

Volume One
Number One
July 1, 2004



The Afghanistan Digital Library

A project of New York University

◆ کتابخانه دیجیتال افغانستان ◆ د افغانستان دیجیتال کتابتون ◆

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER • NEW YORK UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Afghanistan Digital Library Now On Line!

On June 15, the permanent website of The Afghanistan Digital library was launched at:

<http://afghanistandl.nyu.edu>

This is the beginning of what will be a permanent, easily accessible, collection of the works published in Afghanistan between 1871, the date of the first known publication, and 1930. The collection will provide to the general public free and unfettered access to an intellectual legacy that is virtually unknown and has suffered much during the last quarter century of turmoil in the country. Afghanistan's two major libraries, the Kabul Public Library and the Kabul University Library, have endured vandalism, book-burning and the collateral effects of years of war. There was severe damage to their collections by looting and vandalism and from the explosion of rockets and heavy weapons' fire. In the case of the Public Library, we know that at least some of the works from Kabul's presses of the period 1871–1930 were in its collection. That information is found in a three-part article on early publishing in Afghanistan written by Kazem Ahang in 1970 and published in the journal *Aryānā*.

The books that will appear online came mostly but not exclusively from the Government Press in Kabul or from one or two presses run by members of the royal family, the *Shirkat-i Rafiq* press, for example. Today these books are found only rarely in public repositories and research libraries and then in very small numbers. Most of the works that will be digitized come from private collectors. The director of the project, R. D. McChesney, a professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University, has compiled a bibliography now approaching 600 titles and is continually finding new items to (See "Digital Library On Line," p. 3).

Advisory Board Member Nancy Dupree Profiled in *The New York Times*

In the May 8 edition of the *The New York Times*, the subject of "The Saturday Profile" was Advisory Board Member, Nancy Hatch Dupree. Calling her a "a chronicler of Afghan culture" the article provides an encapsulated view of the adventure-filled and productive life she has led since first arriving in Afghanistan in 1962. It concludes with an account of her plans for the construction in Kabul, (See "An Afghan Chronicler," p. 2)

Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan's Books First to Be Digitized

The "Iron Amir," 'Abd al-Rahman Khan (r. 1880-1901), was a firm believer in the power of the press, as long as it was in his hands. He inherited some of the printing capability that Amir Shayr 'Ali Khan (r. 1863–6, 1867-73) first introduced late in his reign and then upgraded state publishing in 1884 with a new lithograph press purchased in India. The output of the press was used, among other purposes, to train his administration, to provide manuals for the armed forces, and to address the problem of being a Muslim nations sandwiched between Christian empires. But other royal interests are reflected in the publications as well.



The ADL has digitized a number of his works, four of which (perhaps more by the time this newsletter reaches you) are available now on the Internet, works which seem particularly germane to the condition of Afghanistan today. These are: *Kalimat amir al-bilād fī targhīb ilā al-jihād*, a work advising his countrymen on the need to be prepared to fight holy war against the aggression of Christian imperial powers; *Taqwīm al-Dīn*, a work written by thirteen Islamic scholars and divided into three sections (*maqālah*)—1) on the virtues of jihad, 2) on the necessity of having an amir and the obligation of obedience to him, and 3) refutation of the doctrines of the Wahhabis; (See "'Abd al-Rahman Khan," p. 3)

Want to Participate in the ADL?

The Afghanistan Digital Library now has commitments from owners for about 60-65% of the titles in the bibliography. But there remains that 35-40% of titles we know were published but for which we do not have original copies offered to the project. In addition, there must be items not on the bibliography because the project team has yet to find a reference to them. Any of you who have items that you think would be appropriate for the ADL (anything published or printed in Afghanistan between 1871 and 1930 or 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 published during this time. There is some reason to believe that ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, for example, published many works in both Dari and Pashto but the Pashto works have so far eluded us. We need your help! The project director, R. D. McChesney, may be reached at:

robert.mcchesney@nyu.edu

or by phone/fax at 212-998-8902/212-995-4689.

Copies of the ADL bibliography are available on request. There is a slightly older version now available on line in downloadable format at jennifertnaylor.com/isis/ (click on bibliography [pdf]). Anyone who would like a hardcopy of the bibliography, please ask. At the moment, for technical reasons, the bibliography is in transliterated Latin script. But eventually we will have it in full Arabic script.

Want to Support the ADL?

This project is costly. The ADL team includes a conservator, cataloguer, digital specialist, and web programmer, as well as the director. Currently, these are full-time employees of New York University who devote a percentage of their time to the project. In addition, there are non-personnel costs such as travel to collections, courier costs for transporting the materials, and equipment. To digitize the large format publications (the 5X5 foot map of ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan, for example, or the law codes or farmans of Amir Habib Allah Khan), New York University Libraries must purchase new overhead scanning equipment.

The NYU Libraries development staff is working to identify and solicit help from foundations with an interest in the kind of work we’re doing. But we are always looking for help. If you know of an individual, foundation, or a company that might have a particular interest in supporting the development of the ADL, please let us know.



Pages from *Sar-rihtah-i Islamiyyah Rum*, undated, ca. 1304–05/1887

“An Afghan Chronicler” (cont’d)

next to the university, of a new center for Afghan research. The new center will ultimately replace the library and center in Peshawar and house the 25,000-book collection now in Pakistan.

The article can be retrieved through the *NY Times* website.

“Digital Library On Line” (cont’d)

add to the list. The bibliography is divided into three sections—books, documents, and serials.

The documents section is limited to printed documents. These include, for example, the great map/proclamation that ‘Abd al-Rahman issued on October 29, 1898. (The map has been recently analyzed with a translation in David Edwards’s *Heroes of the Age*.) This approximately five-foot-square document was sent out to all the amir’s governors to be posted in a public place for the edification of his subjects. New York University Libraries has an original copy of this map which will be digitized for the project. Other noteworthy items in the “documents” bibliography are farmans of Amir Habib Allah Khan (r. 1901-1919) and the numerous laws issued by his successor Amir Aman Allah Khan (r. 1919-1929). With some 180 of these laws (*nizâm-nâmahs*) in hand for the project we believe that once these are digitized they will form the most complete collection of the reformist amir’s *nizâm-nâmahs* available anywhere in the world.

The serials list includes newspapers like *Shams al-nahâr*, the first newspaper published in Afghanistan. (It should be noted, though, that the project has no original copies of this extremely rare publication available for digitizing.) Other noteworthy items is a nearly complete collection of *Sirâj al-akhbâr* missing only vol. 1, no.1 and a newspaper published in Mazar-i Sharif in the early 1920s, *Ittihâd-i Islam*.

One hardly knows where to start with the list of books. More about these as the digitization process moves forward. We will be giving brief descriptions of these books (see article on page 1) as they go on line.

“‘Abd al-Rahman Khan” (con’t)

Â’yinah-i Jahân-numâ selections from Wa’iz-i Kashifi’ (d. 1504), *Anwâr-i suhaylâ*, which is in turn a reworking of the animal fables that came into Islamic culture from India under the name *Kalîla wa Dimna*. The fact that this work was deemed important enough to publish by ‘Abd al-Rahman Khan is symptomatic of his near-obsession with the proper and just conduct of his officials. These animal fables are a kind of commentary on politics and a guide to more universal principles of justice. The fourth work that is online as this newsletter goes to press is *Risâlah-i maw’izah* a work whose stated purpose is to cultivate the requisite virtues of citizenship in the subjects of Afghanistan through a recounting, in twenty-four paragraphs (about 100 pages), of the accomplishments of Amir ‘Abd al-Rahman during the first thirteen years of his reign. A reader would presumably acquire a better understanding of what it meant to be a good Muslim and would learn of the need to be grateful to the sovereign for setting the example.

The Genesis of the Afghanistan Digital Library (as recollected)

Before my memory manages to completely distort the beginnings of the ADL, let me dredge it now for its current take on the subject. In the spring of 2002, a conference on Afghanistan was held at the College of New Jersey. One of the speakers, now a board member of the ADL, Dr. Amin Tarzi, happened to mention a project to create a digital library for Afghanistan led by Houchang Chehabi at Boston University. I was then editor of the journal *Iranian Studies* and Houchang was a member of the editorial board so I called him and asked what his plans were. He said nothing had taken much shape at that point but the idea was a kind of portal to provide web links to other websites with information on Afghanistan. The idea I had begun to form was based on my more traditional conception of a library, that is, a collection of actual books. In light of the interest then in Afghan reconstruction, especially cultural reconstruction, it seemed to me that individuals (and I knew of several, including myself) with collections of books purchased in Afghanistan and from Afghan presses might be willing to lend them for the creation of a digital library. Shortly before the conference in New Jersey, or shortly after, again memory is not very reliable here, Dr. Carol Mandel, Dean of the New York University Libraries, made a presentation to a group of chairpersons of the Faculty of Arts and Science at NYU about a new digital studio set up in Bobst Library and she asked her audience to suggest projects for it. This serendipity led me to make a proposal to her about establishing a library of early Afghan books to which her response was immediate and enthusiastic. I then began the work of creating a bibliography of all works printed in Afghanistan from the dawn of the printing press there. I also started soliciting private collectors as potential sources for the works that needed to be included. In many ways the birth of the ADL was a genuinely “auspicious conjunction” of an idea with the emergence of the kind of technology needed to carry it out. More on the technology involved in future issues. (R. D. McChesney)

International Advisory Board

Dr. Ludwig Adamec, *University of Arizona*, emeritus
Nancy Hatch Dupree, *ARIC, Peshawar and Kabul*
Dr. Ravan Farhadi, *Ambassador, Mission of Afghanistan to the UN*
Dr. M. Jamil Hanifi, *Michigan State University*
Dr. M. Hasan Kakar, *Kabul University*, emeritus
Dr. May Schinasi, *Nice, France*
Richard Tapper, *SOAS, University of London*
Dr. Amin Tarzi, *RFE/RL, Prague*

Project Team

R. D. McChesney, *Project Advisor*
Jerome McDonough, *Digital Library Team Leader*
Melitte Buchman, *Digital Conversion Specialist*
Erika Lindensmith, *Conservator*
Peter Magierski, *Middle East Librarian and Cataloguer*
Michael Stoller, *Director, Collections and Research Services*



The Afghanistan Digital Library

A project of New York University

◆ کتابخانه دیجیتال افغانستان ◆ دافغانستان دیجیتال کتابتون ◆

Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
New York University
50 Washington Square South
New York, NY 10012