



Fig. 1: Frith's Series, North-east Gate, Qaisarbagh, albumen print, mid-1870s.

INTRODUCTION

Rosie Llewellyn-Jones

For little more than eighty years the nawabi capital at Lucknow boasted the richest court in India. From its establishment in 1775 to its abrupt annexation in 1856 by the East India Company, the court blazed like a comet across the skies of northern India, and like a comet attracted all kinds of followers in its trail.

This book captures some of the physical splendour of the city during this period, reflected in its buildings, many of which no longer exist. Anyone looking at these photographs will be immediately struck by the extraordinary mixture of styles pictured here. Indeed the architecture of the city has defied most attempts at classification. It has attracted both criticism and praise, with a heavy bias towards the former. Critics have described the architecture as degenerate, tawdry and insubstantial, while admirers have defended its panache, drama and whimsicality. One cannot be indifferent to Lucknow. A brief review of the elements, both eastern and western, that contributed to the unique 'nawabi' style will offer some explanation for the hybrid buildings pictured here. But the spectator must make up his or her own mind.



Fig. 10: John Edward Saché, North end of the Jilau Khana, Qaisarbagh, with the Tomb of Saadat Ali Khan beyond, albumen print, c. 1867.

Chapter One

THE ROYAL PALACES

Sophie Gordon

It is all too easy when considering the nawabi residences of Lucknow to let the vision of the remains of Qaisarbagh Palace, the last nawabi construction on any great scale, cloud our understanding of the buildings that came before it. The theatrical and ephemeral qualities of Qaisarbagh are usually seen as the culmination of one hundred years of steady decline into ‘grotesqueness’, starting from a point that was already well past the peak of Mughal achievement.¹ Yet with an effort of imagination, we can see Lucknow as it was seen by those who visited the court in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – a court that from the 1750s onwards was located in a palace built around an old Sheikhzada fort, known as Macchi Bhawan.² The main palace building, which was situated inside the walls of Macchi Bhawan fort, was known as Panch Mahalla. It was constructed and enlarged during the reign of Safdar Jung (r. 1739–1754) and his successor Shuja-ud-daula (r. 1754–1775), making it contemporary with the Qudsia Bagh Palace in Delhi.³ Macchi Bhawan remained the principal royal residence until the late 1780s, when Asaf-ud-daula (r. 1775–1797) built the sprawling collection of buildings known as Daulat Khana Palace. In the early years of the nineteenth century, Saadat Ali Khan



Chapter Two

MONUMENTAL GRIEF: THE BARA IMAMBARA

Peter Chelkowski

*Lucknow exists but to mourn Husain.
Rightly it can be called the home of Husain.*

Dilgir

The Bara Imambara at Lucknow, also known as the Great Imambara or the Asafi Imambara, is the world's largest complex of buildings devoted to the rituals and cult of Imam Husain. It has stood proudly for more than two centuries, a testament to the design and structural ingenuity of its builders. In terms of grandeur it can be compared only with the monumental Mughal tombs. Before examining the building of this great edifice, however, we will take a brief look at the source and history of Shia rituals in order to throw some light on the importance and function of imambaras.

In the year 61 of the Muslim calendar (AD 680), a battle took place at Karbala, a barren desert in what is now Iraq. It was there that the rituals and myths surrounding Imam Husain originated. Husain – the champion of the Shia cause, the son of Ali and the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad –

Fig. 49: Shepherd & Robertson, Bara Imambara Gateway, albumen print (detail), c. 1862.

was on his way to join his fellow Shia partisans in the city of Kufa when he was ambushed in the desert. Along with his entire family and (according to tradition) a group of seventy-two male followers, Husain was massacred by the numerically superior forces of the caliph Yazid, the leader of the Sunni Muslims. The battle took place on the day of Ashura, the tenth day of the month of Muharram. This tragedy has assumed immense historical, spiritual and cultural significance for the Shias, who view it as the greatest suffering and sacrifice in history. It has transcended time and space to acquire importance of cosmic magnitude.

Mourning Rituals

The timeless quality of this sacrificial event has allowed the Shias continually to measure themselves against the principles and example of Husain. To this day, they strive to combat



Fig. 88: Samuel Bourne, Dilkusha Kothi, albumen print, December 1864–early 1865.

Chapter Three

THE 'COUNTRY HOUSES' OF LUCKNOW

Neeta Das

Until the fifteenth century, English nobles lived in fortified castle towns, which were designed both for living and security. But when peace prevailed in the country, the rule of force was replaced by the rule of law. Security became a less important factor in house design and castles became redundant, giving way to a new 'power house': the country house. It could work at the local level as a 'manor house', or at the national level as the seat of a Member of Parliament. People who lived in such houses were either powerful or rich, or both, with an interest in real estate, and thus country houses became visible evidence of power and wealth. The country houses were large, elaborate structures with rooms for lavish living, entertaining and pleasure. Until the seventeenth century the English country house continued to be built around two or more courtyards. Increasingly, however, with the influence of Italian and French architecture, there was a tendency to do without courtyards and cohere the building into a single symmetrical mass.¹ The idea of symmetry and order in architecture was carried further with the influence of Palladian 'villas',



Fig. 113: G. W. Lawrie & Co., Ruins of the Residency, gelatin silver print, 1890s.

Chapter Four

THE RIVER AND THE RESIDENCY

Rosie Llewellyn-Jones

The city of Lucknow, former capital of Awadh, lies in the flat and fertile plains of northern India, on the River Gomti, itself a tributary of the great Ganges river. Today's casual travellers – here to pray at the Shia shrines, to visit the crumbling palaces of the nawabs or (more rarely these days) to pay their respects at the bullet-scarred Residency – will not at first be aware of the topographical features of the city. Only gradually do these become apparent when one ventures into the old city, and especially the Chowk, the principal street of the medieval city, which leads to the site of Macchi Bhawan. Here the hilly nature of the ground, although now thickly covered by buildings, becomes apparent. Joseph Tieffenthaler, the Jesuit priest and one of the first people to describe and draw Lucknow in 1765 (fig. 3), noted how visitors to the Chowk had to climb up and down steep stairs to access the buildings on either side. He described the Chowk as a gorge, while 'the greatest part of the town extends towards the east and covers an elevated place.'¹



Fig. 128: Edmund David Lyon, La Martinière, albumen print, c. 1862.

Chapter Five

LA MARTINIÈRE: AN ENLIGHTENED VISION

Nina David

One cannot do better than to begin with the description of W. H. Russell, war correspondent for *The Times*, on first catching sight of La Martinière. He described it as,

... the most curious structure I ever saw. At first glance one exclaims, 'How beautiful! What a splendid building!' at the second, 'Why, it must have been built by a madman!' At the distance of more than half a mile we can make out the eccentric array of statues, the huge lions' heads, the incongruous columns, arches, pillars, windows and flights of stairs leading to nothing, which are the distinguishing features of the Martinière.¹

Reactions to La Martinière continue to be the same today.

Let us look briefly at the story of its builder, Major-General Claude Martin (1735–1800). Historiography has long since discounted the 'great man' theory and the role of accident in history, but Thomas Carlyle and the late British historian A. J. P. Taylor in particular never abandoned their

conviction that an individual could significantly change the course of events. Past schools of history – especially in the field of Indian studies – may have been superseded, but although 'subaltern studies' have occupied centre stage in recent years, many historians still exult when they see modern theorists reverting to the 'role of the individual' in history. From the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, the name of Claude Martin, founder of La Martinière, has endured. Martin was a typical representative of the Enlightenment, the European movement which revered individualist attitudes and questioned established religious thinking. Today, vindicated by history, we can trace the career of this extraordinary Frenchman, who made a name for himself in an array of different professions in Awadh, becoming something of a polymath and a European at home in an oriental setting. He is one of the most intriguing figures of nawabi Lucknow.

Martin is commemorated in the building Constantia (fig. 128), the central portion of La Martinière College, where he is buried well below ground level. Planned by him and begun