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D. Redlinger

The Evolution of the Architectural Décor on the *Quwwa al-Islām* Mosque

This essay focuses on the *quwwa al-islām* mosque, which is located in a suburb of New Delhi called Merauli, 13 kms south of Connought Place. Its aim is to show the development of the architecture, the cultural uses, and the meaning of the mosque also known as the *qutb minār* complex. This development will be discussed on the basis of a few selected examples. The construction of the mosque was begun by the end of the 12th century, shortly after the conquest of northern India during the reign of the Ghūrid Mu'izz al-Dīn b. Sām (r. 1173–1206) and under the supervision of his *ghulam* and deputy in India Qutb al-Dīn Aybak (r. 1206–1210). After its construction, the building was altered, extended and adapted under Shams al-Dīn Īltutmish (r. 1211–36) and 'Alā al-Dīn Khaldji (r. 1296–1316), as the medium for a programmatically-formulated and religiously-founded claim to power by the Muslim rulers. The architectural evolution of the mosque runs parallel to the growing importance of the Muslim empire in northern India in relation to other Muslim regions during this period. After having ceased to serve as the Friday Mosque as a result of the relocation of political and administrative centre, the mosque nevertheless retained its prominence in Indo-Islamic architecture. This importance manifests itself in the many architectural elements such as the *qutb minār* that are often integrated into later buildings (Koch 1991, 95 ff.).

Because of the long use of this exceptionally important mosque, and the extensive building operations in the *quwwa al-islām* complex, the various influences and changes in the building technology can be analysed very well. The different styles of its exterior clearly show a development from the static and decorative elements influenced by different architectural traditions that were prevalent at the time. An analysis of this process also allows us to view the craftsmen, master builders and architects involved in the construction, and to see to what extent non-Muslim and Muslim craftsmen and architects have cooperated in it. Besides an analysis of the construction techniques, the building offers the possibility to examine the intentions by which these

different – partly non-Muslim – architectural traditions were integrated in an important religious building, and to ask whether this knowledge was consciously used by the Muslim rulers as a means of propaganda, against the backdrop of a foreign ideological context. These thoughts come especially to mind when comparisons are made to the early Islamic buildings constructed in the 7th century, such as the Great Mosque in Damascus and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. These buildings are among the most heavily symbolic buildings of the Islamic world, but nevertheless followed previous Non-Muslim traditions (Flood 2001a, 5 ff.). The main difference between the architecture of the Umayyads during the 7th and 8th centuries, and that of the Islamic rulers of the Indian subcontinent between the 12th and early 13th centuries, is that the latter could draw on already existing Islamic architectural traditions established under the Islamic Dynasties of the Ghaznawids and Ghūrids (Welch/Keshani/Bain 2002, 12 ff.) or others like the 'Abbāsids. After the seizure of power in an area almost exclusively inhabited by a non-Muslim population, the first Muslim dynasty on the Indian subcontinent was established. The Muslim rulers set up a few military bases, like Ajmer (Hillenbrand 1988; Meister 1972) and Delhi, which became major political centres due to their strategically important locations. These new provincial towns were mostly developed from already existing settlements, such as the fortress town of *qil' a rāy pithorā* in the case of Delhi. After military stabilisation the new power elite tried to establish their own cultural and manorial program as a symbol of sovereignty under the sign of the Muslim creed, contrary to previous North Indian tradition. This could only be done through the adaptation of existing cultural elements, which often seemed to differ from orthodox Islamic ideology. This was to enable a better understanding of the new culture and religion among the largely non-Muslim population, and to support its integration.

Keeping this in mind, it is no wonder that the *quwwa al-islām* mosque – which served as the main Friday mosque and the most important



Fig. 1. Eastern *riwāq* in Aybak's mosque. Photo: D. Redlinger.

religious building of the Muslim community and the new power elite – was erected in 1191/2 in the former stronghold *lālkot* (after an inscription on the eastern gateway), probably on the remains of a former non-Muslim building, as some scholars such as Page (1926, 6) have supposed. In this function, it became a clear means of expression for the new religion and culture. During the first construction phase, the design of the *quwwa al-islām* complex hardly differed from an ordinary court mosque with an *ṣaḥn* surrounded by *riwāqs* and a *ḥaram*. Three stairways, framed and covered by massive archways, lead from the north, the east, and the west to the mosque. The whole mosque is located on a plinth measuring 214 × 149 feet. There are two-storey sections in the corner of the mosque whose original use as a *zanāna* or a *maqṣūra* cannot be established with certainty. Around 1198 a *pīshṭāq* in front of the *ḥaram*, and the first floor of a tower (the so-called *quṭb minār*) were added.

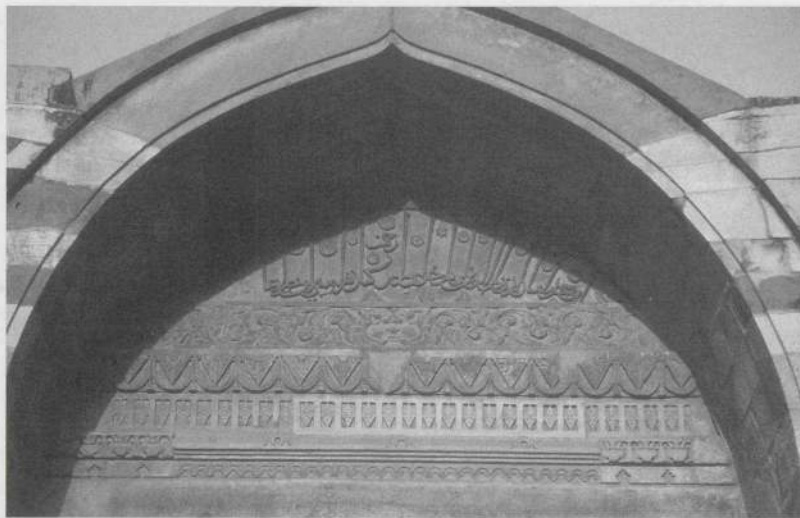
Based on their field investigations, Cunningham and Beglar (Cunningham 1966, 27ff.) and Page (1926, 6ff.) assumed that the western half of the mosque's plinth had originally been a temple platform and that the eastern half was added as part of the transformation into a mosque. The continuous ornamentation of the plinth, whose

patterns come from the canon of temple architecture, and some drainage systems that had been found in the northwest of the complex, support their hypothesis. Moreover, the frequently cited Arabic traveller Ibn Baṭūṭṭa tells us, in a description of the mosque, that it served as a Hindu temple called *al-bhūt kbāna* ("house of demon [idol] worshiping") before the occupation of Delhi by the Muslim rulers (Cunningham 1966, 46). However, both the size and the ground plan of the western half of the platform contradict the assumption that most of the plinth was part of a former non-Muslim sanctum. This now controversial hypothesis can therefore only be verified by an extensive excavation on this site. Nevertheless, although the plinth may not have been a re-used temple platform, its ornamentation undoubtedly refers to temple architecture. Thus, the use or re-use of the plinth continues, on the one hand, the regional religious tradition, and on the other hand indicates a transfer of construction techniques from the Ghūrid homeland, where many early mosques in the Persian area, such as in Sūsa in Khūsistān or Sirāf also have a plinth (Finster 1994, 59).

The location of the domes undoubtedly corresponds to models previously found in the Islamic architectural tradition. In this context, the mosque fits into the series of western Islamic examples in which the honorific character of the dome marks important parts within a building such as the *miḥrāb* area. The shape of the domes – built as corbelled constructions – and their ornamentation is unusual for Islamic architecture outside of India, and they rest on octagonal bases with lintels and architraves. This allows us to conclude that Indian craftsmen were almost exclusively involved in the construction. Indian craftsmen preferred this type of dome to the true dome usually found in Muslim architecture (Fischer 1974, 47). Owing to the adaptation of the architrave, it can be hypothetically conjectured that the dome constructions were perhaps taken in one piece from surrounding temples. This conjecture is based on the observation that a great number of architraves have been re-used as *spolia* by cutting them into the appropriate size or by adding intermediary parts. The same method has probably been used for the domes themselves. This hypothesis also rests upon an inscription on the eastern gateway which says:

"This fort was conquered and this Friday mosque [*masjidid djāmi*] was built in the month of the year 587 by the *amīr*, the great and glorious commander of the army *quṭb al-dawla wa al-dīn*, *amīr al-'umarā* Aybak, *sultānī*, may God strengthen his helpers. The materials of 27 temples, on each of which 2000000 *dilīwāl* had been spent, were used in this mosque. May God the great and glorious have mercy on him who should pray for the faith of the good builder" (Page 1926, 29).

Fig. 2. Inscription in the eastern archway in Aybak's mosque. Photo: D. Redlinger.



Besides the domes and architraves, the columns of the mosque would also give the impression that they stem from a non-Muslim sanctum if they were not so tall. The richly decorated columns of the *riwāqs* consist of two column shafts, placed in pairs one on top of the other, and supplemented by intermediary stones, a capital and a base (fig. 1). Some of the columns display *kīrttimukha* or figurative illustrations in which the figures have been to a large extent decapitated. Due to the disfiguration and the different decoration on most of the columns, it is assumed in reference to the inscription that all the columns were originally taken from demolished temples. However, recognising that each column was supposed to be made from two former column shafts, the vast number of columns speaks against such a thesis, as it is hardly conceivable that so many temples were located in the vicinity. Therefore, it can be argued that local craftsmen carved the column shafts using the example of columns from demolished temples. This way, they could ensure the uniformity of the columns. Thus, local construction traditions were incorporated, but were arranged in a way that corresponded to the views and religious needs of the Muslims. Besides their static function, the composition of the columns also took into account aesthetic considerations. For instance, none of the columns have been placed upside down, and the composition has clearly been inspired by their former arrangement in temple architecture. Due to the fact that no remaining plaster covering has been found, it appears that the decorative elements were generally understood and deliberately used. The tradition of re-using prestigious construction elements within Muslim buildings due to the value of the construction material or the importance of their place within the original building can be very well observed in many mosques in Syria of the Umayyad period or later in the Maghrib. Besides the mosques of Qayrawān, the mosque of Cordoba

also serves as an example (Ewert/Wisshak 1981, 32ff., figs. 19–23). In addition to the usage of *spolia*, attempts were also made to forge or copy these highly-valued construction materials in order to obtain them in larger quantities. In the large mosque in Medina or the al-Aqsā mosque in Jerusalem the columns were assembled from ordinary stone and then plastered and stuccoed in order to resemble columns made of marble (Creswell 1969, 158f., fig. 81–82). With regard to the two mosques in the Maghrib, the *ḥaram* of each mosque has been highlighted by columns that clearly differ from the other columns in the mosque. Judging by the foundation level and its composition, there are grounds for supposing that they remained *in situ* as part of an earlier temple platform or were re-used in an ensemble of *spolia*.

Beside the structural elements and the later erected *pīshṭāq*, many decorative elements were almost exclusively used as *spolia* material in the mosque. The majority of these decorative elements consist of figurative depictions in the form of panels, columns and capitals. While larger figurative depictions on the columns and their capitals have been beheaded, many figurative panels remain intact. From the on-site photographs of Cunningham, Page and Cole (Cole 1872, 67ff.), it cannot be ascertained whether the panels with figurative illustrations were removed and replaced during restoration work or perhaps cleaned from obscuring stucco. Only for one panel with figurative decoration has it been documented that its front side with the figurative illustration was built into the wall and that the rear side was furnished with an inscription from the Koran (Page 1926, pl. 9d/e). In contrast to the panels, it can be assumed that the remaining figurative depictions integrated into the decoration of the columns and capitals, such as the *kīrttimukha* (figs. 1–2), and a few other inconspicuous illustrations of figures or animals could easily be seen. This observation contradicts



Fig. 3. Small Entrance to the *haram* in Aybak's mosque. (Photo: D. Redlinger).

the description of Nizami, the court historian of Aybak, who suggests that all figurative illustrations in the conquered fortress *lālkoṭ* were destroyed (Elliot 1869, 67). This seems to have been a politically motivated exaggeration, since many *spolia* with figurative depictions still remain.

Due to the existence of well-preserved figurative depictions, the question can be raised as to whether this decoration was tacitly accepted or even consciously used by the Muslim constructors as a decorative element in the construction of the first mosque. For example, was the apotropaic function of the *kīrttimukha* deliberately reintegrated. A possible answer is offered by a *kīrttimukha* located in the east entrance below the inscription specified above (fig. 2). Since the inscription and the illustration were cut from one piece of stone, an unconscious reintegration seems impossible. It stands to reason that the meaning of the *kīrttimukha* as a support for the inscription was deliberately employed by the Muslims. Since the inscription is made in a very skilful *naskhī*, it is quite probable that a Muslim craftsman was involved directly in the production of this panel. Given the background specified above, the fact that the *kīrttimukha* image remains intact on the *spolia* columns indicates that the Muslims did not see the decorations

as purely decorative elements, but rather used them for their own purposes as abstract symbols of fame and honour. A further example of a textual transfer of pre-Islamic decorative traditions is a miniature shrine or *vyāli* over an entrance inside the building, or parts of non-figurative depictions including miniature shrines at both sides of the eastern entrance. The same can also be said for the frame of a small entrance in the northwest of the mosque, which definitely originates as a single piece from a temple (fig. 3). An apotropaic effect was probably intended here as well. A similar use of pharaonic *spolia* in door lintels or thresholds is documented for the Mamluk architecture in Egypt. For example, in the lintel of the mosque of 'Uṭhman Katkhudā (1147/1734), which is Mamluk in origin, pre-Islamic *spolia* with snake depictions have been integrated, also suggesting a protective function.

Taking into account the fact that some figurative depictions were consciously integrated into the building, and that some illustrations with a recognizably erotic content were even found in the *haram*, the second question arises as to when and why some of the motifs were first integrated and then destroyed. One assumption would be that these elements were only destroyed at a later date, and even then only those depictions, like the larger illustrations of dancers, which immediately caught the visitor's eye. Potentially, this destruction could have taken place shortly after Aybak's reign, as some of the Ghūrid mosques still possess figurative depictions; for example, a duck flies within the upper range of the dome of the *Shāhī* mosque of Bārī Khatū and an elephant capital is found in the *Caurāsī Kambhā* mosque at Kamān, near Bharatpur, Rajasthan (Meister 1993, 449ff., pl. XLV 89). Al-Maqdisī mentions bull-headed capitals located in an early mosque in Iṣṭakhr in southern Iran, which today no longer exists (Creswell 1969, 21). However, why and when were many figurative depictions later destroyed? Certainly, it would have been much easier to replace these decorative elements such as the capitals with undecorated building material during construction. The destruction of figurative depictions may have taken place at the beginning of the rule of the Īltutmish, as from that time only a few figurative elements were used in Muslim architecture in northern India.

The *pīshṭāq*, an important Western Islamic architectural element, which was erected together with the *quṭb minār* in the year 1198, reveals very clearly the cultural roots of this religious complex in contrast to the other buildings. Both structures were added after the Ghūrid ruler Mu'izz al-Dīn bestowed on Aybak the title of "*walī 'abl-i hindūstān*". As a result, Aybak was given unlimited control over the conquered north of India, and this mosque was to become an important symbol of his power. Nevertheless, the nomination of the Ghūrid rulers Mu'izz al-Dīn Muḥammad and

Ghiyāth al-Dīn, as well as the *laqab* “*sultānī*” or “*mu’izzī*” demonstrates his dependence on his former masters. As appears to be the case with regard to the *quṭb minār*, did the *pīshṭāq* serve as a new sign of power and Muslim sovereignty? Or was it intended to islamize the very “un-Islamic” *ḥaram* by the construction of a new facade? It is very clear that the construction, as well as the form and composition of the decorations and inscriptions on the *pīshṭāq*, was outlined by Muslim supervisors in accordance with Muslim models from the western Islamic areas, like Afghanistan and Iran. The actual execution, however, relied on regional technologies and the knowledge of local craftsmen. For instance, the ogee arch which – at first glance – appears to be Islamic was built in the form of a corbelled construction, which is more common in non-Islamic, Indian architecture (Fischer 1974, 112). The same applies also to the arrangement and thematic design of the inscriptions or the triangular panels above the arch and the decorative bands of the *pīshṭāq*. For example, the use of scroll systems and the geometrical patterns of the triangular panels is – beside inscriptions – a commonly used design in Islamic building decoration. Therefore, there are grounds for the assumption that the few ‘*ulamā*’, following the army campaign, were responsible for the stencil-like planning of these designs. However, within the guidelines of the Muslim master builders, the individual motifs were executed by native craftsmen according to their traditional models and any missing specifications were supplemented by their own ideas. Examples of this are the very vegetal, almost fleshy scrolls, the flower patterns within the triangular panels, or the vase-forms at the lower end of the *pīshṭāq*, in the central opening (fig. 4). In the same way, the local decorative tradition shows its influence in the Persian and Arabic inscriptions, which are overloaded with vegetal patterns. With this careful integration of native decorative traditions into an architecture which at first glance appears to be of Islamic form, a development of Indo-Islamic architecture began in the last years of the rule of Aybak, and emerged during the reign of his successors as a territorially independent Islamic decorative canon.

Political changes under Īltutmīsh (a *mamlūk* and son-in-law of Aybak who ruled from 1211 to 1236), resulted in Delhi becoming the seat of government of a sovereign empire in northern India, in total independence of the Ghūrid territory. The town fast developed into a flourishing political and cultural metropolis of the Muslim territory of northern India. In the year 1228/29 *khālīfa* Mustansīr *bi-allāh* from Baghdad officially declared the northern Indian areas as an independent *sultānāt* of the ‘Abbāsīd empire. As a result, considerable importance was placed upon the Friday Mosque as the most important religious building of the *sultānāt* in which the *khuṭba* was read. From



Fig. 4. Detail of the *pīshṭāq* of Aybak's mosque. (Photo: D. Redlinger).

1223 to 1230, under the rule of Īltutmīsh, the mosque was extended by a surrounding colonnade and a larger *ḥaram*, together with a symmetrical *pīshṭāq* located in front of it. The *quṭb minār* was completed with three further floors and a grave structure was built in the northwest of the mosque. The planning of the extension under Īltutmīsh was strongly geared towards its predecessor in its symmetry as well as in its ornamental decoration. The extension – reminiscent of a *zawiyya* – was added without any modifications to the original building, as was the case in many mosques, such as the great mosques in Iṣfahān and Cordoba. In particular, the *laqab* of Īltutmīsh which is called “*quṭbī*” or “*sultānī*” in the inscriptions of the building, preserves a clear relationship to the buildings of his former master.

In spite of these strong connections, an independent “Indo-Islamic” architectural decoration developed under Īltutmīsh. Islamic traditions, from models derived from cultural and political Islamic centres in Mesopotamia or Iran, are increasingly integrated into the architecture. The prevalent Indian decorative traditions experience a process of “Islamization” through techniques such as stylisation and abstraction. This Islamization of the architecture was certainly influenced by the *ghulām*

education of *Īltutmish* in Baghdad and Bukhārā (Digby 1970, 75 ff.). One of the most unambiguous examples of this Western Islamic influence is the grave at the *qibla*-wall of the mosque. The square and, formerly, domed grave introduces a new type of architecture and cult form into India, which is to be found in the later series of buildings constructed in the Islamic countries like Persia, Afghanistan, Transoxania and in the Punjab. This structure laid the foundation for the grave cult which reached its climax under the Great Moguls.

The inclusion of elements from the Islamic canon of architecture under *Īltutmish* suggests the immigration of artists and craftsmen from other western Islamic countries. The construction of the squinch in the grave appears to be a good example of the experimental collaboration between Indian and Muslim craftsmen, resulting in a synthesis between Indian civil engineering and Islamic aesthetics. The crossing of a square base and an octagonal dome-drum with a corbelled dome was formed by a squinch with a slightly twisted arch and a half dome behind – designed like a lotus. This construction shows the attempt to realise Islamic elements through existing local knowledge of architecture. Another example of the synthesis of both cultural areas are the block-corbels in the angles of the octagonal dome-drum showing the words “*allāh*” instead of the usual images of the god within the form of a miniature shrine. The previously mentioned stylisation and abstraction of the decorative patterns can be observed on the *pīshṭāq* of the extension (fig. 5). The decorative elements of the first *pīshṭāq*, such as the supporting columns and their vase base, wave scrolls and spiral scrolls were used again in a more stylised form. At first glance, the entire decoration on the extension appears more two-dimensional, without the nearly three-dimensional ornamental art of the *pīshṭāq* erected during the reign of Aybak (fig. 4). In addition, the decorations appear far less alive and individual, but more symmetrically and repetitively arranged. The best examples of this are the wave and spiral scrolls or the geometrically-arranged, abstracted flower panels over the *mīhrāb*. The latter element in Islamic architecture can be frequently found on the exterior walls within the inner courtyard of several mosques, such as the al-Azhar mosque in Cairo. A further example consists of lustre-painted tiles of a *mīhrāb* from Kāshān (1226) now exhibited at the museum of Islamic Art in Berlin.

The development of the columns also progressed under *Īltutmish*, including both their decorative effect and their function. While the columns of the mosque of Aybak consisted to a large extent of assembled *spolia*, the columns of the extension were all made especially for this building. Although these columns are made up of several

segments, like those of the first mosque – a base, a capital, and two shafts separated by an intermediate stone – the major difference between them, however, is that the columns of the extension are all without decoration. Interestingly, elements from the Indian repertoire of column forms, such as the octagonal segment of the shaft, can still be found. Therefore, it seems that elements of the Indian column system were adopted here, as was the case for the columns in the first mosque. This also becomes clear when one looks closely at the development of the decorative columns found on both sides of an entrance or at the corner of the building. These form an important component of Indo-Islamic building decoration, beginning with the reign of *Īltutmish*. The use of decorative columns was surely influenced by other Islamic models, such as Saldjūqid architecture in Transoxania and Iran (Leisten 1998, 84). It developed its own form, however, on the Indian Subcontinent. The column shafts on either side of the entrances of the mausoleum, or on the *pīshṭāq* of the extension (fig. 5), all have an octagonal section which is otherwise unknown in Islamic architecture to the west of northern India. In addition, the one or more intermediate stones, and the two or three column shafts, whose composition follows the pattern of the first mosque, cannot be found in Islamic architecture except in northern India.

A further element which was developed under *Īltutmish* towards an independent decoration is the vase form. It encloses each column at the top and at the bottom. On the *pīshṭāq* of Aybak, this vase form is illustrated at ground level close to the opening (fig. 4). Besides some leaves, a *patravalli* grows out of the vase, and surrounds the entire opening. On the *pīshṭāq* of *Īltutmish*, the *patravalli* is replaced by the decorative columns and inscriptions (fig. 5). However, the pattern of the *patravalli* is taken up in a strongly stylised way through a geometrical scroll. A connection between the different motifs is clearly recognisable; the vase, the *patravalli*, the scrolls and the column. Apart from this combination, however, an abstraction and a loss of meaning can also be observed. Thus, the spreading leaves of the vase on the *pīshṭāq* of *Īltutmish* always point outwards to the column, i. e. in the upper range downwards to the bottom. Inside the grave, however, the upper ranges of the vase always points upward. It seems that the vase motif develops into a single element, which can be later combined as above the northern entrance of the ‘*alā*’-i *darwaza* (fig. 6), at the beginning of the reign of ‘*Alā*’ al-Dīn *Khaldjī* (r. 1296–1316).

In addition to the afore-mentioned Islamization of Indian, pre-Islamic patterns under *Īltutmish*, a direct adoption of patterns from the Islamic culture area also takes place. The inscriptions in particular exemplify this. Thus, the inscriptions increasingly become a determining element of the

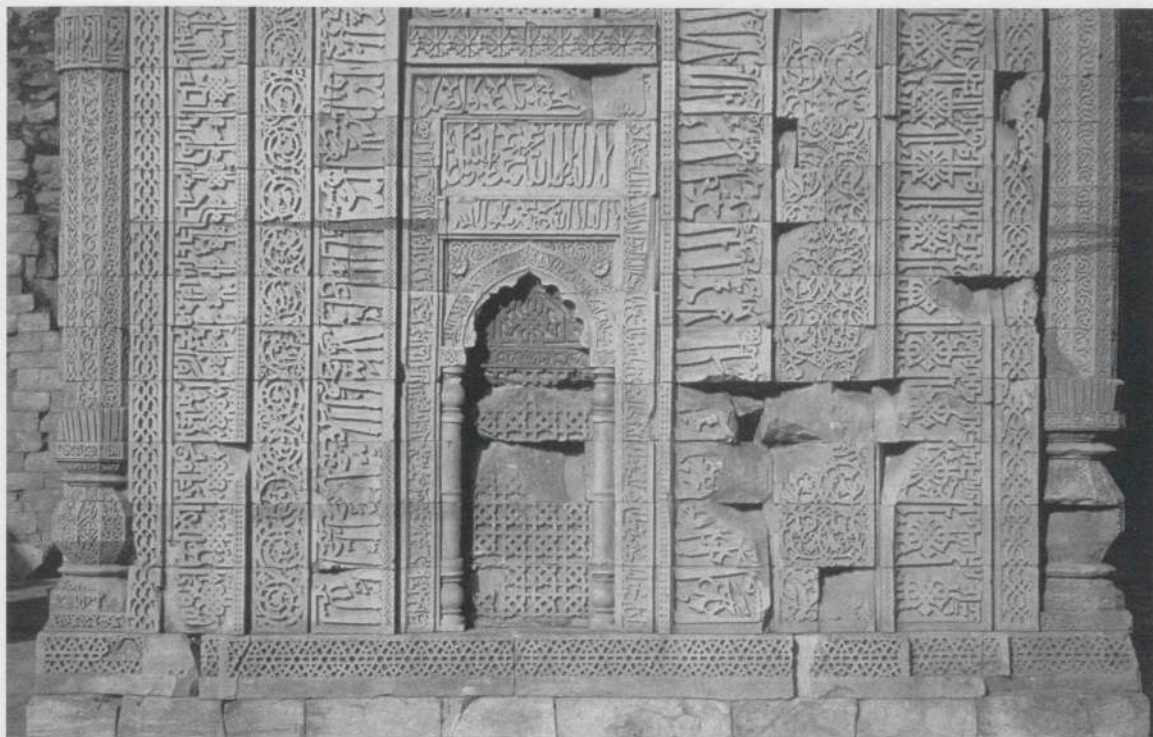


Fig. 5. Detail of the *pishtāq* of Īltutmish's extension. (Photo: D. Redlinger).

architectural decoration, and the script compared to the decoration comes even more to the fore. During his reign, different *kūfī ducti* are introduced as inscriptions into Indo-Islamic architecture and form a complex inscription program together with different *naskhī ducti* (fig. 5). The latter *ducti* evolved further under Īltutmish, as the development of the inscription decoration on the *quṭb minār* clearly shows, with a qualitative improvement of the decoration from the older ones at the bottom to the newer ones towards the top. The interaction between the different ornamentation within the inscriptions is reduced more and more. At the southern *pishtāq* another system of complex wave scrolls below the script can be noticed. It is, however, more abstract and less conspicuous than the script on the *pishtāq* of Aybak (fig. 4). The northern counterpart possesses only isolated flowers and small ornamentations, which fill out the free spaces between the respective inscriptions. At the grave, none of the *naskhī* inscriptions are underlain by scrolls. This dates it to the building phase of the northern *pishtāq*. Later, at the *'alā'-i darwaza*, there are no inscriptions with underlain scrolls to be found (fig. 7). Under Īltutmish, for the first time small *kūfī* inscriptions with the name of God *allāh*, *al-mulk* and *al-mulk li-allāh* appear on the intermediary stones of the decorative columns and at other prominent places (figs. 5; 7). Inscriptions with similar contents and at the same locations are likewise very common in eastern Iran, Afghanistan

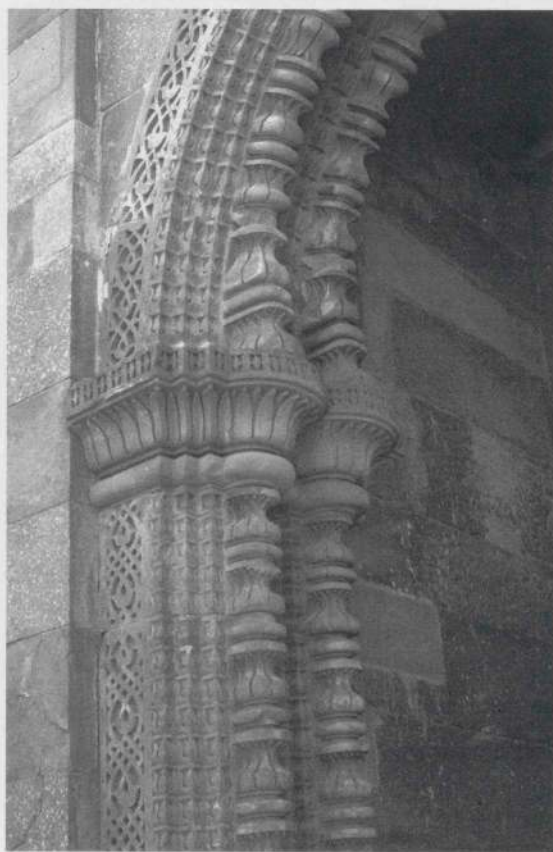


Fig. 6. Detail of the northern entrance to the *'alā'-i darwaza*. (Photo: D. Redlinger).

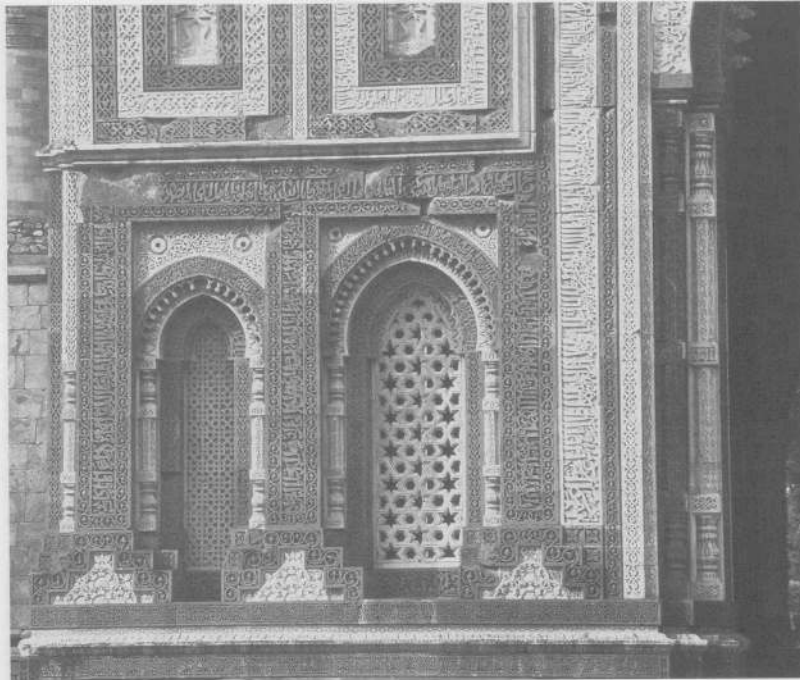


Fig. 7. Southern face of the 'ala'-i darwaza. (Photo: D. Redlinger).

and central Asia in building decoration, for example on the corner columns of the tombs between the 11th and 12th century (Flood 2001a, 141).

An interesting observation for all the inscriptions on buildings constructed under *Īltutmish* is that in addition to the religious inscriptions, like those from the Koran and *ḥadīth*, all nonreligious inscriptions were also written in Arabic. Does this possibly reflect the rulers political and cultural orientation towards the Sunni Abbasid court? This seems conceivable, since the status of *Īltutmish* as an official *nāṣir amīr al-mu'minīn* appointed by Baghdad is also made explicit in the inscriptions. This emphasis of the Arabic language perhaps reflects the self-perception of the Muslim elite in India, who were confronted with the Islamization of a non-Muslim majority similar to that met in the first wave of conquests by the Arab Muslims in the 7th century. At that time, particularly under Abd al-Malik, the Arabic language became an important means for the cultural expression and indication of Muslim identity within the developing Muslim realm in northern India. Apart from the Arabic language, however, different Koran *sūra*, such as the *sūra al-fath* or the Throne verse (II, 255), postulate an ideal Muslim rule, the tasks of the Muslim municipality, the martyr's death, the pacification of the *dar al-harb*, the increasing victory of Islam over the disbelievers and their punishments. Another *sūra*, namely the *sūra XXXVI*, which appears very frequently in the inscriptions of the grave, deals with eschatological subjects, which although used in the Muslim death rite are usually found (Leisten 1998, 86), however, in the Islamic building decoration. They probably

function as an *aide mémoire* for the growing Muslim municipality.

Under 'Alā' al-Dīn *Khaldji*, the independent Muslim empire on the subcontinent expanded. Through the immigration of a large number of scholars, craftsmen and statesmen from Transoxania, Central Asia and Iran, who were fleeing from the Mongols, Delhi became a major centre of Islamic art and culture during this period. With his formal acknowledgment of the collapse of the Abbasid *khalifa* in Baghdad, 'Alā' al-Dīn *Khaldji* entered into direct competition with the large, remaining Muslim dynasties such as the Mamuluks in Egypt. As a symbol of the legitimacy of his rule, 'Alā' al-Dīn *Khaldji* uses the *laqab nāṣir amīr al-mu'minīn* in the inscriptions. Under 'Alā' al-Dīn *Khaldji* the *quwwa al-islām* mosque kept its function as the most important religious and political building in which the *khutba* was read. For the purpose of providing the increasing Muslim municipality with an adequate place for prayer, and giving a clear religious and manorial sign, it was extended at around 1311 with another row of colonnades, an extension of the *ḥaram*, another tower, and an archway known as 'alā'-i darwaza. Apart from the 'alā'-i darwaza, these extensions remained largely incomplete due to the sudden death of the ruler. Owing to the otherwise inexplicable location at the southeast wall of the extension of *Īltutmish*, and the lack of symmetry with the preexisting buildings, there are grounds for the supposition that it was planned to pull down parts of the colonnades of his predecessor's constructions in order to build such an outsized court mosque.

During the rule of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaldjī, the 'alā'-i darwaza forms the climax to an architectural development which was to influence to a large extent the following Indo-Islamic architecture. The following examples provide evidence that a form of building decoration was developed in this phase that no longer tries to express Muslim architecture through native elements as is the case with the squinches of Īltutmish. Rather, a conscious attempt is made to develop an independent Islamic architecture with a strong regional character, and thus to distinguish itself against the large Muslim cultural and political centres existing at that time in places like Egypt by purposefully integrating stylised or Islamized regional motives as well as increasingly assuming elements from Persia, Transoxania and Central Asia.

A good example of the integration and advancement of architectural and decorative elements is the 'alā'-i darwaza, where for instance the elegant squinches are used for the conversion of a square room into a genuine dome through a number of stepped horseshoe arches. Although the origin of this construction is observable, for example, in the mausoleum of Kız Bibi in Marv (10th-11th century), and has clear roots in the mud-brick-based architecture of Transoxania, it clearly shows the excellent craftsmanship which was perfected under the rule of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaldjī. In addition, the true arch, as opposed to the corbelled construction of his predecessors, is used in the quwwa al-islām complex for the first time under his rule. It demonstrates the intensified use of architectural elements from other Islamic culture areas. Also of interest, however, is the arch of the gate at the northern entrance of the building. In addition, the Islamic technique of constructing a true arch is also used for the trefoil arch at the northern entrance in a design of Indian origin. Here the vase patterns mentioned above were again arranged as single patterns independent of their original function.

The ornamental evolution following the rule of Īltutmish, such as the strong stylisation of vegetal patterns in connection with geometrical patterns and an emphasis on the inscriptions under 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaldjī, takes place in a separate phase of the development. In similarity to the architecture of his predecessor, the ornamentation, such as the division into right-angled areas of inscriptions and decoration, follows Islamic models. This development includes the use of patterns of "infinite correspondence" such as the star-and-hexagon pattern in the jāli (fig. 7) or inside the gateway. However, the variety of patterns like the scroll systems, abates significantly and the decoration of the gate appears more structured and more visible in relation to the grave or the pishṭāq of his predecessors. The decoration is structured for the eye of the beholder through the contrasting effect of white marble and red sandstone. Thus kapōta with candrasālā indicate in the lower part an area

for the foundation and in the middle part of the gate a second floor. The virtuoso use of different techniques in connection with different building materials shows the degree of sophistication in the craftsmanship. From the integration of native motives into this decorative schema, for example the cornices, one can infer that under 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaldjī local workshops had been formed that were particularly capable in the treatment of materials in this special pattern repertoire. Besides Islamic motives like the so-called "spearheaded arches" on apertures, gates and blind windows, a number of elements are found which are unique to the Indian culture area. They support and divide the remaining décor – like the kapōta cornices or the semicircular patterns between the windows, which are both made of white marble. Frequently, these mostly organic elements form part of the geometrical décor, as for example in the interior as flowers in the star-and-hexagon pattern or as rosettes in the four blind windows in the upper level of the gateway. These patterns, which also appear in buildings developed at the same time as the quwwa al-islām mosque or even earlier, seem to have been established as a firm component of the Indo-Islamic architectural canon and no longer as pure elements of Indian sacrificial architecture.

Besides the decorative elements, the cultural self-image of the ruler is expressed most clearly in the inscriptions. The inscriptions are almost exclusively formed in undecorated naskhī with long strokes. Most inscriptions, all of them written in the Persian language and placed at prominent points around the central arches, are dedicated to the eulogy of the ruler and mention him among the greatest, noblest and wisest leaders of the Islamic world like Solomon [Sulaymān] at the eastern and southern entrance, Darius [Darā] and Alexander [Iskandar] at the eastern and western entrance, and Moses [Mūsa] at the southern Entrance. The Solomonic seal in the archway emphasizes the connection to the legendary ruler who is mentioned in the Koran (XXVII, 15-44). In addition, 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaldjī is portrayed as an innovator and propagator of the Islamic faith, as a founder of religious buildings, as a leader in the battle against unbelievers, and as the destroyer of places of idol worship and drinking houses. In the inscriptions he compares his own mosque with the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. The few sūra and hadīth inscriptions written in Arabic support the non-religious content and serve to legitimise the manorial image, suggesting the ideal type of Muslim ruler over a dār al-ummā. In consideration of these inscriptions and the extraordinarily splendid decoration, it can be assumed that the building played an important role in court ceremony and in the representation of the manorial program. Thus the 'alā'-i darwaza became a symbol of Muslim rule, which nevertheless had its roots on the Indian subcontinent. The use of the

Persian language instead of Arabic in the inscriptions suggests that the Muslim realm regarded itself as protector of the Persian speaking Muslim community and thus formed a counterweight to the Arabic speaking culture area of the Mamluks in Egypt.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of specified decorative elements in the *quwwa al-islām* mosque, an architectural development can be reconstructed whose three main phases reflect the changing cultural and political situation of the Muslim realm in northern India. In the first building phase under Aybak, an integration of already existing regional traditions took place. One reason for this was that the new rulers were dependent on the assistance of native craftsmen and architects, since after the conquest of northern India skilled Islamic artisans were hardly available. These native workers had to create an architecture on the basis of vague instructions from the 'ulamā', and corresponding to their perception of Muslim requirements. Since the technical knowledge and decorative concepts of these native craftsmen at times strongly deviated from those in the rest of the Islamic world, as in the case of squinches and arches, in most cases only one approximation to Islamic models could be developed. In addition, the conquerors were faced with a highly developed architectural and decorative tradition similar to that faced by the Muslims in the 7th century after having conquered the eastern Mediterranean Sea, whose integration into its own architecture was realized both for reasons of prestige and aesthetic considerations. This integration, discernable in the use of the *spolia* and columns, served to bridge the cultural gap between the different religions. This also includes the contextual assumption of elements, such as the *kirttimukha*, on the columns and below the inscription at one entrance.

After Delhi became a *sultānāt* under Īltutmish, an increasing Islamization of architectural and decorative elements took place. This Islamization occurs on the one hand through an abstraction and geometricization of different pre-existing vegetal elements. Thus, for example, the wave scrolls become more shallow cut and stylized. The decorative motifs, such as the vase pattern, partially lose their original meaning and develop as a pure decorative element. Other elements, like the block-corbels in the form of a shrine under the dome of the tomb were Islamized through the insertion of the name *allāh*. At this time, a group of craftsmen emerged who experimented with elements of Indian and Islamic architecture to develop a synthesis of both cultural areas as can be seen in the construction of the squinches in the grave. This increasing importance of the Muslim faith and its culture can be compared to the rising signif-

icance of the *sultānāt* and its formal integration as part of the 'Abbāsīd empire. This is made explicit by elements that are taken directly from the Islamic cultural areas. These include beside decorative elements, like the pseudo-*mihṛāb* on the *pīshṭāq* of the first extension, the use of the new *kūfī ducti*. In addition, the exclusive use of the Arabic language shows the connection to the Sunni ruling family in Baghdad.

In the last period after the foundation of a sovereign Muslim Empire in northern India under 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaldjī, an architectural canon became established. At that time a series of outstanding artists, most of whom were refugees from central Asia, Transoxania and Persia became available to the rulers in Delhi. In addition, a large group of craftsmen must already have been established in Delhi at this time, and were specialized in the work of Islamic building. Thus it is not surprising that architecture took its cues from Muslim models, as can be seen in the squinch construction in the '*alā'*-*i darwaza* or in the decorative elements such as the star-and-hexagon pattern. On the other hand, however, a huge variety of Indian elements exist, for example *kapōta* cornices with *candraśālā*, which give the architectural evolution its own characteristics with certain regional elements. This development of its own architectural canon, showing the political and cultural independence of the realm, can be seen as a demonstration of the sovereignty of this northern Indian realm against the existing Islamic dynasties of the Mediterranean Sea and Mesopotamia. This is also reflected in the inscriptions, which praise 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaldjī as an ideal Muslim ruler over a realm which, apart from the Egyptian Mamluk dynasty, stood as the last bulwark against the Mongols, and as a place of safety for refugees from central Asia, Transoxania and eastern Persia.

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