

# Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum

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He turned his head like an old tortoise in the sunlight. "Is it true that there are many images in the Wonder House of Lahore?" He repeated the last words as one making sure of an address. "That is true," said Abdullah. "It is full of heathen *būts*. Thou also art an idolater."

"Never mind *him*," said Kim. "That is the Government's house and there is no idolatry in it, but only a Sahib with a white beard. Come with me and I will show."—Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*

In other words, the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.—Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"<sup>1</sup>

There can be little doubt that the recent destruction of the monumental rock-cut Buddhas at Bamiyan by the former Taliban government of Afghanistan will define "Islamic iconoclasm" in the popular imagination for several decades to come (Figs. 1, 2). To many commentators, the obliteration of the Buddhas seemed to hark back to a bygone age, reinforcing the widespread notion that Islamic culture is implacably hostile to anthropomorphic art. Even those who pointed to outbursts of image destruction in medieval and early modern Europe saw these as stages on the road to Western modernity;<sup>2</sup> the persistence of the practice in the Islamic world seemed to offer implicit proof of an essential fixation on figuration fundamentally at odds with that modernity.

Common to almost all accounts of the Buddhas' demolition was the assumption that their destruction can be situated within a long, culturally determined, and unchanging tradition of violent iconoclastic acts. Collectively or individually, these acts are symptomatic of a kind of cultural pathology known as Islamic iconoclasm, whose ultimate origins, to quote K.A.C. Creswell's telling comment, lie in "the inherent temperamental dislike of Semitic races for representational art."<sup>3</sup> The iconoclastic outburst of Afghanistan's rulers thus confirmed the status of that country as out of time with Western modernity, by reference to an existing discourse within which image destruction indexed the inherently medieval nature of Islamic culture.<sup>4</sup> As Carl Ernst has noted recently, the traditional one-dimensional portrait of Muslim iconoclasm "does not acknowledge its subjects as actors in historical contexts."<sup>5</sup>

The conception of a monolithic and pathologically Muslim response to the image, which substitutes essentialist tropes for historical analysis, elides the distinction between different types of cultural practices. It not only obscures any variation, complexity, or sophistication in Muslim responses to the image but also *a priori* precludes the possibility of iconoclastic "moments" in Islamic history, which might shed light on those complex responses.<sup>6</sup> To use a European analogy, it is as

if the destruction of pagan images by Christians in late antiquity, the mutilation of icons in ninth-century Byzantium, the iconoclastic depredations of the Reformation, and the events of the French Revolution could all be accommodated under the single rubric Christian iconoclasm.

The methodological problems stemming from the naturalization of historical acts need hardly be highlighted, and they are compounded by three further aspects of traditional scholarship on Islamic iconoclasm. The first is the idea that Islamic iconoclasm is the product of a specific theological attitude, with only secondary political and no aesthetic content. A second, closely related assumption is that the iconoclastic acts of medieval Muslims were primarily directed at the (religious) art of the non-Muslim "other."<sup>7</sup> The third, and most striking, peculiarity of the existing discourse on iconoclasm in the medieval Islamic world is that, remarkably for a practice that concerns the physical transformation of material objects, such discussions are almost always confined to texts, making only passing reference to surviving objects, if at all. Moreover, the dominance of the text has been marked by the essentialist approach to Islam and the image referred to previously, with a corresponding failure to interrogate or problematize the vocabulary of iconoclasm. Despite the abundant material evidence, there is, as yet, not a single systematic survey (textual or material) of what precisely was done in any region of the medieval world to images by Muslims who objected to them. As a result, rhetorical claims of image destruction have often been taken at face value, even when not borne out by archaeological or art historical evidence.<sup>8</sup>

In this short paper, which deals with a broad sweep of material, I want to draw attention to some of the problems with the traditional paradigms that I have just outlined, to illustrate some of the many paradoxes that complicate our notion of Islamic iconoclasm, and to highlight areas for future investigation. Although there are other facets of the history and historiography of Islamic iconoclasm that merit analysis,<sup>9</sup> my aim here is twofold. First, I want to undertake a critique of essentialist conceptions of Muslim iconoclasm that draws attention to the fact that figuration has been a contested issue even between Muslims and that emphasizes that there have been iconoclastic "moments" in Islamic history when the debate (and its physical correlate in image destruction) waxed in intensity. Second, I intend to highlight some complementary political aspects of what has largely been conceived of as a theological impulse. Both of these concerns inform the historical overview of iconoclastic practice in the first two sections of the essay, which provide the context for an analysis of the Bamiyan episode that follows in the third and final section.

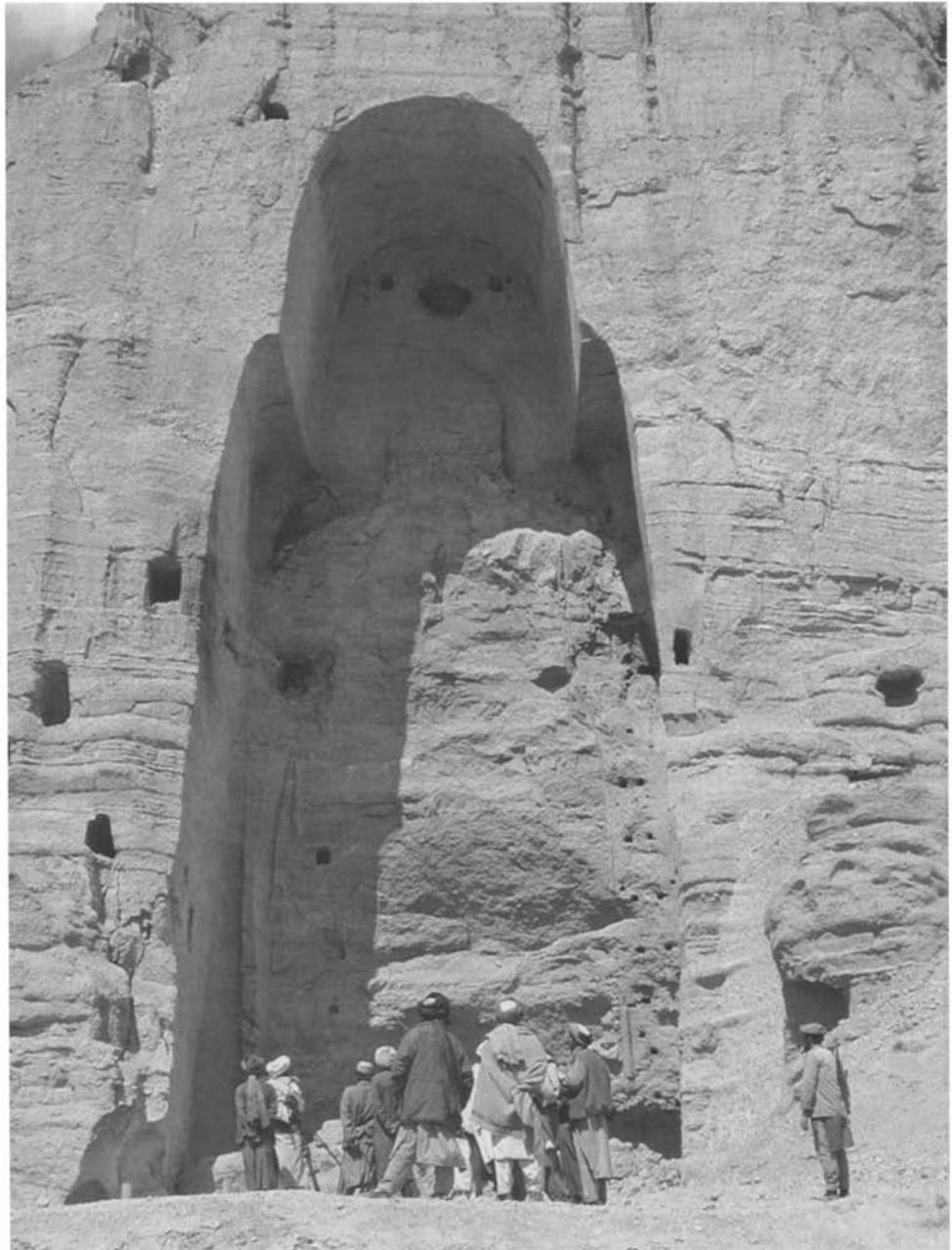
The primary focus will be on the iconoclastic practices of Muslims living in the eastern Islamic world, especially Afghan-



1 Large Buddha, 5th–7th century, before destruction, Bamiyan (photo: Richard Edwards, courtesy of ACSAA Color Slide Project, University of Michigan, #2871)

istan and India. If I ignore the relationship with Byzantium here, it is primarily to compensate for an ethnocentric bias that has led to the discourse on figuration in the Islamic world being dominated by the arts of Christendom and the Mediterranean. These are, in any case, less relevant to the eastern Islamic world in the tenth through twenty-first centuries than they are to the

Levant in the eighth.<sup>10</sup> The discussion is intended to construct a context for the final part of the essay, in which the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas will be reconsidered. It will be argued that their obliteration indexed not a timeless response to figuration but a calculated engagement with a culturally specific discourse of images at a particular historical moment.



2 Large Buddha, after its destruction in 2001, Bamiyan (photo: Corbis.Com)

### Proscriptive Texts and Iconoclastic Praxis

The opposition to figuration in Islam is based not on Qur'anic scripture but on various Traditions of the Prophet, the Hadith.<sup>11</sup> The two principal objections to figuration in the prescriptive texts are a concern with not usurping divine creative powers<sup>12</sup> and a fear of *shirk*, a term that came to mean polytheism and idolatry but originally meant associating other gods with God.<sup>13</sup> Both suggest a concern with the materialism of worship in non-Islamic traditions. While Muslim polemicists frequently accused those of other faiths of indulging in polytheism and idolatry, however, it is important to remember that such accusations were a stock-in-trade of medieval religious polemics, even monotheist polemics.<sup>14</sup> Muslims themselves are often accused of idolatry in Christian and Jewish polemical texts, which might compare Muslim veneration of the Ka'ba and the practices associated with it to those of the (self-evidently idolatrous) Hindus.<sup>15</sup>

There is a general consensus in the Hadith forbidding all

representations that have shadows (whose defacement is obligatory), and some schools of thought go so far as to liken artists to polytheists.<sup>16</sup> Such proscriptions were undoubtedly a factor in both promoting aniconism (the eschewal of figural imagery) and motivating acts of iconoclasm (the destruction or mutilation of existing figural imagery), but their impact on the arts in general varied greatly according to time and place.<sup>17</sup> After initial experiments, the substitution of text for figural imagery on gold coins in 696–97 (and on silver two years later) marked a decisive moment in the development of an official iconography, with the epigraphic issues of the Umayyad caliphate establishing an enduring precedent for Islamic numismatics.<sup>18</sup> Even after this date, however, variations in attitudes to figuration existed, for some later Islamic rulers issued coins bearing figural imagery.<sup>19</sup>

The decoration of early Islamic palaces, lavishly ornamented with sculpture and paintings containing anthropomorphic elements (including Christian priests and churches), stands in



3 Rosewater sprinkler with anthropomorphizing epigraphy, eastern Iran or Afghanistan, bronze, ca. 1200. Copenhagen, The David Collection, inv. no. 65/1998

contrast to the religious architecture of the same period, in which the ornament is primarily vegetal and epigraphic.<sup>20</sup> The aniconic decoration of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (691–92) and of early Islamic mosques points to a distinction between secular and religious art, which is clearly demonstrated in the facade of the mid-eighth-century palace of Mshatta in Jordan, on which the use of figural ornament is interrupted at a point corresponding to the location of an interior mosque.<sup>21</sup> There are, however, anomalies: it was only in 785 that the figures (*tamāthīl*) on a silver Syrian censer donated by the caliph ʿUmar (r. 634–44) to the mosque of Medina were rendered innocuous (probably by decapitation; see below) by the governor of the city.<sup>22</sup> This remedial action falls within the period in which the earliest traditions regarding images were codified, according to a recent reevaluation, hinting at further shifts in attitudes to figuration between the late seventh and late eighth centuries.<sup>23</sup>

Detailed studies of figural ornament in medieval Islamic religious architecture are few and far between (medieval Anatolia being better represented than most other regions of the Islamic world in this respect),<sup>24</sup> but as a general rule, figuration continued to be eschewed in the decoration of medieval mosques and *madrasas* (religious schools). Occasional exceptions include pre-Islamic monuments converted for use as mosques, in which figural ornament was often, but not always, defaced.<sup>25</sup> In those mosques and *madrasas* where figural ornament did appear,<sup>26</sup> it was generally avoided in the area around the prayer niche (*mihrab*), in accordance with specific injunctions, but even here exceptions exist.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images proliferated in the secular arts. The ubiquity of figural ornament is especially noticeable in the arts of the eastern Islamic world from the eleventh century on, where one finds even three-dimensional sculpture produced in a wide range of media.<sup>28</sup> Neither abstract ornament nor epigraphy (which assumed some of the iconographic value of figural ornament) was immune to the tendency toward figuration, with ambiguous zoomorphic forms emerging from vegetal scrolls and the stems of letters inscribed on some medieval objects acquiring heads, eyes, and other anthropomorphic facial features (Fig. 3).<sup>29</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that the divine image was represented in the Islamic world (despite occasional tendencies toward anthropomorphism), but in the eastern Islamic world, depictions of the prophet Muhammad survive from the thirteenth century on.<sup>30</sup> In later paintings the Prophet is sometimes (but not always) portrayed with his face veiled or otherwise obscured; this reticence about the face finds a counterpart in the activities of medieval iconoclasts in the Islamic world, as we shall see below.

The profusion of figural ornament in every imaginable artistic medium attests that the gap between proscription and practice could be a wide one. Medieval Islamic attitudes to figuration varied from individual to individual and could change over time, or with the advent of new political regimes with different cultural values. Consequently, Muslims opposed to icons of various sorts, whether the art of previous Muslim generations or those of the cultures with which Islam came in contact, developed practical strategies for dealing with them. Just as rabbinical tradition suggested ways of neutralizing existing images that satisfied the spirit (if not always the letter) of Jewish proscriptions on figuration, so the Hadith afforded some guidance as to what to do with images.<sup>31</sup> Two basic alternatives emerge from the various Traditions dealing with figuration: recontextualization in a manner that made clear that the images were in no way venerated (by reusing figural textiles as floor cushions, for example), or decapitation, so that they became inanimate, that is, devoid of a soul (*rūh*).<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, no distinction appears to be made between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations. Defacement (or the mutilation of the affective parts of the face, such as the eyes and nose) often substituted for decapitation, a practice that finds a precedent in early accounts of the prophet Muhammad's iconoclastic activities, such as this passage in the ninth-century *Book of Idols*:

When on the day he conquered Mecca, the Apostle of God appeared before the Kaʿbah, he found the idols arrayed

around it. Thereupon he started to pierce their eyes with the point of his arrow, saying, "Truth is come and falsehood is vanished. Verily, falsehood is a thing that vanisheth [Qur'an 17:81]." He then ordered that they be knocked down, after which they were taken out and burned.<sup>33</sup>

Although the phenomenon has never occasioned serious study, from medieval Andalusia to Iran one finds all of the practices outlined above employed by Muslims against images created by other Muslims.<sup>34</sup> Some of this iconoclastic activity undoubtedly arose from individuals acting on their own initiative. A good example of such private initiative is described amid a lively account by the Ottoman writer Evliya Çelebi of an auction of fine goods held by the pasha of Bitlis in eastern Anatolia in 1655. Potential bidders apparently were allowed to peruse the goods in their quarters overnight, for our tale concerns one individual who showed a penchant for an illustrated manuscript of the *Shāh-Nāma*, the Persian Book of Kings:

When the witty fellow brought it to his tent and began leafing through, he saw that it contained miniatures. Painting being forbidden according to his belief, he took his Turkish knife and scraped the narcissus eyes of those depicted, as though he were poking out their eyes, and thus he poked holes in all the pages. Or else he drew lines over their throats, claiming that he had throttled them. Or he rubbed out the faces and garments of the pretty lads and girls with phlegm and saliva from his mouth. Thus in a single moment he spoiled with his spit a miniature that a master painter could not have completed in an entire month. . . . When the auctioneer opens the book and sees that all the miniatures are ruined, he cries, "People of Muhammed! See what this philistine has done to this *Shāh-nāme*. . . . he poked out the eyes or cut the throats of all the people in the pictures with his knife, or rubbed out their faces with a shoe-sponge."<sup>35</sup>

That the offending iconoclast was eventually lashed and stoned as his punishment for defacing the manuscript serves as a reminder of just how contested the issue of figuration could be, even between Muslims. The drawing of a line across the throat should be understood (as the auctioneer clearly understood it) as a symbolic decapitation, which in the case of other painted images and sculptures often found more literal expression (Figs. 4, 5). The practice is attested by a number of surviving manuscripts and miniature paintings, most famously the thirteenth-century St. Petersburg *Maqāmāt* (Fig. 6).<sup>36</sup> Equally, the effacement (or, more correctly, defacement) of the image and the particular focus on the eyes are consistently evident in the work of Muslim iconoclasts from the early Islamic period on (Fig. 7), although by no means exclusive to them.<sup>37</sup>

The anecdote cited above illustrates the uneven and sometimes inconsistent ways in which a lingering unease with figuration in the Islamic world could serve to inspire the iconoclastic practices of pious individuals. In addition to such individual initiatives, it is possible to identify "state-sponsored" iconoclastic moments whose primary target could be

either the symbols of the "other" or the art produced during the reigns of Muslim predecessors. The edict against images issued by the caliph Yazid in 721 is an early example of the first type, even if recent research suggests that contemporary alterations of church mosaics are likely to have been undertaken by local Christian communities rather than knife-wielding iconoclasts sent by the caliph.<sup>38</sup> Whether these changes resulted from internal scruples about figuration or external pressure generated by Muslim opposition to images is unclear, but the central issue, within early Muslim-Christian polemic, was the veneration of icons rather than the question of images per se.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as the embodiment of both a major doctrinal difference between Christianity and Islam (the resurrection of Christ) and a symbol of Christian hegemony associated with the Byzantine enemy, the cross was a more consistent target of iconoclastic polemics than the icon.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, it might be compared to the *minbar* (pulpit) in a mosque, which was the place from which the loyalty of the community to a given ruler was publicly affirmed in the sermon (*khutūba*) each Friday. As a symbol of both religious and political authority, the *minbar* no less than the cross was also targeted for desecration or destruction by those Muslims who rejected the political authority that it embodied, often for religious reasons.<sup>41</sup>

An iconoclastic moment of the second type, primarily directed against the art produced by earlier Muslims (although it included the destruction of Hindu icons), occurred in Delhi in the fourteenth century. This was part of a broader reassertion of orthodoxy by Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq (r. 1351–88), who records its impact in his apologia:

In former times it had been the custom to wear ornamented garments, and men received robes as tokens of honor from kings' courts. Figures and devices were painted and displayed on saddles, bridles, and collars, on censers, on goblets and cups, and flagons, on dishes and ewers, in tents, on curtains and on chairs, and upon all articles and utensils. Under Divine guidance and favour I ordered all pictures and portraits to be removed from these things, and that such articles only should be made as are approved and recognised by Law [*Sharī'a*]. Those pictures and portraits which were painted on the doors and walls of palaces I ordered to be effaced [*maḥw*].<sup>42</sup>

Archaeological evidence suggests that ceramic vessels with figural imagery in Firuz Shah's palace were indeed smashed at this time, while contemporary texts refer to prohibited images being replaced with depictions of gardens and trees, in accordance with the proscriptions on figuration.<sup>43</sup>

As far as we can tell, the practices described by Firuz Shah Tughluq are similar to those employed against images carved on the architectural elements from Hindu temples reused in Indian mosques during the preceding century (Fig. 7). A considerable investment of energy and resources evidently went into both undertakings, reminding us that the determinants of iconoclasm are not just political or religious but also economic, and that the iconoclastic process can be bureaucratic, calculated, and protracted.<sup>44</sup> The picture is further complicated by the fact that many instances of Islamic iconoclasm, including those witnessed in early Indian mosques,



4 Princely feast, from the *Khamsa* of Nizami, Iran, 1574–75, with later iconoclastic alterations. London, India Office Library ms 1129, fol. 29 (photo: By permission of The British Library)

appear to be the product of a negotiation between iconoclasts and iconophiles, with the latter modifying existing images either for financial remuneration or to prevent more extensive alterations by those opposed to figuration.<sup>45</sup> This being so, it might be useful to make a distinction here between *instrumental* iconoclasm, in which a particular action is executed in order to achieve a greater goal, and *expressive* iconoclasm, in which the desire to express one's beliefs or give vent to one's feelings is achieved by the act itself.<sup>46</sup>

In many cases, the use of decapitation and defacement by

Muslim iconoclasts represents not expressive iconoclasm but a type of instrumental iconoclasm, for it permitted the licit survival of preexisting images in the prescribed way, albeit in altered form. Destruction is, by its nature, difficult to confirm, but all the evidence indicates that iconoclasts in the medieval Islamic world only rarely destroyed images, in the sense of physically obliterating them. This is true even for those textual accounts of expressive iconoclasm that appear to describe clear-cut cases of image destruction. In 1528, for example, the Mughal emperor Babur (r. 1526–30) recorded



5 Luster tile, Iran, early 14th century, with later iconoclastic alterations (the heads of the birds removed). St. Petersburg, the State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. IR-1364

his response to a number of monumental rock-cut Jain tirthankaras encountered on a visit to a suburb of Gwalior: “On the southern side is a large idol, approximately 20 yards tall. They are shown stark naked with all their private parts exposed. . . . Urwahi is not a bad place. In fact, it is rather nice. Its one drawback was the idols, so I ordered them destroyed.”<sup>47</sup> An archaeological coda to Babur’s tale indicates that “destruction” did not involve the total obliteration of the images, which survived minus their heads, and were later provided with stucco replacements.<sup>48</sup> Evidently, references to destruction in medieval texts and inscriptions, whether referring to images or buildings, need to be treated with caution. This is not necessarily because such texts were written to deceive (although we should consider the claims they make in relation to the audience that they addressed) but because “destruction,” in Arabic and Persian texts and epigraphs, like “reconstruction” in Roman texts, “was a general and non-denotative ideal, the expression of which could take several forms.”<sup>49</sup>

Just as references to reconstruction in Roman rebuilding texts may “have been more visually meaningful to the reader in the context of an improved surface appearance with minimal structural change,”<sup>50</sup> so “destruction” in medieval Islamic texts could meaningfully refer to transformations of buildings and objects that fell far short of physical obliteration. When motivated by iconoclasm, such transformations are consistently focused on the head and face; although Babur was apparently offended by the nudity of the Jain images, he “destroyed” them by amputating the head rather than any other body part. This is consistent with iconoclastic practice elsewhere in South Asia and in other parts of the Islamic world.<sup>51</sup> In some cases, desecration and ritual defilement were considered sufficient to “destroy” religious icons by demonstrating their impotence in the face of such an affront, an intention that also underlies some iconoclastic practice in medieval Europe.<sup>52</sup> Seen in this light, the dichot-

omy between creation and destruction that underlies much writing on iconoclasm offers too reductive a reading of iconoclastic practice.<sup>53</sup> As the Hadith dealing with images suggest, and iconoclastic practice in the medieval Islamic world implies, this was less an attempt to negate the image than to neutralize it.

Religious “otherness” clearly was not the sole determinant of Islamic iconoclasm, for, as the examples scattered throughout this essay indicate, the kinds of iconoclastic practices associated with the treatment of non-Islamic imagery by medieval Muslims were indistinguishable from those that Muslim iconoclasts employed against images made by their coreligionists. In terms of these practices, Muslim iconoclasts are themselves indistinguishable from other types of iconoclasts, for the same focus on the head and face is a feature of Roman, Early Christian, and Byzantine iconoclasm, and the eyes of fifteenth-century Catholic images were scratched out by sixteenth-century Protestant reformers, even as French revolutionaries decapitated the icons of the ancien régime.<sup>54</sup> In all of these cases, “The aim is to render images powerless, to deprive them of those parts which may be considered to embody their effectiveness. This is why images are very often mutilated rather than wholly destroyed.”<sup>55</sup> The undertaking highlights a fundamental ambiguity regarding the status of the image, which lies at the heart of much iconoclastic practice. The destruction of the idol assailed by the prophet Muhammad in the passage from the *Book of Idols* cited above is divided into different moments, which seem to index respectively a process of neutralization and destruction often repeated in later Muslim encounters with idols.<sup>56</sup> The hiatus between the two moments is a crucial one, suggesting as it does that the idol is imbued with a degree of animation or efficacy, whose source is to be sought perhaps in the supernatural presences inhabiting some of the idols encountered in other accounts of the Prophet’s iconoclastic activities.<sup>57</sup> The notion that the image is the abode of a malign spirit or



6 *Maqāmāt* of al-Hariri, Iraq, ca. 1240, with later iconoclastic alterations, fol. 32v. St. Petersburg, the Russian Academy of Sciences

that it possesses quasimagical powers,<sup>58</sup> which seems to underlie the concern shown by the Hadith with “deanimating” existing images by depriving them of a soul (*rūh*), contrasts with the emphasis on the impotence of idols and images in most writings on the subject within the Old Testament tradition espoused by Islam.<sup>59</sup> The idea that the image is both inert matter and the potential abode of evil or malevolent spirits is, however, common to both Zoroastrian and Early Christian polemics against images.<sup>60</sup> The ambiguities arising from the dual status of the image are reflected in the practices of Muslim iconoclasts in South Asia (and undoubtedly elsewhere), a point well made by André Wink:

It was essential to render the image powerless, to remove them from their consecrated contexts. Selective dilapidation could be sufficient to that purpose. It is hard to gauge the depth of religious convictions here. Did fear play a role in the iconoclastic destruction of the early Muslim conquerors in India? Were the images destroyed, desecrated or mutilated because they were potent or impotent?<sup>61</sup>

To put the question another way, should the drawing of a line across the throat be understood as “an effort to indicate the inanimate and therefore nonreal status of the figures,”<sup>62</sup> or as an attempt to deprive them of the possibility of animation, as the Hadith seem to imply? One answer lies in the way images were treated, and the focus on the head, eyes, and nose. This may have been intended to neutralize images in a manner

determined by Prophetic precedent, but it also accords with the way in which shame, transgression, or lack of fidelity was inscribed on the body of contemporary living beings. It is particularly striking that the Hindu icons destroyed as part of Firuz Shah Tughluq’s reassertion of orthodoxy were burned in a place otherwise reserved for public executions and the punishment of criminals.<sup>63</sup>

The treatment of anthropomorphic images as if they were animate beings is a recurring characteristic of pre- and early modern iconoclasm that was already apparent to medieval observers.<sup>64</sup> In his description of the damage done to Christian images in the churches of Antioch during the Seljuq occupation of the city in the late eleventh century, William of Tyre notes:

The pictures of the revered saints had been erased from the very walls—symbols which supplied the place of books and reading to the humble worshippers of God and aroused devotion in the minds of the simple people, so praiseworthy for their devout piety. On these the Turks had spent their rage *as if on living persons*; they had gouged out eyes, mutilated noses, and daubed the pictures with mud and filth.<sup>65</sup>

If we are to believe recent anthropological and art historical scholarship on iconoclasm, the “confusion” of signifier and signified noted here arises from a universal tendency to invest the image with the capacity for animation to varying degrees.<sup>66</sup> Visiting vengeance or shame on the image as if on the body of a living person, iconoclasts engage with the image as if it were animate. Reports of Taliban officials reproving the statue of a seminaked bodhisattva in the Kabul Museum by slapping it across the face suggest how remarkable the degree of engagement with the icon can be. I will return to this episode below.

### Bamiyan and Medieval Afghan Iconoclasm

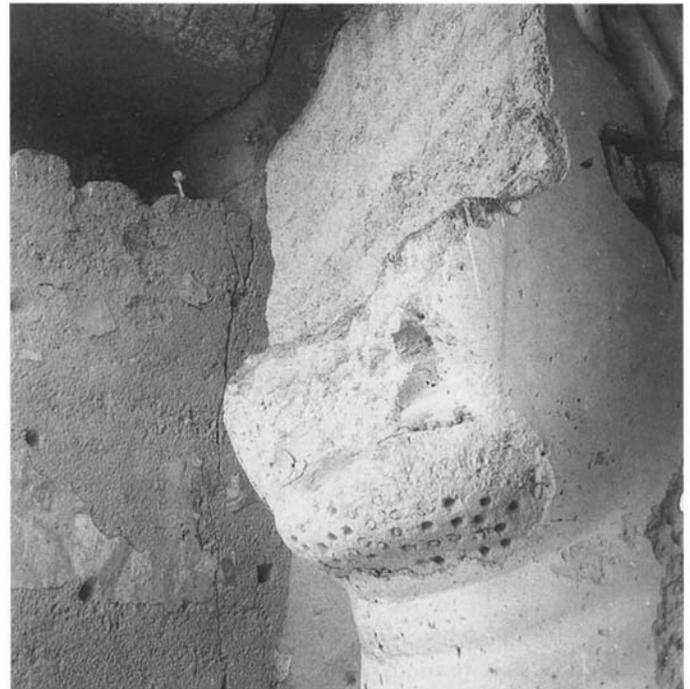
The rock-cut tirthankaras of Gwalior that offended Babur recall the Bamiyan Buddhas in more than stature or medium; the latter may also have been the target of medieval iconoclasts. Even before their destruction in 2001, both Buddhas were faceless above chin level (Fig. 8).<sup>67</sup> Ironically, many of those who bemoaned the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas but were unfamiliar with them assumed that this fate was illustrated by images of the Buddhas *before* the Taliban had attacked them. It has often been stated that the Buddhas were originally provided with masks of wood or copper, but little evidence has been adduced for this. It is equally possible that the upper parts of the faces were deliberately mutilated, reflecting the activities of medieval iconoclasts, for whom the face would have been an obvious target.<sup>68</sup> Buddhist monastic institutions in the Bamiyan Valley suffered iconoclastic damage even before the advent of Islam: in the fifth or early sixth century the Hephtalite (“White Hun”) ruler Mihirikula, who had Shaivite leanings and was opposed to Buddhism, is said to have destroyed the monastic settlement at Bamiyan.<sup>69</sup> Despite such setbacks, Buddhism continued to flourish here after the advent of Islam, for there were practicing Buddhists in the valley as late as the ninth or tenth century, and even in the eleventh century it was not fully Islamicized.<sup>70</sup> The wealth



7 Reused capital with face removed, probably at the time of construction, late 12th or early 13th century. Chaurasi Khamba Mosque, Kaman, Rajasthan (photo: the author)

of the Bamiyan monasteries attracted the attention of hostile rulers, and in 870 the Saffarid ruler Ya'qub ibn Layth (r. 867–79) raided the area, seized a number of precious metal icons, and is said to have destroyed a temple.<sup>71</sup> The removal of the faces, if the result of iconoclastic activity, might have been undertaken at this time, for the practice of defacing pre-Islamic anthropomorphic images was certainly known in eastern Iran in the ninth and tenth centuries. In his history of Bukhara, for example, the tenth-century writer Narshaki describes pre-Islamic doors reused in the Great Mosque of Bukhara, which bore the images of “idols” with their faces erased, but were otherwise intact.<sup>72</sup>

Any iconoclastic transformations of the Buddhas did little to dampen their enthusiastic reception by medieval Muslims, however. Between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, the Bamiyan Buddhas were often referred to in Arabic and Persian literature, where (along with remains of Buddhist stupas and frescoes) they were depicted as marvels and wonders.<sup>73</sup> Several writers emphasize that nowhere in the world can one find anything to equal the Bamiyan Buddhas, popularly known as *Surkh-but* (red idol) and *Khink-but* (gray idol).<sup>74</sup> Medieval accounts of the Bamiyan Buddhas often locate them within discussions of Indian religious practices and iconolatry, topics that were to increasingly preoccupy Arab and Persian writers as the cultural contacts between eastern Iran and India grew between the tenth and twelfth centuries,



8 Small Buddha, Bamiyan, detail of the face before destruction (photo: Courtesy of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art)

the result of military conquest and trade.<sup>75</sup> The idols (*aṣanām*) of Bamiyan were the subject of a lost work by the celebrated scholar al-Biruni, whose book on India, including a sophisticated explication of Indian religion and image worship, has survived.<sup>76</sup>

Paradoxically, this eleventh-century work was written at the court of Mahmud of Ghazna, a historical figure who has assumed a paradigmatic role as the Muslim iconoclast par excellence in South Asia.<sup>77</sup> As was the case in other parts of the Islamic world, iconoclastic practice in medieval Afghanistan existed within a spectrum of responses to the image (religious or otherwise), which also included aesthetic appreciation, awe, fascination, revulsion, and scholarship. An indication of the rather complex attitude to figuration that prevailed at the Ghaznavid court is provided by the ubiquity of three-dimensional sculpture and anthropomorphic reliefs and frescoes, which led to admiring comparisons with idol temples in the work of contemporary poets.<sup>78</sup> References to non-Muslim religious idols (*but*) and idol temples (*but-khāne*) appear elsewhere in the poetry of the period as emblems of physical beauty or indexes of constancy and fidelity to a beloved.<sup>79</sup> Mahmud “the idol-breaker” also issued bilingual Indian coins with a Sanskrit legend in which Muhammad is described as the avatar of God, a concept that, while somewhat unorthodox in an Islamic context, was clearly intended to frame Islamic doctrine within an Indic paradigm.<sup>80</sup> In the following century, Afghan rulers of India went further, continuing coin issues featuring the images of Hindu deities, despite their portrayal in contemporary histories and inscriptions as bastions of religious orthodoxy. However economically sensible this numismatic continuity may have been, it alerts us once again to the divergence between the normative values underlying textual rhetoric and the pragmatic concerns that governed actual practice when it came to the issue of figuration and non-Muslim religious imagery.<sup>81</sup>

Further paradoxes lie in the fact that the central event of Islamic iconoclasm in South Asia concerns not, as one might expect, a precious metal anthropomorphic icon but a *linga*, an aniconic stone image of Shiva, brought to Afghanistan. The *linga* was housed in one of the most celebrated temples of medieval India, which stood in the coastal town of Somnath in Gujarat. In 1025 Mahmud raided Somnath and looted its temple. According to some renditions of the tale, the temple Brahmans attempted to ransom the icon, offering vast amounts for its safety. Mahmud rejected the offer, famously repudiating the idea that he should be known as a broker of idols rather than a breaker of them.<sup>82</sup> The *linga* was subsequently broken, and part of it used to form the threshold of the entrance to the mosque of Ghazna, a practice for which there are earlier textual and archaeological parallels, not just in the Islamic world.<sup>83</sup> The remainder was thrown down in the hippodrome (*maydān*) of Ghazna, where it joined a decapitated bronze image of Vishnu, looted on a previous Indian expedition.<sup>84</sup> According to other accounts, it was set at the entrance to Mahmud’s palace, so that the thresholds of both palace and mosque were composed of fragments of the *linga*.<sup>85</sup>

The Somnath episode is traditionally seen as pitting a monolithic South Asian iconophilia against a monolithic Muslim iconophobia. Just as divergent attitudes to images are

represented simultaneously in the culture of medieval Afghanistan, however, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the relationship between figuration and veneration in medieval South Asia was considerably more complex than has been acknowledged to date. Images were contested between different sects and faiths, sometimes leading to the desecration and destruction of portable icons or the erasure and mutilation of images in temples and shrines.<sup>86</sup> Such events often occurred at times of military conquest or political change and may be seen as reflecting the close interrelations between centers of political and religious authority in medieval South Asia. The relation between icon and ruler is particularly well documented for the Shiva *linga*,<sup>87</sup> whose looting, display, and desecration clearly carried a powerful political message, even if framed within the context of orthodox conformity.

The looting of portable icons was a common practice in medieval South Asian warfare even before the advent of the Muslims in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>88</sup> Ignoring the lurid idol-bashing rhetoric of the medieval Islamic sources, therefore, the triumphalism inherent in the seizure and display of the Somnath *linga* in the dynastic shrines of Ghazna was in no way at odds with the rhetoric of contemporary South Asian kingship. What does distinguish Ghaznavid practice is the treatment afforded the *linga* and other looted Hindu icons brought to Ghazna.<sup>89</sup> Although images were sometimes subjected to destruction in medieval South Asia, looted icons were usually treated with respect and incorporated into the victor’s pantheon in a subordinate capacity, often as doorkeepers. While invoking the “Hindu trope by which defeated enemies were subordinated into door guardians,” the Somnath *linga* became the focus of a kind of performative iconoclasm, recontextualized to be trampled on in a quotidian repudiation of idolatry by the populace of Ghazna.<sup>90</sup> Although this gesture is usually viewed through the lens of religious rhetoric, it also represents the literal enactment of a metaphoric conceit common to medieval Islamic and South Asian rulers by which a victor claims to have trampled the defeated underfoot. The idea is enshrined in the titles of the Ghaznavid sultans, who (along with many other eastern Islamic dynasts) styled themselves “lords of the necks of the people,” a title that, while politically charged, was devoid of any sectarian associations.<sup>91</sup> The motif of a victorious ruler trampling a defeated rival was a common expression of royal victory rhetoric that was often adopted by iconoclasts; the use of a shoe sponge to erase the painted faces of book illustrations in the anecdote cited earlier shows how adaptable the concept was.<sup>92</sup> Similar adaptations are evident in medieval South Asia, where epigraphic claims of kings to have placed their feet on the necks of defeated rivals seem to be reflected in a remarkable series of tenth-century images from eastern India (an area contested between Buddhist and Hindu sects) that show Buddhist deities trampling their Hindu equivalents.<sup>93</sup>

Within an Islamic context, the trampling of the displayed icon is a necessary condition of its performance in this theatrical commemoration of victory, for it obviates any accusation that the icon was venerated, extending a general principle established in the Hadith (by which an anthropomorphic image may be tolerated if sat or trampled on) to an aniconic

image of Shiva.<sup>94</sup> Other of the Hindu icons displayed in Ghazna were decapitated, in accordance with the alternative mode prescribed for displayed images.

The trampling of the tutelary deities of defeated rulers, no less than their display within the shrines of the victorious, highlights the role of such icons as synecdoches, whose treatment in secondary contexts is directly related to their ability to articulate the idea of incorporation, however notional.<sup>95</sup> In both Islamic and Indic discourses of looting, the recontextualized icon, whether desecrated or venerated, affirmed the center while indexing the shifting periphery. The geographic dispersal of religious authority and political power in the medieval Islamic world was often reflected in the treatment of looted icons. Ya'qub ibn Layth dispatched the icons seized in Bamiyan to the caliph in Baghdad, for example, with a request that they be forwarded to Mecca, thus situating the indexes of his territorial expansion within the key centers of religious and political authority.<sup>96</sup> Mahmud's reported dispatch of fragments from the Somnath icon to Mecca and Medina provides a more literal reflection of this cultural fragmentation.<sup>97</sup>

As a heterotopia dedicated to the collection and display of defunct and antique icons, Mahmud's mosque at Ghazna has much in common with the European museum, especially those museums established to commemorate the work of European missionaries.<sup>98</sup> In both cases selected objects assume a didactic function as visual cognates of a concept of progress indexed by the end of idolatry; the recontextualized idol indexes a bringing into the fold dependent on the shifting economic, cultural, and military frontier. Within the European museum, exotic religious icons could also be assimilated as visually interesting in their own right, and even as art objects, a transmutation reflected in Mark Twain's description of nineteenth-century Banaras as "a vast museum of idols."<sup>99</sup> The hegemonic connotations of this shift from cult to culture came to the fore in surprising ways during the recent Bamiyan episode.

### Mullah Omar and the Museum

As the examples discussed above indicate, Muslim iconoclasts have historically availed themselves of a number of options sanctioned by tradition that fall far short of physical obliteration; the Bamiyan Buddhas may themselves have attested this, as did the erasure of the faces of figural images in public places in Kabul after the advent of the Taliban.<sup>100</sup> Although the act invoked the rhetoric of the Islamic past or was represented as a reversion to medieval practice, by either standard the destruction of the celebrated Bamiyan Buddhas was highly anomalous. We may never know for certain why the Taliban altered their previous policy on pre-Islamic antiquities in February 2001. The edict that inspired the action and the various pronouncements that followed suggest, however, that the Taliban's iconoclastic outburst was a peculiarly modern phenomenon, an act that, "under the cover of archaic justifications, functioned according to a very contemporary logic."<sup>101</sup> The timing of the edict, and the fact that it reverses an earlier undertaking to protect the Buddhist antiquities of Afghanistan, suggest these events had less to do with an eternal theology of images than with the Taliban's immediate relation to the international community, which had recently

imposed sanctions in response to the regime's failure to expel Osama bin Laden.<sup>102</sup>

The Wahhabi version of Islam espoused by the regime's Saudi guest may have played a role in the events of February 2001, for the destruction of objects and monuments considered the focus of improper veneration has been a characteristic of Wahhabism from its inception.<sup>103</sup> However, as Dario Gamboni has pointed out, "often elaborately staged destructions . . . of works of art must be considered as means of communication in their own right, even if the 'material' they make use of is—or was—itsself a tool of expression or communication."<sup>104</sup> In this case, the eventual transport of Western journalists to the site to record the void left by the Buddhas' destruction (Fig. 2) suggests that the intended audience for this communiqué was neither divine nor local but global: for all its recidivist rhetoric, this was a performance designed for the age of the Internet.

One can make a good case that what was at stake here was not the literal worship of religious idols but their veneration as cultural icons. In particular, there are reasons for thinking that the Taliban edict on images represented an onslaught on cultural fetishism focused on the institution of the museum as a locus of contemporary iconolatry. The uncritical reception of a rationale that appeared to confirm Orientalist constructions of "Islamic iconoclasm" as an essential cultural value served to obscure a number of paradoxes that hint at the broader cultural significance of the events.<sup>105</sup> To begin with, there are no Buddhists left in Afghanistan to explain the curious concern about the worship and respect afforded the idols in Mullah Omar's edict (see App. below), a fact acknowledged in the Taliban's paradoxical statement that the presence of practicing Buddhists in the country would have guaranteed the continued existence of the images.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the destruction of monumental sculpture was part of a broader iconoclastic program that arguably had its most disastrous effects not on images still in situ but on those housed in what was left of the museums of Afghanistan.<sup>107</sup> According to one report, the Bamiyan episode was initiated after Taliban officials, horrified at being confronted by a seminaked bodhisattva in the Kabul Museum, slapped it across the chest and face.<sup>108</sup>

Apocryphal though this story may be, in subsequent statements, Mullah Omar made clear the perceived relationship between iconolatry and the museum. Faced with the threat to destroy the Buddhist icons, Western institutions offered to purchase the offending items, in effect legitimizing the practice of looting Afghan antiquities from which some had benefited in the preceding decades. In an attempt to save some artifacts, Philippe de Montebello, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, pleaded with the Taliban, "Let us remove them so that they are in the context of an art museum, where they are cultural objects, works of art and not cult images."<sup>109</sup> The response of Mullah Omar was telling, although its significance was missed at the time. The mullah replied on Radio Shari'ca by posing the rhetorical question to the international Muslim community: "Do you prefer to be a breaker of idols or a seller of idols?"<sup>110</sup> If the question sounds familiar, it was intended to, for it self-consciously invokes the very words attributed to Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna when confronted with the offer of the Somnath

Brahmans to ransom their icon.<sup>111</sup> Although iconoclasm is often stigmatized as an act stemming from ignorance,<sup>112</sup> this was a gesture that was particularly well informed about its own historical precedents. The artful mining of the Islamic past for authoritative precedent recalls Mullah Omar's earlier "rediscovery" of the celebrated *burda* (cloak) of the Prophet, in a Kandahar museum, which made it possible for him to align himself with a historical chain of caliphs who had earlier laid claim to this cloak of legitimacy.<sup>113</sup>

The significance of these events was not lost in India, where the Somnath episode still resonates politically.<sup>114</sup> In contrast to the dominant Western view that the Bamiyan debacle evidenced the eternal medievalism of Islam, in India it was represented as the return of the repressed. Jaswant Singh, foreign minister of a Hindu nationalist government, told the Indian parliament that India "has been cautioning the world against this regression into medieval barbarism."<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, the traditional tropes of medieval desecration were invoked in a very modern way, with the radical Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) protesting outside the United Nations headquarters in Delhi threatening to destroy Indian mosques in response to the destruction of the Buddhas.<sup>116</sup> In turn, a Taliban spokesman in New York weakly suggested that the actions in Bamiyan were in fact a (much delayed) response to the destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in 1992, in whose wake large numbers of Indian citizens perished in sectarian violence.<sup>117</sup>

The truly global implications of this event derive, however, from the fact that Mullah Omar's words were directed not eastward, toward the Hindus of India or the Buddhist communities beyond, but westward, toward European and American museum directors seeking to ransom the ill-fated images. By his careful choice of language, Mullah Omar appropriated the authority of the Mahmud legend while transposing the Brahmanical guardians of a religiously idolatrous past with the museological purveyors of a culturally idolatrous present.<sup>118</sup>

The idea of the museum as the locus of a kind of idolatry may seem absurd, since the distinction between cult icon and art object is an ancient one in Western epistemology and, historically, has tended to be asserted as a defense against radical acts of iconoclasm.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, as a response to French revolutionary iconoclasm,<sup>120</sup> the institution of the museum is itself the signifier of a shift from cult to culture that has indexed the transition to modernity in the West from at least the eighteenth century on.<sup>121</sup> If this was some idiosyncratic misreading of Western cultural institutions and values, however, it finds an uncanny echo in the writing of Walter Benjamin and others, for whom the original use value of the artifact continues to inform its reception as an art object.<sup>122</sup> Although rooted in the "timeless theology of images" paradigm that I have criticized here, the tension between Abdullah's reading of the "Wonder House" of Lahore as the locus of idolatry and Kim's perception of it as a governmental institution for the dissemination of Western rationality in my epigraph anticipates a paradox highlighted in the work of a modern anthropologist such as Alfred Gell:

I cannot tell between religious and aesthetic exaltation; art-lovers, it seems to me, actually do worship images in

most of the relevant senses, and explain away their de facto idolatry by rationalizing it as aesthetic awe. Thus, to write about art at all is, in fact, to write about either religion, or the substitute for religion which those who have abandoned the outward forms of received religions content themselves with.<sup>123</sup>

As its etymology (and often its architecture) implies, the museum is a type of secular temple, a "temple of resonance," within which modernity is equated with the desacralization and even "silencing" of inanimate objects by their transmutation into museological artifacts.<sup>124</sup> The ability of these muted idols to speak in novel ways is intrinsic to their existence as art, however. This is clear from one of the foundation documents of the modern museum, Abbé Grégoire's 1794 call for an institution to protect French national patrimony from the depredations of revolutionary iconoclasm: "In this statue, which is a work of art, the ignorant see only a piece of crafted stone: let us show them that this piece of marble breathes, that this canvas is alive, and that this book is an arsenal with which to defend their rights."<sup>125</sup> The work of David Freedberg and Gell suggests that the animation implied here is something more than a metaphoric conceit. As the latter notes, "in the National Gallery, even if we do not commit full-blown idolatry, we do verge on it all the time," a point that the 1978 attack on Nicolas Poussin's *Adoration of the Golden Calf* was presumably intended to underline.<sup>126</sup> It is in the museum that what might be crudely termed the secular and religious discourses of Euro-American iconoclasm coincide. Given the ways in which the aesthetic, economic, and institutional aspects of modernity are articulated around the transmutation of the cult image into cultural icon, it is hardly surprising that in the modern nation-state, the museum rather than the church is the primary target of "traditional" iconoclastic behavior.<sup>127</sup> At the other extreme, occasional attempts to venerate the museological artifact also serve to highlight the often uneasy relationship between cult image and cultural icon.<sup>128</sup> Both in theory and in practice, it seems that the distinction underlying Philippe de Montebello's appeal to the Taliban is far from clear-cut.

As its origins in European religious and revolutionary iconoclasm imply, the institution of the museum, no less than the objects it houses, is a culturally constructed artifact, a product of a particular cultural attitude toward the past. As Gell puts it,

We have neutralized our idols by reclassifying them as art; but we perform obeisances before them every bit as deep as those of the most committed idolater before his wooden god . . . we have to recognize that the "aesthetic attitude" is a specific historical product of the religious crisis of the Enlightenment and the rise of Western science, and that it has no applicability to civilizations which have not internalized the Enlightenment as we have.<sup>129</sup>

As a product of the European Enlightenment, the museum stands among the range of institutions that construct and project a cultural identity defined in relation to the nation-state.<sup>130</sup> At a global level, the institution is part of the paradoxical interplay between structural similarity and cultural difference that characterizes the "community of nations."

The objects it houses are central to its role in articulating and consolidating an idea of a national culture defined in relation to the cultures of this broader community.<sup>131</sup> As Carol Duncan notes, “What we see and do not see in our most prestigious art museums—and on what terms and whose authority we do or don’t see it—involves the much larger questions of who constitutes the community and who shall exercise the power to define its identity.”<sup>132</sup> Historically, the museum has often served to highlight the hegemonic nature of the “universal” values underlying the concept of nationhood that it embodies.<sup>133</sup> On the one hand, there is the awkward relation between the museum, colonization, and modernity.<sup>134</sup> On the other, there are the tensions between the idea of the museum as a showcase for national patrimony, the idea of art as a universal human value, and the historical collecting practices of many Euro-American museums vis-à-vis colonial and postcolonial states.<sup>135</sup> The gap between theory and practice here is often obscured by the assertion (implicit or explicit) that the inhabitants of lands such as Afghanistan are incapable of curating their own patrimony. This argument, a stalwart of the colonial era that resurfaced again during the Bamiyan episode, is somewhat ironic given the damage done to many South and Central Asian archaeological sites in the nineteenth century by European scholars collecting for museums.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, it can be argued that the shift in signification inherent in the resocialization of the artifact within the museum, its transmutation from cult image to cultural icon, has much in common with the semiotic structure of iconoclasm itself.<sup>137</sup>

In the destruction of recontextualized museum artifacts, the literal and metaphoric senses of “iconoclasm,” the destruction of images and an attack on venerated institutions, coincide.<sup>138</sup> It has been suggested that certain acts of iconoclasm directed against Western museums represent “protests against exclusion from the cultural ‘party game’ in which only a minority of society participates.”<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Taliban iconoclasm can be understood as constituting a form of protest against exclusion from an international community in which the de facto hegemony of the elite nations is obscured by the rhetoric of universal values. As an index of an idea of community that frequently falls far short of the ideal (and nowhere more so than in Afghanistan, where superpowers did battle by proxy), there could be few better targets to make the point. If the destruction of Afghan antiquities in March 2001 represented an attack on “a separate Afghan identity,”<sup>140</sup> this was a concept of identity rooted in the “universal” values of the nation-state. Just as the *linga* from Somnath served to evoke a relationship between Ghazna and the wider (Indic and Islamic) world, the Buddhas in the Kabul Museum referenced the incorporation of Afghanistan into a global community of nations. Their destruction represented the definitive rejection of that ideal in favor of an equally hegemonic notion of pan-Islamic homogeneity constituted in opposition to it.<sup>141</sup> This relationship between the art object, Taliban iconoclasm, and the international community was noted by Jean Frodon in an insightful article on the Bamiyan episode, which appeared in *Le Monde*:

If a transcendence inhabits these objects, if a belief that the fundamentalists perceive in opposition to their religion is associated with them, it is this and only this: to be

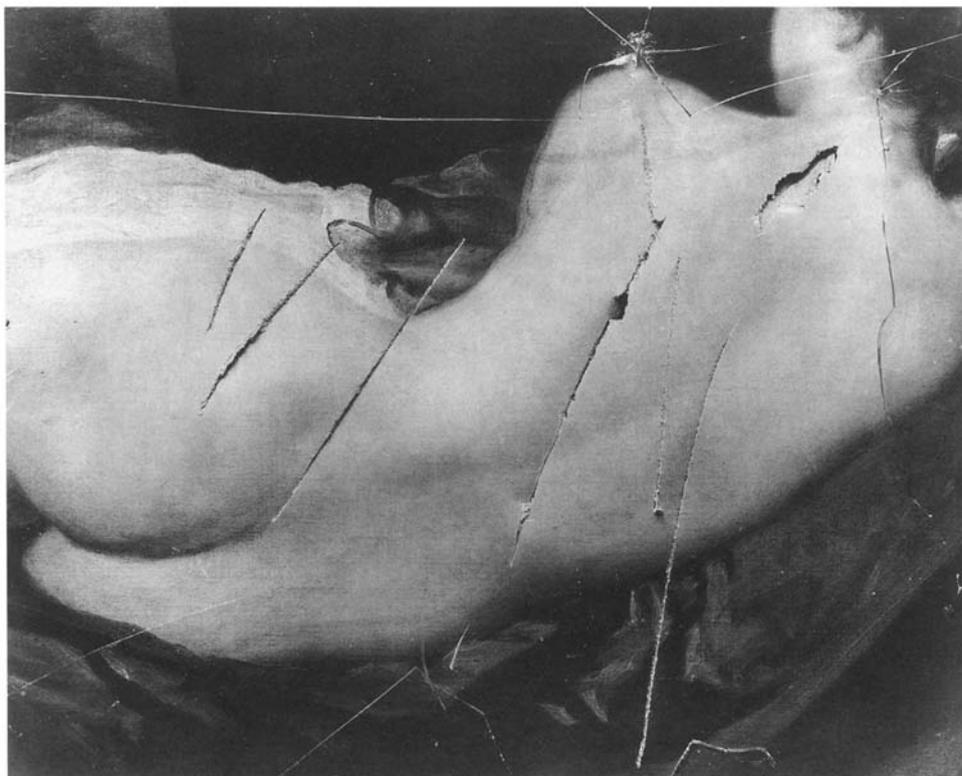
perceived as art objects (which evidently was not the meaning that those who sculpted the Bamiyan giants in the fifth century of our era gave to them). This cultural belief, elaborated in the West, is today one of the principal ties uniting what we call the international community (which is far from containing the global population). It is against this, against a rapport with a world valorizing a nonreligious relation with the invisible, that the explosive charges that annihilated the Buddhas were placed.<sup>142</sup>

A further irony lies in the fact that the Afghan Buddhas were ideally suited to play the role assigned to them in the Bamiyan episode, for they first came to the attention of Western scholarship as evidence of a classical European influence on the early medieval art of the region. Indeed, the very idea of representing the Buddha anthropomorphically was ascribed to the impact of “the mysteriously transmitted Grecian touch.”<sup>143</sup> Within this epistemological tradition, the origins of both the Bamiyan Buddhas and the museum as an institution lie in the same foundational stratum of classicism on which the universalizing values of the Enlightenment were constructed.<sup>144</sup> It was precisely as a reaction to the hegemonic cultural, economic, and political power of this Enlightenment tradition that the destruction of the Buddhas was undertaken.

The attack on the museum as an institution enshrining idolatrous cultural values resonates with a second rationale offered for the Taliban’s iconoclastic edict: that it highlighted the hypocrisy of Western institutions. These “will give millions of dollars to save un-Islamic stone statues but not one cent to save the lives of Afghani men, women and children”; as Sayed Rahmatullah Hashimi, a Taliban envoy to the United States, put it, “When your children are dying in front of you, then you don’t care about a piece of art.”<sup>145</sup> Here, the concern with the materiality of non-Islamic worship that we saw articulated in the Traditions regarding figuration coincides with a critique of “Western” materialism. The reluctance of the international community to aid Afghanistan, even in the face of a major threat of famine, derived from the earlier imposition of sanctions, an extension to Afghanistan of a type of collective punishment that had previously been visited on the civilian population of Iraq, with devastating effects. It is also worth noting that the destruction of Buddhist antiquities followed an earlier massacre of the minority Hazara population of the Bamiyan Valley, which barely merited a mention in the European and American press, firmly focused as it was on the issue of the Buddhas.<sup>146</sup>

In claiming to be drawing attention to a fetishistic privileging of inanimate icons at the expense of animate beings, the Taliban find themselves in curious company, for there is a striking parallel here with one of the most (in)famous acts of modern European iconoclasm. On March 10, 1914, Mary Richardson slashed Diego Velázquez’s celebrated seventeenth-century work *The Rokeby Venus* where it hung in the National Gallery, London (Fig. 9). This action, undertaken as part of a broader campaign for universal suffrage, was specifically intended to draw attention to the treatment of the imprisoned Emmeline Pankhurst. In Richardson’s own words,

I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the



9 Diego Velázquez, *The Rokeby Venus*, detail, ca. 1640–48, after the attack by Mary Richardson in 1914 London, The National Gallery (photo: © The National Gallery)

government for destroying Mrs. Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history. . . . If there is an outcry against my deed, let everyone remember that such an outcry is an hypocrisy so long as they allow the destruction of Mrs. Pankhurst and other beautiful living women, and that until the public cease to countenance human destruction the stones cast against me for the destruction of this picture are each an evidence against them of artistic as well as moral and political humbug and hypocrisy.<sup>147</sup>

Freedberg has pointed out that iconoclasts seeking publicity target art objects precisely because

The work has been adored and fetishized: the fact that it hangs in a museum is sufficient testimony to that, just as the hanging of pictures in churches is testimony to religious forms (or less overtly secular forms) of adoration, worship, and fetishization. Furthermore—especially in the twentieth century—the better the art, the greater the commodity fetishism.<sup>148</sup>

As the “idol of the marketplace,” the fetishized art object illustrates the relationship between cultural and financial capital in a manner that highlights “the problem of the nonuniversal and social construction of value.”<sup>149</sup> Issues of gender notwithstanding, it was precisely their common role as fetishes of Western modernity that rendered *The Rokeby Venus* and the Bamiyan Buddhas desirable targets for modern iconoclasts opposed to the values that they seemed to embody.<sup>150</sup> Such actions reveal the double nature of the fetishized image or icon, which, as signified, can expose and even avenge wrongs inflicted on living persons, while as signifier, it facilitates “the dismissal of moral judgements passed on the destruction of what ‘was only a picture’” in the case of *The*

*Rokeby Venus*,<sup>151</sup> or only stones in the case of the Buddhas. In doing so they exploit the potential of the art object and its associated iconolatry to undermine the subject-object distinction in which Enlightenment epistemology is grounded. As Igor Kopytoff notes in his discussion of the cultural biography of things, “To us, a biography of a painting by Renoir that ends up in an incinerator is as tragic, in its way, as the biography of a person who is murdered.”<sup>152</sup> Similar ironies underlie the central paradox of iconoclasm: visiting vengeance on the fetishized icon by slapping, slashing, or smashing, iconoclasts no less than iconophiles engage with the power (if not the animateness) of the image.<sup>153</sup>

None of this is intended to condone the actions of any of the players in the events of March 2001, but it is imperative to recognize that those events have a logic rooted not in the fictions of an eternal or recurring medievalism but in the realities of global modernity. The Bamiyan episode demonstrates the ease with which an index of cultural change rooted in specific historical circumstances can be ascribed to an essential cultural pathology. As I emphasized at the outset, this ahistorical paradigm should be rejected in favor of approaches that historicize iconoclastic events, acknowledging the agency of those involved, examining their motivation, and interrogating the narratives on which we depend for our information, whether courtly histories, fragmentary artifacts, or Radio Shari‘a. In the unfortunate event that the traditional attitude to “Islamic iconoclasm” were to prevail two hundred, five hundred, or one thousand years from now and we came across a reference to the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, we would invariably assume that this was a typically Islamic response to the image. In doing so, we would be overlooking the coexistence between the Buddhas and the Muslim population that marveled at them for over a millennium before they were obliterated by the Taliban. To miss the

political portents in this radical break with tradition on the part of the ruling regime would be a serious omission, as subsequent events have demonstrated. Worse still is the fact that to memorialize these events as just one more example of "Islamic iconoclasm" would be to valorize the monument to their own brand of cultural homogeneity that the Taliban created at Bamiyan.<sup>154</sup>

## Appendix

### The Taliban's Edict on Images

This is an unofficial translation of the edict concerning the destruction of religious images, prepared by the United Nations staff in Kabul, which was compiled by the Afghanistan Research Group (ARG) and circulated in an electronic newsletter as "News from Afghanistan" on March 2, 2001. The edict was published in Pushtu by the state-run Bakhtar News Agency and broadcast on Radio Shari'a on February 27, 2001. It has not proved possible to obtain a transcript of the original text; the sole transliterated Arabic term was garnered from among the partial translations given in other sources.

Edict issued by the Islamic State of Afghanistan, in Kandahar on the 12th of Rabiul-Awwal 1421 (February 26, 2001): On the basis of consultations between the religious leaders of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, religious judgments of the ulema and rulings of the Supreme Court of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, all statues and non-Islamic shrines located in different parts of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan must be destroyed. These statues have been and remain shrines of unbelievers and these unbelievers continue to worship and respect them. God Almighty is the only real shrine [*tāghūt*] and all fake idols should be destroyed.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has ordered all the representatives of the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice and the Ministries of Information to destroy all the statues. As ordered by the ulema and the Supreme Court of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan all the statues must be destroyed so that no one can worship or respect them in the future.

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## Notes

The research for this paper was undertaken while I was an Ailsa Mellon Bruce Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in 2001. A Smithsonian Senior Fellowship at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C., enabled me to write it in the spring of 2002. I would like to extend a warm thanks to both institutions for their support. My thanks are also due to Zoë Strother, Serpil Bağcı, and Massumeh Farhad for bringing various articles and books cited in the course of this essay to my attention, and to the anonymous reviewers of the piece for their insightful comments. For his critical insights and perennially sharp eye, I am particularly grateful to Zahid Chaudhary. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.

1. Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 54; and Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 217.

2. Daphné Bézard, "When Europe Also Destroyed Its Images," *Art Newspaper* 116 (July–Aug. 2001): 28.

3. K.A.C. Creswell, "The Lawfulness of Painting in Islam," *Ars Islamica* 11–12 (1946): 166. In fact, it is striking how frequently the language of pathology permeates discussion of the topic. See, for example, Patricia Crone on the ability of Islam to make "epidemic what had hitherto been merely endemic"; Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity, and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 59.

4. There are a number of paradoxes and tensions in the ways in which Islamic iconoclasm was portrayed in the course of the Bamiyan episode, the most obvious being the contradiction between representations of Islamic culture as timeless and unchanging and the assumption that the actions of the Taliban indexed an atavistic reversion to medieval practice that is a recurring feature of Islamic societies; see n. 115 below. Both representations entail a denial of covality, which is a common feature of Euro-American discourse on "others" (Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1983], 32–34) and which is particularly acute in relation to representations of Islamic cultures. As Mahmut Mutman notes, in Orientalist discourse, "the West constitutes its own history, its time and itself, among other things, through its difference from the East by characterizing the latter as lacking in history, civil society," and so forth; Mahmut Mutman, "Under the Sign of Orientalism: The West vs. Islam," *Cultural Critique*, winter 1992–93, 175. Thus, Afghanistan was represented as a land whose inhabitants have "the eyes of the ancient mariner," in which even indexes of modernity such as the camera become signs of the persistence of the past, a country the United States is trying to "jolly along" to modernity; Maureen Dowd, "Brutes and Hunks," *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2001; and Tim Weiner, "Time Out of Joint in a Ruined Land," *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2001.

5. Carl W. Ernst, "Admiring the Works of the Ancients: The Ellora Temples as Viewed by Indo-Muslim Authors," in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identity in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2000), 116. Similar issues arise in connection with representations of Jewish iconoclasm, which (as Creswell's comments suggest) has also been conceived of in essentialist terms. For good critiques of such representations, see Joseph Gutmann, "The 'Second Commandment' and the Image in Judaism," in *No Graven Images: Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1971), 1–14; and Charles Barber, "The Truth in Painting: Iconoclasm and Identity in Early-Medieval Art," *Speculum* 72 (1997): 1022–23.

6. As Oleg Grabar notes, 45, "The most obvious difference between Byzantine and Islamic iconoclasm is that the former is usually spelled with a capital 'I' and the latter with a small 'i.' This secondary typographical distinction illustrates first of all the difference between a historical moment (these are presumably capitalised) and an attitude or mode of behaviour, the latter being apparently too common to deserve capitalization." For a theoretical discussion on the supposed roots of this essential attitude, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, "Islam and Image," *History of Religions* 3 (1969): 220–60.

7. See André Wink, *Al Hind, the Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 2, *The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest 11th–13th Centuries* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 317, paraphrasing Grabar, 45: "Unlike Christian

iconoclasm, Islamic iconoclasm was virtually always directed against non-Muslim objects, with the exception of the late defacing of miniatures in manuscripts by pious librarians."

8. For example, V. L. Ménage, "The Serpent Column in Ottoman Sources," *Anatolian Studies* 14 (1964): 169–73.

9. A further important facet of Islamic iconoclasm, not dealt with here, concerns the general assumption that iconoclastic acts result from a type of anti-aesthetic impulse. I have argued elsewhere that in certain contexts, decapitated and defaced figures have a positive aesthetic value and should be considered as new works generated from those that they supersede; Finbarr Barry Flood, "Refiguring Iconoclasm: Image Mutilation and Aesthetic Innovation in the Early Indian Mosque," in *Negating the Image: Case Studies of Past Iconoclasm*, ed. Anne MacLanan and Jeffrey Johnson (forthcoming).

10. The relationship between Byzantine iconoclasm and Islamic aniconism and iconoclasm has been debated in detail in numerous publications: Grabar; Crone (as in n. 3); G.R.D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, no. 2 (1985): 267–77; Sidney H. Griffith, "Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985): 53–73; Terry Allen, *Five Essays on Islamic Art* (Manchester, Mich.: Solipsist Press, 1988), 18–22; and Sidney H. Griffith, "Islam, Images and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, ed. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), 121–38. For an interesting assessment of the "internal" determinants of early Islamic aniconism, see Emiko Terasaki, "The Lack of Human and Animal Figural Imagery in the Public Art of the Umayyad Period," M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1987, 26–56.

11. The Hadith concerning figuration are scattered through a number of collections of Traditions. The classic studies are those of Rudi Paret: Paret; idem, "Das islamische Bilderverbot und die Schia," in *Festschrift Werner Caskel: Zum siebzigsten Geburtstag 5. März 1966 Gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. Erwin Gräf (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 224–32. A more accessible and recent discussion of the Traditions regarding figuration and their sources can be found in van Reenen.

12. Paret, 43–44; Crone (as in n. 3), 67; and A. J. Wensinck [T. Fahd], "Sūra 1. In Theological and Legal Doctrine," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–97), vol. 9, 889.

13. Hawting, 22, 49. Similar concerns are articulated in Early Christian and Jewish polemics against images; Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Early Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 43–53; and Barber (as in n. 5), 1033–34.

14. A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9–10 (1956): 26; and Hawting, 67–87.

15. John V. Tolan, "Muslims as Pagans and Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade," in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of the Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 97–117; and Hawting, 85.

16. Wensinck (as in n. 12), 889–90.

17. Even in the textual tradition a certain ambivalence to figuration emerges, for after the conquest of Mecca the prophet Muhammad ordered the paintings of prophets, angels, and trees that decorated the interior of the Ka'ba to be erased, while sparing an image of Jesus and Mary; Uri Rubin, "The Ka'ba, Aspects of Its Ritual Function and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 97–131; and van Reenen, 40.

18. Sheila S. Blair, "What Is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?" in *Bayt al-Maqdis, 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, ed. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns, pt. 1, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 64–67.

19. For example, Helen Mitchell Brown, "Some Reflections on the Figural Coinage of the Artuqids and Zengids," in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1974), 353–58.

20. Terasaki (as in n. 10); Oya Pancaroğlu, "'A World unto Himself': The Rise of a New Human Image in the Late Seljuq Period (1150–1250)," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000, 14–23; and Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh, *The Book of Strangers: Mediaeval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia Attributed to Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2000), 24.

21. Grabar, 45–47, 49.

22. Abū 'Alī, Aḥmad ibn 'Umar ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-'Alāq al-nafīsa*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1892), 66.

23. Van Reenen, 70.

24. Mehmet Önder, "Konya kal'ası ve figürlü eserleri," *VI. Türk Tarih Kongresi, Ankara 20–26 Ekim 1961* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1967), 145–69; Jean-Paul Roux, "Mosquées anatoliennes à décor sculpté," *Syria* 57 (1980): 305–23; and Pancaroğlu (as in n. 20).

25. Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 13, *The Conquest of Iraq, Southwestern Persia, and Egypt*, trans. and annot. Gautier H. A. Juynboll (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 23, 30; J. Pedersen, "Masjdīd," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 6 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 650; and Flood, chap. 7.

26. For example, Arthur Upham Pope, "Representations of Living Forms in

Persian Mosques," *Bulletin of the Iranian Institute* 6, no. 1 (1946): 125–29; and Roux (as in n. 24).

27. Rudi Paret, "Die Entstehungszeit des Islamischen Bilderverbots," *Kunst des Orients* 11, nos. 1–2 (1976–77): 230. It has been suggested, to my mind not entirely convincingly, that reused animal capitals around the mihrab of the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem in its early 8th-century incarnation were left unaltered and only later defaced; John Wilkinson, "Column Capitals in the Ḥaram al-Sharīf," in *Bayt al-Maqdis, 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, ed. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 134–38. More convincing is the documented appearance of figural scrolls on the 13th-century capitals flanking the mihrab of the Jamī' al-Nuri in Hama, Syria; Ernst Herzfeld, "Damascus: Studies in Architecture, II," *Ars Islamica* 10 (1943): 45. For another possible mihrab with figural ornament, see Tariq Jawad al-Janabi, *Studies in Mediaeval Iraqi Architecture* (Baghdad: Republic of Iraq Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982), 175–76, pl. 164.

28. Ernst J. Grube, "Islamic Sculptures: Ceramic Figurines," *Oriental Art*, n.s., 12 (1966); Eva Baer, "The Human Figure in Early Islamic Art: Some Preliminary Remarks," *Muqarnas* 16 (1999): 32–41; and Pancaroğlu (as in n. 20). In addition, pre-Islamic three-dimensional sculpture was reused in bath-houses (Henri Pérès, *La poésie andalouse en arabe classique au XIe siècle* [Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1953], 331–33), on city walls (Robert Irwin, *Islamic Art in Context: Art, Architecture and the Literary World* [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997], 211), and apparently, in one case, a mosque (Crone [as in n. 3], 68 n. 37). Such classical or late antique sculptures might be described as idols, but, as with their counterparts in Constantinople (see n. 119 below), they were valued for both their aesthetic and talismanic properties. I hope to explore the apotropaic or talismanic reuse of pre-Islamic figural sculpture in a future essay.

29. This is particularly true of the arts of eastern Iran in the 12th and 13th centuries; Adolf Grohmann, "Anthropomorphic and Zoomorphic Letters in the History of Arabic Writing," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 38 (1955–56): 117–22; Anthony Welch, "Epigraphs as Icons: The Role of the Written Word in Islamic Art," in *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Joseph Gutmann (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 63–74; Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *The Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Art*, 2 vols. (Beirut: American University in Beirut, 1981); Raya Shani, *A Monumental Manifestation of the Shī'ite Faith in Late Twelfth-Century Iran: The Case of the Gunbad-i 'Alawiyan, Hamadān*, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), fig. 98e; and Robert Hillenbrand, "The Ghurid Tomb at Herat," in *Cairo to Kabul: Afghan and Islamic Studies Presented to Ralph Pinder-Wilson*, ed. Warwick Ball and Leonard Harrow (London: Melisende, 2002), 142–43, fig. 12.6.

30. Priscilla P. Soucek, "The Life of the Prophet: Illustrated Versions," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1988), 193–217; and Robert Hillenbrand, "Images of Muhammad in al-Biruni's *Chronology of Ancient Nations*," in *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars: Studies in Honour of Basil W. Robinson* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 129–46.

31. E. E. Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts," *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959): 232–33.

32. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 6 vols. (Cairo, 1313/1895), vol. 2, 305, 308, 390, 478; Paret, 46–47; and idem (as in n. 27), 158, 176. For an extensive list of the various collections of Hadith in which this Tradition appears, see van Reenen, 33, 54. A precedent for it can be found in some Jewish traditions on figuration, which held that while sculpture was unacceptable, floor mosaics were permissible, since they were trodden on; Urbach (as in n. 31), 237 n. 89. Conversely, it was precisely this fact that later led Christian authorities to forbid the use of sacred images on pavements and floors; Carole Evelyn Voelker, "Charles Borromeo's *Instruktionen Fabricae et Suppellectilis Ecclesiasticae*," Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1977, 230.

33. Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Idols* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 27. On the pre-Islamic idols of Mecca, see G.R.D. King, "The Sculptures of the Pre-Islamic Ḥaram at Makka," in Ball and Harrow (as in n. 29), 144–50. Note, however, that Hawting disputes, largely on historiographic grounds, the evidential basis of such attempts to reconstruct the Meccan pantheon.

34. Pope (as in n. 26), 129; Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus, the Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), no. 40; and Mikhail B. Piotrovsky and John Vrieze, *Art of Islam: Heavenly Art, Earthly Beauty* (Amsterdam: Lund Humphries, 1999), 34, no. 188.

35. Robert Dankoff, *Evlīya Celebi in Bitlis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 294–97.

36. Yuri A. Pertsyan et al., *Pages of Perfection: Islamic Paintings and Calligraphy from the Russian Academy of Sciences* (St. Petersburg: Electa, 1995), 144–55; and Irwin (as in n. 28), 82.

37. Griffith, 1992 (as in n. 10), 130; Gyöngi Török, "Bilderstürme durch die Türken," in *L'art et les révolutions, section 4: Les iconoclastes*, ed. Sergiusz Michalski, Actes du XXVIIe Congrès International d'Histoire de l'Art, Strasbourg 1–7 septembre 1989 (Strasbourg: Société Alsacienne pour le Développement de l'Histoire de l'Art, 1992), 260–74, fig. 4.

38. Vasiliev (as in n. 14); Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study*, Studies in

Late Antiquity and Early Islam, 2 (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 218–19; and Barber (as in n. 5), 1022.

39. King (as in n. 10), 270; and Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 86.

40. King (as in n. 10), 269–73; Griffith, 1985 (as in n. 10), 60–65; and Hawting, 82–83.

41. Janina M. Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 40; and Finbar Barry Flood, "The Medieval Trophy as an Art Historical Trope: Coptic and Byzantine 'Altars' in Islamic Contexts," *Muqarnas* 18 (2001): 55–56.

42. Abdur Rashid and M. A. Mokhdoomi, *Futuhāt-i-Firoz Shahi* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1949), 14; translation from H. M. Elliott and John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians* (reprint, Delhi: Low Cost Publications, 1990), vol. 3, 382. Despite such assertions of orthodoxy, the same sultan erected a celebrated if enigmatic monument next to the Great Mosque of his capital, Firuzabad, in which was incorporated an antique Buddhist pillar guarded at each of the four corners of the monument by a single monumental stone lion; Anthony Welch, "Architectural Patronage and the Past: The Tughluq Sultans of Delhi," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 317.

43. Ellen S. Smart, "Fourteenth Century Chinese Porcelain from a Tughluq Palace in Delhi," *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 41 (1975–77): 201; B. N. Goswamy, "In the Sultan's Shadow: Pre-Mughal Painting in and around Delhi," in *Delhi through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*, ed. R. E. Frykenberg (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 133; and van Reenen, 46.

44. See, by way of comparison, the involvement of the state bureaucracy in the iconoclastic activities of Assyrian rulers; Zainab Bahrani, "Assault and Abduction: The Fate of the Royal Image in the Ancient Near East," *Art History* 18, no. 3 (1995): 367.

45. Schick (as in n. 38), 218–19; Flood (as in n. 9).

46. I owe this useful distinction to Andrew P. Gregory, " 'Powerful Image': Responses to Portraits and the Political Uses of Images in Rome," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7 (1994): 89.

47. Ernst (as in n. 5), 115. Taken out of context, this account might be seen as attesting an implacable aversion to figuration, but as Ernst points out, in the entry for the following day Babur describes a visit to a group of temples, which he compares to Muslim religious schools (*madrāsas*), mentioning, without comment, the presence of stone-carved icons.

48. Alexander Cunningham, *Four Reports Made during the Years 1862–63–64–65*, Archaeological Survey of India Reports, vol. 2 (reprint, Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972), 365.

49. Edmund Thomas and Christian Witschel, "Constructing Reconstruction: Claim and Reality of Roman Rebuilding Inscriptions from the Latin West," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 60 (1992): 137. For a general discussion of the problems associated with textual reports of monument destruction in medieval South Asia, see Alka A. Patel, "Islamic Architecture of Western India (Mid 12th–14th Centuries): Continuities and Interpretations," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2000, 319–20.

50. Thomas and Witschel (as in n. 49), 139.

51. Zehava Jacoby, "Ideological and Pragmatic Aspects of Muslim Iconoclasm after the Crusader Advent in the Holy Land," in Michalski (as in n. 37), 17–18.

52. S. M. Yusuf, "The Early Contacts between Islam and Buddhism," *University of Ceylon Review* 13, no. 1 (1955): 12, 17; and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 279, originally published as *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990). This could be achieved through physical contact with ritually impure animals, for example; Yohanan Friedmann, "The Temple of Multān: A Note on Early Muslim Attitudes to Idolatry," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 177; and A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 208.

53. Flood (as in n. 9).

54. Freedberg, 415; Bézard (as in n. 2).

55. David Freedberg, "The Structure of Byzantine and European Iconoclasm," in Bryer and Herrin (as in n. 6), 169.

56. See, for example, Tabarī (as in n. 25), vol. 23, *The Zenith of the Marwānid House*, trans. Martin Hinds (1990), 194.

57. Hawting, 51, 107.

58. Priscilla P. Soucek, "Taṣwīr 1: Painting and Other Representational Arts," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 362.

59. Qur'an 26:72–73; Moshe Halberstam and Avishai Margalit, "Idolatry and Representation," *Res* 22 (1992): 19–20.

60. Mary Boyce, "Iconoclasm among the Zoroastrians," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults, Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 97; William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II," *Res* 12 (1987): 31; and Finney (as in n. 13), 54–56. Although the icon was inert matter (*hyle*), it could be inhabited by the malevolent spiritual beings that precipitated image worship. Such beings entered into the material of the image at the moment of consecration, which was conceived of as an act of ensoulment. The identification of consecration as the moment of animation is common to both iconoclasts and iconophiles. In Hindu consecration rituals, for example, the icon is believed to become animated precisely by the entry into it of a divine presence, "just as a soul must enter a human body to

instill life into it"; Richard H. Davis, "Loss and Recovery of Ritual Self among Hindu Images," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6, no. 1 (1992): 47.

61. Wink (as in n. 7), 327.

62. Sandra Naddaff, *Arabesque: Narrative Structure and the Aesthetics of Repetition in the 1001 Nights* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 115.

63. Rashid and Mokhdoomi (as in n. 42), 23; and Flood.

64. Carl Nylander, "Earless in Nineveh: Who Mutilated 'Sargon's' Head?" *American Journal of Archaeology* 84 (1980): 332; Bahrani (as in n. 44), 381; Peter Stewart, "The Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (London: Routledge, 1999), 165–66; and Gamboni, 32.

65. William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily Allwater Babcock and A. C. King, 2 vols. (New York: Octagon Books, 1941), vol. 1, 296, emphasis mine.

66. Freedberg; Gell, 14–19.

67. See also Oskar von Niedermayer, *Afghanistan* (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1924), pls. 217, 218.

68. Nancy Hatch Dupree, "The Colossal Buddhas and the Monastic Grotto," *Marg* 24, no. 2 (1971): 18, 22.

69. André Wink, "India and Central Asia: The Coming of the Turks in the Eleventh Century," in *Ritual, State, and History in South Asia, Essays in Honour of J. C. Heesterman*, ed. A. W. van den Hoek, D.H.A. Kolff, and M. S. Oort (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 754.

70. Gianroberto Scarcia, "A Preliminary Report on a Persian Legal Document of 470–1078 Found at Bāmiyān," *East and West*, n.s., 14 (1963): 73–85; idem, "Sull'ultima 'islamizzazione' di Bāmiyān," *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale dell'Università di Napoli* 16 (1966): 278–81; and Deborah Klimburg-Salter, *The Kingdom of Bāmiyān: Buddhist Art and Culture of the Hindu Kush* (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale and IsMEO, 1989), 41.

71. W. Barthold, "Bāmiyān," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1913), 634; Melikian-Chirvani, 24; and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz (247/861 to 949/1542–43)* (Costa Mesa, 1994), 105–6.

72. Abu Bakr Muhammad Narshakhi, *The History of Bukhara*, trans. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1994), 49. The Buddhas are said to have sustained subsequent damage at the hands of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (a stock figure of Muslim iconoclasm in South Asia) and the Persian ruler Nadir Shah; Barthold (as in n. 71), 643; Benjamin Rowland Jr., *Ancient Art from Afghanistan: Treasures of the Kabul Museum* (New York: Asia Society, 1966), 95; and Grabar, 45.

73. Guy Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), 418; Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn al-Nadim, *The Fihrist*, trans. Bayard Dodge, 2 vols. (Chicago: Kazi, 1998), vol. 2, 82.

74. Melikian-Chirvani, 23–26, 59–60.

75. V. Minorsky, "Gardizi on India," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1948): 629–39; Ratty D. Bhurekhan, "Hindu Religious Beliefs and Practices as Reflected in the Accounts of Muslim Travellers of Eleventh Century," *Indian History Congress: Proceedings of the 25th Session, Poona 1963* (Calcutta: n.p., 1964), 170–75; Bruce B. Lawrence, "Shahraṣṭānī on Indian Idol Worship," *Studia Islamica* 38 (1973): 61–73; and Yohanan Friedmann, "Medieval Muslim Views of Indian Religions," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975): 214–21.

76. Melikian-Chirvani, 60; and Sachau, vol. 1, 111–24.

77. Davis, 96–99.

78. Simon Digby, "The Literary Evidence for Painting in the Delhi Sultanate," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Benares* 1 (1967): 50–51; and Kjeld von Folsach, *David Collection: Islamic Art* (Copenhagen: Davids Samling, 1996), nos. 273–77. For the palace compared to a temple (*bahār*), see Melikian-Chirvani, 69; and Julie Scott Meisami, "Palaces and Paradises: Palace Descriptions in Medieval Persian Poetry," *Princeton Papers* 8 (2001): 25, 27.

79. Assadullah Sourin Melikian-Chirvani, "The Buddhist Ritual in the Literature of Early Islamic Iran," in *South Asian Archaeology, Proceedings of the 6th International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 274.

80. Hirananda Sastri, "Devanāgarī and the Muhammadan Rulers of India," *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* 23 (1937): 495.

81. Flood, chap. 3.

82. John Briggs, trans., *History of the Rise of Mohamedan Power in India, Translated from the Original Persian of Mahomed Kasim Ferishta* (London, 1829; reprint, New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1974), vol. 1, 43–44; and Muhammad Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultān Mahmūd of Ghazna* (Cambridge, 1931; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971), 221. This accords with the Tradition that the Prophet urged the Meccans to destroy their idols rather than sell them (van Reenen, 40). The injunction was apparently broken by the Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya (r. 661–80), who sold idols looted in Sicily to the idolatrous inhabitants of Sind (Sachau, vol. 1, 124), although this may be an invention of anti-Umayyad propagandists. Stories regarding the rejection of ransom for icons are also found in connection with European iconoclasm; Freedberg (as in n. 55), 170 n. 58. See also n. 111 below.

83. In the 9th-century *Book of Idols*, a pre-Islamic Arabian idol named dhu al-Khalāṣa is said to have been reused as the threshold of the entrance to a mosque; Faris (as in n. 33), 31. A comparable reuse of the *linga* is attested

archaeologically in the early Islamic mosque at Banbhore in Sind, where several were employed as the lowest steps of a flight of stairs leading to each of the entrances to the Great Mosque; S. M. Ashfaque, "The Grand Mosque of Banbhore," *Pakistan Archaeology* 6 (1969): 198–99. The veracity of the traditions regarding the treatment of the Somnath *linga* seems to be borne out by the find of an image of Brahma with its face worn away by the passage of feet; Umberto Scerrato, "The First Two Excavation Campaigns at Ghazni, 1957–1958," *East and West*, n.s., 10 (1959): 40. See also nn. 32 above and 92 below.

84. Sachau, vol. 1, 117; Elliott and Dowson (as in n. 42), vol. 2, 454.
85. H. G. Raverty, *Ṭabkāt-i-Nāṣirī: A General History of the Muhammedan Dynasties of Asia, Including Hindustan*, 2 vols. (1881; reprint, New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1970), vol. 1, 82.
86. Karl-Heinz Goltz, "Das Problem von Toleranz in Indischen Religionen anhand epigraphischer Quellen," in *Frank-Richard Hamm Memorial Volume, October 8, 1990*, ed. Helmut Eimer (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica, 1990), 89–102; Wink (as in n. 7), 310–11; Phyllis Granoff, "Sacred Objects in Medieval India: Anti-image Polemics and Their Legacy," abstract of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, San Diego, March 9–12, 2000, available from [www.aasianst.org/absts/2000abst/Inter/1-175.html](http://www.aasianst.org/absts/2000abst/Inter/1-175.html); and Flood, chap. 7.
87. Hermann Kulke, *Kings and Cults: State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 15; and Michael D. Rabe, "Royal Temple Dedications," in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 239–40.
88. Davis, 54–68.
89. Sachau, vol. 1, 117.
90. Davis, 108.
91. Sheila S. Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 183–84.
92. A similar principle is evident in the Jews of Sardis trampling the defaced pagan reliefs laid face-down on the forecourt of their synagogue or the Christians of Gaza trampling paving from the Holy of Holies of the Marneion in their approach to the church that replaced it; George M.A. Hanfmann, *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times: Results of the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis 1958–1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 176; and Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes to Pagan Monuments in Later Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 54.
93. Gulab Chandra Choudhary, *Political History of North India from Jain Sources (c. 650 AD to 1300 AD)* (Amritsar: n.p., 1964), 287; and B. P. Sinha, "Some Reflections on Indian Sculpture (Stone or Bronze) of Buddhist Deities Trampling Hindu Deities," in *Dr. Satkari Mookerji Felicitation Volume* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1969), 97–107.
94. Note that in the Hadith, both sculpted stones and unsculpted found objects are recognized as having the capacity to function as idols; Hawting, 106.
95. For a full discussion of this topic, see Flood, chap. 2.
96. Milton Gold, trans., *The Tārikh-e Sistān* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1976), 171.
97. Raverty (as in n. 85), vol. 1, 82.
98. Fisher 20; and Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 155–56. For the idea of the heterotopia as a single space dedicated to the juxtaposition of several spaces that are culturally, chronologically, or otherwise incompatible, "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live," see Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27.
99. Mark Twain, quoted in Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima Books, 1981), 14; and Fisher, 20; Howard Risatti, "The Museum," *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (1992): 106.
100. Pamela Constable, "Taliban Ban on Idolatry Makes a Country without Faces," *Washington Post*, Mar. 26, 2001, A20.
101. Jean-Michel Frodon, "La guerre des images, ou le paradoxe de Bamiyan," *Le Monde*, Mar. 23, 2001.
102. Isabel Hilton, "Blaming the Breakers of Statues," *Guardian*, Mar. 7, 2001. For the suggestion that the earlier undertaking to protect Afghan antiquities was similarly motivated by the Taliban's concerns with its relation to the international community, see Robert Kluyver, "L'optique culturelle des Tālebān," in *Afghanistan, patrimoine en péril: Actes d'une journée d'étude, 24 février 2001* (Paris: CEREDAF, UNESCO, 2001), 55–59.
103. Esther Peskes, "Wahhābiyya: The 18th and 19th Centuries," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 11 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 40, 42–43. According to recent reports, Afghan Taliban refused to carry out the destruction, which was both initiated and executed by al-Qaeda members; *Art Connection*, BBC World Service broadcast, Nov. 17, 2001; "Documents Detail al-Qaeda Training of Foreign Fighters," *Washington Post*, Nov. 22, 2001, A35.
104. Gamboni, 22; see also Freedberg, 409; and "Taliban Open Afghan Museum, Statues Gone," *New York Times*, Mar. 22, 2001. Nigel Spivey notes that this was "a spectacle of iconoclasm staged under Western eyes, surely designed less to offend practicing Buddhists than to enrage the high priests of UNESCO"; Spivey, "Shrines of the Infidel: The Buddhas at Bamiyan," *Apollo* 156 (July 2002): 28–35, at 28.
105. As Edward Said wrote of an earlier Middle Eastern crisis, "the drama

has unfolded as if according to an Orientalist program: the so-called Orientals acting the part decreed for them by what so-called Westerners expect . . . Westerners confirming their status in Oriental eyes as devils"; Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 56. On the mutual interdependence of "tradition" and "modernity," see also Mutman (as in n. 4), 184, 187–88; and, more generally, Nicholas B. Dirks, "History as a Sign of the Modern," *Public Culture* 2 (1990): 25–32.

106. Associated Press, "Taliban: Statues Must Be Destroyed," *Guardian*, Feb. 26, 2001.
107. Qadratullah Jamal, the Taliban information minister, referred to the destruction of artifacts in Bamiyan, Ghazni, Hadda, Herat, Jalalabad, and Kabul; Associated Press, "Taliban Destroying All Statues," Mar. 1, 2001, circulated electronically by the Afghanistan Research Group as "News from Afghanistan" 01/015, Mar. 2, 2001. In addition, in Kabul, works in the National Gallery were threatened, and some of the National Film Archives destroyed; Kevin Sullivan, "Taliban Had Wrong Impression: Artists Tricked Police to Save Work with Banned Images," *Washington Post*, Jan. 2, 2002, A1, A8. The scale of the holdings of Buddhist art in Afghan museums is evident from the fact that before the Soviet invasion, more than half the exhibition space of the Kabul Museum had been dedicated to the display of Buddhist antiquities; Ann Dupree, Louis Dupree, and A. A. Motamedi, *A Guide to the Kabul Museum* (Kabul: n.p., 1968). Ironically, it is reported that published guides to the collections of the Kabul Museum were used by the Taliban in the selection of objects for destruction; Maev Kennedy, "Bacchus Survives Orgy," *Guardian*, May 3, 2002, 11. For images that reveal the scale of destruction in Bamiyan and the Kabul Museum, see Kristin M. Romey, "The Race to Save Afghan Culture," *Archaeology* 55 (May–June 2002): 18–25.
108. Associated Press, "Taliban Praises Statue Destruction," *Guardian*, Mar. 5, 2001.
109. Reuters, "New York's Metropolitan Makes Afghan Art Offer," Mar. 1, 2001, circulated electronically by the Afghanistan Research Group as "News from Afghanistan" 01/015, Mar. 2, 2001.
110. Reuters, "Afghan Taliban Say Parts of Statues Blown Up," Mar. 5, 2001, at [www.dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20010305/wl/afghan\\_statues\\_dc\\_1.html](http://www.dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20010305/wl/afghan_statues_dc_1.html).
111. See n. 82 above. On the role of Mahmud in recent historiography, see Peter Hardy, "Mahmud of Ghazna and the Historians," *Journal of the Panjab University Historical Society* 14 (1962): 1–36. Other Taliban supporters reportedly favored selling the Buddhist statues and using the money to alleviate an ongoing drought and famine in Afghanistan; Rory McCarthy, "Fate of Ancient Statues in Balance as Talks with Taliban Continue," *Guardian*, Mar. 5, 2001. According to later reports, fragments of the destroyed Bamiyan Buddhas were taken for sale in Peshawar; "Bamiyan Relics Up for Sale in Peshawar," *Jang*, Apr. 2, 2001, at <http://www.rawa.org/statues2.html>.
112. Gamboni, 13.
113. Tim Weiner, "Seizing the Prophet's Mantle: Muhammad Omar," *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 2001; Flood, chap. 5.
114. Davis, 186–221.
115. Associated Press, "India Asks Taliban for Statues," Mar. 2, 2001, H-ISLAMART list. For a discussion of the trope of medieval barbarism in relation to colonial and nationalist constructions of the past and present of Islamic South Asia, see Flood, chap. 1. For a critical overview of scholarship on the history of Islamic South Asia, see Patel (as in n. 49), chap. 6.
116. Reuters, "Indian Hindus Protest Afghan Statue Destruction," Mar. 5, 2001, at [www.dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20010305/wl/afghan\\_hindus\\_dc\\_1.html](http://www.dailynews.yahoo.com/h/nm/20010305/wl/afghan_hindus_dc_1.html). The threat should be seen against the backdrop of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992. A Mughal mosque near Asind in southern Rajasthan was also demolished by a mob in July 2001, and a temple built on its site; "Mosque Demolished," *Hindu*, July 30, 2001.
117. BBC, "Taliban 'Attack' Buddha Statues," Mar. 2, 2001, circulated electronically by the Afghanistan Research Group as "News from Afghanistan" 01/015.
118. This rhetorical transposition of the religiously idolatrous past and the culturally idolatrous present is again evident in Osama bin Laden's characterization of the United States as "the Hubal of the age," Hubal being the preeminent deity of pagan Mecca; "These Young Men Have Done a Great Deed," *Washington Post*, Dec. 29, 2001, A5. Just as for European scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries the "Greco-Buddhist" style of many of these icons rendered them positively assimilable within an existing framework of Hellenizing classicism (see n. 143 below), so Taliban rhetoric invokes the same strategy, assimilating the Buddhas negatively to the pre-Islamic idols known from Islamic historiography. This tendency can be discerned in medieval descriptions of the Bamiyan Buddhas, which are sometimes referred to as Lat and Manat, two further idols of pre-Islamic Arabia; Melikian-Chirvani, 60. The Somnath *linga* was also assimilated with the latter; Davis, 95–96. Although the rhetoric, like that of most iconoclasts, invokes a return to origins, to see this as an attempt to dissolve historical time is too reductive a reading. In the same way that an *isnād*, a chain of transmission, serves to invest a textual citation with authority by linking it to its historical precursors and, ultimately, an originary utterance, so the invocation of historical precedent (prophetic and profane) attempts not to deny the elapse of historical time between the earlier act and its reenactment in the present but to invest the present (re)enactment with a cumulative authority dependent on the existence of a chain of precedent.

119. It is already present in Eusebius's distinction between idols in religious contexts and those that adorned the civic architecture of Constantinople, which were therefore "works of art"; John Curran, "Moving Statues in Late Antique Rome: Problems of Perspective," *Art History* 17, no. 1 (1994): 47. As Curran points out, Eusebius's distinction between the secular and the sacred was an ideal one. The classical sculptures reused in Constantinople might be valued for their aesthetic properties, but the belief that they were animated, often as the result of demonic possession (see n. 60 above), was widespread and persistent; Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 59; S. G. Bassett, "The Antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 87–96; Saradi-Mendelovici (as in n. 92), esp. 51; and Liz James, "Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard": Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople," *Gesta* 26, no. 1 (1991): 12–20. Charles Barber has argued that at a slightly later date, the end of Byzantine iconoclasm was followed by a reconceptualization of the religious image as art object; Barber, "From Transformation to Desire: Art and Worship after Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Art Bulletin* 75 (1993): 7. See also Belting (as in n. 52), 164–83.
120. Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age* (New York: Universe Books, 1967), 173; Klaus Herding, "Denkmalsturz und Denkmalkult—Revolution und Ancien régime," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Jan. 30–31, 1993, 63–64; Belting (as in n. 52), 170–71; Stephen Bann, "Shrines, Curiosities, and the Rhetoric of Display," in *Visual Display: Culture beyond Appearances*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, Dia Center for the Arts Discussions in Contemporary Culture, no. 10 (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 15–29; and Dominique Poulot, "Revolutionary 'Vandalism' and the Birth of the Museum: The Effects of a Representation of Modern Cultural Terror," in *Art in Museums*, ed. Susan Pearce, *New Research in Museum Studies*, 5 (London: Athlone, 1995), 192–214.
121. Robert S. Nelson, "The Discourse of Icons, Then and Now," *Art History* 12 (1989): 145. On the transformation of the religious image into an art object in early modern Europe, see Belting (as in n. 52), 458–90. See also n. 123 below.
122. Benjamin (as in n. 1), 217–18, 237.
123. Gell, 97. Even without discussing commodity fetishism here, the Gell passage bears comparison with Marxist critiques of ideology, "which begins historically as an iconoclastic 'science of the mind' designed to overturn 'idols of the mind,'" and "winds up being characterized as itself a new form of idolatry"; W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 167. Like the fetishism involved in ideology itself, the fetishism resulting from the aesthetic attitude that Gell refers to "is part of an iconoclastic rhetoric that turns against its users"; *ibid.*, 204.
124. Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 91; Fisher, 19–20; and Joan R. Branham, "Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 52–53 (1994–95): 33.
125. Abbé Grégoire, quoted in Poulot (as in n. 120), 194.
126. Freedberg, 378–85; Gell, 62. An unnamed gallery spokesperson commented at the time, without any apparent trace of irony: "I can't think why anyone would want to do this to a painting. . . . It is not offensive. It just depicts the Israelites dancing around the golden calf;" "Poussin Painting Slashed in London," *Washington Post*, Apr. 4, 1978, A14.
127. John Dornberg, "Art Vandals: Why Do They Do It?" *Artnews*, Mar. 1987, 102–9; Freedberg, 407–27; Jeffrey Kastner, "Art Attack," *Artnews*, Oct. 1997, 154–56; and Gamboni, 190–211.
128. Smita J. Baxi, "Problèmes de sécurité dans les musées Indiens," *Museum* 26, no. 1 (1974): 52; Branham (as in n. 124), 37; and Goetz Hagmuller, "Darkness and Light," at [www.asianart.com/articles/darkness/index.html](http://www.asianart.com/articles/darkness/index.html).
129. Gell, 97.
130. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 182–84; and Mark Crinson, "Nation-Building, Collecting and the Politics of Display," *Journal of the History of Collections* 13, no. 2 (2001): 231–50. The idea that ancient monuments constitute a type of national patrimony, so that whoever attacks them "is excluded *de facto* from the community of citizens," is already present in Abbé Grégoire's impassioned writing in favor of the museum; Poulot (as in n. 120), 203–4.
131. Fisher, 8; Brian Macaskill, "Figuring Rapture: Iconology, Politics, and the Image," in *Image and Ideology in Modern/Postmodern Discourse*, ed. David B. Downing and Susan Bazargan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 249.
132. Duncan (as in n. 124), 102.
133. For a critique of the hegemonic potential of universalism, see S. Sayyid, "Bad Faith: Anti-essentialism, Universalism and Islamism," in *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, ed. Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombes (New York: Routledge, 2001), 261: "universalism is the expansion of one particularity so that it can consume other particularities. What distinguishes the universalist particularity from any other particularity is empire, in other words historical and contemporary forms of power relations."
134. Anderson (as in n. 130), 182–84; Thomas Richards, "Archive and Utopia," *Representations* 37 (winter 1992): 118; Risatti (as in n. 99), 106; Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 18–19; and Crinson (as in n. 130). See also the collection of essays edited by George W. Stocking Jr., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). The point is underlined by the fact that the conversation that provides the epigraph to this essay takes place with Kim astride the looted cannon of a Muslim ruler, relocated by the British outside the newly founded Lahore Museum.
135. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 76–105; and Duncan (as in n. 124), 89.
136. Stanley K. Abe, "Inside the Wonder House: Buddhist Art and the West," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 89–90; and I. K. Sharma, "Archaeological Site Museums in India: The Backbone of Cultural Education," *Museum International* 50, no. 2 (1998): 45.
137. Fisher, 10; Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in Karp and Lavine (as in n. 124), 44; Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders, "What Does Iconoclasm Create? What Does Preservation Destroy? Some Observations from Case Studies of China and Japan," abstract submitted to the conference "Iconoclasm—Contested Objects and Contested Terms," Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, July 13–14, 2001.
138. Gamboni, 18.
139. Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Dornberg (as in n. 127), 105.
140. Nancy Hatch Dupree, "Import of the Cultural Destruction in Afghanistan," *Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) Newsletter* 7 (July 2001): 2.
141. Sayyid (as in n. 133), 266, sees the conflict between Islamists and their enemies not as a contest between liberalism and fundamentalism but between different types of hegemonic universalisms: "One may have one's own prejudices for preferring one to the other, but both are attempts to remake the world. Neither is sanctioned by any innate logic, both are themselves grand political projects: projects that aim to transform our cultures, histories, and societies." See also Mutman (as in n. 4), 189.
142. Frodon (as in n. 101).
143. Kipling (as in n. 1), 54; and Abe (as in n. 136), 77–84. The perceived European affinities of the Buddhas came to the fore in various ways during and after their destruction, with some observers mourning the loss of "the link between Western and Asian culture"; "Afghan Buddhas May Be Rebuilt," at [www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/11/19/rec.swiss.buddhas/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/11/19/rec.swiss.buddhas/index.html).
144. On classicism and power, see Henri Zerner, "Classicism as Power," *Art Journal* 47, no. 1 (1988): 36: "classicism means no more than an assertion of authority, of power under whatever form." This was no less true in colonial South Asia, where classical imagery often served as a vehicle to assert political dominion; Barbara Groseclose, "Imag(in)ing Indians," *Art History* 13, no. 4 (1990): 494.
145. W. L. Rathje, "Why the Taliban Are Destroying Buddhas," *USA Today*, Mar. 22, 2001, at [www.usatoday.com/news/science/archaeology/2001-3-22-afghan-buddhas.html](http://www.usatoday.com/news/science/archaeology/2001-3-22-afghan-buddhas.html); and Barbara Crossette, "Taliban Explains Buddha Demolition," *New York Times*, Mar. 19, 2001.
146. Barry Bearak, "Where Buddhas Fell, Lives Lie in Ruins, Too," *New York Times*, Dec. 9, 2001, A1, B10; and "Afghanistan: Taliban Massacres Detailed," Human Rights Watch press release, New York, Feb. 19, 2001, at [www.hrw.org/press/2001/02/afghan0219.html](http://www.hrw.org/press/2001/02/afghan0219.html). The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas will have future economic implications for the local Hazara community, which formerly derived some of its income from the tourism associated with the statues.
147. Mary Richardson, quoted in Gamboni, 94–95.
148. Freedberg, 409. Jean Baudrillard takes the implications of this commodity fetishism to its logical extreme, comparing the art in a museum to a gold reserve in a bank: "just as a gold bank is necessary in order that the circulation of capital and private speculation be organized, so the fixed reserve of the museum is necessary for the functioning of the sign exchange of paintings"; quoted in Mitchell (as in n. 123), 203.
149. Mitchell (as in n. 123), 163; and Wyatt MacGaffey, "African Objects and the Idea of Fetish," *RES* 25 (spring 1994): 123; and Peter Gathercole, "The Fetishism of Artefacts," in *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan M. Pierce (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), 73–81. See also the interesting and provocative comments of James Clifford, "Objects and Selves—an Afterword," in Stocking (as in n. 134), 244.
150. In terms of the cultural value invested in them as a result of their classical affinities, the "Greco-Buddhist" Buddhas and bodhisattvas that were the primary target of Taliban iconoclasts display several features traditionally ascribed to the fetish, among them a heterogeneous or hybrid nature and "a dependence for meaning and value on a particular order of social relations, which in turn reinforces"; Pietz (as in n. 60), 23. See nn. 143–44 above.
151. Gamboni, 97.
152. Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," in *The Social Life of Things, Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 67.
153. See Freedberg, 418.
154. Bearak (as in n. 146), B10: "Hundreds of years from now this may be the single footnote the Taliban have carried into the annals of time." See also Freedberg, 409, on the destruction of art as a way of acquiring fame in perpetuity.
155. *Tāghūt*, a Qur'anic term, can refer to either idols or idol shrines; Hawting, 55. Since the term recurs in the edict, both are presumably intended here.