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Afghanistan's Cultural Officials Visit the ADL

During August of last year, five Afghan cultural officials visited the US under the auspices of the State Department. The purpose of the visit was to study cultural heritage preservation, management, and administration. Three of the five were directors of culture and information in their provinces—Abdul Majid Babay from Kandahar, Walishah Bahra from Herat, and Abdullah Roeen from Mazar-i Sharif. The other two visitors were the Deputy Director of the National Museum, Mohammad Yahya Mohebzada, and the Director of the National Archives, Anwar Zalmaiyyar. Having heard in advance of their trip, ADL asked the State Department to include the Digital Library in their itinerary. Since the group was coming to New York City to visit the Statue of Liberty and the New York Public Library, the State Department agreed they could spend the morning of August 27th with us. The Dean of the Library, Dr. Carol Mandel, hosted the meeting and the entire digital team was assembled to give a presentation of the ADL to the group. Afterwards, the dean, the Director of Collections and Research Services, Dr. Michael Stoller, and Robert McChesney, the Project Consultant, met with the Director of the National Archives to discuss possible collaboration and cooperation. While talks were going on with Mr. Zalmaiyyar, (con't p. 3)



From the left; Mohammad Yahya Mohebzada, Anwar Zalmaiyyar, Walishah Bahra, Abdullah Roeen, Robert McChesney, and Abdul Majid Babay-August 27, 2004.

NEH Awards the ADL a Major Preservation and Access Grant

In March 2005, the National Endowment for the Humanities announced that New York University was awarded a two-year grant of \$298,115 to further the work of the Afghanistan Digital Library. The grant, coming from the Division of Preservation and Access of the NEH, will allow for creating the fully functional website that has been designed (including translations, author biographies and PDFs of the digitized works) as well as providing part-time support for the Middle East cataloguer, since many of the works have no existing catalog records, and the conservator for stabilizing materials before digitizing.

Cooperation Between the ADL and the Afghan Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism

As a result of the visit of the Afghan cultural officials in August and the talks with the Director of the National Archives, Anwar Zalmaiyyar (see related story), on January 20, 2005 Dr. Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism came to New York from Kabul to visit the Afghanistan Digital Library and to discuss cooperation between the ministry and the ADL. He and the Dean of the Library, Dr. Carol Mandel, signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" at the conclusion of the talks. (con't. p. 3.)

More on the ADL and NEH

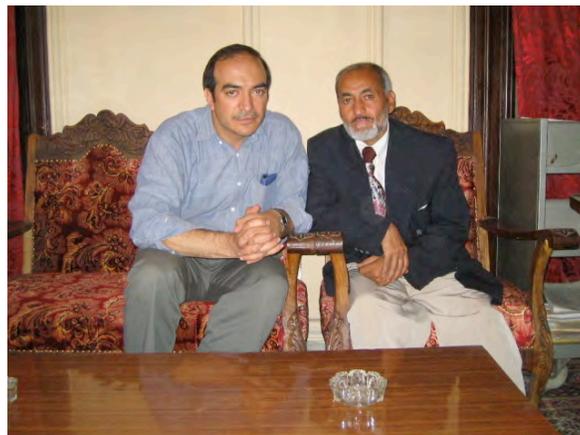
The "Rediscovering Afghanistan" Initiative

At a reception for President Hamid Karzai, held at the Freer Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington on May 23, 2005, the chairman of the NEH, Bruce Cole, announced a new NEH initiative entitled "Rediscovering Afghanistan." In his words, "The 'Rediscovering Afghanistan' Initiative will encourage scholars, museums, filmmakers, and archivists to promote research, education, and public programs about Afghanistan's history and culture. And it will encourage American institutions to assist their Afghan peers in efforts to preserve and document cultural resources. My hope is that this collaborative effort will educate more Americans about the beauty and power of Afghanistan's precious heritage." (con't p. 3)

Survey of the National Archives and National Library Turns Up Important New Material for the ADL

In mid-June of this year, Dr. Amin Tarzi, an ADL board member and regional analyst on Afghanistan for RFE/RL, traveled to Kabul on behalf of the ADL. His trip was a follow-up to the Memorandum of Understanding between NYU Libraries and the Ministry of Culture, Information, and Tourism signed in January (see related story in this issue). Over a ten-day period, Dr. Tarzi carried out a preliminary survey of the holdings of the National Archives and the National Library as they relate to the Afghanistan Digital Library. In addition, thanks to the cooperation of the rector of Kabul University, Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Dr. Tarzi was also able to check the University's library holdings as well. As it turned out, although each institution has some material relevant to the ADL, the National Library is the main repository. Dr. Tarzi discovered a number of items which we had not yet identified as publications of the period including an enormous collection (more than 200 volumes) in the National Archives of administrative manuals sent during Amir Amanallah's time (1919-1929) to the provinces. Among the significant holdings of the National Library are some of the very earliest works published in Afghanistan, such as Muhammad Ibrahim "Ajitan"'s *Kitâb qawâ'id-i risâlah* (n.d.). The National Library has the book and the Archives has the manuscript with painted illustrations (see illustration on page 4 of this issue).

Most significantly, this preliminary survey made clear the problems faced by the Archives and the National Library which affect their ability to protect and preserve these artifacts of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. The Archives, for example, has two subterranean vaults, one for printed materials and the other for manuscript books. Both are served by an air-handling system that has not worked since the Soviet period. The vents open on a busy road, and pollutants, particularly dust and diesel soot, have been pouring through those ducts into the vaults. As things now stand, there is very little provision for conservation at either institution. The National Archives employs a full-time bookbinder but lacks staff, equipment, and materials for paper conservation. Dr. Tarzi's report stressed the high priority of both institutions for facilities to conserve and protect books and documents. In response to this need, ADL's latest application for funding to NEH includes funds to set up a conservation laboratory for the National Archives and the National Library, and to train staff and provide equipment and materials for conservation and for digitizing and cataloguing.



Dr. Amin Tarzi and Anwar Zalmajyar, Director of the Archives, June 2005



National Archives, entrance (above); rear view (below)



National Archives, the manuscript vault



NEH and ADL (con't)

In reviewing what the NEH has done to promote cultural preservation in Afghanistan, the chairman gave prominent mention to the ADL. "Last year, NEH awarded \$25.5 million for research, education and public programs of international topics, including the preservation and documentation of the art and artifacts of Afghanistan. For example, a grant of \$298,000 was awarded to New York University to create a digital library of Afghan works from 1871-1930."

The day after the announcement, Robert McChesney, Project Consultant to the ADL, met with the Deputy Chairman of the NEH, Lynne Munson, and was told that Afghanistan projects would be given priority in reviewing applications to the various divisions of the NEH but unfortunately no new funds were planned at that point for the initiative, unlike the case of the Iraq initiative of 2003.

ADL and the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (con't)

NYU made a commitment to offer 4-6 weeks of training on-site at NYU in materials conservation, digitizing, and digital library development for one or two staff members of the National Archives each year for up to four years as well to provide the necessary equipment for managing digital archives. In turn, the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism committed itself to permitting NYU to examine the material housed in the National Archives and published between 1871 and 1930 for the purpose of identifying material to include in the ADL. The Ministry also promised to permit the ADL to digitize any material to which it otherwise has no access. Digitizing would include stabilization and conservation of materials according to the standards established for the handling of all ADL materials. In addition, both parties agreed in the memorandum to explore the possibility of establishing provincial branches of the National Archives to identify and collect related materials.

Want to Participate in the ADL?

The Afghanistan Digital Library now has commitments from owners for 60-65% of the titles published between 1879 and 1931. But there still remains that 35-40% of works we know were published but for which no original copies have yet been located. In addition, there are probably items not on the bibliography because the project team has not found any reference to them. If you have an item that you think would be appropriate for the ADL, that is anything printed in Afghanistan between 1871 and 1930 (between 1288 and 1349 on the Hijri/Qamari calendar and up to 1309 on the Hijri/Shamsi calendar) please let us know! We are particularly interested in Pashto materials. There is good reason to believe that many of the published works were simultaneously or nearly simultaneously printed in both Persian (Dari) and Pashto. Email the Project Consultant, Robert D. McChesney, at robert.mcchesney@nyu.edu or call (212-998-8902).

Afghan Cultural officials (con't)

the other members of the delegation visited the Digital Studio where the Afghanistan Digital library is being created. They were also taken to the Rare Books Collection which includes some unique Afghanica. As a token of the visit, each member of the group was given a copy of Robert McChesney's book *Kabul under Siege: Fayz Muhammad's Account of the 1929 Uprising* and promised a CD-ROM of eight of the books that had been digitized to that point. These CD-ROMs were delivered by Deputy Minister of Culture, Information, and Tourism, Omar Sultan, when he left the States to take up his post in February.



Afghan Visitors with the Dean of the NYU Libraries, Dr. Carol Mandel, and the Digital Library team, August 27, 2004

Some Important Recent Additions to the ADL and Now Online

Since the last newsletter a year ago, (we did deliberately label it "occasional!") much has been added to the website <http://afghanistandl.nyu.edu>. One of the most significant works from the standpoint of Afghan history is Fayz Muhammad Katib's *Sirâj al-tawârîkh*, a massive documentary history which is particularly important for the reign of 'Abd al-Rahman Khan (1880-1901). The author, nicknamed "Kâtib" (the Writer or Secretary) was a Hazarah from a village outside Ghazni. Fayz Muhammad was court historian to Amir Habib Allah Khan (1901-1919). The work was never completely published. Two quarto volumes (covering Afghanistan's history from 1747 until 1880) were issued in one binding of 377 pages. Then, for reasons not at all clear, the presses were stopped abruptly in mid-sentence on page 1240 of volume three and nothing further was published. It is estimated that 200 of the incomplete volumes were rescued by concerned individuals. Thanks to a private lender all three of those original volumes are now on line.

Another significant publishing achievement, the gazetteer of the provinces of Badakhshan and Qataghan (*Râhnumâ-yi Qataghan wa Badakhshân* with its many highly detailed and hand-colored fold-out maps has also been digitized and uploaded to the web. In addition, the team has begun to digitize and upload the legislative decrees of Aman Allah Khan (r. 1919-1929), known generally as his *nizâm-nâmahs*. Of the more than 200 that have been identified, eighty-seven have now been digitized and eighteen of those are now on the web.



Illustrations from manuscript of the Pashto version of *Kitâb-i qawâ'id-i risâlah* (An army training manual circa 1871)



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