

Diction and Dictionaries: Language, Literature and Learning in Persianate South Asia

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This project undertakes to document the history of Urdu and Persian dictionary production, from the earliest Sultanate-era Persian-Arabic glossaries in verse, through Mughal and colonial British projects in the service of empire, up to and including present-day specialized dictionaries produced by the National Council for the Promotion of Urdu Language in New Delhi. These dictionaries in the Persian and Urdu literary traditions have served a practical role as pedagogical tools in the education of a scribal class well-versed in the political language of statecraft and administration. A new emphasis on dictionaries as an historical archive will provide fresh insights into the formation, by these groups and others, of a language and style of diplomacy and poetry of Mughal India that became the prevalent model throughout much of Asia. Previous accounts have treated as incidental, at best, the important role that dictionary compilers and scribes have played in the Persian and Urdu literary traditions throughout the Mughal period and into the present day. This work will treat dictionaries and scribal handbooks as vital reflections of the societies and cultures in which they were produced.