

Chapter III.
GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS OF FATEHPUR-SIKRI

980/1572

THA: 306

After several more days the Khankhanan went toward Fathpur al-Ghar (literally "Fathpur the Cave") with Iskandar Khan and Yusuf Muhammad. For six days they were honored by kissing the foot [of his Majesty]. Before the coming of Iskandar Khan, the Khankhanan had set out for Fathpur another time for the sake of paying homage to His Majesty. That time too he stayed for six days. During the first time Bayazid [Biyat] was in Benares and the second time, in spite of poverty, he was handed over the fort (qal'a) of Jaunpur, but Sa^cadat Yar, the son of Bayazid, was in service at al-Ghar (Fathpur). He told his father that in this manner warm wind had come with the rainy season and Iskandar Khan, who in spite of being one of the rebel kings, was countered by the Khankhanan from al-Ghar (Fathpur). His Majesty bestowed on the Khankhanan all kinds of reverence and favors.

1584

Fitch: 17-18

From thence we went for Fatepore, which is the place where the king kept his court. The towne is greater then [sic] Agra, but the houses and streets be not so fair. Here dwell many people, both Moores and Gentiles He keepeth a great court, which they call Dericcan. Agra and Fatepore are two very great cities, // either of them much greater then London and very populous.

1610

Finch: 149

At 7 c. on this way, and 12 c. from Agra, is seated the famous citie of Fetipore [Fatehpur Sikri], built by the Acubar, and inclosed with a faire stone wall, which yet standeth fresh, having foure faire and strong gates, it being some three English miles betwixt gate and gate. In the midst it is all ruinate, lying like a waste desart, and very dangerous to passe

through in the night, the buildings lying wast without inhabitants; much of the ground being now converted to gardens, and much sowed with nill and other graine, that a man standing there would little thinke he were in the midst of a citie. To the entrance of the gate from Agra, some course in length upon a stony ascent, lie the ruines of the suburbs; as also without the southwest gate for two English miles in length, many faire buildings being fallen to the ground; and on the left hand are many faire enclosed gardens, three miles alongst from the citie. At the entrance of the north-east gate is a goodly bazar (market place) of stone, halfe a mile long, being a spacious, straight-paved street, with faire buildings on either side. Close within the gate is the Kings saray, with large stone lodgings, but much ruined. At the head of this street stands the Kings house and moholl, with much curious building....

1611

Jourdain: 168

July 29. Wee departed from Crowley [Kiraoli] and came to the cittye of Fettyppore, a greate cittye, walled, with a very faire castle. The building within the cittie is much decayed. It hath bene the seate of a kinge in former tyme. The indico is made neere this cittie, att annother towne a side [sic] of, called Biana, where Mr. Finch bought his indico.

1614

Steel: 266

The sixe and twentieth to Fetipore, 12 c. This hath beene a faire Citie, built by Echabar, and hath within it a goodly house belonging to the King. It is walled round with a faire wall, and both within and round about, hath many spacious Gardens and places of pleasure. Now it goes to ruine, and much ground within the walls is sowne with corne, the King carrying much of the fairest stone to Agra his new Citie.

1615

Withington: 226-27

The auncient seate of the kings of this countrie, where they keepe their courts, was in Fettepoore, 12 courses from Agra, and is a very stronge cittye, situate uppon a mayne quarrye of rocke; but since the castle of // Agra was builte, this cittye hath gone much to decaye and is nowe verie ruynous.

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1633

Peter Mundy: II, 227-28

The Cittie of Futtapore [Fatehpur Sikri] was also built by Kinge Ecbar aforesaid att his returne from the Conquest of Guzaratt, nameinge it the Towne of Victorie. It is encompassed with a faire high wall of bigg square redd stone. In my opinion it was the only place that might // any way resemble our European Citties, for conformitie of stately buildinges. Now it lyes in a manner of a heape (the ruynes to bee seene of broken Arches, galleries, etts.), exceptinge the Kinges howse, the great Messitt [masjid] and one Bazare.

1640

Manrique: 153-54

Along this same route we passed through the City of Fateapur, once the second capital of the Rulers of the Mogol Monarchy. //

The devastations which time had visited upon its ancient grandeur were concealed by great green, but not fruit-bearing, trees that now surrounded it.

1786

Tieffenthaler: 169

Fatepour used to be a royal city founded by Akbar. Today it is nothing but a mass of ruins except for a very small number of houses, a square mosque of red stone, built upon an elevated plot of land at the expense of Akbar who believed superstitiously that he was in debt to the prayers of a hypocritical Mahometan who heard his wishes favourably and [caused him] to have a son. It is because of this that the new city was given the name of Fatepour instead of Sicri which it had been in the local tongue. Its circumference is six miles and it sits upon a series of hills stretching from north to south. There were many houses on the two sides by which one descends from the crest of the hills to the plain. This is why coming from the west one sees the royal castle with the mosque; the other part remains hidden. Those who come from the east perceive a part of the edifices that look to the west. The castle and the mosque, since they sit upon a hill, can be seen from all sides. Although the castle is ruined, there exists still a complete monument with a high gate: enough so that the ruins give a sense of the former magnificence of this edifice.

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All of the houses have fallen down, in part because of age, in part because of the rains. The walls [of the city] constructed of an excellent stone have suffered in a few spots. There used to be a large pool, surrounded by a low wall, that is today a field; now plants float in covered areas that used to be shops and houses. A city that in olden times was one of the most populated is at present an uncultivated terrain: there remains only a single street, where things are shown for sale. Such was the state of one of the most beautiful cities after Akbar transferred his residence to Agra: it was built quickly and died shortly after its birth, resembling a flower that blooms in the morning and withers at night.

1825

Heber: II, 349

The approach to Futtehpoor is striking; it is surrounded by a high stone wall, with battlements and round towers, like the remaining part of the city walls at Oxford. Within this is a wide extent of ruined houses and mosques, interspersed with fields cultivated with rice and mustard, and a few tamarind trees, and nearly in the middle, on a high ridge of rocky hills, is a range of ruinous palaces, serais, and other public buildings, in the best style of Mussulman architecture; and to form the centre of the picture, a noble mosque, in good repair, and in dimensions equal, I should think, to the Jumna Musjeed of Delhi.

1825

Heber: II, 350

This town was the favourite residence of Acbar, and here, in his expeditions, he usually left his wives and children, under the care of his most trusted friend, Sheikh Soliman. The mosques, the palace, and the ramparts, are all Acbar's work, and nearly in the same style with the castle of Agra and his own tomb at Secundra. The two former, are, however, plainer than this last, and there is a far less allowance of white marble.

1825

Heber: II, 353

On the whole, Futtehpoor is one of the most interesting places which I have seen in India, and it was to me the more so, because, as it happened, I had heard little about it, and was by no means prepared to expect buildings of so much magnitude and splendour.

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1828

Archer: 73-74

Jan. 12.--To Futtypore-Sickry (12 miles.) This place has been so minutely described by Bishop Heber, that little more need be said here, than that it was the favourite residence of Acbar, who rendered it prosperous. It is now in the strictest sense a corpse. The owl and the // spider, in the beautiful figurative words of the East, reign unmolested.

1828

Captain Mundy: I, 60-61

After the review, we spurred on ten miles to the camp, which had moved from Agra; and the next day we encamped under the walls of Futtypore Sicree, on our way to Bhurtpore. This town is a picturesque old place, surrounded by a ruinous turreted wall, embracing an extent of five miles; of which, however, the present habitable part of the town occupies not a tenth part. These lofty fortifications appear to have been necessary in isolated towns, to protect the inhabitants from the sudden and frequent predatory incursions of Mahrattas, Pindarees, Mawattees, and other military vagabonds, who lived by ravaging their neighbours.

On entering the outer gateway, we proceeded for nearly half a mile through what // appeared to have once been a spacious street of fine buildings, but which now presented nothing more than two rows of confused ruins.

1835

Parks: I, 402

In spite of my illness I was delighted with Fathipoor Sicri. The gateway, with its superb flight of steps, is a beautiful object; it is built on a fine commanding site. The buildings, which are very extensive, are on high ground; and from an immense quarry on the spot, they daily convey quantities of stone to all parts of India. The Fort of Agra is built of this stone.

1835-36

Sleeman: 350

On the 8th we reached Fathpur Sikri, which lies about twenty-four miles from Agra, and stands upon the back of a narrow range of sandstone hills,

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rising abruptly from the alluvial plains to the highest, about one hundred feet, and extends three miles north-north-east and south-south-west.

1835-36

Sleeman: 358

What strikes a European most in going over these palaces of the Moghal Emperors is the want of what a gentleman of fortune in his own country would consider elegantly comfortable accommodations. Five hundred pounds a year would at the present day secure him more of this in any civilized country of Europe or America than the greatest of those Emperors could command. He would, perhaps, have the same impression in going over the domestic architecture of the most civilized nations of the ancient world, Persia and Egypt, Greece and Rome.

1842

Fane: 88-89

We left Agra on the 5th, and on the 6th encamped under the walls of Futtehpoore Sicre. This ruined city has the appearance of having been, at some time or other, a place of great magnificence. Akbar built and endowed a tomb here, dedicated to a saint, by the aid of whose prayers he supposed himself to have been blessed with a son; and some historians have been scandalous enough to suppose // that he (the saint) had more to do with it than mere prophecy.

We rode through the ruins of the town in the afternoon, and a more complete scene of desolation I have never seen; scarcely one stone remaining on another, with the exception of the walls of the city, which seemed to be tolerably entire. The tomb itself was in very fair repair....

1845

Orlich: II, 64

Immediately after sunrise, we halted at the gate of the large ruined city, formerly the residence of Akbar the Great; and here are ruins, so great and magnificent, that they reminded me of ancient Rome. No description can give so faithful a picture of the taste and mode of life of Akbar as we derive from his numerous palaces, in the remains of which, perhaps twice as many persons might find room as in the colossal imperial palaces of Rome.

Futtehpoor was built partly in the plain, and partly on a mountain ridge of red sandstone 150 feet high, running from south-east to north-

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east. A high wall of the same stone, and of granite, nearly five miles in extent, enclosed the place. The greater portion of the interior space was occupied by the palaces; the town itself appears to have been insignificant. The wall, the town, and the eastern side of the palaces, are in ruins; a colossal gate, with large round towers, likewise stripped of its ornaments, indicates the entrance. It is said that these fine and very remarkable buildings were destroyed by the Maharattas. Every thing is annihilated, and the masses of stone are thrown about, as if Cyclops had been at work here, or as if an earthquake had shaken the city to its foundations.

1853

Taylor: 117-22

My horses, inspired by the pleasant morning air, trotted merrily along, and before three hours were over, Futtehpore-Sikree was in view. A low range of red sandstone hills appeared in the west, with here and there a crumbling ruin on the crest. The extremity of this range, about four miles distant, was covered with a mass of walls, terraces and spires, crowned with a majestic portal, which rose high above them, gleaming against the sky with a soft red lustre, as the sun shone full upon it....

Driving through the deserted gateway, I was amazed at the piles of ruins which met my eye. Here was a narrow hill, nearly a mile and a half in length, and averaging a hundred feet in height, almost entirely covered with the remains of palaces, mosques and public buildings, in some places nearly as perfect as when first erected, in others little else than shapeless masses of hewn stones. Innumerable pavilions, resting on open arches, cupolas and turrets, shot up from this picturesque confusion; but the great portal, of which I have already spoken, dominated over all, colossal as one of the pylons of Karnak. The series of arched terraces, rising one above another up the sides of the hill, gave the place an air of barbaric grandeur, such as we imagine Babylon to have possessed, and of which there are traces in Martin's pictures. But here there was nothing sombre or stern; the bright red sandstone of the buildings, illumined here and there by a gilded spire, was bathed in a flood of sunshine, and stood, so shadowless as almost to lack perspective, against a cloudless sky. The modern village of Futtehpore at the foot of the hill, was adorned with beautiful trees, and that part of the plain enclosed within the ancient walls was green with fields of young wheat.... // The royal residence of

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Akbar was on our left; the grand Durgah, or tomb of Shekh Selim-Chishti on the right, and the empty quadrangles into which we looked showed no trace of ruin. The stone pavements were partly overrun with grass, but not a block of the arched corridors surrounding them had tumbled from its place. How like yesterday seemed the Futtehpore of three centuries ago! The palace was deserted, not ruined, and its lord was not dead, but absent.... //

After breakfast, we set out to make a thorough survey of the place. I should first state that Futtehpore-Sikree was a country residence of Akbar, and stood in the same relation to Agra that Windsor Castle does to London. It was completed in 1571, and for twelve years his court was stationed there. At that time it must have been a populous place, but it is probable that the dwellings of the lower classes of the natives consisted then, as now, of mud huts, for there are very few ruins on the plain surrounding the hill. The existence of a Mint, and other public edifices, on a very large scale, shows that it was considered as a temporary capital, rather than as a mere palace of summer resort.... // It is a wilderness of sculpture, where invention seems to have been taxed to the utmost to produce new combinations of ornament. Everything is carved in a sandstone so fine and compact, that, except where injured by man, it appears nearly as sharp as when first chiselled. The amount of labor bestowed on Futtehpore throws the stucco filigrees of the Alhambra quite into the shade. It is unlike any thing that I have ever seen. And yet the very name of this splendid [sic] collection of ruins, which cannot be surpassed anywhere, outside of Egypt, was unknown to me, before reaching India!

1858

Minturn: 304

About two o'clock we arrived at Futtehpore Seekree, which is twenty-four miles from Agra. It consists of a mass of fortifications, palaces, gateways, and other splendid buildings, situated on the summit and sides of a range of sandstone hills, three miles long, which rises abruptly a hundred and fifty feet above the alluvial plain.