ANTHONY WELCH

A MEDIEVAL CENTER OF LEARNING IN INDIA:
THE HAUZ KHAS MADRASA IN DELHI

In December 1398, the Central Asian conqueror Timur attacked and captured the city of Delhi. A seat of government since the establishment of an independent Delhi Sultanate in 1206, it had been the most important center of Islamic culture in India until the death of Sultan Firuz Shah in 1388. Like Babur a century later and his Mughal descendants, Timur was keenly interested in architecture and cities. He was generally impressed with the prosperity, size, and appearance of the great city, and, though he permitted his army to run wild and destroy several palaces and murder thousands of people, he carefully described Delhi in his "memoirs", the *Mafhuzi-t Timuri* (or *Tuzuk-i Timuri*). Sharaf al-Din Yazdî’s biography of Timur, the *Zafarnāma*, essentially repeats this account in most regards but adds a few details of its own. The following paragraphs summarize the valuable information the two provide for late-fourteenth-century Delhi.1

DELI AS TIMUR FOUND IT

Delhi then consisted of three distinct metropolitan areas unified within an enclosing wall with thirty gates. Old Delhi in the southern part of the urban area (see map) was built around the first jami' masjid (now known as the Qawwat al-Islam or Qutb Mosque), its parts constructed between 1192 and 1316. It had a round wall, as did the somewhat smaller city of Siri that lay about two kilometers to Old Delhi's northeast, which had been constructed under Sultan ʿAla al-Din Khalji (1296-1316). Jahangir was a unification of the two earlier cities by means of an enclosing wall ordered by the second Tughluq sultan, Muhammad Jauna Shah (r. 1325-51). This third city had its own jami' masjid (the so-called Begam-pur mosque), built around 1343, and an adjacent palace (known then as now as the palace of Hazar Sutun), which was famous enough that the women of Timur’s harem specifically asked if they could tour it.

Of Old Delhi’s ten gates, five opened into Jahangir and five to the outside; three of Siri’s gates led into Jahangir and four into the open country; Jahangir itself had thirteen gates, six to the northeast and seven to the southwest. Timur’s decisive defeat of the army of the last Tughluq sultan Mahmud II (r. 1393-99) took place outside the walls of Jahangir on Wednesday, the eighth day of the month of Rabī‘ al-thani, 800 (17 December 1398). The vanquished sultan fled from the city through the Hauz Rani gate in the south that adjoined a great reservoir built before the Muslim conquest. His vizier Malik Khan also fled from the south through the Baraka gate. From a western reservoir, the Hauz Khas (Hauz Khās),2 one could go through the Maydan gate to the maydan, or central square, of Jahangir, where the city’s ʿsidqah, “a lofty and extensive building,” was located; it was there that Timur sat in state to receive the obeisance of the conquered city’s Muslim notables. It was either in the Old Delhi or in the Jahangir mosque that the initial Khutba in Timur’s name was recited.

A palace called Jahannuma was located nine kilometers to the north of Delhi. The palace was built for Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-88) (the architectural fragment known as the Fir Ghaib on the Northern Ridge is all that can be identified with it now). Timur first noticed it from his encampment on the eastern bank of the Jumna river and ordered a contingent of his army to plunder the area around it. Then he crossed the river himself, inspected the area to the southeast of Jahannuma, and selected a battlefield for his impending clash with the armies of Sultan Mahmud II.

The day after the foray against Jahannuma, Timur ordered his army to cross the Jumna, gain control of all the fords, and proceed against Loni, a fort located between the Jumna and the Halim rivers eleven kilometers to the northwest of Delhi. The entire Hindu population died, either by self-immolation or in battle, and the fort was seized. At Firuzabad on the west bank of the Jumna river was the citadel of Firuz Shah, three kos to the north of Delhi. Timur proceeded there after the sack of Delhi, stopped to examine, in particular, its stonework, and apparently accorded it the same admiration he extended to other architectural works of Firuz Shah. He went to pray at the citadel’s congregational mosque and must
Map of Delhi under the Sultans. This map indicates approximate distances, probable roads, and the location of key sites and structures built under the Delhi Sultans from the late twelfth to the early sixteenth century.
have noted the unique minar, large circular cistern, and remains of palaces and fortifications that still stand there today. He obviously considered the citadel and its surrounding area to be separate from the earlier cities of Delhi to the south. There was also a settlement at Wazirabad, on the Jumna some six kos to the north of Delhi, with a dam and sluice gate next to the ca. 1375 mausoleum and mosque of Makhmd Shah 4 Alam.

But Timur was particularly interested in the great Hauz Khas reservoir and the madrasa and mausoleum that Firuz Shah had ordered built on its southeastern corner, and he accords it far more attention than any other single work of architecture. His army camped there before its final battle with the Delhi sultan. "When I reached [the city's] gates, I carefully reconnoitered its towers and walls, and then returned to the side of the Hauz Khas. This is a reservoir, which was constructed by Sultan Firuz Shah, and is faced all round with stone and stucco. Each side of that reservoir is more than a bow-shot long, and there are buildings placed around it. This tank is filled by the rains in the rainy season, and it supplies the people of the city with water throughout the year. The tomb of Sultan Firuz Shah stands on its bank."

The image that emerges from this description of fourteenth-century Delhi is of an area where a series of settlements — cities, citadels, and villages — were interspersed between open fields and large reservoirs that held water for the dry season and that provided irrigation for gardens and orchards. Many of the villages would also have depended for their water upon stepwells that, like the reservoirs, made use of a technology developed by Indian artisans long before the advent of Islam in India. Some of these agricultural areas between Delhi's settlements were vast enough to accommodate large armies and provide room for them to camp, maneuver, and fight.

THE HAUZ KHAS

Today the city that Timur's soldiers so cruelly sacked has a population of over ten million and congestion, noise, traffic, and pollution that increase with every year. Much of the rapid urban expansion necessary for this burgeoning population is taking place in south Delhi: housing developments and institutes of various sorts are being built in the area around Tughluqabad, the great fortress complex built by Sultan Ghiyath al-Din (1320–25), the first monarch of the Muslim Tughluq dynasty that ruled the Delhi Sultanate from 1320 to 1398. Other areas of south Delhi, closer to the center, are being developed with apartment blocks, new shopping areas, and roads, but this growth is not without cost, for it was in south Delhi that much of the Delhi Sultanate's major building took place. Since the early 1960s an estimated forty percent of the Sultanate structures in south Delhi, ranging in date from the late twelfth century to the early sixteenth century, have been demolished, and archaeological investigation of this rich area is rapidly becoming impossible.

Among these threatened remnants of the past is the Hauz Khas, so much admired by Timur. Like many of the other farming communities that used to ring Delhi and supply it with food, its village structure survived until the middle of the 1980s. Since then, however, it has been transformed into a fashionable upper-class district, and with this process of gentrification, it has been thoroughly absorbed into the metropolis. The feature that has made it so attractive to this upscale market is the Hauz Khas, a large tract of open land which was all that remained of the vast fourteenth-century reservoir, but which has since been transformed into a park with paved surfaces, formal plantings, and ordered walkways. In its southeast corner, adjacent to the village, is the madrasa, established by Firuz Shah, the third Tughluq sultan. Since the eighteenth century, it has been simply known as the Hauz Khas madrasa. Soon after its founding in 1352, it had become one of the foremost institutions of Muslim learning in the Sultanate and one of the largest and best equipped seminaries in the Islamic world. Known as Tarababad (the City of Joy), the village produced the food and supplied the servants for the madrasa, and as long as the seminary was rich and powerful, the village must also have been affluent and housed a large population. It was also known as a center of music and the residence of many musicians, who presumably performed for the district's wealthy residents.

The south and west sides of the village are bordered by the madrasa's wall, and through a twentieth-century gate in a wall on the northeastern side of the madrasa (fig. 1), the visitor enters a garden, which until the gentrification of the neighborhood ten years ago, was a magical place where the noise and pollution of the city disappeared in favor of verdant quiet and reflective calm. The madrasa apparently always had this ambience, and a fourteenth-century poet, Mutahhar of Kara, described it in rhapsodic terms that, with a necessary allowance for exaggeration, reflect the wealth and stature of the institution and its gardens five centuries ago:
The moment I entered this blessed building through the gate, I saw a level space as wide as the plain of the world. The courtyard was soul-animating, and its expanse was life-giving. Its dust was musk-scented, and its fragrance possessed the odour of amber. There was verdure everywhere, and hyacinths, basils, roses, and tulips were blooming and were beautifully arranged so far as the human eye could reach. It seemed as if the last year’s produce had in advance the current year’s fruits, such as pomegranates, oranges, guavas, quinces, apples, and grapes. Nightingales, so to say, were singing their melodious songs everywhere. It appeared as if they had guitars in their talons and flutes in their beaks.7

Mutahhar’s vision of an earthly paradise within the sultan’s madrasa is appropriate on many levels, for the garden also contained the tomb of the institution’s founder and patron, Firuz Shah, who seems to have intended from the outset that his pious foundation should eventually shelter his earthly remains within a walled garden sumptuously reflecting the paradise he aspired to.7 The madrasa was the center of Muslim theological learning in fourteenth-century northern India and the chief educational endowment of the Tughluq dynasty. Its construction must have been begun soon after the sultan’s accession in 1352, and while its principal buildings were completed within a few years, the complex may not have been finally finished until 1388, when the sultan, famed for his interest in architecture, was buried in his tomb.8

The complex is built on the south and east sides of the reservoir that lends its name to both site and suburb. It was a notable site. The great reservoir, a rectangle measuring 600 by 700 meters, was over four meters deep; after the summer monsoon it could have held over 800,000 cubic meters of water. It was originally excavated under the patronage of Sultan ʿAla’ al-Din Khalji (1296–1316), under whom Sultan Ghiyath al-Din had served as governor of Multan.9 In 1320 the last Khalji sultan, Muhammad Shah, was overthrown by his court favorite Khusrau Khan, a Gujarati Hindu who had converted to Islam.
Refusing to accept this coup d’état, Ghiyath al-Din and his son Muhammad marched on Delhi, encamped in the open fields adjacent to the Hauz Khas, and defeated Khusraw Khan’s army there. Neither Ghiyath al-Din nor his son Muhammad founded buildings on the site, but Firuz Shah had a keen sense for historical precedent, statements of dynastic legitimacy, and the power of monumental architecture. Although no contemporary text mentions the reason why he chose this site for his madrasa, it is hard to come to any other conclusion than that the theological college was built at the Hauz Khas not only because it was a pleasant spot but also because the sultan intended it to serve as a special thanksgiving for divine support against the usurper.12

The complex brought together two of his favorite interests, hydraulic architecture and madrasas. His waterwork projects were many, motivated in part by their capacity to further urban and agricultural expansion in north India, and in part by his fervent desire to be perceived as a benevolent and pious ruler. He took particular pride in his patronage of hydraulic projects for the benefit of his people and his treasury, and he built a number of dams and sluice gates in the Delhi area,13 supervised the excavation of canals in the Punjab in order to bring abundant water to the city of Hisar, which as a result became a flourishing community, and oversaw the establishment of hundreds of gardens in and around Delhi. He laid out gardens and paid for the excavation of irrigation canals with the same energy and commitment to public weal and royal profit evident in his notable expansion of the imperial hārkānas (workshops).

The Hauz Khas reservoir as originally laid out by ʿAla al-Din Khalji extended over about twenty-eight hectares; in the intervening years much of it had been illegally divided up into small farm lots, and wells had been dug from which water was sold.14 Firuz Shah ordered the reservoir to be reexcavated to restore its capacity, and the area around it and the madrasa rapidly became a new center in Delhi.15 His orthodox piety was evident in his support of other madrasa projects: he repaired and furnished with sandalwood doors the madrasa of Sultan Shams al-Din Altamsh at the tomb of Nasir al-Din Mahmud in Mahipalpur (1231–32); he had the madrasa of ʿAla al-Din Khalji restored as part of his renovation of the old jami mosque of Delhi; he buried his son Fath Khan at the shrine of Qadam Sharif in north Delhi (the complex around the shrine and tomb is variously known as a dargah and a madrasa);16 and he founded another madrasa in the older south Delhi urban area of Siri, where the Khaljis had established their residence, which was large and impressive enough to be noted by Diya al-Din Barani in his Ta'rīkh-i Firuz Shahī: “The atmosphere of this building can be compared with heaven. Attractive and beautiful panoramas stretched around it.”17

Both waterworks and madrasas were part of the king’s policies to counteract the natural and political disasters that had occurred during his uncle Muhammad’s rule (1325–51). Chaghatai raids had ravaged the Punjab and lands immediately to the northwest of Delhi. Convinced that they were an internal threat to his authority, Sultan Muhammad had suppressed both Sufis and their khanaqahs and dargahs. The sultan’s armies marched south and expanded his government to encompass most of the subcontinent, but their success left the Sultanate dangerously overextended and overtaxed. In trying to rule over this vast territory, Muhammad established a second capital at Deogir (Vijaynagar) in the Deccan and compelled many of Delhi’s elite to move to the south: their resentment dangerously undermined the regime. He was a brilliant, though famously ruthless, monarch whose erratic temperament and wide-ranging intellect also brought him grief: his harshness as well as his interests in poetry, music, and Hinduism offended the ulama.

His successor’s policies were designed to repair the damage, and Firuz Shah was blessed by good fortune: monsoons were regular and harvests bountiful during his reign; pestilence did not ravage the land; Chaghatai incursions were minimal; and there were few revolts against his authority. After 1335 Sultan Muhammad had lost his ephemeral empire in the Deccan, and Firuz Shah made no effort to recover it during his own reign. Though Barani and ʿAfif portray him as essentially pacific, he led eight major military campaigns in northern India, though none was notably successful. Although the Sultanate shrank in size during his reign, prosperity within its borders increased impressively.

He was anxious to regain support from the ulama and the Sufis, and his own memoirs explain the relationship between architecture and this goal: “Among the gifts which God bestowed upon me, His humble servant, was a desire to erect public buildings. So I built many mosques and madrasas and khanaqahs, that the learned and the elders, the devout and the holy, might worship God in these edifices, and aid the kind builder with their prayers.”18 His patronage of the Hauz Khas madrasa was the celebration of a dynastic holy spot and the commemoration of valued links with the Khaljis, as well as the early and very public affirmation of the sultan’s orthodox position. Still, the sultan’s mother had been a Rajput princess, and his foremost vizier, Khan-i Jahan Tilangani,
was a convert from Hinduism to Islam: many of the vizier's relatives remained Hindus and continued to find favor at court. Despite his official support of Muslims over the Sultanate's Hindu majority, in practice Firuz Shah was more even-handed toward Hindus than his predecessors had been. Likewise, much of this architectural patronage suggests a ruler who was familiar and comfortable with non-Muslim Indian architecture.

By nature Firuz Shah was a "very cautious man," according to the contemporary historian Shams al-Din ʿAffīf, who also remarked that the third Tughluq sultan had three great interests: governance, hunting, and building. He was fortunate in presiding over a period of peace and prosperity that gave him the time and resources to indulge in his passion for architecture. "Sultan Firuz," continues ʿAffīf, "surpassed all his predecessors on the throne of Delhi in the erection of buildings; indeed, no monarch of any country exceeded him. He built cities, forts, palaces, bunds, mosques, and tombs in great numbers." His investment in architecture implies that his government included a lavishly funded ministry for building, and ʿAffīf gives ample credit to its sound administrative structure. "The financial officer examined the plan of every proposed building and made provision so that the work should not be stopped for want of funds. The necessary money was issued from the royal treasury to the managers of the building, and then the work was begun. Thus it was that so many buildings of different kinds were erected in the reign of Firuz Shah." He also refers to specific individuals who were in charge of the building projects. "Malik Ghazi Shahna was the chief architect and was very efficient; he held the gold staff [of office]. ʿAbd al-Haq, otherwise Jahir Sundhar [was deputy, and] held the golden axe. A clever and qualified superintendent was appointed over every class of artisans." ʿAffīf mentions no others, and it is reasonable to suppose that these two individuals shared responsibility for the construction of the sultan's great madrasa. The sultan's eclectic architectural taste and the fact that ʿAbd al-Haq was evidently a convert from Hinduism may possibly explain some of the more striking aspects of its design.

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Fig. 2. Hauz Khas Madrasa. Seen from the northwest. The tomb of Firuz Shah is near the center. The south side of the madrasa extends to the right and the east side to the left with the mosque on the far left. (Photo: Jennifer Lott)
SITE, STRUCTURES, AND MADRASAS

The madrasa was built on the south and east sides of the reservoir, and after a good monsoon, the water lapped at its foundations and reflected the buildings above it (fig. 2). No part of the building records the beginning or completion of construction, but, as already noted, the project must have been started almost immediately after Firuz Shah came to power and completed quickly, since the court historian Diya al-Din Barani refers to it in refulgent terms in his Ta’rikh-i Firuz Shahi, which ends with the author’s death in 1357. He praises the vistas around the madrasa and compares its ambience with that of heaven. “Its magnificence, architectural proportions, and pleasant air make it so unique among the great buildings of the world that it would be justifiable if it claimed superiority over the Khwānaq built by Shāh or the palace of Kasr.”

The south side of the complex measures 76 meters in length and the east side 138 meters; the tomb of the founder stands in the southeast at the intersection of the two sides (fig. 3). Though Timur says that there were structures on all four sides of the Hauz, the only evidence now of other buildings is a solitary and ruined pavilion, originally a cubic domed structure measuring twelve meters on a side with massive walls and four doorways, sitting on a low rise to the northwest, diagonally across the Hauz from the tomb of Firuz Shah (fig. 4). It would have stood in the middle of the Hauz, and it appears to have served the same purpose as a similar pavilion, described by Ibn Battuta as being in the middle of the Hauz-i Shamsi and only accessible by boat, where people could relax in a shaded area open on all four sides to breezes off the reservoir. If the Hauz Khas was enclosed on all four sides, some of the buildings on the north and west were probably domed aristocratic mansions and garden pavilions, for the refurbishing of the Hauz and the construction of the madrasa had attracted some of Delhi’s elite to build residences in the immediate vicinity. Others may have been the humbler homes of the villagers who farmed the fields fed by the Hauz and whose land may have been part of the madrasa’s waqf. The Hauz Khas was not only the chief center of theological learning and teaching in fourteenth-century Delhi but also a densely populated area important for food production: the madrasa was supported by royal endowment, which together with the adjoining water-rich land created a prosperous economic center. As with other urban planning initiatives, like his foundation of the city of Hissar, the sultan was keenly aware of the power of capital-intensive water management to transform a landscape and its economic capacity.

The modern entrance into the complex is from the east, the present village side. But the original entrance was in the south: presumably preceded by a now vanished forecourt were nearly identical gatehouses, the one furthest west giving access through its north doorway to an enclosed rectangular courtyard, while its east doorway pointed toward the second gatehouse, some 26.6 meters distant (fig. 5). A visitor walked through its western entrance, passed under a dome 5.3 meters in diameter, and came through the eastern doorway into a small rectangular court 15.7 meters in length and 6.5 meters in width. The exit from the walled court was from the southeast corner into the walled garden that bounded the madrasa on its south and east sides, and the visitor, emerging from gateways and a narrow courtyard into the ample, well-planted, and aromatic garden, might have been just as astonished as Mutahhar. Then, too, walls, halls, domes, and garden were seen as part of the same creation. The buildings were constructed of hewn gray stone, faced with smooth durable gach (a tough stucco made from a mixture of mica and plaster), and their roofs and vaults were supported by massive piers and sturdy stone pillars. Though now blackened by the accumulated grime and pollution of many years, the madrasa’s surfaces were originally white with plaster and painted in colors...
that included vermilion, while the domes glistened with
gold that must have been stunningly reflected in the quiet
waters of the Hauz. In their brightness of color, the
buildings rivaled the garden’s hues.

Adjoining the entrance complex’s reservoir side on
the south and facing north was a complex two-storied
building (fig. 6). In the southwest was a two-storied
domed structure whose central dome measured 6.15
meters in diameter. Only the dome of the founder’s
tomb, at the meeting point of the south and east sides,
was larger and higher. The southwestern dome was
flanked by two identical halls, now vanished except for
the bases of their pillars: in each hall a row of four dou-
ble pillars faced the water on the lower story; in the in-
side was a row of four single pillars. They presumably
supported fifteen bays of arches and vaults. The upper
story also consisted of fifteen bays whose vaults, if they
followed the pattern elsewhere in the complex, rested
on trabeate supports: this structural difference in lev-
els — arcuate vaulting on the lower story and trabeate
supports on the upper — provided strength in the lower
story to bear the weight of the upper story and also pre-
sented the juxtaposition of arch and post-and-lintel con-
struction that is one of the characteristics of Tughluq
architecture. In the center of the south side was a some-
what smaller dome, and joined to its eastern side was also
a fifteen-bayed hall (fig. 7) that led to the dome adjacent
to the west side of the founder’s tomb. Approaching over
the lake, a fourteenth-century visitor would have seen an
impressive façade of domed towers and open two-storied
pillared halls or tibaris, the semblance of a palatial resi-
dence far larger than those that once apparently framed
the north and west sides. Each of the domed towers had
a large, projecting window, supported on four elaborate
muqarnas-like brackets and protected from the mon-
soon rains by a projecting stone chajja or eave. While
arches, domed chambers, and vaulted halls are basic
components of Islamic architecture to India’s west, tiba-
ris, chajjas, projecting windows, and brackets were all
derived from the traditions of Indian architecture; no
earlier Islamic building in northern India makes use of
this combination of forms. Similarly, the Golden Minar
(the so-called Lat Pyramid) in Firuzabad, built on Firuz
Shah’s orders at about the same time, reveals a fascina-
tion with pre-Islamic India and a capacity to combine its
elements with established Islamic forms in very innova-
Fig. 5. Hauz Khas Madrasa. Ground plan.
Fig. 6. Hauz Khas Madrasa. South side seen from the east.

Fig. 7. Hauz Khas Madrasa. Domed towers and hall on south side adjacent to the tomb.
tive ways. Both buildings in many respects prefigure the architectural achievements of the Mughal emperor Akbar two centuries later in Fatehpur Sikri. Conscious of historical associations and the power of architecture to make statements of legitimacy, Firuz Shah commissioned a madrasa that in its size, lavishness, and elaborate variety of forms was a veritable “palace of the faith” which demonstrated through style, as much as through endowment, that this madrasa was a royal foundation. Supported by the sultan’s waqf, it was intended to promote orthodox learning under royal aegis and with its prayers support the king’s claim on paradise.

It is a truism that Islamic architectural elements were “interchangeable,” that, for instance, a domed chamber could function as a gatehouse, a tomb, a shrine, and a reception hall. But such interchangeability had not been common in Hindu and Jain architecture: a palace was not a temple. While the sultans of Delhi had undoubtedly quickly learned to live in Rajput-style palaces, which were far more suitable to northern India’s climate than the structures they had known in Central Asia, their use of indigenous architecture here should be understood in a different manner: the great madrasa was a royal endowment, a veritable palace of the faith, where teaching and scholarship would function in a palatial building suitable for royal learning. It was an architectural compliment to the ulama whose support the sultan needed, as it was also an appropriate placement of palatial form next to the king’s last resting place. Mutahhar’s description, replete with its metaphors of paradise, was apt; to have placed his tomb at the center expressed the sultan’s aspiration to move from an earthly palace to a palace in paradise.

Firuz Shah’s madrasa at the Hauz Khas should be briefly put in a larger context: it was not the first madrasa in the Delhi Sultanate, and it was built in a wider context of madrasa construction in the contemporary Islamic world. In his own memoirs, the Futuhat-r Firuz Shah, the sultan, proud of his efforts to preserve the buildings of his predecessors, cited his reconstruction of the madrasa of Sultan Altamsh, a reference to the tomb and madrasa of Altamsh’s son Nasir al-Din Mahmud at Mahipalpur (Malikpur). Part of a complex of buildings that included a pair of smaller tombs of two other sons of Sultan Altamsh, as well as a mosque and khanaqah, the tomb was housed in a square fort, twenty-seven meters on a side, with turrets at each corner. A broad and steep flight of stairs on the east led to the raised main story in the center of which was a raised octagonal platform; on its south side a stairway led down into a crypt. After reconstruction the crypt was probably sheltered by a domed chhatri resting on eight columns, similar to the arrangement in two smaller early tombs at the side also restored by Firuz Shah. Firuz Shah spared no expense in this refurbishment: the outside of the crypt was lined with marble, and a portico of marble and sandstone pillars was placed in front of the qibla. There would have been ample room in it to house a modest madrasa; the village that surrounded it included a mosque that would have accommodated several thousand worshipers, and the community presumably served not only the madrasa but also the khanaqah.

Firuz Shah also describes his renovations at the tomb of Sultan Alauddin Khalji: “I repaired this, and furnished it with sandalwood doors. I repaired the wall of the tank (abdakhana) and the west wall of the mosque, which is within the madrasa.” Alauddin Khalji had undertaken a vast embellishment of the jamii mosque of Old Delhi, and the largest of three chambers on the south side of the ruined madrasa behind the qibla of the old jamii mosque has traditionally been said to be the remains of his tomb. This block of tombs on the south side faces a large oblong courtyard, measuring 49 by 47 meters on its two long sides and 37 meters on its short sides, entered through a three-domed gatehouse on the north and a single-domed gate on the east. Nine chambers, two of them domed, mark the qibla and likely were teaching rooms. Like the 1238 Mustansiriyya in Baghdad, it was built around an irregular oblong, and a domed sanctuary defined its courtyard façade.

Both of these early buildings are funerary madrasas, a type that was prevalent in Egypt under the Ayyubids and the Mamluks. Neither of them appears to have had residential quarters, either for faculty or students. It is likely that they served a single madhhab, the Hanafi. Each of the three madrasas had an impressive portal, though the entrance into Firuz Shah’s madrasa is difficult to envisage now. All three madrasas have the tombs of founders in such prominent positions that it seems as if the madrasa is there to justify it. The four-iwan plan, used with such brilliance in mosques and madrasas in Islam to the west, was known in the Sultanate: the madrasa of Alauddin Khalji suggests it, and the ca. 1343 jamii mosque of Sultan Muhammad in Jahanpanah uses it with great clarity and drama. But the Hauz Khas madrasa ignores this precedent and uses a novel structure: the complex’s two sides project along the sahn-like Hauz Khas rather than enclose it, and there are no iwans. It is the antithesis of walled and enclosed Iranian architecture, for everything about it is open: windows, halls with vistas over garden and over reservoir, domes resting on pillars, and stairs
Fig. 8. Tomb of Firuz Shah. Juncture of south and east sides, seen from the north. (Photo: Jennifer Lort)

Fig. 9. Tomb of Firuz Shah. South side, entrance, and verandah.
leading out and down to water bespeak a different concept of light and space. As in the Golden Minar adjoining the mosque at Firuz Shah’s citadel, Firuz Shah’s builders made novel use of Indian forms for Islamic purposes. The massive scale of the Hauz Khas madrasa, as well as the brilliance of its colors and its siting adjacent to a great body of water, can be interpreted as an expression of royal power promoting orthodoxy and proclaiming Islam’s mission to the non-believers who made up the great majority of the sultan’s subjects.

THE TOMB OF FIRUZ SHAH

The founder’s tomb was the pivot of the entire architectural complex (figs 8 and 9). Like the mausolea of previous sultans such as Altamsh and Ghiyath al-Din, it was a domed square, faced, however, not with stone, but with durable stucco (qash) that was originally covered with paint. Its exterior measured 14.8 meters on a side and 14.8 meters high, so that to the visitor coming in from the south it appeared as a massive cube. The walls, open on all four sides, were so massive and thick that the interior space measured only 8.8 meters on a side. The east side looked out over the gardens to the east and south, and from the north wall of the tomb led a domed and pillared hall, its west side looking over the reservoir and its east side raised slightly above the level of the garden. The roofline along the madrasa’s garden sides was originally embellished with ornamental battlements, but they are absent from the madrasa’s water side. This military
decoration surrounds all four sides of the founder's tomb and all eight sides of the drum of the dome, as if to underscore his kingship. Firuz Shah's mausoleum is the first securely dated example of the enclosed royal garden tomb that was to occupy such a crucial role in later Sultanate and Mughal architecture, and it, as much as the madrasa, was the justification for the splendid garden that Mutahhar describes.56

The south entrance was preceded by a verandah. A low enclosing wall, constructed of stone slabs, supported a railing of three horizontals and eight free-standing verticals, each topped by a fourteen-sided polyhedron (fig. 10). Stone railings were much appreciated by Firuz Shah who used them at the Golden Minar (Lat Pyramid) in his citadel at Delhi57 and around his circular well at the same site.58 Similar railings could be seen along the roofline of the garden sides on the south and the east, a protective measure that can also be found at the Mahipalpur Mahal, or hunting pavilion, built for Firuz Shah. There is no evidence of them on the reservoir side: a railing was worth the expense if it prevented people from falling on the ground but not if it kept them from falling into the water. While their use was long established in the traditions of Indian art, railings of this type had no counterparts in Islamic architecture to the west; and though there is some evidence that similar railings graced the roofline of the earlier Arai Darwaza (ca. 1311–16) at the Quwwat al-Islam mosque, it was in buildings done for Firuz Shah that they were most widely and inventively employed: they are yet another instance of the adoption and adaptation of older Indian architectural elements in the sultan’s buildings.

The structure of Firuz Shah’s mausoleum suggests that tomb rituals became more elaborate during his reign. The tomb functioned not only as the founder’s final resting place and as a memorial to his life and reign, but also as a formal entrance to his madrasa and as the link connecting its east and south sides. A student or faculty member coming along the madrasa’s east side from the north would pass through an arcuate pillared hall of fifteen bays and enter a domed chamber, a kind of architectural prelude to the tomb, similar to it in form and in painted stucco facing, two-thirds its height and half its width. From the south side of the domed chamber the student would then pass through a narrow chamber; its east side a doorway to the outside and its west side a door leading to stairs descending to the water below. On the south side of this chamber was a doorway leading into an L-shaped passage that opened into the north wall of the tomb itself where the cenotaph of Firuz Shah lay under the center of the dome (fig. 11). On the west side of the tomb was exactly the same architectural configuration, except that it opened through the tomb’s mihrab, so that the madrasa’s inhabitants at least partially circumambulated the founder’s cenotaph on their way to class! To design a building that used the mihrab as a passageway was unparalleled in Sultanate architecture in India, and the only other instance is in this madrasa’s own mosque. Architecturally there was no other choice, if the tomb was to be an integral and pivotal part of the complex, but this plan meant that the mihrab served symbolically and explicitly as a door from the tomb into the world of learning and teaching beyond it. It is a daring innovation, typical of the eclectic and adventurous nature of architecture under the sultan’s patronage.

The tomb’s interior walls supported squinches and muqarnas under an octagonal drum (fig. 12). Painted on the surface of the dome was a large eight-pointed star with a smaller eight-pointed star inside it that enclosed a circular medallion (fig. 13). Circular and top-shaped medallions filled the facets of the dome’s design. The interior decoration supported a rich epigraphic program that should be examined in detail. Neither the sultan’s name nor the year when they were done forms part of these inscriptions.

Each of the stone interior arches is inscribed with the bismillah, followed by a selection from the Qur’an. Since the same arch inscriptions can be found on earlier extant Delhi Sultanate buildings, they apparently do not offer specific connections to the deceased sultan but were merely a standard set of epigraphs used on buildings of all sorts.

Over the southern arch, the entrance from the exterior world, are two āyāt (Sura al-‘Imran, 3: 96–97) referring to the primacy of Mecca.59

Lo! The first Sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples:

Wherein are plain memorials (of Allah’s guidance); the place where Abraham stood up to pray; and whosoever entereth it is safe. And pilgrimage to the House is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither.

Earlier uses of these āyāt are on the 1192 qibla screen of the Quwwat al-Islam mosque, on the 1231–32 mosque at the tomb of Nasir al-Din Mahmud, and on the Alai Darwaza, the 1311–15 gateway leading into the Quwwat al-Islam mosque.
Fig. 11. Tomb of Firuz Shah. Cenotaph and interior.

Fig. 12. Tomb of Firuz Shah. Squinches and drum of dome, northwest corner.

Fig. 13. Tomb of Firuz Shah. Interior of dome.
On the southeast arch is recorded sura 59: 21–24, a statement of the omnipotence of Allah and of the Qurʾān’s special power:

If we had caused this Qurʾān to descend upon a mountain, thou (O Muhammad) verily hadst seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of Allah. Such similitudes coin We for mankind that haply they may reflect.

He is Allah, than whom there is no other God, the Knower of the Invisible and the Visible. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful.

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, the Superb. Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him).

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 glorifieth Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

This statement of power refers specifically to the asmaʾ al-husna, the most beautiful divine names, often used on Sultanate buildings; the reference here is particularly apt, since the names are inscribed above the arch on the drum of the dome.

The east and northeast arches present Ḥāfāẓ from Sura al-Fath 48: 11–15, which refer to divine power and to the hellfire awaiting disbelievers. The north and northwest arches contain the Throne Verse or Ayat al-Kursi (2: 255), the most widely inscribed statement of divine power and promise of salvation. It is particularly common in tombs, not only on walls and domes but also on cenotaphs: it adorns the cenotaph of the ca. 1235 tomb of Sultan Altamsh at the Quwwat al-Islam complex. The west and southwest walls warn disbelievers and wrongdoers and refer again to the message of divine omnipotence (Sura al-ʾImrān 3: 25–26). On the drum of the dome the asmaʾ al-husna precede a repetition of sura 59: 22–23. This body of stone inscriptions present well-established, perhaps even formulaic, selections from the Qurʾān.

The remaining inscriptions are more problematic. They are on painted plaster in the dome. The central medallion in the apex of the dome presents the Ayat al-Kursi (sura 2: 255–57). Large circular and top-shaped medallions are painted on the rest of the dome’s surface, and though most are damaged by years of neglect, some still bear legible inscriptions that are significantly different from those on the arches. Four of the top-shaped medallions contain hadith, rather than Qurʾānic verses:

1) He who missed a prayer wilfully became an infidel.
2) The world is a prison to the believer and paradise to the unbeliever.
3) The world is a cursed place and Allah is Everliving,
4) Prayer is the ascent to heaven for a believer.

None of these hadith had appeared before in Sultanate architecture. Since they present a theme of salvation through prayer, they would seem to be particularly appropriate to a sultan for whom public piety and orthodoxy were so important.

Three other top-shaped medallions carry Qurʾānic texts: sura 1: 1–7 is the opening of the Qurʾān and a fundamental statement of divine promise and guidance; sura 6: 1 praises Allah as the Creator and warns polytheists of their error; and sura 97: 1–5, used once before on the tomb of Altamsh, is one of the most potent expressions of the transforming effects of revelation:

Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Power!
Ah, what will convey unto thee what the Night of Power is!
The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.
The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with all decrees.
(That night is) peace until the rising of the dawn.

Only five of the large circular medallions are legible, and they emphasize themes of righteous belief versus disbelief (109: 1–6), prosperity as a gift of God (108: 1–3), God as a refuge from slander and whispered evil (114: 1–5), the punishment awaiting disbelievers (3: 25), and God’s power as the giver and taker of life and the supporter of the righteous against disbelievers (3: 143–47). Four of these selections occur on earlier Sultanate buildings, but one (109: 1–6) appears here for the first time:

Say: O disbelievers!
I worship not that which ye worship:
Nor worship ye that which I worship.
And I shall not worship that which ye worship.
Nor will ye worship that which I worship.
Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.

Six of the small circular medallions around the central medallion can be read, and they suggest that the whole cycle was intended to be a reference to the prophetic tradition:

1) There is no god but God; Ibrahim is the friend of God.
2) There is no god but God; ʿIsa is the spirit of God.
3) There is no god but God; Musa is the Speaker to God.
4) There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God.
5) And God was predominant in his career, but most of mankind knew not. [Sūrah Yūnus 12: 21]
6) Kingdom is for God. And may God confer blessings on Muhammad, the best of His creation and all his family. By Thy mercy, O most Merciful of the merciful.
With the exception of the fourth medallion, all of these inscriptions appear here for the first time on buildings in Delhi; they represent one of the most inventive and interesting epigraphic programs in Islamic architecture. There is also no earlier instance in Delhi of a dome interior decorated with star-shaped designs and medallions of this sort, but there are later ones, notably in the 1434–35 tomb of Muhammad Shah Sayyid and the 1501 Bagh-i ʿAlam-ka Gunbad, built only six years before Sultan Sikandar Lodi’s repairs to Firuz Shah’s tomb. All the inscriptions in stone, presumably part of the tomb’s fourteenth-century epigraphic program, have appropriate precedents in Sultanate buildings in Delhi: if they are not exactly rote, they are at least expected epigraphs. This is not the case, however, with the painted inscriptions: several of them have no early uses but are found instead on structures of the Lodi period. Thus both design and epigraphy strongly suggest that the painted decoration should be credited to Sikandar Lodi rather than to Firuz Shah. They were an appropriate addition to the tomb at the time of the early-sixteenth-century repairs: hovering over the cenotaph of the departed sultan, this list of prophets brings blessing and the promise of salvation into the central point of the madrasa where, in Firuz Shah’s words, “the learned and the elders, the devout and the holy, might aid the kind builder with their prayers.”

THE EAST SIDE

The tomb can be said to serve as a pivot with the two identical passages to its north and west as its arms: adjoining domes two-thirds the size of the tomb’s dome, fifteen-domed halls of identical proportions, and two further domes complete an L whose arms mirror each other. Likewise, the stairs descending to the water are split in half by a diagonal that points directly at the tomb. It is a marvelous one-sided symmetry, framing and completed by the other half, its own reflection in the watery courtyard.

The remarkable stairs lead down from the tomb area into the water. Like the stairs of the numerous deep and impressive reservoirs and baolis (stepwells) in northern and western India, they descend below ground level and for much of the year would have been covered with water.40 Their imposing size and complex design strongly suggest that their function was as much ceremonial as practical, and they must have been intended for the royal arrival of the sultan and his entourage, coming either from the pavilion to the northwest or from the royal hunting pavilions, the Malcha and Kushk mahals, a distance of some seven kilometers to the north on the Delhi Ridge. Their designer could hardly have failed to notice indigenous Indian expertise in the construction of impressive stairways, whether at reservoirs or baolis or riverside ghats, and the noble stairs here not only emulate pre-Islamic Indian models but also suggest the influence of Hindu ablution and purification practice.

The careful symmetry of the tomb, its stairs, and the adjoining vaulted halls also implies a certain degree of self-containment that separates this core from the rest of the south and east sides and suggests a division of the madrasa into five elements: the southwest side, the tomb and its two arms, the garden with its six pavilion tombs, the northern and triple-domed pavilion, and the mosque at the northern end of the east side.

The garden. The garden’s ground is on the same level as the madrasa’s second story: anyone moving down the madrasa’s east side would have had garden on one side and reservoir on the other, a felicitous arrangement that supports the metaphors in Mutahhar’s poem. Baolis like the one at the dargah of Nizam al-Din Awlia’ (fig. 14), where two-storied buildings bounded the stored water, were a frequent feature of Delhi’s landscape: the Hauz Khas makes use of the same concept but on a grander scale.

In the southeast corner of the garden is a low platform with several unidentified grave sites. To its north are six more monumental graves (fig. 15). Their inscriptions cite neither the names of the deceased nor when they died. Five of the tombs are still domed: one has a square base, another is hexagonal, and three are octagonal. A sixth, small rectangular grave site originally supported pillars and a dome.41 That they were graves of departed faculty members is a reasonable assumption based on the fact that five of the six grave sites bear the final āyāt from Surah al-Hashr (59: 21–24), one of the most powerful statements in the Qur’ān of divine creative power. It also appears on the southeast arch of the tomb of Firuz Shah. The sixth site supported two āyāt from Surah al-ʿImrān (3: 17–18) that refer to those who will attain salvation.42 If, indeed, these garden cupolas or chhatris protected and marked the tombs of departed teachers, the deceased faculty continued after their deaths to shelter their students and disciples in tombs that doubled as open-air teaching or study areas. In repose awaiting the Last Day, these honored scholars are bound to the tomb of the madrasa’s founder whose waqf paid their salaries, and
the garden in which they and the sultan rest is an intimation of paradise.

The northern courtyard and triple-domed pavilion. Mutahhar was deeply impressed by the triple-domed pavilion hall (fig. 16) in a rectangular courtyard to the north of the garden and apparently identifies it as the area where instruction principally took place:

The courtyard had a raised [building] ten or eleven feet high and forty feet in length and breadth with a large cupola roof over it. The rooms and balconies of the building were golden decorated and walls and gates possessed a mirror-like shine. The doors were of sandal wood. The rooms were well furnished with costly carpets from Shiraz, Yemen, and Damascus. The learned scholars were seated like angels all around. They wore Syrian jubbas and Egyptian turbans. The students were engaged in discussions and debates, their voices echoing the heavens. After the lectures and discussion were over, the Khawan-i Salar (superintendent of meals) served very sumptuous meals. After the meals the students and teachers performed prayers wishing well to the Sultan and his sons.

Running parallel to the courtyard on its western, reservoir side was a long cross-vaulted hall, now ruined, that presented a characteristic Tughluq exterior façade of double pillars, square in section, massive and blocky in appearance, and topped with equally sturdy capitals. Straightforward strength, not elegance, was their motivating aesthetic. The central pavilion’s large dome on the west side measures 5.5 meters in diameter, and the two smaller domes flanking it are 4.5 meters across. Stone beams resting on large single pillars support a flat roof and divide this broad connecting hall into fifteen rectangular units. The whole structure rests on a platform raised 80 centimeters above the ground; stone steps give access on all open sides; and stone coves project out from the entablature. Suggestive of later Sul-
tanate buildings, this open and inviting structure has no precedent and is further evidence of the innovative talent at work in the madrasa’s design.

Curriculum and student life. A lecturer (mudarris) could be assisted by a mu’tid, a tutor or repeater of lectures. No-where is the precise course of study outlined that would have been pursued here and in the other parts of the madrasa. But Barani refers to predictable subjects, such as the study of tafsir, hadith, qirat, ikhtlaq, kalam, and fiqh, as well as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, calligraphy, grammar, and rhetoric. The first director of the madrasa was one Jalal al-Din Rumi, “who knew fourteen sciences, could recite the Qur’an according to the seven known methods of recitation and had complete mastery over the five standard collections of the Traditions of the Prophet. Besides, he had the unique distinction of having expert knowledge of all the four schools of Muslim law.” Mutahhar attended his lectures, praised the spirit of discussion and debate at the madrasa, and noted the welcoming ambiance in which visitors were encouraged to attend lectures and discussions. He also corroborates that the madrasa was lavishly supported by royal endowment that paid for the expenses of faculty and students and provided not only lodging but also superb meals that were a far cry from twentieth-century cafeteria or faculty-club fare: “Pheasants, partridges, herons, fish, roasted fowl and bulky kids, fried loaves, sweets of different kinds, and other things, were heaped everywhere in large quantities.” There seems to have been no tension between the ulama and Sufis, and Barani’s appraisal of the new madrasa deserves to be quoted at length:

Because this madrasa is a monument of good works and public benefaction, prayers, obligatory and supererogatory, are constantly being offered within its precincts. The five compulsory prayers are offered in congregation according to sunna. The sufi offers the chaht, taslim, fey al-zawal, awah, and tahajjud prayers, praise God night and day, and
send benediction on and sing the praises of the sultan constantly. People who know the Qur'an by heart recite the full text every day; travellers raise their voices to the heavens when they cry “Allahu Akbar”. Through the endowments of Sultan Firuz Shah, these people get stipends, bounties (in zam) and benefits in cash, and every day tables covered with delicious dishes are spread before the people. Whosoever from amongst the pious men, scholars, men who have learnt the Qur'an by heart, members of the congregation, devotees and persons engaged in religious practices, and whosoever from amongst the worshippers of God chooses to go to or enter the madrasa of Firuz Shah, attains comfort and ease and with an easy mind devotes himself day and night to the task of praying for the long life of the king of Islam.47

The mosque. At the north end of the complex is the madrasa’s mosque; its qibla projects some nine and a half meters out into the reservoir so that the mosque forms a dramatic terminus to the site’s east side (fig. 17). The principal entry into the mosque was through a domed gateway to the north of the three-domed pavilion that led into the mosque’s outer courtyard. To the east of the gate are three identical rooms, each measuring 5.3 meters in length and slightly raised above the floor of the yard. The prayer wall and two projecting arcades with double pillars rest on a raised inner area (fig. 18), and double pillars and massive piers support the nine cross-vaulted bays of the qibla (fig. 19). Mosques built during the reign of Firuz Shah show great diversity of form: this simple prayer hall with projecting arcades on the sides is one of the more common types.48 Most remarkably, the four secondary mihrabs project out over the hauz through large grilled windows resting on brackets, while the central mihrab is entirely open and stands out from the qibla wall as a domed chhatri resting on a platform, from both sides of which a flight of stairs descends along the back of the qibla wall to the water below (fig. 20). Additional stairways on the north and south faces also lead down to the reservoir and connect with the west stairway. As in the founder’s tomb, the mihrab takes on
the role of a door, but here it leads not to the rest of the complex but to the water. Practical considerations do not explain this unique arrangement: the stairs on the north and south faces would have sufficed to bring bathers or those who had performed ablutions up from the havd at prayer time and would have obviated the approach through the mihrab. Like the grand stairway linking the tomb with the water of the havd, the elaborate and symmetric stairway at the mosque’s qibla has to be understood in a symbolic context: each served as a ceremonial entrance or exit for the ruler and those closest to him.

Several hadith affirm that the gift of water is a pious act and a legal requirement for Muslims, and Firuz Shah, public with his piety and linking water so conspicuously to his tomb, was clearly guided by such traditions:

No one can refuse surplus water without sinning against God and against human beings.

Anyone who gives water to a living creature will be rewarded.10

The sultan’s refurbishing of the huge Hauz Khas and his commitment to the madrasa on its banks supplied the community with water for its daily needs, supported the Hanafi madhab and the madrasa’s instructional mission, and created architecture in a striking and effective setting, where both tomb and mosque are linked to water by flights of stairs that demonstrate a wider sacred context bringing together aspects of Hinduism and Islam.

The Tughluq sultans of northern India were deeply conscious of the practical and the sacred quality of water. At the shrine of Qadam Sharif in northern Delhi a havd (dam) and havd provided water for the community who served the shrine and for the gardens that fed them.
When Firuz Shah dedicated this baad, as well as one at his Malcha Mahal hunting pavilion, he poured into them water from the sacred well at Zemzem in the Hijaz, as barakat and a talisman of purity. The stone footprint of the Prophet at the shrine was ritually washed each day, and the runoff water, reputed to have healing qualities, was distributed to the faithful. The water from the baoli at the dargah of Nizam al-Din Awliya was also reputed to have medicinal and purifying qualities. Ibn Battuta reports that Sultan Muhammad on his campaigns in the Deccan refused to drink anything but water from the Ganges, as if the sacred river of Hinduism could guarantee a Muslim ruler good health and military success. Islamic gardens, too, had long-established sacred contexts, which are implicit in Mutahhar’s description: the outer world drops away as he comes through the gate, and the space becomes vast and blessed, filled with the flowers and fruits of paradise.

Firuz Shah’s madrasa mediates between sacred water and sacred garden. The two-storied madrasa and its denizens were reflected in the Hauz Khas, and they could get to it by stairs from the tomb and from the mosque. Like Hindus performing ritual purification, worshipers at the mosque may have cleansed themselves before prayer by immersion into the reservoir’s waters.
The madrasa and its garden, with its hyacinths, roses, tulips, and nightingales, were therefore nourished in multiple ways by the waters of the hauz, and the tomb, as a memorial and a stepping-stone toward paradise, was supported by it as well. Seeking order and stability after the tumult of his uncle’s reign, the sultan created one of the most remarkable buildings in the history of medieval Islamic architecture and attracted to this great center of learning scholars and students from all over the Muslim world.

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NOTES

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A further, very personal note may also touch on why it has been a particular pleasure to write this essay. To my mind this site is far and away the finest spot in Delhi and one of my two favorite Sultanate building complexes. Its appeal lies not just in the ingenuity of its construction and the academic purpose to which it was put, but also in the real magic of the place. I remember very clearly the first time I visited the Hauz Khas in November, 1977. After exploring it for several hours, I was sitting in the garden to the east of the founder’s tomb, when, all of a sudden, out of the mausoleum came an angelic soprano voice singing a lovely, peaceful song. I was spellbound. The music continued for several minutes, as if all the scholarly musings about the relationship of gardens, tombs, and paradise had astonishingly come to life in that very spot. Eventually a young woman in a brilliant scarlet sari appeared in the east entrance: she was singing a lullaby to the baby she held in her arms, and she stood against the sooty blackness of the tomb as if she were a peri.

This memory is preserved against present actuality. In the late 1980’s the no longer functioning reservoir was converted into a grassy park with carefully planted ornamental trees along winding paved walks; the village that adjoined the madrasa was gentrified and became a fashionable residential, shopping, and restaurant area built up against the madrasa, and rock concerts in the park echoed off its walls. A center of cultural life in the fourteenth century, the village at the Hauz Khas had regained this erstwhile role, though in an unexpected guise.
1. For English translations see H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, (London, 1867, repr. Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, n.d.), 3: 431–49, 495–505. Timur had a keen understanding of the importance of managed history and kept scribes in his service to write down his words and deeds. While it is likely that the *Tuzuk-i Timur* itself is a later Mughal composition, the data in it are of great value and create a broad image of Delhi in which the Hauz Khas madrasa can be set.

2. *Hauz (baha’)* = reservoir; *khas (khass)* = notable, worthy, excellent. The Arabic name is rendered in most translations, references, and popular renderings as Hauz Khas, rather than the formal transliteration Hauz Khass. I will use this popular form throughout.

3. A *kos* is about 5.2 km.


5. Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1969), p. 120.

6. The original land entrance was into the garden through the madrasa’s south wall.


8. In this respect the Hauz Khas complex is the first walled mausoleum garden in Islamic India. Earlier tombs, such as the 1231–32 tomb of Nasir al-Din Mahmud in the Sultan Ghari complex in south Delhi and the ca. 1225 tomb of Sultan Altamsh, were also physically associated with religious institutions but did not offer gardens for the pleasure of the departed prince or for pious visitors to the tomb. The tomb of Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq at Tughluqabad, along with that of his son Zafar Khan, was within a walled enclosure predicated more on defense than bucolic pleasures. The fact that Sultan Firuz Shah’s madrasa-tomb complex was enclosed by a low wall, intended to define rather than defend the space, reflects the long era of peace, stability, prosperity, and tranquility he had overseen. The association of tomb with madrasa was a well-established tradition in the Sultanate as well as in Islam in the west, particularly Egypt, with whose Mamluk dynasty (1250–1517) and Abbasiid caliph the sultans of Delhi strove to maintain special ties. Prince Nasir al-Din Mahmud was buried in 1231 in a tomb-madrasa complex, and the early-fourteenth-century madrasa at the Qowat al-Islam complex contains two tombs, one of them purported to be that of the founder Sultan Ala’ al-Din Khalji (1296–1314).

9. The most important early history of the Delhi Sultanate, the *Tarikh-i Firuz: Shahi* of Diva al-Din Barani, ends with the author’s death in 1357. Barani’s significant references to and obvious admiration for the madrasa indicate that it must have been largely completed before that year.

10. Over the south entrance is the only historical inscription on the tomb; it records repairs done to the tomb by Sultan Sikander Shah Lodhi in 1507–8. In his *Akhbar al-Sunan*, first published in Urdu in 1847, Sayyid Ahmad Khan suggested that the tomb was built by Nasir al-Din Muhammad Shah Tughluq for his father, Firuz Shah, about a year after his death. There is no evidence to support this hypothesis. Although the sultan’s historian Barani says that the madrasa was begun in the year of Firuz Shah’s accession, he makes no mention of the construction of a tomb; nor does Ala’ al-Din a commentator who outlined the king. The earliest reference to the location of the sultan’s tomb in the Hauz Khas madrasa is in the 1424 *Zafarnama* of Sharaf al-Din Yazdi: “[Timur] carefully examined the walls and bastions of that noble city (Delhi), and then returned to the Hauz-i Khas. This is a reservoir constructed by Sultan Firuz Shah, so large that an arrow cannot be shot from one side to the other. It is filled by the rain in the rainy season, and the people of Delhi obtain water from it all the year round. The tomb of Firuz Shah is by its side” (Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 3: 501). Given the sultan’s public piety, his commitment to the madrasa, the many associations of water with buildings constructed under his patronage, and the attention he paid to the tombs of his predecessors, I see no reason to doubt Yazdi’s statement, written only thirty-six years after the sultan’s demise.

11. Ala’ al-Din Khalji had been much concerned with water conservation. Ibn Battuta reports that the sultan excavated a great reservoir that was even larger than the hauz-i shamsi of his predecessor Altamsh whose hauz measured two miles in length and one mile in width.


13. Sultan Firuz Shah was a passionate hunter, and on the northern ridge were two hunting lodges, now known as the Bhul Bakhri Mahal and the Kishk Mahal, where dams captured run-off water that attracted the game that Firuz Shah liked to hunt. A third combination of mahal and dam was in the outskirts of Delhi to the southwest at Mahipalpur. A dam and reservoir were also built at Qadam Sharif in central Delhi, a darab-madrasa that housed the tomb of Firuz Shah’s son Fath Khan and a shrine for a stone footprint of the Prophet.


16. I am currently completing a study of the shrine at Qadam Sharif.

17. Cited in Banerjee, *History*, p. 141, who also reports that the madrasa’s principal was Sayyid Nizam al-Din Samarqandi (ibid., p. 182).

18. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 3: 382. The Damascus chronicler Shihab al-Din ʿAbbas al-ʿUmari reports in his *Masalih al-abhar fi mamalik al-amir* that Delhi under Sultan Muham-
mulated Tughluq had one thousand madrasas, "one of which is for the Shafiites and the rest for the Hanafites." (trans. I.H. Sid-
diqi and Q.M. Ahmad as A Fourteenth-Century Arab Account of India under Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq [Aligarh, 1971], p. 36).

19. Shamsi Siraj 'Afif lived to see Timur’s destruction of Delhi and looked back on Firuz Shah’s reign with understandable nostalgia. His Ta’rikh-i Firuz Shahi takes up where Barani ends in 1357 and includes a list of the many buildings and cities founded by the sultan. This citation is slightly modified from the translation in Elliot Dowson, History of India, 3: 374-88.


21. Ibid., 354.

22. Nizami, “A Medieval Islamic Madrasah,” p. 73. Barani’s meta-
phors underscore the legendary reputation of Sasanian archi-
tecture in Iran. In his Ta’rikh-i Mubarak Shahi, Yahya Siihindii 
confirms that the madrasa was founded in the year of the sult-
an’s accession: “In the year 755/1352 Prince Muhammad 
Khan was born in the capital. In this same year [the sultan] 
founded the masjid-i jami’ near the palace, and the college at 
the top of the Ha‘udi Khāyās.” (Elliot and Dowson, History of India, 4:7).

23. Primary and secondary literature on the madrasa is scant and 
for the most part general, and is cited here, where relevant. 
Detailed and admirably researched archaeological data are to 
be found in Yamamoto, Ara, and Tsukinowa, Delhi, under 
the headings M. 11, O. 24, and T. 9.

24. Ibnu Battuta saw the Ha‘udi Khāyā between 1334 and 1342 and 
reported that the reservoir was surrounded by forty domes. 
The implication is that there were buildings all around it. But 
since he was writing at least ten years before construction 
was begun on the madrasa, he was likely referring to houses, gar-
den pavilions, and other structures around the ha‘uf. John Hoag, 
Islamic Architecture [New York: Abrams, 1977], p. 294) as-
serts that Firuz Shah replaced these buildings with a madrasa 
that occupied all sides, “completely enclosing the rectan-
gular tank.” This view is scarcely credible: such a structure 
would have been enormous, measuring 600 by 700 meters, 
and students and faculty would have had a long hike to get 
from one side to another. It would have been an unworkable 
building, and its giant size would certainly have been noticed 
and admired by Timur, whose taste for monumental structures 
and objects is well established. There was another factor of no 
slight importance, particularly during Delhi’s hot season. In 
order to take advantage of the prevailing winds from the north 
that would have picked up evaporation from the reservoir 
and brought it south, Firuz Shah would have chosen the south 
and east sides for his madrasa and tomb. The fact that Timur 
camped at the Ha‘udi Khāyā implies that there were orchards 
and gardens on the north and west sides, since armies often 
camped in such areas. Similarly, Ibnu Battuta refers to farmers 
using the banks of the ha‘uf for planting melons, and it seems 
plausible that this garden and orchard land belonged to the 
madrasa and supplied its staff and students with produce and 
with income from the sale of surplus.

25. Ibnu Battuta particularly praises the Ha‘udi Shamsi and reports 
that it was two miles long and a mile wide and that the ha‘uf 
built by ‘Ala‘ al-Din Khulji was even larger. Relying on textual 
as well as archaeological data, H.K. Naqui, Agricultural, Indus-
trial and Urban Dynamism under the Sultans of Delhi, 1206-1555 
(New Delhi, 1986), lists seventeen ha‘ufs in Sultanate Delhi.

26. Although he was assiduous in restoring the architectural cre-
ations of his predecessors, the sultan, perhaps out of careful 
humility, gives less mention to his own public and private 
architectural projects. His Fatihkhā dates in general his building 
of madrasas and khanganhs but does not specifically refer to 
the Ha‘udi ‘Ala‘. although it does record that the Ha‘udi ‘Ala‘ had become filled with earth and unusable and 
that he ordered it dug out and restored to its former state.

27. Mutahhar refers to the effectiveness of these plastered and 
painted surfaces (Sec Nizami, “A Medieval Indian Madrasah,” 
p. 75). A century later, Lodi monuments in Delhi are deco-
rated in blues and greens, and it is possible that these colors 
may also have been part of the palette used on the madrasa. In 
this sensitivity to the reflecting surfaces of quiet and contained 
water, both the Ha‘udi Khāyā madrasa and Firuz Shah’s Jahān 
Mahal madrasa at Hisar prefigure the association of water 
and architecture at Udaipur in Rajasthan and great Mughal 
mausolea like Humayun’s tomb in Delhi and the Taj Mahal in 
Agra. The only other Firuzshahi madrasa to have survived, the 
Jahā Mahal in Hisar, is similar to the Ha‘udi Khāyā in many of 
its structural details and in its relationship to water. See M. 
and N.H. Shokohy, Hisar-i Firuz: Sultanate and Early Mughal Archi-
tecture in the District of Hisar, India, Monographs on Art, Archae-
ology, and Architecture, South Asian Series (London, 1988) 
and Anthony Welch, “Gardens that Babur Did Not Like.”

28. Ernst Reuter, Indische Paläste und Wohnhäuser (Berlin, 1925), 
suggested that the Ha‘udi Khāyā was an Islamic palace. It is a stimu-
lating, though mistaken, observation: the literary evidence, 
as well as the presence of the mosque and the tomb with their 
mibrabs, leaves no doubt that the complex was a madrasa. 
Comparing the madrasa’s south side to the later Palace of Man 
Sahat at Gwalior (1486-1518), John Hoag argues that its forms 
are derived from Indian palace architecture (Islamic Architec-
ture, p. 294). While this argument has its appeal, the only 
and remnant of earlier palace architecture in the Delhi 
area, the 1343 ruined palace of Sultan Muhammad (now 
known as the Biijai Mandel at Begampur), bears scant 
resemblance to the madrasa. The madrasa’s south side may have 
been the residence of the faculty members, and while there is 
no evidence to support this hypothesis, it has much to recom-
end it, if one accepts the idea that an educational institution 
is hardly likely to house its faculty on the same level or with 
the same spartan accommodations as its students. It is more likely 
that the small rooms constituting the whole lower story of the 
madrasa’s south and east sides, being less spacious, less well lit 
through their smaller doorways and windows, and closer to 
the water, were the students’ rooms. The only contemporary 
documentation about the function of individual parts of the 
complex comes from Barani, who refers to lecture halls; 
rooms for teachers, students, imams, and muezzins; guest 
quarters; a jam‘i‘ mosque; and cells for individuals devoting 
themselves to religious meditation (Nizami, “A Medieval Indi-
an Madrasah,” pp. 76-77).

29. For a study of this remarkable building, see Anthony Welch, 
“Architectural Patronage and the Past: The Tughluq Sultans

30. Unlike the two earlier extant madrasas in the Delhi area, Firuz Shah’s is neither a fort nor an addition to an older mosque; with a mosque that is a distant adjunct to the madrasa, it is a structure defined by the *hasa* and the garden tomb.

31. Popularly known since the nineteenth century as the "Sultan Gharı," this structure has been published by S.A.A. Naqvi, "Sultan Gharı, Delhi," *Ancient India* 3 (1947): 4–10; and in Welch and Crane, "The Tughluqs."

32. Firuz Shah’s record is not the only reference to the tomb’s having functioned as a madrasa. Minhaj al-Din Siraj also mentions a "madrasa Mu’izz,” established by Altumsh and named after Mu’izz al-Din Ghuri, the Ghurid sultan who ordered Qub al-Din Aybak’s invasion of northern India, that almost certainly refers to this complex (Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India*, p. 155).


34. There is no inscription identifying the tomb. "'Ala⅃ al-Din had undertaken a vast expansion of the jami’ mosque of Old Delhi, and there seems no reason to doubt that it was his major architectural undertaking in the city. According to Barani, when the sultan died, his body was taken from his palace in Siri and buried in front of the jami’ masjid (Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 3: 208). While it is possible that the reference may be to a new, obliterated mosque in Siri, it seems much more likely that Barani is indicating the old jami’ on which the sultan had lavished so much expense.

35. Like al-‘Umari, the Mamluk scholar al-Qalqashandi reports that there were more than one thousand educational institutions in Delhi (Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India*, pp. 155–56). Respect for the Abbasid caliphate, even in its dependent form under Mamluk control in Egypt, was an important element in the religious polities of the Delhi Sultanate; Firuz Shah and all of his predecessors sought formal investiture from the caliph. The arrival of an emissary from the caliph during the reign of Sultan Muhammad was a major event, described by Ibn Battuta in some detail. In response to internal pressures and external threats, both regimes were ardent supporters of Sunni orthodoxy, expressed architecturally through their patronage of madrasas. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that instructive comparisons can be made between madrasas from both sultanates. Mamluk madrasas also tended to be the product of royal or high official patronage: in its impressive size and outward splendor, the nearly contemporaneous madrasa of Sultan Hasan (1556–63) is comparable to the Hauz Khas madrasa, and both complexes contain a madrasa, mosque, and mausoleum. Sultan Hasan’s great domed tomb takes pride of place behind the qibla, but in an even more astonishing act of architectural daring, the mihrab of Firuz Shah’s tomb becomes the portal to the madrasa’s imposing south side. The Hauz Khas madrasa’s domed *chhatra* and chambers functioned as teaching areas, as did the iwans of the great Mamluk madrasas. But where the great Cairene madrasa was built around a vast courtyard, the Delhi madrasa is built around water; the Hauz Khas becomes a *sahn* whose surface duplicates and disperses the madrasa’s reflected façade. Both madrasas have significant residential areas, though their placement is reversed: the upper stories of the Sultan Hasan madrasa contained the students’ rooms.

36. For a discussion of Sultanate gardens and their relationship to tomb architecture, see Welch, "Gardens that Babur Did Not Like."

37. I am currently completing an article on these so-called *mahals*, presumably hunting lodges, some of the sultan’s most interesting and enigmatic buildings.

38. The last of the Delhi sultans seems to have appreciated both Firuz Shah and his restoration architecture; over the south entrance to the tomb is a fragmentary inscription testifying to repairs undertaken in 913 (1507–8) by Sikandar Shah Lodī ibn Bahīlī Lodī.


40. For a study of *baolis* in the Sultanate period, see Lort, “Baolis of the Delhi Sultanate.”

41. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in Āthār al-Sanādīd, suggested that the tombs had been built for deceased instructors at the madrasa: the principal, Sayyid Yusuf ibn Jamal Husayn, died in the same year as Sultan Firuz; other teachers interred in the garden were Nasir al-Din Muhammad Shah, *‘Afa* al-Din Sikandar Shah, Shihāb al-Dīn Taḥfiz Khan, and Sultan Abu Sa‘īd. An English abridged translation of the Āthār al-Sanādīd was published by R. Nath in New Delhi in 1979 under the title *Monuments of Delhi* (for the Hauz Khas madrasa, see p. 41).

42. "The steadfast, and the truthful, and the obedient, those who spend (and hoard not), those who pray for pardon in the watches of the night.// Allah (Himself) is Witness that there is no God save Him. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise.// Lo! religion with Allah (is) Islam."


44. I am indebted to Nizami, “Medieval Islamic Madrasah,” for the following observations on the curriculum, instructional staff, and amenities the madrasa provided.


47. Ibid., pp. 78–79. Royal support of madrasas and their most distinguished faculty could be lavish. In 1287 Sultan Raziya granted to Minhaj al-Din Saraj, the author of *Tabaqat-i Nāṣirī*, "the Nasirah Madrasa, together with the superintendence of its endowments, the appointment as Qadi of Gwalior, and the lecturership of the jami’ masjid, and [Ulugh Khan-ı Mu‘azzam] conferred upon the author a special honorary robe and a caparisoned horse, such as no one else among his brethren of the same profession had ever obtained" (Minhaj al-Dīn, *Tabaqat-i Nāṣirī*, trans. by H.G. Raverty [Calcutta, 1881], 1: 667).

48. It can be seen in the ca. 1356 Lat-ki mosque in Hisar; the ca. 1360 mosque that Firuz Shah built for the madrasa community at the tomb of Nasir al-Din Mahmud (the so-called "Sultan Gharı" tomb); the ca. 1374 mosque at the shrine of Qadam Sharif; and the ca. 1375 mosque at the tomb of Makhdom Shah ʻAlam at Wazirabad. I am preparing a study of mosque architecture under the Tughluqs.

