

The Tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz: A Late Islamic Period Monument at Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan

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The literary references to the spread of Islam into the modern north-western Pakistan span the period from when the Caliphs governor of Siestan annexed Qandahar, the Pak-Afghan borderlands and parts of north Waziristan in the early part of the 7th century AD up to the time of Mahmud of Ghazni's invasions of India in the first quarter of 11th century A.D. Three bilingual inscriptions found in the Idak-Spinwam region of the Waziristan Agency provide evidence for an Islamic presence in the borderland region in the 9th century AD¹ (Dani et al 1964), but the archaeological evidence for the early Islamic period is extremely limited. The earliest Islamic period structures are small mosques that have been discovered at Udegram, Swat (Khan 1985) and remnants of a fortification and possibly a deserted mosque inside at *Kaṇo-Qalah* in the Mohmand Agency (per.com with M. Naeem Qazi; Ali and Rahman 2005), are believed to have been established during the Ghaznavid regime. In the southern part of the modern Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province in the Gomal plain there are a few tombs at Lal Mahra that have been dated previously to 13th (Rehman 1981) and then to 11th century AD (Ali 1988: 50). Several large archaeological mounds in the Gomal plain that have Islamic occupation have been known since at least 1927 (Stein 1929; Dani 1970-71), but the archaeological significance of the Gomal plain during the Islamic period has only recently received any

focused attention (Ali and Jan 2005: 2009), as scholars have focused their research on the Bronze Age archaeology of this region over several decades (Dani 1970-71; Durrani 1988; Durrani et al 1991: 1994-95; Ali and Khan 2001; Ali and Jan 2005 and 2009). Recent surveys carried out by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, then NWFP (now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) in collaboration with the University of Peshawar located over 140 archaeological sites and monuments dating to the early historic and Islamic periods, which provides new insights into different aspects of the cultural history of the Gomal plain (Ali and Jan 2005; 2009). A group of four tombs, situated about 42 km south of DI Khan at Lal Mahra Sharif, are said to be the earliest Islamic monuments in the region. The fact that these are two and three staged structures with tapering walls, corner turrets and cut brick decoration indicates that these 'anonymous tombs' could date to the Tughlaq period (Dani 1970-71: 31; Rahman 1981: 25), or even to the Ghaznavid period during 11th and 12th century AD (Ali 1988: 50).

From the earliest phases of the expansion of Islamic practices, there are indications that Muslim saints and missionaries from Iran, Central Asia and Arabia (e.g. Khwaja Moeen ud Din Chishti, Data Ganj Bakhsh, Shah Yousaf Gardezi, Bahaud Din Zakariya, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Baba Farid, Nizam-ud-Din Auliya) journeyed to Indo-Pak subcontinent (al-Hind) to preach Islam and as a result, and that parts of the local population came to embrace Islam. Like

¹ The three inscriptions, now in Peshawar Museum, from the Tochi valley have been dated to AD 857, 862 and 865 respectively.

other parts of the sub-continent, some of the distinguished Muslim saints also visited the Gomal plain and adjacent areas. One of the late Islamic period saint, Maulana Sarfaraz, is said to have preached Islam in the Gomal at a time when Islam and the Muslims were seriously endangered at the hands of the Marhattas in the 18th century. After defeating the local Marhattas by the Muslims, Maulana Sarfaraz is said to have played a vital role in the revival of Islam¹. Being a *pir* of the Alizai family of Dera Ismail Khan, a tomb was constructed over the grave of Maulana Sarfaraz by them, after his death. According to the caretaker of the tomb, Maulana Sarfaraz is among the descendants of Baba Farid Ganj Shakar, a Muslim saint who lived in Multan in the late 12th century.

The Tomb

The tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz is located behind the colonial period *Topanwala* temple in Dera Ismail Khan city, and can be approached through a street at the back of the General Post Office, opposite to the District Headquarters Hospital. The green dome of the tomb, however, is visible from the main eastern circular road near Haq Nawaz Park. This is the only three-stage rectangular shaped mausoleum in the Gomal region, and probably elsewhere. It has a rectangular lower chamber, measuring 8.30 x 6.75 m, surmounted by an octagonal drum, which is in turn topped by a circular ribbed dome (Plate I). This rectangular chamber of the tomb is about 4.40 m high. All sides of the lower storey of the tomb have a central entrance leading to the interior of the tomb, which are set in cusp arches. In each instance, the central arched-entrance is flanked on either side by two blind arches in order to give a symmetrical look

to the façade of the building. Today, the western entrance is used the main opening to the structure (Plate II). All of the entrances have been set in rectangular frames marked with perforated screens or *jali*. At the upper edge of the lower storey, just above the perforated frames, there are the cornice mouldings to improve the aesthetics. In the eastern entrance of the tomb, flights of step provide access to the upper portion of the building.



Plate I: The tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz, general view from the north

¹ This information was taken from the care taker of the tomb, which, however, is not mentioned in the literature.



Plate II: The tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz, the western entrance

The octagonal drum is about 2.50 m high and is provided with a moulding at the base and the cornice, in the same fashion as the lower storey. Each side of the octagon is further divided into six recessed panels of different sizes and shapes, which appears to serve a decorative purpose. Out of these recessed panels, the lower three are positioned vertically whereas the upper three

have been placed horizontally. The central among the lower three is larger and contains a blind arch. Each corner of the octagon has an octagonal buttress, which emerges above the level of the cornice moulding (Plate III).



Plate III: The tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz, the octagonal drum

The whole structure is finally topped by a low ribbed dome that is having a height of about 1.50 m. An inverted flower and a central finial complete the structure in a grand style.

Interior

The tomb is also rectangular in plan internally, and the lower chamber of the tomb has been divided into three parts, namely a central square shaped nave and two side-bays, one each on either side. Being separated by an arch from the central nave, these narrow side-bays are on the eastern and western sides. The separating arch, which is constructed for the support of the octagonal zone of transition, is resting on projected offsets in both the northern and southern walls inside the tomb. There are four arched-entrances provided, one on each side, which is giving access to the tomb. There is no *mihrab*, which is usually provided in western wall. Rather all four walls contain an entrance.

With the exception of the eastern one, all the entrances are flanked by niches on either side (Plate No. IV). With the aim of maintaining equilibrium, small sunken arches have also been provided in the dado levels of the side-bays in alignment with the niches in the wall of the central nave. On top of the central nave, arched-squinches are set diagonally at the corner across the interior angles of the walls to change the lower square chamber into an octagonal zone of transition. These corner-squinches have been divided into two parts, the lower small vault and upper arch. The latter part has further been decorated with three small sunken niches, topped by slightly larger recessed alcoves (Plate V). On the top of the central nave as well as on the octagonal drum, there are cornice mouldings in the same style as has been observed on the exterior surface of the tomb. On top of the zone of transition rests the circular dome of the structure. Its base has a series of twenty five

(25) recessed niches just like the smaller ones in the drum (Plate VI).



Plate IV: The tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz, entrance with niches and perforated screen from inside



Plate V: The tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz, the inside corner squinch

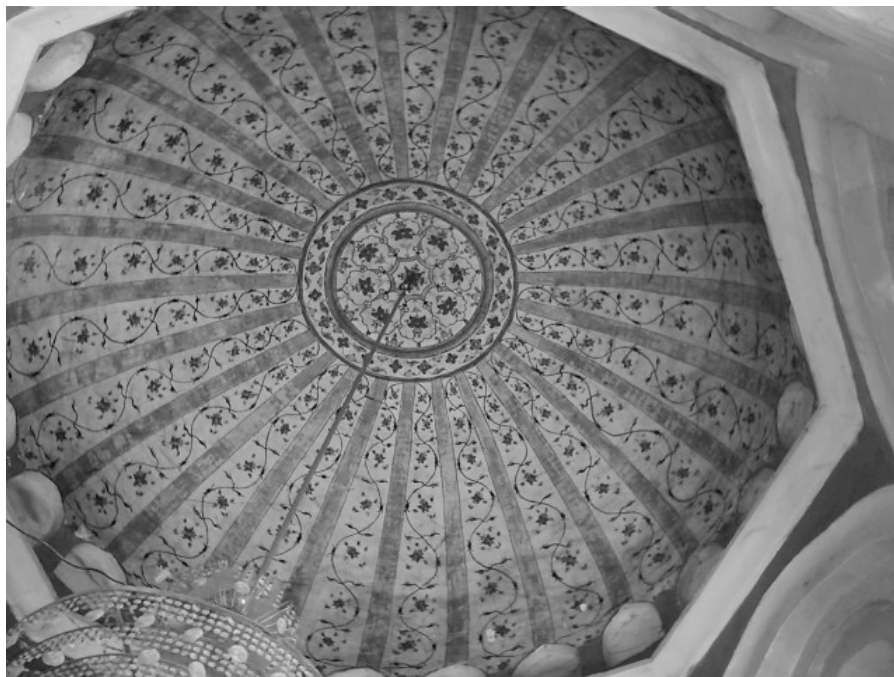


Plate VI: The tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz, the decoration inside the dome

Decoration

Like other Islamic period buildings in the region, the tomb of Maulana Sarfaraz has also been richly decorated with two types of ornamentation: architectural elements and painted decoration. The former, as discussed above, is executed in the forms of architectural features like lattice work in the wooden frames and entrances; the different sizes of niches at the dados, zone of transition and base of the dome; square, rectangular and oblong recessed panels; cornice and base mouldings; ornamented bases on the pilasters particularly at the sides of the entrances and the corner of the drum; and the semi rounded ribs of the low dome alternated by a projecting triangular pattern. There are clear indications that the structure was painted, but all of the original paintings have been replaced completely by new ones owing to the constant renovation/white washing of the structure by the local caretakers of the tomb. In fact, the whole building, both internally and externally, is coated with new paintings. Being lime plastered originally, the tomb might have contained fresco painted designs, and these in turn might have been replaced by the newer ones, but it is not possible to assess this further. The recent designs include various floral (flowers, buds, leaves, vine scrolls and arabesques) and geometric designs, and Quranic inscriptions. This might suggest similar designs could have been there before the enamel and painted coat on the original lime plaster was executed. Therefore, the main decorative element is now the inter dome, which is richly bedecked with the afore-mentioned designs (Plate VI).

Construction Material

In the construction of the tomb, like other local Islamic period monuments of the 17th to 19th century (Shakirullah 1998 and Ali et al 2005), small size bricks, called popularly as ‘waziri

bricks’, have been used. In certain exposed part of the tomb, the size of the bricks, on average, measure 19 x 13 x 4 cm, which have been set in lime mortar. Contrary to the naked brick buildings, the tomb is coated with lime plaster on both internal and external surfaces so as to make it smooth and decorative.

Dating

Owing to the absence of inscriptions, the exact dating of the monument is difficult to obtain. However, on a stylistic basis and drawing on historical references, the monument can be approximately dated to the late Islamic period (early 19th century). This is supported by the presence of the waziri bricks used in the construction, which suggest a date in the late Mughal or pre-colonial period. According to the local caretaker, Maulana Sarfaraz is said to have fought against the Marhattas who remained in power in the 18th century. After his demise, the local people built the structure, according to the mature style of constructing tomb in three stages that was in vogue (Ali and Jan 2005).

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