User Experience Analysis of the Qutb Shahi Tombs
Hyderabad, India
Allison James, SmarchS AKPIA 2015

In June of 2014, and January of 2015, I traveled to Hyderabad, India to conduct field research with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The AKTC is in their second year of a ten-year project, to conserve the tombs and gardens of the Qutb Shahi Sultans on a necropolis, which contains the tombs of all eight Qutb Shahi sultans (1518-1647.) The initial goal of the project was to use experiential analysis of the current use of the site to reveal different types of adaptations in conservation plans. By using methods of participatory photography, videography and interviews, I collected documentation related to user experience of the site.
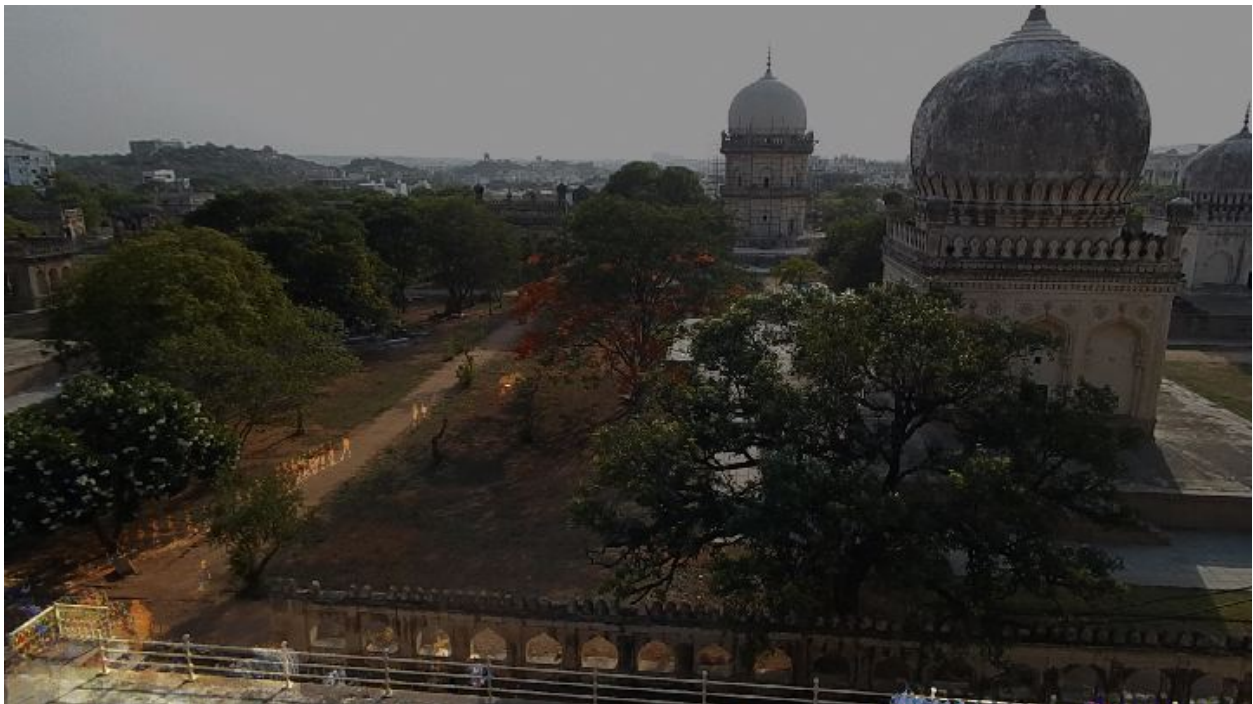
User experience analysis using the Video Abstraction Tool. Photo taken from the tomb of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1580-1611), Allison James 2014.

Mid-way through the summer, the AKTC asked if I would be interested in investigating the original design of each garden surrounding the tombs of four kings on the upper terrace of the complex. After some searching, I gained a richer appreciation for what these other layers would mean to the conservation of the cultural landscape. This opened up a new set of possibilities that I couldn't have predicted in advance for engagement with the site that

took me beyond the gardens themselves to the processional pathways which linked to a Sufi Dargah and to the development of the city of Hyderabad. As a result, I organized my field research by using a mixed method approach resulting in my master's thesis, *"The Architecture of Procession: Political and Spiritual Pathways between the Qutb Shahi Necropolis and Golconda Fortress."*

Fieldwork and Photographic Method

Fieldwork was a critical part of the process of this thesis. The AKTC generously provided housing in their guesthouse for the entire summer of 2014 and January of 2015. They also provided transportation and access to a team of experts working on the conservation of the Qutb Shahi tomb restoration. Without this support, the depth of this research would not have been possible.

On the site, I worked alongside the conservation team, as they excavated different parts of the landscape and conserved tomb structures. I used photography to visualize the processional pathways and took photographs from high above the site in the balcony of the tombs. I walked the site every day, multiple times, to get a sense of what the site would have been like as processions moved through from one side, then the other. I photographed extensively as I walked, embedding myself in the landscape while looking for clues.

As I learned the dates of the buildings and their former uses, I photographed the architecture and the pathways that were currently and formerly associated with them. I also spent some time driving to the other areas that had been built as a part of the larger extents of each sultan's campaign. I climbed up and down Golconda hill, photographing the pathways and views from the buildings there. I also explored the other areas of patronage, including the Naya Qila, different mosques and monuments, the town of Patancheru, the hills of the Taramati Baradari and the mosque of Premamati above the former Bagh-i-Ibrahim. All of this was necessary to physically understand the topography and to situate myself within the landscape surrounding the processional pathways to finally come to the topic of the thesis.

When I returned, I worked through all of the photographs and catalogued them according to landscape and monument. This gave me a different perspective and insight and allowed me to piece them together as parts of a whole.

Thesis Abstract

The resulting thesis is an exploration of the role of processional architecture in articulating the Qutb Shahi necropolis in southern India at the beginning of the Qutb Shahi dynasty (mid-16th c). More precisely, it analyzes two processional pathways that connected Golconda Fortress to the Qutb Shahi necropolis. The pathways were significant because of the political and spiritual qualities they held. They extended northward toward a Sufi shrine and water complex, and beyond that to the antecedent capital of Bidar 135 kilometers to the northwest. Later, these paths would be important in connecting Golconda and the necropolis with the city of Hyderabad founded in 1591.

Methods used to examine these pathways are a mix of historical, topographical, visual, and spatial investigations as they relate to the wider political and spiritual patronages of the sultanate. The first part of each chapter provides context of the wider patronage of each sultan. The second part explores the landscape of procession by moving through the pathways as they were laid out. The third part shows how the series of structures take advantage of the natural topography by framing key "views" of the processional ways and thereby connect Golconda to the necropolis. The final section of each chapter shows how these larger perspectives help to interpret the spatial layout of tombs on the necropolis.

Through this analysis of four spatial relationships, the thesis shows how the tomb complex was defined by an initial pair of orientations to the East and South, which shifted to a primary emphasis to the South during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim Quli Qutb Shah (1550-1580), and back to the East during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1580-1611.) As the Sultanate evolved, the pathways became, and remained, as important as the critical monuments of spiritual and political significance that they connected.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for studying the architecture of procession used in this thesis includes an analytical approach to landscape evidence at several scales, and an interpretive approach to the jointly political and spiritual significance of the tomb complex.

Procession, as it is used here, refers to a function of "ritual" within the Shiʻa practices of the early Qutb Shahi Sultans. The architecture of procession represents a series of symbolic elements in the building of the Qutb Shahi political and spiritual territory; this investigation explores these elements in the territoriality of the two processional pathways as they connected the two sites.

For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term "procession" as it is defined by Arnold Van Gennep's notion of "territorial passage," a system of "zones" related to different

periods or stages in one's life. [1] As James Wescoat explains in reference to Mughal procession, "territorial passage is an encounter with the external 'signs' and 'protocols' that guide one through the process of individual and social transformation. Territorial passage involves not an abstract or metric space; but rather movement between different realms of cultural expectation, constraint, and possibility. The ritual space may be as small and concrete as the rooms of a house, or as vast and abstract as the heavens of the universe. Territorial passage is transforming as well as maintaining." [2]

The analytical approach to procession has four parts that describe and then follow the processional paths from Golconda to the necropolis for each successive ruler. These four steps in the analysis "follow the processional path" from the fort then to and through the necropolis. The architecture of the processional pathways evolved based on several factors, such as how and when the sites could be seen from different points on the pathways, when and where it would be important to add nodes along the way (such as the mosques and gateways built in-between sites), and how the space of each architectural contribution related to the next (gate to mosque to pathway to gate etc.). Finally, an examination of the architecture and landscape at the "local scale" (on the necropolis site) acknowledges the larger political-spiritual significance of the rituals involved in the processions. The political mark of a significant monument to each sultan was placed in the landscape to be seen from several vantage points entered from below and at the foot of the sultan to emphasize the greatness of the Sultan, and the greatness of the sultanate as it evolved into a dynasty. The dargah was strategically placed in close proximity to the necropolis and on the road to and from Bidar. As Sufi visitors passed by the dargah, they would pay reverence to the Sufi saint. A Sufi saint was known to legitimize a sultanate and sultans relied upon these relationships for power and devotion.

In political terms, the tombs mark the power of the dynasty through their siting, size, visibility, and spatial relationships.[3] In religious terms, they were sites of *ziyarat*, especially on the *urs* (death day) of the sultan. The Sufi term *urs* is defined by Nile Green as a 'wedding,' "a saintly death day anniversary celebrated as a wedding with God." [4] And '*ziyarat*' is defined as "*Procession: ziyara*: "a visit or pilgrimage to a Sufi Shrine."[5] An annual *ziyarat* to the tombs of the sultans would further emphasize the intention of the sultan to be recognized as a saint, through the act of pilgrimage.[6] However, Sufi saints were recognized as having a direct connection to the divine, and were therefore more powerful than a Sultan. The Qutb Shahi sultans had evolving relationships with one or more Sufi complexes, including some at Bidar.

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[1] See: Van Gennep, A. (2011) p. 18.
[2] Wescoat, J. (1991). pp. 56-63.
[3] This is based on the interpretive approach that addresses the jointly political and religious aspects of funerary architecture at the tomb complex and related shrines.
[4] See: Green, N. (2012) p. 241.
[5] Ibid. p. 242
[6] Ibid. p. 242

Husain Shah Wali, the official Sufi saint of the Qutb Shahi Sultanate, traced his lineage to Bidar. According to H. K. Sherwani, "Husain was descended from the Saint of Gulbarga, Hazrat Khwaja Gesu Darza…and was born at Muhammadabad-Bidar. Although Ibrahim was a Shi'a he was much impressed by the reverence with which the memory of the Saint of Gulbarga was held by the Muslims and non-Muslims of the Deccan, and when Husain came to Golconda he was called to the palace and was received with great honor and regard. Ibrahim appointed him Superintendent of Public Works and later married him to his daughter, who was known henceforth as Pir Man Sahiba."[7]

The marriage was both a political and spiritual symbol. Ibrahim married Pir Man Sahiba to Husain Shah Wali first to ensure a familial tie to the Sufi saint. This would tie the Qutb Shahi family politically to Bidar and symbolically to Sufism, again strengthening the power of the sultanate through this gesture. The tombs and shrine appeared as representations of these forces of power. Both had political and symbolic significance, the former primary for the sultan the latter primary for the saint. The subtle variations in these politico-religious relationships are discussed in each chapter.
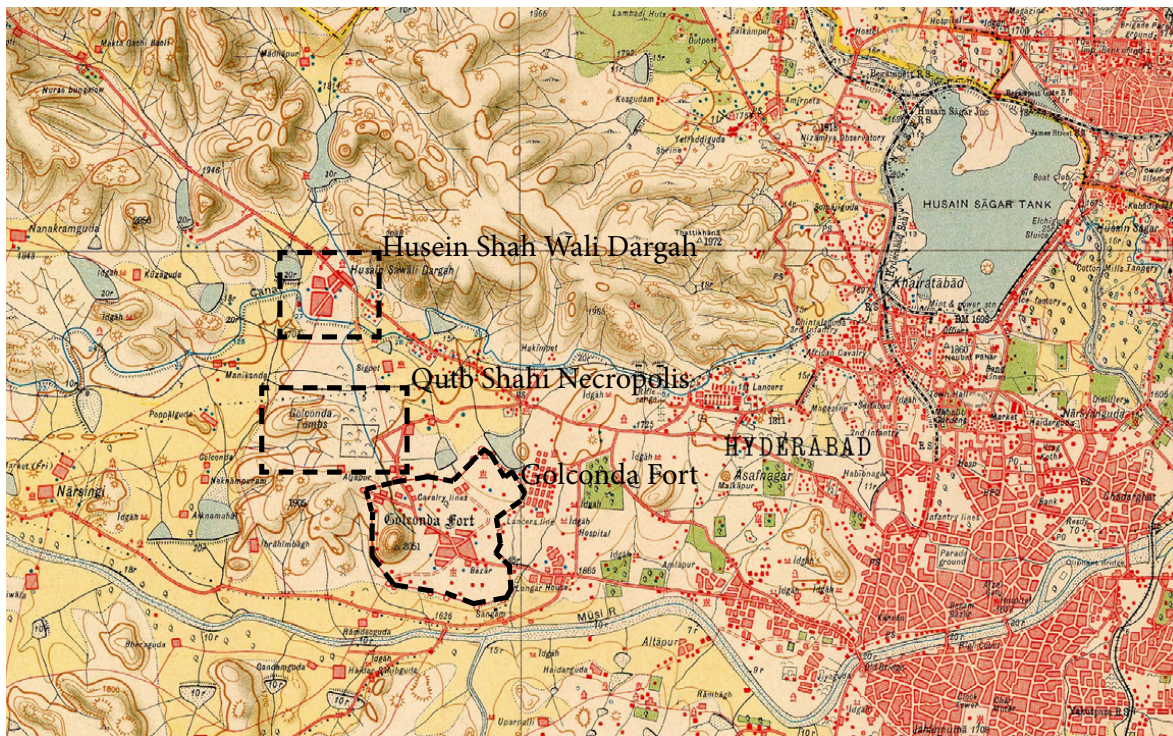
Sufi Shrine and Waterworks

Figure Detail of a 1927 British survey map of Hyderabad with Husain Shah Wali Dargah, the necropolis and Goloconda fortress. Map courtesy of the University of Chicago Libraries.

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[7] Sherwani, H.K. p. 254

A 1927 British survey map of the territory indicates the pathways that connected Golconda to the *dargah* of Husain Shah Wali. Two important *types* of processions are identified within these territories. One type of procession involved an annual pilgrimage from the kingdom of Golconda to the tombs of the sultans on their annual "death day," and before major political and dynastic acts. Another type was to the *dargah*, where all kinds of devotional events occurred throughout the year. As is the tradition of the Sufis of Gulbarga, from which Husain Shah Wali descended, there would also have been a procession that started at the *dargah* and connected to the shrines of the followers of the *sajjada-nishin*, or "one who sits on the prayer carpet." As Richard Eaton explains, the *sajjada-nishin* was, "selected by his predecessor theoretically on the basis of spiritual merit alone. As a hereditary descendant of the *pir* and a resident of the *dargah,* the sajjada-nishin became the most important individual in popular Sufism. It was his duty to supervise the *dargah's* various devotional and social activities, such as the festivities commemorating the birthdate and death date of the *pir* the maintenance of a public kitchen at the *dargah*, leadership of community prayers in the *dargah*, etc. In this way a mystic discipline originally imported from the Middle East and practiced by a small elite, eventually broadened into a popular devotionalism sustained and admired by a familial descendant of a man now acclaimed to have been a saint. To borrow from Max Weber's terms, the original charisma of an early Sufi, or *pir*, was transmitted both on the physical site of his burial and also through blood ties to his descendants residing at or near the tomb." [8]

The pilgrimage pathways between Golconda, the necropolis, and the Sufi Shrine intersected on the north-south road that led to the east-west road. This road (see Figure 1) linked both the tomb of Sultan Quli, who once ruled as a part of that kingdom and the shrine of Husain Shah Wali, who descended from the Saint of Gulbarga.[9]

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[8] See Eaton, R. M. (1973). p. 51
[9] See: Sherwani, H. K. (1974). p. 254
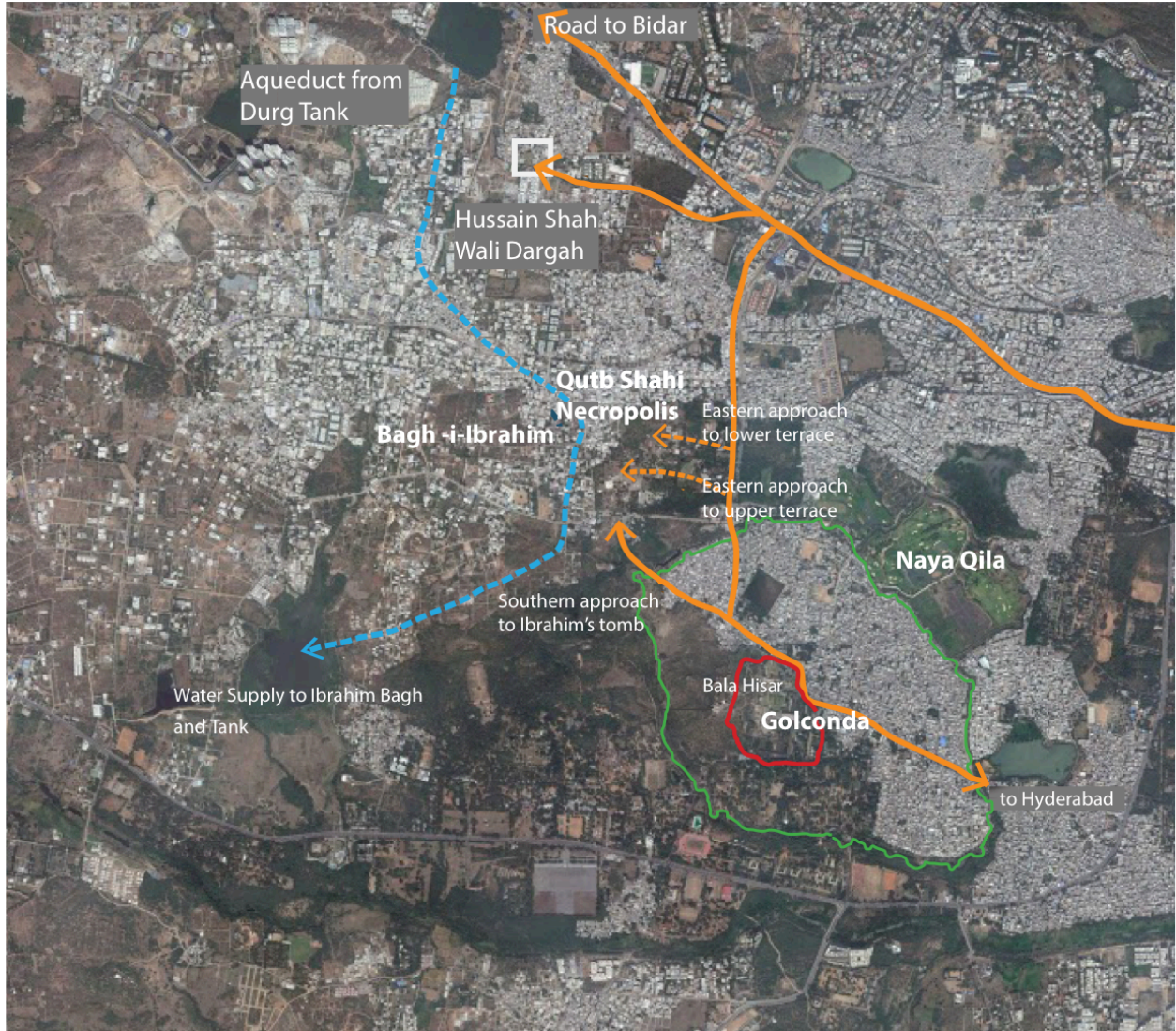
Google Earth 2015. Map of processional pathways between Golconda, the necropolis, Husain Shah Wali Dargah and Bidar. Map Allison James and Sneha Mandhan.

Conclusions

Historical conclusion

This thesis has established that there was an initial strong processional pathway between Golconda fortress and the necropolis that can be traced back to Bidar. This finding is significant in that no previous scholarship has focused on the political and spiritual aspects of the landscape that symbolically linked the monuments of procession in the city of Golconda and necropolis. Urban scale mapping of the wider patronage of each of the early Sultans examined in this thesis reveals how the ritual act of procession was a main consideration in the planning of the extents of the municipality. The pathways were shaped by the act of procession from one sacred and political space to another, and the wider architectural patronage of each sultan grew out of these practices.
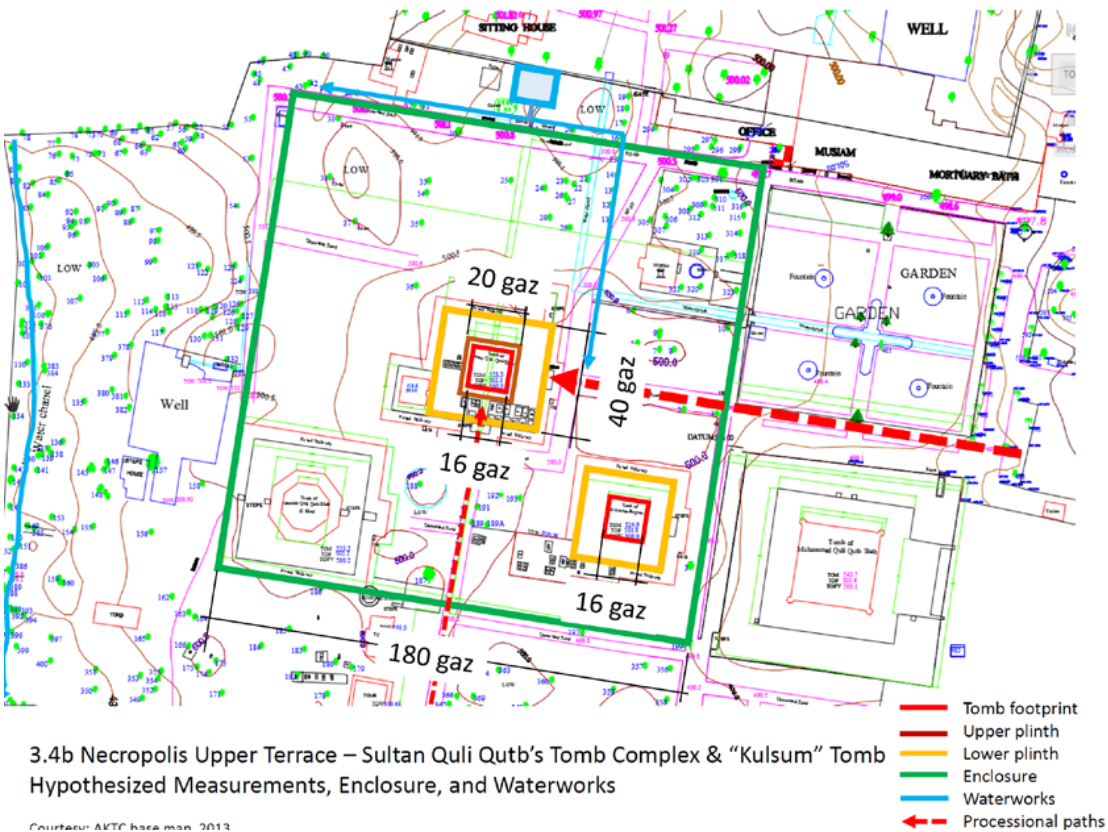
The thesis has shown how these pathways have been strengthened by various kinds of patronage in the area to the north, initially through the building of a Durug tank, that symbolically and literally irrigated all of the gardens in the north and west, including the Bagh-i-Ibrahim.

The early Durug tank connected to Husain Shah Wali's Dargah by way of proximity, is concluded in this thesis and the fact that it was built by a Sufi saint was meant to show the spiritual and political strength of the Sultanate. The tank not only provided a main source of water to the city but also irrigated the public gardens of the Sultanate. Husain Shah Wali himself oversaw construction of a large canal and tank, Husain Sagar.

The careful analysis of this wider patronage and literature review led to Amin Khan's town and city on the main road to Bidar, to the northwest of Golconda, built as a center of public works. The thesis linked the South Gate of the necropolis, built by Ibrahim, to the architecture of Ibrahim's close advisor and amir, by showing the southern gate as a physical link to the necropolis and town, linking it to a long distance processional path on the way to Patancheru and Bidar.

Spatial rules for the development of the necropolis

The thesis maps the pathways and shows extraordinary continuity in the paths and in the spatial rules for the development of the necropolis. The hypothetical measurement system suggested here is similar to that of the north Indian Sultanate and Mughal tombs. A key difference is that the Qutb Shahi tombs were laid out in close, yet not always axial, relationships with one another. Like the north Indian tomb-gardens,They were laid out using even gaz numbers (1,5,10,16,20 gaz, etc.). Walks, rooms, walls and water channels had smaller, yet still regular, gaz dimensions (Figure 40).

3.4b Necropolis Upper Terrace – Sultan Quli Qutb's Tomb Complex & "Kulsum" Tomb Hypothesized Measurements, Enclosure, and Waterworks

Courtesy: AKTC base map, 2013

Legend:
- Tomb footprint
- Upper plinth
- Lower plinth
- Enclosure
- Waterworks
- Processional paths

Survey courtesy AKTC 2013. Gaz Measurement analysis by James Wescoat and Allison James 2015.

Figure 2 Necropolis Upper Terrace; Sultan Quli Qutb's Tomb Complex: Hypothesized

Measurements, Enclosure and Waterworks. Courtesy: AKTC CAD Map (2013)

By using a *gaz* measurement system, where a gaz length was found to be 75 cm, the thesis indicated continuity in the layout of the pathways, starting with the first king. It should be qualified that this gaz analysis is provisional and while it appears to be supported by field documentation, we have not found any historical sources to date, and so this analysis and conclusions based on it have yet to be confirmed.

The tomb layouts were found to emphasize areas to the south to east (the wider patronage), but the necropolis was always at the center of these areas. The developments in the south and east strengthened the necropolis as center. This set rules for the layout of the necropolis by the descendants of Sultan Quli, who followed the same metric rules, only changing them to accommodate spatial experience of the architecture, and terrain, as seen in the approach to both Sultan Ibrahim and Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb's tombs.

Religio-Political Symbolism in the Layout of the Pathways

Significant spatial adjustments in the processional ways were discovered in the process of this thesis. These adjustments reflect very interesting changes in the religious and political symbolism of each sultan's patronage; at one time emphasizing public works, followed by Sufi shrines and then a history of religio-political combinations. Starting with Sultan Quli Qutb, the layout of his tomb with entrances to the south and east facing Golconda and the road to and from Bidar, respectively, connected the necropolis to the spaces of political and spiritual importance from the beginning.

The research shows that the next Sultan to follow, Ibrahim, positioned his tomb with the doors in the same two directions, south and east, thereby strengthening the paths. However, the research determined that Ibrahim shifted the paths with the addition of his tomb and the South Gate. He also strengthened the paths by building around them. The research determined that the contributions of a public garden to the west (Ibrahim Bagh), the Naya Qila to the east, and the Purana Pul to the east strengthened these pathways.

A particularly interesting connection made through this thesis is the establishment of the Husain Shah Wali Dargah. Although the history of the dargah has been tied to the Qutb Shahi dynasty politically and spiritually, the physical placement of the dargah has not previously been interpreted for its symbolic significance. The importance of making the connection the dargah to the pathway that leads to Bidar and Golconda changes the politico-spiritual significance of these pathways with the introduction of the Sufi Saint. The identification of this path also brings to light the history of politico-spiritual combinations with the Sufi saint as a symbol of authority in the government, as he was made Superintendent of Public Works.

The addition of Muhammad Quli Qutb's tomb changed the symbolic relationships of the pathways once again, but maintained the axes to the south and east. This allowed for the grand entrance to be built in front of Muhammad Quli's tomb to the east as it opened to the new city of Hyderabad.

Necropolis Connection

This thesis found that the foundations of the N-S and E-W pathways were so strong that the necropolis was able to maintain its symbolic and spatial power even when the urban center had relocated to the east and built the city of Hyderabad. The thesis found that during Muhammad Quli Qutb's reign, the eastern pathway locally between the fort and necropolis and regionally with Bidar was maintained over time. These connections were so strong that subsequent sultans continued to build on the necropolis.

Methods

I have been able to do this research through a set of four inter-related methods of historical geographic analysis, from the larger urban context to visual and spatial linkages to the

actual layout of the built funerary spaces. The historical geographic analysis revealed the wider connections of the Sultanate in relationship to the development of the pathways. These visual and spatial connections helped me to place myself in the landscape as I connected the architecture to the landscape processions. The gaz analysis solidified the assumptions that the Sultans used these methods as they laid out the necropolis.

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