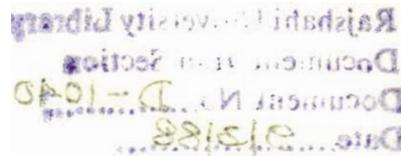


TERRACOTTA ORNAMENTATION
IN
THE MUSLIM ARCHITECTURE OF BENGAL

Muhammad Hafiz Ullah Khan



Tesis submitted to the University of Rajshahi
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic
History and Culture

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INSTITUTE OF BANGLADESH STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF RAJSHAHI, RAJSHAHI
BANGLADESH

CERTIFICATE

With regard to this thesis entitled Terracotta Ornamentation in the Muslim Architecture of Bengal submitted by Mr. Muhammad Hafiz Ullah Khan to the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, I certify

that

- i) it was prepared under my direct supervision and guidance;
- ii) it is the candidate's own achievement and is not a conjoint work;
- and that iii) it is an original study.

I have gone through the final draft of the thesis and approve it for submission.


(A.B.M. Husain)
Professor
Department of Islamic History
and Culture
University of Rajshahi
Rajshahi, Bangladesh

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Muhammad Hafiz Ullah Khan

ABSTRACT

Ornamentation in Muslim architecture is an art of the surface. In an overall estimation, architecture is an art only by reason of its surfaces, its skin of mosaic, stucco, ceramic or marble, the verses of the Qur'ān to be read on its walls and the fascination of its geometric patterns and abstract decoration of arabesque. This is also the view of the Muslim architect who transformed the architectonic elements into purely decorative compositions. In fact, Muslim artists were rarely inventive in the domain of forms, but their contribution to surface ornamentation was indisputably original. Muslim artists not only made the most use of almost all the traditional ornamental media or techniques, but also invented a few ones enriching the world art thereby. They strove to realize the artistic potential of every technique to the fullest, irrespective of its material nature. Even the craft of terracotta was raised to an art of excellence in Muslim decoration. The present study aims at an investigation into the character, quality, technique and technicalities, and the influence of the Muslim terracotta art of Bengal.

The study has been designed into seven chapters, the first two being devoted to background discussions for the setting of the rest - the thesis part of the study.

Chapter I deals in brief with the meaning, aesthetics, characteristics and themes of Muslim ornamentation. It also

presents an over-view discussion on the various ornamental techniques used in Muslim architecture, tracing their beginning and following their course of progress across the Muslim lands including Bengal, the study area. The point of view has been to place Muslim art in Bengal in the context of the pan-Islamic art movement and establish links of some sorts between Bengal art and that in other Muslim countries, particularly Persia, which led to the genesis of Indo-Muslim art.

Chapter II presents a summary discussion on the terracotta art of India in historical perspective from the Peasant Cultures (c. 3rd millennium B.C.) down to the architectural reliefs of the Buddhist Vihāras in Bengal (up to c. 12th century). Through the ages, Indian terracottas mostly consisted of figure subjects of cult deities, men, women and animals, either in relief or in the round. Architectural terracotta is not known in India prior to the time of the Guptas (4th-6th centuries). In the post-Gupta period, terracotta reliefs in architecture remained confined to Bengal, that too, in the eastern and northern parts of the country. But the art appears to have died out by the 10th century. The Muslim conquerors of Bengal, however, revived the terracotta tradition in the 14th century, infusing thereto a new dimension in character, quality and application. They also continued a number of older indigenous motifs of Bengal, those that did not smack of imagery and hence, were not abominable to Muslim iconophobic taste. Muslim terracotta art in Bengal is, therefore, a

hybrid style bred of antithetic art idioms, but developing a distinct personality of its own in compromise with the land of its birth.

Chapter III is devoted to an analytical study of the terracotta ornamentation in the Muslim architecture of Bengal. The chapter has been divided into six sections vis-a-vis the chronology of Muslim political history in Bengal, the purpose being to observe the condition of the art during each of the phases of political rule.

Section A covers the pre-independence (pre-Sultānī) period of Muslim rule in Bengal when the political and cultural ideas of the ruling élite were largely fed by streams coming from Delhi, and through it from the wider Muslim world further beyond. The terracotta art of the period is represented by the Barī Masjid (c. 1300) at Chhoto Pānduā in Hooghly, where a preponderance of Muslim abstract motifs occurred with minimal use of local elements, which were probably the choice of the native artists engaged in the work.

Section B observes the state of the terracotta art during the first phase of independent Bengal represented by the early Ilyās Shāhī rule (1342-1414). The Ilyās Shāhī rulers identified themselves with local interests and made liberal concessions to local elements in the political and cultural arenas. The social tone of the period is reflected in the terracotta ornamentation of the Adina Mosque (1375) at Hazrat Pānduā in Malda, where there

occurred an onrush of local folk motifs side by side characteristic Muslim patterns. But the ornamentation appeared incongruous with the stone surface of the structure, nor were the two art traditions synthesized.

Section C shows the evolution of a purely brick architecture and integrated terracotta ornamentation in Bengal under the local converted House of Rājā Gaṇeśa (1415-32), represented by the Eklākhī Mausoleum (1415-32) at Hazrat Pānduā. The monument set the modus of surface decoration of the subsequent Sultānī architecture of Bengal and by effecting a synthesis between the characteristically Muslim and the local elements, evolved a common art formula. The terracottas now became integrated into the masonry of the structure and also improved in finesse of execution.

Section D consists of a discussion on the terracotta art of the restored Ilyās Shāhī period (1433-86), which was marked by brisk building activities both at the capital of Gaur and in the outlying areas of Bengal. The local aims and ideals that had taken shape during the rule of the converted dynasty continued to be ceaselessly pursued by the Ilyās Shāhī rulers, so that the Muslim rule and culture in Bengal became fully acclimatized. In the process, architecture reached its classical phase by means of balanced proportion of its various elements, and terracotta ornamentation attained its excellence both in substance and execution. A group of monuments built at Khalifatābād (modern Bāgerhāt) in Khulna district during the

period and known as Khān Jahān style distinctly betrays Tughluqian features from Delhi. Besides, certain decorative elements of Persian antecedent are also noticed in the terracottas of the period. All these suggest Bengal's cultural contact both with Delhi and Persia during the period under study. Although sparse use of glazed tiles appeared in the monuments of the period, terracotta remained the almost exclusive decorative technique.

Section E studies the terracotta of the Firūza Minār ascribed to Sayf al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh (1486-89), the Abyssinian ruler of Bengal. The terracottas of the monument are restrained but graceful art products and kept up the classical heritage of the Ilyās Shāhī period. The combined use of glazed tiles and terracotta in the monument as well as its shape and interior spiral staircase betrays Perso-Iraqi influence.

Section F deals with the terracotta ornamentation in the monuments of the Husain Shāhī period (1493-1538). The period witnessed the most extensive building activities throughout the Kingdom of Bengal. Besides brick buildings, there now came to be erected buildings with brick core and stone facing, called the 'brick-and-stone style'. The period offers nothing significantly novel either in architecture or in ornamentation. The brick buildings merely imitated the terracotta designs of the Ilyās Shāhī period for their decoration with no newness in themes or artistic improvement. The attempt at executing terracotta motifs in stone did not also succeed well. There occurred, on

the other hand, an over-richness in the details of the terracottas and meaningless repetition of stereotyped panelled decoration. In fact, the period marked the beginning of decadence of the Muslim terracotta tradition in Bengal. An increase in the use of glazed tiles is noticeable in the monuments of the Husain Shāhis. This perhaps speaks of the opulence of Bengal at the time and also suggests the continued influence of Persia - the land of tiles, on Bengal decorative art.

Chapter IV dwells upon the terracotta ornamentation in the Muslim architecture of Bengal during the interregnum between the end of the Sultanate (1538) and the Mughal conquest of Bengal (1576), and under the Mughal rule. There were little building activities in Bengal during the interregnum with the least use of terracotta decoration. The Mughals preferred plaster decoration and under them, the terracotta art received no royal patronage. However, the popular love for the art kept it alive in sporadic instances away from the centres of Mughal rule till late 17th century. But by then, the ornamental motifs as well as the designs had lost their artistic appeal and were reduced to a faint reflex of their past glorious self.

Chapter V contains a discussion on the occurrence of the Sultānī terracotta motifs and features in the Hindu temple ornamentation of Bengal from the 16th to the 19th centuries. The temples of late medieval Bengal, mostly built of brick, were local in origin with characteristic Bengali features such as curved cornice, panelled ornamentation in terracotta, panelled

arched entrance etc. - features initiated by the Eklākhi Mausoleum (1415-32) and commonly used in the Sultāni buildings of Bengal. Even the ground plan of the ratna style of temples and the interior vault of the temple styles in general are held to have been influenced by Muslim precedents. A large number of Muslim geometric patterns and strip motifs continued almost unchanged in temple ornamentation. Besides, some of the temple terracottas closely imitated Muslim abstract designs such as the arabesque. These influences were extensive in the 16th and 17th centuries temples, but diminished in the 18th and 19th centuries; nevertheless, certain Muslim elements lingered in temple decoration till the end of the temple building movement in Bengal.

Chapter VI investigates into the making technique and the technicalities of seating the Muslim terracotta. It also discusses the nature of formation of the terracotta designs and attempts at their classification. Incidentally, it throws side light on the making centres of the terracottas and the diffusion of the technical knowledge of the art.

Chapter VII summarises the nature and general characteristics of the Muslim terracotta ornamentation in Bengal in the light of the discussions made in the previous chapters.

TRANSLITERATION

The scheme of transliteration for Arabic and Persian words followed in this monograph is that given in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition) except J for ج and Q for ق

For Bengali words, the National Bibliography of Indian Literature has been followed.

In both cases, however, anglicized words or those that have obtained currency in English vocabulary have been left unattended.

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- :3. Gaur. Chāmkātti Mosque (1475), plan.
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- 3:1. Gaur. Tāntipārā Mosque (1480), plan.
- :2. Gaur. Rājibibi Mosque (1433-86), plan.
- :3. Bāgerhāt. Sāt-Gumbad Mosque (mid 15th century), plan.
- 4:1. Gaur. Dhunichak Mosque (1433-86), conjectural plan.
- :2. Rāmpāl (Dacca). Mosque of Bābā Adam (1483), plan.
- :3. Gaur. Lattan Mosque (1493-1538), plan.
5. Gaur. Chhota Sonā Mosque (1493-1519), plan.
- 6:1. Gaur. Gunmant Mosque (1493-1538), plan.
- :2. Dinajpur. Surā Mosque (1493-1538), plan.
- :3. Gaur. Jhān Jhānia Mosque (1535), plan.
(After S.M. Hasan)

CHAPTER I

ORNAMENTATION IN MUSLIM ARCHITECTURE

Ornamentation is the soul of Muslim architecture. Muslim buildings all over the world are characterized by spacious planning, rich colouring and intricate carving. Muslim artists and craftsmen were rarely inventive in the domain of forms, but their preoccupation with surface decoration was highly original. "They perfected a type of decoration whose purpose was first and foremost that of providing buildings and objects with an intricate and complex overlay, covering their structural cores (often with a different material) as with an outer skin or a 'mantle'."¹

Muslim ornament is both a visual pleasure, a practical exercise and an intellectual meditation. "It is an exercise in the sense that it consists for the most part in isolable formulas; yet it is also a meditation for there always is in it, to use a colloquial expression, more than meets the eye."² The complex geometric designs and the perplexing arabesques convey a meaning beyond the visual; they represent the continuum and order of the cosmic phenomena amid the apparent chaos. The

¹Dalu Jones, "Surface, Pattern and Light", in Architecture of the Islamic World, ed. by George Michell (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), p. 16.

²Oleg Grabar, The Formation of Islamic Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 202.

forms are abstract, since attempt at depicting the natural smacks, in Islamic eye, of competing with the creativity of God or imitating Him - an unpardonable sin. Abstraction implies the unreality of the visible and proves the divine permanence. Thus is reflected in Muslim ornaments the attitude of Islamic religion and culture as a whole.

Muslim ornamentation is predominantly an art of decorative themes that occur generally independent of material, scale and technique. Unlike in the West, there is no dichotomy in Muslim art as secular and religious, and ornamental themes do not suffer from stricture of use. There is thus never one type of decoration for one type of buildings; conversely, the same decorative designs, themes and techniques were employed for entirely different buildings - a sort of pan-Islamism in the domain of art.

In almost all phases of European architecture, ornament served principally to clarify and exhibit structural functions, besides signifying iconographic and connoting didactic purposes. Muslim ornament, on the other hand, softens architectonic contrasts, creates non-tectonic values and never indicates the purpose of the structure it decorates. Structure is indeed emphasized by the decoration, but the definition of proportion and alleviation of monotony are of greater importance. In Islam, the primacy of human life and social needs decide the

function of a structure and hence it is adaptable to a variety of purposes. These characteristics remained for centuries and the magnificent façades that came to adorn the many Muslim structures from the 12th century onward never indicated if a building was a mosque, a ribāt, a caravansarai, a palace or anything else.

Muslim ornamentation is characterized by a reversion from the classical monumentalism and naturalism, and although natural motifs like plants, creepers and leaves formed an integral part of Muslim ornament, they were intensely schematized.¹ Stylization of motifs suited Muslim aesthetic most as much as satisfied their iconophobic tendency.² Decorative combinations of various plants and fruits in an unreal manner were characteristic of oriental art and became popular with Muslim artists. Unreal rosettes and palmettes together with the Greek acanthus stylized to the verge of abstraction were favourite themes with Muslim craftsmen. They transmuted the physical form into a vehicle for the expression of something else than itself. But "it would be a mistake to attribute symbolic or allegorical

¹Marshall G.S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, vol. II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 506.

²Thomas Arnold (Painting in Islam, Oxford, 1928) notes among other points the expressionlessness usual on human faces in Muslim painting being an effect of iconophobia. According to Richard Ettinghausen, the iconophobia spread to a larger category of deliberate unrealism which took a great many forms. (See "The Character of Islamic Art", in The Arab Heritage, ed. by Nabih A. Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 259-62).

meaning to these natural motifs when they appear in fantastic stylization"¹ Such a view, however, represents the common Western concept of Muslim art as an abstract art in the same sense as modern Western art, but the two stand at poles opposite. "The one seeks to evade the ugliness of naturalistic and condensed forms of nineteenth century European art by appeal to a mathematical abstraction of a purely human and rationalistic order. The other seeks in the archetypes residing in the spiritual empyrean the concrete realities of which the so-called realities of this world are nothing but shadows and abstractions. It, therefore, seeks to overcome this shadow by returning to the direct reflections of the truly concrete world in this world of illusion and abstraction ... The process of so-called 'abstraction' in Islamic art is, therefore, not at all a purely human and rationalistic process as in modern abstract art, but the fruit of intellection in its original sense, or vision of the spiritual world, and an ennobling of matter by recourse to the principles which descend from the higher levels of cosmic and ultimately Metacosmic Reality".² Muslim art thus expressed in stylization has had a meaning and a spiritual significance. "It is the earthly crystallization of the spirit of the Islamic

¹Ernst Kuhnel, Islamic Art and Architecture (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1966), p. 24.

²Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Foreword", in Titus Burckhardt's Art of Islam: Language and Meaning (England: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976), p. XV.

revelation as well as a reflection of the heavenly realities on earth, a reflection with the help of which the Muslim makes his journey through the terrestrial environment and beyond to the Divine Presence Itself, to the Reality which is the Origin and End of this art."¹

Without great painting and sculpture² which led the artistic thought of the West, Muslim craftsmen effected a revolution in the domain of ornament by decorating their monuments with themes applied to minor arts like pottery, carpets, tapestry etc. In other words, the so-called minor arts of the West reached the level of major arts in the manual of Muslim ornaments. However, the universality of ornamental themes is ever present; a theme from any origin was taken in and used. Thus alongside the predominantly vegetal and geometric motifs, there also exist animal, human and epigraphic themes in Muslim ornamentation.

A distinctive feature of Muslim ornamentation is the ubiquity of patterns in time and space, the unchangeability of the same design from one medium to another and repetition of the same design on different scales, often within the same

¹Seyyed Hossein Nasr, op. cit., p. XVI.

²The Quranic prohibition of sculpture is contained in Surah XIV:35, which reads: 'Abraham said, "O Lord make this land secure, and turn aside me and my children from serving idols"; also in Surah V: 90, that reads, "Verily wine, and games of chance, and statues (anṣāb), and divining arrows are an abomination of Satan's device. Leave it aside in order that Ye may succeed". Abomination of the worshippers of idols are also found in Surahs IV: 76; V: 60; VI: 138; IX: 1-17 and in many others of the Qur'an. The prohibition was more strictly defined in later writings. See Mishkāt, trans. by James Robson (Lahore: Ashraf Publications, 1963), book XX, Chap V, and book XII, Chap. I.

building. These may be explained by the fact that in Muslim decoration each motif is part of an overall patterning of surface, achieved by the counterposition and superimposition of a variety of different designs and materials, each of which retains its identity within the whole composition. No single pattern or design is given pre-eminence over others and all can be reused in newer and newer yet somewhat familiar compositions.

Muslim decoration consists of patterns capable of symmetrically repeated ad infinitum. Just as the structural elements, such as the arch, the dome etc., so it is with the patterns. The principles are of repetition and continuous permutation of motifs and designs. In it, the decoration continually reflects and multiplies patterns creating an art which is dynamic, yet unchanging. Thus façades and walls are mostly decorated with symmetrical repetitions of units which in turn are made up of smaller repeated units.

In the art of ornamentation, the Muslim craftsmen were always ruled by the celebrated 'horror Vacui'.¹ A vacant space on the wall surface was considered negation of divine presence and hence the principle of 'overall surface covering' was adopted. But strongly emphasized contrasts between ornamental surfaces were scrupulously avoided; so was the case with individual motifs, which were used in rows and repetitions "to give the most fluent

¹ In fact, rather than being intolerant of vacant space, the Muslim craftsmen made complete exploitation of the surface in its possibilities of line and colour.

general impression without giving any plastic prominence to one or another."¹

A striking feature of Muslim ornamentation is the emphasis given on the interior of the structure² as opposed to the outside or the façade. Such a spatial emphasis may have been dictated in early Islam by the *sūfī* concept of life in which the enrichment of the soul is of the utmost concern. Similar attitude is also exegetically supported. In later times, however, the emphasis on the interior appears to have become lessened and Muslim monuments in India and Bengal, in particular, received decoration both inside and outside, the latter often predominating. In fact, *Mughal* buildings in India may be defined as a 'proclaiming architecture' because of the stupendous entrance portals and elemental disposition of the architecture and decoration outside. The Buland Darwāza at Fathpūr-Sikrī (1568-85), the entrance gate to Akbar's tomb at Sikandra (1613), the tomb of ʿImād al-Dawla (1627) or the Chinika-Rauza (1639?) at Agra proclaim imperial grandeur in scale and decoration, rather than mystic esoterism of the early Muslim structures.

Love of colour of the Muslim craftsmen is proverbial and almost bordered on obsession. The creation of surface effects with colour techniques like mosaic, lustre painting, opaque glaze etc. appeared early in the monuments of the Umayyads and the

¹Ernst Kuhnel, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²Cf. Ernst J. Grube, "What is Islamic Architecture?", in *Architecture of the Islamic World*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Abbasides and constitutes the *raison d'être* of Muslim ornament in time and space. The mode of colour decoration attained its full bloom in the Il-Khanid monuments in Persia in the 14th century. Under the Timurids and the Safavids from the 15th to the 17th century, colour decoration attained its highest excellence. Whole surfaces were covered with multicoloured tiles which developed certain designs independent of architectural needs. Colour appeared in almost all the techniques and its virtuosity practically exhausted itself at the hands of the Muslim craftsmen.

Muslim ornamentation is not only an applied art, it is structural as well. Structural elements like the arch, the column, the bracket, the dome and even the material of construction itself add to the beauty of the building, besides performing tectonic functions. The airiness of the arcades in the Mosque of Damascus (705-11) or in the Qairawan Mosque (817-38) or in the Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Isfahān (11th-14th century) surrounding the spacious courtyard conveys an impression of majesty, characteristic, perhaps, of Muslim architecture alone. The tiered arches in the sanctuary of the Cordova Mosque (788) has transformed an otherwise vacant space into a dreamland of ethereal beauty. The squinch arch which began its career with a structural connotation ended in Muslim architecture as the most sumptuous and bewildering decorative stalactites. They were used across Muslim lands in entrance portals and in domes and also as supports of balconies of towers where they were spread with great

cunning over expansive surfaces. Stalactites also came to be carved in long rows to form cornices and they appeared on wooden beams and brackets, on capitals and other unexpected places. The wide-open portal arches of the Muslim buildings are not only catholic and welcoming in spirit, but also marks of elevated beauty of the structures. Arches and columns were too often used on wall surfaces as decorative elements out of structural context. Arched niches - recessed or shallow - contained in rectangular frames were used in buildings of all purposes both in western and eastern Islam. Façades, walls and even ceilings were punctuated by rows of arched niches of various depths and scales. Striking examples of the use of the motif are found in Iran and India. The dome in Muslim architecture is more than a roofing device and an engineering feat. It is, besides beauty, an element of majesty, and Muslim experiment with its shape was as varied as it was adventurous. The rows of mini domes over the portal, the parapet or the roof in Indo-Muslim architecture produce a sight unsurpassable in elegance, and were at one time so popular that the Muslim painter portrayed them as symbol of a desired place or dreamland full of love and happiness. In the Ottoman architecture, the riwaqs surrounding the mosque courtyard are surmounted by mini bowl-shaped domes, a feature adding to the magnificence of the lofty domed sanctuary, flanked by pencil minarets.¹ The brick, itself an element of construction, was

¹The feature is markedly noticeable in the Selimiye Jāmi' at Edirne (1569-74), Sultān Ahmed Jāmi', Istanbul (1609-17) and some others.

also a decorative medium. The decorative potentiality of brick was nowhere realized to the extent done in Muslim architecture. Muslim technique of brick-setting reached an all-time high in Islamic Persia and endowed the monuments with the most abidingly pleasant surface producing a texture of unending beauty. The Samanid tomb in Bukhara (907)¹ is both an architecture in decoration and decoration in architecture.² Thus Edward Lutyens justly exclaimed, "Don't speak of Persian brickwork but rather of Persian brick magic!"³

Ornamentation in Muslim architecture often appeared as if contesting with the structure for prominence.⁴ Even when in equilibrium, the two sometimes seemed as different and opposing that were not organically related. Often the structure functioned as mere skeleton to receive the decoration. However, in good examples, ornament was visually organic with the structure, often appearing as if inherent in the material, like the graining of

¹It is the earliest example of ornamental brickwork technique showing superb craftsmanship. The kinship of the technique may perhaps be related to the brick-setting in the Baghdad Gate at Raqqa (8th century). However, the technique subsequently became very popular in Persia and elsewhere including Bengal.

²Cf. A.U. Pope, ed., A Survey of Persian Art, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 1267.

³Edward Lutyens, "Persian Brickwork", London Country Life, (Feb. 1933), p. 118; also A.U. Pope, Persian Architecture (New York: George Braziller, 1965), p. 145.

⁴An admirable example is provided by the Madrasah or College of Mahmud Gawan (1472) at Bidar in the Deccan where the decoration dominates the architecture. Cf. Percy Brown, Indian Architecture (Islamic Period) (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Private Ltd., 1968), p. 75.

wood or veining of marble. It identifies, defines and emphasizes the component elements and their functions by means of patterns appropriate in scale and character.¹

Muslim art is an eclectic creation produced by "a world of movement and tension" in which artisans and elements from the entire world of Islam were available everywhere. Thus an endless variety of themes - Syrianized, Hellenic, Iranian, Armanian or Caucasian, Central Asian, Indian, Chinese and even nomadic occur in Muslim decoration. Besides, Muslim artists and craftsmen were most ingenious in the creation of new themes. They created a vocabulary of forms, purposes and ideas suiting to their taste and culture out of these heterogeneous elements and that "it was unmistakably different from any of the cultures which were near it or which followed or preceded it."²

Muslim ornamentation is characterized by a concerted avoidance of symbols and figures.³ Its difference in this respect from other medieval cultures is too obvious. It is thus in sharp contrast with the elaborate naturalistic sculptures of the Greek

¹Cf. A.U. Pope, op. cit., p. 138.

²Derck Hill and Oleg Grabar, Islamic Architecture and Its Decoration (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 90.

³Islamic Shari'ah banned all figural imagery on the ground that it might tempt the weak to idolatry. "Hanafi and Uṣūlī Shīī law books banned images apropos of avoiding what might distract from the ṣalāt worship; Shāfiīs and Mālikīs implicitly linked art to luxury by discussing the question apropos of accepting an invitation to a wedding feast; but they all came to like conclusions." (Marshal G.S. Hodgson, op. cit., p. 505).

temple, the Roman triumphal arch, the façade of the Gothic Cathedral or the Hindu and Buddhist temples. The appearance of figure motifs in the religious structures of the Saljuqs speaks rather of the arbitrary nature of Muslim ornaments which are seldom organic with the base on which they appear than a matter of predilection. The function of these sculptures is, unlike other medieval art languages, merely decorative, if at all, and not in the least predicator.

Muslim art fed on the compost of earlier cultures, but differed with them not a little. Besides the Shari'ah ban on figure representation, the "inherent temperamental dislike of the Semitic races for representational art"¹ made the Muslim artists rule out the art of myth and of objective symbolism, and thus set before them a problem. It was a task challenging but inspiring and inventive, and the solutions the artists developed set the tone of Muslim art in general. From the perplexing geometry shimmering a massive dome to the orchestral play of colour in the crammed scenes of a carpet, the artists created a new world of imagination, "a world no longer that of the nature myths but yet rich in its own expression of wonder and delight."²

In Muslim decorative scheme, vegetal themes occur at a scale unrivalled by any others. While palmettes, half-palmettes, grape leaves and bunches and rosettes predominate, almost every

¹K.A.C. Creswell, "The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam", Ars Islamica, XI-XII (1946), pp. 159-66; also M. Bonamy Dobree, "Arabic Art in Egypt", Burlington Magazine, (July, 1920), pp. 184-85.

²Marshall G.S. Hodgson, op. cit., p. 506.

motif of vegetal origin found in the classical, early Byzantine, Sasanian, Central Asian and Indian ornament can be found at least once in Muslim art. Besides, the Muslim artists created infinite number of variables, many of which were independent of the motifs themselves. Like the arabesque and the geometric motifs, the vegetal elements signify more than a visual pleasure; they are perhaps related to the Islamic concept of the paradise as an arboretum and their occurrence in Muslim buildings may represent the arbor inversus, inasmuch as the ablution basin inside a mosque compound is said to represent the stream flowing underneath the paradisaal home of the virtuous.

Geometrical interlacement plays a significant role in Muslim ornamentation. It is the most intellectually satisfying form to a Muslim artist. Abstract forms of geometric shape are found throughout Muslim art and architecture in a bewildering variety of combinations at all periods. Muslim art inherited the motif from later classical art, but developed it in complexity and sophistication to an extent previously unknown. Geometric designs are characterized by a tension between a complete and a broken unit. The main geometric units translated into lines are circles and rhombs. The generating source of much of Muslim ornament is the circle, with the radius functioning as a basic linear unit. The basic unit may be developed into a square, a triangle or a polygon. Squares, pentagons, hexagons are all contained in the circle. The forms are elaborated by multiplication and subdivision, by rotation and systematic arrangements.

Here the design develops around a variable number of axes or centres which are most often forms of visual imaginations than physical entities; the axes have no existence of themselves, but exist because of the rest of the design. For the designs to be meaningful, the inter-relationship between the axes and the parts must be recognized. The star also appears in countless variations in every material, scale and variety of application. In all these patterns, particular attention is paid to the principles of repetition and continuous permutations of designs which can extend beyond the forms they decorate and by implication beyond the world of reality. These infinitely extensible designs have been thought of as indicating 'unity in multiplicity' (al-wahdah fi'l-Kathrah) and 'multiplicity in unity' (al-Kathrah fi'l-wahdah).¹

Ornamental calligraphy has given the Muslim architecture a distinct mark. Despite stylistic differences and local variations in script, calligraphy has at all times done most to unify different types of buildings throughout the Islamic world. The Arabic script with the rhythmic alternations of horizontal and vertical strokes is particularly well suited to decoration, whether the square or angular script known as kufic, or the round and cursive script known as Naskhi and its graceful Persian derivative known as Nastaliq.

¹
Dalu Jones, op. cit., p. 170; cf. Titus Burckhardt, op. cit., p. 63.

Calligraphy is closely linked with geometry and in Arabic, it is referred to as 'the geometry of line' implying thereby that the proportions of its letters and curved strokes are governed by mathematical measurements. Beginning with the Dome of the Rock (691), Calligraphy constituted almost an invariable element of decoration of the Muslim buildings throughout the centuries. By the 10th century, Calligraphy shared with other elements of decoration a multiplicity of planes and an emphasis on textured effect. It often became part of arabesque composition and letters assumed foliated and floriated characters, appearing against a background of vegetal scrolls. Inscriptions were mostly used as a frame along and around the main elements of the buildings they decorated, portals and cornices in particular. The mihrāb panel often received similar treatment. Epigraphs on monuments generally consist of Quranic passages, the sayings of the Prophet, eulogies to builders and triumphal inscriptions. "By lending itself to two simultaneous and partly contradictory functions - the iconographic and the ornamental - and by providing at the same time a legible message and a decorative motif, calligraphy solves, to some extent, a tension always latent in Islamic art between representation and abstraction; it gives an identifiable content to abstract patterns and thereby provides a substitute for the figural decorative repertoire of pre-Islamic and non-Islamic cultures."¹ But the recurrent use of patterned calligraphy and of

¹Dalu Jones, op. cit., pp. 168-69. Some writers treat the Quranic texts as a replacement of the images of the old nature divinities. Cf. Marshall G.S. Hodgson, op. cit., p. 510; also Richard Ettinghausen, "The Man-Made Setting", in The World of Islam, ed. by Bernard Lewis (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), p. 61.

intricate and symmetrical abstract designs, both carried further the bent towards stylization.

A most satisfying art motif in Muslim ornamentation representing visual representation of the unity of God¹ underlying the inexhaustible variety of the universe is the arabesque.² It was used as marginal decoration in pre-Islamic Coptic and Sasanian art.³ It is characterized by a continuous stem which splits regularly, providing a series of counterpoised leafy secondary stems which can in turn move again or return to be integrated into the main stem. This limitless rhythmical alternation of movement, conveyed by the reciprocal repetition of curved lines, produces a design that is balanced and free from tension. Compositions were often made with other means, notably through pure geometric inventions of circles, triangles, squares and other polygons interwoven in complex patterns. Also favoured were combinations of the vegetal motifs with the highly cultivated lines of Arabic writing, besides atypical animal and human

¹ Carl J. Lamm, "The Spirit of Moslem Art", Bulletin of the Faculty of Art of Cairo University, 3 (1935), pp. 1-7. The writer views the arabesque as expressive of monotheism and as at the heart of Muslim art.

² Originally signifying something that 'pertained to the Arabs', particularly a surface ornament formed by the combination of conventional plants and foliage combined with artificial objects and geometric lines, the arabesque afforded the necessary reaction from the imitation of nature. Cf. Martin S. Briggs, Muhammadian Architecture in Egypt and Palestine (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 173.

³ Marshall G.S. Hodgson, op. cit., p. 509.

figures (which sometimes were simply variations of the leaves growing out of the stems of the arabesque). The form of the arabesque was so effective even without the enshrinement of texts that it came to be used in every context and in every material: not only on the walls of buildings but as the carving on wooden doors or chests, as frontispieces or covers of books, as monumental carpets. The underlying formulae governing arabesque designs are based on the same mathematical principles that determine geometric patterns.

The development of the arabesque from the classical vine tendril to extreme stylization occurred early in Muslim art. It is met with in the 8th century Umayyad palace at Mshatta where it shows greater intricacy and a denser ingrowing quality than its predecessors in Syria. By the 14th century, the development of arabesque designs appears to have reached technical maturity wherein different superimposed planes became more clearly differentiated and the design was used on a large scale to provide overall monumental decoration, particularly in Iran and Central Asia.

Muslim ornamentation is an art of space. The extensive surfaces offered by the spacious planning of the Muslim buildings together with the absence of a riot of furniture help create continuous space and decorative coherence that are characteristic of Muslim architecture. A continuous space like the Mshatta façade or the Samarra walls allows the artist the most freedom

to plan and extend his designs at will in any direction. Such a spatial treatment also liberates the observer from the shackles of restricted view; he can amuse himself from one plane to another, from one design to another, in the vast expanse of the space. But decoration in Muslim architecture is not limited to the covering of surfaces, it also helps to transform space. This is achieved by artful use of structural elements beyond their natural context.

Muslim structures erected before the Dome of the Rock (691) are not known to have had any decoration. Perhaps the nature of the materials of their construction (e.g. sun-dried bricks, reeds etc.) was not worthy of ornamental treatment.¹ The censure of the Prophet Muḥammad against erection of buildings² (and for that matter against ornamentation) may also have made the first Muslim structures go without decoration. It was only during the Umayyad period (661-750) and in the Dome of the Rock (691) that ornamentation appears earliest in Muslim architecture.

Muslim architecture employed a countless number and variety of motifs for its decoration. But the same motifs appeared in different media or techniques at the same time. It may, therefore,

¹The rude architecture of the Arabian Oases, built of sundried bricks, was devoid of decoration and ornament. Cf. P.K. Hitti, History of the Arabs (London: Macmillan & Co., 1970), p. 256. The tradition may have held on the initial Muslim structures.

²Ibn Sa'd, Kitāb Al-Tābāqāt Al-Kabīr, vol. I, Pt. II, p. 181; vol. II, pp. 7-8.

be appropriate to discuss ornamentation in Muslim architecture with reference to the techniques used.

Mosaics constituted the earliest decorative medium of Muslim architecture. Its Arabic equivalent is fusayfisā.¹ The technique consists of "putting together pieces of various materials either white or particoloured in such a way as to form definite patterns",¹ and had been used since ancient past both in the east and the west. It was a popular form of decoration in secular as well as religious architecture of North Africa, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and parts of Persia in the early years of the Christian era. The Muslims adopted the technique and employed it almost exclusively in their first structures in Syria.

The mosaics of the Dome of the Rock (691) in Jerusalem "constitute the first and the most ancient Muslim decorative scheme known."² The upper part of the outer walls and the drum, the vaults of the entrance porches, the spandrels of the arches between the dome piers, the bands inside the drum and the area above the tie-beams were all embellished with mosaics. Beautiful glass mosaics were used inside the arcades and the drum most of

¹G.C.M. Birdwood, The Industrial Arts of India (London, 1880), p. 212, quoted by R. Nath, Colour Decoration in Mughal Architecture (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Private Ltd., 1970), p. 21.

²K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, vol. I, Pt. I (London: The Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 321.

which still exist.¹ The mosaics display fruits, vine and acanthus scrolls and trees, some of which were adorned with jewels. They also include a Kufic inscription recording the date of completion of the building as 72 A.H./691 A.D. But "none of the elements which later on became typical of Muslim art are to be found here: geometric ornament and interlacing patterns are wholly absent."² The use of vegetal forms to the exclusion of animated figures shows conformity to the newly emerging artistically restrictive attitude of Islam. "Seen historically, the decoration as a whole has a new world-wide aspect, for it combines Byzantine and Iranian motifs and applies the mosaics - a Byzantine type of decoration - in the manner of the Sasanian stuccoes."³

Elaborate mosaic decoration appears in the Great Mosque of Damascus, built by the Caliph al-Walid (705-15). The walls of the mosque, both inside and outside, were completely faced with particoloured marbles and mosaics, glittering with gold and depicting vegetable forms and architectural motifs. The battlements crowning the building were originally covered with mosaics.⁴

¹ G. Fehervari, "Art and Architecture", in The Cambridge History of Islam, vol. II, ed. by P.M. Holt and others (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), p. 702.

² K.A.C. Creswell, op. cit., p. 321.

³ R. Ettinghausen, Arab Painting (Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1962), p. 22.

⁴ G.T. Rivoira, Moslem Architecture, trans. by MCN Rushforth (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1973), p. 94.

The piers and the arches with their gilt keystones received decoration in mosaics and so did the windows. The principal mihrāb was a blaze of gilding and around it were inlaid great cut-pieces of agate and turquoise.¹ But "unlike the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock to which they are stylistically and technically related, the Damascus wall decorations show no Persian influence."² The representation of architectural motifs together with the landscapes recalls similar subjects in Pompeian painting. Elaborate inscriptions in mosaic were used here for the first time.³

The palace complex of the castle of Khirbat al-Min'ya (705), probably built by the Caliph al-Walid (705-15), contained mosaics in its floor showing geometric designs.⁴ Floor mosaics have also been found in the palace of Khirbat al-Mafjar, built during the reign of Caliph Hishām (724-43). Here the main design consists of a large apple-tree flanked by a few leafy plants. It shows a lion jumping on to the neck of a gazelle. These mosaics may be connected with similar floor mosaics of the Byzantines at Antioch and Constantinople. The animals, however, savour of the East where the motif of a lion attacking a gazelle had been a popular decorative theme since Achaemenid times.⁵

¹G.T. Rivoira, op. cit., p. 95.

²R. Ettinghausen, Arab Painting, op. cit., p. 26.

³R. Nath, op. cit., p. 27.

⁴Ernst Kuhnel, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵David Talbot Rice, Islamic Art (London: Thames & Hudson, 1965), p. 22.

Under the Abbasids (750-1258), brick became the universal medium of construction and with it stucco and glazed tiles replaced mosaic as decorative technique. But the use of mosaics was not wholly abandoned. Excavations at Samarra (838-889) have revealed "enamelled, engraved and coloured glasses, bottles, goblets, lamps and small pieces of glass which were clearly used in mosaic."¹ Traces of the use of glass mosaic have also been found in the Great Mosque of Samarra (847-61).²

Furnival reports some examples of glass-mosaics used in the Muslim monuments of Egypt³ which may have been the work of Byzantine artists. In Spain, the Great Mosque of Cordova (786) received mosaic decoration in the mihrāb panel and the dome in front of it in the 10th century. For the execution of mosaic in this sanctuary, "the Emperor of Constantinople, by request, sent a mosaic worker and a present of 320 quintals of tesserae"⁴ The art was practised traditionally in Asia Minor and the Ottomans employed it in the Sulaimāniyah and the Ahmadiyah in Istanbul as late as the 16th and the early 17th centuries.⁵

¹ Andre Godard, The Art of Iran, trans. by Michael Heron (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1965), p. 271.

² David Talbot Rice, op. cit., p. 35; also G. Fehervari, op. cit., p. 709. Proofs of mosaic decoration have also been found in the two small mosques and the palace complex of Balkuwara in Samarra.

³ W.G. Furnival, Leadless Decorative Tiles, Faience and Mosaic (Staffordshire, 1904), p. 534.

⁴ G.T. Rivoira, op. cit., p. 355.

⁵ Banister Fletcher, A History of Architecture on the Comparative Methods (17th ed.; London: The Athlone Press, 1961), p. 949.

In India, a technique generally known as inlay but giving the same effect as mosaic, and hence inlay-mosaic, was introduced by the Delhi Sultāns. The work was done on the surface of the monuments by preparing cut beds to receive contrast stone chips to form patterns mainly geometric, but also floral and arabesque. At the beginning, the bed was prepared on red sandstone to receive marble bodies, the procedure being popularly known as Opus sectile after the Roman method, but in later time, particularly during the Mughal period, was extended to marble bed, the chips then employed being of coloured marbles and semiprecious stones. To differentiate it from the earlier one, this classification is generally known as pietra dura from the Italian vocabulary and its supposed Italian origin. The 'Alāi Darwāza, built by 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī (1296-1316), provides the earliest example of inlay-mosaic in India. The exterior of the tomb of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq (1320-25) in Delhi produces a mosaic effect "by the free use of bands and borders of white marble with a few panels of black marble."¹ The buildings of Dhar and Mandu (15th century) were ornamented with mosaics of marble of different colours including white, yellow, slate and others; while in certain interiors, semi-precious stones such as jasper, agate and cornelian were combined with marble for more decorative effect.² Marble mosaics also decorated the

¹ ASIR. vol. I (Simla: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1871), p. 216.

² Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 63.

façade of the Qila-i-Kuhāna Mosque of Shēr Shāh (1540-45) in Delhi. Here geometric designs were executed with pieces of white, black and yellow marble and red sandstone.¹ In some cases tessellated mosaics consisting generally of cubes of equal sizes but bedded in cement mortar are also seen in the ornament. This is in close harmony with the inlay works and the resemblance is such that unless somebody is well acquainted with both the methods, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the two.

Inlay and tessellated mosaic constituted a major element in the ornamentation of the Mughal buildings in India. Marble inlay-mosaic in the floors and dadoes of Humāyūn's tomb in Delhi (1565) is unsurpassable in fineness and beauty.² The walls of the redstone tomb of Atgāh Khān (d. 1562) in Delhi were nicely decorated with coloured marble inlay.³ Akbar's buildings at Agra Fort such as the Delhi Darwāza (1566) and the so-called Jahāngirī Mahal (c. 1570) were faced with beautiful white marble inlay in red sandstone. Akbar's tomb at Sikandra (1612-13) was embellished with mosaics both tessellated and inlay. The whole exterior of the southern gateway of the tomb has been covered with tessellated mosaic in geometrical designs in red, yellow, white, black and green stones. The inlay patterns of white and

¹ASIR, vol. IV (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1874), p. 74.

²ASIR, vol. I, op. cit., p. 223.

³Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 98.

black marble and white and green marble have been used in the spandrels of the arches and the parapet. The Jāmi' Masjid at Fathpur-Sikri (1571) provides the best example of inlay-mosaic in the Opus sectile pattern executed during the reign of Akbar.¹

It is from the time of Jahāngir (1605-27) that the inlay of semi-precious stones in marble became popular and its first important example is to be found in the tomb of I'timād al-Dawla (1628) at Agra. "Hitherto the inlaid work had been of the kind known as Opus sectile, a marble intarsia of various colours, but from now onward the art took the form of that called pietra dura in which hard and rare stones such as lapis, onyx, jasper, topaz, cornelian and the like were embedded in the marble in graceful foliations."² Almost the whole exterior of the main building has inlay work in geometrical, floral and conventional patterns intermixed with wine-vases, dishes, cypress trees and the like. The pavement and the dadoes inside the tomb have also inlaid mosaics forming star patterns predominantly.

Inlay, particularly the pietra dura variety, reached its high water-mark in the reign of Shāhjahān (1628-56). It appears in the Dīwān-i-Khāṣṣ, Rang Maḥal, Shāh Burj and other structures at the Delhi Fort. The technique has been applied most beautifully at Agra in the Muthamman Burj, the Dīwān-i-Khāṣṣ (1637) and the Tāj Maḥal (1634). Pietra dura decoration appears in the Tāj

¹Cf. R. Nath, op. cit., p. 30.

²Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 109.

on the exterior dadoes of the portals, on the marble screen around the cenotaph and the spandrels of the arches, inside and outside. In the buildings of Shāhjahān, "mosaics of coloured stones on a white marble background were universally applied and the art of inlay was carried to perfection."¹

Ornamentation in glass mosaics seems to have been introduced in the Mughal monuments under Shāhjahān's patronage. The Shīsh Mahals in the forts of Agra, Delhi and Lahore show glass mosaics in the walls and the ceilings. Glass mosaics also decorated the walls, vaults and soffits of the residential palaces in Delhi, such as the Shāh Burj, the Rang Mahal and the Mamtāz Mahal. Several palace apartments in the Agra Fort were similarly decorated. These include the Shāh Burj, the Hammām, the Sard Khāna and the Garm Khāna.

Mosaic as a decorative medium does not appear to have been an acceptable technique to the Muslim builders in Bengal. The character of Bengal architecture built of brick, together with the scarcity of quality stones may have inhibited the development of the art of mosaic in the region; at least no such examples are known to have survived. Since factors like geology and climate largely condition the character of an architecture and its decoration, the absence of mosaic from the ornamentation of Muslim monuments in Bengal seems obvious. What is more, Bengal's preference for traditional terracotta art would naturally weigh less in favour of other techniques of decoration.

¹R. Nath, op. cit., p. 38.

Stone carving was another of the earliest techniques of Muslim architectural ornamentation. It began with the Dome of the Rock (691) in Syria where there was already a long rich tradition of carving in stone and where splendid Christian Churches of cut stone were numerous. In the Dome of the Rock, some of the columns of the arcades carried corinthian and other complex capitals and the windows were originally covered with pierced stone slabs. Beautiful marble slabs carved in geometric patterns formed the grilles in the outer walls of the Great Mosque of Damascus, built by the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd (705-15). But the most magnificent ornamentation in carved stone under the Umayyads appears in the palace of Mshatta (743-44) in the Syrian desert. The richly carved stone façade is now preserved in the German State Museum in Berlin. The decoration is in deeply undercut relief. Vine tendrils, acanthus leaves and rosettes constitute the dominant foliage carved. Here appears a decoration composed of animals, birds and human figures amid vine scrolls derived chiefly from the Christian art of Syria.¹ "Some of these are the most successful of the whole series being unsurpassed in richness and decorative value."² A careful analysis of the ornament, however, reveals not only traditional Syrian and Sasanian motifs, but also a new oriental style that may be termed

¹M.S. Dimand, A Handbook of Muhammadan Art (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1958), p. 85.

²K.A.C. Creswell, A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), p. 132.

Umayyad.¹ "The uncertainty of the stone carvers is clearly expressed in the different attempts to give unity of composition to the mass of tendrils in the triangles. In their spasmodic efforts to give ornamental stylization to the luxuriously rampant and still naturalistic leaf and scroll work, we can witness the birth pangs of the arabesque."² Other Umayyad monuments containing ornamentation in carved stone are the Qaṣr al-Miṇīya (705), Qaṣr al-Ṭubā (c. 720), the Rabāṭ Ammān, and the Khirbat al-Mafjar (c. 743).

Under the Abbasids (750-1258), brick replaced stone as building material and there occurred a consequent change in the decorative technique. The Abbasid palaces and mosques were mostly ornamented in stucco and colour. However, a few examples of carved stone decoration have survived from the Abbasid monuments. Unlike under the Umayyads, the practice of reusing old materials for columns disappeared with the growth of Abbasid architecture and finely carved column shafts and capitals were made anew.³ Of special importance is a series of alabaster capitals found at Raqqa and the region between Ruṣāfa and Dier al-Zon. The carvings of these capitals are significant as they

¹ Cf. M.S. Dimand, op. cit., p. 85.

² Ernst Kuhnel, op. cit., p. 43.

³ Ronald Lewcock, "Materials and Techniques" in Architecture of the Islamic World, op. cit., p. 135.

show the gradual replacement of the Syrian acanthus by the Sasanian palmette.¹ The carving is in low relief.

An excellent example of early Muslim stone carving is a mihrāb, now in the Baghdad Museum. E. Herzfeld found it in the Jami' al-Khassāki at Baghdad, after which it is named. It is a single block of marble with a beautiful conch supported on engaged columns and having a central ornamental band in relief.²

Ornamentation in carved stone along with stucco, painting and terracotta was a favourite art of the Ghaznavid rulers (962-1186). The Bombaci-Scerrato excavations at the palace of Masūd III (1099-1114) at Ghazni, carried out in 1957-58, have revealed carved marble panels in the courtyard walls of the palace. These are carved with human and animal figures, palmettes, arabesques and lotus flowers in relief joined by fine scrolls and also with foliated Kufic friezes.³

Decoration in stone carving was a highly developed art under the Saljūqs (11th to 13th century). The Saljūq carving in stone is supposed to have been influenced by the cut terracotta

¹Two such capitals are now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and show wavy scrolls formed of half-palmettes, split palmettes and full palmettes. (M.S. Dimand, *op. cit.*, p. 86).

²Ernst Kuhnelt, *op. cit.*, p. 44. Until recently, the 'Khassāki Mihrāb' was considered to be an Abbasid work. The decorative motifs, however, suggests an Umayyad date and a Syrian origin. (G. Fehervari, *op. cit.*, p. 707).

³Oktay Aslanapa, *Turkish Art and Architecture* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1971), p. 260.

ornamentation of the Ghaznavids. The Saljūq ornamentation in stone is known from a number of 12th century monuments in Iran including the Masjid-i-Jami at Qazwin (1116) and the mihrāb of the Imām Zāda Karrār at Būzūn (1134). Besides, a number of tombstones of the 12th century with Quranic verse, date and name of the deceased and often with the sculptors' names have come from Nihawand and Yazd.¹

Under the Saljūqs, figural carvings of man and animal became very popular and occupied a place of distinction in architectural decoration in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. Besides, Arabic writing was given a monumental treatment with rich background of arabesque. The mihrābs of the Great Mosque of Nūr al-Dīn in Musul (1148) are richly carved in stone with arabesque decoration in relief. The Talisman Gate of Baghdad (1221-22) had an arch with a relief that was one of the finest examples of the Saljūq stone carving. It represented the Abbasid Caliph al-Nāṣir (1180-1225) in a seated position flanked by two dragons with knotted bodies carved in high relief on a background of graceful arabesques.²

The physical and geological conditions of Asia Minor made the Anatolian Saljūqs confine the decoration of their buildings mostly to stone carving. The country had a harsh and rainy climate which made other techniques of ornamentation unsuitable.

¹M.S. Dimand, op. cit., p. 91.

²Ibid., p. 96.

Two types of motifs were generally carved: the geometrical motifs produced by various combinations of octagons and hexagons together with stars, swastikas etc. and figure motifs which were perhaps the result of influence of the Uighur art of Central Asia. The decoration was largely confined to the entrance porches which reached a monumental scale of decorative art in stone and at their highest development often outshone the architectural base.¹ Geometric designs of braid motifs worked in stone decorated the porch of the Mengujukid mosque (1180) in the Castle of Divrigi in northern Anatolia. Carved geometrical patterns ornamented the mihrāb of the Saljūq Tas (stone) Masjid in Konia (1265), the porch of the Mengujukid Sitte Mālik Mausoleum at Divrigi (1195), the porch of the hospital of Kaykāūs at Sivas (1218) and many others.² Other motifs carved in stone included arabesques, palmettes, lotus flowers, scrolls etc. Very fine examples of sculptured motifs are also found adorning madrasahs, tombs, fortresses and even mosques in Anatolia.³

Ornamentation by stone carving was a favourite art even in Muslim Spain where the technique was a heritage from the Roman times. The magnificent palace of Madīna al-Zahrā', built by 'Abd al-Rahmān III (912-61), contained elaborate decoration

¹ Oktay Aslanapa, op. cit., p. 264.

² Ibid., p. 262.

³ Ibid., p. 266. These include figures of animals, birds, and human beings either separately or combined.

in stone reliefs consisting chiefly of floral scrolls. The disintegrated acanthus of Syrian variety is mixed here with geometrical palmette scrolls wherein Byzantine and Visigothic traditions are traceable.¹ Carved marble capitals and bases of Muslim Spain show acanthus leaves deeply undercut. The marble plaques carved with palmette scrolls and trees of life which flank the mihrāb of Ḥakam II's extension of the Great Mosque of Cordova (965) are masterpieces of Umayyad stone carving in Spain. The palace of al-Jāfariya at Saragossa, built by Abū Jafar Muqtadir (1046-81) was ornamented with stone reliefs with deeply undercut palmettes. The marble columns surrounding the Court of Lion in the Nasirid palace of the al-Ḥamrā' (14th century) were carved with stalactite decoration.²

In Egypt, carved ornamentation in stone was ~~g~~ developed art under the Fatimids (909-1171), Ayyubids (1169-1250) and Mamlūks (1250-1516). The Fatimid art benefited by the freer interpretation of the ban on representation of living creatures. The Fatimid mosques were faced with dressed stones having richly animated carvings on them.³ The splendid openwork rosettes at Al-Aqmar (1125) reveals the excellence of stone carving under the Fatimids. The stone-work in the mosque of al-Ḥakīm (990-1012) was monumental.⁴ The windows, niches, bands and minarets

¹M.S. Dimand, op. cit., p. 104.

²Sir Banister Fletcher, op. cit., p. 1249.

³Ernst Kuhnel, op. cit., p. 69.

⁴David Talbot Rice, op. cit., p. 88.

were carved with arabesques. The tendency of articulating the façade with sculptured decoration continued under the Ayyubids (1169-1250) and the Mamlūks (1250-1516). Under the Mamlūks, stone carving for ornamental purposes reached the status of a passionate art. The characteristic niches and stalactite galleries of the Mamlūk minarets were carved with geometric ornaments in star-shaped compartments. Delicate carvings of various geometric patterns also decorated the Mamlūk mihrābs. The façade of the mosque of Baybars I (1260-77) was richly carved in stone. The magnificent marble screens in the madrasah of Salār and Sanjar al-Gaulī (1303) were open-work objects carved with arabesques. The minaret of the madrasah of Sultān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1292-1304) at Cairo is an excellent specimen of Mamlūk ornamentation in stone.¹ Under the Burjīs (1382-1516), stone sculptures were more frequently used as architectural ornament.² The dome of the tomb of Qait Bey (1463-96) at Cairo represents in its geometric reliefs the height of Mamlūk ornamentation in stone carving.³ The Arab Museum of Cairo possesses a number of Mamlūk stone reliefs from various mosques dating to 14th and 15th centuries.

In India - land of ancient stone carving, Muslim ornamental works in stone date from the beginning of their political occupation. The earliest extant Muslim structures, built in Delhi and

¹David Talbot Rice, *op. cit.*, p. 145, Pl. 145.

²M.S. Dimand, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

³David Talbot Rice, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

Ajmer, were products of reconditioned stones made useable for Muslim purposes. The Qutb mosques at Delhi (1195) and Ajmer (c. 1205), the Qutb Minār (1200) and the mausoleum of Sultān Iltutmish (1235) at Delhi were ornamented with rich carvings of intricate arabesques, lotuses, scrolls and inscriptions in stone. Even in these early monuments, Muslim carving in stone took a totally different form of execution, being of low relief and devoid of sculptural elements, as against the high relief and figure carving characteristic of the traditional Indian art. The sudden change in the nature of the art appears to have caused no serious inconvenience to the Indian carvers who soon adapted their skill to the new demand and produced surprisingly beautiful pieces of stonework. As it is evident, ornamentation in stone carving continued with equal vigour under the Khaljis (1290-1320), but with less pronouncement during the time of the Tughluqs (1321-1414), the Sayyids (1414-44) and the Lodis (1451-1526), rising steeply again during the rule of the Grand Mughals (1526-1707) and culminating in the periods of Akbar (1556-1605) and Shāhjahān (1627-58). The carvings of the Turkish Sultān's House termed 'little architectural gem',¹ or the so-called Jodh Bai's (c. 1570) and Birbal's palaces (1569) at Fathpur-Sikri (1568-85) and those of the Jahāngiri Mahal (c. 1570) in the Agra Fort represent the best of the stone cutter's technique, after which there was no further development but simply polishing. The

¹ Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 103.

The lattice marble curtain screens in the tomb of Selīm Chisti at Fathpūr-Sikrī "are some of the finest specimens of perforated marble work to be found in Indian sub-continent."¹ The stemmed flavour trees on the dadoes of the walls of the Tājmaḥal (1634) and the acanthus leaves on the capitals of the Diwān-i-Kḥaṣṣ or the Mūtī Masjid pillars in the Delhi Fort (1638-49) exemplify the culmination of the beauty of Indo-Muslim stone carving, and are with reason often reproduced as perfect examples of Muslim artistic beauty.

But before its triumphal progress under the Mughals, the art of stone carving attained a high degree of excellence in Gujrāt under the independent rule of the Begarha Sultāns (1459-1550). It is not unlikely that Akbar after his conquest of Gujrāt (1573) brought therefrom stone masons whom he employed for carved decoration of his monuments. In Gujrāt, exquisite carved ornamentation in stone appears in the Jāmi' Masjid of Aḥmadabad (1423), the Jāmi' Masjid at Champanir (1485), the Sīdī Sayyid Mosque at Aḥmadabad (c. 1515) and others. The perforated stone screens in the mosques of Sīdī Sayyid and Muhafiz Khan (1492) representing tree motifs with intricate twigs and flowers are amazing examples of the stone cutter's art and have won world-wide reputation. "There are some exquisite specimens of tracery in precious marbles at Agra and Delhi, but none quite equal to this."²

¹A.B.M. Husain, Fathpur-Sikri and Its Architecture (Dacca: Bureau of National Reconstruction, 1970), p. 120.

²James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, vol. II (London: John Murray, 1910), p. 237.

The 'Adil Shāhī rulers of Bijapur (16th and 17th centuries) also used stone carving for ornamentation of their monuments. The mausoleum of Ibrāhīm 'Adil Shāh (1580-1627) and the mosque attached to it, known as Ibrāhīm Rouza (1615), were entirely covered by "exquisite and elaborate carvings".¹ The carved inscriptions in the tomb are so numerous that it appeared, as if, the whole Qur'ān was written on the walls.²

In the ornamentation of the Muslim monuments in Bengal, carved stone played its part fairly well. Initially, the Muslims appear to have used pre-existing carved stones taken from Hindu temples, examples of which are found in the mosque (1298) and the tomb (c. 1300) of Zafar Khān Ghāzī at Tribeni in Hooghly. The carved decorations show creepers, rosettes and chain-and-bell motifs in deep and bold carving characteristic of the Hindu art.³ Distinctive Muslim decoration in stone carving⁴ appears in the monuments of the Ilyās Shāhī (1342-1414 & 1433-86) and the Husain Shāhī (1491-1538) rulers of Bengal,

¹ James Fergusson, op. cit., p. 561.

² Cf. Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 79.

³ A.B.M. Husain, "The Ornamentation of the Sultani Architecture of Bengal", Shilpakala, I (1978), p. 3.

⁴ Alexander Cunningham while praising the carved ornamentation of Hazrat Pānduā Jāmī and Chhota Sonā Masjid at Gaur as "strikingly rich and beautiful", also complains of it as being "too small and shallow". (ASIR, vol. XV (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1882), pp. 74-75). Modern Scholarship has, however, established that such is the character of Muslim carving and moulding everywhere.

such as the Adina Mosque at Hazrat Pānduā (1375), the Chhota Sonā Masjid (1493-1519) at Gaur and the Mahisantosh Mosque (1507) at Rajshahi. The patterns of the carving reveal that they take their origin from the terracotta art of the time.¹

Ornamentation by stone carving showed a marked decline after the fall of the Husain Shāhi rule in Bengal (mid 16th century). This degenerate state is represented by the carvings in the Kusumba Mosque (1558) at Rajshahi.² Hereafter, stone works in Bengal appear to have remained confined to casual inscriptions, a few cenotaphs and other minor objects.³

Synchronous with stone carving is another decorative technique, known as stucco, in Muslim ornamentation. Stucco is an ancient decorative medium and was used by the Egyptians, Cretans, Greeks, Etruscans, Romans and Byzantines. It was also known to the orientals and from Parthian time (2nd century B.C.) onward was one of the most characteristic techniques of Iranian art.⁴ The lands of the Mediterranean knew the art which they applied to repairs or rapid construction of unfinished works.

¹A.H. Dani, Muslim Architecture in Bengal (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p. 19.

²Ibid., p. 164.

³The pierced marble screen in the tomb of Bibi Pari (c.1684) at Dacca must have been imported from Upper India.

⁴Oleg Grabar, op. cit., p. 193.

The use of stucco in Muslim architecture was influenced by the tradition of the Byzantines, the Sasanians and the Buddhists of Central Asia. Under the dispensation of Islam, which effected a balance between regions, stucco rapidly spread from Iran and Iraq all over the Muslim world. Stucco decoration appeared in the Umayyad monuments of Syria as early as the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (724-27), the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī (728) and the palace of Khirbat al-Maḥjar (c. 743). Fragments of a stucco bas-relief and a stucco grille have been discovered from the palace of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī.¹ The Khirbat al-Maḥjar has yielded stucco sculptures in the Sasanian and ancient eastern tradition. Other motifs of stucco decoration included geometric and leaf designs such as the hexagon, diamond, acanthus, palmettes etc. that later formed part of purely Muslim style.²

In the Umayyad art, decorative ideas were mostly expressed in stone which was the dominant material for construction till late Cordovan phase. Under the Abbasids, it was stucco that determined the form of decoration because of its association with brick building. The most elaborate use of stucco under the

¹ Creswell remarks that "This is the first introduction of stucco ornament in Muslim architecture." (K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, vol. I, Pt. I, op. cit., p. 511). The Great Mosque of Damascus is reported to be one of the earliest Muslim monuments to receive stucco decoration. (Hermann Goetz, "Stucco in the Islamic World", in Encyclopedia of World Art, vol. XIII (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), pp. 642-43). The report, however, is not corroborated by other authorities on Muslim art.

² David Talbot Rice, op. cit., 23.

Abbasids appears at Samarra where all the rooms of the palace complex were furnished with stucco dadoes above which the walls were decorated with paintings. Besides the palace, many of the houses inside were coated with stucco which stood almost to roof height.¹ Samarra stuccoes have been classified into three groups from the point of technique of execution and motif. In the earliest, the decoration was moulded and five-lobed vine scrolls formed the main theme; in the second group, the stems of the scrolls were omitted and only bud-like designs included; in the third and distant group, the stuccoes were carved as well as moulded, the carving being in low-relief with sloping edges, usually called the 'bevelled carving'. The second style appears to have served as the basis from which the stucco work, which was later to become so important for the decoration of mihrābs all over Persia, was developed. The 'bevelled style' is the artistic contribution of Samarra.² The Samarra style spread to Iran where it was a factor from the 10th to the 12th centuries and also to Egypt as seen in the Tulunid and Fatimid monuments.

Stucco appears in the decoration of the Mosque of Nayin (late 10th century) in the Samarra style. Excavations at Nishāpūr has revealed the use of stucco in private dwellings in the 9th and 10th centuries. The greater part of stucco decoration of the Abbasid period (750-1258) comes from several

¹David Talbot Rice, op. cit., p. 33.

²Ernst Kuhnel, op. cit., p. 56.

buildings in the mounds known as Teppe Madrasah and Sabz Pūshan in Nishāpūr. The panels originally painted white, yellow, blue and red were richly decorated with palmette scrolls and palmette devices within foiled medallions similar to those at Samarra. Some of the medallions show Sasanian animal styles.¹ The Nishāpūr stucco is significant as it forms a link between the Abbasid and the Saljūq styles of Iranian stucco decoration.

Stucco played an important role in the decoration of the Saljūq monuments (11th to 13th century). Under the Saljūqs, the arabesque and monumental inscriptions became essential parts of decoration. Saljūq ornamentation in stucco is known from a number of 12th century monuments in Iran such as the Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Qazwīn (1116), the Imām Zāda Karrār at Buzun (1134), Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Zawāre (1156) etc. The mihrābs of the Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Ardistan (1160) were sumptuously embellished with stucco containing several types of arabesques. Besides mosques and tombs, stucco was used in the ornamentation of palaces and houses of the nobles. The compositions often contained hunting and court scenes. Sometimes the reliefs of the figures approached sculpture in the round.² Statuettes of man and woman and busts of amirs and princes, often painted, found in the excavation at Rayy in Iran, were used as ornaments in palaces and

¹ M.S. Dimand, op. cit., p. 91.

² Ibid., p. 92; Oktay Aslanapa, op. cit., p. 265.

pavilions.¹ Stucco is also known to have been used in the tombstones of the Saljūqs.

From Iran, stucco spread to Mesopotamia, Syria and Asia Minor. Mosques, palaces and churches of Muṣul reveal rich decoration in carved stucco in characteristic Saljūq style. The Kara Saray or "Black Palace" of Badr al-Dīn Lu'lu' (1233-59) in Muṣul contained stucco decoration showing figure subjects mixed with arabesque. In Anatolia, stucco was used for decoration of the palace of Sultān 'Alā al-Dīn Kaykubād (1219-36) in Konia.

The Mongols continued the ornamental use of stucco and carried it to a most splendid climax of development. They used the technique particularly for embellishing prayer niches in mosques and mausolea. In the Madrasah Haydaria in Qazwin (second half of 13th century), stucco decoration appeared in the inscription frieze, in the arches and in the mihrāb.² In the mausoleum of Gunbad-i-'Alāviyan (c. 14th century) in Hamadān, both the interior and the exterior were completely covered with carved stucco³ having predominantly vegetal motifs. The dado, the frieze, the squinches, the colonettes and mouldings, all presented a rhythmic tone and it was here that the "Mongol stucco

¹ Oktay Aslanapa, op. cit., p. 264.

² A.U. Pope, op. cit., p. 155.

³ Ibid., cf. Derek Hill and Oleg Grabar, op. cit., p. 59, Pls. 178-83; also A.U. Pope, ed., op. cit., p. 1301.

technique reached its height."¹ The minbar of the Masjid-i-Jāmi' in Isfahān (1310) was also richly decorated with stucco containing inscriptions and arabesques.²

In Egypt, under the Fatimids (909-1171), stucco was almost universally used for interior decoration. The earliest Fatimid stucco ornamentation appeared in the Mosque of al-Azhar (970-72) in Cairo. Here the sanctuary and the qibla wall were decorated with a dense pattern of palmette scrolls in stucco. The Mosque of al-Hākīm (990-1012) contained rich stucco decoration in the windows and niches.³ Stucco continued to decorate the Fatimid monuments during the 11th and 12th centuries. The mihrāb of the tomb-mosque of al-Juyūshī (1085), the entrance cupola in the Mosque of al-Azhar (12th century) and the triple mihrāb of the mausoleum of the brothers of Yūsuf (1100) were all ornately decorated with stucco. The stucco mihrābs of the tomb of Sayyida Ruqayya (1133) showed ornamentation in tiers of stalactites. The windows of the Mosque of Salih Talai (1160) were openwork products in stucco. In the Fatimid mosques, the mihrāb was often kept flat with a mere suggestion of pillars, arches, frames or jambs, all in stucco relief.⁴

¹ M.S. Dimand, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

² Ernst Kuhnel, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

³ M.S. Dimand, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁴ Ernst Kuhnel, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

In the ornamentation of the Mamlūk monuments (1252-1516), stucco enjoyed a welcome application along with mosaics and stone carving. The Mosque of Baybars I (1260-77) still preserves part of the interior stucco decoration consisting of grilled windows with bands of kufic inscriptions and arabesques. Other Mamlūk monuments with stucco decoration are the mausoleum of Sultān Qalā'ūn (1285) and the madrasah of Sultān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1295-1303).

Stucco was also the most common form of ornamentation in the Maghrib from Tunisia to Morocco. Mosques at Tunis, Tlemcen, Timmal, Fez, Marāqish, Rabāt and other places contained decoration in stucco. In Spain, stucco was used in the Great Mosque of Cordova (788), the al-Qāzar of Seville (c. 1200), the al-Hamrā' in Granada (14th century) and the al-Ja'fariya in Saragossa (1046-81). Stucco was equally a favourite technique of the Ottoman ornamentation. Non-figural stucco decoration was used in the inside chambers of mosques to cover wall surfaces including fire-places and shelf niches. Fragments of a stucco niche, probably belonging to the 15th century, have been unearthed at Iznik and is now preserved in the Iznik Museum. The fragments show the use of a meander border, geometrical interlacs, peonies and rosettes, besides usual arabesques and palmettes, together with floriated Kufic and Naskhi inscriptions executed meticulously.

In India, stucco had an ancient tradition of architectural use from the time of the Guptas (4th-6th centuries)¹. But the

¹S.K. Saraswati, Early Sculpture of Bengal (Calcutta: Sambodhi Publications Private Ltd., 1962), p. 107.

stucco of the Muslim monuments in India seems to have been the result of influence coming from Persia where the technique was developed to the extent nowhere reached. Stucco was used in the rubble-stone buildings of Firūz Shāh Tughluq (1351-88). In the 15th century, an increased use of stucco is noticed in the monuments of the Lōdis (1451-1526). The Moth-ki-Masjid in Delhi (c. 1505), built by the prime minister of Sikander Lodi, made profuse use of coloured stucco for interior decoration.¹ There was evidently a very talented group of craftsmen engaged in this art during the fifteenth century, reminiscent of that much greater school of artists who at about the same time were perpetuating much wonders in a similar technique on the walls of the al-Hamrā' in Spain.² The mosque at Khāirpūr in Delhi was richly embellished in stucco; "the sharpness of the lines is perfect to this day."³ The vaults of the domes of the tombs of the Sayyids and the Lodies also reveal the use of painted stucco often in relief. In the Deccan, stucco was used in the Muslim monuments of Bidar, Golconda and Bijapur.⁴

Ornamentation in stucco appeared also in the Mughal monuments. Humāyūn's mosque in the village of Kachpūrā at Agra (1530)

¹ R. Nath, op. cit., p. 53.

² Cf. Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 30.

³ ASIR, vol. IV (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1874), p. 68.

⁴ G. Yazdani, Bidar: Its History and Monuments (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), Pl. XX; Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 76; Ibid., pp. 78 & 82; Henry Cousens, Bijapur and Its Architectural Remains (Bombay: Govt. Central Press, 1916), p. 51, Pls. XV, XXX, XXXIII-XXXVI, XCIII-CV.

bears traces of stucco over the mihrāb and soffits of the central dome.¹ Stucco was used in the buildings of Sher Shāh (1540-45) inside the Purāna Qila in Delhi. Painted Stucco adorned the tomb of Atgah Khān (1566-67) in Delhi.² Stucco appeared in the verandah roofs of Maryam Zamani's palace at Fathpūr-Sikrī where it went with painting. Stucco decoration was also employed in the dadoes and arch soffits in the Turkish and Hakim's baths. Mughal stucco was used both in the incised and relief styles, the latter coming into prominence after Akbar (1556-1605), attained excellence in the tomb of Itimād-al-Dawla (1628) at Agra.³

Ornamental stucco was popular in Bengal from the time of the Guptas.⁴ The Muslims continued the technique but appear to have employed it sparingly in the pre-Mughal period when a preference for terracotta ornamentation reigned supreme. However, some of the Sultānī buildings are known to have received stucco facing. The Gunmant Mosque (1493-1538)⁵ and the Jahāniān Masjid⁶ at Gaur (1535) are reported to have been faced with stucco.

¹ R. Nath, op. cit., p. 53.

² Zafar Hasan, "A Guide to Nizamuddin", in ASI, Memoir No. 10 (Calcutta: Supdt. of Govt. Printing, 1922), p. 31.

³ R. Nath, op. cit., p. 32.

⁴ S.K. Saraswati, op. cit., p. 108.

⁵ PASB, 1875, p. 94.

⁶ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 73.

Stucco was universally used in the Mughal monuments of Bengal. "During the Mughal period the very basis of terracotta ornamentation was destroyed by plastering the walls."¹ Motifs wrought were generally panels, rectangular and arched. The interior of the ceiling contained net patterns and foliage designs, some of which reveals use of colour.

Tile was another universal technique of Muslim decoration. Its decorative potentialities were known in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Iran before the Hellenistic times and it was used for ornamentation of walls and floors. The Sasanids (226-641) revived the technique and employed it in their palace at Ctesiphon.²

Muslim use of ornamental tiles appears earliest at the Umayyad palace in Damascus, called al-Khadra' (the green one), built by Mu'awiyah (661-80).³ Coloured tiles seem to have been used in Abbasid architecture from the beginning. References to the existence of green domes in Baghdad during the early Abbasid period are available.⁴ Al-Mansur's (754-75) audience

¹ A.H. Dani, op. cit., p. 30.

² Andre Godard, op. cit., p. 299.

³ P.K. Hitti, op. cit., p. 215. Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī in his Kitāb al-Aghānī reports that the palace had a dome known as al-Qubbah al-Khadra'. (Ibid.) The naming of the palace and the dome may have been due to use of glazed green faience covering.

⁴ R. Levy, Baghdad Chronicle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p. 24.

chamber in the Madīnat al-Salām was capped by a green dome (al-Qubbah al-Khadrā'). Ibn Rusta, writing about 903, describes the Great Mosque at Baghdad as being decorated with lapis lazuli tiles.¹ Glazed tiles were probably used at Samarra (836-92) where the application of a metallic sheen was developed.² Ya'qūbī in the tenth century speaks of the Masjid al-Bukhārīyah as celebrated for its green minaret.³ But the development of full-scale ceramic decoration in Muslim architecture is known to have begun in Iran with the Great Saljūqs in right earnest.

The Gunbad-i-Khākī of the old Mosque of Isfahān (1088) shows the earliest attempt at coloured decorative effect under the Saljūqs.⁴ Here black stone, grey stone, white stucco and plain brick were used. Thenceforth, the use of coloured tiles in the architecture of Iran appears to have become universal. Blue tiles were used in the tomb of the Karakhanid ruler Jalāl al-Dīn Husain at Uzgend (1152) and in the Maghaki 'Attārī Mosque at Bukhara (11th century). The Ghaznavids (962-1186) also used tiles of green, yellow and brown monochrome glaze in their palaces.⁵

¹A.U. Pope, ed., op. cit., p. 1323.

²George Michell, ed., op. cit., p. 139.

³Le Strange, Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 134.

⁴Andre Godard, op. cit., p. 299.

⁵Oktay Aslanapa, op. cit., p. 62.

Glaze appears to have been used initially for inscriptions to make them visible, for example, at the Jāmi' Masjid at Dāmghān (1106-7), the mosque at Sin in Isfahān (1131-32) and the Minār-i-Alī and Minār-i-Shariban at Isfahān (1131-55). Before long, the best use of glazed decoration in Iranian architecture appears at Marāgha in the Gunbad-i-Surkh (1147).¹ Henceforth, almost exclusively glazed tiles were used for architectural decoration. Glazed tiles ornamented the surface of the tomb of Mūmina Khātūn (1186) at Nakhichevan and Gunbad-i-Kabūd (1197) at Marāgha. The conical roofs of the mausolea of Sultān Tākehsh (early 13th century) and Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (c.1208) at Uzgend were faced with turquoise glazed tiles. But till the time of Ghāzan Khān (1295-1304), only turquoise glaze appears to have been used. Thenceforth, polychrome - ultramarine, black and white, in addition to turquoise - appears in the architecture of Iran.²

Mosaic faience, "the most remarkable achievement in the history of architectural decoration",³ is a type of ornamentation whereby an architectural "surface is entirely covered by a patterned arrangement of closely fitted small pieces of tile which have surface glazes of different colours."⁴ It appeared

¹ Andre Godard, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

² Ibid., p. 307.

³ A.U. Pope, ed., op. cit., p. 1328.

⁴ D.N. Wilber, The Architecture of Islamic Iran (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 84.

in the decoration of the Saljūq monuments in Iran (11th-13th centuries), but was later on extensively used by the Mongols (1256-1349), the tomb of Uljaitu Khudāwanda at Sultāniya (1212-13) being the first example where both the inside and the outside surfaces were completely covered with this decorative technique.¹ From then on, mosaic faience of complete nature continued with exciting colour combination in the monuments under the Timurids (1369-1500) and the early Safavids till the reign of Shāh Abbās (1587-1628) who substituted this ornamental medium, owing to its slow setting and costly making process, with painted tiles which henceforth came to universal use.

From Iran, glazed tile decoration spread to other Muslim countries. In Spain, glazed tiles decorated the dadoes of the palace of the al-Ḥamrā'.² The Ottomans used the technique in Istanbul in the mosques of Sulaimāniyah (16th century) and Ahmadiyah (17th century). Beautiful tiles with flowers and plants represented in rich colours were freely used in Syria and Egypt after the Turkish conquest (1517).³ In Syria, the whole exterior of the Dome of the Rock was covered with coloured tiles by Sulṭān Sulaimān the Magnificent in 1561.

¹Before complete mosaic faience appears in the tomb of Sultāniya (1312-13), the technique was perfected in the monuments of Asia Minor by Iranian craftsmen who fled the Mongol invasion and took refuge thither. Such examples survive in the Sircali Madrasah (1242), the Madrasah Karatay (1252), the Laranda Mosque (1258), the tomb of Fakhr al-Dīn (1269) and the Mosque of Ṣāhib Atā (1270), all in Konia, cf. D.N. Wilber, "The Development of Mosaic Faience in Islamic Architecture in Iran", Ars Islamica, 6 (Reprint, 1968), pp. 39-45.

²Banister Fletcher, op. cit., p. 1234.

³Martin S. Briggs, op. cit., p. 173.

Coloured tiles appeared first in India¹ in the Muslim monuments of the Punjab² (12th-13th centuries) due perhaps to its proximity to Persia, the land of tiles. The chief colours used were blue and white and patterns exclusively geometrical.³ Fragments of blue glazed tiles of geometric designs of about the time of the adjoining buildings have been excavated from the site of the Qutb Minār (1200) at Delhi.⁴ Under 'Alā al-Dīn Khaljī (1296-1316), glazed tiles were used in the 'Idgāh mosque at Rapri.⁵ The technique received favour under the Lōdīs (1451-1526) as a result of increased use of brick in construction. The tomb of Sikander Lōdī (d. 1517) contained tilework. The tomb of Khwāja Khidr (1524) at Sonapat and the Shīsh Gunbad were decorated with tiles. Away from Delhi, glazed tiles were used in the tomb of Shēr Shāh (d. 1545) at Sasarām and in Kashmir in the tomb and mosque of Madanī (1444). In the Deccan, the madrasah of Mahmūd Gāwān (1472) at Bidar was embellished with brilliant glazed tiles with geometrical and floral designs and

¹The Muslims are credited with introducing glazed tiles in India. Cf. ASIR, vol. V (Calcutta: Supdt. of Govt. Printing, 1875), p. 128.

²Tombs of Shāh Yūsuf Gardīzi (c. 1150), Bahlūl-Haqq (13th century) and others.

³Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 125.

⁴ASIR, 1916-17, p. 3. Tiles of the same kind were also recovered during Cunningham's excavation at the Qutb in 1871 and also during Sanderson's excavation at the site in 1913. There can be little doubt that "this particular kind of brickwork was extensively used for the decoration of early Muhammadan structures". Ibid.

⁵ASIR, vol. III (Calcutta: Supdt. of Govt. Printing, 1873), pp. 219-20.

inscriptions on the exterior.¹ The palaces and royal tombs at Bidar also employed glazed tiles.² The Malwa monuments of the Khalji Sultāns (15th century) made use of encaustic tiles in their ornamentation.³

The Mughals used glazed tiles both on stone and brick surfaces. In Delhi, the Khair al-Manzil, a mosque near the Purāna Qila, contains brilliant tile mosaics. The tomb of Shams al-Dīn Atgāh Khān (c. 1567) in the Nizām al-Dīn has green and blue tiles combined with marble panels in geometric patterns. The Jahāngīrī Mahal at Agra (c. 1570) and the so-called Jodhbai palace at Fathpūr-Sikrī (c. 1570) contain decoration in glazed tiles in the façade and the roof respectively.

Jahāngīr's love for fine arts is proverbial. Under him glazed tile mosaic embellished the cupolas on the third storey of Akbar's tomb at Sikandra (1612-13). At the Kānch Mahal nearby, encaustic tiles of blue and green shades were used in the canopied rooms of the balconies. "The combination of red sandstone with the blue and orange tiling is very effective and harmonizes well with the tiling covering the roof of the bay windows".⁴ The most elaborate use of glazed tiles during

¹ Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 75.

² G. Yazdani, op. cit., Pls. XII, XIV, XXVII-XXIX.

³ Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴ E. W. Smith, "Mughal Colour Decoration of Agra", in ASI, (NIS), XXX (Allahabad: Govt. Printing, 1901), p. 18.

Jahāngīr's reign (1605-27) comes from the Lahore Fort, executed between 1620 and 1630, covering an area of about 24,000 feet.¹ The panels show both figure motifs and geometrical and floral designs.

Despite Shāhjahān's preference for stone inlay mosaic, tile decoration was a major feature of the buildings of his reign (1628-58). Monuments of his time at Lahore, Sind and Agra such as the Chauburjī Gate (1646), the Shalīmār Bāgh Gate (1655), the Mosque of Wazīr Khān at Lahore (1634), the Jāmi' Masjid at Thatta (1644-47), and the tomb of Mullā' Shukr Allāh Shīrāzī, known as Chīnī-kā-Rauza at Agra (1639) contain superb examples of tile decoration in different blues, greens, oranges, vermillions, lakes and others.

Tile was also used in the Muslim architecture of Bengal as an ornamental technique. In all probability, the Muslim conquerors introduced tile decoration in Bengal where it held sway for about a hundred years. Blochmann reports about the use of enamelled tiles in the interior wall of the Chhota Pānduā minār (c. 1300) at Hooghly.² But unlike stone carving and terracotta, tile decoration appears rather late in Bengal, possibly as a mark of Bengal's independence from the clutch of imperial Delhi as well as growing Persian influence in the country.³ Glazed

¹J. Ph. Vogel, "Tile Mosaics of the Lahore Fort", in ASI, (NIS), XLI (Calcutta, 1920), p. 2.

²PASB, 1870, p. 122.

³Cf. A.B.M. Husain, "The Ornamentation of the Sultani Architecture in Bengal", Shilpakala, op. cit., p. 5.

tile appeared in the tomb of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 1432) at Hazrat Pānduā, known as the Eklākhi Mausoleum. Thereafter, a number of Muslim monuments in Bengal received decoration in this ornamental medium. These include the Chāmkāṭṭi Mosque (c. 1475), Laṭṭan Masjid (1493-1538), the Fīrūza Minār (1486-89), the Gunmant Masjid (1493-1538), the Gumti Gate (1512), the Chhoto Sonā Masjid (1493-1519), the tomb of Husain Shāh (d. 1519), the Bara Sonā Masjid (1526) etc., all in Gaur. The Tāntipārā Masjid (c. 1475) and the Chānd and Nīm Gates (15th century) are also reported to have been decorated with encaustic tiles.¹ The technique travelled deep into the countryside and appeared in the tomb of Khān Jahān (d. 1459) at Bāgerhāt, Khulna, where encaustic tiles of various colours were used on the stepped terraces of the sepulchre.²

The Bengal tiles appeared different from those in Upper India; unlike the latter, geometrical and inscriptional designs were generally absent from the Bengal examples. Instead, there was a dominance of the vegetal motifs mostly of indigenous origin but sometimes also imitating Persian creeper. Persian influence on Bengal art in the circumstances may perhaps be surmised.

¹Laila Arjuman Ara Habib, "The Art of Glazed Tile Decoration in Medieval Bengal", Shilpakala, I (1978), p. 65.

²Muhammad Abdul Bari, Khalifatabad: A Study of Its History and Monuments (Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, University of Rajshahi, 1980), p. 225.

Tile continued as an ornamental medium in the Mughal monuments of Bengal, but in a limited way. The tomb of Bībī Pari (c. 1684) inside the Lālbāgh Fort at Dacca contained glazed tile casing on the walls above the marble dadoes.¹ The ḥammām (bath) within the Fort was also decorated with tiles.² The Mughals used stucco for coating the surface of their structures in Bengal as against the terracotta and tile decoration of the Sultānī period.

Like most of the techniques of Muslim ornamentation, painting was also used in the architectures of the ancient world. It appeared in Muslim architecture as early as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (691).³ The Umayyad desert palaces of Qaṣayr 'Amrā' (c. 712-15), Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (724-43), Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī (c. 728), Ḥammām al-Sharq (725-30) and Khirbat al-Mafjar (c. 743) have all yielded survivals of paintings on walls, ceilings and floors. They show influence of both the Greco-Roman and the Sasanian traditions, the latter on the whole predominating. Painting also decorated the Abbasid monuments at Samarra (836-92). The palace of Jawsaq al-Khāqānī contained wall-paintings depicting birds and animals, water nymphs and

¹ A. H. Dani, op. cit., p. 215.

² Laila Arjuman Ara Habib, op. cit., p. 66.

³ Painting was used in the frame of the fan-light of the eastern door, in the inner lining of the dome and also in the circular coffers in the ceiling of the inner ambulatory. (K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture, vol. I, Pt. I, op. cit., pp. 90-99).

dancing girls rendered in red and bright blue colours ascribable to Sasanian sources.¹ Some of the private houses and baths at Samarra are also known to have contained mural paintings.² The figures as a whole show abstraction.

The Ghaznavid palace at Lashkaribāzār (1030-41) has revealed the application of wall-painting both in fresco and tempera.³ Human figures and busts as well as geometrical designs and inscriptions were painted in ornate yellow, red and blue colours. The Fatimids applied painting to the interior of their buildings. The wooden ceiling of the Fatimid mosques were often decorated with painting.⁴ The roof of the Mosque of Kairawan (836), restored under the Fatimids (10th century), received painted decoration.⁵ In Spain, the walls of the Nasirid palace of the al-Hamrā' (14th century) were elaborately embellished with painting.⁶ Human figures on horseback, domestic celebrations, hunting scenes etc. have been depicted. More than a dozen of shades including gold were used here. Though much is

¹David Talbot Rice, op. cit., p. 33.

²R. Ettinghausen, op. cit., p. 42.

³Oktay Aslanapa, op. cit., pp. 58-60; A.U. Pope, op. cit., p. 99.

⁴Ernst Kuhnel, op. cit., p. 71.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Banister Fletcher, op. cit., p. 947.

not known about the architectural painting under the Mongols and the Timurids, "We have reasons to believe that there was then in existence a flourishing school of wall-painting."¹ The Safavid palace of 'Alī Qapū (1586-1629) had paintings in floral designs on a stucco base.²

In India, the monuments of the Tughluqs³ (1320-1413) and those of the Sharqīs of Jaunpur⁴ (1360-1480) contained ornamental painting. The palaces of the Bahamānī rulers at Bidar (1422-1512) such as the Rangīn Mahal had coloured decoration "in brilliant schemes of mural painting and coloured tiles."⁵ The interior of the Moth-Kī-Masjid in Delhi (1505) was painted in brilliant colours of green, blue, red, white, black and yellow.⁶ Coloured painting was used in the decoration of the Shēr Mandal (1540-45) inside the Purāna Qil'a in Delhi.⁷ The buildings of the 'Adil Shāhī rulers of Bijapur (16th and 17th centuries) in the Deccan are also known to have used painting for their embellishment.⁸

¹Basil Gray, Persian Painting (London: Ernst Benn, 1930), p. 5.

²R. Nath, op. cit., p. 46.

³Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 23.

⁴Ibid., p. 45.

⁵Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 74.

⁶ASIR, vol. IV, op. cit., p. 67.

⁷Ibid., p. 74; R. Nath, op. cit., p. 54.

⁸Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 82.

At no time in India, perhaps, colour decoration reached such an extent in technique and scale as under the Mughals. The buildings of Akbar's reign (1556-1605) such as Khawābgāh, Maryam's palace, the so-called Jodhbai's palace and the Jāmi' Masjid at Fathpūr-Sikrī made extensive use of painting, often done directly on the stone surface. The palace of Maryam Zamānī is the most profusely painted building, both inside and outside. Painted decoration also appears in the tomb of Akbar at Sikandra (1612-13) and in the tomb of Shaikh Selim Chistī at Fathpūr-Sikrī. The tomb of Itimād al-Dawla at Agra (1627) contains paintings on stucco in the interior walls above the dadoes and in the ceiling. Fresco painting was done in the buildings of the Lahore Fort (c. 1575) and also in Wazir Khān's Mosque (1634) in Lahore. Buildings in the Delhi Fort were gorgeously painted in colour. Floral patterns painted in brilliant colours associated with gold spread from the dado to the ceiling of the Dīwān-i-Khāṣṣ.¹ The plaster-coated Dīwān-i-Āmm at the Agra Fort had gilded decoration. The entire surfaces inside the Khāṣṣ Mahal at the Agra Fort and the Chīnikā Rauza (1639) on the bank of the Jamuna were painted in gold and blue. Shāhjahān's buildings at Agra, Delhi and Lahore were almost all painted with brilliant colours, often gilded.

Examples of the use of painting in the Muslim architecture of Bengal have not survived in large numbers. The only instances so far known are the painted plaster² of the Eklākhi

¹ASIAR, 1911-12, p. 15.

²ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 89.

Mausoleum at Hazrat Pānduā (early 15th century) and the gilt domes of the Chhotā-Sonā Masjid (1493-1519) and the Bara Sonā Masjid (1526) at Gaur.¹ It may reasonably be supposed that many more Muslim monuments in Bengal, both of the Sultānī and the Mughal periods, contained painted decoration and that these have succumbed to the ravages of time and the inimical damp-sodden climate of the country.

Brick, itself an element of construction, also played its role in the ornamentation of Muslim architecture. The origin and development of the technique, known as brick-setting, is shrouded in mystery, but it is from Bukhara that the earliest surviving decoration by brick-patterning has come up.² From Central Asia, the technique appears to have spread to Iran, Iraq, Asia Minor and even to as far distance as Bengal.

The versatility of brick for solution of structural problems was realized quite early in Iran, but "its decorative possibilities were not exploited until well into the Islamic period."³ Muslim Iran created magic in brick ornamentation and the technique was popular there for centuries. Even in the monuments of the 17th century, for instance, in those in Bukhara, the decorative possibilities of the medium was not forgotten.

¹ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 74.

² The tomb of Ismā'īl the Samanid (d. 907) at Bukhara is the monument in point. See for photograph A.U. Pope, op. cit., Pl. 77.

³ Ibid., p. 139.

Brick characterized the architecture and decoration of the Karakhanid monuments (842-1212) in Central Asia. The façades of their mosques were articulated by niches and the arched mihrābs were decorated by brick-patterning.¹ The surface of the Uzgend minaret (11th century) shows alternate wide and narrow courses of geometrical designs of bricks. The mihrāb of the muṣallā, built by Arslān Khān (1119-20) on the outskirts of Bukhara is decorated with geometrical kufic inscriptions in small, barnished, yellow and reddish bricks. Geometrical patterns produced by the four-fold braid and other motifs in brick decorated the porch and façade of the Maḡhaki 'Attari Mosque in Bukhara (12th century) and those of Baladzhī Khātūn (Kazakistān). The entrance porch of the karakhanid caravansarais was contained within broad borders decorated with large star and cross patterns in raised brick.

Brick-setting for decorative effect was also used by the Ghaznavids (962-1186). The walls of the tomb of Arslān Jadhīb (997-1028), the Ghaznavid governor at Sangbast are decorated with zigzag and stepped patterning of bricks as well as painted decoration. The Ghaznavid caravansarai of Ribāt-i-Māhī contains rich ornamentation in brick with palmette and floriated arabesque inset in geometrical patterns.²

¹ Oktay Aslanapa, op. cit., p. 46.

² Ibid., p. 62; Derek Hill and Oleg Grabar, op. cit., Pl. 541.

Decorative brick-lay was carried to maximum effectiveness during the Saljūq period.¹ Variations in brick-setting came not merely to emphasize the architectural lines of the building as at the Ghaznavid towers (12th century), but also to distinguish the surface to be ornamented. The manner of laying bricks transformed into a linear zigzag pattern the carved surfaces of the dome as seen at the mausoleum of Arslān Jadhib at Sangbast (1028), Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Iṣfahān (12th century), Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Zawārī (1135), Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Ardistan (1158-60) and others. In many minarets such as those at Ghaznī (12th century), Dāmghān (11th century), Bukhara (12th century) and Saveh (12th century) and tombs such as the Chihil Dukhtarān at Iṣfahān (1107) and the Bayāzīd at Bistām (1120), it is brick that gave texture to the walls. In richer examples, bricks were patterned into designs; in simpler ones, bricks were separated from each other by interstices of varying length which were either left vacant or filled in with stucco designs. Sometimes, bricks were used in their full purity and superb masses of brickwork were composed as in the walls of the mosque of 'Alī Shāh at Tabrīz (1310-20). The brickwork gave life to the walls, furnishing the structures with an expressive vitality.

Various kinds of bondings and joints and sizes of bricks were devised early in the 11th century to carry on the decorative effect of brickwork. Joints were treated in several ways to

¹D.N. Wilber, op. cit., p. 79.

create deep and thin lines so that a play of light and dark could be produced. The combination of horizontal and vertical lines made possible a great variety of patterns as in the Gunbad-i-Surkh at Marāgha (1147) where "brickwork reached its ultimate beauty."¹ Other schemes were developed and the surface was further enriched by bricks, both sunk and projected, creating shadowed zones as at the Dāmghān minaret (1026-29). An ingenious setting of bricks based on the form of the squinch with its pointed apex bending outward gave birth to the first stalactites which began in the portal of the Gunbad-i-Qābūs in Gurgan (1007) and eventually came to fill squinches and hollows in many parts of the structure. They appear as supports for the platforms of minarets and, like little squinches, mark the transition from the corners of a square base into the circle of a dome. But despite its great beauty, naked brick was thought to be a little harsh. Simulated brick designs in plaster began to be used towards the end of the Saljūq period as at Ardistan and reached its sumptuous expressiveness under the Mongols (1256-1349) in the vaults of the mausoleum of Oljaitu at Sultāniya (1305-1313).

In Iraq, ornamental brick-setting appears to have been used towards the end of the 12th century for interior decoration and achieved extraordinary results in the Qala iwān at Baghdad.²

¹A.U. Pope, op. cit., p. 144.

²Ernst Kuhnel, op. cit., p. 88.

The surface is here treated in the manner of wood panelling by dividing it into angular sections. The effect carries the impression of a ceramic facing. In Anatolia, the minaret of Yakutiye madrasah (c. 1310) was decorated on its surface by a fantastic interlaced brickwork design in high relief.¹ Arrowheads, regular and inverted, covered with turquoise tiles, formed the centres around which the design was executed. Brick was also used in the tomb of Kaykāūs at Sivas (1217), in the unnamed minaret in the town of Akserai,² in the tomb of Zaynul Beg (mid 15th century) at Hışn Kayfr³ and other monuments of Asia Minor as an ornamental technique.

Muslim monuments in India being built of stone had no room for ornamentation by brick patterning. In Bengal, decorative brick-setting appeared in Muslim buildings as early as the Adina Mosque at Hazrat Pānduā (1375). Here the tympana of the mihrāb arches were decorated with variegated designs of patterned bricks often with superimposed rings of receding contours. Some of the patterns are formed with intersecting diagonals, some others, of rows of diamonds simulating textile weave. The contour of the principal arch is often decorated with cusp designs with a pendant hanging from the Keystone.

¹Derek Hill and Oleg Grabar, op. cit., Pl. 341.

²Ibid., Pl. 463.

³Ibid., Pl. 514.

Beautiful designs by brick-setting decorated the spherical pendentives in the Sultānī mosques in Gaur and elsewhere. Bricks have been set edge-wise and corner-wise in horizontal rows giving an appearance of delicate carved pattern in high relief. This technique appears to be unique in its kind and may be considered as "one of the most distinguishing features of the Sultānī architecture of Bengal."¹ Brick-setting was also used in the rings of the arches where they consist of several depths of bricks set edge-wise and vertically, sometimes projecting out of the wall boldly.

A distinctive decorative brick design appears in the mosque of Ronbijoypur at Bāgerhāt² where the dome surface contains circular rows of bricks set edge-wise. The pattern is comparable with similar brick-setting in the dome of the tomb of Ismā'īl the Samanid (d. 907) at Bukhara. The Bengal example was perhaps the result of artistic influence coming from Iranian lands whence some other decorative techniques like stucco and tile are generally supposed to have come.

Brick-setting as an ornamentation continued throughout the Sultānī period and is even found in the monuments erected under the Mughals in Bengal.

¹A.B.M. Husain, Shilpakala, op. cit., p. 6.

²Muhammad Abdul Bari, op. cit., p. 183; Cf. A.U. Pope, op. cit., Pl. 77.

Terracotta constitutes yet another technique of ornamentation of Muslim architecture in medieval times. The medium consists of ceramic fragments specially moulded or formed to fill certain areas or to develop certain designs and was more peculiar to the Iranian lands. The technique was known to the ancient Persians and was used by the Parthians (2nd century B.C.) in Central Asia. It appears that terracotta was brought into use to execute finer details in decoration after the brick-setting technique had failed to do the work.¹ The new medium would also economise time and cost of production.

Terracotta appears in the Muslim monuments of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia from the end of the 10th century either as sections or plaques, or as subsidiary filling and enrichment of the interstices in a brick or stucco framework. The beginning of the technique and the monuments it first decorated are not precisely known, but the earliest well-developed examples date from the early 11th century from east Iran.²

The brick architecture of the Karakhanids (842-1212) in Central Asia is known to have been decorated with terracotta along with stucco and brick carving. The Karakhanid monuments such as the Maghak-i-Attārī Mosque in Bukhara (11th century),

¹ Cf. A.U. Pope, ed., op. cit., p. 1290.

² Ibid., p. 1321.

the Talkhatan Bābā Mosque in Merv (11th century), the tomb of Arab Atā at Tim (978) and those of Aisha Bibi and Baladzhi Khātūn at Talas (12th century) in the present Tazakistan are all decorated with terracotta. The Karakhanid tombs at Uzgend (12th century) were also decorated with various geometrical and foliate ornaments in brick and terracotta.¹

Terracotta also appears in the monuments of the Ghaznavids (962-1186) such as at Ribāt-i-Māhī (early 11th century) and in the upper section of the throne room of the Great Palace at Lashkaribāzār.² Some of these are now preserved in the Kabul Museum. The technique found surprising elaboration in the Tower of Mas'ūd III (1089-1115), which contains four contrasting zones of rectangular panels of intersecting patterns, besides the inscription with delicate leafage background. The upper section of the Tower of Bahrām Shāh (1117-49) is also decorated with a kufic inscription with foliate background in terracotta.

Various tomb-towers and minarets in Iran of the 11th century were ornamented with terracotta facings. These include the Pīr-i-'Alamdār (1021) and the Chihl Dukhtarān (1058) at Dāmghān, the minaret of Simnan (11th-12th century) and others. Terracotta plaques continued to be used throughout the 12th century but in cruder forms. Both the tympana in the corridor in the shrine of Bāyazīd at Bisṭām (1120) are filled with double pattern

¹Oktay Aslanapa, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

²*Ibid.*, p. 58.

schemes executed in terracotta, and worked into ingenious border designs, it frames the arches and decorates the soffits. Terracotta also decorates the Mausoleum of Sultān Sanjār (d. 1157), the minaret at Gulpayagam (1104-18), the Kalyan Mosque minaret in Bukhara (1127) and the minaret at Vebkent (1198-99) to list only a few of an innumerable host. At Qalā-i-Bist (12th century),¹ the technique reached almost perfection in taste and beauty. Here carved terracotta panels of varied designs have been set in the interstices of the geometrical designs. Similar schemes of decoration in terracotta were also employed in the Mosque of Varamin (1326). Terracotta decoration appears to have reached its apogee in the iwān and the mihrāb of the Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Yazd (mid 14th century) where the panels were executed with the most finesse.² These terracotta panels were probably produced in moulds despite the fact that they show a great range of patterns, for carving individual pieces with such complex and minute designs would have been impossibly slow and expensive.

Terracotta inlays were applied to relieve the bare brick surface of the interior in some of the Saljūq buildings. In the small dome chamber of the Isfahān Masjid-i-Jāmi' (11th century), terracotta plaques decorate the tympana of the arches, while rosettes and octagons occur in brickwork. Similar terracotta pieces are to be found distributed in the squinch

¹A.U. Pope, op. cit., fig. 155.

²A.U. Pope, ed., op. cit., p. 1322.

panel of the Great dome chamber.

Simultaneously with Iran and Central Asia, terracotta appears in the decoration of the Saljūq monuments in Asia Minor. The technique may have reached there by way of Nakhichevan in Azerbaijan, where a number of monuments such as the mausolea of Yūsuf b. Kathīr and Mumina Khātūn (12th century) show rich terracotta decoration along with the use of stucco and brickwork. Iranian craftsmen who fled the Mongol invasion were employed in Asia Minor to build and decorate the Saljūq monuments there.

From the early 14th through the 15th century, terracotta decoration was effectively used interspersed with geometrical strap work of enamelled tiles or similarly in a subordinate capacity to fill in spaces left between the framework of tiles. The result was a sharp contrast of surface both in texture and design. Beautiful examples of this type are found at Yazd and especially in the façade of the Khānqāh at Natanz (1316-17).

Architectural ornamentation under the Timurids (1369-1500) and the Safavids (1502-1736) was mostly carried with coloured glazed tiles and decoration in terracotta appears to have been resorted to very little. However, the technique did not die out from the repertoire of Muslim art. What happened, was a shift of place of its occurrence from Iranian lands to distant Bengal where the art attained a new lease of life in scale and magnificence hitherto unknown.¹

¹See Chapter III.

Architectural use of terracotta was the traditional practice in Bengal going back into the times of the Pālas (8th-12th centuries) and their contemporaries, nay earlier. Survival of the ancient Bengal architectural terracotta are found at Pāhārpur in Rajshahi (c. 800 A.D.) and Maināmati in Comilla (6th-12th centuries) districts. Muslim architecture in Bengal during the 14th and 15th centuries made the most use of ornamental terracotta which, however, appears distinct in style and motif. As in the case of the local tiles, Muslim terracotta in Bengal shows little use of geometric designs, which were the sine qua non of this art in the Persian lands of contemporary times. The supposed influence from Persia on the Muslim terracotta art of Bengal may not, therefore, have been of much consequence. Conversely, although largely fed by the traditional motifs of Bengal like rosettes, lotuses, plants, foliage etc., Muslim terracottas do not justify fully local ascription for a number of reasons: firstly, unlike the pre-Muslim terracottas of Bengal, Muslim terracottas are non-iconic in character; secondly, unlike the local tradition, the Muslim terracottas introduced the scheme of total overlay of the buildings and finally, in the technique of execution, the two styles are widely dissimilar. In the circumstances, it may be inferred that Muslim terracotta art in Bengal is neither the product of Persian influence alone, nor owes totally to the indigenous traditional art, but that, it was both an assimilation and an original art style. It, therefore, constitutes an independent

distinct development and need be treated as such. Sultānī monuments such as the Tantipara Masjid (1480), the Darasbari (1479), the Rājibī and the Dhunichawk Mosques (mid 15th century) and the Qadam Rasūl building (1531) all in Gaur, and the Jāmi' Masjid at Bāghā (1523) in Rajshahi, to cite only a few, contain some of the best examples of terracotta ornamentation. But the technique suffered from an invasion of stucco under the Mughals. Terracotta, however, continued sporadically in the Muslim monuments of Bengal¹ till late 17th century.²

Although not structurally organic, carved wood is a significant technique of ornamentation of Muslim architecture. The earliest use of this decorative medium is found in the wooden consoles of the al-Aqṣā Mosque, built by Abd al-Malik (685-705) in Jerusalem. A number of wood carvings dating to the Umayyad and Abbasid periods have survived and are now preserved in different museums. The carved pieces include pulpits, doors, panels and others. The motifs commonly carved are arabesques, scrolls and other abstract compositions.

In Egypt, ornamental wood carving was a popular craft in all periods of Muslim rule. Fragments of carved wooden doors, ceilings, friezes and furniture of the Tulunid period (868-904) are preserved in the Arab Museum in Cairo. Besides abstract

¹ A fuller treatment of Muslim terracotta in Bengal has been made in Chapter III of this monograph.

² For instance, in the Sīdī Mosque (1652) and at Shāh Muḥammad Mosque (1680) at Egārasindur in the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district.

designs, figured motifs also occur.¹ The Mosque of Ibn Tūlūn (876-9) has yielded the earliest specimens of carved door panels with bold and large sculptured ornaments.² The Fatimids (909-1171) employed elaborate carved wood in their palaces and mosques. The richly carved boards and doors, discovered in the hospital and the tomb-mosque of the Mamlūk Sultān Qalāūn (1279-90) and his son, Nāṣir Muḥammad (1293-4, 1298-1308, 1309-40) originally decorated the Fatimid palace.³ The wooden tie-beams of al-Ḥakīm's Mosque (990-1013) and the door of the mosque of al-Azhar (970) contained slant carving, distantly related to the Samarra style. Wooden mihrābs and minbars⁴ of the Fatimid time executed both in Egypt and Syria show rich and intricate carving on them in arabesque and vine scrolls. Wood carving also continued under the Ayyubids (1169-1250) and the Mamlūks (1250-1517). Exquisitely carved wooden minbars decorated the Mamlūk mosques. A significant woodwork of the Mamlūk time was the lattice work (Mushrabiya) done on screens used in mosques and houses. The technique reached perfection in the 14th and 15th centuries and continued as late as the 19th century.

¹ Ibn Tūlūn's palace is reported to have contained wooden figured relief. (Ernst Kuhnelt, op. cit., p. 58).

² Martin S. Briggs, op. cit., p. 214.

³ M.S. Dimand, op. cit., p. 113.

⁴ The pulpit of the Great Mosque of Qairawan (end of the 10th century) is perhaps the oldest surviving example.

Decorative wooden panels found in buildings of the early centuries of Islam in Iran and Turkestan are preserved in the museums of Tashkent and Samarqand. A number of carved wooden columns of the 10th and 11th centuries are still in situ in the Jāmi' Mosque at Khiva. Ornamental wood carving also survive from the Ghaznavid (962-1186) and the Saljūq (1037-1157) periods. They show in general arabesques, geometrical, star and palmette motifs and inscriptions.

Carved wooden doors, minbars, sarcophagi, lecterns and other pieces occupied a special place in the monuments of the Saljūqs of Asia Minor (1177-1300). The minbars in the mosque of Alā al-Dīn in Koniya (1155) represents the finest workmanship in wood and is carved with arabesques. Figure motifs, so favourite with the Saljūqs, are also represented in wood carving.¹ The Mongols (1256-1349), the Timurids (1369-1500) and the Safavids (1502-1736), all used carved wood for embellishment of their monuments. Fine wooden doors carved with arabesques, Kufic inscriptions and geometrical interlacings, dated about 1307-9, still exist in the mosque of Bāyazīd at Bistām (d.c. 878). The Timurid wood carving is survived by a number of doors which include, among others, those of the Gur-i-Mīr (1405)² and the mosque of Shāh Zinda (15th century) at Samarqand. Carved wooden doors of the Safavids are preserved

¹ Cf. M.S. Dimand, op. cit., p. 118.

² The door pieces ^{are} now in the Hermitage, Leningrad.

in the mosques of Iran and Western Turkestan and also in the Islamic Collection of the Berlin Museum. Motifs represented on them include arabesques, floral designs, inscriptions etc., often in relief.

In Spain, the wooden maqsūrah and the minbar of Hakam II (961-76) in the Great Mosque of Cordova (788) were art pieces of beautiful carving.¹ The palaces of the al-qazār in Seville (1199-1200) and the al-Ḥamrā' in Granada (1298-1359) have also yielded artistically carved door pieces. Carved wooden minbars are also known from the Ottoman buildings. The minbar at the Sulaimāniyah (1550-57) represents the most mature example of the Ottoman craftsmanship in wood carving.²

Early Muslim monuments of Lahore and Multan in India are reported to have used wooden door-frames with carved designs.³ But of later Muslim wood carving in India, not much is known except stray instances from the Deccan.⁴ At least not countable examples of the craft have survived. The situation in Bengal is no better. It appears that the ornamentation of Muslim architecture in India and Bengal in this particular aspect lagged far behind that in countries outside the subcontinent.

¹S.M. Imamuddin, A Political History of Muslim Spain (Dacca: Nazma and Sons, 1969), pp. 186-87.

²Oktay Aslanapa, op. cit., p. 269.

³Percy Brown, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

⁴The Rangin Mahal at Bidar built by the first Barid Shāhī King 'Alī Barīd (1482-1518) contained "lovely wood-carving". (G. Yazdani, op. cit., p. 25, Pl. XI).

Speaking in general of the ornamentation in Muslim architecture, it may be said that one cardinal principle was observed throughout. Ornament was used chiefly to break up large flat surfaces, perhaps because such vacant spaces reflecting the glare of the sun are trying to the eye in the climate of the East. In the initial phase, ornamentation appears somewhat confined within the interior of the structures, but it was subsequently exteriorized, and both within and without, Muslim architecture was overlaid with decoration. But unlike western architecture that depended for variety on plastic forms in high relief or in silhouette, on boldly carved naturalistic forms and on strongly marked mouldings, Muslim ornamentation generally dispensed with mouldings and high relief. Instead, all effort was devoted to produce texture, and texture being in many ways akin to tint, colour rather than form was the predominant factor.¹

As already stated, Muslim art fed on the compost of earlier cultures of the East and the West; nonetheless, it was different from both. It created a vocabulary of forms of its own distinguished by abstraction and schematization. The casual appearance of sculptured motifs in Muslim ornamentation is as a rule atypical to the general principle of aniconism, and even in such cases, most of the figures represent heraldry as those of the Mamluks of Egypt or of the Saljuqs of Asia Minor.

¹ Cf. L. March-Phillipps, Form and Colour (London: Ernst Benn, 1915). March-Phillipps, however, generalizes the art of the East as essentially feminine, emotional and a matter of colour, which is of course not always accurate.

Muslim ornaments not only exhausted the entire repertoire of techniques of the classical worlds, but also added novel ones including the faience mosaic. Besides, the decorative potential of the ancient techniques was extracted to extents previously unknown, creating thereby newer and yet newer modes of art expression. Contrasts of form and space and also of colour were most scrupulously balanced, so that Muslim ornamentation is an experience of harmony and repose, of delight and contentment. Monuments like the mosque of Gawhar Shād at Mashhad (1405-6), the Masjid-i-Shāh at Iṣfahān (late 16th century) or the Tāj at Agra (1634) are the culmination of an art attaining the supreme perfection on the canvas of the earth.

Though devoid of didactic intent, Muslim ornaments connote a spiritual meaning and as such are meditative. The complex geometrical arabesque, so universal in Muslim architecture, and the calligraphic rendering of the word of God on the walls, prayer niches, pulpits, domes and in fact everywhere, suggest an all-pervading divine association (hence the horror Vacui) beyond the phenomenal world. Beauty being the substance of art is, in Muslim view, a divine quality¹ and has a double aspect: "In the world, it is appearance; it is the garb which, as it were, clothes beautiful beings and beautiful things; in God,

¹As has been reported in the sayings of the Prophet

إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَمِيلٌ يُحِبُّ الْجَمَالَ (Surely, Allah is beautiful; He loves beauty). See Ibn Mājah, p. 137; Ahmad ibn Hambal, pp. 133, 134 and 151.

however, or in itself, it is pure inward beatitude ; it is the divine quality which, among all the divine qualities manifested in the world, most directly recalls pure Being."¹ Muslim ornamentation thus serves as a key to the understanding of the spiritual realities lying at the root of the cosmic and human worlds.

¹ Titus Burckhardt, op. cit., p. 1.

CHAPTER II

TERRACOTTA ART IN INDIA AND PRE-MUSLIM BENGAL

Of all the plastic media, terracotta or burnt clay is the most ancient and constitutes the earliest art products. It has served as the medium of figure sculpture in all the early cultures of the world - the Minoan, the Egyptian, the Greek, the Mesopotamian, the Iranian, the Chinese, the Polynesian, the Indian and also the Pre-Columbian American. Earth or clay is the most easily and readily available material, the most pliant and also the least resisting to shape. "It thus satisfies the creative impulse of the ordinary man as much for aesthetic expression as for domestic and ritual needs."¹ Clay objects were either baked in the sun or fired into terracotta for hardening and durability and were used by man in his daily life since pre-historic times.

The history of terracotta art in India goes back into ancient past. Terracotta had been the medium of cult figurines and art objects long before the use of stone became common.² Terracotta objects have come up from the sites of the peasant cultures of Kulli and Zhob (3rd millennium B.C.). The urban culture of Harappa has also revealed the use of terracotta human and animal

¹S.K. Saraswati, A Survey of Indian Sculpture (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957), p. 96.

²Cf. A. Goswami, ed., Indian Terracottas (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1959), p. 11.

figurines in abundance.¹ The art "seems to represent the popular plastic idiom of the common man having connection with the terracotta tradition of the peasant cultures. This idiom seems to have continued in the succeeding phases and terracotta remained one of the most favourite mediums of artistic expression for the common people."² This is proved by the enormous mass of terracotta figurines discovered at the various ancient sites throughout India, particularly in the riverine plains of the Indus and the Ganges. Though terracotta objects appear insignificant compared with the monumentality of works in stone, in respects of their extensive use and varied purpose, they have no equal. Objects in terracotta served domestic and ritual purposes; these were used as household utensils and decorative elements, as children's toys and as religious and magical artifacts. Their use even spread to official and literary functions. What is more, the poor and the humble satisfied their desire for personal adornments with terracotta beads and other ornaments. Brick structures looking drab to the eye received variegation and decoration of the wall surface with terracotta facings. It will thus appear that terracotta has held its sway through centuries and has been used for varied and multifarious purposes in Indian art much more than other plastic media.

¹Madho Sarup Vats, Excavations at Harappa, vol. I (Calcutta: Govt. of India Press, 1940), p. 292.

²S.K. Saraswati, op. cit., p. 97.

Scholars have classified Indian terracottas into two broad types with reference to form and technique of production. One type, modelled by hand and conforming to the terracottas of antiquity found also in other countries, is known as 'Primitive'. These primitive terracottas consisting of figurines of man and animal are known from various ancient sites of India¹ and may range in date from pre-historic Indus civilizations to the present day. The figurines of this type are characterized by a simple description of the main physical features, the applique technique having been applied for ornaments and trappings and sometimes also for eyes, ears, lips, hair, navels etc. in case of human figurines, and ears, horns, manes etc. in case of animals. Most of the human figurines represent females with heavy and protruding hips and large rounded breasts. These earliest examples are taken to represent the Nude Mother or Earth Goddess which, in the ancient past, was widespread from the West Asiatic lands to the Gangetic Valley in the east. These figurines are attributed to the Indus Valley cultures of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa dated about the second millennium B.C.² The animal figurines were similarly modelled into cylinders, cones and other geometric forms.

¹ The primitive terracottas - roughly modelled and roughly pinched in clay to the desired shape by hand - have been discovered in Bhitā, Kausambi, Pātliputra, Basārh, Mathurā, Ahichchātra, Bāngārh, Lauriya-Nandangarh, Ghosi and other ancient sites (Cf. Parmeswari Lal Gupta, Gangetic Valley Terracotta Art (Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1972), pp. 16-25).

² Cf. A. Goswami, ed., op. cit., p. 11.

The other type shows the impress of progressiveness and has been designated the "timed variation".¹ Terracottas of this type were both modelled and moulded. The bust or the body was modelled by hand and the face was turned out of mould.² The hair, head-dress and even ears were separately made and then added as in the case of the 'Primitive' variety. In fact, the additive technique in terracotta art "has been the most persistent and figurines with moulded faces and modelled bodies are known to have survived in all phases of Indian art even up to the present day."³

The vast mass of terracotta objects discovered in various ancient sites across India reveal features characteristic of individual places of manufacture. Attempts have, however, been made to classify these finds into broad divisions. Stella Kramrisch recognizes three distinct types in the objects discovered respectively at Patna, Buxar and Mathura and holds that terracottas from other sites represent local variations and adaptations of the types from these sites.⁴ But Saraswati differs with Kramrisch on such division, because of the existence of general resemblance in certain features of the objects and also

¹St. Kramrisch, "Indian Terracottas", JISOA, VII (1939), p. 105.

²Parneswari Lal Gupta, op. cit., p. 26.

³S.K. Saraswati, op. cit., pp. 102-03.

⁴St. Kramrisch, op. cit., p. 106.

the mode of production. To him, the products of various sites belong to one "common movement".¹ It will be evident from the discussion that follows that no sharp division of terracotta objects of different sites as such is possible in view of their common general characteristics.

The earliest terracottas belonging to pre-historic times that have been found in India come from a number of sites in South India.² They show figure representation. No such representation either in stone or wood or any other medium has survived from this age. From the Indus Civilization age, a comparative study of Indian terracotta can be made with reference to stone and bronze figurines. But even at this period, the terracotta human figurines are by far more numerous than human images in stone and bronze. In respect of modelling also, the terracotta figurines differ from those in other media. In the post-Indus Valley pre-Mauryan period, terracotta figurines are, as a matter of fact, the only art products.³

Terracottas ascribed to the Mauryan age (4th-2nd century B.C.) are identifiable by certain broad features. They are characterized by remarkably individual traits in respects of physiognomy

¹ S.K. Saraswati, op. cit., p. 102.

² C.C. Das Gupta, Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1961), p. 259. The major sites of the finds include Ebgodā, Hokupoliām, Todānād, Kunhakkilābettā, Tuneri, Nilgiri Hills, Shevaroy Hills, Kupgāl, Mohuri, Bellampur, Rayān, Guddāh and Nadubettā.

³ Ibid.

as well as expression. Such individualized features are rarely to be seen in any other phase of Indian terracotta art.¹ In size, the Mauryan terracottas are larger² than those of other periods, which are generally of miniature dimension. The Mauryan terracottas are generally crude and primitive "corresponding in this respect with the indigenous stone sculptures of that age."³ Terracottas with modelled bodies and moulded faces and with jewellery and apparel affixed are generally treated as belonging to the Mauryan period. But the identification is not rigid in all cases, for terracotta figurines with similar features are also known to have continued into the Sunga age (2nd century B.C.-1st century B.C.).

Terracotta pieces assignable to the Mauryan period are not numerous. Most of the examples have been discovered at Patliputra, the Mauryan capital and at Taxila.⁴ Most of them are of religious character showing the Nude Mother or Earth Goddess. A few of them have been found at Bulandibāgh,⁵ Biknāpāhāri,⁶ and

¹S.K. Saraswati, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

²Cf. J. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. III (Delhi: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975), Pls. 138 and 139.

³CHI, vol. I, ed. by E.J. Rapson (Reprint. Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1962), p. 583; C.C. Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁴J. Marshall, *Taxila*, vol. I (Delhi: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1975), p. 108.

⁵ASIAR, 1917-18, Pt. I, p. 27, Pl. XVI; 1926-27, Pl. XXXI, fig. K.

⁶K.P. Jayaswal, "Terracottas Dug Out at Patna", *JISOA*, III (1935), p. 126, Pl. XXXII, figs. 1, 2 and 3.

Golakpur.¹ Some figurines found at Buxar (Bihar)² and Tamluk (Bengal) have been assigned to the Mauryan age on stylistic grounds.

With the Śunga period (2nd century B.C.-1st Century B.C.), there dawned a new phase in the history of Indian terracotta art. The period is marked by introduction of miniature plaques, each bearing a figure or figures in relief. The most characteristic types show charming female figures and scenes of everyday life.³ Some of these were modelled on flat plinth as in the case of the contemporary stone reliefs; the majority were made to lean against the wall. A large number of the plaques have holes at the top suggesting thereby that they were meant to be hung on the wall.⁴ The figures are heavily coiffured and wear elaborate dress and rich jewellery. The ears have heavy pendants and the neck is covered by beaded chain. The fore-arms are covered with pairs of bracelets, while the waist shows a girdle of several rings. As under the Mauryans, female figurines are predominating. The use of the mould comes into general vogue in this period.

¹K.P. Jayaswal, op. cit., Pl. XXXI.

²A Banerji-Sastri, "Remains of a Pre-historic Civilization in the Gangetic Valley", JBHS, III (1930), pp. 187-91.

³Parameswari Lal Gupta, op. cit., p. 35.

⁴St. Kramrisch, op. cit., p. 104. A terracotta mould of such plaques has been discovered at Bangarh in Dinajpur. (K.G. Goswami, Excavation at Bangarh (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1948), p. 19.

Terracotta figurines and objects belonging to the Śunga period have been discovered from many ancient sites. From Bhita in the United Provinces, Marshall has unearthed a number of terracotta figurines which he assigns to the Śunga period.¹ At Nagari, were found a large number of ancient figurines,² some of which show Śunga characteristics.³ The Śunga terracottas have also come up from Lauriya-Nandangarh in Bihar⁴ and Mathurā.⁵ In Bengal, Śunga terracotta figurines have been discovered at Mahāsthān in Bogra district,⁶ Bāngarh in Dinajpur⁷ and at Gitagrām in Murshidabad.⁸ A number of figurines of this period have also been found in the west and north-west India. Besides human figurines, most of which are females, a few terracotta animal and bird figurines ascribable to the Śunga period have also been discovered. They show figures in the round or reliefs on plaques.

¹J. Marshall, "Excavations at Bhita", ASIAR, 1911-12, pp. 71 ff., Pls. XXII. 18; XXIII.17, 19, 20, 22, 29 & 31.

²D. R. Bhandarkar, "Excavations at Besnagar", ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 84.

³C.C. Das Gupta, op. cit., p. 163.

⁴N.G. Majumdar, "Excavations at Lauriya-Nandangarh", ASIAR, 1935-36, pp. 64-65.

⁵ASIAR, 1930-34, p. 260.

⁶ASIAR, 1929-30, p. 142; 1930-31, pp. 128-29, Pl. LXII.g.

⁷K.G. Goswami, op. cit., pp. 11, 13, 19.

⁸The figurine is now at the museum of the Vāṅgīya Sāhitya Parishad, Calcutta.

To the Sunga period is also attributed a type of terracotta plaques narrative in character. To this category belong the plaque of the so-called hunting scene of King Dushyanta in Kanva's hermitage¹ and also the plaque from Mahāsthān representing a rider on four-horsed chariot and discharging an arrow at a herd of deer and a centaur.² The figurines of this period served both religious and secular ends. The religious ones show similarity with the Sunga stone sculptures at Bharhut, Sanchi, Bodh Gayā, Mathurā and Amarāvati. This shows that the artists in clay and stone followed almost the same art formulae. But the execution of clay figurines was often better than in stone.³

Indian terracottas of the Saka-Kushana period (1st century B.C.-2nd century A.D.) represent the racial influx in India that occurred at this time. The female figurines show a marked enrichment in their ornaments and have been executed with such tenderness that they appear to be miniature replicas of the lithic representations of the period.⁴ Besides figures of already known types and motifs, "various homely scenes and popular stories enrich the subject matter of this art."⁵ The figurines are characterized by sensuous physical form and joyous mood. Like

¹ASIAR, 1912-13, pp. 35-36.

²ASIAR, 1928-29, Pl. XLII.b.

³Cf. ASIAR, 1911-12, p. 35.

⁴Parameswari Lal Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁵S. K. Saraswati, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

the Śunga period, male plaques of the Kushana age are extremely limited in number and are known from Ahichchatra only.¹

Terracotta figurines ascribable on stylistic grounds to the Kushana period have been unearthed from various ancient sites in India. Such specimens have come from Basārḥ (ancient Vaisali)² in Bihar, Bhitā³ in the United Provinces, Sankisā⁴ in the United Provinces, Mathurā, the capital of the Kushanas,⁵ Ghosi⁶ in the United Provinces, Besnagar in the Central Province⁷ and Kosam (ancient Kausambi).⁸

In Bengal, Kushana terracotta figurines and objects have been found in a number of sites such as Bāngarḥ in Dinajpur, Berāchampā, Ātghorā and Harinārāyanpur in 24-Parganas, Bahiri in Midnapure and Tamluk (ancient Tamralipti).⁹ In north-western India, Kushana figurines have been discovered at Shāh-ji-ki-

¹ Parmeswari Lal Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

² *ASIAR*, 1903-04, p. 73, Pl. XXXIX.

³ *ASIAR*, 1911-12, p. 73, Pl. XXII. 33-35, 40, 42-44.

⁴ *JUPHS*, 1927, p. 113, Pl. IV, fig. III.

⁵ K. de B. Codrington, "Iconography: Classical and Indian", *Man in India*, XXXV(1935), pp. 65-66, Pl. E.

⁶ *JUPHS*, IX (1934), pp. 59-64.

⁷ *ASIAR*, 1914-15, p. 84.

⁸ *ASIAR*, 1921-22, p. 45.

⁹ *IA*, 1954-55, p. 20; 1956-57, p. 30; 1957-58, pp. 52, 70 & 81.

dheri¹ and Taxila.² Other find-spots include Baramula³ in Kashmir, Bikaner⁴ in Rajasthan and Kasia⁵ in the United Provinces. The figurines as a whole show decisive Hellenistic influence, but Indian elements are not totally lacking.

Terracotta figurines and objects constitute a large chunk of the art productions of the Gupta period (4th-6th centuries). Under the Guptas, who established "the classical phase of Indian art",⁶ plastic exercises in clay went hand in hand with lithic productions. The popularity of the clay art was so extensive that 'lypa-karma' or terracotta manufacture became a technical term of the time.⁷ During the Gupta rule, "the image had taken its place in architecture"⁸ and terracotta secured a place in architectural decoration.⁹ Henceforth, the history of Indian terracottas runs into two distinct channels - one, the terracotta figurines and objects, and the other, architectural terracotta.

¹ ASIAR, 1910-11, pp. 25-32.

² ASIAR, 1914-15, pp. 15, 18 & 21.

³ ASIAR, 1916-17, Pt. I, Pl. IV, a-e.

⁴ PRASI, W.C., 1921-22, pp. 112-16.

⁵ ASIAR, 1906-07, p. 56.

⁶ A.K. Coomaraswamy, History of Indian and Indonesian Art (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1965), p. 71.

⁷ Moti Chandra, "A Study of Terracotta from Mirpurkhas", PWMB, vol. XXII, p. 3.

⁸ A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 71.

⁹ Cf. Zulekha Haque, Terracotta Decorations of Late Mediaeval Bengal: Portrayal of a Society (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1980), p. 15.

Both the types were extensively used in India, particularly in the Gangetic Valley, as it is evidenced by discoveries and chance finds.

In Bengal, terracottas ascribed to the Gupta age have been found at a number of ancient sites. Dikshit has discovered a few terracotta figurines and other objects from Mahāsthān in Bogra district.¹ A clay seal, a terracotta female head and relief plaques discovered at the site are attributed to the Gupta period.² Bāngarh in Dinajpur has also yielded a few Gupta terracottas including human and animal figurines and toys.³ Other find-spots of Gupta terracotta in Bengal are Tamluk in Midnapore, Gitagrām⁴ in Murshidabad, Chandraketurgarh⁵ in 24-Parganas and Rangamati⁶ in Berhampore.

At Kasia in the United Provinces, Vogel discovered a number of terracotta figurines which on stylistic resemblance are ascribed to the Gupta age.⁷ Some figurines found at Kasia are dated by Coomaraswamy as belonging to the Gupta period.⁸ Gupta

¹ASIAR, 1928-29, pp. 92-96, Pls. XLI. b-d, e, f; XLII.d.

²Nazimuddin Ahmed, Mahasthan (Dacca: Department of Archaeology & Museums, 1975), p. 35.

³K.G. Goswami, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴ASIAR, 1928-29, p. 98.

⁵IA, 1957-58, pp. 51-52; 1958-59, p. 55.

⁶ASIAR, 1928-29, pp. 99-100.

⁷ASIAR, 1904-05, p. 47.

⁸A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 87.

terracottas have also been found at Rājghāt in Benares¹ and Kosam² in the United Provinces. Terracotta ascribed to the Gupta period were also found at Besnagar in the Central Province, Basārḥ in Bihar and Bhitā in the United Provinces. Cunningham has also discovered a number of terracotta figurines from Kurukshetra³ assignable to this period. About these figurines Marshall writes, "Apart from their artistic interest, these figurines are valuable for the information they furnish as to the fashion in vogue during the Gupta period. Thus the modes of dressing the hair were as numerous then as they are among women today, and perhaps even more startling. The men certainly must have been foppish to a degree, with their long curls falling loose on one side only, or elaborated like a full Georgian wig, or coiffured with jewels in the Antoinette manner, or arranged more severely in the regal style of Persia."⁴

The terracotta figurines reveal no general style as seen in the stone sculptures of this period.⁵ However, the cult figurines are not much different but followed almost the same art formulae. The situation was otherwise with the secular figurines, which "being essentially the representation of the folk art",

¹V.S. Agrawala, "Rajghat Terracottas", JISOA, XI (1941), pp. 1-8.

²ASIAR, 1913-14, Pl. LXX.

³ASIR, vol. XI (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1880), Pl. III.

⁴ASIAR, 1909-10, p. 41.

⁵C.C. Dasgupta, op. cit., p. 214.

were not covered by sāstric iconography and followed more or less the fancy of the artists. Female life with ornate make-up ceases to be represented in the terracottas of this period; instead, it relies more on natural charms of the body showing full-rounded breasts - a trait so often mentioned in the Kāvya literature of the period.¹ "From the standpoint of facial expression, dress and ornaments, these figurines are extremely valuable as they are the only extant evidences regarding these matters."²

The age of the Guptas inaugurated the artistic monumentalism in architecture and sculpture of Indian art. Under them, the scope of the terracotta art widened greatly following construction of brick structure in large numbers. The natural ornamentation for a brick building is terracotta. Thus apart from the traditional use of the medium for human and animal figurines, cult deities, articles of day-to-day use, seals and sealings, toy goods etc., terracotta now came to be employed in architectural ornamentation. Terracotta plaques with figures of divine and semi-divine beings, mythological scenes, popular stories and scenes of everyday life were used to decorate the walls of temples and other buildings. Carved bricks and tiles of the period with vegetal, human and animal motifs have been discovered at a number of sites in India.

¹Cf. Ancient India, 4 (1947-1948), pp. 137-38.

²C.C. Dasgupta, op. cit., p. 226.

The oldest surviving brick structure in India is the Bhitargaon temple in the United Provinces where Vogel discovered a number of terracotta plaques some of which served as bas-relief on the outer walls of the temple.¹ Coomaraswamy dates these terracotta pieces to the Gupta age.² In his account of the Bhitargaon temple, Cunningham makes mention of the brick buildings of the Gupta period with terracotta ornamentation. He writes, "In the plains of northern India, owing to the scarcity of stone, ornamental brickwork must have been extensively used for sacred buildings, both Brahmanical and Buddhist. At every old site, carved and moulded bricks are found in abundance, and I have now ascertained that many of the most famous buildings in northern India at the time of the Muhammadan invasion must have been built entirely of brick, and were decorated with terracotta ornaments and alto-relievos. This was certainly the case with the great temple of the Sun at Multan, with the famous shrine of Jagsoma at Thaneswar, with the great Buddhist buildings at Sankisā, Kosambi and Sravasti and with all the Brahmanical temples of the Gupta period at Bilsar, Bhitargaon, Garhwa and Bhitari. In the more easterly provinces of Bihar and Bengal, the same causes of the want and costliness of stone gave birth to the great brick temples of Bodh-Gayā and Nalanda. Even at Mathurā and Benares, within a few miles of the stone quarries of Rupbas and Chunār,

¹ ASIAR, 1908-09, p. 10, fig. 2.

² A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 87.

moulded and carved bricks are found in great abundance."¹ Vogel also writes about the terracotta ornamentation of the brick buildings at Sravasti ascribed to the Gupta period on palaeological ground.² Regarding the beginning of architectural terracotta Marshall holds, "We do not know how long this peculiar style of carved brickwork remained in vogue, but we may safely assume that it flourished during the rule of the great Gupta emperors, i.e., the 4th and 5th centuries."³

The walls of the Bhitargaon temple are decorated with terracotta panels of Brahmanical subjects.⁴ Cunningham calls it a Visṇu temple judging the figural contents of the terracotta facings.⁵ Besides figure sculptures of deities, men and women, animals and birds, geometrical patterns like the chequer and the scroll occur on the terracottas.⁶ Other temples of the Bhitargaon surrounding are also reported to have been built of brick and decorated with terracotta.⁷ The Bhitargaon temple has similarity with the brick temple of Bodh-Gayā in its sculptured terracotta ornamentation.⁸ The lower part of the Bodh-Gayā temple consists

¹ ASIR, vol. XI, op. cit., p. 42.

² ASIAR, 1907-08, p. 96.

³ ASIAR, 1908-09, p. 6.

⁴ A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 80.

⁵ ASIR, vol. XI, op. cit., p. 42.

⁶ ASIAR, 1908-09, p. 10.

⁷ ASIR, vol. XI, op. cit., p. 41.

⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

of plain bold mouldings above which the walls are faced with groups in terracotta. Some of the panels contain only flowers and foliage or single elephants. The execution of these terracotta plaques is "far superior to that of most of the existing stone temples of later period."¹

Other ancient brick temples are also known to have been decorated with terracotta facing. The temple of Parauli, two miles from Bhitargaon, is a fine example of geometric carving on bricks. "Outside, the whole face of the walls is richly decorated with deeply cut arabesque ornament in perpendicular lines, the edges of each face being distinctly marked by sunken lines by the omission of a brick in every alternate course. The effect is decidedly good, as the different faces are all clearly defined."² Similar decorations appear in the temple of Rar, also in Cawnpore district, U.P. and "the same flowered ornament being repeated from top to bottom."³ The moulded bricks of these temples are considerably smaller in size than those of Bhitargaon. The temple of Kurari contains bricks of 13"x8"x2" almost like those used in the Parauli temple, but the bricks of Bhitargaon measure 17½"x10½"x3".⁴ These smaller bricks have been assigned to the 10th

¹ASIR, vol. XI, op. cit., p. 44.

²Ibid., p. 47.

³Ibid.

⁴ASIAR, 1908-09, p. 6.

century by Growse. Decorative brickwork on small-sized brick was extensively used in the Gangetic plains, not only in Brahmanical temples, but also in Buddhist sanctuaries. The temple of the Buddha's nativity on the site of the Lumbini Garden in the Nepalese Tarai is decorated with carved brickwork of this type and excavations at Sarnāth in 1906-7 revealed the basement of a large Buddhist monastery ornamented in the same fashion.¹ The average size of the Sarnāth bricks is stated to be $8\frac{1}{2}" \times 7\frac{1}{4}" \times 2"$, the maximum length being 12". Carved brickwork also decorated the temples at Tinduli, Bahua, Thithaura² etc. in the Fatehpur district, U.P. The brick temple of Lakshmana at Sirpur in the Central Province dated to the Gupta period in the 5th century A.D.³ Contains rich sculptured decoration in carved brick showing figures in panels arranged in vertical rows.⁴ Many other temples of the region, both Brahmanical and Buddhist, are reported as having contained terracotta ornamentation.⁵ The Buddhist stupa at Mirpurkhas in Sind had its plinth decorated with terracotta Buddha figures in relief⁶ which have been assigned to the Gupta period on the basis of similarity of the haloes that occur in the stone sculptures of the period. In the debris of the site,

¹ Cf. ASIAR, 1906-07, pp. 81 ff, Pls. XXIV and XXV.

² ASIAR, 1908-09, pp. 17-21.

³ ASIR, vol. XVII (Calcutta: Supdt. of Govt. Printing, 1884), p. 28.

⁴ ASIAR, 1909-10, pp. 10-14, Pls. I & II.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-17.

⁶ A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 73.

carved brick of terracotta fineness with motifs of blown lotus within roundels, weave-pattern by intersecting diagonals, child in mother's lap, foliage pattern etc. have been found in abundance.¹ Architectural terracotta plaques have also survived from Ahichchatra in U.P.² and Devnimori in Gujrat. Over three hundred terracotta panels in Gupta style depicting stories from the epic Rāmāyana have come up from a ruined temple at Saheth-Maheth in U.P.³ Regarding the size and placing of the plaques, Vogel writes, "These panels are uniform in size, their height being 12" and their width 15". There are indications which prove that these bas-reliefs were meant to form a continuous frieze on the walls of the buildings."⁴ Similar panels decorated the outer walls of the Gupta temple at Deogarh. Terracotta panels have been also found at Rang Mahal in Bikaner⁵ and Barapal.⁶ These plaques show a mixture of Hellenistic and Indian elements⁷ and have been dated by Coomaraswamy as belonging to late Kushana or early Gupta period,⁸ till which time some of the Hellenistic

¹ ASIAR, 1909-10, p. 85.

² Mofi Chandra, op. cit., pp. 14-16, 21; V.S. Agrawala, "The Terracottas of Ahichchatra", Ancient India, 4 (1947-48), pp. 167-71.

³ Y.D. Sharma, "Exploration of Historic Sites", Ancient India, IX (1953), pp. 144-45.

⁴ ASIAR, 1907-08, p. 96.

⁵ ASIAR, 1917-18, Pt. I, Pl. III, figs. 1-3.

⁶ Ibid., figs. 4-7.

⁷ C.C. Das Gupta, op. cit., p. 212.

⁸ A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 87.

influence may have lingered on Indian art. Architectural terracotta of the Gupta age was also discovered at Kasia (Kusinagar).¹ At Harwan² in Kashmir and Chausa³ in Patna were found a number of terracotta plaques assignable to the Gupta period.

Indian terracottas of the post-Gupta medieval times have come up from a number of sites outside Bengal. Of the find-spots, Nalanda has been the most prolific.⁴ Marshall has discovered a number of terracottas from Saheth-Maheth in the United Provinces which he ascribes to this period on grounds of stratification.⁵ Medieval terracottas have also been excavated from Avantipur in Kashmir.⁶

In Bengal, architectural terracotta and ornamental bricks assignable to the late Gupta period (5th-6th century) were found in the temple wall of the Govind Bhita, an adjacent site to Mahāsthān in Bogra district.⁷ The plaques illustrate Yaksha figures and also dieties of the Buddhists and the Hindus. Also

¹ ASIAR, 1910-11, Pl. XXXIV.

² R.C. Kak, Ancient Monuments of Kashmir (Reprint. New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1971), pp. 108-09, Pls. XVII-XLII; ASIAR, 1918-19, Pl. XI.

³ K.P. Jayaswal, "A Note on a Terracotta Ramayana Panel of the Gupta Period", Modern Review, LII (1932), p. 148.

⁴ ASIAR, 1919-20, Pl. XXIC; 1934-35, p. 40, Pl. XVII.6.

⁵ ASIAR, 1910-11, Pl. X.1-3, 5, 6.

⁶ ASIAR, 1913-14, Pl. XXX.d.

⁷ ASIAR, 1936-37, p. 53.

among the plaques are two, one representing an amorous couple (the mithuna) against the background of a blown lotus, and the other, the dream of Māyā, and hence from the life of the Buddha. On stylistic ground, the plaques have been assigned to the Gupta period.¹ The ornamental bricks show a variety of designs such as chevron, chess-board, cross-petal, dentil, inverted pyramid, corbelled arches, and flowers such as the sun-flower, lotus, lily etc.² Some relief plaques have also been dug up from Gokul, a nearby site.³

The terracotta art of Bengal, as indeed Bengal art in general, was related to the art movement of northern India and the Gangetic Valley up to the end of the Gupta period.⁴ It is evident from the discussion made in the foregoing pages. But Bengal appears to have cut itself off from the traditional trans-deltaic artistic dominance in the post-Gupta time and went on her own. The move is distinctly manifest both in the clay and lithic products of medieval Bengal.

In the deltaic Bengal, abundance of quality clay and scarcity of stone have through ages made the people dependent on clay products which consisted of articles of daily use as well as votive objects. The Bengal potters manufactured another kind

¹ S.K. Saraswati, Early Sculpture of Bengal (Calcutta: Sambodhi Publications Pvt. Limited, 1962), p. 107.

² ASIAR, 1936-37, p. 53, Pl. XVII.

³ ASIAR, 1934-35, pp. 41-42, Pl. XVIII.1,3; 1935-36, pp. 68-69.

⁴ Cf. S.K. Saraswati, Early Sculptures of Bengal, op. cit., p. 109.

of terracotta objects of more durable nature; these were plaques or tablets wrought with designs meant for hanging from walls, windows or stages and thereby served decorative purposes.¹ Demand for such terracotta objects by the local people kept the art living through ages in Bengal. Evidences are available that such terracotta objects were manufactured on commercial scale also and exported outside the country.² Such plaques with inscriptions in the Bengali script of the 11th century have been found at Arakan, Burma and Nalanda.³ Generally, images of divinity were not made in terracotta, nor were the iconographic rules of the Śilpasastras applicable to making such images. The terracotta artists ordinarily represented folk events of day-to-day life, not any serious rendering of thought, philosophy or ideal.⁴

The post-Gupta terracotta bas-relief art is confined to eastern India, particularly Bengal, where it developed profusely and became the established tradition for architectural ornamentation.⁵ It is, however, to be noted that even within Bengal, the pre-Muslim sites of only the eastern and northern Bengal have

¹ Nihar Ranjon Ray, Bāṅgalīr Itihas (Ādiparba) (Calcutta: Book Emporium, 1356 B.S.), p. 762.

² N.K. Bhattasali, Iconography of the Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum (Dacca: Dacca Museum Committee, 1929), p. XXII.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Nihar Ranjon Ray, op. cit., p. 762.

⁵ Parmeswari Lal Gupta, op. cit., p. 69.

yielded proofs of a rich tradition of terracotta art whose evidence is lacking in the contemporaneous brick structures of West Bengal built on ancient tradition.¹ A major site of Bengal terracotta art is located at the Lālmāi-Maināmati ridge in Comilla district. The area also contains the largest assemblage of the ancient Buddhist remains in Bengal. Of a large number of cultural mounds identified here, only three have so far been systematically excavated,² while other ruins have yielded remains of a rich cultural heritage of ancient Bengal. Excavations have revealed at Sālban a Buddhist Vihāra, like the one at Pāhārpur, with a wealth of cultural finds datable from the 7th to the 12th century A.D. Built roughly on a square plan, the monastery is a monumental structure arranged round a central shrine on cruciform plan - "a fully developed and finished example of Buddhist architecture of the 7th-8th century Bengal."³ Made of burnt brick, the central shrine or stūpa is an imposing edifice having its

¹Cf. David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1972), p. 13.

²The excavated sites are Sālbanpur Mound, Kotilā Murā and Chārpātra Murā. Excavation exposed remains of a large Buddhist monastery at Sālbanpur (8th-10th centuries) renamed Sālban Vihāra, the Triratna Stūpas (7th-13th centuries) at Kotilā Murā and a rectangular shrine (c. 1000 A.D.) at Chārpātra Murā. A large number of antiquities, objects of art and utility, including eleven copper plate grants have been recovered from the sites. These finds represent the only available stratified material from South-Eastern Bengal, thus providing a dependable archaeological basis for the reconstruction of history and chronology of this region.

³F.A. Khan, Mainamati (Karachi: Department of Archaeology, 1963), p. 11. Similar structure on cruciform plan with an ambulatory path around was revealed by excavation at Bāngarh in the Second Stratum ascribable to the Pāla period. (K.G. Goswami, op. cit., p. 8).

basement walls decorated with a string-course of "delightfully sculptured terracotta plaques"¹ set within slightly projected parallel bands of ornamental bricks.² Besides the panels in situ, a number of terracotta plaques have been found loose at the site. They represent men and women in various movements, animals and birds, divine and semi-divine beings, trees, plants and flowers. Some of the plaques also represent symbols such as Dharmachakra and Tri-ratna as seen on the Deva coins, seals and Copper Plates. The finds at the site also included minor terracotta objects like animal figurines, beads, net-sinkers, toys etc.³ The Monastic establishment of the Sālban Vihāra was built by king Bhavadeva, the fourth ruler of the Buddhist Deva dynasty of Samatata (South-Eastern Bengal) as is evidenced by a terracotta sealing⁴ discovered from the site.

A large number of terracotta plaques were also discovered from Ānanda Vihāra, a magnificent monastic establishment at the

¹M. Harunur Rashid, "Bangladesh: A Profile in the Light of Recent Archaeological Discoveries", Bangladesh Historical Studies, III (1978), p. 11.

²F.A. Khan, Architecture and Art Treasures in Pakistan (Karachi: Elite Publishers Ltd., 1969), p. 165.

³F.A. Khan, Mainamati, op. cit., pp. 33-36.

⁴The Sealing reads, "Śrī Bhavadeva Mahā Vihāra - Ārya Bhikṣu Sanghāśya", that is "Śrī Bhavadeva, the builder of the Mahā Vihāra". Bhavadeva, the fourth ruler of the Deva dynasty has been assigned a reigning period in the second half of the 8th century A.D. (See Abdul Momin Chowdhury, Dynastic History of Bengal (Dacca: The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1967), p. 147.

Mainamati site and "focus of the last great Buddhist University which developed here from the 7th century onward".¹ The ruins here revealed plan of a square monastery with a central stupa based on a Greek cross with projecting angles between the arms. The recessed angles of the central temple revealed the arrangement of walls which were relieved on the outer face by projecting mouldings and cornices of ornamental bricks on top with designs of stepped pyramid, lotus petals (cyma recta), chess-board patterns, and bands of terracotta plaques set in recessed panels running around the basement. The plaques represented the Buddha and a host of semi-divine, monstrous and secular subjects including warriors, acrobats, musicians, sages, animals and plants.² From the debris were also recovered a number of terracotta plaques with similar representations, ornamental bricks and other decorative pieces of terracotta material that had gone to dress the façade of the basement walls.³

The plaques reveal dynamic movement and are expressive of popular fancy and folk imagination. They betray little of the hieratic artistic tendencies of the Pala-Sena school. The themes are drawn from the daily life of the people, in various stages of

¹ M. Harunur Rashid, op. cit., p. 14.

² Cf. R.E.M. Wheeler, Five Thousand Years of Pakistan (London: Royal India & Pakistan Society, 1950), pp. 101-02.

³ T.N. Ramchandran, "Recent Archaeological Discoveries Along the Mainamati and Lalmai Ranges, Tippera District, East Bengal", in B.C. Law Volume, Part II, ed. by Bhandarkar and others (Poona: The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1946), p. 220.

activity, emotion, movement and rest, and from all creations of God and nature. "There is a purposeful rhythm running through the whole series, as at Pāhārpur, which intimately connects this folk art with contemporaneous stone representations of the hieratic religious art of Bengal of the period."¹ The richness of decoration of the stūpa "though not perhaps in quality" must have rivalled that at Pāhārpur.²

Bricks found at the site are of various sizes and shape, the largest being $13\frac{1}{2}" \times 9" \times 2\frac{1}{4}"$.³ While rectangular bricks constitute the majority, square bricks and tiles also occur. Ornamental bricks which decorated the mouldings and which agree in design and decoration with those found at Pāhārpur and Bāngarh, present very interesting major and minor designs and geometrical patterns. The bell-shaped stūpa was a major design as elsewhere and zigzag, chevron, stepped pyramid and the dental edges with zigzag course between were popular decorative patterns. Similar designs occur on the potsherds together with straight lines, herringbone, square and trellis.

Terracotta plaques representing semi-divine, hybrid and animal figures and ornamental bricks of various sizes have also been recovered from a nearly mound locally known as Rupbān Kanya's

¹ T. N. Ramchandran, op. cit., p. 220.

² R. E. M. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 102.

³ T. N. Ramchandran, op. cit., p. 223.

Palace'. The ruins here showed traces of a central structure and enclosing walls which were probably faced with the terracotta plaques discovered from the debris.¹

The ruins of the so-called 'Bhojārājā's Palace' revealed fragments of massive brick walling of a central square temple with its basement "profusely decorated with terracotta plaques and ornamental bricks."² The plaques represent human, divine, semi-divine, animal and bird lives and also flora as at Ānanda Vihāra. Some of the plaques exhibit a character similar to that of stone sculpture of the times.³ Exuberant in conception and in the richness of subject matter, the Maināmati artists did not scruple to represent small matters and situations and no subject appeared to them too small or unworthy of attention.

A few terracotta plaques and ornamental bricks were also discovered from another nearby mound locally called 'Itākhola'.

As at Ānanda Vihāra, a large number of terracotta plaques discovered from the basement of a ruinous cruciform brick structure at the locally known 'Rupbān Murā' reveal scenes from the daily life of the people in various stages of movement, emotion

¹ R.E.M. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 102.

² Ibid.; T.N. Ramchandran, op. cit., p. 224.

³ T.N. Ramchandran, Ibid.

and experience. Besides, all lives are represented in the plaques - divine, semi-divine, human, animal, bird and flora - not to speak of popular stories and decorative patterns, motifs and compositions. With simple tools and cheap materials like mud and clay, the local folk artists have achieved a marvel in sculptural art.

An excellent group of corner brackets of terracotta materials was gathered from Rupbān Murā. The designs executed include stepped pyramid around squares, Greek vases with fillet bands, pumpkin offsets and full-jar motifs. The site also yielded a number of ornamental bricks containing designs of lotus rosettes in a row and within squares and circles, lotus petals within voluted lines and arched bands, stepped pyramids, serpent hoods, chess-boards and scallops in horizontal courses.

The terracotta plaques from the Maināmati sites are wider in size than those at Pāhārpur, while the art represented on them is of a "higher class of excellence."¹ Bodhisattva Vajrapani, Padmapani, Trailokyavijaya and Prince Sidhartha are popular divine figures. Among semi-divines, Yakshas, Vidyadharas, Gandharva, Kinnara, and Kimpurusha are common. Of human, warriors, archers, man fighting with tiger, dancing and playing on flute, women in their toilet and sleeping and cowherdess churning milk are mostly represented. Animals represented by lion, antelope,

¹ T. N. Ramchandran, op. cit., p. 226.

elephant, rhinoceros, wild boar, bull and squirrel show fascinating animal study. Some of the animals are also seen in decorative compositions and motifs. Such are makara and Kirtimukha. Hamsas and parrots had thematic appeal for the Maināmati artists like their brothers at Pāhārpur.

Some scholars are inclined to antedate the Maināmati terracotta art to that at Pāhārpur and other medieval sites of Bengal. Harunur Rashid holds that "since the Maināmati reliefs are undoubtedly earlier in date and since the Pāhārpur and other series show some definite developments in technique and style, this remarkable art may have originated in this region under the patronage of the well-known Buddhist dynasties of Samatata."¹ In the absence of definite dating of the Maināmati sites, such a fanciful assumption would rather sound unacademic and be wholly based on subjective evaluation of the art specimens discovered at the sites. Shahanara Husain has dated the Maināmati plaques as contemporaneous with those from Pāhārpur² and so has T.N. Ram Chandran.³ Even on point of quality of art of the plaques, opinions are poles varied. Thus while Harunur Rashid designates the Maināmati plaques as "crude, light-hearted, unreflective works" displaying "no spiritual or intellectual quality nor any

¹ M. Harunur Rashid, op. cit., p. 18.

² Shahanara Husain, Everyday Life in the Pala Empire (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1968), p. 48.

³ T.N. Ramchandran, op. cit., p. 223.

refinement of technique", and representing an inferior art style to that at Pāhārpur,¹ other scholars² speak highly of their vitality, richness and variety. F.A. Khan would even rank the Maināmati plaques as "superior to the Pāhārpur series in richness of detail and artistic perfection."³ It, however, appears that both the Maināmati and Pāhārpur plaques belong to the same school of popular art thematically and technically and represent the Bengal folk art "at its best".⁴

The Somāpurā Vihāra at Pāhārpur in the district of Rajshahi has yielded the largest finds of pre-Muslim terracotta art in Bengal. Founded by Dharmapāla (770-810) in about 800 A.D., this gigantic Buddhist monastic establishment is the largest in India⁵ and for that matter, in the ancient world. Excavations⁶ conducted here have revealed a vast monastic complex with a central shrine or stūpa. Cruciform in plan and somewhat pyramidal in elevation, the central shrine originally resolved itself into

¹M. Harunur Rashid, op. cit., p. 18.

²Cf. F.A. Khan, Mainamati, op. cit., pp. 32-33; R.E.M. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 102.

³F.A. Khan, Ibid., p. 32.

⁴Shahanara Husain, op. cit., p. 64.

⁵ASIAR, 1927-28, p. 106.

⁶K.N. Dikshit, Excavations at Paharpur (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1938), pp. 2-3. The report of the excavations form Memoir No. 55 of the Archaeological Survey of India.

diminishing stages, of which only three now survive with a circumumbulatory passage at the base of each. The middle passage is 16 feet above the lowest at the ground level and 7 feet below the uppermost. This style of architecture with a complicated scheme of decoration developed in Bengal during the Pāla period (750-1160).¹ The walls of the lower stages are faced with sculptured panels which form the special feature of the building. Both in the basement and the first floor walls, there were at least two and at places, three rows of terracotta plaques. A large part of these numbering about 2000 is still in situ and the loose plaques found in the excavation numbered more than 800.²

The outstanding importance of the Pāhārpur temple lies in its extensive series of the terracotta panels. Within Bengal, these plaques have resemblance with those discovered at Maināmati,³ Mahāsthān,⁴ Sābhār⁵ and Bāngarh.⁶ Beyond Bengal, in India, similar terracotta plaques have been found at Harwan⁷ in Kashmir,

¹ F.A. Khan, Architecture and Art Treasures of Pakistan, op. cit., p. 164.

² K.N. Dikshit, op. cit., p. 56.

³ F.A. Khan, Mainamati, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

⁴ ASIAR, 1928-29, pp. 88ff.

⁵ ASIAR, 1925-26, p. 41.

⁶ K.G. Goswami, op. cit., p. 9.

⁷ R.C. Kak, op. cit., p. 106.

Hanumāgarh¹ in Bikaner, Mirpurkhās² in Sind, Bhitargaon³ and Saheth-Maheth⁴ in the United Provinces. Comparatively there is closer similarity between the Saheth-Maheth and the Pāhārpur plaques, but even then, in richness, variety and exuberance of the material, the Pāhārpur plaques are unrivalled. It appears that the use of terracotta plaques for decorating the exterior of temples and shrines had been well-established in Bengal from the 7th century of the Christian era.⁵

Like the Maināmati plaques with which the Pāhārpur finds are related in themes, technique, style and execution, the latter also represent the folk art of Bengal. Freedom from the trammels of iconography and canons of religion enabled the artists in terracotta to exercise their fancy more freely and give full play to their ability in depicting the passing phases and moods in everyday life. Thus while the sculptor revelled in delineating form and anatomy to his work, the terracotta artist excelled in rendering every conceivable picturesque subject which the world of man and animal, nature and fiction brought within the compass of his fancy and observation.

¹ASIAR, 1917-18, p. 22.

²ASIAR, Pt. II, 1909-10, pp. 80ff.

³ASIAR, Pt. II, 1908-09, p. 6.

⁴ASIAR, Pt. II, 1907-08, pp. 81ff.

⁵K.N. Dikshit, op. cit., p. 56.

The Pāhārpur terracotta plaques constitute the clay counterparts of the stone sculptures at the basement storey of the temple representing a variety of scenes and figures in an uncouth and vigorous style.¹ They display no spiritual or intellectual quality.² Their nature is wholly popular and draws directly from the daily life of the people "in all stages of rest and movement, in all expressions of emotion and in all possible and impossible situations."³ They are "local and indigenous in trend, popular in inspiration and appeal depicting the everyday life, joys and sorrows, amusements and occupations, sports and pastimes of the common men."⁴ In the hieratic religious art of India, such a large social content, such a variety of human feelings, such intimacy of contact with the events and experiences of daily life and such spontaneous actions and movements are at no time to be seen. The plaques are crude, vigorous, light-hearted owing little to academic tradition, nevertheless, deep-rooted in the folk-art of Bengal country-life. They are the handiwork of simple folk-artists working with crude implements, but truly reflecting the tenor of the life of the time. "We can visualise through them how the common people lived their lives away from the courts and aristocratic environments, and we can

¹ HB, vol. I, ed. by R.C. Majumdar (Dacca: The University of Dacca, 1963), p. 528.

² Cf. R.E.M. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 100.

³ HB, vol. I, op. cit., p. 528.

⁴ S.K. Saraswati, "Terracotta Art of Bengal", Times of India Annual (1969), p. 66.

catch a glimpse of the social and thought-content of the ordinary men."¹

The Pāhārpur plaques are virtually sculptures turned out of moulds.² "Naive and simple in plastic diction, this art is forceful and dynamic in delineation of action and movement and masterful in expression."³ Again, the richness and variety of the themes are no less surprising. They include Buddhist and Hindu iconography, divine and semi-divine beings: gandharvas, apsaras, kinnaras and kinnaris and other mythical creatures, makaras, kirtimukhas; men, women and children engaged in various activities or at rest; musicians, dancers, warriors, acrobats, ploughmen, archers on chariots, women carrying pitchers on their heads, and various other aspects of life, sacred or profane, in bewildering profusion and disorderly confusion. Also included in the subjects is the entire animal world including lion, tiger, buffalo, antelope, monkey, mongoose, elephant, bear, jackal, duck, goose, fish etc., as well as trees, flowers and plants, symbols, sprinklers, vases etc.⁴ Besides, representations of popular stories from the Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Kṛṣṇalīlā, Pañcatantra etc. have also been made in the plaques.⁵ In the examination of ^{/the} plaques, one certainly enjoys "the excitement of a

¹ HB, vol. I, op. cit., p. 528.

² K.N. Dikshit, op. cit., p. 57.

³ S.K. Saraswati, Early Sculptures of Bengal, op. cit., p.10.

⁴ Cf. K.N. Dikshit, op. cit., pp. 58-70.

⁵ Shahanra Hussain, op. cit., pp. 150-60.

voyage of discovery."¹

Other terracotta objects from Pāhārpur include crude female figures, a few holding a child or a pitcher round one arm - reminiscent of similar figurines at Mohenjo-daro. There are animal figurines of horses and bulls, bird-rattles, votive stūpas, potter's dabbers, parts of finials, flat dishes, spindle whorls, terracotta beads etc.²

Besides the terracotta plaques, figurines and other objects, excavations at Pāhārpur have yielded a large number of ornamental bricks of the pre-Muslim times. Dikshit has divided these art products into two periods: those belonging to the early period i.e., the period of the building of the temple (C. 800 A.D.) and those belonging to the second period or roughly the 10th and 11th centuries when repairs were undertaken in the temple. Bricks of the early period contain designs like the stepped pyramid, lotus petal, the chess-board and the transverse alternate, wavy and straight lines. To the second period are referred bricks with rows of battlements divided by wavy lines or chain bands, deep-cut chevron with intermediate band of rectangles filled by hatching, rectangular medallion with half-lotuses, half-round bricks with shallow incision showing a central stem within double leaves, incised rectangular bricks consisting of honey-suckle ornament etc.³

¹ R.E.M. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 101.

² Cf. K.N. Dikshit, op. cit., p. 78.

³ Ibid., pp. 78-79.

The ornamental bricks are, in fact, terracotta pieces turned out of mould like the latter.¹ They constituted a significant element of architectural ornamentation in India and Bengal in the past as at present. These decorative bricks were set as a frieze between the projected cornice above and the terracotta panels below.

That the terracotta art was widely practised in post-Gupta Bengal is also evidenced by finds from various sites. Mahāsthān, the ancient city of Pundravardhana² in the modern Bogra district has proved a prolific site of terracotta objects ranging in date from pre-Christian times to late Pāla period.³ Cunningham discovered here twelve terracotta plaques and a number of carved bricks.⁴ Terracottas from the site belonging to the Pāla period are also numerous. These consist of both figure sculptures and bas-relief. A few plaques, softly and delicately modelled, showing animals and birds betray Gupta classical concept in a faint manner; these have been assigned to the interregnum between the Gupta and the Pāla periods.⁵ Over a dozen of plaques similar in execution to the Pāhārpur series have been found at Mahāsthān

¹A.B.M. Husain, "The Ornamentation of the Sultani Architecture in Bengal", Shilpakala, I (1978), p. 4.

²ASIR, vol. XV (Calcutta: Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1882), pp. 102-4.

³Ancient finds from Mahasthan have been discussed in the relevant places above.

⁴ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 108.

⁵ASIAR, 1936-37, p. 53.

in the temple sites.¹ A large number of terracotta objects have also been discovered from Bhāsu Vihāra, which Cunningham identifies with Po-Shi-Po Vihāra mentioned by the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang (7th century).² Excavations have revealed here three ancient structures - two monasteries of roughly square plan and a semi-cruciform shrine.³ A considerable amount of cultural wealth including sixty bronze images, over a hundred inscribed terracotta and baked sealings, a number of terracotta plaques and many ornamental bricks with floral and geometric designs and pottery objects were discovered from the digging.⁴ The terracotta plaques attract most notice. "Made of finer clay and still excellently preserved, these terracottas are quite different from the Maināmati - Pāhārpur series; they are heavy and large in size, mature in form and style and very well executed".⁵ The lively expressiveness and crude but vigorous style of Bengal folk-art represented by the Maināmati-Pāhārpur plaques are somewhat missing here; instead, they betray unmistakably the influence of the classical Gupta art in their execution. These reliefs, datable to 10th/11th centuries, are free from the Deva-Pāla tradition and "must be regarded as an extraordinary survival of Gupta tradition in Bengal long after it

¹ ASIAR, 1928-29, p. 96.

² ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 103.

³ M. Harunur Rashid, op. cit., p. 22.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

was thought to have died out."¹ From Mangalkot, another newly discovered site near Mahasthan, were discovered a number of life-size terracotta figures showing marked influence of Gupta classical style.²

Pre-Muslim examples of Bengal terracotta art have also come up from a number of other sites. Terracotta figures, plaques, bangles, toys, beads etc. datable to the Pāla period were excavated from Bāngarh in Dinajpur.³ Sābhār, in the district of Dacca, has yielded terracotta plaques with figures of the Bodhisattvas in different attitude stamped on them.⁴ Dikshit has discovered here a terracotta plaque representing Viṣṇu.⁵ The site must have been a notable Buddhist centre in Bengal comparable with Maināmati, Pāhārpur and Mahāsthān. Finds from Sābhār also included terracotta Buddha images in the round and some other human figurines of the same material.⁶ At Raghurāmpur in Dacca district, some terracotta figurines have been discovered of which a few are now in the Dacca Museum.⁷ Birāt, in Rangpur district, also yielded proofs of terracotta art. Excavation has exposed here remains of a temple resembling the one at Pāhārpur.

¹M. Harunur Rashid, op. cit., p. 23.

²Ibid.

³K.G. Goswami, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴ASIAR, 1924-25, p. 37; N.K. Bhattasali, op. cit., p. XXIII.

⁵ASIAR, 1927-28, p. III, Pl. XLIX.

⁶N.K. Bhattasali, op. cit., p. XXII.

⁷Ibid., p. 31.

Several fragments of terracotta discovered from the site strengthen the thesis that the temple dadoes were once composed of terracotta plaques.¹

The above narrative of the pre-Muslim terracotta art of Bengal makes it evident that whatever the type of its use, bas-relief or figure sculpture, the plastic medium was, by and large, mostly employed for representation of living forms - divinities, man and animal, banned by Islam. But architectural use of terracotta in pre-Muslim Bengal is not known beyond the 10th century and "from the evidence of 11th century repairs at Pāhārpur, it appears that the earlier schools of terracotta in the East and North had died out: no new plaques were available, so old plaques were placed lengthwise - and even upside down."² Some scholars have explained this eclipse of the terracotta art in Bengal as the result of "pressure of the hieratic art of the succeeding periods."³ In the centuries immediately preceding Muslim rule, ornamentation of Bengal architecture was extensively carried by stucco.⁴ "All the evidence suggests that the tradition of ornamentation for the pre-Muslim rekha-deuls of Bengal was stucco or direct carving in stone."⁵ The time-honoured practice of making

¹ASIAR, 1925-26, p. 113.

²David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal, op. cit., p. 13; also cf. N.K. Bhattasali, op. cit., p. XXII.

³Zulekha Haque, op. cit., p. 17.

⁴The surviving late Pāla-Sena temples bear evidence of this.

⁵David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples in Bengal, op. cit., p. 13.

figurines and minor objects in terracotta, however, appears to have continued unabated.

Architectural use of terracotta in Bengal owes its revival to Muslim patronage. The phenomenon is in itself a landmark of great cultural value. Added to this, the Muslims brought into being a new art style in content, finesse and execution and "established the basic features of façade decoration".¹ In the annals of world conquerors, the Muslims are well-known for their tolerance and adaptability to the legacy of the conquered. In keeping with the general practice followed in other conquered lands, the Muslim rulers of Bengal allowed the local traditional usage to continue with little change essentially related to their religious beliefs, practices and taste. There thus occurred no sharp break with the past in the social, administrative and artistic life of Bengal under the Muslim rule. However, due to non-survival of the earliest Muslim buildings in Bengal for about a hundred years, the character of the first phase of Muslim terracotta art is not clearly known. Nevertheless, the surviving

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David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", JASP, XIII, No. 3 (1968), p. 244. The terracotta plaques on the early Buddhist sites are two feet square, more or less, laid end to end in rows along the circumambulatory walls with little accompanying strip decoration, whereas Muslim terracottas are only a few inches across and arranged in elaborate patterns around the archways, mihrāb niches or covering the entire façade.

examples from the later period are a certain index to what is lost, since art is a social product and is not created ex nihilo.

Bengal Muslim art arose in hostility to the earlier iconic art of the Buddhists and the Hindus; but in many respects, particularly the vegetal and geometric motifs, the transition was one of compromise. A closer study of the Muslim ornaments reveals that many of them were in vogue in the pre-Muslim art of the Hindus. The whole frames carved with Hindu designs were incorporated in Muslim buildings at Gaur, Pānduā and elsewhere and the designs on them were imitated on new materials. The artists being mostly locals, trained traditionally in the art, such a state of things was only a natural sequence, despite occasional directions and demands from the new masters. A typical example is the hanging beads design with intervening tassels or bells. The motif occurs not only on Hindu lintel friezes, but also on columns and round the hips of gods and goddesses of the Pāla-Sena period (8th-12th century).¹ It recurs in Muslim ornaments, both in terracotta and stone, in the Adina Mosque

¹The inscribed basalt pillar of the Kamboja king, recovered from Bāngarh and now in the Rājbarī garden, Dinajpur, contains the hanging beads design both on the facets of its square base and neck. (JPASB, VII (1911), pp. 615-19). This typically pre-Muslim ornament also occurs on the Rājmaḥal Pillar, now in the Indian Museum. The Garudā Pillar, also in Dinajpur Rājbarī garden, is decorated with similar motif at the neck. ("Bangarh Antiquities", V.R.S. Monograph No. 4, Pls. 2 and 5). The motif is distantly related to the girdles worn by the female figures represented at Sanchi during the Śunga and the Kushana periods. It also occurs on the stūpa at Bharhut. (Cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., fig. 42).

(1375) and the Eklākhī Mausoleum (1415-32) at Hazrat Pānduā, in the Bāghā Mosque (1523) and the Kusumba Mosque (1558) at Rajshahi and many other buildings of the Sultānī period.¹

Scrollwork or successive loops with floral filling, so characteristic an element of the Pāla art, was carried over into the Muslim decoration. The motif occurs in the Adina Mosque (1375) with all its characteristic burgeoning, but subsequently tended to disappear for being over-rich and unrestrained. The various floral and geometric designs that filled in the tympanums of the Adina Mosque could be found in the numerous terracotta plaques and ornamental bricks discovered from the pre-Muslim remains at Pāhārpur, Mahāsthān, Maināmati and Bāngarh and have been continued under the Muslims in all their "liveliness and spirit".² The mihrāb niche of the Sultānī mosques usually shows a pendant, often stylized, flanked on either side by a lotus stalk with the bud at the bottom. The motif was subsequently transferred to the wall surface within beautiful rectangular panels and decorative foiled arches. Often the motif developed into fantastic stylization with bunches of grape and blown lotus springing out of the twigs. Examples of such decorative motifs are found in abundance, both in stone and terracotta in the Sultānī buildings of Bengal. The origin of the hanging motif

¹ A fuller discussion has been made in the next chapter.

² A. H. Dani, Muslim Architecture in Bengal (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p. 68.

goes back to the pre-Muslim 'chain-and-bell' - so favourite in Bengal, a stone replica of which is now preserved in the V.R.S. Museum at Rajshahi. The beautiful 'tree motif' that occurs in the spandrels of the mihrāb arches at Gaur and elsewhere in Bengal has been likened to the Indian concept of Kalpataru (a wish-filling tree).¹ The trefoil arch decorating the backslab of the Pāla-Sena stone images also occurs in Muslim ornamentation in an identifiably modified shape and may be seen, for instance, in the terracotta panels at the outer face of the walls of the Bāghā Mosque (1523) in Rajshahi district. The lotus, which appears almost invariably in the architectural decoration of the Muslims, was equally an ancient Indian motif,² whose nearest examples are found on the Hindu pillars from Bāngarh in Dinajpur and Gaur. In Muslim decoration, the lotus developed into a rosette ornament with all its delicacy and finesse.

¹A.H. Dani, op. cit., p. 69.

²The lotus occurs on the stone railing at Bharhut (2nd century B.C.) and on the posts and gates of the stūpas at Sanchi (1st century B.C.) (St. Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture, (London: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1933), p. 208) and also on fragments from a railing at Besnagar (ASIR W.C., 1914, photos 4042 and 4048). It also occurs at Sarnāth (6th century A.D.) (ASIAR, 1914-15, Pl. LXVIII. figs. 18-19, 22-23), in Amarāvati (J. Fergusson, Tree and Serpant Worship (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1971), Pl. LXXXIX), in Orissa (L. Bachchofer, Early Indian Sculpture, vol. I (Delhi: Munshiram Monoharlal Private Limited, 1973), Pl. 136); also in the paintings of Ajantā, on the Dhamek Stūpa (6th century A.D.) and on many other monuments of ancient and medieval India. Its artistic importance has been suggested by Kramrisch (St. Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture, op. cit., p. 54).

The list of decorative details taken over by the Muslims from pre-existing Bengal art could be greatly extended - the wavy stem, the lotus and diamond, the lotus petal frieze, the quatrefoil, the trefoil, the finial, the festoon, the twisted rope etc.¹ Nor was the pre-Muslim Hindu-Buddhist art lacking in geometric and abstract elements: ornamental bricks with squares and circles containing lotus rosettes within, stepped pyramids, chess-boards, scallops, dentils, zigzag, the diamond criss-cross, chevron etc. have been found at the Maināmati sites,² at Pāhārpur,³ at Mahāsthān⁴ and Bāngarh.⁵ Many of these designs, however, have no exclusive claim to be the artistic monopoly of the Hindus alone. Most of these occur in world cultures in time and space. "The foliated scroll, so typically Gupta, is equally Greco-Roman or Scythian."⁶ Floral scrolls resembling those in the Pāla art may be seen in the 7th century Muslim monument, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, after which they became a common element in Muslim decoration. The Muslim conquerors of Bengal may have brought with them the

¹ Cf. David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 243.

² Cf. T.N. Ramchandran, op. cit., pp. 220-28.

³ Cf. K.N. Dikshit, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

⁴ ASIAR, 1928-29, p. 96, Pl. XLI; 1936-37, p. 53, Pl. XVIII.

⁵ Cf. K.G. Goswami, op. cit., Pl. XXVI.

⁶ David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 243.

Sasanian palmette, but then, the motif is also met with in the Pāla sculpture.¹ The interlocking swastika design, so rampant on Muslim terracotta in Bengal, occurs on the 6th century Dhamek stūpa at Sarnāth, and may distantly be seen in Greek art.² It may also be seen in the Baghdad Gate at Raqqa (8th century).

In the Muslim terracotta of Bengal, there occurs a profusion of vegetal motifs akin to the jungle scenes around. Even local fruits like the mango, the palm, the pomegranate, the pineapple etc., stylized to an extent, are not an uncommon sight. Besides, the craftsmen commissioned with the works must have been largely local people traditionally trained in their craft. Though the pre-Muslim terracotta tradition in Bengal is not known by surviving examples to have continued beyond the 10th century, it is, nevertheless, unlikely that the craftsmanship was totally forgotten even centuries later. Probably, artists in terracotta, for lack of patronage, took to other aspects of the craft, particularly pottery, during the intervening centuries between the Pāla rule and the Muslim conquest of Bengal, and retook their traditional craft when patronage was available under the Muslim rulers. Such a situation better explains the revival of the art

¹ David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 243.

² Ibid.

under the Muslims with concomitant reappearance of older motifs discussed above. Again, the possibility of some talented craftsmen in terracotta coming from outside Bengal, particularly the Persian lands with which the Sultānī Bengal appears to have had contact, cannot be summarily dismissed, in view of such practices in medieval times. This being granted, their number could not have been as numerous as the locals and they were in all probability engaged to supervise and direct the work of the latter in executing the terracottas in characteristic Muslim style. It is very likely that the intricate geometric patterns found in the Muslim terracotta reached Bengal through these immigrant-artists from the Muslim lands of Persia, Asia Minor and Central Asia where under the Karakhanids, the Ghaznavids and the Saljūqs and even later, the terracotta art had attained a high pitch of refinement.¹ Thus together with newer and still newer combinations of geometric forms, the flower and creeper devices and plant motifs of Bengal surrounding constituted a type of art distinct by itself and produced plaques "not in the bold vigorous Pāhārpur style, but sharp-edged in neat shallow relief, closer to the Pāla-Sena stone carving or Middle Eastern stucco."² In the Muslim terracottas, the lines are crisper, the modelling flatter, the forms decorous rather than surging, the

¹ See Supra Chapter one.

² David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal, op. cit., p. 13.

flowers less naturalistic, rather stylized, the patterns more regular - in short, the tendency to abstraction is strong. In the details, characteristic Muslim motifs like the interlocking or the basket-weave are discernible as also the repeated patterns based on the cross, the square and the circle - designs unknown in pre-Muslim Bengal art and hence must have come from the Persian lands where they were common and so highly developed. But Bengal artists appear to have never developed a taste for the labyrinthine linear designs and preferred throughout the plant and vegetal elements, the gracefully twisting stems or hanging fronds also cherished by the Persians.¹ In the circumstances, Muslim terracotta art in Bengal must largely be ascribed a local development nourished by sporadic motifs coming from the trans-Indian Muslim lands.²

In the execution of Muslim terracottas, the concept of centrality pervades the whole decorative scheme. Designs on broad spaces are framed within rectangular moulded panels of graduated scales with geometric or arabesque motifs filling

¹Cf. David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 242.

²Some scholars think that the Sultānī architecture of Bengal is "directly founded upon the traditions of Persian Islamic architecture, reworked in Pre-Mughal India." (See Syed Mahmudul Hasan, Mosque Architecture in Pre-Mughal Bengal (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1979), p. 62). Are similar views applicable to the sphere of ornamentation also? It would appear from an examination of the terracotta art in the Muslim monuments of Bengal that local vegetal and traditional elements are by far predominant. The technique of application, the denaturalization of the motifs as also the intricate geometric compositions must, however, be attributed to extraneous Muslim sources.

the space between. Within the innermost panel, there is usually an engrailed pointed arch, often with spearheads, having a hanging motif hung from the arch apex. The spandrels of these decorative arches supported on ornamental pillars show each a central rosette around which develops the spandrel design, most commonly plant motifs of luxuriant growth. The centrality is further emphasized by a finial placed on the arch apex and also crowning the outer rectangular frame. Such a planning is normally made around the entrance arches, the mihrāb niches, on the offsets and recesses of the walls outside and also within flat surfaces between entrances. The mihrāb niches reveal tiers of panels in horizontal courses, each course further subdivided into units of either blind merlons impressed with plant motifs or of engrailed arches within rectangular panels with a pendant hanging from the apex. The total design of the mihrāb niche centres round a pendant hung from the apex of the mihrāb arch and cutting the niche into two equal halves. Even in continuous designs such as those at the base of the domes or between cornices or on the corner towers and archivolts, the centrality is ever present by means of alternately repeated motifs. In essence, such a centripetal scheme of Muslim ornamentation is a translation of the Islamic philosophy of creation with God as the spring-source.

To sum up, terracotta constitutes the oldest plastic exercise in Indian art long before that in stone. It was the

medium of artistic expression in the pre-historic Indus Civilizations and continued as a favourite idiom also in the historic phases. Its use spread to multifarious purposes - religious, artistic, utilitarian, decorative and even official. Excavated finds from ancient sites reveal the use of terracotta across the subcontinent, from Taxila in the Punjab in the West to Mahāsthān in Bengal in the east, from Harwan in Kashmir in the north to the Nilgiri Hills in the south. A common feature shared by Indian terracotta with its West Asiatic counterpart is the numerical dominance of human female figurines in almost all phases of history. Scholars explain this phenomenon as the prevalence of the "Nude Mother" or the "Earth Goddess" worship from Sumeria in the West to as far east as the Indo-Gangetic Valley.² As it is evident, both the terracotta and the lithic arts in India developed simultaneously in the historic phases with comparable common characteristics.

Technically speaking, terracotta figures are sculptures. Begun with modelling by hand, the technique developed into moulds under the Śungas (2nd-1st century B.C.) when, besides the elaborately ornate figurines, there appeared a novel type - miniature plaques, also turned out of moulds, representing scenes of everyday life and meant for decorative hanging.³

¹ Cf. David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 242.

² Cf. A. Goswami, ed., op. cit., p. 11; A.K. Coomaraswamy terms these figurines as "Indo-Sumerian". (Cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 87).

³ Parmeswari Lal Gupta, op. cit., p. 35.

Under the Guptas (4th-6th centuries), the scope of terracotta art widened greatly and besides figure sculptures of cult deities and other objects, terracotta now came to decorate architecture,¹ wherein it found the most vent.

Terracotta pieces also appear to have been the earliest specimens of Bengal's plastic art.² Up to the end of the Gupta period (6th century), Bengal terracotta art was related to the art movement of northern India and amply betrays classical and hieratic trends.³ The oldest finds in Bengal assignable to the Śunga period have come from Pokharnā (Bankura), Tamluk (Midnapore) and Mahāsthān (Bogra) and represent characteristically female figurines.⁴ The post-Gupta terracotta art of Bengal is mostly represented by the architectural reliefs of the Devas and the Pālas of eastern and northern Bengal respectively. The plaques depict folk life similar to their lithic counterparts in Bengal style and represent Bengal folk-art "at it best".⁵ However, the art tradition is not known to have

¹ ASIR, vol. XI, op. cit., p. 42; ASIAR, 1907-08, p. 96; ASIAR, 1908-09, p. 6.

² HB, vol. I, op. cit., p. 520.

³ S.K. Saraswati, Early Sculpture of Bengal, op. cit., p. 109.

⁴ HB, vol. I, op. cit., pp. 520-21.

⁵ Sahanara Hussain, op. cit., p. 64.

continued beyond the 10th century.¹ "But terracotta was taken up again extensively for the mosques and mausoleums of the Sultanate period - not in the bold vigorous Pāhārpur style, but sharp-edged in neat shallow relief, closer to Pāla-Sena stone carving or Middle Eastern Stucco."²

¹ David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 244.

² David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal, op. cit. , p. 13.

CHAPTER III

TERRACOTTA IN THE SULTANI ARCHITECTURE OF BENGAL

A. Early Phase (1204-1341 A.D.)

The victory of Muhammad Bakht-yār Khaljī at Nudiā in 1204¹ is an epoch-making event both in the history of Islam and of Bengal. It marked the farthest expansion of the Muslim dominion in India in the easterly direction; while for Bengal, it meant a cultural change of great import. Bengal, which in the past was surcharged with Hindu-Buddhist spirit, now came to feel the impact of Islam in the various aspects of her life. But this influence was not a one-way traffic, as real life situations did not permit it to be so. Hence arose the need of 'give and take' between the conquerors and the conquered. Such a co-operation was indispensable even in hostile circumstances and was physically expressed in the field of architecture which "is a social product demanding the co-ordinate effort of peoples divergent in beliefs, customs and manners, often at war with one another."²

The history of Muslim architecture in Bengal is coeval with their conquest of the country. During the initial phase, Muslim rule remained confined to the north-west part of Bengal with the

¹A. H. Dani, "Date of Bakht-yār's Raid on Nadiyā", IHQ, XXX(1954), p. 145. Recently, Abdul Karim has attempted at re-fixing the date of Nudiā conquest to 1205. See Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, XXIV-VI (1979-81), pp. 1-10.

²A. H. Dani, MAB (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p. 2.

towns of Lakhnauti,¹ Devkot² and Mahisantosh³ as the principal centres of its activities.⁴ It is only natural that the Muslim conquerors provided themselves with buildings of various purposes such as mosques for prayers, barracks for soldiers, quarters for dwelling and a host of other ancillary structures related to administrative functions. But surprisingly enough, no Muslim monuments from these places have survived to enlighten us about the nature of Muslim architecture and its decoration for about a hundred years from the conquest.⁵ There are, however, ample literary references which prove that brisk building activities were afoot during these initial years of Muslim rule in Bengal. Minhāj writes, "After Muhammad-i-Bakht-yār possessed himself of that territory (Rae Lakhmaniah's), he left the city of Nudiā in desolation and the place which is (now) Lakhnawati he made the seat of Government. He brought the different parts of the territory under his sway, and instituted therein, in every part, the reading of the khutba, and the coining of money, and, through his praiseworthy endeavours and those of his amirs, masjids, colleges and monasteries were

¹Gaur in Malda district, West Bengal; but a part of its suburb, Firūzpūr, is now in Bangladesh.

²Modern Bāngarh in Bālurghāt Police Station, West Dinajpur district, West Bengal.

³Mahisantosh in Rajshahi district, Bangladesh.

⁴Abdul Karim, Social History of Bengal (Dacca: The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1959), p. 34.

⁵Cf. ASIR, XV (Calcutta: The Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1882), p. 49.

founded in those places."¹ Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn, 'Iwād Khaljī (1212-27) was a great builder and built the fortress of Basan-Kot,² and founded "Jāmi' and other masjids".³ He is also known to have built a beautiful mosque, a college and a caravansarai at Lakhnauti.⁴ Minhāj himself saw the edifices built by Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwād Khaljī in the year 1243.⁵ He also mentions about the gate of the Lakhnauti city. Baranī reports about the city and palace of the rebel governor Tughril.⁶ As for the building activities of the Muslim rulers of Bengal, particularly from the time of Rukn al-Dīn Kaykā'ūs (1291-1300), stronger and surer evidences are available. A large number of inscriptions⁷ recording the erection or repair of mosques, madrasahs,

¹ Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri, vol. I, trans. by H.G. Raverty, (Indian Reprint. New Delhi: Orient Books Reprint Corporation, 1970), pp. 559-60.

² Ibid., p. 582. The location of the fort was at Lakhnauti. See Abdul Karim, Bānglār Itihās (Sultānī Amal) (Dacca: Bānglā Academy, 1977), p. 509.

³ Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri, op. cit., p. 583.

⁴ N.N. Law, Promotion of Learning in India during Muhammadan Rule (Indian Reprint. Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyati Delli, 1973), p. 106.

⁵ Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri, op. cit., p. 584.

⁶ Tārīkh-i-Firūz Shāhī (Bibliotheca Indica Series, 1862), p. 19.

⁷ The oldest Muslim inscription in Bengal dated 1st Maharram 647 A.H. (16th April, 1249 A.D.) records the erection of a mosque by order of Sultān Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish, which was subsequently renovated during the reign of Sultān Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd and under the governorship of Malik Jalāl al-Dīn Mas'ūd Jāni and was found in Gangarāmpur in Malda district. See JASB, (N.S.) V (1909), pp. 54-55; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., pp. 45 and 171, Pl. XXI).

bridges and other structures have been discovered in different parts of Bengal.¹ The religious structures were built as marks of piety by the Sultāns and their amirs and those of a mundane character in fulfilment of their duty to the subject people. But most of these early structures are now a mere memory of the past, not even surviving in identifiable ruins.

The earliest Muslim monuments in Bengal are located in Hooghly conquered at the close of the 13th century² by two personalities, Zafar Khān Ghāzī³ (1298-1313) and Shāh Safi al-Dīn.⁴ At Tribeni, there now stand the tomb and mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzī, the latter dated 698 A.H. (1298 A.D.)⁵, while survivals at Chhota Pānduā consist of the Bari Masjid (c. 1300) and a minaret close by. Though they are almost in ruins and some of them have been much altered in later times, they still

¹ See H. Creighton, Ruins of Gaur (London: Black, Parbary & Allen, 1817); J.H. Ravenshaw, Gaur, Its Ruins and Inscriptions (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1878); Abid Ali, Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1930); A.H. Dani, Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1957); S. Ahmed, Inscriptions of Bengal, vol. IV (Rajshahi: Varendra Research Museum, 1960).

² HB, vol. II, ed. by J.N. Sarkar (Dacca: University of Dacca, 1948), p. 78.

³ JPHS, IV (1956), pp. 198-202.

⁴ PASB, 1870, pp. 121-25; Abdul Karim, Social History of Bengal, op. cit., pp. 116-17.

⁵ A. H. Dani, BMIB, op. cit., p. 6, No. 7.

have enough to tell us about the nature of Muslim architecture in Bengal in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. These monuments speak alike of the use of older materials, particularly stone members, and their adaptation by the Muslims for their purpose.¹ In constructional technique, these buildings show compromise with local traditions; in the details of material equipment, they draw fully upon the treasures of the conquered people. In fact, "these buildings are an epitome of the then architectural achievements of the Bengalis placed at the service of the Muslim conquerors."² These buildings also contain the rudiments of terracotta ornamentation, the traditional art of Bengal, which became so popular with Muslim builders and developed to amazing perfection in later times.

The Mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzī
(Pl. II:1)

Of the Muslim architectural remains in Bengal, the oldest surviving³ is the Mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzī at Tribeni.

¹ The sculptured stone pieces with figures of Hindu divinities used in the plinth of the tomb of Zafar Khān Ghāzī have been mutilated and thereby made useable in the structure. This practice of re-modelling Hindu materials for Muslim use appears to have continued throughout the Sultānī period. Even some monuments of the Mughals in Bengal such as the Kumārpur tomb (c. 1655-56) and the Jahānābād tomb (c. late 17th century) in Rajshahi district bear evidence of such re-conditioning. See A.B.M. Husain, "Kumarpur Tomb", JVRM, I (1972), pp. 84-88; "Jahanabad Tomb", JVRM, 3 (1974), pp. 79-82.

² A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 35.

³ M. M. Chakravarti, "Pre-Mughal Mosques in Bengal", JASB, (N.S.), VI (1910), p. 23.

According to an inscription,¹ the mosque was built in A.H. 698 (1298 A.D.). It is the first available example of the "brick-and-stone style"² introduced by the Muslims in Bengal in place of the traditional Hindu practice of laying rectangular-cut stones, one upon the other, without mortar. Originally planned by the Muslims, the mosque represents the style that developed in Bengal during the century preceding its building. It measures 76' 9" by 34' 7" externally and consists of walls having brick core and stone facing. The material for the mosque was collected from pre-existing structures. It is entered through five arched entrances in the east façade and two each in the south and north walls. The eastern façade is unique with its hexagonal piers, which recall the thick brick piers associated with brick style. Corresponding to the arched entrances in the east wall, there are five stone mihrābs in western wall. The mihrābs open under multi-foil cusped arch supported on ornamental stone pillars. The interior of the mosque is divided into two long aisles and five deep bays of equal size by four stone pillars running longitudinally across the middle. The ten spaces thus created are roofed over by domes supported on arches carried by pillars. The structure thus illustrates a type of multi-domed mosque in which the number

¹A. H. Dani, BMIB, op. cit., p. 6, No. 7.

²A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 42.

of doors in the east wall equals the number of mihrābs in the back wall, and the domes over the roof equal the number of front doors multiplied by the doors on the sides.

The bay at each end of the mosque in line with the stone pillars across the middle has been closed by a wall rising up to the arch springing. These bay walls are the only parts of the mosque built entirely of brick and show on their eastern face elaborate terracotta ornamentation. Both Dani¹ and Hasan² have mis-stated the location of the terracotta ornamentation in this mosque as being in the qibla wall, which is completely faced with stone. The bay wall of the south end is in fair state of preservation. Its entire eastern surface has been composed into small panels flanking a larger one at the centre. Each of these panels contains ornamentation in terracotta.

The central panel. Rectangular in shape with the long arms placed upright and very richly decorated, the terracotta frame of the central panel resolves into two vertical halves by means of two big rosettes placed on the frame within square borders which are impressed with strip motifs. The lower half depicts a swinging creeper consisting of luxuriant leafage; the creeper rises above a blown lotus at the bottom. The

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 43.

²S. M. Hasan, Mosque Architecture of Pre-Mughal Bengal (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1979), p. 129.

composition is held within a strip motif running around. The lateral arms of the upper half of the frame show two half-arch motifs with finial, one placed above the other with contours opposite and in the thick of terracotta shrubs and foliage. Here also the strip motif runs around the composition. The upper part of the frame has disappeared, but at the present state of existence, consists of an ornamental lintel embossed with six terracotta rosettes, ornately executed.

Inside the rectangular frame occurs a multi-foil cusped arch with an elongated finial. The soffit of the arch simulates the curves of the arch and is decorated with intersecting terracotta creepers. The arch is supported on two heavy faceted pillars with intermittent ornamental bands. It appears that the bands themselves and the spaces between them originally contained terracotta ornamentation, traces of which survive at places. The topmost band in each pillar retains its decoration somewhat faintly. Itself built of graduated mouldings with friezes of strip motif impressed on the face, the band is sandwiched between a foliage pattern above and hanging motifs below. The hanging motifs are of the shape of beaded pendants with a chain above and are akin to those in the mihrāb pillars of the Bāghā Mosque (1523) in Rajshahi district. The middle band is now bare except showing a leaf pattern on its upper tier. Above the lowest band, the facets of the pillars show an ornamental merlon motif in projection similar with the ones

in the Bāghā Mosque (1523) and the Kusumba Mosque (1558), both in Rajshahi district. The merlons depict terracotta plants impressed on them. Enclosed within the arch is a shallow flat recess decorated with a single terracotta creeper. This spiralling creeper embraces the entire space around with shoots burgeoning from its stem as it moves upward towards the arch apex. This composition consists of twenty six terracotta pieces each measuring 5" square. The arch spandrels are embossed with two prominent terracotta rosettes flanking the finial. The space between the rosettes is filled by up-going vegetal elements.

The side panels. The central panel is flanked on either side by two oblong panelled terracotta frames arranged vertically. These frames are also divided into two halves, the lower and the upper, by two cross motifs formed of tri-lobed leaves, each set within square borders, a little sunken. Each half again contains four smaller terracotta panels. All these panels show a multi-foil arch with finial and a luxuriant plant motif inside. Even the spandrels are also filled in with luscious vegetal elements around the rosettes. The plant motifs are each different from the other and betray local origin, some with dense foliage, others bearing flowers.

The ornamentation of the northern bay wall is unlike the southern. This wall is almost in ruins and survives in part only. It is probable that this wall also contained a central

terracotta panel with an arched niche inside and flanked on either side by subsidiary panels. Only parts of the southern panels survive which show terracotta decoration. The composition here shows two smaller vertical panels, each containing a multi-foil arch with finial from the apex of which hangs down a chain ending in a round pendant. The pendant is embossed with a rosette. Immediately above the roundel, is a triple-locked necklace, the middle locket placed in line with the hanging chain and joined with the roundel below. Under the roundel is depicted the hunch of a multi-foil pointed arch in simulation of the one above. The space over the arch hunch is filled with vegetal motifs around two rosettes, all in terracotta.

General observations. The back face of the bay walls is at present devoid of any ornamentation, except the presence of some tiny niches in the southern; nor are there indications which could suggest of there being any decoration in the past. The very location of the bay walls poses a problem; they are incongruous with the conventional disposition of the mosque interior. Dani appears to have accepted the terracotta ornamentation of the walls as belonging to an early phase of development of the art when he writes, "Such a natural flow in the decorative art is hardly seen in the subsequent period."¹ But a study of the motifs, the composition of the wall surface and the excellence

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 43.

of execution of the ornaments would assign the Tribeni mosque terracottas a much later dating. In fact, the resemblance of these ornamental panels with those of the mihrābs in the Bāghā Mosque (1523) and the Kusumba Mosque (1558)¹ -- the former built by 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh's son Nuṣrat Shāh (1519-31) and the latter immediately after the Husain Shāhī period, suggests that the terracottas of the Mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzī are contemporary with those of the latter mosques. This resemblance is extremely important in removing the confusion regarding the date of the present structure.² While the date of the mosque is given in its inscription as A.H. 698 (1298 A.D.), the terracotta resemblance suggests that the mosque was restored or repaired during the time of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh (1493-1519) and that the inner walls with the terracotta ornamentation

¹ The mihrāb panel of the Kusumba Mosque is executed in stone-carving of terracotta imitation of the Husain Shāhī period.

² M.M. Chakravarti thinks that the entire structure is original (JASB, VI (1910), pp. 23-24), while S.K. Saraswati refers the present design of the mosque to the later part of the 15th century on the ground of its multi-domed oblong type (JISOA, IX (1941), pp. 14-15). In the opinion of Percy Brown, the mosque as it now exists was "entirely reconstructed into its present form at the beginning of the 16th century." (Percy Brown, Indian Architecture (Islamic Period) (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1968), p. 34). Marshall thinks the present structure is a "much later" construction than the tomb of Zafar Khān Ghāzī (c. 1300) (CHI, vol. III, ed. by Sir W. Haig (Cambridge: University Press, 1928), p. 601). Dani holds a mid-way position by saying that "it will be too much if we attribute the entire structure to a later period". (A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 42).

at the end bays are the works of the time of this great Sultān. The inscription¹ of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh found in this mosque no doubt bears testimony to this. Even without the inscriptional support, the terracotta panels are sufficient grounds for ascribing the present structure of the mosque to the Husain Shāhī period (1493-1538).

The Bari Masjid
(Pl. II:2)

Of the earliest surviving Muslim remains in Bengal is another structure, the Bari Masjid at Chhota Pānduā, also in Hooghly, which shows ornamentation in terracotta. The place is traditionally associated with the name of Shāh Safi al-Dīn,² the conqueror of the area, who also lies buried there. There is no inscription in the mosque, nor is one known to have existed.³ But the mosque is generally dated about 1300 A.D. on stylistic grounds.

Almost in ruins, the Bari Masjid is a stupendous multi-domed structure built of "small light-red bricks", the arches being supported on short basalt pillars of Hindu origin.⁴ It is the earliest surviving Muslim structure with a pure brick fabric. Oblong in plan, the mosque measures 231 feet by 42

¹EIM, 1915-16, pp. 10-14.

²PASB, 1870, pp. 123-25.

³M.M. Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 24.

⁴Ibid.; A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 48.

feet, the long walls facing the west. The east wall contains twenty-one arched doorways, and the sides on the north and the south, three each. The interior of the mosque dissolves into three longitudinal aisles and twenty-one short bays, marked at their intersections with stone pillars. Consequently, there are sixty three small domes roofing the structure. The domes rest directly on the brick arches below and at the corners on corbelled pendentives built in horizontal courses with the successive upper course projecting outward- a very ornate composition. This technique of building up corners of the dome base subsequently developed into a fantastically beautiful feature of the Sultāni architecture of Bengal.

Exterior decoration. The mosque appears to have originally contained rich terracotta decoration, but at the present ruinous condition, most of it has disappeared. "At the time of Cunningham's visit to the mosque, the outer face of the front wall was profusely ornamented with small patterns in carved brick".¹ A photograph² of the mosque taken in 1903-04 shows projected terracotta panels in its eastern façade. The panels are rectangular in shape and are placed between the arched doorways above the level of the arch springing. Each panel is enclosed within slightly raised borders decorated with net

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 48.

²Bengal Photographs, vol. I, 1903-04, negative No. 39.
(Preserved with the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi).

pattern. Inside, occurs a multi-foil decorative arch with an elongated finial resembling vase motif. From the arch apex hangs a chain ending in an ornamental pendant whose decoration appears indistinct. Above the arch, each spandrel is embossed with a small rosette. These decorative terracotta panels not only relieved the monotony of the wall façade, but greatly added to its charm for the viewer. Such ornamental compositions imply a long past development whose examples are unfortunately lost to us. It is significant to note that even in this earliest example of the Muslim architecture in Bengal, due attention was given to the exterior decoration of the building which became richer with the passage of time.

Interior decoration.¹ The decoration of the interior of the mosque was just as well executed in terracotta and remained confined to the mihrāb panels in the west wall. Every mihrāb arch is enclosed within a slightly projected rectangular panel having broad borders. The borders all round are decorated with a continuous interlocking terracotta pattern set between double brick lines, the inner ones thin and a little projected, while the outer ones broad and slightly sunken. The decorative pattern breaks into a rounded form of English capital letter E placed back to back as the basis. The mihrāb arches are of

¹For the interior view of the mosque, see JASB, XXXIX, Pt. I (1870), Pls. VIII & IX.

multi-foil cusped shape and are supported on highly ornamented stone pillars of Hindu origin. These faceted pillars contain three close-spaced mouldings at the top, below which each facet shows a twisted tassel hung from a tessellated garland. The spandrels of the brick arches are embossed with terracotta rosettes, one in each. Above the spandrels, there are two horizontal brick mouldings with a sunken space between, which shows faint traces of past decoration with terracotta motifs. The face of the lower moulding is impressed with a frieze of terracotta lozenge set between two raised thin lines. The terracotta ornamentation of the central mihrāb panel is the most attractive. Besides all other motifs shared in common with the side mihrāb panels, it has a double arch over the mihrāb niche, the lower cinquefoil and the upper of multi-foil shape, having added ornamentation with floriated cusps. The upper arch is supported on jar-shaped pillars having square capitals. The space between the arches is filled in with two different designs in terracotta: at the base is an interlocking pattern similar with that on the panel borders, and above, there is a net pattern consisting of intersecting diagonals.

The mihrāb niches are semi-circular in shape and recessed into the wall masonry. Every niche is divided into five vertical registers by means of raised mouldings running horizontally. These mouldings are impressed with terracotta lozenge. Each register shows a single decorative terracotta motif. From the

bottom, these are arched recesses, each with a rosette inside, leafy scrolls, net pattern, blind merlon and multi-foil arch with hanging motif.

General observations. The terracotta ornamentation in the Bari Masjid represents the earliest phase of the art in the Muslim architecture of Bengal. Significantly enough, the ornamental motifs in this mosque constitute mostly abstract themes as against preponderance of vegetal elements in the Muslim terracottas of later times. Historically, these terracottas are the faithful products of a period when the Muslim conquerors of Bengal were yet to adapt themselves to local environment and looked back to their Central Asian heritage for inspiration and guidance. But the influence of the local art could not altogether be escaped, nor was it practicable. Local art motifs such as the multi-foil arch, the leafy scroll, the hanging pendant etc. were used in the Bari Masjid terracottas, perhaps, because of their somewhat abstract nature. Besides, the task of executing the ornamentation was laid on the local artists who were traditionally trained in rendering figure motifs and had little knowledge of abstract ones. The Bari Masjid terracottas, therefore, also constitute the initial exercise on the part of the local craftsmen with purely abstract motifs and in this they fared no less successfully than with their traditional themes. But with the passage of time

and conditioning of the Muslim rule in Bengal, the local motifs made further headway into Muslim art as is evidenced in the monuments of the Early Ilyās Shāhī period.

The engrailing of the brick arches, which is also an ornamental element, appears in the Bari Masjid for the first time in Bengal. Dani¹ is not correct when he traces the origin of this decorative feature in the Adina Mosque (1375) which is a much later product. Another significant feature of the terracotta ornamentation in this mosque is the application of decorative panels both inside and outside. This scheme of decoration is a traditional Muslim practice in India and outside and developed to picturesque composition in the Sultānī monuments of subsequent times.

Although the earliest of their kind in the Muslim architecture of Bengal, the Bari Masjid terracottas reveal progressive craftsmanship in their making and execution. Characteristic of Muslim relief art, they are shallow in nature and sharp in contour, so much so, that their difference from the traditional Hindu-Buddhistic sculptural work is evident at the first sight. Even though the task may have been largely executed by local craftsmen, the supervision of the work, in all probability, came from the immigrant-artists from the Central Asian lands with

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 15.

which the Muslim society in Bengal appears to have had continuous link during the pre-Sultānī period.

B. The Period of the Early Ilyas Shahis (1342-1414 A.D.)

The foundation of the Ilyās Shāhī rule in Bengal was an event of great political and cultural import in the history of the country. Hājī Ilyās, a new comer to Bengal, was helped to the throne of Lakhnautī in 1342¹ under the title of Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh by the local people, the Hindu Zamindārs and Muslim nobility whose interest he supported.² Ilyās Shāh brought the three regions of Lakhnautī, Satgāon and Sunārgāon under his control and was the first independent Muslim Sultān to rule over the United Kingdom of Bengal.³ The might of his power was even felt outside.⁴ But the assumption of sovereign power by Ilyās Shāh, who ended the last vestige of Tughluq suzerainty over Bengal, did not go unchallenged from Delhi. Firūz Shāh led repeated attacks on Bengal to chastise the Ilyās Shāhī rulers who successfully defended their independence with the support of the local people. This heroic defence is nowhere better expressed than in the bold architectural style that

¹HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 103.

²Abdul Karim, Social History of Bengal, op. cit., p. 28.

³Ibid.; Cf. A. H. Dani, "Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, Shah-i-Bangala", in Essays Presented to Sir Jadunath Sarker (Hoshiarpur: Punjab University, 1958), pp. 50-58.

⁴HB, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 103-05.

developed in this period, incorporating at the same time a spirit of the new kingdom of Islam in Bengal. This style also gave full expression to the local genius, as it was on the support of the local people that the kingdom could withstand the attacks from Delhi. Thus the Muslim architecture in Bengal took a new form and started getting acclimatized in the deltaic soil and climate.¹

Despite cessation of relationship with Delhi, the rulers of the period appear to have maintained cultural link with Persia as the invitation² of the Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Azam Shāh to the Persian poet Hāfiz indicates. In the circumstances, it may be supposed that cultural influences from Persia kept flowing into Bengal unhindered.

The monumental remains of the early Ilyās Shāhī period survive in meagre quantity³ both at the capital city of Hazrat Pānduā⁴ and outside. The latter consists of a mosque at Molla

¹The Museum Journal, Peshawar, IV, No. I (1952), pp. 37ff.

²Abid Ali, op. cit., pp. 25-27; HB, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 117.

³Of the six Sultāns of the period, building inscriptions of only three have been found so far, those too being few in number. See for texts, S. Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 31-43.

⁴The word 'Hazrat Pānduā' is used to distinguish this town in Malda district from Chhota Pānduā in Hooghly district. (Cf. ASIR, vol. XV, p. 46). The capital was actually established by 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī Shāh in 1338 after his revolt and assumption of independence. (HB, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 81-82).

Simla in Hooghly dated A.H. 777 (1375 A.D.), according to an inscription now fixed on the adjacent tomb of Shah Anwar Kuli, and the tomb of Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh (d. 1410) at Sunārgāon in Dacca district. The mosque at Molla Simla suffered repairs a number of times¹ and has totally lost its original character. Of the tomb of Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh, only the stone sarcophagus exists with rich carving on its surface. The surviving monuments at the capital consists of the Adina Mosque (1375) and the tomb of Sikandar Shāh (d. 1392) attached to the western wall of the mosque. The tomb is almost in ruins and consists of a brick-built square structure of 42 feet internally and was once roofed by nine small domes supported on four stone pillars. The high podium on which it stood contains triple mouldings on the plinth wherein are seen the remnants of terracotta that once decorated it. These decorations are of no particular interest and merely repeat the motifs that occur in the Adina Mosque. It is the Adina Mosque per se that represents the style of architecture and ornamentation evolved under the Ilyās Shāhī rule.

The ornamentation of the early Ilyās Shāhī monuments was done both in stone carving and terracotta. The detailed ornamentation of the Adina Mosque at the mihrāb panels, door frames

¹
JISOA, IX (1941), p. 22.

and the cornice of the Bādshā-ka-Takht affords the finest examples of stone carving that the master masons of Bengal were capable of achieving in stone. A significant feature of these carvings is the stylization of originally Hindu motifs to suit the taste of the Muslim masters. It is, however, the terracotta decoration in the mosque which draws the most attention. The terracotta artists of Bengal found here for the first time an opportunity to play their skill independently in a Muslim monument and in their overfondness for decoration, introduced a scheme of folk-art in this mosque. The motifs of the ornamentation included a world of varieties, from geometrical patterns to vegetal elements, which the fancy of the artists could conceive of and in the execution of which they have fairly succeeded. The places of application of the ornamental terracottas were the tympanums of the stone-mihrāb arches and the outer surface of the back wall. But the terracottas appear incongruous with the stone-faced walls of the mosque. The synthesis of the terracotta ornamentation with the structural masonry was achieved in the architecture of the next period.

The Adina Mosque
(Pls. III-X:1)

The Adina Mosque at Hazrat Pānduā is one of the most ambitious architectural projects ever essayed in Eastern India.¹ According

¹CHI, vol. III, op. cit., p. 602.

to an inscription¹ fixed in the west wall of the mosque, it was built in Rajab 776 A.H. (1375 A.D.), by Sikandar Shāh, son of Ilyās Shāh. It is the earliest example of the multi-domed oblong type of mosque in Bengal with a central vaulted nave.² Though almost in ruins, the Adina Mosque is the most remarkable surviving example of Muslim architecture of Bengal of late 14th century. Original in design and construction, the mosque is far in advance of the type hitherto built in Bengal. It is a vast rectangular structure measuring externally $507\frac{1}{2}$ feet from north to south and $285\frac{1}{2}$ feet from east to west. The nucleus of the mosque is a central courtyard measuring 400 feet long by 150 feet wide, with pillared cloisters on all four sides, that on the west being five bays deep, while those on the north, east and south are each three bays deep. Around the courtyard, runs a screen of arches, 88 in all, and surmounted by a horizontal parapet 22 feet above the ground level. The structure was crowned by 306 domes, one over each bay. The screen of arches around the courtyard sprang from piers as against pillars in the past, thus giving rise to a system of arched façade in Bengal. The western cloister being the

¹S. Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 35-38. S. Ahmed reads the date as 6th Rajab, 770 A.H., while Dani corrects the reading as the month of Rajab, 776 A.H. (See A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 55, f.n.5).

²The only other mosques in Bengal with a central vault are the Gunmant Mosque at Gaur (early 16th century) and the Jāmi' Masjid at Old Malda (1596).

main prayer hall has received special attention. A broad vaulted transept cuts it into two equal halves, each consisting of 18 rows of arches having corresponding mihrāb niches in the west wall. But the symmetry of the northern part has been broken with a raised platform, commonly known as the Bādshāh-kakht, placed across the five western bays of the three aisles, only three bays north of the transept.

Entrance to the mosque was provided through three insignificant bays in the south-eastern corner. There are three more doorways in the western cloister towards its northern end, two of which lead into an upper platform "called by the name of Sikandar's Chamber". The outside wall of the north, east and south cloisters was furnished with small windows "highly decorated with carved tiles disposed in arches".¹ The entire composition of the mosque was encircled by a wall built of brick core and faced with stone, except the upper part of the western wall outside. The outer front of the west wall shows rectangular projection of the central mihrāb. It is the best preserved part of the building and is highly ornamented.

Though the individual parts of the building are "well proportioned and pleasing",² the Adina Mosque as a symmetrical composition is disappointing.³ The absence of a grand gateway

¹Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 127.

²CHI, vol. III, op. cit., p. 602.

³Ibid.; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 90; Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 34.

in the east wall to balance the central nave of the west wing, the inordinate length of the aisles compared to their height and that of the nave vault and the stunted domes crowning the building have marred the aesthetics of the mosque. The causes for these defects in the mosque structure could be identified in the inexperience of the Bengali masons to translate into architecture the new concept that the mosque represented and also in the then unsettled political condition of the country. Thus the grand mosque of bold conception is architecturally a failure and "was the first and last of its kind" in Bengal.¹ In respect of ornamentation, the mosque embodies the finest examples of stone carving seen in the mihrāb panels, door frames and the cornice of the Bādshāh-ka-takht. But the terracottas of the mosque mark a new phase in the evolution of Muslim terracotta art in Bengal.

Exterior decoration. The outer face of the west wall up to a height of 11 feet is covered with stone slabs. The wall surface above this shows brick masonry and it is here that the terracotta artists found space to display their art. Each mihrāb panel of the mosque is responded exteriorly by a rectangular projection along the entire wall height. This has produced vertical offsets and recessed chases giving the façade the charm of interplay of light and shade. A brick string-course running horizontally cuts

¹
A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 62.

the wall height into two halves (Pl. III:1). It shows a number of registers decorated with terracotta motifs. The lowest register depicts several decorative patterns, viz., the beaded necklace with four-petalled flowers and vegetal elements within interspersed with tassels, the interlocking, scrolling creepers with rosettes in the convolutions, plant motifs inside rectangular frames and jali design. The ones above show wavy creepers, knotty abstract patterns, intersecting scrolls and stepped designs, all in terracotta relief. These terracotta friezes are each separated from the other by thin horizontal mouldings.

Above the string-course, both the offsets and recesses of the wall surface are decorated with ornamental terracotta panels (Pl. III;2). Each recess shows a multi-foil arch from the apex of which hangs a chain ending in a decorated pendant. The pendants are of different shapes, some resembling round vase, while others are rectangular. The face of each pendant is impressed with delicate vegetal elements. The arch soffits also depict vegetal motifs, while the spandrels show rosettes and lotuses. The multi-foil arch is capped with a decorative terracotta finial. It is, however, the projected panels on the offsets of the wall that show rich terracotta decoration. Each offset shows a rectangular panel jutting out from the wall surface. Each panel is contained within ornamental mouldings below and above. These mouldings show lozenge frieze, inverted and regular lotus petals, billets and a triangular pattern impressed on their face. Below the lower moulding, runs

a frieze of beaded necklaces each with a rosette inside, while an ornamental tassel occurs in between. The frame of the panel is decorated with an interlocking geometric pattern. Inside the frame, occurs a multi-foil arch with two blown terracotta rosettes in the spandrels. From the arch apex hangs a chain ending in a pendant impressed with vegetal shoots. Some of the pendants are surrounded by scrolling creepers, while others show a cross-petal design all around. Between the frame and the upper moulding can be seen, in some instances, a frieze of geometric interlacing, in others, a beaded necklace-and-tassel design also in terracotta. The composition of the panels is surmounted by a row of merlons depicting terracotta plant motifs.

The double cornice and the parapet of the mosque are horizontal. The space between the cornice bands is filled with a row of arched niches showing geometric and plant motifs. Below the cornice bands, runs a continuous frieze of interlocking pattern and jali work in terracotta relief.

The projection of the central mihrāb panel outside shows three ornamental parallel panels on its face. These panels contain elaborate terracotta decoration. The central panel shows an arched niche inside. The arch is supported on ornamental pillars. There is the usual hanging motif inside the niche. The arch soffit is impressed with two spiralling creepers rising from the arch springing and running towards the arch apex. Below the central panel, is a frieze of beaded necklace-and-tassel similar

with the ones seen in the wall panels. The panel is surmounted by a row of blind merlons depicting terracotta plants. The flanking panels are similar in decoration, except that they contain no pillars supporting the arch and there is no niche inside.

Interior decoration. It is, however, inside the mosque, in the brick tympanums of the mihrāb arches that the best specimens of terracotta ornamentation appear in this structure (Pl. IV:1). Cunningham¹ has questioned the selection of these areas for the execution of terracotta decoration, for when the domes were standing, the tympanums must have been enveloped by sombre darkness. Dani, however, defends the artists by saying that "that the brick surface should remain undecorated, was unthinkable to the Bengali architect. It was his overfondness for decoration and his desire to introduce folk-art in this great mosque that the tympanums of the arches were reserved for it."² The terracotta designs executed in the tympanums are of bewildering variety. They reveal the skill of the Bengali artists in moulding clay into various floral, vegetal and geometric patterns according to the taste of the time. The arrangement of different designs in as many as twenty-eight tympanums bears witness to the resourcefulness of the terracotta artists. A description of some of the

¹ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 91.

²A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 68.

tympanums is given below to show the extent of variety of motifs employed in the designs.

Plate IV:2 shows the sixth tympanum from the south and depicts a typical terracotta weave pattern consisting of vertical and horizontal bars and intersecting diagonals so commonly seen in the wood and wattle fences of Bengal village huts. The composition occurs within a decorative engrailing impressed with delicate vegetal shoots. The design is further enlivened by a jar-pendant hung from a chain from the arch apex above. The pendant is held within a square tablet depicting terracotta leaves and flowers of delicate execution. The interstices within the intersecting diagonals and bars also show vegetal shoots. There are traces of an arabesque frieze running horizontally below the geometric composition of the tympanum.

Plate V:1 represents the seventh tympanum from the south and shows a varied composition of ornamental terracotta. At the bottom, are thin mouldings impressed with arabesque and jali-work, above which is seen a row of niches, each separated from the other by an ornamental vertical bar. The niches depict shrubs, twigs and an interlacing pattern. The main composition consists of horizontal lines and intersecting diagonals, the crevices being filled in with rosettes. There is the ornamental arch engrailing above the composition from whose apex hangs a floriated pendant by means of a chain. The pendant is embossed with a design created by two creepers rising from the same base

and then spreading upward to meet again in the shape of coiling tips. The pendant is surrounded with vegetal shoots.

Plate V:2 represents the ninth tympanum from the south. It depicts a succession of arches with receding contours from the top. The soffits are depicted with geometric interlacings, arabesques and vegetal elements bearing fruits. Between the contours of the arches also occurs a diamond frieze. Within the innermost arch, as many as eight rows of step motif arranged in diminutive scale upwards have been carved. The composition of the lower part of the tympanum shows three horizontal rows of terracotta decoration; the lowest consists of a frieze of cross-petals, the middle shows vegetal elements, while the topmost contains plant and vegetal shoots punctuated by vase motifs. There is the ornamental arch engrailing above.

Plate VI:1 depicts the tympanum of the twelfth mihrāb arch from the south. It shows a succession of three arches in diminutive scale. The soffits depict arabesques of very complex formation. The lines separating the arch contours are impressed with four-petalled flowers and vegetal elements. A very ornate pendant hangs from the arch apex. The pendant is of rectangular shape and is bedecked with minute vegetal shoots around a blown lotus. Below the pendant, there are three horizontal rows of terracotta ornamentation. The middle row depicts a complex

geometric interlacing, while the other two show arabesque designs. The arch engrailing is decorated with a spiralling creeper.

Plate VI:2 represents the tympanum of the fourteenth mihrāb arch from the south. The terracotta composition of the tympanum is here arranged into two vertical parts. The lower part depicts a row of trifoil arch motif supported by ornamental pillars. The pillars have bowl-shaped capitals and show spherical bulge in the middle. The bulge is decorated with jali work, while the mouldings of the capital are impressed with diamonds. Under each arch occurs a plant having a serpentine stem. The upper part is decorated with successive rows of rosettes. There is the usual ornate pendant. The soffit of the arch engrailing depicts a continuous scroll with a rosette in each convolution. The entire composition develops above a series of thin mouldings impressed with merlons, creeper frieze and lozenge, all in terracotta relief.

Plate VII:1 represents the seventeenth tympanum from the south. The composition of the terracotta decoration has been arranged here between two ornamental mouldings below and double arches above. The lower moulding depicts plant motifs with outspread leaves and the upper the necklace-and-tassel design. Each necklace contains a rosette inside. The soffit of the inner arch shows an arabesque design with four-petalled flowers filling in the crevices. The upper arch soffit is decorated with

engrailing. The inside decoration of the tympanum consists of terracotta jali work. The chain carrying the pendant here shows a lotus stalk on either side ending in an inverted petal. The pendant is ornamented with an interlacing design.

Plate VII:2 illustrates the terracotta decoration of the eighteenth tympanum from the south. It shows a succession of arches with receding contours. The composition is bounded within an engrailing above and a double ornamental frieze below. The engrailing depicts a swinging creeper. The lower frieze shows four horizontal rows of lozenge, while the upper contains a complex interlacing of creepers. The soffit of the inner arch shows a scroll with a rosette in each convolution. The middle arch soffit depicts a hanging pattern of fruits and leaves. The topmost soffit illustrates an intersecting scroll pattern. The composition within the arches consists of an interlocking pattern that first occurred in the mihrāb panels of the Barī Masjid (c. 1300) at Chhota Pānduā in Hooghly. The hanging motif here is depicted inside an arched niche. Flanking the niche are two terracotta plants, the entire composition being set within a rectangular panel bordered by double rows of cross-petals.

Plate VIII:1 depicts the nineteenth tympanum from the south. It shows a number of horizontal thin panels decorated with terracotta swastika designs within geometric formations. The engrailings on the arch soffit are filled in with shrubs and

vegetables. Above, runs a scrolling creeper with its shoots and fruits filling in the convolutions.

Plate VIII:2 depicts the thirtieth tympanum and shows the terracotta works composed within a double arch. The outer arch soffit is decorated with full-blown lotus and diamond alternately. The lotus occurs inside a circle, while the diamond is composed of four lotuses arranged angularly. The soffit of the inner arch consists of an inter-connected twisted rope pattern. The space inside the arches shows a series of thin horizontal mouldings, each decorated with a different motif. The motifs include necklace-and-tassel, tessellated necklace, diamond and square, hanging buds, balusters, merlons, creeper frieze, diamond frieze, plants and shrubs, hanging bud flanked by petals, leaves, etc. The decoration of the tympanum reveals the surprising range of the terracotta artists' fancy.

Plate IX:1 shows the thirty-first tympanum from the south. It depicts a tall terracotta tree with outspread branches and leaves filling in the entire space within a succession of as many as five arches. Each arch contour shows a different decorative motif from the others. The outermost contour shows regular and inverted leaves placed alternately. The one below has swinging creeper with leaves on both sides. The third contour from the top depicts an interlocking pattern. The one below contains vegetal elements. The innermost contour has an intersecting scroll

design producing loops filled in with rosettes. Dani¹ has likened the tree within the arches to the Indian conception of Kalpa-taru (wish-filling tree). Since the craftsmen were largely locals, such a stylization of a traditional religious element to suit the Muslim taste is not unlikely.

Plate IX:2 depicts the thirty-fourth tympanum wherein the terracotta ornamentation has been composed within an arch engrailing above and double mouldings below. Over the engrailing runs a frieze of plant motifs. The faces of the mouldings show two different decorations, the lower an intersecting scroll and the upper a strip motif. The tympanum is divided into eight horizontal thin registers. The lowest register depicts a frieze of flower buds. In all other registers, the decorative motifs have been arranged within multi-foil arches with rosettes in the spandrels. The register above the lowest shows a basket hung from a branch. The second upper depicts triple hanging fruits, and the next higher, a rosette within an arch suspended from a twig. The fourth register from below illustrates a stylized plant motif, the fifth, a woven hanging pattern and the sixth, a hanging flower from a twig. The topmost register contains vegetal shoots. A decorated pendant hangs from the arch apex across the five upper registers by means of a twisted rope. The thin mouldings

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 69.

separating each register from the other show a number of decorative elements impressed on their face. These include jali work, hanging fruit with leaves, necklace-and-tassel, hanging buds, leaves, etc.

Plate X:1 shows a tympanum with a multi-foil cusped arch supported on stumpy faceted pillars within a rectangular frame, whose borders are decorated with intersecting creepers. The shafts of the pillars are divided into triple vertical sections by means of raised mouldings. The facets of the bottom section depict a multi-foil arch with an intricate intersecting creeper pattern, those of the middle section consist of tassels and the space between the upper mouldings are decorated with a lozenge frieze above a row of blind merlons. On the arch soffit, runs a creeper on either side of a diamond set perpendicularly on the keystone. The diamond is impressed with an interlacement. The spandrels contain two rosettes surrounded by vegetal elements. The flat recess inside the arch is filled in with rows of diamonds and on them hangs the usual floriated pendent. Surmounting the frame is a plant motif surrounded by vegetal shoots, the composition vaguely recalling the pre-Muslim Kirtimukha (the lion face). On either side of the panel, there are series of horizontal registers each of which contains a number of square compartments filled in with rosettes. The entire terracotta composition has been planned within an arch engrailing.

The description of the terracotta ornamentation in the above tympanums of the Adina Mosque reveals the resourcefulness of the terracotta artists of Bengal in matters of motifs and design. The other tympanums of the mosque containing terracotta decoration show more or less similar motifs. Some of the tympanums depict stylized animal figures. The photograph of a tympanum reproduced by Dani in fact represents a recumbent lion.¹

General observations. There is a world of difference between the Bari Masjid terracottas and those of the Adina Mosque. These two mosques are the products of two different periods. The Bari Masjid represents pure Muslim spirit, while the Adina Mosque breathes a note of compromise with the soil on which it stands. It has been already noticed that the very foundation of the Ilyās Shāhī rule rested on local support and that this resulted in concessions given to local elements. The congenial atmosphere of the period, charged as it was with a spirit of mutual co-operation between the Hindu populace and Muslim masters, could only produce the type of terracotta art seen in the Adina Mosque. The local craftsmen were at large to use any form they could conceive of, and in fact, the entire stock of Bengal folk-motifs was depicted in the terracottas of the Mosque. The rich tradition of Bengal architectural terracotta art seen for the last time in the Pāhārpur temple (c. 800) suffered eclipse for centuries till its revival in the Adina Mosque. But the nature of the art underwent change in keeping with the attitude of the Muslim patrons. Traditional

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., Pl. XIII, No. 26.

art motifs of Bengal which appeared repugnant to Muslim taste were dispensed with or reformed, so that they constituted new elements of ornamentation. Such were the beaded necklace which in Hindu art contained figures of divinities, but now replaced with rosette or lotus, and the Kirtimukha, changed into stylized vegetal elements.

Never before was the Muslim decorative art of Bengal so replete with local elements as the Adina terracottas. These consisted of local plants, fruits and flowers, the lotus, the beaded and tessellated necklace, the tassel, the multi-foil arch, the chain-and-pendant, the jar etc. In fact, in the terracottas of this mosque is seen the earliest appearance of vegetal elements which became universal in later Muslim art and not unoften ran riot. Alongside the local motifs, occurred Muslim elements such as interlocking, merlon, the creeper frieze and geometric patterns. Surprisingly enough, in the execution of the geometric patterns and the arabesque, the local artists displayed little genius compared with their Muslim counterparts in the Persian lands with which India had cultural link from distant past. Thus we hardly find the labyrinthine geometric compositions in the Muslim art of Bengal as these were largely the handiwork of local artists. In the technique of execution of the terracottas, the traditional high-relief ideal of the Hindus was replaced by the characteristic Muslim shallow nature. But terracotta being the art of the brick surface, the Adina Mosque examples look like external application,

unrelated to the stone-faced structure. The synthesis of the ornamentation with the structural masonry was achieved in the Eklākhi Mausoleum of the next period.

C. The Eklakhi Mausoleum (1415-1432 A.D.)
(Pls. X:2-XII:1)

The Muslim Sultanate of Bengal passed through a critical phase at the beginning of the 15th century. We have noticed earlier that Ilyās Shāh occupied the throne of Bengal and defended it against the imperial attacks of Delhi with the support of the local people. As a price for this support, liberal concessions were made to local elements. These concessions were expressed in terms of patronage given to "local culture, art and literature and also in the formation of a party of local zamindārs as opposed to the party of foreign elements that had so long been strong in the capital."¹ This political opportunity favoured the rise of a Hindu zamindār, Rājā Gaṇeśa, who intrigued to capture the throne of Bengal for his dynasty and thereby change the course of history in favour of the Hindu rule.² These events seriously rocked the social peace established by the Ilyās Shāhī rule. The Muslim faction at the capital opposed Rājā Gaṇeśa under the

¹ Abdul Karim, Social History of Bengal, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

² Cf. A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 74.

leadership of the great saint Hazrat Nūr Qutb 'Ālam.¹ The political confusion reached climax in 1415 A.D. when the line of the Ilyās Shāhī rulers was temporarily halted by a compromise which brought the House of Rājā Gaṇeśa to power in Bengal. Jadu, the son of Rājā Gaṇeśa, was converted to Islam and was raised to the throne under the title of Jalāl al-Dīn. The local forces thus scored a victory under the banner of Islam. The happy compromise augured well and in Bengal history began a new epoch in which the Muslims and the Hindus mutually co-operated to evolve a common cultural heritage. The new spirit manifested itself in patronage extended to local language and culture² as also to Muslim institutions.³ But nowhere was the new ideal better expressed than in the architecture of the period which is a co-operative social product.

The buildings of the converted House of Rājā Gaṇeśa initiated a phase of Bengal architecture in which local characteristics were impressed upon general Muslim pattern. The phase is marked by the introduction of the 'brick style' in Bengal in which the buildings are entirely made of brick, the walls very thick with stumpy octagonal towers at the corners, and the cornice and the battlements are curved. The wall surface is left without plaster

¹Abdul Karim, Social History of Bengal, op. cit., p. 31.

²Abdul Karim, Bāṅglār Itihās, op. cit., p. 294.

³Islamic Culture, XXXII, No. I (1958), p. 204.

to display brick designs and terracotta decoration. In all but the hemispherical dome that covers the roof, these buildings imitate in brick the bamboo huts of Bengal. In respect of ornamentation also, the buildings of the period set new developments. It was during this time that painting¹ was used for the first time in the Muslim architecture of Bengal. But of the decorative techniques, viz., painting, glazed tiles and terracotta that were employed for architectural ornamentation, the most used was the last, the traditional art of the country. Never before were the Muslim buildings of Bengal so fully overlaid with terracotta decoration as during this period and the practice henceforth continued in the Sultānī architecture of Bengal, nay after.² The motifs depicted represent an amalgam of local and Muslim elements. The former consists of the chain-and-pendant, the lotus, the necklace-and-tassel, local plants and shrubs, the multi-foil arch etc., while included among Muslim elements are the arabesque, the jali work and geometric patterns. Unlike in the Adina Mosque, there is perfect accord between the terracottas and the brick masonry of the buildings of the period. Added to it, the quality of the terracottas shows superior craftsmanship which attained the state of perfection in the monuments of the restored Ilyās Shāhī period.

¹CHI, vol. III, op. cit., 603.

²See Infra, Chapter IV.

During the period, Bengal appears to have maintained cultural contact with Persia as evidenced by the use of glazed tiles and architectural painting. In fact, Sultān Shams al-Dīn Ahmad Shāh (1432) is learnt to have cultivated diplomatic relationship with the Timurid court at Hirat.¹

Only two monuments survive from this period, namely, the Eklākhi Mausoleum at Hazrat Pānduā and the Chikā building at Gaur. Of these, the latter is a "poor copy" of the Eklākhi Mausoleum, which set the true Bengal style.

The Eklākhi Mausoleum built at the beginning of the 15th century,² is an epoch-making monument in the history of Muslim architecture of Bengal. It enshrines the mortal remains of Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad,³ the converted son of the Hindu Rājā Ganeśa. Built of brick fabric, occasionally interspersed with horn-blaze slabs, the mausoleum "defined a set design for all the subsequent buildings that were erected during the period of the Independent Sultāns of Bengal".⁴ Almost a square of 78 feet 6 inches by 74 feet 6 inches externally, the building changes

¹ JASB, 1952, p. 168, f.n. 1.

² Percy Brown is inclined to assign the date 1425 to the monument. (Percy Brown *op. cit.*, p. 39).

³ JASB, LXIV, Pt. I (1895), p. 211.

⁴ A. H. Dani, MAB, *op. cit.*, p. 75; also cf. Percy Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

into an octagon of 48 feet diameter inside by filling the corners with brick work. The walls are 13 feet thick. At the outer corners are four octagonal banded towers, five of whose facets are visible from outside. The mausoleum is entered through a stone door-frame of Hindu origin¹ placed in the centre of each side and there is a pointed arch over each doorway. The wall surface is relieved with offsets and recesses running vertically. A string-course runs horizontally through the middle of the façade and cuts the wall surface into two vertical halves. The cornice and the parapet gently curve² so that the apex is reached in the middle point. The roof is covered by a single hemispherical dome having no shoulder and finial.

The ornamentation of the mausoleum has been done with glazed tiles, painting and large scale use of terracotta. The last is described below.

Exterior decoration. Terracotta decorates the outer surface of the walls on all sides (Pl. X:2). Each doorway has been set within a broad rectangular frame showing elaborate terracotta work (Pl. XI:1). The vertical arms of the frame are divided into three smaller rectangular panels, the middle one being the

¹Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 40.

²This is the earliest example of curved cornice in Bengal. Percy Brown thinks that the curve imitates the bent eaves of the thatched cottage of Bengal. Ibid.

smallest. Each panel is enclosed within an ornamented border showing a continuous frieze of arabesque between two thin lines which are impressed with intersecting scrolls. The lintel of each panel is embossed with three terracotta rosettes, one in the centre and two at the ends. Above the panels, are thin tiers of ornamental mouldings showing friezes of lozenges. Each panel is surmounted by a row of blind merlons which depict different terracotta plants. The space between the bottom and the top of the panels is filled in with terracotta arabesque. The middle panel shows a multi-foil arched niche inside. The arch is supported by two heavily-banded brick pillars. The bands depict terracotta motifs like creeper, lozenge, merlon etc. The arch soffit is impressed with a creeper design. The spandrels are now almost bare except two terracotta rosettes, but were perhaps originally covered with arabesques whose traces are sparsely visible. In the arched niche occurs a chain with a floriated pendant hung from the arch apex. The flat niche was probably further covered with arabesque originally, like other panels.

Inside each entrance panel occurs a two-centred pointed arch above the lintel of the stone door-frame. The soffit and the spandrels of the arch show rich ornamentation in terracotta. The arch soffit shows triple receding contours from the top; the innermost contains a series of arched recesses, now vacant, but were probably filled with plant motifs in the past. The middle contour depicts a frieze of stylized hanging twigs, while the

topmost has plant motifs, all in terracotta. An ornamental finial crowns the arch apex. The spandrels are covered with arabesque designs formed of shoots issuing from a spiralling creeper similar with those of the border panels. Immediately above the spandrels, are two horizontal friezes of terracotta decoration; the lower shows a necklace pattern, while the upper has scrolling creeper. There are rows of ornamental mouldings running horizontally above a pattern of spaced projections impressed with a stylized hanging motif. In between the projections occurs the necklace-and-tassel. The soffits of the mouldings are decorated with lozenge friezes, while their sunken inter-spaces are filled with terracotta jali work. Above the mouldings, runs a stylized hanging pattern.

The wall surface shows variation by means of offsets and recessed chases along its elevation.¹ A string-course running horizontally divides the wall height into an upper and a lower registers (Pl. XI:2). The soffit of the string-course is impressed with terracotta lozenge and rosette alternately. Below it, is a frieze of fruit-bearing plants, geometric motifs and beaded necklace-and-tassel, while a row of merlons impressed on the face with plants surmounts the string-course. Each side of the doorway shows three offsets and two recesses. Except for the quadruple mouldings at the foot of the recesses (Pl. XI:2),

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Percy Brown traces this pattern in the wood and wattle huts of Bengal (Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 37).

the lower register of the walls has been left bare. These foot mouldings depict scrolling creepers and scrolls with rosettes in the convolutions. The soffits of the mouldings show interconnected bells, frieze of rosettes and upright and inverted merlons in terracotta. The mouldings are surmounted with a frieze of merlons impressed with terracotta plants.

The upper register of the walls is more ornate in character and show decorative terracotta panels both on the offsets and the recesses, the former being more elaborate and prominent. The panels on the offsets are bordered with a spiralling creeper having an outstretched leaf in each convolution. There are three additional lotuses on the panel lintel. Within each panel occurs a multi-foil cusped arch crowned with a finial. The arch is supported on two middle-fat slender columns, which McCutcheon identifies with the khari type.¹ A chained rectangular pendant hangs from the arch apex. The pendant is embossed with two crossing bars at right angle within a circle. The arch soffit depicts a swinging creeper, while the spandrels are each decorated with a stalked lotus. The panel is contained within ornamental mouldings above and below showing on their face friezes of terracotta lozenge. Below the lower moulding, is another ornamental composition in terracotta. It shows a frieze of beaded

¹ David McCutcheon, "Hingu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", JASP, XIII, No. 3 (1968), p. 245.

necklace containing vegetal elements with a tassel occurring in between. There are two more terracotta friezes above; the lower shows impressed merlons, while the upper depicts a jali pattern. The entire panel composition is crowned with a row of six spaced merlons showing terracotta plants.

Each of the recessed chases shows an ornate rectangular pendant hung from the keystone of a multi-foil cusped arch by means of a stylized chain. The pendant is embossed with a jar motif surrounded by vegetal shoots and flowers. The cusps have been shaped like buds, while the arch soffit is decorated with a leafy design, all in terracotta. Above the arch, have been arranged a series of mouldings impressed with inverted merlons and leaves.

There are triple mouldings below the curved parapet. The upper inter-space shows a row of arched niches, once filled with enamelled tiles.¹ The lower inter-space depicts a continuous terracotta jali work.

Terracotta ornamentation also appears in the octagonal corner towers of the mausoleum, which, like the wall surface, are designed into offsets and recessed chases along their height (Pl. XII:1). The towers show quadruple horizontal mouldings at the base and intermittent ones on the shaft. The decoration on

¹ A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 77.

the face of the base mouldings are mostly gone. Those that survive show friezes of upright diamonds, regular and inverted merlons and lotuses. The decorations in the inter-spaces of the base mouldings in the north-eastern and north-western towers survive in identifiable state. They display rich ornamentation in terracotta (Pl. XII:1). The lowest inter-space depicts plant and vegetal elements within ornamental arches supported on stylized pillars alternating with a lotus-embossed roundel. The next higher inter-space shows a continuous row of decorative arches carried by stumpy vase-shaped pillars and having plant motifs in the niches. The third crevice from below is filled in with a swinging creeper having a blown flower in each convolution. The topmost space between the mouldings represents a frieze of circle and diamond impressed with flowers alternating with an interlocking pattern. Above the mouldings, runs a row of decorative merlons showing terracotta plants. The mouldings on the shaft of the towers depict more ornate ornamentation in terracotta with minute execution of details. The motifs represented include hanging fruits of various kinds, stylized plants, inverted merlons, jali work etc. Above every moulding, runs a row of ornamental merlons showing plants of various kinds. The angles of the octagonal shaft are faced with stylized hooded vase motifs. The recesses between mouldings depict the chain-and-pendant hung from the apex of multi-foil arches similar with those on the wall surface.

Interior decoration. Terracotta ornamentation also appears at the dome base inside. A frieze of jali work runs all round the dome base. Immediately above, is a series of triple mouldings surmounted by a lozenge frieze. Higher up, runs a row of merlons impressed with plant motifs. The apex of the dome vault depicts a large terracotta lotus.

General observations. The Eklākhī Mausoleum is an epoch-making monument both in respect of architecture and ornamentation. It is the first building in Bengal built of brick with characteristic local features. It is also the earliest example of terracotta decoration covering the entire surface of a Muslim building in Bengal. Since terracotta is the art of clay, it suits the brick surface most, and it is in this monument that a synthesis was achieved between the decorative technique and the structural masonry. The mausoleum also established the basic principles of surface decoration that were subsequently followed in almost all the Sultānī buildings of Bengal. In respect of ornamental motifs, the terracottas of the mausoleum show skilful combination of the Muslim and the Hindu elements, evolving thereby a common art formula in Bengal. In fact, the Eklākhī Mausoleum represented the spirit and extent of Muslim adaptation to local conditions at the cultural level as the accession of the converted Jalāl al-Dīn to the throne of Bengal symbolized a political accommodation.

D. The Period of the Restored Ilyas Shahis (1433-1486 A.D.)

The restoration of the Ilyās Shāhī rule in Bengal after the fall of the House of Rājā Gaṇeśa merely meant a change of the ruling dynasty but none in policy. Rather, it inspired the Ilyās Shāhī rulers to the fulfilment of those aims and ideals that had taken shape during the period of the local converted rulers. The spirit of adaptation with local elements continued unabated and local literature, art and culture flourished alongside Muslim institutions. The political atmosphere of the period was also congenial to such developments as there was no reaction against the restored Ilyās Shāhī rule. These peaceful socio-political circumstances of the time are physically reflected on the building art of the period. The monuments erected during the restored Ilyās Shāhī rule are impressed with the spirit of search after a common goal and in this was born the classical phase of Muslim architecture in Bengal. The classicism is manifested in the balanced proportion of the different parts of the buildings as well as in the appropriate manner of their decoration. The "brick style" and the mode of surface ornamentation initiated by the Eklākhi Mausoleum continued. Architecture became fully acclimatized to the soil and climate of Bengal. Buildings were invariably furnished with corner towers and curvature of the cornice and the parapet. The wall surface outside was variegated with offsets and recessed chases. The door openings were placed

within richly ornamented panels. Smaller decorative panels were placed for further enrichment of the wall surface.

The period attained the highest excellence in brick masonry and the architectural effect of the buildings was maximized by integrating and assimilating the terracotta ornaments into the structural fabric. Although other decorative techniques like glazed tiles were sometimes used, terracotta remained, par excellence, the medium of ornamentation. The quality of the terracottas improved as at no time before or after; the lines became sharper and crisper and the motifs most attenuate. There also occurred an extension of the art motifs, and despite the fusion of the Muslim geometric and abstract elements with the local plant and vegetal ones, the dominance of the latter sustained. But the ornamentation was restrained and free from being over-rich which typified the art of the next period, that of the Husain Shāhis.

The architecture of the restored Ilyās Shāhi period, both at the capital and outside, shows certain structural and decorative features that appeared earlier in the contemporary buildings of Delhi and Persia. In the context of Bengal's political isolation from these countries during the period under study, such influences are difficult to be explained; nevertheless, these are material evidences to suggest the existence of relationship among the Indo-Muslim dominions and those outside at the cultural level. It is perhaps permissible to suppose that the

political unrest which convulsed both the Northern India and the Middle Eastern Muslim lands in the 15th century threw overboard many an artist who sought refuge in the peaceful land of Bengal and introduced these elements in Bengal art.

The architectural remains of the restored Ilyās Shāhī period largely survive at Gaur where Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I (1433-59) shifted his capital from Hazrat Pānduā. Nāṣir al-Dīn ushered in the most flourishing period of the city when the best and the finest remains, now existing, were built.¹ But the chronology of the monuments of Gaur is a baffling problem due to the absence of inscriptions from most of the buildings. This has occasioned differences of opinion among scholars regarding attribution of the monuments to different periods. Cunningham genuinely felt embarrassed at this odd situation and without running the hazard of assigning the monuments to particular periods, simply dealt with them according to their location.² Dani,³ however, has attempted to classify the Gaur monuments period-wise on the basis of historical facts and architectural and decorative styles. Dani's classification is generally acceptable and has been adopted here for our purpose. But most of the monuments at Gaur are now in ruins. However, those that still survive furnish us with a good account of the terracotta ornamentation that adorned the

¹ Cf. HB, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 130-31.

² ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 50.

³ Cf. A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

monuments of the period.

Outside the city of Gaur, a large number of buildings are also known to have been built during the period under review. Of these, a group of monuments ascribed to Khān Jahān (d. 1459) were erected in the region of Khalīfatābād.¹ These buildings, also built of brick, although somewhat differ from the Gaur examples structurally, resemble them in respect of ornamentation, particularly in terracotta. Others are spread across the territory of Bengal. The surviving examples of this latter group are few in number, but these, unlike the Khalīfatābād monuments, follow the Gaur style both in architecture and ornamentation.

For convenience of study, the monuments of the period are grouped under three heads, viz., (i) Monuments at Gaur; (ii) Monuments at Khalīfatābād; and (iii) Monuments of other places.

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Blochmann identified the region with modern Bāgerhāt in Khulna district (See JASB, XLII, Pt. I (1873), p. 227). Khalīfatābād appears as a Sarkār in the rent-roll of Akbar and has been identified with the south Jessore and west Bākarganj (Cf. Ā'in-i-Akbarī, vol. II, trans. by H.S. Jarrett. Rev. by J.N. Sarkar (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, n.d., p. 127). Bari traces the origin of the name Khalīfatābād (Viceregent's clearance) to the time of Khān Jahān, the conqueror of the territory, who named it after the reigning king Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd Shāh I (1433-59), the 'Khalifah of God by proof and evidence'. Cf. Muhammad Abdul Bari, Khalīfatābād: A Study of Its History and Monuments (unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, University of Rajshahi, 1980), p. 43.

(i) Monuments at Gaur

The Kotwālī Darwāza (Pl. XII:2). It formed the southern entrance to the city of Gaur. The gateway is built of brick and was highly ornamented with terracotta.¹ It was so named because the chief of police (Kotwāl) was probably stationed here.² The gateway originally consisted of a lofty brick arch 31 feet in height and 16 feet in span with a depth of 17'14" through the thickness of the wall.³ The arch disappeared long ago.

The outer side of the gateway is flanked on either side by a massive round bastion pierced with two rows of loopholes. On each face of the arched passage inside and outside, tapering semi-circular turrets project from the wall and terminate at the cornice level. Upon them, one in each, is carved a deep niche showing a trifoil arch supported on ornamental pillars. Within the arch hangs down a terracotta chain having a floriate pendant. The wall surface contains a projected moulding running horizontally about the middle, almost at the level of the arch springing. On either side of the archway, both above and below the moulding, is a rectangular terracotta panel surmounted by a frieze of merlons impressed with plant motifs. Inside the panel, occurs a trifoil arch having a terracotta chain-and-pendant in the

¹ Creighton, op. cit., Pl. IV; Ravenshaw, op. cit., p. 19.

² Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 76.

³ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

recess. The pendant is impressed with a diamond. The niche surface shows a loop design in brick carving. The arch soffit depicts creeper designs, while the spandrels are decorated with two rosettes above which runs a triple ornamental moulding impressed with lozenge, all in terracotta relief.

Cunningham¹ is inclined to place the gateway in the 13th century, while Percy Brown² relegates it to the end of the 14th century on the ground that the tapering turrets were derived from the contemporary Tughluq architecture of Delhi. In consideration of the excellence of the terracotta work and brick carving employed in the ornamentation of the gate and also of the historical circumstances, the building of the Kotwālī Darwāza has been assigned by Dani to the time of Sultān Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd I (1433-59),³ who built the fort of Gaur.

The Dākhlī Darwāza (Pl. XIII:1). The Dākhlī Darwāza (Entrance Gateway) was the main gate to enter the city of Gaur from the north. It was also known as the Salāmī Darwāza or "Saluting Gate", because this being the main entrance, salutes were fired from the adjoining rampart.⁴ Cunningham describes the gate as "one of the finest and most picturesque buildings

¹ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 70.

²Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 36.

³A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 95.

⁴ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 51.

now remaining in Gaur."¹ In respect of dimension also, it is one of the largest in Gaur. It measures 75'4" across the front and 113'2" from front to back with a height of about 60 feet. The building consists of a central passage 14 feet wide and 113¼ feet long with a guard room on each side. The walls are 9¾ feet thick and pierced by three doorways on either side of the passage, but with one outer doorway on the inner side of the rampart. The piers between the doorways are made of brick and faced with stone up to the springing of the arches. The rest of the building is built of brick. At each of the corners, there is a twelve-sided tower, five storeys in height, which was originally crowned with a cupola.² Between the corner towers and the central opening is a pylon-like buttress, one on either side of the frontage, guarding the portal. Creighton³ and Percy Brown⁴ ascribe the gate to Bārbak Shāh (1459-74), while Cunningham,⁵ Dani⁶ and others⁷ assign it to Nāsir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I (1433-59).

¹ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 51.

² Creighton's drawing (Pl. II) shows the corner towers as having six storeys.

³ Creighton, op. cit., Pl. II.

⁴ Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 51.

⁶ A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 99.

⁷ Stewart ascribes the construction of the fortifications round the city of Gaur and also its existing gates to Nāsir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I. Cf. Charles Stewart, History of Bengal (Indian Reprint. Delhi: Orient Publishers, 1971), p. 100.

The ornamentation of the Gateway was done only with terracotta. The wall surface including the corner towers has been disposed into vertical offset and recessed panels of shallow depth. The recessed panels in all cases are decorated with terracotta chain-and-floriate pendant hung from the key-stone of multi-foil arches.

Entrance panel. The arched passage is set within a recessed rectangular panel decorated with terracotta. The two-centred arch springs from the waist of the side walls upon slightly projected bands. The arch soffit, now bare, shows faint traces of past decoration not identifiable at present. Each spandrel of the arch is embossed with a tiered terracotta rosette. The panel ends upward in triple ornamental mouldings impressed with lozenge frieze. The inter-spaces between the mouldings are filled in with jali work. Below the lowest moulding, is a series of stylized hanging pattern resembling ornamental brackets. Above the mouldings, occurs a rectangular terracotta panel projecting out of the surface. The panel is contained within double mouldings above and a single moulding below. Within the panel, has been placed a multi-foil pointed arch supported on middle-fat pillars, the like of which were already seen on the walls of the Eklākhi Mausoleum at Hazrat Pānduā. Inside the arch, hangs the usual pendant from a chain. The moulding immediately above the arch shows a thin recess on its face which is filled in which a lozenge frieze. Above this

moulding, runs a frieze of three blind merlons and below, a terracotta necklace pattern. Higher up, is another moulding containing on its face a frieze of lozenge surmounted by a row of decorative merlons. The moulding below the panel runs above a necklace pattern in shallow relief. The whole frame is crowned by a pointed finial consisting of three rounded tiers. Flanking the panel on either side, is a tiered terracotta rosette which Percy Brown compares with the flaming sun.¹

The whole entrance panel is contained within an arched portal whose re-extrant angles facing the arched passage are vertically arranged into three shallow recessed panels depicting terracotta hanging pattern similar with those on the wall surface.

Wall surface. Contained between the corner towers, the wall surface in the middle shows a rectangular projection bounded on either side by a buttress rising up to the parapet. The wall surfaces within the buttresses are each faced with two oblong panels slightly recessed and placed one over the other and contain the usual chain-and-pendant in terracotta within a multi-foil arch. An ornamental rectangular panel crowns this part of the wall. It is set within mouldings below and above, which show lozenge frieze impressed on their face. The panel is bordered by

¹ Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 40.

terracotta jali work. Inside the panel occurs a multi-foil pointed arch on stumpy faceted pillars with ornamental bands in the middle and at the neck. The flat recess inside the arch is decorated with a chain-and-pendant hung from the arch apex. The panel is crowned with a frieze of blind merlons.

The buttresses show a vertical oblong recess on their surface and on the re-entrant angles and contain quadruple mouldings at the base and three on the body, placed intermittently. The upper three mouldings are the continuations of those of the corner towers. Above the moulded plinth, is a row of rectangular niches, now bare, but appears to have originally contained terracotta ornaments. The triple recessed interspaces between the quadruple mouldings above the plinth contain frieze of terracotta jali work. The ornamentation on the mouldings has disappeared. The mouldings are crowned with a frieze of blind merlons which have now blank face. The spaces between the horizontal mouldings on the buttresses are filled in by a row of three cross-petal motifs, the recesses and the offsets each showing one. The wall surface between the corner towers and the buttresses shows two offsets and one recess arranged vertically, the offsets being now bare, while the recess contains a multi-foil arch motif having a chain-and-pendant. At the bottom, the recess contains quadruple mouldings and decorative motifs in terracotta similar with those of the buttresses and corner towers.

Corner towers. The corner towers are divided into five storeys by four ornamental string-courses, the lower two running across the wall surface below the parapet. Each tower has been relieved with vertical offsets and recesses, the latter containing multi-foil arch motifs with terracotta chain-and-pendant in each storey. The recesses in all cases have quadruple mouldings at the bottom in the lowest storey. The inter-spaces between the mouldings show traces of terracotta decoration consisting of jali work. The face of the mouldings shows a lozenge frieze, a little sunken. The string-courses contain terracotta decoration. Every string-course consists of several thin mouldings, each of which is impressed with a frieze of lozenge. The string-courses are surmounted by a continuous frieze of blind merlons, now empty, but were perhaps decorated in the past. Underneath, is a frieze of terracotta jali work still retaining the freshness of its execution. "The existing building was first constructed with ornamental facing work all round, but the base of the building on the east and west was later covered with earth and connected with the adjoining rampart walls."¹

General observations. The Dākhlī Darwāza is one of the earliest existing examples of monumental gateways in true Bengali style. Despite the fact that it consists of a great mass of

¹ Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 51.

masonry, its bulk has been lightened by means of projections and recesses in a singularly original manner. It is a superb example of what can be achieved in brick and terracotta and implies an interesting "fusion of the classic and the romantic, with traces of the indigenous or rustic. The classic is represented by the grand shape and proportions of the portal and its arched portico, and the romantic quality may be seen in the position and slope of the corner bastions, while the influence of the country may be observed in the ingenious surface treatment"¹ The monument provides a singular instance wherein the indigenous terracotta art has been masterly integrated to the excellence of the architectural features. The ornamentation is sparing, yet beautiful. The terracottas also speak of significant development in their making technique. The details are minute but clear and crisp, and their texture is smoother than ever before. The tapering corner towers, characteristic of the Tughluq architecture of Delhi, have attained here a Bengali character by means of projections and recesses and by ornamental mouldings on their shafts and these have greatly added to the picturesque beauty of the structure. Indeed, the whole structure breathes the spirit of the soil on which it stands and represents in its work the master product of Bengal. It is a product of

¹ Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 40.

high conception and magnificent execution.

The date of erection of the gateway is not known, but was probably built in the first half of the 15th century.¹

The Chāmkātti Mosque (Pl. XIII:2). The Chāmkātti mosque² stands to the east of the Luka Churi Gate which formed the main entrance to the fort of Gaur from the east. It is about half a mile from the Lattān masjid. According to 'Abid 'Ali, the mosque was built by a "certain Chāmkātti (skin cutters) class of Muhammadans" and hence the name.³ The date of its erection is not definitely known, but Cunningham ascribes to it an inscription⁴ dated A.H. 880 (1475 A.D.) during the reign of Sultān Yūsuf Shāh (1474-81). Hasan has attempted a fresh study of the inscription and dates it as A.H. 883 (1478 A.D.).⁵ The mosque represents the single-domed square type with a verandah in front. The main hall measures 23 feet 8 inches square internally with a large verandah on the east, 9 feet 11 inches broad and an octagonal tower at each corner. It seems that the brick walls were originally faced with stone as in the Adina mosque and traces of it still survive inside the mosque. There are three doorways in the east façade and one at each end of the verandah.

¹Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 50.

²See Creighton, op. cit., Pl. XV.

³Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 69.

⁴ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

⁵S.M. Hasan, op. cit., pp. 190-94, Pl. XLIII(A).

The main hall is entered by three doors from the east and by one each from the north and south.¹ The battlements are slightly curved and there is a single mihrāb in the west wall. A single dome covers the main hall, while the verandah has a vaulted roof.

Exterior decoration. The mosque is almost in ruins and the corner towers disappeared long ago. Abid Ali² reports about variously coloured enamelled bricks used in this old building at the cornice and between the arches inside the main hall. But there are also traces of terracotta ornamentation on the doorways, walls, cornice and mihrāb of the mosque. The characteristic offsets and recesses on the wall surface are still visible in the east façade. The entrance arches are slightly sunk in the wall masonry. Like the fabric of the structure, the arch panels have seriously suffered damage caused by the weather but still retain vestiges of terracottas that once adorned them. The spandrels must have contained ornamental terracotta rosettes together with arabesque or vegetal designs, so characteristic of the monuments of the period. Above the spandrels, there are still traces of decorative mouldings which possibly once contained ornamental terracotta motifs. Between the doorways, the façade shows rectangular projected panels at the level of the arch shoulder. Each panel is set within ornamental mouldings below and above. The mouldings are faced with terracotta lozenge

¹Cunningham is not correct to place "three doorways on each side of the main room", Cf. ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 60.

²Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 69.

frieze. Below the upper moulding, there is an intersecting creeper design in terracotta, while the design underneath the lower moulding has disappeared. Inside the panels, occurs a terracotta chain-and-floriate motif. The panels are bordered with glazed tiles of various patterns, while surmounting the panels is a jali pattern also in enamelled tile below a frieze of merlons. The cornice shows two horizontal rows of terracotta ornamentation, the upper consisting of a necklace pattern in tiers and the lower showing a merlon frieze impressed with geometric and plant motifs. The raised mouldings enclosing the cornice terracottas were decorated with variously coloured enamelled tiles.

Interior decoration. The ornamentation of the mihrāb panel has equally suffered weathering with the structure. The panel border shows traces of terracotta jali frieze, while the arch spandrels have each a tiered terracotta rosette. There are ornamental mouldings above the spandrels and these must have originally been decorated with terracotta ornaments as faint traces of these are still discernible. The mihrāb panel is surmounted by an ornamental row of merlons whose faces are now bare but were possibly covered with glazed tiles originally.

The dome was repaired during 'Abid 'Ali's time and thereby saved from crumbling down. The dome base has a terracotta jali work all round above which runs a frieze of merlons showing traces of glazed tile decoration on their face. The triangular spaces

between the arches which support the dome base are each embossed with a large tiered rosette ornamented with glazed tile pieces.

General observations. The mosque reveals a new decorative technique of the combined use of glazed tiles and terracotta, which was subsequently imitated in a number of Muslim buildings in Bengal, such as the *Firūza Minār* (1486-89), the *Lattān Masjid* (early 16th century), the *Gumti Gate* (1512) and the *Gumant Mosque* (early 16th century). The effect produced was a pleasing contrast of the surface both in texture and design. Although new in Bengal, the technique was not unknown to Muslim art tradition. The combined use of tiles and terracotta was in practice in the contemporary architecture of Persia, beautiful examples of which are found at Yazd and especially in the façade of the *Khānqāh* at Nätanz (1316-17). In the circumstances, Persian influence on the Muslim architecture of Bengal may reasonably be surmised, and probably more so, when the Muslim patrons were culturally and emotionally attached to their central Asian heritage and not unoften turned to it for inspiration and guidance. The use of glazed tiles does not, however, appear to have been popular in Bengal due, perhaps, to the damp and rain-sodden climate of the country. Terracotta, on the other hand, sustained the Bengal weather well and was, therefore, more acceptable for architectural decoration.

The Darasbari Masjid. (Pls. XIV:1-XVII:1). The mosque appears to have received its current appellation years after its erection from the "picturesque and exquisite academy of learning" founded by Sultān Husain Shāh in the year A.H. 909 (1503-04 A.D.)¹ closeby. It stands between Mahdipur and Firūzpur and is about a mile to the south-west of the Kotwālī Darwāza. A Tughrā inscription² found by Munshi Ilāhī Bakhsh in the debris of the site records the date of the mosque as A.H. 884 (1479 A.D.), the builder being Sultān Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf Shāh (1474-81). Typologically, the mosque constitutes a distinct example by itself having an oblong domed prayer-hall, cut in the middle by a vaulted nave, but with the addition of a verandah in front. The prayer-hall is divided into three sections, a central nave measuring 38'9" by 17'9" and the side halls, each 37'4" by 38'9". The side halls are divided into three aisles by two rows of stone pillars, which supported nine domes in each wing. In the northern wing, there was a raised gallery at the north-west corner, supported on massive octagonal stone pillars,

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The inscription was discovered in 1973 by brick hunters from the debris of the site and subsequent trial excavation by the Department of Archaeology and Museums of Bangladesh in 1975 confirmed the location of the madrasah. (Cf. Muhammad Abdul Qadir, "The Newly Discovered Madrasah Ruins at Gaur and Its Inscription", Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, XXIV-VI (Humanities) (1979-81), pp. 21-22, 27-34 and 75, Pl. XXIII. The discovery of the present inscription has ended scholarly debates centring round Husain Shah's inscription of A.H. 907 (1502 A.D.), also relating to the erection of a madrasah.

²ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 76; JASB, LXIV (1895), pp. 222-23; Abid Ali, op. cit., Pl. III facing page 77.

remains of which survive in situ. The central nave is a single hall with three arched openings towards north and south. It had a vaulted roof. The verandah of the mosque has totally disappeared. There are seven arched openings in the eastern wall and three each in the north and south. The wall surface is variegated with offsets and recesses, the latter containing the arched doorways. The mosque suffered badly from the ravages of time having lost its domes and vault. The rich terracotta ornamentations that once overlaid this brick-built structure have also suffered a similar fate.

Exterior decoration. The wall surface outside has been variegated with alternate offsets and recesses along the elevation which resolves into two vertical registers by means of a string-course running longitudinally (Pl. XIV:1). The entire wall surface is enlivened with terracotta ornamentation. The decoration of the upper register differs from the lower. The upper offsets show each a projected ornamental panel set within tiers of mouldings below and above. (Pl. XIV:2). The mouldings contain lozenge friezes in between. Below the lower mouldings, is a frieze of terracotta hanging patterns, some showing bunches of grapes, while others are akin to twigs. Above the upper mouldings, is a row of ornamental merlons impressed with terracotta plants. A Kalasa motif, carrying a finial, is set in the centre of the merlons. The panel is bordered by a spiralling creeper having flowers and leaves in the convolutions. The panel lintel depicts a rosette at the centre, flanked by two others at the

corners, all in terracotta relief. Inside the panel, is recessed a hanging pattern suspended from the apex of a multi-foil arch, which is supported on banded and moulded pillars. The arch soffit is impressed with a row of lozenge. The hanging pattern is of a unique design having two outstretched wings on either side and ending below in a rectangular pendant surrounded by spiralling creepers and impressed with a jar motif. There is a rosette in each spandrel amidst vegetal elements. The recesses in the upper register of the wall show relatively simpler ornamental treatment. These are planned into two sunken panels arranged vertically, each with a multi-foil decorative arch from the apex of which hangs a terracotta chain ending in a rectangular pendant. The pendant shows traces of past decoration, now disappeared.

The offsets in the lower register contain two rectangular sunken panels, one above the other, each showing a multi-foil arch with a double-winged chain ending in a floriate pendant in terracotta. The recesses in this register show only one decorative panel, the winged-chain in all cases terminating in a pendant shaped like an inverted ornamental merlon (Pl. XV:1). There are triple mouldings at the bottom of the recesses, each depicting a different terracotta decoration. The topmost shows a frieze of rosettes, the middle has a sort of inter-connected bells flanking rosettes, while the lowest is a jali pattern. The sunken inter-spaces between the mouldings are filled in with

hanging twigs, plant motifs and vegetal elements, someones wrought within loops formed of intersecting creepers. The mouldings are surmounted by a frieze of decorative merlons. The lace-like designs on these merlons reveal the skill of the terracotta artists. Each merlon depicts a multi-foil pointed arch with rosettes and vegetal elements in the spandrels, while inside the arch, occur intersecting plants, scrolling creepers, arch motifs etc. in terracotta relief.

Above and below the string-course are two friezes of triangular motifs, regular and inverted respectively, which are impressed with terracotta plants. The face of the string-course, though now bare, was perhaps decorated with terracotta designs in the past.

The triple mouldings below the parapet show the characteristic Bengali convexity and their faces are impressed with an inter-connected bell motif. The inter-spaces between the mouldings show rich ornamentation in terracotta; the lowest consists of a beautiful jali pattern, the middle shows plant motifs within arched niches, while the tompost has a design of arched niches, now blank. The ornamentatal arches are supported on vase-shaped pillars in all cases. The verandah of the mosque and the corner towers (whose bases are still traceable) disappeared long ago. They must have shared the physical and ornamental characteristics of the surviving structure.

Interior decoration. The interior of the mosque was full of carved work, most of which has now disappeared.¹ The mihrāb panels in the western wall still retain magnificent specimens of terracotta ornamentation. There are nine mihrābs in the qibla wall with semi-circular niches, three in each section of the mosque. The engrailed mihrāb arches rest on banded brick pilasters whose decoration has disappeared. Each mihrāb is enclosed within a rectangular frame decorated with double friezes of spiralling creepers, a strip motif running in between. The convolutions are filled in with shoots springing from the creeper stems. The lintel of the frame depicts three tiered rosettes, the central one placed above the arch apex, while the side ones decorate the angles of the frame. Below the lintel, occur two ornamental terracotta friezes, the upper consisting of a row of rosettes amid vegetal elements, and the lower, a hanging motif of twigs. The arch spandrels depict terracotta trees of a splendid type (Pl. XV:2). There are also the usual rosettes. The soffits of the arches are impressed with scrolling creepers.

Each mihrāb panel is contained within a broad relieving arch (Pl. XVI:1). The tympanums of these relieving arches are fancifully decorated with terracotta designs. The designs have

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The position was the same when 'Abid 'Ali wrote in 1912. (Cf. 'Abid 'Ali, op. cit., p. 77).

been composed within arch frames in alignment with the mihrāb panels. The tympanum composition shows a frieze of arch-shaped merlons impressed with plant motifs at the bottom above a series of ornamental mouldings. The mouldings are decorated with lozenge frieze. Below the mouldings, can be seen a vegetal hanging pattern of leaves and twigs. The tympanums mostly depict tree and creeper motifs. The one over the central mihrāb of the nave shows a spreading creeper with flowers filling in the entire space around. Percy Brown is inclined to find similarity of this ornamental creeper with the one wrought on the marble screen of Sidi Sayyid mosque at Ahmadabad (c.1515).¹ One tympanum shows rectangular panelling filled with terracotta rosettes (Pl. XVII:1).

The mihrāb niches were equally ornate with terracotta decorations, most of which have yielded to the ravages of time. The concave niches show horizontal panelling, the lowest panel being occupied by a double-winged chain with pendant inside an ornamental multi-foil arch. The other panels were filled with plant and merlon motifs and jali designs, all in terracotta relief.

The entrance arches of the main hall from the east contain two terracotta rosettes in their spandrels, inside and outside,

¹ Percy Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 41, Pl. XLI, fig. I. Based on similarity of art motifs and administrative institutions, some scholars have reasoned for the existence of cultural relationship between Sultāni Bengal and medieval Gujrat. See M.R. Tarafdar, Husain Shahi Bengal (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965), pp. 306-07.

which flank an upright diamond placed on the keystone. There are ornamental mouldings above the spandrels and these depict lozenge friezes. Above the mouldings is an oblong recess, now empty.

Terracotta designs also appeared in the decoration of the dome base inside (Pl. XVI:2). The dome bases show three tiers of ornamentation, the lowest consisting of a jali design, the middle, an inter-connected bell pattern impressed on the raised moulding, and the topmost, a frieze of ornamental merlons.

General observations. The terracotta decoration of the Darasbāri Mosque truly represents the social mood of the restored Ilyās Shāhī period. By the time the mosque was erected, the rulers were already naturalized in Bengal soil and the ruled contented with their benign government. The local culture, arts and crafts received impetus under royal patronage. The result was an upsurge of the local terracotta art which overlaid the monuments of the period. The ornamentation was boldly wrought upon and judiciously distributed over the various parts of the buildings so as to enhance their decorative effect.

The division of the wall surface of the Darasbāri Mosque into thin offsets and recesses, cut across by an ornamental string-course, has greatly added to the exterior charm of the structure. The setting of the projecting terracotta panels in the upper register of the walls has created a spatial contrast

of height and depth in the wall surface and thereby further enhanced its ornamental effect. The execution of the intricate arabesque designs in the mihrāb panels and of the spreading creeper in the tympanum of the central mihrāb reveals the high state of excellence that the terracotta artists attained during this period. The terracottas of the mosque, even in their present partly restored condition, bear the impress of quality art in their making. There is, however, a predominance of the local plant and vegetal elements as against geometric and abstract motifs. But the compositions are balanced and tastefully restrained.

The Tāntipārā Mosque (Pls. XVII:2 - XVIII:2). Tāntipārā means the quarters for the weavers and the mosque is called after the name of the weavers' quarters.¹ The mosque stands about a mile to the north of the eastern wall of the fort of Gaur between the Laṭṭan mosque and the Chāmkāṭṭi mosque. The Tāntipārā mosque is one of the earliest known examples of the oblong multi-domed type of Bengali mosques. Built of brick with an octagonal tower at each corner, the mosque measures 78 feet by 31 feet internally and 91 feet by 44 feet outside. The mosque is in ruins except parts of the walls. The interior of the mosque was divided into two longitudinal aisles and five deep

¹ Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 72; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 62.

bays by four stone pillars running down the middle. The walls are $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick with five arched openings in the east and two each on the north and south. There was a raised gallery in the northern corner of the mosque. The roof was covered by ten hemispherical domes in the past, but they crumbled long ago.¹ The surviving battlement in front shows the characteristic Bengali convexity. Creighton gives a sketch of the mosque as he saw it during 1801-7.² "From an inscription found near", Creighton gives the date of the Tāntipārā mosque as A.H. 885 (1480 A.D.).³

Exterior decoration. The wall surface has been relieved by offsets and recesses along its height (Pl. XVII:2), the offsets showing projected ornamental terracotta panels and the recesses containing the arched doorways. An ornamental string-course cuts the wall surface into two vertical halves - a decorative arrangement initiated by the Eklākhī mausoleum at Hazrat Pānduā. The string-course shows two thin mouldings on its face, the inter-space being filled in with a terracotta lozenge frieze. Above the string-course, runs a row of ornamental pointed merlons, while below it can be seen a continuous necklace motif, both in terracotta relief. Every offset of the wall surface shows two

¹ The domes fell during the earthquake of 1885. See Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 72, f.n.1.

² Creighton, op. cit., Pl. XII.

³ Ravenshaw, op. cit., p. 22, Pl. 17; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 62; Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 62. The inscription records Mirṣad Khān as the builder of the mosque.

terracotta panels, one above and the other below the string-course. The panels on the side walls are slightly sunk into the wall masonry and each contains a chain-and-floriate pendant hung from a multi-foil arch (Pl. XVII:2). The panels in the front wall are most ornate and project out of the wall surface within ornamental mouldings, below and above. The mouldings show thin horizontal lines on their face and these are decorated with terracotta lozenge. All the panels are bordered with arabesques. Inside the panels, occurs a pointed multi-foil arch supported on slender banded pillars. A winged chain ending in a floriate pendant hangs from the arch apex amidst dense leafage. There is a row of six small rosettes in the spandrels surrounded by arabesque of delicate execution. The panels are surmounted by a frieze of pointed merlons, while below them runs a necklace-and-tassel pattern, all in terracotta. The decorative composition of these terracotta panels speaks of the high skill that the artists of Bengal attained during this period.

The doorway panels are equally magnificent examples of terracotta art. The soffit of the doorway arches shows three succeeding stages of decoration; the innermost has a design of embossed rosettes, the middle of arabesque and the topmost of pointed merlons. The arch is crowned with an ornate pointed finial. The spandrels depict two protruding big rosettes contained within spiralling leafy creepers which rise from the

arch springing and fill in the space around. There are smaller rosettes placed intermittently to the enrichment of the spandrel composition. A little above the rosettes, are two thin horizontal panels, the lower depicting a frieze of pointed merlons and the upper a row of rosettes. The ornamentation of the two decorative mouldings that close in the terracotta composition above the archways has disappeared. The recessed doorway panels are enclosed within larger rectangular frames whose vertical arms are set on the flanking wall offsets. The terracotta ornamentation of these arms, except one big rosette on each at the top, has withered away, but the decoration may reasonably be reconstructed as having consisted of a row of embossed rosettes on each arm. The lintel of each frame shows faint traces of past decoration, but except the surmounting row of terracotta merlons, nothing else can be identified at present.

The octagonal corner towers are now almost in ruins, but they were "also ornamented in the same style"¹ as the wall surface with offsets and recesses and contained floriate hanging motif within multi-foil pointed arch. There are triple cornice mouldings below the curved battlement. The mouldings are impressed with friezes of terracotta lozenge. In the inter-space between the upper mouldings runs a jali pattern, while that between the lower mouldings is filled in with alternate necklace and tassel in terracotta relief.

¹ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p.61.

Interior decoration. Corresponding to the five entrances from the east, there are five mihrābs in the west wall of the mosque. All the mihrābs are set within double rectangular panels that were richly adorned with terracotta in the past (Pl. XVIII:1). Hasan is not correct to designate these terracotta ornamentation as stucco work.¹ But most of the ornamentation has disappeared, so that the panels have lost the charm they originally had. The ornamentations of all the inner panels up to the arch spandrels are almost gone except faint remnants here and there. These traces suggest that the lost decoration was of kindred type with that of the entrance panels and consisted of rosettes enclosed within spiralling creepers. Above the spandrels, the terracotta decoration survives in fairly good condition. The composition shows a number of horizontal panels, each decorated with a different motif. The lowest panel depicts a frieze of tessellated hanging motif below a row of lozenge. Above, runs a cross-petal design surmounted by a frieze of rosettes. The next higher panel shows a cross-petal motif above which is a pattern of hanging fruits with twigs in between. On its vertical arms, the inner panel shows rectangular composition filled with a floriate hanging pattern inside a multi-foil arch. There are also vertical rows of small rosettes flanking the hanging motif. The lintel of the inner panel contains a rosette in the centre flanked by delicate creepers set within

¹ S.M. Hasan, op. cit., p. 133.

square frames whose borders are decorated with terracotta jali work. Further, on either side is a decorative arch having rows of creepers within and vegetal elements outside. The lintel contains at either end a design like the one in the centre. The outer panel is bordered by a spiralling creeper with a rosette in each convolution. Above the outer panel, is a frieze of stylized hanging pattern of vegetal constituents surmounted by a decorative moulding. The panel ends upward in a highly decorated merlon frieze with rosettes in between and punctuated by three ornamental terracotta finials. Higher up, is an ornate terracotta disc resembling the flaming sun and surrounded on its four sides by terracotta rosettes. Similar ornamental motifs also decorate the tympanums of the transverse arches.

Flanking each mihrāb panel are two smaller oblong panels placed vertically, one above the other. Each of these contains a decorative multi-foil arch with an ornate winged pendant hanging from the keystone. The arch spandrels are filled in with vegetal shoots. The compositions are kept within jali borders.

The mihrāb niches also contained rich ornamentation in terracotta relief, most of which has withered away leaving sporadic faint traces. The niches show rectangular panelling in two vertical registers. Each panel of the lower register contains a plant motif inside a multi-foil arch and those in the upper register show the hanging motif. There are rows of mouldings

above the panels and these are impressed with decorative motifs such as rosettes, jali design, hanging fruits with twigs etc. The mouldings are surmounted by a row of pointed decorative merlons with rosettes in between.

The domes were supported on corner pendentives formed of horizontal projecting courses of bricks set corner-wise - a characteristic Bengali feature (Pl. XVIII:2). The terracotta decoration at the dome base inside is equally rich. The composition consists of a frieze of floriate hanging motifs running all round at the bottom, above which is a projected moulding impressed with lozenge. The moulding is surmounted by a row of decorative merlons.

General observations. The Tāntipārā Mosque, according to Cunningham, "is the finest of all the buildings now remaining at Gaur."¹ The excellence of the building lies in the graceful setting of the various architectural elements and the superb quality of the terracotta ornamentation. The terracotta artists of Bengal executed the best of their craft in this structure. Marshall rightly remarks, "In the matter of superficial ornament, indeed, the Tāntipārā masjid marks the zenith of the Bengal school".² The ornamentation of the mosque reveals the terracotta artists of Bengal as having mastered the technique of the Muslim low-relief decoration and the finesse of execution of details.

¹ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 62.

²CHI, vol. III, op. cit., p. 605.

The ornamentation is dense and no space inside the composition has been left vacant, yet it is soothing to sight rather than tiring. Marshall's complaint against the ornamentation "to be verging on the meretricious" is merely based on difference of point of view. The Bengal artists have their own concept of beauty like any other people, and no outsider is a fair judge in this respect. The ornamentation of the Tāntipārā mosque, therefore, must be judged in the cultural context of Bengal. Again, Marshall's comparison of the mosque with the Dākhil Darwāza that the former is "effeminate" and "formal", while the latter is "virile" and "spontaneous" is based on bad reasoning. The Tāntipārā Mosque was a place of prayer where the Muslims bowed down before the Almighty in humility and submission; whereas, the Dākhil Darwāza was a structure of power which proclaimed the regal might.¹ The ideals were, therefore, different and so was their decoration.

The effect of ornamentation of the Tāntipārā Mosque was greatly enhanced by the "rich red colour" of the bricks used in the building. It is significant to observe that the artists' concern was not confined to the execution of the ornamentation alone, but also spread over the materials, which would help their work look more appealing. The survival of the ornamentations

¹See Oleg Grabar, "The Architecture of Power: Palaces, Citadels and Fortifications" in Architecture of the Islamic World, ed. by George Michell (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), pp. 65-79.

almost in their pristine beauty through centuries also speaks of the high technique of making the terracotta pieces. Indeed, the Tāntipārā mosque represents the apogee of the Muslim terracotta art in Bengal.

The Dhunichak Mosque (Pl. XIX:1). The Dhunichak Mosque is a brick-built structure and stands in the Mahdipur area of Gaur. It owes its appellation to the locality inhabited by the dhunies or "Cotton carders".¹ The mosque is included in the revised list of the Ancient Monuments of Bengal,² but its building date is not known. On stylistic ground, the mosque has been ascribed to the restored Ilyās Shāhī period (1433-86).³ The mosque is almost in ruins except parts of the western and northern walls. The corner towers, whose foundations are still in situ, have also disappeared. There are three niched mihrābs in the qibla wall. Dani⁴ is of opinion that the mosque was covered by a single dome, while Hasan⁵ places three domes on the roof. There are remnants of decoration on the wall surface, dome base and the mihrābs, which suggest that the mosque had rich terracotta ornamentation in the past.

¹ S.M. Hasan, op. cit., p. 126.

² List of the Ancient Monuments of Bengal, Revised upto 1895 (Calcutta: Public Works Department, 1896), p. 446.

³ A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p.107.

⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

⁵ S.M. Hasan, op. cit., pp. 126-27.

Decoration. At the present ruinous state, the decoration of the mosque is confined only to the interior. The mihrābs are set within double rectangular frames, the decoration of which has almost peeled off. The surviving traces show that the frames were decorated with terracotta and the designs executed were similar with those of the Tāntipārā and Darasbāri mosques. The inner frame of the mihrāb panels still retains on its lintel a central rosette contained within a square compartment having jali borders. The flanking decorative arches with rows of creepers inside and other vegetal elements outside resemble those on the inner panel of the mihrābs in the Tāntipārā mosque. The outer frame has a spiralling creeper device with a rosette in each convolution. Above the frames, runs a frieze of stylized vegetal hanging patterns similar to that of the Tāntipārā mosque. Immediately above, are two mouldings with terracotta lozenge frieze on their face. Each mihrāb panel is surmounted by a row of decorative merlons, equally distributed between five spaced kalasa motif.

The central mihrāb is bigger than the side ones and shows a pointed cusped arch with ornamental finial. The spandrels are interspersed with rosettes. A luxuriant terracotta tree rising from a vase placed at the arch-spring on either side covers the spandrels and intertwines the rosettes within its branches. Above the spandrels are two thin horizontal panels, the lower showing a hanging pattern of twigs and the upper a frieze of rosette, all in terracotta relief. Each mihrāb is flanked on

either side by two smaller rectangular panels, one placed above the other, a little recessed in the wall. The panels contain a multi-foil pointed arch inside. From the keystone of the arch hangs a terracotta chain ending in a rectangular pendant. The spandrels depict a series of rosettes and vegetal shoots. A stone course runs across the wall inside at the level of the mihrāb arches. Above and below the stone course, is a row of ornamental terracotta merlons.

The remnants of the dome base at the north-west corner of the mosque still survive. The oversailing courses of the pendentives show brick-setting corner-wise. The dome ring shows a moulding impressed with terracotta lozenge. Above it, is seen a row of ornamental merlons.

General observations. Although almost in ruins, the Dhunichak mosque retains traces of rich terracotta decoration. The mosque must have been a very beautiful building when stood intact. The existing walls, even in their battered condition, show outlines of the offsets and recesses that once relieved the surface. The ornamental motifs, the setting of the mihrāb panels and the technique of execution of the terracotta ornamentation undoubtedly assign the mosque to the restored Ilyās Shāhī period. The mihrāb niches, also ruinous, retain traces of original panelled decoration which consisted of terracotta hanging patterns and plant motifs inside ornamental arches. Two stone pilasters, still in situ in the western wall, carried two transverse brick

arches which must have supported three domes above. But the existence of a stone pillar still standing and another lying fallen inside the mosque, suggests that there might have been six domes roofing the structure of two aisles. The trace of only one doorway survives in the north wall. It may be guessed that both the north and south walls had two doorways each. The east façade must have contained three arched entrances corresponding to the three mihrābs in the west wall. The number of domes roofing the structure would then be equal to the number of front doors multiplied by the ones on each side, that is, six in all. Such an arrangement, first initiated by the mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzi at Tribeni may reasonably be applied to the Dhunichak mosque and thereby the problem of the number of domes may be solved.

The Rājibī Mosque (Pl. XIX:2). It is a single-domed square mosque with a verandah in front and conforms to the Chāmkātti mosque in general plan and architectural details. The mosque is built of brick and stands between Bālúa Dighi and Khānia Dighi to the south-east of the Kotwāli Darwāza. The main prayer hall measures 28 feet square inside, roofed over by a bowl-shaped dome supported on corner pendentives. The verandah is covered by three domes. The total measurement of the mosque including the verandah is 62 feet by 42 feet. There are six octagonal towers at the corners -- four at the corners of the main hall and two of the verandah. The mosque is entered by

three arched doors in the east wall and one each in the north and south walls. The west wall inside is faced with ashlar masonry wherein there is a single niched mihrāb. Earlier photograph of the mosque (Pl. XIX, no. 2) shows it in ruins, but the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Bangladesh, restored the structure in recent past. The date of the mosque is not known, as no inscription has been assigned to it. But on stylistic grounds, the mosque falls in the restored Ilyās Shāhī period.¹

Exterior decoration. The wall surface shows the characteristic offsets and recesses and was originally decorated with terracotta ornaments. The west wall outside along its entire breadth showed in the past terracotta decoration of vegetal motifs. Remnants of these decorations were visible till recently.² The ruinous corner towers in the south-west and north-west showed mouldings at the base. Between the mouldings were noticed remnants of terracotta decoration consisting of motifs of jali work, creeper frieze and arched niches with rosettes and plants inside. Both the offsets and recesses contained ornamental panels above and below the string-course that cut across the wall surface horizontally. The panels in the recesses were sunk in the wall and showed floriate terracotta hanging

¹Dani holds a similar view. See A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 112.

²The writer saw these ornamentations in a ruinous condition in the year 1974 when he visited the mosque for the first time.

motifs suspended from keystone of multi-foil arches supported on ornamental banded pillars. There were rosettes in the spandrels surrounded by vegetal shoots. The panels were bordered by a spiralling creeper design with a rosette in each convolution. The mouldings that enclosed the panels below and above showed terracotta lozenge on their face and a creeper design in the interstice. A frieze of ornamental merlons impressed with plant motifs surmounted each panel. The recesses also showed a series of triple mouldings at the base. The interspaces between these mouldings were filled in with arched niches having plant motifs, jali pattern and creeper frieze inside. The faces of the mouldings were impressed with terracotta lozenge. Above the mouldings, ran a row of ornamental merlons depicting vegetal elements.

The panels on the offsets were of similar design with those of the recesses, but bigger in size. The entrance arches open in the recesses and contain a terracotta rosette in each spandrel. The string-course showed upright and inverted merlons above and below respectively. These merlons were impressed with plant motifs of delicate execution.

The cornice of the mosque showed triple mouldings with terracotta ornamentation between; at the bottom was a necklace-and-tassel design, in the middle, a jali pattern and in the topmost, a pattern of arched niches filled in with rosettes, all in terracotta.

Interior decoration. The decoration of the mihrāb panel was done by stone carving. There are two rosettes in the spandrels surrounded by vegetal elements. These are sorely decayed due to the quality of the granite on which the ornamentation was carved. There is an inscription tablet fixed above the mihrāb, but the writing is so badly worn out that it has defied decipherment till now.

The triangular spaces between the dome arches are each embossed with a large terracotta rosette. The dome base has a jali design below an ornamental moulding impressed with an inter-connected bell pattern. Above the moulding, runs a frieze of merlons impressed with terracotta plant motifs.

General observations. The original decorations of the mosque are now almost a thing of the past. The ravages of the weather mercilessly affected the monument and physically harmed the verandah to extinction. The terracotta ornamentations, which must have made the mosque an elegant structure in the past, suffered worse battering. In recent past, the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Bangladesh, took up the restoration of the monument by raising the front verandah and the corner towers and treating the wrecked dome. In the process, the remnants of the original terracotta facings have been peeled off. The restoration work is still in progress.

The appearance of the ashlar masonry on the inner face of the qibla wall of the mosque poses a problem of identifying its

purpose and time. There is no other known example of a purely similar kind of walling in the Muslim architecture of Bengal, although stone facing of brick core, inside and outside, was a style of construction during the Husain Shāhī period. The inscription fixed above the mihrāb appears on the face to be of contemporary date with the ashlar masonry, but its illegibility has precluded the dating. Probably, the ashlar facing was a later addition, but at any rate, its provision has marred the interior beauty of the mosque.

(ii) Monuments at Khalifatabad

Contemporaneous with the Ilyās Shāhī monuments at Gaur, is a group of buildings, mostly mosques, erected far away from the capital in the region of Barisal, Patuakhali, Khulna and Jessore, known as Khalīfatābād, in south-eastern Bengal. Built of brick, these buildings reveal an admixture of influence coming from Sultānī Gaur and imperial Delhi. Known as what Dani¹ and others² call "the Khān Jahān Style", this group of buildings share with Gaur monuments brick fabric, thick walls, curved cornice, massive structure and terracotta ornamentation. In other respects, such as the tapering round corner towers, multi-domes and austerity of wall surface, the influence of the Tughlūq architecture of

¹ A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 141.

² F.A. Khan, "Development of Archaeology in Bangladesh", JVRM, I (1972), p. 16.

Delhi is discernible.¹ Some of the buildings also betray influence coming from Persia in certain of their elements. The remains of a large number of these buildings, said to have been erected by Khān Jahān² (d. 1459), most probably an administrator-general of the Ilyās Shāhī rulers, are now scattered over Khalī-fatābād. The atmospheric salinity of the region together with human piracy have caused most of their undoing. But those that still survive constitute a large number to enable a fair study of their architecture and ornamentation. The existing examples are mostly located at Bāgerhāt³ from where Khān Jahān ruled the conquered region. These include the Ṣāṭ-Gumbad Mosque, the Ten-domed Mosque, the Bibī Begnī Mosque, the Ronbijoypur Mosque, the Singrā Mosque, the Chunā Kholā Mosque and the Mosque of Zinda Pīr, all at Bāgerhāt, while sporadic survivals from other areas of Khalīfatābād are the Masjīdkur Mosque in Khulna district, the Qaṣba Mosque in Barisal district and the Godār Mosque at

¹ Percy Brown, op. cit., Pls. XII and XV.

² Khān Jahān (d. 1459) flourished in the middle of the 15th century during the reign of Sultān Naṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd I (1433-59), the restorer of the Ilyās Shāhī rule in Bengal. He conquered the region of south-eastern Bengal and founded Khalīfatābād. (Cf. JASB, XXXVI, Pt. I (1867), p. 135; L.S.S. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers; Khulna (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1908), pp. 26-27; HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 131.

³ Modern Bāgerhāt is an administrative Sub-division in the district of Khulna. It has been identified with Havelī-Khalī-fatābād (Clearance for the residence of the Viceroy) by Blochmann. (Cf. JASB, XLII, Pt. I (1873), p. 227). Bari holds that Havelī-Khalīfatābād was the centre from where Khān Jahān administered the conquered region. (Cf. Muhammad 'Abdul Bari, Khalīfatābād: A Study of Its History and Monuments (Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, University of Rajshahi, 1980), p. 43).

Barabāzār in Jessore district. Almost all of these buildings are undated,¹ but are ascribed to the middle of the 15th century. Most of these surviving examples are sadly battered physically and show a bruished surface and as such their ornamentation has disappeared. The few that are still in somewhat fair state of existence have austere wall surface. Except for a single instance of stone carving in the central mihrāb of the Sāt-Gumbad Mosque, the ornamentation of these buildings was done in terracotta which remain largely confined to the entrance doorways, mihrāb panels, cornice bands and dome base. In respect of ornamental themes and their setting, these buildings generally imitated the monuments of Gaur and Pānduā, but appear to lack in the high state of excellence attained by the latter. Mentionable examples of this group of buildings, for our purpose, are the Sāt-Gumbad Mosque, the Nine-domed Mosque, the Ronbijoypur Mosque, all at Bāgerhāt, and the Masjidkur Mosque at Āmadī also in Khulna district.

The Sāt-Gumbad Mosque at Bāgerhāt (Pls. XX -XXI:3). It is the best representative example of the Khān Jahān style. The building of this mosque is universally attributed to Khān Jahān (d. 1459). It is an oblong multi-domed structure built of brick

¹Only two buildings of the whole group of the Khalīfatābād monuments, viz., the tomb of Khān Jahān and that of Muhammad Tahir, both at Bāgerhāt, contain dating inscriptions. (JASB, XXXVI, Pt. I (1867), p. 135; O'Malley, op. cit., pp. 135-36, and 166; S. Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 64-67.

and measures 160 feet by 108 feet externally having very thick walls. The mosque is entered by eleven arched doorways in the east wall and seven each in the north and south walls. There is also a postern door in the back wall immediately to the north of the central bay. There are four circular tapering towers at the corners. These towers rise above the parapet wall and are crowned with small domes. Corresponding to the archways in the east wall, there are semi-circular mihrābs recessed in the west wall, except that occupied by the postern gate. The space inside the mosque is divided into seven longitudinal aisles and eleven deep bays. Consequently, there are 77 compartments interiorly, of which those of the nave, numbering seven are of oblong shape, roofed over by cau-cālā covering and the side ones numbering 70 are of square formation and covered with cup-shaped domes. The wall surface in the north, south and west outside is variegated with vertical offsets and recesses. The doorways in the north and south walls open within the offsets, while the projections in the west wall serve as response to the mihrābs inside. The mosque has the usual curved cornice and battlements, but in the east wall over the central doorway is seen a triangular pediment - a peculiar element in Bengal architecture. There is no inscription recording the date of its erection, but the mosque is traditionally ascribed to Khān Jahān. Except the stone carvings on the central mihrāb, the decoration of the mosque was executed in terracotta.

Exterior decoration. The two-centred arched doorways in the east wall open within rectangles slightly recessed in the wall. The spandrels of the arches show terracotta rosettes below triple ornamental mouldings. The central doorway has retained its decoration in fairly good condition. Here the mouldings show decoration in terracotta in the following manner: the lowest moulding depicts a row of hanging twigs, the middle, a frieze of lozenge and rosette occurring alternately, and the topmost is impressed with a row of four-petalled flowers. The inter-space between the upper mouldings is decorated with a scroll having lotus flowers in the convolutions, while the lower inter-space depicts a row of tri-lobed arched niches which are filled in with plant and floral elements such as palm trees, leafy plants, rosettes etc. The whole composition is crowned with a beautiful triangular pediment, whose ornamentation has totally disappeared. The archway is flanked on either side in the upper part by a large rosette encircled by four smaller rosettes. The other entrance arches in the east wall are decorated exteriorly with more or less similar terracotta ornaments.

The outer surface of the walls on all sides except the east is relieved with offset projections which are pierced with arched passage in the north and south walls within recessed rectangles. The keystone of each arch is here embossed with an upright terracotta diamond flanked on either side by a rosette in the spandrels. Above the spandrels, are ornamental mouldings whose

decoration has disappeared, but which probably consisted of plant and floral motifs like those in the east wall. The oblong narrow recessed chases in the north, south and west walls are now plain, but it is probable that they had base mouldings in the past like those seen in the Nine-domed Mosque, and that these base mouldings were decorated with terracotta ornaments.

The projected cornice of the mosque and the ornamental bands of the corner towers are decorated with terracotta lozenge. But it is the interior of the mosque which has preserved richer ornamentation.

Interior decoration. The spandrels of the entrance arches depict on their back face various ornamental motifs in terracotta. Some of these show beaded necklace with lotus inside, some interlocking pattern containing diamonds, while some others have intersecting creepers bearing flowers.

The west wall contains ten niched mihrābs opened under engrailed arches. The central mihrāb is made of grey sandstone and shows carving in the characteristic Muslim shallow relief. The carved motifs include mostly plant and vegetal elements which are also found in terracotta in the brick mihrābs. Most of the decorations on the brick mihrābs have been eaten up by the atmospheric salinity of the region and some have totally disappeared. The remnants show their likeness and affinity with the Gaur and Pānduā examples. The mihrāb arches are

supported on octagonal banded pillars with square base. The bands were decorated in the past with terracotta lozenge and rosette, traces of which still survive. The square bases of the pillars show upright triangles. The facets of the pillars are impressed with intersecting scrolls, which have formed loops filled in with rosettes. The arch spandrels show terracotta rosettes above vegetal elements. The mihrāb niches are disposed into horizontal panels, each filled in with a different terracotta motif. The third niche from the north retains the decoration in fairly good condition. It shows six horizontal sunken panels. The panels are separated from each other by raised brick mouldings which show terracotta lozenge and rosette decorating their face. The panels depict in descending order florid motifs, interlacing scrolls, intersecting scrolls with rosettes in the loops, floral scrolls, interlocking pattern and diamond in terracotta relief.

The inner face of the north and south walls show small decorative niches under cusped arch. These were perhaps meant as lanterns for burning lamps at night. There is a couple of mouldings above the niches. The mouldings are impressed with terracotta rosettes alternating with diamonds. The inter-spaces depict floral scrolls.

The interior of the cau-cālā vaults also show terracotta ornamentation. The compartments of the vault ceiling produced by the intersecting rafters and horizontal bands are decorated at

intervals with terracotta rosettes. The ridge of the vault shows three large rosettes. The cup-shaped domes over the flanking bays of the nave show characteristic Bengali pendentives at the corners. The dome-ring inside depicts terracotta lozenge above a jali frieze, also in terracotta.

General observations. The terracotta ornamentation of the Sat-Gumbad Mosque is in ruins. But for repeated repairs,¹ the structure of the mosque itself must have suffered similar fate with the ornamentation. The existing remains of the terracottas are those executed originally. The motifs show no newness in themes; they merely repeat the examples of the contemporary Gaur style. The ornamental motifs that appear in the mosque such as lotuses, lotus petals, rosettes, cusped arch, necklace, lozenge, chain-and-pendant, scrolls, creepers, diamonds, interlocking and intersecting patterns etc. were universally used in the early Muslim monuments of Bengal. The similarity of these motifs with contemporary Gaur examples may help in establishing the political relationship between Khalīfatābād and Gaur. However, the delicate arabesque designs and the rich composition of the entrance and the mihrāb panels of the Gaur monuments are conspicuous by their absence from the Ṣāt-Gambad Mosque. The reason for this could perhaps be sought in different groups of artists working in the two centres with differential skill. It is natural that the

¹ ASIAR, 1917-18, p. 9; 1929-30, p. 44; 1930-34, p. 37.

skilled in the art were engaged in royal commissions. A novel feature appears in the mosque in the decoration of the vault ceiling which was subsequently followed in the vaults of the Chhota Sonā Masjid (1493-1519) at Gaur. The provision of small ornamental niches on the inner face of the north and south walls of the mosque is here seen for the first time in the Muslim architecture of Bengal and is a feature of local influence.¹

The Nine-domed mosque (Pl. XXII:1). The mosque stands within a quarter mile of the tomb of Khān Jahān in the south-west. It is a brick-built square structure with round banded towers at the corners and measures 54'10" each side externally. The walls are 7'8" thick. The wall surface on all sides shows offsets and recessed chases. There are three arched openings in the east, north and south walls. The arched entrances open within the recessed chases having triple mouldings above. All the entrances in the east wall and the central ones in the north and south walls are enclosed within broad rectangular panels. The recessed chases containing the entrance arches in the side walls end at the top in pointed arched engrailing below the cornice. The other recesses in the north, south and west walls also have similar arch engrailing above and ornamental mouldings at the bottom. The

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Similar interior niches may be seen in the surviving Buddhist temples at Maināmati in Comilla district (7th-12th century) and Pāhārpur in Rajshahi district (c. 800 A.D.).

mosque interior is divided into three aisles and three bays by two rows of stone pillars, two in each row. Consequently, the mosque is roofed over by nine domes, one over each square bay. The domes are supported by intersecting pointed arches. Corresponding to the three doors in the east façade, the west wall is recessed with three enrailed arched mihrābs of which the central one is larger than the flanking ones. The decoration of the mosque has been entirely done in terracotta. The mosque is undated but is generally ascribed to mid 15th century.

Exterior decoration. Like other buildings of the Khān Jahān style, the ornamentation on the exterior of the Nine-domed Mosque has suffered most from the decaying effect of salinity of the region and largely disappeared leaving only traces here and there. The borders of the central arch in the east wall is decorated with terracotta net-pattern. The spandrels of the arches are now bare, but it is probable that these were decorated with terracotta ornaments in the past. The triple mouldings over the arches show traces of jali work on their face and scroll motifs in the inter-spaces. The mouldings at the base of the recesses in the north, south and west walls are faced with terracotta lozenge. The inter-spaces between these mouldings show designs of alternate rosettes and diamonds and also scrolls having rosettes in their bends. The double mouldings at the cornice imitate the curve of the parapet and have greatly added to the beauty of the structure. These are impressed with terracotta

lozenge friezes that run all round the building embracing the corner towers within their fold. The sunken inter-space between the cornice mouldings show vacant square niches in the north wall. Similar niches probably existed all round the cornice in the past and contained terracotta ornaments. Below the cornice mouldings, runs a mat pattern.

The round corner towers have been made graceful with eight ornamental bands, the topmost two having been enclosed within the cornice mouldings. Of the remaining ones, the middle four are impressed with a lozenge frieze set between horizontal rows of lotus petals. The lowest mouldings depict a pellet design, while all the inter-spaces on the towers have rows of lozenge in terracotta relief.

Interior decoration. The mihrāb panels in the west wall are the most decorated parts of the mosque. The mihrāb niches are contained within double rectangular frames, the outer showing terracotta interlocking designs, while the inner depicts a chess-board pattern in brick-setting. The lintels of the frames have been made elegant with three terracotta rosettes on each of them, one placed at the centre and two at the ends. The inter-space between the frame lintels is filled in with a row of rosettes. The spandrels of the central mihrāb arch depict a terracotta tree bearing flowers, while those of the flanking mihrābs have blown lotus embossed on them. The semi-circular niches dissolve into

six horizontal sunken panels, each separated from the other by a raised band impressed with terracotta lozenge and lotus-petal frieze. These panels are decorated with various terracotta motifs consisting of necklace, lotus palmettes and different types of interlocking patterns. Across the middle of these panels, hangs down a terracotta chain with an ornate rectangular pendant. The pendant is embossed with vegetal elements. The mihrāb frames are crowned with a row of ornamental merlons. The side mihrābs are decorated in similar manner with slight variation in the arrangement of the ornamental motifs.

The back face of all the entrance arches also shows ornamentation in terracotta. The spandrels depict lotus flowers and the keystone of the arches is embossed with an upright diamond which is impressed with a rosette contained inside a square. High up above the arches, are three moulded bands, each ornamented with a frieze of rosettes set between lotus petals below and above. The inter-spaces between the mouldings show terracotta necklace, scrolls and floral patterns.

The central mihrāb is flanked on either side at some height by an engrailed arched alcove surmounted by two decorative mouldings. These mouldings show terracotta lozenge on their face. The inter-space between them contains traces of past decoration, decayed beyond identification at present. Similar alcoves decorate the inner face of the north and south walls and they are so arranged that one alcove is placed on either side of a brick pilaster. Each pilaster is relieved with five narrow

bands arranged in tiers, each of which is impressed with a single decorative motif. The motifs include lozenge, four-petalled flowers and eight-petalled flowers in terracotta.

General observations. The nine-domed Mosque is a magnificent example of the Khān Jahān style of architecture in Khalīfatābād. Besides containing the general peculiarities associated with the style, the mosque shows some novel features which have enhanced the architectural effect of the structure. The thin recessed chases on the wall surface terminate in engrailed arches below the cornice. This feature already appeared in the early Muslim architecture of Persia and is seen in the north domed-chamber of the Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Iṣfahān (1088)¹ and the Minaret of Gulpaygan (c. 12th century).² The mat pattern below the cornice mouldings in this mosque also has its precedent in Persian decorative scheme where it occurred in the south-east iwān of the Masjid-i-Jāmi' at Iṣfahān (12th century) and the shrine of Bayāzīd at Bisṭām (1120).³ In the circumstances, Persian influence on the Khalīfatābād architecture is obvious.

The terracottas of the mosque, like other monuments of Khalifatabad, imitate the common motifs used in the Gaur style, but unlike the latter, is of poor artistic quality.

¹A.U. Pope, Persian Architecture: The Triumph of Form and Colour (New York: George Brazeller, 1965), Pl. 109.

²Derek Hill & Oleg Graber, Islamic Architecture and Its Decoration (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), Pl. 286.

³A.U. Pope, op. cit., Pls. 108 and 167.

The Ronbijoypur Mosque (Pl. XXII:2). Locally known as Faḡīrbāri mosque and also Ronbijoypur mosque, this structure stands within a furlong to the north of the tomb of Khān Jahān (d. 1459) in Bāgerhāt. Built of brick with walls of unusual thickness of 9 feet, the mosque is a single-domed square building of 54 feet a side externally. There are four round banded-towers at the corners and a single moulding at the curved cornice. Each of the east, south and north walls gives way to three arched entrances, the middle arch being bigger than the flanking ones. All the archways are a little recessed in the wall with an ornamental moulding above. Corresponding to the three entrances in the east wall, there are three arched mihrābs in the west wall. Like the central archway, the central mihrāb is broader and larger in size than the side ones. The central mihrāb is responded outside by a rectangular projection rising up to the cornice. The interior of the mosque walls is spanned by eight arches rising from brick pilasters, a system initiated by the Chāmkāṭṭi mosque at Gaur.¹ The single dome of the mosque rests on these arches. The dome of the mosque was exteriorly decorated with circular rows of brick offsets in the past, now plastered smooth.

Decoration. Like other monuments of the Khān Jahān style, the ornamentation of the mosque was done in terracotta. However, the decoration on the outer surface of the mosque has almost

¹A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 105.

disappeared leaving sparse traces on the mouldings above the archways, cornice band and the bands on the corner towers. The cornice band and the mouldings atop the entrances are impressed with friezes of terracotta lozenge. The mouldings on the corner towers show triangles and lozenges.

The mihrāb niches open under engrailed pointed arches supported on brick pilasters. Each arch is set within a slightly sunk rectangular panel. Inside the panel and above the arch spandrels, there are two projected brick mouldings which show terracotta lozenge on their face. The inter-spaces of these mouldings are enlivened with floral scrolls in terracotta relief. The spandrels of the central arch are now bare, but probably had decoration in the past. The panel is surmounted by a frieze of ornamental merlons. The interior of the semi-circular niche of the central mihrāb is divided into seven 'vertical' registers by means of raised bands. Each of the bands shows a terracotta decorative motif; the first from the top depicts a row of lozenge, each being separated from the other by a thin vertical line; the second and the fifth mouldings are impressed with triangles; the third and the sixth show rows of alternate lozenge and rosette; the fourth band has a row of rosettes only, while the seventh depicts a frieze of hanging flowers. The sunken inter-spaces between the mouldings have terracotta decoration in the following order from the top: the first shows a net pattern; the second, a floral scroll; the third, intersecting scrolls with

rosettes in the loops, and the decorations of all others have disappeared. Across the bands and panels hangs down a stylized chain-and-pendant also in terracotta.

The side mihrābs have similar decorative composition except variation in the number of decorative panels and bands in the niches and ornamental moulding above the arch spandrels. The central mihrāb is flanked on either side by an engrailed arched niche. Similar ornamental niches also occur on the inner face of the north and south walls. The brick pilasters that support the arches for the dome base are decorated with intermittent mouldings showing triangle motif in relief.

General observations. The Ranbijoypur Mosque is a significant example of the Khān Jahān style¹ and betrays unmistakable Persian influence in the decoration of its dome. The dome surface in the past showed decoration with circular rows of bricks set corner-wise. The technique appeared in the Muslim architecture of Persia quite at an early date, represented by the dome over the brick-built square tomb of Ismā'īl the Samanid (d. 907) at Bukhara. The structural, material and decorative similarity of the Ranbijoypur Mosque with the Samanid tomb leaves little doubt about the Persian influence on the Muslim architecture of Bengal.²

¹Pakistan Archaeology, 5 (1968), p. 241.

²Cf. A.B.M. Husain, "The Ornamentation of the Sultani Architecture of Bengal", Silpakala, I (1978), p. 6. For the photograph of the Samanid tomb, see A.U. Pope, op. cit., Pl. 77.

But unfortunately, this historic ornamental feature of the mosque has been destroyed by plastering the dome smooth during restorations¹ and thus its original character has disappeared. It is a certain example of mis-judged restoration works which may have killed the real character of many historic cultural objects in Bengal.²

The terracotta ornamentation of the mosque imitates the Gaur style, but in a poor manner. The fineness and delicacy of the terracottas seen in the Gaur monuments, such as at the Darasbāri Mosque, the Tāntipārā Mosque, the Dhunichak Mosque, etc. are conspicuously absent from the Ronbijoypur Mosque. The massiveness of the mosque structure badly compares with the purpose³ and size of the structure, and except for the decorated dome already referred to, nothing else is noteworthy of the mosque.

The Masjidkur Mosque (Pl. XXIII:1). The mosque stands in the village Masjidkur⁴ under Pāikgāchā Police station in Khulna district and is stylistically related to the Sāt-Gumbad mosque

¹ Restoration work to the mosque was carried from 1964 through 1969 and again in 1972-73. See Muhammad Abdul Bari, op. cit., pp. 182, f.n. 2 and 183 f.n. 1.

² The Darasbāri Mosque (1479) at Gaur and the Goāldi Mosque (16th century) in Dacca district have suffered loss of original character due to thoughtless restoration and unskilled workmanship.

³ Bari's comparison of the mosque with the Dākhlī Darwāza at Gaur is a bad analogy, since the purposes of the structures were contrastingly different. (Cf. Muhammad Abdul Bari, op. cit., p. 183).

⁴ Traditions relate that the pioneer cultivators of the Sundarbans discovered the mosque from under the earth while clearing jungles along the river Kobadak and named the place as Masjidkur or 'the digging out of a mosque'. Cf. L.S.S. O'Malley, op. cit., p. 183; ASIAR, 1923-24, p. 32.

at Bagerhat. Built of brick, the mosque is square in plan measuring 54 feet 9 inches a side externally. The walls are 7 feet 4 inches thick. There are four round corner towers, each having three other bands except the one at the cornice. The wall surface at the corners shows recessed chases. The mosque is entered by three arched doorways in the east, north and south walls, the middle one being larger than the side ones. The doorways are a little recessed in the wall masonry with mouldings above the arch. There are three arched mihrābs in the west wall, each enclosed within a rectangular frame. The central mihrāb shows projection along the entire height of the wall outside. The parapet and the cornice of the mosque show characteristic Bengali convexity. The interior of the mosque is divided into nine equal bays by two rows of stone pillars, two in each row. There is a cup-shaped dome over each bay. There is no inscription in the mosque, but it is ascribed to mid 15th century.

Exterior decoration. Like other monuments of Khalifatābād, the Masjidkur mosque suffered the wear and tear of time, and due further to repeated repairs done to the structure,¹ it has lost much of its original elegance of terracotta ornamentation. The entrance arches have their spandrels embossed with terracotta rosettes. Above the spandrels, are placed two mouldings horizontally, the inter-space between being decorated with floral scrolls.

¹ASIAR, 1923-24, p. 32; 1924-25, p. 38; Unpublished Manuscript File No. 14-A, 1972-73, preserved in the office of the Superintendent of Archaeology, Government of Bangladesh, Dacca, quoted by Muhammad Abdul Bari, op. cit., p. 163, f.n. 3 and 4.

Atop these mouldings is a big rosette having smaller rosettes at its four axes. The other doorways also show similar decoration with terracotta rosettes. Higher above the central entrance in the east wall, is a decorative arched niche set within a rectangular frame ornamented with terracotta net pattern. The frame is flanked by a row of rosettes on each side. At each end of the wall outside, is a vertical recess with a moulding at the bottom.

The cornice shows a single moulding impressed with terracotta lozenge, each lozenge set between two thin vertical lines. Underneath the moulding, is a frieze of terracotta rosettes ending at the corners in jali design which encloses the corner towers at the neck. The decoration of the corner towers is confined to the mouldings on the shaft. The designs wrought show terracotta lozenge and rosettes.

Interior decoration. The mihrāb arches are enclosed within rectangular frames which show terracotta jali work interspersed with small rosettes. Above the frame, is a boldly projected band impressed with a row of eight-petalled flowers, each sandwiched between lotus petals. The ornamentation of the semi-circular niches has decayed beyond recognition. The composition of the mihrāb panels is surmounted by a centrally placed large rosette encircled by eight smaller rosettes, in terracotta relief. The brick pilasters contain raised bands, each of which is ornamented with alternate rosette and lozenge. At the base, the pilasters

show a triangle motif above a frieze of petals. The entrance arches on their back face are embossed with two terracotta tiered rosettes in the spandrels.

General observations. The mosque illustrates the characteristics of the Khān Jahān style in thick walls, round corner towers, brick masonry, curved cornice, low entrance and terracotta ornamentation. But it has lost most of its decoration owing to the severe salinity of the region where it stands. When first built, the mosque must have been a beautiful architectural piece. The decorative niche flanked by rosettes above the central doorway in the east wall of the mosque recalls similar feature employed in the Dākhil Darwāza at Gaur, built contemporaneously. This ornamental element appears in the pre-Islamic architecture of Persia and could be seen in the Sasanian Palace at Bishāpur (3rd century A.D.).¹ The feature then constitutes another element of Persian influence on the Muslim architecture of Bengal. In fact, Sultānī Bengal's cultural² and diplomatic³ relation with Persia is also borne out historically.

¹ See A.U. Pope, op. cit., p. 60, Pl. 48.

² See HB, vol. II, op. cit.; p. 117; Abid Ali, op. cit., pp. 25-27; Riyāz-us-Salātin, trans. by Akbaruddin (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1974), pp. 83-84.

³ Charles Stewart, op. cit., pp. 111-13. JASB, XVIII, No. I (1952), pp. 168, f.n. 1.

(iii) Monuments of Other Places

Besides the monuments at Khalifatabād, away from the city of Gaur, there are evidences¹ of a large number of buildings erected in different parts of Bengal during the restored Ilyās Shāhī period. The surviving examples of this group include the Gopālganj Mosque in Dinajpur district, dated A.H. 865 (1460 A.D.),² the Masjidbāri Mosque in Patuakhālī district, dated A.H. 870 (1465-66 A.D.),³ the Sālik Mosque at Bashirhāt in the 24-Parganas, dated A.H. 871 (1466-67 A.D.),⁴ the Hāthazārī Mosque in Chittagong district, dated A.H. 878 (1474 A.D.),⁵ the Chhota Pānduā Mosque in Hooghly district, dated A.H. 882 (1477 A.D.),⁶ Majlis Sāhib's Mosque at Kalna in Burdwan district,⁷ Bābā Ādam's Mosque at Rāmpāl in Dacca district, dated A.H. 888 (1483 A.D.),⁸ and the Satgāon Mosque in Hooghly district, dated A.H. 892

¹ See S. Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 319-23.

² JASB, XLII (1873), pp. 272-74.

³ JASB, 1860, pp. 406-07; J.C. Jack, Bengal District Gazetteers, Bakarganj (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1918), pp. 151-52.

⁴ PASB, VI (1910), p. 29; JBORS, IV (1918), pp. 179-80, Pl. II.

⁵ JBORS, IV (1918), p. 181.

⁶ JASB, XLIV (1875), pp. 275-76, Pl. VI, No. I; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., pp. 124-26.

⁷ JISOA, IX (1941), p. 24.

⁸ JASB, XLII (1873), pp. 284-85; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 135; JASB, XVII (1889), pp. 17-27, Pl. V.

(1487 A.D.),¹ All these buildings must have once been richly decorated with terracotta in imitation of the monuments of Gaur, besides having structural affinity with them. But most of these survive as the result of repeated repairs and restorations so that they have lost their original character. Only the Mosque of Bābā Ādam at Rāmpāl retains somewhat its original terracotta decoration, despite casual repairs done to the structure.

The Mosque of Bābā Ādam (Pl. XXIII:2). The mosque is one of the surviving examples of a number of buildings erected during the restored Ilyās Shāhī period across the territory of Bengal. Others of this group² have suffered almost total change of their original character, and hence are not worthy of mention for our purpose. The mosque of Bābā Ādam³ at Rāmpāl in the district of Dacca, though renovated, retains its old features almost intact. According to an inscription⁴ fixed above the central doorway, the mosque was built in A.H. 888 (1483 A.D.) during the reign of Sultān Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh (1481-86). It is an oblong brick-built structure measuring 43 ft. by 36 ft. with octagonal towers at the four corners. The walls show offsets and recessed chases,

¹JASB, XXXIX (1870), pp. 93-94; SPP, XV (1316 B.S.) pp. 30-31, Text No. 6.

²See Supra, p. 232.

³The mosque is traditionally associated with the name of a Muslim saint, Baba Adam Shahid, who is buried nearby and is said to have lost his life in a fight against the local Hindu King, Vallala Sena, father of Lakhman Sena, the traditional founder of Lakhnauti. See JASB, XLII (1873), p. 285.

⁴Ibid.; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 135; S. Ahmed, op. cit., p. 118.

the latter having ornamental mouldings at the base. The parapet and the cornice are curved in the Bengali fashion. There are three entrance doorways in the east façade and correspondingly, the west wall contains three arched mihrābs, the central one being bigger than the side ones. The east façade shows two ornamental panels set above between the arched doorways. The interior of the mosque is divided into two longitudinal aisles and three bays by two stone pillars. The roof is covered by six domes supported on arches rising from the stone pillars and wall pilasters. The north and south walls each shows two arched niches. The building represents the multi-domed variety of the Sultānī mosques in Bengal.

Exterior decoration. The ornamentation of the mosque, inside and outside, was done entirely in terracotta, much of which disappeared long ago. All the doorway arches are two-centred pointed, equal in height and open within rectangular panels slightly recessed in the wall. The central doorway shows triple horizontal mouldings above the arch spandrels with sunken inter-spaces between, which are now empty. The mouldings show traces of terracotta lozenge on their face. The side archways have only two mouldings above, their inter-spaces showing empty rectangular niches. Between the doorways, occur two ornamental rectangular panels at the level of the arch springing. Each of these panels contains an engrailed pointed arch with spearheads supported on decorative banded pillars. The arch spandrels are embossed with

two terracotta rosettes. The arch soffits were decorated with terracotta creepers in the past, whose traces are faintly visible. Inside each arch, hangs a terracotta chain-and-pendant. The pendant is of rectangular shape and is impressed with a floral motif inside a circle. The panels are a little recessed into the wall and end upward in double mouldings. The entire entrance composition is contained within a slightly projected framework. The wall surface between this projection and the corner towers shows a recess at each end. These recesses are decorated with quadruple mouldings at the base surmounted by a frieze of blind merlons. The west wall outside along its height is variegated with offsets and recessed chases, besides the projection of the central mihrāb. The recesses are decorated with a series of mouldings at the base. There are no ornamentations on these mouldings at present, but it is very likely that they contained terracotta decorative motifs in the past.

The central mihrāb projects externally in a rectangular brick masonry along the height of the wall up to the cornice. The projection is decorated with a terracotta panel placed on its western face. The panel contains an engrailed arched niche inside. The arch is supported on banded pillars with two rosettes in the spandrels. The niche depicts a terracotta chain-and-pendant. The panel shows traces of scroll design in its border.

The octagonal corner towers end at the level of the roof and show quadruple mouldings at the base and an ornamental string-course in the middle. The base mouldings are surmounted by a row of blind merlons, while below the string-course runs a frieze of arched niches filled in with terracotta rosettes and plants. The cornice shows a single moulding above a frieze of arched niches, now empty.

Interior decoration. The three mihrābs in the west wall are all decorated with terracotta designs. Each mihrāb niche opens under an engrailed pointed arch supported on octagonal banded brick pillars. Five facets of the pillars are visible outside and each of these contains a floriate pendant hung from a chain and flanked on either side by a lotus stem ending in an inverted petal, all in terracotta relief. The bands are impressed with terracotta creeper and lozenge motifs. The mihrāb niche appears to have been very ornate in the past, but most of the decoration has disappeared. The niche depicts an ornamental moulding below the alcove. The moulding shows a frieze of terracotta lozenge on its face sunk between two thin raised horizontal lines. Below the moulding hangs a chain ending in a rectangular pendant whose decoration has disappeared.

The arch soffit shows a twisting creeper between two thin mouldings which depict a series of inverted lotus petals on their face. The spandrels are embossed with two terracotta rosettes above which runs a horizontal panel. The panel is divided into

small rectangular niches filled in with blown lotus and other floral motifs. Above the panel, are two horizontal mouldings, the upper showing a frieze of terracotta rosettes and the lower, a triangle motif with a projected boss in the centre, distantly recalling the Kirtimukha in Indian Hindu art. All these ornamental compositions of the mihrābs are enclosed within a broad rectangular frame decorated with a scroll design in terracotta. At some height above, occurs a projected brick moulding surmounted by a row of merlons impressed with plant motifs. The inter-space between the frame lintel and the moulding shows a frieze of alternate terracotta necklace and tassel.

The pilasters carrying the arches for the domes are ornamented with triangle motifs in brick carving at their base. The pendentives at the dome base are built up of horizontal oversailing courses of bricks set corner-wise. The dome ring depicts a terracotta lozenge frieze above a jali design.

General observations. The general effect of the mosque, inside and out, is at the same time restful and varied. The projecting framework enclosing the arched doorways produces the effect of light and shade and is further diversified by the intermediate ornamental terracotta panels. The recessed grooves in the wall surface with their base mouldings, though bereft of any decoration at present, relieve the eye of monotonous look and have added to the charm of the mosque. The ornamental terracotta panel on the face of the mihrāb projection imitates the example

of the Adina mosque at Hazrat Pānduā and reappeared in many mosques of the Husain Shāhī period, such as in the Latṭan Mosque at Gaur and the mosque of Sāṅkarpāsā (16th century) in Sylhet. The terracotta motifs of the mosque are similar with the ones occurring in the contemporary Gaur monuments. As a whole, the mosque represents the Gaur style of the period far away from the capital.

The six domes of the mosque are all pretty shapely and are each crowned with a novel type of finial resembling the turban-top. Similar finials are features in the Saljūq architecture in Anatolia, an excellent example¹ of which may be seen in the Mosque of 'Alā' al-Dīn at Nigde. In the circumstances, the Sultānī Bengal's cultural relationship with the trans-Indian Muslim countries may reasonably be surmised.

E. The Fīruza Minar (1486-1489 A.D.)
(Pls. XXIV:1-2)

Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh (1481-86), the last Ilyās Shāhī Sultān, was killed by the Habshī unuch Shāh-zāda, who assumed the title of Bārbak Shāh and ascended the throne of Bengal.² The murderer was in turn killed by the Amīrul Umarā Mālik Āndil, whose

¹See Oktay Aslanapa, Turkish Art and Architecture (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1971), Pl. 21.

²HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 138.

loyalty for the fallen house of Ilyās Shāh was unquestionable. Thus the throne fell vacant a second time within months. This time the choice fell upon the commander himself, who sat on the throne with the title of Sayf al-Dīn Fīrūz.¹ "In the dark annals of Abyssinian predominance in Bengal, Fīrūz's reign alone provides a welcome relief."² He was not only a just and efficient ruler, but also a great builder. The Riyāz-us-Salātīn³ records a mosque, a tower and a reservoir erected by him in the city of Gaur. Of these, the tower has survived in fairly good condition. It is a good piece of architecture and shows that the old traditions still shaped the thoughts and ideas of the period. Scholars differ in their opinions regarding the appellation of the tower. To Cunningham, "Fīrūza Minār means simply 'Blue Tower', from the turquoise coloured glaze with which it was faced."⁴ Others take it to refer to Sultān Fīrūz. The purpose of the building has also been differently interpreted.⁵ The tower has no inscription and hence the date of its erection is

¹ HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 139.

² Ibid.

³ Riyāz-us-Salātīn, trans. by Abdus Salam (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, 1975), p. 125.

⁴ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

⁵ See CHI, vol. III, op. cit., p. 607; Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 52; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 59.

uncertain. Dani¹ and Marshall² following the Riyāz and also in consideration of its architectural style ascribe the tower to Sayf al-Dīn Firūz (1486-89). Fergusson³ also ascribes the tower to Sayf al-Dīn Firūz Shāh, but Cunningham⁴ assigns it to Sayf al-Dīn Hamzah Shāh (1410-11).

The tower is located outside the city of Gaur about a mile to the south of the Bāradwārī Mosque. At present, it stands on an embanked earth over which a flight of steps lead to the entrance on the west side. Abid Ali⁵ reports that the basement of the tower was originally faced with polished stones in the form of steps all round, but was filled in with earth in the year 1911. The tower is about 84 feet high⁶ and 62 feet in circumference in the lower storeys with a diameter of 19½ feet.⁷ It is a brick-built structure and resolves into five storeys. The lower three storeys are twelve-sided and of equal dimension, each separated from the other by stone bands. The fourth and fifth storeys are circular in shape and are less and

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 114.

²CHI, vol. III, op. cit., p. 607.

³James Fergusson, A History of Indian and Eastern Architecture (London: John Murray, 1910), p. 260.

⁴ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 58.

⁶James Fergusson, op. cit., p. 259.

⁷ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 59.

less in diameter. Originally, the tower was roofed by a cupola as seen in Creighton's drawing,¹ but it now ends in flat top. In each storey, there is an arched opening corresponding to the entrance doorway. A spiral staircase of 73 steps inside the tower leads to the top storey.

Decoration. The ornamentation of the tower was done by terracotta besides stone carving and glazed tiles, fragments of the latter having been found in the debris at its foot. The entrance doorway which is faced at the top with stone is decorated with three big rosettes in the spandrels. Above, the doorway frame has two horizontal string-mouldings which are surmounted by battlemented designs. The lower three storeys of the tower are separated from each other by two projecting stone bands. Above and below the bands, is a terracotta jali frieze running all round the tower. Each of the facets of the tower in the lower storeys shows an oblong shallow niche decorated with a double-winged chain ending in a rectangular pendant in terracotta. The pendant is impressed with delicate vegetal elements. The upper two circular storeys of the tower are marked off by a projecting stone Chajja. Each circular storey shows three projected mouldings in succession at the base. The mouldings are faced with terracotta lozenge and inter-connected bell friezes. The inter-spaces between them are filled in with terracotta jali

¹Creighton, op. cit., Pl. I; See also JASB, LXIII (1894), p. 88.

work. Above the mouldings, runs a row of ornamental merlons. High up in each storey, is a projected stone band with terracotta jali frieze above and below. The stone band between the fourth and topmost storey^y has beneath it triple horizontal mouldings in succession, the upper inter-space decorated with terracotta jali work, while the lower is empty. Each storey has a two-centred pointed arched doorway facing west, the arch being slightly recessed in the wall within rectangular panel. Neither the panels nor the arch spandrels show any ornamentation at present, but it is probable that these contained terracotta designs in the past. Above the doorways, four in number, in the topmost storey, runs a frieze of ornamental merlons.

General observations. The Firūza Minār is one of the only two surviving towers¹ in the whole history of Muslim architecture in Bengal, the other being the Chhota Pānduā Minār in Hooghly district. The purpose of the tower is not definitely known. The lonely existence of the tower has led some scholars to regard it as a victory tower.² Husain³ is disposed to treat it as a Ma'dhānā on the basis of the walls of a ruined structure found in the mound on the south-western side of the tower, which, he

¹Cf. A.B.M. Husain, The Manara in Indo-Muslim Architecture (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1970), pp. 16 and 63-66.

²Cf. Fergusson, op. cit., p. 360; Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 52; A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 115.

³A.B.M. Husain, op. cit., p. 66.

thinks, was a mosque. His arguments appear more cogent since they tally with the information given by the Riyāz¹ that "a mosque, a tower and a reservoir" were erected by Firūz Shāh and the topography of the location confirms it.

The terracotta decoration of the tower is restrained but graceful. The bold mouldings on the shaft are pleasantly contrasted with the terracotta jali work executed on the tower. The double-winged chain-and-pendant on the facets of the lower storeys give an impression of added height to the structure and herein the artists succeeded commendably well. With tile and terracotta decoration on its shaft and a spiral staircase inside - characteristics typical of the Iranian minārs, the Firūza Minār, no doubt, betrays strong Perso-Iraqi influence.²

F. The Husain Shahi Period (1493-1538 A.D.)

With the death of the Habshī ruler Muzāffar Shāh in 1493 was "closed a dark chapter of Bengal's history."³ The Habshī interregnum had let loose forces that threatened the foundation of peace in the social life of Bengal. The situation demanded

¹Riyāz-us-Salātin, op. cit., p. 125.

²Cf. A.B.M. Husain, "A Study of the Firuza Minar at Gaur", JASP, VIII, No. 2 (1963), p. 70.

³HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 142.

a man who could command the loyalty of all classes of the people and had the ability to restore peace. Such a personality was found in Sayyid Husain, the Wazir of the overthrown Muẓāffar Shāh. Sayyid Husain was proclaimed king in 1493¹ amid people's rejoicings. He founded the Husain Shāhi dynasty (1493-1538), whose rulers ushered in an era of peace, prosperity and cultural activities in Bengal. Under them, Bengal extended its territorial boundary to include the countries up to the confluence of the Gogrā and the Ganges in the west, Chittagong in the east and Kāmrupa in the north.² The country also prospered in trade and commerce, and there occurred significant developments in respect of religion and literature, and the genius of the Bengali people reached its zenith.³ The material prosperity of the period found vent in hectic building activities at the capital of Gaur, particularly under the first two rulers,⁴ and their examples were emulated by their nobles and courtiers in different parts of the kingdom. The result was that at no time in Bengal were the public buildings so numerous as during the Husain Shāhi rule.⁵ It was also during this period that an

¹HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 142.

²See M. R. Tarafdar, op. cit., p. 347.

³HB, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 143-44.

⁴The surviving building inscriptions of Husain Shāh (1493-1519) number 54 and those of his son, Nāṣir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh (1519-31) 20. See S. Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 149-233 for the inscriptions.

⁵See A.B.M. Husain, "Monuments of Husain Shah's Reign", Rajshahi University Studies, III (1970), pp. 61-76.

increased use of glazed tiles was made in the Muslim architecture of Bengal. Some of the architectural features of the Husain Shāhī buildings also betrayed Tughluqian influence from Delhi. All these suggest that Bengal under the Husain Shāhī rule had cultural links both with Delhi and the Persian lands.

The buildings of the Husain Shāhīs showed no novelty in structural designs or ornamental features, but merely imitated the tradition evolved during the Ilyās Shāhī period with which the classical phase of Bengal architecture had come to an end. "The excellent designs and superb proportion of the Dākhil Darwāza were no more to be found. The master skill which produced the ornamentation of the Tāntipārā Masjid was gradually attracted towards richness in flowering and brilliance in tillery."¹ Like the architectural elements, the terracotta ornamentation as developed in the earlier periods continued in the Husain Shāhī buildings in the usual places. The buildings of this period are generally rectangular in plan having long and low façade with the usual convexity of the parapet and the cornice and a number of pointed arches below, and have octagonal towers, one at each end of the corners. The central doorway was generally made prominent as also the central mihrāb in the west wall of the mosques. Neither the exterior having a series

¹ A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p.117.

of rectangular panels, nor the interior divided into several aisles and bays by stone pillars and brick piers supporting the pointed arches above, can make any deep impression upon the mind. The brick walls of the buildings were often faced with stone. During this period, there also occurred a revival of the stone cutter's art in Bengal, which had been given up under the Ilyās Shāhi rule. But the quality of stone carving was poor, and it was merely imitative of the designs wrought in terracotta. In respect of terracotta ornamentation, the Husain Shāhi monuments revealed no thematic novelty or finesse of execution, but were interesting as showing the progressive decadence of the technique, which became more and more flamboyant with the passage of time until eventually it was smothered into a medley of mechanical and tasteless patterns.¹ The brick buildings,² which were raised in large number³ in the capital and throughout the kingdom of Bengal were invariably coated with terracotta ornamentation. Even the ones with brick core and stone facing - the "brick-and-stone style",⁴ show terracotta decoration on their brick-built arches, vaults and domes.

For convenience of discussion, the monuments of the period under study are divided into two groups: (i) those located at the capital city of Gaur, and (ii) those of other places outside Gaur.

¹Cf. CHI, vol. III, op. cit., p. 607.

²S.K. Saraswati designates these buildings as the "brick style of Bengal". (See "Indo-Muslim Architecture in Bengal", JISOA, IX (1941), p.33). Similar classification of the buildings on the basis of materials has been followed by Dani. (Cf. A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., pp. 118 and 129).

³Available inscriptions justify such a broad statement.

⁴A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 129.

(i) Monuments at Gaur

The monuments of the period located at Gaur fall into two categories, viz., those built of brick having pillars and pilasters of stone representing the 'brick style' and those having brick-core walls faced with cut stone but the arches and the domes being built of brick - the 'brick-and-stone style'. To the former group belong the Gumti Gate (1512), the Latṭan Mosque (1493-1519), the Qadam Rasūl Building (1531) and the Jhān Jhānia Mosque (1535); the latter group consists of the Chhoṭa Sonā Mosque (1493-1519), the Bara Sonā Mosque (1526) and the Gunmant Mosque. The brick buildings are invariably ornamented with terracotta, while the ones with stone facing imitate terracotta decorative motifs in stone carving and also contain terracottas in their brick arches and domes.

(a) The Brick Style

The Gumti Gate (Pl. XXV:1). The Gumti Gate, supposedly built by Husain Shāh (1493-1519), stands a little to the east of the Chikā building and to the south of the Luka Churi gate at Gaur and served as one of the entrances to the fort from the east. The rampart walls still survive abutting the north and south sides of the building. The gate is a single-domed brick-built structure with an octagonal tower engaged at each of its four corners. The inner room is 25 feet square and the walls are 8 feet 8 inches thick. Externally, it measures 42 feet 8

inches a side. It has a passage aligned east-west through an arched doorway 5 feet wide. On both sides of the doorway on the east and the west, there are brick columns with sections of flutings separated by moulded bands. Of the corner towers, only the base mouldings survive. These towers also show flutings¹ in sections with intermittent bands on the shaft. The battlements and the triple cornice mouldings show the usual convexity. The side walls on the north and south are variegated with offsets and recesses which were intended to produce the effect of contrast that is wanting in most of the buildings of the period.² The building is roofed over by a hemispherical dome supported on stone pillars and carried on squinch arch at the corners - the earliest appearance of this feature in the Muslim architecture of Bengal.³ The date of its erection is not definitely known. Abid Ali⁴ ascribes to it an inscription⁵ of 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh, dated A.H. 918 (1512) which was found at the shrine of Shāh Mi'amat Allah at Firūzpur. The style of architecture of the gate-building affirms the ascription almost beyond doubt. The ornamentation of the building was done in enamelled tiles and terracotta.

¹ Similar flutings in corner towers first appeared in the Adina Mosque at Hazrat Pānduā.

² Cf. M.R. Tarafdar, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

³ A.H. Dani, *MAB*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴ Abid Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁵ *JASB*, XLII, Pt. I (1873), p. 295.

Decoration. The entrance arch is recessed within a rectangular frame whose upper part exhibits tiers of ornamental mouldings. The doorway passage, both on the east and west, is flanked on either side by a fluted turret ending at the cornice mouldings. These turrets show ornamental mouldings at the base, along the shaft and at the neck. Between the base mouldings, runs a frieze of arched niches, now vacant, but were probably decorated with terracotta motifs originally. Two thin horizontal bands surmounting the arched niches contain in their inter-space a row of terracotta lozenge. The octagonal corner towers survive to some height. They show quadruple horizontal mouldings at the base. The ornamentation of the mouldings has almost disappeared, but faint traces of lozenge frieze in terracotta are still visible on their face. The inter-spaces between the mouldings contain arched niches, jali work and scroll motif in terracotta, while the flutings appear to have been decorated with "coloured-enamel bricks".¹ The neck of the corner towers was embraced within the cornice mouldings. The wall surface on the north and south is variegated with offsets and recessed chases. The offsets show boldly projected panels. Each of these panels has been set within series of ornamental mouldings below and above. The mouldings are impressed with terracotta lozenge frieze. In the inter-spaces between the mouldings, occurs jali work in terracotta. Inside each panel, is a multi-foil

¹

Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 67.

pointed arch with spearheads from the apex of which hangs a chained terracotta pendant. The space enclosed by the arch has been covered with jali design. The panels are bordered with a spiralling terracotta creeper. Below the upper mouldings, runs a frieze of hanging motifs consisting of floriated twigs. The panels are surmounted by a row of blind merlons faced with coloured tiles. The recessed chases have been made equally ornate with terracotta ornamentation. Each recess shows a multi-foil spearheaded arch with a chain-and-pendant hanging from its apex. The spandrels are embossed with terracotta rosettes. Above the arch, is a sunken rectangular panel filled with a row of small rosettes.

The curved cornice is decorated with triple mouldings running all round the building. Traces of decoration survive at places. The mouldings are impressed with terracotta lozenge frieze on their face. The lowest inter-space between the mouldings shows terracotta jali work, while the upper ones depict series of small decorative niches, now empty.

Terracotta ornamentation in the interior of this gateway-building is sparse and is confined to the squinch arches and the dome base. The intrados of the squinches shows a row of small rosettes. The dome base has triple mouldings impressed with lozenge frieze. The lowest inter-space between the mouldings shows a jali pattern, the middle, alternate rosettes and

lozenge, and the topmost, a frieze of lozenge, all in terracotta relief.

General observations. A gate is an architecture of power and proclaims the might of the builder. The Gumti gate, besides embodying the royal might, also served as a defensive measure. Its masculine character is well demonstrated by its unusually thick walls and massive corner towers. The sparse ornamentation of the gate was, therefore, well in keeping with its purpose.

The Lattan Mosque (Pls. XXV:2-XXVI:1). The mosque stands a few yards to the east of the Nawābganj Road about four miles north of Gaur Thana after crossing the Bhagirathi river. Typologically, it belongs to the single-domed square buildings with a domed verandah in front and is akin to the Chāmkāṭṭi mosque (1475). The mosque is built of brick, but was originally covered with glazed tiles of various colours, inside and outside,¹ which have already fallen off. The main room of the mosque is 34 feet square with a corridor 11 feet wide on the east. The two side walls of the mosque and the front wall of the verandah are each 8½ feet thick, but the front and back walls of the main room are 10 feet 7 inches in thickness. The mosque measures externally 72½ feet long and 51 feet broad. The corridor has three arched openings in front and one at each end. There are three doorways on each of the east, north and south sides to enter the main

¹ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 62.

room. On the west, there are three mihrābs. The main room is covered by a hemispherical dome supported on stone pilasters and elaborately decorated corbelled pendentives at the corners. Of the three domes over the verandah, the middle one is of the Bengali cau-cālā type, possessing as it does four curved parts connected by a bent ridge and having drooping eaves. The mosque has six corner towers, four at the four corners of the main room and one each at either end of the verandah. The central mihrāb projects outside the west wall along the entire height of the façade and is flanked by fluted turrets recalling the ones at the entrance passage of the Gumti Gate (1512) and also those of the Firuzian architecture of Delhi. The wall surface all round is variegated with offsets and recessed chases. The battlements and the cornice are curved. On the authority of Creighton,¹ Cunningham² gives the date of the mosque as A.H. 880 (1475). But Dani rejects the dating and observes, "It does not fit in at all with the monuments of the Ilyās Shāhi period. Its plan is, no doubt, the same as in the Chāmkātti mosque (1475), but its character definitely places it in the Husain Shāhi period."³ Tarafdar⁴ also holds similar views.

¹Creighton, op. cit., Pl. IX.

²ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 62.

³A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 122.

⁴M. R. Tarafdar, op. cit., p. 298.

The appellation of the Lattan mosque has given rise to many conjectures. Cunningham¹ observes, "The name of the mosque is universally believed to be derived from Nattu, a favourite dancing girl of the king, after whom it was called the Nattan Masjid, or, as it is more generally pronounced, the Lattan Masjid". Abid Ali refers to a local tradition which relates that the mosque was built by a favourite dancing girl of some king as a meritorious work. He writes, "She concealed her name and put the king's name in the inscription tablet. The original meaning of the word is a 'Tumbler pigeon'. It may therefore be that the dancing girl received her name Lattan from her acrobatic dancing."² Dani accepts the traditional naming of the mosque and writes, "Really speaking, the word is derived from its Sanskrit original Natin or Nati, meaning a dancing girl. It is very probable, as it is not unusual, that the mosque was built by a dancing girl and hence its present name."³ But whatever may be the reason of the mosque's being so named, the Lattan Masjid was originally profusely decorated with glazed tiles. It also contains rich ornamentation in terracotta as will be noticed in the description that follows.

¹ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 62.

² Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 74.

³ A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 121.

Exterior decoration. The monotony of the wall surface has been relieved with offsets and recessed chases. Each of the three walls of the mosque on the east, north and south contains a broad projecting framework within which open the arched doorways. Each doorway arch is a little recessed into the wall with triple mouldings above the spandrels. The mouldings are faced with terracotta lozenge frieze, while the inter-spaces between them are filled in with various terracotta motifs: the lowest showing a jali work, the middle, diamonds alternating with rosettes, and the topmost, a convex merlon frieze. The central doorway arch is taller than the side ones. The spandrels of the doorway arches are each embossed with a terracotta rosette on either side of a glazed-tile diamond placed perpendicularly on the keystone of the arches. Between the doorways, is a projected vertical panel divided into two halves, one above the other. Each half contains a rectangular recess wherein occurs ornamental motifs in terracotta. The upper recess shows a multi-foil cusped arch supported on banded octagonal pillars whose decoration has disappeared. The soffit of the arch is impressed with terracotta jali work. The spandrels show terracotta rosettes flanking a diamond made of glazed tile and placed at the arch-apex. A terracotta chained pendant hangs from the keystone of the arch. The inter-space between the lowest mouldings above the arch shows rectangular niches, perhaps originally filled with glazed tiles. The upper inter-spaces are decorated with alternate

diamond and rosette and friezes of convex merlons in terracotta. The lower rectangular recess depicts an arched niche with a chained pendant. The arch springs from the side walls. There is an ornamental moulding at the base of the niche with interconnected terracotta bells impressed on its face.

On either side of the projecting framework enclosing the doorways is a vertical sunken panel reaching up to the cornice mouldings. The panel is decorated with an arched niche set in line with the doorway panels and enclosed within mouldings below and above. The arch is supported on stumpy octagonal banded pillars whose decoration has totally disappeared. The arch soffit shows jali work in terracotta. The spandrels have terracotta rosettes and the niche is embellished with a terracotta chain-and-pendant. The pendant shows a rosette embossed in its centre surrounded by a sort of loop design. The mouldings below and above the arch show either terracotta lozenge or interconnected bells impressed on them. The lowest inter-space above the arch shows rectangular compartments containing rosettes and the upper ones are filled in with alternate diamond and rosette and convex merlons in terracotta.

The west wall outside shows a rectangular projection of the central mihrāb reaching up to the battlements. The projection is in successive diminishing phases creating re-entrant angles at every phase. The face of the outermost phase is

is ornamented with two terracotta panels, one above the other. Each of the panels is set within ornamental mouldings below and above, which show terracotta lozenge and inter-connected bell motif impressed on their face. Inside the upper panel, occurs a multi-foil cusped arch with terracotta jali work decorating its soffit and having rosettes in the spandrels. The arch is supported on ornamental octagonal banded pillars. A terracotta chain-and-pendant hangs from the arch-apex. The lower panel is ruinous and its ornamentation cannot be identified at present.

On either side of the mihrāb projection, the wall surface shows one offset and two recessed grooves arranged vertically. The offsets are decorated with two rectangular terracotta panels, one above the other, each placed within ornamental mouldings, which have terracotta diamonds impressed on their face. Inside, occurs the arched niche with the chain-and-pendant in terracotta. The recesses show a single panel in line with the upper panel on the offsets with similar ornamentation. The base of the recesses show quadruple mouldings faced with terracotta lozenge and surmounted by a frieze of merlons. The triple mouldings above the decorative arches show uniform designs in terracotta: the lowest contains jali work, the middle, diamonds alternating with rosettes, and the topmost, a convex merlon frieze above a series of diamonds.

Terracotta ornamentation also appears in the corner towers of the mosque which are round in shape and dissolve into three vertical stages by means of ornamental mouldings. The lowest stage shows quadruple mouldings with terracotta diamonds impressed on their face and surmounted by a frieze of blind merlons, now bare. These moulding continue across the recessed side-bays of the walls. The inter-spaces between the mouldings show rectangular flat niches, now vacant, but were probably ornamented with terracotta motifs in the past. The second and third stages of the towers show round flutes formed with carved bricks. The projected moulding dividing the stages is faced with terracotta lozenge and is placed between a row of niches below and ornamental merlons above. Faint traces of geometric patterns are observable on some of these merlons.

The curved cornice shows triple mouldings which run all round the building and embrace the corner towers within their fold. The soffits of the mouldings are impressed with terracotta lozenge frieze. Each inter-space between the mouldings shows a row of arched niches, now empty. These arched niches were probably filled in with glazed tile pieces originally to which Cunningham emphatically refers in this building.¹

Interior decoration. The entire surface of the qibla wall inside including the panels enclosing the mihrāb arches were

¹ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 62.

decorated with glazed tiles in the past. The corner arches supporting the dome base show in their intrados traces of tile decoration. The pendentives are each embossed with a roundel faced with glazed tiles. Terracotta decoration is, however, noticed in certain parts of the interior. The back face of the entrance arches is decorated with terracotta motifs. The arch spandrels show terracotta rosettes, while the mouldings above the arches are impressed with terracotta lozenge and inter-connected bells. The inter-spaces between the mouldings are filled in with terracotta lozenge alternating with rosettes and convex merlons, like those seen outside. The dome base depicts a jali pattern and a lozenge frieze in terracotta below a row of merlon-shaped recesses which were probably filled with glazed tiles in the past.

General observations. There was an increased use of glazed tiles in the monuments of the Husain Shāhi period as the surviving examples attest. The phenomenon might be explained as the result of increased material prosperity attained during this age. The combined use of glazed tile and terracotta, which began with the Eklākhī Mausoleum at Hazrat Pānduā and continued through the subsequent Sultānī monuments, does not appear to be an invention of the Muslim architecture of Bengal, rather a continuation of the decorative tradition practised in Persia from the 14th century onward. In Persia, beautiful examples of the type

are found in the Masjid-i-Jami' at Yazd (mid 14th century) and especially in the façade of the Khānqāh at Natanz (1316-17). In these circumstances, it may be presumed that Bengal's cultural relationship with Persia was unbroken throughout the Sultānī period with continuous inflow of the Persian artists and artisans into the new land of Islam, although such contact of a continued nature at the political level is yet to be established.

The Qadam Rasul Building (Pls. XXVI:2-XXVII:1). The building is named after a foot-print, said to be that of the Prophet Muhammad, preserved inside.¹ It is situated within

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See Abid Ali, op. cit., pp. 63-64 for the story related with the foot-print. The foot-print as a sacred symbol is embedded in the tradition of almost all the older religions of the world. The Buddhists and the Hindus have similar symbols known as Buddhapada (Albert Grunwedel, Buddhist Art in India (London, 1901), p. 72) and Visnupada (Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1897, p. 6) respectively. The origin of the sacred foot-print of the Prophet Muhammad in Islam may be traced in setting his foot on the summit of Mount Moria in the midst of what has come to be known as the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem during his ascension to heaven. (The Church of the Ascension, also in Jerusalem, commemorates a similar event in the life of Jesus Christ). The spot was subsequently occupied by the Qubbat al-Sakhra' (the Dome of the Rock), built by 'Abd al-Malik in 691 in commemoration of the event, besides some other reasons. The Dome of the Rock is, therefore, the earliest Qadam Rasul building in Islam. In later times, the Qadam Rasul developed into a cult of devotion and spread far and wide in the Muslim world. Important examples outside Bengal are the ones in the Masjid al-Aqdam in Damascus (The Travels of Ibn Battuta, trans. by H.A.R. Gibb, vol. I (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1958), pp. 142-43), the Qadam Sharif in Delhi (H. Sharp, Delhi: Its Story and Buildings (Oxford, 1928), p. 60), etc. In Bengal, besides the Qadam Rasul at Gaur, two other instances are also known; one is preserved in the annexe to a mosque, known as the Qadam Mubarak Masjid in the port-city of Chittagong, and the

(contd.)

the enclosure of the fort of Gaur and to the east of the palace. According to an inscription¹ still in situ over the front doors in the east, the building was erected by Sultān Nusrat Shāh, son of Husain Shāh in 937 A.H. (1531 A.D.). It is a brick-built structure with walls 5 feet thick and consists of a domed central square room 19 feet a side internally. The verandah on the east, south and north sides of the building is 15 feet broad, the outside measurement of the whole structure being 60 feet by 39 feet 6 inches.² The building has four octagonal towers at the four corners, each with an ornamental stone finial. The towers are of 1 foot 5 inches face. The eastern façade contains three arched openings resting on massive but short octagonal stone pillars recalling the type seen in the Mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzī (1298) at Tribeni. The south and north verandahs have each an arched doorway. The verandahs are vaulted. The central hall is entered through a doorway kept in the north, east and south sides.

(contd. from previous page)

other at Nabiganj, opposite to Narayanganj, in the district of Dacca. It appears that the Qadam Rasūl became an item of trade with the Arab merchants from whom Ma'sūm Khān Kabuli is said to have procured the foot-print of Nabiganj on payment of a large sum of money. See Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, vol. II, trans. by M.I. Borah (Gauhati: Govt. of Assam, 1936), p. 710.

¹ JASB, XLI, Pt. I (1872), p. 338; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 55; Ravenshaw, op. cit., p. 20; EI, vol. II, p. 286; Abid Ali, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

² This measurements given by Dani (MAB, op. cit., p. 127) differ from those of Cunningham (Cf. ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 54).

It is covered by a single dome, crowned with a lotus finial. The west wall is totally closed and there is no mihrāb in the building as it is neither a mosque nor a tomb.¹ The battlements and the cornice are gently curved. Inside the building, under the dome, there is a small carved pedestal of black basalt whereupon was placed the foot-print. The building shows rich ornamentation in terracotta.

Exterior decoration. The eastern façade of the building is the most ornate and is overlaid with terracotta decoration. The three entrance arches are two-centred pointed and are supported on stumpy octagonal pillars faced with stone. Each arch is contained within a rectangular panel, a little recessed in the wall. The soffit of the arches shows a series of spaced rosettes flanking a larger rosette placed at the arch-apex. Each arch is decorated with an ornamental terracotta finial very ornate in character. On either side of the finial, there is a terracotta rosette embossed in the spandrel. The surrounding space is now bare, but traces of ornamental terracotta motifs that once existed, are visible. Every doorway panel shows triple horizontal mouldings above the spandrels. The mouldings are impressed with terracotta lozenge. Below the lowest moulding runs a frieze of alternating grape bunches and tassels. The inter-space between the lower mouldings shows a jali work, while

¹Cunningham has wrongly called it a mosque. Cf. ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 54.

that between the upper mouldings is filled in with a frieze of hanging motifs resembling bell-shaped flowers, all in terracotta. The panel is surmounted by a row of stylized terracotta merlons.

There are two decorative terracotta panels placed vertically over the two middle pillars of the doorways. The panels are rectangular in shape and are placed between the arch shoulders. Each panel is set between ornamental mouldings below and above. The mouldings are faced with terracotta lozenge. Below the lower moulding is a frieze of hanging tassels, while the upper moulding is surmounted by a row of blind merlons. The panels are bordered with a scroll having blown rosettes in the convolutions. Inside the panels, occurs a multi-foil pointed arch with a luxuriant plant within, below a rosette hung from the arch-apex by means of a chain. The spandrels of the arch show the usual rosettes embraced within dense foliage. Between each panel and the moulding above, is a horizontal smaller panel ornamented with stylized hanging patterns in terracotta, which resemble bunches of fruits hung from twigs and inverted finials.

A brick moulding running horizontally divides the façade all round into two equal halves vertically. The moulding is impressed with terracotta lozenge on its face, while above and below the moulding, are rows of regular and inverted stylized merlons respectively. Each vertical half of the eastern façade

shows two rows of terracotta panels, one above the other. The lower half consists of five panels in each row on either side of the doorways, while the upper half has six panels in each row. The panels are bordered with various designs in terracotta; some show four-petalled flowers alternating with rosettes; some, rosettes alternating with merlons; some, diamonds and rosettes, and some only arabesques, while others show jali work. Within the panels, occurs a multi-foil pointed arch having hung from its apex a floriate hanging motif resembling tiered chandelier. There is an interior border along the lower half of the panels below the arch springing. It depicts terracotta jali work. Some of the spandrels of the arches are filled in with dense foliage which almost runs riot, while others show rosettes and twigs, the latter spreading over the entire space. All the decoration was done in terracotta.

The octagonal corner towers are divided into three vertical sections by two raised mouldings faced with terracotta lozenge. The stone finials shooting above the towers are an unusual feature in the Sultānī architecture of Bengal and may, therefore, be a later addition. The towers show three mouldings at the base with carved abstract designs on their face. The lowest inter-space shows two terracotta creepers springing from within a multi-foil arch, one running at right and the other at left with lotus in the convolutions. The middle inter-space depicts a design consisting of four-petalled flowers surrounded on all

four sides by confronting twigs. The topmost inter-space is decorated with an inter-connected geometric pattern formed of multi-foil loops with rosettes inside and outside. The mouldings are surmounted by a row of multi-foil arch-shaped merlons having plant motif within. The towers show five of their facets outside. Each facet depicts an ornamental panel decorated with similar motifs in terracotta as those of the eastern façade.

The wall surface on the north, west and south outside is relieved with vertical offsets and recessed chases. The offsets show no decoration, but the recesses have triple mouldings at the base and two above the string-course. All the mouldings show terracotta lozenge on their face. The base mouldings are surmounted by a row of merlons. The ornamentation of the inter-spaces has totally disappeared, but it is probable that they contained terracotta ornamental motifs similar with those at the base of the corner towers.

The single doorway in the north and south walls is enclosed within a rectangular panel surmounted by blind merlons. Below the merlons, runs a frieze of hanging tassels in terracotta. There are rosettes in the arch spandrels above which is a horizontal niche containing terracotta rosettes alternating with hanging twigs.

The triple mouldings at the cornice follow the convexity of the parapet. They are impressed with terracotta lozenge.

The lower inter-space between the mouldings depicts stylized hanging motifs, while the upper is filled with jali work.

Interior decoration. The doorway arch in the north and south walls shows on the back face two terracotta rosettes flanking a vertical diamond placed at the arch-apex. A little above the spandrels is a frieze of hanging twigs in terracotta below ornamental mouldings. These interior mouldings like those outside are also faced with terracotta lozenge. The inter-spaces between the mouldings are decorated with jali work and rosettes alternating diamonds. The three arched doorways, one each in the north, east and south walls of the central room, also contain terracotta ornamentation. The arches of these doorways, like those of the outer walls, are a little recessed in the wall. The arch spandrels have terracotta rosettes beneath ornamental mouldings over which ran a frieze of merlons impressed with plant motifs in the past, traces of which are still visible.

There are prominent terracotta rosettes in the triangular spaces between the arch shoulders below the dome base. The dome base itself shows a terracotta jali frieze below the ring, which is surmounted by a row of merlons.

General observations. The terracotta ornamentation of the Qadam Rasūl building is significant as marking "the beginning of the decadence"¹ of the art. The art has lost its former

¹Percy Brown, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

vigour as represented by the Darasbāri mosque (1479) and the Tāntipārā mosque, (1480) and the artists appear to have exhausted their stock of ornamental motifs. The motifs have become stereotyped along with the arrangement of the panels, which provide no relief to monotony. The artist's liking to cover every space with ornamentation has defeated his sense of balanced composition, more so, with the repetition of the same features. The quality of execution of the motifs, however, testifies to the artists' skill in delicate drawing. But the art has yielded to formalism and lost its inventive spirit. The decoration of the Qadam Rasūl building, like that of the Laṭṭan mosque, is indicative of the material abundance for which the Husain Shāhi period is so famous. But achievement in the field of art is not solely dependent on material prosperity which often corrupts rather than ennobles it. The ornamentation, no doubt, produces a sumptuous effect which the builders seem to have aimed at; but it lacks in the universal appeal that characterized the buildings of the preceding Ilyās Shāhi period. Percy Brown has rightly remarked, "Its wall surfaces are divided up into monotonous diagram of panels, each repeating the same meaningless and stilted motif, giving the whole a trite and stylized appearance."¹ It must, however, be noted that the composition of the terracotta panels in the Qadam

¹ Percy Brown, op. cit., p. 41.

Rasul building greatly influenced the decorative scheme of the late medieval temples of Bengal.¹

Jhān Jhānia Mosque (Pl. XXVII:2). The mosque is the latest of the buildings of the Husain Shāhī period in Gaur, built only three years before Bengal passed into the hands of the Sūr Afghāns, and stands at Sa'dullāpur, a little to the south of the tomb of Akhī Sirāj al-Dīn (d. 1342 or 1357). According to the inscription,² fixed over the middle doorway in the east wall, the mosque was built by the Lady Malti in 941 A.H. (1535 A.D.) during the reign of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mahmūd Shāh (1532-38), son of Husain Shāh. Ravenshaw calls it Jan-Jan Miyān's mosque, while it is known to the local people as Jhān Jhānia Masjid. Abid Ali³ holds that it is only a corruption of the name of one of the saints of Gaur, Jahāniyān Jahāngasht. The mosque is an oblong brick building with three arched openings in front and two each in the north and south walls. There are octagonal towers at the four corners crowned with elongated brick-built pinnacles. The battlements and the cornice are curved. The whole face of the wall is divided by bands of mouldings into four parallel rows of uniform panels placed in regular order. All the panels contain ornamentation in terracotta. Corresponding to the three entrance doorways in

¹ See Infra, Chapter V.

² JASB, XLI, Pt. I (1872), pp. 339-40; ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 73; Ravenshaw, op. cit., pp. 10 and 94, Pl. 58, No. 25; JASB, LXIV (1895), p. 226; Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 93; S. Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 237-39.

³ Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 92.

the east wall, the back wall of the mosque shows inside three decorated mihrābs. The interior of the mosque is divided into two longitudinal aisles and three deep bays by two stone pillars, which carry six domes over the roof. The domes have been provided with lotus finials. The mosque measures 56 feet by 42 feet externally, while the interior dimensions are 40 feet by 26 feet 3 inches.

The decoration of the mosque, inside and outside, was done in terracotta which verge on flamboyancy, characteristic of the monuments of the Husain Shāhī period.

Exterior decoration. The elevation of the wall surface is divided by slightly curved bands of moulding into four parallel rows of uniform panels showing terracotta ornamentation. The bands run all round the building embracing the corner towers within their fold; the lower two bands break at the doorways in the east, north and south walls. All the bands are impressed with terracotta lozenge frieze on their face. A row of regular and another of inverted merlons run above and below the bands respectively. The doorway arches are a little recessed into the wall. The spandrels of the arches contain two terracotta rosettes flanking a decorative finial at the arch-apex. The rosettes are surrounded by vegetal shoots. Each division of the wall surface shows a number of rectangular terracotta panels. Each panel contains a multi-foil arch inside. Within the arch, occurs a terracotta hanging motif resembling the tiered chandelier of the type seen in the Qadam Rasūl building (1531).

There are triple cornice mouldings running all round the building. The mouldings are impressed with terracotta lozenge on their face. Below the lowest moulding, is a frieze of stylized terracotta motifs resembling cone-shaped fruits hanging from twigs alternating with tassels. The lower inter-space between the mouldings is decorated with inter-connected winged-rosettes, while the upper one has a jali work, all in terracotta relief.

The divisions of the octagonal corner towers, unlike those of the Qadam Rasul building, are completely plain and without any decoration. The dividing bands and the cornice mouldings contain terracotta ornamentation similar with those of the wall surface and cornice of the building. The base of the towers show triple mouldings, the topmost running across the wall. The two lower mouldings are carved with inter-connected bell motif on their face. The lowest and the uppermost inter-spaces show terracotta jali work, while the middle inter-space has a design of alternating rosettes and four-petalled flowers. The towers have ornamental finials ending in dome-shaped masonry above a frieze of hood-shaped merlons.

Interior decoration. The three mihrābs in the west wall of the mosque are each contained within a broad rectangular panel. The panels are bordered by two rows of terracotta decoration; the outer depicts a spiralling creeper with blown flowers in the convolutions, and the inner, a jali work. The

lintel of the panel is embossed with three terracotta rosettes, one at the centre and one each at the ends. Above the lintel, is a terracotta frieze of hanging fruits suspended from leafy twigs alternating with tassels. Higher up, is a pair of horizontal projected mouldings impressed with lozenge and inter-connected bells. The inter-space between the mouldings shows a terracotta jali work. The mouldings are surmounted by trilobed arch-shaped merlons.

The spandrels of the mihrāb arches are embossed with two terracotta rosettes enclosed within luscious foliage. A little above, runs a frieze of hanging terracotta fruits and leaves. The arches are supported on octagonal banded pillars. The bands show tiers of thin mouldings above and below a frieze of terracotta lozenge. The facets of the pillars between the mouldings depict hanging twigs bearing fruit bunches. The square base of the pillars shows plant motifs.

The mihrāb niche is divided into two vertical halves by a raised moulding faced with terracotta lozenge. Each half shows a number of parallel rectangular panels having similar terracotta decoration. Each panel contains a multi-foil arch within. The arch spandrels have rosettes and foliage, while an ornate pendant hangs from the arch-apex. The spandrels of the dome-bearing arches show terracotta rosettes below a frieze of hanging motifs consisting of twigs with fruits, and tassels. The dome ring inside shows a projected moulding which is impressed with

terracotta lozenge. Above the moulding, runs a row of stylized merlons.

General observations. The ornamentation of the Jhān Jhānia mosque represents the decaying phase of the Muslim terracotta art in Bengal, which lost much of its appeal by the end of the Husain Shahi period. There is meaningless superfluity and abundance of decoration that has marred the beauty of the building. The ornamentations show no novelty either in the technique of composition or in the ornamental themes, both of which are merely repetitive and tiring to the eye. The appearance of stereotyped features and repetition of monotonous panels on the façade have seriously affected the organic beauty of the building. The curvature of the cornice and the intermediate bands, so pleasant in the earlier monuments, are here "smothered in a medley of mechanical and tasteless patterns".¹ The recessed doorways are unwelcoming in spirit and design, which have further added to the bleak appearance of the façade.

The inspiring beauty of the Dākhl Darwāza (mid 15th century) and the Tāntipārā Mosque (1480) is totally lacking in the Jhān Jhānia Mosque which is symbolic of richness but devoid of taste.

In the foregoing pages we have surveyed the terracotta ornamentation in the surviving brick buildings of the Husain

¹CHI, op. cit., p. 607; also cf. Percy Brown, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

Shāhī period at Gaur. The period also witnessed a revival of the stone cutter's art in Bengal and we come across some monuments with brick core and stone facing inside and outside, while the arches, the roof and the domes are built of brick and decorated with terracotta. These buildings - the "brick-and-stone style",¹ were possibly erected "at the express orders of the royal patrons of art"² and also as marks of material prosperity of the period. The stone carvings on these monuments show no novelty of motifs and composition, but are merely imitative of the terracotta art of the time; nor is the carving rich in quality. They, however, represent "the last efflorescence of the stone cutter's art in Bengal."³ Buildings of this group showing terracotta ornamentation are the Chhota Sona Mosque and the Gunmant Mosque, both at Gaur.

(b) The Brick-and-Stone Style

The Chhota Sona Mosque (Pl. XXVIII:1). The mosque stands at Fīrūzpur, the southern suburb of the city of Gaur, now in Bangladesh. Built during the reign of Husain Shāh (1493-1519),⁴

¹ A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., pp. 93 and 129.

² M.R. Tarafdar, op. cit., p. 301.

³ A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 130.

⁴ For inscription, see EI, vol. II, p. 285; Ravenshaw, op. cit., pp. 38-39; Abid Ali, op. cit., pp. 79-81.

it is a multi-domed oblong structure with brick core and stone facing, and having five doorways in the front wall and three each on the sides. The total number of domes covering the roof is fifteen, of which the central ones are of the Bengali cau-cālā form and the side ones hemispherical. The mosque measures 82 feet by 52½ feet externally with four octagonal corner towers, each of which has bands of shallow moulding. All the entrance arches are enclosed within carved rectangular panels showing features of a traditionalized nature. The ornamentation of the mihrāb panels in the west wall, like those of the doorways, was done in stone carving. The only parts of the building showing brick surface are the arches and the domes.

Decoration. The ornamentation of the mosque was almost entirely done in stone carving and gilding. Terracotta decoration, however, appears on the dome-bearing arches, dome base and ceiling and also on the cornice of the cau-cālā vaults. The soffits of the brick arches are embossed with a row of tiered rosettes interposed by a fruit motif resembling pine-apples. The keystone of the arches shows a diamond placed vertically upon which occurs a terracotta rosette. On the arch apex is depicted an ornamental terracotta finial in the shape of a vase. The dome base inside shows a projected moulding, below which occurs a frieze of terracotta necklace in triple tiers alternated with stylized tassels. The moulding itself

is faced with terracotta lozenge. Above the moulding, runs a row of tri-lobed pointed merlons of an ornate character. The corners of the square bays are filled up with brick pendentives.

The ceiling of the cau-cālā vaults shows panelling by means of intersecting horizontal and vertical stripes. The arrangement recalls the type seen inside the cau-cālā domes of the Sāt-Gumbad mosque at Bāgerhāt in Khulna district. Within each panel, is placed a terracotta rosette at the centre. The vault ridge is also decorated with three similar rosettes. The cornice of the vaults shows a curved moulding impressed with two rows of lozenges, each separated from the other by a strip motif. Below and above the moulding, are a jali work and a diamond frieze respectively in terracotta relief.

General observations. The Chhota Sonā Masjid is "the gem of Gaur architecture"¹ and is the finest of the brick-and-stone style buildings built in Bengal. The monument has successfully withstood the ravages of time and despite repair works² done, it has almost retained its original freshness and beauty. The carvings in the mosque represent the best of the stone cutter's art of the Husain Shāhī period. But there is hardly any novelty

¹ ASIAR, 1922-23, p. 42.

² ASIAR, 1905-06, p. 6.

in the ornamental motifs, all the designs being mere imitations of the terracotta art of the period. The mosque received its popular appellation "Little Golden Mosque" from the gilding employed in its ornamentation, remains of which Cunningham found during his visit to the monument.¹ The use of encaustic tiles in the floor of the mosque in front of the central mihrāb is also reported.² The cau-cālā vaults roofing the central bay of the mosque must have been imitated from those of the Sāt-Gumbad Mosque at Bāgerhāt which is earlier in date by about half a century.

The Gunmant Mosque (Pl. XXVIII:2). The mosque is ruinous and stands near the village of Mahdipur on the eastern bank of the Bhāgirathi or old Ganges, half a mile to the south of the fort and less than half a mile to the west of the Latṭan Mosque. It was first noticed by King.³ It is an oblong structure with octagonal towers at the corners⁴ and measures 157 feet by 59 feet externally. The lower part of the mosque up to the springing of the arches was made of stone with cut facings. The arches and domes were of brick. Internally, the mosque falls into three sections: the central nave, 51 feet long and 16 feet

¹ ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

² A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 139. The earliest appearance of encaustic tiles in Bengal architecture occurred in the tomb of Khān Jahān (d. 1459) at Bāgerhāt.

³ PASB, 1875, p. 94.

⁴ The bases of the towers are still in situ, although Cunningham missed them in his plan of the mosque, cf. ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., Pl. XIX.

10 inches broad is roofed over by a ribbed barrel vault of brick, resting on octagonal stone piers, and the side sections, each covered by twelve semi-circular domes. The mosque is not dated, but Cunningham ascribed to it an inscription of 889 A.H. (1484 A.D.)¹ during the reign of Jalāl al-Dīn Fath Shāh. Dani² has opposed the ascription on architectural and ornamental grounds of the building and assigns it to the Husain Shāhi period. Dani's contentions appear more logical. About the decoration of the mosque, Cunningham writes, "Apparently the back and side walls, as well as the front wall above the spring of the arches, were all faced with glazed tiles, as I found numerous fragments of different colours lying at the foot of the wall, while several large pieces of battlements in dark blue and white tiles were found in the village of Mahdipur."³ The other parts of the mosque, such as the brick arches, dome base and the brick vault are decorated with terracotta reliefs.

Decoration. The brick barrel vault rests on massive octagonal stone piers. Between the piers, open three transverse arches, faced with cut stones, which led to the side aisles. The spandrels of these arches show carved rosettes and there is a

¹ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 65; EI, vol. II, pp. 287-88; Abid Ali, op. cit., p. 87.

²See A.H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., pp. 134-36.

³ASIR, vol. XV, op. cit., p. 66.

four-petalled flower on the arch-apex in carved stone. Above the arches on either side of the nave, runs a stone architrave, whose inner face depicts carved merlons between two rows of stone rosettes. The vault base on both sides shows arched recess. The ribs of the vault cut each of these arches across the middle, thus creating a half-arched recess on either side of the ribs. Each recess shows a plant motif in terracotta. The triangular space between the arch shoulders depicts a terracotta tree with outstretched branches and leaves. The arch soffits have double terracotta designs: the inner consists of a kind of strip motifs, while the outer shows either a merlon or an inter-locking ring or a leaf motif.

A broad ornamental terracotta band runs longitudinally above the arched recesses. It shows several registers separated by thin rows of dots. The lowest register shows hanging fruits surmounted by a row of rosettes and the topmost depicts a merlon motif, all in terracotta relief. The ornamental composition of the vault ceiling between the ribs consists of a large terracotta rosette at the centre surrounded by similar smaller rosettes at the four corners - motifs already met with in the Tāntipārā mosque and the Rājibībī mosque at Gaur. The gable ends of the ribbed vault are each provided with an arched window to bring in light inside the vault, so that the ornamentation could be visible. The window is set within a panel bordered with terracotta jali work.

The domes of the mosque were supported on brick arches and stone pillars. The dome base inside shows an ornamental moulding faced with terracotta lozenge. Below the moulding, runs a frieze of stylized hanging motifs in terracotta, while above it, is a row of ornamental merlons.

(ii) Monuments of other Places

During the period under review, many mosques and other buildings were also constructed outside the city of Gaur. These were more numerous than the ones built in the capital.¹ But almost all of them are now in complete ruins, surviving in most cases only in inscriptions. Those that somehow exist are in precarious physical existence and denuded of their ornamentation; some are thoroughly renovated, so that they have lost their original character. To the latter group belong the Kherāul Mosque in Murshidabad, dated A. H. 900 (1495 A.D.),² the Mosque at Hemtābād, dated A.H. 906 (1500 A.D.),³ and the Rukn Khān's Mosque, dated A.H. 918 (1512 A.D.),⁴ both in Dinajpur district, a number of mosques in the locality of Sunārgāon⁵ in Dacca district, the mosque at Shāhzadpur (15th century) and the

¹ Available inscriptions qualify such a statement.

² JASB (N.S.) XIII (1917), pp. 148-49), Pls. I & II; JISOA, VI (1910), p. 27.

³ M. R. Tarafdar, op. cit., p. 304.

⁴ JASB, XLI (1872), p. 106; EIM, 1929-30, pp. 12-13.

⁵ JASB, XLII (1873), pp. 283-84.

Mosque at Navagram, dated A.H. 932 (1526 A.D.)¹ in Pabna district, the Mosque at Sātgaon, dated A.H. 936 (1529 A.D.),² and a few others. The Mosque of Mullā Hijābur Akbar Khān at Goāldi, dated A.H. 925 (1519 A.D.),³ in Dacca district is thoroughly renovated, but its terracotta ornamentation has been restored. The few that retain their original decoration largely intact despite repair works done to them are the Mosque of Bāghā, dated A.H. 930 (1523 A.D.)⁴ in Rajshahi district, the Mosque at Surā (early 16th century) in Dinajpur district, the Mosque at Sankarpāsā (16th century) in Sylhet district and the Mosque of Majlis Awliyā at Pāthrail (16th century) in Faridpur district. All these monuments merely imitate the Gaur style both in plan and decoration and represent "the baroque decadence of the Bengali terracotta craft."⁵

The Bagha Mosque (Pls. XXIX:1-3). The mosque is situated about 25 miles south-east of Rajshahi city and about 11 miles south of the Chārgḥāt Police Station of Rajshahi district. It is a multi-domed oblong building measuring 75 feet 8 inches by

¹EIM, 1937-38, pp. 37-38.

²JASB, XXXIX (1870), pp. 297-99; SPP, 1316 B.S., pp. 33-34.

³JASB, XLII (1873), p. 295; List of Ancient Monuments of Bengal, op. cit., p. 216; ASIR, XV, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴JASB, LXXIII (1904), pp. 108-13.

⁵R.E.M. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 120.

42 feet 2 inches with octagonal towers at the four corners. The mosque is built of brick with walls 7 feet 4 inches thick, save for a basal course of stone and another stone course at the springing of the arches and 18 stone pillars and responds in the interior. The interior of the mosque is divided into two aisles and five bays by a row of four stone stone pillars. The eastern façade has five arched doorways, each bordered within ornamented frame. The side walls on the north and south contain two arched doorways, each within broad frames, now closed with grille work. The western wall inside has three decorated mihrābs in the southern bays, a panelled design in the fourth and a smaller mihrāb higher up in the wall of the fifth bay. There was possibly a maqṣūrā covering the north-western part of the interior originally. According to an inscription earlier fixed over the central doorway, the mosque was built in A.H. 930 (1523 A.D.),¹ by Sultān Muṣrat Shāh, son of Husain Shāh. The battlements and the cornice mouldings show the characteristic Bengali convexity.

Exterior decoration. The decoration of the mosque was entirely done in terracotta. The wall surface is divided vertically by a string-course running all round and breaking only at the doorways. The string-course shows terracotta lozenge on its face. Above and below the string-course, are friezes of

¹ JASB, LXXII, Pl. I (1904), p. 111; S. Ahmed, op. cit., p. 212. The inscription is now in the National Museum of Pakistan at Karachi.

upright and inverted merlons respectively. The arched doorways are set within broad rectangular frames. Each arm of the frames shows five small rectangular panels arranged vertically, three below the string-course and two above it. Around the panels, there are spaced terracotta rosettes. All the panels contain a multi-foil pointed arch inside from the apex of which hangs a winged terracotta pendant that has developed here into a fantastic grape-cluster. The spandrels of the panel arches are embossed with two rosettes surrounded by leaves and foliage. The soffit of the doorway arches shows a jali work, while the spandrels are decorated with two prominent terracotta rosettes. Above the spandrels, runs a frieze of hanging twigs and tassels surmounted by a series of ornamental mouldings, which show dentil motifs and lozenge. A little above, is a row of rectangular niches filled in with terracotta plants. The frame lintel depicts an inter-connected bell motif above a frieze of hanging leaves, all in terracotta. The doorway frames are surmounted by ornamental merlons.

Between the doorway frames, occur two larger terracotta panels, one below and the other above the string-course. Some of these panels are bordered with arabesque having rosettes in the convolutions, while others show inter-locking and jali designs. Inside the panels, occurs the multi-foil pointed arch with the floriate winged pendant hanging from its keystone.

From each foil of the arch and the apex shoots upward a vase-shaped motif filled with flowers. There are the usual rosettes in the spandrels. The wall surface between the doorways and the corner towers is also ornamented with similar terracotta panels below and above the string-course.

In the western façade, the central mihrāb shows a rectangular projection outside upto the battlements. The angles of the projection have been softened with triple mouldings at the base. The inter-spaces between these mouldings are decorated with terracotta interlocking designs, jali work and arabesque. The wall surface is entirely covered with panelled ornamentation in terracotta below and above the string-course having similar designs with those of the front and side walls.

The octagonal corner towers are equally ornate with terracotta. The towers are divided into three vertical sections by two ornamental brick mouldings which are sandwiched between stylized merlons below and above. The mouldings are impressed with terracotta lozenge on their face. The moulding at the middle of the towers forms part of the string-course on the wall surface, while those at the neck of the towers are in line with the cornice bands. The facets of the towers in each section are decorated with rectangular terracotta panels with jali borders. The panels contain a multi-foil arch within, from the apex of which hangs a floriate pendant similar with the ones on the walls. The arch spandrels here show two rosettes

surrounded by terracotta vegetal elements. The towers show triple mouldings at the base surmounted by ornamental merlons with finials. The mouldings depict terracotta lozenge, inter-connected bells and strip motifs. The terracotta designs of the inter-spaces between the mouldings vary from tower to tower. The motifs include arabesque, designs formed with twigs centring rosettes, alternate rosettes and diamonds, twigs and rosettes, inter-secting diagonals with rosettes within, interlocking patterns with rosettes inside and jali frieze in terracotta. The towers end upward in octagonal masonry cupolas.

The triple cornice bands follow the convexity of the battlements. The decoration on their face has disappeared. The inter-spaces still retain their decoration which consists of terracotta jali work. Below the lowest cornice band, runs a frieze of intersecting beaded necklace, each with an ornamental pendant, all in terracotta relief.

Interior decoration. The interior ornamentation of the mosque, like the exterior, was done in terracotta and remains mostly confined to the mihrāb panels in the west wall. All the three mihrāb panels in the mosque consist of double rectangular frames. The central mihrāb panel is the largest, while the others gradually diminish in size. The vertical arms of the outer frame of the central mihrāb panel are divided into five smaller terracotta panels, the central ones in both the arms showing a floriate winged pendant hanging from the keystone of

a multi-foil decorative arch. The other panels show each a multi-foil pointed arch inside under which occur various types of luxuriant trees, some bearing fruits of local origin, others, blown flowers. The composition of the panels is kept within a border of intersecting scrolls. The arch spandrels contain two rosettes amidst burgeoning vegetal shoots. The lintel of the outer frame consists of a series of rectangular niches showing alternate rosette and plant in terracotta. The inner frame has two rosettes at the base, one in each vertical arm, contained within square frame impressed with jali work. The surface of the frame shows graduated inward recessions decorated alternately with jali work and scrolling creeper, which are interrupted at the middle of the frame by a rosette in each arm placed at the level of the arch springing inside. The lintel depicts a central rosette flanked by two others at the angles of the frame. All these ornamental motifs are in terracotta relief.

The mihrāb niche opens under a multi-foil pointed cusped arch supported on highly ornamented octagonal pillars. The pillars are divided into two halves by a moulding at the middle. The lower half depicts bottle-shaped merlons with finials on the facets, while the upper half shows terracotta chain-and-pendant. There are double mouldings at the base and triple ones at the top of the pillars. All the mouldings are faced with terracotta lozenge. The inter-spaces between the lower mouldings are filled in with scroll and jali designs in terracotta. Below

the mouldings at the top, runs a frieze of intersecting terracotta necklace with pendants. The spandrels of the mihrāb arch are embossed with two rosettes, one on either side of the finial, and embraced within luscious creepers which spring from two vases placed at the arch-spring. Above the rosettes, is a row of hanging pendants resembling grape-cluster. The ornamental composition of the spandrels is surmounted by a moulding faced with terracotta lozenge. Below it, is a frieze of hanging twigs and grape bunches and above, runs a horizontal recess filled with terracotta rosettes.

The semi-circular central mihrāb niche is divided into a number of decorated panels within jali borders. All the panels show similar floriate hanging motifs within multi-foil cusped arch. The spandrels have rosettes and other vegetal motifs in terracotta. Below the panels, runs a frieze of ornamental merlons, while the space above the panels shows triple horizontal mouldings, the inter-spaces being decorated with various terracotta motifs. The lowest shows a row of rosettes; the one above has hanging motifs of grape-clusters, and the topmost, ornamental merlons. The niche alcove depicts a terracotta rosette.

The composition of the central mihrāb panel is surmounted by a projected moulding faced with alternate terracotta rosettes and hanging twigs above which runs a row of stylized merlons interspersed with decorative finials.

The ornamental compositions of the side mihrāb panels are almost like that of the central mihrāb, except variation in minor details. Thus, the outer frame of the southernmost mihrāb panel shows more of hanging motifs than representation of plants, while a series of rectangular niches decorated with alternate rosettes and plants within foliated arches are shown below the topmost moulding, all the motifs having been executed in terracotta.

The dome base shows two rows of decorative merlons separated by a raised moulding impressed with terracotta lozenge. The corner pendentives are formed of oversailing courses of bricks set corner-wise assuming the character of a sort of stylized stalactites, very ornate in appearance.

General observations. The Bāghā mosque represents the pure Bengali mosque plan, oblong in shape with octagonal corner towers and curved cornice and battlements. The structure is raised on a high mound of earth set within an enclosure to which access is provided by an ornamental gateway in the south and another in the north. The brick-built vaulted oblong gateways imitate the mosque structure in their octagonal corner towers and panelled terracotta decoration on the wall surface. A big tank was dug closeby in the east. This composition of the mosque environment appears to have served as the prototype of the Mughal mosques in Bengal erected not long later.

The mosque imitates the lavish ornamentation of the Gaur monuments of the period. The whole decorative pattern represents the baroque decadence of the terracotta art, and the continuous repetition of stereotyped panels on all sides of the building gives the impression of a sugary incrustation rather than architectural ornament. Local folk motifs have made unprecedented inroad into the terracotta illustrations, but to no increase of the decorative effect. The art has lost its vital force and yielded to the unsavoury tastes and likes of the local artists. A significant thing to be noticed is that the further away was a monument from the capital, the greater was the influence of the local motifs on the ornaments. This phenomenon might be due to the lack of artists trained in Muslim traditional ornaments in those outlying places to supervise the work of the local artists, who were thus left to their own native experience to execute the decoration. The technique of execution of the art motifs shows deterioration in delicacy and fineness, and never for once, occurs in the mosque the subtlety of ornaments which characterized earlier monuments like the Darasbāri, the Tāntipārā or the Dhunichak mosques at Gaur. The mosque represents the terracotta art of Bengal at its most exuberance, which also proclaims the decay and degeneration of the tradition.

The mosque was seriously damaged by the earthquake of 1897 when all the domes together with the eastern wall had fallen down.¹ Fortunately, these elements have been subsequently restored.

¹Cf. S. Ahmed, op. cit., p. 213.

The Mosque at Sura (Pls. XXX:1-2). About 5 miles to the west of the Ghorāghāt Police Station in Dinajpur district stands the Surā Mosque in the present village of Chorgāchā. It is a single-domed square building with a three-domed verandah in front. The main room measures 16 feet each side and the verandah forms an oblong hall of 16 feet by 6 feet. There are six octagonal towers at the corners, four of the main room and two of the verandah. All the towers are faced with stone and have ornamental mouldings at the base, in the middle and at the neck, and rise up to the battlements. The walls are built of brick and faced with stone up to a certain height inside. A stone string-course running horizontally cuts the wall surface into two vertical halves, breaking only at the arched doorways. Three two-centred arched doorways lead to the main hall from the east, while the side walls have each a single arched entrance enclosed within broad rectangular panel. The west wall contains three stone mihrābs with rich carving of terracotta imitation. The verandah has three entrances on the east and one on the north and south. The battlements and the cornice mouldings were originally curved, but have been made straight during restorations in later times. In plan, the mosque imitates the Lattan Mosque at Gaur. The mosque is undated, but on stylistic ground and ornamental features has been assigned to the Husain Shāhi period (1493-1538).¹

¹

Cf. A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 161.

Wheeler¹ places the mosque to the close of the 15th century, which is negated by the features of the mosque, such as stone facing of the walls and towers and unrestrained ornamentation.

Exterior decoration. The north and south walls of the main room provide for a single arched doorway kept within a broad rectangular frame. The long arms of the frame consists of three small vertical panels, two below the string-course and one above it. The panels are bordered with terracotta jali frieze. Inside the panels, occurs a multi-foil cusped arch with a high ornate double-winged terracotta pendant hanging from the keystone. The pendant ends in a grape-cluster. The lintel of the frame depicts spaced rosettes in terracotta surmounted by a frieze of ornamental merlons. On either side of the doorway, the wall surface shows three rectangular terracotta panels below and above the string-course. The west wall outside also shows similar arrangements of terracotta panels on each side of the mihrāb projection. The ornamentation of all these panels is similar. Each panel depicts a multi-foil pointed arch with a stylized finial. Within the arch occurs a double-winged floriate terracotta pendant. The arch spandrels are embossed with two rosettes crowded around by dense terracotta foliage. The entire panel composition is enclosed within a terracotta jali border.

Interior decoration. All the three mihrābs are built of stone and enclosed within rectangular frames. The ornamentation carved on the frames consists of four-petalled flowers alternating

¹R.E.M. Wheeler, op. cit., p. 117.

with rosettes. Above the frames, are ornamental merlons. The semi-circular mihrāb niches open under an engrailed pointed arch supported on ornamented octagonal pillars. The arch spandrels show the usual rosettes amidst carved plant motifs. The surface of the niche shows panelled decoration with ornamental merlons below and above. The panels represent imitation in stone of the terracotta motifs seen in the wall surface outside.

The only decoration in terracotta inside the mosque is confined to the dome base which is supported on corner arches springing from stone pilasters. The dome base shows a broad moulding faced with alternate lozenge and rosette. Below the moulding, runs a frieze of intersecting beaded necklace with pendants. The moulding is surmounted by stylized merlons.

General observations. The mosque stands on a raised mound of earth approached from the east by a flight of steps through an arched gateway built of brick. The arched panel is decorated with terracotta spaced rosettes. A large number of carved stone fragments of Hindu origin are lying scattered in the mosque compound. Some of these show the beaded necklace and tassel with carved figures inside and arranged on either side of the Kirtimukha. In the presence of these stone miscellany, the local legend that the mosque was built on the site previously occupied by a temple cannot be seriously questioned.

The terracottas of the mosque belong to the same phase of decadence of the art represented by the Bāghā Mosque in Rajshahi district. The motifs are stereotyped though not lifeless, and there is meaningless repetition all round the wall surface. The attempt to introduce variety in a brick structure with stone facing on the corner towers, on the wall surface inside and the mihrābs does not appear to have succeeded, but the mosque represents the only example of the "brick-and-stone style" erected outside the city of Gaur during the period under review. The fallen verandah restored in recent times is a poor copy of its former self and the shells of the domes covering its roof have telescoped into each other - a sad sight.

The Saṅkarpāsā Mosque (Pls. XXXI:1-2). The mosque is located about 6 miles away from Shāhjibāzār Railway Station in Sylhet district. It is a brick structure and consists of a square hall, measuring 21 feet 5 inches a side, with a front verandah, 5 feet 4 inches broad. The main hall was covered by a single dome in the past, but has now a flat roof supported on iron joists. The mosque has four octagonal towers at the corners of its main hall and two at the angles of the verandah. The structure is thoroughly renovated, so that it has lost much of its original character. The corner towers have been extended beyond the parapet and these now end in flattened pinnacles. The original curved battlements have also been straightened. The mosque is entered through three arched doorways in the east, north

and south walls of the main hall, the central one in every case being larger than the flanking ones. The verandah opens under three arched doorways in the east and one each in the north and south walls. The single mihrāb of the mosque shows projection outside along the height of the wall, flanked on either side by an octagonal turret. The mosque is undated, but on stylistic ground, falls under the Husain Shāhī period (1493-1538). The ornamentation of the mosque was entirely done in terracotta.

Exterior decoration. Despite renovations done to it, the mosque has retained enough of its original decoration which is very significant as showing the state of terracotta art in far-off areas of the country during the period under review. The ornamentation of the mosque differs both in composition and character from the contemporary Gaur style. All the doorway arches are cusped and open under slightly recessed panels. The spandrels have lost their old decoration, but a little above, are seen two friezes of terracotta, the lower consisting of hanging twigs within interlaced roundels, and the upper, merlon motif. There are thin mouldings surmounting the friezes, but these are now bare. There are two oblong sunken terracotta panels over each doorway, with the bare wall surface intervening between. Each panel shows a multi-foil pointed arch with finial, springing from thin wall pilasters. The arch spandrels are decorated with two terracotta rosettes and other vegetal elements. From the arch apex hangs a florid chain ending in an elaborate pendant showing flowers and leaves in terracotta relief.

The wall surface between the doorways is divided vertically by a horizontal moulding placed at the level of the arch springing. The lower part consists of two recessed oblong panels like those above the doorways and having similar terracotta decoration. The upper part is occupied by a single large panel bedecked with terracotta motifs. Above the panel, is a moulding crowned by a frieze of pointed merlons. The decorative composition of the upper panel is set within broad borders which depict leafy scrolls, some interspersed with rosettes. Inside the panel, occurs a cusped arched niche impressed with the florid chain-and-pendant in terracotta relief. The pilasters supporting the arch are changed into vertical rows of decoration formed with alternate squares and diamonds, the former enclosing rosettes and the latter, impressed with four-petalled flowers. The arch spandrels are filled in with surging plants crowned by two rosettes. The spandrels are surmounted by a horizontal frieze which depicts conventionalized hanging twigs. Above, are two thin mouldings with a row of terracotta rosettes embossed in the interspace.

The broad mouldings dividing the lower panels and the upper on the wall surface are impressed with double rows of terracotta lozenge on their face. Below the mouldings, is a frieze of hanging motifs, some representing twigs, others tessellated flowers. The wall-ends of the main hall as also of the verandah on the east, north and south outside show three oblong panels, one above the other, each having a cusped arch and the florid

pendant together with rosettes and plant motifs in the spandrels in terracotta similar with those of the other panels. The back wall outside repeats the panelled composition with terracotta motifs of those of the other sides.

The octagonal corner towers and the turrets flanking the mihrab projection have triple mouldings at the base and intermittent ones on the shaft. The basal mouldings are surmounted by a frieze of pointed merlons, while the inter-spaces between them show traces of alternate rosettes and diamonds, scrolling creeper and jali work in terracotta. The upper mouldings have each a frieze of hanging twigs running below. The corner towers of the verandah still retain panelled decoration on their facets in every vertical section with terracotta ornaments similar to those on the wall surface.

Interior decoration. The mihrāb panel is enclosed within a broad rectangular frame which shows floral designs in three vertical rows, the middle row consisting of four-petalled flowers and the side rows of rosettes. The flowers are contained within rectangles produced by intersecting wavy lines. The pointed cusped arch opening the mihrāb niche is supported on octagonal brick pillars. The pillars are very ornate with terracotta motifs and show vertical divisions by means of ornamental bands. The bands depict stylized hanging motifs. The upper two sections of the pillars show on each of their facets the actual chain-and-bell flanked by leaves and elongated fruits, all stemming from a

rosette above. The lowest section depicts panelled decoration with plant motifs, while the middle illustrates a pointed cusped arch on each of its facets.

The soffit of the mihrāb arch imitates the engrailing below and illustrates a flowery and leafy terracotta creeper. The arch finial has here assumed the form of an exuberant plant with radiating leaves. The spandrels show fantastic tree motifs in serpentine movement with intertwining branches ending in flowers. The usual rosettes in the spandrels have been changed here into eight petalled flowers. Above the spandrels, runs a frieze of hanging twigs. All these motifs were executed in terracotta relief. The panel is surmounted by a broad moulding showing a terracotta frieze of alternate rosettes and four-petalled flowers on its face. Above it, runs a row of pointed merlons.

The semi-circular mihrāb niche is overlaid with terracotta ornamentation. At the base, is a row of pointed merlons. Immediately above, runs a series of arched niches. These niches have been further composed into smaller vertical panels, each depicting a plant motif within cusped arch. The arch is crowned with a florid finial. The spandrels depict two rosettes above lush vegetal growth. The row of arched niches is surmounted by quadruple horizontal friezes decorated in the following order: the lowest shows a leafy scroll, the one above, alternate hanging twigs and fruits, the third, a stylized hanging pattern and the

fourth, alternate hanging twigs and rosettes. Above the friezes, runs a cavetto moulding crowned with a row of foiled pointed merlons.

General observations. The ornamentation of the mosque breathes a local flavour, different from the contemporary Gaur style. The pattern of the panel compositions on the façade is unique in itself having no comparable parallel either in the Gaur monuments or elsewhere in Bengal. The arched niches with their florid pendants appear good enough to relieve the monotony of the wall surface, but the crowded composition of the hanging motifs has greatly marred the decorative effect. It appears that the terracotta artists of the mosque could realize the stagnation which the art suffered during the period and wanted to revivify it with innovations. But their attempt utterly misfired as seen in the grotesque illustration of the plant motifs in the mihrāb spandrels. The substitution of the conventional beautiful rosettes with eight-petalled flowers and the re-introduction of the actual chain-and-bell signalize a return to primitive forms because of the artists' inability to move the art further ahead. The quality of the terracottas is also poorer. Though the style may be defended as of local manifestation, it represents in reality the abysmal degeneration of the terracotta heritage developed under the Muslim patronage. As already noticed, the art reached the meridian of its development under the restored Ilyās Shāhī rule, and thenceforth, tended to decline

till the abyss was reached in late Husain Shāhī period as represented by the Sāṅkarpāsā mosque.

The Mosque of Majlis Awliyā' at Pathrail (Pl. XXXII:1-2).

This ruinous mosque stands at village Pāthrail, 8 miles south-east of Bhāngā Police Station in Faridpur district. The village was the centre of missionary activities of the saint Majlis Awliyā' 'Abd Allah Khān, better known as Majlis Sāhib.¹ The mosque is named after the saint, whose grave also lies nearby. It is an oblong brick structure, measuring 71 feet 6 inches by 28 feet 3 inches internally and the walls are 7 feet in thickness. It had four octagonal towers at the corners in the past, but only two, those in the south-east and north-east, survive at present in derelict condition. There are five doorways in the east wall and two each in the north and south. The west wall inside contains five arched mihrābs corresponding to the doors in the east wall. The central mihrāb projects outside along the wall height. The interior of the mosque is divided into two aisles and five bays by means of four brick pillars. Ten domes, supported on arches carried by the central pillars and 14 wall pilasters, covered the roof in the past, but all disappeared long ago.² The outer surface of the north, west and south walls

¹Bangladesh District Gazetteer: Faridpur (Dacca: Bangladesh Government Press, 1977), p. 74.

²Two of the domes are reported to have been in existence till the beginning of the current century when an earthquake caused their collapse. Ibid.

is in ruins having lost most of the bricks. Only the eastern façade of the mosque survives in somewhat good condition and retains traces of panelled ornamentation in terracotta which must have overlaid the whole structure in the past. The battlements and the cornice mouldings of the mosque show unusual convexity which has made the structure look stunted and unimpressive. The mosque is undated but conforms to the Husain Shāhi style both in construction and decoration.

Exterior decoration. The mosque is ruinous and has lost most of its old ornamentation. The wall surface on the north, west and south was relieved by offsets and recessed chases, but these are now faintly identifiable, since the outer course of the bricks have almost fallen off. In the eastern façade, all the five doorway arches open within rectangular terracotta panels, slightly recessed in the wall. The central panel is the tallest, while the flanking ones gradually diminish in height. The central panel is bordered with a continuous scroll having a rosette in each convolution. The flanking doorways have borders of framed panels, the frames depicting the scroll with rosettes. Inside the panels, occur various interlocking patterns bestrewn with vegetal shoots. The spandrels of the doorway arches are embossed with two rosettes, above which is seen a horizontal moulding impressed with terracotta diamonds, each separated from the other by a thin vertical line. The moulding is sandwiched between two terracotta friezes, above and below,

the former depicting jali work and the latter, hanging twigs and flowers.

The wall surface between the doorways shows two large rectangular terracotta panels, one above the other, with a row of rosettes between. These panels are separated from the doorway frame by a row of large rosettes. The panels are slightly recessed into the wall and depict similar decoration in relief. Each panel is enclosed within a jali border with tiny rosettes in the crevices. Inside the panels, occurs a cusped arch, the cusp showing trefoil formation. A complex type of pendant with outstretched arms and ending in an arch motif hangs from the arch apex. The spandrels show two rosettes embraced within leaves and branches of two trees, each of which rises from the arch-spring on either side. The wall-ends also show similar terracotta panels.

The curved space of the wall above the doorway panels is embossed with series of terracotta rosettes. Above the central doorway panel, are fixed two stone tablets, the writing on which is totally defaced. It is probable that these tablets contained the building date of the mosque.

The cornice shows triple curved mouldings. The ornamentations of these mouldings together with those in their interspaces have disappeared. But a continuous terracotta frieze below the mouldings survive in fairly good condition. It depicts hanging patterns of vegetal origin.

The surviving corner towers are also ruinous and devoid of any trace of ornamentation, except the outlines of triple mouldings at the base and the ones of the cornice.

Interior decoration. The five mihrābs in the west wall were highly decorated with terracotta motifs in the past as the surviving traces suggest. All the mihrābs are enclosed within rectangular frames. The central mihrāb has a scroll border with rosettes in the convolutions, set within two rows of rosettes. The flanking mihrābs are enclosed within panelled borders, slightly recessed in the wall. Some of these panels depict superimposed diamonds with impressed rosettes, some friezes of rosettes within interlaced circles, some jali work, while others, an intricate interlocking pattern, all in terracotta. The panels are flanked outside by terracotta rosettes placed triangularly. The mihrāb arches are supported on octagonal brick pillars showing triple divisions on their shaft by ornamental bands. The facets of the pillars in each division illustrate different terracotta motifs - the topmost, a hanging twig, the middle, a multi-armed pendant, and the lowest, a plant within an arch motif. The bands are impressed with jali work. The spandrels of the mihrāb arch depict tree-motifs intertwining two rosettes. A little above, are double ornamental mouldings with a flat sunken recess between. Below the lower moulding, runs a row of terracotta rosettes. The face of the mouldings shows a frieze of cross-petals. The inter-space is filled in with jali work. The

upper moulding is embossed with spaced rosettes on the face above a frieze of inverted merlons, all in terracotta relief.

The semi-circular mihrāb niche is divided into triple vertical panels by means of mouldings, while another moulding running down from the arch apex across the middle cuts the niche into two parallel parts. The vertical moulding is impressed with a chain-and-pendant. The ornamentation of the niche panels have almost disappeared except faint traces at places. The topmost panel depicts interlaced hanging twigs above a row of rosettes. The middle panel is occupied by a stylized hanging pattern and rosettes occurring alternately. The lowest panel shows a cross-petal design above a row of decorative arches containing plant in terracotta.

The brick pilasters carrying the arches for the dome base show triple mouldings at the base, one in the middle and two at the neck. The base mouldings have lost their decoration, the middle ones show stylized merlons underneath and above, while the neck mouldings have been placed above a frieze of intersecting terracotta hanging necklace with pendants. There also occurs a motif resembling banana plant on the shaft of the corner pilasters.

The back face of the entrance arches shows a diamond placed perpendicularly on the keystone. The spandrels show usual rosettes, above which is a frieze of intersecting hanging garlands with pendants. Higher up, is a moulding embossed with rosettes in terracotta.

The pendentives at the dome base have been formed with oversailing courses of bricks placed corner-wise, vaguely recalling a sort of honeycombing.

General observations. When stood intact, the Majlis Awliyā' Mosque must have been a grand structure in the characteristic Bengali style. It resembles the Bāghā Mosque in Rajshahi district (1523) in architectural and ornamental features and also in environmental setting. The mosque compound is a spacious raised mound on the west bank of a large tank whose outlines are still clearly identifiable. Subsequent human settlement around the mosque may have caused destruction to the gateways that possibly led to the mosque premises in the past.

Like the other monuments of the Husain Shāhī period, the Majlis Awliyā' Mosque shows an over-richness of terracotta decoration, the chain-and-pendant developing here into a fantastic stylization. The ornamental motifs show no novelty and merely repeat older themes. In fact, the progress of the terracotta art has stagnated and degeneration set in.

CHAPTER IV

TERRACOTTA ORNAMENTATION UNDER THE MUGHALS (1576-1757 A.D.)

The Mughal period in Bengal history was preceded by the Afghan occupation of the country following the overthrow of the last Husain Shāhi Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mahmūd Shāh by Shēr Shāh in 1538.¹ The Afghan interregnum was rent by mutual rivalry between the Sūrī and the Karrānī rulers and little cultural activities could be possible during this unsettled state. In the field of building art, the period offers us record of very few monuments² and none of importance from our point of view. The surviving Afghan monuments, such as the Kusumba Mosque in Rajshahi district (1558) and the Qutb Mosque at Ashtagrām in Mymensingh district (late 16th century) betray a poor imitation of the style developed during the Husain Shāhi period. The Kusumba Mosque (Pl. XXXIII:1) is a 'brick-and-stone style' building, built by Sulymān in A.H. 966 (1558 A.D.)³ during the reign of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Bahādur Shāh and corresponds in style to the Chhoṭa Sonā Masjid (1493-1519) and the Bara Sonā Masjid (1526) in Gaur. The mosque is built of brick core with stone facing inside and outside, except the arches, domes and roof.

¹ HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 164.

² S. Ahmed, op. cit., pp. 248-55.

³ JASB, LXXIII, Pt. I (1904), p. 117; HB, vol. II, op. cit., p. 180, f.n. 1. A Jāmī at Rajmahal and another at Kālānā in Burdwan are also said to have been built during this period.

It has the usual oblong plan, measuring 58 feet by 42 feet with octagonal corner towers, triple curved cornice and bands of horizontal mouldings on the façade. The eastern façade shows three multi-cusped arched doorways, each separated from the other by double vertical panels. The interior is divided into two aisles and three bays by means of two stone pillars. The west wall consists of three stone mihrābs, all richly carved. The roof is covered by six domes supported on arches which spring from the pillars and the side walls. In the north-west corner, there is a well-designed raised gallery resting on massive stone pillars probably meant for the ruler or his deputy. The entire decoration of the mosque, except the dome base, has been done in stone carving in imitation of the terracotta motifs of the Husain Shāhi period. The dome base shows a row of ornamental merlons in terracotta and the corner pendentives are built in characteristic Bengali fashion with oversailing courses of bricks set corner-wise. The stone carving of the mosque shows no novelty in technique, rather represents the fallen state of the art, resembling cast metal works. Dani justly remarks, "The stone cutter's art has now reached its evening of life, where nothing intelligible remains, but everything points to its decay and death."¹

The Qutb Mosque at Ashtagrām (Pl. XXXIII:2) is a brick building of oblong shape with octagonal corner towers, double

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 164.

vertical panelling of the wall surface showing arch motifs in plaster and over-emphasized curvature of the battlements and the cornice. The mosque embodies a novel feature in having five domes on the roof, the larger one at the centre and the four smaller ones at the corners. The domes have lotus finials with pinnacles. There are three doors in the east wall and two each on the north and south. The back wall contains three mihrābs. All the entrance arches as well as the mihrābs are contained within rectangular panels. The surface of the structure is almost barren. The decoration of the mosque was done largely by brick moulding, the only terracotta pieces being the series of rosettes bordering the central doorway panel and the mihrāb panels and those of the arch spandrels, and the ornamental merlons at the dome base. The mosque is undated, but on ground of style, Dani¹ ascribes it to late 16th century. It is noticeable that certain Mughal features have already raided the domain of Bengal architecture even at this early date.

In 1576, the Mughals wrested the sovereignty of Bengal from the Afghāns. But the conquest was ephemeral in the face of risings of the local zamindārs for freedom and power. Local chieftains rose and declared independence. Among the local zamindārs, known as Bāra Bhuinyās, the most formidable was 'Īsā Khān, Masnad-i-Ālā, who curbed out a principality for himself in Eastern Bengal

¹A. H. Dani, MAB, op. cit., p. 165.

with its capital at Sunārgāon. The situation further worsened for the Mughals when some of their officials in Bengal became disgruntled with the unorthodox policy of Akbar and revolted. Well-known among them was Ma'sūm Khān Kābulī,¹ who in collaboration with 'Īsā Khān and other local chiefs, fought relentlessly against the Mughals. The Mughals thus lost hold on Bengal in the year 1580 and the task of reconquest took them years. During these years of political upheaval and turmoil, little building activities are reported in Bengal as also the surviving examples prove. The local life almost stopped where the Husain Shāhī rulers left it and the building traditions then established, survived only in a decadent state. The Kheruā Mosque at Shērpur in Bogra district illustrates the state of architecture of the period. A stone inscription records the erection of the mosque by Mirzā Murād Khān, son of Jawhar 'Alī Khān Qāqshal in A.H. 989 (1582 A.D.). In its plan and design, the mosque follows the old local tradition. Externally, it measures 57 feet by 24 feet 6 inches, the walls being 6 feet thick. The brick-built structure has the usual octagonal towers at the corners. The mosque is entered by three arched doorways in the east wall, and one each in the north and south walls, all enclosed within rectangular frames. The spandrels of the doorway arches are embossed with

¹A.K. Md. Fazlur Rahman, "Ma'sūm Khān Kābulī", JASP, XI, No. 2 (1966), p. 164. Ma'sūm Khān even assumed the title of Sultān-i-Azam as is proved by an inscription dated A.H. 989 (1581 A.D.) found in a ruined mosque at village Chatmohor in Pabna district. (See Ain-i-Akbarī, vol. I, trans. by Blochmann (Calcutta, 1873), p. 621). The inscription is now in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi.

terracotta rosettes. The wall surface is vertically divided into two halves by a moulded band which runs all round the building. Between the doorway openings, vertical panels relieve the otherwise plain brick surface. The battlements and the cornice are curved in the traditional fashion and below the cornice runs a row of small arched panels. There are three semi-circular mihrābs in the west wall, the central one showing rectangular projection outside. The mihrābs are enclosed within rectangular frames. The arch spandrels show two terracotta rosettes, while a leafy pattern in terracotta decorates the vertical arms of the frame. The frames are crowned with ornamental merlons. The interior of the mosque is divided into three square sections by transverse arches rising from the side-walls. The three hemispherical domes rest on the walls without extra support of pillars, the phase of transition being effected by oversailing courses of bricks as in the Sultānī monuments.

Despite the outward conformity of the mosque with the Sultānī architecture of Bengal, there is little terracotta ornamentation in the structure and the wall surface is almost barren. Besides, the interior arrangement of the mosque into a single hall of three square bays, each covered with a dome, constitutes a new feature in Bengal architecture, which, henceforth, became the usual form of the three-bay Mughal mosques in Bengal.

A new style of architecture was born in Bengal in the wake of the Mughal reconquest of the country. The traditional building

art, which evolved in the soil, created forms and decoration that were suited to the local climate and environment. It had its own ideals of beauty which appealed to the local people, but not to the Mughal conquerors, who were imbued with new concepts of architecture as represented by their buildings at Agra, Lahore, Fathpur-Sikri and Delhi. The style of architecture that the Mughals introduced into Bengal was, therefore, different from the local tradition, but preferred and practised by the conquerors, it gradually caught the imagination of the people. The new changes are noticeable at the first instance in the urban centres which sprang up with the establishment of the Mughal authority in Bengal and were dominated by the Mughal officials and soldiery.

Due to lack of finer building material like red sandstone and marble in Bengal (which the Mughals invariably used in their buildings in upper India), the traditional bricks continued to be used in the Mughal buildings, but with a fundamental change in the style. The old terracotta ornamentation was replaced by plastering of the walls, which show decorative designs, rectangular and arched - the arches being of various kinds, such as flat arch, multi-cusped arch, four-centred stilted arch, etc. The two-centred pointed arch of the Sultāni period gave way to the four-centred stilted arch.¹ The roof ceiling came to be

¹The earliest example of the four-centred stilted arch in Muslim architecture is seen in the Baghdad Gate at Raqqa (late 8th century).

decorated with net and foliage patterns in plaster. The older curved battlements and cornice became straight under the Mughals and the horizontal parapet was ornamented with blind merlons in plaster. The parapet was further adorned with the addition of pinnacles at intervals. There also occurred change in the shape of the dome as well as in its height. The hemispherical or the bowl-shaped 'bald' domes of the Sultānī period were replaced under the Mughals with well-attenuated sharp-top domes of Persian origin. The dome gained height by means of an octagonal drum faced with blind merlons and was invariably crowned with a Kalasa pinnacle above a lotus finial. The verticality of the buildings was further emphasized by pillard or plastered Kiosks placed atop the corner towers and also by additional turrets shooting above the parapet. Often the corner towers themselves shot above the parapet wall and ended in petalled bud. The parapet was furnished with battlements in keeping with the upward flight of the architectural elements. The pre-Mughal buildings of Bengal almost universally suffered from stunted look and lack of verticality which had been remedied under the Mughals.¹

Another significant change brought about by the Mughals in the architecture of Bengal was the introduction of the Persian

¹ The tall pinnacles over the corner towers in the Qadam Rasūl building and the Jhān Jhānia Mosque at Gaur are probably additions of the Mughal period. Percy Brown is mistaken in placing pinnacles on the corner towers of the Chhota Sonā Mosque (1493-1519) at Gaur in his sketch of the mosque. He is also wrong in placing only one cau-cālā dome over the central bay of the mosque, whereas, there are three in actual existence. Cf. Percy Brown, op. cit., Pl. XXIX, facing page 38.

iwān-portal at the central doorway, flanked by smaller arched openings. Within the portal opened an arched passage under a recessed alcove. The portal was bordered by ornamental slender minarets which were placed on inverted jars and crowned with pinnacles. The introduction of the portal added a majestic look to the façade of the Mughal buildings in place of the monotonous row of small arches of the Sultānī period. Besides, the gentle curve of the alcove with its reduction of the mass gave the portal the effect of grace and lightness.

All these changes introduced by the Mughals in Bengal are initially noticeable in the provincial metropolis, where the successive governors erected buildings for their own use. But they slowly and gradually found popular acceptance across the country. The older tradition of terracotta ornamentation, however, did not die immediately. It declined in the face of invasion of the imperial style and for lack of royal patronage. However, ornamentation in terracotta continued sporadic appearance not in the capitals but in the various localities of the countryside where local craftsmanship kept the tradition alive till a late date of the Mughal rule in Bengal as it is evidenced by the Aṭiyā Mosque (1609) in Tangail district, the Sādī Mosque (1652) and the Shāh Muḥammad Mosque (c. 1680) at Egārasindur in Mymensingh district, the Kamalāpur Mosque (17th century) in Barisal district and a few other minor instances. The extent of ornamentation in all these buildings is rather scanty compared to the

large scale application of the art in the Sultānī monuments. Qualitatively also, the art has fallen a great deal, now being merely a faint reflex of its past glorious self.

The Ātiyā Mosque (Pls. XXXIV:1-2). The mosque is situated in the locality named Ātiyā, about 6 miles to the south of the district headquarters of Tangail. Typologically, it belongs to the single-domed square hall with a three-domed verandah in front of the Sultānī period and is akin to the Chāmkāṭṭi Masjid (1478), the Rājibī Masjid (1433-86), the Lattān Masjid (1493-1519), all at Gaur, and the Mosque of Gopālganj in Dinājpur (1460), the Mosque at Masjidbāri in Bakerganj (1465), the Mosque at Kherāul in Murshidabad (1495), the Surā Mosque in Dinājpur (16th century) and the Sāṅkarpāsā Mosque in Sylhet (16th century). It has also Mughal features particularly in the corner towers, plastered decoration and the dome base, thus illustrating a happy combination of the Sultānī elements with those of the Mughals. The mosque also shows rich ornamentation in terracotta, both inside and outside, attesting thereby to the continuation of the art during the Mughal period. Built in 1018 A.H. (1609 A.D.) by Sayyid Khān Pani, son of Bāyazīd Khān Pani, it is an oblong brick structure measuring 69 feet by 40 feet with walls $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick. There are four octagonal towers at the corners having series of bands on the shaft and ending in ornamental plastered kiosks surmounted by lotus finials and jar pinnacles. The domes are placed on battlemented drums with an additional row of basal

ornaments in plaster. The parapet and the cornice are deeply curved, while the former is decorated with hood-shaped merlons in plaster. There are three two-centred arched doorways in the east wall, one each in the north and south of the verandah and a lintelled entrance in the north and south walls of the main hall. The west wall inside contains three niched mihrābs, the central one being larger and showing rectangular projection outside along the wall height.

Exterior decoration. The outer face of the north and east walls of the mosque is entirely covered with terracotta ornamentation. The west and the south walls are totally bare and there is no indication of any past decoration. The east wall surface is vertically divided by a projecting string-course which runs a little above the entrance arches. The face of the string-course is decorated with a row of terracotta lozenge. Above the string-course, runs a frieze of arch motifs each having a twig inside in terracotta. Below the string-course, is a row of terracotta necklace with pendant with a rosette occurring between. The wall surface between the curved cornice and the string-course is divided into three panelled registers, each separated from the other by spaced rosettes in terracotta. Each of the uppermost panels contains inside a terracotta plant motif enclosed within borders formed of rows of diamonds. The panels of the lower registers depict plant motif within borders of intersecting creepers. The arrangement of the panels recalls the type seen in the Jhān Jhānia Mosque (Pl. XXVII:2) and the Qadam Rasūl

building (Pl. XXVI:2) at Gaur. The inter-spaces between the triple cornice mouldings are also decorated with terracotta motifs: the upper depicts jali pattern and chequer separated each from the other by rosettes, and the lower, a continuous jali design. Below the mouldings, runs a frieze of intersecting necklace with pendants in terracotta.

The wall surface below the string-course also shows numerous ornamental terracotta panels. Each doorway arch is contained within rectangular frames formed of decorative panels which show plant motifs enclosed within borders of intersecting creepers, jali pattern, interlocking design etc. The spandrels of the arches are covered with terracotta creepers, while a row of terracotta necklace with pendants runs above the spandrels. There are spaced rosettes of different sizes over the entire façade.

The northern façade is vertically divided into four registers by means of curved mouldings. Each register shows a row of oblong terracotta panels whose raised borders are decorated with spaced rosettes, while inside each panel occurs a large rosette with a winged motif below and above. There are smaller rosettes encircling the larger one in the centre. The curved cornice depicts chequer and jali pattern in terracotta with rosettes occurring in between.

Interior decoration. Terracotta also decorates the mihrāb panels inside the mosque. The central mihrāb is enclosed within double decorative borders. The outer border shows panelled

decoration. The lower panels contain chain-and-pendant within arch motif, while the upper ones depict vegetal elements. The borders of the panels are embossed with terracotta rosettes. The inner border has cross-petal and jali patterns. The spandrels of the mihrāb arch are plain and plastered. The semi-circular mihrāb niche shows three foiled arches in plaster above which runs a frieze of hanging flowers with intersecting stalks in terracotta. The mihrāb panel has triple ornamental mouldings at the top surmounted by a frieze of arch motifs. The inter-spaces between the mouldings are filled in with terracotta cross-petal design. Below the mouldings, is a frieze of intersecting hanging necklace with pendants, also in terracotta.

The side mihrābs are enclosed within single decorative borders with a moulding at the apex and surmounted by a row of arch motifs with finials, all in terracotta. The borders of the southern mihrāb have panelled decoration with plant motifs inside, while those of the northern mihrāb show horizontal bars, each decorated with two rows of tiny merlons on its face. These mihrāb niches show a single frieze of hanging flowers with intersecting stalks, similar with the ones of the central mihrāb below the alcove.

The pilasters supporting the arches for the domes of the mosque are richly decorated with terracotta motifs at the bottom, in the middle and at the capital. The motifs include cross-petals, jali work, interlocking and vegetal elements. The

pendentives at the dome base still retain the oversailing pattern of brick-setting cornerwise, a characteristic feature of the Sultānī architecture of Bengal.

General observations. As said earlier, the terracotta ornamentation of the mosque is exteriorly confined to the eastern and northern façades and still survives at places in fairly good condition. The western and the southern walls outside are completely bare and plastered over with lime mortar. Here the parapet and the cornice mouldings are also straight. Thus these sides of the mosque are both architecturally and decoratively different from the other two sides. One may reasonably wonder at the incongruous character of the structure. One possible explanation for this state of the building may be sought in the attempt to effect a compromise between the traditional and the Mughal features, but the experiment resulted in loss of architectural aesthetics. What is, however, significant is that the pre-Mughal traditions persistently kept on occupying popular liking even when invaded by the imperial Mughal style. The terracotta ornamentation of the mosque bears witness to this fact. But the decoration has little artistic appeal and the repetitive arrangement of the panels with monotonous regularity of the ornamental motifs tires the sight. In fact, the terracottas of the Aṭiyā Mosque represent the declining phase of the art.

The Sādi Mosque at Egārasindur¹ (Pl. XXXV:1). It is a brick-built structure of 27 feet each side with octagonal towers at the four corners and a single hemispherical dome crowning the roof. The east wall has three arched doorways, the central one being larger. There are two side doorways, one each in the north and south. The parapet is straight in characteristic Mughal fashion, while below it can be seen triple curved cornice, a survival from the Sultānī architecture. The dome rests on a ring at the base and a lotus finial crowns the top. The corner towers shoot above the parapet and terminate in a cap crowned with a finial. Corresponding to the doorways in the east wall, the west wall contains three decorated mihrābs inside. The eastern façade shows vertical panellings at the wall-ends which are now bare. There are two more rectangular panels in the east wall, one each over the doorways flanking the central entrance. These panels show each a terracotta rosette placed at the centre, perhaps surrounded by other terracotta motifs in the past. In keeping with the Mughal style, the mosque is plastered all over, except the east entrances and the mihrābs which show ornamentation in terracotta. The corners inside the mosque show corbelled pendentives which change the square of the structure into a circular base above for the dome to rest.

¹ Egārasindur was an important place in the early Mughal history of Bengal. It lies in the Kishoreganj subdivision of Mymensingh district on the eastern bank of the Brahmaputra, just where the Bonār river breaks away towards east. A fort was established here by 'Isā Khān, (16th century). After its conquest by the Mughals, it was turned into a police outpost.

According to an inscription set up over the central doorway on the east, the mosque was built in A.H. 1062 (1652 A.D.) under the supervision of Sādi, son of Sheroo, during the reign of emperor Shāh Jahān.

Decoration. All the entrance doorways in the east wall are decorated with terracotta motifs. The central doorway is contained within rectangular frame decorated with a scrolling creeper running all round. The lintel of the frame imitates the curvature of the cornice bands above. Above the frame, is a row of decorative blind merlons in terracotta. The central arch shows decorative cusps on its outer face supported on ornamental banded pillars. The arch spandrels depict two large terracotta rosettes flanking a jar finial atop the arch-apex. Sideways, ornamental half-arch motifs have been arranged vertically. The spandrels are surmounted by double mouldings with an inter-space between. The soffit of the lower moulding depicts a frieze of terracotta lozenge and beneath it runs a row of blind merlons. The upper moulding is also faced with a lozenge frieze, now almost indistinct. The inter-space is now vacant, but probably contained ornamental terracotta in the past.

The flanking doorways are slightly recessed in the wall and show almost similar decoration in terracotta above the arches. The arch spandrels have each a rosette on either side of a jar finial. Above, is a curved moulding surmounted by a narrow horizontal sunken panel. The moulding shows a frieze of terracotta lozenge impressed on its face. Below the moulding, runs

a row of blind merlons. The sunken panel in the southern doorway is decorated with a frieze of terracotta rosettes below a line of hanging merlons, while that in the northern is filled with a square pattern formed by vertical and horizontal lines.

The ornamentation of the mihrābs is comparatively simpler. The spandrels of the mihrāb arches are embossed with terracotta rosettes. The central mihrāb has a row of spaced rosettes forming its border. All the mihrāb arches have jar finials. The interior is now white-washed and the possible existence of other terracotta motifs has disappeared.

General observations. The mosque embodies a blending of the Sultānī and the Mughal features of architecture and ornamentation. It is not a product of the initial phase of the Mughal occupation of Bengal, but of long later, when the Mughal rule was very well established in this country. The appearance of the terracotta decoration in the mosque speaks of the innate love for the art of the local people who were wont to appreciate it for centuries, but were now threatened in its continuation by the inroads of the imperial style. But traditions die hard, and the art kept up through vicissitudes as is evident from the discussions made in this section of the essay.

However, the invasion of the imperial style could not ring the death-knell of the terracotta tradition of Bengal. What happened was simply a shift of place of occurrence of the decorative technique from the Muslim buildings to Hindu temples and thus it kept alive till late 19th century.

Shāh Muhammad Mosque at Egārasindur. It is a single-domed brick-built mosque in the typical Mughal style. It stands at the back of a raised courtyard entered through a bungalow type oblong structure also built of brick. The mosque consists of a square of 32 feet each side with octagonal domed corner towers which have plastered kiosks terminating in a finial. There are three doorways in the east wall and one each in the north and south walls. The entrances on the north and south and the main one in the east open within a slightly projected bay with ornamental bordering turrets. The side-wall entrances are flanked by two arched niches in the wall, one on each side. The central arch in the east wall shows cuspings on its outer face. Each of the doorway arches and the blind ones show a rectangular nich above. The wall-ends in the eastern façade are decorated with rectangular panelling in vertical rows, which contained terracotta motifs in the past, some of which are still surviving. The parapet of the mosque is horizontal and the walls are surmounted by battlemented cresting. All the corner towers and doorway turrets shoot above the parapet. The dome is crowned with a lotus finial having a jar-shaped pinnacle. In the west wall inside, there are three decorated mihrābs. The inscription of the mosque is missing, but on ground of style, it may be dated about 1680.

Decoration. The mosque is a pure Mughal type plastered all over excepting the rectangular panels at the wall-ends in the east façade. These panels show terracotta motifs of plants of local

origin in their recesses. The three mihrābs in the west wall show richer decoration in terracotta. All the mihrābs have decorative cusping on their face and are enclosed within rectangular frames. The upper part of the frames above the archspringing depicts an intersecting scroll design containing a multi-petalled flower in each of the loops. The angles of the frame inside are filled with a fan-shaped terracotta design consisting of motifs not identifiable at present. The pillars supporting the mihrāb arches show series of ornamental bands. Above each band, is a frieze of large-sized lotus petals. The mihrāb niches are divided into two vertical parts by a thin moulding above which can be seen a row of arched panels each containing a terracotta plant inside. The decoration of the lower part has disappeared. Flanking the central mihrāb on either side is a smaller arched niche at some height which is now bare. Higher up, on each side of the mihrāb panel is a big rosette placed on a projected tablet. Above the mihrāb panel, runs a row of arched niches filled with terracotta plants.

General observations. The terracotta motifs in the mosque are stereotyped and devoid of artistic appeal. They are, however, indicative of the popular liking for the art, long after the Mughal style had been well established in Bengal.

The Kamalapur Mosque (Pl. XXXV:2). The mosque is situated in village Kamalapur under Gaurnadi Thana in the district of Barisal. It is a three-domed brick-built structure with octagonal

towers at the four corners. Oblong in shape, it measures 56 feet 6 inches by 26 feet 6 inches externally, the walls being 6 feet thick. There are three arched doorways in the east wall and one each in the north and south walls. The central doorway in the east is larger than the flanking ones and has been given prominence by slight projection bounded on either side by octagonal slender turrets. The mosque stands on a podium $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. The corner towers now end at the parapet, but shot above in the past. The east wall shows plastered panelling, except the central doorway which is ornamented with terracotta. The other walls of the mosque are simply plastered over. The parapet is straight, but shows projection over the central entrance.

The mosque interior is divided into three bays by two transverse arches. The central bay has been kept square of 14 feet 6 inches a side, while the side ones are oblong in shape. All the three bays are covered with slightly bulbous domes, the central one being larger and crowned with a lotus finial. The side domes have finials of Kalasa type. Corresponding to the three entrances in the east façade, there are three mihrābs of octagonal section in the qibla wall. All the mihrābs are set within slightly recessed rectangular frames and show cuspings on their contours. The central mihrāb has a rectangular projection outside, flanked by two slender turrets.

Decoration. Although a Mughal building, much of the ornamentation of the mosque consists of terracotta, so characteristic of the Sultāni architecture of Bengal. The central entrance in the

east wall is contained within quadruple frames, the outermost showing the panelled decoration of the Mughal style, while the inner ones are all decorated with terracotta ornaments. Of the inner triple frames, the outer depicts a jali work with horizontal mouldings at regular intervals; the middle shows a densely leafy creeper, and the innermost has an alternate rosette and a 'bow motif', each kept within a rectangular compartment. The four-centred arch of the doorways has been set behind a decorative cusped arch whose soffit depicts a design of intersecting leafy creepers in terracotta. The arch spandrels are embossed with two big terracotta rosettes, each contained within a circle of lozenge. The spandrels are filled with designs formed of terracotta creepers and tendrils. The side arches are kept within panelled borders having plaster coating, but show cusped ornamentation applied to their outer face.

The mihrābs are now barely plain, except that their semi-circular apertures show in their upper parts a slightly projected band topped over by a frieze of blind merlons. The recessed rectangular frames enclosing the mihrābs most probably contained terracotta ornaments in the past, but these are now empty. Both the northern and the southern doorways are flanked inside by two arched alcoves which have greatly removed the monotony of the mosque interior.

General observations. The mosque represents yet another example of survival of terracotta ornamentation late into the

Mughal period. The appearance of the terracottas, though sporadically, in the monuments of the Mughal style testifies to the inherent strength of the art that sprang from the soil of the country. The misfortune that befell its lot under the Mughals was that, for lack of royal patronage, the art migrated to countryside, but still enjoyed the popular favour.

The inscription of the mosque is missing and hence it cannot be definitely dated. But the technique of building the side domes offers a clue to its probable dating. The side domes were raised over oblong halls which certainly posed problems for the builder. The solution was reached through the intervention of half-domed vaults on the corner pendentives, above which the actual domes sprang on a further series of pendentives. Similar techniques are seen employed for the first time in the Lālbāg mosque at Dacca,¹ said to have been built by prince Muhammad A'zam in 1678. The Kamalāpur mosque may therefore be dated to the end of the 17th century, but later than 1678.

¹

See R.E.M. Wheeler, op. cit., pp. 124-25.

CHAPTER V

MUSLIM TERRACOTTA AND TEMPLE ORNAMENTATION

The Muslims revived the architectural use of terracotta art in Bengal after a lapse of centuries.¹ But unlike the older tradition of the country, Muslim terracotta appeared in a totally new character in respect of themes, layout and style. Figure motifs, the soul of the older art, were altogether dispensed with in consonance with the aniconic spirit of Islam and their place taken over by geometric, vegetal and abstract subjects. In early Bengal architecture, represented by the Buddhist sites at Maināmati (Comilla), Pāhārpur (Rajshahi) and Mahāsthān (Bogra), the terracotta plaques were large in size being about two feet square,² and arranged in rows, laid end to end, along the circum-ambulatory walls of the central temple or the Vihāra with little strip motifs. Conversely, the plaques used in Muslim buildings were, as a rule, smaller in size³ of a few inches across, and

¹Pre-Muslim architectural terracotta is not known in Bengal after the 10th century. The later Pāla-Sena temples still surviving are all decorated with stucco. (See David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", JASP, XIII, No. 3 (1968), p. 244).

²For the size of Pāhārpur terracottas, see K.N. Dikshit, MASI, No. 55, (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1938), p. 58.

³Muslim terracotta plaques found on the surface in the temple site at Pāhārpur measure $6\frac{3}{4}" \times 4\frac{1}{4}" \times 2"$ or $5" \times 2\frac{3}{4}"$ or $6" \times 4"$ (Cf. Ibid. p. 79). Use of small-sized bricks in the Muslim architecture of Bengal is perhaps an instance of Persian influence. Smaller bricks of only about half as large as the normal standard square size had been used in the Saljūq buildings (See D.N. Wilber, The Architecture of Islamic Iran, (New Jersey, Princeton: University Press, 1955), p. 48).

arranged in elaborate patterns in the doorways, cornice, corner towers, mihrābs and dome base or so as to sheathe the entire façade and often the interior. The strip motifs were used in abundance so that no space was theoretically left vacant. In fact, Muslim decorative scheme is designed to translate the omnipresence of the Almighty God in space and hence the overall covering of the surface with ornaments. Another significant feature of the Muslim terracottas was their low-relief character, akin to the medieval Middle Eastern stucco decoration, in contrast with the protruding style at the early Buddhist examples of Bengal. The layout of the surface for application of the Muslim terracottas was also subjected to strict discipline and pattern. Designs were composed within well-defined outlines marked by string-courses, mouldings, panels etc. In fact, Muslim treatment of surface is mathematical as also their art motifs. Further, compared with the pre-Muslim Bengal terracottas, those of the Muslims are superior art products in material content, finesse and beauty. But the progress of the art on Muslim support suffered a setback with the Mughal conquest of Bengal towards the close of the 16th century when terracotta was replaced by plaster-work¹ as

¹Dani is of opinion that the Mughals introduced plaster decoration in Bengal architecture. (A.H. Dani, MAB (Dacca: The Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961), p. 17). But it appears that plaster was also used in the Sultāni monuments, although very rarely, the Gaur Madrasah being an instance in point. (Cf. Muhammad Abdul Qader, "The Newly Discovered Madrasah Ruins at Gaur and Its Inscription", Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, XXIV-XXVI (Humanities) (1979-81), p. 52).

a medium for architectural ornamentation. But even in the absence of court patronage, terracotta continued a staggering existence in isolated Muslim buildings till late 17th century.¹ Meanwhile, terracotta shifted its place of occurrence to the Hindu temples, and despite change of context, retained its Muslim character throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Significantly enough, temple decoration with terracotta ornaments constitutes Bengal's individual peculiarity, not found in any other part of India.²

From the 16th century onward, there occurred an architectural revival among the Hindus of Bengal. The singular factor which led to this was the rise of Śrī Caitanya (1486-1534) in the religious firmament of Hinduism. Śrī Caitanya effected a socio-religious revolution of decisive importance in the life of the Hindus of Bengal. The Puranic Renaissance³ which began in Bengal in the 15th century under the liberal administration of the Muslim Sultāns resulted in making the Brahmins the supreme head of the Hindu society. The Brahmins enforced strict adherence to the Śāstras. Under the new dispensation, caste system became more stringent and oppression on the low castes increased manifold.

¹ See Supra, Chapter IV.

² Amiya Kumar Bandopadhyaya, Bāṅkurār Mandir (Calcutta: Sāhitya Saṅsad, 1371 B.S.), pp. 117-18.

³ The movement is associated with regeneration of faith in God and in the Brahmin, vernacular recension of the epics and the Śāstras, revivification of the Śiva and the Śakti cults, etc. (See D.C. Sen, History of Bengali Language and Literature (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1911), Chapter IV, pp. 150-380).

Śrī Caitanya disowned the Brahmins as the unquestionable head of the society, electing in their place those endowed with spirituality and high character "as naturally fit to rule irrespective of their birth".¹ In his preaching, the Purāṇas came to occupy a secondary place with his followers and living examples of faith came to the forefront. He preached the love of God incarnated in Kṛṣṇa. The Brahmins lost their authority on the Vaiṣṇavas and in the new order, the Sudras, the lowest of the four original castes, often occupied equal rank with the Brahmins.² Thus the age-old social order of the Hindus was completely upset; a new life had dawned in Bengal awakening men to a right appreciation of the value of character and spirituality amongst men in preference to caste honour.³ The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult of love preached by Śrī Caitanya thus set ablaze the devotional spirit of the Hindus which was kept in repression under the garb of Puranic Renaissance. The wave of Vaisnavism manifested by the Bhakti Movement swept over Bengal and gave vent to the devotional urge of the Hindus through building temples and decorating them with narrative portrayals of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa stories. The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult thus provided the main inspiration for the revival of Hindu art and architecture in late medieval Bengal.⁴

¹ D.C. Sen, op. cit., p. 444.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 446.

⁴ David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1972), p. 1.

Secondly, the architectural revival of the Hindus roughly coincided with the Mughal rule in Bengal when the country enjoyed peace and security and overflowed with material prosperity resultant of the progressive administration of the great Mughals. The Hindu zamindars and landlords were the chief patrons of temple building during the period. Although the Mughal conquest had turned them into vassals of Delhi, they were still left "without interference" within their estates as long as they were punctual in their remittances of revenue and looked after the welfare of the people. Nowhere do we come across a report of any direct intervention in the internal administration of such estates.¹ In the 18th century, the Hindus became economically further better off as a result of the Nawwāb Murshid Quli Khān's policy of appointing them in large number to state services, particularly in the revenue department² and uninterrupted commercial activities in the country.³ These policies continued under the succeeding nawwābs. Further, the expansion of the East India Company trade in Bengal and its capture of power in the mid 18th century created a rich section of Hindu bāniyās or merchants and professional men in the employ of the Company. The Company's experiment with the revenue system of Bengal in the subsequent years gave birth to a Hindu zamindār class loyal to the English.

¹ T.K. Raychoudhury, Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir (Calcutta: A Mukherjee & Co. Ltd. 1953), p. 21.

² Abdul Karim, Murshid Quli Khan and His Times (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1963), p. 70.

³ Ibid., p. 217.

These parvenus did not always come from the high castes of the Hindus and many of them did not possess social respectability.¹ They erected large number of temples either as mark of religious piety, or to show off their affluence or to improve their social status. In any case, Bengal came to be adorned with numerous temples during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The temples of late medieval Bengal were local in origin and different from the earlier types² which had been the products of extraneous influence.³ The change in the temple styles went along with the change in deities: "the worship of Viṣṇu gave way to that of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, of Camundā to that of Kālī; Sūrya fell entirely out of favour; curious stories of folk cults like that of Dharmarāja or Dakshina Rāya arose"⁴ The new styles of temples consist of the hut style and the pinnacled style. The hut style is an imitation of the common Bengali village house built of Bamboo or mud with thatched roof. It is of two types: one consisting of an elongated base with two sides to the roof and gable ends and called ek-bāṅglā or do-cālā, and the other, built

¹Cf. H.R. Sanyal, "Social Aspects of Temple Building in Bengal", Man in India, 48, No. 3 (1969), p. 205.

²The ancient temples of Bengal belonged to the Northern style of Indian architecture. For the earlier types, see HB, vol. I, ed. by R.C. Majumdar (Dacca: University of Dacca, 1963), Chapter XIV, pp. 493-514.

³Asim Mukhopadhyaya, Cabbis Parganār Mandir (Calcutta: Anandadhārā Prakāśan, 1377 B.S.), p. 4. All the old types, except the rekḥā deul and very rarely the pirhā, went out of fashion.

⁴David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal, op. cit., p. 4.

on square or rectangular base, the roof having four sides which meet at a ridge, if rectangular, or at a point, if square, and called cār-cālā. When two ek-bāṅglā or do-cālā structures are joined one behind the other, one serving as a porch and the other as shrine, the composition is called jor-bāṅglā, which is Bengal's unique contribution to temple architecture.¹ The cār-cālā type retains the characteristic curve of the cornice peculiar to Bengal huts and initiated into brick by the Eklākhi Mausoleum at Hazrat Pānduā (1415-32). When translated into brick and other harder materials, the curves add to the decorative dimension of the structures. When a miniature duplicate is built on the cār-cālā, it is called āt-cālā. Among the dated temples of the 16th and 17th centuries, the āt-cālā appears well established.² Both the cār-cālā and āt-cālā show characteristic Muslim features like arches and vaults in the construction of their superstructures. Structurally, the basic cār-cālā type is a square chamber roofed internally by a domed ceiling on pendentives; when built on an elongated base, the vault is built up from the four sides with a ridge down the centre. This latter type of

¹David McCutcheon, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal, p. 5.

²Examples of the type are the ones at Gokārnā (1580) in Murshidabad, Rāinagar (1588) in Jessore, Bardhankuti (1601) in Rangpur, Itnā (1618) in Jessore, Basudebpur (1626) in Bankura, Ghurīsā (1633) in Birbhum, Tārās (1635) in Pabna etc. The oldest surviving cār-cālā temple is said to be the Simhavāhini temple at Ghātāl in Midnapore district, dated 1490. (David McCutcheon, Temples of Bankura District (Calcutta, 1967), p. 5). It is one of the earliest terracotta decorated temples that still survive.

vault was earlier introduced in the central row of domes on the Sāt-Gumbad Mosque at Bāgerhāt (15th century) in Khulna and in the Chhoṭa Sona Masjid (1493-1519) at Gaur. The extant examples of the ek-bāṅglā temple do not seem to go back earlier than the 17th century;¹ these are the ones at Bardhankuṭi in Rangpur and Mādharpāsā in Barisal. The earliest ek-bāṅglā still standing is said to be the Caitanyadeva at Guptipārā in Hooghly, built during the reign of Akbar (1556-1605). The ek-bāṅglā also contains internally large sweeping vault with curved ridge and lower edges.

The pinnacled or ratna style is nearest to Muslim tradition and has similar ground plan with the hut style - a rectangular structure with curved cornice, but the roof is more or less flat and is surmounted by one or more towers or pinnacles called ratnas (jewel). The number of ratna may range from one to as many as twentyfive. McCutchion holds that the ratna style had its origin in Muslim precedents which were creatively adapted to temple structures.²

Both the hut and the pinnacled styles were especially favoured for the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temples which constitute nearly all the surviving richly decorated examples from the 16th and 17th centuries.

¹ Muslim examples of ek-bāṅglā building such as the Mausoleum of Fath Khān (c. 1660) at Gaur, Gateway to the Mosque of Shāh Muḥammad (1680) at Egārasindur in Mymensingh and the chamber attached to the mosque of Kartalaḥ Khān (c. 1700) in Dacca are all of later time.

² David McCutchion, Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal, op. cit., p. 8.

These temples are marked with profuse terracotta illustration of Vaisnava themes and on them the influence of Muslim art is predominant. The extent of this influence gradually diminished in the 18th and 19th centuries; nevertheless, certain basic features of Muslim origin continued in temples till late last. Both the temple styles heavily fed on Muslim structural elements for their vaulted domes, pillared entrances with pointed cusped arch and curved or humped roofs and cornices. In respect of ornamentation, these late medieval temples imitated the Muslim terracotta art in layout, style and often even in themes.

The Bengal temples are mostly made of brick. They usually stand on raised platform, wide and fairly high. The body of the temples consists of the sanctum, generally with various additions. The sanctum is commonly oblong in shape, but also cubical at times and has, as a rule, a verandah or porch in front. Other additions may also be there, such as an extra covered verandah in front and back, or on all four sides, with rooms at each corner. The verandah has a single or usually a triple arched entrance between two columns. The arches are pointed and cusped. The columns are short, thick, heavy-looking, square above and below, with two or more thick bands round the central shaft. A broad rectangular frame encloses the arched entrance and with additional mouldings on all three sides, separates the upper and side parts of the wall surface from the entrance arches. The side parts of the wall are elaborately panelled and further variegated with ornamental

mouldings. The walls end in well-defined corners marked by horizontal bands and vertical lines simulating the appearance of buttressing towers.¹

The similarity of the temple façade with those of the Sultānī mosques is thus obvious and the resemblance is nearest when the Qadam Rasūl building (1531) at Gaur is taken to represent the Muslim style. The entrance pillars of the Qadam Rasūl are perfectly similar with those of the temples. This type of pillars appeared earliest as supports of the Bādshāh-ka-takht in the Adina Mosque (1375) at Hazrat Pānduā. The focus of terracotta ornamentation in the temples is the single or the triple arched entrance and particularly the space above the pointed arches. The arch spandrels show each a lotus surrounded by floral or sculptural motifs. Lotuses on either side of the pointed arch are a feature of the early Muslim architecture and occur in the Muslim monuments in India as at the Qutb and Ajmer from the beginning. Terracotta rosettes, stylized from the lotus, are a common feature of the arch spandrels of the Sultānī buildings of Bengal. Down the sides of the arch spandrels in temples runs an arabesque which is characteristically Muslim in origin having been developed in the West Asiatic lands in early Islam as at the Mshatta façade (8th century) and was employed almost as a regular element of spandrel decoration of the Sultānī mosques of Bengal. The pointed arches

¹ For characteristics of Bengali temples, see M.M. Chakravarti, "Bengal Temples and their General Characteristics", JASB, V (1909), pp. 141-51.

of the late medieval temples are built on the voussoir principle usually with cusps. The pointed arch is a general feature of Muslim architecture in time and space¹ and cusping is as well a Muslim element of decoration. In India, they first appeared in the early monuments of Delhi such as at the tomb of Iltutmish² (1235) and their earliest occurrence in Bengal architecture could be seen in the side mihrābs of the Adina Mosque (1375).³ The triangular arch with multiple cusps in the mihrābs of the Darasbāri Mosque (1479) at Gaur was a feature of the Western Saljūq art in Iraq, while the blind cusps of the Adina Mosque tympana are exactly paralleled in Persia by those on the 10th century portal of the Jorgir Mosque of Isfahān, or earlier still on the Tāq-i-Kisra of Ctesiphon (3rd century) in present-day Iraq. Some of the Muslim terracotta elements were used for temple decoration almost without change. The terracotta niche reliefs on the façade of the Eklākhī Mausoleum (1415-32) at Hazrat Pānduā and those on the façades of the Bābā Adam's Mosque (1483) at Rāmpāl in Dacca district reappear with their typical Muslim embellishments on the walls of the Ichāi Ghos̄er deul (c. 17th century) in Burdwan district. The terracotta niche reliefs appeared earliest on the

¹ Pointed arches were used in the Umayyad and the Abbasid buildings such as at the Great Mosque of Damascus (710-15), Quṣayr 'Amrā' (c. 712-15), Ukha'idir (c. 775), Raqqa (end of the 8th century), Samarra (836-92) etc. (See K.A.C. Creswell, EMA, vol. I, Pt. I (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 81).

² Percy Brown, Indian Architecture (Islamic Period) (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1968), Pl. VIII facing page 13.

³ Ibid., Pl. XXV, Fig. 2.

façade of the west wall of the Adina Mosque (1375), where they generally had no pillars.

Temple ornamentation in the 16th and 17th centuries betrays extensive influence of Muslim terracotta art. Some of these temples were almost exclusively decorated with purely Muslim floral and abstract motifs.¹ The Bhairavi temple at Rāigunj (16th century) in West Dinajpur district has all its four walls and interior decorated with terracotta designs similar with those on Muslim mosques. In the Baidyapur deul (1578) in Burdwan, except a narrow figure frieze and a couple of elephants, the entire façade was decorated with Muslim banded pattern. The Guptipārā jor-bānglā (c. 17th century) in Hooghly has no figure motifs at all and is entirely decorated with terracotta reliefs of vegetal and abstract themes. In the Gopālparā temple at Naldāngā (1641) in Jessore district, typically Muslim interlocking and geometric motifs have been abundantly used. The Kodlā Math in

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The phenomenon eloquently testifies to the harmonious Hindu-Muslim relationship in medieval Bengal. Living side by side for centuries in an atmosphere of peace and mutual respect, the two communities necessarily influenced each other in many respects. The Hindus visited the shrines of Muslim saints, while the Muslims attended Hindu festivals. (For Hindu-Muslim relationship in late medieval Bengal, see D.C. Sen, op. cit., pp. 792-804; Ghulam Husain Tabatabai, Siyar al-Mutakhkherin, Eng. Trans. by Haji Mustafa (Calcutta, 1926), pp. 144-46). The two communities even developed a common worship, that of Satya Pir - the term is itself formed by compounding an Arabic word with a Sanskrit word. (D.C. Sen, op. cit., p. 796). Hindu masons and artists built and decorated Muslim monuments. Thus when the same set of people came to build for the Hindu patrons, they cared more for the art and little for the change of context. Besides, working in Muslim commissions for generations, they were naturally disposed to repeat the old motifs. This explains the continuation of Muslim ornaments in the temple terracottas of the Hindus.

Khulna also imitates the Muslim banded patterns for its decoration. The temples at Bhusnā-Gopālpur or Nanikhir in Faridpur have façades entirely decorated with floral panels of the type seen in the northern wall of the Āṭiyā Mosque (1609) in Tangail district. The temple of Rādha-Ballabh at Krishnanagar (c. 18th century) in Hooghly provides an excellent example of this imitation. Here the entire façade is decorated with repeated oblong panels containing lotus wheel in the centre between cusped segments above and below. The wall surface inside the verandah depicts rectangular flat niches with a pointed cusped arch in each. There are rosettes in the spandrels and a pendant hangs from the arch-apex. The remaining space is filled with flowers and tendrils. Similar terracotta panels occurred earliest in Bengal on the façade of the west wall of the Adina Mosque (1375) and thenceforth continued their appearance in almost all the Sultānī buildings attaining the richest form on the Tāntipārā Masjid (1480) at Gaur. In later Sultānī buildings, these panels became stereotyped. At Krishnanagar, the space above the archway is filled with terracotta loose tendrils of characteristic Muslim type instead of the typically Hindu tight scrollwork.¹ On the whole, the Rādha-Ballabh temple has no figure motif and besides the decorative panels mentioned above, all the other incidental ornaments followed the terracotta prototypes of the 16th and 17th centuries mosques.

¹ The tight scrollwork is a Hindu adaptation of the Muslim arabesque, but is artistically a failure. It lacks in the sharpness and subtlety of the arabesque and appears dull and sombre. In fact, the Hindu craftsmen of Bengal never excelled in formations of abstract nature due, perhaps, to their very concept of art as being the expression of the swelling and pulsating forms of nature.

Besides the almost exclusive use of Muslim terracottas in temple ornamentation, a number of temples such as those at Gokārnā (1580) in Murshidabad, Rāinagar (1588) in Jessore and Tārās (1635) in Pabna show the combined use of Muslim floral designs and Hindu figure subjects. The Pañcha-ratna Śymrāi temple at Bishnupur (1643) in Bankura is perhaps the richest example of this group. Muslim geometric designs have been used here in combination with mythological figures. The north wall of the temple is covered with pure geometric patterns of Muslim tradition.¹ Parallel with these, there appears to have been a group of other temples where the purely Hindu motifs with figure subjects were fully worked out. Such was the Rāsikā Rāy temple of Haripurgarh in Mayurbhanj, probably built in the 16th century. Here the base of the temple depicts a double frieze of Kṛṣṇalīlā and social scenes; the sides of the archway panel and its top are filled with Gods, dancers and other figure motifs. The archway panels are ruined in this temple, but in a later example at Ghurisā (1633) in Birbhum district, they depict the full scene of the Lankāyuddha. These instances suggest that alongside the almost exclusive or combined use of Muslim terracotta in Hindu temples, there was a group of craftsmen who practised the pure Hindu art.²

The decoration of the temple façade generally followed formalized patterns covering the spaces between the arches, between

¹Cf. Amiya Kumar Bandhopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 175.

²Cf. David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 248.

the curved lines above the arches and the roof base, on the columns and on the sides including the corner angles. In most of the temples, the front façade was elaborately ornamented leaving other sides with insertation of one or two large plaques or often bare, except for a few geometric designs. Some of the temples, however, show lavish ornamentation on all sides as also on the walls of the porch inside. These include the Symrāi (1643) and the Jor-bānglā (1635) temples at Bishnupur in Bankura, the Kāntanagar temple (1704-22) in Dinajpur, the Govinda temple at Puthiā (18th century) in Rajshahi, etc. Within the total decorative scheme, the subject matters were divided according to their function. The temples were, as a rule, covered with sculpturesque overlay, but then, there also occurred floral, vegetal and geometric elements. The latter served to emphasize the lines on the body of the structures, as frames of figure panels and sometimes as distinct panels themselves.¹ Usually, the base of the temple walls and the arch columns were sheathed with floral, vegetal and geometric panels. Above the base, occurred panels of processions crowded with soldiers, horsemen and elephant riders, while scenes from the epics and mythologies occupied the spaces above the archway frame, the vertical panels on the sides, the top of columns and wall corners. The spandrels above the archways, up to the 18th

¹ A large number of such individual geometric, floral and vegetal panels have been used in the Govinda temple at Puthiā (18th century) in Rajshahi district.

century, were filled with themes from the Kṛṣṇalīlā or battle scenes from the epics.¹ From the 19th century, the spandrels appear to have been occupied by Śiva with attendants, and Durgā with her family members.²

The most frequent themes of illustration on the temple walls were from the epics the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata and various episodes from the life of Kṛṣṇa. Besides these, other Puranic stories such as the marriage of Śiva and Umā, Samudramanthana, Bhāgiratha's bringing of Gāṅgā, Anantasayin Visnu, etc. were also portrayed. The temple façades illustrated a world of secular subjects related to the affluent living of their builders in their various social and private aspects. Scenes from the contemporary society also occurred. All these depictions in terracotta contain enough elements of the socio-religious life of Bengal in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Even when the temple terracottas had fully developed their own themes, styles and setting, they still retained many an element of the Muslim terracotta tradition. But it appears that the Muslim influence was more in evidence in the 17th century temples than in those of the 18th and 19th. However, the basic

¹ Zulekha Haque, Terracotta Decorations of Late Mediaeval Bengal: Portrayal of a Society (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1980), p. 27.

² David McCutcheon, "The Ramayana on the Temples of Bengal", Eastern Railway Magazine, XV (1967), pp. 9-15.

patterns of Muslim façade design sustained in all periods. Simpler interlocking designs of scrolls and creepers were common in the temple terracotta throughout the 18th century and sparsely, on to the 19th. Between the figure panels on the temples of these periods also occurred a large number of motifs of Muslim tradition. These are the diamond, square and circle, lozenge, billets, twisted rope, lotus petal frieze, four-petalled flowers, tassels, hanging twigs, intersegmenting circles, foliated wavy line, criss-cross and chequer, rosettes, net pattern, intersecting scrolls with rosettes in the loops, rosettes alternating four or eight-petalled flowers, beading, serrating, so on and so forth.¹ The split-arch motif which frequently occurred in the spandrels of the Sultānī mosques also reappeared on the spandrels of the temple archways as in the Gaṇeśa temple at Naldāngā (18th century) in Jessore. The lotus, a typical emblem of Hindu origin, developed a variety of rosette forms in Muslim terracotta art and continued triumphantly into late medieval temple ornamentation; so was its wheel variety which occurred between arch shoulders inside mosques or often outside, as on the north façade of the Ātiyā Mosque (1609) in Tangail, carried to embellish temples above the base panels. Muslim battlements were continued to decorate the roof base and cornice of the ratna temples as at Kāntanagar (1704-22) in Dinajpur, the Śrīdhara temple (1845) in Bankura, etc.

¹ Although some of these decorative motifs had been used in the pre-Muslim Bengal art, their artistic flowering was achieved by the Muslims and as such they may be identified as Muslim.

The influence of Muslim terracotta on temple decoration is found diminishing from the middle of the 18th century when a coarsening of the art is noticeable in the temples. Decoration now tended to become natural but thick and cursory and hence the almost abstract scrollwork developed by the Hindus at the beginning of the revival was gradually pushed out. A type of floral ornamentation appeared in temples, realistic and balanced, which covered the bottom of the façade, the arch spandrels, the columns and the wall ends on the sides. The designs were continuous and needed no 'filling' or 'separating' strip motifs. At times the decoration developed to highly complex composition without figure elements as in the temple at Mandalay (1758) in Hooghly or at Gobarnāṭi (1772) in Murshidabad. It is significant to note that the terracotta artists once again attempted a return to non-figural decoration as at the period of transition of the art from mosque to temple. Some scholars¹ have suggested that the new trend was inspired by the Mughal miniature painting. Parallel with this development in temples, the Mughal buildings showed a foliage decoration in plaster, besides deep panelling and plaster moulding. There also occurred an increased use of stucco in temple decoration during this period with similar designs as in terracotta. The use of stucco was uninterrupted in Bengal temples from the time of the Guptas (4th-6th centuries) till the Muslim

¹Cf. David McCutcheon, "Hindu-Muslim Artistic Continuities in Bengal", op. cit., p. 250.

conquest. It reappeared in temple ornamentation since the revival in the 16th century and was used on laterite in Bankura and Midnapore districts. The tradition of building terracotta temples, however, continued throughout the 19th century. The panelling of the Sultānī mosques still held sway and some of the Muslim decorative elements could also be identified. The Hemtāpur group of temples¹ in Birbhum district still showed in their spandrels the four-petalled flowers and the net pattern, and the façade of the Ilāmbāzār temple,² also in Birbhum, employed strip motifs like alternate lotus and diamond, twisted creepers, etc. between figure panels, in the corner bands and façade outlines. The decorative blind merlons which the Muslims universally used in terracotta are also retained in the cornices.

The victory of the English at Plassy (1757) was decisive in the history of Bengal in more than one way. Besides being the rulers of the country, the English now came as a tremendous force to influence the Bengal society. English goods flooded Bengal markets and English dress, manners and customs, art and architecture, etc. invaded the Bengali life. The 19th century temple terracotta bears unmistakable evidence of this influence with which the residue of Muslim elements in temple ornamentation practically ended. In the changed circumstances, the artists attempted at

¹See Mukul Dey, Birbhum Terracottas (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1959), Pls. 12 and 16.

²Ibid., Pl. 26.

greater realism and the earlier emphasis on linear and rhythmical treatment of the wall surface disappeared. Compositions now became less elaborate and were arranged in blocks or rows instead of being integrated in the ensemble. Figures assumed larger shape and were conceived in greater depth and rounded form. There was an emphasis on frontality with faces appearing in full-view. These new trends in the style of temple terracotta was the result of Bengal artists coming in contact with European models found in the modelling of canon reliefs and other weapons and in works of European artists imported to Bengal for house-hold decoration of the rich and the Armanian and the Portuguese churches.¹ It appears that the absolute use of terracotta for temple ornamentation lost popularity by the middle of the 19th century and instead, the combined use of stucco and terracotta came into vogue. Examples of the latter are found in the Gopāla temple at Muktador (1840) in Bankura, the Sita-Rām temple (1865) and the Lakshmi-Janārdhan temple (1890), both in Midnapore.

By the end of the 19th century, the tradition of architectural terracotta became dead in Bengal. A number of factors led to this situation. From the middle of the 19th century, the

¹David McCutcheon, "The Impact of the Europeans on the Temple Art and Architecture in Bengal", *Quest*, 54 (1967), p. 17. Imitation of European models by Bengali artists is also noticed in other media, as in the works of the ivory carvers of Jīāgunj and Berhampore in Murshidabad. The wood-carving also shows the influence of the west.

enthusiasm for temple-building gradually waned. The spread of western education brought in new sets of ideas and values and replaced the traditional ones built upon piety. The Calcutta-based Hindu elite came under heavy influence of urban culture characterized by progressive thinking and modern life style; with them, temple-building as a status symbol or as a social or meritorious act had little significance for consideration.¹ To this was added the general decline in the economy of the country resultant of the import of British goods into Bengal markets. But the most decisive blow to Bengal terracotta tradition came with the introduction of modern building technology by means of reinforced concrete and cement plaster. Mosques and temples alike now came to suffer the same fate - cemented-smooth and colour-washed appearance.

With the death of the art, also disappeared the artists. The Kālī temple at Dakshineswar built by Rānī Rāshmoni in 1262 B.S. (1875 A.D.) at a huge cost of six lakhs of rupees had no ornamentation in terracotta. This was, perhaps, due to the non-availability of craftsmen at that time. Mukul Dey² writing about Birbhum terracottas in 1959 says that even seventy years ago, there were regular guilds of artists and artisans conversant with this art, but their descendants knew nothing of the craft at the moment.

¹Cf. H. R. Sanyal, op. cit., p. 209.

²Mukul Dey, op. cit., p. 8.

Today, with the exception of terracotta toys found at fairs, not only in Bengal but all over India, the practice of building and decorating temples with burnt clay has completely disappeared.

CHAPTER VI

TECHNIQUE AND TECHNICALITIES¹

Terracotta is moulded and burnt clay, and constitutes the earliest human art products. Baked clay, because it can be easily manipulated, has been used throughout the world since ancient times for pottery and sculpture and for many architectural purposes. The medieval Muslims gave the plastic medium an artistic dimension hitherto unknown. Muslim terracottas are, in the main, architectural in character and are bas-reliefs. The material solidity and the delicate ornaments still found in them, after centuries of their manufacture, attest to a highly technical skill that went into their making. But unfortunately, no literary accounts are available to enlighten us about the technique of the art. It is presumed that the Muslims followed the traditional methods making further improvements which their art demanded.

From the primary clay to the finished product, terracotta passed through a series of processes. Clay being the basic ingredient for the art had to be selected first. The Bengal delta is an alluvial plain and there has always been rich deposition of clay in her soil. The clay is an inorganic glutinous substance consisting of finer particles of soil. Some of these particles

¹ Technique is "a complex of manual and mechanical operations that act upon the raw material to organize, shape and mould it according to specific artistic intentions" (Giulio Carlo Argan, "Techniques", Encyclopedia of World Art, 1st ed., XIII, p. 965). Whereas, technicalities involve the various procedures, traits and agents associated with the execution of the artistic intentions.

remain in semi-solid (colloid) state which adds to the plasticity of the clay. The clay deposition is not confined to a particular layer but is spread to different levels of the soil and may be available at a few inches below the earth surface to as much depth as several feet. Nor is it always found near at hand and has sometimes to be collected from a considerable distance. Bengal being a floodplain remains under water for certain months of the year. Clay is generally dug out during the summer months from March to May and kept heaped up for use round the year. Clay, dried up and hardened by atmospheric heat, regains its soft adhesive nature when treated with water. But all clay is not suitable for terracotta; only the sticky clay of dark grey colour makes good terracotta. For their terracotta, the Muslims in Bengal appear to have always used the best sticky clay. But clay alone is unsuitable for terracotta, for, it shrinks and cracks during baking and firing. As a tempering agent, sand is very useful, because it greatly adds to the pliability of the clay and also helps in the drying of the objects without cracking. Other ingredients are also mixed with clay for its sustainment. In the Indus Valley, lime, mica and sand were mixed with levigated clay.¹ Here in almost all cases, the same quality clay was used by the potter and the image-maker.² The Hindu treatises on iconography and Silpaśāstras also prescribe various methods of treating clay for

¹ E.J.H. Mackay, Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro (New Delhi: Govt. of India Press, 1938), p. 176.

² Ibid., pp. 258 and 283.

terracotta images.¹ These procedures were aimed at sanctifying the image material as also ensuring longevity to the images. Kramrisch² thinks that the clay for terracotta images was mixed with mica as the main gritty material to avoid cracking when it was fired. The Muslims used the Gangetic clay which is calcarious by nature besides having other components such as mica, sand etc. The Gangetic clay is naturally mixed with requisite sands needed for the best terracotta products.³

The proper clay having been collected, the potters⁴ sat to prepare the loam. For an architectural commission, probably a large number of potters worked together. They would first make a pit large enough to contain several maunds of primary clay (not very pliable). The clay was thrown into the pit and moistened with water. Thereafter, the clay mass was thoroughly split with an iron

¹ Matsya Purāna, Chs. 258-263; Bhaviṣya Purāna, 1.131. 1-8; Sukranītisāra, IV.4.72; Haribhakti Bilāsa of Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, etc.

² St. Kramrisch, "Indian Terracottas", JISOA, VII (1939), p. 104.

³ Rajshekhar Basu, Bhārater Khaniḥ (Calcutta: Visvabhārati Granthālaya, 1358, B.S.), p. 19.

⁴ Terracotta artists as a distinct social group are not known to have existed in Bengal at any period. The Bṛihad-Purāna (c. 12th century) divides the non-Brahmin population of Bengal into 36 castes according to avocations and treats them all as Sudras. But although arts, crafts and professions were generally hereditary and the different castes normally followed the avocations assigned to them, there seems to have never been any absolute rigidity or exclusiveness in actual practice. (Cf. HB, vol. I, ed. by R.C. Majumdar (Dacca: University of Dacca, 1963), p. 574). It is presumed that the Kumbhakāras (potters) practised both the craft of pottery and the terracotta art, since the basic materials for these are the one and the same.

hook or spade so that there remained no chunk left and the clay was well hydrated. At this stage, all foreign elements were removed by careful scrutiny. This step was necessary because foreign elements, particularly harder ones, if left in the clay, would cause split during drying or firing the clay. Thereafter, the clay was kneaded underfoot.¹ The kneading allowed the water to be evenly distributed into the clay mass and removed the air bubbles. It was perhaps at this stage that a requisite quantity of mica was mixed with the clay² as a further step to prevent crack during its drying and firing. Exposed to the monsoonic rains of Bengal, Muslim terracottas had, of necessity, to be made impervious in mass. This required mixing natural alkaline silica, carbon and lime sulphate with the clay.³ This done, sizeable lumps of clay were taken on a heavy wooden plank and kneaded by both the hands of the potter. In the process, additional quantity of sand was mixed with the clay, if needed, to the extent when the potter felt the loam was well composed. Loams cast in mould did not require to be very plastic in character. In moulded tiles and other terracotta objects, bigger quantity of sand was mixed with the clay than in pottery. As a further step to ensure the

¹The practice dates back to the period of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 2000 B.C.) in Egypt. Piero M. Capponi, "Technique of Production", Encyclopedia of World Art, 1st ed., XIII, p. 972.

²Mica is a good conductor of heat. When mixed with clay, it creates micro passages in the mixture for evaporation of the water content during drying and firing. It also prevents build up of serious heat gradients in the mixture by providing for the air entry through the passages into the gaps left by the evaporated water.

³The composition increases the fusibility of the paste.

efficacy of the loam, the potter would beat it flat twice or thrice with his dabber to make it fully free of air bubbles. The loam was now ready for casting into the mould.

Historically, two methods are known to have been practised for shaping the loam throughout the ages, viz., modelling and moulding. But neither of these was in itself a complete process, and each depended on the other to certain extent.¹ The modelling is an "ageless" technique which began with the primitive terracottas (3rd millennium B.C.) and has continued ever since. Under this method, the statuettes of man, woman and animal were made in the round with the main physical features simply modelled by hand, the applique technique having been applied for the eyes, ears, nose, hair, navel, horns, manes etc. Nor was the entire figure turned out of mould in the moulding process, but only the face, while the bust or the body was modelled by hand. These techniques appear to have sufficiently satisfied the potter's need so long as terracottas were made in the round or even in bas-relief with simpler figure composition. The introduction of mould during the Sunga period (2nd century B.C.) must have made the terracotta art progressive in character, but its potentiality could not be fully realized owing to the casts being wholly figure subjects. Terracotta moulds have been discovered in many ancient sites of India and Bengal.² The Muslims must have adopted the moulding technique

¹ Cf. Parmeswari Lal Gupta, Gangetic Valley Terracotta Art (Varanasi: Prithivi Prakasan, 1972), p. 26; also, S.K. Saraswati, A Survey of Indian Sculpture (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957), pp. 102-03, and St. Kramrisch, op. cit., p. 107.

² K.G. Goswami, Excavations at Bangarh (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1948), p. 19.

for convenience of large scale production that was necessary for their architectural terracottas.¹ They made the mould further progressive in keeping with the demands of their art. In fact, moulds were commonly used for tilework with raised decoration in Persia from the 13th century onward and also for rare statuettes and vases in human and animal shape.²

The making of the moulds, however, must have been preceded by detailed planning of the decorative scheme and structuring of the ornaments, for, without such prior decisions, the modellers were helpless in composing designs in clay. This was one of the most technical aspects of the artist's task. The entire space meant for decoration had to be planned all at a time, measurements taken and drawings made.³ Since Muslim ornamentation is a matter of strict formalism and balance, the artist had to foresee the

¹Percy Brown's opinion (Indian Architecture: Islamic Period (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., Private Ltd., 1959), p. 42) that the relief decoration in the Muslim terracottas "was not moulded but curved in the clay when it was in the green ductile state" cannot be accepted in the face of historical and material evidence. Moulding as a convenient technique for turning designs in terracotta was already practised in pre-Muslim Bengal (ASIAR, 1929-30, p. 142; Ibid., 1930-31, pp. 128-29, Pl. LXII, g; K.G. Goswami, op. cit., pp. 11, 13 and 19). The delicate and complex ornaments in the Muslim terracottas, if carved in clay, would consume considerable time and energy, besides creating technical problem in handling the loam. In the circumstances, it is unlikely that the Muslims took to carving their terracottas, as Percy Brown thinks, instead of casting them in mould.

²Cf. Arthur Lane, Early Islamic Pottery (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), pp. 34-35.

³For complex pottery making, the Greek potters are known to have followed a drawn model (Piero M. Capponi, op. cit., p. 974).

entire scheme of decoration in his blue print. Besides the master plan, zonal and sub-zonal plans might also have been drawn up for convenience and accuracy. Each of the areas was carefully divided by horizontal and vertical lines and scales determined, while the whole being delimited by specified borders as in the cartographers sheet. The ornaments were drawn on the drawing sheets with their segments distributed to different divisions of the space later to be occupied by the plaques. Since the terracotta plaques were made smaller in size, the geometric division of the surface gave the artists the benefit of exactness in preparing the clay models. It is thus obvious that the size, shape and ornament of every terracotta plaque were specified in the drawing sheet ahead of preparation of the loam.

With the blue prints ready in hand, it was now the modellers turn to work out the designs in clay. The number of models to be prepared depended on the plan already made in the drawing sheets. For large designs, such as those around the doorways or the mihrāb niches, the number of models might run into scores. Again, for a lotus or a rosette, a single model might serve the purpose, albeit ornaments in segments were generally shared by numerous models. It appears from an examination of the terracotta designs in situ that they are formed of small-sized plaques of only a few inches across and at places, even less. It is worth mention that provisions were made at this very stage to meet the shrinkage of the clay models.

The clay models having been ready were baked in the sun. The expert potter would then take moulds from the models. The moulds were first dried in the sun, and after firing in the kiln, turned into terracotta moulds.¹ It is now evident that hundreds of terracotta moulds had had to be prepared before the task of casting the loam could begin.

The next stage in the process of terracotta manufacture was throwing the loam into the mould and pressing it softly with finger-tips so as to enable the loam to be impressed on its underside with the details carved in the mould. The back and sides of the loam were processed simultaneously, the size and shape being controlled by the blue prints plus provision for the shrinkage. The loam was left in the mould for a while when shrinkage caused ~~to~~ it by air and atmospheric heat allowed the cast to disengage from the mould easily.² The casts were then left under shade for three to four days to be air-dry. The drying had to be made uniform over the entire surface of the casts. This intermediate step was essential to dehydrate the casts of their water content to the minimum³ when baking in the hot sun would not cause them split. Noteworthy is the fact that a number of repeats was taken

¹Cf. Amiya Kumar Bandhopadhyaya, Bankurār Mandir (Calcutta: Sahitya Sangsad, 1371 B.S.), p. 115. Mr. Bandhopadhyaya makes no allowance for the shrinkage problem and takes the dimension of the raw casts as remaining constant even after firing, which is not the case.

²The Greek potters used porous terracotta moulds that absorbed the water of the loam and made easier the detachment of the moulded clay. See Piero M. Capponi, op. cit., p. 972.

³The water content in pottery at this stage ranges from 8% to 15% of the mass. Ibid., p. 973.

of each cast - many more than actually required. Not that all the repeats taken came out in the desired manner, nor did all survive the hazards of manufacture. The repeats, therefore, were measures of precaution against possible split or wreckage or unsatisfactory production.

The air-dry casts were baked in the sun adequately till they reached the white-hard or bone-dry stage and the uncombined water content was 3 per cent. As the casts were in the process of drying, the artists cleaned them carefully bringing into distinct relief the minute details of the designs and polishing their rough surface. For this, the artists used tiny chisels and fine flat pointed knife-like tools made of bone, horn or bamboo.¹ This was the only time when corrections, if needed, could be made on the leather-hard casts.² For any correction, the clay slip was used. The slip consisted of the most refined part of the clay. If clay other than the type employed in the loam was used for the slip, the composition had to be modified with non-plastic substances so that the contraction of both the casts and the slip was identical;

¹ Similar tools were used by the potters of Bengal till late medieval times (Cf. Mukul Dey, Birbhum Terracottas (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1959), p. 13) and are in use even at present.

² No correction was possible when the clay was fully dry or burnt. The simile has obtained currency in a Bengali proverb 'Podā mati jodā lāgenā' (the burnt clay is unresponsive to joints) and is used in case of extremely strained social relationship between persons or parties when all hopes of rapprochement have vanished.

otherwise, the slip detached itself. The sun-dried casts were then ready for firing.

Firing constituted a major event in the terracotta making process. But information about how the Muslim terracottas in Bengal were fired is equally lacking as the other aspects of the art. However, the terracottas themselves suggest a posteriori a highly technical knowledge that went into their firing. It is presumed that the Muslims followed the traditional practices in this field also. Both the open firing and the closed kilns are known to have been used for burning pottery and terracotta figurines in the Indus Valley Civilizations.¹ Kilns have also been discovered in Kish (c. 2800 B.C.),² Sumer and Elam.³ The closed kilns were probably used for the special type of pottery.⁴ The main features of the closed kilns were a pit for the wood, a platform over it with holes and a dome-like structure over the platform.⁵ The

¹ E.J.H. Mackay, Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro, op. cit., p. 177. The closed kilns probably originated in ancient Egypt. A painting from Egypt of the 3rd millennium B.C. depicts a closed kiln (EWA, op. cit., p. 973). The method later on spread to the classical Greece and thence to Rome where the kiln firing became the exclusive practice.

² E.J.H. Mackay, Anthropological Memoirs, vol. I, pp. 115 & 116, Pl. XXXI.

³ E.J.H. Mackay, Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro, op. cit., p. 177.

⁴ Rai Govind Chandra, Studies of Indus Valley Terracottas (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1973), p. 9.

⁵ For illustration, see E.J.H. Mackay, Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro, op. cit., Pl. XXIII (2).

advantages of the closed kiln were that the heat could be graduated by flues according to requirement with a corresponding saving of fuel and avoidance of smoke stains. In the open fire baking, almost similar principles were employed for conserving the heat as done in the closed kilns: the sundried wares were arranged in tiers and covered with mud mixed with cow-dung and straw; the pile was fired from below, the chimney-like pot in the centre acting as a flue. Generally, the potters preferred the open fire baking method as it required ordinary quality of fuel like cow-dung cakes, leaves etc., which were more easily available than wood and coal necessary for firing in closed kilns. The use of charcoal has been found both at Mohenjo-daro¹ and Harappa.² It is presumed that the Muslims fired their terracottas in smoke-free closed kilns with wood or charcoal which helped to create higher temperature in the kiln.

Presumably, a large number of casts was fired at a time. This would require the casts to be arranged in the kiln in such a manner as every piece was exposed to heat all around. Stock-piling the casts would not only prevent their exposure individually and consequent differential firing, but also involve the risk of disfiguring the bas-reliefs. It is, therefore, presumed that the casts were arranged in herring-bone pattern in tiers, the angles

¹ E.J.H. Mackay, Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro, op. cit., p. 207.

² M.S. Vats, Excavations at Harappa, vol. I (Calcutta: Govt. of India Press, 1940), Chapter XVIII, pp. 470-74.

being held by terracotta rings running between rows. The device allowed every cast to receive heat equally on all sides and at the same time be kept in tight framing.

At what temperature the Muslim terracottas were fired remains unknown to us. All the water content in pottery clay evaporates at the temperature between 350°C to 500°C and the organic matter burned.¹ This is a critical stage for clay firing, since the gases released can damage the clay if gathered too rapidly. Between 570°C and 600°C , the expansion of the silica occurs and this may also endanger the results of firing. Due to firing, there occurs change in the bonding of the inorganic materials present in the clay resulting in hardness. The ordinary clay melts under strong heat and turns pumiceous. But for hardness and lasting, terracotta needs exposure to severe heat. This calls for quality clay which does not melt easily and becomes harder by firing. The variation in the proportion of sodium, potassium, calcium, iron silica etc. in the clay imparts it with the quality for easy melting or increased capability to withstand high temperature. Clay composed of duly proportionate elements may sustain strong heat thereby becoming harder and impervious. The Etruscan terracotta statues were fired at a temperature which has been computed to about 960°C ,² approximately the same as that

¹ Piero M. Capponi, *op. cit.*, p. 977; also see Sri Hirendra Nath Basu, *Porcelain* (Calcutta: Visvabharati Granthalaya, 1361 B.S.), pp. 15-16.

² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. XXI (London: William Benton, 1966), p. 956.

used in firing Greek pottery. In the absence of experiments being carried out, Muslim terracottas may be assumed to have been burnt at a similar temperature. Normally, the firing lasted for three days, but in the rainy season, it might continue for a week or so. It appears that the medieval Bengali potters depended on their knowledge built on experience for such a scientific task as firing the terracottas as they do even at present.

The clay shrinkage in pottery firing has been calculated at about $1/8$ th to $1/6$ th of the linear dimension.¹ However, the shrinkage varied with variation in proportion of sand mixture in particular in the loam. As the potters built up their knowledge on experience, it appears that the experts among them could forecast almost accurate result. The shrinkage was of particular concern for architectural terracottas meant for design ornamentation. It is indeed surprising to observe how the different segments of an ornament impressed on different terracotta pieces were joined together, as if, formed of a single tablet and conforming most accurately to the design structure. The terracotta artists must have foreseen the extent of shrinkage of the casts when burnt and provided against it during moulding. The constituents of the loam and the temperature of the kiln were, therefore, matters of serious technical consideration for the artists.

¹ Piero M. Capponi, op. cit., p. 978.

The colour¹ of the terracottas depended upon the chemical composition in the casts and the variation in temperature to which they were subjected. Firing transformed the iron content in the clay to ferric oxide and thereby the casts assumed light-red colour. If, however, the kiln was closed and the air had no access or little access to the iron content, the terracotta turned grey or black.

The cooling of the terracottas was another extremely delicate process because of the shrinkage of silica at 573°C and the great likelihood of cracks in the terracottas. Once the maximum temperature was reached, the fire was damped down and the kiln sealed, allowing the terracottas to cool gradually in a reducing temperature. The cooling might take a week's time or more.² But despite adequate precautions taken, all the terracottas did not come out in the desired manner. Besides wreckage, some of the pieces burned differentially owing to difference in temperature at different parts of the kiln. Some ones might also be stained.³ Only those which turned out best were used in the building. Thus the numerical difference between the clay casts and the terracottas could at times be colossal. The craftsmen, however, made enough provision against such exigencies by taking many more repeats of each cast than actually required.

¹To intensify the colour of the figure terracotta in India, a slip of deeper red was applied to the red figures, while the grey-black figure was coated with a rich black and shiny slip. (Cf. St. Kramrisch, op. cit., p. 104).

²In brick firing, the cooling period varies from 8 to 10 days.

³In case of porcelain firing, 10% to 20% of the goods are calculated as normal wastage. Cf. Sri Hirendra Nath Basu, op.cit., p. 13.

How did the technique diffuse? Like most of the medieval arts, there does not appear to have existed institutional arrangement for teaching the terracotta technique; nor was the art practised by all and sundry. Terracotta was the potters' art and knowledge about it was transmitted hereditarily by oral instructions and practical exercise, the latter being the most important part of the lesson. There are also reports¹ about the artists' guilds in medieval Bengal. Such guilds consisted of about a dozen of skilled potters under one master-artist. These people lived with the master-artist as members of his family and carried out his instructions. They must have received oral and practical lessons from their Guru. It is likely that the guilds worked for both Hindu and Muslim commissions, the only difference being, perhaps, that in case of the Muslim buildings, the supervision was given by the Muslim artists. But such supervisions might have also been dispensed with when the local artists mastered the Muslim themes and technique.

Where were the terracottas made? There do not appear to have been localized centres for terracotta manufacture in medieval Bengal. Since clay was available almost everywhere in deltaic Bengal, it is most likely that the terracottas were made at the building sites. True it is that the clay had sometimes to be collected from a considerable distance, but the problem and the

¹Mukul Dey, op. cit., p. 8.

cost of its transportation¹ was perhaps considered minimal compared to the advantages accrued from site manufacture of the terracottas. Although hardened by firing, the terracottas remained materially exposed to fracture or damage due to handling and hazards of transportation to distant places. Besides, there was also no difficulty to obtain craftsmen and artists at the building sites. The medieval artists are known to have moved about even across countries in search of commission for work. This mobility of the craftsmen largely explains the uniformity of style throughout the Muslim countries at a given time² and also in different areas within the same country. The Bengal potters are known to have wandered in search of work till late medieval time.³ The medieval Muslim monuments in Bengal or elsewhere were largely built by court patronage at places which sprang up into centres of administration. The Jāmi' mosques in these places were the nuclei around which were built the residence and office of the rulers and of the officials, besides host of public dwellings.⁴

¹The transport system in medieval Bengal consisted of boats, carts, pack-animals and also human head-loads.

²Cf. Arthur Lane, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³Mukul Dey, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

⁴Besides the early Muslim townships such as Kufa, Basra, Fustat, Qairawan etc. that developed around the Jāmi' mosques in those places, medieval instances in Bengal such as Chhota Pandua, Tribeni, Haveli Khalifatābād, Sherpur etc. are also numerous. The Jāmi' mosques in Bengal were almost invariably erected on the bank of large tanks, which, besides providing ablution facilities to the congregationalists, added to the physical beauty of the mosque site. The ruler's residence was probably closest to the mosque - a practice developed in early Islam.

It is obvious that for all these buildings, large number of craftsmen was engaged and bricks made locally.¹ It is, therefore, presumed a fortiori that the terracottas were manufactured at the sites of the buildings for which they were meant.

The seating of the terracottas in the design ensemble demanded of the artists no less a technical expertise than their making. Despite the fact that every plaque was the product of adequate calculation as to its size, shape and bas-relief and had its location defined in the design, the spot-seating required enough labour and patience. It is presumed that the plaques meant for a particular decoration were marked and numbered when the casts were moulded, so that there was little difficulty to identify the proper pieces during their seating. The spot-seating may have also been preceded by a trial composition of the designs on the ground and after checking their formations removed to the wall. It appears that a thick mortar was first applied to the wall surface to provide a sticky bed for the plaques. The plaques must have been laid in the ascending order for convenience of support at the base.

The seating of the terracottas involved the joint services of the mason and the artist, for, parts of the plaques were structural such as those in the string-course, cornice mouldings and tower bands. However, the mason appears to have worked at this stage at the bidding of the artists whose task it was to furnish the wall surface. The disposition of the plaques kept to the drawing sheets prepared at the beginning of the commission and no alteration whatsoever

¹ In the countryside of Bengal, the traditional practice of manufacturing bricks near about the building sites continues till today.

was possible subsequently, since the plaques as required had already been made.

From the seating point, the terracottas may be classified into two broad types, viz., the group terracottas and the individual terracottas. The group terracottas are a composite formation made up of a number of individual plaques each impressed with a segment of the design but constituting the whole when joined together. Since the Muslim terracottas are characteristically smaller in size, a broad design such as the one in the tympanum of the central mihrāb of the Darasbāri Mosque (1475) at Gaur or the tree motif in the southern bay wall of the Mosque of Zafar Khān Ghāzī (1298) at Tribeni (Hooghly) might consist of scores of plaques. The constituents of the group type have no independent identity of their own, and as such, are meaningless decoratively beyond the context of the designs for which they have been meant. The individual terracottas are independent units and are used both as part of a design or alone. They may have a single motif impressed on them or more than one motif. To this type, belongs the lotus or the rosette or the alternate rosette and diamond. The lotus or the rosette in the arch spandrels is most often a single-piece terracotta. Such a division, however, is arbitrary and only tentative and is not valid for general applicability. In fact, Muslim terracotta designs appear as numerous as the individual motifs and the artists do not seem to have followed a definite vocabulary in either of the cases. Since denaturalization suited

the Muslim aesthetic most, it afforded the widest range for the artists' fancy and the consequent varieties in designs and motifs.

The plaques were seated differently at different places. On the broad surface, the face-wise laying appears to have been the rule in general. The borders of the panels were made with terracottas arranged edge-wise. These latter plaques are both structural and decorative, for, they held in other plaques in tight framing and also added to the ornamentation. The edge-wise seating is also noticed in the interstices between broad designs so as to variegate the decorative effect. The plaques are in general of square and rectangular shape.

The Muslims introduced in Bengal the low-relief art style from the Middle Eastern lands of Persia and Asia Minor where the art of terracotta had reached the zenith of its development in the 11th and 12th centuries.¹ It is highly probable that the Muslim conquest of Bengal attracted many Persian artists and craftsmen and other professional people to the new land of Islam in search of employment. These immigrants must have been responsible for laying the foundation of the Muslim art and architecture in Bengal, of which, unfortunately, no examples of the first hundred years have survived. The inflow of these Persian immigrants to Bengal appears to have remained constant throughout the Sultānī period and even later, although continued political relationship of Bengal with the Persian lands still remains to be

¹ See Supra, Chapter I, pp. 64-67.

established. These immigrant-artists, however, could not have been as numerous as the local ones who had also a rich terracotta tradition of ancient heritage but of a different character with high-relief execution. The subject matter of the two art idioms was also different - of the Muslims, abstract and geometric and of the locals, figure subjects. The local artists who largely executed the Muslim commissions had, therefore, to switch over to the Muslim idiom and this they did fairly well, except, as the examples show, in the illustration of intricate geometric and abstract formations of purely Middle Eastern type for which they seem never to have developed a hand. Thus there remained a significant difference between the Muslim terracotta art of Bengal and that of the Persian lands. Abstract and geometric compositions rarely occur in the Bengal terracottas, and even when they do, theirs is a simpler version. Besides, there is a preponderance of vegetal elements, largely local, in the Bengal examples. This thematic difference faithfully reflects the environment of the individual art traditions and accounts for their respective distinctiveness.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Muslim conquest of Bengal was more than a military event; it was a turning-point in the history of the country. The conquest ended Bengal's isolation from northern India which she had practically been suffering ever since the fall of the Gupta empire (4th-6th centuries A.D.). Bengal under the Muslim rule was not only re-connected with northern India, but also with the wider world of Islam beyond, whence waves of Muslim immigrants of various professions continuously poured into the new land of Islam in search of fortune and employment. These immigrants helped in the formation of the initial Muslim society in Bengal and also laid the foundation of Muslim building art in the country. They brought with them new ideas of administration and concepts of art which they were acquainted with in their Central Asian home-lands. Thus with the Muslim conquest, there dawned a new era in the political and cultural life of Bengal. Following their traditional practices in other conquered lands, the Muslim rulers of Bengal appear to have caused the least break with the country's past, except in instances which were vitally related to their taste, faith and belief. However, it is natural that the spirit of moderation towards local elements fully developed only after the fury of the conquest had subsided and that the initial phase of the occupation was marked by the dominance of the victor's role. But even there, the imprint of the local elements could not

altogether be avoided, nor was it feasible in the context of practical realities. In the domain of art, the Bari Masjid (c. 1300) terracottas¹ at Chhoto Pānduā in Hooghly truly represent the circumstances of the time. Here the ornamentation is dominantly of extraneous Persian character both in the low-relief technique of execution and the geometrized motifs; but the local elements do also occur although in a subordinate scale. In fact, the condition of the art could not have been otherwise, since the executants of the ornamentation were naturally largely locals with also a rich tradition of terracotta art of their own, but of a different character.² In the circumstances, what was needed of the local artists was to adapt their skill to the demands of their Muslim patrons and this, it appears, they did fairly well.

The character of the Muslim terracotta art in Bengal appears to have changed simultaneously with the gradual acclimatization of the Muslim rule in the country. The elevation of the House of Ilyās Shāh to the throne of Bengal and the support given to its independence by the local people were events of singular importance for the cultural life of the country. Henceforth, the Muslim rulers identified themselves with local interests and extended liberal patronage to local literature, art and culture. The local people came to share with the rulers in the administration of the

¹See Chapter III, pp. 138-44.

²See Chapter II.

country. This harmonious social atmosphere of the time was reflected in the terracotta ornamentation of the Adina Mosque (1375) at Hazrat Pānduā which shows the employment of local folk motifs on a large scale side by side Muslim geometric and abstract patterns.¹ But here the two art traditions appeared mutually apart without being synthesized.

The short rule of the converted House of Rājā Ganēśa (1415-32) was more significant for the cultural life of Bengal than of ordinary political interest. The policy of accommodation with the local elements initiated by the Ilyās Shāhī rulers reached fruition under the rule of the converted dynasty and Muslim art and architecture in Bengal assumed a local character. The Eklākhi Mausoleum (1415-32) at Hazrat Pānduā proved epoch-making in this movement. The building² initiated the 'brick style' of Bengal with heavy corner towers, curved cornice and thick walls suiting to the monsoonic and stormy climate of the country. It also laid down the basic features of façade decoration with projections and recessed chases on the wall surface suggestive of the framework of wood and wattle huts of Bengal and introduced the scheme of overall covering of the walls with terracotta ornamentation. These were subsequently universally followed by the Sultānī buildings of Bengal. Terracotta being the art of brick surface, the monument also illustrated the earliest synthesis of the ornamental technique

¹See Chapter III, pp. 147-63, Pls. III:I-X:I.

²Ibid., pp. 166-73, Pl. X:2-XII:1.

with the structural masonry. What was more, the monument also established the synthesized use of local art motifs with those characteristically Muslim, and thereby evolved a common art formula in Bengal. In making and execution of the designs, the terracottas of the mausoleum showed significant development over the Adina Mosque examples.

Terracotta ornamentation reached the apogee of development in the monuments of the restored Ilyās Shāhī period¹ (1433-86) when the country was free from political tension and enjoyed undisturbed peace. The local ideals set forth by the converted rulers were assiduously pursued and local literature, art and culture were encouraged alongside Muslim institutions. The social spirit of the period was surcharged with search for a common goal and in this was born the classical phase of Muslim art and architecture in Bengal. In architecture, the classicism was manifested in the balanced proportion of the different parts of the buildings which were now erected in large number both at the capital of Gaur and across the country. Bricks continued to be the dominant building material and terracotta the ornamental medium. The decoration now became fully blended with the structural masonry and the ornamental motifs improved in quality of execution as never before or since. Designs were graceful but tastefully restrained and characterized by sharpness of contour. The delicacy of execution of the vegetal arabesques, the symmetrical disposition and

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See Chapter III, pp. 174-238.

balanced proportion of the ornamental panels and the subtle outlines of the designs suggest that the local artists, who must have been now more numerous than ever before, had fully mastered the technique of the Muslim art. However, a comparative absence of geometric and abstract patterns is noticeable in the terracottas of the period. This was perhaps due to the dominance of the local artists who preferred indigenous vegetal elements and simpler geometric formations to intricate abstract designs. They also appear to have continued a number of pre-Muslim art motifs of Bengal, some of them iconic but thoroughly stylized to constitute seemingly geometric and floral elements acceptable to the Muslim patrons. In fact, Bengali artists do not appear to have ever developed a taste for abstract designs of labyrinthine nature which generally characterized Muslim art.

Architectural activities during the short rule of the Habshi usurpers (1486-93) of the throne of Bengal are survived by the Firūza Minār¹ which is of singular importance as showing the state of the terracotta art of the period. The monument represents the continuation of the classical phase of the art in its sparing and tasteful ornamentation as also in the subtlety of the designs. In form and decorative arrangement, the monument betrays Perso-Iraqi influence.

Ornamentation in terracotta suffered stagnation under the Husain Shāhi rule (1493-1538) when it became merely imitative of

¹See Chapter III, pp. 238-43, Pls. XXIV:1-2.

the features and style developed during the earlier periods. There was no further improvement either of the art motifs or in the delicacy of their execution; instead, there occurred an over-richness in the ornamental details and meaningless repetition of stereotyped patterns. During the period, is noticed an unprecedented use of local vegetal motifs, at times breathing naturalistic flavour with luscious branches and twigs, which hastened the decadence of the restrained classical tradition. There occurred a revival of the stone cutter's art in Bengal under the Husain Shāhi rule, but the quality of the carving is poor. The attempt at executing terracotta designs in stone does not also appear to have succeeded well. But the period is notable for the increased use of glazed tiles in architecture.¹ This phenomenon speaks of the opulence of the country during the Husain Shāhi rule when there also occurred the largest extension of the kingdom of Bengal.

Although Sultānī Bengal (1338-1538) remained practically in political isolation both from northern India and the far-off Muslim lands of Persia and Asia Minor, cultural influences from these countries into Bengal appear to have sustained throughout.

¹ The use of glazed tiles is noticed earliest in the Muslim architecture of Bengal at the Chhota Pānduā Minār (c. 1300) in Hooghly. The Eklākhi Mausoleum (1415-32) made use of glazed tiles in the cornice. The monuments of the restored Ilyās Shāhi period (1433-86) such as the Tāntipārā Mosque and the Rājibī Mosque show sparing use of glazed tiles. The Firūza Minār (1486-89) also made use of glazed tiles for its ornamentation around the doorway of the ground storey. But in none of these instances, glazed tiles were used so lavishly as in the monuments of the Husain Shāhi period (1493-1538).

The slope in the corner towers of the Dākhil Darwāza (1433-59) at Gaur and in those of the Khalifatābād monuments (mid 15th century), and the almost austere wall surface of the latter buildings unmistakably betray Tughluqian influence of architecture. But in the absence of Bengal's relation with Delhi, such phenomena are difficult to be explained. However, an analysis of the events that occurred during the period may provide a clue to the answer. It is well-known that Tamerlane's invasion of Delhi in 1398 threw overboard many talented people in the employ of the Tughlūq Sultāns. It is not unlikely that many of these displaced persons, some of whom might also have been architects and artists, took refuge in Bengal. It was perhaps through these media that the Tughluqian features appeared in the Sultānī architecture. Again, the appearance of a host of decorative elements of Persian origin in the Sultānī buildings suggests some sort of a cultural link between the Persian lands and Bengal. Such features include the glazed tiles, the combined use of glazed tiles and terracotta, the recessed chases on wall surface terminating above in engrailed arches, the mat pattern, decoration of the dome surface with bricks set corner-wise and the turban-top finial.¹ All these features appeared in the architecture of Persia and Asia Minor long before they are met with in Bengal. In the circumstances, the influence of these countries on Bengal art during the period under study may reasonably be inferred. In fact, political and cultural relations

¹ See Chapter III, sections B, C, D, E and F.

of the Sultānī Bengal with the Persian lands are referred to in historical literatures.¹

Terracotta ornamentation suffered most during the Afghān interregnum (1538-75) and also under the Mughals who preferred plaster decoration for their buildings. Deprived of royal patronage, the art continued a staggering existence away from the Mughal capital in Bengal in sporadic instances till late 17th century.² But by then, the art had lost its vital force and was reduced to a mere skeleton of its past glorious self.

Meanwhile, there had taken place an architectural revival in temple-building among the Hindus of Bengal from the 16th century onward. The singular factor that led to this was the rise in the religious firmament of Hinduism of Śrī Caitanya (1486-1534) who preached the love of God (bhakti) incarnated in Kṛṣṇa. The Bhakti Movement swept over Bengal and gave vent to the religious urge of the Hindus through building temples and decorating them with the narrative portrayals of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa stories. These temples, built of brick, were impressed with Bengali characteristics initiated by the Eklākhi Mausoleum at Hazrat Pānduā both in their structural features and terracotta ornamentation. Besides the broad panelling of the wall surface, a number of Muslim terracotta motifs was continued in the temple ornamentation.³ These influences were dominant in the 16th and 17th centuries, but gradually diminished

¹See Chapter III, sections B and C.

²See Chapter IV.

³See Chapter V.

in the 18th and 19th centuries when the temples developed their own style of decoration. But even then, certain Muslim elements were clearly identifiable in temple ornamentation till the end of the temple-building movement in Bengal in late 19th century.

The Muslim terracotta art in Bengal is an independent art style. Although fed by influences coming from the Persian art tradition and the pre-Muslim Bengal art, the Muslim terracottas made a happy assimilation of both and developed a distinct personality of their own.

Terracotta was raised to the status of a major art in Muslim ornamentation. From the selection of the primary clay to the fired pieces, it received all the care that the fine arts like sculpture and painting deserved in the West. The seating of the plaques in the design ensemble called for equally careful planning and precision. The terracotta artists made the most use of space available to them. This they achieved by means of panelled decoration as well as by unsparing use of strip motifs consisting mostly of geometric and floral elements. The abundant use of vegetal motifs in the Muslim terracottas of Bengal had a two-way implication: on the one hand, it satisfied the Muslim desire for the re-creation of the heavenly arboretum on earth, and on the other, it was in accord with the surrounding greenery which accounted for the distinctiveness of the art. The overall covering of the surface with ornaments connoted a spiritual meaning to the artists, since it related to the omnipresence of God, the most

beautiful. Muslim architecture in Bengal, like elsewhere, consisted largely of mosques. A noteworthy aspect of ornamentation of the mosque interior was the emphasis given to the qibla wall. The mihrābs were invariably enclosed within broad ornamented panels, flanked sideways by smaller ones. The mihrāb niches were equally sumptuously decorated. Since the qibla wall symbolically represented the Ka'ba, and the mihrābs the presence of the Prophet (hence the focal point of attention of the congregation), they received the maximum ornamental treatment. But the centrality of the compositions was always kept in view. Herein was reflected the Islamic concept of monotheism with God as the spring-source of creation. Ornaments were used in association, balancing each other in parts as well as in whole, so that neither any part of the ornamented space appeared dominant over others, nor were the total compositions asymmetrical. This is, in fact, the character of Muslim ornamentation in time and space.

Muslim terracotta art in Bengal is dead long since. But the monuments ornamented with terracotta still survive in part, and elicit admiration from art-lovers even in their badly battered condition.

APPENDIX: CHRONOLOGY OF THE MUSLIM RULERS IN BENGAL

This is merely a list of the Muslim rulers in Bengal pertaining to an understanding of the text. Since the chronology of the early Muslim rulers in Bengal is reconstructed mostly on the basis of the inscription and coin finds, the dating remains always subject to re-fixation with the discovery of new materials.

A. Early Phase (A.D. 1204-A.D. 1341)1. The Khalji Malikhs (A.D. 1204-A.D. 1227)

- i) Muhammad Bakht Yār Khalji (1204-06)
- ii) Muhammad Shirān Khalji (c. 1206-07)
- iii) Husam al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khalji (1207-08)
- iv) Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī Mardān Khalji (1208-12)
(declared independence)
- v) Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Iwāḍ Khalji (1212-27)
(declared independence and issued coins)

2. Other Turkish governors (A.D. 1227-A.D. 1287)

- i) Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd (1227-29)
- ii) Dawlat Shāh bin Mawdūd (c. 1229)
(Issued coins in the name of the Abbasid Khalīfah, the Delhi Sultān and his own name. He has been identified with Mālik Ikhtyār al-Dīn Balkā Khalji by Edward Thomas (JASB, Pt. II, 1873). He was suppressed by Sultān Iltutmish.)
- iii) Mālik 'Alā' al-Dīn Jānī (1229)
- iv) Mālik Sayf al-Dīn Aibak (1229-c. 33)
- v) Awr Khān (1234-c. 36)
(Usurper?)

- vi) Tuḡhral Tuḡhān Khān (1236-45)
- vii) Tamar Khān Qirān (1245-47)
(Usurper)
- viii) Mālik Jalāl al-Dīn Masūd Jānī (1247-51)
- ix) Ikhtyār al-Dīn Yūzbak (1251-57)
(declared independence in 1255 with the title
of Muḡhiṭh al Dīn Yūzbak and issued coins)
- x) Mālik 'Izz al-Dīn Balbān-i-Yūzbakī (c. 1257-59)
- xi) Tāj al-Dīn Arslān Khān (c. 1259-65)
(ruled independently over Bihar and Bengal?)
- xii) Tātār Khān (c. 1265-67)
- xiii) Shēr Khān (c. 1268-72)
- xiv) Muḡhiṭh al-Dīn Tuḡhral (c. 1272-80)
(declared independence, but was suppressed and
killed by Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tuḡhlūq)
- xv) Buḡhrā Khān (1281-87)

3. Independent Balbānī Rule in Bengal (A.D. 1287-A.D. 1300)

- i) Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (1287-91)
- ii) Sultān Rukn al-Dīn Kaykā'ūs (1291-1300)

4. Independent Firūz Shāhī Rulers in Bengal (A.D. 1301-A.D. 1324)

- i) Sultān Shams al-Dīn Firūz Shāh (1301-22)
- ii) Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Bahādur (1322-24)

5. Tuḡhlūq governors in Bengal (c. A.D. 1324-A.D. 1342)

a) At Lakhnauti

- i) Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (appointed by Sultān Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tuḡhlūq and removed or died about 1326)

- ii) Qadar Khān (appointed by Sultān Muḥammad bin Tughluq)
- iii) 'Alī Mubārak (Sultān 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī Shāh) (declared independence in 1341 but was killed by Hājī Ilyās, who captured Lakhnauti in 1342)

b) At Sunārgāon

- i) Bahrām Khān (d. 1338)
- ii) Ghiyāth al-Dīn Bahādur (appointed joint governor with Bahrām Khān but declared independence in 1327 and was killed between 1328-32)
- iii) Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh (Usurper: declared independence in 1338 and issued coins)

c) At Satgāon

- i) Bahrām Khān (Simultaneously governor of Sunārgāon and Satgāon)
- ii) 'Izz al-Dīn Yahyā Hājī Ilyās captured Satgāon

Hājī Ilyās ascended the throne of Lakhnauti in A.H. 743/A.D. 1342 with the title of Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh. Later on, he captured Sunārgāon in 1352 and thereby became the all-Bengal ruler (Shāh-i-Bangāla). From 1338, when Sultān Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh declared independence at Sunārgāon till 1538, when Sher Shāh captured it, Bengal was completely independent under its own rulers.⁷

B. Independent Bengal Sultanate (A.D. 1338-A.D. 1538)

1. The House of Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh at Sunārgāon

- i) Fakhr al-Dīn Mubārak Shāh (1338-49)
- ii) Ikhtyār al-Dīn Ghāzi Shāh (1349-52)

2. The House of Ilyas Shah (A.D. 1342-A.D. 1414)

- i) Shams al-Dīn Ilyās Shāh (1342-57)
- ii) Sikandar Shāh (1357-92)
- iii) Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'zam Shāh (1392-1410)
- iv) Sayf al-Dīn Hamzah Shāh (1410-11)
- v) Shihāb al-Dīn Bāyazīd Shāh (1412-14)
- vi) 'Alā' al-Dīn Firūz Shāh (1414)

3. The House of Rājā Gaṇeśa (A.D. 1415-A.D. 1432)

- i) Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh (1415-32)
- ii) Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad Shāh (1432)

4. Restored Ilyās Shāhī House (A.D. 1433-A.D. 1486)

- i) Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (1433-59)
- ii) Rukn al-Dīn Bārbak Shāh (1459-74)
- iii) Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf Shāh (1474-81)
- iv) Jalāl al-Dīn Faṭḥ Shāh (1481-86)

5. The Habshī Usurpers (A.D. 1486-A.D. 1493)

- i) Bārbak Shāh
- ii) Sayf al-Dīn Firūz Shāh (1486-89)
- iii) Nāṣir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (1489-90)
- iv) Shams al-Dīn Muzāffar Shāh (1490-93)

6. Husain Shāhī Rule (A.D. 1493-A.D. 1538)

- i) 'Alā' al-Dīn Husain Shāh (1493-1519)
- ii) Nāsir al-Dīn Nuṣrat Shāh (1519-31)
- iii) 'Alā' al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh (1531-32)
- iv) Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maḥmūd Shāh (1532-38)

C. Afghān Rule in Bengal (A.D. 1538-A.D. 1576)

1. The Sūr Afghāns (1538-64)

- i) Shēr Shāh (1538-45)
- ii) Islām Shāh (1545-53)
- iii) Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Sūr (1545-55)
(declared independence)
- iv) Ghiyāth al-Dīn Bahādur Shāh (1556-60)
- v) Ghiyāth al-Dīn Jalāl Shāh (1561-63)
- vi) Ghiyāth al-Dīn (1564)
(userper)

2. The Karrānī Afghān Rule (A.D. 1564-A.D. 1576)

- i) Tāj Khān Karrānī (1564-65)
- ii) Sulaymān Khān Karrānī (1565-72)
- iii) Dāwūd Khān Karrānī (1572-76)

D. Mughal Subādars in Bengal (A.D. 1576-A.D. 1757)

- i) Khān Jahān Husain Qulī Khān (1575-78)
- ii) Ismā'īl Qulī (1578-79)

- iii) Muzāffar Khān Turbatī (1579-80)
- iv) Khān A'zam Mirzā 'Azīz Kokāh (1582-83)
- v) Shāhbāz Khān (1583-84)
- vi) Ṣādiq Khān (1585)
- vii) Wazīr Khān (1586-87)
- viii) Sa'id Khān (1587-94)
- ix) Mān Singh Kachhwā (1594-1606)
- x) Qutb al-Dīn Khān Kokāh (1606-07)
- xi) Jahāngir Qulī Beg (1607-08)
- xii) Islām Khān (1608-13)
- xiii) Qāsim Khān Chishtī (1613-17)
- xiv) Ibrāhīm Khān Fath-i-Jang (1617-24)
- xv) Mahābat Khān (1625-26)
- xvi) Mukarram Khān (1626-27)
- xvii) Fidāī Khān (1627-28)
- xviii) Qāsim Khān Juyinī (1628-32)
- xix) A'zam Khān (1632-35)
- xx) Islām Khān Mashhadi (1635-39)
- xxi) Prince Muḥammad Shujā (1639-60)
- xxii) Mir Jumla (1660-63)
- xxiii) Shā'ista Khān (1663-78)
- xxiv) Fidāī Khān (1678?)
- xxv) Prince Muḥammad A'zam (1678-79)
- xxvi) Shā'ista Khān (1679-88)
- xxvii) Khān-i-Jahān (1688-89)

- xxvii) Ibrāhīm Khān (1689-98)
- xxviii) Prince 'Azīm al-Dīn (1697-1712)
(later 'Azīm al-Shān)
- xxix) Farkunda Siyār (1713)
- xxx) Mir Jumla (1713-16)
- xxxi) Murshid Qulī Khān (1717-27)
- xxxii) Shujā' al-Dīn (1727-39)
- xxxiii) Sarfarāz Khān (1739-40)
- xxxv) 'Alivardī Khān (1740-56)
- xxxvi) Sirāj al-Dawla (1756-57)

ABBREVIATIONS

ASI	: Archaeological Survey of India
ASIAR	: Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report
ASIR	: Archaeological Survey of India Reports
ASIR, EC	: Archaeological Survey of India Reports, Eastern Circle
ASIR, WC	: Archaeological Survey of India Reports, Western Circle
BMIB	: Bibliography of the Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal
CHI	: Cambridge History of India
EI	: Epigraphia Indica
EIM	: Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica
EMA	: Early Muslim Architecture
HB	: History of Bengal
IA	: Indian Archaeology
IB	: Inscriptions of Bengal
IHQ	: Indian Historical Quarterly
JASB	: Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
JASP	: Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan
JBHS	: Journal of the Bombay Historical Society
JBORS	: Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society
JISOA	: Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art
JPASB	: Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
JPHS	: Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society
JRASB	: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal
JUPHS	: Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society

JVRM : Journal of the Varendra Research Museum
MAB : Muslim Architecture in Bengal
MASI : Memoir of the Archaeological Survey of India
N.D. : No Date
PASB : Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
PRASI, WC : Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of
India, Western Circle
PWMB : Prince of Wales Museum Bulletin
SPP : Sahitya Parisad Patrika
VRS : Varendra Research Society

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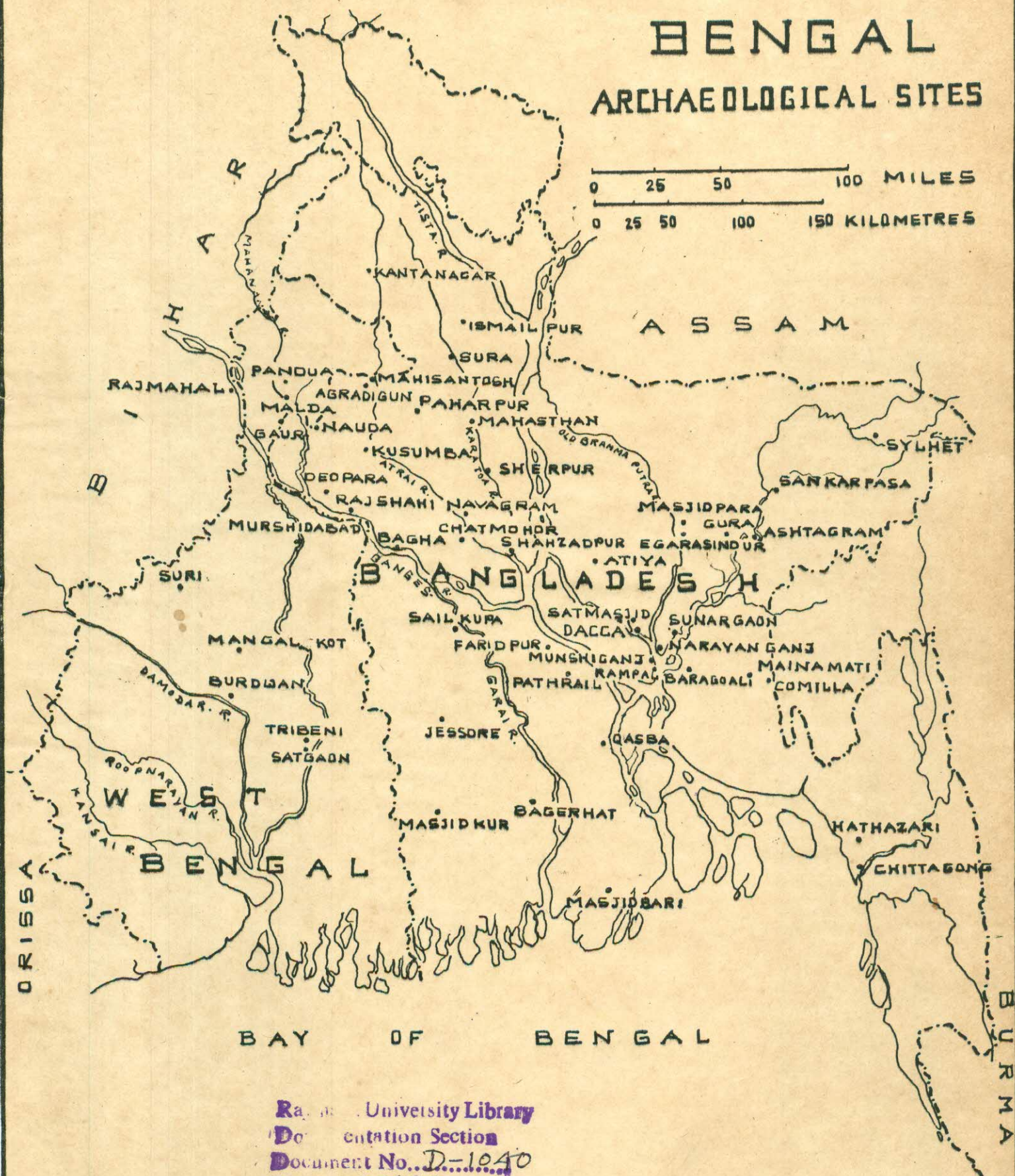
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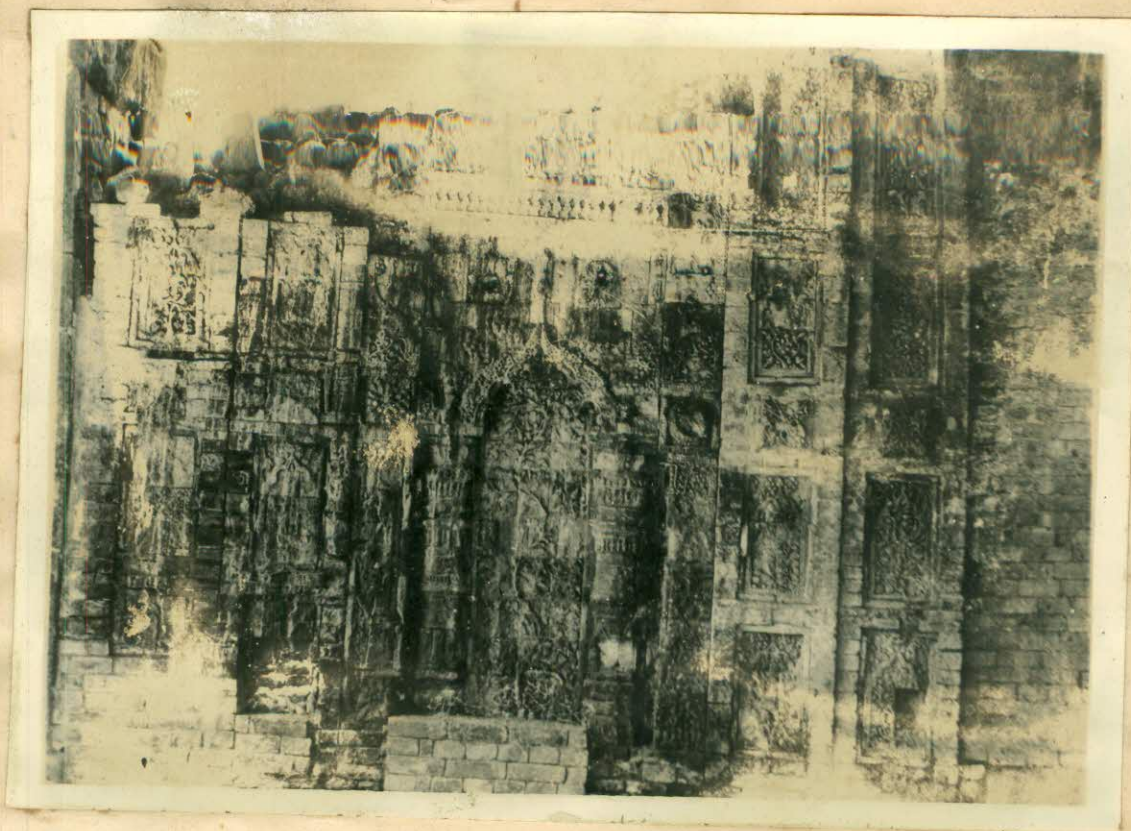
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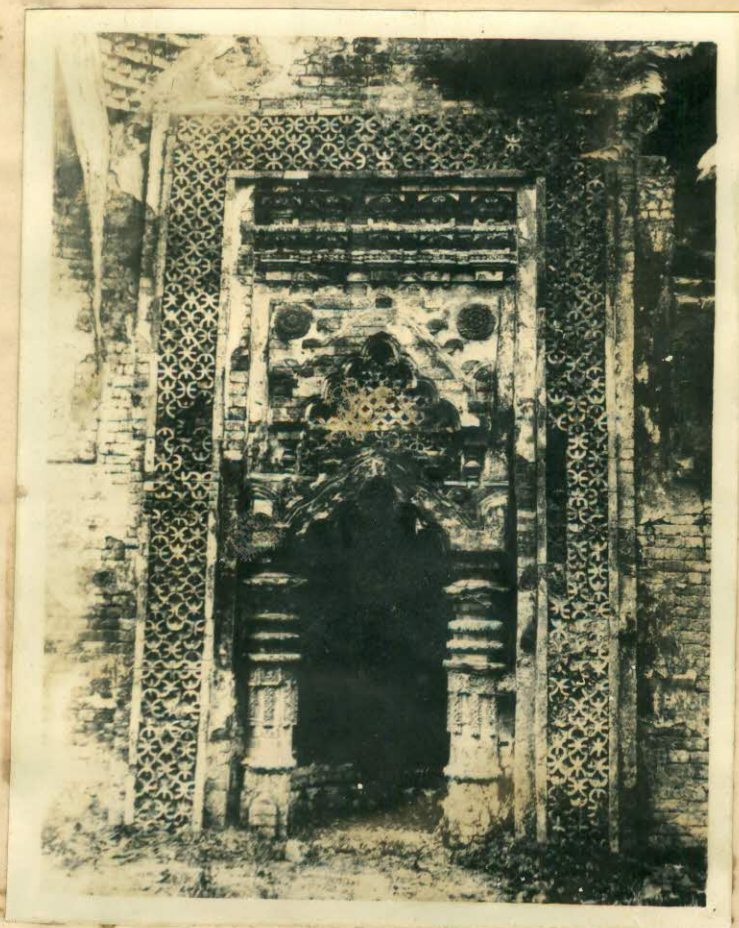


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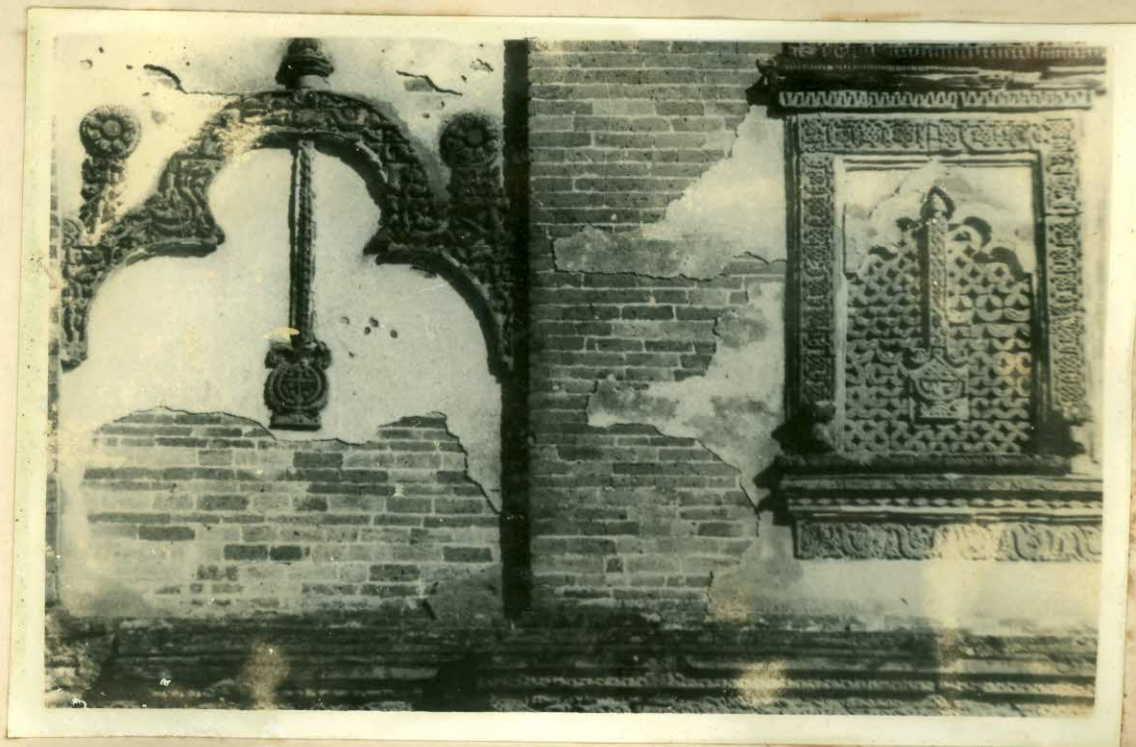
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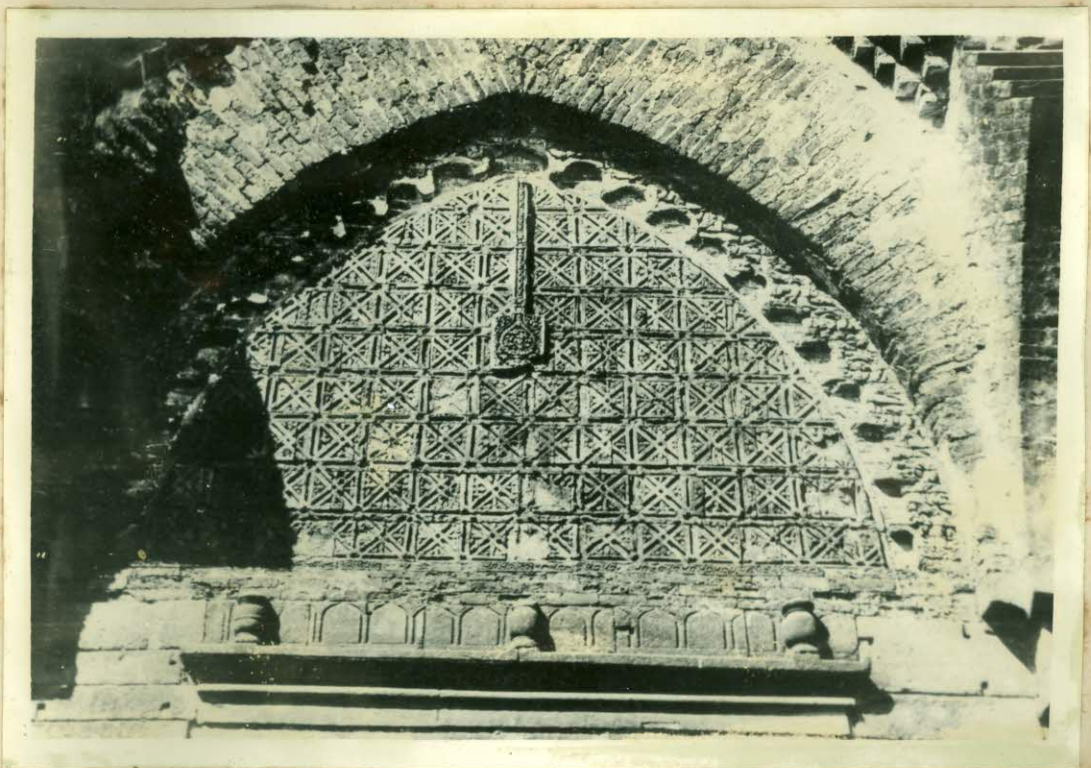
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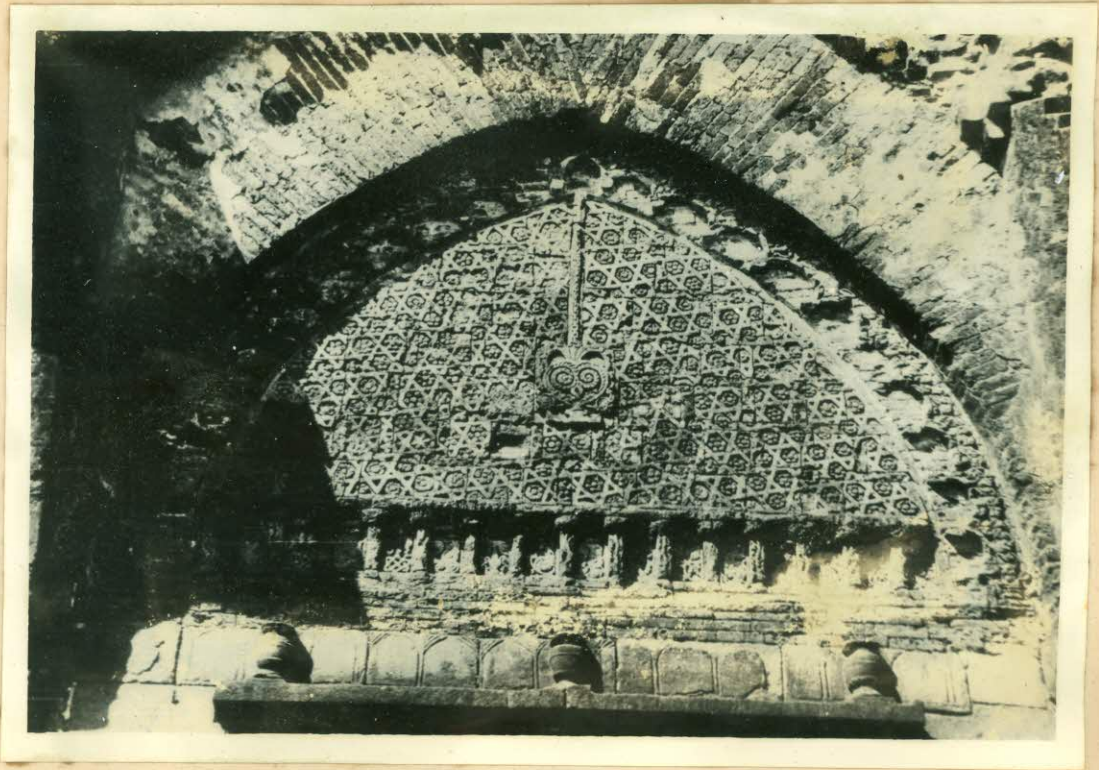
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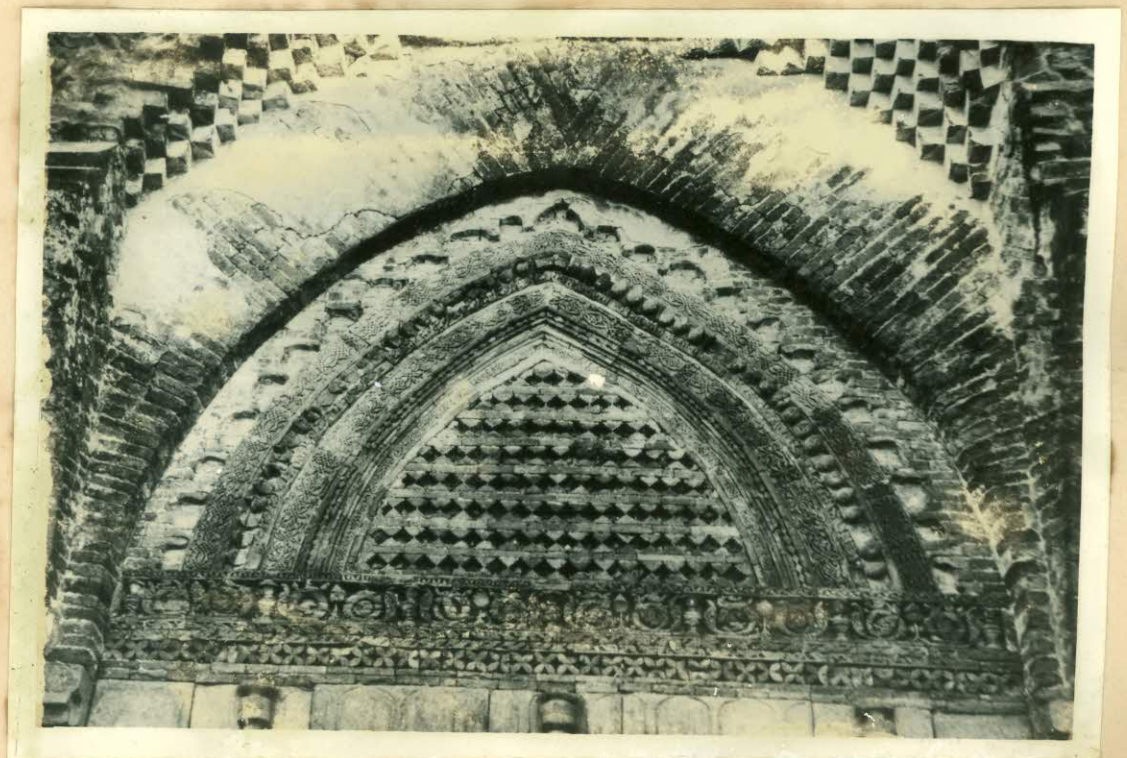
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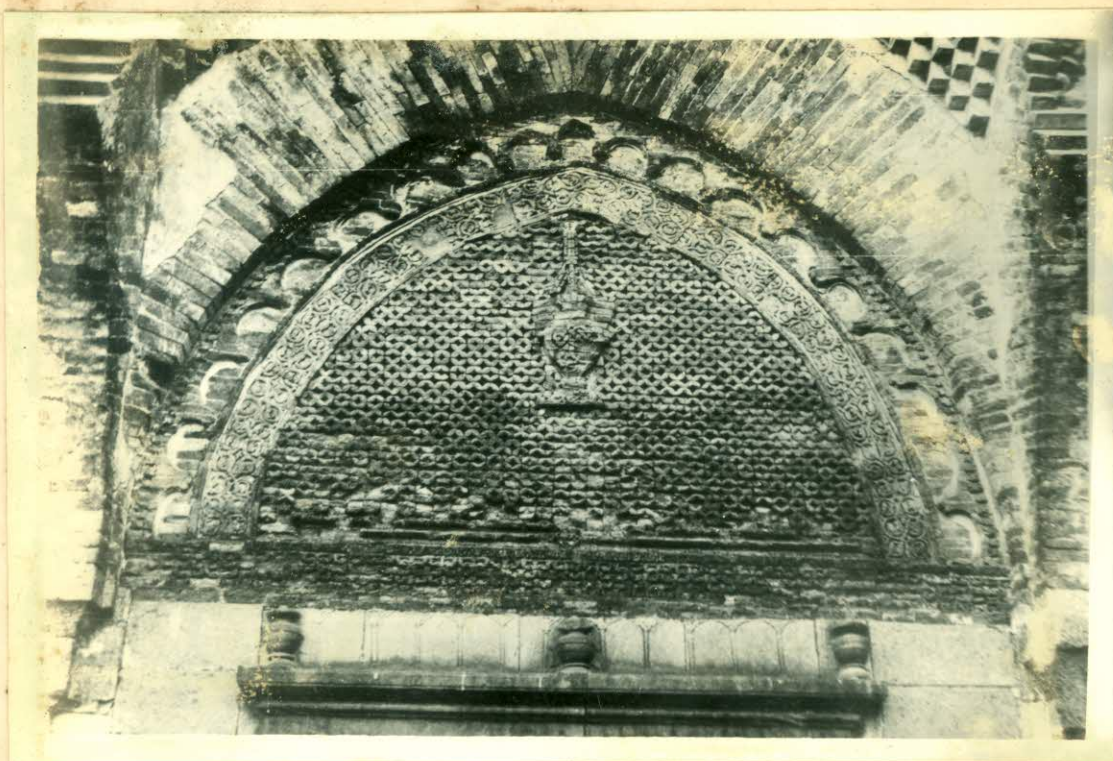
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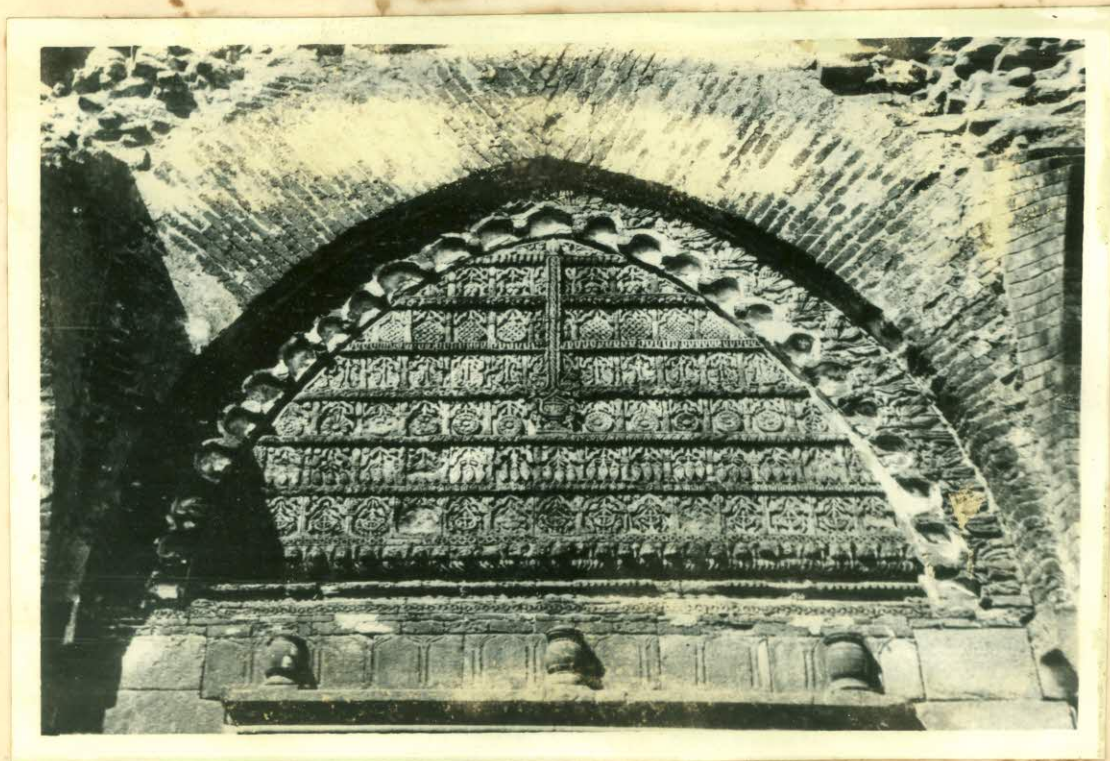
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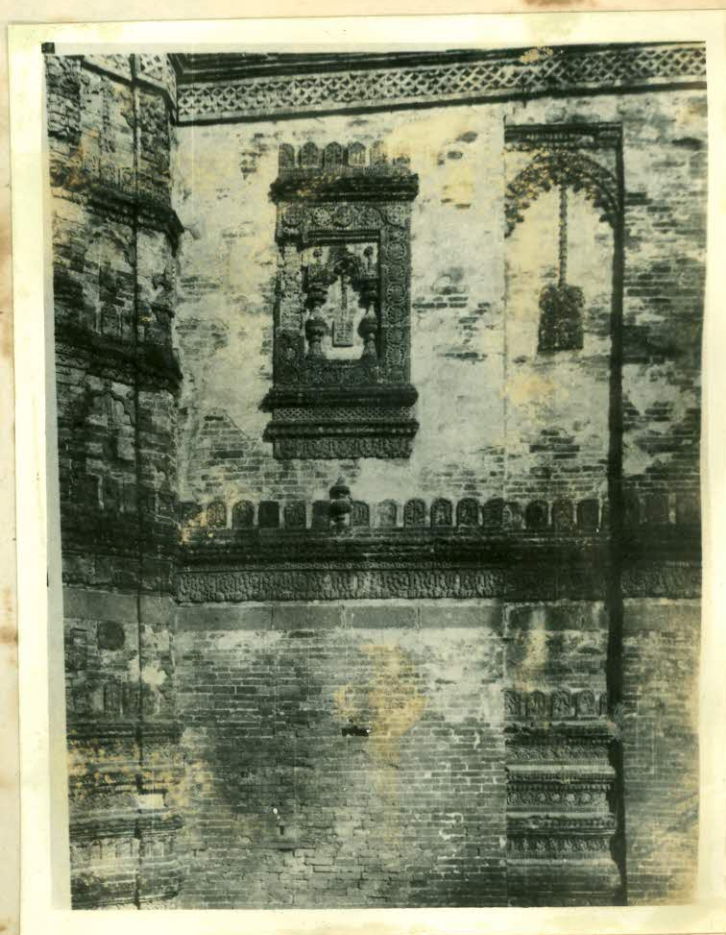
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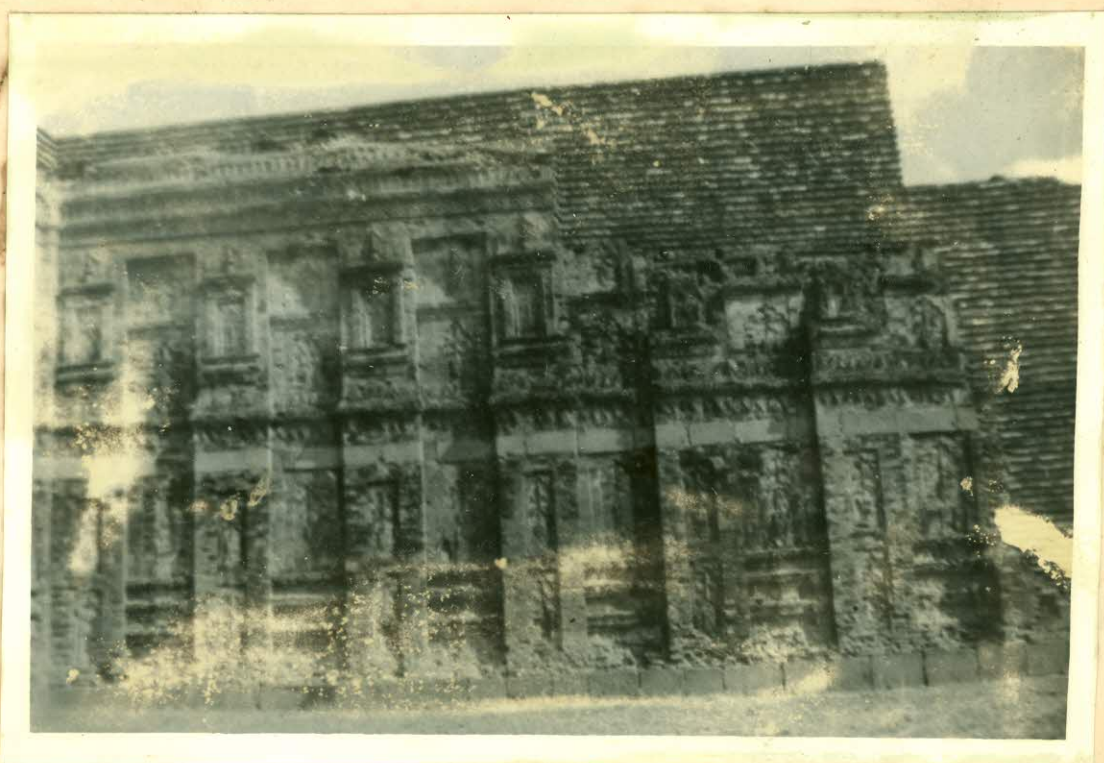
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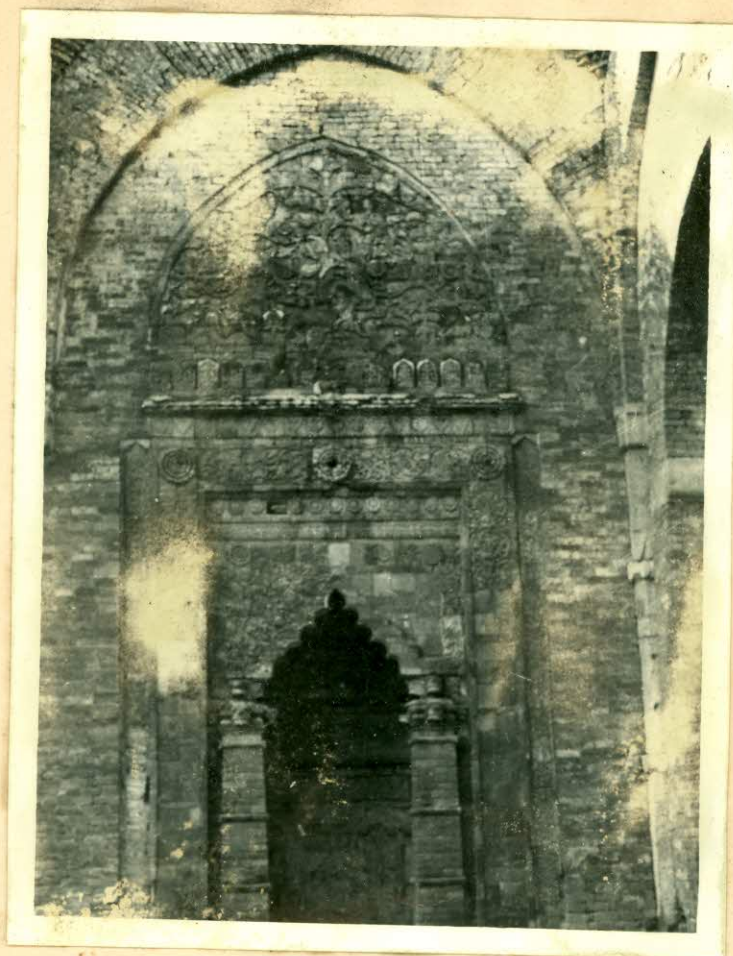
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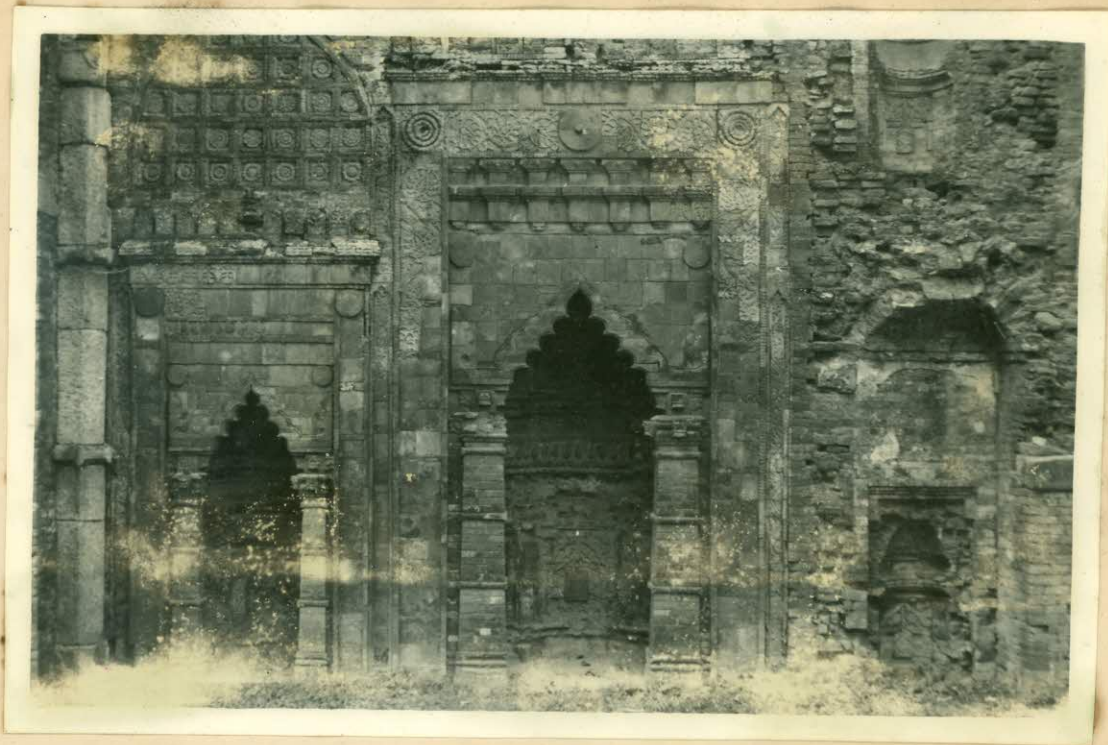
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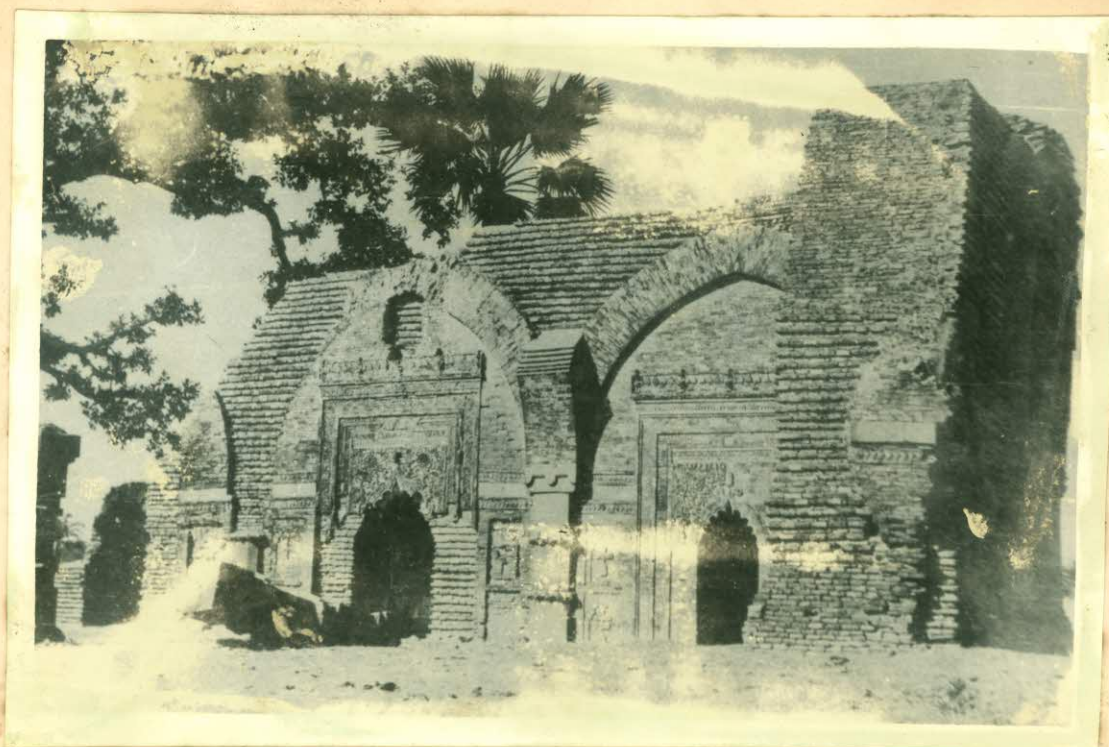
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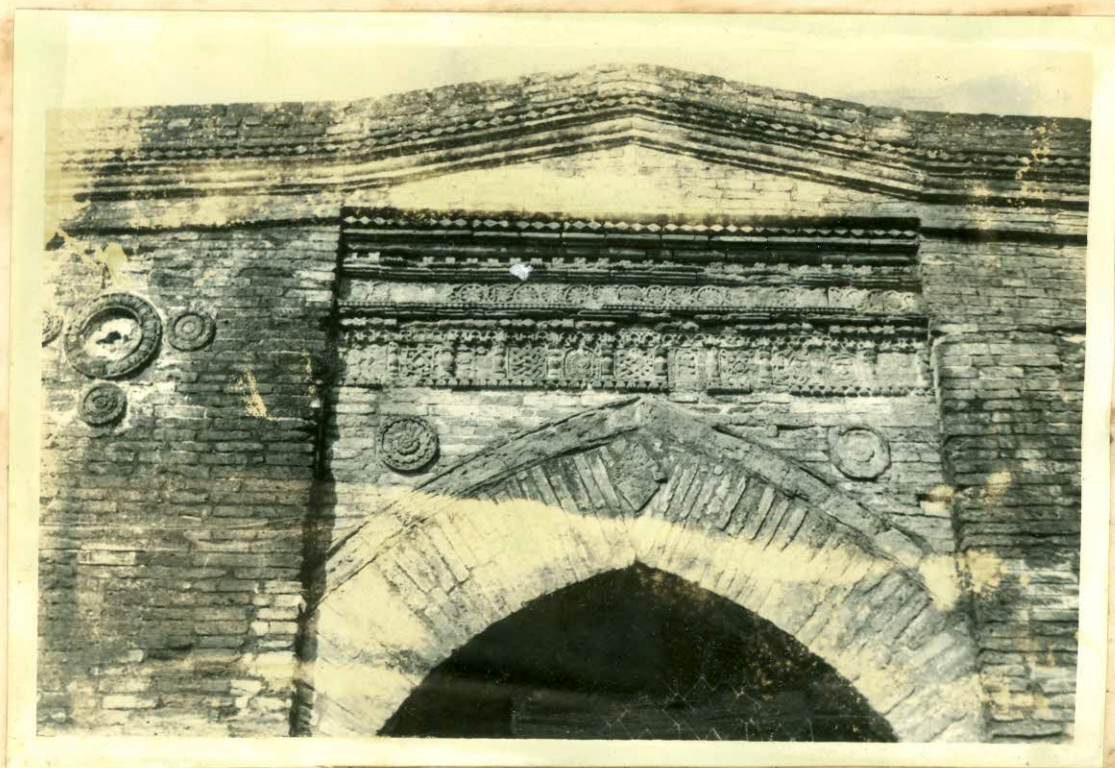
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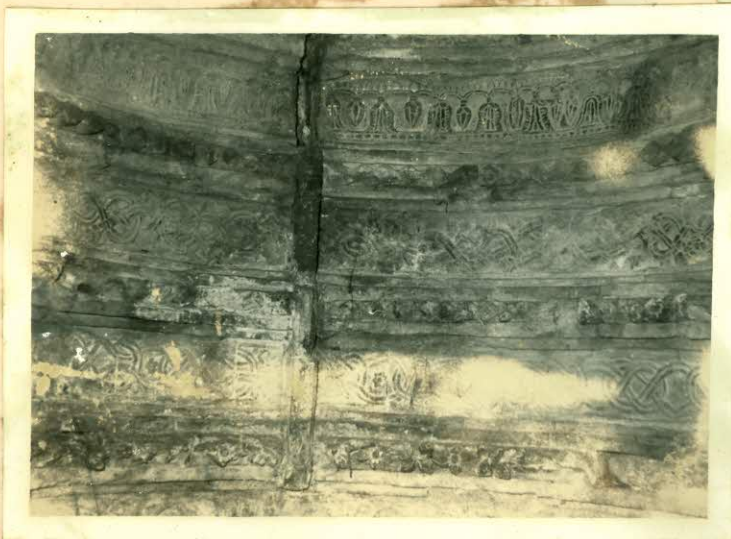




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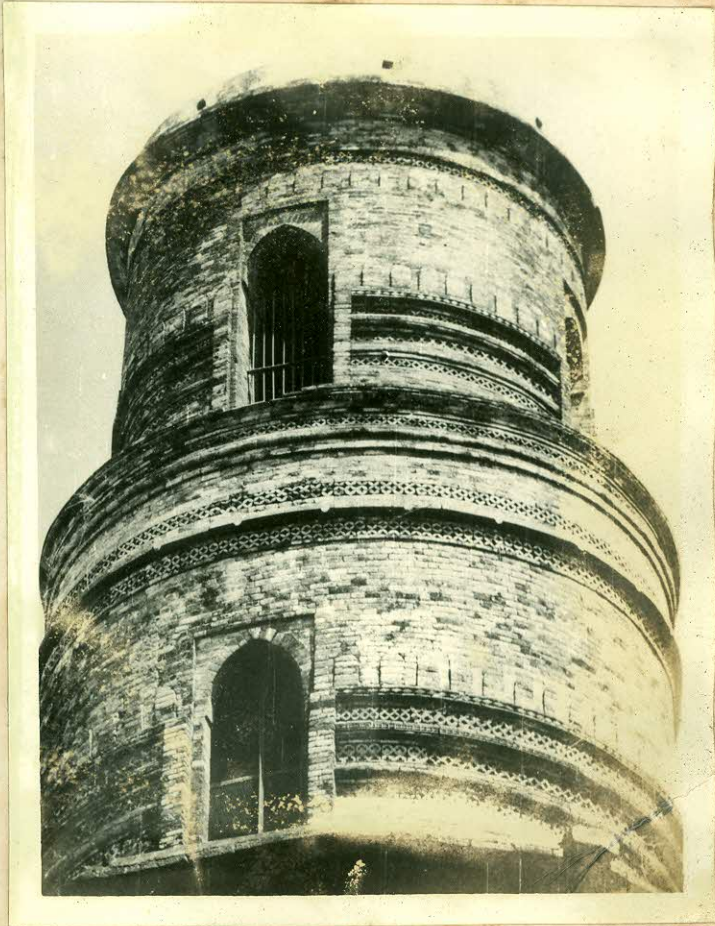
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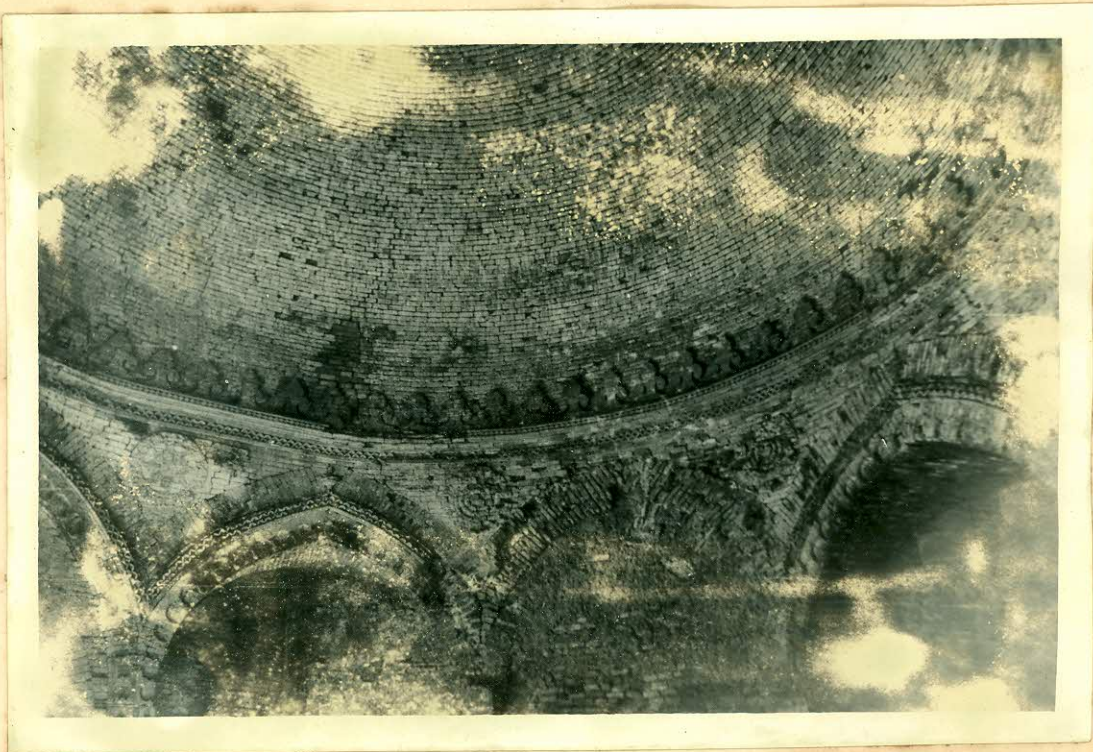
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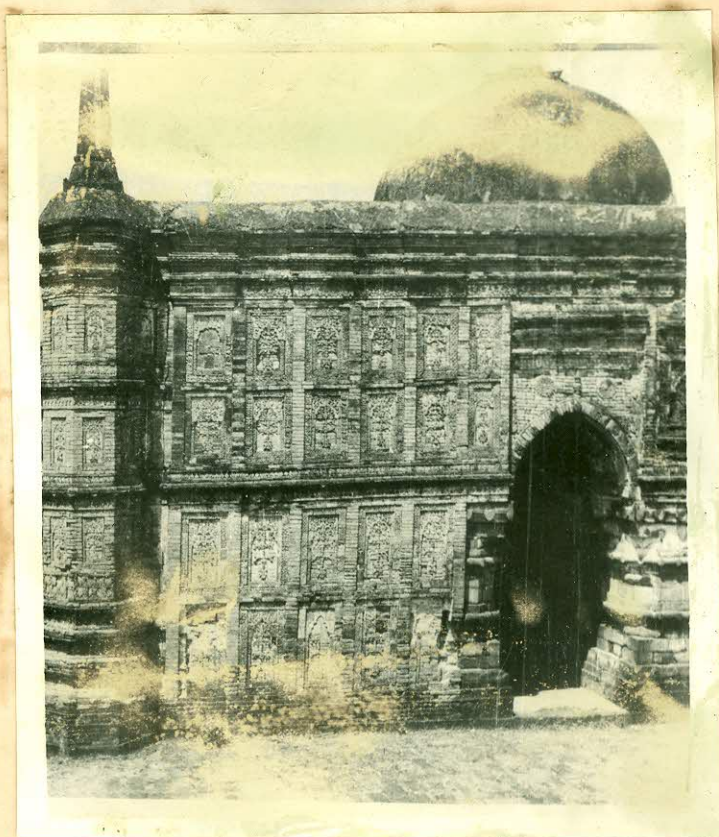
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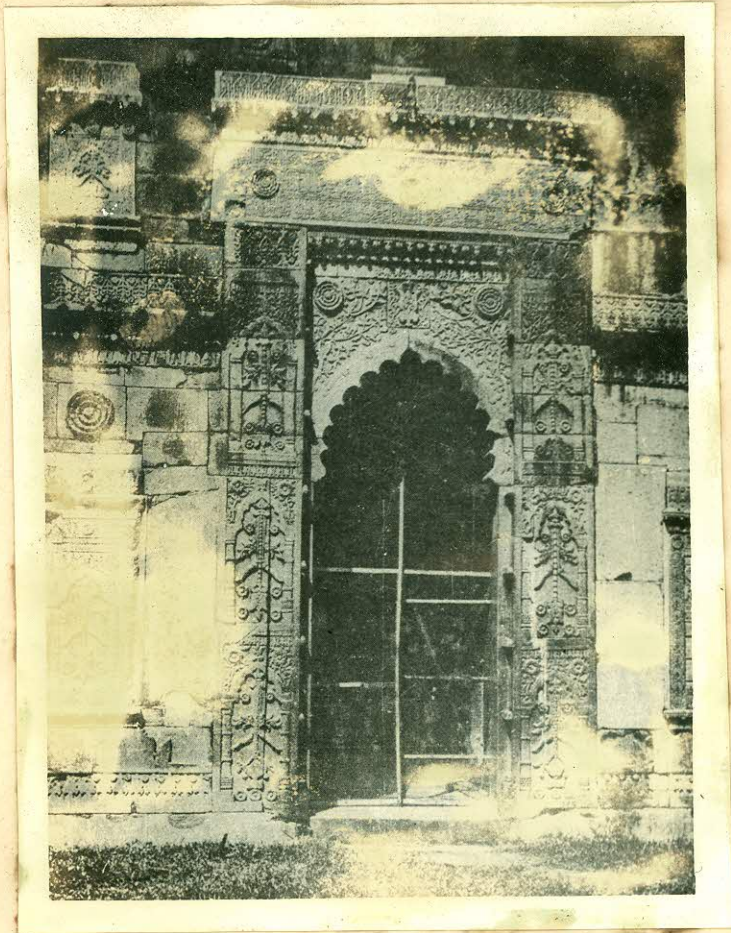
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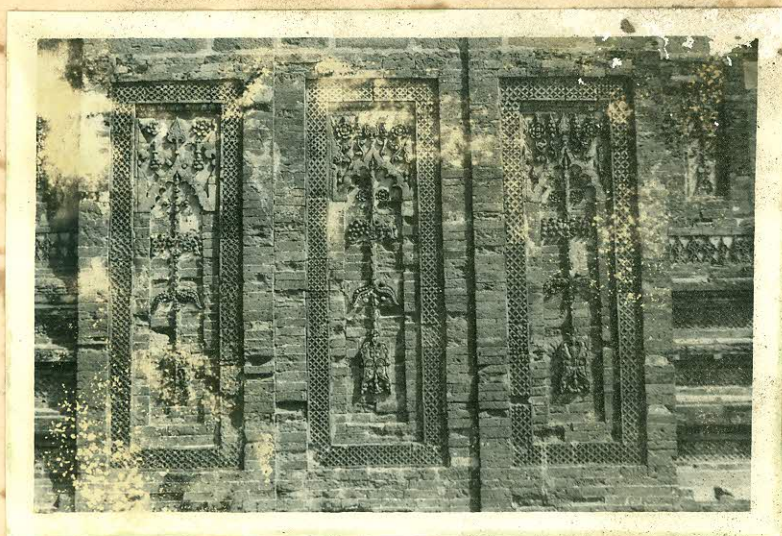
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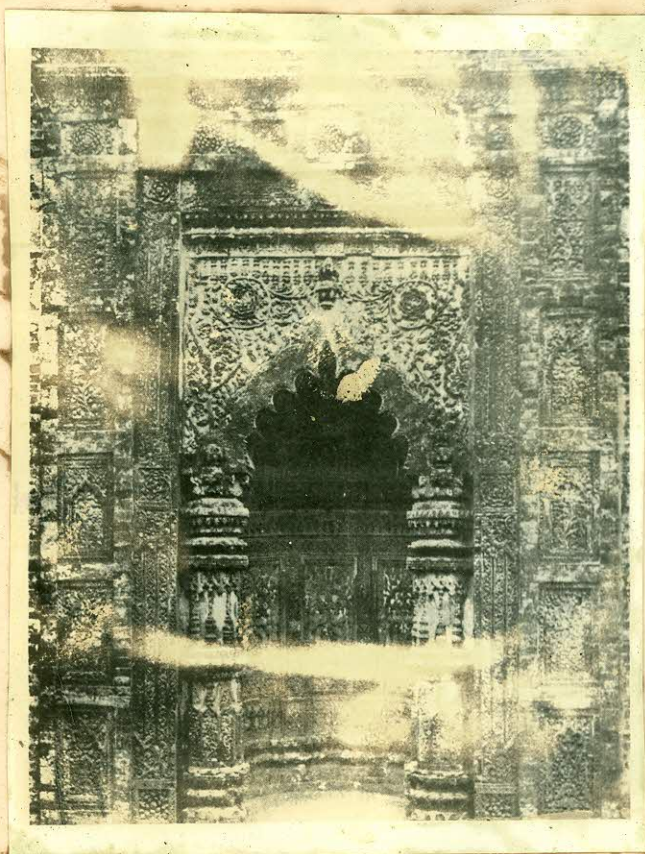
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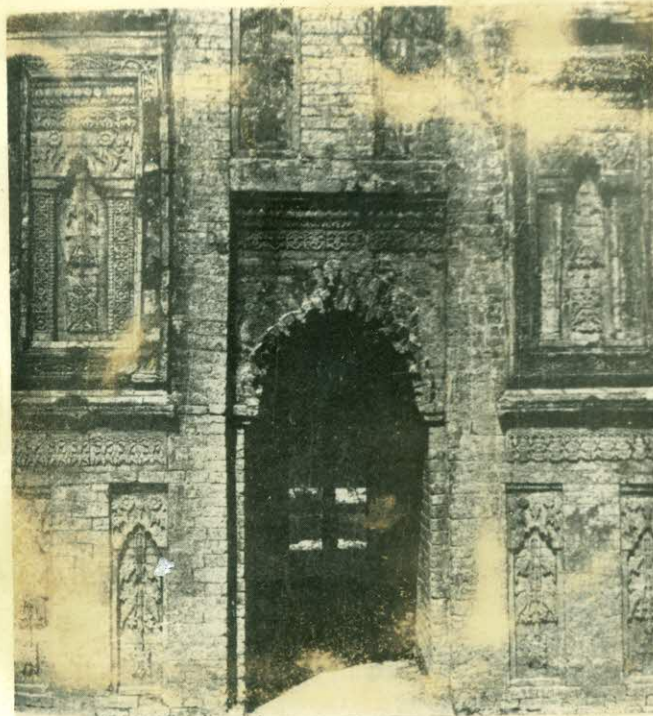
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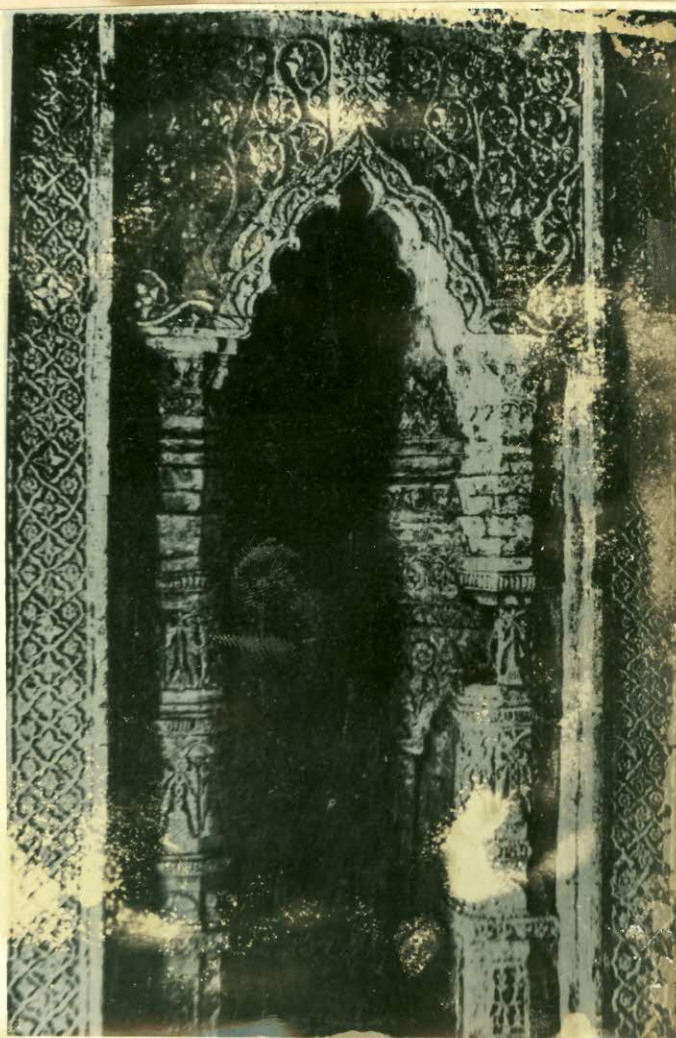
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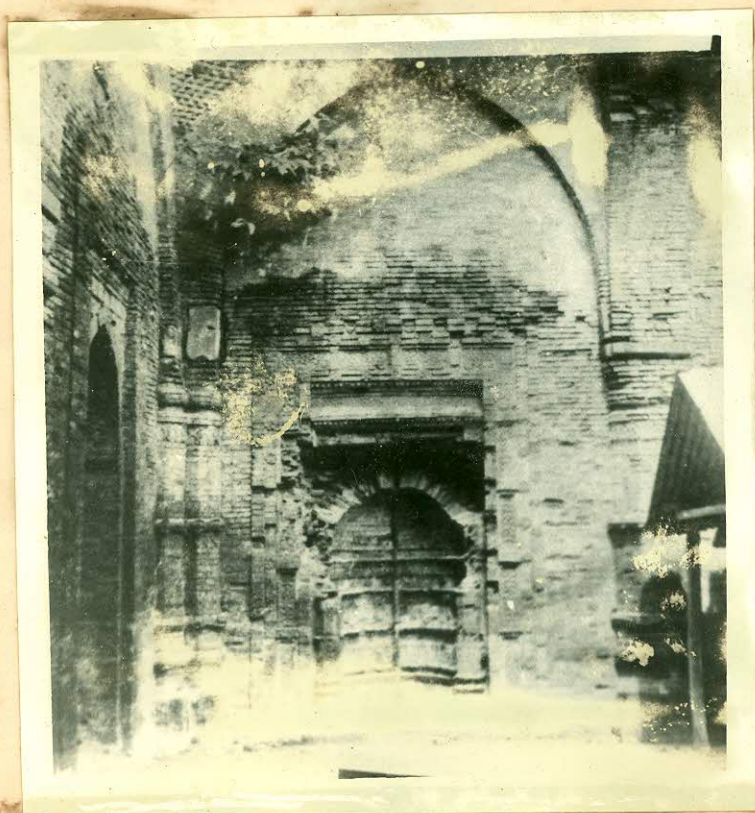
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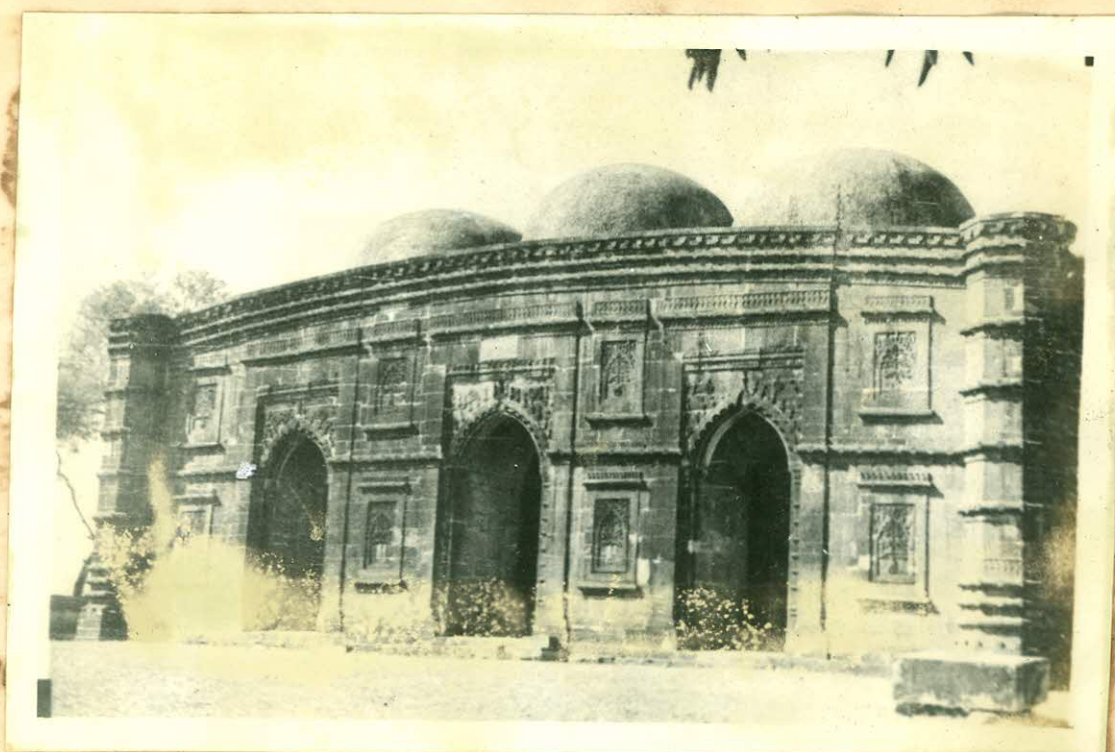
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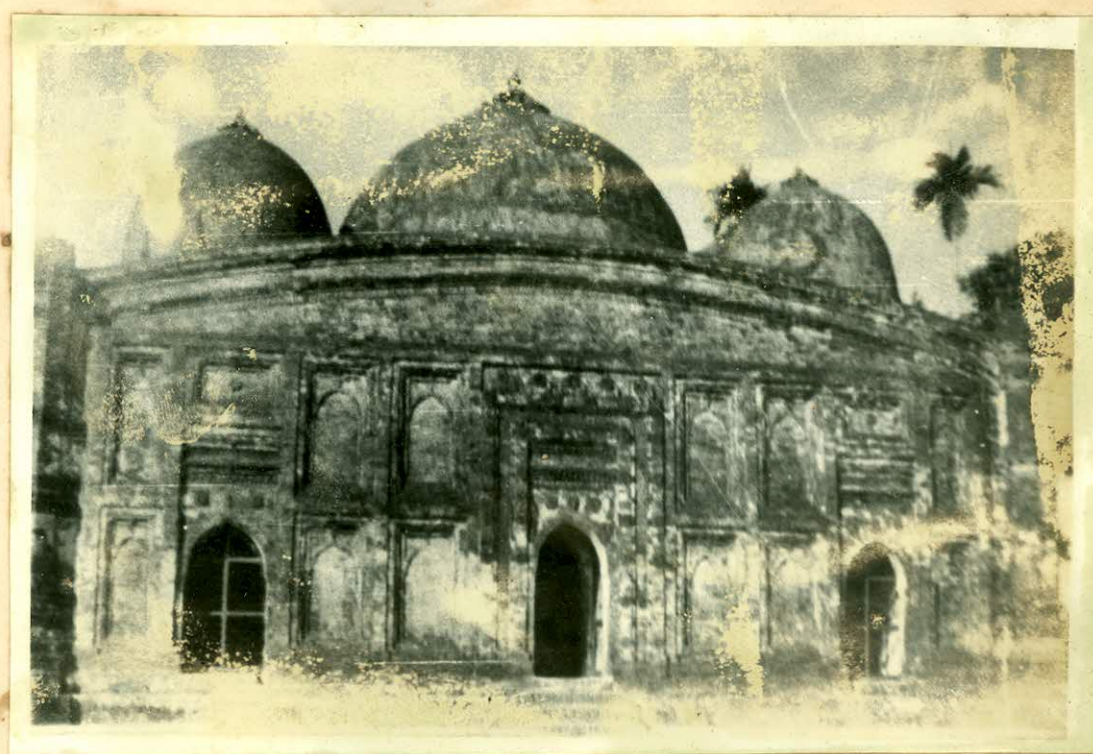
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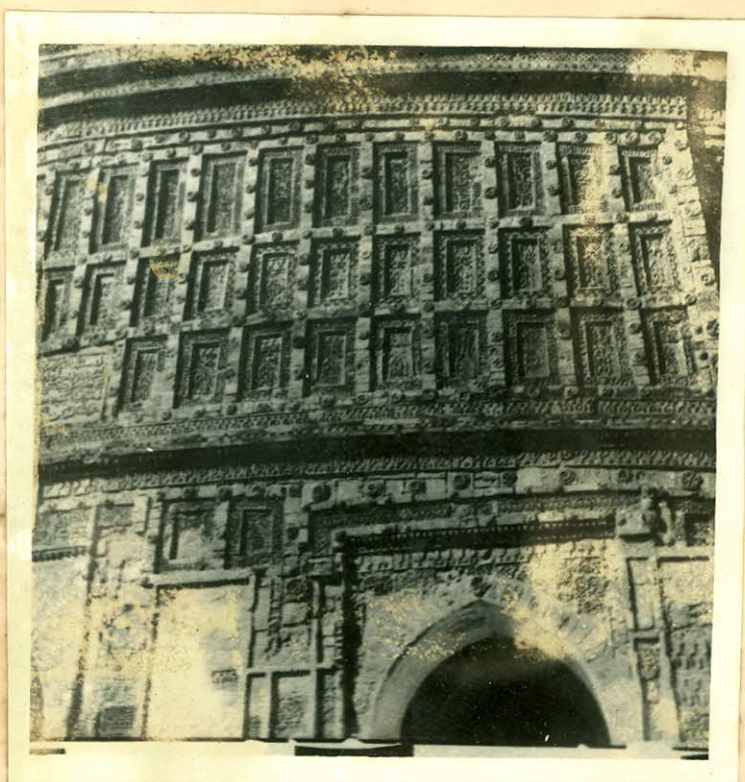


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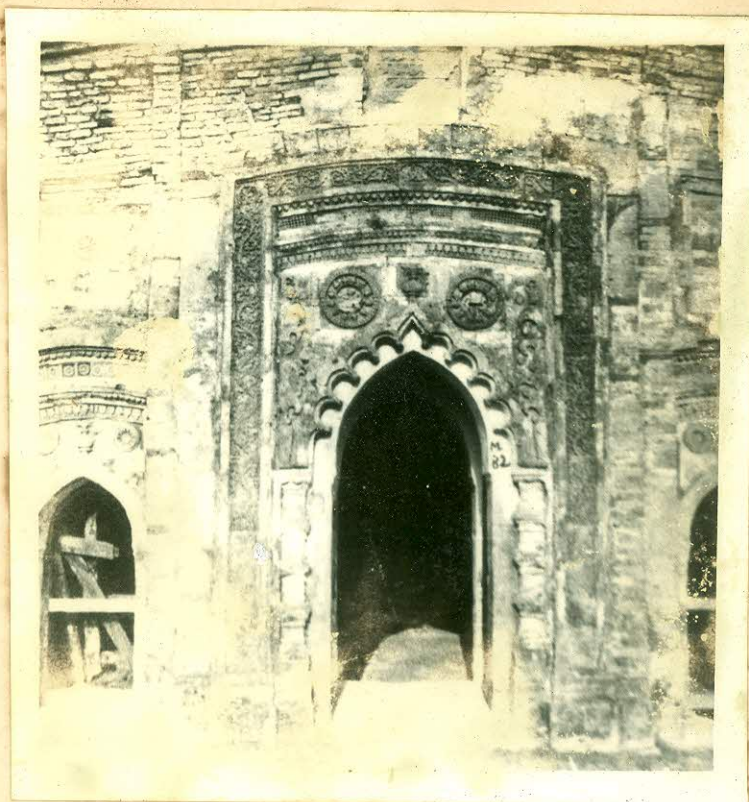


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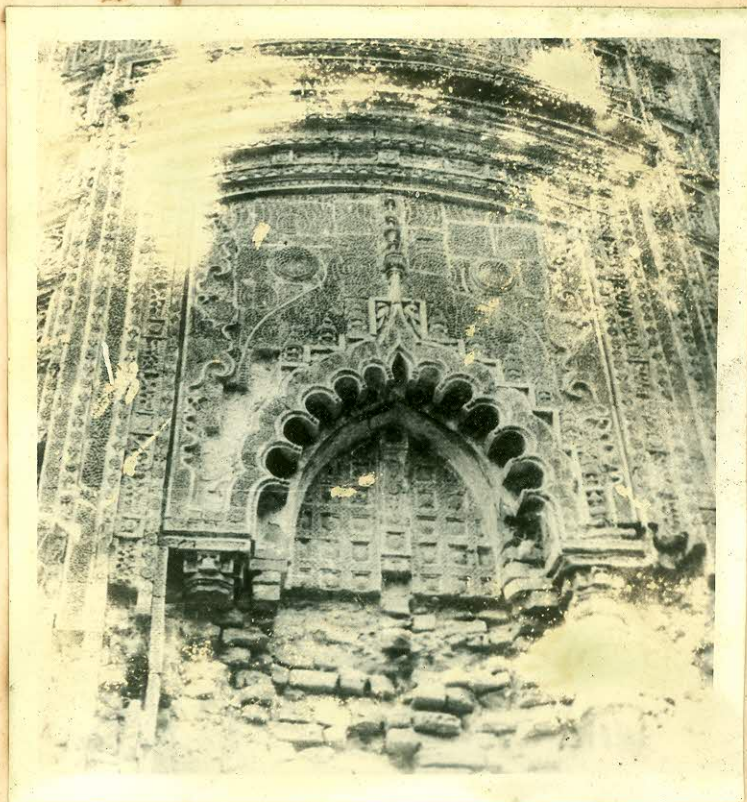
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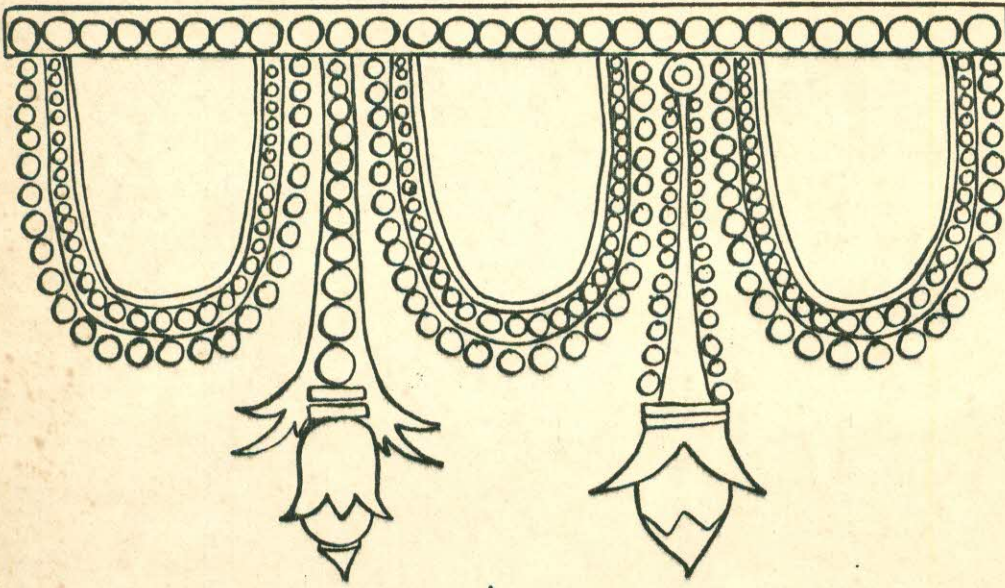


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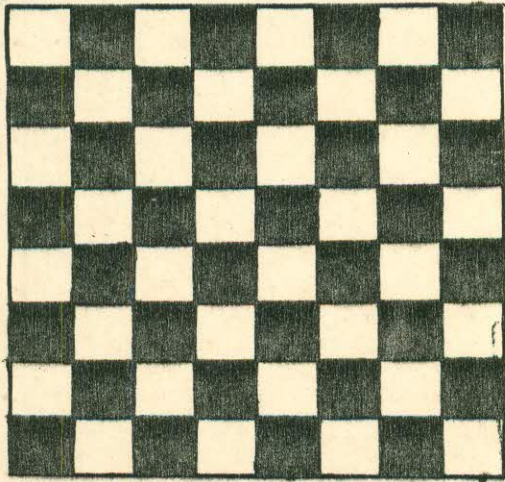


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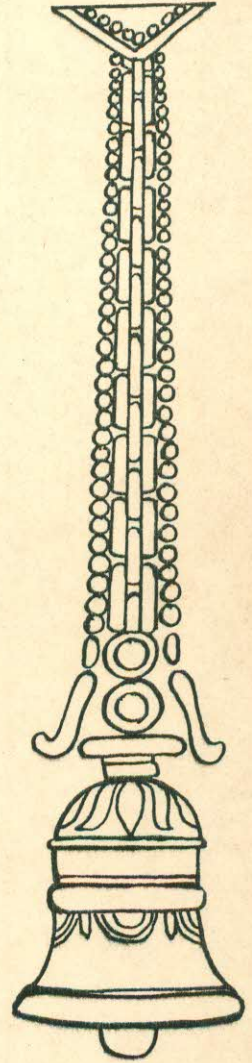
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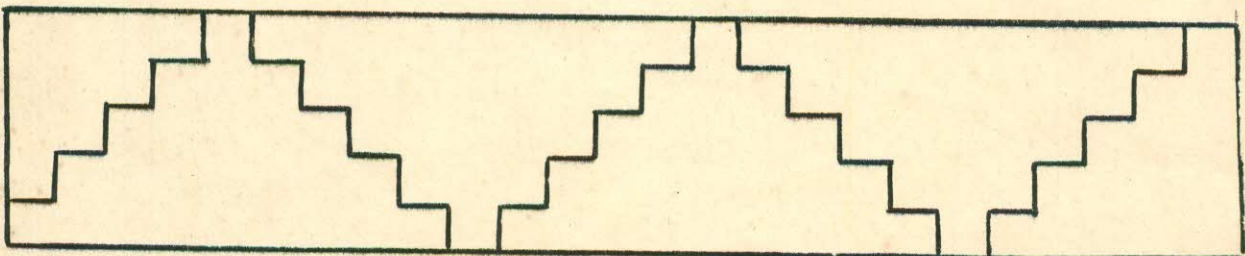
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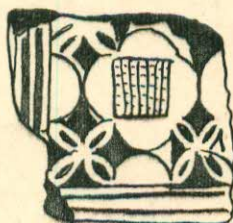
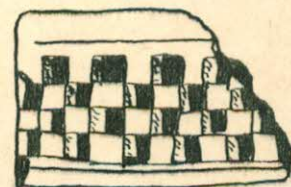
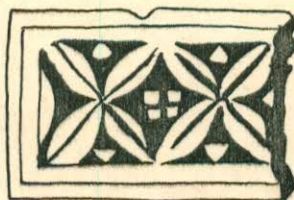
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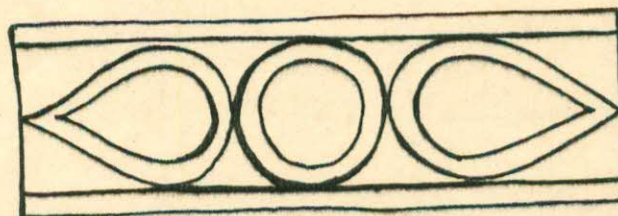
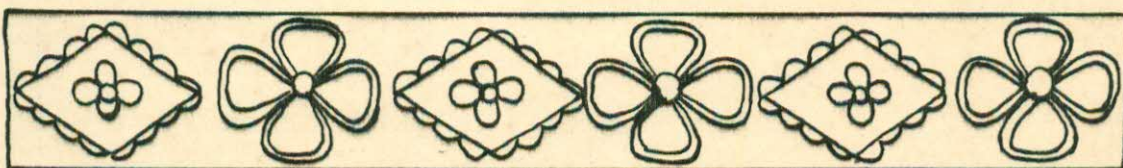
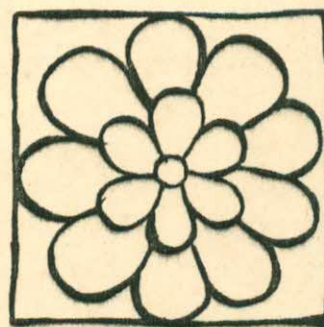
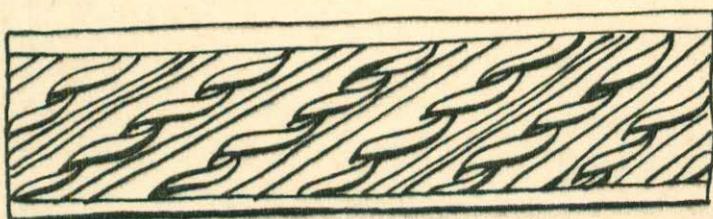
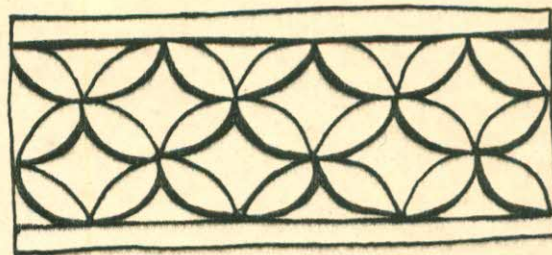
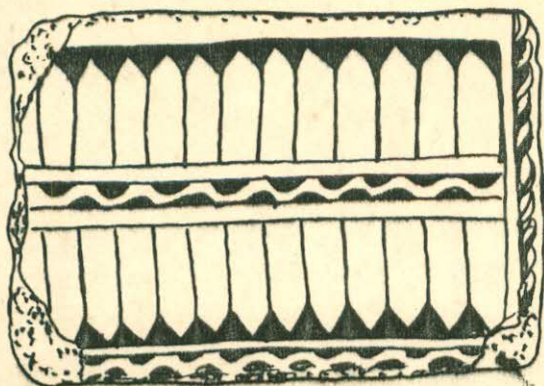


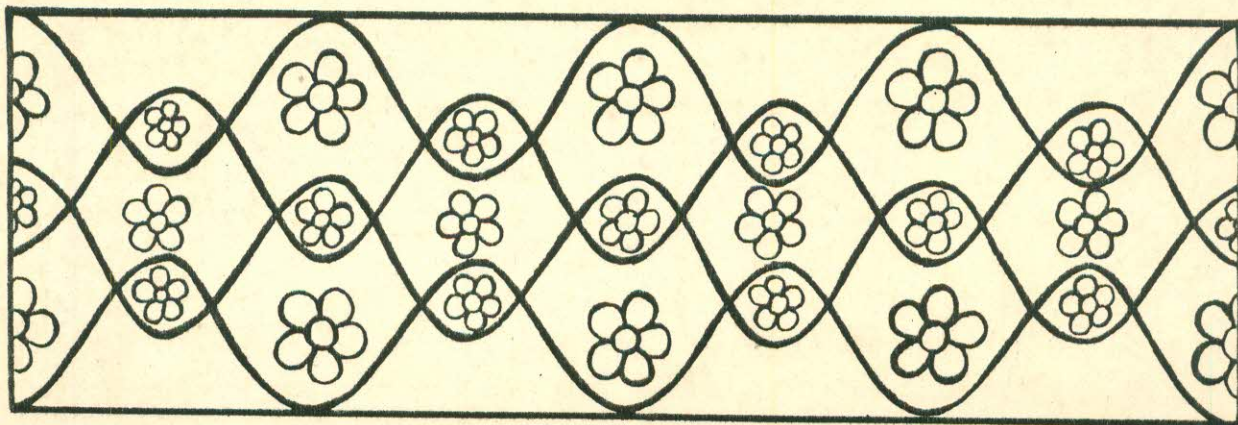
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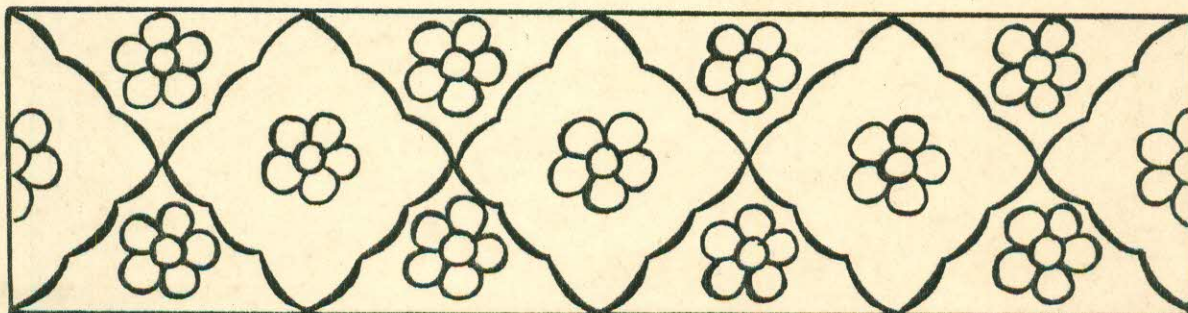
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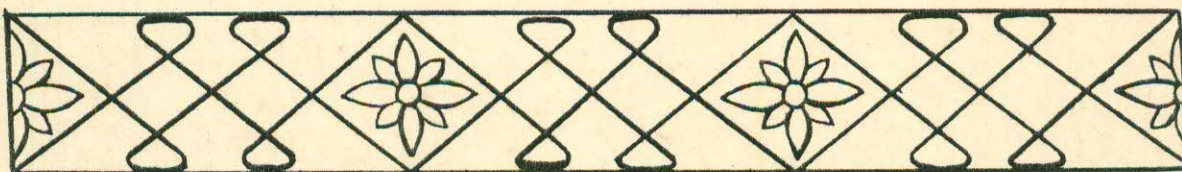




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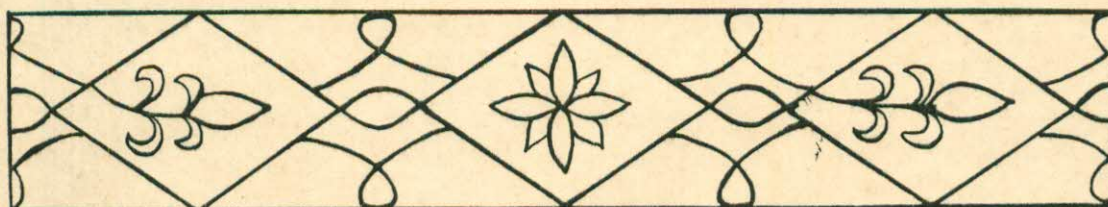
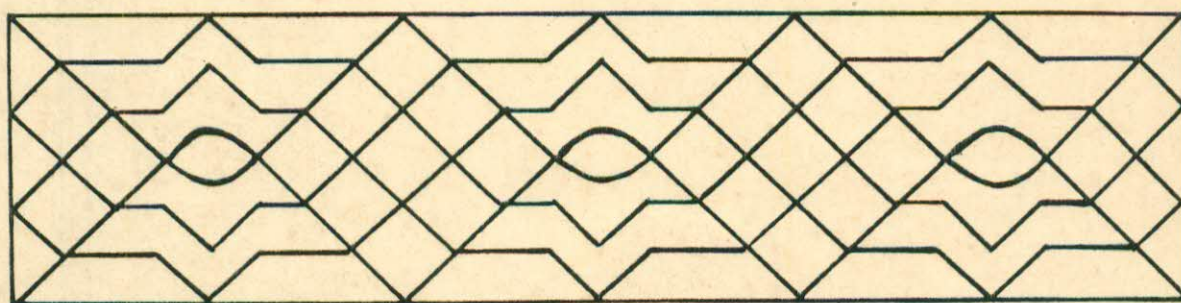
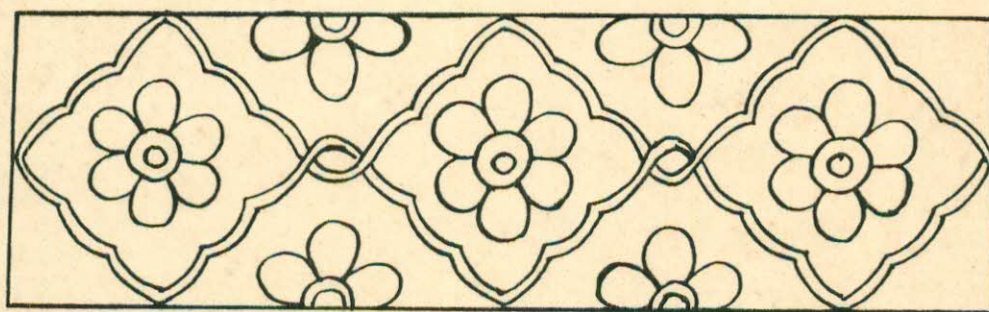
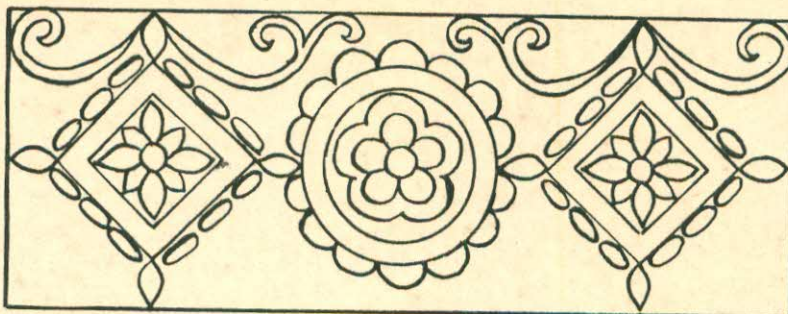
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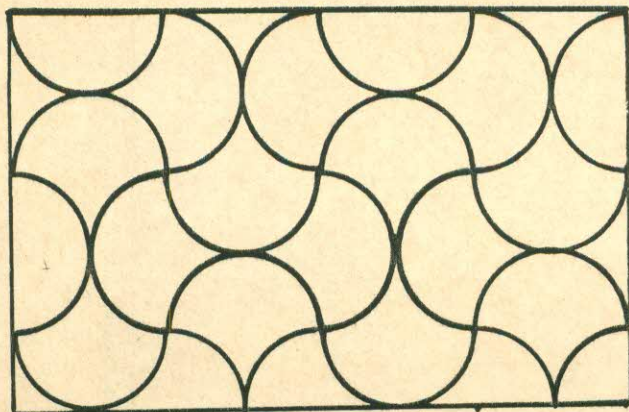


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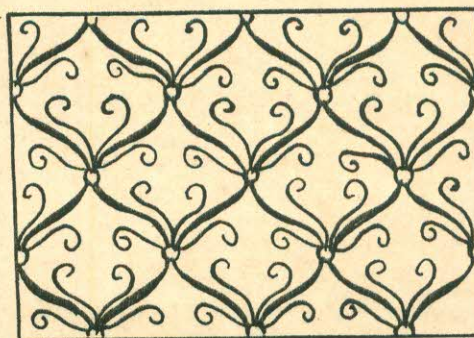


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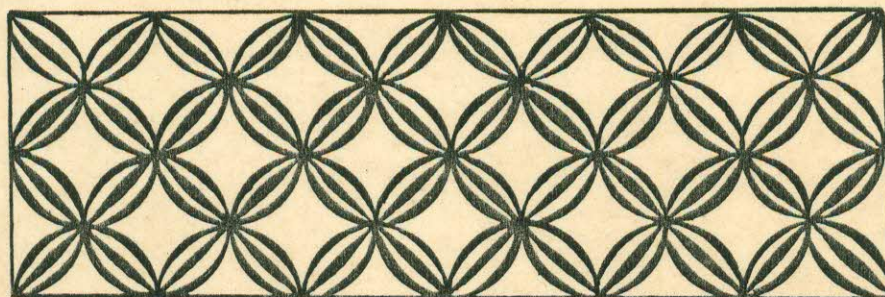




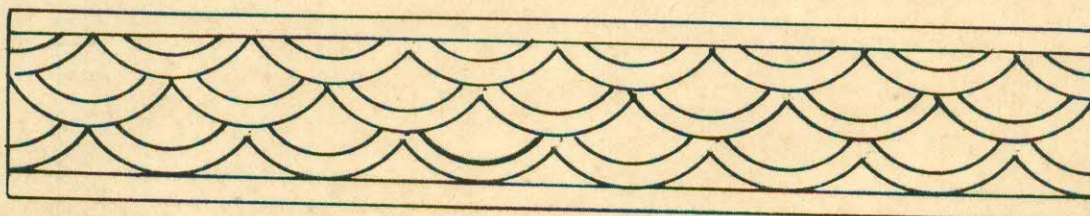
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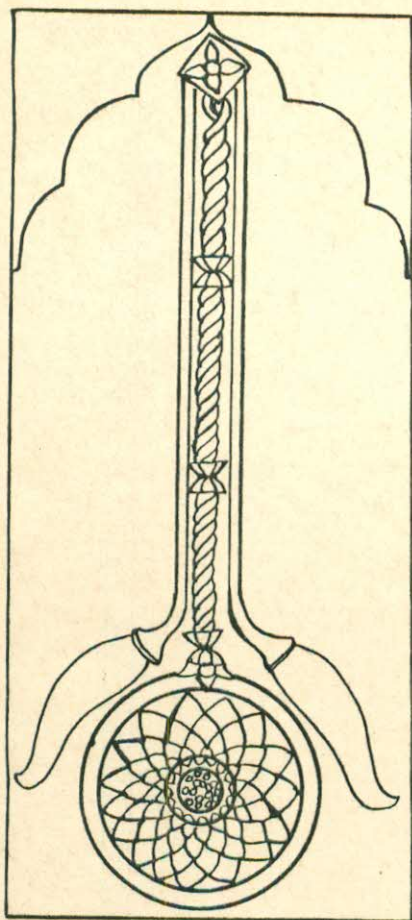
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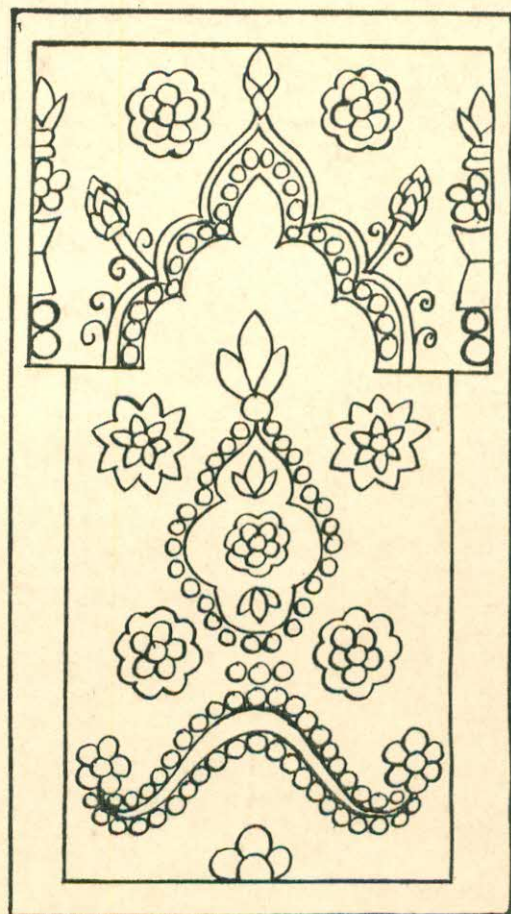
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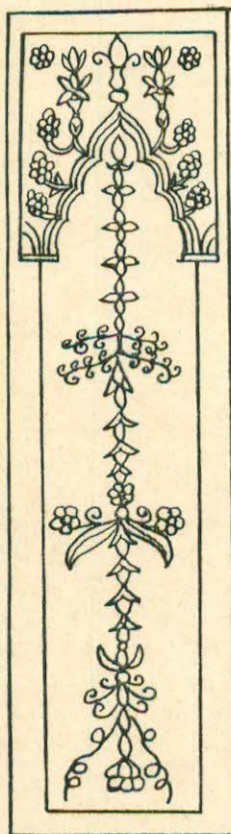
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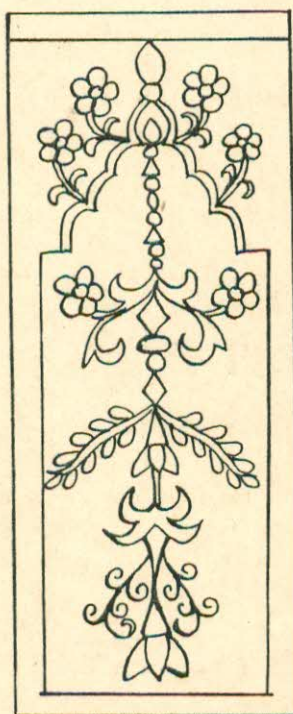
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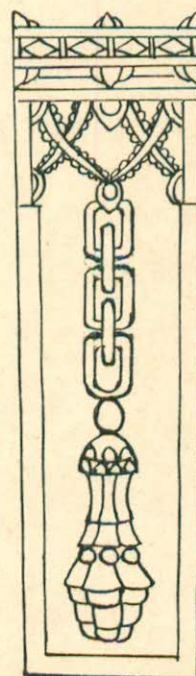
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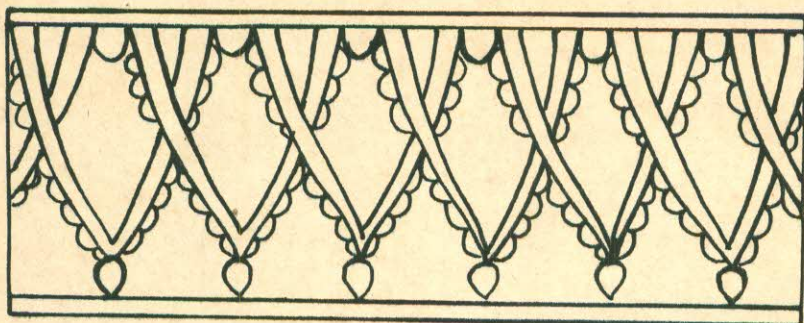
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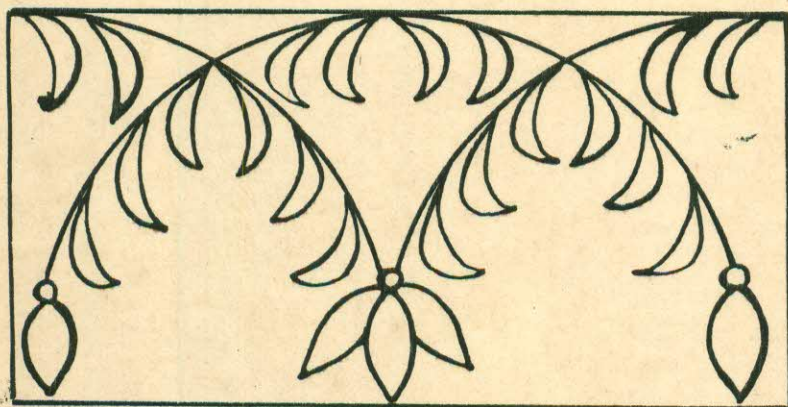
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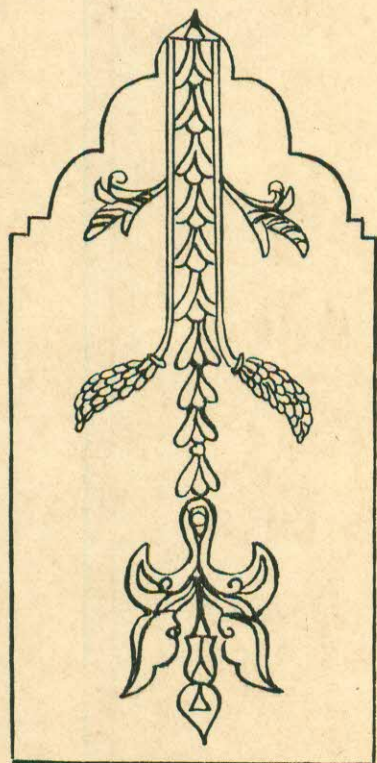
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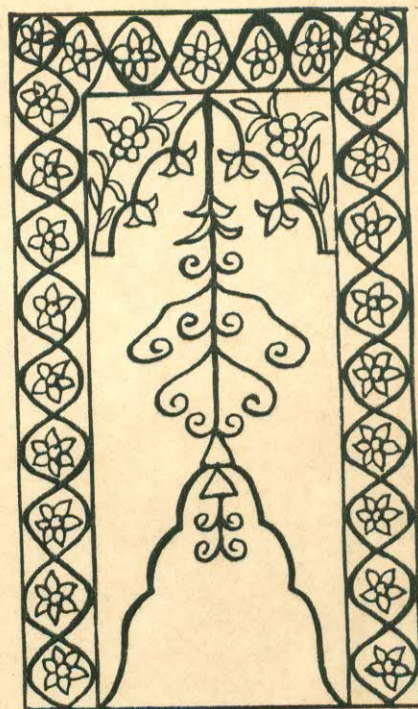
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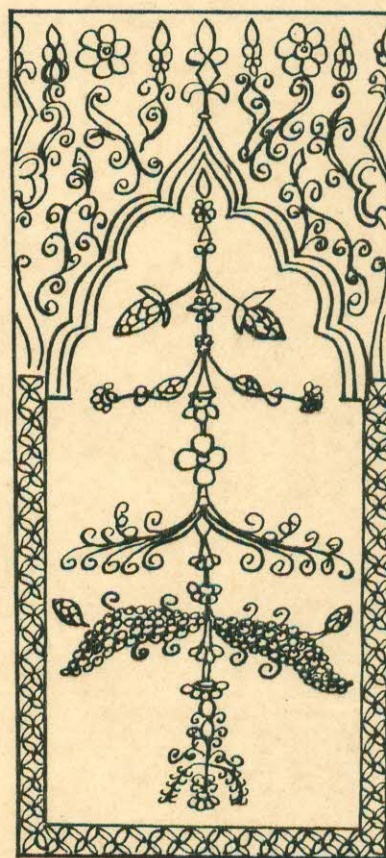
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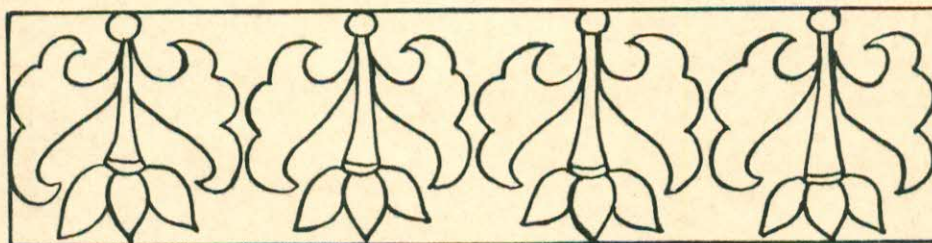
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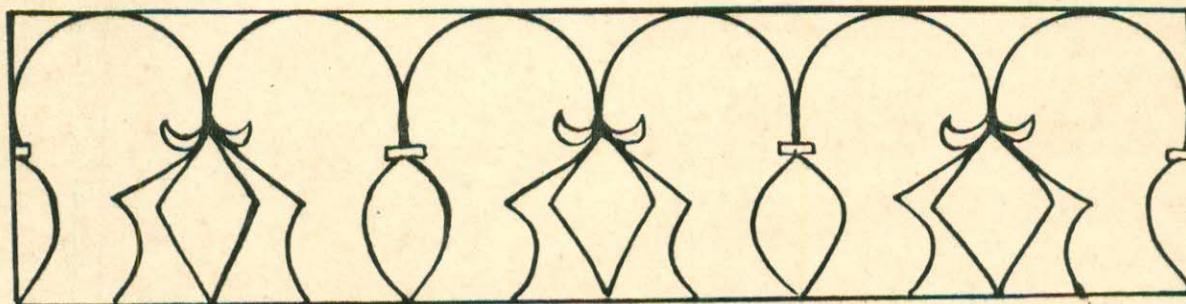
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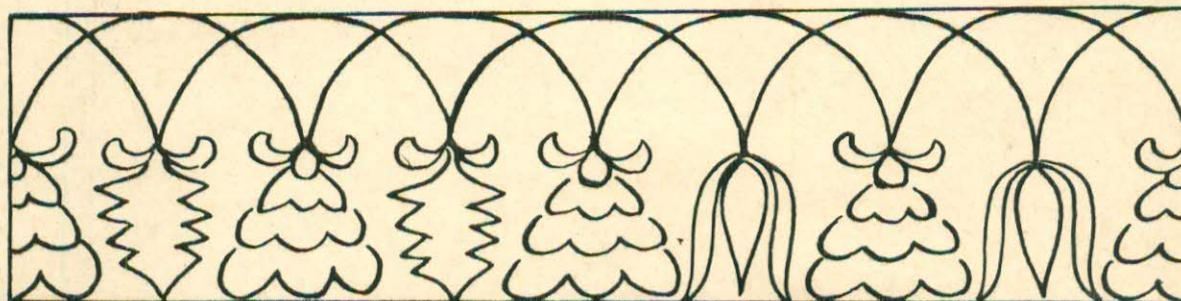
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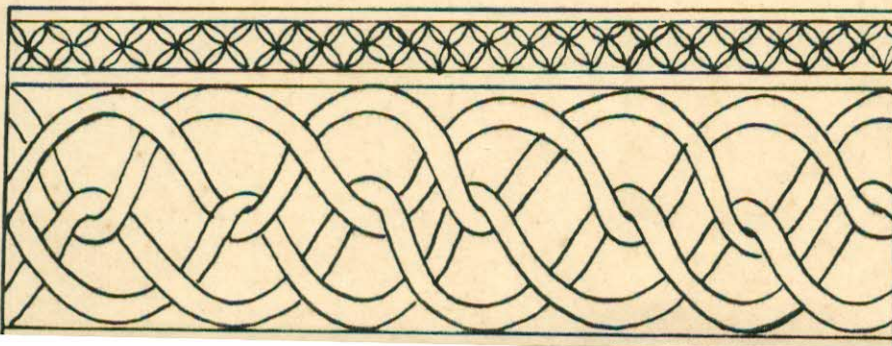
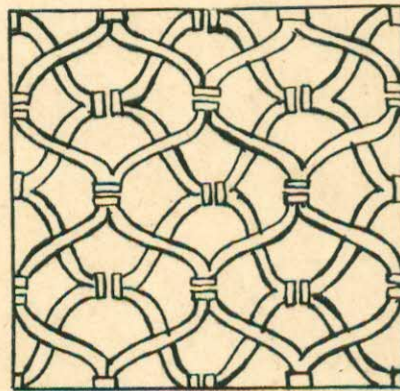
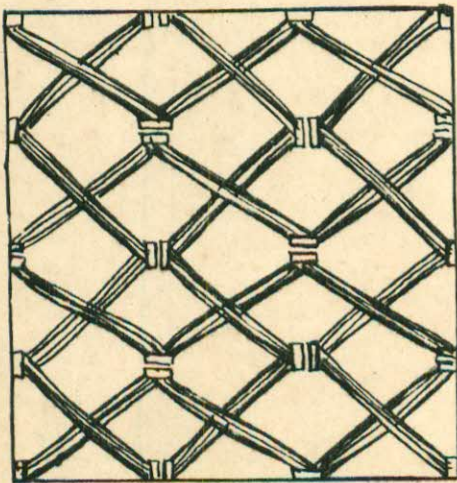
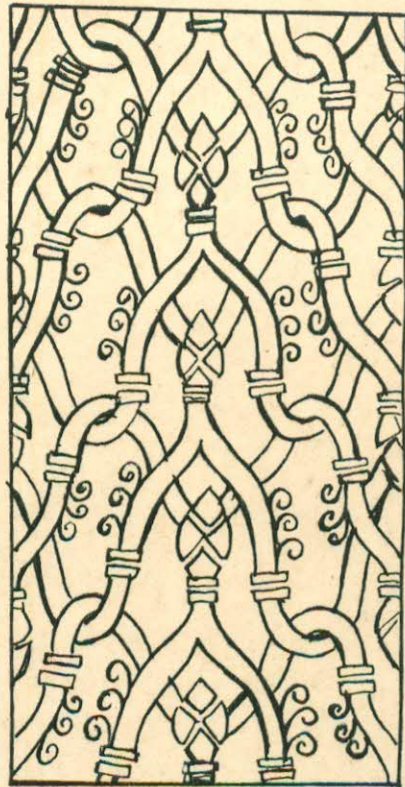
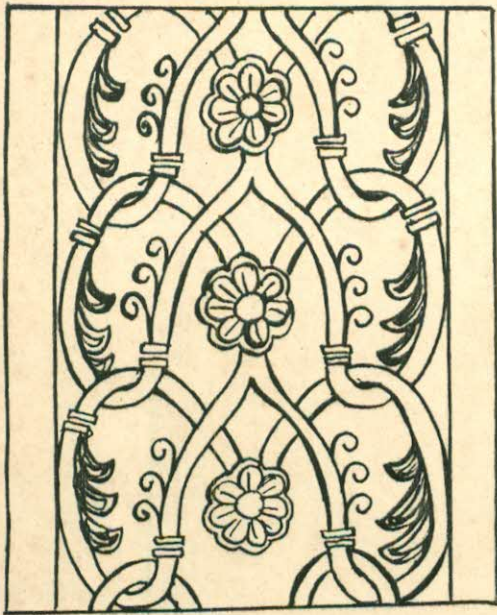


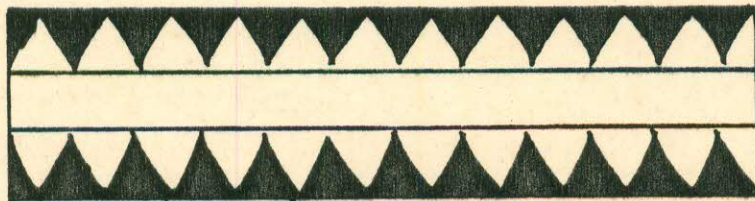
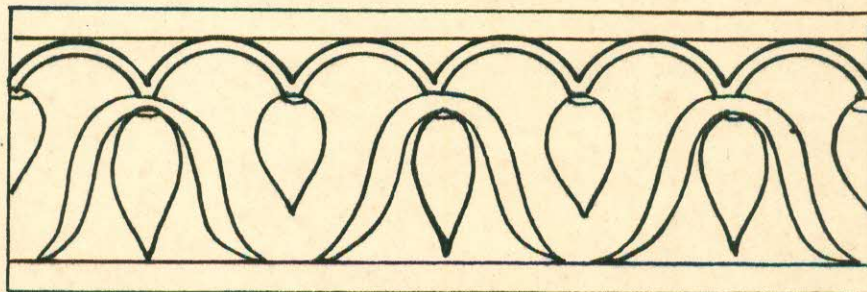
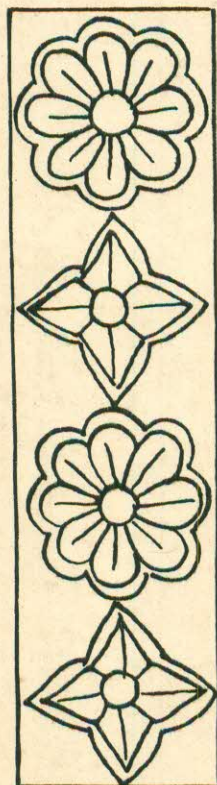
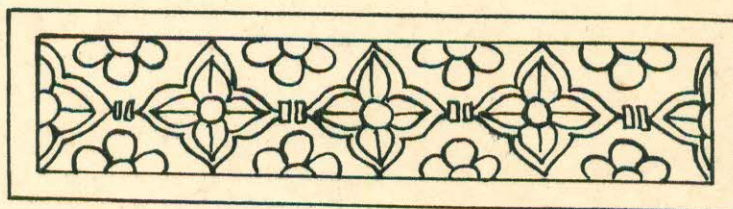
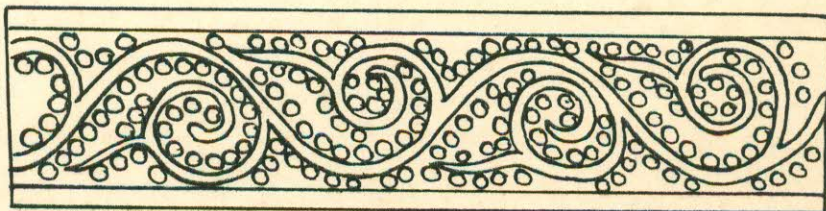
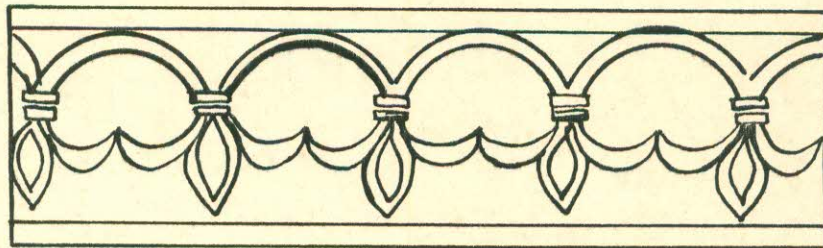
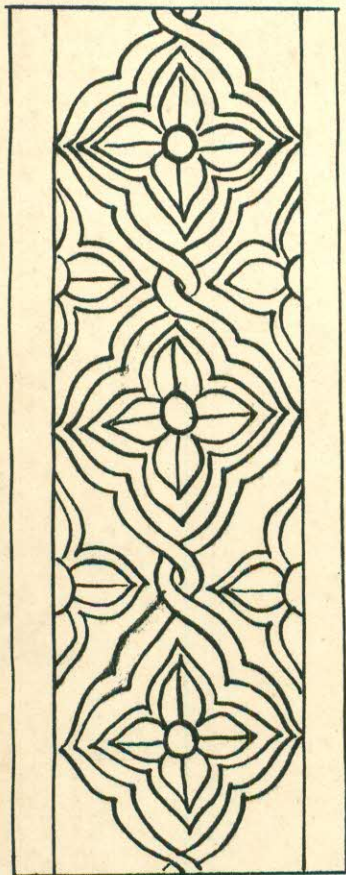
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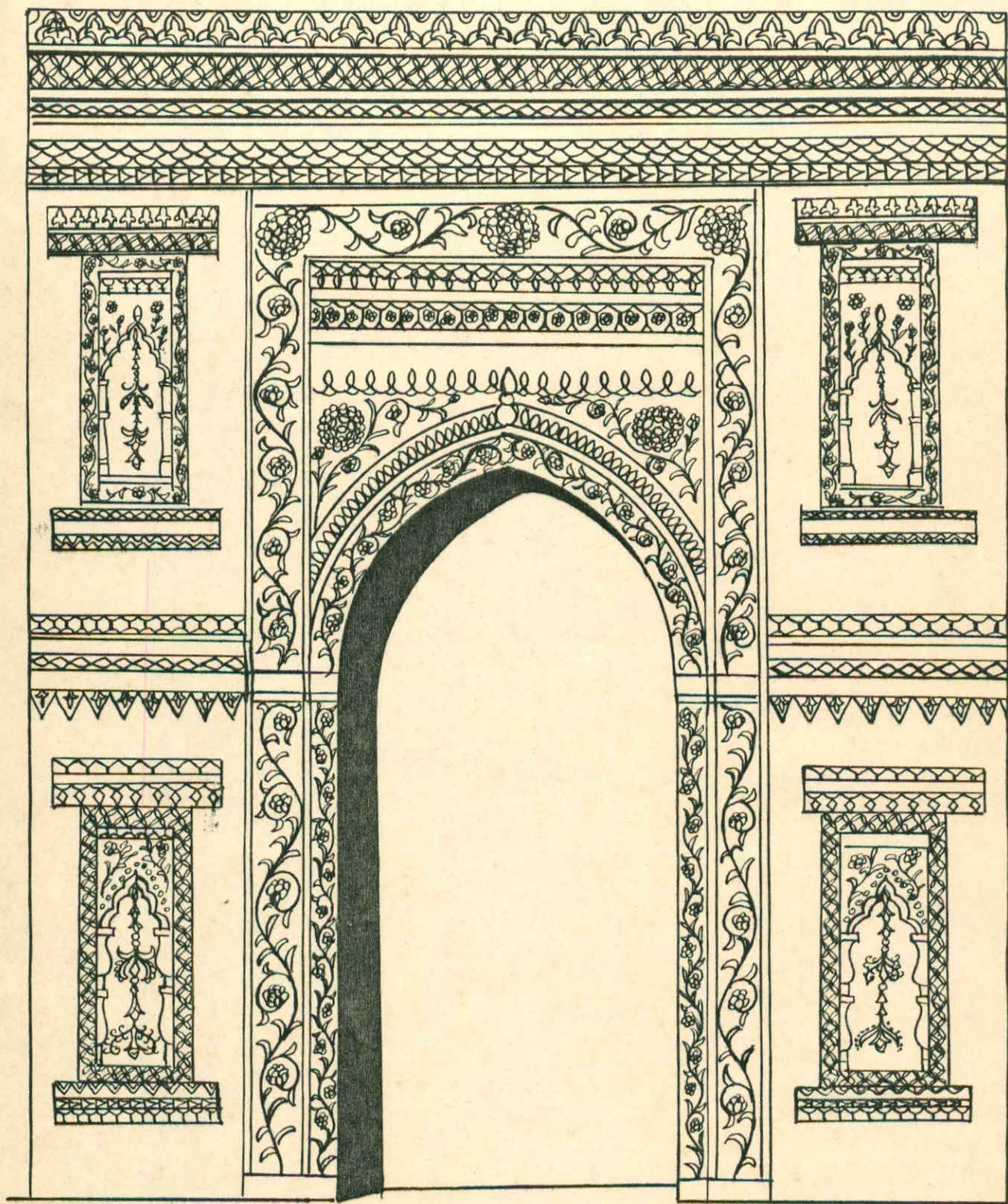


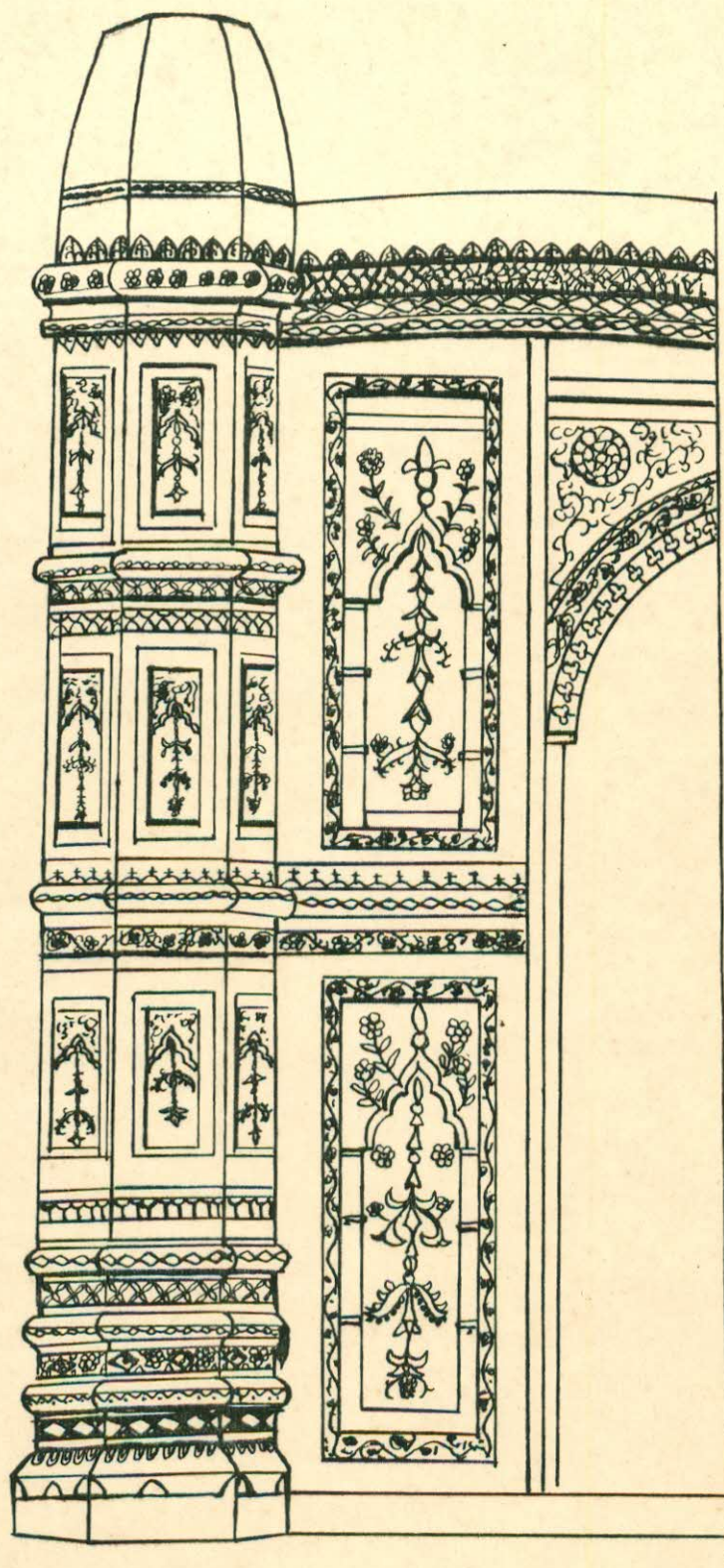
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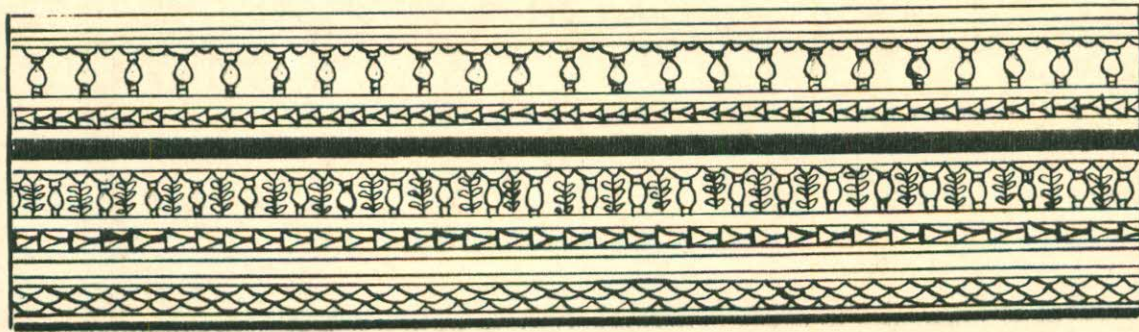




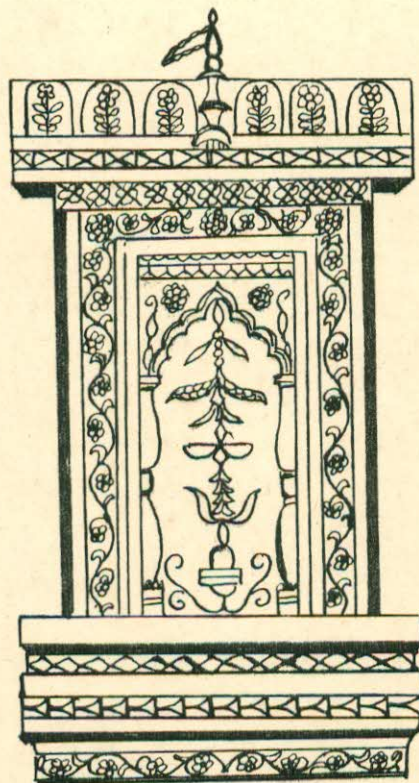




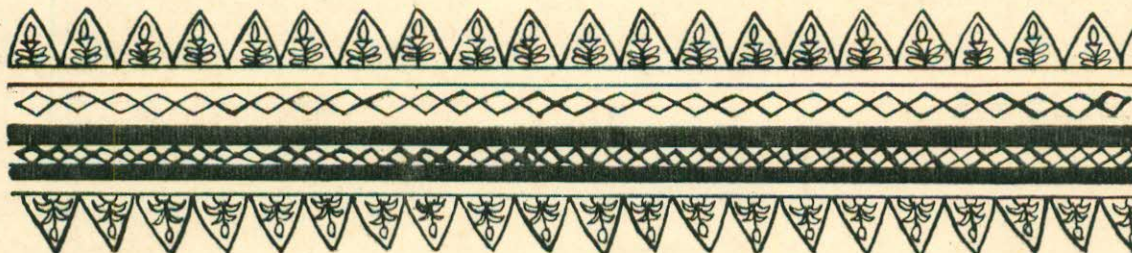




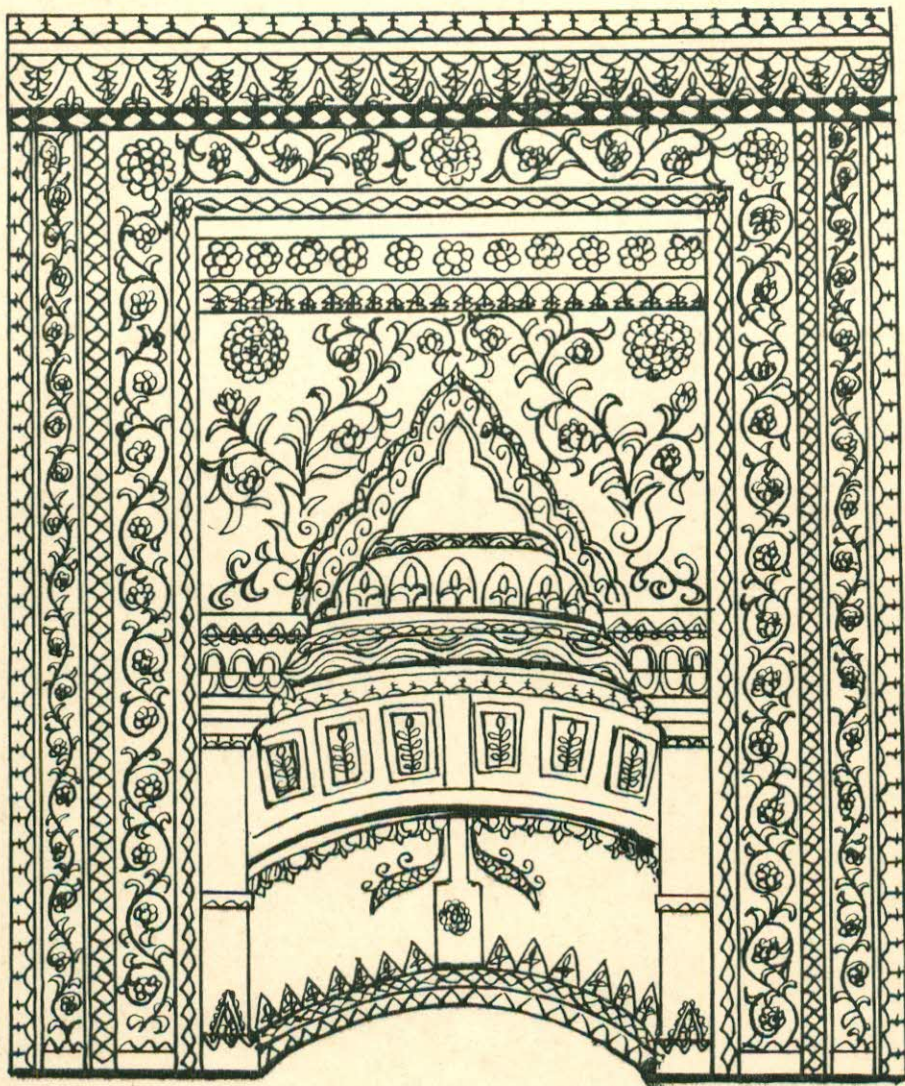
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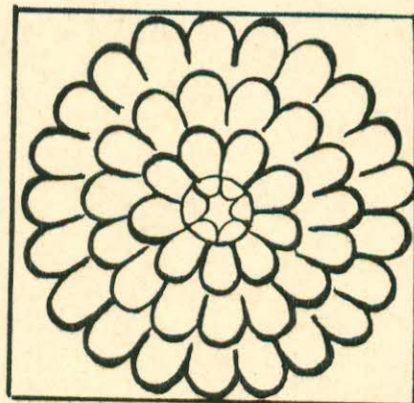
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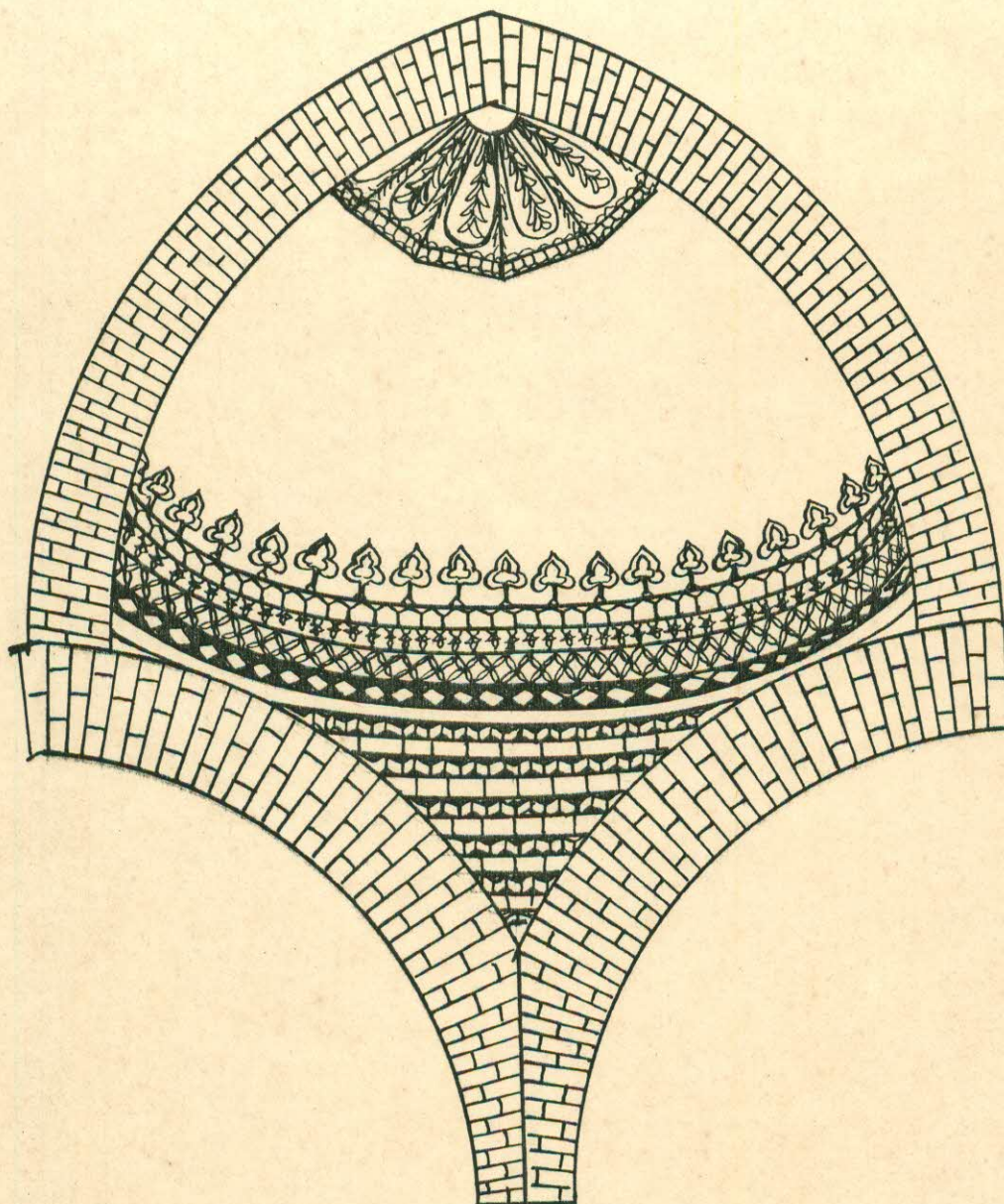
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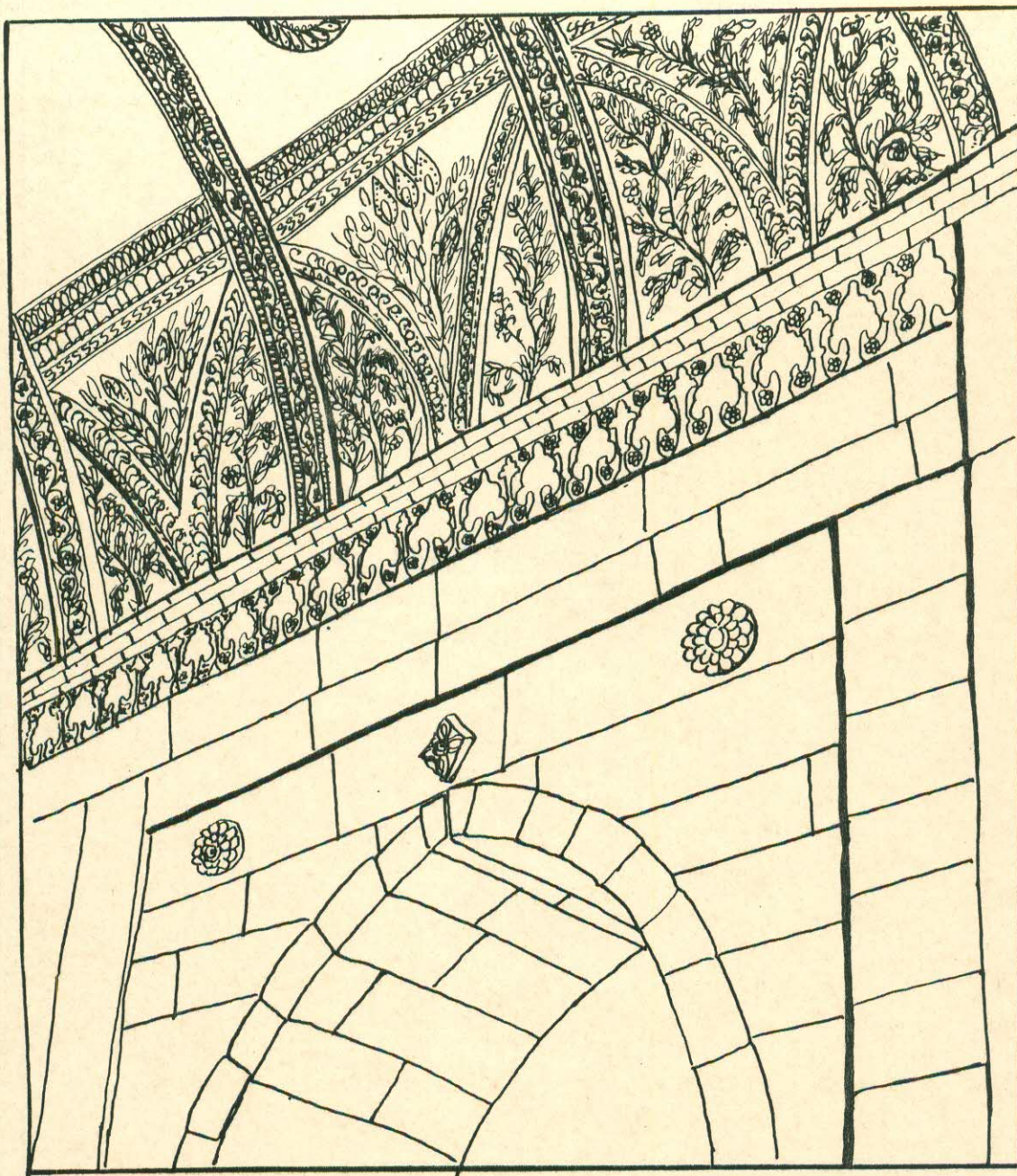


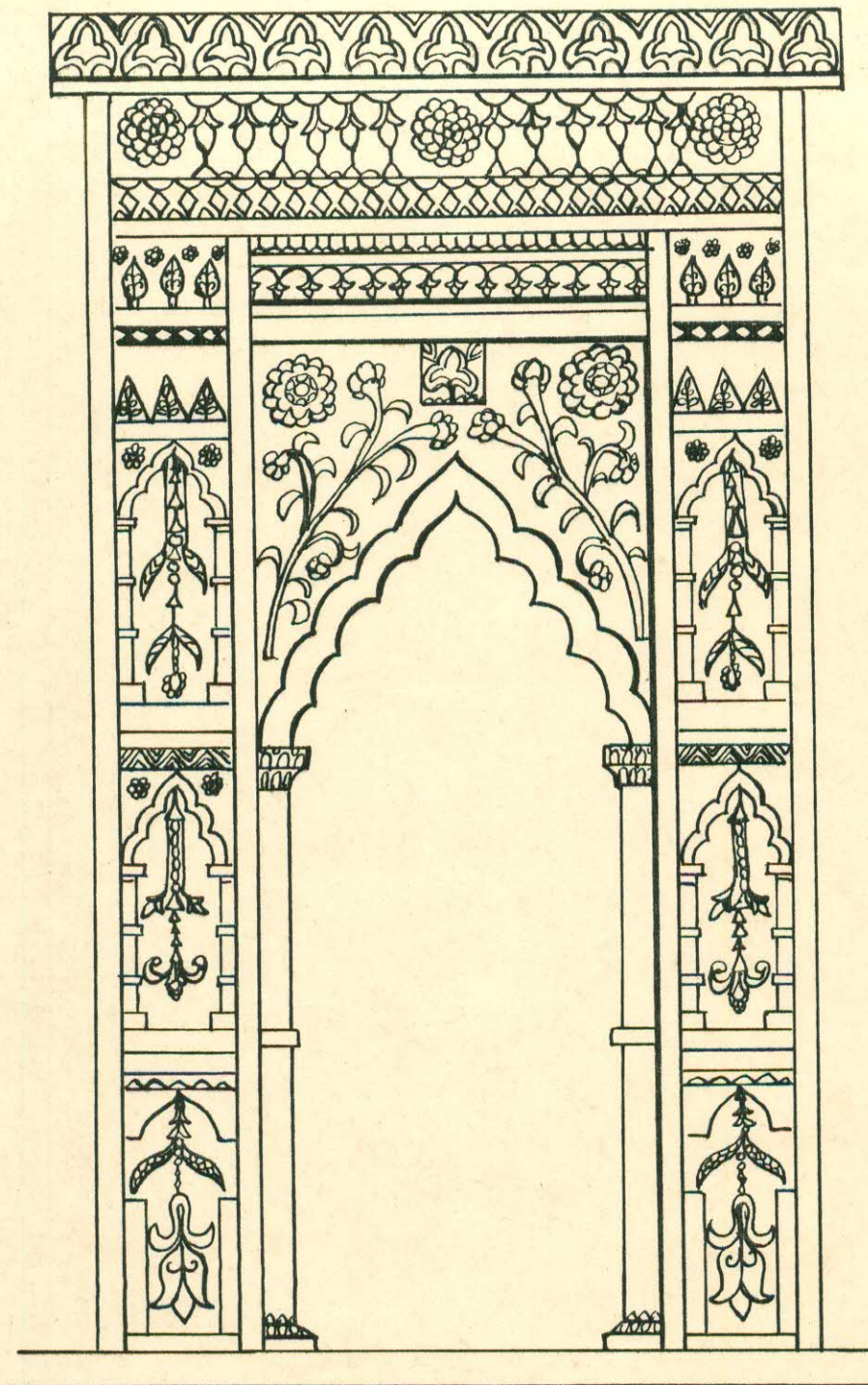
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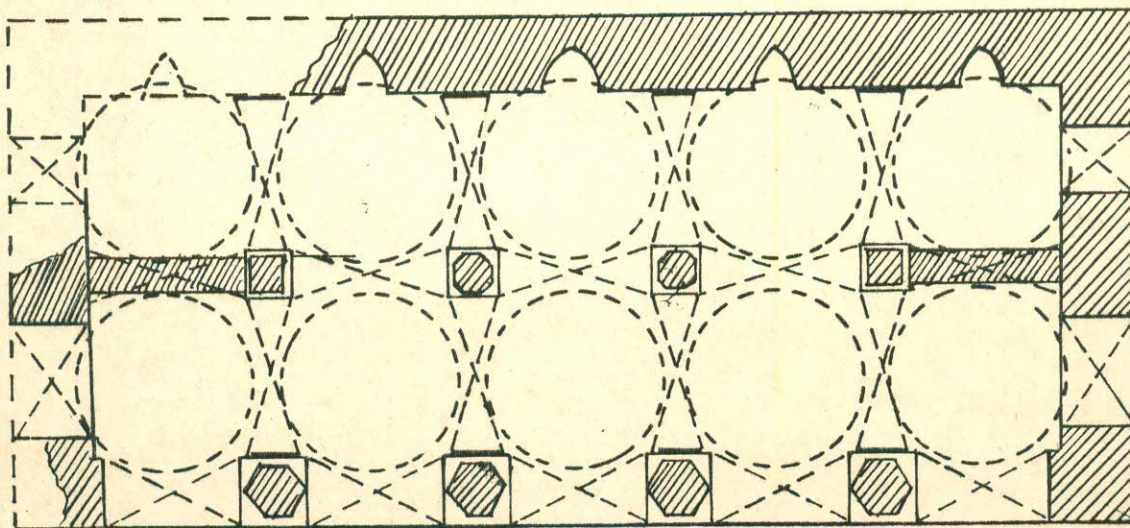
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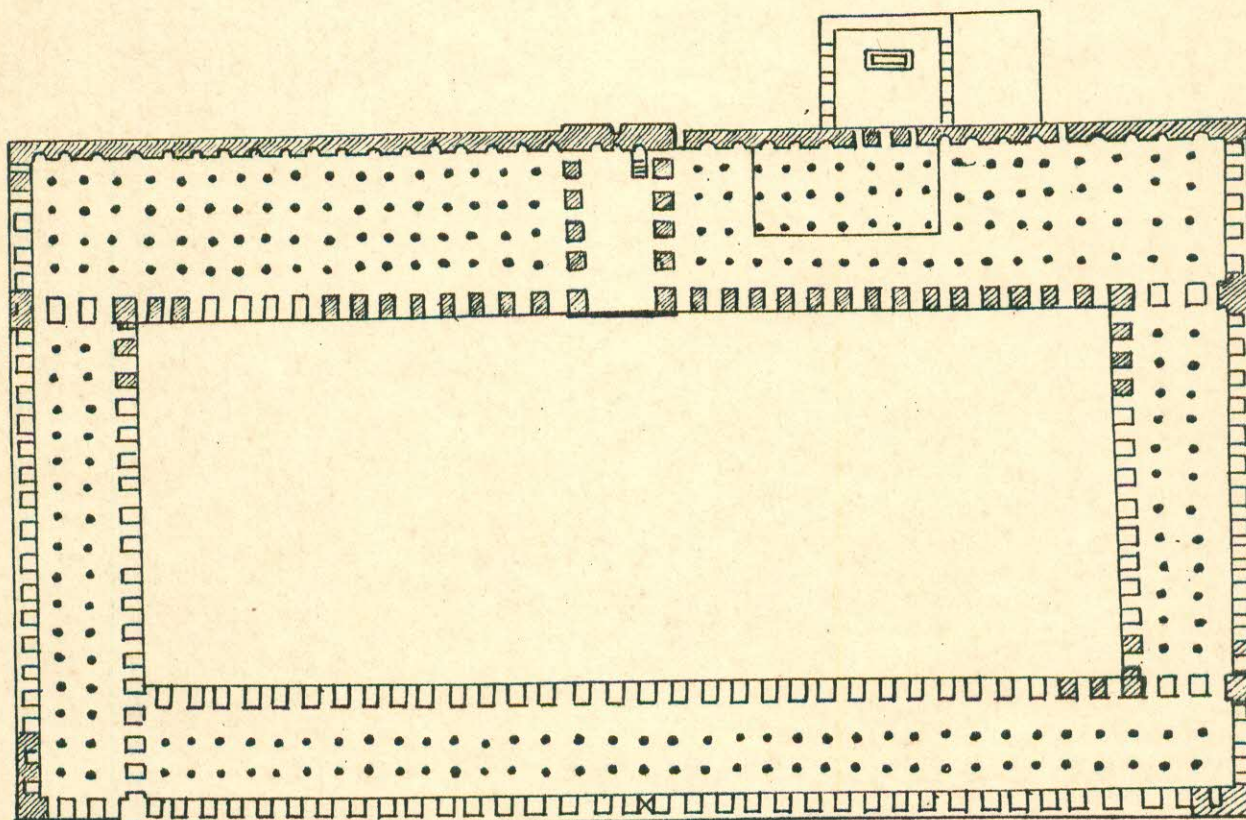




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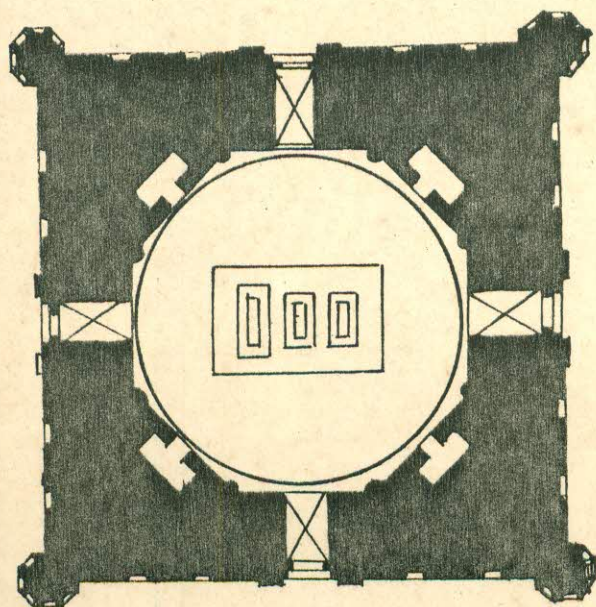


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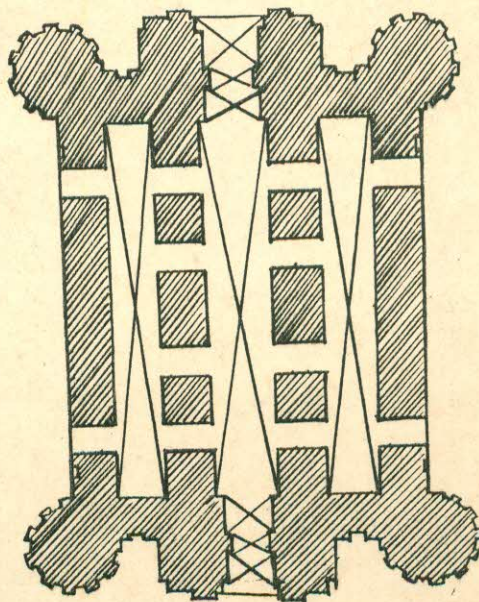


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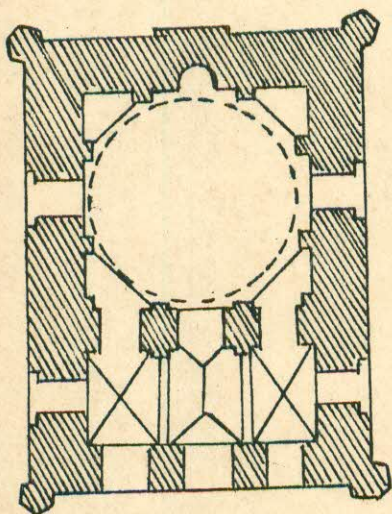
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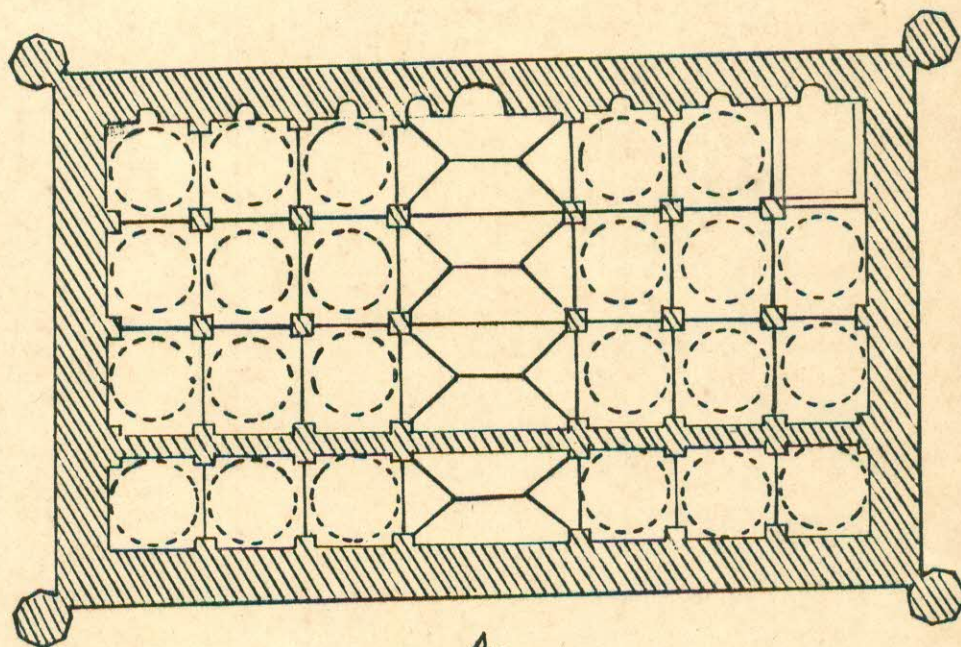
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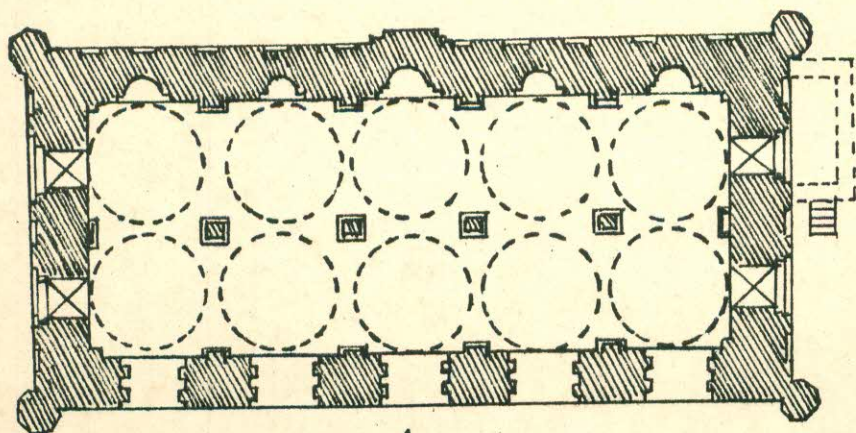
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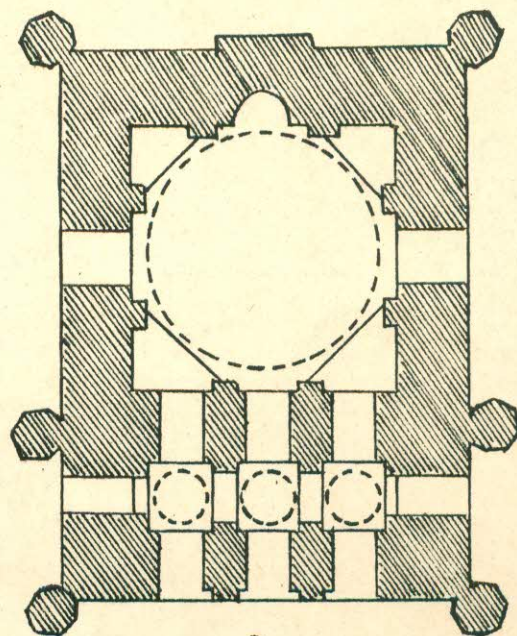
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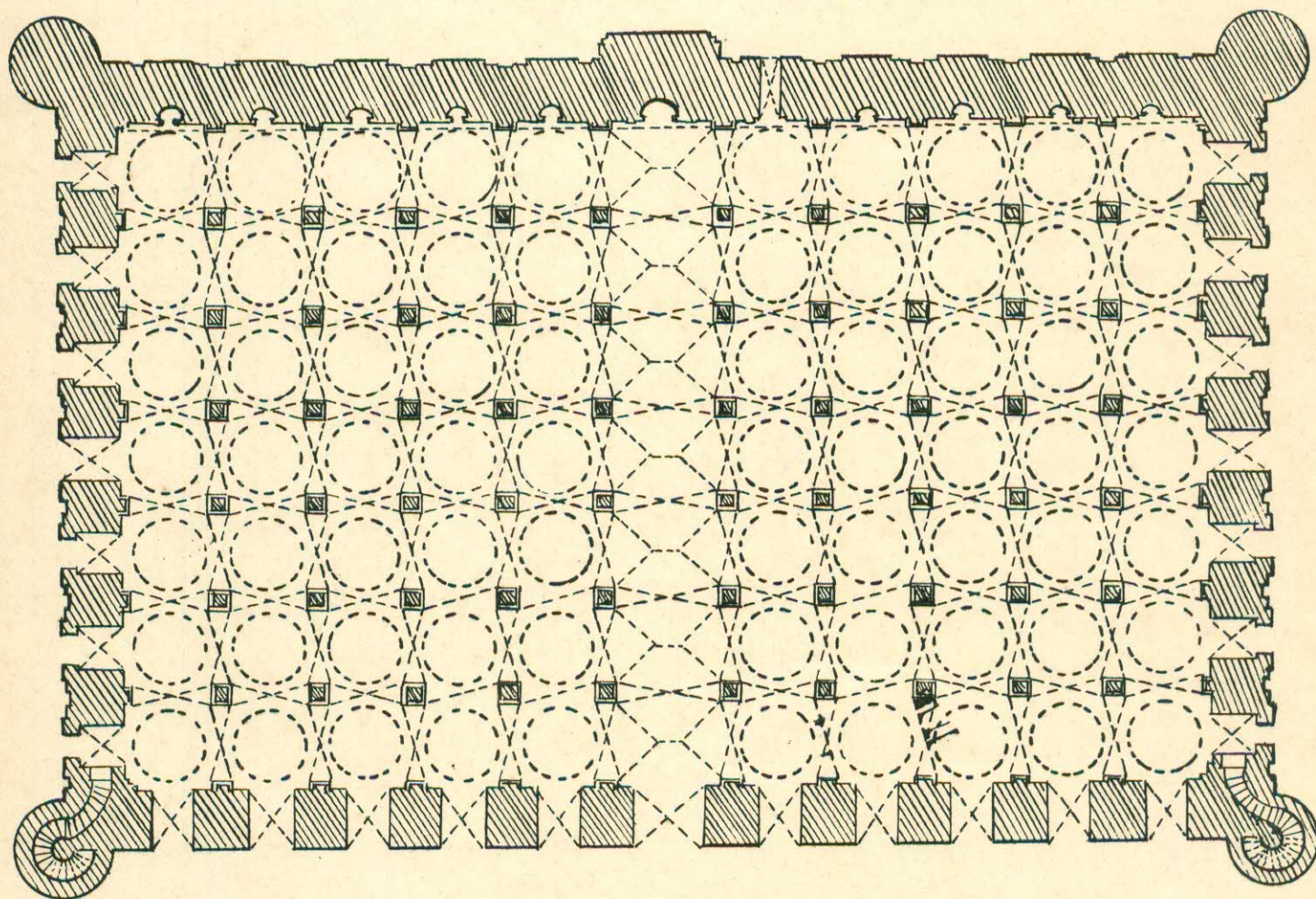
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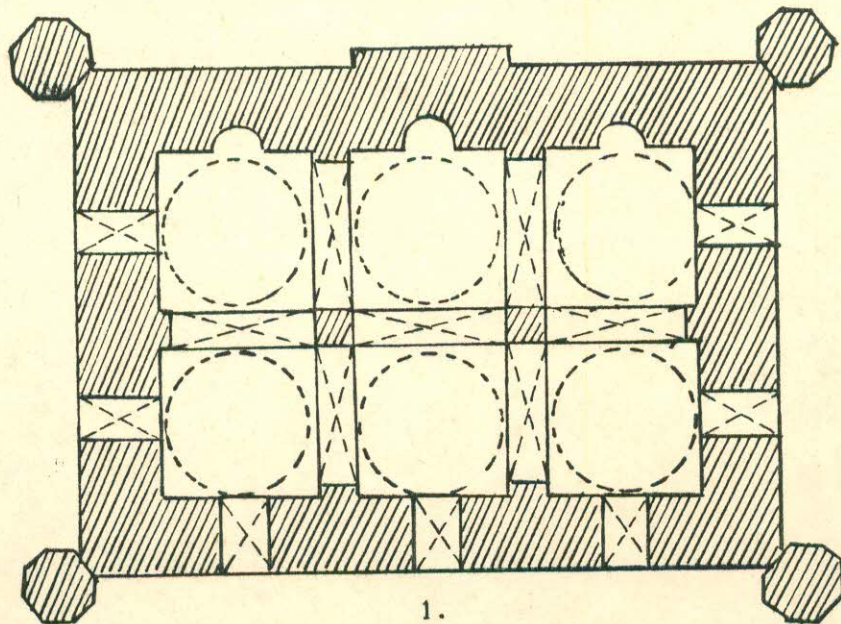
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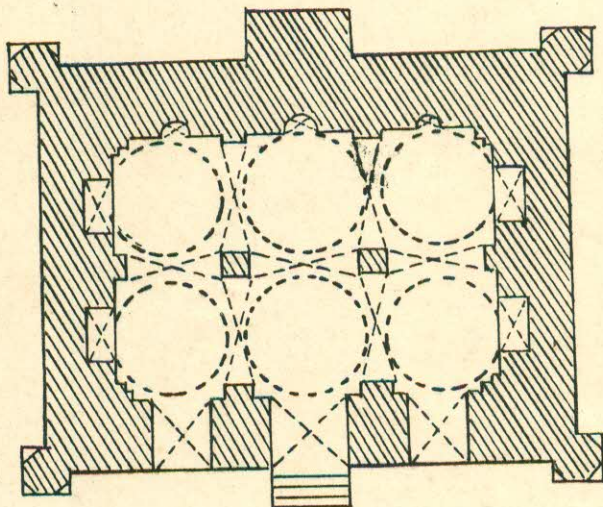
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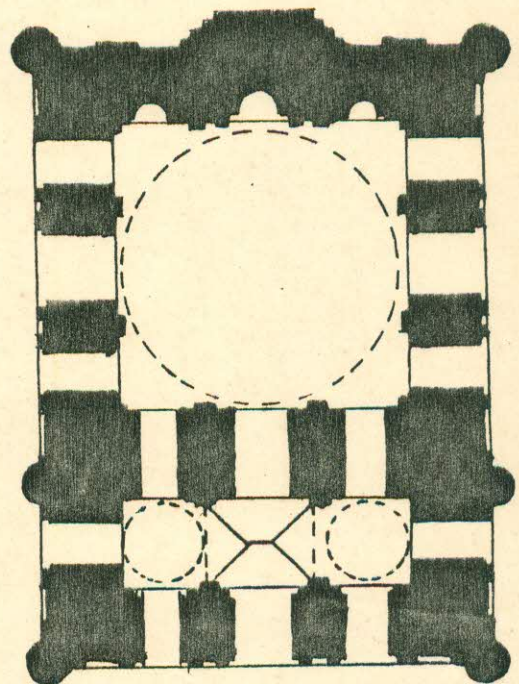
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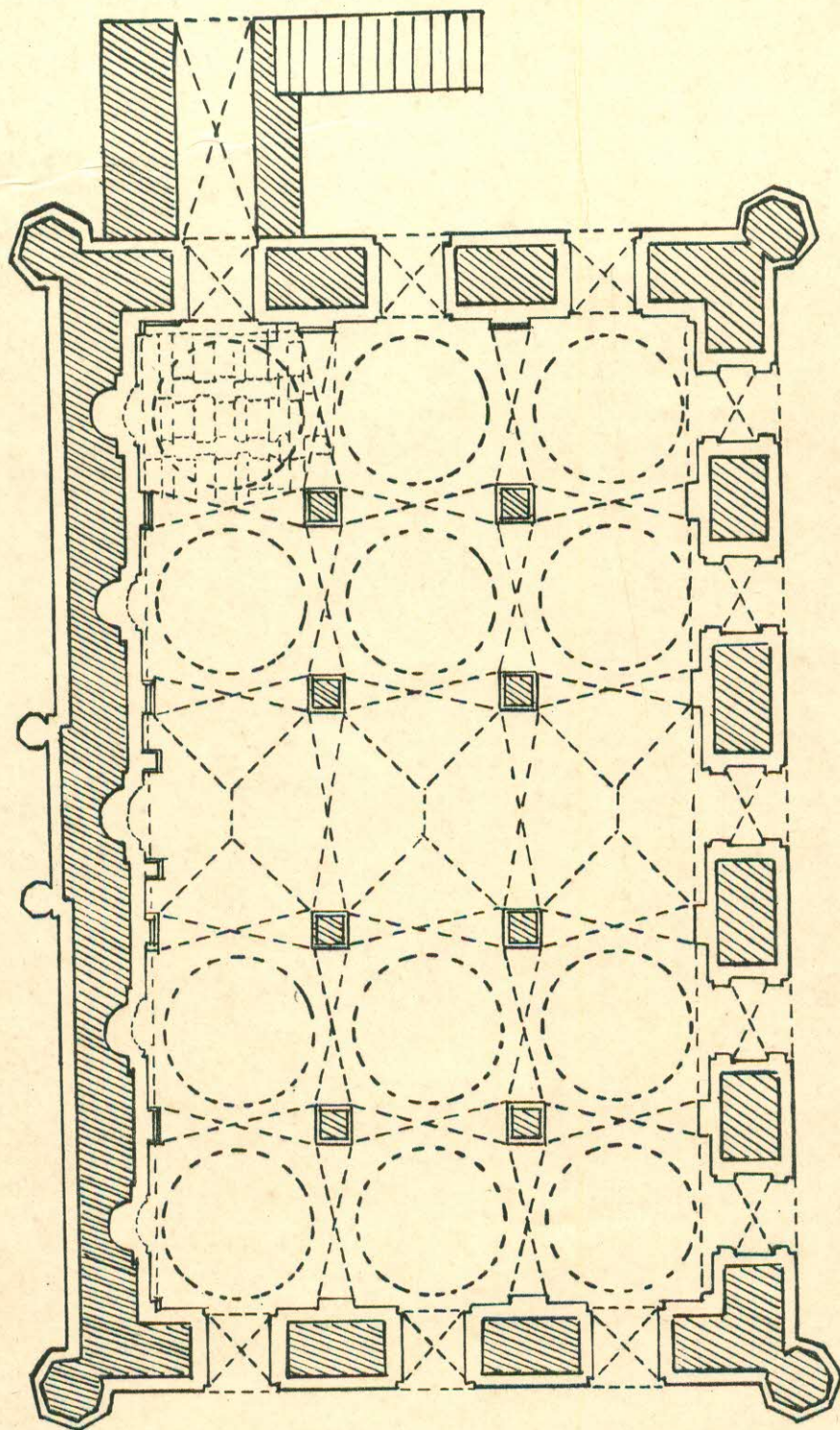
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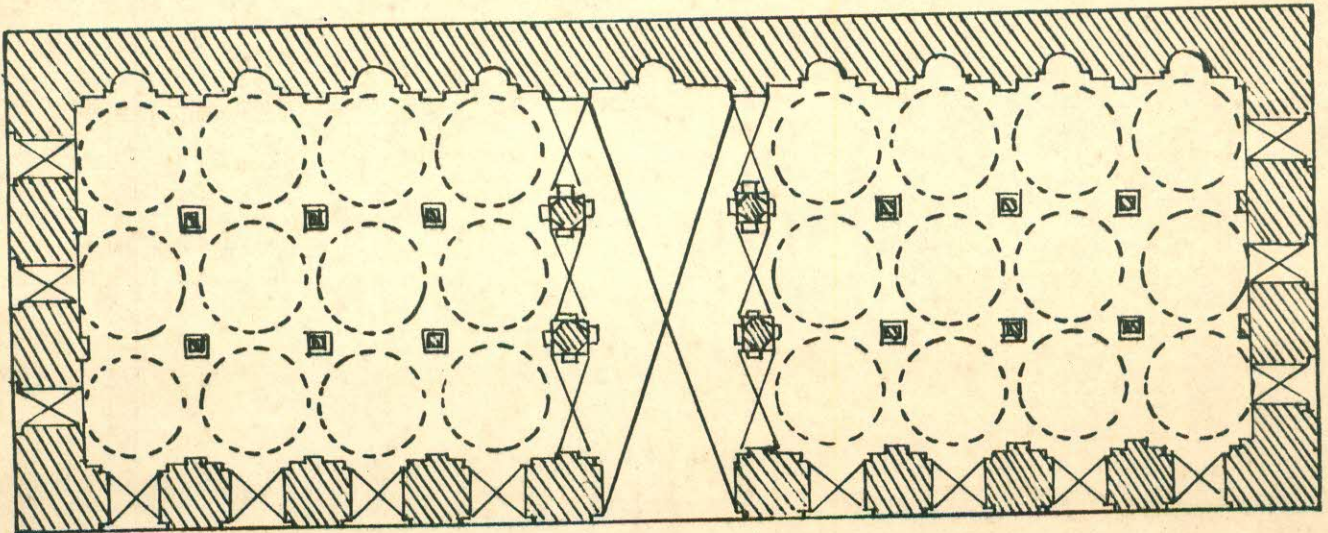


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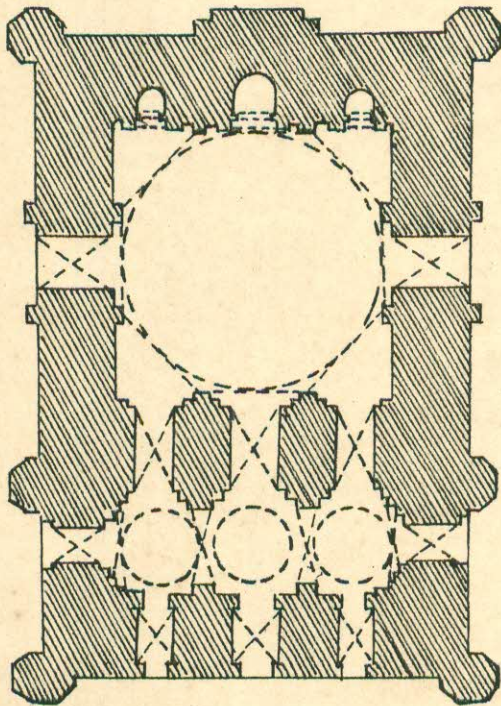


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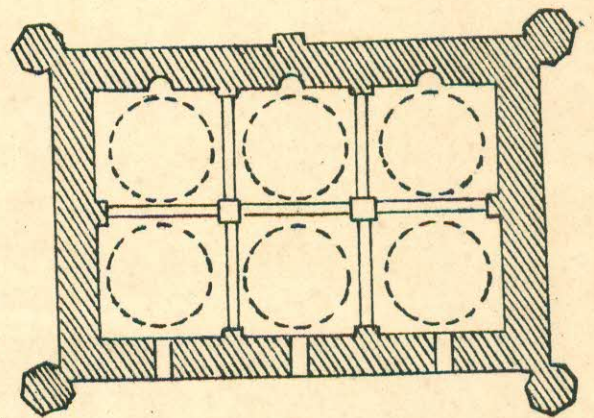




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