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HUMAYUN'S TOMB: FORM, FUNCTION, AND MEANING IN EARLY MUGHAL ARCHITECTURE

On the afternoon of Rabi' al-awwal 7, 963 (January 20, 1556), Nasir al-Din Muhammad Humayun, the second Mughal emperor of India appeared on the roof of his library at Din-panah in Delhi.¹ He remained there for several hours in full view of the people gathered at the Jami' Masjid nearby. At the end of the day he called for his mathematicians and ordered them to calculate the moment for the rising of Venus. Toward evening, he started down the stairs of his library, but on the second step heard the muezzin's call to prayer and stopped. The steps were slippery, and, according to contemporary historians, the emperor's foot caught in his robe, causing him to drop his staff and fall upon his head.² For the next three days he lay near death, and on the fourth he passed away. He was fifty-one years old and had ruled India twice: the first time from 1530 to 1540, and the second from 1555 until his death on January 24, 1556.

Humayun's body was first entombed in his palace at Delhi,³ but shortly after it was disinterred and taken by Khanjar Beg to Sirhind in the Panjab, where Jalal al-Din Akbar, the emperor's son and successor, saw it in 1558.⁴ Although no major sixteenth-century Mughal chronicle mentions its having been returned to Delhi, this must have occurred sometime before 1568, when it was recorded that Akbar visited his father's mausoleum which was nearing completion.⁵

Why was Humayun's tomb not built immediately after his death? What were the inspirations for its complex design and bold use of materials, and how does it relate to other sixteenth-century Islamic monuments in India? Who was its patron? Despite the tomb's size and importance, remarkably few scholars have studied it seriously, and none of these questions has so far been answered. Published plans exist only for the mausoleum's garden, ground floor, and section. Fergusson, Brown, and more recently Hoag and Volwahren⁶ have all examined the building, but their published work has concentrated almost exclusively on the mausoleum's

formal qualities and relationship to later Mughal monuments such as the Taj Mahal. Aside from S. A. Naqvi's booklet of 1947,⁷ no attempt has been made to study the tomb's complicated morphological and ontological problems.

Located on the flat plain of Delhi near the banks of the Jumna, the tomb is surrounded by a series of Sultanate and Mughal monuments (fig. 1). The rubble walls of the city of Din-panah (now called the Purana Qil'a), founded by Humayun in 1533, are 1,500 meters to the north. Six hundred and fifty meters to the west are the *dargāh* and village of Nizam al-Din Awliya, one of the most revered medieval Chishti saints of India. To the east are the *chillakhana* of Nizam al-Din and the Jumna.

The tomb itself—a massive red-sandstone and white-marble structure built around a rubble core—rests on a large plinth, made up of fifty-six cells containing more than one hundred gravestones, in the center of an enclosed garden (fig. 2). The plinth is 6.5 m. tall and 99 m. wide, and the elongated drum and double dome of the monument tower 42.5 m. above the ground. According to 'Abd al-Qadir Badauni, one of the few contemporary historians to mention the construction of the mausoleum, it was designed by Mirak Mirza Ghiyas, an architect of Iranian descent who worked extensively in Herat and Bukhara as well as India before undertaking this project, which lasted from 1562 to 1571.⁸ Although the tomb is essentially square, its corners are chamfered so that it appears to be an irregular octagon. The mausoleum is composed of four discrete octagonal units separated by four recesses, one of which, in the center of the southern façade, is the entrance. From the outside the monument appears as a large sequence of flat surfaces punctuated by recesses of varying size organized around a central dome (fig. 3). The two-dimensionality of the sepulcher's sides is reinforced by the axial approaches to the structure which prevent its being seen in full. As one circulates

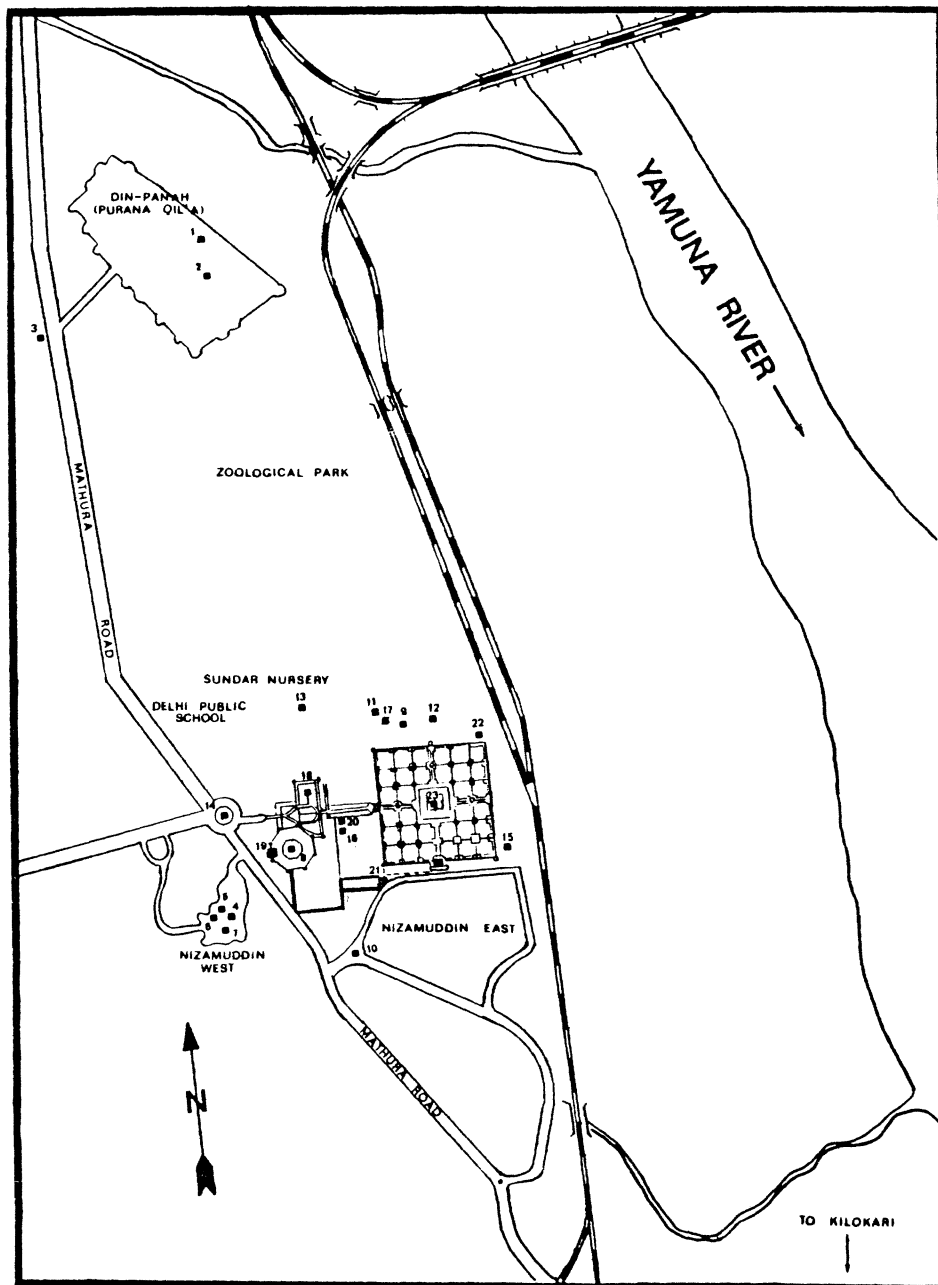


Fig. 1. Sketch map of the area around the tomb of Humayun. 1. Qal'a-i Kuhna Masjid; 2. Octagonal Pavilion (known as the Sher Mandal); 3. Khair-ul Manazil; 4. Tomb of Nizam-ud-Din Auliya; 5. Jama'at Khana; 6. Tomb of Amir Khusrau; 7. Tomb of Atgah Khan; 8. Tomb of 'Isa Khan; 9. Tomb of Mirza Muzaffar Husain (known as the Bara Bateshwala); 10. Tomb of 'Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan; 11. Lakkarwala Gumbad; 12. Sundarwala Mahal; 13. Unidentified tomb; 14. Sabz Burj; 15. Nili Gumbad; 16. Afsarwala Gumbad; 17. Sundarwala Burj; 18. Unidentified tomb; 19. Mosque attached to the tomb of 'Isa Khan; 20. Afsarwala mosque; 21. Gate inscribed to Mihr Banu Qadimi; 22. Chil'a Khana of Nizam-al-Din Auliya; 23. Humayun's tomb.



Fig. 2. Humayun's tomb seen from the south. (All photos by the author.)

around the plinth, however, the tomb's chamfered corners allow the building to appear as a three-dimensional form (fig. 4). From the corners the structure appears to be a complex series of interlocking surfaces.

The interior of the building consists of two radially symmetrical floors. The first is composed of a central domed chamber with the emperor's gravestone in the middle (fig. 5) and four corner rooms (fig. 6). Corridors connect the corner rooms to one another and to the main chamber. The effect of this intricate arrangement is that these rooms can be seen as either totally independent spaces or appendages of the central chamber. If the tomb is entered through the southern façade, then the corner rooms appear to revolve around the main chamber. But if one enters the building by one of the small openings in the angles of the wings on either side of the great recesses (fig. 7), then the corner rooms seem to be discrete and unrelated units. The second floor is made up of an elaborate system of halls and passageways organized around the sepulcher's central chamber that allow one to circumambulate all of the

rooms below (fig. 8). Strategically placed sandstone and marble screens illuminate the tomb's rooms and control access to various parts of the monument (fig. 9).

The garden in which the tomb is set is 348 m. sq. Surrounded by a monumental wall, it both dictates one's first perception of the structure and controls access to it. A series of cross-axially arranged canals and pathways divide it into a *chahār-bāgh* or four-part garden. The rigid geometry of the main pathways and water courses compels the visitor forward, from the garden's entrance in the center of the southern wall, up through the plinth, which is ascended by a series of stairs (fig. 10), and into the tomb itself (fig. 11). Subsidiary water channels and paths subdivide the quadrants of the garden into smaller sections. Small pools of water punctuate the juncture of each of the canals and channels.

The most striking features of Humayun's tomb are its remarkable size, radially symmetrical plan, rubble core finished with red sandstone and white marble, and garden setting. Each of these aspects of the building has a pre-Mughal origin. Massive tombs have existed in

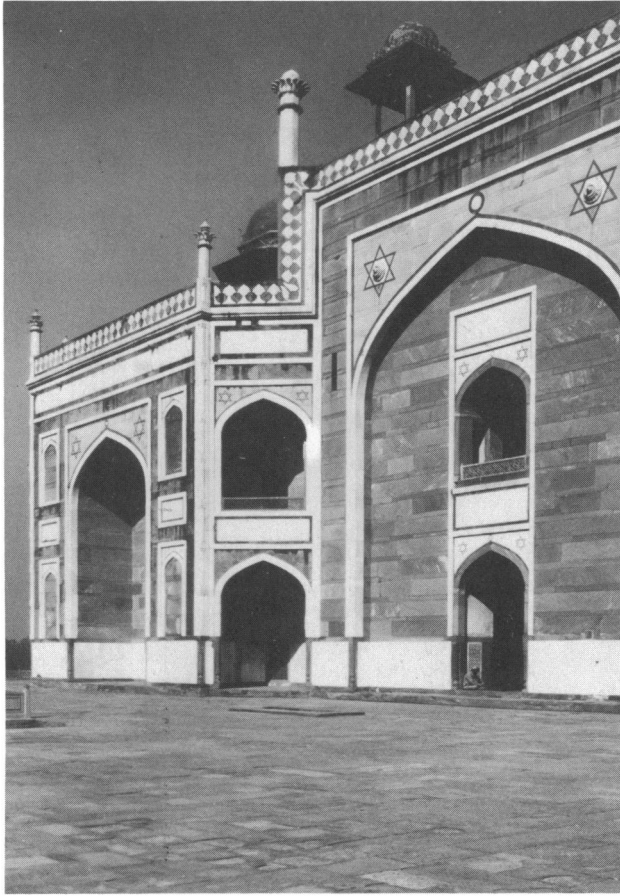


Fig. 3. Humayun's tomb. Southern façade from the plinth.

the Muslim world since at least the beginning of the eleventh century; radially symmetrical buildings—tombs as well as palaces—are common to the Timurid architecture of Iran and Central Asia;⁹ there are numerous fourteenth-century structures in India made out of red sandstone and white marble; and there are several fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century tombs that have formal settings similar to Humayun's. There are, however, no precedents for combining all of these elements in a single monument. Radially symmetrical Timurid tombs, for instance, are invariably made of bricks covered with tiles and are almost always placed in relatively rough and undeveloped areas. This is as true for the Gur-i Mir at Samarqand (1404)¹⁰ as it is for the shrine of Abu Nasr Parsa in Balkh (ca. 1460-61)¹¹ and the so-called Ishrat Khaneh in Samarqand (ca. 1460-64).¹² Conversely Indian tombs made of rubble faced with red sandstone and white marble, such

as the mausoleum of Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq (ca. 1325),¹³ are usually relatively small structures with simple square plans.

Both the size of Humayun's tomb and the innovative use of its features suggest a patron as well as a series of meanings for the building. Although there are no contemporary Mughal references to the monument's builder, several scholars have argued that Humayun's widow, Haji Begam, was responsible for its construction.¹⁴ This, however, seems unlikely, for during much of the time when the tomb was under construction she was on pilgrimage to Mecca.¹⁵ Moreover, given the mausoleum's grandeur, obvious cost, and complex formal decisions, only one person could have built it, Humayun's son Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Abu'l Fazl, Akbar's official biographer, and Father Monserrate, a Jesuit priest who resided at the emperor's court during the early 1580's, both confirm this. Abu'l Fazl states that Haji Begam was put in charge of the tomb upon her return from one of her pilgrimages, implying that the emperor was in control of the project,¹⁶ while Monserrate writes simply, but succinctly, that Humayun was buried in a sepulcher built by Akbar.¹⁷

At the time that Akbar began the construction of Humayun's tomb he had just started to assert control over his empire, Hemu, a Hindu who had seized Delhi from the Mughals after Humayun's death, was defeated by the young ruler on November 5, 1556. A year later Sikander Shah, one of the last Surs with any claim to power, was also defeated. The turmoil of this period, which also saw the dismissal of Bairam Khan, the emperor's guardian, may explain why work on Humayun's mausoleum did not begin immediately after his death. In 1561, just before the tomb was begun, Akbar annexed Malwa in central India, and by the time the monument was completed in 1572 the emperor had taken Gondwana (in eastern India) and the great Rajput centers of Chittorgarh and Ranthambhor.

During this time Akbar also began a series of new policies that changed the course of his empire. These included his marriage to Hindu princesses, such as the daughter of the Raja of Amber in 1562, that at once sealed important political alliances and brought the benefits of Rajput military skills and prestige to the Mughal court; and the revocation of the *jizya*, in 1564, a discriminatory poll tax imposed on those outside the Islamic faith.

The architecture of Humayun's tomb to a large extent reflects Akbar's attempts to articulate both the

range and the scope of his empire, while at the same time defining his personal associations and aspirations. On its most obvious level the elaborate garden setting of the tomb and its many rooms serve as a memorial of filial piety. Abu'l Fazl records in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* a favorite saying of Akbar's that is a kind of verbal equivalent to this aspect of the tomb, "Alas! that the emperor Humayun died so early and that I had no opportunity of showing him faithful service."¹⁸

The many cells of the monument's plinth and the large corner rooms, however, indicate that the building was designed to accommodate not one but several graves, thus establishing it as a dynastic center. Its proximity to Din-panah, the first major Mughal complex built in India and an obvious symbol of the dynasty, reinforce this idea, and in fact various Mughal princes and princesses were interred there from the last quarter of the sixteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth.¹⁹ Both the Gur-i Mir and the Ishrat

Khaneh, though not necessarily designed as dynastic tombs, served as such by the early sixteenth century when the Mughals saw them, and undoubtedly provided at least some of the inspiration for treating Humayun's mausoleum in this way.

The enormous scale of Humayun's sepulcher, however, distinguishes it from all but a handful of other tombs. Among these, three are notable: the tomb of Uljaytu at Sultaniyya (ca. 1305-13) and the tombs of Sher Shah (1545) and his son Islam Shah at Sassaram (ca. 1554). Humayun visited Uljaytu's massive mausoleum during his exile in Iran, and its size must have greatly impressed him. It is over 51 meters tall and 37 meters wide.²⁰ Both Sher Shah, who forced Humayun into exile, and his son, whose death provided the emperor with the opportunity to retake India, are buried in vast tombs surrounded by square pools. Sher Shah's mausoleum is 41 m. in diameter and 45.5 m. tall and rests in a pool 315 m. sq.; his son's, which

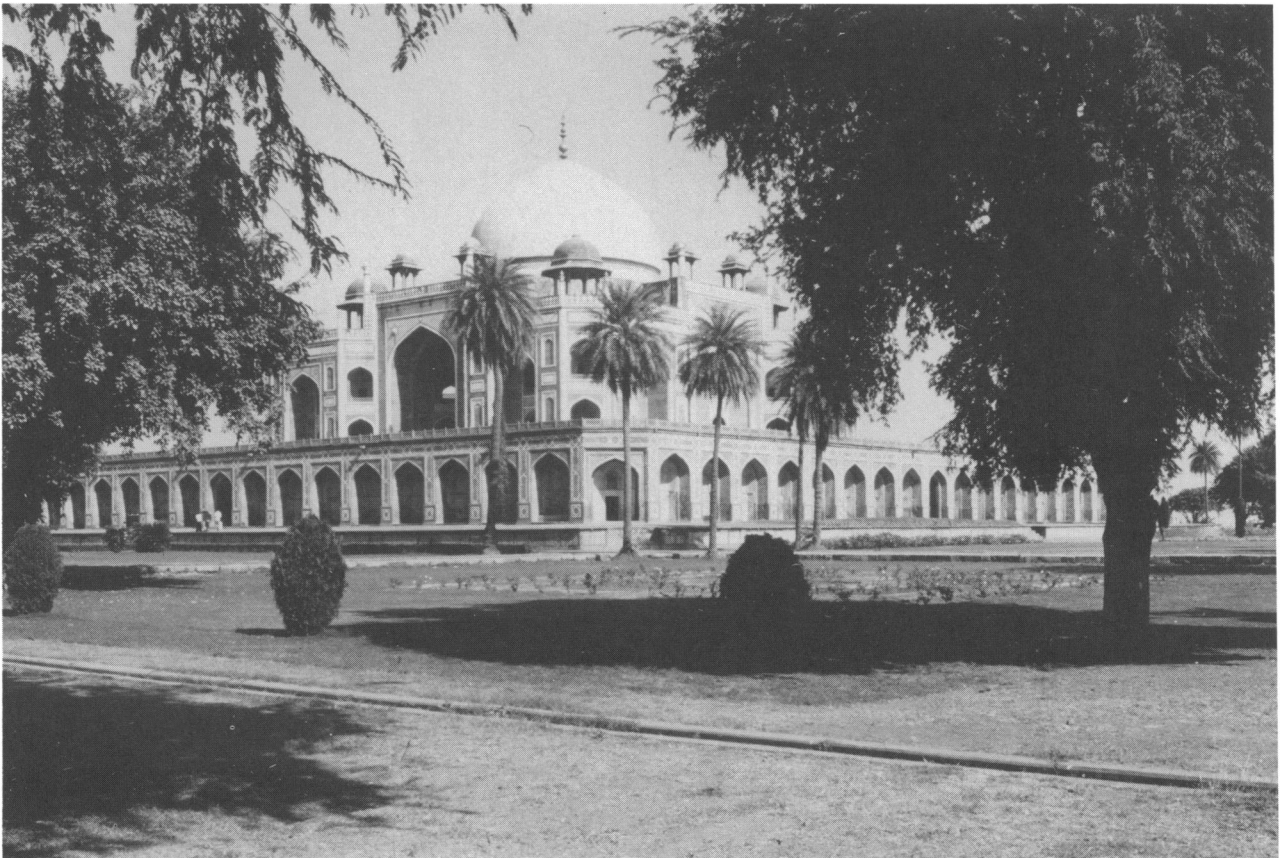


Fig. 4. Humayun's tomb. Southeast corner.

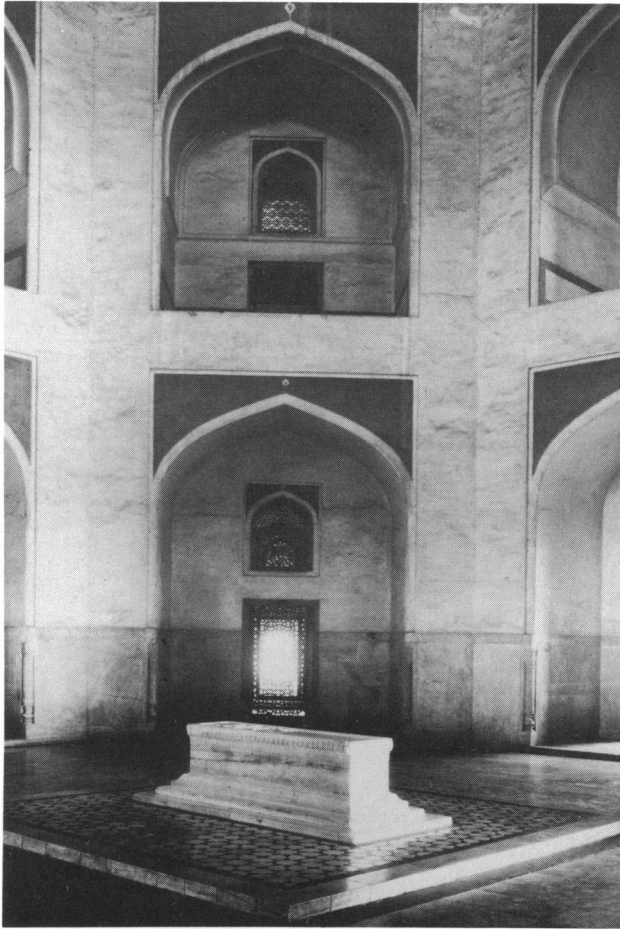


Fig. 5. Humayun's tomb. Central chamber.

was never completed, is 42.5 m. in diameter and in a pool over 416 m. sq. The extraordinary size of these buildings establishes large scale as a characteristic of imperial construction, and the impressive dimensions of Humayun's tomb can be seen both as a direct response to the vision of kingship expressed by these monuments and as an affirmation of the Mughals' power and permanent presence in India.

Size is not the only symbolic aspect of the mausoleum. Its radially symmetrical plan, high drum, double dome (figs. 12-13) and materials of construction also have important associative functions. Radially symmetrical plans²¹ and elongated drums with bulbous double domes are among the most obvious features of fifteenth-century Timurid architecture. For the Mughals, Timurid monuments such as the Gur-i Mir,

Ishrat Khaneh, and the tomb of Ulugh Beg and Abdu Razzaq (ca. 1502-14) at Ghazni, represented the epitome of architectural perfection. In his memoirs Babur, the founder of the dynasty, records in detail the buildings of the great Timurid cities of Samarqand and Herat,²² and both Humayun and Akbar must also have been impressed by them. The tomb of Ulugh Beg and Abdu Razzaq, in particular, with its central chamber, four corner rooms, complicated sequence of passage-ways, and projecting portals, is clearly related to Humayun's tomb.²³ Similarly the high drum and double dome of the tomb—which serve no function other than to enhance the monument's appearance—recall the profile of such buildings as the Gur-i Mir built by Timur for his grandson and later used as his mausoleum as well. A simple dome supported by a low octagonal drum, the standard system in pre-Mughal India, though obviously less majestic, could have been used. However, by consciously referring to such buildings as the Gur-i Mir, the architect of Humayun's tomb links both its occupant and its patron to the Timurids.

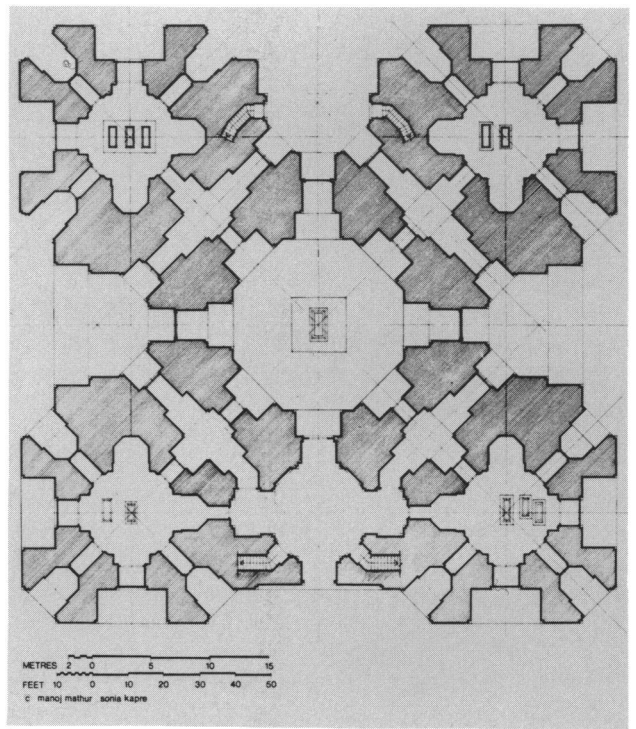


Fig. 6. Humayun's tomb. First-floor plan. (Plan: Manoj Mathur and Sonia Kapre.)

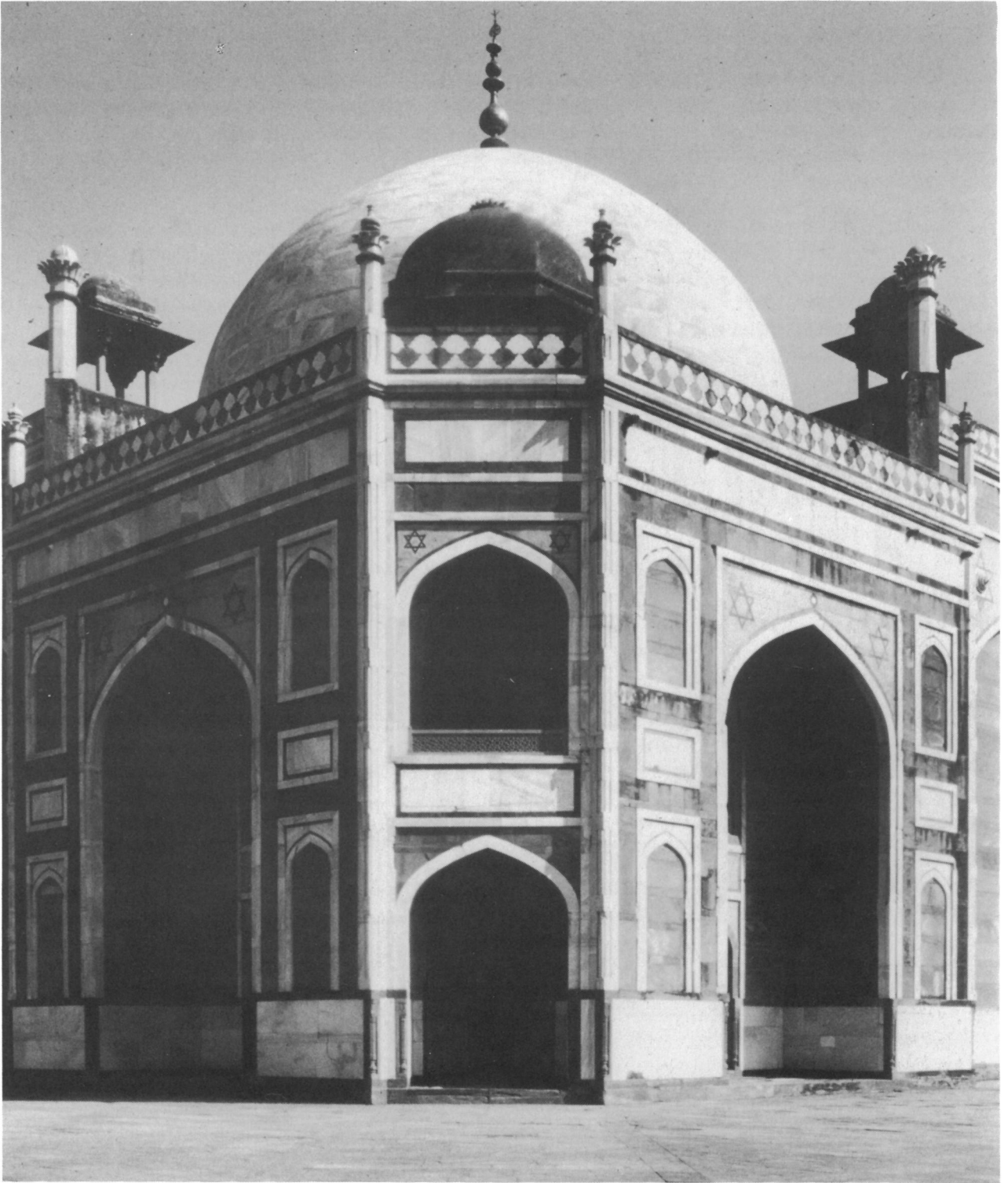


Fig. 7. Humayun's tomb. Detail of chamfered corner.

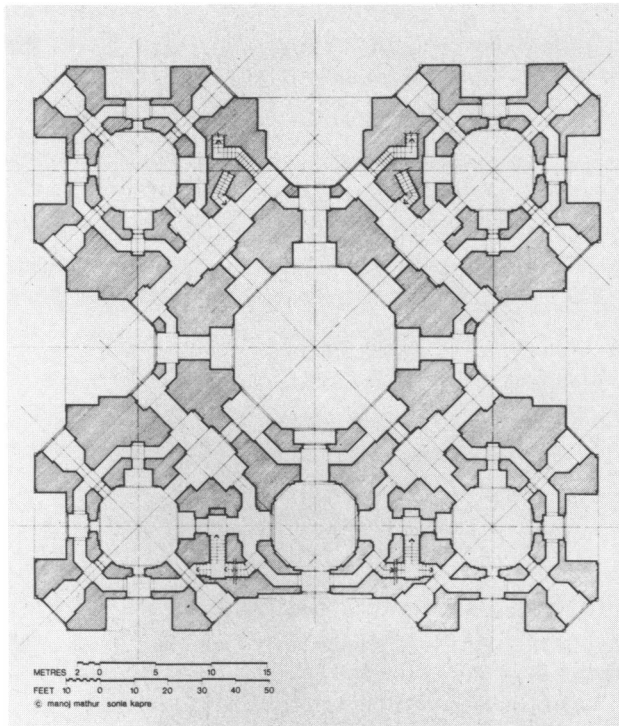


Fig. 8. Humayun's tomb. Second-floor plan. Plan: Manoj Mathur and Sonia Kapre.)

This was not an idle association. Babur perceived himself to be the last of the Timurids. In a moving speech to his closest followers shortly before setting off to conquer India the emperor explained his position:

Strangers and ancient foes such as Shaibaq (Shaybani) Khan and the Auzbeks are in possession of all of the countries held by Timur Beg's descendants; even where Turks and Chaghatais survive in corners and border-lands, they have all joined the Auzbeg, willingly or with aversion; one remains, I myself, in Kabul the foe mightily strong, I very weak. . . .²⁴

A poem composed by the famous calligrapher Mir 'Ali in praise of Babur indicates that others also saw him as the saviour of the Timurid dynasty:

My head is the dust of the door of the Lord of the kingdom of letters,
 The pride of the kings of kingdoms, the honor of Timur's family,
 The sovereign of the virtuous, the sea of generosity, the mine of kindness,
 The leader of the talents, Shah Muhammad Babur.²⁵

Akbar too perceived himself to be, and was seen by his contemporaries as, a Timurid. Abu'l Fazl, for

instance, writes of him, "Akbar, the king, illumines India's night/And is a lamp in the court of the House of Timur."²⁶ The many great Timurid manuscripts, such as the *Shahnāma* of Muhammad Juki²⁷ and the *Zafarnāma* now on deposit at the Walters Art Gallery,²⁸ that belonged to Akbar, attest to the emperor's keen interest in his past and awareness of the prestige associated with its most dramatic symbols of cultural sophistication. A seal of Akbar's further demonstrates his relationship to Timur.²⁹ It consists of a central circle with Akbar's name inscribed on it surrounded by eight smaller circles with the names of his father, grandfather, and forebears back to Timur, whose circle is directly above the emperor's, inscribed on them.

If the plan and dome of Humayun's tomb symbolize Akbar's dynastic origins, then the red sandstone and

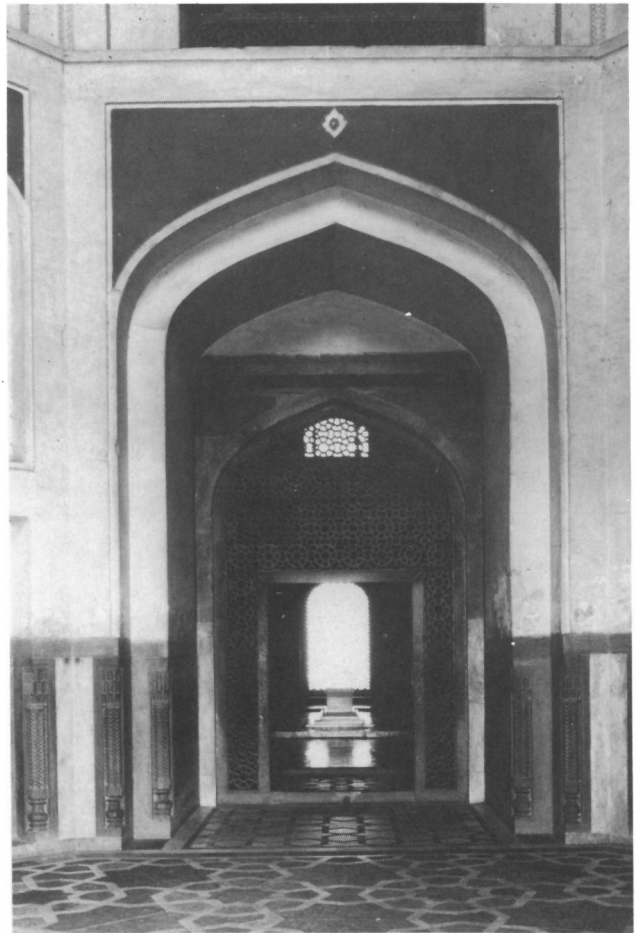


Fig. 9. Humayun's tomb. Inner screens.

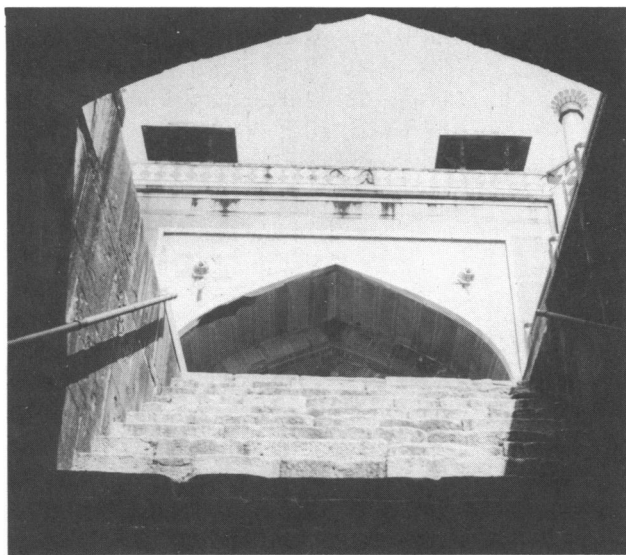


Fig. 10. Humayun's tomb. Stairs in the plinth.

white marble of the building symbolize his Indian aspirations. These materials are common to the fourteenth-century Islamic architecture of the Delhi Sultanate. They first appear in the monuments of the Khalji dynasty (1290-1320) such as 'Ala al-Din's entrance complex (1313) to the Qutub Minar.³⁰ Under the Tughluqs (1320-1414), red sandstone and white marble are associated with several major structures including the tomb of Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq (ca. 1325), the founder of the dynasty, and the Lal Gumbad, also known as the mausoleum of Kabir al-Din Awliya (which may date as late as 1397),³¹ In the early fifteenth century these materials all but disappear. It is not until the end of the century, at such monuments as the Moth ki Masjid (ca. 1488-1517),³² that they begin to be used again. Under the Mughals they become the standard means of finishing a building. The mosque of Jamali and Kamali (ca. 1530), the Qal'a-i Kuhna Masjid (ca. 1534),³³ the octagonal pavilion at Din-panah, and the tomb of Atgah Khan (1566-67) are only a few instances of their use during the first years of Mughal rule in India.

The appearance of red sandstone and white marble at Humayun's tomb was thus not an isolated incident, but part of a widespread and conscious revival of their use. By alluding to the 'Ala-i Darwaza, the tomb of Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq, and other great fourteenth-century Sultanate structures, the architect of Humayun's mausoleum associates it with a tradition

dating back to the establishment of Muslim rule in India and especially the buildings of the Tughluqs, the last dynasty before the Mughals to be fully in control of the country.

The Tughluqs were not only able administrators, they were also active innovators in both architecture and land reform.³⁴ Under Firuz Shah (1351-88), Delhi became a major metropolitan center, and new towns, religious buildings, and public edifices were constructed throughout the empire. After Timur's invasion of the subcontinent in 1398-99 and the fall of the Tughluqs sixteen years later, the Sultanate lost most of its territory in Rajasthan, Bengal, Gujarat, and the Deccan. Under the Sayyids (1414-51) and the Lodis (1451-1526) the Sultanate's political control diminished even further, as various Rajput and Muslim princes asserted their power in outlying regions of what

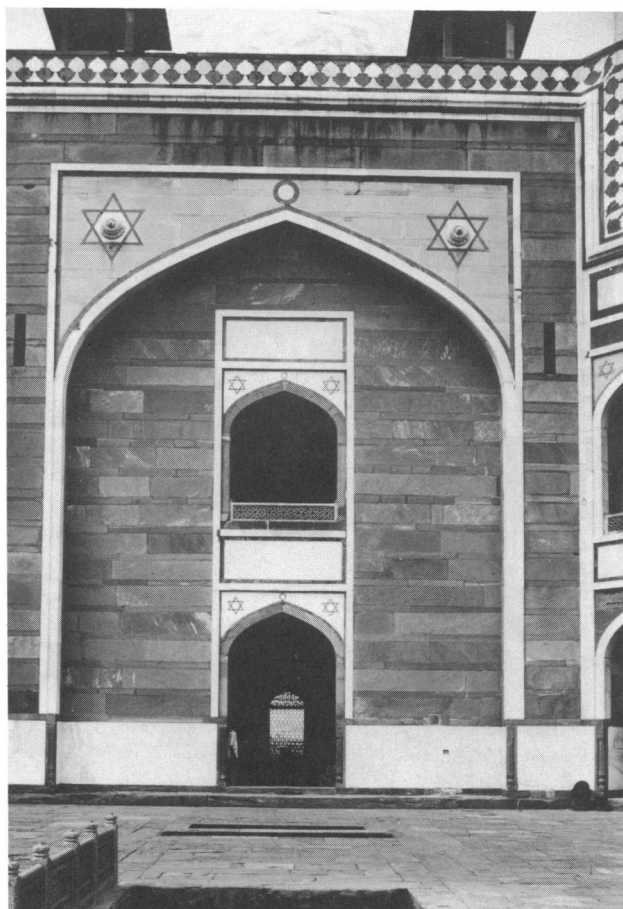


Fig. 11. Humayun's tomb. Detail of entrance.

remained of the empire. Humayun's tomb was meant, in this context, to be a statement affirming the Mughals' intentions to revitalize Delhi and to restore the rule of the Sultanate—now the Mughal Empire—over the rest of India.

Symbolic associations are not reserved for the principle elements of the tomb, but are found throughout the structure. Two examples demonstrate this clearly. Set into the western wall of the mausoleum are three screens—a marble one in the main chamber of the tomb flanked by two sandstone ones in the adjoining corner rooms—that let light into the building (fig. 14). Inscribed on these screens, which face toward Mecca, are mihrabs. As the light filters through the tomb, these mihrabs glow against their background (fig. 15), replacing the words of Surah 24 of the Qur'an that are traditionally inscribed on the mihrabs of Indian tombs. Although few other tombs in India use these screens, Badauni noted in 1584 that after burying one of Akbar's close disciples, Sultan Khvaja, in a mausoleum, "which was of a new-fangled kind, they put a grating facing the light of the sun, so that its rays,

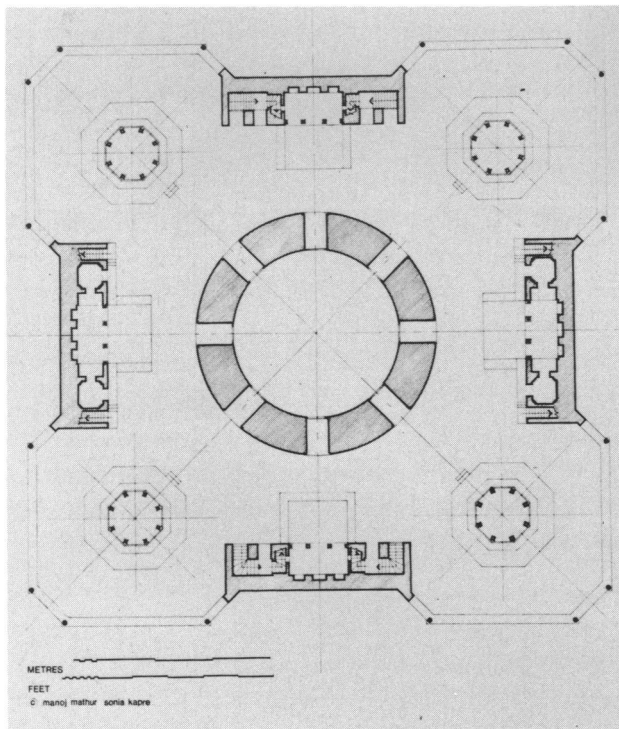


Fig. 12. Humayun's tomb. Roof plan. (Plan: Manoj Mathur and Sonia Kapre.)

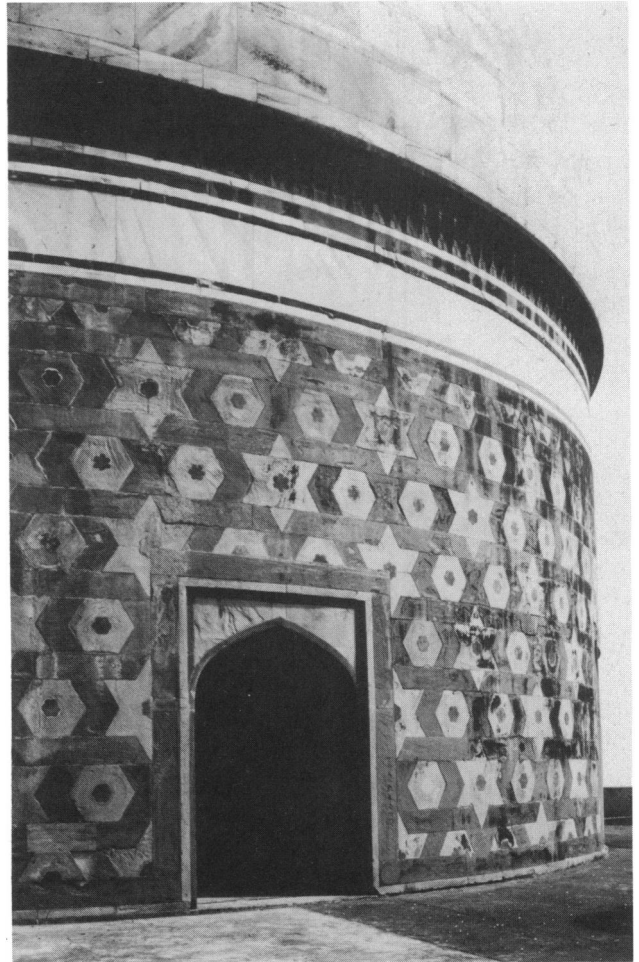


Fig. 13. Humayun's tomb. Double dome and drum.

which cleanse from sin, might every morning fall on his face."³⁵

The second example—the six-pointed stars that mark the spandrels of all the major gates and arches of the tomb (fig. 16)—is more complicated. The large size and prominence of the stars suggest that they are more than purely decorative. Some have argued that they are tantric symbols of the union of Sakti and Siva,³⁶ but it is more likely that Akbar chose them as a convenient symbol for Humayun in particular and the Mughals in general. Even though six-pointed stars appear on many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century monuments both in India and elsewhere in the Muslim world, it is only under the Mughals that they are consistently used as isolated motifs invariably placed on, or near, entrances to buildings. The Qal'a-i Kuhna Masjid, the octagonal

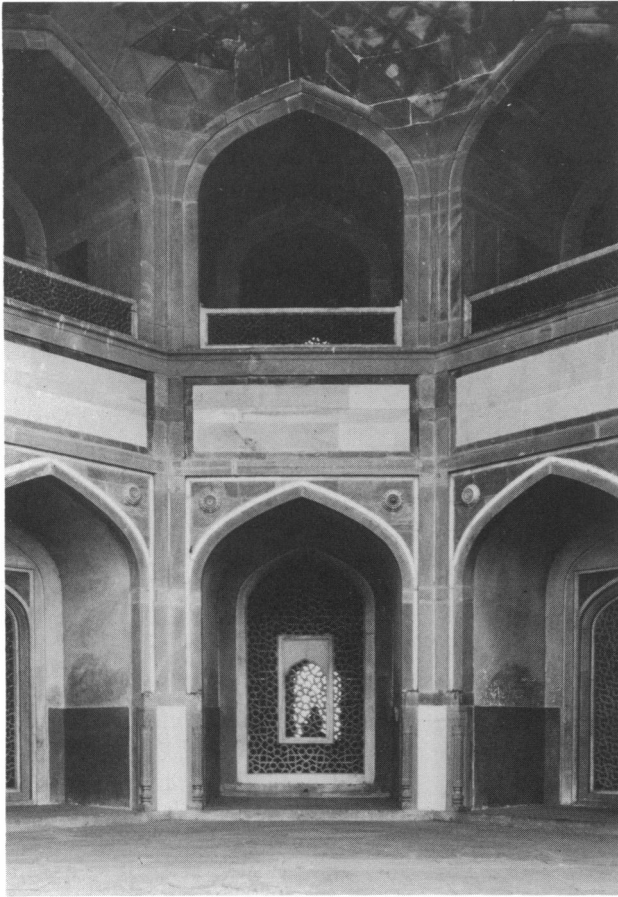


Fig. 14. Humayun's tomb. Exterior view of screens.

pavilion at Din-panah, and Humayun's tomb are examples of early Mughal monuments that use them extensively.³⁷ While it is not clear why this star became identified first with Humayun and then with the dynasty at large, it may be that its auspicious symbolism in Islamic astrology as a sign reflecting the union of opposing elements was appealing to the Mughals.³⁸

Although none of the texts dating from Humayun's reign mentions his use of this star, the sources do discuss his fascination with astrology and alchemy. Khvandamir records that the emperor matched the color of the robe he wore each day to the color of the planet that was believed to govern that day of the week:³⁹ "As Saturday is the day of Saturn, and the color of Saturn, according to astronomers, is said to be black, the ever-successful king dressed his royal body on this day in black."⁴⁰ On Sunday, "which is ascribed

to the sun, whose color is inclined to be yellow, the King, the lord of pomp, used to put on yellow apparel," and so on.⁴¹

Humayun's interest in astrology, which was shared by Akbar,⁴² also led him to create a round "carpet of mirth" (*basāt-i nishāt*), composed of a series of circular spaces:

The first circle which corresponds to the crystalline sphere was white, the second blue, the third black like Saturn, the fourth, which was the house of Jupiter, was light brown, the fifth, which was related to Mars, was ruby colored, the sixth, which was the house of the sun, was golden, the seventh, which was the house of Venus, was bright green, the eighth, which was the station of Mercury, was bluish. . . . The ninth circle, which was the station of the moon, was white. After the circle of the moon came the region (*kura*, i.e., sphere) of Fire, and Air, then that of Earth and Water.⁴³

Humayun's court was then divided into groups, and each group was allowed to sit in the circle that was related to it. Indian officers, for example, occupied the circle of Saturn; the sayyids and ulema sat in the circle of Jupiter.

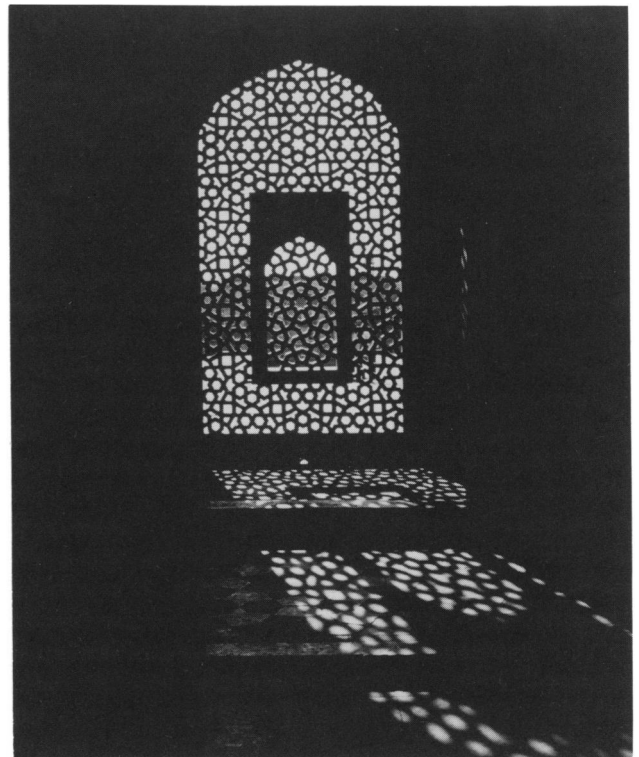


Fig. 15. Humayun's tomb. Central screen viewed from the inside.

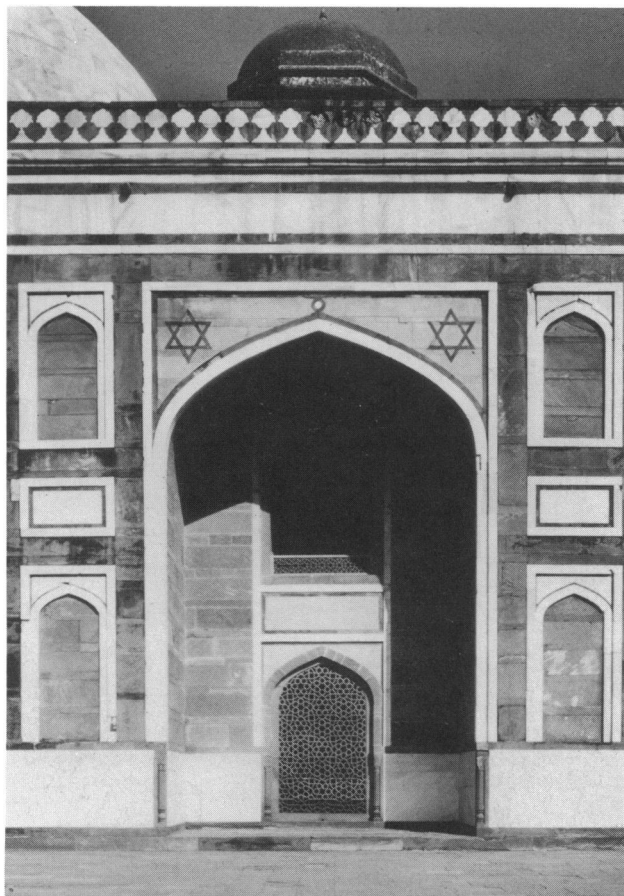


Fig. 16. Humayun's tomb. Six-pointed stars over an exterior spandrel.

The use of six-pointed stars as astrological symbols was certainly in keeping with this general milieu. As “the conjunction of opposing forces,” Humayun would have featured them at the Qalʿa-i Kuhna Masjid and the adjacent octagonal pavilion. Khvandamir’s description of the emperor’s kingship as an asylum where, “under the protection and shelter of his justice, deer sleep in the lap of panthers, and fish fearlessly take rest near crocodiles; pigeons become friends of falcons, and sparrows chirp fearlessly in front of eagles,”⁴⁴ though cliché-ridden, conveys the same idea of uniting opposing forces as the astrological symbolism of the stars.

By using these stars at Humayun’s tomb, however, Akbar added another dimension to their meaning. Just as the tomb is both a private resting place for a single person and a dynastic site, the six-pointed stars serve to

symbolize both Humayun and his descendants. Akbar’s need to associate himself with his father may have been a reflection of his belief that through Humayun he possessed a divine light that distinguished him from all of his rivals, including his brothers.⁴⁵ This light, according to Abu’l Fazl, originated with the semi-mythical Mongol queen Alanquva, who, after having been widowed, “was reposing on her bed [one night] when a glorious light cast a ray into the tent and entered the mouth and throat of that fount of spiritual knowledge and glory. The cupola of chastity became pregnant by that light in the same way as did Her Majesty ... Miryam [the Virgin Mary].”⁴⁶ This light initiated a line of noble rulers that included Chinghiz Khan and Timur as well as the Mughals and “was the beginning of the manifestation of his Majesty, the king of kings (Akbar), who after passing through divers stages was revealed to the world from the holy womb of her Majesty Miryam-makani for the accomplishment of things visible and invisible.”⁴⁷

This theme, which is of paramount importance to any understanding of the Mughals, is elaborated in the *Āʿīn-i Akbarī*:

Royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe, the argument of the book of perfection, the receptacle of all virtues. Modern language calls this light *farr-i zidi* (the divine light) and the tongue of antiquity called it *kiyan kura* (the sublime halo). It is communicated by God to kings without the immediate assistance of anyone, and men in the presence of it bend the forehead of praise toward the ground of submission.⁴⁸

Throughout the *Akbar-nāma* Abu’l Fazl takes great pains to demonstrate, over and over again, that the emperor’s spiritual qualities were recognized by his followers as a manifestation of his divine nature:

Some open-eyed ones who for many years had painfully striven in the quest of knowledge, and were now watching in justice’s portico held a meeting to expound the mystery, and after exchanging many extraordinary experiences, they all joined in the kindling point. On this day the light of saintship is casting a ray on his [Akbar’s] inner soul.⁴⁹

In order to establish Akbar’s divine nature it was necessary to show that he was descended from a line possessing the same spiritual powers. By appropriating Humayun’s symbol of the six-pointed star with all its astrological associations, the emperor rendered as explicitly as possible his relationship to his father. An almost identical statement—this time between Jahangir and his father Akbar—is the central theme of a painting now in the Musée Guimet. In *Jahangir Looking at a Por-*

trait of Akbar,⁵⁰ the old emperor is dressed in a plain white robe and turban, with a halo around his head and holding an orb in his left hand. He is standing on a balcony—a typical Mughal convention in imperial portraiture—which is draped with a lavish carpet. Jahangir wears a more elaborate robe, with a collar decorated with gold six-pointed stars, but is otherwise portrayed, like Akbar, haloed and on a balcony. The halo—a symbol of divinity borrowed by the Mughals from European prints brought to India by Jesuit missionaries and adventurers—identifies Jahangir as Akbar's legitimate heir, because he alone shares the latter's spiritual purity.⁵¹ At the same time it also recalls the divine light that emanated from Alanquva and passed through various rulers before illuminating the Mughals.

The symbolic qualities of Humayun's tomb reflect a bold attempt to create an architecture that grows out of, but is distinct from, earlier Islamic buildings in India and Iran, the two poles of the Mughal world. The novelty of this was not lost on contemporary historians who tried to describe the tomb. Abu'l Fazl, for instance, calls the building a *marqud*;⁵² Badauni refers to it as both an *imārat* and a *rauza*.⁵³ Nizam al-Din Ahmad, on the other hand, describes the structure as either a *mazār* or a *hazirah*.⁵⁴ While it can be argued that by the sixteenth century these terms had been so corrupted through popular usage that they were interchangeable, it is also true that the tomb's features were so different from those of other structures that it was impossible to define them with the normal vocabulary of funerary architecture.

The architect of the tomb, Mirak Mirza Ghiyas, with his Central Asian background and familiarity with the great Timurid monuments of Herat and Bukhara, as well as the Sultanate buildings of India, was the ideal choice for this project. His creation of a series of architectural elements that, on the one hand, are comprehensible because they operate within given traditions and, on the other, depend on visual, rather than verbal associations—there are no inscriptions in the tomb—is consistent with his patron's other artistic interests. Throughout the 1560's and '70's Akbar was encouraging his artists to develop a new pictorial language in which ideas were to be given a formal context or set of signs as effective in communicating meaning as the letters of the alphabet.⁵⁵ "The written shape," noted Abu'l Fazl, "guides to letter and word and from there the content [*ma'na*] is found out."⁵⁶ In order for architecture, like painting, to acquire this

ability, new forms or signs had to be developed that were both capable of expressing Akbar's ideas and understandable to those who came into contact with them. The need to make these forms comprehensible explains, at least in part, one of the more curious aspects of the tomb: its extremely conservative decoration. Stucco and inlaid stone, the principal techniques used to ornament the building, are used sparingly (figs. 17-18). Compared to the elaborate designs that characterize the decoration of both Sultanate and Timurid monuments, the work at Humayun's tomb is elementary. The rhomboidal faceting of the apse-like spaces that punctuate the sides of the building (fig. 19), for instance, are all of the same simple pattern, in contrast to the intricate designs of such monuments as the madrasa at Khargird.⁵⁷ It is as if a conscious decision had been made by the architect to avoid any kind of



Fig. 17. Humayun's tomb. Stuccowork in northeastern corner room.

detail that might detract from the overall impact of the tomb and thus obscure its meaning.

Two aspects of Humayun's tomb share this search for an innovative approach to forms and relate it directly to other projects that Akbar was working on at the time of the monument's construction. The eclectic combination of elements, derived from a variety of sources, that characterizes the principle components of the tomb is analogous to the numerous artistic manners represented in the *Tutināma*, one of the earliest manuscripts illustrated for the Mughals. Some of the manuscript's two hundred and eighteen miniatures are painted in a style derived from fifteenth-century western Indian painting associated with manuscripts of the *Caurāpancasika* and the *Candayana*; others are executed by artists trained at various Sultanate courts;

while still others are painted in an entirely new style that reflects a dramatic synthesis of these sources.⁵⁸ The presence of these different manners of representation side by side in the *Tutināma* identify the traditions out of which Mughal painting developed, just as the various references to the architecture of fifteenth-century Iran and pre-Akbari India establish the context of Humayun's tomb. What both lack in esthetic unity they make up for in the daring of their execution and in their attempt to establish a new mode of representation.

During the years that Humayun's tomb was under construction, the emperor's artists were also at work on the *Hamzanāma*, a manuscript that took some fifteen years (from around 1562 to 1577) to complete. According to Mir 'Ala al-Daula:

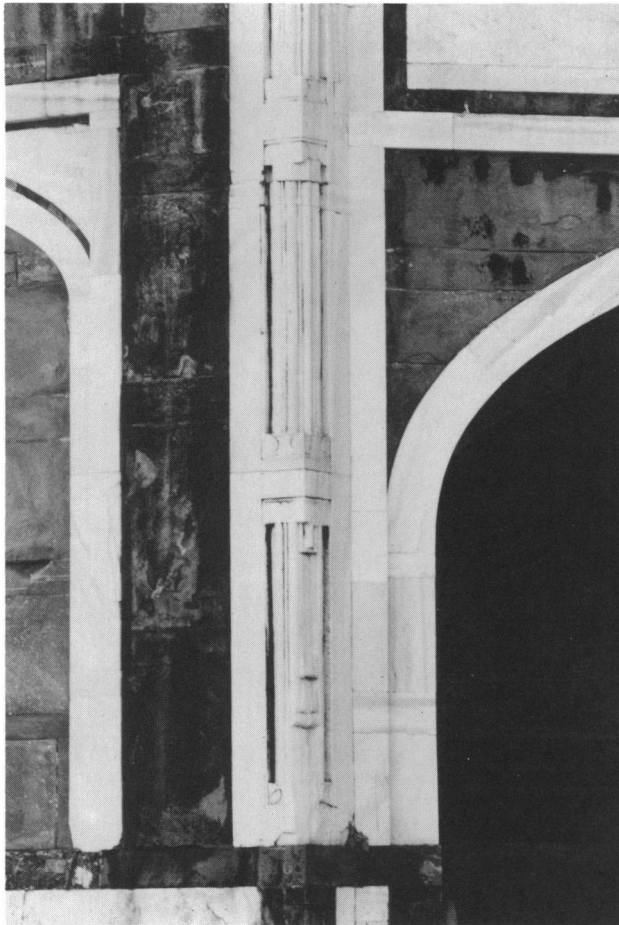


Fig. 18. Humayun's tomb. Detail of stonework.

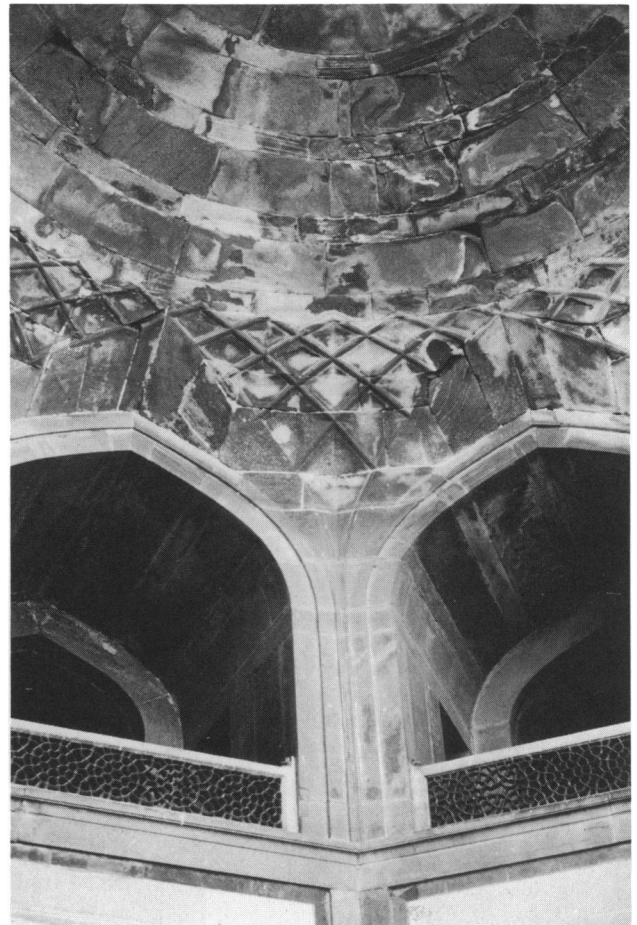


Fig. 19. Humayun's tomb. Tomb's exterior muqarnas.

His Majesty ... conceived of this wondrous book on the following lines. The amazing descriptions and strange events of the story are being drawn on sheets for illustration in miniscule detail, and not the subtlest requirement of the art of painting goes unfulfilled. The story will be completed in twelve volumes, each volume consisting of one hundred leaves (*warāq*); each leaf being one yard (*zar*²) by one yard, containing two large compositions. Opposite each illustration, the events and incidents relative to it, put into contemporary language, have been written down in a delightful style.⁵⁹

The boldness of the *Hamzanāma*'s paintings is striking; they are large (about 66 by 52 cm.), brightly colored, and full of action. This emphasis on direct visual appeal and forceful design is exactly the quality that is found at Humayun's tomb. Although in different mediums, both seek to establish an imagery that is as direct as it is exciting and that can be understood without elaborate textual explanation. It can be argued that in the case of Humayun's tomb this effort was not entirely successful because many of the ideas Akbar was seeking to express, such as his relationship to his father, were either too complex or too new to be conveyed symbolically. Nevertheless the building is a sophisticated and extremely well-executed structure. Its combination of boldness and refinement, energy and strength gives the building its power. That its parts vary in the degree of their success does not detract from the monument's forcefulness or its attempt to create an entirely new approach to architecture in India. The result ultimately led to the creation of such masterpieces as the Taj Mahal.

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Washington, D.C.

NOTES

1. This article is adapted in part from my "The Tomb of Nasir ud-Din Muhammad Humayun," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982. My thanks to Jim Hayden and John Tsantes of the Freer Gallery's photographic department for providing the illustrations for this article by converting my original slides to admirable black-and-white photographs.
2. Abū'l Fazl 'Allami, *The Akbarnama*, trans. H. Beveridge. 3 vols., (1897-1921; rpt. New Delhi, 1979), vol. 1, p. 656. For a discussion of the problems surrounding the exact date of the emperor's death, see *ibid.* 1:654, n. 3. For a slightly different version of Humayun's accident see 'Abd al-Qādir Badāunī, *Muntakhab al-Tavārikh*, trans. G. S. A. Ranking (1899; reprint, Delhi, 1972), vol. 1, p. 601, n. 28.
3. 'Abd al-Qādir Badāunī, *Muntakhab al-Tavārikh*, trans. T. W. Haig (1899; reprint Delhi, 1972), vol. 3, p. 269.
4. Abū'l Fazl, *The Akbarnama*, 2:102.
5. *Ibid.*
6. James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 2 vol. (1876; reprint New Delhi, 1972); Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Islamic Period* (1942; reprint Bombay, 1956); Andreas Volwahsen, *Living Architecture: Islamic Indian* (New York, 1970); John Hoag, "The Tomb of Ulugh Beg and Abdu Razzaq at Ghazni, a Model for the Taj Mahal," *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians*, 27, no. 4 (1968): 234-48.
7. S. A. Naqvi, *Humayun's Tomb and Adjacent Buildings* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1947).
8. *Muntakhab al-Tavārikh*, 2:135. For more information on Mirak Mirza Ghiyas, see the forthcoming article by Wayne Begley, who quotes extensively from Khavja Hasan Nithari's *Mudhakiri Ahbab*.
9. Two of these palaces are described in detail, one by an anonymous Italian traveler in C. Grey, ed., "Travels of a Merchant in Persia," in *Travels to Tana and Persia by Josefo Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini* (Hakluyt Society, Series 1, vol. 49 (London, 1873), pp. 167-69, and the other by Zahir al-Din Babur, in *The Babur-nama in English (Memoirs of Babur)*, trans. A. S. Beveridge (1826; rpt. New Delhi, 1970), p. 302.
10. Published in John Hoag, *Islamic Architecture* (New York, 1976), pp. 264-65.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 273-75.
12. Published by G. Pugachenkova in "Ishrat-Khaneh and Ak-Saray, Two Timurid Mausoleums in Samarkand," *Ars Orientalis* 5 (1963): 180-88.
13. Published and discussed at length by Anthony Welch and Howard Crane, "The Tughluqs: Master Builders of the Delhi Sultanate," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 123-67.
14. See, for instance, Brown, *Indian Architecture: Islamic Period*, p. 90.
15. Abū'l Fazl, *The Akbarnama* 2:367, and *The History of Humayun (Humayun-nama) by Gul Badam Begam*, trans. A. S. Beveridge (1902; rpt. Delhi, 1972), p. 220.
16. Abū'l Fazl, *The Akbarnama*, 3:551. See also *The Āḥ̣ṃ-i Akbarī of Abul Fazl-i-'Allami*, trans. H. Blochmann (1939; rpt. New Delhi, 1977), vol. 1, p. 465.
17. Father Anthony Monserrante, *Mongolicae legationis commentarius*, trans. J. S. Hoyland and S. N. Banerjee (Oxford, 1922), pp. 95-96.
18. Abū'l Fazl, *Āḥ̣ṃ-i Akbarī*, 3:428.
19. Among those buried at the tomb are Muhammad Sultan, the son of Roshan Koka, Dara Shikoh, Kam Baksh, and Bari-quallah. For a detailed discussion of the various Mughal princes interred there, see my "The Tomb of Nasir ud-Din Muhammad Humayun," pp. 130-61.
20. Charles Stewart, trans., *The Private Memoirs of Humayan: The Tezkereh al-vakiat by Jouher* (1832; reprint Idarah-i Adabiyat, 1972), p. 65.
21. This type of plan is often called a *hasht behisht* (see, for instance, John Hoag, "The Tomb of Ulugh Beg and Abdu Razzaq at Ghazni, A Model for the Taj Mahal," and R. Jairazbhoy, "The Taj Mahal in the Context of East and West: A Study in the Comparative Method," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29, nos. 1-2, [1961]: 59-88). This term, however, is not used by any contemporary Mughal historians that I know of except in a purely metaphorical sense. Babur's *Memoirs*, p. 616, refers to a garden by this name, and Khvāndamīr, *Qanūn-i*

- Humāyūni*, ed. M. Hidayat Hosain (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940), p. 54, uses the term *hasht jinnat* in a symbolic context to describe the union of various parts of a barge that Humayun had constructed.
22. Babur, *The Babur-nama*, pp. 304-6; 74-86.
 23. See Hoag, "The Tomb of Ulugh Beg and Abdu Razzaq at Ghazni," pp. 234-48, for a discussion of this relationship.
 24. Babur, *The Babur-nama*, p. 340.
 25. *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad*, trans. V. Minorsky, Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers (Washington, D.C., 1959), pp. 128-29.
 26. Abū'l Faẓl, *The Aʿīn-i Akbarī*, 3:461.
 27. Royal Asiatic Society, London, ms. 239.
 28. For a discussion of this manuscript, see Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, *Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory* (New York: Asia Society Gallery, 1985), pp. 150-51.
 29. Reproduced and discussed at length in *ibid.*, p. 120.
 30. Published in Hoag, *Islamic Architecture*, pp. 290-92.
 31. Welch and Crane, "The Tughluqs: Master Builders," pp. 143-45.
 32. Published in Brown, *Indian Architecture: Islamic Period*, p. 28, pl. 16.
 33. The subject of a recent study by Catherine Asher, "The Qalʿa-i Kuhna Masjid: A Visual Symbol of Royal Aspirations," *Chhavi* 2 (1981): 212-17, who attributes the building to Sher Shah.
 34. For an analysis of this aspect of the Tughluqs, see Welch and Crane, "The Tughluqs: Master Builders," pp. 123-67.
 35. *Muntakhab at-Tavārikh*, 2:351.
 36. R. Nath, "Depiction of a Tantric Symbol in Mughal Art," *Some Aspects of Mughal Architecture* (New Delhi, 1976), p. 69.
 37. Others include the tomb of Atgah Khan, the so-called Jahangiri Mahal at the Red Fort in Agra, and the entrance to the main palace at Fatehpur Sikri (popularly called Jodh Bai's Palace).
 38. Titus Burckhardt, *Le spirituelle de l'astrologie musulmane d'après Mohyiddin ibn Arabi* (Paris, 1950), p. 72.
 39. *Qanūn-i Humāyūni*, p. 51.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
 42. Who also, for instance, chose the color of his clothes according to the planets (Badāūnī, *Muntakhab at-Tavārikh*, 2:268).
 43. Khvāndamīr, *Qanūn-i Humāyūni*, p. 80.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
 45. See Brand and Lowry, *Akbar's India*, and John Richards, "The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir," *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Madison, Wisc., 1983), pp. 252-85, for a more detailed account of this issue.
 46. Abū'l Faẓl, *Akbarnama*, 1:170.
 47. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
 48. *Idem*, *Aʿīn-i Akbarī*, 1:3.
 49. *Idem*, *The Akbarnama*, 3:392.
 50. Musée Guimet, no. 3.676.B.
 51. For a more detailed discussion of this painting, see Glenn D. Lowry, "The Emperor Jahangir and the Iconography of the Divine in Mughal Painting," *Rutgers Art Review* 4 (1983): 36-46.
 52. Abū'l Faẓl, *The Akbarnama* 2:352.
 53. *Muntakhab at-Tavārikh* 2:133, 299.
 54. B. De, trans., *The Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1936, 1940), 2:507, 454.
 55. For more information on this issue, see Lowry and Brand, *Akbar's India*, p. 100.
 56. Abū'l Faẓl, *The Aʿīn-i Akbarī* 1:102; as translated in Ebba Koch, "Jahangir and the Angels: Recently Discovered Wall Paintings under European Influence in the Fort of Lahore," *India and the West*, ed. J. Deppert (New Delhi, 1983), p. 193, n. 73.
 57. Hoag, *Islamic Architecture*, p. 273.
 58. Pramod Chandra, *The Tuti-Nama of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Graz, 1976), pp. 31-48.
 59. Translated from Mir ʿAla al-Daula's *Nafa'is al-Maʿasir* by M. Naim in Chandra, *Tuti-Nama*, p. 180.