

TOMB OF
SHAH
RUKN-I-ALAM





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Multan Pakistan, completed 1977. Client: Government of Punjab, Lahore. Architect: Muhammad Wali Ullah Khan, director, Awqaf Department, Lahore. Restoration: Awqaf Department, Lahore. Master craftsmen: Talib Hussain, Bushir Ahmed, Haji Rahim Bukhsh, Abdul Wahid, K. Allah Divaya, Kashigai Nazar Hussain, Imtiaz Ahmed.

Master Jury's Citation: For the restoration of an important fourteenth-century mausoleum of the Tughluq period in Multan and for its contribution to reviving some of the great crafts of 600 years ago and promoting similar building activity throughout the country.

This remarkable program was the brainchild of Muhammad Wali Ullah Kahn when he was architect to the Antiquities Department. It was further developed when he became director of the conservation section of the Awqaf Department of the government of Punjab in 1970. His main concern has not only been the restoration of the monument but the establishment of a training program for Pakistani craftsmen in the traditional crafts of glazed Multan tilework, wood carving, and terra-cotta.

This commendable effort of Muhammad Wali Ullah Khan has not only resulted in the rescue of a great monument from decay and thoughtless disfigurement, but has led to an awareness of the need for the conservation of other great monuments in the country.

The fourteenth-century Tomb of Shah Rukn-i-'Alam in Multan is one of the outstanding architectural treasures of Pakistan and is considered to be the culmination of the Multan-style tombs, which derived their inspiration from Central Asian models. The earliest example in Pakistan of this style is the twelfth-century Gardezi Tomb at Adam Wahan.

The way of conserving this fourteenth-century monument was to restore all the damaged parts of the building as nearly as possible to their original appearance. Those parts of the tomb only slightly damaged, however, were left untouched in order to convey a sense of age.

Historical Background. Shah Rukn-i-'Alam, for whom the tomb was built between 1320 and 1324, was an accomplished mystic by the age of twenty-five and established a *khanqah*

Pages 170–173: The restoration of the fourteenth-century Tomb of Shah-Rukn-i-'Alam was seen not only as an end in itself but also as an opportunity to establish a training program in glazed Multan tilework, wood carving, and terra-cotta for Pakistani craftsmen.

(shrine) and *madrassa* (Koranic school) in Multan during his lifetime. He also held the title of Sheik ul-Islam (Grand Mufti) bestowed on him by the Sultan of Delhi.

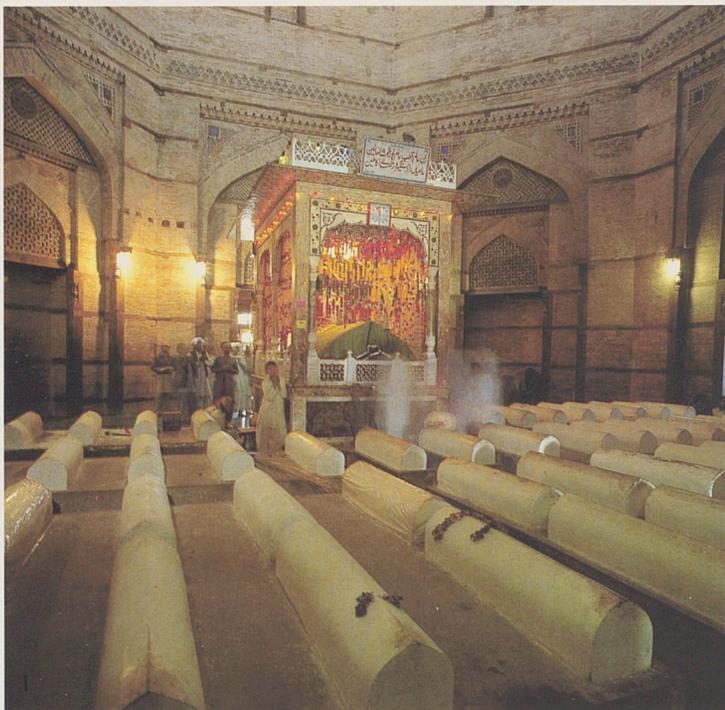
Situated at the eastern end of the fortified hill on which the Tomb of Shah Rukn-i-'Alam stands is the large domed tomb of his grandfather, Hazrat Shah Baha ul-Haq Zaqariya, also the holder of the title of Sheik ul-Islam during his lifetime. One version of the construction of the tomb has it that the monument was originally intended by the Delhi sultan, Ghiyas al-Din Tughluq, for himself. But after his death his successor, Sultan Muhammad Tughluq, rededicated it to Shah Rukn-i-'Alam, who in the meanwhile had already been buried in the tomb of his grandfather. The body of the holy man was transported to his present tomb by a sultan who came later, Firuz Shah Tughluq.

There are, however, no authentic records for this version of events and the more likely story is that the immense reverence in which the aged saint was held at the time of his death resulted in the construction of a magnificent monument solely in his honor.

Location. Because of its raised position on a fortified hill, the tomb dominates the view of the surrounding countryside in many directions. The top of the hill has been leveled at the western end to provide a platform for the structure, with high retaining walls on three sides.

Access is by means of a narrow road leading from the town square below and winding up the hill to the front gates of the tomb. Large numbers of vendors, hawkers, doctors, masseurs, and musicians set up shop daily on either side of this road, assured of a clientele of pilgrims that visit the tomb from all over the country.

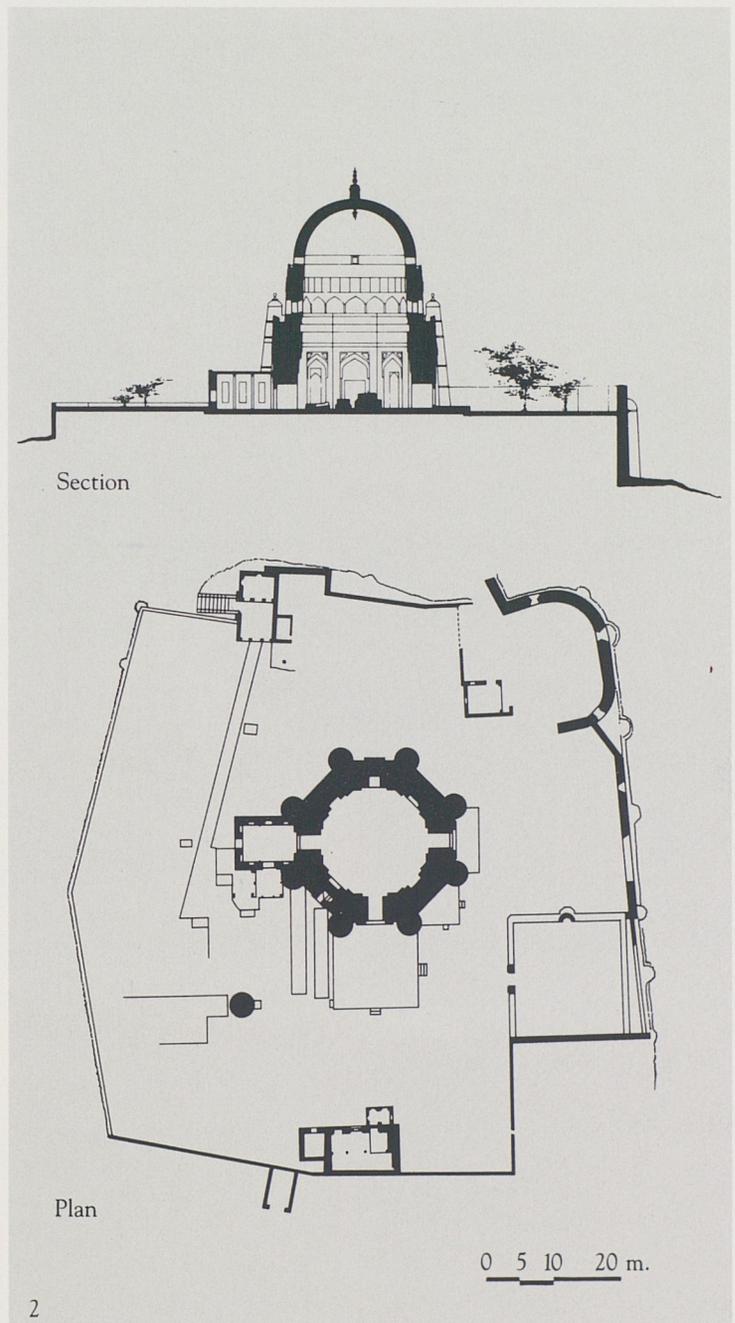
The architectural character of the surrounding buildings is typical of Multan: kiln-dried bricks are used for walls, floors, roofs, and for paving streets. The walls and roofs of buildings are usually plastered and painted in light colors. Most buildings have flat roofs, with domes and vaults usually being reserved for tombs and mosques.



The Process of Restoration. The need to restore Rukn-i-'Alam's tomb and check its severe deterioration was initiated many years ago by Muhammad Wali Ullah Khan, then an architect at the Antiquities Department of Pakistan. On becoming director of the conservation section of the Awqaf (religious endowments) Department of the Punjab, and with the help of the governor of the province, Muhammad Wali Ullah Khan's campaign was successful in raising funds to implement the project. With a budget of \$200,000 (U.S.) work commenced in late 1971 and was completed in 1977.

Before starting, the authorities had to find traditional craftsmen with some knowledge of the fourteen different masonry and wood crafts employed in building the tomb and its

1, 2, 3: Standing on a level platform at the top of a hill, the tomb commands a dominating position. It consists of a domed chamber that is octagonal in plan, its thick walls stepped back on the outside to form two platforms, of which the top platform supports the dome. The octagonal form is emphasized by eight rounded buttresses that rise above the parapets into domed pinnacles.



surrounding areas. Although passed down through the generations, these crafts had either been discontinued or had been significantly modified through time. The task, therefore, was a difficult one. An outstanding mason, a tilemaker, and a wood carver were eventually found. Together they trained a total of thirty-three craftsmen and so revived techniques that had been perfected by trial and error over a long period. In order to maintain a regular check on the quality of the new tiles to ensure that they conformed to the originals, a small laboratory was set up on site for the tilemakers.

Work started with the clearing of the platform area around the tomb. This entailed taking the controversial action of removing all but two of the tombs that had been built over the years both inside the porch and on the platform. The fate of the two surviving tombs has yet to be decided in court. At the same time the original drainage system was cleared of all loose debris.

Next attention focused on the foundations. A complete reconstruction was not considered justified since the foundations had not moved to any great extent. The dome, for example, which has a direct bearing on the state of the foundations, had suffered only from a crack a few millimeters wide. It was discovered, however, that the dome had tilted by 5 to 6 centimeters. Since it would have been too dangerous to correct this, the tilt was left but subtly disguised externally with additional plaster to create thickness.

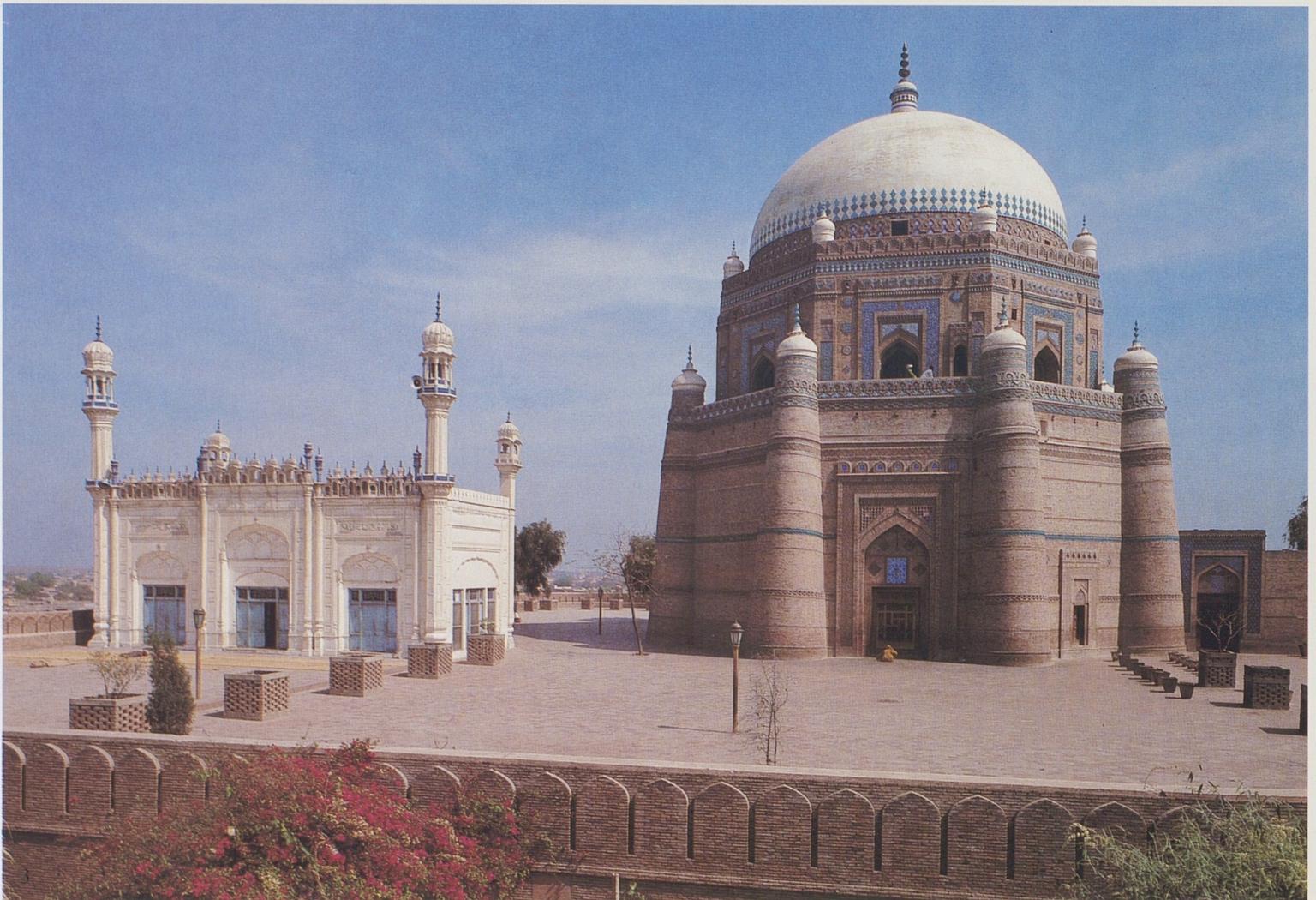
Since reconstructing the foundation was not necessary, the architects concentrated on rebuilding the lowest sections of

the brick walls on the side nearest the city (the western-facing section), wherever the walls were cracked both below and above the platform level.

Once these measures had been taken, the whole of the platform area was surfaced with a 7.5-centimeter bed of very strong concrete, on which new tiles, similar to the original in size and color, were laid. New precast-concrete grilles, matched with the large tiles in size and pierced with holes to allow water to drain into the underground drainage system, were also laid among the tiles. Floodlighting was installed on the platform, and flowering trees and shrubs, with openwork brick structures built around them for protection, were planted to enliven it. An outer vestibule—a later addition to the original entrance—was removed. The entrance to the platform, a portico that lacked authenticity, was demolished and a new one built in the Multan style.

The original enclosure wall was strengthened in two ways. First, wherever necessary, the original foundation was widened and a stepped, buttressed toe wall was provided underground. Second, two new retaining walls were built at intervals in the sloping ground below the enclosure wall. To consolidate the site further the slopes were planted with grass and shrubs, and the area around the top of the hill adjoining the platform enclosure was landscaped with grass and trees.

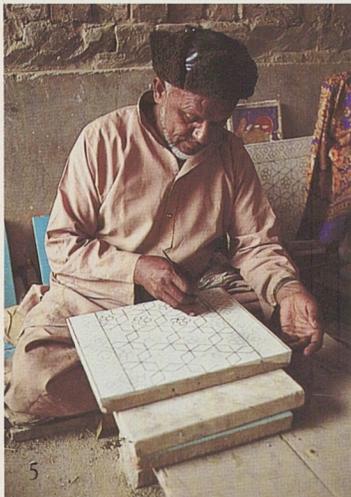
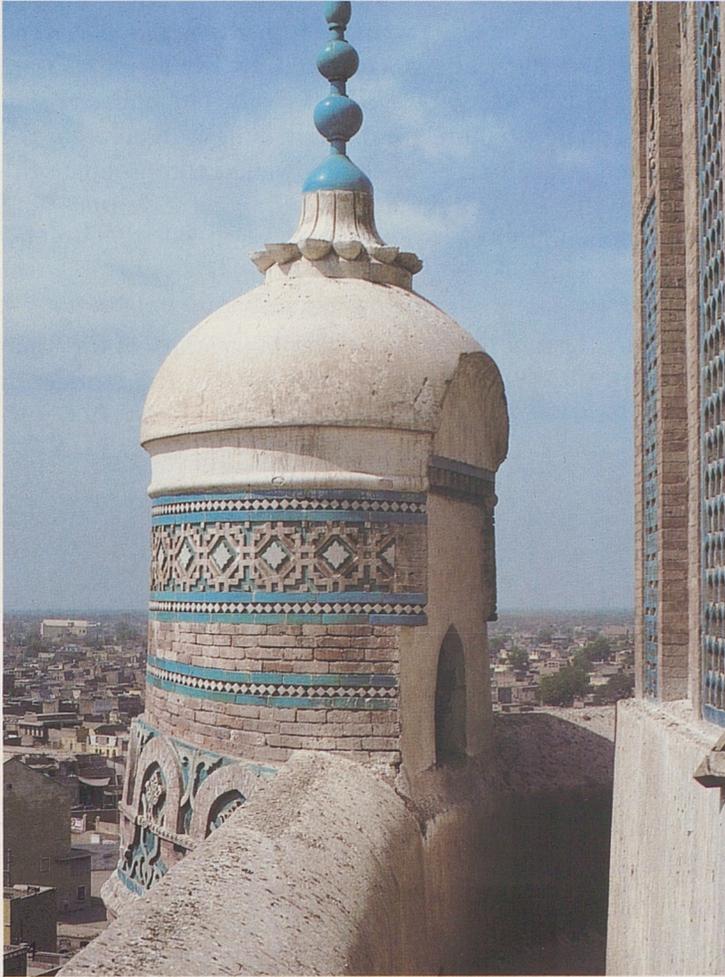
Materials. One of the most outstanding features of the tomb is its tilework. When the tomb was built in the fourteenth century, local clay was used to make the tiles. Today, however,



the same clay has a very high saline content, owing to a drop in the level of the water table over 600 years. In remaking the tiles, therefore, clay had to be brought in from much farther away and washed thoroughly with fresh water in order to remove any impurities.

The wood reinforcing the masonry walls and the carved woodwork of the doors, niches, and *mihrab* were all repaired

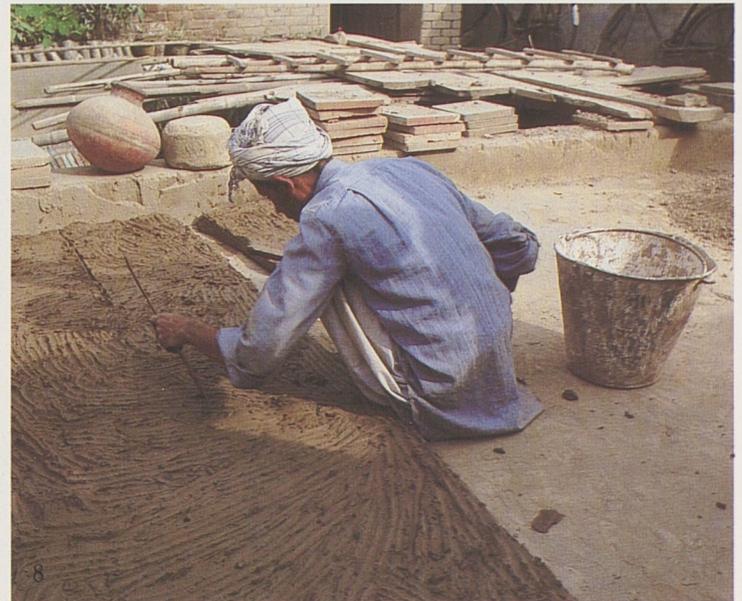
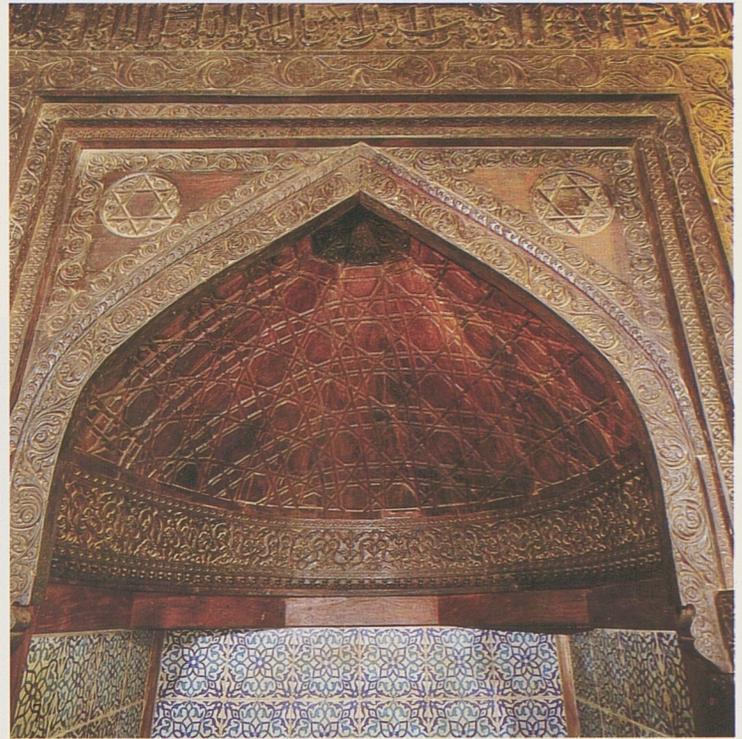
4: The domed pinnacles of the buttresses have extravagantly shaped finials. 5, 6, 7, 8: Perhaps the most spectacular of the craft revivals has been that of the tilemaker, whose work is everywhere apparent. 9: A view into the dome shows the transition from octagon to circle and the pattern of window openings that light the space. Since the restoration of the monument, the number of pilgrims coming from all parts of the country has greatly increased.



with wood carefully selected from the Forestry Department's timber supply some 80 kilometers from Multan. In each case the wood was selected with meticulous care to match the color of the old wood.

In relaying the brickwork of the enclosure wall and some parts of the tomb, cement mortar (one part cement to three parts sand) was used to within 2.5 centimeters or so of the surface. The remaining section was filled, like all the cracks in the existing mortar joints of the brickwork, with *sirkhy* mortar, a lime mortar with a catalyst of burned earth. Portland cement was used to repair and waterproof the substructure of the platform area surrounding the tomb, where it would not be visible.

Conclusion. Visually, the technical quality of the repair of the monument is remarkable. Only the keenest eye can tell the difference between the restored parts and the original. The brick and tile restoration falls little short of perfection. The colors of the tiles have been matched perfectly and, like the



original, have scarcely any glazing cracks or textures. The wood carving is equally superb, if not quite matching the artistic sense of the original, since it was executed more mechanically. This, however, is a fault only visible at close quarters. The match in color and overall appearance is otherwise perfect.

The immense pains taken over every detail in the restoration of this monument may suggest that the building has been overrestored. This might have been the case if the slightly damaged tiles, bricks, and terra-cotta work had not been retained. However, by designing a new main door to the tomb and a new outer portico to its enclosure, the architect can perhaps be said to have given these parts of the structure an excessively new appearance.

Apart from its contribution to the preservation of the architectural heritage of Multan, this restoration project has also had another beneficial effect on the people of the area. As a result of it some fourteen ancient building crafts that had fallen into disuse over the centuries have been revived. These crafts are now receiving patronage in other conservation efforts as well as in new buildings. Master craftsmen trained at Rukni-'Alam either continue to be employed by the Awqaf Department or have set up independent businesses. The master tilemaker who received an award for his tilework, subsequently left the employment of the Awqaf and is now successfully engaged in his own business, the manufacture of tiles of a traditional kind.

