

Material Subversions: Somatic Shi‘ism and the Development of a Deccani ‘Grammar of Tradition’ during the Qutb Shahi Dynasty

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Unlike virtually any other city in the Shi‘i world, Hyderabad, the capital of the erstwhile Qutb Shahi dynasty (1518 – 1687 C.E.) is a city of relics (‘Azmi 2000); the bodies of the Shi‘i Imams and *Ahl-e Bait* permeate the landscape in the form of foot- and handprints, shrines, tomb replicas, and metal standards (*‘alam*) representing them. In this project, I refer to the material culture, ritual practices, and built environment of this particular sacroscape as “somatic Shi‘ism.” The practices associated with this body-inflected sacroscape are what I have termed “reliquary Shi‘ism,” because these diverse material forms are powerful “traces” (*athar*) that point one back to the person associated with it; these objects make the absent Imam or saint *present* (Korom 2012).

¹I am currently in the middle of doing fieldwork for my second book project, “Somatic Shi‘ism: The Body in Deccani Material and Ritual Practice,” and the arguments and data presented in this essay are preliminary and reflect some of my first thoughts. This essay focuses on Sultan Quli, about whom I have only just begun to think in the past few weeks... I will show images during the presentation.

Shi'i materiality and its practices are fundamentally about the body—centered on such somatic material practices as associative relics, sacred foot- and handprints (*qadam sharif*), the offering and partaking of food, and in the ritualized performance of self-flagellation (*matam*). These religious objects have social lives that can be biographically narrated (Davis 1997), telling a story that seeks to complicate the history of the Qutb Shahi dynasty (Eaton and Wagoner 2014) and its relationship to Safavid Iran (1502 – 1736 C.E.) and the hegemonic historical narrative of Shi'i origins in the Deccan (Mitchell 2004, Naqvi 2003 and 1994, Rizvi 1986). The assumption long has been that the Shi'ism practiced in the Deccan was imported from Iran, and underwent a simple process of vernacularization (Ruffle 2011, Pinault 2001 and 1998, Naqvi 1999). I counter that the domestication of Shi'ism in its Deccani idiom was far more complex than the received historical narrative presents, and the Iranian role in this process was considerably more marginal. The history of Deccani Shi'ism has assumed its development as a subsidiary of a fully developed, mature, and authentic Persian tradition, which reflects contemporary Iranian religio-political aspirations to authenticate Shi'ism (Ruffle 2011, Deeb 2006), but more tellingly it draws attention to the types of elite textual sources that are privileged in the writing of religious history in the field of Islamic studies.

I ask why the Deccan was so receptive to Shi'ism in the sixteenth century, particularly to the bodily orientation of its material practices. This paper and my larger project on somatic

Shi'ism seeks to look beyond the archive to the material record, where we can tell a different story about the form and development of Shi'ism in the Deccan in the sixteenth century. Superimposing the landscape of Hyderabad with a sacred geography of relics, replicas of tombs (*zarih* and *ta'ziyeh*), battle standards (*'alam*), sacred footprints (*qadam sharif*), and other votive-talismanic objects, the images, objects, and rituals associated with the Imams and *Ahl-e Bait* simultaneously engage an Islamic and Indic sensorium and grammar of the body. The Qutb Shahi kings deployed their own proto-anthropology (Zore 1941), sending out government officials to the villages to learn the "context-specific rules" (Ramanujan 1989) of the ritual and material religious practices of their Vaisnava, Lingayat, and Saiva polities (Rizvi 1986, Zore 1941). The Qutb Shahi formation of somatic Shi'ism with its material culture, sacroscape, literature, and ritual practices, sought to understand this Deccani religious grammar of the body and integrate its metaphors, metonymies, and scripts (Lakoff and Johnson 2003). The images, objects, physical and sensory practices of somatic Shi'ism were absorbed into the Deccan's composite culture of religious conviviality, in which material culture and ritual systems were shared and made variously meaningful by different religious communities.

The Imprint of Ganga-Yamuna Culture

The social lives and biographies of an image or object are shaped through its interactions with different communities of response. The image or object does not exist in

relation to a single community, and it is perhaps better to think of this relationship in terms of riverine imagery. The image/object is like a river carrying silt, flooding in times of rain and snowmelt, and drying up in drought. In each instances both the river and the landscape through which it flows leave traces that can be seen (and read). The image as river is apropos in the South Asian context because of their association with particular gods and goddesses, and also through the ways in which the convergence of Hinduism and Islam has been characterized in the Deccan as Ganga-Yamuna.

Much has been made of the Deccan's "composite" culture that is the product of the blending of Islamic (Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi) and Indic (Saiva, Vaisnava, Lingayat, and *bhakti*) religious, linguistic (Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, Persian, and Deccani-Urdu), culinary, literary, and architectural traditions. This "Deccani synthesis" is founded on a rather simplistic reading of history that lauds the Qutb Shahi dynasty for its "enlightened" policy of employing Hindu, Telugu speaking ministers, marrying local, non-Muslim women, and not forcing religious conversion. Karen Leonard is critical of this tendency to characterize Deccani culture as composite, arguing that "In the countryside the mother tongues were Kannada, Marathi, and Telugu, and these vernacular cultures displayed little orientation toward Hyderabad city and its Court culture... A series of indigenous and local patterns of culture co-existed with the

urban Court culture even in Hyderabad city.”² While Leonard’s critique calls us to tread cautiously in making naïve pronouncements about the purported “composite” qualities of Deccani culture, I would like to point to its utility in serving as a signpost to the cumulative processes by which Shi‘ism was domesticated in the region.

In Hyderabad it is common to see signboards for cafes and shops with the name “Ganga-Yamuna”—there is a bakery with this name that I frequently pass in Red Hills near the Lakṛi ka Pul crossroads. Both Hindus and Muslims deploy this term to describe Deccani culture to characterize an “attitude of refined hospitality and harmonious relations” between the two religious communities.³ This term refers to one of the most sacred sites in India, the confluence of the Ganga (an indexical referent to Hinduism) and the Yamuna (indexical referent to Islam and Delhi through which the river runs and a onetime capital of the Mughal dynasty) at the Triveni Sangam⁴ in Allahabad, where the Maha Kumbh Mela takes place every twelve years. The *sangam* is a meeting point, where individual identities are maintained, yet mutual influence and crossing over is inevitable.

²Karen Leonard, “The Deccani Synthesis in Old Hyderabad: An Historiographic Essay,” *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 21:4 (1973): 216.

³Steven W. Ramey, *Hindu, Sufi, or Sikh: Contested Practices and Identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 34.

⁴The third river that comprises this confluence at Allahabad is the invisible Saraswatī, first mentioned in the Rg Veda and later in the Mahabharata.

My conceptual framework for religious conviviality among the Shi‘a and different Hindu communities of the Deccan draws on the religio-political discourse of “*ganga-yamuni tahzib*,” or the *composite culture* for which Hyderabadis assert that their city and its distinct religious practices is the Indian paradigm. For some, this composite culture is represented in riverine imagery as a confluence, of the Hindu Ganga and the Muslim Yamuna, creating India’s distinctively connected histories (for connected history see Subrahmanyam 2005; and for discussions of composite, syncretic and Hindu-Muslim shared culture in India, see Hyder 2011, Hansen 2010, Ramey 2008, Mohamed 2007, Green 2007). Others have been more critical of the depth of composite culture as a site of positive, deep interreligious encounter, both in India as a whole and in Hyderabad in particular (Kakar 1996, Leonard 1973). As a framework for understanding the multiple registers that comprise the Deccan’s religious grammar of the body, of which somatic Shi‘ism is but a singular constituent, the metaphor of compositeness is particularly rich. In construction, a composite material (wattle and daub, concrete, or plywood) is made of two or more constituent materials that retain their individual properties when combined for strength and durability. Composites are comprised of a matrix and reinforcement, and they are held together with a polymer, which strongly bonds these distinct materials together. I argue that the Qutb Shahi strategy for adapting their Shi‘ism to its somatic Shi‘i form was the result of an ethnographic sensitivity to local religious material and

bodily practices and an enthusiasm for achieving fluency in this particular Deccani “grammar of tradition” (Stewart 2010).

Sultan Quli: Geography and Subversions of Power

The Qutb Shahs were of Turkoman origin belonging to the Shi‘i Qara Qoyunlu (“Black Sheep”) tribe. The founder of the dynasty, Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk was born in Sa‘dabad in Hamadan province of what is now Iran. He was a descendant of Amir Qara Yusuf, who was a close relation of Muzaffar al-Din Jahan Shah ibn Yusuf (r. 1438-1467 as Jahan Shah), the ruler of the Qara Qoyunlu confederation during a period of instability between the leaders of the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu (“White Sheep”) tribes.⁵ Sultan Quli fled to the Deccan along with his uncle Allah Quli Beg, where they arrived in the court of the Bahmani sultan Mahmud Shah II (r. 1482-1518). They did not stay for long, and the two soon set off for Iraq, although Sultan Quli longed to return to the Deccan, which he and his uncle soon did.

While in Yazd, Sultan Quli met the Ni‘matullahi *shaykh* Shah Na‘imuddin Ni‘matullah Sani, who predicted that the young man would ascend the throne in his lifetime.⁶ Sultan Quli settled in Bidar, a center of the Ni‘matullahi order in the Deccan, where he quickly attained positions of power and prestige in the Bahmani court. With each military success, most notably the subduing of the Telangana region, Sultan Shihab al-Din Mahmud conferred a

⁵Iftikhar Ahmad Ghauri, “Origin of the Quṭb Shāhs of Golconda,” *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 17 (1969): 228.

⁶Ghauri, p. 229.

number of titles of Sultan Quli, including Qutb al-Mulk, and Amir al-Umara' when he was made governor (*tarafdār*) of Telangana in 1496.⁷

Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk did not formally declare independence from his Bahmanī patrons, although by 1518, he had more or less established his own dominion without making any claim to kingship. In his *History of the Qutb Shāhī Dynasty*, H.K. Sherwani refers to the Arabic epitaph on Qutb al-Mulk's tombstone to prove that an independent kingdom was not established under the name Qutb Shah, and "Sultan" Quli was referred to, even in death, as *barē malik*, the title reflecting his position as governor and revenue collector (*ṭarafdār*) over the great vassalage of Telangana.⁸

Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk had the Shi'ī *adhan* call worshipers to prayer, and the Friday prayer was read in the names of the twelve Imams beginning in 1501 at Golconda. While his declaration of Shi'ism as the religion of the Qutb Shahs was useful for establishing diplomatic ties with Safavid Iran, it is important to note, that formal diplomatic relations were not established between the two kingdoms until the reign of the third Qutb Shahi sultan, Ibrahim⁹

⁷Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna Ashari Shi'is of India*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986), pp. 293-294.

⁸H. K. Sherwani, *History of the Qutb Shāhī Dynasty* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974), 15.

⁹See Riazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations, 1500-1750* (Tehran: Iranian Cultural Foundation; Karachi: Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1979), Document 295.

(r. 1550-1550), and the first Safavid envoy did not visit Hyderabad until 1603 during the reign of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (r. 1580-1612).¹⁰

The extent to which the Qutb Shahs were *dependent* upon or looked to the Safavids for the shaping of Deccani Shi‘ism can be argued to be fairly minimal, despite the influx of “westerners” (*gharbiyan*)¹¹, who have anachronistically called *afaqis* (“one who travels in search of knowledge;” a short-hand for the Iranians who came to seek fame and fortune in the courts of the Deccan sultans) by a number of scholars, poets, architects, politicians, and warriors.¹² It must be remembered that Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk was born a Shi‘a and through invoking the names of the Imams, a degree of divinely authorized legitimacy adhered to his leadership.

¹⁰Prince Aghuzlu Sultan was sent by Shah ‘Abbas I (r. 1588-1629) in 1603-4/1012 to represent the Safavid state at the Qutb Shahi court in Hyderabad. While the envoy’s visit was ostensibly diplomatic, Aghuzlu Sultan’s mission was to ask for the hand of Muḥammad Quli Qutb Shah’s daughter Hayat Bakhsh Begum in marriage to one of Shah ‘Abbas’s sons. Muḥammad Quli’s Iranian-born *peshwa*, Mir Muhammad Mu‘min Astarabadi deftly advised against a foreign marriage, even if it would bring these two Shi‘i states even closer together, for he knew it was more important to ensure the future of the dynasty through an endogamous (maintaining a Deccani taboo, if you will) and preferred cross-cousin marriage alliance by marrying Hayat Bakhsh Begum to her cousin Muhammad, who would later succeed Muhammad Quli as Sultan and heir.

¹¹Richard M. Eaton, “‘Kiss My Foot,’ Said the King: Firearms, Diplomacy, and the Battle for Raichur, 1520,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43:1 (2009): 294. Likewise, Laura Weinstein’s dissertation is a sophisticated analysis of Persian manuscripts from the Qutb Shahi period, which seeks to complicate the often simplistic presentation of “*afaqi*-Deccani tension” in premodern Deccani history; see “Variations on a Persian Theme: Adaptation and Innovation in Early Manuscripts from Golconda,” (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2011), p. 56.

¹²For the most sustained historical treatment of the *afaqi*’s presence in the Deccan, see Sadiq Naqvi, *The Iranian Afaqies’ Contribution to the Qutb Shahi and Adil Shahi Kingdoms* (Hyderabad: Bab-ul-Ilm Society, 2003).

Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk was pragmatic in enforcing his religious policy of openness and tolerance, while strategically publicly reciting the Shi'ī call to prayer and eventually having the Friday *khutba* read in the name of Shah Isma'īl I, considering that their neighboring region in the north was the Sunni Mughal Empire, while the Safavids, in spite of being a Shi'ī state, were a *distant* yet significant political and military buffer.¹³ It also behooved Sultan Quli not to alienate his Hindu majority and Sunni subjects. Therefore, translating Shi'ī ritual, devotional literature, and material religious culture into something that would find spiritual and aesthetic valence with different Hindu communities and even local Sunni Muslims (Deccanis) was essential to assuring political legitimacy. In what follows, I will focus on a very preliminary hypothesis that I am developing regarding Sultan Quli's "context-specific" grammar of tradition through the introduction and integration of the Turkic *‘alam* with local religious grammars of the Vaisnava and Saiva bodies, such as the *abhaya mudra* (the protective right palm upturned, common to Vaisnava, Saiva, and Buddhist traditions) and *trishula* (the trident carried by Siva), respectively.

Sultan Quli's Context Specific Grammar

¹³In his essay on the Qara Qoyunlu and the Qutb Shahs, Minorsky notes that Ferishta presents a contrarian narrative in *Gulshan-e Ibrahimi*, which places the Qutb Shahs, and Sultan Quli in particular, in a subordinate position to Shah Isma'īl and the nascent Safavid state; "The Qara Qoyunlu and the Qutb Shāhs" (Turkmenica 10), *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 17:1 (1955): 72 fn. 2. I will return to this issue later in this essay.

In his essay, “Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?,” A.K. Ramanujan (1989) proposed a theory of a context-sensitive grammar reflecting the “overall tendencies” of cultures to establish rules that shape a society’s behavioral norms (47). Ramanujan draws on the Sanskrit *Laws of Manu* (*Manava dharma sastra*, ca. 500 B.C.E.) to define the good king as someone who is intimately aware of his culture’s context-specific grammar. According to Manu (7.41), the good king is one “who knows the sacred law, must imagine into the laws of caste (*jati*), of districts, of guilds, of families, and [thus] settle the peculiar law of each” (47). In the legal imagination of Manu, the ideal king is tasked with a *panoptical imperative* to be fluent in and abide by the context-sensitive grammar(s) of his dominion. As the Sultans of a religiously, ethnically, and linguistically diverse polity in the Deccan, the Qutb Shahs created a novel expression of Shi‘ism that was attentive to the context-sensitive grammar of the religious body shaped by Vaisnava and Saivite Hindu sensibilities and material practices.

Sultan Quli and the Genesis of Deccani Somatic Shi‘ism

Although Sultan Quli was born outside of the Deccan and he established a new Muslim sultanate just to the south of the ruins of the Saiva Kakatiya capital of Warangal (r. ca. 1158-1323), he did not consider the establishment of his independent dominion a break with the past, nor the conquering of “foreign” (*dar al-harb*) territory. I would like to consider several of Sultan Quli’s acts that reflected his canny understanding of the diverse and complex religio-

cultural polity over which he ruled, and how he may have “read” local religious material practices and grammars of the body as a means of introducing Shi‘ism and its ritual and devotional practices.

First, I begin with an act that seems counterintuitive, even counterproductive to the spreading of amity and loyalty among the new leader’s subjects. When Sultan Quli occupied Golconda Fort (*qil‘at*) in 1495, the commission of the *jam‘i masjid* in 1518 was a late addition to the series of walls and fortifications that were first constructed by the Saiva Kakatiya dynasty in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁴ In her study of Golconda Fort, Marika Sardar notes that the door to the *jam‘i masjid* integrates Kakatiya temple pillars and lintels. Above the doorway, a rectangular block of grey stone is inscribed with Arabic calligraphy topped with an arch. The entrance is a perfect expression of the dual register cultivated by Qutb Shahi sultans in which Persianate, Islamic-Shi‘i architectural, literary, and aesthetic forms were integrated with indigenous Deccani Telugu, Indic forms. The use of the Kakatiya temple pillars and lintels in the mosque doorway was not a symbol of conquest, rather when coupled with the Arabic inscription above, their *re-use* was a powerful symbol of continuity between past Saiva and

¹⁴Marika Sardar, “The Early Foundations of Golconda and the Rise of Fortifications in the Fourteenth-Century Deccan,” *South Asian Studies* 17:1 (2011): 48.

present Shi‘i dynasties, visibly announcing Sultan Quli as the heir of Golconda, its environs, and religious and cultural traditions.¹⁵

Sultan Quli and the Material Subversions of a New Deccani “Somatic Shi‘ism”?

As the heir (*waris*) apparent of Golconda, Sultan Quli implemented a new regime of religious practices and policies in accordance with his Shi‘i faith. Yet, Sultan Quli has proven to be a confounding figure in many regards. Much scholarship on Qutb Shahi Shi‘ism has passed over the reigns of the first two sultans (Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk and his successor Jamshid¹⁶), with attention to Shi‘i material, architectural and ritual practices being focused primarily from the reign of the founder of Hyderabad, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (r. 1580-1612) and after, although some earlier references are made to some important events during the reign of Ibrahim (Sultan Quli’s son who succeeded Jamshid, r. 1550-1580). The disproportionate scholarly attention that has been paid to the innovations to Shi‘i material and ritual practices by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, Muhammad Qutb Shah, and ‘Abdullah Qutb Shah in the later Qutb Shahi period (late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries) has deflected attention away

¹⁵For analysis on the long history of architectural reuse and memory in South Asia, see Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval Hindu-Muslim Encounter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009; Richard M. Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States,” *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Richard M. Eaton and Phillip B. Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India’s Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁶Jamshid arranged to have his father Sultan Quli killed while he was offering prayers in the *jam‘i masjid*, and he ruled over Golconda from 1543-1550.

from what I hypothesize was Sultan Quli's plan to use material forms and symbols to implement a form of somatic Shi'ism in the Deccan.

The *Tarikh-e Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah* was written by an anonymous source in 1025/1617 in Hyderabad, and is considered the official court history of the first six sultans of the Qutb Shahi dynasty.¹⁷ The *Tarikh* was written during the reign of the sixth Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah (r. 1612-1626) and is a rich source of information about Sultan Quli. I have not had a chance to look at the manuscript in any depth, however, the author does make it clear that Sultan Quli was a staunch supporter of Shi'i law, had coins struck with the names of the twelve Imams that were issued throughout the districts (*pargana*) of Telangana, the *adhan* recited with the addition of the clause that 'Ali is the *wali* of Allah, and he also advocated 'aza (mourning) rituals and was a supporter of the those affirming the faith of Zahra (*millat-e Zahra*).¹⁸ According to 'Abdullah al-Wadud ibn 'Abdullah Mahmud Nishapuri, the author of the seventeenth-century *Tarikh-e Turkmaniyya*,¹⁹ who further asserts that Sultan Quli was Shi'a and

¹⁷For this paper I am using the manuscript held in the Andhra Pradesh State Archives, *Tarikh-e Qutb Shah (Tarikh-e Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah)* MSS 23, 1261/1845-1846. I have cross-referenced this manuscript copy with the one held in the Salar Jung Museum Library and they are the same.

¹⁸*Tarikh-e Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shah*, Andhra Pradesh State Archives, MS 23, p. 50.

¹⁹A history of the Qutb Shahi dynasty; Minorsky speculates that it is a "preliminary draft or lost part of the" *Ma'athir-e Qutb Shahi-ye Mahmudi*, written by the same 'Abdullah al-Wadud ibn 'Abdullah Mahmud Nishapuri, who entered into the service of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah in 995/1587. The *Ma'athir* was composed sometime between 1033/1624 and 1038/1629,

observed its practices long before Shah Isma‘il declared Shi‘ism the religion of the Safavid state.²⁰ Even in 1518, Sultan Quli’s enactment of Shi‘ism in the Deccan reflected a striking degree of continuity with the Islamic past in the region, a panoptical vision and ability to understand the polyvalent context-specific grammars of tradition into which he integrated the material, devotional and ritual practices of his own faith.

Material Incursions

In this project I am attempting to read the Qutb Shahi material archive—relics, *‘alams*, hand- and footprints (*qadam sharif*; *qadam mubarak*), rocks, food, buildings, and somatic rituals (particularly *matam*, *faqiri*, *swang*, *langar*, and *rang*)—in conjunction with the textual archive in order to understand why Deccani Shi‘ism assumed its distinctive form with its emphases on the body, relics, and having a uniquely “composite” character. This quality of compositeness was central to the emergence of somatic Shi‘ism in the Deccan, which was fostered by the Qutb Shahi policy of religious openness toward the polity and their practice of employing Deccanis and Hindus (*niyogis* and *naikwaris*) in positions of power in the court. The Qutb Shahs also spent

which would have been during the reign of Sultan ‘Abdullah Qutb Shah. For further information see Minorsky, p. 51.

²⁰Minorsky, p. 72.

lavishly on religious festivals, most importantly Muharram, and also Nowruz, Basant, Milad al-Nabi, and Holi.²¹

The material record for the later Qutb Shahi—from the reign of Ibrahim and after—period is comparatively rich, however, Sultan Quli has proven to be an enigma for most scholars. Generally, the material history of Qutb Shahi Shi‘ism has proven to be somewhat shadowy because of the absence of clear references in the archival record providing such information as when *‘alams* were introduced into the Deccan. I have spent the past several months doing fieldwork in Hyderabad and the surrounding areas (Gulbarga and Bidar), where I have spent a lot of time looking at tombs, walls, flags, and other devotional objects, both Hindu and Muslim. Although I was not aware of it at the time, a number of architectural forms, dating from the Bahmani period in both Gulbarga and Bidar, compelled me to think more closely about Sultan Quli.

Sultan Quli spent considerable time in Bidar in the court of Sultan Mahmud Shah II. While in Bidar, he would have certainly visited the tomb of Sultan Mahmud Shah II’s ancestor Sultan Ahmad Shah Wali Bahmani (r. 1422-1436), whose tomb is located in the small village of Ashtur, a few kilometers outside of the capital. Sultan Ahmad is venerated by both Muslims

²¹Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah wrote several Deccani Urdu poems about these holidays; see Sayyidah Ja‘far, ed. *Kulliyat-e Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah*. New Delhi: Taraqqi Urdu Board, 1985. We also have accounts of these events in such histories as Nizam al-Din Ahmad ibn ‘Abdallah Sa‘idi Shirazi, *Ḥadīqat al-salāṭīn-e Quṭb Shāhī*. Salar Jung Museum. Ta. 214.

(Sufi) and by Lingayats, who recognize him as an incarnation of Allamah Prabhu. Sultan Ahmad's 'urs is celebrated each year twenty days after Holi by the *jangam* (head priest of the Lingayats²²) from the village of Mudiyal, who walks to Ashtur, a five days journey. Arriving at Sultan Ahmad's tomb, he washes it and offers coconuts and flowers. The Muslim *mujavir* recites the *fatiha* and distributes *misri* (sugar cubes) as consecrated food (*tabarruk*) to the pilgrims (*za'iran*).²³ Sultan Ahmad's tomb reflects this dual register of devotion, which we also observed in the doorway of the *jam'i masjid* at Golconda Fort.

The Ashtur tomb's dual register is remarkably similar to that of the 1518 Golconda *jam'i masjid*. Focusing on the walls of the Ashtur tomb, we notice in the lower half that Hindu temple pillars have been used to support the upper arch design. The arch is distinctly Persianate-Islamic, while the use of the pillars engages pre-Sultanate Hindu forms. This space is legible to both Lingayat and Muslim devotees. This is further demonstrated by the offerings made at the grave of Sultan Ahmad; lined up around the edge of the *chadar* covering his grave are white stone *lingas*. When my husband and I visited the tomb in February, we asked the local *swamy* about this practice, and he explained that Lingayats come on a daily basis and leave these *linga* at the grave as a supplicatory offering. Muslims tie little tin squares with Imam Husain's horse

²²The Lingayats are a monotheistic Saivite movement established in the twelfth century in Karnataka by a philosopher named Basava. Lingayatism rejects the Vedas, caste, and worship of anything other than the *ishta linga* (the formless god).

²³Yoginder Sikand, "The Changing Nature of Shared Hindu-Muslim Shrines in Contemporary Karnataka South India," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 25:1 (2002): 60.

Duldul (or Zuljaneh) stamped on them to the three *‘alams* installed along one wall or along the canopy covering the grave.²⁴ Many of these tin Dulduls are interwoven with marigolds and some are fashioned into elaborate umbrellas (*chatr*), symbolizing royalty. Many of these practices were contemporaneous with Sultan Quli’s lifetime, and it is highly likely that he would have observed Sultan Ahmad’s *‘urs*, and perhaps intentionally integrated the tomb’s composite architectural form and in his congregational mosque at Golconda.

As the Ashtur tomb indicates, materiality and its practices, likewise play a central role in the religious life of Deccanis. Nizam al-Din Ahmad ibn *‘Abdallah Sa‘idi Shirazi* wrote in *Ḥadīqat al-salāṭīn-e Quṭb Shāhī* that devotion to the *‘alam* during Muharram was one of the hallmarks of reign of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah.²⁵ By the turn of the seventeenth century material and devotional practices placing the *‘alam* at the nexus of a sophisticated and clearly articulated tradition in which the Qutb Shahi kings incorporated reliquary Shi‘ism with the religious grammars of the body of local Vaisnava (e.g. the protective right palm turned outward, known as the *abhaya mudra*), Saiva (the *trishul*, or trident carried by Siva, which is considered an auspicious, protective symbol; and the countless monumental *linga* dotting the

²⁴I have been unable to ascertain the age and provenance of these *‘alams*. Some have speculated that they date from the Qutb Shahi period and in a recent conversation with the art historian and collector Jagdish Mittal, he speculated that they might be more recent, dating from the Asaf Jahi period (18th-20th centuries).

²⁵Shirazi, pp. 44-52.

landscape around Golconda/Hyderabad, a legacy of the region's Saiva Kakatiya heritage) and Lingayat (*istalinga* as living manifestation of God).

The *panja* (hand with the five fingers extended), for example, operates as an indexical sign of the intercessory and protective powers of the Imams and *Ahl-e Bait*, and is one of the principal shapes that the *‘alam* takes in Deccani Shi‘ism, which because of the shared grammar of the body was mutually intelligible by any Vaisnava, who *read* that image as the symbolic protective gesture of Vishnu. When a *panja* was taken out on procession (*julus*) during Muharram, multiple religious communities were able to make meaning from the display of this religious object. The meanings of the metal hand symbol that is publicly processed through the streets of Hyderabad during Muharram can be variously “read” as the Shi‘i *panja* symbolizing ‘Abbas’ caregiving hand and Vishnu’s hand in the auspicious, protective *abhaya mudra*.

How did a symbol such as the *panja* develop into such a sophisticated intersemiotic system²⁶ within less than fifty years after Sultan Quli’s death? Was the *‘alam* brought to the Deccan by Iranian immigrants as has been generally understood, further reinforcing the prevailing thesis that Shi‘ism in Deccan was a Safavid import, dependent on Iranian religious scholars, poets, and its material culture in order to fully develop in its derivative Qutb Shahi context? What if Sultan Quli introduced the *‘alam*? As a Qara Qoyunlu Shi‘a of Turkoman

²⁶Tony K. Stewart, “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory.” *History of Religions* 40:3 (2001): 260-287.

background, exposure to *‘alams* was entirely plausible for Sultan Quli. Both flags (*parcham*) and standards²⁷ were common throughout Central Asia and Iran. James Allan notes that there are examples of a 14th century Central Asian *‘alam* with “a pair of metal dragon heads at either side of a spear-head shaped centerpiece.”²⁸ Hyderabad *‘alams* incorporate similar motifs, which either symbolize the particular quality of the Imam or member of the Ahl-e Bait the icon represents, or having some sort of apotropaic quality. Zulfikar, the sword of Imam ‘Ali ascends from the top of the *‘alam*, sometimes singularly or in pairs. Such vestiges of Sultan Quli’s Persianate, Shi‘i, Qara Qoyunlu heritage is discernible in these material traces, yet closer examination of the architectural context of his Bahmani patrons, as well as the composite religious environment in which he settled in the Deccan offers other valuable clues toward understanding how the *‘alam* came to take pride of place in the Muharram rituals of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah in the 1590s-1600s.

If we accept that Sultan Quli brought the *‘alam* to the Deccan and introduced it into the rituals of *‘aza* for the *millat-e Zahra*, and others who might find legibility in the icon, we must consider the ways in which dialogue between Persianate, Shi‘i Islamic forms and indigenous

²⁷In addition to the Arabic and Persian word *‘alam*, synonyms for the standard in Turkish include *beyraq*, and the Persian word *sanjaq* was used in Ottoman controlled regions; for further information on the history of the *‘alam*, see Jean Calmard, James W. Allan, “‘Alam va ‘Alāmat,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/8, pp. 785-791; <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/alam-va-alamat-ar> (accessed on 19 April 2015).

²⁸Allan, “‘Alam va ‘Alāmat,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/8, pp. 785-791; <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/alam-va-alamat-ar> (accessed on 19 April 2015).

Deccani, Telugu, Hindu forms coalesced. Here, I will offer a few speculative examples about which I am just beginning to research. First, how did aesthetic forms translate across time and to different material objects?

The tomb of Tajuddin Firoz (1397-1422) at the Haft Gombaz complex in Gulbarga, the first capital of the Bahmani dynasty (1347-1425) elegantly weaves together Deccani-Hindu architectural forms and design motifs with Persianate-Islamicate arches, domes, and vaults.²⁹ The walls inside the double-domed tomb are richly decorated with Arabic inscriptions, local Deccani motifs, including the oval-shaped pan leaf, and arch finials that I hypothesize are later adapted by the Qutb Shahi architects and repurposed in the shape of *‘alams* (e.g. on Charminar and in the interior of some of the Qutb Shahi tombs³⁰). The oval pan leaf motif does figure in the *hatheli* (center of the *‘alam* shaped like the palm of the hand in which the names of the Imams, Ahl-e Bait, and the Sultans are inscribed). The tomb also features five-arched niches in the walls, which may symbolize the *panjetan-e pak*. Although Tajuddin Firoz was not Shi‘a, Sufi devotion to the Ahl-e Bait was strong in the premodern Deccan during the Bahmani period. Qutb Shahi architecture replicates the five arch symbol in many of its religious buildings, the earliest being Sultan Quli’s *jam‘i masjid* from 1518.

²⁹George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 69-71.

³⁰This is beyond the scope of this current paper, however, is a line of inquiry for the larger book project.

My second question connects back to the tomb at Ashtur and traditions of shared religious practice. Did Sultan Quli understand the potential for the *‘alam* to be an intersemiotic icon that could be variously read and understood by different religious communities? The *panja*, which indexically references Hazrat ‘Abbas, and can likewise be read by Vaisnavas and Saivas (and Buddhists). The *‘alam* also bears a generally homologous function to that of the *trishul*, the trident carried by the god Siva, in that it is a protective and auspicious symbol. Likewise, flags are flown at the shrine tombs (*dargah*), roadside shrines and sacred trees (both Hindu and Muslim), and temples (*mandir*), which also would have fostered a material context in which the *‘alam* would have been mutually intelligible to a wide range of early sixteenth century Deccanis.

Conclusion: I will conclude the paper during the presentation.

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