

Conclusion

Heritage and Conflict

Medieval Indian Temple as Commodified Imaginary

The hegemony of heritage lies not in continuities and ruptures over time but rather in the will and means to control archaeological sites on the ground. The power to imagine these sites as linked to specific historical periods, while ignoring others, gives a variety of people the agency to curate their material in the present through praxis and for the future—either intentionally or not—via the residue left in stone. The premise of this book—that temples serve as catalysts for human interactions and that architecture can be culled for a wide variety of human experience beyond mere dynastic history—relies on our ability to move with agility forward and backward through diachronic time and ecologically and fluvially through multisectarian space. Sectarian, tribal, regal, and capitalist landscapes interwoven in this book demonstrate the intersectional arena that the once classical topic of “The Hindu Temple” or “The Indian Temple” has become.

Rupture abounds in the art historical records of the Ambikā temple in Jagat and the Śrī Ekliṅgjī temple in Kailāśpurī over the millennium of the *longue durée* history presented in these pages. Most striking is the hiatus between the Sisodia dynasty that rules Mewār today and the Guhila dynasty that arose in the wake of Pratihāra and Paramāra collapse in the second half of the tenth century. The ways in which the architecture of Upamāla and Mēdapāṭa served future generations of pilgrims, monastics, travelers, rulers, and many others, at times, built on Guhila history as a way of erasing rupture. On other occasions, nondynastic sites (such as the Ambikā temple in Jagat) were made dynastic only subsequently, at times centuries after their moment of origin, when inscriptional records that postdated temples’ construction incorporated these magnificent stone structures into new histories over time. The fifteenth century is the period when a golden era of Mewāri

glory began to be constructed in encyclopedic performances of aesthetics typical of the period across the false Hindu/Muslim divide, which was constructed primarily in the colonial era hundreds of years later. Whether we imagine the *Nimāt Nāmā* cookbook in Malwa, the musical treatises in Mewār, or the Kirtistambha tower that encapsulates an entire regal worldview labeled in stone, self-fashioning and self-conscious reification of royal aspiration through direct architectural quotation flourished in this century, whereas by the sixteenth century more of the Rājput glory as we know it from nationalist discourses in the present was circulating in the form of texts about Rani Padmini and illustrated Mughal royal sagas such as the *Akbar Nāmā*.

Despite significant evidence of major historical fissures, such as the Guhila-Sisodia gaps in historical continuity, or the lack of tenth-century Guhila dynastic inscriptions at many of the Mēdapāṭa temples in question, striking similarities between current practices and ancient depictions of ritual on temple walls, as well as in period texts, suggest that ethnohistories of South Asia have often remained unexplored compared to their popularity in Mesoamerican art histories. Far from a nationalist proof of unbroken lineages, though continuous kingship via named individuals certainly does survive in multiple inscriptional and textual records, ritual and the record in stone reveal that temples built right around the birthday of the most famous tantric scholar known to this day can yield new kinesthetic and philosophical information about tantra beyond what is increasingly available from known medieval texts in the original Sanskrit, as well as in English translation. For example, the relationship among myth, ritual, and iconography is quite striking at the Ambikā temple in Jagat, as well as at the Pippalāda Mātā temple in Unwās. These two goddess temples from the Mēdapāṭa cohort—one closer to the Banas River tract, the other closer to the southern Mahi River tract—demonstrate an incredible link between the goddesses Kṣēmaṅkarī and Cāmuṇḍā in temple programs during the third quarter of the tenth century in this small area of northwestern India. A continued emphasis on semantic and nonsemantic mantric worship across this region today suggests that even though Kṣēmaṅkarī is never mentioned in modern folk worship or canonical liturgies, her role as the personification of mantra itself remains fulfilled. Meanwhile, from an ethnohistorical perspective, the power of Bērujī and Cāmuṇḍā-ma all over the tribal Bhil territories creates a fascinating diachronic link between current tribal worship and affiliations, on the one hand, and the stone brāhmanical temples and tenth-century tantric texts, ritual, and iconography, on the other hand. Whereas stone may have once incorporated ritual into the brāhmanical fold, today it is tribal culture, such as the powerful worship of Mallar Mātā on the hill adjacent to the Ambikā temple that really unpacks these medieval tantric indexical traces of historical praxis.

Continuities are not limited to the particulars of mantra and tantra, myth and ritual, or stone iconography and the practice of ritual sacrifice. Liṅga worship—the

cornerstone of royal practice at the Śrī Ekliṅgī temple to this day—has left a very explicit record in stone all over South Asia, but in this region from the northern site of Khamnor, to the central site of Ahar, and the southern sites of Jagat, Āat, and Kalyanpur, specific forms of Pāsupata-Śaiva worship abound from the Gupta period onward. The prevalence of the four-faced liṅgaṃ with the fifth formless face upward, as well as the thousand-faced liṅga and the repetition of the 4 + 1 philosophical paradigm in every material from twenty-first-century clay at Ekliṅgī (see fig. 6.7) to tenth-century stone at Khamnor (see fig. 4.3), Bijoliā (see fig. 4.18), and Ahar (see fig. 5.6), serves as a reminder that the form of the liṅga may well reflect specific localized modes of worship. Whereas the pan-Indian worship of liṅga on yoni platforms found from Khajuraho to Tamil Nadu can also be found in the upper registers of the Ambikā temple in Jagat, as tenth-century worshippers lovingly pour offerings over a liṅgaṃ in a stone sculptural frieze (see fig. 6.2), nothing compares to the elaborate nine kilos of flour and other modern offerings I witnessed at the Śrī Ekliṅgī temple during Mahāśivrātri in 2002.

Nonetheless, textual records such as the *Cintra Praśāsti* from North India and the *Somaśambhupaddhati* from South India indicate similar sequences of pūjā in medieval times. Moreover, the specifically mid-tenth-century punctuation of the temple wall with auxiliary figures along the Banas and Mahi Rivers reveals a syncopated form of circumambulation that seems to mimic the sequential patterns of using mantras to awaken a deity in an icon or even one's own body. An eight-day pratiṣṭhā ceremony to install a new goddess icon in Jagat in May of 2002 revealed the continuities in mantric practice, despite a surprisingly weak reliance on pūjā paddhati prayer manuals. Similarly at Ekliṅgī, Pūjāriji Narendra Dashora spent weeks translating the Pūjā Paddhati with me so that I could understand how it functioned. This was a scholarly exercise, in a private home, in the afternoons, not a ritual initiation in a temple during pūjā. This generous gift of the study of mantra and paddhati together made possible the idea of the tripartite parallel between (1) the gait, cadence, and prosody of the temple wall; (2) the syncopated rhythm of circumambulation; and (3) the mantric sequence of animating a deity in stone or flesh. How fitting that the goddess Kṣēmaṅkarī, as the personification of mantra, still graces the lintel of some of these mid-tenth-century temples in Bāḍoli and Jagat to this day (see figs. 5.21 and 5.22).

Never before have temples and their deities been expected to fulfill so many functions for such diverse groups of people. The stone monuments of southern Rājāsthān have remained largely untouched for the large part of a millennium. Only toward the end of the twentieth century did a new trend begin to emerge. These archaeological sites in rural places are being destroyed by theft and disfigured by use, but to safeguard them against use is to take them back from the local populations who have recently claimed them. To preserve them as dead history would be to privilege these remains as art for the sake of the centralized

government, local and foreign scholars, the international art market, and tourists. To allow the sites to be used is to permit change, breaks with history, and the construction of past and future by local people in the present. These decisions to preserve or to permit change also play into the increasing political struggles between secular and religious groups both within India and on a global scale.

Many of the changes discussed in this book began in the late 1960s and escalated in the 1980s. These changes in conservation at sites in southern Rājasthan date to the era of jet travel.¹ The rise in alterations of ancient temples in villages parallels a rise in tourism in the 1980s and 1990s. Michael Meister has suggested that tax law is also responsible for this rise in reuse of archaeological sites for religious purposes.² The Finance Act of 1972 made tax deductible the “voluntary contributions received by a trust created wholly for charitable or religious purposes” on the condition that audits were provided to register trusts before July 1, 1973, or within one year of their creation.³ The Śrī Ekliṅgī Trust Declaration of 1973 makes explicit the distinction between private patronage of the temple by the royal family and public donations for charity made by devotees. Changes in tax law may account for some of the aesthetic symptoms of reuse found in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

By sheltering charitable trusts and public temples, temple renovation was encouraged. The Bombay Public Trusts Act of 1950 already privileged new construction over the preservation of antiquity. Less decisive is the Rājasthan Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Antiquities Rules, enacted on April 24, 1969, which prohibits interference with both preservation and practice. On the one hand, “any act which causes or is like[ly] to cause damage or injury to any part of the monument” is prohibited.⁴ On the other hand, actions that “violate any practice, usage or custom applicable to or observed in the monument” are also not allowed.⁵

The site manager’s handbook for World Heritage Sites reflects the same unresolved tension between archaeological authenticity and living communities found in the Jaipur Monuments Act of 1941 and the Rājasthan Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Antiquities Rules of 1968. Site managers are advised that “authenticity is of paramount importance to the guardians of world heritage. The only reconstruction found acceptable is in full keeping with the original with absolutely no conjecture.”⁶ Whereas this stipulation may avoid reconstructions, such as the somewhat fanciful walls (re)constructed on Incan foundations at Machu Picchu, it does not provide for a changing, evolving “original.”⁷ The Ambikā temple at Jagat and the Ekliṅgī temple complex are not uncontested “original” archaeological sites, available for display in the Museum of Modern Art.⁸ They exhibit their modernity through praxis as living monuments.

Whether or not their current incarnations are “original” is a moot point since Marxist definitions of taste suggest that authenticity may stem from use rather



FIGURE 8.1. Vermilion footprint, twenty-first-century *sindūr* on tenth-century quartzite stone, Ambikā temple, Jagat. © Deborah Stein.

than from stagnant constructions of archaeological history made to please tourists at the expense of the present. What the Jaipur Monument Preservation Act of 1941; the Bombay Public Trusts Act of 1950; the Rājāsthān Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Antiquities Rules of 1968; the UNESCO handbook of 1993; and even the 2003 UNESCO Intangible Heritage Act (published the year after this fieldwork was begun) fail to explain is the procedure for monuments that fall into more than one category. At places where archaeological sites are interwoven with the daily lives of the residents, the very definition of archaeology threatens practice. The future of Indian patrimony involves learning to strike a balance among archaeological, nationalist, and local histories. Present temple praxis creates an aesthetic rhetoric to be preserved for future generations (fig. 8.1).

Social media has changed the role of the expert, at times seeming to erase that position entirely, yet the curator, the art historian, the anthropologist, and the scholar no longer seek only to explain or to expose a body of knowledge. The task of the humanities is to enhance the agency of every person to produce her or his own knowledge. Sections of this book focusing on women's history, the tenth-century goddesses Kṣēmaṅkarī and Cāmuṇḍā, or praxis and the law permit the lay reader and the scholar alike to put together unlikely arenas of information to juxtapose with their own assumptions and new ideas. In this project I have sought to recuperate the Rājasthani sites from the often-petrifying view of preservationists, government archaeologists, and even modern art historians. In sum, the majority of this data-driven evidence unveils previously ignored sites, goddesses, non-dynastic humans, and populist trends in each era to provide a new postcolonial approach to both the history of the Indian temple and the future of world heritage.

The hegemony of heritage remains a fraught construction, not easily solved through the examination of the material record alone because of the changing landscape of hegemonies in different times and places. "Hegemony" could be defined in the generic and wide use of the term as a mere synonym of "political domination," or it could refer to the southern Italian Marxist theory found in the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. This book about Hindu temple architecture in South Asia conveys a sense of hegemony as a process in concrete historical conjunctures, as an evolving sphere of superstructural conflict in which power relations are continually reasserted, challenged, and modified. This interpretation of "hegemony," beyond standard usage as a synonym of political domination, is important because it reflects the shifting power structures in a competitive grid over time and place. Hegemony is no longer in a simple binary with, say, monumental architecture, as a dominating force used by dynasties to subdue local peoples. Local people use these buildings to establish their own hegemony in a variety of ways in different times and places.

Gramsci delved into the theory of hegemony on multiple occasions in several contexts. He thought about hegemony in relation to praxis and to dialect, as a tool for intellectuals as masters of global hegemony in utter neglect of the local, and as a force used by Jesuits in Italy. He contrasted the hegemony of the Italian bourgeois taste for French novels and the national popular with the way that populist authors with middle-class readerships chose antipopular style and politics.⁹ Furthermore, Gramsci links hegemony to a conflict between Italian nationalism and foreign domination. For example, he writes about the academic Marinetti's protest against spaghetti in November of 1930 as "an obsolete food . . . heavy, brutalizing and gross [accusing this staple of inducing] skepticism, sloth, and pessimism."¹⁰ Throughout his letters and prison notes Gramsci seems to view hegemony as a form of class dominance via behavior, speech, religious convictions, taste in fiction, and the vilified plate of southern Italian gluten.

Can we imagine hegemony in early twentieth-century Gramscian terms as a form of class dominance in relation to Indian heritage in the twenty-first century? To do so would be to accept a dynastic narrative about the hegemony of style. As we have seen in this book, not all Mēdapāṭa temples have dynastic inscriptions, and not all time periods privilege nobles over the clergy. Some times and places were dominated by powerful monastic networks over the sectarian landscape.¹¹ Other times and places served as pregnant imaginaries for nationalisms still to be born. The grid of time and space that intersectionally pushes these catalysts into dialogue creates a hegemony of each different temple as heritage to be harnessed simultaneously by a variety of agents for their own political agendas. The hegemony of heritage in modern Rājāsthān, in fifteenth-century Mewār, in “sultanate”-era Vagada, or in tenth-century Mēdapāṭa lies in the impressive ability of local people, such as tailor’s guilds or women celebrating Daśamātā, to claim these sites through their varied praxis in situ at religious monuments, and in the impressive radius of practices sparked and disseminated from these catalysts. New materialism offers anyone who studies Hindu temples, or any religious monument in South Asia, a chance to incorporate the full extent of ritual residue left behind in perpetuity or ephemerally lost in praxis.

The relationship between heresy and the state arises in Gramsci’s scathing brief history of Jesuits, a word that in Italian we are told suggests “underhand” or “two faced”: “The Jesuits began as the shock-troops of the counter reformation and it was then, according to Gramsci, that the Church reversed its earlier process of absorbing mass heretical movements into its ranks and started propping itself up with state coercion to re-establish its undermined ideological leadership.”¹²

In tenth-century India, temples such as the Ambikā temple in Jagat definitely seem to reflect a process of “absorbing mass heretical movements” if one can imagine populist tantra (very loosely translated) in those terms, as absorbed into the brāhmanical fold of stone temple architecture. I am not sure, however, if at any point in the thousand years of history covered in this book, we find a singular turning point where “state coercion” is used to “re-establish its undermined ideological leadership.” We are left with the question, in light of the record in stone, of where we stand now and how these temples will speak aesthetically to future audiences based on their material uses in the present.

Counterhegemonies, rather than hegemony, seem to characterize the importance of the role of heritage today, as ancient temples serve as catalysts for the actions of many different people, most of whom were often ignored historically and academically. New perspectives turn us away from the largely male scholarship on hegemony from the twentieth century and open the doors to begin to question the spaces where twenty-first-century art history is performed in the museum, in the writings of the discipline itself, in new curatorial spaces across India, and with this book, which I would include in the field where the archaeological sites are found.

A question too large to answer in any one book, and one I have attempted to answer elsewhere, I leave my readers here with just one example of the counterhegemonic praxis I was asked to record by some people who use the Ambikā temple in Jagat.¹³ Finding the scholar waiting during Navratri to see if any animal sacrifice would take place at the stone temple, local Bhils insisted that I was asking the wrong questions in the wrong place and should follow them instead to make a video of their dances to celebrate Ambā Mātā during Navratri. The buffalo sacrifices found in Udaipur palace paintings never took place in Jagat when I was there; they were probably too expensive and too complicated to carry out. Modern praxis is not the exclusive prerogative of centralized urban institutions such as the birth of reform Judaism in nineteenth-century Germany or Vatican Council II, where the priests turned their backs to the altar to face their congregations in vernacular languages instead of Latin. Modern praxis is organic and diverse, and the hegemony of heritage lies in the perennity of change. Here is what some Bhil residents of Jagat want me and you to see, instead of the buffalo that never was sacrificed—the spark of their praxis ignited by the catalyst of the Ambikā temple in Jagat is danced two kilometers away from the temple in a tiny neighborhood nearby. Future scholarship will surely illuminate this fieldwork further in terms of the friction between praxis and history, capital and reification.¹⁴