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Decorative works in the Maryam Zamani Mosque: An Evocation

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Abstract

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The mosque lies at the very heart of Islamic architecture. It is an apt symbol of the faith which it serves. That symbolic role was understood by Muslims at a very early stage, and played its part in the creation of suitable visual markers for the building: dome, minaret, Mihrab and Member among others. Masjid, derived from the root sajada, to prostrate oneself, is used in the Qur'an itself, though in rather a broad sense, to denote a place of worship. Its meaning was quickly refined, however, to indicate more specifically a mosque for daily private prayer. The term is an English version of original Arabic word masjid or the mosque is a derivative of the original Arabic term masjid which literary means to prostrate but traditionally it came to be known worship place of the Muslim community. As far as Maryam Zamani mosque is concerned this is one of the most ancient mosques of the city. It is situated close to the Masti Gate of the city, opposite the eastern wall of the Lahore fort. The mosque is distinct because of the exquisite fresco paintings of the interior surface. The paintings have been rightly regarded as unrivalled in Pakistan as well as in India for their delicacy and lively variety. The use of fresco paintings at the mosque of Maryam Zamani as a means of surface decoration has been favored in the sub-continent from very early days. The early examples at the Jogimara cave in Mirzapur district and those at Ajanta and Bagh take us deep into antiquity. The tradition has since continued in the subcontinent and during the Muslim rule, we find it applied extensively. Never in the history of the architecture of the early Mughal period do we find such an extensive and exclusive use of this type of decoration. The endless variety of geometric, floral and inscriptional designs spread interior surface in a subtle colour scheme is a characteristic not seen elsewhere. The mosque has also several inscriptions, both Quranic and non-Quranic, executed exclusively in plaster in high and bold relief a characteristics which is met with first here in the historic monuments of the Mughals in Lahore. Among the non-Quranic inscriptions, the two executed over the arches of the two entrance gates and the one executed on the high façade of the prayer chamber are important as they record the name of the founder and the date of the completion of the mosque.

Introduction:

The mosque as the prime manifestation of Islamic architecture has been treated with various modes and techniques of ornamentation, and the master-craftsman has used his talent and ingenuity to decorate the entire surface with epigraphs, floral designs, and geometric patterns and motifs created in stones terracotta, faience or faience mosaic, fresco, stucco, or simple paintings. (Qazi 1995:141)

The Maryam Zamani Mosque has been treated with continuous scheme of geometric as well as floral patterns. It is indeed significant to proclaim that in the history of early Mughal period art and architecture we never came across to see such detailed and exquisite form of work. A variety of surface decoration can be seen in this mosque, which shows a variation in the theme of work e.g. i. Geometric ii. Floral and iii. Inscriptional patterns wrought on the inner surface of the prayer chamber. Moreover the inscriptional design also covers the interior part in a wonderful and amazing colour combination. The fresco paintings are enhancing the beauty of Maryam Zamani Mosque as they are highlighting the techniques of the artist and their colour scheme as well as the subject matter. (Waliullah 1962:46)

Calligraphy in the Maryam Zamani Mosque:

As mentioned above the understudy monument was highly enriched with various ornamented designs through different decorative techniques. Among the decorative elements a variety of floral, geometrical and calligraphic specimen can be noticed, these all executed through various techniques like fresco buon fresco painting and stucco stalactite work. It is pertinent to mention that the calligraphic work is executed in the understudy mosque in the stone surface. Besides, floral and geometrical designs can be abundantly noticed. Whereas in some cases some of the inscriptions are elegantly painted. The Mosque possesses a number of inscriptions both Quranic and non-Quranic are found in Maryam Zamani Mosque, which are carried out in plaster in both bold and low relief. It seems the characteristic feature of the Mosque which was first time introduced in a Mughal monument at Lahore. Besides this over the arches of the two entrance gates non-Quranic inscriptions are found, one of them is placed above the facade of the sanctuary. This inscription is very important regarding the history of Mosque architecture as it tells the name of the founder and the date of the construction. The inscriptions which are found on entrance gates are all in Nasta'liq characters, while Naskh-Suls appears on the facade of the Ivan (Sanctuary). (Latif 1956:136)

Attributes of Allah on the roof of the inner side of Mehrab or the ceiling of Mehrab in the Nasta'liq style is the first and earliest example in Mughal Mosque at Lahore. The same style is also found on the inner side of the dome of Maryam Zamani Mosque. Among the Quranic inscriptions, the most prominent is on the Mehrab of the mosque. The Tughra gives the usual Ayat-al-Kursi, while at the crown of the arched-niche is the Kalima. Similarly, all the facades of the niches in other compartments have been decorated with inscriptions of verses from the Quran. There is only one saying of the Rasulullah (SAW) painted on the facade of the second left arch. (Khan 1970-71:130)

The inscriptions carved in Stucco and fixed on the façade of the two entrance gateways, the façade of the Ivan and the Mehrab-arch of Maryam Zamani Masjid at Lahore are both interesting as well as instructive. They are the earliest known stucco epigraphs of the Moghul period. (Nath 1986:115). As said earlier, the two on the gateways are in Nasta'liq, while those on the facade of the Ivan and the Mehrab are in Naskh-Suls, executed in bold relief. The elaborate use of epigraphs in this Mosque makes it a rather unique example. Here for the

first time, Persian verses are composed to document the name of the Queen Mother, and that of the emperor with date of its construction. The master-artist has calligraphed them with precision and the master mason created it by means of chaste white stucco, the white frieze of epigraphs runs along the two sides and atop the Mehrab-arch. The simple but sophisticated treatment gives prominence as well as elegance to these epigraphs. (Khan1991: 182)

Amongst the non-Quranic Inscriptions, the two executed over the arches of the gate entrances and the one executed on the high facade of the prayer chamber are essentials they record the name of the founder and the date of the completion of the mosque. (Latif 1956 : 133)

The inscription on the facade of the sanctuary executed in stucco in high relief and painted in red, records Quranic verse and name of the emperor Jahangir.

(Latif 1956: 132)

Amongst Quranic inscriptions, the most prominent is wrought on the Mehrab of the mosque. The Tughra gives the Ayat al Kursi , whereas the crest of the arched niche is Kalima. Similarly, all the facades of the niches in other compartments have been adorned with inscriptions of verses from the Quran. (Khan1991: 122)

The Inscriptions:

The mosques have, as a rule, been adorned with inscriptions providing pertinent historical information about the chronology of the building, the name of the builder and, in some cases, those responsible for its planning and construction. Besides, these sacred structures have been decorated with numerous epigraphs of selected verses of the Quran, traditions, and formulate. The feature has received prime importance and is indeed one of the most favourite media of surface decoration. (Khan 1991:178)

These inscriptions are created in almost all the forms of styles of calligraphy Kufic (angular, floriated, as well as foliated) Naskh, suls, Tughra, Nasta'liq and many other allied scripts. They are executed on stone, in stucco and terracotta, in Fresco and on faience and mosaic. The most exquisite specimens are, however, those carved on stone. The earliest known such epigraphs are the thirteen inscriptions excavated from the ruins of the mosque at Banbhore.(Ghafur 1968:23) One of these is carved in floriated Kufic and records the dates of the reconstruction of mosque, the name of the builder and other pertinent details. (Khan 1991:178)

A very significant epigraph recorded the construction of a Jame Mosque named Jame' Farrukh at Thatta, by Mir Farrukh Arghun in 936/1532. The Persian inscription is perhaps the earliest known specimen in Pakistan carved in Nasta'liq character. (Khan 1991:181)

As far as the inscriptions in Maryam Zamani Mosque at Lahore is concerned those are bilingual i.e. in Arabic and Persian, whereas the subject matter and theme of the inscriptions is concerned that shows two different issues such as Quranic and historic. Besides, this issue one of the other significant subjects is the calligraphic specimen executed in this mosque is the stylistic approach which can be divided into four styles such as:

- A. Naskh
- B. Thulth
- C. Tughra
- D. Nasta'liq

These are the earliest calligraphic specimens which have been reported in Maryam Zamani Mosque at Lahore.(Qazi 2010:202-3; 2013:41)

A. Naskh style:

This Arabic script is in cursive style. It seems pertinent to describe here that the oldest specimen or recorded evidence in Pakistan may be seen in the shape of the manuscript entitled, *Bahjat-un-Nufooz Wal Israr Fit Tarikh-i-Hijrat-i Mukhtar*, which is now present in the Punjab University library, written in dated 436 A.H/A.D 1044. The round variety, which has been developing unnoticed under the shadow of lordly Kufic, came to be recognized as the script of the state. It was given the distinctive name of Naskh. (Ghafur 1968:50; Din 1979:45)

B. Thluth Style:

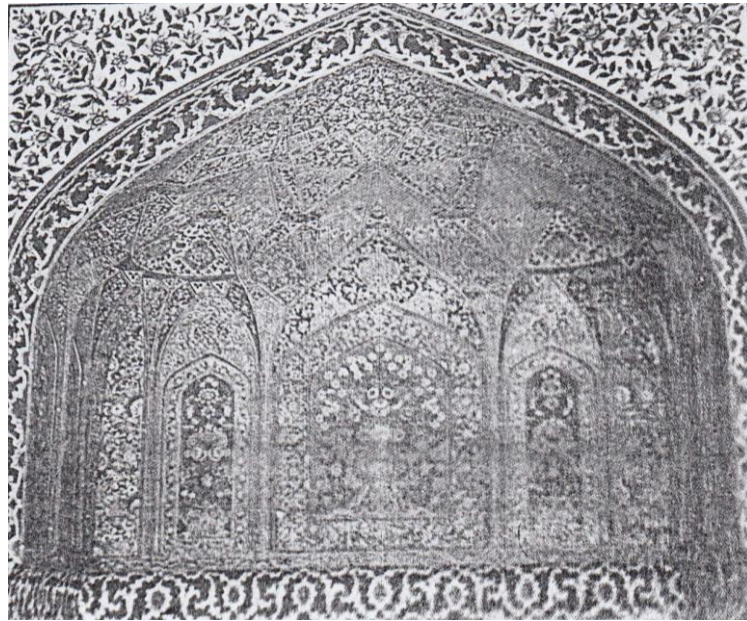
This is an ornamental style of writing. It was first time introduced during Umayyad period in 7th century. But this script did not develop in its full form until the late 9th century. Thluth means ‘a third’—possibly because of the proportion of straight lines to curve, or maybe because the strokes of Naskh are lesser in size as compare to the curves and strokes of the Thluth. However, the style of its length is bigger than the width of Naskh. Furthermore, Thluth is based on curved script. (Dar 1981:57; Lari 1997:134-179)

C. Tughra:

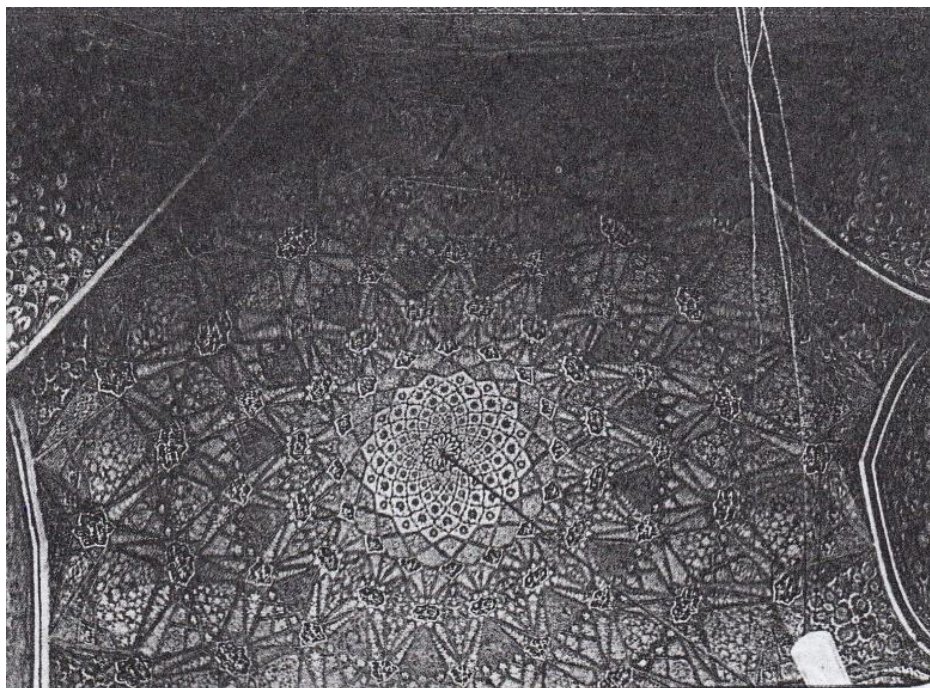
Tughra is associated with Ottoman Dominion because it has been developed during Ottoman rule. Tughra is a calligraphic design or sign of a sultan that was fixed to all official documents and letters. It was also carved on his seal and stamped on the coins minted during his reign. The Tughra was proposed at the start of the sultan’s rule and drawn by the court calligrapher on written documents. The first Tughra belongs to orhan I (1284-1359), the second ruler of the Ottoman Empire and it developed until it reached the classical form in the Tughra of sultan Suleiman the magnificent. (1494-1566)

D. Nasta’liq style:

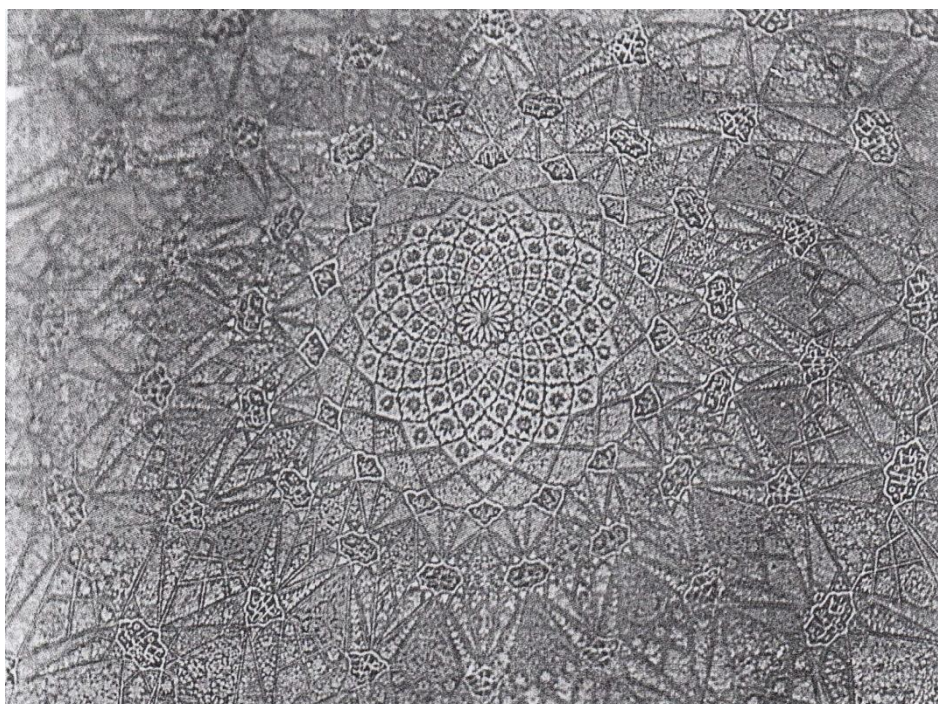
Nasta’liq, is a cursive and round style of writing. It appears very impressive, light, gracious as well as elegant cursive writing system. It was Mir Ali Sultan al-Tabrizi, a Persian calligrapher who created a new form known as Nasta’liq from Naskhi and Taliq writing system in 15th Century A.D. (Schimmel 1984:30). The earliest evidence of this script is found from the Frrukh Arghun Mosque at Thatta, Dated 938 A.H/A.D.1532. (Ghafur 1968:51; Khan 1991:180-199) It consists of lengthy strokes and ornamented circular shapes. Other significant feature of this script is that it is beautified by adding diacritical marks, Sometimes, consisting of merely lines which were flowing rather than straight. Tabrizi is said to have been fantasized by the flying of a geese with flapering wings as Nasta’liq is originally embellished such birdly movements. As a script Nasta’liq processed a wonderful characters as it reflects the swinging movements, going from upper right to lower left of every curve. Nasta’liq, as a writing system has easy access. Therefore, it emerged as one of the most popular system in the Muslim world right from its beginning. (Din 1979:88) Schimmel has rightly appreciated it saying that “a bride of the Islamic style of writing”. (Schimmel 1984:31)



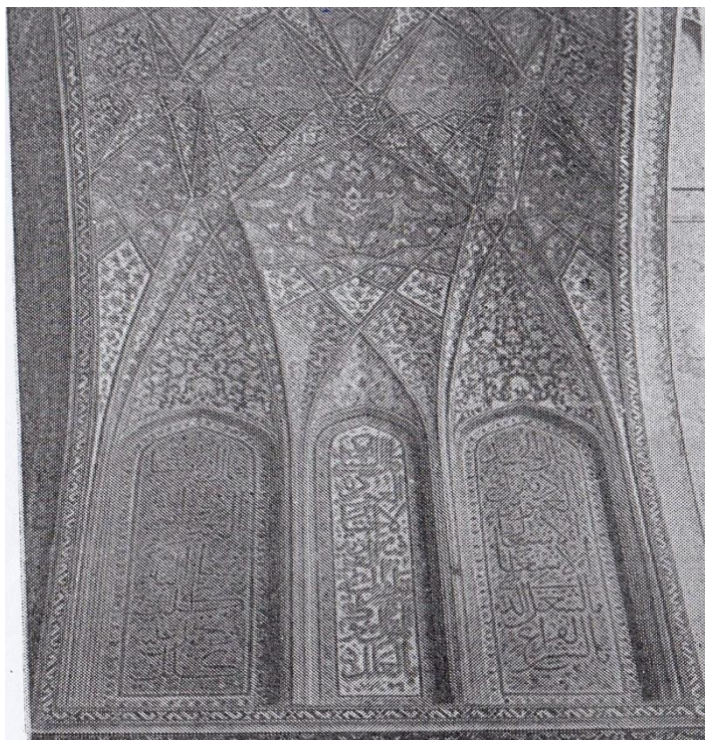
Floral, Geometric, calligraphic and honey comb pattern from the Mihrab, Maryam Zamani's Mosque. (Mahmud 1981:547; pl.XV)



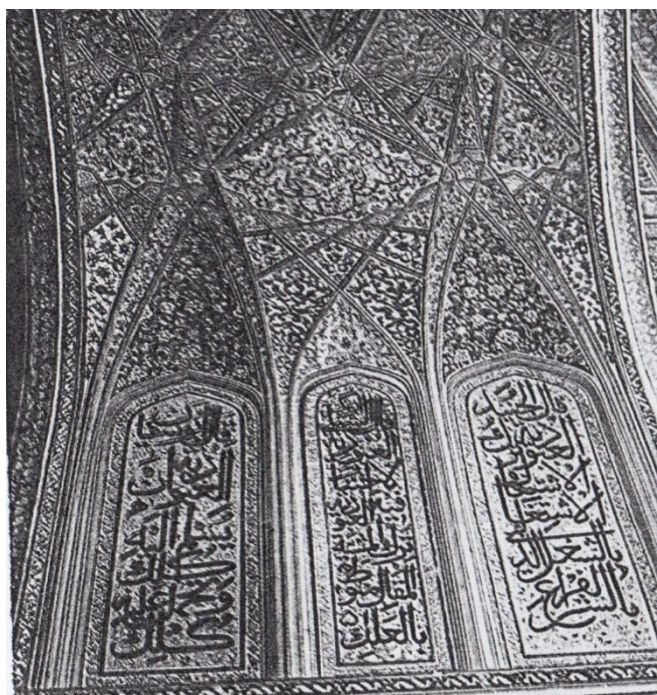
Arabesque, geometric, calligraphic and honey comb patterns from the interior of the dome,
Maryam Zamani's Mosque.
(Mahmud 1981:548; pl.XVIa)



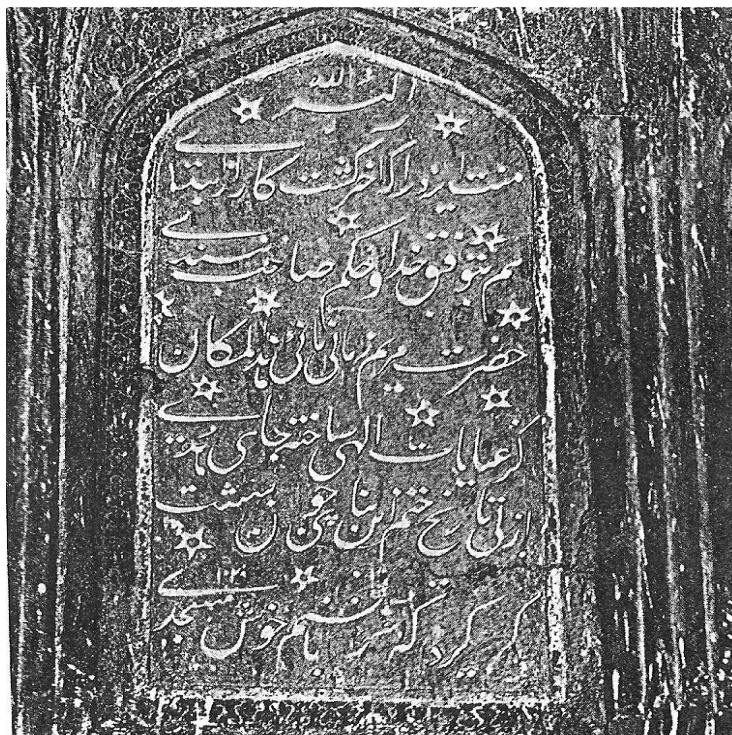
Arabesque, geometric, calligraphic and honey comb patterns from the interior of the dome,
Maryam Zamani's Mosque.
(Mahmud 1981:548; pl.XVIb)



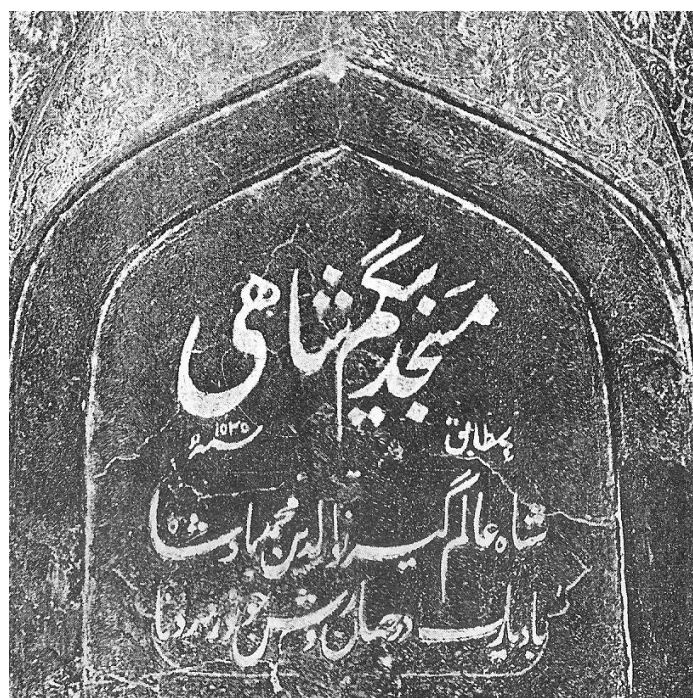
Floral and calligraphic designs with honey comb facets from soffit of main arch, Wazir Khan's Mosque. (Mahmud 1981:549; pl.XVIIa)



Floral and calligraphic designs with honey comb facets from soffit of main arch, Wazir Khan's Mosque. (Mahmud 1981:549; pl.XVIIb)



Maryam Zamani Mosque, Lahore: Persian Inscription the Southern Entrance (Khan 1991:70; pl.33)



Maryam Zamani Mosque, Lahore: Persian Inscription on the eastern entrance (Khan 1991:70; pl.34)

Fresco Bouno Painting:

Like faience mosaic revetment, fresco painting has also been a very favourite medium of surface ornamentation with which interior of the Masjid has been adorned. The use of this medium, it may be reiterated has a history of its own in this subcontinent going back to the early centuries of the Christian era. The early examples at the Jogi-mara caves in Mirzapur district in India, and those more celebrated at Ajanta and Bagh take us deep into antiquity. The tradition has since continued and, during the Mughal rule, we find it applied extensively. The fabulous buildings erected by Akbar and his successors at Agra, Lahore, Fatehpur Sikri and Delhi, possess some exquisite examples of this type of decoration. (Khan 1991:191) The Mosque, however, rise out uniquely because of its fresco ornamentation with which the entire of the inner surface of the Sanctuary is stuffed. The paintings have been rightly regarded as un-rivalled in Pakistan and perhaps in Indian, ‘for their delicacy and lively variety’. (Wheeler 1950:83)

The fresco painting at the Mosque of Maryam Zamani is the first of its kind, and provides evidence for its earliest known use in the Mosques of Pakistan. If we talk about the early Mughal period we don’t see such type of widespread and momentous use of this kind of ornamentation in the history of architecture. The unique and perpetual variety of geometric, floral and inscriptional designs broadens over the interior surface in a delicate and exquisite colour scheme is a characteristic not seen or found somewhere else. The surface has been divided into various panels of different shapes and dimensions according to the space available, and all the soffits, niches, squinches, arches, interior of domes, apex etc., are covered with these paintings. The squinches have been endowed with low stalactites painted with small flower twigs, while the adjacent areas are divided into arched-panels which have gallant interwoven floral patterns. Few borders have panels with geometric schemes of embellishment, formed by carving to some extent incised liens in white. The inner surface of the dome has likewise been divided into honeycombed geometric patterns stuffed with delicate floral tracery. (Wheeler 1950:82) The small space between the honeycomb geometric patterns is filled gracefully with stars which have some of the Attributes of Allah done in Naskh typescript. The terrific amalgamation of colours is also worth mentioning; almost all shades of green, ochre red, blue, yellow and black have been used for the purpose without giving the entire scheme the prominent effect. The experience and proficiency achieved in this enterprise of Jahangir’s early period was used extensively later on in several other buildings. The Mosque of Wazir Khan at Lahore is the most conspicuous example of this type of ornamentation. (Khan 1991:192)

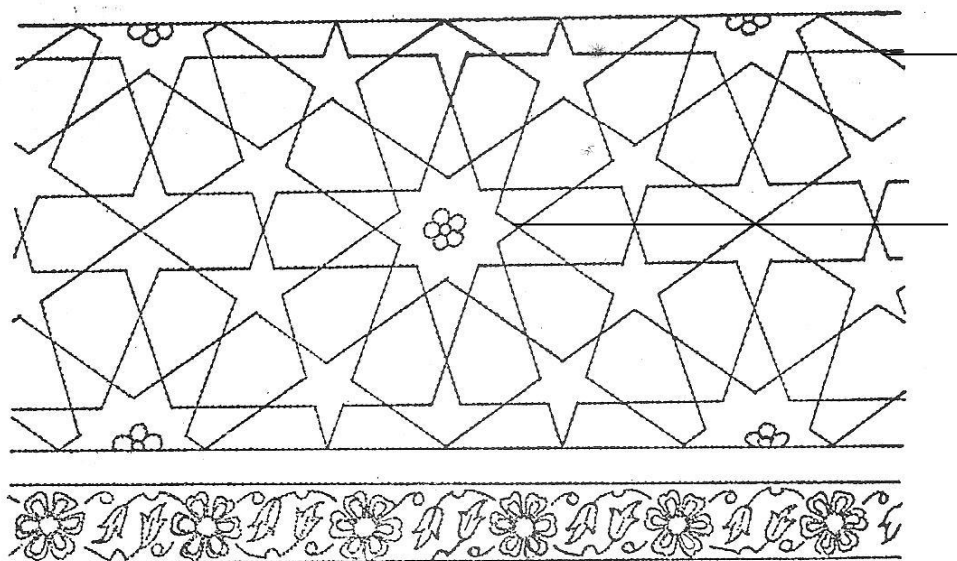
So, the tradition set up by this magnificent Mughal Mosque was followed slightly collectively. The Mahabat Khan’s Mosque at Peshawar, the Wazir Khan Mosque, the Chinian Wali Masjid and Masjid Salih Kanboh, both at Lahore, and many others of the series still retain such ornamentation, whereas those mosques which were erected during the early decades of the present century have been mainly adorned in a simpler technique called Sico where the elaborate methods of real fresco were not followed. The technique used in the mosques at Multan, Uchchu, Muzaffargarh and elsewhere was just colour painting on Chunans glazed plaster. This is usually called Multani painting. (Khan 1991:197)

In my study it is observed that there had been a progressive change in the appearance of various decorative themes. It is observed that, with spell, the rise and decline in style had also occurred. The fresco art had seen its peak between 1566-1658 A.D. and began to decadent from 1658 to 1735 A.D. till its final indulgence by 1752 A.D. (Mahmud 1981:536). It appears on the sovereign power for their support, and the destiny of the school of fresco art was linked with the fortune of the Mughal dynasty.



Floral Arabesque

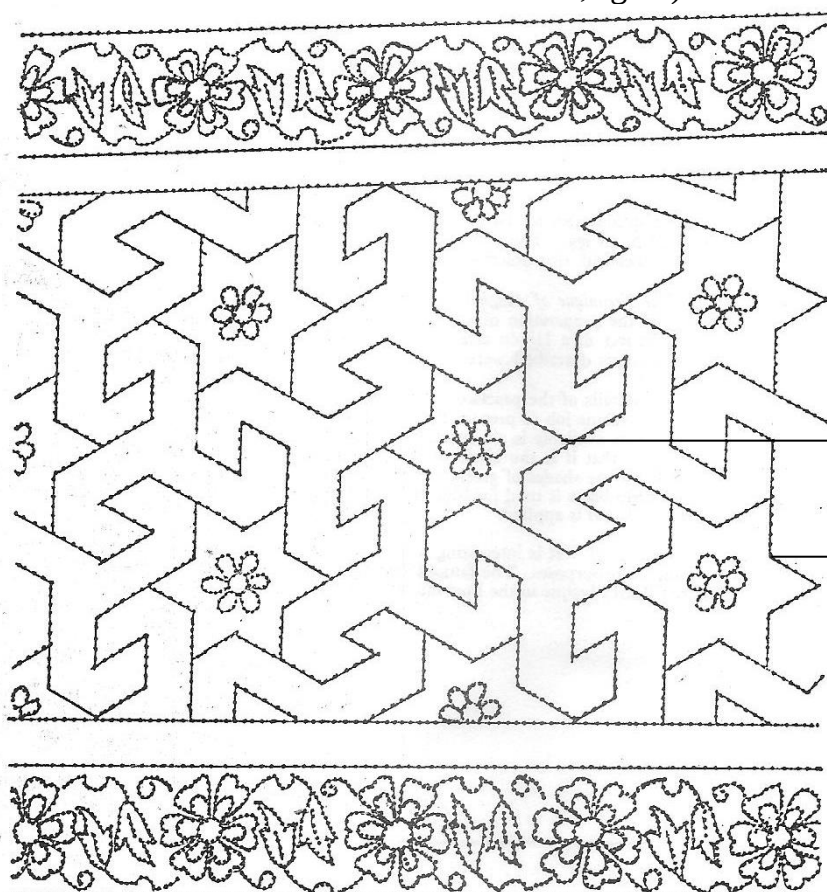
Maryam Zamani Mosque, Lahore: Fresco decoration in the interior of prayer chamber. (Khan 1970-71:131; pl.II)



**Geometrical
Arabesque**

Star Motif

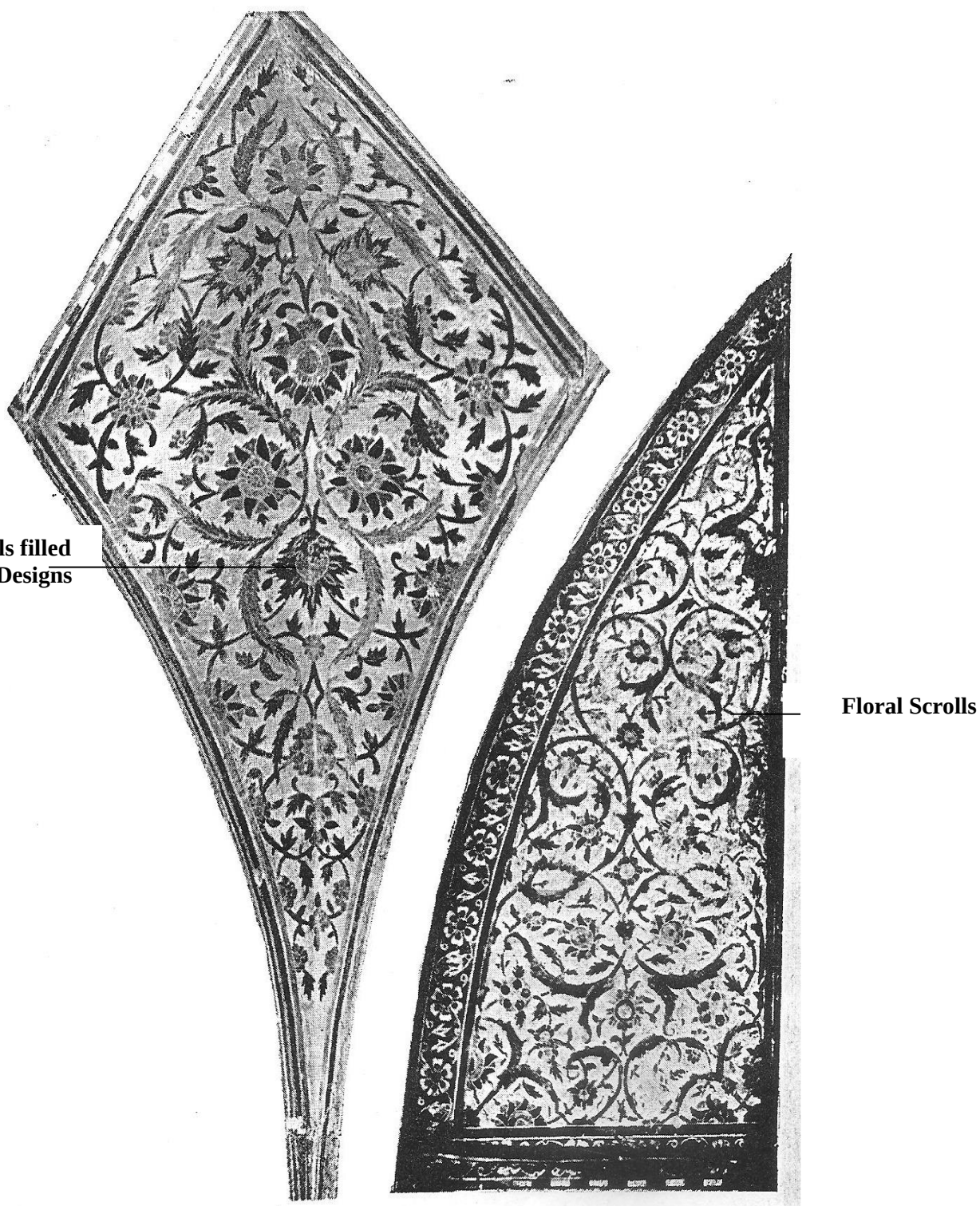
Maryam Zamani Mosque, Lahore: perforated outline of a design. (Khan 1970-71:131;fig.25)



Star Motif

**Geometrical
Arabesque**

Maryam Zamani Mosque, Lahore: perforated outline of a design. (Khan 1970-71:131;fig.26)



Maryam Zamani Mosque, Lahore: Fresco painting on the squinches in the interior of the prayer chamber.(Khan 1970-71:137;pl.XLIX)

Stucco Stalactite work:

This word stalactite is originated from a Greek term stalactos, which means dripping stone (Nath 1986: 115). It is a type of honey comb design, generally similar to the bee hive pattern. Though, it's usually conceived from the formation of calcium carbonate hanging from the roof of a cavern or the deposit of lime, which generally hanging from the roof of a cavern therefore, called as "Stalactites". And those rising from its floor are termed as stalagmites. In other words, it is being produced through the multiplication of tiny arches in the pendentive shape, thus, also termed as stalactite pendentives. In order to support the zone of transition, the stalactites are also applied to the squinches. It is a typical Islamic style of supporting and decorative unit used in the architecture is called muqaranas by the Arabs (Nath 1986: 115; Qazi1995: 115). It is pertinent to explain here that the Stucco Stalactite has been developed from the stone stalactite technique. However, it is done in Stucco then known as "ghalibkari" (Qazi 1995: 119). The ghalibkari work was developed in Persia. It was used generally throughout the Seljuq era. Afterwards, the Ilkhanids have introduced this sort of work to the ceiling of the dome and arch alcoves (Donald 1955: 72; Qazi 1995: 119). It is certainly significant to describe here that this type of technique as a source of ornamental work was adopted in the subcontinent from the Persian and Central Asian traditions. However, it is essential to elaborate here that it was provided for the first time in the Qutb Minar at Delhi, as a supportive element to its balconies. (Brown 1941: 12; Sahai 2004: 18) While, the stone stalactite work can be viewed in the squinches of Uluttmish (Iltutmish) tomb. A.D. 1236. (Nath 1982: 23)

Stucco stalactite work or GhalibKari can be seen in the domical ceiling, alcoves and soffits of the understudy Masjid. In this form of work honey comb pattern and star chain designs are created on the stucco surface. These designs are achieved both in high and low relief. During the Mughal period these designs are printed with different colours. Moreover, the honey comb patterns on tiny niches are printed with different floral designs. In this proficiency Maryam Zamani Mosque at Lahore is one of the gorgeous examples of Stucco Stalactite work. The main purpose of this work is to give firmness to the super structure on one hand whereas on the other hand to create grace and elegance in the entire structure composition (Qazi 1995:119).

Theme of Decoration in the Maryam Zamani Mosque:

Floral designs:

- a. Rosettes
- b. Sun flower
- c. Floral scrolls
- d. Lotus flowers
- e. Palmettes
- f. Floral arabesque
- g. Plants
- h. Vases
- i. Jasmine
- j. Hibiscus
- k. Daisy
- l. Dahlia
- m. Gerbera
- n. Daffodil
- o. Tulip

- p. Periwinkle
- q. Gladiolus

Geometrical elements:

- a. David star
- b. Savastika
- c. Star
- d. Lozenges
- e. Geometrical arabesque
- f. Honey comb pattern

Conclusion:

Maryam Zamani Mosque can be defined as a wonderful piece of art and architecture. Although this Mosque follows the traditional pattern of Islamic Mosque but technically as well as architecturally it shows great turbulent in the art of architecture as well as in the form of Mosque. When we talk about the source of inspiration of Maryam Zamani Mosque, than, it can be said that this is the mixture of Islamic and indigenous art and architecture.

The extensive use of fresco bouno paintings in the interior of the prayer chamber of Maryam Zamani Mosque is remarkable. This happened first time that fresco bouno painting was used in a Mosque at Lahore. The history of the use of the fresco paintings in Punjab is not quite clear but a few examples are found particularly in the Indus valley civilization, particularly at Harappa murals are found possibly in fresco. The use of fresco painting in the Vaishnava temples of the Punjab hills in India is recorded in the history of the Indian arts. (Khan 1991:191). This shows that fresco is also a native tradition which was applied in the Mosque architecture of Pakistan specially Lahore in the reign of Jahangir. We can divide the Mughal architecture into two phases. 1st phase in which the red sand stone was used in building the Mughal monuments from Humayun to Akbar's reign and the second phase is the use of marble on a large extent in building for the purpose of decoration. As far as the decoration on Mughal monuments in Lahore is concerned we see the tile mosaic work in Lahore fort on a large extent and fresco paintings in Maryam Zamani Mosque. Maryam Zamani Mosque became the trend setter for the Mosques in later period. We can say that Maryam Zamani Mosque was in an experimental stage and Wazir Khan Mosque is its developed and advance form. The tradition so set up by these two grandiose Mughal Mosques was followed rather universally. The Mahabat's Khan's Mosque at Peshawar, the Chinianwali Masjid and Masjid Salih Kanboh, both at Lahore and many others of the series still retain such ornamentation, while those created during the early decades of the present century have been mainly decorated in a simpler technique called Sico where the elaborate methods of real fresco were not followed. The technique used in the mosque at Multan Uchhh, Muzaffargarh and elsewhere was just colour painting on Chunams glazed plaster. This is generally called Multani painting. (Khan 1991:197) In the end it can be concluded that Maryam Zamani Mosque was the 1st Mosque of its tradition and has great influence of the Mosque architecture of the subsequent period. In conclusion, the birth, adolescence and the climax of Mosque architecture in Pakistan is the story of Adoption, adaptation and assimilation of various traits and traditions of the art of building, both local as well as foreign.

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