

IN MEMORIAM

Ludwig W. Adamec
1924–2019

It is a great honor and a pleasure to share with you some reflections on the extraordinary scholarly contributions made by our departed colleague, Ludwig Adamec.

Ludwig left Austria in 1950, and by 1952 he had made his first trip to Kabul. That early encounter with Afghanistan had a huge impact on him. Two years later, he was studying history at UCLA, where he would work with the renowned historian Gustave von Grunebaum, a fellow Viennese. In the next decade he made several trips to Afghanistan, Europe, and India to gather materials for his dissertation, which he finished in 1966. The next year he came to the University of Arizona, where he was located in the Department of Oriental Studies. When I came here in 1972 and joined the same department, Ludwig was the very first person to greet me on campus.

His first book, *Afghanistan, 1900–23, a Diplomatic History* (California, 1967), was a revision of his doctoral dissertation and was published in 1967, the year he came to Arizona. That book is important for many reasons, not least because it marked the appearance of Americans in a field that had theretofore been dominated by British scholars. In this respect he was a pioneer, together with people like Donald Wilber, Vartan Gregorian, and especially, names that are familiar to many of us here at Arizona – Nancy and Louis Dupree.

Ludwig's first book adroitly avoided two traps – namely, of seeing Afghanistan either through the lens of the colonial British, who viewed the country as a buffer between India and Russia, or through the lens of Pashtun propaganda, which viewed the British as sinister and malevolent. The book's basic argument was that Afghanistan was not just a pawn whose independence in the age of European colonialism resulted from an Anglo-Russian rivalry that canceled out the effective hegemony of either imperial power. Such a notion is a remnant of an old-fashioned, Kiplingesque fascination with the Great Game. Rather, Ludwig argued that

Afghanistan's independence resulted from the skillful diplomacy of Afghanistan's own leaders, or *amirs*, who shrewdly managed to play these two great powers against each other, thus guaranteeing their country's continued independence.

Luckily for him, and for us, Ludwig was able to base his research largely on British Indian records that had just become available to scholars when he began doing his field research. What made the book even more original was his use of German archival records, which enabled him to trace how German operatives had tried to pressure the Afghans into entering World War I by invading British India. But the *amir* wisely resisted such pressure, outmaneuvering the Germans, as he did also the Russians and British, and keeping Afghanistan neutral.

Very soon after publishing that initial, and very successful, monograph, Ludwig published his *Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan*, (Graz, 1972–85), a six-volume set of comprehensive surveys based on the *British Gazetteer of Afghanistan*. To understand the significance of this work one needs to recall that in India, the British had been obsessed with the notion that the only way to rule their colonial subjects was to know absolutely everything about them – the lay of the land, the local culture and customs, the productivity of the villages, local social and political structures, etc. This mania for collecting the most minute details of all things Indian was naturally extended to Afghanistan, owing to Britain's anxiety about the possibility of a Russian invasion of their “jewel in the crown,” since any such invasion would have to come through Afghanistan. Consequently, the original British gazetteer contained many details of a specifically military nature, such as how many boxes of cartridges were said to be kept in such-and-such fort, which bridges were capable of carrying field cannon, and so forth. What is more, the British considered almost *any* field of inquiry to have a direct or indirect military significance – roads and infrastructure, obviously, but also flora and fauna, climate, topography, and especially the various kin groups.

The *British Gazetteer of Afghanistan* had originally been compiled in 1871 by the British Indian government and was continuously updated until it was finally published in 1914. But only a handful of copies were actually printed, and even those remained secret and classified for many years. It was not until after the departure of the British from India in 1947 that they became available to scholars, and Ludwig was the first to tap into the old British gazetteer and utilize its phenomenally rich data base, which he painstakingly edited and updated. This meant that for the first time an enormous amount of information about Afghanistan was made available

to the public. The maps in these gazetteers, for example, were the very first really good maps of Afghanistan ever published. To give some idea of how exhaustive this work was, the six volumes of his edited and updated *Gazetteer* contain 3,388 pages of text and 343 contour maps.

The next book Ludwig published was *Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs to the Mid-Twentieth Century: Relations with the USSR, Germany, and Britain* (Tucson, 1974). This was really a sequel to his first monograph, which had closed with the year 1923. And like his previous study of the early twentieth century, which explored the role of Germany in the Great Game between Britain and Russia, this book also utilized German records, as suggested in the book's title. In this case, Ludwig studied the role of German expatriates who in the 1920s had lent manpower and technical expertise to the Afghan government's efforts at a radical modernization program championed by its amir, Amanullah (r. 1919–29). The amir devoutly wished to benefit from German technical know-how. By the 1930s, of course, the Germans had their own interest in dabbling in Afghanistan, which was to establish an Axis dependency in the heart of Asia. Doing so would serve their aim of tying up and distracting both Russia and Britain from Europe, which would become the principal theater of the Second World War. The German high command therefore offered the Afghans help in gaining access to the sea through Baluchistan, then under British control. The Germans also promised Pushtun tribesmen, whom India's colonial rulers had treated very badly, that they would happily inflict retribution on the British. All of this was new information. Before Ludwig's book came out, scholars had been fixated on seeing the Great Game in Central Asia as a contest solely between the British Lion and the Russian Bear, without considering or even noticing the German factor.

The very next year, in 1975, Ludwig published his *Who's Who of Afghanistan*, which is a biographical dictionary based on records that had been printed by British Indian officials between 1914 and 1940 for their internal office use. These confidential records were briefly made public before the newly independent Indian government had second thoughts and withdrew them again. It was during that brief window of opportunity that Ludwig was able to exploit these valuable records. Doing so allowed him to give the public the most thorough biographies ever compiled of prominent Afghans in the early twentieth century. A little over a decade later, in 1987, he updated this study in his *Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Afghanistan* (Graz, 1987). Covering the period 1945–78 and including some 1,600 biographical entries of Afghan elites, this volume enabled scholars

for the first time to connect kinship links among prominent Afghans and to reconstruct the diaspora of Afghans abroad.

In 1976 Ludwig published yet another monumental work – his *Historical Gazetteer of Iran* (Graz, 1976). This was a massive four-volume undertaking, and was also based on classified volumes compiled by the Anglo-Indian Army in 1914. But he augmented his finely edited publication by integrating modern Iranian works of geography, such as the *Farhang-i abadi-yi kishvar* and the *Farhang-i jugrafiyya-yi Iran*.

By the 1990s Afghanistan was in the international spotlight, having been occupied by Soviet forces during most of the 1980s. It was shortly after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 that Ludwig published his *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan* (Metuchen NJ: Scarecrow, 1991). By the time the third edition of this work came out in 2003, Americans had just experienced the traumatic attacks of September 11, 2001, marking the beginning of our own protracted war in Afghanistan. As journalists now rushed to learn about the history and geography of a country theretofore remote and relatively unknown to Americans, Ludwig's major works were already right there, available to both the American public and governing classes. His life's work had suddenly become instantly relevant to the news media and policy-makers alike. From now on, he would work hard to keep up with fast-breaking current events by bringing out revised editions of his previous studies, in particular the *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*. This is seen in the fact that each new edition was considerably longer than its predecessor. The original 1991 edition was 376 pages. The second 1997 edition was 499 pages. The third edition, published in 2003, was expanded to 585 pages. And the fourth edition, which came out in 2012, was fully 667 pages, nearly twice that of the original volume. In this work, Ludwig effectively tied together his earlier scholarship on the Great Game and its diplomatic aftermath in the early twentieth century, with contemporary events – namely, the current turmoil within Afghanistan. He also explored the various *mujahidin* groups, their leaders, their ethnic composition, their orientation to Islam, etc.

Ludwig's growing concern with the recent and ongoing conflict in Afghanistan is clearly seen in the title of his 1996 publication, the *Historical Dictionary of Afghan Wars, Revolutions, and Insurgencies* (Scarecrow, 1996). This book was quickly reprinted the very next year, and in 2005 he brought out a second, thoroughly revised edition. Also reflecting his move to describing the centrality of Afghanistan in current international affairs, and tying that to the country's internal developments, was *The A to Z of*

Afghan Wars, Revolutions, and Insurgencies (Scarecrow), which he updated as recently as 2012.

In sum, an overview of Ludwig's extraordinary scholarly output reveals a distinct trajectory. His early work was dedicated to reconstructing the diplomatic history of a much earlier period – the early twentieth century. But as the turmoil in Afghanistan gathered momentum from the 1990s on, his work progressively evolved into tracing the political and military history of contemporary Afghanistan.

All in all, it is a remarkable and sustained record of scholarly engagement. It is not just impressive, but monumental. Afghanistan, and indeed the entire scholarly community, has lost a dear friend and a tireless, dedicated researcher. But while Ludwig himself will be greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues, his work will surely endure. ✧

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