The *rekhta* of architecture: the development of ‘Islamic’ art history in Urdu, c.1800-1950*

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**Introduction**

This essay offers a contribution to the ‘history of art history’ beyond—though not, as we will see, without—Europe.¹ The focus is on publications in Urdu, a major South Asian language that served as the chief lingua franca of colonial India at a time when it also became the main prose language of South Asian Muslims. This sense of dialogue between British and Indian scholars is important to establish from the outset. For not only did Urdu art historical writing develop through close engagements (and direct translations) of English (and occasionally French) works. The rise of Urdu as a language of learned prose and the introduction of printing were also outcomes of the cultural traffic of empire. Art history in Urdu was therefore part of a larger pattern of intellectual exchange that altered the ways in which Indian Muslims not only conceived their own past but also connected themselves to a shared heritage with Muslims elsewhere. The notion of a religiously defined ‘Islamic’ art history was crucial to this larger agenda that distinguished Urdu art history from nationalist formulations of ‘Indian’ art.²

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While the focus here will be on Urdu, we will also touch on Middle Eastern Arabic accounts of Islamic art from the same period, both as points of connection and comparison to developments in India. For as we will see, Urdu art history developed through dialogue with European, Indian nationalist, and Middle Eastern studies of art. The gradual outcome was the development of what was explicitly framed as an ‘Islamic’ (islami) art history in Urdu, a conception which was not merely the projection of European authors. Instead, the language was deliberately adopted by Indian Muslim authors to recover their distinct artistic heritage as Muslims in India and at the same time to link themselves to a wider ‘Islamic civilisation’, particularly in the Arab Middle East.³

Rather than describing these developments through the biological language of ‘hybridity’, to reflect the dual provenance of the new genre of Urdu architectural history this essay adopts a more literary label: the bilingual portmanteau ‘architectural rekhta’. Meaning ‘mixed’ or ‘blended’, rekhta was the name for Urdu before, in apt architectural metonymy, it was renamed after the Red Fort or Sublime Garrison (Urdu-e Mu’ala) in Delhi.⁴ This emic conceptual link between the palace of the last Mughal emperors and Urdu as its language points us from the outset to the importance of buildings for Indian Muslim authors who, in adapting the European genre of architectural history, were not mere colonised mimics. Rather, they selectively combined elements of European art historical practice with their own concerns and traditions to produce the ‘mixed’ new mode of historical writing we will call architectural rekhta.

Since the aim here is to chart the development of new Urdu genres in relation to European (and Middle Eastern) genres, it is important to provide clear parameters by defining what is meant by ‘architectural history’. For the purposes of this essay, then, architectural history refers to distinct texts, whether books or articles, primarily devoted to the discussion of buildings and their architectonic features, and which include all or some of the following secondary characteristics: appreciation of aesthetic, cultural, or civilisational significance; attention to chronology and measurement; delineation of distinct aspects of style, design, or influence; and the use of visual illustrations. This will allow us to demarcate the Urdu texts discussed below from earlier writings (chiefly in Persian) that featured but did not primarily focus on buildings; still less on architecture, which—with its discrete attention to aspects of style, architectonic features, building materials, and

⁴ On the linguistic origins, literary development and subsequent re-naming of rekhta as Urdu, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Early Urdu Literary Culture and History, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.
so on—is distinct from the more general discussion of a building or buildings in aggregate.

**Technologies, contexts, and collusions**

Before turning to specific texts, it is important to recognise the technological adaptations that paved the way for the printed and illustrated Urdu book, because these adaptations formed the infrastructural basis of architectural *rekhta*. After the East India Company and Protestant missionaries jointly introduced Indian Muslims to typography in Calcutta around 1800, lithography was inadvertently introduced in turn, having been initially used by the East India Company as a means of reproducing maps. As local entrepreneurs recognised its potential to reproduce Arabic-script calligraphy, lithography subsequently became the preferred means of printing Urdu. The easy inclusion of images that was also part of lithography’s versatility meant that many lithographic books were illustrated, a development which in the mid-nineteenth century unfolded in both India and Iran. Although chromolithography (or oleography) was rarely used for producing images in Urdu books (as distinct from popular stand-alone prints), by the 1900s a small number of Indian Muslim publishers also adopted newer technologies of image reproduction, including collotype for the printing of photographs. These imported technologies of the image played an important part in the development of Urdu art history, showing how its ‘mixed’ or *rekhta* profile was a feature of the medium no less than the message.

These ‘hard’ infrastructures of textual and visual knowledge were accompanied by similar mixes of the ‘soft’ semantic dimensions of words and images. We will see obvious examples with translations of entire texts, but there was also the subtler adaptation of key concept-words via the use of calque neologisms, reposing earlier terms, or direct loan-words—whether ‘civilisation’ (*tamaddon*), ‘heritage’ (*warisa*), or even ‘tile’ (*ta’il*), and ‘art’ (*art*). This terminological traffic was two-way, as European writings on Islamic art similarly adopted terms

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from Arabic, such as mihrab, muqarnas, and minaret(s). Drawings too were products of exchange. The training of Indian artists in techniques of draughtsmanship favoured by East India Company engineers not only enabled Indians to produce illustrations for British surveyors and tourists; it also established a cadre of local illustrators for subsequent Urdu architectural books that used this new mixed style of line drawing that was easily reproduced through lithography.

There were other cross-fertilisations too. With its debt to the earlier development of archaeology, the monumentalism that emerged as a key feature of the study of Islamic art in India (and the Middle East) in the early twentieth century meant that most Urdu publications focused on major buildings, especially those built by the Mughals. Consequently, the publications surveyed in the following pages focused overwhelmingly on architectural history rather than painting or applied arts, for reasons discussed in the conclusions. Yet, like other aspects of the dialogical discourse of architectural rekhta, this was not merely an external imposition of colonial concerns. Long before the British rose to power in India, Indo-Persian poetry and prose texts celebrated buildings as enduring ‘memory spaces’—albeit, as we will see, in ways which were quite distinct from the new Urdu genre of art history that emerged from the mid-nineteenth century. Here, monumentalism functioned not only in the sense of scale, but also in the etymological sense of a monument as ‘something that reminds’.

This coalescence of concerns, both Muslim and British, around the monuments of the Mughals and earlier Muslim dynasties emerged from the complexities of life in the colony. Because the development of ‘Islamic’ art history in Urdu coincided with—and responded to—the promotion of a model of ‘Indian’ art history by such prominent figures as Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and A.K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) that was framed in exclusively Buddhist, Hindu, and occasionally Jain terms. Even as late as 1927, Coomaraswamy’s influential History of Indian and Indonesian Art managed the considerable feat of excluding even the Taj Mahal let alone lesser Mughal buildings from the story of ‘Indian’ art. Indeed, the Mughals only received passing mention to brush away any question of their external influence on properly ‘Indian’ paintings of the Rajput kingdoms. In

8 On such precolonial approaches to architecture as bastions of collective memory, see Nile Green, Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
contrast to such exclusivist and dismissive approaches to India’s Muslim artistic heritage, a series of British scholars wrote admiring and enthusiastic studies of Islamic architecture in both India and the Middle East, particularly James Fergusson (1808–1886), James Burgess (1832–1916), and Ernest Richmond (1874–1955), along with the French Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) in his laudatory La Civilisation des Arabes (1884). We will see these works being translated into Urdu as buttressing external supports for Indian Muslims’ own celebratory defence of their artistic heritage, along with its ties (pace Le Bon) to a wider ‘civilisation’ (a term rendered as the neologism tamaddon).

Inevitably, such translations brought with them considerable baggage from earlier conceptualisations of European architectural history. There was the keen attention to establishing a firm chronology as the basis for subsequent historicist analysis by way of stylistic developments, influences, and patronage. There was also the European focus on religious and royal buildings, such as churches, palaces and sepulchres, which found its natural counterpart in India’s great mosques, ‘red forts’, and mausolea. Gradually this cross-fertilisation seeded the conceptualisation of an ‘Islamic art’ as a counterpart to ‘Christian art’, replacing prior formulations of ‘Arab’ (though not ‘Persian’) art. Another influence was the determined Victorian medievalism that led Fergusson ‘to dismiss all post-medieval architecture as a sham’, priorities similarly exported from France to Egypt via the institutionalisation of Viollet-le-Duc’s corresponding medievalism, particularly through the leading role of Max Herz (1856-1919)—a proponent of Viollet-le-Duc’s stylistic restoration of churches—on the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe.

Yet these imports met a ready audience among Indian Muslims for whom these were far from alien priorities. Indo-Muslim historical writing placed much—albeit less—emphasis on calendrical precision. While out of genealogical concern for the true lineages of saints and kings, this was primarily for people rather than buildings, short poetic chronograms recording the completion of notable structures were nonetheless a feature of manuscripts and buildings alike. The memorative notion of a ‘monument’ similarly had a Muslim discursive equivalent in the Persian and Urdu term asar (from the Arabic athar, ‘remnants, traces, or remains of the past’), a key term in precolonial Muslim antiquarianism that was adopted in colonial period accounts of architecture in turn. But intellectual exchange with

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12 The locus classicus is the Arabic Kitab al-Athar al-Baqiyya ‘an al-Qurun al-Khaliyya (‘Remaining Signs of Past Centuries’) by al-Biruni (973– after 1050), but the tradition of athar/asar writing continued and evolved over subsequent centuries. See for example Nir
European scholars provided *athar* with a new range of meanings, particularly those that clustered around the European concept of the monument – new meanings exemplified in the Arabic title of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe that sponsored them as the Lajnat Hifz al-Athar al-‘Arabiyya.\(^{13}\)

Attention to religious, royal and aristocratic buildings had also long been a feature of Indo-Persian court histories, travelogues, and urban encomia. But here, importantly, the similarities and continuities ceased. Because buildings—still less their architectural components—had rarely formed the sole subject of Indo-Persian books, whose illustrations of buildings invariably included people, as opposed to buildings without figural decoration.

Other aspects of European architectural historical practice that found their way to India were external to texts, such as ties to architectural practice through providing historical inspiration for new building designs.\(^ {14}\) In the Indian case, this involved the ‘Indo-Saracenic’ style that, drawing on the publications of Burgess and Fergusson, blended Victorian Gothic with Mughal and regional Indo-Muslim architectural forms.\(^ {15}\) Enabling these practical potentialities were finely reproduced drawings, plates, and plans, in the case of Fergusson’s pioneering monograph on the Bijapur Sultanate made by the military engineer ‘Captain P.D. Hart, assisted by A. Cumming and native draughtsmen’ and in the case of Burgess’s volume on Gujarat incorporating new visual technologies such as collotype.\(^ {16}\)

Yet British architects were far from the only designers of buildings in this period, particularly in the Muslim-ruled princely states. The establishment of engineering colleges at Madras (1794), Roorkee (1847), and Hyderabad (1869) reared a series of Indian professional architects, including Muslims and other readers of

Shafir, ‘Nabulusi Explores the Ruins of Baalbek: Antiquarianism in the Ottoman Empire during the Seventeenth Century’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 75, 2022, 1–49, with the term *athar* on 19 and 37.


Urdu who wrote, and read, such manuals as *Dastur al-Bana* (‘Rules of Building’, 1869) and the journal, *Indyjan Arkitekt* (‘Indian Architect’, founded 1884). Blending British engineering techniques with Indian tastes and skills, these too were examples of architectural *rekhta*. Museums also played a part in this function of architectural history as present-day inspiration, albeit more in the metropole than the colony through the great collection of medieval and early-modern Muslim South Asian applied and decorative arts at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). In a contrast whose consequences we will consider in the conclusions, there was no comparably large collection in India, though there were notable collections in the princely states, particularly those at the Baroda Museum, assembled from 1939 by Hermann Goetz (1898-1976), and Hyderabad’s Salar Jung Museum, though the latter did not open to the public till 1951. There was also the small but noteworthy collection at the Prince of Wales Museum (in 1998 renamed the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahshala) in Bombay (now Mumbai). Completed in 1915, the building was itself aptly designed in Indo-Saracenic style by John Begg (1866-1937), who had dispatched his assistant George Wittet on tour of Bijapur, brought to prominence by Fergusson, and who also used Burgess’s monograph on the Gujarat sultanate as his other Indian inspiration.

The export to India of British practices of architectural history also had an institutional dimension by way of the concerns for preservation inaugurated with the founding by William Morris and others of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877. Such practices were also institutionalised in Egypt via the aforementioned Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe, founded in 1881 by the Khedive Tawfiq Pasha (r.1879-92) in response to European scholarly protests about his urban modernisation-via-demolition scheme. Here, both problem and solution were bound up with Europe, with the Khedive’s remodelling of Cairo inspired by Baron Haussmann’s remaking of Paris and his subsequent Comité modelled on the French Commission des monuments historiques. In India, the conservationist exporter-in-chief was George Nathaniel Curzon (1859-1925)

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18 Note, however, that Indian art of the Islamic period was constituted as a section of South and Southeast Asia within the Department of Asia, whereas the Middle East (from Spain to Iran) was displayed and curated as a separate section.


who, during whose tenure as Viceroy of India between 1899 and 1905, pushed through the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904 (prompting the bestowal of an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal Institute of British Architects).\textsuperscript{22} Blending his own personal interests with the Raj’s self-presentation as the heir to the Mughals, Curzon had a particular concern for the latter’s architectural legacy. He oversaw the restoration of the Taj Mahal; donated a European reproduction of a fine Cairene lamp to hang over the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal; and arranged with the Nizam of Hyderabad for a marble screen to be placed round the simple grave of Aurangzeb (r.1658-1707) in a Sufi shrine in Khuldabad.\textsuperscript{23} Ensuing official attention to Mughal architecture provided a political context for the publication of more scholarly Urdu studies of Islamic architecture, many of which were the outcome of partnerships between Muslim authors and colonial officials.

Such, then, were the confluences, contexts, and common technologies that paved the way for the emergence of architectural history in Urdu as a distinct genre characterised, as we shall see, by the appreciation of aesthetic, cultural, or ‘civilisational’ significance; by attention to chronology and measurement; by the delineation of distinct aspects of style, design, or influence; and by the abundant use of visual illustrations via the marriage of engineering draughtsmanship, lithography, and indigenous tastes.

Having recognised this blend of enabling factors, we can now turn to the texts themselves. In the following survey, we will look at both popular, market-oriented works and the more scholarly tomes whose publication picked up pace around 1920, coinciding with both the widening of Muslim university education in India and the formalizing of a field of ‘Islamic’ architectural history in Europe.

\textbf{From precolonial Persian to Company collaborations, c. 1800-1850}

To point to the development of art (and especially architectural) history as a new Urdu genre in the century after 1850 is not to say that the rich earlier literary culture of Indo-Persian had ignored the discussion of buildings or other art forms. Far from it. The genres of history (tarikh), biography (tazkira), travel writing (safarnama), narrative poetry (masnavi), and the paired poetic genre of urban encomium and urban misfortune (shahr-ashob) had all invoked or described art objects and especially buildings. But these were not single texts devoted to either individual art works or to buildings as historical, analytical, or categorical objects of attention in their own right. Discussing several works focusing on Delhi from the early nineteenth century, the distinguished Urdu literature scholar C.M. Naim has noted how, while many buildings were listed, ‘descriptions are extremely brief. Architectural and historical details do not matter’.

This was less a lack of interest than the expression of a cultural logic by which buildings were primarily of significance insofar as they related to important Kulturträger, particularly the saints, poets, and sultans around whom historical memory was configured in the aforementioned genres in which buildings and other symbolic items of material culture were mentioned. Consequently, Indo-Persian tarikh, tazkira, safarnama, and masnavi texts devoted far more attention to significant persons, often detailing their vertical and horizontal genealogies to explain the webs of social and spiritual relations that enabled readers to navigate cities as living human environments rather than aesthetic-historic ones. Similarly, the shahr-ashob was concerned with urban misfortune as either human misery or the degradation of manners more than with the systematic documentation of architectural destruction. Conversely, the urban encomium celebrated flourishing cities as alive with the dazzling notables and diverse subject peoples of rulers to whom such panegyrics were often presented. Their depictions of living buildings could not be further from the focus on emptied monuments that characterised European architectural histories.

There was also the issue of illustration. Being hand-produced manuscripts before the Indo-Muslim adoption of printing gained momentum in the 1840s, few of these Persian texts included the illustrations that would become a feature of Urdu architectural history. Producing (let alone reproducing) manuscript paintings required the costly additional skills of artists rather than individual copyists of text.

For a discussion of several such works, see C.M. Naim, ‘Syed Ahmad and his Two Books Called “Asar-al-Sanadid”’, Modern Asian Studies, 45:3, 2011, 15–23.
Green, Making Space.
See the discussion of the celebrated Moragha'-ye Delhi, written in the 1730s, in Chanchal B. Dadlani, From Stone to Paper: Architecture as History in the Late Mughal Empire, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018, 73–80.
This pre-print scarcity of images helps explain the huge demand for illustrated prints as well as books that followed the introduction to India of lithography then oleography.\textsuperscript{29} As Abbas Amanat has written about the contemporaneous appeal of lithographic illustrations in Iran (many imported from Bombay), ‘these were the earliest images seen by the Iranian public (beyond manuscript illustrations of Persian literature accessible only to the privileged elite).’\textsuperscript{30}

However, between these popular prints and prior Persian manuscripts stood an interstitial period which was crucial to the emergence of architectural history in Urdu after 1850. As Nicolas Roth has shown through his comparative research on North Indian watercolour paintings and Urdu narrative poems from the 1790s, ‘a heightened interest in the representation and reproduction of architecture across media’, whereas ‘earlier treatments of architecture tend[ed] to provide little stylistic or formal specificity, with architectural subject matter ultimately used to further poetic goals’.\textsuperscript{31} From around 1800, there was also a new political context at play. In 1803, the East India Company assumed administrative control over the Delhi region, including Agra.\textsuperscript{32} This brought about a new form of ‘Anglo-Muslim’ education via the inception of the Delhi (or ‘Anglo-Arabic’) College in 1828 with a syllabus in Arabic, Persian, English, and later Urdu—the latter often a medium for translations of English textbooks.\textsuperscript{33} Another consequence was that, by the 1830s, British visitors to both Delhi and Agra began buying sufficient numbers of paintings and prints by local artists—and pioneer lithographers—to create demand for the spread of such skills. These were not quite traditional paintings, but rather a blend of tastes and skills informed by the Delhi school of late Mughal painting and the


draughtsmanship of Company military engineers.  

This tourist market reared a generation of Indian architectural artists whose skill-set was in place when illustrated books about the buildings of Agra and Delhi began being issued by Delhi’s Muslim-owned publishing houses from around 1850.

Another interstitial development was textual, comprising a series of Persian and Urdu descriptions of the Mughal buildings of Agra which were composed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Over the course of 224 folios, one such Persian manuscript work, *Tafrih al-'Imarat* (‘The Pleasure of Buildings’), detailed the Mughal palaces, mosques, mausolea, and gardens of Agra, paying particular attention to their inscriptions. As a student at the recently-founded Agra Government College, the author, Lalah Sil Chand, was sponsored to compile it by James Lushington, who was serving as the East India Company’s collector and magistrate for Agra in 1825-26. *Tafrih al-'Imarat* was by no means the only such work. Several other manuscript accounts were written about Mughal Agra, and the Taj Mahal especially, recording the many Arabic and Persian inscriptions on gateways, mosques, and gravestones, as well as around the ‘luminous burial garden’ (*rawza-ye monawara*) of Mumtaz Mahal.

This attention to inscriptions not only anticipated what we will see as a continuing interest by later Muslim readers in the Persian poems and Quranic verses that added multiple layers of meaning to such buildings. It also prefigured the subsequent key role of learned Indians (and elsewhere Egyptians and Iranians) with Arabic and Persian educations as epigraphic specialists enabling European studies of Islamic architecture, not least through providing information on patrons and construction dates (the latter often concealed in chronogrammatic verses based

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35 Maulavi Abdul Muqtadir, ed, *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Public Library at (Bankipore)*, Patna, 34 vols, Patna: Superintendent, Govt. Printing, 1921, vol 7, 208–211 (ms #648). I have not been able to inspect this manuscript directly. An illustrated manuscript of *Tafrih al-'Imarat* is briefly discussed in Dadlani, *From Stone to Paper*, 169.

36 British Library, ms IO ISL 4741 and Or. 6558.
on the abjad numerological system). The Agra Persian manuscripts, then, were the early forerunners of the Epigraphia Indica series initiated by James Burgess in 1882—especially its Arabic and Persian Supplement begun in 1907 and subsequently edited by Ghulam Yazdani (1913–40) and Mawlvī Muhammad Ashraf Hussain (1949–53)—as well as the Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum directed by the Swiss scholar Max van Berchem (1863–1921) with the aid of such Arab epigraphers as ‘Ali Baghat (1858–1924) and Hasan Muhammad al-Hawari (fl.1920–40).\(^\text{37}\)

The last of the Indian transitional works would become far better known than any of these predecessors, partly through its sheer originality; partly through the fact that it was printed. This was the first edition of Asar al-Sanadid (‘Relics of the Notables’) by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98), which was published in 1847 at the Delhi press of Sayyid al-Akhbar, an early Urdu newspaper owned by his brother.\(^\text{38}\) As the title Asar al-Sanadid suggested, its contents brought together descriptions of buildings with biographies of the living and dead ‘notables’ who made these architectural ‘relics’ meaningful to Muslim readers, be those notable inhabitants of Delhi princes, saints, courtiers, poets, scholars, musicians, or even such humbler heroes as celebrated kebab-sellers. While continuing the concerns and conventions of earlier Persian works, the rigour and scale of Sayyid Ahmad’s book were unprecedented in their attention to a single Indian city (even Delhi). For he not only employed two talented artists who drew in the new ‘engineer’ style, along with Mawvlī Imam Bakhsh Sahba’ī, head of the Persian department at the Company’s Delhi College, to read the many difficult inscriptions scattered around the erstwhile capital of various Muslim dynasties. He also made use of an astrolabe to provide more accurate dimensions for some of the 232 buildings he described. This was a marked improvement on the aforementioned Persian account of Agra, which provided rough dimensions along the lines of ‘two kroh long and one kroh wide.’\(^\text{39}\) Featuring over 130 illustrations of buildings drawn in European perspective and


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devoted of people, it is reasonable to claim of *Asar al-Sanadid* that ‘no other book quite like it then existed in either Persian or Urdu.’^40^

![Figure 1. Epigraphy in its Lithographic Context (from Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Asar al-Sanadid*, 2nd edition, 1854).](image)

**Mughal architecture in the market of print: c.1850-1900**

Nearly a decade before this first edition appeared, Sayyid Ahmad had entered the service of the East India Company as a sar-rishtidar (clerk). By 1841 he had been promoted to the position of munsif (subordinate judge) of Fatehpur Sikri, then five years later of Delhi. During this period, he became increasingly involved with the circles of British officials who in 1847 founded the Archaeological Society of Delhi. The stated aims of the society were to investigate ‘by means of plans, drawings and elevation, by inscriptive, traditional and historical researches, and, if possible, by publications of the ancient remains, both Hindoo and Mahomedan, in and around Delhi.’^41^ To include the learned Indians with whom its British members already worked closely, the society’s meetings were conducted in Urdu. By the summer of

[^40^: Naim, ‘Syed Ahmad’, 1.]
1852 Sayyid Ahmad had been formally elected a member; thenceforth, he became a regular participant in its activities. The society’s discussions, especially their attention to chronology as the basis for archaeological history, paved the way for a second and much revised edition of *Asar al-Sanadid*, which was published in 1854.

Written in the much plainer Urdu style used for the translations issued for the Delhi College, as well as for the Muslim tracts and sermons that print also made possible, this second edition also significantly differed in content from its predecessor. The long chapter on the people of Delhi was cut to focus the book more squarely on buildings, while oral traditions were largely removed as unreliable sources. Instead, Sayyid Ahmad drew on a wider range of textual sources, which now included a translation of an English geography manual and the journals of the Archaeological Society of Bengal and the Royal Asiatic Society. (The latter responded by making Sayyid Ahmad an honorary fellow). This enabled greater chronological detail and precision, as Sayyid Ahmad’s historical thinking was sharpened through discussions with numismatists, such as his judicial colleague in Delhi, Edward Thomas (1813–86), whom he thanked in his new preface. Published just after the first edition of *Asar al-Sanadid*, Thomas’s 1848 study of Ghaznavid coinage was a pioneering transfer to medieval Indo-Muslim history of the methods which James Prinsep (1799–1840) of Calcutta’s Asiatic Society had developed to reconstruct India’s pre-Islamic ancient history. With title pages and prefaces in both Urdu and English, even the format of the second edition testified to its dual intellectual origins.

If, in C.M. Naim’s words, *Asar al-Sanadid* ‘emerged out of … the presence of foreigners in Delhi, and their increasing demand for historical information about the city’, then the book also found a large Indian audience. For, as Urdu commercial printing took off in the second half of the century, *Asar al-Sanadid* was reissued numerous times: by Delhi’s Gopal Malik in 1876; by the great Lucknow publisher Naval Kishor in 1876, 1895, and 1900; and by Kanpur’s Nami Pres in 1904. Its appeal in this new print marketplace was helped by its simplified prose style and abundant illustrations.

The half-century that followed the second edition of Sayyid Ahmad’s book in 1854 also saw the appearance of other lengthy architectural histories in Urdu. Part of the new culture of popular print, these were not aimed at scholars, whether Indian or British, but instead at the larger commercial book market that emerged between 1850 and 1900.

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42 Troll, ‘A Note’, 142.
45 Naim, ‘Syed Ahmad’, 37.
One such popular Urdu work was *Gharabat Nigar* (‘Distant Depictions’) by the otherwise obscure ‘Abd al-Haq, which was completed in Delhi in 1874 and published there two years later. Squeezed into its 180 pages were short descriptions of around 550 buildings, located not only in Delhi but across Punjab, Rajasthan, the Deccan, and Gujarat, thereby incorporating sites in princely states as well as British India. If in this respect ‘Abd al-Haq was more ambitious than Sayyid Ahmad—perhaps because he was competing for the same book-buying public—then as a result of cramming more than twice as many buildings into a considerably shorter book, his entries were often (though not always) shorter than Sayyid Ahmad’s. Nonetheless, *Asar al-Sanadid* was clearly the model for *Gharabat Nigar*. It was also one of its most regularly cited sources, along with the *Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*.

‘Abd al-Haq also shared his predecessor’s empirical concerns. On his very first page, ‘Abd al-Haq advertised the reliability of his book, assuring readers that he had drawn on history books written in Persian, English, and Urdu, and had also inspected many of the buildings with his own eyes. As for his goal, he stated that it was to describe India’s important historical buildings, be they forts, palaces, pools, bridges, mosques, mausolea, temples, towers, minarets, Sufi shrines, or step-wells. Moreover, he pledged to do so in straightforward and easy-to-understand Urdu. In this, *Gharabat Nigar* was also heir to the second edition of *Asar al-Sanadid*, in which Sayyid Ahmad relinquished the complex Persianised prose of his earlier first edition.

‘Abd al-Haq was true to his word, describing the architectural elements of each building he surveyed, mentioning materials (especially when these included marble or semiprecious stones such as agate, or coral) and different decorative techniques, such as carved stone screens (*jali*). But taken to the point of obsessiveness, his particular concern was to provide measurements for each of these elements, whether gateways, minarets, courtyards, or whatever else. The focus was squarely on buildings, then—indeed, on architecture. In a stark contrast to the older genres of the *tariikh* and *tazkira*, humans received little mention (especially the living people who continued to use most of these buildings). When people were

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46 ‘Abd al-Haq Dihlavi, *Gharabat Nigar; bih fazl Qadar Zu al-Jalal Hindustan ki Nami ‘Imaraton ka Hal*, Delhi: Akmal al-Mataba’i, 1876. The date of completion is given in the printed colophon on 180. The author is not to be confused with the Mughal era scholar, ‘Abd al-Haq Muhadith Dihlavi (1551–1642), whose works included *Akhbar al-Akhyar* (‘Reports of the Righteous’), a detailed traditional *tazkira* of Muslim saints and their burial sites.

47 By contrast to *Gharabat Nigar*’s 180 pages, the 1854 second edition of *Asar al-Sanadid* comprised 317 pages (excluding the English sections), though the former had around 25% more lines of text per page on average, presumably to reduce the page-run and hence cover price.

48 Dihlavi, *Gharabat Nigar*, 1, with the additional mention of Urdu books on 180.

mentioned, they were usually deceased and historical, whether as the interred or the patron, as with the mausolea of Princess Jahanara and Emperor Humayun in Delhi and the madrasa of Shaykh Chilli in Punjab commissioned on the latter’s death in 1650 by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh (a report of the Archaeological Survey of India was cited here as the source).

Established in 1861, some thirteen years before ‘Abd al-Haq completed his book, the Archaeological Survey was a major inspiration. Not only were its reports and founder—the former military engineer Alexander Cunningham (1814–93)—explicitly mentioned as sources of details, dates, and measurements (including of Delhi’s lofty Qutb Minar). ‘Abd al-Haq also adopted its quantifying methods. The Archaeological Survey’s titular primary task of surveying—of carefully measuring every element of a site—found expression in ‘Abd al-Haq’s massive provision of measurements, always in miles (mil) or feet (fut). These details often comprised most of his information on a building. And when dates were provided, these not only reflected the historical concerns of Sayyid Ahmad and his interlocutors at the short-lived Archaeological Society of Delhi. They were also usually given in the Christian rather than the Islamic calendar.

Another feature of Gharabat Nigar was its echo of the increased involvement of the colonial state as the custodian of important monuments (especially after the Company’s destruction of so much of Mughal Delhi in repressing the Great Rebellion of 1857). A generation after Sayyid Ahmad’s Asar al-Sanadid, ‘Abd al-Haq thus articulated the nascent formal association in India between architectural history and preservation. Thus, in his account of the Qutb Minar, he recorded how, when the minaret had broken in 1818, the British government’s engineer was assigned the vast sum of 17,000 rupees for the repairs; and how, when the minaret was subsequently split by a lightning strike in 1863, the government again repaired it, adding an iron lightning conductor to prevent further damage. Such positive remarks on colonial policies, along with ‘Abd al-Haq’s apparent visits to so many buildings and his access to so many measurements, suggest that he may have been one of the Indian assistants whom the Archaeological Survey employed, particularly to take measurements and decipher inscriptions. By his own testimony, he certainly knew English. This in turn occasionally lent his writing a delectably mixed flavour, as when he described the decoration on the cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal as ‘tip-top’ (tip-tap). Truly, ‘Abd al-Haq’s Gharabat Nigar was an expression of architectural rekhta.

Even though it shared many elements in common (and drew directly on) the second edition of Asar al-Sanadid, there remained important differences between the

50 Dihlavi, Gharabat Nigar, 138, 161.
51 Dihlavi, Gharabat Nigar, 173.
52 Dihlavi, Gharabat Nigar, 173.
53 Dihlavi, Gharabat Nigar, 27.
two books, published twenty years apart as they were. Whereas Sayyid Ahmad
drew on the skills of a professor at the Delhi College to decipher many Arabic and
Persian inscriptions (as well as several in Indic scripts), employed two talented
draughtsmen to copy the inscriptions as they appeared in situ, then reproduced
them as lithographs in his book, ‘Abd al-Haq generally ignored inscriptions.\(^54\) Even
for such magisterial examples of monumental epigraphy as the Taj Mahal and Qutb
Minar, he merely stated ‘there is a fine Quranic inscription in large, legible letters’.\(^55\)
Another difference was the far smaller number of illustrations in Gharabat Nigar,
whether of inscriptions or buildings. Still, those that were included—predictably the
Taj Mahal and Qutb Minar, but also the Adinatha Jain temple on Mount Abu—were
of notably high quality.

Perhaps the explanation here lies in ‘Abd al-Haq’s intended audience,
readers of unembellished Urdu for whom copied Arabic and Persian inscriptions
would have been illegible. This was no longer the dual readership of British official
patrons and ordinary Indian book-buyers to whom Sayyid Ahmad and his
commercial publisher brother had jointly pitched Asar al-Sanadid. Instead, Gharabat
Nigar was aimed solely at the commercial book market that had matured by the
time it came out in 1874. Since Urdu readers in this period still included many
Hindus (and perhaps also Jains), this may also explain ‘Abd al-Haq’s decisions to
exclude long Quranic quotations, but to include even more Hindu (and Jain) sites
than Sayyid Ahmad. Expanding the geographical ambit of places beyond Sayyid
Ahmad’s Delhi would also have made the book more appealing to a larger
audience. ‘Abd al-Haq and his commercial publisher also presumably recognised
the greater production costs of employing epigraphers, artists, and art-
lithographers, which may well explain the far smaller number of illustrations.
Although as time went on, more texts were produced for a specifically Muslim
readership, the broader readership of Hindus and Muslims which ‘Abd al-Haq
sought for his Gharabat Nigar continued to exist into the twentieth century, at least
for some genres, such as the guidebooks to which we will now turn.

Such commercial works played an important part in the development of
Urdu art history. In many respects they were the textual counterpart to the black-
and-white photographic postcards of Mughal monuments which Indian
entrepreneurs began publishing in the 1900s, particularly the rival firms of H.A.
Mirza and Lal Chand, who specialized in postcards of Mughal Delhi and Agra.\(^56\)
Drawing not only on the colonial technology of the camera, but also on the
photographic styles and architectural postcards published by British firms such as

\(^{54}\) Dozens of careful drawings of inscriptions in Arabic and other scripts appeared as a
separately-numbered appendix in Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Asar al-Sanadid, Delhi: Matba’a-e
Sultani, 1270/1854, 1–62.

\(^{55}\) Dihlavi, Gharabat Nigar, 27, 173.

Raphael Tuck & Sons, these too were expressions of architectural *rekhta*. Accompanying such visual souvenirs, in 1903 a popular guidebook to the monuments of Delhi appeared by way of Muhammad Mas‘ud Shah’s *Dihli Ga‘id, ya Rahnuma-ye Dihli* (‘The Delhi Guide, or Pathfinder of Delhi’). In contrast to Sayyid Ahmad’s and ‘Abd al-Haq’s earlier texts, *Dihli Ga‘id* framed the city in more explicitly Islamic terms. In part this was because its author was a Muslim cleric who had previously written a biography of the Prophet. But this was also a response to the increasingly important role of Delhi as a space of Indo-Muslim collective memory in the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion and the exile of the last Mughal emperor. With its special attention to the Delhi palace of the Mughals that lent Urdu its name, the *Dihli Ga‘id* was an architectural companion to such panegyric histories of the last two emperors’ courts as Munshi Faiz al-Din’s *Bazm-e Akhir* (‘Final Gathering’), first published in 1885 and immensely popular thereafter.

Yet in other respects, Shah’s *Dihli Ga‘id* continued the template established by *Asar al-Sanadid*, whether through the keen attention to dates (including chronological tables of the city’s rulers) or the numerous lithographs of perspective-based line-drawings of buildings. While there were fewer English loan-words than

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58 Dihlavi, *Dihli Ga‘id*, front cover.
59 Tables on Dihlavi, *Dihli Ga‘id*, 38–45.
in ‘Abd al-Haq’s *Gharabat Nigar*, it used both Islamic and Christian dates, gave measurements in feet, and included British buildings, such as St James Church and the Gothic *ghantaghar* (clock tower) erected in 1870 at the centre of the Chandni Chowk market.\(^{60}\) In such ways, the Delhi guide was another expression of architectural *rekhta*.

Shah divided his guidebook in two parts: the first dealing with the noteworthy buildings of ‘Old Delhi’ (*qadim Dihli*), that is, the several capitals of the various Delhi Sultans; and the second with the buildings of ‘New Delhi’ (*jadid Dihli*), that is, the Mughal capital founded by Shah Jahan rather than the colonial city designed later by Edwin Lutyens. While Shah included more historical detail (and fewer measurements) than *Gharabat Nigar*, he gave similar attention to the architectural components of each building, along with their building materials and decorative elements. But insofar as his guidebook enabled visitors to connect themselves to a glorious Muslim past by linking buildings to the sultans or courtiers who patronised them, it also offered meditations on loss, whether by way of the Peacock Throne (*takht-e tawus*) carried off to Khurasan by Nadir Shah or the destruction wrought by the British reconquest in 1858.\(^{61}\)

The popular profile of ‘Abd al-Haq’s *Gharabat Nigar* and Shah’s *Dihli Ga’id* does not place them beyond the categorical pale of architectural history. Guidebooks to significant buildings and monuments were an important part of European architectural history publishing, whether with the famous German Baedeker series founded in the 1850s or the Victorian English architectural guides that paved the way for Nikolaus Pevsner’s more systematic series.\(^{62}\) By the time *Gharabat Nigar* was published in the 1870s, the earlier British tourist trade in Agra and Delhi had expanded to include Indian tourists and pilgrims, whose journeys were enabled by the expanding railway network. In some Urdu books, as with *Baedekers*, these ties to the railway were explicit. Such was the case with *Sayr-e Ajmer* (‘Journey to Ajmer’), an 1892 guide to the Sufi mausoleum of Mu’in al-Din Chishti (d.1236) and the Hindu temples of nearby Pushkar, whose Hindu author, Munshi Sivanath, began with instructions on how to walk to the shrine complex, much embellished by the Mughals, from Ajmer’s train station.\(^{63}\) By the time Shah’s *Dihli Ga’id* appeared in 1903, India’s rail network had expanded even further, placing Delhi in easy and inexpensive reach of people from all over India. Like Sivanath, Shah too provided directions from Delhi’s railway station.\(^{64}\)

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\(^{64}\) Shah, *Dihli Ga’id*, 46, opening the section on ‘New’ (i.e. Mughal) Delhi, which was nearest to the railway station.
The most explicit links between architectural history and the railway appeared in *Tuhfah-e Dihli* (‘The Gift of Delhi’), another guidebook by a prolific Muslim author by the name of Ghulam Nabi. Its first thirty pages consisted entirely of railway timetables detailing the schedules of trains to Delhi from every corner of the subcontinent. The immediate reason was the Delhi Durbar of 1903, a series of Mughal-modeled pageants to mark Edward VII’s coronation as Emperor of India. Having safely delivered his readers to Delhi’s railway station, Nabi then explained the historic significance of some twenty-five monuments, including what had clearly become a canon of the Qutb Minar; the Ashokan pillar in the Firozabad fort; the ruined city and mausoleum of Ghiyath al-Din Tughlaq (r.1320-25); the mausoleum of the emperor Humayun (r. 1530-40, 1555-56); the Red Fort (or Urdu-e Mu‘āla); Shah Jahan’s Friday mosque; the shrine of Nizam al-Din Awiya (d.1325); the Jantar Mantar observatory; and the splendid late Mughal mausoleum of Safdar Jang (c.1708–54). Nabi provided descriptions of architectural features and materials; recorded the occasional inscription (such as the Persian verse on the poet Amir Khusraw’s tomb); gave measurements (mixing feet with the old Indian unit of gaz) and dates (usually in the Christian calendar but sometimes in *hijri*). In these elements, no less than the subsequent section on the Durbar’s ceremonial fusions, Nabi’s *Tuhfah-e Dihli* was another expression of architectural *rekhta*.

Before moving on to the more scholarly Urdu texts that appeared in the decades after 1900, it is worth briefly mentioning another work by Ghulam Nabi, entitled *Dunya ki ‘Aja’ibat aur Qabil-e Did Mashhur Maqamat* (‘The World’s Wonders and Worth-Seeing Famous Places’). An extraordinary feat of lithographic art, it included around two hundred perspective-based drawings. Though likely inspired by imported books and oleographs, these were in a more lively and playful style than the ‘engineer school’ draughtsmanship that the East India Company had promoted. In displaying and describing not only the many sacred buildings of

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68 For Khusraw’s tomb, see Nabi, *Tuhfah-e Dihli*, 43.
69 For the Durbar section, see Nabi, *Tuhfah-e Dihli*, 56–71, and the subsequent map which is the book’s sole illustration.
70 Ghulam Nabi, *Dunya ki ‘Aja’ibat aur Qabil-e Did Mashhur Maqamat*, Delhi: Matba’a Afkhar, 1901.
71 On the impact of imported oleographs and their adaptation by Indian popular print firms, such as the Calcutta Art Studio (founded 1878), the Bombay New Press, the Poona Chitrashala Press, and the Ravi Varma Fine Art Lithographic Press (founded 1894), see Mitter, ‘Mechanical Reproduction’, 13–30. Mitter also notes that ‘Ravi Varma (1846–1906), the man who transformed the whole print culture’ drew on ‘the help of a German technical assistant’ (Mitter, ‘Mechanical Reproduction’, 26). It is worth adding that the same technical
India, but also those of the Middle East, Burma, China, Japan, and Europe, Nabi’s *Dunya ki 'Aja'ibat* was an Indian popular counterpart to James Fergusson’s earlier illustrated survey of world architecture.\(^7\)

![Fig. 3. Statues Outside a Burmese Temple (from Ghulam Nabi, *Dunya ki 'Aja'ibat, 1901).*](image)

**Teamwork, translations, and Indian tourists, c.1900-1950**

While such market-oriented books on Urdu architectural history didn’t disappear after 1900s, they were gradually joined by a more scholarly bookshelf. In some respects, these were heirs to Sayyid Ahmad’s *Asar al-Sanadid*. But in other respects, they tipped the balance in the blend of *rekhta* towards European ingredients by including outright translations of English and French books. Yet such texts were not only carefully selected for local purposes. As acts of linguistic translation and cultural transmission, they also served to provide Indian Muslims with otherwise scarce detailed information on the distant architecture of Middle Eastern coreligionists. Such translations performed important intellectual tasks at a time when many Indian Muslim reformists were trying to renew their connections with what they saw as the Arab roots of their civilisation. These reformists included the heirs of Sayyid Ahmad who graduated from the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College he founded in 1875.

Perhaps the most important of these translations was *'Arabon ka Fann-e Ta’mir* (‘The Architectural Art of the Arabs’), a 1910 rendition of the chapters on art advances, Indian cities, and German collaborations also shaped the development of the picture postcard in India, many of which featured architectural sites.

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and architecture in *La Civilisation des Arabes* by Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931).\(^{73}\) The latter was already very popular among Muslims in the Middle East.\(^{74}\) After all, in the heyday of European imperialism, it was no small thing for a famous French intellectual to declare that ‘if we must judge the value of men by the greatness of their works, then we can say that Muhammad was the one of the greatest men ever known to history.’\(^{75}\) His Indian translator was Sayyid ‘Ali Bilgrami (1853-1911?), a prominent civil servant, educationalist, and author whose earlier works included a guidebook to the Hindu and Buddhist cave temples at Ellora.\(^{76}\) Bilgrami had begun his career as a student of engineering, graduating from the Thomason Civil Engineering College in Roorkee, before rising through the Nizam of Hyderabad’s mine and railway administration, then retiring to England with a lectureship at Cambridge. These sources of employment echoed the intellectual genealogy of British historians of Islamic architecture, including such prominent figures as the sometime architect James Fergusson and the colonial civil servant Ernest Richmond, whose works we will also see being translated in the wake of Bilgrami’s version of Le Bon.

Perhaps Le Bon’s most important service to Indian Muslims, and to the development of Urdu art history specifically, was to promote the idea that architecture was evidence of grand civilisational achievement. In this formulation—with the crucial rôle of buildings as the *mise en scène* for Le Bon’s case for Arab civilisation—medieval mosques and palaces were not merely religious sites or relics of defunct despots, nor even monuments of antiquarian curiosity. Instead, they were aesthetic evidence that the sophisticated Arabs belonged to the highest tier of ‘civilisation’—that European system of human classification that found its way into various Middle Eastern and Asian languages. Since many members of colonial India’s Muslim elite claimed Arab ancestry (Bilgrami himself descended from noble Arab émigrés from the Iraqi city of Wasit), Le Bon’s championing of Arab civilisation was no foreign affair, but rather a personal validation of family lineages.


\(^{75}\) Le Bon, *La Civilisation des Arabes*, 93: ‘S’il faut juger de la valeur des hommes par la grandeur des œuvres qu’ils ont fondées, nous pouvons dire que Mahomet fut un des plus grands hommes qu’ait connus l’histoire.’ My thanks to Sara Eckmann for tracing this quotation for me.

\(^{76}\) Syed Ali Bilgrami, *A Short Guide to the Cave Temples of Elura* [sic], Madras: Asylum Press, 1898. This work preceded by several decades—and quite possibly enabled—the later visits and studies of the caves by Bengali and Japanese artists associated with Rabindranath Tagore.
from a renowned European writer. Further cementing these Indo-Arabian ties, the sections of Le Bon’s book that Bilgrami translated included that dedicated to the Arab architectural style in India. This served as material testament to the genealogical links to India of sayyids of Bilgrami’s book-reading class. As a final fillip to this vindication of Indian Muslim qua Arab civilisation, Le Bon’s book also made a case for the influence of Arab architecture on its European counterparts, thus reversing the terms of the colonial civilizing mission.

Yet it would be banal to reduce Le Bon and Bilgrami’s collaboration to the cultural politics of colonialism. Because ‘Arabon ka Fann also played an important role in the intellectual development of Urdu art history into a more distinct discipline—not least through the provision of a more precise technical vocabulary and analytical schema. In some cases, this came through the adaptation of existing words, with ‘style’ being rendered as tarz (a word previously used to distinguish literary forms) and ‘gallery’ as ghulam gardish (literally a slaves’ ambulatory). The Parisian art school notion of the ‘fine arts’ was translated as fonun-e zarifa (‘delicate crafts/arts’) by redeploying the older Arabic term fann as an equivalent to the European concept of ‘art.’ Some of these Urdu terms were sufficiently unfamiliar for Bilgrami to feel the need to add an appendix to clarify their meanings. This complex conceptual mélange rendered ‘Arabon ka Fann more than a simple translation. It was instead another example of architectural rekhta.

Despite being an indubitably learned work, Bilgrami’s Le Bon was not without appeal in the book market, having an initial print run of a thousand copies, followed by several reprints and expanded editions over subsequent decades. Nonetheless, it bore one notable difference from both the popular Urdu works discussed above and from its French source book: Bilgrami’s version of Le Bon had none of the many illustrations in the 1884 original. The likely reasons were economic and technical: issued in what was at the time perhaps the world centre of art publishing, Le Bon’s Parisian imprint made extensive use of intaglio gravure and chromolithography, as well as photographic plates. Even when Bilgrami made his translation in 1911, few if any Urdu publishing houses had comparable technical capacities.

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77 Bilgrami, ‘Arabon ka Fann, 18–31. A sayyid is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.
78 On these earlier literary uses of tarz, see Shahla Farghadani, ‘A History of Style and a Style of History: The Hermeneutic of Tarz in Persian Literary Criticism’, Iranian Studies 55, 2, 2022: 501–519. Ghulam gardish was also a much older term, used by the poet Amir Khusraw (d.1325) among others to refer to the space guarding a harem. However, it was being used here to translate Le Bon’s much broader use of gallerie in describing mosques and various other structures. On the complex semantic exchanges that rendered the Arabic term fann equivalent to ‘art’, see Adam Meshtyan, ‘Arabic Lexicography and European Aesthetics: The Origin of Fann’, Muqarnas 28, 2011: 69–100.
79 This initial print-run of the 1910 Lahore edition is mentioned on the front cover.
The next notable Urdu work was written by Sayyid ‘Ali Asghar Bilgrami (1884-1961), another member of the distinguished Bilgrami clan in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Between 1923 and 1924, Asghar Bilgrami was acting director of the Nizam’s department of archaeology (founded in 1914) and it was towards the end of this assignment that his *Ma’asir-e Dakan* (‘Memorials of the Deccan’) was issued by the publishing office of Hyderabad’s Urdu-medium Osmania University (founded in 1918). The book was in every sense a monumental survey, systematically scrutinizing seventy-six Islamic buildings in the city and suburbs of Hyderabad. To do so, Asghar Bilgrami used what had become the three key datasets of Indian archaeology: site surveys, inscriptions, and literary sources. While drawing on European methods, English textbooks, and Orientalist editions of Persian texts—all freely acknowledged in his introduction and footnotes—he built on these foundations through his vast knowledge of Indo-Islamic literature, his professional site surveys, and his deciphering of faded inscriptions. Far from


81 See the acknowledgement of previous surveys, methods, and publications in Bilgrami, *Ma’asir-e Dakan*, ‘Muqaddima’. The scale of Bilgrami’s mastery over the traditional corpus is attested in the manuscript catalogue he previously compiled: Sayyid ‘Ali Asghar Bilgrami,
colonial mimicry, the resulting tome set new standards of thoroughness for the study of India’s Islamic architecture, especially beyond northern India. The book also set new standards for Urdu art history publishing, whether in the clarity of its textual layout; the consistency of its scholarly apparatus (footnotes, bibliographies, appendices); or its fifty-eight photographic illustrations.

The illustrations in Ma‘asir-e Dakān were important interpretive assets. For the 1920s was a decade when photography was also becoming a crucial tool of Islamic architectural history in Egypt and Iran through the respective surveys of K.A.C. Creswell (1879–1974) and Arthur Upham Pope (1881–1969).\(^8\) Such photographs were also very costly to reproduce. What made this possible in Asghar Bilgrami’s case was the financial support of Hyderabad’s government, which was readily forthcoming in a decade when, following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Nizam’s State was increasingly posing as the protector of not only its own Muslim heritage, but of that of Muslims far and wide.\(^83\)

In a continuation of the intellectual exchanges we have seen surrounding the birth of Urdu architectural history in Sayyid Ahmad’s Asar al-Sanadid, Bilgrami’s book was reissued in 1927 in an English translation funded by the Nizam’s finance minister.\(^84\) A few decades later, this Hyderabadi to-and-fro between Urdu and English would see the reverse translation of a groundbreaking monograph on the architecture of the Malwa Sultanate. Its author was Ghulam Yazdani (1885–1962),

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\(^83\) On the direct links between the Nizams, the late Ottoman Empire, and the latter’s exiled royals, see Omar Khalidi, ‘Ottoman Royal Family in Hyderabad, Deccan, India’, *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 46, 3, 1998: 89–97.

The *rekhta* of architecture: the development of ‘Islamic’ art history in Urdu, c.1800-1950

the longtime director of the Archaeological Department of H.E.H the Nizam’s Dominions, for whom Bilgrami had deputised while writing *Ma’asir-e Dakan*.

Such Anglo-Urdu joint enterprises continued in Hyderabad with the 1932 translation of a revised edition of James Fergusson’s survey of Indo-Islamic architecture, which included Ferguson’s many sketches and ground plans. Issued by Osmania University Press, the translation was linked to the expansion of higher education in Hyderabad. Its translator, Sayyid Hashimi Faridabadi (1890-1964), worked for the university’s translation office (Dar al-Tarjuma), translating other English history books. While the Urdu version of Ferguson was no match for the thoroughness of Asghar Bilgrami’s study of Hyderabad’s architectural heritage, it was probably the broadest survey of Indian Islamic architecture as a whole then available, taking in Ghazna, Jaunpur, Gujarat, Malwa, Bengal, Gulbarga, and Bijapur, as well as the Mughal dominions, before turning briefly to the wooden constructions of Kashmir.

Marching swiftly across time and space, Fergusson’s key concern was with the identification of ‘style’, which, in line with the standardisation of Urdu architectural vocabulary, Faridabadi rendered as *tarz*. By this stylistic criterion, for Ferguson the content and aesthetics of inscriptive calligraphy, let alone its religious substance, were irrelevant to the point of being absent from his book. Even though the building type he most often selected was the mosque, the result was a paradoxical diminishing of their Islamic dimensions. But then, it wasn’t Ferguson himself who classified such art as ‘Islamic’. As a Victorian writing before the rise of ‘Islamic art history’ around the 1910s, his chosen category was ‘Saracenic’


87 Kavita Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2013, chapter 3. The state-funded translation bureau was a major enterprise, employing fifteen full-time translators by the time Faridabadi was working on Fergusson’s book. Of the 395 translated books which were published in Urdu, 306 were, like Fergusson’s, from English. See Datla, *Language of Secular Islam*, 65.

architecture. It was only in Hyderabad that in 1932 his survey was reclassified by his translator as ‘Islamic architecture’ (Islami fann-e ta’mir).

Nor was this development peculiar to India. Three years after Faridabadi’s rebranding of Ferguson was published in Hyderabad, in Cairo Zaki Muhammad Hasan (1908-57) published his Arabic monograph al-Fann al-Islami fi Misr (‘Islamic Architecture in Egypt’). Educated at the Egyptian University (now Cairo University) then the Sorbonne, where he wrote a doctoral thesis on the Tulunids, Hasan was back in Cairo by the mid-1930s as assistant curator to Gaston Wiet (1887-1971) at the Musée Arabe (also called the Antikkhana ‘Arabiyya). As part of the wider engagements with Europe that also shaped the development of ‘Islamic’ art history in Urdu, Hasan’s publications in Arabic, French, and English, and his lectures for Creswell’s program in Islamic archaeology at the Egyptian University, further contributed to this reframing of ‘Arab’ as ‘Islamic’ art. By the early 1940s, Arabic and Persian editions of his detailed monograph on the arts of the ‘Islamic’ period in Iran had been published in Cairo and Tehran. In 1952, his efforts culminated when, as Wiet’s successor as director of the Musée Arabe, Hasan renamed it the Museum of Islamic Art (Mathaf al-Fann al-Islami).

There were also related developments in Iraq, where in 1937 the Museum of Arab Antiquities (Mathaf al-Athar al-‘Arabiyya) was established in the Khan Murjan, a fourteenth century caravanserai in Baghdad. Although the Museum of Arab Antiquities would not be renamed like its counterpart in Cairo, it owed its very existence to the determination of local intellectuals—especially Iraq’s first director of antiquities, Sati’ al-Husri (1880-1968)—to found an institution that celebrated not only the pre-Islamic past prioritized by the British-sponsored Iraq Museum inaugurated fourteen years earlier, but that instead promoted Iraq’s Islamic heritage. Consequently, the collections of the new museum differed greatly

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89 For example, the title of book vii, which contained the eleven chapters on Indo-Muslim architecture, was ‘Indian Saracenic Architecture’. See Ferguson et al, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, vol 2, book vii, 186.
90 Zaki Muhammad Hassan, al-Fann al-Islami fi Misr, Cairo: Imprimerie de la Bibliothèque Égyptienne, 1935.
93 Reid, Contesting Antiquity in Egypt, 187–191, 194.
94 Lisa Cooper, In Search of Kings and Conquerors: Gertrude Bell and the Archaeology of the Middle East, London: I.B. Tauris, 2016, 235–237. I have given the museum its usual English name rather than render athar as “monuments”.
from the ancient Mesopotamian objects displayed in the nearby Iraq Museum which, as the brainchild of Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), reflected Euro-American interests whose origins lay in Victorian Biblical archaeology.  

While the growing interest of learned Indian Muslims in ‘Islamic’ architecture was part of these wider developments, it is important to recognize that al-Husri was a committed Pan-Arabist for whom ‘Islamic’ art in general, and his museum in particular, served as an expression of a collective ‘Arab’ heritage. Clearly, then, the meanings and significance of ‘Islamic’ art varied in different contexts. But given the increasingly close interactions between Indian and Middle Eastern Muslim intellectuals in this period, and the development of a notion of “Arabness” (‘Arabiyya) based more on shared language and culture than on a narrowly nationalistic model of blood and soil, the Iraqi conflation of ‘Islamic’ and ‘Arab’ may not have been antithetical to Indian Muslim concerns. This was all the more so for members of the Arabophone Indian intelligentsia, such as Sulayman Nadvi (1884–1953), who wrote extensively on this shared Indo-Middle Eastern heritage of ‘Arabiyya and whom we will encounter below publishing articles on architectural history in his Ma’arif journal. Given this post-1900 renaissance of Arabic-learning in India in which Nadvi played so key a role, it is important not to automatically concede ownership of either ‘Islamic’ or ‘Arabness’ to the Middle East. For despite al-Husri’s promotion of a Pan-Arab identity, having been raised through the late Ottoman educational and administrative systems, his primary language was Turkish and he later spoke Arabic with a strong Turkish accent.

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98 For important recent studies of these Indo-Arabic intellectual circles, see Mohsin Ali, ‘Modern Islamic Historiography: A Global Perspective from South Asia’ (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2022) and Roy Bar Sadeh, ‘Islamic Modernists between South Asia, the Middle East, and the World, 1856–1947’ (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2022).

Languages—including their sociolinguistic and political aspects of who used and owned them—were very much in flux in this period.

This was no less the case for particular words. As the names of the new museums in Cairo and Baghdad demonstrate, the terms *athar* and *fann* were being used in new ways to mean ‘monuments/antiquities’ and ‘art’ respectively. Still, this was not an overnight or single-handed shift, particularly in the case of *fann*. In Egypt, from around 1830, the classical Arabic term *fann* (type, kind) was gradually used to translate the European (and primarily French) notion of arts (as distinct from sciences), then, from around 1880, as art in the more singular and aesthetic sense of fine art.100 Similarly, the conceptual replacement of Le Bon’s ‘Arab civilisation’ with the notion of ‘Islamic civilisation’ had already been underway by the 1900s, when Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914), an influential Lebanese scholar at the Egyptian University, published his *Tarikh al-Tanaddun al-Islami* (‘History of Islamic Civilisation’, 1901–06).101

This religio-civilisational rubric also became a feature of the increasing number of journal articles on ‘Islamic’ art in Urdu from the 1910s onwards. A major case in point is the aforementioned Indo-Muslim cultural journal, *Ma’arif*. The journal was associated with the Nadvat al-‘Ulama seminary in Lucknow, whose founders sought to renew their links with the Arab Middle East by reviving Arabic studies in India, an orientation that even influenced the style of calligraphy the journal adopted. *Ma’arif*’s articles on art and architecture began in its very first issue in 1916 via an account of the Mosque of the Prophet (Masjid-e Nabavi) in Medina—a site which, being inaccessible to non-Muslims, never entered the European architectural history of Islam.102 The article’s North Indian author, ‘Abd al-Salam Nadvi (1883–1956), drew on the language skills he acquired as a student at the Nadvat al-‘Ulama by combining classical Arabic sources with on-site description. (He subsequently also published a book on the holy sites of both Medina and Mecca.)103 Adopting into Urdu the new Arabic use of *fann* (plural *fonun*) as ‘art’, articles in subsequent issues of the journal focused on such new conceptual topics as the ‘fine arts of Islam’ (*fonun-e latifa-e Islam*) and ‘the Islamic art of architecture’ (*islami fann-e ta’mir*), as well as specific monuments, such as the mausolea of Shah

Begum in Allahabad, of Shah Rukn-e ‘Alam in Multan, of Muhabbat Khan near Lahore, and of Qutb al-Din Aibak in Delhi. Other articles in *Ma’arif* were translations from English, a strategy of historiographical capacity-building that also saw the pioneering Afghan journal of cultural history, *Aryana*, translate articles by the likes of Sir Thomas Arnold (1864–1930), sometime Dean of the Oriental Faculty at Punjab University and teacher of *Ma’arif*’s editor, Sulayman Nadvi.

Combining Indian concerns and research with European concepts and sources, the *Ma’arif* articles offer further examples of architectural *rekhta*. For example, the articles on the mausolea of Muhabbat Khan and Qutb al-Din Aibak were written by Muhammad Shuja’ al-Din, also of Punjab University. In the latter’s library, he presumably accessed the Orientalist editions of Persian texts, the English translations thereof, and the translated travelogue of Niccolao Manucci (1638-1717) that featured alongside manuscripts and Indian imprints in his footnotes. Similarly, the author of an article on the tomb of Shah Begum (c.1570–1604), wife of the Mughal emperor Jahangir, engaged with English studies from the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* and reports of the Archeological Survey of India, while providing measurements in both feet (*fut*) and the latter’s domestication as *qadam*, a calque translation of ‘foot’.

Not only was Shah Begum’s tomb and the surrounding imperial edifices of Allahabad’s Khosrow Bagh among the earliest Indo-Islamic buildings to be carefully drawn by European draughtsmen—in this case by the famous Thomas Daniell (1749-1840). The latter’s illustration was also explicitly discussed in the *Ma’arif* piece. But it was not reproduced. This suggests a deliberateness in *Ma’arif*’s...
eschewal of illustrations, hinting that theological as much as technological factors may have shaped its editorial policy of avoiding illustrations in the many articles on both Islamic and non-Islamic art that featured in the journal over the decades.

Since the journal’s editor and many of its contributors (including the author of the Shah Begum article) were Muslim clerics (‘ulama), Ma’arif’s studious avoidance of illustrations seems to reflect a certain theological caution about representations. If so, this would imply that its articles were not only about Islamic architecture; they were also Islamic studies of architecture—or at least attempts to transpose European methods of architectural history into acceptably Islamic terms. Together with the linguistic training of the many seminarian contributors to Ma’arif, this may also have contributed to the emphasis on Arabic calligraphic inscriptions in many of its articles.

Such epigraphic, and explicitly Islamic concerns, also became a feature of Urdu publications pitched toward the popular marketplace. A case in point is Tarikh-e ‘Imarat-e Shahan-e Mogholiya, ma’ruf bih Agra Ga’id (‘History of the Buildings of the Mughal Emperors, Known as the Agra Guide’), published in 1933.108 It included what had by then become such standard features of architectural rekhta as the sequential presentation of architectural parts, precise measurements in both feet and gaz, dates given alternatively in the Christian and Muslim calendars, and tables classifying building materials. But the most distinguishing feature of Tarikh-e ‘Imarat was its focus on inscriptions. In each case, these were provided in the Arabic or Persian original, along with an accompanying Urdu translation. The author, Kalikhan Akbarabadi, pointed out that, many of these were ‘a new Urdu translation only available in this book’, though like many a European researcher, he too had to draw on the deciphering skills of a traditionally-educated local scholar, Khwaja Sadiq Husayn.109 Although the resulting guidebook was pitched towards Muslim tourists to the former Mughal capital (with directions given to various buildings from Agra’s railway station), like the articles in Ma’arif, it too eschewed illustration entirely.110

This attention to inscriptions also characterised an Urdu travelogue on Afghanistan published in 1933, the same year as Akbarabadi’s guidebook to Agra.111 The travelogue author was Khvaja Hasan Nizami (1878-1955), a prominent Sufi scholar based in Delhi and associated with the famous shrine of Nizam al-Din Awliya that we have seen appearing in Urdu guidebooks. Making use of the new motor transport system that enabled the contemporaneous tour of Afghan

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110 Akbarabadi, Tarikh-e ‘Imarat, 164.
111 Khvaja Hasan Nizami, Qadim-o-Jadid Afghanistan ke Do Safarnama, ba Tasvir, Delhi: Masha’ikh Buk Dipu, 1933.
architectural monuments by Robert Byron (1905-41), Nizami carefully recorded the Arabic and Persian inscriptions he found (unlike Byron), while also (like Byron) making use of a handheld camera to take the photographs he similarly included in his book.¹¹²

Nonetheless, through the 1920s there were still new books being written that can be characterized as ‘Islamicate’ insofar as they also continued to include aspects of India’s non-Muslim architectural history. A case in point is the Urdu history of the various Shalimar Gardens—in Lahore, Srinagar, Rajouri, Kapurthala, and elsewhere—completed in 1924 by Muhammad al-Din Fauq (d.1945), an Urdu litterateur who had previously published books on the poetry of Rumi but now turned his attention to the gardens, pavilions and other associated architectural features.¹¹³ Fauq’s *Shalamar Bagh* was indubitably a work of architectural *rekhta*: the list of sources he included in his preface began with *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities* by the colonial judge Muhammad Latif (c.1845-1902), followed by the travelogue of the East India Company veterinarian and explorer William Moorcroft (1767-1825), while later in the book Fauq described the Shalimar Garden in Jammu which Maharaja Ranbir Singh (r.1856-85) founded in honour of the visit of the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) in 1875.¹¹⁴ Latif too had

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¹¹² On Nizami and Byron’s overlapping architectural ventures, see Green, ‘New Histories’. Since Nizami’s tour only covered eastern Afghanistan, he seems to have relied on other suppliers for his photographs of Herat.

¹¹³ Muhammad al-Din Fauq, *Shalamar Bagh*, Lahore: Khadim al-Ta’lim Barqi Pres, 1924. I am most grateful to Saima Nazar for bringing this work to my attention and supplying me with a copy.

brought together Mughal and British imperial history in his subsequent book on Agra, recounting the Prince of Wales’ tour of Agra’s monuments later on the same trip, where like his Mughal predecessors the prince held a darbar attended by a dozen maharajas.\footnote{Syad Muhammad Latif, Agra: Historical and Descriptive; with an Account of Akbar and his Court and of the Modern City of Agra, Calcutta Central Press Co., 1896, 69–70.}

Returning to Fauq, he also recounted the role of the Sikh rulers of the nineteenth century in maintaining Lahore’s famous gardens, along with the garden-founding efforts of other non-Muslim elites, such as the aforementioned Hindu ruler of Jammu, and Fateh Singh Ahluvalia (r. 1801-37), the Sikh ruler of Kapurthala.\footnote{Fauq, Shalamar Bagh, 64–66.} In part, this perhaps reflected the status of Urdu in Punjab, where it remained the official language of instruction in colonial government schools for Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs alike. Nonetheless, the chief focus of Fauq’s book was on the great Shalimar Gardens of Lahore that flourished under the Mughals. And like other Urdu architectural histories, his served to transfer to a wider readership his understanding of Persian manuscript sources and inscriptions, such as the quatrain of the emperor Aurangzeb’s daughter Zeb al-Nisa (1638-1702) inscribed on the marble ‘throne’ (takht) in the Lahore garden.\footnote{Sadaf Fatma, ‘Gardens in Mughal India in the Light of Inscriptions’, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 74, 2013: 297–304 and Latif, Lahore, 188–90.} Yet despite its rich documentation and detail, Fauq’s Shalamar Bagh was another example of an architectural history without illustrations.

This had not been the case with Latif’s 1892 English account of Lahore’s historical buildings, which in its nearly fifty lithographic line-drawings no less than its deep learning took inspiration from the Asar al-Sanadid of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, into whose family Latif had married.\footnote{Latif subsequently wrote a history of Agra that similarly included many architectural drawings: see Latif, Agra: Historical & Descriptive.} Nor was it the case with another English work—a guide to Delhi’s Mughal-era Jama Masjid—written in 1936 by Aziz-ur-Rahman, a local ‘instructor in Oriental languages’, which included numerous photographs of both architectural features and inscriptions.\footnote{Aziz-ur-Rahman, History of Jama Masjid and Interpretation of Muslim Devotions, Delhi: Roxy Printing Press, Jama Masjid, 1936, with the author’s professional title provided on the frontispiece.}
'European visitors and American tourists coming to the Jama Masjid (Grand Mosque) at Delhi, on a sight-seeing expedition to look at its marvelous structure.'\textsuperscript{120} After thanking ‘Mrs. Brooke (wife of G.P.H. Brooke) for her kind and most valuable literary aid … [and] diligent attention to the fidelity and veracity of the English phraseology’, he then explained that, like churches and temples, mosques are ‘invaluable text books of History’.\textsuperscript{121} Then, he proceeded to enumerate the measurements and materials of the mosque’s various elements, before focusing, like the authors of the Urdu guide to Agra, on its Arabic and Persian inscriptions. Here, then, architectural \textit{rekhta} was coming full circle from its origins among British tourists in Delhi and Agra a century earlier.

The late 1930s also saw the publication of popular guidebooks in Hyderabad, whose ruling Nizam, aristocracy, and Muslim officials ensured the rich patronage of not only architectural history but also of preservation and neo-traditional construction.\textsuperscript{122} The most detailed was \textit{Delchesp Maqamat} (‘Fascinating Places’), a multi-volume guidebook to the architectural and archaeological monuments of Hyderabad State as a whole written by the son of the royal physician, Nawwab Arastu Yar Jung (1858–1940).\textsuperscript{123} As its preface explicitly stated, the guidebook was designed to provide Hyderabadi tourists and students with information during their excursions to the titular ‘fascinating places’.\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Delchesp Maqamat} presented a vivid contrast to Akbarabadi’s Agra guidebook and especially the \textit{Ma’arif} journal. For not only did it commemorate the grand Mughal architectural legacy of Awrangzeb’s capital in Aurangabad and the royal and saintly mausolea in Khuldabad. It also included details and illustrations of the Hindu sculptures and Buddhist paintings in the Ellora and Ajanta caves, including a lithographic line-drawing of the voluptuous, bare-breasted ‘wife of Buddha’ from Ajanta.\textsuperscript{125} With its links to the colonial Indian archaeological practices imported to Hyderabad State by Ghulam Yazdani, this was certainly an expression of architectural \textit{rekhta}. But it was one adapted to the distinct cultural politics of Hyderabad, where Urdu remained the shared educated language of the Nizam’s Hindu and Muslim subjects.

The coming of Indian and Pakistani independence in 1947 (and Nehru’s invasion of Hyderabad a year later) did not put an immediate end to the developments traced in the previous pages. Rather, the founding of Pakistan set in

\textsuperscript{120} Aziz-ur-Rahman, \textit{History of Jama Masjid}, 1.
\textsuperscript{122} Lanzillo, ‘Between Industry and Islam.’
\textsuperscript{124} Asghar Husayn, \textit{Delchesp Maqamat: Subah-e Aurangabad Riyasat-e Nizam Haydarabad}, Hyderabad: A’zam Steam Press, 1939, unnumbered preface (\textit{Chand Guzareshat}).
\textsuperscript{125} The ‘wife of Buddha’ (\textit{Buddha ki bivi}), attributed to Ajanta cave #1, is on Husayn, \textit{Delchesp Maqamat: Subah-e Aurangabad}, 97.
motion a complex series of policies attempting to construct a history for the new nation, which included incorporating the ancient Buddhist and Gandharan no less than the more recent Muslim and Mughal past. Meanwhile, in 1952, the Republic of India’s most prominent Urdu cultural institution issued a translation of Moslem Architecture by Ernest T. Richmond (1874-1955) under the title Islami Fann-e Ta’mir (‘The Islamic Art of Architecture’). Like his counterparts in India, Richmond had begun his career as an architect and engineer. It was while serving in related

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administrative positions in Egypt then Palestine that he developed his historical interests. Just as the earlier Urdu translation of Le Bon channelled information to Indian Muslims about the ‘Arab’ arts of the Middle East, so Richmond’s book funnelled more recent findings from Egypt, the Levant, and Spain, while framing their buildings as being both ‘art’ and ‘Islamic’.\(^{128}\) The translator—an MA from Hyderabad’s Osmania University called Mubariz al-Din Rif’at—was by now well equipped with an Urdu art historical lexicon, requiring hardly any Romanised loan-words (a rare exception was ‘gesso’).\(^{129}\) This may well have been a result of the deliberate effort in previous decades by Hyderabad’s Translation Bureau to create a new Urdu lexicon to cope with translations of European works on the arts and sciences being prepared for Osmania University.\(^{130}\)

Yet there was one other startling loan worth mentioning in closing. For when it came to the discussion of ceramic decoration, Richmond’s translator still found himself facing a conundrum: the lack of an Urdu term for ‘tile’. After deciding to transliterate the English term as \(ta’il\), Rif’at added a justificatory footnote, explaining that while the Iranians used the Persian word \(kashi\), this was actually derived from the place-name Kashan, so they too had no proper term for ‘tiles’ as such.\(^{131}\) If this Urdu lexical lacuna seems startling, then it is worth remembering that south of Thatta and Multan, India had never developed an ongoing tradition of architectural ceramic. And so, when this ‘Islamic’ artform was rediscovered in India through an English account of Middle Eastern architecture, it required the borrowing of a term from English—a language which, by the end of colonial rule, had become more familiar than Persian. This subtle traffic of terms is a fitting point to end our survey of architectural rekhta.

**Conclusions**

As Mohammad Gharipour has written, European and American studies of ‘Persian’ architecture in the first half of the twentieth century, ‘challenged the Eurocentric views of the architectural history of the Near East and advanced historical understandings of the region which were not simply projections of a European mentality.’\(^{132}\) Yet Gharipour goes on to note how ‘these studies … rarely involved

\(^{128}\) The Urdu translation included, *inter alia*, Richmond’s summaries and citations of such scholars as van Berchem (135), Creswell (54, 165), Dozy (113), Lane-Poole (136), and de Vogüé (196). In describing the Mamluk mausoleum of al-Nasir in Cairo, Rif’at used the Urdu word *aviza* (‘hanging pendant’) to describe the *muqarnas* squinch that had become such a key concern of European architectural historians. See Richmond/Rif’at, *Islami Fann-e Ta’mir*, 200.


\(^{130}\) Datla, *Language of Secular Islam*, 77–78, noting that no fewer than 6,288 new Urdu words were coined for arts subjects (and 56,407 for scientific ones).

\(^{131}\) Richmond/Rif’at, *Islami Fann-e Ta’mir*, 65.

local archaeologists and historians.' In a striking contrast, born from the complex exchanges of India’s colonisation, Urdu materials point to a dialogical discourse through which, in some if by no means all cases, Indians also contributed to European understanding of India’s Islamic artistic heritage.

While indubitably taking place in the colony, this reflects the situation Ahmed El Shamsy describes in his account of the recovery of an Islamic textual heritage in Egypt, in which the writings of local scholars ‘cannot be reduced to a reaction to colonialism, nor was Orientalism something they simply experienced passively. Instead, they excavated their own intellectual heritage for their own reasons, sometimes in dialogue with, informed by, or even in opposition to Western scholarship.’ Neither wholly original nor wholly derivative, the works of Urdu architectural history perused here involved the skills of Indian lithographic printers, artists, calligraphers, epigraphers, historians, translators, source critics, and, above all, shapers of public memory who produced books and articles that gave meaning to visible—and visitable—buildings.

Far from being the products of narrowly Indian or colonial developments, Urdu publications reflected the adaptation of European art history in other regions of Asia in the same period. Looking east from India, we might point to Kokka (‘Flower of the Nation’), the pioneering Japanese art history journal founded in 1889 to promote the study of indigenous art forms in the face of the Westernising Yōga style that gained prominence in the early Meiji period. Yet like the Urdu works examined here, Kokka had a similarly mixed origins through the many exchanges with European and American scholars of its co-founder, Okakura Tenshin (1863–1913), a highly influential intellectual who worked the preservation of pre-modern Japanese art and culture while collaborating with Tagore and other Indian intellectuals who reappraised Buddhist art as Asia’s common “classical” heritage, from India to Japan. Subsequently, Okakura became the first curator of the Asian art section of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Looking west from India, we might point to Mir’at-ı Sanayi’-ı Islamiye/ Le Miroir de l’Art Musulman, the bilingual Turkish-French journal founded by the late Ottoman dealer-collector Ismail Hakky-Bey (1844-1903). Moving between Paris and Istanbul, Hakky-Bey filtered into his

135 On the role of Okakura, Tagore and others in promoting these pan-Buddhist links, see Nile Green, How Asia Found Herself: A Story of Intercultural Understanding, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022, ch. 3 and 4. On the tangible architectural impact of these collaborations, see Sebastian Conrad, ‘Greek in Their Own Way: Writing India and Japan into the World History of Architecture at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, American Historical Review, 125: 1, 2020, 19–53.
journal readings from the Bibliothèque nationale (including Le Bon’s *La Civilisation des arabes*) and sourced its engravings and phototypes from Fermin Didot, a specialist publisher of books on Islamic art.\(^{137}\)

This mirroring of terminology—‘art’ as ‘fann’ in Arabic then Urdu, and ‘Sanayi’ in Turkish—that was in turn conceptualised as ‘Islamic’ was not only a transnational and transimperial process. The emergence of a distinct field and formulation of ‘Islamic’ art history was also a broadly contemporaneous development, particularly in the interwar period that saw the founding of the journal *Ars Islamica* in 1934 no less than the rapid growth of scholarly publications we have seen in India and Egypt during these decades. Yet there were important distinctions and emphases. Since Western-defined Islamic art effectively comprised the art of the Middle East and North Africa (including Spain), *Ars Islamica* featured very little on India, with only five short contributions in its first five years—only slightly more coverage than Islamic art in Poland!\(^{138}\) (Correspondingly, India also played a minor role the Francophone Iranian journal *Athâr-é Iran*, founded by André Godard in 1936.)\(^{139}\) While it may seem obvious that Urdu works would emphasise Indian art, there was more to the matter than meets the eye. For as we have seen, the rapid uptick in scholarly and educational publications coincided with (and in some measure responded to) influential Anglophone Indian nationalist formulations of ‘Indian’ art as essentially Buddhist and Hindu. Correspondingly, the increasing attention to Middle Eastern Islamic art signalled by the translation of Le Bon sought to bolster the cultural capital of India’s Islamic art by tying it to a larger civilisation being celebrated by prominent European writers. The Indian authors and translators we have discussed did not therefore merely coincide, still less baldly imitate, an alien and external European conception of ‘Islamic’ art. They adapted it to their own circumstances and self-conceptions.

For as much as the development of a self-consciously Islamic art history by Indian Muslim authors in Urdu was an outcome of dialogue with European scholars, it also emerged from a ‘trialogue’ in which the unmentioned third partners were the Indian (and Ceylonese) nationalists who promoted Buddhist and Hindu traditions as the acme of ‘Indian’ art. Even such celebrated promoters of an all-encompassing ‘Asian’ art as Coomaraswamy, Okakura and Tagore largely excluded the arts of Islam from the fold, with Coomaraswamy prioritizing Hindu and Buddhist art in his many influential publications, while Okakura’s *Kokka* placed a strong emphasis on Buddhist art which was echoed in the pages of Tagore’s *Visva-

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\(^{138}\) The four articles in question were by Hermann Goetz; Ananda Coomaraswamy; Basil Grey on Mughal painting; and Nabih A. Faris and George C. Miles on an inscription from Bengal. Statement based on *Index to Volumes 1–16, Ars Islamica*, 15–16, 1951.

\(^{139}\) On the development of architectural history in 1920s and 30s Iran through similar intellectual exchanges, see Green, ‘New Histories’. 
Bharati Quarterly founded in 1935. Meanwhile, the spread of nationalist formulations of art history across the Middle East and India not only furthered the essentialisation of ‘Indian’ art as Buddhist, Hindu, and occasionally Jain. It also fostered a tension between ‘Islamic’ and ‘Arab’ formulations of Middle Eastern art, as well as the promotion of the notion of a distinct ‘Persian’ art by a closely-knit coterie of Iranian, American, and European scholars in the 1930s. One possible consequence of this removal of Iran from the developing picture of ‘Islamic’ art was the way Urdu works on Islamic architecture paired India with the Arab lands rather than Iran (let alone Central Asia). While this requires further research, not least in the Urdu journals of the period, the Urdu texts that have been examined here show that their authors largely ignored the arts of Iran, whether seen as ‘Persian’ or ‘Islamic’.

As for what we have seen as an overwhelming emphasis on architecture, the links between Urdu art history and the preservation-cum-promotion of an Indian Muslim cultural identity may help us explain this. If this partly emerged from the legacy of prior archaeological approaches to India’s past (particularly through the grand institution that was the Archaeological Survey of India), then the corresponding monumentalist emphasis in Urdu also expressed Indian Muslims’ own concerns with their sites of collective memory. Even as some Urdu writers drew on European studies, their stress on buildings associated with the Mughals and their special attention to grand mausolea represented a continuity with precolonial Persian texts in which buildings were important insofar as they were linked with important figures, preferably sultans or saints.

Here lay an irony. For the same colonial power that had bombarded Delhi’s Red Fort then banished the last Mughal emperor also rendered such palaces accessible to the public then funded their upkeep through Curzon’s Ancient Monuments Preservation Act. Such public access was an important factor in the development of Urdu architectural tourist guides to Agra and Old Delhi, those definitive memory spaces of the vanquished precolonial order. Colonial policies, both military and cultural, were therefore key factors in the monumentalisation of Indian Muslim cultural memory. Another factor was the relative lack of museums

140 For further discussion, see Green, How Asia Found Herself, ch.2 and 4 and Yuka Kadoi, ‘Embracing Islam: Okakura Tenshin and Alternative Orientalism’, Journal of Transcultural Studies (forthcoming).
devoted primarily to Islamic art—in contrast to Cairo and Istanbul—that rendered art objects and paintings less accessible and observable to the Urdu-reading public than the living mosques and protected monuments that featured in so many books.¹⁴²

Yet colonial policies were far from the only factors. In his essay on the impact of popular prints in colonial India, Partha Mitter has argued that such mass-produced images ‘offered a new sense of cultural unity that contributed to the construction of national identity.’¹⁴³ Mitter rightly added a cautionary caveat, noting that ‘there were of course limitations to such a “ubiquitous” visual culture. The “imagined community” created by print culture, which expressed the centralising tendency of elite nationalism, was considerably fragmented and fissured, as alternative popular forms of visual culture proved resistant to its hegemonic forms.’¹⁴⁴ Representing such fragments and fissures—whether the small Muslim publishers of Agra or the presses of princely Hyderabad—Urdu formulations of an artistic heritage that was at once Indian and Islamic were indeed a response to the ‘hegemonic’ cultural nationalism of Asian Anglophone elites like Okakura, Coomaraswamy, and Tagore. But they were more than just that. Because through the collaborations and amalgams that contributed to what we have called architectural rekhta, the development of ‘Islamic’ art history in Urdu became a search for an Indo-Muslim self that involved the participation of the European other.

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