

Kabil (110036)

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Kabul art and architecture

Kabul, capital and principal city of modern Afghanistan, has a history of **art and architecture** spanning over two millennia but only few material remains survived. Kabul blossomed at times as a provincial garrison town and major trade post, at other times as the centre of the various pre-Islamic and Islamic empires that dominated the Hindu Kush region, the proverbial “crossroads of Asia” and “gateway to India,” amalgamating cultural influences from Hellenic, Persian, Arabo-Islamic, Central Asian, and Indian civilisations.

Numerous remains and archaeological finds both within, and in the vicinity of, Kabul’s historic settlement area clearly attest a period of prosperity in the first centuries C.E. under Buddhist Kushano-Sāsānian rule (for site distribution, see Ball and Gardin). The relatively peaceful and prosperous times under the Kushans and later under Sāsānian suzerainty came to an end in the early second half of the fifth century C.E., when warlike Hephtalite tribes from the Central Asian steppes started to push southward

across the Hindu Kush barrier and subsequently into the Indus Valley. The fall of the Hephtalites was eventually brought about in the mid-sixth century C.E. by a coalition of Western Turks and Sāsānians known to the Arab chroniclers as the Kābul Shāhīs.

The first lengthy Muslim occupation occurred in the third/ninth century followed in the fourth/tenth century by the semi-autonomous non-Muslim Hindū Shāhīs. In 366/977, Kabul fell to Sebüktingin (d. 387/997), founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty (r. 366–582/977–1186). At the time, the town reportedly possessed a strong citadel, the Bālā Ḥiṣār, built on an eastern spur of the Shīr Darvāza mountain; it was connected with defensive walls that ran along the ridges of the Shīr Darvāza and the Kūh-i Āsamā’iyya on the opposite, northern bank of the Kabul river, circumscribing a settlement area of approximately four to five square kilometres. While the citadel had already been firmly in the hands of Muslims, the town at the foot of the citadel and the populous suburbs within the wider walled-in area were still inhabited by a Hindu-Buddhist population (al-Iṣṭakhrī, 120).

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