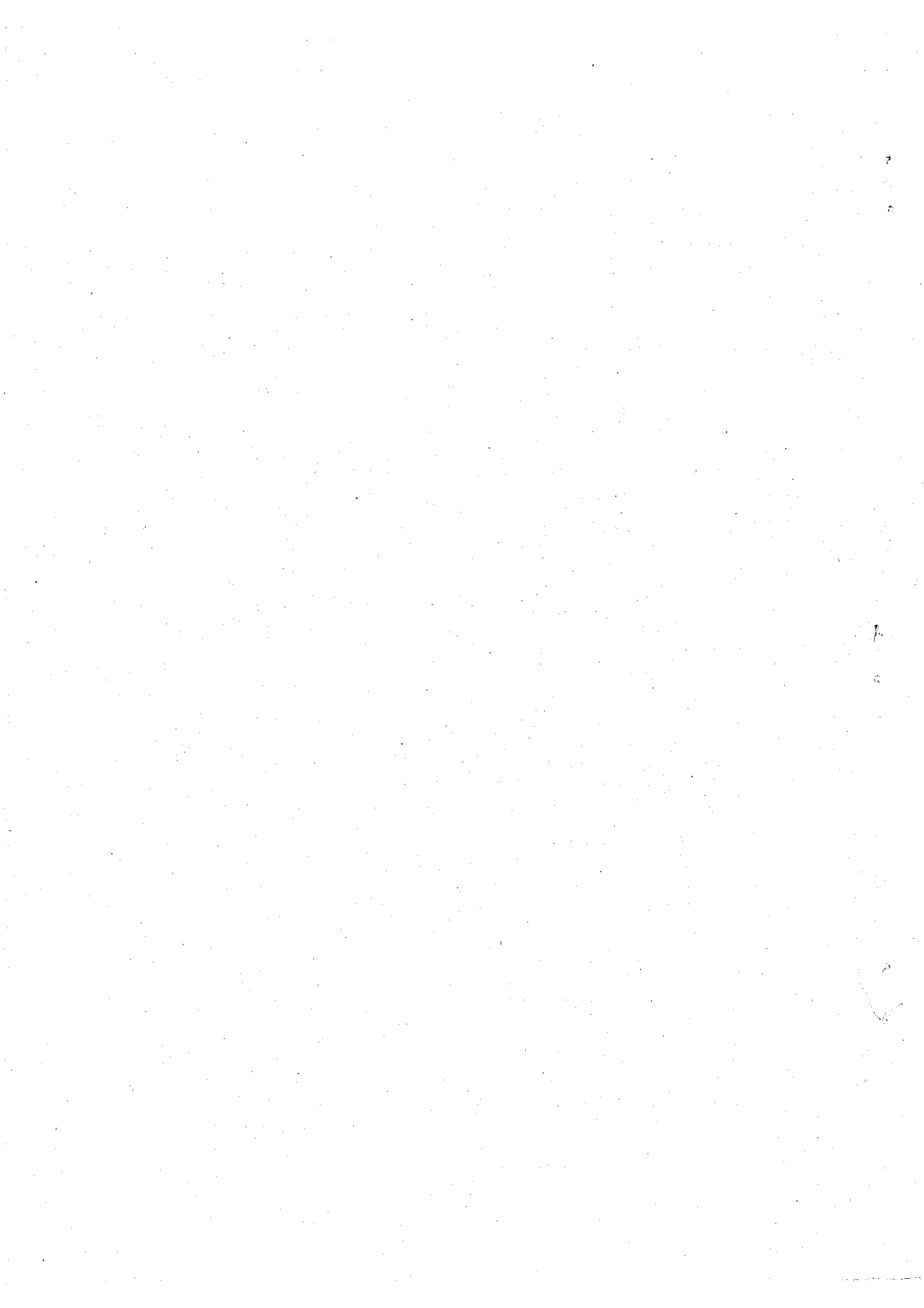


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Located on the bank of the river Neelum (Kishen Ganga) on the east side, close to a small settlement which shares its name, is the ancient monument of Sharda. Referred to by Kalhana in his *Rajataringni*,¹ the shrine exists at a latitude of 34-48' and a longitude of 74-14' as identified by Stein. Near the site (on the south bank of the Madhumati) exists a crude fortification which perhaps was the residence of the 'thanedar' (at the time of Stein's visit) whose authority extended down to the village of Dinyer.² It is not possible to accurately estimate the antiquity of the monument but it was certainly in existence about a millenium ago.³ Apart from a brief history and general features of the monument, three aspects seem worth mentioning; the legends associated with it which are current in the region today, the general similarity of its structure with monuments near Sirinagar and the rather remarkable shape of a pillar at its entrance.

Today the site is approached by crossing a bridge across the Neelum from the west side after travelling from Muzaffarabad. A century ago the Gazetteer described it as located at the northern extremity of the upper Drawar, "on the direct road from Kashmir (Sirinagar) to Chilas; the path crosses the Kishen Ganga by a Zampa bridge, and follows the course of the Sargan, or Kankori stream four stages to the village of Neat, in Chilas." The Sargan is fed, some distance from Sharda, by Noori Nai via which one may reach Naran. The main road to Sharda today was virtually unused a hundred years ago when, the Gazetteer notes, "in the direction of Mozaffarabad the main path follows the right bank of the Kishen Ganga (as it does even today); it is fairly good for footpassengers, but may be held to be impassable for cattle." Mention is also made of a Ziarat of 'Sayad Jamal', but it seems to be unknown to the villagers today, shaded by some walnut trees "which are almost the only trees in the village".⁴ The fort was then occupied by two *Jamadars* and sixty *Sepoys* with two *Zamburas* (small field pieces). It is probable that the bulk of the population changed in the village at the time of partition (or soon thereafter) because today there exists a legend in which not one but two monuments are referred to as "Mai Sharda" and "Mai Narda", the latter of which is not mentioned in any historical source (however Narda is given as a second name for Sharda), and Narda has not been seen by any living person in the area. The locals believe that the Tirthas were built by supernatural beings in one night because the stones have been made remarkably smooth and such large stone could not have been lifted by a human hand.

"The ancient Tirtha, though once evidently one of the most important in Kashmir, and famous for beyond its limits...." had lost its importance for the Hindus long before Partition.⁵ The temple has a legendary, almost mythical, origin. It is said that Sandilya, the Muni, son of Matanga, wished to see the goddess Sharda (Sarada) and was advised by divine revelation to go towards the site of the present temple. After various other

niches in the region of the entrance which could have been used for putting lamps but they do not bear any burn or soot marks to indicate such use.

The central structure itself is a square cella which rises on a twenty-four foot basement which is five and a quarter feet high. The outer walls of the cella are twenty-two feet in length. Three sides of the cella have blank trefoils on the outside, in relief, along with pillars on the top of which is the base of a pyramid. The extant wall from the plinth to the top is about twenty feet. The first and last yard of the height of the wall seem to be thicker than the rest. Within the larger arches "are smaller trefoil headed niches covered by double pediments There are scarcely any traces of the usual pyramidal stone roof. From the absence of any debris which such a massive roof when destroyed could not have failed to leave in and around the cella, I am inclined to doubt whether it ever existed. At present the cella is covered by a low shingle roof",¹⁰ which may have been constructed by colonel Gundu, the late *Zillahdar* of Muzaffarabad. This roof mentioned by Stein also does not exist, nor is there any debris to show its erstwhile existence. The possibility of such a shingle or wooden roof having existed earlier may, therefore, be considered also.

"The entrance to the interior of the cella is on the west side and is approached by stairs 5½ feet wide with flanking side walls"²⁰ wrote Stein a century ago, he fails to mention that the pillars on the south side are derelict (although Bates who visited the site earlier does refer to it). The pillars on the north side are standing with a crude supporting wall which must have been erected since Stein's visit. The pillars were two feet four inches square and about sixteen feet high. On the south side the inner pillar stands. It is interesting to note that the debris of the pillar is scant. It seems probable that scavengers have cannibalized the remains for adjacent constructions. The capitals of both pillars seem to have been made of a single stone each. The stones were cut into shape and the exposed face of the inner pillar on the south, displays the niche which was probably made for a wedge to hold the larger stone, capital, in place. The wedge itself is visible on the capital on the north side.

The interior of the cella is also a square measuring twelve feet on each side. "The only conspicuous object in it is a large rough slab on the ground which measures six by seven feet, with a thickness of about half a foot. This stone is believed to cover a Kunda, or spring cavity, in which Śārada appeared to Śandilya. At the time of my visit a red cloth canopy with plenty of red tinsel surmounted the sacred spot. Conches, bells and other implements of worship filled the remainder of the interior space."²¹ Today there is neither canopy, nor conches nor bells but the flat slab is still there (broken). Bates noted the existence of red pigment on the walls, flowers inserted in cracks but does not refer to conches and bells, he however suggests that the stone may have been disturbed by Mansur Khan, Raja of Karnao, in search of a treasure which he never found.²² The cella is built of sandstone blocks which Stein does not consider remarkable for size or careful dressing, he believes that the material and 'solidity of construction' of the temple to be inferior to that of the enclosing quadrangle. He is further of the opinion that the original

shrine was covered with plaster and hints that the present structure may be of no great antiquity.²¹ Compared to temples such as Kother and Kapetesusia, ascribed to Raja Bhoja, the fane lacks finesse, as Bates puts it the 'general effect of the Sharidi temple is ponderous and wanting in elegance' even though it displays the characteristics of the Arian architecture.²⁴

The inner chamber, as it appears today, consists of plain walls with some signs of a kind of mortar in the masonry. There is no sign of images or icons on the inside but there is a broken slab and a crater in the middle of the floor. The upper portion of the chamber opens out (some eight to ten feet from the plinth) creating a ledge on three sides of the chamber which has no roof as noted earlier. This ledge is probably lower than the abutments shown on the outside (and marked 'c' in figure III). The blank trefoil has been duplicated in the entrance of the courtyard (twice) in two sizes and on the three sides outside the shrine itself (shown in Fig. I and III). The double pediments covering the smaller trefoil headed niches could indicate the design of the original roof as the entrance itself may seem to be a part of a trefoil headed niche and it seems likely that the entire monument was the embodiment of the single (trefoil) motif which has been replicated in it where ever possible.

Though the poor quality of construction may belong to a later date the original Tirtha should have belonged to the time of Lalityaditya (on the evidence of Kalhana and because of the similarity of the structure with the Martand temple²⁵ known to have been constructed in the time of Lalityaditya). Apart from this period, the dates in²⁶ which the temple could have been built under imperial patronage were c. 850 A.D. and c. 1150 A.D. The last is unlikely also because Albiruni has mentioned the fame of the site. It must, therefore, have been in existence c. 1000 in any event.

Whereas the monument is worth-noting as it may be one of the furthest Hindu monuments in the north-west of Kashmir and because it depicts the Arian style for which examples may be scant in Pakistan today, its most remarkable feature seems to be the unique shape of the central pillar in the entrance porch. The cross section of the pillar has been reproduced in Figure I. The pillar must have held the frame for the door, however, a simple square pillar could have sufficed. As it stands, the chisled stones have been given a peculiar design in which the sides have been regulated unevenly. The outer side of the pillar has three slanting indentations, the side holding the door has one and the inner side of the pillar has two indentations such that the slants of the single and double indent meet on the inner side of the porch. Visualizing the open door as seen from the top of the steps (while entering the courtyard) this would give an open and welcoming impression while, when viewing the porch from the inside (at the time of exit) it would heighten the tunnel effect causing some sense of claustrophobia. If this was indeed the object, it could be an important concept of structural design.



NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. M.A. Stein, Tr., *Kalhana's Rajatarangini: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, Vols. I & II, Mirpur, 1991, i. 37; iv. 325; viii. 2556, 2706 and note; B-i. 37 (pp. 8, 152, 201, 212, 279-89). i. 37, "There when visiting the (shrine of the) goddess Śārada, one reaches at once the river Madhumati, and (the river of) Sarasvati worshipped by poets, traced by Stein in 1892. Almost opposite to Sarda is a large stream coming from the direction of Chilas, called 'Kankatori' on the map but designated as Srasvati by 'Saradamahatmya...'. Another name for the Madhumati in the Gazetteer is *Katsli ka Katta*. iv. 325. In the reign of Lalityaditya "having come to Kashmir under the pretext of visiting the (shrine of the goddess) Śārada" the Gaudas (from Bengal) invested the temple of Vishnu. vii. 2492, refers to a fort near Sharda (on the south) called Sirahsila which Stein identifies with the site of Ganesh Ghati which is further south of the fort lying near the Madhumati close to Sharda. viii. 2556, "On the following day the son of Garga (Sasthachandra) arrived after visiting the (temple of) Śārada, and added to the population of Indra's city the fighters he killed." This is before the time of Jayasimha, A.D. 1128-49. viii. 2706, "At day (-break) then he pursued him with a few followers on his flight as far as the shrine of the goddess Śārada, but did not succeed in stopping him."
2. Major Charles Ellison Bates, *A Gazetteer of Kashmir and the Adjacent Districts of Kishtwar, Badrawah, Jammu, Naoshera, Poonch and the valley of Kishten Ganga, Verinag, Mirpur, Azad Kashmir*, 1990, p. 338.
3. E.C. Szchau, Tr. *Albiruni's India*, Vol. I, Lahore, 1962, p. 158, refers to Sharda, which lies between Sirinagar and the hills of Bolor and has a wooden idol.
4. Bates, op. cit., p. 339.
5. Stein, op. cit., p. 279.
6. Ibid., p. 281.
7. Ram Chanda Kak, *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir*, Lahore, 1991, has a list of sites some of which are mentioned here because they are similar to Sharda. The Martand temple was built by Lalityaditya according to Kalahana (Stein, p. 141) and is situated near Sirinagar 75° 11' long, 33° 45' lat. Cunningham believed that Martand was built by Ranaditya but Fergusson, *Indian Architecture*, p. 258, does not accept Cunningham's view, which is based on the *Rajatarangini* (iii. 462) reference to a site of the same name. Cunningham believes the temple to be identical with that referred to by Kalahana. Narastan 34° 3' lat., 75° 10' long has not been referred to in the *Rajatarangini* but Stein has a note of it (P. 461, Vol. II). Mahayana constructed the temple at Pandethran (Puranadisthana). If we accept Stein's identification of Pandethran with Puranadisthana, i.e. 'the old capital', Sirinagar founded by Ashoka.
8. Bates, op. cit., p. 340.
9. The Superhuman builders are accepted today probably because the present technology in use in the region could not reproduce a similar structure. Similar legends are rife in South America, perhaps for similar reasons.
10. Stein, op. cit., p. 284.
11. Ibid., p. 285, and Szchau, op. cit.
12. Stein, op. cit., p. 286, the Jain scholar, Hemachandra, under king Jayasimha of Gujrat sent to Sharda for works on grammar, but Stein is of the view that the land of Srasvati-Sharda should be taken to mean Kashmir in general and Sharda in particular.
13. Ibid., pp. 287-88.
14. Ibid., p. 282.
15. Bates, op. cit., p. 339.

16. Ibid.
17. Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 282.
18. Bates, *op. cit.*, p. 339.
19. Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 283.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Bates, *op. cit.*, p. 340.
23. Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 284.
24. Bates, *op. cit.*, p. 338.
25. Kak, *op. cit.*, plates LII & LIII.
26. Sir Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Lahore, 1991, (originally written c. 1890) gives the dates which are somewhat at variance with Stein.

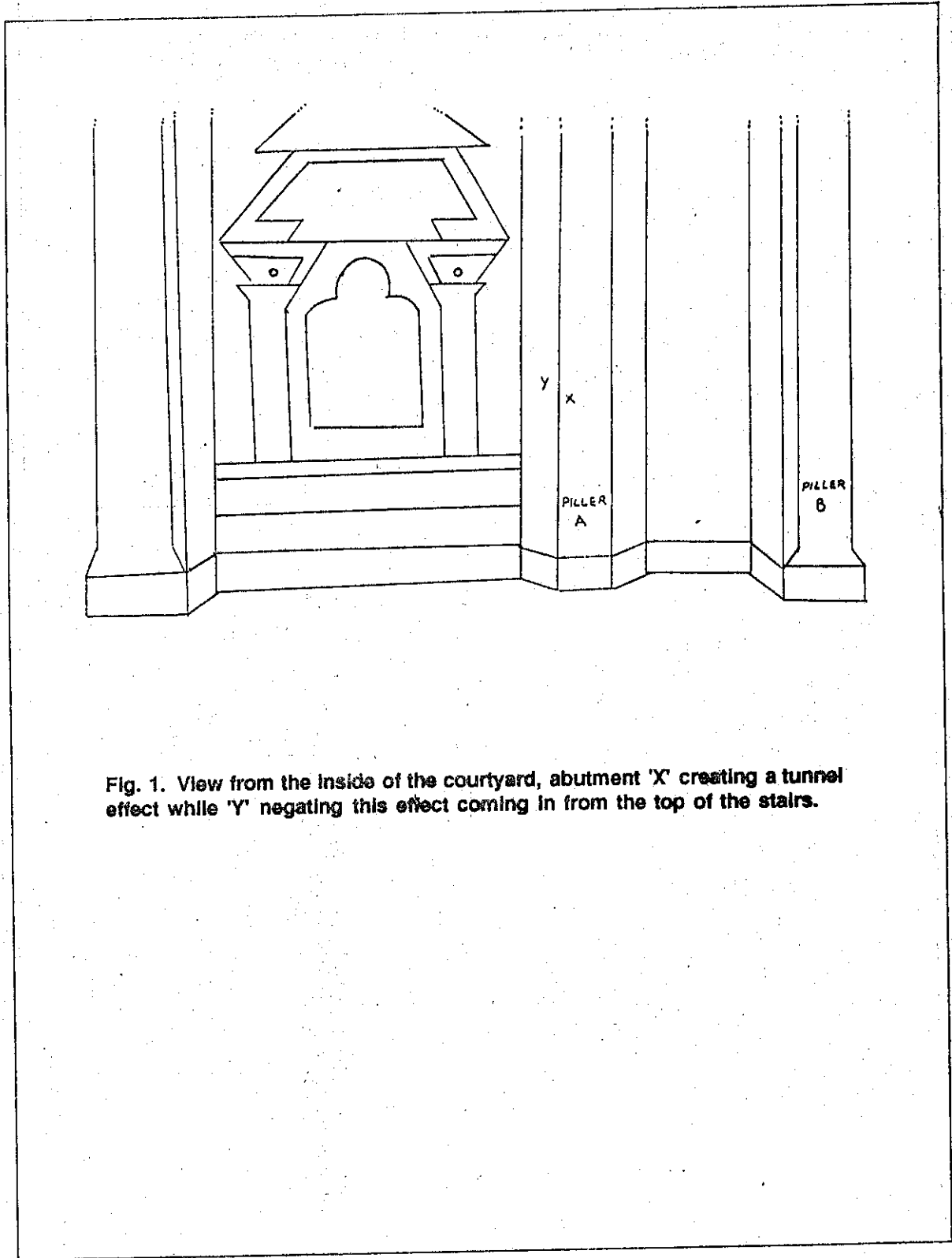


Fig. 1. View from the inside of the courtyard, abutment 'X' creating a tunnel effect while 'Y' negating this effect coming in from the top of the stairs.

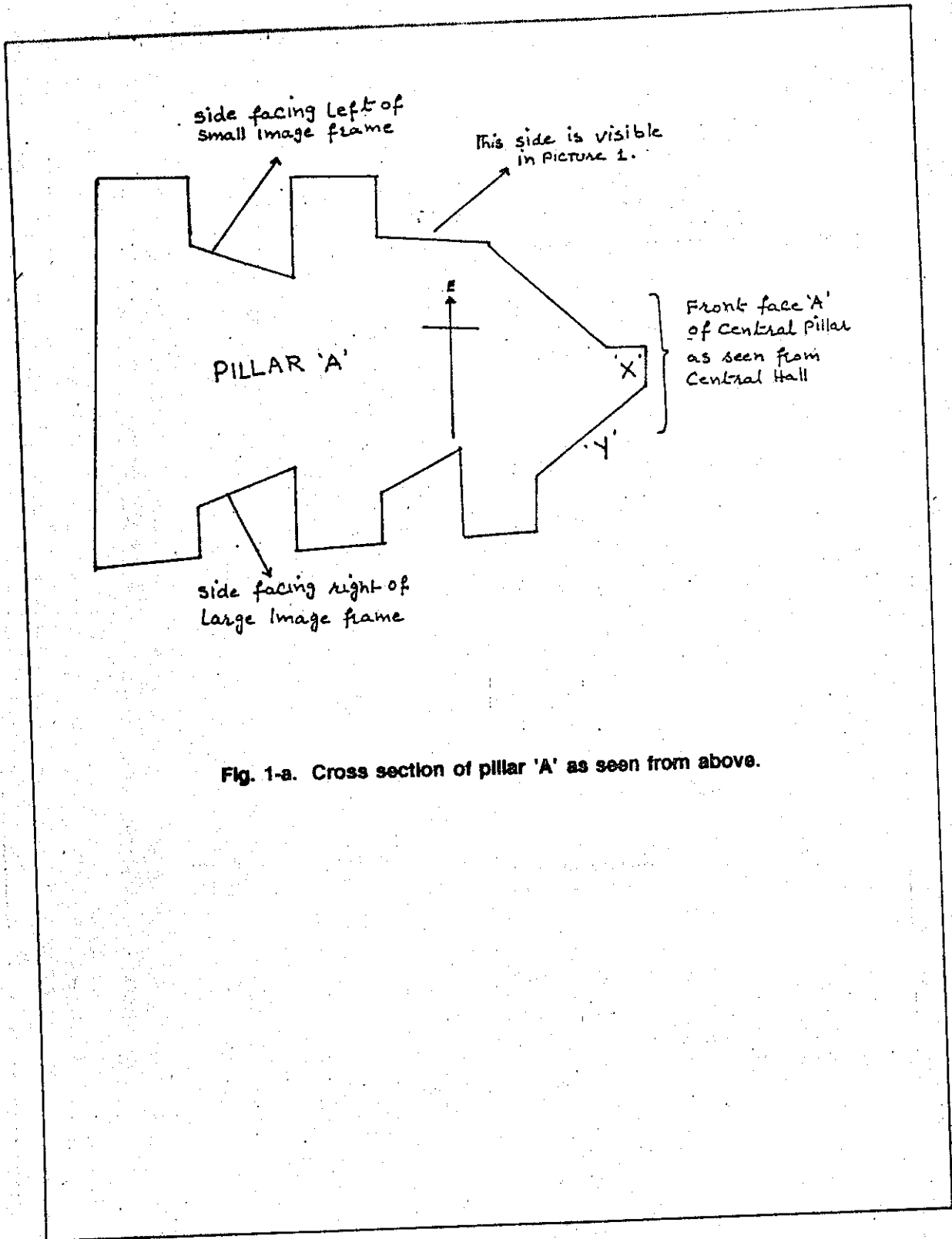


Fig. 1-a. Cross section of pillar 'A' as seen from above.

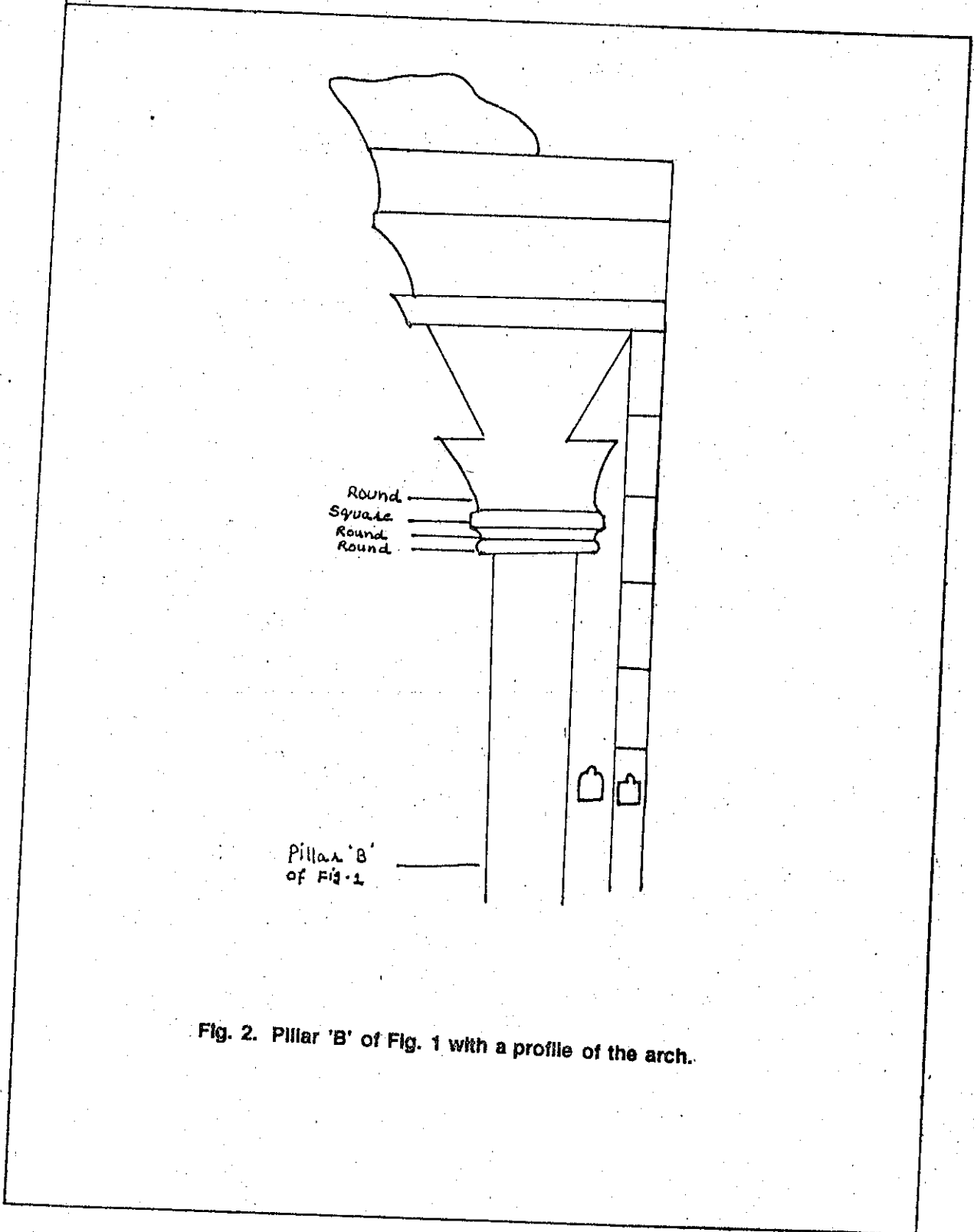
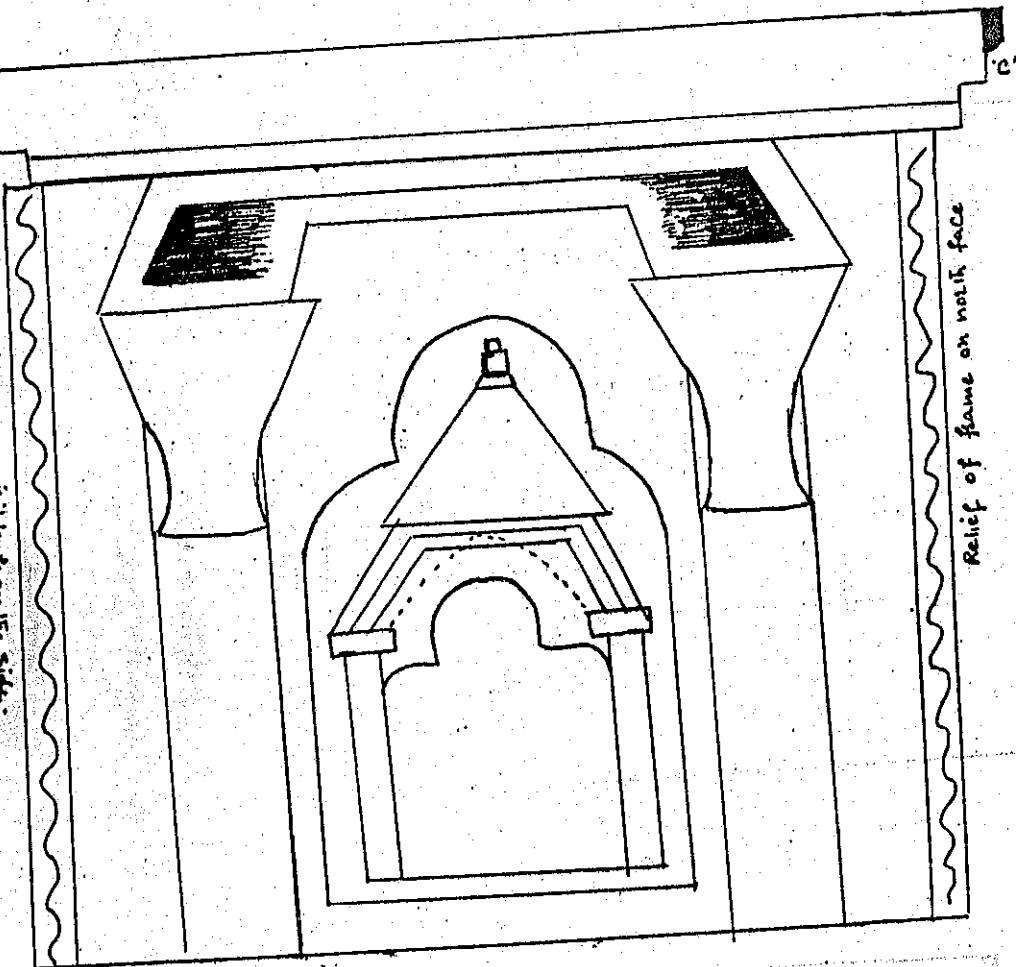


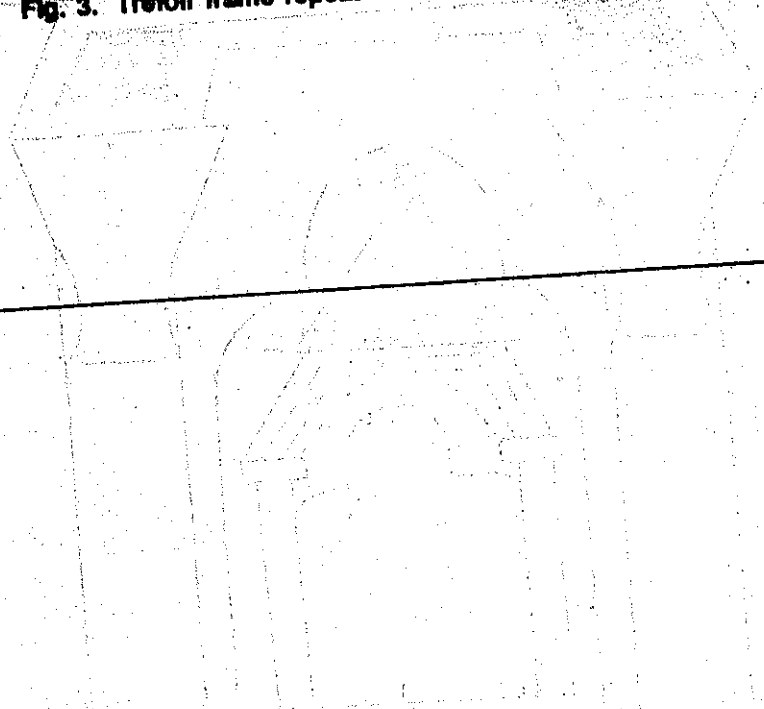
Fig. 2. Pillar 'B' of Fig. 1 with a profile of the arch.

Relief of frame as visible from the side.
Inset like the pillar of the east frame shown frontly.

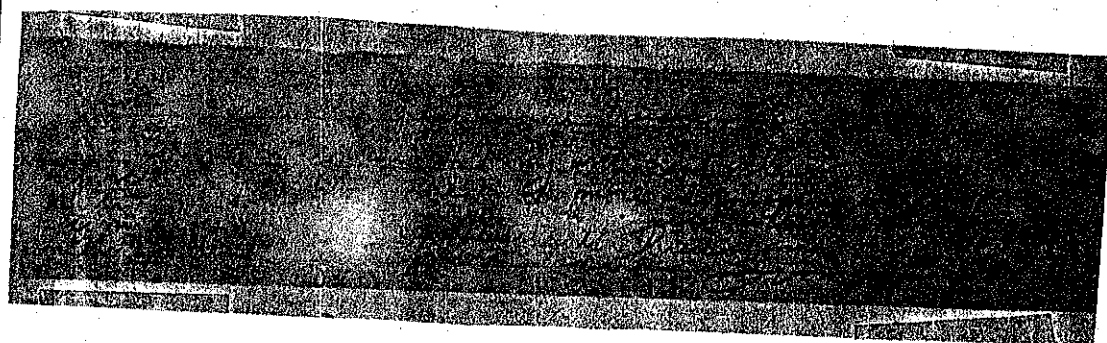


Relief of frame on north face

Fig. 3. Trefoil frame repeated on three sides of the main Chamber.



Lahore Museum as viewed by a Specialist



Having known this great Lahore Museum since 1956, visiting it at intervals since and following with great interest its steady improvements in exhibiting more and more advantageously its great collections. I find on this visit reason to admire what has been accomplished and to congratulate the Director and his collaborators in the excellence of the presentations.

DR. GRACE MORLEY
HEAD ICOM REGIONAL AGENCY IN ASIA
25TH MARCH, 1974.