

Homeland Afghanistan

HTTP://AFGHANISTAN.ASIASOCIETY.ORG/

PRODUCED BY THE ASIA SOCIETY

Reviewed by Howard Faber

Homeland Afghanistan, a new website created by the Asia Society, is a remarkable online resource for anyone seeking to learn about Afghanistan from the pre-history of the region to the present day. It is a visual, speaking textbook, full of images, old and new. I found it appealing, mostly easy to navigate, and a balanced combination of scholarly comment and historical visual images. The music adds greatly to the flavor of this website, and the visual timeline is helpful in placing the many people and events in history. The Asia Society offers seventy-five video episodes, featuring archaeological finds, paintings, literary works, music, photographs, and documentary films. This site will be useful to middle and high school students and teachers as well as college students and professors who are studying this now well-known country.

This story of Afghanistan, its place in history, and the people who have lived, fought, and laughed in this (until recently) not-so-well-known part of our world community is particularly well told. The comments of the contributors are mostly insightful and accurate. I say “mostly” because there is room for debate about the views of one of the contributors, and there are some missing elements.

First: The debate. The contributor, who speaks primarily about recent history, is far too kind to Pakistan and the Taliban concerning their roles in the attempts of the Afghan people to rebuild their country. He is also unduly harsh when speaking about American soldiers, using the words “violating” and “violence” to describe their activities, not mentioning the word “protecting” or the many positive contributions these members of the US Armed Services have made to Afghanistan.

Next: The missing pieces. The biggest omission is mention of Mohammed Zahir Shah (r. 1933–1973), the last *shah* (king) of Afghanistan. His reign connects various players in Afghanistan history who are so elegantly documented in Homeland Afghanistan. An account of his reign

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would help readers understand the hope that Afghans have for their country. It would also be helpful to build a greater understanding of the Soviet invasion if the story of Daoud, the successor to Zahir Shah, was included. Also missing is any mention of the two main languages of the Afghan people, Farsi and Pushtu. In the chapter about storytelling, including one of the popular Mullah Nasruddin stories would be entertaining and authentic.

A few corrections could be made. Somewhere in the early graphics of the site, the term “terrorist breeding ground” moves across the screen. That is not completely accurate, and it is offensive to Afghans. No one in the 9/11 terrorist group was an Afghan. In the chapter “Afghanistan in the World,” the term “puppet leaders” leads one to think the Afghans themselves caused the wars. In pronunciation, Buzkashi wants to have the last syllable accented rather than the middle. The word “qala” needs a hard swallowed “k” sound at the beginning. The site would greatly benefit from some organizational improvements, because there is no way to know what the site offers until the user chooses a summary sentence at the bottom of the entry screen for each of the four main sections. A text-based table of contents seems to be in order here.

These comments are not meant to and do not negate the overall excellence of Homeland Afghanistan. So many of the components radiate the essence of this land of the Afghans with authenticity. ■

HOWARD FABER received his EdD from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and Master’s degree from Columbia University. After receiving his undergraduate degree from Northern Iowa University, he set off for adventure in the Peace Corps to a then little-known corner of the world: Afghanistan. He teaches sixth grade and lives with his wife and daughter in the Omaha suburbs.

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