BOOK REVIEWS


Decorative use of terra cotta in architecture had been an established practice in pre-Muslim Bengal for centuries until the time of the Sena rulers (ca. 1097-1223 C.E.) who preferred to embellish their buildings with stone-carving and stucco work instead of terra cotta. The fondness of the royal patrons for the new ornamental medium led to the neglect of the terra cotta technique; consequently, the architectural terra cotta ornamentation in Bengal suffered an eclipse for about two centuries immediately before the Muslim conquest of Bengal. The situation was reversed after the conquest of the country by the Muslims who not only revived the tradition of the ornamental terra cotta but also infused into it a new life in the scale of application and style of execution, bringing it in line with universal Muslim art idiom. Employment of local elements and the indigenous traditions of art resulted in the birth of a new art distinct in itself.

Dr. Khan, in his book, attempts to trace the genesis of the new art and analyses its development, stagnation and decline. Moreover this study observes the progress of the Muslim rule in Bengal. The author has also sought to bring to the surface the inherent rapport between art and socio-cultural interactions. Attempts have also been made to investigate the technique and the seating technicalities of the Muslim architectural terra cotta and to assess the extent of impact of the Muslim terra cotta art on the Hindu temple decoration of late medieval Bengal.

The book is divided in seven chapters. The first chapter is devoted to an over-view account of the various ornamental techniques used in Muslim architecture accross the continents, besides dealing in brief with the meaning, aesthetics, characteristics and themes of Muslim ornamentation. Chapter Two contains a discussion on the terra cotta art in India and Pre-Muslim Bengal in historical perspective. Actually both the chapters provide an informative background for the rest of the work. The chronology of the Muslim rulers of Bengal presents an analytical study of the terra cotta ornamentation in the Muslim architecture, observing the state of the art during the successive phases. Dr. Khan deals with this aspect in Chapter Three. Chapter Four dwells upon the Muslim architectural terra cotta in Bengal during the interregnum between the end of the Independent Sultanate (C.E. 1538) and the Mughal Conquest of the country (C.E. 1576) and also during the Mughal rule. Chapter Five contains a discussion on the occurrence of the sultani motifs and features in the decoration of the Hindu temples of late medieval Bengal. Chapter Six looks into the technique of preparing and sealing the terra cotta used in the Muslim architecture. Concluding the study in Chapter Seven the author opines, that Muslim terra cotta art in Bengal is an independent art style. Influenced by the Persian art tradition
and the pre-Muslim Bengal art, Muslim terra cotta made an assimilation of both. Muslim terra cotta art in Bengal has been dead since long, but the monuments ornamented with terra cotta still survive in part and elicit admiration from art-lovers even in their badly battered condition.

The work contains fifty-nine excellent illustrations and an appendix. Dr. Khan has consulted all the known archaeological and literary sources on Muslim terra cotta. The lucid and thought-provoking style of the author will be cherished for sheer handling of the subject. The publication, a long-awaited survey, is a pioneering work in the field.

Golam Kibria Bhuiyan


This work aims at teaching tajwid, the art of Qur'ân recitation, to those with little background in the subject. A manual, accompanied by two audio cassettes, presents a total of 75 rules, arranged in 17 units of graded difficulty; explaining and illustrating each rule with copious examples from the Qur'ân and providing extensive practice. The text is recited by a qualified Qur'ân reciter.

There is no doubt that this is a very useful book. The author provides a comprehensive and systematic treatment of the subject, giving evidence of his command of the theory and experience as a teacher. Assuming no prior knowledge on the part of the user, the author leads him/her step by step through the course. Conscientious use of the book cannot fail to produce positive results, and that, too, in a relatively short period of time.

There are a few problems, however. First, the author uses an essentially traditional approach, making extensive use of technical terminology in the expository sections. This may cause difficulties for a 'modern' user. Second, the language is in need of improvement. The translation of technical terms needs special attention: makhraj, for instance, is 'point of articulation', not 'place of origin.' There are some spelling mistakes, too.

In spite of these shortcomings, the book meets a real need and will be welcome by those wishing to learn tajwid or standard Arabic pronunciation. A shorter version, without some of the technical material and parts of the Practice Texts, may be more practical. An index of technical terms should be added.

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