Ambivalent Appropriations: Narrating Enmity through the Monumental Remains of South Asia

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Art history and enemy studies

The article investigates the mutually constitutive relationship between enemization[1] and identity construction, as it continues to be formed around discussions of monumental remains of past empires in South Asia. In particular, I address the proliferation of narratives of enmity within post-colonial India that speak of a "Muslim conquest" of the "Hindu" subcontinent.[2] Such accounts construct militant alterity by reading it off the material surfaces of monumental remains of pre-modern times. The essay explores the interrelationships between representative architecture and textual accounts—medieval, colonial, and contemporary—in instantiating teleologies of inimical relationships, which are traced vertically across centuries.[3] My analysis therefore moves between examining, on the one hand, the historical processes of conquest and consolidation of power that marked the establishment of Islamic polities on the Indian subcontinent during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and on the other, drawing attention to the multiple readings and mobilizations of "evidence," primarily material remains, in the service of cementing antagonisms of the present. Textual articulations of enmity targeting historical architecture, in particular the

1 The term has been coined by scholars in enemy studies. See, for instance, Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

2 S. R. Sharma, *The Crescent in India* (Bombay: Karnataka Publishing House, 1937); A. B. M. Habibullah, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India: A History of the Establishment and Progress of the Turkish Sultanate of Delhi 1206–1290 A.D.* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1961).

3 This paper draws on research I have done earlier and published in two articles. The material forms part of a new argument to address issues brought forth by enmity studies. See Monica Juneja, "Architectural Memory between Representation and Practice: Rethinking Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire*," in *Memory, History, Colonialism: Engaging with Pierre Nora in Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts*, ed. Indra Sengupta, *German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Supplement* 1 (2009): 11–36; and Monica Juneja, "Materielle Appropriation, Kulturerbe und Erinnerungsdiskurse: Der Denkmalkomplex und das Qutb Minar in Delhi," in *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell: Grenzgänge zwischen Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Michael Falser and Monica Juneja (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 37–52.

mosque, as a metonym of aggression by the enemy invader, have played a seminal role in unleashing actual violence between communities constituted along religious lines. A notable instance here is the conflagration of 1992, when the Babri Mosque in the North Indian town of Ayodhya was destroyed by Hindu nationalist groups, and the days of blood-soaked rioting that came in its aftermath.[4] Motivated by the call to redress or avenge the perceived wrongs of the past, such acts of violence draw on building histories that mobilized the trope of Muslim vandalism or architectural iconoclasm, making these a generic motif to explain traumas of the present.

This essay examines, in a first step, the deployment of art historical concepts such as iconoclasm, appropriation, and reuse in a given historical situation. It then proceeds, in a following section, to analyze the conceptual potential of these categories to unravel the ambivalent dynamic of seizure and emulation that unfolded as buildings were captured, taken apart, and rebuilt by conquerors. Ambivalence, understood as a contrary pattern of values and practices, marks the historical developments studied here at different levels: it informs the processuality of iconoclasm, which is not contained within a single act of violent destruction of an object; rather, iconoclastic action inhabits a longer durée that includes relocation and resignification, involving both loss and gain. As an expression of enmity, iconoclastic behavior thus produces such seemingly paradoxical or inconsistent effects of rejection and attraction, of emulation and the desire to annihilate, which are held to constitute the "relational logic" of enmity.[5] Enmity, this study further argues, is both driven by and fosters transculturation. It unfolds over an extended period in reciprocally constitutive social and political processes, and it is quintessentially relational in a context formed by conquest, migration, conflict, and consolidation. The latter processes, as the following account will illustrate, encompass far-flung territories, and also play out on regional and local scales. A theory of transculturation can destabilize fixed meanings like those that art history ascribes to phenomena, such as iconoclasm. Reading acts of conquest and architectural appropriation through a transcultural lens reveals these instead as a crucible of transformation, which infuses buildings and objects with a life that oscillates between continuity and novelty. This investigation therefore points to the ways in which art-historical analysis can sharpen our understanding of enmity as a profoundly relational and intrinsically ambivalent phenomenon constituted through processes of transculturation.

4 A good overview is Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi Issue* (New Delhi: Viking Press, 1992). See also Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

5 Johannes Becke, Nikolas Jaspert, and Joachim Kurtz, "Ambivalent Enmity: Making the Case for a Transcultural Turn in Enmity Studies," Introduction to this issue, 5.

Narratives of conquest

In the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, published in 1829, the colonial scholar James Tod castigated the Turkic forces who occupied regions of North India through phases of warfare, accompanied by waves of migration, as "the Goths and Vandals of Rajasthan," evoking thereby the expression coined by Abbé Grégoire in 1792 to denounce the breaking of statues during the revolutionary decade in France. Tod's account proceeds to describe the mosque at Ajmer constructed by the new rulers, for which they used materials of existing temples, as follows: "Bigotry has destroyed, or raised to herself altars of materials … of two distinct and distant eras: that of the independent Hindu, and that of the conquering Muhammadan … it is as if a modern sculptor were to adorn the head of Cato with a peruke. I left this precious relic, with a malediction upon all the spoilers of art—whether the Thane who pillaged Minerva's portico at Athens, or the Toork who dilapidated the Jain temple at Ajmér."[6] By subsuming a number of actions performed in different though synchronic contexts under the overarching, censorious category of vandalism, Tod conflated alterity with enmity articulated through "pillaging," and what he perceived as an unpalatable juxtaposition of incommensurate traditions. In doing so, he set the tone for many subsequent commentators and authors of architectural histories of the subcontinent, who viewed a category of public mosques (Persian: *masjid-i jama*) created in the wake of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate as "conquest mosques,"[7] cementing thereby a constitutive relationship between enemization and the erection of public monuments.

Central to the discussion of the phenomenon building acts that come in the wake of conquest and occupation is the first Friday mosque of Delhi, the construction of which began in 1192, when the city was made the capital of the Sultanate established by the Ghurid dynasty, whose members came from central Afghanistan. The mosque is also known as the Qutb Mosque, owing to the adjacent minaret, the Qutb Minar, begun around 1199, whose magnificence and technical achievement have not ceased to impress observers and visitors from the time it was erected down to the present (Fig. 1). Substantial parts of the mosque were built using material—sculpted blocks of stone—from temples under construction at the site where the mosque was located. A relationship between military conquest of territory and the use of temple stones

6 James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or, the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: M. N. Publishers, 1957 [1829]), vol. 1, 778, 782.

7 Phillip B. Wagoner and John H. 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* 61, no. 1 (2001): 77–117; 87. Also discussed in Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), chapter 4.

as building material can be posited on the basis of negative evidence from regions of the subcontinent where Muslim merchant communities had settled predating the Ghurid military campaigns. In Sindh and Gujarat, for instance, local craftsmen, primarily Hindu, who built mosques, did not make use of existing material following desecration or from ruined structures, including temples.[8] The appropriation and reuse of materials in the context of Delhi and other regions annexed following warfare thus appears to represent a conscious choice.[9] The sculpted blocks of stone carry signs of violence, often in the form of a hasty defacing of human figures. Architectural accounts of this building have cast such signs as acts of uncompromising enmity, deploying arguments that assume a metonymic relationship between materials and the totality of religious cultures they are meant to represent.

Fig. 1. *Delhi, Qutb Complex (12th century), aerial view.*

The temple and the mosque have continued in modern architectural histories to be placed on a matrix of enemization where they stand for the mutually antithetical cultural domains demarcated as "Hindu" and "Muslim." The entry on Indian architecture by John Burton-Page in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, for example, states that "idol-temples were not only anathema to Islam but were its direct antithesis," an argument that represents antagonisms as radical,

8 See Mehrdad Shokoohy, *Bhadreśvar: The Oldest Islamic Monuments in India* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); and Alka Patel, "From Province to Sultanate: The Architecture of Gujarat during the 12th through 16th Centuries," in *The Architecture of the Indian Sultanates*, ed. Abha N. Lambah and Alka Patel (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2006), 68–79.

9 Wagoner and Rice underline this for the Jami Masjid in Warangal; see "From Delhi to Deccan," 84–106.

fixed, and essential to cultural forms and practices marked by a relationship of conflict within context of struggles for political control.[10] Identities, read off stones in buildings, are reduced to sectarian, and therefore inimical, qualities. This in turn leads to a reading of their coexistence within the structure of a single building as an anti-canonical deformation of a pristine original. James Fergusson's pioneering *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* of 1876, which aspired to place the discipline of architectural history of the Indian subcontinent on a scientific footing by devising a taxonomic chronology of Indian monuments, drew on notions of essence and purity embedded in theories of race, to describe the presence of different forms that, according to him, could only signal degeneration by their coming together.[11] Relationships between communities, each aligned to a distinct religious formation, are placed in correspondence with a single moment of conquest, valorized as the decisive moment of creation of a work or a building to fix its character for all times to come. Modern scholarship continues to inscribe a discourse of radical antagonism onto medieval buildings, reading the latter as teleological warnings of the violence and trauma that came in the wake of the truncation of the national body of the new-born nation at the moment of its liberation from the colonial yoke in 1947. A national memory of "wrongs" inflicted by the enemy invader remounting to the Ur-moment of the "Muslim conquest" of India in the twelfth century is kept alive by regular outbreaks of religious violence in the present, including the tearing down of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, referred to above. Another mode of "redress" can be observed in regular demands by Hindu nationalist groups to hold a Hindu purification ceremony at sites of mosques, many of which are now "protected monuments" under the aegis of the Archaeological Survey of India.[12] Such demands are

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10 John Burton-Page, "Al-Hind," in *Encyclopedia of Islam: New Edition,* ed. Peri J. Baerman et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2005), vol. 2, 412–428 and 440–452; 441.

11 James Fergusson, *A History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1876). For a discussion of Fergusson, see Monica Juneja, "Introduction," in *Architecture in Medieval India: Forms, Contexts, Histories*, ed. Monica Juneja (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 1–108; 13–29.

12 On November 15, 2000, members of Hindu right-wing activist groups with political affiliations to organizations that were instrumental in the destruction of the Babri Mosque assembled outside the complex of buildings including the Qutb Minar and mosque in Delhi, and demanded to be allowed to hold a ceremony—*dev mukti yajna*—to free the gods from imprisonment, claiming that they were trapped inside the complex. Their claim rested on the popular belief that the mosque was built following the destruction of twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples. Following a tussle with the police, the mob was prevented from entering the complex. The event was widely reported in English language newspapers as well as the regional language press, e.g. *The Hindustan Times*, November 14, 2003, or *The Pioneer*, November 15, 2000. See Mrinalini Rajagopalan, *Building Histories: The Archival and Affective Lives of Five Monuments in Modern Delhi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 156. Such movements have continued in recent years, extending to several other sites; see for example: https://hinduexistence.org/2020/03/05/dr-subramanian-swamy-to-take-charge-as-the-commander-of-sri-kashi-gyanvapi-mukti-yagna-samiti/.

often followed by civil suits to the courts seeking the restoration of the temples with their respective deities, with a view to protecting what they regard as the religious heritage of India, in other words, "purifying" it from the debasement that came with enemy occupation.

Iconoclasm as process

The tropes of iconoclasm, appropriation, and reuse have all been deployed in narratives of early Indian mosques to stand for the violent breaking of images and structures, together with their forcible dispossession. These concepts make up a prolific field of investigations, which point to the multiple, often mutable, and polyvalent meanings attached to actions that invariably take destruction as their starting point. The account that follows intends to move beyond an exploration of iconoclasm that examines the phenomenon as contained within a single act. Instead, it will study a particular set of actions identified as iconoclastic as a long-term process that unfolds within relationships of antagonism, with a view to enriching via enemy studies the conceptual import of this key notion within art history. The etymological roots of the English term iconoclasm—*eikon* (image) and *klao* (to break)—encompass a broad spectrum of actions directed towards objects, images, and sites, of which hostile destruction or intent to obliterate, even as these exist in relationship to other phenomena, form the core. Investigative analyses of iconoclasm (these do not include the uses of the term as a metaphor to stand for an attack on any bastion of authority) predominantly understand it as an ideologically motivated form of action to destroy or alter images or objects associated with religious practice and endowed with symbolic value.[13] Such a focus has emerged from certain broad fields that have for long generated studies of iconoclasm. The themes investigated include clashes within the early Judeo-Christian tradition over the permissibility of images; acts of destruction that came with the expansion of Islam; the Protestant Reformation, following which modern and contemporary conflicts such as the toppling of statues of discredited political leaders; the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas; and the image wars surrounding the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. All these cases have brought forth studies of the phenomenon in its multiple forms.[14] The focus of this writing has mainly

13 Among the important surveys of the phenomenon are Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion, 1997); David Freedberg, *Iconoclasm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021); Kristine Kolrud and Marina Prusac, ed., *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); and Stacy Boldrick, Leslie Brubaker, and Richard Clay, ed., *Striking Images: Iconoclasms Past and Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

14 See for instance Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993); Jaś Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium", *The Art Bulletin* 94, no. 3 (2012): 368–394; Finbarr Barry Flood, " Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum," *The Art Bulletin*

been on the object itself, while addressing the relationship between destructive actions—such as mutilation, fragmentation, burial, covering, soiling, and at times even obliteration—and their meanings.

More recently, investigations of iconoclastic practices in contexts beyond the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have drawn our attention to the multi-layered dimensions of the phenomenon. Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders summarized this complexity when they wrote that iconoclasm "is rarely a single act which totally obliterates the object."[15] Iconoclasm, in their view, is driven by the power a group or community ascribes to images; their breaking is an act of philosophical violence that incites a physical response, and yet conceptual and physical breaks are not always conflatable.[16] Investigations of the relationship between the action of destroying and its meanings as they unfold in the aftermath of that action, which does not rule out relocation, reframing, or re-signifying, speak of a "sign transformation," both material and discursive, which proceeds in the aftermath of physical breaking.[17]

An approach that situates iconoclasm within the study of enmity, conceptualized as "processual, relational, and profoundly ambivalent,"[18] builds on understandings of the phenomenon outlined above, and carries these forward by attending to the transcultural dynamics involved. Reading iconoclasm as an element of enmity as process helps us understand its wider, long-term implications beyond the intentionality of individual actors or the exclusive focus on an image, object, or site. As studies of enmity draw on different disciplinary perspectives, these allow us to place the religious dimensions of acts of iconoclasm in relationship to other factors, to establish connections to events and processes that at first glance seem unrelated but

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84, no. 4 (2002): 641–659; Jens Braarvig, "Iconoclasm: Three Modern Cases," in *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*, 153–170; Finbarr Barry Flood, "Inciting Modernity? Images, Alterities, and the Contexts of the 'Cartoon Wars'," in *Images that Move*, ed. Patricia Spyer and Mary M. Steedly (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2013), 41–72; and Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 836–862.

15 Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders, "The Buddha Head at Kōfukuji Temple (Nara, Japan)," in *Striking Images*, 39–46; 39–40. See also Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders, *Buddhism and Iconoclasm in East Asia: A History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

16 Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22. See also Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*.

17 The term has been used by Richard Clay, cited by Stacy Boldrick, "Introduction: Breaking Images," in *Striking Images*, 1–12; 2. See also, in the same volume, Richard Clay, "Saint Geneviève, Iconoclasm, and the Transformation of Signs in Revolutionary Paris," 97–112; and Bruno Latour, "What is Iconoclash? Or is there a World Beyond Image Wars?" *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2002), 15–40.

18 Becke, Jaspert, and Kurtz, "Ambivalent Enmity," 2.

are joined by the ambivalence that lies at the core of relationships to the enemy. The following study looks at iconoclasm conjoined to appropriation of sites and territory—an act of forcible dispossession and transfer of ownership that at the same time bears the ethical or moral value assigned to such acts in a given era or cultural context. These terms emerge as ambivalent signifiers: they can stand for the transience of a given power, be it iconic or political, as well as its fresh accumulation. Acts of appropriation and iconoclasm encode violence, even though this can be elided in terms such as reuse or re-signification; the visible signs of violence, such as defacement, read as wounds, continue to intimate a history of enmity and keep it alive. Reframing or re-contextualizing, however, involves a process of loss as well as gain, a semiotic mutability, which is at the same time a social one, as we shall see in the case study of the Qutb Mosque that I will elaborate on in the following section. By signaling towards the mutual dependence of iconoclasm and iconophilia, by recognizing that attempts to destroy a site or an image go hand in hand with the proliferation of fresh sites and images, these concepts can be made productive in unraveling the intrinsic ambivalence of inimical relationships.

Fig. 2. *Qutb Mosque, entrance portal.*

Fig. 3. *Qutb Mosque, Riwaq and courtyard.*

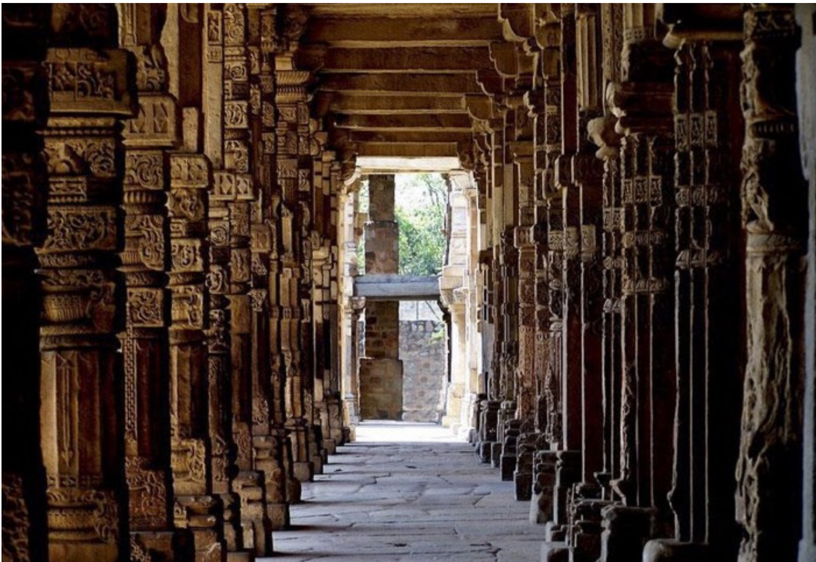

Fig. 4. *Qutb Mosque, Riwaq pillars.*

Fig. 5. *Qutb Mosque, sculpted pillars.*

Fig. 6. *Qutb Mosque, Riwaq with lotus ceiling.*

Fig. 7. *Qutb Mosque, courtyard with monumental arched screen.*

The Qutb Complex: Iconoclasm as preservation?

The subject of this study is an architectural complex in Mehrauli, on the southern fringes of the city of Delhi, dating to the end of the twelfth century. Its construction, as mentioned above, was initiated in 1192 by Qutb ud-din Aibak, the first Sultan of Delhi. In 1993, UNESCO declared the complex a world heritage site. During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries this cluster of buildings had formed the locus of a new political capital. It consisted of a Friday mosque—a place for community prayer but also a space for a number of other political and social transactions—a *madrasa*, the tombs of royalty and saints, and a 72.5-metre tall tapering minaret, the Qutb Minar, that imparted a special visibility and symbolic substance to the site. The mosque itself has a narrow, spartan entrance (Fig. 2) leading into a courtyard surrounded on three sides by rows of pillars, whose visual impact invariably takes the visitor by surprise (Fig. 3). We enter a sacred space of Islam alive with the rich visual vocabulary of Hindu and Jain art forms. Rows and rows of pillars receding into the spatial depths of the congregational hall, the *riwaq* (Fig. 4), resonate with the plasticity of the sculpted motifs that cover their surfaces—the *kalasa* (water pot) and the lotus carved ceilings (Figs. 5, 6), with figures drawn from Hindu mythology, and a panel on the north wall portraying scenes from the

birth of the infant Krishna.[19] At a number of places, figural representations of deities show traces of mutilated faces, intended both as a sign of power and by implication of the resulting powerlessness of the object.[20] By analogy, the act of violent defacement of a sculpted object stands for an attack on the body and beliefs of the infidel enemy, now justly humiliated. Such acts of ritual humiliation were a trope that made a regular appearance in hagiographical texts, often composed a few hundred years after the event, recording the conquest and establishment of sacred sites across the subcontinent.[21] While couched as an attack on false religion, the visual experience of the interior space of the Qutb Mosque speaks the language of a structure whose purpose is both different and yet similar. With its trabeate principles of construction and awkwardly shallow domed interiors, characteristic of Hindu temples, it was far removed from the memory and associations of a prayer space created in accordance with arcuate principles of construction generally associated with a traditionally "Islamic" aesthetic outside the Indian subcontinent. The prayer hall is preceded by a monumental arched screen added in 1198, the surface of which is among the most lavishly ornamented in the mosque, carved with floral and epigraphic ornament, the latter comprising citations from the Qur'an (Fig. 7). The range of styles among the constituent materials indicates a mix of reused materials from twelfth century temples and newly carved stones that frequently emulate the style of the temple materials. The lotus vaults of the trabeate temple ceilings were taken apart piece by piece and carefully reconstructed in the low ceilings of the mosque (see Fig. 6). Such an instance of "iconoclastic preservation,"[22] which retains the visibility of the earlier form, now recreated with care through an act both disruptive and transformative, carries the analysis of the processes at work beyond the binaries of malevolence and submission.

19 For an attempt to date this panel and locate it within the genre of scenes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, see the note by R. B. K. N. Dikshit, "A Panel Showing the Birth of Lord Krishna from the Qutb Mosque," *Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society* 17 (1944): 84–86.

20 This is a common iconoclastic gesture in Christian as well as Islamic contexts, in the latter a way of making an image safe; see Flood, "Between Cult and Culture," 647–648.

21 For example, Richard Eaton cites an inscription dated 1455 from the doorway of a tomb-shrine in Dhar, Central India, celebrating the life of the saint who is believed to have founded the community of Muslims in Malwa by avenging the previous killings of Muslims by infidels. His great acts included the smashing of images, trampling over *siva lingam*s, and converting the temple into a mosque. See Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in Richard M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 94–132; 96–97.

22 The term has been used by Rambelli and Reinders, though they read it as negatively connoted, effecting "a more subtle form of harm" to sacred objects. The history that is being discussed here tempts us to speculate on the potential of such reconfigured spaces and material artefacts to function as a cultural resource. Rambelli and Reinders, *Buddhism and Iconoclasm*, 180.

Fig. 8. *Qutb Mosque, entrance portal with inscription on inner lintel.*

In order to highlight the seeming paradox presented by the inside and the outside of the mosque, let us return for a moment to the entrance portico. The inscription on the inner lintel (Fig. 8) states that the congregational mosque was built from the materials of twenty-seven idol houses (*but-khana*); two million *diliwals* had been spent on each idol house. This inscription is treated as a foundation text and an expression of victory over the unbelievers. A sandstone plaque installed by the Archaeological Survey of India next to the entrance "translates" the inscription as "the temples were razed to the ground" (this appears in the Hindi version of the plaque). The English version however frames it more neutrally by referring to the use of material from "27 temples."[23] Interestingly the figure twenty-seven to denote the temples on site, not confirmed by sources, is not therefore to be taken literally, but coincides, as Michael Meister asserts, with the traditional number of *nakshatra*s or lunar mansions in Indic cosmology, suggesting that it was chosen for its connotative potential rather than its denotative value.[24] The cost of the materials is also coded in the local currency of *diliwals* rather than the *dirhams* used in Afghanistan. Like many parvenu dynasties, the Ghurids portrayed themselves as purveyors of Sunni orthodoxy. The utility of championing the faith constituted a form of symbolic capital that was essential to refashion and reposition themselves

23 For a photograph, see Juneja, "Materielle Appropriation," 40.

24 Michael W. Meister, "Mystifying Monuments," *Seminar* 364 (December 1989): 24–27; 25.

in the larger Islamic world in the twelfth century. Framed within the rhetoric of idolatry, Indian victories were useful in bolstering the orthodox credentials of the conquerors. Textual accounts similarly aggrandized the achievements of sultans as champions of the faith and depicted the campaigns in India as a confrontation between the army of Islam (*lashkar-i Islam*) and that of the enemy infidel (*lashkar-i kuffar*).[25]

Fig. 9. *Qutb Mosque, courtyard with iron pillar.*

While the erection of congregational mosques was among the normative duties of Muslim kingship, other strategies employed within the same complex suggest an adoption of longstanding Indic practices of conquest and appropriation.[26] In the center of the courtyard, the heart of the complex, facing the monumental screen, is a seven meter high antique iron pillar that had belonged to a distant Indic past and been used by various kings, as the

25 Peter Hardy, "Force and Violence in Indo-Persian Writing on History and Government in Medieval South Asia," in *Islamic Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Professor Aziz Ahmad*, ed. Milton Israel and N. K. Wagle (Delhi: Manohar: 1983),165–208; 169. A similar phenomenon has been observed by Cemal Kafadar in relation to the Ottoman rulers; see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 91.

26 Extensively discussed in Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

inscriptions testify, to shift the sacred center to the capital of the victorious conqueror (Fig. 9).[27] The Turkic Sultan Iltutmish's appropriation and re-erection of the antique pillar might be read as a continuity of the ritual practice of earlier Indian kings, who routinely reappropriated, re-contextualized, and reinscribed antique pillars. The potential for legitimation through borrowing from the enemy's practice resided therefore not just in the pillar itself, but also in the very act of appropriation, which served to construct continuity rather than rupture, affinity rather than alterity. We thus notice a tension through the entire complex produced by the ambivalent strategies of proclaiming radical difference and efforts to surmount it.

Studies of iconoclasm rarely set out to identify the intentions of the iconoclasts, to which access remains elusive. Even where we have explicit statements of purpose, these cannot be taken at face value.[28] Our analysis therefore needs to shift from a focus on authorial intention to the varying discourses that surround the acts of violent appropriation, disfiguring, dismantling, and rebuilding. Such discourses, which register shifts over time, were from the start couched in ambivalence between the necessary rhetoric of enmity and its disavowal. While demonstrative articulations of enmity "depend on competing interpretations of shared symbolic resources,"[29] a study of Arabic scholarship, notably jurisprudence, has introduced the notion of "cultural ambiguity" as an attribute of this scholarship, whose practitioners never ceased to reflect on the uses of the concept.[30] Such ambiguity occurs through a coexistence of discourses within a given social or cultural formation; these "simultaneously exert the power to set up norms which often are not mutually compatible and may even directly collide."[31] Their juxtaposition is accepted by most within a social community, even as its members experience tensions among those who reject such ambiguity. Most often, according to Thomas Bauer, informal mechanisms ensure the continuation and acceptance of ambiguity. In Northern India, since the establishment of the Muslim sultanates and well into the Mughal empire, a plurality of discourses of political governance, ranging from the classical Mirror of Princes genre to religiously

27 Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 247–249.

28 Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 144, 252.

29 Becke, Jaspert, and Kurtz, "Ambivalent Enmity," 20.

30 Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011). English translation by Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Tricia Tunstall, *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021). Though ambiguity comes close to ambivalence, as used by Zygmunt Bauman, Bauer distinguishes one from the other by limiting ambivalence to a psychological state that "may trigger discomfort," while ambiguity assumes an acceptance, or "tolerance," of plurality. Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 18–29.

31 Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 20.

admonitory texts or still other texts/genres driven by political pragmatism, prescribed different modes of treatment of the non-Muslim population. In the absence of an authority to mediate between these positions and prescriptions, it was left to the ruler to choose his path without having to explicitly valorize any single one as exclusively valid.[32] Islamic societies, most often dynamized by long-term processes of transculturation, followed the principle that such "ambiguity" was the key to political stability. Its manifestations can provide a useful entry point into a range of cultural phenomena extending beyond political treatises, including the processes examined here.

A further example, also embedded in processes of war, conquest, and enemization, is furnished by the deeply equivocal figure of the *Ghazi pir*. While the term *Ghazi* stands for a warrior who slays the infidel, *pir* denotes a saint enjoying a large popular following. The ambivalent compound created by conjoining the two opposing figures works in two directions: it fixes an iconic meaning to the body of the enemy and at the same time valorizes its destroyer, the militant warrior as saint. This re-iconized persona became a popular cult figure on the Indian subcontinent, attracting devotees across the religious divide. The legendary biography of one such figure, Salar Masud, better known as Ghazi Miyan, studied by the historian Shahid Amin, traces the transformation of a Turkic warrior of the eleventh century, consecrated as a Sufi saint, whose cult thrived through Northern India over the centuries, drawing large numbers of Hindus as well as Muslims to his shrine at Bahraich. While the common Hindu view of Muslims was that of beef-eaters, popular Hindu folklore venerated Ghazi Miyan as the protector of cows, the savior of oppressed cowherds, and a determined foe of rapacious landlords. By the nineteenth century, Amin's account shows, the cult of the Ghazi had become a source of acute anxiety to British, Muslim, and Hindu elites alike. Colonial ethnographers and officials had set out to clearly differentiate "Hindu" and "Muslim" communities, and the presence of a large number of Hindu worshippers at the sites associated with the Ghazi was immensely bewildering to them. Both Muslim elites and Hindu revivalists viewed with alarm members of their respective communities who surrendered their dignity to consort with the enemy other.[33] Such "cultural ambiguity," to invoke Bauer's term once more, prevailed through the decades of consolidation of Islamic rule on the Indian subcontinent, informing the intervention of different actors and positions, standing for diverse interests. It throws light on how enmity itself is a mode of relationship that oscillates between positions and interests, and is

32 Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200–1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

33 Shahid Amin, *Conquest and Community: The Afterlife of Warrior Saint Ghazi Miyan* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2015).

subject to shifts in the process of unfolding, from conquest to consolidation of power over the vanquished.

Rewriting enemy space

To return to the Qutb complex: The use of memory as a device to establish continuity with different pasts—conceived of as mutually exclusive—is a strategy of ambivalence that characterizes this complex of buildings. One dimension of this strategy was to create a chain of memories going back to the foundation of Islam as a religious community of believers as well as an expansive polity. The *masjid-i jama*, the public mosque where Friday prayers were held and the sovereignty of the ruler was inscribed within a genealogy of Islamic kings through the ritual inclusion of the sovereign into the *Khutba* (Friday sermon), was built to follow the Arab prototype or hypostyle plan. This is a plan in which the roof of a hall is carried by columns and pillars, the latter set in parallel alignment with the walls. The origins of this form go back to the visual memory of Islam's first mosque, the house of the Prophet in Medina, which had an inner courtyard with two shaded areas, created by a thatched roof held up by rows of palm trunks.[34] The courtyard of the Prophet's house was more than a simple space for prayer; it was here that all significant decisions were made and the newly born Muslim community's activities took place. The memory of becoming a community, which had fixed itself onto a stable space, was transmitted onto the collective memory of subsequent generations by the emergence and diffusion of the hypostyle form, through its crystallization as tradition. This form, which both kept alive the earliest individual memories and transformed them into collective remembrance, was adopted by a large number of public mosques with ceremonial functions in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Spain.[35] That the earliest monumental mosque in Delhi relocated this memory to an Indian setting was a significant symbolic act associated with the inception of the Delhi Sultanate, for the form, which was now canonized through unbroken remembering and had become a component of social framing, effectively made the Turkic Sultanate of Delhi one more link in the chain of references that held together sites over a vast geographical area within the symbolic framework of a world empire.

Delhi's first Friday mosque set a precedent that was repeated by Friday mosques erected across the Indian subcontinent in the following centuries. In addition, the coming into being of Delhi's *masjid-i jama* evoked a pattern of conquest and symbolic appropriation of an alien territory which had precedents in the history of Islam's expansion in Arabia, North Africa, and

34 For a plan, see Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 15.

35 Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), chapter 5.

southern Europe.[36] Elite groups expressed their victory over a conquered land through visual acts and forms that recalled similar victories elsewhere: the immediate seizure of the centers of power and the conversion of the indigenous population's sacred sites into places of worship for the new community. In Delhi, the Chauhan ruler's capital city was taken, and the main temples pulled down. As soon as possible, a *masjid-i jama*, the chief congregational mosque of the capital, was built, where the Friday sermon was read proclaiming the new ruler and locating him in a genealogical sequence, and coins were struck in his name. The memory of successful conquest was kept alive by the epigraph on the mosque's portal cited earlier, which proclaimed victory over the land of unbelievers and the erection of the mosque on the site of the temples. Given the incommensurate traditions of prayer in Hindu and Islamic tradition—which meant that temples, unlike churches, synagogues, and basilicas in the regions where Islam took root, could not be converted into mosques by a simple expedient of reorientation—the utility of destruction, or rather pulling apart to reconstruct, can hardly be doubted. The act served the purpose of declaring war on the infidels, while at the same time emulating features of medieval Indic warfare, where the erection of commemorative structures on the sacred sites of an earlier ruler's capital was an accepted feature of conquest.

The act of rewriting the sacred space of the enemy during the aftermath of the conquest required negotiating between several groups of the newly consolidated polity, in view of the range of functions a congregational mosque had to serve. These oscillated between exclusion of unbelievers at certain moments in its everyday life and their integration at others. The public mosque's functions, both sacred and worldly, meant that its spaces were used by a multiplicity of publics to whom culture was accessible mainly through oral and visual media. We therefore need to shift our attention to the semiotics of its architecture and location. At one level, the mosque is conceived of as part of a larger whole, represented by Islam with its sacred center at Mecca. Unlike a Hindu temple with its sacral core in the *garbha griha* (the innermost chamber, literally "womb"), places of worship of the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are all oriented towards a sacred center, which is located not inside the edifice but outside of it. This centricity determines the orientation of every mosque in the Islamic world and of every devout Muslim at the time of prayer, making it a physical reminder of belonging to a larger community that transcends political frontiers. At another level, the congregational mosque was conceived of as a closed unit at the time of prayer, a refuge from the outside world within which class antagonisms, dissidence, rivalries, and differences dissolve through the constitution of a homogeneous community held together by shared obligations, piety, and brotherhood. The horizontal axis of a mosque and the lateral organization of

36 Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, chapter 3.

space within its interior sought to generate the experience of solidarity within an undifferentiated congregation. A significant characteristic of the hypostyle model of the mosque, which kept alive the memory of the first Muslim community, was its ability to fragment space in a repetitive manner, thereby creating identical units that seemed to stretch into infinity, de-emphasizing any single unit of space, that might otherwise draw attention to its uniqueness. Accompanying this was an epigraphic program quite distinct from that of the portal. The inscriptions on the interior screen of the mosque bear a selection of verses from the Qur'an, which stresses the importance of adherence to the tenets of the faith, piety in everyday life, and moral conduct and brotherhood among Muslims.[37] This structure and epigraphic program were designed to cement the relationship of an egalitarian brotherhood defined by submission and conformity to Islam and so, by its very definition, by excluding those outside that structure at the given moment of community prayer. In twelfth-century Delhi this "community" of Muslims, present within the enclosed space of the Friday mosque, was indeed marked by deep-seated social and ethnic differences. It was made up of a minority of Turkic noblemen and their slaves, and also included migrants from Afghanistan, Sind, and Khurasan. The largest number of "Indian Muslims," however, were lower caste Hindu converts to Islam. To address all these groups collectively as a community of Muslims meant to overlay their memories of different pasts with a shared vocabulary reiterating the bonds and duties common to all Muslims. At the same time, to the latter group of Muslims, the iconic vocabulary of the sculpted stone blocks that framed the prayer space embodied a powerful memory of those sacred spaces from which Hindu ritual practice debarred communities labelled "outcastes." Access to ritual status was one of the mainsprings behind the conversion of low caste Hindus.[38] Conversion to Islam did not necessarily result in the discarding of older cultural practices.[39] The memory of their own exclusion and yearning, which can be recovered from devotional literature of the time, now triggered by access and belonging to a new sacred space resonant with familiar forms, meant that memory could function as an important resource in the constitution of a new sense of self and in the forging of new bonds.

Then there is the question of a fresh set of dynamics that comes in the immediate aftermath of conquest, where assertions of acquired power have to negotiate the exigencies of consolidating that power. What were the associations

37 Anthony Welch, "Qur'an and Tomb: The Religious Epigraphs of Two Early Sultanate Tombs in Delhi," in *Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art,* ed. Frederick M. Asher and G. S. Gai (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 257–268; 261–263.

38 The question of what motivated Hindus of lower castes to convert to Islam is a subject of much debate. See Richard B. Eaton, "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 109–111.

39 Mohammed Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), 19–20.

of place, space, and memory that related to those users of the *masjid* who did not belong to the Muslim community? As well as being a place for community prayer on Fridays, the mosque was a site for meeting and transacting business between mercantile groups and their customers. Equally important were its political functions, as a place where the *Khutba* was read and legitimacy accorded to the ruling Sultan, and the site where protests were voiced, disputes adjudicated, and conspiracies hatched. Located in the heart of the city, the mosque and the bazaar just beyond it formed two poles of urban life. The spaces of the *masjid* were where many encounters took place and many transactions were effected between social groups across caste and religious belonging—and all of them were part of the process by which an empire and an urban fabric came into being.[40] The invocation of multiple pasts and the ambivalent present was integral to an endeavor to construct collective memories around which a community divided by ethnicity, political affiliation, and religious differences could adhere and cohere.

Fig. 10. *Qutb Minar and mosque enclosure.*

40 For a fuller discussion, see Juneja, "Introduction," 76–84.

And finally, let us look at one more equivocal signifier that stood for an accumulation of deeply ambivalent memories in different moments of conquest. The impressive Qutb Minar (Fig. 10), which functions as a visible and powerful landmark of the emergent capital, a sign of a new power and a victorious civilization, was modelled on precedents in Ghazni and Jam, whose memories it sought to evoke and transplant to the soil of Delhi.[41] This was part of the political agenda of one of the Turkic factions controlling Delhi, which was involved in a struggle for suzerainty with two rival factions within a single religious community. Popular memories long associated the Minar with the political authority of the Delhi faction led by Qutb ud-din Aibak.[42] Over the twelfth century however, as memories of conquest seemed to fade, the Minar was perceived as the protective shadow of another Qutb, the Sufi preceptor, Qutb ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki, whose shrine was located in the heart of the capital city and attracted a continuous stream of devotees cutting across religious communities. The Minar was rechristened in everyday parlance as *Qutb sahib ki laath* (the walking stick of the holy Qutb), which cast its protective shadow over the city and its inhabitants. Well into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, long after the site of the capital had shifted to other locations, Mehrauli continued to be regarded as the *Old Shahr*, a hallowed site of imperial visits and pilgrimages drawing its charisma from the shrine of Qutb ud-din Bakhtiyar Kaki and the Minar. A third layer of memory was constituted in the fourteenth century, kept alive under the Mughal emperors during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and lasted until the deposing of the last Mughal emperor in 1857. This was coined as a semantic exercise centered on the word *Qutb,* which in Arabic and Persian means "axis." Political discourses which styled monarchies as an axis of perfect justice sought to inscribe this abstract idea onto popular visual memory by a practice of architectural citation, either by constructing "copies" on a minor scale of the Qutb Minar, or by replicating the highly individual surface patterns of the Minar's first three stories on another building.[43] That multi-layered memories continued well into subsequent centuries and have not disappeared from the postcolonial present is obvious from innumerable signs and practices, such as the continuing and living presence of the shrine of the Sufi in the vicinity of the monuments,

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41 Both of these minarets had been erected some years earlier to commemorate victories. The minaret at Jam built by Sultan Muhammad of Ghur in 1190 has a similar tapered silhouette and bears panels of calligraphic verses from the Qur'anic sura of victory. Illustrations in George Michell, ed., *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 263–264.

42 Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 26–28.

43 Ebba Koch, "The Copies of the Qutb Minar," *Iran* 19 (1991): 95–107. On the notion of *adl* (justice) in the political thought of South Asian Islam, see Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 54–61.

or the annual procession of floral garland-makers (the *Phoolwalon ki sair*), which takes the shrine as its starting point and circles the settlement with the Minar as its point of reference. Yet these memories, while still visible, are being increasingly repressed by younger memories of trauma at the hands of enemies, being kept alive by constant repetition, or circulation through, which produces self-enclosed virtual realities.

Reactivable enemization

During the nineteenth century, as colonial administrators and scholars sought to write architectural histories of the subcontinent for the edification of its inhabitants, who were considered incapable of acquiring the scientific prowess required to make sense of their heritage, new technologies of reproduction were at the same time deployed to make fragments of these histories available to a metropolitan public. In addition to engravings and photographs, plaster casts of the pillars of the Qutb Mosque, redolent with temple iconography, were shipped to London for display in the architectural courts of the South Kensington Museum.[44] In order to provide a British audience with explanations to be able to give meaning to these fragments, they were once more inscribed in a Manichean vision of history aligned along a narrative of enmity, violence, and appropriation. This mode of argument activated on a different plane the scholarly knowledge produced by histories of architecture written during this time.[45] Such narratives have continued to proliferate and gain a cumulative force in postcolonial India, in circulating stories of Muslim violence that ended a "Golden Age" of Hinduism.

Architectural remains of the past, which bear witness to violence, and whose memories are inscribed in a language of enmity, are at the same time imbricated in transcultural engagements between objects, their appropriators, and the multiple communities who bring different, often contesting dispositions and agencies to their spaces. The dialectic of attacking symbols and sites of the enemy and emulating the enemy aesthetic allows us to recast iconoclasm as an ambivalent process, by which a fresh life animates the object first assaulted. The process brings forth a set of meanings that continues to mutate over generations, well into the present. In this context, Rambelli and Reinders have coined the term "hieroclasm" to designate the phenomenon of re-semiotization, namely the elimination of sacred value from formerly religious artifacts once they are

44 Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London: Routledge, 1998), 11–27.

45 Discussed extensively in Juneja, "Introduction," 1–35.

re-signified as cultural heritage or works of art.[46] Studies of enmity, however, as shown above, belie such a neat transition from one regime of value to the other. Even as the Qutb complex was declared a UNESCO World Heritage, enemization has been continuously reactivated through fresh narratives. It therefore becomes necessary for scholarship to find alternative models of explanation, which can eschew the ascription of singular, static, originary identities to material remains of the past. Transcultural methods that insist on establishing subjects of investigation in broader contexts, both transregional and diachronic, are a corrective against the tendency to disaggregate complex wholes, and enable a theorization of enmity in all its complex relationality as well as its profound ambivalence.

46 Rambelli and Reinders, *Buddhism and Iconoclasm*, chapter 5.