The Historiography of Reuse in South Asia

ALKA PATEL
University of California, Irvine

It is little wonder that the historical phenomenon of architectural and sculptural reuse has attracted the attention of scholars investigating many regions and time periods. The late Roman empire and its immediate cultural diaspora (4th–5th c. CE), the Byzantine and Islamic worlds (6th–11th c. CE), and medieval Europe (12th–14th c. CE) are among the geographies and time periods known in scholarly ambits for reuse of architectural and sculptural fragments.[1] Reuse of older elements to create new buildings or other composites is an eminently pragmatic human activity, with, additionally imaginative, allusory, and less tangible implications. To modern scholars and other viewers, historical instances of the integration of older and sometimes non-local elements into new works seems to signal, at least at first sight, the *physical* bringing together of different cultures and eras. Where scholars and/or the public have defined religions, states, or communities as mutually antagonistic, one group's reuse of its rivals' creations—whether wholesale or in part—seems to promise especially rich historical insight, indicating either the ultimate triumph of one over the other, or alternatively, their ultimate resolution of differences.

The promise of greater historical understanding is surely one of the reasons that many scholars of South Asian art and architectural history have investigated instances of visible reuse ever since the first systematic surveys of physical remains during the nineteenth century.[2] In keeping with the particular interest of periods of confrontation between supposedly opposing forces, a majority of scholarly as well as general attention has been directed toward the late twelfth century and onward. In nineteenth-century scholarship, the successful Ghurid campaigns of conquest during the 1190s, east of the Indus in modern north India, and the subsequent Islamic states of the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, were collectively cast as adversaries of "Hindu" civilization.[3] In recent years, though the binary narrative presupposing "Hindu" and "Muslim" societies as monolithic and inherently opposed has been superseded in scholarship by more nuanced approaches, historians, art and architectural historians, scholars of South Asian religions, and non-specialists[4] have continued to be fascinated by instances of architectural reuse dating from this span of five centuries.

Until the 1990s[5] the academic and public focus on acts of reuse dating from the late twelfth through sixteenth centuries had left even historically documented instances from earlier times little explored.[6] This decontextualization and implicit privileging of Islamic-Indic[7] encounters has resulted in an inaccurate understanding of the overall significance(s) of these historical events.

Asher and Metcalf's *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past* (1994) largely corrected the analytical imbalance in studies of South Asian reuse, until then myopically fixed on Islamic-Indic confrontations. But this collection of essays had a wider purpose than simply righting a scholarly and public misperception. At the outset the volume's editors state, "[accepted] attitudes toward South Asia's visual past shaped ... a distinctive historical consciousness." Furthermore, this "canon," which offered a coherent, authoritative mode of understanding South Asia's visual past, though not identical with the narrative of colonialism, was inextricably bound up with it.[8] Although some essays in the volume analyzed architectural and sculptural reuse as tangible evidence of specific pasts at particular historical moments,[9] instances of reuse were by no means the only available glimpses into these moments. Other articles also bring more intangible evidence to bear on the seminal question of how pasts were perceived during various presents throughout time: whether the artist was thought to have chosen historicity or contemporaneity in the depiction of religious narratives, or whether an architectural style was used consciously in emulation of a historical moment.[10] Noticeably, the volume altogether omitted analysis of reuse in Islamic contexts,[11] perhaps as an overt gesture of compensation for the bias of past studies.

In the wake of *Perceptions'* timely questioning of the attitudes and "canons" informing analyses of South Asian pasts, a panel convened at the 2005 meeting of the American Council on Southern Asian Art revisited the phenomenon of reuse during various periods of South Asian history.[12] The panel's aims were more limited than the volume edited by Asher and Metcalf.

Rather than scrutinizing the methodologies of a scholarly field, the panel undertook a focused and comparative approach to reuse in South Asia. Underpinning this project was the belief that the phenomenon of reuse furnished a unique entrée to specific historical processes, such as the establishment and consolidation of new rulerships, changes in religious and nonreligious iconography and their reception through time, and the emergence of new ways of building. Four essays in the present volume (by Patel on Ghurid architecture, Sears, Kasdorf, and Aitken) are the collective—though indirect—result of that panel. Though the chronological scope of these articles is not as wide-ranging as the panel's, we believe the essays enrich the ongoing discussions of South Asia's pasts and its multiple presents.

A growing number of works in South Asian art and architectural history focus on architectural and sculptural reuse in non-Islamic contexts, analyzing, for example, the recarving of Gandhāran Buddhist reliefs in accordance with changing iconographic preferences, Śaiva-Vaiśnava sectarian competition, and the conversion of a Brahmānical goddess temple to Jaina worship.[13] The majority of studies, however, continue to focus on the larger motivations behind and details of architectural reuse in the context of Islamic state formation and expansion in South Asia.

Such an unfaltering gaze on the part of lay and scholarly circles has most likely been premised on two interconnected factors. As recently as the late 1980s–early '90s, in large part due to a heavy reliance on historical texts for the interpretation of visual phenomena, scholarly publications still viewed the Ghurid presence in northern India and the Islamic states that ensued to be the cultural and religious opponents of a long-established Hindu-Jaina civilization.[14] Thus, mosques (and other structures of Islamic affiliation) built from temple fragments were closely examined to glean indices of the overarching triumph of Islam over the indigenous populations and their socio-religious practices. Such grand civilizational themes are often more glamorous than subtle historical processes or those deemed to be of minor significance.

Indeed, the events of the last half-century and more might appear to underscore the irreconcilable religious (and political) divide between the Islamic and Indic cultural spheres of South Asia. In modern India baleful public attention is drawn especially to mosques, tombs, and *dargah*s exhibiting reused Indic fragments. These buildings, I would argue, serve as the memorial icons not only of a distant historical past, but also of the alive and raw memories of the subcontinent's Partition in 1947 along Muslim and Hindu identities.[15] We are actively reminded of this seismic political, religious, and emotional fissure with each conflagration that erupts between India's Muslims and Hindus—sometimes physically centered at monuments such as a sixteenth-century mosque in Ayodhya (1992), or the late twelfth-century Qutbi Complex of Delhi (2001)—and between the larger nation-states of India and Pakistan themselves.

Scholarly discourse, then, has found itself submerged in the clamor of communal conflicts. It has confronted intractable *public* perceptions of a South Asian past still dualistically divided into "Hindu" and "Muslim," itself at times susceptible to that dualism in the 1980s–early 1990s. With the gradual deepening of analysis, however, and the consequent disengagement from grand historical themes, scholarly publications of the last fifteen years have begun to detail the *intricacies* of sectarian rivalry and cross-cultural encounters.

The work of Richard Davis (1993) and Michael W. Meister (1993) provided significant strides toward what has eloquently been termed "a new historical imagination ... recover[ing] the variety and multiplicity of [the past]."[16] Rather than the previous exclusive gaze on the clash of "Muslim" and "Hindu" cultures, Davis brought under scrutiny the *political* acts of temple desecration and of image reconsecration by non-Islamic kings. He thereby began the process of contextualizing the events of the late twelfth through sixteenth centuries—traumatically remembered in the twentieth century—and helped broaden their reception as a part of the performance of kingship and authority in general, rather than an exclusively Islamic practice.[17]

Simultaneously, Meister's analyses of late twelfth-century Ghurid patronage brought much-needed sophistication to the analysis of reused building materials during these years of repeated campaigns of conquest. Earlier studies had concluded that "the use of spolia ... [rendered] the role of the mosque as a metaphor of domination."[18] In contrast, Meister's examination of the late twelfth–early thirteenth-century mosques at Kaman and Khatu (eastern and central Rajasthan, respectively) suggested that these buildings "did not represent simple plunder, nor [had their] Hindu elements been thoughtlessly reassembled."[19] Instead, these buildings signaled a more sustained and less confrontational interaction between "Hindu" workers and their new "Muslim" patrons. Meister's command of Indian temple architecture and iconography, moreover, brought the knowledge of these well-developed fields to bear on the analysis of the Islamic buildings of South Asia.

The groundbreaking works of Richard Eaton (2000) and Philip Wagoner, along with John Henry Rice (2001), have expanded the scholarly discourse not

only on the practice of architectural reuse, but also on Islamic state formation in South Asia. Using as points of departure studies by Richard Davis and Sheldon Pollock,[20] and by means of a thorough analysis of Persian textual sources, Eaton proposed that temple desecration and reuse by newly forming Muslim elites was a selective practice, focused on eradicating the *political* presence of the previous (usually Hindu) dynasty. With this precise focus of military force on the *rashtra devata*, or dynastic deity, of the previous rulers, and the simultaneous patronage of Sufi orders, establishment and consolidation of a new power was efficient and enduring.[21] Thus, Eaton convincingly argued that the late twelfth through sixteenth centuries were not a period of civilizational confrontation, but rather of the consolidation of many new states—states that happened to be controlled by Muslim elites.

Building on the new directions set by Eaton, Wagoner and Rice investigated Islamic politico-military activities outside of northern India, focusing on the expansion of Tughluq (based at Delhi, ca. 1320–ca. 1410) presence at Warangal-Sultanpur in the northeastern Deccan. There, the remains of a congregational mosque and possibly an audience hall, both dated to Tughluq occupation of the area from 1323 to about 1331, exhibit large reused fragments from a temple complex. In keeping with Eaton's proposal of selective temple desecration, Wagoner and Rice concluded that Tughluq forces had dismantled the previous Kakatiyas' (1163–1323) center of dynastic power, the thirteenth-century Svayumbhuśiva Temple, in order to establish a new, Tughluq-directed political presence in the region in an unequivocally monumental fashion. Their identification of the "conquest mosque type"—constructed largely of reused components and formally similar to Delhi's Qutbi Complex (founded 1192–1193)—is an important contribution to future analyses, particularly art-historical studies of architectural reuse.[22]

Finbarr Barry Flood has authored perhaps the largest number of studies dedicated to practices of reuse in South Asia. He has not shied away from the late twelfth-century Ghurid-patronized buildings, bravely confronting these emotionally laden sites that have been the *loci* of religious and political violence in both past and present. Flood has not only analyzed in detail these and other South Asian Islamic buildings constructed of older components, he has also brought the structures into the analytical ambit of Islamic architectural history.[23] Flood has significantly observed that intra-Muslim architectural destruction also occurred. Following Sunil Kumar's observation that, at last, historians no longer treat surviving Persian textual sources as unimpeachable,[24] Flood suggests that court-sponsored Arabic and Persian chronicles are evasive about this issue, accounts of which nonetheless figure in regionally based and non-Islamic histories.[25]

Flood's multiple publications on the subject of reuse in South Asian Islamic buildings highlight how each instance of this practice differed in motivation.[26] Expanding the horizons first sighted by Richard Davis, Michael W. Meister, and Philip Wagoner, Flood has approached the Muslim elites of South Asia and their states as distinguishable entities. His work has greatly advanced the important historiographical project of providing a gradually more detailed understanding of Islam in South Asia.

The essays in this volume by Sears, Patel, Kasdorf, and Aitken have built upon the foundational work that has been laid by these senior scholars. Hopefully, these essays demonstrate once again that the advancement of knowledge of historical times and places is, inevitably, a cumulative process.

Notes

1. The bibliography on all of these regions and periods is much too extensive to cite in its entirety here, but a publication treating these widespread instances of physical and conceptual reuse and their receptions within a single project is *Ideologie e pratiche del reimpiego nell'alto medioevo, Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo XLVI* [*The Ideology and Practice of Reuse during the High Medieval Period*], 2 vols. (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medieovo, 1999).

2. The writings of Sir Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893) and other Colonial-era surveyors, all acting under the auspices of the new Archaeological Survey of India (founded 1862), are well known and have been frequently treated in the historiography. See, e.g., Alexander Cunningham, *Four Reports Made during the Years 1862–63–64–65* (Simla: Government Central Press, 1871), vol. 1, pp. 131ff., vol. 2, pp. 252ff. Cunningham, *Report of a Tour in Eastern Rajputana* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendant of Government Printing, 1885), pp. 54ff., 60ff.; James Fergussen, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1876), vol. 2, esp. pp. 196–214). See also Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Asia Society and Harvard University Press, 1983); and Gary Michael Tartatov, "Changing Views of India's Art History," in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, ed. Catherine B. Asher and Thomas R. Metcalf (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1994), pp. 15–36.

3. "Hindu" and "Saracenic" (Islamic) cultures were considered so divergent that, even in the architectural realm, Islamic buildings exhibiting indigenous stylistic ele-

ments were assumed to have been constructed of reused materials; see, e.g., Henry Cousens' analysis of the sixteenth-century tomb of Jam Nizam al-Din at Thatta (Sindh) [*The Antiquities of Sind* (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publications Branch, 1929), p. 114]; refuted by Daniel Ehnbom, "Cosmology and Continuity; A 16th Century Tomb in Sind," in *South Asian Archaeology 1989*, ed. Catherine Jarrige (Madison, Wis.: Prehistory Press, 1992), pp. 361–66.

4. Scholarly publications are discussed below in main text. Sita Ram Goel (1921–2003) was a historian trained at Delhi University, and many of his objections to South Asian Islam and secularism in general likely sprang from a problematic fixation with the left-leaning intellectuals of Aligarh Muslim University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. An influential, purely lay voice in the "revisionist" history of Islam in South Asia was P. N. Oak (1921–2007), whose *Some Blunders of Indian Historical Research* (New Delhi: self-published, 1990) famously proclaimed that no medieval Indian buildings could be attributed to Islamic patronage as they were all built by Rajput rulers and nobility.

5. I refer here to the several important works of the mid-1990s treating reuse, including Richard Davis, "Indian Art Objects as Loot," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1 (February 1993), pp. 22–48. See also R. C. Sharma, "Mathura: A Case Study," in *Perceptions*, ed. Asher and Metcalf, pp. 117–26, and Richard Davis, "Trophies of War: The Case of the Chalukya Intruder," in *Perceptions*, ed. Asher and Metcalf, pp. 161–77 as initiating a broadening of the discourse on reuse in South Asia. Davis subsequently expanded his work "to explore the different worlds of belief that Indian religious images ... inhabit over time," including British colonial acquisition of Indian objects, and modern museum exhibitions (Richard Davis, *The Lives of Indian Images* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997], p. 6ff.).

6. There have been, of course, some noteworthy exceptions to the general trend. An important article from the 1970s analyzed the reuse of an Aśokan column (4th c. BCE) during the Gupta period (6th c. CE): Joanna Williams, "A Recut Asokan Capital and the Gupta Attitude towards the Past," *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1973), pp. 225–40.

7. In her discussion of the 1992 events at Ayodhya, Tapati Guha-Thakurta observed that, certainly for the conservative Hindu-nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its allies—and in some instances, also in scholarly publications—"the term 'Hindu' is conveniently conceived ... as the homogenized umbrella category ... standing in 'for ... Jainism, Shaivism Shaktism, Vaishnavism and the rest'" (Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Archaeology as Evidence: Looking Back from the Ayodhya Debate," *Occasional Paper*, no. 189, p. 23 (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1997). Taking this salutary point, the term 'Indic' is used below in this essay as more accurate shorthand for the religious systems indigenous to the Indian subcontinent—a usage justifiable at least in the shared iconographies among these religions.

8. See "Preface" and "Introduction," in *Perceptions*, ed. Asher and Metcalf, pp. vii, 1.

9. See Sharma, "Mathura," in *Perceptions*, ed. Asher and Metcalf, esp. p. 117; and Davis, "Trophies of War," in *Perceptions*, pp. 168–69.

10. See, e.g., M. K. Dhavalikar, "Ajanta: The Perception of the Past," in *Perceptions*, ed. Asher and Metcalf, pp. 127–34; George Michell, "Revivalism as the Imperial Mode: Religious Architecture during the Vijayanagara Period," in *Perceptions*, pp. 187–98; and Mary Beth Coffman Heston, "Images from the Past, Vision of the Future: The Art of Marttanda Varma," in *Perceptions*, pp. 199–210.

11. With the exception of a brief passage, stating, "Islamic rulers also appropriated older indigenous pillars and columns" (see "Introduction," *Perceptions*, p. 8).

12. Alka Patel, Chair, "Millennia of Iconoclasm? Re-Use in South Asia," *ACSAA Symposium XII* (San Diego Museum of Art, 21–23 October 2005). The panel title made ironic reference to the predominance of analyses dedicated to Islamic-"Indic" reuse at the expense of other instances, invoking the Colonial-period narrative privileging interpretations of reuse based in supposed Islamic iconoclasm. Four presenters explored the types (sculptural, architectural, etc.) and historical specificities (inter- or intra-sectarian rivalry, dynastic competition, alterations in religious iconography, etc.) of reuse. Examinations began of the first centuries of the Common Era at sites in Gandhāra, the western *ghats* (modern Mahārāṣṭra), and at Amarāvatī, and concluded in late twelfth-century northern India. The original panel presenters were Kurt Behrendt (Metropolitan Museum, New York), "Gandharan Religious Imagery: Use, Re-use, and Recontextualization"; Tushara Bindu Gude (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), "Recovering the Past: Re-use at Amaravati"; Alka Patel (UC Irvine), "Temple of Temples: The Jageshvara Mandir of Sadadi, Rajasthan"; and David Efurd (Ohio State University), "The Appropriation and Re-use of Early Buddhist Cave Sites in Maharastra."

13. Gandhāran reuse has been analyzed most recently by Kurt Behrendt, "Reuse of Images in Gandhara (Second through Sixth Centuries CE)," *Journal of Asian Studies*, forthcoming (2009). Vidya Dehejia ("Addition, Erasure, and Adaptation of the Rock-Cut Monuments at Mamallapuram," *Archives of Asian Art*, forthcoming [2010]), examined Śaiva-Vaiśnava competition in southern India. I am grateful to Drs. Dehejia and Behrendt for access to their manuscripts. The Jaina appropriation of a Brahmānical structure in Rājāsthan was analyzed by Michael W. Meister, "Sweetmeats or Corpses? Community, Conversion and Sacred Places," in *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History*, ed. John E. Cort (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 111–38.

14. See esp. Robert Hillenbrand, "Political Symbolism in Early Indo-Islamic Mosque Architecture," *Iran*, vol. 26 (1988), pp. 105–17; Anthony Welch, "Architectural Patronage and the Past: The Tughluq Sultans of Delhi," *Muqarnas*, vol. 10 (1993), pp. 311–22. It is particularly surprising that the twelfth-century Ghurid foundations of northern India fell within this narrative, given Michael Meister's convincing 1972 article analyzing the "mixture of Hindu and Muslim artistry." (Michael Meister, "The 'Two-and-a-Half-Day' Mosque," *Oriental Art*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1972), pp. 57–63.)

15. Richard Davis observes, "[A] significant number of Indians now perceive Indo-Muslim holy places not as ... examples of sacred architecture, but as 'ocular reminders' of what these structures allegedly cover, the sites of destroyed Hindu icons and temples"; "Memories of Broken Idols," in *The Experience of Islamic Art on the Margins of Islam*, ed. Irene Bierman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 136. The "ocular reminder" can be extended to include also the traumatic memories of the 1947 Partition, as specifically noted with reference to the Qutb Minar (1199) by Sunil Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory," in *The Partitions of Memory*, ed. Subir Kaul (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 174–75.

16. Guha-Thakurta, "Archaeology as Evidence," p. 26. See also n. 15 above and n. 19 below.

17. Davis, "Indian Art Objects"; Davis, *The Lives of Indian Images*.

18. Hillenbrand, "Political Symbolism," p. 109.

19. Meister, "Indian Islam's Lotus Throne," p. 447.

20. For Davis, see esp. "Indian Art Objects"; also Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2 (May 1993), pp. 261–97.

21. Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2000), pp. 246–81. In my own work I have set out possible objections to subsuming six hundred years of architectural reuse, in regions as historically and culturally distinct as Gujarat and the Deccan—and states as disparate as the early sultanates and the Mughal empire—into a single paradigm. Moreover, epigraphical and architectural evidence indicates that medieval Indian rulers often patronized their own *rashtra devata* temples as lavishly as other sectarian institutions; see Alka Patel, "Architectural Histories Entwined: The Rudramahalaya/Congregational Mosque of Siddhpur (Gujarat)," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2004), pp. 144–63; Patel, *Building Communities in Gujarat: Architecture and Society during the Twelfth through Fourteenth Centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), esp. pp. 157–64.

22. Philip B. Wagoner and John Henry Rice, "From Delhi to the Deccan: Newly Discovered Tughluq Monuments at Warangal-Sultanpur and the Beginnings of Indo-Islamic Architecture in Southern India," *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 61, no. 1 (2001), pp. 77–116.

23. See Finbarr Barry Flood, "Ghurid Monuments and Muslim Identities: Epigraph and Exegesis in Twelfth-Century Afghanistan," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2005), pp. 263–94. Significant parts of this work were inspired by Janine Sourdel-Thomine's *Le minaret ghouride de Djam* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 2004). See also Finbarr Barry Flood, "Refiguring Iconoclasm in the Early Indian Mosque," in *Negating the Image*, ed. Anne McClanan and Jeff Johnson (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 15–35.

24. Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory," esp. pp. 152ff.

25. See Finbarr Barry Flood, "Introduction," in *Piety and Politics in the Early Indian Mosque*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xxxvii.

26. Finbarr Barry Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices: Translating the Past in Sultanate Delhi," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2003), pp. 95–116; Flood, "Persianate Trends in Sultanate Architecture: The Great Mosque of Bada'un," in *The Iconography of Islamic Art: Studies in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. Bernard O'Kane (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 159–94.