

TOMB OF SHAIKH SĀDAN SHAHĪD, ITS DECORATION

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A roofless structure standing in the middle of a small graveyard near the village of Jalaran, which itself lies about 30 km from Muḏaffarḡarḡ on the main road leading to Jhang, is ascribed to a certain saint Shaikh Sādan Shahīd. The tomb provided with a glazed terracotta plaque at a recent date bears the name of Shaikh Sādan Shahīd and the date of 674H/1275 A.D. Local tradition traces his ancestry to Tamīm Anṣārī, a companion of the Holy Prophet Muḡammad (PBUH) who is said to have come to Multān with the army of Muḡammad bin Qāsīm and settled here to preach Islām among the masses. The descendants of Anṣārī followed his foot prints and devoted their lives to the preaching of Islām in the region. We have no information about the life of Shaikh Sādan Shahīd, however, it is said that he was killed during Mongol invasions and later on his disciples erected a tomb over his grave.

The tomb was discovered by Ṭālib Ḥusain, Deputy Director Auqāf Department, Panjāb in 1987, and he wrote an article on this monuments.¹ This article was followed by that of A.N. Khan who gave a detailed accounts of the tomb and its architectural decoration,² and recently A.M. Khan Lundkhwaḡ high-lighted the main architectural features and decoration of this monument.³

It is assumed, on the basis of the dated terracotta plaque that the tomb was built during the reign of Ghiyāth ad-Dīn Balban, when his son Sultān Muḡammad was the governor of Multān. Neither literary nor historical literature is available to corroborate the above oral tradition.

The tomb, built of fine bricks, is almost square in shape (approximately 9x9 m externally). It has slightly sloping walls and is raised on a high podium about 2 m from the existing ground level, a flight of steps on the east and south sides give access to the tomb chamber (Pl. 1). The steps and the podium are recently repaired with modern bricks with patches of original masonry and decorative treatment which remind us that the entire surface of the podium was embellished with rectangular panels with a gabled roof in cut brick technique and the top of the podium was marked by a carved moulding.

Each side of the square structure is divided into three parts vertically and the central portion is provided with a trefoil arched opening (250x100 cm) enclosed in a rectangular frame. The central arched opening is flanked by identical arched panels resting on projected brick courses and these in turn are provided with rectangular frame (Pl. 1).

The top of each rectangular frame is marked by a few projecting courses of bricks and is crowned above by false merlons created in brick masonry. These merlons have either the word Allāh in *Kūfic* character or vine leaves with a dot at the centre. The entire surface of each side encompassed by three rectangular frames, as can be gathered from the existing evidence, was most probably surmounted by a frieze of false merlons marking the parapet of the monument.

The tomb chamber is almost square in shape (6.50x6.25 m internally) and is converted into an octagon by means of arched squinches having projecting brick pendentives in the centre (Pl. 2). The remaining phase of transition has crumbled down and it is difficult to make an accurate idea regarding its construction. However, it can be assumed that a row of brick

pendentives or similar contrivances above in the zone of transition paved the passage to the base of the dome.

The tomb chamber was once covered by a central dome which is now completely collapsed and therefore it is not possible to determine its exact shape and size.

ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION

The most remarkable feature of this mausoleum is its carved brick decoration (Pls. 3–4). Internally the tomb chamber is completely devoid of decoration, however some scribbling in Devanaari characters can be seen on the walls. Externally almost every visible brick is not only an integral element in construction but also plays an important role in the decoration of the tomb. The delicate and fine brick carving of this tomb is unique in the sense that no where else has such a superb lattice work been found on any monument in the neighbouring regions⁴ and shows a marked contrast to the traditional architectural decoration commonly found in the so called Multān style of architecture. The profuse interlaced decoration (Pls. 3–4) of this tomb in the cut brick technique is so remarkable that it makes this monument unique in the series of early monuments of the Islamic period in Pakistan. The intensity of decoration shows a vast variety of motifs on the one hand and speaks volumes for the engraver's competent hand and dexterity without changing the medium or the technique on the other.

The top of the podium is provided with a broad frieze of interlaced floral pattern which encircles the entire building, broken only at the corners. The entire frieze is parcelled out into triangles (Pl. 4) and the pattern on each side changes as it turns the corners. The occurrence of triangles is significant, for a frieze on the facade of Mshatta palace is divided into twenty triangles.⁵ The spatial and time difference between the two structures does not permit us to draw any plausible conclusions. It can be assumed that this resemblance is accidental and difficult to interpret. However this feature seems to make this monument archaistic. Above this frieze run nine decorative bands, almost each consisting of a single brick course carved with different designs on their narrow sides (Pl. 4). They show a chessboard pattern, vine scrolls and other geometric/floral designs. One of the bands depicts the word Allāh in *Kūfic* character or pseudo *Kūfic* letters separated by a floral, or other design from the next. The leaves and the round heads of certain Arabic characters have a dot at the centre and in the later case they are surmounted by a floriated design. The notched or perforated vine leaves are recorded on some early Muslim monuments in Iran, Western and Central Asia.⁶

The chessboard pattern has a long history in the decorative scheme of Hindū/Buddhist architecture. It is used frequently in the Buddhist artistic tradition and was inherited by the Hindus as can be seen on the temples at Bilot and others in the salt range. Similarly, vine scrolls are a common motif in Buddhist and Hindū temple architecture. An identical vine scroll is used in the temple at Bilot in Derā Ismā'īl *Khān* and can also be seen on the facade of the Qutb Mosque.

The trefoil arched openings and the flanking arched panels with their rectangular frames are identical in construction and decoration. The pillarets supporting the arches are constructed of carved bricks with scroll and geometric designs. Their composite capitals are composed of several worked bricks resting on an amalaka. The impost and some other parts of the trefoil arch are made prominent by providing them with floral designs. The arched panels which possibly imitate windows, are decorated either with scroll and geometric pattern or with the word Allāh in *Kūfic* style. The rectangular frames enclosing the trefoils rest on a few courses of bricks carved

with geometric or floral designs. These rectangular frames depict scroll friezes and inscriptional bands in *Kūfic* or pseudo *Kūfic* characters.

The inscriptions of the tomb make it distinguished among the series of the naked brick monuments of the early Islāmic period in Pakistan. All the inscriptions are cut with great care when brick was wet. They show balanced proportion of the individual letters and their verticals are tall and follow the shape of the *qalam*. Some of the letters are Pseudo *Kūfic* in character. The inscriptional friezes on the wall surfaces and the false merlons usually depict the word Allāh Yā Allāh and al-Mulku-Lil-Lāh. In the latter case the letter *kaf* and the round head of the *mim* terminate in floral pattern. The monument once had two major inscriptions, which are now very fragmentary. One of them was on the east side making one of the outer most frames of the entire facade (Pl. 3). It is taken from the Quran and begins with Bismillāh, the remaining portion shows that it had a floral background with the main inscription over it, which reads as follows (Quran 48: 1–3).

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ ۝ اِنَّا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُّبِیْنًا ۝ لِيُغْفِرَ لَكَ اللّٰهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَاخَّرَ ۝ وَيُمْتِنَ عَلَیْكَ وَيَهْدِيْكَ
صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِیْمًا ۝ وَيُنصِرْكَ نَصْرًا عَظِیْمًا ۝

Trans: With the name of Allāh, the most gracious and merciful. [We have opened up a clear victory for you, so God may forgive you for any offence of your, you have committed previously or whatever you may do later on, complete His favour towards you and guide you along a straight path,] and so God may support you in a mighty success.

The second inscription was on the inner side of the western trefoil arched opening. It was composed in two lines and is historical in nature. The words still in situ (Pl. 2) on the wall in the first line read as follows: امر ببناء (He ordered the construction..). The second line contains the word (اسدر) which most probably refers to the name of the buried person.

A.N. Khan is quite right in stating that the tomb is remarkable both for the structure and surface decoration among the monuments of early Islāmic period in Pakistan. He further says that it has no *mihrāb* in the thickness of the *qibla* wall and the four sides are pierced with low arched openings 'which is indeed very unusual'.⁷ However he does not express the same opinion about the tomb of *Khālīd Walīd* at *Khattīchaur* near *Kabīrwālā* and the two tombs at *Aroḡ* described by him.⁸ All these funerary buildings referred to above have four arched entrances and hence all of them have no *mihrābs*. Does not the absence of *mihrābs* and the provision of four arched openings make the plan of these tombs 'unusual'? However it is important to mention here that some of the earliest mausoleums in Central Asia and elsewhere have no *mihrābs* and all of them are square in plan with four arched entrances. The earliest tomb with four arched openings is the mausoleum of the *Sāmānīds* (913–43 A.D.) at *Bukhārā*. It is square in plan (10x10 m) with four arched openings and covered by a large central dome.⁹ The mausoleum in *Imām Bābā* cemetery (late 10th century) at *Merv*, is square (5x5 m) also having four arched openings.¹⁰ Another related example for our comparison is the tomb of *Arsalan Jāzib* at *Sangbast* (1028 A.D.). It is square in outline with an entrance on each side and is covered by a dome.¹¹ The so-called tomb of *Sidi Bou Khriṣṣan* (dated 1093 A.D.) and the cupola known as *Msid al-Qubba* were square buildings and apparently open on all four sides.¹² *Grabar*, in his concluding remarks on the origin and development of the earliest commemorative structures is of the view that "the square or polygonal "canopy" type of tomb covered with a dome existed everywhere. "In the earliest instance it was open on all four sides and then, little by little, was transformed into a hall with a single door-or sometimes two doors-and a *mihrāb*".¹³

Hillenbrand¹⁴ is also of the same opinion. Summarising his arguments on the development of Saljūq Mausolea in Irān, he has remarked that the available archaeological and architectural evidence shows that it was the Central Asian region where earliest funerary structures evolved for the glorification of the dead. It is generally believed that it was the “Chahār-Ṭāq”, the Sāsānian fire temple which the Muslims encountered in Irān and Central Asia and they found it to be the most suited model for mausoleum in the beginning. Later the architects brought changes in the Chahār-Ṭāq type by closing three of the four sides and sometime providing the *qibla* side with a *miḥrāb* and marking the entrance by an elaborate *pīshṭāq*. The foregoing description clearly shows that the absence of a *miḥrāb* and the four arched openings in the tomb of Shaikh Sādan Shahīd do not make the plan of this tomb unusual. It can be certainly assumed that it was the traditional style of construction of the period when the tomb was built.

The significance of the decoration is twofolds. On the one hand it refers to the continuation of pre-Muslim architectural decoration. The plant decoration of classical origin and the geometric motifs such as lotuses, rosettes, scroll, dentils and chessboard designs formed an integral part of pre-Muslim architecture. This decoration certainly reminds us of the decoration used for embellishing temples and was a deep rooted tradition.¹⁵ On the other hand proper attention is also given to calligraphic decoration. A master calligraphist adept in architectural calligraphy was assigned the task of composing the letters to be used in the decorative scheme of this structure by the mason.

No doubt the tomb of Shaikh Sādan Shahīd shows a perfect assimilation, or rather climax of an assimilation of two artistic traditions: Muslim and Hindū. This culmination resulted in the impressive tomb of Shaikh Sādan Shahīd which is a classic example in cut brick technique.

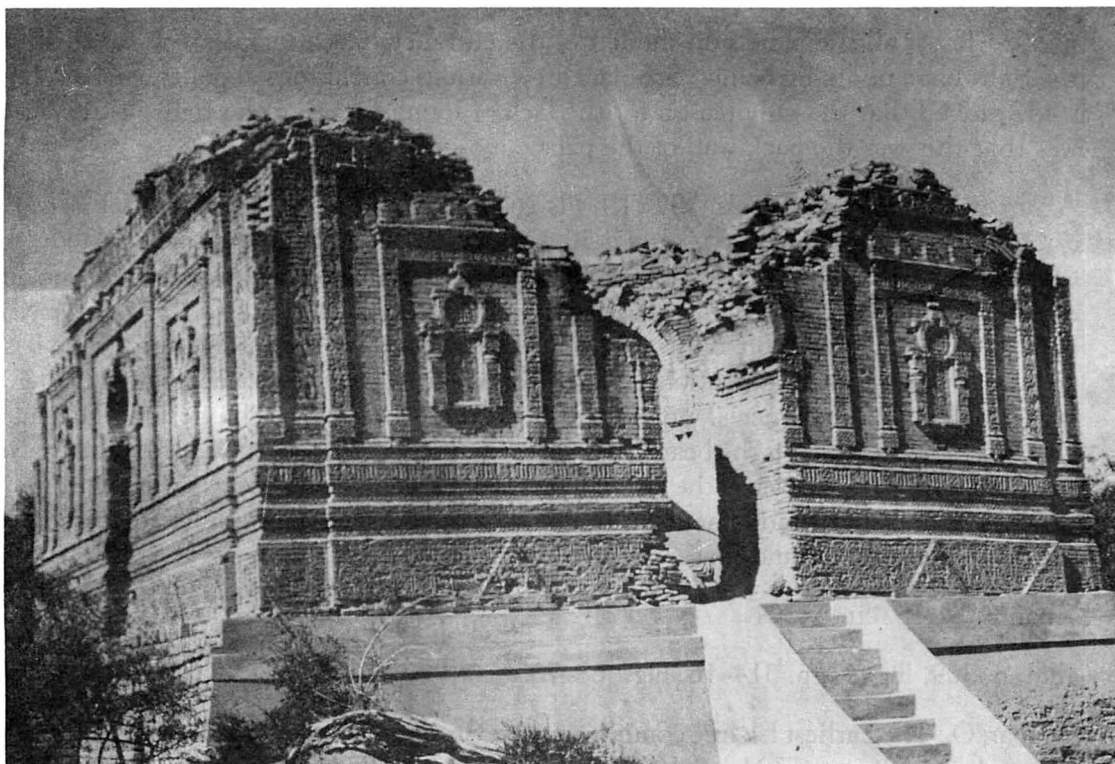
At the present state of our knowledge we can assume that no other monument in Pakistan can boast of such superb cut brick decoration in terms of quality and richness. As mentioned earlier a date in the Balban period¹⁶ has been suggested following the inscribed glazed terracotta plaque of a later time. Its plan with four arched entrances and architectural decoration in the form of classical motifs such as chessboard, lotuses, dentils, scrolls and the capital of pillarets and the similarity of its decoration with the *miḥrāb* of Khālīd Walīd tomb suggest a contemporary or near contemporary date. An historical inscription in the latter case informs us that it was built by ‘Alī bin Karmākh, a Ghorid Governor of Multān and Lāhore in the last quarter of the 12th century A.D.¹⁷

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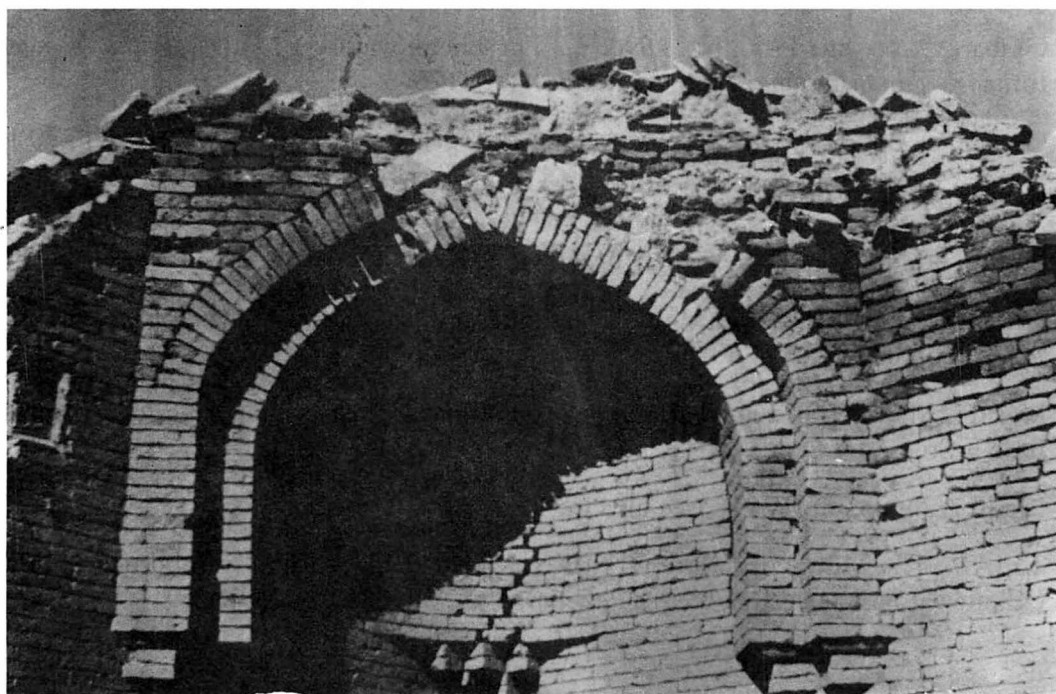
1. Talib Husain. ‘A Magnificent Monument of the Balban period.’ *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, June 5, 1987.
2. Khan, A.N. ‘Naked Brick Architecture of early Islamic period in Pakistan. An Analytical Study,’ *Pakistan Archaeology* — 23, 1987–88, p. 316, fig. 72, Pls. Liv-v.
3. Lundkhwar, A.M.K. ‘Tomb of Shaikh Sadan Shaheed,’ *Archaeology* I, Karachi 1988, p. 60–61.
4. Khan, A.N. *op. cit*, p. 318.
5. Creswell, K.A.C. *A short Account of early Muslim Architecture*, London 1958, P. 132–34; Ettinghausen, R. and O. Grabar. *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 650–1250*, London 1987

p. 67. Almost all the panels on the left of the entrance have animals, whereas those on the right have no living beings. Scholars drew various conclusions about them but a later study proved that the only reason for the lack of living things to the right of the facade was that this was the back wall of the palace mosque.

6. *A Survey of Persian Art*, vols. VI, VIII, Pls 267–69; Hbras, M. and E. Knoblock, *The Art of Central Asia* London, 1965, Pls 47–50. Golombek, L. 'Abbasid mosque at Balkh,' In: *Oriental Art* 15/3, 1969. p. 169ff. The excavations at Samarra have exposed the remains of an Abbasid palace with rich stucco decoration, (Ettinghausen, R.&O. Grabar, Op. Cit. p. 104, Creswell, K.A.c. op. cit. p. 289–90). This decoration is classified into three basic styles. However this classification is not chronological, for, the archaeological evidence hints to their co-existence if not at the same time throughout the period. The main characteristic of style A is the beautifully carved vine leaf with four sunk "eyes" and incised veins. In style B the surface of the individual leaf or flower is completely covered with small notches or dots. Early monuments in Iran and Central Asia depict similar stucco decoration where the leaves and flowers are notched.
7. Khan A.N. op. cit. p. 321.
8. Ibid. p. 309, Fig. 67, p. 314–16, Figs. 68–70.
9. Grabar, O. 'The Earliest Islamic commemorative Structure. Notes and Documents.' In: *Ars Orientalis* 6, 1966, p. 17 No. 6; Rempel, L. 'The Mausoleum of Ismail, the Samanid.' In: *Bulletin of the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology*, IV, 1935 p. 199, Fig. 2. Albaum, L.I. and b. Brentjes, *The Herren der Steppe*, Berlin 1986 p. 26–27, Pls 7. Fig. 5, 8.
10. Grabar, O. op. cit. 1966, p. 21 No. 22; Pugachenkova, G.A., *Puti Razvitiia Arkhitekturi Iuzhnogo Turkmenistana*, Moscow, 1958, fig. P. 176.
11. Grabar, O. op. cit. p. 24, No. 36; *A Survey of Persian Art*, Vol. III, P. 986 Pl 260 B,C.
12. Ibid, p. 29. No. 51–52.
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15. Meister, M.W. et al. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*. American Institute of Indian Studies N.D. Pls 301–02, 430–31.
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17. Taj Ali, 'The Mihrab inscription of the so-called tomb of Khalid Walid near Kabirwala (Khanewal District),' In: *Ancient Pakistan*, Vol. VII, 1991 pp. 39–46.

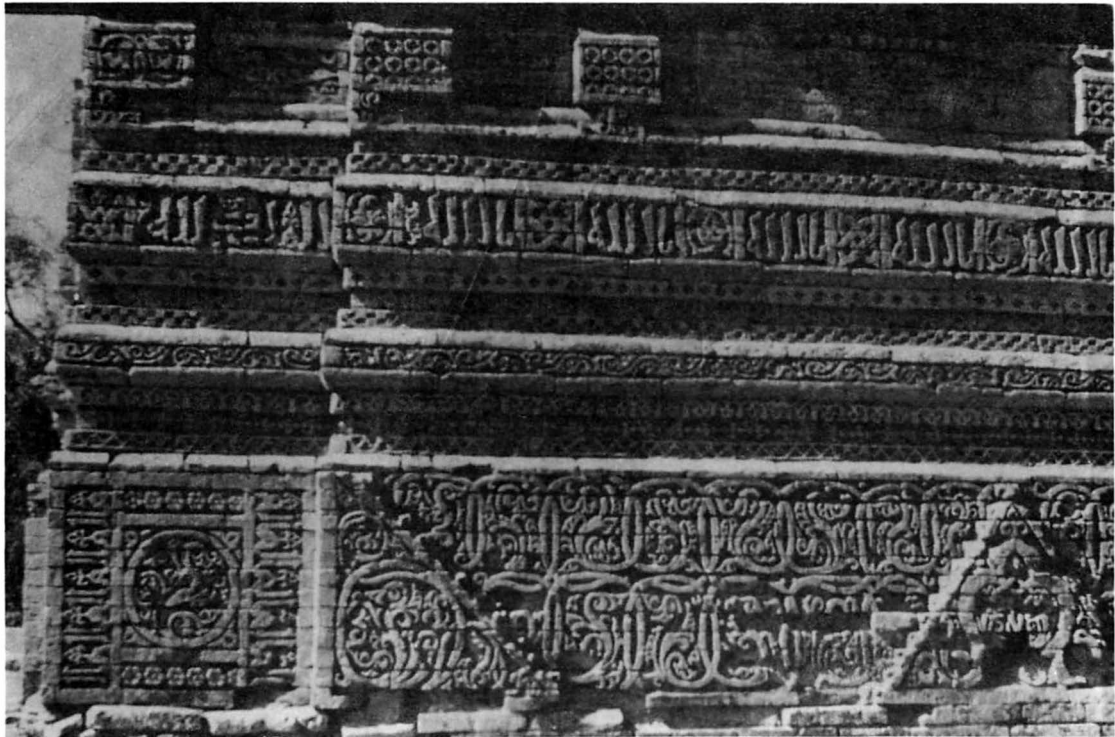
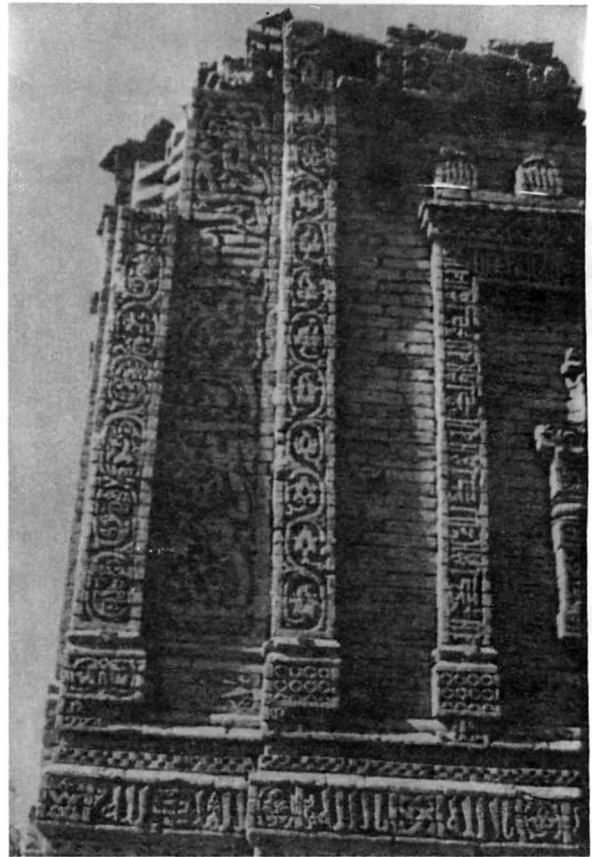


Pl. I. Tomb of Shaikh Sādan Shahīd (East side)



Pl. II. The squinch (NW corner)

Pl. III. Details of Decoration



Pl. IV. Details of decoration