

# THE TOR GUMBAT: A FORGOTTEN MONUMENT

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The Tor Gumbat (Pl. I) is situated 251 km south west of Peshāwar on the right bank of the Kurram river opposite the Thall city on a spur commanding the bridge through which passes the road to Bannū. It is located on the north eastern boundary of the north Wazīristān agency.

The tomb building, owing to weathering effect and also the use of travertine stone in its construction, has with the lapse of time turned black. There is another tomb in the same vicinity called Spin Gumbat. Now, the words *Tor* and *Spin* in *Pashtū* mean 'black' and 'white' in the same order. The expression 'Tor Gumbat' therefore, suggests that this name was given to the monument just because of its colour and for no other reason. Thus the real name seems to have long been forgotten.

Diligent enquiries in the neighbouring Thall Town even could not solve the problem of attribution. At the present state of our knowledge therefore it is extremely difficult to say who lies buried in this dilapidated building which stands upon an almost metre high square platform made up of rounded river pebbles, cobbles and both regular and irregular blocks of *kanjūr* stone etc., still visible at certain places in the ruined walls. Above this platform is the square chamber, a single story building, surmounted by a low dome.

Externally the grave chamber measures 7.20 m a side and is constructed of dressed and undressed travertine (*kanjūr*) blocks, river pebbles and cobbles and burnt bricks set in grey lime mortar. It is evident from the extant remains that the *kanjūr* blocks were not properly bounded into the burnt bricks. The total height of the building is 8.29 m as measured from the present ground level. Each side is relieved by a tall pointed arch which accommodates the entrance contained within a rectangular frame. Presently the northern and eastern entrances have completely collapsed and those on the western and southern sides are still intact. Each entrance is about 1.70 m high, 1 m wide and 40 cm deep.

Internally the tomb chamber is square and each side, relieved by an alcove contained within a rectangular frame measures 4.70 m. From the springing point upwards, the arches are made of burnt bricks, while the lower portion shows *kanjūr* blocks fixed in greyish lime mortar. Above the rectangular frames just referred to is a slightly projecting cornice showing traces of plaster coating here and there. In the phase of transition (Pl. II) there are four squinch arches one in each corner with intermediate arches in between having clerestory windows. Of the four clerestory windows, two are still in tact although in a very bad shape. But the one on the western side has developed a very wide gap. In the southern clerestory window, cracks are developing with the result that the apex of the arch has slipped down. The arches in the entrances and also of the clerestory windows are squatish in shape the middle portion representing the area of key stone being comparatively weaker, for this is precisely the place which has developed cracks. It seems that vertical thrust of the weight of the superstructure of the building was not successfully diverted to the sides of the structure. This short coming in diversifying the vertical thrust has led to the collapse of various parts of the building.

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Above the phase of transition there are rectangular holes at regular intervals, four of which can be seen on the south western side which suggests that similar holes were also there on the opposite sides for fixing wooden cross beams. The purpose of these beams was to strengthen the sides of the building.

The tomb is completely devoid of any architectural decoration. Even the spandrels of the arches which normally show embossed designs are plain in this case. The tomb was lime plastered both internally and externally, traces of which are still clearly visible at places, such as the inner wall surfaces and the summit of the dome. Probably the dome was originally provided with a finial as seen on the neighbouring Spin Gumbat, although it no longer exists.

The use of bricks on the whole is confined to the arches and the dome with occasional use in the walls. The size of the burnt bricks is not uniform and varies from 24 x 19 x 5 to 30 x 21 x 5 and 19 x 17 x 3 cm.

The centre of the chamber which should accommodate the actual grave is occupied by a heap of debris making it difficult to fix its real position. Nor it is possible at the present state to say whether the grave was made of bricks or stones.

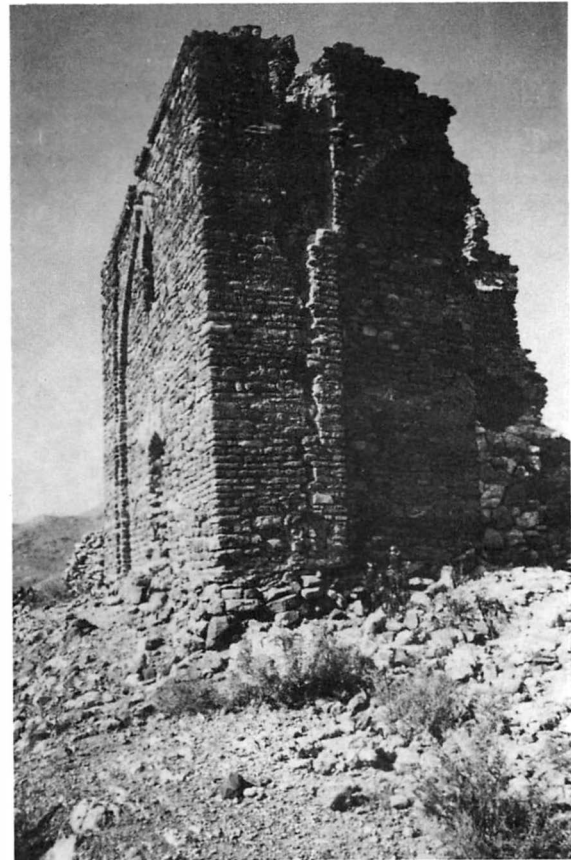
Historical literature and local tradition are silent about the person lying buried there. Nor is there any inscriptional evidence to help us in this case. Although ancient history of the area is shrouded in mystery, Bābur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, is known to have plundered this region, killing numerous people whose severed heads were collected and placed one above the other in the fashion of a minaret. From the time of the Emperor Akbar to the invasion of Nadir Shāh this area formed part of the Mughal Empire. It is along the course of the Kurram River that the ancient road (route) passed, connecting Pārāchinār with Kohāt on the one hand and Bannū on the other. This was the main thoroughfare for the movement of armies from Ghazni to the Indus plain.

This monument is the only example of its type in this area and therefore, needs to be restored and preserved. No other monument in the whole neighbourhood can stand comparison with this tomb in terms of the use of different materials and its imposing height.

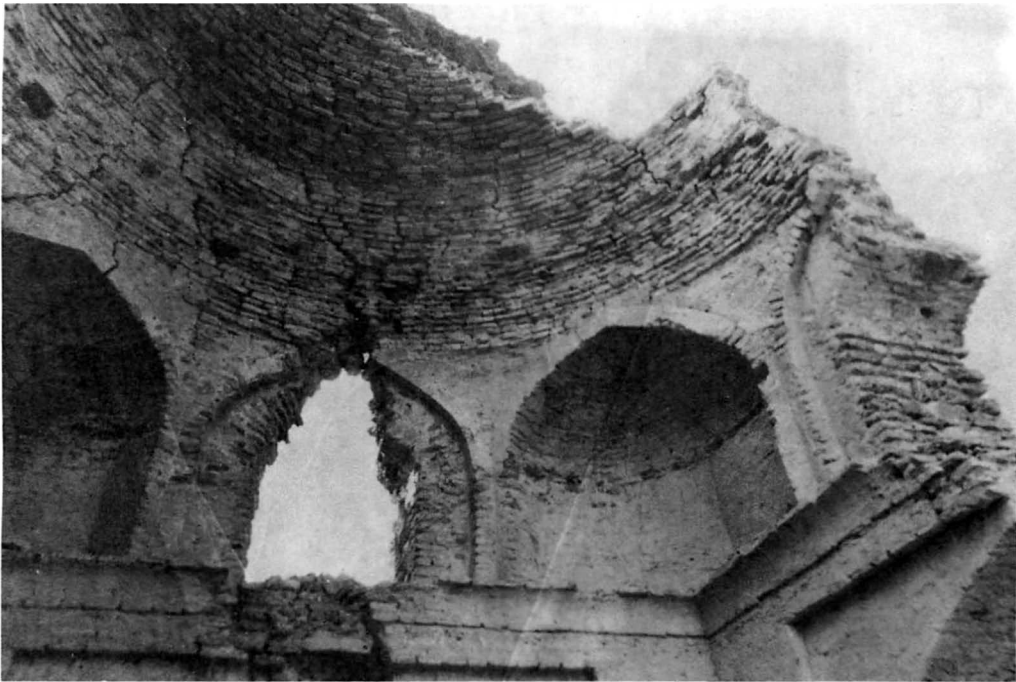
Although it is difficult to pinpoint an exact date, the style of the building with its rather low dome, the use of burnt bricks, *kanjūr* blocks, river cobbles and grey mortar and plaster suggests a date not earlier than the period of Shāh Jahān. It might very well be much later.



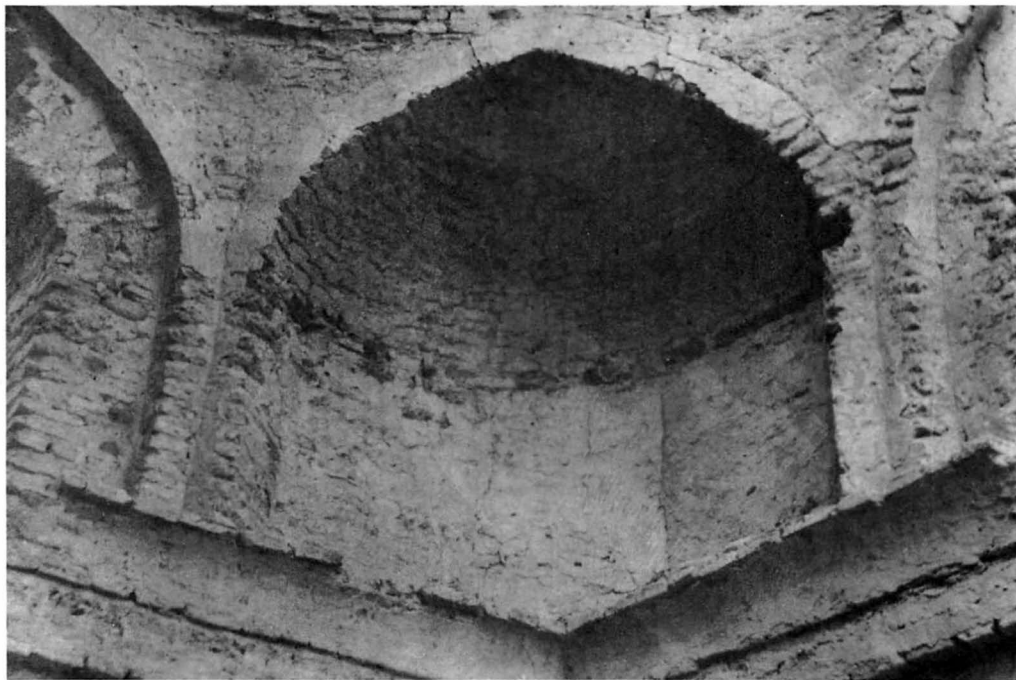
Pl. Ia. Thal: Tor Gumbat and Spin Gumbat.



Pl. Ib. Thal: Tor Gumbat showing elevation.



Pl. IIa. Thal: Tor Gumbat showing phase of transition.



Pl. IIb. Thal: Tor Gumbat showing squinch arch.