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KASHMIR V. PERSIAN INFLUENCE ON KASHMIRI ART

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v. Persian Influence on Kashmiri Art

The Iranian influence on the art and architecture of Kashmir is indirect, appearing in ancient times via Hellenistic and Kushan culture and later through Muslim India. Spread over the western Himalaya, the once relatively inaccessible region's architecture still reflects Himalayan traditions in its extensive use of timber and the pitched and tiered roofs. Even as late as the 17th century, its people lived in rudimentary huts and tents; only palaces, mansions of the wealthy, and temples were constructed of timber, still a perishable and combustible material. As a result, little is preserved of the ancient monuments except in the ruins of a very few stone temples, which, to a great extent, reflect the style of the timber structures.

The earliest Iranian influence can be seen in a fragment of a 2nd-century statue of a Kushan ruler, carved in the Parthian style, found in the ancient site of Huvishkapura (modern Ushkar), and preserved in the Sri Partap Singh Museum at Srinagar. Huvishkapura, founded by Emperor Huvishka (see huviška) in the 2nd century CE, is one of the many towns built by the Kushan kings in Kashmir. Little survives of the town today, except for the remains of Huvishka's stupa, which was reconstructed in the 8th century and later

became a Vaishnavite Hindu site (Kak, 1933, p. 152).

Extensive Iranian influence impacted Kashmir after the disintegration of the Parthian empire in 227, when numerous artisans and stonemasons seem to have left the eastern borders of the empire for Kashmir and northwest India. As the Sasanian conquest of Kushan did not extend as far as Kashmir, the Parthian style continued to flourish in the Buddhist sites of the region, as presented in the stupas and monastery at Harwan, which preserve numerous figures in Parthian costume carved in the Parthian style (Figure 1).

Parthian traditions seem to have remained prevalent, as wherever Indians in Indian costumes are represented they are carved in a non-Indian manner. Nevertheless, the images show that Indians were indeed in the region, and when their art is reflected, it is in typically Gupta floral motifs. By the end of the 4th century, the Iranian influence started to decline, and Indian culture began to dominate. Later Buddhism, along with its arts, much related to Gandharan and Partho-Hellenistic culture, was replaced by Hinduism, and the Iranian influence would not be seen in Kashmir until the introduction of Islam into the region in the mid-14th century. But in the 9th-century temples of the Utpala dynasty at Avantipura, decorative motifs of Sasanian style are prevalent in the surface decoration, while the design principles relate to North India. It seems that, with the collapse of the Sasanian empire after the Muslim conquest, once again Iranian craftsmen together with others from the Near East moved to the relative safety of the mountains of Kashmir (Goetz, 1952, p. 81).

Kashmir was never conquered by a Muslim army, but Islam was introduced to the region by one Šāh Mirzā or Šāh Mir, a Muslim adventurer who entered the court of the local raja in 715/ 1315-16; subsequently, in 747/ 1346-47, he married the last Hindu ruler, Queen Kutāh Div (Kotā Devi), but killed her a day after their marriage (Ferešta, II, p. 338; Neẓām-al-Din Aḥmad Heravi, *Ṭabaqāt-e akbari* III, p. 425). The spread of Islam was slow but firm, and the sixth Šāh-Miri sultan, Sekandar b. Hindal, known as Botšekan “Idol-breaker” (r. ca. 796-819/ 1393-1417), converted the entire population. This was after the coming of the Kobrawi Sufi, Sayyed ʿAli Hamadāni, who resided in Srinagar and was instrumental in the spread of Islam in Kashmir. Among his many followers was the Kashmir Sultan Qoṭb-al-Din Ṭāher (ca. 772-88/1370-86; Aḏkāʾi, pp. 51-53). Sekandar expelled those who did not convert, although his son, the enlightened Sultan Zaynal- ʿĀbedin (r. 826-77/1422-73), allowed some Hindus to return.

Sekandar earned his epithet by destroying whatever temples were left from earlier eras. Little remains of his own edifices, but the buildings of the time of Zaynal-ʿĀbedin leave the impression that the early mosques and tombs would either be built over the remains of the sanctum of an earlier temple or be erected on a square plan following the traditional style. They were often made entirely in timber or with brick or stone walls and Islamic arches, but with a timber pitched roof surmounted by a square canopy with an elongated pitched roof—similar in form to the pinnacle (*chattrāvali*) of a Himalayan stupa—used as a minaret for the call to prayer. The style appears in many buildings, such as the shrine of Madani or Mādin Šāh at Zadibal and the mosque of Šāh Ḥamdān (the local name for Sayyed ʿAli Hamadāni) in Srinagar, both originally founded at the time of Sultan Zayn-al-ʿĀbedin but many times rebuilt.

The exception is the tomb of Zayn-al-ʿAbedin's mother, which is a brick structure consisting of an octagonal, double-shelled domed chamber with four smaller double-shelled domes over three square chambers and the entrances at the cardinal points. The building, and particularly its domes, seems to have been inspired by the grand monuments of Samarqand, but executed on a modest scale (Figure 2). An example representing all aspects of traditional Kashmiri architecture is the mosque at Avantipura, erected near the ruins of the ancient site, but, unlike the earlier mosques and shrines, not incorporating spoil of ancient monuments. The most outstanding monument of the sultanate of Kashmir, however, is the Jāmeʿ Mosque of Srinagar, which has an Iranian and Central Asian four-*ayvān* plan built with brick walls and grand arches for the *ayvān*s, but with wooden columns supporting a traditional, Kashmiri-style timber superstructure. In his memoirs, the Mughal emperor Nur-al-Din Moḥammad Jahāngir (p. 338) describes this mosque:

In the town there is an extremely elegant mosque of the edifices of Sultan Sekandar, which was founded in 795 [1392-93] but after some time it burnt, and Sultan Ḥasan reconstructed it; but before its completion the mansion of his life collapsed on its foundations and in 909 [1503] Ebrāhim Bākari, the vizier of Sultan Moḥammad completed the mosque with auspicious ending. . . . It has four *ayvān*s and the surfaces of the *ayvān*s and columns are covered with paintings executed with elegant motifs. Truly, no monument better than this has survived from the time of the rulers of Kashmir.

Elsewhere (p. 340) he notes that the roofs of the mosque, as with those of other buildings, were covered with soil and planted with tulips (also see Lāhuri, I/2, p. 23). The mosque was, however, rebuilt at the end of the reign of Jahāngir (r.

1605-27) and was completed in 1637 at the time of Šāh-Jahān (r. 1628-57), apparently without much alteration to its original layout and appearance, but the tradition of planting tulips on the roof has long been abandoned.

Kashmir was taken by the army of the Mughal emperor Akbar in 994/ 1585-86 (ʿAllāmi, III, p. 474; Jahāngir, p. 338), who himself visited the region three years later (ʿAllāmi, III, pp. 542-52), constructed a fort in Srinagar, and established a garden known as Bāḡ-e Nurafzā (Jahāngir, p. 343). The garden may be the same as what is now known as Nasim Bāḡ, a sizeable but dilapidated garden on a Persian *čahārbāḡ* layout, the avenues of which are lined with lofty plane trees and said to date from the time of Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Whether or not the two gardens are the same, there is little doubt that Akbar's gardens would have been on a *čahārbāḡ* layout, as the form was introduced to India by Bābor in his garden at Agra, and subsequent Mughal gardens were laid out on similar principles. Akbar also introduced a number of fruit trees native to Khorasan and Badakhshan, including sweet cherries and an early fruiting morrello cherry called *aškan* (Jahāngir, p. 348). Akbar's fort, completed by Jahāngir, has, however, survived and, as with other Mughal monuments of the period, the Persian influence is apparent in the profile of the arches, which follow closely the style of late Timurid and Safavid four-centered arches.

PERSIAN GARDENS IN KASHMIR

Although only a few of the many Mughal gardens in and around Srinagar have survived, the remaining ones are the main attraction of the town. Two such gardens established by Jahāngir in 1029/ 1619-20 are Šālimār (called Šālmāl by Jahāngir, pp. 343-44, and Šālmār by Kanbō, II, p. 28), a rectangular *čahārbāḡ* by the Dal Lake in Srinagar, laid out on three ascending platforms, each with stylish pavilions, and the Vērnāg garden (Jahāngir, p. 356) with a large, octagonal pool at the source of the river Jhelam, which was favored particularly by Nur Jahān, Jahāngir's influential Persian queen. On her order a mosque called Patthar Masjid was built of stone in Srinagar, following the traditional Indian plan but with a wooden pitched roof. In the vicinity of Srinagar Jahāngir established other gardens, including one in Achhabal (Jahāngir, p. 355).

Jahāngir also notes the shawls of Kashmir (pp. 341- 42): "Kashmir's shawls . . . are so famous that they need no words of admiration; another type is *therma* which is thicker than shawl and is a twill weave (*mowjdār*) and soft . . . The wool of the shawl is from a type of goat, which is specific to Tibet." Whatever

the patterns of the pre-Mughal shawls might have been, the motifs of surviving Mughal and later examples are closely comparable to traditional Islamic and Iranian designs. A fashionable article in 19th-century Europe, Kashmir shawls became a victim of their own success when machine-made imitations from centers such as Paisley in Scotland gradually took over their market in the 1870s. The Mughals also introduced carpet weaving with traditional Persian knots and patterns, and even today some of the best carpets of India are produced in Kashmir.

Šāh-Jahān also spent many summers in Kashmir, where he established new gardens, improved the older ones, and at Vērnāg garden added an arcade around the pool (Lāhuri, I/2, pp. 23-29, 47; Kanbō, II, pp. 28-31, 276). His daughter, Jahān Ārā Begom, built a stone mosque with a grand arched portal for her spiritual leader, Mollā Šāh Badaḵši, in Srinagar; and near Šālimār his minister, Āṣaf Khan, a brother of Nur Jahān, established Nešāt Bāḡ (Lāhuri, I/2, p. 47; Kanbō, II, p. 355), a grand garden, again on several platforms. Some suggest (Agrawal, p. 181) that the platform arrangement seen in the gardens of Kashmir follows the concept of palaces and houses with a forecourt at the lower platform, leading to a middle platform as the public area (*biruni*) with the highest platform acting as the private quarters (*andaruni*), but the more likely reason for terracing is to bring out the potential of the sloping terrain while resolving its problems in a pragmatic way. The last of the Mughal gardens of Kashmir is the Pari Maḥal or Pir-e Maḥal, built by Dārā Šokuh in 1644 as his residence on the side of the steep hill with a commanding view over Srinagar and the Dal Lake. The terraces and structures of the garden have survived, but little remains of the garden and its trees. Most of the gardens of Kashmir have been restored in recent years and have been replanted with flowering shrubs and ornamental trees, but the many varieties of fruit trees, a prime feature of these gardens described by Jahāngir in detail, are missing.

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