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The Architecture of Ritual: Eighteenth-century Lucknow and the Making of the
Great Imambarah Complex, a Forgotten World Monument

by

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ABSTRACT

In the late eighteenth century, a large urban redevelopment program was initiated by the *Shīʿī Isnā ʿAsharī* Muslim ruler Āṣaf al-Dawlah in Lucknow, a city located in the prosperous, semi-autonomous north Indian region of Awadh. The development included four monumental entrances, a congregational mosque and a monumental *imāmbārah*, a ritual centre used for the annual mourning of the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Ḥusayn by the city’s small, elite *Shīʿī Isnā ʿAsharī* community. Incorporating one of the largest masonry vaults ever built in human history, the *imāmbārah* has a monumental scale that contributes to its uniqueness. Although *Shīʿī Isnā ʿAsharī* communities elsewhere developed smaller *imāmbārah* facilities, none ever thought to build one using monumental proportions typically reserved for congregational mosques. Āṣaf al-Dawlah’s Great Imāmbārah is unusual in the history of world architecture and in *Shīʿī Isnā ʿAsharī*, Islamic religious practice, but the building and complex have never been the focus of study. They receive only passing treatment in historical, religious and architectural surveys of the period. As a result, an uncritical version of the site’s development has entered into circulation. The Great Imāmbārah, in particular, is seen as a famine relief project by Āṣaf al-Dawlah, designed by the architect Kifāyat Allāh and undertaken in 1784 with the labour of an impoverished nobility. I will demonstrate that this version is unsupportable. Instead, a more complex view of the site’s development

can be put forward that portrays it as the product of several social discourses. In fact, the site is not a series of unrelated monuments. It is a cohesive, interwoven complex where social discourses within the Lucknow community, generated by rulers, elites, builders, and Islamic religious leaders converge to define ritual practices for the citizenry of Lucknow and the city's *Shī'ī Isnā 'Asharī* community, who were inheritors of Safavid and Mughal imperial legacies and aspired to be a distinct but authentic Islamic community. This view can be illustrated by examining how the site appears today, how it has been understood in the past, how it served the ambitions of its patrons, how its designers and builders brought their vision to reality, and lastly how it was an instrument in religious believing.

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Despite the help I have received, I remain responsible for any errors in the text that follows. I repeat what Muslim scholars of long ago, who were far more learned than me, were fond of saying:

“And God Knows Best”

DEDICATION

To my parents Allaudin and Laila Keshani,
Kayam and Malek Jiwani,
and my sister,
who taught me how to read.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It is one of the last great works of pre-Industrial Revolution architecture. With thin wafers of fired brick and lime-rich mortar, workers in the late eighteenth century fashioned a vault like a billowing sail that spread over a vast expanse and roofed the Great Imāmbārah of Lucknow in northern India [Fig. 74]. Completed in 1205/1791, the Great Imambarah incorporates a masonry vault that spans distances measuring 50 metres long, 17 metres wide, and 15 metres high, a stunning technical achievement in the building arts. Made prior to the advent of reinforced concrete, the vault's shallow, elliptical curvature is a particularly remarkable achievement in engineering. Invisible from the exterior, the vault can only be seen and experienced from within. Nowhere in the world of the late eighteenth century, not even in Europe or Britain, the new authors of world history and progress, could one move in such a vast space covered with a single masonry vault unimpeded by columns or walls.

Known in vernacular Bengali as a *chawchala* (four-sided) and in Persian texts as a *bangla* (Bengali) vault, it is the largest sail vault ever built up to that time; its monumental proportions rival the architectural wonders of the past as well as those of its

own period.¹ Only the third century B.C. Sassanian throne hall at the Ṭāq-i Kisra (Ctesiphon) near Baghdad, with its parabolic vault measuring 46 by 26 by 27 metres; St. Peter's Basilica in Rome with its semi-circular barrel vault (built: 1013-35/1605-26; 27.5 m wide, 46.2 m high); and perhaps the Frigidarium of the Imperial Roman Baths of Caracalla can boast vaults of comparable dimensions.² Yet in current histories of world architecture and of Islamic civilization, the Great Imambarah is barely noticed, and in the histories of religion and politics of eighteenth century South Asia, it is regarded with only glancing interest.

The word *imambarah*, a blend of Bengali, Urdu-Hindi and Arabic, is just one of several terms for a type of multi-purpose religious facility with similar functions found throughout Persia, Central Asia, and South Asia in centres where *Shī'ī Isnā 'Asharī* Muslims, followers of one of Islam's historically significant minority religious traditions, are present; their beliefs will be discussed in greater detail below.³ These facilities are known by the names *takyah khānah*, *ta'ziyah khānah*, and *ḥusayniyah* in Persia and Central Asia; *'āshūrā khānah* in South India; and *majlis khānah* and *imambarah* in North India, including the current states of Uttar Pradesh and Bengal. The facilities serve several religious functions central to the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition, including the accommodation of religious gatherings throughout the year, the annual mourning rituals commemorating the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Ḥusayn, and the storage of ritual artifacts. Diaspora South Asian *Shi'i Isna Ashari* communities around the world continue to establish *imambarahs* as centres of worship for their communities.⁴ Since *imambarahs* and complexes with similar purposes have generally not been the

focus of study, relatively little has been written about them. But it is clear that no similar building has ever been built on the scale of the Great Imambarah.

Not a monument conceived in isolation, the Great Imambarah is just one part of a large multi-hectare complex that includes a monumental congregational *masjid* (mosque), four imposing gateways, and three vast courtyards surrounded by enclosures of recessed arches that together form an impressive urban quarter [Figs. 2, 14]. The Great Imambarah complex is an addition to a larger palace quarter to the east known as the Panj Maḥāl (Five Palaces) that no longer survives in its entirety [Figs. 140, 142, 143, 144]. It once consisted of garden courtyards, fountains, impressive structures and the unique integrated step-well water reservoir and palace or Bā'olī Palace (Stepwell Palace) that still survives [Fig. 95].

From the city of Lucknow the patron of the Great Imambarah complex, Nawwāb-Vazīr Āṣaf al-Dawlah (r. 1188-1211/1775-97), ruled over one of South Asia's wealthiest region known as Awadh, in India's northeast, when the Mughal empire was in decline and the fortunes of the British East India Company had begun to rise [Fig. 1]. The Nawwab-Vazir, along with the majority of Lucknow's elite households, were newly arrived *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Muslims in a city where communities of *Sunnī* Muslims and followers of the Hindu traditions were deeply established. Lucknow's population numbered less than 275,000 people, and roughly sixty per cent followed the Hindu traditions historic to that region.⁵ Upon his death, Asaf al-Dawlah was buried in the Great Imambarah. This was an unusual decision since Muslim rulers of the subcontinent, including Asaf al-Dawlah's father, typically commissioned purpose-built, monumental

square-domed tombs set in garden enclosures. The use of a long rectilinear building intended for *Shi'i Isna Ashari* ritual practices as a burial site was an unconventional idea.

Not simply a complex whose history began and ended with its patron, the site had a dramatic life of its own and many masters. Initially controlled by the Nawwab-Vazirs of Awadh, it was occupied by the British for over a decade. In the late nineteenth century it was administered by the Ḥusaynābād Trust, and in the mid twentieth century the Archaeological Survey of India, in conjunction with the Husaynabad Trust, assumed responsibility for overseeing the site.

Argument

How and why was the Great Imambarah complex developed? There has been no study devoted exclusively to the Great Imambarah complex. Only brief discussions of the complex have been made in surveys of Awadh's political, religious, and cultural history but these perspectives have not been brought together. There is need for a study of the complex that scrutinizes the available evidence and discusses the interwoven political, economic, religious, and technical dimensions of the site. At present, popular and scholarly views with the greatest currency focus on the Great Imambarah, which is said to have been commissioned as a famine relief project in 1198/1784, designed by the architect Kifāyat Allāh, and built with the help of impoverished nobles who from shame would only come out at night to help build the new monument and receive their wages. However, this account deserves closer examination, and a far richer view of the history of

the development of the Great Imambarah and the complex of which it was a part can be put forward in its place.

This study is an inquiry into the history of the Great Imambarah complex. It argues that the site should first be seen as a cohesive entity, where social discourses generated by the Lucknow community, rulers and elites, builders, and Islamic religious elites converge to define ritual practices for the citizenry of Lucknow and the city's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community, who aspired to define themselves as a distinct but authentic Islamic community in the shadow of Safavid and Mughal imperial legacies. This idea is illustrated by examining how the site appears today, how the site has been understood in the past, how it served the ambitions of those seeking greater power, how its designers and builders brought vision to reality, and, lastly, how it was an instrument in religious believing. Four principal assumptions underlie this argument and reflect an evolving and conflictual understanding of the process of humanistic historical inquiry.

The sense in which “humanistic” is used here refers to an intellectual perspective that seeks to form a coherent, rational view of nature and human society that presumes “dignity, order, reason and intelligibility are prominent in human experience.”⁶ Since the built environment, which includes works of monumental architecture, is a recurring feature of human existence and is produced through social processes that involve contests of power and convictions to achieve social acceptance, it can be considered as highly relevant to the concerns of broader humanistic inquiry rather than as a subject reserved strictly for specialists in visual culture. Examining monumental architecture is of value to humanistic inquiry not simply because it is an aesthetic phenomenon and aesthetics are integral to human existence, but also because it generally plays a role in community

formation. From conception to function, the development and use of monumental architecture often serves as a medium through which various levels of society interact and contest their wills and ideas on how the community as a whole should conduct itself.⁷ It is an important instrument in forging social conformity. This idea that the exploration of architectural history is of central rather than tangential relevance to humanistic inquiry is the first assumption that permeates this study.

Second, an exploration of human history solely through its intellectual or political history is incomplete without considering its related material cultural history and vice-versa. The culture of ideas that pertain to the communal life of people is inseparable from material culture. Cultural artifacts, like works of monumental architecture, are formed in a social context shaped by its culture of ideas. Likewise, ideas are formed in a context that includes material culture and must at some point manifest themselves in material reality in ways beyond appearing as text on a page. For example, an analysis of power is incomplete without considering how power is manifested materially, and the material manifestations of power are incomprehensible without understanding the notion of power at work.

Third, the past can be known through traces of evidence in text, visual objects and memory that are systematically reconciled with each other, but these are gateways into larger undocumented currents of the past. Yet, works of historical writing are the attempts of writers of a certain age and context to fashion a social memory of another that is rooted in truth but oriented to suit their own ends, which range in their scholarly and political emphasis. As a result there is a plurality of internally consistent historical narratives possible, which raises the question from what point of view is this study

written? It is written from the point of view of a member of the diaspora communities of Muslims and South Asians in the Anglo-European world and with the aim of understanding the historical faith and traditions of these communities in order to grapple with their contemporary reformations.

Fourth, a complex phenomenon like the Great Imambarah complex is generated by multiple preceding factors. The weight of one factor's influence over a phenomenon can only be judged in relation to that of other factors. In a specialized stream of thought and activity such as construction, which is both an artistic and a technological enterprise, developments can be explained both in the context of an internal history of precedents and an external history of influential social circumstances. Both internalist and externalist approaches are necessary in order to understand a phenomenon such as the Great Imambarah complex.⁸ With these four assumptions in mind, the Great Imambarah complex can be approached as a continuously evolving fusion of thought and material culture, in all its political, artistic, technological and religious dimensions, that is an agent and a consequence in the process of forging social conformity in Lucknow from the site's conception up to the present time. In this way, the complex can be seen not as an isolated object but as part of the society that has produced it.

The primary methods employed here belong to contemporary historiography in the Anglo-European tradition. Efforts have been made to seek out textual and visual evidence pertaining to the site that survives in Lucknow, Faizabad, New Delhi and London. Textual evidence is approached with one eye on its place within the texts themselves and the other on the historical context in which they were produced in order to secure appropriately critical evaluations and interpretations of their value. Though

they have a range of interpretive dimensions, images are primarily used here as a type of record of the scenes they portray, since this best serves the objectives of the study.

Overview

The chapters that follow present five interrelated narrations of the history of the Great Imambarah complex centred, respectively, on the themes of observation, interpretation, power, craft and religion. In Chapter Two, a narration of this writer's observations of the site in the spring of 2002 is given. The site as it stands and is perceived through the human eye is documented. The complex emerges as an elaborate, thoughtful composition infused with a spirit of innovation and play.

Chapter Three examines the various ways the complex has been written about and delineates the limits of the evidence available to explore the history of the site. The writings as a whole fall into two distinct historical moments. In the first, the British-Indian colonial encounter resonates deeply in writings that are absorbed in a contest of virtues between Indian and European civilizations. The complex is enmeshed in arguments about South Asia's political, moral, and aesthetic decline in the face of an ascendant "Western civilization." In the second moment, the global system of nation-states now resonates. The complex is interpreted through the diverse intellectual responses to the British-Indian colonial project, one being the trend towards producing more 'scientific' or professional renditions of history and culture. In the minds of intellectuals, the narratives that the complex is enlisted to complement overshadow any narrative of the Lucknow community's encounter with the site.

Chapter Four is concerned with the ways the complex serves the pursuit of power under Asaf al-Dawlah, subsequent Nawwab-Vazirs, the British occupiers, and the modern Indian nation. The site was initially developed in a brief period when the British were not directly interfering in the affairs of Lucknow. Their relative distance provided Asaf al-Dawlah with a unique opportunity to demonstrate his power through commissioning the complex. The subsequent and prolonged British occupation of the site and disruption of its religious functions following the Great Rebellion of 1273/1857 were not simply instances of military pragmatism but were wilful and extended acts intended to demonstrate British authority.⁹ In its incarnation following Indian independence in 1366/1947, the site was transformed into a cultural heritage object to serve divergent secular and Hindu nationalist memories of the past and local *Shi'i Isna Ashari* concerns.

Chapter Five explores the processes of designing, building, reconstructing and conserving the Great Imambarah complex. The design and construction of the complex is shown to be a collective enterprise of individuals ranging from members of the elite to the humble labourers who prepared the required materials. The original vision for the complex is recovered, and the significant modifications made to the site are chronicled. The roots of this vision are traced to the monumental architecture commissioned by the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān, particularly his works in the Mughal capital city Shāhjahanābād (Delhi).

Chapter Six looks at *Shi'i Isna Ashari* beliefs and practices in Iran, Shahjahanabad and how they informed religious practice in Lucknow while the Great Imambarah complex was being developed. When considered as a whole, the complex is

an integral part of the attempt by *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elites and religious scholars to chart a new direction in *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practice that includes Friday congregational prayers and continues to foster Muḥarram commemoration rituals in Lucknow. Such practices helped define the community as distinct, while maintaining the appearance of conformity to Muslim practices accepted among Sunnis and Persian *Shi'i Isna Asharis*. Finally, the concluding chapter forges a synthesis of these narratives and looks at the points where the pursuits of interpretation, power, craft and religion intersect.

Contributions

This study of the Great Imambarah complex contributes new textual and visual evidence not published before. Particularly noteworthy instances include the contents of a framed Persian document that rests at the head of Asaf al-Dawlah's grave, selections from the British East India Company's archival records pertaining to the period the site was occupied, an excerpt from the Persian traveller 'Abd al-Latīf Shustarī's account of the Great Imambarah complex, and a petition by former employees of the site, showing that the site was funded with the rents of shops located in the complex. In the area of visual evidence, noteworthy instances include reproductions of the paintings of the Great Imambarah complex by Sīta Rām, the painter of the Marquess of Wellesley, and the anonymous panorama painting of the complex, which together reveal the early appearance of the site and how it dramatically differs from its contemporary appearance. The earliest exterior and interior photographs of the Great Imambarah are identified, and

a plan of the now demolished Panj Mahal, the palace to which the complex was added, is reconstructed.

Beyond introducing new evidence, this study contributes the first detailed study of the Great Imambarah complex and provides a more accurate assessment of the date of its development and its contributors. Since the complex is often briefly mentioned in historical surveys of politics, religion and architecture in Lucknow and Awadh, its significance to these narratives can now be more clearly determined. In addition, this study takes the opportunity to reconsider the site's current absence from the canons of Islamic and world architecture. It is hoped that it will be of assistance to the efforts of the Archaeological Survey of India and other Indian heritage agencies responsible for the site's conservation and interpretive material.

Throughout the text, the first occurrence of uncommon names and terms in Persian and Arabic is italicized and rendered with the Library of Congress (LOC) transliteration system for Persian, rather than adopting multiple systems. Due to the limitations of the character fonts at hand, the frequently used letter ض has been rendered with the letter “z̄”, which is typically reserved for the less commonly used letter ذ , instead of a z underscored with two dots as the LOC system specifies.¹⁰ In the interest of simplicity, phonetic representations of the names and terms have not been provided. Definitions for the terms appear in a glossary at the end. To avoid confusion arising from the proliferation of multiple transliterations, all terms and names, including those within quotations and except those in bibliographic references, have been standardized. To make reading quotations easier, original spellings have been replaced with their transliterated equivalents in brackets rather than duplicating the terms. Modern place

names have not been marked. Dates are first cited from the *Hijrī* calendar used by Muslims, followed by a backslash and the equivalent in the Gregorian calendar. Unless otherwise specified, all photographs and drawings are produced by the author.

Historical and Intellectual Contexts

Before the Great Imambarah complex can be examined in more detail, it is necessary to become better acquainted with the political, religious and architectural trends that preceded and influenced its development, bearing in mind that these trends are themselves scholarly constructs and subject to debate. The Great Imambarah complex and its history belong to a diverse set of interwoven global and regional contexts, which offer both precedents and points of comparison. Its history is tied most closely to the histories of the empires of the Safavids, the Mughals, and the British as well as the regional powers of the Deccan in southern India and especially the north Indian province of Awadh and its religious and architectural traditions.

In the eighteenth century, the world's expanding imperial powers included the Manchu dynasty, who were forging the largest empire in China's history, the Oyo empire in West Africa; the Russian empire; and most significantly, the colonialist and commercial empires of the French and the British.¹¹ Anglo-European aristocratic political structures were shifting and the latter half of the century witnessed the American and French revolutions, heralding the age of nation-states. In retreat were the empires of the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the Hapsburgs of Austria, the Safavids of Iran, the Mughals of South Asia, and, to a lesser extent, the Ottomans of Anatolia and the Middle

East. In the north Indian region of Awadh, the historical legacies of the Safavid and the Mughal empires intersected with the ambitions of the British and the French.

Reflecting the prosperity of Europe and England, cities like London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Dresden were the beneficiaries of extensive building programmes, yielding impressive palaces, churches, and other notable institutions. As impressive as these architectural endeavours were, typically they were not at the forefront of Anglo-European construction technology. The most ambitious construction projects were undertaken with more utilitarian purposes in mind. Monumental canal-building projects were pursued in England and Europe, and new fortress designs were experimented with. Two high points in masonry bridge design that employed shallow vaults comparable to the Great Imambarah's ceiling were the Dresden Bridge of 1143/1731 and the Pont de Neuilly of Paris (1187-1375/1774-1956), no longer extant and one of the finest examples Europe had to offer.¹² Consisting of five arches resting on piers 4 metres thick, each arch spanned 39 metres long by 5 metres wide.¹³ The Pont de Neuilly provided the best example of the extent to which shallow masonry vaulting had been pursued in the Anglo-European context. However, a new future for construction was signalled by the completion of the first iron truss bridge in Shropshire, England, in 1195/1781. With truss designs like the one used in Shropshire, structures would become lighter and prefabricated in the industrial age.

One characteristic of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anglo-European engineering was the increasing sophistication and availability of scientific concepts and mathematical tools to design and analyse structures; an example is the work of Charles Augustin Coulomb. Based on an intellectual tradition that included Galileo's ruminations

on statics and dynamics and Newton's Principia Mathematica, Coulomb read before the French Academy in 1186/1773 his now famous essay dealing with areas of statics that included soil mechanics, the bending of beams, the fracture of columns, and the calculation of abutment thrusts of masonry arches.¹⁴ Evidence of mathematical tools employed in the service of construction design and engineering is not forthcoming in the contemporary South Asian context, but there are a few indications that geometry combined with an accumulation of building expertise over centuries served as the basis for projects like the Great Imambarah complex.¹⁵ The developments in England and Europe are useful for comparison, but they did not play a role in the initial development of the complex in Lucknow. For that, it is necessary to turn to the empires of the Safavids and the Mughals.

The Safavid empire and its successor regimes

Of the three Muslim empires, the Safavids, the Mughals and the Ottomans, the Safavid empire was the first to lose its footing. In the sixteenth century, the Safavid empire under its founder Shāh Ismā'īl I (r. 906-930/1501-24) encompassed contemporary Azerbaijan, Iran, and portions of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Turkey.¹⁶ For the next two centuries it posed a constant military threat to the Ottomans and the Mughals, but both empires imbibed Safavid culture, its language, its administrative structures, its poetry, its artists, its soldiers, its craftsmen, and its wares. Though at political and religious odds with each other, their court cultures were heavily intertwined. However, unlike the Ottoman and Mughal regimes, the Safavids made the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition of Islam a cornerstone of its rule.¹⁷

In the intellectual and popular memory of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, particularly as it took hold in the Safavid empire, the Divine manifested itself in existence, through the cycles of prophecy and *Imāmate*. Throughout human history, there were the known prophets who shared their knowledge of the Divine through Revelation and the unknown *Imāms*, who were spiritual guides that were divinely inspired, infallible, supreme educators of humanity, and imbued with divine essence.¹⁸ In the lives of unique individuals, such as Moses, Jesus or Muhammad, the two cycles converged in one individual. For the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, the culmination of the Prophet Muhammad's Revelation was the declaration of his cousin and son-in law 'Ali as the *Imam* of the Age, concluding the cycle of prophecy. In this memory of Islam's beginnings, the other companions of Prophet Muhammad, who denied Ali his rightful authority over Muslims, were remembered as usurpers and considered worthy to be condemned. Ali's designated descendants were believed to have inherited his authority and spiritual station. Just as Islam was perceived by Muslims in general to be a more authentic version of the Abrahamic faiths, *Shi'i Isna Asharis* perceived their tradition to be a more authentic version of Islam. Like their co-religionists, they accepted that the sayings and deeds of the Prophet and the Qur'ān were foundational elements in the creation of a systematized Islam but insufficient if the deeds and sayings of the *Imams* were not also incorporated.

The *Imam* was revealed in order to continue guiding humanity through the culmination of revelations that was Islam following the completion of the cycle of prophecy. This guidance continued through the sons of Ali and Fāṭima (the daughter of the Prophet) and a chain of succession, which included *Imam* Ali, *Imam* Ḥasan, *Imam*

Husayn, *Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn*, *Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir*, *Imam Jāfar al-Sādiq*, *Imam Mūsā al-Kāzim*, *Imam ‘Alī al-Rizā*, *Imam Muḥammad al-Taqī*, *Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī* and *Imam Ḥasan al-‘Askarī*. The twelfth *Imam*, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan, was concealed for his own protection by the Divine, and the hidden *Imam* made, and continues to make, his presence in the world felt, while awaiting his divinely decreed return. *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* religious scholars conceptualized and articulated this belief as the doctrine of occultation.

The life and martyrdom of *Imam Husayn* was singled out in *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* memory as an especially calamitous event of cosmic significance. *Imam Husayn*, upholding his claim as leader of all Muslims and as *Imam*, was drawn into battle on the plains of Karbala with the powerful family of Mu‘āwiya, which contested his authority. Grossly outnumbered, Husayn, most of his family, and his loyal supporters were vanquished and murdered. In *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* memory, Husayn’s martyrdom was a tragedy for both Islam and the world; it was a violation of the Prophet’s will, since his legitimate successor was overturned, and it assaulted a violation of the world’s sacred order, since the *Imams* were an integral part of creation.

The Safavid religious agenda was imposed on the heterodox Muslim communities living throughout its territories, many of which combined the foundational teachings and social structures devised by religious scholars like Abū Ḥanīfa (80-150/698-767) and al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) with a high regard for Ali and various Sufi orders, creating an “atmosphere of relative religious eclecticism.”¹⁹ The religious agenda sharpened the emerging distinction between *Shi‘i* and Sunni religious identities, which were previously more intertwined. For example, the fifteenth-century religious scholar Ḥusayn Wā‘iz al-

Kāshifi (d. 910/1505) was considered a Sunni in his town of birth, a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* in the town where he died, and a *Naqshbandī* Sufi by his son.²⁰ This was not mere confusion but a reflection of the hybridity of Muslim identity in the region prior to the implementation of the Safavid religious agenda.

For the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, al-Kashifi was best known for writing the Rawzat al-Shuhadā (The Paradise of the Martyrs), an emotionally charged retelling of the events leading up to the martyrdom of *Imam* Husayn. The reading of the Rawzat al-Shahada at annual congregational gatherings became an integral part of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious life under Safavid rule. Behind the new hardening of religious identities were conflicting worldviews and historical memories of the initial conception of Islam as a set of beliefs and a template for social organization.

At first, Islamic religious life under the Safavids carried on as before with only nominal professions of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* faith required in the *masjids*. Later, a group of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) composed mainly of immigrant Arabs from Southern Lebanon and Iraq was established and widely influenced the Safavid bureaucracy and religious institutions.²¹ In centres of power like Isfahan, an intellectual debate between *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious schools of thought unfolded; the older established *Akhbārī* school of thought was overtaken by the *Uṣūlī* doctrine.

In conjunction with the doctrine of occultation, *Shi'i Isna Ashari* legalists in the *Akhbārī* tradition (which took its name from reports [*akhbār*] or Traditions relating to the Prophet and the *Imams* on which their jurisprudence was based) reasoned that the *Imam's* role as Friday congregational prayer leader, interpreter of the Quran, and law giver could

not be assumed by anyone; the future determination of the community's life was restricted to the boundaries elucidated in the Quran and oral reports from the Prophet and the *Imams*.²² To suggest that someone could take the place of the *Imam* was seen as unfaithful and a denial of his eventual return.

In response, the *Usuli* school of thought (so named because of its commitment to rationalist principles [*uṣūl*] to underlie its jurisprudence) was formed, and it proposed that trained religious scholars could assume some of the *Imam*'s authority in matters of religious interpretation and observance, making legal judgements, collecting alms and conducting Friday congregational prayers.²³ A principal figure in propagating this view was the religious scholar Shaykh 'Alī al-Karakī al-'Āmilī (870?-940/1466?-1534), who migrated from Jabal 'Āmil, Syria, to Iraq and then to Safavid Iran. Al-Karaki was designated by Shah Ismail's son and successor Shāh Ṭahmāsp (r. 930-83/1524-76) as deputy of the *Imam*, making him one of the most influential people determining Safavid religious policy. It was al-Karaki who decreed that Friday congregational prayers led by the newly elevated *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* would be institutionalized in Safavid domains, bringing *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious practice into conformity with that of the majority of Muslims and facilitating religious transformation.²⁴ The debate over the legitimacy of congregational Friday prayers for *Shi'i Isna Asharis* would resurface in eighteenth-century Lucknow precisely around the time the Great Imambarah complex and its monumental congregational *masjid* were conceived.

In the late seventeenth century, influential religious scholars, now largely Iranian in cultural origin, began laying great emphasis on the importance of commemorating the

martyrdom of *Imam* Husayn during the Islamic month of Muharram, cursing those who had usurped the *Imam*'s authority, and on making pilgrimage to the tombs of the *Imams* and their descendants, particularly those within Safavid domains. Mourning and pilgrimage became central fixtures in the prescribed *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious life. The principal shrines were the tombs of *Imam* Husayn in Karbala, *Imam* Ali in Najaf, *Imam* Ali al-Riza in Mashhad, *Imam* Musa al-Kazim in Kazimayn near Baghdad, and *Imams* Hasan al-Askari and Muhammad al-Mahdi in Samarra.

The sixteenth-century scholar Mīr Makhdūm Sharīfī argued that pilgrimage to the shrines of the *Imams* could be substituted for the general duty to perform pilgrimage to the Ka'bah in Mecca. The premier religious scholar and official of the seventeenth century that took up al-Karaki's *Usuli* agenda was Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699). In his encyclopaedic work the Bihār al-Anwār (Ocean of Lights), he wrote extensively on the importance of making pilgrimage to the tombs of the *Imams* and their offspring. The importance of pilgrimage grew as the theme of the life hereafter became increasingly dominant in religious writing and the *Imams* were recast as spiritual intercessors for the faithful, along the same lines as well-respected Sufis. With traditions reaching to the early days of Islam Sufis were generally well-educated in the Islamic religious sciences but advocated devotional and mystical approaches to Islamic faith and played the role of spiritual guide and conferrer of blessings to Muslim communities and their students. Majlisi was attempting to appropriate resurging *Akhbari* and Sufi concepts

and popular religious practice as part of his reformulation of officially endorsed *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Islam.²⁵

With the legitimacy of congregational prayers for *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Muslims established, Safavid rulers commissioned *masjids* for Friday congregational prayers in the local tradition, of which the most prominent example is in Isfahan, the capital of the Shāh 'Abbās I (995-1038/1587-1629). On the south side of Isfahan's large urban quadrangle known as the Maydān, the Shāh *masjid* was built from 1019/1611 to around 1039/1630 under the patronage of Shah Abbas I and Shāh Ṣafī (r. 1038-51/1629-42). Measuring 100 metres by 130 metres in its entirety, the *masjid* incorporated a courtyard and a large double-shell dome 25 metres in exterior width and 52 metres in height. The *masjid* followed the four-*ayvān* model, an architectural concept that evolved in the region over the centuries, in which the *masjid* courtyard consisted of four mirroring monumental gates with half-domes (*ayvan*). This pinnacle of Safavid dome-building was significantly smaller than the largest dome produced by the rival empire of the Ottomans. The stone dome of the Selimiye *masjid* built from 976/1569 to 982/1575 in Edirne spanned a distance of 32 metres. The Taj Mahal's dome measures roughly 19 m wide on the interior and 29 m on the exterior.

Along with the layers of Islamic traditions in Iran and Central Asia, the Safavids inherited the architectural legacy of earlier dynasties that had ruled the region – the Buyids, the Saljuks, the Ilkhanids and the Timurids. Relatively little is known of the architectural endeavours of the early Safavid empire, but a tradition noteworthy for its elegance and proportions was cultivated. Ancient techniques of brick, lime and stucco

manufacture that were spread across Central Asia, Iraq and into northern India provided the foundation for Safavid architecture that was characterized by its extensive use of highly refined stuccowork and coloured tiles covering meticulously laid brickwork. Despite the established building technology and the availability of similar techniques, the technology of shallow curvature vaulting technology was evidently not used in Safavid architecture as it was in Mughal architecture and in the Great Imambarah of Lucknow.

The Maydan of Shah Abbas I in Isfahan was an extraordinary urban vision completed between 998/1590 and 1003/1595 before the Shah *masjid* and intended for state ceremonies and sports.²⁶ The Maydan was a long rectangular arcaded enclosure measuring 512 by 159 metres. Like the Shah *masjid*, a key feature was the use of monumental gates (*ayvan*) at the centre of each block that mirrored each other, an architectural scheme echoed in the Great Imambarah complex.

Judging by the account of French jeweller Chevalier Jean Chardin, who was in Isfahan in 1077/1667, the city regularly witnessed large processions commemorating the martyrdom of *Imam* Husayn, events the Maydan was probably used for as well.²⁷ Men with standards were followed by horsemen, musicians, men with their faces and bodies smeared with blackness and blood, wagons with arks decorated in brocade, coffins, a large throne representing Husayn, and men beating their breasts and chanting “O Husayn.” Yet, apparently no special facilities to accommodate religious gatherings complementing these processions were developed in Isfahan, and tents were probably used for Muharram commemorations. In smaller centres, town plazas and utilitarian structures to house commemorative artifacts were likely employed. However, there was considerable interest in developing the shrines of the *Imams*. Corresponding with the

rising emphasis on the religious merits of making pilgrimage to the tombs of the *Imams*, shrines to the *Imams* and *Imāmzādahs* (offspring of the *Imams*) were refurbished where they existed and built anew where none had stood before.

Internal revolution was instrumental in the undoing of the Safavid empire. The Sunni Ghilzay Afghans revolted and captured the capital Isfahan in 1134/1722. The Safavid ruler's territories shrank, and Shāh Ṭahmāsp II (r. 1134-1144/1722-1732) was forced to rely on a capable general, Nādir Khān (d. 1159/1747), to reassert his rule. But Nadir Khan capitalized on the empire's weakness and seized rule, renaming himself Nādir Shāh. Though raised as a *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, Nadir Shah sought to integrate the *Shi'i* and *Sunni* traditions by seeking the inclusion of the *Shi'i* jurist tradition among the officially sanctioned Sunni schools. As a result, he appropriated many endowments that had been established to support *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious scholars, who were already migrating from Isfahan to semi-autonomous Karbala, Najaf, and Kazimayn, where the major shrines to the *Imams* were located in Ottoman-controlled territories. Mindful of the precarious Mughal empire in South Asia, Nadir Shah orchestrated a series of devastating raids from 1142/1730 to 1152/1740 that reached the Mughal capital of Shahjahanabad, plundered its wealth, and temporarily devastated the psyche of its once proud inhabitants. On the course to forging a new empire, Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1159/1747.

Out of the political chaos that followed Nadir Shah's death, two powerful tribes that adhered to the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition, the Zands (1163-1209/1750-94) and the Qājārs (1209-1344/1794-1925), dominated the remnants of the Safavid empire. The

initial pre-eminence of the Zands, who based themselves in the city of Shiraz and endowed the city with their architectural patronage, gave way to the Qajar dynasty. The Qajars especially contributed to re-institutionalizing the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* faith and presided over a revival of the *Usuli* doctrine.

The earliest known instance of a facility dedicated to mourning ceremonies is the *tazyah* (grieving) hall of a *takyah khanah* (Sufi lodge) dated 1201/1786 in Astarābād, which was controlled by the Qajars.²⁸ Under the Qajars, the storytelling of *Imam Husayn's* tragedy as part of the mourning ceremonies evolved into a form of theatrical performance, a practice never fully accepted in Awadh.²⁹ Instead of simply being narrated by an individual, the tragedy of Karbala was dramatized and played out by actors. Theatrical facilities were built in the houses of nobles culminating in the construction of the Takyah Dawlat, a monumental building begun after 1289/1873 on the orders of the Qajar ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (1264-1313/1848-96), who had attended a concert in Albert Hall in London.³⁰ The Takyah Dawlat was a state mourning theatre designed as a cylindrical brick amphitheatre with a stage and roofed with a canvas dome.

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The rulers of the Safavid empire were not the only ones to actively pursue a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious agenda as part of their political ambitions. In central and southern India, in the region known as the Deccan, small successor states espousing *Shi'i Isna Ashari* doctrines as well emerged from the once mighty Bahmānī dynasty, a breakaway group from the Delhi Sultanate.

Shī'ī Rulers of the Deccan

Following the Delhi Sultanate's loss of control of the Deccan in the mid-fourteenth century, power was concentrated within the Bahmani dynasty, but by the early sixteenth century the region began decentralizing and came to be controlled by three small but prosperous dynasties: the Quṭb Shāhīs of Golconda, the 'Ādil Shāhīs of Bijapur, and the Nizām Shāhīs of Ahmadnagar. All three would foster *Shi'i Isna Ashari* traditions, and Sultān Qulī Quṭb Shāh of Golconda went as far as to claim that the idea of actively propagating the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* faith in his domain had occurred to him prior to Shah Ismail of Persia's declaration.³² The Deccani rulers were highly conscious of the rise of the Safavids, and there were numerous diplomatic exchanges between the Safavid empire and the Deccan. The Deccani rulers were also witnesses to the rise of the Mughal empire in South Asia, which would eventually subsume them.

Vibrant and distinctive architectural traditions flourished in the Deccan employing basalt stone, carved plaster ornament and stone, painted and glazed ceramic tiles, and painted plaster.³³ *Masjids* and tomb complexes in particular were the most common architectural commissions. It was in Bijapur around 1066/1656 that another often-overlooked world monument was built, the tomb of Muḥammad 'Ādil Shāh or the Gul Gumbad. The square-planned tomb was noteworthy for its single shell hemispherical dome with an interior diameter measuring 41 metres. In the Golconda fort, the Qutb Shahis included special facilities associated with *Shi'i Isna Ashari* mourning rituals that they referred to as *ashura khanahs*, and in 1005/1596, the Bādshāhī 'Āshūrā Khānah was built.³⁴

The Mughals

The Deccani dynasties posed an obstacle to the imperial expansion of the Mughal dynasty in South Asia, and the Mughal Emperor Awrangzīb (ruled: 1068-1118/1658-1707) spent much of his rule waging war in the region. The Mughal imperium in South Asia began in the early sixteenth century with the Central Asian aristocrat soldier Bābur, who took advantage of a power vacuum in North India. The Mughal dynasty he founded in 932/1526 did not truly end until 1273/1857, when the British assumed full control following the Great Rebellion. Rebellion by one of his generals, Sher Shāh, drove Babur's son Humāyūn into exile in Iran from 948/1542 to 962/1555, when he returned to northern India with Safavid assistance. Through its wealth and abundant patronage, the nascent Mughal empire under Humayun and his son Akbar (963-1013/1556-1605) subsequently attracted large numbers of Iranian intellectuals, artists and professionals. What followed was a hereditary dynasty of strong rulers that established control over most of the Indian subcontinent through military might, skilful administration, and careful cultivation of alliances, particularly with Rājput lords. From lavish capitals like Akbarābād (Agra), Fatehpur Sikri, and Shahjahanabad (Delhi), the Mughals and their culturally diverse aristocrat-soldiers wove a network of cities and fortresses from which they controlled the northern two-thirds of the Indian subcontinent, building on the imperial template of the Turkic Delhi Sultanate empire and Rajput confederacies that predated the advent of the Mughal empire.³⁵

Unlike the Safavids who aimed for religious uniformity, the Mughals sustained an empire of immense religious and cultural diversity. Ancient Hindu traditions centred on devotion to Shiva and Vishnu permeated the lives of the greater number of South Asians, of whom the majority lived within the numerous networks of agricultural villages that provided the economic foundation for the empire's wealth. The Jains, Zoroastrians, and tribal groups were also important minority groups. There was considerable Islamic diversity as well; numerous Sufi orders were prominent; and immigrant *Shi'i Isna Ashari* communities, mostly from the Safavid empire, also played prominent roles in the Mughal courts. However, the Mughals did endorse and institutionalize a particular Islamic viewpoint over and beyond others, but the weight they gave to it varied from ruler to ruler and with differing political circumstances. They also wove into their concept of kingship, spiritual leadership characteristics resembling those of the *Imams* and Sufi leaders.³⁶ Unlike the Safavids, their rule, at least up until the reign of Awrangzīb, was not as intricately intertwined with promoting a particular Islamic doctrine.

The Mughals saw themselves as people of the *sunna*, like their rivals the Ottomans of Anatolia and the Middle East and many of the historic pre-Safavid Muslim communities of Persia and Central Asia. The *Shi'i Isna Ashari* view of the genesis of Islam and doctrine of *Imamate* contrasted sharply with theirs. For them and the religious scholars they regularly patronized, the concept of *Imamate* was not valid and the Prophet's mantle of leadership was justly passed on to his most trusted companions, Abū Bakr, Uthmān, 'Umar and then Ali. But this position of authority did not incorporate a relationship with the Divine. As the primary bearers of the Islamic tradition, the Prophet's Companions deserved nothing but the utmost respect. Only through the

Qur'ān, the record of the Prophet's life (*sunna*) and sayings (*ḥadīth*), and the guidance of those so dedicated to the Divine that they became spiritually illumined could Muslims pursue an authentic Islamic life in keeping with Divine will. The eighth-century religious scholarship of Abu Hanifa, informed by the records of the Companions of the Prophet, provided a legal template for Islamic society that was considered beyond reproach and unsurpassable. Friday congregational prayer was unambiguously the centrepiece of Islamic religious life and the forum for Mughal rulers to assert their authority.

The Mughals devised ambitious urban visions and were enthusiastic patrons of monumental architecture. The favoured genres included fortresses, tombs, palace complexes and Friday *masjids*, in a style reflecting an evolving synthesis of Central Asian and South Asian designs and techniques. The imperial centres and their suburbs were crucibles for the imperial aesthetic and distinctive in their use of red sandstone and white marble exterior facing over rough-hewn stone and mortar substructures. Interiors that were not similarly faced were finished with highly refined stucco, and shallow vaults were widely used on a small scale, often rendered with stone slabs. Exterior stucco, brick and mortar were more prevalent in regions like the Bengal and in later Mughal architecture.

Perhaps the boldest Mughal urban development project undertaken was the seventeenth-century development of the garden-palace and fortress city Shahjahanabad, which was located in the urban region of Delhi and named after its patron Shah Jahan.³⁷ Planned within a large, chamfered rectangle measuring 820 by 492 metres, the city was encompassed by large walls punctuated with bastions [Fig. 115]. Within the walls, there was a series of square and rectangular arched enclosures interconnected with mirroring

gateways aligned on central axes. However, the city's boldest architectural venture, Shah Jahan's Friday *masjid*, was located outside the walls of the palace city. Essentially an arcaded enclosure raised on a high square platform, the *masjid* could be accessed on three sides through a broad staircase and monumental gate. On the west, a large structure framed by two towering, engaged minarets and covered with three monumental domes marked the principal prayer area.

Though not fully free to publicly express their beliefs, the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite in the Mughal empire did have occasion to develop religious architecture in service of their faith. For example, it is thought that around 1052/1642, in the city of Dacca during Prince Shujā's rule over the Mughal province of Bengal in north-eastern India, an individual named Sayyid Murād, commissioned the Ḥusaynī Dālān, a building that was used for *Shi'i Isna Ashari* mourning assemblies.³⁸ Repaired in 1221/1807, 1224/1810 and 1314/1897 by the British, the site's original appearance is unclear. Still standing but significantly modified, the building was sited on a large platform and consisted of two adjacent long halls. The southern hall was coloured black and used for *majlises* while the northern hall was used to store religious artifacts used in the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* mourning processions. Flanking the halls on both sides were smaller chambers thought to be used by women. In the southern suburbs of Shahjahanabad, a shrine centre that housed an impression of the foot of *Imam* Ali known as Dargāh-i Shāhī Mardān was built in 1164/1750-1 and incorporated a small hall to accommodate mourning assemblies.³⁹

The Mughal ruler most emphatic in his support of the Hanāfi doctrine was Awrangzib, whose religiously tinged rhetoric was often conflated with his military and

political objectives. Awrangzib was the last of the militarily strong Mughal emperors, and after his death the empire no longer maintained its cohesion. As the Safavid empire dissolved into Zand and Qajar rule, the Mughal empire of South Asia decentralized into regional powers based in the Delhi-Agra region, Awadh, Bengal, the Deccan, Hyderabad, Mysore and Northwest India-Central Asia.

In the Delhi-Agra region, the trappings and prestige of empire were maintained along with very fragile regional alliances, but divisions along ethnic and religious lines deepened. Afghānī, Irānī, Tūrānī, *Shi'i Isna Ashari* and Sunni loyalties increasingly divided the Mughal court. Worried Hanafī religious scholars were threatened by the considerable influence of the Irani *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, who more and more controlled the office of Emperor and wielded considerable military strength but also competed for power among themselves. The Mughal emperor was reliant on powerful aristocrat-soldiers who could maintain the empire's holdings and still offered lucrative governorships and imperial prestige in return.

An Irani *Shi'i Isna Ashari* émigré to the Mughal court named Sa'ādat Khān (1133-52/1720-39) helped the Mughal Emperor secure his position in the capital. In gratitude, he was awarded the governorship of the Agra region but, upon failing to quell the uprisings there, was deputed to Awadh. The landholders and historic families of the prosperous region no longer submitted their revenues to the Mughal emperor. Saadat Khan succeeded in securing Awadh for the Mughal emperor and became its governor, laying the seeds for what would become a semi-autonomous Awadh ruled by his descendants, one of them being Asaf al-Dawlah, until 1273/1857. Saadat Khan did not always serve the emperor's interests. After the emperor favoured a rival of Saadat Khan,

the scorned aristocrat-soldier undermined peace negotiations between the invading army of Nadir Shah and the Mughal court, which led to the brutal sacking of Delhi and even further diminishment of the imperial court.

While Saadat Khan established his authority over Awadh, his senior rival at the Mughal court, Āṣaf Jāh, became governor over portions of the Deccan in the south, and ruled from the city of Awrangabad; his successors relocated to Hyderabad. Known as the Nizāms of Hyderabad, they retained their authority until the birth of the Indian nation-state.

In the period following Awrangzib's death, Bengal was under the governorship of a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* follower, Murshid Qulī Khān, who upon becoming more autonomous from the Mughal ruler relocated his capital from Dacca to Murshidābād, a new capital bearing his name. A successor of Murshid Quli Khan, Nawwab Sirāj al-Dawlah, built a masonry and wood building called a *madīna* (the Arabic word for 'city') as part of his palace complex to accommodate mourning assemblies. In 1257/1842 and 1262/1846 it caught fire and finally burnt down, the second incident stemming from a fireworks display gone awry; but it was replaced with the vast masonry structure touted as the world's largest *imambarah*, which still stands today. Another *imambarah* was built in the port of Hooghly in Bengal by an Irani émigré during the latter days of Awrangzib's rule and was rebuilt, perhaps more than once, resulting in the structure that stands there today.⁴⁰

The British East India Company

Of all the regional powers, the *Nawwabs* of Bengal had to confront the British East India Company's growing presence in the subcontinent most directly. The Company initially established itself in the seventeenth century in Surat, Madras (Chennai), Bombay (Mumbai) and Calcutta (Kolkata) and was part of a global trading network nurtured by the emerging British empire. Among India's more valuable exports were textiles, handicrafts, tea and spices, enriching a pre-existing South Asian merchant class, who facilitated British trade.

The Company maintained an army of British officers and largely Indian soldiers of all faiths equipped with the latest muskets and canons and built fortresses to protect its interests from competing European and local powers. Its growing presence in Bengal prompted the *Nawwab* of Bengal, Siraj al-Dawlah, to attack in 1170/1757, resulting in the historic Battle of Plassey. With its military and technological superiority, the Company easily defeated the *Nawwab*, paving the way for further military and commercial expansion, bolstered by the tax revenues from its new dominions.

The Company was next confronted by a military challenge from the Nawwab-Vazir of Awadh, Shujā al-Dawlah, who had become the official defender of the Mughal Emperor's dominions.⁴¹ When he was defeated at the Battle of Baksar in 1177/1764, the East India Company gained title to both the territories of Awadh and the Delhi-Agra region, in addition to Bengal. But administration of the new territories was beyond the Company's capacity, so it reinstated both the Mughal Emperor and the Nawwab-Vazir of Awadh, levied heavy reparations payments, demanded unfettered commercial access and appointed Residents in Delhi and Lucknow to oversee their interests. The Company was

both a commercial and military organization that inevitably began to sell arms and military services to the regimes of the Indian rulers it had defeated.

In Calcutta, the British based themselves in a fortress named Fort William, but after the conflict with the *Nawwab* of Bengal it was irreparably damaged and, beginning in 1171/1758, they rebuilt Fort William anew. It took over a decade to complete and cost about 2,000,000 pounds or roughly 20,000,000 rupees.⁴² Planned as a complex star using the most modern Anglo-European fort design concepts introduced by French military engineer Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (1042-1118/1633-1707), the new Fort William was a potent symbol of British power that Asaf al-Dawlah was keenly aware of when he became ruler of Awadh.⁴³

The seeds of the Great Imambarah complex were carried in these currents of history. Asaf al-Dawlah's ancestors had emerged from the Safavid empire bearing its faith and religious practice and cognizant of the idea of a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* state. The Mughal court generously accommodated them and provided a model of rule and an architectural legacy to rival, if not religious freedom. In the Bengal and the Deccan, the first monuments to encourage *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious practice were raised. The rise of the British East India Company presented a serious challenge to the economic and political viability of an autonomous Awadh, an ideal epitomized by the Great Imambarah complex. These currents of history are inseparable from the intellectual processes that have striven to chart them and governed the way the significance of the Great Imambarah complex has been interpreted.

Scholarly themes

The historical currents sketched above are seen through the prism of scholarly debates that are in turn shaped by their own historical contexts. Across academic disciplines such as History, Art History, Anthropology, and Islamic Studies, certain key themes are being explored, such as how power is constituted, the reasons underlying the success of the British commercial and imperial project in South Asia, the fluidity of individual and cultural identities, and the roles of Muslim religious elites in societies under Muslim rule and influence.

How power is constituted and lost remains the theme that dominates most writings by historians in the Anglo-European tradition concerned with Awadh. The period is in the midst of being reconceptualized. Once thought of only as a period of Mughal imperial decline with weak successor states palely echoing past glory, it is being recast as one of prosperous regional powers benefiting from Mughal administrative institutions and sustaining Mughal ideology if not pan-Indian rule.⁴⁴ The Mughal centre is now seen as invested with considerable symbolic influence that transcended its military and economic decline.⁴⁵ At heart, the exploration of this theme is an effort to come to grips with the differences between the Mughal concept of power and Anglo-European ones.

British success in securing control over India remains posed as a mystery, provoking rich debate. British technological and military superiority are generally accepted but are not deemed to be entirely responsible. Archaic assertions of the superiority of British cultural values over Indian ones are thoroughly rejected, and structural conditions, political or economic, are explored instead.⁴⁶ The idea of British

India as an imported political and economic concept is countered by the idea that British India was an adaptation of the Mughal empire and indigenous commercial networks. Portraits of the active colonizer overwhelming passive, colonized communities are questioned; instead of categorizing historical participants as either with or without agency in the determination of events, all participants are rendered with a degree of agency.⁴⁷ Representations of the British presence in India as benign are vigorously disputed and rigorous deconstruction of British colonial values, actions and vehicles for extending their power analyzed. More recently, attempts have been made - not without argument - to represent the rise of British India and the colonial economy as the product of collaboration between the British and an ambitious Indian merchant class.⁴⁸

Fluidity of individual and cultural identities is another important theme. British colonial categorization of Indian society by religion is displaced by alternatives like social rank or function, ethnicity and language. Hindu and Muslim communities are increasingly seen as participating in a common shared culture, most obvious in areas like music, devotional culture, language, architecture and food.⁴⁹ Religious practices rooted in a specific tradition but observed by members in varying ways are frequently explored. Monolithic categories such as Hindu and Muslim, East and West are increasingly in question, leading to the use of multiple and specific groups. For example, Hindu and Muslim communities tend to be broken down into constituent groups such as Vaishnavi, Shaivite, *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, *Sunni*, Sufi, Turk, Irani, Turani, Afghani, Rajput, Brahmin, artisans, and merchants with greater awareness that these identities have been combined in complex ways. The scholarly notion of the fluidity of identities is increasingly at odds with rising religious communalism in South Asia, which it often aims to counter.

The role of Muslim religious elites, whether they be scholars and mystics with either court or community patronage, in spreading Islam in South Asia and shaping Islamic thought and practice as well as the political environment, has been an area of sustained interest.⁵⁰ The history of Islam in India is for the most part seen as invested in these figures caught in a prolonged contest between heresy and orthodoxy intensified by the exposure to the Indian religious traditions.

The themes sketched here have surfaced throughout the prominent scholarship on eighteenth and nineteenth century Awadh that address the Great Imambarah complex in one way or another. In their own unique way, each scholar responded to the overarching dialogues and historical contexts that they were part of. The ways that these intellectual discourses have been shaped by their own contexts and have shaped the presentation of the Great Imambarah complex's history and significance are explored further in Chapter Three; but, first, a more detailed survey of the complex will be undertaken.

¹ Ahmad Hasan Dani, Muslim Architecture in Bengal (Dacca: 1961), pp. 12, 180. Ebba Koch, Mughal Architecture (Munich: Prestel, 1991), p. 93.

² Werner Blaser and Monica Stucky, Drawings of Great Buildings (Boston: Birkhauser Verlag, 1983), pp. 114-5.

³ Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isnā 'Asharī Shī'īs in India, 2 vols. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1986), vol. 2, p. 352. *Imam* is an Arabic word that in this context refers to the sacred guides descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Rizvi explains that in Bengali, the word *bārhi* means mansion and mourning halls were called *imābarhi*. In towns they were sometimes pronounced *imābārha* and in modern Pakistan the word has been Persianized as *imābārghāh*. In Hindi and Urdu the word has come to be pronounced *imābārah*.

⁴ For example: Bara Imambargah, Kharadar, Karachi, Pakistan; Dar es Salaam Jamaat Imambarah, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Mohamadi Imambarah KSIMC of Paris, France;

Hujjat Islamic Centre (Imambarah), Stanmore, Middlesex, London; The Husayni Imambarah of Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., Az-Zahra Islamic Centre (Imambarah), Richmond, B.C., Canada.

⁵ H.G. Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors to Lucknow (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1875 [repr. New Delhi, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 2000]), p. 73. Compare Keene's population statistics with estimates in, Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British, and the City of Lucknow (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 12.

⁶ R. W. Southern, "Medieval Humanism," in The Middle Ages, Volume II : Readings in Medieval History, Fourth Edition, ed. Brian Tierney (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992), p. 179.

⁷ I am inspired here by the abundant literature pertaining to the sociology of space as pioneered by Georg Simmel. I do not draw a hard distinction between the humanities and the social sciences, in which sociology has come to be grouped, and include them under the umbrella of humanistic inquiry. Simmel saw spatial relations as central to understanding human societies, which he saw as networks of individuals and their interactions. For example, in his 1908 essay "The Stranger," Simmel wrote, "[S]patial relations not only are determining conditions of relationships among men, but are also symbolic of those relationships." On Simmel, see: Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," trans. Kurt Wolff, in The Sociology of Georg Simmel (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 402-8. Georg Simmel, David Frisby, and Mike Featherstone, Simmel on Culture : Selected Writings (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997).

⁸ For a clear discussion of internalist and externalist approaches to historical studies of technology, see: J. M. Staudenmaier, Technology's Storytellers: Reweaving the Human Fabric (Cambridge, MA: Society for the History of Technology/MIT Press, 1985).

⁹ British correspondence during the uprisings of 1857 and 1858 and subsequent publications used the terms mutiny and rebellion interchangeably, generally favouring the latter. For example, see: Darogha Ubbas Alli, The Lucknow Album (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1874), p. 2. Under the umbrella of Indian nationalism, the recent trend has been to use "rebellion" to emphasize the justness of the uprising over a failure in duty as implied by "mutiny." Both terms are accurate, and I use the terms interchangeably as well.

¹⁰ Throughout the text, there is only one instance, the word *mazhāb*, where there is potential for confusion. Here, "z" refers to the letter ذ.

¹¹ Patrick K. O'Brien, ed., Atlas of World History (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999).

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- ¹² An overview of European bridge building is provided in: Eric DeLony, "Context for World Heritage Bridges," Occasional Papers for the World Heritage Convention (Paris: International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1996).
- ¹³ Jean-Rodolphe Perronet, Description des Projets et de la Construction des Ponts (Paris: 1788).
- ¹⁴ Charles Augustin Coulomb, Essai, trans. Jacques Heyman as Coulomb's Memoir On Statics, An Essay in the History of Civil Engineering (New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing, 1997).
- ¹⁵ The use of geometry is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
- ¹⁶ Roger M. Savory, Iran Under the Safavids (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- ¹⁷ Said Amir Arjomand, The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 103, 210.
- ¹⁸ Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Sh'ism (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 153-7.
- ¹⁹ Arjomand, p. 106.
- ²⁰ Rizvi, vol. 1, pp. 353-4.
- ²¹ Arjomand, pp. 129-32
- ²² Arjomand, pp. 145-7.
- ²³ For an introductory comparison between the *Akhbārī* and *Uṣūlī* schools, see: Momen, pp. 223-5.
- ²⁴ Arjomand, p. 141.
- ²⁵ Arjomand, pp. 165, 168-70.
- ²⁶ Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250-1800 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994), p. 185.
- ²⁷ John Chardin, Journal du Voyage du Chevalier Chardin en Perse, aux Indes Orientales par la Mer Noire et par la Colchide (London, 1686; 10 volumes, Paris 1811), excerpt and trans. in Muhammad Ja'far Mahjub, "The Effect of European Theatre and the Influence of its Theatrical Methods Upon Ta'ziyeh," Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York Univ. and Soroush Press, 1979), pp. 140-1.

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- ²⁸ Samuel R. Peterson, "The Ta'ziyeh and Related Arts," Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran, pp. 65-6.
- ²⁹ Abdul Halim Sharar, Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture, trans. ed. E.S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (London: Paul Elek, 1975), pp. 216-7.
- ³⁰ Nasir al-Din Shah, Diary of His Majesty the Shah of Persia During His Tour Through Europe in A.D. 1873, trans. J.W. Redhouse ([repr. Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1995]).
- ³¹ Peterson, pp. 69-71.
- ³² Rizvi, vol. 1, p. 295.
- ³³ George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).
- ³⁴ S.A.A. Bilgrami, Landmarks of the Deccan: A Comprehensive Guide to the Archeological Remains of the City and Suburbs of Hyderabad (1927 [repr. Asian Educational Services, 1992]), pp. 21-5. Michell, p. 138. Rizvi, vol 1, pp. 306-8; vol. 2, pp. 334-40.
- ³⁵ There are innumerable studies of the Mughal empire. One entry point is John F Richard, The Mughal Empire. Vol. I, Part 5, of the New Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993). Another concise and useful study that focuses on Mughal imperial structure is Stephen P. Blake, "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic empire of the Mughals," Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXXIX, no.1 (Nov. 1979): pp. 77-94.
- ³⁶ Abu al-Fazl Allami, Ain-i Akbari, 3 vols., trans. H. Blochmann (London: 1927 [Delhi: Low Price pub., 1997]), p. 3. For a discussion of Babur's grandson Akbar and his attempts to become a leader of a Sufi circle and not the founder of a new religion, see Blake, "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic empire," p. 83.
- ³⁷ Stephen P. Blake, Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639-1739 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993)
- ³⁸ Dani, p. 204. A. B. M. Husain, "Husayni Dalan," Encyclopaedia of Islam 2 – CD ROM edition (Leiden: Brill, 1999).
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CHAPTER TWO

Surveying the Great Imambarah Complex

A visitor to the Great Imambarah complex today most likely approaches from Lucknow's main commercial strip in the east, Hazrat Ganj, by cycle rickshaw on a busy road with scooters and cars whizzing by [Fig. 13]. A public transport three-wheeler, a scooter or even a hired car are just as likely a means of transport, but it is all too easy with them to miss the pageantry of monuments. Many of Lucknow's landmarks roll by: the palace complex of Sa'adat 'Ali Khān, known as the Farhād Bakhsh and now home to Lucknow's Central Drug Research Institute; the grounds of the British Residency, where memories of the Great Rebellion of 1857 are kept alive; and the large hill known as the Lakshman Tīla, named after the Hindu deity Lakshman and crowned by a brilliant, whitewashed *masjid* commissioned when the Mughal emperor Awrangzib still ruled Awadh [Fig. 11]. Occasionally, one sees the wide Gomti River to the right, polluted but still beautiful. Only in a cycle rickshaw does the scene of the Great Imambarah complex unfold at the same slow pace as it did for earlier inhabitants of Lucknow who witnessed its completion. Though not immediately apparent, the complex has two interlocking, enclosed forecourts each with imposing gateways and a main court containing notable

buildings like Asaf al-Dawlah's congregational *masjid*, the Great Imambarah and the Baoli Palace. The Great Imambarah complex is an elaborate, thoughtful, and unified design that reflects a mind at play, joining and manipulating forms in interesting ways. It is a text of sorts that has only been skimmed but not read in detail.

The First Forecourt

At first, one appears to be entering a symmetrical, three-sided, enclosed urban plaza, called a *jīlaw khānah* in Persian historical sources, that is bounded by three monumental entrances [Fig. 13]. To the west, the unique gateway known as the Rūmī Darvāzah stands, appearing closer than it is. To the north and south, the two entrances stand opposite each other. The entrance to the north is the façade of a building commonly called the Naqar Khānah or Nawbat Khānah. The south entrance is the first of two gateways leading to the court of the Great Imambarah, and consequently will be called the first Imambarah gate.

Once between the Naqar Khanah and the first Imambarah gate, one sees that these three monumental entrances do not define the First Forecourt by themselves.

The three entrances are not freestanding structures but monuments integrated into long multi-storey arcade blocks roughly two-thirds the height of the entrances and just as deep. As a result, these composite structures consisting of a monumental entrance and flanking arcades are more properly termed entrance-arcades. Unlike the other two entrance-arcades, the Naqar Khanah arcade is asymmetrical and has an adjoining arcade only on its eastern side.

On closer examination, the first Imambarah gate-arcade and the Rumi Darvazah (the Roman Gate) arcade are joined by a combined wall and single-storey arcade block, punctuated by a small projecting and chamfered gateway building [Fig. 25]. A newly planted garden styled like a golf course fills the space between the Rumi Darvazah and Naqar Khanah-arcades. The Naqar Khanah-arcade is detached from the rest of the forecourt but a single storey arcade that adjoins it to the east hints at the forecourt's former unity.

The first forecourt is highly fragmented, and modern necessities, such as telephone and power lines and raised asphalt roads, cut through the length of the court. The chambers behind the first storey arcades are generally sealed off with iron railings, and blank walls are replete with graffiti and posters. Despite this, the forecourt continues to provide a striking urban composition. Locals, like the *Shi'i* Muslim communities that live and work to the west of the Great Imambarah complex, approach from the west and experience the first court in a different way, first seeing the western façade of the Rumi Darvazah-arcade and then only orphaned monuments tracing the outlines of an urban court that is no longer whole [Fig. 15].

The Rumi Darvazah-arcade – west façade

As a whole, the Rumi Darvazah-arcade is symmetrical and consists of the Rumi Darvazah itself - a central arched gateway -, two adjoining arcade wings, and two slightly taller octagonal bastions on its ends; but its western and eastern façades differ significantly.

The Rumi Darvazah is a monumental arched niche portal that towers above the arcaded wings and consists of a large archway and inset niche. Instead of being framed by a typical rectangular border, the exterior profile of the archway follows the outline of a pointed arch, and the interior of the archway takes the shape of a multi-cusped arch. The archway has an elaborate decorative program of moulded and cut stucco that can be described from the inside out. The profile of the cusped arch is accentuated with moulding, and two distinctive vegetal relief mouldings curl away from the convex of each cusp and downwards. A large floral design is moulded over the apogee of the cusped arch [Fig. 16]. Smooth and slender engaged columns moulded into the vertical edges of the cusped arch complete the first decorative band. This combination of cusped arch and vegetal and floral mouldings recurs frequently throughout the Great Imambarah complex and will be referred to as a foliated cusp arch.

A pointed arch band projects slightly over the central foliated arch [Fig. 16]. Two alternating motifs are cut out from the band as ornament. The first is a four-lobed or quatrefoil design, and the second is a fusion of three quatrefoils. This ornamental motif also recurs frequently and will be referred to as a quatrefoil cutout. Next, three bands of three-dimensional leaf mouldings ornament the archway. They include a row of small leaves with perpendicularly curved tips, a row of medium sized trifoil, acanthus leaves, and a row of large dramatic leaves with perpendicularly curved tips. Even more unusual is the double course of distinctive finials, known in Persian historical sources as *guldastas*, that radiate over the top half of the archway. A *guldasta* has a lobed shaft that terminates in a sculpted flower bud.

A half-octagon niche is set within the main archway of the Rumi Darvazah and is surmounted by a pointed half-dome. The niche has three levels. The first has three rectangular faces, each with a border of quatrefoil cutouts and a pointed arch opening set within a false cusped arch that can be more succinctly described as a pointed-cusp arch. The second level has a series of seven blind pointed arches, three of which have smaller pointed arch openings. The third level is a smooth, concave interior surface of a dome.

At the highest point of the Rumi Darvazah, people can often be seen gazing over the city standing under a turnip-shaped, lobed dome with acanthus-leaf reliefs around its base that looks like a lotus bud and rests on six small cusped columned arches [Fig. 16]. This type of dome occurs frequently throughout the complex and is known as a *chatrī*. Two tall, slender, engaged columns with baluster bases and star shaped shafts adjoin the outer ends of the Rumi Darvazah. Two polygonal projecting eaves subdivide them. The top ones are specially cut to resemble the sepals of a flower, and small octagonal *chatris* crown them.

The arcade wings and corner bastions of the western façade that flank the Rumi Darvazah are subdivided into three levels by horizontal bands [Fig. 15]. Blind cusped arches set in rectilinear bands run along the exterior perimeter of the first level. At the corners, an octagonal platform with a parapet provides the base for the upper levels of the bastion. At the second level, five cusped-arch openings run the length of one arcade wing but pointed-cusp arches penetrate the bastion. The third level of the arcade has two layers of successively smaller arches that are divided into six groups by wider piers and pinnacles. A course of over thirty small, lotus-bud domes runs above this arcade.

The Rumi Darvazah-arcade - east façade

The eastern façade of the Rumi Darvazah-arcade differs dramatically from the western one, primarily because it does not replicate the large, ornamental central archway [Fig. 17]. Instead, it has a central three-arched gateway with adjoining three-level, terraced arcade wings. The bastions at the end on the western façade are mostly concealed but the rear of the ornamental archway, a polygonal supporting structure with the large crowning *chatri*, projects visibly above the three-arched gateway of the western façade.

The eastern three-arched gateway façade has three major levels. Like the west façade, there are three large pointed-arch openings on the first level, but they are in the same plane and set within pointed, not cusped, false arches. The outer arches, which are cast in shadow, are particularly interesting because by passing through them one must turn inwards forty-five degrees to come out of the octagonal niche of the west façade. Large piers, each ornamented with three blind and pointed arches set in rectilinear outlines one over the other, separate them. An arcade of thirteen smaller cusped arches, grouped in threes conforming to the gate's tripartite scheme, runs above the three principal arches. Those on the ends are blind arches; the ones over the central piers are pointed-cusp arches; and the others are simple cusped arches. Above this row are bands of cornices, floral reliefs, and an arcade divided by slightly broader piers into three distinct groups of seven small pointed arches in line with the large central piers below. A course of small lotus-bud domes runs above the arcade. Two grooved pilasters bracket the three-arched gateway. The south one is capped with an ornamental square *chatri*, but the one on the north one appears to have fallen away.

Only by standing on the top terrace of the three-arched gateway can the two-tiered, half-octagon arcade structure that rests on it be clearly seen. The structure supports the top archway of the Rumi Darvazah's west façade [Fig. 21]. One face has five arched openings on the first tier, and the second has eleven; the piers bear engaged columns. Again, there is a crowning series of lotus-bud domes. A smaller but similar two-tiered, arcaded, octagonal structure with a crowning row of lotus-bud domes sits on top of the half-octagon, supporting the large octagonal *chatri* from which the city can be surveyed [Fig. 24]. In order to ascend the three-arched gateway and the polygonal structures above it, one must first pass through the flanking two-tiered arcade wings.

The first tier has an arcade of pointed arches interrupted by a projecting staircase, with steps made of red bricks of modern proportion. The second tier is narrower than the first, creating an irregular terrace in front of it [Fig. 18]. In contrast to the continuous façade of the western face, the second tier of the east façade has two sections: an arcade of four cusped arches two bays deep and an attached outer arcade of two cusped arches one bay deep. Archways that consist of two thin layers of cusped arches that sandwich a pointed arch define the bays [Fig. 19]. They are simply ornamented with rectilinear outlines and floral reliefs over their apexes. Four broad, coved cornices (*cavettos*) form the ceilings of each bay with the leftover square openings filled in with masonry. Arcades of smaller cusped arches grouped in sets of fives by slightly wider pillars run above both arcades, as does a continuous course of lotus-bud domes on octagonal bases, slightly larger than the corresponding domes on the western face. A small passageway in the outer arcade leads to an octagonal chamber inside the north bastion, which offers a

picturesque view of the Gomti River through pointed arch openings; the exterior decorative cusped arch is invisible from inside.

Where the second-tier arcade join each side of the three-arched gate, a tall pointed archway opens onto a dark narrow staircase that turns right, to the west, and leads to the roof terrace over the second tier of arcades [Fig. 20]. At this level one can enter the second level of the bastions and the chambers behind the thirteen-arched arcade that runs above the three-arched gateway. The unornamented interior space is subdivided into three rectilinear bays roofed with pointed-arch barrel vaults. They yield a clear view of the street below and the reflecting Naqar Khanah and first Imambarah gate-arcades. The two outer bays have narrow arched openings with stairs oriented west that turn inwards twice so that one exits onto the roof terrace of the three-arched gateway facing east.

From there, westward-pointing stairs on both sides of the half-octagonal structure lead up to that level. As one ascends, the *guldastas*, the rose-like ornaments that radiate from the arched portion of the western façade, are clearly visible [Fig. 23]. They consist of curved stone segments joined together with iron clamps and embedded between the large leaf motifs that curve outwards pointing to the west. There are actually two parallel rows of *guldastas*. The stairs leading up the half-octagonal level turn inwards 180 degrees and lead to the arcade of narrow chambers surrounding the half octagonal level. On both ends, narrow westward-facing stairs again turn 180 degrees midway and lead to the roof of the half-octagon structure [Fig. 24]. From here the arcaded base of the octagonal superstructure is clearly visible and stands on a convex surface, the outer curve of the monumental half dome of the Rumi Darvazah. Westward pointing stairs leading to the arcade of the octagonal structure turn inwards 90 degrees. The stairs continue turning

westward leading to the highest point in the Rumi Darvazah, the elegant octagonal *chatri*. Through the thin columns and delicate cusped arches a 360 degree view of the city presents itself [Fig. 14].

Unceasing traffic flows through the principal archways of the Rumi Darvazah day and night. Throughout the Rumi Darvazah arcade, reconstruction efforts, sometimes careful but often crude, are made with red cement. Large black patches, mould from water-soaked areas, deface the stucco surfaces along with abundant graffiti in Hindi, Urdu, and English. Only traces of an original smooth white finish remain. On the terraces of the flanking arcades stained with bird waste and blotches of *pān*, rusted light fixtures to illuminate the building's exterior lie derelict. Still, the lofty heights and the views of Lucknow's Gomti River and urban expanse seen through the poetic frame of an arch continue to attract adventurous schoolboys and passers-by.

The Chamfered Gateway

A clear view of the chamfered gateway is visible from the octagonal *chatri* dome atop the Rumi Darvazah [Figs. 14, 25]. The gate follows the plan of a chamfered square, which is not used elsewhere in the complex. The principal façade has a large pointed-cusp arch. Two small corner niche-arches flank the central arch. The chamfered corners each have two smaller arched openings with moulded rectangular borders, one on top of the other. The ground-level arch is cusped, but the one above is rounded. A slight cornice marks the roofline, and a row of floral relief motifs runs above it. A broken row of *chattris* runs along portions of the roof's chamfered-square perimeter, and each shift in plane is accentuated with *guldastas*. The adjoining arcade to the west of the gate stands half as

high as the gate and has widely-spaced, arched openings separated by large piers. The adjoining arcade to the east is a thin wall with inset blind arches.

The Naqar Khanah arcade

The entrance façade of the Naqar Khanah is most clearly visible from the arches of the opposing Imambarah gateway that faces it [Fig. 26]. The façade is subdivided into three tall, foliated cusp-arch niches set within rectilinear borders lined with quatrefoil cutout ornament. The spandrels have mirroring moulded reliefs of scaly-bodied fish that curve dramatically inwards so that their mouths, which bear two long whiskers, almost graze their tails. The three foliated cusp-arches are surmounted by a band of small pointed-arch openings, and above that is a band of ornamental floral reliefs and a row of 31 *chattris* divided by *guldastas* into three corresponding segments. Grooved pilasters on each end, with bases and capitals that are chamfered and swollen and segmented by projecting solid and cutaway eaves, complete the entire façade, and each are crowned with a square *chatri*.

The two outer cusped-arch niches are identical. Each niche incorporates of two storeys of arched openings. The first has three pointed arches, and the second has three similar sized arches with elliptical curvatures flanked by two smaller but similar arches, making a total of five. The elliptical arch is used frequently throughout the complex. Above the two rows of arches, a covered marble balcony supported by brackets projects [Fig. 30]. It is covered with a small *bangla* vault, with eaves, resting on three cusped arches supported on slender, lobed columns. Each column has a baluster-styled base; the shaft with its bulbous base is decorated with leaf ornaments pointing to the centre; and

the capital has a vegetal ornament. Since it, too, recurs frequently throughout the complex, it shall be referred to as a foliated column. An arch opens behind the balcony. The balcony of the central cusped arch differs significantly from the two adjacent ones since it uses a tripartite vault form, not a basic *bangla* vault [Fig. 31]. Another small difference is that there are three rectilinear, not arched, openings at the ground level.

The façade of the Naqar Khanah is a patchwork of dirty white and yellowing stucco and smooth plaster finish, as well as reddish cement stucco applied by workers for the Archaeological Survey of India, roughly moulded to resemble the original details of the structure and most evident in the lower half of the façade. In two areas, the stucco has fallen away to reveal the underlying thinly proportioned, fired bricks with which the bulk of the structure is built. The spandrel of the large eastern archway reveals that the cusped face of the arch is a façade of thin radiating bricks attached to a concealed sub-structure. The underlying brick of the top segments of the pilasters is exposed.

The first Imambarah gate-arcade - north façade

Returning to the first Imambarah gate-arcade, the entire structure consists of a monumental three-arched gate and two flanking arcades. What is striking about the gate is that it mirrors the Naqar Khanah entrance in almost every detail, down to the marble balconies and the curved fish reliefs in the spandrels of the arches. The most significant difference is that within the three monumental pointed-cusp-arch niches and beneath the marble balconies are three large pointed-arch openings, instead of the two tiers of arches in the Naqar Khanah façade. The openings lead into the next court, the Second Forecourt.

The flanking arcades are two storeys high with a three-storey octagonal bastion on each end. The first level of the arcade is broader and serves as a platform for the one above, but it is sunken slightly below ground level. Both the first and second levels have arcades of nine cusped arches with rectangular quatrefoil cutout borders not including the bastion. The bottom arcade gives into a series of chambers behind, but the top arcade leads to a series of open bays, and the dividing piers and the vertical edges of the cusped arches have moulded inset foliated columns. A series of medium-sized lotus-bud domes resting on polygonal drums runs above the arcade, in line with the arches below.

The Second Forecourt

Upon passing through the first Imambarah gateway, one enters a large square court, bounded by two-storey arcades on the east and west and with a large monumental gateway-arcade on the south, the second Imambarah gate. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the court is the way it is landscaped. Most of its surface is covered with a vast circle of grass bordered with hedges and flowers; a wide circular pathway surrounds the area. The circular geometry of the space distracts from the rest of the structure. If one looks backwards, to the north, at the first Imambarah gateway that was passed through, one realizes its south façade differs considerably from its northern one [Fig. 32].

The first Imambarah gate-arcade - south façade

The south façade of the first Imambarah gate-arcade consists of the central three-arch gate and flanking arcades. The gate's south façade is vertically shorter than the north, creating two tiers. The first tier has three foliated pointed-cusp arches that lead back out

to the first forecourt. The cusped arch outline is considerably shorter than the ones on the north side. Instead of curved fish reliefs in the spandrels, fish with extended bodies are moulded onto the surface [Fig. 33]. The piers bordering the arches are wider than those on the north and ornamented with two cusped arch openings, one on top to the other. The two ground level cusped arches on the end piers have small staircases giving access to interior staircases leading to other levels of the building. Vertical bands of small ornamental arch niches also ornament the piers, flanking the decorative arch niches. An arcade of thirteen cusped arches runs above the three principal arches. Those above the piers bordering the arches are fronted by projecting balconies each with two slender columns supporting a small *bangla* vault. The piers of this arcade have short, squat, engaged columns moulded on them. An eave runs above the arcade completing the first tier of the south façade. The ends of the south façade are ornamented with thin rounded engaged columns. The second tier forms the rear of the top section of the north façade, with an arcade of thirteen smaller, widely spaced arches, corncicing and *chatris*. The tier has a terrace in front of it, which forms the roof of the south façade. Unlike the gate, the south façades of the adjoining two-storey arcades are almost identical to their corresponding northern façades. The lower tier projects forward, creating a terrace in front of the upper tier.

The eastern and western arcades of the second Forecourt

A two-tiered arcade runs along the eastern side of the court [Fig. 38]. The first level, broader than the one above it, projects forward. A few of the arches open into recessed chambers, while the others are relief outlines. The level above is simply an arcade of

blind arches. A single-storey arcade wall of blind pointed and elliptical arches borders the western section of the second forecourt [Fig. 39].

The second Imambarah gate-arcade

The second Imambarah gate-arcade consists of a central, monumental three-arched gate and two flanking, large, multi-storey arcades that almost reaches the height of the gate, the tallest arcades encountered in the complex so far [Fig. 34]. The central gateway sits higher than its counterpart to the north and a broad staircase fronts it, accommodating the change in height. The north façade consists of three large foliated pointed-cusp arch openings with a rectangular border of small arched niches, an arcade of thirteen smaller cusped arches above them and a row of *chatris* [Fig. 35].

The north façade of the second Imambarah gateway is similar to the mirroring southern façade of the first Imambarah gateway, with a few interesting exceptions. The three principal arches are taller. The vegetal reliefs over the principal cusped arches are denser; three, instead of two, vegetal motifs flare from the convex of each cusp. The intriguing fish in the spandrels of the outer arches are larger with more fins and their mouths bare sharp pointed teeth [Fig. 36]. The bodies of the fish ornamenting the central arch spandrels are curved, not extended. Three, not two, blind arches ornament the piers and the top one incorporates diagonal lattice patterns, an ornamental technique not yet seen in the complex.

The row of *chatris* varies from previous ones. At the centre stands a small *bangla* vault flanked by two standard *chatris* supported by four columns. A hybrid of three domes and a *bangla* vault comes next followed by a course of five standard *chatris*. The

three-dome hybrid is used on both ends of the row of *chatri* domes. The hybrid domes are in line with the projecting *bangla* vault balconies below them and the pillars that separate the monumental arches. Two square columns surmounted by square *chattris* define the vertical ends of the gate at the *chatri* level.

Turning to the flanking arcades [Fig. 35], the first two levels have three cusped arch openings that alternate with blind arches with small inset arched niches. This sequence shifts to three groups of three arched openings followed by a blind arch. Above the first two levels, a blind arcade using rounded arches of varying width run the entire length. An overhang projects above this row and is followed by a row of *chattris*, subdivided into three sections by another type of dome hybrid. This one appears to be a fusion of the two lotus bud domes or a small *bangla* vault with three pinnacles radiating skyward. Many of the arches on the eastern arcade are filled in with thick bricks from recent construction efforts to create contemporary usable offices. Staff of the Archaeological Survey of India stationed at the Great Imambarah have adapted several second and third storey chambers on the east arcade as offices.

When one passes through the second Imambarah gateway, it is clear that it is deeper than the first, and incorporates a number of chambers within it [Fig. 37]. The area behind the piers incorporates chambers. As one passes through the gate and looks towards the pier, one sees two rows of three arches, one over the other. The first row has a central pointed-cusp arch opening accessible by a small stair leading to a small chamber that allows one to pass into the adjacent entrance arch. Two smaller foliated pointed-cusp arch openings flank the central cusped arch. Two squat, engaged, foliated columns separate the arches. The apexes of all the arches have an ornamental floral relief motif.

The second row above these three arches has three identical elliptical arched openings. They are ornamented with slender engaged columns and decorative moulding. The ceiling of the archway has coved cornices and a small shallow sail vault. A rectangular band of moulded leaves accentuate the area where the cornices meet the roof. Altogether, the space is highly ornamented and lacks a utilitarian character.

The Principal Court

After passing through the second gateway an asymmetrical court unfolds. Straight ahead is the long horizontal Great Imambarah [Fig. 57]. To the west stands a monumental westward facing *masjid* set at a dramatic angle with two towering minarets [Fig. 41]. The court's eastern perimeter is bounded with a two-storey arcade with a small gateway penetrating it. A broad staircase runs the entire length of the Great Imambarah creating a vast platform in front of the building and the stairs continue at an angle in front of the *masjid*, and project dramatically in front of the main entrance to the *masjid*. An extension from the west end of the Imambarah turns into an arcade that surrounds the *masjid* and joins to the second Imambarah gateway-arcade. The landscaped grounds of the court are irregularly divided by the hedge-lined pathways leading to the Great Imambarah, the *masjid*, and one heading to the small gateway to the east; the areas between are covered with grass.

Surprisingly, the southern façade of the second Imambarah gateway is identical to its northern façade but due to the differences in ground level, the south façade is shorter than the north one [Fig. 40]. The south façades of the arcades adjoining the central gate

differ considerably, sharing more in common with the Great Imambarah façade than with their corresponding southern façades. On the east arcade, immediately next to the gateway at ground level, there is a pointed-cusp arch with stairs leading inside to the upper levels of the arcade. Four smaller, blind, elliptical arches surround the pointed-cusp arch. Moving east, there is a two storey projecting half-octagonal bastion. The first level has cusped arch openings bordered with slender inset columns and the next level is marked with a row of brackets supporting projecting eaves over which there are elliptical arch openings. The half-bastion is roofed with a shallow half lotus-bud dome. To the left, there is a variation on the cusped arch ornamental motif. Spanning two stories a moulded archway, with an exterior profile looking like a *bangla* vault façade and cusped arch interior, appears to rest on two engaged, foliated columns. Inset within this architectural relief are two arched openings. The elaborate relief is bounded by two sections with two arched openings, an elliptical one on top of a cusped one. Both are flanked by smaller arched niches. An additional set of two stacked arches completes the façade. An arcade of small blind cusped arches runs across the length of the arcade wing and is surmounted by a projecting cornice and a row of *chatris* that are identical to those on the northern façade and include the small *bangla* vaults as well.

The congregational masjid - exterior

On the large platform in front of the *masjid*, there is an octagonal well with a slightly raised border incorporating a marble tablet inscribed with Persian text that has seriously eroded [Fig. 44, 45]. However, the date 1254/1838-9 can still be read. A rectangular ablutions tank with modern plumbing is also located here.

The *masjid* exterior has a central, projecting, rectangular entrance, flanking wings, an engaged octagonal minaret at each end and three surmounting monumental lotus bud domes with copper finials, of which the centre dome is slightly larger and taller than the other two. The projecting monumental entrance has a large foliated cusped arch niche with an inset foliated cusped arch that opens into the *masjid*; this combination will be called a double cusped arch [Fig. 46]. The curved space between the two cusped arches is filled with concentric rows of small, moulded curved arches, known as *muqarnas* that are aligned with the cusps of the outer arch. Each *muqarnas* has five vertical grooves moulded into it, like a clamshell, and various points of the *muqarnas* are connected with lines that altogether create a complex geometric display. The lower half of the niche is rectangular and is ornamented with blind arches. The rectangular border surrounding the cusped arch from the inside out is ornamented with a thin band of diagonally slanted leaf reliefs, straight mouldings with iron rings bolted into them, and quatrefoil cutouts that are crudely interrupted above the apogee of the arch as an afterthought to accommodate a white marble tablet with a black-letter inscription in Persian [Fig. 48]. Vertical bands of four small, cusped arch reliefs flank the borders and a horizontal band of intricate ornamental vegetal reliefs runs across the top. Horizontal moulding and a large band of intricately detailed, moulded acanthus leaves curving forward run above this. They are surmounted by a course of *chatris*. Slender, engaged columns capped with small octagonal *chatris* bracket the ends of the projecting entrance. On each side of the projecting entrance, five identical archways open into the interior of the *masjid*. Each one has a foliated pointed-cusp arch with *muqarna* infills and engaged foliated columns.

The congregational masjid - interior

The interior of the *masjid* has two interconnected parallel halls, wide in length but narrow in depth. The front hall receives abundant sunlight through the many arches that open into it. It is divided by archways into three distinct chambers. The central entry chamber is square and covered with a small vault. Long uninterrupted rectilinear chambers identical to each other adjoin to the north and south and are entered by archways that each consist of two thin parallel cusped arches that sandwich a pointed arch and rest on engaged foliated columns [Fig. 51]. Unlike the eastern interior façade of the chamber, which has five open pointed-cusp arches, every alternate arch on the mirroring western façade - a total of three - is open and leads into the second interior hall. The odd arches are blind with small elliptical arch niches and form the sides of the monumental pillars that serve as part of the substructure supporting the monumental domes above. The outer ends of the long north and south chambers each have a cusped arch opening, bringing even more light into the spaces.

The long narrow chambers are each roofed with a shallow sail vault supported by a coved cornice incorporating two rows of *muqarnas* [Fig. 52]. Beneath the cornice of *muqarnas* runs a band of quatrefoil cutouts. Where the cornice meets the ceiling, another band of quatrefoil cutouts ornaments the surface. Five intricate circular, moulded, floral reliefs evenly spaced along the centre length of the ceiling also ornament the vault. They each follow the geometric outline of a square rotated within a square, with each corner sprouting a floral flourish resembling those used over the apogees of arches in the complex. An iron ring is at the centre of each one and electric fans hang from them.

Unlike the front hall, which has three chambers, the interior hall is much deeper and has a series of three square chambers connected with each other by extended archways and to the front hall by less elaborate archways. Accessed mainly from the entry chamber, the central west chamber, or *miḥrāb* chamber, is the most elaborately ornamented and tallest of the three [Fig. 53]. Four complex arch combinations define the chamber [Fig. 54]. The one on the west is a blind arch, while the ones on the north, south and east are open. Each side follows the same pattern with an exterior and interior archway not bordered by a rectangle. Both archways have an exterior moulded pointed arch and a heavily foliated cusped arch interior, inverting the pointed-cusp architectural motif. Tiers of *muqarnas* fill the concave space between exterior and interior archways. Here, the innermost cusped arch passageway is not ornamental but carved out of the actual arch. The lower bases of the arches are ornamented with simple rectilinear motifs.

Within the interior cusped arch of the western wall of the *masjid*, which is known as the *qiblah* wall and indicates the direction of Mecca and of Muslim prayer, there is a half-octagonal niche, known as a *mihrab*; it indicates the place of the prayer leader [Fig. 53]. The exterior profile of the *mihrab* relief arch uses a *bangla* vault façade and the interior is a foliated cusped arch with engaged columns, whose shafts have chevron pattern ornaments. This *bangla*-cusped arch recurs elsewhere in the complex. The interior surface of the *mihrab* is ornamented with vegetal motifs and a doorway has been cut into it. In the floor area in front of the *mihrab*, there is an unusual small pit area with a descending stair and to the right of the *mihrab* there is a small five-step, built-in masonry staircase, known as a *minbar* from which communal addresses and religious lectures are to be delivered.

The spaces between the four exterior archways that define the *mihrab* chamber are joined together by a pendentive ornamented with tiers of *muqarnas*, which provide a multi-cusped circular base for the shallow hemispherical dome that covers the space [Fig. 54]. A small arch, with pointed exterior and cusped interior, is incorporated into the pendentive and bridges the four major arches. At each cusp of the dome's base, a three-dimensional acanthus-leaf relief curls upwards and forward. Ribs ornamented with rope-like moulding sprouting leaves on both sides emanate from these cusps at the dome's perimeter, creating radial grooves and terminating at a circular ring of moulded leaves that mark the ornamented apex of the dome's interior from which hang an iron ring and electric fan. This foliated grooved dome recurs throughout the complex. The dome's interior curvature does not reflect the exterior lotus-bud profile of the dome, confirming the use of double-dome construction design. The intricate geometry of the *mihrab* chamber, with archways nested within arches, makes for a complex stepped eastern profile for the piers that have broad flat western profiles and support the central dome.

Passage from the *mihrab* chamber to the chambers to the north and south is achieved with a transitional space, an extended archway. It is bounded by two foliated cusped-arch openings and is roofed with a narrow, pronounced *bangla* vault whose interior bears leaf ornaments following rectilinear outlines. The corners of the vault are accentuated with elaborate acorn-like mouldings. The west end of the vault terminates in an elliptical arch relief, and within there is a pointed arch relief encasing a smaller pointed arch, rectangular niche ornamented with tiers of *muqarnas*. The transition zone leads into another seemingly smaller and slightly less ornamented square chamber under the subsidiary domes of the *masjid* that closely resembles the central *mihrab* chamber

[Fig. 55]. Another extended archway is inserted between these square chambers and the exterior north and south walls that are pierced with exterior cusped arches, allowing light into the much darker interior hall [Fig. 56].

The Great Imambarah exterior - north façade

The Great Imambarah stands at the southern end of the final court with a large stone terrace before it [Figs. 57, 58]. Its symmetrical façade divides into two distinct horizontal tiers. The first tier has a central arcade of seven foliated double cusped arches encased within rectangular borders and spaced evenly by wide piers. The dividing piers have two ornamental arch reliefs above each other, a cusped arch below and an elliptical *bangla* relief arch with a floriated base and interior filled with a diagonal lattice pattern [Fig. 63]. Two projecting half-octagonal bastions, two-storeys high, bracket the central seven-arch arcade, foreshadowing the division of interior spaces to come [Fig. 60]. Both levels of the bastions have arched openings on each face, a pointed-cusp arch combination and surmounting elliptical arch separated by a bracketed eave over which a thin red sandstone lattice balcony railing runs. The bastions are roofed with a lotus bud half-dome. The remainder of the Great Imambarah façade has a tall floriated *bangla*-cusp arch opening flanked by a cusped arch opening surmounted by a *bangla* relief elliptical arch. It is interesting to note that the outer façades of the Great Imambarah from the bastions to the outer edges reflect the corresponding façades in the opposing second Imambarah arcade-gate to the north. Only the central arch and the two tall arches that flank the half bastions have steps leading to the interior of the Great Imambarah; the rest have ledges. Across the top of the first level runs an elaborate cornice of alternating small pointed arch

openings and blind, latticed arches surmounted by a row of *muqarnas* and intersecting tracery; a stone eave projects above the *muqarnas* [Fig. 62]. A course of *chattris* runs across the entire length of the Great Imambarah and those between the bastions are subdivided by a single freestanding *chatri* emphasized by four vertically projecting *guldasta* ornaments that align with the piers below.

The second tier is recessed, creating a terrace in front of it that forms the roof of the first tier. It has two half octagonal bastions in line with the ones on the first tier [Fig. 57]. The most striking features are the three long courses of *chattris*, which mark out a bead of light across the sky with their arched openings. Four *guldasta* ornaments punctuate the corner ends of the second tier.

Returning to the first tier, two walls project from both ends of the Great Imambarah façade and slope downwards, each terminating with a two-storey octagonal bastion [Figs. 58, 59]. The inner façades of both sloped walls have a similar unusual ornamental program. The east wall has a *bangla*-cusped arch niche with floriated engaged columns flanked on both sides by two floriated cusped-arch reliefs enclosing surmounting cusped and elliptical arched niches [Fig. 58]. The *bangla* relief extends in a straight line over the flanking arch reliefs. Two lotus-bud dome reliefs and baluster reliefs have been moulded into the wall. Two narrow surmounting arch reliefs, flank this faux architectural relief as well as two floriated cusped arch openings each surmounted by a small ornamented elliptical arch opening. While the central arched niche is not directly accessible because of a high ledge, the outer arches have a series of four steps. The opening on the left leads to the octagonal bastion that is highly similar to the engaged half-bastions attached to the Great Imambarah and the walled arcade along the eastern

court. The arch to the right leads to a broad staircase that ascends the height of the Great Imambarah, the sole access to the higher levels of the building.

The western projecting wall mirrors the one on the east except that the central arch is open and not a closed niche and the outer flanking archways are open [Fig. 59]. The left arch leads to a pathway that leads around the Great Imambarah's west face and to the *masjid* on the right.

The Great Imambarah exterior - west façade

If one passes through the arches of the western projecting wall and turns left one encounters the heavily ornamented, symmetrical west façade of the Great Imambarah [Fig. 64]. Seen from a distance, the façade resembles a gateway arcade, with a central foliated cusped arch half-octagon niche in a rectilinear border that projects forward and upward from the two flanking wings [Fig. 67]. The niche has a raised ledge accessed by two small inset stairs on either end. Each face of the octagon has a smooth blind arch, but the central one looks as if it once opened to the interior but has been recently filled newer bricks. The niche's foliated, grooved half-dome appears to have been heavily retouched [Fig. 68]. A series of surmounting arch openings - a cusped arch, two rounded arches and a rounded arch with a projecting *bangla* style balcony – flanks the central arch. Two large channels extending to the roof and faced with four surmounting narrow elliptical arches also flank the central arched niche. The channels are stained black with mould from moisture and are clearly intended for draining storm water during the heavy downpours of the monsoons. Above the central arch is an arcade of three elliptical arch openings. The rectilinear bands between all the arches are ornamented with cutout

quatrefoils. Above the top arcade there is a projecting eave, a row of floral relief motifs, and above that, a continuous course of *chatris* runs across. The corners are augmented with delicate *guldasta* ornaments [Fig. 64].

The wings flanking the central projection also have a large floriated cusped arch niche but it is rectangular and its ledge is inaccessible [Figs. 65, 66]. The ends of the ledge are accentuated with short baluster columns. The central pointed-arch opening is also filled in with brick. The niche's half-dome has an impressive series of ornamental *muqarnas* with interconnecting geometric tracery. A row of three elliptical arches run above the arched niche, the central one being larger than the adjacent ones. Arched openings using a cusped arch surmounted by two elliptical arches, flank the arched niche. Vertical bands of small cusped arch niches separate the central niche from the flanking ones.

The Great Imambarah exterior - south façade

The two-tiered, long south façade of the Great Imambarah is also carefully composed and ornamented [Fig. 69]. The first tier has an arcade that divides into two principal groups, the central and outer arcades. The central group consists of seven foliated, cusped, raised arched openings with inset elliptical arches surround by a pointed arch moulding – an elliptical-cusped arch - and the transition areas between the two are smooth concave surfaces. The piers that divide the central group have three squat elliptical arch reliefs surmounting each other.

A blind pointed-cusp arch and a group of three open arches flank the central group. The blind arch is filled with a small cusped arch niche and surrounded by five

small relief moulded cusped arches. The outer group of arches each has a central foliated elliptical-cusped arch flanked by foliated pointed-cusp arches. The blind arches and the arches of the outer groups all use *muqarnas*. The dividing piers for the outer group have three narrow cusped arch niches that surmount each other.

Above all three groups, an alternating series of ornamented open elliptical arches with a small latticed railing and a blind latticed arch, runs the length of the whole south façade [Fig. 70]. Above the projecting eave that runs the length of the building, there is a course of *chattris* separated into groups of five by a single *chatri* dome bounded by four *guldastas* [Fig. 69]. The rectilinear bands bordering the arches have iron rings bolted in [Fig. 70].

At the ends of the southern façade, two additional series of three surmounting rows of cusped-arch reliefs complete the wall [Fig. 69]. The ends of the façade incorporate foliated, grooved pilasters segmented by two projecting eaves, with the top one cut to look like the sepals of a flower that support a square lotus bud *chatri*. Only the eastern one still stands. As on the north façade, the second tier is recessed, creating a terrace that forms part of the roof of the Great Imambarah.

The Great Imambarah exterior – east façade

The east façade of the Great Imambarah is irregularly planned and has the most poorly preserved ornamental stucco; it appears to have been heavily modified [Fig. 71]. The original thin brick wafers used to build the complex are clearly visible. The central section of the façade projects upward but not forward like the west façade. Near its top, there is a course of seven pointed-arch openings alternating with blind arches and a

course of five elliptical arch openings alternating with blind elliptical arches below. Above a projecting eave there is a row of floral relief motifs and a course of *chattris* that is bounded by *guldastas* with small octagonal *chattris*. The left section has a course of elliptical arch openings alternating with blind ones, surmounted by an eave and a row of *chatri* domes. The section to the right is similar except it has a series of only blind arches and a few non-aligned openings. The exposed brick back of the projecting sloped wall is also visible, but it has no extant ornament and is deteriorating.

The Great Imambarah interior – entry hall

One can enter the Great Imambarah through the central arch on the north by ascending three small steps. The interior is laid out as a series of three parallel, interconnecting, longitudinal halls, each with an adjoining chamber on each end. The entry hall is painted mostly with light green and white accents [Fig. 72]. It has seven foliated double-cusped archways on the north and south. The inner cusped arch is not ornamental but carved into the structural arch. The bordering rectilinear bands around the arches have small iron rings and the dividing piers have two surmounting arch niches, one cusped and one elliptical. The short walls at the east and west ends of the entry hall each have a large cusped-*bangla* arch resting on engaged floriated columns. A series of iron rings lines the top of the arch, which is flanked by surmounting cusped and elliptical arch niches.

A coved cornice (*cavetto*) joins the four walls of the entry hall to the gently curved sail vault ceiling. Small elliptical arch openings that curve with the cornice open into it and are centred over each archway below. Multiple rows of iron rings are

embedded in the ceiling, and small electric candelabra-style chandeliers hang along the length of the central row.

The cusped archways connect to smaller, identical, rectangular chambers to the east and west [Fig. 73]. The depth of each connecting archway is ornamented with successive rows of *muqarnas* and geometric tracery. The treatment of the short east and west walls of the entry hall is replicated on the other side of the dividing wall facing the ancillary chambers and on the interiors of the east and west exterior walls. These each have within the cusped-*bangla* arch relief a raised *bangla* arch niche. The eastern ancillary chamber differs slightly since two slender elliptical arch openings flank the niche leading to an inset staircase that turns inwards and gives access to the raised section of the niche.

The north and south walls of the ancillary chambers reflect each other closely. They each have a large central cusped-*bangla* arch opening identical to the one connecting the central and eastern chamber. On either side of each arch, there is a smaller cusped arched opening surmounted by *bangla* elliptical arch. Tall uniquely, cusped arch niches surmounted by a *bangla* elliptical arch niche flank the cusped arch opening. Like the central hall, the chamber is roofed with a coved cornice and shallow rectilinear *bangla* vault.

The Great Imambarah interior – central hall

Returning to the central entry hall one can pass through any of the seven cusped archways into the largest hall in the whole complex, the central chamber of the Great Imambarah with its monumental *bangla* vault [Fig. 74]. No light shines directly into the

central chamber. Only the ambient light from the entry hall streams through the arches to illuminate the significantly darker and cooler hall. A paint scheme of blue paint and yellow accents colours the walls of the hall. The wall treatment of the entry hall's seven double-cusped arches is replicated on the north façade of the central chamber. On the south wall are also seven arched openings, of which the five raised central ones are identical, with a *bangla* relief arch supported by engaged foliated double columns set within a cusped arch profile. Within the three centre arches, tall models of domed buildings ornamented with tinsel and silver foil called *taziyah* sit illumined with incandescent and fluorescent light [Fig. 77]. The two outer elliptical archways have no *bangla* façade and no engaged columns, but they incorporate four recessed steps leading to the next hall, the raised area known as the Shāh Nashīn.

The central hall is not empty. In front of the piers of the Shah Nashin wall, wood tables covered with black velvet stand, supporting tall mirrors with highly ornamented gilt architectural frames [Fig. 75]. At the centre of the hall is a diagonally slanted grave surrounded by a crude wood fence that is covered with marble fragments and a cloth and attributed to the patron of the complex, Asaf al-Dawlah. Four poles around the grave stretch a brocaded cloth canopy over the grave. At the head of the grave rests a framed document in Persian script [Fig. 76][Appendix B]. On both sides of the grave stand two very tall five-tiered brass candleholders. Large slabs of polished black stone cover the floor and reflect the ambient light streaming in from the north.

Where the walls begin to touch the ceiling, a low, red sandstone post-and-lattice balcony runs around the entire perimeter [Fig. 75]. Evenly spaced brackets that align with the architectural features below support the balcony. A large concave cornice with

three tiers of large *muqarnas* niches and interconnecting tracery also surrounds the ceiling perimeter. Every fourth *muqarnas* on the lowest tier has a dark pointed arch opening. Rows of iron rings are spaced over the entire ceiling's area, and various modest brass candelabras and glass lamps hang from the rings running down the centre row.

The Great Imambarah interior – east chamber of the central hall

The three arched openings of the east and west walls of the central chamber each have a central double-cusped arch flanked by a cusped arch relief surmounted by an elliptical arch relief and a cusped archway. The three archways on the east lead into a large square chamber covered with a shallow dome [Fig. 78]. Each wall has a large cusped arch relief with a rectangular border. Cusped arches with rectangular outlines also span the corners of the room creating four squinches and the illusion of an octagon of eight cusped arches that form the transition zone between the square floor plan and the dome. Each corner arch has two levels. The first incorporates the smaller archways leading to the central hall and the entry hall, as well as a corner niche. The second level has three elliptical arch openings with red sandstone lattice railings. The ones on the eastern, outermost wall open to the outside, admitting dramatic shafts of light that cut through the dark interior. Two courses of *muqarnas* run above these openings. A sixteen-sided transitional zone of decorative and actual moulded elliptical arches surmounts the octagonal transition zone. In every alternate arch, corresponding with the apexes of the cusped arches below, a square red sandstone lattice balcony supported by brackets projects into the hall. Of the eight balconies, the ones on the east, north, and south open directly to the outside and permit additional shafts of light into the chamber like the openings below. The interstitial

spaces between the arches are filled in and form a perfect circle that serves as a base for the smooth shallow dome that covers the space [Fig. 79]. The dome interior is decorated with three concentric rings of moulded leaf reliefs. A thin rope-like trim decorates the first ring around the dome's perimeter. Large leaves, slanting left, curl inwards onto the dome's curvature, and small ones curl outwards from the circular trim. Near the apex of the dome, there is a second ring of rope-like trim with large leaves curling outwards and smaller ones inwards. Within this ring, there sits another smaller, third ring with outward curling leaves. The leaves are very distinctive, moulded in deep relief, spiralling inwards on themselves.

A raised *bangla* façade, elliptical arch opening with engaged foliated columns is cut into the cusped arch relief on the south wall and flanked by two smaller cusped arches with stairs to the Shah Nashin hall behind. The east wall has a raised cusped-*bangla* façade arched niche set within the large cusped arch relief on that wall. Two small staircases cut into the ends of the raised ledge. Both cusped-arch reliefs on the north and west walls have large cusped-*bangla* archways with *muqarnas* along their depths leading to the adjoining entry hall's east chamber and the central hall. Two smaller cusped arch openings flank the principal archways.

The Great Imambarah interior – west chamber of the central hall

The chamber to the west of the central Great Imambarah hall is considerably different from its counterpart to the east [Fig. 80]. It too is a square room but the dome that covers it is considerably deeper, creating a more hemispherical volume. Instead of the cusped arches of the east chamber, shallow elliptical arches with foliated concave ribs span the

corners of the room joining relief images of shallow elliptical vaults on each of the four walls, which each have a projecting square red sandstone lattice balcony. They complete the octagonal transition zone consisting of eight elliptical shallow arches with no rectilinear exterior border. The interstitial spaces are filled to create a multi-cusped ring that forms the base of the foliated grooved dome. Ribs in line with the cusps radiate from the dome's interior apex, making it resemble a clamshell. The lines of the ribs have thin rope-like moulding from which leaves curl off either side. They terminate with a ring of outward facing acanthus leaves. A radial display of long and short leaves fill the centre of the ring. This pattern is repeated in the various half-domes used in the room [Fig. 81].

Beneath the large, shallow, elliptical arch of the west wall is a foliated, pointed-cusp arched niche set within a rectilinear border flanked by three surmounting shallow cusped arch niches. The profile of the raised pointed-arch niche is inwardly bevelled and incorporates three steps. Two smaller, foliated, pointed-cusp arch openings set in a rectilinear border flank the central arched niche. The south wall has a raised *bangla* façade, elliptical arch with engaged floriated columns, that is flanked by three surmounting cusped arch reliefs. Two pointed-cusp arches with inset stairs leading to the raised Shah Nashin hall, flank the central arch.

The Great Imambarah interior – the Shah Nashin hall

The Shah Nashin halls have a raised floor. The central chamber has seven elliptical arch openings with *bangla*-vault treatments on its south wall and is roofed with a steeply arched *bangla* vault. The south wall of the rectangular west chamber has an elliptical arch opening set within an elliptical arch relief with a *bangla* vault façade and engaged

foliated columns. Arch reliefs and a pointed-elliptical arch opening flank it. The west wall has a pointed arch niche set within an elliptical *bangla* vault relief arch and flanked by two surmounting elliptical arch reliefs. The space is roofed with a coved vault.

The Great Imambarah interior – the east staircase

A broad enclosed staircase climbs the east side of the Great Imambarah and leads to the roof [Fig. 84]. Along the way, smaller, narrower stairs branch off to the right (east) providing access into the structure of the Great Imambarah. The first one leads to an elliptical arch opening over a subsidiary arch in the east chamber of the entry hall and to an open window to the right. While ascending the main stair, one sees a window revealing the *bangla* vault over the east chamber of the entry hall appears. Further up the stairs, one finds an offshoot with three possibilities. Straight ahead, there is a narrow round-arched passageway with round-arch openings that lead to the square balconies in the domes of the east and west chamber and the main balcony of the central hall of the Great Imambarah [Fig. 85]. To the right, there is a small set of stairs that turn 180 degrees, pass a narrow pointed arch passageway pierced with windows and lead to the broad terrace above the entry hall [Fig. 87]. To the left, there is a set of left-turning stairs that has its own offshoots that lead to an upper balcony in the east chamber of the central hall, a narrow passageway under the one mentioned above, and a narrow passageway along the east that leads to the south terrace of the Great Imambarah [Fig. 86].

On the terrace, the projecting exterior central hall is visible. There is an arcade of alternating blind and recessed pointed arches surmounted by a low post and lattice, red sandstone railing. Within the recessed arches, the exterior curvature of the vaults of the

central hall is visible, and in some areas the stucco has peeled to reveal the underlying brickwork [Fig. 88]. There are passageways separating the central hall's *bangla* vault and its eastern and western domes. Instead of a narrow passageway, the western side allows passage from the south terrace to the north one by means of three interconnected rooms. The central rectangular room has a heavily ornamented, steeply arched *bangla* vault and commands an impressive view of western Lucknow through its three open arches to the west [Fig. 89]. The opposite wall has an arched opening leading to an upper balcony in the dome of the west chamber of the central hall. The outer square rooms have projecting heavily ornamented *bangla*-vault balconies. Above the arcade of alternating blind and recessed arches, there is a narrow terrace fronting a second arcade of alternating blind and recessed pointed arches. They front broad, arched passageways that surround and separate the vaults of the central chamber [Figs. 90, 91]. Along these passageways, there are multiple arched niches revealing the exterior curvatures of the vaults [Fig. 92]. The vaults are surrounded with a supporting arched brace. The passageways lead to stairs on the east that open onto the vast flat roof surmounting the vaults of the central hall and is enclosed by *chatris*. It is possible to enter the engaged bastions from this terrace, which affords a majestic view of the principal court dominated by the towering *masjid* to the west.

The Baoli Palace

Before the vast stairs in front of the Great Imambarah in the principal court, a pathway leading left, to the east, towards the gateway of the Baoli Palace [Fig. 93]. The gateway has a tall foliated pointed-cusp arch opening with an inset ascending staircase,

surmounted by a course of *chatris* and flanked by multiple small arch reliefs. The Baoli Palace consists of a four-sided cusped arch arcade and pathway that surrounds a sunken, arcaded stepwell that collects water and an octagonal well behind it [Figs. 10, 94, 95, 96]. The stepwell has two levels, a row of cusped arches running above a row of arches that lengthen as the steps go down and a large pointed-cusp arch on the east end. The stepwell's water level likely never surpassed the lower tier of arches. The east wall of the arcade that encloses the stepwell has two surmounting rows of round arches, which lead to the passageways and chambers encircling the octagonal well. The lower arches are unusually short making passage difficult. The west wall of the first arcade of the stepwell has ordinary-sized arches allowing far easier passage.

The octagonal well has three visible arcaded levels, beginning with a pointed arch on the bottom, a *bangla* façade, elliptical arch above it and a surmounting cusped arch with a *bangla* façade [Fig. 97]. One can circulate around the well and there are several, two-level, recessed, short chambers with stairs fronted by a double arcade of round arches [Fig. 99].

The Baoli Palace has been heavily remodelled with reddish cement, and uncharacteristic italianate arches are used for reinforcing the structure in the passageways surrounding the octagonal well [Fig. 98]. Many of the spaces are very short and awkward to manoeuvre in and the well no longer holds fresh water. It contains only water that is dank and filled with algae and litter. Yet, the recessed and sunken chambers are still remarkably cool, a welcome respite from the heat of a north Indian summer.

Conclusions

One of the most intriguing things to notice about the site is the limitation of conventional and even Persian architectural vocabulary in describing the building types used in the complex and their architectural motifs. Compound terms like gateway-arcade are needed to describe building types that often defy contemporary ways of grouping architectural space. The principal gateways of the complex are fused to its adjacent arcades, and their circulation systems are interconnected. Terms like arch or even cusped arch inadequately capture the frequent nesting of arches within each other that takes place and the bewildering array of combinations that occur. An architectural vocabulary rooted in Anglo-European architectural traditions is strained when used to describe the architectural features of the Great Imambarah complex.

The other striking aspect of the complex is the consistency in architectural motifs and ornament from its outer periphery to its innermost spaces. For example, the ornamental moulded floral flourish over the apogee of the arch of the Rumi Darvazah is identical to the ones placed over the arches of the Great Imambarah [Figs. 16, 61]. This consistency not only brings aesthetic unity but suggests that the complex was built in a continuous campaign and that there was a measure of standardization in building techniques.

Several principles of design are in effect. The site is planned around the notion of regulated access. The structures themselves are configured as enclosures to regulate the movement of people and animals through a hierarchy of spaces. This hierarchy of spaces is marked by increased ornament that is progressively denser. Ornaments used separately in secondary spaces are combined for greater effect in primary spaces. There is a

progressive concentration of different motifs into one unit. Organization also becomes more elaborate at higher planes than lower ones. Structures and spaces that are higher are generally more complex and intricately ornamented.

Far from being repetitious in its use of architectural motifs, the site's buildings incorporate continuously shifting and innovative combinations of familiar architectural motifs. Pointed-cusp arches are set within *bangla* profiles, and vice versa. Building façades sometimes carry over façade designs from opposite faces of the same building or opposite buildings. The lines between ornament and structure are frequently blurred. Ornament imitates structure; structure becomes ornamental. Though an organic ornamental aesthetic permeates the site, it conforms to rigorous geometric schemes. There is a continuous sense of play and surprise behind the combinations of forms, which on first glance hint at uniformity and standardized design.

There is a gradient in the size of spaces offered by the complex that range from a single-cell chamber to a vast enclosed hall. There is great mastery over a range of structural and vaulting techniques, and the complex is a pattern-book of vaults, including, coved, domed and sail vaults that range from the diminutive to the monumental. This gradient of spaces also allows for a gradient in room climates to help cope with changes in weather. As it gets hotter, one can progressively move into dark, more enclosed and cooler spaces.

All of these principles at work point to an elaborate complex requiring immense forethought, planning, administrative ability, and structural ingenuity. The Great Imambarah complex is a work of sustained thought, marked also by a spirit of innovation and play.

CHAPTER THREE

In the Minds of Intellectuals

The Shifting Significance of the Great Imambarah Complex

The story of how the Great Imambarah complex has been a part of the writing of intellectuals concerned with Awadh's history, from its construction until the present, is as important as the story of its development and subsequent life. Their views on the complex not only compete with each other to define the ways we regard the site, but also tell as much about the prevailing currents of intellectual thought and their respective historical moments; they are simultaneously works of reflection on their respective subjects and pieces of evidence illuminating the era in which they were produced.

Though consistently mentioned, the Great Imambarah complex is usually only a brief part of the writings that include it. A selection of writings that are most important in terms of their influence and perspective is considered in this chapter. There is a noticeable shift in tenor between those writings that precede South Asian independence from Anglo-European colonial control and those that follow. The former group includes the works of writers such as Abū Ṭālib Iṣfahānī, James Fergusson, Henry Keene, P.C. Mookherjee, Alois Fühler, Abd al- Halim Sharar, and Percy Brown, whose views and reasons for writing are informed in various ways by the British Indian colonial encounter.¹ All of these writers, who include erudite

individuals and scholars, see themselves to some extent in a contest of virtues between the cultures and civilizations of India and Europe. Immersed in a post-colonial, highly globalized environment, the latter group of writers, which includes Hermann Goetz, P. N. Oak, Keith Hjortshoj, Banmali Tandan, S. A. A. Rizvi, Juan Cole, Michael Fisher, Neeta Das and Catherine Asher, who are compelled to confront the values of the British Indian colonial enterprise while building on its scholarly legacy.² With some exceptions, these writers tend to be professional scholars aspiring to apply more 'scientific' modes of thinking to their respective subjects.³ In the context of these writings, the Great Imambarah complex is merely one element in illuminating various broader trends. In addition to representing the range of intellectual perspectives that have been applied to the Great Imambarah complex, all of these writers have arguably contributed the most or have been most influential in shaping how the site is regarded.

Despite being sparse, the treatments the complex has received are rooted in remarkably diverse intellectual traditions that include Mughal court historical writing; nineteenth and early twentieth-century Anglo-European Orientalist philology, history, archaeology; and Urdu journalism and historiography.⁴ Late twentieth-century Islamic studies, anthropology and the historical study of art, architecture, culture and politics have also been influential. In addition, some writers bring certain sympathies to their writing, which include Euro-centrist, British nationalist, Indian nationalist - both secularist and Hindu fundamentalist - and *Shi'i Isna Ashari* perspectives.

Data and Evidence Pertaining to the Complex

How have these writers learned about the Great Imambarah complex? What sources of information have they had to draw on? All rely in varying degrees on their interpretations of direct experience, oral knowledge, texts, images and archaeological remains to craft their versions of history. Inevitably, with the passage of time such information degenerates or is lost, a trend countered by the conservation agendas of personal collectors in Lucknow, Indian heritage conservation agencies and the Anglo-European Orientalist project and its legacy of collecting historical manuscripts now deposited in the archives of modern Great Britain, India and France and producing documentary evidence through paintings and photographs. One event in particular has dramatically affected the survival of information pertaining to the complex. The Mutiny, or Rebellion of 1273/1857, and its after-effects wreaked havoc on the physical landscape of Lucknow, especially the Great Imambarah complex, and affected the survival of contemporary Awadh court documents.

The incapacity to preserve, as well as the shifting of historical values, has led to neglect and limited the survival of information. Primary textual information pertaining directly to the complex appears mainly in Persian, English, Latin and French and tends to occur in small passages scattered throughout larger documents. Urdu and English translations and excerpts in the writings of intellectuals sometimes reproduce these sources. The *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community of Lucknow is alive and well and is the bearer of ritual practices, memories of history and libraries of

manuscripts, though it is confronted by the challenges of being a minority within a Muslim minority in the modern nation-state of India.

There are various types of surviving textual records that refer to the complex and the practices associated with it while it was being built and shortly afterwards. In Persian, there are court histories and travelogues that not only retell the past but also include events witnessed by the writer. Some daily or weekly records of court activities known as the *akhbars* are extant. Biographical literature on the *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* has survived as well. Several texts in Latin, English and French are written in the Anglo-European tradition of published travel diaries and journals. Voluminous correspondence within the British East India Company and with the court of Awadh in Persian and English translation has been preserved.

Early images of the complex also survive. Some are by indigenous miniature artists working in a tradition transformed through exposure to Anglo-European art. The majority of images are frequently a part of Anglo-European travel diaries and are drawn by the author or by accompanying professional artists, both Indian and Anglo-European. Commercial British artists rendered the site as well for publication in England.

Paradoxically, the after-effects of the Mutiny, namely the occupation of the Great Imambarah complex by the British army, have produced considerable photographic and architectural survey data. The post-Mutiny history of the site is accessible through traces of evidence in the administrative records of the British and the Husaynabad Trust, which came to control the site. Urdu journals and newspapers in Lucknow bear small nuggets of information. More contemporary traces of the life of the complex are to be found in the conservation records of the Lucknow Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (A. S. I.), city planning documents, news media

coverage and even in a few Bollywood films, which have used the site as a filming locale.

These records are ultimately limited in the information they provide. No records explicitly detailing Asaf al-Dawlah's intentions or documenting the design and construction process are forthcoming. With some exceptions, men have produced the majority of the records, and the experiences of women with the site are not directly accessible. This is the case with Sunni and Hindu perspectives as well.

The perspectives of the writers mentioned above are explored before and after Indian independence in more detail in this chapter, with an attempt to understand how their respective contexts and vantage points influenced the way they interpreted the Great Imambarah complex's significance. Four trains of thought that have interacted with each other on occasion emerge. The longest and most developed one frames the complex in an evolving art historical/archaeological debate. The central issues revolve around how to assess the site's aesthetic value and whether it reflected cultural degeneration or vitality and influence? (A key point was that architectural and economic decline was reflected in the use of stucco on exterior surfaces instead of marble exterior finish.) The second most common train of thought relates the complex to Asaf al-Dawlah's qualities and performance as a ruler. At issue is whether the complex testifies to the weakness, impotence, decadence, benevolence or piety of Asaf al-Dawlah as a ruler. Third, the site's religious dimensions are explored primarily through the Great Imambarah's relationship to the commemoration rituals of Muharram. Various interpretations of the site as a household, communal gathering place for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, and as a public endorsement of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition are put forward. The fourth and final train of thought is generally rejected by scholarly discourse, but remains influential in public discourse in modern India. The

issue presented is whether the site is a Hindu monument or an Islamic one and whether its authentic history has been veiled.

Pre-Independence Writings

To glorify one's patron or at least to present his view of history was arguably part of the requirements of successful writing in the Mughal court. Abu Talib Isfahani, a former official in Asaf al-Dawlah's court who had fallen from favour and had been assigned to assist the British officer Colonel Hannay, brought these values to bear when he was asked to write an account of Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah's reign by a certain Captain Richardson, while residing in Calcutta in 1211/1796.⁵ Though his account details the reign of Asaf al-Dawlah, his patrons were British colonial administrators, who were frustrated with Asaf al-Dawlah's indebtedness to them and viewed him as fiscally irresponsible and incompetent. Having lost his personal diaries, Isfahani produced from memory a year-by-year history in the style of Mughal court narratives. Not surprisingly, it chronicled a history of moral depravity, mismanagement, and incompetence and concluded with a recommendation that the British should take a more active role in the rule of Awadh.⁶ What Isfahani wrote was not simply a record of events or his own views, but what he thought his British patrons would want to read. Isfahani's very useful discussion of the Great Imambarah complex was set within this narrative.⁷

By his own account, Abu Talib Isfahani was born in 1166/1752 in Lucknow to a family that had hailed from Iran and was instrumental in the establishment of Nawwabi Awadh. Distrusted by Shuja al-Dawlah, Isfahani's father fled to Bengal and after completing his education in Lucknow under the Nawwab-Vazir's

compassionate patronage, Isfahani followed. He returned to the Awadh court in Lucknow in 1189/1775 where he gained favour, but ran afoul of Asaf al-Dawlah's principal minister, Ḥaydar Begh Khān, and was compelled against his wishes to serve the British officer, Colonel Hannay, as an administrator. Isfahani prospered in this role but nourished great resentment towards Haydar Begh Khan and Asaf al-Dawlah.⁸

How strange it was, then, that Isfahani wrote admiringly of the buildings he knew as Asaf al-Dawlah's Imambarah and the Rumi Darvazah. After writing about the numerous poorly constructed and abandoned buildings built under Asaf al-Dawlah's aggressive building campaign in Lucknow, he wrote, "In a word, of all his buildings, the Imambarah is the finest and most strongly built" and of the Rumi Darvazah, "It dazzles the eyes of those who look up."⁹ The discussion of the Imambarah was the only instance in Isfahani's narrative where his criticism of the Nawwab abated. However, Isfahani was sure to criticize the Nawwab-Vazir's general frivolousness regarding building construction, the oppressiveness of his aggressive building program, and the gratuitousness of his expenditure on *taziyahs*, Imambarah ornamentation, and the annual Muharram commemorations. The Great Imambarah was a building to be admired in itself, but one that Asaf al-Dawlah misused. Though Isfahani singled out the Imambarah and the Rumi Darvazah, he perceived them to be a part of an integrated complex that included the congregational *masjid*, monumental gates, enclosed courts, outoffices, a hospital, and travellers' rest houses.

Writing in post-Mutiny British India when the Great Imambarah complex was occupied by British soldiers and catering to a sizeable market of British tourists and officers visiting India, Henry Keene (1240-1333/1825-1915) published a slim, but historically informed, travel guide in 1291/1875, A Handbook for Visitors to Lucknow with Preliminary Notes on Allahabad and Cawnpore, which included one of

the earliest British considerations of the Imambarah complex. The guidebook was designed primarily to facilitate people's desire to retrace the events of the Mutiny as they played out throughout the city. This was one of several guides he wrote for cities such as Agra and Delhi that enjoyed several reprintings. Keene was no dilettante; he was knowledgeable in Persian and a trained historian who had written about the rise of the British in India in his book, The Fall of the Moghul Empire of Hindustan, a book he referred to in his Lucknow guide.¹⁰ However, he did not use Persian records for the guidebook and relied on articles in the Calcutta Reviews, English histories of the region, the Lucknow album and a guide to Lucknow that is now lost.¹¹ In his work on the Mughal empire and in the Lucknow guide, Keene expressed confidence that British rule in India, though somewhat dishonourable in Awadh, was beneficial to Indians, whom he, like so many of his British contemporaries, condescendingly regarded as weak and incapable of self-rule.¹²

Keene instructed his readers that the sites of greatest historical interest were those connected with the Mutiny, so the Great Imambarah, the *masjid* and Rumi Darvazah were part of the Machi Bhavan fortress, which was first occupied by the British during the Mutiny and then abandoned for the Residency.¹³ However, Keene digressed and gave additional details on the site, which he saw as a series of impressive monuments made in a period of decline and as substandard to the monuments of Agra, Delhi, and the Deccan.¹⁴ To his credit, Keene explained the religious uses of the Great Imambarah during Muharram, associating it with the *taziyah*. He saw the Imambarah complex buildings' "vast size, their striking style, and their origin" as their "claims to notice."¹⁵ There were intimations that the Great Imambarah site was an important reaction by Asaf al-Dawlah and the elite to the

famine crisis of 1198/1784; it was also seen as a major part of a building programme to visually establish Lucknow as the capital of Awadh.¹⁶

Writing at roughly the same time, James Fergusson, who was a successful British-Indian plantation farmer and erudite enthusiast of world architecture, argued for the inclusion of South Asian architecture into the established European architectural canon because of its intrinsic value and as a means to enrich nineteenth-century British architectural thought. He wrote A History of Architecture of All Countries, with the view that the historical study of architecture had “ethnographic value;” that is, it was “as important as language for discriminating between the different races of mankind.” Fergusson’s appreciation of the value of Indian architecture was so great that he created a separate volume for the subject and surprisingly regarded “Saracenic” Indian architecture as the epitome of the “Saracenic,” or Islamicate, architectural legacy. He wrote, “When however, this great branch (Indian Saracenic) is cut off, the Saracenic styles west of the Indus do not occupy a very important place in the general history of architecture – nothing that can compare with those of Assyria or Egypt.”¹⁷

Fergusson assessed the significance of the Great Imambarah monument in two ways. First, it was, in scale, one of the very last examples of pure “Muhammadan” architecture in India that was untainted by European influence, and it compared favourably with Sultanate and Mughal precedents but not with their architectural details. He thought that, “there are some buildings into which the European leaven has not penetrated, and which are worthy of being mentioned in the same volume as the works of their ancestors. Among these is the Great Imambarah, which, though its details will not bear too close an examination, is still conceived on so grand a scale as to enable it to rank with buildings of an earlier age.”¹⁸ Fergusson derisively viewed

subsequent Awadh architecture that incorporated European design elements using indigenous construction methods and craftsmen as part of a “bastard style.”

Second, Fergusson valued the technology behind the Imambarah’s roof construction, acknowledging its superiority to European techniques. In his view, the Great Imambarah had a “more durable form of roof than our most scientific Gothic vaulting; certainly far cheaper and far more easily made, since it is literally cast on a mud form, which may be moulded into any shape the fancy of the architect may dictate.”¹⁹ Preoccupied with the formal aspects of architecture, he was uninterested in the site’s religious dimensions and wrote nothing about it.

Considerable portions of Lucknow were levelled by the British in the post-Mutiny aftermath and its new masters began pushing the city towards modernity. P. C. Mookherjee, a witness to the loss of Lucknow’s architectural heritage, was employed as an officer by the British, but was dismayed by the direction his city was taking. He was also resentful of British aloofness and political opportunism and saw Lucknow entering into economic and moral decline under the British. A Hindu himself, Mookherjee felt that Hindus were morally better than Muslims, but thought that Muslims had earned Hindu loyalty in the past and together Muslims and Hindus had forged an Indian civilization. When Mookherjee looked at the architectural landscape of Lucknow he saw the virtues of Indian civilization being indiscriminately discarded for those of Europe. In his self-published book Pictorial Lucknow dated May 26, 1883/1300, Mookherjee wrote,

[I]s there nothing in the native civilization worth preservation? Has the European civilization become so indispensable to us, that we should at once throw away what is national and adopt the other without pausing to consider where are we drifting to? Is the past history of Awadh so despicable an affair, that no lessons can we derive therefrom for our future guidance? Is there nothing in the dying local arts, especially architecture which requires enquiring into, and which deserves encouragement?²⁰

In this light, the Great Imambarah, the congregational *masjid* and the Rumi Darvazah were among Lucknow's surviving splendours and were products of a civilization now ignored. He saw them as individual monuments, testifying to past achievements, but not as an integrated functioning complex. He accepted the popular views of the day that the Great Imambarah was a famine relief project by Asaf al-Dawlah, whom he regarded as a well-intentioned but foolish leader. About the Imambarah he wrote, "It is a redeeming feature of the otherwise weak reign of Asaf al-Dawlah."²¹ The buildings of the Imambarah complex were unlike the British headquarters in Lucknow known as the Residency, which he thought was impressive but extravagant and indicative of British insularity.²²

British archaeological interest and activity in India were fostered by societies for Orientalists in the late eighteenth century and culminated with the institutionalization of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1277/1861, a British colonial institution that survived Indian independence. After a hiatus, the Survey's activities resumed in the 1880s, when Keene, Fergusson, and Mookherjee were writing about Lucknow. The Survey, which was predisposed towards monuments of Hindu and Buddhist antiquity and the inscribed architectural splendours of Sultanate and Mughal Muslim courts, did not classify the buildings of Lucknow as worthy of documentation or conservation, keeping in line with views of the local government. Perhaps this was because they were relatively recent buildings, and their lack of antiquity, made them less significant.

In support of the A. S. I.'s mandate to conserve India's architectural heritage, the Lieutenant Governor of the North Western Provinces, Sir John Strachey, sent a memo to his subordinates requesting an inventory of buildings of historical or archaeological interest and an accounting of funds spent on their conservation. On the

23rd of Zay al-Hijjah, 1308/July 30, 1891, the Commissioner of Lucknow H. D. Wonte replied that money had only been spent on the Residency, which was not the kind of building he understood the memo to be soliciting information about. He wrote,

There are of course many other such buildings, such as the Martinière, Ḥusaynabad, Shāh Najāf etc. etc. which are preserved by priests and the like and again there are Nazūl buildings like the Chatar Manzil. It is presumed that information regarding these is not-at-present desired.²³

Wonte did not even think to mention the Great Imambarah complex, perhaps because it was barely a century old, or perhaps because of a lingering contempt for the cultural heritage of the mutineers.

However, in a survey of monuments and inscriptions in the North West Provinces and Awadh made for the A.S.I. in 1308/1891, Alois Fühler did admire Lucknow's architectural profiles, if not its "detestable" details, calling it "one of the most beautiful and picturesque large cities of India." The *masjid* was "noble" and imperial in dimensions and he thought, "[T]he Great Imambarah is the architectural glory of Awadh," but "cannot compare with pure examples of Mughal architecture." This would remain the extent of the Survey's interest in the site until after Indian Independence.

In response to the introduction of the British penny paper to India and as an extension of Mughal court newswriting, Urdu newspapers and literary journals emerged in nineteenth-century North India, and in addition to news, some would begin to offer essays, novels in serial form, and historical essays.²⁴ Having worked for one of North India's most popular Urdu dailies produced in Lucknow, Abdul Halim Sharar (1276-1344/1860-1926) established his own Lucknow literary journal Dil Gudāz [Quickener of the Heart], which was published right up until his death in

1344/1926. Sharar was interested in developing a modern vibrant Urdu intellectual environment and culture to parallel the rich intellectual environment that was being fostered in English in Calcutta and Delhi. From 1331/1913 onwards, Sharar composed and published essays on Lucknow's history and culture under the title Hindūstān Men Mashriqī Tamaddun ka Ākhrī Namūna [The Last example of Eastern Culture in Hindustan].

Sharar's vision of Lucknow was a romantic one governed by social etiquette and resplendent with elegant lifestyles; it was a culture that fostered advances in all realms of culture like medicine, the arts, and poetry. His brief references to the Great Imambarah complex portrayed it as a collection of monuments. He mentioned the Imambarah and Rumi Darvazah, but left out the congregational *masjid*. He believed it was a famine relief project designed by the architect Kifayat Allah and built in part by an impoverished nobility.

For Sharar, sincere religious motives motivated the benevolent Asaf al-Dawlah to commission the Imambarah and its construction. In his words, "The result was the creation of an edifice of the most imposing grandeur and matchless character, the like of which could be found nowhere else."²⁵ Like his romanticized view of historic Lucknow, the Imambarah was a work of "rare beauty and great dignity and distinction" and was "one of the world's wonders." The complex owed nothing to European influence in his view. He wrote adamantly, "Asaf al-Dawlah's buildings are in no way influenced by European architecture. In style, they are purely Asiatic, without ostentation but with genuine splendour and dignity." As with Mookherjee, the complex offered evidence of cultural sophistication and not excess.

As part of an apologetic trend defending the virtues of Nawwabi culture and the merits of its architecture, Nandlal Chatterji published an article in 1354/1936

entitled “The Nawabi Architecture of Lucknow.” Chatterji argued against the idea that Lucknow’s architecture was part of a degraded and barbarous style and made the case that, considering the challenging economic and political environment, the monuments of Lucknow, such as the Great Imambarah, were impressive achievements. But he conceded that they did not compare with the marble-clad monuments of Agra and Delhi.²⁶

In the following decade, Percy Brown, an art instructor in India who had surveyed Ancient and Islamic Indian architecture, still saw the Imambarah as an important example of late Mughal style architecture verging on stagnation, more notable for its scale than its “mediocre” decoration. For Brown, the Great Imambarah was valuable in completing his stylistic chronology of Mughal architecture. However, he did marvel at the speed with which Lucknow had transformed itself into one of the most architecturally endowed cities of India.

Post Independence Writings

After Indian independence, British values were no longer a primary reference point for writings on the Imambarah complex, which was now part of the nation of India with its empowered Hindu majority. The new nationalist narrative of India centred on Indian Secularist ideology emerged as a competing reference point to orient historical narratives. Indian and international scholars from a wide variety of disciplines increasingly produced writings addressing the Great Imambarah complex.

The German art historian Hermann Goetz, who spent many years in India, contributed to devising a historical past for the new nation of India in works like, India: Five Thousand Years of Indian Art.²⁷ One of Goetz’s areas of interest was

Indian art from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In keeping with the reassessment of previously scorned Baroque European art that was taking place in European art historical scholarship, he urged a reconsideration of Indian art and architecture. Goetz only briefly considered the Great Imambarah complex, but he saw it in particular as indicative of the spread of European architectural ideas in India. He wrote, “In the Great [Imambarah] of [Asaf al-Dawlah] Western Baroque models and South Indian forms evolved from the [Awrangzib] style are mixed with late North Indian traditions.”²⁸

In 1383/1964, the Archaeological Survey of India, published a two-part survey of Indian monuments and museums. An article in the publication by Y. D. Sharma made only passing reference to Lucknow’s Imambarah complex, which he thought belonged to a declining Mughal style and was impressive in scale but florid in ornament.²⁹ The survey’s view shifted in the 1970s following the implementation of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of 1391/1972, which gave greater protection to India’s antiquities and art treasures. The Agra Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India, which was then responsible for Lucknow, decided to complete an exhaustive survey of the Imambarah site and attend to its conservation. Suddenly, the Great Imambarah complex’s historical value was significant enough to warrant a survey.

On the fringe of scholarship stood the journalist P. N. Oak (b. 1335/1917) who was immersed in Hindu nationalist ideology. He believed that Indian history had been falsified as part of a British and Muslim conspiracy to obscure the Hindu past. Arguing the Taj Mahal was originally a Hindu temple, Oak applied the same views to the Great Imambarah complex in his 1395/1976 book, Lucknow's Imambaras are Hindu Palaces. The significance of the Imambarah complex was reinterpreted as a monument of Hindu accomplishment and as a symbol of the victimization of

*Lākhnawī*s and Indians by Muslim and British Colonial imperialism. While Oak's views were never been taken seriously by professional scholars and were the object of ridicule by Indian Secularists, they did have popular influence that resonated with Hindu nationalists. Ironically, Oak's book provided one of the most detailed examinations of the Great Imambarah complex and, unlike most earlier treatments, made good use of Abu Talib Isfahani's account!

At the same time, the Great Imambarah complex was viewed from an anthropological perspective by the American Keith Hjortshoj for his doctoral dissertation "Karbala in Context: A Study of Muharram in Lucknow, India," which was completed in 1397/1977 for Cornell University. As part of his focus on Muharram rituals, Hjortshoj developed a general concept of *imambarahs*, which included the Great Imambarah. He saw Lucknow's Muharram rituals as the coming together of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* households as though they were actual participants in the historic events of Karbala. *Imambarahs*, then, became representations of the households. As Hjortshoj expressed it, "The *imambarah*, therefore, like several other representations used in Muharram, represents both the Household of Muhammad and the particular *Shī'ah* household of which it is a part, as well as the spiritual and linear links between them."³⁰ In this view, the Great Imambarah was simply a representation of the household of Asaf al-Dawlah that occupied a prominent place in a network of elite household *imambarahs* and played a large role in shaping the social commemoration of Muharram. Hjortshoj also added an historical interpretation for the purpose behind commissioning the Great Imambarah. He wrote, "Considering its size, however, the Asafi Imambarah might have been built as a flagrant assertion of the *Shi'ah* faith and its protection in Lucknow under the patronage of the *Nawwabs*."³¹

Another doctoral dissertation written from an art historical perspective was completed at Cambridge University by the Indian national Banmali Tandan, an admirer of Nawwabi architecture, who had deep roots in Lucknow and connections to the Indian Civil Service. Tandan catalogued Nawwabi architecture across Awadh according to building type, something that had never been done before, and categorized it into three stylistic trends - Indian and Islamic, European, and a hybrid Indo-European style.

In opposition to previous narratives of cultural decline associated with Nawwabi architecture, Tandan was motivated to reposition the status of this architectural tradition to a higher place in India's evaluation of its national architectural heritage. Writing about the Great Imambarah specifically, he saw it as a "structural tour de force." Tandan saw the Great Imambarah as defining later *imambarah* design and spawning imitations throughout Lucknow. He wrote, "The Great Imambarah is of central importance in the evolution of *Nawwabi* architecture, as it led to the widespread adoption of an *imambarah* type." He felt the same about the adjacent congregational *masjid*.³² In Tandan's eyes, the Rumi Darvazah's eastern and western facades were stylistically distinct and he hypothesized that this was either intentionally built in two phases by one patron or by Shuja al-Dawlah and then Asaf al-Dawlah.

In the 1980s, there was a wave of professional scholarship - Indian, British, and American - that was interested in the region of Awadh and what its history might have to offer in terms the ongoing re-examination of the British colonial enterprise and scholarly narratives. Specialists in Islamic studies and Persian, Arabic, and Urdu language studies pursued areas of inquiry where they encountered the Great Imambarah complex. Following the Iranian revolution of 1398-9/1978-9, Anglo-

European scholars of the Islamic world grew particularly interested in the relationship between Islamic faith and state-building and by extension Islamic community formation; Awadh provided a useful case study in this respect.

In 1406/1986, the Indian-trained S. A. A. Rizvi published two large volumes entitled, A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna 'Ashari Shi'is in India, which could only have been based on a lifetime of reading Arabic and Persian sources in the archives of India and Great Britain. Quoting the historian of Islamic religion Charles Adams, Rizvi saw the Western intellectual study of Islam as Sunni-centric, often overlooking the different ethos underlying Sunni and *Shi'i Isna Ashari* traditions. Rizvi argued that the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* of India fostered a rich intellectual culture that could accommodate European sciences and philosophy. *Shi'i Isna Ashari-Sunni* struggles figured prominently in his narrative of eighteenth-century North Indian history, which sought to counter twentieth-century Indian scholarly narratives that in his view were plagued with Sunni bias. Dedicating his work, "To The memory of the Martyrs of Karbala," Rizvi clearly brought *Shi'i Isna Ashari* sympathies to his work.

Though incomparably rich with useful references and quotations, Rizvi's work did not concentrate on the Great Imambarah complex; he did not see it as particularly significant for his study of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* contribution to Indian intellectual culture or for *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious life in India. For him, the complex was reflective of Asaf al-Dawlah's inability to consolidate power due to increasing British interference in the affairs of Awadh; it was a refuge from political reality that Rizvi found overly ornamented and "wanting in delicacy." He wrote, "The Nawwab, unable to prevent administrative collapse, concentrated mainly on fostering the development of art and architecture. Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah's insatiable passion for

constructing imposing monuments is reflected in the Rumi Darvazah, the Asafi Imambarah and the mosque near Awrangzib's mosque in Lucknow."³³

The American historian Michael Fisher was also a part of this new wave of scholarship on Awadh and embarked on a "social scientific" study of the regional power. He aimed to "disclose the underlying structure and complex interaction of the province of Awadh and the Mughal and British empires."³⁴ Most importantly, he argued that the rise of vibrant, regional powers like Awadh suggested that the narrative of political and cultural decline of the Mughal empire could not be applied to all of North India, which was experiencing its own independent prosperity.

Fisher was of the view that Asaf al-Dawlah's building program was part of a concerted effort to define a distinctive culture for Lucknow based on his own conception of the world. Palaces and public buildings were built to provide a level of "pomp and state," while *masjids*, *imambarahs* and charitable works served a minority court culture immersed in *Shi'i Isna Ashari* traditions in a predominantly non-*Shi'i Isna Ashari* environment. The Great Imambarah complex was one piece of evidence of Asaf al-Dawlah's building program that bore strong *Shi'i Isna Ashari* purpose and a desire for *Shi'i Isna Ashari* symbolic expression.³⁵

Another American scholar, Juan Cole, presented his study of the *ulama* of Awadh, Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq, as contributing to inquiry into Muslim communal formation and the role of the *ulama* in this process. He argued, "[I]n North India a process of community formation, promoted by *Shi'i Isna Ashari* learned men (*ulama*) and notables, formed an essential background to later politicization."³⁶ Like Rizvi, Cole did not write much about the Great Imambarah complex, but he did regard the institution of *imambarahs* in North India as significant. He concluded that they provided common meeting places for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*,

particularly *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradespeople and labourers, and provided environments for conversions to *Shi'i Isna Asharism*.³⁷ They were used as social statements of piety, wealth, power, and status.³⁸ In simplest terms, Cole saw the Great Imambarah, and the others that were built, as a response to a need for a physical site to publicly mourn the martyrdom of Hussein and accepted that the Rumi Darvazah and the Great Imambarah were commissioned as famine relief projects.³⁹

Picking up the earlier art historical thread of discussion, American art historian Catherine Asher included the site in a section on late-Mughal architecture in her survey of Mughal architecture published in 1412/1992 that has become a standard reference work on the subject. She also rejected earlier narratives rendering the period as steeped in aesthetic decline. She wrote, "I have attempted to consider this material [late Mughal and successor state architecture] on less judgemental grounds."⁴⁰ Asher saw Awadh's religious buildings as less receptive to European ideas than palace architecture. For Asher, the design of the Rumi Darvazah was highly creative in its experimentation with the Mughal architectural vocabulary, and the Imambarah was a unique technological achievement whose plan and ornamental program was rooted in the Mughal architectural tradition and its domestic architecture.

In the same year, Lucknow architect Neeta Das, proud of her city's architectural heritage, published a study of *imambarah* architecture in Lucknow. Das thought that Nawwabi architecture could be divided into two phases, an eighteenth-century period of declining Mughal architecture and a nineteenth-century period of European influence.⁴¹ Das concluded that the *imambarah* building type was a hybrid of *rawza* (tomb) and *baradārī* (residential) design. Das, who approached the Great Imambarah complex stylistically, morphologically, and as a working design

professional, saw it as an example of the first phase of *Nawwabi* architecture exhibiting no European influence at all. Its scale was impressive, but its ornamentation was absurdly small.⁴²

In writings and surveys of the post Indian Independence period, much effort was expended to overturn earlier British Colonial interpretations of Awadh's past. The established narratives of the region's political, cultural, economic and aesthetic decline in the eighteenth century were questioned. In this context, the Great Imambarah complex was less narrowly perceived and enjoyed the brief attention of scholars concerned with the political, religious, and architectural history of Awadh.

Conclusions

There are various questionable facts presented in the accounts highlighted above, and there are issues with the conceptual approaches taken. Some of the facts in question appear in the majority of the accounts, while others originate with only a few individuals. The issues with the conceptual approaches include the challenges of diverse scholarly approaches, the limits of survey perspectives, the problems of reducing the site's development to the role of elites, the overly narrow definitions of the site's activities and functions, and the limitations of pursuing a discussion of the site in terms of cultural progress and decline.

Several claims without secure, supporting evidence have permeated many of the accounts and in the chapters that follow, many of these will be countered. The most common include the following: 1198/1784 was the date construction on the Great Imambarah began; Asaf al-Dawlah commissioned the Great Imambarah as a famine relief project; an impoverished nobility helped build the complex; Kifayat

Allah was the architect of the site; and a design competition was held to design the Great Imambarah.

Some less common claims maintain the following: Asaf al-Dawlah built several *imambarahs*; water was designed to flow out of the ornamental *guldastas* of the Rumi Darvazah; Asaf al-Dawlah had little influence over his political affairs when he commissioned the Imambarah complex; Asaf al-Dawlah made no provisions for the maintenance of the Imambarah complex; the Rumi Darvazah was built in part by Shuja al-Dawlah⁴³; Asaf al-Dawlah participated in the construction process; one million pound sterling (roughly 10 million rupees) was spent on the construction of the Great Imambarah⁴⁴; interlocking bricks were used in the Great Imambarah roof's construction; the Great Imambarah roof was built without timber⁴⁵; Kifayat Allah was buried next to Asaf al-Dawlah in the Great Imambarah; marble was unattainable; an Imambarah like the Great Imambarah was necessary for the public commemoration of Muharram.⁴⁶ These issues of fact are more problems of detail and do not undermine the various interpretations of the site to a great extent. The conceptual approaches to the Great Imambarah complex provide more cause for debate and difficulty in pursuing a better understanding of the site.

First, the very diversity of scholarly approaches at work presents the problem of how the very different ways of seeing the site as art object, social institution, instrument of power, and technological feat can be reconciled with each other across intellectual traditions and across time to forge a unified presentation of the site's history. For instance, if the site is reflective of Awadh's political and cultural vitality in the eighteenth century, as more recent art historical and political studies suggest, and not its decline, how does this relate to the site's role in cultivating communal *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious life in Lucknow?

Second, approaching the complex from surveys of architecture, political history, and religious intellectual development, which have broad scopes, tends to render it as a typical occurrence when it was not. Writers see it as a typical articulation of power through monumental architecture, typical of late-Mughal architecture and typical of *Shi'i Isna Ashari imambarahs* and Muharram ritual commemoration; the site can only be seen in terms of its usefulness in supporting the definition of broad trends and its uniqueness is submerged. But, the development of the Great Imambarah complex was a highly unusual event rooted in uniquely specific circumstances. A monumental *imambarah* on the scale of a congregational *masjid* had never been commissioned by a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* ruler. The Mughal architectural tradition had never yielded a monument on this scale with this particular technology. *Imambarahs* had never been built in conjunction with Friday congregational *masjids* or with aspirations to serve as a community complex.

Third, the development and functioning of the Great Imambarah complex is generally seen as a function of the agendas of Awadh's elites, when it really is a social phenomenon that involves many different levels of Awadhi society. Builders, the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community, employees, merchants, and other social groups all played a role in developing and using the site.

Fourth, functions are too rigidly assigned to the site, which hosted a variety of activities beyond its designated functions throughout the year. *Imambarahs* and *masjids* are typically multi-purpose buildings, hosting a variety of communal and solitary activities ranging from the religious to the social. Too narrow a range of functions is used to define the site.

Fifth, the debate over whether Awadh was a part of Mughal decline or a site of cultural resurgence of which the complex was a part is not a particularly fruitful line

of discussion. It too easily degenerates into a subjective contest of cultural values that depends on one's notion of progress. For instance, deciding whether the site is influenced by European styles tells little about the role it played in the *Lakhmawi* community.

There still remain many unasked questions about the site's development. How was it financed? Where did its builders come from? How involved was Asaf al-Dawlah? How did women interact with the site? How did non-*Shi'i Isna Ashari*, Hindus, and *Sunni*, interact with the site? Why was the Great Imambarah so large? How did subsequent rulers in Awadh regard the site? What life did the site enjoy after Asaf al-Dawlah's death? Over the next several chapters many of these matters of fact, conceptual approaches, and questions will be pursued in more detail. For now, it suffices to say that the shifting interpretations of the Great Imambarah complex by intellectuals who considered it are not as inclined towards recovering the site's history as they are towards advancing their own respective, disconnected discourses.

¹ Abu Talib Isfahani, Tafzih al-Ghafilin [The Disgrace of the Negligent], trans. William Hoey, A History of Asafu'd Daula (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1885 [repr. Lucknow: Pustak Kendra, 1971]), pp. 72-4. H.G. Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors to Lucknow (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1875 [repr. New Delhi, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 2000]), p. 103. P.C. Mookherjee, Pictorial Lucknow (Lucknow: 1883), pp. 238-9. Alois Anton Fühler, The Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the North Western Provinces and Oudh Described and Arranged (Allahabad: Supt. Govt. Press, N.W.P and Oudh, 1891), pp. 265-66. James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1891 [repr. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967]), vol. 2, pp. 328-9. Abdul Halim Sharar, Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture, trans. E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (London: Paul Elek, 1975), pp. 47-8. Percy Brown, Indian Architecture: The Islamic Period, vol.2 (1942 [repr. Bombay: Taraporevala, 1950])

² Hermann Goetz, Rajput Art and Architecture, ed. by Jyotindra Jain and Jutta Jain-Neubauer (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978), pp. 185-7. Keith Hjortshoj, Kerbela in Context: A Study of Muharram in Lucknow, India, PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1977, pp. 77-9, 85, 116-7, 153-5. P.N. Oak, Lucknow's Imambaras are Hindu Palaces

(Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1976). Banmali Tandan, The Architecture of the Nawabs of Avadh between 1722 and 1865: A Descriptive Inventory and Analysis of Types, PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1979. Banmali Tandan, The Architecture of Lucknow and its Dependencies, 1722-1856: A Descriptive Inventory and Analysis of Nawabi Types (New Delhi: Vikas, 2001), pp. xx-xxi, xxxiii, 23-24, 31-36, 83-84, 85-88, 125-8, 135-7, 200. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isnā ‘Asharī Shī‘īs in India, 2 vols. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1986), vol. 2, p. 76. Juan Cole, Roots of North Indian Shi‘ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859 (Delhi; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 94-6. Michael Fisher, A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, The British, and the Mughals (New Delhi: Manohar, 1987), pp. 77-9. Neeta Das, The Architecture of Imambaras (Lucknow: Lucknow Mahotsava Patrika Samiti, 1991), pp. 16, 45-50, 65-71, Catherine Asher, Architecture of Mughal India (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 323-4. Tandan’s works include reproductions of the Archaeological Survey of India’s drawings of the site and Das’s book also includes her own drawings of the site.

³ By ‘scientific,’ I mean a greater attempt to use theoretical models and quantitative empirical methods to understand human society in a way that emulates the natural sciences to an extent.

⁴ The term Orientalist is not used in the sense that Edward Said has defined it but in the historical sense with which the term was used.

⁵ Isfahani, pp. iii, 10-1.

⁶ Isfahani, pp. 104-5.

⁷ Isfahani, pp. 72-4.

⁸ Isfahani, pp. 10-1.

⁹ Isfahani, p. 73.

¹⁰ H. G. Keene, The Fall of the Moghul Empire of Hindustan, A New Edition, with Corrections And Additions (1887). Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 68.

¹¹ Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 59.

¹² Keene, The Fall of the Moghul Empire, pp. 71-2.

¹³ Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 95, 101-4.

¹⁴ Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 75.

¹⁵ Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 102.

¹⁶ Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 68.

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- ¹⁷ Fergusson, vol. 2., p. 187.
- ¹⁸ Fergusson, vol. 2, p. 328.
- ¹⁹ Fergusson, vol. 2, p. 329.
- ²⁰ Mookherjee, p. 1.
- ²¹ Mookherjee, p. 239.
- ²² Mookherjee, p. 17.
- ²³ H. D. Wonté, Commissioner of Lucknow to Secretary to Government of North-West Provinces and Oudh, July 30, 1891, Dept. XV, Preservation of Buildings of Historical or Archaeological interest, File 40, Box 19, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.
- ²⁴ Ulrike Stark, "Politics, Public Issues and the promotion of Urdu Literature: *Avadh Akhbar*, the First Urdu Daily in Northern India," The Annual of Urdu Studies, vol. 18 (2003): pp. 66-94.
- ²⁵ Sharar, p. 47.
- ²⁶ Nandlal Chatterji, "The Nawabi Architecture of Lucknow," Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society, vol. 9 (July 1936): pp. 39-44. See also: Tandan, The Architecture of Lucknow, p. 191.
- ²⁷ Hermann Goetz, India: Five Thousand Years of Indian Art (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).
- ²⁸ Goetz, Rajput Art, p. 185
- ²⁹ Y. D. Sharma, "Islamic Monuments," in Archaeological Remains: Monuments and Museums, 2 vols. (1964 [repr. New Delhi: A. S. I. Govt of India, 1996]), vol. 2, p. 325.
- ³⁰ Hjortshoj, p. 79.
- ³¹ Hjortshoj, pp. 77-8.
- ³² Tandan, The Architecture of Lucknow, p. 24.
- ³³ Rizvi, vol. 2, p. 76.
- ³⁴ Fisher, pp. 4-5.
- ³⁵ Fisher, pp. 76-8.
- ³⁶ Cole, p. 2.

³⁷ Cole, p. 101.

³⁸ Cole, p. 103.

³⁹ Cole, p. 94.

⁴⁰ Asher, p. xx.

⁴¹ Das, pp. 14-5.

⁴² Das, p. 16.

⁴³ Tandan, The Architecture of Lucknow, p. 127.

⁴⁴ Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 103. One pound is generally accepted to have been equal to ten rupees. See: Richard B. Barnett, North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British 1720-1801 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. xvii.

⁴⁵ Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors, p. 103.

⁴⁶ Cole, p. 98.

CHAPTER FOUR

In Service of Power

Issues of power are inherent to works of monumental architecture, especially those that are of use to the community. To raise a monument and control its use inevitably inspires deference in those who cannot. Those who raise monuments do so, not only to memorialize themselves, but also in order to establish their position in the power hierarchies in which they find themselves. Monumental architecture is not simply an expression of the personal traits of its patrons or a useless frivolity indicating the depth of a patron's personal vanity. Though this may be true in some cases, it is not true in all. To only see monumental architecture's reason for being as lying primarily within the individual psyche of its patron tends to cloud the fundamental issues of power relations present in the development and use of such works. Alternatively, a work of monumental architecture's reason for being can be explored by understanding the roles it serves in socially contested power relations.

Power does not exist unless it can be exercised in a tangible way and the ability to manipulate and control shared space and social behaviour in a conspicuous manner is both a concrete test, and a display of power and the capacity to concentrate economic resources to that end. The way monumental architecture defines spaces that can be used

to mould social behaviour or the ability of monumental architecture to impress itself upon the consciousness of those who encounter it directly and indirectly, day after day, is a powerful form of influence. A patron's intent and purpose behind mobilizing a work of monumental architecture are situated within this discourse but are not necessarily bounded by it. Personal motives are not only governed by a self-perpetuating interest in amassing power for its own sake, but also by convictions in ideas that they wish to advance.

Power relations are contested not only during the conception of monumental architecture and the determination of its form, but also in controlling the social memory and behaviour associated with monumental architecture throughout its life. More fluid than monumental architecture's form, power can shift hands more quickly and the way a site functions as a result is more malleable than its form.

In popular memory, the Great Imambarah complex, particularly the Great Imambarah, has been understood as an expression of Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah's benevolence and conversely, in some strands of scholarly memory, as an expression of his indolence. Its role in demarcating power relations during Asaf al-Dawlah's time and afterwards has been overlooked. There are three major phases in the way that the complex has played such a role. First, from its completion in 1205/1791 to the Rebellion of 1273/1857, the complex contributed to defining power relations between the office of the *Nawwab-Vazir*, his court, *Lakhnawis* - *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, *Sunni*, Hindu - and the British East India Company. Second, from 1273/1857 to Indian independence in 1366-7/1947, the site has been a part of colonial power relations between the British, the rebellious indigenous armies and *Lakhnawis* and has been subject to the administration

of institutions like the British East India Company, the British-controlled Husaynabad Trust and the Archaeological Survey of India (A. S. I.). Third, after Indian Independence the way the site is remembered and consequently used has been subject to contests of power and ideologies between secular and Hindu Indian nationalists, *Lakhnawis*, *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elites and *Shi'i Isna Ashari* women, which have been brokered by the Archaeological Survey of India and the Husaynabad and Allied Properties Trust. The common thread between these periods is that the Great Imambarah complex, by virtue of its monumentality, continues to carry associations of power. Consequently control over it continues to be seen as useful in advancing socio-political agendas.

The *Nawwab-Vazirs* of Awadh, the Court, *Lakhnawis* and the Company

Asaf al-Dawlah's crisis of power and the period of semi-autonomy

The complex's significance for the office of the *Nawwab-Vazir* was most pronounced during the rule of its patron Asaf al-Dawlah. Publicly, the site was significant to Asaf al-Dawlah, since it was a tool to articulate his authority on a number of fronts, while privately it enabled the pursuit of his own religious convictions. The site's development was an important use of the medium of architecture to help him both to define Lucknow as his own base of power in opposition to the city of Faizabad, which his father and mother had built up, and the British East India Company.

Asaf al-Dawlah's father, Shuja al-Dawlah, made Faizabad, initially called Bangla, the ruling capital of Awadh in the first half of the eighteenth century and built his fortress there with the aid of French military advisors. Although the British East India Company

defeated Shuja al-Dawlah at the Battle of Baksar in 1178/1765, it was not able to directly administer his territories and Shuja al-Dawlah was reinstated as ruler, provided he followed their conditions.¹ He was required to submit tribute to the Company, secure free trade for the Company in his dominions and was permitted to modernize his army. Shuja al-Dawlah seized the opportunity and as he became stronger he tested the Company's boundaries, increasing the size of his army only to have it curtailed to a maximum 35 000 soldiers.² He even hired the Company's army and purchased 2 000 muskets to reinforce his own army in a successful campaign against the neighbouring western region of Rūhīlkhand, dominated by the Afghan-descended *Sunni* Rūhīlahs.³ The move further indebted Awadh to the Company, but also expanded Awadh's territories and revenues. Slowly, Awadh was becoming a threat to the Company once more.

Shuja al-Dawlah also placed great importance on building a city as part of the reconstruction of his power. Awadh chronicler, Fayz Bakhsh described the *Nawwab's* development of Faizabad in 1179/1765:

A vast plain extending far more than two miles on each side of the fort was reserved and round it was dug a deep trench. In the middle of this plain all his retainers and military officers built themselves residences and outoffices as spacious as they desired.⁴

Large city walls, the monumental gateway called the Tirpawliyah, hunting parks and enclosed gardens were built and personally inspected by the *Nawwab*.

Shuja al-Dawlah's impressive recovery from disgrace owed much to his wife Bahū Begam, who used her sizeable inherited fortune to help him meet the reparations

payments levied by the British. Shuja al-Dawlah owed 4 000 000 rupees against which Bahu Begam loaned him 2 000 000 rupees. So grateful was Shuja al-Dawlah that according to Fayz Bakhsh, “he determined from that time forward not only to repay this sum but to hand over to her all that remained after making the changes of government.”⁵ After his death in 1188/1775, Bahu Begam controlled an estimated twenty million Faizabad rupees that had been amassed by Shuja al-Dawlah and was held in the Awadh treasury. She possessed her own private fortune, held lands all over Awadh, but her heaviest concentration of properties was in Faizabad.⁶ Awadh’s wealth and power were centred in Faizabad and the city was inseparable from the personas of these two towering and dynamic figures.

Judging by the memoir of Shuja al-Dawlah’s accountant Muhammad Fayz Bakhsh, which unflatteringly described Asaf al-Dawlah as short, obese, fat in the ears and neck, laden with a double chin, frivolous and foul-mouthed, the legitimate heir to the court of Awadh had little credibility among the Faizabad elite and the prospect of him emerging from the shadow of his parents seemed dim.⁷ Yet, Bahu Begam, playing the role of kingmaker after Shuja al-Dawlah’s unexpected demise, apparently affirmed Asaf al-Dawlah’s right as eldest son to succeed, a decision that she would later regret. Although she helped raise her son to the throne, she maintained her tight grip on Awadh’s treasury with the support of her personal troops and combined with her own considerable wealth, she was a force to be reckoned with. According to Fayz Bakhsh, Asaf al-Dawlah personally disliked his mother and was angered by her hostility to his first political appointment of Murtaza Khān, entitled Mukhtār al-Dawlah. The Begam had a longstanding family dispute with the man and was not pleased to see him assume

such an intimate relationship with her son. This prompted Asaf al-Dawlah to flee Faizabad for Lucknow in 1188/1775.⁸ Unlike Faizabad, Lucknow provided him with a relatively blank slate to redefine himself as ruler of Awadh, free from his mother's interference. The development of Lucknow's Great Imambarah complex by Asaf al-Dawlah made his newfound autonomy explicit but it would be well over a decade before he had the resources to commission such a monumental vision, and in the intervening years, he also had to contend with the powerful British East India Company.

During this time, the inexperienced and, by all hostile accounts, incompetent Asaf al-Dawlah became increasingly dependent on the Company's military services to address his fear of Maratha and Sikh armies, now active in North India. When Raja Anup Giri, Asaf al-Dawlah's key general in charge of half of Awadh's army, left to join Najaf Khan in Shahjahanbad because of the *Nawwab's* inability to manage and pay the army, Asaf al-Dawlah's ineffectual military leadership was exposed and Awadh became vulnerable to the advances of the Marathas. The British East India Company, represented by its Lucknow Resident John Bristow, convinced Asaf al-Dawlah to permit his armies to be commanded by Company officers for a heavy price.⁹ The Company ingeniously hoped to use the *Nawwab's* army, funded at his expense, to defend their North Indian holdings. The military progress Awadh had made after the Battle of Baksar abruptly came to a halt. Furthermore, the protracted dispute between Asaf al-Dawlah and his mother made his access to the treasury of Awadh difficult and deepened his indebtedness to the Company. In response, he resorted to colluding with the British to coerce her to release funds. By withholding the salaries of his troops stationed in Faizabad for a year and a half, he also encouraged a mutiny of his troops, who then laid siege to the Begum in frustration.¹⁰ It

was not until the early 1780s, with British assistance, that Asaf al-Dawlah gained full access to the Awadh treasury, placing him in a better position to undertake expensive projects like the commission of the Great Imambarah complex.¹¹

Asaf al-Dawlah's fiscal autonomy and his political independence from the British were in serious question given the considerable debts he owed to the Company for their military services. They meddled more and more in his public and private affairs. British Resident John Bristow, like one of his predecessors Charles Purling, was poised to seize complete control of the *Nawwab's* finances. Having formerly served as a Lucknow Resident, the ambitious Bristow returned to replace the *Nawwab's* friend Nathaniel Middleton as Resident in August 1196/1782. He was keen to collect the *Nawwab's* debts to the Company and soon recommended the appointment of a British Treasurer and Comptroller to oversee the *Nawwab's* financial expenditures. Such measures were perceived as a tremendous insult by the *Nawwab*, who wrote to Bristow,

You desire that a Treasurer and Comptroller might be appointed over the disbursements of the Dowaub Domestic of my household. I objected because it would reflect disgrace upon me in the eyes of the whole world; since it would be apparent that I had no longer any authority over my own Household, my Dowaub & my Domestic, at the same time.¹²

With impressive political acumen, the *Nawwab* was successful in securing not only the removal of the meddlesome Bristow in 1198/1784 but the withdrawal of the Lucknow British Residency in April of 1199/1785 by having his debts guaranteed by two influential Awadhi bankers and accepting direct, unmediated political relations with the Company's Governor General Warren Hastings.¹³ Asaf al-Dawlah wrote to Governor General Warren Hastings, "I am ready and willing to pay the company's monies. I

entreat as a favor that you will recall Mr. Bristow and Mr. Cowper and permit me the exercise of discretionary power for the management of my country and the payment of the company's monies."¹⁴ Following Bristow's removal, he wrote in thanks to Hastings, "You have now from your bounty and your kindness, restored to me my authority over my country ..."¹⁵ The British also withdrew their Residents from Lucknow over the hostilities that locals were beginning to show them. In addition, the increasingly embarrassing and unethical behaviour of the Lucknow Residents, since several had solicited private salaries from the *Nawwab*, monopolized trade for their own private ventures and manipulated currency differences between cities, was a factor. Such questionable activities were deemed as threats to Awadh's overall sustainability and the Company's long-term interests. According to Awadh historian Richard Barnett, the recall of Bristow marked the second failure of the Company to assume complete control over Awadh and its continued reliance on a subsidiary alliance system to protect its economic interests.¹⁶ First, Shuja al-Dawlah was reinstated as ruler of Awadh after the Battle of Baksar and second, Asaf al-Dawlah was permitted to resume authority after Bristow's term as Resident was concluded. In both instances, the Company was on the brink of assuming full control of the lucrative region of Awadh but could not completely seize power.

With construction on the Great Imambarah complex beginning around 1200/1786, an elaborate extension to Asaf al-Dawlah's Panj Mahal palace complex was made as was a spectacular display of Asaf al-Dawlah's reassertion of his autonomy, which had been challenged by his mother and the British East India Company. Thinking Asaf al-Dawlah's construction activity was simply intended to expand the palace complex, the

initial perception of Company officials was that the Great Imambarah complex was an economic extravagance. The only indication so far that the British were aware of Asaf al-Dawlah's construction activity was a letter by, then Governor General, Lord Cornwallis dated Feb. 25, 1203/1789, which stated, "In his [the Governor-General's] opinion the *Nawwab* should curtail his expenses by putting a stop to all such outlays as are involved in the construction of unnecessary buildings and the purchase of superfluous jewels."¹⁷

The Awadh chronicler, Abu Talib Isfahani, recognized that this period in Asaf al-Dawlah's rule following Bristow's removal was a moment of unprecedented autonomy for Asaf al-Dawlah. He wrote, "Had the Vazir and his officials had any sense of shame, or appreciation of good advice, they would, during the ten or fifteen years that they have had absolute power, since Mr. Johnson and Mr. Bristow left, have effected reforms ..."¹⁸ Barnett, too, saw these years as a period of semi-autonomy.¹⁹ However, Asaf al-Dawlah's authority continued to be perceived as precarious. Governor General Cornwallis, noted, "[Asaf al-Dawlah's] own authority and that of his ministers were despised by his own subjects," a sentiment echoed in Isfahani's account of the *Nawwab*.²⁰

With the disrespect of the nobility of his father's generation, considerable economic power still residing with his mother and the British, with his military capacity to defend against the encroachment of the Marathas depending entirely on the British,²¹ and with the steady encroachments on management of the affairs of his household and Awadh by the Company, both Asaf al-Dawlah's actual authority and the public

perception of his authority were in serious jeopardy, to which one of his major responses was to develop the Great Imambarah complex.

A processional stage

Beyond being a display of wealth, how did the complex add to Asaf al-Dawlah's power? The complex as a whole was in reality a stageset for conducting public processions in the Mughal imperial mode. In addition to monumental architecture, processions, particularly in the South Asian context, were the other concrete way to display who held power. Those who could mobilize the largest processions were clearly powerful. The first and largest forecourt of the complex, the first *jilaw khanah*, which included the monumental Rumi Darwazah and the Naqar/Nawbat Khanah, was most instrumental in providing a monumental processional stage for receiving dignitaries and making public displays of Asaf al-Dawlah's authority. Such processional rituals most likely took place in the first decade of Asaf al-Dawlah's rule in Lucknow, but the urban environment was not yet configured to accommodate them.

The monumental Rumi Darwazah was the public entrance to the core of Lucknow, and the visitor's first impression of the city. Repeating what he had been told, Viscount George Valentia, who between 1216/1802 and 1220/1806 visited several Indian courts including Lucknow, mentioned that Asaf al-Dawlah intended that the gateway emulate one in the Ottoman imperial capital of Istanbul, perhaps in an effort to draw parallels between Awadh and the realms of the Ottomans, the largest and most intact Muslim empire of the day.²²

The *Nawwabi* protocol for receiving esteemed guests was to ride out of the western part of the city for some miles with an entourage, greet the oncoming party and accompany them back into the city, through the Rumi Darwazah, past the mirroring gates of the Great Imambarah and the Nawbat Khanah, which resounded with drumbeats and music; the end destination was the Panj Mahal palace complex. In a meeting with the reinstated Resident Mr. Cherry in 1208/1794 that was purposefully located in the Great Imambarah in order to impress him, Asaf al-Dawlah promised that after Muharram, he himself would march out of the city to greet the then Governor-General John Shore, who was coming from Calcutta to Lucknow.²³

Similarly, Governor General Francis Rawdon (1167-1241/1754-1826), the Marquess of Hastings, visited Saadat Ali Khan, Asaf's successor just two years after Asaf al-Dawlah's death, and remarked, "I had been apprized that on this public entry I must scatter money to the populace as the *Nawwab-Vazir* would do it to those on his side of the elephant. A bag containing 1000 rupees had been prepared for me accordingly."²⁴ The Marquess reflected on the whole experience, "We were long in reaching the palace which is at the further extremity of the town. It does not aim at anything splendid, yet the number of courts through which one passes gives it an air of considerable magnificence."²⁵

A visual record of the processional functions of the Rumi Darwazah and the first forecourt was made by the artist Sita Ram, who accompanied the Marquess. In one painting, people, horses, and elephants all proceeded towards the Rumi Darwazah and in another, Ram clearly showed an elephant moving through the Rumi Darwazah; the gate was purposely designed to accommodate the entry of elephants, not only historically

India's most prized military asset but the most prestigious mode of transport and an essential feature of royal processions.

Asaf al-Dawlah's fondness for sounding the drums to announce his presence dated back to Faizabad, where according to Muhammad Fayz Bakhsh, "he used to sound the drum when riding out morning and evening; whereas it is not proper to beat drums near the residence of one's masters."²⁶ The Marquess also indicated how the ritual sounding of the *nawbat* at sunrise functioned as a civic clock and came to be regarded as integral to the honour of Nawwab Saadat Ali Khan.

[H]e complained with great apparent sensibility of Major Baillie's preventing him from having the *nawbat* (large drum) beat at sunrise, because the noise of it would disturb the Resident. He added that the beating of the *nawbat* was an article of dignity; and represented that he was lowered by not being allowed to do it.²⁷

The *nawbat* established the sonic presence of Lucknow's *Nawwab-Vazir*, another dimension to the multisensory projection of authority that took place every morning and on special occasions through the melding of sound and architecture.²⁸ The *nawbat* was located in the gateway opposite the entrance to the Great Imambarah known as the Nawbat or Naqar Khanah, though it is possible musicians were also placed on the balcony of the Rumi Darwazah. As far as can be determined, the Nawbat Khanah had no other function but to provide sonic support and an aesthetically pleasing architectural mirror for the entry gate to the Great Imambarah, where the sonic experience would have been most intense.

All of these features of political procession – the elephants, the advance parties, the *nawbat* bands, the dispersal of money - drew from the Mughal imperial model. For

example, when the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (r. 1013-1036/1605-1627) re-entered the imperial capital Akbarabad (Agra) in 1028/1619 after a five-year absence, he did so in a spectacular procession. He himself described the day as follows:

On Sunday the first of Urdibihisht [April 11], at an auspicious hour chosen by the astrologers, I mounted the royal elephant named Diler and entered the city under favorable auspices. A large crowd of men and women were lining the streets and markets and standing in doorways and on roofs in expectation. As usual, I proceeded scattering coins until I was inside the palace.²⁹

Consolidating courtly and general authority depended on public and mutually reinforcing projections of wealth, power and piety. In addition to structuring political processional ritual, the Great Imambarah complex was instrumental in centering the *Nawwab* within the city's Muharram ritual processions among the court elite and the public. Keith Hjortshoj's anthropological analysis of Muharram processions in Lucknow in the 1970s revealed a deeply entrenched social pattern that was likely initiated during Asaf al-Dawlah's time. In Hjortshoj's analysis, processions emanating from the *imambarahs* of prominent men in Lucknow's urban quarters converged with the processions emanating from their superiors, the highest status being accorded to the *imambarahs* of the *Nawwab*. Lucknow's *imambarahs* and the sequence of processions traced out a network of status relations throughout the city.³⁰

There was some historical evidence to support Hjortshoj's model. For *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Muslim and Hindu male courtiers of Asaf al-Dawlah, the Great Imambarah impressed itself on their minds as a model to be emulated and they built smaller versions of it for their homes; the site helped define the typology of their households. An impressive *imambarah* and elaborate *taziyah*, sacred artefacts to be used in the *Shi'i Isna*

Ashari mourning processions in the month of Muharram, could win a visit by the *Nawwab-Vazir* and his appreciation. Court records of Asaf al-Dawlah mentioned a number of visits by Asaf al-Dawlah to the *imambarahs* and mansions of his courtiers and servants during Muharram.³¹ The *Nawwab* circulated between his own *imambarah* and those of his courtiers; the immense difference in scale made the corresponding difference in resources, not to mention his public projection of piety, conspicuous.

In the month of Muharram of 1208/1793 and 1210/1795, Asaf al-Dawlah visited the *imambarahs* and mansions of ‘Atiq Allāh the barber, Ashraf ‘Alī Khān and his brothers, Nawwāb Hasan Rīza Khān, Miyyān Tāhsin ‘Alī Khān, Rāja Jhā’ū Lāl, Nawwāb Almās ‘Alī Khān the wealthy eunuch, Fawjdār Khān, Mastān Shāh, Mudde Khān the chief elephant driver, Mīrzā Jumma, Dīn Muḥammad Chawdhri, Waris ‘Alī, Rāja Bhawāni Mihra, Mīr Masayta, and Āghā Bāqir, and he always placed an offering of rupees before the *taziyah* in their households. All kept *taziyah* and at least five of them had built *imambarahs*. The occasions were also a time to conduct business in their homes. For example when visiting Almas Ali Khan, Asaf al-Dawlah demanded the payment of outstanding dues. While visiting the palace quarters of the women of his household, he issued their salaries. Company officials also participated by calling on Asaf al-Dawlah and visiting the Great *Imambarah*.³²

Among the mourning rituals of Muharram, it was customary to re-enact the burial of Imam Hussein by burying the *taziyah*. Asaf al-Dawlah ordered the development of an enclosure of land to serve as a special burial ground known as a Karbala across the Gomti river opposite to the Panj Mahal palace complex. The simplest way to get there was to

cross the “stone” bridge that Asaf al-Dawlah had built, but in order to do so, one had to pass through the first forecourt of the Great Imambarah complex.³³ With the bulk of Lucknow’s population located on the western and southern sides of the Great Imambarah complex, all of Lucknow’s *taziyah* processions that desired to join the *Nawwab*’s procession and complete the burial rituals along with the *Nawwab*’s *taziyah* were compelled to travel through the first forecourt in order to gain access to the bridge and the new burial grounds. The Great Imambarah complex then served as an integral point in the consolidation of Lucknow’s public Muharram processions around the persona of Asaf al-Dawlah.

A matter of faith

The personal religious significance of the Great Imambarah to Asaf al-Dawlah should not be discounted despite his reputation for immorality and the public conspicuousness of his “piety.” To say that the site was of religious significance to Asaf al-Dawlah would not be the same as saying Asaf al-Dawlah was deeply religious or pious, since religious sentiment has often co-existed with impiety. Court records conveyed the impression that the *Nawwab-Vazir* did see the site as an important place to construct religious meanings for himself. Arriving from the west before the Rumi Darwazah on foot, most probably from his new Dawlat Khanah palace grounds, the *Nawwab* would mount a horse, ride to the gate of the Great Imambarah in the first forecourt and then dismount, walking the rest of the way to the Great Imambarah on foot. It was a curious mixture of regal display and personal piety that emphasized his own sense of reverence that he brought to the Great Imambarah.³⁴ This reverence was not reserved for the structure itself but for its purpose,

which was to store his *taziyah*, and the *taziyah* were a medium to engage the spirit of the Imams, particularly Imam Hussein, and the tragedy of humanity's failure to acknowledge and protect them.

Asaf al-Dawlah regularly inspected the *taziyah* held in the Great Imambarah but collecting them seemed to have become a habit that exceeded his religious sentiments. Isfahani complained that the *Nawwab* had left no room in the vast Great Imambarah, having filled it with *taziyah* and making the Great Imambarah a display chamber and warehouse for Asaf al-Dawlah's designer *taziyah*.³⁵ Asaf al-Dawlah also used the Great Imambarah for performing *matam*, the practice of self-immolation to express grief and religious devotion, and finally, he apparently chose to be buried there.³⁶ In many ways, the Great Imambarah was a private religious monument for Asaf al-Dawlah that assumed public dimensions and functions.

If the poetic epitaph of Faizabad nobleman Jawāhir 'Alī Khān (d. 1214/1799), who chose to bury himself in his own wooden *imambarah*, provided any insight into why anyone would want to be buried in an *imambarah*, it was that they desired to be buried at the foot of the imam as symbolized by the *taziyah*. The epitaph read,

When this great man, a jewel rightly named,
To rest beneath the dust of the earth was laid
The great archangel thus his death proclaimed
Lo! At the *Imam*'s feet his grave is made.³⁷

This sentiment was echoed in a chronogram that was supposedly inscribed at Asaf al-Dawlah's grave: "*astāna shahīd ibn shahīd*" ("Threshold of the Martyr, son of the Martyr"; i.e. *Imam* Husayn) but no such inscription survived. The document preserved at

Asaf al-Dawlah's grave that reflected on his virtues did not record this chronogram nor did it make clear reference to the *Imams* [Appendix B]. Regardless, it would be an oversight to disregard the idea that its associations with the Imams through the *taziyah* enhanced the Great Imambarah's value as a gravesite to Asaf al-Dawlah and the person who decided that he should be buried there.

It was estimated that over 2 000 *imambarahs* were built in Lucknow following the development of the Great Imambarah.³⁸ The majority of these were most likely built by family members and courtiers of the *Nawwab*, and Neeta Das's morphological study of several surviving examples showed that their plans resembled the Great Imambarah's plan indicating that Lucknow's elite, or the builders they commissioned, were intimately aware of the example set by the Great Imambarah.³⁹ For example, both the *imambarahs* of courtiers Almas Ali Khan and Raja Jhau Lal, built during Asaf al-Dawlah's time and still extant, were similar to the Great Imambarah with their rectilinear plans, two long central halls - one raised - and flanking side chambers. Later examples included the Mughal ka Sāhibā Imāmbārah and Amjad 'Alī Shāh Imāmbārah, which also bore extraordinary resemblance to the Great Imambarah and survived.⁴⁰ Like the Great Imambarah, many of these *imambarahs* also served as tombs for their founders.

The household imambarahs of women

The large number of *imambarahs* could be explained in part by the strict customs of gender segregation surrounding women of the elite. Women keen to participate in the *taziyah* and the large *majlises* had few options but to develop their own private household *imambarahs* and to arrange *majlises* for women only. The women of Asaf al-Dawlah's

household, for instance, kept their *taziyah* in their palace quarters, the Khvurd Maḥāl within the Panj Mahal complex, and not in the Great Imambarah.⁴¹ Writing in 1247/1832 about the lives of Lucknow's women, Mrs. Mīr Hasan 'Alī observed,

The ladies celebrate the returning season of Muharram with as much spirit and zeal as the confinement, in which they exist, can possibly admit of. There are but few, and those chiefly princesses, who have *imambarahs* at command, within the boundary of the *zanānah*; the largest and best apartment in their establishment is therefore selected for the purpose of an *imambarah*, into which none but females are admitted, excepting the husband, father, son, or brother, of the lady; who having, on this occasion, full liberty to invite her female acquaintance, those who are her nearest male relatives even are not admitted until previous notice is given, in order that the female guests may secrete themselves from the sight of these relatives of their hostesses.⁴²

Alternatively, *purdah* curtains surrounding the area designated for women could be arranged for mixed *majlises*. For the elite women of Lucknow, the Great Imambarah complex, particularly the congregational *masjid* and the Great Imambarah, belonged to the public, male sphere and their lives were anchored to their private, domestic worlds. As a bastion of public power, the Great Imambarah complex was also a bastion of male power.

A home to bureaucracy

Not only was the Great Imambarah complex useful in projecting power through the facilitation of processional rituals with political, economic and religious dimensions, but a portion of it, the second forecourt, served as an administrative and public services centre. The siting of the Great Imambarah complex affirmed its role as architecture in the service of Asaf al-Dawlah's attempts to project power. It was designed as an addition

to the Panj Mahal complex, which was Asaf al-Dawlah's primary residential and administrative quarters. Asaf al-Dawlah's father had enlarged the pre-existing ruler's residential complex to include an administrative centre referred to as the Machi Bhavan [House of the Fish].⁴³ The Awadh court's administrative functions were clearly centred in the Panj Mahal palace complex during Asaf al-Dawlah's reign. Courts of Law were newly established in 1197/1782-3.⁴⁴ Petitioners would enter the complex to have their complaints heard at the hall of justice, and facilities for the office of the police among others were located there. When the British Resident Bristow requested facilities in which to base his office, Asaf al-Dawlah decided to place him in this portion of the palace complex showing that he regarded the office of the British Resident as a department within his administration, but Bristow was unhappy with the condition of these facilities.⁴⁵ Asaf al-Dawlah raised the Great Imambarah complex mainly over this administrative section of the Panj Mahal complex, and the forecourts accommodated offices, a hospital and rest houses according to Isfahani.⁴⁶ The Great Imambarah complex was truly a centre of bureaucratic power.

As a result, the Imambarah complex was an important site of employment, requiring attendants for the shops of the first forecourt, for the outoffices of the second forecourt, for the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid*. Valentia noted that a staff of forty Koran readers for Asaf al-Dawlah's grave had been appointed. The second forecourt contained a series of outoffices for the *Nawwabi* bureaucracy. A petition submitted to the British government in 1276/1860 indicated at least thirty employees were historically employed at the site whose salaries were drawn from the shops in the first forecourt.⁴⁷ Given that Asaf al-Dawlah's household sustained a staff of thousands, it

would not be unreasonable to assume that the site employed several hundreds of people, if not thousands, during Asaf al-Dawlah's time.⁴⁸

Curiously, as the expanded Panj Mahal complex became inextricable from public rituals of power and religion, Asaf al-Dawlah developed a new, alternate and separate private palace area removed from the Great Imambarah complex. The development of Asaf al-Dawlah's new Dawlat Khanah palace west of the Rumi Darwazah and his relocation there around the year 1198/1784 was prompted by the arrival of his mother and grandmother, who after a long period of estrangement due to Asaf's early collusion with Hastings to extort money from them, made a prolonged visit to Lucknow as part of an attempt at reconciliation initiated by Asaf al-Dawlah. He made the Panj Mahal and Baoli Palace available to his mother and grandmother respectively, while he moved to the Dawlat Khanah palace complex.⁴⁹ The *Nawwab's* primary residence was no longer joined to the Great Imambarah complex, weakening the identification of the site with the *Nawwabi* court.

A financial extravagance

Documents detailing the cost of the entire Great Imambarah complex may not have survived but given that the project accountant of the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid*, if not the whole complex, put its cost at 20 000 000 rupees, the annual costs would have been 4 000 000 rupees a year.⁵⁰ Similarly, Isfahani reported that Asaf al-Dawlah spent 1 000 000 rupees per year on buildings, although this referred to all building projects and not the Great Imambarah complex alone.⁵¹ In 1199/1784-5, Awadh's annual revenue was reportedly 20 098 263 rupees and in 1215/1801 it was 13

523 474 rupees. At most, this was roughly thirty percent of the annual gross revenue the *Nawwab-Vazir* received from Awadh, a considerable but not unsustainable amount.

Along with these large expenditures on buildings, large amounts were spent on public celebrations and processions on occasions like the Hindu festival of Holi, the *Vazir*'s carnival, marriages and during Muharram. Isfahani thought that over 1 000 000 rupees were collectively spent on such events each year and even more on the maintenance of the Awadh court, which employed thousands.⁵² The annual expenses for the decorations for the Great Imambarah alone, which included the costly oil needed to light lamps for illuminating the building, were estimated to be at least 400 000 rupees. Asaf al-Dawlah went as far as to order two glass chandeliers from England at a total cost of 100 000 rupees.⁵³

A platform for religious authority

Just as the complex provided a base of power for Awadh's chief administrators, it also provided a base for a newly formed *Shi'i Isna Ashari* ulama and as a result, contributed to their further empowerment in Lucknow society. For the *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama*, the site's significance rested more with the *Jama Masjid* as opposed to the Great Imambarah. The construction of the *masjid* validated and mobilized the efforts to introduce Friday communal prayers. When Sayyid Dildār 'Alī Naṣīrabāḏī, a man who would become the figurehead for a new *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* in Lucknow, returned to the city from Iraq having completed his studies, he was approached by Hasan Riza Khan, a key minister in Asaf's court, to introduce Friday communal prayers to Lucknow, which he did so at Hasan Riza Khan's palace.⁵⁴ The construction of the *masjid* transformed the court

practice into a public one for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* of Lucknow who for the first time in Awadh had their own congregational *masjid*. Often engaged in scholarly polemic with some Sunni factions, the *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* must have appreciated the fact that the new *masjid*'s enormous twin minarets posed a topographical challenge to the city's *Sunni* centre where the Awrangzib mosque, which marked the highest point on the city's horizon, was located.

The complex's heavy emphasis on *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious institutions was curious given that Asaf al-Dawlah's court was populated by a majority of Hindus; eight of twelve of his favoured revenue contractors (*mustājirs/ 'āmiks*), who were awarded contracts for agricultural lands based on what they committed to submit to the treasury, were either Brahmans or Rajput soldiers.⁵⁵ Perhaps the religious aspects of the development were intended to defend against criticism that Asaf al-Dawlah was either overly sympathetic to non-Muslims or was irreligious. Fayz Bakhsh complained that before Asaf al-Dawlah became *Nawwab-Vazir*, he was, "day and night in the company of abject Hindus," but it was not clear whether Fayz Bakhsh objected to their religious loyalties or their personal character and status.⁵⁶ Alternatively, the complex's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* emphasis reflected the knowledge that the base of Asaf al-Dawlah's power truly rested with Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community. By impressing and winning over his core constituency and elevating a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious elite to consolidate the community, Asaf al-Dawlah set the stage for broadening the base of his power.

After Asaf al-Dawlah

While the Great Imambarah complex was integral to Asaf al-Dawlah's reassertion of power, later *Nawwabs* increasingly distanced themselves from the site by building new palace complexes in the latest European-inspired architectural trends. Saadat Ali Khan built the Farhad Bakhsh palace quarters including the (Chatar Manzil) to the east of the Dawlat Khanah grounds and the Great Imambarah complex and near the grounds of the British Residency. Valentia noted that the staff of Quran readers appointed for Asaf al-Dawlah's grave was reduced from the forty readers specified by Asaf al-Dawlah to the ten employed by Nawwab Sadaat Ali Khan, reflecting the site's declining significance.⁵⁷ Vājīd 'Alī Shāh developed the palace complex of Kaysarbāgh to the south of the Farhad Bakhsh palace quarters, and Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh developed the Husaynabad Imambarah precinct and initiated the construction of a new congregational *masjid* to the east of the Great Imambarah complex. The Great Imambarah complex's role as an employment site declined with the shifting court and the development of alternative sites, but it was decimated by the Rebellion of 1273/1857 and the subsequent occupation by the British. The complex became less integral to the consolidation of *Nawwabi* authority and personal religious expression and became an institution oriented towards the Lucknow public.

For reasons still unclear, the Great Imambarah came to be heavily interpreted as a famine relief project begun in 1198/1784 and served to signify Asaf al-Dawlah's magnanimity, a story that should be viewed with some scepticism since Asaf al-Dawlah

was only mildly concerned with the famine. Numerous accounts testified to a famine occurring in parts of rural Awadh in the early 1780s, and officials in the Company expressed concern both for the population's well being and their future profits. Though Asaf al-Dawlah seemed to have taken some nominal measures to reduce the export of food from Awadh, he was more preoccupied with the extended hunting trip that he was undertaking during the famine of 1198/1784.⁵⁸ Furthermore, it is not at all clear that the Great Imambarah was initiated in 1198/1784. Hastings, who visited the city in that year and stayed at the Baoli Palace, made no mention of the site being under construction in his accounts of the visit. Since the earliest published reference to the Imambarah as a famine relief work appeared decades after its construction and after the Rebellion, this idea was probably born from nostalgia for more prosperous and politically independent times.⁵⁹

Surprisingly, the Great Imambarah complex, particularly the *masjid* and Imambarah, did not come to be closely identified with Sayyid Dildar Ali and the *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama*, and none of them were buried there as might be expected. Instead, Sayyid Dildar Ali's own *imambarah* in a nearby neighbourhood, which still remains an important focal point during Muharram to this day, became a burial ground for the family and learned associates of Dildar Ali, enriching its sense of sanctity in a way that never pervaded the Great Imambarah. Yet, the position of Friday prayer leader at the complex's *masjid* continued to hold great prestige and influence.

The British East India Company, the Rebellious Army, and the *Lakhnawis*

When Asaf al-Dawlah was confirmed as heir to the Awadh court, the British East India Company was disappointed since it had favoured the rise of his half-brother Saadat Ali Khan, whom they financially supported in Benares (Varanasi). With Asaf al-Dawlah's death in 1211/1797 and the succession of his adopted son Vazir 'Ali, the Company swiftly brought Saadat Ali Khan forward to challenge the throne and forestall any alliances that were brewing amongst Awadh's power holders against the Company. Saadat Ali assumed leadership of Awadh, abruptly ending the period of resurging autonomy, which had brought about the Great Imambarah complex.

It was under these terms that Francis Rawdon, second Earl of Moira, afterward first Marquess of Hastings, visited Lucknow as the Company's Governor-General of Bengal and Commander-in-Chief (1227-1238/1813-1823). There was a sense that he was there to inspect and document the possessions of the Company's empire, which now covertly controlled Awadh with little difficulty. The monumental Imambarah then helped affirm the British in their growing sense of imperial sovereignty. Like the earlier Lucknow Resident Cherry, the Marquess also seemed to regard visiting the Imambarah as a courtesy or a measure of respect for his host Saadat Ali Khan. Unlike most other accounts, the Marquess noted the site's religious significance for locals when he wrote, "Both [Muslims] and [Hindus] attach a character of sanctity to any animals which take up their abode near places deemed sacred."⁶⁰

Conditions and salaries for indigenous troops employed by the British East India Company and stationed on the outskirts of Lucknow were in serious decline in the 1850s,

and this was one of the key factors that spurred the spread of the Rebellion of 1273/1857 to Lucknow. The events of the Rebellion radically transformed British regard for the Imambarah site. Suddenly it became a strategic military site necessary to occupy, attack, defend, survey, maintain, sanitize and even destroy.

The British Resident of Lucknow at the time, Henry Lawrence, decided to fortify the Machi Bhavan fortress complex in order to deal with the anticipated outbreak of a mutiny in the Lucknow environs and by extension sealed off the Great Imambarah and *its* congregational *masjid* from its users; its strategic significance outweighed any others in British eyes. On May 23rd, 1273/1857, Lawrence sent out a secret letter to his superiors in Calcutta indicating that he was preparing for the mutinies, which had begun in Delhi and were inflaming Lucknow's soldiers. He wrote, "Our magazine stores are nearly all moved into the [Machi Bhavan] where ten days supplies for five hundred men are stored, thirty guns and one hundred Europeans are in position there."⁶¹ Lawrence chose three locations in the city to fortify: the Cantonments, where the local Company army barracks had been built; the Residency, the official seat of the city's British Resident; and the Machi Bhavan fort, which included the Great Imambarah complex.

Though Lawrence's decision on the surface was based on an assessment of the strategic military value of the fort, it was one that the local *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community in particular could only have read as an explicit appropriation of power by the British and a suppression of religious practice. Months later, when officials of the then Nawwab Vajid Ali complained about the ongoing British occupation of the Imambarah complex, they argued that it would prevent the *taziyah* procession from taking place. They wrote, "From this it is certain that the festival of [Muharram] which is fast approaching will

have no chance of being celebrated or the rites of [*ta'ziyahdārī*] being observed.”⁶² By occupying the Machi Bhavan fort and disrupting their religious practices and processional displays, Lawrence was also sending a signal to the Lucknow populace showing who was in charge.

During the course of conflict in Lucknow, the British position at the Great Imambarah complex fell and they retreated to the Residency, leaving the complex in the hands of the rebels. However, once British reinforcements arrived the site was retaken. In those violent months, possession of the Machi Bhavan fort became the measure of who controlled Lucknow. It was clear that those who could control the site were militarily superior.

Following the reestablishment of British power, some of the more vengeful British soldiers saw the Imambarah and Lucknow as a means to retaliate against all Indians and Muslims in general. Lamenting the passing of the opportunity to level Delhi, Chief Commissioner Couper contemplated destroying Lucknow, as a warning to “the whole of India” and as “a very heavy blow to the [Muhammadan] religion.” He continued, “No Mosque no temple should be spared. The Chief Commissioner would not desecrate them but he would destroy them or at least declare them the absolute property of [Government] to be dealt with hereafter as we may deem proper.”⁶³

For over twelve years the British occupied the site and saw fit to treat the Great Imambarah as a storehouse for their artillery, and the mosque was converted into a hospital by the occupiers, perhaps motivated by a mixture of pragmatism and spite. If the British weren't attuned to the political and religious significance of the Imambarah complex before the Mutiny they certainly were afterwards. In the period during which

the Imambarah was still occupied by the British, correspondence mentioned, “A question has been raised in the Foreign Department as to whether the [Great Imambarah] and the Mosque attached to it, both of which are in the [Machi Bhavan] Fort, and which are at present used as ordinance store-rooms, may not also be given up to their original sacred uses.”⁶⁴

There were questions among British officials as to whether the Imambarah complex was being held just to remind *Lakhnawis* that the British held power. Lieutenant Colonel P.S. Lumsden, Quarter Master General to the Secretary to the Government of India, wrote to his superiors on this issue, “We have never thought it necessary to erect forts or to take up positions in the heart of cities for the purpose of overawing them.” He continued,

If the military position of [Machi Bhavan] be wanted on political grounds, it should be kept intact, without reference to religious feeling. If it be not wanted, it should be abandoned and dismantled. The holy buildings being restored to their owners and the neighbouring sites be made available to the local [Government] for building purposes.⁶⁵

Amongst the *Lakhnawi Shi'i Isna Ashari*, the occupation of the Imambarah site became one of the symbols of British oppression and religious interference and it figured as an important part of the community's petition for the restoration of the city's religious and confiscated sites in 1293/1877 on the occasion of Queen Victoria assuming the title of Empress of India and the staging of the first Delhi *darbār*, an elaborate ceremonial gathering of all of India's rulers in the capital to pay allegiance to the Queen following Mughal custom.⁶⁶

As discussed in Chapter Three, Lucknow officials were still mindful of the mutiny and the tragedy that unfolded at the Residency, but faced with a new government initiative to encourage archaeological conservation, found themselves in a position where they had to determine for their superiors which buildings were noteworthy. The Commissioner of Lucknow, H. D. Wonte, held the power to direct more resources towards the conservation of Lucknow's greatest architectural monument but he made it clear that money had only been spent on the Residency, the site of British tragedy. The Great Imambarah complex did not enter Wonte's mind.⁶⁷ The complex's future was not his concern.

Husaynabad Trust

Prior to the Rebellion, Nawwab Muhammad Ali Shah (r. 1252-57/1837-42) established the Husaynabad Trust, an endowment of funds invested with the Company whose interest was intended to support the institutions he had built as well as his dependents after he died. Muhammad Ali Shah had built the Husaynabad Imambarah complex in 1253/1838 and appointed a select group of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* noblemen and their descendants as trustees. Though not immediately, the Great Imambarah complex was eventually turned over to the Husaynabad Trustees, who began financing major restoration work at the site in 1301/1884.

The Husaynabad Trustees were initially a group of local Muslim elites entrusted with administering the financial endowment established by the late Nawwab Muhammad Ali Shah in 1254/1839. Nawwab Muhammad Ali Shah, who was brought to power by the British, loaned the Company 1 200 000 rupees at 4% interest in order to ensure that

they would disperse funds to trustees appointed by him and to designated stipendaries from his family.⁶⁸ This blending of the historic Muslim institution of *vaqf* (revenue endowments and expenditure specifications) with a financial investment generating interest was known as *vasīqa*. The trustees were charged with overseeing the *imambarah* and *masjid* that Muhammad Ali Shah commissioned.

Following the mutiny, however, these trustees were relieved of their responsibilities with charges of financial misconduct, and individuals sympathetic to the British were instated, one of them being a Hindu banker. In 1284/1868, these trustees were placed under the direction of a committee headed by the British Commissioner of Lucknow.⁶⁹ The Husaynabad Trust then became an instrument to consolidate the financial endowments and administration of other religious institutions in the city, and the Great Imambarah complex, once it was released from military control, fell under the Husaynabad Trust. The use of the site was deregulated but the financial systems to sustain it as a functioning religious institution were still firmly under British control.

Following the Rebellion and due to the collapse of effective *Nawwabi* rule, the ownership and endowments for many sites, including the Great Imambarah complex, were in question. As a result, the Husaynabad Trust and its administering committee became the principal organization under which the responsibility of Lucknow's major sites was consolidated, which included the tombs of Saadat Ali Khan and his wife and the Shāh Najaf Imāmbārah. The committee lavished considerable funds on the restoration of the Great Imambarah complex from 1301/1884 to 1310/1893, even though

this fell outside the specifications of Nawwab Muhammad Ali's wishes for how the Husaynabad Trust funds were to be spent.⁷⁰

By consolidating the Great Imambarah complex and Muhammad Ali Shah's Husaynabad complex, as well as other sites in the city within their authority, the committee administering the new Husaynabad and Allied Properties Trust became a powerful institution in its own right and was responsible for Lucknow's most prestigious and sacred sites, although it was still subject to British influence. The scholar Veena Talwar Oldenburg insightfully noted that the Husaynabad Trust really was responsible for much of the city and controlled funds far greater than those wielded by any comparable municipal authority in the city that was directly administered by the British.⁷¹ The Trustees were engaged in a delicate balancing act in which the British desire for solutions to the administrative headaches of reallocating properties in a post-Rebellion environment was weighed against popular *Shi'i Isna Ashari* demands for the return and restoration of their civic and religious space, the Great Imambarah complex. From the British perspective, it was simpler to have one umbrella organization to oversee all of these sites but, practically speaking, there was no surviving endowment to support the Great Imambarah complex, therefore assuming responsibility for it stretched the resources of the Husaynabad Trust.

The dynamics between the Trustees and their British overseers were made evident in a letter composed in 1313/1896 by Lucknow Commissioner J. S. Mackintosh to J. LaTouche, Chief Secretary to the Government of the North West Provinces and Awadh. Mackintosh refers to disputes between local Muslim leaders and an attempt by junior Trustee members to appoint a new officiating religious official for the Great

Imambarah in his absence. Mackintosh indignantly wrote, “I found on inquiry that the trustees had not a shadow of right to issue any order of the kind, or to regulate in any way the religious services in the [Great Imambarah].” Such matters should appear before the courts in his view and he promptly revoked the Trustees decisions. Mīr Āghā Sāhib was reinstated although it is not clear how he came to be appointed in the first place.

This confusion only exacerbated the dispute over who had the right to appoint the senior religious officials to the city’s most prominent institutions. Did it fall to the British government or relatives of the *Nawwabs*; did it fall to the Husaynabad Trustees; or did it fall to the courts? In 1323/1906, the issue of who should be the prayer leader of the *Shi’i Isna Ashari* mosque resurfaced with the death of the incumbent Mir Agha Sahib. The Trustees appointed their own candidate to replace him, but Mawlī Sayyid Āghā Ḥasan mounted a vigorous campaign to secure his own appointment.

Two letters addressed to the Chief Secretary in June of 1323/1906 clearly expressed that government should not address such religious questions. One stated, “The mosque being a royal mosque the appointment would rest with the ruler. But Govt. does not wish to interfere in a matter of this kind and the decision should be left to the leaders of the [Shiah] community.” Despite this reluctance an official endorsement was issued on August 3rd, 1323/1906. J.J.D. Latouche wrote,

It appears that [Mawlvi Sayyid Agha Hasan] was nominated by the late [*mujtahid* Mir Agha Sahib] in his lifetime to carry out the duties of [*pish namāz*] of the Asafi [*masjid*]. The Govt. understands that it is customary for a [*pish namaz*] to nominate his successor. There is no question as to [Mawlvi Sayyid Agha Hasan Sahib] being properly qualified and [Government] recognizes him as the [*pish namaz*] of the Asafi [*masjid*], Lucknow.⁷²

Just one year later the British were faced with a similar issue in the case of the city's other major *Shi'i Isna Ashari* mosque, the Muhammad Ali mosque, which was half finished when they assumed power but was later completed with their help. After the Mutiny, they somewhat arbitrarily turned over the site's ownership to a local individual presenting himself as a religious scholar, but the site was ultimately administered by Mālīka Jahān, Nawwab Muhammad Ali Shah's wife. Years later a descendant of the earlier British designate laid claim to the mosque causing the matter to come before the Husaynabad Trustees. Deputy commissioner of Lucknow at the time, Mr. S.H. Butler strongly advised the Trustees to reconsider their decision on the matter.

I do not wish to interfere in what is largely if not altogether a religious matter. ... I think the Trustees would do well then to reconsider their position ... I wish to make clear that as to the merits of individual candidates I can have no opinion. All I am concerned with is that the action of the trustees should be regular and in accordance with precedent.⁷³

Butler was clearly directing the Trustees on how to handle the issue while claiming to not be involved.

The preceding discussion shows that in both of Lucknow's monumental mosques for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community the British held decisive influence over who the prayer leader would be following the mutiny. Through the mists of committee structure, which they controlled, the British made their preferences understood while sustaining the pretence of their disinterest in religious matters.

The question should be asked: how did this serve British interests? The British were concerned about the prayer leaders having played a role in mobilizing the mutineers with their speeches in the mosques. For example the commissioner of the Superintendent of

the Lucknow division wrote to Major Barrow on the 9th of Şafar, 1275/Sept. 17th, 1858 regarding the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious leader Sayyid Muhammad.

I beg the favour of your stating anything you know regarding this Priest more particularly as regards the belief recorded by Major Carnegie the City magistrate that the Priest was engaged in preaching a crusade against Europeans. There is no doubt about this Priest's attending the Rebel [*darbar*], and that he escaped plunder which would not have been the case had he not lent his influence and support to the Rebellion.⁷⁴

In an earlier letter a pardon for the religious leader Dildar Ali was recommended on the grounds that he might then be sympathetic to the British and be useful to them.⁷⁵ The British saw the mosques as a prime site to incite rebellion and the prayer leaders as instrumental in rousing Muslim passions. The quest for security therefore necessitated controlling who became the prayer leaders of the mosques.

A National Monument ?

Secular and religious nationalists

With the birth of the modern independent nation-state of India, the discourses of power surrounding the Great Imambarah complex changed significantly and set the stage for its new incarnation as a symbol of national and cultural identity. The post-colonial identity of the new nation-state was being contested, and a key debate was waged between Indian nationalists with secularist and religious affinities. Both ultimately shared a commitment to the Anglo-European concept of a nation state, which was interwoven with a notion of national history. Monumental architecture continued to play an important role in the nationalist discourse.

Integral to the Anglo-European notion of nation-state making that India was adopting was the assumption that modern nations were inevitably meant to come into being. Jawarharlal Nehru (1306-83/1889-1964) was a leading proponent of a secularist vision India that was fused with futurist, industrialist, secularist, socialist, democratic and pluralist impulses.⁷⁶ His vision attempted to separate issues surrounding the future of India's religious traditions and her national government and was centred on the development of a new, modern and industrialized nation-state. Monumental architecture played a role in advancing this vision, as the development of the entirely new city of Chandigarh in the Panjab by Swiss/French architect Le Corbusier showed. Intended as a beacon of Indian modernity using Indian tradition as inspiration, Chandigarh employed the latest in urban theory and architectural technology and design. It was supposed to be a prototype for life in the modern Indian nation.

Historical monumental architecture did not share the same prominence in Indian nationalism as a modernist architectural vision like Chandigarh did, but it was not deemed entirely irrelevant. Accompanying this enthusiasm for architectural Modernism was a lingering antiquarianism. A nineteenth-century British conception of archaeology devoted to the study of architectural monuments of antiquity survived and evolved in the institution, the Archaeological Survey of India, which was initially formed by the British but sustained by the new nation. The maintenance of this institution and associated intellectual disciplines was in itself an outgrowth of a commitment to an Anglo-European notion of modernity. As part of the desire to project India's modernity, it was important to display competence in Anglo-European intellectual endeavours, including the areas of archaeological science and historiography. Nehru for one saw these activities as

stimulating the intellect to boldly imagine a new future. While historical architecture itself did not necessarily serve the projection of Indian modernity, the scholarly study of it did.

It was an unvoiced but underlying assumption that historical works of monumental architecture provided a tangible heritage with which to illustrate Indian history. They were useful in defining the identity of the new nation because they were tangible proofs of Indian accomplishments and the heights Indian civilization had reached before being subjected to colonization by “foreigners.” The ability of historical architectural monuments to connote power was less rooted in their physical qualities and more in the depth of the symbolic associations they created with the past.

It would be misleading to say that the Great Imambarah complex played a significant role in the post-Independence nationalist discourse since it did not. In fact, the Archaeological Survey of India, the chief interpreter of its national significance, carried forward British interpretations and continued to view it as a marginal national monument but did devote minimal funds to it.⁷⁷ In a 1964 publication by the Archaeological Survey of India that was aimed at impressing attendees of the Twenty-sixth International Congress of Orientalists in New Delhi, the organization surveyed the country’s archaeological remains, but made only a passing, oblique reference to the Great Imambarah complex. It fell into the category of architecture succeeding the “declining Mughal style of Delhi” and was described as “spacious and impressive but too florid.”⁷⁸ In contrast, the Taj Mahal, for example, was described in detail and singled out as the height of Shah Jahani architecture. If anything, the Great Imambarah complex connoted weakness and Mughal imperial disintegration, and not vitality. Constricted by this

modern and scholarly historical interpretation, the Great Imambarah complex did not reinforce a national narrative of Indian grandeur but cast doubt upon it and could only be of limited use, even though it had been recognized early on as a technological wonder.

While the Great Imambarah complex's historical value was relatively unimportant to a secular nationalist agenda, one that was driven by religious nationalism appropriated it. Since the struggle for South Asian independence, Hindu-centric nationalism was, and continues to be, a recurring feature of Indian politics and efforts to define its national identity. As briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, the history of the Great Imambarah along with other major monuments such as the Taj Mahal was co-opted by the Hindu-nationalist journalist and revisionist historian P.N. Oak, who founded the Institute for Rewriting India History in 1383/1964.

Published in 1395/1976, Oak's book Lucknow's Imambarahs are Hindu Palaces seemingly reacted to the increased attention given to the site by the Archaeological Survey of India, which began documenting the site in the early 1970s.⁷⁹ The significance of the Imambarah was reinterpreted as being a monument of Hindu accomplishment and as a symbol of the victimization of *Lakhnawis* and Indians by British Colonial cultural imperialism. Oak inaccurately saw the complex as a Hindu temple whose history was rewritten as part of a British and Muslim conspiracy. It would be easy to dismiss Oak as eccentric with little credibility in academic circles but he did read the English sources available on the Great Imambarah closely and his views on India's other Islamic monuments did penetrate into mainstream Indian media and flourish on the Internet, although these have been countered with sophisticated and well-informed critiques.

Oak basically argued that the Great Imambarah existed before Asaf al-Dawlah and because of its forms and names it belonged to Hindu architecture; he also maintained that the sole account by Isfahani attributing the Great Imambarah to Asaf al-Dawlah, was unreliable. First, if this were true then accounts of Lucknow prior to dates given for the site's development by Asaf al-Dawlah would show that the Great Imambarah existed. However, both the textual description of Lucknow by Gladwin made in 1199/1785 and the map of the city drawn by Tieffenthaler in 1178/1765 did not testify to the existence of the Great Imambarah. Second, there would be no reason to assume that Muslims would not use forms developed within other religious traditions; stylistic evidence alone would not be sufficient to establish the point. Third, Isfahani's account was consistent with other historical records on a number of points and should be judged as very reliable. For example, the famine of 1198/1784 mentioned by Isfahani was corroborated with letters written by Bristow and Hastings. To Oak's credit his scepticism about details such as the date of the Great Imambarah's construction was not always unwarranted but it was misdirected by what could unfortunately only be described as an irresponsible agenda to propagate hatred against Indian Muslims. For Oak, the first step to securing the site for an exclusively Hindu constituency was to redefine its history.

A heritage monument

More recently, heritage organizations like the Archaeological Survey of India (A. S. I.) and the Indian National Trust for Culture (INTACH) have sought to elevate local, national, and international recognition of the Great Imambarah complex. The A.S.I. reorganized its circles of responsibility in 1403/1983, creating the Lucknow Circle.⁸⁰

The Great Imambarah is the most recognizable flagship heritage monument for the city, which was made explicit in a pamphlet published by the Lucknow Circle A.S.I. to commemorate India's World Heritage Week entitled "Monumental Heritage of Lucknow"; the publication featured the Great Imambarah on its cover.⁸¹ INTACH, India's most nationally active heritage conservation organization, commissioned a book on Lucknow's architecture by the senior scholar W. H. Siddiqui, an indication that a process of redefining the city's heritage value was at work.⁸²

These modest efforts to redefine the Great Imambarah complex, or portions of it, as an object of greater historical and national significance drew from a vision of Indian modernity that reacted against the neglect of India's architectural legacy in the face of pressures like those generated by Modernist architectural ideology, institutional bureaucracy, the rapid population growth of India cities, rampant illegal appropriations of property, poorly regulated commercial expansions, pollution, urban poverty and local indifference. In this vision, architectural conservation was seen as important to the preservation of India's identity as a modern nation and the sustainability of commercial tourism to the country. It echoed global architectural heritage conservation and legislation movements long active in Europe and North America.⁸³

The Great Imambarah as a film set

While the Great Imambarah complex was drawn into various nationalist discourses, it continued to play a role in local contests to secure greater power. For example, members of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community's elite repackaged the annual mourning rituals of Muharram into an event titled "*Matam on Fire*" that was open to the public but

invitations were also deliberately issued to local dignitaries to ensure their attendance. Hjortshoj recorded the event in the 1970s, and the event continued on since the author observed similar proceedings in 1422/2002. The events were staged on the evening of the first night of Muharram in the first and second forecourts of the Great Imambarah complex, which were lit with lights powered by gas-powered generators. Young men walked across hot coals as part of their *matam*. Events were narrated over loudspeakers and photographers and television cameramen covered the event. The Great Imambarah complex's monumentality enhanced the drama of the event, which was a conspicuous effort on the part of Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community to emphasize their heritage, their numbers and their continued presence in the city to all *Lakhnawis*.

The recent attempt to use the interior of the Great Imambarah as a set for the Bollywood film Ghadar revealed another dimension to the current power dynamics of which the Great Imambarah and its surrounding complex are a part. In the March 23, 2000, issue of the Times of India, an article on an Indian film crew's struggle to obtain permission to film scenes inside the Great Imambarah was published. District magistrate Sanjay Agarwal was quoted as saying, "Our permission is subject to approval of the A. S. I. and the [Husaynabad] Trust. We cannot do anything which will hurt the sentiments of the [Shiah] community."⁸⁴

Curiously, the key opponents of the filming were not members of the Husaynabad Trust, which collects an entrance fee from tourists for the Great Imambarah, but Kalbe Sadiq, an influential *Shi'i Isna Ashari* theologian and vice-chair of the Muslim Personal Law Board, and prominent *Shi'i Isna Ashari* families descended from the *Nawwabs*. They objected on the grounds that filming in the Great Imambarah's interior would

compromise the sanctity of the building since it was intended for religious purposes and should not be used as a stage for singing and dancing. If such efforts were not solely motivated by religious concerns, then they may have been attempts by individuals to enhance their personal stature within the Lucknow *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community, who sought to appear as protectors of Islamic faith against the pressures of secularization and mounting Hindu-Muslim tensions. Such posturing took place in a national and local environment where the illegal appropriation of difficult to maintain Muslim *vaqf* properties was, and continues to be, a source of dispute, especially between Hindus and Muslims. The Ghadar incident revealed that the use of the Great Imambarah complex continued to be a politicized affair; this time its use was contested between contemporary *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elites of Lucknow, commercial interests and the Husaynabad Trust.

More significantly, the complex also became a focal point in issues surrounding the balance of power between men and women in Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community. A group of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* women of Lucknow chose the Friday mosque of the Great Imambarah complex as the venue to mount their bid for access to the Friday congregational prayers. Women traditionally were not permitted to attend Friday congregational prayers at the *masjid*. On the eleventh of Rabi' al-Sānī 1418/August 15, 1997, Independence Day in India, an eighteen-year old woman named Sadaf Rizvi led a small group of women to the Friday prayers in the congregational *masjid*.⁸⁵ Their aim was to be allowed to regularly attend the prayers. Though the connections are not clear, this was not an isolated incident but part of an international rise in feminist or womanist Islam in the 1990s, a key instance being the women in mosques campaign of South Africa. On the surface, the demonstration in Lucknow was over an issue of religious

practice but it was really about *Shi'i Isna Ashari* women's participation in the public life of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community and was part of the broader issue of women's empowerment in contemporary Muslim societies.

Conclusion

From its conception to the present day, the Great Imambarah complex has continued to play a role in socially contested power relations on local and regional planes but in very different ways. Because of its communal functions and its monumentality, the site continues to be a place where power relations are contested and its historical memory and use challenged. Initially a significant vehicle for demonstrating the authority of Awadh's ruler, its occupation becomes a pointed tool for British vengefulness after the Rebellion of 1273/1857 and a license to influence religious appointments. After Indian independence, its value as a conferrer of power, now diminished, lies in how well it can reinforce Indian nationalism and the Indian nation's visions of its own modernity, as well as the religious views of Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite.

The development of the Great Imambarah complex shows two very different notions of power at work in Awadh. For Asaf al-Dawlah, who was steeped in Mughal traditions, power was rooted in perception. One needed to be perceived as powerful in order to secure the loyalties of subordinates and subjects. By doing so, one could then exert greater control over military and economic resources. It should be remembered that the complex was both an elaborate processional stage and an amalgam of community institutions that included a masjid, an *imambarah*, a hospital and a hall of justice, which

enhanced community life. For the Company, power was rooted in the tangible control of trade and military forces. Officials assumed that authority over Lucknow and Awadh would follow once these were secured. Asaf al-Dawlah's building activities were therefore not seen as enhancing his power but weakening it by draining his financial resources. Since these resources ultimately were not being directed into the Company, which was prosperous but overextended in its commitments, the situation had the potential for disrupting the Company's cash flow and weakening it as well.

Instead of turning to the development of monumental architecture, Asaf al-Dawlah could have chosen to modernize his army with Company support. This was not contrary to the Company's interests since they were already in the arms trade and profited handsomely from the sale of modern weaponry and training, activities that also granted them strategic access to indigenous military forces. But, in the face of a restless population who expected clear signs of who was in power through architectural and processional displays, the Great Imambarah complex was probably, at that point in time, a more effective strategy than investing in a highly trained army.

Is it fair to say that Asaf al-Dawlah's decision to develop the Great Imambarah complex was a wasteful extravagance, an escapist exercise by a ruler ignorant of changing political realities, or a weak effort to conceal the loss of real power to the Company? On the contrary, it was an intelligently conceived and an essential preliminary step towards the reconsolidation of Asaf al-Dawlah's power in Awadh. Commissioning monumental architecture was an early step on the path to reasserting authority in the face of humiliation. Following his crushing defeat at Baksar to the Company, Asaf al-Dawlah's own father had also embarked on a large building program

in Faizabad, while taking steps to modernize his army.⁸⁶ Pursuing such a strategy did not put Asaf al-Dawlah on a pace that would position him to challenge the British militarily, but it did effectively capitalize on *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious sentiment and shore up the loyalty of his own people, a necessary precondition to amassing greater power. The clearest evidence of the long-term success of this strategy was the production of the social myth of Asaf al-Dawlah's benevolence, and the wave of imambarah construction by Lucknow's elite that followed.

It is during British control of the Great Imambarah complex, that brutally simple relationships between the quest for power and monumental architecture were forged. With force came ownership and power over monuments; people intuitively knew that the holders of monuments were the holders of power. If there are any doubts that those who seek greater power are highly conscious of how monumental architecture can be used to that end, the correspondence of British colonial officials during the period of their greatest influence in Awadh sets them aside. They show that long after military concerns had passed, the Great Imambarah complex continued to be occupied to make a point to the once rebellious Lucknow populace. They could see that the greatest monuments of their past belonged completely to the Company and could be used or destroyed according to its will.

Since Indian independence, the Great Imambarah complex has been embroiled in a number of attempts by various groups – Hindu nationalists, a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite, *Shi'i Isna Ashari* women, architectural conservationists - to reposition themselves and their agendas within their respective but intertwined power hierarchies. These issues have played out on a number of fronts and are not uniquely tied to the Great Imambarah

complex itself. The institutions and individuals wielding and contesting power through their control over the Great Imambarah complex after Indian independence are far less influential than those during *Nawwabi* rule and British occupation. Yet, the issues raised are not trivial and on the whole speak to the Indian struggle to reconcile tradition with modernity.

Does the complex actually have anything to do with these power relations or has it simply by chance become a convenient focal point for disputes to unfold? All of the groups mentioned have thought that by controlling some measure of the complex, whether it be its history or the way it is used, their agendas would be advanced and their influence expanded. The ultimate goal of Oak and his sympathizers is not just to change history books but also to gain control of the Great Imambarah complex, along with other examples of monumental Muslim architecture in India, and claim them for the purpose of constructing a modern Hindu identity. The *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite are not simply protesting a single incident but are attempting to set in place a precedent that will restrict the future use of the site to only religious purposes that are in accordance with their views. The *Shi'i Isna Ashari* women, who joined the congregational prayers in Lucknow, are not only interested in fundamentally changing religious practice at the complex's *masjid* but undoubtedly aspire to fundamentally change religious practice in all *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, and perhaps Sunni, mosques in the region and elevate women's roles in the community. The protesting groups draw on the monumentality of the site to give their cause greater weight and grander proportions.

Born from Asaf al-Dawlah's power crisis and his commitment to the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* faith, the Great Imambarah complex has played, and continues to play, a role in

defining power relations in *Lakhnawi* and Indian society, despite the radical shifts in power due to the British colonial project and the rise of the modern Indian nation. In this way, the Great Imambarah complex has continued to be a meaningful instrument of power.

¹ Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, Shuja-ud-Daulah, 2 vols. (Calcutta: 1939-45), vol. 2, pp. 8-11. Richard B. Barnett, North India Between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British 1720-1801 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 73.

² Srivastava, vol. 2, pp. 70, 75-8. Barnett, North India Between Empires, p. 83.

³ Srivastava, vol. 2, pp. 209-33. Barnett, North India Between Empires, p. 92, n. 69.

⁴ Muhammad Fayzbakhsh, Tārīkh-i Farahbakhsh [Joy-conferring history], trans. William Hoey as, Memoirs of Delhi and Faizabad, being a translation of the "Tarikh Farahbaksh" of Muhammad Faiz-Baksh, from the original Persian, vol. 2 (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1889), p. 5.

⁵ Fayzbakhsh, p. 19.

⁶ Fayzbakhsh, p. 61. Richard Barnett, "Embattled Begams: Women as Power Brokers in Early Modern India," in Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety, ed. Gavin Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 524.

⁷ Fayzbakhsh, p. 16.

⁸ Fayzbakhsh, pp. 16-24. Barnett, North India, p. 105.

⁹ Barnett, North India, p. 112.

¹⁰ Faizbaksh, p. 51.

¹¹ Fayzbakhsh, p. 207.

¹² Asaf al-Dawlah to Bristow, rec. 1783, Home/Misc./185, f. 667, India Office Library, British Library, London. Bristow's aggressive tactics were similar to those of the Lucknow's resident Charles Purling. See: Barnett, North India, pp. 156-9.

¹³ Report of Mr. Russell the Board of Directors of the East India Company Solicitor, Nov. 28, 1785 on Vizier's complaints against Mr. Bristow with a Precis and an

Appendix, Home/Misc./344, ff. 583-585, India Office Records, Oriental and India Office, British Library.

¹⁴ Asaf al-Dawlah to Hastings, April 7th, 1783, Home/Misc./185, ff. 108-9, India Office Records, Oriental and India Office, British Library.

¹⁵ Asaf al- Dawlah to Hastings, rec. August 25th, 1784, Home/Misc./555 (4) (12) etc., f. 271, India Office Records, Oriental and India Office, British Library.

¹⁶ Barnett, North India, pp. 95, 221.

¹⁷ Cornwallis to Hayder Begh Khan [Asaf al-Dawlah's finance minister], 25 Feb. 1789 in Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Vol. VIII, 1788-89 (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1953), p. 442, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

¹⁸ Abu Talib Isfahani, Tafzih al-Ghafilin [The Disgrace of the Negligent], trans. William Hoey, A History of Asafu'd Daula (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1885 [repr. Lucknow: Pustak Kendra, 1971]), p. 103.

¹⁹ Barnett, North India, p. 229.

²⁰ Cornwallis to Court of Director, 16 Nov. 1787, Home/Misc./236, f. 178, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

²¹ Hyder Beg Cown and the Vizier to Mr. Hastings, Dec. 23, 1784, Oude 5 B Enc.:2-269072ab, Home/Misc./554, p. 29, India Office Records, Oriental and India Office, British Library. In this letter Asaf al-Dawlah and his minister look to Hastings as the only one who can help Awadh resist the expansion of Maratha domains under Sindia.

²² George Valentia [1769-1844], Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, The Red Sea, Abbyssinia, and Egypt in the years 1802-1806, 3 vols. (London: Printed for W. Miller 1809), vol. 1, p. 155.

²³ Anon., Intikhab-i akhbar-i Navab Vazir ul-Mamalik Bahadur u Intikhab-i Akhbar-i Durbar Mu'alla u Atraf 1208-1209, no. 92 M.P. Cat. 90, Box 43, Royal Asiatic Society, London. Anon., Intikhab-i Akhbar-i Durbar-i Navab Vazir ul-Mamalik Asaf ud-Daula Bahadur, 1209-1210, no. 93., M.P. Cat. 91, Box 43, Royal Asiatic Society, London. A summary appears in Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isnā 'Asharī Shī'Is in India, 2 vols. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1986), vol. 2, p. 309.

²⁴ Francis Rawdon [Marquess of Hastings], The Private Journal of the Marquess of Hastings, ed. Marchioness of Bute, 2 vols. (London: 1858), vol. 1, p. 188.

²⁵ Rawdon, vol. 1, p. 191.

²⁶ Fayzbakhsh, p. 22.

²⁷ Rawdon, vol. 1, p. 206.

²⁸ When the British built Lucknow's famous clock tower in the 1880s, they made it clear, through the imposition of a new system of regulating time, that they now held power.

²⁹ Jahangir, Jahangirnama, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston as The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 300.

³⁰ Keith Hjortshoj, Cornell University Occasional Papers: Urban Structures and Transformations in Lucknow, India (Cornell: Cornell University, 1979), p. 85.

³¹ Rizvi, vol. 2., pp. 309-16.

³² Rizvi, vol. 2., pp. 309-16.

³³ Rizvi, vol. 2., p. 313.

³⁴ Rizvi, vol. 2., p. 310.

³⁵ Isfahani, p. 73-4

³⁶ Rizvi, vol. 2., p. 312.

³⁷ Fayzbakhsh, p. 60.

³⁸ Juan Cole, Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq : religion and state in Awadh, 1722-1859 (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 96, esp. n.18.

³⁹ Neeta Das, The Architecture of Imambaras (Lucknow: Lucknow Mahotsava Patrika Samiti, 1991).

⁴⁰ Sayyid Anwer Abbas, Wailing Beauty: The Perishing Art of Nawabi Lucknow (Lucknow: Saiyed Anwer Abbas, 2002).

⁴¹ Rizvi, vol. 2., p. 312.

⁴² Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, Observations on the Musulmauns of India, Descriptive of their Manners, Customs, Habits, and Religious Opinions (1832 [repr. Karachi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974]), pp. 23-4.

⁴³ F. Gladwin, "Account of Lucknow," in Asiatic Annual Register, vol. 1 (London, 1800), pp. 97-101, 1742.756980n, British Library, London.

⁴⁴ Isfahani, p. 55.

⁴⁵ Bristow to Hyder Beg, 26th Juma ud awall 1197 rec. 1783. Reply, Juma ud awwal, 1197 H. Khan to Bristow, Home Misc. 185, p. 675, India Office Records, Oriental and India Office, British Library.

⁴⁶ Isfahani, p. 72.

⁴⁷ Carnegy to Abbott, 23 May, 1860, File No. 2693 - List of Attendants on the tomb of Asafud Dowlah, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.

⁴⁸ Isfahani, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Fayzbakhsh, p. 215.

⁵⁰ 'Abd al-Latīf Shushtari, Tuhfat al-'Ālam [Gift to the World], Add 23,533, fol. 1944a, Persian Collections, Oriental and India Office, British Library, London. Isfahani, p. 80. Cole, p.95 n.13. H.G. Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors to Lucknow (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1875 [repr. New Delhi, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 2000]), p. 112. After briefly describing the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid*, Shushtari says that he heard from the project accountant that two *crore* rupees were spent (see: Appendix B). Cole believes that Shushtari, an Iranian, had an Iranian *crore* in mind, for which one *crore* equals 500 000 units. Consequently, he concludes the Great Imambarah cost 1 000 000 rupees. However, the passage appears to refer to both the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid*. The number appears as a record of a conversation with knowledgeable officials, who probably thought in terms of Indian *crores*, where one *crore* equals 10 000 000 units. Also, Shushtari's account was a retrospective one that was completed in 1802 after he had spent at least a year in India and most likely adopted the local numbering system. I have decided to take Shushtari's figure of two *crore* to mean 20 000 000 rupees was the cost of the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid* and possibly the entire complex over a period of roughly five years, the project's estimated length of construction. This also seems more consistent with the *Nawwab*'s other expenses as discussed by Isfahani.

⁵¹ Isfahani, p. 72.

⁵² Isfahani, p. 30.

⁵³ Isfahani, p. 73, 74.

⁵⁴ Anon., Ā'inah-i haqq-numā, Delhi Persian 259 (b), ff. 67b, Oriental and India Office, British Library, London. Safi Ahmad, Two Kings of Awadh: Muhammad Ali Shah and Amjad Ali Shah (1837-47) (Aligarh: P.C. Dwadash Shreni & Co. (P.), 1971), p. 127. Rizvi, vol. 2, pp. 130-1. Cole, pp. 128-9.

⁵⁵ Barnett, North India, pp. 168-9, 175-7.

⁵⁶ Fayzbakhsh, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Valentia, vol. 1, p. 158.

⁵⁸ Asaf al-Dawlah to Bristow, rec. 30 May, 1783, Home/Misc./ 344, f. 615, India Office Records, Oriental and India Office, British Library.

⁵⁹ For the earliest references to the Great Imambarah as a famine relief project see: Edward H. Hilton, The Tourists' Guide to Lucknow, in five parts. By one at the beleaguered garrison (Lucknow: London Print. Press [repr. 1894]) and Keene, pp. 102-3.

⁶⁰ Rawdon, vol. 1, pp. 110-1.

⁶¹ Lawrence to Governor General, 23 May 1857, Foreign Dept., Secret Progs., 6790, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

⁶² 18 Dec. 1857, Foreign Dept., Secret Progs., 6913, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

⁶³ Couper to Edmonstone, 29 Jan. 1858, Foreign Dept., Secret, No. 361, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

⁶⁴ Crommelin to Secretary to the Govt. of India - Military Dept., May 1871, Foreign Dept., General B, No. 191, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

⁶⁵ Lieutenant Colonel P.S. Lumsden Quarter Master General to the Secretary to the Govt. of India, Simla, 25 July, 1869, Military Dept. No. 3, 32, rec. Army headquarters Simla 26th Aug. 1869 included in Foreign Dept. General B May 1871 No. 191 Use of Great Imambarah and mosque within the Muchee Bhawan Fort at Lucknow, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

⁶⁶ Veena Talwar Oldenburg, The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877 (Princeton, N.J., Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 50.

⁶⁷ H.D. Wonte, Commissioner of Lucknow to Secretary to Government of North-West Provinces and Oudh, July 30, 1891, File 40, Box 19, Dept. XV, Preservation of Buildings of Historical or Archaeological interest, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.

⁶⁸ Copy of Translation of Deed of Trust of Mahomed Ally Shah late King and grandfather of the present King of Oude (1839), 13 April 1893, Box 44, 130A. Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow. C. U. Aitchison, A Collection of Treaties, Engagement and Sanads (Calcutta, 1909) vol. 8, No. XLV.

⁶⁹ Talwar Oldenburg, p. 198

⁷⁰ Anon., D. Extracts from "Husainabad Annual Administration Reports" showing certain items expended contrary to the directions of His late Majesty Muhammad Ali Shah, as declared in the Deed of Trust, Box 44, 130A, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.

⁷¹ Talwar Oldenburg, p. 193.

⁷² J.J.D. Latouche, Chief Secretary to Government of North-West Provinces and Oudh, 3 August 1906, Appointment of a mujtahid to Nawab Asafuddoula's mosque Lucknow, Political, Box 370, File 254/1926, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.

⁷³ S. H. Butler, Deputy Commissioner of Lucknow, 27 March 1908, Appointment of a Mujtahid to the Jama Masjid Lucknow, Political, Box 76, File 2777, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.

⁷⁴ Commissioner of Superintendant Lucknow Division to Major L. Barrow, 17 Sept. 1858 Lucknow, File No. 2365, Old Oudh Records 1858-90, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.

⁷⁵ Mr. Elzins to L. Barrow, 9 July 1858, Recommendation for Pardon of Dildar Ali a rebel, praying for pardon, Oudh General, File 585, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.

⁷⁶ For a sense of Nehru's notion of the pre-eternal Indian nation, see: Jawaharlal Nehru, speech delivered on Indian Independence, August 14, 1947, reprinted in Brian McArthur, Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches (London: Penguin Viking, 1992), pp. 234-7. For a discussion of Nehru's relationship with history, see: David Ludden, "India Before Colonialism: The International Impact of Indian Research Since 1947," in India's Worlds and U.S. Scholars: 1947-1997, eds. Joe Elder, Ainslee Embree, and Ed Dimock, published for the Delhi: Manohar Publishers and The American Institute of Indian Studies, 1998), pp.265-82.

⁷⁷ For example, 3 000 rupees were spent on conservation of the Great Imambarah in contrast to the 30 000 spent on the Taj Mahal in 1953-4. Government of India, Annual Report 1953-54.

⁷⁸ A. Ghosh, ed., Archaeological Remains: Monuments and Museums, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1964 [repr. 1996]), vol. 2, p. 325.

⁷⁹ P.N. Oak, Lucknow's Imambaras are Hindu Palaces (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1976). Reproductions of the Archaeological Survey of India's dated drawings of the site made in the 1970s are available in Banmali Tandan, The Architecture of the Nawabs of Avadh between 1722 and 1865: A descriptive inventory and analysis of types, PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1979.

⁸⁰ Anon., Monumental Heritage of Lucknow, Archaeological Survey of India – Lucknow Circle, (no date, c. 1990s).

⁸¹ Anon., Monumental Heritage of Lucknow.

⁸² W. H. Siddiqi, Lucknow, the Historic City (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 2000).

⁸³ For discussions on architectural heritage conservation in India, see: Sachindra Sekhar Biswas, Protecting the Cultural Heritage (National Legislation and International Conventions) (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1999). E. F. N. Ribeiro, "The Existing and Emerging Framework for Heritage Conservation in India: The Legal, Managerial and Training Aspects," in Third World Planning Review, 12 (November 1990): pp. 338-48.

⁸⁴ R. B. Singh, "Gadar runs into trouble in Lucknow too," Indian Express, June 23, 2001. Anon., "Muslim Jagriti Manch objects to some scenes in 'Gadar'," Daily Excelsior, June 25, 2001.

⁸⁵ Sharat Pradhan, "Women offer namaz in Lucknow mosque," Rediff, August 25, 1997. Ranjita Biswas, "Revolution behind the veil," The Hindu, Sunday, May 27, 2001.

⁸⁶ Barnett, North India, p. 77.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the Builders' Eyes

Designing and Building the Great Imambarah Complex

[Kifayat Allah] is said to have been the architect [of the Great Imambarah] whose designs were adopted; and tradition adds that many of the hitherto prosperous citizens were so reduced by want as to be compelled to take up the trowel or the hod among the more experienced masons. In order to spare their sense of shame at this degradation, the [Nawwab] considerably allowed the wages of these retiring amateurs to be paid at night. So goes the story:¹

Published in 1291/1875 by the historian and travel writer Henry George Keene over eighty years after the completion of the Great Imambarah, this is one of the earliest references to the building's architect but the author's last few words betray a hint of skepticism. About the architects of the congregational *masjid*, the Rumi Darvazah or the forecourt buildings, Keene remains silent. Less than a decade later, P. C. Mookherjee, a member of the Indian Civil Service and resident of Lucknow, tells a more elaborate version of the story, in which Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah stages a design competition that is won by Muhib Allāh and his son Kifayat Allah. Starving in the wake of a terrible famine, veiled women of the neighbouring women's quarters (*zanarah*) come out at night to work on the site hoping to earn some silver. Still alive during Saadat Ali Khan's reign, Kifayat Allah is employed to build the tomb of Saadat Ali Khan's mother and the Lāl

Bāradarī.² Like Keene, Mookherjee does not discuss who the architects for the rest of the Great Imambarah complex were. Two significantly later works claim that Kifayat Allah is buried next to Asaf al-Dawlah in the Great Imambarah, that he originates from Shahjahanabad and that he may have alternatively been buried in a *masjid* near the Muṣāhibganj Imāmbārah in Lucknow.³

It is satisfying to know the name of the architect responsible for the largest building in the world at the time; yet, there is no trace of information about Kifayat Allah's life, the staging of an architectural competition, or the labours of a starving elite. In the most trustworthy source of information on Asaf al-Dawlah's reign, the eyewitness account of Abu Talib Isfahani that was compiled from his diaries and memory in 1211/1796-7, these three details are conspicuously absent. The late-Mughal biographical dictionary Mā'sir al-umarā is silent about Kifayat Allah and his father.⁴ No inscribed gravesite for the architect has been found in either the Great Imambarah or Musahibganj. Despite these issues, Keene's account, including his separation of the Great Imambarah from its surrounding buildings and his date of 1198/1784 for the Great Imambarah's construction, continues to define popular and even scholarly conceptions of who designed and built the Great Imambarah and when.⁵

For the dating of the Great Imambarah, one recent scholar turns to Isfahani, who provides a year-by-year account of Asaf al-Dawlah's rule.⁶ Isfahani writes,

1205 A.H. (10th September, 1790-30th August, 1791)

In this year the [Imambarah] was completed and [taziyahs] began to be deposited here. ... There is a large courtyard, and at the sides stand a lofty [*masjid*] and outoffices in keeping with it. Opposite the [Imambarah] is erected a high gate, a kind of '[*tirpawliyah*],' and beside it are two or three extensive [*jilawkhanahs*],

which have three doors each in the same style. Near this are outoffices, a hospital, and travellers' rest-houses. Over the gate of the outermost '[*jilawkhanahs*],' which is known as the [Rumi Darvazah], they have erected a circular chamber with painted walls.⁷

Isfahani not only describes the completion of the Great Imambarah but also gives the impression that the Great Imambarah is the last piece completed in a complex, which includes the congregational *masjid*, the forecourts, and the Rumi Darvazah.

The dates when construction begins on each individual monument are less clear but it seems that between the years 1200/1786 and 1205/1791 there is an overlapping period in which the major monuments of the complex are simultaneously under construction. The commonly circulated date of 1198/1784 is highly unlikely, when one considers that Warren Hastings stayed at the Baoli Palace in 1198/1784 and did not mention any monumental construction efforts underway in his personal or official correspondence.⁸ Gladwin's highly descriptive account of Lucknow's Panj Mahal in 1199/1785 also does not mention new construction but it does include Asaf al-Dawlah's Baoli Palace, showing it to be an earlier commission.⁹ Even as late as May 1786 (13 Rajab 1200), the decision to build the congregational *masjid* has not yet been made since the concept of Friday prayers, new to Lucknow *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Muslims, is just being introduced by Sayyid Dildar Ali, who on Hasan Riza Khan's urgings first leads communal Friday prayers for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* in the palace quarters of Asaf al-Dawlah.¹⁰ The major religious monuments of the Great Imambarah complex and probably the Rumi Darvazah and forecourt buildings are initiated and completed in a remarkably short span of roughly five years between 1200/1786 and 1205/1791.

Who, then, are the architects and builders of the Great Imambarah, the Rumi Darvazah, the congregational *masjid* or the structures that connect them? As discussed in Chapter Two, direct answers are not forthcoming with the present pool of available evidence. However, Keene's version can be exchanged for one that is broader and more detailed in scope. In this chapter, we first enter the practical world of the designers and builders of eighteenth and nineteenth century North India and Lucknow in order to map out the complex networks of people, aesthetic legacies and people involved in the design and construction of the Great Imambarah complex as a whole and their methods. Second, we seek out the aesthetic vision that they collectively brought into reality in comparison with what remains today. A network of people endowed with wealth, financial management expertise, visualization skills, knowledge of building materials, extraordinary bricklaying and plastering skills, and brute strength and resilience brought the Great Imambarah complex into being and not just Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah, the mysterious Kifayat Allah and their workforce interspersed with a starving nobility.

The Craft of Building in Eighteenth-century North India

For those involved with architecture in eighteenth-century northern India, the lines between patron, architect, engineer and construction manager were not clearly drawn. Financial management was one of the most valued skills, but religious affiliation was not overly important in Awadh. Like their Mughal exemplars, the *Nawwab-Vazirs* of Awadh actively involved themselves in construction. Buildings were visualized with rudimentary plans on grids, and if the need arose, elevations were used too. Lastly,

without an extensive industry to produce and supply bricks and lime, skilled bricklayers, stucco artisans, and labourers nothing could have been built.

The late-Mughal Mir Imarat according to Shah Hidayatullah

If Kifayat Allah did indeed come to Lucknow from the late-Mughal imperial court in Shahjahanabad, he would have been familiar with the office of the *Mir Imarat* (chief of building construction). Ideally, the *Mir Imarat* was familiar with accounting practices, could estimate the amounts and costs of building materials for a project (quantity surveying) and was knowledgeable about the market wages of builders and artisans.¹¹

This listing of qualifications was compiled by a forlorn *sajjadāh nashīn* (shrine attendant) named Shāh Hidāyat Allāh who attended to the *khānqah* of Manir Sharīf in the Patna district and who was forced to leave his trade of construction management due to the inability of his clients to pay. Hidayat Allah included this list of qualities in a treatise on codes of conducts for businessmen, traders, landholders entitled Hidāyat al-Qavā'id, which he completed a few years before his death in 1128/1716-7. His financial difficulties foreshadowed the emerging vacuum for building professionals in an increasingly chaotic North India.

Only with the emergence of semi-independent Awadh, and the accession of Asaf al-Dawlah, would this situation dramatically reverse itself. *Nawwabi* Awadh, nominally still a province of the Mughal empire, undoubtedly bore traces of Mughal social institutions and its building design and construction industries, which had generated the Taj Mahal, Shahjahanabad and other splendours.

The anonymous architect of Shuja al-Dawlah

When the French were compelled by the British to leave Bengal in the 1760s, the French officer Jean-Baptiste Gentil also found himself searching for a safe harbour and a reliable patron, which he found in Nawwab-Vazir Shuja al-Dawlah of Awadh. Using an Indian artist exposed to Anglo-European artistic and drafting conventions, Gentil later commissioned an album with paintings of the palaces of Delhi and Faizabad for his wife's family entitled, Palais indiens receuillis par M. le Gentil. One painting, a hybrid of Anglo-European watercoloured draftings and the Mughal miniature tradition, was made of a no longer extant palace in the Shahjahanabad area [Fig. 101]. Interestingly, the painting was inscribed with the following passage in French that identified the painter: "Palais du vieux Dély bâti par Selimcha qui fit bâtir aussi Selingar qui sert de prison aux Princes Mogols. Levé en 1187/1774 par un architecte du Vizir Sandjan Daula [Shuja al-Dawlah]." ¹² Shuja al-Dawlah clearly employed indigenous architects capable of rendering real buildings on paper, but the role such depictions played in the design of new buildings is unclear.

The Hindu 'architects' (project supervisors) of the Gulab Bari

In 1188/1775, Gentil's patron and friend Shuja al-Dawlah died and was buried in a rose garden known as the Gulāb Bārī in Faizabad. The Gulab Bari began as a tranquil garden abundant with roses first built on the wishes of Şafdar Jang (d. 1167/1753), Persian immigrant, usurper of Mughal imperial authority, father to Shuja al-Dawlah and grandfather to Asaf al-Dawlah. It was in this garden that Safdar Jang's wife, the

Nawwab-Begam, laid her husband to rest under a modest domed tomb until a more fitting monument was completed in suburban Shahjahanabad, the Mughal capital. Safdar Jang's remains were eventually transferred to Shahjahanabad into a monumental tomb that would be the city's last [Fig. 129]. When Safdar Jang's son Shuja al-Dawlah expired, he too was interred in the Gulab Bari and a similar post-mortem journey to Shahjahanabad was planned for his remains. However, this did not take place and his body remained in Faizabad. Only the simple dome that his mother had built for his father would have sheltered his corpse, were it not for the ambitions of his devoted minister and friend Hasan Riza Khan, the Hindu building project managers Lala Hemraj Brahman and Bhawani Parshad and the seemingly reluctant Asaf al-Dawlah.

Over a decade later and at the same time the Great Imambarah was being built in Lucknow, Asaf al-Dawlah finally consented to release funds for a more elaborate tomb complex for his father at Faizabad in 1204/1789. His change of mind was not inspired by a newfound desire to honour his father, but was prompted by Hasan Riza Khan, a loyal courtier and personal friend to his father and now an indispensable minister to Asaf al-Dawlah who was also an influential advocate for the introduction of Friday prayers for Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Muslims. Through gentle prodding, Hasan Riza Khan obtained the funds, and entrusted them with various officials in Faizabad to tend to the matter. For three years, a Hindu accountant, Lala Hemraj Brahman, and his son, Bhawani Parshad, oversaw the redevelopment of Shuja al-Dawlah's tomb complex at the Gulab Bari. In the words of Faizabad's court historian Fayz Bakhsh,

[Hasan Riza Khan] obtained seven thousand gold pieces from the treasury and sent them to Matbu' 'Ali Khān, who handed them over to Hemraj Brahman, a very

prudent and intelligent man, and ordered him to build a tomb. Hemraj employed his younger son, Bhawani Parshad, to superintend the work. The Gulab Bari was then very small. There were many houses in front of it and behind it belonging to residents of Faizabad. Hemraj bought up their houses and built the present lofty dome and a number of large edifices. After this [Hasan Riza Khan] obtained various sums from time to time from [Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah] and sent them to Faizabad, until eventually a total of seven [lākh] [700 000] of rupees was reached. ... To sum up, in three years and some months all these buildings were completed.”¹³

The new and improved Gulab Bari that Lala Hemraj Brahman and Bhawani Parshad set about building was a large enclosed plot with a massive domed tomb at its centre [Fig. 132]. Long reflecting pools radiated from the tomb and at the perimeter flanking the entrance gate on either side were a small *imambarah* and a *masjid*, perfectly realized by their Hindu overseers [Figs. 133, 134, 135, 136].

Lala Hemraj Brahman was no outsider to the Nawabi court; he had served as an accountant to an agent of Shuja al-Dawlah’s mother, the *Nawwab-Begam*. Hasan Riza Khan must have been pleased with his building expertise since he continued to use him to build a *masjid* and a *sarāy* (commercial rest stop, inn) in Faizabad. Hemraj himself became powerful and very wealthy and built several temples according to Fayz Bakhsh, who noted, “He built in his day many Hindu temples, and having raised a lofty residence for himself, he died in the very height of his wealth and power.”¹⁴

Nawwab-Vazir / ‘Architect’ ?

Despite his reluctance to redevelop the Gulab Bari, Asaf al-Dawlah was extraordinarily interested in architecture, and Isfahani angrily estimated that, “the expenditure of the [Vazir] in buildings is ten *lakhs* [1 000 000 rupees] per anum, and [this allocation] has continued regularly from the beginning of his rule up to the present day.”¹⁵ This amount

could cover the expenses of building four bridges, like the one Asaf al-Dawlah commissioned to span the Gomti river at Lucknow at a cost of 200 000 to 300 000 rupees. According to Isfahani, the *Nawwab-Vazir* was so impatient and consumed with building that not enough time was allowed for bricks and lime to be completely fired, leading to embarrassing failures like the annual washing out of Lucknow's bridge by heavy rains that killed forty to fifty people each time.¹⁶

An intriguing watercolour, thought to have been painted between 1204/1790 and 1214/1800 in the 'Murshidabad style,' portrayed a man with a stout belly and long drooping moustache standing in front of the Great Imambarah and pointing towards it, while surrounded by various attendants, one of whom is shading him with the iconic royal umbrella [Fig. 107]. The man bears a clear resemblance to the numerous portraits of Asaf al-Dawlah. Were it not for the gesture, this image might be simply a record of Asaf al-Dawlah being shown the newly completed Great Imambarah. Asaf al-Dawlah's extended arm and finger convey the flattering impression of an active presence before the completed monument rather than a passive one. Perhaps he was issuing final orders on the completion of the Great Imambarah?¹⁷ Could Asaf al-Dawlah, who was willing to spend so much on architecture, remain uninvolved in the design and construction of the Great Imambarah complex? The impression the painting projects is consistent with the active role North Indian patrons played, or presented themselves as playing, in architecture in the eighteenth century and earlier.

It would be imprudent to conclude from the redevelopment of the Gulab Bari complex, that the task of bringing buildings into existence in Awadh was always delegated to subordinates. Shuja al-Dawlah oversaw the development of Faizabad and

acted like a building inspector of sorts ordering unsanctioned buildings torn down.¹⁸ Nawwab Siraj al-Dawlah of Bengal allegedly laid down foundation bricks for the Imambarah of Murshidabad in Bengal with his own hand.¹⁹ When Count Valentia visited Lucknow following Asaf al-Dawlah's death, he was convinced that Saadat Ali Khan, Asaf al-Dawlah's half brother and successor, was personally involved with the creation of architecture. Valentia wrote twice, "[Saadat Ali] is his own architect" and "[Saadat Ali] never employs an architect."²⁰ His view was undoubtedly formed during his visit to a palatial retreat in Lucknow's suburb's known as Mūsā Bāgh. He wrote, "It is (also) called Baroun, and was built by himself after a plan of his own ..."²¹

It was conceivable that Saadat Ali Khan, Asaf al-Dawlah or other *Nawwabs* for that matter, were creative forces in the building process. Safavid and Mughal history was replete with instances of designer-monarchs such as Shah Abbas, Babur, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. For example, the court historian for Shah Jahan in particular noted that, "for the majority of buildings, he himself draws the plans [*tarāḥ mīfarmayand*]. And on the plans prepared by skilful architects, after long consideration he makes appropriate alterations and emendations."²²

The Anglo-European Military Engineers

Gentil's entry into the court of Shuja al-Dawlah paved the way for several Anglo-European military engineers to pursue unusual careers in Awadh. Gentil himself advised Shuja al-Dawlah on military matters and modern fort design for Faizabad. One of the French military engineers that entered Shuja al-Dawlah's service with Gentil was

Canaple, who oversaw the design of a fort north of Faizabad that Count Modave described as a regular hexagon.²³ Unfortunately, no trace of this fort remains.

The Swiss 'foreign Protestant' military engineer of French origin Antoine (Anthony) Polier (1153-1209/1741-95), who served as an officer and agent in the British East India Company in Faizabad and Lucknow, was employed by the court of the *Nawwab-Vazir* as an engineer, architect and field officer from 1186-96/1773-1782. Outside of his professional responsibilities, he oversaw the construction of his own house and was closely involved in the details of the planning and construction of its garden, complete with pigeon-houses.²⁴

It was Polier that paved Claude Martin's way to the Awadh court. Martin was a military engineer of French origin working for the British East India Company who eventually amassed great riches and wielded considerable power in Awadh. Martin, who built the Farhad Bakhsh palace, which Saadat Ali Khan admired and bought, built one of Lucknow's enduring landmarks, the monumental La Martinière estate and school.

Valentia did notice disapprovingly that the *Nawwab-Vazir* was intent on reproducing Fort William in Lucknow, the recently rebuilt British headquarters in Calcutta for which Polier was engineer in charge of construction from 1175/1762 to 1177/1764.²⁵ The fort was later completed in 1186-87/1773-74. During Polier's term, the French infiltrated his office, and plans for Fort William were stolen and copied. In 1192/1779, French soldier Lafitte de Brassier was able to draft a plan of the fort [Fig. 102].²⁶

The most advanced fort of its day, Fort William radiated like a star with its perimeter comprised entirely of sloped escarpments and pointed bastions. This was

radically different from fort design in Lucknow prior to the heightened British presence, which consisted of linear walls and cylindrical bastions as the images of Tieffenthaler and Hodges showed [Figs. 105, 106, 108].

Yet, a plan of the Great Imambarah complex made shortly after 1273/1857 before it was modified by the British showed that the southern section of the Machi Bhavan incorporated escarpments and two polygonal pointed bastions, strongly reminiscent of those used in the design of Fort William [Fig. 140]. An earlier commission, they were likely an expansion ordered by Asaf al-Dawlah in the course of his development of the Great Imambarah complex. The fortress features of the Great Imambarah were noted in Company correspondence, in the year before the Mutiny. The Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Lucknow wrote to Edmonstone on October 8, 1856,

The building so called was the original palace of [Asaf al-Dawlah] and is built as a fortress with ramparts and bastions projecting into the streets for mounting cannon that commanded the approaches to the city by both the bridges over the river [Gomti], the [Chawk] and the principal [bazaars] as well as the Residency and all places in the city.²⁷

Polier or Martin, not indigenous architects, were the most obvious candidates to implement this expansion of the Machi Bhavan fortifications, but no evidence suggests that they were involved, nor needed, for the design or construction of monumental structures like the congregational *masjid* or Great Imambarah. Instead, there was a sophisticated indigenous tradition of architectural planning and construction that could be depended on.

Architectural planning methods

Language and image were both integral to eighteenth century North Indian and Persian methods of planning and designing buildings. In general, spoken language, more than minutely detailed pictorial representations or models, was the primary medium for communicating architectural ideas, which was possible because planners and builders shared a common understanding of building practices and architectural elements. Yet, architects for the Mughal, Rajput and Qajar courts did use *tarah* or grid like plan drawings initially sketched on erasable tracing boards and then transferred to paper. These were not scrupulously preserved and rarely survived. Using a fixed proportion of bricks to a grid square, these layouts were easily translated into real dimensions using cheap, plentiful powder like ash, powdered lime or gypsum.²⁸ Building elevations were less frequently drawn but geometric patterns on paper were used as a template for creating *muqarnas*.

Two rare examples of architectural drawings on grid paper dated to the eighteenth century and bearing *devanagari* inscriptions were preserved in the Sawai Man Singh II Museum in Jaipur. The first drawing was a plan of the Shahjahanabad fort and palace complex [Fig. 115]. The fortress walls were drawn as elevations while the layout of the fortress city was depicted in plan. The second set of drawings was made for the Amber palace in Jaipur [Fig. 114].²⁹ These consisted of a separate elevation and a plan laid out on a grid.³⁰ The Qajar royal architect/engineer Mirza Akbar made architectural drawings dating to the late eighteenth or nineteenth century. Some incorporated plans with brick face designs laid out on a grid while other drawings on plain paper showed two

dimensional geometric patterns from which three dimensional *muqarnas* could be extrapolated [Fig. 116].³¹

These drawings were initially brought to London by Caspar Purdon Clarke (1262-1328/1846-1911), the resident architect for the British embassy in Tehran, Iran, who resided there in 1292/1876. He investigated the process and observed that Tehrani architects,

first of all worked out the general scheme, not as our architects do, on plain paper, but on a sectional board, every square of which represents either one or four bricks. These tracing boards are the key to the mystery of their craft... Error is not possible, as the squares confine the sizes to brick dimensions, and as only one system of bond is used the number of bricks required for the intended structure is easily computed by counting the squares and multiplying by the height after deducting openings.³²

The practice of using tracing boards that Clarke observed dated back several centuries and was known in Northern India as shown by a well-known Mughal miniature dated circa 987/1580 from a copy of the Bāburnāmah, the autobiography of the founder of the Mughal dynasty [Fig. 113]. In the painting, a man was depicted holding a large board with a grid directing the construction of a garden. The tracing boards of nineteenth century Persia were known in sixteenth century Mughal India, if not earlier, and were likely used in eighteenth-century Lucknow as well.

The abilities to produce profiles and three-dimensional images of actual or imaginary buildings on paper and in colour were present in eighteenth century Awadh as testified by the paintings of North Indian palaces by the anonymous architect of Shuja al-Dawlah and the various extant miniatures of Faizabad and Lucknow. Model making skills were also available due to the tradition of making *taziyah*, models of Imam Hussein's tomb in paper, wood, and precious metals for the rituals of Muharram. Yet,

buildings were made not only by those who imagine but also by those who anonymously toiled.

Tradesmen and Labourers

When Asaf al-Dawlah made Lucknow his capital, there could not have been enough artisans in the city of Lucknow to support the massive building program that he initiated. In the words of one visitor to Lucknow, Comte de Modave: “La ville n’est remarquable par aucun édifice. Le palais du nabab est sur le bord de la rivière ... Les *masjids* sont petites et n’ont rien annoncent la splendeur.”³³ Artisans would have migrated to Lucknow along political, economic and religious networks that the city was a part of. Most immigrants to Lucknow came from Faizabad, which itself had attracted people from various parts of South Asia. Fayz Bakhsh wrote about Faizabad, “[A]rtisans and scholars flocked hither from Dhaka, Bengal, Gujrat, Malwah, Haidarabad, Shahjahanabad, Lahaur, Peshawar, Kabul, Kashmir, and Multan.”³⁴ He also portrayed Faizabad as attracting merchants from Persia, Turan, China and Europe; it was a thriving link in a trade network facilitating the movement of goods and people.³⁵ Turmoil and decline followed Nadir Shah’s sack of Shahjahanabad in 1151/1739, and Awadh benefited from the exodus of the city’s elite particularly those of Irani origin and *Shi’i Isna Ashari* persuasion. Instability in Iran, and Awadh’s rising prosperity attracted many Persians. *Shi’i Isna Ashari* pilgrims and students of Islamic sciences moved between the cities of Karbala and Najaf that were revered for their sacred shrines and *Shi’i Isna Ashari* religious scholars.

Building supplies industry

Building practices were similar across south-eastern Persia and northern India, evolving slowly from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth-century. For example, if sixteenth-century references by Abū Fāz̄l, the court biographer of Mughal emperor Akbar, to brick and lime manufacture and miniature paintings were compared with early nineteenth century images in albums compiled for British officials, James Skinner and the Marquess of Wellesley, and with the discussion of these industries in the late nineteenth-century survey of North Indian trade by a British city magistrate and tax official for Lucknow named William Hoey, George Watt's Dictionary of the economic products of India 1306-13/1889-1896 and Hans Wulff's WWII era (1355-59/1937-41) study of traditional Persian crafts, there would be a striking correspondence.³⁶ There was a remarkable degree of continuity in building practices spanning four centuries that helps bring the working world of Lucknow tradesmen and labourers to life. In the end, the Great Imambarah complex was the product of the labours of bricklayers and plasterers.

Abu al-Fazl specifically mentioned two classes of bricklayers (*bildars*) and three classes of limeworkers (*gilgars*), lime plasterers (*gachkars*), brick crushers (*surkhī-kub*), and white washers (*safidkars*).³⁷ Rates for bricklayers were based on their class and whether they were building fortress walls, regular walls, laying foundations or digging ditches. Bricks were available in three kinds, burnt, half burnt and unburnt. Quicklime (*chūna*) was extracted from boiling *kangur* (river deposits), and various additives were readily available. There were standardized amounts of bricks, quicklime, and crushed

brick per unit of measurement. For instance, Abu al-Fazl made the following note: “Brickbuildings. For every *gaz*, there are required 250 bricks of three [*sir*] each, 8 *mans chuna*, and 2 m. 27s. pounded brick.”³⁸ Such standardization made estimating costs and materials simpler.

Centuries later, James Skinner commissioned a manuscript entitled Tashrih al-Aqvam [Description of the People] that documented various caste members of North Indian society in images and words and was completed in Hansi in 1240/1825. Among these pages, there was a watercolour painting of an old barefooted man, with a dark turban over his head and a full, white beard [Fig. 118]. He was most likely from the Delhi region and was bent over in order to inspect a recently fired brick from an open kiln.³⁹ This man was a *kumbar* hired by a brick manufacturer/vendor [*puzāvahvālā*] to lay unbaked bricks in the kilns of the vendor’s rented brickfields located on the outskirts of town. Such a man undoubtedly helped supply bricks for the Great Imambarah complex and someone like him still practiced his craft when William Hoey surveyed the trades in North India in 1296/1879.

The unbaked bricks were brought to the kilns by muscular coolies and drivers hired by *dhoidars*, mule owners, from the edge of the brickfield where they had been heaped by the *lunias* who had expertly moulded mud bricks from the soft earth that they had dug up and soaked with water. The sizes of bricks were fairly constant though subject to innovation since the prominent Awadhi official and architectural patron, Almas Ali Khan, was thought to have invented his own uniquely proportioned brick. Once the bricks were baked, they were sorted, and mule drivers would be hired again to take the bricks to the river for further transport or directly to the construction site.

On the Lucknow banks of the Gomti River, not only did the *puzawahwalas* ensure a steady supply of baked bricks but lime vendors known as *chuna kamp farush* were also active. The lime vendors sold made-to-order batches of slow-setting putty-like lime (*chunam*) prepared upriver by lime slakers, who mixed cakes of lime with water and other additives such as pulverized brick (*surkhi*) in tanks. Different grades of *chunam* for rough plastering or decorative treatment could be specified. The pre-made cakes of lime, or *tikiyas*, were essential for the speedy preparation of lime and were prepared further upriver near the Gao and Kurya *ghats* of Bhaisakhund.⁴⁰ Lime-rich mud called *chur* was dug up from riverbeds and brought to Bhaisakhund from Dularman by riverboat where coolies mixed the mud with charcoal dust into cakes that were then fired in kilns on land rented by lime burner businessmen.

Such a lime burner and his kiln were also painted for Skinner [Fig. 117]. Dressed from the waist up like a prosperous merchant with an elegant shirt but from waist down like a labourer with his bare legs and tool in hand, this lime burner was positioned between his crumbling kiln and a pile of *tikiyas* he had produced and the bullock used to transport them. Someone like the bare-chested, blue-turbaned labourer burning lime, who was painted for the Wellesley album, probably performed the real work [Fig. 120]. In this scene, an especially refined lime that was useful for rendering delicate ornament and marble-like finishes was produced by adding crushed seashells. Such lime was not normally produced in Lucknow but was commonplace in Bengal and could be imported if needed.

For the oxen, mules and their drivers who transported bricks and lime, it was a slow, continuous march from the banks of the Gomti river to the site of the Great

Imambarah complex. This kind of traffic through the city continued even after the Great Imambarah complex was completed. Writing in 1213/1799, Reverend William Tennant complained that uneven, narrow roads and traffic impeded his journey to one of the Nawwab's palace within Lucknow. He wrote, "My palanquin was frequently stopped by the small asses which were passing along loaded with bricks."⁴¹ If the flow of construction material was great enough in 1213/1799 to present a problem it paled in comparison to the situation prior to 1205/1791 when the Great Imambarah was being built.

Bricklaying and Plastering

After the levelling of uneven terrain and earth clearing by elephant and oxen, the construction site of the Great Imambarah complex was the domain of the bricklayers and the plasterers. Captain Thomas Williamson was not so impressed with Indian bricklayers, who did not easily understand Anglo-European drawings. "Some of the [rawz], or bricklayers, in India, are very clever, so far as relates to mere practical operations; but they have not the smallest idea of planning from paper, or on paper."⁴² The technical ingenuity of the bricklayers of the Great Imambarah complex lay not with their abilities to read drawings but with their abilities to build sound, elaborate foundations, incorporate decorative elements into structural fabrics, design structural and decorative arches, raise fluted domes and shallow vaults, and erect tall, slender minarets.

Larger buildings like the congregational *masjid* and the Great Imambarah warranted their own massive platform (*chabūtra*) foundations, while less elaborate solutions were needed for the other connective structures of the complex. However,

Lucknow was encumbered with uneven terrain divided by streams as Tieffenthaler noticed in April of 1178/1765: “L’inégalité du terrain est causé qu’on ne peut marcher dans cette ville que par des détours, en montant, en descendant.”⁴³ Isfahani viewed Asaf al-Dawlah’s choice of the irregular terrain of Lucknow over the level plain of Faizabad contemptuously. “[T]he climate of Faizabad is better than that of Lucknow, and the ground at Lucknow is uneven ... Had he first of all selected a level site for his new residence, a city worthy of a name would have been raised for less expense than was incurred in the building of Lucknow.”⁴⁴ William Hodges drawing of the riverbank published in 1198/1784 best conveyed the ruggedness of the terrain [Fig. 108]. Even today, the western area adjacent to the Great Imambarah complex drops steeply.

For centuries, north Indian builders used platform foundations to establish a solid base and raise buildings high above monsoon rains, and they were a common feature of Mughal monumental architecture. Platform foundations, like more common buildings, rested upon a network of foundation walls that were made by digging deep trenches and filling them with alternating layers of a mixture of earth, hydrated lime and either bricks or stone.⁴⁵ New foundation technology was not used for the Great Imambarah complex, but the challenging, uneven terrain made the establishment of level foundations by Lucknow’s builders all the more remarkable.

Soaring to great heights, the minarets of the congregational *masjid* were the tallest structures in Lucknow and probably all of Awadh, but they still could not surpass those of Awrangzib’s *masjid* located on the city’s highest hill, Lakshman Tila. Three structural elements constituted the minaret: a sufficiently deep foundation, the helical core of stairs and the encasing, hexagonal wall of brick.

A ubiquitous modular element, translated to various scales, was the combination of a cusped arch projecting over a smooth arch that was either elliptical or pointed. The bricklayers had to be comfortable thinking in advance about structure and ornament in an integrated way and about curved elements in three dimensions. For example, the three ground level arches in the Rumi Darvazah, the two gates, the *masjid* and the Great Imambarah all incorporated this element. The straight load bearing arches were likely formed using centerings made of mud brick. Projecting above them were ornamental multi-cusped arches emanating from the same structural core.

In keeping with the fashions of late-Mughal architecture initially conceived in the medium of stone, facades throughout the Great Imambarah complex consistently incorporated architectural elements in deep relief that plaster workers alone could not achieve. It fell to the bricklayers to integrate organic, engaged columns into their structural walls and piers using curvilinear bricks. Since the ornamental program of the site was integral to the structural design, the two would have been conceived simultaneously.

Lucknow's builders inherited roughly one-hundred and fifty years of refinement of "*bangla*" or sail vaulting technology in the Mughal architectural tradition.⁴⁶ The scholar Dani described the variation of the *bangla* vault favoured by Lucknow builders as a *chawchala* roof after the *chawchala* hut commonly found in Bengal.⁴⁷ The *bangla* vault was continuously curved in two planes, and tapered to a point in each of its four corners. Except for the fact that a *bangla* vault generally sprang from a rectangular base instead of a square one, it was the same as the sail vault in the architectural terminology used for medieval and classical architecture, so named because of the resemblance to a

billowing sail. The masonry *bangla* vault in both stone and brick was developed from the vernacular thatch roofs of Bengal and became an iconographic element of Mughal imperial architecture from Shah Jahan on. Some key examples were the marble Divān-i ‘Āmm [Hall of Public Audiences] of Shahjahanabad’s Red Fort, the Nawlakha building at the Lahore fort, and the tomb of Safdar Jang in Delhi. Eighteenth century Rajput buildings used the *bangla* vault extensively as well. The primary use of the vault was to cover small rectilinear side chambers flanking larger square rooms roofed with domes. It was not until the building of the Great Imambarah complex that the *bangla* vault would form the centrepiece of a monumental endeavour.

Peeling plasterwork, low vault heights and good lighting made the subsidiary chambers of the tomb of Safdar Jang in Delhi the best place to observe how *bangla* vaults were rendered with brick [Fig. 130, 131]. A small, northern chamber in the platform foundation was surmounted with a *bangla* vault. On top of each of the four perimeter walls, a course of bricks was laid forming the profile of a shallow parabolic arch. The corners were then filled with courses of brick following the contours of the arch until an elongated pendentive was formed leaving an oval shaped hole. The oval was filled with a spiral course of bricks laid on their edge. Similarly, plaster peeled from the interior of the sail vault of the northern passageway in the gate to Husaynabad in Lucknow, a nineteenth-century building that revealed an almost identical patterning of bricks.

Brick *bangla* vaults were used throughout the Great Imambarah complex. Small decorative ones were used above the two forecourt gateways. Larger ones covered the spaces surrounding the domed areas of the congregational *masjid*. The secondary spaces

in the Great Imambarah used the *bangla* vault as well, but the premier example was the central hall of the Great Imambarah.

According to A. Fühner, an Orientalist philologist who worked for the Archaeological Survey of India in the late nineteenth-century and someone in a position to observe residual building practices, a centering mould of mud and bricks in the negative shape of the roof was first made over which several feet of rubble or coarse concrete were poured and allowed to set for one to two years.⁴⁸ However, bricks, which are clearly visible behind peeling plaster on the interior and exterior of the vault of the Great Imambarah's central chamber, were used in the vault. Fühner probably meant that thick layers of mortar were used between the layers of brick that formed the vault.

Fühner did not clarify how the scaffolding for the Great Imambarah vault was built or with which materials. Scaffolding for such heights and distances needed to be built with brick pillars and arches, since too much wood would have been required. Brick scaffolding could have been used, as was the case during the construction of the Taj Mahal. Tavernier, a witness to its construction, wrote, "It is said that the scaffoldings alone cost more than the entire work, because, from want of wood, they, as well as the supports of the arches, had all to be made of brick; this has entailed much labour and heavy expenditure."⁴⁹ Alternatively, vaulting techniques without a centre may have been employed.

Lucknow's bricklayers for the Great Imambarah complex were also able to raise impressively large domes. A half dome was used in the Rumi Darvazah. The square and octagonal chambers flanking the central hall of the Great Imambarah employed impressive domes encased within the building, but they did not have the dramatic impact

of the three majestic domes crowning the nearby congregational *masjid*. Like the *masjid*'s minarets, these domes were the largest ever-built in Lucknow, matched only by the dome for the tomb of Shuja al-Dawlah in Faizabad.

According to Mookherjee, there were at least eight styles of domes and the bulbous one favoured for the Lucknow *masjid* and in later Shah Jahani architecture was called a *saljami* [*shalgham*] dome, meaning shaped like a turnip.⁵⁰ Following a centuries long history of double-shell dome building in the Indo-Persian Islamic world, these domes consisted of a shallow hemispheric interior vault and a bulbous exterior shell resting on a common cylindrical drum. Once again integrating ornament with structure, the exterior of the domes were fluted, a three-dimensional extrapolation of a cusped arch that was in keeping with late-Mughal trends.⁵¹

Stucco workers and artisans

The scarcity of red sandstone and marble deposits in Awadh meant that buildings were primarily finished with stucco. Exposed brick or ornamental brick façades popular in Persia were not considered. Countless stucco workers were needed for the immense task of coating the brick substructures and preparing the way for stucco artisans with special talents for rendering decorative floral and organic motifs. Stucco could be applied directly to brick surfaces with a trowel because the bricklayers did not spread the connective mortar to the edges of the brick, leaving a jagged surface for the stucco to bind to. A sophisticated range of mixtures was at the disposal of the stucco worker who provided the buildings with a protective coating and an ornamental program.

Unlike other major architectural traditions, stucco artisans played a prominent role in the architecture of Islamdom; the genius of the Alhambra in Granada, Spain for example was largely that of the stucco artisan. In conjunction with common architectonic elements, stucco ornament brought great unity throughout the Great Imambarah complex. Stucco artisans relied on knives and modelling implements to cut and shape designs and perhaps moulds as well. Hans Wulff described the process as it survived in mid twentieth-century Persia as follows,

If carved ornaments are to be applied the design is traced (*tarāhī kardan*) onto the previously prepared layers, and new plaster is built up sufficiently thick for the required ornament. This is often done with the aid of wooden molds or frames (*qāleb*). As soon as the plaster begins to set (*mohkam šodan*) the stucco plasterer starts cutting away (*borīdan*) any surplus plaster to bring out the required design. For the cutting or carving he uses a series of differently-shaped knives (*kārd-e gač-borī*), i.e., a pointed knife (*dambor*), one with a round end (*būmgerd*), one with a concave end (*būmhwor*, *kārd-e qāšoqī*), and one with a square end (*naqālī*), another one with a hooked end (*kārd-e būm-konī*, *būm-konī*) is for cutting away the background (*būm*).⁵²

At the Great Imambarah complex the ornamental vocabulary rendered with such techniques included, concentric layers of *muqarnas* used to ornament arches, archways, and pendentives, plant motifs above the ogees of arches, acanthus leaves on column bases, acorns at the base of intersecting arcs, rope-like trims above arched openings, rings of slanted acanthus leaves on dome interiors and surmounting the apogees of dome exteriors. The majority of these motifs were derived from Shah Jahani architecture and were originally carved in relief on stone. However, an organic, naturalistic aesthetic overshadowed the underlying geometry that governed the design of the Great Imambarah complex, and in general, its ornaments tended to be intentionally oversized.

Support workers

An array of secondary workers supported the work of the master bricklayer and the stucco artisan. Workers skilled in carpentry, like the individual painted for the Skinner album and the Fraser brothers, were mainly needed to build wood scaffolding for shorter parts of the complex [Fig. 119]. A note in Persian on the painting identified him as “Udaya, a carpenter, resident of Jodhpur, of the Burbhati, Rajput caste.”⁵³ Stone-cutters were still needed for decorative work on items like the railings inside the central hall of the Great Imambarah near the ceiling Great Imambarah [Fig. 75] or the flower-like *guldasta* ornaments on the Rumi Darvazah [Fig. 23]. Segments of carved stone were joined together with iron crimps. The no longer extant decorative band around Asaf al-Dawlah’s grave or the original inscribed foundational tablet (*kataba*) for the Friday *masjid* would have required an inlayer and/or inscriber of calligraphy known as a *sang tarash*.⁵⁴ Since the cupolas (*chatri*) surmounting the congregational *masjid* minarets and the Rumi Darvazah were originally gilded, craftsmen knowledgeable in installing sheet metal onto curved surfaces were occasionally needed. All of these workers were kept busy by the constant flow of materials transported by mule and in the arms and over the heads of unskilled labourers.

Such work did not usually place people in a morally uncomfortable position, but according to Isfahani, Asaf al-Dawlah’s labourers were transformed into oppressors who expropriated people’s houses and demolished them before they had the opportunity to remove their belongings.

[T]he labourers have dismantled the house before it was vacated, and the occupants of a tenement have been compelled to quit, leading their wives and children by hand. ... [T]he Vazir's workmen, on every possible pretext, utilize the houses of the people to furnish bricks, timber, and other building materials. In this matter their tyranny is so great that where there is a house with doorways or pillars of brick and the rest of the building of mud, and there is a family living in it, they ruin that whole family for the sake of the fifteen or twenty thousand bricks and pull down the house.⁵⁵

Recycling bricks was made easier by the fact that lime-based mortars were easily chiselled off. The intense building activity generated by Asaf al-Dawlah and his imitators was so great that tradesmen were not allowed to work for the public. Isfahani wrote, “[B]uilding materials and carpenters and [sic] masons are frequently interdicted to the public.”⁵⁶

Forming a vision

Collectively, this network of people, diverse in their religious loyalties but bound together through economic ties, from patron to coolie, brought the Great Imambarah complex into existence with their resources, their intelligence, and their labours. As the creative forces of this network began to envision the complex, what actual precedents were in the minds of the builders?

Architectural legacies

The Great Imambarah complex was conceived in the spirit of the innovative aesthetic of Shah Jahan, particularly as expressed in the Shajahanabad administrative/palace complex. A new architectural vocabulary was synthesized under him and included rectilinear halls

with *muqarnas* cornices in their interiors, semi-circular cusped arches, baluster columns with organic decorative motifs, building veneers of white marble and stucco, and *bangla* vaults.⁵⁷ The use of the colour white was central to this new architectural repertoire, used at first to enhance Mughal imperial iconography. White created a visually enhanced zone of emphasis standing in dramatic contrast to the environment; white helped define a zone of imperial presence.

Throughout Shah Jahan's illustrated court history the Pādshāhnāmah [Chronicle of the Emperor], one of the finest illustrated manuscripts the Mughal courts ever produced, the spaces that Shah Jahan inhabited were invariably white, accentuating his place in the image while documenting his new architectural preferences. Many of Shah Jahan's notable commissions, his additions to the forts of Agra, Lahore and Shahjahanabad and the Taj Mahal, drew dramatic impact from the juxtaposition of white buildings against an architectural setting permeated with red sandstone. The dramatic profile of the *bangla* vault also fascinated Shah Jahan and was poignantly used along with white marble to frame his presence in the *jharukah*/throne of the Diwan-i Amm in the Shahjahanabad fortress, where he received his subjects.

When the builders of Lucknow's congregational *masjid* looked for precedents they ignored Awrangzib's stone *masjid* on top of the city's highest hill and chose to emulate the beautiful congregational *masjid* of Shahjahanabad.⁵⁸ Both had three broadly spaced apart *saljami* domes and five cusped-arch openings on either side of a central arch and two attached minarets with balconies and crowning cupolas. There were differences as well. For example, Lucknow's new *masjid* had octagonal minarets, fluted domes, *bangla* vaults, rows of ornamental cupola domes, and a white stucco finish, while the

Shahjahanabad congregational *masjid* incorporated cylindrical minarets, smooth dome exteriors, rows of ornamental battlements, and red, white and black stone finishes.

More significantly, Lucknow's *masjid* was not situated within the same massive enclosed platform as the Shahjahanabad *masjid*. This was due, not to a lack of resources, but to the fact that Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* minority, still new to the idea of communal prayer assembly, was not numerous enough. Unlike the panels of graceful inlaid Quranic calligraphy in Shahjahanabad, there was no epigraphic program on the Lucknow *masjid* or anywhere in the Great Imambarah complex for that matter. The new Lucknow *masjid* was dramatically different on the interior. An uncommon sunken area for the prayer leader (*pish namāz*) was made in front of the *mihrab* of the Lucknow *masjid*.⁵⁹

The links between the aesthetic legacy of Shah Jahan's Shahjahanabad and Asaf al-Dawlah's Lucknow were not simply conjectural. Asaf al-Dawlah was still officially *Nawwab-Vazir* to the Mughal *Pādshāh* (Emperor, King of the World). He inherited a palace that is no longer extant just outside of the Shahjahanabad fort that had once been home to Shah Jahan's eldest son Dārā Shikuh.⁶⁰ He acquired the Padshahnamah of Shah Jahan. The manuscript was presented as a gift to King George III of England by Asaf al-Dawlah through the agency of Lord Teignmouth, who described the manuscript in the following way: "This is the most splendid Persian Manuscript I ever saw. ... This was the Book which was shewn to me at Luknow, & I was there informed that the deceased [Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah] purchased it for 12000 Rupees, or about £1500."⁶¹ In the vicinity of Asaf al-Dawlah's Dawlat Khanah palace, a small marble *masjid* that still stands was built [Fig. 137, 138]. Probably commissioned by Asaf al-Dawlah, it closely

resembled Awrangzib's private "*Moti Masjid*" (Pearl Mosque) in the Shahjahanabad fort and its precursor, Shah Jahan's "*Nagina Masjid*" (jewel mosque) of the Agra fort.⁶² Both were sheathed in white marble as well.

Asaf al-Dawlah's father, Shuja al-Dawlah, also established an architectural legacy of a smaller kind; the most impressive examples were built in the cities of Shahjahanabad, Bangla/Faizabad, and Lucknow. Shuja al-Dawlah commissioned the last of the great Mughal garden tombs for his father, Safdar Jang, on the outskirts of Shahjahanabad.⁶³ The brick structure, clad in sandstone and marble raided from an earlier Mughal tomb, used *bangla* vaults in subsidiary chambers and included a small *masjid* in its precinct. Two ornamental features, rows of cupolas surmounting the tomb's entrance, and cutaway cartouches in the tomb garden's main gate would surface in the Great Imambarah complex. Between Shahjahanabad and the tomb of Safdar Jang, the entire architectural vocabulary employed in the Great Imambarah complex was complete.

Following Safdar Jang's death, Faizabad's prosperity declined and its location was strategically insecure for Shuja al-Dawlah in his military conflicts with British. Accordingly, Shuja al-Dawlah based himself in Lucknow's pre-existing Panj Mahal complex and added a quarter for administrative affairs named the Machi Bhavan. The name for this addition would later come to be used, particularly by the British, as the name for the entire Great Imambarah and Panj Mahal complex. Awadhi historians reported that the descendants of an influential Muslim pioneer in the region initially built the Panj Mahal complex. Known as the *Shaykhzādahs*, they forfeited the site to Shuja al-Dawlah's grandfather when he subdued them along with the region's rebellious landholders (*zamindars*) for the Mughal *Padshah*. The British destroyed much of the

Panj Mahal with explosives after the rebellion of 1273/1857 but visual and textual accounts were preserved.

If the accounts of Gladwin, Hodges, and Eden, combined with the images of the Panj Mahal palace complex rendered by Tieffenthaler, Hodges, and Daniells, and post-1273/1857 photographs by the British army were reconciled with each other they could yield the following reconstruction [Fig. 140]. The Panj Mahal consisted of five interlocking court enclosures. The *baoli* court was centred on the Baoli Palace and lay adjacent to a court centred around a large building referred to as the *sangi dalan* (stone arched enclosure). There was a *zanannah*, a court for women of the *Nawwabi* household, and the Machi Bhawan administrative court. All were planned as square or rectangular gardens divided into parterres bounded by enclosures incorporating arched chambers. Buildings or gates were located at the midpoints along the perimeter or in the centre.

Following the Battle of Baksar of 1177/1764 between the British and Shuja al-Dawlah, a less antagonistic relationship was formed with the British, and Shuja al-Dawlah returned to Faizabad in 1179/1765, ordering all of his court officials to accompany him.⁶⁴ There he built the now demolished fort of Chota (Small) Calcutta and two-mile (3.2 kilometre) long city walls, commissioned the still extant three arched gateway named the Tirpawliyah, and planned the market street known as the Chawk.⁶⁵ Hunting parks and various gardens were also developed. Predictably, Shuja al-Dawlah also commissioned a palace for himself, which did not survive but was rendered in the Gentil album by one of his architects [Fig. 100]. It appears to have been a more austere version of the late-Mughal palaces of Delhi. But Shuja al-Dawlah's most monumental architectural endeavour was started just three years prior to his death. In response to the

construction of Fort William in Calcutta, he employed the French engineer Canaple in 1185/1772 to design and build a hexagonal fort with ramparts and bastions north of Faizabad.⁶⁶

Shuja al-Dawlah and Asaf al-Dawlah shared some similar concepts and details in their architectural patronage. Both shared inclinations towards large urban developments rather than individual monuments. At certain points in their lives, both saw the Panj Mahal as their centre of power in Lucknow, and Asaf al-Dawlah continued to build upon his father's expansion, first building the Baoli Palace and then the Great Imambarah complex. Structures for both were built using brick and stucco, cusped arches, *bangla* and *saljami* vaults, although Shuja al-Dawlah's tomb for Safdar Jang employed marble and sandstone facing. Asaf al-Dawlah's two monumental gateways for the second forecourt were similar in design to the western gateway for Shuja al-Dawlah's expansions to the Panj Mahal, first drawn by Tieffenthaler [Fig.104, 105, 106] and photographed later by the British Army [Fig. 143, 144, 145]. A chamber and colonnades of arches surmounted the three archways. Shuja al-Dawlah favoured gardens divided into parterres in the Persian and Mughal *chahar bagh* (four-part garden) tradition, like the parterres in front of Asaf al-Dawlah's Great Imambarah and congregational *masjid* (see below). Both introduced Anglo-European fortification designs as well.

The sphere of influences for the Great Imambarah complex was not bounded by Shah Jahan's and Shuja al-Dawlah's endeavours. Asaf al-Dawlah went far beyond these in using the resources of the *subah* of Awadh to develop facilities to advance *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious faith. Shuja al-Dawlah's commissions did not include monumental religious structures like Asaf al-Dawlah's Great Imambarah and the congregational

masjid. Though elaborate Muharram processions took place in Faizabad, as shown in a painting dated to 1185/1772 [Fig. 103], no *imambarah* commissioned by Shuja al-Dawlah survived.⁶⁷ In Shahjahanabad, there was only one clear precedent in the suburb of 'Aliganj.

Aliganj was established by Qudsiyah Begam, mother of Mughal ruler Āḥmad Shāh Bahādur, between Shahjahanabad and the site where the tomb of Safdar Jang was later built. It was centred on the Dargāh-i Shāh-i Mardan (The Shrine of the King of Men i.e. Ali), which housed a footprint of *Imam* Ali. A building called a *majlis khanah* in the site's inscriptions was apparently built for *Shi'i Isna Ashari* gatherings and to house *taziyah*. The diminutive *majlis khanah* consisted of a rectangular room with a smaller attached room with a raised level where the *taziyah* were kept.⁶⁸

By 1187/1774, Faizabad had four *masjids* according to Comte de Modave but none of these could have been devoted to *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practice since *Shi'i Isna Ashari* communal prayers would not begin in Faizabad until 1214/1799 when Jawahir Ali Khan instituted them, following the new trend in Lucknow.⁶⁹ According to the scholar B. Tandan, Asaf al-Dawlah's grandmother reputedly commissioned a *masjid* in Faizabad but for whom and when was unclear.⁷⁰

The original Great Imambarah complex

From the social agendas of Asaf al-Dawlah and members of the Awadh elite like Hasan Riza Khan and Sayyid Dildar Ali, from the planning and engineering expertise of master builders, from Lucknow's building industry and from the architectural legacies of

Shahjahanabad, Faizabad and Lucknow, the Great Imambarah complex emerged. However, the original vision of the complex did not correspond exactly with what stands today. In the original design, the complex was integrated into the Panj Mahal complex, the first forecourt was a continuous enclosure, there were no joining stairs between the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid*, a water tank for ablutions was located in front of the Great Imambarah, inscriptions surrounded Asaf al-Dawlah's grave, copper gilt cupolas were used with great effect and an ephemeral whiteness set the complex apart from its lush green setting. Neglect by the *Nawwabs*, the Indian Rebellion conflict, subsequent British occupation, the interventions of the Archaeological Survey of India, Lucknow's urban growth and the elements all left their mark, obscuring the original architectural vision.

A plan of the Machi Bhavan site, drawn by a British officer in 1273/1857, clearly showed the original architectural context for the Great Imambarah complex.⁷¹ The complex was an addition of three massive courts to the Panj Mahal complex that Shuja al-Dawlah had modified. Shortly after this drawing was made, British officers decided to demolish much of the Panj Mahal area with explosives, divorcing the Great Imambarah complex from its context.

Over fifty years earlier, the artist Henry Salt, who accompanied Valentia, made a fascinating representation of the congregational *masjid* [Fig. 109]. The massive stairwell that fronts the congregational *masjid* today and connects with the Great Imambarah did not exist. Instead, it rested on a large delicately railed platform perforated with arches. In the centre, an archway projected providing access to a concealed stairwell leading to the top of the platform. Other paintings from the period, portrayed the congregational

masjid in the same way [Figs. 107, 111, 126] but the most convincing image was produced by Dārōghah Ḥazrat ‘Abbās who photographed the building in 1289/1873 without the unifying stairwell in place.⁷² A post mutiny photograph of the site by the photographer J. Saché showed the arcaded podium as well [Fig. 152]. Salt’s image contained one detail that was lacking in the others. The area in front of the congregational *masjid* was originally divided into multiple parterres and walkways, which Valentia had described as constituting a garden. Valentia wrote, “The approach to the building [the Great Imambarah] is through a very large quadrangle to a garden, elevated a small height; on one side of which is a very beautiful [*masjid*], and on the other the [Baoli Palace].”⁷³ This was not the only garden in the complex. A post-mutiny photograph of the complex showed trees extending from the court of the second forecourt.

An anonymous painter from Muhammad Ali Shah’s day painted the Great Imambarah as part of a panorama illustrating a procession through Lucknow. The platform fronting the Great Imambarah incorporated long continuous stairs, similar to the ones in place today, but it also showed a large projecting tank. A photograph of the Great Imambarah taken shortly after the mutiny also captured this projecting tank [Fig. 152]. Earlier paintings by Sita Ram and the anonymous painter showed this alternate *imambarah* platform, but in less accurate detail. The no longer extant tank was certainly part of the original design for even Isfahani made reference to it several decades earlier. He wrote, “In front of it is a very broad terrace, and in the middle of it a reservoir.”⁷⁴ Mookherjee observed the tank sometime before 1300/1883 and noted that it was then used as a tank for tropical fish!⁷⁵

When Valentia visited the interior of the Great Imambarah, he noticed that Asaf al-Dawlah's canopied grave was covered with vegetation and surrounded by a white marble border inlaid with black stone tracing out Arabic script. He wrote, "[I]n the middle one is his tomb, level with the ground. The centre is earth, covered with scanty herbage, and surrounded with a broad margin of white marble, in which sentences from the [Quran] are inlaid in black."⁷⁶ The Marquess of Hastings also noticed the curious grave of Asaf al-Dawlah and wrote, "It is a grave of earth sodded, the pavement being in part interrupted for the purpose."⁷⁷ Sita Ram's rare painting of the interior of the Great Imambarah paralleled the Marquess's words, showing a patch of earth in the middle of the stone floor of the Great Imambarah covered with vegetation [Fig. 112]. According to Keene, a certain Mr. Brown in his Lucknow Guide identified the vegetation over Asaf al-Dawlah's grave as "... covered with cakes of barley from Mecca."⁷⁸ The marble band of inscriptions did not survive and Asaf al-Dawlah's grave was later filled in with broken pieces of stone, probably during the British occupation.

The British also filled in an important archway along the longitudinal axis of the Great Imambarah on the west side. The whole exterior western façade was highly ornamented, especially in contrast to the eastern one, and high up a special chamber overlooked the entire city. The archway that was filled provided an entrance through this ornamental façade that was perhaps meant for dignitaries alone.

According to a seldom seen photograph of the Rumi Darvazah held in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the gate had a balcony on the western façade within the main archway [Fig. 150, 151]. Animals resembling peacocks and leopards were painted on the walls behind the balcony. Isfahani may have been referring to these

when he noted, “Over the gate of the outermost ‘[*jilaw khanah*],’ which is known as the [Rumi Darvazah], they have erected a circular chamber with painted walls.”⁷⁹

The builders of the Great Imambarah complex would not have recognized its present-day appearance with its blackened domes, the aged, flaking yellowish exteriors, its reconstructed features in modern, reddish cement, or the blue-yellow and green-white interior colour schemes of the Great Imambarah. The complex they envisioned was entirely sheathed in dramatic white stucco, punctuated with gilded cupolas atop the Rumi Darvazah and the congregational *masjid* minarets and lines of red sandstone lattice railings. This vision was recorded by two painters mentioned earlier, Sita Ram and the anonymous painter of the panorama for Muhammad Ali Shah. Writers also noticed the original colours. In 1258/1843, Englishwoman Honoria Lawrence observed, “Lucknow with its white stucco, gilding and red paint has a very upstart look after the ‘melancholy and gentlemanlike’ marble and desolation of Agra. Nevertheless this is a curious and even splendid city.”⁸⁰

Original features in the Great Imambarah complex

When compared with its precedents, the Great Imambarah complex included elements that were strikingly original. These included the Great Imambarah, the Rumi Darvazah, and the mirrored gateways of the first forecourt. The idea to conceive an *imambarah* on a monumental scale was unprecedented in all of *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* history and Islamdom. Only tombs, *masjids* and palaces were conceived on such scales. Not even in Safavid Iran, which had made the *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* faith the core of its political existence, did the idea surface.

The design of the Great Imambarah was highly innovative. The choice of sail vault technology to roof the large central hall was an unusual decision, since in the Mughal architectural tradition large spaces were traditionally covered with domes. Another unusual and slightly terrifying feature was the use of small balconies that cast one into the domes of the chambers flanking the central hall [Fig. 78, 79, 80].

Burying Asaf al-Dawlah in the Great Imambarah was also an unusual break with tradition. Tombs, cemeteries, shrines, homes or *masjids* were the conventional places Muslims chose to be buried. Furthermore, this was inconsistent with the tradition of monumental tomb building practiced by the Mughals and the *Nawwabs*, as in the instances of the tombs for Safdar Jang and Shuja al-Dawlah.

The western façade of the Rumi Darvazah was highly innovative and without precedent. An arch, instead of the conventional rectangle one would expect, defined its exterior profile. *Guldasta* ornaments were a common feature of late-Mughal architecture, typically used in moderation to accentuate shifts in planes. In the western façade of the Rumi Darvazah, they are used in great number in close proximity following the exterior curvature of the arch to accentuate its profile. The oversized ornamental stucco leaves were also unusual and reminiscent of similar ornamental leaves surrounding domes in Deccani architecture like the *masjid* and tomb of Ibrāhīm in Bijapur.

Mirroring gateways in the first forecourt of the Great Imambarah complex were an interesting adaptation of the historic four-*ayvan* concept initially developed within *masjids* but seldom applied on an urban scale. Only the Timurid Registan, Shah Abbas's Isfahan and perhaps Faizabad employed the concept with similar dramatic impact.

Conclusions

Despite common wisdom that monumental architectural endeavours are always collective enterprises, there is a tendency to write about the Great Imambarah complex, or its key monuments, as if its development is due solely to the efforts of key individuals like Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah or Kifayat Allah. Certainly, key individuals have played a greater role than others, but in reality there are four circles of individuals - patrons, master builders, artisans and suppliers - who have been integral to the process.

The circle of patrons includes Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah, Hassan Riza Khan, and Sayyid Dildar Ali and is dominated by *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Muslim interests. Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah is clearly the chief patron of the complex and probably took a particularly keen and active role in the design and construction of the complex. While the Great Imambarah appears to have been more enthusiastically endorsed by Asaf al-Dawlah, it is less commonly known that the congregational *masjid* is clearly the brainchild of Hasan Riza Khan and Sayyid Dildar Ali, a fact elaborated through Juan Cole's research. In keeping with Muslim patronage practices dating back to the twelfth century, both Asaf al-Dawlah and Hasan Riza Khan show no concerns for the religious loyalties of the master builders as their employment of Hindu project supervisors Lala Hemraj Brahman and his son Bhawani Parshad for *imambarahs* and *masjids* in Faizabad shows. Building expertise is valued over religious loyalties.

The circle of building experts remains unclear but if P. C. Mookherji's 1300/1883 account can be relied upon, (this is not necessarily the case) then both Muhabb Allah and his son Kifayat Allah are the master builders of the site and not just

Kifayat Allah as other accounts assert. Curiously, accounting and financial management skills seem to outweigh the importance of planning and technical skills. If the southern bastions were commissioned by Asaf al-Dawlah then it seems that Anglo-European engineers were contributors to the complex as well.

Highly skilled artisans, primarily in the arts of bricklaying and stucco finishing, comprise the third circle. The building technology they used throughout the complex belongs to a surprisingly wide Indo-Persian geographic and temporal sphere. The *bangla* vault was clearly not imported from outside this realm but was the culmination of at least a century of continuous refinement under imperial Mughal and *Nawwabi* patronage.

The supply line of bricks and lime upstream along the Gomti River and the roles of small enterprise and division of labour in supplying building materials are new to the discussion of the Great Imambarah complex. The individuals in this line form the final circle of influence and include merchants who rented land for kiln construction, the firing of lime and brick, animals for transport and labourers who specialized in lime and brick manufacture and transport. Only by considering the tracts of land and the number of merchants and labourers involved can the geographic breadth of the environmental and positive economic impact on the region be appreciated. Though effective, this system still could not keep pace with the intense pace of construction that resulted in building supply shortages for Lucknow and the expropriation of building materials from Lucknow residents.

Instead of representing a faltering architectural tradition, the Great Imambarah complex is permeated with innovative spirit and extraordinary monumental vision. It is better seen as emblematic of a period of aesthetic experimentation and technical

brilliance. Commonly categorized under the diffuse term of late-Mughal architecture, the Great Imambarah complex is indebted to the architectural legacies of Shahjahanabad, Faizabad and Lucknow. More specifically it draws its architectural vocabulary from Shah Jahan's palace complex at the Shahjahanabad fort. However, the techniques of rendering these forms with brick and stucco are drawn from the tomb of Safdar Jang in suburban Shahjahanabad.

The full extent to which the present site has been modified from its appearance upon completion is not fully appreciated. The brilliant white that enveloped the interior and exterior has given way to an ad hoc colour scheme and decay. The inscriptions that surrounded Asaf al-Dawlah's grave are lost. The stairwell connecting the Great Imambarah with the congregational *masjid* is a later addition that eliminated the ablution tank in front to the Great Imambarah. The parterre flower garden of the court joining the two is gone. The Panj Mahal complex to which the Imambarah complex was joined is destroyed and the first forecourt survives in a fragmented incomplete state. The detailed paintings of peacocks and leopards on the Rumi Darvazah are lost as well.

There is a willingness to experiment with the Mughal architectural idiom. The idea of using the *bangla/sail* vault on a massive scale in the Great Imambarah, when previously it was only considered suitable for covering subsidiary spaces, is unique in the history of Mughal and world architecture. The highly static concept of urban gate was radically manipulated in bringing about the Rumi Darvazah. A unique program of oversized organic motifs was developed and consistently employed throughout the complex.

Many individuals of different skills, social status and faith contributed to the raising of the Great Imambarah complex in different ways and it is their collective achievement. It was forged not only with brick and lime but with monumental vision and memories of Shahjahanabad, Faizabad and other important cities. Through the eyes of its builders the complex was not only a creative opportunity but also an administrative and technical challenge, one that they met with great success.

¹ H. G. Keene, A Hand-book for Visitors to Lucknow (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1875 [repr. New Delhi, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 2000]), p. 103.

² P.C. Mookherjee, Pictorial Lucknow (Lucknow: n.p, 1883), pp. 238-9.

³ Sidney Hay, Historic Lucknow (Lucknow: The Pioneer Press, 1939), p. 115. Yogesh Praveen, Lucknow Monuments (Lucknow: Pnar Publications, 1989), p. 207.

⁴ Shāh Navāz Khān Awrangābadī and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy, Māsir al-umarā, trans. H. Beveridge, revised, annotated, and completed by Bains Prasad as The Māthir-ul-umarā: Being Biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D., 3 vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1941-1964 [repr. Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1979])

⁵ Keene, p. 103.

⁶ Cole, p. 95.

⁷ Isfahani, p. 72.

⁸ Isfahani, p. 60.

⁹ F. Gladwin, "Account of Lucknow," in Asiatic Annual Register, vol. 1 (London, 1800), pp. 97-101, 1742.756980n, British Library, London.

¹⁰ Cole, p. 129.

¹¹ Shāh Hidāyat Allāh Biḥārī, Hidāyat al-Qawa'id, *Fārsiya* 108, ff. 39a-40b, Aligarh. For a general discussion of the manuscript, see: Qeyamuddin Ahmad and Fritz Lehmann, "Shah Hidayatullah Bihari's Hidayat-al-Qawa'id: Mughal Social Norms as Defined in an early eighteenth century Manuscript," in South Asian Horizons: vol. 1 - Culture and Philosophy (Ottawa: Canadian Asian Studies Association, 1984), pp. 104-17, esp. 105-6. For an accessible summary of the ideal qualities of the *Mir Imarat*, see: Ahsan J. Qaisar, Building Construction on Mughal India: The Evidence from Painting (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 7.

¹² Jean-Marie Lafont, Chitra: Cities and Monuments of Eighteenth-Century India from French Archives (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 126. Lafont concludes Sandjan Daula is a corruption of Shuja al-Dawla.

¹³ Fayzbakhsh, p. 234.

¹⁴ Fayzbakhsh, p. 234.

¹⁵ Isfahani, p. 72.

¹⁶ Isfahani, p. 73. For a discussion on the bridge's date of construction, see: Banmali Tandan, The Architecture of Lucknow and its Dependencies, 1722-1856: A Descriptive Inventory and Analysis of Nawwabi Types (New Delhi: Vikas, 2001), p. 169.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Asaf al-Dawlah's gesture is similar to the master builders pointing to their subordinates depicted in the V&A Akbarnama, illustrated some two centuries prior.

¹⁸ Fayzbakhsh, p. 6.

¹⁹ Major Walsh quoted in Ahmad Hasan Dani, Muslim Architecture in Bengal (Dacca: 1961), p. 12, 180. Ebba Koch, Mughal Architecture (Munich: Prestel, 1991), p. 273.

²⁰ George Valentia [1769-1844], Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, The Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt in the years 1802-1806, 3 vols. (London: Printed for W. Miller 1809), vol. 1, pp. 143, 173.

- ²¹ Valentia, p. 147. Llewellyn-Jones identifies Baroun as Musa Bagh. Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British, and the City of Lucknow (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 44.
- ²² Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Lahori cited in W. E. Begley and Z.A. Desai, Taj Mahal, the Illumined Tomb (Cambridge, Mass: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture and University of Washington Press, 1989), p. 10.
- ²³ Lafont, p. 134.
- ²⁴ Antoine-Louis Henri Polier, I‘jāz-i arsalānī, trans. Muzaffar Alam and Seema Alavi as A European Experience of the Mughal Orient : The I‘jāz-i Arsalānī (Persian letters 1773-1779) of Antoine-Louis Henri Polier (New Delhi ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2001). See also: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “The Career of Colonel Polier and late eighteenth-century Orientalism,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 3rd ser. X (2000): pp. 43-60.
- ²⁵ Valentia, vol. 1, p. 155.
- ²⁶ Lafont, pp. 108-11.
- ²⁷ Secy to Chief Comm to G. Edmonstone, 8th Oct. 1856, Foreign Dept, Secret Progs, 18 Dec (Nos 453-878) 1857 823 6915, National Archives of India, New Delhi.
- ²⁸ Caspar Purdon Clarke, “The Tracing Board in Modern Oriental and Medieval Operative Masonry,” Transactions of the Lodge Quatuor Coronati No. 2076, vol. 6 (1893): pp. 99-107, esp. 100-1. An accessible excerpt is available in Gülru Necipoğlu, The Topkapı scroll : Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture : Topkapı Palace Museum Library MS H. 1956 (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), p. 20.
- ²⁹ G. H. R. Tillotson, The Rajput Palaces: The Development of an Architectural Syle, 1450-1750 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 103-104, fig. 129.
- ³⁰ There is still much that is unknown about these drawings but for the time being they provide a glimpse into the methods that would have been at work in Lucknow.
- ³¹ Necipoglu, pp. 15-9, figs. 27-36.
- ³² Clarke pp. 100-1, quoted in Necipoglu, p. 20.
- ³³ Louis Laurent de Féderbe [comte de Modave, 1725-1777], Voyage en Inde du comte de Modave, 1773-1776 (nouveaux mémoires sur l'état actuel du Bengale et de l'Indoustan), ed. and annot. Jean Deloche (Paris: École française d'extrême-orient, 1971), p. 184.

³⁴ Fayzbakhsh, p. 9.

³⁵ Fayzbakhsh, p. 6.

³⁶ Abu al-Fazl, pp. 233-6. William Hoey, A Monograph on Trade and Manufactures in Northern India (Lucknow: American Methodist Mission Press, 1880). George Watt, Dictionary of the Economic Products of India 1306-13/1889-1896, 7 vols. (London: W. H. Allen, 1889-1896), esp. vol. 2, pp. 144, 147, 152. Hans E. Wulff, The Traditional Crafts of Persia: their Development, Technology, and Influence on Eastern and Western Civilizations (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966).

³⁷ Abu al-Fazl, pp. 233-6.

³⁸ Abu Fazl, p. 236.

³⁹ According to M. Archer and T. Falk, the artist was probably Ghulam Ali Khan or a member of his family, which had a history of painting for the Mughal courts and British patrons. Mildred Archer and Toby Falk, India Revealed: The Art and Adventures of James and William Fraser 1801-35 (London: Cassell, 1989), p. 46.

⁴⁰ I do not know the precise locations of these ghats but two other ghats, Chau ghat and Gobaria ghat are indicated upriver on the map entitled "City and Environs of Lucknow, 1858" in George Forrest, A History of the Indian Mutiny, 3 vols. (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1904-12).

⁴¹ William Tennant, Indian Recreations : Consisting Chiefly of Strictures on the Domestic and Rural Economy of the Mahomedans & Hindoos. 2nd ed., enl. and corr. 2 vols. (London: Printed by C. Stewart, Edinburgh for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1804) cited in H. R. Nevill, ed. United Provinces Gazetteers, Lucknow, 1904 – Lucknow: A Gazetteer being Volume XXXVII of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Allahabad: Govt. Press, 1904), p. 150.

⁴² Captain Thomas Williamson, The East India Vade Mecum or Complete Guide to Gentlemen intended for the Civil, Military or Naval Service of the Honourable East India Company, 2 vols. (London: 1810), vol. 1: p. 515 cited in Lewellyn-Jones, p. 216.

⁴³ Tieffenthaler, Joseph. Description Historique et Geographique de l'Inde. Berlin 1786-8, ed. and trans. Jean Bernoulli, 3 vols. (Berlin: Impr. de C.S. Spener, 1786-1789), vol. 1, p. 256.

⁴⁴ Isfahani, p. 8.

⁴⁵ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Lāhawrī, Pādshāhnāmah, ed. Mawlawies Kabīr al-Din Ahmad and Abd al-Rahīm as The Bādshāh nāmah (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1865-1872), vol. 1, p. 223, vol. 2, p. 323. Qaisar, p. 21. Wulff, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Koch, p. 94.

⁴⁷ Dani, p. 180.

⁴⁸ Alois Anton Fühler, The Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the North Western Provinces and Oudh described and arranged (Allahabad: Supt. Govt. Press, N.W.P and Oudh, 1891) p. 266.

⁴⁹ Jean- Baptiste Tavernier [1605-1689], Six voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier [1676] trans. V. Ball as Travels in India (London ; New York : Macmillan and Co., 1889 [repr. 1925]) cited in Qaisar, p. 50. Qaisar questions the accuracy of this observation based on a lack of supporting references, the availability of timber from other parts of the Mughal empire outside Agra and the impression that the comment is based on hearsay and not observation. I find Qaisar’s scepticism on this point excessive.

⁵⁰ Mookherjee, n.p.

⁵¹ Koch, p. 132. Lafont, pp. 122-35.

⁵² Wulff, p. 135. Compare with: Qaisar, pp. 28-9.

⁵³ Archer and Falk, p. 108, pl. 92.

⁵⁴ Hoey, p. 213.

⁵⁵ Isfahani, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Isfahani, p. 72.

⁵⁷ Koch, pp. 93-5.

⁵⁸ The identification and dating of the Aurangzib *masjid* still needs to be more securely determined but it is safe to say the *masjid* existed prior to the raising of the Great Imambarah complex. See Tieffenthaler’s c. 1786 drawing of Lucknow, which shows the Aurangzib *masjid* on top of Lakshaman Tila [Fig. 105].

⁵⁹ This feature is also found in the congregational *masjid* of Isfahan and the tomb of Uljaytu. I thank Dr. Jere Bacharach for his observations of sunken *mihrabs* in Iran.

⁶⁰ Stephen P. Blake, Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639-1739 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 75-6.

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- ⁶¹ Letter from Lord Teignmouth, dated June 1799, Royal Library, Windsor Castle, MS.1368 cited in Milo C. Beach et al., King of the World: The Padshahnama – An Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle (London: Azimuth – Sackler Gallery, 1997), p. 13.
- ⁶² Koch, p. 122-3, fig. 148, p. 129-30, fig. 158.
- ⁶³ Fayzbakhsh, p. 47.
- ⁶⁴ Fayzbaksh, pp. 3-5.
- ⁶⁵ Fayzbakhsh, p. 5. Tandan, p. 146. H. R. Nevill, ed., Fyzabad: A Gazetteer Being Volume XLIII of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Allahabad: Govt. Press, U.P., 1905), p. 214.
- ⁶⁶ Lafont, p. 108.
- ⁶⁷ Rizvi says Shuja al-Dawlah did build some imambaras in Fyzabad. Rizvi, vol. 2, p. 308.
- ⁶⁸ J. A. Page, ed. with Zafar Hasan, compiler, Monuments of Delhi : Lasting Splendour of the Great Mughals and Others, 3 vols. (1917 [repr. New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1997]), vol 1, p. 202, no. 283.
- ⁶⁹ Modave cited in Lafont, p. 134. Fayzbakhsh, p. 57.
- ⁷⁰ Tandan, p. 21. Until the Fyzabad *masjids* that Modave observed are properly identified and a chronology established, they are not particularly helpful in understanding the precedents to Asaf al-Dawlah's congregational *masjid*.
- ⁷¹ "Removal of certain old building in Fort Machie Bhawan and proposal of their original use," Foreign Dept., July 1869, No. 33/35 with map, General B, National Archives of India. I would like to thank S. A. Abbas for drawing this map to my attention.
- ⁷² Darogha Ubbas Alli, The Lucknow Album (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1874), pl. 41.
- ⁷³ Valentia, vol. 1, p. 158.
- ⁷⁴ Isfahani, p. 73.
- ⁷⁵ Mookherjee, n.p.
- ⁷⁶ Valentia, vol. 1, p. 157.

⁷⁷ Francis Rawdon [Marquess of Hastings], The Private Journal of the Marquess of Hastings, ed. Marchioness of Bute, 2 vols. (London: 1858), vol. 1, pp. 110-1.

⁷⁸ Mr. Brown quoted in Keene, p. 103.

⁷⁹ Isfahani, p. 73.

⁸⁰ John Lawrence and Audrey Woodiwiss eds., The Journals of Honoria Lawrence: India observed 1837-1854 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), p. 133.

CHAPTER SIX

In the Hearts of the Believers

The Great Imambarah Complex and the Unveiling of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Belief

Abdul Halim Sharar, the devoted early twentieth-century chronicler of Lucknow's past, speaks of the growing openness accorded to *Shi'i Isna Ashari* beliefs and practices in eighteenth century North India and of their widening cultural influence. He writes,

In Delhi, because the religion of the kings was [*Sunni*], the Persians concealed many of their customs and so were unable to reveal themselves completely. The court of [Awadh] had emanated from Khurasan and adhered to the [*Shiah*] faith. Hence the Persians here showed themselves in their true light. The more brilliantly they revealed themselves, the more their co-religionists at this court began to adopt their mannerisms and deportment.¹

The flowering of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* culture and religious practice in eighteenth century North India is one of the most intriguing trends of the period that is often obscured by conventional narratives focused on the decline of the Mughal state and the rise of Anglo-European colonial power. Similarly, most histories also present Awadh culture as a last gasp of Mughal culture though influenced by Europeans. The Great Imambarah complex, commissioned by the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah and consisting primarily of two monumental religious structures, belongs to this flowering of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* culture and marks its apex.

This chapter compares the conditions of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* believing and religious practice in Safavid and Zand Persia, Shahjahanabad and Faizabad with those in Lucknow and studies the links between these environments and Lucknow. The religious discourses in Lucknow surrounding the raising of the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid* are examined in more detail. Both buildings are presented as part of converging agendas aimed at transforming *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practice in Lucknow. These two monuments stem from two different agendas, one that seeks to conspicuously distinguish Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community from the *Sunni* and the other to make it conform. One legitimates and amplifies the existing practice of Muharram *majlises* and processions, while the other introduces the practice of the Friday congregational prayers to the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* of Lucknow. Together they lay out a new direction for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community where both Muharram commemoration rituals and Friday congregational prayers are institutionalized.

In Sita Ram's painting of the interior of the Great Imambarah, a man was painted sitting aloft a staircase of red and gold, a *minbar* [Fig. 112]. This individual was known as a *rawzah khvān* and he was responsible for retelling the ritualized narratives of the tragedy of Karbala over the ten days of Muharram. He would speak in Persian, a language only understood by Lucknow's educated elite. The text he followed was the Rawzat al-Shuhada (The Garden of the Martyrs), written in 908/1502-3 by al-Kashifi of Khurasan.² In the Safavid empire, the text was widely adopted and became standard to quote from during the Muharram *majlises*; its continued use in Lucknow showed that there were elements of continuity in the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition as it was forged in Safavid domains and in Awadh.

The Safavids

As discussed in the introductory chapter, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Safavid empire was the effort of its rulers to make the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious tradition a central feature of their rule in Persia, through their policies of persecuting the *Sunni* and related Sufi communities, the destruction of *Sunni* mosques and compulsory profession of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* doctrine. They fostered the development of a *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama*, comprised primarily of Arab immigrants who advocated for the *Usuli* doctrine but also constituted the Safavid bureaucracy. The *Usuli* theologian Shaykh Ali al-Karaki, the Friday congregational prayer leader for Isfahan, ordered Friday congregational prayer leaders appointed for every town and village despite the objections of an older established *Akhbari ulama*, who maintained only the *Imam* could lead congregational prayers.

Muharram commemorations in Safavid Iran predated their rule but flourished under them. Chevalier Jean Chardin observed a Muharram procession in Isfahan in 1077/1667.³ He wrote of a procession of people bearing battle standards, elaborately outfitted horses, musicians, men with blackened faces who appeared to have been pierced by arrows, wagons, arks and coffins covered in velvet brocade. "Afterwards a large throne representing [*Imam* Husayn] and borne on the shoulders of eight men approaches." Gold and silver were the preferred material for such objects. Crowds followed crying "O Husayn."

Though monumental Friday congregational mosques became a significant feature of Safavid architectural patronage, purpose-built structures for Muharram commemorations were not prominent. The earliest evidence of a hall built for such purposes in Iran was from Astarabad. Henri Massé recorded an inscription in a dervish lodge, a *takyah*, in Astarabad, which described the vaulted *takyah* as a *taziyah* hall.

It is the [*takyah*] which creates a stir even unto the divine throne, because of the plaintive cries of the devotees of [Karbala]. The vault of its portal, like unto the sky, is so black because of the smoke of the nightly sighs of the captives of [Karbala]. ... [T]he body of the Knight of the faith [Husayn] fell in the middle of the plain of [Karbala]. From that day until now, all the world weeps in the edifice of the [*taziyah*] hall of the martyrs of [Karbala].⁴

Michael Edward Bonine's 1400/1980 geographical study of the region of Yazd could be interpreted as providing a clearer idea of the way Muharram commemorations were probably observed in Safavid and Zand Persia.⁵ Yazd and the towns around it were centred on an open area frequently referred to as a *husayniyah*, a term of reference that came to be applied to halls devoted to Muharram commemorations. A shed in the open area was used to house the articles of the Muharram processions. Larger towns in Yazd developed separate areas accommodating purpose-built structures termed *husayniyahs* opening into the common area. If these geographic configurations existed under Safavid and Zand rule, then the *husayniyahs* of the Yazd area provide an alternative example to the *takyah* of Astarabad.

Shi'i Isna Ashari Migration from Safavid to Mughal Courts

In the Mughal courts, *Shi'i Isna Asharis* of military skill, ability, intellect and beauty were accommodated and acknowledged but were expected to keep their faith private and not challenge the political ambitions of the Mughal emperor or the officially sanctioned Hanafi *ulama*. To better appreciate how the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* came to be an important presence in the Mughal courts and the ways they were viewed, it is necessary to look back to the sixteenth century beginning with the troubled reign of Padshah Humayun.

After his embarrassing expulsion from Northern India, the Mughal monarch Humayun was able re-conquer his father's Indian empire in 962/1555, which he had lost, with the assistance of soldiers from Shah Tahmasp of Safavid Persia. The Shah's generosity initiated a significant migration of aristocrat-soldiers, artists, professionals and nobility, many of whom were probably *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, from Safavid to Mughal domains that would last for over two hundred years. By the late seventeenth century, during the Mughal emperor Awrangzib's reign, large numbers of Iranians were observed in the Mughal capital. Khāfi Khān, the author of a useful history of the period entitled the Muntakhab al-Lubāb [Selection of the Best], reflected on the reign of Awrangzib's father, Shah Jahan: "During those days, [Shahjahanabad] had been recently built, every *Muḥallah* [urban quarter] was known after the name of an Iranian *Amīr* [Commander]. There was no *Muḥallah* in which one Iranian *Amir* or other did not have his mansion."⁶

The destruction of the Safavid empire in 1134-5/1722 and the emergence of the general Nadir Shah in Persia launched a fresh wave of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* migration to

Northern India in the eighteenth century fleeing the turmoil of the region. The religious scholar Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Dihlavī was alarmed at the large number of *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* in prominent Mughal cities and worried that they would mislead his fellow *Sunni* Muslims. In a treatise refuting *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* claims, he wrote,

In the cities in which we live and in this period in which we are alive, the popularity and prevalence of the [*mazhab-i Isnā ‘Ashariyah*] has gained such a magnitude there is hardly any house in which we do not find one or two men who have not embraced [*Shiah*] faith, or they are not inclined towards that faith.⁷

The émigrés and their descendants fluent in Persian, the language of culture and power, were drawn by opportunity and the promise of lucrative land grants in exchange for their skills and military prowess. For those who believed in the *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* tradition, the Mughal courts from the age of Humayun to the age of Awrangzib were generally welcoming environments though they could turn unfriendly from time to time.

Mughal Court Attitudes Toward the *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* from Awrangzib on

The attitude of the Mughal *padshahs* went a long way in defining the environment with which the *Shi‘i Isna Ashari* in South Asia had to cope from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Humayun’s descendants, Akbar and Jahangir, saw their imperial authority as transcending South Asia’s religious diversity, which included a small but influential number of *Shi‘i Isna Ashari*, and correspondingly projected themselves as tolerant overseers of not only Muslim diversity but of all religious diversity. Akbar’s court

historian Abu al-Fazl wrote the well-known passage describing the multi-faith dialogues of Akbar,

The wide capacity and the toleration of the Shadow of God were unveiled. Sufi, philosopher, orator, jurist, [*Sunni, Shiah,*] Brahman, Jati, Siura, Carabak, Nazarene, Jew, Sabi, Zoroastrian, and others enjoyed exquisite pleasure by beholding the calmness of the assembly, the sitting of the world-lord in the lofty pulpit,... and the adornment of the pleasant abode of impartiality.⁸

Jahangir reinforced this imperial rhetoric of Akbar's transcendence over religious difference in his autobiographical account where he wrote,

Followers of various religions had a place in the broad scope of his peerless empire – unlike other countries of the world, like Iran, where there is room for only [*Shi'is*], and Rum, Turan, and Hindustan, where there is room for only [*Sunnis*]. Just as all groups and the practitioners of all religions have a place within the spacious circle of God's mercy, in accordance with the dictum that a shadow must follow its source, in my father's realm, which ended at the salty sea, there was room for practitioners of various sects and beliefs, both true and imperfect, and strife and altercation were not allowed. [*Sunni and Shi'is*] worshipped in one mosque, and Frank and Jew in one congregation.⁹

Jahangir had more intimate connections with the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*. His wife Nūr Jahān was likely a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* as were her influential father and brother, who became key figures in the Mughal court. Despite Jahangir's words and his family's religious loyalties, there were limits. When the learned Qāzī Nūr Allāh Shustarī of Lahore, who had been previously appointed by Akbar, decided to openly advocate for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, he antagonized the city's Hanafī majority and *ulama*, and Jahangir was compelled to order his execution.

Awrangzib, who has far too often been portrayed simplistically as a religious bigot, was less enamoured with rhetoric that idealized Indian or Islamic plurality. In contrast to

his older brother Dara Shukoh, who celebrated the commonalities between the Islamic and Hindu religious traditions and was the rightful heir to the Mughal throne, Awrangzib, who killed his brother to obtain power, subscribed to a purist, Arabo-centric vision of Islam and the *sharīʿat* (personal religious law) stripped of the traces of ancient Iranian and Indian cultural influences. Awrangzib did conquer the openly *Shiʿi Isna Ashari* realms of Golconda and Bijapur in southern India, but total conquest of this region known as the Deccan was a longstanding Mughal political ambition dating back to Akbar and was even coveted during the Delhi Sultanate, which preceded the Mughal empire. For example, Akbar's armies conquered Berar in 1004-5/1596 and Ahmadnagar in 1008-9/1600.

While Awrangzib was not openly hostile towards the *Shiʿi Isna Ashari*, he certainly endorsed and empowered the historically entrenched Hanafi *ulama*. According to Khafi Khan, “The Emperor gave such extensive powers to the [*qazis*] ... in the civil administration and general and detailed affairs of the state that it became a cause of jealousy and envy of the leading nobles of the Empire.”¹⁰ Awrangzib commissioned the encyclopaedic compendium of Islamic jurisprudence, the *Fatāvā-i ʿĀlamgīrī* [Alamgir's (Aurangzib) Legal Compendium], that was described by Khafi Khan: “[T]he compilation of [the *Fatava-i Alamgiri*] had been completed in those very days after a hard labour of seven or eight years by the scholars and Ulama of Lahore and the capital (Delhi)”.¹¹ He also bestowed property on Lucknow's religious scholars that would form the important intellectual school known as the Farangī Mahāl (European Palace) that trained many of the city's Quran readers, jurists and *Shiʿi Isna Ashari ulama*.

Awrangzib consciously tried to realign Indian society with his understanding of the *shariat* by instituting the Arab lunar calendar over Akbar's Zoroastrian inspired Ilahi solar calendar, discontinuing the ancient Persian celebration of the spring equinox known as *Nawrūz*,¹² ceasing the Hindu inspired *jharukah-i darshan* ceremony that granted an auspicious vision of the Mughal emperor to his subjects, halting his patronage of poetry, and banning music and alcohol. A conflict in the Mughal city of Burhanpur in present day Madhya Pradesh between armed *Shi'i Isna Ashari* gunmen in rival *Ashura* processions gave Awrangzib reason enough to ban this public display of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* believing. "[H]e issued orders prohibiting [*tābūt*] procession in all the provinces of the Empire during the [Ashura]."¹³ *Tabut* refers to coffins used to symbolize the dead in the Muharram processions.

In a dramatic shift in attitudes, Awrangzib's son, Shāh 'Ālam (Bahādur Shāh), advocated for the *Shiah* tradition amongst the Hanafi religious scholars of Lahore. Khafi Khan wrote,

Accordingly, on his [Bahadur Shah's] arrival at Lahore, he assembled the learned men of that city, most of them staunch [*Sunnis*], and argued with them on the justice of the claim of his holiness Ali, ... the Commander of the Faithful, on whom be peace. These men were all defeated in argument, and the confusion to which he reduced them made him entertain the design of adding to the usual profession of faith, as uttered in the public prayers in the [*khutbā* (Friday sermon)], the words 'and Ali is the saint of God, and heir of the prophet of God.'¹⁴

Farrukhsiyar, who became emperor in 1124/1713, was more sensitive to the *Sunni* majority's views. He responded to a conflict at the Shahjahanabad congregational *masjid* between supporters of Khvājah Jā'far, a *Shiah shaykh*, and Shāh 'Abd Allāh, a visiting

Sunni prayer leader who had recently come to the city from Multan, by asking Khvaja Jafar to repair to the suburbs on the advice of the chief *qazi*.¹⁵

The ascendancy of Safdar Jang, an Irani *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, in the Mughal courts of Muhammad Shah and Ahmad Shah, created a highly intricate political environment, which ultimately polarized the court and the capital along *Sunni* Turani and *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Irani lines and inflamed hostility towards all things *Shi'i*. Safdar Jang's rise took place in the aftermath of Nadir Shah's brutal sacking of Delhi, after which Muhammad Shah appointed him as *Mir-i Ātish* [Commander of the Artillery]. The position entailed managing the artillery and protecting the *padshah* and his household, making Safdar Jang one of the most powerful men in the Mughal capital much to the displeasure of Turani *Sunni* nobles.¹⁶ Safdar Jang used his position to mobilize Mughal troops to suppress the emerging *Rūhilahs* galvanized by their *Sunni* persuasion. The *Rūhilahs* were a *Sunni* tribespeople from the Peshawar region who had settled around the Rampur area in North India, known as *Rūhilkhand*. With the succession of the Mughal boy-regent Ahmad Shah, Safdar Jang was appointed *vazir* of the empire but saw his power being stripped away and given to another *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, Javid Khan. Consequently he launched a covert coup d'état that led to street battles between Irani and Turani forces in Shahjahanabad. The *Rūhilahs* entered the fray and supported the Turanis. Sensing failure, Safdar Jang withdrew to his family's assigned province of Awadh.

Curiously, one of Safdar Jang's staunchest opponents was Ahmad Shah's mother Qudsiyah Begam, who was also *Shiah*, showing that the strife in Shahjahanabad was at root political and not arising solely from *Shi'i-Sunni* doctrinal clashes. As discussed in

chapter five, she commissioned the development of a fortress enclosure named Aliganj in 1164/1750-1 in the southern suburbs of Shahjahanabad that was centred on a shrine named Dargah-i Shahi Mardan that housed an impression of the foot of *Imam* Ali. Aliganj was formed along the established model of a typical Indian Sufi shrine, a *dargah*, and in essence was the nucleus of a *Shi'i* colony in the Mughal capital, the first and only instance of public, *Shi'i* communal space in Shahjahanabad.

The *Ulama* of the Mughal Courts

Though the attitudes of the Mughal *padshahs* were important in setting the stage in Awadh, those of the *ulama* were even more so. In addition to generating religious scholarship, the *ulama* oversaw the administration and enforcement of justice and Islamic institutions and religious practice. The religious scholars of tenth-century Bukhara espousing the Hanafi *mazhab* and *kalām* (theology) of Maturidi and Ashari cast a long shadow over the South Asian *ulama* sanctioned first by the Delhi Sultans in all likelihood and then by the Mughal *padshahs*. The *ulama* under the Mughals were often intertwined with prominent Sufi orders such as the *Chishtīs* and later the *Naqshbandīs* and *Qadarīs* since Sufi *khanqahs* were the primary venue for studying Islamic sciences. In general, the South Asian Mughal *ulama* were suspicious and deeply critical of the *Shi'i* religious tradition.

The case of Qazi Nur Allah Shushtari was a clear example of tensions within the South Asian *ulama* and that would persist. At stake was nothing less than religious identity. Shushtari was a *Shi'i* émigré to Akbar's court in Fatehpur Sikri from Shushtar

and Mashhad, who was trained in medicine and the religious sciences. Mullā ‘Abd al-Qādir Badā’ūnī, a member of the *Sunni ulama*, who was disenchanted with most of Akbar’s decisions made this observation about Shushtari,

Although he is by religion a [*Shiah*] he is distinguished for his impartiality, justice, virtue, modesty, piety, continence, and such qualities are possessed by noble men, and is well known for his learning, clemency, quickness of understanding, singleness of heart, clearness of perception, and acumen.¹⁷

Shushtari was appointed as *qazi* of Lahore and overconfidently decided to publicly argue the case for *Shi’i* Islam against the Hanafi *ulama* and against the practice of *taqiyyah*, the historic *Shi’i* doctrine and practice of concealing one’s religious loyalties in the face of persecution that was widespread in India and promoted by *Shi’i* religious scholars. Shushtari wrote a letter to a colleague in Iran saying,

The Emperor [Akbar]’s patronage and favours increase daily. In fact my success is due to Divine munificence, and the benevolence of the Prophet and that of Allah’s [*valī*] (friend), Ali ... In refuting the arguments of the Nasibis, I was guided by the holy traditions of my ancestors. In these circumstances I came to the conclusion that in India, [*taqiyyah*] was a great calamity. It would expel our children from the Imamiyya [*Shi’i Isna Ashari*] faith and make them embrace the false Ashari or Maturidi faiths. Reinforced by the kindness and bounty of the Sultan, I threw away the scarf of [*taqiyyah*] from my shoulders and, taking with me an army of arguments, I plunged myself into [*jihād*] (holy war) against the (Sunni) *ulama* of this country.¹⁸

One particularly vexing point for Hanafi critics of the *Shi’i Isna Ashari* was the practice of cursing the first three caliphs of Islam who were venerated in the *Sunni* traditions. This was an act contrary to the officially accepted *shariat* as formulated in Awrangzib’s legal compendium, the *Fatava-i Alamgiri*. The work declared that those who cursed the first three caliphs were apostates.¹⁹ In such a climate, the practice of *taqiyyah* that Shushtari had fought against flourished, although people’s true religious

persuasions were obvious even to outsiders. The French visitor to Awrangzib's court Tavernier observed,

Although he [Aurangzib] had, ... numerous Persians in his service, he did not allow them to celebrate the festival of [Hasan and Husayn], sons of Ali, who were killed by the *Sunni* ... and they themselves, to please the king and advance their own fortunes, made no scruple about conforming themselves externally to the cult and customs of the *Sunnis*.²⁰

Despite the stricter codification restricting objectionable *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practise, the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* in Shahjahanabad still enjoyed a degree of legitimacy as Mir Ghulām Husayn Khān's account of the episode between Khvajah Jafar and Shah Abd Allah, during Farrukhsiyar's reign that was briefly mentioned above, illustrated. Shah Abd Allah, a prayer leader (*imam*) from Multan on an extended business trip to Shahjahanabad, was outraged by the religious activities at Khvaja Jafar's home where his spiritual disciples prostrated before him, and where *marsiya*s, elegiac poetry commemorating the Prophet and *Shi'i Isna Ashari Imams*, were sung without mention of the first three caliphs. Consequently, Shah Abd Allah delivered a sermon discussing *Imam* Ali in the Shahjahanabad congregational *masjid* in which he was remembered to have said,

Ali ... was not within the pale of the saints – that it was improper to call him a [Sayyid] – and that the expression of 'five pure bodies' was contrary to the true principles of the faith; for whoever should admit it, would thereby exclude the three first [*khalīfs*] as not being equally pure.²¹

Taking this as a challenge, Khvaja Jafar invited Shah Abd Allah to debate his views among a learned group but was spurned. Khvajah Jafar then arranged for a group of

young *Shi'i Isna Ashari* men carrying *tasbehs* (rosaries) to attend the congregational *masjid* and stare down Shah Abdullah during his sermon. Violence ensued, bringing the conflict to Farrukhsiyar's attention. When Qazi Shariat Allah Khan was asked by Farrukhsiyar to assess Shah Abd Allah's charges against the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, he found no legal basis but did recommend that Khvaja Jafar repair to the suburbs in order to diffuse the situation; Shah Abdullah was not reprimanded. Mir Ghulam Husayn-Khan's account of this episode emphasized *Sunni* abuses of position and captured the sense of oppression felt among the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*.

Shāh Valī Allāh of Delhi, a Hanafi scholar with a number of Sufi affiliations whose father was involved with the Fatava-i Alamgiri, was a critic of what he perceived to be declining court morality and an opponent to the rising interest in Greek science and grammatical analysis among the *ulama*. He also wrote a treatise addressing *Shiah-Sunni* differences. *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Karbala narratives had so permeated his consciousness that when Nadir Shah occupied Delhi, Shah Vali Allah consoled Delhi residents by narrating the events of Karbala.²² However, Shah Vali Allah grew to resent the expanding sphere of influence of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* and could not accept the doubts that the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* cast on the legitimacy of the caliphs.

The perversiveness and deviation from the right faith of the [*Shiahs*] have come to light very clearly and the hearts of the people have been affected because of doubts which they have successfully created in them. Also, most of the people of this country have begun to doubt the very basis of the [*khilāfat*] of the pious caliphs.²³

Shah Vali Allah's son, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz Dihlavī, was even more strident in his views.

He blamed the decline of the Mughal empire on the *Shi'i*. "[W]henever [the *Shi'i* faith]

became popular in any one of those countries, it gave rise to discord, sedition, rebellion, misfortune, disgrace, mutual distrust [sic], which led to the downfall of the empire, just as torrential rains cause the break up of super-structures made of earth ...”²⁴ It was Shah Abd al-Aziz’s polemical writings more than any other that motivated Lucknow’s most prominent *Shi’i Isna Ashari* scholar Sayyid Dildar Ali to write his own series of counter polemics.

Shi’i Isna Asharism in the Streets of Shahjahanabad

According to the scholar Muhammad Umar, *Shi’i Isna Ashari* Muharram rituals became less secretive and more public during the reign of Bahadur Shah.²⁵ Mir Ghulam Husayn-Khan described the numerous Muharram processions and *marsiyah* singers in Shahjahanabad in the age of Farukhsiyar that were then subsequently suppressed following the conflict between Khvaja Jafar and Shah Abd Allah.

[H]eretofore, it was common enough to see professed singers going about the streets, singing the praises of the pure and holy family, and numbers even of learned men used often to stop and to take pleasure in hearing their music; yet now matters were so altered, that such singers were sure of being hooted, and accused of impiety and blasphemy.²⁶

The anonymous author of the Tārīkh-i ‘Ālamgīr Sānī [History of Alamgir II], an account of the reign of Alamgir II from 1167/1754 to 1173/1759, thought that the *Shi’i Isna Ashari* of Shahjahanabad were able to freely conduct public Muharram processions in the reign of Farrukhsiyar. He wrote,

As the [Shiah] nobles had come into power during the reign of [Farrukhsiyar], the construction of mimic sepulchres and tombs of the Imams, which had not been

encouraged by the former rulers because they were Sunnis, got publicity. The practice gradually became so popular that during the [*ashura*], mourning assemblies were held in the houses of the nobles with great pageantry and an unlimited number of [*taziyahs*] were taken out from every lane and bazaar in procession accompanied by beating of kettle-drums. The kings of the past had ordered that no one should observe the practice of constructing [*taziyahs*] but since this practice had popularly been continuing for the last forty years, it could not now be stopped.²⁷

Qudsiyah Begam's Dargah of Shahi Mardan was a popular destination on Saturdays for urban pilgrims throughout the year having joined the numerous sacred, suburban sites. Using language applicable to any *dargah*, a visiting Hyderabad official Dargāh Qulī Khān observed,

On Saturdays crowds of pilgrims thronged there for eternal blessings and adorned the turban of their devotion with the flowers of obsequiousness and servility. The dust of its threshold is a source of cure for distressed people. The water of the spring of its bounty is a source of honour to the needy. A large number of people make a vow in return for the fulfilment of their needs and are successful.²⁸

Perhaps the best evidence of the flowering of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* inspired culture in Shahjahanbad was the emergence of the elegiac Urdu *marsiya* as a musical and poetic art form. *Marsiya* poetry was a specialized genre devoted to lamenting the tragedy at Karbala. Recitation of *marsiya*s was integrated into Muharram commemoration *majlises*. Two masters of the genre, Mirzā Rafī al-Dīn Sawdā and Mīr Taqī Mīr eventually moved from the Mughal capital to Lucknow, where the genre would continue to flourish.

Though the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition was most prevalent in Shahjahanabad, there were other ways *Shi'i* beliefs were engaged. There were the *Tafzīlīs*, who bridged *Shi'i* and *Sunni* traditions by recognizing Ali as the rightful heir to the khilafat and as superior

to the three caliphs venerated by the *Sunni* but otherwise conformed to *Sunni* practise.²⁹ There was also the peculiar “Bekouk” fringe movement founded by Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusayn during Bahadur Shah, Farukhsiyar and Muhammad Shah’s reigns.³⁰ An émigré from Kabul to Shahjahanabad, Husayn claimed a type of succession after *Imam* Riza and that he was “that being ... that was brought into the world by the young [Fatima], on whom be peace, when she suffered an abortion.”³¹

Faizabad

In Faizabad, a new city developed by Shuja al-Dawlah and a good portion of the nobility that settled there after negotiating peace with the British in 1176/1763, the Mughal emperor and his religious policies were no longer influential. Since Faizabad was the base of the Awadh dynasty’s power, there was no entrenched *Sunni ulama* to contend with. Shuja al-Dawlah was free to bring his passion for the commemoration of Muharram to the city and make it a prominent part of military and civic life. However, political and economic security still needed to be achieved.

An historical portrayal of the *Nawwabs* of Awadh composed in 1222/1808, the ‘Imād al-Sa’ādat by Mīr Ghulām ‘Alī of Lucknow, described an incident showing Shuja al-Dawlah’s close involvement with Muharram a few years prior to his move to Faizabad. Shuja al-Dawlah and his troops were in Anupshahar prior to the Battle of Panipat in 1174/1761 and were contemplating an alliance with the *Sunni* Afghan general Aḥmad Shāh Durrānī, the successor to Nadir Shah, against the Marathas. Like leaders of earlier

Afghani regimes, Durrani, who was based in Kabul, had been raiding India to exploit its wealth and this one was his fifth incursion. But this time, Ahmad Shah was drawn into a major confrontation with the Hindu Marathas with imperialist ambitions for South Asia and he appealed to Shuja al-Dawlah to overlook their *Shi'i* and *Sunni* differences and unite against a common enemy in the name of Islam.

While Shuja al-Dawlah was in Anupshahar, the month of Muharram arrived. Along with his followers - bareheaded, barefooted and clothed in black – he marched with *'alams* (battle standards), singing *marsiya*hs and beating his breast. Offended by this perhaps intentionally flagrant display of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* conviction, Ahmad Shah's *Sunni* troops had to be restrained from attacking the procession.³² Shuja al-Dawlah typically arranged for tents to accommodate the *majlises*, and his soldiers made *taziyahs* from bamboo and paper.³³ The shared memory of Husayn's martyrdom was a powerful means to galvanize soldiers under the intense emotions of outrage and vengeance.

This immersion in the processions of Muharram by Shuja al-Dawlah took place not only abroad on the battlefield but in Faizabad too. In the album of Shuja al-Dawlah's friend and ally, Gentil, a painting of an impressive procession of men was included [Fig. 103]. The painting was inscribed in French and explained that the scene illustrated the last day of a grand function in Faizabad in 1185/1772.³⁴ This image presented the clearest impression, textually or pictorially, of the Muharram processions that took place in Faizabad and shaped Asaf al-Dawlah's experience.

The scene was filled with several interesting elements that can be interpreted by consulting Qanoon-e-Islam, a 1248/1832 account of the similar religious customs of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* dominated Hyderabad. Towards the front and after a line of marching

soldiers, men seated aloft two elephants held *alams*. *Alams* were teardrop shaped standards affixed atop wooden or metal shafts intended to resemble those used by Husayn and his supporters in the historic battle of Karbala. Next, a group of musicians playing military horns (*turhai, qurna*) and drums were shown riding on horses.³⁵ This was the *nawbat*, a band to announce the presence of the procession and nobility. Behind them was an effigy of a horse carried by two men that represented the steed of Husayn followed by effigies of women with wings. Next was the mythical animal of Burāq, a creature in Islamic lore that was a blend of human, lion, swan and mule with the tail and wings of a peacock and was sent by God to carry Prophet Muhammad before the throne of God. Behind Buraq, was a small circle of men with their right arms raised to their chest and mouths open. Among the things they may have repeatedly shouted: O Ali! Shah Hasan, Shah Husayn, *doolha* (bridegroom), *Hay dust* (alas friend), *Ruheeo* (stay)".³⁶ Following them was a model of a three-domed building with a balcony and awning. This was most probably a *shah nashin*, literally a royal seat that perhaps served to connote the temporal authority of the *Shi'i Imams*.³⁷ Next, there was a row of banners surmounted representing those who fought at Karbala capped with *alams* in the shape of a hand that symbolized the five pure bodies of the Prophet's family, Muhammad, Fatima, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn. Two especially tall standards followed and symbolized Qāsim and *Imam* Husayn's daughter, who were narrated to have been married by Husayn on the Karbala battlefield. A larger circle of mourners lay behind these standards with one man sporting a moustache singled out with the word "nabob," meaning *Nawwab*, written next to him. This was undoubtedly Shuja al-Dawlah, given the date 1185/1772 on the painting and the

reference to his capital Faizabad, his active participation in Muharram rituals and his preference for wearing a long moustache, as testified by numerous portraits. The largest sacred object to be carried in the procession came next, a large model of a building surmounted by a dome that was the tomb of *Imam* Husayn. Two smaller domed models subsequently appeared in the procession, one likely belonging to *Imam* Hasan. There was also a series of coffins, known as *tabut*, in elaborate casings that are reminders of the deaths of key individuals at Karbala and that give the procession a funerary dimension. The end of the procession was marked by a row of eleven elephants, some carrying men with baskets of bread who threw them down below to half clad beggars.³⁸

This was the Muharram procession as Asaf al-Dawlah knew it and incorporated it into his *Shi'i Isna Ashari* believing. Like his father, he participated in the procession in Faizabad. Fayz Bakhsh recalled, "The [*ta'ziyah dāri* procession] was observed by the [*Nawwab-Vazir*] in Faizabad on the tenth of Muharram and all his buildings were duly furnished and maintained in repair as usual."³⁹

Lucknow

The distinctive Imambarah

In Shahjahanabad and Faizabad, the rise in power of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* noblemen and noblewomen was accompanied by increasing space for public expressions of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* believing, as shown by the various accounts of Muharram processions and the flowering of *marsiyah* poetry. Muharram processions were now an opportunity for rulers to make public displays of religiosity. The development of the Great Imambarah by Asaf

al-Dawlah marked an apex in this trend towards increasingly public *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practice. The unique building was an outgrowth of the relationship that was forged between Asaf al-Dawlah and the Muharram processions and *majlises* during his upbringing in Faizabad. Unlike the nearby congregational *masjid* that was built concurrently, no other voices on the historical record propelled its development. It was a public assertion of a distinct religious point of view. It transformed the public landscape, it entered into public consciousness, and it even aroused the admiration of critics of Asaf al-Dawlah.

Unlike the congregational *masjid*, the set of religious practices associated with the Great Imambarah and which it was intended to facilitate were rooted in distinctly *Shi'i Isna Ashari* beliefs and practices of eighteenth century North India and fused with other features of general Muslim ritual life. *Shi'i Isna Ashari* notions of *Imamate* and narratives of *Imam Husayn's* martyrdom permeated the building's purpose. The building served to house *taziyahs* used in the annual Muharram processions and to host the annual series of *majlises* retelling Husayn's martyrdom over the first ten days.

The centrality of Muharram to *Shi'i Isna Ashari* life must be appreciated. It was and continues to be the most significant event on the calendar. The whole year could be geared in anticipation of Muharram. It was not only a reliving of history but a psychological purge of all grief and an occasion of spiritual intensity

At the most basic level, the Great Imambarah was a year round repository for Asaf al-Dawlah's *taziyahs*, the largest and most splendid in Lucknow. Some made of more disposable materials were to be used in the Muharram processions and ultimately buried while others made of precious metals were permanent. The largest *taziyahs* held in the

Imambarah were generally understood to represent the tombs of *Imam* Hasan and Husayn in Karbala, while others could represent individuals in *Imam* Husayn's family.

Abu Talib Isfahani mentioned how Asaf al-Dawlah used the building to collect “[h]undreds of [*taziyahs*], big and small, ... made of gold and silver ...” He complained that the main floor was cluttered with them.⁴⁰ Asaf al-Dawlah's court records showed that on the evening of the first Muharram on 1210/ 18 July 1795, golden and silver *taziyahs* were installed in the Great Imambarah.⁴¹ Valentia, who visited the site in date, 1216/1802 described the Shah Nashin area filled with *taziyahs*. He wrote,

The third apartment was filled from one end to the other with a range of silver temples or cenotaphs, raised on platforms about three feet from the ground, in which were placed the supposed tombs of the two brothers. These were brilliantly illuminated from the ceiling, and by candles placed around in branches. I think they were at least twenty in number and were worth from 50, 000 to a [*lakh*] of rupees each.⁴²

However, Sita Ram's painting of the interior of the Great Imambarah showed no *taziyahs* in the archways of the Shah Nashin but instead one large golden and seemingly immovable *taziyah* that represented either Hasan or Husayn's tomb was shown in the main hall. [Fig. 112] The tall and narrow *taziyah* consisted of a series of successively smaller square segments stacked upon each other and surmounted with a lotus bud dome common in late-Mughal architecture; it did not resemble an actual tomb. At some point fourteen tombs of silver representing each of the twelve *Imams*, the Prophet and Fatima were installed and it appears that Saadat Ali Khan melted down some of Asaf al-Dawlah's *taziyahs* that were made of precious metal.⁴³ The earliest interior photograph of the Great Imambarah taken in the early 1900s, showed two smaller *taziyahs* in the main hall covered [Fig. 153]. Current practice would suggest that within the Imambarah

the elevated area known as the Shah Nashin was where the most impressive *taziyahs* were located within the archways, the most prominent place being allocated for the *taziyah* of Husayn's tomb; *taziyahs* are also kept on the main floor.

The *taziyahs* in the Great Imambarah, particularly the permanent ones, were miniature tombs invested with the same sense of sacredness as the tombs of *Imams* Hasan and Husayn in Medina and Karbala. On the surface, visiting *taziyahs* was an alternative means of making pilgrimage to the tomb of *Imam* Husayn in Karbala, which the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* considered as significant a practice as making pilgrimage to Mecca. At a deeper level, the encounter with the *taziyahs* was about seeking gnosis with the *Imam*, who was believed to be the blessed proof of God.

When Asaf al-Dawlah visited the *taziyahs* in the Great Imambarah on the first night of Muharram on 30th Zu al-hijjah 1208/29 July 1794, he conducted himself as though he was visiting a grave. He circumambulated the *taziyahs* and recited the opening chapter of the Quran, and on some occasions, ritual greetings (*durūd*).⁴⁴ Current day practice would include the recitation of a special *ziyarat* (pilgrimage) prayer, following the performance of ritual ablutions and other prayers. This incorporation of ablutions into the *ziyarat* ritual perhaps explains the inclusion of an ablutions tank in front of the Great Imambarah before its steps were rebuilt. When encountering the *taziyahs* of his noblemen, his wives or the poor in their respective homes or in the streets, Asaf al-Dawlah would make donations ranging from one hundred to five hundred rupees, and presumably visitors to the *taziyah* of the Great Imambarah did so as well. The *Nawwab-Vazir* also included Koran readers among the staff he employed to attend to the building,

as was the convention with tombs. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 1199/1783), a Qadiri pir important to the Farangi Mahal, thought that the *taziyahs* were visited by the spirits of *Imams* Hasan and Husayn.⁴⁵ Following Asaf al-Dawlah’s death in 1211/1797 he was buried in the Great Imambarah, extending the funerary character of the building.

Beyond being a chamber of tomb replicas, the Great Imambarah accommodated the *majlises* of Muharram sponsored by Asaf al-Dawlah, the most lavish in Lucknow. Readers of the Karbala tragedies, and *marsiyyah* singers were employed as part of the building’s financial provisions. Asaf al-Dawlah attended the readings and listened to the mournful *marsiyyahs* that followed. Like so many, he became moved and performed *ma’tam*, self-flagellation. Abu Talib Isfahani indicated that these *majlises* were well attended by Lucknow’s elite, but people were forced to sit outside the building due to the large number of *taziyahs* filling the floor of the interior.⁴⁶

Illuminations

Asaf al-Dawlah directly oversaw the expenditures on the Muharram commemorations, the most expensive items being the commissioning of *taziyahs* and illuminations. Spectacular illuminations reinforced the intense atmosphere created by the powerful narratives and emotional *marsiyyahs* and were the most expensive feature of the annual evening Muharram commemorations after the *taziyah* commissions. Attendants scaled the east stairs of the Great Imambarah and walked the narrow balconies along the ceiling in order to line it with torches. Fiery chandeliers hung from the iron rings embedded in the ceiling of the main hall of the Great Imambarah. Large freestanding, tree-like

candelabras rivalling the *taziyahs* filled the floor. What was a chamber of tombs throughout the year became a chamber of light every Muharram.

On the subject of illuminations in the Great Imambarah, Valentia observed,

The [Imambarah] itself is built on an elevated terrace, which on this occasion gave still more splendour to the innumerable lights placed upon it; yet even these could not diminish the effect of the thousands of girandoles, filled with wax-candles, which were suspended from the roof at different heights, and were reflected by the different coloured cut glass, which composed them. The floor was covered with candles likewise in glass branches, leaving only sufficient space for the crowd to pass.⁴⁷

Valentia later remarked, “[I]n the [Muharram], the late [Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah] use to suspend lustres in rows, as close as their size would admit, the whole length of the chamber.”⁴⁸

Emma Roberts, who published an account including her travels in Lucknow in 1250/1835, wrote,

[T]he whole is bathed in floods of light from multitudes of wax tapers and lamps of various colours. The quadrangles of the [Imambarah] are similarly illuminated and their vast dimensions, the beauty of their proportions, the rich grouping of the pinnacles and domes, the long arcades lofty gateways and tall [*mināras*], can seldom if ever, be seen to such advantage as when the dazzling resplendence of artificial light imitates the blaze of day, without its heat and glare, and when the darkness of the surrounding atmosphere throws each illuminated building into bright relief.⁴⁹

Mrs. Mir Hasan Ali wrote of the competition in illuminations amongst *Lakhnawis* that took place in the decades after Asaf al-Dawlah’s death. She wrote,

The poor people vie with their rich neighbours, in making a brilliant light in their little halls containing the [*taziyah*]; the very poorest are liberal in the expenditure of oil and tallow candles – I might say extravagantly so, but for the purity of their intentions, supposing it to be a duty – and they certainly manifest their zeal and respect to the utmost of their power; although many to my knowledge, live all the year round on the coarsest fare, to enable them to show this reverence to their [Imam’s] memory.⁵⁰

The Mr. Brown quoted by the historian H. G. Keene noted that, “The hall was usually illuminated with a profusion of wax tapers and numerous hanging lights ...”⁵¹

The most compelling account of the illuminated Great Imambarah was Sita Ram’s painting of the interior. Torches in red, green and yellow containers lined the ceiling perimeter, chandeliers hung from the ceiling and metal candelabras were scattered throughout the floor, all in accordance with the textual descriptions.

The production of light in such abundance was not easily achieved by most due to the expense, nor was it necessarily restricted to *imambarahs*. For instance, Dargah Quli Khan described the illuminations for the annual commemoration of the Mughal Padshah Bahadur Shah’s death (*‘urs*) at his tomb in suburban Shahjahanabad as follows: “When the place is fully lighted it dazzles like sunlight and over-shadows the moon. The sun realizing its unimportance sets and does not show its face before dawn. The towers of lamps throw lights as high as the sky.”⁵² Such displays of light corresponded with the common literary trope that described the graves of the distinguished as illumined. Light held even more significant metaphorical resonance amongst the *Shi‘i*, who viewed the *Imam* as possessing the light of God and used light as an important philosophical and mystical theme.

Asaf al-Dawlah’s court records gave the impression that during the first ten days of Muharram the Great Imambarah was primarily Asaf al-Dawlah’s personal hall accessible to Lucknow’s male elite and not completely open to the public. Women were not recorded as visiting the Great Imambarah, but special mention was made of Asaf al-Dawlah’s visit on the second and fifth of Muharram to the women of his household

residing at the Khvurd Mahal in the Panj Mahal complex adjacent to the Great Imambarah, where they kept their own *taziyahs*.⁵³ *Pardah*, the segregation of non-related men and women, was strictly observed among the elite as the case of Asaf al-Dawlah's grandmother showed. When a British officer came to pay his respects to her, they sat in pavilions across a garden court concealed from each other communicating via intermediaries who met at centre court. If the women of Asaf al-Dawlah's household attended the *majlises* at the Great Imambarah then they may have occupied one of the side chambers, which could be veiled, or special times may have been allocated. More likely, they rarely saw the Great Imambarah and created a parallel ritual life.

Mrs. Mir Hasan Ali described the lives of women as being limited to their domestic quarters during Muharram and throughout the year. She wrote,

There are but few, and those chiefly princesses, who have [*imambarahs*] at command, within the boundary of the [*zananah*]; the largest and best apartment in their establishment is therefore selected for the purpose of an [*imambarah*], into which none but females are admitted, excepting the husband, father, son, or brother, of the lady ...⁵⁴

She continued, "The ladies assemble, in the evening, round the [*taziyah*] they have set up in their [*pardah*]ed privacy – female friends, slaves, and servants, surrounding the mistress of the house, in solemn gravity"⁵⁵

Conforming and the Congregational *Masjid*

In many ways, the raising of the Asafi congregational *masjid* was an integral part of a process to make Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community and their Islamic practices

conform to those of Shahjahanabad and the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* of Safavid and post-Safavid Persia by introducing Friday prayers for the Lakhnawi *Shi'i Isna Ashari*. The *Shi'i Isna Ashari* of Lucknow had generally accepted early *Shi'i Isna Ashari* scholarly conclusions that congregational prayer was not possible without the *Imam*, who had entered into concealment. This was at great odds with the norms of Muslim practice established in Mughal imperial society for centuries, where congregational Friday prayers and the congregational *masjid* were defined as integral to all Islamic practice. It was also at odds with the Safavid tradition, where Friday prayers were institutionalized and congregational *masjids* were built. A few individuals from the *Shiah ulama* and nobility challenged the *Lakhnawi Shi'i Isna Ashari* disinclination to congregational prayers, but their efforts were given social currency by Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah. With his patronage of a monumental *masjid* evoking Shahjahanabad's congregational *masjid*, it was clear that Asaf al-Dawlah actively endorsed this innovation; *Lakhnawis* were left with no doubt that Friday prayers were to be a part of Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practice.

The advocacy of Friday congregational prayers in the city was a topic explored by scholars S. A. A. Rizvi and Juan Cole based primarily on readings of the biography and sermons (*mavā'iz*) of Sayyid Dildar Ali (b. 1166/1752-3), Lucknow's most eminent religious scholar and religious personage. Dildar Ali's wealthy landholding family claimed descent from the tenth *Imam* Ali Naqi, and Dildar Ali, aspiring to be a religious scholar, studied primarily with Maturidi Hanafis and adopted an *Akhbari* stance towards *Shi'i Isna Ashari* scholarly Islam. Sponsored by Faizabad nobleman Hasan Riza Khan, Dildar Ali studied in Najaf, Karbala and Mashhad and became committed to *Usuli* views of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Islam and actively wrote about them when he returned to Lucknow.

He pushed for the development of a *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* in Lucknow and Awadh that could occupy the position of the *Sunni* Farangi Mahal. He also challenged Sufi traditions especially the adoption of Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the Unity of Being.

According to Dildar Ali's biography, Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī "Padshah" Kashmīrī, presumably from Kashmir, settled in Faizabad under Shuja al-Dawlah and wrote a treatise in 1199/1785, extolling the virtues of Friday congregational prayer and recommending Sayyid Dildar Ali among the names of three potential prayer leaders. The work was presented to Hasan Riza Khan, who approached Sayyid Dildar Ali to lead congregational prayers. Concerned about *Sunni* backlash, Dildar Ali initially rejected the idea but later agreed. Hasan Riza Khan was also impressed with Shāh 'Alī Akbar Mawdūdī, a Chishti Sufi and émigré from Delhi who professed to accept *Shi'i Isna Ashari* beliefs. Surrounded by *Sunni* and *Shi'i Isna Ashari* followers, Mawdudi was in the habit of leading congregational prayers. Hasan Riza Khan, convinced that congregational prayers were important, successfully lobbied Dildar Ali again to lead the prayers and he hosted the first of regular gatherings on May 12, 1786/13 Rajab 1200 in his palace.⁵⁶

In the sermons that Dildar Ali made on these occasions, he made the case for congregational prayers. Of particular note, he asserted that *Sunni* rulers in India had prevented the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* from conducting congregational Friday prayers. In his view, such prayers were in accordance with the canonical sayings of the Prophet, the *Imams* and in keeping with *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practise in Safavid Persia. Like Shustari

from over one hundred and sixty years earlier, he feared *Shi'i Isna Ashari* dependency on India's *Sunni ulama* and the spectre of assimilation.

In the same hall in Hasan Riza Khan's palace, Shah Ali Akbar Mawdudi held Sufi gatherings on Fridays, which included morning meditation and devotional song and dance, but they did not participate in the congregational prayers led by Dildar Ali; they preferred to follow Mawdudi in prayer elsewhere. Dildar Ali began to condemn Sufi practices, which he associated with the *Sunni*, and to curse Mawdudi, creating a divide between the two.⁵⁷

The introduction of Friday prayers was not popular initially. Dildar Ali's sermons futilely chastised the wealthy elite, older scholars and artisans and labourers who were not participating. Lucknow's situation was not unique. In Faizabad, where Friday prayers were being introduced as well, twenty men were hired to bring people to both daily and Friday prayers.⁵⁸ The next logical step for the advocates of Friday prayers was to secure the patronage of a congregational *masjid* in Lucknow by Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah, and for reasons still unknown he was convinced accordingly. Once the congregational *masjid* was complete, Dildar Ali emerged as the prayer leader of the new institution.

Perhaps the Nawwab-Vazir had a special interest in fostering the development of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* faith as Dildar Ali claimed in his sermons or Kashmiri suggested in his treatise on the merits of Friday prayers. There were other good reasons for sponsoring the congregational *masjid*. The development of a Friday mosque would emulate imperial Mughal practice and fulfil Asaf al-Dawlah's desire to be perceived as an autonomous ruler. Such an institution would serve as a catalyst and a centre where none existed

before for developing a useful and loyal *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* that could take the place of *Sunni* scholars trained in the Farangi mahal who were established in the area of jurisprudence. The communal assembly of people was also an opportunity to centralize *zakāt* (alms) collection, a religious obligation of Muslims; Asaf al-Dawlah would be able to oversee these funds. Lastly, it was an opportunity to indulge an interest in architecture.

Conclusion

The religious beliefs and practices of Shuja al-Dawlah; the *Shi'i Isna Ashari Usuli* scholars of Iraq; the *Chishti* Sufi convert to *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Islam, Mawdudi; the criticisms of the *ulama* of Shahjahanabad; the norms of Muslim practice in Shahjahanabad; and the experiences, memories, and legends of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* practice in Safavid Persia are all factors in the formation of Lucknow's monumental religious institutions, the congregational *masjid* and the Great Imambarah.

Shuja al-Dawlah's passion for Muharram commemorations is particularly influential since it shapes the religious practice of Asaf al-Dawlah, who then decides that his Muharram commemorations should be housed in a monumental venue. Sayyid Dildar Ali was inspired by the *Usuli ulama* he studied with in Iraq to seek platforms to build a *Shi'i Isna Ashari Usuli ulama* in India that could rival the *Sunni*; this led him to advocate for the Friday prayers. Mawdudi continued his *Sunni* practice of Friday congregational prayers when he converted to the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* doctrine, inspiring Hasan Riza Khan to continue advocating the practice.

Muharram commemorations in North India have been described by Cole as a form of popular religious practice but in Shahjahanabad, in Faizabad and in Lucknow, rulers and noblemen participated directly. By the time the Great Imambarah complex was being built Muharram commemorations were not only a popular phenomenon but entrenched in the religious lives of the elites.

A key difference between the Persian and Indian environments was that there was no environment where a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* majority existed in India, so the issues of sustaining *Shi'i Isna Ashari* identity in a Hindu and *Sunni* environment were more pronounced in India than they were in Persia, which had been subject to an extended period of state-sponsored *Shi'i Isna Asharism* and conversion.

Shahjahanabad bore the vestiges of the imperial Mughal offices, an increasingly disenfranchised *Sunni ulama* resentful of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* success, and a resistant group of *Sunni* inclined Turani noblemen. Political power was not fully in the hands of a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* ruler, a situation exacerbated by inter-*Shi'i Isna Ashari* conflict. Faizabad was under the rule of a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* ruler, Shuja al-Dawlah, but the political stability of Awadh was still in question and the wealth of Awadh was still being accumulated. There was no *Sunni ulama* to contend with and no *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* with its own agendas had formed yet. There was no historical *Sunni* community to conform to and no architectural legacy to contend with.

Lucknow, by contrast, provided a time and place to display *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious identity in ways never before possible in Northern India. Political power and the considerable economic wealth of Awadh that Shuja al-Dawlah and Bahu Begam had amassed were firmly in the grasp of Asaf al-Dawlah, who was committed to *Shiah*

beliefs, and the British were content to tolerate and exploit the regime. There was a long-established *Sunni* community in Lucknow bestowed with the architectural legacy of Awrangzib's Friday *masjid* atop the city's highest hill. The influence of the *Sunni ulama*, which was increasingly anti-*Shi'i*, over the ruling courts and Muslim communities was on the wane in Delhi due to the erosion of the Mughal *padshah*'s power and patronage. *Sunni* scholars of the Farangi Mahal in Lucknow kept a relatively low profile and focused on intellectual pursuits rather than politics. Hasan Riza Khan felt free under Asaf al-Dawlah's rule to mobilize his own religious agendas. The *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama* in Lucknow was beginning to crystallize around Sayyid Dildar Ali and seek platforms to assert its authority. A concentration of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* nobility and their households from Delhi, Faizabad, Iran and elsewhere was filling the city.

Since the Great Imambarah and the congregational *masjid* were built together they should be viewed collectively when trying to understand their roles in the religious discourses of Lucknow. Both the congregational *masjid* and the Great Imambarah serve the aim of creating high profile religious spaces intended primarily for Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community that the entire Lucknow community would be aware of. They facilitate a hardening of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* identity and collectivity. They also illustrate how Lucknow's elite shaped the course and experience of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* believing in Lucknow.

Unlike the congregational *masjid*, the Great Imambarah represents Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah's unmoderated contribution to the religious discourses of Lucknow; no other voices have appeared so far on the historical record urging for its construction. He showed that the commemoration of Muharram was as worthy of monumental

architectural patronage as the Friday congregational prayers. It is not clear that he envisioned the Great Imambarah as a civic congregational venue but rather he treated the Imambarah as a semi-private facility geared towards the elite. The production of light is an integral part of the religious experience that the Great Imambarah was to provide. The congregational *masjid* emerged from efforts by the nobility and the *ulama* to introduce Friday congregational prayers. The advocates of Friday congregational prayers did seek to gather all of Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* men in one place for prayer.

For those who lived in eighteenth-century Awadh and believed in the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition, it was a time and place to display their religious identity in ways never before possible in Northern India. The Great Imambarah complex was thus an important part of an effort to unveil and reconstitute *Shi'i Isna Ashari* identity in North India.

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- ⁶ Khafi Khan, Muntakhab al-Lubab, trans. S. Moinul Haq as Khafi Khan’s History of ‘Alamgir (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1975), p. 329.
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- ⁹ Jahangir, Jahangirnamah, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston as The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 40.
- ¹⁰ Khafi Khan, p. 218.
- ¹¹ Khafi Khan, p. 254
- ¹² Khafi Khan, p. 84
- ¹³ Khafi Khan, pp. 216-7

¹⁴ Mīr Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Siyar al-Mutākhirīn [A Review of Modern Times], trans. John Briggs as The Siyar-ul-Mutakherin: A History of the Mahomedan Power in India During the Last Century, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1832), p. 26.

¹⁵ Tabatabai, pp. 108-9

¹⁶ Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, The First Two Nawabs of Oudh (Lucknow: Upper India Pub. House, 1933), p. 102.

¹⁷ Abd al-Qadir Badauni, Muntakhab al-tawārīkh, trans. G. S. A. Ranking, W. H. Lowe, T. W. Haig, 3 vols. (Calcutta: 1884-1925), vol. 3, pp. 193-4.

¹⁸ Qazi Nur Allah Shushtari, letter to Bahā al-Dīn 'Āmilī, excerpt and trans. in Rizvi, vol. 1, p. 358.

¹⁹ Rizvi, vol. 2, p. 37.

²⁰ Jean Tavernier, Travels in India, 2 vols. ([repr. New Delhi: 1977]) p. 177. See Umar, p. 170.

²¹ Tabatabai, 106

²² Umar, p. 35.

²³ Shāh Valī Allāh, Izālat al-Khafā' 'an Khilāfat al-Khulafā', excerpt quoted and trans. in Umar, p. 215.

²⁴ Shah Abd al-Aziz Dihlavi, Tuhfa-i Isna Ashariyah, excerpt quoted in Umar, p. 216.

²⁵ Umar, p. 183.

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²⁷ Anon., Tarikh-i Alamgir Sani, excerpt quoted and trans. in Umar, p. 232, n. 55.

²⁸ Dargah Quli Khan, Muraqqa'-i Dihlī, excerpt and trans. in Rizvi, vol. 2, p. 72. Compare with: Dargah Quli Khan, Muraqqa-e-Dehli, trans. Chander Shehkar and Shama Mitra Chenoy (Delhi: Deputy Publ., 1989), p. 4.

²⁹ Umar, p. 233 n. 67.

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- ³² Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, Shuja-ud-daulah, 2 vols. (Calcutta [S.N. Sarkar] 1939-45), vol. 1, p. 86. Umar, p. 194.
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- ³⁴ Mildred Archer, Company Paintings (London : The Museum, 1992), p. 122.
- ³⁵ Sharar, p. 154.
- ³⁶ Jafar Sharif, Qanoon-e-Islam, or, The customs of the Moosulmans of India, trans. G. A. Herklots (London: Parbury, Allen, and co., 1832), p. 173.
- ³⁷ Sharif, p. 185. This is not to be confused with the Shah Nashin hall of the Great Imambarah, although they are conceptually related.
- ³⁸ Sharif, p. 187.
- ³⁹ Fayzbakhsh, p. 22.
- ⁴⁰ Isfahani, pp. 73-4.
- ⁴¹ Rizvi, vol. 2, p. 314.
- ⁴² Valentia, vol. 1, p. 158.
- ⁴³ Cole, p. 103
- ⁴⁴ Rizvi, vol. 2, pp. 310-1.
- ⁴⁵ Rizvi, vol. 2, p. 308.
- ⁴⁶ Isfahani, p. 74.
- ⁴⁷ Valentia, vol. 1, p. 158.
- ⁴⁸ Valentia, vol. 1, p. 476.
- ⁴⁹ Emma Roberts, Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan, with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society, 3 vols. (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1835), vol. 2, pp. 183-4.
- ⁵⁰ Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, Observations on the Mussulmauns of India, ed. W. Crooke (1917 [repr. Karachi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974]) pp. 28-9.

⁵¹ Keene, p. 103.

⁵² Quli Khan, p. 17.

⁵³ Rizvi vol. 2, pp. 311-2.

⁵⁴ Ali, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Ali, p. 29.

⁵⁶ Cole, p. 129.

⁵⁷ Cole, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Fayzbakhsh, p. 57.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, various discussions of the Great Imambarah complex and its history are presented. The first chapter introduces the complex as an understudied monument displaying world-class technical sophistication in late-eighteenth century North India, a period of great political upheaval. As a starting point, works of monumental architecture are presumed to be an important focus for humanistic inquiry, since it is a phenomenon that belongs to all human societies in one form or another and provides insight into social relations. In contrast to existing approaches to the Great Imambarah complex, which hold onto a semi-mythical version of its history and treat it in a tangential manner from a single disciplinary perspective, an approach that integrates the site's scholarly, political, economic, technical and religious perspectives is proposed, which treats the complex as a convergence of multiple social discourses influencing each other in significant and interesting ways.

The Great Imambarah complex is set against select historical contexts to trace and better understand the underlying factors behind its evolution. These included the developments of architectural technology in Great Britain and Europe as a point of comparison; the integration of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* ideology within the Safavid Iranian empire and the rise of the *Usuli* theological tradition, the emergence of special facilities for the mourning rituals of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*, the rise and fall of *Shi'i*

Isna Ashari states in the Deccan, Mughal imperial expansion and *Shi'i Isna Ashari-Sunni* relations, the emergence of semi-independent Awadh, the British East India Company's expansion from its base in Bengal and the monumental architectural ventures pursued by Safavid, Mughal and Deccani dynasties. Since the unfolding of these historical events and their interpretation are filtered through the scholarly debates, which identify and construct them, and have shaped the scholarly treatment of the Great Imambarah complex, the key debates are sketched as well. These include: who acquired power and how; fluid versus static notions of culture and identity; the reasons British commercial and imperial projects in India were successful; how they were oppressive; and the ways the *ulama* amass and exert power in Muslim societies.

Since the Great Imambarah complex is still relatively unknown and has been described only in rudimentary detail, the second chapter surveys the architectural layout of the site, its major monuments and their intricate ornamental details, through text and image.

From a visual survey of the complex, the study moves to an exploration of how the site has been viewed by various writers in the past, each noticeably shaped by their enveloping cultural and temporal moments. The most noticeable division occurs between writings completed before and after Indian independence. British imperial ideology combined with a notion of aesthetics interdependent with morality is reflected in a paradoxical admiration for the Great Imambarah complex's monumental scale and a vigorous detestation of its intricate ornament and finishing materials that spawned an apologetic trend in scholarship concerned with the site that carried on into post-independence professional scholarly literature. Such literature, is dominated by professionalized scholarship endeavouring to pursue more 'scientific' methods with

the overall effect of muting the uniqueness of the site and its historical significance in its own right in favour of exploring the category of social institutions to which the complex's monuments belonged.

Three central themes are selected from the existing scholarship to explore in greater detail in separate chapters. The theme of power recurs often, but the Great Imambarah complex is generally seen as a symbol of the loss of power or an event irrelevant to Awadh politics. The next chapter takes up the theme of power in relation to the Great Imambarah complex and explores this relationship under the *Nawwabs* of Awadh, the British East India Company, the Husaynabad Trust and the Archaeological Survey of India. For Asaf al-Dawlah, the complex is mostly a manifestation of his increasing, not decreasing, autonomy after a period when his authority was seriously questioned. For the Company, possession of the site visibly expressed their power in the face of a rebellious populace. The Husaynabad Trust and Archaeological Survey of India have had to manage Hindu nationalist, feminist, Islamist and secularist uses of the site's memory and functions to exert their respective social agendas.

Despite the various art historical treatments of the site, an underdeveloped theme in the existing scholarship is the process involved with building the Great Imambarah complex, the subject of the next chapter. The complex's development is viewed as the collective enterprise of a hierarchical network of labourers, small entrepreneurs, landholders, craftsmen, officials and patron.

The site's role in *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious practice is another prominent theme in the existing scholarship and is examined in the penultimate chapter. Set against the context of Mughal Sunni-*Shi'i Isna Ashari* relation, which were mutually beneficial and acceptable as long as the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* kept their allegiances

private, the Great Imambarah complex is an expression of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* loyalties and autonomy using, in part, Sunni and Mughal imperial symbols, like the design of the Shahjahanabad congregational mosque. The *Shi'i Isna Ashari ulama's* attempts to redefine *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious practice by introducing congregational prayers and the need for a corresponding congregational *masjid* were complemented by Asaf al-Dawlah's own emphasis on the mourning rituals of Muharram. As a result, the congregational *masjid* cannot be viewed in isolation from the Great Imambarah.

One View for Another

It is now possible to move beyond the generally accepted view that the Great Imambarah complex was a series of unrelated monuments, and that the Great Imambarah was commissioned as a famine relief measure, designed by Kifayat Allah, and completed in 1784 with the contributions of an impoverished nobility. It is also possible to move beyond the view that the site was not endowed with supporting funds

There were no social religious needs or requirements to build structures like the Great Imambarah or the congregational *masjid*. Muharram commemorations had flourished in the streets of Faizabad under tents in open spaces and, presumably, within the confines of individual households. Most *Shi'i Isna Asharis* in Lucknow did not commonly accept Friday prayers and were not even desirous of a congregational *masjid*. This situation could have easily carried on without concern had a group of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite not raised the issue. While there were famines plaguing Awadh and Lucknow around 1784, the plight of the starving did not weigh heavily on Asaf al-Dawlah, who while preoccupied with his extended ritual

hunting expeditions simply ordered agricultural exports from the region to be halted. Shortly afterwards, he authorized large repayments of his debt to the British, a curious priority given the widespread suffering taking place in his domains. However, there was both an acute need and an opportunity for Asaf al-Dawlah to make a visible expression of the power for himself for his court, for his subjects, and for the British that surpassed his concern for the famine or the requirements of social religious practice.

In the period leading up to the construction of the complex, the British Resident in Lucknow took more interest in the affairs of Lucknow and Awadh and pried into Nawwab-Vazir Asaf al-Dawlah's own household, a tremendous blow to Asaf al-Dawlah's self-concept as ruler. The British Resident Bristow was emboldened by Asaf al-Dawlah's debts to the Company that were inherited from his father. They were also inflated since Asaf al-Dawlah carried the official and unofficial expenses associated with the British Residency in Lucknow and used British military services to address threats to Awadh's security from the Ruhilas and the Marathas. His indebtedness to the Company did not trouble Asaf al-Dawlah as much as its intrusions into his household did. His debts were not beyond his financial capacity and the schedule of repayment was his own prerogative. In his mind, a more threatening issue was how could he continue to be perceived as a ruler if it were known that the Company was controlling his household expenses. To lose power over his household was as serious as losing power over his dominions, which were in Mughal kingship ideology an extension of the household.

Arranging repayment and demonstrating Bristow's corrupt practices to the Governor-General of the East India Company were strategies employed by the *Nawwab-Vazir* and his advisors to achieve the removal of the British Resident from

Lucknow. With the threat of his household coming under the control of the Resident now removed, Asaf al-Dawlah enjoyed an opportunity to consider how to make a clear reassertion of his authority.

At the same time, a few members of the courtly and religious elite formulated an agenda for *Shi'i Isna Ashari* reform along the *Usuli* principles adopted by religious scholars in the important shrine cities of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* and in Lucknow and Awadh. As Ahmad, Rizvi, and Cole point out, Hasan Riza Khan, inspired by Kashmiri and Mawdudi and with Sayyid Dildar Ali's reluctant support, advocated Friday congregational prayers for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*. They thought it was a means by which Asaf al-Dawlah could fulfil his responsibilities as ruler, which included the advancement of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition in Awadh. *Shi'i Isna Ashari* communities of South Asia for at least three centuries had been outnumbered by *Sunni* communities and were vulnerable. They also had a tempestuous relationship with some groups of the *Sunni ulama*, who attributed the Mughal decline and their corresponding economic straits on the increasing influence of the *Shi'i Isna Asharis*. The validity of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* tradition was always potentially in question.

But, in the decade of his rule leading up to the complex's development and during his days as a prince in Faizabad, his religious proclivities were only hinted at by his participation in the Muharram processions of Faizabad. By the fact that the congregational *masjid* was financed and erected, it was clear that Asaf al-Dawlah accepted their case and saw congregational Friday prayers and a corresponding monument as serving his own interests. For Sayyid Dildar Ali, congregational prayers and the *masjid* provided an opportunity for him to lead the Friday prayers and a platform for him to exert religious leadership over Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community by delivering his sermons. A congregational *masjid* made the *Shi'i Isna*

Ashari community of Lucknow resemble both the dominant Sunni communities of North India, for whom congregational prayers were an unquestionable religious institution, and the past *Shi'i Isna Ashari* communities of the Safavid empire, which exemplified what a purely *Shi'i Isna Ashari* society could be.

For the design of Lucknow's congregational *masjid*, Asaf al-Dawlah and his builders turned away from the most prominent example in Lucknow, the *masjid* of Awrangzib on top of the city's highest hill, and looked to Shahjahanabad where the Mughal empire at its peak had produced one of its most spectacular congregational mosques. In a city now teeming with distinguished refugees from the tumultuous palace city of Shahjahanabad, there was no better architectural icon that resonated with the power the Mughal emperor was perceived to wield. The similarities in exterior appearance between the *masjids* of Lucknow and Shahjahanabad were deliberate, and such an icon and association suited Asaf al-Dawlah's needs.

But, Asaf al-Dawlah also commissioned the Great Imambarah at the same time as the congregational *masjid* and in the same locale; together they formed an impressive architectural ensemble. The Great Imambarah was a response and an addition by Asaf al-Dawlah to the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* reform agenda of Kashmiri and Hasan Riza Khan. There could be no clearer statement that the commemoration rituals of Muharram and virtual pilgrimage rituals with the *taziyahs* were to receive the same prominence as the congregational prayers for Lucknow's *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community in the reform agenda. Muharram commemoration rituals were not just popular expressions of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* faith; they had become a central part of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite's faith and needed to be acknowledged within any set of reforms. When the complex was complete and when Asaf al-Dawlah sought to make a conspicuous display of his religiosity, it was his pilgrimage to the *taziyahs* in the

Great Imambarah and his participation in the Muharram commemorations that were remarked upon, not his participation in congregational prayers.

While the Lucknow congregational *masjid* was clearly modelled after the congregational *masjid* of Shahjahanabad, there were no clear precedents for the Great Imambarah. Thus, it is a highly original concept. In Persia, the Safavids had never considered developing a monumental facility in association with the Muharram commemoration rituals, and when the Qajars did so in the early nineteenth century, they developed facilities geared towards the theatrical presentation of the tragedy of Karbala rather than the storytelling and religious congregational environment favoured in Lucknow. In Shahjahanabad, the Muharram commemorations were observed in the streets and around *dargahs* with small halls to accommodate *majlises*. In contrast, the congregational *masjid* of Lucknow and the Great Imambarah were integrated within a series of arched enclosures that were not decorative but living and working spaces for workers at the site.

When it came to planning and building the Great Imambarah complex, Asaf al-Dawlah relied heavily on a multicultural and multi-religious network of now anonymous building planners, project accountants, bricklayers, stucco artisans, merchants of building supplies and transport services, brick and stucco producers, and labourers. The overseers of the project were clearly familiar with the architecture of Shahjahanabad, most notably the tomb of Safdar Jang and the style Shah Jahan advanced in his later commissions. Shallow vaults in the '*bangla*' style developed in the Bengal and under Mughal patronage had been experimented with on a small scale but never considered for monumental goals. Nevertheless, the shallow vault became a primary structural module throughout the Great Imambarah complex. Most likely working with grid plans and set proportions of building materials, building planners

employed tools in use throughout the Indo-Persian world. The supply industry, which organized itself upriver along Lucknow's Gomti River, was not necessarily familiar with the specific architectural traditions it was called upon to service, but its techniques and methods also belonged to a large Indo-Persian sphere. It was through these building traditions that Asaf al-Dawlah's architectural ambitions were expressed and defined the range of stylistic, dynastic, and historical allusions that could be drawn upon.

Asaf al-Dawlah's attempt to reassert his power lay not in the less-visible accumulation of wealth and military force but in the active display of wealth through architecture. The project accountant for the Great Imambarah complex put its cost at 2 crore (20 000 000) late eighteenth-century Lucknow rupees. The annual spending on the complex represented roughly thirty percent of the yearly gross revenue that the Nawwab-Vazir received from Awadh.

Asaf al-Dawlah's primary response to his need to display his authority was to commission the Great Imambarah complex, not out of weakness, but out of an increased sense of autonomy that was highly cognizant of the power wielded by the East India Company. It was a curiously nuanced expression of power that integrated medical, administrative, judicial, processional, timekeeping, and, most importantly, religious functions. It was a monument that provided a host of community services.

Once the complex was built, Asaf al-Dawlah used it as a showpiece to impress visitors, and he made sure that the British Resident, upon being reinstated in Lucknow, was taken through the site and specifically shown the Great Imambarah. More important than its ability to impress were the roles that the building played during Muharram commemorations. Asaf al-Dawlah saw the site less as a communal assembly hall open to the entire *Shi'i Isna Ashari* community of Lucknow and more

as a personal facility open to the elite of his court and as a repository for his *taziyah*, foregrounding the importance of making pilgrimage before the virtual tombs of *Imam* Husayn and others. It was this function that cloaked the site with a perpetual aura of sanctity. Massive and costly displays of light were made during the nights of Muharram, creating a religious environment and display of wealth that no one in Lucknow could compete with.

Both the expenses of the congregational *masjid* and the Great Imambarah were funded with the revenue from the shops of the first forecourt. The congregational prayer leader, Quran readers, *marsiyah* singers, readers of the tragedy of Karbala and lamplighters were all to be supported. In addition, people would make donations before the *taziyahs* of the Great Imambarah and alms were now collected at the congregational *masjid*. The site was a considerable revenue generator that paid for its own operational expenses as was common of Muslim and other institutions. It was an integrated financial system. This practice of integrating shops and revenue generators into the planning of complexes was widespread in the Muslim world. For example, both the Sulaymaniyah *masjid* complex in Ottoman Istanbul and the arcaded enclosure of the Maydan in Isfahan, incorporated shops and revenue into their building operations budgets.

The Great Imambarah also became an important alternate site for court relations, even for those who were not *Shi'i Isna Ashari* Muslims. In a curious blend of politics and religion, the Great Imambarah became an alternate space in which to conduct displays of allegiance, which now included paying respects to the *taziyah*, contributing *taziyah*, making donations and attending the *majlises* to the satisfaction of the *Nawwab-Vazir*. To honour what was important to the *Nawwab-Vazir* could only enhance the fortunes of a courtier.

This sentiment ran so deep that members of the elite, including followers of the Hindu traditions, developed their own small household *imambarahs* to closely resemble the layout of the Great Imambarah. Having an *imambarah* was an important way of demonstrating one's allegiance to the court. There are no clear indications that any *taziyah* were built prior to the Great Imambarah complex, so their construction added a strong religious dimension to court relations. During Muharram, Asaf al-Dawlah would visit the *imambarahs* of fortunate noblemen, including them in an exclusive network of *imambarahs* of which the Great Imambarah was dominant. Through the Great Imambarah and its imitations, Asaf al-Dawlah extended his influence into the households of his courtiers.

Already a site with strong funerary connotations because of the *taziyah* stored within and the presence of hushed Quran readers who were customarily employed at major tombs, the Great Imambarah was an obvious place to bury Asaf al-Dawlah when he died. Quite unlike the conventional domed, garden tomb that Asaf al-Dawlah had commissioned for his father in Faizabad, the Great Imambarah was an unusual monumental tomb and there was no precedent.

Authoring the Significance of the Great Imambarah Complex

Scholarly discourse does not have a monopoly over the delineation of the Great Imambarah complex's significance, nor can the complex be separated from its context. Three internally diverse communities with their intertwined historical narratives have negotiated the significance and purpose of the Great Imambarah complex within and amongst themselves: the *Lakhnawis*, Indians and their governing

institutions (i.e. the South Asian inhabitants of Lucknow, Awadh and India); British colonial officials; and Orientalist and contemporary scholars.

Of the three communities, only the *Lakhnawis* have continuously reconfigured the significance of the Great Imambarah complex, from the site's conception to the present, although their cultural foundations have evolved dramatically from those based on pre-colonial late Mughal, Perso-Islamic (*Shi'i Isna Ashari*) bases to those rooted in contemporary Indian nationalism and communalism. It is from the pre-colonial cultural traditions of this environment that the Great Imambarah complex was born and its significance initially envisioned.

By contrast, the re-significations of the site by British Colonial officials are short-lived in their influence, most dominant during the British occupation of Lucknow following the 1857 Mutiny but evaporating forever in 1947 with Indian independence. The British brought a radically different cultural framework to bear, one rooted in Anglican Christianity, philosophical positivism and a host of nineteenth century Anglo-European ideologies such as nationalism, capitalism, and imperialism. It is due to the British colonial presence in Lucknow that the traditions of Anglo-European philological, historical, and art historical scholars were introduced and the Great Imambarah complex subjected to this gaze. The scholarly gaze has not been a deep or protracted one, but it has survived past British colonial rule into the present, having been moulded by the accompanying paradigm shifts.

From the Mutiny to Indian independence, *Lakhnawis*, British Colonial officials, and scholars together have collectively imagined and contested the significance of the Great Imambarah complex. However, with the end of the colonial era this overarching trialectic has evolved into a new one defined by the voices of *Lakhnawis*, interested Indian and international scholars and now Indian nationalists.

Looking over these three intertwined narratives of the *Lakhnawis*, the British colonials, and the scholars, which only hint at the complex historical processes at work, four distinct moments emerge in the evolution of the Great Imambarah complex's significance. In the first moment, one that corresponds with the initial development of the site and its early use, the site's value is bound up with Asaf al-Dawlah's need to express his authority. The site is developed as an integrated system of religious, commercial, administrative, and political spaces geared towards processional display, punctuated with monuments servicing the projection of Nawwab Asaf al-Dawlah's public authority simultaneously in religious, political, and economic terms. This monumental projection of authority and display of civic sophistication comes at the expense of the former residents of the site, the region's villages, and the fortunes amassed by Shuja al-Dawlah and Bahu Begam. The driving factors are the crisis in Asaf al-Dawlah's authority, the pressure by Hasan Riza Khan and Dildar Ali to render *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious practice public and consistent with Safavid and Sunni religious practice, and Asaf al-Dawlah's own personal religious preoccupations with *tazyah*. Yet even within Asaf al-Dawlah's own time, the site's importance to *Nawwabi* authority is destabilized.

In the second moment, when the site was under British occupation, the indigenous community is no longer the pre-eminent author of the complex's significance. Instead, their discourse has to contend with a newly empowered British colonial one, which unhinges the site's functionality from its cultural moorings, using its state of inoperation as a means to project British authority. So long as the British occupation separates the site and particularly its religious structures from public life, British hegemony is indisputable and highly visible. Meanwhile, British occupation of the site intensifies the site's importance for the indigenous community, which has

already seen the site's role as a projector of *Nawwabi* authority diminish with succeeding *Nawwabs* and shift to serving as a nostalgic memento of Asaf al-Dawlah's age and into a civic religious space for the *Shi'i Isna Ashari*. Though diametrically opposed in purpose, the indigenous community seeks to reactivate the site and the British seek to immobilize it; these two discourses actually reinforce the intensity of each other. The longer the British withhold the site, the more important it must become in *Lakhnawi* eyes particularly those of the *Shi'i Isna Ashari* since their religious structures are at stake. Conversely, the more *Lakhnawis* clamour for restitution the greater the British self-satisfaction in inflicting a righteous punishment for the sins of the Mutiny.

The third moment begins with the return of the site to *Lakhnawi* use under the administration of the British-controlled Husaynabad Trust and the entry of the Great Imambarah complex structures into scholarship mainly by means of the discipline of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art history. Instead of two competing voices contesting the imagination of the site's significance, there are now three. This third voice of scholarship, having been granted unprecedented access to the site under British colonial authority, ignores the values constructed by that of the *Lakhnawi* and the British colonial official, and views the Great Imambarah complex not as a social institution but as a disconnected group of stylistic objects within a centuries long global and Indian stylistic trajectory of its own making. Using surveying knowledge, photography and words, and the Anglo-European historical cognitive perspective, the complex is seen as a last gasp in the aesthetic vitality of Indian-Muslim civilization and, therefore, can be used as confirmation of social, moral, and civilizational decline, a recurring feature of Anglo-Indian historiographical narratives. This additional perspective undoubtedly reinforces the attitude of cultural superiority held by the

British colonial official, who contradictorily more often than not succumbs to admiration of the site, but it also further obscures the site's historic social and religious functions, as well as its significance. Yet, the small portion of *Lakhnawis* attuned to these developments turns the acknowledgement of the site by Anglo-European scholars into a symbol of their cultural potential in terms of technology and wealth. The Great Imambarah complex shows that *Lakhnawis* were capable of building world-class monuments that even its oppressors grudgingly appreciate and write about, whether it be favourably or not. The complex is a tool in mounting an indigenous cultural apologetic geared to the British.

Finally, there is the fourth moment of post-Indian independence in which we live today. *Lakhnawi* and scholarly voices continue with greater vigour to articulate the significance of the Great Imambarah complex, but the voices of the British colonial presence having evaporated are supplanted by an Indian nationalist discourse. No longer an integrated system of social institutions but now a series of orphaned giants, the site's primary value seems to rest with the cultural prestige its monuments are able to confer on those who lay claim to them.

For the first time, there is a conspicuous internal divide in the indigenous discourse between *Lakhnawi Shi'i Isna Asharis* and Hindu nationalists. Still a *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious precinct of some import, especially at prayer times and on Fridays because of the still active congregational *masjid*, the Great Imambarah complex is increasingly used by the *Lakhnawi Shi'i Isna Ashari* (namely the Husaynabad Trust and *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite) as a tool to remind *Lakhnawis* of the presence of the *Shi'i Isna Asharis* and their contributions to the city. Local and Maharashtra questioning of the cultural bases of the site is generated by an Indian Nationalist discourse swayed by *Hindutva* centric historical revisionism. In these

eyes, the complex is significant as a Hindu accomplishment and, paradoxically, the charge of malicious Anglo-Muslim historical revisionism is levelled.

Aside from this spurious revisionist debate, which is muted in comparison to the controversy over Ayodhya or the Taj Mahal, there is consensus that much of the site's value, particularly with structures like the Rumi Darvazah and the Great Imambarah, lies in what it contributes to a people's historical representations rather than its role in active social practice. The site becomes more important as a tool for constructing a historical identity in terms of Anglo-European Nationalist thought rather than its previous role as a tool for consolidating political authority and structuring religious practice. In this fourth moment, the structures of the Great Imambarah complex are individually recast as heritage monuments useful in building a national history, an essential building block for new nations. The shift in perspective governing the transformation of the Great Imambarah complex's significance from one that is functional and culturally specific in nature to one that is more historically symbolic and generic is due largely to the legacy of Anglo-European nationalist thought and South Asia's subsequent political reorganization along the nation-state model combined with the rise of Indian secularist and Hindu nationalist ideologies.

Complementing the site's re-imagination as a disconnected series of historical monuments is the intensification of the *Lakhnawi* community's collective perception of portions of the site, such as the Rumi Darwazah and the Great Imambarah, as a tool to attract tourism and generate income. Though earlier British and European travellers have regarded the site as a tourist monument, *Lakhnawis* and Indians did not truly do so until the advent of the fourth moment. The site is now the city's premier tourist precinct, a stage-set of sorts that offers visitors historical reverie and religious

spectacle. This uneasy adaptation of religious space to tourist curiosity and commercial motives is certainly not unique to Lucknow – it is part of a global phenomenon born from the advent of modern mass tourism.

Post-independence scholarship addressing the site has been shaped by *Lakhnawi* and international scholars, who collectively continue Colonial era Anglo-European lines of historical inquiry into *Lakhnawi* society while refining and reacting to them. For the most part, it has been consciously sympathetic and apologetic for *Lakhnawi* aesthetic and religious culture in contrast to the earlier, critical tone of Anglo-European scholarship, but it has continued to facilitate the re-imagination of the site as a heritage object. Following British precedents, locally driven art historical scholarship based in Lucknow has been the most active, seeking more to improve the Great Imambarah complex's eroding presence and position within the aesthetic canons that have been forged in the past rather than approach the site from the discipline's reconfigured theoretical perspective. International work has been more general in nature focusing on developing period narratives in history and religion that conceptually are tentative in their integration of material culture.

The current position of the Great Imambarah complex in the scholarly record is the product of key historical processes weighing in on scholarly perspectives, namely British colonialism along with its international post-colonial critique, Indian and Hindu nationalism; and the compartmentalizing tendencies of professional academic disciplines, which have generally divided religious, political, and aesthetic dimensions of *Lakhnawi* society, relegating the bulk of contemporary discussion of the Great Imambarah to an increasingly obsolete debate centred around style and canon.

What is most striking about the advent of scholarly treatments of the site is that rather than focusing on the cultural discourse present, they overlay additional scholarly discourses on aesthetics, politics, historical identity, and religion generated in Anglo-European cultural contexts, purporting to be universal in nature, that then enter and transform the historic but ongoing cultural discourse of Lucknow.

Returning to the goal, laid out at the beginning of this chapter, of re-assessing the significance assigned to the Great Imambarah complex among the strands of contemporary scholarly record, namely the segregated historical narratives in political, religious, and aesthetic terms, more appropriate positions for the complex can be proposed.

Repositioning the Great Imambarah Complex in Current Scholarly Narratives

With this new more elaborate view of the development of the Great Imambarah complex, it is possible to make some remarks about how it might be repositioned within existing scholarly narratives, which continue to sustain arbitrary divides between the study of Awadh's material, political, economic, and religious cultures. As the case of the Great Imambarah complex shows, they are deeply interrelated phenomena that cannot be easily extracted from each other.

Historical narratives inquiring into political power in Awadh are typically centred on military success and acquisition of territory and revenue as indicators of power and on the acquisition of British power at the expense of *Nawwabi* power. For instance, writers are quick to mention Asaf al-Dawlah's British-assisted defeat of the Ruhilas as a key moment in the consolidation of his power but also as an indication of

his growing reliance on the Company. However, power can be wielded just as significantly through material culture, such as monumental architecture.

It has been overlooked that when Asaf al-Dawlah achieved his greatest moment of financial and political independence through manipulation and good fortune, his principal response was not to invest in his military, which would have further enriched the British, who supplied the latest weaponry and military services, but to develop the monumental Great Imambarah complex, an amalgam of various religious, humanitarian, and administrative social institutions serving the people of Lucknow. It was not a mere amusement to escape his inevitable loss of power or a profligate display of excess luxury, as some have suggested, but a vibrant display of vitality and autonomy. The complex is Asaf al-Dawlah's strategic use of the medium of architecture for the public projection of authority and independence, a brief reversal in the broader context of the weakening of the foundations of his power due to the British monopolization of the economy and military power and technology.

The importance of the *Nawwab's* conception of power in explaining his decision, which was Mughal inspired and rooted in his command over his household, has been underemphasized; his role as an advancer of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* faith and practice, his conspicuous piety, his pleasure in providing tours of monumental architecture and engaging in the rituals of public procession are all part of the way he understood how power should be asserted and expressed. It might be argued that these activities are peripheral to securing real power, but given the Mughal inspired concept of power that governed Asaf al-Dawlah and the Lucknow public, they were essential to the maintenance of power. Without displaying power conspicuously and regularly, one was not regarded as having power. In this light, the development of the Great Imambarah complex was not only a reflection of increased power but integral to

the maintenance of power. It is not by coincidence that religious monuments adorn the Great Imambarah complex. Amassing power depended on winning religious authority and there was no better vehicle to do so than the establishment of monumental religious institutions.

Historical and anthropological studies of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious phenomena of the period have focused on texts, treatises of the *ulama*, and the descriptions of Muharram rituals. The Great Imambarah complex has not been previously considered as an aspect of Asaf al-Dawlah's innovative personal religious practice involving the intensification of *taziyah* veneration, with profound echoes in the community's religious practice, nor has it been seen as a means to translate an image of personal piety into public authority. It has been overlooked that the Great Imambarah is Asaf al-Dawlah's response to the congregational prayer agenda of a select *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite. It is evidence of the relation of the *Nawwab* with the *ulama* over issues of religious practice and an indication of how he exerted religious leadership. Instead of seeing the select *Shi'i Isna Ashari* elite and *ulama* as the primary authors of religious innovation, the complex's development clearly suggests that the *Nawwab* was active in shaping religious practice. When it comes to the Muharram commemoration rituals, the development of the Great Imambarah suggests that categories such as popular or folk religion, which imply that they are somehow corruptions of authentic religious practice, should be discarded since Asaf al-Dawlah, the ruler of Awadh and Lucknow's elite, actively participated in them, as did his father. Muharram commemoration rituals were clearly part of mainstream elite religious practice as the Great Imambarah, and the wave of *imambarahs* that were subsequently built testifies to this.

The complex has not been considered within the broader context of the history of *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious thought and practice. Never before had an architectural type unique to *Shi'i Isna Ashari* religious practice - the *imambarah* - been conceived on such a monumental scale on the order of a congregational *masjid*, nor had so many resources been devoted to this purpose.

Existing anthropological and historical literature has tended to see the Great Imambarah too narrowly as a setting for Muharram commemoration functions, but the multiple uses of the building and the rest of the site have been overlooked, as well as the way these uses have evolved over time. To define the Great Imambarah solely as a ritual hall obscures how it was used as an alternate meeting area for the *Nawwabi* court, a place for congregational prayer, or a tomb with Quran reciters. Its subsequent evolution into a symbol of British oppression, ordnance storehouse, or tourist monument is also obscured. In a sense, the architecture of the Great Imambarah complex and the atmospheres it generates are an integral part of the rituals of power and faith that structure their observance.

Narratives of art, architecture, building technology, and urban planning have excluded the Great Imambarah complex from consideration on stylistic grounds, despite early scholarly awareness of the site. In narratives of world architecture the flat arch technology and unmatched scale of the sail vaulted roof make the Great Imambarah the most ambitious and technically advanced architectural project in the world during the late eighteenth century, an engineering masterpiece! Histories of Islamic and Mughal urban plans and architecture can consider the site in the context of past planned urban visions in Muslim societies that include Baghdad, Samarqand's Registan, Isfahan, Shahjahanabad and Faizabad. Finally, the Great Imambarah is the

most monumental example of the still unexamined architectural genre of *husayniyahs* or *imambarahs*.

This is an initial attempt to detail and untangle the social complexity behind the making and remaking of the monumental Great Imambarah complex. The site is a rigorously well thought-out aesthetic endeavour that weaves together and advances various shifting political and religious agendas through the efforts of an elaborate network of individuals. Its development marks not only a significant point in Awadh's history but in the world's architectural traditions.

GLOSSARY

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>akhbar</i> | News reports. |
| <i>alam</i> | Teardrop shaped battle standards used in Muharram mourning processions. |
| <i>Amir</i> | Commander, noble. |
| <i>Ashura</i> | First ten days of mourning in in the Islamic month of Muharram, particularly the tenth day on which <i>Imam Husayn</i> is believed to have been killed. |
| <i>ashura</i> | Facility to observe Muharram <i>majlises</i> and store <i>taziyah</i> . |
| <i>khanah</i> | |
| <i>ayvan</i> | Large arched niche. A common Islamic architectural motif. Referred to as a <i>pishtaq</i> in the Indian context. |
| <i>bangla</i> | Vault like a billowing sail (sail vault) following an elliptical profile in two axes. |
| <i>baoli</i> | Underground step-well. |
| <i>baradari</i> | Residential building |
| <i>Buraq</i> | Mythical animal that took Muhammad on his famous spiritual journey. |
| <i>chabutra</i> | Building foundation podium or platform. |
| <i>chahar bagh</i> | Four-part garden design common in the Indo-Persian Islamic world. |
| <i>chatri</i> | Small ornamental cupola dome on columns. |
| <i>chuna kamp</i> | Lime vendors. |
| <i>farush</i> | |
| <i>chur</i> | Lime-rich mud. |
| <i>darbar</i> | Court or assembly of notables. |
| <i>dhoidars</i> | Mule transport vendors. |
| <i>Divan-i Amm</i> | Hall of Public Audiences. |
| <i>durud</i> | Ritual greeting, praise. |
| <i>ghat</i> | River steps for functional and ritual purposes. |
| <i>guldasta</i> | Architectural stone ornament consisting of a lobed shaft and a surmounting carved flower. |
| <i>husayniyah</i> | Usually refers to facility to observe Muharram <i>majlises</i> and store <i>taziyah</i> but also refers to town plazas in regions of Iran. |
| <i>imam, Imam</i> | For <i>Sunnis</i> the term means congregational prayer leader. For the <i>Shi'i</i> , it refers to Muhammad's Divinely sanctioned and spiritually illuminated heirs. |
| <i>imambarah</i> | Facility to observe Muharram <i>majlises</i> and store <i>taziyah</i> . |
| <i>jharukha</i> | Architectural frame of a ceremonial balcony for Mughal imperial appearances before the public, usually with a <i>bangla</i> vault profile. |
| <i>jharukha-i darshan</i> | Ceremonial public vision of the Mughal emperor. |
| <i>jilaw khanah</i> | Enclosed public and semi-public arcaded forecourt preceding a monument. |
| <i>kalam</i> | Islamic theology to complement legal traditions. |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Karbala | City in Iraq known as the site of <i>Imam</i> Husayn's martyrdom |
| kataba | Foundational tablet installed on buildings. |
| khanqah | Sufi lodge. |
| khilafat | Institution of Islamic leadership that gained sway after the Prophet Muhammad's death and competed with <i>Shi'i</i> conceptions of the <i>Imam's</i> authority. |
| khutba | Friday congregational prayer address and political pronouncement. |
| kumbar | Brickmaker. |
| lakh | 100 000 |
| Lakhnawi | Resident of Lucknow. |
| lunias | Labourers. |
| majlis | Religious assembly that can range from being casual to highly ritualized. |
| marsiyyahs | Poetic funeral orations sung during Muharram in commemoration of Hasan and Husayn |
| masjid | Mosque |
| matam | Self flagellation performed to express religious devotion and emulate the suffering of the martyrs of Karbala. |
| mihrab | Niche at centre of <i>masjid's</i> main wall that faces Mecca and indicates the place of the prayer leader. |
| minbar | Stairs commonly found next to the <i>mihrab</i> in <i>masjids</i> for the prayer leader to deliver congregational addresses and sermons. |
| Mir Imarat | Chief of building construction. |
| Muhallah | Urban quarter. |
| Muharram | First month of the Islamic lunar calendar associated with mourning for the <i>Shi'i Isna Ashari</i> since Imam Husayn is believed to have died on the tenth day of the month. |
| mujtahid | Religious scholar who in <i>Usuli Shi'i Isna Ashari</i> thought had the authority to exercise independent reasoning for interpreting religious issues. |
| muqarnas | Decorative ornament of curved rows of small arched niches stacked above each other. |
| nawbat | Band of musicians including kettledrum and horn players that accompany royal and religious processions and can be stationed in a <i>nawbat khanah</i> . |
| nawbat khanah, naqqar khanah | Usually a gateway building with surmounting chambers to station musicians to mark important events, the times of the day and regal presence. |
| Nawruz | Ancient Persian and Indo-Persian Islamic festival commemorating the spring equinox. |
| Nawwab | Title referring to deputies of the Mughal empire. |
| Padshah | Emperor, King of the World. |
| Pardah | The custom of segregating non-related men and women |
| pish namaz | Prayer leader. |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>puzavahvala</i> | Brickmaker merchant. |
| <i>rawz</i> | Bricklayers, builders |
| <i>saljami</i> | Turnip style. |
| <i>sangi dalan</i> | Stone arched enclosure. Structure in the Panj Mahal palace complex of Lucknow. |
| <i>saray</i> | Commercial rest stop, inn. |
| <i>shariat</i> | Islamic personal religious law. |
| <i>Shaykhzadahs</i> | Descendants of a shaykh. In Lucknow, it refers to the powerful land holders who controlled the region before Saadat Khan's subjugation of the area. |
| <i>surkhi</i> | Crushed fired brick. |
| <i>tabut</i> | Coffin effigy used in Muharram mourning processions to signify the martyred. |
| <i>Tafzili</i> | A fringe Muslim movement centred on Fatima, Prophet Muhammad's daughter, and her unborn child. |
| <i>takiyah</i> | Sufi lodge. |
| <i>takiyah</i> | Facility to observe Muharram <i>majlises</i> and store <i>taziyah</i> . |
| <i>khanah</i> | |
| <i>tarah</i> | Design, ground plan. |
| <i>tasbihs</i> | Rosaries. |
| <i>taziyah</i> | Models of tombs made from materials ranging from bamboo and paper to cast gold that serves as a mythical replica of the tomb of <i>Imam</i> Husayn and often others who were martyred. |
| <i>Taziyah-dari</i> | Refers to either participants in Muharram processions carrying <i>taziyahs</i> or the procession itself. |
| <i>tikiya</i> | Brick wafers. |
| <i>turhai, qurna</i> | Military horns used in the <i>nawbat</i> . |
| <i>ulama</i> | Religious scholars usually forming a religious bureaucracy to oversee religious and legal issues. |
| <i>urs</i> | Annual death anniversary. |
| <i>usul</i> | Rationalist principles. |
| <i>vaqf</i> | Charitable trust or pious foundation, revenue endowments and expenditure specifications. |
| <i>vasiqa</i> | Adaptation of <i>vaqf</i> with the British East Indian Company, where a principal sum was invested with the Company and the interest was disbursed according to the specifications of the investor. |
| <i>Vazir</i> | Title referring to the position of principal imperial administrator and defender of the empire. |
| <i>zakat</i> | Obligatory alms in Islam. |
| <i>zamindar</i> | Land holder. |
| <i>zananah</i> | Segregated women's quarters of the palace precinct. |
| <i>ziyarat</i> | Ritual pilgrimage performed to shrines, tombs and <i>imambarahs</i> . |

APPENDIX A

File No. 2693 – List of attendants on the tomb of Asafud Dowlah

Office of the Board of Revenue
United Provinces, 1942
Alphabetical Index to Old Oudh Records for the years 1858-90 – Lucknow District

3 Pages

Page 2

Copy
No. 617 of 1860
From P. Carnegie Esquire
[Dy] Comm of Lucknow

To Coll S. A. Abbott
Comm of Suptt. Lucknow [??]
[??] Lucknow 23 ? May / 60

Sir,

With reference to your docket # 666 of 3^o ultimo, I beg to append a list of the attendants at the tomb of Ashufud dowlah showing their length of service, their ages, present means of livelihood and former rate of pay.

Their monthly salaries amounted to Rs 365..8..0 and were paid from the income derived from the rents of the shops of the Jelokhanah, since destroyed & of those attached to the mukbarah now included in Muchee Bhawn Fort.

They received their allowances during & up to the end of Wajid Ally Shah's reign.

On annexation these shops were made nuzool, but on Sir. H. Lawrence becoming Chief Commissioner, he released them and placed them in charge of Sehatood Dowlah, who immediately gave the attendants two months pay. Since then they appear to have received no salary & are all in straitened circumstances.

Lucknw
Dy. Commms's [By ?????] Office
The 23^o May / 60

[I have to]
Prof. P. Carnegie

[true copy Munshi ???? A]

| Number | Names | Length of Service | Age | Present means of livelihood | Former Rate of pay | Remarks |
|--------|---|-------------------|----------|---|--------------------|--|
| 1 | Meer Syeed Darogha Son of Meer Insha ulla Khan | 30 years | 56 years | Fed & clothed by Zoolfikar ood Dawla his relative | 43.12 | The whole of these [??] were paid by Sehootood Dowlah for 2 months only ??? April & May / 56 – Since then they have rec'd no pay |
| 2 | Syeed Mohamed Razabarsgha son of Syed Mohd alle khan | 12 “ | 30 “ | Subsists on the sale of proceeds of his personal property | 43.12 | Entertained in room of his father |
| 3 | Shaik Ameer Ally Naeboo son of Mudad ally | 12 | 35 “ | Do | 20.12 | |
| 4 | Lalljee Mutsuddee | 11 | 35 “ | Makes vernacular works and subsists on the sale s of proceeds thereof | 10.12 | |
| 5 | Mirza Ally Hoosein, Kitabkhwan | 12 | 30 | Reads murseeas during the Mohurram | 30 | Entertained in consideration of the long servitude of his ancestors |
| 6 | ? asuddick Hoosein, Murseeah singer | 4 | 13 | Live on his father | 30.12 | Do |
| 7 | Meer Mehudee, Murseeah Khwan son of Roshan Ally | 18 | 50 | Same as No. 5 | 10.12 | |
| 8 | Hajee Mohamed Ally Fateeha Khwan | 30 | 60 | Reads prayers on graves and obtains charity | 20 | |
| 9 | Meer Bakur Ally Expositor of Koran, son of Meer Mehr Ally | 30 | 55 | sponges on parties and attends every feast | 9 | Do |
| 10 | Meer Mohamed Raza | 17 | 45 | Sponges on parties and | 9 | Entertained in room of his |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|----|---|-------|--|
| | Expositor of Koran | | | attends every feast to get a meal | | father in law |
| 11 | Mahomed Jafar - do | 12 | 45 | Do | 9 | Do |
| 12 | Meer Mahomed Hosein - do son of Meer Jafar Ally | 17 | 40 | Do | 9.12 | Do in room of his father |
| 13 | Mirza Ali Mahomed -do-son of Mirza Akbar Ally | 36 | 50 | Do | 9.12 | Do |
| 14 | Abdoola alias Meer Nawab son of Agha Jan Expositor of Koran | 12 | 20 | Do | 9.12 | Do in room of his maternal grandfather |
| 15 | Sheik Mohomed Buy Expositor of Koran | 12 | 50 | Do | 9.12 | |
| 16 | Mirza Muzuffar Ally do son of Mohamed Jafur | 12 | 55 | Do | 9.12 | |
| 17 | Vazeer Mirza, son of Mirza Kasim Ali Expositor of Koran | 12 | 50 | Do | 9.12 | |
| 18 | Shaikh Ikram oola son of Sheik Gholam Imam do | 20 | 45 | Do | 9.12 | |
| 19 | Mushurruf Ally Mooezzin | 12 | 25 | Lives in a masjid and obtains charity | 5.12 | Entertained in room of his father |
| 20 | Ameer Ally Perfume bearer son of Meer Hassan Ally | 35 | 50 | Obtains a meal ??? now and again by begging | 15.12 | |
| 21 | Agha Mirza Abdar son of Mohamed Hosein Beg | 12 | 40 | Do | 4.12 | Do in room of his uncle |
| 22 | Akbur Ally Tehaeeldar son of Mouzzum Ally | 12 | 30 | Lives on his relatives | 7.12 | Do |
| 23 | Meer Bundeh Ally do son of Meer Khoda bux | 29 | 50 | do | 5.12 | |
| 24 | Agha Jan Tehaeeldar | 4 | 45 | Do | 7.12 | Entertained in room of his |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|----|----|-------------------------|---------|---|
| 25 | Abid Ally do | 4 | 15 | Do | 7.12 | father |
| 26 | Kadur Ally Furrash son of ????? Khan | 30 | 50 | Do | 3.12 | Do – do – paternal uncle |
| 27 | Morad Khan do son of Bheekun Khan | 20 | 30 | Makes and sells torches | 4.12 | |
| 29 | Nisar Ally Furrash in charge of chandeliers son of Mok d Ally | 12 | 30 | Vide to 20 | 4.12 | |
| 30 | Saadat Ally Furrash son of Roostam Ally | 4 | 45 | Do | 4.1 | Entertained in room of his father in law |
| Total Rupees | | | | | 365.8.0 | |

Lucknow
Dy Comm Office
The 23rd May 1860

P. Carnegy
Deputy Commissioner

Meer Bakarally
And others
Attendants of the Tomb
of Asuf ud Dowlah

APPENDIX B

Framed document at head of Asaf al-Dawlah's grave in the Great Imambarah

نصب نموده حاجي حسين [...] عبد الله الحسين نواب محمد تقي عليخانصاحب ابن نواب علي حسين خانصاحب
عرف نواب انا صاحب
ابن نواب صفدر عليخانصاحب ابن نواب شجاع الدوله بهادر عرش منزل علي الله [...]

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| شامه اشمام حسرت مينمايد از نسيم | گلشن عشرت بتاراج خران رفت اي ندیم |
| ان در شهوار رفت از دست عالم شد يتيم | آصفي كان نه صدف را يك در شهوار بود |
| شهر يونان پي مسيح و طور سينا پي كلیم | لكنهو پي آصف است و آسمان پي آفتاب |
| بر كریمان جنس غفرانست اعطاي کریم | نقد رحمت در کنار و فرد بخش در بغل |
| ها هنا روح و ريحان و جنات النعيم | نقشبند کاف و نون بر تربت آصف نوشت |

کتبه سيد حسين ميرزا [...] الحسين عليه السلام سنة ۱۲۱۲ هجرتي

The lineage has shown Haji Husayn [...] Abd Allah al-Husayn Nawwab Muhammad Taqi Ali Khan Sahib Ibn Nawwab Ali Husayn Khan Sahib Urf Nawwab Ana Sahib ibn Nawwab Safdar Ali Khan Sahib ibn Nawwab Shuja al-Dawlah Champion of the Throne of the Palace Ali Allah [...]

Friend, the rose-garden of pleasure is ruined.

The morning wind does not bring the fragrant scent longed for.

Asaf who was the royal pearl amidst the nine pearls.

That pearl of kings is no more.

Lucknow without Asaf is like the sky without the sun.

Or like the country of the Greeks [Byzantium] without the Messiah and Mount Sinai without Moses.

The coin of mercy is set aside and its hand is not extended.

Generosity comes to this one in the form of forgiveness.

The maker of the letters "kaf" and "nun" wrote over the grave of Asaf.

Here, is the spirit, sweet basil and the paradise of delights.

The writing of Sayyid Hasan Mirza [...] al-Husayn, peace be upon him. The year 1212 Hijra (1797 AD, the year Asaf al-Dawlah died).

APPENDIX C

Excerpt from Tuhfat al-Alam

تازیة خانه اصف الدوله

از فرط ولای ایامه اطهار صلوات الله علیهم و جدّ و جهدي که بمراسم تازیة داری سید الشهداء داشت تازیة خانه و مسجدی عالی در جنب آن قریب بخانه خود بنا نهاد و مبالغ خطیر صرف عمارت و تزیین آن نمود. از دفتر داران آن سرکار و مردم تقه که در آن امر دخیل بودند شنیدیم که از دو کرور روپیة زیاده خرج آن شده است. در تمام این کشور عمارتی بان بزرگی و وسعت و روح و فضا جای دیگر نیست.

The *taziyah khanah* of Asaf al-Dawlah

Out of great love for the Pure Imams (Peace of God upon them) and utter devotion to the ceremonies of the *taziyah* bearers for the lord of the martyrs [Husayn], [Asaf al-Dawlah's] built a *taziyah khanah* and great *masjid* next to his own palace and spent large sums on the building and its ornament. From the chancellors of his eminence who were involved with that event, I heard that more than two *crore* rupees have been spent on that. Among all the buildings of this country, there is none greater, more pleasant and more spacious.

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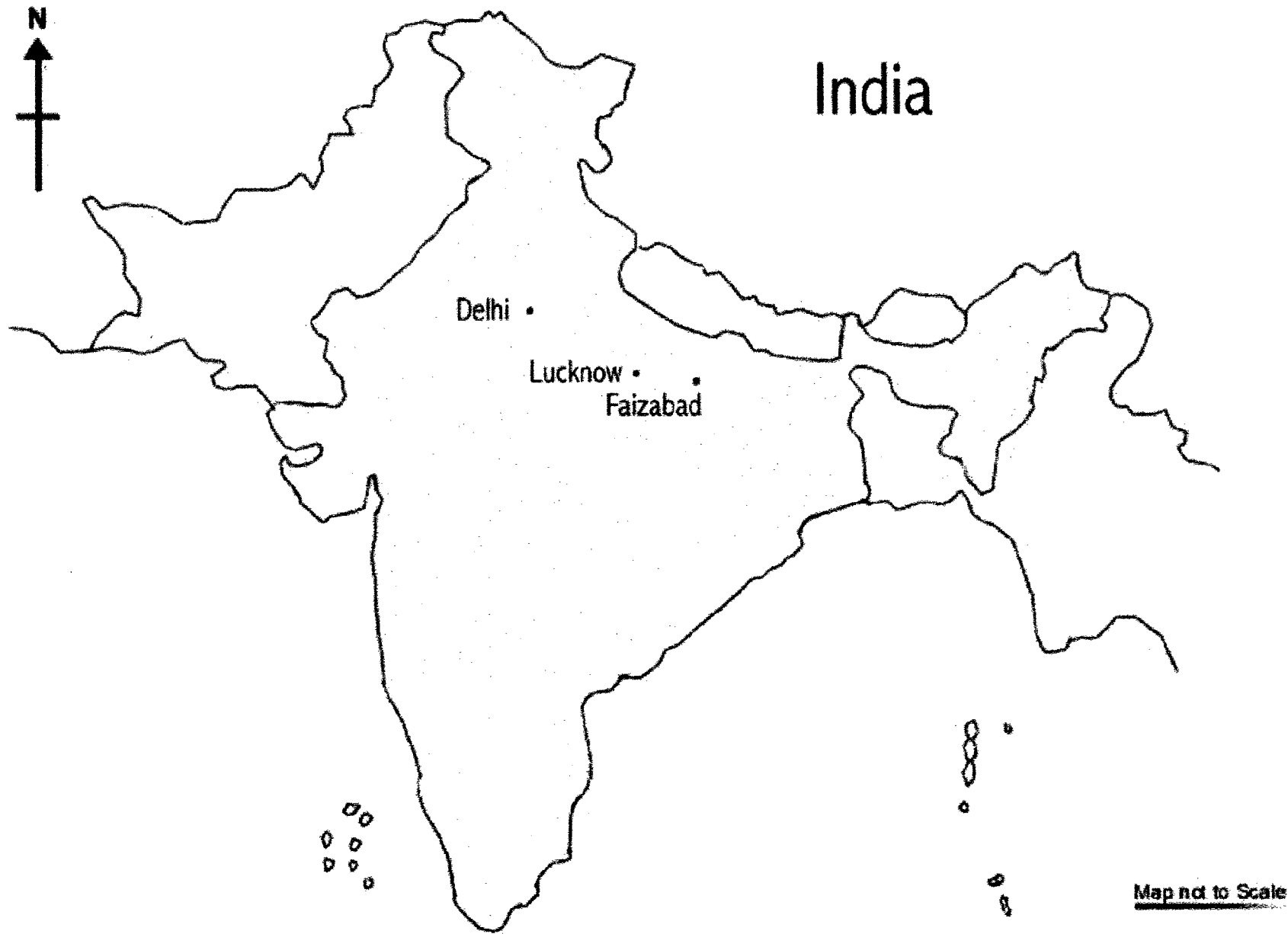
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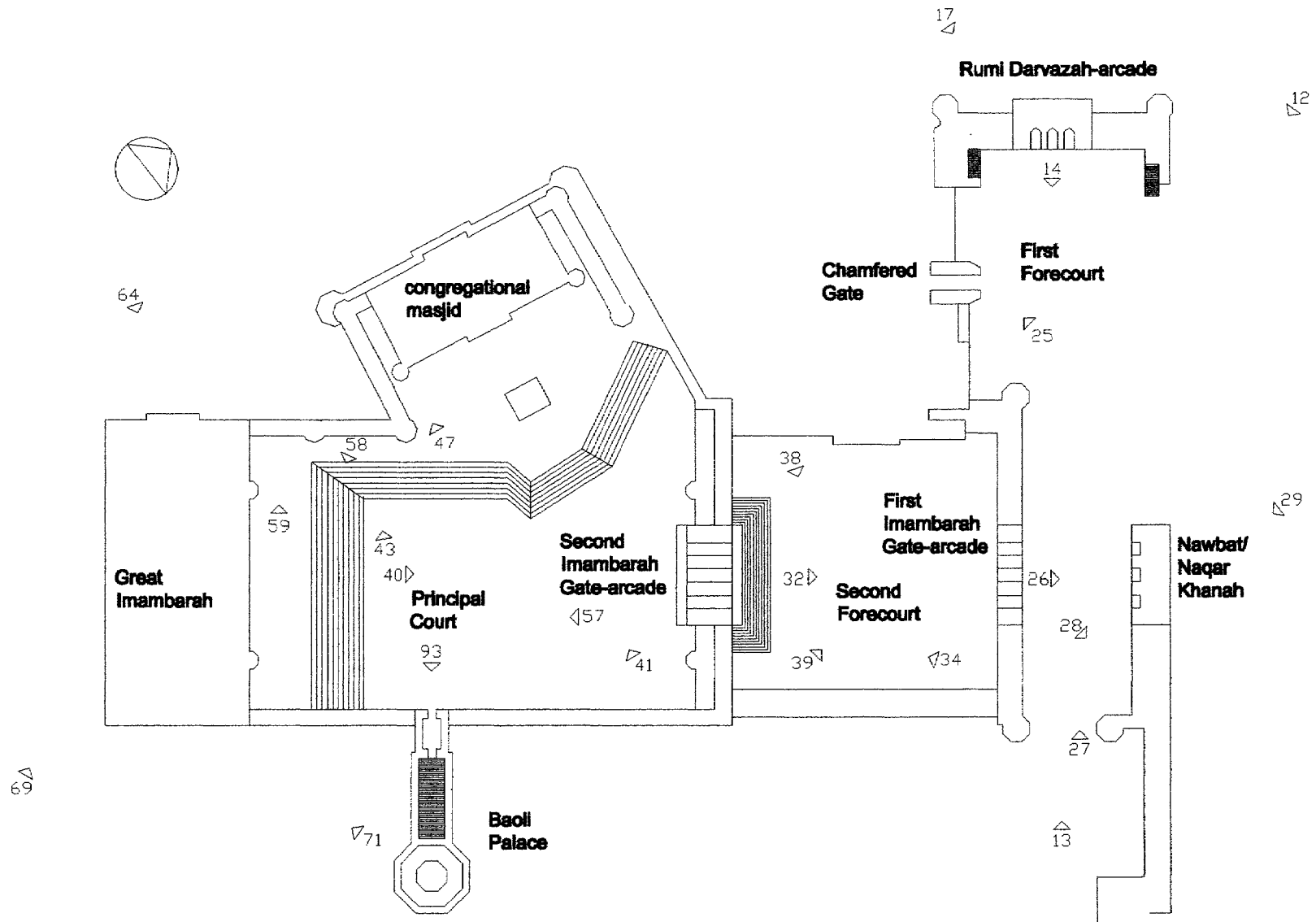
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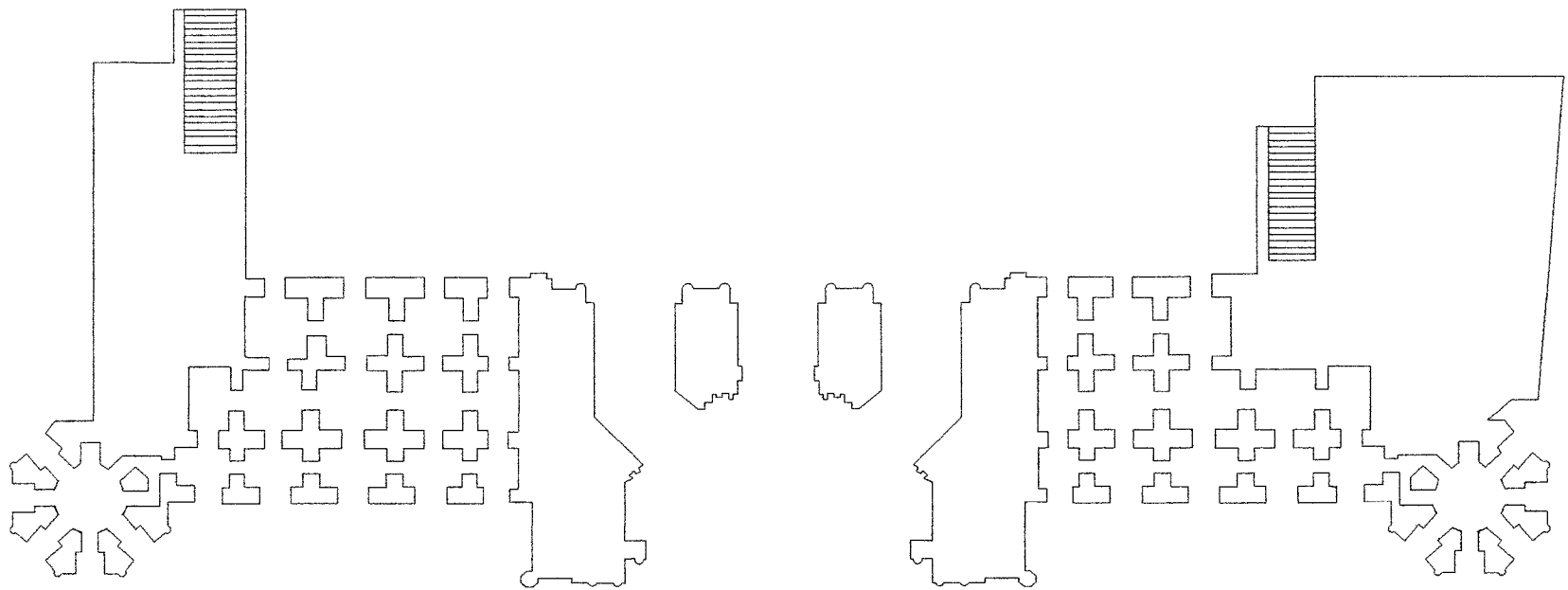
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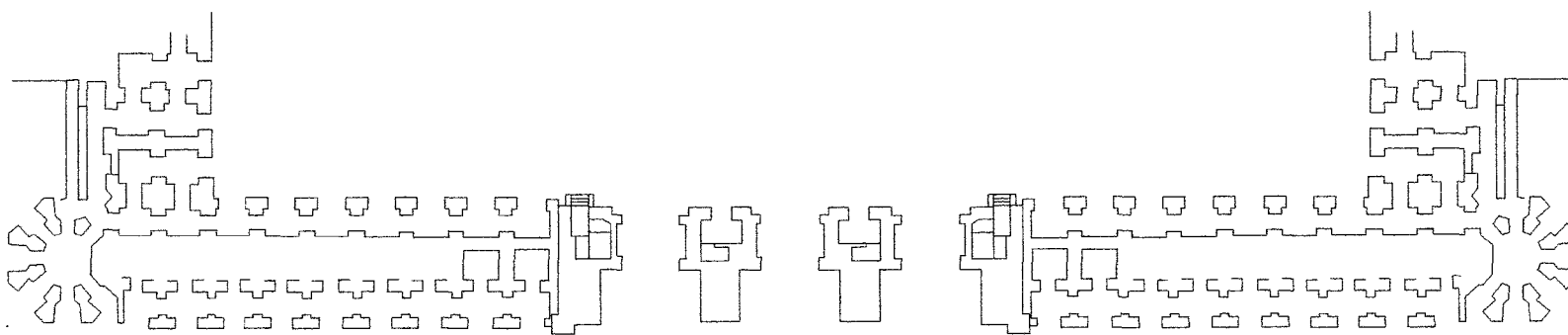
1. Map of India, line drawing



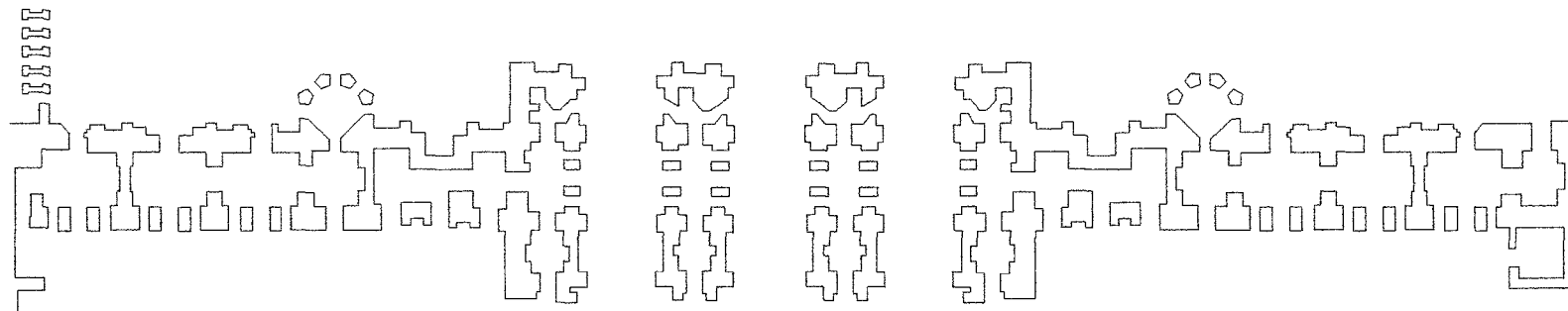
2. Plan of the Great Imambarah complex, c. 2002, with key photo angles corresponding to figure numbers, line drawing



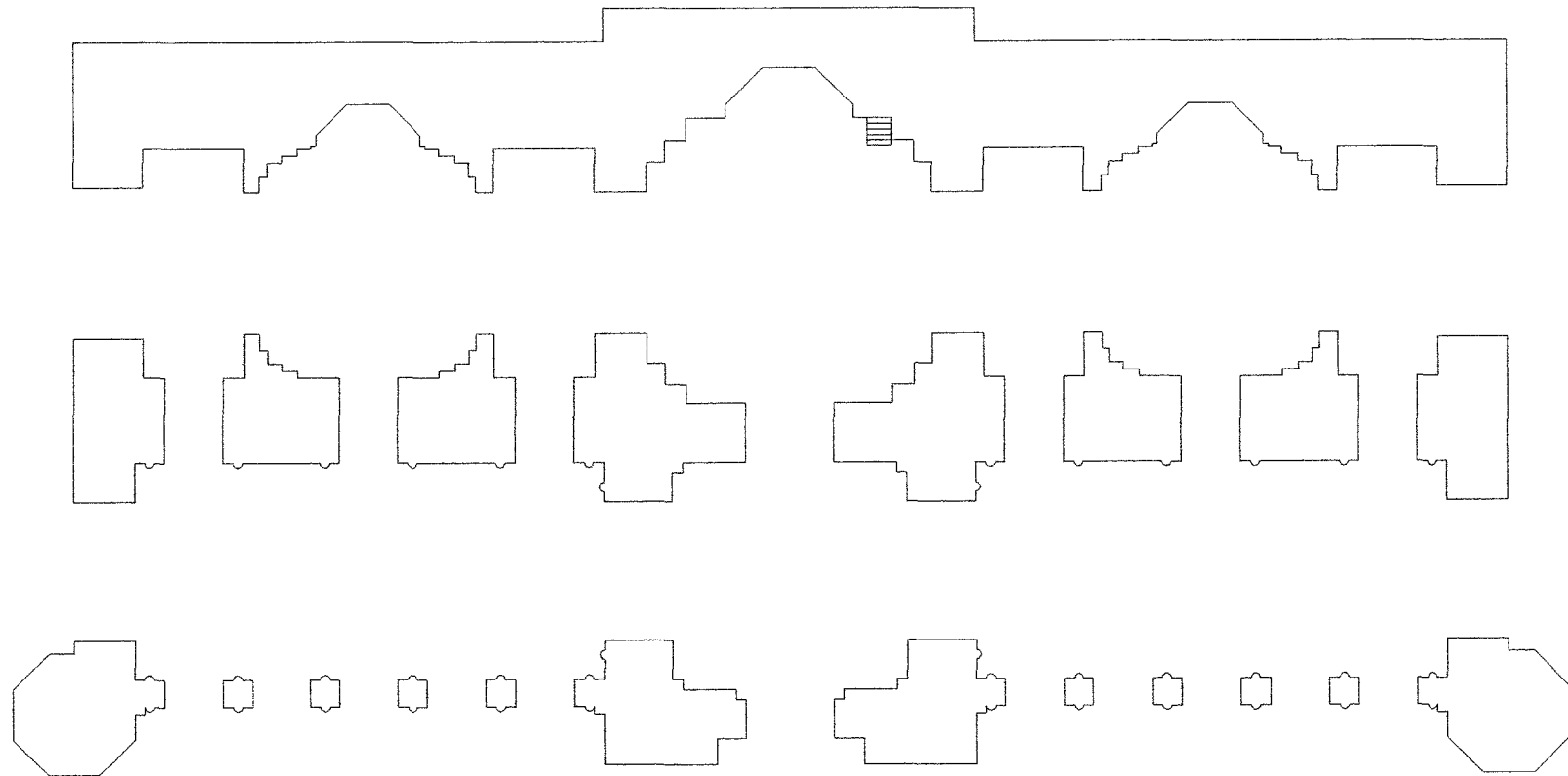
3. Plan section of Rumi Darvazah, line drawing



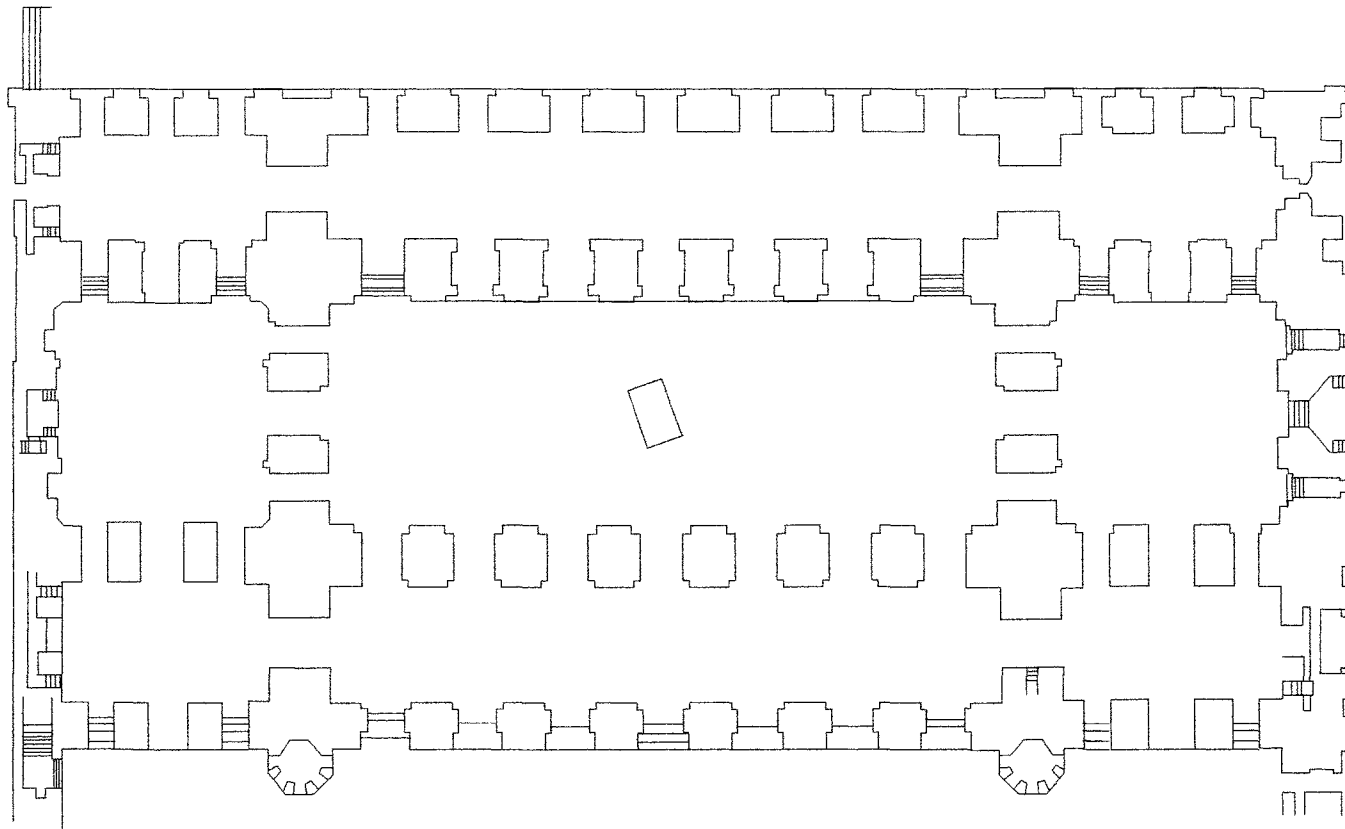
4. Plan section of first Imambarah gate, line drawing



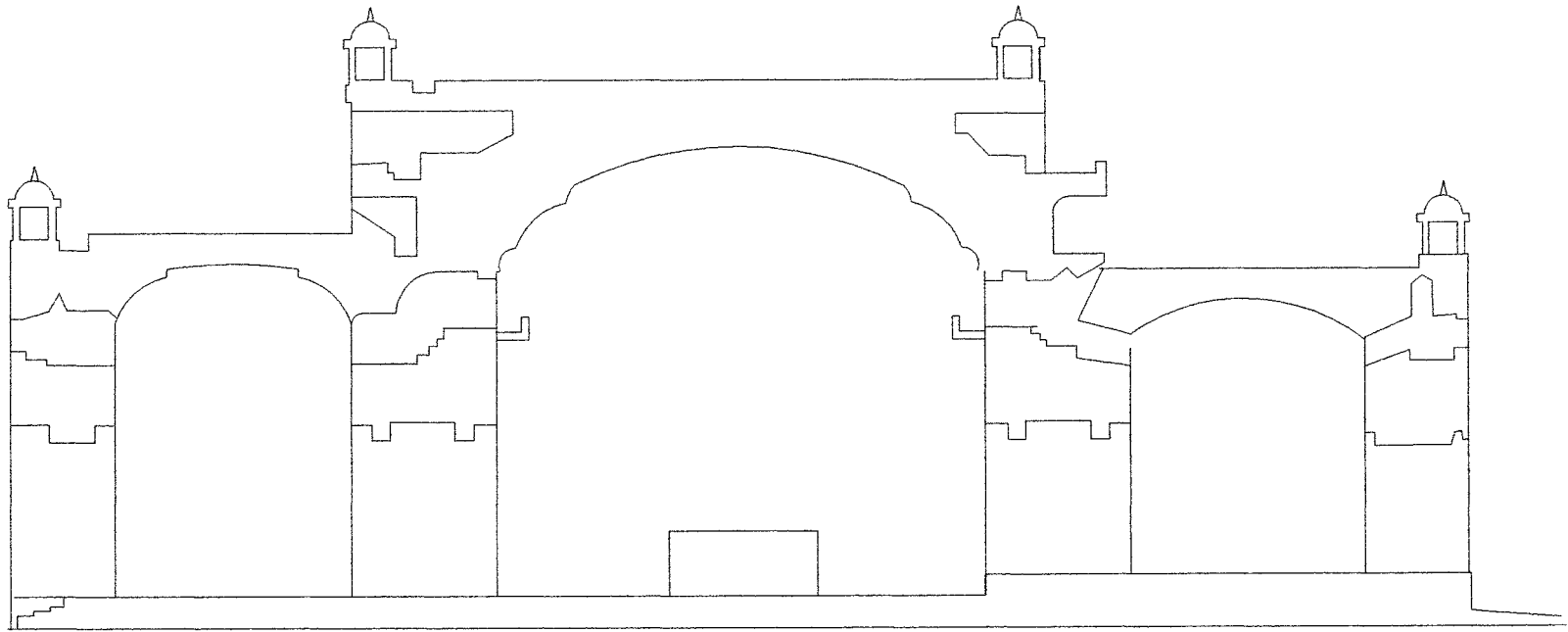
5. Plan section of second Imambarah gate, line drawing



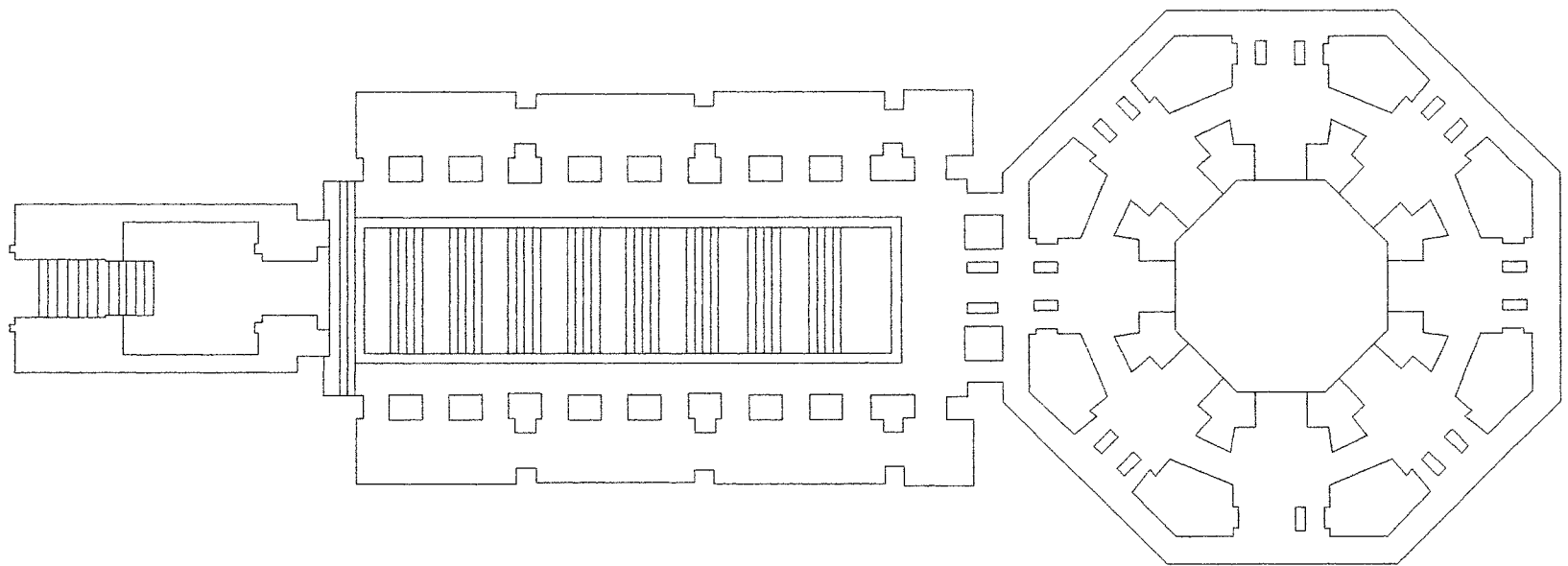
6. Plan of congregational *masjid*, line drawing



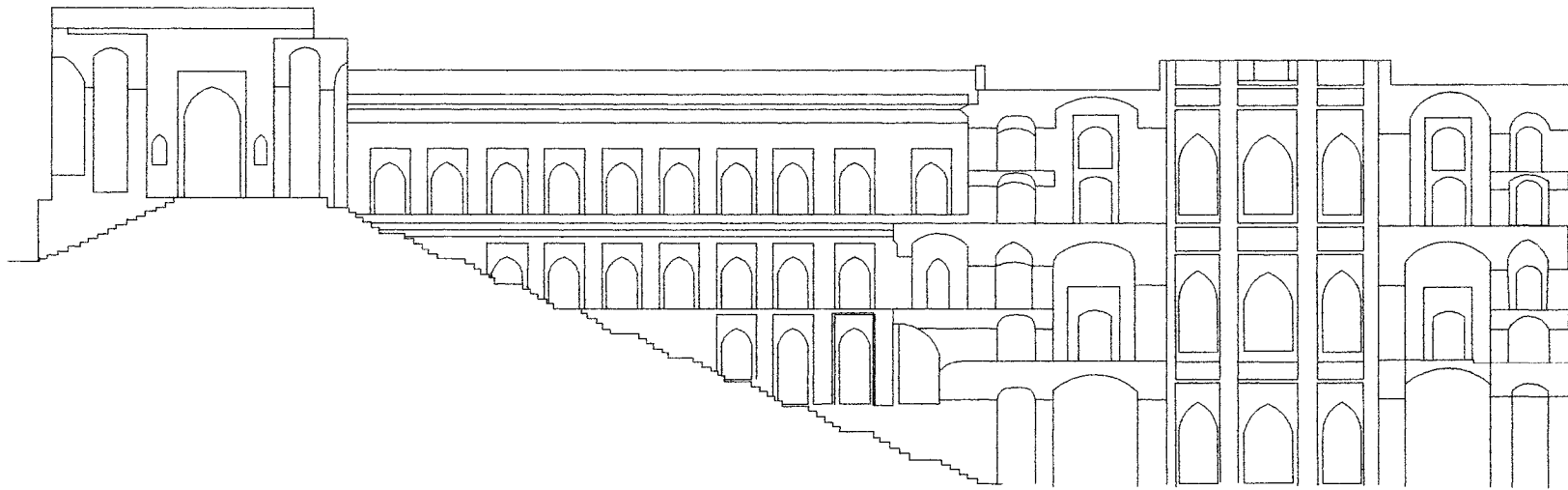
7. Plan section of Great Imambarah, line drawing



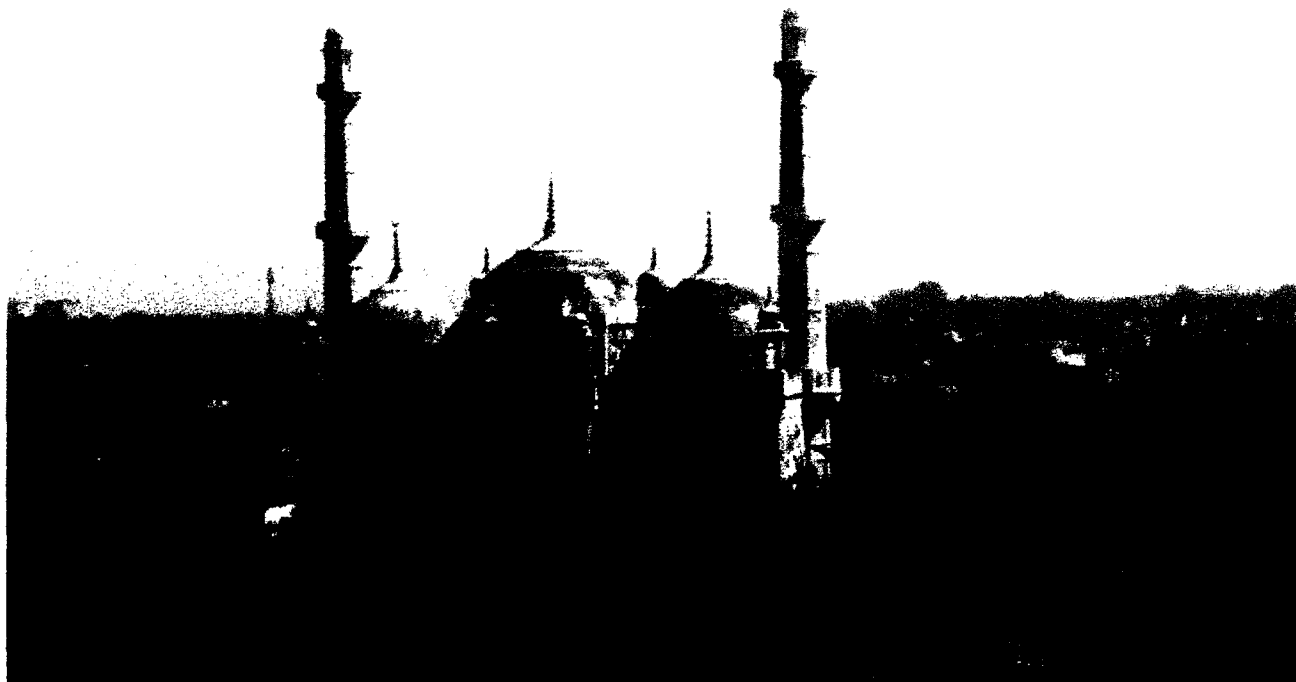
8. Section of Great Imambarah, line drawing



9. Plan section of Baoli Palace, line drawing



10. Section of Baoli Palace, line drawing



11. West facade of Awrangzeb masjid, photograph, March 2002



12. North-west exterior of first forecourt, photograph, March 2002



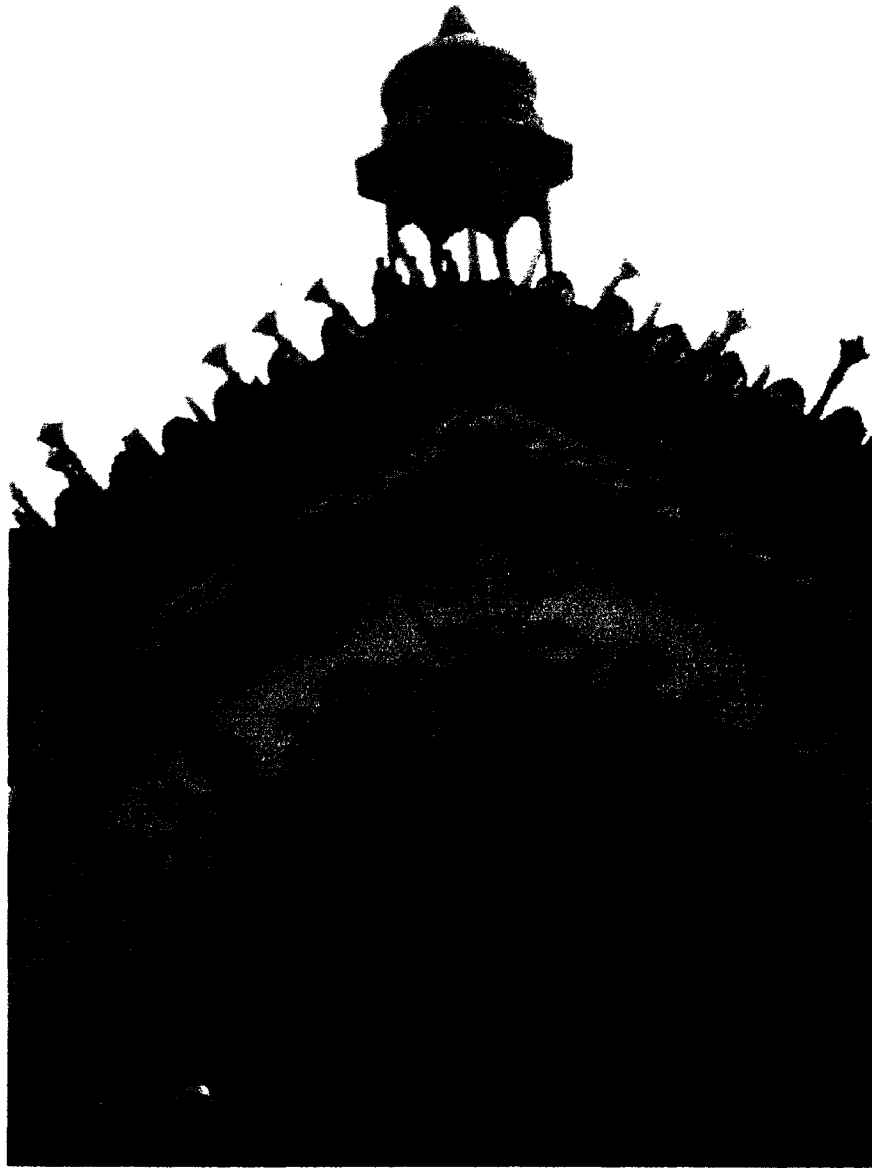
13. Interior of first forecourt facing west, photograph, March 2002



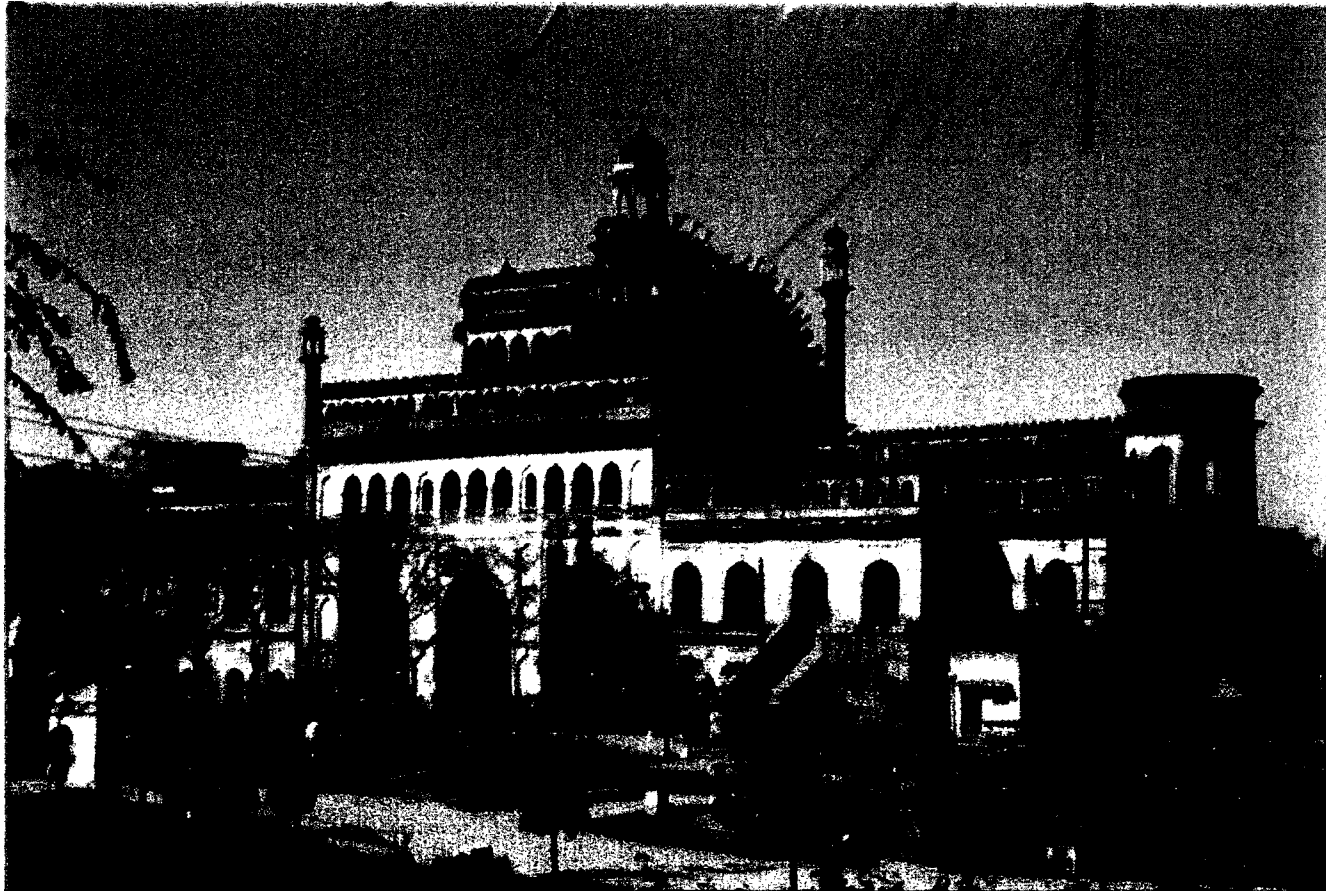
14. Interior of first forecourt facing east, photograph, March 2002



15. West exterior of Rumi Darvazah-arcade, photograph, March 2002



16. Detail of west facade of Rumi Darvazah, photograph, March 2002



17. East exterior of Rumi Darvazah-arcade, photograph, March 2002



18. Exterior of second tier arcade on Rumi Darvazah-arcade, photograph, March 2002



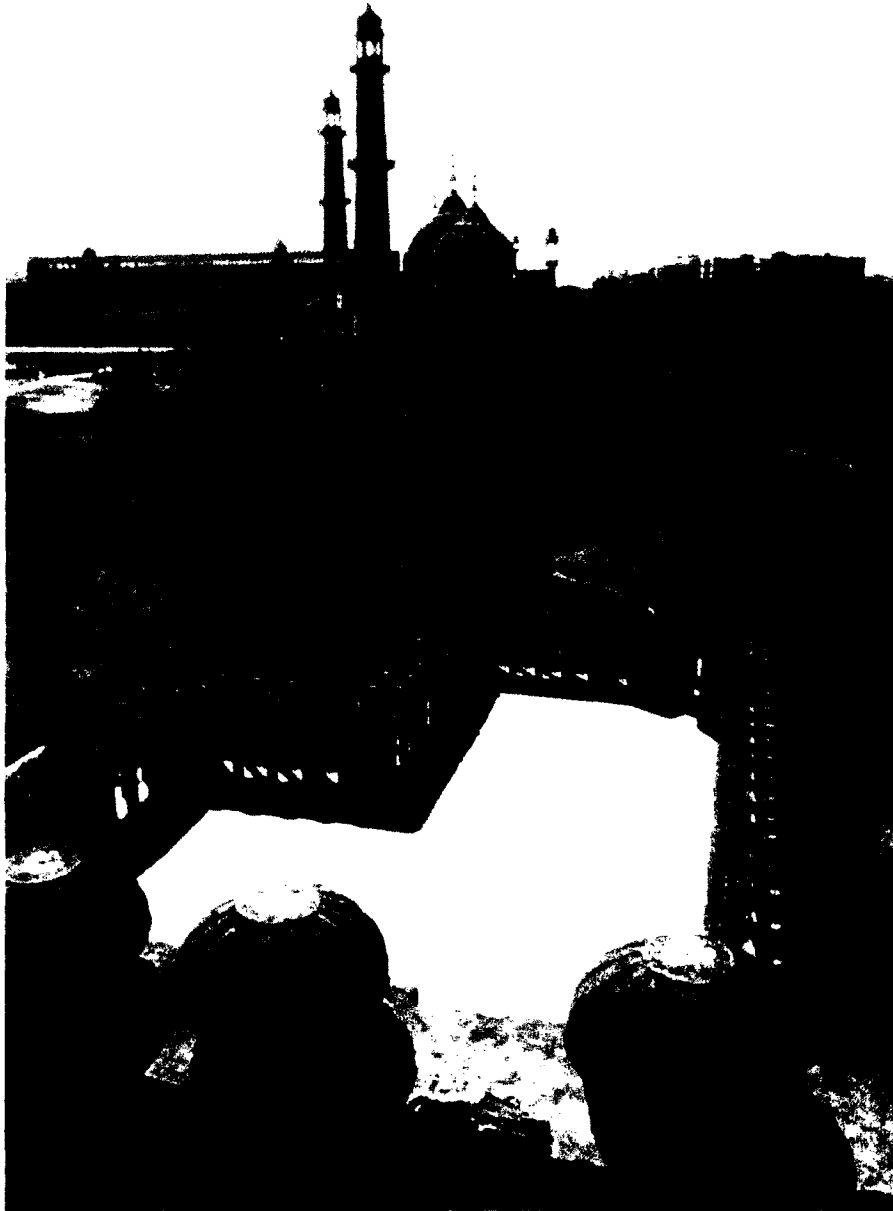
19. Interior bays of second tier arcade on Rumi Darvazah-arcade, photograph, March 2002



20. North terrace above second tier arcade on Rumi Darvazah-arcade, photograph, March 2002



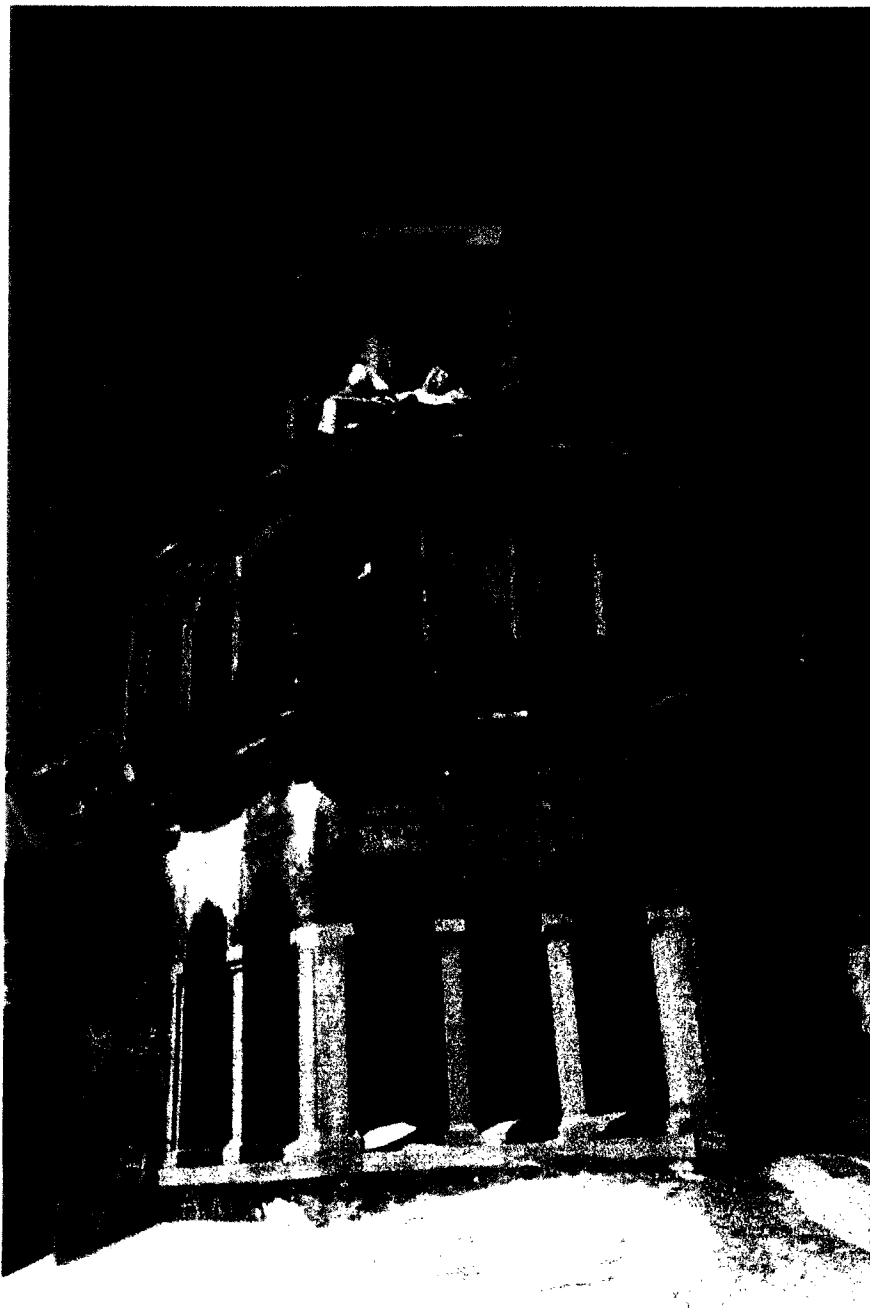
21. North profile of half octagonal superstructure supporting Rumi Darvazah, photograph, March 2002



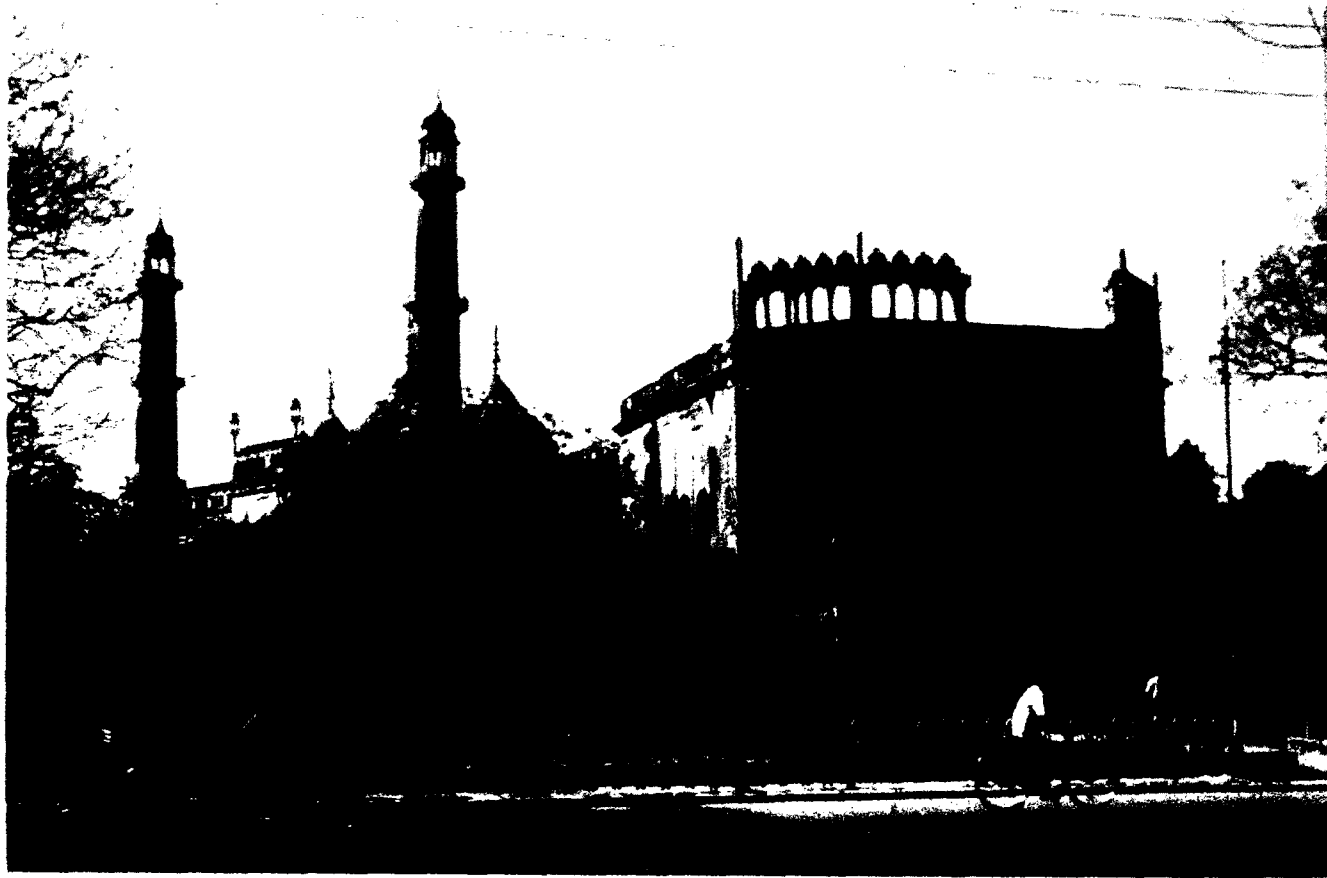
22. South terrace above second tier arcade on Rumi Darvazah-arcade, North terrace above second tier arcade on Rumi Darvazah-arcade, photograph, March 2002



23. Detail of guldastas embedded around top half of Rumi Darvazah,
photograph, March 2002



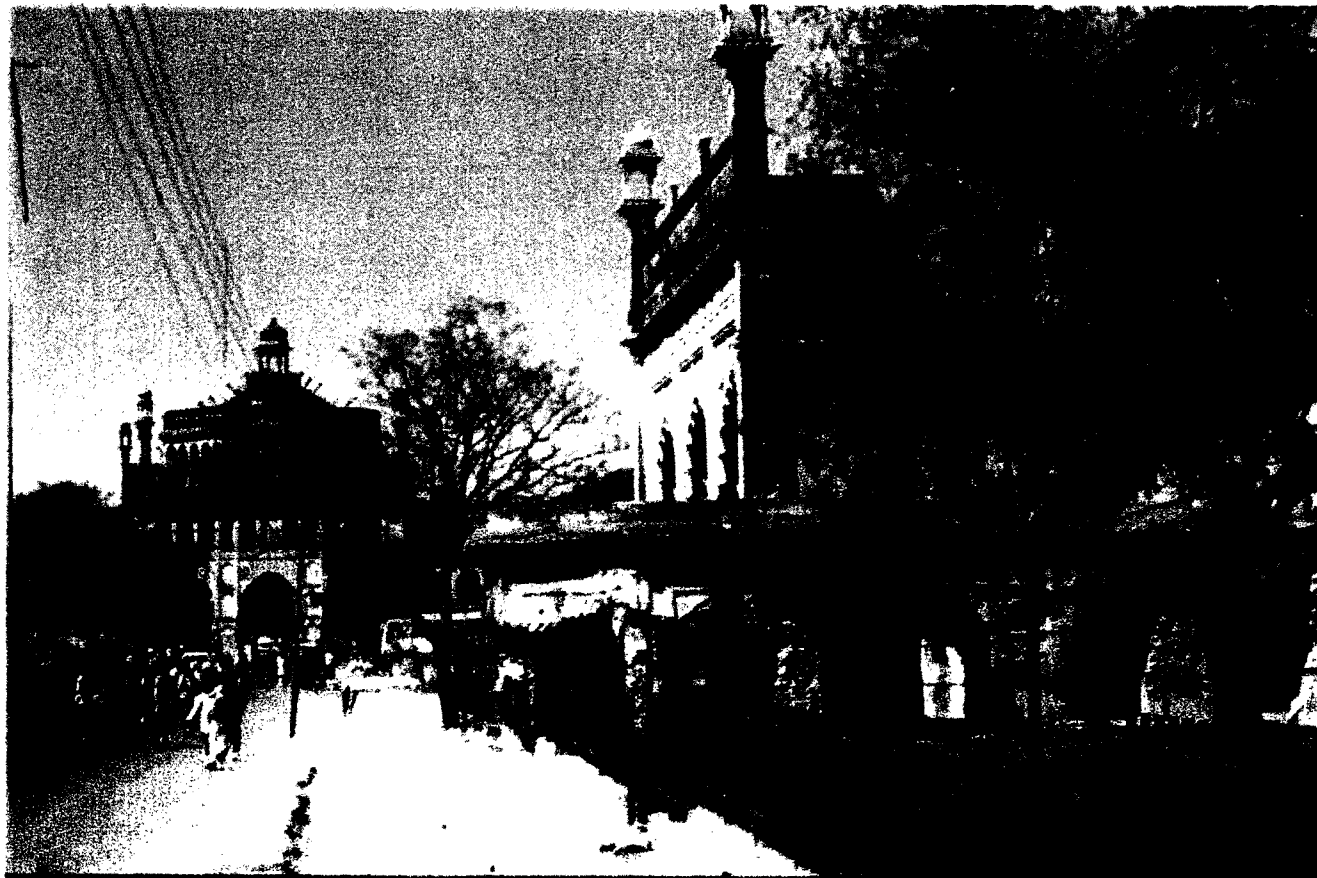
24. East exterior of octagonal superstructure on Rumi Darvazah,
photograph, March 2002



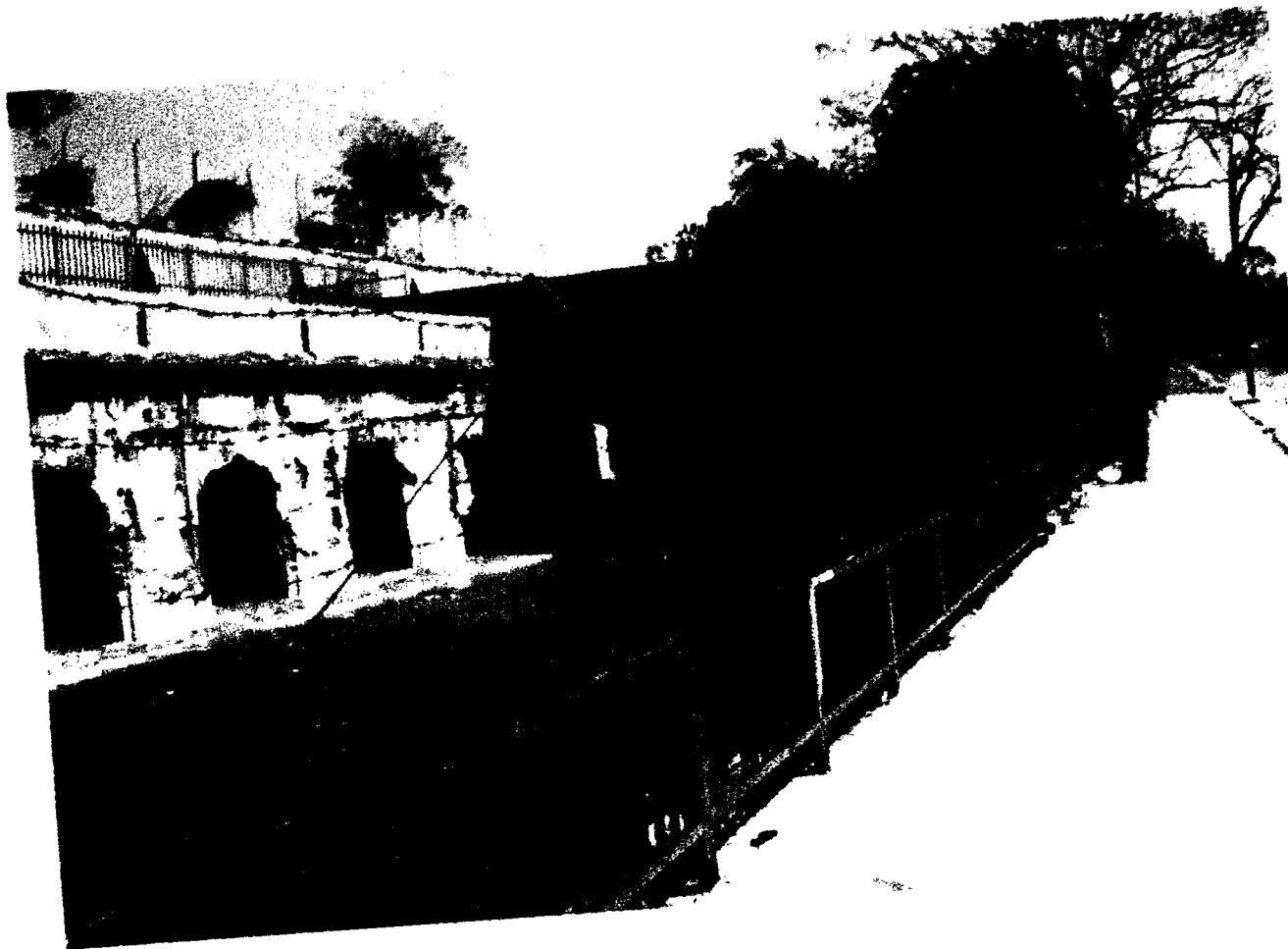
25. Exterior of chamfered gateway in first forecourt, photograph, March 2002



26. South facade of Naqar Khanah, photograph, March 2002



27. East facade of Naqar Khanah, photograph, March 2002



28. Arcade east of Naqar Khanah, photograph, March 2002



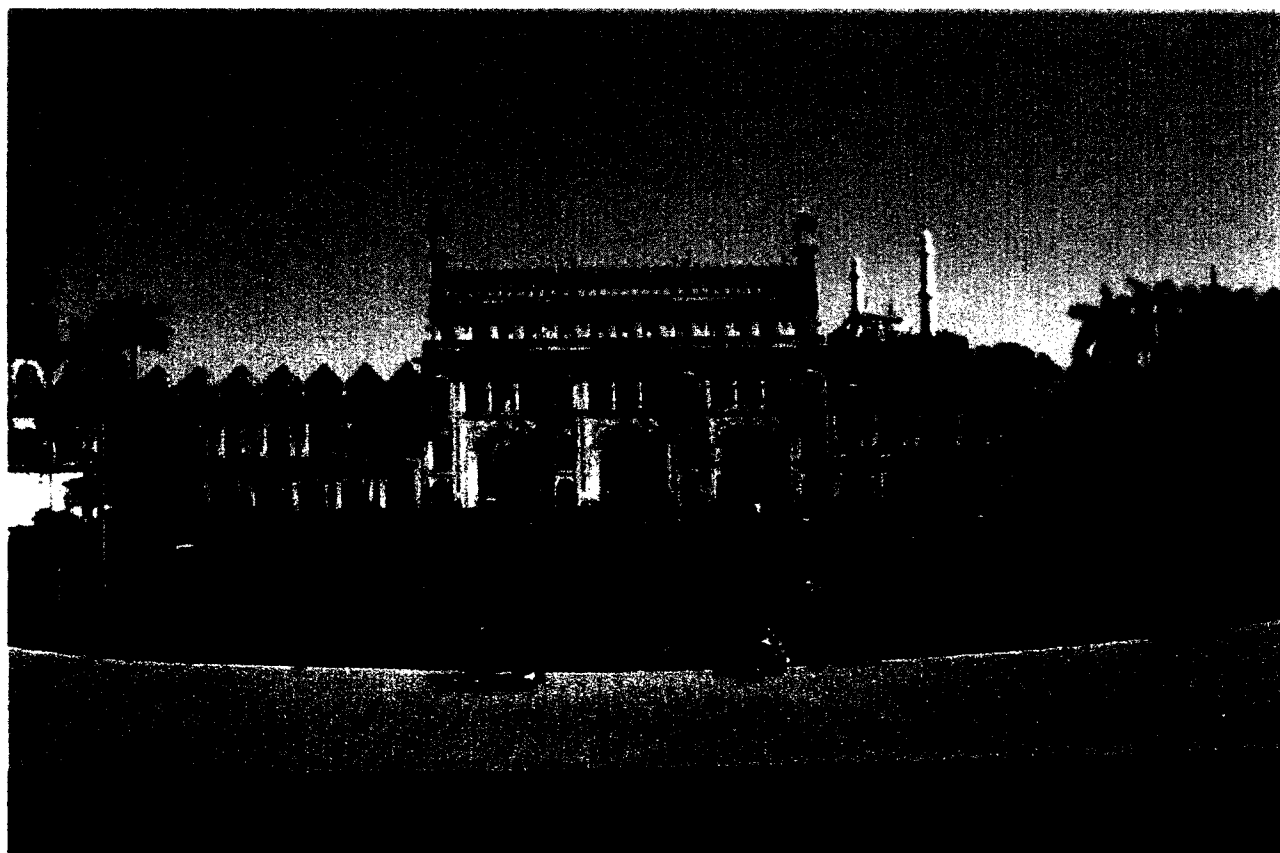
29. North facade of Naqar Khanah, photograph, March 2002



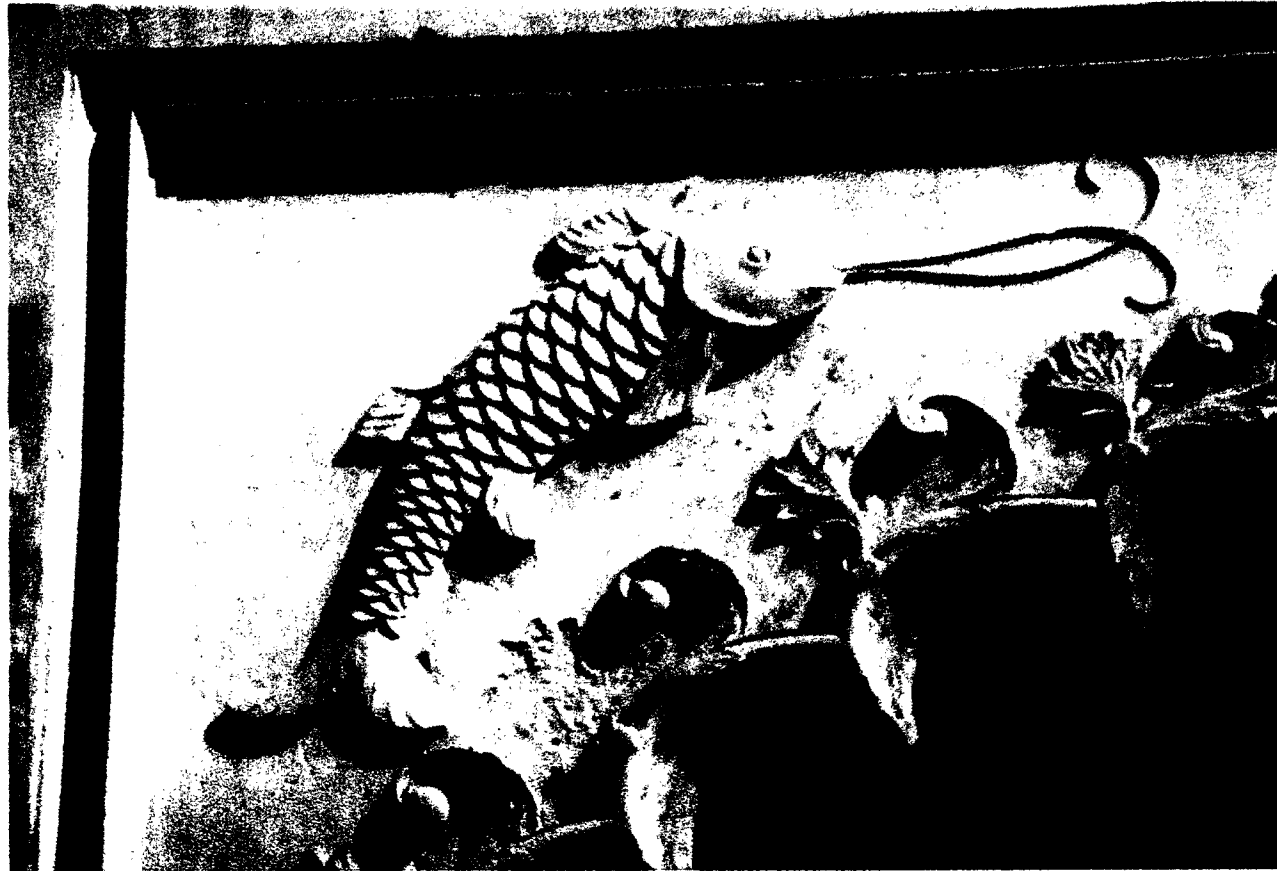
30. East marble balcony of Naqar Khanah, photograph, March 2002



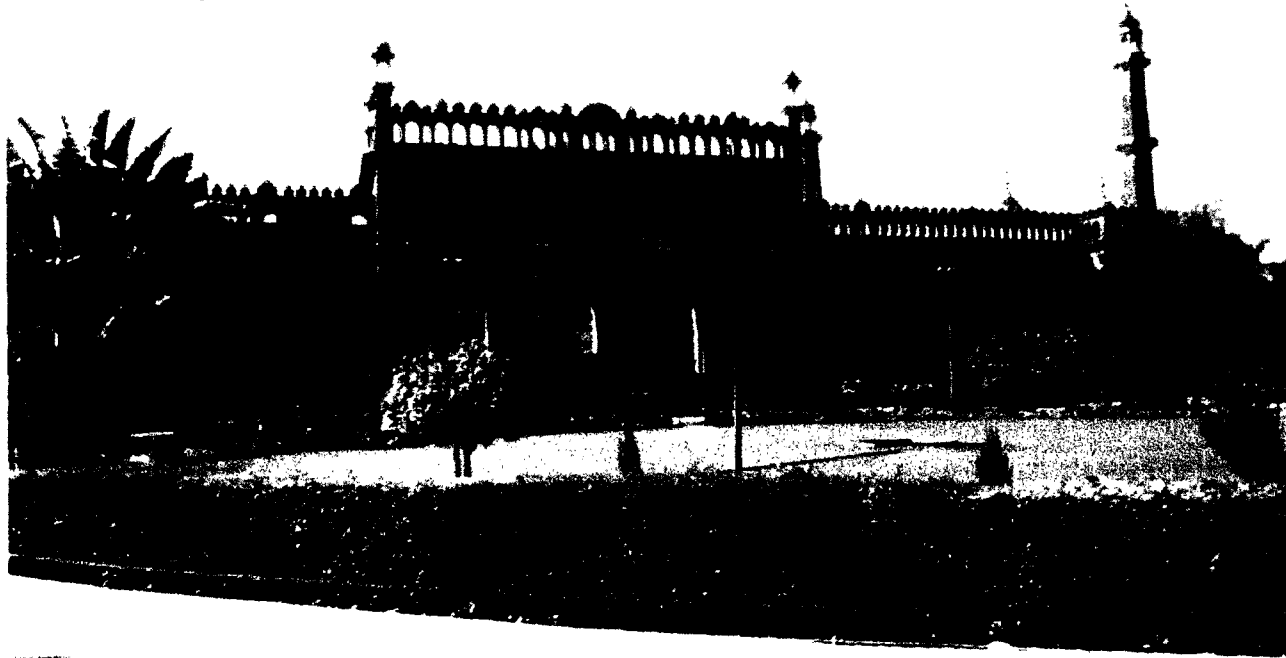
31. Central marble balcony of Naqar Khanah, photograph, March 2002



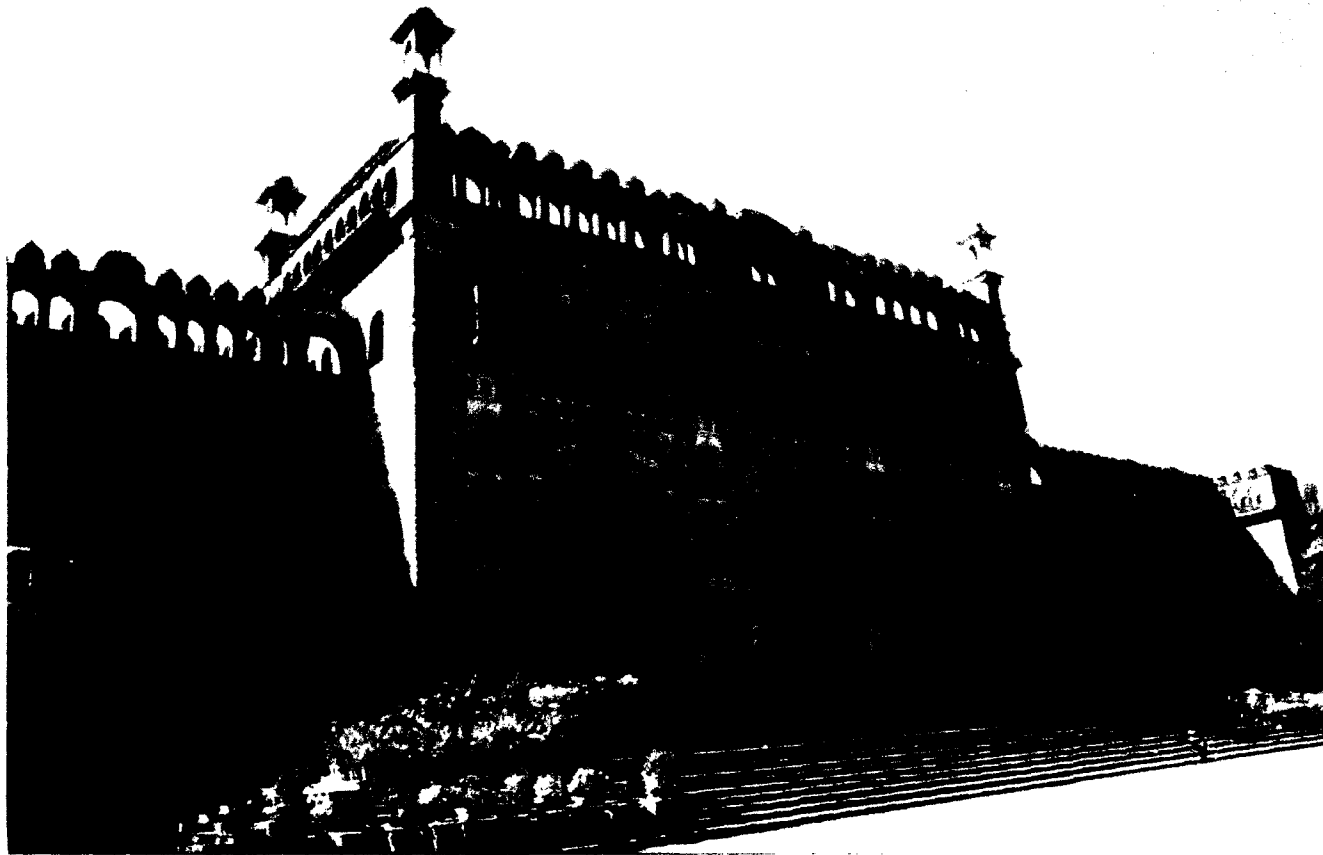
32. South facade of first Imambarah gateway-arcade, photograph, March 2002



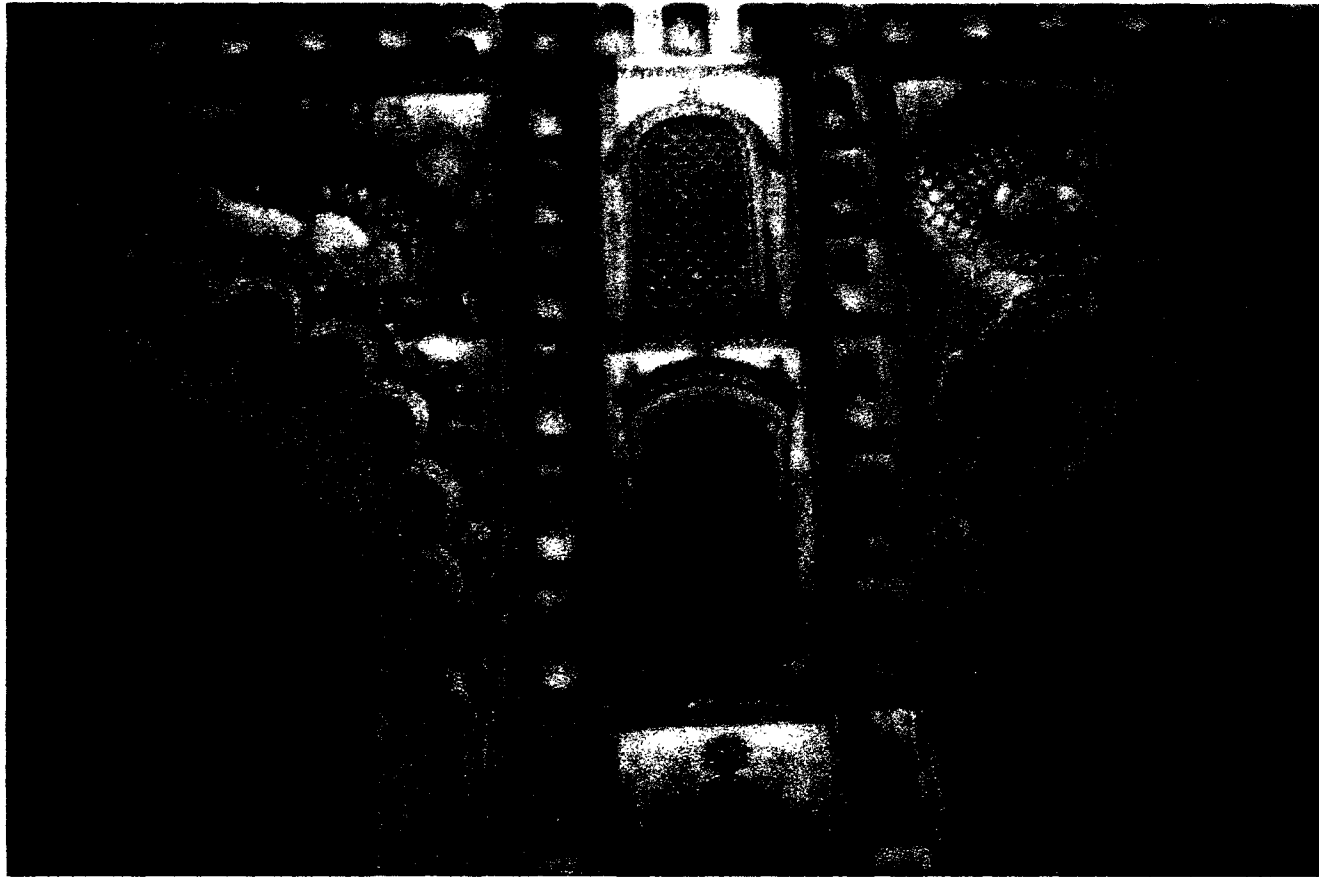
33. Detail of fish spandrel ornament on south facade of first Imambarah gateway, March 2002



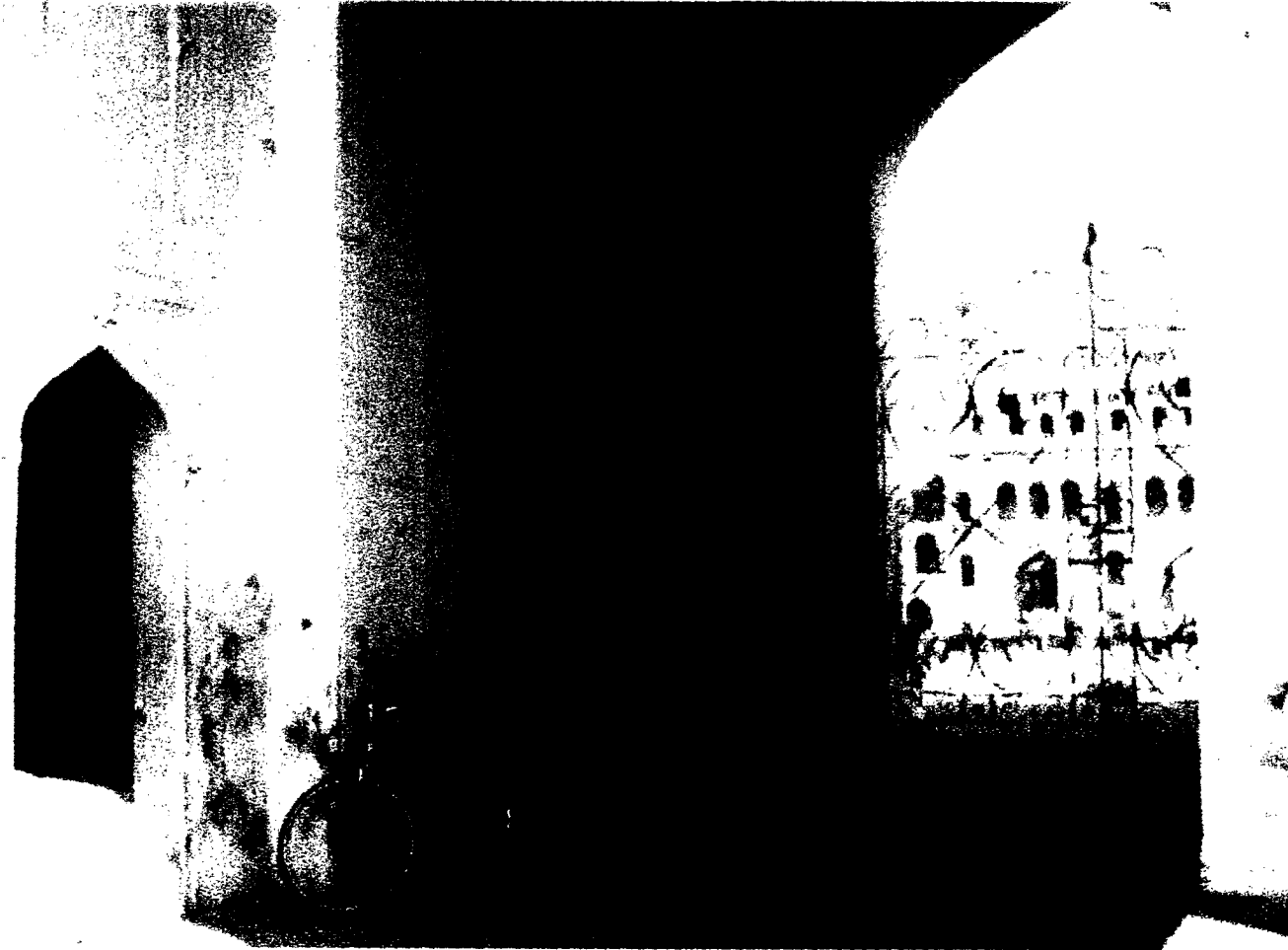
34. North facade of second Imambarah gateway-arcade, photograph, March 2002



35. North facade of second Imambarah gateway, photograph, March 2002



36. Detail of fish spandrel ornaments on north facade of second Imambarah gateway, photograph, March 2002



37. Pier chambers in second Imambarah gateway, photograph, March 2002



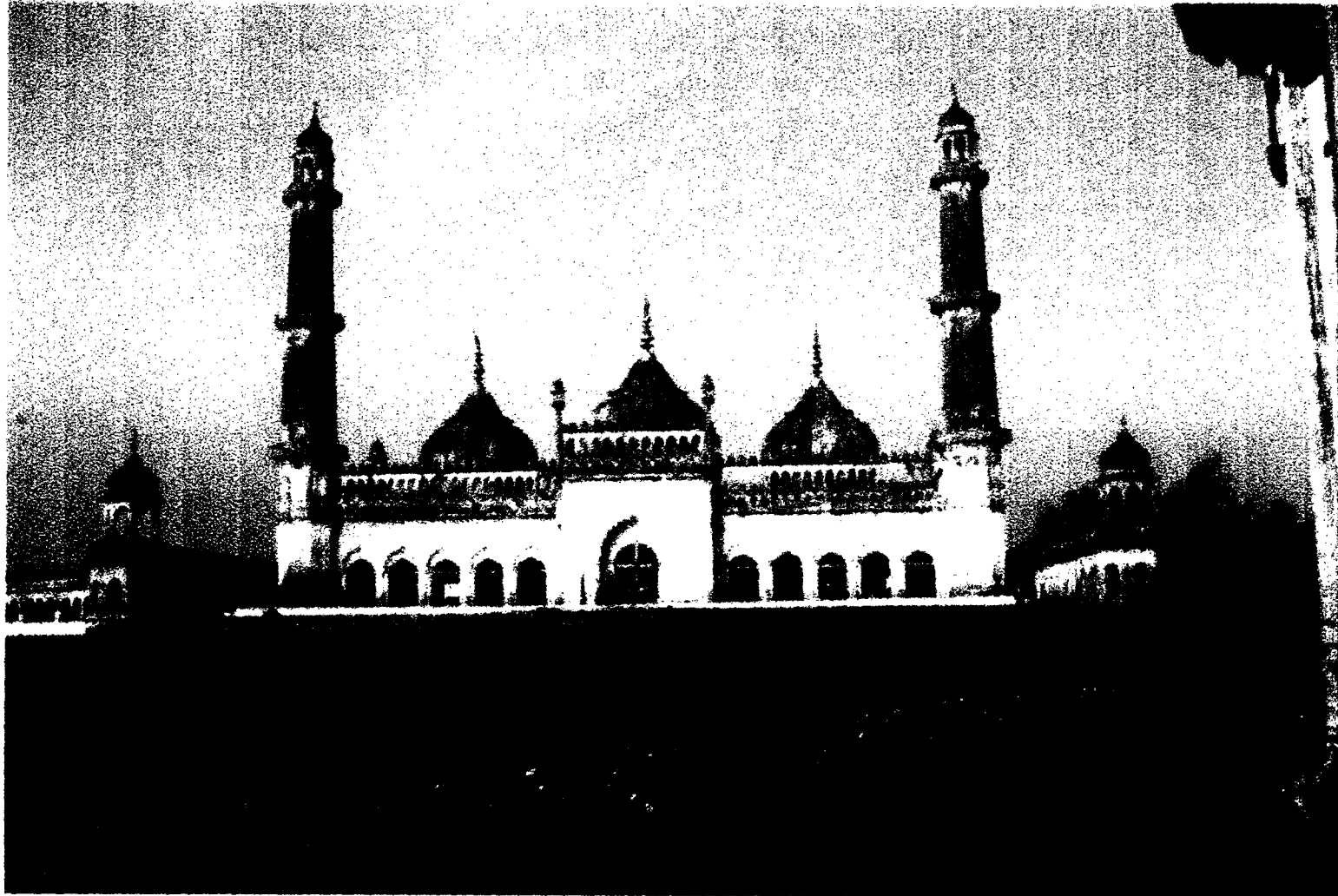
38. Interior of east enclosure arcade in second forecourt, photograph, March 2002



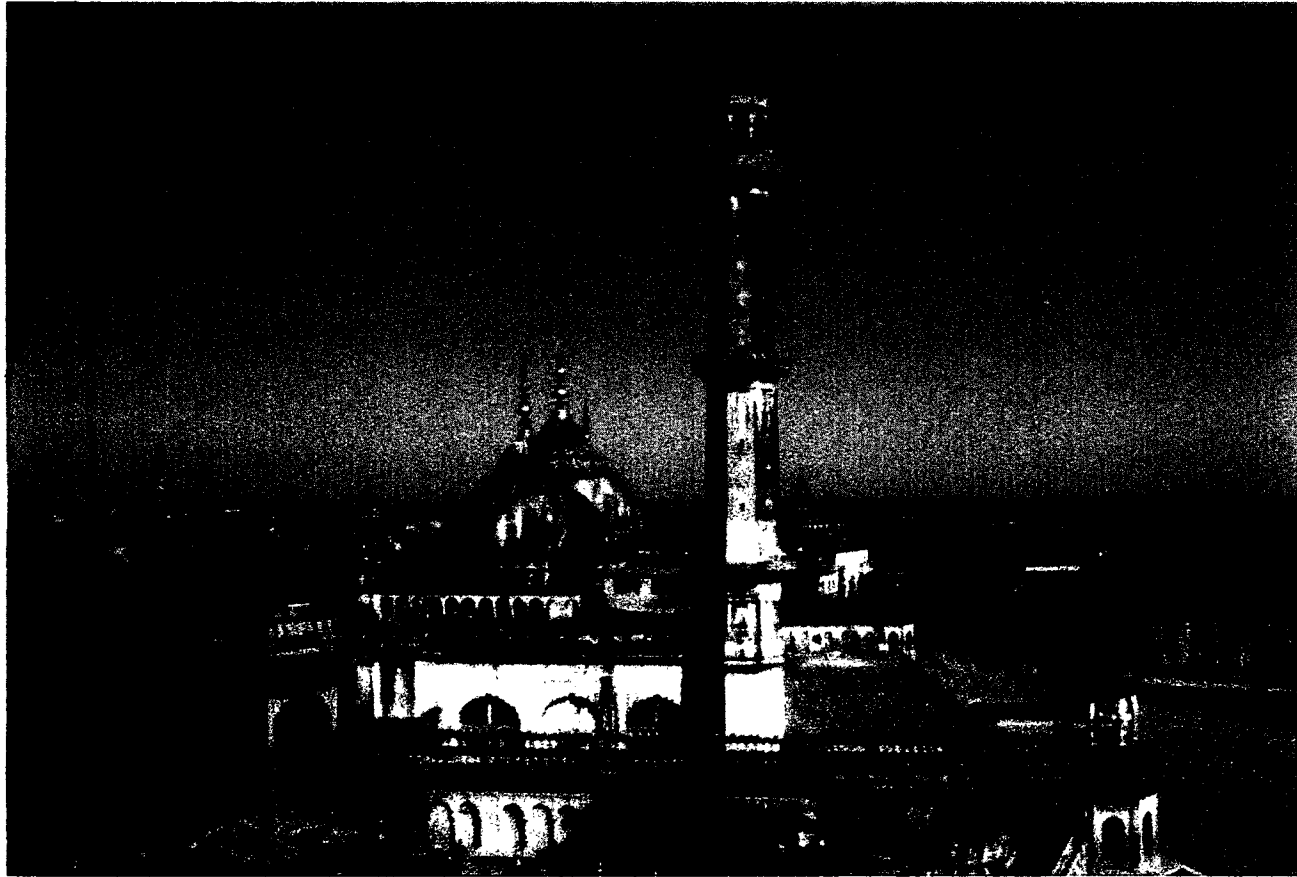
39. Interior of east enclosure arcade in second forecourt, photograph, March 2002



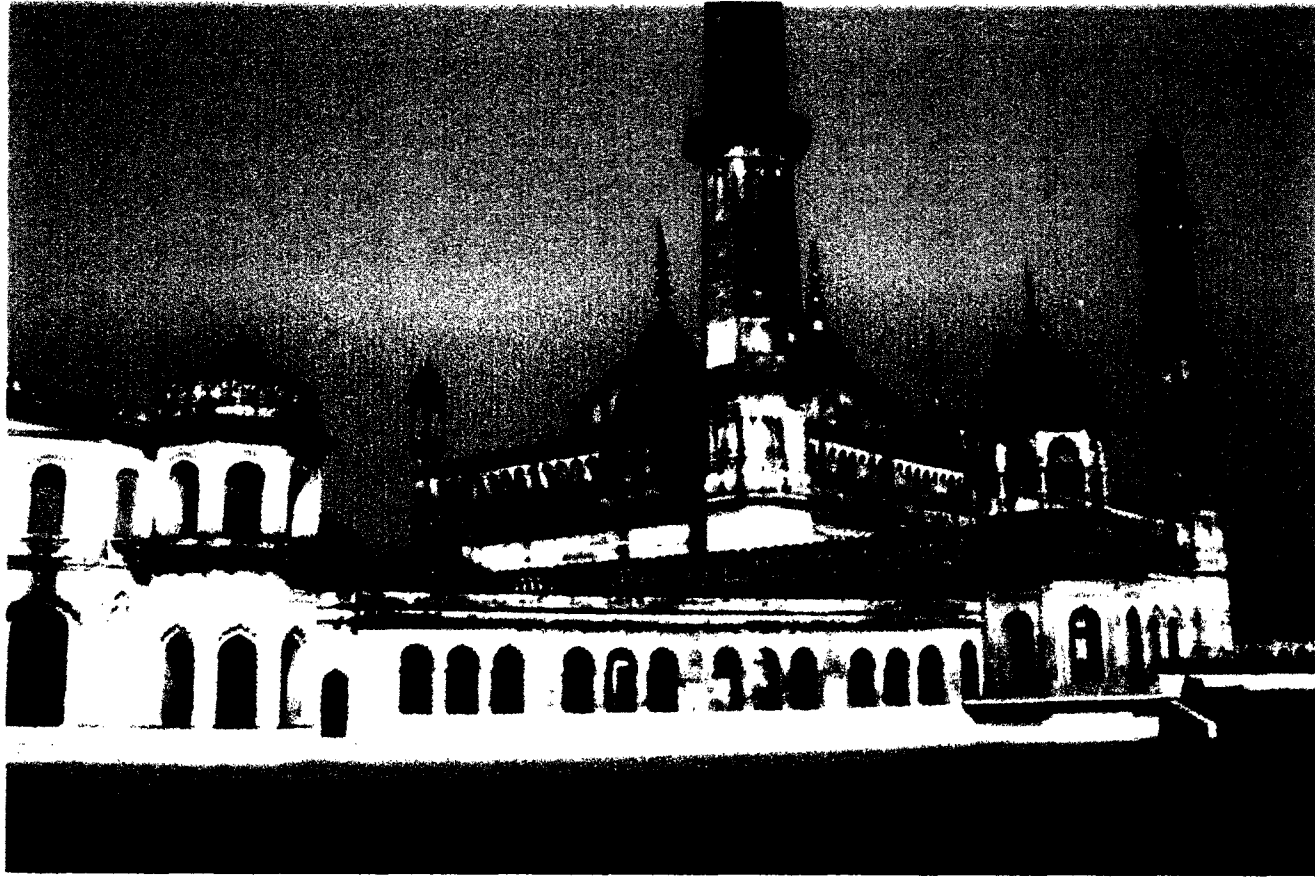
40. South facade of second Imambarah gateway-arcade, photograph, March 2002



41. East exterior facade of congregational masjid, photograph, March 2002



42. South exterior facade of congregational masjid, photograph, March 2002



43. Arcade connecting the Great Imambarah to the congregational masjid, photograph, March 2002



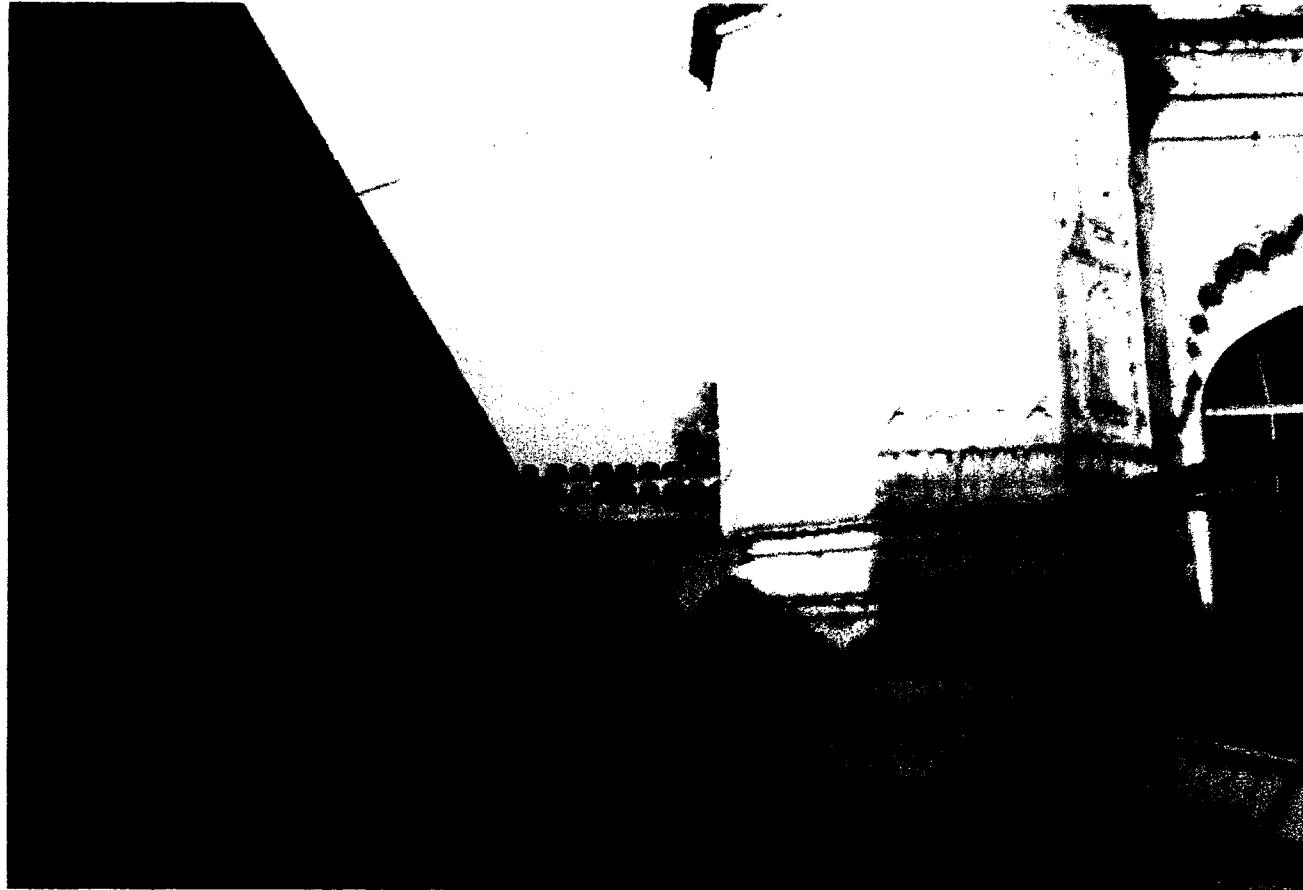
44. Well in front of congregational masjid, photograph, March 2002



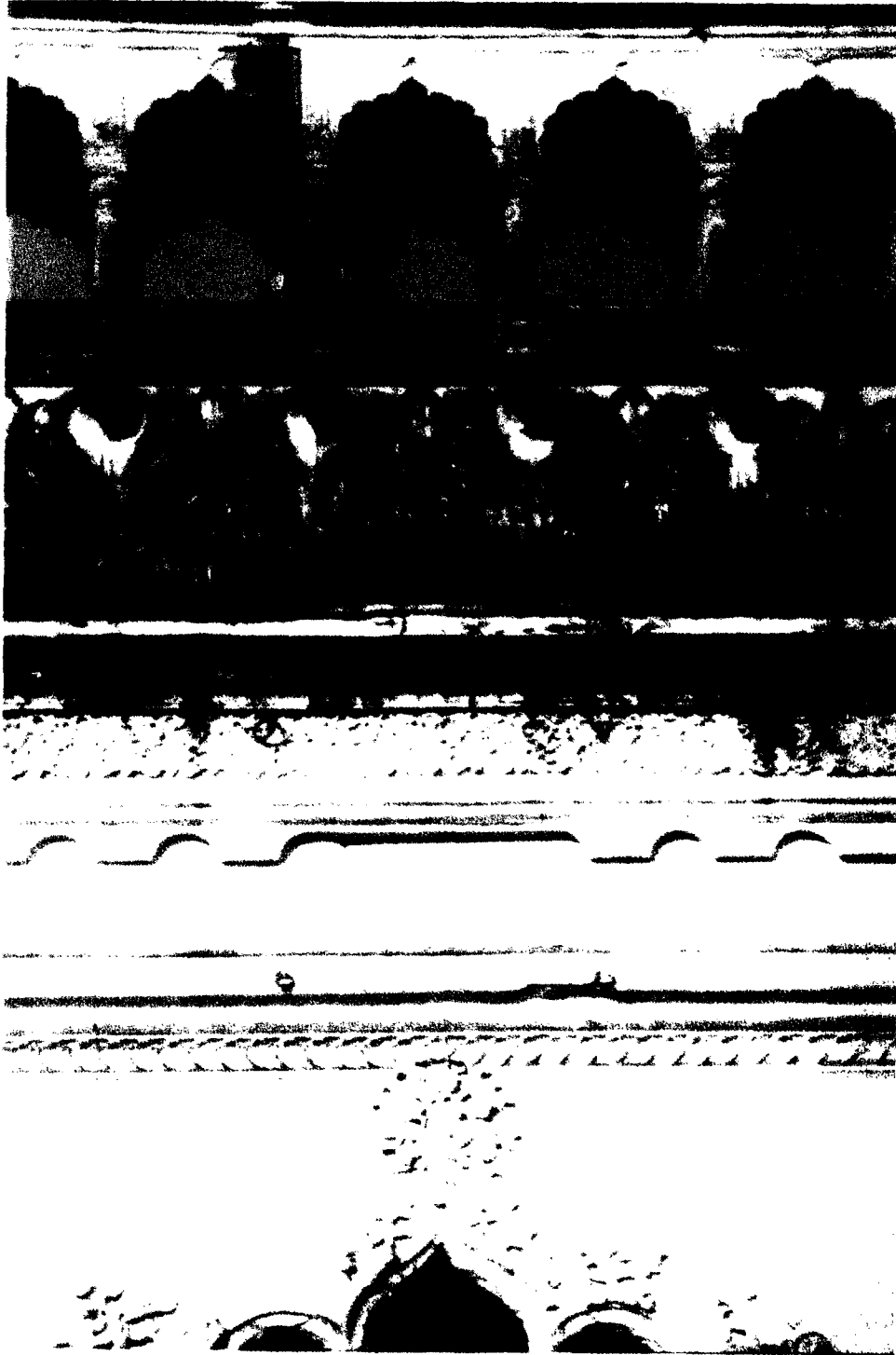
45. Inscribed marble tablet at well in front of congregational masjid,
photograph, March 2002



46. Projecting entrance to congregational masjid, photograph, March 2002



47. Arcade surrounding congregational masjid, photograph, March 2002



48. Inscribed tablet over exterior central arch of congregational masjid,
photograph, March 2002



49. Detail of floriated engaged column bases on congregational masjid exterior, photograph, March 2002



50. Detail of floriated engaged column capital, arch cusp and muqarnas on congregational masjid exterior, photograph, March 2002



51. Interior of south chamber of entry hall to masjid facing north,
photograph, March 2002



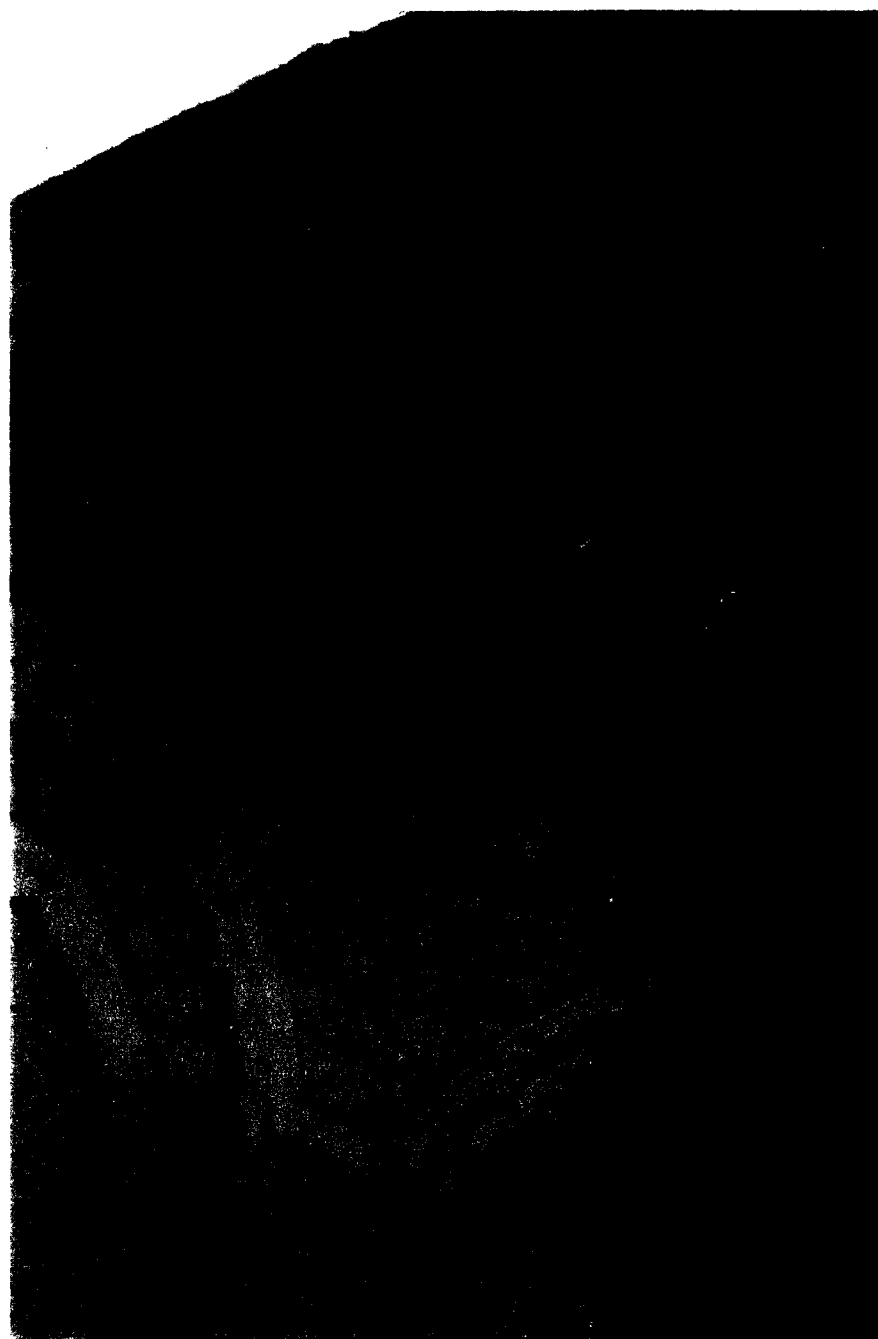
52. Detail of covered muqarna cornice and ceiling ornament of the interior of south chamber of entry hall to masjid, photograph, March 2002



53. Western facade (qiblah) of central mihrab chamber of masjid, photograph, March 2002



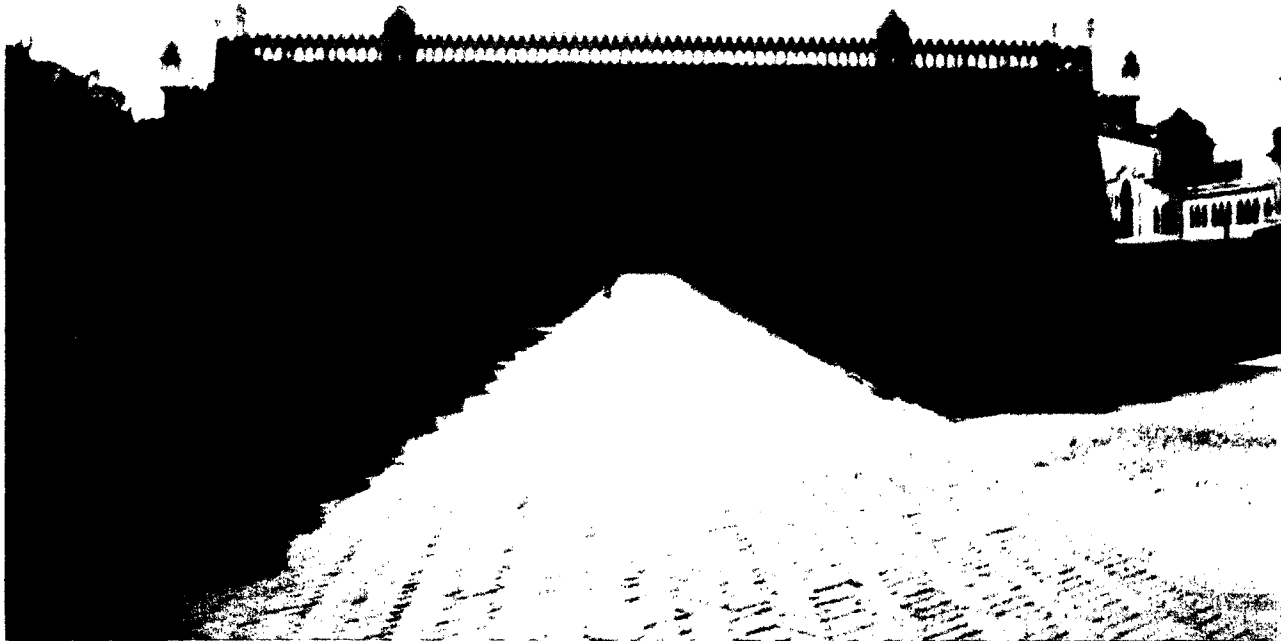
54. Foliated grooved dome over central mihrab chamber of masjid,
photograph, March 2002



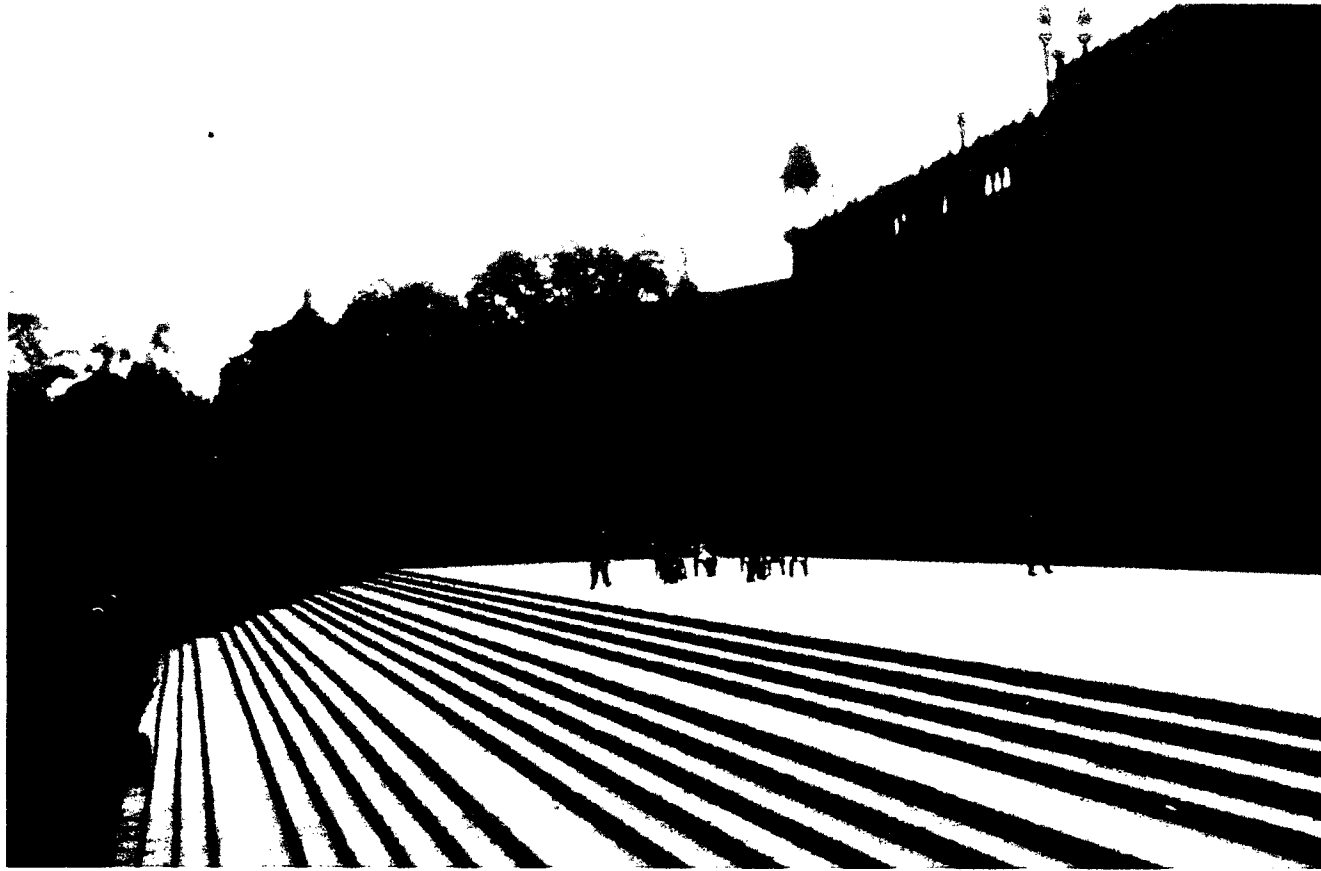
55. Foliated grooved dome over south chamber of masjid's qiblah wall, photograph, March 2002



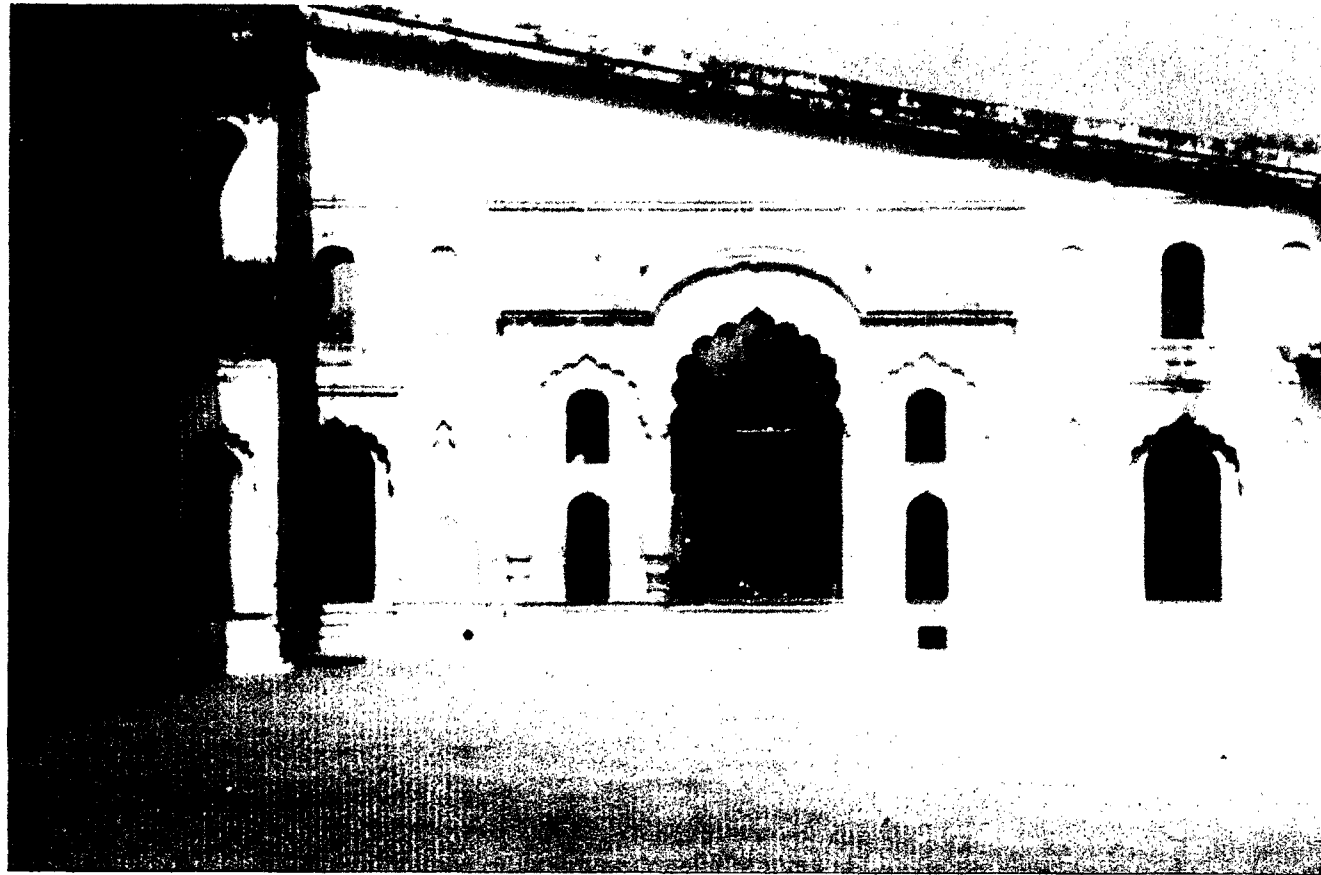
56. Southernmost bangla vaulted transition space of masjid's qiblah wall, photograph, March 2002



57. North exterior facade of Great Imbarah, photograph, March 2002



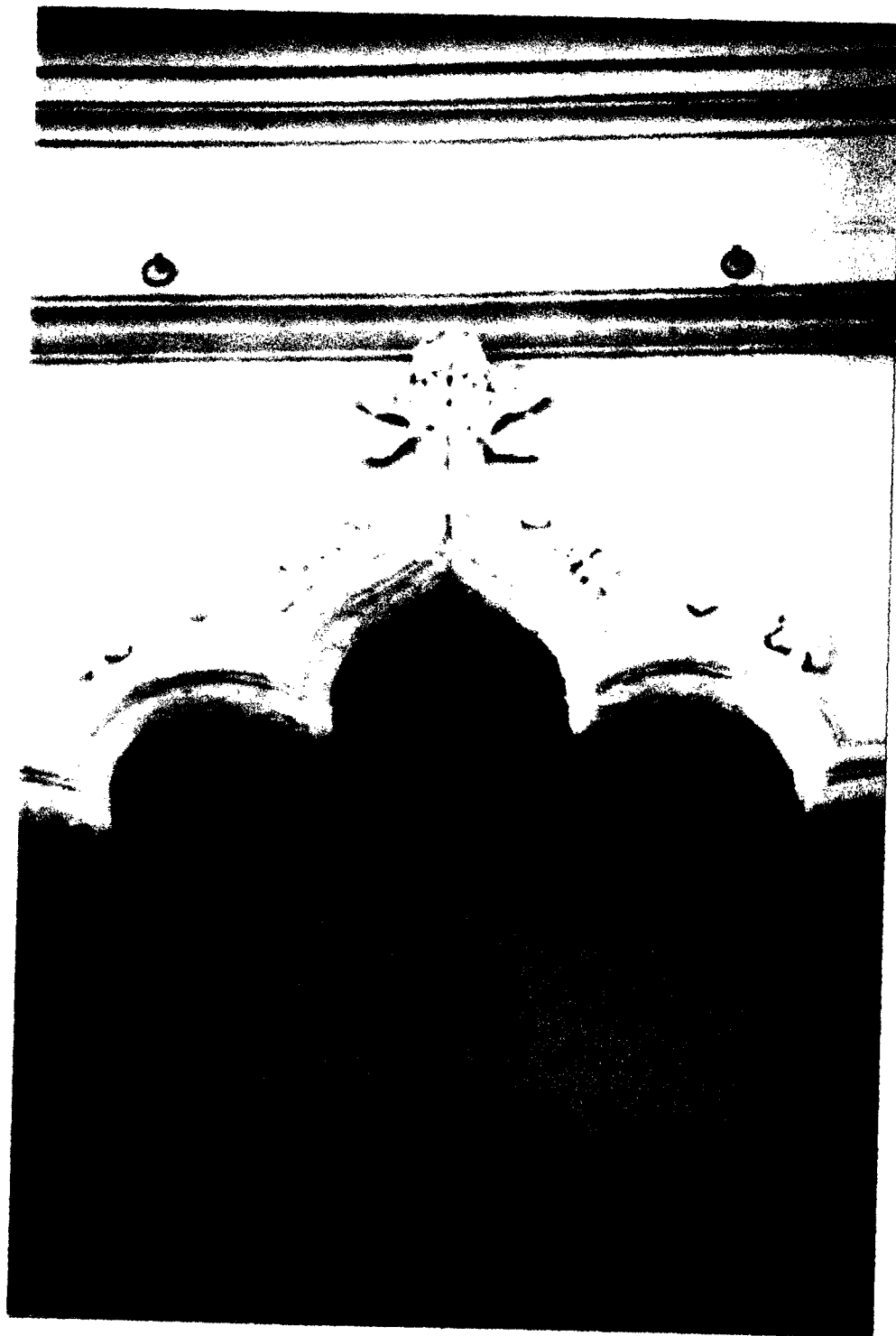
58. Eastern sloped projecting wall, stairs and terrace of the Great Imbarah, photograph, March 2002



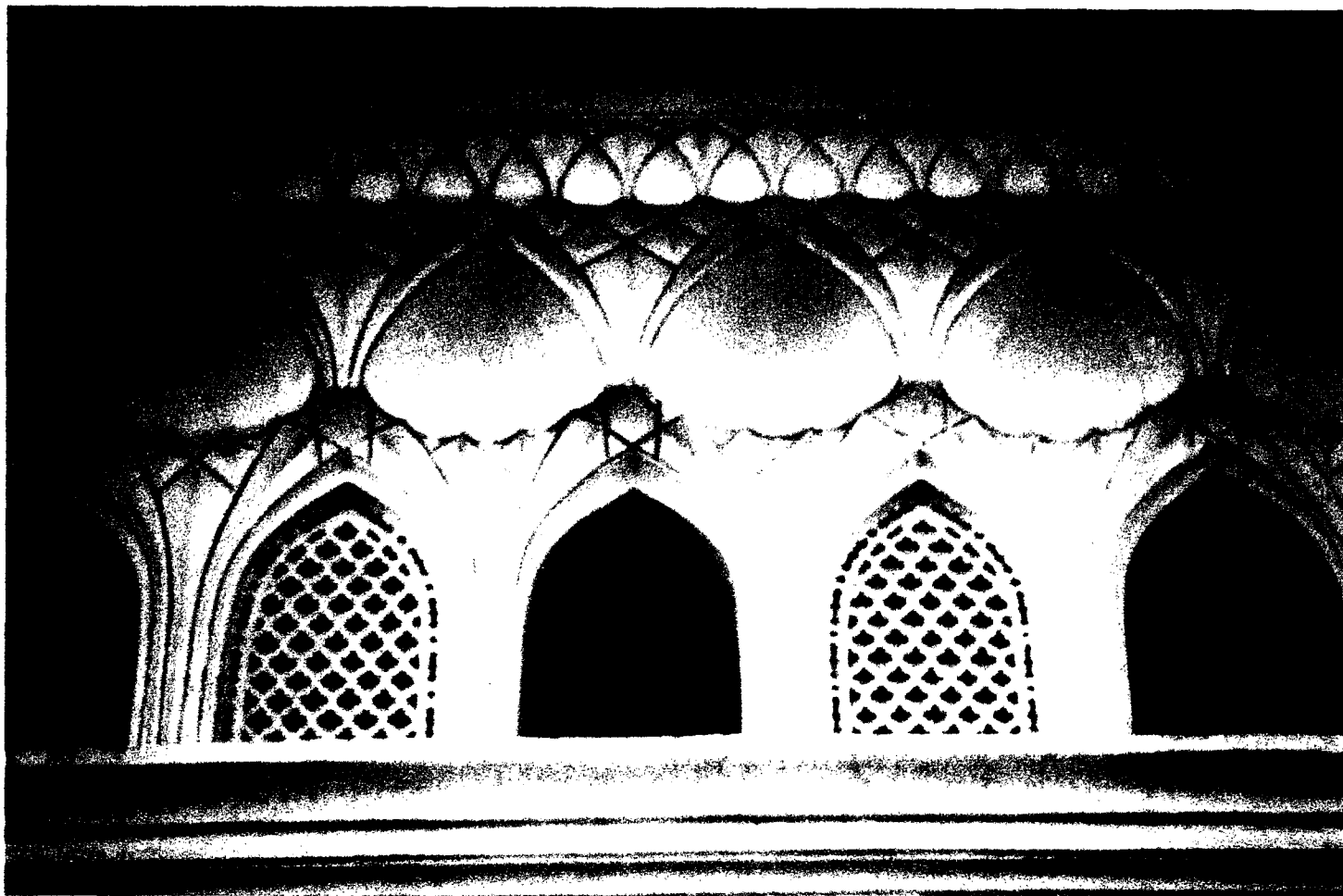
59. Western sloped projecting wall of the Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



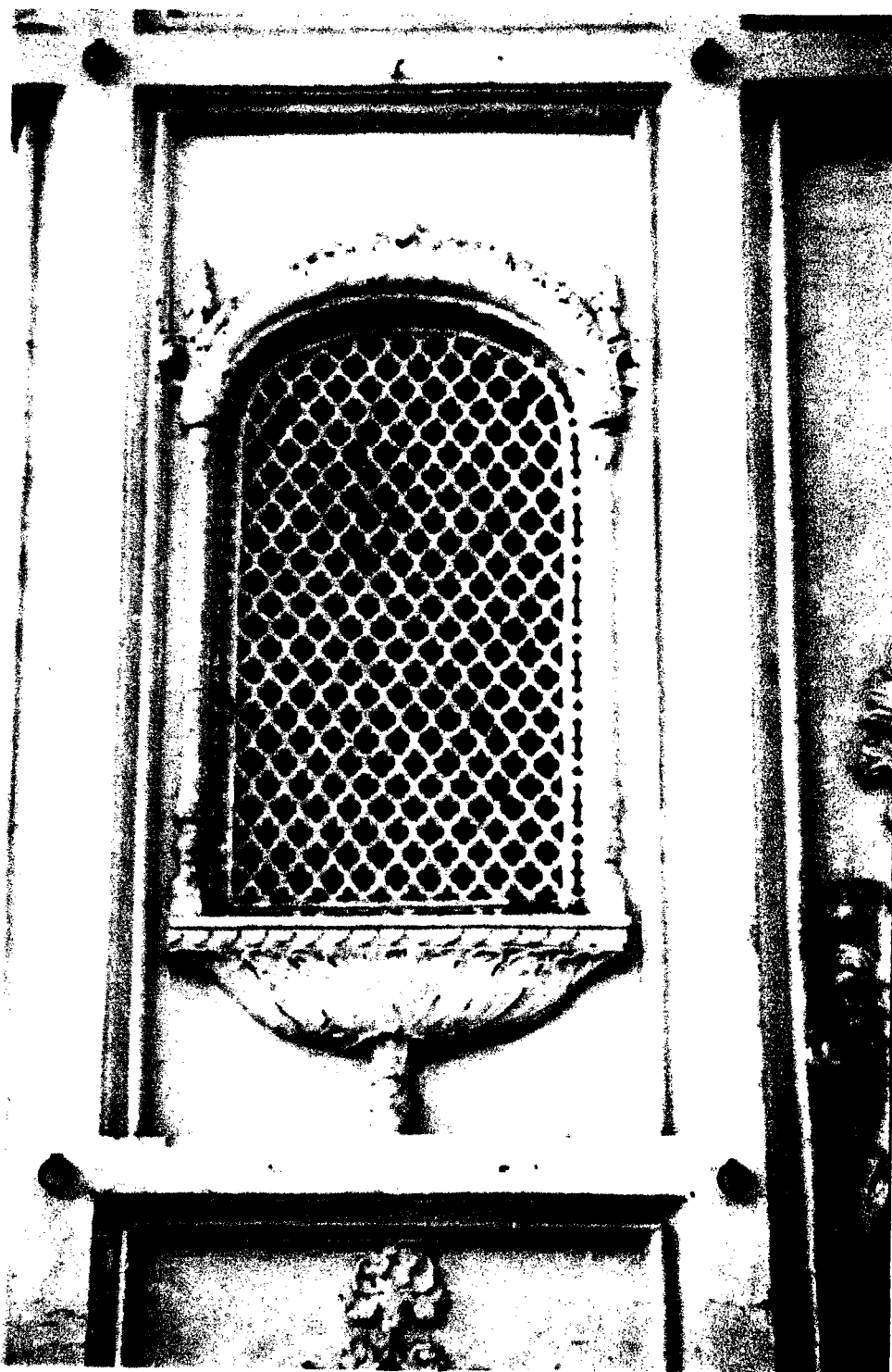
60. West ground level engaged bastion of the Great Imambarah,
photograph, March 2002



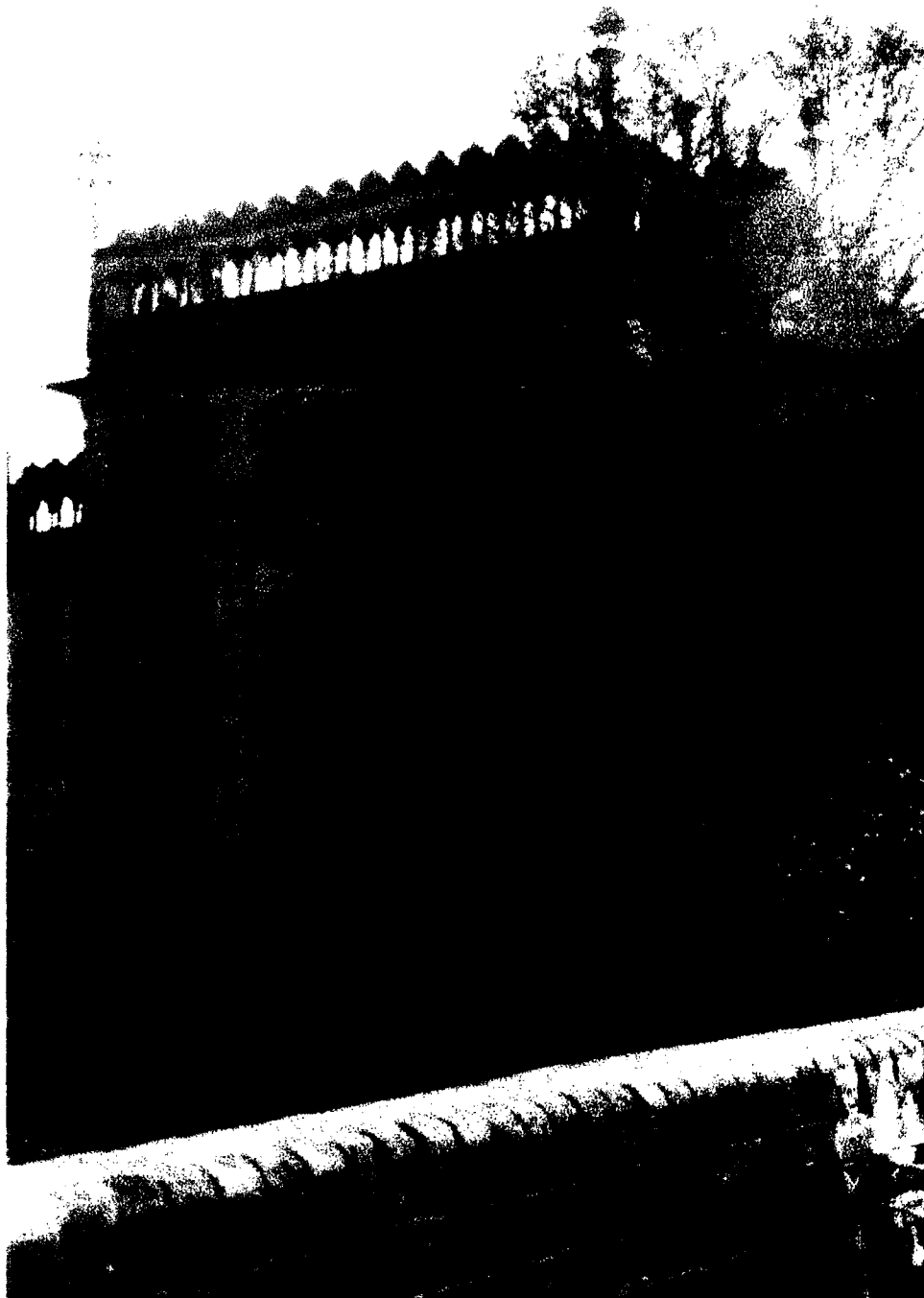
61. Detail of exterior foliated double-cusped arch on north facade of Great Imbarah, photograph, March 2002



62. Detail of exterior muqarna cornice on north facade of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



63. Detail of foliated lattices blind round arch on north facade of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



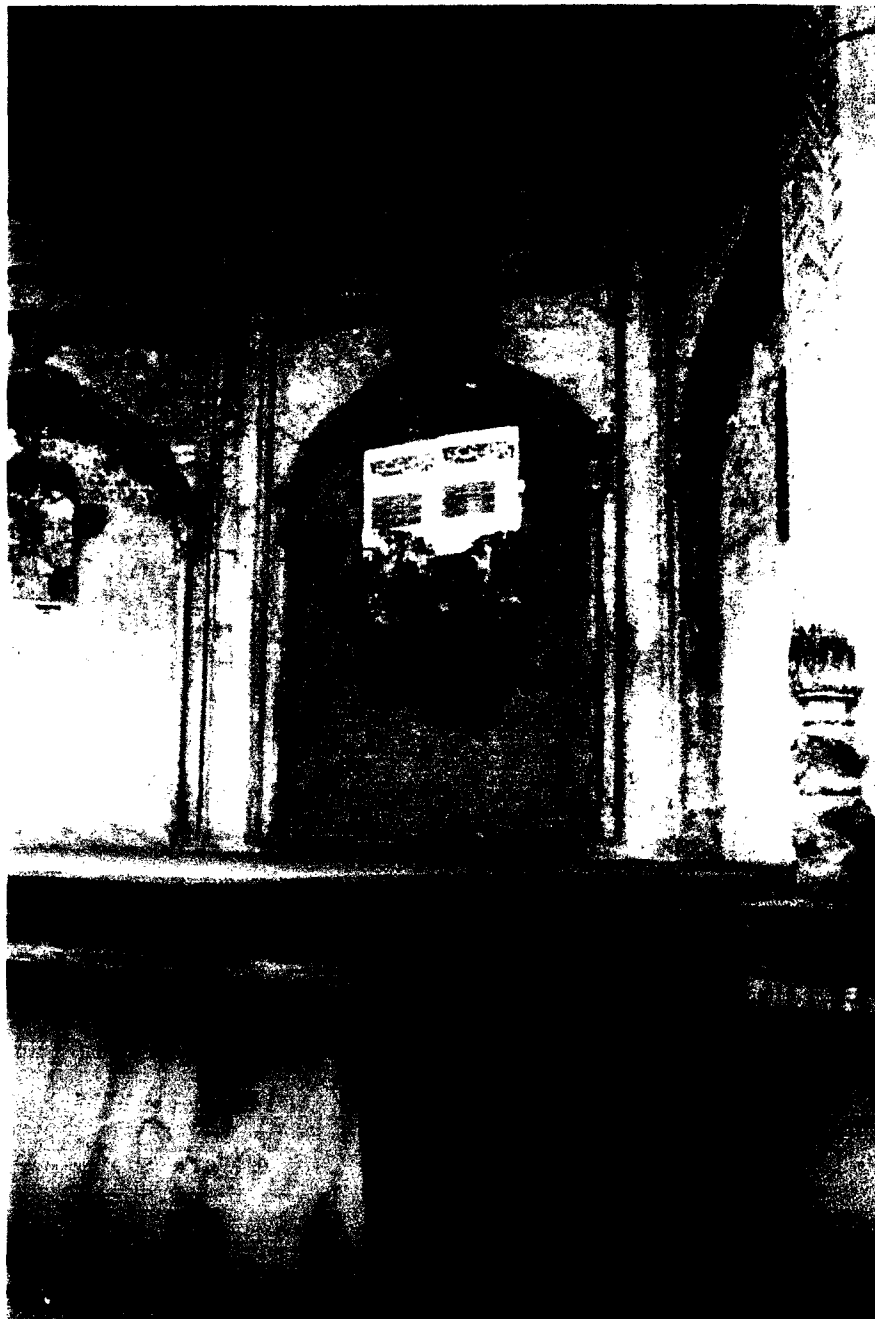
64. West exterior facade of Great Imbarah, photograph, March 2002



65. Northern arched niche of exterior west facade of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



66. Detail of floriated engaged column capital and arch cusp on northern arched niche of exterior west facade of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



67. Central arched niche of exterior west facade of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



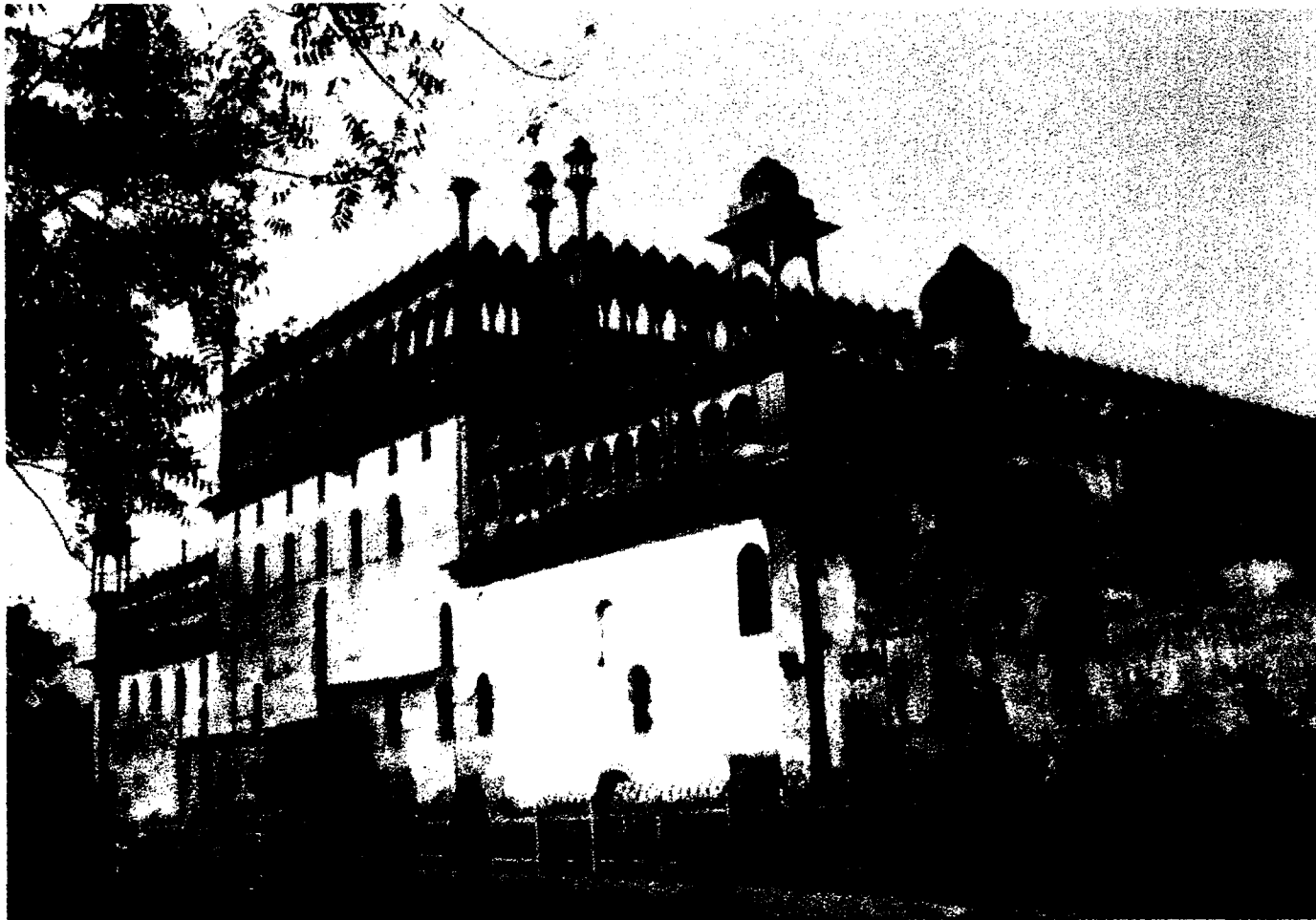
68. Floriated grooved half dome covering central arched niche of exterior west facade of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



69. South exterior facade of Great Imbarah, photograph, March 2002



70. Detail of floriated pointed-cusp arch with muqarna infill and surmounting floriated round arches, photograph, March 2002



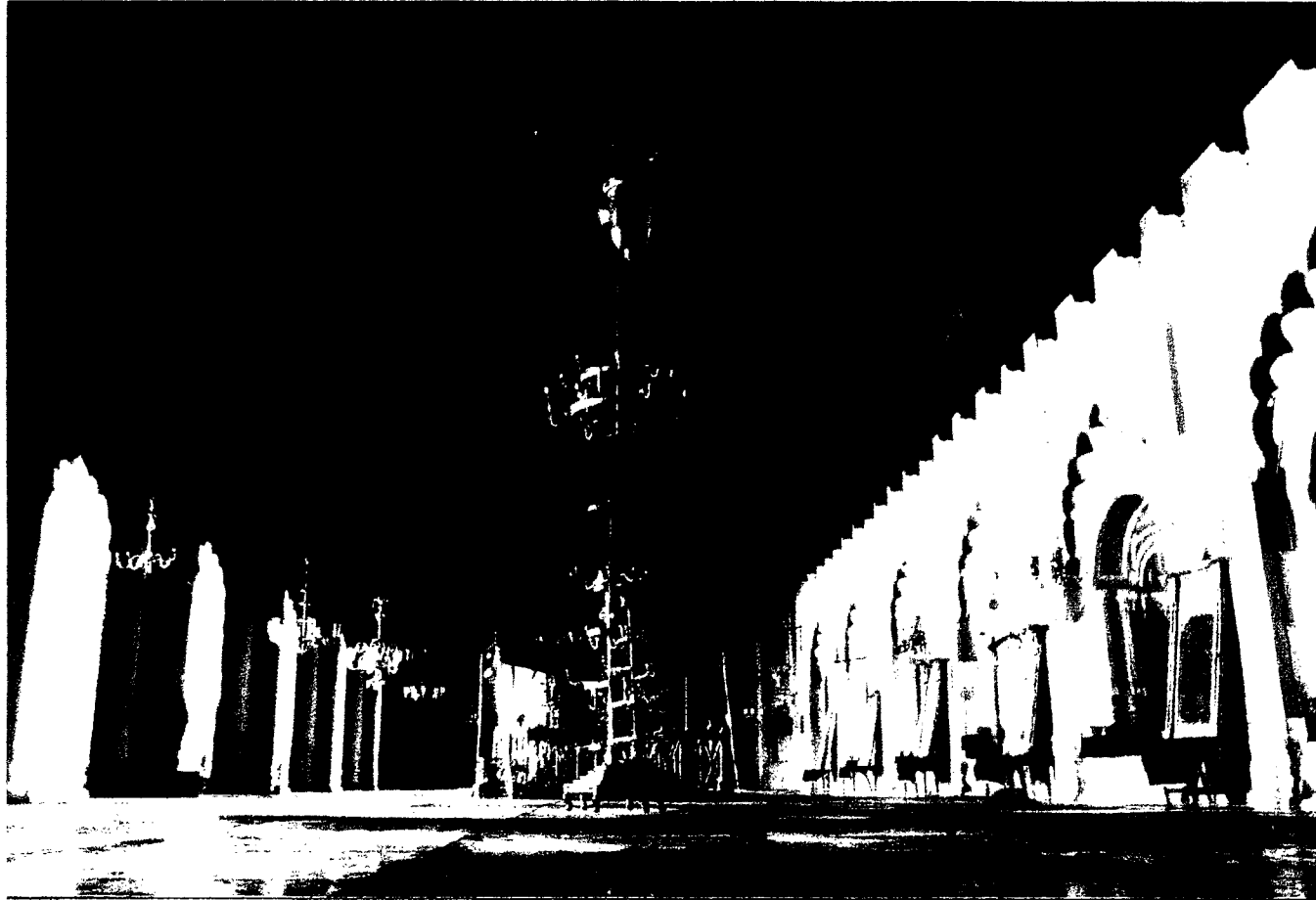
71. East exterior facade of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



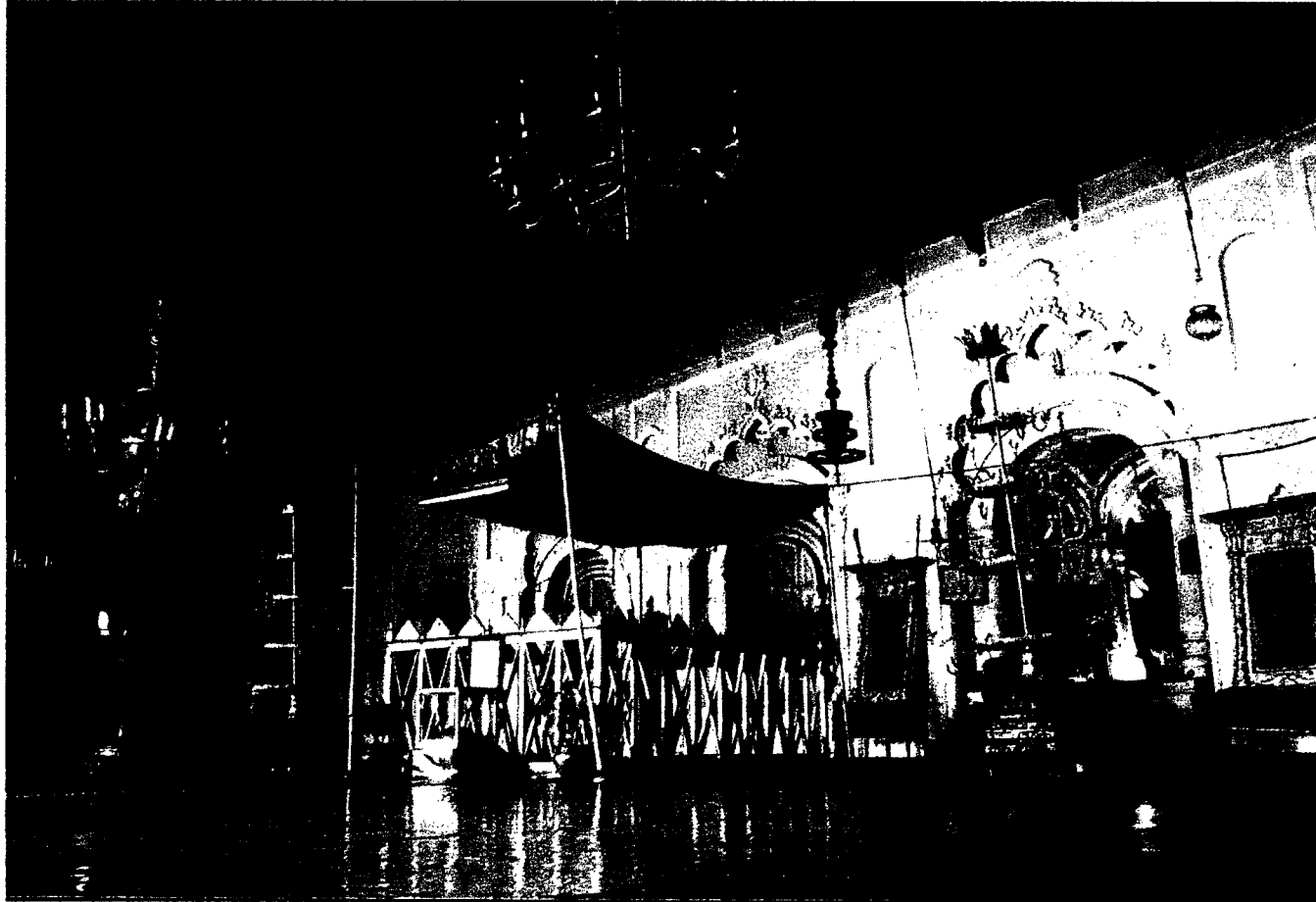
72. Interior of central entry hall of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



73. Interior of west chamber of entry hall of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



74. Central hall of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



75. Grave area of Asaf al-Dawlah in central hall of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



76. Framed document at grave of Asaf al-Dawlah, photograph, March 2002



77. Taziyah in arched niche on south interior facade of central hall of the Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



78. Interior of east chamber of central hall of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



79. Interior of east chamber of central hall of Great Imambarah showing dome, photograph, March 2002



80. Interior of west chamber of central hall of Great Imbarah,
photograph, March 2002



81. Detail of foliated grooved half dome west chamber of central hall of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



82. Detail of foliated acorn corner ornament in west chamber of central hall of Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



83. Detail of coved muqarna cornice of central hall of Great Imbarah, photograph, March 2002



84. East staircase of the Great Imam ḥarah, photograph, March 2002



85. Round arch passageway leading to balcony over central hall of Great Imbarah,
photograph, March 2002



86. South roof terrace over Shah Nashin hall of the Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



87. North roof terrace over Shah Nashin hall of the Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



88. Arched niche on south roof terrace showing curvature and brickwork of dome over the Great Imambarah's east chamber of central hall, photograph, March 2002



89. Western central chamber with bangla vault connecting north and south terraces,
photograph, March 2002



90. Roof passageways surrounding vaults of the Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



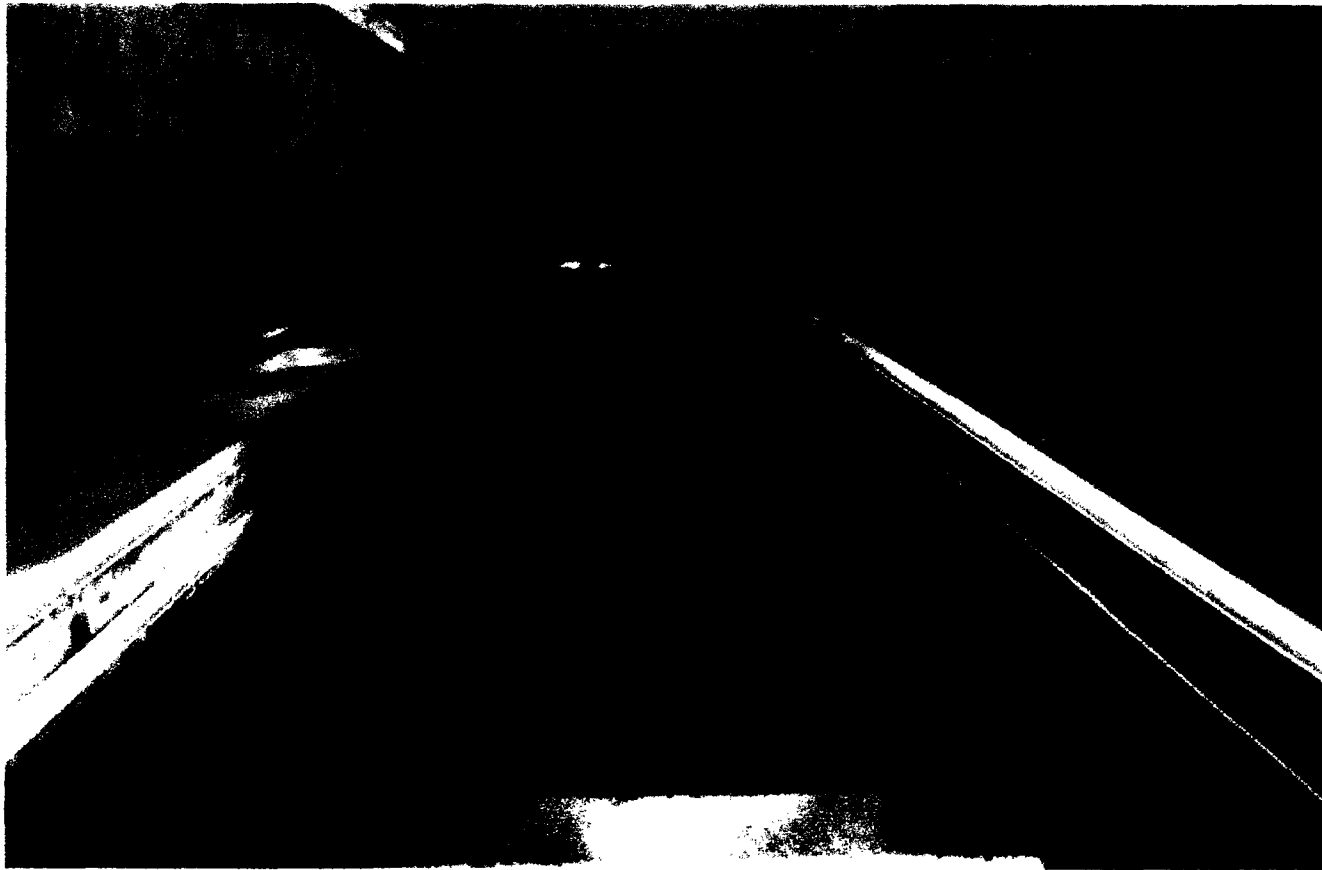
91. Passageway separating central and west chamber hall vaults, photograph, March 2002



92. Arched niche showing exterior curvature of central hall bangla vault of the Great Imam barah, photograph, March 2002



93. West facade of Baoli Palace gate an arcade connecting to Great Imambarah, photograph, March 2002



94. Baoli Palace stepwell and surrounding arcade facing east, photograph, March 2002



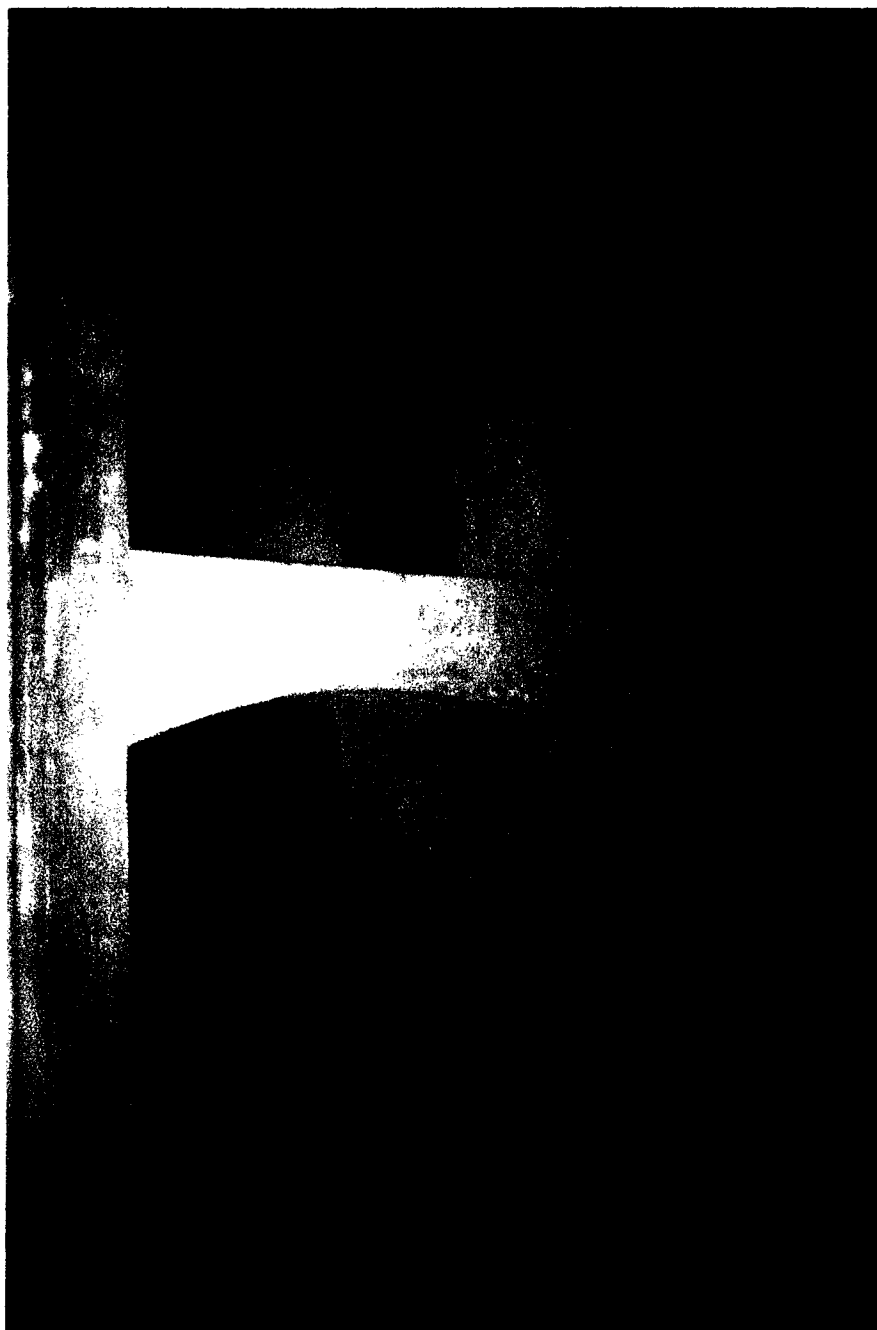
95. Baoli Palace stepwell and surrounding arcade, photograph, March 2002



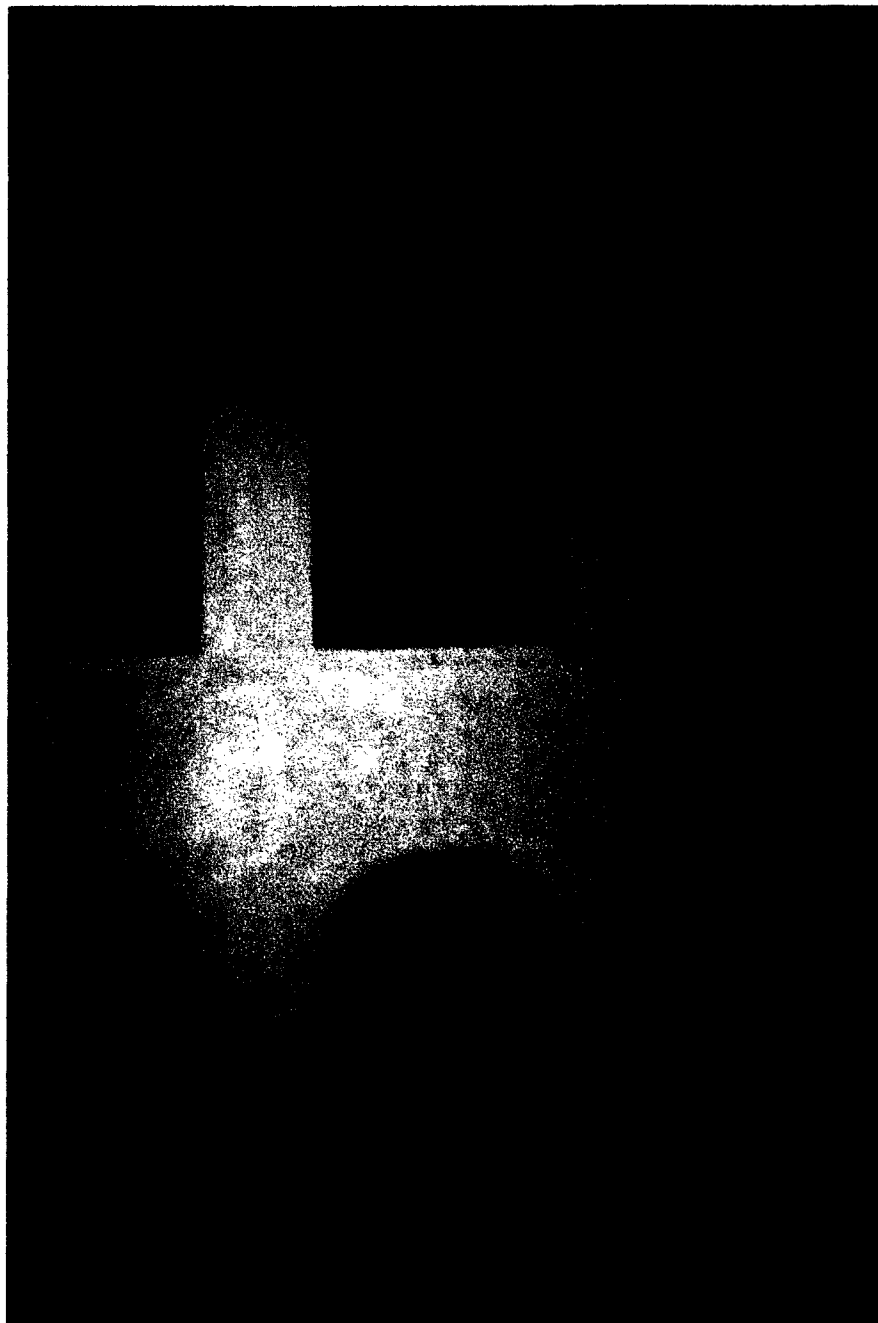
96. East facade of Baoli Palace gate, photograph, March 2002



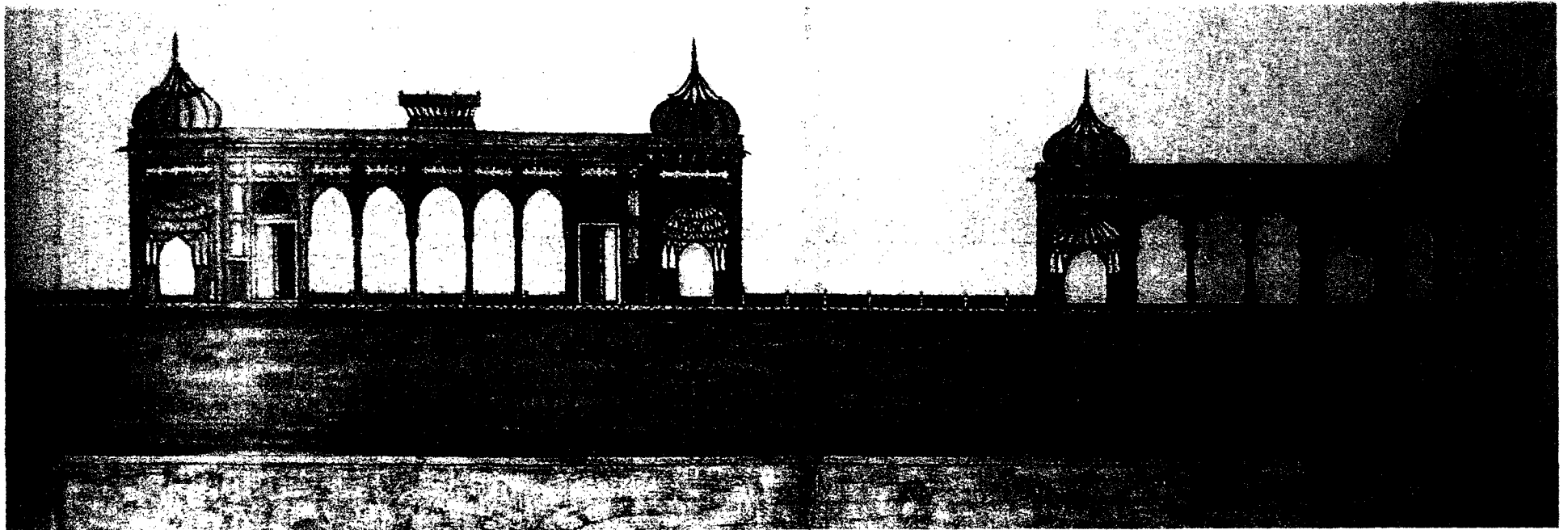
97. Baoli Palace octagonal well facing west, photograph, March 2002



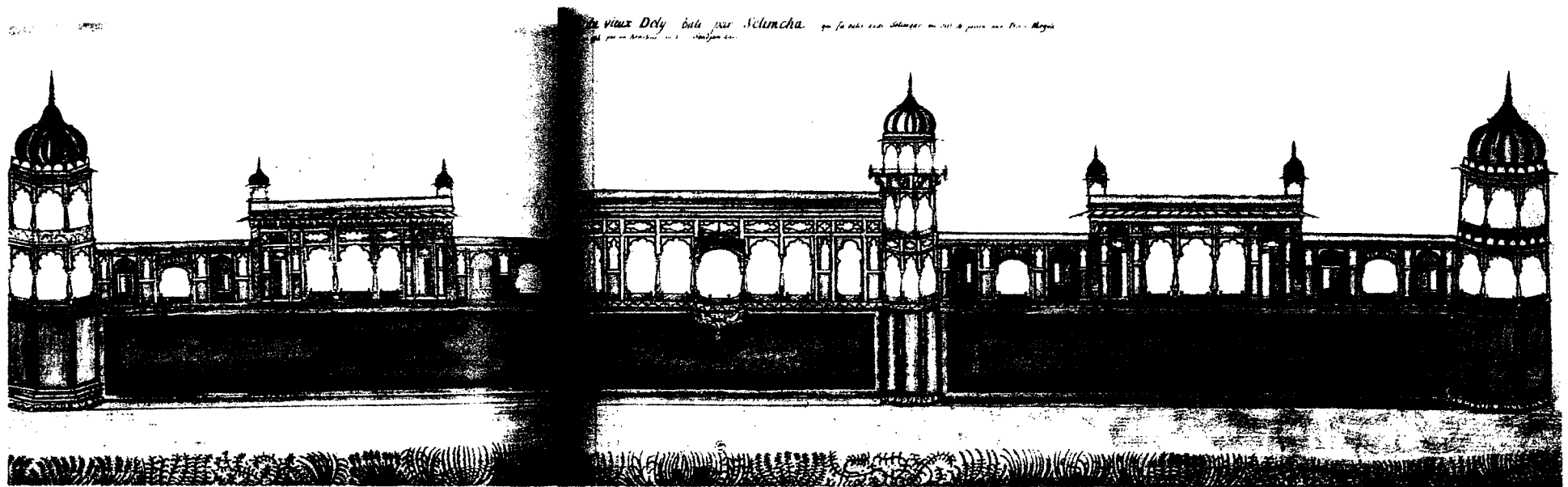
98. Passageway with Italianate arches surrounding octagonal well of Baoli Palace,
photograph, March 2002



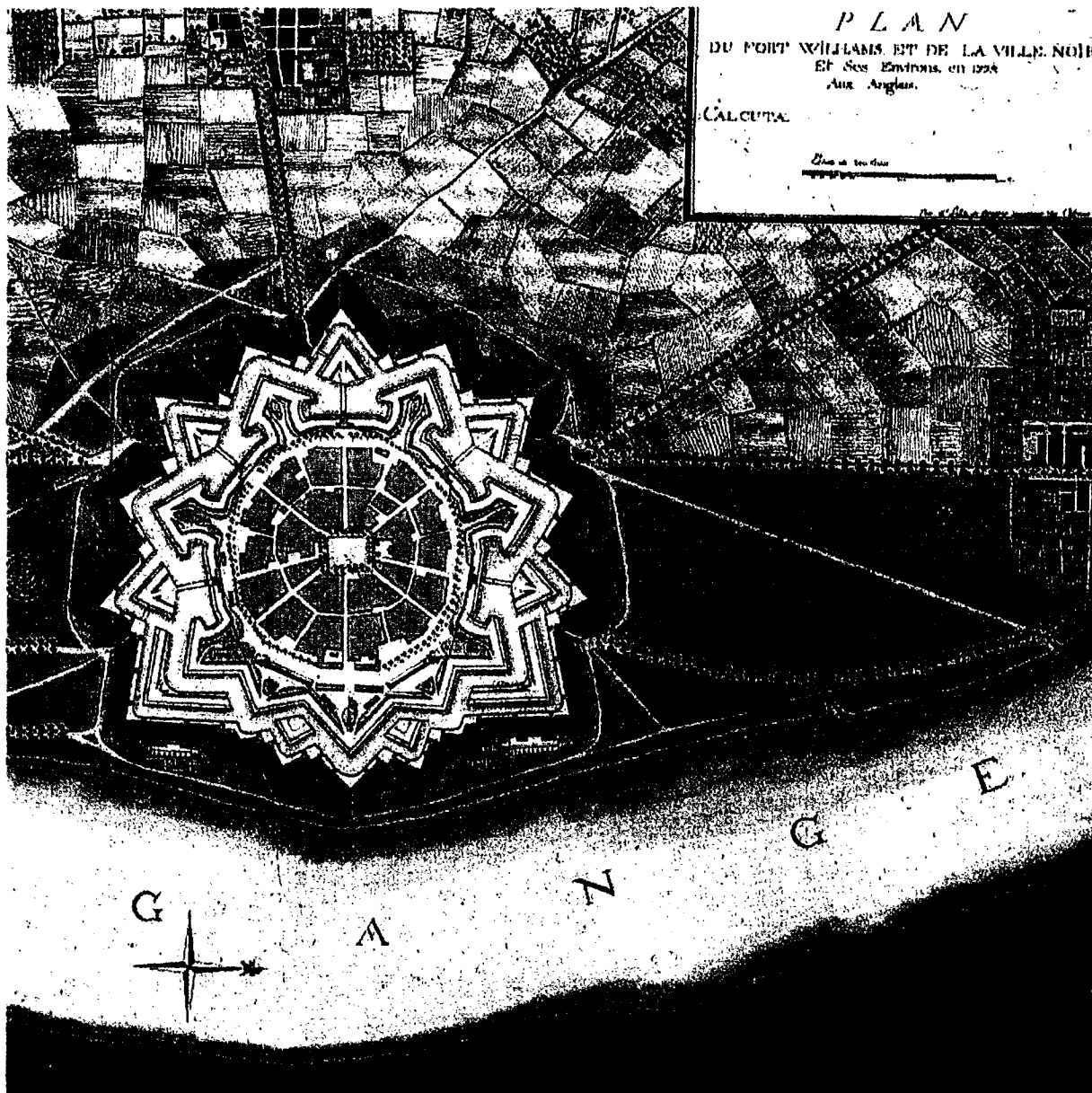
99. Recessed two-level chambers surrounding octagonal well of Baoli Palace, photograph, March 2002



100. Residence of Shuja al-Dawlah at Faizabad, watercolour on paper, by an architect working for Shuja al-Dawlah, 1774, Gentil album in Gentil collection in Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, BN Od 63/24



101. Palace built in Old Delhi by Salim Shah, watercolour on paper, by an architect working for Shuja al-Dawlah, 1774, Gentil album in Gentil collection in Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, BN Od 63/2



102. Detail of plan of Fort William and the Black Town and its surroundings in 1779, watercolour on paper, by Lafitte de Brassier, 1779, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (CAOM), Archives de France, Aix-en-Provence, DFC 31 A 361

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103. Muharram ceremony, 1772, at Faizabad. Procession on the last day, watercolour on paper, by various Indian artists including Nevasi Lal and Mohan Singh, 1772, in Gentil Album, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Crown Copyright), 89 (30).

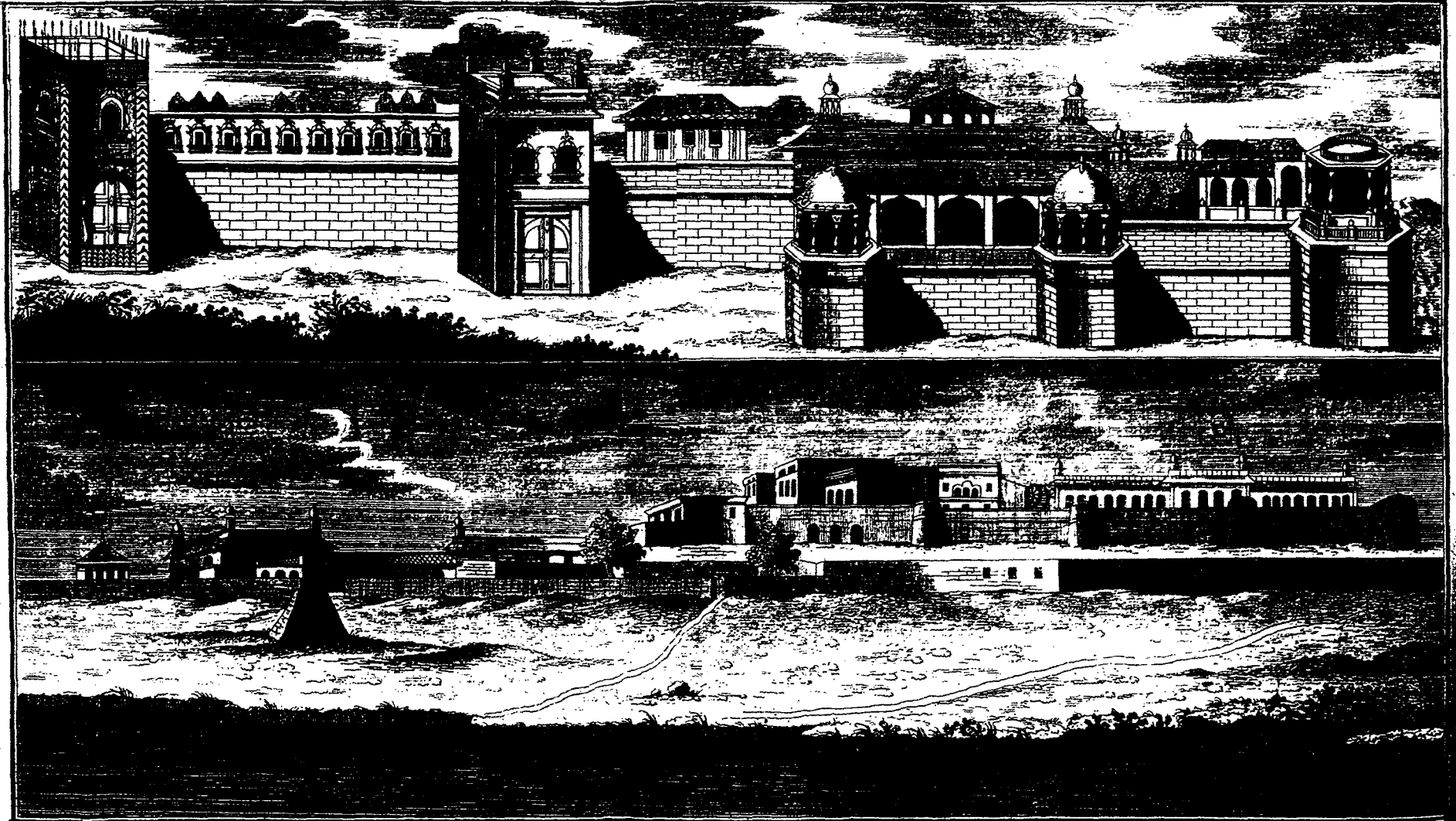
Mahometisme



— gravé en 1792.

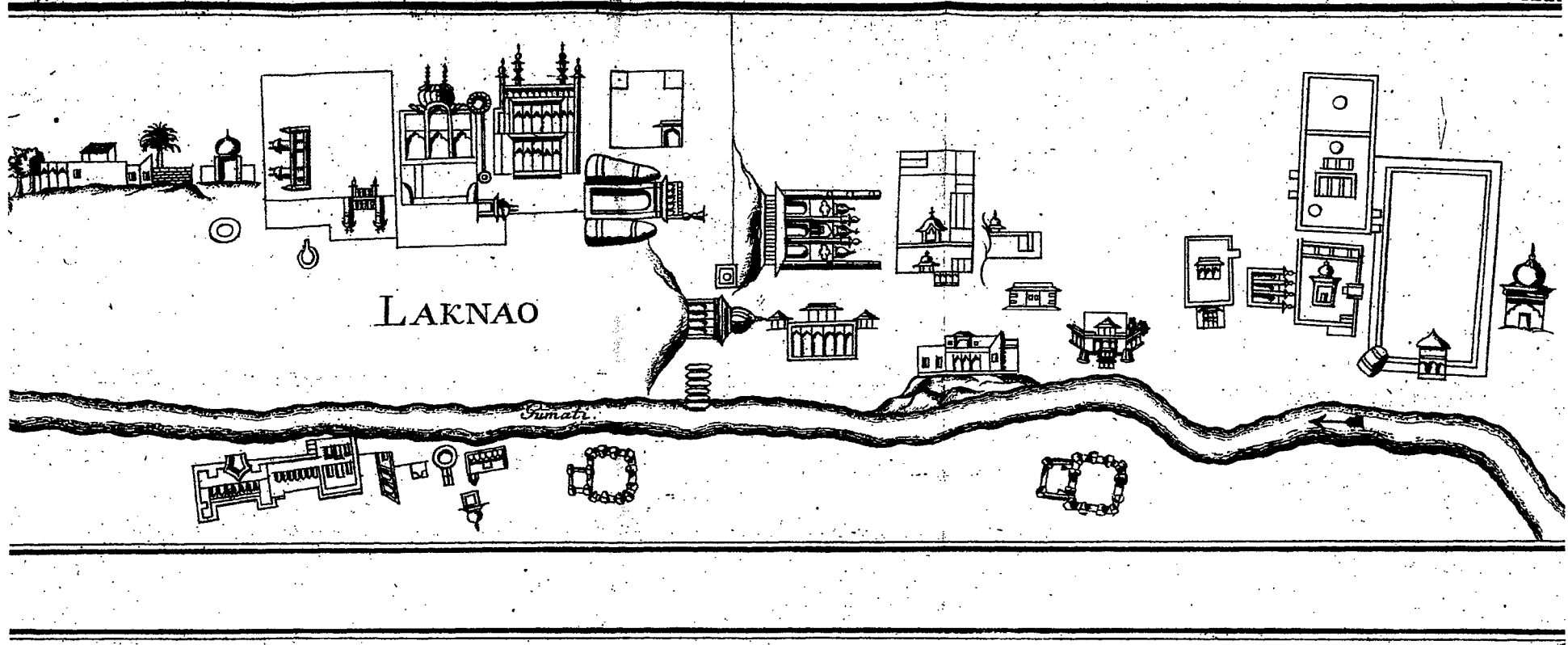
Palatium Banqlae, seu Fjabad, recens conditum, australi Gagrae ripae adsitum.

XVI.

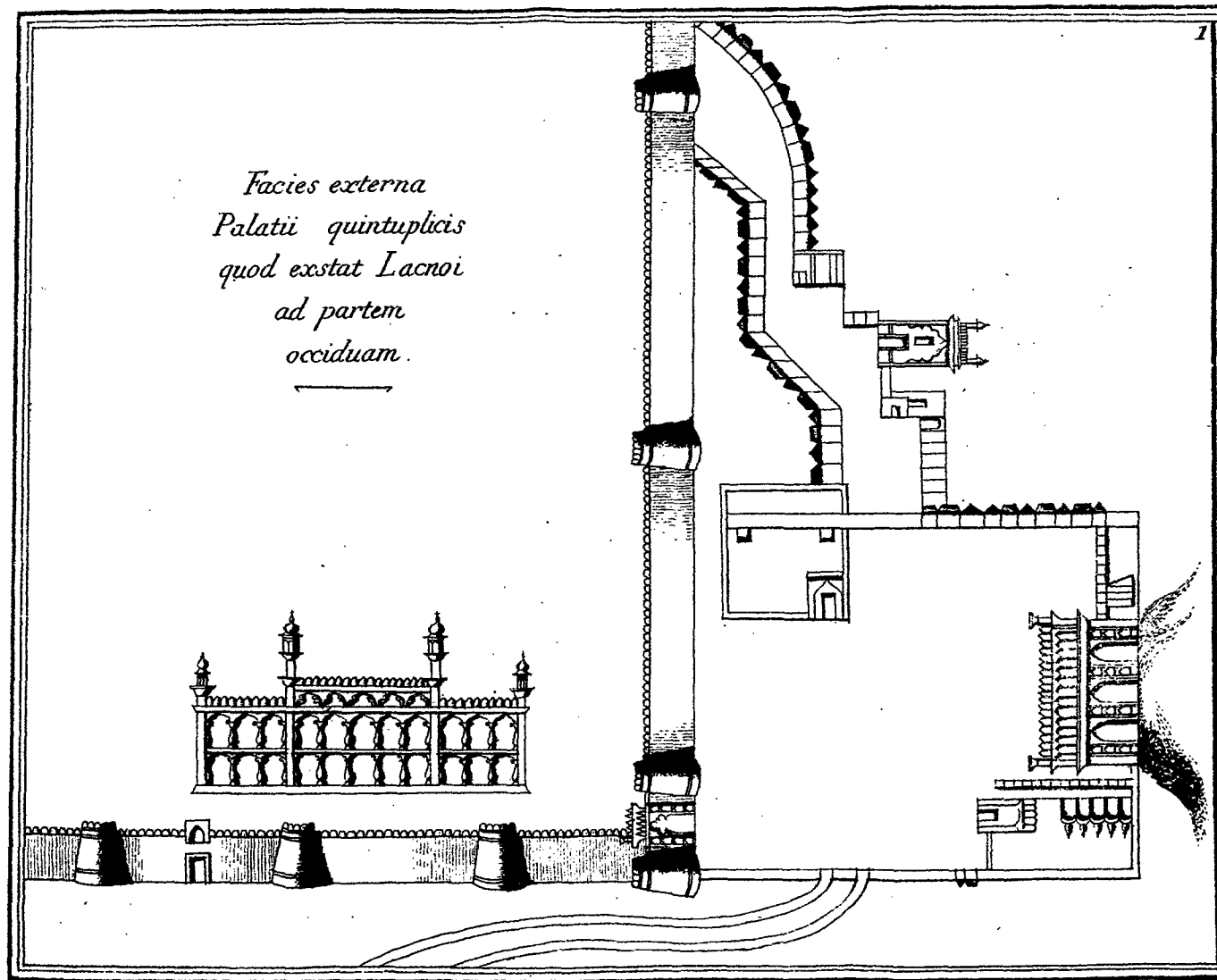


Palatium, quod Laknoi visitur, ripae Gumatis adsitum.

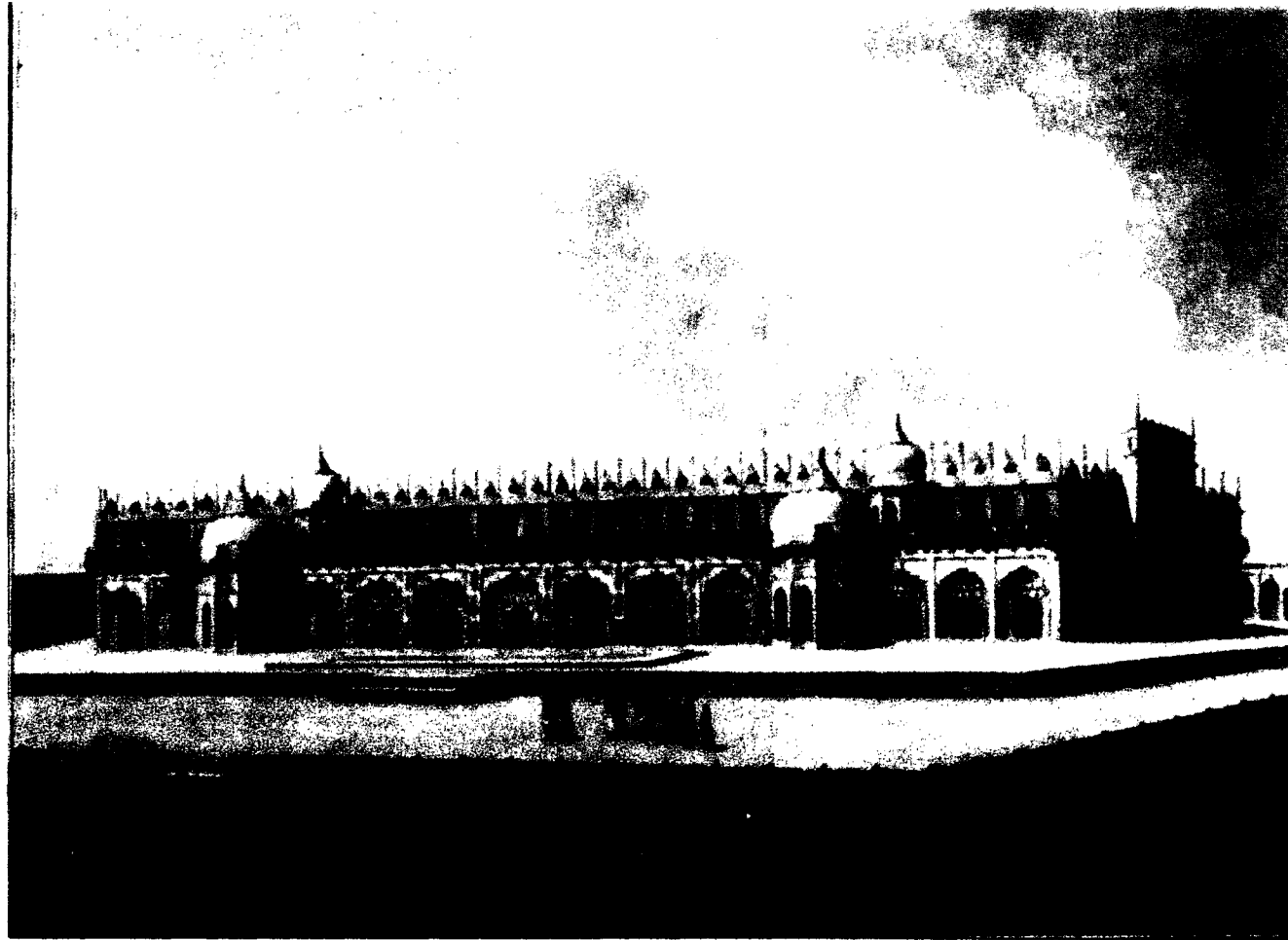
104. Reproduction of Palatium, quod Laknoi visitur, ripae Gumatis adsitum (Panj Mahal Palace complex at Lucknow), woodcut print, by Joseph Tieffenthaler, 1786, in Tieffenthaler, Plate XVI-2, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, T 30613. OIOC



105. Reproduction of Palatium, quod Laknoi visitur, ripae Gumatis adsitum (Elevation of Panj Mahal Palace complex), woodcut print, by Joseph Tieffenthaler, 1786, in Tieffenthaler, Plate XXXV-1, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, T 30613. OIOC



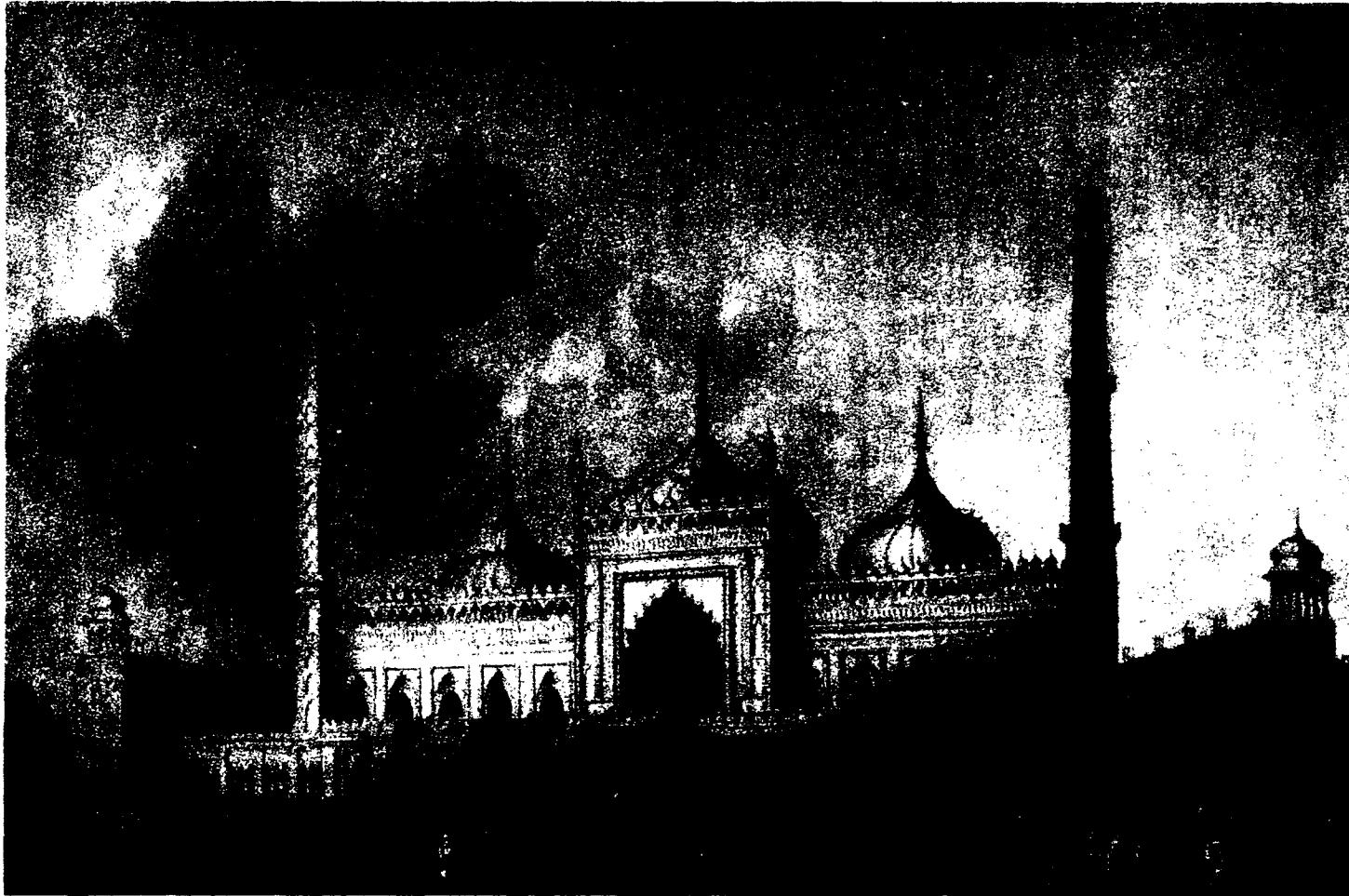
106. Reproduction of *Facies externa Palatii quintuplicis quod existat Lacnoi as partem occidentuam* (Plan of Panj Mahal Palace), woodcut print, by Joseph Tieffenthaler, 1786, in Tieffenthaler, XV-1, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, T 30613. OIOC



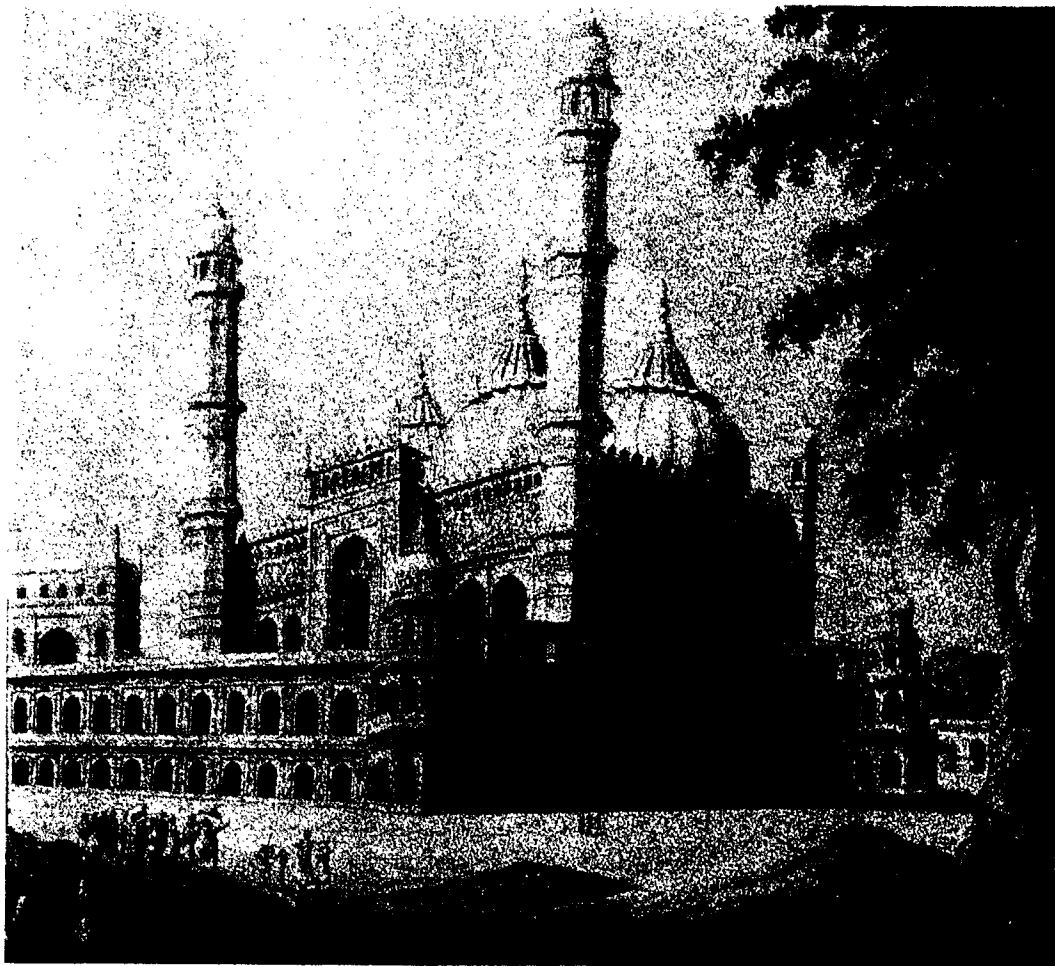
107. The Great Imambarah of Asaf al-Dawlah, Lucknow, watercolour on paper, anonymous, 1790-1800, Hyde Collection in Prints and Drawings, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or. 3215



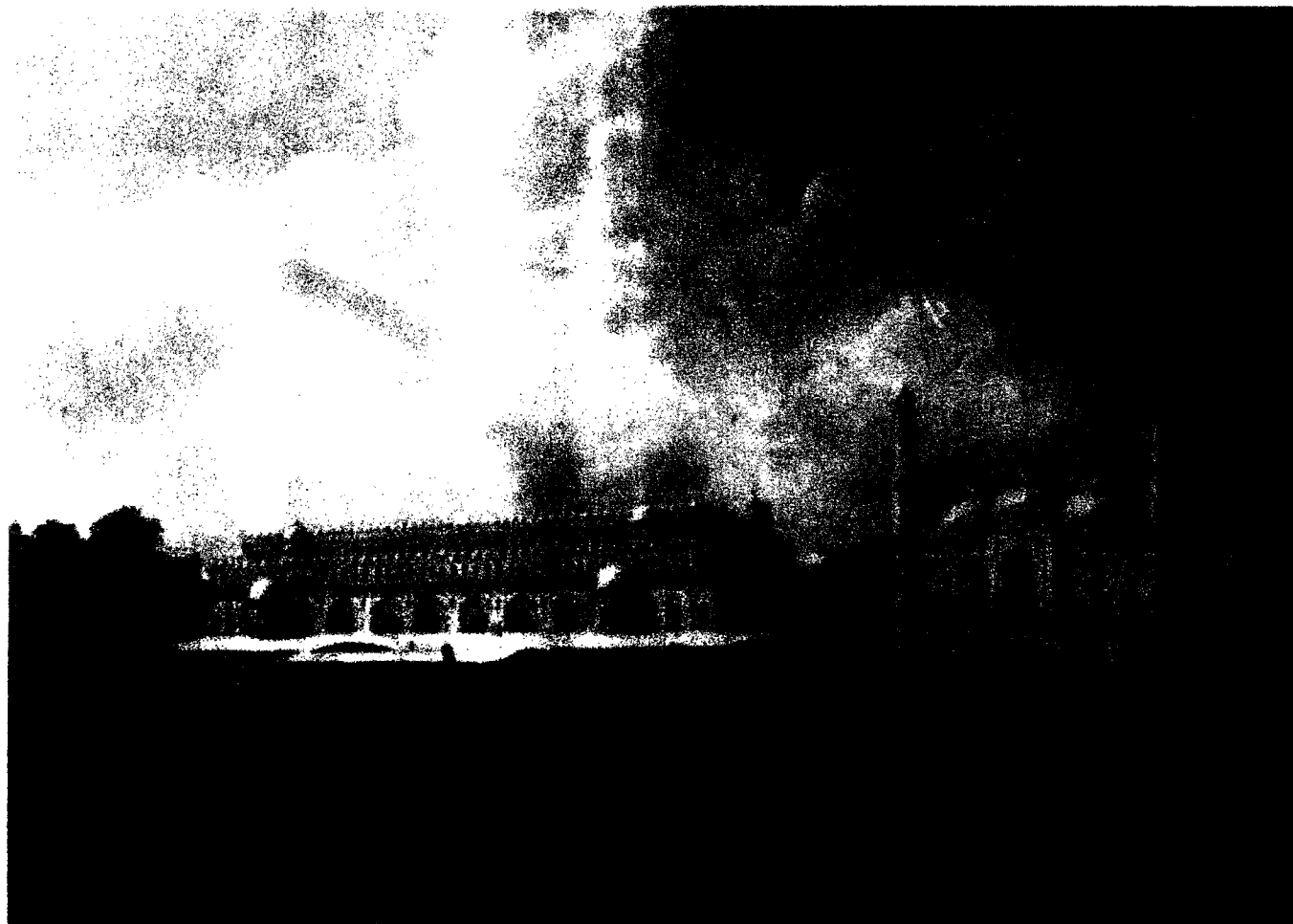
108. Nawwab's Palace and Machi Bhavan, woodcut print, 1784, in Hodges, Copyright: Cambridge University Library



109. 'Mosque at Lucknow' after plate 7 from Henry Salt's (1780-1827) 'Twenty Four Views in St. Helena, the Cape, India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt', published by William Miller (London: 1809), coloured aquatint, by John Hill, early 19th century, Prints and Drawings, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, X123(7)



110. Asaf al-Dawlah's masjid, watercolour on paper, anonymous, c. 1800, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Crown Copyright)



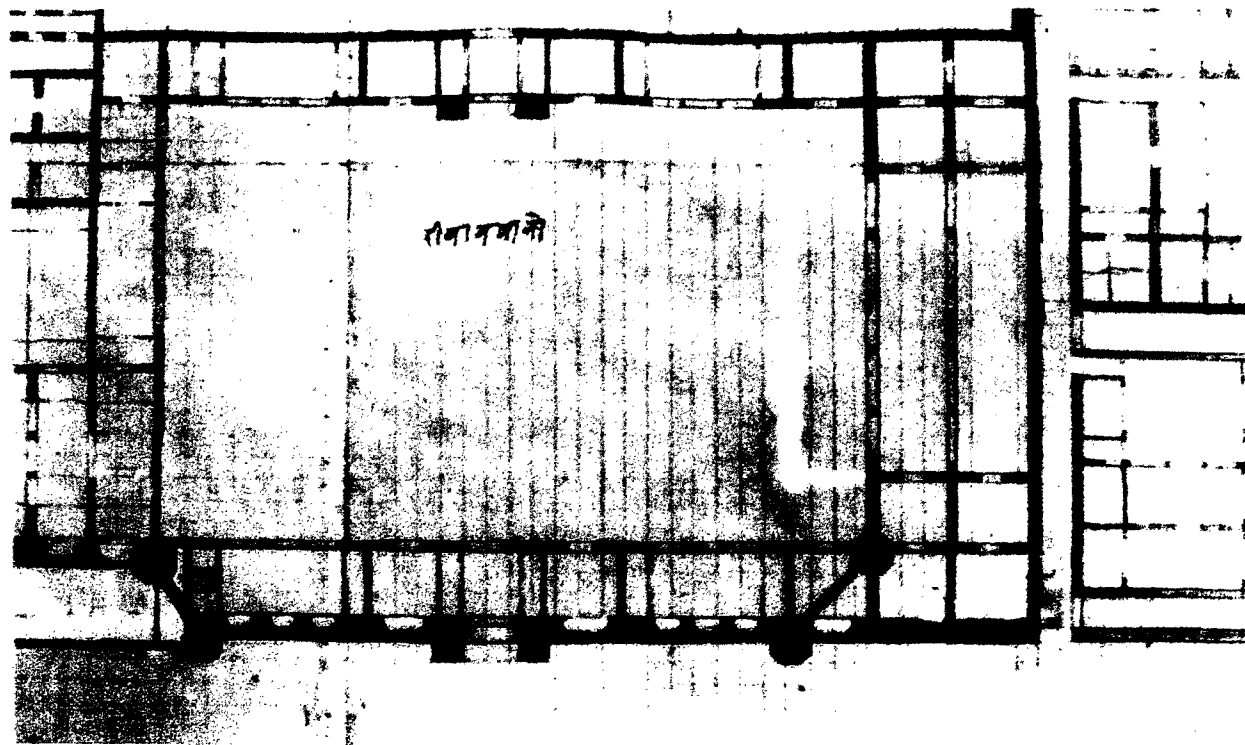
111. The Imambarah building itself, with the mosque to the right, watercolour on paper, Sita Ram, 1814-1815, Hastings Albums in Prints and Drawings, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.4757)



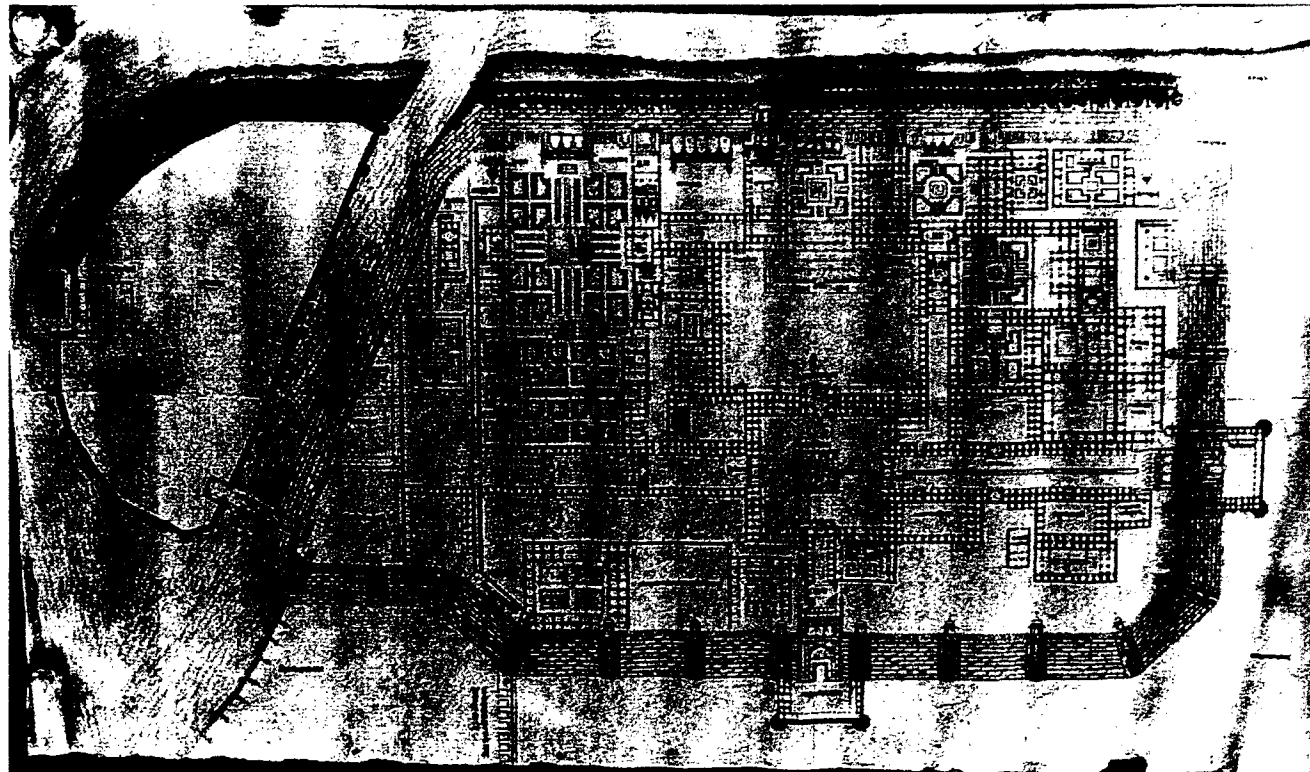
112. The simple grave of Asaf al-Dawlah under a canopy inside the Imambarah, watercolour on paper, Sita Ram, 1814-1815, Hastings Albums in Prints and Drawings, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.4758



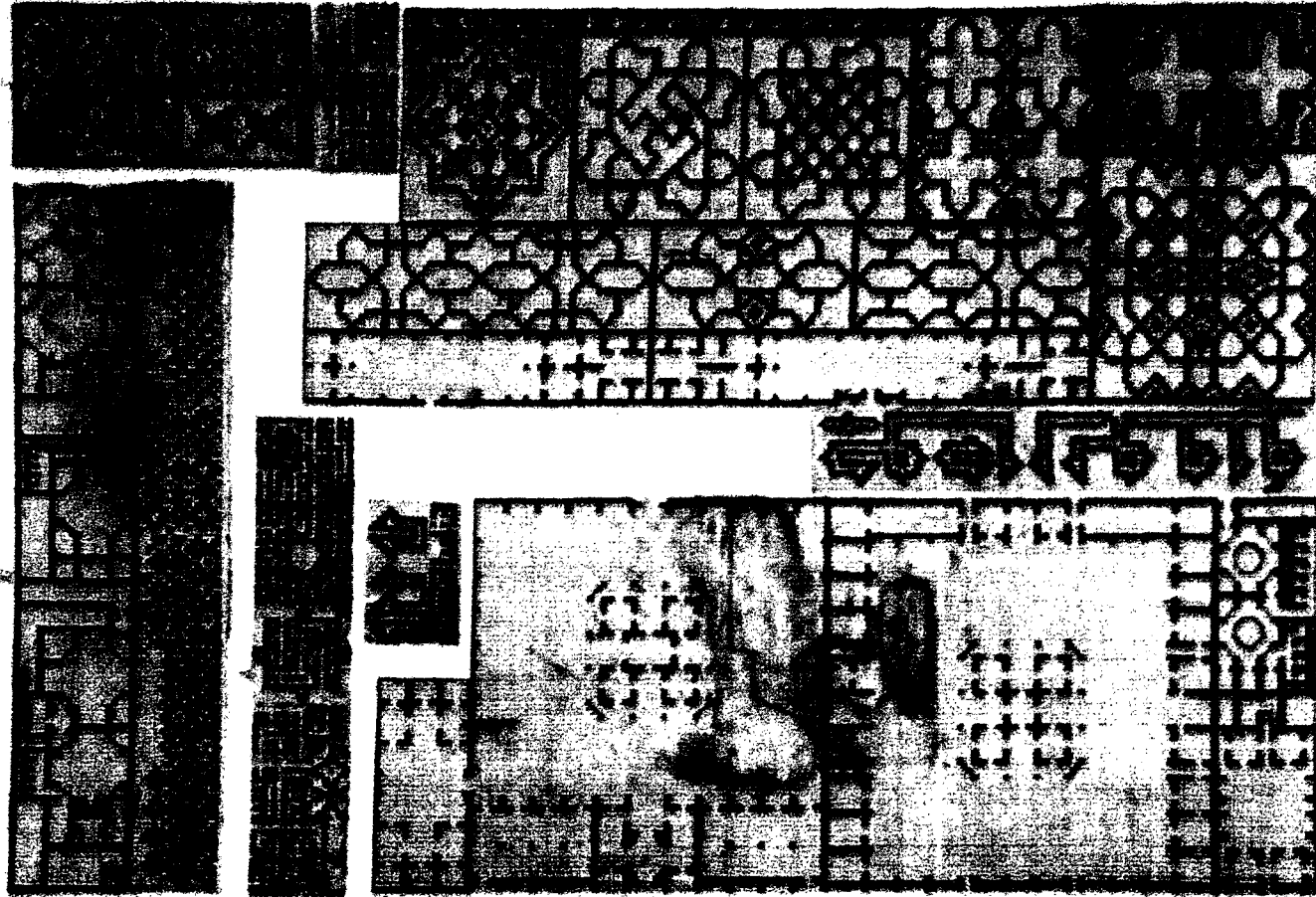
113. Detail of 'Laying out a Garden' using grid tablet in the Baburnama, by Bishan Das, V&A Picture Library, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London



114. Photograph of detail from the c. 18th C plan of a Rajput palace in City Palace Museum, Jaipur, Begley and Desai, in Begley and Desai, *The Illumined Tomb*, Fig. 10.



115. Photograph of 18th century watercolour plan of the Red Fort of Delhi in devanagari script (Jaipur Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Cat. no. 122), 1985, E. Koch, in Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture*, Fig. 129.



116. Scroll fragments belonging to Qajar royal architect Mirza Akbar, ink on paper, Mirza Akbar, late 18th or 19th C., V & A Asian Section, MS. no. 25, courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London



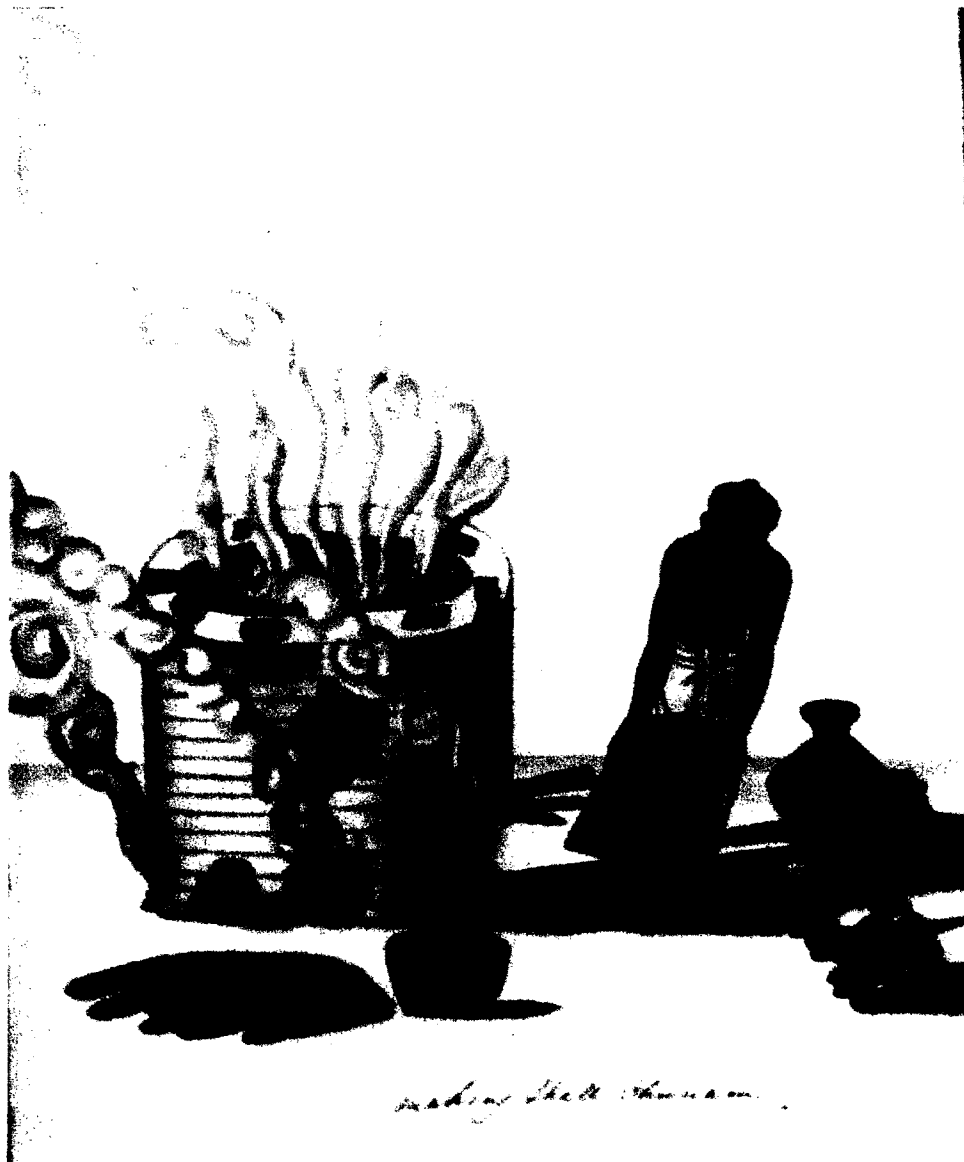
117. Lime Burner and lime kiln, Anonymous, 1825, Skinner album (Tashrih al-Aqvam), courtesy of the British Museum, London, BM Add. 27255, sketch no. 91 (p. 263)



118. Brick kiln, Anonymous, 1825, Skinner album (Tashrih al-Aqvam), courtesy of the British Museum, London, BM Add. 27255, sketch no. 55 (p. 254)



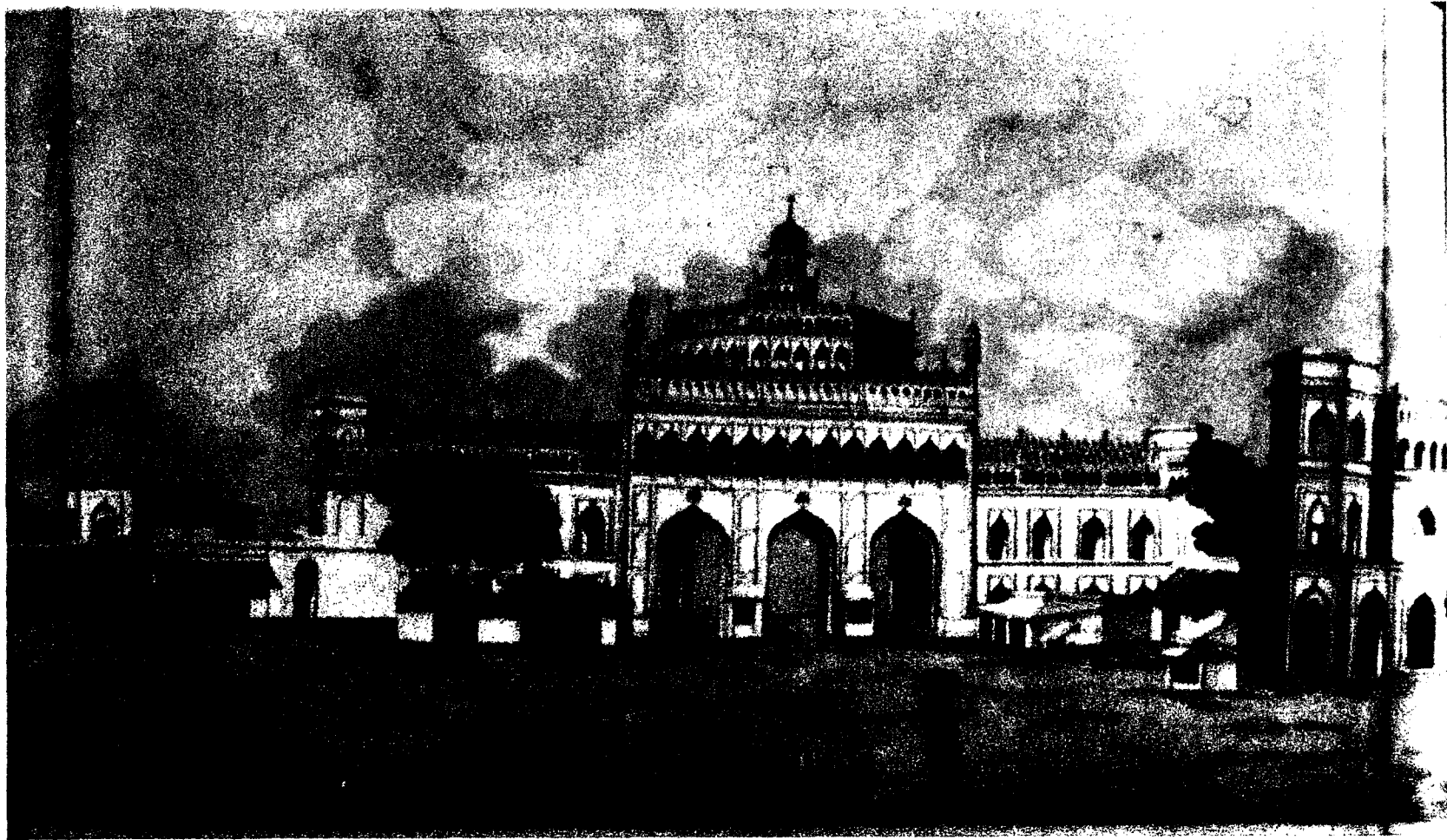
119. Carpenter at work, Anonymous, 1825, Skinner album (Tashrih al-Aqvam), courtesy of the British Museum, London, BM Add. 27255, sketch no. 69 (p. 220)



120. Making of lime (chunam) from shells, watercolour on paper, anonymous, 1814-1815, Wellesley Albums in Prints and Drawings, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.1109 (Add.OR.1098 12)



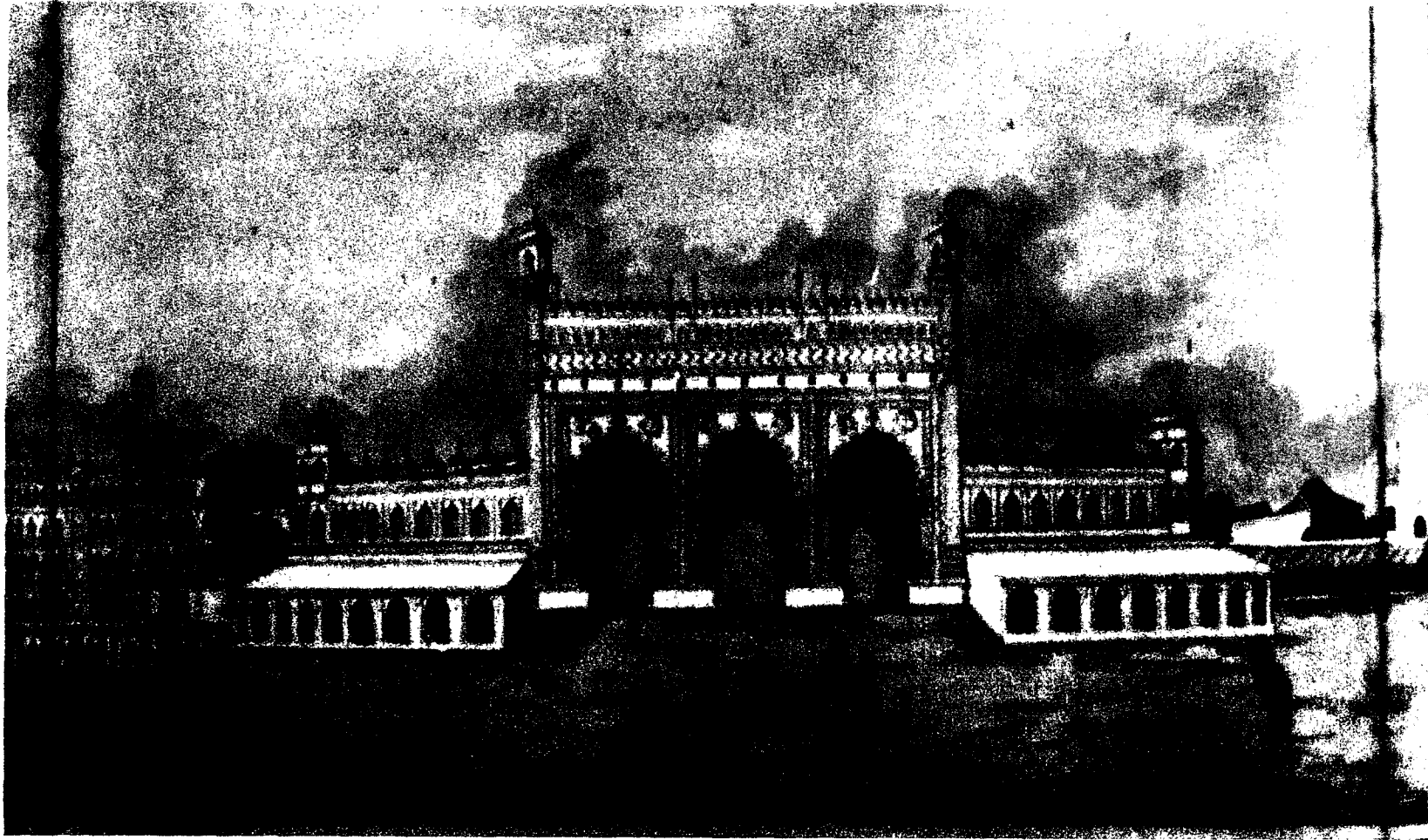
121. Panorama showing the main buildings of Lucknow with a procession of Muhammad Ali Shah (King of Awadh 1837-42) passing along the road, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c.1848, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.739



122. Panorama detail – West facade of Rumi Darvazah, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c.1848, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.739



123. Panorama detail – East facade of Rumi Darvazah, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c.1848, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.739



124. Panorama detail – North facade of first Imambarah gateway-arcade, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c.1848, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.739



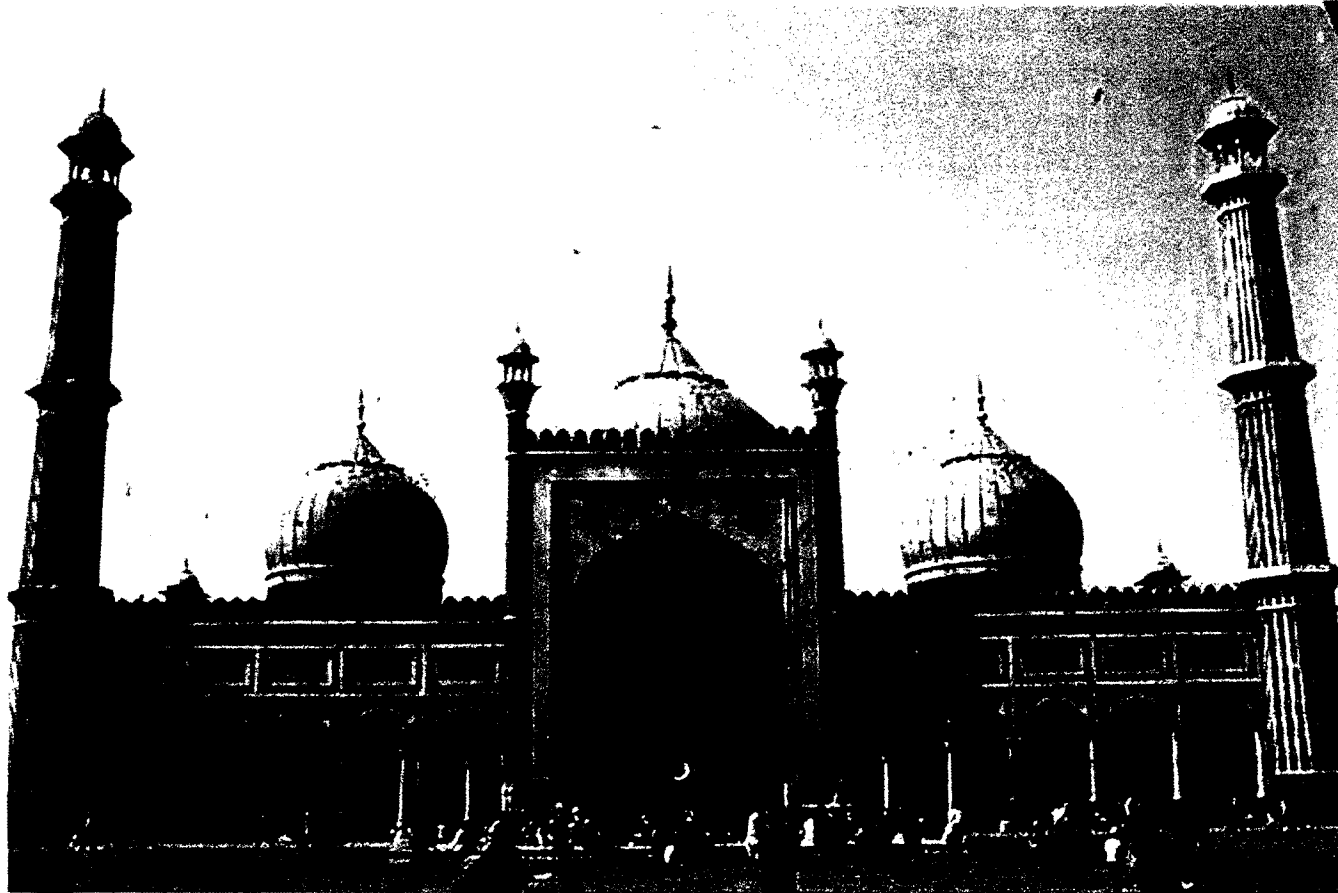
125. Panorama detail – South facade of second Imambarah gateway-arcade, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c.1848, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.739



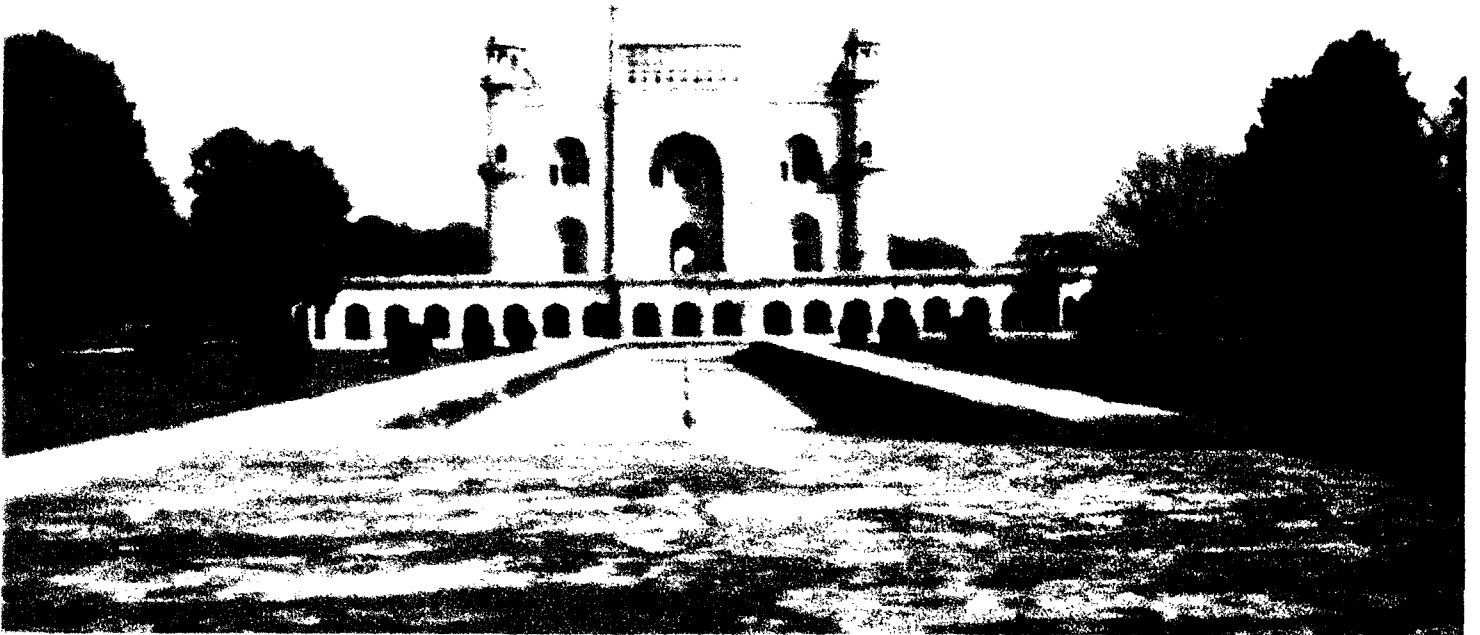
126. Panorama detail – East facade of congregational masjid, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c.1848, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.739



127. Panorama detail – North facade of Great Imambarah, watercolour and pencil on paper, anonymous, c.1848, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Add.Or.739



128. Shahjahanabad congregational *masjid* (1650-56), photograph, March 2002



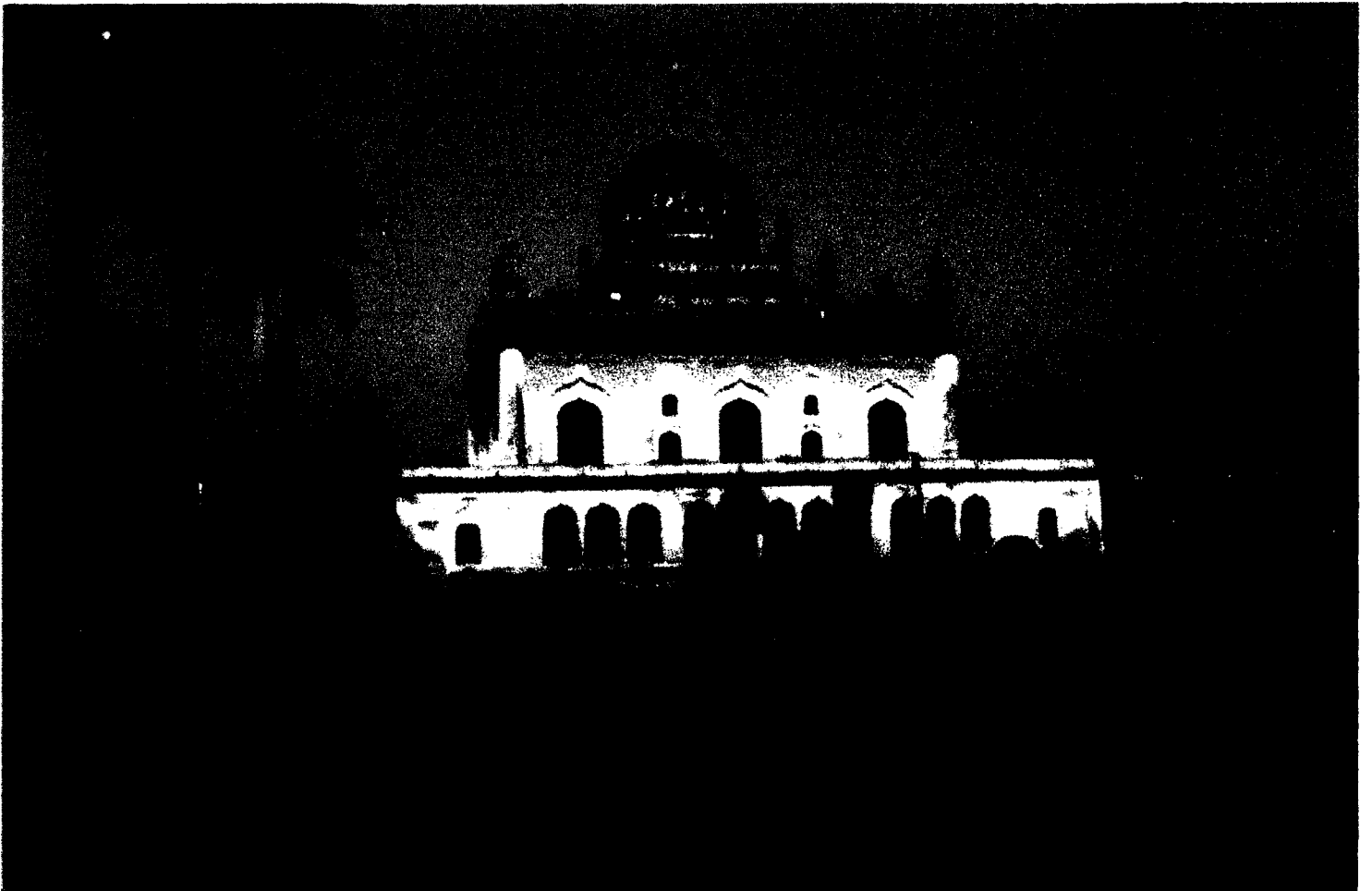
129. Tomb of Safdar Jang in suburban Shahjahanbad (1753-54),
photograph, March 2002



130. Bangla vaulted podium chamber in tomb of Safdar Jang,
photograph, March 2002



131. Detail of bricks in bangla vaulted podium chamber in tomb of Safdar Jang, photograph, March 2002



132. Gulab Bari, tomb of Shuja al-Dawlah in Faizabad (c. 1791), photograph, March 2002



133. Imambarah at Gulab Bari, tomb of Shuja al-Dawlah in Faizabad (c. 1791), photograph, March 2002

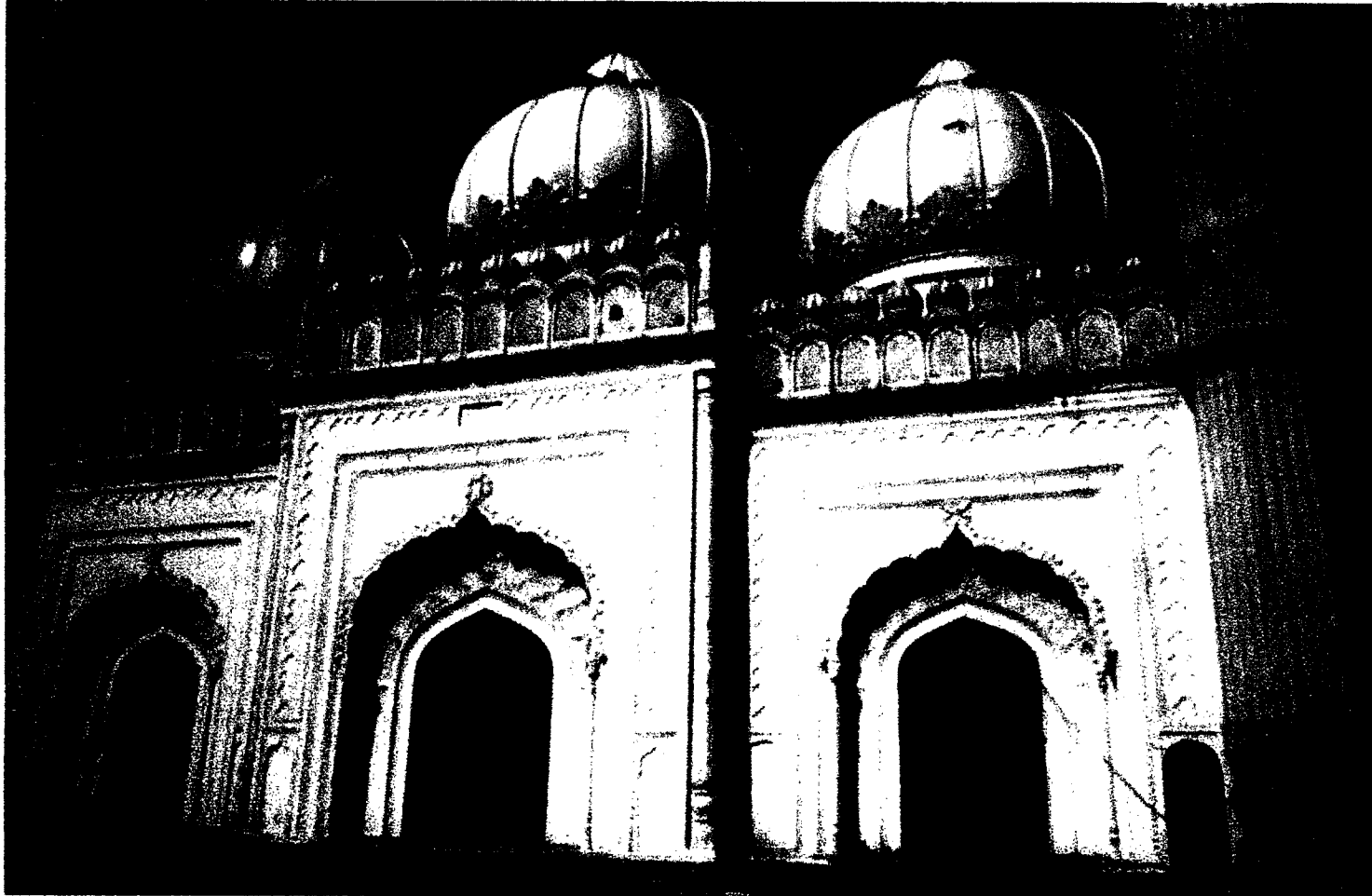
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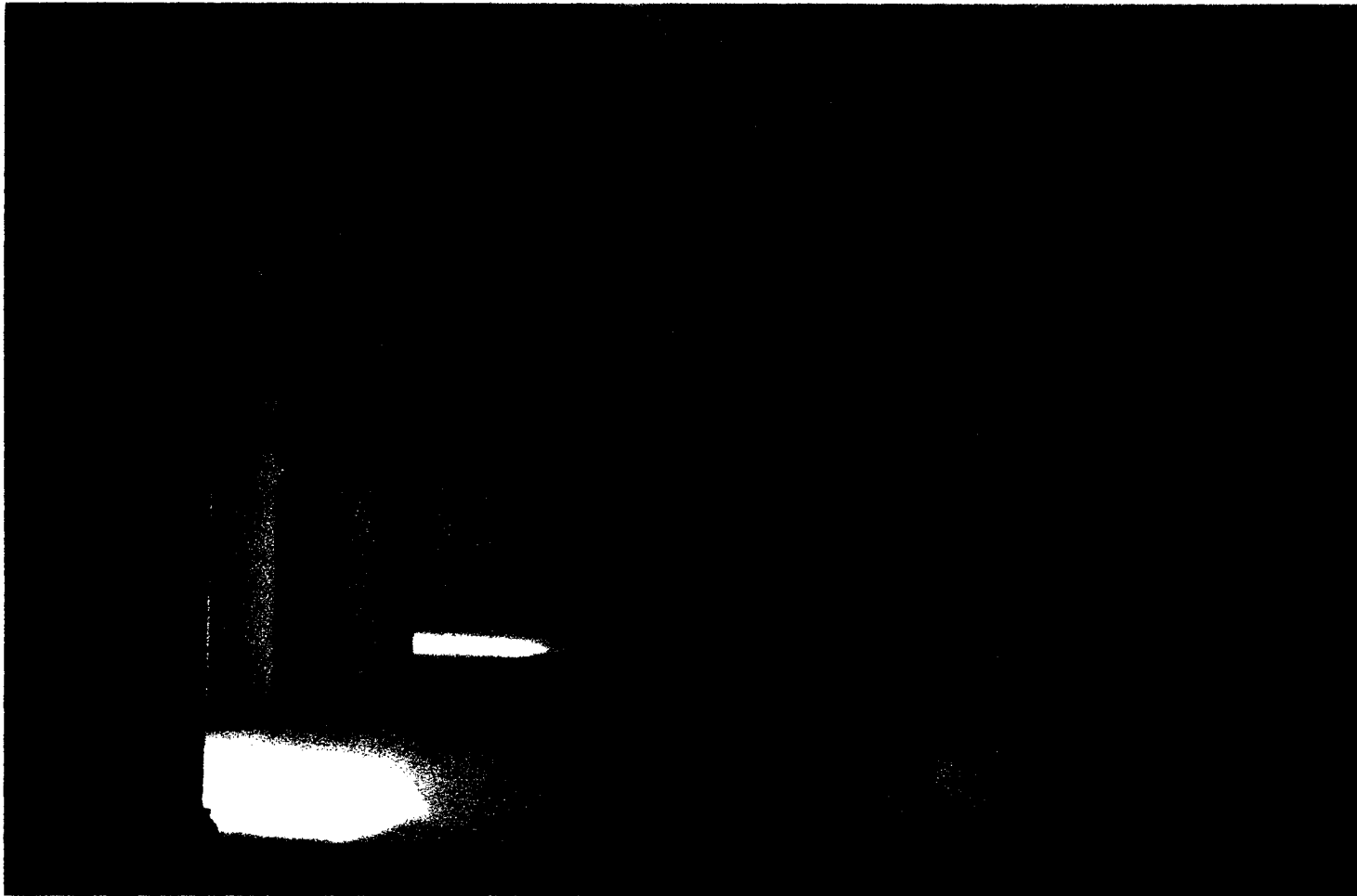
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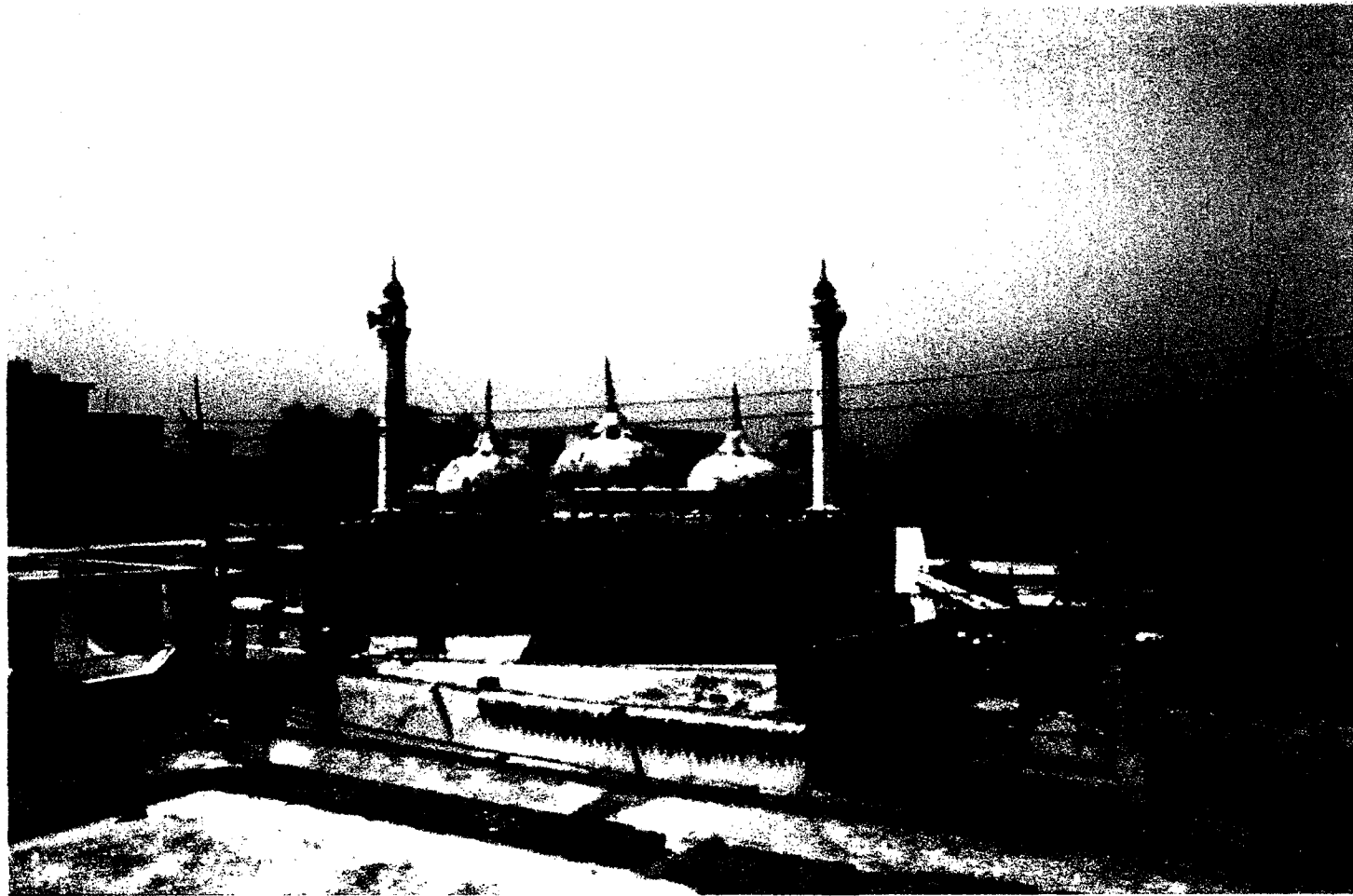
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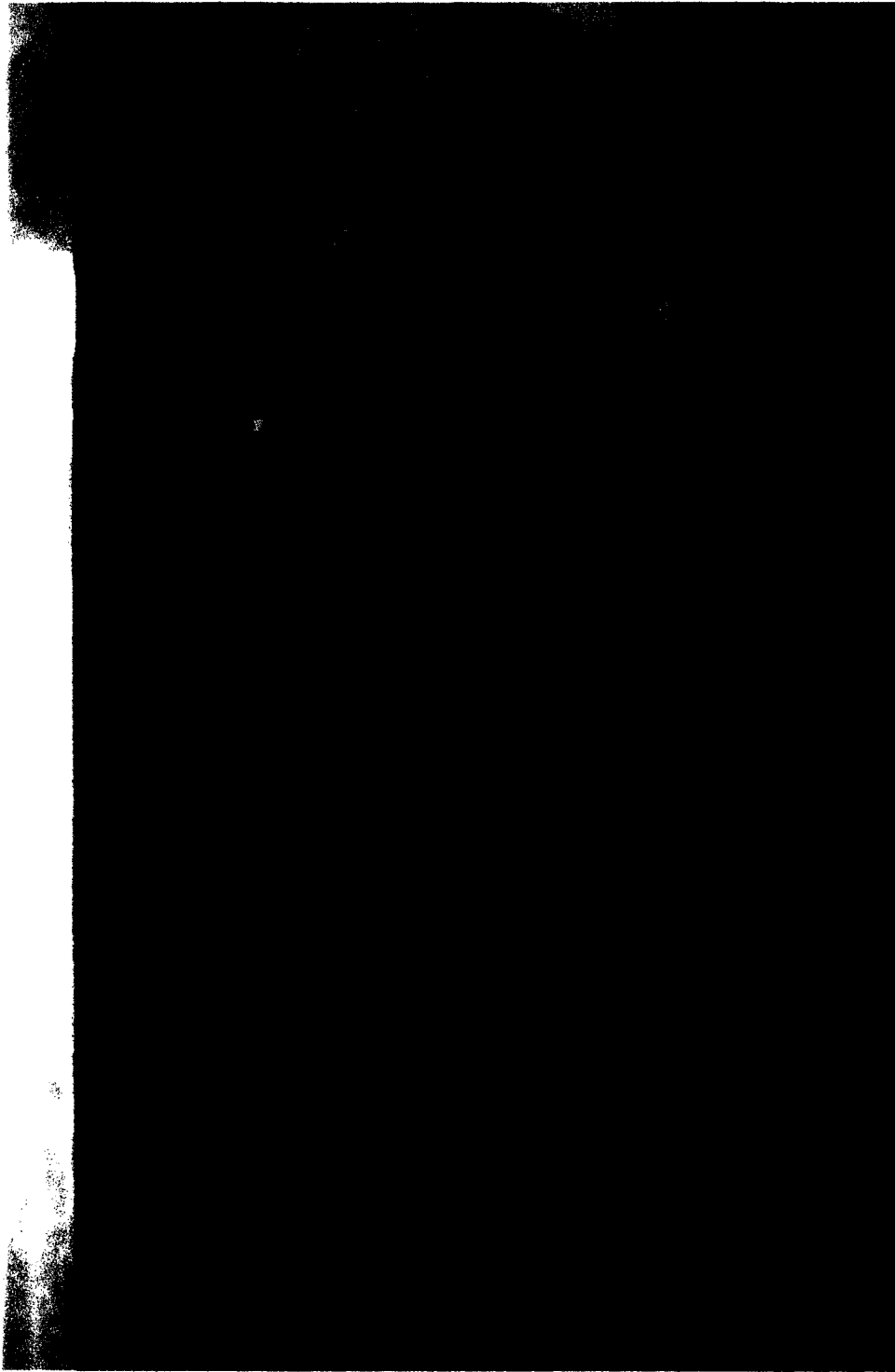
135. Masjid at Gulab Bari, tomb of Shuja al-Dawlah in Faizabad (c. 1791), photograph, March 2002



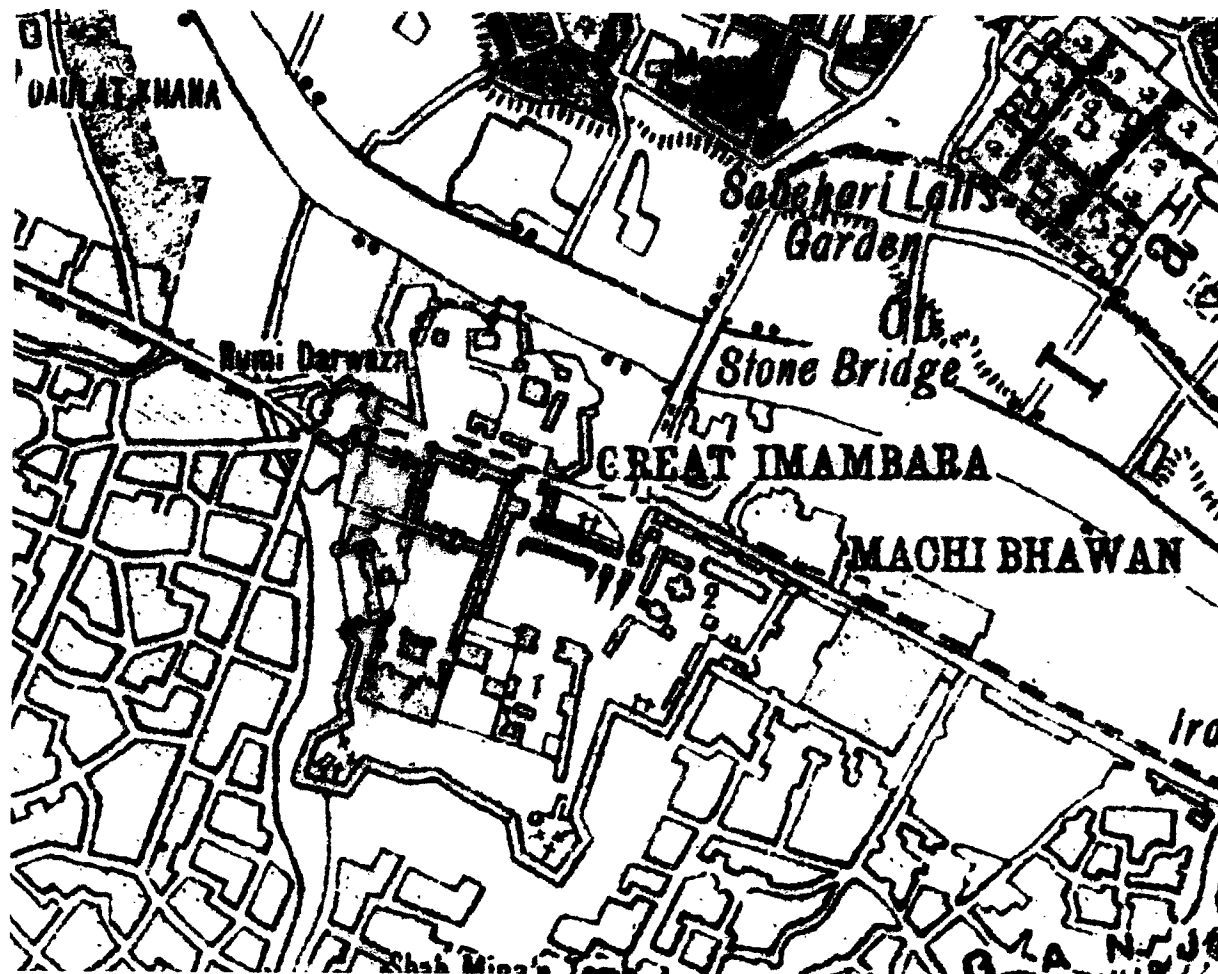
136. Interior of masjid at Gulab Bari, tomb of Shuja al-Dawlah in Faizabad (c. 1791), photograph, March 2002



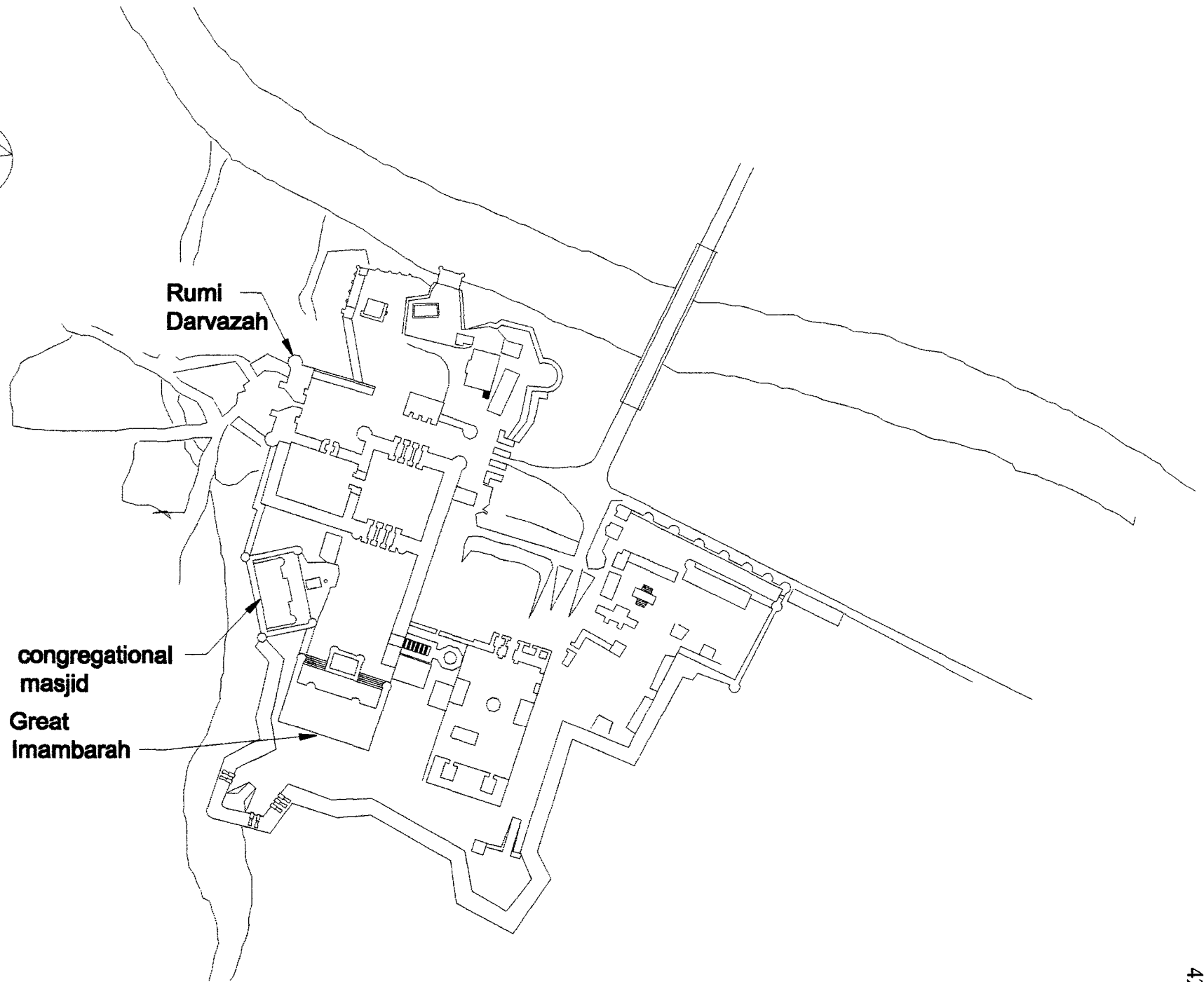
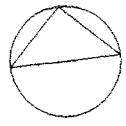
137. Asaf al-Dawlah's marble masjid at the Dawlat Khanah palace complex in Lucknow (c.1791), photograph, March 2002



138. Interior of Asaf al-Dawlah's marble masjid at the Dawlat Khanah palace complex in Lucknow (c.1791), photograph, March 2002



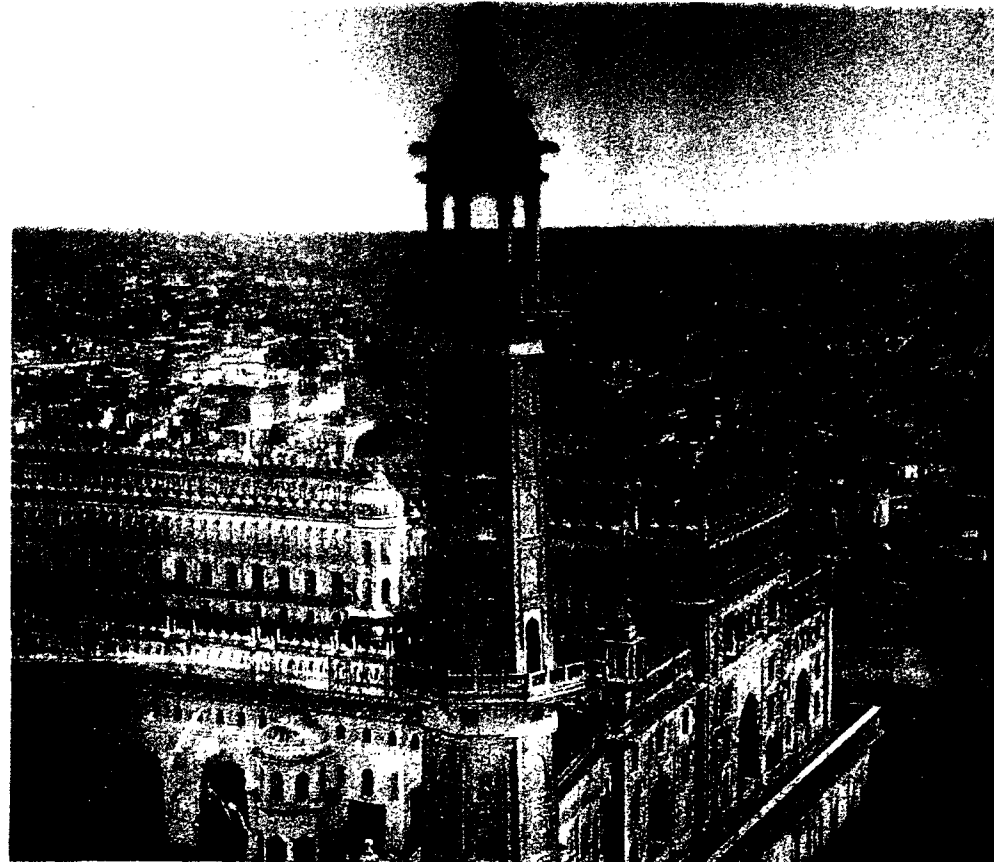
139. Detail of compilation map of Lucknow based on 1862-1863, 1865-1866 surveys, Ink on paper, British army, 1896, published in G.W. Forrest, History of the Indian Mutiny (1904)



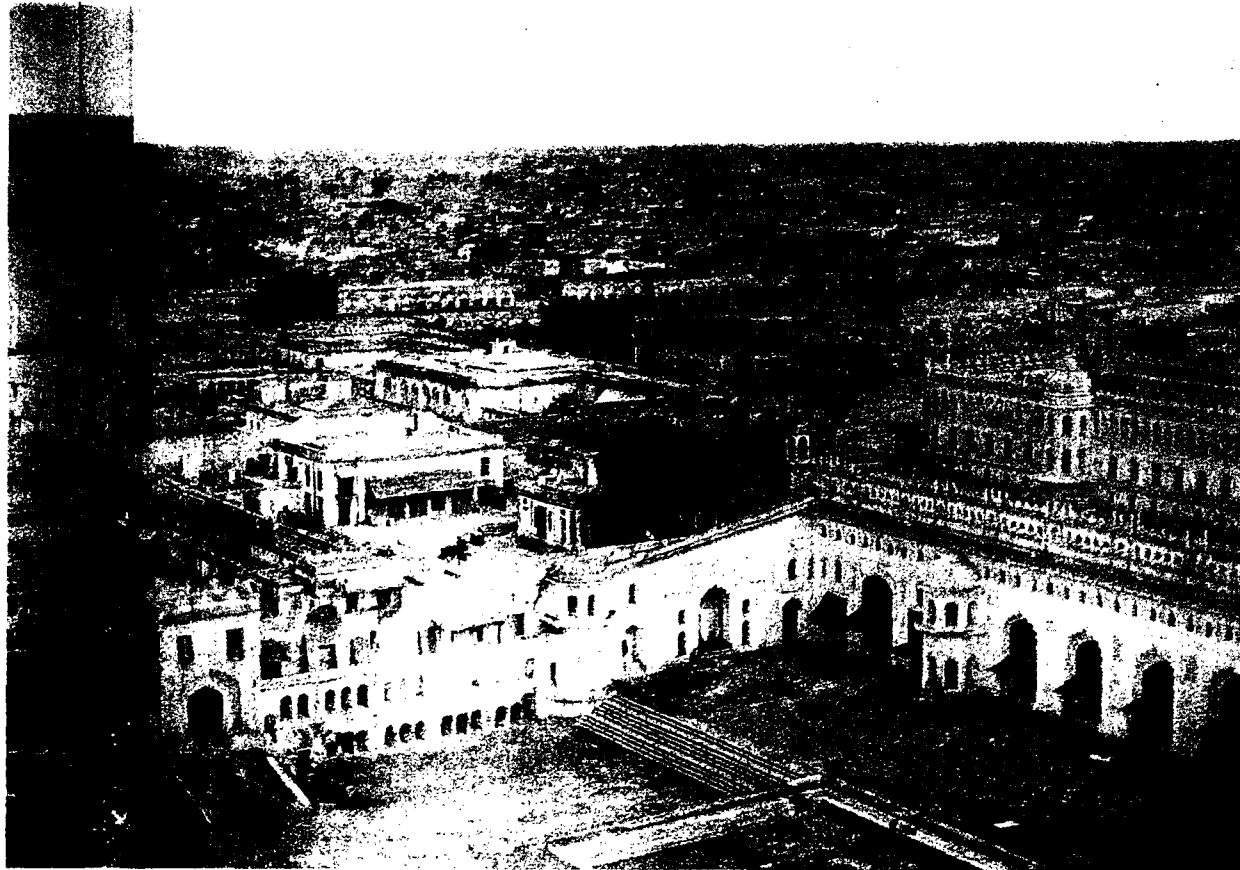
140. Reconstruction of “Plan of Machi Bhavan Fort for showing the buildings that will remain after demolitions” (National Archives of India, Delhi, No. 33/35 with map), ink on paper, by British Army, July 1869, line drawing



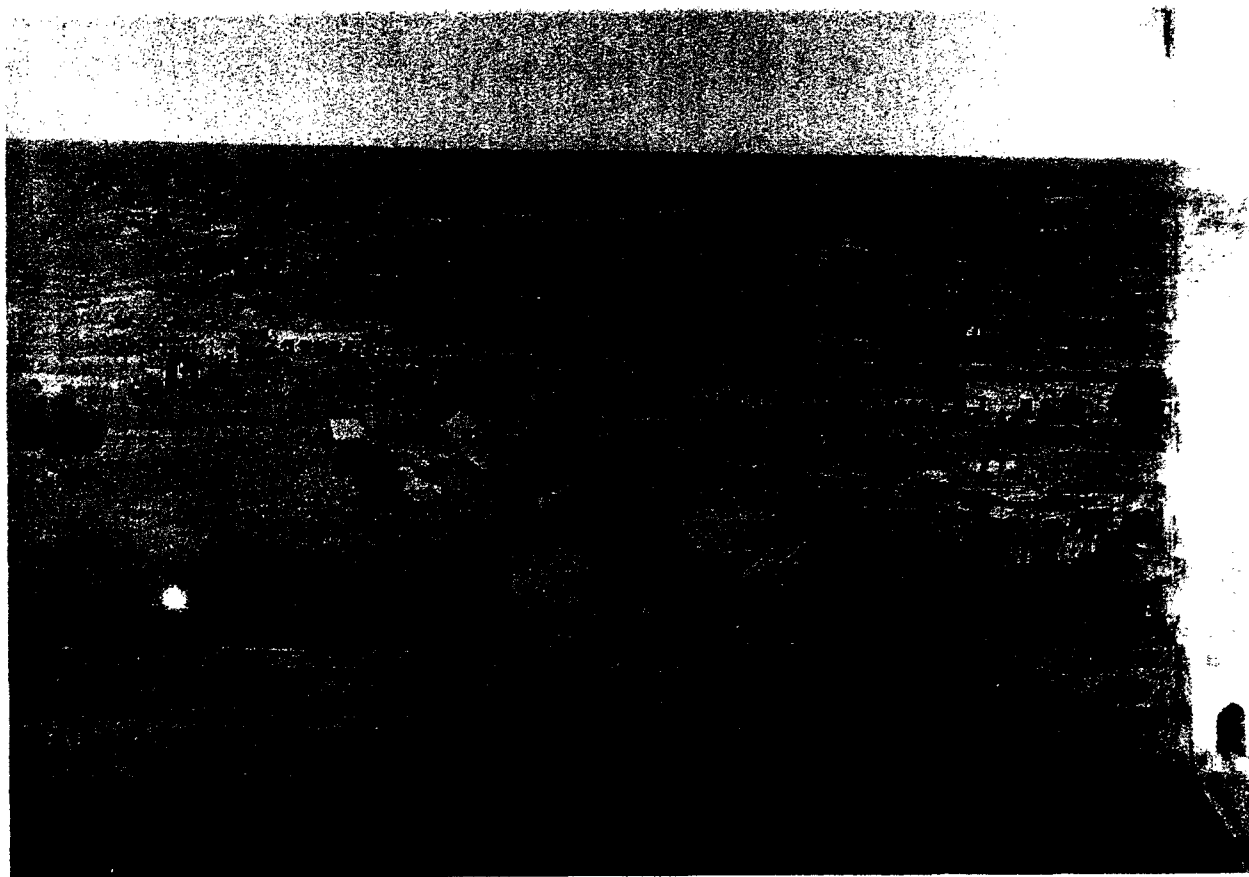
141. Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25243-25250



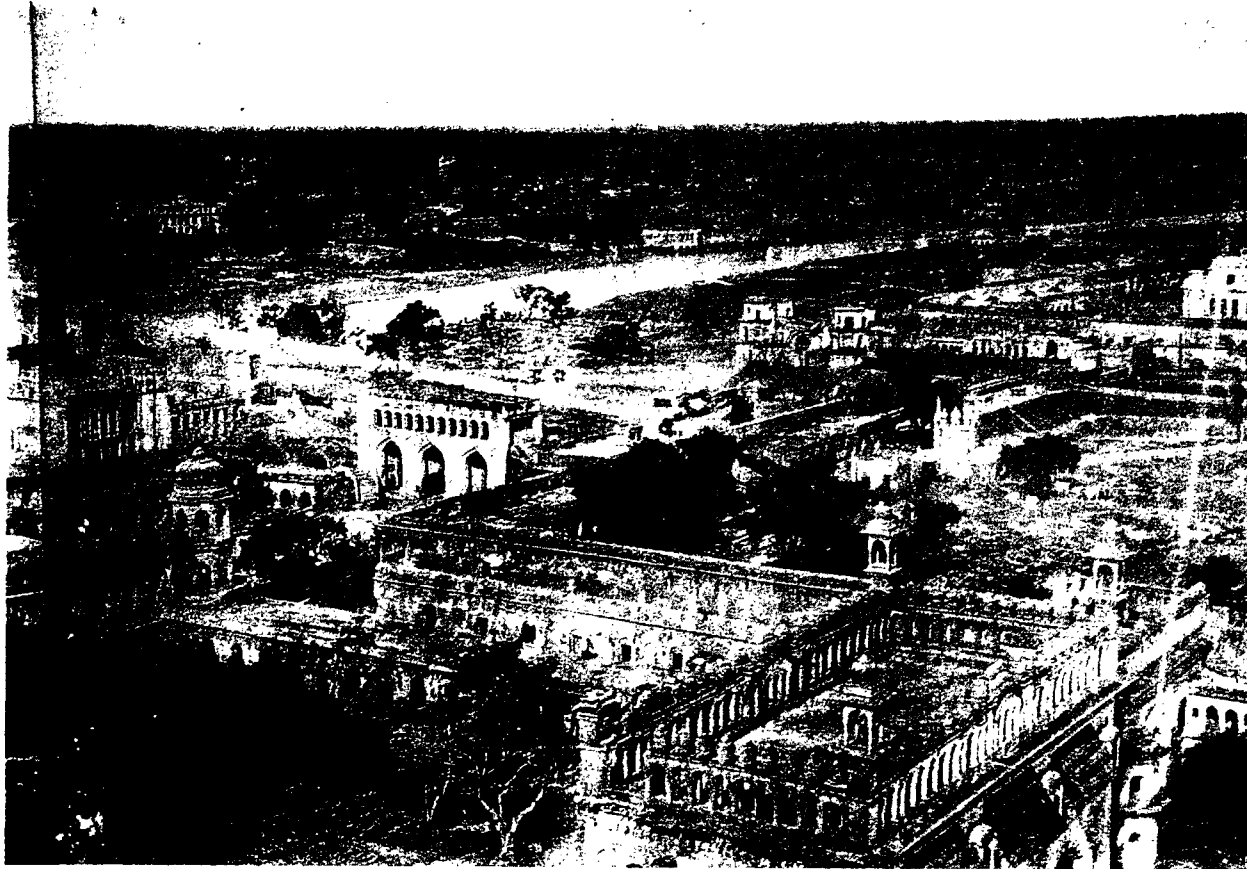
142. Detail 1 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25250



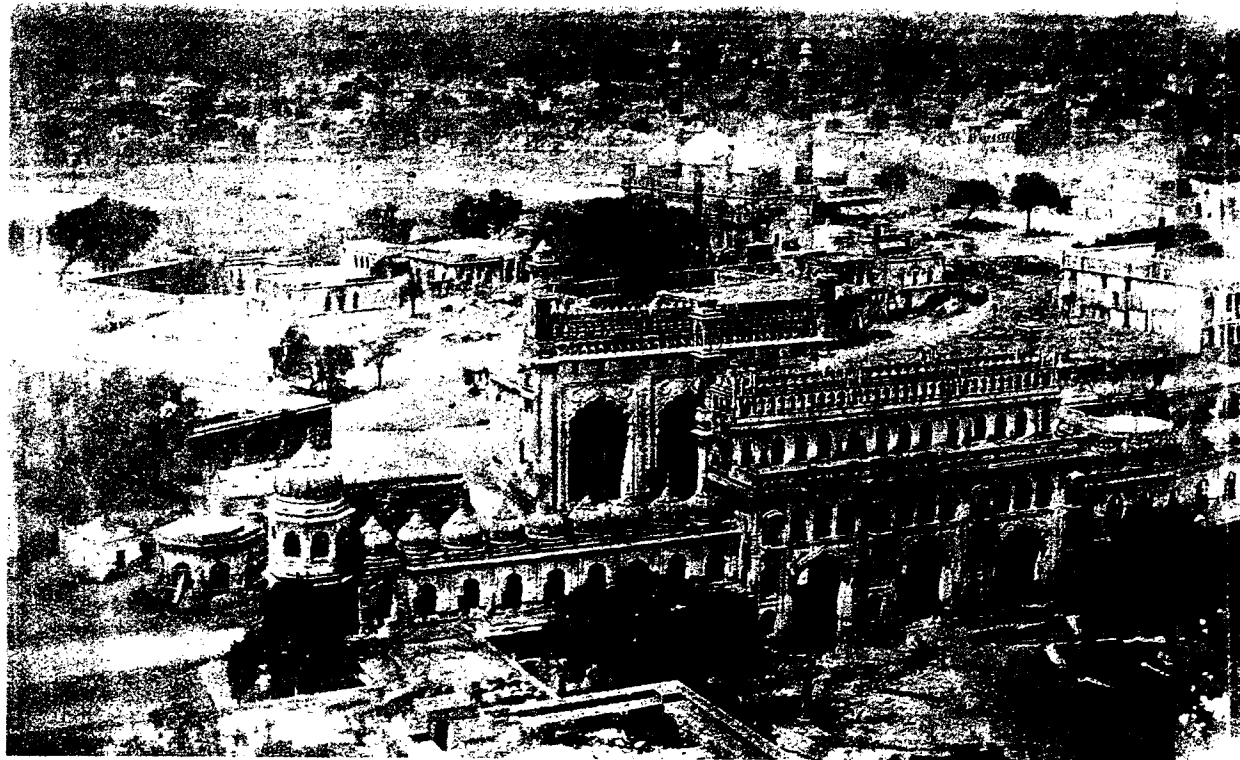
143. Detail 2 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25249



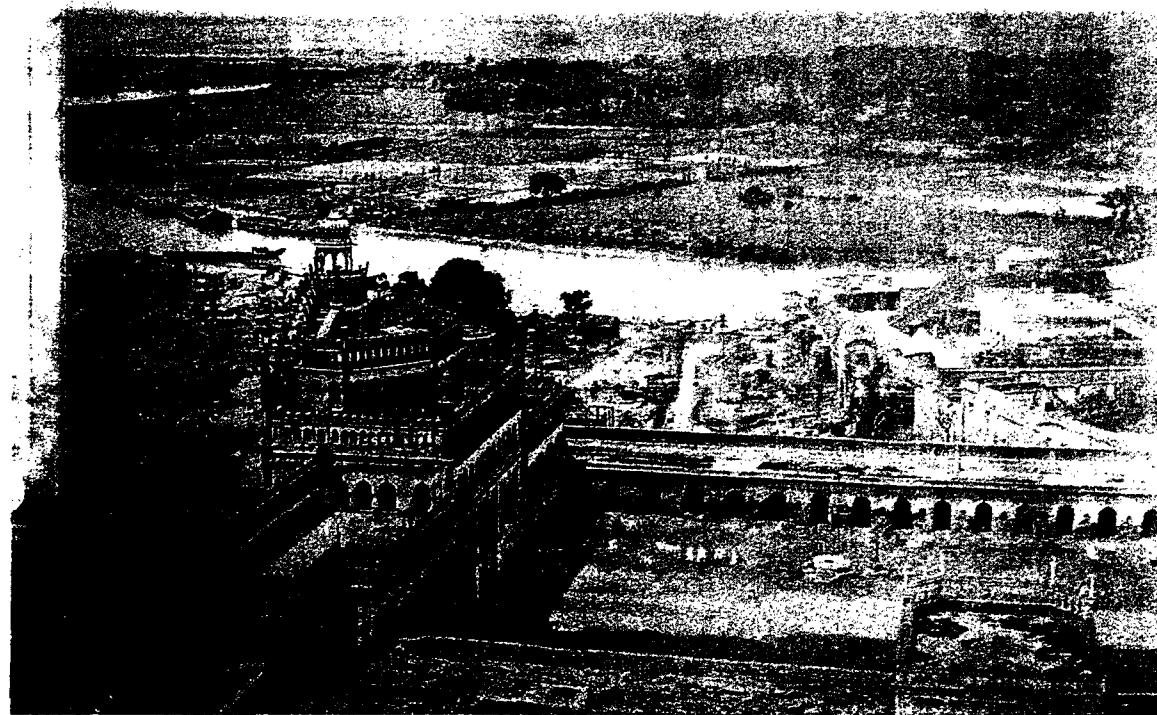
144. Detail 3 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25248



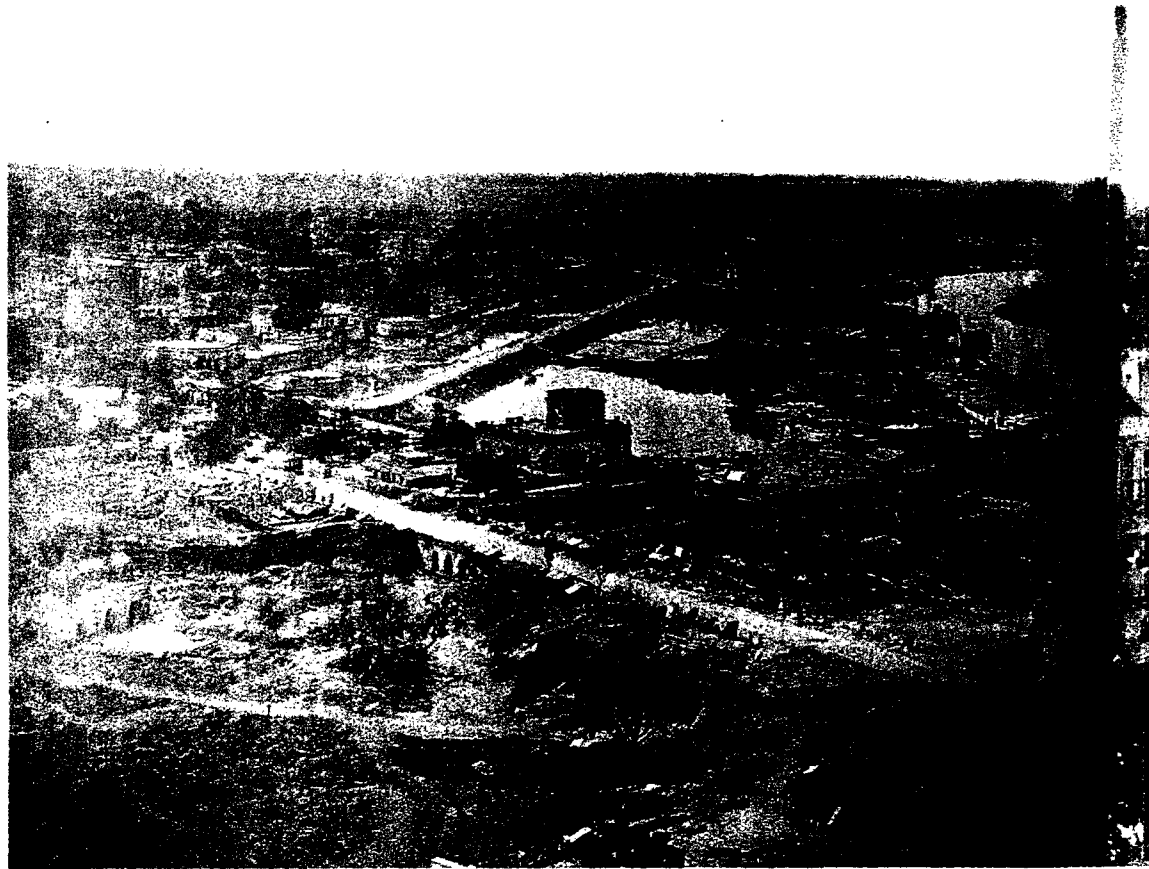
145. Detail 4 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25247



146. Detail 5 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25246



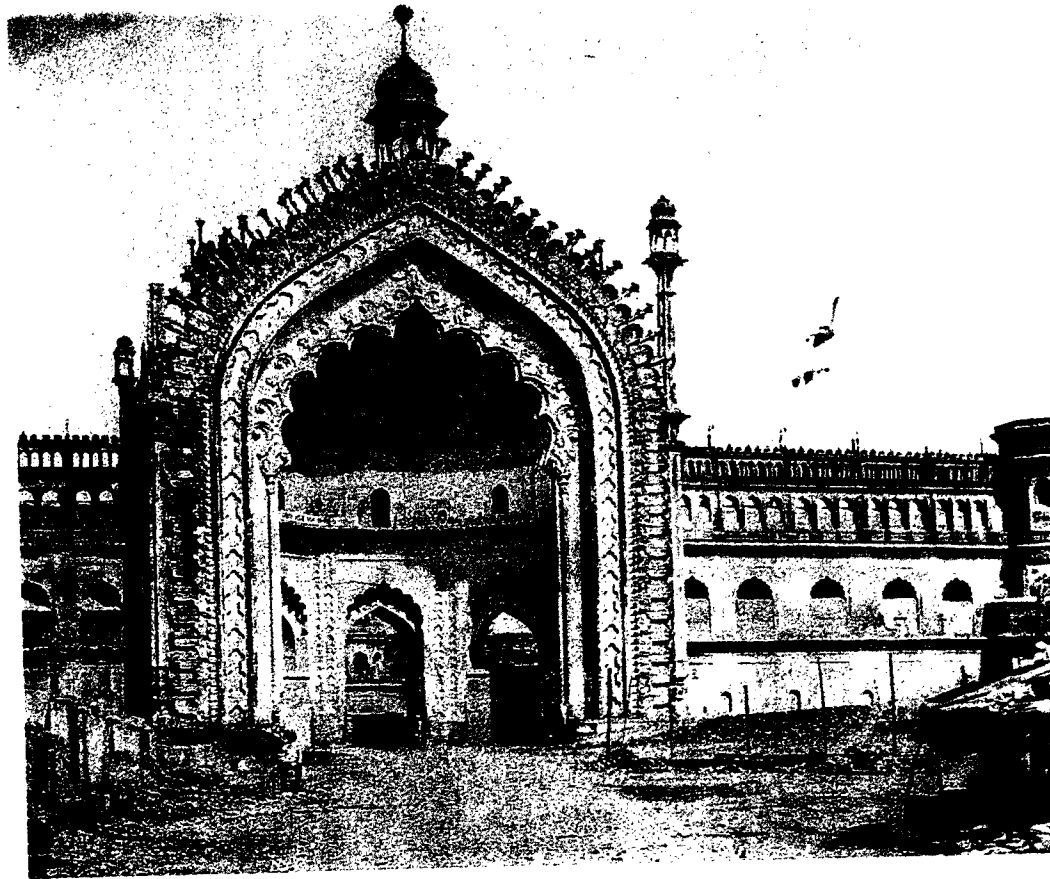
147. Detail 6 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25245



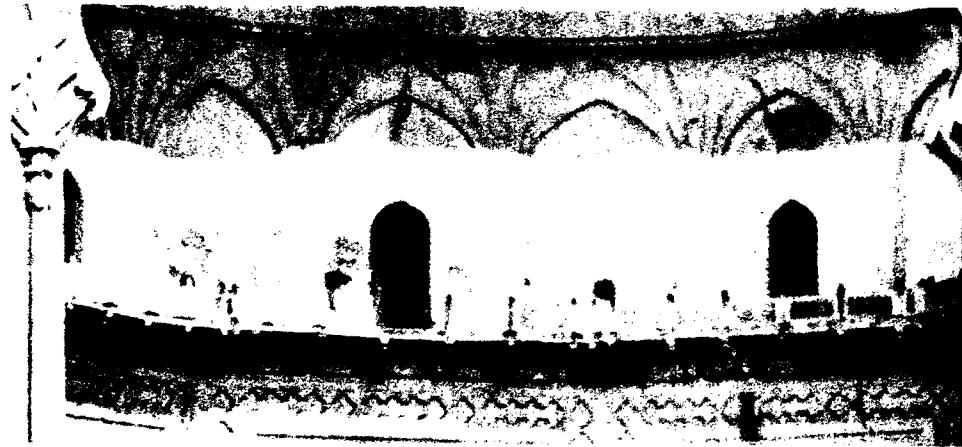
148. Detail 7 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25244



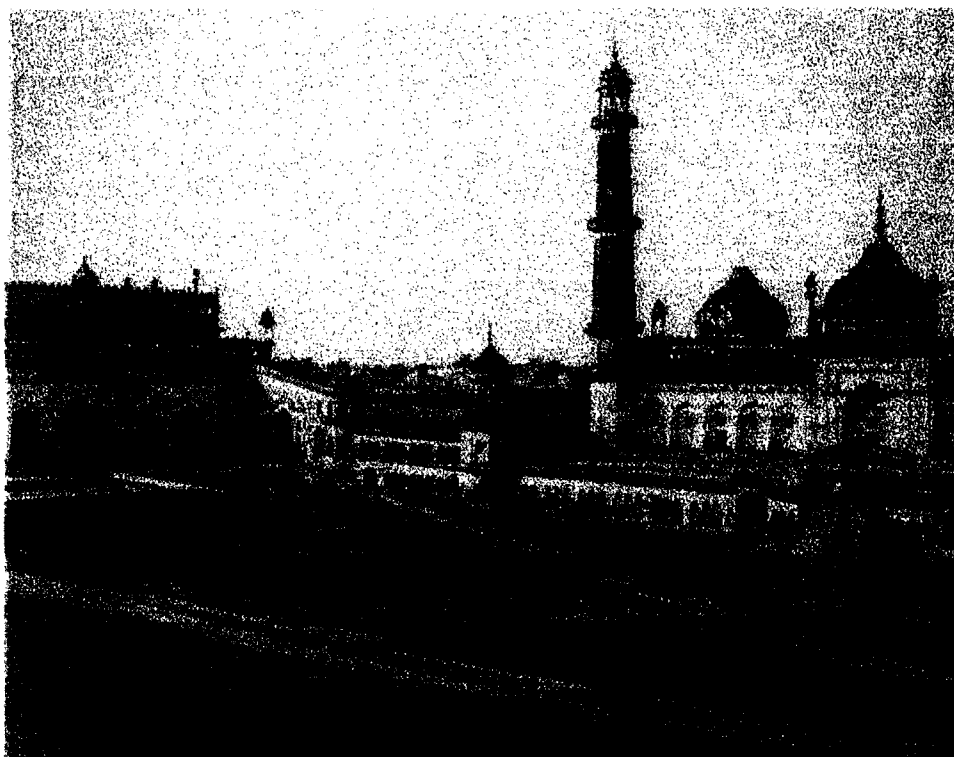
149. Detail 8 - Panorama of Great Imambarah complex and Machi Bhavan, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25243



150. West facade of the Rumi Darvazah, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25260

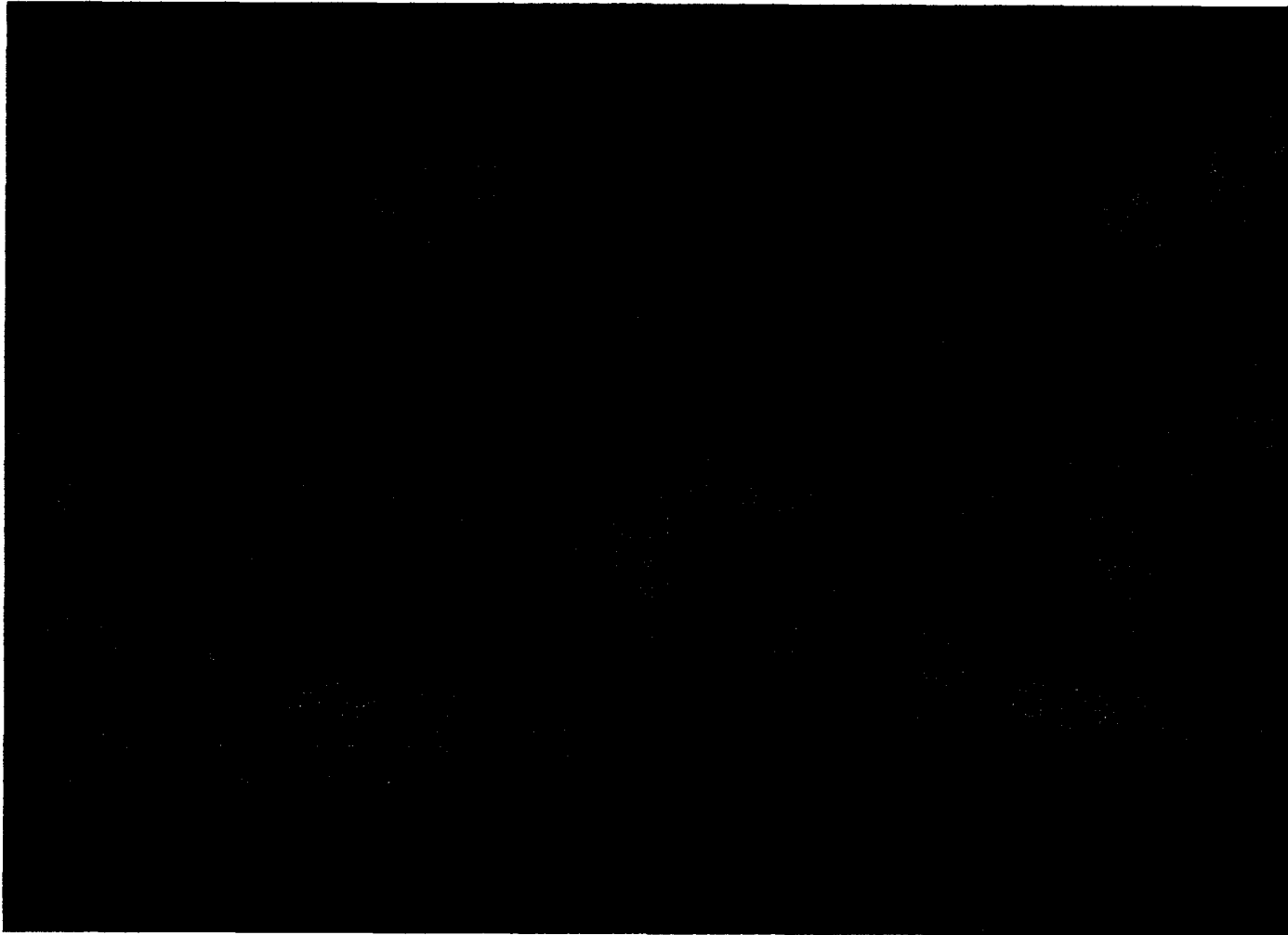


151. Detail of balcony paintings on the Rumi Darvazah, b/w photograph, British Army, c. 1857, Picture Library, courtesy of the National Army Museum, London, 25250



J.E. Saché
Lucknow, Bara Imambara Complex, with Masjid
albumen print, late 1860s
ACP 94.87.0015

152. Lucknow Bara Imambarah complex, with masjid, albumen print, J.E. Saché, late 1860s, courtesy of the Alkazi collection, London, ACP 94.87.0015



153. Oldest interior photograph of the Great Imambarah's central hall, stereoscopic negative on 6½" x 4½" glass plate, Joseph Sheffield, early 1900s, India Office Select Materials, Oriental and India Office Collection, by permission of The British Library, Photo 262/2 (20)