AFGHANISTAN*

by

Ahmad Javid

1991

* The political circumstances in Afghanistan do not allow a comprehensive field survey of all collections of Islamic MSS there. The compiler, who, until 3 years ago, was a member of the committee set up by the Government to oversee its cataloguing programme has put together this survey on the basis of his knowledge and involvement in that process, and through correspondence with his colleagues in Kabul. This survey is not as detailed as the Foundation would normally wish, but the compiler regrets that, owing to the present circumstances in Afghanistan, a comprehensive survey cannot be fully realised.
UNION CATALOGUES & SURVEYS


Catalogue of 1596 Arabic, Persian, Pasho, Turkish (incl. Chaghatay & Azeri) and Urdu MSS in 6 libraries of Kabul and Herat. Titles, authors, measurements, no. of folios, lines per page, dates, scripts and some notes on bindings, condition & contents.


Afghanistan, pp. 699–700. Mentions Turkish & Chaghatay MSS acquired by libraries and collectors since the 1964 catalogue of Laugier de Beaurecueil (see above), or omitted from it.
INDIVIDUAL COLLECTIONS

HERAT

Herat Museum (Kitābkhānah-i Mūziyum-i Harāt)

Total number of Islamic MSS: 102 (44 Arabic; 1 Pashto; 51 Persian; 6 mixed) [1964 information].
Published catalogues:
1964. Included in union catalogue of Laugier de Beaurecueil (see above), pp. 313–331.

Kitābkhānah-i ʿAmmah-i Harāt

Pār-i Nādir-Pashtūn
Status: Public library
Total number of Islamic MSS: ca. 100 (mostly Arabic; few Persian) [1971 information].
See:
Unpublished catalogue: Handwritten lists, including both MSS and printed books.

KABUL

Ākādimī-i ʿUlūm-i Afghānīstān Library

Sher pūr, Kabul
Date of establishment: 1979
Status: Governmental
Total number of Islamic MSS: Over 2,000 (Persian, Arabic, Pashto).
Conditions of access: Open to members of the Academy and scholars.
Description of collection: The Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan came into existence in 1979 on a Russian model. Several institutes already in existence were merged together under the name of the Academy of Sciences. These included Pashtū Tolānā (Academy of Pashto), Anjumān-i Tāriḵ-i Afghānīstān (Historical Society of Afghanistan), Markaz-i Bayn al-Mīlāḥ-i Muṭāliʿāt-i Pashtū (International Centre for Pashto Studies), Dāʿīrat al-Maʿārif-i Ārānā (Aryana Encyclopaedia Directorate), Kabul Museum and Markaz-i
committee to encourage people to donate their manuscripts in order to preserve them as part of the Afghan national heritage.

Among the documents and manuscripts collected were some which people had donated, and others which were confiscated from people trying to smuggle them out of the country, as well as those that were taken over from collections of people who either were killed in the civil war or had left the country.

The MSS mentioned by LAUGIER DE BEAURECUEIL all exist in the Archives, including those transferred from the library of the Ministry of Information (as it was previously called), those taken over from the library of the Royal Palace, and those from the libraries of Ghazi and Herat.

Unfortunately, many MSS from the King’s private collection were stolen by the authorities. Among these was a valuable copy of Gusitan-i Sa’di transcribed only 30 years after the death of the famous Persian poet and author of the 7th century AH.

The National Archive also has over 2000 works of calligraphy, some of which were written by the most renowned calligraphers of their time, including masterpieces presented to contemporary rulers. One of these is a rare copy of Naqsh-i al-Urs by Nur al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (the great 9th-century poet). Another is a copy of the Dīwān of Hāfiz, by the famous calligrapher Muhammad Muḥammad Muḥsin written in nastā’īq on ḥārī paper scattered with gold dust: certain pages have been decorated with golden motifs of flowers and leaves, and the panels on the title-page have been decorated in gold in the Timurid style. This MS was commissioned by the Timurid Prince, Farīdun Mirzā, and it also contains beautiful miniatures.

The National Archive is now in a state of disrepair owing to the lack of personnel with a knowledge of maintenance and management systems. The few experienced personnel that did exist have been lost in the tragic civil war.

Published catalogues:

1964. See the union catalogue of LAUGIER DE BEAURECUEIL (details above).


Unpublished catalogues: A hand-list giving some details of 3,551 MSS has been prepared by Fikrī Sajīgī and Basīr Ḥiravī and is available in the library. It gives the titles and authors of the MSS. A copy of the same list is also available in Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation’s Library.

Javid Collection

Nāhiya Chār Shahr-i-Naw
Date of establishment: 1951
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: Over 300 (Persian, Arabic, Pashto).
Conditions of access: Temporarily closed owing to the political situation and civil war.

Description of collection: There are valuable MSS including a rare and complete copy of the Persian Tafsīr-i Abī Bakr Aṭīq Surānādī, written in thulth, on buff polished paper, some time in the 7th or 8th centuries AH. The script is vocalised. Part of it was photocopied and published in Iran by Bunyād-i Farhang-i Irān.

The fields covered by the majority of the MSS are literature and history.

Parvanta Collection

Share-Nau, Kabul
Date of establishment: 1940
Status: Private
Total number of Islamic MSS: 2,000 (Persian, Arabic).
Conditions of access: Temporarily closed owing to the political situation and civil war.
Description of collection: Precious and rare MSS, including some autograph copies. The fields covered are literature and history.

Puhantün-i Kabul Library

Puhantün-i-Kabul, Jamāl Mayna
Date of establishment: 1964
Status: University library
Total number of Islamic MSS: Over 1,000 (Persian, Arabic, Pashto).
Conditions of access: Temporarily closed by the Government.
Description of collection: The Faculty of Literature of Kabul University possessed a valuable collection of MSS. When the Central Library of Kabul University was established, all MSS were transferred to it. The Central Library started to acquire more MSS, but owing to the critical circumstances in the country, several precious MSS were stolen, including the following:

(i) Holy Qur'an divided by 3 lines of elegant black muhaqqaq, thuluth and naskh, on polished buff paper plus fly-leaves. Opening page with illuminated headings within gold clouds and gold margins with floral motifs. Punctuation in red, rosettes between verses, without date and name of scribe. Probably 8th century AH.
(ii) Other main missing MS. is the rare copy of Majmu'ah-i Lailatul-Qadr of Saffah-i-Zarqawi of Syr-i Jami Harawi. This MS. is from the 7th century AH. There is a photocopy of the original in India at the disposal of Professor NAZR AHMAD of the Aligarh University.

The fields covered by the majority of MSS are literature, history, and fiqh. The physical condition of the MSS is very bad, with poor preservation.

Published catalogues: None
Unpublished catalogues: A hand-list which gives the titles of the MSS and the shelf numbers is available in the library. A copy of the same hand-list is also available at Al-Furqan Foundation Library.

MAZAR-i SHARIF

City Museum

According to BERNBAUM, 1983 (see Union Catalogues above), an 18th- or 19th-century MS. of ŠAḤ İSMĀ'IL'S Dīvān-i Khāṣṣ, in Azeri, is preserved here.

QUNDUZ

BERNBAUM, 1983 (see Union Catalogues above) mentions 2 MSS here, but does not state the library or collection to which they belong. They are both works of ALI SHIR NAẓĀR: Majālis al-nafsiyāt, in Chaghatai, and Fāyūṣ, in Persian.

TASHQURGHAN

Bazar Library

Status: Public library
Total number of Islamic MSS: 133 (45 Arabic; 71 Persian; 4 Chaghatai or Uzbek; 13 Arabic/Persian). [1971 information.]
Published catalogues:
Unpublished catalogues: Register kept by a “young mullah”, on which REUT’s list was partially based.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX

Afgānīstān, p. 5, no. 36.
Lists catalogues and publications about Arabic manuscripts all over the world. Afgânîstán, Vol. 1, pp. 149–151.

Afgânîstán, p. 184, nos. 582–583.

Afgânîstán, p. 1.

Afgânistan, p. 190, no. 1.

Bibliography of catalogues and surveys of Arabic MSS. Afgânistan/Afganistan, pp. 31–33, nos. 79–81.

Bibliotheken und Sammlungen arabischer Handschriften, pp. 311–466. Afgânistan, p. 322.

ALBANIA

by

Gazmend Shpuza

1991