EPIGRAPHY AS A SOURCE FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAMIC CULTURE IN BENGAL*

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One of the great intellectual achievements of Islamic civilization and one of its significant contributions to the science of historiography is its rich legacy of historical texts. This historical output is not limited to chronicles and books on history (such as the *tabaqat* [Biographical Dictionaries] of various writers[1[1]]), but assumed other forms, including inscriptions. Like most other modes of expression in this culture, these epigraphs reflect the Islamic faith itself. The extraordinary number of epigraphs also ensures the important role that inscriptions played in transmitting Islamic culture. Inscriptions can be found not only on buildings, but also on textiles and rugs, metal and glass objects, ceramics and ornaments, not to speak of arms, coins and seals. In some regions, a rich tradition of inscribing on stone existed even before the advent of Islam. Ibn Ishaq, for instance, mentions about a number of Syriac inscriptions which were unearthed while Ka'ba was demolished for reconstruction when the Prophet was about thirty five years of age.

The use of archaeological materials for scholarly investigation is encouraged in the Qur'an. The word *athar*, which can be found the Qur'an in several places, is used in modern Arabic to mean archaeology.[2[2]] Archaeological findings offer many clues to the past; epigraphical studies reveal evidence of rulers who might otherwise have remained unknown. Thus we read in the *sura* (chapter) "Believers" in the Qur'an: "Do they not travel through the earth and see the end of those who had lived before them? They were more numerous than these and superior in strength and [ancient] remains in the land [where they had once lived]. Yet all that they accomplished was of no profit to them."(40:82).

Inscriptions were used in Islamic culture from the beginning: a number of them date from the seventh century, i.e. first century Hijra. Most of them appeared on the inside of the

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1[1]   For instance, Mawlana Minhaj al-Din Siraj al-Din, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, ed. 'Abd al-Hay Habibi (Kabul, 1342 A.H.), provides much useful information about early Muslim rule in Bengal.

2[2]   The celebrated Muslim historian Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Maqrizi also uses the word *athar* to mean more or less the same thing in his treatise on the relics and remains of Cairo *al-Khitat wa al-Athar* (Cairo, 1370 A.H.).

buildings until the eleventh century, when they began to be used to decorate the outsides of buildings as well. During the same period, the cursive styles of writing, *naskh* and *thulth*, gained popularity while the angular style known as Kufi (angular) declined in use.[3]

Calligraphic panels often constitute the most decorative elements in an Islamic building. The use of written messages for architectural decoration may be described as a typical Islamic cultural phenomenon. These inscriptions both embellished and conveyed messages. In some buildings, the calligraphic panels are placed too high to be deciphered,[4] suggesting that their aesthetic intent was regarded as more important than the textual message. In fact many early Kufi inscriptions and some Bengali *tughra* (a highly intricate and stylized form of calligraphy) inscriptions from the Sultanate period in Bengal are almost indecipherable, suggesting again that aesthetics was more important than content. For those regions influenced by Shi'ism, this development may to some extent have been inspired by the mystic nature of Shi'ism, especially its belief that a hierarchy of knowledge and spiritual development should be assigned to various classes of people accordingly. Thus it seems that not all the inscriptions were meant to be read by ordinary viewers. In a number of Islamic inscriptions, letters are easily confused and uncertainties are created by a concern for ornamentation, which takes priority over legibility.[5]

It is also probable that with many inscriptions, some kind of historical intent was involved from the very beginning. Perhaps they were intended to be read by scholars (or more precisely by historians) in the future. There is also another possible explanation that because of their initial training in the Kufi style, the educated class of the Muslim world were more comfortable with the intricate pattern of Kufi writing than they were with the cursive writing (e.g., *naskh*) which today we consider to be much easier. Kufi writing in a way enjoyed a higher status than cursive writing in those days. The selection of an appropriate place for the inscription on a monument was also important, since those parts of the monuments which were most easily seen best served the purpose.

In spite of the great importance that Islam attached to reading, writing and learning, the vast majority of the population in the rural areas of the Muslim world remained illiterate, but the viewing of religious inscriptions, especially Qur'anic ones, was still a source of *baraka* (blessings). Even for the common literate persons, recognition of the text -- whether it was the Throne Verse from the Qur'an or sayings of the Prophet about the

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3[3]   One of the earliest examples of this development can be seen in the Qur'anic inscriptions on the *tabut* of al-Husayn made sometime around 550/1155 in Cairo, in which both Kufi and *naskh* are used; see Caroline Williams, "The Quranic Inscriptions on the *tabut* of al-Husayn," *Islamic Art* 2 (1987), pp. 3-13. Another example is Qutb Minar in Delhi built in early 13th century.

4[4]   The inscription on the Zafar Khan's masjid dated 698/1298 in Tribeni, Hooghly; the Chhoto Sona Masjid inscription in Gaur from the reign of Husayn Shah and Bagha Masjid inscription in the district of Rajshahi dated 930/1523-24 are examples of this kind of calligraphic program, where the inscriptions are placed too high to be easily read.

5[5]   R. Ettinghausen, "Arabic epigraphy: communication or symbolic affirmation," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. D. K. Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), pp. 297-317.

importance of building a masjid - was the important thing, and not being able to decipher it accurately and completely.

Inscriptions are found everywhere in the Muslim world from Spain and North Africa to the archipelago of Indonesia. These inscriptions were interesting enough to draw attentions of Muslim historians and writers from time to time from quite an early period. Bengal was perhaps the first region where scholarly interest about Islamic inscriptions began, as early as the second half of the eighteenth century, when Sayed Ghulam Hussein Salim used epigraphic evidences in a scholarly method to write *Riyad al-Salatin* (a Persian work on the history of Bengal completed in 1788). Almost half a century later, Sayyid Ahmad Khan -- a great Muslim thinker and 'alim (scholar) of North India -- surveyed a number of Islamic monuments and inscriptions of Delhi and Agra and wrote a valuable book in Urdu *Athar al-Sanadid* (completed in 1846). Another important pioneer in the field during the second half of nineteenth century was Munshi Ilahi Bakhsh who deciphered nearly forty-two inscriptions of Gaur and Pandua and included the study in his monumental world history book *Khurshid-i-Jahan Numa*. Interestingly, one of Munshi Ilahi Bakhsh's students, Abid Ali Khan, also took a great interest in the inscriptions of Gaur and Pandua as is evident in both of his works *Short Notes on the Ancient Monuments of Gaur and Pandua* (Malda, 1913) and *Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua* (edited by H. E. Stapleton, Calcutta, 1931).

Early in the nineteenth century British collectors began to take an interest in these inscriptions, motivated principally by their visual appeal. For many of them, colonizing of lands and peoples also meant the colonizing of their arts, architecture, archaeological heritage, and even interpretation of their history and culture. Most of the private as well as museum collections of this period were built upon works removed from their context and often illegally or improperly acquired. However, as interest in Oriental antiquities and art objects developed in the West, many Europeans set out to explore ancient sites in search of them. Cities such as Gaur and Pandua attracted a number of such adventurers, many of whom were little more than plunderers, or at best antique collectors. Some, however, left accounts and diaries of their experience, most of them now preserved in the India Office Library in London, which provide a rich source for materials on inscriptions that no longer exist.

Foremost among the British scholars pioneering this field is Sir Henry Creighton who lived for twenty years (1786 and 1807), near Gaur and wrote a book, *The Ruins of Gaur* (London, 1817) illustrated with fabulous sketches and architectural drawings. He often refers to inscriptions he found in the old Islamic monuments of the area. Another celebrated British collector of Oriental antiquities was Major William Franklin who visited Gaur at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Both his diaries, "*Journal of a Route from Rajmahal to Gaur*" and "*The Ruins of Gaur,*" preserved in the India Office Library (Mss. nos 19 and 285), give a clear description of the archaeological remains in the region and record a number of inscriptions. The collection that he took with him to England consisted of many monumental inscriptions, some of which he gave to the

British Museum. The most elegant piece in this collection, however, found its way through antique dealers to the United States, where it ended up in the museum of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Franklin was accompanied on his tour by a local guide named Munshi Shayam Prasad, a scholar of Arabic and Persian. At Franklin's request, he prepared a report on the archaeological remains of the area. It, too, has become a valuable source for the epigraphy of the region (Ms. 2841 in the India Office Library, later published by A. H. Dani as an appendix to his book, *Muslim Architecture of Bengal* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961)). Another contemporary archaeologist, named Orme, also left a brief report, *The Ruins of Gaur*, now in the India Office Library (Ms. 65: 25), which describes a few inscriptions. Francis Buchanan Hamilton was another early nineteenth-century scholar who noted a number of inscriptions during his tour of the district of Dinajpur in 1807-1808. He mentions some of them in his work *A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of the District or Zilla of Dinajpur*.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the investigation of the art and archaeology of the region became more scholarly. One of the first studies of this period was by Captain W. N. Lees, who published an Arabic inscription of Sultan Barbak Shah in the *JASB* in 1860. Among the important studies of that time is *Gaur, Its Ruins and Inscriptions* by J. H. Ravenshaw (London, 1878), which is particularly rich in illustrations and texts. The formation of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861 brought a revolutionary change to the archaeological study of South Asia. Its first director general, Sir Alexander Cunningham, and his subsequent colleagues, took systematic steps to record all existing inscriptions. Other scholars to discover Islamic inscriptions of Bengal during this period were Dr. James Wise, Mr. E. Vesey Westmacott, Mr. Hili and Mr. Walter M. Bourke. Many of the rubbings they collected were sent to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta, where scholars such as Henry Blochmann deciphered and published them.

Among other scholars to contribute to this field in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were R. D. Banerji, Henry Beveridge, H. E. Stapleton, S. Aulad Husain, Rahmat Ali Taish, Hamid Allah Khan and Khan Sahib Moulvi Abdul Wali. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Archaeological Survey of India established a separate section for epigraphy and began to publish its specialized series, *Epigraphia Indica*. *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*, devoted entirely to the Muslim inscriptions of India, issued its first volume in 1907-08. Eminent scholars such as Ghulam Yazdani, Paul Horn, Denison Ross and J. Horvitz either participated in its editing or contributed scholarly articles. After independence from the British, its name changed to *Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement*. Scholars such as Ziauddin Desai published a number of inscriptions from Bengal. Two important works were published before the independence of Bangladesh and certainly provided models for a comprehensive epigraphic study of the region. The first was *Bibliography of Muslim Inscriptions of Bengal* by A. H. Dani (published as an appendix to *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, vol. 2 (1957)),

and the other *Inscriptions of Bengal* by an eminent twentieth-century epigraphist, Maulvi Shamsuddin Ahmad (Rajshahi: Varendra Research Museum, 1960). Among recent publications, *Corpus of Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bihar* (Patna: Jayaslal Research Institute, 1973), by Qeyamuddin Ahmad, and *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992), by Abdul Karim, a prominent historian of Bangladesh, are indeed important additions to this genre. Recent publication of a monumental Arabic work *Rihla ma'a al-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyya fi Bilad al-Bangal: Darasa Tarikhiyya Hadariyya* is an important addition to the field of Islamic inscriptions of Bengal. This important work contains an elaborate discussion of almost 400 inscriptions of Bangladesh and West Bengal.[6] All of these works have enriched the field of epigraphy of the region.

Still any discussion about Islamic epigraphy would remain incomplete if we do not mention about a famous Swiss Orientalist Max Van Berchem (1863-1923) who can be truly regarded as the father of the science of Islamic epigraphy as he codified its rules in true sense. The research methodology, that he established for the study of Arabic inscriptions, not only as an art form in its own right, but also as a scholarly discipline of considerable importance for oriental studies in the fields of language, history, art and architecture. Instead of just deciphering, reading, and translating inscriptions -- a work of considerable skill by itself -- he established the methodology of analyzing each inscription in its cultural and historical context, often culminating in a whole essay covering its particular time and space as well as biographical details of the names appearing in the epigraphic text. His pioneering works, such *as Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*,[7] certainly paved the way to establish Islamic epigraphy on sound footing. Soon after that, the monumental task of cataloging the Islamic inscriptions began with the publication of the *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* in 1931. More than eight thousand inscriptions were edited in the first sixteen successive volumes of *Répertoire* (Cairo 1931-64) only, which covered the first eight centuries, and the effort continues to this day. In spite of the fact that *Répertoire* remains incomplete in a number of ways, partly because of the discoveries of a number of new inscriptions that came into light after its publication, still it can be considered one of the most useful inventories and the only existing attempt at a systematic grouping of Islamic inscriptions by year and in an approximately geographical order. Scholars such as Tychsen, Reinaud, J. J. Marcel, George C. Miles, S. Flury, Gaston Wiet, E. Herzfeld, A. Grohmann, Jean Sauvaget, Moritz Sobernheim, E. Lévi-Provençal, J. Sourdel-Thomine have contributed greatly in the field in the Western languages. On the other hand, Hassan Mohammed al-Hawary, Ibrahim Jum'a, Hasan al-Basha, Zaki Muhammad Hasan, Abder Rahman Fahmy and many others have contributed much in the Arabic language. A number of valuable works have also been rendered in other Islamic languages, particularly in Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Bengali, Pushtoo, Bahasa Malay and Indonesian.

6[6] Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'a al-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyya fi Bilad al-Bangal: Darasa Tarikhiyya Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2004).

7[7]   Max Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum* , in *Mémoires publiés par les Membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, (*Egypte* , Vol. xix, Cairo 1903; *Jérusalem*, vols. xliii, xlv, Cairo 1920-22*; Syrie du Nord* [in collaboration with E. Herzfield], vols. Lxxvi – lxxvii, Cairo 1955).

Almost every inscription, whether on a milestone, frieze, or tombstone, contains useful information. The use of inscribed panels was and remains so common that it would be difficult to imagine a building in an Islamic culture without one (charts 7-8). In miniature painting, buildings are often shown decorated with inscriptional panels. Architectural inscriptions are often large to capture the attention of the viewer; in this way they interact directly with the aesthetics of their surroundings. The horizontal inscriptional band of the Kiswa (the decorated black veil on the Ka'ba) as well as *tiraz* (a highly stylized form of writing on early Islamic textiles) may have visually influenced the architectural epigraphy in the Muslim world.[8[8]] In spite of the great diversity from one region to another in their visual expression, a unity prevails in the Islamic messages that most of them convey.

In most cases when a region became Islamic, though the local language for every day use was often retained, Arabic became the official, religious, educational and literary language. In Central and South Asia, Persian was used in the royal courts, but Arabic remained the language of religion and therefore the *lingua franca* among Muslims; Islamic inscriptions of this vast land used both Arabic and Persian. Rulers used Persian, even though many came from a Turko-Afghan background and some spoke Turkic dialects. Turkish inscriptions in South Asia are rare, however, since the conquering Muslim forces hardly ever used the language for writing. Among the Indian languages, Sanskrit was used in rare cases both for numismatic and epigraphic purposes. The first coin issued by Ikhtiyar al-Din-Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji commemorating his conquest of the Gaur region bears both Arabic and Sanskrit inscriptions. In a way, it suggests that even the Muslim ruling class patronized the elite culture, perhaps at the cost of the popular one. One of the earliest inscriptions in Bengal, executed under the patronage of a Muslim ruler by the name of Balka Khan Khalji some time in 626-28/1229-31 is inscribed in Persian, while a khanqah inscription from Sian, Birbhum District, not far from an early Islamic center of Lakhnawr, dated 618/1221 is rendered in Arabic. Bengal was one of the earliest regions to use Persian for epigraphic purposes. That Persian was used at such an early period for architectural inscriptions there, an area quite distant from both Persia and Central Asia, is intriguing.

Inscriptions can be difficult to read, and much of the information in them may appear trivial to the uninitiated. However, one can gradually develop the skills and sensitivity that make their study both useful and interesting. From the point of view of political history, important data in an epigraphic text can be a date, a place name, or the name of the ruler recorded there. A historian can then try to incorporate all this fragmentary information into a historically coherent narrative. Such information can tell us that the area where the inscription was found was indeed under the jurisdiction of the ruler mentioned. If the name of the ruler in the inscription is different from the one usually found in contemporary chronicles, it might mean that some unusual event, such as rebellion, had taken place there which historians for some reason did not record. One

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8[8]   One can argue of course that it was architectural epigraphy which influenced the *Kiswa* as well as the *tiraz* tradition in the Muslim world. In any case, some kind of mutual influence must have taken place at some stage.

such example is the Baramatyabari inscription dated 934/1528, which records Mahmud Shah as being the sultan, even though the ruler of Bengal at that time was in fact Nusrat Shah. The inscription suggests to us that Mahmud Shah may have proclaimed himself the sultan in defiance of the authority of his brother, the actual sultan Nusrat Shah in 1528, though no such event is recorded in contemporary historical writings. Many violent events, especially those that went against the interests of the ruling establishment, were not recorded by an official chronicler at the imperial court, leaving the reader of the chronicle with the impression that peace and happiness prevailed throughout a ruler's reign. Generally speaking, dates on inscriptions are more reliable than dates in the texts of historical manuscripts, and therefore they provide valuable clues for reconstructing events in local history. The famous traveler Ibn Batuta noticed a commemorative inscription on the mihrab of the earliest Jami' Masjid in Delhi, which he deciphered. This inscription helped him to find the exact date of the Muslim conquest of Delhi.[9]

Inscriptions can also provide details about local administration such as the names of revenue collectors, police officers, local army commanders and officials of the central government, names otherwise lost to history because they would not have been known to historians and chroniclers living far away in the imperial capitals. Similarly, older or original names of places or administrative units and divisions in use when the inscription was made can be preserved, as can details bearing on social or religious history. Commemorative inscriptions sometimes tell us why the inscriptions themselves were made. The theme of sovereignty is historically associated with monumental entranceways, for example, because they were thought to be proper places to proclaim the sovereign's power. Epigraphic texts can also help us understand religious trends in a region.

Though the contents of the epigraphic texts may vary from one inscription to another, one can often find a sense of unity in the messages they carry. The inscription on an entrance to a masjid is apt to contain verses in praise of Allah, or Qur'anic verses or sayings of the Prophet which promise divine reward for those who construct masjids and maintain them. Inscriptions on mihrabs often use a verse in which the word *mihrab* (in Arabic) itself appears. The calligraphers also find a great source of inspiration both spiritually and aesthetically in inscribing on religious buildings *al-asma' al-husna'*, or the beautiful divine attributes of Allah, the *basmala*, and sometimes even a poetic verse (usually in Persian) conveying some spiritual theme. Sayings of the Prophet *(hadith)* start appearing on the inscriptions towards the end of eleventh century as we find a *hadith* on the minbar inscription dated 484/1081 in the tomb of the head of Husayn (grandson of the Prophet) in Ascalon (later on moved to the haram in Hebron) in Palestine.[10]

9[9]   Ibn-Batuta, *Rihla* (Beirut; Dar Sadir, n.d.), p. 421.

10[10] A number of writings of the famous epigraphist Max Van Berchem throw light on these issues. See for instance his article: "Note on the Graffiti of the Cistern at Wady el-Joz," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1915), pp. 85-90, 195-198.

Both Qur'anic verses as well as hadith quoted in the epigraphic text can yield historical clues since they were selected for their appropriateness to a particular setting. If, for example, the epigraphical text contains the terms of *waqf* (endowment),[11] as is the case with an inscription from Nayabari, not far from Dhaka, dated 1003/1595, and another *Waqf* inscription of a Khanqah in Sitalmat dated 652/1254), then the verse selected may contain messages promising rewards for those who look after the endowment and punishment for those who neglect or vandalize it. The Throne Verse is often and appropriately used for funerary inscriptions and for calligraphy in mosques, as it is considered a source of *baraka* (blessings).[12] A particular hadith is selected for an inscription on the same principle of appropriateness. So can names with religious connotations: the appearance of the names of the first four caliphs in an epigraphic text, for example, can be taken as evidence that the patron was a Sunni Muslim. If the patron of the building had been a Shi'i, only the name of 'Ali and the direct descendents of the Prophet (particularly the *pak panj tan* or five holy bodies, a popular Shi'i invocation in South Asia) would appear.[13]

The *madad-i-maash* inscription from Nayabari dated 1003/1595 also serves as a good example of how epigraphic panels were occasionally used to record legal documents such as *waqf* (endowment) deeds for mosques and madrasas.[14] This tradition existed in certain parts of the Islamic world until the eighteenth century, no doubt in part because it had the practical advantage that stone slabs are less likely to perish or be stolen. There are a number of such inscriptions in Bengal, such as the Dohar inscription dated 1000/1591 and the Barakatra inscription dated 1052/1642. A complete *waqf* is inscribed in a building in Qazwin in Iran, for example.[15] In general, however, Muslims preferred paper for writing legal documents. Before the advent of the Muslims in Bengal (the first Muslim conquest under Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji began in 601/1205) copper and other metal plates in general, and stone slabs in some rare cases, were used to record land grants and endowments in the region.

Tombstones and stele also yield inscriptions that can furnish valuable information; they are sometimes the only authentic evidence we have for ethnic immigration to a particular region, since the surnames, titles and more particularly the *nisba* (geographical attribution) of the deceased person on a tombstone will indicate the family's place of origin and the name of his tribe, such as Kabuli, Shirazi or Qaqshal. In addition, the stone may mention the profession of the deceased person or his social status, which can

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11[11]   A number of such inscriptions have been discovered in Bengal. Of these, a Burarchar inscription and a Dohar inscription both dated 1000/1591 and now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, probably belong to the same edifice that is referred to in the Nayabari inscription. Other examples are a Gaur inscription dated 893/1489, now in the British Museum, and a Barakatra inscription dated 1055/1645, in Bangladesh National Museum.

12[12]   The use of the Throne Verse for funerary inscriptions is quite common almost everywhere in the Muslim world. We find it, for instance, in the inscriptions on the *tabut* of al-Husayn dated 550 (1155) now in the Islamic Museum in Cairo.

13[13]   The Garh Jaripa inscription dated 893/1487; the Husayni Dalan inscription dated 1052/1642, and the Piyari Das Road Masjid inscription dated 1109/1697 are good examples of this kind of epigraphic record.

14[14] The institution of a *waqf* had certain advantages since *waqf* property could not be confiscated easily even by those in power.

15[15] Sourdel-Thomine, "Inscriptions Seljoukides et salles a couples de Qazwin en Iran," *Revue de Etudes Islamiques*, 42 (1974), pp. 3-43.

be useful for social and genealogical study.[16][16] Most importantly, it furnishes us with the most authentic date of the death of the person for whom the tombstone was made.

Inscriptions are found on all kinds of structures -- mosques, madrasas, forts, palaces, tanks, wells and caravanserais, -- and are again often the most authentic record for the architectural chronology of a particular region. Many are inscribed on a beautifully decorated background, and studying these decorative motifs can itself be rewarding. As in the rest of the Islamic world, the majority of Islamic inscriptions in Bengal record the circumstances of a building's construction, which allows us to date and to identify buildings and their functions. The calligraphic panels are usually so well blended into the overall decorative program that they seem to be an integral part of the architecture in many Islamic buildings, especially in Iran (e.g., Masjid-i-Mir in Mashhad), Central Asia (e.g., the Gur-i-Mir complex in Samarqand) and Turkey. In Bengal, however, it is somewhat different, as inscriptions are not completely blended into the aesthetic unity of the architecture; rather they remain distinctive in their appearance.

Calligraphic patterns in the Islamic inscriptions of Bengal come in a great diversity of styles. These calligraphic styles can be a good source for determining the period of construction of many monuments whose dates otherwise can not be ascertained. Bengal has a rich tradition of stone carving and sculptures going back to the periods of the Palas (750-1150) and Senas (1095-1300), which was inspired by the religious imagery of Hinduism and Buddhism. In spite of this superb stone-carving tradition, the artists and craftsmen did not in general use their skill for decorative writing during pre-Islamic periods. All that changed with the advent of Islam in the early thirteenth century. Representation and sculpture, though they evolved in other nations as power symbols often associated with divine power, could not acquire any such significance or appreciation in Islamic culture, whose religious message was so firmly aniconic. Instead, Muslims explored other media to express their artistic zeal, and it was in calligraphy that they found the means to serve this purpose. Calligraphy thereby found a new role in Bengal after the Muslim conquest in 1205, when Bengali artists diverted their traditional stone-carving skills to produce some of the most amazing specimens of Islamic calligraphy on stone, quite a number of which have survived to this day. Islamic inscriptions themselves are a good source for art historical information.

While Sanskrit inscriptions are mostly incised; Arabic and Persian inscriptions in Bengal in general were rendered in relief, and rarely we find any Islamic inscription in incised form. One might wonder about the origin of the scribes, calligraphers, artists, and craftsmen who were instrumental in leaving behind a rich legacy of art and architecture including a vast number of Islamic inscriptions. While the *nisba*s (the place of origin) of the scribes and calligraphers found in a number of epigraphic texts indicate that most of

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16[16]   In the Barakatra inscription dated 1055/1645, for instance, Abu 'l-Qasim al-Husayni (who endowed the edifice) uses the *nisba* al-Tabataba'i al-Simnani (from Tabata and Simnan), and the calligrapher Sa'd al-Din Muhammad uses the *nisba* al-Shirazi (from Shiraz). In a Nayabari inscription dated 1003/1595, Bhagal Khan, who endowed a masjid, is called Hajji (one who has performed pilgrimage).

them originally came from Iran and Central Asia,[17][17] many stoneworkers, masons, craftsmen and artisans were also locally recruited. Art and architectural activities required a series of interactive processes that necessarily led to interaction between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. In the case of inscriptions, the patrons (e.g., sultans or court barons) commissioned the work, a local *'alim* (Islamic scholar) wrote the texts, a calligrapher designed the calligraphic layout to accommodate the text in such a way that it covered the whole surface of the stone slab. Then he outlined it on the stone probably in charcoal or by incising very light and small dots. A very skilled stone chiseler then chiseled the surface of the slab with extreme care, leaving the calligraphic portion of the space as well as borderlines on all the four sides in relief form. Not all the commissioned works were fully completed, for we do find some inscriptions where the calligraphic outlines were marked on the stone, but the chiseling process was never completed, perhaps due to some unusual circumstance.[18][18] Though the epigraphic texts often contained Qur'anic verses and hadith, there is little evidence that anyone worried about employing non-Muslim stonecutters to inscribe religious texts.

An inscription can tell us about the proficiency of stone engravers and rock cutters at a given time and place.[19][19] The kind of stone used for the inscription can often provide interesting clues about stone trade during that period. In Bengal, black basalt was used for inscriptions in most case. Because of its scarcity in the main land of Bengal, it used to be imported from the neighbouring regions, mostly from Rajmahal in Bihar. In cases when a stone was rare and valuable, it was often used more than once; for that reason stone slabs can be found that have inscriptions on both sides dating from different periods. A stone slab from Sian with an Arabic inscription dated 618/1221 is a good example of such a case: the earlier Sanskrit inscription on the other side was left intact.[20][20] Sometimes the stone slabs were acquired from ruined and deserted buildings and reused without removing the original decorative motifs. In some epigraphic stone slabs in Bengal, we find traces of Hindu figural motifs, suggesting that they were picked up from the ruins of dilapidated temples and monasteries in the area. This was a utilitarian practice with no malign intentions. Even in the construction of mosques, old building materials were reused,[21][21] in some cases, bought from their previous owners.

Though many inscriptions were made for commemorative purposes, the small amount of space available for the text discouraged unnecessary rhetoric. The messages they contain

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17[17]   We have at least one definite source that informs us about the widespread employment of Muslim craftsmen in sophisticated technology, art and architecture in Eastern India including Orissa. See *Baya Chakara*, trans. Alice Boner, Sadasiva Rathasarma and others, in *New Light on the Sun Temple of Konark* (Varanasi, 1972), pp. 57, 68, 93, 116.

18[18]   The unfinished masjid inscription from Mandra dated 836/1433 presents a visual description about how the calligraphic program used to be outlined on the slab before it was actually inscribed.

19[19]   Hasan al-Basha, "Ahminyat Shawahid al-Qubur ka Masdarin li Tarikhi al-Jazirah al-'Arabiyh," *Majallat Darasat Tarikh al-Jazirah al-'Arabiyyah,* [Riyadh University Press], Vol. 1(1), (1399 A.H.), pp. 81-83.

20[20]   It may be mentioned here that in most areas of the Bengal Delta, stone is not easily available, and therefore had to be imported from places such as Rajmahal in Bihar through its vast riverain routes.

21[21]   A stone mihrab from a ruined Sultanate mosque in Gaur, now in the Varendra Research Museum in Rajshahi, is a good example of a reuse of old building materials. Traditional Bengali decorative motives usually found in the temple architecture in Bengal cover almost all of the outer façade. The use of old building materials especially from ruined Hindu temples for the construction of mosques by the Muslim rulers has led some people to assume that mosques were erected after Hindu temples were destroyed on those sites. These unfounded beliefs have occasionally resulted in communal tensions and the demolition of places of worship in South Asia, such as the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodha in India in 1993.

often give an unadorned account of what happened and thus can be considered a reliable primary source for documentation. Arabic inscriptions are also helpful in guiding us in tracing the paleographic development of Arabic writing. Very few of the epigraphic texts of Bengal bear the name of the calligrapher. In a way it reflects the cultural values of the past Islamic societies where the creation of an art was more of a social expression of the Muslim *ummah* than an individual creation or an artist's effort to perpetuate his name on his art work.

While Sanskrit inscriptions quite often provide the primary historical source for many non-Muslim dynasties of the ancient period in South Asia, this is not usually the case for Muslim rule in the region. In Islamic culture, historical accounts were normally recorded on paper in the form of chronicles. However, not all the regions share this rich legacy of history writing in the same proportion, and calamities could affect the preservation of manuscripts in one particular region more than another. This is especially true of pre-Mughal Bengal (1205 - 1538), where chronicles either were not often written or did not survive. Inscriptions fill many gaps in the early history of Muslim Bengal, which is otherwise not well recorded. These inscriptions are, however, not as lengthy as the Sanskrit inscriptions from the region. One reason was that calligraphic considerations for Arabic and Persian inscriptions required more space than, for instance, inscriptions in Sanskrit. Some of the Sanskrit inscriptions from the Pala and the Sena dynasties of Bengal are so lengthy that they include the full genealogy of the rulers. Both the Pala and Sena rulers used copper and bronze plate for their inscriptions in addition to stone slabs,[22] but the Muslims used only stone slabs for a more monumental effect. The letters in Sanskrit inscriptions are also much smaller than letters in Arabic and Persian inscriptions and their calligraphic output is also restricted. There are some Sanskrit as well as bilingual inscriptions (Arabic and Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit or Persian and Sanskrit) from the Muslim dynasties in Bengal (one example is the Nayabari inscription, dated 1003/1595), but their number is insignificant.

In sum, inscriptions can be an indispensable source material for historians. The inscriptions of Bengal form a distinctive part of the Islamic cultural heritage of South Asia.

22[22]   See, for instance, Dinesh Chandra Sarkar, "Mainamatir Chandra Bangshiyo Tamra Shasantroy," in *Abdul Karim Sahitya Visharad Commemorative Volume*, ed. Mohammad Enamul Hoque (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan).

APPENDIX

SOME NEW ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM GAUR AND PANDUA

(1)

A Stone Tablet of an Unidentified Sultanate Masjid in Pandua from the Reign of al-Sultan Jalal al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Muzaffar Shah

ORIGINAL SITE: An Unidentified Sultanate Masjid in Pandua, Malda District, West Bengal, India.

CURRENT LOCATION: Fixed on a grave adjacent to the northern wall of the mosque located in the Khanqah of Shaykh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi (d. 1244-45) in Panuda, Malda District, West Bengal, India.

MATERIAL, SIZE; Black basalt; 20 × 9 inches.

STYLE, NO OF LINES: Monumental *Bihari*; two lines.

REIGN: Sultan Jalal al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu al Muzaffar Muhammad Shah (818-35/1415-31).

LANGUAGE: Arabic

TYPE: Commemorative inscription of a masjid.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mahammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aal Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi Bilad a1-Bangal: Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2004), 429; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, Calligraphy and Islamic Culture", *Bulletin of the School of the oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 68, Part 1 (2005) 21-58.

Plate 1:   A Stone Tablet of an Unidentified Sultanate Masjid in Pandua from the Reign of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Shah

Text (Plate 1)

<div dir="rtl">

۱-L [قال الله تعالى وأن المساجد الله فلا تدعوا مع] الله أحد قال الله النبي صلى   ...ه- و...

من بنى مسجدا [بنى الله له سبعين قصرا في الجنة]-

۲-L [بنى المسجد في عهد السلطان جلال] الدنيا والدين أبو المظفر محمد ... السلطان خل

ملكه بناه معظم الدين والدولية الغ الدين سلمه الله . . . . . .

</div>

Translation:

L-1 [Allah, the Exalted, has said, "And verily the mosques belong to Allah only; so do not call anyone] with Allah (72:18)." The Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said, "Whosoever builds a mosque, [Allah will build for him seventy palaces in Paradise]."

L-2 [This masjid was built during the era of Sultan Jalal al-Dunya] wa a1-Din Abu a1-Muzaffar Muhammad Shah al-Sultan, may his kingdom perpetuate. Mu'azzam al-Din wa a1-Dawala Ulugh'Izz al-Din built it, may Allah protect him.

(2)

Commemorative Inscription of a Religious Edifice in Gaur from the Reign of Sultan Mahmud Shah Dated 847 (1443)

ORIGINAL SITE: An unidenfied religious edifice somewhere around Gaur in Malda district, West Bengal.

CURRENT LOCATION: Collected and preserved at Gaur Social Welfare Mission Museum (Registered with Department of Art and Culture under Government Art and Antiquities Rule 10=973, Lalbazar, P.O.: Uttar Mahdipur, Registration no. S-85650) by its honorary curator Sadeq Shaykh.

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black Basalt; Not known.

STYLE, NO OF LINES: *thulth*; single line.

REIGN: Sultan Mahmud Shah (841-864/1437-1460). LANGUAFE; Arabic

TYPE : Commemorative inscription of a religious edifice.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aal-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya Bilad al-Islamiyyah fi'1-Bangal: Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2004) 430; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Calligraphy and Islamic Culture" *Bulletin of the Oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 64, Part 1 (2005), 21-58.

Plate 2 : A commemorative inscription of a Religious Edifice in Gaur from the Reign of Mahmud Shah, Date 847 (1443)

Text (Plate 2)

ر . . . (خلد الله). . . ملكه وأعلي أمره وشأ (نه) بني . . . الله

علي يد شخص المخاطب بعالي الشان شرف الزمان ابقاه (الله)

وبني في التاريخ غرة شهر شعبان سنة سبع وأربعين ثمانماية۔

Translation:

........; May Allah perpetuate his kingdom and elevate his affairs and position, it was built .... Allah .... at the hand of a person who is addressed as 'Ali al-Shan Sharf al-Zaman; May Allah protect him. It was built during the date, the first of the month of Sha 'ban, in the year eight hundred forty seven.

(3)

An Inscription of Nim Darwaza at Miyaneh Dar in the Citadel of Gaur from the Reign of Barbak Shah Date 871 (1466-67) Currently Fixed on Minarwali (Indarawala) Masjid in Mahdipur

ORIGINAL SITE: The second gate of Miyaneh Dar (middle gates)-commonly known as nim Darwaza (Halfway Entrance)-in gaur, in the Police Station of Ingrez Bazar in the facade of a newly built jami masjid (still under construction) locally known as Minarwali Masjid or Indarawala Masjid, Mahdipur village, Malda district, West Bengal India. A tiny fragment of the beginning part of the inscription, with which the upper panel of the text started, has been fortunately found and preserved by Mr. Sadeq Shaykh, Honorary Curator of GAUR SOCIAL WELFARE MISSION MUSEUM (Registered with Department of Art and Culture under government Art and Antiquities Rule 10=973, Lalbazar, P.O.: Uttar Mahdipur, Registration no. S-85650).

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black basalt; 111 x 16 inches.

STYLE, NO. OF LINES: *rayhani* (akin to monumental *thulth*) and tughra interchangeably in 16 rectangular panels in each line; 2 lines (the upper line, except a tiny portion at the beginning, is currently missing).

REIGN: Sultan Barbak Shah (864-78/1460-74).

LANGUAGE: Arabic (except a few Persian words at the end).

METER: Bahr al-Basit. (   ). The meter scheme is not properly observed throughout. A

number of verses are thus broken or faulty.

TYPE: Commemorative inscription from a monumental entrance of a palace garden.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aal-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi' Bilad al-Bangal: Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadriyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr 2004), 4431; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Calligraphy and Islamic Culture,' *Bulletin of the School of the Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 68, Part 1 (2005), 46-51.

Plate 3 A: First two lines.

(Plate 3 A)

Text of the Upper Panel: The whole line is missing except a very small fragment of the beginning part of the inscription which reads:

بعد المحامد رنّ الإنس والجان

ابن تقدّم عن حدث وعن قرن

Text of the Upper Panel: The whole line is missing except a very small fragment of the beginning part of the inscription which reads:
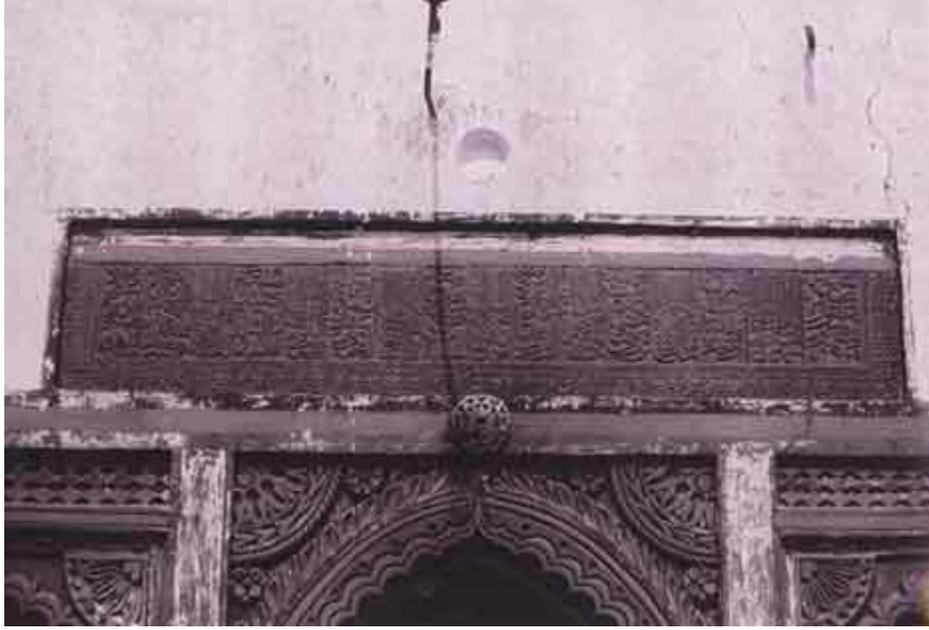
Plate 3 B :   Te Nim Darwaza Inscription at Miyaneh Dar in the Citadel of Gaur from the Reign of Barbak Shah Date 871 (14466-67) Currently

Text of the Lower Panel: **(Plate 3 B)**

إلا ولي قادم وهو غني	ما امّه مقتّر يرجو سماحته
ومصرا عهده أمناً وهدي	وادره مالها ثان فان دنما
بحسنها مثل علت مكانته	تروق من حسنها فما رأي] احد
ما زرت سنا في جنة عدن	ازري بنا ها عمّار الدين مشيّدين
فينتصر بنصرة الله خلّد سلطانه	للدار باب وسيع مشرف سمه
فان تاريخ ذلك ذات شرف	إحدي وسبعون عاما وثمانماية
مخلد وحده في الأرض مبارك	فالله أسأله تشييد ملكته
ركن الدنيا وللدين أبو المظفر باربكشاه	در دور سلطنت شاه جهانيناه
ببناء ميانة در بسنة احدي وسبعين و ثما (نماية)	(السلطان) خلّد ملكه وسلطانه

Translation:

(Remaining Fragment of the Upper panel):

After praises, as (both) human beings and jinns resounded, A son (i.e., the author of these verses) came forward to narrate the happenings about the surrounding.

(Lower panel):

Whenever a needy person approaches him cherishing his kindness,

Due to his graciousness, he appears to be prominently wealthy.

His dwelling is unmatched (there is no other of its kind), as it has stood the test of time,

His reign is well settled in peace and with righteousness.

It (the edifice) excels in its charms that none has seen before,

With its exemplary beauty; indeed its position is marvelled.

Its building has humbled architects and builders of the world,

Like the illuminating glamour of Paradise in Eden.

For this dwelling, there is monumental entrance a symbol of vigilence,

With God's help, he is always victorious; may his kingdom be perpetuated.

The year eight hundred and seventy-one,

Indeed this date is of great honour.

Thus I seek from Allah furtherance of His gift,

Who alone is the Sustainer on this blessed earth.

In the era of the sultanate of Shah Jahan-Panah [the refuge of the universe],

Rukn al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Mzaffar Barbak Shah Sultan.

May his kingdom and authority be long lasting 9continued),

Along with the building of Miyanah Dar, in the year eight hundred and seventy-one.

(4)

A Commemorative Inscription of an Unidentified Sultanate masjid in Gaur from the Reign of al-Sultan Shams al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Nasr Muzaffar Shah Dated 897 (1490)

ORIGINAL SITE: An Unidentified Sultanate Masjid in Gaur, Ingrez Bazar Police Station, Malda District, West Bengal, India.

CURRENT LOCATION: Collected and preserve at Gaur Social Welfare Emission Museum (Registered with Department of Art and Culture under Government Art and Antiquities Rule 10=973, Lalbazar, P.O.: Uttar Mahdipur, Registration no. S-85650) by its honorary curator Sadeq Shaykh.

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black basalt; 26 × 10 inches.

STYLE, NO. OF LINES: Plaited thulth in monumental Bengali tughra; single line

REIGN: Sultan Shams al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Nasr Muzaffar Shah [Sidi Badr] (896-98/1491-93).

LANGUAGE: Arabic.

TYPE: Commemorative inscription of a masjid in Gaur.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Sidiq, *Rihla ma'aal-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi Bilad a1-Bangal: Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr 20040, 432-33; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiiq, 'Calligraphy and Islamic Culture,' *Bulletin of the School of the Oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 68, Part 1 (2005), 51-52.

Plate 4:   A Commemorative Inscription of an Unidentified Sultanate Masjid in Gaur from the Reign of
Shams al-Din Abu a1-Naṣr Muzaffar Shah Dated 897 (1490)

Text (Plate 5)

بني في عهد السلطان علا و(ء) الدنيا والدين أبو (أبي) المظفر

حسين شاه السلطان خلد الله ملكه وسلطانه بي هذا المسجد

مجلس خرشيد ادام الله عزه وعلوه في سنة تسعماية۔

Translation:

The Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said, "Whosoever builds a mosque for the sake of
Allah, Allah will build for him seventy palaces in paradise. 'During the era of Sulṭan Shams al-Dunya wa
a1-Din Abu a1-Naṣr Muzaffar Shah Sulṭan, al-Malik Almas (built) this masjid, may the Almighty Allah
keep him in peace in both of the abodes (worlds). This was (done) in the date, the twentieth of the month of Sha
'ban, the year eight hundred and ninety seven.

(5)

Masjid Inscription from Gaur from the Reign of Husayn Shah Now Fixed on Minarwali
(Indarawala) Masjid in Mahdipur Dated 900 (1494)

ORIGINAL SITE: An unidentified sultanate mosque somewhere around Gaur in Malda disrtict, West
Bengal.

CURRENT LOCATION: Indarawla (Minarwali) Masjid, Mahdipur village near Gaur.

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black Basalt, 18.5x9.5.

STYLE, NO. LINES: Plaited *thulth* in monumental Bengali *tughra* single line.

REIGN: Sulṭan Husayn Shah (899-925/1494-1519).

LANGUAGE: Arabic.

TYPE: Commemorative inscription of a masjid.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aal-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi Bilad a1-Bangal: Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2004), 433-34; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Calligraphy and Islamic Culture", *Bulletin of the School of the Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 68. Part 1 (20050, 52-54)
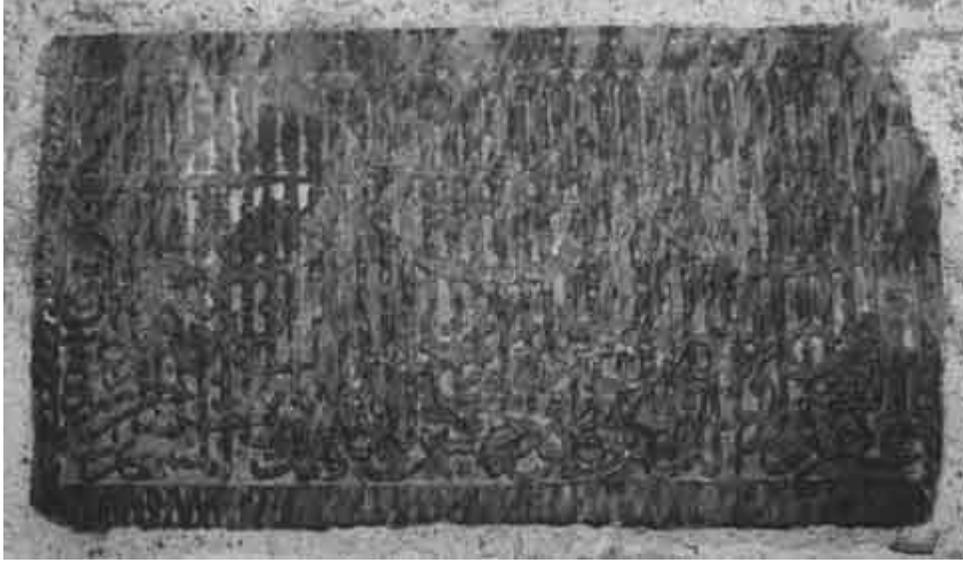
Plate 5: A Masjid Inscription from Gaur form the Reign of Husayn Shah Now Fixed on Indarawala (Minarwali) masjid in Mahdipur, Dated 900 (1490)

Text (Plate 6)

قال النبي صلي الله عليه وسلم من بني مسجدا لله يبتغي به وجه الله بني الله تعالي له (بياتا)

مثله في الجنة بني هذا المسجد

في زمن (ال) سلطان العادل سيّد السادات علاو الدنيا والدين أبو المظفر حسين شاه السلطان

خلد الله ملكه وسلطانه ـ

Translation:

It was built in the reign of the Sultan 'Ala' al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Muzaffar Husayn Shah al-Sultan, may Allah make his kingdom and authority everlasting. Majlis Khurshid may Allah perpetuate his honour and greatness built this mosque in the year nine hundred [1496]

(6)

A Masjid Inscription of Gaur from the Reign of Husayn Shah now Fixed on the Qibla Wall of Minarwali Masjid in Mahdipur

ORIGINAL SITE: An unidentified mosque in Gaur.

CURRENT LOCATION: Fixed on the qibla wall inside Indarawala (Minarwali) Masjid in Mahdipur village near Gaur, Malda district, West Bengal, India.

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black basalt; 19 × 19.

STYLE, NO. OF LINES: Monumental Plaited *thulth* with features of Bengali tughra single line

REIGN: Sultan Husayn Shah (899-925/1494-1519).

LANGUAGE: Arabic

TYPE : Commemorative inscription.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aal-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi' Bilad a1-Bangal Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr 2004), 434-35, Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Calligraphy and Islamic Culture,' *Bulletin of the School of the Oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 68, Part 1 (2005), 54-55.

Plate 6:   A Masjid Inscription of Gaur from the Reign of Husayn Shah now Fixed on the Qibla Wall of Indarawala Masjid in Mahdipur

Text (Plate 7)

بني هذا الباب المسجد جامع السلطان المعظم المكرم السلطان ابن السلطان ناصر الدنيا والدين

أبو المظفر نصر تشاه السلطان ابن حسين شاه ابن السلطان خلد الله ملكه وسلطانه في سنة ثلاثين

وتسعماية۔

Translation:

L-1 The Prophet- may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him –said "He who builds a mosque for Allah seeking Allah's favour, Allah the Almighty will build for him a similar abode in Paradise. "This mosque was built during the reign of the just Sultan Sayyid al-Sadat Ala al-Dunya wa [a1-Din Abu al-Muzaffar Husayn Shah al-Sultan may Allah perpetuate his sovereignty and kingdom].

(7)

Gate Inscription of an Unidentified Jami Masjid in Pandua from the Reign of Nusrat Shah Date 930 (1524-25)

ORIGINAL SITE: A Jami Masjid probably somewhere around Gaur or Pandua, Malda district, West Bengal.

CURRENT LOCATION: B.R. Sen Museum in Malda town, inventory no. MMSI-4.

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black basalt; Not known.

STYLE, NO. OF LINES: *thulth*; 2 lines.

REIGN: Nusrat Shah (925-23/1519-32).

LANGUAGE: Arabic

TYPE: Commemorative inscription.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aal-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi' Bilad a1-Bangal Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus: Daral-Fikr 2004), 435-36; "Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq", Calligraphy and Islamic Culture, *Bulletin of the School of the Oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 68, Part 1 (2005), 55-56.

Plat 7 :   Gate Inscription of an Unidentified Jami Masjid in Pandua from the Reign of Nusrat Shah Date 930 (1524-24)

Text (Plate 8)

قال النبي صلي الله عليه وسلم من بني لله مسجدا في الدنيا بني الله تعالي له سبعين قصرا في

الجنة بني هذا المسجد في عهد السلطان ابن السلطان ركن الدنيا والدين أبو المظفر باربكشاه

ابن السلطان محمود شاه خلد ملكه بنا كرد اين مسجد خان محمد سعيد في سنة سبع وسببعين

ثمانماية۔

Translation:

L-1 This door of the mosque was constructed in the reign of the exalted and honoured Sultan the sultan-son of the sultan, Nasir al-Dunya wa a1-Din L-2 Abu a1-Muzaffar Nusrat Shah al-Sultan Ibn Husayn Shah al-Sultan, may Allah perpetuate his kingdom and sovereignty; in the year nine hundred and thirty.

(8)

An Unidentified Sultanate Masjid Inscription from Gaur from the Reign of Sultan Barbak Shah Dated 877 (1473) Currently Fixed on a Masjid in Horigram

ORIGINAL SITE: An unidentified masjid somewhere in Gaur in Malda district, West Bengal.

CURRENT LOCATION: Fixed on the eastern wall of a newly constructed Masjid in the village of Horigram, Malda district, West Bengal, India.

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black Basalt; 26 × 8.5 inches.

STYLE, NO. OF LINES: Typical intricate decorative Bengali *tughra* style single line.

REIGN: Sultan Barbak shah (864-878/1459-1474).

LANGUAGE: Arabic except a few Persian words at the end.

TYPE: Commemorative inscription of a masjid.

SECONDAR SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aa1-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi' Bilad a1-Bangal Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus; Dar al-Fikr, 2004), 437-38; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq" Calligraphy and Islamic Culture, *Bulletin of the School of the Oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 68, Part 1 (2005) 56-57.
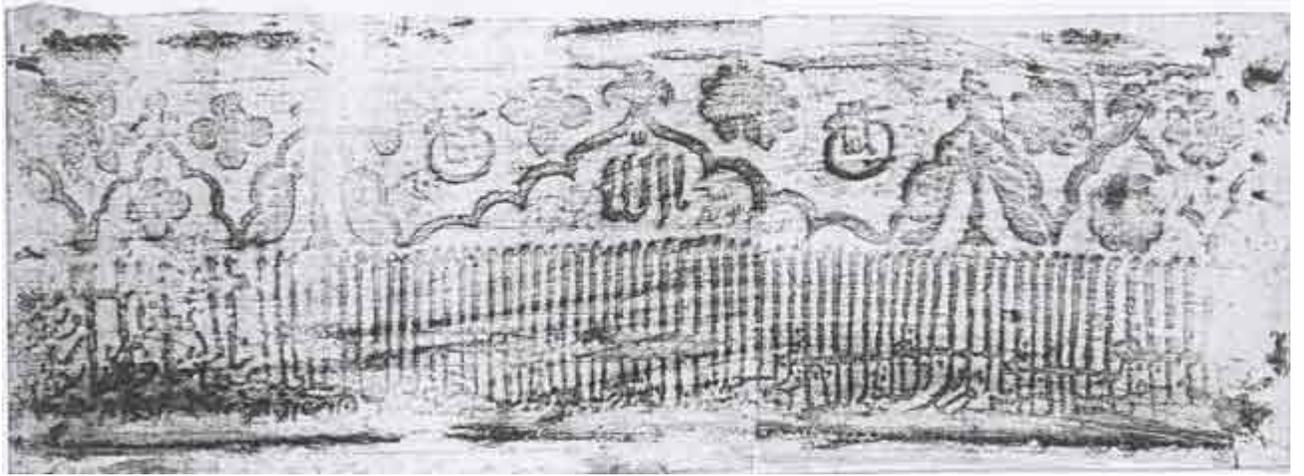

Plate 8:   An unidentified Sultanate Masjid Inscription from Gaur from the reign of Sultan Barbak Shah, dated 877 (1473) currently fixed on a Masjid in Horigram

Text (Plate 9)

قال النبي عليه السلام من بني مسجدا لله بنى الله تعالي له سبعين قصرا في الجنة بني هذا

المسجد في عهد السلطان شمس الدنيا والدين أبو المظفر يوسف شاه السلطان ابن باربكشاه

السلطان ابن محمود شاه السلطان وقد بني هذا المسجد الملك المعظم المكرم ناظر خان في

سنة تسع وسبعين وثمانماية-

Translation:

The Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said, "Whosoever builds a mosque in this world for the sake of Allah, Allah exactly will build for him seventy palaces in Paradise. "This masjid was built during the era of al-Sultan Ibn al-Sultan Rukn al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Muzaffar Barbak Shah al-Sultan, son of al-Sultan Mahmud Shah. Khan Muhammad Said built this masjid in the year eight hundred seventy seven.

(9)
An Unidentified Sultanate Masjid Inscription from Gaur from the Reign of al-Sultan Shams al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Muzaffar Yusuf Shah Currently Fixed on a Masjid in Horigram

ORIGINAL SITE: An Unidentified Sultanate Masjid in Gaur, Malda District, West Bengal, India.

CURRENT LOCATION: Fixed on the southern wall of a recently constructed masjid in the village of Horigram near Gaur, Gaur Malda District, West Bengal, India.

MATERIAL, SIZE: Black basalt; 23.5 × 12.5 inches.

STYLE, NO. OF LINES: Monumental *thulth* in Bengali *tughra*; single line.

REIGN: Sultan Shams al- Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Muzaffar Yusuf Shah (879-86/1474-81).

LANGUAGE: Arabic.

TYPE: Commemorative inscriptive inscription of a masjid.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'aal-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyyah fi' Bilad a1-Bangal Darasa Tarikhiyyah Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr 2004), 436-37; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Calligraphy and Islamic Culture", *Bulletin of the School of the Oriental and African Studies,* Vol. 68, Part 1 (2005), 57-58.
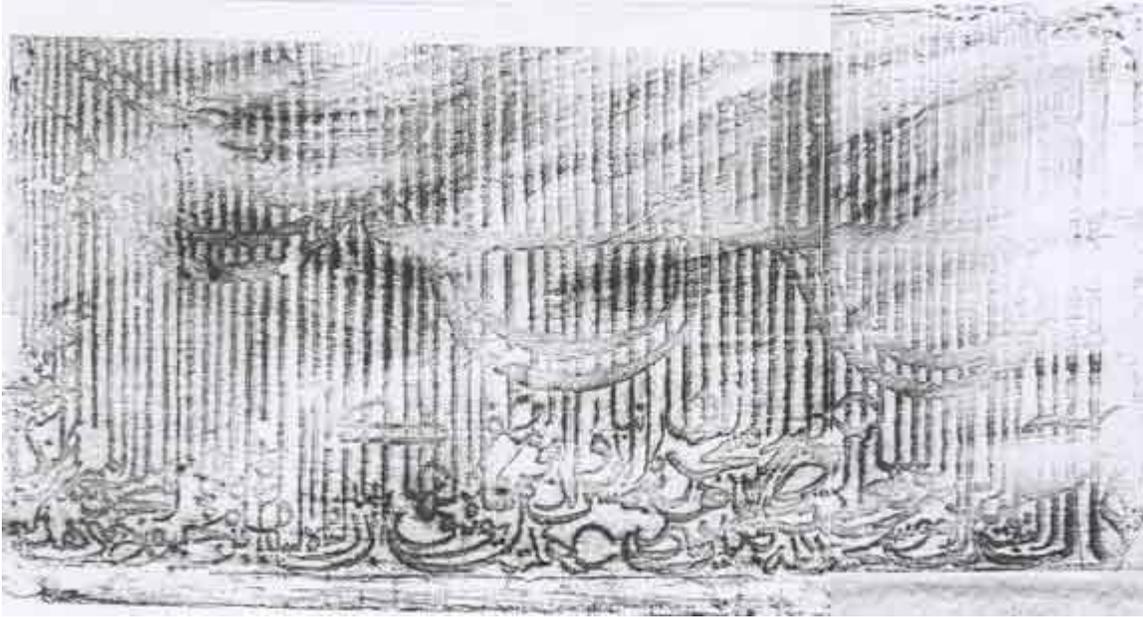
Plate 9:   An Unidentified Sultanate Masjid Inscription from Gaur from the Reign of al-Sultan Shams al-Dunya wa '1-Din Abu '1-Muzaffar Yusuf Shah Currently Fixed on a Masjid in Horigram.

Translation:

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "Whosoever builds a mosque for the sake of Allah, Allah the exalted will build for him seventy palaces in Paradise. This masjid was built during the era of Sultan Shams al-Dunya wa a1-Din Abu a1-Muzaffar Yusuf Shah al-Sultan, son of Sultan Barbak Shah al-Sultan, son of Mahmud Shah al-Sultan. Al-Malik al-Muazzam al-Mukarram Nazir Khan built this masjid in the year eight hundred and seventy nine [1474 C.E.]

SOURCE: Journal of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh