EXPRESSION OF PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE SAINT:
DECORATIVE VOCABULARY ON THE TOMB OF AHMAD KABIR

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ABSTRACT

The recently discovered tomb of Ahmad Kabir, situated east of village Chhata Pohar and west of village Jhandirwa near Dunyapur, Lodhran district (Figure 1) in Pakistan is unique in history of architecture in Pakistan (Hassan, Mahmood et. al. 2002, 15-18). The discovery of the tomb further strengthens the ideas of strong eastern Persian (mainly Islamic) and South Asian (inspired from Hindu and Buddhist tradition) relationship and their culmination into a new vocabulary of architecture emerged in the early thirteenth century. This paper analyses these design elements for the first time in detail with reference to tomb architecture in Pakistan. In particular the Hindu religious design tradition and its assimilation in Muslim tomb has been rarely discussed adequately in any scholarship and therefore became focus of this paper. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part placed the tomb in its architectural context prevailing in the respective time. The second part discussed the Central Asian and Arab influence which was brought to the region during Ghaznavid and Ghorid period. The local Hindu and Buddhist art influences on the tomb are discussed in the third part. The architectural features of the tomb in relation to the other monuments of the region have been discussed in the last part. The paper finally concludes with importance of the tomb in the history of architecture in Pakistan and impact of meeting of eastern and western cultures and resultant new form in architecture.

Key Words: Ghurid period architecture, architecture of Punjab, cultural impact on architecture, tomb architecture, early Islam in India.

The tomb of Ahmad Kabir is located in a small graveyard surrounded by fields. Nothing much is known about the life history of the saint from original or modern sources, nor is any epigraphic evidence of the saint found on the monument. It is believed that he was a respected personality of his time and therefore, a magnificent tomb was built after his death. An inscription on the south façade (Figure 12 and Table 1) provides information on the date of construction of the monument and will be discussed slightly later. The tomb of Ahmad Kabir is one of the oldest surviving monuments of Pakistan built during Ghurid Period. Although monument suffered from the ravages of the time but due to constant repair the original walls still survives but roof comprised of dome were rebuilt. Comprehensive documentation of the

1 Attention to this tomb was first drawn in a short article by Hassan, Mahmood et. al. in Museum Journal 2002, 15-18 National Museum Karachi. Since then no significant research has been carried out on the subject.

2 According to local tradition the saint belonged to Hashmi clan. The family tree of Hashmi clan meets up with their ancestor (549 – 619), who was the head of the clan. He was married to Fatima bint Asad and was an uncle of Prophet (PBUH).