D. FAIRCHILD RUGGLES

AT THE MARGINS OF ARCHITECTURAL AND LANDSCAPE HISTORY:
THE RAJPUTS OF SOUTH ASIA

Mughal architecture and gardens are much loved and well studied by historians of South Asia, and the Taj Mahal’s shimmering pool, axial vistas, and majestic domed mausoleum appear in nearly every textbook surveying the history of art. In contrast, little scholarly attention has been bestowed on contemporaneous Rajput sites, built by the Hindu princes of a warrior caste who ruled before and during the Mughal Empire (1526–1857). This is not due to any aesthetic shortcomings or lack of Rajput architectural complexes in India for historians and architects to study: there are beautiful and well-preserved palaces with gardens at Amber, Udaipur, Orchha, Bundi, and Nagaur, among others. The various Rajput kingdoms were largely located in Rajasthan, although they eventually spread to Malwa and Bundelkhand, and to the Punjab Hills and what is today Pakistan (fig. 1). Their palaces are visually stunning and every bit as sophisticated as their Mughal counterparts in their cultural symbolism, political expression, architectural ornament, hydraulic engineering, and artistic innovation. Rajput palace architecture belongs to a broadly defined South Asian visual culture in which many forms were shared by both Mughal and Rajput patrons, although historians of Islamic architecture have generally treated this as an example of cultural influence, in which distinct entities swapped artistic elements and style, rather than the highly complex interweaving that it was.

The purpose of the following exploration of Rajput palace gardens is not to promote an imagined binary that separates Mughal from Rajput forms of art. Most scholars of South Asian art move flexibly between Hindu and Muslim art forms and recognize the futility of trying to distinguish one from the other, especially given the mobility of artists and artistic motifs and the competition among patrons. But scholars who focus on the Islamic world rarely look beyond the Taj Mahal and the Agra Fort to see what sites like Amber, Bundi, and Orchha can tell us about Islamic architecture and particularly landscape. If they did, they would see that the premise of the Islamic garden as an expression of Muslim religious beliefs falls apart when it is applied to Rajput gardens, which often use the same quadripartite form to express entirely different meanings. My point here is not to castigate historians of Islamic architecture, who, admittedly, cover vast world areas, spanning from western China to the Maghreb, and from Central Asia to Mali. Rather, I wish to show that, because of the asymmetrical way various areas of art have been defined—according to religion, ethnicity, geography, dynasty, and language—we often lack a useful framework (or even a concern) for areas of significant cultural overlap and complexity like mudéjar Spain, Coptic Egypt, and Hindu South Asia. I will focus primarily on palace garden architecture, although buildings and painting must also be considered.

One exception to the general blindness to Rajput architecture is the palace at Amber Fort (fig. 2). The Amber Fort was built by Raja Man Singh (r. 1590–1615), a Rajput ruler of the Kachhwaha clan and one of the highest-ranking officials in the Mughal court, on a mountain in the Aravalli range (about 14 kilometers from the site where, in 1727, Jaipur would be founded). Rectangular in plan, it was built in successive stages and was significantly extended during the reign of Mirza Raja Jai Singh I (r. 1623–67/8), who built an outer reception courtyard as well as a handsome inner courtyard to serve as his own quarters. This inner court closely matches Mughal models, with a central garden divided
Fig. 1. Map of the Indian subcontinent, showing the boundaries of the Rajput kingdoms (seventeenth century). (Map: C. Scott Walker, Harvard Map Collection, Harvard College Library)

Fig. 2. Amber Fort, plan of Raja’s court, 1623–68. (Plan: D. Fairchild Ruggles and Binaifer Variava)
into quadrants and subdivided by a stellar geometry into smaller sunken beds crisscrossed by narrow raised walkways (fig. 3). The garden court is flanked on either side by the elaborately ornamented pavilions of Sukh Nivas (to the west) and Jai Mandir (to the east), which open towards it through columnar arcades and raised terraces. Following the typology of the classic Mughal waterfront garden complexes at Agra and Lahore (the Delhi Fort had not yet been constructed), the palace had an elevated position on a hilltop overlooking an artificial lake. In Mughal fashion, water was prominently and dynamically displayed: from the Sukh Nivas and Jai Mandir pavilions, water cascaded over a chādar (chute) and a panel of chīnī khāna (tiered niches) to flow through white marble channels towards the central pool, which took the shape of an eight-pointed star.

On the edge of the manmade Maota Lake below, the Maunbari Bagh, also known as the Kesar Kyari, similarly adhered to the geometrical formalism of the cross-axial four-part garden, commonly called a chaḥār bāgh. The garden is laid out symmetrically, with dominant central axes connecting the stepped levels of the ground plane (fig. 4). The precise date of this garden is unknown, but it was built before 1711, when it appears on a cloth map of Amber, and probably after the Mughals’ surge of garden building in Kashmir, which ended in the mid-seventeenth century. The downward cascade of the
Maunbari Bagh’s terraces and the dramatic panoramic views of the surrounding landscape owe a clear debt to the Mughal garden estates of Kashmir to the north. There, the Nishat Bagh (1625) and Shalamar Bagh (1619–20), both built on the shores of Lake Dal in Srinagar, mediated in tiered levels between the high snow-capped mountains and the silvery lake, their central water channels forming powerful axes that stretched the *chahār bāgh* from a centralizing plan into a linear series with pronounced directionality (fig. 5). On the north bank of Amber’s lake, a second garden, the early eighteenth-century Dilaram Bagh, likewise followed a quadripartite plan with four pavilions. In all three of the Amber Fort gardens, the legacy of the Islamic *chahār bāgh* is evident, a distinctly Mughal contribution to South Asian garden forms.

Elsewhere, Rajput patrons departed from Mughal modes. At Orchha, the capital of the Rajput state of Bundelkhand from 1531 to 1783, the principal palace garden followed neither the classic model of the *chahār bāgh* nor the stepped linear model of Kashmir. Orchha’s Jahangiri Mahal, begun in 1605 and finished circa 1619 by Bir Singh Dev, occupies the highest point of an island formed by the natural bend of the Betwa River and an artificially enhanced moat, in both size and altitude eclipsing the older Raj Mahal built by his father. At the foot of these two palaces stands the Rai Praveen Mahal, an airy two-storied garden pavilion with rooftop terrace (fig. 6). The pavilion and its garden served as the residence of the consort of Indramani (r. 1672–75), named Rai Praveen, but it is not absolutely clear whether it was built by that patron or earlier, by Bir Singh Deo (r. 1605–27), who had built the Jahangiri Mahal. In his recent study of Orchha, Edward Rothfarb speculates that the pavilion and garden may have replaced an earlier garden, and indeed such rebuilding—especially of gardens—was not uncommon. The Rai Praveen Mahal overlooks the large Anand Mahal Bagh, a garden divided into two halves, each enclosed by high walls (figs. 7 and 8). The dominant axial path that runs from the main pavilion to a diminutive one set against the north wall suggests bilateral symmetry, but in fact neither the enclosures nor the organization of walkways and plants within them is symmetrical. Instead of division into halves or quadrants, the garden follows a grid system in which the planting is confined to relatively small, sunken octagonal cavities (approximately 1.5 meters in diameter) in a packed-mortar horizontal surface (fig. 9). The cavities today hold tall slender Ashoka trees and more broadly canopied Orange Jasmine (*murraya paniculata*), giving the effect of an orchard. The present trees have only recently been planted, but in the seventeenth century the area was also probably arranged as an orchard garden, although more likely with small fruit trees. Rather crudely built conduits running across the mortar surface supply the garden with water.

This preference for planting in pits excavated in a hard surface is not unique to Orchha; it is also seen at Ahhichatragarh Fort at Nagaur (Rajasthan) and the City Palace of Udaipur. The garden in the City Palace’s Amar
Vilas courtyard (1698–1710) is laid out neither as a strictly cross-axial *chahār bāgh* nor as a linear Kashmiri type with stepped esplanades. Instead, the courtyard is divided into a grid with a square pool in its center (fig. 10). Surrounding this, each square of the grid is further divided into nine small, individual pockets excavated from an otherwise hard surface. These are filled with flowering plants and shady trees.10

At the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rajput Ahhichatragarh Fort at Nagaur, a palace with elegant halls and gardens stands within an enclosure of high, fortified walls.11 The palace is divided between the women’s quarters (*zenāna*) on the western side (a rabbit’s warren of small residential units arrayed around an oblong courtyard, simplified as generic blocks on the axonometric view) and the more open and expansive public halls to the east (fig. 11). Moving from the western
Fig. 9. Orchha, Anand Mahal Bagh, planting detail. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

Fig. 10. Udaipur, City Palace, Amar Vilas courtyard, 1698–1710. (Photo: courtesy of Jennifer Joffee)
also stores water in small rooftop tanks and, when necessary, lifts it up from a cistern in the garden below via a bucket and chain mechanism. When the rooftop tanks hold sufficient quantities, the water can be slowly released to flow down the surface of a nearly vertical chādar in the hall’s interior below (fig. 14). The water from this inspired ornamental display flows from the Abha Mahal out into the open area of gardens or orchards that fills the eastern portion of the palace enclosure. In the desert environment of Nagaur, where slightly less than 4 centimeters of rain falls annually, and where there are no lakes, rivers, or streams nearby, water is not wasted and its presence is admired.

The garden that fills the large oblong courtyard between the Main Baradari and the Jal Mahal tank merits closer attention because it is highly unusual. Instead of deep beds of earth filled with vegetation, as in a typical Mughal garden, the quadrants that are divided by four water channels form a shallow depression of hard-packed mortar. In the surface of each are pits approximately deep enough for the root ball of a shrub (fig. 15). Water conduits run between these pits below.
Fig. 12. Nagaur Fort, Sheesh Mahal’s chahār bāgh, seventeenth century. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)

Fig. 13. Nagaur Fort, main courtyard: a large rectangular pool is in the lower left-hand corner, the lotus garden is beyond the small bangla-roofed kiosk, and the square bāradarī is in the upper right. (Photo: D. Fairchild Ruggles)
trees that rose above the ground plane, but more likely it was a type of low vegetation that spilled beyond the edges of the cavity. If this had been a water-thirsty species that could not tolerate drought, the container method and its sub-surface piping would have preserved moisture and facilitated irrigation; but if, as some scholars believe, the pits were filled with water and planted with lotuses or water lilies, the slightly sunken quadrants may have been designed to fill with water after the rains, flooding to a level slightly higher than the pits and covering the flat mortar surface with a thin silvery film. It would have been a seasonal event—but gardens are always characterized by such ephemeral moments of exceptional beauty. The “lotus pools” had an intermediary position between the Main Baradari’s enormous pool and the large Jal Mahal tank, and the effect of viewing all three bodies of water at once must have been spectacular. In the dry season, only the pits themselves would have held water. With either the abundance or scarcity of water, and whether potted with low shrubs or afloat with lotuses, the vegetation

the surface of the mortar paving, forming an interconnected system for irrigation in which evaporation would have been minimized. Such underground channelization would have been advantageous in arid Nagaur. The pits could have been planted with shrubs or small fruit
would have spilled beyond the confines of the cavities, forming islands of colorful blooms and green foliage. The display could have been enjoyed from any of the surrounding pavilions, but it would have been especially impressive in the two diminutive kiosks, which may have given the illusion that they were poised between two seas of water.12

A second form at Nagaur that eludes the Mughal typology is that of the courtyard with the large tank enclosed by walls and fronted by hypostyle pavilions, as exemplified by the Jal Mahal tank and the smaller tank in the Sheesh Mahal ensemble. The Sheesh Mahal tank is enclosed by an arcade that extends from the pavilion itself, and the pool serves in place of an interior courtyard (fig. 16). The interpretation of this courtyard is complicated by the historic sequence of architectural change and augmentation in the Fort. The Sheesh Mahal has interior wall paintings that closely match a similar mural program in the Hadi Rani Mahal, which lies on the same north-south axis and belonged to the women’s quarters of the palace. This correspondence suggests that the Sheesh Mahal was at some point incorporated into the women’s quarters. If so, the pool may have been a later addition, providing the women with a private place to swim, as seen in Rajput miniature paintings and murals in which women are shown bathing and cavorting in such pools. The typological source for this kind of enclosed courtyard with tank appears to lie within Indic domestic tradition because there is evidence for such galleried tanks in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries at the city of Vijayanagara (Hampi) (in the south), as, for example, in the so-called Queen’s Bath. Although the Deccan plateau in the peninsular south was far from the northeastern desert where Nagaur was located, there seems to have been an awareness, and even exchanges, between the courts of northern and southern India.13 Therefore, when analyzing artistic exchanges, it is not only the relationship between the Mughals and Rajputs that must be considered, but also relations among the Rajput kingdoms, as well as between the Rajputs and other Hindu kingdoms.

These gardens and courtyards provoke typological questions that force us to reexamine the prevalence of the Mughal aesthetic and to ask whether there were, in
The Mughal imperial histories, while not necessarily more numerous, were for the most part available in translation throughout the twentieth century, due to the keen interest of British historians in the great empire they had colonized, which they could not help but see in terms of their own imperial ambitions, as well as to the nature of the texts themselves. As Allison Busch has explained, the Mughals preferred a kind of historical writing that was recognizable to Europeans as a chronicle, whereas the Rajputs wrote about history differently, through poems and writings that revealed historical values rather than a straightforward sequence of events. In consequence of these biases, there were far more translations of Mughal dynastic histories than Rajput histories, and the Mughals became more widely known at both the scholarly and popular level. The greatest Mughal histories were the Baburnāma (the memoirs of Emperor Babur [r. 1526–30], first translated in 1826), Akbarnāma (the history of Emperor Akbar and his reign [1556–1605], translated beginning in 1868), and Jahangirnāma (the history of Emperor Jahangir and his reign [1605–27], translated beginning in 1909). But while the translations may have made Mughal history available to a wide audience, the fact that such works were translated and published is a reflection—not a cause—of an already deep fascination with the Mughals on the part of British historians and empire-builders.

The scarcity and lack of translated sources on the Rajputs do not entirely explain the imbalance in the scholarship. Because there were a great many Rajput dynastic houses that coexisted with the Mughals, serving variously as allies or foes, there are many more Rajput forts and palaces than Mughal ones. Here the imbalance would seem to favor the Rajputs, suggesting that there ought to be a great many more publications on Rajput palaces and their gardens than on Mughal residential architecture of the same period. But this is not the case. While in recent years scholarly and handsomely illustrated publications have appeared focusing on regional capitals, the classic survey works on Rajput palaces continue to be those of Oscar Reuther (1925), Giles Tillotson (1987), and George Michell (1994). Historians of South Asian landscape are grateful to have serious studies of Rajput palace architecture, but while architectural publications often include plans that indicate the presence of courtyard gardens as an element
of the built form, they rarely extend beyond the formal to address the iconography, specific plantings, water systems, and climatic conditions that are key aspects of garden design. Moreover, the field of Rajput architectural study is still small enough that palatine sites such as the Nagaur Fort are generally unknown. In general, while Mughal palaces receive serious scholarly analysis, Rajput palaces are dismissed as merely scenic.\textsuperscript{21}

There are reasons for this. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Mughal forts were empty and could be coopted by the British for both use (as occurred in Delhi) and study; Rajput palaces, on the other hand, were inhabited by their princely families (and many still are). Even when the Rajput owners chose to live elsewhere, outsiders were not typically allowed into their empty palaces. Thus, the architecture was more likely to be viewed in that superficial scenic sense, rather than understood as a result of serious methodical study. Until Independence in 1947, the art and architectural history of South Asia was written mostly by British rather than Indian scholars, and the former often looked at form without inquiring further, emphasizing classification and ignoring (or not having access to) the texts that could have provided the social context for the material culture and explain the original meaning of the architecture. The outstanding exception to this was Ananda Coomaraswamy (d. 1947), who served as curator of Indian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts from 1916 until his death.\textsuperscript{22}

Even the architecture of the Mughals, one of the three great Muslim empires, is sometimes relegated to the margins of Islamic architectural history.\textsuperscript{23} Because the emphasis has historically been placed on the central Islamic lands, the Sultanate and Mughal eras in South Asia have been treated as Ghaznavid and Timurid spin-offs, whose architecture can only be explained through reference to more central, mainstream precedents.\textsuperscript{24} Ernst Kühnel began the short Mughal chapter in his 1962 survey by acknowledging this tendency to explain Mughal art solely in terms of derivation from Persian precedents. Kühnel allowed for the originality of the Mughal artists but seemed to take it for granted that “an unadulterated Indian-Muhammadan style” could be differentiated from the “pure Hindu stream.”\textsuperscript{25} In the more recent Pelican History of Art series, where the second of the two volumes on Islamic art covers South Asia from the Sultanate through the Mughal periods, the authors are sensitive to the eclectic nature of Islamic art in South Asia, but the specific examples of Indic ornament and Hindu temples to which comparisons would logically be drawn are relegated by the Pelican’s overarching serial structure to a separate volume on Indian art.\textsuperscript{26} A similar division occurred in Stokstad’s Art History (to which I contributed), where Islamic and South Asian art comprised separate chapters.\textsuperscript{27} Worse, although David Talbot Rice’s Islamic Art (published in 1965, and revised in 1975) and Robert Hillenbrand’s Islamic Art and Architecture (1999) purported to be comprehensive, they ignored South Asian Islam entirely.\textsuperscript{28}

In history writing, the Mughals suffer sometimes by being excluded from the rest of the Islamic world and at other times by being included in Islam but separated from other South Asian artistic traditions.

Within art history, the most cogent explanation for why most historians have paid little or no attention to Rajput gardens and palace architecture is that while the Mughals occupy a niche in the broad history of Islamic architecture, and Hindu temple architecture and city planning occupy their own niche in South Asian studies, the Rajputs straddle the two. Their religious affiliation and worldview were Hindu,\textsuperscript{29} and yet they adopted many of the outward signs associated with the Mughals. Although Hindus constituted a demographic majority within the Mughal Empire, historians outside of India have typically treated them as a subcategory in a time and place generally categorized as Islamic.\textsuperscript{30} A similar observation can be made with respect to manuscript painting, where Rajput paintings have generally received less attention from art historians than Mughal paintings, largely because they were regarded as a deviation from a centralized courtly tradition, according to a model that defined artistic relationships as those inevitably between an influencer, who is seen as actively creative, and the one so influenced, who passively receives artistic forms and ideas from a position of inferiority.\textsuperscript{31} It is true that court painters who served Rajput patrons employed many of the same craft techniques, media, and themes as their contemporaries working for Mughal patrons, and many of them appear to have been trained by artists working for the Mughal
court. Although there is evidence of much earlier Hindu painting at, for example, the Ajanta caves (culminating in the second half of the fifth century) and in sacred manuscripts donated to temples, Rajput painting changed with the introduction of a new style by Muslims in the Sultanate period. And it was again profoundly altered in 1554, when Emperor Humayun (r. 1530–40, 1555–56) brought Persian artists to India from the court of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76).

However, as is so often the case in South Asian visual culture, the flow of influence was not unidirectional: if artists working for Rajput courts acquired some of their practices and motifs from their counterparts in the Mughal court (who in turn were affected by imported Persian ideas and expertise), it is also true that the early Mughal artists received ideas and motifs from their Hindu contemporaries. Local plants and dark-skinned figures started to appear in Mughal scenes; fields of color were sometimes rendered without the Persian taste for intense pattern; the figure seen in profile became more prevalent. Emperor Akbar even commissioned an illustrated manuscript copy of the great Sanskrit epic the Rāmāyana (Rama’s Journey, 1587–99). In the case of the Ṭūṭī-nāma (Tales of a Parrot), a relatively early Mughal manuscript (ca. 1570), it appears that about a third of the illustrations were extensively overpainted by artists in the Mughal atelier working on an earlier set of pages painted by Hindu artists (fig. 17). According to John Seyller’s analysis, the manuscript’s apparent mixture of Hindu and Mughal styles was due not to different painters working side by side—although Akbar’s workshop did accommodate diverse artists—but rather to the drive to update the style of the existing illustrations so that they would better match the newer ones that were added later by artists in the Mughal atelier. However, he also notes the incorporation into the manuscript of new paintings in an older Hindu style, although the phenomenon was not continued in subsequent manuscripts. In other words, the “flow of influence” was by no means as passive as that phrase suggests: at times, old visual modes were selectively employed; at other times they were actively wiped out and replaced or updated by newer ones.

Later, when painters were hired from Rajput courts, they had to change their style for their Mughal patrons. Regarding the patronage of the Mughal emperor Jahangir, Milo Beach notes, “Jahangir’s great Album contains Mughal, Deccani, Persian, and European works (both prints and paintings by European artists), and Jahangir was famous for his cosmopolitan interests. But nowhere does he even acknowledge any tradition of painting in Rajasthan, despite the fact that a Rajput noble such as Raja Man Singh (who held the highest rank in the Mughal administration) was decorating his spaces in Rajput style back home in Amber.” The rejection was surely because of the prevalence of Hindu religious themes among Rajput court workshops, but it may also have been because of the different ways that Hindu artists chose to represent narrative. Instead of a realistic picture of plausible events, as in Mughal painting, Hindu painters invited their viewers into a visual world represented in multiple moments in time, in multiple places, and even in two worlds (the human and the divine).

Rajput and Mughal painting traditions responded to each other over the course of three hundred years (and Hindu princes competed not only with Mughals but also among themselves). It was not only the artists who were adept at moving among visual modes: Rajput patrons themselves freely commissioned painters working in either Mughalizing or distinctly Rajput idioms, as was the case among the Kachhwahas of Amber. In The Intelligence of Tradition, Molly Aitken asserts that the Rajput encounter with Mughal art was by no means a steady assimilation, describing it variously as “adaptive,” “selective,” and rejecting.

Despite significant overlap among the style, technique, and artists who moved from court to court, Rajput painting is less well known than Mughal painting. Nonetheless, it has received more study than Rajput architecture, in part due to the art market. A number of collections of Rajput manuscript paintings came up for sale in the mid-twentieth century, spurring collectors and connoisseurs to treat them as something other than Mughal derivatives. Study and classification were ways to make them more marketable. Additionally, art history’s high regard for the artists themselves prompts analysis of the hand of individual artists, whereas in the more collaborative endeavor of architecture, the hand of the master workman can rarely be identified—just the traditional practices of artisanal workshops.
Fig. 17. Tūtīnāma, (Tales of a Parrot): Tale XII: Gardener Releasing the Merchant’s Daughter from Her Promise, ca. 1560. India, Mughal, Reign of Akbar, 16th century. Color and gold on paper, 20.3 × 14.0 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. A. Dean Perry 1962.279.100.b

The fact that the Rajputs do not fit neatly into either the Muslim or the Hindu category of architecture as framed by the international canon of South Asian visual studies is a methodological problem. Rajput patrons are rarely included in studies of Mughal architecture, although many of them were full participants in Mughal culture and the military and administrative construction of the empire. To take one example, the Rajput Kachhwaha rulers of Amber served as high-ranking members of the Mughal administration and married their daughters to Mughal emperors so that they eventually became enmeshed in the Mughal dynastic line. As described above, their palace at Amber has an enclosed courtyard with white pavilions that look outward toward the dramatic exterior landscape in one direction and open inward, through delicate arches, onto the central garden. The quadripartite garden consists of sunken beds traversed by a geometrical array of walkways and water channels, flowing from a chādar and chīnī khāna (fig. 3). It has all the attributes of a Mughal garden. Similarly at Bundi (Rajasthan), the palace of the Chauhan Rajputs has a large garden terrace (probably eighteenth century) that forms a chahār bāgh with a central water pool (fig. 18). However, despite their clearly Islamicate form and planning, Amber and Bundi are omitted from surveys of Islamic architecture and, less surprisingly, introductions to world art history. Their cultural hybridity disqualifies them from histories that identify linear chronological development within a well-defined context. These are problems that occur not for reasons intrinsic to the works themselves but because of the way that geographical and historical areas have been defined.

“Hybridity” itself is a problematic term because it begs the questions of identity and agency. It assumes that there were original identities—stable and clearly bounded—that interacted to form a hybridized union while ignoring imbalances of power such as relations of dependency due to conquest, economic forces, and gender inequalities that may have caused or given meaning to the union. But the stability of those human identities is by no means as clear as the differentiating terms Rajput and Mughal would suggest. The Mughals themselves were produced by the coupling of Mughal fathers with Rajput mothers, both of whom were themselves produced through sexual union—by nature, a commingling of difference—in which there is no absolute, stable identity, only a constant coming into being.40 This is not to say that the clans lacked identity and were indistinguishable. By their visible worshipping at mosques and temples, the difference in their burial rites, the celebration of different holy days, and the markings made on the body itself, they created external signs that insisted on distinct identities. It is in the act of making (always in the process), rather than in being (denoting something complete), that people perform their cultural identities. The making of things and shaping of spaces are thus critical.
The term “hybridity” does not disclose the extent to which formal typology was associated with identity: it does not explain why and under what conditions typological forms were exchanged between the Mughals and Rajputs. The question has been addressed by architectural historians, who have called attention to the indigenous roots of forms such as the distinctively curving *bangla* roof (so-called for its Bengali origins), *chhatrī* (a cupola raised on slender supports), corbelled arch, serpentine bracket, and rooftop terrace, as well as the locally quarried red sandstone used in Hindu palace architecture and, subsequently, in imperial Mughal monuments. From the perspective of the twenty-first century it may be easy to attribute the *bangla* and *chhatrī* to Indic origins and the *chahār bāgh* and *hesht behesht* (a square or octagonal shape divided into nine bays) plan to Muslim (and specifically Timurid) sources. Historians make these distinctions for the reasons explained above, but did patrons in the seventeenth century understand them according to such culturally specific Rajput/Mughal or Hindu/Muslim binaries?

Would they, for example, have regarded the exquisitely carved and pierced stone screen (*jālī*) at the Tomb of Sheikh Salim al-Din Chisti (tomb built 1581–82, *jālī* screens added ca. 1605) (fig. 19), in the Mosque of Fatehpur-Sikri, as derived from Hindu temple architecture, with origins at least as early as the seventh-century temple at Aihole? Or would they have associated it with the ceramic screens filling the windows of Timurid and Safavid architecture of Iran? They could have found the immediate source in fifteenth-century Sultanate mosques in India, and with such a history of commingling already permeating the subcontinent well before the beginning of the Mughal Empire in 1526, perhaps they would have refused to imagine a binary set of paths by which such an element had to have arrived in Fatehpur-Sikri through either Muslim or Hindu carriers. “Hybridity” also does not clarify the degree to which architectural forms were simply interchangeable signs that could be appropriated or shed for political expediency. Just as the Mughals were quick to borrow beautiful forms and employ the structural techniques and
talented Hindu and Muslim artists of the Indic region that they conquered, the Hindus appear to have also embraced the arts, forms of dress, and other cultural signs associated with the Mughals. They adopted and adapted forms with freedom but also selectivity. Because the artistic syntax and meanings were different from their own art, the appropriation was not a direct transfer but a reworking and renegotiation of form and expression. However, paradoxically, while historians have celebrated the cultural eclecticism of the Mughals as a source of strength, by which the strands of smaller kingdoms were strategically woven into the larger Mughal imperial fabric, this same eclecticism among the Rajputs has caused them to be excluded from the international canon of South Asian visual studies.

If it is difficult to classify the various schools of Rajput painting and explain their various relationships to the Mughal workshops, and to find a way of discussing Rajput architecture that does not insist upon assigning it to either a Muslim or Hindu context, the problems only increase with landscape because the matter of cultural identification is exacerbated by a disciplinary one. For many landscape historians, especially those trained in the discipline of art history, the analytical apparatus of architectural history provides the starting point for landscape studies. Indeed, two of the best books on Rajput architecture—those of Tillotson and Michell—are useful studies of the evolution of architectural typology, patronage and regional style, and the dynastic expression of power and legitimacy, but as they were written with the intent of explaining the buildings, other aspects of palatine architecture, such as furnishings, murals, and gardens, appear only as a subset. This is often the case in histories written from the architectural perspective: gardens appear as secondary dependencies, designed and inserted into the palatine environment after the construction of the major buildings, even though the material evidence contradicts this imagined sequence. The Tomb of Humayun (New Delhi, finished 1572) (fig. 20) and the Nagaur Fort, to give two examples, were constructed with water channels and spouts embedded in their roofs and terrace floors, which were designed to collect precious rainwater and direct it into irrigation cisterns. The water catchment of the main buildings contributed to the functioning of the irrigation system of the whole complex, but it also became a powerful visual effect, as the water thus captured was then displayed in the large rectangular pool at Nagaur Fort and in the grid of water channels and pools running through the garden of Humayun’s Tomb. These were not afterthoughts, added after the completion of the architecture in response to the gardener’s sudden demand for adequate water supplies. The gardens were conceived in tandem with the buildings.

But the weight of architectural history is such that landscape historians often consciously or unconsciously adopt the values of the architectural historian, examin-
ing gardens with an eye to the identification of typologies (such as the chahār bāgh), artisanal technique (such as cut-stone channels and carved marble basins), and patronage (categorized as either Mughal or Rajput, but not both). They focus on permanent elements such as walkways and fountains, and often do not even attempt to answer the question of the character of the garden that was planted. They view gardens as stable categories with well-defined forms, created by an architect according to a plan and having a distinct moment of origin. This is as reductive as the way that historians treat cultural identities.

However, it is possible to conceive of gardens in entirely different terms: not as grand manipulations of the built environment reflecting deep-seated religious beliefs and centralized governmental control, but as, first, local responses to the climate, soil, and topography and, second, expressions of diverse political and cultural identities. Considered thus, the question of garden meaning can depart from the rigidly unilateral theological explanation, which in the field of Islamic gardens usually takes the familiar form of the garden being a foretaste of the paradise promised in the Koran to the faithful, and the chahār bāgh as an earthly reflection of the four rivers of paradise. Humayun’s Tomb garden often provokes such an interpretation. The Persianate tomb is characterized by a hesht behesht plan, monumental central double-shell dome, and iwans rendered on the façade at various scales (fig. 21). It stands majestically within a chahār bāgh garden that, given the commemorative and funerary purpose of the site, was certainly intended to connote “paradise on earth.” Of course, any Muslim tomb garden built during or after the Timurid dynasty (1370–1506) had paradisiac meaning—but then it was so ubiquitous as to be a cliché. However, the political motivations underlying the construction of Humayun’s tomb and garden were by no means so commonplace and generalized: the site
was intended to express a specific set of meanings that would link the Mughals to their Timurid forebears and thus confer authority and legitimacy upon Humayun’s son Akbar, who (possibly together with Humayun’s widow) had built the tomb as much to honor his deceased father as to assert Humayun, and by extension himself, as the rightful ruler of the nascent Mughal Empire. This political meaning is a more probing explanation than the more obvious paradisiac explanation of the garden because it requires an examination of the particular motivations of the patron, the political conditions of the moment, and the specific cultural conditions of the audiences.

If the symbolism of Islamic gardens can be attributed to a complex array of economic and political as well as environmental concerns, it is especially important for the interpretation of Rajput gardens, since the interpretation of the latter as reflections of paradise simply does not serve. When used in a Rajput context, the *chahār bāgh* plan must perforce have had an entirely different symbolic resonance, because in Hindu philosophy and religion, the understanding of death and the afterlife, and the rituals by which those attitudes are expressed, are wholly different from those of Islam. An extraordinary photograph by Raghubir Rai shows the dry edges of the Yamuna River as it passes through Agra (fig. 22): the contrast between the human skull in the foreground and the monumental Taj on the far bank calls to mind the difference between Muslim observance of burial and entombment and the Hindu practice of cremation, particularly along the banks of the sacred Ganges, of which the Yamuna is a tributary. It hardly needs to be said that Rajput gardens, as well as Hindu gardens in general and Buddhist gardens, connoted something dif-
different than Islamic gardens: the question is why the quadripartite plan, with its well-recognized paradisiac iconography, was used and what it meant.

Followers of Hinduism did not construct comparable tombs for interment, but they did embrace the four-part garden plan for palatine complexes, where pleasure and politics were defining attributes, and by the sixteenth century they had developed commemorative monuments such as the large-scale memorial chhatrī. Hindu cenotaphs were often situated near bodies of water, either natural or manmade, and sometimes had a park-like setting, as in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commemorative chhatrīs that still stand outside of Amber (fig. 23). But, unlike Islamic mausolea, they were not situated in chahār bāghs because the chahār bāgh layout of gardens such as those at the Amber Fort did not have a direct association with burial, the human body, and eternity. They were not read as metaphorical references to paradise by their patrons or the patrons’ associates. Therefore, when the quadripartite plan was employed at the center of the Amber Fort, the easily recognizable chahār bāgh was a sign not of paradise but of the contemporary political landscape and the cultural situation of the patrons, the Rajput Kachhwahas, who had very close political and family alliances with the Mughals. One of the Kachhwaha daughters was married to the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1562 and produced the son that became the next Mughal emperor. That son, Jahangir, married another daughter of the Kachhwaha House, who gave birth to his first son, Khusrav (the future Shah Jahan [r. 1628–58]), in 1592.

In later palaces of the Rajputs and other princely Hindu dynasties, the chahār bāgh garden plan may have harkened back to a golden age of empire, before the Mughals began to weaken and the British presence became threatening. It is even more likely that by the late seventeenth century, in those cases when the chahār bāgh was employed by non-Muslim patrons, it held no particular significance as a specifically Mughal or Muslim sign but was simply a common and available South Asian garden form. Even among the Mughals, the quadripartite plan did not always signal paradise in the eschatological sense and was not used exclusively in tombs: it was also used in palace gardens, where it was a sign of pleasure, in the more general sense of “heavenly.”

The Rajput gardens that most adhere to the Islamic garden canon are easiest to study because we can apply to them our knowledge of their Islamic counterparts and because that very process of translation into an Islamic idiom leaves the categories of Muslim/Mughal and Hindu/Rajput intact. Thus the courtyard and terrace gardens of the Amber Fort receive the most attention, while those in Orchha, the Nagaur Fort, and the City Palace of Udaipur—where the gardens are neither strict cross-axial chahār bāgh nor Kashmiri-style stepped terraces and indeed fit no recognized typology—are hardly known. These cases suggest that the widespread (but myopic) insistence on the chahār bāgh as the quintessential Islamic garden form may have distracted scholars from recognizing other kinds of formal planning, even in contexts such as Rajput forts, where the patrons and primary audience were not Muslim and did not look to the same tradition of landscape planning and meaning. Moreover, in pursuing a model defined by precise geometrical form (a practice learned from architectural history), scholars have too often overlooked the rich trove of references to sacred landscapes such as pools and groves in Sanskritic literature, which are characterized not by form but by function and meaning. In addition to references to the deities and the sacred spaces associated with them, the literature also sheds light on early Indian court gardens,
which Daud Ali shows to have been idealized spaces with formulaic components: spectacular waterworks, wooded bowers, and a hill (often an artificial mound). They were sumptuously appointed with textiles and wall paintings that invited recreation, romance, and festivity. Most importantly, he argues that in Buddhism, “celestial gardens developed in close dialogue with their earthly counterparts.” Early royal patrons sometimes tried to emulate the magnificent wonder of heavenly gardens, with pools of perfumed water, artificial trees with gold flowers, and embankments of sand made from pearls: these “formed an important space where the realm itself was projected and thought about.”52 This is very close to the kind of arguments regarding the garden as political and environmental metaphor that I made in Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain (2000), and indicates a commonality among early gardens that may have been due to the garden’s expressive capacity as an aestheticized environmental response rather than the result of stylistic or technical evolution (as in architecture).

The blindness to autochthonous formal types and conceptual models has given rise to the assumption that all designed landscape forms in South Asia were an Islamic, and more specifically Persian, importation, with the result that Rajput gardens have either been regarded as derivative or ignored altogether. Ultimately, it may be useful to discard the category of “Islamic garden”—and with it the corollary “Rajput garden”—and instead acknowledge the complexity and interdependence of South Asian visual culture, as South Asianists have already done. This is particularly appropriate in the case of gardens because, responding to specific geoclimatic conditions such as the monsoon, intense heat, hilly or flat landscape morphology, and a regional palette of trees and plants, the gardens of both Muslims and Hindus in South Asia drew upon the same repertoire of traditional cultivation practices. There were a great many pragmatic concerns that garden architects had in common, regardless of whether they served a Muslim patron, who perceived the garden as a foretaste of the paradise promised in the Koran, or a Rajput patron, who saw in pools and groves the presence of the gods. Historians have typically understood the Hindu approach to nature as responsive—seeing gods present in those places where nature has distinctive characteristics, such as springs, ponds, rivers, crossings, mountains, forests, and trees. But perhaps we should consider the other response, which is to seek to design and create places of worldly pleasure for mortals as well as places that might, in their shady arbors and deep waters, actually invite the gods to dwell there.

Department of Landscape Architecture,
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

NOTES

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1. Rajput is a Sanskrit word meaning “prince.” The Rajputs, who claim to be descended from deities, are not a dynasty but a large group of warriors who gained dominance in northern India sometime between the sixth and ninth century. In this essay, regnal dates are given for individual dynasties of Rajput rulers, but the dates are not those of the clan as a whole.

2. On the Amber Fort, see Oscar Reuther, Indische Paläste und Wohnhäuser (Berlin, 1925), and G. H. R. Tillotson, The Rajput Palaces: The Development of an Architectural Style, 1450–1750 (New Haven, 1987). Specifically on its gardens, see D. Fairchild Ruggles, “Gardens,” in Art of India: Prehistory to the Present, ed. Frederick Asher (Chicago, 2003), 258–70, and D. Fairchild Ruggles, “The Framed Landscape in Islamic Spain and Mughal India,” in Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain (2000), and indicates a commonality among early gardens that may have been due to the garden’s expressive capacity as an aestheticized environmental response rather than the result of stylistic or technical evolution (as in architecture).


4. A map of Amber, made of cloth, was drawn in 1711 for M. S. Jai Singh (collection of the National Museum, New Delhi). It was published by Susan Gole, _Indian Maps and Plans: From Earliest Times to the Advent of European Surveys_ (New Delhi, 1989), 170–71, and is discussed in C. Asher, “Excavating Communalism,” 222–46, esp. 231–32.


6. B. L. Dhamla, _A Memoir on the Temple of Jagat Shiromani at Amber_ (Jaipur, 1977). I was also fortunate to receive Giles Tillotson’s letter on this subject at a garden workshop held in Nagaur (January 30–February 3, 2006).


11. Minakshi Jain, _Architecture of a Royal Camp_ (Ahmedabad, 2009). Minakshi Jain and team, “Ahlichatragarh, the Fort of Nagaur; Conservation Works Report to Facilitate Garden Workshop 30/01/06–3/02/06” (unpublished). My observations on Nagaur were made on the basis of fieldwork on site, but the following conclusions were made in discussion with Minakshi Jain, James Wescoat, Giles Tillotson, Ratish Nanda, Milo Beach, Kathryn Gleason, Catherine Glynn, Amita Sinha, and others who attended the 2006 Nagaur Garden Workshop.

12. Because of the difficulty of supplying enough water, I was not convinced of the lotus hypothesis, imagining the garden as an orchard, like Orchha. But Rahul Mehrotra persuaded me by pointing out the visual logic of the kiosks’ placement: positioned on the edge of the large pool yet providing an overview of the garden that the presence of trees would have blocked.


16. For example, the inscriptions from Udaipur published by N. P. Chakravarti and B. Ch. Chhabra in multiple volumes of _Epigraphia Indica_ (1951–53) and discussed in Jennifer Joffee, “Art, Architecture, and Politics in Mewar, 1628–1710” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2005).

17. James Tod, _Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India_, 2 vols. (New Delhi, 1971; orig. pub. 1829–32).


of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, Compiled by His Royal Librarian; The Nineteenth-century Manuscript Translation of A.R. Fuller (British Library, add. 30,777), ed. and comp. Wayne Begley and Z. A. Desai (Delhi and New York, 1990), Wayne Begley laments the lack of translated materials recording the reign of Shah Jahan. He notes the exception of ‘Inayat Khan’s history of Shah Jahan, which was translated in the mid-nineteenth century by A. R. Fuller, but points to the fact that it remained an unpublished manuscript in the collection of the British Library. Nonetheless, there were even fewer available translations for the Rajputs and they mostly attracted only local interest.

25. Ernst Kühnel, Finbarr Flood, “Lost in Translation: Architecture, Taxon -

24. The interest in South Asia is relatively recent among histo-

23. The inclusion of Rajput architecture in such surveys, however, does not necessarily mean that the authors ever visited the more distant sites.

21. I am focusing on the Rajputs, but the same lament could be voiced for the Marathas, Jats, and other groups who patronized art and architecture in South Asia.


20. Reuther, Indische Paläste und Wohnhäuser; Tillotson, Rajput Palaces; and George Michell and Antonio Martinelli, The Royal Palaces of India (New York and London, 1994). To these can be added less comprehensive works such as Sidney Toy, The Strongholds of India (Melbourne, 1957), as well as G. S. Ghurye, Rajput Architecture (Bombay, 1968), which, despite the book’s title, ignores all the Rajput palaces except Gwallior. Prominent among the older works is James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture (London, 1891), which included Rajput palaces in a short chapter called “Civil Architecture,” 470–88. The inclusion of Rajput architecture in such surveys, however, does not necessarily mean that the authors ever visited the more distant sites.


27. Ruggles, “Islamic Art” (chap. 8), and Frederick Asher, “Art of South and Southeast Asia before 1200” (chap. 9) and “Art of South and Southeast Asia after 1200” (chap. 23), in Art History, ed. Michael Cothren and Marilyn Stokstad, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 2010), 260–89, 290–323, 770–89. Unfortunately, the Cothren-Stokstad volume does not clearly acknowledge the specific authorship of individual chapters.


29. The term “Hindu” is used here with considerable unease. It is convenient as a term that broadly describes a set of religious practices and philosophies, and the architecture and artifacts that were produced by those religious and philosophical practices. But used to describe people and their cultural identity, it first conflates religion with culture and then condenses a variety of cultural identities into a single, simple, homogenous group. However, there is nothing homogenous about the group of South Asians typically defined as Hindu, other than that they are not Muslim. Nonetheless, I have used the word cautiously, simply for want of a better term and following the justificiation of S. Radhakrishnan, “Hinduism,” in A Cultural History of India, ed. A. L. Basham (New Delhi, 1975), 60.

30. A welcome exception to this is Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, India before Europe (Cambridge, 2006). The myth of stable Muslim and Hindu cultural identities in an earlier period is the topic of Finbarr Flood’s Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter (Princeton, N.J., 2009).


35. Personal communication, June 2006.
Aitken, Intelligence of Tradition, 17–22.


Aitken, Intelligence of Tradition, 41.


There is a burgeoning literature on “composite culture” and the idea of essential versus composite (or “hybrid”) categories of identity. Cynthia Talbot succinctly summarizes the debate in “Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 4 (1995): 692–722.


This is a particularly vexing problem in South Asia, where the type of planting done in the Mughal era was almost entirely replaced by British-style planting. Few historians or archaeologists have explored this colonial layer. Recent exceptions are Eugenia Herbert, “The Taj and the Raj: Garden Imperialism in India,” *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly* 25, 4 (2005): 250–72; Eugenia Herbert, *Flora’s Empire: British Gardens in India* (Philadelphia, 2011); and A. Mukherji, *Red Fort of Shahjahanbad* (New Delhi, 2004).


Historians of South Asia have understood this more quickly than historians of Islamic art. For examples of discussions of Indian gardens as expressions of political power, environmental control, and pleasure, see Catherine Asher, “Gardens of the Nobility: Raja Man Singh and the Bagh-i Wah,” in Hussain, Rehman, and Wescoat, *Mughal Garden*, 61–73, as well as the various contributions to Diamond and Glynn, *Garden and Cosmos*, and Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens*, 131–45. For the early centuries of the common era and Buddhist associations with the garden (which may have been absorbed into later Hindu belief), see Daud Ali, “Gardens in Early Indian Court Life,” *Studies in History*, n.s., 19, 2 (2003): 221–52.

On Maratha *chhatri* built in emulation of Rajput practices, see Melia Belli, “Keeping Up with the Rajputs: Appropriation and the Articulation of Sacrality and Political Legitimacy in Scindia Funerary Art,” *Archives of Asian Art* 61 (2011): 91–106. An extensive list of cenotaphs, mostly Rajput, is given in Ratanal Mishra, *Memorial Monuments of Rajasthān: The Cenotaph* (Udaipur and Delhi, 2004); however, his refusal to admit any Islamic influence on commemorative architecture in South Asia reflects a narrow-minded and inaccurate view of history.


