

## SOUTH ASIA

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*Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu–Muslim” Encounter.*

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The invasions of northern India by Afghan and Central Asian troops and the consequent introduction of Islamic building techniques and forms into the subcontinent is a familiar topic to all scholars interested in this region. However, few previous publications can match Flood's exhaustive and nuanced study of the material evidence for the “encounter” that took place during the tenth–thirteenth centuries, an era dominated by the eastward expansion of the Ghaznavid and Ghurid kingdoms of Afghanistan. In this author's treatment it becomes apparent that interaction between the invaders and the various Indian communities during this period was not always of the same intensity, since it often depended on political necessity and control, varying widely from one region to another. An admirable virtue of Flood's treatment is that this diversity is never collapsed into a single, simplified narrative; rather, his survey demonstrates that elite cultures, whether Muslim or Hindu, had flexible social and cultural boundaries that found different expressions in both religious architecture and courtly art.

The book opens with an introductory survey of the maritime networks that brought newly Islamicized Arab traders to the coast of Sindh, now in southern Pakistan, as early as the eighth century. The arrival of these settlers was in conformance with long-standing commercial and cultural exchanges between the subcontinent and the Middle East and Mediterranean zone. As Flood points out in his first chapter, archaeological evidence for the Arab presence in the subcontinent during the first centuries of Islam is scanty, an exception being the traces of the Jami Masjid at Banbhore, identified with the emporium of Daybul. This site and other important centres in the Indus Valley region, such as Multan, resulted in a westward flow of peoples and precious artefacts, often as tribute. In their quest for such commodities, however, these foreigners sometimes acted as predators, the most celebrated example being Mahmud of Ghazni whose raid in 1026 on the treasury of the temple at Somnath on the Gujarat coast passed rapidly into legend. Pieces of the looted linga that was worshipped in this sanctuary were sent to Afghanistan, and even shipped to Mecca and Medina. Flood considers the symbolic value of such looted votive objects, as well as the economic advantages of converting into revenues the bullion and gilded icons pillaged from Hindu and Buddhist shrines. However, this plunder was accompanied by genuine intercultural exchange since, as Flood observes, the coins issued by several of the invaders who settled in the subcontinent mixed Arabic texts and Hindu religious imagery. Among the isolated artefacts surviving from this turbulent era is a unique, carved ivory elephant with a moustachioed rider, of obvious Indian workmanship, with a ninth–tenth century Kufic inscription on its base.

In the next chapter Flood considers what he describes as “cultural cross-dressing”, in which he reviews the evidence for the adoption of Iranian and Central Asian Turkish costume in India. His data ranges from depictions of monks with royal visitors in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Jain miniatures

of Gujarat to murals in the Buddhist shrines at Alchi in the far off Himalayan valley of Ladakh. The author discusses the habit of presenting robes of honour as a means of extending a ruler's influence among subordinates. However, as far as Indian rajas were concerned there was always a problem of ritual pollution, since the clothes sent by sultans could never actually be worn by Hindu figures.

In the third chapter Flood addresses the expansion of the Ghurids into India in the last decade of the twelfth century. These conquests offered an opportunity for the rulers of what had been a comparatively contained, regional kingdom to assume a new, imperial, status. The author suggests that a significant factor in this transition was the erection of conquest mosques in the centres of the newly acquired territories, as in Delhi, Kaman, Khatu and Ajmer. In the fifth chapter of his book, Flood examines these monuments from the point of view of the reuse of architectural materials that had been pillaged from dismantled temples, a practice not detected in pre-conquest period mosques, as at Banbhore and Bhadrashwar. A significant feature of Ghurid mosques in the subcontinent is the royal chamber (*muluk khāna*), generally misidentified as a women's gallery (*zenana*), built into one end of the prayer hall. Such chambers are distinguished by their private entrance leading to the adjacent residence of the sultan, and their reuse of ornamented temple columns, balcony slabs, beams and ceiling pieces. This leads Flood to a general appraisal of the role of spolia in mosques, noting that such materials had a pivotal role in the process of what he terms "trans-culturation". He illustrates his argument with an abundance of photographic details that demonstrate a highly select redeployment of motifs, especially *kittimukhas*, birds, pots with flowing foliage, and bells hanging from chains. No doubt such designs must have been recognized by mosque designers as embodying a desirable sacral, protective function. Flood suggests that such reused materials indicate "a willingness on the part of medieval architects to rise to the challenge posed by mediating distinct architectural traditions" (p. 179). Flood then progresses to a consideration of the international implications of such crossovers between different building traditions by examining instances of reuse of temple materials beyond the subcontinent. Here he presents some little-known cenotaphs and funerary reliefs from Ghazni and Bust, apparently fashioned by masons brought by the Ghaznavids and Ghurids from western India. But whether the small Masjid-i Sangvi at the remote site of Larvand in Afghanistan was actually constructed by imported workers, as Flood suggests, or partly assembled from pillaged pieces, remains unproven in the opinion of this reviewer.

In his final chapter Flood investigates the projects of Sultan Iltutmish (r. 1211–36), an ambitious builder who commissioned extensions to earlier mosques, as well as an elaborately ornamented mausoleum for himself. In the Delhi and Ajmer mosques Iltutmish added screen walls with arched openings framed by intricately carved inscriptions, which offer the author an opportunity of examining epigraphic programmes. Here he suggests that widespread use of the Sura of Victory (Quran chapter 48) may be "related not only to its rhetorical value but to its talismanic potential since these verses were often recited immediately before battle" (p. 245). It is this and other similarly intriguing suggestions that render the volume highly stimulating – surely essential reading for all those interested in the early sultanate period of Indian history.

The volume concludes with a 41-page bibliography, divided into sections, and an equally extensive index.

**George Michell**