

## Integrating Archival Studies with Architectural Research: Occidental Impressions of the Sultanate Architecture of Chanderi

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The pivotal role played by archival studies in facilitating and furthering architectural research of ancient and medieval edifices is undeniable. The fact the architectural edifices are prone to various agents of deterioration makes it imperative to record their structural attributes, embellishments (in the form of both sculptures and mouldings) and stylistic affiliations for the benefit of future researchers and, ultimately, posterity. It is, in this context, that the contribution of British residents and surveyors, to the creation of vast visual and textual archives on the history, archaeology, topography, demography etc of former British colonies, is of great significance. The present paper seeks to highlight the contribution of one such British resident, Lieutenant Frederick Charles Maisey (1825-1892 CE), to the study of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Sultanate architecture of Chanderi, through his drawings and descriptive notes that are housed in the Asia Pacific and Africa Collections department of the British Library, London.

This paper is the outcome of archival research conducted at Asia Pacific and Africa Collections department of the British Library in March 2015. It is divided into three sections. The first section contains an overview of history of Chanderi and discusses the salient features of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century sultanate architecture of Chanderi. The second section highlights the importance of the process of surveying and documenting, instituted by the British in India and carried out by a highly specialised class of military officers who were scholars in their own right. In an attempt to trace Frederick Charles Maisey's journey in Central India, this section also includes excerpts from his handwritten manuscript housed at the British Library viz. *Mss. Eur D572/1* titled *Descriptive List of Drawings Executed by Lt. F.C. Maisey, 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment Bengal Native Infantry*.

The third section focuses on the analysis of Maisey's drawings of Chanderi's architectural edifices and select architectural members alongside their present photographs.

## I

Chanderi (24.72'N 78.13'E), a small town ensconced in the Vindhya range and located in the Ashoknagar district of Madhya Pradesh, India, still retains its medieval splendour which is discernable in its cobbled streets and magnificent architectural edifices. Chanderi is divided by a fortification wall into the inner town (*andar shahr*) and outer town (*bahar shahr*) which are both composed of a labyrinth of lanes interspersed with architectural edifices of the sultanate era, datable from the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The inner town, enclosed within the fortification wall of the Chanderi fort, was home to the nobility during the sultanate period. It is replete with mansions and a grand bazaar, so much so that its prosperity has been highlighted by the Moorish traveller Ibn Battuta.<sup>i</sup> It also houses smaller mosques, tombs, step-wells and mansions. The foundation of the outer town is intimately linked with an increase in the influx of migrants from neighbouring areas which subsequently led to the establishment of a township beyond the frontiers of the inner town to accommodate the burgeoning population. The outer town is marked by the Jama Masjid, the main congregational mosque. The outer town, like its inner counterpart, houses smaller mosques, tombs, step-wells and relatively modest dwellings.

As regards the history of Chanderi, the earliest evidence of imperial rule is that of the Gurjara - Pratiharas.<sup>ii</sup> The first Islamic incursion into Chanderi was led by Ghiyasuddin Balban in 1251 CE at the behest of Nasiruddin Mahmud, the then sultan of Delhi. Chanderi was then annexed into the domains of the Delhi sultanate sometime before 1312 CE, during the reign of Allaudin Khalji.<sup>iii</sup> However, the glory of Chanderi as a place of architectural importance commenced with the establishment of the independent provincial sultanate of Malwa in 1401 CE by Dilawar Khan Ghorī (the former governor of Malwa) during the last decades of Tughlaq sovereignty. Chanderi was converted into a frontier outpost by the Malwa administration.<sup>iv</sup> The town gradually advanced into a thriving centre of trade and commerce and benefited immensely from the architectural patronage extended by the Malwa nobility. In this regard, sub-imperial patronage, implying patronage of the nobility in the fields of art and architecture is of great significance. While the Malwa Sultans undertook mammoth building projects in their first capital Dhar and

later at Mandu, their nobles in the provinces (including Chanderi) were not far behind in asserting their authority and prestige through architectural enterprises, both religious and secular.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century in Chanderi was marked by prolific building activity. Most of the town's architectural edifices, attributable to the sultanate period, have been constructed during the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>v</sup> and are similar with regard to both structure and ornament. They have been built primarily of local variety of sandstone quarried from the Vindhyan hills. The sultanate architecture of Chanderi forms an integral part of the architectural style of the provincial sultanate of Malwa.

The articulation of provincial architectural styles involved complex liaisons with native artisans who inevitably included indigenous architectural forms in structures that had hitherto been unknown to them. In this context, it is important to note that the prolific building tradition which existed in India before the advent of Islam was based on architectural treatises collectively known as the *Śilpaśāstras*. These prescribed detailed injunctions pertaining to the construction of religious and secular edifices. With the advent of Islam and Islamic building techniques, Indian artisans, so well-trained in the trabeate mode of construction and accustomed to building towering temple spires (*śikharas*) were faced with a diametrically opposed system and tried their best to adapt to it. This led to the reconciliation of Indian and Islamic building techniques and culminated in a fruitful synthesis, resulting in the formation of the Indo-Islamic style, combining the indigenous trabeate mode with the Islamic arcuate mode.

Similarly, the sultanate architecture of Chanderi, comprising tombs, mosques, palaces, free-standing gateways and step-wells, is Indo-Islamic in character. While the Islamic arcuate mode is used in the construction of arches and domes in some buildings, the indigenous trabeate mode with its corbelled, flat and lantern ceilings, still persists. Indigenous surface mouldings including vegetal and foliage motifs exist alongside Islamic geometrical designs and patterns. Serpentine struts, which derive essentially from the ornamental arches of medieval Indian temple gateways, are a ubiquitous decorative feature and impart a degree of grace and elegance to the edifices at Chanderi. Arches, both true and ornamental exist alongside. They have an emphatic ogee curve and lotus rosette spandrels. The intrados of some of them are embellished with spearhead merlons.

The key to understanding many of the architectonic and decorative features of Chanderi's Indo-Islamic monuments, some of which are in a bad state of preservation, lies in the examination of the drawings and descriptive notes of Lieutenant Frederick Charles Maisey (1825-1892 CE).

## II

The visual and literary chronicles of British residents and surveyors in India comprise a reservoir of information on the historical, cultural, social and economic milieus of various territorial regions within the country. Further, they contain a copious documentation of the art and architectural heritage these regions. A thorough study of this vast corpus comprising travelogues, archaeological survey reports, drawings, paintings and photographs has been instrumental in the reconstruction of the history and heritage of India. It is a well-known fact that these officers cum scholars were central to archaeological practices in the 19th century.

The creation of this enlightened class of officers is intimately linked with the cultural aspect of empire building in colonies acquired by the British. It was fuelled by a desire to know the history, heritage, religion and customs of the colonized which would help both in the governance of the colonies as well as in reconstructing their historical pasts. As a part of their training, cadets and civil servants were given a thorough grounding in drawing, which was deemed to be a professional requirement for many colonial administrators and soldiers.<sup>vi</sup> The nature of their military duties involved laying siege in remote areas and conducting expeditions aimed at subduing the indigenous population. It was during these expeditions that they encountered numerous inscriptions, coins, shrines, mosques, tombs, forts, architectural fragments, sculptures, relics etc. This piqued their interest in Indian antiquities and explorations in search of these gained considerable momentum. During the course of these explorations, officers recorded their findings in the form of drawings, copious descriptive notes, photographic prints, surveys, travelogues, memoirs etc. Subsequently, the broad spectrum of individual explorations was concretised in the form of an institution, the Archaeological survey of India (established in 1861), which was given the mandate to conduct extensive surveys, documentation and conservation of ancient buildings in a scientific manner. A logical outcome was the creation of systematised visual and textual archives to house the vast amount of material that was collected.

Lieutenant Frederick Charles Maisey (1825-1892 CE), who later rose the rank of General, was one such officer who surveyed and documented the architectural heritage of central India in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. He conducted these surveys as a Lieutenant in the 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Bengal Native Infantry, deputed on special duty. This is attested by the introductory pages of his handwritten manuscript *Mss. Eur D572/1* (of the India Office Library) presently in the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections department of the British Library, London.<sup>vii</sup> Information gleaned from this manuscript reveals that it was damaged twice and was somehow salvaged and copied out for the third time. It is this third copy which is available today. It is rather unfortunate that some notes and drawings listed in this manuscript are now lost. This manuscript is signed from Shimla and the date mentioned is 1854.

An excerpt from the introductory note to the report by Maisey is as follows:

“The following report, with the exception of a few alterations was completed in the hot season of 1850 and submitted to the Secy. to the Governor Sir H.M. Elliot in October. As there were a few of its illustrated vignettes still to be completed, I obtained permission to take it (handwriting illegible) a second time to Sanchi for the purpose of completing the series of drawings and excavating the topes at other places.....I am now able to send with it 16 of its illustrative plates as also copies of all the Sanchi inscriptions and a list of the funeral relics excavated at Sanchi and elsewhere by Major A. Cunningham and myself. Having applied for permission to complete my drawings and reports, I hope soon to send in the remaining plates of Sanchi and relic series as well as the whole manuscript and drawings connected with the places previously visited, a list of which is appended to this report.”<sup>viii</sup>

The list of illustrative plates appended to this manuscript mentions 55 drawings belonging to the *Sanchi Series*, 57 drawings belonging to the *Miscellaneous Series* and 27 drawings belonging to the *Relic Series*.<sup>ix</sup> It is unfortunate that out of the 57 drawings, 42 out of the miscellaneous series were stated as not required. With regard to Chanderi, the list mentions drawings which are not presently available. These include:

- Plate 10: *Plan of the Jama Masjid at Chanderi*
- Plate 11: *Sections of ditto and ornamental details*
- Plate 13: *Ornaments and mouldings of the Shazada's tomb*

- Plate 17: *Rough sketch of the Palace at Fatehabad*

It is possible that the missing drawings of Chanderi may have fallen into this category and may have as a result, succumbed to the ravages of time. This, however, cannot be established with certainty. Unfortunately, this manuscript doesn't even contain descriptive notes on the architectural edifices of Chanderi or on Chanderi's history whereas it contains notes on the history and heritage of various other sites that Maisey visited in central India such as Udayapur, Gyaraspur, Pathari, Khajuraho etc. Nonetheless, it has been of great significance since it provides an insight into Maisey's understanding of Indian history, art, architecture and religion in general. With regard to its importance in analysing and reconstructing lost details of the architectural edifices at Chanderi, Maisey's description of select architectural members such as pillars at Kadwaha and Pathari (Hindu and Jain pilgrimage sites) have been crucial since they bear structural and stylistic affinities with those seen in the sultanate architecture of Chanderi. It is possible that these pillars were appropriated from the aforementioned sites as well as other Hindu pilgrimage sites and employed as structural expedients for the construction of early trabeate mosques at Chanderi. The note below supplies a general description of these pillars:

Note 34: "Though, at a little distance, these capitals and pillars appear to have volutes, the real design is foliage falling in clusters over the edge of vase, which is usually adorned with lotus leaves. This order is very common in central India..."<sup>x</sup>

The body of work contained in the *Mss. Eur D572/1* as well Maisey's published monographs titled *Description of the Antiquities at Kalinjar* (1848) and *Sanci and its Remains, complete with drawings, copious notes and measurements* (1898, published posthumously, with contributions from Alexander Cunningham), gives an insight into the painstaking process of surveying sites of archaeological importance in inhospitable terrains and climate. Further, it bears testimony to the phenomenal amount of research and archival work conducted by these officers before, during and after their surveys. It may be noted here that these officers, were in most part, assisted by indigenous linguists, scholars and draughtsmen in their surveys.

### III

As regards Frederick Charles Maisey's drawings of Chanderi, they are of an eclectic nature ranging from a gateway to a mosque, the Jama Masjid, architectural members such as pillars and their constituent elements, cornices, niches and surface embellishments. Three out of these will be analysed alongside their present photographs. Maisey's drawings are mentioned as 'fig.' within parentheses while present day photographs taken by the author are mentioned as 'pl.' within parentheses.

*Mosque at Chanderi*, Drawing in pencil heightened with white, Frederick Charles Maisey, 1850 CE, Asia Pacific and Africa Collections (APAC), Shelfmark WD3610, British Library, London, © The British Library Board (fig. 1)

This folio titled '*Mosque at Chanderi*' is actually a gateway which is at present in a totally dilapidated condition as only fragments of its turrets survive (pl. 1a). This folio has proven to be a vital visual aid since the author has been able to identify this gateway only after scrutinizing it thoroughly. The merlon ornament (pl. 1b) embellishing the crown of one of the surviving turrets has been the guiding force behind the identification. The emphatic ogee arches along with the cornice of the structure have succumbed to the ravages of time. Maisey has also drawn the different kinds of niches employed in the decoration of this gateway, circular rings of ornament adorning the terminal turrets, a detailed sketch of the spearhead merlon embellishing the crown of the arch and decorative motifs employed in the volute-edged corbels extending outwards that probably supported oriel windows.

*Miscellaneous Series Plate 14, From a small building in the Fort above Chanderi depicting a Pillar and two styles of base*, Pen and ink water-colour drawing by Frederick Charles Maisey, 1850 CE, Asia Pacific and Africa Collections (APAC), Shelfmark WD546, British Library, London, © The British Library Board (fig. 2)

This folio depicts the generic elevation of a pillar along with two styles of bases. The elevation appears to be a schematic rendition as surface embellishments have been omitted. The pillar has a square base, square shaft with central offsets and square capital surmounted by four-pronged brackets. The bases that flank this pillar in the folio depict decorative mouldings from the

indigenous architectural repertoire, harking back to the surface ornamentation seen in North Indian temples. These include the half diamond motif (*ardharatna*), a motif composed of rosettes alternating with diamonds or *mañibandha* (rendered in a reductionist manner here) and a perforated motif resembling an elephant's eye (*kuñjarākṣa*). A fringe of spearhead merlons adorns the upper part of one of the bases. It is probable that these are from the colonnade of Chanderi fort mosque (c. 15<sup>th</sup> century CE) as their elevation is similar to the one depicted in the folio and their pedestals are embellished with both the *ardharatna* and *kuñjarākṣa* motifs (pl. 2). A similar pillar with an embellished pedestal, base and capital and surmounted by four pronged-brackets has been drawn by Maisey in *Miscellaneous Series Plate 15* (Shelfmark: WD546). This folio also includes a detailed drawing of decorative niches.<sup>xi</sup> It construes that both these folios serve as models defining the generic make-up of pillars used in the construction of medieval trabeate edifices at Chanderi.

*Miscellaneous Series Plate 12, Juma Masjid, Chanderi.* Maisey in a top-hat sketching in the foreground, Pen and ink and wash drawing by Frederick Charles Maisey, 1847-1854 CE, Asia Pacific and Africa Collections (APAC), Shelfmark WD546, British Library, London<sup>xii</sup>

This folio is rather interesting as Maisey has drawn his own caricature involved in the task of sketching. It is an expression of how Maisey wanted himself to be viewed and understood as an explorer and artist, enamoured by the antiquities of India. The drawing depicts the Jama Masjid (built in the middle decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century) from south east direction. Close attention has been paid to detail even though this seems to be a leisurely sketch and not one to that has been done to scale. The three massive stilted domes and the two barrel vaulted ceilings wedged in between them have been depicted with precision, as have the finials. This drawing indicates that the Jama Masjid was in quite a ruinous condition during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has, over the past years, been restored to its former glory through restoration and regular maintenance (pl. 3).



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<sup>i</sup> Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Authority and Kingship under the Sultans of Delhi (Thirteenth-Fourteenth centuries)* (Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 243.

<sup>ii</sup> Andre Wink, *Al Hind, the Making of the Indo-Islamic World: Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam 7<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 2002), 285. Inscriptional evidence establishes that Chanderi was part of the erstwhile Gurjara- Pratihara dominions in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>iii</sup> Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 144-45.

<sup>iv</sup> Upendra Nath Day, *Medieval Malwa: A Political and Cultural History 1401-1562* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1965), 352.

<sup>v</sup> R. Nath, *The Art of Chanderi: A Study of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Monuments of Chanderi* (New Delhi: Ambika Publications , 1979), 15.

<sup>vi</sup> Hogler Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and, the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2010), 298-299.

<sup>vii</sup> Frederick Charles Maisey, *Mss. Eur. D572/1* titled *Descriptive List of Drawings Executed by Lt. F.C. Maisey, 67<sup>th</sup> Regiment Bengal Native Infantry*, India Office Library, Asia Pacific and Africa Collections, British Library, London, 1854, p. 1.

<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, note 34.

<sup>xi</sup> For image see: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019wdz000000546u00028b00.html>

<sup>xii</sup> For image see: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/019wdz000000546u00027000.html>