



[Home](#) > [Middle East and Islamic Studies](#) > [Encyclopaedia of Islam](#) > [Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE](#) > Bahmanī dynasty

Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE

Bahmanī dynasty

(2,706 words)

The **Bahmanī** were a Muslim **dynasty** of eighteen sultans that ruled from 748/1347 to 934/1528 in present-day North Karnataka, in the Deccan plateau region of India. In the 740s/1340s, in the wake of uprisings against Tughluq rule in the Deccan, two rival empires consolidated authority on opposite sides of the Krishna River: the Muslim Bahmanīs, who adopted the family name of the dynasty's founder, 'Alā' al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh (r. 748–59/1347–58), and the Hindu Vijayanagara state (Eaton and Wagoner, 27–31). The two powers fought regularly over the mineral-rich Raichur Doab while engaging in diplomacy and strategic alliance, as attested by the marriage of Fīrūz (r. 800–25/1397–1422) to the daughter of Deva Rāy I (r. c. 809–25/1406–22), in 809/1407. Concurrently, Fīrūz exchanged delegations with Tīmūr (r. 771–807/1370–1405), welcomed immigrants from Persian- and Turkish-speaking lands (Eaton, *Social history*, 37–43, 48–51), and appointed Mīr Faḍlallāh Injū of Shīrāz—who had matriculated under the renowned Khurāsānī polymath Sa'd al-Dīn Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390)—as his *wakīl al-saltāna* (prime minister). The stage was thus set for the evolution of a composite courtly culture exemplified by a built environment synthesising local traditions with imported ones—from Anatolia: the cross-in-square plan, *ḥammāms* (baths), and gunpowder devices; from Iran, Khurāsān, and Central Asia: *chihil sutūns* (pillared halls), *īwāns* (rectangular halls or spaces, usually vaulted, walled on three sides, with one end open),

[Article Table of Contents](#)

[1. Gulbargā](#)

[2. Bīdar](#)

[Bibliography](#)

pointed arches, mosaic tilework, and *qanāts* (well-like vertical shafts, connected by gently sloping tunnels, for the supply of water) (e.g., Philon, *Silent splendour*, 42–3; Rötzer, *Fortifications and gunpowder*; Hillenbrand, *Persians*, 165).

The cosmopolitan climate of the Bahmanī court also brought difficulties. Continuing clashes between local-born Muslims (variously *dakkanī* or *dakhanī*, in reference to individuals from the Deccan) and foreigners from western Islamic lands (*gharībān*, from Ar. *gharīb*, foreigner; this term is preferred to *āfāqī*, which is largely a product of twentieth-century scholarship, as underscored in Fischel, building on Eaton)—led to the dynasty’s demise in 934/1528 and the rise of successor states (Barīdī, 892–1028/1487–1619; ‘Ādil Shāhī, 895–1097/1490–1686; Nizām Shāhī, 895–1046/1490–1636; and Quṭb Shāhī, 901–1098/1496–1687).

In addition to the delicate balance between local and foreign powers, Bahmanī sovereignty hinged upon the ruler’s relationship with charismatic Ṣūfī saints perceived as both prophesising and legitimating kingship (Eaton, *Social history*, 43–7). A late-tenth/sixteenth-century tradition relates how, after meeting with Sulṭān Muḥammad b. Tughluq (r. 724–52/1324–51), the Chishtī *shaykh* from Delhi Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ (d. 725/1325) discovered the general Ṣafar Khān (later ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh, r. 748–59/1347–58) waiting outside his *khānqāh* and remarked, “Today one king has gone out and another king is at the door” (Ṭabāṭabā; King, 2). Other sources recount the transfer by Shaykh Sirāj al-Dīn Junaydī (d. 781/1379–80) of Dawlatābād of his turban to Ṣafar Khān and the prediction that it would become a crown (Digby, 78). Later Bahmanī rulers were equally defined by their piety and alliances with Ṣūfī *shaykhs*. Aḥmad I (r. 825–39/1422–36), for example, famously shifted his patronage from the Chishtī to the Ni‘matallāhi and further blurred the boundaries of spiritual and temporal authority by becoming revered as a saint (*walī*).

The Bahmanī built environment was shaped predominantly by five factors: the inherited Tughluq architectural tradition; military conflict and cultural exchange with Vijayanagara; the influx of immigrants from western Islamic lands; the supply and allocation of water; and the relations between sultan and *shaykh*. The major building types were forts, mosques, royal tombs, *dargāhs* (shrines), garden villas, and water features, and the construction material was dictated by the local geology (laterite, basalt, sandstone) (Rötzer, *Supplying water*). The most common plans were the cross-in-square and tripartite scheme (the earliest examples featured a tripartite facade; later expanded versions included a pillared hall, side rooms, and a ceremonial space at the rear), and stone and brick forms (domes, *īwāns*, *pīshṭāqs*—usually serving as decorated gateways to the *īwāns*—transverse arches, and pyramidal vaults) were intermixed with timber features (balconies, roofs, columns, lintels) (Philon, *Silent splendour*, 34–55). Although architectural decoration was limited largely to plasterwork during the early Tughluq-inspired period, wall painting, stone carving (including epigraphy in basalt), and

mosaic tilework were increasingly employed in the ninth/fifteenth and early tenth/sixteenth centuries. Examples include the tomb of Aḥmad I (c. 839–40/1436), the tomb of the Ṣūfī saint Khalīlallāh (d. c. 845–58/1442–54) [Illustrations 1 and 2], and the *madrasa* of Maḥmūd Gāwān (876/1472), Bīdar's prime minster.

1. Gulbargā

Shortly after being crowned the first Bahmanī *sultān* in Dawlatābād's mosque, 'Alā' al-Dīn moved the capital 320 kilometres southwest, to Gulbargā. The most significant extant building in the city's fort is the so-called Jāmi' Masjid (congregational mosque) [Illustration 3], which lacks a courtyard, features five large domes (over the *miḥrāb* and marking the four corners) and 63 smaller ones, and is enclosed on three sides by a U-shaped aisle traversed by low-springing arches [Illustration 4]. The precise dating of the mosque and the reasoning behind its revolutionary plan are uncertain. Some scholars trust a stone inscription dated 769/1367–8, which names the patron 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad I (r. 759–76/1358–75) and the architect Rafī' b. Shams b. Manṣūr al-Qazvīnī (Haig, 1–2; Hillenbrand). Others argue that the building dates to after 809/1407, during the reign of Fīrūz, and was conceived primarily as an audience hall (*hazār sutūn*, lit., one thousand columns) (Philon, Great mosque, building on Desai and Merklinger).

A comparison of Gulbargā's two royal necropolises exemplifies the aesthetic shift away from Tughluq models towards an independent Bahmanī style. The tombs in the earlier cluster, including those of Muḥammad I and Muḥammad II (r. 780–99/1378–97), are simple cubes with sloping walls and somewhat flattened domes. Those in the second necropolis (Haft Gunbad, lit., seven domes) feature higher domes, straight walls, and exteriors enlivened by arched recesses, the most elaborate being Fīrūz's double structure [Illustration 5]. The mature Bahmanī style also typifies the tombs in the most important *dargāh* in the city and the Deccan overall, that of the Chishtī saint Sayyid Muḥammad Gīsū Darāz (d. 825/1422). After Tīmūr's invasion of Delhi in 800/1398, Gīsū Darāz set out for the Deccan and eventually settled in Gulbargā, at the invitation of Fīrūz. The relationship between ruler and saint soon soured, probably because of Gīsū Darāz's premonition that Fīrūz would be succeeded not by his son but by his brother, Aḥmad. Aḥmad indeed assumed the throne and honoured Gīsū Darāz by constructing a large tomb (825/1422) over his grave in his *khānqāh* (Eaton, *Social history*, chap. 2).



Illustration 1. The tomb of Khalīlallāh (Chaukhandi), Ashtūr, Bīdar. Photograph courtesy of Keelan Overton.

In addition to Gulbargā, four other sites are associated with the early Bahmanīs: Dawlatābād, the first capital (748–51/1347–50); Fīrūzābād, the palace city of Fīrūz (begun 802/1399) [Illustration 6]; the country villa of Sulṭānpūr (c. 803/1400–1); and Sagar, a military outpost (c. 810/1407–8).

2. Bīdar

In an effort to distance himself from his predecessors and the political strife associated with Gulbargā, Aḥmad I pursued two new plans shortly after his accession. In 833/1430, he transferred the capital one hundred kilometres northeast, to Bīdar. Concurrently, he chose not to patronise the Chishtī descendants of Gīsū Darāz and instead invited Shāh Ni‘matallāh Walī (d. 834/1431) of Kirmān, the founder of the Ni‘matallāhī Ṣūfī order, to his court. The saint declined Aḥmad’s request but nonetheless conferred upon the ruler the title *walī* and approved the relocation of his grandson Nūrallāh (d. c. 834/1430–1) to Bīdar. Upon Shāh Ni‘matallāh’s death, his son Khalīlallāh (d. c. 845–58/1442–54) led a second migration to Bīdar, and his sons, in turn, married into the Bahmanī royal family. The result was a shared culture of Ni‘matallāhī architectural heritage between southern Iran (e.g., complexes in Māhān and Taft) and Bīdar (e.g., the tombs of Aḥmad and Khalīlallāh) (Firouzeh, Architecture, sanctity and power).

The influx of *gharībān* (foreigners) into the spiritual realm was paralleled by the rise of Iranian immigrants in the Bahmanī administration, many of whom were enticed by Bīdar’s international trade network (extending to Konkani ports such as Dabhol and Chaul), the dynasty’s receptiveness to foreigners, and the presence of the Ni‘matallāhī *shaykhs*. The most prominent migrant was Maḥmūd Gāwān of Gīlān, who rose from horse trader to *malik al-tujjār* (prince of merchants) and *wakīl al-saltāna* (Eaton, *Social history*, chap. 3). Maḥmūd Gāwān’s greatest impact on Bīdar’s built environment was his eponymous *madrasa* (876/1472), whose four-*īwān* plan and mosaic tilework recall Tīmūrid buildings (Crowe, *Glazed tiles*; Merklinger, *Madrasa*). The prime minister was also a key conduit and “pull” factor for the transmission of the Shiraz school of philosophy to the Deccan, as exemplified by his



Illustration 2. Epigraphy in the tomb of Khalīlallāh (Chaukhandi), Ashtūr, Bīdar. Photograph courtesy of Keelan Overton.



Illustration 3. Exterior view of the Jāmi‘ Masjid, Gulbargā. Photograph courtesy of Keelan Overton.

exchanges with Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502), among others (Anooshahr, Shirazi scholars).

The fort of Bīdar (begun 835/1432) is perched on sandstone bluffs, surrounded by moats and stone fortifications, and connected to the city to its south by a sequence of three gates, including the domed Gunbad Darwāza (lit., dome(d) gate, built 835–40/1432–36). The most notable Bahmanī buildings in the fort's royal group are four palaces conforming to the expanded tripartite scheme, with central *maṇḍapas* (pillared halls) and a distinct space in the rear (Palace I, perhaps an administrative centre; Palace II, with a domed throne room; Palace III, possibly a *zanāna*, or women's apartments; and the Prince's Palace, perhaps the heir's residence) (Philon, *Silent splendour*, 49–54). The final building of note in the fort is the so-called Solah Khamba (*sola khamb*, lit., sixteen columns) mosque [Illustration 7], which originally comprised a single domed chamber used for court ceremonial (c. 864/1460). In the late ninth/fifteenth or early tenth/sixteenth century, hypostyle halls were added on either side, creating a *hazār sutūn* (Philon, Solah Khamba). Other features of the fort include its upper and lower gardens—supplied by lakes, dams, wells, *bā'olīs* (stepwells), and *qanāts*—fortifications, and cannons (Rötzer, Fortifications and gunpowder, fig. 2; Rötzer, Hydraulic works, 113; Rötzer, Supplying water, 74–5, 78–9).

The final group of late Bahmanī monuments includes the royal tombs at Ashtūr, a village located three kilometres northeast of Bīdar. The most impressive is that of Aḥmad I (840/1436), which preserves extensive wall painting and epigraphy in the international Tīmūrid style combining Qur'ānic verses and poetry by Shāh Ni'matallāh (Firouzeh, *Sacred Kingship*; Philon, Murals).

Keelan Overton



Illustration 4. Arches inside the Jāmi' Masjid, Gulbargā.

Photograph courtesy of Keelan Overton.



Illustration 5. The tomb of Fīrūz, Haft Gunbad, Gulbargā.

Photograph courtesy of Keelan Overton.



Illustration 6. An arch with carved spandrels, Fīrūzābād.

Photograph courtesy of Keelan Overton.

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Illustration 7. Solah Khamba mosque, Bīdar fort. Photograph courtesy of Keelan Overton.

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