

The Temples of Katasraj in Pakistan between Legend and History

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Abstract: Katasraj (also spelled as Katas Raj) is the name of a historical place in Pakistan- at a distance of around 162 kilometres from Islamabad towards Lahore- where a cluster of ancient buildings and temples are located around a pond considered to be sacred by Hindus. The features and structures of these buildings, however, point to influence of multiple civilizations and religions such as Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Sikhism. After partition of the Indian Subcontinent into India and Pakistan, the non-Muslim population abandoned this area and migrated to India. The complex remained unattended for decades and its structures had starting decaying. Eventually, it came into notice of the governmental authorities and a project of thorough restoration and renovation of this temple complex was completed in the year 2012. The history and significance of this place still needs to be studied by the scholarly community, however. Only brief mentions of Katasraj are found in a couple of scholarly articles and in the relevant district Gazetteers published by the British government in the 19th century. Besides, some writers local to this area have published a few booklets about this temple complex. Most of such writers do not seem to be familiar with the principles of historical research. Apparently, the boundaries between hearsay, legend, and history are quite blurred in their narratives. Against this background, the present paper aims to achieve three objectives: a) to explore the available historical and archeological materials in order to construct a methodologically reliable account of history and significance of temples and other historical buildings at Katasraj; b) to determine authenticity of various popular legends about these temples by consulting sources and writings produced by the Hindu tradition itself; c) and to elaborate how the sacred space here used to be shared and/or contested between different religious and cultural traditions.