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Striking Images, Iconoclasm Past and Present

In memory of another great iconoclast, Adrian Bantjes

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ASHGATE

The Taliban, Bamiyan, and Revisionist Iconoclasm*

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The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 was one of the most heavily publicised acts of image-destruction in recent history, an internationally viewed instance of iconoclasm on a grand scale. The Western press painted the occasion in stark black-and-white terms as the wanton destruction of world-heritage monuments. In this, the Western press differed little from accounts of 'vandals' destroying monuments during the French Revolution. But beyond this, Western accounts of the Bamiyan episode decontextualised the event (in much the same way as museums decontextualise images) and ignored the tensions between local and international needs and responses, as well as the competing impulses of religion and capitalism. Once again, iconoclasm in the post-Enlightenment worlds plays into issues of power and the forces of market capitalism.

I ask the Afghans and the Muslims of the world: Would you rather be the smashers of idols or the sellers of idols?

On 26 February 2001 Mullah Umar, the Supreme Leader of the Taliban militia ruling most of Afghanistan, ordered the destruction of all statues in areas under Taliban control. Starting on 2 March, the Taliban embarked on an extended campaign using dynamite, anti-aircraft guns, and other heavy weapons to destroy the two best-known pre-Islamic relics in the country, the Buddha statues of Bamiyan. Their construction began in the second century CE under the Buddhist king Kanishka and was probably completed in the fifth century CE. The taller, at 55 meters (175 feet), is believed to have been

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the largest statue of the Buddha in the world; the smaller statue, at 38 meters (115 feet) tall, also ranked among the largest surviving images of the Buddha. Through a thousand years of Muslim rule they had suffered only sporadic, isolated attempts at their destruction by particularly zealous iconoclasts. More recently, they had been viewed as the centerpiece of Afghanistan's (albeit small) tourist industry and were promoted as a symbol of the country's long heritage, appearing on postage stamps and state-produced cultural publications before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

The obliteration of the Bamiyan Buddhas was accompanied by the destruction of most of the Buddhist figural art left in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after two decades of looting and bombing in the war against the Soviet Union and the subsequent civil war. The three-week long saga, beginning on 12 February 2001, with the announcement of the planned destruction of the Buddhas and ending shortly after the confirmation of their destruction on 26 March, unfolded amid a massive international campaign to save the statues. Their destruction was widely condemned by the Western world, in countries with Buddhist and Hindu populations, as well as in Islamic countries such as Afghanistan's neighbors, Iran and Pakistan. Criticism of the Taliban by all parties, East and West, consisted of their vilification as intransigent philistines who were utterly intolerant of other religions and of the concept of art, history and world heritage.

This essay attempts to contextualise the Taliban's actions by taking a close look at their statements and behaviour as the events unfolded in February and March of 2001. It argues that the Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas was neither part of a preconceived plan based in an uncompromising and anachronistic view of Islam, nor was it a petulant political reaction to their rejection and isolation by the world community. On the contrary, throughout the weeks in question, the Taliban leadership was sensitive to both international and local public opinion; the discursive process surrounding their pronouncements concerning the Buddhas and others' reactions to them played a large part in shaping the Taliban's self-understanding. Furthermore, when viewed in the context of other incidents of iconoclastic destruction in the modern Islamic world, it becomes clear that the Taliban's iconoclastic acts lie at the intersection of local and global concerns that transcend an opposition to images in and of themselves.

Much has been written on Muslim attitudes toward idolatry.² In brief, Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity a two-faced distrust of visual and physical representation. On the one side is the preference for the non-physical over the physical, thought over matter, that pervades the philosophy of late antiquity and to which Islamic philosophical thinking is a direct heir. On the other is the scriptural prohibition against figural imagery. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that there is no clear Islamic condemnation paralleling the Biblical ban of the Second Commandment. Qur'anic condemnations are

nowhere as explicit, perhaps the clearest being, 'And Abraham said to his father Azar: Do you take idols (*usnatun*) as Gods? Indeed I see you and your people in a manifest error' (Q. 6:74). The ambivalence of Islamic attitudes toward idolatry and iconoclasm is evident in the following accounts of Muslim encounters with idols. Two are from the South Asian context and one from the formative period of Islam.

In September 1528 Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire in India, came to the town of Urwah in Gwalior. His memoirs describe the event as follows:

Urwah is surrounded on three sides by a single mountain, the stone of which is not so red as that of Bayana but somewhat paler. The solid rock outcroppings around Urwah have been hewn into idols, large and small. On the southern side is a large idol, approximately 20 yards tall. They are shown stark naked with all their private parts exposed. Around the two large reservoirs inside Urwah have been dug twenty to twenty-five wells, from which water is drawn to irrigate the vegetation, flowers, and trees planted there. Urwah is not a bad place. In fact, it is rather nice. Its one drawback was the idols, so I ordered them destroyed.³

The second example is from a description of the Indus valley (Al-Sind), by the renowned tenth-century Arab Muslim geographer al-Muqaddasi:

As for the idols in this region, there are two in Harawa made of stone; no one approaches them. They have a power such that should a man try to lay his hand on one, it will be held back and will not reach the idol. They both appear as though made of gold and silver. It is said that if one expresses a wish in their presence, the request will be granted ... The two statues are quite enchanting. I saw a Muslim man who said he had forsaken Islam to return to the worship of the idols, having been captivated by them; when he returned to Naysabur [in Iran] he became Muslim again. The two idols really are miraculous!⁴

The final example is a popular account in a work by Ibn al-Kalbi, entitled *The Book of Idols*, of the destruction of al-'Uzza, a deity mentioned in the Qur'an. According to Ibn al-Kalbi, sometime around 630 CE Muhammad commanded his military champion Khalid ibn Walid to the valley of Nakhlah where there were three trees inhabited by the goddess al-'Uzza, and ordered him to cut down the first one. When Khalid reported back, Muhammad asked him if he had seen anything unusual there, to which Khalid ibn Walid replied that he had not. Khalid's return to cut down the second tree was similarly uneventful. When he returned to cut down the third tree, he encountered an Abyssinian woman with wild hair, gnashing and grating her teeth, accompanied by Dubayyah al-Sulami, the custodian of al-'Uzza. Dubayyah addressed the woman, calling her al-'Uzza and beseeching her to kill Khalid. The Muslim champion struck her with his sword, cutting off her head, at which she fell to the ground in a pile of ashes. He then killed her custodian, Dubayyah, felled the tree, and returned to Muhammad with his report. Muhammad allegedly

commented: 'That was al-'Uzza ... Verily she shall never be worshipped again.'

The implications of Ibn al-Kalbi's account of the killing of al-'Uzza are clear. Muhammad did not deny that al-'Uzza was *real*. She was not a mere tree that the ignorant pagan Arabs insisted on worshipping; Dubayyah, her custodian, did not try to stop Khalid ibn Walid himself but rather beseeched the goddess to defend herself (and, by extension, those who worshipped her); and it took one of the greatest champions of Islam to kill al-'Uzza, a feat that presumably could only be accomplished because it was the will of the superior deity of Muhammad and Khalid ibn Walid.

Al-Muqaddasi's description of the Indian temple is similar in its open acknowledgment of the power of the idol. Clearly, neither he nor Ibn al-Kalbi denied the existence of supernatural power resident in idols; they simply saw them as doctrinally illegitimate and inferior both morally and in power to Islam and Allah. In contrast, Babur's iconoclastic act ostensibly was motivated not by religion as much as aesthetics; the vulgar statues of Urwahi were a stain on an otherwise very pleasant place.

These varied examples notwithstanding, Islam has an undeniable iconoclastic ethos similar to that of Judaism and most of Christianity. The Qur'an situates Muslim monotheism squarely within a Biblical prophet tradition in which Abraham is the proto-monotheist who rejects the false gods of his ancestors. There are many instances of Muslims destroying Hindu idols for the express purpose of eliminating idolatry or marking the victory of Islam, and some Muslim rulers proudly bore the title of 'idol-destroyer' (*but-slikan*).

Newspaper Coverage

The Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas in February and March of 2001 must be seen within the context of a trajectory of Muslim religious and political action, in which intolerance of idols can easily, if erroneously, be seen as woven into mores of proper Muslim behavior. Iconoclasm, if not always viewed as laudable, is nevertheless not a popularly condemnable act. The destruction of the Buddhas coincided with one of the holiest periods in the lunar Islamic calendar used in most Muslim societies including Afghanistan. The Hajj pilgrimage, a central ritual that ends on Eid al-adha (or 'Eid ul-azha'), the holiest day of the Muslim year, fell on 3–6 March. The timeline leading up to the destruction of the Buddhas is therefore critical to understand the Taliban's actions. I have provided major dates in the Gregorian calendar with the corresponding Hijri date in parentheses:

1996 (1417): The Taliban conquered Kabul for the first time, making them de facto rulers of Afghanistan.

1998 (1419): A preliminary attack was made on the smaller Buddha during the Taliban occupation of Bamian.

July 1999 (Rabi' al-awwal 1420): Supreme Leader of the Taliban, Mullah Umar decreed protection for all non-Muslim relics, including the statues.

12 February 2001 (19 Dhu'l-qa'da 1421): The BBC reported that Taliban representatives, invoking the Islamic prohibition against the depiction of living things, had destroyed over a dozen ancient statues in the National Museum in Kabul.

26 February 2001 (2 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): Mullah Umar, announced that all pre-Islamic statues in the Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan were to be destroyed.⁶ This was followed immediately by a statement issued through the Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef: 'Afghanistan's religious scholars and the Supreme Court have unanimously issued the *fatwa* which [will] be implemented at all costs'. The decree was to be carried out jointly by the Ministries of Information and Culture and of Fostering Virtue and Preventing Vice.⁷

1 March 2001 (5 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): It was widely reported that the Taliban had started using heavy weapons to destroy the statues.

2 March 2001 (6 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted Taliban sources as saying explosives were being brought to Bamian from other provinces and that all statues in Taliban-controlled areas were in the process of being demolished. India offered to take custody of the artefacts.⁸

5 March 2001 (9 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): Mullah Umar defended his edicts, posing the rhetorical question: 'I ask Afghans and the world's Muslims to use their sound wisdom ... do you prefer to be a smasher of idols or a seller of idols?'⁹

9 March 2001 (13 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): The AIP confirmed that demolition work had resumed after having been suspended for a few days.¹⁰

11 March 2001 (15 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): A joint UNESCO-OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference) delegation arrived in Pakistan to plead with the Taliban, led by Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Zaid al-Mahmud, accompanied by Shaikh Nasr Farid Wassel, Mufti of Al-Azhar (the most prestigious religious institution in the Sunni world), as well as by another Al-Azhar-based scholar, Shaikh Muhammad al-Rawi; they were to be joined by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the most popular preacher in the entire Arab world.

14 March 2001 (18 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): Taliban expelled BBC reporter Kate Clark and closed the Kabul office of the BBC, accusing her of biased reporting and of calling the Taliban 'ignorant'.

16 March 2001 (20 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): The Afghan Foreign Minister, Wakil Ahmed Mutawakkil, announced that the destruction was not completed because snowfall had caused a work stoppage. He simultaneously announced that the Taliban would continue to provide sanctuary to Osama bin Laden.¹¹

19 March 2001 (23 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): Al Jazeera showed footage of the destruction. The Taliban sacrificed 100 cows to atone for the delay in destroying the statues.¹²

20 March 2001 (24 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): The U.S. government rejected Taliban claims that the statues' destruction was justified by an alleged UNESCO offer of money to save the statues when no money was offered for the starving people of Afghanistan. It also insisted that sanctions against Afghanistan would stand until Bin Laden was handed over.

22 March 2001 (26 Dhu'l-hajjah 1421): Journalists were taken on a tour of Afghanistan's national museum to show the results of the destruction there.

26 March 2001 (1 Muharram 1422, New Year's Day in the Hijri calendar): Twenty journalists were flown to Bamiyan to see the destroyed statues.

11 November 2001 (24 Sha'ban 1422): The Taliban destroyed the town of Bamiyan as they retreated in front of the advancing local militia, Hizb-e islami.

Western popular coverage of Taliban statements and actions was almost uniformly condemnatory through this period, with few journalists or analysts attempting to make sense of what the Taliban were doing. Statements by Mullah Umar saying the statues would be destroyed because they 'have been used as idols and deities by the non-believers ... Only Allah, Most High, deserves to be worshipped, not anyone or anything else', and his infamous comment 'We do not understand why everybody is so worried ... All we are breaking are stones'¹³ were quoted in the Western media primarily as examples of the Taliban's incomprehensible irrationality. Their actions were universally treated in the Western press as out of keeping with the will of the Afghan people, and the BBC went so far as to declare that the 'majority' of Afghans inside the country were 'devastated' by the destruction of the Buddhas.¹⁴

Coverage of the Taliban's actions after the fact in scholarly publications showed a similar tone. In one of several articles dealing with the Bamiyan Buddhas published in *Iconoclasm*, Jean-Michel Frodon stated 'It is against that community and against a relationship with the world that values a non-religious relationship with the invisible, that the dynamite which destroyed

the giant Buddhas was used'.¹⁵ In another essay in the same collection, Jean-François Clément displayed no understanding of the nature of religious reformism when he mused about the implications of the Taliban's behaviour carried for their attitudes toward other Muslims and the future of Islam:

By destroying the Buddhas, the Taliban were clearly signalling that all [Muslims] who had preceded them in Afghanistan, who had respected the statues, were not real [Muslims]. In short, there had never been [Muslims] before them. But will there be any after them? In the decree ordering the destruction of all representations of living creatures, the Taliban declared that the Bamiyan Buddhas had to be destroyed because 'Buddhism should return to Afghanistan.' What strange [Muslims] were these who could foresee the impending disappearance of Islam.¹⁶

Significantly absent in the coverage of the events in Western-language publications is any indication that commentators had read the local press. The most remarkable aspect of this oversight is that, to the best of my knowledge, not one scholar or journalist who has written about the events bothered to look at the Islamic calendar used in Afghanistan, a major omission since the calendar played a central role in the proceedings. Mullah Umar's initial declaration ordering the destruction was made on the second of Dhu'l-hajjah, five days before the start of the Hajj pilgrimage and eight days before Eid al-adha. The lead-up to the pilgrimage is a time of heightened religious sensitivity across the Muslim world, as pilgrims prepare for their departure for Mecca while the rest of the community participates vicariously in this major ritual. Eid al-adha itself commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son and is popularly understood as a reminder to all Muslims to be ready to sacrifice all that is dear to them at God's command. Mullah Umar's choice of occasion can hardly be considered accidental, since the other major act for which Abraham is remembered is his decision to break from the idolatry of his father and ancestors, an obvious precedent on which the Taliban modelled their decision to right the wrongs of their forefathers in Afghanistan and destroy idols that they openly acknowledged were part of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic heritage. It is in this light that the animal sacrifice on 19 March (23 Dhu'l-hajjah), makes most sense.¹⁷

The calendar was a central factor not just in evoking religious memory as the Taliban cast themselves as moral heirs to Abraham but also in the very progression of events. Demolition work was suspended for Eid al-adha, and there appears to have been a brief lull during which Mullah Umar was directly responsive to opinion from the Western and Islamic worlds. However, the high-level delegation of Muslim clerics was prevented from assembling until 11 March (15 Dhu'l-hajjah) by the same holiday. The Taliban's responses to statements and proposals from the West, which seemed oblivious to the symbolism of what the Taliban saw themselves as doing, were clearly coloured

by the calendar. Significant among these was the offer of New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, made through the United Nations, to pay for the removal of all moveable relics in Afghanistan. This offer came during the Hajj, at a time when the memory of Abraham could not be stronger, since both the Hajj and Eid al-adha commemorate events in Abraham's life, in particular his willingness to sacrifice his son for the sake of God. It is no wonder that such offers were reported widely and negatively in newspapers read by those sympathetic to the Taliban.

It is in the context of local opinion and media that the Taliban's actions come into clearest light. Given the almost complete absence of publishing in the Taliban's Afghanistan, their international isolation, strong ideological ties with religious groups in Pakistan, and the pattern of reliance on Pakistani resources forced on many Afghans through two decades of war, the local press to which the Taliban reacted most directly was that of Pakistan.

The emotional links between the Taliban and some religious elements in Pakistani society are very deep.¹⁸ Most of the Taliban leadership was trained in Pakistani seminaries belonging to the Deobandi school of Sunni thought, a somewhat puritanical reform movement started in opposition to British colonial rule in India. Deobandi ideology, which teaches that a Muslim's primary loyalty is to the religion, not the nation-state, and actively encourages individuals to agitate for the political unification of the world's Muslim population, has a substantial and influential following in Pakistan. The majority of religious seminaries are run by Deobandis and the political party associated with the school, the *Jamiat-ul-e 'ulama'-ye Islam* (henceforth JUI) has a disproportionate degree of influence in Pakistani politics. In many ways, the Taliban can be seen as the wayward children of the JUI, born in politicised seminaries and traumatised by the Afghan civil war. Large numbers of Pakistanis joined the Taliban and fought in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, and many more viewed the Taliban as ideologically admirable harbingers of a Muslim utopia. The Taliban, in turn, were dependent on Pakistan for education and military training, as well economic, diplomatic and moral support. Though not always tractable in their decision making, there is no doubt that they were ever-cognizant of the importance of Pakistani public opinion and shaped their policies to reflect that.

Very insightful work has been done concerning the difference between English and local-language media in India. In *Politics after Television*, Rajagopal demonstrates the way English-language media failed to see the growth of Hindu nationalism through the late 1980s and the 1990s. When the serialised *Ramayan* began in 1985, many found it significant only because it was the most-watched show in the country at the time. The English-speaking self-proclaimed shapers and arbiters of public opinion were taken completely by surprise when this TV show became the fuel for the Ram Janam Bhoomi movement, which culminated in the destruction of the Babri Mosque on 6

December 1992.¹⁹ The destruction of this mosque was widely condemned by the Pakistani public and its memory played a significant role in the Taliban's rhetoric.

In Pakistan, the relationship of language to newspapers is somewhat different, in the sense that Urdu, Pakistan's national language, is pervasively used. Not only can Urdu-language publications be considered mainstream, but Urdu newspapers of record also follow the same journalistic standards as English-language papers, unlike the non-English press in India. There are, however, substantial differences in audiences for English and Urdu publications which has a broad impact on the construction of Pakistani identity and attitudes to a wide range of issues, including the place of religion in society and the role of the Taliban.²⁰

The English-language press in Pakistan echoed international opinion on the Taliban's behaviour, and was almost universally condemnatory. The *Pakistan Times*, one of the most widely read English papers, emphasised the following themes:

1. the need to preserve global heritage
2. tolerance for other religions
3. that Islam condemns destroying other people's places of worship
4. in addition, that Islam mandates tolerance of other religions
5. that these actions would make the world think Muslims were backward; and
6. it would give justification to others to victimise Muslims and put Muslim historical sites and places of worship at risk.

Through the period in question, only three letters in the *Pakistan Times* expressed ambivalence over the issue. They highlighted the hypocrisy of the international community's concern for dead stone in a country suffering a severe drought and a widening famine. None were supportive of the Taliban.²¹

In contrast the Urdu press, read by the majority of Pakistan's population, published a much wider spectrum of opinion. The daily *Jang*, which is published by Pakistan's largest media group and employs a neutral reporting mode, provided extensive coverage of Taliban statements, as well as reactions by Muslim religious scholars, some of whom supported the Taliban. It also displayed a much wider range of opinion in editorials and letters to the editor. The majority of letters to the editor in *Jang* brought up Western hypocrisy. Some specifically mentioned iconoclasm as a religious duty; complained of the lack of international concern when the Babri Mosque was destroyed a decade earlier; of an anti-Muslim bias in the West; and connected the sanctions on the drought-stricken people of Afghanistan to the persecution of Muslims in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir and the Palestinian territories.

The Taliban's public statements should be seen in the local context of Pakistan's Urdu press, where they seem the least irrational. Trying to justify the destruction of the statues, the Taliban and their sympathisers stressed four main points. In addition to the commonly made claim of the hypocrisy in concern over dead stone but not for living human beings, the Taliban and supporters argued that the statues were not objects of worship since there were no Buddhists in Afghanistan. As such, destroying them was not an act of desecration or persecution. Thus they pointed out that their actions were not out of line with Islamic injunctions to respect other religions, an accusation levelled against them from number of quarters. Since no one worshipped the Buddhas, they were not covered by rules of protection that were extended to idols in Hindu temples and homes in Afghanistan. (In fact, the Taliban reacted very strongly to accusations that the destruction of the Buddhas was symptomatic of their treatment of religious minorities.) In direct contradiction to these points were statements made by Taliban spokesmen as well as sympathetic Pakistani clerics saying that the Taliban's acts were payback for the destruction of the Babri Mosque at the hands of Hindu militants.²² Finally, the religious argument was linked to the accusation of hypocrisy on the part of the international community: the very fact that money was offered to save the statues transformed them from artifacts into idols because they were now being venerated more than human lives, and this reverence necessitated their destruction.

When Mullah Umar rhetorically asked the Afghan people and Muslims all over the world if they would rather be the smashers of idols or the sellers of them, he was clearly referring back to Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, the Afghan iconoclast of myth and legend, who sacked the Shiva temple at Somnath in Gujarat in 1025 CE. The local priests and rulers allegedly offered a treasure to ransom the main Shiva Linga icon, and Mahmud is legendary for having replied that he was a smasher of idols, not a seller of them.²³ Mullah Umar was also referring to the prophet Abraham, who broke with the religion of his father Azar, a maker and seller of idols, and it was this latter claim that resonated in the popular press and was applauded by Taliban sympathisers. On 2 March (6 Dhu'l-hajja, the day before the Hajj starts), Abdul Akbar Chitrali, a provincial head of the *Jum'at-e Iftitah*-e 'ulama' (an organisation supported by the JUI), declared that selling idols was wrong and congratulated the Taliban for reviving the 'Tradition of Abraham' (*sunnat-e Ibrahim*).²⁴ The same sentiment was echoed at a high-level meeting of the JUI on the eve of Eid al-Adha, in which one prominent cleric, Hafiz Husayn Ahmad, made an explicit link between the timing of the Taliban's actions in the 'month of sacrifice' and the tradition of Abraham. The head of the organisation and then-leader of Pakistan's opposition, Maulana Fazlur Rahman, also applauded the Taliban and congratulated them for exposing Western hypocrisy.²⁵ The following week, other important members of the JUI gave wider legitimacy to the

Taliban's actions by declaring that iconoclasm was the way of all prophets and that the Taliban had fulfilled 'Prophetic Tradition' (*sunnat-e nabi*), an explicit reference to Muhammad.²⁶

Even moderate religious voices were not necessarily condemnatory of the Taliban's actions. On the day commemorating Abraham's sacrifice, Maulana Shah Ahmad Nurani, leader of the *Jum'at-e 'Ulama*-ye Pakistan, the World Islamic Mission, and a man long recognised for his moderate views, said that destroying the Buddhas was the right thing to do.²⁷

However, the overall tone of this highly respected Urdu paper was not supportive of the Taliban. The editorial on Eid al-adha spoke at length about the nature of sacrifice in Abrahamic tradition but did not mention the Taliban or Afghanistan. A well-written essay on the editorial page of the same day pointed out the hypocrisy of the Taliban's concern with the 'false gods' of dead stone at a time when the 'false gods' of starvation, poverty, cruelty, sickness, unemployment, and ignorance were stronger every day, and for which no Mahmud of Ghazna seemed forthcoming.²⁸

Jum'at's coverage of the events contrasts with that of other Urdu dailies, which reflected a point of view more divergent from the attitude of the international community. The popular Lahore-based daily *Nawa-i Waqt* was openly supportive of the Taliban; the Sunday magazine of its March 18 issue ran a full-page article comparing how the suffering of children failed to move the West, while earthen statues brought out their supposed 'humanity'.

The destruction of the Buddhas illustrates the vast gap that exists in the values and priorities of different populations within South Asian societies. Those who condemned the destruction of statues on the grounds of preservation of global heritage, art, and religious tolerance, view the icon smashers as the standard-bearers of an archaic ideology completely out of place in modern society. The defenders of the act of destruction see the condemners as dupes and apologists of the West, deracinated and desecralised.

One is tempted to speculate as to whether it would have been possible to save the Buddha statues. Had international sanctions on Afghanistan been lifted and combined with non-sensationalistic diplomatic efforts, it is conceivable that the Taliban might have been convinced to let another country take custody of the statues. But in light of the Taliban's human-rights record and their stance on the extradition of Bin Laden, there was little chance of a more conciliatory international approach.

It is critical to note that the Taliban did not approach the crisis of the Bamiyan Buddhas with a preconceived plan. Not only did their position change over the weeks in question, but so did their self-conception and their reputation among their wider base of sympathisers. What started out as a vague iconoclastic impulse became sharply focused as a re-enactment of prophetic tradition, the Abrahamic precedent being invoked not just in the iconoclastic act but also in the symbolism of sacrifice, since the deaths of children as a

direct consequence of international sanctions evoked Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his child for his monotheistic God. Their understanding of Muslim doctrine concerning religious figural imagery evolved through their response to international offers to remove the artefacts or screening them in such a way that passersby could not see them: not only did the Taliban come to see the statues' presence in Afghanistan as a threat, but they came to fear that any willingness to allow the Buddhas to survive in another country would make them complicit in perpetuating idolatry. And finally, linking the Buddhas to the Babri Mosque recast the traditionally isolationist Taliban as part of an international Muslim movement, since the destruction of the mosque was important to Muslims in Pakistan and India but had little resonance in Afghanistan. Their internationalisation was recognised when both Chechen separatists and Kashmiri militants expressed support for the Taliban's actions. In the end, their actions were seen as meeting with divine approval in the widely circulated reports of drought-ending rain immediately following the destruction of the statues.²⁹

The events of February and March 2001 confirmed the Taliban's status in the eyes of their supporters as pious champions of Islam against its international foes, just as it reaffirmed the view of the international community (and this includes the majority of Muslims) that the Taliban were intolerant, uneducated and irrational. The subsequent government of Afghanistan declared rebuilding the Bamiyan Buddhas a cultural imperative, although it remains unclear when and how this will be carried out. Among the more ambitious schemes approved by the government of Afghanistan but since abandoned was a Swiss proposal to reconstruct replicas in their place (estimated at US\$30 million per Buddha in 2001), and another by the Japanese artist Hiro Yamagata to project coloured laser images of the Buddhas into the empty niches, powered by hundreds of windmills that would also supply electricity to surrounding residents (estimated at US\$64 million in 2006).³⁰ Many have questioned the ethics of spending large sums to make replica statues in a country where the overwhelming majority of the population lives without personal security or the basic necessities of life.

Destruction, Construction and Revisionism

The moral balance of human lives against inanimate artifacts faced with destruction is difficult to weigh – and the dilemma is no easier when considering their reconstruction. What the case of the Bamiyan Buddhas makes clear is that such instances of destruction occur in a complex interplay where local religious, ethnic and political differences play important parts. The act is complicated further by the discursive interaction between the local, regional and global as actors, observers and commentators take and modify

their positions. In the case of the Bamiyan Buddhas, existing differences and hostilities between the Persian-speaking, Shi'a Muslim, Hazara ethnic local population on the one hand, and the predominantly Pashto-speaking, Döbändi Sunni Muslim, Pushtun ethnic Taliban conquering group on the other, was the backdrop against which the destruction of the Buddha statues unfolded. The dimension of a culture war between the preservers of the Buddhas as part of a global heritage and the Taliban occurred in ways that were intertwined with such local (or regional) concerns.

The dynamics of the local and global are important in the majority, if not all, modern iconoclastic acts of destruction in the Islamic world. The years since the acts of destruction in Afghanistan have seen other public instances of the destruction of religiously significant artifacts in several other places. Shortly after the fall of the Mubarak government in Egypt in 2011, a number of Sufi shrines were destroyed in the country; similarly, religious actors dug up and desecrated Sufi graves in Libya after the fall of the Qaddafi regime. In 2012, after rebel militias seized control of parts of Mali, a Sunni group named Ansar Dine engaged in a systematic policy of destroying Sufi shrines and tombs in Timbuktu and surrounding areas.³¹

The destruction in Mali, in particular, bears strong similarities to the demolition of the Buddhas, in that it involves a militia with non-local affinities engaging in acts of iconoclastic destruction with a local and global audience in mind. The Ansar Dine, a religious group with clear non-local associations (including with the so-called 'Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb'), seized control of the Tuareg separatist movement that had gained strength in northern Mali following a coup in late March of 2012. They began their destructive project on July 1 2012, shortly after taking control of Timbuktu, several of whose religious spaces had only recently been placed on UNESCO's list of endangered World Heritage sites. In roughly a week, they had destroyed seven of Timbuktu's historically important Islamic mausoleums, and a religiously significant door (venerated as a relic) of the fifteenth-century Sidi Yahya mosque.

The demolition of Sufi shrines and other physical artifacts of religious significance has definite local symbolism, but the Ansar Dine, like the Taliban, were conscious that they were performing on a global stage. A source inside the Ansar Dine promised that as soon as someone from outside Mali referred to anything in Timbuktu as a 'World Heritage site' it would be destroyed. And someone claiming to be a spokesman for the group declared:

There is no world heritage, it doesn't exist. The infidels must not get involved in our business ... We will destroy everything, even if the mausolea are inside the mosques, and afterwards we will destroy the mausolea in the region of Timbuktu.³²

Although the audience for such declarations very clearly includes the Western world, the non-local audience is not exclusively (or even primarily)

direct consequence of international sanctions evoked Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his child for his monotheistic God. Their understanding of Muslim doctrine concerning religious figural imagery evolved through their response to international offers to remove the artefacts or screening them in such a way that passersby could not see them: not only did the Taliban come to see the statues' presence in Afghanistan as a threat, but they came to fear that any willingness to allow the Buddhas to survive in another country would make them complicit in perpetuating idolatry. And finally, linking the Buddhas to the Babri Mosque recast the traditionally isolationist Taliban as part of an international Muslim movement, since the destruction of the mosque was important to Muslims in Pakistan and India but had little resonance in Afghanistan. Their internationalisation was recognised when both Chechen separatists and Kashmiri militants expressed support for the Taliban's actions. In the end, their actions were seen as meeting with divine approval in the widely circulated reports of drought-ending rain immediately following the destruction of the statues.²⁹

The events of February and March 2001 confirmed the Taliban's status in the eyes of their supporters as pious champions of Islam against its international foes, just as it reaffirmed the view of the international community (and this includes the majority of Muslims) that the Taliban were intolerant, uneducated and irrational. The subsequent government of Afghanistan declared rebuilding the Bamiyan Buddhas a cultural imperative, although it remains unclear when and how this will be carried out. Among the more ambitious schemes approved by the government of Afghanistan but since abandoned was a Swiss proposal to reconstruct replicas in their place (estimated at US\$30 million per Buddha in 2001), and another by the Japanese artist Hiro Yamagata to project coloured laser images of the Buddhas into the empty niches, powered by hundreds of windmills that would also supply electricity to surrounding residents (estimated at US\$64 million in 2006).³⁰ Many have questioned the ethics of spending large sums to make replica statues in a country where the overwhelming majority of the population lives without personal security or the basic necessities of life.

Destruction, Construction and Revisionism

The moral balance of human lives against inanimate artifacts faced with destruction is difficult to weigh – and the dilemma is no easier when considering their reconstruction. What the case of the Bamiyan Buddhas makes clear is that such instances of destruction occur in a complex interplay where local religious, ethnic and political differences play important parts. The act is complicated further by the discursive interaction between the local, regional and global as actors, observers and commentators take and modify

their positions. In the case of the Bamiyan Buddhas, existing differences and hostilities between the Persian-speaking, Shi'a Muslim, Hazara ethnic local population on the one hand, and the predominantly Pashto-speaking, Djabandi Sunni Muslim, Pushtun ethnic Taliban conquering group on the other, was the backdrop against which the destruction of the Buddha statues unfolded. The dimension of a culture war between the preservers of the Buddhas as part of a global heritage and the Taliban occurred in ways that were intertwined with such local (or regional) concerns.

The dynamics of the local and global are important in the majority, if not all, modern iconoclastic acts of destruction in the Islamic world. The years since the acts of destruction in Afghanistan have seen other public instances of the destruction of religiously significant artifacts in several other places. Shortly after the fall of the Mubarak government in Egypt in 2011, a number of Sufi shrines were destroyed in the country; similarly, religious actors dug up and desecrated Sufi graves in Libya after the fall of the Qaddafi regime. In 2012, after rebel militias seized control of parts of Mali, a Sunni group named Ansar Dine engaged in a systematic policy of destroying Sufi shrines and tombs in Timbuktu and surrounding areas.³¹

The destruction in Mali, in particular, bears strong similarities to the demolition of the Buddhas, in that it involves a militia with non-local affinities engaging in acts of iconoclastic destruction with a local and global audience in mind. The Ansar Dine, a religious group with clear non-local associations (including with the so-called 'Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb'), seized control of the Tuareg separatist movement that had gained strength in northern Mali following a coup in late March of 2012. They began their destructive project on July 1 2012, shortly after taking control of Timbuktu, several of whose religious spaces had only recently been placed on UNESCO's list of endangered World Heritage sites. In roughly a week, they had destroyed seven of Timbuktu's historically important Islamic mausoleums, and a religiously significant door (venerated as a relic) of the fifteenth-century Sidi Yahya mosque.

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Although the audience for such declarations very clearly includes the Western world, the non-local audience is not exclusively (or even primarily)

Western, since such iconoclastic acts reverberate across the Muslim world with different valences. It is this audience that was foremost when an Ansar Dine spokesman, Sanda Ould Boumama, stated in a radio interview that 'When the Prophet ... entered Mecca, he said all the mausoleums should be destroyed. And that's what we are repeating'.³³ Such statements are part of internal debates within Sunni Islam, which is divided among those who venerate and seek the intercession of the holy dead and their relics, and those who condemn such practices. The fault lines between those Sunnis who believe in human intercession and those who do not are apparent in the majority of Sunni Muslim populations, but they have been gaining increasing poignancy in the second half of the last century and the first decades of this one partly as a consequence of the wealth, prestige and influence of Saudi Arabia and the well-documented power of the Internet.

Militant, politicised Sunnis are often characterised as Wahhabis by other Muslims as they are by the world press, where the designation 'Wahhabi' is used pejoratively. Wahhabism is the name of a Sunni reform movement that started in present-day Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century and is largely limited to the Arabian Peninsula. Few, if any, of the iconoclastic actors in other parts of the Islamic world can accurately be described as Wahhabis. Nevertheless, they do belong to a range of related ideologies of which Wahhabism is but one, and which can collectively be referred to as Salafism, a reference to those Sunni Muslims who take a specific, revisionist religious view which seeks to revive an imagined version of Islam practised by the first generations of Muslims after Muhammad. Salafis do not comprise a specific sect, but they are all heavily influenced by the teachings of a limited group of medieval and early modern thinkers, such that they share ideological similarities regardless of where they are found. As a prosperous state with certain practices and policies espoused by other Salafis, Saudi religious society (as distinct from the Saudi political model which is seen as corrupt by most Salafis) is perceived as worthy of emulation, even if only at a vague ideological level.

Saudi Arabia, and the Wahhabism which played a central role in its emergence as a country, are characterised by a staunch religious iconoclasm. When Wahhabi tribesmen first conquered the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in the 1800s, they demonstrated their opposition to the veneration of relics and shrines by destroying the cemetery in Medina where many members of Muhammad's family lie buried. They even attempted to tear down the Prophet's tomb, but were prevented from doing so by the Ottomans who expelled them and subsequently rebuilt many of the main tombs. When the Saudi Arabs reconquered the holy cities roughly half a century later, they destroyed the tombs again as part of their ideological opposition to any form of veneration of objects and people. The acts of destruction had conscious symbolic value for an audience beyond the Arabian peninsula, since it had an impact on the religious practices and sensibilities of both Sunni and Shi'a

Muslims outside the immediate region. The site venerated as the house of the Prophet was converted into a cattle market, later transformed into a library in response to vociferous opposition by the population of Mecca (who were overwhelmingly not Wahhabis).

Saudi acts of iconoclastic destruction and transformation continue into the present with complex signification for local and global audiences. The most dramatic case has been the construction of the Abraj al-Bayt Tower complex (also called the Royal Mecca Clock Tower) which opened in 2012, towering over the precinct of the Ka'ba in Mecca. The complex, funded by the King Abdulaziz Endowment, is dominated by the tallest clock tower in the world, and claims the world's second-tallest building and the tallest hotel. The complex was built by destroying an eighteenth-century Ottoman fort (and flattening the mountain on which it stood), and is part of a large and ambitious project to transform Mecca. Supporters of the project point to the desperate need for improved infrastructure in a city that receives over twelve million pilgrims a year, and see the vast modern complex right beside the Ka'ba as a source of pride for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the global Muslim community. Critics of the project point to the commercialisation of the holy city, the destruction of Muslim heritage sites, and the dramatic way in which luxury hotels and condominiums overlooking the Ka'ba represent a departure from Muslim ideals of social equality exemplified in pilgrimage rituals. Where the rich can now look down on the geographic locus of Islam from their living room windows, the city of Mecca is becoming unaffordable for its long-time residents who are being forced to commute long distances and have allegedly not been compensated properly for homes that were seized for building projects.³⁴

Conclusion

The local contestation between Meccan residents and Saudi government officials and real estate developers is inseparable from global concerns in which the destruction and transformations in Mecca carry iconoclastic messages for a multitude of audiences. The clock tower, with the largest clock face in the world, is an oversized copy of Big Ben; it is set to 'Mecca time', consciously and overtly supplanting London as the temporal centre of the Muslim world, if not aspiring to changing the time coordinates of the entire planet. Whether or not the global Muslim audience agrees with the intended purposes of such symbolic gestures, it seems clear that Western commentators see the construction of the clock tower as part of a culture war and react to it in terms reminiscent of, though distinct from, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas at the hands of the Taliban.³⁵ For a construction project occurring in the Islamic world in which no non-Muslims are directly affected nor non-Islamic

sities destroyed, the construction of the Abraj al-Bayt complex, and especially its clock tower, has garnered an exceptional amount of press in the UK and the US. The obvious reason is that the clock tower is designed to upstage Big Ben and Greenwich Mean Time. Yet the tone of many of the articles on the tower goes beyond simple description to making aesthetic judgements, with the tower referred to as 'gaudy', 'kitsch', and an 'architectural absurdity'.³⁶ Such reactions make clear the symbolic effectiveness of the tower; none of the articles on the construction that I have encountered in the mainstream press sees it in the well-documented context of the myriad other examples of monumental architecture (including many churches in Europe) that consciously mimic and surpass in grandeur earlier monumental structures. What makes the Abraj al-Bayt clock tower objectionable in such a context is the fact that it is constructed by a group that is viewed as a hostile, cultural other.

At the local or the Muslim global level, the Abraj al-Bayt towers belong in a different discourse. It is part of the reconstruction of Mecca as the centerpiece of a distinct and muscular Muslim modernity in which the iconoclastic policies of Wahhabis and Salafis are conscious gestures of the affirmation of a so-called 'true' Islam against what the Salafis perceive as inappropriate forms of Muslim practice (most specifically, the intercessory models of religion espoused by those with Shi'a and Sufi proclivities). In such a symbolic contestation, the destruction of venerated sites such as the house where Muhammad is believed to have been born or the home of his wife Khadija (the first female Muslim) as part of the expansion of the complex surrounding the Ka'ba is intentionally presented as no different from the destruction of an Ottoman fortress or the removal of ancient pillars from the sanctuary of the Ka'ba. The message is a clear one: objects from the past, be they of religious significance for some or part of the cultural heritage of others, have no worth relative to the interconnected values inherent in modernisation and in improving the religious practices of the global Muslim community. The relative insignificance of the loss of Mecca's ambience or its architectural history in the face of a gargantuan architectural project that dominates its landscape is captured in the response given by the Saudi minister for tourism and antiquities to criticisms of the Abraj al-Bayt: 'When I am in Mecca and go around the Ka'ba, I don't look up'.³⁷

The symbolic value of demolition and construction in Saudi Arabia is inseparable from iconoclastic acts committed by other actors such as the Ansar Dine in Mali or the Taliban in Afghanistan, in that they signify the ascendance of an interpretation of Islam that is set upon reforming the society around it, the wider Muslim community, and the terms of engagement of global Islam with the West. The prestige of Saudi Arabia as the birthplace of Islam, a prosperous Islamic country and one which actively projects its image of the religion onto others, means that no act of iconoclastic destruction perpetrated

by Salafi actors in the world can be seen independent of the history of Wahhabi iconoclasm at Islam's geographic center. Furthermore, the legitimacy enjoyed by the Saudis as 'good' Muslims in Sunni communities that are not themselves actively Wahhabi or even Salafi, means that criticism of their actions on the part of Sunni Muslims is often muted: faced with the destruction of objects and relics, many Muslims will acknowledge the superiority of an Islam which eschews the veneration of the dead, or attachment to objects, in favor of a direct, unmediated connection to God. The iconoclastic act of destruction, therefore, retains its multivalent quality as part of an ongoing dialogue in which local specificities influence and are influenced by a variety of global interlocutors who are only partially the intended audience of the symbolic acts, and whose reactions influence the course of future iconoclastic gestures.

Notes

- 1 Statement made by Mullah Umar, supreme leader of Taliban.
- 2 For a sustained discussion of the topic, see Jamal J. Elias, *Al-Shari's Crusade: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, 2012), especially chapters four and five. Finbar Barry Flood has written an interesting article historicising the Taliban's acts in an Islamic context in an attempt to show that their sort of iconoclasm is an aberration and not part of a universal Muslim attitude toward idols and images ('Between Cult and Culture: Baniyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum', *The Art Bulletin*, 84/4 (2002): 641–59). Flood's essay also contains a very thoughtful discussion of questions of museumship and preservation as they pertain to the international attempt to preserve the Buddhas of Bamiyan.
- 3 Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama*, ed. with Persian translation of 'Abd al-Rahim Khankhanian by Wheeler M. Thackston, Jr., 3 vols, Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures, no. 18 (Cambridge, 1953), 3: 728–729.
- 4 Al-Muqaddasi, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions (Ahsan al-taqsim fi ma'rifat al-aqalim)*, trans. Basil Collins (Reading, 2001), p. 390.
- 5 Ibn al-Kalbi *Kitab al-asnam*, ed. Ahmad Zaki (Cairo, 1964). *The Book of Idols (Kitab al-asnam)*, trans. N. Amin Faris (Princeton, 1969), pp. 21–22. This version of the destruction of al-Uzza is not found in the collections of Prophetic traditions (*hadith*) considered canonical by the majority of Muslims, but notions of canonicity have little bearing on the construction of sacred history, nor on the impact such narratives have on attitudes toward art, objects, or much else. There is a large corpus of prophetic traditions that serve as the wisdom literature of Muslims, guiding attitudes and ethics in all walks of life.
- 6 Detailed information on various reactions to this decree and other related events is available at the website of the Archeological Institute of America (<http://www.archaeology.org/online/news/afghanistan/index.html>, accessed July 15 2007).
- 7 Anon., 'Taliban to Implement Edict on the Destruction of Statues', *Pakistan Times*, 28 February 2001.
- 8 Anon., 'Taliban Assembling Explosives to blow up Buddha Statues', *Pakistan Times*, 3 March 2001.
- 9 Anon., 'Taliban Leader defends Afghan Statue Destruction', *Pakistan Times* (Reuters), 6 March 2001.
- 10 Anon., 'Taliban resume Bamiyan Buddhas' Destruction', *Pakistan Times*, 10 March 2001.
- 11 Anon., 'No Shift in Policy on Osama Statues: Taliban', *Pakistan Times*, 16 March 2001.
- 12 Anon., 'Taliban assure Protection to Historic Relics', *Pakistan Times*, 20 March 2001.
- 13 Molly Moore, 'Afghanistan's Antiquities Under Assault', *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 2 March 2001.

- 14 Anon., 'UN condemns Taliban on Statues', *BBC News*, 2 March 2001 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1210922.stm). Viewed 15 July 2007. According to the report, the dam was made by the UN coordinator for Afghanistan.
- 15 Jean-Michel Frodon, 'The War of Images, or the Bamiyan Paradox', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds), *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, exh. cat. (Cambridge, MA and London, 2002), p. 222.
- 16 Jean-François Clement, 'The Empty Niche of the Bamiyan Buddha', in Latour and Weibel (eds), *Iconoclasm*, p. 218.
- 17 The question of why the Taliban did not destroy the Buddhas earlier in their rule of Bamiyan remains unanswered. Their anger at having been internationally ostracised no doubt played a role. It is also likely that different factions within the Taliban disagreed on how attacks from Afghanistan's pre-Islamic past should be treated, with Mullah Umar representing the tolerant end of the spectrum (evidenced by his declaration of protection in 1999) and hard-liners, such as Mullah Dadullah (killed in May 2007) having insisted on their destruction from the beginning and eventually leaving Umar with no choice in the matter.
- 18 For an introduction to the Taliban and their relationship with the Pakistani government and society, see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, 2001).
- 19 Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge, 2001); see also Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* (New Delhi, 2001); and Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian Language Press, 1977-99* (New York, 2000). The Babri Mosque, named after the aforementioned emperor Babur, commemorates the establishment of Mughal rule and is viewed with reverence by many South Asian Muslims.
- 20 For more on the relationship between English and Urdu in Pakistan, see Tariq Rahman, *Language, Ideology and Power: Language Learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India* (Karachi, 2002); and by the same author, *Language, Education and Culture* (Karachi, 1999). For a description of how differences in language and literacy manifest themselves in Pakistani society, see Jamal J. Elias *On Wings of Desire: Trucks, Identity and Culture in Pakistan* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 39-54. There have been dramatic shifts in the nature of the Pakistani media since the period under review in this article, most significantly through the proliferation of 24-hour Urdu news channels. The restoration of an internationally supported central government in Afghanistan has also seen the resumption of domestic publishing and broadcasting, as well as the formation of national narratives concerning the Taliban.
- 21 The letters were: Barkatullah Marwat (Kuwait), 15 March 2001; A. Khan (Islamabad) 28 March 2001; Rohul Amin (Swat), 30 March 2001. The United States of America imposed unilateral financial and economic sanctions on the Taliban on July 5 1999, in an attempt to force them to stop providing sanctuary to Osama bin Laden. On October 15 of the same year the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1267, which imposed financial sanctions and a flight-ban on Taliban-controlled Afghanistan if it failed to turn Bin Laden over to a competent authority within 30 days. These sanctions were strengthened in December 2000, despite an August 2000 report from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that the sanctions were having 'tangible negative effect' on the population of Afghanistan (Anon., 'Sanctions against Al Qaeda and the Taliban', *Global Policy Forum*, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/202/41753.html>, accessed April 8 2012).
- 22 Anon., 'Ye Babri Masjid ki shahadat ka rukh-e-umal ha, Taliban' (This is the consequence of the martyrdom of the Babri Mosque), *Jang*, March 5, 2001.
- 23 This statement has gained much popularity among Muslim admirers of Mahmud of Ghazna, although it does not accurately reflect his words as they appear in the historical work from which they are drawn. The chronicle *Tarikh-e Firshia* describes Mahmud as being concerned with the judgment of posterity and declaring his preference for being remembered as a destroyer of idols. See Muhammad Qasim Firshia, *Tarikh-e Firshia*, 2 vols (Lucknow, 1905), I: 33; English trans. by John Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mohammedan Power in India*, 4 vols (Delhi, 1829), rpt. 1990), I: 43-44.
- 24 Anon., 'Mullah 'Umar ne bat-shikani ka hukm de kar sunnat-e Ibrahim ko zinda kiya' (Mullah Umar's brings the Tradition of Abraham back to Life by Ordering the Destruction of Idols), *Jang*, 2 March 2001.
- 25 'Mullah 'Umar ki sunnat ne masjid ki ko tula kar rukh diya' (Mullah Umar's Strategy leaves the West Shaken), *Jang*, 5 March 2001.
- 26 Anon., 'Taliban ne Injil ko ta kar Nabe-ye Akram ki sunnat ada ki' (Taliban Fulfill the Tradition of the Noblest Prophet by Destroying Statues), *Jang*, 11 March 2001.
- 27 Anon., 'Afghanistan mein bat-bani ka injil darna hai' (Decision to Destroy Idols in Afghanistan is Correct), *Jang*, 6 March 2001.
- 28 Hasan Nisar, 'Bat-shikani ka shauq' (Fondness for Iconoclasm), *Jang*, 6 March 2001.
- 29 Anon., 'Bat tite to Afghanistan mein barish shuru ho gayi' (When the Idols Broke Rain began Falling in Afghanistan), *Nad-e-aulad*, 10 March 2001.
- 30 Carlotta Gall, 'Afghans consider rebuilding Bamiyan Buddhas', *International Herald Tribune*, 5 December 2006, <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/12/05/news/buddhas.php?page=1>; Emily Sharpe, 'Tenth anniversary of Taliban's destruction of ancient buddhas', *The Air Newspaper*, 222 (March 2012) (<http://www.theairnewspaper.com/articles/tenth-anniversary-of-Talibans-destruction-of-ancient-buddhas/23217>).
- 31 Tom Hinnigan, 'Advancing radical Islamists lay waste to religious heritage', *Reuters*, 4 July 2012 (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/07/04/uk-mali-crisis-iconoclasm-idUKBRE8630R30120704>).
- 32 Anon., 'Ansar Dine destroy more shrines in Mali', *Aljazeera*, 10 July 2012 (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/07/2012071012301347496.html>).
- 33 Hinnigan.
- 34 Jerome Taylor, 'Mecca for the rich: Islam's holiest site "turning into Vegas"', *The Independent*, 24 September 2011. For a discussion of the Abraj al-Bayt project and the transformation of Mecca, see also Razul Butt, 'Marketing Mecca: luxury timeshares on offer at Islam's holiest pilgrimage site', *The Guardian*, 14 November 2006; Hassan M. Fattah, 'The price of progress: transforming Islam's holiest site', *The New York Times*, 8 March 2007. For a description of the changes in Mecca from the perspective of a pilgrim, see Basharat Peer, 'Modern Mecca: the transformation of a holy city', *The New Yorker*, 16 April 2012: 74-87.
- 35 For more on the connection between the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and the construction of the Abraj al-Bayt complex, see James Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-breaking in Christianity and Islam* (London, 2013), especially Chapter 7.
- 36 Nicolai Ourousoff, 'New look for Mecca: gargantuan and gaudy', *The New York Times*, 30 December 2010.
- 37 Ourousoff.