Ḥiṣār-i Fīrūza: Sultanate and Early Mughal Architecture in the District of Hisar, India by Mehrdad Shokoohy; Natalie H. Shokoohy
Review by: Ebba Koch
Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, No. 2 (1989), pp. 362-364
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25212530
Accessed: 20/11/2014 23:01

bodies and minds, i.e. their incarnate selves – but that is the world of outward action, of *karma*: events in time. But going from object to object or seeking relationships is, at bottom, an unknowing search for happiness which only transcendence can give. The only lasting relationship is between seekers of the Real beyond birth and death. It culminates in the final truth which is also Love. The beginning of the way to it is not doing, but witnessing, which need not mean doing nothing. One can perform life's functions and duties and live Truth through one's actions, inwardly unattached and free. Adwayananda himself is not a renunciate (*sa'nnyâsi*) and has even raised a family as did his father, who was a government official and also a *guru*, effectively a *karma yogi* which reminds us of Kṛṣṇa's teaching in the Bhagavad Gītā.

On the whole, there is nothing in the conversations that is not known from other sources, such as the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā and Advaitic Vedāntism, both classical and popular. So we must assume that the impact and value comes from the person. Adwayanada himself insists that the initiation to the path and the realization of truth can be effected only with the direct assistance of a *guru*. When a seeker is earnest and prepared, the *guru* will turn up or will be found.

There is not much one can say about the value of records like this for academic research except in terms of collecting historical sources for the future. The phenomenon of Ashrams and *gurus* is already seen as being important enough also outside India to warrant collecting such materials for future use and assessment.

KAREL WERNER

ḤIṢĀR-I FĪRŪZA: SULTANATE AND EARLY MUGHAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE DISTRICT OF HISAR, INDIA. By MEHRDAD and NATALIE H. SHOKOOHY. (Monographs on Art, Archaeology and Architecture, South Asian Series.) pp. vi, 138, 47 figs., 141 b. & w. illus. London, Monographs on Art, Archaeology and Architecture, 1988. £27.00 (cloth), £19.00 (paperback).

The survey and documentation of the Muslim monuments of India by government institutions, in particular by the Archaeological Survey of India (which found its main reflection in the *New Imperial Series*) was not continued after independence. The recording of Indo-Islamic architecture was now left to the initiative of individual scholars, often non-Indian. The main works in northern India are a survey of the Sultanate monuments of Delhi published on a monumental scale with excellent drawings by a team of Japanese scholars (Tatsuro Yamamoto, Matsuo Ara, and Tokifusa Tsukinowa, *Delhi: Architectural Remains of the Delhi Sultanate Period*, Tokyo, 1967), a comprehensive re-documentation of Fatehpur Sikri by Italian architects (Attilio Petruccioli, *Fathpur Sikri: La Citta' del Sole e delle Acque*, Rome, 1988), and the book under review. While the first two publications could rely to a considerable extent on earlier work – also with regard to measured drawings – the survey of the Shokoohys is a more pioneering one because it presents us with the first drawings of the Muslim monuments of the district of Hisar in Haryana. It is a descriptive catalogue of over fifty monuments of the townships of Hisar, Hansi, Tosham, Fatehabad, Barwala, and, in an addendum, Ladnun in Rajasthan, which is included because during the fourteenth century it seems to have been part of the district Ḥiṣār-i Fīrūza. The material is organised topographically, the body of monuments of each town being preceded by a historical introduction based on primary Persian sources. Maps, in particular the town plans of Hisar, provide not only new insights into Sultanate town planning and irrigation systems but will now also enable students of Sultanate architecture to find buildings (such as the "Jahāz Kothī") without wandering in circles, misdirected by the local population.

Almost all monuments are illustrated by black and white photographs. Since virtually all the buildings are in a bad state of repair they appear at their best on the carefully executed measured drawings. More than half of the buildings are represented by ground plans as well as by elevations and sections in metric scale, which from an international point of view is to be highly commended.

The entries read as brief discussions. Whenever available, epigraphical evidence or references to architecture in the histories of the time are used to shed light on the buildings. Since at the

period in question such evidence is sparse, the main tool of the authors for identifying and categorising the monuments is the recording of their physical features. The most informative entries are on early Sultanate and Tughluq architecture, the authors' predominant field of research. These include the Tughluq buildings of Hisar (founded by Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq in 757/1356), to which belong such important monuments as the palace of Fīrūz Shāh with its mosque, the "Gūjarī Maḥal" and its gardens, the "Jahāz Kothī", the mysterious "Bāradarī" at Tosham which is identified as a Tughluq building, and the reconstruction of the early Sultanate mosque at Ladnun which was rebuilt under Fīrūz Shāh. Here the authors appear to be "truly at home", they provide an analytical description and convincing comparisons with related architectural phenomena elsewhere in Sultanate architecture.

The rest of the survey consists of less important material. With the exception of the Barsi Gate, the monuments of Hansi lack the quality of the Tughluq buildings of the district. Often historical interest outweighs architectural merit (Dargāh of Chahār Quṭb).

A group of tombs at Hisar (recently also mentioned by S.Parihar, *Mughal Monuments in the Punjab & Haryana*, New Delhi, Inter-India Publications, 1985, p. 29 f., pl. 22) includes a dated example from the first period of Humāyūn's reign (944/1538). These tombs are of interest not only because dated monuments of that period are rare but also because they show that something like a vernacular architectural style seems to have developed in the area, which on the non-imperial level was continued by the Mughals. Here one would have welcomed a more profound analysis of this local tradition and its relationship to the metropolitan styles of Delhi. While such evidence justifies the span of the period investigated from "Sultanate to Early Mughal", it is less easy to understand why the authors extended their survey far beyond their self-chosen chronological limit. Apparently carried away by the desire to record as much as possible of what they feel will soon be lost, they let the collecting of "a few buildings of later periods . . . as examples of the later architecture of the district" (p. 4) swell disproportionally. At least a fifth of their survey deals with rather nondescript buildings of the seventeenth, eighteenth and even the nineteenth centuries. On the whole much of the dating of all post-Tughluq architecture seems to be based on rather shaky evidence and often the authors are not convinced of their own deductions and hesitate to suggest a date at all. One feels that the Shokoohys would have obtained better results if, of their chosen tools of dating namely "orientation, building material and design" (p. 53), they had used in particular building material to the fullest extent. The authors observe correctly that the format of bricks changes and they realise that the size of bricks in the Sultanate period is larger than that used in Mughal times. However they do not make any further use of the potential of this observation. Only once are the exact measurements of a brick format given (p. 53) and the (admittedly few) published data about the format of Mughal bricks are not considered (See *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Progress Report of the Archaeological Surveyor, Northern Circle*, 1905–06, pp. 17 f. and also, probably too recent to be known to the authors, E. Koch, "Notes on the Painted and Sculptured Decoration of Nur Jahan's Pavilions in the Ram Bagh [*Bagh-i Nur Afshan*] at Agra", *Facets of Indian Art: A Symposium Held at the Victoria and Albert Museum on 26, 27, 28 April and 1 May 1982*, ed. R. Skelton *et alia*, London, 1986, p. 63, n. 26).

But here one might raise a more fundamental question. Research into a certain period based on monuments of secondary merit, however painstaking, can throw only a limited light on the subject investigated. Reflections on this point were already made by Friedrich Nietzsche (*Vom Nutzen und vom Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, Reclam Universal Bibliothek, 1982, p. 27 ff), who criticises such an approach as "antiquarian", as regarding everything past to be of the same importance. Architectural surveys with a topographical goal will always have to face this problem because they tend to consider all the monuments on equal terms. This approach is certainly justified in a national government institution, such as the Archaeological Survey of India, where surveyors set out on their fact-finding tours to answer the question of "what is there". The student of Muslim architecture in India is of course in an awkward position because he sees himself torn between conflicting demands, on the one hand the need to address himself to the various questions the discipline has developed and on the other the fact that the base for answering those questions has as yet to be provided. But with waning government interest there is no realistic hope that all Muslim monuments of India will ever be recorded. Many top-quality monuments of various periods are still undocumented. It therefore seems that the efforts of field

work in India would lead to more rewarding and satisfying results if they were directed more systematically towards one period or to a typology of buildings. If, however, the criterion must be topography, an area should be chosen where the more important monuments do not become unfairly buried in the mass of modest material, or else a critical selection of the material should be made so that secondary monuments are not accorded an undue significance just because they have been recorded.

It is quite rare that scholars of Indo-Muslim architecture combine architectural knowledge with precise field work and a thorough command of Persian and Arabic. Therefore, while one feels that much of the painstaking labour of the Shookohys will not be of as much benefit as if it had been applied to more significant material, students of this field will nevertheless be immensely grateful that we now have a ready reference for the monuments of the area.

EBBA KOCH

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA II. 2. BENGAL: THE BRITISH BRIDGEHEAD. EASTERN INDIA 1740–1828. By P. J. MARSHALL. pp. xv, 195, front, 2 maps. Cambridge etc., Cambridge University Press, 1987. £17.50.

This monograph is one of seven that constitute the second part of the *New Cambridge History of India*, under the general title "Indian States and the Transition to Colonialism". Altogether four parts are envisaged, with no less than 32 monographs. One's first question is how this enterprise compares with the old *Cambridge History*. Not only do we have 32 slender volumes instead of five substantial ones: the new venture begins with the sixteenth century, instead of with ancient history, or with pre-history. This seems regrettable, given the wealth of scholarship that has been devoted to ancient history and pre-history in recent years, not to speak of the new interpretations that have been formulated about various issues. Some coherence also seems likely to be lost. This can already be seen even in spelling and transliteration: for example, the same city is spelt "Dhaka" in the present volume and "Dacca" in its predecessor.

One can detect a considerable change in underlying assumptions. There is none of that confidence in British achievements which characterised the old *Cambridge History*. This is not to say that much attention is given to nationalist criticisms of British rule. Indeed, the Cambridge view of the nationalists, as we shall no doubt see in subsequent volumes, is that they were disappointed men, whose criticisms of British policies camouflaged their quest for the meagre loaves and fishes of municipal patronage available to those who had failed in the competitive examinations for the ICS. However, the new approach provides indirect answers to nationalist criticisms of the damage done by exploitative imperialism. The British, it seems, could do very little. Insofar as their policies had any impact at all, they were manipulated by Indian subordinates who had their own axes to grind.

Marshall begins with an exhaustive analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of Bengal and Bihar, emphasising regional differences and the richness of the religious and cultural life that continued throughout this period, of course unharmed by British activities. His treatment of the doings of Clive and Warren Hastings is very low-key. One might almost think that Burke made a fuss about nothing. Much of the underhand plotting that led to Plassey, even "the undeceiving of Omichund", is passed over. So is the execution of the great Brahmin Nanda Kumar, though research has shed fresh light on his remarkable career.[1] On the other hand, Marshall provides a subtle analysis of the situation that led to Plassey, taking account of the socio-economic consequences of Maratha incursions: of course they seem to have done more damage than British activities. Many Indian merchants were crippled by their losses and by the exactions of the Nawab, who was desperate to re-establish his military ascendancy. They failed to provide the goods needed by the English and Dutch companies. So those Companies turned to direct dealings with artisans. Consequently Indian merchants were no longer available to

[1] B. K. Roy, *The Career and Achievements of Maharaja Nanda Kumar, Dewan of Bengal (1705–1775)* (Calcutta, 1969).