

The Carpet Dealers

Abdullah owned a carpet store in Kabul and a carpet weaving factory in Sheberghan in northern Afghanistan. More than fifty people worked there. Almost all the carpets were knotted on horizontal frames. The weavers sat on the carpet. Only a very few weaving frames were set up vertically and the weaver sat directly in front of it. In his Kabul store, Abdullah offered traditional carpets that he had bought from private individuals. The weaving shop in Scheberghan produced for a business partner in "Kieslingkirch" according to his specifications. This customer sat down with Abdullah in the Intercontinental Hotel and sketched patterns in a notebook with colored pencils for the carpets he sold in Kieslingkirch. These carpets had to have a thick pile. Abdullah spoke some German. Kieslingkirch was his name for Gelsenkirchen.

Abdullah had a much younger brother Abdul Rassul and a son Allah Nasar. Both attended the "Amani Upper Secondary School," a boys' high school supported by Germany since the reign of King Amanullah, in the 1920s. In all other Afghan high schools, the foreign language English was taught - but almost unsuccessfully. At the Amani school, German was and still is taught. Even some of the subject lessons were held in German at that time. Apart from the Amani School, there was also the Istiqlal School in Kabul, which was supported in the same way by France and still is today.

Today you can still meet older Afghans who speak German well, although they have never visited a German-speaking country and although they did not need the German language in their professional life. They had gone to the Amani school. There they had learned German.



Abdul Rassul and Allah Nasar were far from this level. They went to the eighth and seventh grade, but could not put together a sentence in German. It was unimaginable that they could follow a biology lesson in German. Presumably, in the huge Amani school, there were trains with good

students and trains with other students. Abdullah asked us to do something for the German language skills of his son and his brother. My wife Anne Marie took on the task. That was in 1975.

I had exchanged 1000 DM in Afghani at the money bazaar. When I came home, Anne Marie was just finishing the lessons for the young gentlemen. I loaded them into our VW bus and took them home. There I briefly got out with them. Abdullah was also there. We chatted for another five minutes. Then I had to go home for dinner. After dinner, we wanted to do some shopping. Where was the money we had exchanged? In the briefcase! It was still in the car. But there was no money in the briefcase. Had I perhaps carried the money into the house before bringing them home? We didn't find it.

When the communists came to power in 1978, Abdullah was already dead. His family tried to keep their property in Afghanistan. The business in Kabul was lost. During the Communists' rule in Afghanistan, Turkey generously took in Afghans of Turkic origin. Our friends were Turkmen. Abdullah had been in Istanbul on business trips and had told us that he could converse with the locals there with some difficulty. So, part of the family moved to a settlement in western Anatolia built especially for refugees from Afghanistan. But it was hard to do business with other refugees. Our friends moved on to Istanbul, where they had a market. The contacts to Kieslingkirch also still existed. Once Abdul Rassul visited us in Germany.

Soon after I came back to Kabul in 1998, Allah Nasar visited me. He wanted to clear up an old story. I did not understand what it was about. Allah Nazar helped. Now I remembered the 1000 DM that had disappeared at that time.

Yes, Allah Nazar told me, their gatekeeper had taken the money out of my pocket at that time. If Abdullah had found out, he would have beaten him and Abdul Rassul to death. But now it was time to put everything back in order. Then he gave me back DM 1,000.