

Luther Obrock
American Institute of Pakistan Studies
Summer Research Grant Proposal

With the support of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies Summer Research Grant, I will undertake preliminary research based at the Punjab University in Lahore. My stay will center around exploring the collection of manuscripts and secondary material housed within that institute, particularly difficult to find sources on early second millennium Sanskrit production in Sindh and the Punjab. This archival work will form a basis of my project “Mercantile Sanskrit: Trade, Region, and Literature along the Indus.” I will use this short-term grant not only to undertake preliminary research in the library of the Punjab University but also to make contacts for further discussions and collaborations with scholars within Pakistan on the history of early second millennium South Asia.

My research in Pakistan concentrates on the Indus River as a major conduit of elite groups between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries. The production of Sanskrit (and Prakrit) literary sources are often overlooked in understanding the history of these regions. To that end, I am especially interested in regional purāṇic (mythological, cosmological, and genealogical) texts in their ritual and cosmological mode, accounts of merchant lineages (*vamśavalis*), and descriptions of pilgrimage routes and religious centers in both Jain and Hindu contexts. The second phase of this project will compare the social and geographical imaginations of these texts to the world described in Śūfī hagiographies and other Persian texts. In the end, I hope to gesture towards the complex world of the Indus River Valley in the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries and the ways in which the Sanskrit literature produced, patronized, and valorized by elite communities in major trading centers imagined this world, its geography, and its inhabitants.

While this project us ultimately about the history of Sindh and the Punjab, it is rooted in the study of texts produced by a variety of groups, from merchants to Jains, in a variety of contexts, from religious to courtly. I have already begun a preliminary study of the inscriptions of merchant families from Uchh and other centers on the Indus and their connections to the early Delhi Sultanate, which forms the basis of an article I will publish soon. With the help of the AIPS, I plan to broaden and deepen this source base in Pakistan itself. The AIPS Grant will allow me to undertake preliminary study of the Woolner Collection of manuscripts kept at the Punjab University in Lahore. While this manuscript collection has deservedly received attention for its impressive digitization program, its utility in rewriting the history of Sanskrit literature in the second millennium has barely been utilized.

More than sources in Sanskrit and Prakrit, the AIPS Summer Research grant will allow me to consult the great trove of published material kept within the archives of the Punjab University. Access to these sources will deepen and broaden by own research into the field. Further, I hope to make lasting connections between scholars within Pakistan to broaden and deepen my own understanding of Sanskrit literature in its historical and geographical context. I will undertake this research in the month of June, and it will be completed by early July. The AIPS research grant will allow an intensive first look at the archive, the sources available, and future avenues to pursue in the study of Sanskrit in the early second millennium.