



PLATTS, JOHN THOMPSON

PLATTS, JOHN THOMPSON (b. Calcutta, India, 1 August 1830; d. London, 21 September 1904), scholar and teacher of Persian at the University of Oxford. He wrote a widely used Persian grammar and published an edition and an English translation of Sa'di's *Golestān*.

Platts was the second son of Robert Platts. The untimely death of his father left his mother and a large family in financial difficulties. Platts was sent home to Britain to be educated at Bedford School in London, but he returned to India in his twenties. He worked as a teacher of mathematics in Benares College between 1858 and 1859 and was then appointed as the head of Saugor School in Madhya Pradesh, the Indian Central Province. In 1861, he returned to Benares College as headmaster and professor of mathematics. He worked as assistant inspector of schools, second circle, in the North-Western Provinces from 1864 until 1868, when he was given the post of officiating inspector in the same area. He retired on 17 March 1872 due to ill health and returned to England with his family.

In 1874, after two years in England, his first wife Alice Jane, née Kenyon, passed away; this marriage had produced three sons and four daughters. Platts married again on 4 October 1876. His second wife was Mary Elizabeth, née Dunn, widow of John Hayes, an architect and surveyor, and they had one son.

Platts settled in Ealing and spent his time teaching Hindi, Urdu, and Persian and undertaking scholarly research. He had published his *Grammar of the*



Hindustani or Urdu Language in 1870, and owing to his mastery of Persian and the Indian languages, he was appointed as a teacher of Persian at the University of Oxford in June 1880. He matriculated, at the age of 50, from Balliol College on 1 February 1881, and on 21 June 1881, he was granted an honorary MA. The degree of MA was conferred on him by decree on 19 March 1901.

At Oxford, he led a very active academic life, publishing and editing many books, mainly intended for the classroom. Among his scholarly works on Persian literature are an edition and an English translation of the *Golestān* of Sa'di (b. ca. 1210; d. 1291 or 1292), first published in 1871 and 1873, respectively. The Persian text was enhanced with an extensive vocabulary of Persian words, alphabetically arranged and enriched with notes about pronunciation and their meaning in English. His translation is in consistently readable and sometimes eloquent prose, and supplied with a variety of notes. With Alexander Rogers (1825-1911), Platts published in 1891 an edition of Sa'di's *Bustān*; the publisher employed photo-lithography to reproduce a manuscript written between 1871 and 1872 in India by a professional scribe (Figure 1). Platts' dictionary of Urdu and classical Hindi, first published in 1884, contains more than 50,000 words. It presents each word in Perso-Arabic, Devanagari and Roman script, followed by a grammatical explication and its English equivalent. He also compiled a Persian grammar, but only the first part on accidence was published during his lifetime, in 1894 (Figure 2). After his sudden death in London on 12 September 1904, George S. A. Ranking (1854-1934) revised the first part and added a new second part on syntax.

An able and enthusiastic scholar, Platts was at home with Hindi and Urdu, as well as with Persian. His Urdu and Persian grammars were widely regarded as superior to any other books of this nature and were used for almost 30 years after their first publication (see GREAT BRITAIN x. *Iranian Studies of the Islamic Period*). His lexicographical works in these three languages were used as textbooks for many years after his death. He was buried on 26 September 1904, at the Wolvercote cemetery near Oxford.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Selected works by Platts.

A Grammar of the Hindustani or Urdu Language, London, 1870; repeatedly reprinted.

Sa'di, *Golestān: A New Edition, Carefully Collated with Original MSS. with a Full Vocabulary*, 1st ed., London, 1871; rev. and corrected 2nd ed., London, 1874; several reprints; the complete text of the 1874 edition is available as an Open-Access resource via the Hathi Trust Digital Library at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081914115>

Idem, *The Gulistān, or Rose Garden: Translated from a Revised Text, with Copious Notes and a Life of the Poet*, London, 1873; several reprints.

A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English. London, 1884; several reprints; the complete text of the 1884 edition is available as an Open-Access resource via the Digital South Asia Library (DSAL) at: <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/platts/>.

With A. Rogers, Sa'di, *Bustān*, London, 1891; the complete text is available as an Open-Access resource via the Hathi Trust Digital Library at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015024348503>.

A Grammar of the Persian Language: Part I – Accidence, London, 1894.

A Grammar of the Persian Language, rev. and enlarged by G. S. A. Ranking with Part II on Syntax, Oxford, 1911.

Studies.

Joseph Foster, *Alumni oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1715-1886, their Parentage, Birthplace, and Year of Birth, with a Record of their Degrees, Being the Matriculation Register of the University, Alphabetically Arranged, Revised and Annotated*, 4 vols., Oxford, 1888.

G. S. A. Ranking, "Platts, John Thompson (1830-1904)," rev. Parvin Loloi, *Oxford*



Dictionary of National Biography, available at:
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35539>, accessed on 4 February 2014,
doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/35539.

Abida Samiuddin, ed., *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Urdu Literature*, New Dehli,
2007, p. 478.