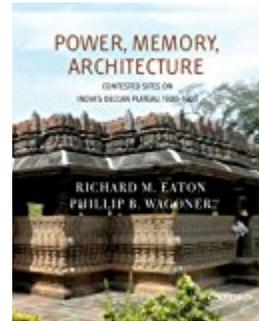


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Richard M. Eaton, Phillip B. Wagoner. *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014. Illustrations. xxvi + 395 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-809221-6.



Reviewed by Pushkar Sohoni (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research)

Published on H-Asia (May, 2017)

Commissioned by Sumit Guha

The primary focus of this book by Richard M. Eaton and Phillip B. Wagoner is the three cities of Kalyana, Raichur, and Warangal, as exemplars of fortified secondary urban centers that served as economic, political, and social links between agrarian hinterland societies and courtly elites in the capital cities of their respective sultanate kingdoms of the Deccan. These cities are contextualized in the period between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries, particularly as contested spaces in the sixteenth, and their monumental architecture is understood as “the most visually prominent expression of societal culture” (p. 32).

While the chapters are sufficiently described in the introduction, a small outline is provided here. Eight chapters are organized into four sections containing two chapters each. The first chapter gives a brief history of the Kalyana Chalukyas and their successor dynasties, and their encounter with the Delhi sultanate in the thirteenth century. Rejecting conventional models of antagonism, Eaton and Wagoner demonstrate that the two literary cosmopolitan systems of Persian and Sanskrit were in fact “preoccupied with the universality of dominion, with codifying and explicating law...; and with proper etiquette and comportment, especially in the context of royal courts,” and produced similar discourses (pp. 25-

26). The conquest and annexation of the Deccan by the sultanate of Delhi is explained as the catalyst for the diffusion of ideals from the Persian cosmopolis into the Sanskrit cosmopolis, and not a cultural rupture. The second chapter, on the conquest of the Deccan by the Delhi sultanate, tries to understand the sultanate’s subsequent actions as victors who had to politically engage with the built landscapes of the defeated regimes. While explaining why Hindu temples were the “most culturally and politically significant structures encountered,” the discussion is not limited to simplistic ideas of desecration, but shows a range of reactions, from patronizing, occupying, rebuilding, rehabilitating, redefining, imitating, or even destroying the religious buildings that were inherited from the past (p. 40). Such discourse is illustrated with a range of examples, from Pillalamarri, Devagiri, Bijapur, Bodhan, Warangal, Rajahmundry, Kalyana, Sholapur, Manvi, and Kondapalli, which were all sites taken over by the Delhi sultanate in the early fourteenth century.

The second section of the book is dedicated to understanding the legacy of the Chalukyas of Kalyana. The authors suggest that as opposed to the earlier dispensation of reusing temple elements to build mosques, a strategy that only aimed to displace “one contemporary political

and religious order by another,” a new pattern emerged in the sixteenth century (p. 77). In the spirit of Wagoner’s seminal essay “Sultan among Hindu Kings,” they examine in detail the building practices of both kingdoms, Vijayanagara and Bijapur, demonstrating that architectural elements and fragments from a period stretching over five hundred years were deliberately deployed by the two polities in new buildings, and not necessarily only in religious contexts.[1] In the third chapter, which focuses on Vijayanagara, the genealogical, literary, and titular continuity of the Vijayanagara dynasties is shown to bear continuity with the Kalyana Chalukyas. Thus, the architectural reappropriation and reuse of Chalukyan building elements and sites by the Vijayanagara kings is an extension of the same effect. Eaton and Wagoner, through the use of individual examples, such as the Bhuvaneshwari Temple and the stepped well at Vijayanagara, demonstrate how the kingdom continuously made aesthetic and political claims to being the inheritors of the Chalukya past. The fourth chapter is about the sultanate of Bijapur and its relation to an earlier imperial history of the region, as imagined materially. The authors argue that several factors explain the varied stances of different Adil Shahi sultans toward the Chalukyan past of the region, including the usual factional divisions between ethnic Persian émigrés and indigenous Muslim (and Hindu) communities, and “the personality or ideology of the ruling sovereign, as well as the broader political context” (p. 126). The gateway to the citadel of Bijapur, the Aravattukhambada Temple converted to a mosque, and Kalyan fort are the three sites where changes by the Adil Shahs are explained within their specific context.

The third section is about two regimes, those of the rebel Bahmani governor Shitab Khan and later the Qutb Shahs, and their connections with the Kakatiya past in present-day Telangana. The fifth chapter traces the life of Shitab Khan, from his humble beginnings and rapid rise at the Bahmani court in the mid-fifteenth century, to his conquest of Warangal in the early sixteenth century. The authors show how Shitab Khan’s capture of Warangal, and conformance with “Sanskritic models of kingly behaviour,” which included having panegyric verses composed by Brahmins, had a strong resonance in form with the earlier Kakatiya rulers of Warangal (p. 170). With some clever forensics, the authors explain the relocation of the Kakatiya *śivaliṅga* from Hanamkonda to Warangal and the assemblage of an older temple in the construction of the Pancaliraya Temple as Shitab Khan’s attempts to interpret and deploy the Kakatiya past in order to assert his potential kingship. The next chapter logically follows

the Qutb Shahs, who recaptured Warangal from Shitab Khan, but their actions, which connected them to the Kakatiyas, were situated in their new capital, Hyderabad. Eaton and Wagoner explain how the conceptual model of Hyderabad was based on the cosmogrammatic intentions at Warangal, in a composite milieu of the Persian-Telugu Qutb Shahi court.

In the fourth section, the seventh chapter traces the developments in military technology in the Deccan from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Using textual sources to see how many times various forts changed hands, and mapping such statistics onto the developments in artillery and fortifications in the sixteenth-century Deccan, the authors make spatial and temporal claims about the frontiers of the Deccan polities and their stability. The eighth chapter considers the functions of city gates beyond the simply utilitarian, instead arguing for their monumental, ritual, and symbolic values. The Kati Darwaza at Raichur is discussed in great detail in this chapter. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the various chapters, and ends on a note of irony, with a tongue-in-cheek description of recent developments at the site of Warangal. Two interesting appendices that provide some of the raw data generated in the course of research follow the conclusion.

This book is one of the few truly diachronic studies for multiple architectural sites, exploring how successive regimes received the constructed environment of the vanished or vanquished dynasties of the past. In a region like the Deccan, continuously occupied by a variety of fast-changing polities and states, architectural and political history intersected, as demonstrated masterfully and compellingly through this truly interdisciplinary work. The volume is profusely illustrated, and all the arguments are animated with drawings and photographs. The authors have conducted extensive fieldwork, making observations in the field and consulting relevant texts, followed by intensive analysis in the lab. Information from historical texts (such as the *Tarikh-i Firishtah*) is coupled with GIS software to create maps that show frequent contestations over secondary urban centers; this book thus provides a paradigm shift for the study of architectural history in the Deccan. Discursively, the authors dismiss conventional binaries and tropes, such as outsiders and invaders vis-à-vis the indigenes, or simple religious contestations. The diversity of material they encounter is not collapsed into any naive formation; instead they recognize the complexity of political circumstance and flexible cultural boundaries.

Perhaps the only minor criticism would be that the seventh chapter does not neatly fit the theme of the book; while it does engage architecture and political history in novel ways, it does not directly address questions of received architectural memory and power, though the conclusion does eventually accommodate the chapter in the narrative of contested secondary urban centers. Other than that, the absence of the northwestern Deccan is striking, given that the area was under Chalukya rule and has several monuments from their reign. They were followed in this region by the Yadavas, an important post-Chalukyan polity, who also had their monuments razed, reappropriated, and reused in the sultanate period. The northwestern Deccan was later integral to the Bahmani kingdom (which had declared independence in the erstwhile Yadava capital of Devagiri or Daulatabad). The region was also the heartland of the Nizam Shahs, a pow-

erful sultanate of the post-Bahmani Deccan, who were the progenitors of the Maratha kingdom. The northwestern Deccan completes the triad of linguistic zones that Firishtah mentioned as comprising the Deccan. Thus, a third of the cultural history of the Deccan, as represented through time by the Yadavas, the Nizam Shahs, the Marathas, and the modern state of Maharashtra, all entities associated with the Marathi language, is largely absent. But a book should not be judged by what is missing, and what is presented is of outstanding value, in terms of extensive data, imaginative scholarship, and rigorous methods. Hopefully, this book will provide inspiration for several other scholars to do similar work.

#### Note

[1]. Phillip B. Wagoner, "Sultan among Hindu Kings," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996): 851-880.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-asia>

**Citation:** Pushkar Sohoni. Review of Eaton, Richard M.; Wagoner, Phillip B., *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. May, 2017.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49387>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.