Project Title: Crafting a Pakistani ‘Regional Culture’: Urdu and Sindhi Cultural Histories in Lok Virsa, 1947-1980

Abstract:
Immediately after its independence in 1947, Pakistan witnessed the massive expansion of Urdu publishing in Sindh, the result of the migration of muhajirs and the establishment of Karachi as the first capital of Pakistan. Yet, the narration of Sindh’s history in post-1947 Urdu publications has received little attention. In this project I will interrogate the place of Sindh’s textual heritage and cultural history in elite debates over the ‘national culture’ of Pakistan in the Urdu, Sindhi, and English publications and exhibitions of the Lok Virsa Museum [National Institute of Folk & Traditional Heritage] in Islamabad and in the library of the National College of Arts in Lahore. While recent scholarship has engaged post-colonial Indian museums and the continuity of pre-colonial ‘regional’ literary traditions in colonial and post-colonial South Asia, the place of Sindh’s cultural history in Pakistani Urdu publishing and museum collections has not received extensive analysis. I will argue that Sindh’s Islamicate cultural history emerged as a contested arena for constructing a ‘national culture’ for Pakistan in the decades immediately following Partition, one in which Urdu cultural narratives partially supplanted Sindhi. The appropriation of Sindh’s Islamicate textual heritage by post-colonial Urdu publishers and ‘national’ museums is an overlooked aspect of the shift of South Asia’s Urdu ‘ecumene’ from colonial north India and Hyderabad (Deccan) to the newly formed territories of Pakistan. The first part of this project, for which I seek the support of AIPS, will use the textual collections of Lok Virsa and the library of the National College of Arts to analyze the retelling of Sindh’s ‘regional’ history in Urdu publications, while the second part of the project will focus on Urdu collections in India and London.