

Derawar Fort Cholistan- History, Architecture, Conservation

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Abstract

Nowadays, lots of ancient sites are threatened by diverse anthropogenic actions. The absence of documenting of these ancient sites, mainly in developing nations like Pakistan, has resulted in the loss of a valuable part of history. The purpose of this research is to investigate one such site, the Derawar fort, a massive square fortification situated in Tehsil Yazman of Bahawalpur District, Punjab, Pakistan, in terms of its historical importance in the Cholistan desert and also the possible dangers it confronts nowadays.

Unfortunately, this fort is crumbling into an unstable heap of bricks, necessitating major preservation work. This study attempts to provide an introduction to the overall geography and background of the site in focus, followed by a discussion of the present scenario for the site's preservation and architecture. It provides a summary of the fort's existing status of decay and highlights the primary elements causing structural damage. Furthermore, the extent to which the government is successful in implementing preservation and restoration measures is being investigated.

This study's method was observational, using a qualitative approach, along with data gathered from the web, archives, and publications. The investigation of the site was restricted in numerous ways, like there was a lack of sufficient archaeological mapping and documentation. Much of the data gathered has come through first-hand observation and interviews with Rohi village residents.

According to the findings, the fort is on the point of deterioration. The study found that the fort is on the verge of deterioration, and while preservation work is being done, it will not be enough to restore it to its original splendor. The study draws conclusions on the strengths and weaknesses of conservation initiatives, as well as describes key features of development that may assist in preservation work.

Keywords: Archaeological Sites, Derawar Fort, Cholistan Desert, Bahawalpur District, Preservation

Introduction and History of Derawar Fort

The sustainable preservation of architectural heritage necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses a wide variety of research and expertise. Unfortunately, too frequently, preservation expertise has primarily concentrated on the technical and environmental factors of, say, stone/brick degradation diagnosis and potential solutions. Such attempts frequently fail to investigate the causes of heritage decay in a larger context in order to use preservation techniques in the most effective way to restore them to their former splendor in the long run.

This study will address and investigate the causes of the degradation of one of Pakistan's historic forts, Derawar Fort, which is the greatest remaining example of the forts that were used to defend desert trade routes. It is located in the Choli stan (Rohi) Desert around 94 km from Bahawalpur city. The desert itself covers 26,933 square kilometres in the districts of Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, and Rahim Yar Khan, which were once part of the old state of Bahawalpur (Figure 01). Once a rich region watered by what is now the dry Hakra River, the old Sarswati. Cholistan derives its name from the Turkic term chol, which means "sands," and istan, a Persian suffix that means "land of." As a result, it is known as "a land of sands."

The Cholistan Desert has an arid environment with occasional rainfall, high summer temperatures, low relative humidity, substantial evaporation losses, and strong summer gusts. The majority of the rain falls during the monsoon season (July to September), but some rain usually falls in the winter and spring (January to March). The yearly rainfall ranges from 100 to 200 mm (Akbar et al., 1996; Arshad & Rao, 1995).

The desert landscape is a repository of valuable and one-of-a-kind cultural assets. The constructed assets included ancient monuments, forts, communities with distinctive patterns, and house forms of a primarily nomadic population that wandered over the desert in search of food and water for their livestock and fertile land. According to folklore, this territory was previously home to 39 forts. Unfortunately, there is no reliable verification of this. Most of these forts have already mixed with the desert landscape, while the remaining have been abandoned to fade with the desert's dusty winds and are in a ruinous state because of human negligence, vandalism, and erosion of the brick walls. Fort Derawar is the only one of the 39 forts that is still in a pretty good condition of preservation because of its continuous use. Since no major detail about the other forts was available, and to keep the focus on the research's relevance, Derawar, the main subject of the research, is explored in detail.

The Derawar fort, approximately 130 kilometres south of Bahawalpur (Figure 03 and 04), is a spectacular, huge, and well-known historical site that rises out of the surrounding Cholistan desert and can be seen from afar (Figure 05). It is owned by the Abbasi family. This fort is prominent because it dominates the Cholistan desert skyline. According to common belief, this fort was titled Derawar after the founder, Dev Rawal. Historians and archaeologists think Derawar is one of the Cholistan deserts' earliest inhabited locations. In the 9th century, Rai Jajja Bhatti, a Rajput leader of the Bhatti dynasty whose sister was married to Deoraj, a prince of Jaisalmer, India, erected it for military purposes. This ancient fort was the nexus of Rajput and Daudputra rivalry in the seventeenth century. It guarded the old trading route connecting Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The site was taken from Raha Rawal Singh of Jaisalmer by the Abbasi ruling family in 1733, when the existing fort was completed. Due to Bahawal Khan's preoccupations at Shikarpur, the fort fell out of the control of the Abbasis in 1747 (Figure 02). Nawab Mubarak Khan took control of the fortress back in 1804. Several structures were erected within and around Fort Derawar throughout the State period (1805–1954), which included a palace, mosque, market, and quarters for the imperial troops, and also the adjoining Abbasi royal cemetery, with its tomb features.

The Hakra valley civilization lived in Cholistan around 4000 BCE. The areas of these early civilizations were located along the bank of the Ghaggar River (presently recognised as the Hakra in Pakistan, and recognised in ancient Vedic times as the Sarasvati), which was 300 miles in length but had its centre point around Fort Derawar (Figure 06), where it split into various small streams and formed a playa. As a result, the Derawar settlements remained livable at least from 4000-2000 BCE (Mughal, 1997). Furthermore, the entire region around Derawar was originally well irrigated by this river, and clean water could be had there, attracting desert nomads who erected communities around the forts at various times, a few of which still survive today, like those near Forts Bijnot, Derawar, Dingarh, and Mojgarh. The purpose and function of these forts, which were situated at regular intervals of 29 kilometres, are shrouded in mystery.

Over 400 archaeological sites dot the 500-kilometer dried riverbanks, the majority of which date back to the Indus Civilization. In the eighteenth century, the settlement below the fort walls housed 12,000 inhabitants. Derawar was irrigated by a canal till the 1960s and then became abandoned, when water from the Sutlej River was redirected to India under a new international agreement. Now that the ancient canal has been cleaned and new waterways have been constructed, farmland now surrounds Derawar, and a paved road connects it to Ahmedpur East.

Architecture of the Derawar fort

The courtyard of the fort is reached after entering through the Shahid Gate, which overlooks the Cholistan desert. The innermost courtyard was erected on top of a network of underground tunnels and prisons, as is typical of most sub-continental forts. The fort's eastern gate is currently guarded by a massive tower with gun emplacements erected during the 1965 war with India. According to information given by the Punjab archaeological department (Farouq, 2013) several of the structures within the fort were dismantled during this period to make room for training and a parading ground. The fort was built in mud originally, as shown by the damaged walls. The ancient mud fort is represented by an atria on the north-eastern flank of the current fort. The current fort is built on the ruins of the old mud fort. The fort's floor level is roughly 20 feet high. Ramps are used to reach this height.

Mostly every era saw the restoration of Derawar. Daudpotras gave it its current form. The mud fort was rebuilt into something more substantial by Nawaz Mubarak Khan. It is currently large and spectacular, constructed of millions of red fired bricks and has a tremendous architecture that is both beautiful and intimidating. Bricks of 1" thickness were made from available local clay. These were utilised to construct the exterior massive walls, which are sustained by giant round 40 buttresses (bastions), four on every corner, nine on three sides (West, South, and North), and eight on the eastern side, measuring 40 metres (130 feet) high and 1.5 kilometres (a mile) in circumference (The Express Tribune, 2015).

The current fort, which has been transformed throughout time, encompasses around 35 acres of land. Other historical structures in the vicinity of the fort have included the White Marble Mosque, also known as the Abbasi Mosque, which was erected in 1849 for the Nawab's personal religious man, Pir Ghulam Farid. There was additionally a Noor Mehal built on the northern side of the fort, where Nawabs used to lodge before approaching the land. Furthermore, a water pond also borders the fort's outer edges on the northern edge of the Noor Mehal. Just a few hundred metres to the east of the fort are the marble and blue-tiled mausoleums of the Nawabs and their families. The gracefully domed marble mausoleum of the last nawab's English wife is also on sight. Likewise, the fort is a multi-structured building that includes the Nawab's watch tower, Nawab's resting area, Zanan khana, workers' and soldiers' area, the Nawab's office, Phansi Ghatt, prisons, and weapon storage, among other structures. Two guns are stationed in a parade yard inside the fort. According to historians, the structures inside the fort, which are now dilapidated, were vacated by the reigning Nawab's family in 1920. It is not just a masterpiece of beauty, but every single little thing about the fort takes you back to a period when the fort was completely lived in by its residents. Whether it's the mysterious underground jails or the inhabitants' quarters, each part tells its own narrative. One of the most interesting aspects is that there is an underground railroad that took the previous emperor from his castle to the fort. The Nawab's underground lodgings are still there, but they have deteriorated in several parts. It is wonderful to witness the air movement system that keeps the underground royal palace pleasant as an air conditioned area, as well as the impressive passive ventilation system.

Considering the decoration of buildings (Figure 07 and 08), which is an essential feature of South Punjab's ancient architectural language, as shown in the Derawar fort. The fort's most notable aesthetic feature is the art of wall murals, which has antiquity roots but whose origins are unknown. The Royal Chamber was lavishly decorated with nonfigurative Islamic art from the Islamic tradition (Figure 09, 10 and 14). The frescoes and wall paintings of the room were created in compositions with different pairings of fruits and vegetables, as well as floral patterns, indicating oneness and togetherness, and themes influenced by local flora and fauna, as well as inspiration from outside. Plants in murals have curved leaves that have been decorated in the Iranian manner. Colors and themes were brilliantly blended. Colors for fresco painting were

originally made from natural ingredients and kept wet in matkas (earthenware jars). Hirumchi was used for red, burned coconut husk for black, green from sand-e-sabz (green stone), yellow from yellow clay, white from burnt marble chips, and blue from Laagward or Lajwanti (Lapiz Lazuli) to achieve the colour range. In reality, wall painting is an Iranian tradition that peaked during the Mughal Empire, notably during the reign of Jahangir. The blue colour utilised in the motifs, in various tones of cobalt blue, indigo blue, and turquoise, represents nobility, sincerity, and faithfulness (Khan, 2003). This style of ornamentation was ideal for the deserted area's setting since it could withstand the harshness of the climate, such as extreme heat, rainfall, and cold.

All of the fort's buildings were built mainly as load-bearing brick structures with cut and moulded bricks, generally supported by wooden beams, and with carved wooden doors (Figure 11-13), and ventilators. Furthermore, hardwood ceilings are adorned with naqaashi work (Figure 15), with floral designs and carvings. This ceiling was made in some rooms using the traditional tarseem bandi technique (Figure 16), in which small pieces of cut wood are joined with each other in a geometric form by an intricate interwoven joinery.

Arches and columns were among the other architectural elements. The fort had three types of arches: one was multi-foiled (Figure 18 and 21), which are distinguished by various circular or leaf forms carved into their inner profile (the name foil originates from the old French word for "leaf"), and the other was semi-circular and pointed arches (Figure 19 and 20). The semi-circular arches at the front of the building were part of the area that was regularly used by the British. These arches form an arcaded veranda in the front, while the arches on the sides are multi-foiled blind arches added by the Mughals. The columns were designed in the manner of Persia and Egypt's ancient columns (Figure 22 and 23). The garden front is pretty ordinary in its arrangement since it provides vistas to all rooms and spaces and adds to the fort's majesty.

Deterioration of the Derawar Fort

The current condition of the Derawar fort makes it impossible to believe that it was once one of the most significant key locations inside the Cholistan desert, since the fort is crumbling at an alarming rate and no one seems to be concerned about it. The fort was in fine form two decades ago, but the destruction in the last decade has been sudden and massive. According to reports, the fort is still the private property of Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan V's descendants, who have been struggling for control for decades. As a result, the fort has been clearly neglected in terms of preservation. The fort's structures are vulnerable to a variety of natural disasters. Bricks used in the fort's erection currently lie at the bottom of its damaged and cracked outer walls, and it indicates that residents have tried to steal building materials from the façade (Figure 27-32). The Nawab's quarters (a long hallway with rooms off either side), the women's section behind a closed door, a high wall, and some military barracks are all that survived. Some of the bastions have become nothing more than mud piles. The overall condition of the masonry is deteriorating; although the walls have undergone relatively little neglect, the poorly drained structures have fallen victim to rainwater.

Underground buildings are inaccessible because they have been entirely filled with sand, blocking the pathways (Figure 25 and 26). The 2019 monsoon rains blocked the passageways significantly. Furthermore, three bastions and two pieces of the fort's 80-foot-high, 8-9-foot-thick outer wall had been severely destroyed by harsh weather and time. There are several factors that add to the degradation of fort structures; nevertheless, the following are the most likely causes of fort structures' deterioration. The presence of various organic materials in masonry walls necessitates laboratory testing for bricks and mortar. It is possible that various impurities existed in the original structures have been reintroduced in materials being used for recent repair and restoration works.

Furthermore, the Cholistan Desert's climate is characterised by strong summer winds. At times, the velocity can exceed 20 miles per hour at times, while the average velocity is around 11 to 12 miles per hour (PCRWR, 2004). Wind pressure at these velocities has had an influence on the fort's buildings. The structures on site are riddled with cracks and holes.

The most damaging consequences of the combination are caused by rain penetrating them and being forced by wind pressure to produce significant interior degradation following saturation of exterior surfaces. In the vicinity of the fort, rainfall is light and infrequent (166 millimetres on average per year). Rain generally falls during the monsoon season (July to September). Monsoon rainstorms are frequently heavy showers (PCRWR, 2004). Rain will cause damage to the brickwork above and below ground level, as well as inside areas, in a variety of ways. Rainwater poured down vertical surfaces after the bricks had been soaked, and wind pressure propelled it through fissures or even through the material itself due to its high porosity. Rain entered the brick walls, causing internal degradation and the formation of holes.

Furthermore, the groundwater in the desert is typically saline (PCRWR, 2004), and rising damp is a common phenomenon and a key cause of deterioration in construction materials, particularly when combined with high salt concentrations. Even if it is minor, it can induce a variety of deteriorating forms. As per its quality "chemical composition," saline groundwater is identified as the most significant factor that can impact the high level of harm to various materials and lead to a variety of deteriorating forms.

Preservation of the Derawar Fort

Architectural preservation can be defined in a variety of ways. For instance, Elias defined conservation as "a set of procedures that contribute to the protection of the architectural and historical features of significant old places and structures, including such repairing, removing erosion and sedimentation signs, and safeguarding acceptable standards for protecting of open spaces and squares" (Hmood, 2019). Architectural preservation contributes to the maintenance of an area's identity and pride among its residents. It goes beyond simply restoring and maintaining historical treasures to promote well-being and security via widespread community participation and engagement. It creates chances for jobs and poverty reduction, and also, in the long term, aiding in the achievement of sustainability objectives.

In recent years, the government of Pakistan's Department of Archaeology has undertaken a number of conservation measures to preserve this legacy (Figure 33-35). In 2017, the Directorate General of Archeology and the Government of the Punjab executed a project titled "Preservation and Restoration of Derawar Fort, District Bahawalpur," which was funded by the "Youth Affairs, Sports, Archeology & Tourism Department, and the Government of the Punjab,." The general public, local and foreign tourists, and stakeholders, including Ar. Maqsood Ahmad, Director of the Directorate General of Archeology in Punjab, and Engr. Sajjad Ahmad, SDO of the Directorate General of Archeology in Punjab, are project beneficiaries. On July 20, 2017, the project was authorised for a PC-I sum of Rs. 101.600 million, which was later amended to Rs. 115.742 million on December 18, 2018. However, up to August 20, 2021, actual expenditure was Rs. 76.030 million, indicating a financial utilisation of 65.7 percent (Zia, 2021).

The exterior of the fort's wall is currently being adversely damaged by salt and is crumbling down in numerous parts. Therefore, preservation work has been divided into phases. The salt-affected bricks were removed in the first phase, and underpinning work was carried out using special-sized bricks, and a 19-foot wide portion of the boundary wall and the 62-foot deep bastion of the Derawar Fort were repaired up to a height of 75 feet (Figure 36). Furthermore, partial preservation works include the restoration of the front of the south-eastern and north eastern fort bastions, the first entry gate, the interiors of the fort, a Mosque (Figure

37), the approach and interior of Bara Dari (Figure 38), and the Godowns. The godowns were maintained at the project site, but diagonal lines were added to the final outside surface of these godowns. Since preservation is required to be done in accordance with the original pattern and design, and because there was no trace of such a pattern before the conservation tasks were undertaken there, the presence of such additional patterns indicates a deviation from the original design. Furthermore, work progress is slow, which may cause delays in the project's date of completion.

Discussion

All of the discussion in this study aims to raise knowledge and awareness of Pakistan's heritage.

The following suggestions in the discussion part cover a broad range of related issues:

1. Raising and developing awareness, as well as instilling it in students and the general public.
2. Training and training programmes should be promoted, and urban conservation teams should be trained. Architects, planners, sociologists, economics, historians, and geologists should all be included. Joint programmes between universities that provide courses relating to the built heritage can aid in the blending of many disciplines into a single cross-disciplinary curriculum.
3. Almost majority of the labors and artisans employed by the Department of Archaeology are daily wage employees who work for less than half the year due to the current budgeting structure of fund carry-over. There is no motivation for a skilled artisan to stay on the job or for a new corps of skilled craftsmen to be taught. Existing landmarks and monument sites are excellent examples for giving craft training in institutes and schools. Joint programmes should be developed between vocational training institutes and such institutions. Rather than big cities, the latter might give on-site training in small towns and locations with a high concentration of monuments, such as Cholistan, Taxila, Thatta, and so on.
4. In addition to utilizing existing training institutions, specialist training courses and seminars relating to historical conservation and the environment must be undertaken. Research into old construction techniques, materials, and art and craft forms must be promoted. Prior to the establishment of new centers, existing infrastructural facilities like the Pakistan Council for Scientific and Industrial Research laboratories, the Building Research Laboratory, the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, and university research laboratories may be used.
5. Creating a detailed inventory and record of the built heritage
6. Collaboration among various agencies, municipalities, universities, research and development organizations, archaeology, auqaf, and tourism departments/corporations is mandatory.
7. Policymakers and administration must be involved in the efforts of preservation from the initial level.
8. Tourism marketing and growth with environmental impact assessment is required. While tourism marketing has economic benefits, its drawbacks must also be considered. Tourism has an impact on a region's native lifestyles and demands infrastructure, which may harm ecosystems and generate pollution. An environmental impact assessment study should be included as part of the overall development strategy prior to the construction of tourism infrastructure. Coordination among tourism departments, archaeological departments, and other development organizations is essential.

Conclusion

Derawar Fort is a magnificent and iconic location in Cholistan that can be seen from a considerable distance on a clear day. This massive square fort with towering walls and bastions still stands tall in its splendor after nearly twelve centuries and tells the stories of its glorious history. It appears majestic from the exterior, but the inside reveals a different storey: neglected, damaged, and collapsing.

Because of a lack of maintenance and restoration work by competent authorities, it, like many other forts in Pakistan, is slowly decaying and quickly becoming ruins. Although Derawar is now an abandoned and neglected fort, it once stood as the gateway to the Cholistan desert, defending this realm against invaders from Iran and Afghanistan. Derawar Fort requires significant restoration work, or else this magnificent desert fort will be gone forever. The government of Pakistan is concerned about its conservation, but only on a relatively small scale. The present condition of the fort indicates that great care should be taken to maintain and preserve it. The fort is on the UNESCO list, and if it remains in such poor condition, I am sure UNESCO will remove it. It is the right time for the Punjab government to take action to preserve and maintain it. It is a one-of-a-kind fort in the Cholistan desert with a lot to offer visitors and historical scholars.

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Figure 1: Map of Pakistan with the highlighted region of Cholistan and other deserts

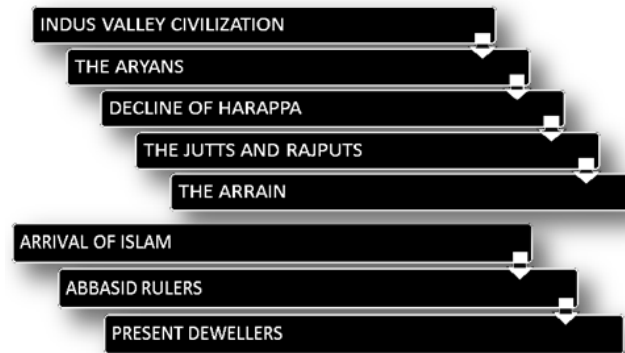


Figure 2: Historical timeline of Cholistan Desert



Figure 3: Location and distance of Derawar Fort from Bahawalpur (Source: Author)

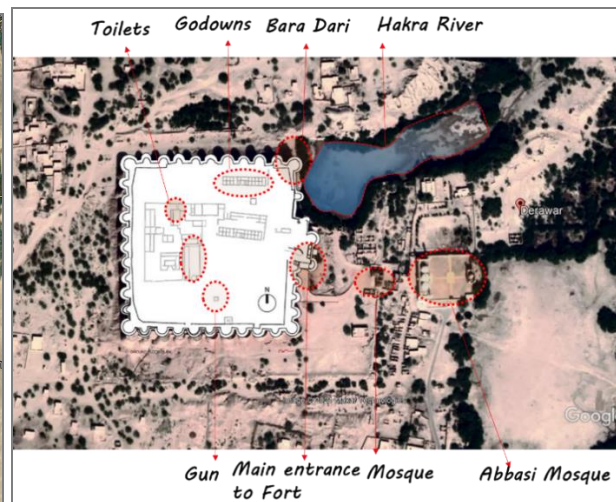


Figure 4: Plan of Derawar fort with highlighted spaces



Figure 5: Derawar Fort with giant round 40 buttresses (bastions) measuring 40 meters (130 feet) high, dominating the landscape of Cholistan desert (Source: Author)



Figure 6: Dry Hakra River, the old Sarswati near Derawar fort
Source: Author



Figure 7-8: Carving on doors panels and decoration on roof

Source: Author

Figure 9-10: Wall paintings of the room were created in compositions with different pairings of fruits and vegetables, as well as floral patterns, indicating oneness and togetherness (Source: Author)

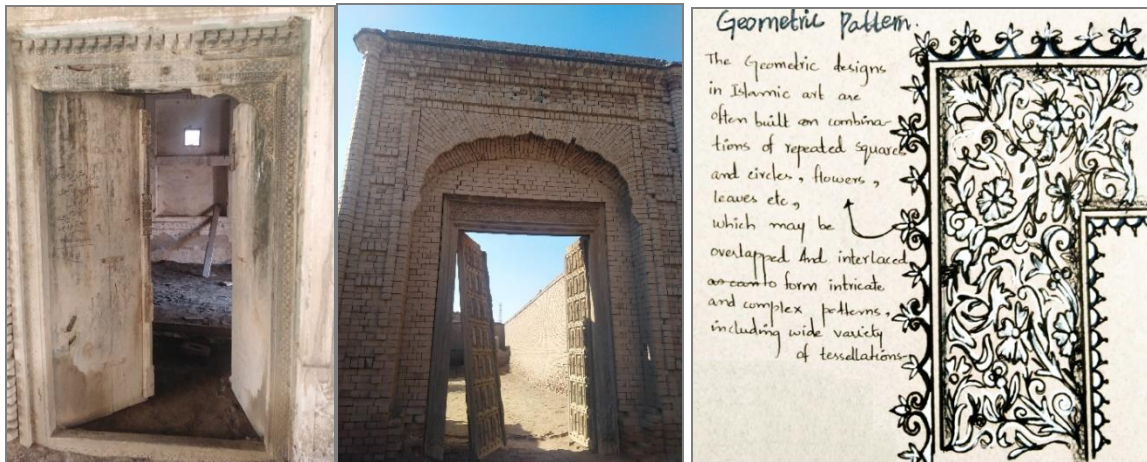


Figure 11-12: Carving on doors with geometrical patterns at the Fort

Source: Author

Figure 13: Geometrical patterns at the Fort

Source: Author

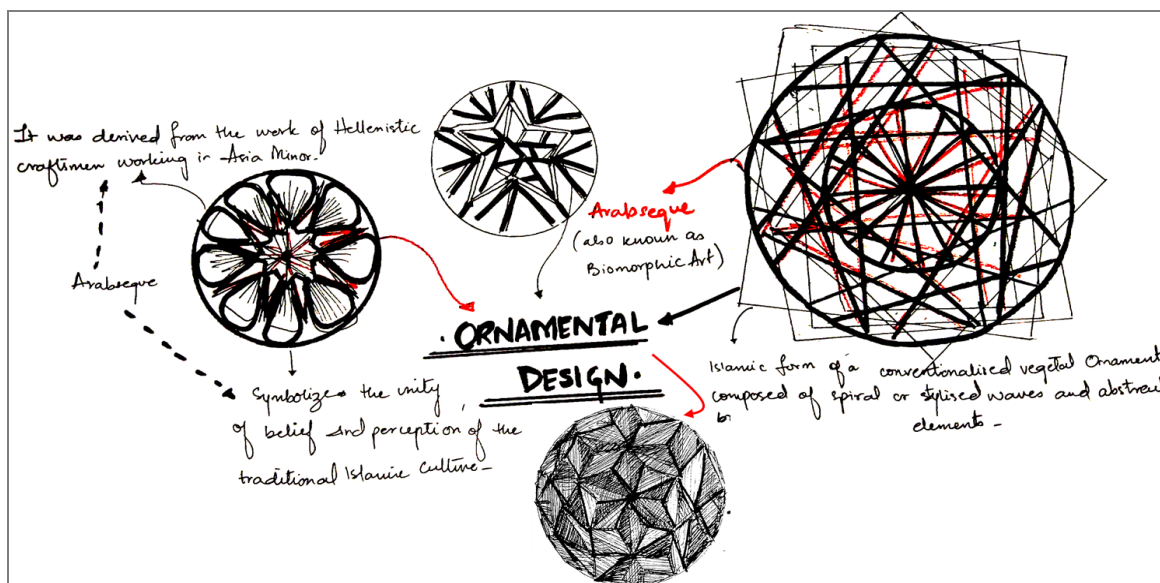


Figure 14: Ornamental design and patterns at the Fort (Source: Author)



Figure 15: Hardwood ceilings are adorned with Naqaashi work, with floral designs and carvings at the Fort (Source: Author)



Figure 16: Traditional tarseem bandi technique at the ceiling of the fort's room (Source: Author)



Figure 17: Hardwood ceilings of rooms has been destroyed (Source: Author)



Figure 18: Multi-foiled arches at the fort (Source: Author)

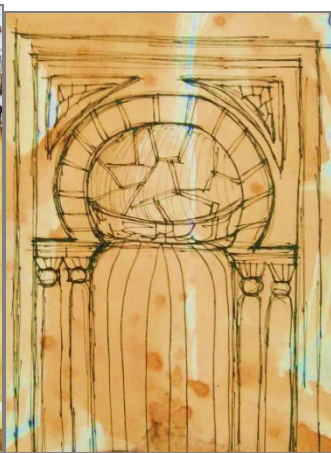


Figure 19: Semicircular arches at the fort (Source: Author)

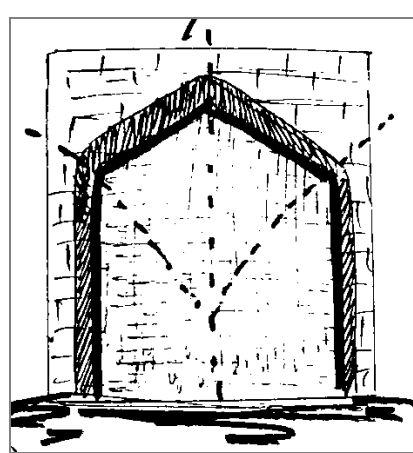


Figure 20: Pointed arches at the fort (Source: Author)



Figure 21: Multi-foiled arches at the fort has been damaged (Source: Author)



Figure 22-23: Columns of the fort designed in the manner of Persia and Egypt's ancient columns (Source: Author)



Figure 24: Roof and walls of the room have damaged
(Source: Author)



Figure 25-26: Underground room has blocked due to rain
(Source: Author)



Figure 27-29: Bricks used in the fort's erection currently lie at the bottom of its damaged and cracked outer walls
(Source: Author)



Figure 30-32: Bricks used in the fort's erection currently lie at the bottom of its damaged and cracked outer and inner walls
(Source: Author)



Figure 33-35: Preservation and Restoration of Derawar Fort is in progress
(Source: Author)



Figure 36: Preservation and restoration of the approach and interior of Bara Dari has been done
(Source: Author)



Figure 37: Preservation and restoration of the Mosque has been done
(Source: Author)



Figure 38: 62-foot deep bastion of the Derawar Fort has been repaired up to a height of 75 feet
(Source: Author)