



An old diary, thought to be written by a member of Afghanistan's royal family from year's past) rests in the basement vault of the Kabul National Archives.



Dusting off bookshelves

New light shed on written history at national archives

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KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan has begun to rebuild itself. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghans have been piecing together bits of their old lives. As Afghanistan rebuilds, it is also seeking to preserve and restore its past.

In Kabul, housed within a building constructed during the late nineteenth century, are poems, books, photos and historical documents. On the first floor is a display of several documents, photos of Afghanistan's past royalty, illuminations from centuries-old books and religious gems.

One floor below, concealed in a vault are the aisles of crumbling remains. Once proudly displayed by their owners were vellums, books, diaries and military transcripts. However, when Afghanistan fell into unrest with civil war followed by the reign of the Taliban, many treasures were

destroyed through neglect or outright violence, or spirited away for safekeeping.

"Some of the items are in desperate need of repair," said Dr. Omar Sultan, deputy minister of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. "The building also needs proper air conditioning, and we are working on both of those problems."

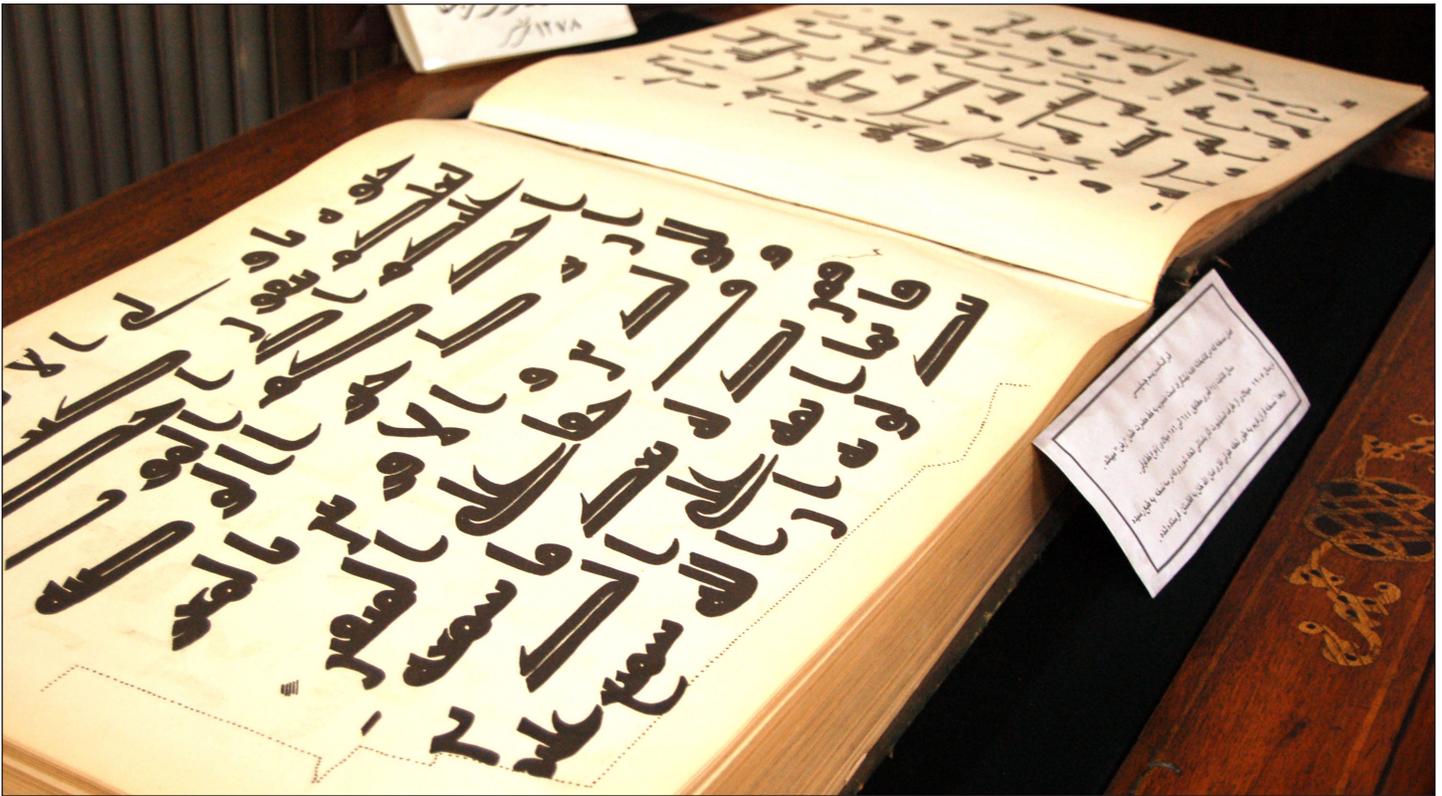
"It is everyone's responsibility to help save and protect these pages of history. We no longer have to hide them from the world, but display them with care and pride."

— Abdul Rashid Usman,
Afghan National Archives director

Without a working climate control and monitoring system, the books lying in the vault are rapidly deteriorating from the growth of white mold. The mold is consuming the sheets of paper and putting the items at risk of being lost forever.

"What we need is for Afghanistan to embrace its history and help us preserve our birthright," said Abdul Rashid Usman, Afghan National Archives director. "It is everyone's responsibility to help save and protect these pages of history. We no longer have to hide them from the world, but display them with care and pride."

Some museums were more successful than others at



The largest Koran, one meter in length and housed in the archives basement, is on display at the Kabul National Archives.

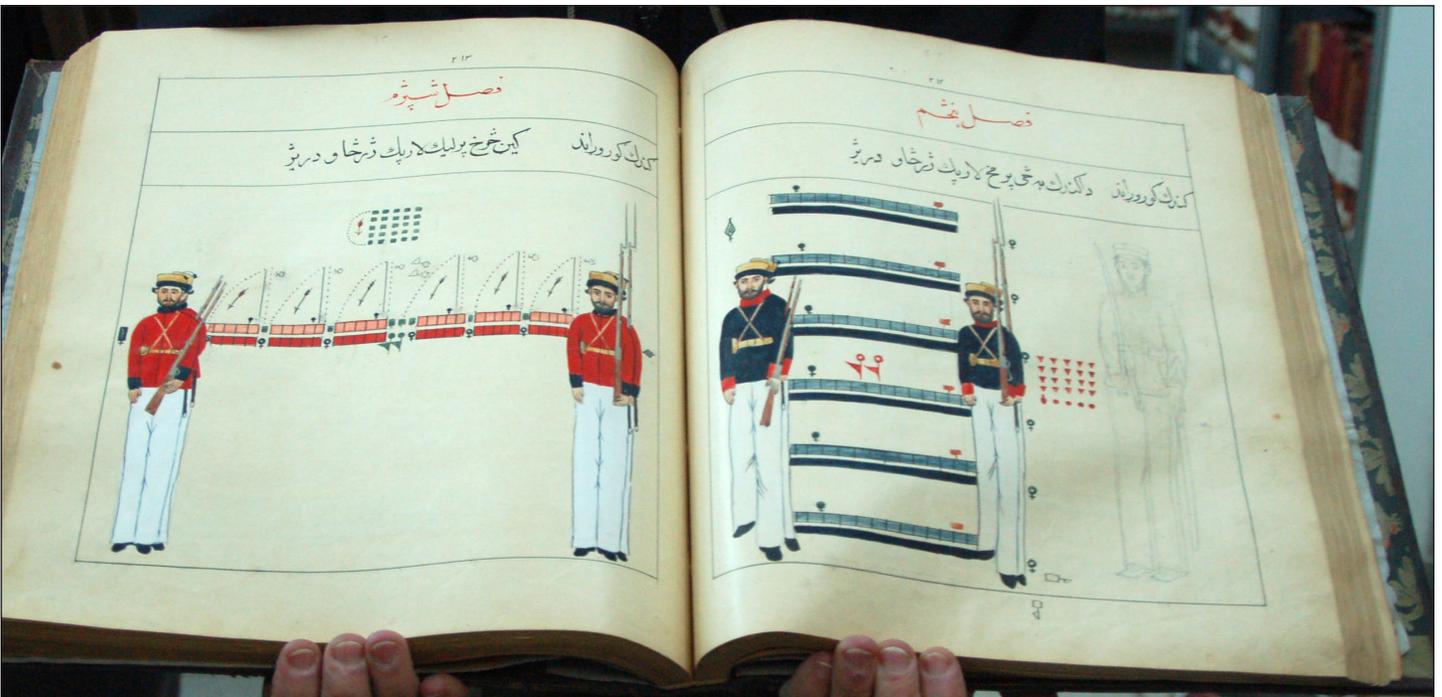
protecting precious pieces of art and history. The National Archives was one of those buildings.

“From the time of the Civil War through the Taliban reign, this building was lucky enough to not get ransacked or looted,” said Sultan.

A few of the prized possessions kept in the archives are: The largest printed Koran, the oldest Koran written on cloth that is still legible and the smallest Koran. The original

military instruction manual from more than 150 years ago describing military bearing and the proper construction and wear of the uniform is another prized possession. Other items include various books on the royal families and 400-year old poems.

Sultan adds that, though the national archives are in dire need of a climate control system, it is an institution aimed at restoring and preserving Afghanistan’s proud history. 



A book on military regulations for the Afghan Royal Army dating more than 150 years old is housed in the Kabul National Archives. It describes military regulations for uniforms, recognition of the royal family and other military details.