



# KASHMIR III. PERSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE STATE ADMINISTRATION

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## KASHMIR

### iii. Persian Language in the State Administration

Officially Persian became the court language in Kashmir during the 14th and 15th centuries. We lack any sources for this early period, but later, under administrators of the Mughals, Afghans, and Sikhs, the picture becomes clearer. As for the Dōgrā State of Jammu and Kashmir (1846-1947), there are copious documents in archives in India and Pakistan (see below) that demonstrate the impact of Persian administrative tradition; this holds for the Highland states in the Karakorum and Hindu Kush as well. Such documents continue until after the replacement of Persian with Urdu as the official court and administrative language in 1889 (Weber, I, p. 74).

*Jammu and Kashmir.* Persian was introduced in Kashmir by the Šāh-Miri dynasty (1349-1561) and started to flourish under Sultan Zayn-al-Ābedin (1420-70). Aside from spurious information, not much is known from this time. We have a fairly good picture of the time under Mughal, Afghan, and Sikh rule and finally the Dōgrās (1846-90). Original documents are stored in archives in India and Pakistan.



Recent research on Dōgrā administration shows that, besides its use for keeping records, writing regulations and (sometimes coded) reports, and communicating military orders (*eršād*), the Persian language, with its long history in chancelleries in Asia, was the perfect medium for communication with the surrounding states, even with China. This is not surprising, considering the proximity of India and Afghanistan. Another contributing factor was that Persian was the lingua franca of traders in vast parts of Asia, from the Balkans to China. In order to expedite letters and orders, the Dōgrās installed a postal system, in which the so-called *dāk*-runners delivered the documents on fixed routes with astonishing speed and reliability (Bhag Ram, 1891, pp. 130 ff.; idem, 1895, pp. 94 ff.; for general reference, see Weber, I, pp. 77 ff.). From 1879 on, this system was partly replaced by the telegraph (for a collection of Persian telegrams, see Weber, II, pp. 781 ff., 847 ff.).

Persian lost its superior role in the administration of Jammu and Kashmir in the course of a general reform in the year 1889, when Urdu, another language foreign to the region, was chosen for administrative purposes.

*Highland.* The small kingdoms in the Northern Highland also entered the Persian communications network, which was maintained basically through letters (for the different types of letters, *morāsala*, *arzdāšt*, *arzi*, etc., and their formal implications, see Weber, I, pp. 133 ff.). These de facto independent, small, state-like entities kept a complex symbolic relationship to the expansionist Dōgrā state of Jammu and Kashmir by exchanging presents; a usually more valuable *kel'at* (lit. robe of honor) from the superior Jammu and Kashmir state (comprised of certain goods and money) was reciprocated with a *nadrāna* (gold dust, falcons, dogs, apricots) from the subordinate Highland states. All of this was carefully documented by the Dōgrā administration (Weber, I, pp. 255 ff.). There are also writings from Chitral, Nager, Hunza, Dir, Gilgit, Kartakhsha, Yasin, Gizer, Punyal, and Chilas (published on compact disc attached to Weber, I). These letters, mainly from the last third of the 19th century, clearly demonstrate the existence of a rudimentary administration (e.g., see the photocopy of a *qabāla*, a privilege promulgated by Rāja Ġāzan Khan, 1863-86, in Qodrat-Allāh Beg, p. 250). Regarding the language, the Persian used in these documents can hardly be called literary, although proverbs and classical poems (e.g., of Hāfeẓ) are occasionally cited. In essence, it was adapted to the specific purpose and is basically the (spoken) Persian of the eastern Persianate zone. Hence, it shows some of the distinct grammatical features of Afghan Dari (cf. KABOLĪ) and Tājiki (see TĀJIK ii, online) with some



loanwords borrowed from local languages (for the grammatical features, see Weber, I, pp. 184 ff., and for a vocabulary list, idem, II, pp. 918 ff.).

The earliest available documents from this region are seven edicts (*farmān*) from Chitral in the 18th century, promulgated by five rajas (texts in Holzwarth, pp. 137 ff.; Ġofrān, pp. 51, 55-57, 101). In Hunza, the so-called “Baltit Letters” to Chinese officials date from 1815 onwards (Müller- Stellrecht, p. 453; India Office Library and Records, P+S/7/67, 1892, Enclosures I-II). In addition, the inscriptions of the seals of the Highland rajas and viziers bear Persian legends (Weber, I, pp. 156 ff.).

*Officials and offices.* The full-fledged administration of Jammu and Kashmir required the training of candidates, to be recruited in special colleges in the cities of Jammu and Srinagar (for the curriculum see Anant Rām, pp. 181 ff.). There the students studied the art of letterwriting (*enšā'*; the basic course was study of the *Enšā'-e Harkarn*, a collection of model letters by [Harkarn Dās Kanbōh](#), arithmetic (*raqm* or *ḥesāb*), and *siāq*, the special notation used for numerals in accounting (for the *siāq* used in Kashmir, see Weber, I, pp. 251 ff.). The scribes (*monši*) were almost exclusively recruited from the *Karkun*-Pandits (Pers. *kārkun* “revenue collector”). Because of their engagement in this profane work, they formed a distinct group of high-caste Brahmins (Sender, pp. 21 ff.).

On the Highland side, the main officials were the local rajas, their viziers, and high-ranking members of the nobility with close ties to the courts. Ām had a good knowledge of Persian, like Amān-al-Molk, the raja of Chitral. However, the one who delivered the letter (*wakil*) and the scribe or secretary (*monši*) were the indispensable middlemen. In Hunza at least some of the *monšis*, in this case Muslims, were sent from Jammu and Kashmir. As for Nager, we know that some literary people from the clan of the Kashmiriting were the *monšis* of the *daftar* (registry) in the capital Uyum-Nager. Besides writing letters, they kept track of the land register (*fehrest-e entezāmiya*) and copied books (Frembgen, 1985, p. 102). In societies where illiteracy is the norm the role of the *monši* is therefore a very privileged one. The same holds for the *wakil*, who in addition had access to luxury goods in the markets of commercial centers.

*State of the art.* Archives in India and Pakistan with collections of Persian documents relevant for Kashmir are situated in New Delhi (National Archive), Jammu (Jammu State Archives and Repository stores hold a unique collection of documents for the Dōgrā period), Srinagar (State Archives, Research



Department), Patiala (State Archives), Chandigarh (Punjab University), Lahore (Civil Secretariat Library, Anarkali Tomb), and Gilgit (Weber, I, pp. 17 ff.). The actual dimensions of these collections are not totally clear yet, partly because of the complex form of the calligraphy style, called *šekasta-āviz*, which makes research difficult and very time-consuming. This is unfortunate, because these sources shed a different light on occurrences and phenomena that up to now have been related to us basically by British sources. There also exist private collections, which are almost out of reach. General problems are the conservation of the documents and the accessibility of the archives for research, especially in Pakistan.

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