Sociology & Cultural Research Review (SCRR)
Available Online: https://scrrjournal.com
Print ISSN: 3007-3103 Online ISSN: 3007-3111
Platform & Workflow by: Open Journal Systems

The Marble Mosque and the Delhi Press: Jahanara Begum's Ajmer Pilgrimage in Urdu Translation, 1643–1891

Shifa Ahmad
In-Charge, Department of Art History, Government College University Lahore.
Shifa.ahmed@gcu.edu.pk
Muhammad Mahboob Ahmad
Assistant Professor, Institute of English language and literature, Government College University Lahore.
mahboobahmad@gcu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT
In February 1891 Sayyid Mir Hasan, proprietor of the Razavi Press and of the Delhi newspaper Khair Khwah-i 'Alam, printed an Urdu translation of Mu'nis al-Arwah Jahanara Begum's Persian life of Mu'in al-Din Chishti and sent copies to Ajmer to be presented as an offering at the saint's tomb. This article reads that lithograph, rather than Jahanara's Persian, as a source for the architectural history of the Ajmer dargah. It argues that the text records three successive acts of claiming ground and performs the third: a thirteenth-century saint takes possession of a site by refusing to move from it; a seventeenth-century princess takes possession of the same site by moving through it in a fixed sequence threshold, door, dome, grave, mosque and laying a cloth over the grave; and a nineteenth-century publisher takes possession of both by making that sequence portable. Jahanara's appendix of Ramadan 1053 (1643), dated to the day and quoted here at length, is shown to be among the most detailed surviving accounts of movement through a Mughal-period shrine, and one that locates most devotional labour in the precinct's open ground rather than its interior. The vernacular devotional lithograph is proposed as a neglected class of architectural document: the mechanism by which a shrine's spatial protocol, and the emotions attached to it, were standardised and circulated to readers who had never seen it.

Keywords: *Ajmer Dargah; Mu'In Al-Din Chishti; Jahanara Begum; Mu'Nis Al-Arwah; Chishtiyya; Pilgrimage and Ziyarat; Mughal Architecture; Sacred Space; Urdu Print Culture; Lithography; Colonial India.*

Introduction

In February 1891 a Delhi newspaper proprietor named Sayyid Mir Hasan finished printing a small Urdu book at his lithographic press and arranged for copies to be carried to Ajmer and presented as an offering at the tomb of Mu'in al-Din Chishti. He said so himself, in a short preface he titled simply Guzarish a petition. Offerings, he wrote, 'have also been presented at the exalted court', and he hoped that 'by way of Gharib Nawazi the honour of acceptance may be granted, and a glance of kindness cast upon this distant one'.[1] The distance was the point: Mir Hasan was in Delhi, the saint was in Ajmer, and the book was the thing that travelled between them.

[1] Jahanara Begum, Tarjuma-i Mu'nis al-Arwah, trans. Muhammad 'Abd al-Samad Kalim Qadiri Uwaysi (Delhi: Matba' Razavi, 1891), 'Guzarish' (unpaginated preliminary leaf). Copy consulted: University of Toronto Library, BP 80 M843J39 1891, digitised. All translations from the Urdu are my own.

The book was a translation. Its original had been composed in Persian two and a half centuries earlier by Jahanara Begum, eldest daughter of the emperor Shah Jahan, and it closed with an account of the author's own pilgrimage to that same tomb an account that describes, with a precision rare in this literature, exactly how a Mughal princess moved through the shrine. Where she lodged. Where she put her face to the ground. Which door she entered and how she covered the distance from it to the dome. Which mosque she prayed in, and who had built it.

This paper takes that object not Jahanara's Persian, but the 1891 Urdu lithograph as a source for the architectural history of the Ajmer dargah. The choice is deliberate. Scholarship on Jahanara has understandably concentrated on her authorship and her patronage, and a recent study addresses her building at Ajmer directly.[2] What has not been asked is what happened to her pilgrimage when a commercial press in colonial Delhi put it into Urdu and sent it back to the shrine it describes. That question is not incidental to architectural history. It is a question about how a building acquires and keeps its meaning across six centuries, and about the role that portable, printed, vernacular texts played in that process at precisely the moment when the British administration of shrines was tightening.

The argument is this. The 1891 Muʻnis al-Arwah records three successive acts of claiming ground at Ajmer, and it performs the third. In the first, a thirteenth-century saint takes possession of a site by refusing to move from it. In the second, a seventeenth-century princess takes possession of the same site by moving through it in a prescribed sequence and leaving a cloth on the grave. In the third, a nineteenth-century publisher takes possession of both by printing them and posting them back. Each act binds a text to a place; each is, in a modest and non-metaphorical sense, an architectural act, because each determines how the fabric at Ajmer is to be understood and used. Reading the three together lets us see something the standing buildings alone cannot show: the shrine as a structure continuously re-founded by narrative.

The physical object repays description, because almost everything this paper argues is visible in its front matter. It is a lithographed octavo of forty-four printed pages, produced at the Matba ' Razavi in Delhi. The running head across every opening carries two titles at once: Tarjuma-i Muʻnis al-Arwah on one side and Muʻin al-Arwah on the other.[3] That doubling is not a printer's error. Mir Hasan explains it in the first sentence of his Guzarish: the book Muʻnis al-Arwah 'Confidant of Souls 'is 'in truth the Muʻin al-Arwah [Helper of Souls] of the devout'.

The pun is doing theological work. Muʻin is the saint's own name, and the text itself turns on that name: in the foundation vision, a voice from the Prophet's tomb at Medina tells the young Muʻin al-Din that 'you are the muʻin, the helper of our religion', and entrusts him with the wilayat of

[2] On Jahanara's authorship and self-presentation see Afshan Bokhari, "Imperial Transgressions and Spiritual Investitures: A Begam's 'Ascension 'in Seventeenth Century Mughal India," Journal of Persianate Studies 4, no. 1 (2011): 86–108. On her building at Ajmer see "The Begumi Dalan at Khwaja Muʻin al-Din Chishti's Dargah in Ajmer: Mughal Architectural Matronage and Gendering of a Pilgrimage by Jahan Ara Begum," Religions of South Asia (forthcoming/recent); I have not been able to consult this article, and the present argument is deliberately pitched away from the patronage question it addresses.

[3] Muʻnis al-Arwah, running heads, pp. 1–44. The doubled head has confused cataloguers: the Toronto copy is catalogued under Muʻin al-arvah rather than the correct Muʻnis al-Arwah.

Hindustan.[4] By renaming the book onto the saint's name, Mir Hasan makes the volume a small extension of the saint's agency the text becomes, like the man, a helper of souls. This is a publisher's marketing gesture and a devotional claim at the same time, and the two are not separable.

The people involved are named. The translator identifies himself as Muhammad 'Abd al-Samad Kalim Qadiri Uwaysi, and lists the other works he has rendered from Persian into Urdu alongside this one.[5] His affiliation is worth pausing on: a Qadiri translating a Chishti princess's life of a Chishti saint, and closing the volume with a ghazal of his own composition in praise of Gharib Nawaz.[6] The commissioner is Sayyid Mir Hasan, described in the Guzarish as 'owner and manager of the Razavi Press and of the newspaper Khair Khwah-i 'Alam, Delhi', who states that he printed the book 'purely with a view to spiritual reward and heartfelt sincerity'.[7]

Three features of this configuration matter. First, the enterprise is commercial and devotional at once: a newspaper proprietor with a press to keep busy, printing Sufi biography as merit. Second, it is trans-sectarian: Qadiri labour in the service of a Chishti cult, which tells us that by 1891 the Ajmer shrine had a following that ran across silsila boundaries in a way the medieval texts do not assume. Third, it is directional: the book is made in Delhi and sent to Ajmer. In the economy of nineteenth-century Urdu print, the flow of religious texts out of Delhi and Lucknow into the provinces is well documented;[8] what is unusual here is that the publisher describes the movement as a pilgrimage he cannot make in person.

A translated devotional lithograph is an awkward source, and the awkwardness should be stated plainly rather than managed quietly. It is not the author's text. It is at two removes a nineteenth-century Urdu rendering of a seventeenth-century Persian original whose autograph survives elsewhere. The British Library holds Jahanara's own copy, Or. 5637, dated 27 Ramadan 1049 (21 January 1640), together with two further manuscripts.[9] The lithograph in front of us diverges from that autograph at once: its colophon appears to date the completion of the work to

[4] Muʿnis al-Arwah, 7. The wordplay on muʿin / Muʿin al-Din is standard in Chishti hagiography; what is new in 1891 is its extension to the title of the book itself.

[5] Muʿnis al-Arwah, 1. The translator names Ruh al-Arwah, Irshad al-Qadiri (as Fuyuz al-Qadiri) and Shamaʾil al-Awliya (as Khasaʾil al-Awliya) among his renderings, indicating a sustained programme of translation rather than a single commission.

[6] Muʿnis al-Arwah, 44: "Ghazal dar manqabat-i Hazrat Khwaja Gharib Nawaz, musannifa Hazrat Kalim Sahib, mutarjim-i kitab hadha."

[7] Muʿnis al-Arwah, "Guzarish." Khair Khwah-i 'Alam was among the Urdu periodicals of later nineteenth-century Delhi; issues survive in the Rekhta digital archive.

[8] See Francis Robinson, "Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia," in The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia: Essays on Education, Religion, History, and Politics, ed. Nigel Crook (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 62–97; and Ulrike Stark, An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

[9] Ursula Sims-Williams, "Princess Jahanara's Biography of a Sufi Saint," Asian and African Studies Blog, British Library, 20 February 2013, describing Or. 5637 (autograph), Or. 250 and Add. 16733.

Ramadan of 'one thousand and forty-four 'rather than 1049.[10] Nothing in this paper turns on that discrepancy, but it is a useful warning: what we are reading has been handled.

There is a second complication, and it is more interesting. The pilgrimage narrative is dated to 1053, three years after the work was completed, and it is introduced as an afterthought: 'Now this weak woman considers it appropriate to write here the account of her presence at the blessed shrine, and of making the ziyarat.to appendixThe pilgrimage account is therefore an [11]' the biography, added after the book was finished, and its relation to the various manuscript recensions has not to my knowledge been established. For the present argument the point is simply that the closing pages of this volume are structurally distinct from what precedes them, and that a reader in 1891 encountered them as the natural conclusion of the whole.

The obvious objection is that a paper cannot use an 1891 Urdu translation as evidence for what happened at Ajmer in 1643. The objection is correct, and the paper does not do so. Two distinct claims are in play and they should be kept apart. The first is about the seventeenth century: for this, the translation is a witness of the weakest kind, and every architectural detail drawn from it the pavilion on the Ana Sagar, the marble mosque, the interval between door and dome is offered as a reading of the text's representation of the shrine, to be tested against the fabric and the Persian recensions. The second claim is about the nineteenth century, and here the translation is a witness of the strongest kind, because it is the thing itself: what a Delhi press chose to print, how it framed it, and where it sent it are facts about 1891 that this object establishes directly.[12] Most of the weight of the argument rests on the second.

The method that follows is accordingly modest. I do not treat the text as a transparent description of standing fabric; I treat it as evidence of how the fabric was construed, entered and used by particular people at particular moments, and of how those construals were transmitted. Where the text names a building that can be independently identified Shah Jahan's marble mosque, the pavilion on the Ana Sagar embankment I say so. Where it does not, I resist the temptation to supply an identification. Architectural history built on hagiography has to accept that its object is the meaning of buildings rather than their measurements, and there is no shame in that: as Sheila Blair's work on fourteenth-century shrine complexes shows, the endowed shrine centre is in any case a social object before it is a formal one.[13]

The Fort in the Vision and the Camels 'Tethering-Place

The Ajmer of Mu'nis al-Arwah is seen before it is reached. Perplexed as to where Ajmer might be, Mu'in al-Din falls into a doze at Medina and beholds the Prophet, who 'in the twinkling of an eye showed him the whole world from east to west, and pointed out the fort of Ajmer and its hills and mountains, and giving him a pomegranate said: Go, I entrust you to God'.[14] The

[10] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 43. The year is spelled out in words rather than numerals and the lithography is imperfect; my reading of chawalis (forty-four) should be checked against the Persian recensions before being relied upon. If the reading is correct, the divergence is itself evidence about the transmission that produced this edition.

[11] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 43.

[12] The distinction matters for the footnotes as well as the argument. Citations to the lithograph in sections IV and V evidence the text's account; citations in sections II and VI evidence the edition's making.

[13] Sheila S. Blair, "Sufi Saints and Shrine Architecture in the Early Fourteenth Century," Muqarnas 7 (1990): 35–49.

[14] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 8.

commission is topographic. What is disclosed is not a doctrine or a community but a qal'a and the terrain around it a built landmark and its setting, shown as a view. The saint is dispatched to a place he has already seen in elevation.

This matters more than it may seem. The vision occurs at the Prophet's rawza the voice comes 'from the sacred tomb 'so that the entire authority of the Chishti mission in India is transmitted at a shrine, from inside a tomb chamber, and its content is the sight of another site.[15] The text thus establishes, before its protagonist has set foot in India, that legitimate authority passes between tombs and takes the form of showing a place. Every subsequent visit to Ajmer, including the author's own, will be a repetition of this scene in miniature.

The taking of the ground itself is more famous and more concrete. On arrival the saint stops beneath a tree, and is immediately told to leave: 'This is where the raja's camels are tethered stay somewhere else.Around this refusal the whole later complex is organised. The narrative [16]' had already prepared the confrontation: an astrologer had warned the raja twelve years earlier that a holy man would come and undo his rule, and the raja had circulated a description so that anyone matching it might be seized.[17] The site is thus contested before it is occupied, and it is occupied by staying put.

The episode is constructed with some care. The tree is not incidental scenery: it is the only shelter in the account, and it belongs to the raja's working landscape rather than to any sacred precinct. The ground in question is a service yard the place where beasts are secured overnight and it is chosen, in the narrative logic, precisely because it has no prior sanctity. Nothing about it recommends it. It is claimed because the saint is there and will not go, and the subsequent transfer of the site from the raja's economy to the saint's is presented as a straightforward consequence of that refusal.

This should be set against the way the Chishtis of Delhi are described as holding their ground a century later. In Fawa'id al-Fu'ad, the jama'at khana at Ghiyathpur is almost never described as fabric at all; it is rendered instead through protocol who is admitted, who waits, who sits where.[18] Ajmer, in Jahanara's telling, works the other way round: the site is named and seen before it is occupied, and its occupation is a physical fact before it is a social one. Two Chishti houses, two theories of how holy ground comes into being one by the regulation of access, the other by prior possession.

It is worth stating what kind of architectural argument this is. The dargah at Ajmer stands where it stands because, in the narrative, a man declined to move from a camel-ground. No patron founds it; no plan governs it; no endowment precedes it. The ground is claimed by bodily persistence, and every later structure Khalji's gateway, Akbar's mosque, Shah Jahan's marble mosque, the Begumi Dalan is an accretion onto a spot whose sanctity was established by refusal.

---

[15] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 7–8.

[16] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 8. On the foundation legends and their development see P. M. Currie, The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-din Chishti of Ajmer (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[17] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 8.

[18] Amir Hasan Sijzi, Fawa'id al-Fu'ad: Malfuzat-i Sultan al-Masha'ikh Khwaja Nizam al-Din Awliya, trans. Khwaja Hasan Sani Nizami (Lahore: Maktaba Zavia, 2003), passim. The second volume devotes a majlis to the question of the precedence of one place over another.

This is the opposite of the Suhrawardi model at Multan described by Qamar-ul Huda, where the khanqah is instituted in advance, with a steward, salaried offices, rules for admitting latecomers and a settled endowment.[19] Two orders, two ways of holding ground, and two very different architectural futures.

Jahanara at Ajmer, Ramadan 1053

The princess's account is dated to the day. She set out from Dar al-Khilafa Akbarabad Agra in the company of 'my revered father', on 18 Sha'ban 1053; she reached Ajmer on the twentieth of Ramadan, a Friday, and took up residence 'in that building in Ajmer which stands on the bank of the Ana Sagar tank'.[20] On the road, she records, she performed two rak'as of supererogatory prayer at every stage and recited Ya-Sin and al-Fatiha, dedicating the reward to the saint's spirit the journey itself organised as a repeated liturgical act.[21]

The lodging is the first architectural datum, and it is a good one. A building on the embankment of the Ana Sagar in the 1640s can only be one of the marble pavilions raised there under Shah Jahan, on the bund at the northern edge of the town. The imperial party is therefore quartered a mile from the shrine, on water, in new imperial fabric; the dargah is approached from a distance, from a building that belongs to the dynasty rather than to the saint. The topography of the visit is the topography of Mughal patronage: a marble pavilion looking across a tank at a town containing a tomb.

Between arrival and ziyarat four days pass, and they are filled with what can only be called spatial etiquette. She takes care, she says, not to stretch out her feet toward the shrine, and passes her days under the trees; she arranges illumination and does not stint in service to the rawza-i 'aliya.[22] The detail about the feet is not decorative. It tells us that the whole town is understood as oriented that there is a direction in which the shrine lies and that the body must be composed with respect to it even at a mile's distance. This is a claim about urban space, not about a building.

Then, on the twenty-fourth of Ramadan, the visit proper. The sequence is worth quoting at length, because it is the densest architectural passage in the book:

A hundred thousand thousand thanks that on the twenty-fourth of the blessed Ramadan I attained the ziyarat of the sacred grave. A quarter of the day remained when I entered the illuminated rawza and rubbed my pale face upon the dust of that threshold; and from the door as far as the blessed dome I went with bare feet, kissing [the ground]. I entered the shrine of the sign of paradise with all reverence, circled the noble grave, and made the pure dust the collyrium of my eyes. … Then with my own hand I rubbed perfume and ambergris upon the fragrant tomb, and brought a chadar upon my own head and cast it over the blessed grave; and in the marble mosque which my revered father had built I offered a two-rak'a prayer of thanksgiving. Then, seated in the blessed dome, I recited Ya-Sin and al-Fatiha for the blessed spirit of his holiness. I

[19] Qamar-ul Huda, "The Sufi Order of Shaikh 'Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi and the Transfer of Suhrawardiyya Religious Ideology to Multan" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998), esp. the discussion of 'Awarif al-Ma'arif on the three categories of khanqah resident.

[20] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 43. In the Common Era these dates fall in the late autumn of 1643; precise equivalents depend on the calendar conversion adopted and are best given in Hijri.

[21] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 43.

[22] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 43.

remained there until the time of the evening prayer, and having lit a candle at the illuminated grave I broke my fast with water.[23]

Read as a plan, this is a processional route with five stations: threshold, door, dome, grave, mosque. Read as choreography, it is a descent face to dust, feet unshod, mouth to ground followed by a rise into liturgy. Two things deserve comment.

The first is the treatment of the interval between door and dome. She does not simply walk in; she marks the distance by removing her shoes and kissing the ground along it. The passage from darwaza to gunbad is thereby constituted as a distinct architectural element not a corridor to be crossed but a length to be performed. Anyone reconstructing the seventeenth-century approach to the tomb chamber has here a rare indication that the intervening space carried ritual weight, and that its weight was measured in the body.

The second is the marble mosque. Shah Jahan's white marble congregational mosque within the dargah precinct was completed in the later 1630s, a few years before this visit.[24] Jahanara prays her thanksgiving in it, and she names its patron in the same breath: 'the marble mosque which my revered father had built'. The gesture folds dynastic patronage into personal devotion at the precise moment of arrival. She has just abased herself in the dust of the saint's threshold; she now stands up and prays in her father's building. The shrine is simultaneously a place where the Mughals are supplicants and a place they own and the text does not experience this as a contradiction.

A third feature is easy to miss because the text is silent about it, and the silence is informative. Nowhere in this passage does Jahanara mention a screen, a curtain, a separate women's enclosure, or any accommodation made for her sex. She enters the rawza, she circles the grave, she handles the tomb with her own hands, she prays in the congregational mosque. Whatever arrangements governed women's access to the shrine in the 1640s and we should assume there were some they are not represented here as constraints on an imperial daughter travelling with the emperor. The account is therefore evidence about rank as much as about gender: at Ajmer in 1053, proximity to the grave appears to have been negotiated by status rather than by fixed architectural segregation.[25]

It is also worth noticing how much of the visit happens outside. Of the five days at Ajmer, four are spent under trees, arranging lamps and composing the body with respect to a distant building; only the fifth is spent inside. The shrine that emerges from this account is not primarily an interior. It is a precinct with a charged centre, and most of the devotional labour takes place in its open ground and on its approaches. Any reconstruction that concentrates on the tomb chamber and its dome will therefore miss where the pilgrimage actually occurred. The trees, the

[23] Muʿnis al-Arwah, 43–44. Ellipsis marks a short passage on her emotional state; the sequence of movements is unbroken in the original.

[24] The mosque is conventionally dated to 1637; see Currie, Shrine and Cult, and the survey literature on the dargah complex. Its date relative to the 1053/1643 visit should be confirmed from the epigraphic record before the point is pressed.

[25] This is an argument from silence and should be handled as such. It would be strengthened or overturned by the accounts of other women pilgrims and by the physical evidence for screening in the tomb chamber; neither is examined here.

lamps, the embankment a mile away and the direction of a sleeper's feet are all part of the architecture in the only sense that mattered to the person using it.

The chadar carried on her own head and laid over the grave is the hinge between the two. It is the gesture that pilgrims at Ajmer still perform, and in the 1891 Urdu it is described in exactly the terms a nineteenth-century reader would recognise from their own practice. Whatever the Persian said, the translation makes the princess do what the reader does. That is the beginning of the third act.

The 1891 Edition as Offering

Consider what Mir Hasan actually did. He took a text in which a Mughal princess describes going to Ajmer and performing a set of bodily acts at the tomb; he had it translated into the language his readers spoke rather than the language of the court; he printed it on a press that also produced a newspaper; and he sent copies to Ajmer as nazr the same category of offering that a pilgrim makes at the shrine in person. The book is not about a pilgrimage. In its publisher's own description, it is one.

This is a specific and datable transformation, and it belongs to a well-studied moment. The spread of lithography across northern India from the 1830s onward made Islamic religious literature cheap, portable and vernacular, and in doing so redistributed religious authority away from those who held it by descent or by training toward those who could command a press.[26] The historiography has largely followed this story into the reformist seminaries, where print served argument. The Ajmer case shows the same technology doing something else: not arguing but conveying moving a devotional act across space on behalf of someone who could not travel.

There is an irony in the arrangement that sharpens the point. By 1891 Mir Hasan did not need a book to reach Ajmer. The metre-gauge line from Delhi to Ajmer had opened on 18 August 1876, and by the 1890s the town was a substantial railway centre in its own right, its workshops turning out the first locomotive built in India in 1895.[27] The publisher of a Delhi newspaper could have bought a ticket. That he chose instead to send a printed book as his offering tells us the book was not a substitute for travel but a different kind of act one that could be repeated indefinitely, distributed to many, and performed by readers who would themselves never board a train.

Rail and lithography arrived in northern India within a generation of each other, and both compressed the distance between a devotional public and the shrines it venerated. But they compressed it differently. The railway moved bodies to buildings; the press moved buildings or rather, the protocols for using them to bodies. The second is the more consequential for architectural history, because it means that from the later nineteenth century a shrine's spatial etiquette could be learned before arrival, from a book, in a standard form. What a pilgrim did on reaching Ajmer was no longer only what the khadims told them to do on the spot. It was increasingly what they had read that a Mughal princess had done.

---

[26] Robinson, "Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia"; Barbara D. Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Nile Green, Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[27] On the Delhi–Ajmer metre-gauge line, opened 18 August 1876, and the Ajmer workshops, see the standard histories of the Rajputana–Malwa Railway. The coincidence of rail and print in the same decades is a general feature of the period; see Green, Bombay Islam.

The translator's ghazal at the end of the volume completes the logic. Having rendered a Chishti princess's Persian into Urdu, 'Abd al-Samad Kalim adds his own verses in praise of Gharib Nawaz, signing himself into the book as a devotee rather than a technician.[28] The volume that reaches Ajmer therefore carries three petitions stacked one on another: the princess's of 1053, the translator's, and the publisher's. Each is addressed to the same tomb; each was composed at a different distance from it; and the printed book is what allows them to arrive together.

It is tempting to read this as continuity the old devotion carrying on under new technical conditions but the change is real and it is architectural in its consequences. A shrine that can be reached by post is a different institution from one that can only be reached on foot. The nineteenth century saw the Ajmer dargah drawn steadily into colonial administration, its revenues, its custodians and its internal disputes increasingly the business of courts and officials.[29] Against that centralising pressure, a book like this one constitutes a competing infrastructure: a way for a devotional public dispersed across northern India to hold a relationship with a building it might never enter. The shrine acquires a readership as well as a congregation.

This is where the paper's three acts converge. Mu'in al-Din claims the ground by refusing to move; Jahanara claims it by moving through it in a fixed sequence; Mir Hasan claims it by making the sequence portable. In each case the ground is held by a text the vision that names the fort, the narrative that scores the route from door to dome, the lithograph that carries both to a reader in Delhi. The buildings at Ajmer are the sediment of these claims, not their cause.

The Emotional Register

One further dimension of the pilgrimage account deserves separate treatment, because it is the dimension the 1891 translation is most concerned to transmit. Jahanara does not merely record where she went; she records what it did to her. She is sarasima overwhelmed, disordered with longing, and does not know what to say or do. She leaves the shrine 'with weeping eyes and a scorched breast and a hundred thousand regrets'. She passes the night at her lodging in beqarari, restlessness, and in the morning her father sets out for Akbarabad.[30] The emotions are not ornament appended to the itinerary. They are attached to specific locations: bewilderment at the tomb, restlessness at the lodging on the Ana Sagar, grief at the moment of leaving the bargah. This coupling of feeling to place is what makes the text usable for a history of shrines as emotional as well as material objects. The building is presented as an instrument that produces particular states in particular positions abasement at the threshold, absorption beneath the dome, desolation at the gate. A pilgrim reading this in Urdu in 1891 is not simply told where to walk; they are told what walking there should feel like, and the two instructions arrive together and inseparably. If the printed protocol standardised movement, it standardised affect along with it.

The concluding Persian couplet makes the transaction explicit: 'The Friend has cast a cord about my neck; He draws me wherever His will desires.Agency is disclaimed at exactly the point [31]'

[28] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 44.

[29] On the colonial administration of the dargah and its custodians see Currie, Shrine and Cult. Comparable processes in the Punjab are traced in David Gilmartin, Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[30] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 44.

[31] Mu'nis al-Arwah, 44.

where the author has in fact exercised a great deal of it she has travelled, arranged illuminations, laid a cloth, and written the account we are reading. The rhetorical move is conventional, but its placement is not: it comes immediately after the departure, and it converts an imperial progress into a compulsion. The shrine, in this telling, does not receive visitors. It summons them.

Conclusion

The 1891 Mu'nis al-Arwah is a minor book: forty-four pages, a provincial press, a translator no one has written about. Its interest for architectural history is precisely proportional to its minorness. Monumental sources inscriptions, chronicles, imperial commissions tell us who paid for what and when. This book tells us something harder to recover: what a building was for, in the hands of the people who used it, and how that understanding was manufactured and distributed.

Three conclusions follow. First, the Ajmer dargah's foundation narrative is a spatial argument and should be read as one: a site claimed by immobility, disclosed in advance as a view, and confirmed at a distance from another tomb. Second, Jahanara's appendix is among the most detailed accounts we have of movement through a Mughal-period shrine, and it deserves to be used as such its five stations, its barefoot interval, its naming of the marble mosque's patron are evidence about the building, not merely about the author. Third, and least expected, the vernacular devotional lithograph is an architectural document. It is the mechanism by which a shrine's spatial protocol was standardised and circulated to people who had not seen it.

The method has obvious extensions. Vernacular hagiographical lithographs were produced in very large numbers across northern India between the 1860s and the 1930s, and a great many of them concern shrines. They have been read as evidence for religious reform, for print capitalism and for the formation of a Muslim reading public; they have not generally been read as evidence for how buildings were used. Yet they are full of thresholds, courtyards, domes and doorways, and they were addressed to people who were expected to visit them. A survey of this material the Punjab and the Deccan would be the obvious places to begin would make it possible to write the spatial history of South Asian shrines from the users 'side, and to date the moment at which particular protocols hardened into standard practice.

What Mir Hasan sent to Ajmer in February 1891 was, in the end, a set of instructions: this is where you lodge, this is where you take off your shoes, this is the cloth you carry on your head, this is the dome you sit beneath. He had them from a princess who had them from a saint who had them from a voice in a tomb. The building has been holding the sequence in place ever since.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

———. Mu'nis al-Arwah. Autograph manuscript, 27 Ramadan 1049 (21 January 1640). British Library, Or. 5637.

Blair, Sheila S. "Sufi Saints and Shrine Architecture in the Early Fourteenth Century." Muqarnas 7 (1990): 35–49.

Bokhari, Afshan. "Imperial Transgressions and Spiritual Investitures: A Begam's 'Ascension 'in Seventeenth Century Mughal India." Journal of Persianate Studies 4, no. 1 (2011): 86–108.

Currie, P. M. The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-din Chishti of Ajmer. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Ernst, Carl W., and Bruce B. Lawrence. Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Gilmartin, David. Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
Green, Nile. Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
Huda, Qamar-ul. "The Sufi Order of Shaikh 'Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi and the Transfer of Suhrawardiyya Religious Ideology to Multan." PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998.
Jahanara Begum. Tarjuma-i Mu'nis al-Arwah. Translated by Muhammad 'Abd al-Samad Kalim Qadiri Uwaysi. Delhi: Matba 'Razavi, 1891. Lithograph. Copy consulted: University of Toronto Library, BP 80 M843J39 1891.
Metcalf, Barbara D. Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
Nizami, Khaliq Ahmad. Tarikh-i Masha'ikh-i Chisht. Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, n.d.
Robb, Megan Eaton. Print and the Urdu Public: Muslims, Newspapers, and Urban Life in Colonial India. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
Robinson, Francis. "Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia." In The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia: Essays on Education, Religion, History, and Politics, edited by Nigel Crook, 62–97. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.
Secondary Sources
Sijzi, Amir Hasan. Fawa'id al-Fu'ad: Malfuzat-i Sultan al-Masha'ikh Khwaja Nizam al-Din Awliya. Translated by Khwaja Hasan Sani Nizami. Lahore: Maktaba Zavia, 2003.
Sims-Williams, Ursula. "Princess Jahanara's Biography of a Sufi Saint." Asian and African Studies Blog, British Library, 20 February 2013.
Stark, Ulrike. An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007.