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## Appropriation as Inscription: Making History in the First Friday Mosque of Delhi

Finbarr Barry Flood

The essence of the monument is paradoxically its lack of monumental stability ... and therefore its inability to offer a return rather than a new journey.

Don Fowler, *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin* (Oxford, 2000), 211.

### Introduction

The reuse of architectural elements was ubiquitous in those parts of the premodern Islamic world (primarily Anatolia, Egypt, Syria, and north India) where stone was the principal medium of construction. In modern scholarship, the phenomenon of reuse – especially across what are thought of as cultural frontiers – is usually explained either in economic terms (as a pragmatic undertaking) or in ideological terms (as an expression of the triumph of Islam).<sup>1</sup> In this, as in its marginalization of aesthetic considerations, scholarship on reuse in premodern monuments built for Muslim patrons is comparable to that dealing with the recycling of "pagan" materials in early Christian or Byzantine monuments.<sup>2</sup> A major difference, however, is the way

1 A critique and relevant bibliography can be found in Flood, "Medieval Trophy" and "Image Against Nature".

2 In addition to the references given below, see Saradi, "Use of Ancient Spolia"; Papalexandrou, "Memory Tattered and Torn". A further point of comparison is a recent interest in the ascription of a talismanic value to reused materials, which broadens the frame of analysis. For exemplary approaches to the recycling of Pharaonic and Byzantine materials in medieval and early modern Egyptian mosques, see Meinecke-Berg, "Spilien in der mittelalterlichen Architektur"; Jakeman, "Abstract Art and Communication"; Barrucand,

in which essentialist notions of Islam in general, and a penchant for iconoclasm in particular, have inflected discussions of reuse in Islamic contexts.

The early Islamic architecture of South Asia provides particularly well-documented case studies of appropriation, recycling, and reuse and the ways in which they have been represented in modern scholarship. In discussions of these phenomena, one monument holds center-stage: the Qutb Mosque, the first Friday Mosque (*jāmi' masjid*) of Delhi. Construction of the mosque began in 1192, after the conquest of north India by a Muslim sultanate based in the central Afghan region of Ghur (and hence known as the Ghurid dynasty), an event often referred to as the "Muslim" conquest of north India. The mosque and its adjacent minaret, the Qutb Minar, begun around 1199, were celebrated as wonders by thirteenth- and fourteenth-century chroniclers and geographers writing in Arabic and Persian as far away as Egypt and Syria. Their enduring fame is reflected by their pre-eminence among the tourist attractions of Delhi until today.

Many of the stones from which the Qutb Mosque was constructed were recycled from earlier monuments. In modern scholarship, these materials are often referred to as "Hindu" or "Jain" materials, an identification that highlights four interrelated (if rarely explicit) assumptions that pervade most modern discussions of premodern architectural appropriation. The first assumption is a metonymic relationship between recycled elements and the broader cultural formations that they are made to stand for. Secondly, the identities manifest in cultural artifacts and forms are invariably imagined as singular, and often sectarian. Third, there is often an assumption that identity is not only singular, but also fixed at a valorized moment of creation that represents the Ur-moment of a work: hence references to "Christian" or "Hindu" objects reused in "Islamic" monuments, an assertion of synchronic identities even within diachronic analyses. Finally, secondary or tertiary deployments of architectural materials are often seen not only as temporally posterior to a canonical original state, but as anti-canonical deformations or derogations of this pristine state, and the cultural values that it manifests. The travails of artifacts, materials, and monuments across time are thus comparable to the degeneration of cultural forms transmitted across space in diffusionist models of cultural transmission.

These assumptions notwithstanding, monuments no less than their makers have complex biographies, which often entail radical shifts in appearance, function, and meaning, as both the papers in this volume and the history of the Qutb Mosque make clear. In an earlier series of essays, I have explored the way in which the Qutb Mosque was appropriated by and for colonial and post-colonial scholarship, a theme also explored in this volume by Mritalini

"Les chapiteaux de remploi", Heiden, "Symbolische Verwendung pharaonischer Spolien" and "Pharaonische Baumaterialien".

Rajagopalan.<sup>3</sup> Here I want to draw attention to the appropriation of the site by those vying for political authority and power in north India during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The continuing success of these premodern appropriations is manifest in their legacy to modern scholarship. As I hope to demonstrate, the topic is not only of regional interest, but has significant implications for histories and theories of appropriation.

### **Appropriation as Displacement**

Modern visitors to the Qutb Mosque in Delhi approach it through a narrow high-stepped rectangular entrance that projects from a rather plain façade (Fig. 6.1). To the left of the entrance, standing outside the south-eastern corner of the mosque, is the looming presence of the Qutb Minar, a massive red sandstone tower standing over two hundred feet high, visible long before the visitor reaches the complex (figs. 6.2 and 6.5). The unprepossessing entrance to the mosque does not prepare the visitor for the riot of richly-carved stone ornament that he or she experiences stepping inside it, a visual cacophony (Fig. 6.3) whose density and impact are rendered all the more dramatic by juxtaposition with the large empty space of the courtyard that lies at its heart.

When complete, the mosque measured 147.5 by 47 ft, conforming to a long-established architectural template in which a narrow *riwāq* or arcade surrounded a rectangular court on three sides, with a multi-bayed prayer hall located at the end of the courtyard that faced Mecca, which from Delhi lies roughly to the west (Fig. 6.4). The prayer hall is preceded by a monumental arched screen added in 594/1198, the surface of which is among the most lavishly ornamented in the mosque, carved with floral and epigraphic ornament, including extensive citations from the Qur'an (Fig. 6.6).

In addition to the main eastern entrance, the mosque was provided with two lateral stepped entrances at the center of its northern and southern sides (Fig. 6.4). In all three cases, monumental corbelled domes were set within the arcades at the point where the entrances opened into them. Additional corbelled domes spanned the space of the prayer hall. The corbelled domes and the flat slabs roofing the mosque were supported on trabeate beams borne by pillars composed of discrete sections set vertically on end to achieve the required height. The range of styles among the constituent materials (Fig. 6.3) indicates a synthesis of antique stones and reused twelfth-century materials with newly carved stones that often emulate the style of the reused material. Some of the materials in the Qutb Mosque are comparable in style to those used in Hindu temples of the eighth or ninth centuries in Gujarat and Rajasthan

3 Flood, "Signs of Violence" and "Lost in Translation".

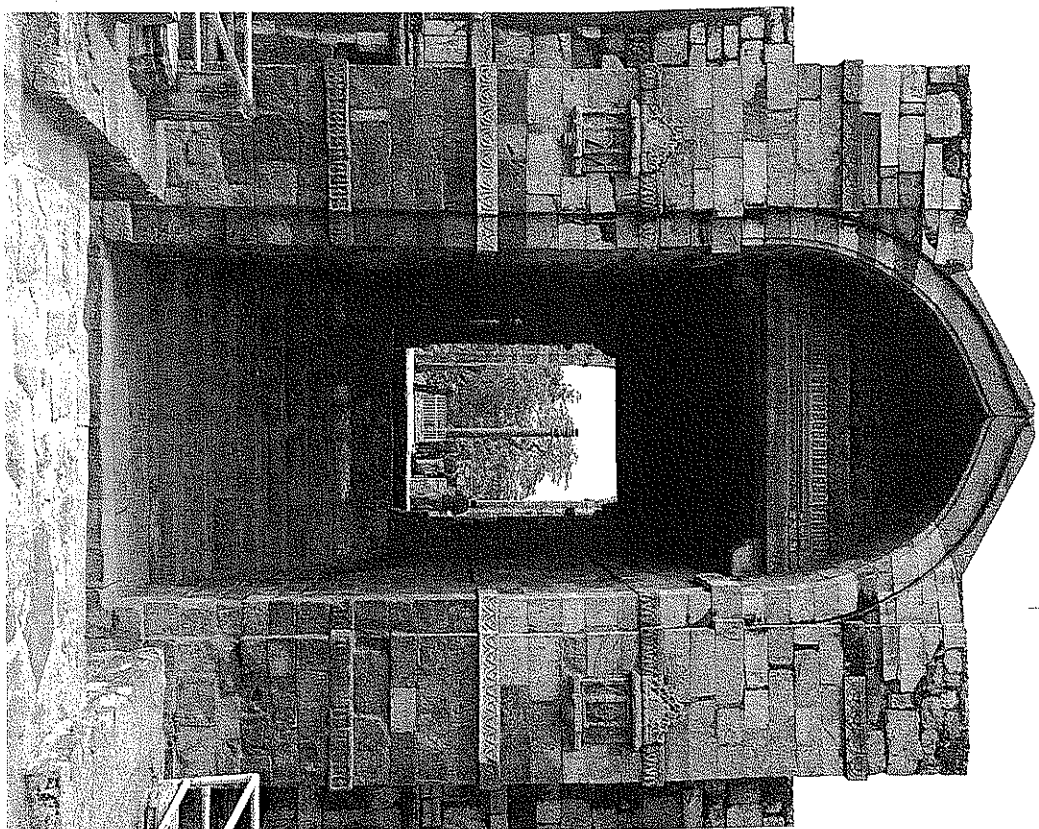


Fig. 6.1 Eastern entrance to the Qutb Mosque, its lintels inscribed with Persian historical texts and Qur'anic passages

(western India), or derive from Jain temples of similar date, whereas others seem to date from more recent structures of the eleventh or twelfth centuries.

An account of the conquest of Delhi in Hasan Nizami's *Tāj al-Ma'ādhir*, a chronicle written just a decade or two after the Qutb Mosque's construction, describes how the city's main temple was demolished by elephants, its stone images (*butān-i-sangīn*) destroyed, and its materials recycled in the Qutb mosque:

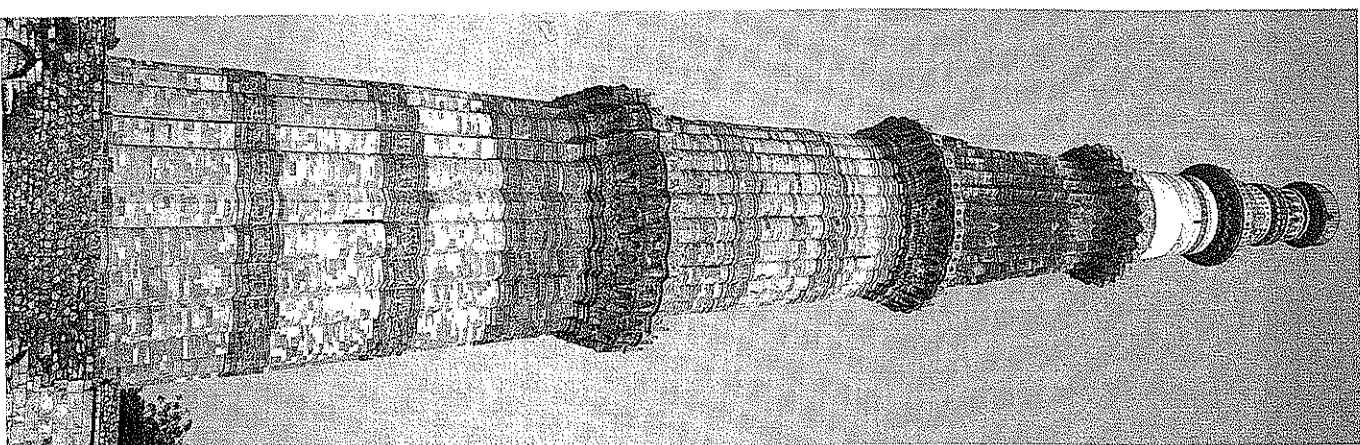


Fig. 6.2 The Qutb Minar

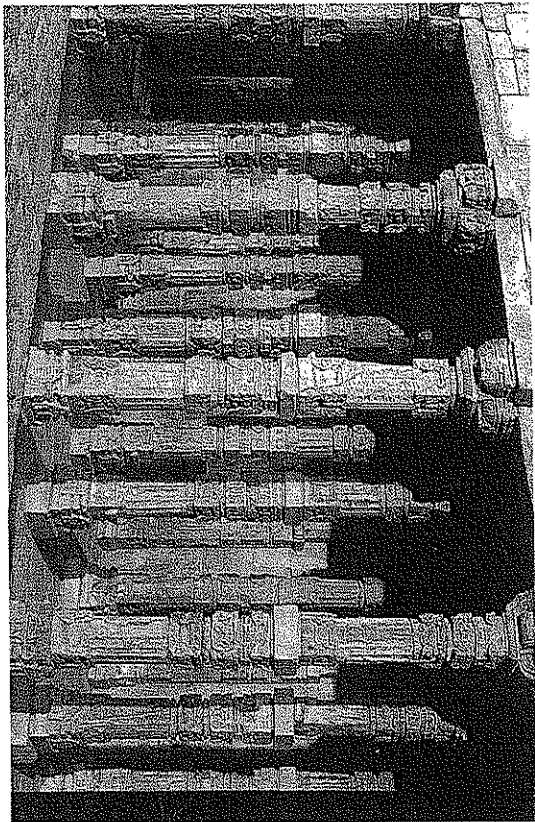


Fig. 6.3 Qutb Mosque, reused columns in the northern courtyard arcade

On its battlements were placed the golden domes of the idol temples (*gubhātā-yi zarīn-i but-khānahā*), looking like the glass parasol of the sun or the crown of Venus, set with pearls. By the blessings of the royal judgement, that delightful and sacred spot became the abode of men of purity, a place where prayers were granted.<sup>4</sup>

Later graffiti in the Qutb Complex, and continuities in the way in which pre-conquest materials were redeployed in its construction, indicate that Hindu masons were largely responsible for the recycling of appropriated materials. The recycling of architectural materials even when such masons were available thus seems to represent a conscious choice. The failure to “retrofit” existing temples (to use Hans Buchwald’s term) may reflect the fact that, unlike mosques, temples were not designed for mass communal worship.<sup>5</sup> Speed may also have been a factor, but the same pattern was repeated later when the sultans of Delhi expanded their reach into western and southern India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This apparent preference for *spolia* in mosques built in newly conquered frontier territories has led to suggestions that they constituted a distinct “conquest mosque” type, characterized by specific formal features and by the reuse of materials garnered from temples destroyed after the expansion

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Saroop, *Crown of Glorious Deeds*, pp. 141–2, using Hasan Nizami, *Tarīkh-i Mubārakshāh*, fols 114a–b.

<sup>5</sup> Buchwald, “Retrofit”.

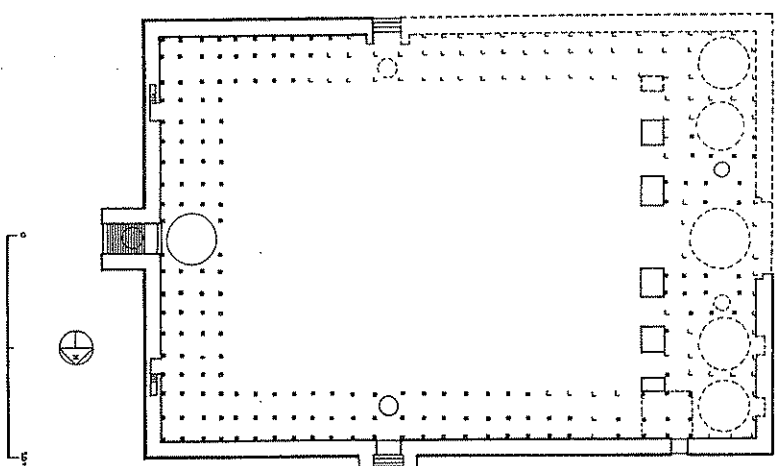


Fig. 6.4 Schematic ground-plan of the Qutb Mosque in 1192

of Indo-Islamic polities.<sup>6</sup> Many of these were tutelary temples, temples that housed deities that presided over specific polities, their destruction constituting and heralding the end of the dynastic lines associated with them.<sup>7</sup>

The replacement of tutelary temples with congregational mosques constituted a rewriting of urban space that was both pragmatic (providing the Muslim community with a space to fulfill the requirements of ritual prayer) and ideological (signifying the supersession of the old political order and the permanence of the new). As in earlier contexts in which Muslims exercised political hegemony as a statistical minority, patronage of large-scale urban mosques formed part of what Oleg Grabar famously dubbed a “symbolic appropriation” of the land.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Wagoner and Rice, “From Delhi to the Deccan”, pp. 89–90.

<sup>7</sup> Eaton, “Temple Desecration”, pp. 259–60.

<sup>8</sup> Grabar, *Formation*, pp. 43–72.

The appropriation of the site and materials for the Qutb Mosque is in fact announced to those entering it in one of two Persian foundation texts inscribed on the main (eastern) entrance (Fig. 6.1). The inscription on the inner lintel appears to be the earliest of the historical texts inscribed in the mosque:

This fort was conquered and this congregational mosque built in the months of the year 587 [1191–92] by the amir, the great general, commander of the army, Pole of the World and Religion, the *amir al-umara* Abbek *sultani* (that is, slave of the sultan) may God strengthen his helpers. [The materials of] twenty-seven idol temples (*but-khāna*), on each idol temple two million *dinārs* had been spent, were used in this mosque. May God the Great and Glorious have mercy on that slave who prays for the faith of the good builder.<sup>9</sup>

The commemoration of reuse is unusual in a foundation text of this period even if the practice was common. The most obvious comparison is with the earliest days of Islamic expansion; for example, the (now lost) foundation text of the Great Mosque of Damascus (705–15) recorded the expropriation of the city's former Christian cathedral for the site of the mosque.

The apparent coincidence between material appropriation and its textual representation has led most modern scholars to take the foundation text of the Delhi mosque as a transparent statement of historical fact. There are, however, reasons to doubt this, as we shall see shortly. For the moment, I would like to draw attention to the manner in which the apparently factual information contained in the inscription is conveyed, and the rhetorical frames that it employs. The first point concerns the deployment of statistics. Most commentators have taken the figure of 27 temples mentioned in the inscription quite literally, sometimes attempting to confirm its veracity by correlating the number of reused pillars in the mosque to the number used in a "typical" Hindu temple. The figure coincides, however, with the traditional number of *nakshatras* or lunar mansions in Indic cosmology, suggesting that it was chosen for its connotative potential rather than its denotative value.<sup>10</sup> The manner in which the cost of materials is coded – in the local currency of *dinārs* rather than the dirhams used in Afghanistan and the central Islamic lands – represents another point of continuity with indigenous cultural norms. In addition, the citation of a figure for the value of the constituent materials (re)used in the mosque is highly unusual among Islamic foundation texts. It conforms, however, to the way in which certain kinds of religious patronage were memorialized in pre-conquest Sanskrit texts. This tension between the semantic content of the inscription (with its emphasis on discontinuity) and the protocols that it employs (which represent points of continuity with pre-conquest royal patronage), will be considered further below.

The second factor worth emphasizing is the suggestive content of the Qur'anic quotation that accompanies the historical text at the eastern entrance:

From those who deny and die disbelieving will never be accepted an earthful of gold if proffered by them as ransom. For them is grievous punishment, and none will help them. You will never come to piety unless you spend of things you love; and whatever you spend is known to God (Qur'an 3: 91–9).<sup>11</sup>

If the figures cited in the accompanying historical text should be understood metaphorically, so too the gold referred to here can be understood as a metaphor for materials that should be valued not in themselves, but for their ability to advance the welfare of the community using the mosque. The juxtaposition of historical and religious texts locates the reuse of architectural materials within an "economy of piety", according to which the hoarding and accumulation of gold (activities particularly associated with India in Arabic and Persian writings) were proscribed in favor of its circulation for the benefit of the *umma*, the Muslim community.<sup>12</sup> Just as the material resources encapsulated in looted Buddhist or Hindu metal icons could be freed for circulation in the service of Islam (often by funding the construction of mosques), so too the constituent materials of demolished temples or derelict structures could be recycled to the same end. This rationale for reuse finds parallels in other religious traditions, notably Christian exegesis on passages in *Exodus* 12:35 that refer to the appropriation of Egyptian gold and silver by the fleeing Israelites. Late antique and medieval exegetes emphasized that the appropriation of these metals was divinely sanctioned, since they were subject to improper usage in pagan hands, extending the paradigm to justify the selective appropriation of pagan artifacts, learning, and style by Christian craftsmen. Christian theologians in medieval Spain used the same passages to justify both the physical appropriation of objects from the Muslims and the process of translating Arabic works, a type of sanctified looting that enriched the receiving community with the "ill-used" spoils of Arabic learning.<sup>13</sup>

The texts carved above the main entrance to the Qutb Mosque may provide insights into the connotations of appropriation and recycling in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, but with the single exception of the *Taj al-Ma'ādhir*, a chronicle of conquest, their emphasis on reuse is unique. We are fortunate in having several thirteenth- and fourteenth-century references to the mosque, ranging from passing mentions to extensive descriptions. These ignore the reuse of architectural materials in its construction, identifying

9 Horowitz, "Inscriptions", p. 13; Page, *Historical Memoir*, p. 29. For the grammatical

peculiarities in this text see Patel, "Islamic Architecture", pp. 109–14.

10 Meister, "Mystifying Monuments", p. 25.

11 Welch et al., "Epigraphs, Scripture", p. 18.

12 For the economy of piety, see Flood, *Objects of Translation*, Chapter 2.

13 Cutler, "Reuse or use?", p. 1059; Pym, "Twelfth-century Toledo", pp. 59–60, 62.



instead the Arabic inscriptions that proliferate throughout the monument as its most culturally significant feature.<sup>14</sup>

This situation changed dramatically in the early nineteenth century, when colonial scholars began studying and writing about the Qutb Mosque.<sup>15</sup> Informed by essentialist notions of Islam in general, and contrasting the despotism of "Muslim" rule in India with the benign hegemony of a burgeoning colonial state in particular, colonial writers focused on the extensive reuse of architectural materials to the exclusion of the formal qualities of the mosque in which they were redeployed.<sup>16</sup> The context for the spoliation to which reuse apparently bore witness was provided by premodern textual narratives of conquest (including the *Tāj al-Ma'āthir*), with their tales of iconoclasm and temple desecration. Until recently, even the popular name of the Qutb Mosque, the *Qutwat al-Islām* (Might of Islam) was consistently cited as proving the intentions of its builders, although the name was first recorded in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century; premodern texts simply refer to the mosque as the Friday Mosque of Delhi.<sup>17</sup>

Reduced as they were to despoiling and recycling superior "Hindu" carvings in a rhetorical evocation of sectarian victory, Muslim patrons were presented as lacking a flair for artistic creativity or originality. Failing to consider reuse as a positive mode of reception, nineteenth- and twentieth-century observers who lauded the quality of the carvings from which the Qutb Mosque was constructed generally denied the same appreciation to their Muslim patrons. This perception was facilitated by a consistent emphasis on the *fact* rather than the *mode* of reuse. However, as Igor Kopytoff and many others have emphasized,<sup>18</sup> the manner in which artifacts are redeployed illuminates the meanings and values ascribed to them by secondary and tertiary consumers. In the absence of contemporary texts offering a comprehensive rationale for strategies of reuse, the reused materials themselves constitute an archive capable of providing insights into both. The physical manipulation of the carved stones comprising the mosque provides significant insights into the "social life" of its constituent materials, permitting questions of agency, performance, and process to be addressed rather than sidelined or occluded from analysis. The point is made by the treatment of figural imagery on the carved stones reused in the mosque, which is usually cited as evidence for the undifferentiated iconoclasm of its patrons. Figural ornament was generally avoided in mosques, so the myriad of celestial nymphs, dwarfs, lion-faces,

and sea monsters that proliferated on the reused materials from which the Qutb Mosque was constructed presented a problem. It has usually been assumed this was addressed by systematically defacing all figural imagery, or that the reused materials were plastered in order to obscure the offending images. However, neither view is correct. In the first place, alterations to images presuppose that they were visible and not obscured beneath a coat of plaster, an impression confirmed by the orchestration of polychromatic effects by alternating differently colored stones.<sup>19</sup> Paradoxically, the idea that reused materials were originally plastered or whitewashed to produce a coherent whole is at odds with the emphasis on fragmentation in modern analyses. In the second place, while it is true that many of the images on the piers and pilasters of the mosque have been defaced, these alterations are not uniform; not all reused materials had the same semiotic value. At one end of a spectrum are the anthropomorphic images that were systematically altered. At the other are the antique images of lions (the royal beast of both Indic and Persian iconography) that were left intact, selected to embellish the threshold of the exterior entrance to a royal box (*mīlāk khāna*) located in the northern end of the prayer hall.<sup>20</sup>

The dialectic between past and present to which the figural carvings bear witness is no less relevant to the protocols governing the redeployment of the carved stones on which they appeared. Although some of the material used to construct the mosque may have been appropriated from temples targeted as symbols of the *ancien régime*, the compositional strategies governing its redeployment were firmly rooted in the idiom and syntax of pre-conquest architecture, suggesting continuity in the work of north Indian masons' guilds.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the dialectical engagements to which the Qutb Mosque bears witness are characterized not only by an appropriation of the past through its material traces, but also by an engagement with the present through its living traditions.

The same is true of the inscription above the main entrance of the mosque; despite its emphasis on the mining of pre-conquest temples for structural materials, there is a tension between the content of the inscription, with its record of disjunction and rupture, and the conventions that it uses, which represent a point of continuity with pre-conquest practices. The dialectic between continuity and rupture, past and present, manifest in both the mosque and its foundation text is at odds with the emphasis on singular identities and synchronic meanings in published discussions of the multiple appropriations to which it bears witness.

14 Flood, *Objects of Translation*, pp. 242–3.

15 The earliest extended modern account of the mosque appeared in 1835: Ewer, "An Account of the Inscriptions".

16 Flood, "Lost in Translation".

17 Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory". David Lelyveld has apparently discovered a reference to the Qutb Complex as the *Qutwat al-Islām* in a late eighteenth-century Urdu text.

18 Kopytoff, "Cultural Biography of Things".

19 Flood, "Refiguring Iconoclasm".

20 Flood, "Lost in Translation".

21 Flood, *Objects of Translation*, pp. 160–84.

More productive approaches to these dialectical qualities might be sought outside the fields of Islamic architecture or South Asian history. Analyses of post-revolutionary appropriations in early modern Europe offer particularly rich models. In her work on Revolutionary France, for example, Françoise Choay suggests that

To break with the past means neither to abolish its memory nor to destroy its monuments, but to conserve both in a dialectical movement that simultaneously assumes and transcends their original historical signification, by integrating it into a new semantic stratum.<sup>22</sup>

Choay's comments resonate with Dale Kinney's observations on the historical diplopia (double-vision) associated with the deployment of *spolia*, a phenomenon closely related to the construction of memory, as we will see below.<sup>23</sup>

The revaluation through appropriation intrinsic to the construction of "a new semantic stratum" has much in common with Roland Barthes' notion of myth, a second order of signification marked by the appropriation of an existing sign (a compound of signifier and signified) and its transformation into a new signified, a partial component of a second sign generated from it. Robert Nelson has demonstrated the utility of Barthes' analysis for articulating processes of resignification that accompany practices of artistic appropriation.<sup>24</sup> That Barthes' theory lends itself to such usage is hardly surprising, given its close relationship to the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' discussion of mythical thought, in which he employs the metaphor of *bricolage*. This is a practice that refashions a heterogeneous assemblage of cultural materials derived from the accumulated remains of previous constructions and destructions in a manner congruent with both current needs and established practice.<sup>25</sup> In semiotic terms, *bricolage* constitutes an appropriation in which materials that once functioned as ends come to function as means. In Hal Foster's formulation, *bricolage* is distinguished from myth ("a one-way appropriation") by its dynamic character as "a process of textual play, of loss and gain."<sup>26</sup> The image of collage (and the work of Kurt Schwitters in particular) is often invoked in descriptions of premodern

monuments that make extensive reuse of architectural materials, but, with its relationship to dynamic processes of sign-formation, *bricolage* is perhaps a richer point of reference.

The appropriations and improvisations intrinsic to *bricolage*, and their ability to generate new meanings from pre-existing materials (and artistic vocabularies), exemplify the unstable and fluid nature of any sign, material or textual. In the Qutb Mosque, this semiotic mutability undermines the notion of singular, static identities intrinsic to the privileging of valorized "originals". In the case of the Delhi mosque, this "original" is dual: the ideal Persian mosque form and the material temple whose spoliation facilitates its deficient realization with alien materials and methods, the deformation of one mirroring the destruction of the other. In this sense, the *translatio* intrinsic to both *bricolage* and myth is closely related to processes of translation, highlighting the relationship between conceptual and physical displacement to which Choay's observation also draws attention.

The model of translation implied here is not, however, the traditional one of mimesis, replication and reproduction, which presupposes the generation of secondary works from a privileged original that can be carried between (architectural, verbal, or visual) languages. Rather, whether imagined as *bricolage* or myth, the phenomenon of appropriation necessitates a more fluid concept of translation, one closer to post-structuralist concepts of translation as transformation. These reject the notion of a stable "original", acknowledging instead that the semiotic value (and hence the meaning) of any term is always already heterogeneous and in process; as a consequence, there is no stable "original" to privilege over "secondary" translations. Like *bricolage* in Foster's characterization, the economy of translation is characterized by both loss and gain, the excess of translation promoting creative transformations that expand the meaning or semantic range of appropriated terms. Both modes of conceptualizing appropriation have the advantage of shifting the emphasis from the priority of primary contexts or self-subsisting forms to the more contingent and open-ended realm of practice. In the case of the Delhi mosque, the appropriation of land and materials in 1192 marked the beginning, not the end, of a diachronic process of appropriation. Ultimately, the mosque itself was susceptible to a variety of successive appropriations, the first of which explains the peculiarities of its foundation text.

### Appropriation and Reinscription

In a discussion of Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* of 1953 (frontispiece), an iconoclastic icon of American modernism, Benjamin Buchloh has outlined the procedures of appropriation essential to the creation of the palimpsest image. *Erased de Kooning Drawing* is the product of a careful (but

<sup>22</sup> Choay, *Invention of the Historic Monument*, p. 75. In a similar vein, see Wrigley, "Breaking the Code", p. 185; Clay, "Bouchardon's Statue".

<sup>23</sup> Kinney, "Rape or Restitution", p. 57. See also see Gross, *The Past in Ruins*, p. 5; Marinescu, "Transformations", p. 286.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson, "Appropriation", pp. 162-4.

<sup>25</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*, pp. 17-22; Ashley and Plesch, "Cultural Processes of 'Appropriation'", pp. 4-7.

<sup>26</sup> Foster, "Primitive 'Unconscious'", pp. 63-4. It is worth drawing attention to Annie Coombes' differentiation of modernist collage from postmodernist *bricolage*, a distinction that she sees as inhering in the ability of the former to articulate a dialectical tension reproduced in the latter as a free-flowing confusion and flux that obscure the fractures and disjunctions essential to collage. Coombes, "Object of Translation".

incomplete) erasure of a pencil drawing supplied to Rauschenberg by his contemporary, Willem de Kooning, framed and provided with a title engraved on a metal label that evokes its production by the appropriation (or mythification) of de Kooning's work. In his discussion of *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, Buchloh relates its dialectical qualities to practices of depletion (of the original image), the doubling of a visual text by a second superimposed upon it (the label), and the tension that both generate between the "appropriated historical construct" on the one hand, and the "devices of framing and presentation" on the other.<sup>27</sup> Many of these qualities are common to the premodern appropriations discussed above, but I would like to draw particular attention to the identifying text and its role in creating the frame, which locates the work and informs its reception.

At first glance, the foundation text above the eastern entrance to the Qutb Mosque (fig. 6.1) appears to fulfill a similar function, constituting the mosque as a *lieu de mémoire* inscribed with the conditions of its own production. On closer examination, however, the inscription is marked by several idiosyncrasies that complicate the question of its historicity. These include the date given for the capture of Delhi, which is at odds with that of 588/1192 given by most contemporary chronicles. In addition, it is inscribed in Persian rather than the more usual Arabic; Persian foundation texts only became common in India a few decades later, during the reign of the Delhi sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish (r. 1210–36). In addition to chronological and linguistic anomalies, the form of the inscription suggests that it should be dated several decades later than 587/1191–92, the date it cites.<sup>28</sup>

The emphasis on Qutb al-Din Aybek, the mamluk (military slave) of the Ghurid sultan, rather than the sultan himself (who is named in an Arabic text set above the northern entrance to the mosque dated 592/1195), further suggests a relationship to Iltutmish, who had served under Aybek. After the death in 1206 of the Ghurid sultan under whose auspices (or at least in whose name) the Qutb Mosque had been built, the Ghurid sultanate disintegrated.<sup>29</sup> In India, Qutb al-Din Aybek assumed pre-eminence among the royal mamluks who had effected the conquest of north India. The death of Qutb al-Din Aybek in 1210 initiated a period of internecine strife. In the unsettled conditions that followed, several rival mamluks vied for supremacy, quickly pushing aside the claims of Qutb al-Din's son. Over the next two decades, one contender emerged victorious from these internecine struggles for power,

27 Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures", p. 45.

28 Horowitz, "Inscriptions", p. 14. Although it has been suggested that the text is a "maladroit Persian translation" of an Arabic original, with an original date of 589 instead as 587 (the confusion between 7 and 9 being common in Arabic in the absence of diacritical marks), why it might have been felt necessary to replace the original text is unclear. Pinder-Wilson, *Studies*, p. 102n.

29 For the historical background, see Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 28–35; Kumar, *Emergence*, pp. 116–24, 132–43.

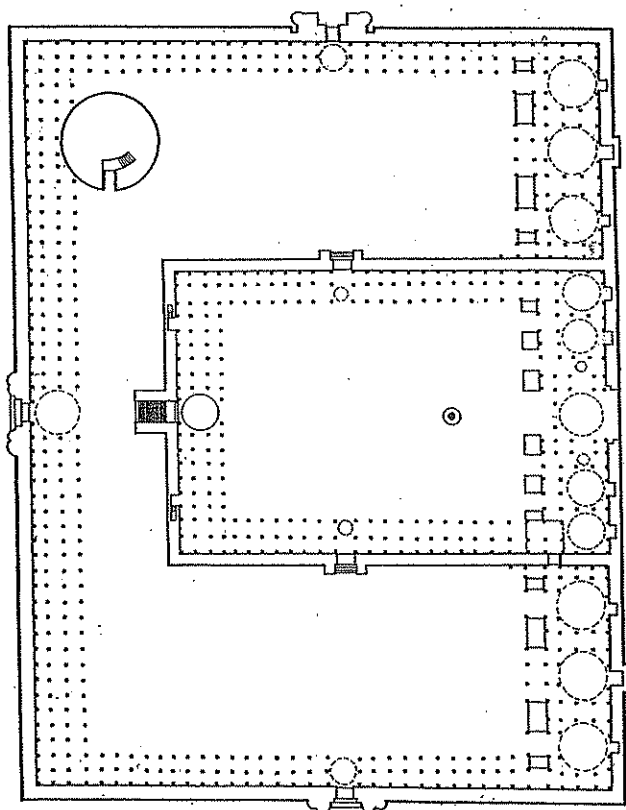


Fig. 6.5 Schematic ground-plan of the larger complex constructed in the 1220s, now largely ruined

eliminating his opponents through a combination of political guile and military prowess: Shams al-Din Iltutmish. With the demise of rival centers and claimants to authority, Iltutmish established himself as the paramount ruler of a new Indian sultanate based in Delhi. In effect, Delhi became an imperial capital in the first decades of the thirteenth century as the result of a spat between rival war-lords.

As the Friday Mosque of the newly emergent imperial center, the historical associations of the Qutb Mosque rendered it a valuable rhetorical tool for a parricidal sultan. A massive building campaign undertaken by Iltutmish in the 1220s enshrined the mosque of 1192 within a monumental architectural frame that almost tripled its original area (fig. 6.5). The most famous feature of the original mosque, the Qutb Minar, had originally stood outside its southwestern corner, but was now heightened by an additional three stories (perhaps according to the original plan) and enclosed within one of the courtyards of the newly extended monument. In this way, the original mosque and its minaret were both figuratively and literally integrated into "a new semantic stratum". The precedent set by Iltutmish in both appropriating and superseding the ultimate sign of his master's authority was followed by subsequent claimants to the title of sultan. A century later, for example, history repeated itself when



the Delhi sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji (r. 1296–1316) sought to up the ante of this competitive discourse, developing a megalomaniac vision for the complex that would have tripled the area of the Ilutmish mosque. In 'Ala' al-Din's plan – marked by a gigantism that defied realization – the composite mosque built by Aybek and Ilutmish would itself have been incorporated into a more monumental structure, and provided with a minaret that would dwarf the most famous feature of the complex, the Qutb Minar.

The inscription of the Qutb Mosque within a monumental carapace in the 1220s provides a context for the anachronistic textual frame that introduces the mosque at its eastern entrance. The cumulative evidence suggests that this "original" foundation text was in fact set in place during the reign of Ilutmish. Its general emphasis on the extirpation of idolatry found an echo in the Qur'anic passages inscribed on those sections of the Qutb Minar added by Ilutmish. The appropriation of the material resources of idolatry commemorated in the inscription found a practical counterpart in the appropriation of resonant Hindu icons and their installation in the Delhi mosque during the 1220s. The looted stone and brass sculptures are lost today, but a remarkable artifact survives to suggest more complex engagements with more distant Indian pasts. This is a seven-meter high antique iron pillar that stands in the courtyard of Qutb al-Din's mosque, the physical heart of the massive complex that Ilutmish endowed as the symbolic omphalos (*gubh*) of his capital, directly on axis with its main mihrab (Figs. 6.6, 10.3).<sup>30</sup> That the pillar has been reused from an earlier context is clear, for a dedicatory text inscribed upon it tells us that it was originally dedicated as a standard (*dhwaja*) to a Vishnu temple by a fourth- or fifth-century Indian ruler of the Gupta dynasty, whose military prowess the inscription celebrates. The pillar belongs to a genre of commemorative columns erected by Indian rulers, known as pillars of fame (*kirtistambhas*) or pillars of victory (*jayastambhas*).

The mid-fourteenth-century historian Shams-i-Siraj 'Afi informs us that Ilutmish re-erected the pillar in order to perpetuate the memory of his rule, probably in the late 1220s or early 1230s, when other signs of authority were being accumulated within the mosque. The endeavor (or at least 'Afi's representation of it) highlights a relationship between appropriation and the construction of historical memory, a theme to which I will return. The appropriation and re-erection of the pillar are usually seen as reflecting its trophy value and consequent ability to memorialize the triumph of the "Muslim" present over the "Hindu" past, but (unlike the looted Hindu icons) there is nothing to suggest that it was seized during one of Ilutmish's military campaigns. More tellingly, the closest precedents for Ilutmish's appropriation

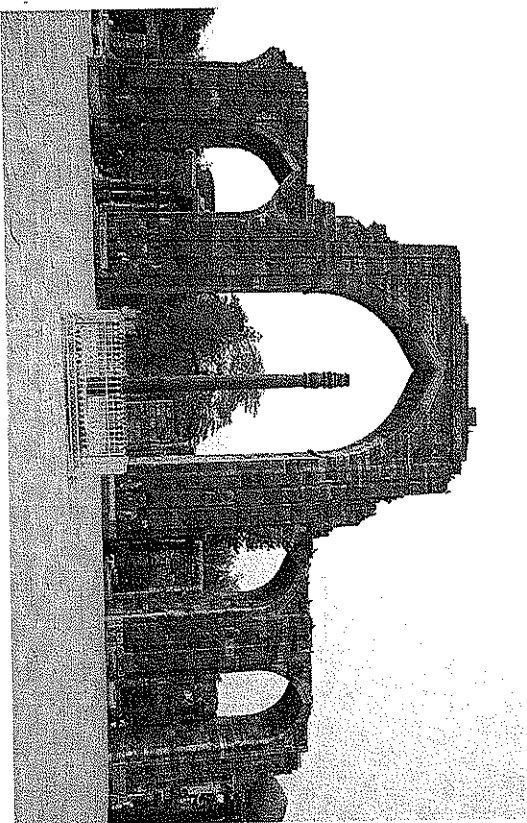


Fig. 6.6 The monumental screen added to the prayer hall in 1198, with the Iron Pillar standing on axis

and re-erection of the antique pillar are in fact found in the ritual practices of pre-conquest Indian kings, who routinely appropriated, recontextualized, and reinscribed antique pillars. The potential for legitimization resided, therefore not just in the pillar itself, but also in the very act of appropriation, which contributed to the construction of fictive continuities. The valences of the iron medium may have further enhanced the column's mytho-historical associations and consequent narrative potential, for in Arabic and Persian tradition a close relationship existed between marvelous iron structures and Alexander the Great, to whose legacy Ilutmish laid titular claim as the "Second Alexander" (*Sikandar al-thamān*).

The cultural connotations of the iron pillar and its potential to evoke literary and oral accounts of ancient epic deeds remind us that when it came to architectural space, material manipulation was but one mode of appropriation. The physical rewriting of sacred space during the 1220s found a contemporary literary counterpart in a paean to Ilutmish included in the *Jawāmi' al-hikāyat* (*Collections of Stories*) of Saḍid al-Din Muhammad 'Awfi (c. 625/1228), who includes the Delhi mosque in a section on remarkable monuments, including the pyramids of Egypt. In his description, 'Awfi refers to the stone arches and the pyramids of the mosque and the beauty of its *riwāqs* (arcades). Particular praise is reserved for the adjoining minaret, the Qutb Minar (Fig. 6.2). In 'Awfi's description, the minaret is compared to a living creature standing near the presence of the sultan (whose palace was evidently located nearby) and rewarded by him for its service with a rich belt or girdle (*band*), a reference

30 For a full discussion of the pillar and its relationship to the architectural patronage of Ilutmish, see Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests and Princely Practices" and *Objects of Translation*, Chapter 6.

to its richly carved ornament.<sup>31</sup> The spectacular appearance of the structure is represented as the result of royal beneficence, while the image of the belt (a common element of royal gifts) binds the minaret to the sultan as one who is his vassal and hence does his will. Similarly, the call to prayer (*adhan*) given from the minaret is compared to the orchestra (*maubad*) that sounded the hours of prayer at the gate of the sultan's palace.

'Awfi's appropriation of the Qutb complex for the glorification of the sultan provides a literary equivalent to Ilutmish's physical manipulation of architectural space to the same end, inscribing it within a narrative of beneficence, dependence, and submission. The coincidence between material and textual enframing not only extended to the "original" foundation and text set at the entrance to the mosque, but to the other signs of imperium, renunciation, and victory set within it. In its role as a palimpsest agglomeration of appropriated signs that advertised and aggrandized the authority of both sultan and sultanate, the Delhi mosque provides a precocious example of what Michel Foucault termed a "heterotopia", a space in which a variety of sites, including those that are incompatible or incommensurate, "are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."<sup>32</sup> As a heterotopia, the Delhi mosque of the early thirteenth century functioned as a *lieu de mémoire* in which the transition from one political order to the next was indexed in a manner that stressed continuity. To this end, Ilutmish's patronage engaged both the immediate Islamic past materialized in the mosque itself (thus obscuring the way in which the sultan had seized power) and the distant Indic past manifest in ancient brass images and antique iron pillars.

### Conclusion

The religious pre-eminence of the Qutb Mosque endured until the first decades of the fourteenth century, after which a series of new imperial capitals was built in close proximity to the old center of Delhi, each provided with its own Friday Mosque. Even then, its aura was sufficiently potent to inspire attempts at appropriation, either through interventions on its material fabric (rebuilding or restoration, for example) or by replicating its characteristic features in new monuments.<sup>33</sup> After the end of the fourteenth century, we hear little about

31 'Awfi, *Jawāmi' al-hikāyah*, fol. 74b. An English summary of the text is given by Prakash, "Qutb Minar", pp. 55–6.

32 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces".

33 Koch, "Copies of the Qutb". The phenomenon finds an interesting contemporary counterpart in the eastern Mediterranean, where, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Mamluk sultans of Egypt undertook several campaigns of restoration to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque of Damascus, or sought to replicate their characteristic features in their own monuments. Flood, "Umayyad Survivals".

the mosque until the early decades of the nineteenth century, when its ruins became an object of scholarship. Through the course of the nineteenth century, developing technologies of representation and reproduction enabled new transregional patterns of appropriation and consumption. In addition to the production and circulation of descriptions, engravings, and photographic images of the Qutb Mosque and other Indian monuments, in 1870 the reused pillars of the mosque were themselves cast in plaster and shipped to London for display (along with photographs of the casting operation) as part of the representation of the subcontinent in the architectural courts of the South Kensington Museum. Appropriately, in light of the emphasis on the appropriation and reuse of carved "Hindu" stones in contemporary scholarly literature, colonial endeavors to bring the mosque "back home" to a metropolitan audience were premised on the representational power of the fragment.<sup>34</sup>

Indian objects displayed to nineteenth-century British audiences required textual and verbal explication to identify, order, and give them meaning.<sup>35</sup> Neither the fragments nor the monuments from which they derived and into which they were incorporated spoke for themselves, but required narrative re-presentation. Inscribed within a Manichean vision of South Asian history, the reused fragments from which the Qutb Mosque had been constructed materialized narratives of conquest, decline, and violence, within which tropes of appropriation and spoliation proliferated. These narratives were instrumental to colonial-era contrasts between "Muslim" and British rule and, more recently, to their Hindu Nationalist successors, for whom the advent of Islam ended a Hindu Golden Age. In both colonial and nationalist narratives, the materialization of these histories in monumental form opened the possibility of renegotiating the past by re-appropriating sites or materials purloined by Muslim invaders.<sup>36</sup> A plaque attached to the eleventh-century Sas Bahu temple in Gwalior is inscribed in English:

This temple was cleaned and stripped of the Chuna [whitewash] with which the Mahomedans had defaced it for centuries by Major J.B. Keith November A.D. 1881 under the direction of Captain H. Cole R.E. Curator of Ancient Monuments in India.<sup>37</sup>

The gesture of inscription literalizes a trope found in the work of contemporary architectural historians, which figured medieval monuments as lithic books from which the (primarily sectarian) history of India could be read.<sup>38</sup> In its

34 Pallizzani, "From Stone to Paper", pp. 35–7; Hoffenberg, *Empire on Display*, p. 153.

35 Breckenridge, "Aesthetics and Politics", p. 205.

36 The manipulation of "Hindu" fragments, their removal from mosques and restoration to "original" contexts or functions has sometimes been central to these endeavors: Flood, "Lost in Translation".

37 Recorded during a visit to the temple in December 1999.

38 Flood, "Signs of Violence", p. 26.

attempt to shape the reception of the monument, to inscribe it within sectarian histories of appropriation, the text bears comparison to the foundation text set at the entrance to the Qutb Mosque in Delhi in the 1220s. In the former case, however, the emphasis is not on rupture but on restoration, a reflection of the synchronic fixation of modern scholarship criticized at the outset: the ascription of singular, static, originary identities to material artifacts and forms.

Alongside the perpetuation of colonial-era paradigms, however, over the past decades there has been a gradual shift in scholarship on the appropriation and recycling of architectural materials in north India away from the bare fact of spoliation and fragmentation (and its denunciation) to an interest in practices and protocols of appropriation and their broader cultural implications. This shift reflects (and has been heavily dependent on) developments in the study of late antique and early medieval architecture in Europe, particularly Dale Kinney's pioneering work on *spolia*. The burgeoning of what might broadly be termed "*spolia studies*" (a phenomenon to which this volume contributes), is an exciting development that promises to broaden our understanding of premodern appropriation. As I have tried to demonstrate above, premodernists are well positioned to avail themselves of a wide array of methodological and theoretical tools developed in the fields of anthropology, art history, and literary and cultural studies whose appropriation for the analysis of premodernity promises at the very least to help refine the questions that we ask of our material and the manner in which they are posed.

However, the very availability of these tools underlines the contemporaneity of this interest in questions of appropriation, recycling, and reuse across a range of fields, a development that reflects the rise (and after-effects) of post-structuralism and postmodernism within and without the academy. The pre-eminence of strategies of accumulation, appropriation, *bricolage*, hybridization, and pastiche in contemporary artistic production similarly reflects the meta-quality of what Charles Jencks has dubbed "the age of quotation marks".<sup>39</sup> In a recent study of classical *spolia* in the early Christian churches of Rome, Maria Fabricius Hansen suggests that

The dramatically increasing interest in *spolia* through the last decades of the twentieth century seems to be closely related to contemporary historicist [sic], eclectic and unclassical tendencies. What has been designated the postmodern and deconstructionist era has witnessed a new appreciation of the heterogeneous, oblique qualities of early Christian architecture so clearly reflecting the juxtaposition of historical phases. There seems to be some kind of correspondence between the early medieval period and present times in their

cultivation of history and tradition. History is paradoxically both drained of and invested with new meaning.<sup>40</sup>

The suggestion is pregnant with two further, perhaps contradictory, implications. The first is the possibility that premodern aesthetic sensibilities may have prefigured those of postmodernity in some sense. Not directly relevant to my subject here, the topic is an interesting if controversial one, which I hope to explore elsewhere. The second implication, unsettling for those invested in privileging eric categories of explanation (those that would have been recognized by the actors in a given situation) over *etic* (those drawn from external frameworks of analysis and understanding), is that our own interest in and understanding of appropriation, fragmentation, and spoliation may be quite different from those of the builders, patrons, and users of the monuments that we study. At the least, this realization would indicate our inability to escape anachronism. At its worst, it would see our own interest in fragments and reuse as producing the objects of our study.

As previously noted, one of the most persistent features of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship on the Qutb Mosque has been a tendency to fragment the whole, to emphasize reused architectural elements at the expense of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of which they formed part and to whose creation they contributed. By contrast, the recycling of architectural materials failed to attract the attention of the premodern literati who visited the mosque and consigned their impressions to paper. This discrepancy might be read in the light of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's assertion that "fragments are not simply a necessity of which we make a virtue, a vicissitude of history ... We make fragments."<sup>41</sup> A broader context for this observation can be sought in Bruno Latour's provocative contrast between a premodernity marked by practices of translation and hybridization, and a modernity characterized (at least in theory) by strategies of disaggregation or purification that correspond to what he calls "the modern critical stance".<sup>42</sup>

Even where appropriation is a relevant category of analysis, it is never sufficient. Analysis organized around the theme of appropriation not only runs the risk of disaggregating complex wholes, but also risks dehistoricizing and homogenizing what are in effect complex congeries of heterogeneous cultural practices. With its implications of reflexivity or self-consciousness in the act or its representation, "appropriation" is perhaps relevant to the initial seizure of the materials to build the Qutb Mosque in the 1190s and the later commemoration of the act of foundation in the 1220s. However, Ilhamish's re-erection of the fourth-century iron pillar in the Qutb Mosque during

<sup>39</sup> Fabricius Hansen, *Eloquence of Appropriation*, p. 38. In a similar, but contradictory, vein see Papalexandrou, "Memory Tattered and Torn", pp. 75–6.

<sup>41</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography", p. 388.

<sup>42</sup> Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 3, 10–11, 121.

the same period and its antecedents in the practices of earlier Hindu kings remind us that we must consider not only practices of appropriation but also *appropriations of practice*. More crucial still is the need to distinguish between synchronic acts of appropriation and their textual representations, which can be integral to diachronic processes of appropriation. If appropriation, unlike influence, implies an active engagement with its objects and is (explicitly or not) a necessarily historicist gesture, the assertion of historicity sometimes obscures or occludes as much as it reveals. The text at the main entrance of the Delhi mosque commemorating the expropriation of temple materials constituted an appropriation, not of the temples of Delhi to which it refers, but of the mosque that had superseded them decades earlier. The dialectic between the connotative and denotative aspects of the inscription, its reiteration of the normative rhetoric of "Islamic" conquest according to pre-conquest "Hindu" conventions, reflected the architecture and contents of the mosque to which it was affixed. In the 1220s, the mosque became the repository of highly charged objects that invoked both the recent past of Islam in India and the more distant epic past of Indian kings. The invocation of multiple pasts was integral to an endeavor to construct collective memories around which a community divided by ethnicity, political affiliation, and sectarian affinities could adhere and cohere.

Although rooted in the specific historical conditions of early thirteenth-century north India, the (re)deployment of select fragments to construct new frameworks of meaning in which past and present are brought into constellation is hardly unique. In her study of the reuse of "pagan" sculptures in Middle Byzantine churches, for example, Amy Papalexandrou (drawing on Mary Carruthers' work on premodern memory) relates their appropriation to the manipulation of social memory "by appropriating visually recognizable material remains and re-installing them in a new 'web' of associations".<sup>43</sup>

In his study of the relationship between history and memory, Pierre Nora suggests "memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present", distinguished from history by its attachment to sites rather than events.<sup>44</sup> However, if memory is distinguished from history by its attachment to sites rather than events, Iluminish's appropriation of the Qutb Complex suggests that both could be rendered coincident by the judicious use of texts. In this sense, the figurative and literal reinscription of the Qutb Mosque in the 1220s bears comparison with other historical examples of *translatio memoriarum*.<sup>45</sup> Informed by colonial concerns, essentialist notions of a monolithic Islam, and a tendency to privilege the analysis of texts over that of material

culture, modern scholars took the text inscribed on the mosque decades after its construction as an original historical document. Perpetuating a carefully crafted version of history that emphasized the ideal of inter-sectarian conflict over the verities of intra-sectarian competition, these scholars fell into a trap set for them in the 1220s.<sup>46</sup>

The anachronism that characterizes this pragmatic intersection between premodern dissimulation and modern essentialism illuminates a broader phenomenon of appropriation. In his classic essay on cultural memory and identity formation, Jan Assmann distinguishes between the diachronic potential of the texts, images, and sites that Pierre Nora sees as central to the formation of memory, and the synchronic realization of this potential in specific cultural-historical circumstances:

Cultural memory exists in two modes: first in the mode of potentiality of the archive whose accumulated texts, images, and rules of conduct act as a total horizon, and second in the mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectified meaning into its own perspective, giving it its own relevance.<sup>47</sup>

Whether characterized as interpretation, myth, or translation, the activation of the archive is always a form of appropriation, as much an activity of the present as a practice in the past that it endeavors to represent.

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43 Papalexandrou, "Memory Tattered and Torn", p. 69.

44 Nora, "Between Memory and History", pp. 8–9. For a particularly contentious example of the relationship between monuments and memory in contemporary South Asia, see Gita-Thakur, "Archaeology and the Monument".

45 For examples, see Kinney, "Spoils", pp. 134–5; Eisner, "Iconoclasm", pp. 209–19.

46 See Jackson, *Delhi Sultanate*, p. 31; Kumar, *Emergence*, pp. 87–97, 105–25, 135.

47 Assmann, "Collective Memory", p. 130.

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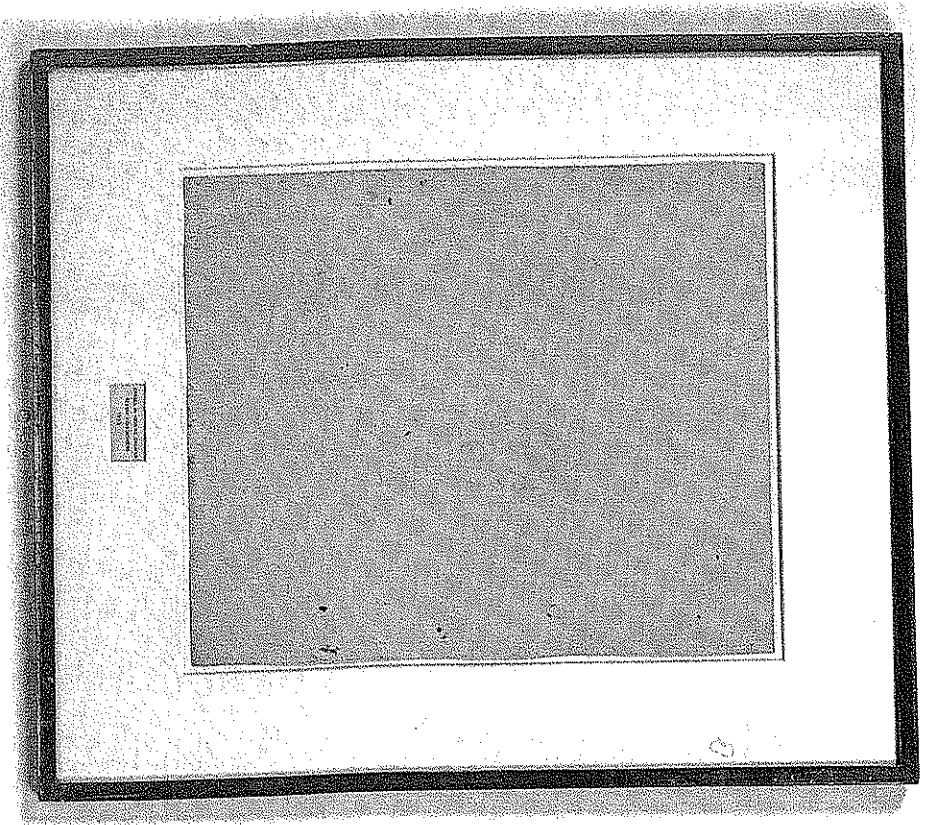
# Reuse Value

*Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture*  
from Constantine to Sherrie Levine

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Edited by Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney

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Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Art © Estate of Robert Rauschenberg/Licensed by VAGA, New York,

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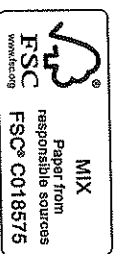
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## Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>About the Authors</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<b>Introduction</b> <i>Dale Kinney</i>	1
1 On the Reuse of Antiquity: The Perspectives of the Archaeologist and of the Historian <i>Arnold Esch</i>	13
2 Reading <i>Spolia</i> in Late Antiquity and Contemporary Perception <i>Paolo Liverani</i>	33
3 The Use of Older Elements in the Architecture of Fourth- and Fifth-Century Rome: A Contribution to the Evaluation of <i>Spolia</i> <i>Hugo Brandenburg</i>	53
4 <i>Spolia</i> : A Definition in Ruins <i>Michael Greenhalgh</i>	75
5 Ancient Gems in the Middle Ages: Riches and Ready-mades <i>Dale Kinney</i>	97
6 Appropriation as Inscription: Making History in the First Friday Mosque of Delhi <i>Finbarr Barry Flood</i>	121