

QUR'ANIC EPIGRAPHY IN THE DELHI SULTANATE:
THE 'ALAI DARWAZA

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the significance of Qur'anic epigraphy on religious architecture by analysing the previously unexamined inscriptions of one of the Delhi Sultanate's major monuments. The inscriptions on the interior and the exterior of the 'Alai Darwaza, appear to constitute a clearly thought out, well articulated program which serves the function of incorporating Khalji sultan 'Ala' al-Din's monumental gateway into the epigraphic program of the Quwwat al-Islam complex, as expressed by its original builders some 120 years earlier. For example, both sets of inscriptions speak of the destruction of idolatrous temples by the victorious servants of God, an important theme in the early years of the Muslim conquest of India. There are, however, significant differences in the choice of Qur'anic inscriptions that reveal that the selection of these passages was governed by an intellectual process aimed at presenting scriptural support for contemporary politics. My analysis of the 'Alai Darwaza's inscriptions has revealed that 'Ala' al-Din Khalji used Qur'anic verse as political propaganda to legitimise his rule.

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In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

To my Parents.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth,
Createth man from a clot.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen,
Teacheth man that which he knew not." ¹

Thus began God's final message to humanity - sacred words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad some 1,400 years ago. To the Muslim, the Qur'an is the Word of God. In an Islamic society the recitation of the Qur'an serves numerous functions: its repetition in times of illness or danger is believed to be efficacious; in religious schools such as the elementary maktab or the advanced madrasah, its purpose is didactic; and in the weekly sermon, or khutba, its message is often political. This multi-functional aspect of the Qur'an is also reflected in the wide variety of scriptural text used in monumental epigraphy which is an extension of calligraphy, esteemed as the central art form of Islam. ² It would seem reasonable to expect that significant insight into an Islamic society can therefore be gained by undertaking a thorough analysis of the Qur'anic epigraphic programs that grace its monuments.

¹ Qur'an 96:1-5. This and all subsequent passages from the Qur'an are taken from the English translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, The Glorious Qur'an, Hyderabad, 1935.

² See the article by Holly Edwards, "Text, Context, Architext," in Brocade of the Pen: The Art of Islamic Writing, ed. Carol Garrett Fisher, East Lansing, 1991, pp. 63-75.

Earlier scholarship focused primarily upon the decorative function of inscriptions. When architectural studies made reference to a building's Qur'anic passages the style of script was usually noted, but the inscription's content was rarely analysed. For example, in his introductory remarks to "A List of Published Mohamedan Inscriptions of India," written in 1909-10 A.D., J. Horovitz clearly states how he purposely omitted those inscriptions "which consist merely of quotations from the Qur'an, without containing date or name of ruler."³ Rather than dismissing Qur'anic text as being simply decorative, recent scholarship has sought to analyse the various ways in which the scripture has been used in an architectural context.

Today, Qur'anic inscriptions are seen as invaluable tools in the attempt to understand the historical context of even the earliest monuments. The embellishment of buildings by means of inscriptions is nearly as old as Islam itself. Islam's first extant building, Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock, built in 72 A.H./692 A.D. by the 'Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65-86 A.H./685-705 A.D.), contains a program of Qur'anic inscriptions which has been proved to be essential in understanding that building's purpose.⁴ Situated in a city of magnificent Christian churches, the Dome of the Rock dominates the skyline, and its Qur'anic verses proclaim Islam's superseding

³ J. Horovitz, "A List of the Published Mohamedan Inscriptions of India," EIM, 1909-10, p. 30.

⁴ See for example: Oleg Grabar, "The 'Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," Ars Orientalis, 3, 1959, pp. 33-62; Erica Dodd, "The Image of the Word: Notes on the Religious Iconography of Islam," Berytus 18, 1969, pp. 35-79.

all other religions, Jesus' position as God's prophet, not His son, and the central role of Muhammad as God's final Messenger. The inscriptions themselves were of a size and location that made them difficult if not impossible for the casual observer to read.⁵ This has led at least one scholar to assert that especially in situations where there was a large non-Muslim population and many new converts (i.e. Jerusalem in the seventh century, or medieval India), religious inscriptions function as a symbolic affirmation of the faith of the ruler and the community.⁶ In these cases, according to Richard Ettinghausen, the inscription's legibility is irrelevant because it was never meant to be read: "The lettering is the message, rather than its content."⁷

While there is no doubt that Qur'anic inscriptions on medieval religious monuments served as symbolic affirmations of Islam, many of them also served to communicate important temporal messages to their contemporary community, and those messages are still there for those who wish to study them today. Qur'anic inscriptions, far from being merely decorative, or even purely religiously symbolic, may actually offer us the key to a given

⁵ Dodd, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

⁶ R. Ettinghausen, "Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation," in Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles, ed. D. K. Kouymjian, Beirut, 1974. p. 307.

⁷ *Ibid.*

patron's purpose in building or renovating a specific monument.⁸

The interpretation of architectural meaning changes over time. For example, the Dome of the Rock has become a commemorative shrine to the Prophet's ascension to heaven, and the Taj Mahal, originally intended as a physical representation of the Throne of God, is now commonly accepted as a love offering to a deceased wife. In many of these instances, it is only through a thorough analysis of the monument's Qur'anic inscriptions that one begins to perceive the building's original message. Qur'anic inscriptions may be seen as the salient feature of a monument⁹ when the understanding of that monument, in terms of its original context, depends upon the relationship between those inscriptions and contemporary history. This relationship between Qur'anic text and contemporary events is one which is very familiar in an Islamic society. Literary texts abound with Qur'anic references that parallel everyday life. The traditional Friday *khutba* often juxtaposes references to Qur'anic passages with current events, emphasizing the similarities between them. Recited Qur'anic passages can become the vehicle for any number of situational messages, depending upon the needs of the preacher and his community.¹⁰ This is also the case with

⁸ See for example: Sheila S. Blair, "The epigraphic program of the tomb of Uljaytu at Sultaniyya: meaning in Mongol architecture," *Islamic Art*, 2, 1987, pp. 43-96; Wayne Begley, "The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning," *The Art Bulletin*, LXI, no.1, March 1979, pp. 7-37.

⁹ Holly Edwards, op. cit., p. 65.

¹⁰ Richard Antoun quoted in Edwards, op.cit., p. 68.

architectural inscriptions, where the same passage may take on an entirely different meaning depending upon the situation.

A thorough examination of the historical background of a monument and its patron is the first step in determining whether the Qur'anic inscriptions carry an historically specific message. In order to be certain, one must confirm any preliminary suspicions by using the same tools as those of the Muslim preacher, and by extension, the epigraphist: specifically tafsir, or Qur'anic exegesis; hadith, the traditional actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad; and sirah, or early biographical histories of the Prophet and his companions.

In his article on the inscriptions of the madrasah-mausoleum of Qaytbay in Cairo (874-879 A.H./1469-1474 A.D.),¹¹ Oleg Grabar set out a basic typology of inscriptions. First, there are general, or pious quotations such as the ubiquitous Throne Verse (Qur'an 2:255), passages which include God's Attributes, or any of the various professions of faith.¹² A second category contains specific passages which are relatable to the function of the building or any one of its components. Examples would include eschatological passages in mausoleums describing eternal life, or mihrabs inscribed with the verse which directs believers to turn their faces toward

¹¹ Oleg Grabar, "The Inscriptions of the Madrasah-Mausoleum of Qaytbay," in Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles, ed. D.K. Kouymjian, Beirut, 1974. pp. 465-468.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 466-467.

the qiblah in prayer.¹³ The third type of inscription is the unusual or unique inscription chosen as a result of concrete historical events.

Qur'anic passages are frequently repeated on monuments for several reasons: some are believed to have talismanic or efficacious properties; others have achieved a certain architectural significance, for example Surah al-Taubah: 18, which describes those who tend to God's mosques, has become a popular foundation inscription; and a few seem to be repeated simply because they have found favour with a particular ruler or patron.¹⁴ It is the uncommon inscription that appears to be most likely to contain a specific historical message. By analysing the inscriptions of a certain period, determining the frequency with which certain inscriptions appear, and then comparing any rare or unusual quotations with historical texts, it may be possible to sift out those with historical content.

In an attempt to identify an example of this third type, Grabar drew an analogy between Sultan Qaytbay's use of verses seven and eight, and 12-13 from Surah Ya Sin (describing how Allah would place fetters on the necks of the unbelievers) and the events of contemporary Cairo, where the sultan's enemy Shah Suwar was dragged through the streets with chains around his neck.¹⁵ Unfortunately, Grabar's statement that these verses were uncommon

¹³ Ibid., p. 476.

¹⁴ Anthony Welch, "Qur'an and Tomb: The Religious Epigraphs of Two Early Sultanate Tombs in Delhi," in Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art, ed. Fredrick M. Asher and G. S. Gai, New Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta, 1983. p. 266.

¹⁵ Grabar, 1974, op.cit., p. 468.

was later to be proved erroneous by a corpus of Qur'anic inscriptions published by Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah.¹⁶ Both verses from Surah Ya Sin are mentioned numerous times in the contemporary period, especially in Cairo and Delhi. Grabar's choice of example was also problematic because the practice of placing fetters upon the necks of conquered enemies was a fairly common one throughout the Islamic world, as it had been elsewhere since antiquity. Although Grabar's example in this case is somewhat flawed, his methodology provides a basis for the discussion of monumental architecture, Qur'anic inscriptions and meaning.

When the medieval Muslim armies began the conquest and occupation of northern India, they brought with them a rich and long-established tradition of monumental epigraphy. The monuments of the Delhi Sultanate are some of the most richly inscribed buildings in Islamic history. At the time of their creation, the enormous Qur'anic epigraphic programs of northern India's first Muslim rulers were virtually unparalleled.¹⁷ In the pages that follow I will examine the inscriptions of the Delhi Sultanate's Quwwat al-Islam, the first congregational mosque in northern India, and especially the 710 A.H./1311 A.D. gateway known as the 'Alai Darwaza, in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the creative choices underlying the selection of medieval Qur'anic epigraphic programs.

¹⁶ Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, The Image of the Word: A Study of Qur'anic Verses in Islamic Architecture, 2 vols., Beirut, 1981.

¹⁷ Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest recorded Islamic expedition to the coast of India occurred just a few years after the Prophet's death, during the caliphate of 'Umar in the year 16 A.H./636-37 A.D. It is said that 'Umar strongly disapproved of campaigns in such far away places and forbade any further attempts.¹⁸ When the Arab armies of the 'Umayyad Caliph Walid I (86-96 A.H./705-715 A.D.) invaded India and captured the city of Multan in 94 A.H./713 A.D., their commander Muhammad ibn Qasim inquired as to the reason for that town's prosperity. Upon being told that pilgrims' visits to the local idol, known as Aditya, were responsible for such a vast accumulation of treasures, he pragmatically decided it "best to have the idol where it was, but he hung a piece of cow's-flesh on its neck by way of mockery."¹⁹ Although these early Arab invasions would have little lasting impact upon India, they did set two important (and paradoxical) precedents: 1) by building a mosque at Multan the 'Umayyads set a precedent for the appropriation of indigenous temples as the sites of Muslim places of worship;²⁰ and 2) the idol worshipping Hindus were designated as

¹⁸ Ishwari Prasad, History of Mediaeval India, 3rd ed., Allahabad, 1970, p. 53.

¹⁹ Edward C. Sachau, Alberuni's India, 2 vols., Delhi, 1964, p. 116.

²⁰ The appropriation of holy places by the conquering peoples has a long history throughout the world. Perhaps the most famous Islamic example is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. This topic will be discussed at length in a

dhimmis, or protected "people of the Book," whose lives, property and rights to practice their religion were considered inviolate in return for the levying of a poll-tax. ²¹

The Qur'an divides non-Muslims into two categories: Ahl al-Kitab, or "People of the Book" such as Christians and Jews with their belief in one God and revealed scriptures; and kafirs, or unbelievers, including polytheists, animists, and atheists - any who would deny the absolute power of the Almighty, or who would associate others with that power. The Ahl al-Kitab are to be respected and their rights protected, while idolatry is not to be tolerated: "a rigid interpretation of the Qur'an, subsequently modified by commentators and legislators, allows to idolators only the choice between Islam and death." ²² In India, as earlier in Persia with the Zoroastrians, a "legal fiction" was concocted which permitted Hindus the status of Ahl al-Kitab. ²³

After each successful battle or the submission of a town or city, Muhammad ibn Qasim would give the survivors the choice of embracing

later section.

The first mosque at Multan was later closed by the heretical Karmatians in favour of a new one, which was also appropriated from the Hindus after the Karmatians destroyed their idol and killed their priests. Sultan Mahmud was later to reopen the old mosque. See Sir H. M. Elliot, The History of India As Told By Its Own Historians, ed. John Dowson, Calcutta, 1877 (reprinted 1954), (Hereafter referred to as E&D) vol. 18, p. 15.

²¹ Prasad, op. cit., p. 64.

²² The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 3, ed. Sir W. Haig, Delhi, 1958, pp. 3-4. (Hereafter referred to as Cambridge).

²³ Ibid., p. 4.

Islam (which meant immediate exemption from slavery, tribute and the poll-tax) or retaining their religion, land and property while paying the taxes.

The sticky issue of religious freedom he referred to Hajjaj, the governor of Iraq, who replied:

As they have made submission and have agreed to pay taxes to the Khalifa, nothing more can be properly required from them. They have been taken under our protection and we cannot, in any way, stretch out our hands upon their lives or property. Permission is given them to worship their gods. Nobody must be prevented from following his own religion. They may live in their houses in whatever manner they like. ²⁴

As W. Haig has pointed out in the Cambridge History of India, there were some very practical reasons for Muhammad ibn Qasim's decision to grant amnesty to the idolators.

His campaign in Sind was not a holy war, waged for the propagation of the faith, but a mere war of conquest, and it was undoubtedly politic in the leader of a few thousand Arabs to refrain from a course which might have roused swarms of idolators against him. ²⁵

According to Utbi's Tarikh-i-Yamini, when the caliph al-Qadir Billah of Baghdad recognized Mahmud of Ghazna (388-421 A.H./998-1030 A.D.) as an independent ruler in 389 A.H./999 A.D., that monarch "made it incumbent

²⁴ Prasad, op.cit., p. 59. When Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji, the patron of the 'Alai Darwaza', asked Qadi Mughis al-Din of Bayanah about the proper status of Hindus he was told, "No doctor but the great doctor (Hanifa) to whose school we belong, has assented to the imposition of the jizya (poll tax) on Hindus. Doctors of other schools allow no other alternative but "Death or Islam." see Barani's Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi in E&D, vol. 14, p. 102.

²⁵ Cambridge, p. 4.

upon himself to lead an expedition against India every year." ²⁶ Sultan Mahmud, who is considered one of Islam's fiercest warrior-kings, would eventually mount seventeen successful expeditions against India, turning his semi-independent state into a veritable empire including India as well as Persia, Transoxiana and Afghanistan. It was said that on the very night that Mahmud was born, ²⁷ "an idol temple in India, in the vicinity of Parshawar, on the banks of the Sind, fell down." ²⁸ According to tradition, Mahmud was the first Muslim ruler to receive the title of sultan from the caliph. ²⁹ "His influence upon Islam soon became widely known, for he converted as many as a thousand idol temples into mosques, subdued the cities of Hindustan, and vanquished the Rais of that country." ³⁰

²⁶ S. M. Jaffar says Elliot's translation (E&D vol. 11, p. 24) is inaccurate in implying that Mahmud took a vow to undertake a holy war, in effect portraying the invasions as religious fanaticism instead of purely secular exploits. See S. M. Jaffar, Medieval India Under Muslim Kings: The Rise and Fall of the Ghaznavids, Delhi, 1972, p. 49 and ff.

²⁷ November 1, 971 A.D. - according to Cambridge, p. 12.

²⁸ Tabakat-i Nasiri in E&D, vol. 16, pp. 13-14.

²⁹ According to the Cambridge History of India (pp. 12-13) the caliph al-Qadir Billah formally recognized Mahmud's sovereignty by sending him a robe of investiture and a patent conferring upon him the titles Yamin al-Daulah and Amin al-Millah. However, Jaffar says it is improbable that the caliph conferred the title of sultan on Mahmud as he never used it on his coins, using amir instead. There is a strong tradition that he was the first king who styled himself as sultan. See Jaffar, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

³⁰ E&D, vol. 16, p. 13-14.

The crowning achievement of Sultan Mahmud was the sack of Somnath in Kathiawar 416-417 A.H./1025-1026 A.D.³¹ The Kamil al-Tawarikh of Ibn Asir includes the oldest account of Mahmud's expedition to Somnath.³²

This idol was the greatest of all the idols of Hind. Every night that there was an eclipse the Hindus went on pilgrimage to the temple, and there congregated to the number of a hundred thousand persons...In the temple were amassed jewels of the most exquisite quality and incalculable value ... Mahmud ... resolved upon making a campaign to destroy this idol, believing that when the Hindus saw their prayers and imprecations to be false and futile, they would embrace the faith.³³

This major Hindu shrine was built upon 56 pillars of teak wood covered with lead and set with hyacinths, rubies, and pearls.³⁴ The idol itself was in a dark chamber which was lit by jewelled chandeliers. In the nearby treasury were many other idols made of gold and silver, and over the treasury hung veils set with jewels of immense value.³⁵ Following the example set by the Prophet at the Ka'ba after the conquest of Mecca in 8 A.H./630 A.D., Mahmud of Ghazna destroyed the idol of Somnath by

³¹ Jaffar, op.cit., p. 75.

³² The Tabakat-i-Nasiri of Minhaj al-Siraj names the idol as Manat, which was also the name of one of "daughters of Allah," the three main idols of the pagans at Mecca. The author also states that the idol was broken into four pieces, one of which was cast before the entrance of the great mosque at Ghazna, the second before Mahmud's palace and the third and fourth brought to Mecca and Medina respectively. See Tabakat-i-Nasiri, vol. 1, trans. H.G. Raverty, New Delhi, 1970 (reprint), p. 82.

³³ E&D, vol. 18, pp. 49-52.

³⁴ See the Habib al-Siyar of Khwandamir (c. 1521 A.D.) in E&D, vol. 22, p. 156, ff. 54.

³⁵ E&D, vol. 18, p. 52.

smashing it to pieces with his battle axe. To the Brahmans who offered him a fortune in gold if he would but leave the idol alone, he replied: "I desire that on the day of resurrection I should be summoned with the words, 'Where is that Mahmud who broke the greatest of the heathen idols' rather than by these: 'Where is that Mahmud who sold the greatest of the idols to the infidels for gold?'" When the idol was demolished, it was said to contain superb rubies and jewels exceeding a hundred times the value of what the Brahmans had offered. The remnants of the idol were taken to Ghazna and cast down at the threshold of the jami' masjid where they could be trodden upon by worshippers.³⁶

The expedition to Somnath has been called "one of the greatest feats of military adventure in the history of Islam."³⁷ Muslims the world over rejoiced, and the Caliph heaped honours and titles on Mahmud who quickly became a somewhat mythical figure.³⁸ "The idol of Somnath itself perished but it immortalized the name of Sultan Mahmud."³⁹ However, in his book Mediaeval India Under Muslim Kings, S.M. Jaffar argues that Mahmud's Indian invasions should not be interpreted as jihād.

Far from enjoining or recommending, Islam, which means peace, which preaches peace and which stands for universal peace, does not even countenance but positively forbids the use

³⁶ The Tarikh-i Alfi (E&D, vol. 18, p. 53) gives the date of the destruction of Somnath as 414 A.H./1022 A.D.

³⁷ M. Nazim's Mahmud of Ghazna, the Life and times of Sultan quoted in Jaffar, op. cit., p. 82.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

of force for the spread of the faith and no principle known to the Shariat enjoins, recommends, justifies or countenances systematic spoliation of temples and places of worship for the acquisition of wealth.⁴⁰

Mahmud, it would seem, did not destroy temples and smash idols out of a sense of religious duty, he did it because they were the storehouses of India's fabulous wealth. Only the richest of the shrines were attacked, and in times of peace "Mahmud never demolished a single temple."⁴¹

If the destruction of temples and the extinction of idolatry or the spread of Islam in India were his motive, he ought to have followed that policy in times of peace as well.⁴²

This argument, as to whether or not the destruction and spoliation of Hindu and Jain temples by Muslim rulers can legally (and/or morally) be termed jihad, is an interesting one, but one which time and space constraints place beyond the scope of our study. For our present discussion it suffices to say that contemporary accounts all agree that Mahmud's destruction of the temple at Somnath, as well as his other conquests, was widely understood and accepted as jihad.⁴³

Many modern scholars agree:

Mahmud was a fierce and fanatical Muslim with an insatiable thirst for wealth and power...India...presented a favourable field for the exercise of his religious and political ambitions...Every expedition against the Hindus amounted to a jihad.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jaffar, op. cit., p. 102.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 103.

⁴² Ibid., p. 104.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴⁴ Prasad, op. cit., p. 77.

Despite Mahmud's extraordinary successes, internecine warfare following his death led to the rapid disintegration of his empire. It is Qutb al-Din Aibak (603-607 A.H./1206-1210 A.D.) who is considered "the real founder of Muslim dominion in India."⁴⁵

In 588 A.H./1192 A.D., Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam of Ghur defeated the Rajputs under Prithvi Raj at the battle of Narain, beginning seven centuries of Muslim rule in India. Later that same year Qutb al-Din, the sultan's Turkish slave and army commander, captured the capital city of Delhi where he built the great Quwwat al-Islam, or "Might of Islam" mosque using the spolia of some twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples.⁴⁶

Following this successful expedition Sultan Muhammad, who was pleased with his slave, recalled Qutb al-Din to the capital at Ghazna, appointing him viceroy of the Muslim lands in India. Qutb al-Din's triumphant return to Delhi was cause for a mighty celebration.

"...the city and its vicinity rejoiced and was decorated like the garden of Iran, and the gates and walls were adorned with the gold tissues of Chin and the brocades of Rum...and triumphal arches were raised, beautiful to look at, the top of which a strong-winged bird could not surmount, and the glittering of the lightening of the swords and the splendour of the arms, which were suspended on all sides of them, inspired terror in the spirit of the beholder."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cambridge, p. 41.

⁴⁶ It is not known when the Quwwat al-Islam acquired that name. In histories the mosque is usually referred to simply as Delhi's Masjid-i Jami', or the Masjid-i Jami' Hazrat, the "most honoured" Friday Mosque. See Muhammad Habib, The Campaigns of 'Ala' al-Din Khilji, Madras, 1931, p. 14, ff. (Hereafter referred to as Campaigns.)

⁴⁷ Hasan Nizami, Taj al-Ma'asir in E&D, vol. 17, p. 76.

To celebrate his success and commemorate the victory at Narain and the taking of Delhi, Qutb al-Din "adorned (the Quwwat al-Islam) with the stones and gold obtained from the temples which had been demolished by elephants"...and covered it with "inscriptions in Toghra, containing the Divine commands." ⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid. The inscriptions are not in "Toghra" script, but a combination of various Kufic and nashki styles, and they are not all Qur'anic, but contain several passages from hadith as well as historical inscriptions. The Muslim builders initially incorporated the building material of the demolished Hindu temples, stone columns, roofing, etc., and these may still be seen today. However, any of the precious stones or gold taken from Hindu temples that may have been re-used to decorate the mosque have long since disappeared.

CHAPTER THREE

THE QUWWAT AL-ISLAM

When Qutb al-Din Aibak took Delhi in the twelfth century, he chose Elbutkhana⁴⁹, the city's principal Hindu temple, as the site of his Friday mosque. Just as the pagan Roman temenos at Damascus provided the foundation for that city's Great Mosque, Elbutkhana's plinth appears to have been incorporated into the Quwwat al-Islam's structure. In An Historical Memoir on the Qutb:Delhi, J.A. Page examined the archaeological evidence and concluded that (aside from the removal of the idolatrous sculptured figures) the original temple chabutra, a raised platform or terrace, was left standing with new gateways to the north and south being built against its north-east and south-east corners. The chabutra was extended by the Muslims to complete the eastern half of the present quadrangle with its further gateway on the east⁵⁰ (Fig. 1)

Qutb al-Din's mosque, which is today in ruins, is a simple rectangle enclosing a central, quadrangular court. Externally, the original mosque is a "sombre, heavy looking square stone building,"⁵¹ measuring 64.2 metres by

⁴⁹ J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India, Calcutta, 1926. p. 6. The name Elbutkhana is a blend of Arabic and Persian meaning the House of gods or idols.

⁵⁰ Page, op. cit., p. 7, ff. 2.

⁵¹ Carr Stephen, Archeology and Monumental Remains of Delhi, Allahabad, 1967 (originally published in 1876). p. 40.

44.7 metres.⁵² The main entrance is through an arched gateway in the centre of its eastern wall. The prayer chamber on the west is four bays deep, the eastern colonnade three bays deep and the two remaining sides two bays deep. Entrances to the mosque are centrally located in the colonnades on the north, south and eastern sides. On the western side, most of the prayer chamber was originally roofed over, but little remains today. Page noted several corbelled capitals that offered evidence of having supported previously existing lintels that had been arranged in the octagonal shapes necessary to support domes.⁵³ The domes would have been situated in front of the western wall's five mihrab niches.

Although the four-iwan mosque had already emerged in Seljuk Persia,⁵⁴ Qutb al-Din chose the classic hypostyle form. One reason was undoubtedly the ease of building such an edifice in what was still quite hostile territory. It is also possible that the choice of a hypostyle mosque may have been an intentional reference to the Prophet's mosque in Medina, the first gathering place of the early, and likewise besieged Muslim community.

Unlike a Hindu or Jain temple with its garbha griha (womb, cella), or hidden inner sanctuary of the gods and goddesses, Islamic worship simply ← requires an open space large enough for believers to pray together, facing

⁵² Measurements are taken from Page, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ For example, the four iwans of Isfahan's Masjid-i Jami were probably added during the early twelfth century. See Oleg Grabar, The Great Mosque of Isfahan, New York, 1990. pp. 55-59.

Mecca, shoulder to shoulder arranged in rows. The Quwwat al-Islam with its open spaces was totally unlike anything seen before in Hindu northern India, and may be regarded as the first example of Indo-Islamic architecture.

The central theme of Islamic belief is the unity of God. The making and worshipping of idols is considered to be the most grievous of sins; and Muslims have therefore largely rejected the use of figural images in their sacred art. When Qutb al-Din built his mosque, he had at his disposal the rich spolia of some 27 Hindu and Jain temples. Column shafts, bases, capitals, lintels, flat ceiled slabs, shallow corbelled domes and other materials ornamented with geometric or floral designs were used. Those components bearing figures were first stripped of their idolatrous images through mutilation, over-plastering or simply through reversal (Fig. 2). Several Hindu and Jain images escaped destruction and may yet be seen in various locations in the mosque (Fig. 3).

It has been argued that this wholesale use of spolia and the fact that a few images escaped destruction suggest that the original building of the mosque was carried out in great haste.⁵⁵ Qutb al-Din's overlord, Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam of Ghor, had been defeated by Prithvi Raj at Taraori, near Karal in 587 A.H./1191 A.D. Mu'izz al-Din returned from Ghazna a year later, soundly defeating the Rajputs and gaining control over most of northern India in 588 A.H./1192 A.D., the same year Delhi was

⁵⁵ For example see, R. Nath, History of Sultanate Architecture, New Delhi, 1978, p. 10.

taken. However, the city itself was not safe to be made the seat of government until 589 A.H./1193 A.D. ⁵⁶

A Persian inscription on the inner lintel of the eastern gateway of the Quwwat al-Islam reads:

This fort was conquered and this Jami masjid built in the months of the year 587 by the amir, the great, the glorious commander of the army, Qutb al-Daula wa al-Din, the Amir al-Umara Aibak, the slave of the Sultan, may God strengthen his helpers! The materials (?) of 27 idol temples, on each of which 2,000,000 Deliwali had been spent were used in (the construction of) this mosque. God the Great and Glorious may have mercy on that slave, every one who is in favour of the good(?) builder prays for his faith. ⁵⁷

However, since the year 587 A.H./1191 A.D. saw the defeat of Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad Ibn Sam by the Rajputs, and the city of Delhi was not taken until the following year, it would seem that either the inscription itself is incorrect, or it has been incorrectly read. In his article on early Sultanate inscriptions, J. Horowitz states that while he believes the date has been read correctly, it is, in fact, wrong. Based upon stylistic evidence, language (the inscription is in Persian while all others of such an early date are in Arabic) and the fact that any inscription put up by Qutb al-Din during the lifetime of his overlord would have contained Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam's

⁵⁶ Raverty, *op. cit.*, Appendix A, and Cambridge, pp. 40-41. Another, more plausible argument for the existence of the Hindu figures is offered by Carr Stephen, who points out that the figures were originally covered over with plaster, and it is the disappearance of this plaster over time which is responsible for the reemergence of the offending deities. (Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 47.)

⁵⁷ J. Horowitz, "The Inscriptions of Muhammad Ibn Sam, Qutbuddin Aibek and Iltutmish," in EIM, 1911-12, p. 13.

name, Horovitz concludes "that the inscription was put up after Qutb al-Din's death by order of some ruler, who wished Qutb al-Din's memory to be preserved as that of the conqueror of Delhi, but who had no interest in having it stated that Shihabuddin (Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam) was his sovereign at the time."⁵⁸ Noting the inscription's request for prayers to be said for Qutb al-Din's helpers, Horovitz surmises that it must have been written while those helpers were still alive, during the reign of Altamsh, or thereabouts.⁵⁹ A second, undated Persian inscription on the outer eastern gateway appears to have been written at the same time and is a shortened version of the first.

This mosque was built by Qutb al-Din Aibak. May God have mercy on that slave everyone who prays for the faith of that good builder (?)⁶⁰

An Arabic inscription on the northern gate of the Quwwat al-Islam offers what Raverty believes to be the probable date of its beginning:

In the months of the year 592 (1195 A.D.). This building was undertaken by the high order of the exalted Sultan Mu'izz al-Dunya wa al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam, the helper of the Prince of the Faithful.⁶¹

The above inscription would also seem to challenge Horovitz's theory of an attempt to eliminate Mu'izz al-Din's name.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 14.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. See Raverty, *op. cit.*, p. 622, ff. 6, for a discussion of the dates of the Quwwat al-Islam.

A fragmentary inscription on the left pillar of the western central arch provides Raverty with a completion date.

...the date of the 20th Dhu'l Qa'da of the year 594 (23 September, 1198 A.D.)...⁶²

Following his triumphant return from Ghazna, which he had visited at the request of his overlord, Qutb al-Din built the five arched screen that forms the prayer wall in front of the qiblah. The red and yellow sandstone wall of these arches is 2.4 metres deep, and may be divided into three parts: a central wall 15.9 metres high and 9.3 metres wide; the walls on either side measure 7.5 metres high and 10.5 metres wide.⁶³ Stephen measured the ogee-shaped central arch and found it to be 12.9 metres high, and 6.6 metres wide. The side-arches to the north and south (only three of the four remained) measured 7.2 metres high, those closest to the central arch 3.45 metres wide, while the outer ones were only 3 metres wide. Each arch is defined by a band of Qur'anic inscriptions and is framed by square bands covered with scrolls of intricate design, as well as further passages from the Qur'an. The spandrels too are elaborately engraved with ornamental patterns.

A year later, Qutb al-Din built the Arhai din Ka Jhompra Mosque in Ajmir. An inscription on the central mihrab reads:

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Stephen, op. cit., p. 46.

Built...(in) Jumada II of the year 595. The Prophet, on whom may be God's blessings, said: Be speedy with your prayers before (its time) elapses and be speedy with repentance before death (intervenes).⁶⁴

On the back wall of the Arhai din Ka Jhompra, immediately under the roof is an Arabic inscription (Fig. 4) that may identify an individual responsible for work at both the mosque at Ajmir and the Quwwat al-Islam.

Under the supervision of Abu Bakr Ibn Ahmad
Khalu (?) al-Harawi (i.e. of Herat) at the date Dhul Hijja in the
year 596.⁶⁵

It has been argued that Hindu artisans must have carried out the bulk of the work on the Quwwat al-Islam as Qutb al-Din had only a few non-combatants in his entourage, consisting of mullas and clerks but no artisans.⁶⁶ However, as a skilled scribe was a necessity for a ruler who was expected to send regular letters home to his overlord at Ghazna, it is likely that a calligrapher was included amongst the company.

In 627 A.H./1229 A.D. Sultan Altamsh began the Quwwat al-Islam's second building campaign. He extended the mosque by adding two wings to Qutb al-Din's prayer screen, and new cloistered courts were added on to the southern, northern and eastern sides of the mosque with entrances situated axially with those of the original mosque (Fig. 1). The surviving colonnades show that the elaborately carved Hindu columns used in Qutb al-Din's mosque (Fig. 5) were rejected in favour of relatively plain capitals

⁶⁴ Horovitz, 1911-12, op. cit., p. 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Nath, op. cit., p. 10.

and shafts (Fig. 6).⁶⁷ Page argues that this choice was the result of the original supply of Hindu columns having run out.⁶⁸ However, as Hindu artisans continued to work in their own tradition throughout this period, it seems more likely that Altamsh's choice was a positive one, a conscious movement away from indigenous elements and towards a new Indo-Islamic style. If we compare columns from Altamsh's southern colonnade with those of the southeastern corner of 'Ala' al-Din's later extension (Fig. 7), it becomes apparent that this movement was one which would continue.

Altamsh extended the western wall of the mosque by about 34.5 metres on either side, although little of this remains today (Fig. 1).⁶⁹ In his conjectural restoration of the mosques of Qutb al-Din and Altamsh (Fig. 8), Page has suggested that the central bay of the western sanctuary was double-storied with a surmounting dome, based upon the evidence of double corbels at the arch-springing of the rear face of the prayer screen, and the fragmentary remains of roofing slabs and lintels projecting at the lower level.⁷⁰

The most obvious expression of the emergence of an Indo-Islamic style may be seen in the changes in surface decoration over several campaigns. Qutb al-Din's prayer screen is carved with the same undulating leaves and

⁶⁷ Page, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁷⁰ Page, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

serpentine tendrils found in contemporary Hindu temples (Fig. 9).⁷¹ Their use in bands of ornamentation juxtaposed with inscriptions is typically Islamic, and suggests to Stephen the combined efforts of a Muslim supervisor and a Hindu artisan.⁷²

However, in order to decorate his prayer screen, Altamsh brought in skilled calligraphers from Iran.⁷³ They used naskhi script as well as intricate panels of geometric plated Kufic (Fig. 10). The quality of the non-calligraphic motifs has changed as well, as evidenced by the panels of lotus rhizome separating the angular and static Kufic from the more dynamic naskhi.⁷⁴

The third, and final, of the Quwwat al-Islam's building campaigns began in 710 A.H./1311 A.D., at the hands of Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji. It was at this time that the monumental gateway known as the 'Alai Darwaza, the main subject of our study, was built. In order to understand the significance of the 'Alai Darwaza, and especially 'Ala' al-Din's choice of inscriptions, one must take the time to study the life and times of the sultan.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷² Ibid., p. 10.

⁷³ Wayne Begley, Monumental Islamic Calligraphy from India, Villa Park, 1985, p. 30.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR
'ALA' AL-DIN KHALJI

Legitimization is the process "whereby the naked power of the ruler attempts to represent itself as sanctioned by right."⁷⁵ In Islamic ideology, legitimacy, the right to rule, devolves from adherence to the absolute source of authority, the Shariah, or Islamic Law as set out in the Qur'an, God's Word, and the Sunna, or example of the Prophet. As a prophet, Muhammad's authority came directly from God, but his position as a statesman and political leader remained firmly rooted in the Arab tradition of leaders emerging and being recognized as they prove their abilities.⁷⁶ At his death, the Prophet left no explicit instructions as to how to choose his successor. A group of Companions chose his close friend and father-in-law, Abu Bakr, as Caliph. Abu Bakr, in turn, appointed 'Umar as his successor. 'Umar left the question of succession in the hands of a six member council who chose 'Uthman. The last of the four "Rightly Guided Caliphs," was 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, again chosen by consensus.

The earliest Islamic leaders were very much in the mold of Arab leadership. The Amir al-Muminin, or Commander of the Faithful, as the

⁷⁵ Roger Scruton, A Dictionary of Political Thought, New York, 1982, p. 366.

⁷⁶ M.A. Shaban, Islamic History: A New Interpretation A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132), Cambridge, 1971, pp. 16-17.

caliphs had come to be known, was more of a counsellor than a commander.⁷⁷ The rapid expansion of Islam required a change in leadership style, and many of the customs and political practices of the conquered peoples were adopted and adapted by Muslim rulers. For some three hundred years prior to the emergence of the Delhi Sultanate, Muslim rulers in Iran and Afghanistan had looked to Sasanian and even pre-Sasanian history for political guidance.⁷⁸ It is from ancient Persia that the Delhi Sultanate inherited the idea of absolute monarchy.

The principle of legitimacy underwent substantial shifts throughout the period of the Delhi Sultanate. This is perhaps most evident in an examination of the issue of succession. For example, in the Ilbari period 607-689 A.H./1210-1290 A.D., the principle of legitimacy rested upon the belief that none except a descendant of Altamsh had the right to rule. The Khalji revolution of 689 A.H./1290 A.D. destroyed that belief and forced subsequent rulers to seek out new sources of legitimacy.

The Fatawa-i Jahandari of Zia al-Din Barani is the only known contemporary Indo-Persian work exclusively devoted to the political theory of the Delhi Sultanate. Written in the final years of the author's life (c.761-762 A.H./1358-1359 A.D.), it takes the form of a book of advice ostensibly written by Sultan Mahmud and others for the "Sons of Mahmud," by which

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁷⁸ Mohammad Habib and Afsar U.S. Khan, The Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate (including a translation of Zia al-Din Barani's Fatawa-i Jahandari), Allahabad, n.d., p. ix. (Hereafter referred to as Barani.)

is meant all Muslim kings.⁷⁹ In it, Barani offers us a contemporary definition of kingship.

Sultan Mahmud says: Sons of Mahmud! You should know that kingship means the control which a man obtains over a territory by power and force. He may be entitled to it (by inheritance) and may be thus maintaining what is his own or he may have obtained it by usurpation and without any right. In either case they call him king on account of his control of the territory.⁸⁰

Qutb al-Din's accession to the throne of India was immediately recognized without dispute by the nobles of his master and predecessor, Sultan Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad Ibn Sam.⁸¹ Altamsh, slave and successor of Qutb al-Din, was actually invited to power by the nobles of Delhi, weakening the principle of nomination by one's predecessor and heredity as the basis of sovereignty and, for the first time, asserting the right of the nobility to elect a leader and enforce their choice through the force of arms.⁸² The 'Abbasid caliph's 628 A.H./1229 A.D. confirmation of Altamsh's right to rule India provided the seal of his legitimacy. From that time until the end of the Ilbari dynasty in 689 A.H./1290 A.D., the transfer of power was deemed to be legitimate only if it remained in the hands of a descendant of Altamsh.

⁷⁹ Barani, p. 2. ff.

⁸⁰ Barani, p. 96.

⁸¹ S. B. P. Nigam, Nobility Under the Sultans of Delhi A.D. 1206-1398, Delhi, 1968, p. 22.

⁸² Ibid., p. 25.

The coup d'état of the 19th Muharram 689 A.H. (February 1, 1290 A.D.) resulted in the passing of the throne from the Ilbaris to the Khaljis.⁸³ The Ilbari nobility had expended every effort in an attempt to keep state control within the hands of a group of some 'forty nobles.' After Jalal al-Din Khalji murdered Sultan Mu'izz al-Din⁸⁴ and ascended the throne, he did everything he could to create a new nobility based upon the principle of blood-relationship.⁸⁵ By awarding the choicest positions to the most prominent members of his tribe and setting the example of murdering his predecessor, Jalal al-Din Khalji set the stage for his own demise at the hands of a calculating and opportunist nephew.

Although Jalal al-Din Khalji attempted to maintain his position by rewarding his own relatives, the salient features of Khalji politics after 1290 A.D. were the total disregard of the hereditary right to kingship, the decline of the idea of racial superiority, and the displacement of the concept of the divine source of kingly power by a more pragmatic approach - from now on, the Crown would belong to "anybody who had the courage to pick it up with his sword."⁸⁶

Following his daring but successful and wildly lucrative expedition to the great southern kingdom of Deogir, 'Ala' al-Din Khalji murdered his

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 49-51.

⁸⁴ Not to be confused with the earlier sultan of the same name.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 60. See also K.A. Nizami, State and Culture in Medieval India, New Delhi, 1985, p. 103.

uncle and father-in-law, Sultan Jalal al-Din Khalji, and proclaimed himself king on the 16th or 17th of Ramadan 695 A.H./July 19 or 20, 1296 A.D.⁸⁷ Under 'Ala' al-Din, the Turkish empire reached its zenith. Unlike his predecessors, he successfully defended the Sultanate of Delhi from successive Mongol invasions while aggressively expanding his rule into the south, earning himself the distinction of being "the first Turkish Emperor of India."⁸⁸

The Khalji's had murdered or blinded all Ilbari successors to the throne, and were therefore forced to seek out new sources of legitimacy. Not surprisingly, and like many kings before them, they turned to religion to shore up their claim to the throne. The first Khalji sultan, Jalal al-Din, while freely admitting his plebian origin, considered adopting the title of Mujahid fi sabil Allah, or "Warrior of Allah," in order to sanctify, and thus legitimize, his claim.⁸⁹ 'Ala' al-Din Khalji's search for legitimacy took him once again to the Hindu temples in the south of India where, like Mahmud before him, he became the pious "destroyer of idols" and, not incidentally, the owner of fabulous wealth.

The first year of 'Ala' al-Din's rule was spent fighting off the Mongols, but in 699 A.H./1300 A.D.,⁹⁰ the sultan ordered his first expedition into the

⁸⁷ Kishori Saran Lal, History of the Khaljis, London, 1967. pp. 61-62 ff.

⁸⁸ A.L. Srivastava, The Sultanate of Delhi, Agra, 1950, pp. 172-173.

⁸⁹ Nizami, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁹⁰ Muhammad Habib, The Campaigns of 'Ala'u'd-din Khalji (including a translation of the Khaza'inul Futuh of Amir Khusrau), Madras, 1931, p. 35. (Hereafter referred to as Campaigns)

south of India - to Gujarat to topple the temple of Somnath that had been rebuilt following Mahmud's famous expedition.⁹¹

The Tazjiyatul Amsar of 'Abdullah Wassaf contains a lengthy account of the conquest of Somnath. Perhaps most importantly, it contains an obvious crib from the story of Mahmud's conquest, namely his refusal to sell the idol back to the Brahmins, that signified his intention to be remembered for din, or religion, rather than dunya, or the life of this world.

When Sultan 'Ala' al-Din, the Sultan of Delhi, was well established in the centre of his dominion and had cut off the head of his enemies and slain them, and had imparted rest to his subjects from the fountain of his kindness and justice, the vein of the zeal of religion beat high for the subjection of infidelity and destruction of idols...With a view to holy war, and not for the lust of conquest...(the Muslim army left for Gujerat where they began to) kill and slaughter on the right and on the left unmercifully, throughout the impure land, for the sake of Islam...They plundered gold and silver to an extent greater than can be conceived, and an immense number of brilliant precious stones, such as pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, etc., as well as a great variety of cloths, both silk and cotton, stamped, embroidered, and coloured. They took captive a great number of handsome and elegant maidens, amounting to 20,000, and children of both sexes, 'more than the pen can enumerate'...In short, the Muhammadan army brought the country to utter ruin, and destroyed the lives of the inhabitants, and plundered the cities, and captured their offspring, so that many temples were deserted and the idols were broken and trodden under foot, the largest of which was one called Somnath...Its head was adorned with a crown set with gold and rubies and pearls and other precious stones, so that it was impossible for the eyes to trace the redness of the gold on account of the excessive lustre of the jewels, and a necklace of large shining pearls, like the belt of Orion, depended from the shoulder towards the side of the body...The Muhammadan soldiers plundered all those jewels and rapidly set to demolish

⁹¹ To what extent the temple of Somnath was destroyed is debatable, see Henry Cousens, Somanatha and other Mediaeval Temples in Kathiawar, Archaeological Survey of India, vol. XLV, Calcutta, 1931, pp. 22-23.

the idol. The surviving infidels were deeply affected with grief, and they engaged to pay a thousand pieces of gold as ransom for the idol, but they were indignantly rejected, and the idol was destroyed, and its limbs, which were annointed with ambergris and perfumed, were cut off. The fragments were conveyed to Delhi, and the entrance to the Jami' Masjid was paved with them, that people might remember and talk of this brilliant victory. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds. Amen! ⁹²

The reappearance of this story of the rejection of ransom for the idol is an obvious comparison of 'Ala' al-Din with medieval Islamic India's greatest hero, Mahmud of Ghazna, and is, in itself, evidence of an attempt at legitimizing the former's rule.

Amir Khusrau went a step further and saw this breaking of idols and the preservation of the idol of Somnath in order to provide a spectacle back in Delhi as a reaffirmation of the Qur'anic verse:

It seemed as if the tongue of the Imperial sword explained the meaning of the text: "So he (Abraham) broke them (the idols) into pieces except the chief of them, that happily they may return to it". (Qur'an 21:58) ⁹³

⁹² Taken from the Tazjiatu-l Amsar wa Tajriyatu-l Asar, "A Ramble Through the Regions and the Passing of Ages," of 'Abdu-llah ibn Fazlu-llah of Shiraz, whose literary name was Wassaf, the Panegyrist (See E&D, vol. 22. pp. 46-48). Volumes one through four of Wassaf's work were published in 1300 and presented to Sultan Uljaitu in June, 1312 A.D., the fifth and final volume was completed in 1328 A.D.. Sultan Uljaitu was the Ilkhanid ruler of Persia from 703 A.H./1304 A.D to 716 A.H./1317 A.D. In 1310-11 A.D. he sent a message to 'Ala' al-Din Khalji suggesting the two rulers cement their countries' old friendship through the marriage of one of the Delhi Sultan's daughters to the Persian king's son. 'Ala' al-Din considered the suggestion a deliberate insult to his dignity, and imprisoned and eventually executed the eighteen Persian ambassadors by having them crushed under the feet of his elephants. See Lal, op. cit., pp. 248-249.

⁹³ Campaigns p. 36.

This use of Qur'anic passages in reference to contemporary history by Amir Khusrau was a typical literary device of the day, and one that will provide an important parallel in our later argument for a similar role for Qur'anic inscriptions on monumental architecture.

The army's return to Delhi from Gujarat was marred by a particularly odious incident that is not mentioned by Amir Khusrau, but is examined in some detail by Barani. When 'Ala' al-Din's generals, Ulugh Khan and Nusrat Khan, began to make extortionate demands of the army in order to obtain a greater portion of the spoils for the state, two or three thousand 'New Muslims', or Mongol converts, staged a revolt, killing Nusrat Khan's brother and a nephew of 'Ala' al-Din. The revolt was quashed and the leaders fled for support to the Hindu chieftains. 'Ala' al-Din retaliated by putting to death the wives and children of the rebels, while Nusrat Khan revenged his brother's death by giving the wives of the assassins to sweepers to be used as prostitutes and ordered their infant children to be cut to pieces before their eyes.⁹⁴

Perhaps not suprisingly, 'Ala' al-Din continued to have trouble with the New Muslims throughout his reign. Many of them supported Akat Khan, 'Ala' al-Din's nephew, in the attempted murder of the sultan.⁹⁵ When 'Ala' al-Din finally dismissed the New Muslims from his service a group of them plotted to assassinate him. Their plot was discovered and 'Ala' al-Din

⁹⁴ see Barani quoted in Campaigns, p. 37, ff. and Cambridge, pp. 100-101.

⁹⁵ Cambridge, p. 103.

ordered all New Muslims throughout the empire to be exterminated, and he stipulated that anyone murdering a New Muslim would automatically inherit his women, children and properties. In this way some twenty to thirty thousand New Muslims were killed. ⁹⁶

The second expedition to the south, the campaign against Arangal, began on the 25 Jamada al-Awwal, 709 A.H./October 31, 1309 A.D. ⁹⁷ The return march began on 16th of Shawwal, 709 A.H./March 19, 1310 A.D., with the army reaching Delhi on the 11th of Muharram, 710 A.H./June 10, 1310 A.D.. ⁹⁸ A great durbar was held in Chautr-i-Nasri on the 24 of Muharram, 710 A.D./23rd June, 1310 A.D., ⁹⁹ A black pavilion was set up "like the Ka'ba on the navel of the earth...and treasures under which a thousand camels would have groaned, were all displayed." ¹⁰⁰ According to many later writers, the famous Koh-i-Nur was among the treasures brought out of the Deccan at this time by 'Ala' al-Din's army. ¹⁰¹

The third, and final, southern expedition took place in 710-711 A.H. The army left for Mabar mid-day on Tuesday, 26 Jamada al-Akhir, 710 A.H./November 20, 1310 A.D., ¹⁰² 'Ala' al-Din had ordered his army further

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 117.

⁹⁷ Campaigns, p. xxi.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. xxii.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. xxiii.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 81.

south than any Muslim ruler before him had dared to go. Amir Khusrau offers an explanation of his motives:

The blade of the Khalifa's sword, which is the flame of the lamp of Islam, had now illuminated all the darkness of Hindustan with the light of its guidance...with a sincere motive, the Emperor removed these symbols of infidelity [idols], first from Deogir and then from all other demon-lands, so that the light of the Shariat may reach their neighbourhood to dispel the contamination of false beliefs from those places through the muazzin's call and the establishment of prayers. God be praised for all this!

But the sea of Ma'bar is so far from Delhi that a man travelling with expedition can only reach it after a journey of twelve months. The arrows of preceding Sultans had never reached that distant land, but the exalted ambition of the World Conqueror induced him to test the marksmanship of his archers, and the Muslim faith was published in that far-off region.¹⁰³

Again Amir Khusrau drew analogies between the Qur'an and contemporary history by stating that the infamous eunuch general, Malik Kafur, was dispatched to Ma'bar with orders to bring to the ears of the idols ("and they have ears with which they cannot hear" [Surah al-A'raf 7:179]) a warning, "that He may make it (Islam) overcome the religions of all of them." (Surah as-Saff 61:9)¹⁰⁴ Malik Kafur is noted as saying that Sultan 'Ala' al-Din was sending him to Mabar to "break the bodies of large idols rather than to capture the large bodies of the elephants," but he was also quick to mention that although the "enclosure of the Imperial Court has

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 80-81.

(already) been dignified by the enormous elephants of Arangal...there are over five hundred of them on the coast of Ma'bar." ¹⁰⁵

The vast wealth accumulated in the south of India provided 'Ala' al-Din with the necessary funds to undertake a massive building campaign, beginning with an expansion of the Quwwat al-Islam, or the Masjid-i Jama-i Hazrat (the exalted Friday mosque) as it was referred to by Amir Khusrau. ¹⁰⁶ On the 15th of Shawwal, 710 A.H./ March 7, 1311 A.D., four months after the army left for Ma'bar, the first part of his project, the 'Alai Darwaza, or southern gateway, was dedicated. The planned expansion was to include three more gateways, a dramatically extended prayer screen, an enlarged court and a second massive minar which, had it been completed, would have effectively dwarfed the existing one (Fig. 1). Amir Khusrau writes:

He ordered a fourth court (Khusrau used the term maqsura), with lofty pillars to be added to the pre-existing three courts; it was so high that the fourth heaven may call it the second Mecca. In a day, stones like the sun were brought from the sky, and the (structure of) stones rose from the earth to the moon. Verses from the Qur'an were engraved on stone as if it was wax; on one side the inscription ascended so high that you would think the word of God was going up to heaven; on the other side it came down in such a way as to symbolize the descent of the Qur'an to earth. Through the elevation of this inscription a conversation, which will never end, has been started between heaven and earth. After this wide and high

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

edifice had been finished from top to bottom, other mosques were built in the city.¹⁰⁷

This reference to Qur'anic inscriptions is puzzling. Although the foundations of 'Ala' al-Din's northern gateway were discovered during excavations carried out at the beginning of this century, nothing remains of the eastern gateways. All that remains of the arch-piers of his northern extension to the prayer screen are low masses of masonry core.¹⁰⁸ Both the minar, and the screen extension were begun after the 'Alai Darwaza was completed. In fact, it has been widely accepted that only the 'Alai Darwaza itself was completed, the rest of the project being abandoned at 'Ala' al-Din's death.¹⁰⁹ If that is the case, Amir Khusrau's description of the completed project may be dismissed as typical panegyric. It is not impossible, however, that the description of the Qur'anic inscriptions may be a reference to the inscriptions of the 'Alai Darwaza.

'Ala' al-Din had established communication posts from Tilpat, which was the first stage from Delhi, to the army's camp. Fast horses, runners and writers were stationed all along the way, so that news of the army reached the Sultan "every day, or every second or third day."¹¹⁰ It is not

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 14-15. In this passage, Qutb al-Din's original mosque is counted as the first court, Altamsh's extensions either side of the original are counted as two, making 'Ala' al-Din Khalji's extension the fourth. The fine mosaic and carved-stone inscriptions were removed at some point, but it is not known when, nor by whom. (Ibid., p. 16, ff.)

¹⁰⁸ Page, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Page, op. cit., p. 14, or Percy Brown, Indian Architecture: The Islamic Period, 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1942, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ Campaigns, p. 116.

difficult to imagine the Sultan's delight when, within days of dedicating the 'Alai Darwaza with its theme of the destruction of idolatrous temples, his army discovered and conquered yet another centre of idolatry.

On the 4th of Zul al-Qa'da, 711 A.H./March 25, 1311 A.D., the army discovered the golden temple of Barmatpur, a rich city with many temples and other idols - images of Siva and Vishnu. ¹¹¹ Amir Khusru describes the destruction of the main temple with its golden idol:

Its roof and walls were inlaid with sparkling rubies and emeralds...The jewelled figure of the idol looked like a bubble on the surface of the sun...The foundations of this temple, which was the holy place of the Hindus, were dug up with the greatest care. The 'Glorifiers of God' broke the infidel building...and the 'heads' of the Brahmans and idolators danced from their necks to their feet at the flashes of the sword...The stone idols called 'Ling-i-Mahadeo,' which had been for a long time established at that place...these, up to this time, the kick of the horse of Islam had not attempted to break...The Mussalmans destroyed all the lingas. Deo Narain fell down, and the other gods, who had fixed their seats there, raised their feet and jumped so high, that at one leap they reached the fort of Lanka, ¹¹² and in that affright the lingas themselves would have fled, had they any legs to stand on. ¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. xxxi.

¹¹² Amir Khusrau's story is studded with references to other literary works. For example, the "kick of the horse of Islam," makes reference to a story from the Shahnama about Shah Yazdagird whose blasphemy resulted in waves of water rising up and forming the shape of a horse that kicked the king to death. The "fort of Lanka" is a reference to the Hindu Ramayana story of Hanuman, the monkey god.

¹¹³ Campaigns, p. 104. The linga is the representation of the Hindu god Siva's phallus, symbolizing the procreative powers of nature. The idol at Somnath was a linga, as were those at Barmatpur. (See Cousens, op. cit., p. 21, ff.)

Amir Khusrau states that much gold and many valuable jewels fell into the hands of the Muslims, who destroyed all the temples at Barmatpur and placed the plunder in the public treasury.¹¹⁴ The golden idol temple of Ma'bar also fell prey to the Muslim army:

In the early part of 711 H. (1311 A.D.) the army reached Delhi, bringing with it six hundred and twelve elephants, ninety-six thousand mans of gold, several boxes of jewels and pearls, and twenty thousand horses...The old inhabitants of Delhi remarked that so many elephants and so much gold had never before been brought into Delhi. No one could remember anything like it, nor was there anything like it in recorded history.¹¹⁵

The campaign of Ma'bar represents the height of 'Ala' al-Din's power, he died on the 7th of Shawwal, 715 A.H./January 6, 1316 A.D.,¹¹⁶ never having finished his planned expansion of the Quwwat al-Islam.

In his translation of Amir Khusrau's Khaza'in al-Futuh, Muhammad Habib argues that the Deccan expeditions had one clear object, "the acquisition of horses, elephants, jewels, gold and silver."¹¹⁷ He totally rejects the idea of any underlying religious motivation, saying "they had neither the time nor the inclination to enrol converts..."¹¹⁸ And yet, as we shall see in the following chapter on inscriptions, 'Ala' al-Din chose to portray his activities in southern India as the acts of a devout servant of

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

¹¹⁵ Zia al-Din Barani's Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi in E&D, vol. 14, p. 124.

¹¹⁶ Lal., op. cit., p. 270.

¹¹⁷ Campaigns, p. xiv.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

God, sent on a holy mission to uproot and destroy the temples of idolatry. In doing so, 'Ala' al-Din was laying claim to legitimacy as the spiritual heir of ghazi predecessors such as Mahmud of Ghazna and Qutb al-Din Aibak.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE 'ALAI DARWAZA

In an attempt to strengthen his claim to legitimacy as the spiritual (and therefore temporal) heir of the first Muslim conquerors of India, 'Ala' al-Din Khalji chose to begin his massive building campaign with Delhi's jami' masjid, the Quwwat al-Islam. The jami' masjid, or Friday prayer mosque, is the site of the obligatory weekly communal prayer and khutba, or sermon, during which the entire community asks God to bestow blessings upon the sultan as the rightful representative of the caliph, God's Shadow upon the earth.

The building campaign began in 710 A.H./1311 A.D. with the building of the 'Alai Darwaza (Fig. 11). This monumental gateway is situated in the south cloister of 'Ala' al-Din's extension, and probably served as the city gate of the mosque.¹¹⁹ 'Ala' al-Din Khalji's intended extension of the Quwwat al-Islam would have created a vast new complex which would virtually incorporate within its perimeter the earlier works of Qutb al-Din and Altamsh. He planned to build a massive, all-encompassing cloistered third court measuring some 210 metres long and 120 metres wide,¹²⁰ including a northern extension to the existing prayer screen, and a colossal minar which would effectively dwarf its predecessor, the Qutb minar (Fig.1).

¹¹⁹ Stephen, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

The enormous scale of 'Ala' al-Din Khalji's extension to the Quwwat al-Islam indicates both the vast quantities of wealth he had at his disposal following the southern campaigns and the importance he placed upon the creation of tangible evidence of his rule being an extension of the reigns of Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam, Qutb al-Din, and Altamsh.

The 'Alai Darwaza was the only part of 'Ala' al-Din's planned extension that was completed. At his death in 715 A.H/1316 A.D., the rest of the work was abandoned and left to ruin. The southern gateway was originally built as one of four monumental entrances to the mosque, two of which were to be built on the eastern side, and another on the northern side.¹²¹ Because the 'Alai Darwaza stands as an isolated structure, the only completed building in an unfinished complex, it has been surmised that the intention was either to build the gateway as the ruler's formal viewing entrance through which he could gauge the progress of the rest of the complex, or as a model for the architectural complex as a whole.¹²² It is more likely that the 'Alai Darwaza was built to serve a function similar to that of a Roman triumphal arch, celebrating the success of 'Ala' al-Din's southern campaigns.

It has been noted that the 'Alai Darwaza exhibits a certain affinity with Seljuk architecture: the use of recessed nook-shafts, horseshoe-shaped arches with a "spear point," (in fact, a lotus-bud) fringe, the coherence of its

¹²¹ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹²² *Ibid.*

decorative scheme, and an improved quality of stone masonry, have led several authors to attribute the work to Anatolian Seljuk refugee artisans displaced by the Mongol invasions.¹²³ However, much of the detailed carving, especially that of the plinth (Fig. 12) where sinuous tendrils and rounded lotus buds prevail, suggests that indigenous artists were also at work.¹²⁴ The entire surface of the 'Alai Darwaza's facade is intricately carved in red sandstone and white marble; some areas in low relief, others deeply incised. Above the plinth, naskhi inscriptions predominate, bordered by narrow panels of formal, repeating patterns of geometric shapes and arabesques.

The structure itself is fairly simple, a square pavilion open on all four sides. Although this is the first (but by no means the last) example of its type in India, the cube-shaped structure with a dome is one that is typically Islamic, often serving as a tomb. Although a gateway and not a tomb, the 'Alai Darwaza was a turning point in the evolution of Indo-Islamic architecture, serving as a prototype for later tombs such as that of Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq (726 A.H./1325 A.D.) (Fig. 13) and setting the standard for later building art.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid. See also Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹²⁴ Hoag, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

¹²⁵ Page, *op. cit.*, p. 48. General Cunningham called the 'Alai Darwaza "the most beautiful specimen of Pathan architecture that I have ever seen," while Fergusson remarked, that it 'displays the Pathan style at the period of its greatest perfection when the Hindu masons had learned to fit their exquisite style of decoration to the forms of their foreign masters.' (Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 54.) Brown noted that the composition of the 'Alai Darwaza offers "distinct

The building is a square measuring 10.35 metres inside and 16.95 metres on the outside, with walls 3.3 metres thick; from the inner floor to the domed ceiling it measures about 14.1 metres high.¹²⁶ The exterior measures 18 metres from the ground to the amalaka finial atop the dome.¹²⁷ The centre of each of the three outer walls is articulated by a pointed horse-shoe arched doorway measuring almost the entire height of the building. The three outer-doorway arches are constructed with recessed nookshafts, radiating voussoirs and decorated with a lotus-bud fringe. The fourth wall, the northern wall leading directly into the mosque itself, is completely different, its semi-circular shaped, trefoil archway perhaps been designed by an indigenous hand (Fig. 14).¹²⁸ The archways cover staircases leading up to a single interior room containing a domed ceiling.

The 'Alai Darwaza is the first extant building in Indo-Islamic architecture to use the true dome. Although the dome itself is large and quite plain, the transition from a square base to the octagon supporting the dome is accomplished through the use of elegantly shaped squinches that echo the keel-shaped arches of the doorways (Fig. 20)

evidences of intelligent supervision, of the direction of someone with a knowledge of architectural procedure only acquired after long years of accomplishment and right application." (Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 16.)

¹²⁶ Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹²⁷ Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 17. An amalaka is an indigenous Indian finial shaped like a fluted melon.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Now missing, a pillared portion carrying a small dome which jutted into the mosque courtyard was originally attached to the northern face (Fig. 15).¹²⁹ According to Carr Stephen, the outer walls had been "crowned with a battlemented parapet" which was removed by Major Robert Smith of the British Engineers during the repairs he carried out in 1828-29 A.D.¹³⁰ An analysis of the still intact red-stone facing and marble dressing suggests that in the original design, the facade rose higher in the centre (Fig. 15).¹³¹ Major Smith's reparations are responsible for the parapet's present square outline. It has also been surmised on the basis of existing evidence that ornamental walls once connected the building to the pillared cloisters of the courtyard.

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¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹³⁰ Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 57. In 1827 a visiting major described the gateway as being in such "a state of dilapidation and destruction" that it was likely "none of it will stand." (Ibid., pp. 56-57) As a conservator of ancient monuments, Major Smith has been praised for his patience and skill, as well as castigated for restorations denounced as being "in the true style of 'Strawberry Hill Gothic'." (Cunningham in Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21) His most unfortunate "restoration" was a sixth and a seventh story he added to the Qutb minar, largely it would appear, to serve as the base for a British flagstaff. The sixth story consisted of a red sandstone dome supported by an 'enriched cornice' on eight stone fluted pillars, each 1.95 metres in height, with a .9 metre high red sandstone railing, complete with a parapet of spear head blocks of the same material. The seventh story was a "less pretentious" pavilion of sisoo wood which supported the flagstaff. "In 1848, by the order of Lord Hardinge, the 'grotesque ornament' was removed from the top of the minar and pitched on a small mound...bereft of its flagstaff." (Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 64) See also Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21, for a discussion of Smith's further "embellishments" of the Qutb minar.

¹³¹ Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15, and Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹³² Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

The facades of the three outer walls are divided into two stories (Fig. 17). On either side of each central archway the lower walls are pierced by two windows, the same shape as the main arch, but only about one-third its size. The outer windows are slightly smaller than the closer ones. Both are covered with geometric, sandstone jali screens and a lotus-bud fringe. Above each lower window, are two small, blind arches surrounded by rectangular panelling so as to resemble second-story windows (Fig. 18).

Historical Persian inscriptions of a panegyric nature praising the patron appear three times around each central archway (Fig. 19): the face of the arch itself has a lower band of inscriptions carved in red sandstone, and on the upper band similar inscriptions are carved in white marble; the most lengthy version of the inscription, including the date of completion, the 15th of Shawwal, 710 A.H./March 7, 1311 A.D., is to be read on the white marble architrave framing the entrance.

On the "lower story," the Qur'anic and hadith inscriptions are located on the rectangular red sandstone panels surrounding the lower windows, and around the red sandstone arches of those windows (Fig. 20). On the "upper story," the inscriptions are located on the rectangular white marble panels surrounding the blind arches closest to the central arch, as well as on the blind arches themselves (Fig. 18). The rectangular white marble and red sandstone panels surrounding the outer blind arches are decorated with geometric and arabesque design (Fig. 18).

The interior walls of the 'Alai Darwaza (Fig. 15) are entirely covered with a deeply incised geometric motif based upon the six-point "Star of

Solomon," a motif repeated on the intrados, and referring to the ideal form of kingship. The arches surrounding the windows are also decorated with elaborately carved Qur'anic inscriptions in naskhi script.

Despite the obvious importance of Qur'anic epigraphy to the decorative program of the 'Alai Darwaza, those writers who have not virtually ignored the inscriptions have either only briefly noted them in passing or, as R. Nath has done, actually denied their existence.¹³³ An examination and analysis of the Qur'anic inscriptions of the 'Alai Darwaza will reveal the same distinct evidence of intelligent supervision and direction in the choice of inscriptions as we have seen in the choice and application of architectural forms.

¹³³ One of the 'Alai Darwaza's main features, according to Nath, is the "bold use of eulogical Persian instead of Qur'anic verse as calligraphic ornament." (my emphasis) R. Nath, *op. cit.* p. 48.

CHAPTER SIX

THE INSCRIPTIONS

Although the architectural features of the 'Alai Darwaza have been discussed in several surveys, its Qur'anic inscriptions have yet to be analysed. Any attempt to analyse the inscriptions of the 710 A.H./1311 A.D. gateway must obviously begin with an examination of those of the earlier mosque.¹³⁴

The inner lintel of the mosque's eastern gateway supports what appears to be the earliest inscription on the Quwwat al-Islam, dated 587 A.H./1191 A.D., and naming Qutb al-Din as patron.¹³⁵ It is accompanied by a passage from the Qur'an, Surah al-Imran 3:91-92, which threatens the disbelievers with a painful doom and, in a sense, justifies the appropriation of the "idolatrous" Hindu temples and offerings by the "pious" Muslim community:

Lo! Those who disbelieve and die in disbelief, the (whole) earth full of gold would not be accepted from such a one if it were offered as ransom (for his soul). Theirs will be a painful doom and they will have no helpers.
Ye will not attain unto piety until ye spend of that which ye love. And whatsoever ye spend, Allah is aware thereof.

¹³⁴ The inscriptions of the Quwwat al-Islam, including Altamsh's extension and those of the 'Alai Darwaza have been published in M. A. Husain's A Record of All the Qur'anic and Non-Historical Epigraphs of the Delhi Province. Memoirs of the Archeological Survey of India, No. 47, Calcutta, 1936.

¹³⁵ As noted earlier, however, Raverty has argued that since the Muslims had yet to take Delhi in 587 A.H., this date appears highly unlikely, and it would seem that this inscription, missing any reference to Qutb al-Din's overlord, was probably a slightly later addition.

Wealth, in the hands of idolators, can do no good. Taking such accumulated wealth into the hands of believers who can spend in the way of Allah, in effect, turned bad to good. An inscription on the arch tympanum of the northern gateway, dated 592 A.H./1195 A.D. and citing Mu'izzi sultan Muhammad ibn Sam as patron includes a Qur'anic quotation, Surah Yunus 10:26, which seems to continue the message:

For those who do good is the best (reward) and more (thereto).
Neither dust nor ignomy cometh near their faces. Such are the
rightful owners of the Garden; they will abide therein.

The majority of the Quwwat al-Islam's inscriptions are to be found on the qiblah screen, built by Qutb al-Din in 594 A.H./1199 A.D. and extended by Altamsh in 627 A.H./1229 A.D. Qutb al-Din's original screen contains eight Qur'anic inscriptions and two hadith, the latter being placed one each on the outermost arches. Unlike the inscriptions of the nearby minar, inscriptions such as Surah al-Baqarah 2:255-260 and Surah Ibrahim 14:29-30 which express the omnipotence of Allah, the importance of prayer and faithful adherence to Islam, and the pain and anguish awaiting disbelievers and idolators,¹³⁶ the Quwwat al-Islam's screen contains verses which lay much less stress on the punishment awaiting disbelievers while emphasising instead the importance of worship, the obligations incumbent upon believers, and the power of Allah. This is most clearly observed in the use of Surah al-Fath, for while both the minar and the screen support verses one to five,

¹³⁶ See Welch, op. cit., p. 257. For a fuller treatment of the inscriptions of the Qutb Minar, see a forthcoming article by Anthony Welch and Alexandra Bain.

only the minar includes verse six, which specifically warns of the fate awaiting idolators. The minar was a statement of Islam's victory and a warning to the disbelievers, but the prayer screen, on the other hand, was addressed to the faithful. Thus it is immediately apparent that the choices of inscriptions made for the minar were significantly different from those made for the screen; here, as in other instances, architectural position seems to have been an important factor in the selection of epigraphs.¹³⁷

In addition to architectural position, there seem to be other, equally important criteria in the selection of verses. Following Grabar's typology, as outlined in an earlier chapter, the inscriptions were also analysed in terms of generalised, pious quotations and passages which make specific historical reference to contemporary events.¹³⁸ The Quwwat al-Islam's prayer screen contains several general or "pious" quotations, for example: the outer arches contain Surah al-Rum 30:17-18, which calls upon the believers to praise Allah day and night and Surah al-Imran 3:189-193, which speaks of Allah's sovereignty and reminds believers of the importance of prayer; or again Surah al-Furqan 25:61-67 which addresses the "faithful slaves of the Beneficent" as those who "walk upon the earth modestly;" and Surah al-Mu'minun 23:1-14 which defines the qualities of the believers and promises them paradise.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ See Grabar, 1974, op. cit., pp. 465-468.

The prayer screen also contains what appears to be an epigraphic reference to Qutb al-Din's "cleansing" the mosque of its former Hindu idols. Surah Bani Israel 17:78-82 includes the verse recited by the Prophet as he witnessed the destruction of the idols at the Ka'ba following the conquest of Mecca in 630: "And say: Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished away. / Lo! falsehood is ever bound to vanish." The verse, in this context, may be seen to draw an analogy between the idolatrous (and conquered) Meccans and the idolatrous (and conquered) Hindus.

The screen repeats the theme of the Muslims' victory over non-believers with Surah al-Fath 48:1-5, while the destruction of those who denied Allah's revelation is also the topic of Surah al-Furqan 25:36-39:

Then We said: Go together unto the folk who have denied our revelation. Then We destroyed them, a complete destruction. And Noah's folk, when they denied the messengers, We drowned them and made of them a portent for mankind. We have prepared a painful doom for evil doers. And (the tribes of) A'ad and Thamud, and the dwellers in Ar-Rass, and the many generations in between. Each (of them) We warned by examples, and each (of them) We brought to utter ruin.

The screen's central arch contains Surah Bani Israel 17:1-6, six verses which apparently contain the key to the Quwwat al-Islam's epigraphic program:

Glorified be He Who carried His servant by night from the Inviolable Place of Worship [Mecca] to the Far Distant Place of Worship [Jerusalem] the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, that We might show him of our tokens! Lo! He, Only He is the Hearer, the Seer.
We gave unto Moses the Scripture, and We appointed it a guidance for the Children of Israel, saying: Choose no guardian beside Me.
(They were) the seed of those whom We carried (in the ship) along with Noah. Lo! he was a grateful slave.

And we decreed for the Children of Israel in the Scripture: Ye verily will work corruption in the earth twice, and ye will become great tyrants.

So when the time for the first of the two came, we roused against you slaves of ours of a great might who ravaged (your) country, and it was a threat performed. Then we gave you once again your turn against them, and We aided you with wealth and children and made you (more in soldiery).¹³⁹

This passage may be seen to fulfill two separate functions. First, it possibly marks the Quwwat al-Islam as a special place of prayer and pilgrimage, akin to the holy areas of Mecca and Jerusalem. On October 2, 1187 A.D., a mere five years before Qutb al-Din began building his mosque in Delhi, the Muslim armies under Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayub entered Jerusalem, recapturing it from the Crusaders for the first time in almost one hundred years. The news had undoubtedly reached Qutb al-Din, who, here on the farthest reaches of the Islamic empire, chose this surah, which begins with the story of the Prophet Muhammad's mystical Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, for the central arch of his prayer screen. This analogy between Mecca, Jerusalem and the Quwwat al-Islam as a place of pilgrimage, or visitation appears to have been strengthened in the later epigraphic programs of Altamsh and 'Ala' al-Din. Perhaps this aspect of the Quwwat al-Islam as a centre of pilgrimage developed over time, and was merely being acknowledged through the choice of inscriptions. In any case, the theme of visiting a holy site seems to be supported by the hadith inscriptions on the Qutb mosque's outer arches:

¹³⁹ Note: the last two words are omitted. The underlining here and in subsequent Qur'anic passages is my emphasis.

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "The mosques are the Divine courtyards and structures. The Most High Allah orders their erection...confer blessings on their inmates (?)

and even more:

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The Prophet, peace be on him, said, "Islam is founded on five basic principles: there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah; the offering of prayer; the giving away of the poor-rate; the keeping of fast during the Ramazan; the pilgrimage to the House (of Allah at Mecca) enjoined on those who can afford it." And the Prophet, peace be on him, said, "The mosques are built for Allah, the Most High." And the Prophet, peace be on him, said, "Whoever visited...a mosque, visited (so to say), the Most High Allah (Himself), and it is incumbent on the one thus visited to bless the visitor. And all praise is due to Allah...."

A stronger case can be made for the second function of the central arch's passage from Surah Bani Israel 17:1-6: it draws an analogy between the first destruction of the Jewish Temple of Solomon by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and the destruction of Hindu temples by Qutb al-Din. Following their arrival in the land of Palestine, the Jews had begun to worship the goddesses and gods of their neighbours.

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of their Lord, and served Baalim: And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. ¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Judges, 2:11-13. Quoted in S. Abul A'la Maududi, The Meaning of the Qur'an, Lahore, 1988, p. 122.

The Jews ignored, banished and even murdered the prophets sent by God to warn them against corruption. Thus, the Qur'anic verse from Surah Bani Israel:

And we decreed for the Children of Israel in the Scripture: Ye verily will work corruption in the earth twice, and ye will become great tyrants.

Nebuchadnezzar's razing of the Temple of Solomon was seen as a punishment for these acts, "this was the first calamity that came as a warning to the Israelites, and the first chastisement that they suffered as a result thereof." ¹⁴¹ Surah Bani Israel says:

So when the time for the first of the two came, we roused against you slaves of ours of a great might who ravaged (your) country, and it was a threat performed.

This theme of Allah's punishment of idolators, and specifically the theme of the destruction of temples by the servants of Allah served as a reaffirmation of the presence of Islam and its victory against idolatry in India. This was obviously Allah's victory, for the pious Muslims had won a resounding victory over the more numerous Hindus.

There is one puzzling question, however. Why, if the theme was the subjugation of idol worshippers, did the epigraphist include verse six?

Then We gave you once again your turn against them, and We aided you with wealth and children and made you more (in soldiery).

The last two words were, in fact, omitted, in all probability the result of a lack of space.

¹⁴¹ Maududi, op.cit., p. 123-124.

When Altamsh extended the qiblah screen in 627 A.H./1229-30 A.D., he seems to have continued the basic themes set by his predecessor, but he chose new passages to do so. Only one of the passages used on the original screen is repeated in Altamsh's extension, Surah Bani Israel 17:1-5, this time minus the problematic verse six and with the addition of verses 10 to 12 which again threaten the unbelievers with a painful doom. It would appear then, that these passages from Surah Bani Israel were significant: they were not only chosen for the central arch of the original screen, but were repeated on the extension. Yet what of the missing ayats? Why were verses seven through nine not included in either building campaign?

I suggest that the verses were intentionally left out of the Quwwat al-Islam's original qiblah screen, as well as the extension of Altamsh, because they did not make sense in terms of the analagous reference to the tearing down of the Hindu temple. In Surah Bani Israel, verses seven through nine refer specifically to a second tearing down of the Jewish temple:

...So when the time for the second (of the judgements) came,
 (We roused against you others of Our slaves) to ravage you,
and to enter the temple even as they entered it the first time,
 and to lay waste all that they conquered with an utter
 wasting...

In other words, if the epigraphist was attempting to compare God's sending His slaves to tear down the Jewish temple with the contemporary subjugation of Hindus, it would be illogical, in Qutb al-Din's original building campaign of 1191-1198 A.D., to include a reference to the second destruction. By the time of Altamsh's extension in 1229-30 A.D., Genghis Khan had burst out of Central Asia and into India. For most of his rule

Altamsh was concerned largely with repulsing the Mongols and dealing with vassals who had withdrawn their allegiance after the death of Qutb al-Din Aibak.¹⁴² Although Altamsh repeated the passage referring to Qutb al-Din's initial temple destruction, he did not see fit to include the passage about a second tearing down of the temple, possibly because he saw his reign as one of consolidation rather than expansion.

By the time of the final expansion of the Quwwat al-Islam in 710 A.H./1311 A.D., 'Ala' al-Din Khalji (695-715 A.H./1296-1316 A.D.) had extended his campaign of conquest, expansion, idol destruction, and temple looting into the Deccan and southern India. The fabulous wealth which 'Ala' al-Din carried away from the gutted Hindu temples paid for his massive building campaigns. It was this destruction of "infidel" temples that was chosen in 1311 A.D. as the main theme of the 'Alai Darwaza, the southern, and main gateway of a vastly enlarged Quwwat al-Islam complex.

The 'Alai Darwaza contains, appropriately enough, the missing reference to the second tearing down of the temple. Surah Bani Israel 17:7-10 is repeated here twice: first the entire passage, including verses one through twelve, is inscribed on the main entrance, the southern facade; and verses seven through ten are again repeated on the interior of the south wall. It would appear that 'Ala' al-Din saw himself fulfilling God's prophecy, having been sent as God's slave, "to ravage you, and to enter the Temple even as they entered it the first time, and to lay waste all that they

¹⁴² Ishwari Prasad, History of Medieval India, Allahabad, 1970, pp. 154-160.

conquered with an utter wasting." The message was made clear to any non-believer who might stand before the main entrance of this great place of pilgrimage: "if ye repeat (the crime) We shall repeat the punishment."

This drawing of analogies between current events and scripture has been a fairly common theme throughout world history, and the Islamic world has not been an exception. During the Delhi Sultanate, the viewing of contemporary history as the fulfillment of Qur'anic prophecy appears to have been quite popular. Poets such as Amir Khusrau made frequent reference to the Qur'an in their work. As mentioned in a previous chapter, during a passage describing the destruction of the temple of Somnath in his book Khaza'in al-Futuh, or the history of 'Ala' al-Din Khalji's campaigns, Amir Khusrau notes the similarity between Malik Kafir's sparing of Somnath's largest idol in order to return it to Delhi to teach the Hindus a lesson, and Surah al-Anbiya 21:58, "It seemed as if the tongue of the Imperial sword explained the meaning of the text: 'So he (Abraham) broke them (the idols) into pieces except the chief of them, that happily they may return to it.'" ¹⁴³ The surah later explains that in an attempt to show the idolators the foolishness of their beliefs, Abraham denied his act and accused the chief idol of destroying the smaller ones. He challenged the idol worshippers, saying if they truly believed in their idols they would simply ask their chief idol what had happened to the others. ¹⁴⁴ In the

¹⁴³ Campaigns, p. 36.

¹⁴⁴ Yusuf Ali, The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an, Cairo and Beirut, 1938, p. 808.

same work, while describing the campaign of Ma'bar, Amir Khusrau also drew a parallel between the Muslim conquest of the elephant-owners of Kandur and Surah al-Fil, or "The Elephant." which describes the invasion of Mecca by the Christian Viceroy of the King of Abyssinia at Yemen in 510 A.D.

"Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the possessor of the elephant? Did He not cause their war to end in confusion, and send down (to Prey) upon them birds in flocks, casting them against hard stones like straws eaten up."

In describing the one hundred and twenty elephants which the Hindus had loaded with treasures in an attempt to escape the Muslim invaders, Khusrau says:

"It seemed that, smeared with the blood of those 'possessors of the elephants' the elephants of the land became like 'birds in flocks' and carried to the elephantine clouds the words of thankfulness to the Lord of Ka'ba." ¹⁴⁵

Just as Amir Khusrau drew literary parallels between Qur'anic passages and the exploits of the sultan's general, in studying the walls of the 'Alai Darwaza, it becomes apparent that an important factor in the choice of Qur'anic inscriptions was their applicability in an historical context. Not only did 'Ala' al-Din choose to draw comparisons between his actions and those of "the victorious servants of God," but it appears that he also wished to justify otherwise dubious activities under the cover of "Islamic" behaviour.

¹⁴⁵ Campaigns, p. 101.

As was described in an earlier chapter, the three outer facades of the 'Alai Darwaza received identical treatment. While the lower walls were heavily inscribed, primarily in red sandstone, the inscriptions on the upper walls were restricted to one of two wide, rectangular, white marble panels surrounding the blind niches on each section of the upper wall. The panel farthest from the central arch was carved in a stylised arabesque, giving the closer panel, the one supporting inscriptions, an air of prominence. It was on one of these panels, the one surrounding the niches to the west of the southern archway, that the epigraphist chose to inscribe the missing passage from Surah Bani Israel (Fig. 18).

The verse chosen to balance this politically motivated inscription was one with an equally obvious, and similar message, again centred around the destruction of the disbelievers' place of worship by the servants of Allah. The marble panel surrounding the blind niches east of the southern archway contains a passage from Surah al-Taubah 9:104-107 which includes the verse:

...And as for those who chose a place of worship out of opposition and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who warred against Allah and His messenger aforetime, they will surely swear: We purposed naught save good. Allah beareth witness that they verily are liars.

This section of Surah al-Taubah was revealed upon the Prophet's return from the campaign of Tabuk in the year 9 A.H/631 A.D. While the Prophet and his army of some 30,000 followers had gone off to confront the Byzantines in northern Arabia, a Christian monk and a group of Hypocrites

lagged behind and plotted against the Muslims.¹⁴⁶ On his return from Tabuk, the Prophet was ordered by Allah to treat the Hypocrites as kafirs, or disbelievers, (Surah al-Taubah 9:73) and be harsh with them. He burnt the mosque the Hypocrites had set up in order to serve as a cover for their activities. This "Mosque of Mischief," the one mentioned in the above quoted passage, had been built in Quba, a suburb about three miles to the southeast of Medina.¹⁴⁷ This area had been chosen because Quba was already a sacred place, the site of the first mosque built by the nascent Muslim community. It was here that the Prophet Muhammad rested for four days during the hijra, just before his triumphant entry into Medina. A mosque was built on the spot where he had prayed and he frequently returned to this mosque throughout his stay in Medina. The Prophet's mosque in Quba was known by two names, one was the "Mosque of Piety," or Taqwa, the other was the "Mosque of the Power of Islam," or the Quwwat al-Islam.¹⁴⁸ Although it is not known when Delhi's Jami Masjid acquired the name of Quwwat al-Islam, this would appear to be the first, albeit indirect, reference to that appellation.

Aside from the possible reference to the Quwwat al-Islam, 'Ala' al-Din Khalji had another, more ominous reason for including this passage from Surah al-Taubah. As related in an earlier chapter, a group known as the

¹⁴⁶ Maududi, op. cit., pp. 157-167.

¹⁴⁷ Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p. 469 ff.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

New Muslims, Mongol converts to Islam, had been a source of problems for the ruler throughout his reign. By seeking asylum with Hamir Deo, the Hindu ruler of Ranthambhor, these New Muslims must have seemed reminiscent of the treacherous group of Hypocrites who had been in league with the Christian Byzantines, and had plotted to overthrow the Prophet. Perhaps it was by deeming these New Muslims to be "Hypocrites," and therefore beyond the pale of Islam, that 'Ala' al-Din felt justified in ordering, as he did, the extermination of all New Muslim men, some twenty to thirty thousand souls.¹⁴⁹ While the reference to the Quwwat al-Islam is indirect, the use of this passage suggests that by the first decade of the fourteenth century, the mosque in Delhi had already acquired that name.¹⁵⁰ Once again, a specific passage has been chosen to illustrate the strong connection between contemporary events and Qur'anic history. Here too, the central theme is the destruction of an infidel temple.

A Persian inscription on the white marble architrave framing the southern entrance to the 'Alai Darwaza (Fig. 19) includes a description of 'Ala' al-Din Khalji as "the destroyer of the doctrines of infidels, the demolisher of the foundation of the places of idol worship, the exalter of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁵⁰ While it is reasonable to assume that the presence of this inscription offers us a likely terminus ante quem for the use of the name Quwwat al-Islam, it in no way offers evidence as to whether or not 'Ala' al-Din Khalji was responsible for this designation.

the foundation of congregations of Islam...the suppressor of infidelity." ¹⁵¹

The white marble band of the southern arch's upper face reads:

This mosque, which in extent and height is like unto Baitu-l-muqaddas [Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem], nay is the second Baitu-l-mamur (Ka'ba), was built in pure faith and good intention by his exalted majesty, the lord, the diffuser of grace and beneficence, helped by the help of the benevolent king, great in the world and in faith, the victorious, (named) ABUL MUZAFFAR MUHAMMAD SHAH, the king, the right arm of the Khilafat, the ally of the Amiru-l-muminin (chief of the faithful), may God continue the shadow of his majesty until the day of judgement. ¹⁵²

Here we have proof that the epigraphist chose the passage from Surah Bani Israel with the intention of comparing the Quwwat al-Islam with the holy places at Mecca and Jerusalem. The importance of this passage is again stressed through its repetition on the white marble architrave framing the eastern archway, one of only two Qur'anic verse to be included in the Persian inscriptions surrounding the main arches.

....and preserve him [Ala' al-Din] in his kingdom and rule as long as the world exists and this Surah is read: "Praise be unto Him who transported His servant by night from the sacred mosque (of Makka) to the Masjid-al-Aqsa (temple of Jerusalem)," on the 15th of Shawwal, the year 710 (7th March 1311 A.D.). ¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Page, op.cit., p. 37. The building's eulogical Persian inscriptions are located around the central archways, while the Qur'anic inscriptions are around the ornamental arches and windows of the facade.

¹⁵² Page, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 35.

The other Qur'anic verse is to be found on the architrave surrounding the western archway; it is Surah al-Taubah 9:18, the most common Qur'anic inscription found in mosques.¹⁵⁴

He only shall attend Allah's sanctuaries who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due and feareth none save Allah. For such (only) is it possible that they can be of the rightly guided.

Returning to the southern facade, the small marble arches of the niches on the upper wall support an inscription from Surah al-Jinn 72:18, "And the places of worship are only for Allah, so pray not unto anyone along with Allah," an important message to a minority population of believers in an idolatrous land, and one which, not suprisingly, has been repeated in a similar location on each of the walls. The two red sandstone, rectangular panels surrounding the screened windows on each side of the lower southern facade have been inscribed with verses that refer to the Ka'ba, once again strengthening the analogy between the Quwwat al-Islam and the holy places. Surah al-Baqarah 2:127-132, inscribed around the windows to the east of the southern archway, contains Abraham's prayer while building the Ka'ba, invoking Allah's mercy and guidance upon those who submit. "And who forsaketh the religion of Abraham save him who befooleth himself?" Surah al-Imran 3:95-99, around the windows to the west of the southern archway, again speaks of Abraham and the religious obligation of

¹⁵⁴ See Erica Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, The Image of the Word, Vol. 1, p. 63, and Vol. 2, pp. 43-53, where over 150 instances of the passage's use have been recorded, including two uses on the 'Alai Darwaza itself, as well as on the earlier Quwwat al-Islam.

pilgrimage to the Ka'ba at Mecca, and it includes a warning to non-Muslim People of the Book not to drive the believers from the path of Allah.

"Say: O People of the Scripture! Why drive ye back believers from the way of Allah, seeking to make it crooked, when ye are witness (to Allah's guidance)? Allah is not unaware of what ye do."

The two red sandstone panels between the arched windows on either side of the southern facade are inscribed with passages concerning Paradise. To the west of the southern archway, Surah al-Sad 38:50-54 promises paradise:

Gardens of Eden, whereof the gates are opened for them,
Wherein, reclining, they call for plenteous fruit and cool drink
(that is) therein.
And with them are those of modest gaze, companions.
This it is that ye are promised for the Day of Reckoning.
Lo! this in truth is Our provision, which will never waste
away.

While to the east of the southern archway, Surah al-Ra'd 13:23-25 promises paradise for believers and at the same time curses those who break Allah's covenant.

A similitude of the Garden which is promised unto those who keep their duty to Allah: Underneath it rivers flow; its food is everlasting, and its shade; this is the reward of those who keep their duty, while the reward of disbelievers is the fire...

This theme of Paradise is repeated on the equivalent panels from each of the other two exterior walls: Surah al-Qaf 50:31-35 on the eastern wall; and Surah al-Nisa 4:122-123 on the western wall.

The remaining inscriptions on the southern facade are located on the arches around the screened windows on the lower walls (Fig. 21). They consist mainly of hadiths which encourage prayer, especially congregational

prayer, the reading of Qur'an, and the building of mosques. Only two passages from the Qur'an appear here. On the upper arch of the first window east of the southern archway is a Qur'anic inscription which is too badly damaged to identify.

And the words of the Great and Glorious God are: "And keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate...."

The second of the two is from Surah Ibrahim 14:31:

Tell my bondmen who believe to establish worship and spend of that which We have given them, secretly and publicly, before a day cometh wherein there will be neither traffick nor befriending.

The examination of the inscriptions of the southern facade has revealed that the epigraphist carefully chose the inscriptions to fit certain recurrent themes and chose specific places to display those themes. The least prominently displayed are the generalised, or "pious" quotations, concerning such subjects as the importance of prayer and the benefits of building mosques. These are all brief quotations in red sandstone, located around the arches of windows. The themes of Paradise and the Ka'ba are given a certain prominence, given their location on the large, red sandstone panels around and between the windows on the lower part of the facade. However, the most prominent Qur'anic inscriptions, given their location on large slabs of white marble on the upper wall, are those which make obvious reference to contemporary history. By examining the other exterior walls we can ascertain if this epigraphic program was consistent throughout.

A Persian inscription on the western archway of the 'Alai Darwaza describes the mosque as "a second Ka'ba," and one which is "like

Paradise."¹⁵⁵ As mentioned above, the theme of Paradise again appears on the red sandstone panel between the windows of the lower wall, south of the western archway, in Surah al-Nisa 4:122-123.

But as for those who believe and do good works, We shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. It is a promise from Allah in truth; and who can be more merciful than Allah in utterance?...

The theme of the Ka'ba and pilgrimage is taken up again with Surah al-Taubah 9:18-19, located on the arch of the screened window north of the western archway. As noted above, verse 18 is the Qur'anic text most often found in mosques. The addition of verse 19, however, is very rare, appearing for the first time in Qutb al-Din's earlier mosque and remaining largely restricted to India.¹⁵⁶

Count ye the slaking of a pilgrim's thirst and tendance of the Inviolable Place of Worship as (equal to the worth of) him who believeth in Allah and the Last Day, and striveth in the way of Allah? They are not equal in the sight of Allah. Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk.

On the opposite side of the facade, on the arch of the screened window south of the western archway, is inscribed Surah al-Baqarah 2:45-46:

Seek help in patience and prayer; and truly it is hard save for the humble-minded,
Who know that they will have to meet their Lord, and that unto Him they are returning.

Just as was noted on the southern facade, the remaining window arches support hadiths which encourage prayer and the building of mosques.

¹⁵⁵ Page, op.cit., p. 36.

¹⁵⁶ Dodd and Khairallah, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 53.

Although it has been much mutilated, the inscription on the red sandstone panel on the lower facade surrounding the screened windows north of the western archway can be identified as the Throne Verse from Surah al-Baqarah 2:255-266, a verse which is the quintessential statement of the Islamic faith, and which has been inscribed in hundreds of mosques throughout the Islamic world.

Allah! There is no god save Him, the Alive, the Eternal.
Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth.
Who is he who intercedeth with Him save by his leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His Throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never wearied of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.

There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm hand-hold which will never break. Allah is Hearer, Knower.

On the opposite side of the arch from the Throne Verse, around the screened windows south of the western archway, is Surah al-Imran 3:132-135, a passage repeated from the qibla screen of the earlier mosque which describes the attributes of a believer:

And obey Allah and the Messenger, that ye may find mercy.
And vie with one another for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who ward off (evil);
Those who spend (of that which Allah has given them) in ease and in adversity, those who control their wrath and are forgiving toward mankind; Allah loveth the good;
And those who, when they do an evil thing or wrong themselves, remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins -- Who forgiveth sins save Allah only? -- and will not knowingly repeat (the wrong) they did.

Surah al-Fath 48:28-29, provides a moving description of the sight of Muslims at prayer:

...Thou (O Muhammad) seest them bowing and falling prostrate (in worship), seeking bounty from Allah and (His) acceptance. The mark of them is on their foreheads from the traces of prostration. Such is their likeness in the Torah and their likeness in the Gospel – like as sown corn that sendeth forth its shoot and strengtheneth it and riseth firm upon its stalk, delighting the sowers -- that He may enrage the disbelievers with (the sight of) them. Allah hath promised, unto such of them as believe and do good works, forgiveness and immense reward.

The epigraphist has chosen the above inscription for the most prominent position on the western facade, on the white marble panels surrounding the niches on the upper wall to the south of the western archway.

Unfortunately, due to the deteriorated condition of the western wall (Fig. 22), the opposite inscription, north of the western archway, is not readable.

The eastern facade's most prominent inscriptions, the white marble panels surrounding the niches on the upper wall return to the themes of Paradise and the Ka'ba, or pilgrimage. To the north of the eastern archway is Surah al-Ma'idah 5:97-100:

Allah hath appointed the Ka'bah, the Sacred House, a standard for mankind, and the Sacred Month and the offerings and the garlands. That is so that ye may know that Allah knoweth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth...

To the south of the eastern archway is Surah al-Ra'd 13:35-38:

A similitude of the Garden which is promised unto those who keep their duty (to Allah): Underneath it rivers flow; its food is everlasting, and its shade; this is the reward of those who keep their duty, while the reward of disbelievers is the Fire. Those unto whom We gave the Scripture rejoice in that which is revealed to thee. And of the clans there are who deny some of it. Say: I am commanded only that I serve Allah and ascribe

unto Him no partner. Unto Him I cry, and unto Him is my return...

The red sandstone panels surrounding the screened windows on the lower walls contain passages which state the fundamental principles of Islam and pray for Allah's forgiveness and mercy. To the north of the eastern archway, Surah al-Baqarah 2:285-286 includes a list of basic Islamic beliefs:

...Each one believeth in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers -- We make no distinction between any of His messengers -- and they say: We hear, and we obey...

The above inscription also includes the surah's final prayer:

Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget, or miss the mark!
 Our Lord! Lay not on us such a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us!
 Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear!
 Pardon us, absolve us and have mercy on us, Thou, our Protector, and give us victory over the disbelieving folk.

On the opposite side of the eastern archway, the red sandstone panel surrounding the screened windows is inscribed with Surah al-Araf 7:31-35, which encourages the believers to suitably adorn themselves for prayer. It reminds them that Allah forbids only indecencies, sin, wrongful oppression, the association of others with Allah, and speculation about that which is Unknown. Again, the Hindus are reminded:

And every nation hath its term, and when its term cometh, they cannot put it off an hour nor yet advance (it).

On this wall, as on the other two exterior facades, the arches surrounding the screened windows of the lower wall contain mostly brief, pious inscriptions. Surah al-Jinn 72:18-20, on the arch immediately south of

the eastern archway, states that "...the places of worship are only for Allah, so pray not unto anyone along with Allah..." The rest of the inscriptions are hadith concerning the importance of congregational prayer and the building of mosques. One unusual hadith of particular interest is that located on the arch south of the above noted inscription, which states:

The Prophet of Allah, may Allah bless and assoil him, said.
"The most beloved places to Allah are the mosques and the
most detestable places to Allah are the markets."

When the cost of maintaining the large army needed for his extended sorties into southern India proved to be exorbitant, 'Ala' al-Din Khalji decided to solve his problem by cutting down the soldiers' salaries. In order to allow for the maintenance of a suitable living standard he instituted certain economic reforms, achieving market control primarily through a system of fixed prices.¹⁵⁷ This choice of hadith may reflect 'Ala' al-Din Khalji's attitude towards those unhappy merchants who attempted to thwart his schemes.

Our examination of the three external walls has revealed two major points: 1) that the inscriptions were carefully chosen to fit certain recurrent themes; and 2) specific areas of the building's facade were chosen to display these themes, giving more prominence to some than to others. Pious statements of faith exhorting the believers to do good deeds such as pray and build mosques are relegated to the positions of least importance, located primarily on the arches surrounding the windows of the lower facade. The

¹⁵⁷ Lal, op. cit., p. 197.

Quwwat al-Islam's designation as a sacred place of pilgrimage, "the one like Paradise," is reinforced through the frequent appearance of the themes of Paradise and, especially, of the Ka'ba or pilgrimage, repeated on the panels between the windows on lower wall of every facade. These themes are especially prominent on the panels surrounding the windows on the lower wall of the southern facade as well as the large marble panels surrounding the niches on the upper wall of the eastern facade. However, it is the large white marble panels surrounding the niches on the upper wall of the southern, or entrance facade which seem to command the place of prominence on the 'Alai Darwaza's exterior. By choosing two inscriptions that describe the success of the faithful servants of Allah over the disbelievers in terms of their destruction of idolatrous temples, the epigraphist is communicating 'Ala' al-Din's political message aimed at justifying his policies and legitimising his rule.

The interior of the 'Alai Darwaza (Fig. 15) contains quotations from only two surahs: the first is Surah al-Fath 48:1-9, the second is Surah Bani Israel, 17:1-12. This repetition of Surah Bani Israel, including verses 7-9, reinforces the significance of its appearance on the entrance. Inside, the two surahs are placed one above the other, with Surah al-Fath on the upper part of the wall, and Surah Bani Israel lower down. Following the right to left nature of the Arabic script, the inscriptions begin on the north wall, the entrance to the mosque itself, and carry on in a narrative sequence from wall to wall around the room, ending with the east wall. In addition to this horizontal narrative sequence, the epigraphists of the 'Alai Darwaza also

chose inscriptions that make sense thematically when read vertically, with each wall bearing discrete themes.¹⁵⁸ There also appears to be some correlation between the themes expressed on the exterior walls, and those expressed on their corresponding interiors.

The inscriptions of the interior entrance (the north wall) reiterate two of the main themes of the Quwwat al-Islam: the victory of Islam (Surah al-Fath 48:1-4); and the importance of pilgrimage (Surah Bani Israel 17:1-4). Unlike the southern facade, which promises a dire fate to the non-believers beyond its portal, the interior north wall, opening directly into the complex, contains messages of victory and success for the faithful.

The interior west wall, the qibla wall, repeats its exterior wall's theme of victory with a passage from Surah Bani Israel 17:4-6, describing the initial ravaging of the country and temple of the idolators. Another theme which is also repeated from the exterior is that of paradise, as expressed in Surah al-Fath 48:4-5.

The interior east wall repeats its exterior wall's themes of paradise, belief in Allah, and punishment for the unbelievers with Surah al-Fath 48:6-9, and Surah Bani Israel 17:9-11.

It is the interior south wall that repeats the key passage found on the 'Alai Darwaza's exterior entrance facade, but which is significantly missing from Qutb al-Din and Altamsh's qibla screens, Surah Bani Israel 17:7-9,

¹⁵⁸ Coincidentally, Giotto's contemporary frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua (c. 1303-05 A.D.) may also be read narratively/horizontally and thematically/vertically.

which describes the second destruction of the temple and threatens the unbelievers with fearful punishments:

(Saying): If ye do good, ye do good for your own souls, and if ye do evil, it is for them (in like manner). So when the time for the second (of the judgements) came, (We roused against you others of Our slaves) to ravage you, and to enter the temple even as they entered it the first time, and to lay waste all that they conquered with an utter wasting...

On the same wall the passage from Surah al-Fath 48:5-6, reinforces this message of punishment for the idolators:

...is the supreme triumph.
And may punish the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, and the idolatrous men and the idolatrous women, who think an evil thought concerning Allah. For them is the evil turn of fortune, and Allah is wroth against them and hath cursed them...

It is probably not coincidental that the passage concerning the second destruction of the temple which was left off of the original Quwwat al-Islam mosque's screen in 594 A.H./1198 A.D., and later extension in 627 A.H./1229-30 A.D., appears decades later on the entrance of 'Ala' al-Din's monumental gateway, both inside and out. The epigraphists of the original Quwwat al-Islam mosque presumably left out the passage referring to the second temple destruction because it did not fit their intended message, just as the later epigraphists specifically chose to put it on both sides of the south wall of the 'Alai Darwaza because, in their circumstances, the analogy was a clear confirmation of divine guidance and the unfolding of divine plans.

The sacred inscriptions of the Quwwat al-Islam and 'Alai Darwaza were carefully selected by individuals or groups who knew the scripture

well enough to use it to express the goals of successive Muslim sultans. Although these selections may possibly have been made by the sultans themselves, it is far more likely that the epigraphists were royal political and spiritual advisors who took on the task of creating an iconographic program that so aptly defined the achievements and reinforced the aspirations of their rulers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The early twelfth century saw that "total integration of inscriptions and decoration" which became an important part of Islamic architectural style.¹⁵⁹ Using a variety of scripts from pattern-like, angular Kufic to the most fluid naskhi, Qur'anic passages were inscribed on buildings throughout the Islamic world. An understanding of the relationship of inscriptions to their buildings requires a knowledge of Islam and its cultures, which is often neglected. For example, in a series on "living architecture," Andreas Volwahren writes about Indo-Islamic buildings: "It is possible to understand these architectural forms without having to inquire deeply into Islam, the religion of the men who built them."¹⁶⁰

In a previous study Anthony Welch observed that the epigraphic programs of two early monuments of the Delhi Sultanate, the tombs of Nasir al-Din Mahmud (1231 A.D.) and Altamsh (c.1235 A.D.), constantly stressed the distinction between the beliefs of the Muslim patrons and the non-Muslim subjects they ruled.¹⁶¹ Our examination of the inscriptions of the 'Alai Darwaza proves that this theme continued to be an important one

¹⁵⁹ J. D. Hoag, Islamic Architecture, New York, 1978. p. 82.

¹⁶⁰ Andreas Volwahren, Living Architecture: Islamic Indian, London, 1970, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

beyond the first two generations of Muslim rulers in northern India, and into the fourteenth century.

The 'Alai Darwaza and its inscriptions tell us much about Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji and his times. His choice of building site, an extension of the Quwwat al-Islam, indicates his desire to associate his name with the names of his legitimate predecessors, Qutb al-Din Aibak and Altamsh. While the choice of a four-sided, domed pavilion is typically Islamic, its use as a gateway is reminiscent of a triumphal arch, expressing the grandeur of 'Ala' al-Din's vision.

Not only is the 'Alai Darwaza heavily inscribed, the inscriptions have been given places of prominence on both the exterior and interior walls. Separate areas have been chosen for distinct themes: the generalised, pious quotations that have apparently been deemed to be less important, are relegated to less conspicuous areas and are carved from the ubiquitous red sandstone; while the more important (more historically significant) inscriptions are given pride of place and have been carved from the most costly material - white marble. The 'Alai Darwaza is the first extant Islamic building in India to use white marble, a material that will become a major feature of much later Indian architecture, its use reaching a zenith with the building of the Taj Mahal in the seventeenth century.

The epigraphic program of the 'Alai Darwaza continues and amplifies a number of the themes from the Quwwat al-Islam's earlier building campaigns: the victory of Islam over idolatry; pilgrimage; and the promise of Paradise. It is the passage concerning the destruction of idolatrous

temples, used by both Qutb al-Din and Altamsh, that 'Ala' al-Din has chosen as the main theme of his monumental gateway, a statement which reinforces his status as ghazi, or defender of the faith against the infidels.

When 'Ala' al-Din Khalji severed the crown from his uncle's head and claimed it for himself in 1296 A.D., he gained power, but lacked legitimacy. Qutb al-Din's accession to the throne of India had been arranged by Mu'izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam before his death and had the support of the Mu'izzi nobles.¹⁶² Altamsh, too, had been chosen by his predecessor (Qutb al-Din), had the support of the nobles, and like Mahmud of Ghazna before him, received a robe of investiture from the caliph at Baghdad. The Khalji revolution of 1290 A.D. tore apart the political fabric of the Delhi Sultanate by usurping power from the nobles and placing it in the hands of whomever was strong enough to grasp it. By choosing Qur'anic passages that drew analogies between his own actions and those of the Prophet and other servants of Allah, and inscribing them in carefully chosen places of prominence on his monumental gateway to the jami' masjid of his predecessors, 'Ala' al-Din Khalji was proclaiming his God-given right to rule.

It is no longer possible to view Qur'anic epigraphy as irrelevant, or simply decorative. Any attempt at understanding a building must include a careful analysis of its inscriptions. Comparisons should be made with other epigraphic programs throughout the Islamic world, but especially with those

¹⁶² Nigam, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

buildings that are geographical and chronological contemporaries, in order to determine patterns of similarity and pockets of uniqueness. Patterns of similarity may represent themes which are of general interest to a particular audience over a certain period of time: for example, inscriptions stressing the importance of 'Ali's Imamate during Uljaitu's conversion to Shi'ism or during the Safavid period;¹⁶³ or the Delhi Sultanate's theme of the distinction between believers and idolators. Pockets of uniqueness offer the student of epigraphy the opportunity to seek out the historically specific inscription by attempting to "read" these passages through the filter of contemporary history. By examining the events surrounding a building's history, its context, and by referring to the tools of Qur'anic exegesis used by the religious scholars who were probably responsible for the choices of inscriptions, it is possible to find what appear to be Qur'anic references to the lives of the patrons and the society they lived in. Given the popularity of such references in literary works it is not at all surprising to find them on the walls of religious monuments such as the 'Alai Darwaza, especially when the patron's purpose in building was so blatantly political in the first place.

¹⁶³ For an examples see Blair, op. cit. and Noha Khoury, Safavid Epigraphy in Isfahan: The Masjid-i Shah, (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Victoria, 1983).

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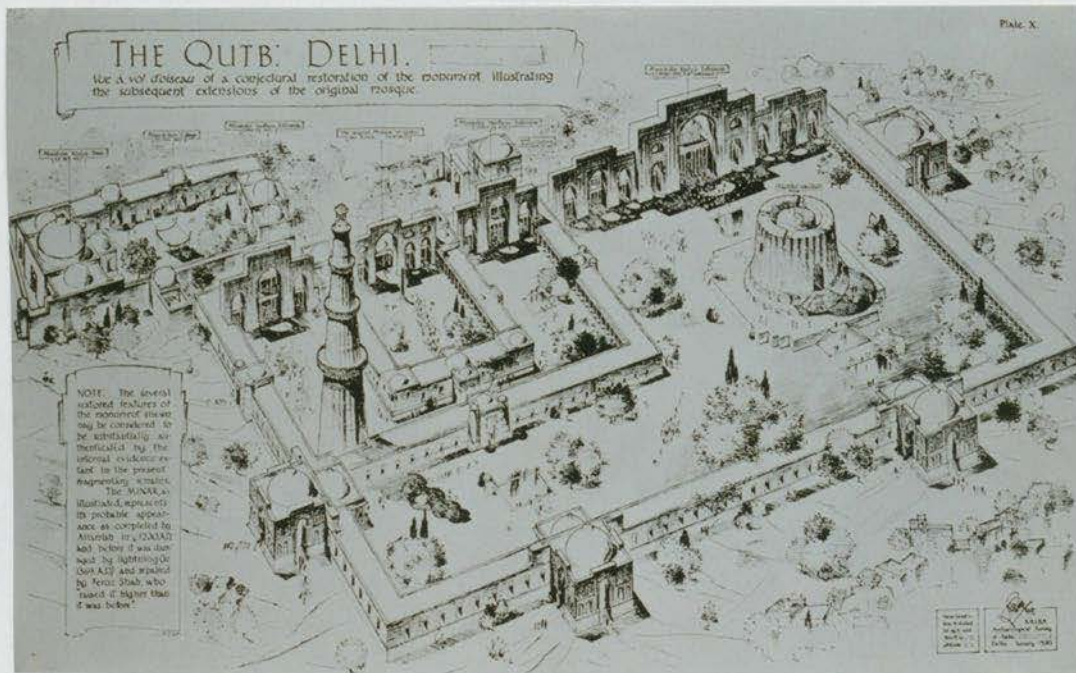
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Figure 1:
Conjectural restoration of the Quwwat al-Islam.



(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate X.)

Figure 2:
a) Obverse of Hindu sculptured stone.



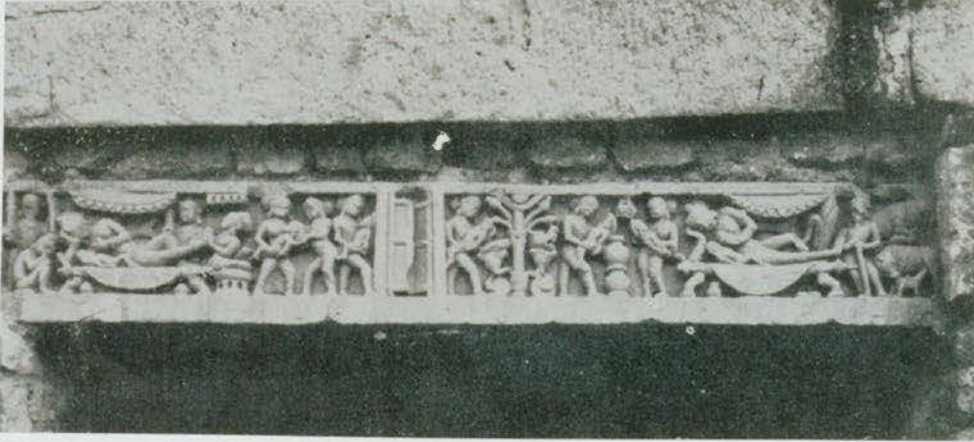
b) Reverse of same stone with Arabic inscription.



(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate 9 d&e.)

Figure 3:

Detail of sculptured lintel portraying the "birth of Krishna," from a window in the north facade of Qutb al-Din's original mosque.



(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate 9 c.)

Figure 4:

Inscription of epigraphist from the Arhai din Ka Johmpra mosque at Ajmir.



(See: R. Hillenbrand, "Political Symbolism in Early Indo-Islamic Mosque Architecture: The Case of Ajmir," Iran. vol. XXVI. 1988. p. 111.)

Figure 5:
View of the east colonnade of Qutb al-Din's original mosque.



(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate 6, fig. a.)

Figure 6:
View of Altamsh's southern colonnade.



Figure 7:
Interior view of 'Ala' al-Din's colonnade in the south east corner of the mosque.



(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate 8, fig. d.)

Figure 8:
Conjectural restoration of the mosques of Qutb al-Din and
Altamsh.

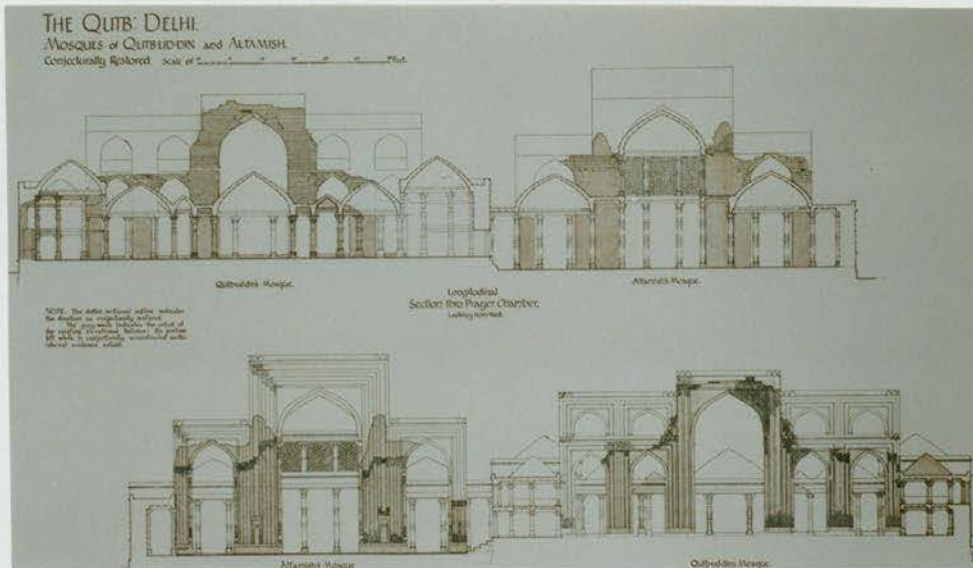
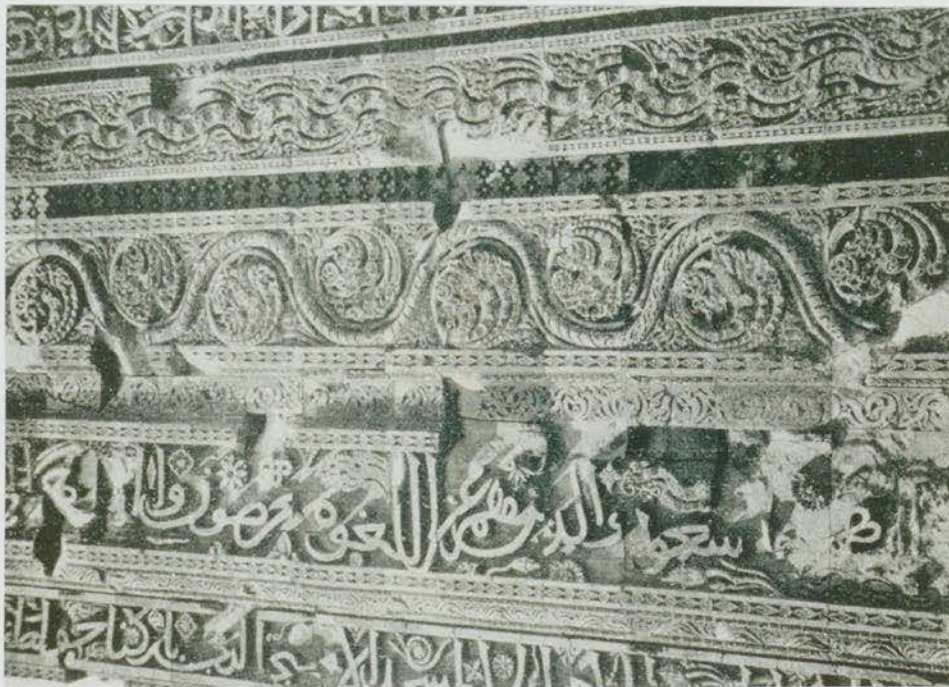
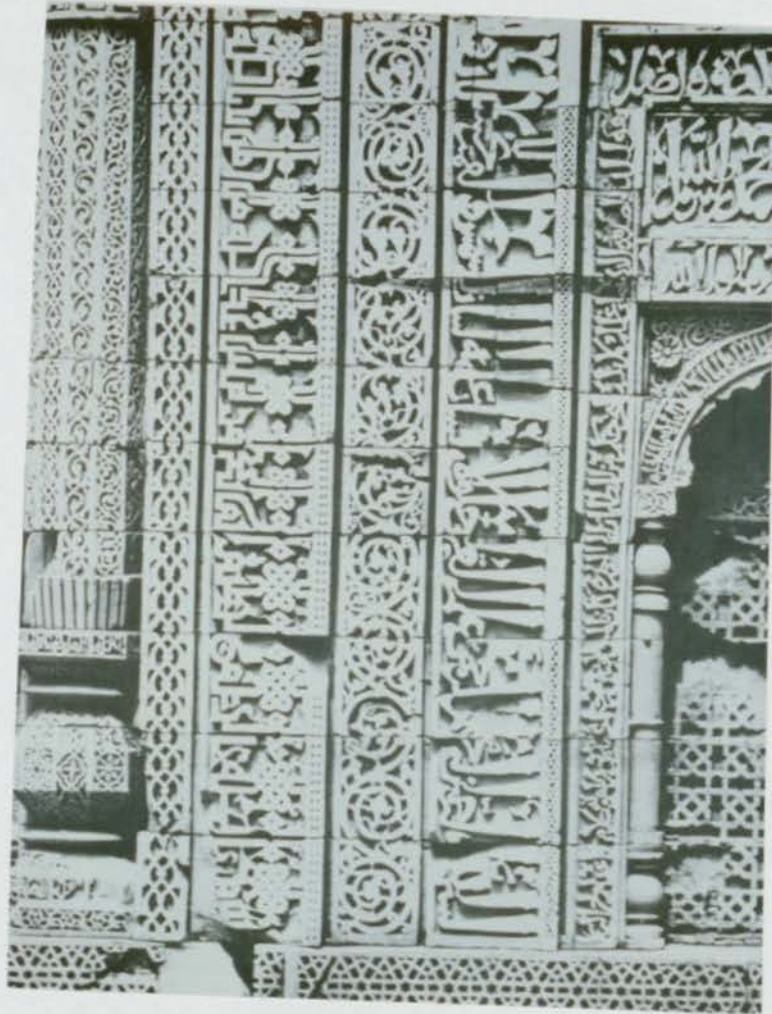


Figure 9:
Detail on the facade of the original mosque of Qutb al-Din.



(see: J. A. Page, *An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi*. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate IV, and Plate VII, fig. 2.)

Figure 10:
Detail of Altamsh's screen.



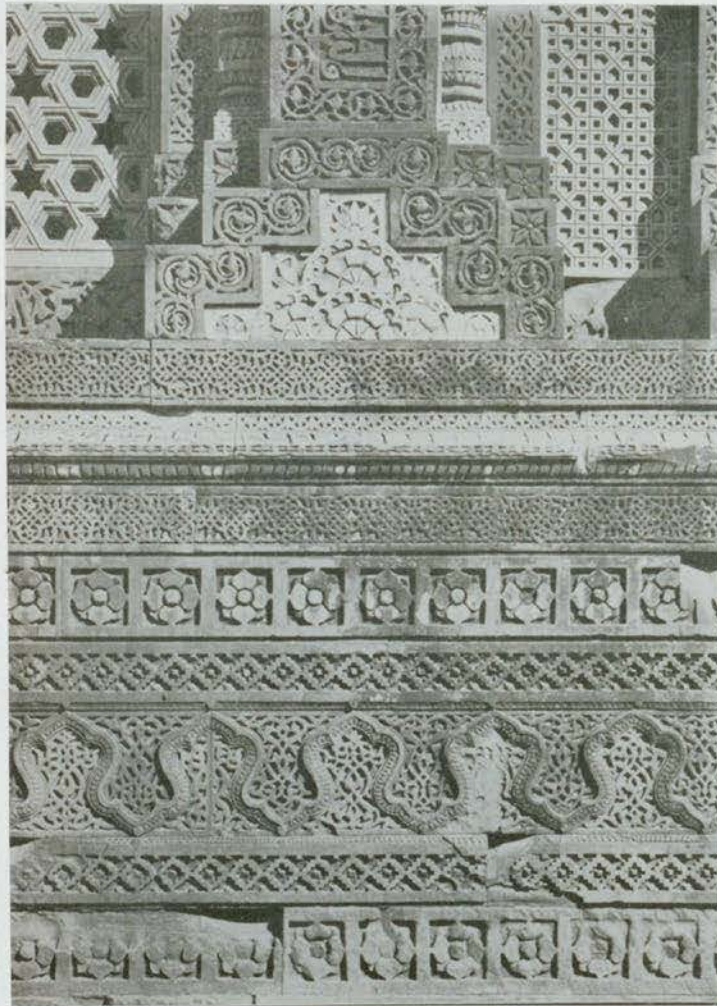
(see: Wayne Begley, Monumental Islamic Calligraphy from India. Villa Park. 1985. p. 31.)

Figure 11:
South facade of 'Alai Darwaza "as repaired by Major Smith R.
E. in 1828."



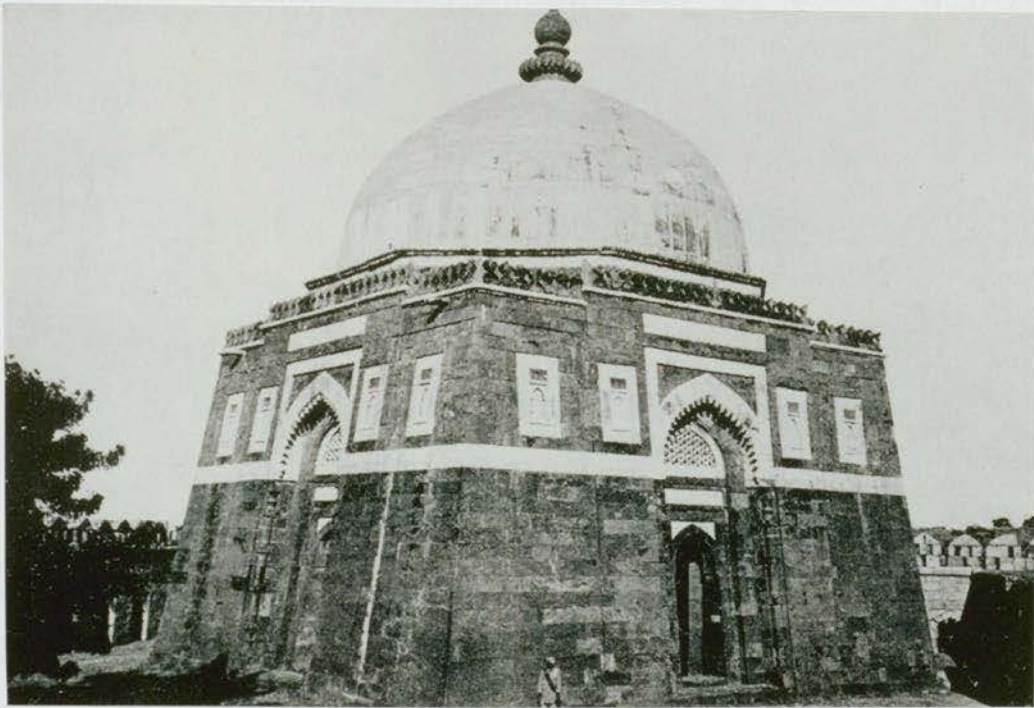
(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate IV.

Figure 12:
Detail of the stone carvings on the 'Alai Darwaza's plinth.



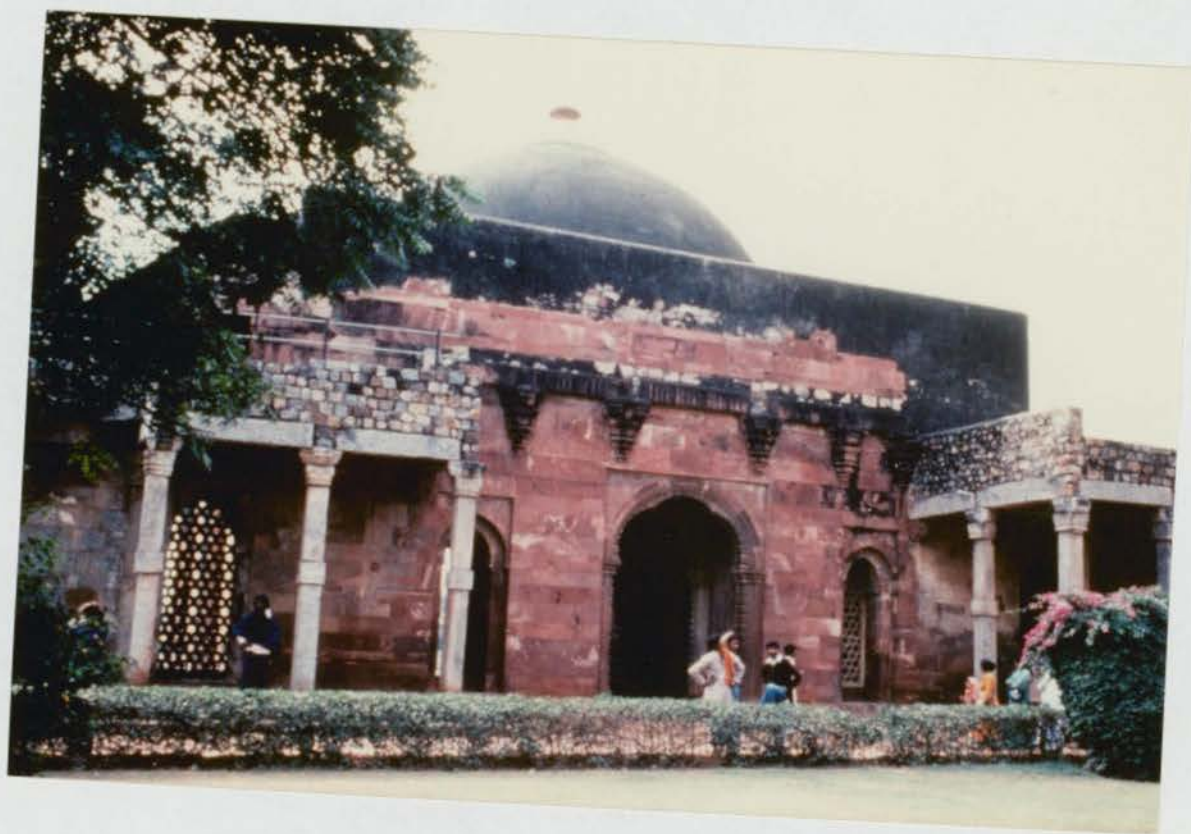
(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate VII, fig. 2.)

Figure 13:
Tomb of Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq.



(see: Percy Brown, Indian Architecture: Islamic Period. 4th ed. Bombay. 1964. Plate XI, fig. 1.)

Figure 14:
View of the 'Alai Darwaza's north facade, showing tri-lobed arch.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher)

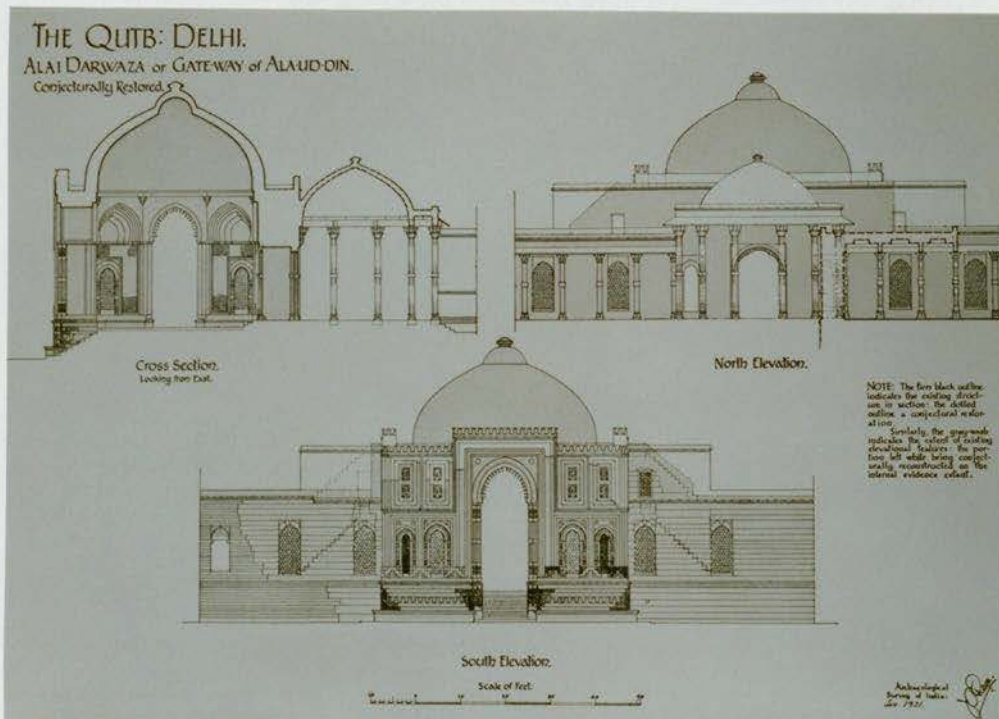
Figure 15:

Interior of the 'Alai Darwaza showing keel-shaped squinches, inscribed arches above the windows, and decorative treatment of the walls.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher)

Figure 16:
Conjectural restoration of the 'Alai Darwaza.



(see: J. A. Page, An Historical Memoir of the Qutb, Delhi. Architectural Survey of India. Calcutta. 1926. Plate IV, and Plate VII, fig. 2.)

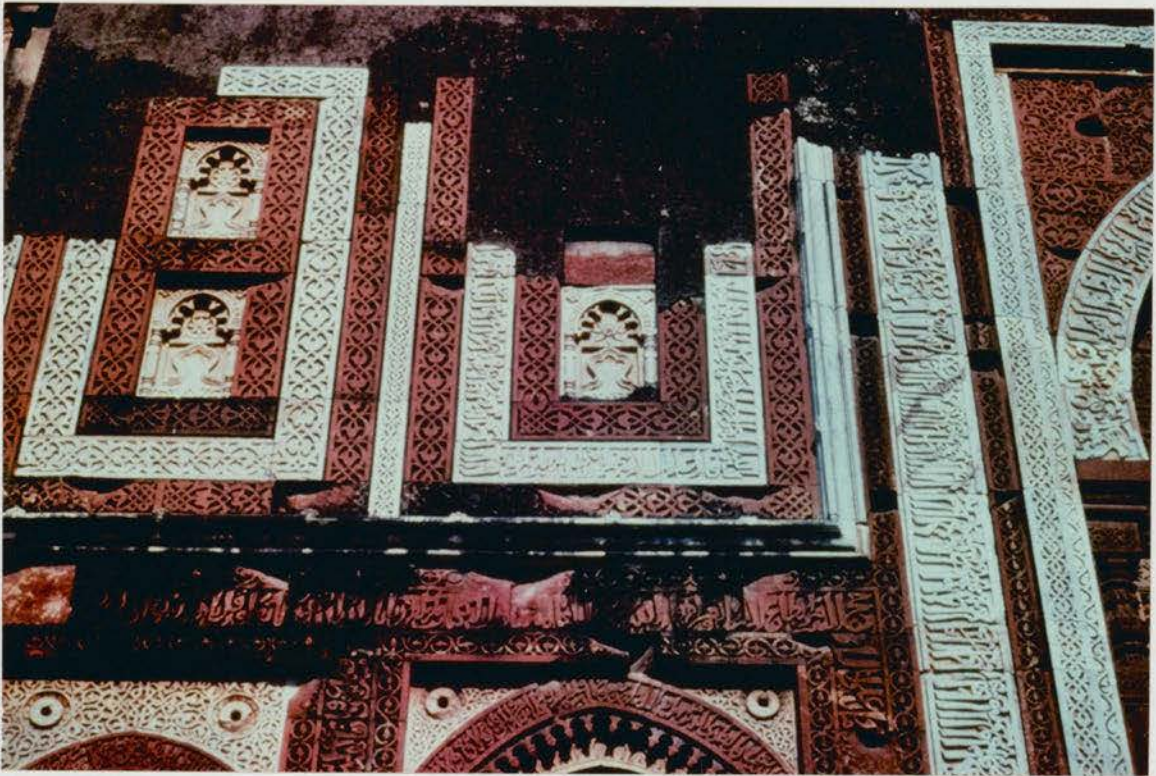
Figure 17:
South facade of the 'Alai Darwaza.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher)

Figure 18:

Upper facade of the 'Alai Darwaza showing the "second-story windows," the red and white panelling, and the inscription from Surah Bani Israel 17: 1-12.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher.)

Figure 19:

Main entrance and central archway of the 'Alai Darwaza's southern facade, showing horse-shoe arch, lotus-bud fringes, recessed nookshafts, and the Persian inscriptions on the white marble panelling surrounding the arch.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher.)

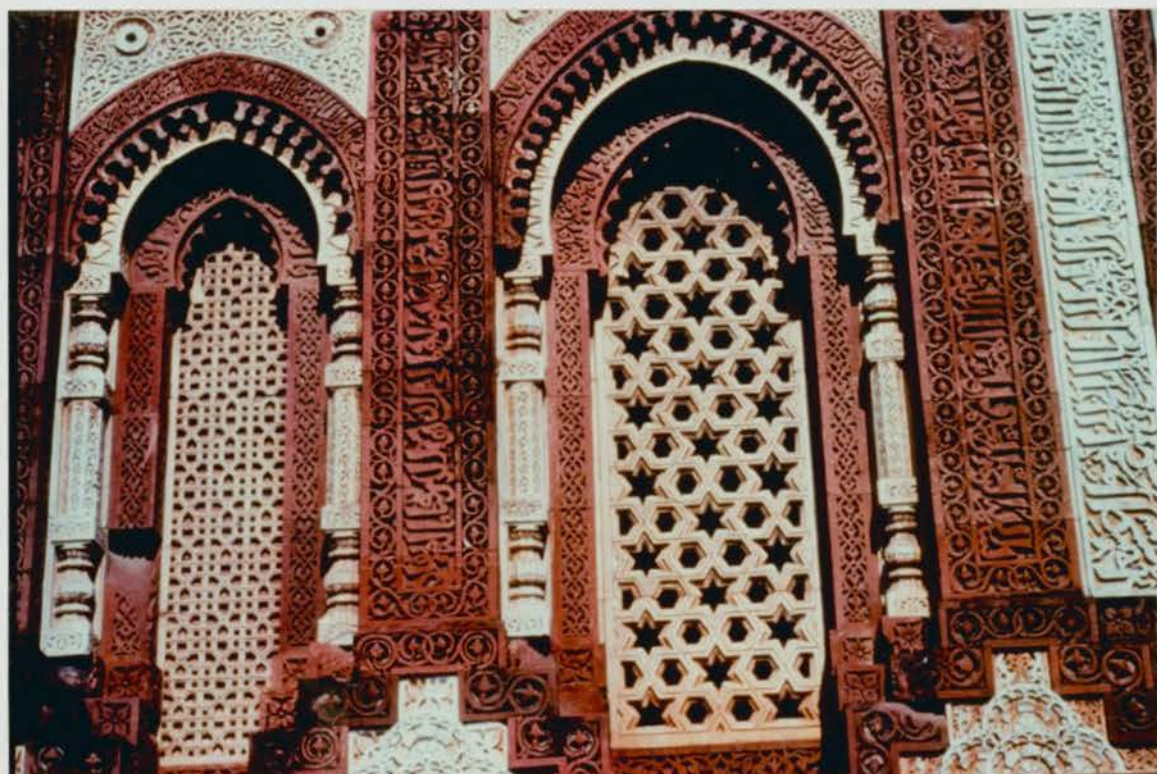
Figure 20:

Red sandstone panels surrounding the lower windows of the southern facade of the 'Alai Darwaza.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher.)

Figure 21:
The jali screened windows of the lower walls on the 'Alai
Darwaza's southern facade.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher.)

Figure 22:
The 'Alai Darwaza's western facade.



(Photo courtesy of Dr. Catherine Asher.)

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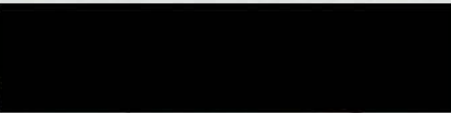
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