Persian loanwords in English

ALAN S. KAYE

A survey of terms inherited from Persian, often through intermediate languages

ENGLISH may be considered a typical case of a European language indebted to Persian, often through the intermediary of another language, a point with which this survey seeks to deal. A comprehensive list of such loanwords, direct and indirect, can be found in Cannon and Kaye (2001), to which the reader is referred for the full list of the 811 items, including their etyma. One hundred and thirty three of these are distant loans, as with the word *azure* ('a light purplish blue'), which comes into English through Old French, probably through Old Spanish azur ~ azul, which comes in turn from Arabic lāzaward ~ lāzuward, and ultimately from Persian lājuvard ('azure; cobalt blue'). The following thematically-organized article provides a general review of the field.

An Arabic and Persian legacy in India

The coming of the Moguls into India accounts for the influence of Arabic and Persian vocabulary in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the arena of Islamic religion and culture. As the Moguls introduced Persian and Arabic words into Hindustani, the English source may often be Urdu rather than Hindi *per se*. A word such as *amildar* ('an Indian agent or revenue collector') derives from Hindi, Urdu, and Persian ᶜamaldār ~ ᶜamildār, which is a compound of Arabic ᶜamal ('work') + Persian -dār ('have'). In fact, Arabic, Persian, and Islam are closely linked in many parts of the world.

The loanwords which will now be presented are in such semantic spheres as botany, chemistry, agriculture, commerce, ethnology, linguistics, music, rugs, food and drink, and religion. Some words that were originally Arabic penetrated into Indian varieties of English, and from there into other dialects. An example of this can be found in the realm of agriculture:

amani ('Indian governmental estates not leased') < Hindi amānī ('security') < Persian amānī ('based on trusteeship') < Persian (and ultimately Arabic) ʾamān ('security').

Two further agricultural terms which have penetrated English are zamindar ~ zemindar < Hindi zamīndār ('a landed proprietor or landlord') < Persian zamīn ('land') + -dār ('holder'). The next word to be presented is a derivative of the former citation with the addition of -ī (abstract noun suffix) giving zamīndārī ('the system of zamindar's landholding and revenue collection'). The *a* ~ *e* alternation in English has to do with the possible transcription of Persian fathe (short *a*) heard as a higher vowel (which also occurs in several Arabic dialects).

Loanwords in botany

azadirachta ('the East Indian margosa 'tree') < Persian āzād daraxt ('azedarach')
gul ('rose; flower') < Persian gul ('rose')
gulmohar ('the royal poinciana') < Hindi gulmohur < Persian gulmuhr ('rose seal')
jasmine ('a tall Asiatic fragrant shrub') < French jasmine < Arabic yāsmīn < Persian yāsmīn
lemon ('an acidic fruit' < Middle French limon < Middle Latin < Arabic laymūn and Persian līmūn)

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musk ('an odoriferous substance secreted by the musk deer') < Middle French musc < Late Latin muscus < Modern Persian mušk (now mišk) < Middle Persian mušk

nargil ('the Indian coconut') < Persian nārgīl ('coconut'), now pronounced nārjīl

sandal ('an ointment made from powdered sandalwood') < Middle Latin sandalum < Low Greek sandalon via Persian čandal ('mangrove')

spinach ('a potherd native to Asia cultivated for its edible leaves') < Middle French espinache ~ espinage < Old Spanish espinaca < Arabic 'isfānāx < Persian 'ispanāj

tulip ('a plant of the lily family introduced into Europe from Turkey with flowers in the shape of a turban') < Neo-Latin tulipa and possibly French tulipan ~ tulipe < Ottoman Turkish tülbent < Persian dulband ('turban')

turban ('a headress of Muslim origin consisting of a cap and a long piece of cloth around the cap') < Middle French turbant < Italian turbante < Ottoman Turkish tülbent < Persian dulband ('turban')

Loanwords in zoology

afghan ('a blanket/shawl of colored wool') < Persian and Pashto 'afγān ('a blanket/shawl of colored wool')

bulbul ('a songbird') < Persian (and Arabic) bulbul ('nightingale')

jackal ('jackal') < Turkish čakāl (< Persian šaγāl) and Persian šaγāl ('jackal')

Loanwords in chemistry

borax ('the best-known sodium borate') < Middle French, influenced by Middle Latin bōrāx < Arabic būraq < Persian būra ('sodium borate')

bronze ('a brown alloy of copper and tin') < French < Italian bronzo, probably < Persian birinj ('brass') < Middle Persian brinj

lake ('a purplish red pigment obtained from lac dye') < French laque < Old Provençal laca < Arabic lakk < Persian lak ('a purplish red pigment obtained from lac dye')

sugar ('a sweet sucrose substance') < Middle French sucre < Middle Latin succarum < Arabic sukkar < Persian (older form) šakar (modern šekar)

Loanwords in geography and geology

[Since most such words are proper nouns, their etymologies will not be given here (but see Cannon & Kaye (2001)). They include *Afghan, Baluchistan, Farsi, Hindi, Hindu, Hindustani, Iran, Ispahani, Kabuli, Kurdistan, Punjabi, Tehrani*.]

Two remarkable doublets (distinct words with the same ultimate source) are:

jargon, jargoon ('a colorless, pale yellow, or smoky variety of zircon') < French jargon < Italian giargone < Arabic zarqūn ('bright red') < Persian zargūn ('gold-colored') < zar ('gold')

zircon ('a tetragonal mineral') < German < French jargon < Italian giargone < Arabic zarqūn ('bright red') < Persian zargūn ('gold-colored') < zar ('gold')

Loanwords in commerce

bazaar ('an Oriental market') < Persian bāzār ('market')

caravan ('a company of merchants, travelers, or pilgrims in the Middle East or North Africa, banded together for security') < French caravane and possibly Italian carovana, both < Persian kārvān

caravansary < French caravanserai < Persian kārvānsarāy ('an Eastern inn with a large courtyard where caravans stop')

check ('a call at chess where the opponent's king is threatened', with many additional meanings) < Old French eschec < Arabic šāh ('check at chess') < Persian šāh ('king')

dewan ('an Indian official, such as the chief treasury officer, finance minister, or even the prime minister of an Indian state') < Hindi dīwān < Persian dīvān ('an account book')

Kashan ('a kind of Persian carpet') < Persian kāšān ('the name of a town and province in central Iran, known for high-quality carpets')

khan ('a caravansary or rest house in Turkey, Iran, or other Asian country') < Arabic xān ('an inn') < Persian xān ('a house')

kiosk ('an open summerhouse or pavilion in Turkey, Iran, and the West') < Turkish köšk ('pavilion') < Persian kūšk ('portico, kiosk, banqueting house') < Middle Persian kōšk ('palace, kiosk')

Qajar ('an ancient northern Persian people who furnished a dynasty of rulers in Persia from 1794–1925') < Persian qājār < Turkish kāčar

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Loanwords in ethnology

[For proper nouns in this area, see Cannon & Kaye (2001)]

roumi ('a European, i.e., a non-Muslim') < Persian rūmī ('Roman')

sidi ('the honorary title of an African Muslim holding a high position under an Indian Deccan king') < Urdu sayyidī < Persian sayyidī ('my lord'), ultimately < Arabic sayyidī ('my lord')

A loanword in law

firman ('an official edict or order, once issued by an Oriental sovereign, especially the Sultan of Turkey') < Turkish ferman 'command' < Persian farmān ('command') < Middle Persian framān ('command')

Loanwords in linguistics

izafat ('a grammatical relationship, as between two nouns and especially between a noun headword and its modifier, notably in Persian, as with the '*-e*' in *qalb-e man*, literally 'heart of mine': that is, 'my heart') < Persian 'izāfat (Modern Persian ʾezāfé) < Arabic 'iḍāfa ('construct state')

nastalik ('a decorative Persian script used especially for Persian poetry and Urdu and Malay manuscripts') < Persian nasta'līq ('a type of decorative Persian handwriting') < a shortening of Arabic nasxī taᶜlīq ('Naskhi cursive [suspended] script')

shikasta ('a very cursive Persian script, the term literally meaning "broken"') < Persian šikasta (Modern Persian šekasté) 'broken'

Politics and government

[For a range of proper nouns, see Cannon & Kaye (2001)]

amir ('an emir', this term itself a closely related borrowing) < probably from Persian, Arabic, and/or Urdu 'amīr, ultimately < Arabic 'amīr ('emir')

kadkhoda ('the headman of a Persian village') < Persian kadxodā (literally, 'house master') < Middle Persian kādag xwadāy ('master of the house')

komiteh ('a special Iranian political committee') < Persian komité probably < English committee, denoting especially the revolutionary committee formed after the Shah was deposed in 1979

mehmandar ('an official in India who is appointed to escort an ambassador or other important traveler') < Persian mehmāndār ('holder of a guest')

mirza ('a title of honor commonly prefixed to the surname of a prince') < Persian 'amīr (with aphaeresis of the first syllable) + Persian zā < zāda ('born; son'), Modern Persian zādé)

shah ('king', especially of Iran) < Persian šāh ('king')

shahzada ('the son of a shah') < Hindi šāhzāda < Persian šāhzāda (same meanings)

Literature

diwan ('a collection of poems, especially in Arabic or Persian') < French divan and Italian divano < Turkish dīvān < Arabic dīwān < Persian dīvān

ghazal ('a lyric poem') < Persian (and Arabic) ɣazal ('a love poem')

qasida ('a laudatory or satiric poem') < Persian (and Arabic) qaṣīda ('a long laudatory poem')

rubaiyat ('a collection of poems by Omar Khayyam') < Persian (< Arabic) rubā'iyyāt ('quatrains in Arabic and Persian poetry')

saki ('a cupbearer') < Persian (< Arabic) sāqī ('one who gives [someone something] to drink')

Scheherazade ('the fictional wife of an Indian sultan who tells him interesting stories nightly') < German < Arabic šahrāzād < Persian šīrāzād < Middle Persian čehr āzād

Music

nay ('a flute') < Arabic nāy < Persian nāy < Middle Persian nāy ('a flute')

santir ~ santour ~ santoor ('a Persian or Arabic dulcimer, played with two curved sticks') < Arabic santīr and Turkish santūr < Persian santūr ('spinnet, harpsichord')

shahnai ('a wind instrument of the oboe class') < Urdu šāhnāy < Persian šāhnāy ('a large [king-size] flute')

sitar ('a long-necked, lute-like Indian instrument with a varying number of strings') < Hindi & Persian sitar ('a guitar')

tambour ('a drum') < French tambour < Persian and Arabic ṭambūr

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Rugs

[Proper nouns may be found in Cannon & Kaye (2001)]

kilim ('a rug woven in Turkey') < Turkish kilim ('rug') < Persian kilim ('a coarse woven blanket or rug')

sitringee ('a carpet of checkered or striped cotton') < Urdu šaṭranjī < Persian šaṭranjī < šaṭranj ('chess[board])' < Middle Persian čatrang ('chess[board])'

Cloth and clothing

[Cannon and Kaye (2001) lists 68 words]

burka 'a loose enveloping garment with veiled eyeholes, worn in public by Muslim women' < Hindi and Urdu burqa < Persian and Arabic burquᶜ) (same meaning)

chadar ~ *chador* ('a large veil, usually black, worn primarily by Muslim women as a long shawl or cloak') < Hindi and Urdu čādar ~ čaddar < Persian čādar ('tent, veil')

cummerbund ('a broad waist sash or girdle') < Hindi and Urdu kambarband ('loin or waist; soldier's belt') < Persian kambarband (same meaning)

khaki ('a stout cotton twill') < Hindi and Urdu xākī ('dusty') < Persian xāk ('[the color of] dust, earth') + -ī ('nisba suffix')

pagoda ('a Hindu or Buddhist temple or sacred building in Asia') < Portuguese pagode (same meaning) probably < Persian butkada ('idol temple')

pajamas, pyjamas ('loose drawers or trousers once much worn by both sexes in India, and for sleeping in the West and elsewhere') < Hindi pāyjāma < Persian pā(y) ('foot') + jāma ('garment') + English plural -s

purdah ('a screen, curtain, or veil especially to screen women from the sight of men strangers, in a practice initiated by the Muslims and adopted by many Hindus in India') < Hindi and Urdu parda ('screen, veil') < Persian parda ('a curtain for a doorway')

scarlet ('a rich cloth, often bright red') < Old French escarlate < Middle Latin scarlata, probably < Persian sāqirlāt ('a rich cloth')

shawl ('a simple Oriental garment or wrapper usually made of a long piece of fabric such as wool') < Urdu šāl (same meaning) and < Persian šāl ('same meaning')

Food and drink

biryani ('an Indian spicy meat-dish cooked with rice') < Hindi and Urdu biryāni (same meaning) < Persian biryān ('to fry or roast') + -ī ('nisba suffix')

bulgur ~ *burghul* ('a cereal food prepared from parched cracked wheat and eaten as a staple in Turkey and nearby areas') < Ottoman Turkish bulγūr ('boiled and pounded wheat') < Arabic buryul ~ buryūl , possibly < Persian burgūl ('cracked wheat, grits')

kabob ~ *kebab* ('cubes of lamb, beef, etc. usually cooked with vegetables on a skewer') < Arabic and Persian kabāb (same meaning)

kofta ('a meat or fish rissole, popular in the East') < Hindi and Urdu kufta ('a pounded meat') < Persian kūfta ('rissole')

lime ('the small, globose fruit of the lime tree') < French lime ('lime') < Spanish lima ('lime') < Arabic līm(a) ('citrus fruit') < Persian līmūn ('any of various trees and shrubs bearing similar citrus fruit')

nan ('a flat, round bread, usually cooked in a clay oven in India, Afghanistan, etc.') < Urdu nān 'bread' < Persian nān ('bread')

sabzi ('a green vegetable used in Persian cuisine') < Hindi sabzī ('greenness') < Persian sabz ('green') + -ī (abstract suffix)

tandoori ('of or pertaining to food cooked in a tandoor or clay oven') < Hindi tandūr ('a clay oven') < Persian tanūr ('a clay oven')

Money

afghani ('the principal monetary unit of Afghanistan') < Persian and Pashto ʔafγānī 'Afghan' with -ī ('nisba suffix')

baksheesh ('a gift of money, tip, or bribe') < Arabic baxšiš ('a gift of money, tip, or bribe') < Persian bakšīdan ('to give') < Middle Persian baxšišn ('present')

dinar ('the name for various Arab coins; a Persian monetary unit') < Arabic and Persian dīnār ('a unit of money')

pahlavi ~ *pahlevi* ('a former gold coin of Iran') < Persian pahlavī ('belonging or referring to Reza Shah Pahlavi, 1878–1944')

rial ('the basic monetary unit of Iran and various Arab countries') < Persian and Arabic riyāl

toman ('a Persian monetary unit') < Persian tōmān ~ tūmān

Religion

[Cannon & Kaye (2001) lists 76 items borrowed in the field of religion. Discounting the proper names, the following are the most significant]

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calender ('a Sufi order of wandering derveshes') < qalandar, the Arabicized form of Persian kalandar, lit. 'uncouth man')
dervish ('a member of a Muslim fraternity of monks characterized by their vows of poverty') < Turkish dervish (same meaning) < Persian darvīš (same meaning)
kismet ('destiny or fate') < Turkish kismet (same meaning) < Persian qismat (same meaning)
Mussulman ('a Muslim') < Persian musulmān ■

Reference

Garland Cannon & Alan S. Kaye. 2001. *The Persian Contributions to the English Language*. Germany: Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

FROM THE INTERNET

[The following text is representative of electronic press releases relating to electronic issues. It is reproduced here without adaptation or further comment, but readers' comments would be welcomed. Ed.]

Subj: money trade alert

Date: 06/05/2004 02:35:30 GMT Daylight Time. From: mariahfisher_fv@pacbell.net

GlobeTel Communications Corp.
(OTCBB:GTEL)
Current price: $0.11
Short term: $0.17
Long term: $0.50-0.70

GlobeTel Signs Agreement to Deploy Sanswire Technology in Australia

Wednesday May 5, GlobeTel Communications Corp. (OTCBB:GTEL) today announced it has entered into an agreement to deploy the world's first high altitude Stratellite platform for wireless voice, data and digital broadcast services in Australia.

GlobeTel, through its subsidiary, Sanswire Networks, has entered into a binding heads of agreement with an Australian consortium that will provide funding to deploy the world's first "Stratellites" in Australia. The jointly owned company will operate the Stratellite network in Australia and New Zealand.

Mr. Tim Huff, CEO of GlobeTel Communications stated that: "This agreement is a strong indication of the worldwide interest in the Stratellite technology, and independently validates the proposition that this technology, successfully deployed will be a paradigm event in the history of telecommunication. The Australian press has already picked up on the importance of this partnership and we feel that this technology will change the landscape of the telecommunications market."

A Stratellite is similar to a satellite, but is stationed in the stratosphere rather than in orbit. At an altitude of only 13 miles, each Stratellite will have clear line-of-site communications capability to an entire major metropolitan area as well as being able to provide coverage across major rural areas. The Stratellite will allow subscribers to easily communicate in "both directions" using readily available wireless devices. In addition to voice and data, proposed telecommunications uses include cellular, 3G/4G mobile, MMDS, paging, fixed wireless telephony, HDTV and others.

GlobeTel is an IP solutions/applications based company. Although international carrier termination business is the base and the beginning of the Company's services, GlobeTel's goal is to provide strategic advantages to commodity telecommunications based products. Taking such products as voice termination, prepaid calling cards, store valued debit cards and IP adapters and giving these products and services unique market advantages through the deployment of unique software and IP platforms. In each of these cases, GlobeTel has developed unique approaches that give the Company market advantages worldwide.

Chart in the best position for huge runup. Don't miss this one folks. Check other news from the past few weeks on this baby!

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