

Tomb of Rukn-I Alam in Multan, Pakistan

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Fall 2012

ARLH 325: Islamic Art and Architecture

Undergraduate Historic Preservation Major

Every culture since the beginning of time has had a tradition of burial and how they deal with the dead. Even the earliest of cultures buried the dead; leaving offerings for the dead from their everyday life. With this you can usually get insight on how the culture believes and what religious beliefs they have. As technology in building advanced, elaborate structures were erected in honor of the dead. Many of the buildings still standing today from ancient cultures are burial structures. The Egyptians have the pyramids, and the Valley of the Kings. Every culture has a way of honoring the dead. In their culture it was important to honor the dead and make sure they had a comfortable journey to the afterlife, burying the dead with all the comforts of life. It was an important part of their culture and belief system. When Muhammad formed the Islamic religion, creating monuments to worship the dead were outlawed. Over time Islamic culture began to allow the use of monuments and mausoleums. They adapted previous traditions and building styles into their own, skirting Islamic law and using creative loopholes. The evolution of burial culture reflects the changing beliefs of the Muslim people. By the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Tomb architecture was a large part of their culture. The Tughluqid people of India fully embraced this tradition and have fully embraced previous cultures' design and some of the local ancient Indian traditions. Their tomb architecture is a perfect example of the advancements in Islamic beliefs and culture. It represents the mixture of styles and shows that all buildings built on what came before but adding their own features to make it their own.

The evolution of Islamic tomb architecture involves many different cultures. The Zoroastrian people were a semi nomadic people that lived in the Middle East. They believed the earth was sacred and you could not disturb the ground to bury a body. They built Towers of Silence high up on the surrounding hills. These towers were open air structures that allowed for the body to be disposed of by the elements. Islamic culture emerged around this time so it was a readily adapted style. Early Seljuk tombs were the tower shape, but were actually closed in around the body. Early Islamic culture allowed for a structure to be built to shield the body, so early tombs used this loophole most readily. Seljuk

tombs would have an opening where the body was resting so it would still be open to the elements. Fatimid culture also adapted this loophole. They modeled their early tombs after fire temples, also a Zoroastrian tradition. These temples were open on all four sides, basically a tent made of stone. This too allowed the body to still be open to the elements. By the end of this era, these structures became more elaborate and styles that you see today began to emerge. Tombs began to have their own style and form. When Islam came to India they adapted the building styles of the Hindi culture that was already there as well as many of the traditions of the Iranian cultures, mainly from the Seljuk era. This added a new level of detailing and style that was uniquely suited to this culture of people.

The Tomb of Rukn-I Alam, located in modern day Multan, Pakistan, was built during the time of the Tughluqid in India, the dynasty located there before the Mughal period. This empire emerged in about 1320 and was established by the Turco-Indian Tughluq Shah<sup>1</sup>. The empire lasted till about 1414 when the leader Feroz Shah Tughlaq came into power. He was known as a very compassionate leader, who put his people's needs first, but he was an awful military leader which was ultimately his downfall as well as the downfall of the empire.<sup>2</sup> The tomb was constructed by the first Shah of the dynasty, Ghiyas-ud-din between 1320 and 1324.<sup>3</sup> The tomb was constructed on a large hill that overlooked the old city of Multan.<sup>4</sup> It is part of a larger fort complex know as the Fort Kohna of Multan, though that no longer exists due to the British occupation in the 1800s.<sup>5</sup> The tomb was constructed by the Sultan, but

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<sup>1</sup> "Building Style: Tughluqid." ArchNet.

[http://archnet.org/library/images/sites.jsp?select=style&key=Tughluqid&order\\_by=site\\_name&collection\\_id=-1&showdescription=1](http://archnet.org/library/images/sites.jsp?select=style&key=Tughluqid&order_by=site_name&collection_id=-1&showdescription=1) (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> "Tughlaq Dynasty." iloveindia.com. <http://www.iloveindia.com/history/medieval-india/delhi-sultanate/tughlaq-dynasty.html> (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> "Tomb of Shah Rukn-e-Alam." UNESCO. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1884/> (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> "Restoration of the Tomb of Shah Rukn-i-Alam (Multan, Pakistan)." Islamic Arts and Architecture. <http://islamic-arts.org/2011/restoration-of-the-tomb-of-shah-rukn-i-alam-multan-pakistan/> (accessed November 14, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Tahir. "Multan Fort : Qila Kohna Qasim Bagh." PakiMag. <http://www.pakimag.com/tourism/multan-fort-qila-kohna-qasim-bagh.html> (accessed November 14, 2012).

when he died, his son gifted it to the family of Hazrat Shah Rukn-al-Din, also known as the saint Sheikh Rukn-i-Alam.<sup>6</sup> This is the most prevalent theory about the origins of the tomb, though there are no official accounts if this is history or just local legend. Hazrat Shah Rukn-al-Din is considered the patron saint of Multan, and over 100,000 people a year make a pilgrimage to his tomb. His body still resides in the structure in a grand sarcophagus, surrounded by 72 of his relatives. In 1971, the decision was made to completely restore the tomb and repair damage done in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by local warfare. Due mainly to their painstaking research and dedication to creating an accurate recreation, there is now a perfectly preserved example of a 14<sup>th</sup> century tomb. UNESCO recognized the site as a world heritage site in 2004, though it is still only on the tentative list.

This tomb is a product of its predecessors, adapting and using the techniques and styles of what came before it. It was a break from the traditional form of a dome on top of a square, which had dominated most of the tomb types before. Thankfully due to the restoration, the tomb is in its original form, making it a shining example of tomb architecture during this period. The tomb is designed in an octagon shape. Each of the eight corners has a circular buttress tower capped off by a short bulbous dome with a lotus flower decoration on top. The second level is slightly smaller but is also in an octagon shape; essentially the same as the first level though the corners do not have the projecting rounded corner towers. The second level also has pishtaq openings on each of the sides that are decorated with the typical blue tile that most Islamic structures have. There is a slight delineation and then the third level that is the capping dome. The exterior gives the building a very fortified feeling, a style that dates back to the earliest of Islamic structures during the Umayyad dynasty. Though there is some evidence that it was actually fortified for an actual reason since it was part of a fort complex. The interior of the tower is also a reflection of previous tombs. You enter the tomb through a grand pishtaq entranceway.

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<sup>6</sup> "Restoration of the Tomb of Shah Rukn-i-Alam (Multan, Pakistan)." Islamic Arts and Architecture. <http://islamic-arts.org/2011/restoration-of-the-tomb-of-shah-rukni-alam-multan-pakistan/> (accessed November 14, 2012).

The interior is mainly devoted to housing the body of the saint, Sheikh Rukn-i-Alam, and his relatives. The inside is not as ornate in the sense of colorful decorations, but it does use brick to create elaborate designs on the walls. Many of the interior decorations are also carved terra cotta tiles, similar to the glazed exterior tile work except left bare. Each of the sides has a pishtaq arch though only a few are openings. Originally the inside was thought to have been plastered over, but with the restoration they decided to leave the stone patterning exposed.

Each of the elements of this tomb is an extension of an earlier trait, a reflection of cultures past. The whole aesthetic of the site is a perfect example of this. It has a very fortified look, which originated with the Umayyads. This fortified look is thought to be completely for show. The walls are not considered thick enough to withstand any real warfare. It also shows the adaptation of the local culture. All of the decorative domes are topped with a lotus flower, very typical of Hindi architecture, which preceded Islamic influence in the region. The use of the lotus flower is almost exclusively used in Islamic Indian design. Islamic culture of the region fully adapted the lotus flower and its symbolism. Though octagonal tombs were seen in other areas, this building was the first of its kind in this area. The overall design relates back to the Tomb of Uljaytu at Sultaniya.<sup>7</sup> (figure four) This form is seen as a natural successor of the previous squared dome tomb, though the Tomb of Rukn-I Alam is the first octagonal tomb in the area and is credited for being the main influence for tombs in that area. The Seljuk ribbed tomb towers, are also believed to have had a great influence for the design of the corner tower buttresses. Many of the features also come from Iranian culture of design. The fortified wall surrounding the structure, as well as the location on a hill over looking the city is very common in many Iranian designs. The buttresses that adorn the corners are thought to have multiple symbolic meanings as well as being a structural device. The style of the buttress originated with the Tomb of the Samanids at

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<sup>7</sup> Hillenbrand, Robert. *Muqarnas Volume IX: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*. 1992. [http://archnet.org/library/documents/one-document.jsp?document\\_id=3682](http://archnet.org/library/documents/one-document.jsp?document_id=3682) (accessed November 14, 2012).

Bukhara. (figure two) The buttresses on the Multan tomb were different, though they were not entirely decorative. They were thought to be used as a military symbol, as well as to resemble the minarets that were common on other structures. The small, squatter domes also originated with the Bukhara tomb.<sup>8</sup> The fortified appearance is further emphasized by the glazed tile work in the formation of crenulations, surrounding the octagonal floors upper frieze area and surrounding the base of the dome. The main decoration that adorns the exterior and interior is the elaborate brick work. This is a strong Iranian tradition, starting with the Seljuks. Most of their buildings were decorated with elaborate brick work patterns and blue glazed tile work, very similar to the decorations on the exterior of the Multan Tomb. They also use a carved terra cotta tile for decoration on the exterior, an advance from the work of Seljuk Dynasty who used glazed tile to decorate their exteriors. They were the first to use colored tile work as decoration.

The Tughluqid dynasty lasted just over 100 years but even in that short period of time they managed to make a large impact in the scope of Islamic architecture in India. They, like all of the dynasties before hand, adapted and reworked the styles that had come before. For the Tomb of Rukn-I Alam, they looked mainly to Iranian cultures and their designs. They adapted the blue glazed tile work that became a huge style of building and was later adapted to the painted tile work that covered later designs. Islamic buildings and designs utilize the blue color almost exclusively eventually adding, touches of white and ox blood red when painted tiles became popular. The Tomb builders looked mainly to the Seljuk Empire for inspiration. They adapted their eight sided tomb tower style into a more contemporary style, utilizing the eight sides with corner ribbing as inspiration; they then adapted the stacked nature common in their own designs. All of the features of the Tomb of Rukn-I Alam can be related back to this

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<sup>8</sup> Hillenbrand, Robert. *Muqarnas Volume IX: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*. 1992. [http://archnet.org/library/documents/one-document.jsp?document\\_id=3682](http://archnet.org/library/documents/one-document.jsp?document_id=3682) (accessed November 14, 2012).

time or before, giving the style and design a grounded feeling, a deep rooted place in Islamic design and culture. Every structure is an advancement of style, of an identity of buildings that is uniquely Islamic.

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Figures



Figure One: Interior showing the main Sarcophagus and the smaller tombs of his relative (ArchNet)



Figure Two: Tomb of the Samanids at Bukhara

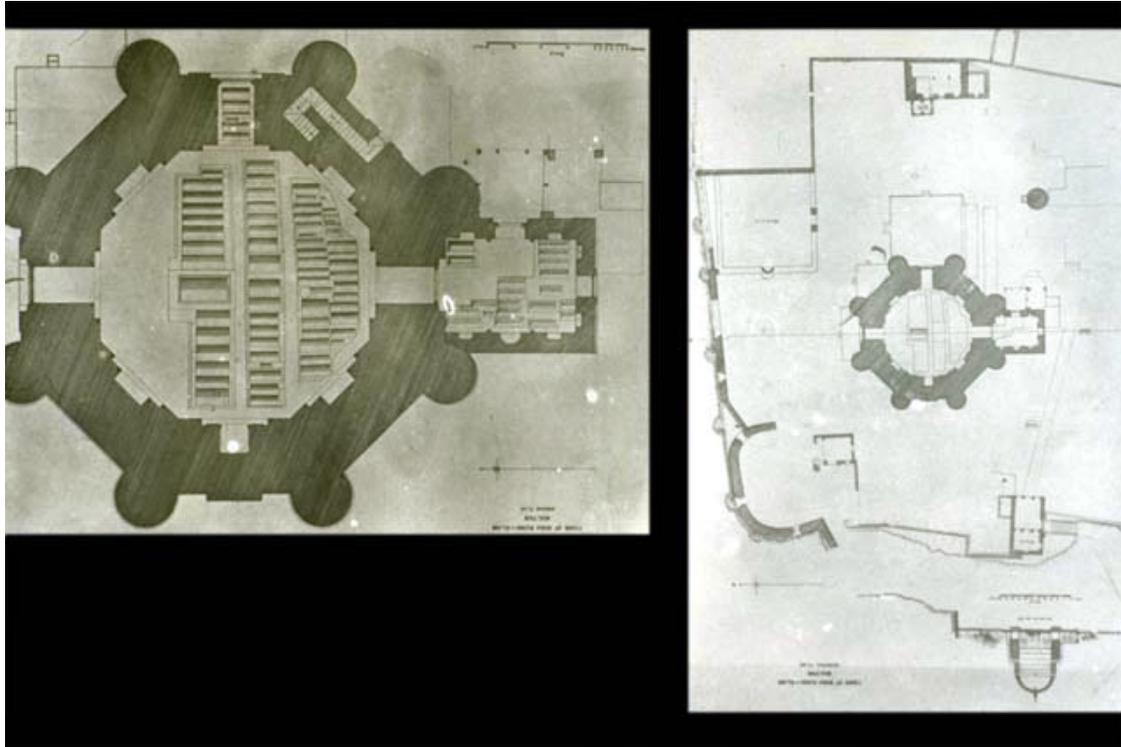


Figure Three: Floor plans of the tomb



Figure Four: Tomb of Uljaytu at Sultaniya



Figure Five: Tile work diagramming done for the restoration

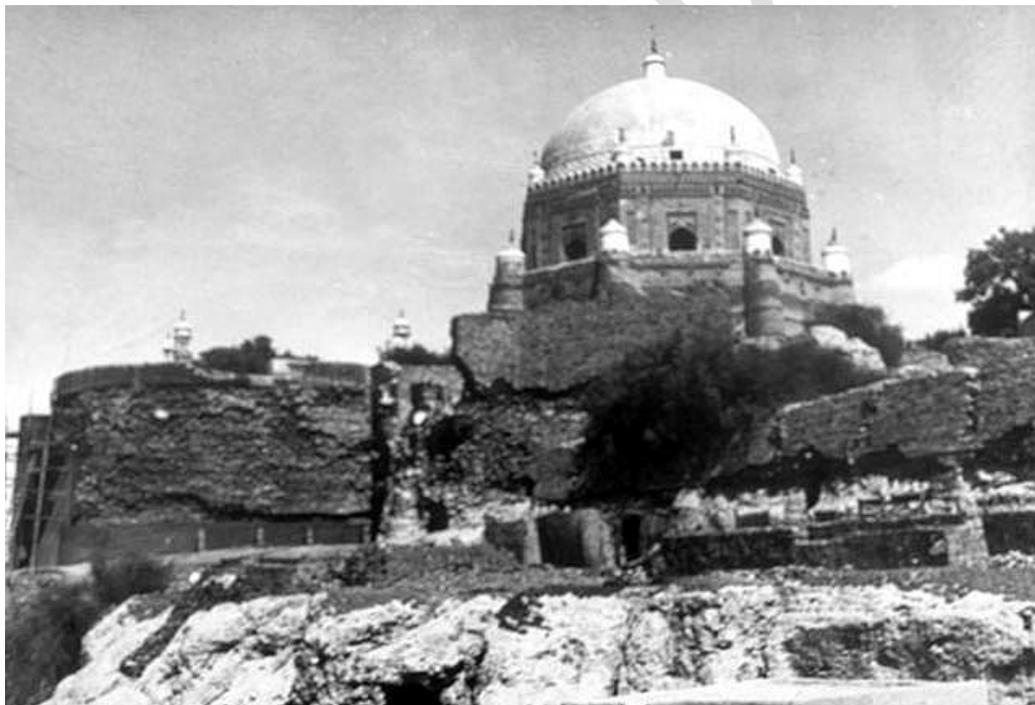


Figure Six: The tomb before the restoration

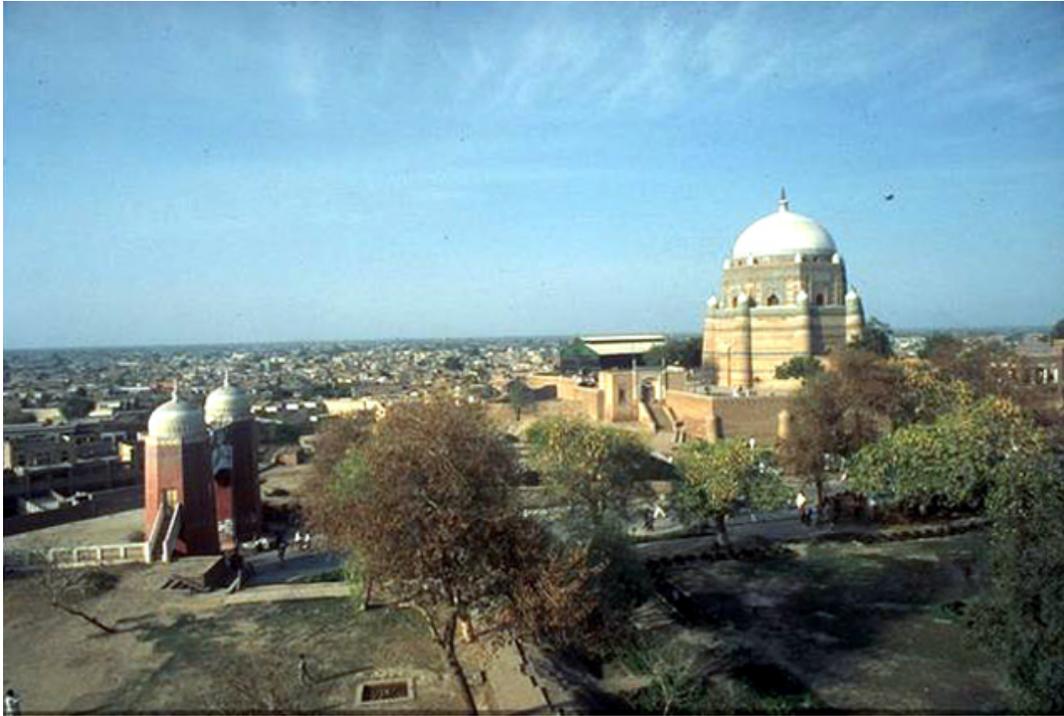


Figure Seven: The whole site, showing the whole tomb

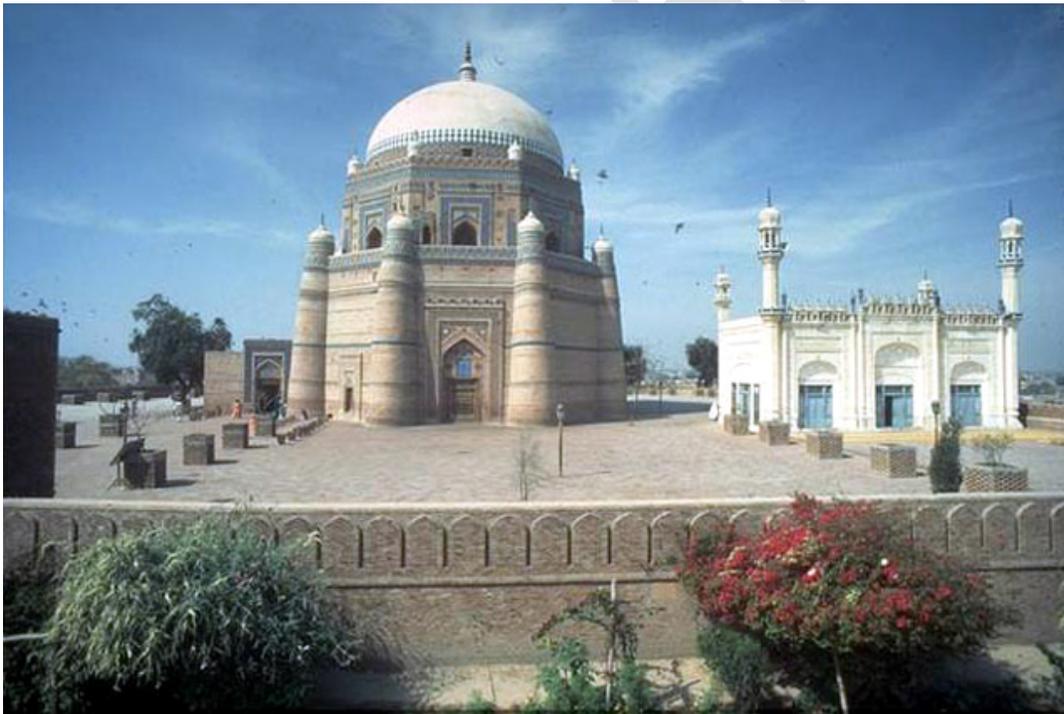


Figure Eight: The tomb and a small mosque located on the site

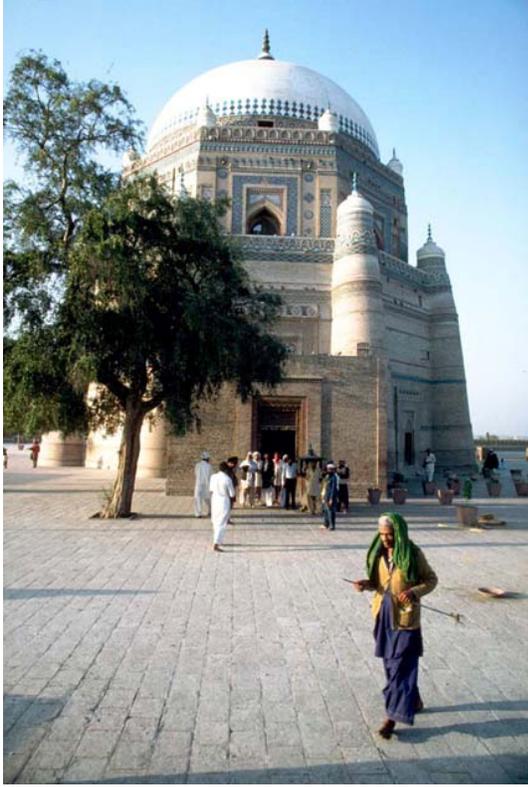


Figure Nine: The Tomb



Figure Ten: Detail of the top of the corner buttresses



Figure Eleven: Detail of the upper glazed tile work

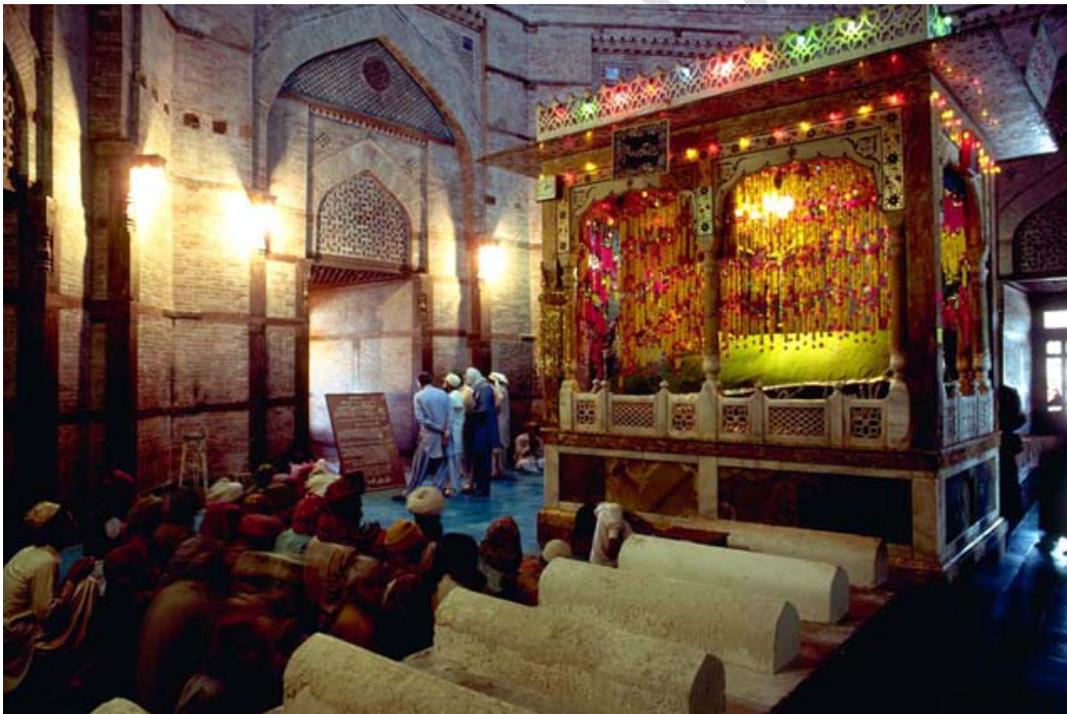


Figure Twelve: Interior shot showing the sarcophagus



Figure Thirteen: Detail of the glazed tile work

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