James Hurley
Book Dealer, Out-of-Print and Rare Books on South and Central Asia

James Hurley got a late start at becoming an Asianist. Following his graduation from Columbia University, he served almost five years in the United States Foreign Service at the Consulate General in Lahore, Pakistan. There he began buying the books that formed the foundation of his five thousand item collection specializing in South and Central Asia. He would especially like to find a college or university for which his collection of books on Kashmir might be an appropriate focal point for Asian Studies. At the invitation of the Editor, Hurley relates his bibliographical story.

In his book, A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books (Henry Holt, 1995), Nicholas A. Basbanes describes the inclination to collect books and documents as a sort of madness. Nevertheless, he points out, bibliomania is also the passion that has built some great collections and through these collections, great libraries.

My own propensity to collect was fueled by my experience as a Vice Consul at the United States Consulate General in Lahore, Pakistan. At Columbia University, I had not studied South Asia, but I learned Urdu on the job and began a life-long interest in South and Central Asia. I traveled extensively around the large consular district that then covered the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province and visited Amritsar, Delhi, Kabul, Agra, and Srinagar. I met Pakistani officials in the course of business and middle and upper class Pakistanis at parties and receptions. I visited the Old City, the villages, and the countryside.

Lahore Publishing Houses

As I learned more about the area’s history and culture, I located relevant resources. Ashraf and Ferozsons, prolific Lahore firms, published current scholarship. There were also scattered titles left over from pre-Partition days from presses like Lion, Dewan’s, and Hero, once owned by Hindus and Sikhs.

Beyond these, few second hand shops or bookstores specialized in used, scarce, or out-of-print books in European languages. I moved farther afield, to India’s Susil Gupta, Granthaloka, and Mukhopadhyay presses. Although these houses did have some older titles, the pricing was uneven. I corresponded with American dealers like William H. Allen of Philadelphia, Paragon and Orientalia of New York City, and Cellar Bookshop in the Midwest.

The big break came with the English book dealers when Heffers, Blackwell's, and Arthur Probstain began pouring the detritus of returned “India hands” into the Consulate mailroom. Supplemented by a few Continental sources, I was inundated with small packages bearing the relics of long gone presses on a variety of subjects connected with the sub-continent.

I found a local trove of these relics in the warehouse of the Punjab Government Press. It was still functioning, but my interest was in the products of its Raj period, the gazetteers, settlement reports, handbooks, memoirs, and scholarly studies of the Indian Civil Service officials and academics. I wandered among the shelves of the warehouse revealing in the titles with imprints into the last century. Although at this time I bought only single copies, I began to consider acquiring multiple copies for possible re-sale.

In the 1950s and 1960s, materials were plentiful on the areas of my interests: the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Afghanistan, Kashmir, the Karakoram-Himalayan chain, pre-Partition British India, the Independence movement, and the establishment of India and Pakistan. I extended my geographic reaches to the adjacent territories of Sind, Baluchistan, Persia (Iran), Central Asia, and Tibet. In addition to perusing and ordering from catalogues, I prepared “want” lists of special items to send to my growing coterie of dealers.

SIR AUREL STEIN AND M.N. ROY

Gradually I honed my primary interests to Baltistan in Kashmir, the North-West Frontier Province and its Tribal Areas, and the life and work of scholar-explorer, Sir Aurel Stein. Secondary interests included Islamic groups of the Punjab such as the Ahmadiyas and the rising Jamaat-i-Islami, the life and work of M. N. Roy, and Lahore and its history, especially that of the Old City.

My annual trek was to Baltistan in Kashmir, a remote part of the “Northern Areas” of the former Kashmir State administered by Pakistan, with the United Nations cease fire line running through it. Baltistan, once known as “Little Tibet,” encompassed K2
and the Karakoram range with some of the world's highest mountains. A popular spot with international mountaineers, it was then accessible only by a limited DC3 service out of Rawalpindi. The spectacular flight, always early in the morning to avoid the clouds, followed the Indus River valley, flying close to massive Nanga Parbat before skimming a butte and settling down on a baked mud field near Skardu, at an elevation of 6000 feet.

The Kesar Saga

In most of Baltistan's six major valleys, the remnants of the Muslim ruling families, headed by rajas, carried on in a limited feudal way. I became acquainted with the Raja of Khapalu, who in 1960, arranged for a scribe to take down a local version of the Kesar Saga, the legend that runs across eastern Asia from Mongolia to the Karakorams. The scribe's Tibetan version is written in Arabic characters, not a lingua franca. (Recently Klaus Sagaster, Central Asian Institute, Bonn University, has taken an interest in the version and is enlisting the help of a mutual friend, Muhammad Iqbal, formerly with the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs, in translating the copy of the Kesar Saga that I have.)

The Nur Bakshiya sect in Baltistan also interested me. Reputed to have come from Persia in the fifteenth century, it seems to be a variant of the Shi'a sect, though it has also been considered as an attempt at a middle ground between the Sunni and Shi'a schools.

In addition to Baltistan, I was intrigued with the life and career of Aurel Stein (1862-1943), the Hungarian archaeological-explorer, in the service of the British Indian Government, who opened up many sites along the Silk Route in Central Asia. I left Lahore with one hundred titles by or about Stein, including original editions of his early scholarly works on Kashmir and his expedition reports. I spoke with a number of people who had worked with him or known him personally, and was encouraged to write his biography, a project still in the dream stage, despite many notes.

At the end of my tour in Lahore, I had gathered about five thousand books on South and Central Asia. Within the general group, there were three distinct sub-collections. These included about 700 items on the North-West Frontier Province and Afghanistan; 500 or so on Kashmir, including Baltistan and the Kesar legend, and a smaller number on Aurel Stein. There were also sizeable groups of materials on Chinese and Russian Central Asia, Tibet, the Punjab, mountaineering, Eric Shipton, M. N. Roy, S.C. Bose, E. Dennison Ross, Mohammad Iqbal, Owen Lattimore, and Sven Hedin.

Before leaving Pakistan, I joined a British-Australian mountaineering-mapping expedition to Baltistan. Following that, on my way home, I took a circuitous route through Western Asia and Europe, meeting scholars and explorers connected with my interests. After resigning from the government, I studied for three years at the Near and Middle Eastern Department of the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

Upon my return to New York, I had a large part in establishing The Society for the Preservation of Weeksville and Bedford-Stuyvesant History, directed the Long Island Historical Society, and was a New York City archivist. Now in retirement, I am locating repositories for my three special collections (Afghanistan/North-West Frontier Province, Kashmir, and Aurel Stein) and have become a book dealer.

Afghanistan Studies Center, University of Nebraska

Three hundred items of the Afghanistan and North-West Frontier Province collection have been acquired through the Afghanistan Studies Center at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, for the Arthur Paul Collection in the University Library, the most extensive holding on Afghanistan in the United States. Several items filled gaps in the holdings of the world's largest Afghanistan library, the Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica in Liezal, Switzerland.

Kashmir collection

There are five hundred items in the Kashmir collection, including nineteenth century maps, classics of early exploration and mountaineering, and materials on the history of ancient and modern Kashmir, its languages, peoples, and folklore, ranging in dates from about 1815 to 1970. I have always hoped that this collection might someday be the basis of a Kashmir Studies program or a part of a start-up South Asian Studies program.

My career as a dealer in Asia-oriented books brings me back to where I started at the United States Consulate in Lahore where I combined my study of South Asia with an interest in collecting books. Although there are only a few firms in the United States specializing in out-of-print books on Asia and a similar number for new releases and imports, the field is growing.

Cataloguing, identifying a target market, and trying to reach that market are the challenges of a rare book dealer. Access to good bibliographic resources is paramount. For my purposes, Yoshimi Yakushi's Catalogue of Himalayan Literature (Tokyo: Hakushuisha, 1994) is excellent, backed up by J. M. Mahar's perspicacious, India, A Critical Bibliography
(Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1964), and Maureen Patterson's wide ranging and comprehensive *South Asian Civilizations, A Bibliographic Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Other resources have been those of the Butler Library at Columbia University, the University of Chicago's South Asia collection of 400,000 items, and the online resources of OCLC, RLIN, the Library of Congress, and the British Library. I have appreciated the assistance of the Asia Society.

**On-line databases**

On-line antiquarian book databases and search engines, such as Advanced Book Exchange (abebooks.com), Alibris.com, Antiqubooks.com, Bibliocity.com, Bibliofind.com, and Bookfinder.com, are not only useful for bibliographic purposes, but are changing the entire nature of the book market. Some of them are augmented by active "mailing lists" where dealers and book lovers of all sorts, world-wide, trade information and opinions with "postings" on every sort of book point, from the minutia of rare book description to issues as large as freedom of speech.

In addition to learning about marketing, I now am studying the long and complex history of the book, bibliographic points such as those of folio pagination of hand printed books, and the lives of great bookmen and women.

My lifelong connection with books is summarized by the words on the façade of my hometown library, the Brooklyn (New York) Public Library, "Here are enshrined the longing of great hearts and noble things that tower above the tide; the magic word that winged wonder starts; the garnered wisdom that has never died."

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**RESOURCES**

**Indiana University East Asian Study Center**

On-line resource available for teaching about Korean history and culture, containing photos with descriptive text and short essays on various areas of culture and society that you can read or listen to. The URL is: http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/korean/menu.htm

**Contact:** Jason Lewis, Indiana University East West Center, <jalewis@indiana.edu>

**Persimmon: Asian Literature, Arts, and Culture**

*Persimmon* is a new quarterly published by Contemporary Asian Culture, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation, whose mission is to bring to English-speaking, well-informed, general readers insights into Asia not readily available elsewhere. The focus of *Persimmon* is contemporary culture in East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. It will steer away from political or economic topics, except as they relate to social or cultural concerns.

Each issue will include a selection of the very best of Asian literature in translation (short stories, excerpts from novels, excerpts from memoirs, and poetry); interviews with prominent Asian writers, artists, and film directors; letters from correspondents in Asia, or from those recently returned, in the tradition of the "Letters From" columns in *The New Yorker*; feature articles; and reviews of Asian films, exhibitions of Asian art, and books from or about Asia.

The first issue will be published in October 1999; subsequent issues will appear in February, May, August, and November. The annual subscription rate is $24.

*Persimmon* is seeking submissions in all categories listed above and is eager to establish working relationships with correspondents and contributors here and in Asia. Please send proposals or suggestions for articles (in a short descriptive letter or e-mail).

**Contact:** Caroline Herrick, Editor, 46 East 92nd Street, #7, New York, NY 10128; Tel.: 212/831-4751; <persimmon.mag@worldnet.att.net>

**US-Indochina Reconciliation Project**

The publication, *Indochina Interchange*, focuses on Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Its new address follows.

**Contact:** US-Indochina Reconciliation Project, Fund for Reconciliation and Development, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 727, New York, NY 10115-0122; Tel.: 212/367-4220; Fax: 212/367-4366; usindo@igc.org; http://www.usirp.org