

The Peshawar Museum in Retrospect

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Abstract

Peshawar Museum was established in 1905 and is the fourth oldest museum in Pakistan. It presents a blend mixture of British and Rajastani architectural elements. It has the largest Gandhara Buddhist collection of panel reliefs and other sculptures. A lot has been written on the museum collection but the museum building itself has always been ignored. Was the museum building originally designed for the display of antiquities or for some other purpose, if the building was not originally designed as a museum, how did it end up in becoming a magnificent repository of sculptures are the kind of questions which needed to be properly addressed. An attempt is made in the following pages to answer these questions. This research is based on the archival material now available. A detail description of the architectural features is given here for the first time.

Keywords: Peshawar Museum, Victoria Memorial Hall, British, N.W.F.P, History, Archaeology

1. Introduction

The Asiatic Society of Bengal (ASB) was founded in 1784. The cultural material collected by its researchers was displayed in Calcutta (present Kolkatta) in a proper museum in 1814 (Markham *et al.* 1936: 195). Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India and Sir John Marshall, Director General, Archaeological Survey of India were responsible for establishing museums in the main cities and over half a dozen site museums in the subcontinent (Ibid : 10). The first museum of Pakistan, the Victoria Museum, Karachi, was founded in 1851, the Lahore Museum in 1864, the MacMahon Museum, Quetta in 1900 and the Peshawar Museum in 1907 (Pl. 1) (Dar 1981: 13). Apart from these, other museums were also founded at several places in the territory presently called Pakistan. The Peshawar Museum is first mentioned by Mr. Loewenthal (1862:411-13) while discussing some of the sculptures and panel reliefs in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and its

gradual filling with antiquities in 1861. Sir Alexander Cunningham (1871:125) mentions the existence of a museum at Peshawar in 1872, while discussing an inscribed relic casket (vase) which he believed was from Taxila and was in the possession of the Peshawar Museum. But where was this museum precisely located no information is available. During the War of Independence 1857 the ground floor of the Ali Mardan Khan Villa was converted into the Government Treasury, where as antiquities were stored on the first floor (Khan 1998: 20). The Guides Mess had its own collection of sculptures often mentioned by early writers. The N.W.F Province District Gazetteer, Peshawar records “The Mess besides being a museum of precious relics and trophies is also the home of the Corps of Guides. The glories of old Gandhara are recalled by a number of sculptures and statues which are unique in design and interest.” (N.W.F. P. Gazetteers 1934: 315). On the request of Sir Aurel Stein this precious collection was handed over to the Peshawar Museum.

2. The Concept of a Museum Building

According to the archival record published by the Rashtrapati Bhavan¹ Library Delhi, India, ‘Mr. M. F. O’Dwyer, Offg. Commissioner and Agent to the Governor General, of the North West Province wrote a letter to the Governor General of India dated 24th July 1905. In the letter he wrote, “To honour the Late Queen Victoria it is decided to build a monument at Peshawar in her memory which was officially named as Victoria Memorial Hall and will be inaugurated by Prince of Wales when he will visit Peshawar in 1905. An amount of Rs. 45,000 was collected (which included Rs. 20,000) through private donations in the province in 1901-02. While the Municipality provided Rs. 20,000 (mentioned above) and Rs. 5,000 by the District Board of Peshawar. The Local donors were in favour of constructing a Darbar Hall (Assembly Hall) in Her Majesty’s memory. During the Director General of Archaeology, Mr. John Marshall’s visit to Peshawar in 1903 he suggested that a museum for the Buddhist period antiquity of the province should be constructed at Peshawar and promised that he will request the Government of India for a Grant-in-Aid of Rs.15.000 for the museum project. A total of Rs. 60,000 were collected for the project

¹ It is the name of President House of India.

and spent on the construction, furnishing and interior decoration of the building. For the building the present site was selected which was in the middle of cantonment and city". The reply from the Governor General's Office was also received in the following order:

Letter from Private Secretary to Viceroy, to H. A. Stuart, Esq., C.S.I., Offq. Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated 28th July 1905, on the contribution for the Victoria Memorial at Peshawar.

"The Viceroy desires me to forward the accompanying letter from Mr. M. F. O'Dwyer, regarding a contribution from archaeological funds for the Victoria Memorial at Peshawar. Will you please let me know the views of the Department upon it?" (Indian Archaeology 1899-1905: 66-68).

There are no details available regarding the private donors and their contributed amounts. But it was a common practice that an inscribed plaque mentioning the names of donors and the donated amount was installed in the buildings. The Victoria Memorial Hall, Muzzafargarh which was inaugurated in 1909 the donor's plaques are still installed in the original place (Pl. 2). When the Prince of Wales visited Peshawar, the building was incomplete and it was not inaugurated by him. Instead he was presented with a model of the building as a silver casket in which the welcome address was kept. The address was presented and read out by Babu Abdul Gafur Khan, Divisional Judge in Gor Khuttree where the Prince of Wales stayed during his visit (Pl. 3) (Sahai 1906: 140).

2. Building Style

The other memorial buildings constructed by the British in Peshawar are Mackeson Memorial, Hastings Memorial, the All Saints Church, the Saint John's Church and the Government House (Jaffar 2008: 154). The Portuguese, Dutch, French and Danish colonies adopted their native style of architecture of 17th and 18th century's buildings in India. The British also followed their footsteps but adapted it to the climatic conditions of the Indian subcontinent in larger cities. During the latter half of the 19th century the architects merged the local indigenous styles with the British architecture. Mr. R. F. Chisholm and Mr. H. Irwin

produced "Hindu-Saracenic" style. The other renowned architects of the same period were Sirdar Ram Singh in Punjab, Mr. F. C. Oertal in the United Provinces and Mr. E. B. Havell in Bengal, Mr. G. Wittet in Bombay. (Brown 1942: 135-36).

3. Sir Swinton Jacob: The Architect

Sir Swinton Jacob (Pl. 4) of Royal Engineer also transformed the Indian architectural styles according to the modern needs. He designed Sandeman Memorial Hall, Quetta; Victoria Memorial Hall, Peshawar; St. Stephen's College Lahore in present day Pakistan. As an Engineer and Political Officer, he severed the Maharajah of Jaipur and was awarded with KCIE (Knight Commander of the Indian Empire) and CVO (Commanders of the Royal Victorian Order). He died at Weybridge on 4 Nov 1817 (Rao 1915: 203-4).

Marshall twice mentioned the completion of the newly constructed Peshawar Museum building and mentioned the imperial subsidy of Rs. 15000 for the museum at Peshawar in the Annual Reports of Archaeological Survey of India (Marshall 1907: 02, Marshall 1906-07?: 03). The same amount was promised by Marshall in 1903 visit to Peshawar as mentioned above in the letter of Mr. M. F. O'Dwyer.

The Victoria Memorial Hall was built in 1905 and lies 34.01 N and 71.56 E on the world map. The museum was opened for the public as Peshawar Museum in November 1907. It is situated close to the Governor House and the Secretariat buildings just by the side of the main road that comes from the Cantonment Railway Station. The Memorial building stands on a grassy terrace. The brick building with four crowing kiosks at the corners is typically Curzonian architectural style, having Mughals and European elements. The total display area was 4850 sq. and consisted of one hall and four side galleries, two each on ground floor and up-stairs (Pls. 5, 6) (Dar 1979: 11-12, Jaffar 2008: 96, Dani 1995: 216-17).

4. Lawns

The size of the museum front and side lawns have shrunk because of new construction work and widening of the main road. The old Cypress trees were removed in 2001 and new trees were planted. The old trees

were complimenting the antiquity of the building and their removal has damaged its beauty. Flower beds are cultivated with oranges, roses and seasonal plants. For watering boring was done in the front lawn where pottery sherds were recovered at a depth of 80 feet. It shows that the museum is located on an archaeological site and in the past from the nearby Governor House punched mark coins were recovered.

5. Building Exterior

Prof. Dr. A. H. Dani has written about the architecture of the Victoria Memorial Hall Peshawar that it is a mixture of Mughal and British architectural elements, but if the building is studied in detail it has more influence from the monuments of Rajasthan. Swinton Jacob was stationed in Jaypore for a long period.

The museum building is oriented from Northwestern and Southeastern. Bricks, wood, iron and (*Kasuri mitti*) mortar was used in the construction of the building. The brick are devoid of plaster and are laid in English bond. The plaster was used only in interior and for decorative work. The whole building can be divided into four parts: the main hall, side aisles, side galleries and offices. The building is resting upon a raised podium showing torus and cyma mouldings. Its thick walls have empty space in between for insulation purpose. The main entrances to the hall are provided on the western and eastern side in the centre in the form of a projected vestibule. Its front corners have octagonal shafts/turrets crowned by cupolas/*chattris*; while the side walls are pierced with a windows. The projected *chajja* marks the level of ceiling, above it is a low wall forming a terrace on top of the vestibule. On the ground floor on either side of the vestibule are two windows; on the first floor are five of which the middle one has similar *jharoka* frame of the ground floor. The other four windows on the side have flat roof decorated with merlons. In their construction show segmental or terminated arches and double doors and are framed by projected cornices having two pilasters topped by a *chajja*. The parapet is crowned by three ribbed cupolas. The windows are separated by piers having Loin spout on either side. The parapet is plastered and decorated with false merlons. Each pier at the parapet is crowned by a cupola with a square solid base and a false arch on either side. The cupola are crowned by finial. Some piers on the central hall are crowned by solid capulas. The only difference is that instead of

windows it has a ventilator in each panel. The wooden shutters of the ventilators are divided into three cusped arched frames with glass pans. Originally the corner cupolas and the *jharoka* at the front rested upon four pillars with arches (Pls. 7, 8).

6. Rooms/Offices

At each end of the longitudinal wall are square rooms of which the ones at the east and south open on the south eastern side and are meant for offices. The arched windows are framed in recessed arches. The rooms on the first floor are provided with an entrance from the aisles and on three sides windows are framed by a half projected *jharoka*. The balcony of the *jharoka* rests upon a row of projected brackets forming a cornice: two pillars are support the *chajja*. On top of the roof of these rooms are octagonal platforms with (domed pavilion) *chattri*. Each pillar is in the form of an octagonal shaft crowned by a capital supporting a cusped arch in a recessed frame having projected *chajja*, above is a round low drum from emerge stylized acanthus leaves forming a collar for the dome which is crowned by *padmakosha* and finial. The roofs of the rooms on which the *chattris* are resting and projected in the centre with receding corners on three sides. Originally it was provided with a wooden railing which was later on replaced with cemented grill (Pl. 9).

7. Western Entrances to Stair

Flanking the main entrance are two doors, each opening under a cusped arch. These were used by the people for going to the first floor. Presently these doors have been blocked and the space converted into a washroom of the curator's office on one side on the other into a kitchen. On top of the entrance is a small office having small arch window in eastern and western walls. Towards the south is an arched opening with a doorway having a narrow-projected balcony supported by a cornice (Pl. 10).

8. Main Entrance from the Governor House side

The main entrance to the hall on the northwest. It has three double doors in cusped arches framed in rectangular panels having rosettes in

the spandrels. The door are separated from one another by three pilasters. In the side walls were arched windows which have been permanently blocked. The doors open into a lobby having entrances to the curator's office and the coin room opposite to it. In the centre of the entrance lobby is a huge segmental arch which separate the offices from the steps leading to the first floor (Pl. 11).

9. Main Hall

Three archways supported by octagonal shaft columns open into the main hall. Opposite to these arches are two large arches similar to the five arches on either side. In past there was a raised platform at the opposite side, which was later removed and the windows in the back wall were permanently blocked. It was used by the musicians and singers during ball parties. All the arches are framed in a recessed rectangular panel with rosettes in the corner. The balconies of the first floor are slightly projected with the help of simple brackets in row, thus forming a cornice with a low wooden railing having gul-e-no pattern. The main hall is constructed with the help of five huge arches supporting the flat roof constructed with the help of iron girder beams, Tee iron rafters and *choka* or thin bricks. To hide the girders and for the sake of beautification a false ceiling was built in 1969. To strengthen the structure the beam girders are externally attached with thick iron plates with the help of nuts and bolts and these plates are again tied to one another with a thick long iron bar which is a very unique type of strengthening process. The purpose was to avoid the collapse of the structure caused by the huge span of arches exerting pressure on the side walls. The purpose of the side aisles was to provide strength to the structures. The wooden floor of the main hall was made of teak wood replaced and repaired many times, presently the teak planks have been replaced by diyar or Pine. There is a space between the wooden floor and the ground below it for air circulation. The air ducts are provided on all the four sides to protect the wooden logs from of humidity and to keep it dry (Pls. 12).

10. Lobby on First Floor

Wooden stairs of teak are provided on either side of the entrance lobby. Of the three contiguous archways, the central doorway is changed into

a showcase while the side doors with glass pans open into the terrace on top of the half lobby i.e. curator's office and coin room. At each corner of the parapet is a solid cupola and the parapet is decorated with pseudomerlons. The doors and windows of both rooms are made in segmental arches. The newly constructed galleries have tarnished the beauty of the old building which was well balanced.

The curator's office and coin room clearly indicate that these were later additions when Sir John Marshall gave the idea to build a museum in Peshawar. The brick recovered from curator's office during repair work are inscribed with 1908. On top of the main hall at each corner is a cupola which was supported by four pillars while towards the Governor House were three cupolas in the centre which are missing now. The corner cupolas are replaced with solid ones.

11. Addition in the building

In 1969–70 on the eastern and western sides of the building, two halls were added in a similar fashion. In 1974–75, a second story was added to these two side halls (Ali *et al.* 2014: 5716). S. M. Jaffer have acknowledged the contribution of the people for the development of the Museum in the following words: "That Peshawar Museum has a very bright future admits of no doubt. It is deeply indebted to Mr. B. A. Kureshi, S.P.K., S.Q.A., C.S.P., Chairman, Planning and Development Board, West Pakistan, for his untiring efforts in initiating and completing its renovation and starting its expansion at a cost of Rs. ten lacs and thus meeting the long-felt need" (Jaffar 1969: iv).

12. Administrative Control

Sir Aurel Stein was appointed as the first curator of the Museum in 1906 and it was opened for the public in November 1907 (Markham *et al.* 1936:). Initially the Peshawar Municipality was looked after the Museum until April 1910. Then the control was shifted to the Local Government but still the Municipality maintained its garden which was later handed over to the Local Government in 1917 (Markham *et al.* 1936: 195). Being a provincial Museum it was directly controlled by the Director of Public Instructions, Peshawar in the past (Jaffar 1969: iv). The curators were also holding the charge of Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of India, Frontier Circle till 1927 when the

office was shifted to Lahore. With the appointment of a full-time curator, the building along with antiquities was transferred to the Provincial Government. Then a Board of Governors was established for the Peshawar Museum in December 1971. It was an autonomous body headed by the Chief Secretary of the Province as Chairman of the Board. The Museum started receiving annual Grant in Aid from the Provincial Government. Later on, the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was established on 1st July 1992. The control of the museum was then handed over to this Directorate, which operated under the of Archaeology and Museums, Ministry of Sports, Youth Affairs, Tourism, Archaeology and Museum, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ali *et al.* 2014: 5714-15).

13. Activities in the Museum

The first session of the Legislative Assembly of the then North-West Frontier Province took place in the museum building on April 19, 1932 (Pl. 13). The Viceroy of India, Lord Willington inaugurated the session (Ali *et al.* 2014: 5715). For the legislative Council meeting, it was kept closed for seven weeks in 1935. The building was also used for committee meetings, vice-regal durbars, meetings of the local Associations of Peshawar, Girl Guides, Local examinations, tea parties, etc. Because of these activities the museum was kept closed for the visitors (Markham and Hargreaves 1936: 68).

Among other important event which took place in the Victoria Memorial Hall was the Jirga of Mohmands, Orakzais, Afridis and other neighboring tribes. On 13 February, 1915, Roos-Keppel held a representative *Jirga* of 3,000 men in the Victoria Memorial Hall, Peshawar, where he announced the grant of increased allowances on the condition of "loyalty, good conduct, ratification of past agreements, and equitable distribution of the whole subsidy" by the tribe. For the loyalty of the trans-border chiefs, Roos-Keppel recommended gift of rifles and ammunition to the Mehtar of Chitral and the Nawabs of Amb and Dir (Baha 1978: 85).

In the post Partition era the establishment of the Museums Association of Pakistan took place on the premises of the Peshawar Museum. It was chaired by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1949 and was also attended by Abdul Qayyum Khan, Chief Minister, North West Frontier Province. Large number of people participated and the Association

worked tirelessly for the development of Museums in Pakistan (Pl. 14) (Shakur 1949: 10).

14. Collection and Display

During the first display large sculptures were displayed outside the building in the vestibule (Pl. 8) and the relief panels along with small sculptures on wooded panels in the side aisle (Pl. 10-11). The museum collections were displayed in the vestibule, side galleries, and upper galleries of the building (Pls. 15, 16, 17) (Dar 1979: 11-12).

Initially trilingual labels (English, Urdu and Pushto) were used for the guidance of visitors. Now only bilingual labels are placed with the exhibits. Before partition there was a “Purdah” day on Thursday when only female visitors were permitted.

The arches within the hall gave way to showcases and for display of sculptures in 1968-70. The newly established eastern hall was converted into the Ethnological and the western hall Islamic gallery.

The record number of visitors to the Peshawar Museum in pre-Partition era was 95,904 in 1910-11. When Sahribahlol excavation were carried out by H. Hargreaves in 1906-07, he gave an account of the sculptures found and displayed in the Peshawar museum, in the following words.

“The sculptures finds were singularly rich and numerous. No complete detailed list of them is here given, as this will find its natural place in the illustrated catalogue of the Peshawar Museum, where the collection is now exhibited. But an even better idea of the extent of the finds than such a list would give, can be gathered from the statement that they number nearly 300 fragments and fill twelve cases in the museum, where they take up more than one entire side of the main gallery. In arranging these sculptures in the Museum an attempt has been made, so far as I know the first attempt of the kind, to exhibit them with some classifications” (Marshall 1909: 106).

Similarly, during the excavation at Takht-i-bhai in 1907-8, the excavator mentioned the excavation material in the following words,

“The most important result of the work in the year under review was the recovery of the sculptures mentioned above. Apart from shapeless

fragments and those too badly damaged to justify being placed in the Museum under present condition (footnote:), the stone fragments alone number 472 specimens, occupying 15 cases in the Museum galleries, besides some dozen larger sculptures in the entrance hall (Spooner 1911: 135).

The number of antiquities went on increasing rapidly. The available space for display in the museum became insufficient with the passage of time. Thus arrangement had to be made for additional space.. The credit of rapid development in all departments of the museum goes to Dr. Spooner, who classified the antiquities according to the most scientific and up-to-date methods. The catalogue of the antiquities could not be finalized because of his other engagements as Archaeological Superintendent. Proposals accordingly were made for the appointment of an assistant (Marshall 1909: 03).

The antiquities consisted of images of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and Buddhist deities, reliefs illustrating the life of the Buddha and Jataka stories, architectural pieces and minor antiquities excavated at Charsada, Sahribahlol, Shah-ji-ki-dheri, Takht-i-Bahi and Jamalgarhi (See Figure), including engraved gems, pottery, relic caskets, stone, ivory, shell and metal objects. In the upper gallery are exhibited lithic inscriptions in Kharoshti, Sarada, Gupta, Kufic and Persian characters and photographs of the excavated sites yielding the antiquities. Electrotypes of the early coins of the North West Frontier Province are exhibited in the hall but the coins collections, jewellery and more valuable metal antiquities including the Kanishka relic casket are preserved in safes in the Library. Five cases of arms are displayed in the lower gallery and portraits of Sikh and Afghan rulers of the Province are hung in the hall and specimens of Kashmir papier-mâché, fine needle-work and Persian and Sanskrit manuscripts are exhibited in the upper right gallery (Markham and Hargreaves 1936: 195).

The museum was considered the best and up-to-date in India. The revised *Handbook to the Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum* could not be published because of pressure of work on Mr. H. Hargreaves, the then Honorary Curator. It was expected to be published on his return from leave in October next. He was then relieved of the additional charge of the Honorary Curatorship. The yellow wash given to the interior of the building, has been replaced with a more pleasing pale buff colour (Pls. 18, 19) (Dilawar Khan 1931: 156-57).

14. Discussion

The present research has traced back the history of Museums in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to 1857 when the antiquities were kept on the first floor of Ali Mardan villa during the War of Independence for safe custody. The same Ali Mardan villa remained in use as Peshawur Museum as mentioned by Lowenthal. The present building often mentioned as a Ball Hall, is also not true. It was constructed for the dual purpose i.e. Darbar Hall and a Museum, which is clear from the archival record published by the Rashtrapati Bhavan Library, Delhi. The architect of the building was Jacob Swinton who designed a beautiful majestic building and for strengthening of the roof he used the concept of side aisles which was very common in the Cathedral architecture of Europe for strengthening the central hall. He also used the concept of iron plates tied to one another with a long iron bars with the help of nut and bolts. The structure is well balance from the architectural point of view and shows influence from the architecture of Rajasthan where the architect stayed for a very long period. Besides being a museum, it was the hub of all major political, cultural and social activities of the province.

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Fig. 1 - Sculptures lying outside the Museum building (1930).



Fig. 2 - Stone plaque shows names of the donors.



Fig. 3 - View of a Darbar at Gorkhutree during Prince of Wales visit to Peshawar (1905-06).

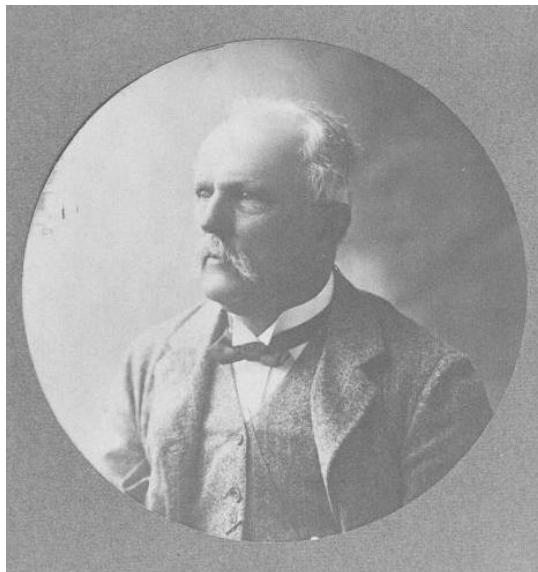


Fig. 4 - Colonel Sir Swinton Jacob architect of Victoria Memorial Hall (Peshawar Museum).

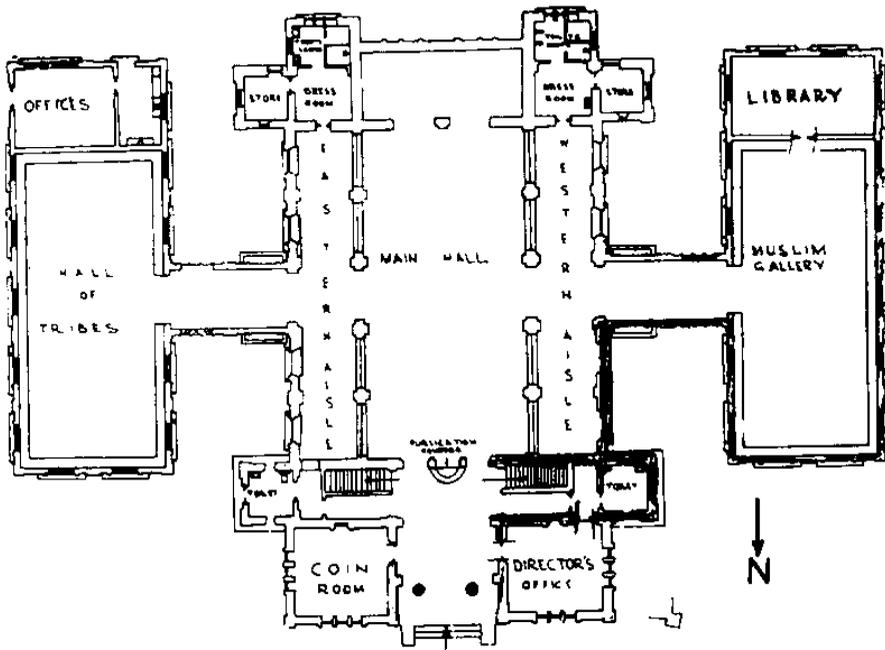


Fig. 5 - Plan of the Peshawar Museum, Peshawar ground floor.

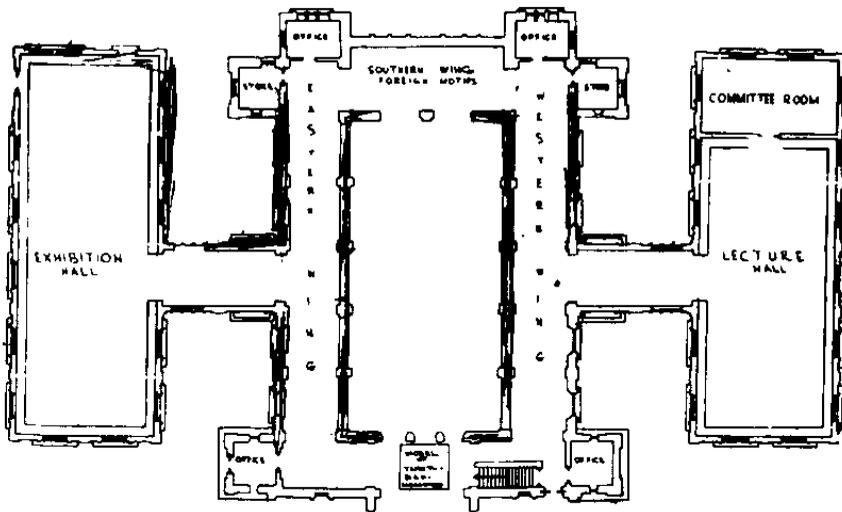


Fig. 6 - First Floor Plan of Peshawar Museum.



Fig. 7 - Museum building, looking from eastern side.



Fig. 8 - Museum building from back side.



Fig. 9 – Detail of Fig. 7.



Fig. 10 - Main entrance having three arch-gateways.



Fig. 11 - Main hall, displaying Buddha life story.



Fig. 12 - Members of the Legislative Assembly (1938).



Fig. 13 - Sir. Mortimer Wheeler, Archaeological Advisor, Government of Pakistan, reading his inaugural address in the Proceeding of the MAP first session (1949), held in Peshawar Museum, Peshawar. Courtesy: 'Proceeding of the MAP first session (1949).'



Fig. 14 - Display of Sculptures on Panels.

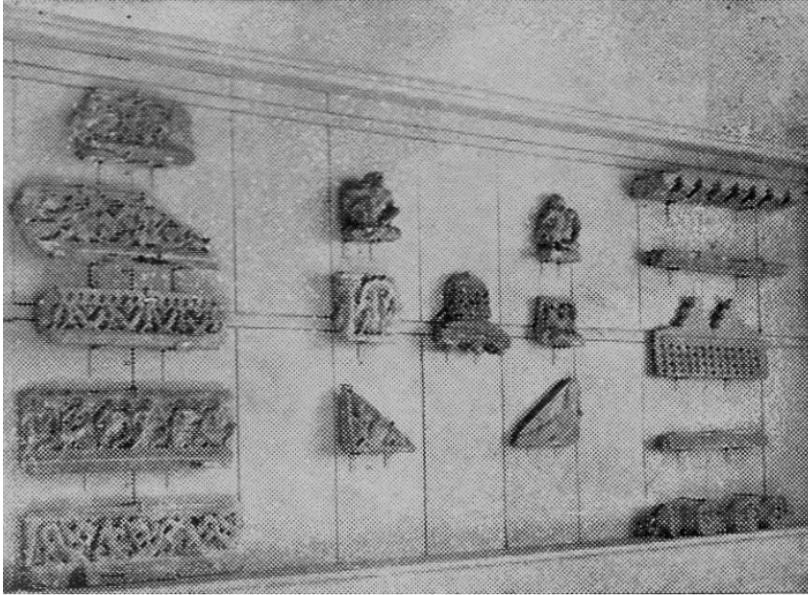


Fig. 15 - Specimen of open-display (1962).



Fig. 16 - Bird Eye view of Peshawar Museum the Kiosks and Cupolas are whitewashed.



Fig. 17 - Entering view of Peshawar museum from western gateway (1965-66).