



Detail of Shawl, wool embroidered with woolen thread, Kashmir (India), third quarter of the 19th century. [Victoria and Albert Museum, IS.31-1970]

WORK IN PROGRESS

Crafting Kashmir: Painting & Stitching Place in the Nineteenth Century

Fatima Quraishi, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Art History

The verdant Kashmir Valley, a place of unearthly beauty, has long been a subject of praise and description. The history and geography of Kashmir appeared in multiple literary genres, including Sanskrit sources which claimed the valley to be a sacred landscape and Persian courtly literature which characterised Kashmir as being *jannat nazir* (paradise like). Recent scholarship has highlighted the connections between Mughal literary imaginings, political discourse, and the construction of gardens in Kashmir, interpreting these landscaped spaces as a means to claim sovereignty over the land. In the nineteenth century, the region was again the subject of an imperial discourse, that of the British empire, a discourse shaped by a particular interest in the production of Kashmiri shawls, a highly sought after commodity in Victorian England. Among the shawls were a small set of embroidered 'map' shawls which depicted the city of Srinagar and its significant landmarks, both natural and manmade, one of which was sent as a gift to Queen Victoria. Large-scale painted cotton maps of the entire valley were also produced in the mid-nineteenth century, often employing the same visual conventions as the shawls. This paper explores the image-making practices which underlay the production of these textiles, departing from existing scholarship which has emphasized their imbrication within the colonial enterprise. I instead approach their resistance of the colonial gaze and highlight how the craftsmen creating them were informed by a distinctly South Asian, perhaps even Kashmiri, sense of place.

Wednesday, April 9, 2025 at 5:30pm in ARTS 333