



# KASHMIR I. INTRODUCTION

---

## KASHMIR

### i. Introduction

Iranian influence in and beyond the region of Kashmir is a long-term phenomenon. Inscriptions in Sogdian, Parthian, and Middle Persian demonstrate pre-Islamic contacts there with Iranian-speakers (Jettmar, p. 402; inscriptional material in Sims-Williams). New Persian spread in the valley of Kashmir during the rule of the Šāh-Miri dynasty (1349-1561). The interest in Persian was initiated by Šehāb-al-Din Širāšāmak (r. 1354-73) and flourished under Sultan Zayn-al-Ābedin (1420-70). Continuous efforts to develop Persian scholarship since that time, the availability of locally produced, high-quality paper, and the constant influx of Iranian scholars earned Kashmir its surname Irān-e ṣaḡir, “Little Iran.”

There is a close link between the introduction of Persian and the Islamization of the Kashmir valley. The person generally referred to in this context is Sayyed ʿAli Hamadāni (d. 786/ 1384, q.v.), a member of the Kobrawi Sufi order. Although interest in Persian has been closely connected to the spread of Islamic ideas, from the beginning Hindu Pandits stood side by side with Muslim scholars in their efforts to promote Persian learning, science, and literature (e.g., for a list of Pandit poets, see Sufi, II, pp. 485 ff.). Among the first texts produced were translations of the *Mahābhārata*, presumably the oldest Persian translation of this epic, and the *Rājataranḡiṇī* (Persian title: *Baḥr al-asmār*), a Sanskrit history of Kashmir. Both are attributed to Mollā Aḥmad, a



court poet of Sultan Zayn-al-‘Ābedin (Hadi, pp. 41-42).

From the 14th century, on Persian exerted enormous influence on the intellectual elite and literacy in Kashmir and the surrounding highland area. Having been the vehicle for the introduction of Islam in the valley, the Šāh-Miri sultans made it the official court language. For five hundred years thereafter Persian was the primary medium for literary production in all fields of learning and poetry. Persian has kept its status as a highly prestigious language up to the present time. Hence, in 1980 Ḥāji Qodrat-Allāh Beg in Hunza could reasonably justify the publication of his local chronicle, *Tāriḳ-e ‘ahd-e ‘atiq-e riāsat-e Honza*, in Persian.

Persian prevailed as court language until the Jammu and Kashmir of the Dōgrā dynasty (founded 1846). It was finally replaced by Urdu in 1889, partly because of the growing number of Panjabis working in the administration. After the link between the study of Persian and occupation in the administration had been severed, Persian was abolished in the primary education system in 1911. Even during the 20th century, it was still customary to copy Persian books by hand, a tradition apparently lost nowadays. Modern discourse in Kashmir centers on language politics, with a focus on the Kashmiri language for shaping a future Kashmir nation. As a result, Persian and its historical legacy is cherished mainly in the scholarly milieu—for example, in the Persian Department of Kashmir University in Srinagar, which, since 1969, has published the annual periodical *Dāneš*, containing articles mainly on literature in Urdu, Persian, and English. Nevertheless, Persian is still held in esteem and seen as an integral part of the elite culture, as the case of the late Hunza chronicle clearly shows (for contemporary [Chitral](#), see Marsden).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Nabi Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature*, New Delhi, 1995.

Karl Jettmar, “Chilas,” in *EIr*. V/4, 1991, pp. 401-3.



M. A. Stein, ed., *Kalhaṇa's Rājatarāṅginī, or Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, Bombay, 1892.

Idem, tr., *Rājatarāṅginī: a Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, 2 vols., Westminster, 1900.

Nicholas Sims-Williams, *Sogdian and other Iranian Inscriptions of the Upper Indus* I, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, London, 1989; II, 1992.

Magnus Marsden, "Mobile Life on the Frontiers of Crossroads Asia," Crossroads Asia Working Paper 1, Bonn, 2011; [http://crossroads-asia.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/publications/Magnus\\_Marsden\\_-\\_Mobile\\_Life\\_on\\_the\\_Frontiers\\_of\\_Crossro.pdf](http://crossroads-asia.de/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/Magnus_Marsden_-_Mobile_Life_on_the_Frontiers_of_Crossro.pdf).

Ghulam M. D. Sufi, *Kashmīr: Being a History of Kashmir from the Earliest Times to Our Own*, 2 vols., Lahore, 1949.