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Rājatarāṅgiṇī (Zayn al-‘Ābidīn translation)

The Rājatarāṅgiṇīs (River of kings) are a series of Sanskrit chronicles from Kashmir written in the style of poetry (kāvya). In 1148-1149, during the reign of king Jayasiṃha (r. 1128-1155), a court poet named Kalhaṇa completed the first Rājatarāṅgiṇī, which consists of 7,826 verses in eight chapters with narration ranging from the early mythic periods of the first king of Kashmir Gonanda I - the Mahābhārata war was considered to break out 653 years after the commencement of the current age (kaliyuga) during his reign - up to the period of Kalhaṇa’s lifetime (Slaje 2007, pp. 331-332; Stein 1900, vol. 1, p. 15). By and large, after chapter four, which narrates the history of the Kārkoṭa dynasty (7th century to 855-856), the historical account of rulers and events becomes more reliable. After Kalhaṇa’s death, no sequel to the Rājatarāṅgiṇī was composed for about three hundred years. The tradition of Sanskrit historiography in Kashmir was revived in the middle of the fifteenth century under the rule of a Muslim dynasty, the Śāhmīrids (1339-1561). During the reign of the eighth Śāhmīrid sultan, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (r. 1418-19 and 1420-70), a court pandit named Jonarāja made a chronicle of Kashmir’s historical events from 1148 to 1459 in his Rājatarāṅgiṇī at the request of the sultan, who was eager to know the history of Kashmir after Kalhaṇa. Although Jonarāja died suddenly in 1459 while Zayn al-‘Ābidīn was alive, Sanskrit historiographic writings continued to develop after him, and three other Kashmiri pandits, Śrīvara, Prājyabhaṭṭa and Śuka wrote their chronicles. In addition, some anonymous authors inserted verses into Jonarāja’s Rājatarāṅgiṇī and composed the appendices to the Rājatarāṅgiṇī of Śuka. The account of the appendices of Śuka’s chronicle lasts up to the first visit to Kashmir by the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) in 1589 (Śuka 1966, appendix C, verses 351-352). These sequels constitute valuable contemporary sources on the history of Kashmir and the surrounding areas during the late medieval period (Slaje 2005b).

Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s cultural policy did not only give a new impetus to the tradition of Sanskrit historiography, but also promoted the bi-directional process of translation of Sanskrit and Persian works. According to Śrīvara’s *Zaynataranṅiṇī*, a Sanskrit source composed by a contemporary to Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, and Sayyid ‘Alī’s *Tārīḥ-i Kaśmīr* (completed in the 1570s), the *Rājataranṅiṇī* was translated into Persian as well as the *Mahābhārata* and other famous Sanskrit works (Śrīvara 1966, verse 1. 5. 85; Sayyid ‘Alī 2009, p. 21). In addition, based on Śrīvara’s account of the translation at the Zayn al-‘Ābidīn court, a later Persian translation of the *Rājataranṅiṇī*s composed by Mullā Šāh Muḥammad Šāhābādī for Akbar (completed in 1589) refers to the previous translation. Moreover, the Mughal chronicles relying on the translation made for Akbar also mention that the *Rājataranṅiṇī* had been previously translated at Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s court (see Šāhābādī, *Rāj-tarangīnī*, Ms. London, British Library, add. 24.032, f. 81b; Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad 1935, vol. 3, p. 440; Firišta 1874, vol. 2, p. 344). To date, however, no manuscript of the Persian translation of the *Rājataranṅiṇī* made for Zayn al-‘Ābidīn has been found, nor do Persian chronicles on Kashmir composed in the Mughal period use this earlier translation as a historical source. As the latest references to the Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s translation are roughly contemporary with the annexation of Kashmir to the Mughal empire in 1586, it may have been lost in the wake of the annexation.

Judging from the accounts of Śrīvara and Sayyid ‘Alī, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s translation is probably of the *Rājataranṅiṇī* by Kalhaṇa. Sayyid ‘Alī mentions the source text in singular form; in favour of this hypothesis are also the facts that Jonarāja was still in the process of writing his continuation of the *Rājataranṅiṇī* during Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s reign, and that Śrīvara did not finish composing his own works, the *Zaynataranṅiṇī* and the *Rājataranṅiṇī*, before 1486 (Slaje 2005a).

The name of the translator is unclear. Some previous studies assert that the translator was Mullā Aḥmad (Parmu 2009, pp. 160-162; Hasan 2002, p. 135). However, no source composed prior to the late eighteenth century refers to him as a translator. The *Tārīḥ-i Kaśmīr* of Kaśmīrī (completed in 1027/1618), the *Tārīḥ-i Kaśmīr* of Ḥaydar Malik (completed in 1030/1620-21), and the *Wāqī‘āt-i Kaśmīr* of Muḥammad A‘zam Dīdahmarī (completed in 1160/1747) all refer to Mullā Aḥmad (or Mawlānā Aḥmad) as a poet of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s time (Kaśmīrī, ff. 118a-b; Ḥaydar Malik 2013, p. 62; Dīdahmarī 1995, vol. 1, p. 104). The *Gawhar-i ‘ālam tuḥfatan*

li-al-Šāh ‘Ālam by Muḡammad Aslam Mun‘imī (completed in ca. 1200/1786) is presumably the earliest work mentioning Mullā Aḡmad as a translator. Mun‘imī claims that Nūr al-Dīn Walī (d. 842/1438), a Kashmiri ascetic and poet who is supposed to be the founder of the so-called rīšī order, composed a treatise on the ancient history of Kashmir in Kashmiri language under the title of Nūr-nāma, and Mullā Aḡmad translated it from Kashmiri into Persian (Mun‘imī, f. 7b). A century after Mun‘imī, in his Tārīḡ-i ḡasan (written in the 1880s), Pīr Ġulām ḡasan Khū’ihāmī asserted that Mullā Aḡmad translated the Rājataranḡiṇī into Persian at Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s court. Khū’ihāmī states that in addition to the Rājataranḡiṇī, Mullā Aḡmad translated the Ratnākarapurāṇa, a Sanskrit chronicle composed in the reign of Avantivarman (r. 855/6-883) before Kalhaṇa (Khū’ihāmī 1954, vol. 1, p. 371, vol. 2, p. 15), claiming further that he obtained a manuscript of this translation during a trip (Khū’ihāmī 1954, vol. 1, p. 367). In all likelihood, Khū’ihāmī confused some other sources with Mullā Aḡmad’s alleged translations since neither the Ratnākarapurāṇa nor its translation is referred to in texts other than Khū’ihāmī’s work. This suggests that the identification of Mullā Aḡmad as the translator of the Rājataranḡiṇī was a much later phenomenon, while the real identity of the translator remains unknown.

In addition to the name of the translator, the title of this translation has been misunderstood by some previous scholars. Lowe and Athar Ali claim that the title of this translation is Baḡr al-asmār (Sea of fables, q.v.), based on Badā’ūnī’s account in the Muntaḡab al-tawārīḡ which states that in 1595 Akbar ordered him to translate a Sanskrit fable, a portion of which had already been translated at the court of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (Badā’ūnī 1864-9, vol. 2, pp. 401-402; Badā’ūnī 1986, vol. 2, p. 416, footnote n. 2; Athar Ali 1999, pp. 177-178). However, as Rizvi has accurately pointed out, Badā’ūnī’s account is not about a Persian translation of the Rājataranḡiṇī, but about a translation of the Kathāsaritsāgara of Somadeva. Muḡafa ḡāliqdād ‘Abbāsī refers to the previous translation of the Kathāsaritsāgara made at Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s court in his revision or new translation of this Sanskrit collection of tales, which was titled Daryā-yi asmār (ḡāliqdād ‘Abbāsī, 1375š/1997, p. 4; Rizvi 1975, p. 219; Ogura 2011, p. 34). From the information given by Śīvara, Sayyid ‘Alī and Šāḡbādī, it remains unclear how the translation of Rājataranḡiṇī made for Zayn al-‘Ābidīn had been titled in Persian. And while the absence of any surviving manuscript makes it impossible to evaluate this translation, it nevertheless demonstrates the vitality of

the tradition of historical writing in pre-Mughal Kashmir and the ongoing political importance of translation.

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