Report on the State of the National Archive of Afghanistan and its Manuscript Collection







Made possible with a grant from THE ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPT ASSOCIATION

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First Published September 2016; Revised and Expanded Version Published January 2017

Executive Summary

The National Archive of Afghanistan (NAA) is in one of the most important repositories of Persian and Arabic manuscripts in the region. It is home to a large collection of high-value endangered manuscripts, including 6,550 manuscripts, 1,200 calligraphy and miniature sheets, and more than 70,000 historical documents. It contains priceless historical treasures such as several early Qur'ans in Kufic script, an unparalleled collection of Pashto manuscripts, numerous richly illuminated manuscripts, a copy of Jami's *Nafahat al-'Ons* that is believed to be in his handwriting, and a farman from Sultan Husayn Mirza Bayaqra (1438-1506).

This report details the findings of the team led by Francis Richard and comprised of Behruz Amini, Noshad Rokni, and Amir Mansuri in (1) conducting a preliminary curatorial evaluation and conservation assessment of the manuscript collection of the National Archive of Afghanistan (NAA), and (2) providing basic training in preservation and cataloging to the staff of the NAA. There are three emergency priorities for the NAA to address: (1) cataloging the entire collection according to current standards, (2) preparing a plan for conservation and preservation, and (3) instituting a digitization program as soon as possible to preserve the invaluable cultural heritage in the NAA collection.

The curatorial and conservation assessments found that the building where the manuscript collection is housed has many strong points including location, the reading room, and the exhibit spaces, but that the utility system's placement poses a danger to the collection, the electrical system needs to be brought up to code, the lighting needs to be changed to avoid damaging the collection with fluorescent lights, the amount of daylight entering the exhibit halls needs to be limited, and the ventilation in the collection's storage room needs to be improved to limit the accumulation of dust.

The team recommends that the NAA develop a full conservation and preservation plan for addressing existing concerns and preventing future damage, and provides a list of suggested measures that can be immediately implemented at the archive. The materials in the collections need to be cleaned, the method for storing materials should be standardized to avoid damaging the materials through crowding and improper storage, the facilities should implement an integrated pest management (IPM) plan to eliminate pests, temperature and humidity levels need to be correctly maintained during any improvements to the space to ensure that no inactive microorganism spores will grow, and protective boxes should be built for many of the items. Additionally, many of the materials need to be stored and transported flat, and the use of suitable cushions and cradles for the opening of manuscripts and books should be made mandatory for staff and patrons. A brief proposal outlines the advantages of acquiring or constructing an additional building to house the archival materials in order to free more space in the existing building for the housing and care of the manuscript materials.

Creating a complete, detailed, and standardized catalog of the entire collection is a top priority. The catalog should first be written in Persian/Dari, Pashtu, and English. A catalog will make the contents of the collections known to more scholars, especially beyond Afghanistan, and thus benefit scholarship and raise the global profile of the NAA. The manuscript collection can be categorized according to five types of materials: Qurans, tafsirs of the Quran and other religious texts, historical works, literary works, and Pashtu works.

A list of 300 high priority texts which represent the best of the collection was compiled by the team. These 300 items were deemed to be especially important for the following reasons: the age of the text; the quality of the text's materials, illuminations, etc.; the rarity of the text or the style it represents; the importance or noteworthiness of the text's binding and calligraphy, the historical significance of the handwritten notes; and the text's representation of specific scribal schools or decoration ateliers. These materials should be among the first to be preserved, cataloged, and digitized. Additional personnel will be needed to work on the catalog, and it recommended that three managers

be hired to oversee the cataloging of, respectively, the Arabic, Persian/Dari and Pashtu texts. The team offers suggestions for how the NAA might fund and staff the endeavor including partnering with foreign institutions and hiring graduate students.

In conjunction with the cataloging project, a policy and schedule needs to be established for digitizing the 300 priority items. The digitization project could be completed in two stages: (1) the creation of an "NAA portal" website that will showcase the collections (run by the NAA under the supervision of the Afghan Ministry of Culture and Information and connected to the Persian Manuscript Initiative led by Kent State University and Roshan Institute for Persian Studies at the University of Maryland), and (2) the initiation of a digitization program for the most important manuscripts, and subsequently the rest of the collection. This digitization program will result in the long-term preservation of the entire collection and will enable the production of copies in print and online. The Persian Manuscript Initiative and the Hill Manuscript Museum and Library (HMML) have already offered to run a pilot digitization and digital training program with a strong likelihood of subsequent expansion and renewal (pending the approval of the Minister of Culture and Information and the NAA director).

The team led training for the NAA staff including workshops on general codicology, codicology of Persian and Arabic manuscripts, conservation, and preservation. Further specialized training would be advantageous and could possibly be conducted in Iran where the conditions, concerns, and materials are similar. This additional specialized training should include archiving, classification, laboratory procedures for conservation, bookbinding, and documentation.

Resources and tools that will aid in carrying out the recommended steps for moving forward include computers and software, copies of catalogs from libraries containing similar materials, in addition to tools and materials for conservation and preservation such as acid-free paper, boxes and cleaning solution, disposable gloves, soft brushes, bookbinding tools, glues, wash tubs, disinfecting chambers for files and manuscripts, etc.

Finally, the report emphasizes that the manuscripts at the NAA are a valuable collection that needs to be preserved for the future. The contents of the collection need to be presented to the world through the new catalog and proposed digitization project.

Introduction

Between April 13th and May 4th, 2016, Francis Richard (CNRS/l'Université Sorbonne nouvelle) led a team comprised of Behruz Amini, Noshad Rokni, and Amir Mansuri in (1) conducting a preliminary curatorial evaluation and conservation assessment of the manuscript collection of the National Archive of Afghanistan (NAA), and (2) providing basic training in preservation and cataloging to sixteen staff members of the NAA.

The National Archive of Afghanistan is the largest governmental center for handwritten documents in the country. During the political instability of the past thirty years, several manuscript collections from across the country were transferred to the NAA. Such collections include those of the Kholm Library, Ghazneh Library, the Library of the School of Literature at Kabul University, the Library of the Ministry of Information and Culture, the Library of the Afghanistan National Museum, and the Royal Arg library. In addition to the manuscripts from these libraries, the NAA collection also includes manuscripts from private owners such as Fekri Saljuqi, Khalilolah Khalili, 'Abdolhay Habibi, Khal Mohammad Khasteh, Nasrollah Khan, as well as lesser known collections from numerous twentieth-century Afghan intellectuals. The seals of these public and private libraries as well as handwritten notes from former owners can be seen on many of the manuscripts.

In general, the collection has deteriorated significantly. Many works (easily over a thousand) need to be conserved. The lack of regular maintenance and damage caused by dust, poor storage conditions during the war years, and temperature and humidity variations have weakened and damaged a sizable number of volumes. Many volumes have been stored improperly, especially the large volumes.

The following report contains our assessment, recommendations, and selection of priority documents. We begin with our assessment of the facilities and our recommendations for their improvement and for the creation of a conservation and preservation policy. We describe the contents of the collections and provide a list of 300 priority documents for conservation, cataloging, and digitization; provide our assessment of the existing catalogs and recommendations for future cataloging efforts; discuss our recommendations for the creation of a digitization policy; report on the workshops and training held during our visit; and, finally, conclude with a summary and suggestions for future steps. The three priorities for the NAA are to catalog the entire collection, prepare a conservation and preservation policy, and to create and implement a digitization policy to preserve and increase the accessibility of the manuscript collection.

Assessment of the Facilities

NAA's collection of documents and manuscripts is housed in a 120-year-old building in Kabul's Dahafaghanan district. The structure was initially meant to be a palace, but was never used as such. The position of this structure in the city of Kabul presents both a threat to and an opportunity for the collection. On the one hand, the actions of the Taliban in metropolitan areas, particularly those near political and military institutions, threaten the security of the NAA. On the other hand, the building's accessibility to all areas of the city provides the opportunity for interested individuals to visit the archive and benefit from its large and valuable collection. The fact that the structure has been built on a dry stone bed and at the base of a hill is also beneficial to the contents of the NAA, since humidity is a major threat to the preservation of the works, and the dry stone bed helps mitigate humidity. The structure of the building is strong and durable, and has survived the passage of time and various wars. The manuscripts in the NAA have miraculously escaped the war and destruction of the last thirty years, thanks in large part to the courage of our Afghan colleagues who took the necessary measures to save them from destruction and looting.

The ground floor of the NAA building is an exhibition space with display cases containing facsimiles of documents and manuscripts. The archive contains three separate collections. The first is an archival collection, gathered since the time of King Amanollah, containing more than 70,000 documents, of which the oldest is a farman of Sultan Hoseyn Mirza Bayqara. The basement contains two large repository spaces which are protected by armored doors and equipped with metal shelves. Each repository is two meters wide and runs the length of the building. One of these repositories houses the archival documents (usually in boxes) and photographic archives (often in albums), and the second repository houses the manuscripts, paintings, and album pages. Both of these spaces have individual entrances at each end of the palace. The collection of manuscripts codices was the focus of our mission. The NAA also contains a collection of printed books, which are stored in a separate place, but we have not examined this collection.

Condition of the Building and Storage Space

Our examination of the storage facilities found the following:

- 1. The utility system for the building runs above the manuscript collection, putting it at risk in the event of structural damage.
- 2. The building's electrical system also poses a fire threat to the collections because it is not up code.
- 3. The storage spaces currently use fluorescent lighting. Fluorescent light has high UV levels that damage paper and cause ink and illustrations to fade more rapidly than other lighting types.
- 4. Large windows in the exhibition halls provide most of the light for the space during the day. Such high levels of sunlight can damage the materials on display.
- 5. The display cases in the exhibition halls are made out of wood and are non-standard.
- 6. The materials in the collections are covered with dust. This is partially due to the fact that the ventilation system is currently not functional due to electricity problems.
- 7. The metal shelves are in acceptable condition. However, the materials could be stored more efficiently. Placing the fine manuscripts too closely together will result in damage and breakage.
- 8. Fortunately, there was no sign of microorganisms (such as mushrooms) in the storage chambers.
- 9. A certain type of roach was present in the chambers, which can be hazardous to the manuscripts. It is important to note that manuscripts from India are abundant in this collection, and the paper on which they are written attracts these roaches.
- 10. In the past, the staff had built boxes to protect fine volumes, but that program has since been halted.

Recommendations for Improvements

In order for the basement storage areas to be made into a safer repository for the collections, the NAA must make a few structural modifications, implement better shelving standards, and update the lighting, intercom, and fire safety systems. Specifically, we recommend the following measures:

- 1. The utility systems need to be updated or some other solution needs to be found to prevent damage to the collections.
- 2. The electrical system needs to be updated as soon as possible to minimize the chance of an electrical fire.
- 3. The fluorescent lights should be replaced with LED lights.
- 4. The amount of light entering through the windows in the exhibition halls should be minimized.
- 5. The display cases should be replaced with standard cases.
- 6. The materials in the collections should be periodically removed from the repository to be cleaned of dust and closely examined for damage that may require conservational attention.

Additionally, the ventilation systems should be repaired or replaced. The spaces through which dust enters the space should be located and blocked during the upgrade of the storage spaces.

- 7. The method for storing materials should be standardized and organized so that the materials are easy to locate and are appropriately spaced out to avoid damage from crowding and improper storage.
- 8. Although there are no signs of microorganisms in the storage repositories, it is possible that there are inactive spores in the chambers which could grow if the temperature and humidity levels increase. This potential hazard needs to be kept in mind as improvements are made to these spaces.
- 9. To address the presence of roaches, the repositories should implement an integrated pest management (IPM) plan.
- 10. The production of protective boxes for the materials should be resumed. Alternatively, volumes could be covered with acid-free paper or disposable fabrics and sheets that are resistant to UV light and dust (such as those used in Iran because acid-free paper is expensive). We could not find these fabrics in Afghanistan and it has been suggested that these fabrics could be ordered from Iran.

Alternatively, we also suggest the possibility of improving the storage through the creation or acquisition of an additional building. The most advantageous option would be to consider the construction of a new building to house the archives. This building could be—as in Tbilisi—an open repository to receive the archives, old and new. The NAA would then be able to centralize the archives of the government and ministries, as required by law. Modern services could be set up to meet the country's needs in terms of public archiving and preservation.

Thus, if the archives were moved to a new building, the manuscripts section could be housed in the greater part of the present building, whose historic character deserves to be preserved and respected. With nice exhibit rooms and a reading room on the ground floor, the building lends itself very well to storage and access. All the space in the basement could be reserved for manuscripts and perhaps for photographic collections as well. These storage spaces could be refurbished and the shelving re-employed to store the manuscripts lying flat, in the manner most favorable to conservation.

In addition, it would be advantageous to provide space for new preservation and conservation workshops as well as photography and imaging spaces in the immediate vicinity of the collections as part of the remodeling. Offices for cataloging the collection should also be included.

The objectives of these transformations—achievable in several stages—would be fourfold:

- I. All manuscripts could be housed in one place, with adequate space for storing new accessions.
- 2. The imaging and photographing spaces would allow for the creation of digital surrogates of the materials. Patrons of the NAA would then have access to these digital copies (locally in the reading room and remotely through the Internet), in lieu of the originals, except for justified exceptions, to reduce wear on the originals.
- 3. Thanks to the expanded and modernized storage, the collection could be enriched with new acquisitions.
- 4. Regular exhibitions highlighting Afghan heritage as well as the artistic and educational interests of the collections could be organized. These exhibitions can be connected with events, lectures or meetings, and can also be linked with the cataloging program.

Conservation and Preservation Plan

We recommend that the NAA develop a full conservation and preservation plan for addressing existing concerns and preventing future damage. In the meantime, the following simple measures could be rapidly implemented:

- 1. Sheet materials (isolated pages, calligraphic pages, separate paintings, sheets from albums) should be stored flat and be protected by tissue paper.
- 2. Small Qurans should be stored in special storage boxes.
- 3. All materials should be systematically dusted.
- 4. The materials should be stored so as to avoid damage, especially large volumes.
- 5. Materials should be transported flat. Baskets may be useful for transporting some of the items.
- 6. The use of pencils and suitable cushions and cradles for the opening of manuscripts and books should be mandatory. These rules should apply to the staff as well as external readers.

Further training of the conservation staff could be pursued through internships in Iran, Turkey (Süleymanie Kütüphanesi), or India. It is important that these courses (of at least one month in duration) be taken under conditions comparable to those encountered in Kabul. Additionally, the equipment with which they train should be comparable to that available in Kabul. The language barrier is one of the key problems in training of the staff. Thus, the best option would be to train them in Iran because the staff will be able to easily communicate with their Iranian counterparts in Persian.

The Contents of the Collection

The manuscript collection contains approximately 6,550 volumes, 1,200 pages of calligraphy, and several lithographs. It is a collection which is, therefore, by number and quality, in competition with the largest collections of manuscripts in the Persianate world.

The materials in the manuscript collection come in part from acquisitions from scholars (such as Faruqi) and Afghan collectors, but a larger portion are from Afghan heritage collections, such as the library of the old Kabul Museum, the Library of the Royal Palace, the office of the Presidency of the Republic, the Independent Press Library of Afghanistan, and other smaller libraries such as Kholm and Ghazneh. This specific heritage gives a special color to the collection. This point should be highlighted: it is a heritage collection for all citizens of Afghanistan and an invaluable treasury of Persian manuscripts. Unfortunately, however, it has remained largely unknown to this day due to the tumultuous political situation in Afghanistan and the lack of a comprehensive catalog.

All the materials are, however, registered with an inventory number and are carefully—but very briefly—described in the input register (an excellent practice which has helped in rescue efforts). We want to emphasize that our Afghan colleagues deserve a tremendous amount of respect for their protection of the collection from destruction and looting under very difficult conditions. Despite the adverse conditions, they even continued updating the archive's inventories with great care during times of unrest.

A large number of manuscripts in the collections have been microfilmed, but the microfilms have been damaged and are hardly usable. The collection was well known locally before the war period. It is sometimes cited, and scholars have worked with the collection. It is therefore a duty to preserve, revive, and return this collection to its former position in the scholarly world.

The manuscript collection at the NAA has been categorized into five sections: the Qurans, interpretations (*tafsir*) of the Quran and other religious texts, historical texts, literary works, and Pashtu works. In the judgment of our Iranian colleague Noshad Rokni, the manuscript collection "is a collection

not only interesting for Afghanistan but part of global cultural heritage." The following sections describe these five sections of the collection in detail.

Qurans

This collection includes a handful of manuscripts on parchment in Kufic script, which are among the oldest works in the library, and some of which bear the royal seal of Sultan Hoseyn Safavi (d. 1726 CE), the last king of the Safavid dynasty. The Qurans in this collection include seven hundred volumes, nearly one tenth of the library's contents. In chronological order, these manuscripts include examples of Kufic, Naskh, Sols, Mohaqqaq, Reyhan, and Bahari scripts. Some have been translated into Persian, and in some cases they have been translated according to the local vernacular Persian spoken by Afghans. Some manuscripts have been translated into the Badakhshan Persian vernacular. These works include examples of Rob', Sob', and Baghali, Kheshti, Regh'i, Vaziri, Rehli, and Sultani. A considerable number of these manuscripts include fine and artistic touches such as Quranic *tazhib* implemented in Saljuq, Timurid, and Safavid styles.

The Quran section is a collection of the first order. The catalog published in 1984-6 CE gives an overview of the types of pieces that are present, but is devoid of stylistic comparisons and in-depth analysis. Therefore, this catalog urgently needs a complete overhaul, as will be discussed further below. Of the roughly 700 pieces in the collection, we counted about 150 of unquestionable artistic value.

The collection's strong points are the presence of some Kufic script specimens written on parchment and illuminated during the Umayyad period (which are extremely rare and fine), the presence of large illuminated Qurans representing different schools of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries CE (which are richly illuminated and sometimes include Persian translations), and a rare set of Qurans in Bihari script (with no equivalent elsewhere, in our opinion).

There are a number of illuminated Qurans in different styles including Kashmiri, Kabuli or Bukhari from the eighteenth through twentieth centuries CE. They are of various types and often quite beautiful. Some are covered with Afghan lacquered bindings or with other lesser-known binding styles (many of which need to be conserved). The collection demonstrates a clear desire to bring together various styles of Qurans. If the poor condition of the collection improves and the urgent conservation-preservation measures are addressed, the collection will undoubtedly attract many scholars of Quranic studies and art historians.

Tafsirs of the Quran and other Religious Texts

The *tafsirs* and other religious texts in this collection appear among other manuscripts, and we have not been able to determine their exact number. It must be said, however, that between 2,500 and 3,000 manuscripts in this collection include *tafsir* (interpretation) of the Quran, *fiqh*, religious treatises, and *kalam*. In this collection, *tafsirs* from earlier periods (up to Timurid period) are primarily in Arabic, indicating study at religious institutions as they evince the handwritings of the *salf ulama* and various artistic royal embellishments. These manuscripts include the examples datable from the Ilkhanid to Timurid era. After this time, there is a gap and then the collection includes manuscripts from the past two centuries.

Mystic texts (*irfan*) are well represented, with many anthologies, and these texts merit further work and investigation by specialists. Many manuscripts are of composite content and require thorough examination.

The nearly 2,000 Arabic manuscripts include treatises on Muslim religious thought and law. The majority of them are Hanafi works. Many copies are fairly recent (eighteenth and nineteenth century CE), but some important manuscripts are much older (twelfth to fourteenth centuries CE). Many manuscripts are from Central Asia or India and a few are from Iran.

Historical Works

Nearly a thousand manuscripts in the NAA collection are historical works of various centuries. Most of the works in this library are related to Persian history, to the Timurid era and earlier, and there are also works from the last two centuries. The earliest works in this collection include the translation of the *Ta'rikh al-rosul wa al-moluk* by Mohammad ben Jarir Tabari, *Ta'rikh-e Bayhaqi* of Abu al-Fazl Bayhaqi, and *Mojmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qesas*. The collection also includes the *Habib al-seyar-e* of Khandamir and *Rozat-osafa*, which belong to Afghanistan's recent history. The manuscripts of some of these works, such as *Mojmal al-Tawarikh* and the *Ta'rikh Bayhaqi*, are rather rare even in Iran. The collection is especially focused on Afghanistan. The collection includes a good copy of the *Ta'rikh-i Bayhaqi*, as well as copies made in more recent times from good manuscripts. We also found some important autographs in the collection. The lack of artistic adornments in these works suggests that the royal courts of this area had less interest in historical works.

Literary Works

About 3,000 manuscripts in this collection are related to literary works of prose and poetry. This section of the collection, which mostly contains works from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries CE, includes personal writings and works of poets and authors such as Mollah Hoseyn Va'ez Kashefi, Abd al-Rahman Jami, Mohammad ebn Taleb Amoli, Bidel Dehlavi, and many others. Additionally, the manuscripts in this collection include artistic manuscript pages of the Timurid, Uzbeks, and Mughal Empire that were made into books by individuals like Sultan Mohammad Nur, Soltan Ali Mashhadi, Mir Ali Heravi, and many others. These works have the characteristic embellishments of the Timurid and Mughal era and are mostly written in *nasta'liq*, an indication of their age. Their seals are also an indication of their relation to the royal courts of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah-Jahan. Furthermore, there are manuscripts ordered by Timurid kings such as Shams al-Din Mohammad Kokaltash, indicating their artistic significance.

Manuscripts of Persian poetry (*divans*) occupy a prominent place in the NAA collection. Some manuscripts are well known, such as a *divan* of Sa'di, written shortly before his death. The manuscripts written in *naskh*, which date to the fourteenth century, include the collected works of Sa'di (1325 CE), the collected works of Kamal al-Din 'Abd al-Razaq Esfehani (1321 CE), *Dastur al-kateb fi ta'yin al-marateb* by Henduhah Nakhjavani, and *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat* by Mohammad Ghazali (1302 CE). The multitude of the written manuscripts is also indicative of the attention to the Persian-speaking literary figures in Afghanistan, such as Bidel Dehlavi (70 manuscripts), 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, Nezami Ganjavi, as well as the historians such as the sixteenth-century historians Shahidi Qomi, Sharaf Jahan Ghazvini, and many others.We also noted the significant presence of a very large number of copies of the *Masnavi* of Jalal al-Din Balkhi Rumi and various commentaries on the *Masnavi*. Another well represented author is 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, with many copies of his works (including a very valuable *Nafahat al-Ons* which may be in his hand) as well as commentaries on his works.

Other literary works in this collection, which distinguish this collection in comparison to other collections in Iran, Tajikistan, and Turkey, are manuscripts produced in India, including a translation of the *Mahabharata* and poems from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries produced with the book decorating style of the subcontinent in that era.

We characterize the rest of the collection as excellent and it contains many good copies of the important texts of Persian literature, with a lot of early copies and rare authors.

Manuscripts of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries CE, dated and undated, are relatively numerous (unfortunately, many colophons have disappeared). There are also many good copies from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries CE. A number of copies are illuminated and came from libraries belonging to the elite.

Looking at the collection from the perspective of the geographical origin of the manuscripts, we must emphasize its special significance. A number of copies are the works of calligraphers from Khorasan, Central Asia, India, and Afghanistan. Their presence greatly enriches our knowledge of the history of the book in these regions. Similarly, we found manuscripts that demonstrate the vibrancy of the intellectual and literary life in the Kabul region; many of these manuscripts are underestimated and understudied. As already mentioned, illuminated manuscripts are an important part of this remarkable collection. A large number of copies are linked by their script and their décor, sometimes by their paintings with the prolific school of Kashmir (1770-1830 CE) or the schools of Central Asia of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries CE. Indian copies are also numerous.

Many of the manuscripts were copied in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul (although most of them are relatively recent (eighteenth to twentieth century CE), and they give the collection a distinctly "Afghan" color. Specific lacquered bindings, marbled paper margins, and numerous illuminations added to some of the more important books reinforce this "Kabuli" character.

Several manuscripts of the collection came from the Imperial Library of the Mughals, as shown by the stamps and marks (*'arza-dasht* written by librarians) on guard leaves; others came from the Royal Safavid Library of Iran and the ateliers of Central Asian courts. Several other major collectors had previously owned parts of the collections. Some volumes were princely gifts (including gifts from the Khan of Khoqand to the ruler of Afghanistan).

The collection includes a limited number of dictionaries like *Majma al-Loghat*, *Jahangiri* dictionary, *Borhan-e Ghate'*.

Pashtu Works

Among the almost 8,000 manuscripts of the NAA, there are about 400 manuscripts in Pashtu. Most of these works are literary or historical texts with a limited number of religious or scientific texts among them. These manuscripts, which were written in the past two hundred years, are related to Pashtuspeaking Afghan kings, as most of them are the work of Kabuli book illustrators and calligraphers and they have glossy lacquered bindings and illustrate the *tazhib* techniques of the Kashmir and Peshawar school. This section of the library contains the largest collection of Pashtu manuscripts in the world—an important point which cannot be over emphasized.

Review of the Collections and the Selection of Major Works

In the second part of the project, Francis Richard, Amir Mansuri and Behruz Amini, in collaboration with Abd al-Rashid Osman from the NAA, conducted a preliminary review of all 6550 manuscript volumes in the NAA collection.

The NAA requested that we identify a selection of "priority documents" that constitute the heart of the collection. Such a choice was difficult and necessarily somewhat arbitrary because there are no manuscripts in NAA that are inherently uninteresting or unimportant. Our criteria were therefore the following:

- Antique copies
- The presence of a quality setting
- The presence of valuable illumination or paintings
- Rare texts or autographs
- Calligraphy done by known calligraphers
- Texts bound by interesting bindings (including those specific to Afghanistan)
- Historically important handwritten notes
- Volumes that are representatives of scribal schools and/or specific decoration ateliers (with attention to what is specifically Afghani).

In short, a choice that is fairly representative of the collection. We hope that our list will be added to later by our Afghan colleagues. We selected just over 300 manuscripts. See Appendix for our list, including the dimensions and titles of each manuscript.

We had intended to record details of the manuscripts along with the reasons for our choices (setting, date, presence of paintings, former collection, princely or other, rarity of the text, autograph, binding, etc.) in an Excel spreadsheet. The limited timeframe did not allow us to carry this out. We limited our work to photographing two or three sheets of the manuscripts that were likely to be selected. A set of the photographs taken by Amir Mansuri and Francis Richard were given to Mrs. Nazari, director of the NAA.

These selected manuscripts will have priority for dust removal. Some will be housed in acid-free paper envelopes. All these manuscripts will be cataloged or re-cataloged. All or part of them will be—if approved by the Ministry of Culture—digitized with a dual purpose:

- I. To retain a copy of each patrimonial (national Afghan legacy) document
- 2. To limit the handling of the most valuable originals

We regret that we could not begin cataloging the manuscripts as we had planned. This visit, unfortunately, was too short.

Cataloging Assessment

A cataloging program for all materials had started to bear fruit in the 1980s, but unfortunately was stopped by the war years:

- In 1363 and 1365 H (1984-6 CE), two volumes of the inventory of archival documents in the National Archives of Kabul were published in Kabul.
- In 1366 SH (1987), a one-volume catalog of Qurans in NAA was published, written by 'Abd al-Qadir Moshtari Najrabi. It lists 330 volumes, described relatively briefly.
- In 1363 and 1367 H (1984 and 1988), Mohammad A'zam Afzali and Mohammad Anwar Nayyar wrote and published 1,012 catalog entries (the texts are in alphabetical order of the titles of the works, Volume II contains the letter *Dal* and in particular describes the poetic *divans*).

Despite their meritorious qualities, these catalogs, published in Kabul by the NAA, do not give a complete picture of the collection. They are not written according to current standards, and do not reflect the changes that have occurred in the arrangement of the materials.

Cataloging Recommendations

Therefore, the enterprise of cataloging the manuscripts preserved in Kabul is absolutely essential and should be a top priority. Only after this work is completed will we know the exact contents of the Archive's collections. Cataloging efforts will aid in the conservation of the collections, and will also help to produce publications and exhibitions. A complete and standardized catalog will be a working tool for scholars and researchers. It will also be a contribution to our knowledge of the Afghan national heritage and bring many unknown texts to light. Standardized cataloging of entire collections has also been undertaken by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France as part of the "Series catalogorum," and, in digital form, in Berlin and the US libraries, following the standards recommended by Iraj Afshar, in Iran.

The manpower for cataloging the collection in this library includes only two individuals who are somewhat familiar with the manuscripts but will retire in the next four to five years. Furthermore, these individuals lack sufficient knowledge of online informational resources and the Arabic language. Therefore, additional staff and training is recommended for the cataloging project. A manager must be found for each section of the catalog: Arabic, Persian, and Pashtu. These managers will supervise the entire project with the director of the NAA. The entire staff of the Manuscripts Section of the NAA must be involved in this enterprise in order to ensure harmonious collaboration and their responsibilities must be clearly defined. Any form of subcontracting should be avoided.

To write this catalog, the solution would perhaps be to recruit young Afghan post-MA or doctoral students (in Iran or elsewhere) or other young scholars (from abroad, if conditions allow it) using funding from foundations such as The Islamic Manuscript Association or other larger grants. The NAA's administration could apply for such funding. Regarding The Islamic Manuscript Association, we suggest to Mrs. Nazari that the NAA join the Association with an annual membership. These scholars would be charged with the task of writing the individual parts of the catalog over a period of six months or a year:

- Persian literary texts
- Persian historical and epistolographic (ensha') texts
- Persian mystical texts
- Scientific and medical texts
- Arabic religious literature, etc.
- Pashtu texts

Accomplished in incremental steps, this catalog may take a print form first and a digital form at a later time. It is likely that the catalog must first be published in Persian and Pashtu, but an English translation should be prepared in parallel.

A catalog of paintings and the illuminations and bindings found in the manuscript collection must also be considered in order to make the wealth of this collection known and available to art historians. Additionally, a new, image-rich catalog of the Qurans should be created.

In order to help our colleagues in Kabul, an interesting prospective project could be cataloging part of the manuscript collection in the NAA in partnership with other international institutions. A project could be devoted to cataloging parts of the manuscript heritage for which there are no available Afghan specialists, such as religious literature in Arabic (e.g., Islamic law, *fiqh*, *kalam*, philosophy, grammar, *tafsirs*). The collection in Kabul represents a corpus of texts that are representative of the Central-Asiatic Hanafi schools active in Afghanistan. A young Arabic specialist could, for example, work on this catalog. The same kind of project could also be launched to catalog the manuscripts with decorations and paintings. International students are likely to be interested in such a project).

Catalog work on Sufi texts could also be an important focus (see the work undertaken by Prof. Jürgen Paul and the German scholars on the Biruni center of Tashkent in collaboration with local scholars). Cataloging Sufi literature preserved in the NAA collection would be an excellent endeavor. For such cataloging, we must have ready access to the published catalogs of other collections (Monzavi for Pakistan, Tashkent, etc.). Therefore, the acquisition of the print catalogs of other institutions and reference books (digital or print) is an important component of the cataloging work to be done in Kabul.

Similarly, some Turkish and Indian manuscripts have to be cataloged by specialists, which will require significant funding. We suggest identifying specialists and inviting them to work on the project.

Publishing the catalogs will not be a problem. We contacted Prof. Michel Bernardini who is the Dean of the Oriental Faculty in Naples, which publishes the prestigious *Series Catalogorum*. He indicated that he would be excited to publish the entire catalog of the NAA manuscript collection in an English version as well as a Persian version. He suggested asking the Gerdan Henckel Foundation to subsidize the publication.

An important point, in our opinion, is that there must be close links and coordination among the staff of the NAA who are involved in the essential jobs of curating, conserving, photographing, and

cataloging. The organization of the work at the Archive should facilitate this collaboration. All personnel must also have been trained in basic codicology and conservation. This includes the promotion of the professional specialties amongst the staff, which will be necessary for the success of the cataloging enterprise.

Digitization Program

A policy and schedule needs to be established for imaging these 300 high priority items. We have suggested that this digitization project be completed in two stages:

- 1. The creation of an "NAA portal" that will showcase the collections of the NAA. This site, run by the NAA under the supervision of the Afghan Ministry of Culture and Information, will inform researchers, facilitate sharing the wealth of Afghan heritage, provide an educational tool for young Afghans, and draw attention to the great needs of the NAA. This site will also help in obtaining additional funding. The Persian Manuscript Initiative (PMI) led by Kent State University and Roshan Institute for Persian Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park is willing to create this portal for the NAA.
- 2. The digitization of the most important manuscripts (especially, the 300 manuscripts detailed in Appendix A), which will be followed by a second stage of digitization focused on the remainder of the NAA collection, completed in order of priority. This digitization program will result in the long-term preservation of the entire collection and it will enable the production of copies in print or online. The Persian Manuscript Initiative and the Hill Manuscript Museum and Library (HMML) have already offered to run a pilot digitization and digital training program, with a strong likelihood of subsequent expansion and renewal. (Permission of the Minister of Culture and Information and the NAA director will be required, however, for the launching of digitization program).

For Stage I, the particularly interesting and important documents from our list may be featured on the website in order to attract the interests of scholars. One could imagine that the website would, at first, include partial reproductions (images of a few pages from each manuscript) of fifty documents (or more), with some bibliographic and item description. This would be an excellent showcase for the archive. Interested users of the website could then possibly order complete reproductions of the items (on terms to be decided by the appropriate authorities). The NAA will store the digital copies of the manuscripts on local computer servers (an embryo of the future manuscripts collection server).

Alongside the production of the website, we recommend that the NAA continue their current policy of manuscript reproductions through the publication of books and albums (with the partnership of the Aga Khan Foundation and other foundations). It might also be possible to publish, in parallel with the drafting of catalogs, albums on Shaibanid Uzbek manuscripts, illuminated Pashtu literary manuscripts, illustrated Afghan military manuscripts, and the old Qurans.

For Stage 2, HMML has already offered its services to digitize the 300 selected manuscripts. In addition, the NAA has recently received a book scanner as a gift from the Embassy of the Czech Republic. Mr. Rokni has outlined for the staff the best practices and procedures for imaging the priority documents that can safely be digitized.

Those responsible for developing the imaging policy and plan must make a detailed study of the procedures and formats. Staff training and workshop equipment could benefit from the support of foreign foundations, but it is important that the NAA retain control of the project and retain ownership of the scans.

Training Workshops Held During Visit

During our stay in Afghanistan, intensive general codicology and professional conservation workshops were held for sixteen NAA staff members. During the first two days of the team's visit to the NAA, all of the staff were introduced to codicology through detailed PowerPoint presentations which covered all aspects of the study of Persian and Arabic manuscripts. We also briefly introduced the staff to the latest findings in codicology regarding different aspects of a manuscript. We wanted to show how these findings directly apply to the conservation of collections and creation of systematic catalogs, as well as the necessity of writing catalogs according to the latest standards.

During the next two days, after a general presentation of UNESCO standard requirements for the preservation of old books, Noshad Rokni provided specific training for those who are or will be in charge of conservation and preservation. Some training was also provided on the subject of the digital reproduction of manuscripts, including methods, aims, and materials to be used.

It should be noted that the most recent Iranian practices were demonstrated as practices that could be adopted for use in the NAA. Some points are evident: the weather and the type of stored documents are comparable and the difficulties to be overcome are often the same. The colleagues from the Malek Museum offered to provide further training to the NAA conservators in Iran.

In the conservation workshop, the personnel first were instructed in the standards for preservation (such as the proper handling and moving of manuscripts), lighting, humidity, temperature, floating particle control, utilities, intercom systems, fire safety standards, and the cleaning and transfer of the works (including how to work with damaged materials).

Later in the conservation workshop we delved into more detailed treatments of the following topics:

- Methods of packing and transporting written manuscripts;
- Methods of cleaning manuscripts and documents;
- Advanced methods for creating the optimal conditions for maintaining materials in the exhibition and reading rooms, along with ways of maintaining those conditions in imperfect situations and with limited resources;
- Specialized methods for protecting paper materials with an emphasis on the protection of damaged documents and manuscripts;
- Methods of quarantining newly arrived or damaged documents and manuscripts;
- Methods for the preservation of paper volumes (even with only limited resources);
- Specialized photography with simple equipment for the works that cannot be imaged due to their poor condition (methods for distinguishing and separating these works have also been taught to the NAA personnel);
- Creation of conservation records for each work with the personnel's assistance (there was a need to translate certain idioms into Dari) as well as offering programs for a quick review and updating of these cards;
- Preliminary training for creating a risk management plan.

Conclusion and Future Steps

To summarize, we believe that there are three emergency priorities:

- I. Cataloging the entire collection according to the current standards of cataloging;
- 2. Preparing a plan for preservation and conservation;
- 3. Instituting a digitization program as soon as possible in order to preserve the invaluable cultural heritage contained in the NAA collection (especially important in light of HMML's offer to fund a digitization program overseen by Persian literature experts at Roshan-UMD-KSU's PMI).

In terms of physical resources that would improve the functionality of the NAA, the acquisition of several computers equipped with software such as a PDF reader and an internet connection would be highly beneficial to the departments of preservation, conservation, and cataloging. Perhaps with the assistance of local and international cultural organizations, these vital necessities can be provided so that this important cultural project can continue. (At present, the only computer in the department of manuscripts is unable to read PDF files).

In order to move forward with the long-term goals proposed in this report, some additional training, equipment, and planning are needed. The following list gives an idea of where to start.

- Provide specialized training of personnel in archiving, classification, conservation, laboratory procedures for preservation, bookbinding, and documentation. Some of this training must be done in equipped workshops. Therefore, it is best that some of the personnel are given the opportunity to travel to other countries for training. Iran in particular would be a very good option since there would not be a language barrier and Noshad Rokni has offered to help coordinate this training in Iran.
- Create organized programs for conservation and cleaning of the manuscripts.
- Obtain the basic equipment needed for cleaning and the creation of a temporary conservation workshop, in particular:
 - Disposable gloves
 - Soft brushes
 - Cotton and soft cloths
 - Acid-free cleaning solution
 - Distilled water
 - o Ethanol
 - Disinfecting chambers for files and manuscripts
 - Antiseptic solutions
 - Applicators
 - Light tables
 - o Scalpel blades
 - Japanese tissue paper
 - Appropriate paper for separating fragile decorated sheets
 - Warm and cold presses
 - Wash tubs
 - Acid-free paper or polypropylene fabric
 - o Bookbinding tools
 - $\circ \quad \text{Glues}$

More specialized equipment will also be needed.

In conclusion, we have found the manuscript collection at the National Archive of Afghanistan to be a very valuable collection of materials which need to be preserved for the future. The contents of the collection need to be presented to the world through a new catalog and the proposed digitization project. We have described the training and assessments undertaken during our visit, and have outlined our recommendations for moving forward. This mission was conducted with the support of The Islamic Manuscript Association, the Roshan Initiative in Persian Digital Humanities (PersDig@UMD), and the French Embassy in Kabul.¹¹ The project was supervised by Mrs. Masuma Nazari, the director of the NAA, and her kindness and competence have greatly facilitated our endeavors. We are also grateful to Mr. Armin Yavari from The Islamic Manuscript Association and Dr. Rohullah Amin and Mr. Zafar Dagig from American Institute of Afghanistan Studies for working closely with us to transfer the funds to Afghanistan, Mr. Marlaud, Ambassador of France, Mr. Pascal Hanse, Mr. Alain Masetto from the French Embassy, and Mr. Julio Bendezu, the director, and Mr. Thomas Lorain from D.A.F.A. (delegation archeologique française en Afghanistan) all helped make this visit to the NAA a success. Mr. Abdol Rashid Osman, head of the Manuscript Section at the NAA, worked hard throughout the project, and in addition to his excellent knowledge of the materials in the collections, his long experience and sense of humor were an immense help.

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Appendix: List of Priority Documents

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