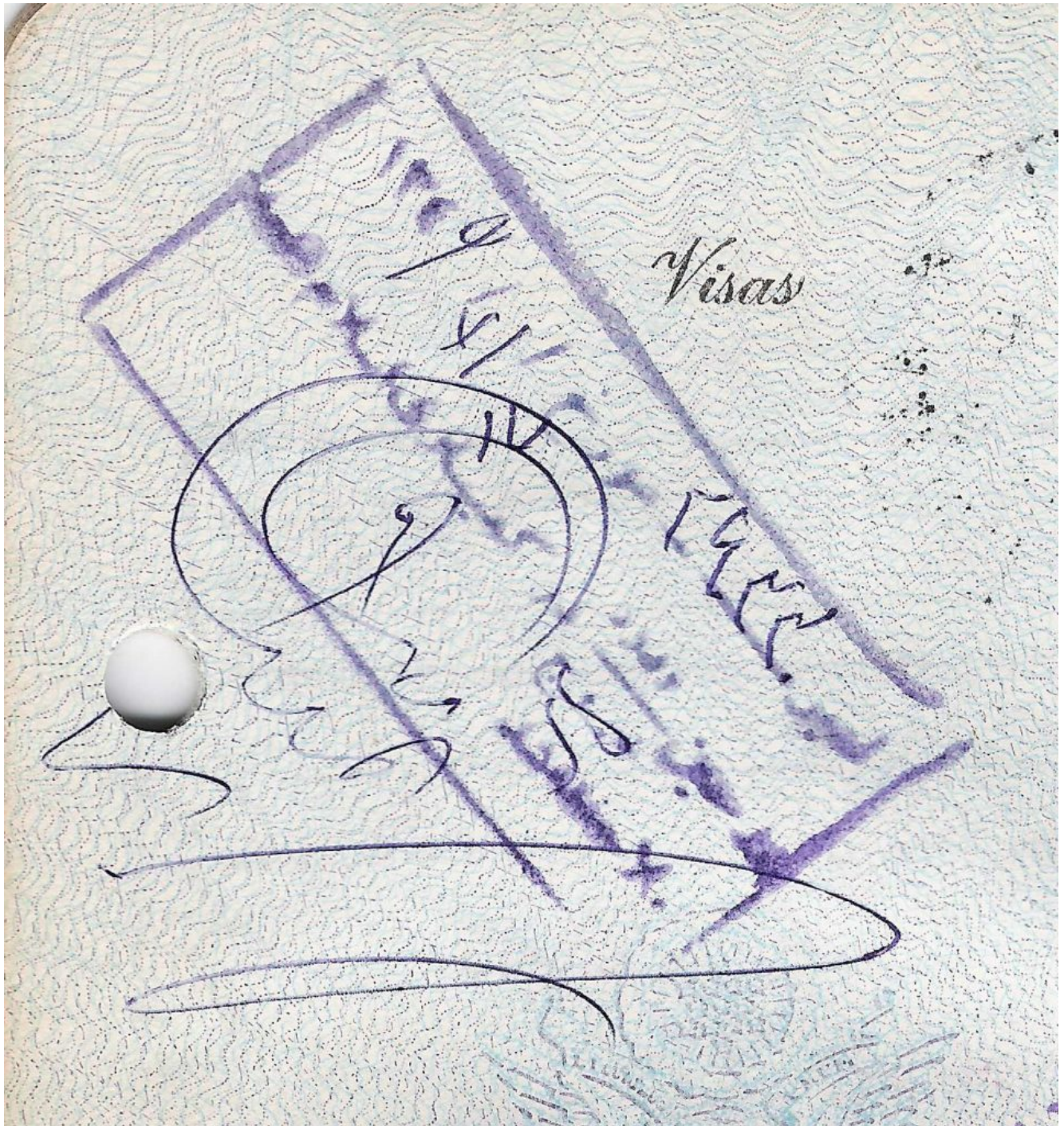


Afghanistan!!

After spending a night under the stars, we were ready for crossing the border into Afghanistan. Actually, we weren't at all ready for what was to follow. Fortunately, my mom and dad kept all my letters home as did some close friends of mine; these helped jog my memory.

The "system" at the Afghan border was unbelievable. We submitted our passports in a room with two desks. A man at the first desk checked in the passports and then placed them on the second desk—*anywhere* on the other desk. A customs officer from an inner office came, took a handful of random passports into the inner office and then called the passport owners in to interview them before stamping their passports. I think you can see the weakness of this "system". People who handed in passports at the same time could wait as short as five minutes or as long as hours to be called into the inner office.

Since we were all traveling together, our drivers didn't want to leave anyone behind. The driver of the vehicle I was riding in (a German doctor) finally reached the limit of his patience. He strode up to the second desk, rifled through the passports, and pulled out all the passports of those traveling in his vehicle. He then barged into the inner office and shoved the passports at the border official. I was watching in horror, imagining all kinds of horrific scenarios, one of which included all of us in an Afghan jail. To my great surprise, the doctor emerged alive with all our passports stamped. I never asked if money exchanged hands.



Once we were all across the border into Afghanistan, we drove to Harat, the closest city of any size, about 90 miles from the border. Once in Herat, our breakneck pace of travel came to an abrupt halt. We found a reasonably priced clean hotel (less than \$1 per night). I was beginning to learn what was fairly safe to eat – basically anything cooked to death, such as delicious, fresh flatbread and kebabs. It was delightful to look forward to several days of rest rather than constant travel. Recalling that I was a hippie and an unbeliever, it

won't surprise you to learn that those days were spent in a haze of Afghan hashish, which was cheap, potent, and legal.