

Personalities in Archaeology

The Late Dr. Ghulam Yazdani

These few pages are reserved to introduce those personalities who have devoted their whole life to the cause of archaeology in general and to the advancement of human knowledge in this field about this region in particular. From the driest details of the archaeological materials it is, no doubt, satisfying to learn about the human beings who have pursued their activities in out of the way places almost in seclusion to resuscitate kins of their own land, who are long dead and gone, and to bring before the view of the coming generations the dead civilizations of the past as if to draw a long vista of human life on the face of this earth. Perchance in this rebirth of the old the archaeologist might himself relive. Whether that is possible or not, it is surely given to the fellow archaeologists to remember their old colleagues and recount their services done in this field. Of all such personalities the late Dr. Ghulam Yazdani deserves to be remembered first of all, for among the Muslims of our time he can be taken to be the pioneer in the field devoting his attention both to the ancient and medieval archaeology.

The late Dr. Ghulam Yazdani was born at Delhi in December, 1885. His father Maulvi Ghulam Jilani was a reputed scholar of Persian and Arabic and Dewan of Dojana State. From him Dr. Yazdani inherited the scholarly tradition, which was further added from the mother's side, the mother being a descendant of Maulvi Shah Abdul Haq, the celebrated scholar and jurist of the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. As was the usual practice among the Muslims, Dr. Yazdani received his early education at home in Arabic and Persian, and later joined the school and college. He graduated in 1905, standing first in the University in Arabic, Oriental Classics and English and winning a purse and three gold medals. The following year he took the M.A. degree of Calcutta University.

Dr. Yazdani started his career as a Government of India Archaeological Scholar, he being one of the two earliest recipients of this scholarship under the new scheme formulated by Sir John Marshall. During this period he specialized in the study of Arabic palaeography and epigraphy. But somehow there was a little interruption in his archaeological career. From 1907 to 1914 Dr. Yazdani joined the profession of teaching. He served as Professor of Persian or Arabic first in the St. Stephen's College, Delhi, next in the Government College, Rajshahi and finally in the Government College, Lahore. At Rajshahi Dr. Yazdani became associated with the great scholar Zamindar Mr. Sanat Kumar Roy, and with him was responsible in the foundation of the Varendra Research Society and the



THE LATE DR. GHULAM YAZDANI
(1885 to 1962)

establishment of the Varendra Research Museum. During this educational career he was awarded Griffith's prize for original research work in Indian History in 1913 by the Calcutta University. But this teaching line was to be surpassed by the archaeological profession which Dr. Yazdani started in 1914 as the first Director of Archaeology in the former Hyderabad State. In Hyderabad he stayed on until his death on 15th November, 1962.

As an archaeological administrator Dr. Yazdani had to organize the new department of archaeology in Hyderabad State. Following the lines of the Government of India Department of Archaeology, Dr. Yazdani developed four-fold branches of archaeology—conservation of monuments, excavation of important sites, establishment of a museum at Hyderabad and publication of annual reports. Dr. Yazdani was a man of all interest in archaeology. Though his own educational qualification was confined to Arabic and Persian and to the study of medieval Muslim history his interest far Surpassed this limit. As an administrative head he realized his duty to pay attention to all kinds of monuments. He untiringly devoted his energies to their recovery, conservation and interpretation in a manner commendable to all. Besides the attention that he paid to the Hindu temples and Muslim monuments, he had the foresight to recognize the world-wide importance of the caves at Ajanta and Ellora. The zeal with which he devoted himself to the repairs of the Ellora Caves is writ large in the resuscitation of this great monument and his name is bound to be associated with the long life that he gave to these caves. Ajanta attracted Dr. Yazdani quite naturally as others have been attracted too. The time and energy that he devoted to the study of the cave painting, their exact photographic reproduction, understanding the depth of meaning, and the interpretation of the different scenes - all these collected together in the most beautiful volume on Ajanta - a monument to the world-famous caves as well as to the author himself - do tell us that Dr. Yazdani became as much an adept in the Pre-Muslim history and Culture as in the Muslim. No wonder that Dr. Yazdani was chosen to be the editor of *The Early History of the Deccan* published in 1960 and the reviewer of this book, Prof. A. L. Basham correctly remarks: "No other Indian Muslim of Dr. Yazdani's generation devoted as much scholarly attention to India's pre-Muslim past.¹ It is for this universal scholarship that Dr. Yazdani was elected to be the President of such literary associations as All India Oriental Conference (1940), All India History Congress (Archaeological section, 4th Session) Bihar and Orissa Research Society Patna (1941), and Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. Poona (16th anniversary). In order to arouse -public interest in archaeology, he laid the foundation of Hyderabad Archaeological Society. But he never lost his love of Oriental Classics, for he was long responsible for running the Hyderabad Persian Manuscript Society, while he himself edited the *Amal-i-Salah* for the Bengal Asiatic Society, the *Matsnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi and Riadul Insha*.

As an epigraphist Dr. Yazdani's knowledge was unrivalled. His services were specially requisitioned by the Government of India to edit Epigraphia - Indo Moslemica from 1915 to 1941. After going through these volumes it appears that Dr. Yazdani was decipherer, translator, and editor all by himself. For over twenty-five years Dr. Yazdani interpreted Indo-Muslim epigraphy and set the standard for

1. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1913, Vol. XXVI, Pt. 2, p. 445.

others to be followed by his students in this field, who later succeeded him in Government of India.

Above all we can hardly forget to mention the great part that he played in interpreting the Indo-Muslim architecture. His first venture in this field was a small but delightful book on *Mandu, the City of Joy* — a name which he aptly chose from its old Persian name *Shadiabad*. Those who have seen Mandu and have read this book, can alone realize how Dr. Yazdani has remarkably succeeded in bringing out the archaeological beauties of the place and telling the tale of the natural delights and royal romances of the place. His mature mind later produced the most important work on *Bidar, its History and Monuments* — a work of classic importance that will long remain a standard in this field. His fellow archaeologists only wish that he should have been given a chance to produce works on more important monuments at Agra and Delhi. Absence of such works on these important places is a great lacuna in Indian archaeology. Nay, Indo-Muslim architecture has been sadly neglected and even today there is no officer in the Government of India, Department of Archaeology, who is qualified to interpret the great architectural heritage that the Muslims have bequeathed to India.

Till the last moment Dr. Yazdani continued to be associated with the research activity. He was a member of the Governing Body of the reputed Journal *Islamic Culture*, issued from Hyderabad (Deccan). It is for his literary activities and original research that Government of India conferred on him in 1936 the title of *Order of the British Empire* and later in 1959 he was awarded Padma-Bhushan. The Osmania University, Hyderabad, also honoured him by awarding in 1943 the honorary degree of D. Litt., and in 1953 the Aligarh Muslim University followed suit.

The fellow archaeologists hereby record with deep appreciation the great services rendered by Dr. Ghulam Yazdani to the cause of Indo-Pakistan archaeology and hope that the fields of research that he started, will long remain an inducement to the younger generation for further advancement in archaeology and humanities.

May God in His mercy bless his soul and find a place for him in heaven!

A. H. Dani.

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