

Asar-ul-Sanadid: a nineteenth-century history of Delhi

Fatima Quraishi

Introduction

Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) was a major cultural figure of the Muslim community in nineteenth-century India.¹ He is best remembered as an activist for Indian Muslim education and for founding the first secular Muslim educational institute on the Subcontinent – the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh (now Aligarh University). Throughout his career, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was an active commentator on religion and politics on the Subcontinent,² and in 1888 he was made a Knight Commander of the Star of India by the British crown. Before all these achievements, however, he began his career as a young Muslim academic in 1846 when he transferred his position of *munsif* (judicial officer) for the East India Company from Fatehpur Sikri to Delhi, following the death of his elder brother.

The historic atmosphere of Delhi, with its ruins and grand monuments, fascinated Sayyid Ahmad Khan and he began studying the city's architecture shortly after his arrival. This ultimately led him to carry out a painstaking personal survey of Delhi's monuments with the aid of Maulvi Imam Bakhsh Sahba'i (1806-57), head of the Persian department of Delhi College. Sayyid Ahmad Khan's meticulous attention to detail during this process is well described in this passage from his biography written by Altaf Husain Hali:

Conducting research into the buildings, which lay outside the city, was no easy task. Scores of these buildings had fallen down and were lying in ruins.

¹ Much has been written about Sayyid Ahmad Khan. I include here a brief list of the key texts, beginning with a contemporary account of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's life: G.F.I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1974 (reprint of the 1st edition, of 1885; 2nd edition, 1909); Hafeez Malik, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980; Shan Muhammad, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Political Biography*, Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969; Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan, A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978; Bashir Ahmad, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1957; David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979; and Shahabuddin Iraqi, ed., *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: Vision and Mission*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2008.

² See, for instance: *Asbab Baghawat-i-Hind* (The Causes of the Indian Revolt), Delhi, 1858; *Loyal Mohammadans of India*, Delhi, 1860-1; *Essays on the Life of Mohammed*, Delhi, 1870.

Most of the inscriptions were either illegible or incomplete and some were written in scripts, which no one knew how to read. The most important parts of some of the ancient buildings had been demolished and from the existing remains, which were scattered over a wide area, the purpose for which the buildings had been erected could not easily be determined. If the name of the founder happened to be contained in the inscription, references had to be checked with the available histories before a complete description could be written. Some of the older buildings had been so vastly altered that it was impossible to discover how they had originally been planned. In this way, writing a detailed account of some 125 buildings, tracing and reproducing the inscriptions in their exact form and drawing up the plans of each broken-down edifice posed many problems. Sir Sayyid found that some of the inscriptions on the Qutb Minar were too high to read. Therefore, in order to obtain an exact copy, he would sit in a basket, which had been suspended between two scaffolds parallel to the inscription. While he was carrying out this operation, his friend, Maulana Sahbai, would grow quite pale from fear.³

From this programme of fieldwork emerged Sayyid Ahmad Khan's first major publication in 1847, the *Asar-ul-Sanadid: Imarat-i-Dihli ki Mustanad Tarikh* ('Great Monuments: An Authentic History of the Buildings of Delhi'), a fairly comprehensive description of Delhi's architecture, and the first of its kind. A runaway success, the book was much admired by the Royal Asiatic Society when Arthur Roberts (1818-68), magistrate of Shahjahanabad and collector, brought the newly-published text to the Society's attention within a year or two of its publication. Colonel Saxon, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, then proposed that Roberts should produce an English translation of the text. Before an English translation could be made, however, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's prospective British patrons required him to re-write his study, adding more descriptions into its corpus and restructuring the text. The most noticeable change of all, however, was that which was eventually made to the language in which the text was written. The first edition's ornate, flowery Urdu, replete with Persian expressions, reflected the typical education of an Indian Muslim of the time, inasmuch as it bore the imprint of the vocabulary and prose style of classical Persian literature, as well as being indebted to older works of history, such as the official account of Akbar's government, the *A'in-i Akbari* ('Institutes of Akbar'), written by the Mughal ruler's advisor Abu'l-Fazl 'Allami (1551-1602). The second edition of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's text (published in 1854), however, indicates the transformation of Urdu into a language of straightforward vernacular prose, a process that began in the early nineteenth century and was heavily influenced by British interests.⁴ In the editing and

³ Altaf Husain Hali, *Hayat-i-Javed*, tr. David J. Matthews, Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1994, 51.

⁴ Christian Troll has written on the various changes made to the *Asar* and speculated on their causes: Christian W. Troll, 'A Note on the Early Topographical Work of Sayyid Ahmad Khan: *Asar al-Sanadid*',

reformatting of the text, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was aided by Roberts as well as Edward Thomas (1813-86), a Delhi sessions judge and a well-known numismatist.

The end result of this transformation was the publication in 1854 of an encyclopaedic text on Delhi's architectural history.⁵ This second edition of the *Asar* includes four categories of information: (i) a general history of Indian civilization, (ii) the settling of cities and the construction of forts on the geographic site of Delhi (nineteen entries), (iii) the buildings of Delhi (134 in total), and (iv) illustrative prints of inscriptions on Delhi monuments, produced specifically for the publication. Though Roberts did indeed then begin a translation of the 1854 edition into English, with the aid of Thomas, only a few pages were ever translated⁶ and the *Asar* was soon subsumed by similar texts in English that appeared shortly thereafter.⁷ Some of these texts were greatly indebted to Sayyid Ahmad Khan's seminal work, ultimately rendering a complete English translation unnecessary.⁸ In addition, the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861 under the directorship of Alexander Cunningham (1814-93) supplanted the need for such a text by embarking upon a systematic process of locating and documenting all historic sites in India and publishing yearly reports.

The vast expansion of subject matter in the 1854 edition presented a multi-layered historical panorama of the city and created a publication that is notable as the earliest comprehensive record of Delhi's extant architecture. For this reason alone the text is immensely valuable, as Delhi has witnessed considerable decay and

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2, 1972, 135-46. For more on the development of Urdu in the nineteenth century, see Aziz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969, 91-126, and Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, 294-336.

⁵ Troll lists a further third and fourth editions published in 1876 (Lucknow: Newal Kishore Press) and 1904 (Cawnpore: The Nami Press) respectively, which are not significantly different from the earlier editions, as well as two reprints: Khalid Nasir Hashmi, ed., New Delhi: Central Book Depot, 1965, and S. Moinul Haq, ed., Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1966. See Troll, 'Early Topographical Work', 136-7 (footnote no. 6). To my knowledge, there has been only one further reprint of the text, a three-volume text with extended commentary: Khaliq Anjum, ed., New Delhi: National Council for the Advancement of the Urdu Language, Govt. of India, 2003. This last reprint is the one I have used for translation in the present article. There is an abridged translation of the text in English by R. Nath but he does not provide a literal translation of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's text, instead correcting inaccurate information in the original text. Furthermore, Nath's translations primarily focus on the Islamic architecture described by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, only referring to other monuments (such as the Ashokan pillar or the Observatory) in appendices: see R. Nath, *Monuments of Delhi: Historical Study*, New Delhi: Ambika, 1979.

⁶ These are available in their unfinished form in the 2003 edition, 183-90.

⁷ These texts include Stephen Carr, *The Archaeological and Monumental Remains of Delhi, Ludhiana and Calcutta*, Ludhiana: Mission press; Calcutta: Messrs. Thacker, Spink & Co., 1876 and Zafar Hasan, *List of Hindu and Mohammadan Architecture of Delhi Province*, Delhi, 1916-9 (reprint: Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1997). The latter is perhaps the most encyclopaedic, surveying over 1,200 structures.

⁸ A translation in French of the second and third sections of the *Asar* did appear a few years later as a series of articles: J.H. Garcin de Tassy, 'Description des monuments de Delhi en 1852, d'après le texte Hindoustani de Saiyid Ahmad Khan', *Journal Asiatique*, 15, 1860, 508-36; 16, 1860, 190-254, 392-451, 521-43; 18, 1861, 77-97.

significant loss of its heritage since the writing of the *Asar* – a process which began only three years after the 1854 publication. In 1857, following the War of Independence and the formal colonization of India, a number of structures recorded in the *Asar* were demolished, including significant portions of the Red Fort in Delhi.⁹ Moreover, by surveying Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu monuments alike, in an Indian language which was widely socially accessible, the text was revolutionary. From a twenty-first century perspective, the *Asar* serves as an aid to contemporary critical deconstruction of nineteenth-century Indian historiography and as an advocate for the inclusion of local historians in recording and critically examining India's past. Including such complex voices will allow us to move beyond a mode of thinking in binary oppositions (in this case, the Indian Self versus the British Other) and present a more realistic picture of the period in question.

To this end, a representative sample of sections of the text have here been translated from their original Urdu into English. The six passages in question are (i) [Introduction to] the building of the forts and cities of Delhi; (ii) Ashoka's Pillar; (iii) Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque; (iv) Qutb Minar; (v) Jahan Numaya Mosque (Friday Mosque of Delhi); and (vi) Jantar Mantar (Observatory). The first of these sections is presented here in order to establish Sayyid Ahmad Khan's historical framework for the examination of Delhi's monuments. The following descriptions of specific structures have been chosen because they are the longest descriptions within the text and constitute a diachronic selection of sites, thus allowing them to stand as representatives of the text's holistic approach to Delhi.¹⁰ It should be noted that the majority of the buildings described in the text are furnished with few details save for their location and date of construction.

This translation attempts to faithfully reproduce excerpts from Sayyid Ahmad Khan's 1854 text in terms of both the information recorded and the tone of his writing, seeking to provide as clear a reading of the original document as possible and to demonstrate the formidable difficulties that would be faced in the production of a full and accurate translation of the complete text. The *Asar-ul-Sanadid* is not an easy work to translate; it was written at a time when vernacular Urdu was still undergoing a very active process of development and is, as a consequence, full of curious turns of phrase. At points the meaning of the text is unclear and in these instances the act of translation has been forced to generate hypotheses about the intended meaning. Furthermore, Urdu has little in the way of punctuation, with only one form of comma and a dash to indicate the end of a sentence. Even these are recent additions to the language. The *Asar*, being a relatively early example of Urdu non-fiction, thus has a very simple grammatical

⁹ S.M. Azizuddin Husain, 'Sir Syed's *Asarus Sanadid: A Historical Review, 1846 to 2006*', in Shahabuddin Iraqi, ed., *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: Vision and Mission*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2008, 31-51.

¹⁰ As Christopher Bayly notes: '... Sayyid Ahmad's description of Delhi displays similar affection for the Hindu and Jain temples which had arisen in the city'. See Christopher Bayly, 'The Indian Ecumene: An Indigenous Public Sphere', in David Finkstein and Alastair McCleery, eds, *The Book History Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 177.

structure, which I have tried to replicate. There are also a few instances within the Urdu text where long series of synonyms are used to praise monuments: on occasion these have been shortened in the translation because of the limitations of the English language. All of these changes and adjustments are indicated in the translation through footnotes marked (FQ) to differentiate them from the text's original footnotes.

TRANSLATION OF THE *ASAR-UL-SANADID*¹¹

(I) An account of the building of forts and settling of cities in Delhi

Greek philosophers divided the world into seven parts, classifying each part as a separate region. Each region begins at the horizon line and ends at the outer limits of the north.¹² According to the Greek system, Delhi is in the third region. The length of the land is 114 *darjay* and 38 *daqiqay* and the width from the horizon is 18 *darjay* and 15 *daqiqay*. The longest day here lasts for thirteen hours and fifty minutes. English¹³ geography divides the world into four parts.¹⁴ According to this system Delhi is in *Ashbah* [Asia?] and is specifically located in Hindustan. Hindustan has been further divided into three parts and Delhi is in middle Hindustan. The length of Hindustan, as calculated in London by English experts [geographers?] is 20 *darjay* less than the Greek system. Apart from this discrepancy, the rest of the calculations are the same. This city is very old. The rajas of the city have sometimes governed on behalf of the kings of Persia, or Kamao, or Kanauj, or Deccan or have ruled as independent heads of state. Delhi, from its inception, has been the capital of rajas and/or kings, save for eight periods when Delhi was not the centre [of power] for an empire.¹⁵ The first time was when Raja Jadhashr laid siege upon Raja Jarjodhan, who fled to Histnapur and for seven generations ruled from there. When Nami, known as Raja Dustwan, became the raja of Delhi, the banks of the Ganges rose so much that the city of Histnapur was flooded and swept away. The ruler then established a city along the banks of the river Kushki in the Deccan region but eventually returned to Delhi and

¹¹ Notes: As stated above, all footnotes given in the translated excerpts that follow are those noted in the 1854 second edition of the *Asar-ul-Sanadid* by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, with the exception of the notes that are followed by '(FQ)', indicating the present author's notes to this English translation. Square brackets in the main body of the text are interpolations by the present author to indicate a possible interpretation. Where Sayyid Ahmad Khan's footnotes read 'see inscription no.', they refer to images of inscriptions made to accompany the 1854 edition. The footnotes with italicized titles are also from the 1854 text, referring readers to the source of the *Asar's* information. All transliteration in this translation follows the Urdu pronunciation used in *Asar-ul-Sanadid*.

¹² *A'in-i Akbari*.

¹³ *Jughraafia*.

¹⁴ 'English geography' presumably refers to the system and rules of modern geography followed in Britain at the time (FQ).

¹⁵ *Mahabharat*.

made it the capital.¹⁶ The second period was when Raja Bikramjait [Vikramjait] of Ujjain was victorious over Raja Bhagwant and seized the city but kept Ujjain as the capital, leaving a governor in Delhi. It was in the Jogi period that central authority returned to Delhi. The third period occurred when Rai Pithaura built the Ajmer Fort and moved the capital there, leaving his brother, Khaande Rao, as the governor. The fourth period was in 587 AH (1191 AD),¹⁷ when, after his conquest, Sultan Shahabuddin returned to Ghazni¹⁸ and appointed Qutbuddin Aibak, the commander-in-chief, as governor of Delhi. The fifth¹⁹ period was in 737 AH (1336 AD), when Sultan Muhammad Tughluq Shah felt the capital should be in a more central location within the empire. Thus, he moved the capital from Delhi to Qutbabad (Diyogar). Tughluq changed the name of the city from Qutbabad to Daulatabad. This king was very bloodthirsty and cruel, and he gave orders that all inhabitants of Delhi were required to move to the new capital. His rule was so strict that no one managed to remain in Delhi following the forced move. The helpless citizens of Delhi left the city and it was completely abandoned and empty. Wild animals began inhabiting the city, day and night. Diyogar (Daulatabad), however, was too far from Mughal lands, and in 742 AH (1341 AD), the sultan returned to Delhi and gave his subjects the choice between going back to Delhi or staying in Daulatabad. And thus, Delhi was once again populated. This unfortunate incident in the history of Delhi is very famous and perhaps there is no other city that has been left abandoned in such a manner. The sixth²⁰ period was when Sultan Sikandar Lodhi made plans to take Gwalior and moved his capital to Agra. At this time there was already a fortress in Akbarabad. After destroying the original fort, the king, Jalaluddin Akbar, built another one on top and, eventually, his son Sultan Ibrahim²¹ also maintained it as the royal residence. When the Mughal emperor, Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar, defeated Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi, the capital was still based in Agra. After this event the king, Humayun, first kept the capital in Agra but later moved it to Delhi. The seventh time was when Jalaluddin Akbar Shah built a fort in Agra and established a city, Akbarabad, there and proclaimed it the new capital, leaving a governor in Delhi. This remained the capital when Jahangir was king, moving back to Delhi when Shah Jahan ascended to the throne. The eighth period is the current one in which General Lake took Delhi from Shah *Jum Jah Jaarj* [Jim J. George?] under the Siom treaty in September 1803 AD.²² The dynasty came to an end and power was transferred to London. The city has remained populated during the

¹⁶ *Khulaasata al Tawarikh o Rajawaali*.

¹⁷ Different dating systems are cited by Sayyid Ahmad Khan: he generally uses the Hijri calendar first, and notes other relevant dates – the Gregorian calendar, Hindu dating, and so forth – later. All dates are those noted in the original text (FQ).

¹⁸ *Taj Almaasir*.

¹⁹ *Tarikh-i Farishta*.

²⁰ *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*.

²¹ *Akbarnama*.

²² In 1803 the Battle of Delhi took place during the Second Anglo-Maratha War between the British troops, under General Lake, and the Marathas of Scindia's army, under the French General Louis Bourquin (FQ).

times of Hindus and Muslims. From the location selected by Shah Jahan for his city fourteen miles south of the city, there are ruins of cities and buildings dotted all over the landscape. Looking at these structures, it is clear that rajas and emperors were very active in building new forts and establishing cities in order to gain fame. Some of these settlements continue to be inhabited, while others have been abandoned. Apart from the rulers, private wealthy citizens also built recreational buildings and tombs, some of which still exist today. For this reason, I shall first address the topic of the history of construction of forts and cities.

(II) Lath Ashoka or Minar-e-Zaria or Lath Ferozshahi

This pillar is constructed of stone, many believe it is *korand* stone, and it is constructed very neatly. There used to be five more pillars like this one, located in Radhiya, Mahta, Allahabad, the Meerat district, and Nawhra village. The king, Ashoka, also known as Biyasi, constructed all five of these pillars. Hence, there are two inscriptions upon this pillar. The first is in the name of this king. The language of this inscription is Paali and Sanskrit²³ and the letters are of a very old script, which predates the Devanagiri script. The proclamation includes teachings of the Buddha, commands to do no harm to others and not to practise laws of retaliation and corporal punishment upon criminals. This inscription had not been understood prior to now, Ferozshah²⁴ had gathered many pundits, but they too were unable to decipher the language, and now Mr James Prinsep has read and translated the text.²⁵ It is said²⁶ that Raja Ashoka was the grandson of Chandra Gupta,²⁷ that he was the governor of Ujjain, and was enthroned in about 325 BC. This pillar was built in the twenty-seventh regnal year or 298 BC. According to the Persian dating system, it would seem that this king was actually the king of Kashmir, and his laws governed all of Hindustan. In this period, matters of religion were debated [altered?], which angered the public, and the king was driven out from his empire. The religious views on the pillar provide some evidence for the theory that Ashoka was the king of Kashmir. Using the Persian dating system, it would place the reign of Ashoka starting around 1373 BC, but I believe the first date is correct. The second inscription²⁸ upon the pillar contains the name of Baildeo Chauhan.²⁹ He was initially the king of Sanbhar, where the Chauhans are from originally. By waging

²³ See inscription no. 2.

²⁴ *Haft Aqleem*.

²⁵ James Prinsep (1799-1841) was a renowned numismatist and philologist, who became the secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. His most notable scholarly contribution was the groundbreaking translation of the Paali script as it appeared on the Asokan pillars, which led to the discovery of Mauryan India (FQ).

²⁶ *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, Shams Siraj ud din Afif*.

²⁷ Archaeological Society of Bengal, book no. 6, p. 566, volume 209, p. 791, and Royal Asiatic Society, book 6, p. 469.

²⁸ *A'in-i Akbari and Tarikh-i Kashmiri*.

²⁹ Nath writes Baildeo as Bisaldeva, which is not how Sayyid Ahmad Khan spells it (FQ).

war against the rulers of Delhi, he conquered the land. Rai Pithaura, during his rule, which was 1220 Simt (1163 AD), had the proclamation of his victory inscribed upon the pillar. The letters of this inscription are in the Devanagiri script and it is in the Sanskrit language. The sentences of this edict are easily read. The text praises Baildeo, listing his attributes, and claiming that his rule brought peace to Hindustan. During the time when Ferozshah went to Thatta to build a fortress and, from there, made his way to Delhi, that is, about 770 AH (1368 AD), the pillar was in the village Nawhra, subdivision Salura, district Khizrabad,³⁰ which is located towards the mountains, about ninety *kos* from Delhi. At this time, it was thought that the pillar was the stick used by Bhim to graze his cattle.³¹ Ferozshah made the decision to uproot the pillar from its original location and had it moved to Delhi so that it would be remembered for a long time. With this plan, men from the surrounding villages and towns were gathered and bales of cotton were used to pad the pillar and digging began to uncover the foundations. When the entire structure was uncovered, the column tilted and came to rest on the cotton. The bales were then carefully removed one by one to bring the column down onto the ground.³² At the column's root was a large square rock upon which the pillar rested. This rock was also removed, and once the entire structure was unearthed, it was wrapped in rawhide to prevent any harm in the move. A wagon of forty-two wheels was constructed to move the pillar, and a large group of men tied ropes around the column to lift it up and place it onto the wagon and then tied the ropes firmly to the wheels. Two hundred men pulled these ropes in order to move the wagon. Thousands of men toiled to move the column to the edge of the river, which flowed beside Nawhra village, where many boats were tied together and the pillar was lifted onto them and then taken on the river to Ferozabad and finally brought to the Ferozshah fort where it was brought near the mosque and a three storey structure [scaffold?] was built. As each level came up, the pillar was placed atop it and then work on the next level was begun. Completion of the next level restarted the same cycle and, thus, all three levels were built. When the pillar had to be raised, thick ropes were tied at one end to the pillar, and wound around circular posts embedded firmly in the ground on the other end. Many men collectively twisted the posts with great force to lift the pillar even half a yard. Once the pillar had lifted a bit, sticks would be placed underneath with cotton bales for padding. Raising the pillar to its full height using this process took quite a few days and the same square rock was placed underneath the column, with the spaces filled with rocks and limestone to strengthen the foundation. White and black marble were used at the top to create a beautiful turret,³³ a copper finial plated with gold was placed on top, which gave the structure the name of *Minarah-e-Zarrin*. It is unfortunate that neither the towers nor

³⁰ *Khulaastha al-Tawarikh*.

³¹ Bhim is a Hindu mythological character from the *Mahabharata*, one of the sons of Pandu (FQ).

³² *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, Shams Siraj Afif*.

³³ *Burj* is the term used here, but Nath calls it a kiosk (FQ).

the finial exist anymore, in fact, even the tip of the pillar has broken off. Many say the damage was caused by lightning or by bombs. The length of the pillar is thirty-two feet, with eight yards sunk in the building and twenty-four yards rising above it.

(III) Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque site

Rai Pathaur Temple

Near the Rai Pathaur fort, there was a very famous temple. On all four sides of the temple were built two-aisle, three-aisle, and four-aisle deep courtyards. In the centre of the temple, there was a courtyard with doorways in the northern, southern and eastern sections and an idol placed on the western section. In this same manner, the external courtyards were built for circumambulation. This temple was built at the same time as the fort, hence can be dated to 1200 years after the reign of Raja Bikramjait [Vikramjait]³⁴ (1143 AD/538 AH). The structure of this temple is very unusual and the work of the master lapidaries is of such high quality as cannot be replicated. On each stone there is inlay work of such beautiful flowers and marvellous carved vegetal motifs so fine that no description of them can be adequate. In every place, on lintels, ceilings and columns, there are images of gods and bell-and-chain [*ghantamala*] motifs. The eastern and northern sections of this temple have remained intact. The iron column, which is a symbol of the Vaishnavis [followers of Vishnu], and the numerous idols of Krishan Atar, Mahadevi, Ganesh, and Hanuman, testify to this being a Vaishnavi temple. Consequently, during the Muslim period, all the idols were destroyed. Despite the destruction, close inspection of the remains reveals the identity of each statue. In my opinion, apart from these courtyards, there was also a building made of red stone in this compound, which was destroyed. Remains of red bricks among the rubble of the destroyed idols provide evidence for such a building.³⁵

Adena Delhi Mosque or Mosque Jamiye or Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque

In 587 AH (1191 AD/1248 years since the reign of Raja Bikramjait [Vikramjait]), Qutbuddin Aibak, who was the commander of the army of Mu'izzuddin Muhammad bin Sam commonly called Sultan Shahabuddin Ghauri, conquered Delhi, and converted the aforementioned temple into a mosque. They took away all the idols from the temple, and wherever idols were depicted upon walls, doorways, and columns, they either completely destroyed them or wiped out their faces. They, however, left the building intact and the effects of twenty-seven temples, which were worth 54,000,000 Dehliwals,³⁶ were used in the construction of this mosque,

³⁴ *Khulaastha al-Tawarikh*.

³⁵ *Taj Almaasir*.

³⁶ *Dehliwaal* being the coinage of the period (FQ).

and a plaque with the date of Delhi's conquest by Qutbuddin Aibak was placed above the eastern gate.³⁷

Construction by Sultan Mu'izzuddin

After Qutbuddin Aibak returned to Ghazni after conquering Ajmer, Ranthambor Fort and Naharwala [modern-day Gujrat],³⁸ Sultan Mu'izzuddin gave the order that the temple be converted into a mosque. When Aibak returned from Ghazni in 592 AH (1195 AD), following the king's orders, he had a red stone mosque constructed with five arches on the western façade of the site and the date of construction was inscribed upon the northern door.³⁹ In 594 AH (1197 AD), the mosque was completed. This date is inscribed on the left jamb of the central arch.⁴⁰ Among the five arches, the four outer ones are approximately twenty-eight feet high and the central arch is about forty-eight feet high and twenty-one feet wide. The arches are decorated with inlay of great intricacy, and an immense variety of vegetal motifs. There are carved inscriptions of Qur'anic verses and Hadith on all arches; when the mosque was completed, gilded pinnacles were placed onto the roof.⁴¹ Stones from the temple have been used in the arches as well. Where one of the outer stones of the middle arch has fallen, the interior side of a stone can be seen with depictions of an idol. Using a telescope, the idol can be seen quite clearly. In the time of Sultan Mu'izzuddin and Qutbuddin Aibak, the covered area measured fifty by seventy-two yards. Ibn Abul-Ma'ali was designated the custodian of the mosque and his name is inscribed upon one of the pillars of the western courtyard.

Construction by Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash

In later years, Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash wished to expand this mosque, and in 627 AH (1229 AD), three arches were added to the southern and northern sides of the mosque, extending it all the way to the outer courtyard of the Rai Pathaur temple. These arches are of a very finely constructed red stone with Qur'anic verses inscribed upon them in Kufic and *naskh* calligraphic styles, and decorated with exquisite vegetal motifs. The date of construction has been inscribed upon the left side of the central arch of the southern extension.⁴² Some of the arches have been damaged and, in the case of one northern arch, the entire structure has collapsed onto the street. In 631 AH (1233 AD), when Sultan Shamsuddin had conquered Malwa and Ujjain, the Mahakal Temple was destroyed and the idols as well as the image of Raja Bikramjait [Vikramjait] were brought to Delhi and placed at the entrance of this mosque.⁴³ The arches added by Shamsuddin Altamash on the

³⁷ See inscription numbers 3 and 4.

³⁸ *Tarikh-i Farishta & Taj Almaasir*.

³⁹ See inscription no. 5.

⁴⁰ See inscription no. 6.

⁴¹ *Taj Almaasir*.

⁴² See inscription no. 8.

⁴³ *Tarikh-i Farishta*.

southern and northern extensions are thirty-seven yards one foot high, and the central arch is eight yards wide. The southern section is contiguous with the original temple courtyard, which when added to the mosque make the total covered area 132 yards and nine feet in length.

(IV) Qutb Minar

The eminence, the exaltation and the beauty of this monument cannot be described. The fact is that this monument is such that there is no comparison for it here on earth. It is said that if one stands beneath the pillar and looks to the skies, hats and turbans have to be removed in order to see [otherwise they fall off, presumably]. When looking down from the top of the column, people on the ground seem very small, and seeing tiny men, small elephants and horses, is very odd. In the same way, those on the ground see the people on top as miniscule, and it seems as if they are angels descending from the heavens. Thus, this pillar is from a miraculous time.⁴⁴ As well as its elevation and magnitude, the structure is also very beautiful and finely wrought. One cannot help but be forced to gaze at the pillar. The lowest section of the *minar* is decorated with alternating circular and square engaged columns, the second section is entirely comprised of spherical engaged columns, the third is entirely square engaged columns, with the highest two sections being completely round. The structure is made entirely of red stone, except the fourth level where white marble is also employed. There is inlay work and painting everywhere of such splendour that each carved vine is interwoven endlessly with many others, and even the smallest flowers and branches have been created by dozens of scattered hints of colour, all these elements creating a monument that is of great interest. It is often thought by Muslims that Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash constructed the column and this information is often seen in history books and on the epitaph of Sikandar Bahlul on the entrance.⁴⁵ In some history books, the monument is identified as a mosque's minaret⁴⁶ and in some as Sultan Mu'izzuddin's pillar.⁴⁷ It cannot be a minaret because the column's door is north-facing similar to Hindu temples, while the doors of minarets are always east facing. It is known that the pillar begun by Sultan Alauddin had an east-facing door and, as is common in Muslim construction, was located on a plinth. This is unlike the Hindus who do not use plinths, a feature also missing from this monument. The structure's first level also shows evidence of stones being placed at a later stage and there is evidence of the bell-and-chain motif of Hindu temples on the first floor. Additionally, the inscription on this pillar is similar to that of Qutbuddin Aibak and Mu'izzuddin's conquest on the converted temple-mosque. From these various facts, it can be argued that the first floor is

⁴⁴ The phrase used is *ajajib rozgar*, which can mean 'a wondrous/fantastical/miraculous age' (FQ).

⁴⁵ *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi, Shams Siraj Afif.*

⁴⁶ *Taqvim ul Baladan.*

⁴⁷ *Fatuhah-i Firoz Shahi.*

Hindu in origin. There is nothing odd in the fact that epitaphs have been inscribed where idols once were. It has become legendary that stones bearing praises of the king, Rai Pathaura, were replaced with inscriptions of the names of [Muslim rulers?] kings and Qur'anic verses. This belief has helped in continuing the belief that Rai Pathaura, apart from the fort and temple, also built this pillar 1200 years hence from Raja Bikramjait [Vikramjait] (538 AH/1143 AD). This may be true because Rai Pathaura's daughter was a sun worshipper, and Hindus believe that the Jamna river is the daughter of the sun, which is why visiting the Jamna is considered an important obligation.⁴⁸ From this point of view, the pillar was first constructed as a location from which the worship of the Jamna could occur. In 587 AH (1191 AD), when the Muslims conquered the temple, they added their own epigraphs upon the building,⁴⁹ and named Fazl ibn Abul-Ma'ali the caretaker, inscribing his name near the entrance.⁵⁰ The monument was raised higher at the same time that Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash expanded the mosque by adding three additional arches to two sides, that is, in 627 AH (1229 AD). The expansion is documented in inscriptions on the wall.⁵¹ Since then, the column has been called a minaret, with inscriptions on every level referring to this identification,⁵² including those of the call to prayer, and naming the architect of the expansion. Today there are five sets of ruins of this structure, but there is also no doubt that, as is legendary, there were once seven storeys, and the column was also well-known as *minarah-e-haft-manzari* [minaret of seven views]. Now where there is a railing, there once were crenellations, like those on ramparts. On the fifth level, there were doors on all four sides, and on top of that, a *chattri* was placed to form the seventh level. Firoz Shah built the seventh level in 770 AH (1368 AD). He writes that at the time of construction,⁵³ he had the column's height raised from the existing level, and had the construction information inscribed upon a door on the fifth level.⁵⁴ After this, the column was damaged again. In 909 AH (1503 AD), during the reign of Sikandar Bahlul, Fateh Khan also had some work done on the structure, and had the construction status inscribed above the entrance to the column.⁵⁵ It is famous that in 1197 AH (1782 AD), due to a severe dust storm and earthquake, the uppermost levels fell to the ground. Stones from the original construction also fell and, in some places, cracked. In 1829 AD (1245 AH), Captain Smith, under the orders of the British Government, restored the entire column.⁵⁶ He replaced the crenellations with stone railings, and a beautiful brass railing on the

⁴⁸ The word used is '*darshan*' (FQ).

⁴⁹ See inscription no. 9.

⁵⁰ See inscription no. 10.

⁵¹ See inscription no. 11.

⁵² See inscription no. 12.

⁵³ *Fatihat-i Firoz Shahi*.

⁵⁴ See inscription no. 13.

⁵⁵ See inscription no. 14.

⁵⁶ There are multiple references in contemporary sources to an engineer by the name of Smith, about whom very little is known. This may have been the same Captain Smith who discovered the Ajanta caves in 1819, but as yet that is impossible to prove (FQ).

fifth level. The sixth level was replaced with a beautiful stone *burj* with eight windows, and the seventh level was cut away to place a wooden *burj* topped by a standard. Unfortunately, neither of these towers remained intact. The stone *burj* was taken down from the column and placed on the ground below, and the wooden *burj* no longer exists. It is a pity that at the time of this construction, the epitaphs on the fallen stones were incorrectly repaired. Often, the shape of letters has been made out, but close inspection reveals that they are incorrect, in some cases just imitations of alphabets, and in other cases words which have little to do with the subject of the inscription. Until today, the inscriptions of this monument had not been read. I have read all of them with the aid of a telescope. The height of the first column is thirty-two yards, some inches, the second, seventeen yards, some inches, the third, thirteen yards, and the fourth, eight and one quarter yards. The total length of the existing five levels is almost eighty yards, and that of the stone *burj* constructed by the English, which then was lowered to the ground, is six yards. With all the missing elements, the complete structure would have been one hundred yards. This is the height the column was believed to have attained when it had seven complete levels. The circumference of the column on the ground is fifty yards, which then tapers at the top to a circumference of ten yards. The monument is completely empty on the inside, with only stairways circling anti-clockwise along the walls. The first level has 156 stairs, the second, seventy-eight stairs, the third, sixty-two stairs, the fourth, forty-one stairs, and the fifth also has forty-one stairs, so that the total number of stairs comes to 378 stairs. It seems as if there have always been this many stairs, since there was no way to reach the two uppermost levels.

(V) Jahan Numaya Mosque, Friday Mosque

This supreme place of worship, this mosque is about a thousand yards away from Shahjahanabad towards the west, on a small hill, built in such a manner that the hill has been completely hidden by the building. The king, Shahabuddin Muhammad Shah Jahan, constructed the mosque with a delicacy and beauty that is beyond description. There is no man with the ability to describe this monument. As well built and beautiful a mosque does not exist upon this earth. The entire structure is built of red stone with inlay work in white and black marble, and white marble in the interior. All the domes are made from white marble, with lines of black marble. A highly skilled architect built this mosque, where every door, wall, arch, niche, and decoration is filled with careful detail.⁵⁷ The foundations of the mosque were laid on 10 Shawwal 1060 AH (1650 AD), the twenty-fourth regnal year, under the supervision of *wazir* [Minister] Saadullah Khan and *khan-i-samaan* [head of stores] Faazil Khan, and every day five thousand masons, labourers, diggers, and stonecutters worked on the site. Despite this, it took six years to complete the mosque and a total of one million [ten *lakh*] rupees were spent. The building has

⁵⁷ The Urdu ends with a double negative: '... not absent of detail' which I have rearranged (FQ).

three domes of great beauty. The mosque measures ninety yards in length and twenty yards in width. The *qibla* wall has seven niches, and on the outside, facing the courtyard are eleven arches. One arch is very high, flanked by five arches on each side. All the arches are inscribed using black marble for inlay; the central arch has a tughra, '*ya haadi*' ['O Guide!'], on it, and the remaining arches bear an epitaph with praises to Shah Jahan, the date of construction and the details of expenditure.⁵⁸ On both sides of the arcade are extremely tall and stately minarets, which have attached stairs to reach the top. The minarets are crowned by *chattris* with twelve windows, which are superb. From the top of the minarets, the entire city can be seen. The view of the city resembles a bowl, and trees and homes animate the scene. The northern minaret has fallen due to lightning and, along with the flooring of the courtyard, both of red stone, has suffered damage in various sections. In 1233 AH (1817 AD), the English, during the reign of Akbar Shah, restored the minaret and the flooring. Thanks to God's blessings, the mosque is able to accommodate such a large number of worshippers that they resemble ants and many cannot hear the voice of the *imam*. Hence, Prince Mirza Salim, son of King Mo'inuddin Muhammad Akbar Shah, had a magnificent raised platform of stone constructed in the middle of the central arch in 1245 AH (1829 AD), so that a *mukabbir* could stand upon it and deliver the call to prayer and other sections recited aloud so that they would resound in the ears of all present. All the floors in the mosque are white marble with black marble inlay demarcating individual prayer spaces. The minbar is made of white marble and is of such beauty that it cannot be described adequately. In the northern section's verandah, there are housed some holy relics of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). This area is known as the *Maqaam Dargah Asar-ul-Sharif* [shrine of sacred relics]. The verandah is very beautiful and pleasant. The courtyard is 136 square yards in area, and in the centre is an exquisite⁵⁹ marble ablution tank, fifteen yards long by twelve yards wide, and in its centre is a fountain, which operates every Friday, on Eid, and on other holidays. At the southern section of the pool, in 1180 AH (1766 AD), Muhammad Tahseen Khan *Muhli Badshah* [royal eunuch] had a small stone railing constructed, proclaiming that he had dreamt of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sitting in that location. On all four sides of the mosque's courtyards are built beautiful *iwans* leading into verandahs, pleasant rooms, and buildings, and on all four corners are towers of great interest, which have provided liveliness and light in the mosque. In the southern and eastern courtyards are clocks to indicate prayer times. The mosque has three fine brass-plated doors.

Southern Door, Friday Mosque

The elegant southern doorway of the Friday Mosque is located near the Chitli-Qabr Market. There are habitable rooms above the doors and a stairway of thirty-three

⁵⁸ See inscription no. 42.

⁵⁹ There are actually four synonyms for 'beautiful' given in the original, which have been elided from this translation (FQ).

steps. At the third turning of the stairs, there is a public space, and small business vendors set up their stalls, selling all manners of things, including *faluda* [traditional South Asian dessert] vendors, who sell sugarcane juice and multi-coloured *faluda* at their stalls. Many varieties of *kebabs* are made; their scent can cause a passer-by to fall into a deep longing for the *kebabs*. A variety of odd animals and poultry of good stock is sold here and angel-faced youths congregate here on the [Persian – *naurowz*] New Year, and even the sky is envious of their magnificence and their wiles. Old friends, and youths, step out in a feeling of camaraderie to enjoy and celebrate.

Northern Door, Friday Mosque

The northern doorway of the mosque is by the Paiye-Wale Market. This door is also very beautiful, and also has habitable rooms constructed above the doors, a stairway of thirty-nine steps. Here too are located *kebab* stands and grocery stands, but the big spectacle comes from the showmen⁶⁰ and the storytellers. At the third turning, a storyteller sits with his carpet spread on the floor, and recounts the tale of Amir Hamza. In other places, the stories of Hathim Tai and the *Bustan-e-Khiyal* are recited, and everywhere there are men clustered, listening to the tales. At one side, the showmen perform and magicians perform tricks, making the old look young and the young look old.

Eastern Door, Friday Mosque

The eastern doorway is located by the Khas Market. The doorway is very large. There are buildings built upon the doors. In front of the doors are thirty-five stairs. Every day there is heavy traffic on these stairs. This *mêlée* is like a festival every day in Shahjahanabad. A thousand different types of fabric are displayed upon lines and, in unusual and wonderful ways, the walls seem like gardens in bloom. Young men of passionate temperament wander with all kinds of animals in cages, and their beautiful sounds can be heard everywhere. At one side, a birdman sells pigeons, and on another side, a horseman stands with horses. Customers wander through the markets in groups and, after examining the wares, purchase them.

(VI) Jantar Mantar⁶¹

'Jantar' means 'tools' and refers specifically to 'tools for stargazing' here, and 'mantar' is a meaningless word that is attached to the real word in conversation, like

⁶⁰ Referring to jugglers, trained monkeys, snake charmers, and so forth (FQ).

⁶¹ The awkward construction of the Observatory section is notable: these passages do not read as smoothly as do the other descriptions. The contrast with other portions of the text may indicate that the fault lies with Sayyid Ahmad Khan's difficulties in grasping the technical aspects of the observatory instruments. The fact that the Observatory was in ruins and no longer functioning probably meant that he had to rely on accounts of nearby inhabitants in the absence of written sources, which might also explain some of the idiosyncracies of this section (FQ).

khana wana.⁶² Thus, this is an observatory that was built by Raja Swami Jai Singh of Jaipur during the reign of Muhammad Shah in the seventh regnal year (1137 AH/1724 AD).⁶³ For accuracy in measurements, observatories were also constructed in Jaipur, Mitra, Banaras, and Ujjain. Most of the instruments in this observatory were made of limestone and other stones to prevent discrepancies in measurement. The observatory is now in a ruinous state. Most of the instruments have been destroyed and the measurement units on them have faded and none can be used for taking measurements today. Three stargazing instruments, made of limestone and rock, are still in the building in pieces.

1. Jai Prakash⁶⁴

This instrument is for the measurement of shadows, a pillar for the purpose of measurement has been placed on an upper level, around the horizontal circumference, a diameter of fifty-three feet, eight inches has been established and four levels have been constructed in the manner of a well, one level is below the ground, and three raised above the ground. The wall has been divided into sixty sections. Windows have been carved out in the shape of a niche and have been alternately left open and filled in. Along the inner walls, *muqantarāt*⁶⁵ have been drawn with units for the measurement of degrees, and above, the *muqantarāt* of the circumference and horizon have all been divided.

2. Ram Jantar

This instrument is a raised platform; its breadth is oriented towards a northern direction with four arcs. Each arc has stairs running on both sides so that one may climb them and survey the effect of the shadows. Underneath the platform, two more arcs emerge. The measurement units for the equatorial horizon and the zodiac signs were recorded on each arc but they have been completely wiped out and the arcs are often broken.

3. Samrat Jantar

This building is actually a measuring device. A ramp has been laid out in the middle of an equatorial sundial of a radius of eighteen *gaz*; it is a fine structure made from limestone and rock. Measurement units have been marked out upon it. The ramp has stairs to allow people to reach the top and observe the shadows. Similarly stairs

⁶² *Khana* means food and *wana* has no meaning; the phrase is similar in construction to something like 'super-duper' (FQ).

⁶³ *Zaich Muhammad Shahi*.

⁶⁴ Sayyid Ahmad Khan seems to have some of the names of the instruments confused: Jai Prakash consists of two hemispheres sunk into the ground, Ram Jantar is a sundial, and Samrat Jantar is an equatorial sundial (FQ).

⁶⁵ *Muqantarāt* may refer to the walls radiating outward from the central pillar to the walls at equal intervals at the ground level. Garcin de Tassy's translation defines *muqantarāt* as traced or imagined circles parallel to the horizon (FQ).

have been constructed in each side of the sundial arcs. The units on this instrument have also been erased over time. Thus, in 1852 AD, the Raja of Jaipur handed over the renovation of the ramp to the Archaeological Society of Delhi, but repairs were not completed. Sawai Jai Singh himself invented these three instruments, which is why they have Hindi names.

Karah-i-Maqar

Below this observatory, two concave hemispheres have been placed such that the axis of the zodiac is incomplete in one and in the other. Thus, if one half is raised and placed upon the other, the sphere will be complete. There are twelve *kos* [arcs] made in the spheres. Six sections have been filled in and the other six are empty. There are signs of inscribed units, which are now erased, and perhaps there was once an axis, but that no longer exists. Every empty *kos* has stairs leading up to it so that they can be reached and the shadows can be observed. The diameter of these spheres is twenty-six feet, and they are constructed from limestone blocks.

This observatory is one where the English principles and rules of astronomy have been applied from its inception. In the past, Greek astronomy principles and their stargazing tools were used everywhere. Thus, the observatory is unique and well known among its peers. In the fourteenth regnal year of Muhammad Shah (1144 AH/1731 AD), Raja Sawai Jai Singh sent many mathematicians with Father Manuel to England and had telescopes ordered from there.⁶⁶ These men visited the English observatories. They brought the English stargazing instrument, known as Lear, and compared it to the Jantar Mantar instruments. The lunar calendar measurements of Lear differed by half a *darja* [minute] and during solar and lunar eclipses by a quarter *daqiqay* [equivalent to fifteen seconds]. From these accounts, it can be confirmed that the English were involved in this observatory. It explains why an observatory built according to Greek principles followed those of the English system. Those following the Greek system agitated at the acceptance of the different system and demanded that the new principles should be validated by rational proofs. The fact of the matter was that the calculations made according to this new system and what was observed corroborated with each other and the case to prove the new rules was set aside, perhaps forgotten. Now, at the Observatory, there are catalogues, which list the new principles that have been adopted which are contrary to those accepted in the Greek system:

1. The outer circumference of the centre of the Sun was accepted.
2. The movements of the moon around its circumference were to be recorded.
3. It was accepted that Venus and Mercury are lit, like the moon, by the Sun, and also wax and wane.
4. It was accepted that Saturn is not of a spherical shape, but of a pear-shape.

⁶⁶ Father Manuel was a Portugese Jesuit priest who was friends with the Raja. Further information on Manuel and Sawai Jai Singh can be found in V.N. Sharma, *Sawai Jai Singh and His Astronomy*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, 1995 (FQ).

5. Around Jupiter there are four celestial bodies, which have been designated as Jupiter's moons.
6. Various objects around the sun were identified and their behaviour observed, and it was determined that it took a *bars* for them to complete an orbit.
7. Many constellations have not been proven to be stars, and are often planets. The appearance of the new moon, and the visible and invisible constellations, their rising and setting do not need to be measured any longer, because the telescopes allow them to be observed during the day. Instruments for observation have been prepared according to the accepted Greek and English rules of astronomy. There is no doubt that the measurements recorded by the instruments are generally accurate. At the observatory, a new calendar was recorded which is known as Muhammad Shahi. It began on Monday, 1 Rabi-us-Saani 1131 AH (1718 AD) and this date has been recorded as the start of the Muhammad Shahi reign. The first regnal year actually started on 8 Rabi-us-Saani 1131 AH (1718 AD); after Jalaluddin Farrukh died, high-ranking officials placed the treasurer on the throne, after whom Muhammad Shah was crowned. Since they both ruled for only a few months, their rule was erased and the eight days of Rabi-us-Saani that had passed were invalidated and 1 Rabi-us-Saani was pronounced as the beginning of Muhammad Shah's reign. These dates are according to the lunar calendar with days and months following the lunar cycle, which the Hijri calendar is also based upon. The only difference is that the Hijri calendar begins with Muharram and the Muhammad Shahi begins with Rabi-us-Saani. Dates are calculated using instruments and recorded. At this point it is worth noting that on 1 July 1852 AD, the date is 14 Ramadan 138 Muhammad Shahi [calculated] or 12 Ramadan 138 Muhammad Shahi [lunar sighting].

Fatima Quraishi is currently Assistant Curator at the Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi. She has a Masters in History of Art from the University of Victoria (Canada) where she first studied the *Asar-ul-Sanadid*. She will be joining the PhD programme at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, in Autumn of 2012 to continue studying Indo-Islamic art history.

quraishi.fatima@gmail.com