
PRESENTING THE COLLECTIONS

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THE FORMATION AND STUDY OF THE AFGHAN MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION IN THE ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH OF THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

Far from all collections of Oriental manuscripts contain manuscripts in the Afghan (Pashto) language, and only a few of them have manuscript collections in which the best works of Pashto classical literature are represented with sufficient completeness.

The collection of Pashto-language manuscripts at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies runs to twenty-six volumes which contain twenty-nine copies of twenty-two works and twenty-two individual poems by eight poets, including some not represented in *dīwāns*. It is one of the largest collections in the world, which can be confirmed through a comparison with the best collections in European and Asian libraries (although it is, of course, like other Afghan collections, quantitatively not comparable to Persian collections, for example) [1].

Seven libraries in the British Isles hold 170 copies of 63 works in Pashto, mainly concentrated in two centres. For the most part, they built their collections in the nineteenth century on manuscripts brought by British officers, officials or missionaries from India. The British Library holds 69 copies of 45 works; the library of the India Office holds 60 copies of 28 works; the School of Oriental and African Studies holds only 10 manuscripts, Cambridge University — eight, and the Bodleian Library — five. These are, of course, all institutions famed primarily for their collections of Persian manuscripts [2].

Nineteen collections in India today contain 144 manuscripts of 79 works in Pashto; only the Riza Library in Rampore has a larger number of books than the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies — forty manuscripts [3].

Eight manuscripts of five works and one large collection, made up of works by many poets, are located in Germany [4]. Only one manuscript in Pashto is attested in America [5]. Collections in Pakistan, in particular the Pashto Academy, the University and Literary Society in Peshawar, and the Oriental College in Lahore doubtless contain a significant number of manuscripts, but their catalogues have not been published and one can judge their holdings only by the several dozen texts of poetic, religious and historical works they have published. We know of three

Pashto manuscripts in Tashkent, one in Dushanbe, and one in Erevan [6].

In Afghanistan itself, 56 manuscripts were in the Ministry of Information and Culture, significantly fewer in the Kabul Museum, and a mere handful in the Public Library, the Herat Museum, the library of the former king of Afghanistan (Muḥammad Ṣāḥir-shāh), and the national archive. The Academy of Language and Literature holds about one hundred copies (based on oral communications with the institution's members, since a printed catalogue of the collection does not exist) [7]. The fate of these collections and their current condition are unknown. The Royal Ark, and the buildings located within it, have sustained serious damage. Before the Ṭalibān took the capital on 27 September 1996, the Kabul Museum had already been destroyed three times (attempts at reconstruction were undertaken after each incident). Its riches have been ruined and plundered, and only a third of the books and archaeological finds in the Museum has survived [8]. The fate of other collections and personal libraries is most likely as tragic. Hence, the significance of Pashto manuscript collections outside of Afghanistan has grown; as one of the world's largest collections, this in particular applies to the holdings of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies.

Before 1844, not one Afghan manuscript was held in the Asiatic Museum, the predecessor of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, although it even then contained rich collections of Oriental manuscripts, including many in Persian. Bernhard Dorn, who at that time was occupied with the study of Afghan history and the grammar and lexicon of the Pashto language, first became acquainted with Afghan manuscripts in the library of the East India Company in London. In 1827—1829 he completed there a translation into English of the Persian work *Makhzan-i Afghānī*, which describes the history and genealogy of the Pashto tribes. It was later published in England in two parts for the Imperial Academy of Sciences of Saint-Petersburg [9]. According to information provided by Dorn in the introductions to this edition and to a Pashto chrestomathy he later published, the East India Company held ten