

**STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS AND  
CONSERVATION OF REWAT FORT - A SURI  
PERIOD MONUMENT IN POTOHAR REGION  
(PAKISTAN)**

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**Abstract**

The present paper treats with the archaeological conservation carried out at different parts of the historical fort of Rewat (also as Riwat or Rawat). The fort is believed to have been built during the Sultanate/Suri period (1192-1545CE) in Potohar region of Punjab province of Pakistan. The monument of the fort suggests that it was built keeping in view the strategic importance of the area of Rewat since it is located along the Grant Trunk (G.T) road connecting Punjab with Peshawar. Hence it was a military fort and also fulfilled the accommodation requirements of the travelers and merchants travelling from Peshawar to Delhi and elsewhere. The fortress-cum caravan - serai is consists of monumental gateways, fortification wall with battlement merlons, a series of living cells, a mosque and a tomb. All these architectural components of the fort have deteriorated due to natural hazards and human vandalism in the past. In order to restore and conserve the fort from further decay, the Department of Archaeology and museums, Government of Pakistan decided to launch the conservation and restoration project of the Rewat Fort. A preliminary report of the conservation activities carried out in the fort is presented here for the readers.

**Keywords:** Conservation, Rewat Fort, Caravan Serai, Suri Period, Ghakkhars, Mughals, Potohar Region, Pakistan

**Introduction**

Pakistan is one of the fortunate countries of the world which possesses the oldest socio-political background going back to the Old Stone Age whose existence has been estimated to the remarkable period of two million years from today. The site of this earliest Paleolithic culture have been found in the Pothohar Plateau, (Rawalpindi) which appears to have been the earliest abode of the human species Homo Erectus and Homo Habilis outside Africa, roughly in the time range of the first glacial and interglacial phases of the Pleistocene Age. The crude stone tools used by them for their livelihood and termed as Pre-Soan tools by anthropologists and archaeologists have been found in abundance in different areas of Pakistan (see Khan 1990).

The first archaeological survey in Taxila Valley (Pothohar or Pothohar region) was carried out by Sir Alexander Cunningham, former Director -General of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1863-64 and provided rich information on some of the important monuments in this area (see Cunningham 1871). After Alexander Cunningham, Sir John Marshall carried out surveys and excavations on major Buddhist sites in Taxila Valley during 1913-34 (see Marshall 1918). However, systematic study of the Paleolithic sequence of the Pothohar region was conducted by De Terra and Peterson based on a short season of survey in 1933 (see De Terra 1939). During field survey, they reported discovering several Paleolithic sites and Pleistocene geology of the area. Peterson was followed by Paolo Graziosi in 1964. He conducted brief investigations in Pothohar Valley (see Graziosi 1964). Another Paleolithic survey was carried out by Eden O. Jonson from USA in 1964 (see Ashraf et al. 2010). However, a detailed archaeological Paleolithic survey of Pothohar region including Rawalpindi region was undertaken by Raymond Allchin and Bridget Allchin, from the University of Cambridge, in close collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan during 1979-1990 (see Bridget et al. 1989). They recorded archaeological sites and two million old artifacts near Rewat and localities with fossils, to understand more about the climate, the plants and the environment (see Ashfaq et al. 1988).

The Department of Archaeology and Museums (hereafter DoAM) Government of Pakistan carried out research activities at Taxila and extended its excavations at Sarai Kholo site (1968- 1972) by M. A Halim (see Halim 1972; G.M. Khan 1983; G.M 1988; Salim 1978; Bahadur Khan et al. 2002). Moreover, the Buddhist complex at Mankiyala near Rewat which was previously ransacked by General Court and General Ventura during the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century was scientifically excavated in 1968 by S.R Dar (see Dar 1972). Few years

later a team of DoAM conducted archaeological researches in the surrounding areas of Taxila valley in 1973 (see Khan 1990). A team from Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations (TIAC) Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad under the leadership of Dr. Muhammad Salim carried out comprehensive researches of the Stone Age sites in Soan Valley, Pothohar Plateau and Attock area in 1997 and mapped a considerable number of Paleolithic period sites in the area (see Khan et al 2010).

An archaeological survey of district Rawalpindi and Islamabad Capital Territory was carried out by a team of TIAC, Quaid-i-Azam University under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ashraf Khan, during 2010. The survey team documented 130 archaeological sites and monuments (both secular and religious) dating from the Paleolithic period (Circa 1 million BCE) to British Colonial period (18<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century) CE. In the historical and archaeological context, the region played an active role in the evolution of human history since remote antiquity. The Islamic period monuments are well known ranging from the mosques, tombs, mausolea, caravan serais (Inn), baolis (step wells), historical forts, graveyards and ponds in the region (see Saeed 2020). It is not out of place to mention here that a detailed description of caravanserai along the Grand Trunk Road in Pakistan have been provided by S.R Dar (see Dar 1994).

### **Location of Rewat Fortress –cum-Caravan Serai**

Geographically, Rewat Fort is about 18 kilometers east of district Rawalpindi in the Punjab Province of Pakistan on the main Grand Trunk Road. In this fort a mosque and a tomb repose<sup>1</sup>. The strategic position of this fort is considered as very important monument and its construction is attributed to Sultan Sarang Khan, a member of the Ghakkhar tribe, who was the local ruler of Pothohar region during mid of 16<sup>th</sup> century (see Nadiem 2006). It was constructed keeping in view the military and administrative requirements of the Mughuls. Sultan Sarang Khan after being defeated by Islam Shah, son of Sultan Sher Shah Suri was killed and buried inside the Fort complex in 1545. The Serai (Inn) was constructed by Sultan Sarang Khan himself for performing administrative and official functionary matters under the Mughuls.



Fig 1. Location Map of Rewat Fort (Source: [maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com))

#### **Early history, architecture and significance of Rewat Fort:**

According to the *Gazetteer of the Rawalpindi District 1893-94*, Rewat<sup>2</sup> located in district Rawalpindi<sup>3</sup> is the first camping ground from Rawalpindi on the Grand Trunk<sup>4</sup> (G.T) Road towards Jhelum, is noted for the tomb of Sultan Sarang, as mentioned above. About the early history of the District Rawalpindi, it is mentioned that the names of Alexander the Great, Mahmud of Ghazni, Babur and “Tamurlane” (Timur) are all closely connected with the Rawalpindi district<sup>5</sup> (see Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Farishta, *Tarikh -i- Farishta*(2008) Vol.1, (Trans. Abdul Hai Khawaja).

The architecture of this fortress-cum-caravan serai appears to date from the Sultanate Period in early 15<sup>th</sup> century C.E. This elegant little stone fortress is however also curiously associated with the name of Mas’ud son of famous Mahmud of Ghazna (1039 C.E) where he is said to have been arrested by his rebellious soldiers and eventually murdered in the famous fort of Giri near Taxila, detail of which is mentioned by Muhammad Qasim Farishta<sup>6</sup>.

It was after Mas’ud of Ghazni that the fort came to be associated with the name of Sarang Khan who fell with his sixteen sons fighting against Islam Shah (Sher Shah Suri’s son), and was buried within the precinct of this monument<sup>7</sup>. The Rewat fort in its present condition contains; two gateways<sup>8</sup> on north and east, a three domed Mosque in the middle of the Western Wing, an octagonal single domed Mausoleum on the North-Western corner, partly obstructing the frontage of the Mosque

and several scattered graves inside the Fort. There are regular rows of identical residential cells along the four sides of the quadrangular inner face of the defense walls overlooking the inner courtyard<sup>9</sup>. The graves and Mausoleum of Sultan Sarang Khan in the Rewat Fort was built by Sultan Adam Khan, who became ruler of this area after the defeat of Sarng Shah.

### **Description of the Rewat Fort**

The Rewat fort is oblong in design measuring 306 feet, 9 inches east-west and 348feet, 9 inches North-South. It has got semicircular bastions on its four corners and on either side of the two gates located on the eastern and northern flanks. The main gate being on the eastern side, is in the center of the Fort, on the western flank is a big mosque.



Fig 2. Façade of Rewat Fort

Flanking the gates and the mosque along the fortification wall are small cells each measuring 6 feet, 3 inches by 7 feet, 9 inches. Originally, there were 76 cells for accommodating travelers. The enclosure wall is topped by merlons constructed in the shape of pointed arches. The Fort has been constructed of stone with a sprinkling of burnt bricks. The vast area within the fortification is occupied by graves, a mosque and a tomb which is generally ascribed to Sultan Sarang Khan<sup>10</sup>.

### **Architectural details of the tomb of Sultan Sarang Khan**

The tomb of Sultan Sarang Khan was built on a raised octagonal platform, measuring 39 feet from each side with a height of 2 and half feet. The octagonal chamber is crowned by a squat dome resting on squinches. The dome is identical in shape and design to the domes of the nearby mosque. The arches, domes and cornices of the monument are built of burnt brick while the rest of the structure is finished in stone



Fig 3. The Tomb of Sultan SarangKhan at Rewat Fort

(rubble) masonry. The whole construction is quite massive, sturdy, but the cenotaph no more exists in the interior of the tomb. There is also a graveyard within the fortification containing the graves of those who had laid down their lives while fighting with the forces of Sher Shah Suri<sup>11</sup>.

### **The Mosque**

The mosque is rectangular in plan measuring 96 feet, 9 inches by 39 feet, 9 inches. It is built of stone with insertion of burnt bricks, and crowned by the squat domes supported by squinches and intermediate



Fig 4. The Mosque of Rewat Fort.

arches. The mosque is two aisles deep. The façade is marked by three doorways each open to the central and side bays. The exterior of the façade is also decorated with recessed panels and pointed arches. In the recent past, a covering shade has been installed in the front of the façade for the convenience of the worshippers.

### **Residential Cells**

There are identical residential cells, built along the four sides of quadrangular and against defensive walls overlooking the inner courtyard. Originally there were 76 cells which were built for the accommodation of travelers and merchants travelling on the adjacent G.T road. These cells are square in plan, provided with an arched entrance and a domical ceiling. A rectangular vestibule connects the cells with the central courtyard. There are also living cells inside the bastions in main gate of the fort for the accommodation of security personnel and watchmen.

### **Structural Problems and Conservation of the Rewat Fort**

It is widely considered that archaeological sites and historical monuments of all religions are the common heritage of the entire world. As such, all people are responsible for the proper preservation of these relics of the past, which implies thorough conservation, restoration and

proper presentation to prolong their life by saving them from further decay. The Federal Department of Archeology and Museums since in inception in 1947, has a long history of carrying out conservation of historical monuments pertaining to Islamic era (Early 8<sup>th</sup> century – Late 19<sup>th</sup> century CE) located in the different areas of Pakistan. The most significant conservation works were carried out at a number of important Islamic period monuments. However, the name of a few of these monuments are mentioned here such as; Qutubuddin Aibak's Tomb, Lahore Fort, Shalimar Gardens, Jehangir's tomb, Nur Jehan's tomb, Sarvvala Maqbara (Sharffun Nisa Begum's tomb) Lahore, Sheikhpura Fort, Hiran Minar & Tank, Banbhore site, Makli Hill Monuments at Thatta, Umerkot Fort, Attock Fort. The reports of such conservation activities have been published regularly mainly in the research journal entitled *Pakistan Archaeology* of the Department of Archaeology and Museums (see *Pakistan Archaeology* No.7, 1972). Therefore, keeping in view to continue the same spirit, Federal Department of Archaeology and Museums started a project entitled "Master Plan for Preservation, Restoration, Presentation and Development of Rewat Fort, Islamabad" during 2017-20 in order to improve the present state of conservation of this very important monument of the early Islamic period of Pakistan.

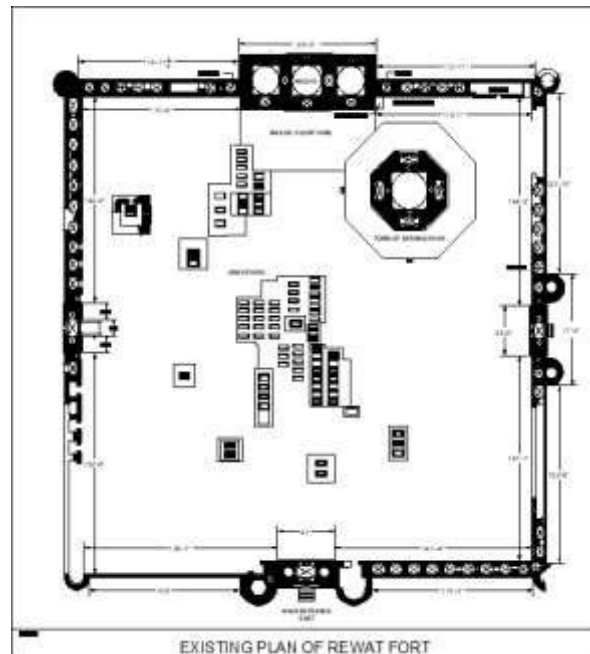


Fig 5. Existing Plan of Rewat Fort (after Saeed 2020, p.36)



### **Authenticity and Integrity of the Rewat Fort:**

The Rewat Fort in general maintains the features of authenticity such as; the authentic layout, forms, design and substance of both complexes and the constituent layouts, elements and features associated with the Islamic period artistic and aesthetic expressions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Maintaining authenticity of workmanship necessitates that contemporary repair and conservation work uses and revives traditional techniques and materials. As regard Integrity (Original state) of the monument the remedial conservation efforts for the last many years have progressively addressed the repair of this monument. Necessary measures to improve its integrity have been identified which includes; consolidation and protection of damaged structures, protection of fortification or external walls, major works in upgrading of monuments and its features, extension of buffer zones to better protect the complexes and their settings and removal of the urban encroachments and control on urban pressure.

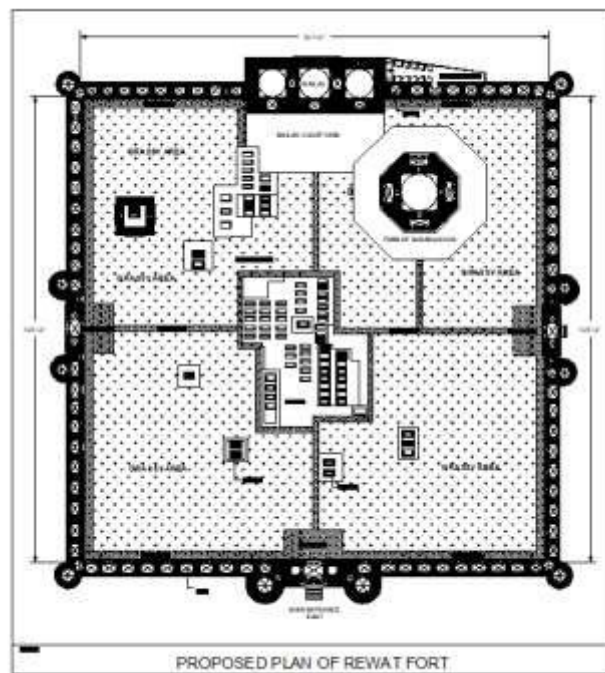


Fig 6. Proposed Plan of Rewat Fort (after Saeed 2020, p. 37)

### **Achievements of the Conservation Plan**

The main objective and purpose of the scheme was to conserve and develop our cultural heritage through scientific and traditional methods. This, no doubt leads to present our important monuments as a model before passing them on to posterity. The architectural conservation deals with issues of prolonging the life and integrity of the original architectural character, such as form and style, and its constituent material. In this sense, the term refers to the “professional use of a combination of science, art, craft, and technology as a preservation tool” and is allied with its parent field, of historic environment conservation. In addition to the design and art/science definition described above, architectural conservation also refers to issues of identification, policy, regulation, and advocacy associated with the entirety of the cultural and architectural environment. This broader scope recognizes that society has mechanisms to identify and value historic cultural resources, create laws to protect these resources, and develop policies and Management plans for interpretation, protection, research and education. Typically, this process operates as a specialized aspect of a society’s planning system and thus its practitioners are termed historic environment conservation professionals.

In this context the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a lengthy controversy on two different approaches; conservation or restoration. The fact, however, remains that neither of the two approaches can wholly be applied for all the problems of the preservation of monuments. In the case of Rewat Fort, as such, both conservation and restoration techniques have been applied for proper protection and preservation of this important monument of early Islamic period on the soil of Pakistan.

### **Preliminary initiatives of Conservation work at Rewat Fort**

The earlier notable conservation work was carried out at the Fort during the year 2004-05. A small iron grill at the facade of the fort was installed to protect it from encroachment. In addition, the work of hard and soft landscaping was carried out in the same year. With the passage of time substantial conservation work at different places of the Fort was undertaken during 2015 with the cost of Rs.1.5 million. Before the commencement of the present conservation, preservation and restoration work in the Fort, substantial efforts were made to examine and study the conservation works which had been carried out earlier at

the monument.

Besides, testing of construction material, binding material and other research studies were also carried out in order to execute conservation work on scientific and modern techniques. Thereafter, based on results and scientific investigations, the binding material was applied for carrying out necessary conservation work at different places of the Fort.

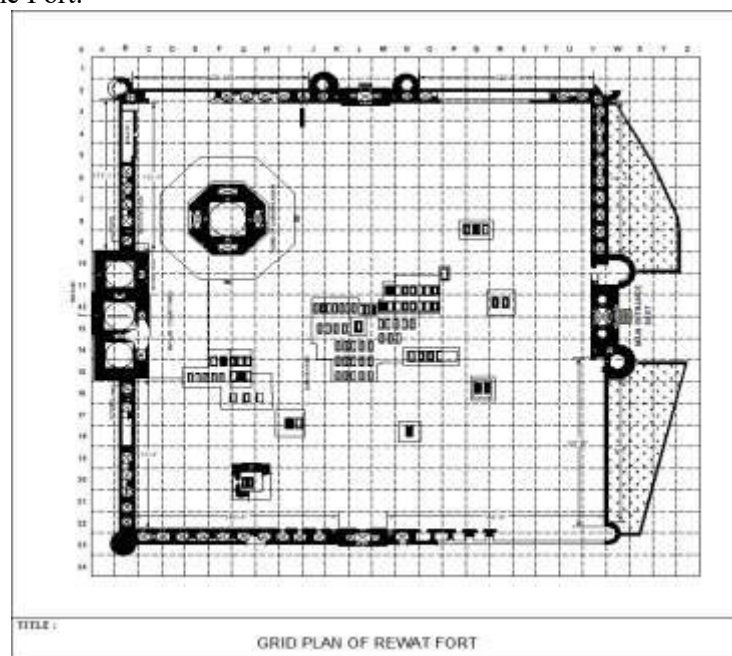


Fig 7. Grid Plan of Rewat Fort (after Saeed p.44)

### **Structural problems and Conservation work carried out at Fort**

A number of structural problems were identified during the execution of the recent conservation works which includes; deteriorated condition of the structural remains due to ravages of time, damages due to environmental and climatic effects, human negligence, natural disasters like earth quakes, floods, heavy rains, vegetation, illegal encroachment and urbanization around the Fort, improper sewerage system, as well as the use of cement as binding material in previous conservation projects in the Fort etc. Therefore, these main structural problems of the Fort were addressed (during 2017-20) by carrying out necessary conservation, preservation, restoration, underpinning coping, shoring, stabilization and plinth protection work in the specified areas/portions of the Fort complex.

The restoration work of the missing merlons once built on the defensive wall with stone masonry and hydraulic lime plasters work was carried out in the eastern fortification wall of the Fort. The restoration of the fallen fortification wall was also carried out with stone masonry in hydraulic lime mortar. In addition, the entrance gate on northern side of the Fort, along with bastions and residential cells were also restored and conserved. The other works deserving mention include; provision of walkways for visitors, provision of hard and soft landscaping, tourist facilities, maintenance of the front lawn along with outer fortification wall, and publication of information kit for the general visitors were carried out in the recent project.

#### **A brief account of construction material used in Rewat Fort**

In Rewat Fort, limestone is extensively used for construction mainly in the defensive wall, entrance gates, bastions, turrets battlemented merlons (Crenellations), and Muslim graves etc., whereas, the *Kanjur* stone was also used for the purpose of different kinds of construction in the complex. Lime plaster was applied in the monument in order to save and protect it from eventual decay or devastation due to heavy rainfall. The traces of the applied material in question were observed in the main entrance gates, fortification walls and other masonry work of the monumental complex. The binding material, used in the construction of Fort was lime mortar, hydraulic and non-hydraulic lime, lime plaster and lime mortar mix.

#### **Conclusion**

The recent conservation work carried out at the Fort has helped us to prolong the life of the monument. The restoration and preservation work has reinforced the decaying and damaged part or portion of the Fort. The digital documentation of the monumental complex of Rewat Fort was carried out for recording the present state of conservation and to address the conservation problems properly. Necessary restoration of missing portions at the different identified places with limestone masonry in lime mortar was carried out. During the process of conservation lime plaster on the identified / specified places was applied as reversible agent so as to prolong the life of the monument. Besides, flush pointing on stonework with lime mortars was applied on the damaged portion of the structure. The Restoration of missing merlons with stone masonry work in hydraulic lime mortar was carried out at the top of the fortification wall of Fort.

In addition to the above-mentioned works, lime terrace flooring work was carried out at specified areas of the Fort. Further, restoration of missing boundary wall with stone masonry in hydraulic lime mortar and restoration of vaulted roof and arches in super structure was carried out. The necessary restoration work of missing portions at the identified places of the fort was carried out in accordance to the condition of the structural remains. The Archaeological Excavations in different parts of the fort such as living cells, fortification wall was conducted for the purpose of finding out the original structure and buried remains. A number of other important and significant works were however, completed at the Fort such as; provision of development facilities for tourists, hard and soft landscaping, Provision of plantation, maintenance of garden area and Publication of publicity / information kit about Rewat Fort.

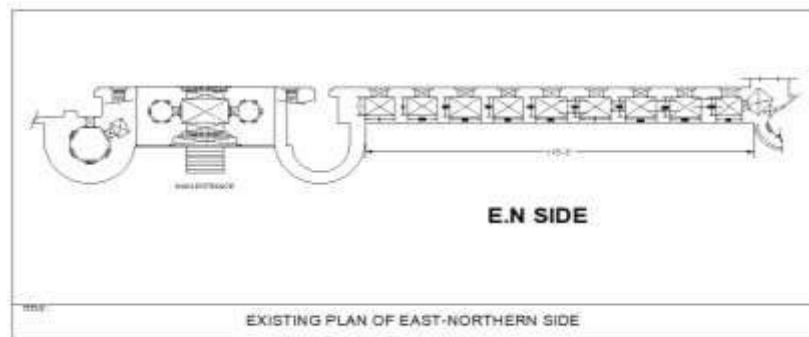


Fig 8. Existing Plan of East Northern side of Rewat Fort (after Saeed, p. 49)

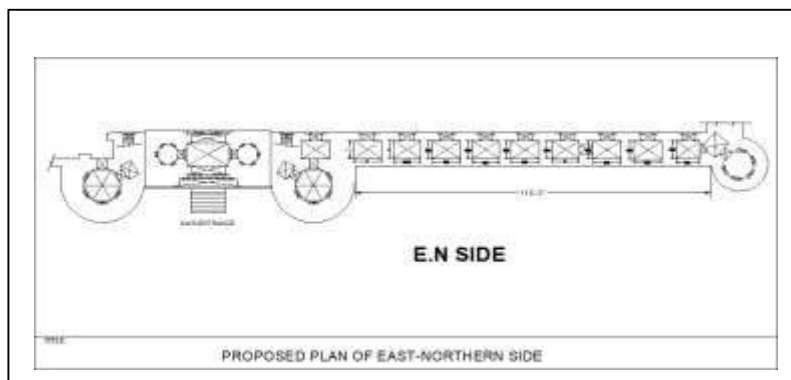


Fig 9. Proposed Plan of East Northern side of Rewat Fort (after Saeed, 2020, p. 49)

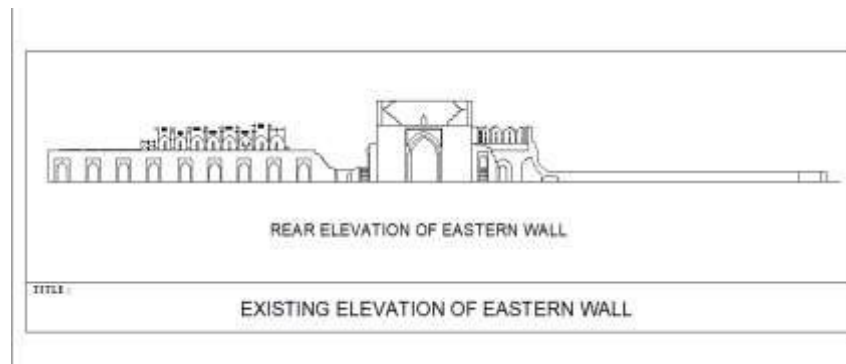


Fig 10. Plan of Existing Elevation (Rear Elevation) of Easter Wall of Rewat Fort (after Saeed2020, p. 50)

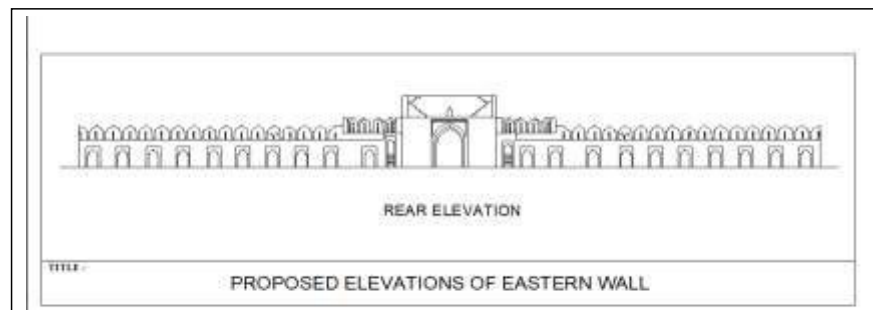


Fig.11. Proposed Elevation Plan (Rear Elevation) of Eastern Wall of Rewat Fort (after Saeed 2020, p.50)

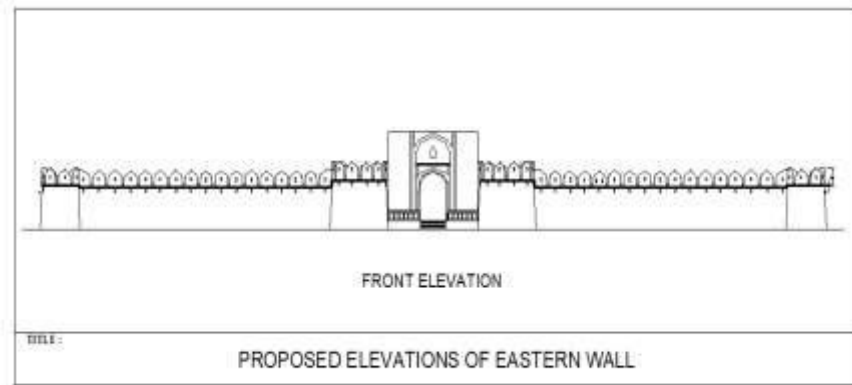


Fig 12. Proposed Elevation Plan (Front Elevation of Easter Wall of Rewat Fort (after Saeed 2020, p.50)

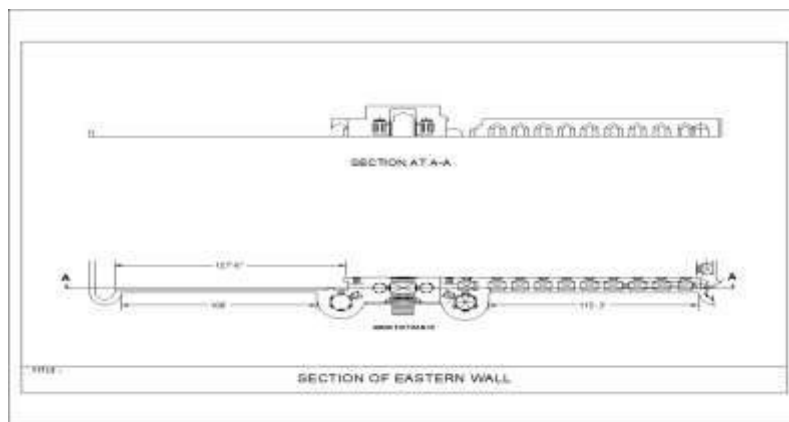


Fig 13. Plan of Section of Easter Wall (Section A-A) of Rewat Fort (after Saeed 2020, p.50)

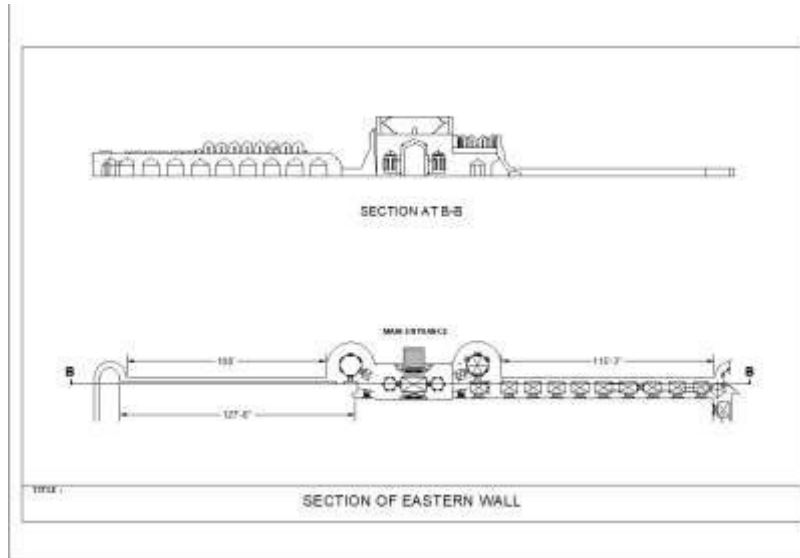


Fig. 14. Plan of Section of Eastern Wall (Section B-B) of Rewat Fort (after Saeed 2020, p.50)

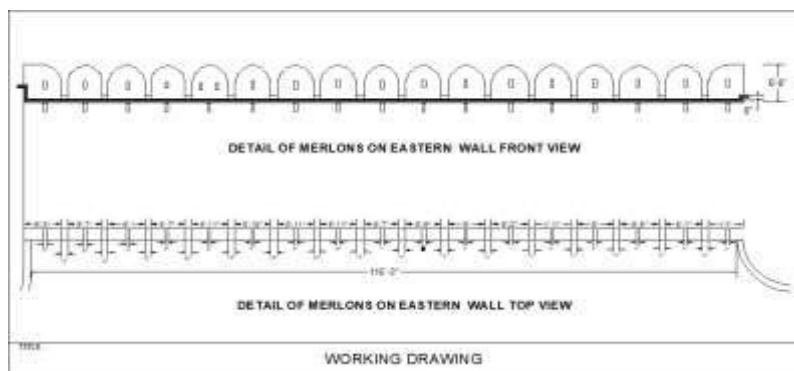


Fig 15. Working Drawing of Merlons on Eastern Wall (Front View and Top View) of RewatFort (after Saeed 2020, p.50)



**REWAT FORT (Before Conservation)**



Fig.16. Façade of Rewat Fort

**REWAT FORT (Before Conservation)**



**After Conservation**



Fig.17. Northern gate and Bastion of the Fort (view from outer side)

**Before Conservation**



**After Conservation**



Fig.18. Merlons at fortification wall of Rewat Fort

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The geographical location of Rewat Fort is 33.4981° N, 73.1942 °E.
2. The word “Rewat” is a corruption of an Arabic word “Rebat” which means “Sarai” (resting place). The fort is situated about 17 kilometers east of Rawalpindi city towards Jhelum on the main G.T road. It is a small Fortress-cum-Caravan Serai, constructed by Ghakkhars, who were local rulers of this area.
3. The District Rawalpindi in Punjab Province of Pakistan lies between 33. 4981° N, 73.1942° E.
4. Sher Shah Suri, the founder of Suri dynasty extended the Grand Trunk Road from Chittagong in the province of Bengal in northeast India to Kabul in Afghanistan in the far northwest of the country. The influence of his innovations and reforms extended for beyond his brief reign.
5. op.cit. *Gazetteer of the Rawalpindi District* 1893-94, p.43
6. Muhammad Qasim Farishta, *Tarikh-i-Farishta*, (2008) Vol.1, (Trans. Abdul Hai Khawaja), Almeezan Publishers, Lahore, p. 107.
7. A classified list of Immovable Archaeological sites/monuments protected under Antiquities Act, 1975, compiled by Rana Muhammad Khan, Federal Department of Archaeology and Museums, (DoAM), Karachi, 1987. p.273
8. Originally it had four gates, on the eastern and northern sides provide access to the interior of monument while the southern one has been blocked in later period. The western gateway was demolished during the construction of the mosque in the Fort.
9. Op. Cit. No. 6, p.273.
10. The results of limited archaeological excavations carried out during 2020 by Department of Archaeology and Museums, Islamabad, inside the tomb have revealed the existence of a main grave in the centre of the tomb area. The details of the excavations are mentioned in the present report. At Rewat, an ancient well (approximately 500 meter from the Fort) and a water pond (approximately 800 meter from the Fort) is existed which are presumed as an integral part of RewatFort during the heydays. These both ancient constructions are however, still in use by the local people of this area.
11. Shaikh Khurshid Hassan, (2005) *Historical Forts in Pakistan*, National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad. pp. 63-65

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## Hakim Mohammed Said

Did you have life easy?

No. But you made it your mission  
To make it a little easier for others.

Orphaned at two,  
You opened your heart to all children,  
Giving them respect, education, care,  
Making sure their little voices didn't go unheard.

As an adult, you had to start life twice:  
Once in your birthplace, once in your land of choice.  
You wore holes in your shoes,  
But your spirit of service stayed intact.

Two rented rooms, pieces of rented furniture:  
You started small, but your heart was big.  
Your God-given gifts, you used in God's name,  
And He blessed you hundredfold.

Many men's pride is swelled with success;  
Yours increased your humility.  
So you turned your institution over to Allah –  
Its profits to profit the poor.

All men have dreams – a thing apart from life.  
You said Why not? and worked to make them real.  
Free clinics and dispensaries on wheels,  
Hospitals, schools, colleges, even a university!

You married modern science to ancient medicine,  
And bred respect for *hikmat* in doubting hearts.  
Journals, books, societies, and conferences,  
Assemblies, think-tank – all bear witness to your drive.

You spoke the truth, unwavering, unafraid.  
One morning a gun spoke, to silence you forever.  
O, vain attempt! Your words, your works live on.  
The gun but gave you a martyr's immortality!

– A tribute from Khaula Yasmin Qureshi.

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