

## Bara Bridge Inscription of Shahjahan

by

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*The fabulous ancient city of Peshawar has not received due attention by the historians and archaeologists. On the evidence of the Chinese pilgrims' accounts the city is claimed to have been the capital of the Kushanas particularly after Kanishka. His famous stupa was excavated by Dr. D.B. Spooner but, except for its relic casket preserved in the Peshawar Museum, nothing remains of the stupa and the nearby monastery. No attempt has been made to locate the site of the royal palace and other buildings. Though Peshawar continued to be an important city in the succeeding changes of dynasties, still the remains above ground are few and far between. The destruction was no doubt caused by a series of invasions that lay their ruinous hands on the city. Its history is a challenge to the archaeologists who may find tit-bits here and there to catch the thread and weave a story of man that placed his foot on the soil of Peshawar. Here we have a Persian inscription edited and commented upon by Dr. Abdullah Chaghatai (for his biography see below) — the inscription which originally belonged to a bridge on the river Bara, on which the city of Peshawar originally stood. Since 1872 the river has shifted its course.*

We reproduce here an important inscription (Pl. II No. 1) in Persian verse, which is preserved in Peshawar museum<sup>1</sup>. It mentions the construction of a bridge in Peshawar during Shahjahan's reign while Nawab Lashkar Khan was the governor of this area. The Persian text is engraved on a marble slab in standard style of calligraphy and it measures 28x36 inches. Though this marble slab has been badly damaged in the course of time yet the Persian text can easily be deciphered as noted below:

شاه جهان پادشاه غازی

بقاع خیر عالی کرد بنیاد		بحمدانہ کہ از فضل الہی
کہ مثلش مادر ایام کم زاد	ن	محب اہل دل عبداللطیف آنکہ
الہی تا جهان باشد بما ناد	خا	پلے بنیاد کرد اندر پشاور
بگننتا خیر جاری باد اباد	لشکر	بی تاریخ اتسمامش مہندش

(۵۱۰۳۹)

1. The Photograph of the inscription is published here by the courtesy of the Peshawar Museum. The text and its translation were published in *Peshawar - Past and Present*, by S. M. Jafar, Peshawar, 1945 pp 14-15 and 153.

در عهد سلطنت حضرت ظل سبحانی صاحبقران ثانی در ایام حکومت نواب لشکر خان  
باهتمام بنده رب و دود داؤد بن ابومحمد قریش میمنت اتمام یافت -

## TRANSLATION

“Praise be to Allah, that by the Divine grace, laid the foundation of the grand auspicious building.

The friend of the generous, Abdul Latif, like whom the world has never produced,

Founded the bridge in Peshawar. O! God! endure it as long as the world lives.

For the sake of chronogramme of its completion, *Muhandis* (engineer) said: May this existing auspicious construction perpetuate for ever (which yields A. H. 1039/A. D. 1629).

During the reign of the kingdom of His Majesty, the shadow of Almighty God, Sahib Qiran Thani (Shahjahan), and the tenure of the jurisdiction of Nawab Lashkar Khan, and under the management of slave of the loving Lord, Daud, son of Abu Muhammad Qureshi, reached its auspicious completion.”

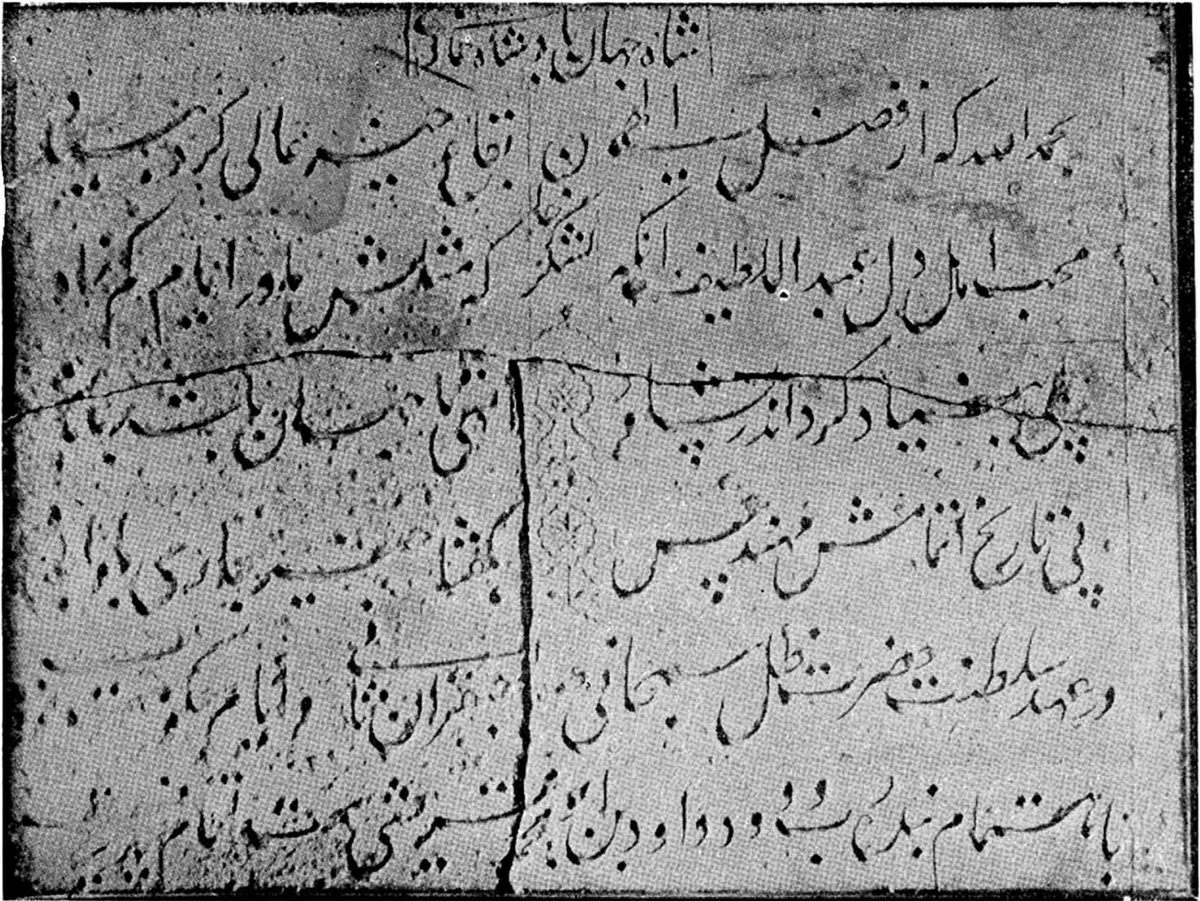
The following points are quite clear from the above noted inscription:

1. The bridge was built during Shahjahan's reign in A.D. 1619.
2. Abdul Latif founded the bridge in Peshawar.
3. The poet having his *nom de plume* *Muhandis* (engineer) composed this chronogrammatic Persian verse of the inscription which shows that the bridge was built in A.H. 1039/A.D. 1629.
4. The bridge was built in Peshawar, while Nawab Lashkar Khan<sup>1</sup> was the governor of this area.
5. It was built under the management of one Daud, son of Abu Muhammad Qureshi.

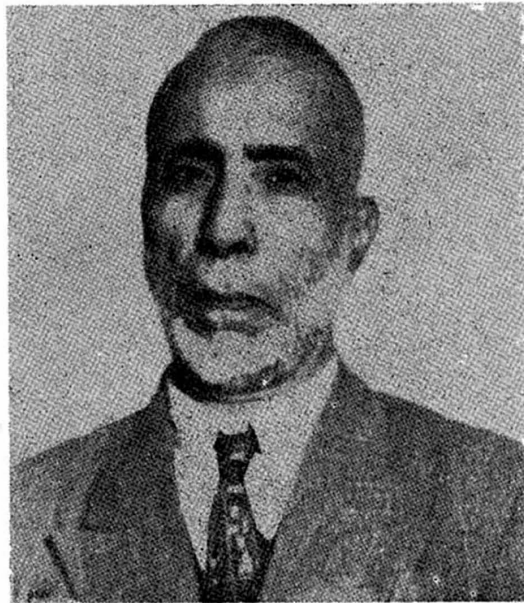
In the light of contemporary history the above noted points are expounded below:

1. Emperor Shah Jahan ascended the throne in A.H. 1037/A.D. 1627, after the demise of his father Emperor Jahangir while the Mughals were already at war with the Afghans<sup>2</sup>.
2. Abdul Latif, who founded the bridge, was one of the important officials of Shahjahan's reign. According to *Amal-i-Salih*<sup>3</sup> he was appointed by Shahjahan as an administrator (*Dewan*) of civil and revenue affairs in place of Rai Mani Das, during the fifth regnal year. Although Mulla

1. The name of Nawab Lashkar Khan occurs in the text of the inscription between its verses instead of in the last but one line after the word *Nawab*.  
2. Mulla Muhammad Salih Kambo, *Amal-i-Salih* or *Shahjahan Nama* ed. by Ghulam Yazdani, Calcutta 1923-1939, Vol. I. pp. 165 esq., 477 esq.  
3. *Ibid*, Vol. I pp. 513-14.



No. 1. Bara Bridge Inscription



No. 2. Dr. M. Abdullah Chaghatai (b. 1896)

Abdul Hamid mentions in his *Badshah Nama* that Rai Mani Das, owing to old age was relieved of his office and in his place Mulla Abdul Latif of Gujrat was appointed<sup>1</sup>. Fortunately Mulla Muhammad Salih discusses in the course of the learned persons of Shahjahan's reign under an independent sub-head that one Abdul Latif Gujarati Lashkar Khani<sup>2</sup> who was formerly incharge of the affairs of Lashkar Khan Mashhadi, after leaving his services, was entrusted with the office of the administration of civil affairs of the state. He was also conferred the title of Aqidat Khan along with the rank of one thousand four hundred infantry during the 11th regnal year. But later on owing to the prevalence of his illness he handed over this charge of the Dewan to Dyanat Rai and he then devoted himself to literary pursuits. Therefore in the light of these contemporary evidences, it is clear that Abdul Latif, as noted in the inscription, was attached with Lashkar Khan while he was the governor of Kabul and Bangash and for the same reason he was known as *Lashkar Khani*. Therefore it is possible that he had then founded this bridge in Peshawar.

3. *Muhandis* (Engineer) was the *nom de plume* of Lutfullah, the son of Ahmad of Lahore, who was a great architect of Shahjahan's reign. Lutfullah was a great poet and writer on mathematics. His *Diwan*, collection of his poetry, has been published<sup>3</sup>. It is possible that this bridge in Peshawar, as noted in the inscription, might have been designed and constructed by Lutfullah himself, because he was a great engineer, for which reason he had adopted his *nom de plume* 'Muhandis'.
4. This bridge in Peshawar was built in A.H. 1039/A.D. 1627, while Nawab Lashkar Khan was the governor of this whole area including Kabul and Bangash<sup>4</sup>. According to the *Maathari-al-Umara*<sup>5</sup> his full name was Abu 'I-Hasan Lashkar Khan Mashhadi. But it is obvious that since Jahangir's reign Lashkar Khan held responsible jobs as one of the Mughal courtiers. When Shahjahan ascended the throne, Lashkar Khan was conferred a robe of honour, a dagger, horse, elephant and a personal rank of five thousand. Zafar Khan Ahsan, who, on behalf of his father Khwaja Abu 'I Hasan Turbati, was holding the charge of the province of Kabul and Bangash, was transferred and in his place Lashkar Khan was appointed. An army consisting of Sayyids of Barah, Mughals, Afghans and others in the royal service numbering upto fifteen thousand was put at his disposal<sup>6</sup>. At this moment Nazr Muhammad Khan, the ruler of Balkh and Badakhshan, out of his short-sightedness, thought that the death of Jahangir was an opportunity to push up a large army into Afghanistan. So he arrived near the city of Kabul. Lashkar Khan, on receiving the news of Nazr Muhammad Khan's arrival at Kabul, without waiting for the re-inforcement, which were being brought by Haibat Khan, marched on to Kabul rapidly. Lashkar Khan advanced to meet him and when Nazr Muhammad Khan saw that Lashkar Khan's army

1. Mulla Abdul Hamid Lahori *Badshah Nama*. Calcutta, Vol I. p. 446.

2. Amal-i-Salih, *Op. cit* Vol. III. p 437-38.

3. Chaghatai, Dr. M. Abdullah, *Ahmad Minar aur uska khandan*. Lahore 1953.

4. *Amal-i-Salih*, *op. cit.* vol. I PP. 283-294.

5. Vol. I. PP. 300-302.

6. *Maathar-i-al-Umara*, Nawab Samsam ad Daula Shah Nawaz Khan. Calcutta. A.H. 1309. Vol. III. PP. 163-69.

was coming with great boldness and that the mercenary servants who would help him in difficulty, were not sufficient, he did not think it advisable to engage in war; so he returned to Balkh on 9th Muharram<sup>1</sup>, 1038 A.H. (A.D. 1628). Lashkar Khan entered Kabul without any opposition and the citizens rejoiced, who had been afflicted by the plunderings of the Uzbeks. He sent troops wherever were required and thus drove off the raiders. In the 5th regnal year he was replaced by Sayid Khan and was appointed, in place of Mahabat Khan, to take charge of Delhi, but on account of his great age he could not render proper service. Hence in the 6th regnal year he retired. He had visited the holy shrine and had spent large sums of money there. At last he turned to his native country Iran and settled at Mashhad. He founded *Sarais* (inns) and there he died<sup>2</sup>.

5. The bridge was built under the management of one Daud bin Abu Muhammad Qureshi, who, according to the *Amal-i-Salih*, was the *gumashta* - agent of Lashkar Khan. It is related that when Sayid Khan, the successor of Lashkar Khan was in Kohat, he came to know of a serious rebellion of the Afghans on the border of Tirah and Bangash which was led by Kamaluddin Rohilla. Shamsheer Khan and Daud, agents (*gumashtas*) of Lashkar Khan, had furnished this information to Sayid Khan<sup>3</sup>.

We have tried to establish the historical value of this inscription in our above-noted account relating to persons mentioned therein. It undoubtedly forms an important chapter of Peshawar's history of Shahjahan's reign. But as to the actual provenance of the inscription itself, which is to-day preserved in the Peshawar Museum, I quote below from the Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report 1908-09 which records<sup>4</sup>:

“For sometime this inscription adorned the facade of an unpretentious mosque in a back street of the Qissa Khani Bazar. How it found its way into the mosque and got fixed in its niche was explained by its Mulla, who said that his father had acquired it from the ruins of a bridge over the Bara river on the Grand Trunk Road nearly three miles east of Peshawar city, and fixed it in the facade of the mosque”.

Consequently it is clear that this inscription actually belonged to the bridge over the Bara river which was built in A.H. 1039 by Mulla Abdul Latif while Nawab Lashkar Khan was the governor of this province during Shah Jahan's regin. This chronogrammatic inscription in Persian verse might have been composed by Lutfullah *Muhandis*, son of Ahmad and the construction of the bridge was managed by Daud, son of Abu Muhammad Qureshi.

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Amal-i-Salih*. vol. I. P. 379.

4. *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report* 1908-09, Calcutta P. 209.