

MONOGRAPH

STONE-CARVING AND IN-LAYING

IN THE

PUNJAB,

1904-05.

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**MONOGRAPH ON STONE-CARVING AND IN-LAYING
IN THE PUNJAB, 1904-05.**

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No. 610 S.

FROM

A. L. DANSON, ESQUIRE,

Under-Secretary to Government, Punjab,

Revenue Department,

TO

THE JUNIOR SECRETARY TO THE FINANCIAL

COMMISSIONER, PUNJAB.

Dated Simla, 22nd June 1906.

Commerce and Industry.

SIR,

IN acknowledging the receipt of your letter No. 386, dated the 8th of May 1906, forwarding a monograph on "stone-carving and in-laying" in the Punjab by Mr. S. Wilberforce, I am directed to say that the Lieutenant-Governor agrees with the opinion of the Financial Commissioner that Mr. Wilberforce has accorded suitable treatment to the subject.

I have, &c.,

A. L. DANSON,

Under-Secretary to Government, Punjab,

Revenue Department.

No. 386.

FROM

R. C. BOLSTER, ESQUIRE, C.S.,

Junior Secretary to the Financial Commissioner, Punjab,

TO

A. L. DANSON, ESQUIRE, C.S.,

*, Under-Secretary to Government, Punjab,
Revenue Department.*

(Dated Lahore, 8th May 1906.

SIR,

IN compliance with your endorsement No. 1325, dated 14th November 1904, forwarding a letter No. 25—29-1, dated 3rd October 1904, from the Government of India, Revenue and Agricultural Department, specifying "stone-carving and in-laying" as the subject of the monograph for the year 1904-05, I am directed to forward a monograph on this industry prepared by Mr. S. Wilberforce, Registrar of Co-operative Credit Societies, Punjab, with the remark that, in the Financial Commissioner's opinion, Mr. Wilberforce has accorded suitable treatment to this industry, which, however, possesses little importance in the Punjab.

2. Mr. Wilberforce explains the delay in the submission of his monograph by his unwillingness, in view of the hope which he entertained that the industry might be found to exist in unexpected places, to abandon his enquiries before the end of his touring season.

I have, &c.,

R. C. BOLSTER,

Junior Secretary to the Financial Commissioner, Punjab.

MONOGRAPH ON STONE-CARVING AND IN-LAYING IN THE PUNJAB,
1905.

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MONOGRAPH ON STONE-CARVING AND INLAYING IN THE PUNJAB.

1.—HISTORY OF THE INDUSTRY.

THE previous history of the industry in the Punjab is best described in a note kindly furnished by Mr. Percy Brown, Principal, Mayo School of Art, Lahore.

“It may be assumed as a general rule that stone carving is only carried on as an indigepous industry in those localities where an easily worked stone suitable for carving purposes is found more or less abundantly. In recent years increased facilities of transport have tended to widen these areas, but it will almost invariably be found that the productions of a craftsman and the nature of his work are considerably influenced by the materials at his command. Applying this rule to India, it will be noticed that the principal marble work comes from Rajputana owing to the presence of the marble quarries at Jodhpur. Agra is the centre of a very thriving sandstone industry due to the outcrop of that material in its immediate vicinity. Where a good clay is obtainable, brick buildings and terra cotta are used in preference to stone or marble, and where timber is abundant, as in Burma, wood is the favourite means of expression by both architect and decorator.

Turning to the Punjab therefore, and with the above facts in view, it will at once be seen that, the geological conditions of that Province being such that a good easily worked stone is practically unprocurable, any expression of artistic feeling is naturally obtained by the use of some other local and easily procured product. With one or two exceptions, practically all the buildings in the great alluvial plain of the Punjab are composed entirely of brick, and the decoration is of glazed tiles or of wood. It will thus be seen that stone carving and its allied industry inlaying are, for the reasons indicated above, of very little importance in the Province. Specimens of stone work belonging to historic periods are, however, to be found.

In the neighbourhood of Delhi there is a vast quantity of stone construction and decoration which, with a few exceptions, may be classed as of the Muhammadan style. The particular material used is a sandstone, which, there is little doubt, was obtained from the Agra quarries, and was presumably prepared by workmen from the same locality. As evidence of this, it may be mentioned that at the present time any repairs or additions to these old buildings are entrusted to workmen from Agra.

The above remarks also apply to the Muhammadan Art of stone inlaying, specimens of which are to be found at Delhi, Amritsar and Lahore. I think it may be safely assumed that all the Muhammadan stone carving and inlaying found in the Punjab was carried out either at Agra, or by workmen drafted from that locality for that particular work.

The principal buildings in which this style of carving and inlaying may be found are:—

At Delhi—The Fort and Palace, The Tomb of Tugluck, The Kutub Minar and surrounding ruins.

At Amritsar—The Golden Temple.

At Lahore—The Fort and the Tomb of Jahangir.

In two localities in the Punjab elaborately carved stones in the Jain style are to be found, remains of Budhist workmanship, after the decline of that religion in India. These are at Murti in the Jhelum District, and near the Kutub Minar at Delhi. Most of the fragments from the former site are now collected and preserved in the Lahore Museum. It is difficult to say where and by whom these carvings were executed, but, the material used being a sandstone similar to the Agra variety, there is little doubt that this work was also intimately connected with that district.”

From the above note it is apparent that the industry has never been indigenous to the Punjab and has never flourished and is never likely to flourish.

2.—THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE INDUSTRY.

Inquiries were made of all Deputy Commissioners as to the existence of the industry in their districts. The industry is reported to exist in only two districts, *i.e.*, stone inlaying in Shahpur and stone carving at Delhi. There is also a Government-aided repairing shop attached to the Golden Temple at Amritsar, which does no work for outsiders. It seems doubtful whether such a repairing shop supported by Government for a particular object can be strictly said to be engaged in a general industry.

3.—THE INDUSTRY IN DELHI.

The following note by Mr. Kirthee Singh, Extra Assistant Commissioner, describes the state of the industry in Delhi:—

“Delhi is not a centre for the stone carving or stone inlaying industries. The report must therefore of necessity be somewhat meagre and wanting in those details which makes the stone work of Jaipur and Agra so interesting a study. There are, however, some Mistris and Ustads who are capable of turning out really artistic work. The expense renders the employment on a large scale of carving and inlay work impossible except to the very rich; and a general deterioration in taste has reduced the demand even by men of this class to the vanishing point.

The best workmen are in general those whose ancestors came or who themselves have migrated from Jaipur and Agra. Muhammadan and Hindu Ustads or Raj Mistris are about equal in numbers, but there is nothing characteristically Hindu or Muhammadan in their work. Both do little but copy the ideas found in the old buildings and monuments of Northern India.”

Mr. Kipling dismisses the subject in the following sentence:—

“Stone carving is not very extensively practised, but there are numerous examples of modern work which show a high average of excellence. The spandrels or mihrabs of door-ways seem to be the favourite field for the stone carver's art. The foliage, as in all modern work, is excessively suave and flowing in line and somewhat tiny in detail, contrasting in this respect with the simpler and more rigid lines and scantier forms of the ornaments of the best period.”

The stone carving of Delhi may be divided up according to the material used:—

Stone carving in Agra red sandstone (Sang Eansi)—

Marble (Jodhpur).

Sang Surkh.

Sang Khara.

Serpentine.

Sang Musa (Black marble).

Sang Zahir.

Or the subject may be divided according to the nature and object of the work.

I. Stone carving, architectural—

- (a) Jallis in sandstone or marble (perforated screen work).
- (b) The spandrels of door-ways.
- (c) Bukharchas (or bow windows).
- (d) Arches and pillars usually in dalans.

II. Marble inlay work—

(a) Panels.

(b) Tables, plates, etc.

III. Marble figures and models,

IV. Work in other species of stone, chiefly the manufacture of stone utensils, mortars, &c.

Under all these heads excellent work can still be turned out, but only to order. The demand is not sufficient to support any considerable body of men working in stone alone and stocking their artistic work for sale, as may be found in Agra, Jodhpur and Jaipur.

The cost of work in sandstone or marble is so great as to preclude the possibility of their extended use in house building.

The cost of white marble slabs is per square foot (two inches thick) from Rs. 5 to Rs. 6, and the weight approximately 17 seers. The cost of the more elaborate designs for Jallis is from Rs. 15 to Rs. 20, or a total cost of from Rs. 20 to Rs. 26 per square foot. The cost of a similar Agra sandstone slab is approximately Re. 0-5-0, its weight about 7 seers, and the cost of work from Rs. 4 to Rs. 5 per square foot, or a total cost of from Rs. 4-5-0 to Rs. 5-5-0 per square foot. The lowest price of a marble screen (Jalli) measuring say 10 feet by 6 feet would be Rs. 1,200 and in sandstone Rs. 200. Only a man who wanted to build a palace would care to pay the price.

The pay of Raj Mistris, taking into consideration the fact that it is skilled labour, is very low, ranging from Re. 0-10-0 to Re. 1 per diem.

The instruments employed are primitive, but in skilled hands effective—

Hammers of sizes (hathaura).

Chisels without handles (tanchi).

Gunyan and parkar, (gnomon and compasses).

Files of sorts (sohan).

Saws of sorts, some of steel, some of copper.

Kurand (corundum powder).

Barma (or drills of sorts).

Burnishing instruments.

The method employed may be briefly described as follows: The design is traced out on the stone and all the principal points are perforated with the drill; then the saw and the chisel are employed in the case of Jalli work, where the holes go right through, to cut out the spaces to be left open in the trellis work, and in ordinary carving, where the boring varies in depth to cut down to the pattern.

Bukharchas are to be seen on a number of houses in the city. They break the straight line of the outer walls and are most effective. The work is done in red sandstone. None have been erected of recent years.

In the dalans of many of the large houses, as in that of Lala Ishri Parshad in the Chandni Chauk, pillars both in marble and in sandstone are to be found. In the house mentioned the marble work is characterized by the simplicity, almost severity, of the best old work. The shaft of the pillar (dandi) is often fluted, and the Capital carved sometimes in the lotus pattern or in arabesque. (*This work was done about 50 years ago.*) Marble inlay work is too expensive to be employed for panelling rooms, and I think the only modern example is in the house of Lala Sheo Parshad. The work is not of a high order of merit.

Various stones are employed for inlaying—

- Siph (mother-of-pearl).
- Sang Musa (Black marble).
- Kathaori (a dark green stone).
- Sang Satara (brown with gold spots).
- Khattu (yellow red in colour).
- Nilum.
- Serpentine, &c.

Work in inlay is almost entirely confined to the turning out of table-tops plates and boxes. Favourite flowers represented are the rose and the jasmine (chambeli).

Marble models of animals, figures of deities and heroes are sometimes made. The work is entirely in imitation of Jaipur work, and is wholly conventional, and worthless from an artistic point of view.

There is not much carving work in other stones except perhaps serpentine, which is sometimes carved prettily. Lal pathar and sang khara are used for mortars, cups to hold chatni, &c., but these, as they do not come directly within the scope of a note on stone carving, need only be mentioned in this place.

Such is a brief review of the stone carving industry in Delhi. The trade is stationary and the tendency is to further diminution. In house decoration work in plaster is now almost invariably employed. The work in this line is so excellent and the polish of the surface is so fine that the foliated and geometric patterns in high relief on the surface may easily be mistaken for real stone work.

Masons informed me that there are a large number who can carve in relief if required. The actual number employed on carving at any one time is probably less than ten. I made recently, in company with Mr. Kirthee Singh, an exhaustive search round the city, and discovered only three men so employed. Carving except in relief is not done nowadays. For any work of really artistic merit workmen are imported from Agra. The amount of work done at Delhi at the present day is so insignificant that it is doubtful whether any of the Delhi masons could make a living if he relied entirely on his profits from inlaying or carving. With regard to marble inlay work I found only one shop where it was said to be done. Two artisans only were employed, and their main duties consisted in making tombstones. Their work seemed inferior.

4.—THE INDUSTRY IN SHAHPUR.

With regard to the Bhera industry Mr. J. L. Kipling wrote as follows:—

"It is not easy to determine whether the stonehandled cutlery of Bhera (Shahpur District) should be classed under the head of lapidaries' work or cutlery. The same artisan practises both trades; that is to say, he forges and finishes the blade and fashions the false jade or serpentine hilt of the peshqabz or of the hunting and dinner knife. The green, jade-like stone has not yet been assigned its proper name; it is not true jade, being softer than that of Silesia or China, nor do authorities on the subject admit it to be plasma. It is said to be found near Kandahar, and to be brought down the river Indus on rafts floated with inflated skins to Attock, whence it is carried to Bhera. Other stones resembling serpentine and Purbeck marble are used as handles, and also in the fashioning of toys and small objects, as paper weights, by the lapidary cutters of Bhera."

I may note that in the Catalogue of the Calcutta Exhibition he finally classed the Bhera work under the head of lapidary's work, and strictly speaking the industry of stone inlaying cannot be said to exist at Bhera.

Mr. Percy Brown describes their trade as follows:—

"The industry consists of the manufacture of small caskets, inlaid tables, knife handles, walking sticks, &c., of various kinds of polished stone and mother-of-pearl. It is a comparatively small industry, and is in the hands of three men, Muhammad Din, Fazal Din and Muhammad Amin. Its general character is also a mixed one, as these men are

quite as well known as cutlers and arms manufacturers as they are noted for their skill in polishing various kinds of stone. There is little doubt that their art was until recently mainly employed in the preparation of weapons of war. The passing of the Disarmament Act has now caused them to turn their skill and energies into the more peaceful occupation of carving caskets and tables."

At Bhera there are altogether six shops. A recent visit showed that the actual number of men employed was 25, though others are engaged when required. The artisans are all blacksmiths, and, as Mr. Percy Brown remarks, their trade is a mixed one. They forge blades, do lapidary work and inlay stones. As far as the last branch of their work is concerned, they mainly make inlaid marble tables, chess-boards, inlaid knife and sword handles, which they send to Delhi or Lahore for sale. They had nothing in stock at the end of February.

The stones which they employ chiefly are Sang Yesham, Sang Abri, Sang Musa and Sang Marium. Sang Yesham is the false jade which they import from a village near Jalalabad in Afghanistan; Sang Abri is a mottled variety of marble or lime found in the Salt Range; Sang Musa is the ordinary red Agra sandstone; and Sang Marium is an inferior marble said to come from Afghanistan. In their better inlay work they also use Serpentine and Cornelian. Their inlay work is of good class, and according to their statements fetches high prices. Sword handles sell for as much as Rs. 120 and knife handles for Rs. 40. Their methods of cutting stones are primitive. They are first cut on the Tar Ahini (English steel wire), on which water and corundum powder are sprinkled. They are then polished on the San Karand, a grinding wheel made up of corundum powder and lac melted together, on which finely pounded burnt Sang Yesham is rubbed in. The stones being ready and fitted to each other are then fastened to the handles or tables with lac and some mysterious mixture of which they would not reveal the composition. The marble in which stones are inlaid is cut to the required design by various kinds of chisels without handles and polished with files. Their designs are not original, but copied from Agra work. Tea cups and saucers are also made out of the false jade. The industry is on the decline, and except on such occasions as the Delhi Darbar, the demand is decreasing.

5.—THE INDUSTRY IN AMRITSAR.

At Amritsar no stone carving or inlaying industry exists. As, however, I stated in paragraph 2, there is a repairing shop attached to the Golden Temple where 8 workmen and 2 munshies are employed. This shop is supported out of a grant of Rs. 5,000 a year made by Ranjit Singh and continued by the British Government. Both carving and inlaying is done by the artizans. With regard to the carving, Bhai Gurbaksh Singh, the manager of the works, informed me that formerly there were only 2 carved slabs in the temple, and that he had 19 slabs carved with a pattern after the old Sikh style. The tablet put up recently to commemorate the bravery of the 35th Sikhs was not made at the works. No carving was being done when I visited the works, but I gathered that the methods were the same as those employed by the Delhi masons.

At the time of my visit most of the artizans were engaged in preparing marble for inlaying or cutting the stones. The work was not of a very elaborate description, and the methods and instruments the same as those used at Bhera.

6.—GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.

The above notes show that stone carving and inlaying does not exist for practical purposes as an industry in the Punjab. Except at the repairing shop at Amritsar, there are probably no artizans exclusively engaged on either carving or inlaying, and the men who are occasionally employed are insignificant in numbers. There are shops which supply tomb-stones of English designs which can be seen at the Lahore and other cemeteries. No description of this branch of the industry is required, as it is a purely modern exotic.