

---

Cameron Rashti

Regardless of the particular bias of the viewer, academic or other, there is general agreement that landscape architecture (arising from the creative and organized intercession in nature by human design), by the way it alters and filters the relationship of mankind to nature and opens new vistas to the all-encompassing environment, reaches into a deep level of the human psyche and impacts the common sense of well-being and the quality of life. This is arguably the most pertinent explanation for the Historic Cities Programme's very close association with historic gardens over most of its existence.

In the regions selected by the Programme for particular research and conservation assistance, Mughal garden sites have evolved into a proper subset of projects within its garden portfolio. To date, the Programme has been actively engaged with historic Mughal gardens and sites in Kabul, Delhi and Lahore, many of these sites comprising campus-like settings with multiple complexes and monuments embedded in a wider terrain of landscaping, intricate water systems and places of repose.

In chronological order, this series of major projects commenced in Delhi with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture's first involvement with the rehabilitation of Humayun's Tomb-Garden and then the mausoleum as of 1997. Work on this World Heritage Site was then supplemented by preservation and community redevelopment programmes in the Nizamuddin Basti and Sunder Nursery as of 2007 and continues to this day. The Trust took on the responsibility for the conservation and reuse of Babur's Garden (Bagh-e Babur), Kabul, as of 2002, now a public park operated through the Bagh-e Babur Trust. Finally, in 2007, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) joined ranks with the World Bank and the Lahore Walled City Authority to plan and implement an urban rehabilitation project in the eastern end of the



2



3

- [1] Sunderwala Burj, Sunder Nursery, Delhi, an early Mughal tomb in the newly re-landscaped Sunder Nursery.
- [2] Isa Khan's Tomb, part of Humayun's Tomb complex, Delhi.
- [3] Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, India, an axial view of the garden and its central water channel aligned with the monument.

Lahore Walled City, including work on Mughal elements within the project domain.

More than mechanical landscape conservation exercises, these projects have been approached as platforms for archaeological research, the review of authenticity of later interventions, development of appropriate conservation approaches, urgent repair works, training and the development of new resources. These interventions allow the public at large to comprehend and appreciate the wealth of cultural assets that sites such as these contain. In essence, as stated by His Highness the Aga Khan:

“Large segments of all societies – in the developing world and the developed world – are unaware of the wealth of global cultural resources and, therefore, of the need to preserve the precious value of pluralism in their own and in others’ societies.”<sup>1</sup>

The comprehension and appreciation by a larger audience of the pluralistic nature of the artistic contributions underlying the development of the Mughal period and its masterpieces of landscape and architecture are the underlying subjects of this volume.

In an earlier publication – *The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme: Strategies for Urban Regeneration*<sup>2</sup> – the Programme’s overall portfolio was presented with emphasis placed on detailed case studies delineating the relationship of restored historic landmarks and gardens to communities in their midst and the interactive nature of conservation and socio-economic regeneration. The benefits of a ‘Public-Private Partnership’ (PPP) framework basis for Area Development Projects were explained in the context of the extended time horizons often required for such sites and the importance of multi-year commitments by

both public and private partners in carrying out such projects. These factors having already been described, the present publication seeks to deepen the discussion and analysis of the Programme’s work on key sites of Mughal heritage, as opportunities to work on such privileged sites do not often occur.

In addition to the rich stock of information these sites contain, there is an increasing awareness of heritage as constituting ‘cultural capital’. One leading contributor to the field of cultural economics (an emerging specialty within economics), David Throsby, has advanced a list of values that can guide the analysis of different aspects of heritage: (a) aesthetic value; (b) spiritual value; (c) social value; (d) historical value; (e) symbolic value; and (f) authenticity value.<sup>3</sup> Comparing cultural capital with the more familiar term of natural capital allows the interested public to ponder the issues of ‘intergenerational equity’ and ‘intertemporal distributive justice’ in terms of the access to heritage and cultural capital across time and across society. Joined by other scholars, such as Amartya Sen and John Rawls, a new framework is emerging that suggests that the safeguarding of heritage is not only a custodial duty for the protection of heritage itself in a museological sense but also a pressing societal concern in the interest of increased equality of access to the benefits for culture.

These notions, even in their abstract form, solicit attention when considering significant heritage in these and other Mughal sites. Important as these shared values of cultural heritage are, Mughal heritage calls for specific attention on its own terms and in its relationship to what one can term ‘universal expressions’ of architecture.

4





The growth of literature in recent decades about the Mughal period has been considerable, even to those who consider themselves relatively well informed. The movement by the Mughals to leave their imprint on the built environment is often viewed as exemplified by Emperor Babur’s lament upon seizing Delhi – “the gardens have no walls, and most places are as flat as boards... there is little running water aside from the great rivers...” – and his consequent decision to reverse the situation, declaring: “Everywhere that was habitable it should be possible to construct waterwheels, create running water, and make planned, geometric spaces”.<sup>4</sup>

As this publication corroborates, the Mughals did not start from scratch and they borrowed frequently and widely from many cultures, adapting elements appropriated to their specific new settings. This cross-sharing of knowledge is explored in many aspects in Part II of this book. As a sign of their resilience and value, the resultant Mughal forms of expression have endured and the stimuli Mughal architecture and art have provided to the larger world of South Asia and beyond have been considerable. This is in no small part due to the fact that Mughal architecture became, over time, closely interrelated with the

wider urban artefacts of its period, hence confirming what architectural theorist Aldo Rossi once posited:

“Architecture, along with its composition, is both contingent upon and determinative of the constitution of urban artefacts, especially at those times when it is capable of synthesizing the whole civil and political scope of an epoch, when it is highly rational, comprehensive and transmissible – in other words, when it can be seen as a style. It is at these times that the possibility of transmission is implicit, a transmission that is capable of rendering a style universal.”<sup>5</sup>

He went on to observe: “All of the great eras of architecture have reposed the architecture of antiquity anew, as if it were a paradigm established forever; but each time it had been reposed differently”.<sup>6</sup>

Through these select Mughal sites, the Historic Cities Programme project teams have sought to contribute to the base of knowledge about these sites and their link to a broader treatment of architectural and landscape spaces that have been transmitted across the region and had a wide impact. This research is particularly relevant in striking a balanced view in the growing field of garden history and the risk otherwise that

[4] Alamgiri Gate, Lahore Fort, Pakistan, viewed from the exterior.

[5] Aerial view over Hazuri Bagh showing the entrance to the Badshahi Mosque (left) and Alamgiri Gate (right), Lahore, Pakistan.



6

“garden history may inadvertently contribute to a naturalization of Western culture and further its hegemony over everyday life in other cultures.”<sup>7</sup>

In many ways, the scope, the organizing principles and the aesthetics that are expressed in these Mughal sites transcend the standard definition of the core of landscape architecture<sup>8</sup> as practised today for new sites. The ‘problem’ arises in the fact that in the past (prior to at least the 1860s)<sup>9</sup> the term ‘landscape design’ was not in common use. Landscape design has, in fact, been practiced until recent times and with limited exceptions in large areas of the world for centuries and even millennia without individually identified landscape architects or designers. The presence of knowledge of design and of a strong body of craft persons and technicians who were at the origin of important historical landscaped sites has never been in doubt.

In the search for the origin of the ‘paradise garden’, Geoffrey Jellicoe has posited that the incidence of “three great forces in history upon which the gardens and indeed the landscape of

almost the whole world are based are the Chinese, the Western Asian, and the Greek.”<sup>10</sup> In terms of the Persian paradise garden, he further observes:

“What began as no more than an engineer’s conception of a functional landscape, became in due course a work of art, and was endowed for very obvious reasons with an almost sacred character. The whole garden, containing fruit trees and cypresses, was symbolic of life and earth. It is certainly the clearest example in history of the progress of landscape from one of pure utility to one within the realms of metaphysics.”<sup>11</sup>

The paradise garden no doubt benefited from the habit of highland and lowland living once political control over a large region was established; the tendency to build gardens with enclosure walls and based on subdivisions of a square was perpetuated through time not only in Western Asia and in Mughal gardens but even in Europe, in the form of cloisters.

In Part II of this publication, the contributors reflect on the sources and deeper significance of ‘Mughal heritage’: Mughal

arts, architecture, gardens, painting and poetry. Part III focuses in detail on the actual work of the Historic Cities Programme (HCP) in these specific site interventions. What emerges is the story of a partnership based on the exchange of ideas and artistic talent across the Iranian plateau, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Triggered originally by armed groups seeking territorial domination, this broad movement eventually became sedentary and was sustained for a significant period by a new combination of forms of urban administration and cultural expression. As urban settlements, Delhi, Lahore and Kabul all pre-dated the Mughals, yet they were co-opted and significantly transformed in part during the course of the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The project sites described in Part III evoke themes and techniques for translating design into reality that became finely honed over the Mughal period. These include: the refinement of the earlier paradise garden model; the fine differentiation and delineation of intra- and extramural territory and cultivated space; the refinement of models for the royal garden, working on flat or terraced land; the highly geometrical demarcation of water and landscaped bodies; the intricacy of various sources and pathways for water; the sophistication of horticultural variety and the raising of horticulture to a museological level (with native and exotic species); and also the desire for connection to the cosmos through seasons, plant varieties and sunlight.

Mughal architecture and garden design were to rapidly mature and enter a zenith of achievement roughly parallel to the corresponding architectural accomplishments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Safavid Isfahan and Western Europe (with Italian and French classical gardens). Mughal architectural and artistic achievements were themselves a part of a global, if multi-centric, process of transformation of the natural environment by creative and talented designers and sponsors who saw ambitious, large-scale projects of landscape and architecture as key signifiers of a newer and larger purpose of society and cultural expression. It took another two centuries for the profession of landscape architecture to be academically established but, as these and similar works attest, the history of landscape design had already been well and fully established.

---

#### Endnotes

- 1 From a keynote speech by His Highness the Aga Khan concluding the Prince Claus Fund's Conference on Culture and Development entitled "Enhancing Pluralism", in 2002 (in *Where Hope Takes Root: Democracy and Pluralism in an Interdependent World*, Douglas & McIntyre, Madeira Park, 2008, p.9).
- 2 Philip Jodidio (ed.), *The Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme: Strategies for Urban Regeneration*, Prestel Verlag, Munich, 2011.
- 3 David Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, pp.9, 84–85. See also his review of the contributions of Sen, Rawls, and others on pp.55 and 67. The Brundtland Report, entitled *Our Common Future*, published in 1987, was instrumental in focusing world attention on the many social dimensions of the environment and influencing the environmental movement, along with works such as *The Limits to Growth* (1972) by others. *Ibid.*, p.53.
- 4 Wheeler M. Thackston (ed. and trans.), *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, The Modern Library, New York, 2002, pp.335 and 363.
- 5 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999, p.116.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.107.
- 7 M. Conan, *Introduction to Perspectives on Garden Histories*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, 1999, p.1.
- 8 For example, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) provides the following contemporary definition for landscape architecture on their website, but one which seems nonetheless inadequate in the face of such historic sites: "The planning and designing the use, allocation and arrangement of land and water resources, through the creative application of biological, physical, mathematical, and social processes," [www.asla.org/nonmembers/licpac99.htm](http://www.asla.org/nonmembers/licpac99.htm) accessed on 29.9.2014.
- 9 The first instance of use of the term 'landscape architect' or 'landscape designer' in the USA is attributed to the time of appointment of Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux by the New York Park Commission in conjunction with the Central Park project. William A. Mann, *Landscape Architecture: An Illustrated History in Timelines, Site Plans, and Biography*, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1993, and referenced in the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) Yearbook, 1989, p.26.
- 10 Geoffrey Jellicoe, *The Studies of a Landscape Designer Over 80 Years: Volume III*, Garden Art Press, 1996, p.27.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.30.