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LANDSCAPE IN TRANSLATION

KASHMIR OF ZAIN AL-ABIDIN

In the history of Kashmir, the 14th and 15th centuries may be looked at as a period of transition, wherein the new social and political formation was negotiating its unique identity seeking inspiration from the existing sacred traditions and cultural imaginations. *Mehran Qureshi* cites examples of spatial design and planning from the times of Zain al-abidin, a ruler from Shahmiri Sutanate [14th–15th century] that laid the foundation of Muslim rule in the region.

“It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language that is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.”

— Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator*

Kashmir, since antiquity, has been imagined and celebrated as a valley of mythical and mystical landscape, venerated by locals as sacred and coveted by outsiders as a paradise. The sacred geography of both Buddhism and Hinduism in Kashmir, towards the closure of fourteenth century, was inherited by the nascent Shahmiri Sultanate [est. 1339 CE], that was trying for the first time in Kashmir, to establish their sovereignty within the framework of Islam and its Persianate political and cultural ethos. The period of early Shahmiri Sultans, particularly the rule of Zain al-abidin, therefore, is not only a period of transition, but also a moment of synthesis, where a new Muslim culture takes root in Kashmir while also negotiating its similarity and difference vis-à-vis the cultural forms and spiritual practices of Buddhism and Shaivism.