

## Tomb Architecture of the Chitral Valley, Pakistan

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### Introduction

Chitral is located in the north-western part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan (Dani, 2007, 12-13), between 71° 12' and 73° 53' east longitude and between 35° 13' and 36° 55' north latitude, bounded on the north and west with Afghanistan and on the east and south with Northern areas and Dir and Swat districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Cacopardo, 2001, 45-46). Culturally and physically, Chitral valley is the most isolated region of Pakistan (Dichter 1967: 24-26). Tomb architecture of the Chitral valley forms a separate group. For the development of architecture some basic requirements such as wealth, political peace and good environment are very essential. Till the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chitral had none of these. In 1313 H/AD 1895 (Aziz, 1991, 208) the British army of India cleaned the area from terrorists / local warriors and appointed Shujā' ul-Mulk as *Mihtar* of Chitral on September 2 (1895). With this the Sunnis, Shi'as, Isma'īlies and Nūrbakhshi sects (Jettmar, 1992, 13) integrated with each other. That is why we find religious buildings such as mosques and tombs not earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD (Shakir, 2012, 20).

Three types of structures are noteworthy with reference to their building material: (1) mud with stones, (2) mud with wooden courses and (3) wooden structures.

### Type-I (Mud with Stones)

The Gumbazi Ziārat at Ghist Bālā and Muḥammad Ziā Wali Mazārāt at Sanoghar

fall in the first group as they are built of mud with stones.

### Gumbazi Ziarat

The Gumbazi ziārat (Ali, 2005, 99) is the tomb of a well-known saint of the area located at Ghist Bālā village in the Sur Lāspur area. After his death the local people of the village from their own resources built the said tomb.

### Architecture:

The building is square (Fig. 1) in plan and built on a three metre high platform. The walls are built of locally available stones fixed in mud mortar with thick mud plaster. The entrance is provided in the southern side. Inside the chamber is a small grave. The roof was flat, comprising wooden beams and rafters, but unfortunately, it has collapsed. The structure can be dated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD as the saint buried here died at about the same time and the tomb building was erected by his followers. The building is in a very bad state of preservation as the roof has collapsed and the sidewalls of the grave chamber are exposed to rains and other natural hazards.

### Muhammad Zia Wali Mazarat

Muḥammad Ziā Wali Mazārāt (Ali, 2005, 99) at Sanoghar are built over two graves, one belongs to the saint Muḥammad Ziā Wali and the other to his son. Muḥammad Ziā Wali was a saintly person who migrated to this village before the arrival of the British and spent most of the time in prayers taking no interest in worldly affairs. One of his sons died in childhood and was buried in the same

tomb. After his death a tomb was built by his descendants on both the graves with the help of other villagers.

**Architecture:**

It is rectangular (Fig. 2c) in plan, measuring 3.70 x 4.00 m, having thick mud walls with a flat roof. The entrance (Fig. 2a) is provided in the north sidewall with a wooden doorway. Externally and internally the walls are coated with a thick mud plaster. Inside (Fig. 2b) there is an unpaved floor and two graves; the larger of which belongs to the saint, the other to his son. Both are covered by a rectangular wooden frame. The sidewalls of the structure are white washed with lime. The ceiling is made of wooden beams fixed in rectangular bars showing a matted pattern. The centre is kept open for light and fresh air. The roof top is covered with thick mud plaster while the opening is covered with wooden planks to protect the interior from rainwater. As the tomb building is comparable with other buildings of the area, it may be dated sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is a well preserved tomb and looked after by the followers of the saint.

**Type-II (Mud with Wooden Courses)**

Room Pāpo tomb (Ali, 2005, 97) at Reshon is fall in the second type and is built of mud with wooden courses on regular interval.

**Room Papo Tomb**

The tomb is known to have been there even before the arrival of the British Army in this area. People of this village have no other information regarding this tomb. The structure seems to be of the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD.

**Architecture:**

The building (Pl. III) has mostly collapsed and only the south, east and western walls of the grave chamber exist in a dilapidated

condition. The chamber is rectangular in plan, measuring 9 x 8 m and 6 m high. The walls are made of mud and wooden courses. The northern side, which accommodates the entrance, has totally collapsed, while the rest of the three sidewalls are standing, but even these, both externally and internally, are defaced.

Only the south side shows some architectural features. This wall is divided into two sunk panels horizontally and then sub-divided into four vertical sunk panels. The lower panels of the west side show some niches for lamps etc. The same arrangement was repeated on all the four corners and sides. The rectangular structure was topped by a flat roof of wooden beams and rafters covered with mud plaster. It has completely collapsed. Externally and internally the tomb building was plastered with mud, the inner side also shows some white-wash traces of lime. This tomb building is in a very bad state of preservation and needs immediate attention.

**Type-III (Wooden Structures)**

The third type shows wooden structures of which the first and the earliest is that of Shabor Wali tomb, the second is the wooden tomb at Workop village and the third is the tomb of Nayat Zarin Chardalo.

**Shabor Wali Tomb**

The tomb building is located at Jang Bāzār (Ali, 2005, 98) in the main Chitral city. This well-preserved and nicely built tomb was raised by the first *Mihtar* (Shujā'ul – Mulk) of Chitral during the British Rāj in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. Shabor Wali is known as a saintly person who came to this area for the propagation of Islam in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and spent his entire life in this area at different places. He had a number of followers in Central Asia besides Chitral. He

died in about the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. After some time his descendants from Central Asia arrived and took his remains back home. Nevertheless, his Chitrali followers still retain a grave on the same spot. When Shujā'ul – Mulk became the *Mihtar* of Chitral, he ordered to build a nice tomb on the said grave, because the family of Shujā'ul – Mulk also had some respect for the saint (Shakir, 2012, 21).

**Architecture:**

It is a rectangular wooden structure 5.45 x 4.05 m, erected on a stone platform. The entrance is provided under a cusped arch. The rest of the structure is externally divided into four cusped arches on each side (Pl. I). These arches are, up to the dado level, screened by a wooden grill, but above that level they are blocked with wooden panels. They are flanked by panels in a vertical row adorned with nice woodwork. The entrance door is also decorated with multi-foil wood work in relief. The arches are topped by two horizontal rows adorned by floral designs, screens, matted patterns, honeycomb and geometrical designs on all the four sides. Some of the panels depict birds in relief. The structure is covered with a wooden vaulted roof and a projected eave (Pl. I).

Internally, the floor is paved with large size stone slabs; in the centre is the brick paved grave of the saint. The tomb walls internally show plain wooden structure. For the support of the roof are wooden columns: five on the east-west side and four on the north-south side. The screens are blocked by wooden planks, which can be adjusted to admit or block fresh air. The same arrangement in Persian and Pashtu is locally known as *Bastai*. The corners of each side are adorned with a line in relief. These columns are topped by wooden beams of the low domical wooden ceiling. The spaces in-between the beams are covered by wooden rafters adorned with acanthus leaves in relief. The

joints of the rafters are covered with small pieces of wooden planks with a decorative line. The ceiling is centred by an inverted hanging wooden *fanus* (Chandler) (Pl. II). The point where it is fixed to the ceiling rafters is marked by an acanthus leaves design looking like a lotus flower. The building was erected by Mihtar of Chitral, Shujā ul Mulk, in the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is a wooden structure of low weight and is well preserved.

**Warkop Wooden Tomb**

The wooden tomb at Warkop (Ali, 2005, 99) village known as Warkop Wooden tomb is built on two graves (one small and one large).

**Architecture:**

It is rectangular (Fig. 3b) in plan measuring 5.50 x 5.00 m, externally and 4.50 x 4.00 m, internally, and is built on a 0.30 m high platform. The entrance measuring 0.90 m in width is provided in the middle of the western wall. The sidewalls are built of wooden columns at regular intervals. The spaces in-between the columns are blocked by wooden rafter grill (Fig. 3a) which is topped by a horizontal row of rectangular panels decorated as *gul-e nau* designs. This rectangular chamber, at a height of 3.50 m, is in its turn topped by a vaulted roof of wooden beams and rafters, with a steel sheet cover.

Internally, the grave chamber accommodates two graves one large and one small. The floor is paved with modern cement. The tomb building may be dated to sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. The building is in a good state of preservation and is looked after by the descendants of the persons buried therein.

### **Nayat Zarin Chardalo Tomb**

The tomb of Nayat Zarīn Chārdalo (Ali, 2005, 99) is located at Rāin. It is built on a single grave of an unknown origin. It is said that the burial belongs to the Kathor family who ruled Chitral for so many years and that the tomb was also erected in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by the same family when they were in power.

#### ***Architecture:***

It is rectangular (Fig. 4b) in plan measuring 4.50 x 3.80 m, externally and 4.00 x 3.50 m, internally and stands upon a 0.30 m high platform. It shows wooden columns at regular intervals. The spaces in-between the columns are blocked by crossed wooden rafters looking like a grill (Fig. 4a). In the middle of the south side is the doorway opening in a rectangular frame measuring 1.50 x 0.50 m. The building is 2.30 m in height and is topped by a vaulted roof comprising wooden beams and rafters with steel sheets. The floor shows the use of modern cement accommodating in the middle a single grave. The building is well preserved and is looked after by the local people.

#### **Comparison**

All the decorative feature/motifs noticed in the above mentioned tombs are very commonly observed in many monumental buildings like tombs, mosques and houses at Peshawar (Mumtaz, 1985, 153, pls. 7.35 & 7.36), Nowshera (Shakir, 1999, 83, 89, 92: pl. IIa) and in mosques at Swat (Dani, 1989, 34, 62; Rahman, 1989, 162-176, pls. 4, 5, 18, 20, 28, 38, 42, 66 & 67). These photographs published in the mentioned reference books and articles are studied and compared, having very close resemblance with decorative motifs carved in the tombs under discussion of Chitral valley.

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Pl. I - Chitral: South side of the dome and general view of Shabor Wali Tomb



PL. II - Chitral: Shābor Wali Tomb: Soffit of the dome showing details of architectural features



PL. III - Chitral: Room Pāpo Tomb, a view of the interior

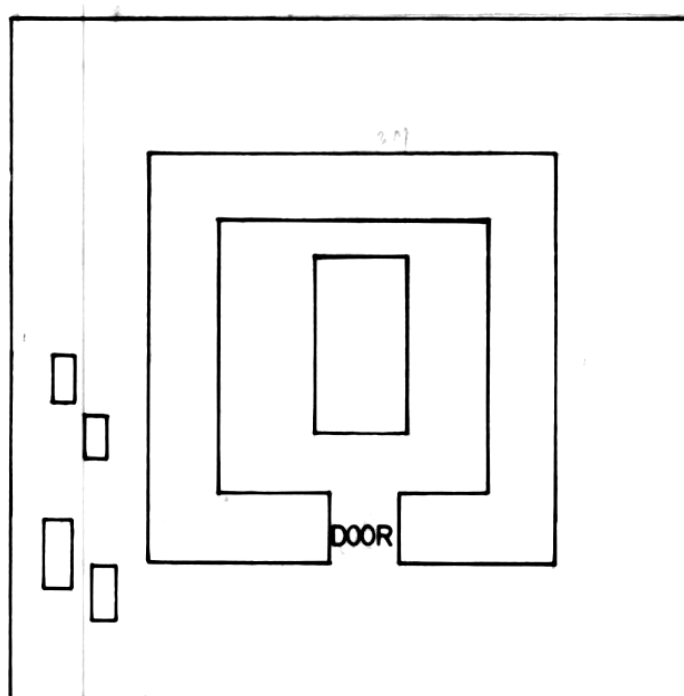
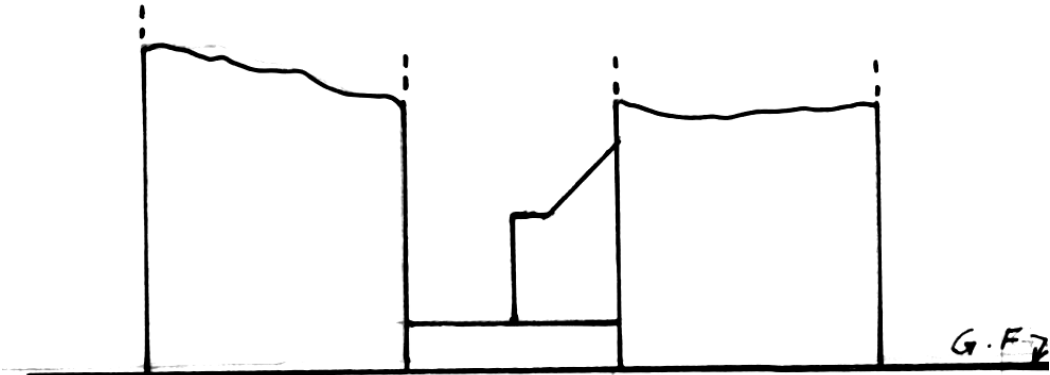
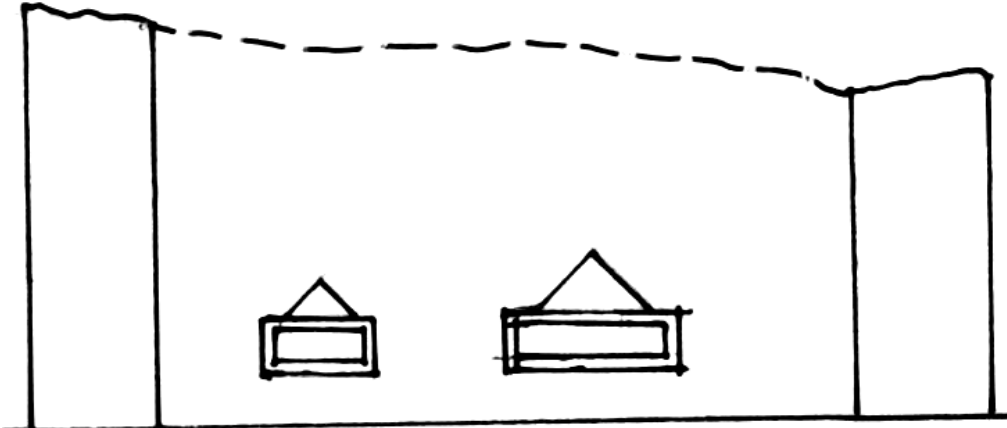


Fig. 1 - Chitrāl (Ghast Bāla): Gumbazi Zīarat Ground plan

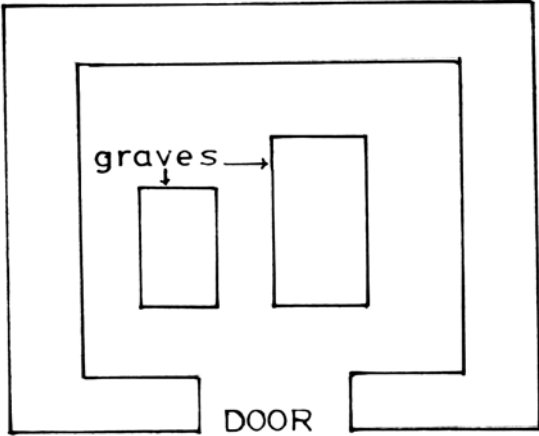
Fig. 2- Chitrāl (Sanoghar): Muḥammad Zia Wali Tomb



A. Front Elevation



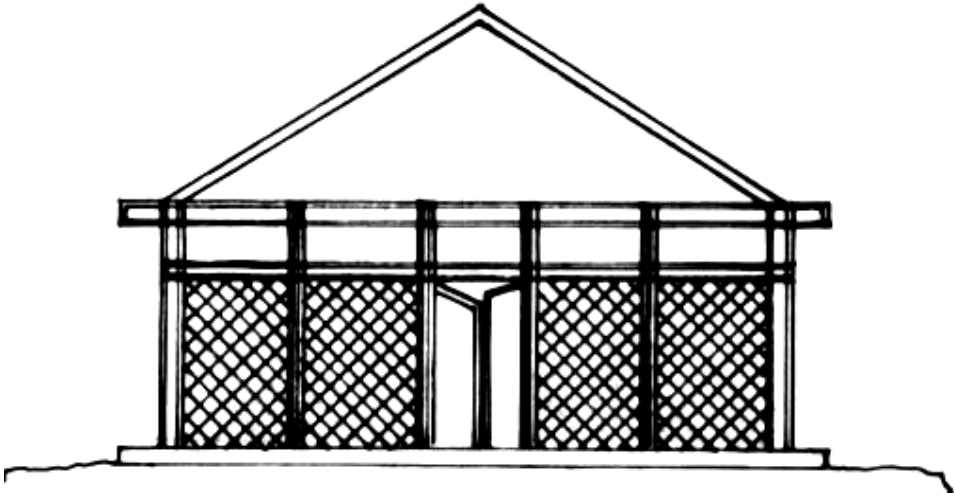
B. Sectional Elevation



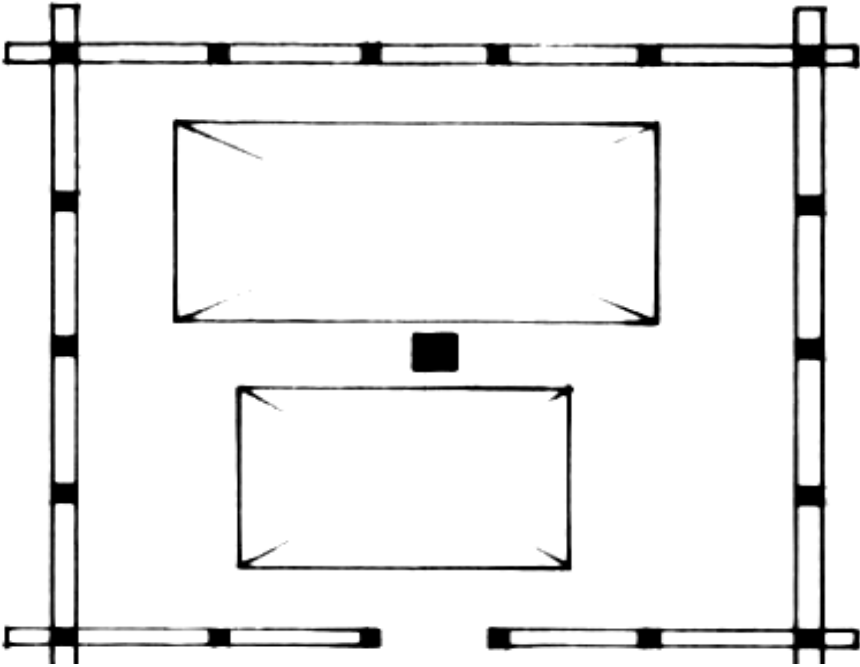
C. Ground Plan



Fig. 3 - Chitrāl (Tor Koh): Warkop Wooden Tomb

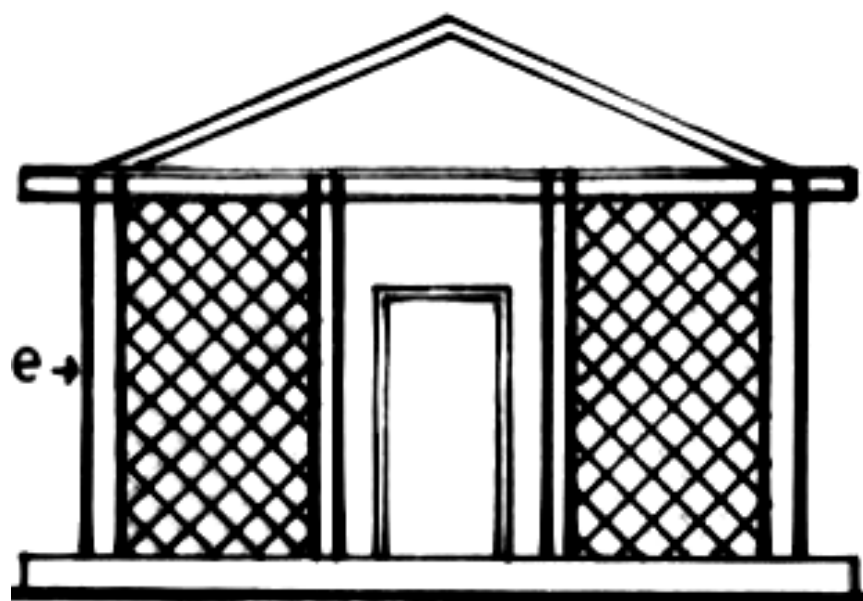


A. Front Elevation

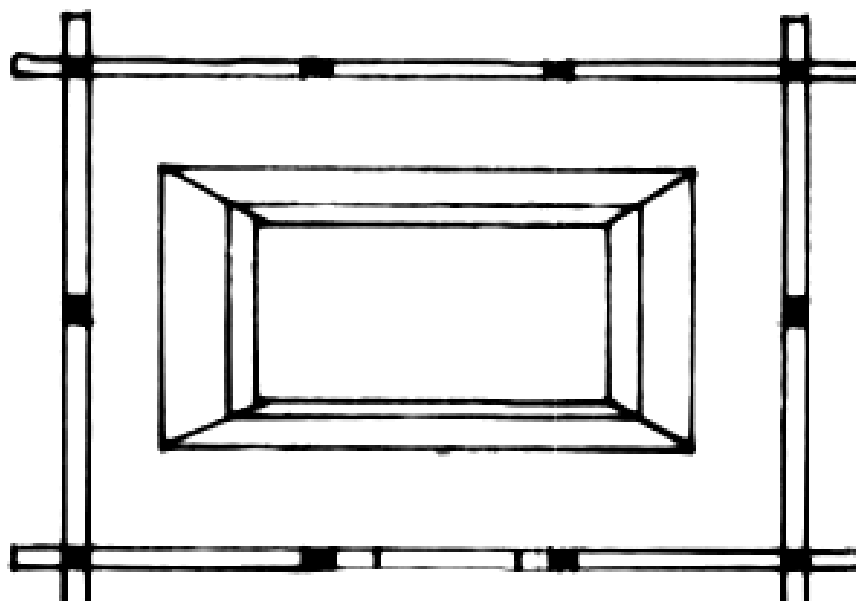


B. Ground Plan

Fig. 4 - Chitrāl (Rain): Nayat Zarin Chārdalo Tomb



A. Front Elevation



B. Ground Plan