Catherine Asher

The Qutb Complex: India and the Persianate World

This presentation will examine the famous Qutb mosque complex in Delhi that commenced in the late 12th century and remains today a major attraction for locals and tourists alike. Components of the mosque complex derive from Iranian and Persianate traditions brought by the Ghurids such as Alibak’s arched screen, the towering Qutb minar and its tombs as well as style of its epigraphy. Other features are more Indic in nature, for example, the naturalistic carving on the screen and the use of stone in lieu of brick. A goal of this presentation is to think about this well-known site in new ways that contextualize its place in both India and the larger Persianate world. The motivations for the construction of Delhi’s mosque, originally from spolia, are examined as are the multiple new components of this complex that spanned the first several hundred years of Muslim rule. Included in this complex are the world’s tallest brick/stone constructed minaret, an early tomb and a magnificent arched stone screen in front of the original mosque. Issues to be addressed include: the possible reasons for radical changes in visual aesthetics at the complex, the messages of the inscriptions including graffiti on the monuments and the political aspirations of the patrons responsible for complex’s growth.

Catherine Asher is a professor in the Department of Art History at the University of Minnesota. She is a specialist in Islamic and Indian art from 1200 to the present. She’s well known for her work on the Mughal dynasty (1526-1858), but increasingly is working on the patronage of their successors and predecessors, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Exploring not only architecture but also painting as well as luxury arts, she shows that these communities were more often in harmony with one another than in adversarial relationships. In addition to urban formations and developments, Catherine Asher is also interested in the shrines that develop around deceased Muslim saints, that is, Sufis, examining the appeal such complexes have for devotees. Her books include a co-authored book (with Cynthia Talbot), *India before Europe* (2006), a co-edited volume (with Thomas Metcalf), *Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past* (1994), and *The Architecture of Mughal India* (1992). Currently Catherine Asher is working on the built environment of Jaipur from its foundation in the 18th century to the present.

FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 2019
5 ~ 7 PM
10 STEPHENS HALL

The event is FREE and OPEN to the public. More information at southasia.berkeley.edu