1. Introduction

Most accounts of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the former Taliban regime of Afghanistan invoked the widespread idea that Muslims are implacably hostile to figural imagery, situating the demise of the Buddhas within a long culturally determined tradition of image destruction. Despite abundant evidence for the espousal of figural art in many parts of the Islamic world from the time of the Prophet onwards, in both scholarly and popular discourse, 'Islamic iconoclasm' generally refers to a quasi-pathological aversion to figuration that is assumed to be an essential and enduring characteristic of Islamic culture, and that is particularly directed towards the religious images of the non-Muslim 'Other'. In this

1 An earlier version of this paper was submitted for publication in Anne McClanahan & Jeffrey Johnson (eds.), Negating the Image: Case Studies of Past Iconoclasts (Ashgate Press) in the spring of 2002. Both papers are based on a talk presented to the symposium Exploring the Frontiers of Islamic Art at MIT, Cambridge, Mass., in May 2001. An extended discussion of the issues raised here will appear in my forthcoming book on the Ghurids and South Asia. The observations offered here are based on a very brief visit to the mosques undertaken in 1999, and are therefore of a preliminary nature.
way, acts of iconoclasm undertaken by Muslims (as opposed to Christians, for example) are generally held to be primarily the product of a religious compulsion underwritten by a timelessness theology of images, and only secondarily motivated by economic or political factors, if at all.

Such assumptions negate the role of Muslim iconoclasts as historical agents (Ernst 2000:116), obscure the specific socio-political circumstances in which image destruction occurred, and elide regional and historical differences in attitudes to figuration. Those who represented the fate of the Buddhas as the inevitable product of a cultural fixation with images, for example, ignored the fact that they had been celebrated as wonders by Muslim writers for almost a millennium before their destruction. In doing so, they obviated the need to explain what specific changes in the culture and politics of the region (and beyond) had led to the events of March 2001. The ahistoricism that follows from the naturalization of historical acts not only makes for bad scholarship, but reinforces essentialist constructions of Islam that can have a profound political impact in the present.

Among the many problems with traditional constructions of 'Islamic iconoclasm' that one could highlight, this paper focuses on the complex interplay between creation and destruction that characterizes many iconoclastic interventions. It is specifically concerned with the aesthetic implications of iconoclasm in the first mosques constructed after the Muslim conquest of north India in the late twelfth century. Based on empirical observation, it challenges the assumed linkage between the negation of Hindu and Jain images that appeared on architectural elements reused in the construction of the mosques, and the rejection of the artistic traditions which they are assumed to embody. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate the need for further empirical research on the subject and a re-evaluation of the conceptual framework within which the relationship between Islam, Muslims and images has been articulated.

2. Iconoclasm in the Islamic World
The opposition to figuration in Islam is based not on any Qur'anic injunction, but on various Traditions of the Prophet, the Hadith (Paret 1960; Paret 1968; van Reenen, 1990), whose proscriptions are reinforced by historical accounts of idol-destruction after the conversion of pagan sanctuaries in Arabia for Muslim use (Flood 2002). The two principal objections to figuration in the prescriptive texts are a concern with usurping divine creative powers (Paret 1960: 43-44; Wensinck-[Fahd] 1997: 889), and fear of shirk, polytheism and idolatry (Hawting 1999: 22, 49). There is a general consensus in the Traditions forbidding all representations that have shadows (whose defacement is obligatory), and some schools of thought go so far as to liken artists to polytheists (Wensinck-[Fahd] 1997: 889-90). Such proscriptions were undoubtedly a factor in promoting aniconism, or the avoidance of figural imagery (Grabar 1977: 51), but their impact varied widely in time and place. Attitudes towards figuration could change over time, or with the advent of new political regimes with different cultural values.

If attitudes towards figuration in the medieval Islamic world were far from homogenous or monolithic, it is within the context of ritual or sacred space that the proscriptions on figuration had their greatest effect. Although detailed studies of figural ornament in medieval Islamic religious architecture are few and far between (Anatolia being an unusual exception), it is fairly consistently avoided in the decoration of medieval mosques and madrasas. In those mosques where figural ornament did appear (e.g. Pope 1946; Roux 1980), it was generally eschewed in the area around the prayer-niche (mihrab), but even here there are exceptions. Such exceptions include pre-Islamic monuments converted for use as mosques, in which figural ornament was sometimes left intact (Pedersen 1991: 650).

In addition to the promotion of aniconism (at least at a normative or ideal level), the proscriptions on figuration led to a lingering unease that could motivate acts of iconoclasm (the destruction or
mutilation of existing figural imagery) by pious individuals or, more rarely, the medieval state. Such iconoclastic moments might target either the symbols of the ‘Other’ and/or the art produced during the reigns of Muslim predecessors (Flood 2002, 645). The Hadith offer at least two practical strategies for iconoclasts: perhaps surprisingly, both fall short of total obliteration. Images could either be re-contextualized in a manner that made clear that they were in no way venerated (by reusing figural textiles as floor cushions, for example) or, alternatively, they might be decapitated, so that they became inanimate, that is, devoid of a soul or ārūḥ (Paret 1960: 46-47; Paret 1976-77: 158, 176; van Reenen 1990: 33, 54). To judge from both textual evidence and surviving objects, these strategies were frequently employed by medieval iconoclasts in the Islamic world (Flood 2002). In many cases defacement (or the mutilation of the affective parts of face such as the eyes and nose) often substituted for decapitation, a practice that finds precedents in early accounts of Prophet Muhammad’s iconoclastic activities (Faris 1952: 27). In both manuscript painting and metalwork, a line was sometimes drawn across the throat in a symbolic decapitation (e.g. Petrosyan et al. 1995: 144-55). Occasionally, ritual defilement substituted for physical alteration and was evidently considered sufficient to negate or neutralize the image. It is important to note that such practices are by no means peculiar to the Islamic world: the same focus on the head and face characterizes the work of late antique, medieval and early modern iconoclasts in Europe (Freedberg 1989: 415), where a work of art might “be ‘damaged’ rather than ‘destroyed’ in order to make it a token of the violence it was subjected to and of the infamy of anything with which it is associated (Gamboni 1997: 19).” The continued existence of such ritually ‘destroyed’ images suggests that the dichotomy between creation and destruction that underlies much writing on Islamic iconoclasm offers too reductive a reading of iconoclastic practice. This is the case with the Indian mosques that form the subject of this paper.

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3. Iconoclasm and the Early Indian Mosque

There are few areas of the Islamic world where the issue of Islamic iconoclasm has proved as contentious as in South Asia. In traditional South Asian historiography of the colonial and post-colonial periods, the invasions of predominantly Hindu northern India by the armies of Muslim sultans based in Afghanistan during the eleventh and twelfth centuries are characterized as pitting a monolithic indigenous iconophobia against an equally homogeneous Islamic iconophobiya, resulting in the destruction of temples and the looting and desecration of religious icons.

Curiously, discussions of Islamic iconoclasm in South Asia have tended to focus on its least tangible aspect, the now vanished portable images whose histories are known primarily through medieval texts (Davis 1997: 88-113). This focus on the intangible reflects a larger historical problem in the study of medieval South Asian cultures, namely the preeminence afforded texts, which frequently provide the lens through which even material remains of the medieval period are viewed (Patel 2000: 325-58; Kumar 2001: 172). Thus, the much more quantifiable evidence for iconoclasm offered by the alteration of images that appeared on architectural elements from Hindu temples reused in certain medieval Indian mosques has escaped detailed examination. Nevertheless, despite the lack of detailed study, the alterations have generally been taken as corroborating textual accounts of a virulent culturally determined iconoclasm, with devastating consequences in the present.

The destruction of the sixteenth-century Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in 1992, which sparked violent inter-communal rioting,

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2 See, for example, André Wink’s analysis of Islamic iconoclasm, in which he cites the destruction of (unnamed) religious monuments in modern Bangladesh and Pakistan as exemplifying the phenomenon seen in twelfth-century India (Wink 1997: 323). There is no discussion of the very different cultural and historical circumstances in which these acts occurred (Partition or the rise of the nation state, for example), and questions of motive and agency are obscured by the assertion of a timeless, theologically motivated cultural compulsion. For a critique of the same phenomenon in relation to Bamiyan see Flood (2002).
was justified by the belief that a temple that once stood on the site had been destroyed by Muslim iconoclasts to make way for the mosque (Guha-Thakurta 1997). Those seeking to provide a rationale for this act of contemporary iconoclasm, and to prepare the ground for future destruction, have drawn directly on colonial and post-colonial scholarship on Indo-Islamic monuments (e.g. Goel 1993). As others have noted, within such scholarship architectural forms, and even their component elements, have traditionally been categorized in ways that assign them fixed sectarian identities as ‘Buddhist’, ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim.’ Consequently, the very presence of ‘Hindu’ material in mosques is assumed to corroborate the generic references to temple destruction that pepper medieval Arabic and Persian textual histories, with little further investigation (Asher 2000: 122; Patel 2000: 311-22; Flood 2001: 155; Kumar 2001: 175).\(^3\) However unwittingly, the resulting complicity of scholarship on early Islamic architecture in South Asia in the current wave of anti-Muslim iconoclasm at contested sites is directly proportional to its continuing willingness to embrace the essentialist paradigm of Islamic iconoclasm discussed at the outset.

This paradigm is particularly evident in published discussions of the mosques built in the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (roughly between 1175 and 1205), after much of northern India was brought under the control of an eastern Iranian dynasty of Muslim rulers based at Ghur in central Afghanistan. This radical change in the political configuration of South Asia has usually been seen as bringing about a profound rupture in the cultural fabric of the region, the product of a clash between two mutually opposed and incommensurate cultural traditions. Articulated within discussions of the mosques built after the conquest, discussions often strongly colored by issues of colonialism, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and race (Flood unpublished; Kumar 2001), the question of responses to the image, and to religious imagery in particular, have served as a touchstone for this division.

At least four mosques built in the wake of the conquest survive. Two of these, the Qutb mosque at Delhi and the Arhai-din-ka Jhompra Mosque at Ajmer in Rajasthan, bear foundation inscriptions giving respective dates of 587/1192 and 596/1199 (Horovitz 1911-12: 13, 15; Hillenbrand 1988). The inscriptions of the Delhi mosque inform us that it was built by the Turkish commander Qub al-Din Aybak on the orders of the Ghurid sultan, Muhammad b. Sam [r. 1163-1203] (Horovitz 1911-12: 14; Page 1926: 29). A third mosque, the Shahi-Masjid at Khatu in Rajasthan, is provided with a mihrab (prayer-niche) of virtually identical form to that in the Ajmer mosque, and can be confidently dated to the turn of the twelfth century (Shokoohy & Shokoohy 1993: 107). Finally, the Chaurasi Khamba mosque at Kaman, in the Bayana region of Rajasthan can be ascribed to the patronage of another Turkish commander of the Ghurids, Baha al-Din Tughrul, some time between 1195 and 1210, when he ruled as governor (Shokoohy & Shokoohy 1987).

The basic form of these stone monuments is similar in each case with a monumental projecting entrance (often elevated) leading to a central courtyard with a multi-bayed prayer-hall at its western end and, at Delhi and Kaman, a narrow arcade or riwaq surrounding the remaining three sides. The interior spaces are covered by means of corbeled domes and flat slabs supported on trabeate beams borne by pillars composed of discrete sections set vertically on end to achieve the required height. Many (but not all) of these elements have been reused from earlier pre-conquest monuments.

Based on a number of common features, including the use of spolia and their location on what are believed to be the sites of former temples, it has been suggested that such mosques constitute a distinct type, recently dubbed the “conquest mosque,” which is associated with the expansion of the frontiers of Islamicate South Asia (Wagoner & Rice 2001: 89-90). The stone mosques built by

\(^3\) There are some notable exceptions to this general tendency. See, for example, Lehmann 1978.
Hindu craftsmen for communities of Muslims living in Sind and Gujarat in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, before the Ghurid conquest, make no use of spolia (eg. Shokoohy 1988). Such craftsmen were surely available in major urban centers such as Ajmer and Delhi after the conquest and, as we will see, may even have been involved in the construction of Ghurid mosques from reused materials. The use of spolia even when alternatives were available thus seems to represent a deliberate choice. The fact that the same pattern is repeated later, with mosques of similar form also constructed from spolia built immediately after the conquest of different Indian regions by the Delhi sultans in the 13th and 14th centuries, points to a relationship between the construction of such mosques from spolia and successful campaigns of conquest (Wagoner & Rice 2001: 90-105).

Dale Kinney has noted of spolia in another context that “how the spolia were acquired must have been a principal determinant of how they were originally perceived (Kinney 1995: 57).” In the existing discourse on the early Indian mosque, the converse is also true: how the use of spolia is perceived often colors assumptions about the contexts in which they were acquired. In published discussions of the Indo-Ghurid mosques the reused material is either assumed to come from desecrated temples, or the contentious issue of source is side-stepped by attributing the use of spolia rather generically and vaguely to their abundance (Patel 2000: 270). It seems probable that the truth lies somewhere in between. As the range of styles represented in the material indicates, not all the material reused in Indo-Ghurid mosques is of the same date: in fact, some of the material pre-dates the Ghurid conquest by several centuries (Meister 1993: 448). Although not strictly orthodox, the reuse of earlier architectural material was known in north Indian temples (Wink 1997: 322; Dhaky 1998: 127). The reuse of material does not of itself offer evidence for temple desecration, therefore, since some of this material may have been available from ruined structures including (but not restricted to) temples. Other of the spolia reused in the Indo-Ghurid mosques come from more recent structures, however, and their abundance seems to reflect a policy of selective desecration during periods of conquest and military expansion.

Although the phenomenon of iconoclasm in pre-conquest South Asia is usually considered a cultural anomaly, and has therefore never been systematically studied, both image destruction and temple desecration were practiced by ‘Hindu’ kings before the advent of the Ghurids. Just as divergent attitudes to images existed within Islam, Buddhist, Hindu and Jain images were contested between different sects and faiths in South Asia, sometimes leading to the desecration and destruction of portable icons, or the erasure and mutilation of images in temples and shrines (Golzio 1990; Thapar 1994: 16-18; Wink 1997: 310-11; Flood forthcoming). Other instances of pre-conquest iconoclasm occurred at times of military conquest or political change, and may be seen as reflecting the close inter-relationships between centers of political and religious authority in medieval South Asia. In addition to image destruction, medieval South Asian rulers of the pre-conquest period also desecrated the temples of those that they defeated far more frequently than one might imagine from published discussions of the early Indian mosque (Eaton 2000: 256; Flood forthcoming).

In a recent study of those instances of temple desecration by invading Muslim armies that can be reliably documented, Richard Eaton concludes that “temples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority well before the coming of the Muslim Turks to India,” therefore, “by targeting for desecration those temples that were associated with defeated kings, conquering Turks, when they made their own bid for sovereign domain in India, were subscribing to, even while they were exploiting, indigenous notions of royal legitimacy” (Eaton 2000: 256, 270). As in the pre-Ghurid period, in many cases these were not random acts of destruction, but represented a selective desecration of shrines identified as the power bases of defeated rivals, whose tutelary images were often carried off for display in the victor’s
capital (Davis 1997: 51-87; Eaton 2000: 256). As an instrument of state policy this practice finds parallels in the practices of pre-conquest Indian rulers. Along with the looting and destruction of religious images, temple desecration therefore appears to have been phenomena of the expanding frontier in pre-Ghurid South Asia. It therefore seems likely that the employment of spolia in the early mosques derives from a complex interweaving of political and economic pragmatism (depriving a rival of the source of his political power, while profiting from the resulting availability of architectural materials). A similar intention can be detected behind the looting of temple elements by pre-conquest Indian kings, who carried the materials off to be incorporated into their own dynastic shrines (Dayalan 1985: 136). This is not to elide important differences in the nuances and political consequences of iconoclastic acts in northern India before and after the Ghurid conquest (Kumar 2001: 159, 161), although even here cultural difference has frequently been over-emphasized (Flood 2002: 650-51; Flood forthcoming), but to emphasize that the principle of image destruction, temple desecration and the reuse of architectural elements in the context of military conquest was by no means as alien to pre-conquest South Asia as is often assumed.

4. Iconoclasm as an Anti-Aesthetic Gesture

Perhaps because of its implied associations with conquest and victory, the reuse of architectural members in Indo-Ghurid mosques has been read as a derogation of ‘Indian’ tradition, a negative response to the aesthetics of the temple and its emphasis on figuration. In one of the earliest reports on the Quwwat al-Islam or Qutbi Mosque, the Ghurid Friday mosque of Delhi (1192 onwards), the antiquarian Alexander Cunningham noted in 1863 that,

The general effect of these large rows of made-up columns is certainly rich and pleasing; but this effect is due to the kindly hand of time, which has almost entirely removed the coating of plaster with which the whole

of these beautifully sculptured pillars were once barbarously covered by the idol-hating Musalmans (Cunningham 1871: 177).

The question of aesthetic value was thus inversely linked to the iconoclastic impulse in scholarly discourse on this key monument from its inception. This linkage is related to a much broader art historical tendency to privilege originary works over those created from their components (Kinney 1995: 55; Patel 2000: 236). In terms of the Indo-Ghurid mosque, that originary work consists of both the assumed material source, the despoiled temple from which components are drawn, and the conceptual source, the eastern Iranian mosque to which the early Indian mosques are often assumed to be crude (and aesthetically alien) approximations (Welch 1993: 314). In what follows, I want to suggest ways of looking at the Indo-Ghurid mosque that transcend the tendency to privilege some implied original (whether material temple or conceptual mosque), considering the Indo-Ghurid mosque not as a random collection of mutilated fragments, but as a Gesamtkunstwerk, and examining the role of iconoclasm in its creation.

Let us turn to the first two of Cunningham’s propositions: that the images carved on the reused pillars were covered, hence no aesthetic value was placed on the pillars. The iconoclastic practices envisioned by Cunningham – a spree of image mutilation followed by a swift dose of whitewash – not only have a distinctly Protestant feel to them, but are based on a number of erroneous assumptions. In fact, somewhat ironically, any desire to obscure the decoration of the reused pillars seems to have been subordinated to aesthetic considerations, for the “pleasing effect” that Cunningham noted in the rows of reused pillars was deliberately orchestrated by those responsible for the mosque’s construction. At key points in the mosque – around the opening of the eastern entrance onto the courtyard for example - the gray, yellow, and red stones from which the mosque was constructed are arranged so that these colors alternate in horizontal bands. Similar effects were orchestrated by
those who arranged the stones reused in the Ghurid Friday Mosque at Ajmer, and the mosque at Kaman in Rajasthan, where one also finds alternating courses of richly carved gray, red and yellow stone. In the careful juxtaposition of different colored stones we see here in embryonic form the polychromatic aesthetic beloved of certain early sultanate monuments, among them the Ala‘i-Darwaza at the Qutbi Complex in Delhi. The antecedents of the tradition lie, however, in the pre-conquest temple architecture of north India, where similar arrangements of structural stones to form horizontal bands of polychromy are sometimes found.

The espousal of lithic polychromy is among a number of features common to both temple and mosque, despite the reconfiguration of visual idioms in the latter (Meister 1993: 449). This continuity of tradition suggests that craftsmen trained to build temples were later involved in the construction of Ghurid mosques from their components. Even if these components were plastered in the post-Ghurid period, the care taken to achieve such effects only makes sense if the pillars were seen and not obscured beneath a coat of plaster when the mosque was built in the twelfth century.4

The assertion that the images on the structural members of the Delhi mosque were obscured is thus contradicted by the most cursory examination of the monument, and would appear to be based solely on the belief that images must have been so offensive to the patrons of the mosque that they could not possibly have remained visible. A variant on this idea holds that the figures depicted on reused material were mutilated in “a rather feeble and crude attempt to render the human form unrecognizable” (Grover 1981: 6). Just how feeble, may be seen from the fact that clearly recognizable anthropomorphic figures are to be found throughout the mosque (e.g. figure 2). Nevertheless, changes have been made to many of the anthropomorphic representations in this and other Ghurid mosques. In the majority of cases these alterations are restricted to the most anthropomorphic features, predominantly facial features such as eyes and noses (figures 1–3), thereby conforming to iconoclastic practice in other areas of the medieval Islamic world (Flood 2002).

Assuming that the majority of the alterations to the images in the Delhi mosque were made at the time that the pillars were reused in the late twelfth century (and broad parallels with the patterns of iconoclasm found in other Indo-Ghurid mosques would seem to support this),5 we are dealing with something much more than a visceral response to the image. The scale of the undertaking suggests a considerable investment of time and labor: one might even speak of an economics of iconoclasm. Other case studies indicate that the iconoclastic process can be bureaucratic, calculated, and protracted (Bahrani 1995: 367): in the case of the materials reused in Delhi and elsewhere it must have extended over a certain time frame, days at least. We are not dealing therefore with an immediate emotional reaction, but with what appears to have been an orchestrated program of alteration directly related to that which governed the collection and re-assembly of existing architectural materials.

As already noted, it is probable that craftsmen trained in the temple tradition were responsible for the construction of many, if not all, Indo-Ghurid mosques. It is therefore conceivable, if not provable, that these same craftsmen were responsible for altering the figures on reused pillars at the behest of their Ghurid patrons. Many instances of ‘Islamic iconoclasm’ appear to be the product of a negotiation between iconoclasts and iconophiles, with the latter modifying existing images either for financial remuneration, or to prevent more extensive alterations by those opposed to figuration.

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4 There are in fact many examples of Indian mosques in which richly carved reused elements that were originally exposed were later plastered over (e.g. Shokooy & Shokooy 2000: 62, figs. 10-11). Even if whitewashed later, the images were not necessarily obscured: both temples and mosques could be whitewashed annually in India without obscuring (or, without any intention to obscure) their decoration.

5 The mosques at Ajmer and Khatu, which are closely related in terms of their decoration, also represent the most radical expression of both an aniconic and iconoclastic impulse that is much more muted in Delhi and Kaman.
(e.g. Schick 1995: 218-9; Flood, forthcoming). Physical damage to religious icons was considered to preclude their veneration in medieval Hinduism (Davis 1992: 52), a fact noted in medieval Arabic references to Indian iconolatry (Said 1989: 78). In pre-modern societies, iconoclasts frequently considered such physical transformations more effective in neutralizing or negating images if they were undertaken by those who had formerly worshipped or otherwise made use of the altered images. The alteration of the relatively minor deities found on the architectural elements reused in Indo-Ghurid mosques may therefore have functioned as a mode of de-consecration desirable to both Muslim patrons and Hindu craftsmen for different reasons. If the impetus for neutralizing the images came from the patrons of these monuments, the range of ways in which images are altered (from the uncommon total erasure to the ubiquitous gouging of the face: figures 1 & 2) suggests that the specific ways in which it was to be effected were left to the individual craftsman.

Once again, such investment of resources in the relatively minor alterations to the figural imagery only makes sense if those images were originally visible in their altered state and not obscured beneath a layer of stucco. One therefore gets the impression that the alteration of anthropomorphic images derived not from a desire to obscure them, but from a need to neutralize them in a manner that accorded with both textual prescriptions and established iconoclastic practice. This need was contingent upon the decision to reuse pre-carved elements bearing figural ornament in the construction of a mosque. This being so, it is useful to attempt to distinguish here between *instrumental* iconoclasm, in which a particular action is executed in order to achieve a greater goal, and *expressive* iconoclasm, in which the desire to express one’s beliefs or give vent to one’s feelings is achieved by the act itself (Gregory 1994: 89). In these early Indian mosques, the use of decapitation and defacement by Muslim iconoclasts represents a type of instrumental iconoclasm, for it permitted the survival of pre-existing images in the prescribed way (albeit in altered form) as part of a larger whole. Although the product of changes in attitudes within a religious community rather than shifts in cultural values stemming from political change, an analogous phenomenon may underlie the erasure of images in the Late Antique synagogues of Palestine, which one scholar has ascribed to “the desire to keep using a mosaic or appurtenance after the communal aesthetic changed from one of tolerance for images to one of lessened tolerance or even hostility toward them (Fine 2000: 190).”

Within the post-conquest north Indian mosques, there is little sense that the reuse of temple elements represents a derogation of the Indic traditions that they represent, although this has been generally assumed and frequently asserted. On the contrary, as the careful alternation of colored stones in certain places indicates, established pre-conquest conventions continued to govern the reuse of pre-existing elements, which by and large conforms to the architectural grammar of the Indian temple (Meister 1993: 448). Even elements featuring figural ornament were used right side up in prominent contexts (above exterior window openings, for example [Page 1926: pl. 9c; Dikshit 1944]), while iconoclastic alterations to such figural scenes were relatively restrictive in nature, and did not involve all figures equally, as we shall see shortly. In Ajmer, Delhi, and Khatu reused elements appeared alongside those carved ex novo, with the style of the spolia determining that of the newly carved members (Meister 1972: 57), a phenomenon that “seems to indicate more of a positive response than the traditional scholarly interpretation of a violent extinguishing of a despised tradition (Patel 2000: 322).”

In fact, the positive aesthetic value placed on architectural materials reused in Indo-Ghurid mosques in India needs to be seen in a wider cultural and geographic context. Similar Indic traditions were, for example, espoused in contemporary funerary monuments built for Ghurid patrons in the Indus Valley, which make no use of stone or spolia, but are instead constructed from
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Building material in the region. The style of these monuments is closely related to that of the temples of the region, and they appear to represent collaboration between local artisans and those from the Ghurid centers in Afghanistan (Flood 2001: 144-5, 157).

Even more remarkable is the evidence for Ghurid architectural tastes and aesthetic values from Afghanistan itself. While Indian elements such as puramātha capitals may be found in the art of the region from the eleventh century (Flood 2002a: 11, pls. 10-5), the presence of decorative and structural techniques that reflect the architectural style of late eleventh and twelfth-century Ghurid architecture in the region is not easy to demonstrate. However, it is clear that the Ghurids were interested in the use of elements such as puramātha capitals, and this suggests that they may have been influenced by the architecture of the Indian subcontinent.

The most remarkable testimony to this vogue is the Masjid-i-sang at Larand in central Afghanistan, a small monument constructed in stone with an arch on a brick base. This building is closely related to that of contemporary temples in Gujarat and Kathiawar. Whether the Masjid-i-sang was the work of Indian craftsmen or was built with materials taken to Afghanistan from India is not clear (Scarr & Taddéi 1973; Ball 1990), but the proliferation of traditional Indian modes of decoration in Ghurid monuments in the twelfth century is also evidenced in a number of other fragmentary late-twelfth-century Ghurid monuments (some dated) that make use of vase-and-foilage capitals, clumps, and latticework (Flood 2001: 153-54, figs. 43-45). Taken with the evidence of the Indian monuments themselves, the reception of such ornament in the Ghurid heartlands strongly suggests that the material reused in the typical monastic style was intended for a positive aesthetic value.

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India: the same phenomenon is manifest contemporaneously in the Crusader sculptures reused in the Islamic monuments of Jerusalem after the city had been recaptured in the twelfth century (Jacoby 1992: 21). Moreover, the treatment of images on the material reused in the Indo-Ghrud mosques is closely correlated to the nature of the imaged; the economics of iconoclasm evidently dictated that only those images considered problematic were altered.

The alteration of anthropomorphic imagery is the closest one gets to a monolithic iconoclasm in the Indo-Ghrud mosque, and considerable resources appear to have been expended in neutralizing such imagery. In only a few cases are the alterations so drastic that they amount to the total elimination of the form so that it is no longer recognizable or visible only in shadow outline. In most cases the alteration is restricted to the mutilation of the face or head (figures 1-2). Much less energy was expended on dealing with animal imagery, which is only occasionally altered (as noted by Shokoohy & Shokoohy 1993: 109 and 1996: 335). Certain types of representational imagery, including figural imagery, were thus left untouched in Indo-Ghrud mosques, with elephants, birds, and mythological creatures such as maqaras appearing alongside headless torsos and noseless faces. This is particularly evident in the northern porch of the Kaman mosque, richly embellished with reused figural sculpture which has been selectively mutilated, so that elephant heads and the images of mythological creatures are intact, while anthropomorphic images are defaced.

Most remarkable of all, and perhaps by virtue of its perceived apotropaic properties, the image of the radiant horned lion, the kritimukha was not only left unaltered, but became as ubiquitous a figure as it had been in pre-Ghrud Buddhist stupas and Hindu temples (Flood, forthcoming). Based on a brief and unscientific headcount, in the Qutbi Mosque, the Ghrud Friday Mosque of Delhi alone the image of the kritimukha appears more than thirty times on the trabeate lintels that still remain in place (roughly fifty per cent of the original number), and innumerable more times on the reused columns that support them. This survival is not the random product of chance but represents a deliberate choice, for throughout the mosque one can find pillars on which anthropomorphic figures have been defaced while the associated image of the kritimukha remains intact (figure 3). Even in the mosques at Ajmer and Khatu, where the iconoclastic alterations are most extensive, numerous manifestations of the beast are still intact. In fact, it seems to have been considered such an integral part of the contemporary mosque, that it is found on elements that were apparently carved ex novo for Ghrud mosques in India (at Khatu, for example), and on the entrance and interior beams of the Masjid-i sangi in central Afghanistan, where it features alongside friezes of ducks or geese (hamsamithunas) similar to those found in contemporary Hindu temples (Scarcia and Taddei 1973: 98, figs. 3-4). The latter serves as a cogent reminder that even figuration was no bar to the assimilation of Indic elements in monuments erected for Ghrud patrons, within or without India.

As the case of the kritimukha demonstrates, it was not figuration per se that was the problem, nor even figuration in the context of mosque decoration, but the nature of what was represented in such a context. Paradoxically, despite a supposed quasi-pathological aversion to figural imagery, a surprisingly liberal attitude to figuration seems to have prevailed in the first mosques built after the Ghrud conquest.

5. Refiguring Indo-Islamic Iconoclasm

Part of the problem with the way Indo-Ghrud mosques have been conceptualized from the nineteenth-century onwards lies in a disciplinary tendency to privilege the creation of a work (be it painting, sculpture or monument) over its reception. The consequences of what might be called a synchronic fixation are abundantly clear in Cunningham’s characterization of the reuse of temple materials in Ghrud mosques as a barbarous anti-aesthetic gesture. If, however, we approach the work diachronically, not as
a static creation frozen at the moment of birth, but as dynamic and constantly shifting in terms of form, content and meaning, then we can begin to conceive of reuse and the role of iconoclasm in the early Indian mosque in a less reductive manner.

Far from being the driving force behind the desecration of existing monuments, such alteration of figural imagery as occurred was contingent upon a preference for the reuse of stone elements. Some of this material may have come from temples destroyed during the conquest, but the majority of it was re-deployed in a manner congruent with pre-conquest practice and seems to reflect a contemporary vogue for Indic ornament that is manifest even in the architecture of Afghanistan at this period. The various responses to figural imagery witnessed in the Indo-Ghurid mosque might be seen as a contingent compromise rooted in a tension between continuity and discontinuity. Indeed, as an architectural creation with multiple aesthetic affinities, the Indo-Ghurid mosque itself is the product of such a compromise.

In his work on iconoclasm during the French Revolution, Richard Wrigley has noted that, “in practice, we find that acts of iconoclasm are commonly exercises in compromise, usually resulting in hybridized or synthetic results” that represent a dialectical synthesis between different traditions (Wrigley 1993: 185). As Wrigley notes, the product of such compromise may be intended to convey a quite different message than the original work, but its original meanings are never entirely obliterated; they are always present under erasure, obscured yet still visible and in dialogue with the superimposed marks of effacement. Such altered images index their own history of transformation, which is integral to the production of what is in effect a new work. The act of iconoclasm may thus be seen as an attempt to re-code meaning according to new iconographic and aesthetic conventions. Rather than see the process in terms of hybridization or syncretism with its implied “condition of uneasy union” (Stewart & Ernst, forthcoming), the physical and conceptual displacements that it entails might be best conceptualized as a type of visual translation. The concept of translation that it implies is not the traditional one of equivalence or fidelity to an original, however, but one closer to Derrida’s notion of textual translation as “a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another” (Derrida[Bass] 1981: 20). Homi Bhabha has developed this idea in arguing that the process of translation gives rise not to secondary (and implicitly inferior) versions of original texts, but to new works that contain traces of earlier meanings that they transcend (Bhabha 1990; Evans 1994: 32). Although developed in relation to texts, this concept of translation as a transformative process that gives rise to new works has much to recommend it as a model for understanding iconoclastic transformations of existing artworks.

In a recent posthumous publication, the anthropologist Alfred Gell argued that as the product of a type of ‘artistic agency’, the act of iconoclasm often follows the same conceptual structure as the act of creation, giving rise to a new work, related to, but distinct from the original (Gell 1998: 62-65). The concept of the iconoclastic gesture as an extension of the creative process, a mode of creating new works out of old, has a long pedigree in western art, notably in Duchamp’s LHOOQ (Gamboni 1997: 262), and Rauschenberg’s Erased de Kooning (Gamboni 1997: 268). The idea of ‘creative iconoclasm’ has been particularly in evidence in the past decade, from which one could cite many examples. In May 1994, for example, an artist named Mark Bridger erased Damien Hirst’s Away from the Flock, a work consisting of a whole sheep suspended in a glass tank of formaldehyde, by pouring black dye

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6 In an important and innovative article Tony Stewart (2000) has explored the implications of different translation theories for conceptualizing inter-communal textual production in early modern Bengal. While acknowledging the value of translation theory for conceptualizing various modes of cultural production across cultural, linguistic, or religious boundaries in pre-colonial South Asia, my own theoretical perspective is more indebted to recent work located at the intersection between post-structuralist and postcolonial theories of translation (e.g. Niranjana 1992) than to formal linguistic theories.
into the solution in which the animal was suspended. Claiming
authorship of the amended work, Bridger placed a label, which read
“Mark Bridger, Black Sheep, May 1, 1994,” over the original title.
Sued for criminal damage, Bridger claimed that his intention was
not to destroy the work but to transform it creatively (Kastner 1997:
154). The authors of the works targeted in these creative outbursts
have sometimes accepted, either implicitly or explicitly, that such
radical alterations to the original works constituted an extension
of the creative process. Damien Hirst, for example, published an
image of his Away from the Flock with a sliding tab that enables
the reader to reproduce the inked-out version of the original work
(Hirst 1997).

I do not want to suggest here that those responsible for having
the figural imagery on the architectural elements reused in Indian
mosques altered would have justified their actions in post-
structuralist terms, if at all. Nor would I argue for a moment that
they had as self-conscious or self-publicizing an approach to the act
of alteration as the modern iconoclasts just mentioned. Moreover,
unlike the iconoclastic gestures of French Revolutionaries or
contemporary artists, the acts of iconoclasm to which Indo-
Ghurid mosques bear witness were not the driving force in the
production of a work that might be entitled ‘The Indo-Ghurid
Mosque’. They were instead contingent upon a decision to reuse
pre-existing architectural materials, which may have constituted
an attack on the religio-political symbols of the ancien régime,
but also reflects, as we have seen, the positive aesthetic value that
Afghan patrons placed on Indic art and architecture. Nevertheless,
despite this difference, conceiving of iconoclastic transformation
as part of a broader process of visual translation enables us to
escape the bind into which we are placed when we privilege the
originary work (whether Persian mosque or Indian temple) as more
authentic than any subsequent work created from its elements.
Transcending this synchronic fixation, we can see the physical and
conceptual translations witnessed in the Indo-Ghurid mosque not as
barbarous attacks upon (or crude approximations of) an originary
aesthetic tradition (‘Indian’ or ‘Persian’), but part of a process of
transmutation that gave rise to the Indo-Ghurid mosque, a new
work with its own distinctive aesthetic.

This analysis may seem anachronistic, but it finds some support
among the Hadith discussed at the outset, which prescribe a
transformative practice comparable to those just described. Among
a group of Traditions that deal with the angel Gabriel’s refusal to
enter the house of the Prophet Muhammad is one which attributes
his hesitancy to the presence of images on a curtain and another
unspecifed object. The remedy for the curtain is to transform it
into pillows that will be thrown on the ground and trodden upon,
while the Prophet is ordered to decapitate the remaining images,
so that they become like trees by virtue of their inanimate status
(Ibn Ḥanbal 1313/1895 2: 305, 308, 390; van Reenen 1990: 33).
Formal or iconographic transformation is a relatively common
response to iconoclastic concerns (witnessed, for example, in the
transmutation of the Virgin into Liberty in Revolutionary France),
but the nature of the transformation envisaged in the Hadith entails
a radical conceptual metamorphosis. The resemblance between tree
and headless image clearly lies in the fact that both are perceived
to lack a spirit (rūḥ) and with it, the potential for animation (van
Reenen 1990: 33, 54). Decapitation is evidently judged to result in
the production of what are in fact images of an entirely different
class than the original, inanimate and licit in place of the animate
and illicit originals. The acts of desecration and creation thus appear
closely intertwined, the simultaneity of their products destabilizing
the boundaries between abstraction and figuration that is integral
to much art historical thinking. This blurring of the boundaries is
particularly marked in the iconoclastic reworking of figural material
in the Ghurid mosque at Ajmer. Although the phenomenon has not
been noted previously, at several points the columns in the upper
levels of the southern end of the prayer-hall have had their figures
removed in such a way as to leave only a rhomboid outline (figure
4), which perfectly replicates the form of the rhomboidal rama designs of similar size that have been carved ex novo on the lower shafts of the same columns (figure 5). The latter replace the figural imagery normally found in this position in temple architecture (Patel 2000: 233).

Both newly carved members and those that have undergone iconoclastic transformations are thus structurally and decoratively integrated in the Ajmer mosque. As Alka Patel has noted of Indo-Gurid mosques, “if the buildings were... viewed in their entireties, it would have been visually difficult to extract the despoilied from the newer materials” (Patel 2000: 236). The view of these mosques as disjointed reflections of the greater wholes upon whose life and death their creation is predicated probably offers more of an insight into the methodologies of modern art historians than the tastes of Gurid patrons. At least in the case of the Delhi mosque, we have an unusual abundance of descriptions from the century and a half following its construction (Flood forthcoming). The fact that none of these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century descriptions mention either the reuse of temple elements or the associated iconoclastic alterations strongly supports the idea that the mosque was viewed as a unitary whole by those who used it.

While contingent upon a decision to reuse existing architectural elements, the alteration of figural imagery was integral to the creation of that unitary whole. A widespread and long established aversion to the use of figural imagery in the decoration of a mosque led to steps being taken to neutralize anthropomorphic images on the reused architectural elements in ways that conformed to orthodox prescriptions and established practice. The process provides evidence for the creative function of iconoclastic transformation at both the micro and the macro level: in the transformation of illicit anthropomorphic figures into qualitatively new images, and in the contribution that this made to the creation of what was in effect a Ghurid Gesamtkunstwerk. The close relationship (in both theory and practice) between acts of image alteration and architectural creation in the early Indian mosque serves as an indication that, even when rationalized within the rhetorical frame of religious orthodoxy, iconoclasm in the medieval Islamic world was less the product of an essential cultural pathology than a series of choices made by multiple historical agents and governed by a complex nexus of aesthetic, cultural, economic, and political factors.

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7 Perhaps fortuitously, the substitution of a rhomboid for anthropomorphic imagery is also found on certain late eighth-century coins from Tabaristan in Iran that otherwise follow pre-Islamic numismatic models: Miles (1975): 366, pl. 25(7).


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3. Qubii mosque, Delhi, reused pilasters with kritimukha figure intact while the apsaras emerging from its mouth have been defaced.

4. Arhai-din-ka Jhoomra Mosque, Ajmer, erased figure with rhomboidal outline.
APPENDIX

A Translation of Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s Address to the Public Meeting at Somnath*

New Delhi, Kartik, 1923
31. October, 2001

The following is the text [in Hindi] of the speech made by the Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today, at Somnath (Gujarat) on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the ‘Sanctification of the jyotirlinga at Somnath’.

Today is a day of great joy. Today it is exactly fifty years since the idol of Lord Somnath was sanctified here at the temple. There is another reason for joy – today is also the jayanti of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. This is his 125th anniversary. This is a precious coincidence – like the invaluable union of gold and diamond – for had Sardar not been there Somnath would not exist today in this form. In what state it would have existed I cannot say. But Somnath is the symbol of our sanatan sanskriti (timeless culture), our shaswat dharma (eternal religion, way of life), the symbol of the successive shifts and changes in our history. History had also witnessed that moment when conquering invaders razed Somnath to the ground. Today too such tendencies are becoming stronger. But the manner in which we resurrected Somnath, rebuilt Somnath on new foundations, and defeated the ones who razed it to the ground and destroyed it – in the same manner those who want to advance on

* The text was officially made available to media by the Government agencies.