THE GHURID MADRASA AND MAUSOLEUM OF SHĀH-I MASHHAD GHUR, AFGHANISTAN

By Abdul Wassay Najimi

Conservation Architect, Kabul

Abstract
Shāh-i Mashhad is the name of twelfth-century archaeological remains located in the Murghāb Valley of Bādghīs Province in north-western Afghanistan. This structure was an educational centre—a madrasa and a mausoleum—and one of the best examples of architecture and structural decorative artwork of the Ghurid period. The structure was first published in 1971, not by architects or archaeologists but by two German ethnographers studying the region’s nomadic community. Discussions on Shāh-i Mashhad in the context of Ghurid art have been published previously; this author looks at Shāh-i Mashhad in the context of the conservation of monuments, despite the fact that due to its remote location, Shāh-i Mashhad may not be subject to any conservation programme in the immediate future. Reflecting on its architectural scale, style, construction techniques, and details, in the context of potential work for the preservation and conservation of what remains, this paper studies and presents a virtual reconstruction of the building in an effort to understand the form, functions of the spaces, and related architectural ornamentation of the original construction. The reconstruction is based on the author’s visit to the site in 1993 and transcriptions of inscriptions not previously read.

Keywords
Afghanistan; archaeology; cultural heritage; Ghurid architecture; madrasa; mausoleum

I. INTRODUCTION

Shāh-i Mashhad is an archaeological site and the remains of a twelfth-century Ghurid building (Figs. 1 & 2) located in Jawand district of Bādghīs province. The structure stands on the left bank of the Murghāb River, which flows northwards, approximately 3 km downstream from the junction of the Murghāb and Kūcha.

1 The author visited this site with Dr Bernt Glatzer in 1993. Bernt died in 2009 and this article is dedicated to him and his lasting affiliation with Afghanistan.
2 “Mashhad” means “place where a [Islamic] martyr is buried”, and is a monumental mausoleum. Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn’s tomb in Herat was also called a mashhad (Hillenbrand 2000: 192); and the word is used in the masonry inscription on the façade (Stuckert 1980); Shāh-i Mashhad was also recorded as the ruins of an old town on the left bank of the Murghāb, c. 4 km (2.5 miles) below Qala Niaz Khan (Dahan-i Kūcha). There is also a village in the area (Adamec 1975 [1914]: 360 [after Hira Singh 1891]).
3 Bādghīs is a province east of Herat and west of Faryab. In 982, an anonymous geographer described this area as a prosperous and very pleasant place with some 300 villages (Anon. 1937: 104, no. 24).

4 Michael Casimir (now Professor at Cologne University) and the late Dr Bernt Glatzer published the first accounts of Shāh-i Mashhad in 1971. Their paper remains the most detailed and richly illustrated description of Shāh-i Mashhad and a primary reference for other scholars. Due to its remote location, few professionals have visited Shāh-i Mashhad, although the architect Flemming Aalund visited the site in 1977. Whatever remains of the structure today is

5 Casimir and Glatzer 1971; Casimir and Glatzer were field researchers in 1970, studying the lifestyle of a group of Achakzay Pashiūn Māzdārs (nomadic animal herders) whose seasonal movement was between the summer and winter camps in the upper Ghur (Tor Band and Chaghcharan) and the Kūcha Valley respectively.
6 Shāh-i-Mashhad was discussed in publications by Hillenbrand (2000) and Blair (1985).
7 Aalund 1990; Aalund was a Danish conservation architect, working for a UNESCO project in Herat (“Conservation of Herat Citadel and the minarets of the Timūrid Musallah”) in 1977–78; he visited Shāh-i Mashhad in the autumn of 1977 and shared information with the author in Herat when the author was working with students on a survey of monuments there.
Fig. 1. The southern facade of Shāh-i Mashhad in 1993, where the main arch has fallen and bricks of the adjacent chamber have also been removed by locals (photo B. Glatzer, 1993).

Fig. 2. The site of the Shāh-i Mashhad structure and its surroundings (looking north-west from the opposite hillside). Nomads have their winter camp around this archaeological site on the bank of the Murghāb River (photo B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970).

difficult for the Afghan authorities and NGOs to monitor, given the security situation, so Shāh-i Mashhad continues to be one of the least preserved and most endangered heritage sites in Afghanistan.

Prior to 1970, only the local nomadic community knew of the structure’s existence, and thought of it as ruins perhaps dating to the pre-Islamic era. Glatzer took a mullah (Muslim cleric) to the site who, by studying the Kufic inscriptions on the portal arch and facade, confirmed that the building was Islamic and a madrasa. The structure had a rich architectural design, form of construction, and aesthetics comprised of wall
Fig. 3. A map of Afghanistan’s north-western region where the major Ghurid buildings are found, showing Herat, Chesht (Chesht-i-Sharif), Jam, and Shāh-i-Mashhad.

decorations in the form of inscriptions and geometric and floral designs.

The present author has made another study of Shāh-i-Mashhad’s architecture—ornamental details and previously unread wall inscriptions—while undertaking research into the architecture of Ghurid portals; in particular, the architectural form and details of the structure of the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque of Herat, before it was renovated by the Timurids in the fifteenth century, and its comparison with the portal at Shāh-i-Mashhad. This research has helped the present author develop an understanding of the architectural concepts of monumental Ghurid portals and their decorative work, as will be discussed in part of this paper.

Bernt Glatzer and the author visited Shāh-i-Mashhad in the autumn of 1993. Time constraints and security concerns did not permit a detailed architectural study, although they observed that the structure had suffered further damage. The top of the portal arch, which was already structurally weak and fragile in 1977, had collapsed and many of the walls and arches with decorative panels on the southern facade had fallen down (Figs. 1 & 4).

It is evident that the structure has been deliberately damaged throughout its history, perhaps in the first instance in the thirteenth century by Genghis Khān’s army. More recently, it appears that the shepherds

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8 Lézine 1963–64.
9 Erik Hansen, a Danish architect, restored the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat in 1964–65. His measured drawings, photographs, and reports to UNESCO were helpful for this study, which also helped in understanding how the Ghurid portal in Herat appeared before its restoration by the Timurids in the fifteenth century.
10 Bernt Glatzer and the present author were colleagues working for the Danish organisation (DACAAR) in Herat in 1993. Bernt wanted to revisit his Achakzay Mālārī friends at their winter camp in Dahan-i-Kūcha, 22 years after his previous field stay there, in order to update his ethnographic observations and conduct a follow-up study on the socio-economic changes in their lifestyle as a result of the conflict and instability in Afghanistan since 1978. The ruins of Shāh-i-Mashhad were 3 km downstream from the camp (Fig. 5).
11 Aalund 1990.
12 The site is situated in the Murghāb Valley which is a major route connecting the Bālā-Murghāb and Jawand districts, and further upland Ghur.
Fig. 4. The southern facade of the eastern half of the Shāh-i Mashhad madrasa (photo B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970).

(normally young boys), who brought their flocks to shelter from the sun among the ruins, have vandalised the embossed wall decoration. Furthermore, parts of the walls—apart from the mausoleum—were demolished to recycle the bricks in the nearby small village. The site was full of broken pieces of bricks and scattered terracotta elements. Much of the fallen bricks and debris (of baked bricks and stucco) had been taken away by the villagers and reused to build their homes during the 1980s.\(^\text{13}\)

Glatzer and the author also learned that antiquities looters had excavated inside the mausoleum but had failed to find anything other than the grave of a "pious person". Fearing a divine curse, the looters had abandoned the dig and afterwards slaughtered oxen as an offering.\(^\text{14}\)

Illegal excavations and the looting of antiquities occurred all over Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet resistance years and beyond (1979–92), as a means of survival.\(^\text{15}\) Glatzer and the author also observed that the remaining structure’s physical state had further deteriorated due both to the effects of nature (rain, snow, and wind) and through neglect by the government and the community of heritage professionals.

Funding for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage in Afghanistan was not generally available between 1979 and 2002. Limited resources became available for safeguarding a number of socio-cultural urban historic buildings in Herat in 1994 and some funds were also allocated by UNESCO for flood protection works at the base of the Minaret of Jam in 1996.\(^\text{16}\) With the political changes in the country, donors funded conservation of some major urban monuments begun in Kabul in 2002, and in Herat in 2005.\(^\text{17}\)

Raising public awareness is the first important step towards conservation. For some years, Glatzer hosted a website on Shāh-i Mashhad providing extensive photographic documentation, while in 2008 in Kabul, Glatzer reviewed some initial sketches the current author had produced as a reconstruction of the Shāh-i Mashhad structure. Unfortunately, the website ceased to be maintained after Glatzer’s death in 2009.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{13}\) This had taken place prior to the first publication on the site in 1971, and more recently during the anti-Soviet resistance years of the 1980s. The valley is a major route for movements of animal herds between the northern lowlands and the upper Ghur.

\(^{14}\) They were told this by the host community in 1993, who also called the structure “Mashhad-i-Shāh”. Shāh/Shār was used in Ghur and Garjistan as title for chieftains; see nn. 19 and 20.

\(^{15}\) Thomas 2004; Najimi 2011.

\(^{16}\) The author also went on a mission to the Minaret of Jam for UNOCHA/UNESCO in 1995. Protection work against seasonal floods from the Jam River was initiated in 1996; the author revisited the site in 2002.

\(^{17}\) Najimi 2011; www.akdn.org

\(^{18}\) Casimir and Glatzer 2009.
The historic structure at Shāh-i Mashhad has still not been safeguarded. To refocus attention on this important structure, this paper discusses the monument from the perspective of a conservation architect. To assist this study, Prof. Michael Casimir has kindly provided scans of photographs taken by him and Bernt Glatzer in 1970 and 1993. The present author has developed sketches and illustrations aiming to understand Shāh-i Mashhad’s purpose, architecture, and construction within the genre of ornamental Ghurid portals. It is hoped that some time in the near future, conservation work on the remains of the structure will be undertaken before it is too late.

1.1. Geography of the area

The site of Shāh-i Mashhad\(^{19}\) is located in the Murghāb valley in the east of the Afghan province of Bādghīs. The Murghāb flows towards the north-west. Administratively, the site falls under the jurisdiction of the Jawand\(^{20}\) district of Ghur province, which is located 35 km upstream. Shāh-i Mashhad is about 100 km from Qādis\(^{21}\) (a district centre in Bādghīs province), travelling east and passing through Gulchīn (a nomadic weekly trade station) along a seasonally dry riverbed and proceeding through inhospitable hills towards a deep rift called Gazestān and a valley called Kūcha. From here, some 2.5 km downstream (eastwards) is the Dahan-i Kūcha ("the mouth of the valley"—the junction of the Kūcha stream and the Murghāb River) where the winter camp of the Achakzay nomad community is located. From here, the Shah-i Mashhad site is situated about 2.7 km downstream on the left bank of the Murghāb River. Another route to Shāh-i Mashhad is via the town of Bālā-Murghāb,\(^ {22}\) travelling upstream (south-east) along the Murghāb River; the distance to the site is about 135 km.

Shāh-i Mashhad has been referred to as the Madrasa of Shāh-i Mashhad of Gharjistān.\(^{23}\) The region has also been referred to as Gharchistān.\(^{24}\) The territory to

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\(^{19}\) Ball 1982: 240, no. 1023; Adamec 1975 [1914]: 360.

\(^{20}\) For further details, see Adamec 1975 [1914]: 210.

\(^{21}\) It was called Kādes; also Kadus (Raverty 1970 [1881]: 367, n. 7); see also Kādis in Adamec 1975 [1914]: 213; Ball 1982: 204, no. 826 (Qadis).

\(^{22}\) For geographical details, see Adamec 1975 [1914]: 46.

\(^{23}\) Blair 1985; Casimir and Glatzer 1971.

\(^{24}\) The area was also called Gharchistān, of which the chief place was Bashīn (Afshin). The chief of this district was called Shār (shāh) (Anon. 1937: 105 no. 36).
the south was called Ghur.\textsuperscript{25} In Pashtu, ghar means “mountain”, and can be pronounced ghar or ghur in various tribal dialects. Sfejtan, a shorter version of astān, is synonymous with “domain” or “settlement”. Afghanistan, therefore, means “the land where Afghans have domain”. Ghar-jai-stān means “the land where people live in a mountainous territory”. In geographical terms, and especially for communities whose economy is based on animal husbandry, people need to migrate between different seasonal pastures in upland and lowland areas; this practice still occurs in Afghanistan today. The region of Ghur has also been known as Ghrurat\textsuperscript{26}/Ghor-art, which can mean “mountainous vast land”. The source of the Murghāb River is also found in the upper Ghorāt region.

Located on the south-western bank of the river, on the eastern flank of a mountain, the lower part of the hillside is c. 100 m wide. Here the ruins of the Shāh-i Mashhad—madrasa and mausoleum—are situated on a natural rise 10 m above the river level.\textsuperscript{27} The coordinates of the site are 35° 02’ 06’’ 60” N, 63° 59’ 33’’ 54” E and its elevation is 853 m asl. The direction to Mecca is 243.69° N.\textsuperscript{28} The site is located 27 m from the nearest irrigation channel and about 80 m from the river itself (Figs. 2 & 5). The main path passes to the south of the structure. South of the path, on the hillside, is a vast graveyard, although none of the graves have markings or any decorated tombstones. Much of the graveyard seems to have been damaged by pits, the result of bombs, or illegal excavations. It must have been a cemetery used by the nomadic community residing in or passing through the valley.

The madrasa itself does not appear to have been associated with the remains of any settlements (see Fig. 2).\textsuperscript{29}

1.2. Purpose of the construction

The Ghurid sultans heavily patronised religious education and constructed attractive buildings, known as madrasa, which functioned as boarding schools. More than seven major madrasa structures were famous in the territories where the Ghurids ruled.\textsuperscript{30} Shāh-i Mashhad was probably the first of these institutions in Ghur, especially because it was also the mausoleum of a Ghurid sultan—Sultan Sayf al-Dīn Muḥammad son of Alā al-Dīn Husayn, who was considered a shaheed (or martyr), having been murdered in the battle against the Guz̄ who's country was known as Guz̄ganān\textsuperscript{31} in 558/1163. According to the portal inscription, Shāh-i Mashhad was built in 561–71/1165–76.\textsuperscript{32} The site of

\textsuperscript{25} Ghur (Ghōr) was described, in Hādūd al-‘Ālam (Anon. 1937) as “a province amid mountains and rugged country (shikastaghi-hā i). It had a king called Ghur-shah. He drew his strength from the mir of Gūzgānān. In the days of old this province of Ghur was pagan; actually most of the people now were Muslims. To them belonged numerous boroughs and villages. From this province came slaves, armor (zirī, coats and mail (jaushān), and good arms. The people were bad tempered, unruly and ignorant” (Anon. 1937: 110 no.1); see also Adamiec 1975 [1914]: 135–39.

\textsuperscript{26} For geographical details, see Adamiec 1975 [1914]: 135–39.

\textsuperscript{27} No precise topographic survey has taken place; the information is based on observations at the site.


\textsuperscript{29} Adamiec 1975 [1914]; see n. 22 above.

\textsuperscript{30} Ghur had the madrasa of Shāh-i Mashhad and that of Afšān (Bāshī). Bāmiyān had two madrasa buildings that Sarā al-Dīn Mināḥ was managing; the city of Herat had the madrasa of Ghiyāša (adjacent to the Grand Mosque), where Ḥāmam Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzi taught; Sistan had the madrasa of Sar-i Hauz (near the cistern); Mūlān (in modern Pakistan) had a madrasa known as Ferozī, managed by Mināḥ al-Dīn Juzjānī; the author of Tabakāt-i Nāṣirī (Hūzūlān 1864) and the city of Delhi had a madrasa named Nāsiri that was operating until the era of Rāzī Sultana Begum (Nādīm 2010).

\textsuperscript{31} Gūzgānān, “a very prosperous and pleasant province where on the east, this province marched [i.e. ‘spread’? with [territory having] the limits of Balkh and Tukhrūristān down to the limits of Bāmiyān; on the south, with the end of the confines of Ghur and the boundary of Bust; on the west, with the limits of Ghuristān and (its) chief place Bāshīn; down to the limits of Marv; on the north the limits of the river Jāhīn [Amū river]. The sovereign (pāsdāshā) of this province was one of the margraves (mulūk-i atfrā). In Khorāsān he was called ‘Malik of Gūzgānān’. He was a descendant of Afridīsān. All the chiefs within the limits of Ghuristān and Ghur were under his order (furrān). He was the greatest of all the margraves in authority, greatness (‘izz), rank, policy (štavār), liberality and love (ṣīnsār) of knowledge” (Anon. 1937: 105–06 no. 46).

\textsuperscript{32} Sultan Sayf al-Dīn was murdered by one of his generals, Sīpāh-sālār, Abu ʿl-ʿAbbās, son of Shīs, who avenged his brother Warmesh’s (son of Shīs [sīsh]) death by the Sultan (for the full story, see Raverty 1970 [1881]: 365–68).

\textsuperscript{33} Blair (1985) suggested AD 1176 and Casimir and Glatzer (1971) AD 1165–66 as the date of construction of Shāh-i Mashhad. Blair (1985: 82) agrees that the “Ghargistan madrasa was initiated in AD 1165–6, under the patronage of Ghiyāth al-Dīn’s wife. The later date would be of the completion of the structure which could certainly have taken about a decade to finalize planning, material supply, main construction, design and cutting the decorative elements, backing and installing”; see also n. 53 below.
the ruin is not the actual place of the murder of Sultan Sayf al-Din, but the present author believes it might be the place where he was laid to rest after the Ghurid army regrouped under Ghiyath al-Din’s command and returned towards Gharjistân. The lower part of the Murghâb valley (the “valley of prisoners” —Asîr Dara and Luwiz/velo —) is believed to be the route followed on their return by the Ghurid army and Ghiyath al-Din, who served in Sultan Sayf al-Din’s army, on the expedition against the Ghuzz tribe prior to formally becoming the Ghurid Sultan in Firozkoh in 1163. It is understandable, therefore, that according to the tribal traditions still applied in Afghanistan, Ghiyath al-Din honoured his brother-in-law Sultan Sayf al-Din by bringing his corpse for burial in Gharjistân. This place, known today as Shâh-î Mashhad, is a wider part of the Murghâb Valley. It was perhaps a camping site of the Gharjistânî nomadic community and must have been a cemetery on the major route of communication between the Rudbâr and Marvrud to Gharjistân and further towards Ghor in the highlands. Burial structures of the Ghurid era — Jam, Chesht, Sowarz (Esfars), Taywarah, and Tulak — are on heights commanding a landscape of valley and river.

Casimir and Glatzer reported that the patron/sponsor of the construction was a lady, but the pieces of inscription giving her name were missing from the crumbling portal inscription of Shâh-î Mashhad. Professor Habibi, however, in response to Casimir and Glatzer’s paper and in reference to accounts by Minhâj al-Din (the court chronicler, al-Jûzjâni, who does not specifically mention any patron), suggested that the lady who commissioned the construction of the Shâh-î Mashhad madrasa was Mâh-Malik, daughter of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad son of Sâm (d. 558–99/1163–1203). Blair, however, proposes the wife of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din as the patron. The current author, studying the Persian original of al-Jûzjâni’s Tabaqat-i Nâsiri, agrees that the lady in question is actually the Ghurid queen, Tâj al-Hâfir Jawhar-Malik, wife of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din and sister of Sultan Sayf al-Din.35

The two events—the reconquest of Gharjistân from the Saljuq-Ghuzz confederacy in 1165–66, and the honouring of a martyred predecessor and kinsman—account for the founding of the madrasa and mausoleum within a well-proportioned structure of brick architecture with an extensively decorated main facade of three-dimensional geometric patterns and inscriptive designs including verses from the holy Qur’ân, Sîra 48 al-Fath (The Victory) and Sûra 59 al-Hashr (The Banishment) vv. 22–24.36

II. ARCHITECTURE OF THE STRUCTURE

The Ghurids’ ornamental architecture in Afghanistan is best exemplified by their constructions at Shâh-î Mashhad (in Gharjistân), Chesht-i Sharif, Jam (in Ghur), Danestama37 (in Bâmiyân/Baghlan), and the Grand Mosque of Herat. “The common denominator of this style was the use of baked bricks as the medium of construction and of brick and terracotta as the principal means of external decoration”.38 Ghurid struc-

34 Jûjzâni (1864: 68) “came up via the Asîr path through Wello road”; Tabakat (Raverty 1970 [1881]: 369) writes it as “Asîr Darah and La-wir [or Lu-ir?]”.

35 Blair 1985: 81; Habibi 1979; Casimir and Glatzer 1971; Jûzjâni 1864.


37 A Ghaznavid-Ghurid period madrasa; see Ball 2008: 182–83 for the plan of the complex which is c. 45 × 40 m (almost the same size as the Shâh-î Mashhad); Dupaigne 2007: 277; the site was excavated by Le Berre of DAFA in 1960 in the Surkhab valley, 12 km upstream from Tâla and 34 km downstream from Duâb-î Mikhzarfn (where Bamiyan and Baghlan provinces merge).

38 Ball (2008), Dupaigne (2007), Hillenbrand (2000: 128), Blair (1985), and Casimir and Glatzer (1971) have dis-
tures had courtyard-based rectangular plans—covered spaces built around a courtyard. The structures were solid with massive walls, openings were completed with arches, and spaces roofed with domes and vaults. Monumental portals decorated with brick and terracotta masonry and Kufic inscriptions marked the main accesses to the complexes. The courtyard enclosures were important features defining semi-private spaces from the public outside. Spaces for specific use such as praying, teaching, or accommodation were accessed from the courtyards. In some parts such spaces would have had openings to the outside. The layout and construction was designed as a practical answer to the climatic extremes of winter and summer. Intricate three-dimensional panels of geometrical, floral, and inscriptive ornamental work made up the details on the wall surfaces. The visitor would experience the interplay of mass and volumes, solid and void, and contrasts of light and shade as part of the embellished architecture. Most of the geometry and proportions were based on circles, squares, and octagons.

The geometrically developed designs and patterns in bricks produced in Ghurid structures were a continuation of the building tradition found in Ghazni, on the minarets of Sultan Mas'ūd III and Bahramshāh built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as well as the monumental structures in Balkh, the mosque of No-Gunbad (ninth–tenth century), the Zadyān minaret of Balkh (1108–09), and the Mausoleum of Sālār Khālīf or Bābā Hātim (Baba Khatoon) in the village of Imam Sahib some 60 km west of Balkh. Architectural styles and construction techniques migrated with the architects (mi’mār), masons (banār), and skilled labourers who travelled to undertake construction work in other territories.

Shāh-i Mashhād had a symmetrical plan defined by the north–south axis. The monumental portal at the south and Ivān at the north dominated the structure and provided the main (public) and secondary (semi-private) entries into the complex. Larger rooms must have been located on the southern and northern wings of the complex; accommodation chambers for students could have been aligned on the eastern and western wings, and therefore were not as high. The square plans in the major chambers were transformed by corner arches into octagonal bases that then morphed into the circular base for the dome construction. The larger domes, like that of the mausoleum, were also supported by crossing arches springing from the sides of the upper part of the corner arches (Fig. 13). The geometric proportions were well respected.

This author believes that the pre-Islamic work in the Bamiyan caves and the facade work of the Kushan and Buddhist-Sasanian period (found in the cave-ceilings in Bamiyan and house structures in the Pamir region), and the decorative stone features seen on the Buddhist stupa in Guldara (south of Kabul) and on the recently discovered stupa(s) in Mes-Aynak (Logar province) may have inspired the architectural solutions and decorations in the Ghaznavid and further in Ghurid architectural works. Using corner beams for the structure of ceilings was the prototype of the corner arch in domes for shortening wider spans and enabling the covering of a space. The friezes made of thinner stones on the facades of the stupas of Guldara and Mes-Aynak form the architectural decoration, whereas bricks are used in a more detailed way on the Ghaznavid and Ghurid architecture facades.

Shāh-i Mashhad is remarkable for its fine decorative designs. It is among the best examples of Ghurid architectural style prior to the introduction of glazed tiles as part of the exterior inscriptive ornamentation of buildings. To provide long-term durability against rain-

39 Such a complex had a minimum of two ivāns, or four ivāns situated on axial centres.
40 Hillenbrand 2000: 129.
41 Dupaigne 2007: 100–1.
43 Dupaigne 2007: 81, 92.
46 Hillenbrand (2000: 157) argues that, "Apart from the Shāh-i Mashhad madrasa, Jam has no rivals in the pre-Mongol Iranian world for the endless ingenuity and sustained panache of its decoration". The movement of professional builders and labourers is no surprise, it is still common for labourers in the country—specialised masons from Herat have been taken to Ghazi, Helmand, Kabul, and Balkh to work on brick structures with large arches and domes; Habibi (1979) believed that the architects of Shāh-i Mashhad might be the same as those of Bābā Hātim (Bābā Khatoon). Similar practices occurred in mediaeval Europe, see www.historylearningsite.co.uk/medieval_masons.htm (accessed 24/03/2015).
47 Casimir and Glazter 1971: figs. 1 and 2.
48 Casimir and Glazter 1971: fig. 32.
49 Ghurid glazed masonry is mainly visible on the main and monumental inscriptions on the Minaret of Jam and the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat. The latter
wash, exterior walls consisted of exposed brick masonry, which was often added as the finishing layer; some shaded surfaces seem to have had lime-based plaster.

The eastern facade of the mausoleum (Fig. 12/a,b), which also had an entrance and relatively simple masonry work, was finished with a second layer of masonry in paired bricks, possibly influenced by earlier mausoleums in Central Asia, or imitating similar designs of exposed masonry in the structures mentioned above. Three-dimensional decoration can be seen on the exterior of the Ghurid structures, however, exhibiting more refinement in their three-dimensional geometric ornamentation.

The main facade of the Shāh-i Mashhād complex has rich and intricate decorative works. Thinner-sized bricks and prefabricated terracotta elements set into baked bricks, as medallions installed like mosaics, complete the ornamental finish of inscriptive and geometric designs and architectural details.

Internally, too, bricks were in places used simultaneously for structural and decorative purposes, like those found on the corner arches in the smaller domed chamber next to the portal hallway. The portal’s side walls and the soffit of its arch were decorated with carved baked brick, prefabricated terracotta elements, and repetitive sequences of pottery-like elements produced for the purpose. Some decorative medallions were assembled on the ground as mosaics of brick and terracotta pieces, and then installed on wall surfaces (Figs. 8 & 14).

Inscriptive ornamentation was embedded in the decorative details of internal and external Ghurid wall surfaces. External inscriptions were produced using thinner baked bricks, either incorporated within the masonry or prefabricated as terracotta elements. Inscriptions on the interior wall surfaces were produced by carving the gypsum plaster. The inscriptive panels record the structure’s history and also provide religious messages for the benefit of the local community, among them students and visitors. The name of the patron and date (month and year) of the construction being commissioned were included in the main inscription on the portal. The three-dimensional inscription on the facade of the Shāh-i Mashhād structure was integrated with the rest of the interwoven geometric decorative patterns.

Qur’ānic verses were part of the Ghurid structure’s decorations. The amount of work involved in planning, material production, logistics, and the execution of the construction of such a delicately decorated work must have required five to ten years.

The names of the master builders and the decorative artist often appear on a secondary decorative panel of such structures, interlinked with another set of geometric or cursive patterns. At Shāh-i Mashhād, this panel is placed at the rear of the portal projection’s east side (Fig. 11/a,b). As it is badly damaged, the full text is not legible. Habibi linked the architectural and decorative style of the Shāh-i Mashhād structure to the style of architecture of two other mausoleums in the north of Afghanistan. These structures were built in the eleventh century during the rule of the Ghaznavid sultan Mas’ūd I (421–32/1031–41) and thus are earlier than Shāh-i Mashhād’s construction. Habibi suggested that the builder of the two mausoleums in Balkh was Abū Nāṣr Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmūd (Termīzī), who could have been the architect-builder of the structure of Shāh-i Mashhād. The current author reads the surviving text as follows: “completed this building, the servant of God, Ahmad son of Mahmūd, having a time-bound life, May God forgive and bless him.”

II.1. Access and orientation

II.1.1. The site plan (see Figs. 2 & 5)

Archaeological studies are urgently required at Shāh-i Mashhād to clarify, among other things, previous ob-

53 The Minaret of Jam depicts Sūra 19, Maryam, while the Shāh-i Mashhād had Sūra 48, al-Fath.
54 The duration of the works has been estimated by the author based on his experiences working on restoration projects in Afghanistan.
55 Habibi (1979) was referring to the mausoleum of Sāfī Yahya ibn Zaid ibn ‘Alī ibn Hussain ibn Ali ibn Abī-Talib (also known as Imamzada Yahya) in Argbā district of Jūz-jān province (west of Balkh), and the mausoleum of Salār-i Jalīlī, Sā’īd Mun‘īm al-Razī (also known as Bāba Hāṭim) outside the village of Imām Sāhib, 60 km west of Mazar-i Sharif on the road to Aqcha, Balkh.
56 This building, measuring 9.50 m on each side, was restored by DAFA in 1978 (Kervran 1987).
servations recording that structures were partially obscured by collapsed debris. That said, the drawings of the site plan produced by Casimir and Glatzer in 1970, and Aalund in 1978, indicate that the complex had a square plan. Reading Aalund’s drawings, it seems that the complex occupied an approximately square area measuring 44 × 44 m (i.e. 1936 m² in area), which is close to one jerib, a traditional unit of land measurement in Afghanistan. Studying the site and comparing the remaining structures with other madrasa sites in the region, it is clear that domed spaces and vaulted chambers surrounded the almost square courtyard.

The main route in the valley passes south of the structure, and therefore the main entrance to the complex was from the south. A secondary access could have been from the northern side, via the northern ivan, as the brick masonry at a lower opening indicates. This was closer to the river providing access to the water.

Water has always been important for founding a settlement and almost all villages and towns in Afghanistan are built near a stream or springs. Water would have been necessary for mixing mud, producing mud bricks, and for construction work. Much of the construction works in rural areas is begun during the spring and early summer seasons when water from springs, melting snow, and streams can be easily supplied to the construction sites. Sometimes straw is added to mud bricks but mainly to the mud plaster, which is most available in the summer/autumn after the harvest. For a mosque, the availability of water for ablutions and cleansing before the five-time day prayers is essential. For a madrasa and boarding facility, water is also important for drinking, the kitchen, and the hamam (washing facilities).

Casimir and Glatzer mentioned that some 60 m to the south-east of the structure stood the remains of a tower, built out of rocks, together with the remains of a brick-edged entrance. Perhaps this was one of the kilns where all the bricks and terracotta used in the Shāh-i Mashhad structure were baked.

II.1.2. The building’s plan (Fig. 6)

The complex of Shāh-i Mashhad had its main axis oriented north–south, 3° west of geographical north. The main portal dominated the southern facade. The building was constructed around a courtyard measuring 24.8 m (north–south) and 26.6 m (east–west). Aalund’s sketches indicate that the portal’s opening measured about 4.65 m; its external measurement was 9.35 m and projected about 2.60 m from the main facade. Each wing of the southern facade measured about 15.9 m from the wall of the portal to the wall of the corner towers (which were about 1.96 m in diameter). This means the length of the half-facade (in the south-east) was 17.85 m, with a total of 43.36 m (including the corner towers), for the whole facade.

Most of the monumental spaces and chambers covered by domes, such as the mausoleum, were found at the southern wing of the complex. The mausoleum—a

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57 Aalund 1990; Casimir and Glatzer 1971. Unsurprisingly the latter being anthropologists/ethnographers, and Aalund, a conservation architect, there are minor discrepancies in their recorded measurements. Glatzer reported that the direction of the eastern wall of the structure was due north, but Aalund marked it 9° to the north-west of the building (perhaps due to using compasses of different precision).

58 Traditionally, one jerib is 44.5 m × 44.5 m – an area of 1980 m², although today for simplicity’s sake 2000 m² is officially used.


60 See Fig. 2; Casimir and Glatzer 1971: fig. 6. A shorter access to the river was available only to the east and north of the building.

61 This is calculated based on the remaining south-eastern parts of the complex, in maps published by Casimir and Glatzer (1971) and Aalund (1990).

62 Aalund 1990.
Fig. 6 (above and right). An architectural reconstruction of the plan and front elevation of the madrasa (drawing A.W. Najimi, 2008).

A monumental Ivân (ḍalân)67 similar in concept to the plan of the madrasa of Chesht-i Sharif (562/1167).68

larger square space in the south-east—measured about 7.25 m on each side; the smaller chamber, between the entrance hall and the mausoleum, measured about 5.8 m on each side. Symmetry would suggest that the western part of the south wing was similar in structure and layout.

The direction to Mecca (the qibla for prayer) from Shâh-i Mashhad is 243.69° N (i.e. 27° south of due west).64 Normally in Afghanistan one enters a mosque from a direction other than the qibla, and often from the east; therefore, the larger domed chamber in the southwest must have been the communal worship area—a mosque and/or khanagâh (where Sufis gather). In Ghur and Gharjistân, the Cheshî order of Sufism was practised.65 Student accommodation (hujra), as mentioned earlier, could have been arranged at the eastern and western wings of the complex with access from the courtyard.66

was open to the north of the Shâh-i Mashhad complex. Such ḍalân/ivân functioned as a semi-outdoor space for gathering, teaching, and communal prayers. The western wall of the Ivân in Shâh-i Mashhad indicates that there were two spaces, an ivân and a chamber behind with decorations around the northern window; the masonry of the northern wall indicates the existence of a secondary and semi-private access from the north into the space.69 The height of the northern wall of this structure indicates, as well as the change in the levels, that there might have been a staircase/steps leading down to the ground below.

64 www.qiblalocator.com (accessed 22/09/2014). The qibla in Afghanistan, if it cannot be determined exactly, is taken to be the equinox west, as in the Hanâfî school of Islamic faith the direction (jehad) is good enough to show respect.
65 The Cheshi Order of Sufism was founded by Abu Isháq Shâmmâ (“the Syrian”) in Chesht some 150 km east of Herat in present-day western Afghanistan. Then the Cheshi order was led by Khwâja Mu‘in al-Dîn Cheshtî, born in 492/1141 in Chesht; after getting his education in Bukhara, during the Ghurids rule he took the order to the city of Ajmer in northern India in 1193.
66 Hillenbrand (2000: 138) compared this ruin with those of Danestama in the Bamiyan/Baghlan border area.
67 ḍalân has been mostly used in Ghazni and eastern parts of Afghanistan; Ivân is used in western and historic Khorasan for a roofed space having one side fully open.
68 Blair 1985: 82, 85, pl. 12; one is dated, in Persian, to 562/1167.
69 The summer breeze in most villages in Afghanistan normally blows from the north, and at the site of Shâh-i Mashhad the breeze from the lower part of the valley and Murghâb River would certainly have been refreshing.
tural and decorative composition of the structure and indicating the patron. The portal in Shāh-i Mashhad documented that a female benefactor sponsored the construction. While the top of the portal (similar to that of the Ghurid portals in Herat) was damaged and the text is missing, the side pillars had inscriptions starting at the bottom of the right pillar and finishing at the bottom of the left. Casimir and Glatzer in 1971 and Blair in 1985 published the Kufic inscription with slight differences:

Translation:

Right pillar: In the name of God the clement and merciful. [She] Instructed construction of this blessed madrasa the great and knowledgeable lady [if السيدة] or queen [if الملكة].......

Top: structure and text missing...

Left pillar: [May God bless] her, extend her dominion and double her power; dated in the month of Ramadan of the year 571 [March–April 1176].

While the reference in the portal inscription is to a lady, a reference to a male personality is found in a cursive inscription along the lower edge of the arch of the portal; the text ends with: نوراً الله مرقد و يصطفه لحده “may God illuminate his tomb and widen his grave”. This funerary inscription perhaps refers to the person buried there; or to the person who supported the construction.

The portal of Shāh-i Mashhad, judging by Aaland’s sketches, was about 11.30 m high from ground level, and 9.35 m wide, allowing for a frontal bay of 4.60 m. The width of the pillars of the portal was 2.36 m; the projections had recessed masonry on the external sides of the pillars. The depth of the portal’s bay was 3.45 m with an extra arched recess of 37 cm, with the entrance opening 2.40 m wide and about 2.30 m high.

About a 1 m-high masonry base supported round

70 Casimir and Glatzer 1971: fig. 7.

71 Blair 1985: 81; Casimir and Glatzer 1971. A major difference is that the inscription at Shāh-i Mashhad starts with “In the name of God the clement and merciful”, the inscription on the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat does not include this part.

72 The present author has not yet found in the building any direct reference to the Sultan Sayf al-Din being buried there; if such information was recorded on the interior plasterwork it must have vanished as has most of the interior plasterwork. Further study is needed.

73 Aaland 1990.
decorated corner columns on each side of the bay. These columns were ornamental, not structural elements, with a diameter of c. 42 cm and a height of c. 3.85 m. The top a column-capital, up to 70 cm in height, was built from masonry. The springing-line (curvature) of the arch started at a height of 6.50 m from ground level and the tip of the arch's soffit ended 9.57 m from the ground. The arch was crowned with decorated masonry, the thickness of which was equal to the frontal width of the projected pillars, giving a total height of nearly 11.50 m.

The side walls of the portal bay were divided into panels for different decorations in stucco, above the base masonry; each side wall was organised into nine equal framed squares, each having three-dimensional geometric, interwoven, or floral decorative patterns (Fig. 9). At the height of the corner columns, a horizontal panel of inscriptions was placed at the same height as the column's capital masonry (Figs 7 & 10). Above this, the skirt of the arched plate of the portal bay sprang and was decorated with geometric design in bricks and inlaid terracotta elements (Figs. 8 & 9).

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74 Similar columns in the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat have an outer diameter of 44 cm. Interestingly, archaeologists found brick columns 23 cm in diameter on the courtyard paving west of the minaret of Jam during excavation in 2005 (Thomas et al. 2006), perhaps not of a portal location.

75 In the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat it was 9.50 m (Lézine 1963–64).

76 In comparison, the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat was actually 10.5 m high but may have originally been some 2 m higher making it c. 12.43 m. The top of the Ghurid arch was 9.5 m high, and the bottom line of the Kufic inscription was 10.54 m above the ground. The portal niche had an opening 4.45 m wide. The structure at the base of the portal was a plain brick construction 9 m long, 2.70 m deep, and 1.60 m high, comprising about 18 courses of masonry over the floor level (Hansen 1964–65; Lézine 1963–64).

77 At the portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat, the Ghurid side walls were each decorated with one panel of geometric design in terracotta, like an interwoven carpet, measuring 2 m high by 4 m wide and with some inlaid glazed elements (Hansen 1964–65; the present author visited the site in 2013).

78 At the portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat, the soffits of the arches are decorated with terracotta elements, but the bay is roofed with a vault formed by small corner arches and has decorative stucco (Hansen 1964–65; Lézine 1963–64).
II.2.1. The southern facade

The main facade was extended c. 15.93 m on each side of the portal. As a composition of panels, it was divided into three main frames flanked by two slender panels (1.45 m wide). The central bay was 2.9 m wide and had a blank arcade; the other two bays, each 3.09 m wide, provided entry into the domed chambers behind them. All three bays and the flanking panels were arched (four centre-pointed arches) in the same geometrical proportions and at the same height from the ground. A second layer of decorative masonry formed the external finish. Bands of decorative masonry, 50 cm wide, were the vertical elements between the bays and framed the panels (Figs. 4 & 6). Inscriptions that run on top of the arches in the southern elevation were from Sūra 48 (al-Fath) of the holy Qur‘ān.

The mason’s skills were often passed down from one generation to the next within families. It is possible that a chief mason (father) and his pupil (son) worked jointly on this construction project. We can therefore imagine that both Mahmūd and his son Ahmad may have worked on the design, planning, construction, and ornamental completion of Shāh-i Mashhad. The name Muhammad/Mahmūd was also visible on the exterior decoration of one of the panels which sadly no longer exists (Fig. 17). 79

II.2.2. Courtyard facing walls

Having studied the remaining courtyard facing walls of the Shāh-i Mashhad, it is fair to say that the inner facades in general were arcade-based walls with recesses and openings into the rooms, as in the traditional caravanserais. The two main archways (of the main entrance and that of the northern tavan) dominated the rest. The walls were plastered. 80

II.3. Structure and building material

The Ghurids built their structures with massive walls. The walls of the Shāh-i Mashhad structure measured up to 1.25 m (five bricks) wide (Fig. 18/a). The building materials were clearly found or supplied locally. Despite the fact that many Ghurid buildings, such as those of Chesh-t-i Sharif, Jam, and Shāh-i Mashhad, were located close to mountains (and rivers) and thus could have been built of stones, in fact bricks form the major building material. Stone was perhaps used in the foundations and infill of walls, but the use of bricks allowed constructions of different wall thicknesses, recesses, and geometric forms. The bricks also allowed for relatively rapid construction. Ghurid bricks were square in format and suitable for the construction of arches and domes.

Lofty domes covered the major spaces in Shāh-i Mashhad. While the majority of the structure was built out of sun-dried bricks, the important parts of the structure, and those intended for greater heights, were built out of baked bricks, both for their structural stability and also as a body on which to add the decorative masonry of wall surfaces. 81

Structurally, the height of the roofing of spaces was in proportion to the breadth of the space between the supporting walls or pillars. The larger chambers had higher ceilings or domes. To prepare for dome construction, corner arches (squincbes) were first built to transform the square plan into an octagonal structure. This was then transformed into a circular base for the construction of the dome with gradual masonry work. In the two dome chambers at the south-east of Shāh-i Mashhad, the zones of transition have different heights and solutions: one has four squincbes, simple in form, constructed of finely cut brick masonry; the corner chamber has higher, interlocking facets with stucco ornamentation, which develop into rib-arches across the walls and establish a frame for the vaulting to form a dome (Fig. 13). 82 Cross-over arches (i.e. rib arches) rise from the level of secondary level niches, toqī, above the horizontal band of inscriptions encircling the chamber.

Vaults provided adequate roofing for rectangular spaces such as the students’ chambers. The recesses in the kitchen or the homāmī were roofed with square bricks, set flat. This technique of roofing with bricks—zarbev—has been used for the vaulting work over smaller bays, mostly in Kandahār.

Timber was used as reinforcement and tie beams

81 “Although most Ghaznavid and Ghurid architecture was of baked brick, mud brick was also used on a scale not encountered for major public buildings in the rest of the Iranian world” (Hillenbrand 2000: 167).
82 Stuckert (1980: 14) shows sketches of the ribbed domes of the mausolea in Shāh-i Mashhad and in Herat. The present author has sketched a different solution.

79 Casimir and Glatzer 1971: fig. 22.
80 Casimir and Glatzer 1971: fig. 5.
Fig. 10. An inscription inside the main entrance ivan (see Fig. 7) (rectified by A.W. Najimi, 2014, after photos of B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970). This inscription, copied on both sides of the entrance ivan, has different terracotta framing. This was not read by Glatzer and Casimir in 1970–71. Habbibi suggested that it was repetition of the “Kalima Shahada” - "الله أكبر الله أكبر لا إله إلا الله إمام أحمد ابن محمود الفقاهي غفر الله"; this author, however, reads it as the Takbir of Tashriq, which is usually recited during the time of Hajj celebrations and the sacrifice of animals. “God is great. God is great. There is no God but Allah, God is great. God is great and praise be to God only.”

Fig. 11. (a) A photograph of the inscription panel installed high up behind the projection of the main entrance (photo B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970). The four pre-made panels bear a geometric design and the Kufic inscription naming the architect/builder as described in (b). In this drawing, Glatzer identified the word Mahmūd (محمود) and believed it to be a reference to Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn capturing the Marghāb region in 561/1165–66; Habbibi read it as Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmūd (محمد ابن أحمد ابن محمود) and believed it to be the reference to the chief builder/architect of Shāh-i Mashhād. (b) A reconstruction drawing of the panel in (a). This author reads it as: “completed this building, the servant of God, Ahmad son of Mahmūd, having a time-bound life, may God forgive and bless him”. The Arabic text is suggested: “امه هذه النبأ العبد أحمد ابن محمود الفقاهي غفر الله" (drawing A.W. Najimi, 2012).
against tensile forces in the masonry. In places where the surface decoration has fallen, the ends of the reinforcing timber are clearly visible. The interior of the Shāh-i Mashhad structure was mostly plastered with clay and gypsum.

II.4. Architectural ornamentation

The architectural decoration has been the predominant focus of the descriptions of Ghurid architecture and structural characteristics. In Ghurid buildings, architecture was the structure and decoration; and decoration and structure were the architecture. As noted above, Shāh-i Mashhad was one of the finest early examples of such Ghurid works.

The Ghurid sultans believed that victory resulted from divine help, so they decorated their buildings with the first few verses of Sūra 48, as mentioned earlier, perhaps to celebrate an event, but also to give a message to the community and their followers. This was produced both in Kufic script, made out of terracotta if applied on the exterior—as found at Shāh-i Mashhad—and in gypsum plaster when applied on the interior, as found inside the southern ʿIbān of the Grand Mosque in Herat and the sultan’s mausoleum. The other Ghurid structure where Qurʾānic verses were applied as part of the surface decoration is the Minaret of Jam, where the complete text of Sūra 19, Maryam, is produced in thinner bricks and in the Kufic style of scripture.

Having studied the Shāh-i Mashhad structure again recently, this author understands the conceptual design and details of the Ghurid portals in general. More specifically, it has since become clear that the details of the horizontal inscription of the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat were replaced and covered by the Timurid renovation in the fifteenth century.

In addition to geometric designs at Shāh-i Mashhad, inscriptional ornamentation was the core feature of Ghurid wall decoration. Casimir and Glatzer documented a total of 15 inscriptions in 1971. Ten of the inscriptions in the Kufic style were produced in terracotta and five inscriptions were created in plaster applications. Cursive inscriptions in plaster formed the ornamental bands around the rooms and/or framed the openings. In style such inscriptions were similar to those found in Andalusia.

83 “Wood is used here and there in Ghaznavid buildings, both for structural purposes—as in the horizontal wooden frames in the minaret of Masʿud III at Ghazna” (Hillenbrand 2000: 171, pl. 17); the late architect Ruedi Stuckert (1980) and Bernt Glatzer compared the structure and dome styles applied in the mausoleum of Ghiyāth al-Dīn (adjacent to the Grand Mosque of Herat) and the mausoleum of Shāh-i Mashhad in Gharjistan.

84 Sourdil-Thomine 2004; Moline 1973–74.
85 Much of the Ghurid decorative details of the portal came to light after restoration of the portal in 1964–65. Some details still remain covered, as part of the fifteenth-century Timurid vault was also preserved.
Fig. 13. A plan and cross section of the south-eastern chamber, the mausoleum. The structural zone of transition from square plan to octagonal base is achieved by corner arches (squinches) and eight rib arches forming the base of the lofty dome (A.W. Najimi, 2012).

II.4.1. Ornamentation with bricks and terracotta

As mentioned earlier, terracotta was mainly used on the exterior; interior decorative work consisted of both terracotta and plasterwork. Surfaces were decorated with patterns in masonry of regular and cut bricks (Figs. 14–17). Inscriptions in Kufic style, integrated with decorative designs, were produced from finer bricks and terracotta units (Fig. 16–17). The main inscription, including the reference to the patron and the date of construction, was on the frontal facade of the portal. Other inscriptions with different messages were on the side walls of the portal and the southern facade of the structure. The remaining decorative details produced in terracotta consisted of floral or geometric patterns.\footnote{This was well explained by Casimir and Glatzer 1971.} All were installed in a plaster bed of gypsum mix. In places the brick masonry was laid to produce a pattern (Figs. 14 & 15).

Bricks were cut to shape or moulded; elements were produced for the purpose and design of creating effects of shade lines in the bright sunlight of Ghur to complete the concept of the three-dimensional embossed decorative work on the facades. Square, pentagon, hexagon, octagon, and dodecagon shapes were parts of the composition. The intricate and carefully designed ornamental details had proportions derived from the thickness of the brick or the embossed line of a terracotta piece.

Fig. 14. Detail of brick and terracotta decoration on Figs. 1, 4 and 7 (photo B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970).

Fig. 15. Detail of decorative brick masonry on wall surfaces at Shāh-i Mashhad (photo B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970; drawing Najimi, 2013).
Fig. 16 (above and left). (a) Detail of the external decoration and inscription on the arch of the middle bay of the southern façade:

وَهَدِيهِمْ صِرَاطًا مستقِماً وَيَصِرِّرُكُمْ اللَّهُ نصراً عُزِيزًا (detail from a photo by B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970). (b) A close-up of (a) showing the word “Allah”, in verses 2 and 3 of Sūra al-Fath, made out of brick and terracotta pieces and inlaid terracotta elements.

Fig. 17 (right). A Kufic inscription in the upper part of the third arch bay (from right) in the south façade (detail from a photo by B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970). The content is a continuation of the niches to the right of it. Glatzer (1971: no. 5) read it as verse 4 of Sūra 48, al-Fath:

هو الّذى أؤزِّن السَّماوات والأَرض وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ حَكِيمًا

"It is He who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith along with their [present] faith. And to Allah belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth, and ever is Allah Knowing and Wise.”

And the horizontal inscription reads عَلِمَ مَحْمُود.

Note: it no longer existed when the site was visited in 1993.
II.4.2. Ornamentation in plaster and inscriptions (Fig. 18)

Three styles of cursive inscriptions were found in the remains of the Shāh-i Mashhad structure: Naskhī, and two in Thuluth (all in Arabic). Such decorations were carved in the plaster. The plaster was made from a half-baked gypsum mix applied as a fresh paste and carved before it hardened. As mentioned earlier, these inscriptions served double functions: art and education—verses from the holy Qur’ān and/or Hadith.

The northern īvān had well-decorated walls with inscriptions. The plaster-cut Arabic inscription shown in Fig. 18.c read: “The geometry of the arch and its

87 In an effort to get the plaster-cut Arabic inscription shown in Fig. 18.c read, the author showed Glatzer’s photograph to two scholars, from Lebanon and Morocco, in 2013. They could not read it, but described the style as Andalusian.
Fig. 19. (a) and (b). The Kufic inscription at the northern entrance wall, terracotta decoration (photo B. Glatzer/M. Casimir, 1970; drawing A.W. Najimi, 2012). The interwoven decorative panel with the 99 names of Allah. The text for these decorative panels, from Sūra 59, al-Hashr, vv. 22–24, is presented below:

"In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.

He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, Knower of the unseen and the witnessed. He is the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful. (22) He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, the Sovereign, the Pure, the Perfection, the Bestower of Faith, the Overseer; the Exalted in Might, the Compeller; the Superior. Exalted is Allah above whatever they associate with Him. (23) He is Allah, the Creator; the Inventor; the Fashioner: to Him belong the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (24)"
sub-curves (5 or 7), integrated into a horse-shoe arch found at the upper part of the northern wall of that īwan, resembles the geometry carved on the tombstone of Sultan Mahmood in Ghazni and the carved tombstones of Bust, the south palace of Lashkari bazaar, the northern structure at Chesht and the Ghurid Mausoleum in Herat. Perhaps the design symbolised the flame (source of light). The decorative inscription around the horseshoe arched keyhole opening was in plasterwork.

It was read by an Iranian scholar, Dr Abdullah Ghouchani, in 2013; it is a Hadith that is mainly copied in Shi‘a books of Hadith collections. The text in Arabic is:

 köz ona in al-din ya ‘aṣiyafa, wa harkhu madāj biyta, waw da laykum raq ta’laka wa takhfa wa likha wal ‘ilaha. Tablet mal hawala, wa takhib wa takhib (t[jamun mal a-taka‘lum wa tabilum mal adetrum). Hidhik List Shāhe

Translation:

Be in the world like a guest, and take shelter in the mosques, make your heart tender, increase thoughts [reflection] and crying [praying], and do not enslave yourself to the fancies you build what you do not dwell in and do not stock what you don’t hope for what you cannot realise.

The remaining wall of the northern īvān, part of its western wall, had both terracotta and plaster decorative work (Figs. 18–19). The geometric decoration installed on the wall consisted of the 99 names of God mentioned in the holy Qur‘ān.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The visit to Shāh-i Mashhad in 1993 and a re-analysis of the available material about this important site have enabled the present author to read some of the inscriptions differently or for the first time. The content of the inscriptions indicate that this historic structure was a major institution of learning and the mausoleum of

89 Qartabi 2008: 2446.
90 Account by al-Hakim ibn Amir of the prophet Mohammed’s instruction, as narrated by Imam Abu Nu‘aym Ahmad ibn Abdullah ibn Ahmad, al-Isbahani (1932–38: 188).
91 Some of these names are in Sūra 59, al-Hashr, of the holy Qur‘ān.
a chieftain (Shâh/Shar). The dedication and patience of the patron, architect, and masons is evident through the study of the architectural, structural, and decorative details of the building; the designs demonstrate their knowledge of geometry and religious references. During the study, it became clear that the portal of Shâh-i Mashhad was similar in proportions and design concept (decorative details vary) to the Ghurid portal of the Grand Mosque in Herat, which was built 25 years later (Figs. 9 & 21).

The archaeological ruins at Shâh-i Mashhad have been abandoned due to their remote location. Sadly, after the discovery of this Ghurid monument in 1970, Afghanistan became engulfed in political and administrative instability, which has in different ways now continued for almost four decades. In addition to natural decay, armed conflict, and negligence, under-investment by successive governments in the maintenance and repair of cultural heritage have been the most important causes of damage to the historic sites of Afghanistan. A lack of awareness of the non-commercial value of cultural heritage, indifference, and a shortage of resources have compelled some inhabitants to earn their living by illegally digging for artefacts at archaeological sites near their villages. Shâh-i Mashhad is an extreme example of the damage that can be done by local villagers who, due to a lack of awareness, as Muslims demolished Qur'anic inscriptions of the south facade—damage second only to that wrought by the army of Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century.

Ghurid structures, along with other monuments in Afghanistan, need to be protected and preserved. Surprisingly, the structure of Shâh-i Mashhad has not received the attention of UNESCO and other NGOs working in heritage conservation in Afghanistan. While the Minaret of Jam is today a UNESCO World Heritage Site, other superb examples of Ghurid heritage nearby, at Chesht-i Sharaf (which is on the road to Jam), and Shâh-i Mashhad, remain overlooked.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Dr Bernt Glatzer for showing him Shâh-i Mashhad in 1993. Travelling to Dahan-i Kûcha took us three days from Herat. We had stops in Qala-i Nau and in the village of Langar (in Qades district of Bâdghîs province). Glatzer's old friend in the nomadic community, Sûrgul, was our host and guide in Kûcha and to the Shâh-i Mashhad ruins; he accompanied us back to Qala-i Nau (capital of Bâdghîs). Glatzer and the author remained in touch with Sûrgul until 2009. The author is also grateful to Prof. Michael Casimir for supplying his and Glatzer's photographs in 2013, and to Dr David Thomas for reading an earlier version of this paper and guidance for improvements, and to Associate Prof. Alka Patel, Prof. Finbarr Flood, and other reviewers of this paper for their comments and suggested revisions.
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### APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial no (Fig. C &amp; G)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Casimir, M.J. and Glatzer, B. 1971</th>
<th>Habibi 1970</th>
<th>Blair 1985</th>
<th>Najmi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 1 (8–11)</td>
<td>Main archway right side</td>
<td>Plaited Kufic</td>
<td>The right column: In the name of God. The clement and merciful, she has commanded to build this madrasa, the blessed, exalted, fortunate, wise [name]…</td>
<td>Agreed with Glatzer but added that the name of the patron was Māh Malik (daughter of Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn)</td>
<td>Agreed with Glatzer but added that the name of the patron was Jawhar Malik (Queen of Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn)</td>
<td>Agrees with the text Blair read, and the patron being Taj al-Harir Jawhar Malik (Queen of Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn), sister of Sultan Sayf al-Dīn For the word that I read السعیدة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 2 (9–10)</td>
<td>Main archway left side</td>
<td>[... the portly, peerless [...] in the month of Ramadan of the year 561 [H]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 3 (13)</td>
<td>Exterior – right to the entrance</td>
<td>Kufic</td>
<td>Mahmūd</td>
<td>Ahmad ibn Mahmūd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 4 (22–23)</td>
<td>2nd Bay right ward</td>
<td>Kufic</td>
<td>Continuation of No. 6 Sūra 48.4–6</td>
<td>Sūra 48.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 5 below 4</td>
<td>Below No. 4</td>
<td>Kufic</td>
<td>Mahmūd</td>
<td>Amal Mahmūd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 6 (24)</td>
<td>3rd Bay right ward</td>
<td>Kufic</td>
<td>Sūra 48.2–4</td>
<td>Sūra 48.2–4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 7 (26)</td>
<td>4th Bay right</td>
<td>Kufic</td>
<td>Sūra 48.1–2</td>
<td>Sūra 48.1–2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No. 8 (35)</td>
<td>North Iwan</td>
<td>Kufic</td>
<td>Religious text</td>
<td>Not read</td>
<td>Sūra 59 al-Hashīr vv. 22–24</td>
<td>مع الله الرحمن الرحيم (Fig. 19/a,b) هو الله الذي مع الله الرحمن الرحيم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 9 (34)</td>
<td>North Iwan</td>
<td>Kufic stucco</td>
<td>Not read</td>
<td>Not read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 10 (12)</td>
<td>Left-entrance</td>
<td>Kufic</td>
<td>wa ‘Ali, wa ‘Ali</td>
<td>Not read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 11 (11)</td>
<td>Detail of inscription main entrance</td>
<td>Kufic bricks/stucco</td>
<td>The text of the right side</td>
<td>Agrees with BG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 12 (13)</td>
<td>Side wall of the entrance projection</td>
<td>Kufic stucco</td>
<td>Mahmūd</td>
<td>Abū Nāṣir Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Mahmūd (Termizī)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 13 (18–19)</td>
<td>Thuluth</td>
<td>Like No.12</td>
<td>لا الله إلا الله He meant the Shahāda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 14 (33–34)</td>
<td>North arch</td>
<td>Naskhi</td>
<td>Only read the al-masajed</td>
<td>Not read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 15 (33–34)</td>
<td>North below 14</td>
<td>Naskhi</td>
<td>Thuluth</td>
<td>Not read</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1. Comparison of the decoration, ornamentation, and inscriptions published by different authors.
Table 2. Frontal facade inscriptions. Contents and translation of the inscriptions produced in baked terracotta and plasterwork.
The inscription on the side wall of the portal ivān is the Takbir of Tashhrī which is usually recited during the Eid al-Adhā celebrations and when making the animal sacrifice at Hajj. Allah is Great, Allah is Great, there is no God but Allah, Allah is Great, Allah is Great, and to him alone is the praise.

The Kufic panel inside the entrance hallway: Completed this construction the servant Muhammad son of Mahmūd May God forgive him eternally.

The plaster inscription up on the main portal arch: May God lighten his tomb and widen his grave.

*The band above:* A reference to the Messenger, Peace be upon Him

The damaged panel of inscriptions on the side panel of the northern ivān: (Fig. 19)

He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Knower of the Invisible and the Visible. He is the Beneficent, Merciful. (22) He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, and the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him). (23) He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifith Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (24) Sūra 59 al-Hashr vv. 22–24

The gypsum made inscription on the northern wall of the northern ivān (Fig. 18/c)

Be in the world like a guest, and take shelter in the mosques, make your heart tender, increase thoughts and crying, and not enslave yourself in fancies you build what you do not dwell in and do not stock what you don’t hope for what you cannot realize.

Read by: Abdullah Ghouchani, 2013

[Shī’a book of Hadith]