Notes

2. Cappadocia was featured in Architecture without Architects, a 1964 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art that propagated late modernist notions of primitivism.


Alka Patel
Building Communities in Gujarāt: Architecture and Society during the Twelfth through Fourteenth Centuries

What are the implications of the repeated appearance of an architectural style across commonly held categories of use and community affiliation? In Building Communities in Gujarāt, Alka Patel investigates this question by tracing the widespread adoption of the Maru-Gurjara architectural style of northwestern India from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries. Patel examines the transformations of this style as it is deployed for both Indic buildings, that is to say Hindu and Jain temples, and Islamic ritual spaces. She also explores the possible motivations behind reuse of building materials from ruined Indic structures in the construction of new Muslim ritual spaces in the fourteenth century. Why does such reuse begin at this moment, and must interpretations of such supposedly iconoclastic activities always be understood in political terms? Through the examination of architectural texts, epigraphic evidence, and the exceedingly thorough analysis of the ritual spaces in question, Patel argues for a reconsideration of the fraught, overly broad, and simplified categorizations implied by terms like “Hindu” and “Muslim” or “religious” and “secular.”

In chapter 1, “The Contours of Examination,” Patel elucidates the historiography of such broad categorizations and her objections to the application of this terminology to the Islamic buildings considered in her study. While the tombs and mosques examined here fulfilled Islamic ritual functions, Patel questions whether, given the shared aesthetic of these buildings and their Indic counterparts, ritual function is sufficient ground on which to designate these structures as exclusively Islamic. Rather, she contends that the inclusion of almost all Indian buildings designed for Islamic ritual purposes within the rubric of Islamic architectural history can be traced to the formation of Islamic studies, in which the delineation of an intellectual territory resulted in such buildings taking on the status of “foreign imposition upon the subcontinent’s landscape” (9). Patel similarly challenges the categories of religious and secular, tracing such classifications to the needs of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial bureaucracy and, with it, the designation of religion “as a practice separable from the rest of existence,” a distinction that she suggests differed from nonmodern notions of spirituality (19). In challenging the historiographical mapping of the categories of Hindu and Muslim onto monuments and events in the medieval past, Patel instead argues for the recognition of multiple axes of belonging and a spectrum of possibilities between the neat binary of religious and secular.

The second chapter, “Integrating the Buildings and Communities of Gujarāt and Western India,” delves further into the notion of multiple and perhaps fluid axes of belonging introduced in the previous chapter. In considering a broad inscriptive record, Patel notes that in Gujarāt of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, two epigraphic traditions—the Perso-Arabic, with its more ornamental associations, and the Sanskrit, with its tradition of recording a diversity of transactions—coexisted. In her examination of these inscriptions, Patel discusses moments where a multitude of Muslim identities might be expressed with only occasional examples of what she deems to be largely rhetorical gestures, such as the disparaging of idolaters. Much of Patel’s investigation of this material focuses on how sociolinguistic communities are simultaneously defined and transcended. For example, a thirteenth-century bilingual inscription on the headstone of a shaikh at Pešlad records the endowment of Nūr al-Dīn Fīrāz for the maintenance of the mosque. The Sanskrit version of this inscription, which seems to call on both Muslim and non-Muslims alike to assist in the upkeep of the mosque (72–73), supports Patel’s unfolding argument for notions of community that are only partly informed by religious distinctions.

Having explored inscriptive evidence of the fluid nature of communities in medieval Gujarāt, Patel turns her attention to the Maru-Gurjara style of architecture. One criticism of this otherwise extraordinary and erudite study might be that the discussion of the actual sites begins in earnest only toward the second half of the book. By this point, the reader is hungry for Patel’s explication of this architectural style and its reach. In chapter three, “The Maru-Gurjara Style as a Source for the Islamic Ritual Buildings in Western India,” Patel traces the emergence of the Maru-Gurjara style from its inception in the
late eighth century, when the more sculptural and ornamented Mahā-Maru style of Rājasthān merged with the plainer surfaces associated with Mahā-Gurjara style of Gujarāt and southeastern Sindhi, through the height of this architectural idiom in the eleventh century. By closely comparing the appearance of specific motifs and modular units in both temples, mosques, tombs, and wherever still preserved, civic and residential structures, Patel charts not only the changes in this style, but the ways in which the Maru-Gurjara craftsmen deployed various elements of this style for both ritual and secular spaces.

Patel acknowledges that certain elements of the Maru-Gurjara style were applied within specific contexts. For example, the Sēkhart form of superstructure employed for temples was omitted in mosques and tombs, with a domical Phāmnāna used instead (91). Although the ornamented surfaces associated with the Mahā-Maru style eventually dominated temple architecture in the region, Patel points to the ninth-century temple known as the Hariścandra-ni Corī at Sāmlājī in Gujarāt (92). This temple in the Maru-Gurjara idiom eschews the more ornamental tendencies of this style. Instead, with plain surfaces on the exterior and interior of its rauḡamāṇḍapa, the Hariścandra-ni Corī illustrates the continuation of Mahā-Gurjara elements within the fused Maru-Gurjara style. Thus, by tracing the origins and evolution of the Maru-Gurjara style, Patel demonstrates how the later buildings of Islamic worship discussed in chapters four and five can be understood as growing out of this style. Rather than heralding a sharp break with previous building practices brought about by the advent of Islam in this region, the mosques and tombs examined in this study are, in fact, examples of the fluidity and adaptability of the Maru-Gurjara style.

Chapter four, “The Maru-Gurjara Style in Buildings of Islamic Worship,” examines structures from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, and chapter five, “Islamic Ritual Buildings of Gujarāt and its Vicinity of the Fourteenth Century,” continues this thread by examining the political linkages with Delhi that resulted in a building boom in the Gujarāt region. In the latter chapter, Patel also introduces her reinterpretation of the practice of reusing materials from Hindu and Jain temples in the construction of Islamic ritual structures. Commonly such reuse, especially the removal of remains from temples with dynastic associations, is described as desecration designed to trump the triumph of Islam over conquered dynasties. Patel counters this claim in several ways. First, she suggests that dynamic association with specific temples, such as the Caukulā dynasty’s patronage of Śāiva temples, was by no means exclusive. For example, several Caukulā rulers, starting with Mularājā I in the tenth century, also patronized Jain shrines (158). Patel offers a more pragmatic explanation for reuse: given the seismic instability of much of Gujarāt, perhaps building materials were selected from previously seismically damaged temples. Patel further questions the theory of “thoughtless destruction” of temples by pointing to a thirteenth-century ceiling removed from a nearby temple and installed in the jāmi’ masjid in Khambhāt during the fourteenth century (161). The tremendous care required to remove an elaborate stone ceiling so that its interlocking components might be reassembled elsewhere refutes the claims of propagandistic desecration and mutilation of these temples. Patel also rightly argues for a reexamination of a scholarly mentality that equates preservation with a static and unchanging historical monument. Rather, use and maintenance at a site of worship can be a form of preservation designed to prevent deterioration. Indeed, my own findings in the second-century enlargement of the Amarāvati stupa in Andhra Pradesh, while admittedly a rather different example of the reuse of building materials, also point toward a more expansive understanding of concepts like renovation and preservation.

Patel’s reconsideration of the reuse of Hindu and Jain materials in Islamic ritual buildings from fourteenth-century Gujarāt comprises only a brief section of this thorough, elegant, and well-illustrated study of the permutations of the Maru-Gurjara style; however, within the context of her earlier elucidation of multiple axes of belonging, the assumption that the reuse of building materials results from political and religious motivations must be reassessed. Patel’s careful exploration of the deployment of the Maru-Gurjara style demands that other established categorizations, such as “religious” and “secular,” “Hindu” and “Muslim,” or even generalized terminology such as “North India,” continue to be reexamined and challenged. Moreover, the success of Patel’s project, with its underlying assumption that tracing the deployment of an architectural idiom can yield broader cultural and social information, argues for the necessity of including careful formal analysis within any investigation of the meaning and function of South Asian architecture and imagery.

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Tracy E. Cooper
Palladio’s Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic

Palladio’s relationship with Venice is a difficult topic with complex implications for the understanding of the Vicentine architect’s work and career. Tracy Cooper’s book Palladio’s Venice takes up the challenge and makes a fine contribution by depicting the intricate social networks that enabled, and more often aggravated, Palladio’s work in the lagoon. In doing so, Cooper’s text opens new questions that further complicate our understanding of Palladio’s uneasy relationship with Venice.

In spite of Palladio’s efforts to establish himself as an architect in Venice, he only managed to receive his first serious Venetian commissions in the late 1550s, by which time he had reached the age of fifty and was a well-established architect.