

NECROPOLIS AS PALIMPSEST: THE MAKLI CEMETERY IN SINDH (CA. 1350—1650)

On the outskirts of Thatta, a medieval port city, lies the vast necropolis of Makli. Situated on a natural ridge, once along the Indus river, the UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to hundreds of funerary markers from simple, unadorned graves to ornate monumental tombs. While funerary monuments are abundant in Pakistan, the scale and diversity of Makli makes it unlike any other site. The necropolis was in continuous use from the fourteenth century by multiple ruling dynasties of southern Sindh and was the burial place of many saintly figures. Makli's distinctive character also lies in its architecture, which includes many regionally diverse building types and decorative forms. For example, the finely carved stone monuments show analogies to the architectural style of temples in Rajasthan and Gujarat while the brick and glazed tile tombs at Makli show affinities with funerary monuments in Islamic Central Asia and Mughal India. Adding to the rich texture of Makli is the extensive use of calligraphy in the necropolis, an efflorescence rare in the Indus Valley.

Studies of necropoli in Islamic art history are scarce despite the extensive building of them and Makli, a rare example of an accessible extant necropolis, holds the potential to offer insights into the development of the Islamic necropolis more generally. Funerary Islamic architecture in the subcontinent has largely been studied through the lens of single monumental structures characterized as either royal monuments or as sacred spaces, and discussions of them are primarily limited to questions of stylistic genealogies. The necropolis at Makli problematizes these categorical distinctions; it is clear that the cemetery is simultaneously a royal funerary complex and a sacred space where saints are buried. Added to this is the palimpsestic nature of the site as the necropolis grew over time and as the deceased and the monuments acquired new meanings. The accretional nature of both monuments and site necessitate an interpretive approach that acknowledges both synchronic and diachronic aspects of the site.

Located near the Indus river delta and the western ports of India, as well as being connected to overland trade routes between the Subcontinent and the Eastern Islamic world, Makli's architecture is best examined as a complex nexus between local, Sindhi, architectural and funerary traditions and those that circulated along these routes. In order to meaningfully parse the history of the site, it is necessary to take a *longue duree* approach to studying the necropolis. The aim of my dissertation, therefore, is to undertake a systematic study of the development of Makli over a period of three centuries, from the earliest structures of the late fourteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century when its importance declined.