

## AIPS PROPOSAL SUMMER 2014 GRANT

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### ***Background***

The Khōjā are an Indic peoples whose diverse origins lay in Kashmir and Punjab from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries. This unique amalgamation of peoples emerged as a ‘Muslim’ caste during the religious transformation of western India in its encounter with Islam, similar processes by which Sikhism emerged. Over the centuries they began a great migration down the Indus river valley into Sindh and eastward into Kathiawar, until some communities finally reached the entrepôt of Bombay at the turn of nineteenth century. This process of migration facilitated a socio-economic transition of the caste from an agrarian society to urban mercantilism and created a cohesive Hindu-Islamic religious tradition of the caste, known as *khōjāpanth*. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seafaring Khōjā merchants created robust transnational trading networks the breadth of the western Indian Ocean, as far as Burma in the east, Madagascar and Zanzibar to the south. Contact with the Aga Khan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century later transformed the community into an identifiably ‘modern’ Islamic community.

### ***Significance***

The Khōjā manuscripts and the content of the later printed books at the National Archives in Islamabad are significant for three primary reasons. First, they predate the official British colonial categorization of religious communities and imposition of modern sectarian identities in this region. Thus it preserves medieval religious texts which chart the religious interspace of Khōjā Hindu-Islam. They provide a textual basis for systematic study of ‘conversion’ in the western Subcontinent, hitherto understudied. Second, they chart the terms on which Near Eastern Islam was negotiated. These manuscripts contain books which are based on the Near Eastern Islamic texts but reimagined for the Indic context allowing a vernacular expression of ‘Islamic’ themes. Third, the language of these manuscripts flows through dialects of Hindustani, Sindhi, and Gujarati. This allows for linguistic mapping of the entry of Persian and Arabic terms and ideas into these languages and how it shifted their language and the Ismā‘īlī Khōjā script by introducing new phonemes and characters to meet this expansion. Apart from inaugurating a new field of study into the process of theological and cosmological transition from Hinduism to Islam in the Perso-Indian corridor, preservation of these manuscripts could have contemporary significance in philosophically conceptualizing contemporary challenges to religious pluralism in the region through its history of religious transformation.

### ***Project***

The proposed summer travel would be to Islamabad to consult the Khōjā manuscripts at the Pakistani National Archives and create a catalogue of their contents. Research permission has already been obtained and there is preliminary interest by Brill in one of these manuscripts for publication.