



RESEARCH PAPER

Epigraphic Scheme of the Bestowed Mughal Mosque of Maryam Zamani at Lahore

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the research is to explore the motive behind building this Mosque through its calligraphic inscriptions that either it was an act of reverence and bestowment or an endowment project, to serve public faith, by the royal patron. Epigraphic schemes of Mughal Mosques reflect the thought behind the construction of their Mosques, such is the case of Maryam Zamani Mosque of 1614 at Lahore built during the reign of Jahangir in the name of his mother Maryam Zamani. This *Panchmukhī* Masjid is profusely decorated with non-figurative motifs in fresco among which calligraphic scripts *Nast'aliq*, *Thuluth* and *Ṭughrā* compositions have their own significance. Most of the scholarship related to Maryam Zamani Mosque is limited to descriptive information related to its locality and plan of the Mosque. The research deploys Feldman's art historical research method by qualitatively analyzing the collected data from on-site visits, photography, study of the inscriptions and related scholarly data. The novel aspect of studying its epigraphic scheme, comprised of Quranic and poetic inscriptions, to explore its construction as a bestowment Imperial project is of prodigious significance which will add valuable knowledge to the existing sparse information on Mughal calligraphy at Lahore. This research also conserves the faded vanishing epigraphy which can be used for restoring the calligraphic specimens.

KEYWORDS Begum Shahi, Calligraphy, Epigraphy, Lahore, Maryam Zamani, Mughal, Quranic Inscriptions, Script, *Thuluth*, *Nast'aliq*

Introduction

The Mughal preferred calligraphy as one of the primary subjects for ornamentation of their Mosques. The Mughal calligraphers practised various scripts but *Nast'aliq*, *Thuluth*, *Naskh* and *Ṭughrā* were favoured the most. New styles of writing like *Khatt-e Bāburī*, *Lāhorī* *Nast'aliq*, and *Shakistāh* were introduced by the Mughal emperors. In sixteenth century *Nast'aliq* was favoured for manuscript writing, *Naskh* was designated for the writing of the Qur'an and Arabic books whereas *Thuluth* developed for architectural embellishment. Later on, in seventeenth century *Nast'aliq*, *Thuluth*, *Naskh* and *Ṭughrā*, and their variants are deployed at several Mughal monuments of Lahore. The art of calligraphy found new horizons during the Mughal Period with the arrival of Babur and Persian artists and calligraphers in 1566. He and his successor Emperor Humayun (1530-1555) laid the foundation of Mughal calligraphy under the supervision of Shiekh Muhammad Munjo and Mulla Surkh that flourished in different cities of the Indian Subcontinent in which Lahore had its own importance. *Khatt-e Bāburī* was an innovation by Babur but his invented script received less favourability (Asif Ali and Ahmad Sanusi Hassan, 2017). However, Babur also introduced *Nast'aliq* by inviting Persian calligraphers like Mohammad Ali Tabrezi and Mulla Zahid who are credited for the epigraphy of *Kutbāt* of *Dergah* Nizam ud-Din Auliya. Humayun, inspired by the artistic atmosphere of Persia during his exile, was as an avid admirer of calligraphy and invited calligraphers of Herat while returning to India (Asif Ali and Ahmad Sanusi Hassan, 2017). Moreover, he maintained a library for himself at Delhi. Among his calligraphers is Maulana Kamal-ibn-e-Shahab whose specimen in *Thuluth*, are preserved in the Islamic gallery of Lahore Museum. Akbar (1556-1605) was a great patron

of calligraphy, like his father and grandfather, who maintained Lahore as an important centre for fourteen years during the last two decades of sixteenth century. Siddique says that the Mughal monumental calligraphy was actually the successful combination of two traditions: the Indian and Islamic. It echoes the attitude, pride, magnificence and the creative abilities of the two traditions (Siddique, 1987).

Muhammad Husain Sherazi, who was given the title *Zarrīn Qalam* (golden pen), and Hibtullah-al-Hussaini were the famous calligraphers of Akbar's court (Bhutta, 2007, Asif Ali and Ahmad Sanusi Hassan, 2017). According to R. Nath, Akbar paid special attention to the art of calligraphy and he invited many calligraphers from other regions to work at his atelier. He gave special attention to monumental inscriptions, as seen on the grand Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri in monumental *thuluth* script, for which the name of Ahmad al-Chishti is noted (Asif Ali and Ahmad Sanusi Hassan, 2017). Akbar had great predilection for the art of manuscripts produced by his royal atelier on a highly mature level (Nath, 1979). Aijaz Rahi states that until Akbar Period the art of Islamic calligraphy was under Persian influence. However, with the passage of time Akbar, who always wanted to portray his uniqueness, allowed the arts to blend with the regional styles which brought forth new and pure art forms in, as pure Mughal calligraphic style (Rahi, 1996). Jahangir (1605-1627) emphasised on the development of *Nast'aliq*, *Thuluth*, and *Naskh*. Lahore remained as one of the important centres of the art of calligraphy, even until the Mughal Empire declined, and learning the art of calligraphy was considered a prestigious art for the upbringing of a royal member (Bhutta, 2007, Masud, 1981). Maryam Zamani Mosque anticipates other Mughal Mosques of seventeenth century in its decorative scheme including calligraphy. However, here the deployment of epigraphy is not solely confined to aesthetics but also holds significant meanings as is observed in several other Mughal architectural calligraphic schemes of decoration where verses, eulogistic, panegyric inscriptions and poetry is selected for conveying ideology and concepts. Through inscriptions it is decipherable to suggest that either the Mosque has "endowment or funerary inscriptions" or it is conferred as a bestowment (Stefanovic, 2012, p. 69).

Literature Review

Most of the art historical data related to the Mosque of Maryam Zamani at Lahore is descriptive. It does not discuss the epigraphic scheme in detail with reference to its context, especially with regards to the discourse that the Mosque was either an endowment project known as *waqf-e khayrī* which includes mosque for public usage (Crecelius, 1995) conveying religiosity or an act of reverence by a King towards his mother on a private level. Chughtai only focuses descriptively on some of the inscriptions rather than analyzing the context of the script (1976). Chaudhry only gives Timurid and Safavid sources for the fresco mural decoration but does not provide an in-depth analysis of the calligraphy (1999). Nadiem mentions its architectural style as a mixture of Pathan and Mughal style and has given limited information on the patron of the Mosque (1998). Alfieri has only stated few lines on calligraphy of the central bay of the sanctuary at Maryam Zamani Mosque rather than discussing the whole epigraphic scheme (2000). Lal while narrating the date of the construction examines the entrance doorway inscriptions and does not clearly explain the rest of the calligraphic specimens (Lal, 2011). R. Nath mentions the Mosque as the sole construction in the name of Queen Maryam Zamani during the Period of Jahangir however the author does not discuss the information with reference to the epigraphical fact (Nath, 1994). Books related to Mughal calligraphy do not provide in detail functionality of the royal *kitābkhānā* with regards to calligraphers working alongside architects. Scholars usually only make generalized remarks about Lahore as one of the leading centres of calligraphy and its development (Qalam, 2004). Tariq Masood only mentions the extravaganza that Lahore had as a Mughal cultural hub and residence of imperial figures; thus, providing us with several edifices of the time (Masood, 1981).

Materials and Method

According to Feldman's method of art historical research data for this research paper has been described, analyzed, interpreted, and judged qualitatively. It has been collected by observing and photographing on-site calligraphic specimens. Afterwards collected data has been comparatively analyzed within its context for detailed interpretation. APA citational style has been deployed for this research.

Results and Discussion

Mosque of Maryam Zamani belongs to one of the finest constructions of the earlier architectural contributions during the reign of Emperor Jahangir in Lahore (Ahmed, 2010). The *panchmukhī* (five bay) mosque of Maryam Zamani, close to the eastern gate of the boundary wall of Lahore Fort_ the *Masjidī Darwāzah* (is one of the ancient gates of Lahore today called *mastī darwāzā*. In vernacular language the word *mastī* is a corruption of the word *masjidī*) (Chaudhry 1999). As the gate, built by Akbar in 1566, near the Akbari Mahal, was used to approach Maryam Zamani Mosque in Jahangir's time, hence it was called *Masjidī Darwāzah* after the Mosque (Chaudhry, 1999). The Mosque, on the exterior of Lahore Fort, is considered as the largest mosque of the time in its vicinity (Bahadur and Latif, 1994). The Mosque according to locals is called Begum Shahi Masjid because it was built by King Jahangir in the name of his mother, the Rajput princess, Mariam az-Zamani (Chughtai, 1976). R. Nath mentions that she was the daughter of Rajput Raja Bharmal, Kachhwaha ruler of Amber and the sister of Raja Bhagwan Das (Chughtai, 1976) but the Rajput name of the mother queen is not known. Nath says that because of Jahangir's secular nature Maryam Zamani Mosque "is the only mosque of consequence built in the name of his mother (Nath, 1994, p. 52 and 396)." She was an acknowledged connoisseur, who built a garden along with a *bāolī* (step well), *serāi* (caravanserai), and a gateway at the village of Barah, in the state of Bihar, in 1613, as well as an active participant in foreign trade. It was just one year before the construction of Maryam Zamani Mosque that in 1613 the ship called *Rahīmī* ("largest Indian ship trading in the Red Sea") owned by Queen Maryam Zamani, also carrying pilgrims to Mecca, was captured by the Portuguese. After this incident all ties with the Portuguese were suspended by Emperor Jahangir (Findly, 1988, p. 227). Nath states that Mughal construction at Lahore, contemporary to Maryam Zamani Mosque, were the palaces, gardens, open-air sitting places, and Picture Wall of Lahore Fort that date between "1612 to 1619" which were supervised by "Khwajah Jahan Khwaja Dost Muhammad." Jahangir visited Lahore after his return from Kashmir in 1620 when he would have visited the Mosque too (Nath, 1994, p. 342). Thackston mentions emperor Jahangir's praise of these buildings in his Memoirs *Jahāngīrnāmeḥ* (Thackston, 1999).

Plan and the location of inscriptions

Plan of the Mosque of Maryam Zamani reveals the fact that it was of a secular nature meant for a specific audience. The five bay *Panchmukhī* Mosque has a sanctuary facing the east and a moderate size courtyard enclosed on all three sides. There are two entrance doorways: one on the north and the other on the east opening in the courtyard (fig. 1).

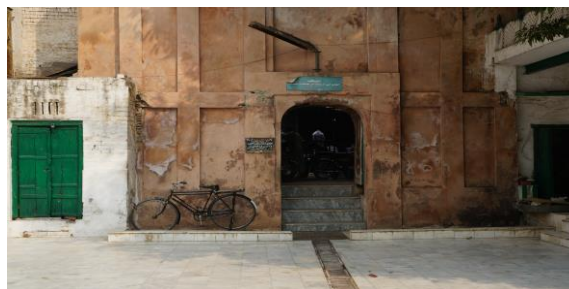


Figure 1. Northern entrance archway from the interior of Maryam Zamani Mosque. (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

The inscriptions of Maryam Zamani Mosque are mainly by the Mughal scribe Abdullah Hussaini, who was the native of Tirmuz, but spent most of his time in Lahore and also supervised the school of calligraphy. He was given the little of *Mushkīn Qalam* by the Mughal court. He created many art pieces of calligraphy to serve Qalich Khan the governor of Lahore in the reign of Emperor Jahangir. These specimens are still preserved in the Lahore Museum and the Faqir Khana Museum Lahore. Later his two sons Mir Mumin and Mir Saleh also became renowned calligraphers at the court of Emperor Shah Jahan (Bhutta, 2007).

Entrance of the Mosque

The northern entrance archway, according to the epigraphic inscription, was “built in 1023A.H./ 1614 A.D by Akbar Rajput wife Queen Jodha, the mother of Emperor Jahangir, known by the title of Maryam Zamani” (Chaudhary, 2000, p.72). Today the *Nast’aliq* inscription is in a dilapidated condition which quotes the verses as follows (fig. 2):

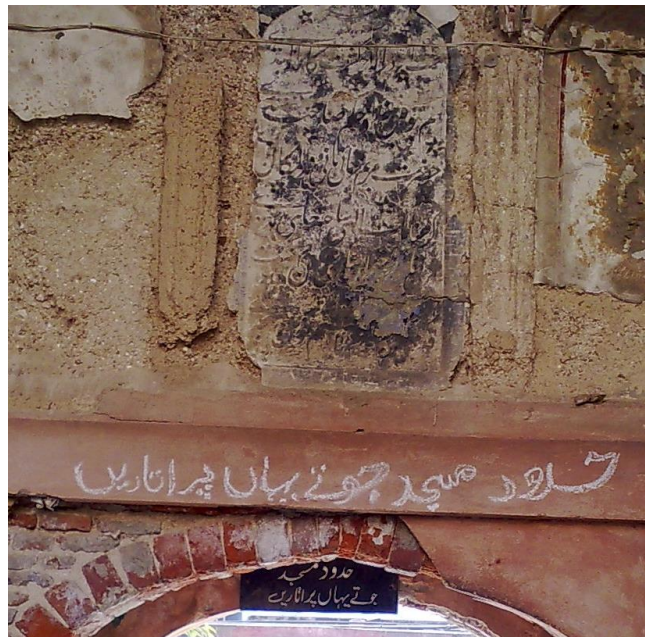


Figure 2. *Nast’aliq* Inscription above the northern entrance archway on the exterior (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

منت ایزد را کہ آخر گشت کار از ابتدائے
 ہم بتوفیقِ خدا و حکمِ صاحبِ مسند
 حضرت مریم زمانی بانی ہذا مکان
 کز عنایاتِ الہی ساختہ جائے ہدی
 از پی تاریخ ختم این بنائے چون بہشت
 مکرمی کردم کہ آخر یافتم ’خوش مسجدے‘

(Chughtai, 1976)

Minnat-e ayzed rā ke ākhir gasht kār az ibtadā’ay

Hum baytufiq-e khudā wa ḥukm-e ṣahib-e masnadī

Haṣrat Maryam Zamānī bānī-e hadhal’Makān

Gaz ‘ināyāt-e Ilāhī sākhtay jāi-e huda

Az pa'ey tārīkh khatm īn banā'ī chūn bihisht

Fikrastī kerdum ke ākhir yāftum khush masjiday

With the grace of God that the commenced work is finally completed

(which is) also by the benevolence of God and command of the throne-beholder

Her highness Maryam Zamani is the founder of this edifice

By the blessings of the Lord this place of enlightenment is constructed

According to history the paradise-like place construction is finished

I was in search nevertheless at last found this beautiful mosque (translation by Masooma Abbas)

Chughtai (1976, p. 52) mentions that the words "*Khush Masjiday*" is the chronogram that calculates the date 1023 AH. /1614 AD. Here in this Persian inscription the poet has acknowledged Queen Maryam Zamani as the founder of the Mosque however after acknowledging the imperial orders of the then King Jahangir, in the second verse. Kozlowski states that "women of the imperial family were frequently responsible for the building and maintenance of the mosques. Endowment deeds for them have not come to light" (Kozlowski, 1995, p. 360). Hypothetically it can be assumed that either both the Mother and Son jointly benefacted a royal private place of worship or the Queen was the originator of the idea of constructing a Mosque. Data regarding the functionality of the Mosque as a royal harem Mosque, relatively closer to Akbari Mahal in the interior of Lahore Fort, has not been found. Nevertheless, calculating the distance from the imperial residency in the Lahore fort is questionable for royal empresses and princesses to regularly visit the Mosque five times a day. The debate can be concluded by saying that the Mosque seems more to be in the name of the Queen rather than a mosque solely meant for regular usage by women of the royal harem as understood from the inscription as a bestowment project.

Inscription on the eastern gateway

شاه عالم گیر نورالدین محمد بادشاه

باد یارب در جهان روشن چو نور مهر و ماه

Chughtai, 1976){

Shāh 'Ālam gīr nūr al-Dīn Muhammad Bādshāh

Bād yā Rub der jehān roshan chū nūr-e mehr o māh

the conqueror of the world Nur ud-Din Muhammad, the King

May he O Lord! shine in the world like the sun and the moon.

(translation by Masooma Abbas)

Chughtai (1976), while appreciating the "high-class *Nast'alīq*," states that according to this inscription we come to know that this Mosque was built by Jahangir in the name of his mother (1976, p. 50-51). The source of this Persian inscription is from Chughtai's book and today we do not have the visual of the original inscription (1976).

Sanctuary

Maryam Zamani Mosque inscriptions are one of the earliest Mughal specimens at Lahore. One enters while descending the flight of four steps (fig. 1), from each of the two

archways, leading to the main courtyard which has the sanctuary facing the east. The façade of the sanctuary consists of five arches in which we find one of the calligraphic inscriptions on the frieze above the central larger arch (fig. 3). The Quranic “verses inscribed in relief cut out of the thick layers of plaster” at the Mosque are also found in other Mughal monuments (Ahmed, 2010, p.105). The frieze has verses ninety-six and ninety-seven from chapter *Āl-e Imrān* in *Thuluth* script ending with the name of the Emperor:

وَهْدَى لِلْعَالَمِينَ (٩٦) مُبْرَكًا بَبَكَّةَ إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي
سَبَّأًا ط إِلَيْهِ اسْتَوَاعَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ حُجَّ النَّاسِ عَلَى كَانِ أَمِنًا ط وَلِلَّهِ دَخَلَهُ ۖ وَمَنْ فِيهِ آيَةٌ بَيِّنَةٌ مِّمَّا كَفَرُوا
الْعَالَمِينَ (٩٧) عَنِ غَنِيِّ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ كَفَرَ وَمَنْ
جهانگیر۔ شاہ غازی محمد الدین نور نذور

*Innā awwala baytin wwūḍī'a linnās lalladhī bebakkatā mubarakan wwā huda-
llill'alamīn 96- fihī āyatu bayyīnātu-mmaqāmu Ibrahīm – wa man dakhalahu kāna āminān,
wa lillahi 'ala al-nnāsi hijju al-bayti mani-staṭā'a ilaiyyhi sabīlā – wa man kafara fa-inna Allaha
ghanīyyun 'anil al-'alāmīn 97 nadhūr nūr al-Dīn Muhammad Ghāzī Shāh Jahāngīr -*

“Indeed, the first house to be set up for mankind is the one at *Bakkāh*, blessed and a guidance for all nations (96). In it are manifest signs [and] Abraham’s Station, and whoever enters it shall be secure. And it is the duty of mankind toward Allah to make pilgrimage to the House—for those who can afford the journey to it—and should anyone renege [on his obligation], Allah is indeed without need of the creatures (97).” (Translation from <https://www.al-islam.org/quran/surah/3/aal-i-imraan/ayat/96-97>).

At the end is the inscribed name of the emperor that reads *bestowment of Noor ud-Din Muhammad Ghazi Shah Jahangir* which as of today has vanished because the picture was taken in 2007 (fig. 3). This inscription is a testament for our argument that the Mosque was conferred by Jahangir in the name of his mother as a gesture of piety and display of religiosity. While analyzing the text of the *Memoirs of Jahangir* Lefevre, also mentioning Jahangir’s recovery from illness in 1614, states that the Emperor in his official autobiography showcases his “spiritual modesty” (2022, p. 186). Hence, the inscription is not just a mere element of decoration and is purposefully deployed for the Imperial ideology.



Figure 3. *Nast'aliq* inscription on the frieze above the central arch of the sanctuary on the exterior, at Maryam Zamani Mosque, facing the east (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

Chughtai (1976) mentions that the central portal arch is framed by *Āyāt al-kursī* (verse of the throne) in *Naskh* script, starting from the lower right portion, running vertically upwards to the cornice in a dilapidated dimly readable condition but as compared to forty-

eight years back, when Chughtai records this script, today it has totally vanished. Chughtai's statement regarding the Quranic inscription of *Āyāt al-kursī* on the façade and the dilapidated *Āl-e Imrān* verses ninety-six and ninety-seven of the frieze suggests that once the whole façade was profusely covered with an ornamental scheme that had inscriptions displayed prominently (fig. 3).

Interior of the Sanctuary

Central Bay

Similar to the once profusely embellished exterior the interior is also extravagantly ornamented with fresco painting. The sanctuary consists of five bays in which the central bay has the largest size of the dome with squinches. The mihrab wall is completely covered with non-figurative stylized motifs in fresco technique among which the inscriptions take prominent position on the borders and above the mihrab (fig. 4).



Figure 4. The Inscriptions on mihrab of the central bay of the sanctuary at Maryam Zamani Mosque (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

Around the spandrel of the central arch a rectangular band again has *Āyāt al-kursī* verse 255 from chapter *Al-Bāqrah* inscribed on this panel. It starts from the lower right portion of the mihrab that runs towards to the left framing the mihrab completely (fig. 4). As far as the technique is concerned in this inscription, it is *mannabbat kāri* or stucco tracery. The carved stucco was extensively developed in the whole Islamic world for examples in Madrassa Haydariya Persia of the eleventh century; the stucco has been used for superb inscriptions in frieze, for the embellishment of arches and mihrab. In the Indian Subcontinent, stucco is a familiar technique from first century B.C. The examples are found from Apsidal Temple at Sirkap, Taxila. The earliest architectural example of it from Muslim rule in Pakistan is found at the mausoleum of Bahauddin Zakriya of 1269 at Multan (Hussain, 2011). At Maryam Zamani Mosque, first a thick layer of plaster is applied on the surface then burnished by agate stone. After this, the designs are drawn on the surface extra spaces are cut away. The words and designs on the burnished surface are left in relief or in an embossed form. Then afterwards it is painted against a lighter background. Currently here letters are in black against a white surface and some of the inscriptions have lost their finesse overtime due to inappropriate conservation.

At Maryam Zamani Mosque the harmony used in the epigraphical design is visible due to balanced proportion of the words in a fluid composition. Framing the mihrab of a mosque is one of the quintessential elements of decorating the sanctuary's central bay in Islamic architecture. The diacritical marks and *tashkilāt* (ornament) aesthetically fill the

negative spaces while balancing the script of *Āyāt al-kursī* (fig. 4). Some scholars have given their views on the calligraphic style of the mihrab panel verses. Chughtai (1976) suggests that this verse is in *Naskh* script but according to Khan (1997, p. 134) it is executed in “*tughrā* style.” However, Khursheed Gohar Qalam has claimed this script as *Thuluth* (Bhutta, 2007, p. 341). Contemporary master calligrapher Ustad Ashraf Heera (in a telephonic discussion after analyzing the script) has the view that the inscription is in *Thuluth* but not of high quality. The controversy arises not because the panel has a hybrid form of *Naskh-Thuluth* but after a close observation of the stucco-relief work, in which the inscriptions are carved out, it shows that the calligraphy has been carelessly restored in the preceding years which has modified the shape of the letters. In some verticals of the *Thuluth* letters, like the *alif*, the crown is missing while some letter’s round shapes have deliberately distorted endings. Initially the script would have been in true *Thuluth* directly inspired from the successful previous Mughal architectural inscriptions like at the tomb of Akbar at Sikandara of 1605. However, Bhutta suggests that the Mosque is under “Persian influence” in its construction and embellishment (Bhutta, 2007, p. 159). Due to the infinite blessings of *Āyāt al-kursī* and its significance for the Muslims, it has been a notable part of the epigraphical scheme in Islamic architecture. Hence, deployed twice at the Mosque of Maryam Zamani. It is regarded for spiritual defense from the evil of enemies. It represents Allah as the most Merciful, having knowledge and command on the concealed creations of sky and earth. It beholds Allah’s dignity, sovereignty, and praise. Not only do the religious inscription provoke sanctity through making the word of Allah visible but are also powerful signs containing specific religious messages while acting as a sort of talisman for the whole structure upon which they are inscribed (Michel, 1978).

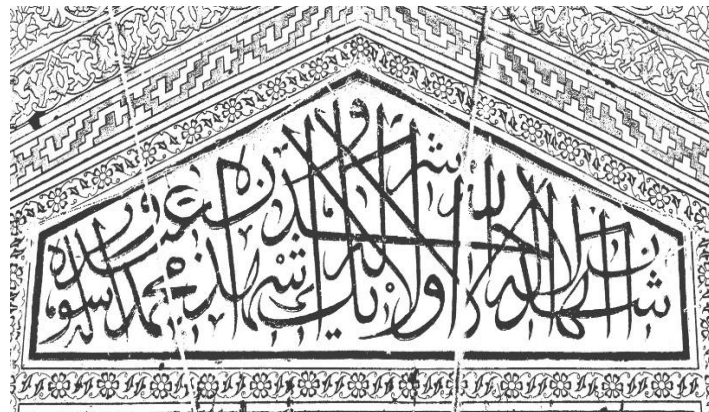


Figure 5. Detail of figure 4. Tympanum oblong panel with *Kālīmāh-ī-Shāhādāt* above the central mihrab of Maryam Zamani Mosque Sanctuary (Source: Illustration by Syeda Roohi Jamal).

In the central bay while touching the apex of the recessed arch, above the mihrab, on the tympanum is an oblong panel with *Kālīmāh-ī-Shāhādāt* (testimony of the core Muslim belief) in *Thuluth* script (figs. 4-5): أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ.

Ashhadu un lā ilahā illAllah waḥdahu lā sharikā lah wa ashḥadu anna Muhammadan ‘abdahu wa rasūloh

The inscription is designed in a pyramidal composition while effectively utilizing the verticals of the *Thuluth* script. Originality of the calligraphic specimen is much better preserved in this panel as compared to the mihrab *Āyāt al-kursī* border inscription. *Kālīmāh-ī-Shāhādāt* is a declaratory expression and testament of the faith of a Muslim in which he witnesses that there is no God except Allah, who is One without any partner and also endorses that Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is His servant and His Messenger.



Figure 6. The inscriptions in fresco on the inner surface of the central dome of the sanctuary at Maryam Zamani Mosque (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

Another striking calligraphic composition is on the inner surface of the dome which is richly decorated with *islīmī-khatā'ī* motifs composed within the geometric shapes of the stalactites in fresco (fig. 6). Calligraphy is added in concentric circles within this decorative repertoire that are very appealing to the eye as they diminish towards the apex of the dome. There are sixteen cartouche medallions in each circle enriched with the names of Allah almighty in *Thuluth*. The first tier has inscriptions of *Yā Allāh*, second has *Yā Latīf* (The Most Gentle), third one is inscribed with *Yā Baṣīr* (The All-Seeing), and *Yā Muzil* (The Dishonorer), fourth is inscribed with *Yā Ḥakīm* (the All Wise), *Yā 'Alīm* (the All-Knower), and fifth round has *Yā Khabīr* (The Aware), *Yā Sām'ī* (the Listener) and, *Yā M'uizz* (The Bestower) (fig. 6). These *ṭughra* style compositions are in white on ultramarine blue background that stand out against rest of the rich chromatic vibrant color scheme. The honorable names of Allah composed skillfully on this blue and white color scheme seems to be an inspiration from the Multani pottery style. Symbolically both colors carry spiritual and ethereal connotations. The composition gives feel to the worshipper that the blessings of Allah are spreading all over. These names also represent the authority and commendation of Allah. It shows that He who is Knowledgeable, very Kind, the All-Powerful, has full authority to give esteem or belittle His creation. Allah is the best Listener for all of mankind. Most of the Mughal monuments have some way or the other displaying the names of Allah in the overall decorative epigraphic scheme to gain blessings from these Holy names.

Side Bays of the Sanctuary



Figure 7. Quranic inscription of the sanctuary's far northern bay at Maryam Zamani Mosque (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

The side bay Qibla walls are decorated similarly with a mihrab in the center of a double-recessed arch. On the profusely decorated wall above the Qibla mihrab are horizontal double-framed rectangular panels with calligraphic compositions. In each rectangular band inscriptions are highlighted with white against a blue background.



Figure 8. Detail of Figure 7. Quranic inscription of the far northern bay of the sanctuary of the Mosque of Maryam Zamani, Lahore (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas).

The far northern bay of the sanctuary, above the mihrab, has a Quranic inscription in *Thuluth* from chapter *al-Tāūbā* verses 108 executed in white on blue background in fresco (fig. 7):
 لَمَسْجِدٍ أُسِّسَ عَلَى التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْ أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَقُومَ فِيهِ ۚ فِيهِ رِجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَتَطَهَّرُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ

Lamasjidun ussisa alattaqwā min awwale yaumin a'haqqū un taqūma fihey – fihey rijālun yuhibbūna an yataṭahharū – wallahu yuhibbu al-muṭaṭahhirīn (9:108).

“Surely a mosque founded from the first day on piety is more worthy that you should stand in it for prayer. In it are people who love to purify themselves, and Allah loves those that purify themselves” (Translation by Abul-ala Maududi, <https://myislam.org/surah-taubah/ayat-108/>).

At first look the inscription is mistaken as in *Naskh* script however; it seems that unrefined restoration has distorted the finesse of the actual *Thuluth* script visually. Negative spaces are composed with *tashkīlāt* and diacritical marks (fig. 8). The verse refers to the importance of the purpose of building a mosque and hence indicates towards intentions of the builder. In other words here at Maryam Zamani Mosque the builder has tried to signify the spirit of benefaction for which the Mosque was built.



Figure 9. Inscription from the northern bay of Maryam Zamani Mosque's Sanctuary (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).



Figure 10. Detail of figure 9. Inscription from the northern bay of Maryam Zamani Mosque's Sanctuary (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

The bay on the north, adjacent to the central bay, has the same rectangular panel, inscribed with a saying of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) (fig. 9):

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ أَسْلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنِ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ كَأَسْمَكِ وَالْمَأْمَأِ
وَالْمُنَافِقُ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ الطَّيْرُ الْفَقْفَصِ

Qālā Rasūl Allah 'alaihay-as Salām

Al-momino fil-masjid kal-samak wa-almā

wa-almunāfiq fī al-masjid ka-aṭṭaiyr al-qafaṣ.

The Holy Prophet Peace be upon Him says that the believer in a mosque is (related) like a fish and water and the hypocrite in a mosque is like a bird in a cage (translation by Masooma Abbas).

The inscription in *Thuluth* is composed horizontally to fit in the panel; however it seems crowded (fig. 10). Blue is slightly in a darker tone as compared to the composition on the parallel wall. The outline and framing are same in their colour and design. The Saying highlights the importance of a mosque for a believer.

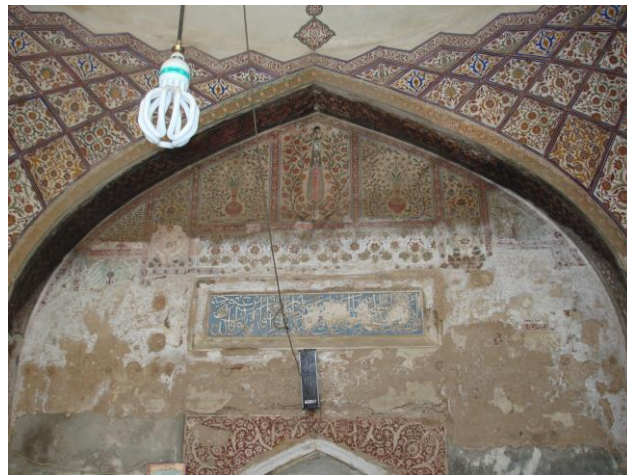


Figure 11. Inscription from the southern bay of Maryam Zamani Mosque's Sanctuary (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).



Figure 12. Detail of figure 11. Inscription from the southern bay of Maryam Zamani Mosque's Sanctuary (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

One of the bays on the south of the sanctuary of Maryam Zamani Masjid is almost chipped off today however the image captured in 2007 shows that the panel had Quranic verses 191 and 192 from surah *al-Baqarah* in the same stucco relief technique (figs. 11-12). The verse 191 in *Thuluth* starts with:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّىٰ يَقْتُلُوَكُمْ فِيهِ ۖ فَإِن قَتَلْتُمُوهُمْ فَآتُوا لَهُمْ جَزَاءَ الْكَافِرِينَ
 ۖ فَإِن أُنْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Wa lā tuqatilūhum ‘inda al-masjid al-Ḥarām ḥattā yuqatilūkum fīhay fā-in qatalūkum faqtulūhum kadhalika jazā’u al-kafirīn fa-in intahū fā-inna Allah Ghafūr al-Rahīm

And do not kill them in the (sacred) Mosque al-Haram unless they attack you in it, but if they massacre you then kill them, this is the reward of the disbelievers (2:191) But if they (disbelievers) discontinue Verily Allah is all Merciful and Forgiving (2:192). (Translated by Masooma Abbas)

The verses call for peace and forgiveness however if the enemy attacks the sanctity of a holy place by fighting and blood shedding he should be dealt with an iron hand and be attacked in response. Quranic inscription such as this one seems to be meant for a generalized audience of the Mughal Mosque in early seventeenth century (fig. 12).

The inscription on the other southern corner bay is in a better condition (fig. 13). Here we find a date 1021 A.H written in the end of the composition which is a date, as mentioned earlier, of the commencement of Lahore Fort's residential palaces in 1612: two years prior to the completion date of Maryam Zamani Mosque. It is possible that these panels and the qibla walls would have finished before the rest of the ornamentation and construction of the Mosque began in this same year. However, evidence of actual day of commencement of the Mosque needs to be explored. This southern bay Quranic inscription in *Thuluth* is from chapter *Al-Aḥzāb* verse fifty-six says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

“Inna-Allah wa malāi’katakū yuṣṣallūna alan-Nabiyyī - Yā ayyuha al-ladhīna āmanū ṣallū ‘alaihay wa sallimū taslīmā 1021” (33:56). (fig. 13)

Indeed, your Lord and His angels confer blessings upon the Prophet – O those who have (are amongst the) believed send your salutations upon Him (the Holy Prophet PBUH) and greet (Him) with submission. The verse describes the importance of salutations on the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and is frequently found in Islamic architectural epigraphic ornamentation.



Figure 13. Quranic inscription of the far southern bay of the sanctuary at Maryam Zamani Mosque (Source: Picture by Masooma Abbas taken in 2007).

The holy inscriptions on the qibla wall of the sanctuary of Maryam Zamani Mosque are mostly generalized and intended for the believer visiting the Mosque. While inscriptions on the exterior of the sanctuary are directly related to the patron and construction of the Mosque. Apart from these inscriptions, there are other inscriptions by “Abdul Majid Perveen Reqam, a twentieth century calligrapher on the demand of Faqir Ghulam Qadir by mason Elahi Baksh Mistri” (Bhutta, 2007, p. 314) which are out of the scope of our subject. The Mosque of Maryam Zamani influenced the other later Mughal mosques with its calligraphic style and selection of Quranic text. The style of writing and techniques continued in the future edifices. However, its importance as the earliest Mughal Mosque at Lahore is significant.

Conclusion

Like any other sovereign of a Muslim state, the Mughals since the inception of their Empire, were conscious about the portrayal of their religiosity. Hence, mosques were planned, built and ornamented according to the ideological approach of the Mughal Emperor. Similar efforts are seen at one of the important centers of Mughal Empire at Lahore in the edifice of early seventeenth century surviving Mosque of Maryam Zamani. Maryam Zamani Mosque displays aesthetically designed calligraphic inscriptions by royal calligraphers of the age. Among the decorative scheme of the Mosque is the inscriptional program which reveals that the Mosque was of a private nature and an imperial bestowment project under the patronage of Jahangir. The Persian verses in *Nasta’liq* and the Arabic inscriptions in *Thuluth* and *Tughrā* compositions with their contextual symbolism reveal that incidents occurring before 1614, especially during 1612 when contemporary Lahore Fort construction commenced, lead to the construction of such a small-scale royal Mosque, slightly away from Lahore Fort’s residential area in the vicinity. The Sanctuary inscriptions reveal the importance of a Mosque for the believer and maintaining its sanctity. Today most of the inscriptions have vanished and the glory which once this Mosque had can only be visualized through imagination.

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