Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AFGHANISTAN
Archif- e Melli/National Archif

Established: 1973
Address: Salang Wat (behind Jamhuriyat Hospital)
Kabul, Afghanistan
Phone: +93 (0) 786793183
Archives: +93 (0) 202202974-5
Facebook: www.facebook.com/National-Archives-of-Afghanistan-1484335141856814

Chief of the National Archives: Masuma Nazari, since 2013
The National Archives of Afghanistan (NAA) resides in central Kabul in a palace built at the end of the 19th century by Abdul Rahman Khan for his son. Established in 1979, the NAA preserves valuable manuscripts, old books, newspapers, journals, calendars, declarations, seals, stamps, decrees, important historical official documents, deeds, treaties, public subscriptions, public letters of complaint, family trees, historical drawings and photos, calligraphy, paintings and miniatures, handwritten books, and other unique and old items. The oldest manuscript in the archives is part of a Qur’anic text attributed to Osman and Ali (the third and fourth caliphs of Islam), Imam Hassan, and Imam Hossain. These were written in Kufic script on deerskin, illuminated with letters of gold, and date back to the second and third century.

History
The NAA was officially established in 1973 when the government began a rehabilitation and reconstruction program for Kabul’s historical buildings. The NAA building stands in an area known as Baghi-Charmgari (Tanner’s Garden) in old Kabul. In August 1978, a collection of documents from the Kabul Public Library was transferred to the archives. Although the restoration was completed in 1978, the archives was not officially inaugurated and remained closed during the years of conflict that followed. In 1979, the archives was placed under the direction of the Ministry of Information and Culture. In addition to the collection held at the archives in Kabul, there are provincial archives in Herat and Ghazni. But the Herat archive is the only active provincial archives.

In the decades of crisis that followed the establishment of the archives, they were largely neglected. Despite the fact that the building was attacked several times during the civil war, its collection remained miraculously undisturbed, even under Taliban rule.

Due to shortage of space, the archives began construction on a separate building to the east of the historical building. An administration section, reproduction unit, preservation unit, and a new research room with more than 3,700 printed books for researchers and staff are in the new building.

The Archives Today

![Figure 1. National Archives, Afghanistan (National Archives)](image)

Functional Responsibilities
"The basic goals of Afghanistan’s National Archives are to collect and to preserve archival documents in Afghanistan and to prevent manuscripts and documents from leaving the country” ("Afghanistan National Archives" 2011). To offer services to researchers and scholars and to protect the cultural heritages kept in the archives are the other goals. The NAA has five sections: the handwritten manuscripts
section, historical documents section, administration section, preservation section, and an information and public services section. Each has an underground storage vault that safeguards unique and valuable holdings.

- Manuscripts: Located under the right wing of the building, the manuscripts section contains an office and large exhibition hall. The vault holds 7,700 handwritten books, including many valuable copies of the Holy Qur'an, poetry collections, historical and philosophical works, as well as unique items of calligraphy, paintings, and many shelves filled with old manuscripts written in Arabic, Turkish, Urdu, Farsi, Pashto, Dari, Uighur, and other languages from 13 centuries ago. The manuscript section's responsibilities include preservation, organization, indexing, and assisting researchers and visitors of the National Archives.

- Historical documents: The historical documents section includes a small office and exhibition hall. Located in the left wing of the building, it holds about 130,000 valuable historical documents including rare collections of photos, documents, journals, postage stamps, decrees, family trees audio and video cassettes, CDs, and books. Kept in special folders and placed on bookshelves, these documents have not met the 30-year time requirement for documents housed at the National Archives. Thus, they reside in the temporary historical archives. The historical documents section's responsibilities are preserving and protecting historical documents and guiding and assisting researchers who visit the National Archives.

- Information and public services section: This section is located on the first floor of the new building. More than 3,700 printed books, newspapers, old and new journals, and magazines from the last decades are kept here. Beside an open-shelf library, the facilities include a printer, scanner, computers, and space and furniture for researchers and staff.

Organizational Structure

The NAA, which comprises nine administrative and professional directorates, is a separate organization within the framework of the Cultural Department of the Ministry of Information and Culture and gained a global reputation when it was registered with UNESCO in 1978.

Services to Government Departments

Chief of the National Archives, Mrs. Masuma Nazari, told Afghanistan Times that the archives was officially given the responsibility to protect historical documents and the cultural heritage of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, "There are thousands of historical documents that have yet to be provided to National Archives for better protection according to the law. As many as 5,000 documents are available within the presidential palace but not provided to the archive despite several request calls," she said (Qayomi 2015). In early 2017 the government of Afghanistan decided to transfer a part of its historical documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and archive of the Presidential Office to the National Archives but still has not done so.

Illegal transfer of thousands of important documents from the country is another serious issue. Hundreds are in the possession of common people. A large number had been sold in neighboring countries, but the National Archives did not have the funds to purchase them.

Physical Infrastructures

The archives building, built in 1892, occupies 10,500 square meters in the Deh-e-Afghan area of Kabul City. It was not until 1973 that it was inaugurated as the National Archives of Afghanistan. The new archives building built to the east of the historical building was officially opened by President Hamid Karzai in 2002. Several sections, including a research room, are in this building.

Current Focus

The NAA holds 130,000 historical documents, such as farmans, deeds, newspapers, and photographs, and 7,700 manuscripts, including copies of the Qur'an, hadith and tafsir collections, poetry, philosophy, jurisprudence, and history. The collection boasts several rare items, ranging from a Qur'an attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib to early copies of Mirza Bedil's poetry and works of well-known calligraphers. Books and manuscripts held in the manuscript section are mainly on subjects such as philosophy, interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, history, geography, ethics, chemistry, mathematics, law, politics, veterinary science, and sports.

Spotlight

Among the many historic holdings of the NA are two that deserve special mention:

1. Masnawi Maanawi by Maulana Jalaluddin-Mohammad Balkhi Rumi contains six parts written by different people between 1880 and 1885. All pages are ornamented with colored flowers and leaves. The first page contains a gilded tablet made of Quwandi paper. The cover is of the Qalamdani type.

2. Majmu-e- Latayef va safin-e- zarayef written by Saifee- Jam-e- Herawi contains poems and biographies of poems that existed in the 14th century. This manuscript was smuggled into Pakistan and then Iran in 1975 and was finally returned to Afghanistan in 2016.
Public Access to Records

Public access to records is possible upon approval of the director after presenting a letter from the institution to which the researcher belongs (e.g., academic institution) and a form completed by the researcher to determine which kind of materials or subjects he/she needs.

Two small reading rooms with one desk each are located in each section for researchers to work with original materials. A research room with 3,700 printed books, computers, printers, scanners, a copier, and tables and chairs is located in the new building for those who request reproduction of archival materials. A printed catalog is available in the reading room, manuscript section, and historical documents section. Requests for historical documents should be made in advance, since it may take one or two days to fulfill them. Other official documents, such as deeds and correspondence, are more difficult to locate since they are not cataloged.

Catalogs published in 1984 list basic information about Qur’ans and manuscripts, but no descriptions are included. In 2014 the NAA began to catalog manuscripts and historical documents. By mid-2017, more than 3,800 farnams, all Qur’ans, and a 1,200-book poetry collection had been cataloged.

Guards are on station at the entrance, so the building is considered relatively safe. Visitors must sign in and check their bags upon entry.

Days and Hours of Operation

Regular hours: Saturday to Wednesday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Duplication Services

Copy equipment, book scanners, and cameras are available. The digitizing unit will make scanned archival materials upon request. Researchers can request the use of printers and photocopy machines to make hard copies of archival material for a fee.

Assistance provided by Masuma Nazari, chief of the National Archives of Afghanistan.

References


Albanian Republic

GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF ARCHIVES
Drejtoria e Përgjithshme e Arkivave

Established: 1949
Address:
Rruga Jordan Misja
Tirana, Albania, 8303
Phone: +355 44541798
Email: dpa@albarchive.gov.al
Contact Form: www.new.albarchive.gov.al/?page_id=56
Website: www.new.albarchive.gov.al
General Director: Ardit Bido, since 2016

The Republic of Albania is in southern Europe. Tirana is the largest city within Albania and also the nation’s capital. Albania declared independence from the Ottoman Empire in November 1912. The establishment of the Albanian Independent State, along with the Proclamation of Independence in 1912, created the conditions for organizing the work and care of documents.

History

The value placed on preserving archives can be traced back to antiquity in Albania, first in the form of holdings in libraries. After independence in 1912, efforts began to appraise, administer, and preserve government documents and to develop a central archive to hold the most important