

**Central Asian Museum
Centre of Central Asian Studies
University of Kashmir**

After the establishment of the Centre of Central Asian Studies (CCAS) in 1978-79, it was on the advice of the then Chief Minister of J & K State, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah (d.1982), that the Founder-Director of CCAS, Prof. S. Maqbool Ahmed (1978-83) moved a proposal with regard to the establishment of a Central Asian Museum (CAM) which in future was to be an important component of the CCAS with the aim to strengthen it by showcasing archaeological material depicting history, culture and heritage of Kashmir and Central Asia.

The Beginning

Housed temporarily in the first floor of Allama Iqbal Library, the Central Asian Museum (CAM) was formally inaugurated by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah on 24th of October, 1981—less than a year before his death. Speaking on the occasion, Sheikh Sahib pressed upon the importance of cultural, political and historical relations of Kashmir with Central Asia and the role that the Centre and its Museum could play in building awareness and enthusiasm among students and researchers. Sheikh Sahib, who evinced keen interest in the establishment of the Museum, visited the State Toshkhana and the Sri Partap Singh (SPS) Museum (Lal Mandi, Srinagar) alongwith the Director CCAS, Prof. Maqbool Ahmed, and his colleagues including Dr Abdul Majid Mattoo, Mr Gulshan Majeed and the Curator. Sheikh Sahib himself identified and selected 254 art objects before handing them over to the Director CCAS under whose personal supervision the Museum was set up by Mr J L. Bhan, the first Curator. Records reveal that the CAM started with the above-mentioned artefacts which were legally transferred to it on 5th of December, 1980 (birthday of Sheikh Sahib). Most of the artefacts were from the Central Asian places such as Khotan, Yarkand, Taklamakan, Gilgit, Chitral, Tibet, Skardu, China, Multan, etc. As far the J & K State, some of the artefacts were from Ladakh, Burzahom, Rainawari, Verinag, Harwan, Madin Sahib and Hawal. But three decades later, CAM was forced to de-accession the aforementioned artefacts and return them to SPS Museum (in 2014) in response to Govt. Order No. F(CC/PIL/Reg) KU/13 dated 23rd of October, 2010. Luckily, the CCAS had, from the very beginning, started purchase of antiquities from public and other agencies in order to enrich the CAM and preserve the precious things for the posterity. In this regard mention must be made of the former Director, CCAS, Prof. Aijaz A. Bandey (Rtd. May, 2014), who during his Curatorship made tremendous contribution by developing, enriching and beautifying the CAM especially with the assistance of Mr. Iqbal Ahmed Dar and Mr. Bashir Ahmad Mir both of whom retired as Technical Officers in 2014.

Art Purchase Committee

With the passage of time, the CCAS developed a systematic process of acquiring artefacts (for CAM) through an Art Purchase Committee of which the following officials are nominated as members by the Vice Chancellor of Kashmir University as and when required: Dean Social Sciences, Director CCAS, two senior Professors of CCAS, Deputy Registrar KU (Purchase), Curator CAM, and one member of the State Archaeology Department, J & K Govt. The Purchase Committee which meets once in a year, invites recognised dealers/agencies through advertisements published in the leading dailies and then verifies the authenticity of the objects and selects them after a rigorous process in order to ascertain the originality and requirement of the CAM. For these purchases, CAM has a separate budget. Besides gifts and donations, one important method of acquiring objects is through the archaeological field explorations and excavations of which the latter has been the most effective one, as the object collected through

field surveys has an accurate context and a history behind, which mostly is not the case with the former. Today, CAM houses 1170 artefacts—precious specimens from prehistory to modern times.

New Museum Building?

As already mentioned, CAM is housed in the first floor of Allama Iqbal Library with a very limited space to showcase the artefacts. Needless to say that CAM has grown manifold since its inception and demands a new building with all the modern facilities essential for such a structure. The recent developments in the museum affairs and the technological involvement in preservation and conservation of museum collection have grown manifold in global context. At present, CAM has no such facilities and is vulnerable to lose artefacts due to environmental factors e.g. humidification, dust, mite, light, etc. Therefore, it is high time that the construction of (already proposed) new museum building be undertaken before it is too late. In fact, the efforts made by the CCAS in this regard during the last three decades are yet to come to fruition.

The Art of Kashmir Exhibition (New York)

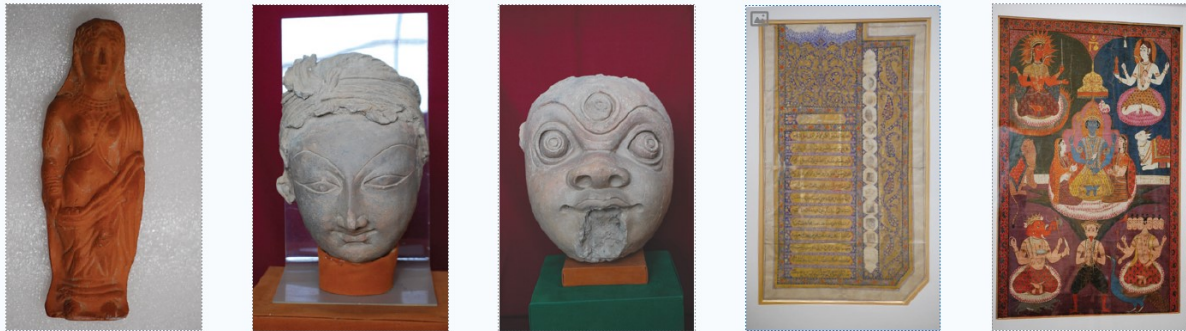
Although CAM has been organising thematic exhibitions from time to time, yet it was a moment of joy when America-based organisation Asia Society and Museum (New York) requested CAM to send (temporarily) some of its art objects for the Art of Kashmir exhibition to be held in New York at 725 Park Ave (October 3, 2007 to January 6, 2008). The ‘Arts of Kashmir’ was a major international loan exhibition of objects of exemplary quality devoted to the rich artistic tradition of Kashmir. This exhibition which covered the period from fourth to twentieth century was the first ever to be devoted to the extraordinary arts of Kashmir valley. Premier examples of Kashmir’s little-known works of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic art, along with famed craft works ranging from furniture and paper-machie to carpets and embroidery, were included to provide a sense of the broad artistic production of this region. The exhibition included altogether 136 objects from collections in the United States, Europe and India and was curated by the world-renowned Prof. Pratapaditya Pal, who has been engaged with the art of Kashmir for more than thirty years.

After much deliberations and required documentation, permission was granted by the State Government to send the below mentioned five objects from CAM (CCAS, KU) to the New York exhibition:

1. The standing plaque Image of a Lady in relief having a flowing dress, ornaments and shoes from 3rd century AD, from Semthan, Kashmir. (Acc. No 2005.9, Terracotta, 11.0 x 3.8 x 1.7 cm.).
2. The Boddhisattva of the early 8th century AD, having an oval face, small thin nose, sensitive nostrils, soft delicate lips, and round chin. He has elongated almond shaped eyes under arched brows. The hair is combed back, held by a fillet forming a knot at the front. The back of the head is missing along with the ears of which the right is partly available. (Acc. No 2004.9.1, Boddhisattva, Clay/Terracotta, 20.0 x 15.5 x 13.5 cm.)
3. The demon looking Yaksh of early 8th century AD, having head with wide opening bulging eyes, a vertical third eye on the forehead; nose short with wide open nostrils. The upper lip is protruding while lower partly and chin is broken and missing. The upper part of the skull, its back and ears are missing. (Acc. No 2005.14, Yaksha, Clay/Terracotta, 28.0 x 24.0 x 21.5 cm).
4. Nikah-Nama, paper, ink and colour, of 19th century AD. The Marriage Contract document of 1296 AH (1878-79 AD) is a leaf of handmade paper having calligraphy and

illumination mostly in blue and gold. The Arabic and Persian calligraphy on gold background is in one white and twelve black lines. On its right are stamped eleven seals of various personalities. The illumination at the top is in arabesque design while on the right side is in almond pattern. (Acc. No 1995.2, Nikah-Nama paper, 43.0 x 27.0 cm.).

5. The Kashmiri Painting on Cloth of 18th century AD is having various coloured backgrounds. In the centre is the figure of Vishnu seated on the Lotus Throne along with his two Consorts. They are on the shoulders of the Vishnu vehicle, Garuda. On the four corners of the painting are the images of Durga, Shiva, Kartikya and Ganesha-all with their respective Vahans. At the places of the old creases and folds paint has peeled off. (Acc. No 1980.169, Painting/Cloth, 97.0 x 73.5 cm.). [Transferred to SPS Museum]



(Note: All the five objects were safely returned to CAM (CCAS, KU), after the exhibition was over).

Iran-Kashmir Exhibition at CAM

In view of the World Heritage Day (18th of April, 2016), one-week long exhibition on Cultural Heritage of Iran and Kashmir was held from 18th – 27th of April 2016, at the CAM. The exhibition was organised by the CCAS in collaboration with Iran Culture House, New Delhi. Almost nine thousand people from different walks of life including students from thirty schools and colleges of Kashmir valley visited the exhibition and got acquainted with the shared heritage of Iran and Kashmir. Dr Mohammad Ajmal Shah (Assistant Professor-cum-Curator, CCAS/CAM) and his team worked hard to make the event a success by educating the visitors about the significance of the World Heritage Day in global prospective.

Some Significant Artefacts at CAM

Among the 1170 artefacts housed in CAM, the details (with accession numbers) of some noteworthy artefacts are given bellow (region wise) in a chronological order:

a. Chronological phase – Pliocene period

Siwalik Range

Accession no. 83-60: Bone fossil of elephus (elephant)

b. Chronological phase – Palaeolithic

Pahalgam, Kashmir

Accession no. 83-53: stone handaxe of Palaeolithic period

Balapora, Kashmir

Accession no. 83-55: stone chopper tool of middle Palaeolithic period

Chakpalwal, Jammu:

Accession no. 83- 57 to 59: Stone chopper tools of Palaeolithic period c. Chronological phase – Neolithic period

Burzahom, Srinagar, Kashmir

1. Accession no. 81-1 – Celt with a deep horizontal cut on the two sides of the tool.
2. Accession no. 81-7 to 81-13: Agate/ Carnelian beads of Neolithic period.
3. Accession no. 81-15: Bone, double edged pin of Neolithic period.
4. Accession no. 81-27 to 29: Bone arrow head and harpoon.
5. Accession no. 81-50 to 52: Human burials from Burzahom.

Boras, Anantnag, Kashmir

Accession no. 81-30: Stone mace head with deep flacks over its periphery.

Kaneer, Budgam, Kashmir

Accession no. 81-31: Stone mace head with hour glass section with primary retouching.

Chronological phase – Early historic phase

Provenance Unknown

Accession no. 2005-2.1 to 2.4: Silver coins of Azes; Menander; Apollodotus; Heliocles.

Semthan, Kashmir

Accession no. 2005-9: Terracotta standing plaque of a lady in relief.

Lethpora, Kashmir

Accession no. 2005-14: clay/terracotta head of a Yaksha bulging eyes, a vertical third eye.

Chronological Phase – Later historic phase**China**

Accession no. 94.10: Bronze vase of Ming dynasty having two handles f. Chronological Phase – Medieval phase

Japan

Accession no. 88.32: Silken ladies' robe

China/Tibet

Accession no. 88.4: wooden panel with Lacquer work Afghanistan Accession no. 95.3: woollen carpet

Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Accession no. 2007.1: Velvet blue coloured gown with profuse zari work

Samarkand, Uzbekistan:

Accession no. 2007.2: Velvet blue coloured gown with golden work

Kazakhstan

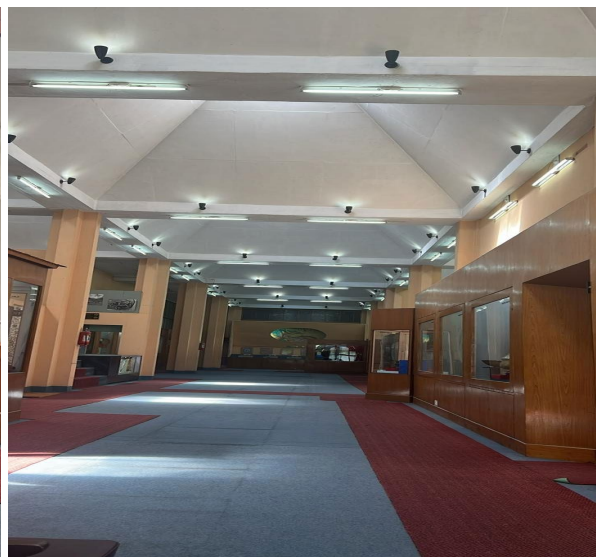
Accession no. 2007.4: Velvet black coloured gown with cap

Central Asia

Accession no. 2009.8: Mughal period handwritten holy Quran, leather bound, gold washed.

Yarkand

Accession no. 2012.3: copper teapot with brass handles



Details of Artefacts in Possession of Central Asian Museum:

- i) Sculptures - 163
 - ii) Stone- 13
 - iii) Bronze- 4
 - iv) Clay/Terracotta Figurines- 141
 - v) Metal sculptures- 5
- 2) Paintings – 54
- 3) Numismatic/coins – 582
- 4) Manuscripts – 25
- 5) Metal objects- 40
- i) Table ware (Copper)- 28
 - ii) (Silver)- 4
 - iii) (Brass)- 4
 - iv) Swords (Iron)- 4
- 6) Handicrafts – 94
- i) Decorative items- 30
 - ii) Shawls (antique)- 6
 - iii) Shawl designs- 20
 - iv) Carpets- 7
 - v) Wood work- 17
 - vi) Metal-1
 - vii) Porcelain- 13
- 7) Musical instruments – 3
 - 8) Ethnographic items – 84
 - a) Jewellery- 54
 - i) Metal- 11
 - ii) Stone- 3
 - iii) Beads- 7
 - iv) Silver- 29
 - v) Ivory- 4 - b) Dresses- 27
 - c) Leather-1
 - d) Clay pots- 2
- 9) Anthropological - 16
- i) Skeletal remains- 3
 - ii) Fossils- 13
- 10) Palaeolithic & Neolithic
- i) Stone tools- 17
 - ii) Bone tools- 17
 - iii) Clay pots- 3
- 11) Terracotta moulds/tiles/seals - 37
- 12) Stone/metal seals/votive tablets -19
- 13) Astrolabe instruments - 6

*The total number of artefacts is based on the entries on accession register of Central Asian Museum till 2014.

[As mentioned elsewhere, out of these 1170 artefacts, 254 artefacts were returned to SPS museum and the same have been de-accessioned from the register.]

CAM Visitor's Book

Since its inception, CAM has been the centre of attraction for reputed personalities across the globe. During the last 43 years, a large number of dignitaries from different parts of the world visited the CAM and appreciated its rich collection and overall contribution in spreading the awareness of Central Asian culture and heritage. A list of some of the eminent personalities who visited the CAM (since 1981) is given below:

1. John Hadwen, His Excellency, Canadian High Commissioner to India, August 7, 1982.
2. Dr. F. Dayoub, Vice-Chancellor, University of Damascus, 19.09.1983.

3. Prof. E. Hnquent, Churchill College, Cambridge.
4. Sayyid Hamid, Vice Chancellor, Aligarh Muslim University, 21.04.1984.
5. Ahrar Mukhtarov, Member, Tajik Academy of Science, Dushanbe (USSR), 01.09.1986
6. Prof. C. B. Tripathi, Department of Indian Studies, Freie University, Berlin, Germany, 16th September, 1987.
7. Prof. H.P. Francfort, CNRS, Paris, France. 05.07.1988.
8. Prof. Hamidi Kashmiri, Vice-Chancellor, University of Kashmir.
9. Mr. S.M. Krishna, Chief Minister of Karnataka, 01.06.2003.
10. Mr. Peter Sutherland, Canadian High Commissioner, 24.06.2003.
11. Mr. Robert Blake, Deputy Cultural Mission, U.S. Embassy, 23.07.2003.
12. Mr. S. K. Sinha, Governor, J & K State (Chancellor KU), 10 August 2003.
13. Prof. Annette Dinker, Leiden, Netherlands, 05.04.2004.
14. Mrs. Lucie Edwards, Canadian High Commissioner, 14.07.2004.
15. Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, High Commissioner to UK, 16.07.2004.
16. Dr. Fida Hassnain, Director Archives, Archaeology and Museums, J & K State, 17.08.04.
17. Mr. Taj Mohi-ud-din, Minister J&K State, 01.09.2004.
18. Syed Sibtey Razi, Governor of Jharkhand, 17.05.2006.
19. Prof. Valeriy S. Khan, National University of Uzbekistan, 29.08.2006.
20. H. E. Kairat E. Umarov, Ambassador of Kazakhstan, 29.08.2006.
21. Prof. Gregory Gliason, University of New Mexico, 30th August 2006.
22. Dr. Bushra Hamid, Peshawar University (Pakistan).
23. Prof. Keuji Tozawa, Chief Secretary and Prof. Koji Okamoto, President, Japan-India Friendship Association, 10-09-2007.
24. Mr. Ratan Prakash, Director (News) All India Radio, New Delhi, 12.05.2008.
25. Prof. Birgit Schlyter, Stockholm University, 10-02-2010.
26. Dr. Chhaya Battacharya-Hanser, Tagore National Fellow, Janpath, New Delhi, 25.06.2011.
27. Prof. Dinesh Singh, Vice Chancellor, University of Delhi, 19.10.2011.
28. Prof. Jonathan Han, Associate Director of Student Development and International Programme, Syracuse University, USA, 21.05.2012.
29. Prof. Rob Linrothe, Northwestern University, USA, 18.06.2013.
30. Mr. Vijay Kumar, Inspector General of Police, Lucknow, U.P. 20.06.2013.
31. Prof. R. C. Agrawal, Professor of Museology, 04.04.2015.
32. Dr. Hyder Reza Zabeth, Iran Culture House, New Delhi, 2018.

33. Prof. Tusaku Hattori, Japan, 2019.

34. Prof. Natalia Polosmak, Member, Siberian Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences, Novosibirsk, Russia 2019.

35. Prof. Alison Betts, Professor of Silk Route Studies/Director Centre for Classical and Near Eastern Studies, Australia, 2019.

36. Ms. Meenakshi Lekhi, Minister for Culture and External Affairs, Government of India, June, 2023.

37. Mr. Sanjeev Sanyal, Member, Prime Ministers Economic Advisory Board, Government of India, June, 2023.

(Apart from above mentioned eminent personalities, dignitaries from almost 39 countries around the world have visited the Central Asian Museum from time to time).

