

Sammlung : **ALBERT E. ENGLER, KABUL 1939-1944**
Serie : 15-129 bis 15-194 (Dorf und Landschaft auf 4,5/6 cm Film)

Remarks on the photographs by Albert E. Engler

Rudolf Stuckert and Albert Engler were among five Swiss architects who worked in Afghanistan at the same time; both donated their papers and photographs to the Bibliotheca Afghonica. Unlike Stuckert, Albert Engler seems not to have kept a diary of his time in the country. There are also no letters to his family at home in Switzerland, which would in all likelihood have included contact prints of his photos, with corresponding descriptions. Only in a few cases does Engler indicate the date of recording, for which reason we usually indicate "1939-1944" as the date. The order of the photographs appears to be neither chronological nor object-related.

The arrangement of his 850 or so photographs chosen by Albert Engler is quite unusual. Presumably it took place only after his return to Switzerland, several years after his travels. Its primary ordering principle is the **negative format** used. All recordings were made on black and white films or on glass plates:

- Photographs on glass plates and film in the format 13/18 cm were given the number 01
- Photographs on glass plates and film in the format 9/12 cm were given the number 02
- Photographs on glass plates and film in the format 6/9 cm were given the number 03
- Photographs on film in the format 6/6 cm were given the number 04
- Photographs on film in the format 4½/6 cm were given the number 05

Each of these five groups was then divided into five **motifs**:

- Buildings, villages and landscape 10
- Crafts 20
- Folklore 30
- Embroidery 40
- Heads 50

The picture number 12-021 is the 21st shot of a building on negative format 9/12 cm;

The picture number 34-006 shows the sixth folklore image on negative format 6/6 cm.

In the 322 shots of the group 15-XXX, the better and more significant photos seem to be arranged at the beginning of the series, with others relegated to the end.

The negatives on glass plates are usually stored individually in typewriter-labelled glassine paper sleeves. The negative films were cut into single or double images and put into show-book sleeves made of pregame. Their original order can no longer be determined because the negatives are not numbered on the edge, as is common with later 35mm roll films.

The numbering and arrangement of the negatives corresponds to a 34-page list (*Afghanistan, Negative 1940-1944*) drawn up by Albert Engler, which he provided with concise information for each picture. Only a few of the negatives on the list are missing; however, there are prints and/or negatives of about 50 shots that are not mentioned in the list.

The system described above is retained for the archival storage of negatives and original prints. This reference number is given in the description of images under "*Orig. Legend: [Liste der Negative:] XX-XXX*".

When editing the collection in preparation for its publication on the website www.phototheca-afghanica.ch it turned out that photographs of the same subject/object were taken on glass-plates or films in different formats and some were classified into different motif groups. This suggests that Engler worked with two or more different cameras at the same time. We have therefore decided to re-arrange all the photographs and to group them into the following subject groups:

Series 1: Historic Buildings in Kabul

Series 2: Religious Sites in and around Kabul

Series 3: Nowruz 1944 at the *ziyarat-e sakhi*

Series 4: Traditional Kabul

Series 5: Surroundings of Kabul, Paghman

Series 6: Crafts and Agriculture

Series 7: Museum Objects and Buddhist Sites

Series 8: Journey to Paktia

Series 9: Journey to Ghazni – Kandahar – Herat

Series 10: Journey to Northern Afghanistan

Sammlung : **ALBERT E. ENGLER, KABUL 1939-1944**
Serie : 15-129 bis 15-194 (Dorf und Landschaft auf 4,5/6 cm Film)

During this process of re-arrangement, about one third of the images were omitted, either because they seemed qualitatively unsatisfactory or meaningless (cloud formations, trees, landscape that could not be linked to a specific location).

Most of the shots have small-format contact prints, believed to have been developed in Kabul, a selection of which that Engler included in a small (10/7 cm) leather-bound booklet that he probably acquired in Kabul. Further contact prints (together with photos by R. Stuckert) are arranged on 17 panels made of black photo cardboard (15/21 cm). There are no descriptions of the pictures on the loose prints, in the booklet or on the panels.

In the autumn of 1941, with the permission of Ahmad Ali Kohzad, then director of the Kabul National Museum, Engler took photographs of ethnological objects (clothing, jewellery, embroidery) in the collection. Forty prints of these photographs, with succinct captions, are assembled in an album bound in beige linen (20/15 cm). A further 25 photographs of museum objects (ceramics, metalwork, jewellery and some statues from Kafirstan) are included in the album as loose prints.

On his return to Switzerland, Engler had a selection of 200 of his photographs printed in a large-format (mostly 125/175 mm) that were mounted on card panels on the back of which were captions that match the list of negatives. Very little additional information is provided – among the exceptions are the series illustrating the New Year celebration at *the ziyarat-e sakhi*, dated March 21, 1944.

The black and white film used for most photographs (in the format 4.5/6 cm) is quite grainy and therefore blurred in detail, with many prints in high contrast, so that either the bright parts fade or the dark parts appear almost black.

In around 1990, after donation of the collection to the Foundation BA, the Foto-Studio Kamber in Liestal produced high-quality professional prints of all negatives in the format 12/18 cm. These new prints were used for the publication in Phototheca Afghanistanica. The scans were made with 400 dpi of the large-format prints. Experiments showed that better results were achieved than with scans of the original negatives or contact copies with 3200 dpi.

The text before us is also the basis for the digital version on the website. Since diacritics cannot be used there for technical reasons, they have been omitted. All words in Dari/Pashto are italic and set in minuscules with the exception of personal names and words at the beginning of the sentence. In order to enable the digital search throughout, the transcription follows the simplified spelling commonly used in the English language.

The image descriptions are based both on the limited information that Engler provides in the 'List of Negatives' as well as comparison with similar photographs in other collections (Rybitschka, von Hentig, Souvenir d'Afghanistan, von Segnitz, Stuckert, etc.). Of great importance was the personal knowledge of the country by May Schinasi, Jolyon Leslie and Paul Bucherer. The pictures and texts were compiled by Paul Bucherer, who thus also takes responsibility for any errors and information gaps. Correction and supplementary suggestions are always welcome.

Editing and publishing this collection has been made possible

- through a contribution from the *Swisslos Fund of the Canton of Basel-Landschaft*
- thanks to the support of Jolyon Leslie (Kabul and London) and May Schinasi (Nice)
- thanks to the meticulous corrective reading by Veronika Bucherer-Dietschi and
- thanks to the transmission to the website on the Internet by Stefan Känel

The Bibliotheca Afghanistanica Foundation offer this further contribution as part of its efforts to enhance and preserve the knowledge of Afghanistan's history and rich cultural heritage.

Bubendorf / London, July 2020
Paul Bucherer and Jolyon Leslie