



PERSO-INDICA

*An Analytical Survey of Persian Works
on Indian Learned Traditions*



4TH PERSO-INDICA WORKSHOP

**JOHN MACGREGOR MURRAY (1745-1822): PERSIANATE AND INDIC CULTURES IN BRITISH
SOUTH ASIA**

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Abstracts

Anglo-Persian texts and the colonial understanding of religion

Carl Ernst

The British conquest of India included a period (1750-1832) marked by a demand for explanations of the religions of India, leading to the commissioning of a number of original writings on this subject in Persian. Unlike the original works on Hinduism by Hindu authors, the “Anglo-Persian” writings were more explicitly shaped by European concepts of religion. This lecture will examine two Persian texts on Indian religions commissioned by British colonial officials, which H. H. Wilson used as sources for his *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus* (1828-32). The analysis will highlight the impact of European concepts of religion on the emerging notion of Hinduism.

Colonial Readers of Indo-Persian Scientific Texts

Fabrizio Speziale

Historians of sciences have generally perceived the European scholars’ use of Muslim languages as a phenomenon limited to the Medieval period when Greco-Arabic scientific sources were translated into Latin. The translation of Paracelsus’ (d. 1541) ideas has often been considered the main innovation that circulates in post-medieval Arabic and Persian medical texts, while the contacts between European scholars and Persian scientific culture during the 19th century is



frequently seen as an asymmetric interaction characterized by the Persian translation of modern scientific texts for the *Dar al-funūn* (1851), the Polytechnic school of Tehran. This paper attempts to re-examine this issue by looking at the interactions of the Colonial milieu with the Persianate and Hindu scientific cultures of South Asia, and by analyzing the hybrid forms of scientific studies that emerged from these contacts. I will look especially at the Persian scientific works which were written and translated for the Colonial elite before the establishment of the British Raj (1858), and at the uses and adaptations of these texts in the colonial environment. The first English translations of classical Sanskrit scientific works such as the *Bījagaṇita* (on arithmetic) and the *Śālihotra* (on the horse and its treatment) were not made from the Sanskrit text, but from their Persian translations dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, the Persian texts written for the Europeans dealt also with the medical and scientific learning of Muslim scholars. The medical texts produced for John MacGregor Murray (d. 1822) are emblematic in this regard. He commissioned the translation into Persian of Arakanese medical texts. Moreover, at his request ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Buḥārī Qalandar wrote the *Tašrīḥ al-ašjār* (1792), a Persian dictionary (*farhang*) of drugs and foods that has been illustrated with over a hundred colored illustrations.

John Macgregor Murray and the preservation of Indian architectural heritage: the case of the Taj Mahal

Anne-Julie Etter

This communication deals with John Macgregor Murray’s concern with what is today called Indian architectural heritage, and more particularly with one edifice that was in his time already considered one of its greatest specimens: the Taj Mahal. In the last decade of the 18th century, he meant to draw attention to the neglected state of the famous Mughal mausoleum and to promote



its preservation. He turned to Benoît de Boigne, who commanded the army of Mahadji Shinde, to induce the Maratha ruler to adopt effective measures of protection, and he linked this endeavor to the fate of the Mughal dynasty. The exchanges between Murray and the French general reflect the political history of the subcontinent at the end of the 18th century, and notably the relationships between the Mughal Empire, the Maratha Confederation and the East India Company. They can also be considered part of the history of preservation of Indian monuments, in so far as they put forward arguments which permeated the way East India Company's authorities handled Mughal remains in the first half of the 19th century.

Bagpipes, Ossian, Gaelic and Tartan: Sir John MacGregor Murray as a Mediator of Highland Culture

Karen E McAulay

Sir John MacGregor Murray of Lanrick Castle is perhaps primarily known by Scottish music historians as the man who brought Joseph Macdonald's *Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* back to his brother Patrick a few years after Joseph's death. However, this act of transmitting a work about Highland culture was, in fact, just one instance of the Highland chieftain's involvement in facilitating the artistic output of his native country. A founder member of the Highland Society of Scotland, we find him traversing the Highlands in pursuit of James Macpherson's *Ossian* poetry, assisting song-collector Alexander Campbell in planning his own itinerary in the Highlands and Western Isles, and helping establish a piping competition in Edinburgh – to name but a few of the projects in which he was involved.

In this regard, Sir John can be regarded as one of a number of individuals who played such a mediatory role in the collecting and publication of Scottish music. Those who transcribed tunes, translated or wrote lyrics, compiled anthologies and wrote contextual notes owed a debt of



obligation to these individuals, who might not have played an active role as editors or performers, but certainly 'oiled the wheels' for them.

In this paper, I shall outline Sir John's significant role in facilitating the codifying and promotion of Highland culture, which embraced literary endeavours every bit as much, if not more than in music; and I shall introduce some of the other individuals who were to play a similar role in Scottish song-collecting during the Georgian and Victorian eras.

Atmaram and the emergence of Anglo-Persian ethnography: the *Daḥīra al-fu'ād*, an account of Hindu festivals, castes and sects

Jean Arzoumanov

In the last decades of the 17th century, Hindu literati, often from scribal castes, started to engage with Indo-Persian literature and historical writing, and began to expand its scope. Atmaram, a Hindu revenue officer who had intermittently worked for John Murray, stands in this tradition. As a writer of Persian, he was immersed in the *munšī* culture and engaged with both Islamic and Hindu literary and religious cultures and wrote books on Indian history, Muslim prophets, policy matters. Under the commission of John Macgregor Murray he wrote the *Daḥīra al-fu'ād* in 1796, a text, unusually for the time, entirely devoted to Indian society and Hindu religions. The text describes in great details Hindu festivals, the Indian caste system and Hindu sects. Atmaram's text seems to have been the first in a string of similar ethnographic and classificatory texts composed in Persian by Hindu scholars in the first decades of the 19th century and as such is a landmark in Anglo-Persian literary production.

***Risāla-yi zirā'at*, an agrarian treatise on Bengal**

Parissa Ganji

In 1765, the Mughals granted to the East India Company the administration of the Bengal region



and revenue. To manage this huge revenue, the British heavily relied on the network of Indian officials who had worked in the fiscal administration under the Mughals. A large volume of Persian fiscal records and manuals continued to be churned out and proved crucial for the British. The *Risāla-yi zirā'at* is a short Persian treatise on agronomy commissioned by John Macgregor Murray and composed by an anonymous author. The text describes several topics including types of land, crops, categories of cultivators, methods of revenue and revenue officials. It offers a glimpse into the agrarian policy and the fiscal administration under the Mughal and the British rules. Moreover, it suggests solutions for current issues in agriculture production and revenue. Apart from its importance as a historical and economic source, it is a precious document for the study of the assimilation of Indian lexicon into Persian technical writing.

Mahjūr al-waṭān: Notes on Persian and the British Experience of North India

Thibaut d'Hubert

After he returned from Bengal to Scotland, John MacGregor Murray received a commentary on the first chapters of St Matthew's Gospel as a present. The text was written in Persian and contained a lengthy preface addressed to John Murray. The author of the preface was a Briton born in India who lived for some time in the then capital of Bengal, Murshidabad. In this text, the author refers to the carrier of his father at the service of Najaf Khan, and his departure for Bengal of the death of the Mughal general. There, he became physician and treated the dignitaries of the Nabab's court of Murshidabad before traveling to England where he seems to have copied the text. The text does not provide detailed information about his activities, but rather reflects on the state of Mughal India and ethical matters through anecdotes and verses. My presentation will review the autobiographical content of this preface written in ornate prose style and in which the author displays a deep familiarity with the conventions of Persian epistolography. My comments



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will then focus on the idea of a shared experience of India expressed by this companion of John Murray in a present that constitutes a peculiar account of acculturation in early colonial Bengal.