

# The Mosque of the Forgotten City: The Bilingual Inscription of Zalamkot Revisited

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Il presente contributo discute un'iscrizione bilingue persiano-sanscrito presumibilmente rinvenuta a Zalamkot, in Swat, Pakistan. Sulla base di una nuova lettura e interpretazione del testo persiano, l'iscrizione apparterebbe a una delle più antiche moschee costruite dalla dinastia ghaznavide nel Subcontinente indiano. Essa ha permesso di datare al 1011 (401 AH) il completamento della moschea, dieci anni dopo la prima campagna indiana del sultano Maḥmūd di Ghazni. L'iscrizione riporta anche un toponimo sinora sconosciuto, ricostruito come Jayapāl(a)nagar, che ospitava la moschea.

## Introduction

About three decades ago, the distinguished Pakistani archaeologist Professor Abdur Rahman, to whom I would like to dedicate the present paper, was able to examine and photograph a bilingual inscription from the early 11<sup>th</sup> century CE in a private collection in Peshawar. He subsequently published a series of articles about this inscription including one in the *East and West*, Vol. 48 (1998).<sup>1</sup> According to his account, the inscription “is said to have been brought from a place called Zalamkot, not very far from Batkhela (Lower Swat Valley) in the present Malakand Agency. At the time of its discovery it was found fixed in an ancient wall wherefrom it was extracted by some antiquity dealers who sold it in the Peshawar market.”<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, a matter of great regret that the original archaeological context of the inscription remains forever uncertain, even though its approximate find-spot is known.

The inscription is engraved on a rectangular limestone slab 55 × 36 cm in size. The bilingual text comprises seven lines in Persian, written in undotted Kufic script, and three (or four?) lines in Sanskrit, inscribed in Śāradā script (Fig. 1). In the above-mentioned articles, Professor Abdur Rahman has read the inscription's Persian text, translated it to English, and made useful commentaries on its date and content.<sup>3</sup> His

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Abdur Rahman 1993; 1997; 1998; 2002; 2017-2021.

<sup>2</sup> Abdur Rahman 1998: 469.

<sup>3</sup> The reading and translation of Abdur Rahman is as follows:

ن بود.

“With the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful / There is no god but Allāh, Muḥammad is the Prophet of Allāh / This tomb was founded by the grand *amīr*, the governor of Tūs / Arsalān al-Jādhīb, may Allāh prolong his life. It was completed by / The *sipahbāk* (i.e. commander) Khalīlbak, son of the *Kotwāl* Aḥmad al-Baḡhr / May Allāh perpetuate his fortune, in the month of Dhū al-Qa'ada / The current (*marr*) year was 401” (Abdur Rahman 1998: 469-470).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. Allegranzi 2015: 34; Khaw 2016: 142-143.