mr. Rindler, and another one seen in the depot. A number of pieces are missing, thus also the massive male bust discovered by Dr. Klimburg in Waigal in 1971 (Klimburg 1999, pl. 709) and the temple posts with deity figures from Parun which had been acquired by a Kabul Museum expedition in the autumn of 1976 (Klimburg 1981, p 157)



Mr. Rindler with two of 'his' restored ancestor figures.

One of the restored fourteen figures is the upper half of an ancestor effigy from the Kalash Kafirs in Chitral (Pakistan). It had been sawed into two pieces for facilitating its illegal export, and then was brought to Kabul and finally confiscated at the airport. The lower half of the figure is missing (see the illustration on p. 3)

It is thus with great pleasure that the Austrian-Afghan Society herewith presents its contribution to the re-establishment of the Kabul Museum and its world-renown collections by the restoration of fourteen Kafir wooden figures. This was made possible by funds provided by the Austrian Government which wants to express its conviction that assistance in the preservation of the national cultural heritage is an important aspect in the rebuilding of war-ravaged Afghanistan. There is full understanding and support of the Kabul Museum's motto: *A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive.*

Kabul / Vienna, November 2004

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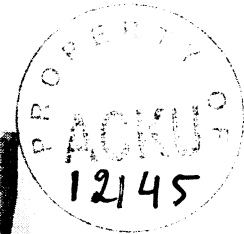
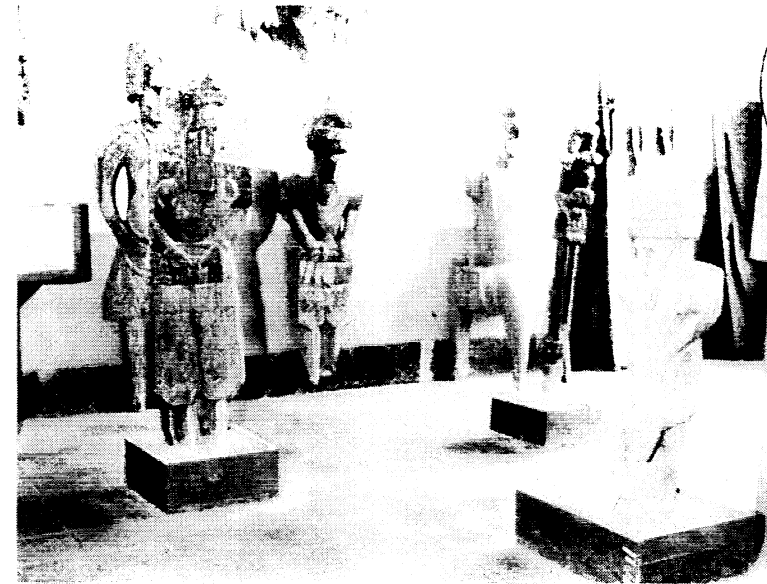
د اطریش و افغانستان جامعه

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The Restoration of the Kafir Effigies of the Kabul Museum

The Kabul Museum, which once owned an art collection of great renown, mainly of Buddhist and Islamic origin, presented additionally ethnographic objects from different parts of Afghanistan. Leading show pieces among them were fourteen wooden figures, many of them nearly life-sized, from Nuristan, a region located in the Hindu Kush mountain range and formerly known as Kafiristan. The figures, representing ancestors and deities, had originated under the "Kafirs of the Hindukush" who had not been Islamized before the end of the 19th century. These fourteen figures is all that remains in Kabul from the originally 32 circa effigies, which were brought to Kabul as trophies when the Kafirs were forcefully Islamized by the Afghan army. Four figures were given to French museums in Paris (Musée Guimet and Musée de l'Homme). Several other statues entered the Kafir collection at a later stage, among them those in the large Nuristan collection of Dr. Max Klimburg, who had undertaken extensive field research in the 1970s.



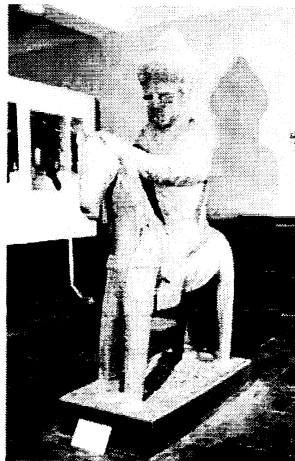
Kafir ancestor figures in the Nuristan collection in the Kabul Museum (1976)



Ancestral figure from the eastern Kafir Kafirs

On his recommendation, this collection was donated to the Kabul Museum by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany in late 1978 (see Klimburg 1981).

Kafiristan or "Land of the Kafirs" was the name of a region high up in three southern valley systems of the Hindu Kush area, located in the north-easter of Afghanistan. The region's name derived from a derogatory expression applied to its inhabitants who had succeeded in holding on to their non-Islamic belief systems and traditions, and who

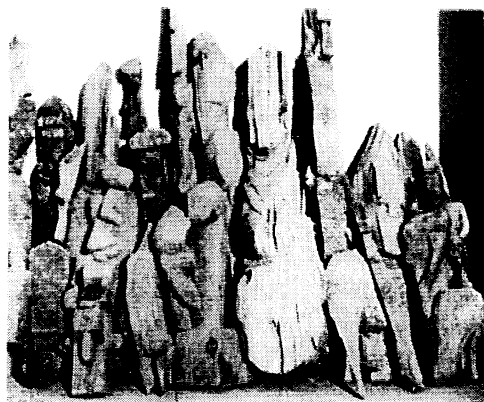


Mounted ancestral figure from the eastern Kafir Kafirs in the Bishgal Valley

were therefore called "Kafirs" or "heathens". It was only in the 1896 that they were Islamized. The then ruler of Afghanistan, Emir Abdur Rahman, had decided on the military invasion of the region after the 1893 agreement on the border between then-British India and Afghanistan. This made him also the ruler of Kafiristan. As the "light of Islam" had been brought into the region, it was renamed into "Nuristan" - "Land of Light".

The Nuristan collection thus presents a very important documentation of an old pre-Islamic civilization in the Hindu Kush, which was crushed only 108 years ago. Most of it had survived the plundering of the Museum during the civil war in Kabul in 1993/94. However, it then fell victim to the Taliban, who chopped up the effigies when in March of 2001 their leader, Mullah Omar, ordered the destruction of all the statuary in the country.

The chopped-up fragments of the Kafir effigies were carefully kept and photographed, here seen piled up against a wall in a building of the Ministry of Culture and Information. In 2003 several experts of the Kabul Museum, guided by its director



The dismembered



The upper part of the figure from Chitral and a seated Kafi figure

Mr. Omar Khan Masoudi, started with the restoration project. At the same time our Austrian-Afghan Society proposed a project of restoration to the Austrian Government. The project was approved, and then, in late November 2003, Dr. Klimburg, the President of the Society, and Mag. Giovanni Rindler, an Austrian-Italian restorer specialized in wooden objects, undertook a brief fact-finding mission. On that occasion, much of the preparatory work was done by piling together and allocating the fragments to each of the 14 dismembered figures. By

then three effigies, among them the two most impressive figures shown above (p 2) had already been restored by the museum experts.

Working intensely in the whole month of May 2004, Mr. Rindler succeeded in the restoration of all the fourteen figures. In most cases the effigies were fully pieced together and touched-up to hide the cracks and small holes resulting from the Taliban axe blows. He was assisted with great dedication by the museum experts who were given much professional advice by Mr. Rindler in general and in handling more complicated tasks - such as replacing missing parts - as long as such repair work is justifiable.

In his work description Mr. Rindler emphasises the slow approach technique by checking first on the fit of the different pieces. If necessary, they were then made to fit. Then the pieces were glued together. Finally cracks and holes were filled with splinters or paste made of the same wood which were often stained to hide them.

Dr. Klimburg documenting the work in progress



A dismembered standing female Kafi figure

