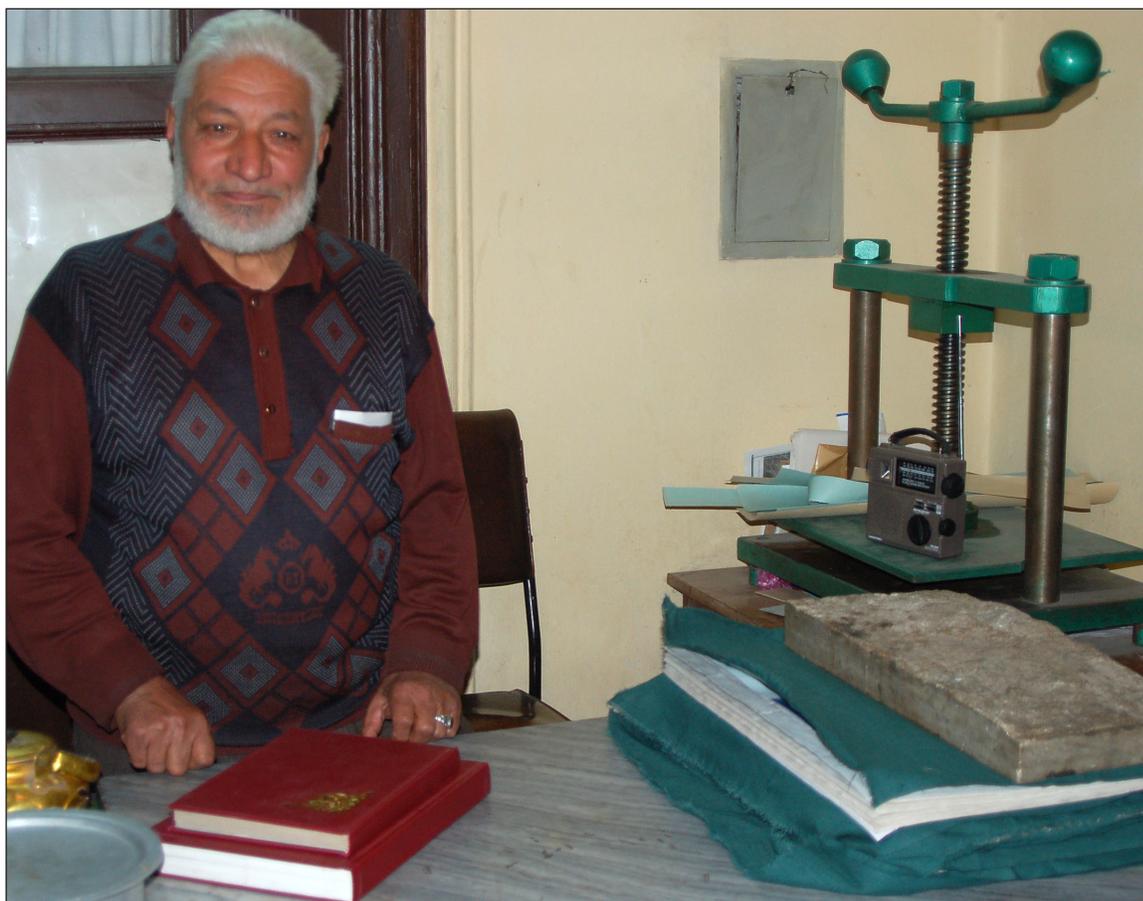




# The Last Bookbinder of Afghanistan



Ahmad Shas Naderi, purported to be the last bookbinder of Afghanistan, uses traditional techniques to piece back together old texts. He works out of an anteroom in the Kabul National Archives.

*Story and photos by Senior Airman Stacia Zachary  
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**KABUL, Afghanistan** — Treasures are fraying at the seams. Volumes, once brightly bound, now lay in tatters. Pages of history suffocate under the tight hold of white mold.

In a tiny workplace, a wizened old man stoops over a vice. And old tale freshly bound in new leather rests wrapped in cloth between two granite slabs.

Ahmad Shas Naderi is determined not to let Afghanistan's history be lost. While he may not be able to work miracles and save every text, Naderi means to save as many as possible.

"I have rebound more than 1,000 (texts and other published work) since the Taliban left," he said. "They sought to refuse my country our heritage, and I am trying to fix what damage I can. I cannot rest until I know that my books are taken care of."

Renowned as the last bookbinder of Afghanistan, Naderi is already taking steps to make sure the business doesn't end with him. The bookbinder is training his two sons and a grandson in the business. Naderi believes that bookbinding is a privilege and the knowledge should be passed on through a family.

"My sons will continue this great work," Naderi said. "As long as there is someone who can keep this knowledge (alive) I feel confident that Afghanistan will continue to grow and learn from its (past). Protecting these books is an honor - one my family will always help keep safe."

Too many treasures are left, waiting for their new leather bindings. Many books, however, have already received their new coat. The books come complete with a seal molded into the new leather and veneer - Naderi's seal. This stamp will let even the newest admirers know who is responsible for the books' preservation. Long live tradition. 