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Crossing Lines: Architecture in Early Islamic South Asia

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# Crossing lines

## Architecture in early Islamic South Asia

MICHAEL W. MEISTER

The architecture of early Islamic South Asia shows in clear material terms multiple layers of reception, local marking, and subversion. That local aspects of construction and ornament were incorporated into early Islamic monuments is an increasingly accepted concept, yet substantive incorporation of local beliefs has hardly been approached. Both Hindu and Muslim monuments from early Islamic Pakistan suggest that such an issue should be raised.<sup>1</sup>

### Multan

In the sixth and seventh century A.D. perhaps the best known pilgrimage temple in India's northwest was that dedicated to a solar deity at Multan (Punjab Government 1926:272–277), yet other cults, not all of them canonically "Hindu," could also have been discovered (Meister 2000b).<sup>2</sup> Some of the complexities of crossing lines in the two millennia before Islam reached South Asia in the eighth century are suggested by words of the French Vedic scholar, Louis Renou (1953:5–6), which can give a sense of the processes of in-migration in this region from a much earlier period: "The Vedic clans . . . surrounded by the hostile mass . . . themselves were divided. There were the *aris* or 'strangers.' . . . There were the *vṛtyas*, whose religion Vedism tried to absorb." There need have been little homogeneity, but rather substantial diversity, among populations filtering in at any time.

Under Arab Muslim hegemony in the eighth century A.D. the importance of Multan as a pilgrimage center remained. Abu Zayd al-Hasan, who traveled there in the ninth century, recorded that (Renaudot 1733:68):

1. Variants of this paper were presented at a UNESCO-sponsored "Colloquium on Indus Civilization: Dialogue Among Civilizations," Islamabad, Pakistan, April 2001, and a symposium "Exploring the Frontiers of Islamic Architecture" organized by the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT, Cambridge, Mass., May 2001.

2. Eliade (1969:302) wrote of "a convergence for a large number of religious, magical, and alchemical traditions and practices, most of them Śivaistic, but some of them Buddhist."

there is a famous Idol called *Multan*, whither they report in Pilgrimage from the remotest parts, even from distances of several Months. Some of the pilgrims bring with them the odoriferous Wood *Hud al Camruni* . . . which they offer to this Idol; delivering it to the Priest of the Temple that he may burn it before his God.<sup>3</sup>

S. M. Ikram (1964:14, 17–18), reporting on conditions in the Indus valley in the eighth century, wrote that "soon after the conquest of Sind and Multan the killing of cows was banned in the area" and that the Arab ruler's dress soon became "similar to that of the Hindu rajas, and, like them, he wore earrings and kept his hair long." Only "through a coup d'état" in 997 was Multan "captured" by the Ismailis, who "destroyed the old historic temple . . . which Muhammad ibn Qasim had left in charge of the Hindus." In 1005 Mahmud of Ghazni "compelled the ruler of Multan to recant his Ismaili beliefs," and in 1175 "Sultan Muhammad Ghuri captured Multan and appointed an orthodox Sunni governor." I cite these facts from Ikram in part to suggest the degree to which territorial disputes could involve intra-Islamic contestation.

Multan had also become a major Muslim pilgrimage center at least by the time the tombs of Rukn-i 'Alam and other *pīrs* were built there by the fourteenth century (fig. 1) (Punjab Government 1926:278–282). Yet, in spite of its previous "destruction," the Sun temple at Multan continued to have a presence. According to the Multan Gazetteer (*ibid.*:274, 279–280), "[i]t was apparently destroyed in the 11th century, but it was again restored, and it seems to have been still standing in Thevenot's time (after 1666 A.D.)." Its latest iteration on the hill, the Prahlādpuri temple behind the tomb of Bahā-ud-din Zakaria, was finally de-ritualized only by partition in 1947 and its body wrecked in response to the destruction of the Bhabri masjid in north India in 1992.<sup>4</sup>

3. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang had also visited Multan and written a description of the Sun temple in 641 A.D. (Punjab Government 1926:24).

4. The Prahlādpuri temple, in close proximity to the tombs, remains a protected monument under the Government of Pakistan. The site of the ancient Sun temple has not been archaeologically

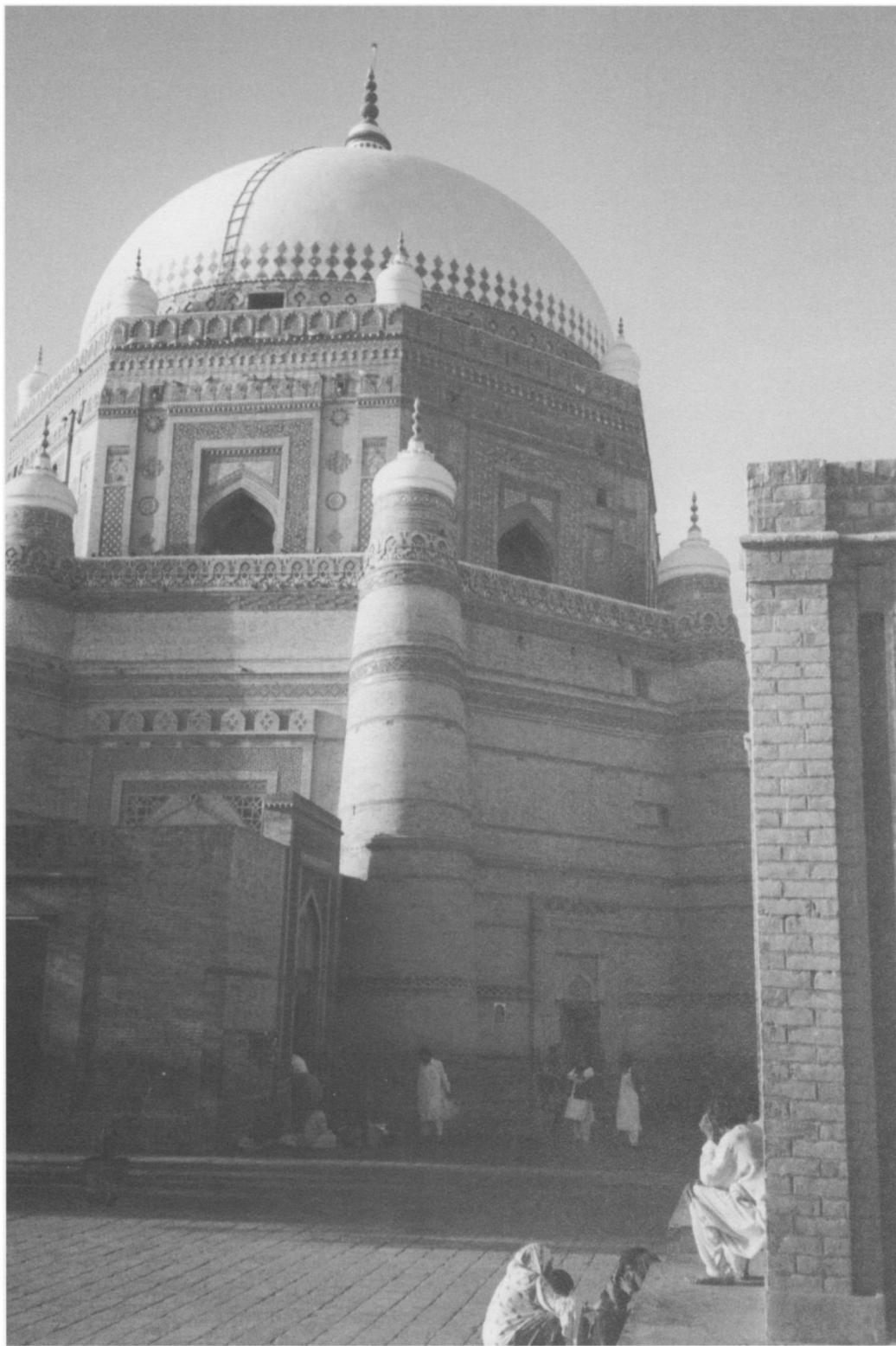


Figure 1. Multan, tomb of Rukn-i 'Alam, ca. fourteenth century (restored, twentieth century).  
Photo: Michael W. Meister.



Figure 2. Khatti Chor (Kabirwala), tomb of Khalid Walid, ca. twelfth century, view from south. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

Multan's great tomb architecture combined elements and materials of the constructional traditions of the Indus with forms of ornament that conspicuously mark this region's contact with elsewhere in the Islamic world (Hillenbrand 1992; Khan 1987–1988). Yet we can see these tombs as part of a continuum of experience with sacrality that goes far back in the history of the region.<sup>5</sup>

determined, although Alexander Cunningham's excavations of a well next to the Prahlādpuri shrine (Punjab Government 1926:272–273) showed continuous habitation from the sixth century B.C., and "ashes in the 8th century A.D." that may "represent the capture of Multán by Muhammad Kasim in A.D. 702."

5. Eliade (1969:302) remarked that with ascetic traditions "we are dealing with a movement of considerable importance that seems to have been highly popular after the twelfth century of our era. . . . These mythologies and folklores . . . represent extremely archaic contents."

I have found useful R. A. Jairazbhoy's (1995:v) observation in his book on *Foreign Influence in Ancient Indo-Pakistan* that

[o]nce technologies of civilization have been learned or fashioned . . . , once an idiom has been learned by the native craftsman from the limited horizons within his purview, there follows a period of entrenchment and assimilation. If after this there should be no further contact with a world of different values, then there is a process of hardening in which innovation gives way to repetition, and elaboration is preferred to invention.

#### The "Frontier"

Certainly the rapid expansion of Islam across Eurasia in the seventh to twelfth centuries offers one of the great case studies for testing processes of innovation produced by contact. Yet we must challenge the creation of any

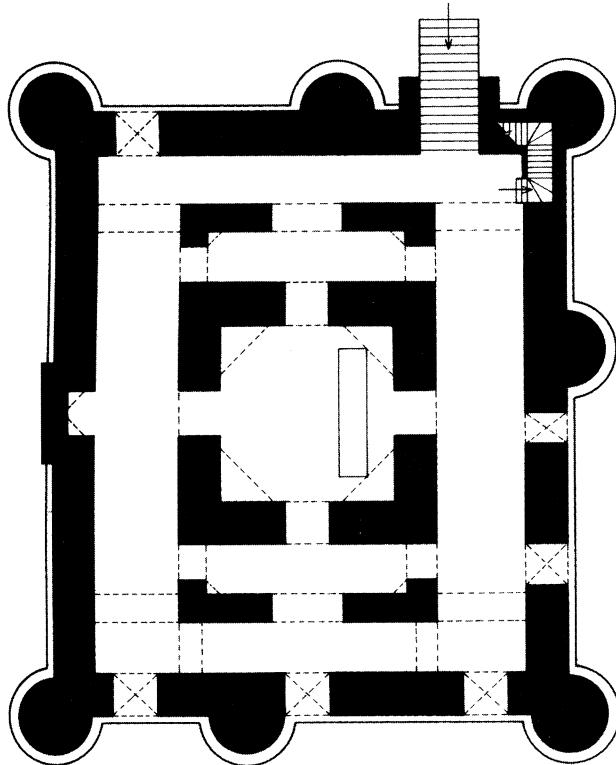


Figure 3. Khatti Chor, *ribāt* of Khalid Walid, ground plan. Drawing: Michael W. Meister, after Khan (1990) and Ali (1991).

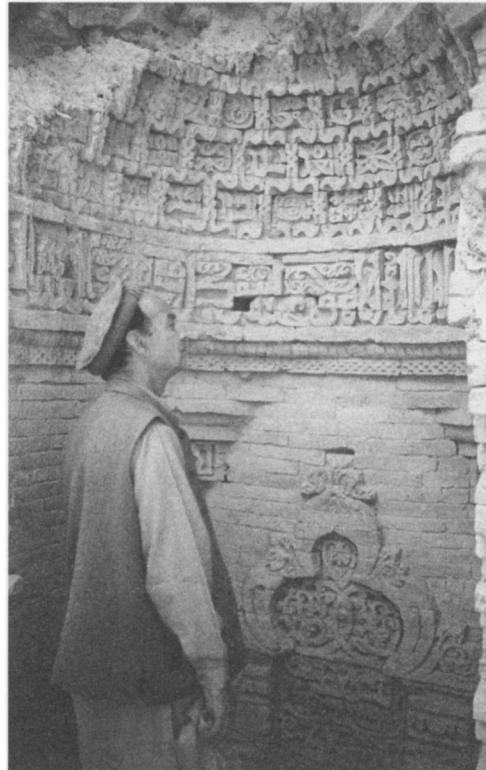


Figure 4. Khatti Chor, tomb of Khalid Walid, *mihrāb* in west corridor. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

single canon to define all art under Islam. It would seem too much to claim, for example, that among all territories into which Islam initially spread, it was *only* South Asia that was "a clear slate" requiring "the entire range of Islamic institutions" (Blair and Bloom 1994:149).<sup>6</sup>

Oleg Grabar's seminal book on *The Formation of Islamic Art* in 1973 both helped frame a defining canon and began to destabilize it. As an art historian he found (Grabar 1973:39) that only "for Western Iran, in the areas under the direct and continuous influence of the Sasanian empire, is it possible to talk of a fairly clear artistic style," but wrote eloquently of the broad multicultural worlds and communities across which

6. Blair and Bloom (1994:149) continue "virtually all of [these] were fundamentally different in spatial concept from most Hindu and Jain structures." The temple they view as never "designed for congregational worship, the sole requirement of the mosque," overlooking both evolving functions of the temple and the semiotic value of a mosque.

Islam as a religion quickly extended itself in the seventh century:

The result of this religious and ethnic variety was twofold. On the one hand, it brought the Muslim world into contact with a far wider set of ways of life, beliefs, and artistic traditions. On the other hand, it meant the Muslim world lacked a single predominant artistic koiné such as the Roman. . . .<sup>7</sup>

In addition to this focus on continuities of Sasanian and Roman conventions in early Islamic west Asia (Grabar 1967), Grabar (1973:128) also offered a significant preliminary insight into formative contributions of other regions, particularly the east:

It is a feature of the Islamic frontier, of the peculiarly fascinating world of the edges of the empire where a Muslim elite sought to convert others and mixed with an

7. Grabar (1973:39) continued ". . . in most other areas, especially the northeast, the variety of forms is impossible to define in unified stylistic terms."

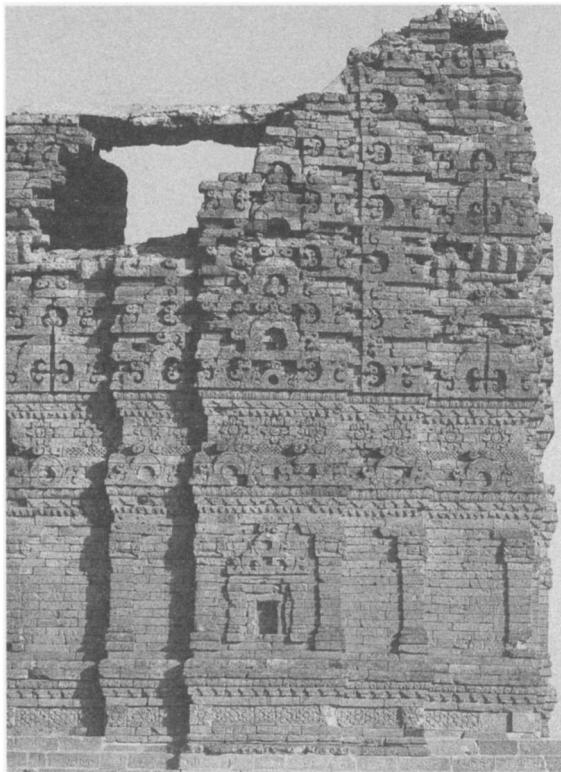


Figure 5. Kallar (Salt Range), brick temple, ca. eighth century, view from west. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

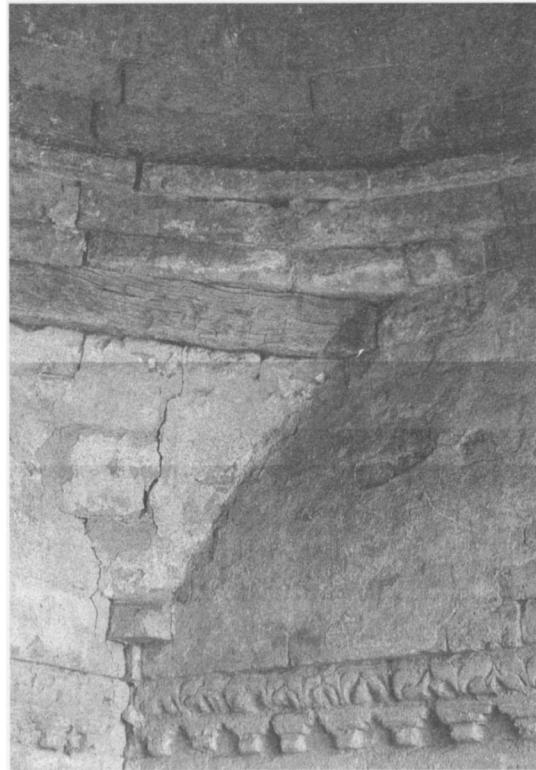


Figure 6. Kallar, brick temple, dome and pendentive on the interior. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

astounding variety of ethnic and cultural groups. Although we know very little about the formation and history of a Muslim frontier spirit, it shaped much of the mind and forms of later Islamic culture, and it is perhaps not an accident that original functions first developed there quite early.

In particular, as Grabar (1973:38) had written earlier in his study,

The predominance of Central Asia in the growth of the special religious form of the mausoleum to holy men should probably be explained by the frontier spirit of the *ghazi*, warriors for the faith. Thus it would appear that the Islamization of eastern and northeastern Iran was more rapid, more profound, and more original than that of the western Iranian world.

#### Tomb or *ribāt* of Khalid Walid

Perhaps no monument could better be used to represent the “frontier spirit” Grabar talked of—and the response of local craftsmen—than the ca.-twelfth-

century fortified brick tomb attributed to Khalid Walid near the village of Khatti Chor (Kabirwala tehsil) southeast of Multan in Pakistan (figs. 2–4) (Khan 1990:75–78; Edwards 1990, 1991).<sup>8</sup> Should this, with its bastions, court, and corridors, also be considered a *ribāt*, “dedicated to the monastic and missionary fighters for the faith,” (Grabar 1973:128) in addition to a tomb for one of them?<sup>9</sup>

Islamization in the northeast of Iran, as Grabar (1973:38) wrote:

was the work of a comparatively small number of Arabs . . . military men who settled in or near . . . ancient cities with

8. The tomb was “built under the orders of ‘Ali Karmakh, who acted as governor of Multan under Shahab u’d-Din Ghuri” (Khan 1990:75).

9. Grabar (1973:38) also comments that “it is not accidental that [in northeastern Iran] . . . we hear of ribats, although no certain instance of the monuments themselves have been preserved.” Hillenbrand (1996a:512) refers to this monument as the “*ribāt* of ‘Ali ibn Karmakh near Multan,” citing Edwards (1991).

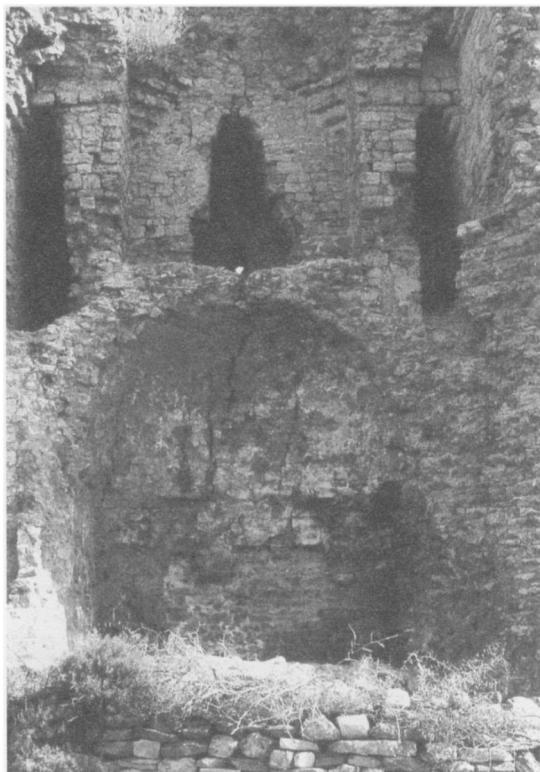


Figure 7. Nandana (Salt Range), brick temple, late tenth–eleventh century, view of domes in ruined interior.  
Photo: Michael W. Meister.

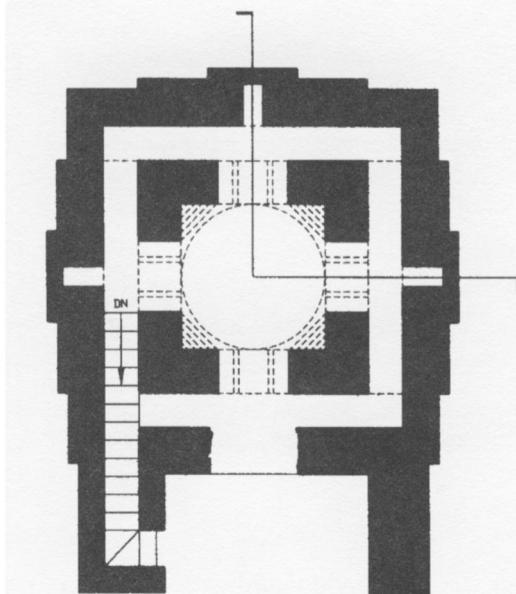
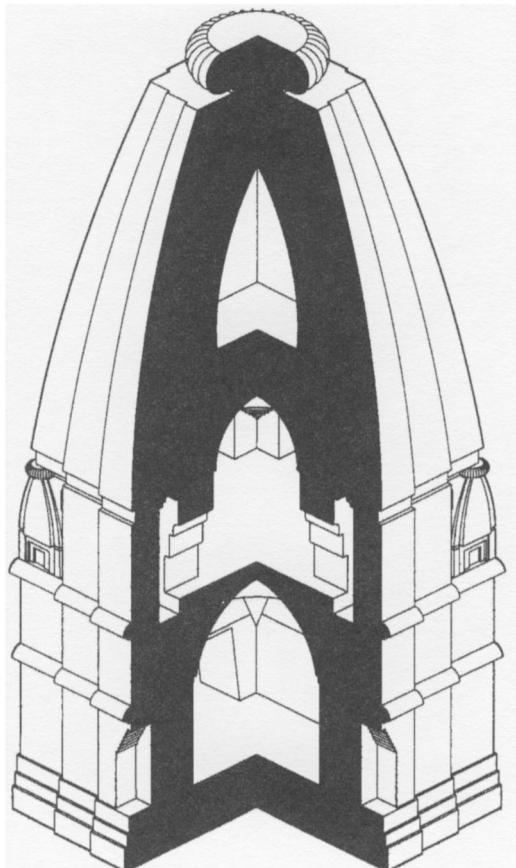


Figure 8. Nandana, brick temple, axonometric section and ground plan of second story. Drawing: Hasina Choudhury, © Michael W. Meister.

a rich and impressive Zoroastrian, Manichaean, and Buddhist heritage. . . [T]hat these cities were on or near the frontier as guardians of the Muslim world . . . greatly affected the character of the faith found there.

Within the massive structure of Ali bin Karmākh's *ribāṭ*, with its surrounding vaulted corridors and central domed chamber (fig. 3), the *mihrāb* placed at the center of the west wall of the inner court was decorated by cut-brick ornament that carefully combined an Islamic message with patterns marking the South Asian location of the tomb (fig. 4) (Akbar, Rehman, & Tirmizi 1991).<sup>10</sup> As Ahmad Nabi Khan (1993:266) phrased it, "Islamic art [in Pakistan] learnt a great deal from the Hindu way of construction and decorative embellishment."

It is not difficult to compare the Indic arch (*candraśālā*) and vase-and-foliage (*pūrṇa-ghaṭa*) pillarets of this

10. The inscription carved on bricks framing this *mihrāb* (Ali 1991) was removed by smugglers but recovered by customs officials some years ago.



Figure 9. Taxila, Shrine of the Double-headed Eagle, façade detail, ca. second–third century. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

*mīhrāb* to source forms on a Hindu–Shahi-period temple such as the brick structure at Kallar from the eighth century (fig. 5) (Meister 1996, 2000). What we may question instead is the way and for what reasons such forms have been received and incorporated here.<sup>11</sup> Are they simply borrowed local decoration, or are they rather a claim—in the name of the *fakir* or *ghazi*—on the locality of South Asia itself?

To represent such arched decoration as a variant on “Islamic” patterns found elsewhere masks the point.<sup>12</sup> They are, rather, empathetically understood local forms, with demonstrable antecedents from the pre-Islamic period.<sup>13</sup>

11. See categories of interaction posited in Meister (1972).

12. Hillenbrand (1996b:168) writes that the “most common form of arch was the horseshoe, distinguished from its counterpoint in Western Islamic architecture by a pointed apex.”

13. Hillenbrand, *ibid.*, states that “arches could be cusped, whether with three cusps (‘tomb’ of Khalid ibn Walid) or more commonly five or seven, a form found extensively on contemporary gravestones and mosques as far away as India [citing Delhi and Ajmer

The brick construction of the half-dome of the *mīhrāb* also parallels local building conventions known from Hindu–Shahi and previous periods (Meister 1996). Such domes had begun much earlier in the traditions of Gandhara and the northwest. Examples of interior domes with plain triangular pendentives come from sixth- and early-seventh-century stone temples at north Kafirkot and Bilot as well as the eighth-century brick temple at Kallar (fig. 6).<sup>14</sup> Such local conventions evolved and were passed on from late Kushan through Shahi periods, to those of early Islamic patronage in the region. The large domed chambers and vaulted corridors inside temples built by the Hindu Shahis in the tenth century at Amb, Bilot, and Nandana (figs. 7–8), for example, can

mosques]” without acknowledging the existence of indigenous pre-Islamic sources. See Meister (2000a:1331), “[t]he [5-cusped entrances to the small temple at Amb . . . continue a line of evolution begun with the simple triple-arched vaulted entrance of temple B at Māri.”

14. Some of these pendentives still are crowned by structural wood beams, a combination of wood and brick found later in the construction of the tombs at Multan (Khan 1990).

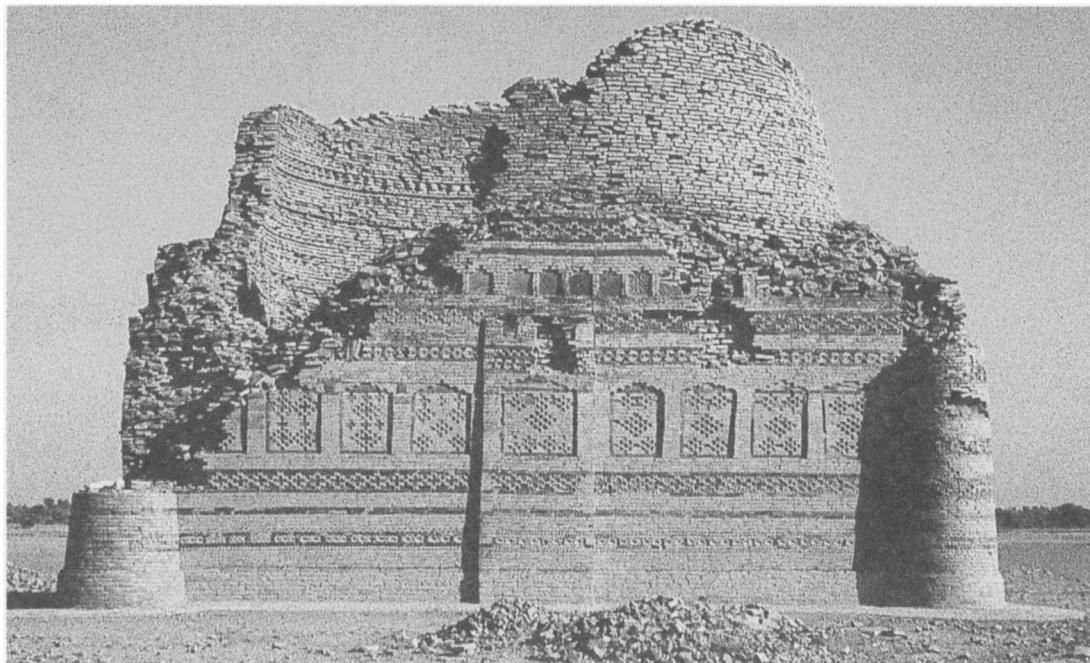


Figure 10. Lal Muhra (North-West Frontier Province) brick tomb no. 4 with blue-tile ornament, ca. thirteenth century. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

remind one of similar spaces in local brick structures of the following Islamic period that take on a much different modality (Meister 1996, Khan 1997–1998).

In the late-tenth-century temple at Nandana, the hill fort from which Hindu-Shahi rulers lost control of their territory to Mahmud of Ghazni, for example, large interior dome covered chambers on each of two stories (fig. 7). A stairway built into the outer wall led to a vaulted corridor surrounding a central chamber on the upper level.<sup>15</sup> Much the same interior construction was used for the tomb of Shah Gardez at Adam Wahan (Bahawalpur)—a domed tomb with no curvilinear “śikhara” as at Kallar and Nandana (figs. 5, 7–8).<sup>16</sup> That is, the sign value marked by the exterior form of the building could change independent of the constructional system used.

Domes go back well beyond “Islamic contact” in this region, at least to such Buddhist-period monuments as cells of the monastery of Takt-i-bhai north of Peshawar, and may seem to represent both a response to constructional conventions of nearby central Asia and the Roman world and to the semantic suggestion of a

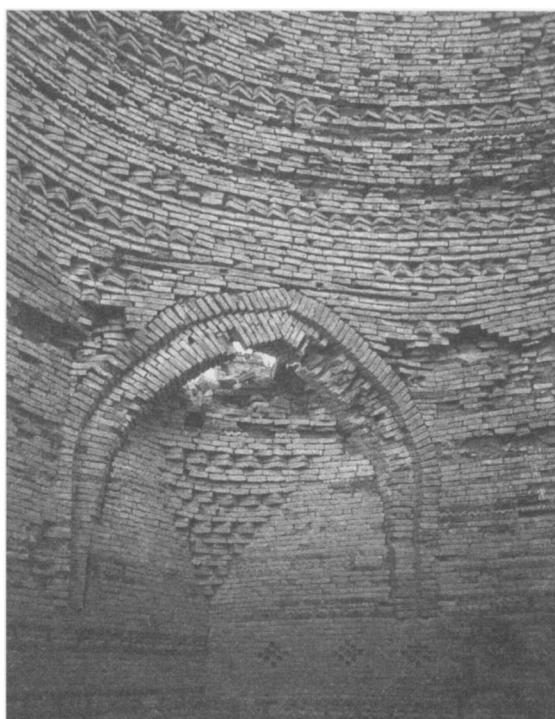


Figure 11. Lal Muhra, brick tomb no. 4, dome and squinch on the interior. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

15. See also the temples at Amb and Bilot (Meister 2000a:figs. 14, 15).

16. Compare Khan (1990:fig. 26 & pl. 82).

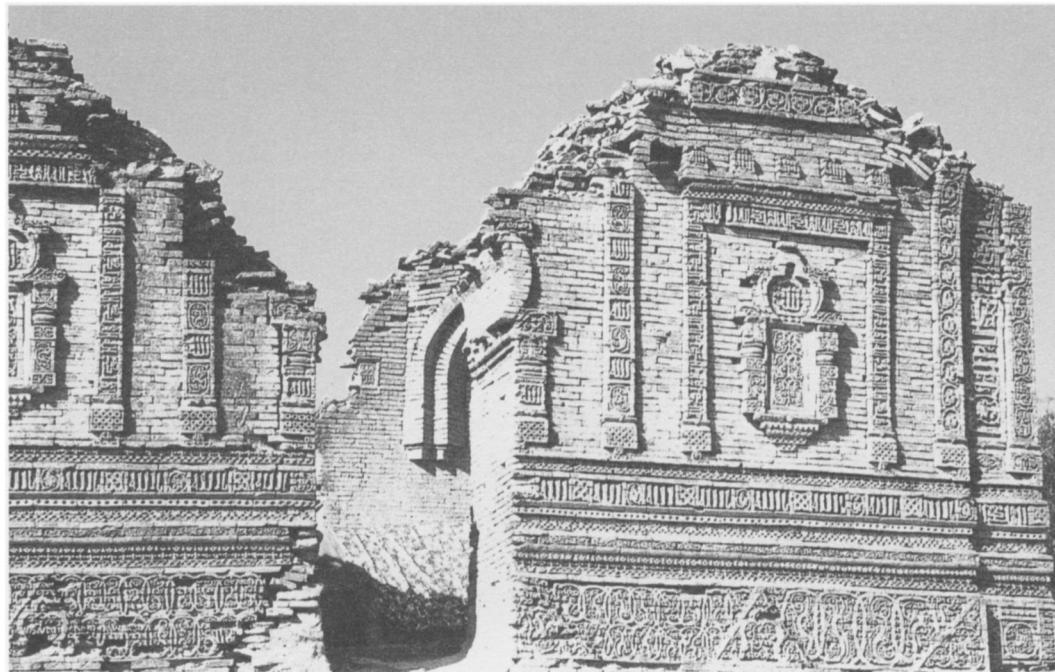


Figure 12. Sadan (Muzaffargarh), tomb of Shaikh Sadan Shahid, west view, ca. thirteenth century.  
Photo: Michael W. Meister.

Buddhist ascetic's thatch-domed hut (Coomaraswamy 1988; Renou 1998). In this early period, most notably on the façade of the Shrine of the Double-headed Eagle at Taxila (fig. 9), architectural forms could be used to signify the variety of community cross-currents present: the classical pediment of a fire temple, the arched façade perhaps of an ascetic's retreat, and the *toraṇa* gate of a Buddhist shrine. In similar fashion, the tomb of Khalid Walid also signed its location by its ornament (fig. 4).

#### **Tombs at Lal Muhra and Sadan**

Many other sources also interacted, of course, as models for the architecture of early Islamic South Asia; remarkable tenth-century Samanid tombs survive at Bukhara,<sup>17</sup> twelfth-century tombs at Chhist, a minaret at Jam, an arch at Bust (Grabar 1973; Hillenbrand 1996a, b; Maricq & Wiet 1959).<sup>18</sup> Local craftsmen who built for

Muslim merchants along Gujarat's coast before political hegemony was established also built temples (Shokoohy 1988). The monuments of Gurids and Ghaznavids, slave dynasty and later sultans, become markers of where people had come from and where they had arrived (Meister 1972, 1993).

Questions of plunder or patronage, craft guilds and contact, of assimilation, innovation, stagnation, and change need to be parsed with care.<sup>19</sup> The little-known brick tombs at Lal Murha (figs. 10–11), south of Dara Ismail Khan in the North-West Frontier Province, for example, have precursors at Bukhara and Chhist as well as being local constructions with brick and blue-tile ornament that can seem antecedent to those more famous local tombs of the fourteenth century at Multan (fig. 1) (Ali 1988; Ali, Durrani, & Sehrai 1997; Khan 1990:167–173).<sup>20</sup>

17. Of the Samanids Grabar (1973:38) remarked "by the end of the ninth century the rise of the Samanids can serve as a convenient point in time at which a fully formed culture of Islamic Iran can be assumed, at least for the northeastern provinces. . . ."

18. Excellent photographs of the tombs and ornament at Chhist appear in Niedermayer (1924:pls. 182–184).

19. Reuel Marc Gerecht (*The New York Times*, Mar. 8, 2001) wrote of "the tolerance of traditional Islam, which in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent even made its peace with polytheists and idol worshipers."

20. Khan (1990:167) wrote that "the tombs are unique in design and construction, inspired and executed by local masons."

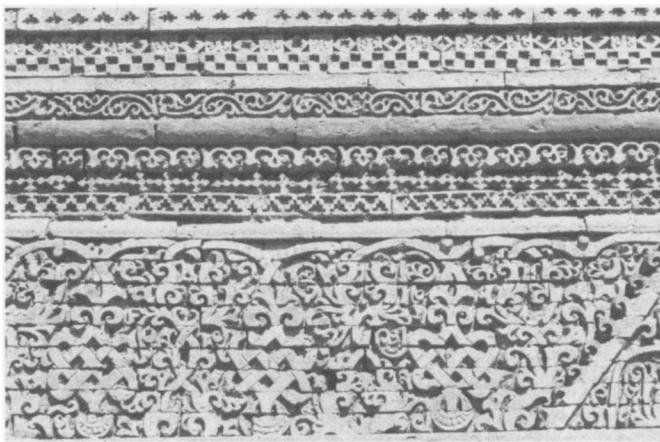


Figure 13. Sadan, tomb of Shaikh Sadan Shahid, detail of cut-brick ornament. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

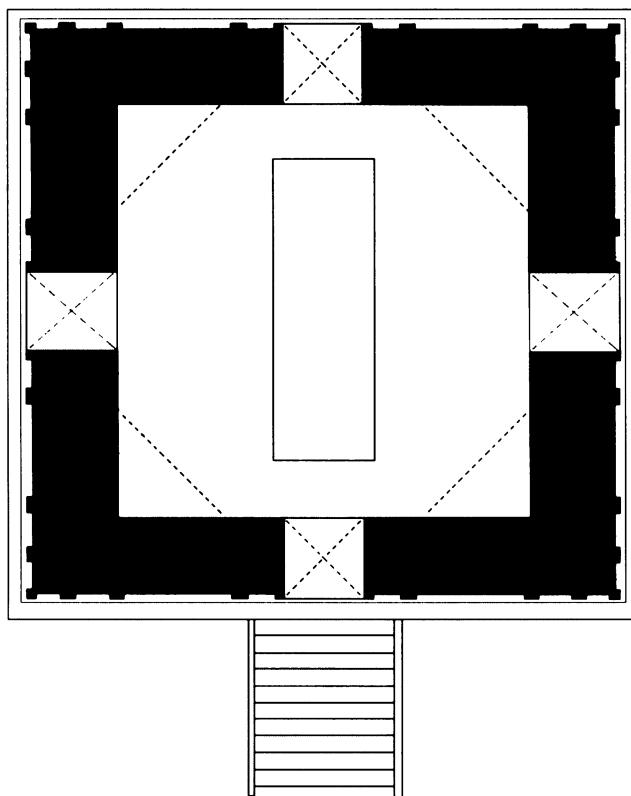


Figure 14. Sadan, tomb of Shaikh Sadan Shahid, ground plan. Drawing: Michael W. Meister.



Figure 15. North Kafirkot (N.W.F.P.), sculpture of a transubstantiating sage excavated in front of temple B, ca. sixth–seventh century. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

Yet southwest of Multan, near a small village known as Sadan or Jalaran, also in the thirteenth century, a tomb for a saint known as Sadan Shahid had been built of exquisitely made thin bricks, carved across the surface with precise ornament (fig. 12–14).<sup>21</sup> This tomb combines local with constructional and decorative conventions brought from Central Asia (Ali 1993; Khan 1990:82–86). Compared with the contemporary tombs at Lal Murha, however, it has been intentionally indigenized by its decoration, which conspicuously

21. Ali (1993:133) identifies the village as Jalaran. The cut-brick ornament, he remarks (136), "refers to the continuation of pre-Muslim architectural decoration" but "proper attention is also given to calligraphic decoration," largely the name of Allah and Muhammad repeated on the outer walls.

continues and elaborates the niche forms and foliage found a century earlier on the *mīhrāb* in the *ribāt* of Khalid Walid (fig. 4). Did this ornamentation, perhaps, suit the local—as well as transnational—power of the *pīr*?<sup>22</sup>

### Dome and spire

Ettinghausen and Grabar (1994/1987:216–217) had already raised the issue: “Why the earliest consistent group of Islamic mausoleums should appear in tenth-century Iran is not altogether clear.” They concluded that “[d]ynastic pretensions, worshipping the burial places of Ali, and attempts to attach a Muslim meaning to traditional holy sites must all have played a part in a phenomenon . . . which may have spread westward from Iran.”

I might wonder if the *idea* may also have spread westward from lands where Alexander’s first encounter with sages became so important an Islamic trope for kingship.<sup>23</sup> Certainly *r̄sis* continued to play an important role in the seventh century in India’s northwest, as the image recently excavated at north Kafirkot can attest (fig. 15)—as also in the distant past and today (Meister 2000b; Meister & Rehman in press).<sup>24</sup> In Islamabad I suggested that seals from the Indus Valley civilization with figures seated in yogic posture (fig. 16) “might be seen as marking a line of sages and followers in the northwest as much a part of the heritage of Pakistan as of India.”<sup>25</sup>

Grabar (1973:128) postulated that, more important than the conversion of old building types to new functions, “is the appearance of new, particularly Islamic functions that acquired a monumental form”; using that frame, he also put forward that “[c]ommemorative buildings, especially mausoleums to holy men,” were thus “less uniquely Islamic.” For northeastern Iran, he “suggested that . . . the original impetus for mausoleums derived from princely constructions,” but also significantly noted that:

22. As one believer said to me at the ruin, were a person to take even a brick away, “the power of the *pīr* would strike him dead.”

23. Michael Barry, “The King and the Hermit—the Visual Transmission of a Theme from Alexander and the Brahmin to Thangir,” presented at the UNESCO “Colloquium on Indus Civilization,” Islamabad, April 2001.

24. The sculpture was found in two pieces above and in front of the stairway to temple B and is of a scale appropriate to have been placed in that temple’s sanctum.

25. See note 1.

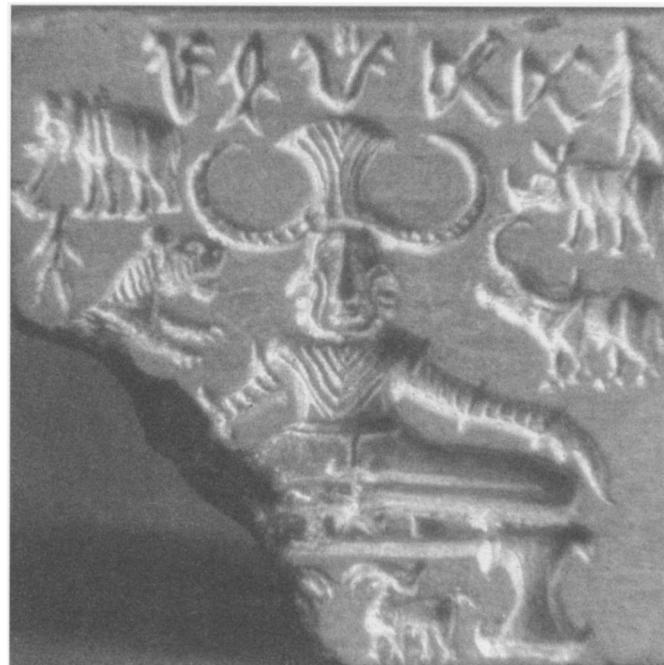


Figure 16. Moenjo-daro, Indus Valley, steatite seal perhaps showing a yogic shaman (so-called proto-Śiva seal), second millennium B.C. Photo: Gregory Possehl.

the widening of the patronage and changes in religious and cultic habits (here related more precisely to the importance of semi-religious orders guarding the frontier and of social organizations with mystical overtones) led to the wider use of the monumental tomb.

What Grabar was playing with at the time was that monumental forms could both have and acquire multiple and concurrent Islamic and non-Islamic functions.

J. Spencer Trimington’s (1971:22) study of Sufism asserted that “Indian Islam seems to have been essentially a holy-man Islam” and continued that “[t]hese migrants in the Hindu environment acquired an aura of holiness, and it was this which attracted Indians to them, rather than formal Islam.” To understand the role of the saint’s tomb in South Asia, Trimington’s (*ibid.*:22, 26) further observations seem particularly apropos (although they might apply nearly as well to the temple and its icon [Maxwell 1982, 1984]):

As in other aspects of Sufi thought and practice there is an essential distinction between the way in which the genuine Sufi approached a saint’s tomb and the practice of the people. The mystic . . . find[s] in the material symbol an aid to meditation. But the popular belief is that the saint’s soul

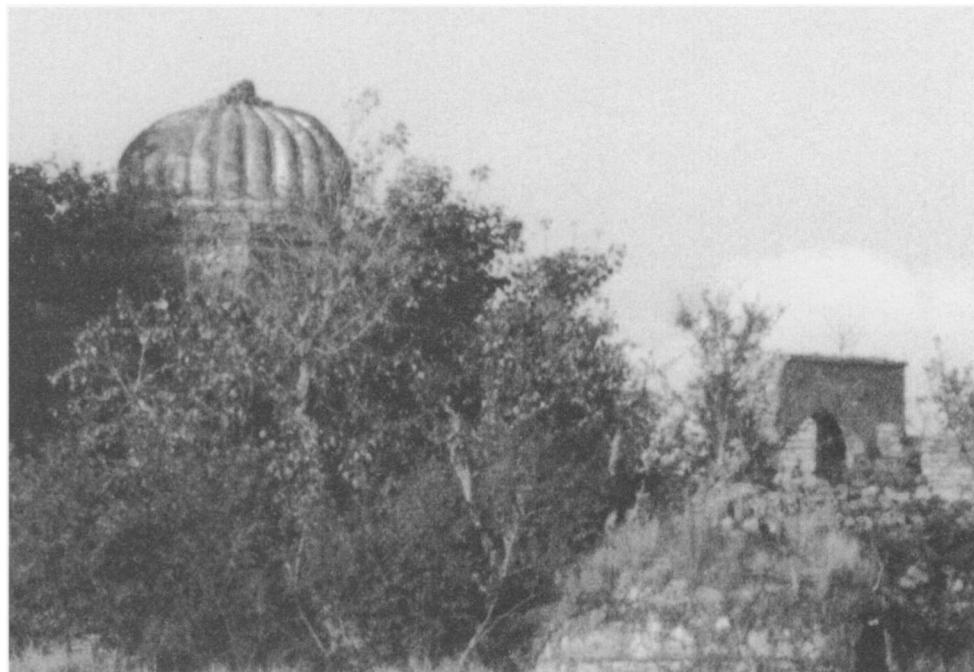


Figure 17. Thila Yogiyan, domed tomb of an ascetic, post Mughal. Photo: Michael W. Meister.

lingers about his tomb. . . . At such places his intercession can be sought.<sup>26</sup>

Certainly the acts of those who visit the tomb of Shaikh Sadan Shahid today—tying threads and miniature baby-swings to the gnarled tree in front of it—confirm his observation.

In South Asia, then, did the tomb become a temple, or its rival? Does the transcending image of the sage in part explain the building of Sikandra or the Taj?<sup>27</sup> It may seem too large a leap to move to the defining royal monuments of Mughal India, yet it was with the mental image of the Taj Mahal that Grabar began his search for

the “earliest Islamic commemorative structures” in 1966.<sup>28</sup> Were they regal or sacral, for king or saint?<sup>29</sup>

In the late Mughal period and after we can test that question in part by citing the burial practice of one much patronized sect of *r̄sis*, the Gorakhnāth or Kānphata Yogi. On a forested hill at Thila Yogiyan, north of Rotas fort in the Punjab, for example, this wealthy and powerful group over time built a number of almost royal tombs for its holy men (fig. 17). These take the form of square-domed chambers; the body of the sage is buried upright under the floor; a *liṅga* is placed above his head at the center of the shrine.<sup>30</sup> The

26. He (Trimmington 1971:23, 26) also commented that “[t]here were two categories of Sufis, those associated with *khānaqāhs* and the wanderers. . . . Indian *khānaqāhs* grew up around a holy man”; “dervishes . . . acted as cultural agents in spreading and stabilizing Islam.”

27. That a long tradition of holy-men’s tombs preceded the development of royal tombs in South Asia was not addressed by Begley (1979); the interdiction against monumentalizing graves was also circumvented in other regions of the Islamic world, drawing on other models and “new functions”; and Grabar (1966:7) had demonstrated how many and varied the names were to “illustrate the multiple facets of memorial construction in the minds of Muslims.”

28. Grabar (*ibid.*) began: “One of the most characteristic buildings of Islamic architecture is, without doubt, the monumental tomb. The Taj Mahal or the great Mamluk mausoleums in Cairo are visited by thousands of casual tourists, while every traveler in North Africa or the Near East has seen along the roads, on top of hills, . . . hundreds of small shrines usually assumed to be the resting place of some saint or hero. . . .”

29. “Siddhas . . . understood liberation as the conquest of immortality” (Eliade 1969:302).

30. *Ibid.*:307, 402: “they are not cremated but are buried in the posture of meditation. . . . Above the tomb are set symbols of the *liṅga* and *yonī*”; “[a]scetics were buried in the posture of meditation, and *liṅgas* were set up on their tombs. Many of these tombs later became temples.”

symbolism of the dome above is both shared by Islam and transformed (Coomaraswamy 1938).<sup>31</sup>

### Permeability of borders

My tentative supposition on the permeability of borders in South Asia has been that mechanisms at work make separation and survival as possible as assimilation (Meister 1994a). They have seemed to me to involve the capacity to integrate a variety of cultural patterns within a shared social system—a social compact. It is this compact that architecture itself can signal in its forms and ornament, its layered and multiple uses over time and territory (Meister, 2000b). Architecture can share communities as well as differentiate them.

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31. Akbar's tomb at Sikandra and his Diwan-i-Khass at Fatehpur Sikri, in my view, invert this borrowing.

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