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A LITTLE-KNOWN MUGHAL COLLEGE IN INDIA: 
THE MADRASA OF SHAYKH CHILLIE AT THANESAR

Within the range of Islamic religious architecture, the madrasa is the third most numerous type after the mosque and the tomb. The Arabic word *madrasa* literally meant "study" and later, by extension, the place where the studies took place. Architecturally a madrasa was usually composed of teaching rooms, a library, a mosque, and living accommodations for teachers and students. The reason why the building type is categorized as religious rather than secular architecture is, of course, that the teaching originally involved mainly Islamic law and theology, though recently the word has shed that essentially religious connotation.

In India, although the number of surviving Muslim buildings is generally quite large, the extant madrasas are few, for reasons that are not difficult to find. Because they were used to educate only the small ulema class for the civil service and judiciary — primary education was given in an ordinary mosque — there was no need to build a great many of them. Four madrasas survive from the pre-Mughal period: the madrasa of Alauddin Khalji (ca. 1315) in Mihrauli (Delhi) is the earliest; two built by Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351–88), one of which forms part of the tomb complex of his son Fateh Khan (d. 1374) and popularly known as Qadam Sharif and the other at Haus Khas, both also in Delhi, and finally the madrasa at Bidar in the Bahmani kingdom, built by Mahmud Gawan, the scholar-minister of the Bahamani king Muhammad Shah III (1463–82). From Mughal times there are three: the earliest is popularly known as Khair-ul Manazil, opposite the old fort in Delhi; it was founded by Maham Ankah in 1561–62. The other two are the madrasa of Ghaziuddin Khan (d. 1710), outside the Ajmeri Gate in Delhi, and the madrasa of Shaykh Chillie at Thanesar (Kurukshetra district, Haryana), 165 kilometers northwest of Delhi, the subject of our study.

The madrasa of Shaykh Chillie is the most impressive of the madrasas that survive from Mughal times. The elegant tomb of the shaykh forms part of the madrasa, and taken together the complex gives a vivid idea of the general character of the madrasa in Mughal India. It stands on a high mound to the west of the north end of the town’s main bazaar and is visible from afar. Its overall dimensions are 102.8 meters from north to south and 51.7 meters from east to west, excluding the octagonal bastions at its corners.

The part of the building used as a madrasa is composed of a courtyard surrounded by an arcade with nine arches to a side (figs. 1–2), the standard plan for most

Fig. 1. Thanesar. Madrasa of Shaykh Chillie. General plan.
Fig. 2. Madrasa of Shaykh Chillie. Rooms.

Fig. 3. Madrasa of Shaykh Chillie. Well and structure from where water was drawn for hammam.