Examining derivations of authority for architectural conservation in the context of living heritage at two sites in India, probing the mediating potential of documentation.

Horse and rider: who will drive change in ethics and practices of globalised conservation on living heritage sites?

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UNESCO conservation principles, critiqued by Laurajane Smith[1] as being a manifestation of the so-called 'Authorised Heritage Discourse', define heritage as both tangible and intangible.[2] It is a generalised observation of twentieth-century British narratives of India, from E. M. Forster[3] to William Dalrymple,[4] that the living understanding and participation in a ritual and mythic imagination there hosts a public realm in which ancient and present realities remain simultaneously present. This continuity is more vivid than it is in many cultures where the separation between ancient representations and preoccupations, and current ones, is more definite, such as in contemporary Britain. This simultaneity of living heritage in India makes the objective distance of architectural conservation harder to enforce or defend. Indeed, in one of the two studies presented here, the legal authority for conservation practice is literally being contested in court and on site through acts of reconstruction between religious, political, and professional bodies.

UNESCO principles for determining Outstanding Universal Value[5] are used to signify the comparative significance of heritage assets, and consequently have an impact on their economic future and authorised care. In contributing to the documentation of heritage, through drawing, modelling, or photographing, we engage in a process of objectification that risks inadvertently ossifying precisely that which we cherish most. This happens on a pragmatic level whereby institutions of authority – religious and statutory – will intersect and overlap. In the cases presented here, it also occurs on a professional level whereby technical expertise is deemed to come not only from scientific or professional hierarchies but from religious ones also. This context disrupts many of the pretexts of conservation authority that are

1 View over Ajmer, Rajasthan from Taragarh Fort, 2016.
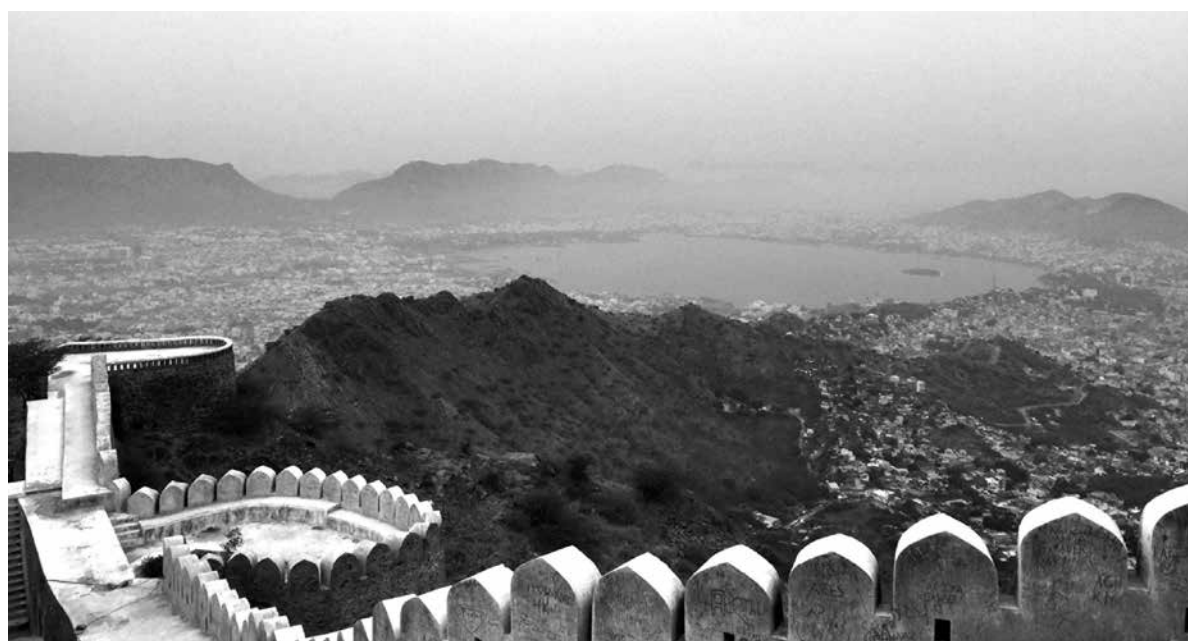
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based on connoisseurship or scientific expertise.

In this article, considering accurate documentation as the primary and arguably the most critical task of architectural conservation (to recognise an asset), challenges and opportunities are drawn from identifying similarities between the experience of attempting to record two ostensibly distant case studies in India: the Gangadhar Ji Ki Haveli in the Naya bazaar at Ajmer in the north; and the Pudhu Mandapam of the Sri Meenakshi Temple at Madurai in the south of India. As a white British academic and architect, my experience highlights vividly the limitations for recording intangible heritage. However, the similarity in findings drawn from the contemplation of subsequent digital models also points to broader implications. The need for developing accessible means of documentation, for widening authority for the assertion of universal values using digital tools is highlighted in both contexts.

Both my case study sites are rich in iconography: the intensely painted haveli (courtyarded house) at Ajmer in the north; and the richly sculpted Pudhu Mandapam (pillared hall) at Madurai in the south of India. One is a domestic building never previously noted as being of architectural merit and is demonstrably at risk of economic transformation and redevelopment; the other is a known landmark whose intensive use sparks anxiety. Each demonstrates evidence of present and apparently imminent risk to their physical endurance. In Ajmer, the neighbouring haveli of similar scale has recently been demolished for the erection of a new hotel. With much greater media attention in Madurai, the future of the Pudhu Mandapam and its traders has been accented by the recent destruction by fire of a similarly occupied mandapa within the adjacent Sri Meenakshi temple complex itself, prompting a UNESCO fact-finding mission.[6]

After briefly describing the two sites, this article first introduces the interaction of global and local drivers for conservation practice, touching upon UNESCO definitions of Outstanding Universal Value and Tangible and Intangible Heritage. It goes on to outline the role of documentation in safeguarding heritage and notes the particular colonial legacy of heritage assets of India, as collated by the British. The findings made through reflective observations following the digital documentation of each case study are then presented. Finally, the implicit significance of similarities emerging from these interpretations of disparate sites is discussed. The conclusion highlights the urgency for architects and conservation agents to probe further into the multi modal potential of newly accessible means to use 3D documentation opportunities to better engage with what lies before us.

Challenges to continuity in Ajmer, Rajasthan

Beneath the Taragarh fort, sheltered by 'invincible hills'[7] lies Ajmer, the city that hosts the second largest Muslim pilgrimage in India [1]. The Sharif Dargah Sufi shrine of Moinuddin Chishti attracts millions of pilgrims per year, but the city is tested by its tight and overcrowded surrounding streets, and its basic infrastructure causing hazards and impeding access to the differently abled. By contrast, the nearby town of Pushkah, with its unique Bramah temple has succeeded in augmenting its many Hindu pilgrims with tourists. The town has generated a lucrative industry around its Camel Fair since the 1980s. The fair and the spacious open tank offer an appealing space for the image of desert travel. The tourist attraction of Ajmer is effectively eclipsed by Pushkah, yet historically the reverse was the case. The pictorial depictions found on the walls of the nineteenth-century Haveli in Ajmer are shown here to reflect the cosmopolitan nature of its integrated Hindu and Muslim past. The documentation of its current state is shown also to highlight an unconventional reading of its management and conservation. The neighbouring haveli, which lies in ruins, demonstrates the precarious margin by which this one survives.

Visual representation of this city has been updated to transfer traditional understanding of legends between generations. The two images [2, 3] depict an apparently unbroken aspiration that has remained in one place. In 2016, a man and boy atop a white horse [2] pose before a PVC backdrop at a photographer's stand at the Taragarh fort, which commands the view over Ajmer. Meanwhile, a seventeenth-century painting from the Sawar district of Ajmer [3] is inscribed: 'Maharaja Pratap Singh bred the horse at his stud farm.'[8] The time of this familiar depiction has changed but the place remains the same. In 2016, the adult introduces the child to be part of a scene that ties them to valuing the precious beauty of that breed of horse, but also to the lively and various legends of twelfth-century Prithviraj Chauhan, King of Ajmer and Delhi.[9] Notwithstanding its different materiality, the plastic backdrop is evidence of a perpetual aim to recreate a specific scene, despite the existence of the actual panorama that is readily available on the other side of the road. In their unspoken teamwork to determine their direction, a rider's command of his horse is possibly the oldest and most readily recognised visual depiction of human triumph shared across cultures.

Challenges to continuity in Madurai, Tamil Nadu

The seventeenth-century pillared hall of the Pudhu Mandapam at Madurai lies to the north of the Sri Meenakshi Temple at Madurai, in Tamil Nadu. The pillars of the façade facing the temple are coincidentally also the sculpted depictions of four horsemen, which seemingly drive the building along [4] (hence the title of this article). The building, designed with a ritual role, has operated in a quasi-commercial capacity for over two hundred years. The hall consists of a central pillared space, which is gated and unused, save for during festivals. Surrounding this, a perambulatory colonnade is densely packed with tailors working to order and associated stalls selling fabric, decorative trims,

4   Pudhu Mandapam of the Meenakshi-Sundareshvara Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, 2018.

brassware, books, and toys. It is opened and shut daily during daylight hours. The up-and-down mechanical movements of the heavy sewing machines adapted with electric motors operating between each pair of columns is resonant with the repetitive rhythm of the spaces.

Within the temple itself the rebuilding of the colonnade around the golden tank, and a recent fire that destroyed a pillared hall within its walls, have raised questions as to the effectiveness of cultural heritage management at the site. This forms part of a wider concern to establish conservation management principles for the state in which there are reputedly over 32,000 temples.[10] There are complex layers of governance and stewardship that intersect including governmental, religious, and community authorities making the design and delivery of conservation interventions, or even of guidelines, challenging.

Global and local practices

The whole issue of how ideas of authority are derived – whether spiritual, scientific, technical, or historical – is prescient here. David Jasper suggested that the notion of 'a message to the timid robot of the technological age'[11] should be read as a lesson to the West in his review of the epic poem Veer Dargadas Rathore.[12] The balance between secular (state) and religious management of the 32,000 temples in Tamil Nadu has been the subject of debate for many years. Complexities of control in Tamil temple conservation practice have attracted discussion from different perspectives. Notably Arjun Appadurai[13] in the 1970s and political scientist Franklin Presler, who argued in 1982 that 'Temples are built to grow in social and historical contexts; presumably, they can and often do wither and decay.'[14]

There now are two UNESCO inscriptions for Tamil Temples. These cover the Group of monuments at Mahbalipuram,[15] which was inscribed in 1984 under criteria[16] (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv) and The Great Living Chola Temples,[17] under criteria (ii) and (iii), which

include the Brihadisvara temple complex at Thanjavur (inscribed 1987). This was extended in 2004 to include the Airavatesvara Temple Complex in Darasuram and the Brihadisvara temple complex, Gangaikondacholapuram. Notably, the sites at Darasuram, Tanjore and Mahabalipuram were all predominantly at risk of physical decay in the face of advancing vegetation and in the case of Mahabalipuram, rising sea levels.

As a UNESCO site, the monuments at Mahabalipuram were assisted by resource allocation following the tsunami of 2004. These risks of decay

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5 **The Shore Temple Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, 1988.**

6 **The Shore Temple Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, 2018.**

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were evident and have been addressed through extensive conservation and consolidation works. However, arguably the risks these sites faced were less difficult to overcome than the current conundrum of suggested over-use by humans and disputed authority that has been suggested in Madurai, for example. The inscribed temples of Tamil Nadu are jointly managed by the Archaeological Survey of India the Department of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments, Government of Tamil Nadu. These do not include the temples of buildings at Madurai, which benefit from the state rather than the national oversight alone.

Photographs from 1988 and 2018–19 demonstrate the degree to which the consequent protection and management of the Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram [5, 6] and the temple at Darasuram [7, 8] in Tamil Nadu have changed. The installation of landscaped and fenced 'buffer zones' around the temples has altered their appearance, albeit for good reason to protect against coastal erosion and to remove damaging vegetation. They are in now a good state of repair and their settings are well managed and maintained. There is a significant distance between the condition and activity surrounding these buildings and that of many others, which are now seen by some to be at greater risk. For example, outside Kumbakonam a rare brick temple has been completely deconstructed in order to be 'better' rebuilt, while its icons wait patiently in a steel shed to be rehoused. This is an extreme example of how conservationists find themselves in the paradoxical position of their good intentions to retain physical cultural heritage placing them directly at odds with the very living intangible heritage that created it. Furthermore, there is a clear contrast between the degree of religious activity and life around the protected monuments and those that have not been protected which raises urgent questions as to whether there might be a more mediated path to the goal of safeguarding.

UNESCO defines Outstanding Universal Value as 'cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity'.[18] In order to argue a case for Outstanding Universal Value, a statement of Integrity and of Authenticity as well as commitments for protection and management are required. In terms of the studies of aesthetics and of ethics, the notion that a Universal or Objective value can be ascribed has long been deemed debatable.[19] One path that is open to developing this assertion is to state that the aesthetic value can be defined relative to a person or a culture. In simple terms: relativism establishes a spatial relationship whereby a value may be ascribed at various distances is arguably behind the segregation of values around cultural heritage defined by UNESCO as lying at local, regional, national, or international levels.

The suggestion of a potential universality in terms of heritage values is controversial. Questions arising from the assertion of universal values are problematised by numerous theorists – most notably, a discourse of critical realism has emerged in cultural heritage theory promoted by Smith et al.,[20] centred on emulating the potential perspectives of a diverse community as opposed to those of the 'Authorised Heritage Discourse'. Notwithstanding that common sense suggests there are still instances, for example of imminent physical collapse, where multiple viewpoints may not be the optimal way forward, I suggest that there is a role in architectural documentation – in drawings, models, and photographs – whereby a certain contribution can be made with respect to positioning the beholder. The two case studies here demonstrate how significant challenges should be contemplated with care.

The definition of intangible heritage adopted by UNESCO since 2003[21] defines 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith'. It makes specific mention of 'recognizing that communities [...] play an important role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and recreation of the intangible cultural heritage'. In the case of the Tamil Temples, the issue of recognising this participation in maintenance is specifically noted in the inscription of the Chola Temples, where the Hindu Agama doctrinal texts are cited in the inscription. The consequent question of how to mediate technical expertise with respect to methods of conservation in such an environment is evident.

While, as architects, we stumble into ethnographic methods and anthropological arguments at times, these are not our territories of expertise. We can only aim to acknowledge that it exists but lies outside our domain. A seemingly promising concept of 'dialogical heritage' has been further developed by Rodney Harrison,[22] which in simple terms retains both tangible and intangible concerns. In the main, the issue of intangible heritage is examined from the perspective, or by attempting to adopt the perspective of aboriginal people and of people with little material heritage. In India there is a fountain of both, there is little distance between them. In many ways it is tempting to argue that it is not heritage precisely because it is not dead.

In India, of course, the legacy of colonial control casts a more intense spotlight on Westerners like myself engaging with such sensitive concerns as the care, protection, or control of its cultural heritage, even from the perspective of research. Appadauri has narrated the legacy of British attempts to organise and control the management of temples during the imperial era.[23] Later, he specifically discusses the South Indian Temple context as a means to challenge preconceptions of the continuity of past in the present with respect to social change.[24] Nevertheless, the impending environmental and developmental acceleration of mass rapid urbanisation has charged research councils in both countries to fund these studies.

Challenges of documentation
Documentation is required by the World Heritage Convention for the purpose of inscription,[25] and is consequently understood as the first, and therefore arguably the most critical step, in any strategy to conserve or manage cultural heritage. It plays a key part in the assertion of value of both tangible heritage and intangible heritage practices. Architects and archaeologists approach the means to record and measure tangible heritage differently. Architects are accustomed to working with orthogonal projections and to codifying information to be read at certain scales in order to communicate instructions or to project a future vision. Considering conservation risks, they may isolate, for example, recordings of structural and surface degradation or degradation of different materials and in an attempt to direct expertise separately. Archaeologists may deploy visual methods but may focus perhaps more on written documentation or monitors of condition, the dimensional aspects having perhaps less intrinsic importance in their aims. In addition to these frameworks, ethnographers and historians will seek oral and epistolary testimony to build evidential positions.

To some extent, the architectural aim in documentation, while it may meander into other disciplines, is to provide a potential skeleton: a scaled depiction, often reduced to a line drawing; binary and therefore definite in so far that the line is either there or not. The aim of the documentation in each case is to build a means to articulate, with the greatest possible accuracy and clarity, an authoritative platform from which decisions may be made and directions given. In general, for the architect, the accuracy and clarity of drawings or models enable the provision of unequivocal instructions for repairs or alterations. For cultural heritage professionals, they provide the basis and rationale for constructing Conservation Management Plans. The degree to which the nature, quality, and scope of the documentation itself may set a cast of activity in motion opens further debate in the case of heritage that is still a part of daily

practice, as it is in these cases. Newly amenable digital tools enable multidisciplinary teams to draw in three dimensions within a scaled photographic domain. Arguably, they also offer significantly more accessible means for participatory planning in sensitive circumstances.[26]

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), initiated by the Ancient Monuments and Preservation Act of 1904, was established under British Rule. Ajay Khare provides a context of pre-independence legal frameworks for conservation and archaeological recording back to the sixteenth century.[27] Nalini Thakur has highlighted the subsequent challenges of a legal legacy so entrenched in the recording of monuments, as opposed to a wider definition of heritage.[28] She also raises the issue of the disruption to tacit knowledge, and conservation education, brought about by the domination of an educational system in English, and she argues that the buildings survive but the knowledge is lost. The ethnographer Appadurai speaks of the parallel fragmentation of knowledge through the disruption of language in this context.[29]

In common with numerous similar imperial missions to capture visual evidence of ancient cultures of subaltern states, the ASI brought about an early photographic inventory at an unprecedented scale. It provides a documentary source of archaeological sites in parallel with the birth of photography. In simple terms, the photographs provide a means to assert where change has happened, where there has been loss or significant alteration. This can be extremely useful in dispelling anxiety over accelerating decay. The images, however, do little to furnish reading of the ritual or lived experience of the places they record. Even today, high-resolution images that depict neither sound nor smell are limited in their capacity. The practice of photogrammetry and of stereo photography also began in the nineteenth century. Today, with the aid of freely available software, three-dimensional models can be generated with relative ease. Here digital models derived both from terrestrial laser scans and photogrammetry have been created. In both cases, the aim has been to develop digital platforms for the discussion of contested methods of conservation practice and to posit new channels for authority.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Ruskin had championed the use of photography as an emergent tool that offered a more authentic view: '[...] a photograph of [...] early architecture is a precious historical document; and that this architecture should be taken, not merely when it presents itself under picturesque general forms, but stone by stone, and sculpture by sculpture.'[30] The indication is that photography could be used to ascribe a more objective view that would be desirable in a quest to value monuments and their aesthetic value systematically. Christopher Janaway notes that 'the central problem concerning aesthetic value is that it is not merely in the eye of the beholder, while yet it seems to require the eye of the beholder in order to exist.'[31] With respect to conservation documentation,

this Ruskinian desire for an objective point of view to be achieved through the medium of photography is important. Arguably it is conversely, almost impossible to compose an objective photograph. All that could be claimed to be objective is that material that is unintentionally captured might lead us to further opportunities. However, the many hundreds or thousands of images that are used to create a photogrammetric model are not framed as such and the virtual space that model creates perhaps offers more scope for objectivity by allowing, for example, the extraction of orthogonal sections.

Case study: Madurai

The author's limitations could be summarised thus:

The lady will not get out of my photograph. I was trying to capture the increased clutter in front of the Pudhu Mandapam since visiting the previous year. The lady is determined that I should centre my attention on her and moves with me to secure her place in my memory. It is very important that I don't alter my focal length as that will muck up my workflow in my photogrammetric software when I get home where I plan to build an enormous digital model. I am not equipped to converse with her, I am an architect, I am only interested in buildings, excuse me. It is true that I am also a human but I have no qualifications in that respect that distinguish me from other humans, so I would like to invest my small claim for authority in the pile of achievements I consider to be tallest. I cannot read anything here and I cannot understand what you are saying but I can look and I can look again and wonder.

As Crispin Branfoot has noted,[32] at the Pudhu Mandapam at Madurai [9], an exceptional degree of attention has been afforded historically to the documentation of the building. By contrast to the haveli at Ajmer, a cache of drawings and images dating back to the early eighteenth century in the British Library are testimony to the fascination and perceived value of the building's many sculpted columns by an international, albeit dominant, ruling audience. The quantity of documentation is said by Branfoot to be unparalleled. This highly sculpted pillared hall lies to the north of the main Meenakshi temple, whose enormous gopura characteristically dominates the plains of the surrounding landscape as man-made mountains. Although associated with the ritual use of the temple, it is not a part of it.

Woven screens and hoardings are evident in some early nineteenth-century photographs [10] and Branfoot has identified records of the tailors' existence there back into the early eighteenth century. However, the continued occupation of this building by these people is at risk. As noted above, in 2018 a fire broke out in the Veera Vasantharayar Mandapam within the Meenakshi temple across the road. The hall was full of shops lit with makeshift electrical installations, which were ultimately blamed for the blaze.[33] Assuming that the entire granite structure was no longer safe, it has been razed to the ground and there are plans to rebuild it. Following this event, the Pudhu Mandapam was closed for three weeks while the electrical installations there were checked.

Significant anxiety as to the future tenancy of these businesses was understandably heightened. Indeed, at Hampi, where a conservation management plan was established under a national framework, there were challenges noted in its complete implementation.[34] A scheme was enacted whereby a similar group of traders were resited at a distance from the ancient building they had occupied. The action has proved controversial. While the physical condition of the buildings are significantly easier to monitor and read, the former tenants protested at their eviction despite intentions of UNESCO to work with the community.[35]

There are some strong contra-indications in terms of the current treatment of the Pudhu Mandapam.

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9 Aerial View of Meenakshi-Sundareshvara Temple at Madurai, Tamil Nadu, 2019.

10 Photograph of the entrance of the Pudu Mandapa, Minakshi Sundareshvara temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, 1882.

although visually distracting when open, can be monitored – they cannot grow beyond their dormant size and any infrastructural servicing for power or light must be independent of them and therefore presumably relatively easy to design or control. Looking closely through the clutter of items on sale at the modest structures used to support displays of plastic toys, it is evident through the small gaps left between carved stonework and the sharp ends of galvanised poles, that they generally do not touch, rest upon, or fix themselves to the building at all [11]. There is a delicacy evident in this arrangement that takes time to observe. The key issue that these notes are intended to illustrate is that there is an active conservation management plan in place – it may not be ideal or obvious but it is effective insofar as it has evidently worked for over two hundred years.

Case study: Ajmer

At Ajmer, a braid-making factory [12] continues to function in the confines of a once-highly decorated nineteenth-century Gangadhar Ji Ki Haveli in the Naya bazaar. Many of the building's numerous paintings have been compromised over time. Arguably, however, the discourse between the fictive spaces depicted and the apparently pedestrian activity of the factory remain unexpectedly alive. The internal courtyard is covered in corrugated sheet roofing in order to create more working space. In the entrance courtyard, which has plinths with loopholes either side for tethering and dismounting elephants, a symmetrical pair of these magnificent animals are depicted in wall paintings either side of the doorway [13]. Their legs are now lost beneath a cement render and their trunks decorated with subsequent electrical installations. The elephant's continued domination of the space through their presence in the paintings not only signifies their importance but also gives the modern visitor a clear

11 Shop structure in Pudhu Mandapam of the Meenakshi-Sundareshvara Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, 2019.

The first is the way in which the street frontage, facing the Meenakshi Amman temple's north tower has railings that act as a structure to support huge road signs. These are placed directly in front of the amazing equestrian pillars – since the road is blocked to traffic, it is hard to understand why such huge signs were placed there. Internally, the central space is kept locked, and it was possible to notice during our survey that the large protected area and two or three people sweep its statues by hand every day. The building is locked and unlocked daily and each of the stalls close up with shutters during that time as self-contained units. In this respect, the stalls,

12 Gangadhar Haveli, Ajmer, Rajasthan. Terrestrial laser scan axonometric view, 2016.
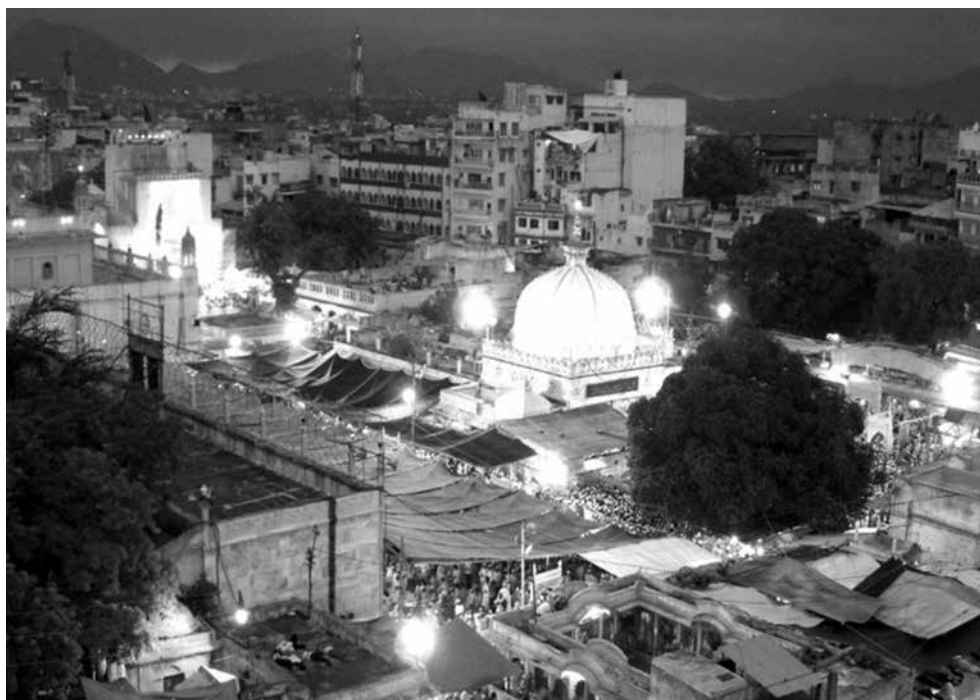

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13 Gangadhar Haveli,
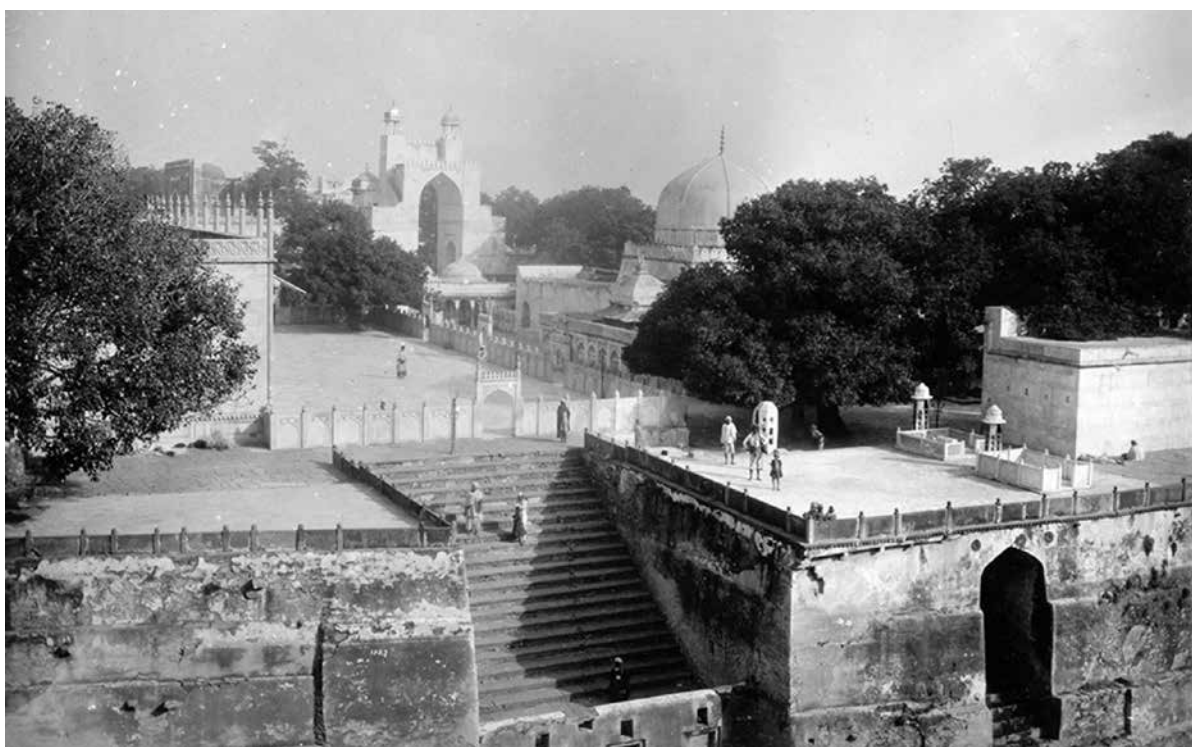Ajmer, Rajasthan.
Elephants, 2016.

14 Gangadhar Haveli,
Ajmer, Rajasthan.
Wall painting with
loom, 2016.

15 Dargah Sharif, Ajmer,
Rajasthan, 2015.

16 Dargah at Ajmere,
Rajasthan, 1885.

reading of the scale and purpose of the space with its otherwise obscurely scaled surrounding raised platform.

The factory produces 'all kinds of Gota Fancy Jari and Metallic Goods' using 'Rayon, Nylon and Metallic Yarn', which are used in the regular ritual activities of the local Dargah. Large bags of ribbons of different shades and designs await distribution from the main courtyard, the front office negotiating their price at the gate. In a first floor room, presumably once a ladies room, with its decorative perforated Jali screens to prevent overlooking, a loom is bolted to the wall presumably to secure it from moving across the floor when it is in operation. The bolt pierces the centre of a large wall painting [14]. Importantly, the bolt is placed in a small piece of plain ground.

On close examination of the photographic survey, this research has identified that the picture is of significant interest with respect to the city of Ajmer and its particular legacy of intertwining of Sufi Muslim and Hindu ritual activity. At first, a colleague identified the scene as a celebration of Dasahra in Jaipur. However, using historic photographs to confirm recognisable architectural elements and through subsequent in-depth discussion with local residents (by DRONAH), it has been possible to confirm that the setting of the scene is indeed of the Dargah Sharif, albeit with Krishna depicted enthroned outside the mosque. Much of the foreground of the Dargah Sharif has been obscured in modern photographs [15] by the erection of festive structures but looking at old photographs [16] makes the scene more recognisable. The white wall and arched gate can be recognised in the foreground, meanwhile the columns of tomb itself, currently covered by awnings, can be identified in nineteenth-century photographs.

Beyond the significance of the painting itself and the precise date and nature of the scene it depicts, which deserve to be the subject of art-historical study, the issue of importance here is that it is recognised and understood by the people that own the building and work within it. Without any official notoriety, it was the weavers themselves who brought us to see the painting. It was they who chose to place a bolt through the ground plane rather than a detailed depiction within the scene. Moreover, it is they whose work and endeavour continues to serve this same living activity that is depicted in the same city. The condition and on-going operation of the factory in a haveli displays a poignant note regarding the curation and cultivation of cultural heritage, it also guides us to read it better.

The pictures, un-recorded in any official index and only called to attention by a worker on the site, are literally and metaphorically tied to the present by a belt, bolted through the white ground plane of the painting, used to restrain the vibrations of the loom housed in that room. The entire building was bought by an entrepreneur, who has proudly salvaged it from demolition. Being used in this way,

the modifications to the historic structure are relatively minimal. It is a good example of the absence of guidelines being an advantage. Imagining the consequences of a more regulated regime of control might well have brought about significantly greater risk to the paintings – by inducing requirements for greater levels of servicing or plumbing were it to be converted to a boutique hotel, for example. Although the use of the building, as a factory, is on the face of it inappropriate, the conversion of this once domestic building to meet modern expectations in terms of plumbing and ventilation would certainly have engendered a greater degree of alteration.

Arguably, such a move would also have extracted the building from its economic context and disassociated it from its potential to move with the local pace of change. Less prosaically, a link remains in place between the fictive depiction of the paintings and the living activity of the building and the town to which it belongs. Although fragile, this link is critical in the maintenance of the cultural landscape. Importantly, it would also be virtually impossible to imagine constructing such a continuity through an imposed process of management or design. This raises the uncomfortable notion that a designation of significance may also engender alienation from the very culture that created that artefact. That, in claiming a significance to a greater-than-local reach, there is an implication that the object should be extracted from its family. When this is depicted as the private assets of wealthy ancestors being protected from undeserving heirs, it is very different from the consideration of what might be understood as shared values within a locality or a community.

Documentation, technology, and authority

Heritage practitioners are accustomed to working within an authoritative framework. In the case studies addressed here, as well as many others, there is much valid and well-intentioned interest in developing guidelines for such control to be managed. However, as indicated above, there are instances where the apparent decimation of a site into its past and present states through designation seems to challenge the very precepts that created those values. On the face of it, documentation should be the least contentious step to take in contributing to this goal. However, the moment of capture and the digital editing of that material will always compromise its completeness. How can the readily available new technologies be deployed to better capture the present for a future audience? Should this not be the limit of our aim?

In terms of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 'safeguarding' is defined by measures 'including the identification and documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and nonformal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage'.[36] Above all, at the Pudhu Mandapam,

17 Spiderman in Pudhu
    Mandapam of the
    Meenakshi-
    Sundareshvara
    Temple, Madurai,
    Tamil Nadu, 2019.

there is a relationship manifest in the parallel life of the occupants, shoppers, and visitors in relation to the deities themselves. Each day, deities are dressed, blessed, or garlanded between stitching a shirt or selling a bucket, and this is a further form of safeguarding. Denis Byrne notes that 'It is critical for any assessment of the social significance of heritage places and landscapes that inter-generational transmission and change be taken seriously.'[37] The row of hopeful plastic Spidermen encased in polythene bags, which are exposed every morning to tempt the children of potential indulgent parents, is surely much less awesome to the young imagination than the legends of ancient fantastically carved superheroes that tower over them [17].

The wholesale dismantling and reconstruction of the colonnade around the Golden Lotus Tank at the main Meenakshi temple is very hard to understand, as is the reconstruction of smaller temples outside Kumbakonam. Yet it is a living culture that continues to create. Indeed, the intangible cultural heritage convention placed communities at the heart of safeguarding and notes a requirement for participation and consultation. Among others, Janet Blake makes pertinent points as to the practical viability of this ambition with respect to legal structures.[38] The past is not at a distance, in David Lowenthal's terms, in this instance.[39]

Both examples addressed here have neighbouring and recent precedents for the complete destruction of very similar buildings, one by design and the other by accident. The questions emerging regarding the management or protection of such sites are thus fuelled with some urgency. Arguably both sites, albeit one well known and the other less known, could and should be recognised more for their historic value. However, there is reason to contemplate the methods by which protection should be implemented, under whose authority and how. There is also reason to suggest that potentially these neighbouring catastrophes have, by contrast, already served a significant purpose in highlighting imminent risk and thereby establishing a higher degree of vigilance in any event.

In both these examples, it is the representative narrative of the buildings' ornamentation that distinguishes them to the outsider. Their craftsmanship is a part of that but, unlike many Western examples, the dialogue between the iconography and the practice within these spaces is unbroken. Although some might argue that, over time, the integrity of the physical condition of these sites had been diminished to a point where intervention is required, the practice of safeguarding by community work should be acknowledged as indeed the UNESCO charter provides.

Conclusion
Returning to the image of horse and rider described at Ajmer, attempts to record the four magnificent sculpted equestrian figures that seemingly steer the Pudhu Mandapam in Madurai highlight the role of

digital documentation for altering conventional cultural heritage management practice. The very universality of the legibility of skilled craftsmanship of a codified iconography may be a critical factor in determining their deemed value as heritage assets to a wider or even global community. Yet that wider audience may be ill equipped to read the more precise significance in this time and place without help. This article has considered, through attempts to document the complexity of such circumstances in two different sites in India that are perceived to be at risk at a time of rapid transformation, some wider questions regarding the challenges of defining heritage management strategies.

As noted by many, including UNESCO, the intention to protect intangible heritage should encompass observation of current practices, but still there are severe limitations. One benefit of documentation over time through comparing the large quantity of early photographs of the Pudhu Mandapam has been the ability to observe when a missing flame on a statue has actually been missing for over 150 years.[40] It helps to evidence a lack of change, as well as the pace of change. The question of responsibility – ideally tied to that of authority with respect to the care of sites – is the greatest concern. The case must be reinstated to take repair and management interventions back to their absolute minimum. Of course, defining appropriate use is

also a form of design intervention, but in these instances drawing and recording is a means to understand. Obviously the actual loss of physical historic built fabric is to be avoided. However, the challenge here is more with respect to the contentious prospect of controlling people whose daily practices are the heritage subject.

The locked central space of the Pudhu Mandapam is arguably an example of effective community management and conservation practice. The legacy of historic photographs indicating the age of these co-existent activities could be held up as evidence of sustainable conservation management. Observed by so many, it is the simultaneity of religious, cultural, commercial, symbolic, ritual, ancient, innovative, quotidian, and generative activity that makes India the critical locus to challenge future methods. As Thakur stated, the limitation of recording monuments alone is that the knowledge associated with them is lost. It is important to record the apparent clutter that defines today as a moment in time, not to strip this from the 'more important' historic fabric that supports it.[41] It is critical, therefore, that, in association with our enhanced modelling and digital recording skills, we also record maintenance practices and engage with the means to admit others to access and participate in our virtual creations and promote vigorously the need to look carefully from multidisciplinary viewpoints.

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Illustration credits

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