Notice. An Unpublished Inscription from the Fort of Ahmadnagar

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The fort of Ahmadnagar is important in the Sultanate history of the Deccan. There is no published epigraphic evidence regarding its construction. This notice concerns an inscription that has hitherto gone unnoticed, and which mentions the rebuilding of the fort in stone.

History of the Fort

Malik Ahmad Nizam-ul-Mulk (later Ahmad Nizam Shah I) defeated the Bahamani general Jahangir Khan in a battle on 28 May 1490 CE.[1] After the death of his father Malik Naib Nizam-ul-Mulk Bahri in a court intrigue, Malik Ahmad had declared independence from the Bahamani court. There was an attempt to quell this rebellion and Jahangir Khan, who was the Bahamani Governor of Telangana, was instructed to put it down. Accordingly, he marched towards the territories claimed by Malik Ahmad, and *en route* he camped at the village of Bhingar. His forces were routed by Malik Ahmad, who built a palace and a garden on the site to commemorate his victory.[2] The garden was named the Bagh-i Nizam and the precinct was surrounded by walls, the material of which is unknown.[3] This palace and garden were later enclosed within the fort of Ahmadnagar.

In 1494, Malik Ahmad founded the city of Ahmadnagar nearby.[4] This arrangement of a physically discrete city and fort of the same name was unusual—most other sultanate settlements had royal citadels within the city enceinte. For the most part, the fort of Ahmadnagar was used as a primary residence by the Nizam Shah sultans, who never resided within the city.[5] In the first decade of the sixteenth century, Malik Ahmad, now called Ahmad

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[1]John Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mohammedan Power in India till the Year A.D. 1612*, vol. III (London, 1829), p. 197.

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]*Ibid.*, Muhammad Qasim Hindushah Astarabadi, *Tārikh-i Firishtah*, jild 3 (Tehran, [2014]), p. 317.

[4]Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mohammedan Power*, p. 201; Astarabadi, *Tārikh-i Firishtah*, p. 321:

پس در شهر سنه تاسعمائه (٩٠٠) در ساعتی که منجمان اختیار کرده بودند مقابل باغ نظام کنار ناهار سین طرح شهر انداخت

[5]Pushkar Sohoni, 'Patterns of Faith: Mosque Typologies and sectarian affiliation in the kingdom of Ahmadnagar', in *Seeing the Past - Envisioning Islamic Art and Architecture: Essays in Honor of Renata Holod*, (ed.) David Roxburgh (Leiden, 2014), pp. 110–127.

Nizam Shah I (d. 1509/10 CE), built a palace of red stone inside the Bagh-i Nizam and constructed a citadel.[6] It is known that Husain Nizam Shah I (*reg.* 1553–65 CE) had the fortifications upgraded and rebuilt in stone in his reign.[7] The fort is unique in its military features, including a glacis and a moat, a round plan and a single entrance with a postern gate.[8] Husain Nizam Shah is best remembered as the sultan who led an alliance against Rama Raya of Vijayanagara at the battle of Talikota, and used a large artillery battery against him, particularly cannon cast by Rumi Khan. Husain Nizam Shah is also the first Deccan sultan to be rendered in portraits, including the famous *Tarif-i Husain Shah Badshah-i Dakkan*.[9]

This fort was later central to several historic events, such as the defence by and defeat of the dowager queen Chand Bibi in 1600 when the Mughals took over the fort. Lord Wellesley scored one of his victories here when he conquered the fort from the Marathas in 1803, and a spot on the north-eastern glacis of the fort marks the location where he had breakfast following the encounter. Also at the same spot is a gun supposedly cast by Rumi Khan Dakkhani, the guncaster of the famous Mulk-i Maidan, now in Bijapur. A marble plaque records this attribution. In the twentieth century, the fort was used as a prison for keeping several nationalist leaders in custody, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Nehru wrote *Discovery of India* when he was detained at the fort of Ahmadnagar.

Inscription

The city and fort of Ahmadnagar have been explored and the inscriptions largely transcribed and translated by M. Nazim, published mostly in *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*.[10] There are several publications that collate and describe inscriptions by period or dynasty.[11] However, there have been no inscriptions regarding the foundation and rebuilding of the fort under the Nizam Shahs. Yet, one large inscription on the eastern external wall of the fort went

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[6]Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mohammedan Power*, p. 204; Astarabadi, *Tārikh-i Firishtah*, p. 327:

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ان حشم را نوازش فرمود ان قله را تفرج نمود و هر چه محتاج مرمت بود تعمیر کرد و به مردم معتمد خود سپرده مزافغر و
منصور به احمدنگر مراجعت نمود و در ساعت خجسته و طالع شایسته در باغ نظام که بر خود مبارک دانسته مسکن خود
کرده بود حصاری از گیل و سنگ ساخت و درونش عمارات عالی طرح انداخت. قصور دلکش را چون آبگینه به سرخ و
زرد بیاراست و در آن سنوات هر گزار سواری متقائد نگاشته

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[7]Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mohammedan Power*, p. 242; Astarabadi, *Tārikh-i Firishtah*, p. 397:

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نظام شاه به احمدنگر رفته قله را که از خشت و گل بود بشکست و دایره اش بزرگ ساخته از گچ و سنگ گردانید

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[8]Pushkar Sohoni, 'From Defended Settlements to Fortified Strongholds: Responses to Gunpowder in the Early Modern Deccan', *South Asian Studies* 31, 1 (Jan 2015), pp. 111–112.
[9]G. T. Kulkarni and M.S. Mate (eds.), *Tarif-i Husain Shah, Badshah of Dakhan by Aftabi* (Pune, 1987).
[10]M. Nazim, 'Inscriptions from the Bombay Presidency', in *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica 1933–1934* (Delhi, 1937), pp. 1–61.
[11]For inscriptions organised by the chronology of their creation, see V. S. Bendrey, *A Study of Muslim Inscriptions: with special reference to the inscriptions published in the Epigraphia-Indo-Moslemica 1907–38* (Bombay, 1944), pp. 123–126, concerns the period under Husain Nizam Shah; an example of a dynastic grouping of inscriptions of the Nizam Shahs is 'Appendix: Inscriptions', in Pushkar Sohoni, *The Architecture of a Deccan Sultanate: Courtly Practice and Royal Authority in Late Medieval India* (London, 2018), pp. 220–235; a topographical list for Ahmadnagar is 'Ahmadnagar', in Z. A. Desai, *Arabic, Persian, and Urdu Inscriptions of West India: A Topographical List* (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 16–20.

unnoticed and has never been read; there is no mention of it even in the various issues of the *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy*.[12]

The inscription was noted only in 2010 when the walls were cleared, but is now again overgrown with vegetation and is no longer visible (Fig. 1). The inscription is placed high on the wall at the north-eastern corner on the outside. The inscription and its suggested reading is as follow:[13]

<div dir="rtl">

در عهد نظامشاه سلطان زمان   شد قلعه احمدنگرا رشک جنان

گردون فلک کشد همی سنگ و گچش   از برج فلک زیاده گشتست از آن

تعریف حصار او کسی گر بکند   کز کنگرهاش بصد زبان گشته بیان

برجی که شرف یافته زو چرخ فلک   تاریخ بنایش طلب از سنجر خان

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In the age of Nizam Shah, the Sultan of Fortune
The fortress of Ahmednagar became the envy of Paradise.
[If] the celestial sphere were to cover it with stone and plaster,
It would exceed the zodiac [in size].
If someone should wish to describe its fortifications,
The [fame] of its crenellations has been told in a hundred tongues!
The tower from which the wheel of the firmament has derived honour,
Ask "Sanjar Khan" for the date of its construction!

Ahmadnagar is spelt either Ahmad Nagara or Ahmada Nagar, with an extra letter alif. This is not uncommon, and can be seen on some of their coinage in Persian and in Marathi documents (in Modi script).[14] The abjad chronogram for the date is provided by the name Sanjar Khan, in the last line, which yields the date 964 [H] (1556–57 CE). This is presumably the same Sanjar Khan who built a mosque in the fort of Dharur under the Nizam Shahs - his name appears in an inscription there which is dated 981 [H] (1573–74 CE).[15]

Conclusion

This inscription provides important evidence that corroborates the narrative of textual chronicles, which say that Husain Nizam Shah I constructed the fort in stone. The date given for this building campaign is almost a decade before the battle of Talikota (c. 1565 CE), precluding the idea that the spoils from the war financed the reconstruction of the fort. The fort has a few European features on some of the bastions and towers, prompting the suggestion of a Portuguese presence in the construction, not surprising since we know of several good contacts between the Portuguese and Husain Nizam Shah I, notably

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[12]All the notices of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu inscriptions from Ahmadnagar are in the following issues of *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy*: *1961–62* (1966), pp. 187–188 (D-119–122); 1962–63 (1967), p. 185 (D-103–112); 1971–1972 (1981), pp. 125–129 (D-47-78); 1976–77 (1987), p. 164 (D-205); 1978–79 (1989), p. 129 (D-78).

[13]The authors are grateful to Manijeh Bayani and Wheeler M. Thackston for their assistance in translation.

[14]Aravind S. Athavale, 'Coins of Nizam Shahi sultanate of Ahmednagar', in *Numismatic Panorama: Essays in the Memory of Late Shri S.M. Shukla*, (eds.) K. K. Maheshwari and Biswajeet Rath (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 291–320, especially p. 301.

[15]*Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy 1965–66*, D192; *Indian Archaeology: A Review 1964–65* (New Delhi), Arabic and Persian Inscriptions, no. 18.

that of the physician Garcia da Orta.[16] Thus, the inscription is another crucial piece in the reconstruction of the physical fort in particular, and of the history of the Nizam Shahs in general. <pushkar.sohoni@iiserpune.ac.in>

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[16]Sonja Brentjes, 'Issues of Best Historiographical Practice: Garcia da Orta's *Colóquios dos simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da India* (Goa, 1563) and Their Conflicting Interpretation', in *The globalization of knowledge in the Iberian colonial world*, ed. Helge Wendt (Berlin, 2016), pp. 95–137, especially p. 98, available at https://www.mpiwg-ber-lin.mpg.de/resources/publications/books/globalization-knowledge-iberian-colonial-world (accessed August 2019).