Located astride the mountainous knot where Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent intersect, landlocked and remote Afghanistan had few connections with the wider world until recent times. Or did it? If clichés of a distant mountain land that time forgot have long formed the stock-in-trade of travel writers and journalists, the history of the region in the modern era presents a very different picture.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Afghanistan and its increasingly mobile inhabitants have entered into alternatively amicable or bellicose relationships with a widening group of nations. The pattern began with the encroachments of the British and Russian empires in the early years of the nineteenth century, which brought the first European emissaries and soldiers in the cause of enmity or alliance. Partly in response to this abrupt imperial arrival, from the beginning of the twentieth century, Afghan statesmen and intellectuals sought new sources of assistance and inspiration in their attempts to build a stable, independent state. Both international and transnational in scope, these widening interactions were conducted between representatives of the Afghan and foreign nation states and national organizations as well as between individual Afghan and foreign travellers who moved in and out of the country.

If international interactions tended to be about diplomatic, military, and developmental issues, those at the more informal transnational level were often concerned with cultural and religious matters. In all cases, strengthening ties between Afghanistan and the world contributed greatly to the unsteady path of modern Afghan history, as importing numerous ideas and resources and forging multiple alliances and influences resulted in a destabilizing confluence of global ties. In building a stable and unified nation state, Afghans already had to grapple with problems of internal linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. The interests of foreign parties in Afghanistan, and the Afghans’ own reciprocal fascination with a variety of foreign ideas and ideologies, created even greater divisions. Where Afghans had once spoken languages including Pashto, Dari Persian, and Uzbek, by the middle of the twentieth century, many of them had also been educated in English, French, German, Russian, Urdu, Arabic, and Turkish, with each language forming a conduit for distinct ideas of what was best for Afghanistan. The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 was only the most recent chapter in a modern history punctuated by foreign interactions.

The books, magazines, and papers in this case illustrate the rich holdings of the UCLA Library on Afghanistan and its global linkages. Illustrating the range of participants – both Afghan and non-Afghan – in the country’s modern history, the items on display, many quite rare, encompass a wide range of languages. In a reflection of the relative underdevelopment of publishing in Afghanistan, the books were also published in a variety of locations, showing how not only the history but also the historiography of Afghanistan emerged as a product of global exchange. The exhibit is organized by Nile Green, professor in the UCLA Department of History, and David Hirsch, librarian for Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Islamic studies in the Charles E. Young Research Library, with the assistance of Kristina Benson, graduate student in Islamic studies, and Thomas Wide, visiting graduate student from Oxford University.

The First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42)

One of the greatest disasters in British imperial history, the First Anglo-Afghan War (Jang-i Awwal-i Afghan wa Inglis) marked the dramatic widening of Afghan interactions with the larger, particularly non-Asian, world. The war resulted from British concerns about Russian imperial expansion across Central Asia toward the British-ruled territories of India.

During the 1830s, Britain's East India Company was itself expanding control across regions of what is now Pakistan that only decades earlier had been governed by Afghans. From the opposite direction, imperial Russia was seeking to appoint envos to Kabul, which alarmed the company's governor-general in Calcutta. The ensuing war ultimately resulted in the retreat and massacre of the British and Indian invaders.
Both the war and its implications of British involvement in the region attracted the attention of local commentators. This rare manuscript and printed edition of the *Tarikh-i Afghanistan* (History of Afghanistan) were written by a nineteenth-century Iranian civil servant. The printed edition was assembled and published by the Westwood-based Iranian scholar and publisher Ghassem Beykzadeh, who used the manuscript, housed in UCLA Library Special Collections.

One of the first signs of the uprising in Kabul was the murder of Sir Alexander Burnes, whose account of Kabul became a bestseller. The war subsequently featured in many British literary works, such as the novel shown by the children’s writer George Alfred Henty, whose books were also tremendously popular in the United States. Partly in response to such imperial accounts, Afghan historians created their own nationalist interpretations of the events, including the royal history written for the state-sponsored Afghan Historical Society (*Anjuman-i Tarikh-i Afghanistan*).

In the wake of the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80), the prince ‘Abd al-Rahman returned from exile in the Russian imperial outpost of Tashkent and gained the throne in Kabul with British acquiescence. As imperial Russia
conquered much of Central Asia in 1865, he was ever mindful of the need to keep both the British and Russians at bay. ‘Abd al-Rahman ensured Afghan independence from further incursions by consolidating his own power, suppressing tribal uprisings and religious dissenters, and invading the country’s inaccessible mountain regions that had never been effectively ruled from Kabul.

A contemporary of the Prussian state-builder and unifier of Germany, Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), ‘Abd al-Rahman established ruthlessly effective policies that earned him the nickname of the “Iron Amir,” an echo of Bismarck’s “Iron Chancellor.” Ironically, he was only able to assert his power with the help of financial subsidies from British India’s colonial government, which now regarded a strong, independent Afghanistan as the most effective and economical obstacle to Russian expansion.

Late in life, ‘Abd al-Rahman dictated his memoirs in an early Afghan example of autobiography. Aimed at the edification of his people in the ways of loyalty to their rightful ruler, his state-building memoir was dictated to his Indian secretary, Mir Munshi Sultan Muhammad Khan. In a bookish echo of his reliance on external subsidies to fund his armies, it was necessary to turn to the much more developed printing industries outside the country to publish it.

Presaging the burst of international and transnational linkages that Afghanistan would forge in the decades after ‘Abd al-Rahman’s death in 1901, these rare editions of his autobiography were published in Bombay, India; Mashhad and Tehran, Iran; and the even more distant imperial metropolis of London.

Exiles, Reformists and Pan-Islamists (1901-53)

After the death of ‘Abd al-Rahman in 1901, several influential families whom he had exiled were allowed to return to Afghanistan. Their exiles to India and the Ottoman Empire exposed these families to new influences – both ideological and technological – that had not yet reached Afghanistan itself. On their return, the former exiles became important conduits for reform and modernization, particularly because a number of them took up leading posts in the governments of the rulers Habibullah (ruled 1901-19), Amanullah (ruled 1919-29), and Nadir (ruled 1929-33). The latter, who added the title “Shah” (“Emperor”) to his regnal name in emulation of his modernizing Iranian contemporary Reza Shah, had spent much of his life exiled to India and, according to some sources, was more comfortable speaking Urdu than Pashto or Persian.

Mehmed Fazli
Resimli Efgan Seyahati [Illustrated Afghan Journey]
Istanbul: Matba’a-i Ahmed Ihsan, 1325/1909
Charles E. Young Research Library

Anonymous
Afghanistan hukumdanin memleketimizi
Istanbul: Resimli ay matbaasi, [1928]
Charles E. Young Research Library

The most influential former exile was Mahmud Tarzi (1865-1933), who spent almost twenty years as an exile in the Ottoman Empire. There he absorbed reformist ideas from both the Young Turks and the Iranian Pan-Islamist thinker and exile Jamal al-Din ‘al-Afghani’ (1838-97), whom he appears to have met in Istanbul. On his return to Kabul in the early 1900s, Tarzi established Afghanistan’s first major newspaper, Siraj al-Akhbar (Torch of News), which he used as a mouthpiece for his and his Ottoman teachers’ ideas about the pressing need to modernize Islam and for different Muslim peoples to unite in the face of Western power. Since printing remained underdeveloped in Kabul, Tarzi recruited foreign experts including the Turkish zincographic printer Mehmed Fazli, whose Ottoman Turkish travelogue of his experiences in Kabul is shown. Afghanistan hukumdanin memleketimizi, an illustrated guidebook to Afghanistan’s modernization projects during these years, was itself printed in Istanbul in testament to both the better printing technologies available there and the close ties that Afghan modernists developed with Turkey.

Mahmūd Tarzī
Zhulidah: Ash’ār [Dishevelled: Poems]
Istanbul: [publisher unknown], 1933
Charles E. Young Research Library

After the closure of Tarzi’s newspaper, in the 1920s he became foreign minister and ambassador to France, before the anti-reformist coup d’état of 1929. While his royal ally Amanullah sought refuge in Rome, Tarzi returned to Istanbul. There, in the
year of his death, a Persian anthology of his late poems was published in 1933. Entitled Zhulidah (Dishevelled), the anthology covered in bleak and honest terms the pain of this second exile. The UCLA Library copy shown is the only example of this extremely rare book in the United States and one of very few in the world.

Ahmed Ates and Abdülvehhab Tarzī
*Farşa Grameri* [Persian Grammar]
Istanbul: Bozkurt Matbaası, 1942
Charles E. Young Research Library

After Tarzī’s death, his son ‘Abd al-Wahhab Tarzī remained in Istanbul for several years. A graduate of Oxford University, he was a professor at Istanbul University between 1939 and 1952, where he co-wrote this Persian grammar book. When Afghan affairs resettled, ‘Abd al-Wahhab returned to Afghanistan and served as the head of the Afghan Tourist Information Service from 1953 to 1976, years in which the hippie trail passed through Kabul.

**Cultural Collaborators (1901-30)**

Gustaf John Ramstedt (1873-1950)
*Mogholica: Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Moghol-Sprache in Afghanistan* [Mogholica: Contributions to the Understanding of the Mongolian Language in Afghanistan]
Helsingfors, Finland: Druckerei der Finnischen Litteraturgesellschaft, 1905
Charles E. Young Research Library

André Godard, Y. Godard, and J. Hackin
*Les Antiquités Bouddhiques de Bāmiyān... avec des Notes Additionelles de M. Paul Pelliot* [The Buddhist Antiquities of Bamiyan... with Additional Notes by Mr. Paul Pelliot]
Mémoires de La Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan
Paris and Brussels: G. van Oest, 1928
Charles E. Young Research Library

Bismillah Bāmiyānī
*Nigāhā bāh Tarikh wa Kultūr-i Bāshbandagān-i Bāmiyān az Zuhūr-i Islām tā 1380 H. Sh.* [A Glimpse of the History and Culture of the Inhabitants of Bamiyan from the Dawn of Islam until 2002]
Peshawar, Pakistan: [publisher unknown], 2001
Charles E. Young Research Library

During the same period in which Afghan exiles returned, Afghanistan’s borders opened to foreign travellers, particularly once the country established border and visa controls after the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919. Partly through the private interests of European academics and partly through the state-building interests of the Afghan officials with whom they interacted, these visitors served as cultural collaborators who helped the state discover its rich cultural resources.

In some cases, this involved ethnological and linguistic explorations, as in the case of the research conducted by the Finnish scholar Gustaf John Ramstedt on the form of language spoken by the small Mongolian minority in Afghanistan. In other cases, it amounted to the discovery of a deep history through the first systematic archaeological excavations ever done in the country, which from 1922 were led by French archaeologists under the aegis of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (DAFA).

In some cases, as in the DAFA volume shown, this led to fuller understanding of sites such as the Bamiyan buddhas that were already known to Afghans; in other cases, it led to the discovery of buried cities and entirely unknown chapters in Afghan history. While the discoveries certainly enlivened the museums and lecture halls of Europe, they also filled the National Museum of Afghanistan (*Muzah-yi Milli-yi Afghanistan*), which was established in 1922, as well as providing nationalist historians working for the official Afghan Historical Society (*Anjuman-i Tarikh-i Afghanistan*) with a long history for the fragile and all-too-modern Afghan nation state. In more recent times, international appreciation of the wonders of Bamiyan has encouraged the writing of more assertively local scholars from ethnic minorities, as with Bismillah Bamiyani’s recent history of Bamiyan.
America Arrives: Cold Wars and Soft Diplomacy (1945-89)

The United States was a relatively late entrant into Afghan history. While the Russians, then Soviets, had been active in Afghan affairs since the first half of the nineteenth century, it was not until the mid-1940s that the first U.S. embassy was opened in Kabul as part of the realignment of international affairs after World War II. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the U.S. and the Soviet Union vied for influence in Afghanistan, not least through funding development projects and awarding aid grants. Whether in terms of hydro-electric dams, modern roads, or the expansion of the national airline Ariana, the modernization of the country’s infrastructure was in large part the result of Cold-War rivalries hatched in distant Moscow and Washington.

Neumann Family Papers, Collection 1344
UCLA Library Special Collections

UCLA played a leading role in these developments after President Lyndon B. Johnson offered Robert G. Neumann (1916-99), a tenured UCLA professor of political science, the position of ambassador in 1966. Neumann served for almost seven years in Afghanistan during a period in which the U.S. became increasingly involved in Afghan affairs. The photos and two booklets shown belong to the extensive archive of his papers, which his family generously bequeathed to UCLA.

Nancy Hatch Dupree
Afghanistan over a Cup of Tea: Forty-six Chronicles
Kristianstad: Kristianstads Boktryckeri, 2008
Charles E. Young Research Library

If infrastructure and diplomacy represented one side of the Cold War effort to win over Afghanistan, then “soft” diplomatic efforts were the other side. The 1960s and ’70s also saw the expansion of cultural and educational ties between Afghanistan and the U.S., as numerous Afghan students were given scholarships to American universities. Some went on to form the nucleus of the Afghan-American population after the Soviets invaded their country in December 1979.

Probably the most influential American participants in this effort were the husband and wife team of Louis Dupree (1925-89) and Nancy Hatch Dupree. Between 1959 and 1983, Louis served as the Afghanistan representative for the American Universities Field Staff and compiled numerous reports and books on Afghan anthropological and archaeological matters. After her husband’s death, Nancy continued to work for the preservation of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage. She based herself in the Pakistani city of Peshawar and, after the fall of the Taliban, again in Kabul, where she is currently director of the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University. Her book recounts numerous struggles and occasional triumphs of those seeking to preserve the country’s cultural heritage.

David Fleishhacker
Lessons from Afghanistan
[Publication place unknown]: DF Publications, 2001
Charles E. Young Research Library

Less well-known are the many Americans who worked in Afghanistan for the Peace Corps in the decades before the Soviet occupation (1979-89). Their metaphorical and occasionally literal bridge-building efforts are represented by this memoir by the Californian educator and UC Berkeley graduate David Fleishhacker, who taught English in Afghanistan as a Peace Corps member between 1962 and 1964.

From Taliban Triumph to Global Diaspora (1996-2011)

After the final withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, the country collapsed into a vicious civil war between various factions of mujāhidīn (holy warrior) organizations, who had led the resistance to the Soviets. As the high moral claims of these factions were sullied by murder and looting, ordinary Afghans grew increasingly disillusioned with their country’s peace prospects. Growing numbers sought refugee status in Western nations, adding to the diaspora that had emerged in the 1980s in countries as distant as Germany, England, France, Norway, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

al-’Imārāt al-Islāmiyyah [The Islamic Emirate]
Qandahar: Markaz al-’I‘lām bi-‘Imārat Afghanistān al-Islāmiyyah, 2000-01
Charles E. Young Research Library
From makeshift religious schools in Pakistani refugee camps emerged a new armed movement calling themselves simply *taliban*, Persian and Pashto for “students.” Promising to end the chaos of the civil war and the criminality of the *mujahidin*, the Taliban were initially welcomed when they quickly stormed the main cities of Afghanistan in 1995 and 1996. Despite links to certain regions, the Taliban always possessed an international outlook; they attracted financial support from Saudi Arabia and enjoyed on-the-ground assistance from groups of Arab “holy warriors,” most famously Osama Bin Laden (1957-2011). UCLA Library collections contain a number of rare publications related to the Taliban’s reign, including this Arabic magazine, printed in Afghanistan for Arab readers, which portrayed the country as a Shari’a-ruled “Islamic emirate.”

Favzyia Rahgozar Barlas (born 1955)  
*Wa Āsmān Pidaram: Majmū‘ah-i Shi‘r [The Heavens Are my Father: An Anthology of Poems]*  
Toronto: Intishārāt-i Barg-i Sabz, 2001  
Charles E. Young Research Library

*Zan-i Afgān [Afghan Woman]*  
Charles E. Young Research Library

Many Afghans exiles wrote in opposition to either Taliban rule in general or to specific aspects of its laws on women’s rights and cultural expression. Women were among the leading participants in this movement of cultural resistance. Printed in Canada shortly before the Taliban was toppled, this collection of Dari Persian poems was written by a female poet whose ties to the West Coast were strengthened by her studies at the University of Washington. From closer to UCLA comes *Zan-i Afgān* (Afghan Woman), a magazine published in Fremont, California, where many Afghans have settled since the 1980s. The Fremont Afghans included the family of Khaled Hosseini, the author of *The Kite Runner*, which is partly set in the Bay Area.

Said Hyder Akbar (born 1984) and Susan Burton  
*Come Back to Afghanistan: A California Teenager’s Story*  
New York: Bloomsbury, 2005  
Charles E. Young Research Library

*Afghan Scene*  
Kabul  
Charles E. Young Research Library

Reflecting Hosseini’s use of English as a language of Afghan expression is the memoir of Said Hyder Akbar, recounting his return to Kabul from the Bay Area after his father, Saïd Fazel Akbar, was named a member of President Karzai’s government. Also shown are various issues of *Afghan Scene*, a social events and cultural interest magazine published in Kabul for the many expatriate aid and development workers.

Through such varied materials, the holdings of the UCLA Library help students and scholars document Afghanistan’s history with all of its global interactions.

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