Great Games? Afghan History through Afghan Eyes
an international conference

November 17-18, 2011
Young Research Library
Presentation Room
UCLA

With support from the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies
Co-sponsored by the G.E. Von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies
The year 2011 marks the eightieth anniversary of the death of Fayz Muhammad Katib, often considered to have been the founder of modern Afghan history writing. Whether in the present day or in Katib’s own period, Afghans have long invested in a multiplicity of historiographical models to make sense of the tortured development path of the Afghan state. Recent international intervention in Afghanistan has created or reproduced many narratives of the Afghan national story, from repeatedly doomed invasions to perpetual fault lines of ethnic division. Yet very little attention has been given to the ways in which Afghans themselves have understood their history, whether as national Afghans or international socialists, as members of ethnic qawms or Muslims.

This conference focuses on patterns and case studies of the historical writings which Afghans have produced in abundance since the formation of the Afghan state in the mid-eighteenth century and which form crucial but under-researched sources on Afghans’ own representations of state, society and culture. Bringing together the leading international specialists on Afghan historiography, the conference represents the first consolidated attempt to study the range of historical genres and narratives produced by Afghans themselves.

-Nile Green, Professor of History
Chair, UCLA Program on Central Asia
and Conference Organizer
Fayz Muhammad Katib Hazara (1862-1931)
Thursday, November 17

9:30-10:00 Breakfast

10:00-10:15 Welcome and Introductions
Randal Johnson, Interim Vice-Provost, UCLA International Institute
Nile Green, Chair, UCLA Program on Central Asia

10:15-12:30 Panel I
Ashraf Ghani, Institute for State Effectiveness, Kabul (by video presentation)
   Crafting History: A Tribute to Fayz Muhammad and Seraj-al-Tawarikh

Robert McChesney, NYU
   Toeing the Line: Fayz Muhammad Katib's Career as Court Historian

Senzil Nawid, University of Arizona
   Afghan Historiography in the Twentieth Century

Robert Nichols, Richard Stockton College, NJ
   Reclaiming the Past: The Tawarikh-i Hafiz Rahmat Khani and Pashtun Historiography

Chair & Discussant: Farzin Vejdani, University of Arizona
   Comparative Perspectives from Persian Historiography

12:30-1:45 Buffet Lunch

1:45-2:00 Viewing Afghanistan: From Isolation to Interaction
Curator Talk with Nile Green, UCLA
2:00-4:00 Panel II
Amin Tarzi, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA
*The Lasting Legacy of the Great Game: ‘Pashtunistan’ through Afghan Lenses*

Ingeborg Baldauf, Humboldt University, Berlin
*Chori Laqay and the Qo’nghurot of North Afghanistan: Oral Histories and Written Stories*

James Caron, University of Pennsylvania
*Fictive Histories, Real Historiography: Time, Space, and Reality in 21st Century Afghan Prose Fiction*

Chair & Discussant: James Gelvin, UCLA
*Comparative Perspectives from Arab Historiography*

Friday, November 18

9:00 - 11:00 am
Emerging Research in Afghan History: Graduate Papers

Thomas Wide, Oxford University
*An Afghan In Exile: Mahmud Tarzi In Istanbul 1929-1933*

Naveena Naqvi, UCLA History
*Haji Shamsuddin: An Indian Educationist in Afghanistan*

Jawan Shir Rasikh, James Madison University
*Afghanistan-Iran Imagined: A Debate of the Afghan-Iranian Nationalists, 1930s*

Discussant: Robert McChesney, NYU
Related Exhibition

Curated by Nile Green, *Viewing Afghanistan: From Isolation to Interaction* is a special exhibition of Afghan historical books and documents held by the UCLA Young Research Library presented in conjunction with the conference from November 14, 2011 through December 16, 2011.

Related Event

**Friday, November 18, 2011**
**3:00 pm-4:30 pm** 10383 Bunche Hall
Program on Central Asia Colloquium
Ingeborg Baldauf, Humboldt University, Berlin
*The Emergence and Tides of a Contemporary Saint: Bibi Nushin of Shibirgh/ Afghanistan*

Asqalon, Afghanistan, 2008
*Courtesy of Ingeborg Baldauf*
Abstracts

Ashraf Ghani, Chairman, Institute for State Effectiveness, Kabul

Crafting History: A Tribute to Fayz Muhammad and Seraj al-Tawarikh

This paper discusses Fayz Muhammad’s contribution to the development of Afghan history-writing by focusing on four aspects of his life and work. Firstly, Fayz Muhammad's own formation. Secondly, the genealogy of the Afghan state, on which he focused in volumes 1 and 2 of his Seraj al-Tawarikh. Thirdly, the craft of the historian as scribe, viewing the text through the lens of territory, named-groups, state-apparatus, power as violence and as justice, resistance and voice. And finally, by interpreting Seraj al-Tawarikh through readings focused on events, ethnic oppression, process and change, and the past in the present.

Robert McChesney, NYU

Toeing the Line: Fayz Muhammad Katib's Career as Court Historian

Fayz Muhammad Khan “Katib-i Hazarah” had a long but checkered career as court secretary and historian under three amirs from 1893 until 1929. His work was always reviewed before publication, edited, and sometimes rejected out of hand. He was jailed during the writing of his magnum opus, the Siraj al-Tawarikh, and before it was completed, the presses were ordered stopped and the work left unfinished. This paper will reconstruct his career and the fate of his works, bring out the severe constraints under which he labored and the ways in which he managed to subvert the attempts to control what he wrote. It is based on his own autobiographical notes contained in the pages of the Siraj al-Tawarikh, the biographical sketches left by others who knew him, and on a small documentary trail.
Senzil Nawid, University of Arizona

Afghan Historiography in the Twentieth Century

Following the establishment of Nadir Shah’s regime in 1930, historiography in Afghanistan evolved from production of annalistic court chronicles into experimenting with modern methods of writing history. Histories of ancient, medieval, and modern Afghanistan, as well as a number of edited old historical texts were produced under the auspices of the government-controlled Historical Society (Anjoman-i-Tarikh) to authenticate the Afghan identity. Historiography was thus appropriated to foster nationalism and legitimize the nation-building policies of the regime in power. In this paper I will examine major trends in the twentieth century Afghan historiography by focusing on the works of four leading twentieth century historians: Ali Ahmad Kohzad; Abd al-Haiy Habibi; Abd al-Wakil Fofalzai; and Mir Gholam Ahmad Ghobar, whose work, in some ways, marks a departure from the historical writings of the other historians of the period.

Robert Nichols, Richard Stockton College, NJ

Reclaiming the Past: The Tawarikh-i Hafiz Rahmat Khani and Pashtun Historiography

For centuries, perceptions of Afghans and Pashtuns have been largely interpreted through the texts of non-Pashtun writers and scholars. Studies of Afghan-Pashtun society and politics and longer narratives about Pashtun origins and history were often presented by outsiders with imperial perspectives and state-building agendas. The cultural politics of language status and patronage in nineteenth century British India, including the Punjab, found numerous languages, including Pashtu, devalued as “vernacular” languages, inferior in status and utility to the languages of literature, law, and administration patronized by government officials.
From the twentieth century, theories and assumptions about modernization and the ‘traditional’ role of Islam in Pashtun society also framed recurring patterns of analysis that inevitably shaped and limited historical research and narratives. Stereotypes of conflict, fanaticism, and tribalism continued to color even nominally dispassionate writing. Yet for these same centuries regional voices from Pashtun communities also produced historical manuscripts, verse, and religious literature that portrayed events, revealed mentalities, and traced social, cultural, and ideological realities.

This paper discusses centuries of Pashtun regional historiography related to the Peshawar Valley and argues that the postcolonial recovery and publishing in 1971 of a Pashtu language history, the *Tawarikh-i Hafiz Rahmat Khani*, written in 1767-68/A.H. 1181, marked a symbolic transition from a broader historiography characterized by the selective silencing of Pashtun literary and cultural voices (oral and textual), often simply ignored or not translated, to a regional critical historical sensibility that now identified, valued, and utilized a variety of Pashtun and regional primary sources and secondary works, some dating to the sixteenth century and perhaps earlier.
Amin Tarzi, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA

The Lasting Legacy of the Great Game: ‘Pashtunistan’ Through Afghan Lenses

One of the lasting legacies of the Great Game is the controversial Durand Line. However, the controversy resides only on one side of that line—the Afghan side. Since the formation of Pakistan, that line has represented a significant obstacle to establishing normal relations between the two countries because Afghanistan regards its southeastern neighbor as an usurper of Afghan territory. Kabul’s stance—known as the Pashtunistan policy—began in 1947, gained momentum from 1954 to 1964, and continues in varying degrees today. Kabul’s irredentist policy is based on a set of narratives that was formulated in India as an attempt to halt the partition of the subcontinent and later was institutionalized by the Afghan state. Over the years, an increasing number of historians, artists, poets and storytellers have adopted this policy and mindset into their work. In my talk, I will focus on the Afghan histories of “Pashtunistan” from the late-1940s to mid-1960s. These have, in modern times, become part of the Afghan reality for a large number of Afghans and a taboo for those who wish to challenge it.

Ingeborg Baldauf, Humboldt University, Berlin

Chori Laqay and the Qo’nghurot of North Afghanistan: Oral Histories and Written Stories

When anti-Soviet resistance definitely lost ground in southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the late 1920s-early 1930s, several thousand rebels, land-owners and spiritual leaders headed for North Afghanistan. Among them were individuals and families from the Laqay and Qo’nghurot tribes. Their advent ran counter to Afghan imperial as well as foreign policies. Lacking support by the Afghan government, many returned to the Soviet Union while others finally settled on poor soil in the Turkestan and Qataghan provinces.

Descendants of these settlers tell the history of their forefathers’ immigration to this day. More recently, an intellectual of Qo’nghurot descent has published the “historical epos” Razm-awari az tabar-i bahaduran, which renders a fictionalized (?) account of the life and struggle of Chori Laqay.

My presentation will describe the difficult dialogue of oral and written testimony striving for truth, history, and self-assertion.
What relationships can we draw between history writing and creative literary prose as genres? In twenty-first century Afghanistan, the answers extend beyond reading fiction as a dramatization of facts we know from other sources, or even as a form of evidence. Rather, I argue, in an environment where academic writing of modern social history was perennially constrained and frequently disciplined when it approached systemic social analysis, literary writing has developed as a major alternate locus of exactly that analysis. Beyond evidence, Pashto literature alerts social historians to more sophisticated framing of questions – questions of spatiality as well as mobility; historical memory as well as time; quotidian life and interiority as opposed to organizational and policy-driven accounts of conflict. Moving yet further, beyond literature’s value as a source for historiographical frames, I draw on South Asianist historiography that engages colonial-era literary production to argue that Pashto literary prose also prompts us to consider the relationship of both fiction and non-fiction representations of Afghan pasts to realities of violence, and even to expand our definition of “real.”
About the Program on Central Asia
In a period in which scholars from all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences are paying increased attention to Eurasian and global interactions—as well as a period of unprecedented American political involvement in the region, the UCLA Asia Institute's Program on Central Asia, launched in the spring of 2008 with generous support from International Institute, aims to cultivate a space for the social, cultural, religious and economic dimensions of Central Asian studies. Looking beyond the old Silk Road paradigm, the Program seeks to bring these gaps and opportunities together by facilitating the introduction of Central Asia into comparative and connective studies, while at the same time promoting the study of Central Asia as a region with properly autonomous histories in their own right that also connect outwards to the wider worlds. For more information please visit:
http://international.ucla.edu/asia/centralasia/

The UCLA Asia Institute
The UCLA Asia Institute, with its six regional member centers, promotes Asian Studies at UCLA and fosters greater understanding of Asia through a wide variety of research support, public programs, and community outreach on East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. It promotes collaboration with institutions in Asia, Europe, and North America to make the study of Asia even more interdisciplinary and truly international in its content, communication, and organization through international research exchanges and graduate and faculty fellowships. It has been recognized as a National Resource Center for East and Southeast Asia by the US Department of Education.