

THE BUDDHIST MONASTERY, ART AND TEACHINGS AS A
FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH INDIAN AND
CENTRAL ASIAN ISLAMIC PRACTICE AND ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

The teachings and practices of Buddhism resonated with many nascent Islamic Sufi orders in the northern Indian and Central Asian contexts, starting with the arrival of Islam to the region in the 7th Century, gaining momentum with the expansions of the Ghaznavid and Ghurid Empires in the 12th Century, and continuing into our own times through philosophies and local customs. The contrasting reputations of the two traditions, with Buddhism often viewed as a peaceful journey towards enlightenment and Islam as a faith bent on military conquest, have restricted historical investigations of Buddhism and Islam's relationship with one another and have often removed these practices from time and place. This dialogue can be made more fruitful by entering through the specific examples offered by the architecture of the Buddhist monastery structure or sangha and the Islamic Sufi lodge or khanqah between the 12th and 15th Centuries.

A disciple asked the man, “who persuaded you, being a king’s son, to abandon this fleeting world and to take up that which endures forever?” He answered: “I sat in the hall of my palace with courtiers around me. Looking out of the window I observed a beggar at the entrance of the palace, with a piece of dry bread in his hand... he ate it and went to sleep, satisfied.” The prince asked, “How is it that I am not satisfied with what I see and hear? What ought I to do in this world that I may obtain contentment as this beggar does?” When evening came, he put off his splendid garments and put on hair clothing. He left the royal palace and took to a wandering life like the beggar did.¹

¹ This passage, edited, is derived from the tale in T. Duka, “The Influence of Buddhism on Islam,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1904): 132–133.

This excerpt recounts an episode from the life of Ibrahim ibn Edhem (d. c. 776), a Muslim ascetic, Sufi, and, according to legend, a former prince of the city of Balkh, Afghanistan. The striking parallels with the tradition of Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha who forsook his privileged life as Prince Siddhartha Gautama to follow a new path, are illustrative of the ways that Buddhism and the Sufi orders of Islam resonate with one another in northern India and Central Asia. The contrasting reputations of the two traditions, with Buddhism often viewed as a peaceful journey towards enlightenment and Islam as a faith bent on military conquest, have, in some cases, restricted historical investigations of such resonances. This investigation is further complicated by the Hindu practices that also shaped the thoughts and traditions of the region, playing a strong role, and even acting in a bridging capacity, between the end of Buddhist institutions and the beginnings of Muslim ones. I have attempted here to assemble and discuss case studies that focus specifically on juxtapositions of the Buddhist monastery structure or *sangha* and the Islamic Sufi lodge or *khanqah* as a means of entering this dialogue through architecture.

The monastic organisation is one of the main formal channels of transmitting Buddhist teachings. Buddhist monasticism maintained a presence in northern India until the 13th Century, when chronicles and archaeological evidence suggest that it all but disappeared. The historical narrative is interpreted by some as a demonstration of Islamic interests in demolishing the monastic system and in forcing Buddhist practitioners to choose between flight or conversion. While Islamic practices entered India as early as the 7th Century, it was the arrival of the Turkish Islamic Ghaznavid Dynasty (977–1186), followed by their more aggressive vassals the Ghurid Dynasty (c. 1148–1215) that solidified Islamic leadership in northern India.² The monastic complexes of northern Indian Buddhism, such as the great university and monastery of Nalanda, in India's northern Bihar state, were repositories of teachings in the form of texts, didactic sculptural programmes and learned scholar monks, themselves a resource that drew students from as far as China. At the time the Ghurid general Muhammad Bakhtiyar invaded Nalanda in the latter part of the 12th

² The Ghurids launched repeated campaigns in India, and attacked Ghaznavid cities as well. Ghurid general Bahram Shah was given the title “Cihan Suz,” “World Incendiary,” c. 1150 for his destructive tendencies.

Century, the Islamic world was very familiar with the concept of Buddhism and of Indic culture and learning on a wider scale. The burning of the Nalanda library during the conquest, recorded in the *Tabakat-i Nasiri*, can perhaps be regarded as an act of ignorance by soldiers seeking the spoils of conquest.³ Yet, such accounts of desecrations of the Buddhist didactic infrastructure and the dramatic attempts of fleeing monks to rescue scrolls have made it difficult for scholars to look upon Islamic encounters with Buddhism in any light but that of conquest and pillage. Textual scholars have examined Islamic-Buddhist confluences effectively through didactic tales and fables and their analyses.⁴ This material points to the broader question of Buddhist resonances with and impact upon Islamic society, thought, and religious practice. Formal doctrines, laws and rules of religious communities as they are recorded and passed on do not always reflect the ways in which syncretic and emulatory developments reach people in practice. The architectural organisation of Buddhist monasticism opens up this question of resonance to a number of comparative possibilities and resources, including travel accounts, archaeological reports and visual analyses; by selecting spaces and settings where Buddhists and Muslims were in direct contact with each other in northern India and Central Asia between the 11th and 15th Centuries, I have assumed exchange, and even emulation.⁵

3 See Maulana Minhaj-ud-din Abu-'Umar-i 'Usman, *Tabakat-i Nasiri*. trans. H.G. Raverty. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1970).

4 The *Panchatantra*, didactic animal fables of the early 4th Century, emerged with additional tales as the famous Arabic language *Kalila wa Dimna* stories. The *Jataka* tales of Buddhism are distinguishable with slight alterations in a number of Arabic and Persian texts, and several narratives from the *Arabian Nights* have striking similarities to Buddhist stories. See S.M. Stern and Sophie Walzer, *Three Unknown Buddhist Stories in an Arabic Version*. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1971); Alexander Berzin, "Response to Majid Tehranian," *Islam and Inter-faith Relations: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2006*. eds. Lloyd Ridgeon and Perry Schmidt-Leukel. (London: SCM Press, 2007), 256-261; and Duka, "The Influence of Buddhism on Islam," 125-141.

5 The arrival of the Sufi *shaikhs* antedates the decline of Buddhist monasticism, leaving the intermediary of Hindu traditions variously as a potential means of transmitting concepts or as a screen between Indian Sufism and Buddhism. Annemarie Schimmel wrote in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* that "Under the influence of the theory of 'Unity of Being' some

The Chishtiya Order of Sufis

Sufism, often explained as a mystical form of Islam, gained popularity amongst the masses with its emphasis on a personal connection to the divine through contemplation and prayer. While some Sufis have followed an ascetic path and *dervish* practices of wandering and begging,⁶ other orders are inclined towards urban settings, trades or scholarship.⁷ Organised Sufi orders emerged from Central Asia in the 10th and 11th Centuries, centred around the teacher–student relationship that also characterizes Buddhist teaching pedagogy. The central architectural unit of Sufism is the *khanqah* or Sufi lodge, where practitioners gather, prepare food for themselves or the surrounding community, meet with their spiritual guide, a *shaikh* or *hoja/kawaja*, and ultimately form their community. The *khanqah* has often been established at the home of the *shaikh*, and came to be associated, as is the case in India, with the *dargah* or tomb of a saintly figure.

The Chishtiya order has had a great and long lasting impact in northern India.⁸ The founder, Khwadja Abu Ishak Shami (“of Syria”), travelled to Central Asia in the latter part of the 9th Century, drawn by the centres for Sufi teaching in the region. He settled in Chisht, an Afghan town between Herat and Ghazna, where he trained his successor before returning to Syria.⁹ The tradition was carried into

mystics might see points of correspondence between Sufi thought and the Vedanta system of Hindu philosophy.” (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 357.

6 The Persian word *dervish* (also *darvish*) comes from the root word “*dar*” or door and means to wander / one who wanders from “door to door.” This is reminiscent of the Buddhist *bhikku* who wanders in search of alms.

7 Proponents of Sufism believe its traditions to go back to the time of the Prophet. See John Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

8 The Shattariya, Qadiriya, Naqshbandiya, Suhrawardiya and Qalandari Orders, along with the smaller Lalshahbazia, Musa–suhagia, Rasulshahi, Madari and Malang lineages are also part of the South Asian Sufi landscape.

9 See Saiyid Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India Vol. I: Early Sufism and its History in India to 1600 AD*. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978). See also K.A. Nizami, “Chishtiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth et. al. (Brill Online: Brill, 2008). This article notes that there is no reliable history for the Chishtiya prior to the establishment of the order in India.

India in the early 13th Century by Khwaja Mu'in ad-Din, who settled in the city of Ajmer on the borders of the Ghurid Empire; his followers congregated around him, seeking his guidance. His *dargah* was surrounded by the *khanqah* of the Chishti order, which took the name of his town of Chisht, acknowledging their Afghan roots.¹⁰

The Chishtiya eschewed donations or endowments that implied government connections, so *khanqahs* used *futuh*, unsolicited donations, to operate soup kitchens where they prepared meals for Sufis and the poor or ill as part of their teachings about social responsibility. An early 14th-century traveller stated that, "in Delhi and its surroundings are *khanqahs* and hospices numbering two thousand."¹¹ Even if understood as a hyperbolic estimation, this suggests a vast number of *khanqah* establishments integrating Islamic Sufism into Indian society in an accessible and beneficial form, in a role once filled in part by Buddhist institutions.

The Sufi *khanqah* and its associated community were regulated and purposeful, with a strict set of rules derived from the *Qur'an*.¹² The Buddhist monasteries of India were also governed by a similar set of canonical rules that developed from those recited at the First Buddhist Council. Known as the *Vinaya*, this framework was passed orally and developed into different sets of rules for various schools of Buddhism.¹³ Both systems emphasise conduct, the use of time, and moral responsibilities. Shaikh Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi drew up these fundamental principles for *khanqahs*:

- (1) The people of the *khanqahs* should establish cordial relations with all men (khalq).

10 Akbar constructed a mosque at the *dargah* in 1570 and the Mughal Shah Jihan constructed a large congregational mosque at the site in 1628–37.

11 Recorded by Shihab al-Din al-'Umari in *Masalik al-Absdr fi Mamalik al-Amsdr*. trans. O. Spies quoted in Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "Some Aspects of Khanqah Life in Medieval India," *Studia Islamica* (1958), 53.

12 Verses XXIV, 36–37.

13 The *Vinayas* have often been a source of debate and disagreement. See <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe13/index.htm> for the nineteenth-century, T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg translations of the *Vinaya* texts from Pāli and their variations. Included in the rules of conduct are instructions for seeking alms; proper comportment between men and women; and issues of mindfulness in accepting alms, preaching Dhamma and relations with other monks.

- (2) They should concern themselves with God, through prayers, meditation, etc.
- (3) They should abandon all efforts at earning a livelihood and should resign themselves to the will of God.
- (4) They should strive for the purification of their inner life.
- (5) They should abstain from things that produce evil effects.
- (6) They should learn the value of time.
- (7) They should completely shake off indolence and lethargy.¹⁴

The conversations between the Chishtiya *shaikh* Nizam ad-Din Awliya and his followers in the early 14th Century are recorded in the *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad, Morals for the Heart*.¹⁵ This text reveals the nature of their *khanqah*. The central hall, known as a *jama'at khana*, was the focus of communal life in a manner that parallels the congregational centrality of the Buddhist monastic hall, the *Upatthana-sala*.¹⁶ In both the Buddhist and Sufi settings, small rooms lined the outer walls of this hall and a central courtyard that accessed the hall was entered via a gatehouse with a gate room. Food preparation and distribution took place in an open kitchen near the *khanqah's* gatehouse. The *shaikh* lived in a wooden room atop the roof of the hall, and a great banyan tree shaded the courtyard and some of the rooms. This combination of meeting and learning spaces, the cells of lodgers, and even the centrality of a tree is in keeping with architectural findings and textual descriptions of Indian Buddhist monasteries.¹⁷

One of the challenges of comparing the early Indian *khanqas* with Buddhist monastic architecture is the lack of surviving structures. Both the Buddhist and the Islamic lodges were built in ephemeral materials that were replaced over time and are difficult to identify in archaeological excavations. There is also a scarcity of recorded details about their appearance, materials and floor plans. It thus becomes, as

14 'Awarif al-Ma'arif (Urdu translation) (Lucknow, 1926), 123 quoted in Nizami, 55.

15 Shaykh Nizam ad-din Awliya, as recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi, Bruce B. Lawrence, trans. *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad (Morals for the Heart)*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 30–31.

16 See Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1962), 92.

17 See, for example, the accounts and descriptions of the 7th–century Chinese monk and traveller Xuanzang.

shown above, a comparison of brief textual descriptions of architecture versus a direct structure-to-structure juxtaposition. Although it might be logical to expect that the incoming Muslims might adopt and adapt pre-existing Buddhist establishments, as nascent Islamic societies so often did with local architecture, this does not seem to be the case in northern India. For example, Sukumar Dutt's examination of *lenas*, Buddhist cave monasteries, makes no observations about post-Buddhist occupation.¹⁸ Sufis travelled to congregate around a respected teacher, which centralised the branches of the various orders in areas that were not necessarily near suitable monasteries and their spolia.¹⁹

The centrality and importance of the *shaikh* to Sufi communities led to the practice of locating *khanqahs* and *dargahs* of former *shaikhs* and other saintly exemplars in close proximity. The dervishes and their visitors could venerate the tombs, which were thought to bring blessings, *baraka*, upon followers. The founder of the Indian Chistiya's *dargah* was erected in his *khanqah* in Ajmer. His tomb, rebuilt many times, is typical of Islamic funerary architecture in its cuboid form. Like a Buddhist *stupa*, it is domed and contains relics of the deceased, with intercessory properties that are venerated through visits and pilgrimages. Continuing tradition, the tomb is circumambulated, and flowers and other ephemeral offerings are left by believers. The tombstone, in a practice that is remarkably like that of washing and dressing a Buddha image for veneration, is cleaned and clothed in a *chadar*, a cloth of costly fabric.²⁰ There are practices and habitual markers of belief that are no longer distinguishable as distinctly "Buddhist" or "Muslim" for their very pervasiveness, and Sufi

18 Dutt. See Chapter 5, "Lenas, The Cave Monasteries of Western India," 138–161.

19 The Muslim practice of constructing mosques, such as the Quwwat al-Islam Mosque (1206–1210) of Delhi from the *spolia* of Jain and Hindu temples is often discussed in terms of dominance over local culture. If the defeat of the Buddhists is accepted as a primary goal, then we must inquire further as to why we do not encounter structures with Buddhist building components in India intended to display a similar message.

20 These veneratory practices are described by R. Nath in "Indian Facet of Sufism," *Islamic Architecture and Culture in India*. (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1982), 29–40. Nath draws parallels with Hindu traditions rather than Buddhist practices.

teachings emphasize ideas that resonate with Buddhist concepts.²¹

The Ghaznavids

The Ghaznavids ruled their Turkic dynasty from Ghazna, a city not far from Chisht in Afghanistan. Formed by the military on the borders of the Iranian world, the Ghaznavid Empire strove to legitimate itself by constructing a society rich in the arts, but was forced to pay its standing army in a combination of state funds and spoils.²² This necessitated frequent Ghaznavid raids, and the eventual conquest of northern India,²³ resulting in a period of direct contact between Buddhism and Islam.

The Ghaznavid palace at the capital, as well as the summer palace of Lashkar-i Bazar, were richly decorated. Little remains of Ghazna's 10th– to 12th–century constructions save a pair of towers, c. 1150, and the tomb of the ruler Mahmud (d. 1030). The first two excavation campaigns at Ghazna took place under the direction of the Italian Archaeological Mission in 1957 and 1958. The dig location they labelled “the Palace” was a 100–metre oblong platform with the remains of mud brick and rubble walls covered in terracotta panels and polychrome plasterwork.²⁴ D. Schlumberger argued that the

21 David Scott draws comparisons between “enlightenment” in Buddhism and *itlaq* in Sufism in “Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons,” *Numen*. Vol. 42 (May 1995), 147. *Fana* or “annihilation,” is the move into the omnipresence of the divine that all Sufis strive for; this is ultimately an abandonment of the self that has been compared to the Buddhist concept of nirvana. *Wahdat al-wujud* or “unity of being” is a related concept that also connotes a merging of the self with the divine. The aniconic tradition of venerating the *Buddhapada*, the footprint of the Buddha, is mirrored in the veneration of the *Qadam Rasul*, the footprint of the Prophet Muhammad; there is a proliferation of such shrines in South Asia. See Perween Hasan, “The Footprint of the Prophet,” *Muqarnas*. Vol. 10. (1993), 335–343.

22 Sebüktegin's son Mahmud supposedly relied on booty for four-fifths of the army's wages. Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius, eds. *Islam: Art and Architecture*. (Germany: Tandem Verlag, 2007), 330.

23 See Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 994–1040*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963).

24 See Umberto Scerrato, “Summary Report on the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan: The First Two Excavations at Ghazni, 1957–1958,” *East and West*. 10 (1959), 23–55.

palace's architectural marble paralleled Central Asian Buddhist donor portraits in the arrangement and dress of the figures.²⁵ The marble carvings of the palace also included vine scrolls, epigraphic registers, narrative scenes such as a horse and rider, and zoomorphic imagery including elephants and lions. French archaeologist A. Godard believed that the use of marble was introduced from India,²⁶ but his counterparts in the Italian Archaeological Mission felt that the Muslim Abbasid Empire's (750–1258) use of architectural marble was an equally viable and more local influence, coupled with the presence of a marble quarry near Ghazna.²⁷ This dialogue highlights an important issue that must be considered when looking at the history of Islamic art and culture in Central Asian locales. At the time of the Ghaznavid construction projects, Buddhist concepts and motifs were not being introduced, but rather *re*-introduced. While an influx of Buddhist and Hindu *spolia* and even craftspeople were arriving in Afghanistan in the 11th and 12th Centuries CE, similar ideas and forms had been part of the local artistic environment since the earliest Buddhist expansions of the 6th and 5th Centuries BCE.

The congregational mosque of Ghazna was legendarily splendid; it was likely built, at least in part, with Indian labour as well Indian *spolia* and materials. The *Kitab-i Yamini*, the memoirs of Mahmud of Ghazna, describes the materials for what must have been a very impressive building, including those brought from India:

And they brought trees from Hind and Sind, and used these trees in the said works, for strongly constructing all belonging thereto ... And they brought from distant places mighty stones (marble) square and hexagonal, all shining (and polished) ... and they worked it exquisitely, with various hues and colours, like the plains of the garden of spring full of enamelled (flowers) so that the eye became dim and the intellect confused in contemplating it.²⁸

25 D. Schlumberger, "Le Palais Ghaznavide de Lashkari Bazar," *Syria*. XXIX (1952), 251–270.

26 A. Godard, *L'Art Ghaznevid*: 291, cited in Alessio Bombaci, "Summary Report on the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan: Introduction to the Excavation at Ghazni," *East and West*. Vol. 10 (1959), 8.

27 Bombaci, "Summary Report," 8.

28 Al-Utbi, *Kitab-i Yamini The Memoirs of Mahmud of Ghazni*. trans. James

The description of the construction of the mosque explains how spoils taken from India were used to decorate the architecture. It is apparent that gold and statuary were employed, as “they crushed the body-like idols and corporeal images, and fastened them into the doors and walls... So great was the splendour, gilding, decoration and colouring of this mosque that everyone who saw it took the finger of wonder into his mouth.”²⁹ It is interesting to note that they were used in such a manner at the mosque, flattened lest they be mistaken for idols, but none-the-less recognisable to the chronicler. This distinction between venerated objects and decorative spolia figures symbolising victory was nominally achieved by the Ghaznavids who were “fastening them into the doors and walls” of the mosque.

Buddhist tradition and practice is based around teachings and *sutra* texts. The larger monastic foundations developed universities, attracting students from around the Buddhist world to study at a central location. Islam also emphasizes texts and formal education, and in the early 1000s, a new, purpose-built educational establishment known as the *medrese* was established and supported by the Seljuks of Persia, a competitor state of the Ghaznavids.³⁰ Students lived and studied in rectangular buildings with a simple floor plan of outer walls lined with cells surrounding an inner courtyard. Baghdad, Nishapur, Amul, Mosul, Damascus, Jazirat Ibn ‘Umar, Marv and Basra each had such an early *medrese*.³¹ The Ghaznavid cities of Herat, Balkh

Reynolds. (London: W.H. Allen, 1958), 464.

29 *Ibid.*, 465. It is not clear whether the sculptural figures were Hindu or Buddhist. Siva images have been found at specifically Buddhist archaeological sites such as Nalanda. See John Marshall, ed., *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1923–24*. (Calcutta: Central Government of India, 1926), 74. The Italian Archaeological Mission published an image of a maimed Visnu figure from their excavations at Ghazna in Scerrato, “Summary Report.” Thank you to Professor Susan Huntington for identifying the iconography of the sculpture and for her support for the research that formed the basis of this article, which was conducted during my studies in her graduate seminar on Buddhist monasteries at The Ohio State University.

30 Nizam al-Mulk, Seljukid Sultan Malik Shah’s vizier, authored the *Siyasat-nama* between 1086 and 1091 as a “sultan’s handbook” which outlines the creation of educational institutions. Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*. trans. Hubert Drake. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978): xiv.

31 A.K.S. Lambton, “The Internal Structure of the Saljuk Empire,” *The*

and Ghazna, in close contact with early forms of Buddhism and the contemporary teaching centres of northern India, were also early *medrese* sites. While there were internal factors in the Islamic lands that may have been the impetus for the evolution of *medreses*, it is interesting to consider the ways in which an institution like Nalanda may have inspired these projects.³²

The formal resemblances between Buddhist and Islamic architectural structures may derive from Ghaznavid imports of both materials and workers from India. Qadi Ibn az-Zubayr, working in the service of the Fatimid Caliph in Egypt, wrote of his ambassadorial mission to the Ghaznavid court in the late 10th or early 11th Century, stating “When I approached the town where the Sultan was, I encountered a vast body of his troops ... [there] were Indian troops whose number, I was told, was 30,000.”³³ Alongside the military figures came trained craftspeople, such as masons and carvers. The rulers of these states expressed their admiration for India’s rich architectural traditions. Mahmud of Ghazna is said to have praised “the stability and splendour” of the northern Indian city of Mathura’s buildings in correspondence with one of his governors.³⁴ When Islamic powers began to establish themselves in India, they preferred to use skilled locals rather than bringing builders from Ghazna. Near Eastern architectural details reveal clues that indicate the presence of Buddhist construction crews. The Buddhist *chakra* symbol of the wheel and the *triratna* trident were identified on a mosque in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid state to which the Ghaznavids once paid allegiance; the *kumbha* or *kalasha* water pot form is still seen today on Persianate

Cambridge History of Iran. Vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 216.

32 Warwick Ball, an archaeologist specialising in Afghanistan, has noted the resemblance between the 12th-century *medrese* at Danistana, Afghanistan, and the “pre-Islamic Buddhist stupa complexes” (vihara). Warwick Ball, “Afghanistan, Art and Architecture,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE. eds. Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas et. al. (Brill Online: Brill, 2009).

33 Translated in C.E. Bosworth, “An Embassy to Mahmud of Ghazna Recorded in Qadi Ibn az-Zubayr’s *Kitab adh-dhakha’ir wa’t-tuhaf*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol. 85, (1965), 405.

34 Andreas Volwahsen, *Living Architecture: Islamic Indian*. (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1970), 40.

and Indian Islamic dome finials.³⁵

Kamul of Turfan

In 1419, Shah Rukh, the Timurid ruler of Muslim Central Asia, sent an ambassadorial expedition to the Chinese court. Envoy Ghaiassuddin Nakkash, “The Painter,” was instructed to keep notes on all they encountered. He recounted that they proceeded to “Turfan where the people were mostly Buddhists, and had a great temple with a figure of Sakya Muni.”³⁶ After a few more days’ march, the party “reached the town of Atasufi,” then “Kamul, where they found a magnificent mosque and convent of Dervishes [Sufis] in juxtaposition with a fine Buddhist temple.”³⁷ Another translation records that “Amir Fakhar al-Din had built a high, very costly and ornamented mosque, but near it the polytheists had constructed a large and a small temple with wonderful pictures.”³⁸ The envoy remarks that the temple gate had a pair of guardian figures that looked like “two demons preparing to fly at one another.” With these brief but tantalising observations, the party set off again, proceeding through the Great Desert. It is essentially a statement that a mosque and Sufi lodge sat side-by-side with Buddhist temples and a surrounding monastery.³⁹ Paired together in early 15th-century Kamul, a frontier town on one of the main Silk Road routes between western Asia and China at the edge of the Great Desert, the two communities would have had interaction based on proximity. Perhaps there was a more intentional exchange

35 Unfortunately, I was not able to locate the specific Abbasid mosque in Baghdad to verify this imagery. See Havell, *Indian Architecture*. Vol. 99, fig. 23, for the reference. In both the Afghan and Indian contexts, the sources are scarce, and the damage of time and war is extensive.

36 An alternate translation reads: “They found that in that country most of the inhabitants were polytheists, and had large idol-houses, in the halls whereof they kept a tall idol.” Henry Yule, trans., ed. “The Embassy Sent by Shah Rukh to the Court of China,” *Cathay and the Way Thither*. Volume I. (Taipei: Cheng-Wen Publishing Company, 1966), 272, fn. 1.

37 In Turkish, the prefix “Ata” is an honourific, meaning “father” or “ancestor.” The name of this site may refer to a “Father Sufi.” For the text, see Yule, 272–273.

38 *Ibid.*, 273, fn. 1.

39 It is logical to assume that this was a Sufi establishment, based on the role of Sufis as the main transmitters of Islam to outlying regions. For more on the spread of Sufism, see Trimingham.

of ideas as well.

Kamul's *khanqah*–monastery pairing is no longer extant, and to trace the buildings through the archaeological record is challenging. German archaeologists staked a major claim on the western Chinese frontier on behalf of the Berlin Ethnological Museum in the early 20th Century. Explorer and archaeologist Albert von Le Coq wrote an account of the expeditions and their findings in *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan*, noting that his team took out “103 cases weighing from 100 to 160 kilogrammes” of paintings, manuscripts and sculptures during the 1904–1905 expedition in the Kamul region.⁴⁰ Roughly 300 more such cases of varying weights were carried to Berlin in subsequent years and placed on display until the Berlin Ethnological Museum and its collection was destroyed in a Second World War bombing raid in 1944.

Neither the mosque nor the temples noted in the 15th–century account survived in recognisable forms by the time of the 20th–century expeditions. Von Le Coq mentions an 18th–century mosque in Kamul, but nothing as remarkable as the fascinating architectural juxtaposition of Buddhism and Sufism noted by the Timurid envoy. Von Le Coq ultimately gave up on excavations near Kamul, as the soft sandstone made for impenetrable digging. The buildings only survive in a few brief lines of the envoy's account from the 15th Century.

Conclusion

Islam and Buddhism intersected with each other in northern India and Central Asia through philosophy, text and teachings, practice, and architectural and decorative forms. Buddhist–Muslim interactions were sometimes direct, beginning as early as the 7th Century and lasting until the 12th, and indirect, through surviving visual arts and local traditions. Historical factors such as war, empire building and the establishment of educational infrastructure have simultaneously been the impetus for interaction and driven the two traditions to counter purposes. The question of Buddhist resonances with and impact upon Islam examined through an architectural perspective necessarily encompasses chronicles, archaeological findings, and architectural descriptions in texts. This combination of approaches

40 Albert von Le Coq, *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan*. trans. Anna Barwell. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), 25.

emphasizes the lacunae in all areas of evidence, but also shows the way towards further exploration of the topic.

Ephemeral spaces can only be imagined when we regard them from a distance of one thousand, or, in the case of the Buddhist examples, two thousand years – smaller *darghas* and *sanghas* made from organic materials rarely remain as part of the architectural record, meaning they are also often not part of the scholarly record. There was very little direct contact between settled Islamic society and Buddhist monastic complexes. The site in Kamul, about which we know so little, is a rare exception. The intermediary traditions of Hinduism and Manichaeism have a bridging effect but bring up a new set of questions and research concerns. Many sites, including Nalanda, and the cities of Baghdad, Ghazna, and Chisht were destroyed, leaving scattered remains. The archaeological work that has been conducted has not been fully published, leaving this material inaccessible.

Ultimately, the success of any kind of inter-faith or inter-philosophical study rests on the creative problem solving abilities of the researchers, and it is a rare person who might master the nuances of both Islam and Buddhism. For this reason, it is imperative that we seek out collaborative relationships with our colleagues to combine our knowledge for a better and more complete understanding of historical events and their impact. Buddhism and Buddhist monasticism was surely a factor in the development of organized Sufism in northern India and Central Asia. To state this does not detract from the internal development of Islamic culture or ignore the destructive nature of many Buddhist-Muslim encounters in the 11th and 12th Centuries. It does, however, imply that particular visual and philosophical elements of Buddhism continued in an Islamicised form following the end of some of the great Buddhist monasteries.

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