

In the Shadow of the Mughal Court: Mulla Tughra's Travels to Kashmir

Sunil SHARMA (Boston University)

In the seventeenth century, Mughal court poets produced more than a dozen poems in the narrative *masnavi* form in response to the valley of Kashmir becoming a favorite haunt of the imperial family. In addition to these poems, many of which are formulaic descriptions of Mughal gardens and other sites in and around Srinagar, a few other unusual texts were composed on the topic. One example is a prose work in Sanskrit, *Asaphavilasa* by Jagannatha, dedicated to the nobleman Asaf Khan. Another is a Persian work, *Ti'dad al-navadir* (Number of Rarities), by the Iranian emigre poet Mulla Tughra Mashhadi, in mixed prose and poetry. This work is a lyrical description of seven places on the Mughal road that served as stopping stations for the court. Composed as a travel account of his own trips to Kashmir, this work raises several questions about Tughra's place at court and the nature of his writings. Although not as well known or mentioned as other major poets of the courts of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, Tughra counted Mughal princes and nobles as his patrons, but also managed to steer his own course. Two other works on Kashmir by him show that he responded to the courtly literary fad in multiple ways. This paper will introduce Mulla Tughra and his writings on Kashmir and place him in the context of the larger Mughal literary culture of his time.