

Pillars, palimpsests, and princely practices

Translating the past in sultanate Delhi

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In the traditional master narratives of South Asian history, the conquest of northern India by the army of the Ghurid sultan Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad (r. 1163–1203) in the last quarter of the twelfth century figures a profound rupture in the cultural fabric of the region. Many of the monuments erected in the wake of the conquest appear to confirm this, for they make extensive use of architectural elements that predate the conquest and are assumed to have been purloined from temples destroyed in its wake. The idea of the trophy looms large in published discussions of these monuments, largely on the basis of a practice of reuse that has never been subjected to any serious analysis. Analysis has been obviated, in large measure, by the widespread perception that reuse offers support for the lurid and highly formulaic tales of looting, spoliation, and desecration found in the medieval texts that have been privileged in the construction of histories (and even art histories) of the period.¹

In addition to the circularity of such an approach, the disciplinary divisions written into Orientalist discourse on South Asia at its inception frustrate the assumption of a diachronic approach to the material culture of the region.² Yet some of the objects and buildings in which

the past is instantiated for us today were already antique in the early pre-modern period. Enduring through time and dynastic change, such artifacts often ensured continuity in the process of imagining and re-imagining the past, providing a focus for the “necessary sedimentation of meaning that accumulates as part of the process of historical change.”³ The palimpsest nature of such artifacts was intrinsic to their role as sites for an ongoing process of “translating” the past, a process that frequently encompassed a physical displacement. This was a past that inhered not only in objects, however, but also in the practices and rituals associated with them. The act of physical appropriation might itself be palimpsest upon earlier reuses of the same or similar objects, thus serving to construct a dynamic continuity between contemporary practices and their historical antecedents.

This is the case with a number of pre-Islamic commemorative pillars (*stambhas* or *lats*) that were re-erected in Delhi during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Essentialist notions of Islamic cultural practices have combined with traditional disciplinary divisions to obscure the transcultural nature of these pillars, which were central to the self-conscious articulation of an imagined relationship between the sultans of Delhi and the Indian past. The relocation of the pillars appears to reference a past that encompassed both the mythic kings of a dimly perceived Indian antiquity and the more immediate predecessors of the Delhi sultans, who provide a precedent for the reuse (that is, reinscription and/or relocation) of similar pillars.⁴ The existence of indigenous precedents for such

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1. For a critique of this position see Alka Arvind Patel, “Islamic Architecture of Western India (Mid 12th–14th Centuries): Continuities and Interpretations” (D.Phil. thesis, Harvard University, 2000), pp. 325–358.

2. Finbarr Barry Flood, “Refiguring Iconoclasm: Image Mutilation and Aesthetic Innovation in the Early Indian Mosque,” in *Negating the Image: Case Studies of Past Iconoclasms*, ed. Anne L. McLanan & Jeffrey Johnson (London: Ashgate Press, forthcoming); idem., “Transcribing Ruins Inscripting Difference: Architectural Photography as Ethnographic Practice in Colonial India,” paper presented to the symposium “Photography in the Islamic World, 19th–20th Centuries,” Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, December 8, 2000.

3. Annie E. Coombes, “Translating the Past: Apartheid Monuments in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” in *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, ed. Avtar Brah & Annie E. Coombes (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), p. 175.

4. As will become clear below, “reuse” here implies a historicist gesture in which “the ‘second user’ was aware of his or her posterior status.” Anthony Cutler, “Reuse or Use? Theoretical and Practical Attitudes Toward Objects in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Ideologie e Pratiche del Reimpiego nell’Alto Medioevo*, Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo 46, (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro, 1999), pp. 1056–1057.

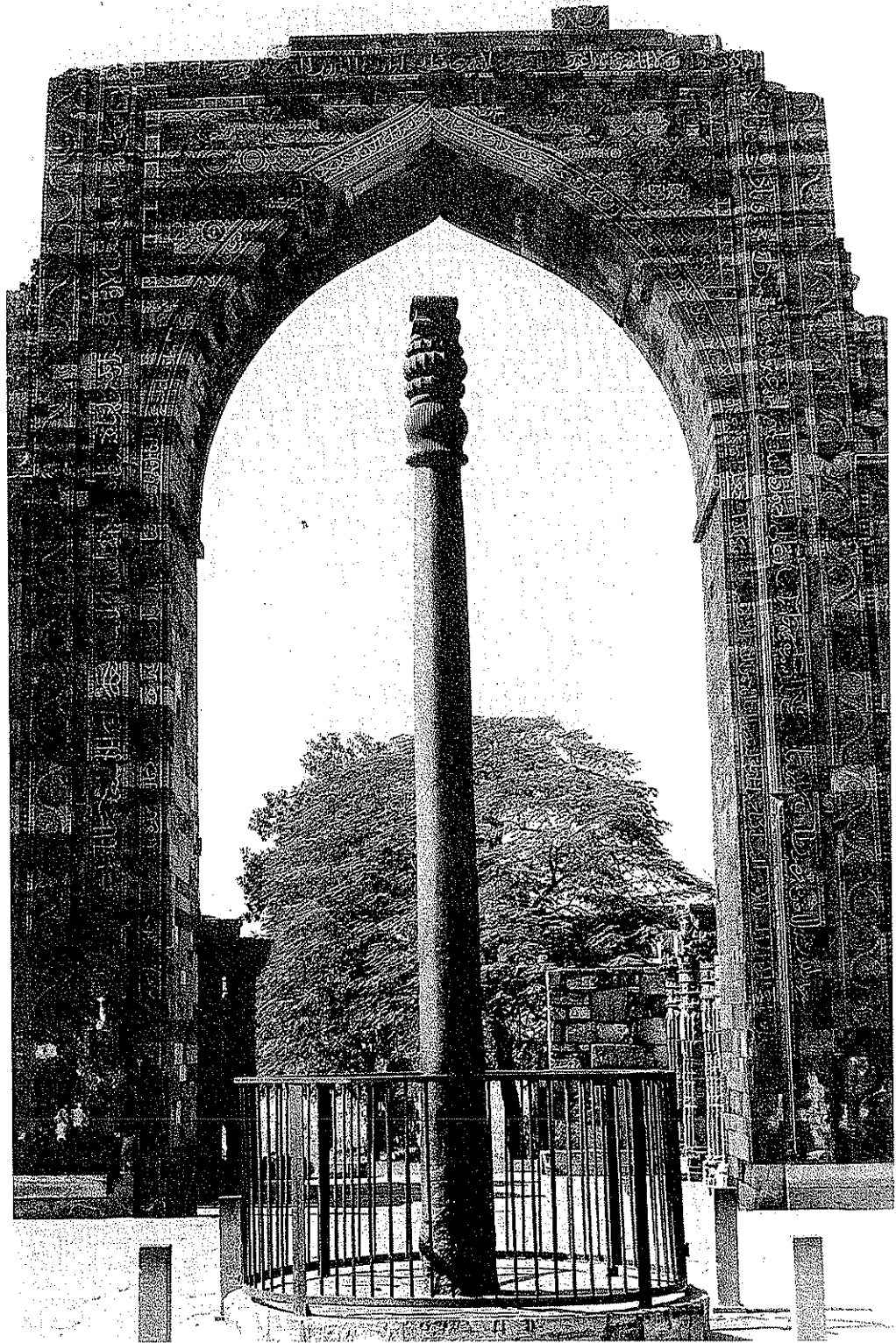


Figure 1. Iron pillar and *qibla* screen, Ghurid Friday Mosque, Delhi.

reuses of the past suggests that there was much greater continuity in the characteristic cultural practices of Indian rulers between the pre- and postconquest periods than has previously been acknowledged. What have been read as trophies at first glance, on closer inspection appear to offer evidence for transculturation in the ritual practices of the earliest Delhi sultans.

The earliest instance of reuse following the conquest is evidenced by a seven-and-a-half-meter-high iron pillar standing in the courtyard of the Friday Mosque built after the Ghurid conquest of Delhi in 1192, the mosque known today as the Quwwat al-Islam (fig. 1). The pillar, which stands on the axis of the mosque, directly in front of the prayer hall, is crowned with a fluted bell capital and a molding consisting of three superimposed *āmalakas* and a square pedestal, now empty (fig. 2). It can be counted among a number of commemorative columns often referred to in inscriptions as pillars of fame (*kirtistambhas*) or pillars of victory (*jayastambhas*), which were erected by medieval Indian rulers to memorialize their architectural patronage, donations to temples, or military and spiritual victories.⁵ So deeply embedded in the rituals of medieval Indian kingship was the notion of a pillar of victory that the term was sometimes used metaphorically, to refer to other types of

5. John Faithful Fleet, "Mandasor Pillar of Yasodharman," *The Indian Antiquary* 15 (1886): 255, 257; E. Hultzsch, *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 3, part 1 (Madras: Government Press, 1899), pp. 52, 64, 69; Henry Cousens, "The Iron Pillar at Dhar," *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report* (1902–1903): 207–208; Michael D. Willis, "Religious and Royal Patronage in North India," in *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers, Temple Sculptures from North India A.D. 700–1200*, ed. Vishaka N. Desai & Danielle Mason (New York: The Asia Society, 1993), p. 54, fig. 17; Ram Nath, *Jain Kirti-Stambha of Chittorgadh [c. 1300 A.D.]* (Jaipur: The Historical Research Documentary Program, 1994), pp. 8, 13, 55, 59, 61. In addition to those which survive, such pillars are frequently mentioned in royal inscriptions: John Faithful Fleet, "Sanskrit and Old-Kanarese Inscriptions No. 185. Mahakuta Pillar Inscription of Mangalesa," *The Indian Antiquary* 19 (1890): 16, 19; Rai Bahadur Hira Lal, "Khairha Plates of Yasahkarnadeva-[Kalachuri] Samvat 823," *Epigraphia Indica* 12 (1913–1914): 216; Radhagovinda Basak, "Rampal Copper-Plate Grant of Srichandradeva," *Epigraphia Indica* 12 (1913–1914): 140. To suggest that the victory commemorated by such pillars, "was one of a more spiritual nature than politico-military character" (Patel, see note 1, p. 213), is to ignore the abundant epigraphic evidence for their erection in association with military campaigns, including victories over *Turushka* or Turkish armies. I have suggested elsewhere that the tradition of commemorating victories by the erection of pillars had an impact on the manner in which Ghaznavid and Ghurid sultans memorialized their own triumphs: Finbarr Barry Flood, "Between Ghazna and Delhi: Lahore and its Lost Manāra," in *Cairo to Kabul: Afghan and Islamic Studies Presented to Ralph Pinder-Wilson*, ed. Warwick Ball & Leonard Harrow (London: Melisende, 2002), pp. 102–112.

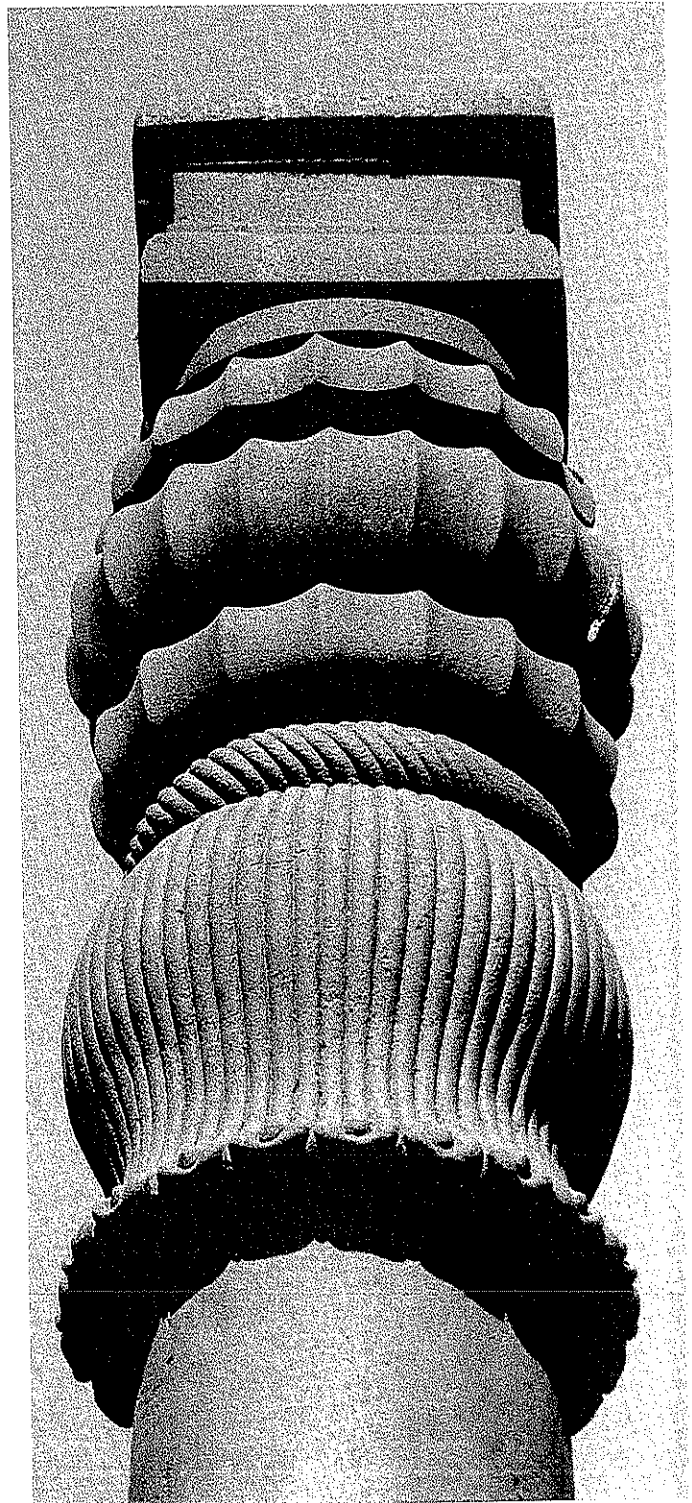


Figure 2. Detail of the iron pillar showing its capital.

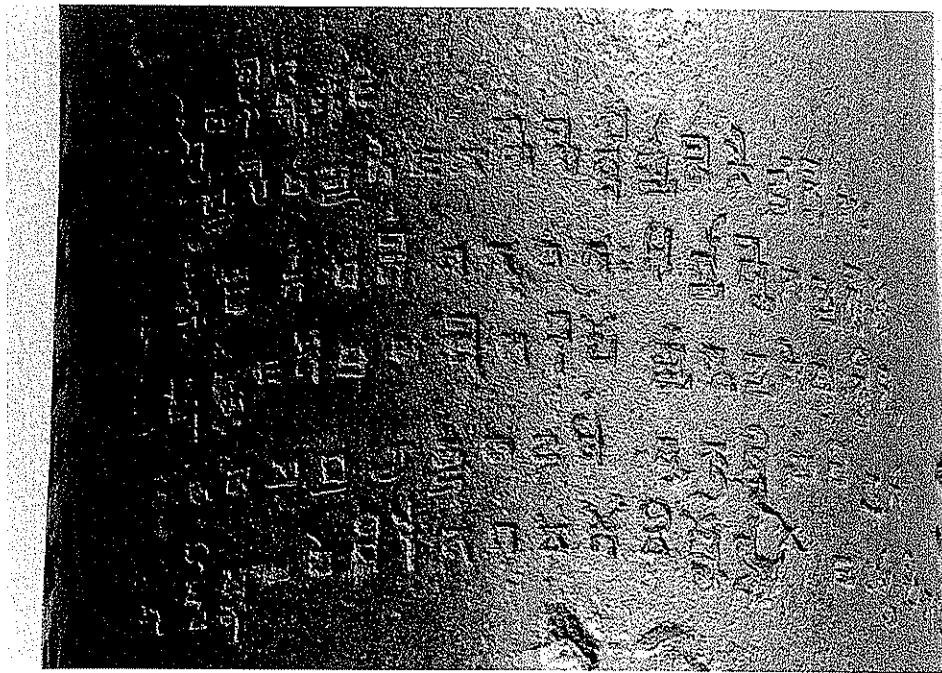


Figure 3. Gupta inscription on the iron pillar.

objects or structures that memorialized martial triumphs or territorial conquest.⁶ Such pillars were considered an appropriate locus for royal inscriptions, and a Sanskrit text inscribed upon the Delhi iron pillar (fig. 3) tells us that it was originally dedicated as a standard (*dhvaja*) to a Vishnu temple by the fourth- or fifth-century ruler Chandra, whose military prowess the inscription celebrates.⁷

6. For example, Aditya Chola (r. 850–871) had the head of his defeated Pandya rival set up in the Chola capital as a pillar of victory: Rao Sahil K. Krishna Sastri, *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 3, part 3 (Madras: Government Press, 1920), pp. 387, 420. After a military victory in the early eleventh century, Rajendra Chola marched golden vessels of Ganges water back to his capital on the heads of captured prisoners. There he created a vast artificial lake, referred to in contemporary inscriptions as a “liquid pillar of victory”: Vidya Dehejia, *Art of the Imperial Cholas* (New York: The Asia Society, 1990), p. 79.

7. T. S. Burt & Alexander Cunningham, “Lithographs and translations of inscriptions taken in ectype by Captain T. S. Burt, Engineers: and of one, from Ghosi taken by Captain A. Cunningham, of the same Corps,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1838): 629–631; Garcin de Tassy, “Description des monuments de Dehli,” *Journal Asiatique*, 5th series, 15–16 (1860): 226–229; Alexander Cunningham, *Four Reports Made During the Years 1862–63–64–65*, Archaeological Survey of India Reports, vol. 1, (Delhi & Varanasi: 1871; reprint Indological Book House, 1972), pp. 170–174; Carr Stephens, *The Archaeology and Monuments of Delhi* (Simla & Calcutta, 1876), pp. 17–24; John Faithful Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early*

The Delhi column is unusual because it is iron rather than stone and survived so long without being melted down, but it is by no means unique. Fragments survive of a much larger iron pillar, over thirteen meters in length and bearing a Sanskrit inscription, which was re-

Gupta Kings and Their Successors, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. 3 (Varanasi: Reprinted by the Indological Book House, 1970), pp. 139–142; J. A. Page, *An Historical Memoir on the Qutb: Delhi*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India No. 22, originally Calcutta, Government of India, 1926 (Delhi: Reprinted by Swati Publications, 1991), pp. 44–45. For a complete copy of the inscription see Ram Nath, *Monuments of Delhi* (New Delhi: Ambika Publications, 1978), Inscription 1. There is some debate as to whether the Chandra mentioned on the pillar is Chandragupta I or II, or indeed any Gupta ruler: Vincent A. Smith, “The Iron Pillar of Delhi (Mihrauli) and the Emperor Candia (Chandra),” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1897): 1–18; M. M. Havaprasad Shastri, “King Chandra of the Meharauli Iron Pillar Inscription,” *The Indian Antiquary* 42 (1913): 217–219; R. D. Banerji, “A Note on King Chandra of the Meharauli Inscription,” *Epigraphia Indica* 14 (1917–18): 367–371; J. Ph. Vogel, “Facts and Fancies about the Iron Pillar of Old-Delhi,” *Journal of the Panjab Historical Society* 9, no. 1 (1923): 82–86; Dines Chandra Sircar, “Digvijaya of King Chandra of the Meharauli Pillar Inscription,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Letters 5 (1939): 407–415. The pillar was originally surmounted by an animal figure, which most scholars (e.g. Smith, *ibid.*, p. 18) have assumed was removed when it was placed in the mosque; this was not necessarily the case, however, given that animal figures proliferate throughout the mosque.

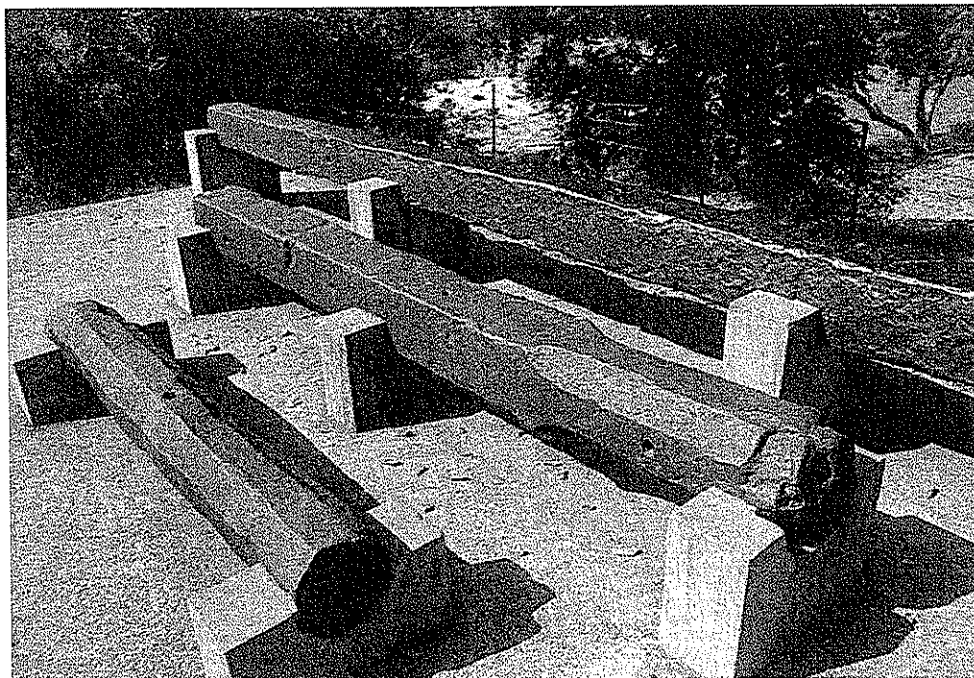


Figure 4. Fragments of an iron pillar outside the Mosque of Dilawar Khan, Dhar.

erected in front of a mosque at Dhar in central India in 1404 (fig. 4).⁸ The Dhar column has been interpreted as a pillar of victory (*jayastambha*) erected by a local Paramāra ruler in the twelfth or thirteenth century.⁹ A much smaller pillar in the form of a trident dated Samvat 1468 (A.D. 1412) stands in front of the Achalésvar temple on Mount Abu in Rajasthan (fig. 5), and is reportedly cast from the arms abandoned by a defeated Muslim army.¹⁰

It has generally been assumed that the erection of the pillar was contemporary with the foundation of the Delhi mosque by Qutb al-Din Aybak, the slave general of the Ghurid sultans, in 1192.¹¹ According to the

fourteenth-century *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī* of Shams-i Siraj 'Afīf, however, the pillar was set up in this position not by Qutb al-Din Aybak, but by Shams al-Din Iltutmish. Iltutmish was a former Turkish slave who had risen through the ranks of the army in the service of Aybak, before acceding to the Indian sultanate that had emerged after the death of the last of the Ghurid sultans with effective control over the empire, in 1206. The date at which the pillar was installed is unknown, but it was presumably after the accession of Iltutmish in 1211, and possibly around or before 1229, when the area of the mosque was more than tripled, one of numerous architectural projects sponsored by the sultan.¹²

8. Wheeler Thackston, *The Jahangirnama, Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 235.

9. Cousens (see note 5), especially p. 210; B. V. Subbarayappa, "Dimensions of Iron Technology in India up to the end of the 18th Century," *Journal of Central Asia* 3, no. 2 (1980): 25; J. Burton-Page, "Dhār. Monuments," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), p. 219. Among the inscriptions carved after the pillar had fallen from its original position is one recording the halt of the Mughal emperor Jahangir, who mentions the pillar in his memoirs: Thackston (see note 8), p. 235.

10. Cousens (see note 5), p. 207.

11. Anthony Welch & Howard Crane, "The Tughluqs: Master Builders of the Delhi Sultanate," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 127, 133; Anthony Welch, "Architectural Patronage and the Past: The Tughluq

Sultans of India," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 319–320; Catherine B. Asher, "Appropriating the Past: Jahāngīr's Pillars," *Islamic Culture* 71, no. 4 (1997): 8.

12. Finbarr Barry Flood, "Persianate Trends in Sultanate Architecture: the Great Mosque of Bada'un," in Bernard O'Kane, ed., *Festschrift for Robert Hillenbrand* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). Some have argued that the pillar was already standing before a temple on this site, and was incorporated into the mosque as it stood: de Tassey (see note 7), pp. 228–229; D. S. Trivedi, *Viṣṇudhvaja or Qutb Manār* (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1962), p. 251; Sunil Kumar, "Qutb and Modern Memory," in *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, ed. Suvir Kaul (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 142, 176 n. 3. The text states quite clearly, however, that the *mināra buzurg*

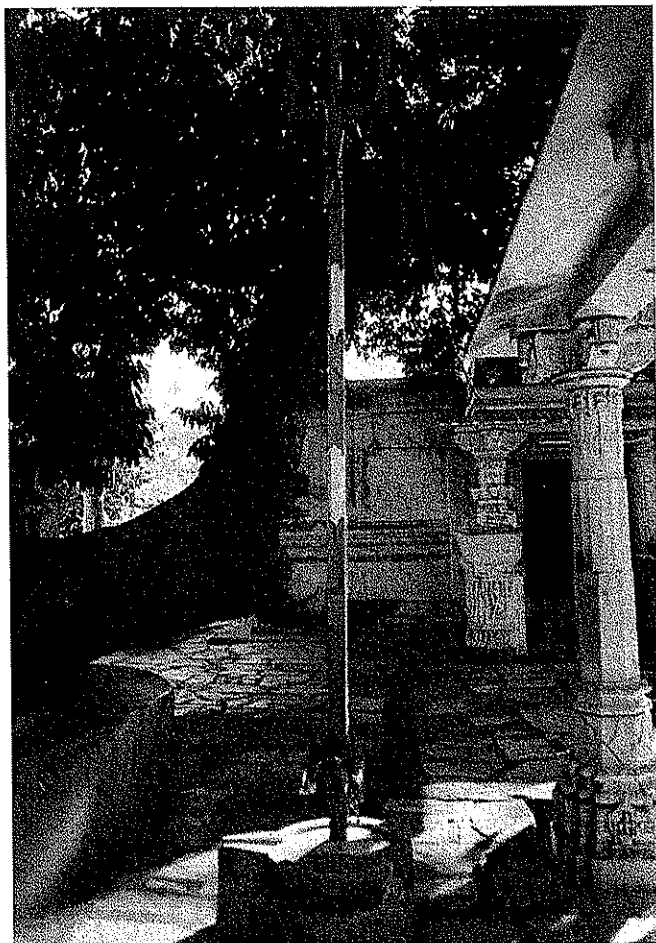


Figure 5. Iron pillar in the form of a trident, Achalesvar Temple, Mount Abu.

The reuse of the Delhi iron pillar in the early thirteenth century inspired the actions of later Indo-Islamic rulers, who similarly relocated antique pillars as part of their architectural patronage. Ghiyath

in the Delhi mosque was erected (*bar-avarda*) by Iltutmish: Shams-i Siraj 'Afif, *The Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, ed. Maulavi Vilayat Husain (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1888), p. 314. The terms employed might equally refer to the Qutb Minar (see note 22), but since the passage occurs amid a lengthy discussion of Firuz Shah Tughluq's reuse of antique pillars, it is safe to assume that the reference is to the pillar in the Delhi mosque rather than its minaret. That the pillar was set up again in the thirteenth century seems to be supported by the archaeological evidence, since the column is supported by a series of iron bars soldered with lead, which rest upon the surface of a floor assumed to be that of the temple that previously stood on the site of the mosque: Smith (see note 7), pp. 4–5.

al-Din Tughluq (r. 1320–1325) may have included a pre-Islamic pillar in the mosque which he built at Tughluqabad, but 'Afif makes it clear that it was the precedent set by Iltutmish that inspired the reuse of as many as ten antique pillars by one of his successors, Firuz Shah Tughluq (r. 1351–1388; figs. 6 and 7);¹³ many

13. Afif (see note 12), pp. 313–314; H. M. Elliot & John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, 4 vol., originally London: 1867–1877 (Delhi: Reprinted by Low Price Publications, 1990), vol. 3, p. 353. For the suggestion that an Ashokan pillar was reused earlier in the mosque of Tughluqabad, see Mehrdad Shokoohy & Natalie H. Shokoohy, "Tughluqabad: the earliest surviving town of the Delhi Sultanate," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 3 (1994): 548. Firishta lists ten monumental pillars among the works of Firuz Shah Tughluq, but this may be an exaggeration: John Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India*, 4 vol., originally London: 1829 (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1981), vol. 1, p. 270. Those that survive are at Fatehabad and Hisar in Haryana, and Firuzabad and Meerut in Delhi. The latter two can be associated with the activities of Firuz Shah through contemporary textual evidence, while the former two are attributed to the activities of the same sultan through their architectural context or epigraphic content: James Prinsep, "Interpretation of the most ancient of the inscriptions on the pillar called the *lât* of Feroz Shâh, near Delhi, and that of the Allahabad, Radhia and Matthia pillar, or *lât*, inscriptions which agree therewith," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 6 (1837): 566–609; de Tassej (see note 7), pp. 229–234; E. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Ashoka*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), pp. xvii, 107; B. C. Chhabra, "Aśokan Pillar at Hissar, Panjab," *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal* 2 (1964): 319–322; James Prinsep, *Essays on Indian Antiquities*, vol. 1 (Varanasi: Reprinted by the Indological Book House, 1971), pp. 324–325; Welch & Crane (see note 11), p. 133; Mehrdad Shokoohy, *Haryana I: The Column of Firuz Shâh and other Islamic Inscriptions from the District of Hisar*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Part IV: Persian Inscriptions down to the Early Safavid Period*, vol. XLVII: India, State of Harayana (London: 1988), pp. 15–22; Mehrdad Shokoohy & Natalie H. Shokoohy, *Hişâr-i Firûza: Sultanate and Early Mughal Architecture in the District of Hisar, India* (London: Monographs on Art, Archaeology and Architecture, South Asian Series, 1988), pp. 32–33; Welch (see note 11), pp. 318–320; William Jeffrey McKibben, "The Monumental Pillars of Firuz Shâh Tughluq," *Ars Orientalis* 24 (1994): 105–118. A fifth pillar in Jaunpur was erected by Ibrahim Na'ib Barbak, Firuz Shah's half-brother, by order of the sultan: de Tassej (see note 7), pp. 231–233; Alexander Cunningham, *Report on Tours in the Gangetic Provinces from Badaon to Bihar, in 1875–76 and 1877–78*, *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, vol. 11 (Varanasi: Reprinted by the Indological Book House, 1968), pp. 105–106; A. Führer, *The Sharqi Architecture of Jaunpur*, *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, vol. 11 (Calcutta: 1889), pp. 26–27; Z. A. Desai, "Inscription from the Jaunpur Fort Mosque," *Epigraphia Indica Arabic and Persian Supplement* (1974): 23. It has recently been argued that the Jaunpur pillar was not antique, but was carved ex novo: McKibben, *ibid.*, p. 110. In view of the conjunction of antique and contemporary elements in the Fatehabad and Hisar pillars (the antique parts of which may once have belonged together), this is quite possible. Although it has sometimes been assumed that the Allahabad pillar (see Asher, note 11) was also moved by Firuz Shah Tughluq, there is no evidence for this.

of these were re-erected within, or in close proximity to mosques. In the following century, pre-Islamic iron pillars were re-erected outside congregational mosques at Dhar (fig. 4) and Mandu in Malwa, probably in imitation of Iltutmish's gesture.¹⁴ The re-erection of the iron pillar by Iltutmish may also have been a factor in the later reuse of an Ashokan pillar at Allahabad fort by the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), although there is no evidence for this having been associated with a mosque. Catherine Asher has demonstrated that in its Mughal incarnation, the pillar was associated with a "chain of justice," a chain-hung bell by means of which those seeking justice from the ruler would make their presence known.¹⁵ This was a feature of Sasanian kingship as memorialized in Persian texts, but was also common in medieval Indian courts, for reference is made to it in several royal inscriptions.¹⁶ According to Ibn Battuta, the palace of Iltutmish in Delhi had such a chain.¹⁷ Although the subject awaits further investigation, it is quite possible that the inspiration for Jahangir's chain derived from indigenous kingship traditions mediated via the precedent of Iltutmish as memorialized in pre-Mughal histories. As we shall see shortly, the reuse of the pillar itself points to the continuation of a practice that was well established in South Asia long before the Ghurid conquest in the twelfth century. Whatever contextually specific meanings each instance of reuse acquired, culturally and chronologically the relocation of the iron pillar by Iltutmish can be seen as a pivotal act, linking the actions of later Islamicate rulers with a preconquest tradition of reuse.

Although the Delhi mosque was constructed using large quantities of spolia (fig. 8), the inclusion of the iron pillar in the mosque was merited on something other than utilitarian grounds, for it fulfills no structural function. Iltutmish's re-erection of the iron pillar in a mosque constructed in the wake of the Muslim conquest using an abundance of temple spolia has usually been assumed to reflect the pillar's value as a trophy and its consequent ability to memorialize *Muslim* victory over

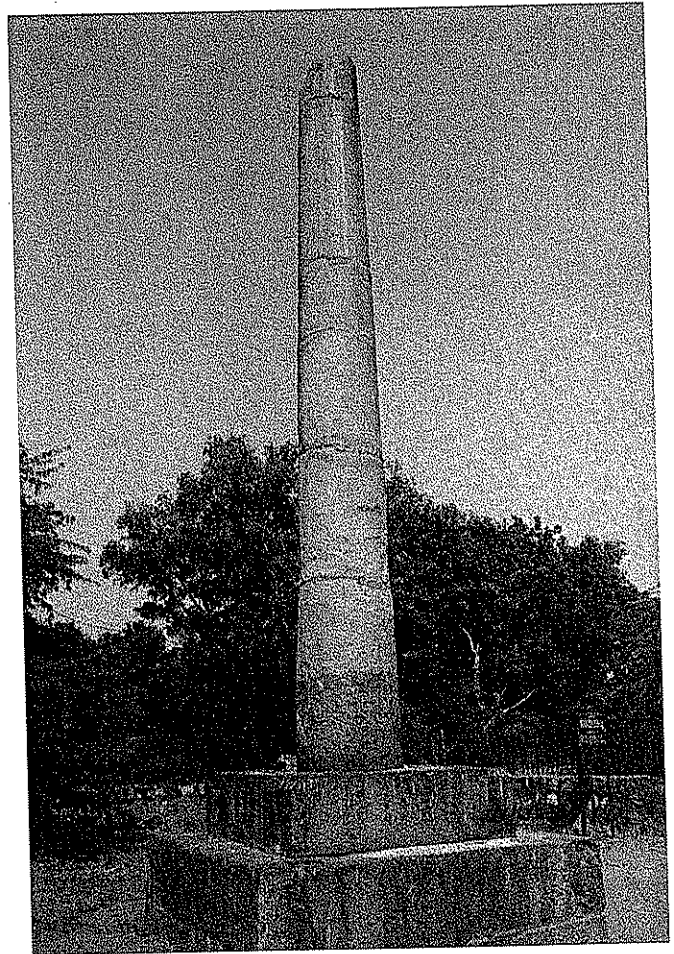


Figure 6. Ashokan pillar from Meerut re-erected by Firuz Shah Tughluq, Delhi.

the conquered Hindu population of Delhi.¹⁸ This assumption may be influenced by the European practice of re-erecting ancient obelisks looted from colonial possessions in metropolitan capitals, but it is also part of

14. Michael Anthony Brand, "The Khalji Complex at Shadiabad Mandu" (D.Phil. thesis, Harvard University, 1986), pp. 218–219.

15. Asher (see note 11), pp. 1–2, pl. 1.

16. For two twelfth-century examples see E. Hultzsch, *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 2, part 3 (Madras: Government Press, 1895), p. 311, n. 3; idem, *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 3, part 2 (Madras: Government Press, 1903), p. 185.

17. H. A. R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa A.D. 1325–1354*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 630.

18. See, among others, Burton-Page, who states that the pillar was "doubtless placed there by the builders not only as a curious relic but also as a symbol of their triumph over the idolaters": "Dihli," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 2, (Leiden: Brill Ltd., 1965), p. 260. See also Welch (note 11, p. 320), where the iron pillar is described as "a trophy celebrating Islam's 1192 victory in north India"; Hillenbrand [*Islamic Architecture, Form, Function and Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 158], where the small scale of the pillar, juxtaposed with that of the adjacent minaret, is said to be evocative of Muslim victory. Similarly, Catherine Asher refers to the reuse of pre-Islamic pillars in Delhi during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries "to proclaim the supremacy of Islam": Asher (see note 11), p. 8. Carl Ernst, in an article that criticizes the traditional

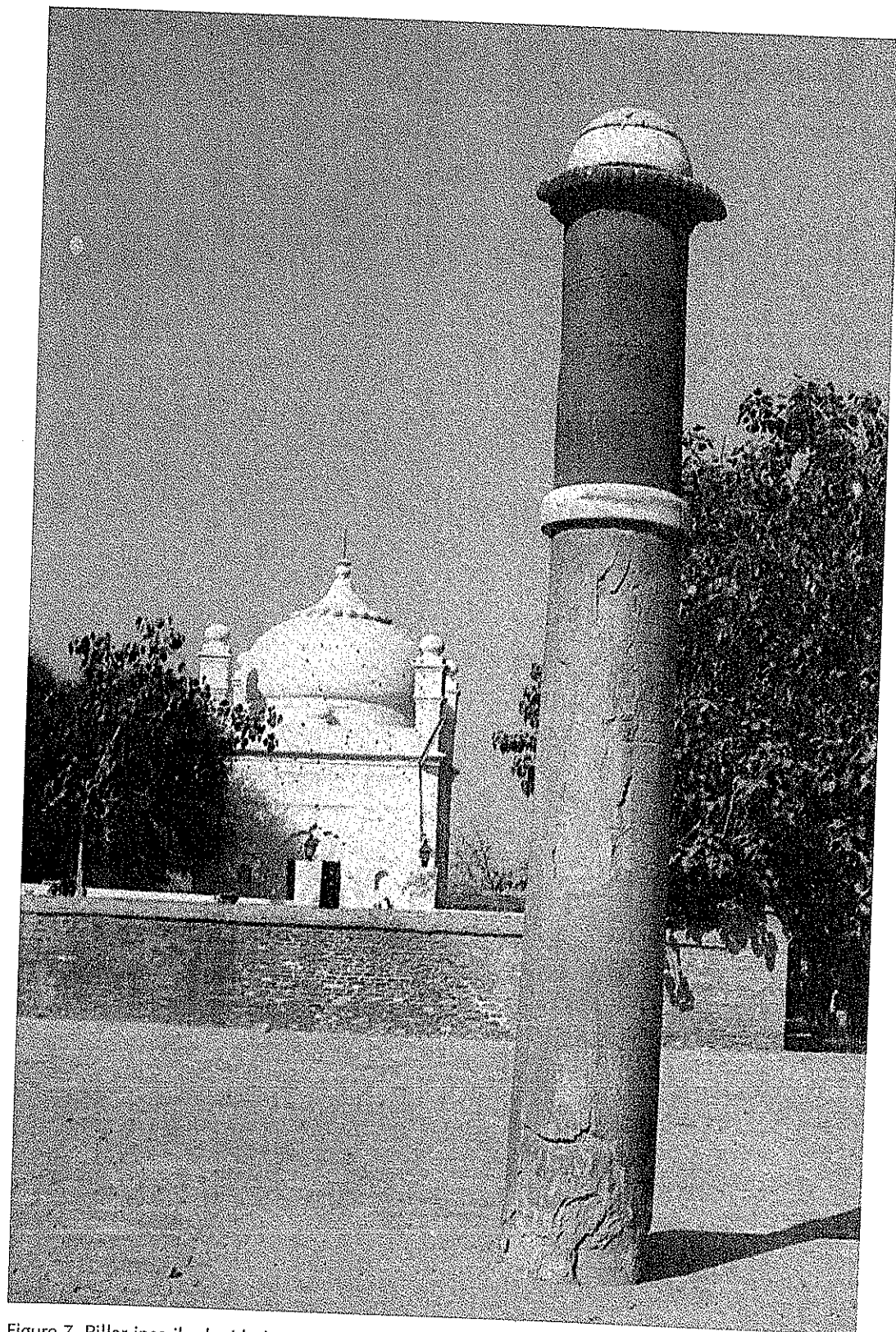


Figure 7. Pillar inscribed with the genealogy of Firuz Shah Tughluq, Fatehabad.



Figure 8. Ghurid Friday Mosque of Delhi, general view.

a broader belief in an essentially Muslim penchant for triumphal gestures involving the reuse of artifacts and monuments identified as non-Islamic.¹⁹ The attribution of static sectarian identities to medieval objects and

essentialist view of Muslim responses to the relics of the Indian past, concludes more neutrally that the iron pillar is part of "the triumphant political use of trophies": Carl W. Ernst, "Admiring the Works of the Ancients. The Ellora Temples as viewed by Indo-Muslim authors," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identity in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin & Bruce Lawrence, pp. 98–120. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), p. 98 and n. 1. Interpretations that foreground Muslim victory (as opposed to victory) are implicitly based on an assumed hostility toward reused objects conceived of in sectarian terms, is also manifest in scholarship dealing with the re-erection of antique stone pillars in the fourteenth century by Firuz Shah Tughluq. See for example the interpretation of Firuz Shah's pillars as representing "his triumph over India's jahiliyya": Welch (see note 11), p. 320.

19. Finbarr Barry Flood, "The Medieval Trophy as an Art Historical Trope: Coptic and Byzantine 'Altars' in Islamic Contexts," *Muqarnas*

buildings is standard in traditional discourse on South Asian art and architecture.²⁰ Thus the iron pillar in Delhi is often referred to as the "Hindu" iron pillar, an object in direct opposition to the adjacent "Islamic" minaret (fig. 9),²¹ ignoring the fact that the terms *stambha* (pillar) and *minār* (minaret) were used interchangeably to refer to the same objects by medieval Indians, Hindus, and Muslims.²² Within such a paradigm, the presence of "Hindu" materials in a "Muslim" context is necessarily ascribed to the promulgation of sectarian victory rhetoric.

In the case of the Delhi mosque, scholars have turned to its epigraphic program to provide a cultural and historical context for the reuse of Hindu and Jain elements in its construction. Most frequently cited are a number of Qur'anic inscriptions that place a strong emphasis on the rejection of idolatry, and a problematic Persian foundation inscription above the eastern

18 (2001): 41, 63–64. See also Cousens's (as in note 5, p. 210) unsubstantiated assumption that the Dhar pillar was "thrown down by Muhammadans," in spite of the evidence for its re-erection by the Muslim patron of the adjacent mosque. Earlier, Prinsep had asserted that at some point between the fourth century and the fourteenth, the Ashokan pillar at Allahabad was "overthrown again by the idol-breaking zeal of the Musalmán": James Prinsep, "Notes on the facsimiles of the various inscriptions on the ancient column at Allahabad, retaken by Captain Edward Smith, engineers," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 6 (1837): 968.

20. For a critical survey of the relevant material see Patel (as in note 1).

21. Welch & Crane (see note 11), p. 134; John Irwin, "Islam and the Cosmic Pillar," in *Investigating Indian Art: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Development of Early Buddhist and Hindu Iconography held at the Museum of Indian Art, Berlin, May 1986* (Berlin: 1987), p. 134.

22. The pre-Islamic *lats* and *stambhas* incorporated into sultanate mosques are referred to as *minārs* in fourteenth-century Persian texts (e.g. 'Afif [see note 12], p. 314), which can equally compare the minaret of the Delhi mosque to a stone pillar (*sutūn*): Nath (see note 7), p. 28. Conversely, the Qutb Minar is identified as a *jayastambha* and *kirtistambha* in contemporary Sanskrit inscriptions: Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of the Delhi Sultanate 1191–1256* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. xxx, 2–3, 18–19. The absence of any functional minarets in the royal mosques in which the pillars were re-erected (at Firuzabad and Hisar) suggests that they were intended to replace freestanding minarets such as the Qutb Minar, an impression reinforced by the decoration of some of the pillars: Shokoohy & Shokoohy (see note 13), p. 33. As Ram Nath ("The Minaret vs. the Dhvajastambha," *Indica* 7, no. 1 [1970]: 29) remarks, "the idea is more symbolic than functional," with the *lat* acquiring a role as the "conceptual equivalent" to the *minār*: McKibben (see note 13), p. 112. Formal similarities between pillar and minaret apparently enabled these to be identified in the eyes of contemporaries, for the identification of tall structures associated with Indian religious monuments (temple *śikaras*, for example) as *minārs* is found as early as the ninth century in Arabic texts: Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Kitāb Futuh al-Buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: 1866), p. 437.

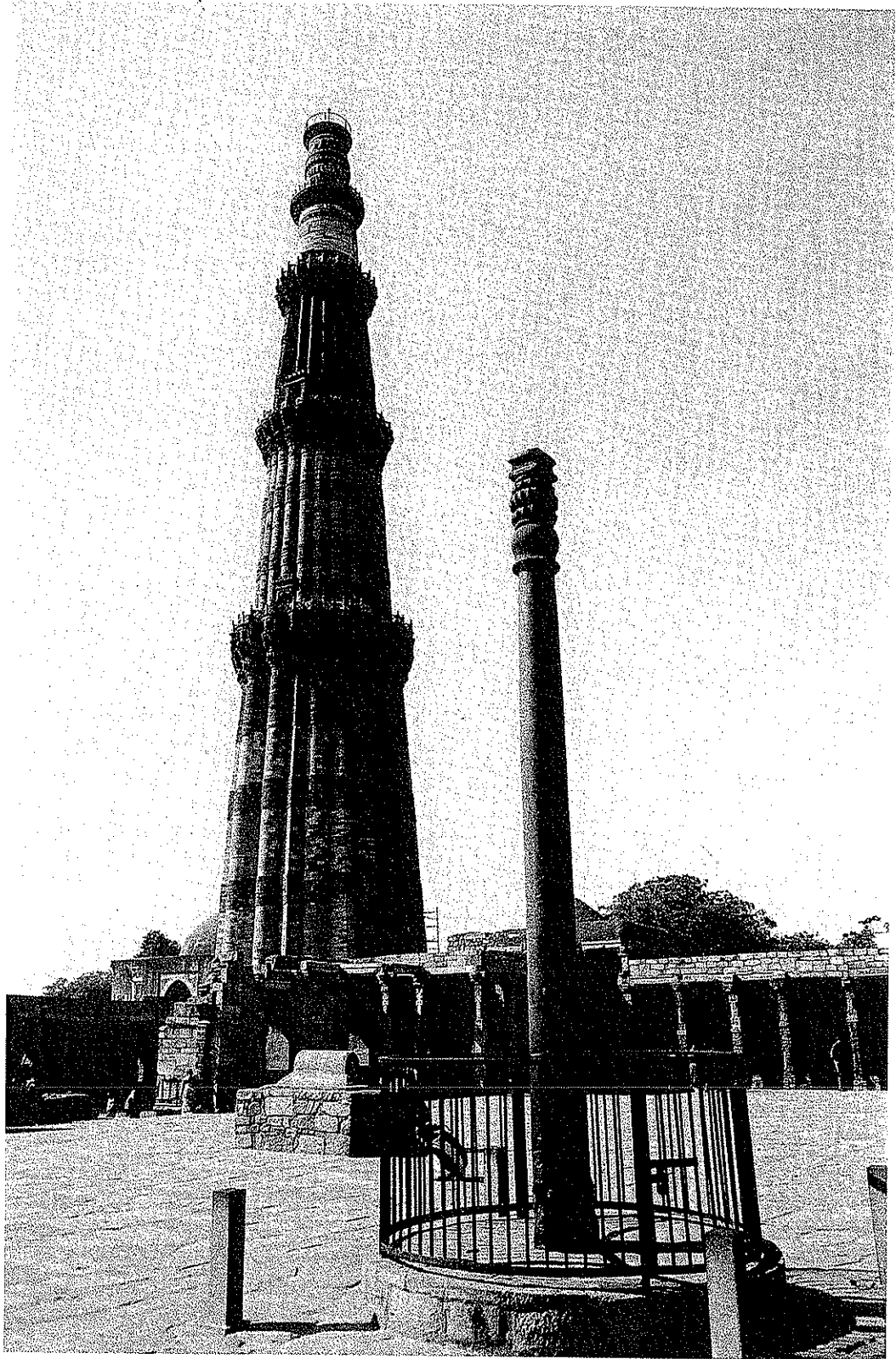


Figure 9. The iron pillar and the Qutb Minar, Delhi.

entrance to the mosque, which appears to refer to the desecration of twenty-seven temples and the reuse of their elements in its construction.²³ However, not all the materials comprising the monument are spolia, and even with regard to the mosque's structural components the whole question of reuse is more complex than has usually been assumed.²⁴ The dangers of reading material culture exclusively through the lens of textual rhetoric (whether Qur'anic or historical) are amply demonstrated by the survival of contemporary Ghurid coin issues that continue to feature images of Hindu deities.²⁵ This pragmatic continuity is in stark contrast to the rhetoric of religious orthodoxy that permeates contemporary texts and inscriptions, which make little reference to the sorts of compromises with preexistent traditions witnessed in the numismatic evidence.

We should also be aware of possible shifts in the meaning of the Delhi mosque, even over relatively short periods of time. One such shift may have occurred between the foundation of the mosque in or around 1192 and the massive extension that it underwent during the reign of Iltutmish. There are indications that the eastern "foundation" text dates from the latter period rather than the former, and it may have been set in place as part of a massing of signs of various sorts within the mosque during the reign of Iltutmish.²⁶ The Qur'anic injunctions against idolatry within the mosque (and especially the Qutb Minar) once found a material counterpart in a number of stone and metal Hindu icons looted during Iltutmish's campaigns of conquest in Ujjain (1233–1234), and resituated along the approach to the mosque where they could be trampled by those entering it.²⁷ The display of the Ujjain loot harks back to earlier Islamicate precedents (recalling Mahmud of

Ghazni's treatment of the Somnath *linga*, for example), and can be ascribed to the ability of the looted icons to index the expanding frontiers of Iltutmish's empire very publicly in the first mosque of the imperial capital.²⁸ While such a reuse of Indian artifacts might support the idea that the iron pillar was intended to commemorate "Muslim" victory, it should not be assumed that all the objects garnered within the mosque had the same semantic function. The rejection of idolatry can hardly be equated with a rejection of Indian culture in general, as is too often assumed,²⁹ and it is far from obvious that the pillar was capable of functioning as an index of idolatry in the same way that looted Hindu icons could. Moreover, there is nothing to suggest that the iron pillar was seized during one of Iltutmish's military campaigns, and it is unmentioned in the thirteenth-century sources that associate the installation of looted icons in the Delhi mosque with the theme of imperial victory.

The idea that the iron pillar was an Islamic trophy finds no support in medieval references to it, the earliest of which date from the fourteenth century. Ibn Battuta, writing after a visit to the Delhi mosque in or around 1333, gives the most extensive description of the pillar:

In the center of the mosque is the awe-inspiring column of which [it is said] nobody knows of what metal it is constructed. One of their learned men told me that it is called *Haft Jūsh*, which means 'seven metals' (sic), and that it is composed of these seven. A part of this column, of a finger's length, has been polished, and this polished part gives out a brilliant gleam. Iron makes no impression on it. It is thirty cubits high, and we rolled a turban round it, and the portion which encircled it measured eight cubits.³⁰

In the *Ta'rikh-i Firūz Shāhi* we are told that fifty years later the Central Asian conqueror Timur was similarly awed by the pillars re-erected in Delhi by order of Firuz Shah Tughluq (figs. 6 and 10).³¹ A reference in Elliott and Dowson's translation of the same work to these

23. Page (see note 7), p. 29; Anthony Welch, "Qur'an and Tomb: The Religious Epigraphs of Two Early Sultanate Tombs in Delhi," in *Indian Epigraphy, Its Bearing on the History of Art*, ed. Frederick M. Asher and G. S. Gai (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1985), pp. 260–264; Hussein Keshani, Anthony Welch, and Alexandra Bain, "Epigraphs, Scripture, and Architecture in the Early Delhi Sultanate," *Muqarnas* 19, (2002):12–43. For a discussion of the grammatical oddities in the foundation inscription see Patel (as in note 1), pp. 101–114.

24. See Flood (forthcoming, as in note 2).

25. Hirananda Sastri, "Devanāgarī and the Muhammadan rulers of India," *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 23 (1937): 495. This fact is ignored by the epigraphic studies cited in note 23, as are recent studies of the monument that question the privileging of Qur'anic epigraphy above all other modes of evidence.

26. Finbarr Barry Flood, *Translating India: Art and Transculturation in a Medieval Afghan Polity* (forthcoming), chapter 8.

27. H. G. Raverty, *Tabakāt-i-Nāsiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia, including Hindustan*, 2 vol.,

originally Calcutta, 1881 (New Delhi: Reprinted by the Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 623, 628.

28. Finbarr Barry Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum," *Art Bulletin* 84/4 (2002):650–651.

29. See Flood (forthcoming, as in note 2).

30. Gibb (see note 17), p. 622. On the "seven metals" see Iqbal Khan, "Views of Abul Fazl on the 'Birth' of Metals," in *Art and Culture: Felicitation Volume in Honour of Professor Nurul Hasan*, ed. Ahsan Jan Qaisar & Som Prakash Verma (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1993), pp. 105–109.

31. 'Afif (see note 12), p. 314; Elliott & Dowson, (see note 13), vol. 3, p. 353; Welch (see note 11), p. 319. That the inscriptions on many of the surviving pillars stress their enduring nature and indicate a desire to evoke awe is hardly serendipitous: Fleet (1886, see note 5), p. 257; idem., (1970, see note 7), p. 148.

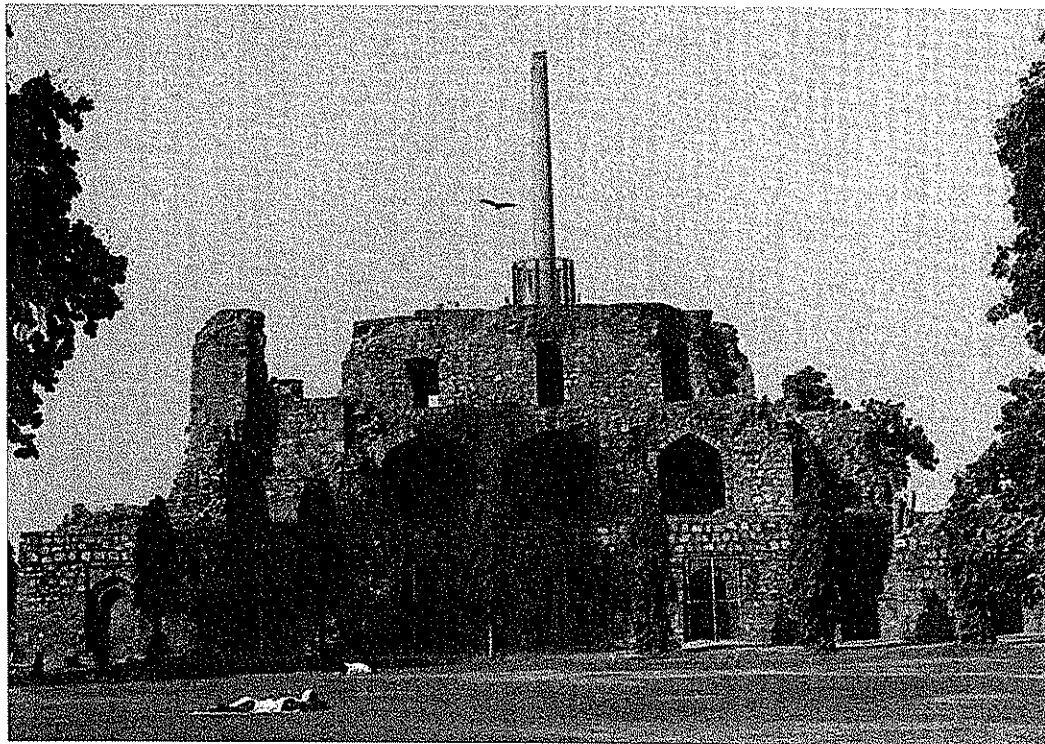


Figure 10. Re-erected Ashokan pillar, Kotla Firuz Shah, Firuzabad.

pillars being moved to Delhi "as trophies" is not borne out by the published Persian text, where their value as wonders (*ʿajaʾibān*) is instead stressed.³² So far as surviving fourteenth-century accounts go, awe and mystery rather than triumph and victory are the keynotes in the reception of these fragments of the Indian past.

In a rare dissension from the tendency to ignore the transcultural nature of the pillars reused in Delhi, William McKibben notes that Iltutmish "may have appropriated the iron pillar for the Quwwat al-Islam mosque in part to glorify the achievements of past civilizations and affirm the ideological beginnings of Islamic rule in India by aligning himself with pre-Islamic sovereigns."³³ A similar interpretation of Jahangir's later reuse of two pre-Islamic pillars was offered by Catherine Asher, who very plausibly read the inscription of Jahangir's royal lineage on the Allahabad pillar as an attempt to link Mughal rule "to both the Timurid tradition and to deeply rooted Indian traditions."³⁴

In both cases, while the meaning of the reused pillars is considered in relation to their connection (however vague) with the pre-Islamic history of India, the practice of reuse itself and its cultural antecedents remains unexamined. If one considers the antique pillars reused in sultanate Delhi diachronically, however, it quickly becomes apparent that many of them had already acquired complex genealogies through reuse and reinscription in preceding centuries. Just as Egyptian pharaohs or Byzantine emperors inscribed their names on columns and pillars that were already antique, medieval Indian rajas were apparently prone to reinscribing existing commemorative pillars in order to commend their own glorious deeds to history.³⁵ Some of these inscriptions correspond with the re-erection of the pillars during different phases of reuse, a fact that must

32. Afif (see note 12), p. 308; Elliott & Dowson (see note 13), vol. 3, p. 350.

33. McKibben (see note 13), p. 113.

34. Asher (see note 11), p. 7.

35. The pharaonic obelisk now in New York was, for example, inscribed by three different pharaohs between 1461 B.C. and 933 B.C.: Bern Dibner, *Moving the Obelisks* (Norwalk, Conn.: Burndy Library, 1952), p. 44. See also the dedication to the Byzantine emperor Phocas (r. 602–610) on a column set up in the Roman forum in the third century by the emperor Diocletian: Marlia Mundell Mango, "Imperial Art in the Seventh Century," in *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. Paul Magdalino (London: Variorum, 1994), p. 110.

cause us to reconsider the idea that the re-erection of the iron pillar constituted a specifically Islamic mode of commemorating victory.

In the case of the Delhi iron pillar, although attention has been focused on the Gupta temple in which it first stood and the Ghurid mosque in which it eventually came to rest, in fact these only mark the beginning and end of its history. Among a number of less well-preserved inscriptions recorded on the column in the nineteenth century was one that referred to the foundation of Delhi by the Tomar ruler Anang Pal in Samvat 1109 (A.D. 1052).³⁶ On epigraphic grounds it has been assumed that this is a contemporary inscription, carved at Anang Pal's behest more than six centuries after the column had first been dedicated. Some of the temple material reused in the Delhi mosque is of similar date, and it has been suggested that the iron pillar was taken from its original location and re-erected within a temple built by the Tomar ruler in 1052, at the time that the pillar was reinscribed.³⁷ On the basis of numismatic evidence, however, the date of Anang Pal's reign has recently been put at ca. 1130–1145.³⁸ Since no attempt seems to have been made to correlate the epigraphic and numismatic evidence, this redating requires further research. If the later date is correct, however, the error in the date inscribed on the column suggests that the inscription is anachronistic and cannot therefore be used as evidence for the reuse of the pillar by Anang Pal in the eleventh century.

The complicated genealogy of the Delhi column is by no means unusual. On the contrary, inscriptions on a number of reused antique pillars tell the same story. The Allahabad pillar reused by Jahangir in the early seventeenth century illustrates just how complex the life histories of such pillars could be.³⁹ Reconstructing its

travails from the multiple texts that it bears in different languages and scripts, the pillar was first inscribed in the third century B.C. by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (although it may even have been erected earlier),⁴⁰ then reused in the late fourth century A.D. by the Gupta raja Samudra, when it was carved with a list of his accomplishments and those of his ancestors.⁴¹ The same pillar was re-erected once again in 1605, and carved with a Persian text celebrating the lineage of Jahangir.⁴² Such documented instances of reuse may be but the tip of the iceberg, since those reusing the pillars may not always have inscribed them, and even inscriptions are liable to wear and erasure over time.⁴³

While the reuse and reinscription of antique columns by later Indian rulers provides a general context in which to locate Iltutmish's appropriation of the iron pillar, the reuse of an antique pillar in the vicinity of Delhi in the decades before the Ghurid conquest points to more immediate precedents. The pillar in question is one of five surviving from the architectural program of Firuz Shah Tughluq, and still stands where it was re-

Pillar-Cult at Prayāga (Allahabad): its pre-Aśokan Origins," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1983): 253–280.

40. For conflicting views about this see A. Ghosh, "The Pillars of Aśoka—their purpose," *East and West* 17 (1967): 275, and Irwin (1981, see note 39), pp. 335–337. Although Irwin argues that the Allahabad pillar has stood on the same site since the time of Ashoka, earlier writers pointed out the likelihood that it had fallen and been re-erected, since the texts on the pillar include both horizontal inscriptions which would have been legible when it was erect, and vertical inscriptions presumably carved when the pillar had fallen: Prinsep (see note 19), p. 968; Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib & Amalananda Ghosh, "A Note on the Allahabad Pillar of Aśoka," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1935): 703–704. The same is true of the Dhar pillar. Hultzsch (1925, see note 13, p. xx) suggests that the pillar stood in its original location when reinscribed in the Gupta period, but was subsequently moved by the Mughals.

41. John Faithful Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum. vol. 3, (Varanasi: Reprinted by the Indological Book House, 1970), pp. 1–12.

42. Burt (see note 33), pp. 107–108; Prinsep (see note 19), p. 968; James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1876), p. 53; Asher (see note 11).

43. Burt (see note 39), p. 109; Prinsep (see note 19), p. 969; Chhabra (see note 13), p. 320. I am confining my remarks here to inscriptions that mention historical rulers, or which may be considered "official," and therefore offer some evidence for dating phases of reuse. The equally interesting, but less chronologically useful, graffiti left by merchants, travelers, and tourists would be an interesting subject for a separate study: Cunningham (1972, see note 7), p. 167; Stephens (see note 7), p. 24; J. A. Page, *A Memoir on Kotla Firoz Shah*, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India No. 22 (Calcutta: Government of India, 1937), p. 29; idem. (1991, see note 7), p. 45; Chhabra (see note 7), pp. 320–321; Prasad (see note 22), pp. 32, 40–42.

36. Cunningham (1972, see note 7), p. 151; (see note 7), p. 45.

37. Cunningham (1972, see note 7), p. 153; Carr Stephens (see note 7), pp. 23–24; Smith (see note 7), pp. 13–15; Syed Hasan Barani, "History of Delhi to the time of Timur's invasion," *Islamic Culture* 12, no. 3 (1938): 313.

38. John S. Deyell, *Living without Silver, the Monetary History of Early Medieval North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 153–154, 157–167, table 14.

39. T. S. Burt, "A description, with drawings, of the Ancient Stone Pillar at Allahabad called Bhim Sēn's Gadā or Club, with accompanying copies of four inscriptions engraved in different characters upon its surface," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3 (1834): 105–121; Prinsep (see notes 13 & 19); Hultzsch (1925, see note 13), pp. xix, 156; John Irwin, "Aśokan Pillars: A Reassessment of the Evidence," *The Burlington Magazine* 115 (1973): 706–707, fig. 3; idem., "The Prayāga Bull-Pillar: another pre-Aśokan Monument," *South Asian Archaeology* 1979 (1981): fig. 15b; idem., "The Ancient

erected in 1357, at the center of an extraordinary pyramidal structure in the heart of Firuz Shah's new capital, Firuzabad, just north of Ghurid Delhi (fig. 10). When re-erected in this position, the pillar was crowned with a golden *kalaśa*, a gesture which offers incidental evidence of continuity in Indian royal ritual, for such golden vases were often provided by medieval Indian rulers to crown the summit of temple *śikaras*.⁴⁴

The Firuzabad pillar predates the monument which it now graces by over fifteen hundred years, for it may already have been standing in the third century B.C., when it was inscribed with an edict of the Buddhist emperor Ashoka, written in Prakrit in *brahmi* script.⁴⁵ Just below this original dedication is a Sanskrit inscription carved in *devnagari* script a millennium and a half later, in 1164 (fig. 11). The inscription records the conquests of prince Visala Deva, Vighararaja IV of the Chauhan dynasty which had taken Delhi from the Tomars a few years previously and still ruled most of northwestern India at the time of the Ghurid conquest three decades later.⁴⁶ In an ironic twist, plays concerning Visala Deva's battles against the *Turushkas* or Turks (including one written by the raja himself) were found inscribed on stones later reused in the Ghurid

Friday Mosque at Ajmir.⁴⁷ The defeat of a *Mleccha* (barbarian, presumably Ghurid) army is also among the victories mentioned in the inscription carved on the Firuzabad pillar at Visala Deva's command. Since it is unlikely that this pillar remained in one spot for fifteen centuries, it seems probable that it was re-erected when it was reused in the late twelfth century by Visala Deva to commemorate his military victories.⁴⁸

In eleventh- and twelfth-century Sanskrit texts, pillars of fame are, along with the pedestals of religious images and copper plates, among the loci considered appropriate for royal inscriptions.⁴⁹ The manner in which existing pillars were reinscribed, however, indicates a desire to highlight their function as palimpsests. On the Allahabad pillar, inscriptions of different dates and scripts are interlineated.⁵⁰ In other cases, such as the Firuzabad pillar, the Prakrit and Sanskrit inscriptions are juxtaposed in such a way that the later Sanskrit inscription frames the earlier Prakrit (fig. 11). The two texts are further distinguished not only by their differing lengths but also by a striking difference in script. Just as medieval Indian rulers could seek to link themselves with illustrious predecessors by citing earlier eras in their inscriptions, it seems likely that the

44. Page (1937, see note 43), pp. 5, 41; 'Afif (see note 12), p. 312; Elliott & Dowson (see note 13), vol. 3, p. 352. The *kalaśa* was surmounted by a globe and crescent similar to those which seventeenth-century visitors still saw on the Meerut pillar, another of the pillars moved by Firuz Shah: William Foster, *Early Travels in India 1583-1619* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 157. The provision of a terminal *āmalaka* and *kalaśa* on the Jaunpur pillar and on that at Fatehabad further heightens the parallels with the crowning elements of the temple: Cunningham (1968, see note 13), p. 106; Shokoohy (1988, see note 13), p. 17. Jahangir later crowned the Allahabad pillar with a *kalaśa*: Irwin (1987, see note 20), p. 136, n. 28. For the gifting of the *kalaśa* in pre-sultanate India see Sahityacharya Pandit Bisheshwar Nath Reu, "Jalor Inscription of the Time of Paramāra Visala, dated V.S. 1174," *The Indian Antiquary* 62 (1933): 41. It is possible that the *kalaśa* was intended as an aniconic substitute for the animal figures that had earlier crowned many of these columns, although the two often appeared in conjunction: John Irwin, "'Aśoka' Pillars: A Reassessment of the Evidence—IV: Symbolism," *The Burlington Magazine* 118 (1976): 738, fig. 8.

45. Hultzsch (1925, see note 13), pp. xv-xvi, 119; Irwin (1973, see note 39), p. 709.

46. Henry Colebrooke, "Translation of one of the Inscriptions on the Pillar at Dehlee, called the Lat of Feeroz Shah," *Asiatic Researches* 7 (1808): 175-182; F. Kielhorn, "Delhi Siwalik Pillar Inscriptions of Visaladeva; the Vikrama Year 1220," *The Indian Antiquary* 19 (1890): 215-219. For a complete copy of the two inscriptions see Nath (1978, as in note 7), Inscription 2. On the identity of Visala Deva and Vighararaja IV see Dasharatha Sharma, *Early Chauhan Dynasties*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1975), p. 67; Deyell (see note 38), p. 167.

47. F. Kielhorn, "Sanskrit Plays, Partly Preserved as Inscriptions at Ajmere," *The Indian Antiquary* (1891): 201-212; Har Bilas Sarda, *Ajmer: Historical and Descriptive* (Ajmir: Fine Art Printing Press, 1941), pp. 76-78.

48. The precise context from which the Firuzabad pillar was brought to Delhi in the fourteenth century is not entirely clear, even if we know that it came from somewhere near Topra: Page (1937, see note 43), p. 29. The *Sirat-i Firūz Shāhi* states that Visala Deva found the pillar standing in front a temple there (*ibid.*, p. 34), which led Cunningham to assume that it was inscribed by Visala Deva while still in situ: *idem.*, (see note 7), pp. 162, 167. The fact that when found the pillar was, like many Ashokan pillars, set upon a foundation stone might support the idea that it was in its original location: John Irwin, "'Aśoka' Pillars: A Reassessment of the Evidence—II: Structure," *The Burlington Magazine* 116 (1974): 719, fig. H. The replication of this arrangement in Firuzabad demonstrates, however, that the same system could be used in secondary contexts.

49. Basak (see note 5), p. 140.

50. Hultzsch (1925, see note 13), p. 156; Irwin (1981, see note 39), figs. 15b, 16b; Asher (see note 11), pp. 6-7. Prinsep (see note 19, p. 967) dismisses the interlineations on the Allahabad pillar as "merely a series of unconnected scribbles of various dates, cut in most likely by attendants on the pillar as a pretext for extracting a few rupees from visitors." Note that a later Persian inscription on the same pillar overlays part of an earlier text: O. P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 170. Similarly, the Persian inscription on the Fatehabad column overlies an earlier faded inscription in an unidentified Indic language: Shokoohy (1988, see note 13), pp. 17-18.



Figure 11. Detail of Ashokan and Chauhan inscriptions on the Firuzabad pillar.

act of reinscribing or re-erecting the pillars was intended as a synecdochal appropriation of the valorized pasts to which various antecedent texts bore witness.⁵¹

51. Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 249–250. Conversely, an ascendant power might seek to assert its dominance by rejecting the era in common use, as when the Chalukya raja Vikramaditya VI abolished the Saka era and began using his own Chalukya one: K. P. Jayaswal & R. D. Banerji, “The Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharavela,” *Epigraphia Indica* 20 (1929–1930): 75. On the relationship between calendars and conquest and power see Alfred Gell, *The Anthropology*

This self-consciousness with regard to script, inscriptions, and reinscriptions contrasts with most instances of reuse in the sultanate period, where (with one exception—fig. 7) there is a noticeable absence of Arabic or Persian inscriptions.⁵² This is surprising, since

of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images (Oxford & Providence: Berg, 1992), pp. 312–313.

52. The earlier exception is the pillar at Fatehabad (fig. 7), which is inscribed with a thirty-six-line Persian biographical genealogy of Firuz Shah Tughluq. In a rare coincidence between epigraphic content and

the pre-Islamic inscriptions on the pillars reused in the fourteenth century were noticed, remarked on, and (where possible) translated by contemporaries, as we shall see shortly. While it is difficult to account for the apparent reticence to inscribe the columns reused in sultanate monuments, the difference between epigraphic and anepigraphic phases of reuse might conceivably reflect different conceptions of time. If the careful juxtaposition of inscriptions attesting to phases of use and reuse evokes the cyclical and repetitious nature of historical time in preconquest traditions, then perhaps the later reluctance to inscribe these ancient artifacts served to assert the status of Islam as the end of the line rather than another in a series.⁵³

Despite this seeming reluctance to inscribe the pillars that came to grace the monuments of the Delhi sultans, it is clear that some of them had previously been transported around the north of the subcontinent over the course of a millennium or more. During this time they were erected and re-erected, inscribed and reinscribed by rulers of different dynasties and different

geographic location, many of the events that facilitated Firuz Shah's rise to power discussed in the inscription took place in this very area: Shokoohy (1988, see note 13), pp. 17–18. The Jaunpur pillar bears the foundation text of a mosque built in 761/1360, but this pillar may not be antique: McKibben (see note 13), p. 110. For the inscription of Jahangir's titles and lineage on the Allahabad pillar see Asher (note 11), p. 4.

53. Like their Indian equivalents, the various models of medieval Persianate historiography emphasize recurring patterns in human history: Julie Scott Meisami, "The Past in the Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 253, 261, 270–271; idem., *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 283–285; Gerhard Böwering, "Ideas of Time in Persian Mysticism" in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian & Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 179. A major difference, however, is the fact that, in Persianate historiography, such patterns occur within a history that proceeds "from a finite beginning—the Creation—to a preordained end": Meisami (1999), p. 285. Historical accounts of the pre-Islamic past in medieval Persian chronicles "come to full closure," unlike their Islamic counterparts: Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Contested Memories: Narrative Structures and Allegorical Meanings of Iran's Pre-Islamic History," *Iranian Studies* 29, nos. 1–2 (1996): 152, 154–155. See also John Irwin's interesting suggestion that the Qutb Minar and the iron pillar in the Delhi mosque represent different facets of time, "one mytho-historical, the other actual": Irwin (1987, see note 21), p. 142. For a European parallel, see Ottonian reuse of pagan and early Christian artifacts to reflect the concept of a *culminatio*, "the Ottonian fulfillment of the concept of a cumulative and culminating Christian history": Irene H. Forsyth, "Art with History: The Role of Spolia in the Cumulative Work of Art," in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. Christopher Moss & Katherine Kiefer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 158.

faiths. That this fact has been overlooked is largely due to the neglect of (or selective quotation from) the inscriptions on these remarkable artifacts within an academic tradition partitioned in ways that make it difficult to deal diachronically with objects crossing rather arbitrarily defined cultural or taxonomic boundaries.⁵⁴ Yet its importance for understanding the reuse of such artifacts by Indo-Islamic sultans can hardly be overstated. The cumulative weight of the evidence discussed above suggests that the ritual practices of medieval north Indian kings encompassed not only the erection of commemorative pillars but also the appropriation of those erected by royal predecessors. Based on the evidence of the Firuzabad pillar, we can be certain that the Chauhan rulers of Delhi were reusing antique pillars less than three decades before the Ghurid conquest of the city. Moreover, in addition to epigraphic evidence for the reuse of antique pillars in the preconquest period, medieval inscriptions also attest to the looting and destruction of the victory pillars erected by contemporary rivals.⁵⁵ The reuse of such pillars, whether those of a contemporary or a long-dead predecessor, was thus an intrinsic part of the ritual practices of medieval South Asian kings.

Seen in this light, Iltutmish's re-erection of the iron pillar in the Friday Mosque of Delhi has little to do with cultural rupture and everything to do with cultural continuity. This was no mere appropriation of spolia designed to suggest a *symbolic* continuity with pre-Muslim kingship, but the *actual* continuation of a practice associated with medieval Indian kings. The gesture may have been intended to commemorate the victories of the Ghurids and their successors, but it did

54. Thus while Prakrit scholars have focused on the Ashokan inscription, Sanskritists have tended to highlight Gupta and later texts, while Islamicists have dealt with both as anomalies, whose presence in a mosque could be best explained by falling back on the standard explanation of trophy value. William McKibben, for example, in an extensive account of the pillars reused in sultanate architecture does not discuss the content of the pre-Islamic inscriptions. While he mentions some of the inscriptions on the Firuzabad pillar in passing (see note 13, p. 117, n. 39), he omits any reference to the crucial inscription of Visala Deva.

55. For the looting of a victory pillar see the inscription of the Pallava king Vijaya-Nandivarman III recording his seizure of the pillar that stood at the center of Vatapi (modern Badami), the capital of his defeated Chalukya rival: Rao Sahib H. Krishna Sastri, *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 2 (Madras: Government Press, 1916), p. 511. See also the destruction of the twin victory pillars (*rapastambhas*) erected by the Rashtrakuta raja Kaka or Kakara III by the western Chalukyan ruler Taila II in the tenth century: Fleet (1886, see note 5), pp. 255, 257; Vogel (see note 7), pp. 88, 90–91.

so in a language and idiom adopted directly from indigenous Indian rulers. If one sees in the re-erection of the iron pillar in Delhi a triumphal rejection of the pre-Islamic traditions of India, one is therefore left with the need to explain why this particular royal tradition was embraced so enthusiastically by the Delhi sultans. Even the association with a mosque finds parallels in the erection (and re-erection) of such pillars in front of preconquest temples, however different their form and function; in the case of the Firuzabad pillar, its previous association with a Chauhan temple was familiar to those who reused it. The relocation of such pillars within or near mosques may have been represented as an Islamicization in contemporary textual rhetoric, but it was clearly a practice adopted from preconquest (and mostly Hindu) kings.⁵⁶

The peregrinations and tribulations of the antique pillars bear comparison with those of the icons and insignia that were ritually appropriated and reappropriated by medieval Indian rulers.⁵⁷ The meaning of these objects was directly related to their possession of a history, to the existence of a genealogy memorialized in contemporary narratives (both oral and textual), or even inscribed upon the objects themselves and the buildings that housed them.⁵⁸ Such relics were inalienable by virtue of an indexical relationship with kingship and their consequent possession of the power to define the historical identity of those who deployed them. Possessing the ability to "attract new meanings, fictitious memories, altered genealogies, and imagined ancestors," inalienable objects are ideally suited to confer legitimacy on those associated with them.⁵⁹

The potential for legitimation inherent in these inalienable fragments of antiquity was obvious to the Muslim rulers that reused them, for the *Tārīkh-i Firūz*

Shāhī tells us that in setting up the iron pillar, Iltutmish, like every great king, wanted to establish a lasting memorial to his power.⁶⁰ Although it has been suggested that this entailed a shift in emphasis in the meaning of these antique columns, "from an exclusively cosmological role to one that encompassed ideas of kingship and legitimacy,"⁶¹ the neglected epigraphic evidence discussed above suggests that Iltutmish was following a precedent rather than establishing one, even if subsequent Islamicate historiography saw otherwise.

The association of the pillars with earlier Indian kings (historical and mythical) was not only stressed in medieval Persian sources,⁶² but in some cases was literally legible. A keen interest in the original cultural context of the reused pillars is suggested by attempts to decipher the inscriptions on the pillars reused in the fourteenth century by Firuz Shah Tughluq, an interest in antique epigraphy that recalls the response of earlier Persian rulers to the relics of the pre-Islamic past.⁶³ Sanskrit inscriptions were evidently read with a high degree of accuracy, for the *Sīrat-i Firūz Shāhī*, the Persian text that records the removal of the Firuzabad pillar, reports quite correctly that the writing on the

60. 'Afif (see note 12), p. 314; Elliott & Dowson (see note 13), vol. 3, p. 353.

61. McKibben (see note 13), p. 113. See also Brand (as in note 14, p. 219), where the use of "captured pillars" in mosques is said to have been a concept developed by the early sultans of Delhi.

62. In addition to the historical kings, a widespread popular tradition identified the pillars with Bhīm, one of the legendary Pandava brothers who once ruled India. The pillars appropriated by Firuz Shah are said to have been the walking stick of Bhīm: Elliott and Dowson (see note 13), vol. 3, p. 350. The Allahabad pillar is similarly identified, as are Ashokan pillars in Bihar and the Nepalese Tarai, and a *stambha* erected at Badoh in Madhya Pradesh in the ninth century: Burt (see note 39), p. 106; F. Kielhorn, "Pathari Pillar Inscription of Parabala; [Vikrama-Samvat 917]," *Epigraphia Indica* 9 (107–108): 248; Hultzsch (1925, see note 13), pp. xviii, xxiii; Kejariwal (see note 50), p. 170; Michael D. Willis, *Temples of Gopaksetra* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), p. 75. While Mughal sources preserved the memory that the *lat* reused in Firuzabad was once associated with Hindu rajās (Colebrooke [see note 46], p. 177; Prinsep [see note 13], p. 566), seventeenth-century popular opinion had it that the pillars at Allahabad and Delhi were erected by Alexander the Great: Cunningham (1972, see note 7), pp. 163–164; Foster (see note 44), pp. 177, 248. On the legends that accumulated around the Delhi pillar see Vogel (as in note 7).

63. See, for example, the interest of the Buyid ruler 'Adud al-Dawla in the Pahlavi inscriptions at Persepolis, where he had two Arabic inscriptions carved to commemorate his visit in 344/955. His son, Baha' al-Dawla, later commemorated his own visit in 392/1001–1002 with an inscription located opposite a Pahlavi text: Sheila S. Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), Nos. 6–7, 18, pp. 32–35, 60–62, figs. 10–12.

56. Page (see note 43), p. 34. See also notes 66 and 92. On the association with temples see Irwin (1987, see note 21), p. 134; idem., "Islam and the Cosmic Pillar," *South Asian Archaeology* (London, 1985) p. 397, fig. 3.

57. Richard H. Davis, "Trophies of War: The Case of the Chalukya Intruder," in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, ed. Catherine B. Asher & Thomas R. Metcalf (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1994), pp. 162–174. See also D. Dayalan, "The Role of War-Trophies in Cultural Contact," *Tamil Civilisation* 3, nos. 2–3 (1985): 134–137.

58. See, for example, the golden image that came to rest in the Lakshmana Temple at Khajuraho after twice being looted and once given as a gift, facts recorded in the foundation inscription of the temple that housed it: F. Kielhorn, "Inscriptions from Khajuraho," *Epigraphia Indica* 1 (1888–1891): 134; Richard H. Davis, "Indian Art Objects as Loot," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (1993): 29.

59. Annette B. Weiner, "Inalienable Wealth," *American Ethnologist* 12 (1985): 224.

column commemorates its reinscription by prince Visala Deva two centuries earlier, and notes its previous association with a temple.⁶⁴ By contrast, the Prakrit inscriptions on the Firuzabad pillar remained elusive, connoting a mythologized antiquity. Even here the inscriptions were integral to the perceived meaning of the pillars, since monumental texts are capable of evoking power not only through their content, but also "through their location in space and the way they look."⁶⁵ That the only two pillars to be inscribed when reused in an Islamicate context (at Fatehabad [fig. 7] and Allahabad) were inscribed with genealogical texts very similar in content and nature to those that Gupta and Chauhan rajas had earlier carved on similar pillars is strong evidence for a continued association between reuse, kingship, and legitimacy.⁶⁶

The act of epigraphic translation prefigured a physical *translatio* that was no less relevant to the issue of legitimacy, for it was not only the pillars that were palimpsests, but also the acts and practices associated with them. The very ability to move and re-erect these extraordinary relics of the Indian past echoed the original act of creation, conveying significant messages about patronage and power in a manner determined by royal precedent. Such heroic endeavors were memorialized in contemporary Persian texts, which prefigure European treatises on similar topics by several centuries.⁶⁷ The reported failure of earlier kings to move

the pillars transported by Firuz Shah Tughluq, and the demise of later attempts to repeat such feats only serve to underline the extraordinary skills needed to move the pillars, which could weigh up to thirty tons or more.⁶⁸

The attempt to foster a sense of legitimacy by forging an association with a distinguished political lineage, as with the glories of a real or imagined past, was a common concern of those engaged in the business of state formation in medieval Iran and South Asia.⁶⁹ In both realms, the construction of genealogical histories relating the present to the glories of the past finds a visual counterpart in the patronage of archaizing art and architecture, or the reuse, recontextualization, and reworking of carefully selected relics of the past.⁷⁰

64. 'Afif (see note 12), p. 312; Elliott & Dowson (see note 13), vol. 3, p. 352; Page (see note 43), p. 34. On the translation of pre-Islamic inscriptions in Islamic histories see Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 123–126.

65. Alan K. Bowman & Greg Woolf, *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 8. Although written of classical antiquity, this was equally true of many pre-modern societies. In medieval China, the presence of archaic inscriptions added to the value of antique bronzes, even when neither read nor legible: Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things, Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). As Catherine Asher notes of the inscriptions on the Allahabad pillar, even though they were probably not accessible to early seventeenth-century viewers "they clearly were recognized as the product of an ancient Indian past": Asher (see note 11), p. 7.

66. Ibid., pp. 7–8. See also the suggestion that Firuz Shah Tughluq's decision to inscribe his memoirs on the Jamī' Masjid of Firuzabad was inspired (in a general sense) by Ashoka's edict on the adjacent pillar, even if illegible: K. A. Nizami, "The Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi as a Medieval Inscription," in *Proceedings of Seminar on Medieval Inscriptions (6–8th February 1970)* (Aligarh: Centre of Advanced Study, Aligarh Muslim University, 1974), p. 30.

67. Firuz Shah Tughluq's endeavors are memorialized in a long section of 'Afif's *Ta'rikh-i Firūz Shāhī* and in the anonymous *Sirat-i Firūz Shāhī*: 'Afif (see note 12), pp. 308–314; Page (see note 43), pp.

33–42; Elliott & Dowson (see note 13), pp. 350–353. For similar treatises on moving antique columns and obelisks in early modern Europe, see Domenico Fontana, *Della Transportatione dell'Obelisco Vaticano* (Rome, 1596); Francesco Bianchini, *Considerazioni teoriche e pratiche intorno all trasporto della Colonna d'Antonino Pio collocata in Monte Citorio* (Rome: Stamperia della Reverenda Camera Apostolica, 1704).

68. The iron pillar in Delhi reportedly weighs over six tons, while the Ashokan stone pillars such as that moved to Firuzabad can weigh over thirty tons: Smith (see note 7), p. 4; Trivedi (see note 12), p. 249; Irwin (1981, see note 39), p. 338. The *Sirat-i Firūz Shāhī* reports that the fifty years before Firuz Shah's successful appropriation of the Topi pillar (that now in Firuzabad), three Chingizid and Chaghatai rulers had tried unsuccessfully to move it: Page (see note 43), p. 34. The destruction of the iron pillar of Dhar is attributed to the attempt by Sultan Bahadur (r. 1526–1537) to carry it off to Gujarat. Jahangir late intended to carry the largest fragment to Agra to serve as a lamp-stand but this was never carried out: Asher (see note 11), p. 8; Thackston (see note 8), p. 235. See also Garth Fowden's remarks on the political kudos accruing to Late Antique emperors from the ability to move apparently immovable Egyptian obelisks to Constantinople and Rome: Garth Fowden, "Obelisks Between Polytheists and Christians: Julian, EP.59," in *Polyphonia Byzantina: Studies in Honour of Willem J. Aert*, ed. Hero Hokwerda, Edmé R. Smits, & Marinis M. Woesthuis (Groningen, 1993), p. 37. For a good discussion of the logistics involved in moving antique obelisks in early modern Europe see Dübner (as in note 35).

69. "The role of history in linking present rulers with past ones (whether with those of ancient Iran or with the caliphate) and thereby legitimizing the transfer of power to the current incumbents is clearly crucial": Meisami (1993, see note 53), p. 250. See also Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic and the Search for Dynastic Connections with the Past," *Iran* 11 (1973): 51–6. For the importance of genealogies (mythological and otherwise) in medieval Indian kingship see V. Raghavan, "Variety and Integration in the Pattern of Indian Culture," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1956): 499; R. C. Majumdar, "Ideas of History in Sanskrit Literature," in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C. H. Philips, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 24.

70. See the revival of Chola architectural styles by the Vijayanagara rulers of southern India, which has been read as a "visual statement of appropriation and incorporation" of the former territories of the earlier

Occasionally the textual and artifactual coincided in the articulation of genealogical claims, as when Mughal emperors reinscribed royal artifacts bearing the accumulated names of illustrious predecessors,⁷¹ or when epic passages from the *Shāh-nāma*, the Iranian book of kings, were quoted on the walls of cities and palaces, in an endeavor "to legitimize the present through identification with the past."⁷² The latter case is particularly interesting, evidencing as it does the ability of the mythologized pre-Islamic past to serve as an instrument of legitimation through the operation of a type of *isnād* paradigm. Just as the appeal to authority in contemporary Persianate histories was "linked to the appropriation of prior authoritative narratives,"⁷³ the epic past enshrined in texts such as the *Shāh-nāma* could be appropriated by Muslim rulers seeking to construct a genealogy by means of which the present

could be "instantly incorporated into a victorious tradition."⁷⁴

Like the Mirror for Princes literature of the eleventh and twelfth century, the *Shāh-nāma*, reportedly inspired by an ancient Indian king's patronage of historical and allegorical texts,⁷⁵ provided a paradigm for a reframing of the pre-Islamic kingly past within an Islamicate matrix that emphasized the shared experience of kingship.⁷⁶ The use of past precedent to frame the contemporary encounter with India can be seen in the commissioning of the *Shāhrīyār-nāma* by the Ghaznavid sultan Mas'ud III (r. 1099–1115), who was celebrated in an epic poem inscribed on the walls of his palace, giving the genealogy of the Ghaznavid sultans in the meter of the *Shāh-nāma*.⁷⁷ The *Shāhrīyār-nāma* details the Indian exploits of the great-grandson of Rustam, and was clearly intended to cast Mas'ud's own Indian campaigns in an epic light. Slightly later, the Ghurid overlords of Ilutmish devised a lineage that related themselves both to the kings of pre-Islamic Iran and to the Arabic-Islamic past embodied in the caliphate, invoking (like many Persian kings before and after them) various material relics of that past to bolster their claims to a noble lineage.⁷⁸ When it came to royal rhetoric appropriated

Chola empire: George Michell, "Revivalism as the Imperial Mode: Religious Architecture During the Vijayanagara Period," in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, ed. Catherine B. Asher & Thomas R. Metcalf (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1994), pp. 192–193. This took place several hundred miles from where its sources of inspiration stood, offering a further parallel for the relocation of ancient monuments discussed above. The phenomenon continued until the early modern period in South India: Mary Beth Coffman Heston, "Images from the Past, Vision of the Future: The Art of Marttanda Varma," in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, *ibid.*, pp. 201, 204. A more literal expression of the same impulse reveals itself in the reuse of objects and architectural fragments associated with earlier dynasties: Joanna Williams, "A Recut Aśokan Capital and the Gupta Attitude Towards the Past," *Artibus Asiae* 35 (1973): 225–240. In North India, Rajput and Sikh chiefs who challenged centralized authority as Mughal power waned sometimes carried off fragments of Mughal monuments for reuse in their own buildings: Cunningham (1972, see note 7), p. 223; Janice Leoshko, "Mausoleum for an Empress," in *Romance of the Taj Mahal* (Los Angeles & London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), p. 84.

71. Sheila S. Blair, "Timurid Signs of Sovereignty," *Oriente Moderno* 76, no. 2 (1996): 571–572. There are, of course, numerous instances of the phenomenon from Late Antique and medieval Europe: Kim Bowes, "Ivory Lists: Diptychs, Christian Appropriation and Polemics of Time in Late Antiquity," *Art History* 24, no. 3 (2001): 352.

72. Sheila S. Blair, "The Ilkhanid Palace," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 243–244; Alessio Bombaci, *The Kūfic Inscription in Persian Verses in the Court of the Royal Palace of Mas'ud III at Ghazni* (Rome: IsMEO, 1966), p. 40.

73. Meisami (1999, see note 53), pp. 287–288. See especially the relationship between the translation of preexisting narratives in texts such as the *Shāh-nāma* and the *translatio imperii* that led to the triumph of Persianate political culture over its Arabizing predecessor in Iran. For the role of citation in Arabic and Persian histories of the Ghaznavid period see *ibid.*, pp. 291–292; Roberto Rubinacci, "Le citazioni poetiche nell'Al-Ta'riḥ al-Yamīnī di Abū Naṣr al-'Utbi," in A Francesco Gabrieli, *Studi Orientalistici offerti nel sessantesimo compleanno dai suoi colleghi e discepoli* (Rome: Dott. Giovanni Bardi, 1964), pp. 263–273; Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "The Poetical

Citations in Baihaqī's *Ta'riḥ-i Mas'ūdī*," in *XX. Deutscher Orientalistentag vom 3. bis 8. Oktober 1977 in Erlangen*, ed. Wolfgang Voigt (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1980). On the relationship between literary citation and other forms of cultural production in medieval Europe, see Cutler (see note 4), p. 1064; Umberto Eco, "Riflessioni sulle tecniche di citazione nel medioevo," in *Ideologie e Pratiche del Reimpiego nell'Alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro, 1999), *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 46, vol. 1, pp. 461–484.

74. Linda Seidel, "Images of the Crusades in Western Art: Models as Metaphors," in *The Meeting of Two Worlds, Cultural Exchange Between East and West During the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1986), p. 386.

75. Vladimir Minorsky, "The Older Preface to the *Shāh-Nāma*," in *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida* (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1956), vol. 2, p. 167. On the impact of the text on Persianate historiography in India see *ibid.*, p. 167; M. Athar Ali "Ta'riḥ. 4. In Muslim India," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), p. 295.

76. See Meisami (1999, as in note 53), pp. 285–286 on the importance of the "great man" paradigm of Persian historiography. Bosworth (see note 73, p. 51) notes, however, the absence of quotations from the *Shāh-nāma* in Baihaqī's history of the deeds of the Ghaznavids in India. On the use of quotations from the *Shāh-nāma* in an Anatolian Seljuq Mirror for Princes, see Julie Scott Meisumi, "The *Shāh-nāma* as a Mirror for Princes: A Study in Reception" in *Pand-o Sokhan*, eds. Christophe Balaý, Clair Kappler, and Živa Vesel (Teheran: Institut français de recherche en Iran, 1995), pp. 265–273.

77. Bombaci (see note 72), pp. 40–42.

78. Bosworth (see note 69), pp. 54–55.

for genealogical purposes, cultural boundaries were relatively fluid. Thus, Indo-Muslim sultans might claim descent from the Pandavas (to whom many of the antique pillars were attributed), while later Indo-Persian historians imagine the heroes of the *Shāh-nāma* and Indian epics such as the *Rāmāyana* as contemporaries whose colorful trajectories sometimes intersected.⁷⁹

The paradigmatic role of the pre-Islamic past in conferring legitimacy on *parvenu* Persianate dynasts offers one potential model for the co-option of the Indian past and its material traces by Ilutimish and the newly emergent Delhi sultanate. Contemporary evidence for the role of material remains within such a paradigm may be found in Seljuq Anatolia, geographically remote from sultanate India but culturally contiguous by virtue of its shared Persianate Turkic cultural milieu. Seljuq participation in the pre-Islamic past of Anatolia was orchestrated by means of spolia, historical and mythological tales, and textual quotation. Scott Redford notes of the architectural program undertaken at Sinop after its conquest in 1214 that: "... Sultan Izzedin Keykavus seems to have placed himself in a mythic context, keeping company with the kings of yore, whether Caesar or Khusraw."⁸⁰ The walls of Konya erected by Alaeddin Keykubad in 1219–1221 incorporated classical and Byzantine spolia along with epigraphy, which included both religious texts and quotations from the *Shāh-nāma*. The latter functioned as a vector of appropriation that extended the mythic age of pre-Islamic Iran to Anatolia and permitted the assimilation of a pre-Islamic past instantiated in the material remains of cultures that, strictly speaking, lay outside the cultural ambit of the text.

Given this extrapolation from the mythologized past of pre-Islamic Iran to the instantiated past of pre-Islamic Anatolia, the pre-Islamic pillars reused in sultanate Delhi might be considered the material correlates of a citational practice encountered in contemporary Persianate historiography and occasionally reflected in princely practice. Although no equivalent for the *stambhas* and *lats* of India existed in Iran, the evidence

from contemporary Anatolia suggests that they were potentially assimilable as a variant of the known.⁸¹ The common use of the past in the self-representations of both Persianate rulers and their Rajput equivalents may have facilitated the process of assimilation, for later European encounters with India attest the fact that "symbolic representations of power could be 'translated' on the basis of cross-cultural analogy."⁸² Both undertakings bring to mind Walter Benjamin's classic formulation of the translator's art as "a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness" of its object.⁸³ Such pillars may even have been familiar from preexisting descriptions of the region, for a tale preserved in the eleventh-century Egyptian compendium, the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf*, refers to a mysterious iron pillar encountered during an earlier phase of Islamic conquest. According to the tale, Hisham b. 'Amr al-Taghlibi, the 'Abbasid governor of Sind, was confronted with an iron pillar seventy cubits long in "Kandahar" (probably the region of Gandhara in northeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan) during an attempt to conquer India in 768. The governor was told that the column was a victory monument erected by Tubba', the celebrated pre-Islamic ruler of Yemen, and fashioned from the weapons used by his Persian allies in gaining the victory that it commemorated.⁸⁴ The recasting of weapons to produce an indexical relationship between victory monuments and the events that they commemorate is relatively common, and similar claims made for medieval iron columns that survive in India may be relevant to the ways in which the iron column in Delhi was perceived.⁸⁵ Moreover, the

81. See, however, the undated *minārs* in the area around Kabul: Warwick Ball, "The so-called 'minars' of Kabul," *Studia Iranica* 13 (1988): 117–127. On the issue of equivalence see note 22 above.

82. Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance. South India Through European Eyes, 1250–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 30.

83. Walter Benjamin, [Harry Zohn, tr.], *Illuminations* (London: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 75.

84. Ghāda al-Ḥijjāwī al-Qaddūmī, *Book of Gifts and Rarities, Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 180–181. The same story is repeated with characteristic scepticism by al-Biruni, writing at the Ghaznavid court: Hakim Mohammad Said (tr.), *Al-Beruni's Book on Mineralogy: The Book Most Comprehensive in Knowledge on Precious Stones* (Islamabad: Pakistan Hijra Council, 1410/1989), p. 220. On Tubba' see A. F. L. Beeston, "Tubba'," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), pp. 575–576.

85. The iron pillar on Mount Abu is said to have been cast from the arms of a fleeing Muslim army: Cousens (see note 5), p. 207. For a modern parallel see the inclusion of captured Iranian helmets in Saddam Hussain's Victory Arch in Baghdad, a monument fashioned

79. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims (8th to 14th Century)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1998), p. 84; Briggs, (see note 13), pp. liii–lxiii.

80. Scott Redford, "The Seljuqs of Rum and the Antique," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 154; idem., "Words, Books, and Buildings in Seljuk Anatolia," in *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman Middle East and the Balkans: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz*, ed. Karl Barbir & Bakri Tezcan (forthcoming). I am grateful to Scott Redford for providing me with a copy of his unpublished paper.

association of the Kandahar column with a known figure from pre-Islamic Arabia sets the 'Abbasid campaign of conquest in an epic context, while demonstrating how familiar figures of antiquity could be associated with the obscure relics of Indian antiquity. In similar fashion, the pillars reused by Firuz Shah Tughluq came to be seen as relics from the time of Alexander the Great.⁸⁶ As a curiosity that hinted at a wondrous technological capacity, the iron pillar may have evoked legends concerning mythical kings such as Alexander and Solomon, whose marvelous works were represented both textually and visually in medieval Persianate culture.⁸⁷

Such identifications suggest that what was at stake in the appropriation of the antique pillars was neither the assimilation of a living adversary nor a past characterized by a single antecedent regime, but the palimpsest of cumulative heroic pasts. It is this that distinguishes the re-erection of the pillar in the Delhi mosque from the contemporary display of recently acquired Indian loot in the same monument.⁸⁸ The commemorative value of the iron column lay not in its specific associations with the historical kings of India, but in its ability to represent "the broader notion of Indian kingship, regardless of whether specific names or deeds were known."⁸⁹ As "visual substitutes" for history, inalienable objects such as insignia, regalia, or royal pillars of fame are ideally suited to "bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles, or mythological events become an intrinsic part of a person's identity."⁹⁰ The construction of identity is directly relevant to the re-erection of antique pillars by the Delhi sultans, for as William McKibben notes:

Through the physical incorporation of the lat from its antique site to the new Islamic capital, the empires of pre-Islamic India (Dār al-Ḥarb) were symbolically incorporated into the Dār al-Islām.⁹¹

from melted down Iranian weapons: Samir al-Khalil, *The Monument: Art, Vulgarly and Responsibility in Iraq* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1991), p. 8.

86. See note 62.

87. See, for example, a fourteenth-century representation of the metal wall built by Alexander from the Great Mongol *Shāh-nāma*: Glenn D. Lowry, *A Jeweller's Eye, Islamic Arts of the Book from the Vever Collection* (Seattle and London: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery & The University of Washington Press, 1988), No. 12, pp. 86–87.

88. For a detailed discussion of Islamicate looting practices in South Asia during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries see Flood (as in note 26), chapter 3.

89. McKibben (see note 13), pp. 113–114.

90. Weiner (see note 59), p. 210.

91. McKibben (see note 13), p. 114.

The translation of the Indian past into the sultanate present may have been read as a retrospective Islamicization according to existing paradigms developed in relation to other pre-Islamic pasts, but the manner in which this was achieved reveals a dependence on indigenous Indian models of legitimation.⁹² If the iron pillar itself was a fragment of the distant mythic past, the reuse of similar objects during the more recent Chauhan past was conceivably within living memory when Iltutmish incorporated it into the Delhi mosque in the early thirteenth century. The potential for legitimation resided not just in the pillar itself, therefore, but in the act of translating it, which belonged in the normative realm of Indian kingly self-representation.

The stability of certain kinds of ritualized activity through periods of political change often serves to foster a sense of continuity,⁹³ and the benefits of conforming to type were no doubt obvious to the Ghurid conquerors of India and their *parvenu* successors such as Iltutmish. As McKibben notes perceptively, "recognition of the pre-Islamic Indian past (*jāhiliyya*) as an authoritative basis for rule and linkage to an uninterrupted line of Indian sovereigns served to legitimize the sultan's claim to power in a country where the Muslim population remained a minority."⁹⁴ Despite the undoubted political

92. The later "Islamicization" of the Firuzabad pillar through its removal from a temple and reuse as a *minār* of a mosque is celebrated in the *Sīrat-i Firūz Shāhī*: Page (see note 43), p. 34. However, not all the pillars reused by Firuz Shah were set up in mosques, and it is not clear how widespread such attitudes regarding the Islamicization of pre-Islamic relics were, or if one can project them back into the early thirteenth century. Moreover, as noted above, even the secondary association with religious architecture has earlier Indian precedents.

93. Richard Bradley, "Ritual, Time and History," *World Archaeology* 23, no. 2 (1991): 211. For further examples of continuity with pre-conquest traditions in the ritual practices of Ghurid and sultanate rulers, see Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identity in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin & Bruce Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), p. 269; Flood (as in note 26). Arjun Appadurai's work on the different historical narratives that have accumulated around a single structure, a Sri Vaishnava temple in Madras, highlights how the maintenance of a set of norms relating to the authority, continuity, and interdependence of different narratives concerning the past permitted "an orderly symbolic negotiation between 'ritual' pasts and the contingencies of the present." The operation of such norms served to preserve cultural continuity in the face of changes, even those wrought by the advent of colonial rule: Arjun Appadurai, "The Past as a Scarce Resource," *Man* n.s.16 (1981): 217–218.

94. McKibben (see note 13), pp. 113–114. Despite assertions that "unbelievers, especially profane idolaters" would not have been permitted entry to the Delhi mosque (Kumar, see note 12, pp. 157–158), we have little evidence for the audiences that gestures such

changes that followed in the wake of the Ghurid conquest of India, the observance of certain established norms (the maintenance of existing coin types, for example) shows a keen awareness of the benefits of projecting authority in a manner congruent with past precedents, wherever possible or useful.

Through the manipulation of inalienable objects, Iltutmish and his successors encompassed and incorporated an Indian history within which they were in their turn accommodated. That the process of articulating legitimate sovereignty was a bilateral one is clear from the well-known Palam inscription, written in 1276, eight decades after the conquest of Delhi. Enumerating the dynastic changes in the region during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, the author of the Sanskrit text writes:

The land of Haryānaka was first enjoyed by the Tomaras and then by the Chauhānas. It is now ruled by the Śaka kings (i.e. the sultans). First came Sāhabadīna (i.e. Shihab al-Din Ghuri), then Khudavadīna (i.e. Qutb al-Din Aybak), master of the earth, Samusdīna (i.e. Shams al-Din Iltutmish), then Pherujsāhi (i.e. Firuz Shah), lord of the earth.⁹⁵

This seamless integration of Ghurid and early sultanate rulers into South Asian history as just the latest in a long line of conquering monarchs betrays little sense of the religious, political, and cultural rupture so often highlighted by historians and art historians alike. Such assimilation may be a product of a pragmatic urge to legitimize effective political authority,⁹⁶ but it is surely just as much a product of the ability of early Indo-Islamic sultans to engage with existing traditions, to project their authority in the expected manner. In part at least, the incorporation of the Delhi sultans into indigenous Indian histories and royal genealogies reflects the successful manipulation of semiotically charged artifacts whose power resided in the fact that they were already possessed of a distinguished history.

96. Eaton (see note 93), p. 270.

as the re-erection of the iron pillar addressed. See, however, Catherine Asher's comments on the likelihood that some of those dwelling in early sultanate Delhi (and presumably using its Friday Mosque) were non-caste Hindu converts to Islam: Catherine B. Asher, "Delhi Walled: Changing Boundaries," in *City Walls: The Urban Enceinte in Global Perspective*, ed. James D. Tracy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 255. In preconquest temples, the degree of access to the sanctuary was related to such factors as caste status: Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, "Le droit d'entrer dans les temples de śiva au XIe siècle," *Journal Asiatique*, 263 (1975): 103–117.

95. G. Yazdani, "The Inscriptions of the Turk Sultāns of Delhi," *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1913–1914): 4; Prasad (see note 22), pp. 3–11. As Yazdani comments (*ibid.*, p. 37), "the poet extols the greatness of the Mlécchha king in no less flattering terms than are used in the panegyrics of the Hindu period." See also Chattopadhyaya (as in note 79), pp. 48–54. For two other similar inscriptions from Delhi, one dated Samvat 1347 (A.D. 1291), the other Samvat 1384 (A.D. 1328), see Prasad (as in note 22), pp. 15–18, 27–30. The corollary to this is the inscription of the Ghurids and other "Muslim" conquerors into medieval lists of those vanquished by successful Indian rulers. The vanquished are incorporated into such lists by means of dynastic or ethnic appellations (such as *Turushka*), not on the basis of religious affiliation: Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 4 (1995): 692–722, especially p. 701. Similarly, it has been pointed out that the connotations of "Hindu" in pre-Mongol Persian literature "were primarily ethnic": Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (1992: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 24, 30–31.

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