



Archives



The [National Archives of Afghanistan](#) was established in 1973 in a former palace. It functions to gather, preserve and exhibit historical and government documents. According to National Archives Director Abdul Raul Mahajoor, the Archives remained relatively safe during the war, sustaining only minor bomb damage to one corner of the building which has since been repaired. The Taliban protected the materials housed in the Archives as they were regarded as being of national importance. During the turmoil of the 1990s there were numerous changes of government and the directorship of the National Archives also changed. Although it does not appear to have lost any documents during that period, Mahajoor realises that taking an inventory is vital. Today students and academics can use the archives but they are not allowed into the book rooms without

special permission from the Ministry of Information and Culture, as government documents are not available for public access. There are two display rooms with photocopies of documents with some signage in English and the Archive building itself is worth a visit. The holdings comprise government documents and precious books by some of the great Afghan writers from the past 500 years. The oldest document housed in the National Archives is a letter written and stamped by Timurlane in the 14th century. Its most important book is a 500 year-old Koran featuring gold calligraphy.

The National Archives currently has no facilities, equipment or materials to repair books and documents, but its dedicated staff note that the large grounds could house a new laboratory and restoration workshop. Staff training is another key developmental need which could be met through international collaboration.

The National Archives has just been relinked to the main power supply and the American Embassy has donated a mobile phone, phone cards and vacuum cleaners and has also agreed to dig a well. But there is as yet no heating or air conditioning in the building and the lack of climate control poses a threat to the ancient books and manuscripts. Some 1,200 books are in immediate danger. One, covered with white mould, is literally falling apart. Books in greatest danger are the oldest ones, dating from the 14th to 16th centuries, and the ones that were hidden in the cellar where damp took its toll. A number of books have been transferred onto microfilm, but the microfilm reader is currently broken.

An announcement was recently made on national radio asking people to bring in their old books. The [Ministry of Information and Culture](#) has also given the National Archives a modest fund to purchase important documents.

