

Devotional Architecture as Antiquities: Reflections on the colonial outlook in Sindh.

Prof. Michel Boivin

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Abstract

The expression devotional architecture is related to the shrines the Sindhis visit for asking help and succour to different categories of religious figures, including Muslim saints and Hindu deities. Despite the obvious social function they implement in Sindh, it is amazing to see that these shrines were neglected by the British during colonization. At best, they saw them as « antiquities », a concept that implies they were « dead », and not « working », despite an obvious importance due to their size, architectural style and aesthetics, as well as the numerous and varied people who used to come. In this paper, I argue that the British were locked in a representation of South Asian architecture constructed on Persian and Moghul patterns, and that they consequently totally neglected or even ignored the vernacular architecture of Sindh. After introducing the general outlook the British made of the religions in Sindh, the first part will analyze how the British represented the Sufi *dargahs*, both in their writings and paintings. The second part will be devoted to the figure of Jhulelal to underscore how, in some cases, the British depicted the buildings devoted to him when they fit their representation of architecture, as for example the *dargah* of Zinda Pir, and how they simultaneously ignored the huge *darbar* settled in Udero Lal.

Bio

Michel Boivin is Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies, CNRS-EHESS. He teaches historical anthropology of Muslim societies in Modern South Asia at the Advanced School of Social Sciences (EHESS), Paris Research University, where he is also supervising masters and Phd thesis. He has authored academic papers and books mostly focussing on the circulation of religious patterns and social structures in colonial and postcolonial Sindh. He has published several books with OUP Pakistan, including *Artefacts of Devotion* (OUP, Karachi, 2011), with a foreword by Carl Ernst, and the *Historical Dictionary of the Sufi culture of Sindh in Pakistan and in Indian* (OUP, Karachi, second impression 2016). In 2016, he has also co-edited with Rémy Delage *Devotional Islam in Contemporary South Asia. Shrines, journeys and wanderers* (Routledge, New Delhi). In French, his last book is on *The Agha Khan and the Khojas. Shia Islam and social dynamics in the Indian subcontinent (1843-1954)* (Karthala, Paris, 2013). In 2019, his next book published by I. B. Tauris in London will be titled *The Hindu Sufis of South Asia : Partition, Shrine culture and the Sindhis of India*.