



Vakil Caravanserai: Amazing historical structure in Kerman

Iranica Desk

Vakil Caravanserai is an amazing ancient structure located on Shariati Street in Kerman, the capital city of the southeastern province of Kerman. With more than 120 rooms, the monument is among the largest caravanserais of the country. The two-story building was built by the order of Mohammad Ismail Khan, the governor of Kerman from 1898 to 1908, chn. ir reported. The historical monument

is in the vicinity of the important historical center of the city including Ganjali Khan bathhouse and caravanserai, Coin Museum, Kerman Bazaar, as well as Vakil Bazaar and mosque. The caravanserai has two entrance doors to Vakil Bazaar, both of which are decorated with beautiful plasterwork and tiling. Eighty-one chambers have been constructed on the ground floor, and thirty-nine on the upper floor. The caravanserai has a windcatcher, having a

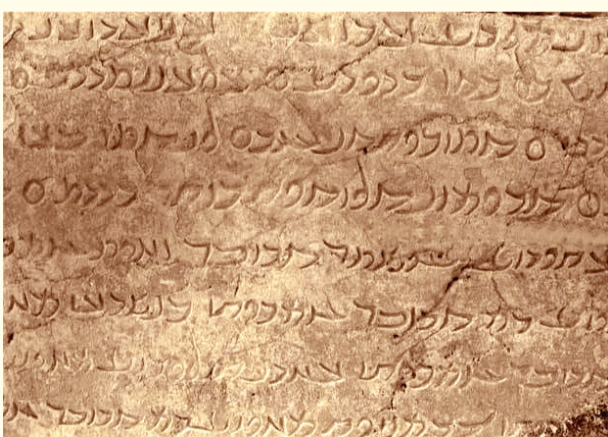
special beauty, and a clock tower which is of great historical importance. A renovation project is being implemented in the caravanserai, which was previously served as a commercial center, to turn it into a hotel. Regarding the geographical location of the monument, the move is expected to lead to the prosperity of the tourism sector in the region and help attract a large number of Iranian and foreign tourists to the province. During the implementa-

tion of the project, efforts are being made to use the full capacity of the caravanserai in the best possible manner and make the monument an accommodation center making revenues for the city. Several sections are scheduled to be established in caravanserai to introduce various handicrafts and souvenirs of the city including kilim-weaving, *pateh-douzi* (a type of embroidery), mat-weaving and precious stone-cutting. A typical caravanserai con-

sists of a square or rectangular plan centered around a courtyard with entrances and arrangements for defense if necessary. Whether fortified or not, it at least provided security against beasts of prey and attacks by brigands. Iran's earliest caravanserais were built during the Achaemenid Era (550-330 BCE). Centuries later, when Shah Abbas I assumed power from 1588-1629, he ordered the construction of a network caravanserais across the country. For

many travelers to Iran, staying in or even visiting a centuries-old caravanserai, can be an interesting experience; they have an opportunity to feel the past, a time to travel back into a forgotten age. Big and sprawling Kerman Province is something of a cultural melting pot, blending various regional cultures over time. It is also home to rich tourist spots and historical sites including bazaars, mosques, caravanserais, and ruins of ancient urban areas.

Secretaries, Poets and the Literary Language



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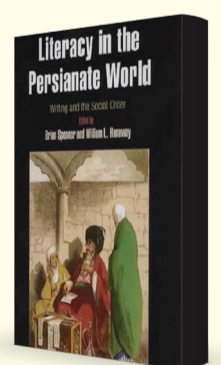
The formal, written, courtly language of the Persian-using courts, at least up to the 13th or early 14th century, was created and developed as result of the dynamic interaction of the work of the secretaries and the poets, with an increasingly important contribution from the lexicographers. Poets and secretaries interacted with each other

in their work and in their social life, and with other *adibs* (cultivated men of letters) in the intellectual and artistic circles of the courts. Many secretaries wrote *divans* of poetry in Persian and Arabic in addition to their official prose. Poets, on the other hand, knew the epistolary terminology and style and wrote letters in verse, even saying that they were letters. In their ease with, and mastery of, the written language, poets and secretaries borrowed devices of language and meaning freely from each other or from the common pool. They also shared a literary form, the tripartite structure of many *qasidas*. The early Persian courts provided the setting or the matrix from which emerged a written language that became standard throughout the Persianate world, which

later included the Ottoman court, many Central Asian courts, and the Mughal courts of the Indian subcontinent. Many aspects of formal written Persian and its history need to be isolated and examined before we can begin to see more clearly the reasons and implications of its stability and seeming resistance to change over a millennium. The main source of written Persian from the 7th to the early 10th century CE, the period from which the earliest written texts survive, was the courts of sovereigns and provincial officials where the work of governing was carried out, and particularly the chancelleries of these courts, where there was the greatest concentration of educated, literate men and the greatest need for a standard written language.

Broadly speaking, the courts remained the main source of written Persian at least until the end of the Seljuk Period (1038-1194 CE), when Sufi establishments and the schools called *Nezamiyeh* began to play a more significant role in the production and standardization of written Persian. The courts of the Persianate world, from the Sassanid Period onward, were the milieu of the *ahl-e qalam* (men of the pen), or the literati. The literati comprised all those who used written, formal Persian in the course of their professional work and, in many cases, in their leisure-time activities as well. They would have been the viziers, other administrators and bureaucrats, secretaries and scribes, poets, accountants, historians and chroniclers, jurists, lexicographers,

other scholars and *adibs*. The core of the literati were the secretaries — the *munshis*, dabirs, or *katibs* — for it was they who were most instrumental in the transition in the use of Pahlavi in the pre-Islamic courts to the use of Arabic and then New Persian in the Islamic courts. They were also the transmitters of the bureaucratic and administrative skills and traditions from the Zoroastrian regime of the Sassanid's to the regimes of the Muslim rulers. *Munshi* retained its basic meaning of "secretary" throughout the Persianate world until at least the 18th century, occasionally being used to mean "author," as it was by the Ilkhanid-period ruler Muhammad Zangi Bukhari. In Persian-using South Asia, the meaning of *munshi* began to evolve during the 18th century



and gradually assumed the sense of "translator" or "language teacher" in addition to its more traditional sense of "secretary." In Ottoman lands, the function of translator came to be filled not by the *munshi* but by the dragoman. From among the literati, the two groups at court most involved with the written language were the secretaries and the poets.

The above is a lightly edited version of a part of a chapter entitled, "Secretaries, Poets, and the Literary Language", from a book entitled, 'Literacy in the Persianate World', edited by Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway, published by University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia.