

THE MIHRAB-INSCRIPTION OF THE SO-CALLED TOMB OF KHALID WALID NEAR KABIRWALA (KHANEWAL DISTRICT)

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Recent investigations have brought to light several important monuments which greatly help us to understand the origin and development of tomb architecture in Pakistan.¹ The so-called tomb of Khalid Walid is one of the earliest funerary structures in the group. According to local traditions Khalid Walid came to Multan with the armies of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi and died here. Neither contemporary or later historical literature nor the inscriptions on the *mihrab* verify the above assumption.

The tomb occupies the centre of a rectangular fortified brick structure (70x90 feet) with attached round tapering towers, one at each corner. (Fig. 1) Similar asymmetrical round towers are provided on the three sides, while on the Qibla side is a tall rectangular projection marking the position of the *mihrab*.

The tomb itself is a square structure (24x24 feet) with an entrance on each side. Three of which, those on the north, east and west sides are now blocked. The southern entrance, provided with a wooden door, alone gives access to the tomb chamber. This square chamber is converted into an octagon by corner squinches which spring at a height of about five feet from the existing floor level.² The squinches are executed by placing bricks in a zig-zag position and their spandrels are filled with stepped recessed niches, an architectural device commonly used in the Muslim monuments of Central Asia.³ The most important feature of the whole building complex is the *mihrab* in the Qibla wall of the outer fortified structure. The upper portion of the *mihrab* has crumbled down and therefore some parts of the inscriptions are missing. Now the remaining inscription is no longer present on the *mihrab*, as it has been stolen by antique dealers. [The stolen inscribed slabs were later recovered and are now in the custody of the Department of Archaeology, Government of Pakistan — Editor]

The *mihrab* has two elaborate frames of kufic inscriptions worked in cut brick technique, running on the two sides and on the top. (Pls. I–III) The third inscription is situated on the shafts of the pillarets supporting the arched *mihrab* and the fourth one is on the lowest register of the half dome of the *mihrab*. Besides these inscriptions, the attributes of Almighty God, the name of the Holy Prophet and his four companions (Abu Bakr, Umr, Usman and Ali) are also worked out on the nichehead and the trefoil arch in kufic characters (Pl. IV). The open space between the letters is covered with foliated decoration in the form of spirals and planets. The letters are both angular and cursive and their shape and style is elaborate. Uprights are tall and follow the style of the pen. In some letters such as *waw* و, *ha* ه, *kaf* ق and *mim* م, the rounded heads are crowned by floral designs.

Recently attempts have been made to decipher these inscriptions.⁴ In an earlier attempt only a small portion of these inscriptions was deciphered and published (not translated).

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According to the author,⁵ it reads as follows (see App. 1a)

مما امر ببناء هذا سجد العمارة الامير شهنشاه الامير قلوب جهان
على بن كرم اخ اعز الامارة

The second attempt shows an improvement on the first one as far as the verses from the Holy Quran are concerned but has followed the earlier author word for word in deciphering the historical inscription.⁶

As the above reading shows it is not only defective grammatically but also the titles reconstructed by these scholars for Ali bin Karmakh, who was a Sipah-salar of the Multan province during 1175–85 A.D. under the Ghorid Sultan Shahabuddin Muhammad bin Sam, seem dubious.

Following are the major inscriptions on the *mihrab* of the above mentioned structure. The first inscription (not published by the above author) forms the outer frame of the *mihrab* and is taken from the Holy Quran (Quran 9. 18–19). It reads as follows: see App. 1b (Pls. I–III, Figs. 2–3).

النمايعمر مساجد الله من امن بالله واليوم الآخر واقام الصلوة.....سبيل الله
لايستون عند الله-والله لا يهدي القوم الظالمين

Translation:

“The mosques of God shall be visited and maintained by such as (those who) believe in God and the last day, (and) establish regular prayers, and practise regular charity, and strive with might in the course of God. They are not comparable in sight of God, and God guides not those who do wrong.”

The third inscription is on the shafts of the pillarets supporting the arched *mihrab*. It is also taken from the Holy Quran (61.13) and reads as follows (not published by the earlier author). See App. 1c

Translation: نصر من الله وفتح قريب - وبشر المؤمنين

“Help from God and speedy victory. So give the glad tidings to the Believers”.

The fourth inscription is on the lowest register of the niche head and is also taken from the Holy Quran. (Quran 9.129) See App. 1d It reads as follows:

فان تولوا فقل حسبى الله لا اله الا هو عليه توكلت وهو رب العرش العظيم-

Translation:

“But if they turn away, say, Allah sufficeth me. There is no God but He. On him my trust, He the lord of the throne of supreme (glory)”.

The second inscription is of historical character and makes the second frame of the *mihrab*. It is the most significant one, for it gives us historical information and mentions the name of the personage responsible for the construction of the building. According to my analysis, it reads as follows: See App. 1e (Fig. 3–5).

مما امر ببناء هذا المسجد العمادة الامير الاسيپه سالار----- ب الامم الپهلوان
جهان على بن كرماخ اعز الامارة

Translation:

"Ali bin Karmakh, the support of the Amir, the Sipah-salar (... who curbs the neck of the) nations, Hero of the world, ordered the construction of this mosque. May God prosper his domain."

The titles 'al-Amir', Shahinshah and al-Amir Qulub-i-Jahan given to Ali bin Karmakh in the earlier attempts⁷ need some explanation. Historical literature informs us that Ali bin Karmakh, the patron of the building was a governor of Multan province under the Sultan Shahabuddin Muhammad bin Sam Ghorī. Therefore it means that Ali bin Karmakh was neither an *Amir* nor a *Shahinshah*. Moreover, the title 'al-Amir Qulub-i-Jahan' given to the patron of the building by the earlier authors is their own imagination. It makes no sense and never occurs in historical literature or at least I have not come across this title. Ali bin Karmakh was, no doubt, appointed by the Ghorid Sultan, Sipah-salar of the Multan province after defeating the Karamati ruler of the region.⁸

In my reading of the inscription, the two Persian titles 'Sipah-salar, and 'Pahlawan-i-Jahan in an Arabic text seem astonishing. But it is interesting to mention here that certain Persian titles such as 'Pahlawah-i-Jahan' (Hero of the world), 'Shahriyar (Monarch) and Khusraw-i-Iran' (the Khusraw of Iran) appearing in some inscriptions in Iran were used even by some of the rulers of Iraq, Syria and Egypt.⁹ The title 'Isfahsalar' (General or Commander-in-Chief) appears for the first time on the Chehel-Dukhtaran tomb at Damghan (early eleventh century A.D.) and was used until the middle of the 13th century A.D. It also appears in an inscription at Urmiya (1184) and on a faience plate (1210 A.D.) in a private collection.¹⁰

The province of Multan was known to the Muslim world from an early date and was a great centre of socio-religious activities. Being situated on the main trade route between Iran and the Indian subcontinent, it played an important role in the Muslim history of the region. Coming under the banner of Islam from an early period it seems likely that Multan received more cultural and literary inspiration from the west rather than the east and the use of Persian titles in Arabic inscriptions is not astonishing as their use was common in the Arab countries, as mentioned earlier.

Taking into consideration all these inscriptions, one comes to the conclusion that they inform us about the construction of a mosque and not a tomb. Moreover, the traditional inscriptions, usually found on the mausoleums contain: The name of the buried person, the date of his death and almost all such inscriptions begin with the words: See App. 1f

Translation:

هذه القبة يا هذا القبر

This dome or tomb

Similar information is missing in these inscriptions. It would be plausible to assume that this building is a mosque mausoleum. During medieval period mausoleums of saints and pious persons were usually provided with an attached mosque. It was intended for the visitors to say their prayers during paying homage to the departed saints. In some cases mausoleums were also provided with other accessory buildings such as *Khanqah*, *Langar-khana* and *Madrasa*.

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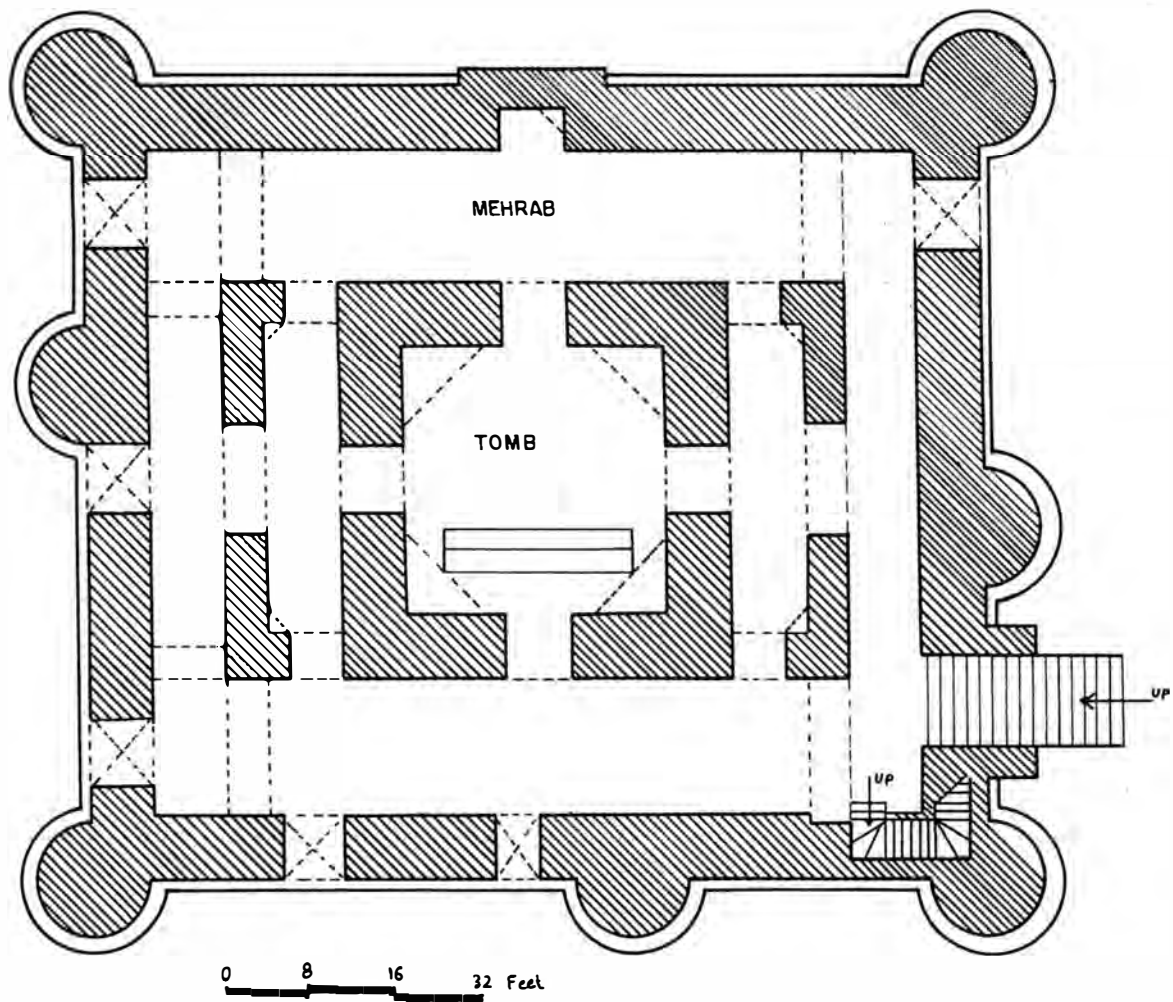


Fig. 1 Plan Tomb of Khalid Walid at Kabirwala (Multan).



Fig. 3. Khalid Walid Tomb: Inscription on the left side (see Pl.-III).



Fig. 2. Khalid Walid Tomb: Inscription on the right side (see Pl.-II).



Pl. I Khalid Walid Tomb: the Mihrab



Pl. IV Khalid Tomb: Tilefoil arch in the Mihrab.



Pl. III Khalid Walid Tomb: left side of the
Mihrab with Inscription.



Pl. II Khalid Walid Tomb: right side of the
Mihrab with Inscriptions.