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## ***Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte Kaschmirs und des Karakorum-Raums vor der britischen Eroberung im Spiegel persischer Archivalien aus Kaschmir (1841-1891)***

Über mehrere Jahrhunderte hinweg diente bis zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert im Hochgebirgsland Kaschmir-Karakorum Persisch als Verwaltungs-, Hof-, Prestige-, Literatur- und Handelssprache. Hier soll ein Korpus persischer Archivalien aus Kaschmir aus der Zeit von 1841-1891 zum ersten Mal diplomatisch und sprachlich analysiert werden. In inhaltlicher Hinsicht wurden einzelne dieser Dokumente bisher allenfalls für ereignisgeschichtliche Sachverhalte herangezogen. Davon abgesehen wurden sie bis heute weder in Indien bzw. Pakistan noch im Westen bearbeitet. Bearbeiter und Antragsteller erwarten sich von der Analyse der Dokumente grundlegende Aufschlüsse über soziokulturelle Verhältnisse Kaschmirs vor der Eingliederung in die Britische Herrschaft (Verwaltung, Hofleben, Interaktion unterschiedlicher ethnolinguistischer Gruppen im Hochgebirgsland etc.).

**Kashmir**, presently in the focus of world news media, has been a disputed region since the 19th century, when during the „Great Game“ czarist Russia expanded into Central Asia trying to push its borders forward to the south. As a consequence, near the end of the 19th century the British took hold of Kashmir in order to obstruct the Russian expansionist plans.

To consider adequately the importance of this region we first have to take a look at its geographical situation. Kashmir is composed of two major parts, the Lowland and the Highland with the Karakorum mountains. The Highland is of special signification since important trade routes led through this region, connecting the markets of Central Asia with those of Afghanistan and India. The control of these trade routes guaranteed a steady income and whoever controlled them took part in a multi player game bestowing him with considerable political importance.

Before the Russians and the British appeared on the scene, local powers tried to conquer the high mountain region. To the west the Afghan rulers had ambitious plans, while in the Kashmir Lowlands the Dogras who became independent from the Sikhs in 1941, pressed to the north.

But every invader soon saw himself confronted with and was quickly retarded by several small kingdoms spread over the Highland. For this reason he had to negotiate with these local forces, the sovereigns of Hunza, Nager, Chitral, Yasin and Chilas. Without their cooperation no force from outside was able to dominate the Highland, because large scale military expeditions were hardly feasible due to the nature of the mountainous country, where a small force was able to keep a whole army in check. Another important factor to be considered was the scarcity of rations. The production of food hardly reached the level of subsistence and for an occupation force it was almost impossible to maintain a steady flow of supplies, even worse during the winter season the passes were impassable.

As a consequence it was indispensable for the ambitious major powers to keep up contact with the local rulers. Changing coalitions happened quite frequently. Whenever necessary an agent, the so-called vakil, was sent to the court or as in the case of the Dogras, to the administrative outpost in Gilgit to exchange news and presents and to receive orders from the

Maharaja.

The primary sources of information which scholars have consulted in order to reconstruct this historical epoch of the Kashmir Highland are the reports of certain British officers, secret agents and civil servants, published in books or military gazetteers, or unpublished accounts to be found in British and Indian archives. Other important sources consist of travel books and ethnological and geographical reports. Local sources are historiographical works in Persian and less frequently in Urdu.

But there is a different source yet which has very rarely been used in scholarly studies despite the fact that it provides a completely different approach to the social and cultural history of this region, namely the Persian records in Indian state archives like Jammu, Srinagar and several other places. Their rich handwritten material gives testimony of the flow of communication from and into the different parts of the Kashmir Highland with its many languages which have a long oral tradition but for the most part no written characters. Persian, being the language of the educated and of almost all the courts of Central and South Asia, was not only the basis of this communication by letter, making use of centuries old formal categories, but was also the language of the administration in Mughal-India and the dominions of the Sikhs and the Dogras. On the literary level Persian poetry and historiography flourished.

One topic of the planned research, out of a vast bulk of handwritings, are the letters of the Highland rajas and some of their wazirs, written to the Dogra administrative outpost in Gilgit, which provide first hand material showing aims and intentions on political subjects. They are also of particular interest with respect to their formal structure as being part of the ruling class' culture.

As a second stage it is necessary to analyze the original letters of the Dogra officials, their interpretation of the news and suggestions to the court. On a further level, together with the endorsements of the first group of letters, they grant insights into administration procedures. A totally different access is achieved through a diary written by a Dogra officer who took part in a military campaign in the Highlands. Since all campaigns of the Dogras in this region were of limited success or became a complete failure this diary has to be considered as a highly important source of information concerning the progress of such a campaign.

The research project is limited to the second part of the 19th century for different reasons. First of all the records themselves suggest this limitation, because only for this period of time coherent collections of letters exist.

At the Jammu State Archives and Repository a preliminary search for Persian records was carried out in September 1998 on the initiative and in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Irmtraud Stellrecht, director of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Tübingen. The selection of copied records was primarily based on an ethnological and historical point of view. But it soon became obvious that an approach from the side of Persian letterwriting and diplomacy was desirable. Thanks to Prof. Dr. Bert G. Fragner this project has already been started. In the course of 2002 a second search in the relevant Indian archives is expected to bring some important supplementary material to light.