

Book Reviews

Subhashini Kaligotla, *Shiva's Waterfront Temples: Architects and Their Audiences in Medieval India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 288 pp. incl. 134 colour and 24 b&w ills, ISBN 9780300258943, £60/\$75 (hardback) doi:10.1017/arh.2025.10021

Reviewed by CRISPIN BRANFOOT

In 1855, Thomas Biggs took up a new appointment as architectural photographer to the Bombay government tasked with documenting the monuments of India. The archaeological sites he photographed that year at Badami, Mahakuta, Aihole and Pattadakal were published in *Architecture in Dharwar and Mysore* (1866) with a commentary by the pioneering Victorian architectural historian James Fergusson, initiating a long history of scholarship on the many stone temples built between the sixth and the eighth centuries CE in today's Karnataka state. Though ranging widely across the Deccan region of south-central India, and even further afield, the core focus of this engaging book is the group of Hindu temples built at Pattadakal.

Temples have been built in India in two architectural traditions, the Nagara and the Dravida, each distinguished by the form of the tower rising above the main shrine to the presiding deity. The curvilinear, vertically inclined Nagara has been built across a vast area of central and northern India from the fifth century; the horizontally organised, tiered Dravida superstructure is more common in southern India. What has fascinated architectural historians approaching the sites discussed in *Shiva's Waterfront Temples* is the presence of both forms — here labelled 'styles' — alongside each other. Subhashini Kaligotla's book is concerned with 'the spectrum of ways in which Deccan makers manipulated and translated the constituents of these building systems and placed them in spirited dialogue with one another'.

The introduction situates and summarises the book's six chapters within existing scholarship on the cultural histories of temple architecture and court culture in first-millennium India. Three important courtly values underpinned the worldview of temple makers and their audiences: *alamkara* ('ornament'), an all-encompassing lens through which medieval people of rank fashioned self and space, *kama* ('pleasure') and *rasa*, the aesthetic quality or mood of an artwork. Kaligotla's aim is to move the discourse away from questions of origins and 'influence' to address the reception of these temples by a range of Deccani social agents. 'This means writing the history of Pattadakal from the perspective of courtly individuals and their ideas of self, space, and power, but also from the point of view of makers, monks, pilgrims, and others who played equally significant roles in constituting medieval Indian social worlds.'

Over the course of the millennium from the fifth to the fifteenth century, elites articulated a shared political vision and aesthetic expression over land and sea across

a vast region that stretched from modern Afghanistan to the south of India, and to the south-east Asian mainland. Adopting Sheldon Pollock's conception of the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis', Kaligotla situates early Deccan temples within this trans-regional worldview, evident in architectural styles, writing systems and religious imagery. Earlier scholars had noted the presence of makers' names and other inscriptions on temples and rock-cut caves in the Deccan, but have tended to employ these only for the information on dating or the patronage that they suggest. In keeping with wider recent scholarship on the materiality and visibility of architectural inscriptions, Kaligotla explores the choice and juxtaposition of epigraphs in different demotic and literary registers, in both Deccan and translocal scripts, and their physical appearance high on cliffs or at the entrances to temples. Further chapters explore the many meanings of micro-architecture, as clusters of shrine models or miniature buildings on the margins of larger temples, and as temple images on the walls of buildings that enhanced the sensory experience of sacred space alongside a wide range of other vegetal, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and abstract representation.

A sustained theme is Kaligotla's critical analysis of past scholarship on early Deccan temples. Her targets range from the 'epistemic violence' of Fergusson in the nineteenth century for separating Nagara from Dravida through to recent scholars who have seemingly denigrated unusual or enigmatic temples by describing them as 'hybrid'. Preferring the terms 'heterogeneity' or 'eclecticism' over the loaded term hybridity, Kaligotla asks what Nagara and Dravida offered makers for innovation or creativity. Unlike many other sites in India, some temples in the Deccan deployed Nagara for the sanctum area and Dravida for the route towards this. Kaligotla's wider view of around 200 temples built between the sixth and eighth centuries across the Deccan enables her to suggest that Dravida communicated social prestige and political power — and possibly even Shaiva authority given the prevalence of temples dedicated to Shiva — in the western Deccan, whereas the prestige style in the eastern Deccan was Nagara.

The author states at the outset that this 'is a chronicle of Pattadakal from the perspective of its makers and their audiences'; the site is renowned as the coronation site of the Chalukya dynasty who sponsored three major temples there, and the construction in the late seventh and eighth centuries of five more. The book is written in an engaging and accessible style for a readership unfamiliar with early South Asian architecture and cultural history, with a wide frame of reference that touches on Gandharan Buddhist reliquaries, the margins of Mughal court paintings, as well as cloth paintings of the Jain pilgrimage site at Shatrunjaya. Yet Pattadakal is not discussed as a whole site despite this declared focus, requiring a degree of prior familiarity with the site's layout, history and temples. Largely absent is an assessment of Pattadakal's status as a coronation site for the Chalukya kings, religion at the site and the sculpture of temples.

Kaligotla's attempts to reconstruct period bodies in motion through the landscape and the presence, distribution and form of miniature buildings might have been enhanced by an assessment of the earliest scholarship, surveys and photography before the archaeological clearance of Pattadakal and its twentieth-century transformation into a heritage site. More on the overall landscape would be welcome: the author argues that the temples were approached from the river and the east, and not the direction prescribed by today's Archaeological Survey of India. But why were temples built at this location at all? Did the site have pre-existing sacred status? What further landscape features might explain

the relationship of temples to each other and the wider topography? Nor is there much attention to audiences over the millennium after the eighth century and before the 1860s; it is a 'chronicle of Pattadakal from the perspective of its makers and their audiences', but primarily the eighth-century ones and modern audiences. When did the majority of the temples fall out of use? One is in use today, but how and when has worship been interrupted or revived over the past 1,200 years? Is there any evidence of later additions or modifications to the temples? Might the accumulation of any later epigraphs testify to the continuity of this sacred site? Many questions remain about the temples of the early Deccan, but this lucid evaluation, rich in ideas and interpretations — even if sometimes speculative — with colour illustrations throughout is a welcome addition to scholarship on the architectural history of South Asia.

Crispin Branfoot is reader in the history of South Asian art and archaeology at SOAS, University of London

Joanne Allen, *Transforming the Church Interior in Renaissance Florence: Screens and Choir Spaces from the Middle Ages to Tridentine Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), xix and 348 pp. incl. 180 mainly colour ills, ISBN 9781108833592, £90 (hardcover)
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Reviewed by PAUL DAVIES

Precisely fifty years ago, Marcia B. Hall published two pioneering articles on S. Maria Novella and S. Croce, both in Florence, that were to transform scholarship on the appearance of Italian medieval church interiors. She showed that their present, spacious, uncluttered naves were the result of a radical, Counter-Reformation programme of changes effected to conform with the new devotional priorities of the Roman Catholic church. Swept away were the vast, monumental rood screens that had previously divided the naves into two zones, one intended for lay congregations located at the church's west end and the other reserved primarily, but not exclusively, for the friars, situated closer to the high altar. The screens' demolition was prompted by a perceived need to increase visibility of the high altar and by extension to facilitate engagement and participation in the mass. These articles inspired subsequent scholars to find new examples, to reconstruct some now-lost screens and to investigate the various functions that such screens once served. An enormous amount of work has been conducted in this field in the intervening years, by historians of painting interested in the patronage, iconography and disposition of paintings on the screens, by historians of drama exploring the miracle plays that were sometimes staged on top of these screens, by historians of misericords interested in reconstructing the original arrangement of choirs for monks and friars, and by historians of architecture interested in reconstructing the appearance of screens or the form and placement of the choir in churches of various sorts. And this is a list that could easily be extended.