

The Early Foundations of Golconda and the Rise of Fortifications in the Fourteenth-Century Deccan

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The fort of Golconda gained fame in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was the capital of the Qutb Shahi dynasty (c. 1495–1687), but despite its legendary status many aspects of the fort's physical development remain uncharted. It is known that it existed before the Qutb Shahis occupied it, that it was developed greatly during the years it served as their capital, and that it then became essentially abandoned after their defeat by the Mughals of Delhi in 1687, but the major turning points and key developments between these landmark dates have yet to be identified and discussed. Through the visual comparison of remains from several sites in the Deccan, this article attempts to identify and date the earliest phase of Golconda's development, prior to its adoption as the Qutb Shahi capital. It thereby adds another example to the corpus of medieval Indian forts, providing more data to this subject in need of further study. It also highlights the importance of these early foundations, which remained the heart of the city in the later development of the fort as the capital of the Qutb Shahis.

Keywords: Deccan; Golconda; fortifications; fort; citadel; Kakatiyas; Tughluqs; Khaljis

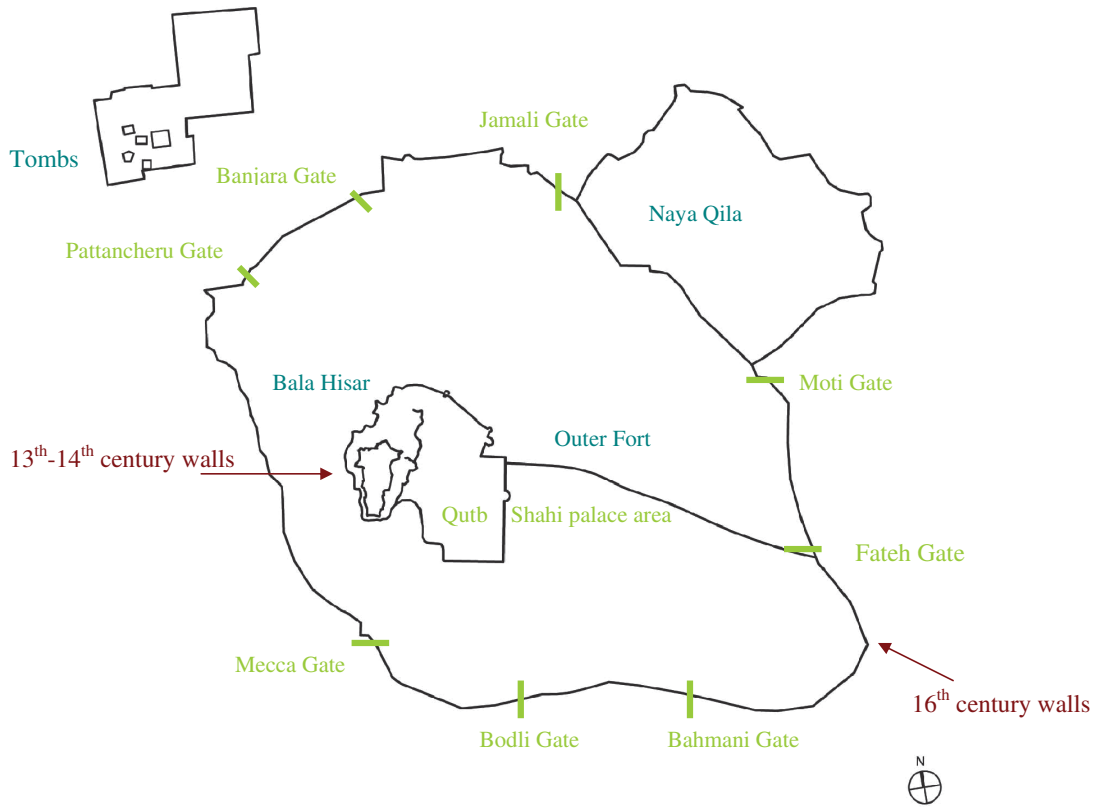
The fort of Golconda gained fame in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was the capital of the Qutb Shahi dynasty (c. 1495–1687), and the name 'Golconda' remains synonymous with great – perhaps even excessive – wealth. Yet despite this legendary status, many aspects of the fort's physical development remain uncharted. It is known that it existed before the Qutb Shahis occupied it, that it was developed greatly during the years it served as their capital, and that it was then essentially abandoned after their defeat by the Mughals of Delhi in 1687, but the major turning points and key developments between these landmark dates have yet to be identified and discussed.

This article discusses the earliest phase of Golconda's development, its foundation in the fourteenth century. This period is significant in the subsequent history of the site because the fourteenth-century core was transformed into the royal center in the sixteenth century and thus remained at the heart of the city throughout its history. By focusing on this aspect of the fort, the article adds to the corpus of work on medieval Indian forts, contributing to the state of knowledge of a subject in need of further study. In addition, it places the foundation of Golconda within the context of the development of the Deccan in the fourteenth century, a period which saw the construction of many forts in response to the incursions into this area by the Khalji and Tughluq sultanates of the north. These incursions had the effect of overturning the

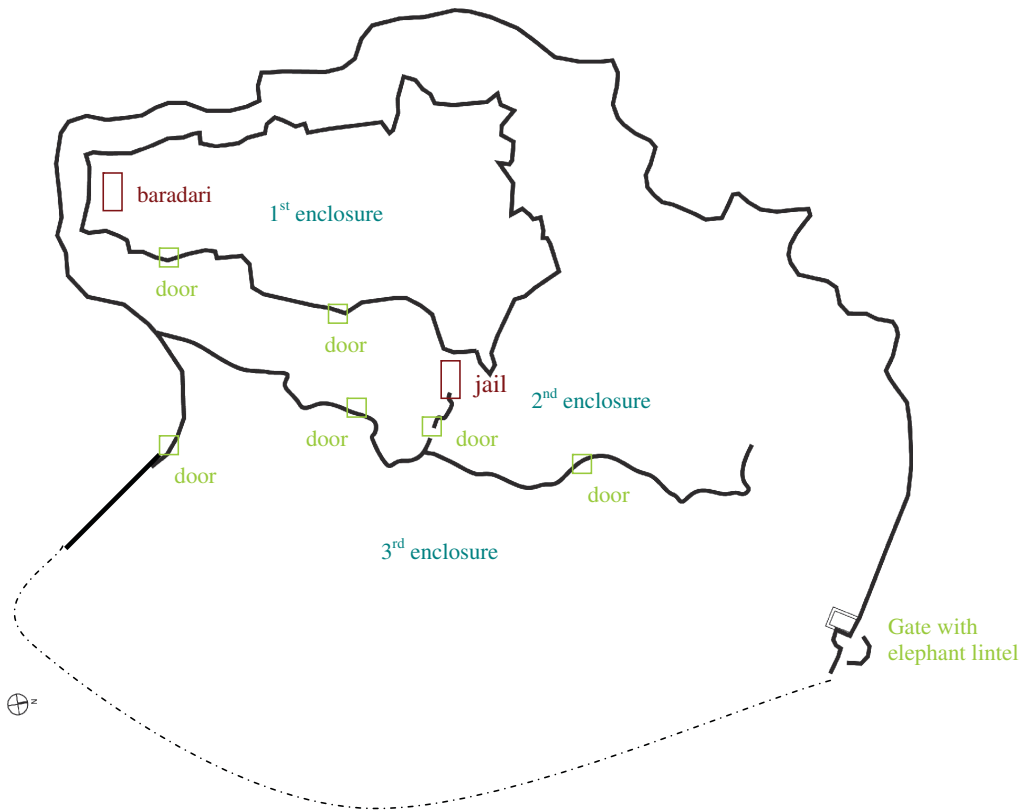
three local dynasties that had ruled the Deccan for over two centuries, and ultimately changed the way in which fortifications were constructed in the Deccan from that point forward.

Today, Golconda consists of three connected but separate fortified areas, known respectively as the *Bala Hisar* ('Lofty Citadel'), the Outer Fort, and the *Naya Qila* ('New Fort') (Figure 1). Clustered within the walls of the *Bala Hisar* are several courtly buildings, while the Outer Fort contains mosques, shops, and residences. In the *Naya Qila* are two mosques, as well as the remains of a garden and its pavilions, and just north of the fort is a group of domed tombs belonging to the Qutb Shahi family. These structures date mostly from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries, the result of the fort's occupation by most of the kingdoms that ruled the Telangana region up to and including the present-day republic of India, whose Archaeological Survey and army are currently stationed there.

The reason for Golconda's absence from the scholarly landscape is difficult to understand; located just outside the major city of Hyderabad, it has always been relatively accessible and was never forgotten or unknown. In fact, it has been almost continuously occupied since its foundation – the walled town surrounding the palace area is still inhabited, and part of the Outer Fort is still the base of the Indian army. But even as more remote sites in the Deccan such as Bijapur and Vijayanagara received notice in the



1. Golconda: plan. Drawn by Cornelia Wu.



2. Golconda: Bala Hisar, plan during the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Drawn by Cornelia Wu.



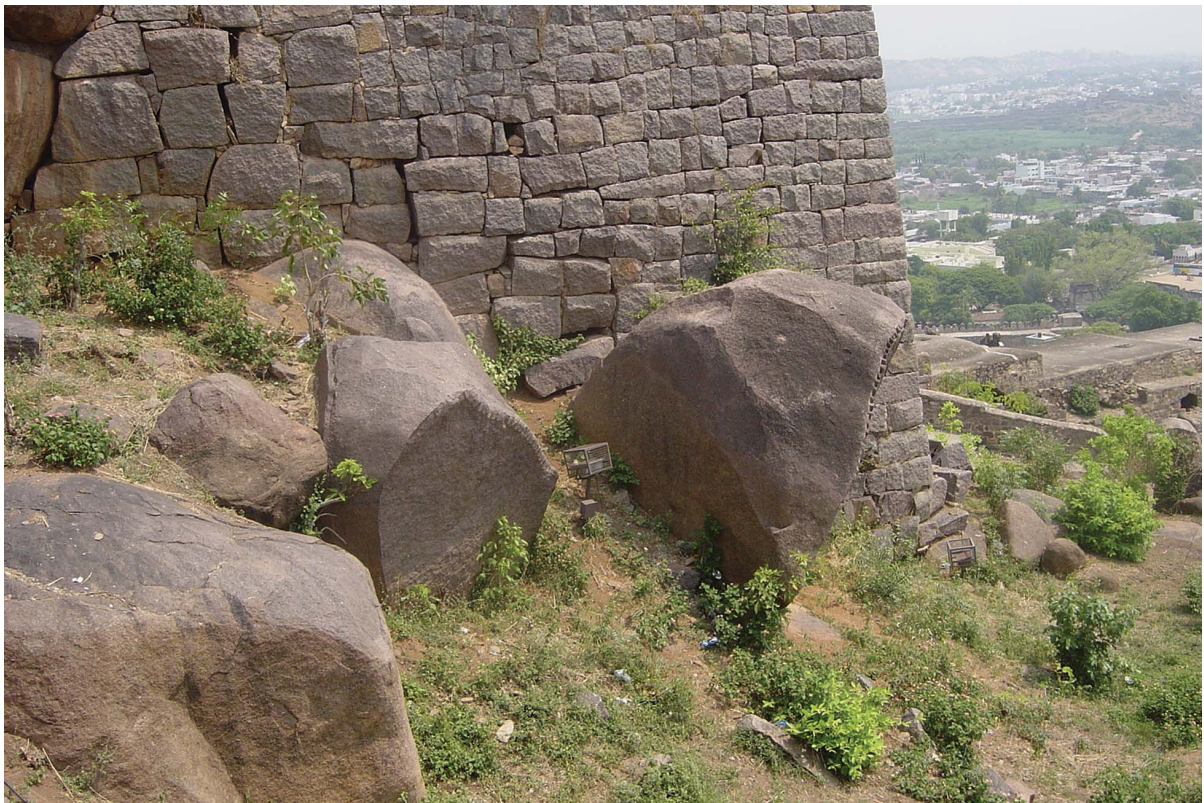
3. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, first enclosure, north end of west side.



4. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, north side.



5. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, third enclosure, south side, bastion.*



6. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, east side, wedge marks on the boulder.*



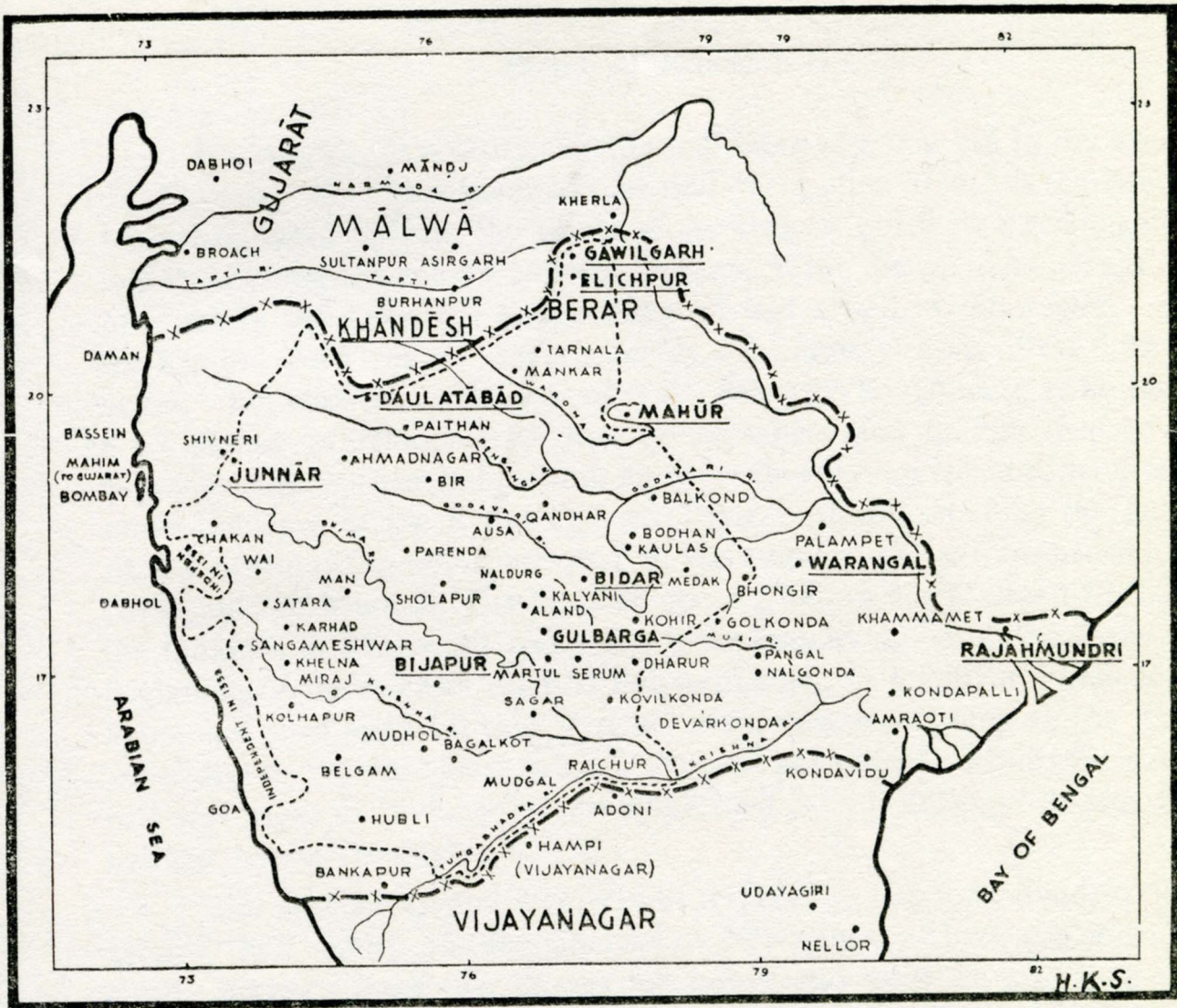
7. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, north side, tool marks.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the first art historical studies of India were undertaken by the Archaeological Survey,¹ Golconda remained neglected with the exception of two short studies by T. W. Haig. He published nineteen inscriptions from Golconda and Hyderabad and later wrote an entry on Golconda for the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.²

Golconda's neglect might stem from the fact that the state of Hyderabad, in which the fort is located, may simply have been too well endowed with spectacular monuments for the fort to have received its share of attention. Although the Asaf Jahi *nizams* who ruled Hyderabad maintained their own archaeological department – in 1914 the tenth *nizam*, Mir Osman Ali Khan (r. 1911–48), inaugurated an institution dedicated to the full-time study, conservation, and publication of historical monuments that worked in parallel to the British government-run Archaeological Survey of India – it seems that other monuments, such as the famous caves of Ajanta and Ellora, occupied the local personnel with years of conservation and study, time that might otherwise have been dedicated fully to mapping and exploring Golconda. Inscriptions from the site were published and basic plans were created, which are certainly important foundations for advanced study, but further analysis never took place.³

Since the middle of the twentieth century, when care for the fort passed to the Andhra Pradesh state's department of archaeology, Golconda has continued to languish in terms of scholarship. Despite the department's maintenance of it as a fee-charging tourist site and local historians' interest in it, only the same basic information about it is repeated, and today its details remain virtually unknown.⁴ Even the most recent and extensive publications of Qutb Shahi architecture do not attempt to analyze or date constructions or buildings within the fort.⁵

In fact, the early history of Golconda remains 'enveloped in the mist of oblivion,'⁶ although several seventeenth-century historical chronicles provide reasons to believe that the fort existed from at least the mid-1300s, for they mention the signing of a treaty whereby control of Golconda passed from a local chief to Muhammad Shah Bahmani (r. 1358–75) some time around 1363. The 1606 *Tarikh-i Ferishtah*, written for Ibrahim 'Adil Shah II of Bijapur, discusses this event,⁷ as do the Mughal histories *Ma'asir-i Alamgiri* and *Muntakhab al-Lubab*, which mention it in the context of emperor 'Alamgir's conquest of Golconda in 1687. The latter two additionally note that the fort was known as Mangal, and that it was founded by ancestors of a king named 'Dev Rai' (Devaraya?), further suggesting that it



RISE OF THE BAHMANI KINGDOM

.....THE KINGDOM IN 1358
 x—x—THE KINGDOM IN 1481

FURTHEST POINTS REACHED:
 MĀNDŪ, RAMĒSHWARĀM,
 JĀJPŪR, KĀNCHĪ.

CAPITALS OF PROVINCES
 CARVED OUT BY
 MAHMŪD GĀWĀN,
 UNDERLINED.

8. Map of the Bahmani Kingdom, with its forts. From H. K. Sherwani, 'The Bahmanis', in Sherwani and Joshi, I, 206 (opposite).

had been built before a Muslim ruler (who would not have had such a name) occupied the site.⁸ Following this written evidence, several scholars have concluded that the fort must have been established under the Kakatiya dynasty of Warangal (c. 1158–1323),⁹ which ruled the

region in which Golconda is located for a period of about one hundred and sixty-five years, up through the early part of the fourteenth century. But most have also concluded that even if this were the case, nothing remains at the site from before the sixteenth century.¹⁰



9. Raichur: early fortification walls, near the 1294 inscription.



10. Raichur: early fortification walls, citadel.



11. Raichur: early fortification walls, citadel, wedge marks on the boulder.



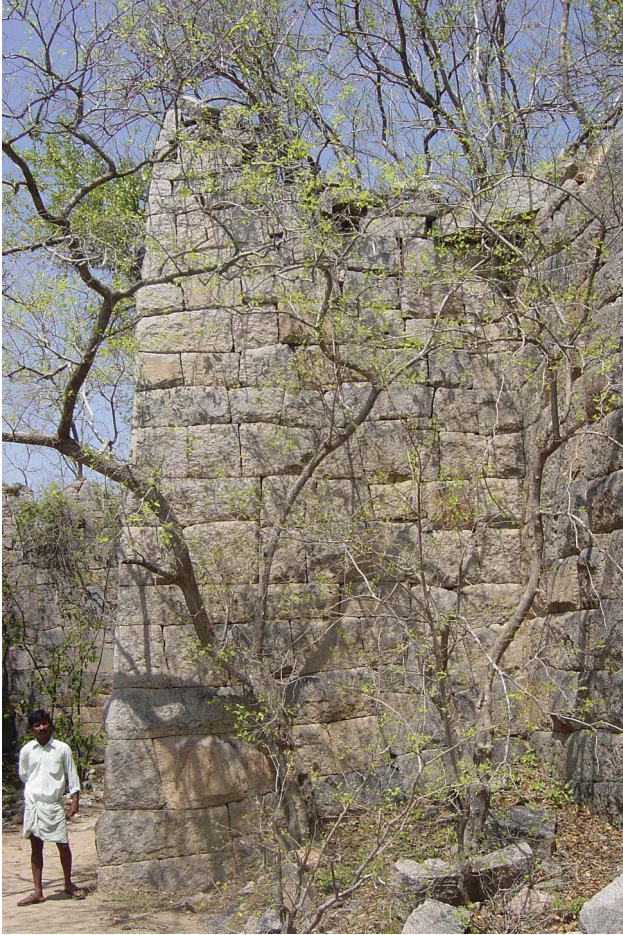
12. Warangal: early fortification walls, bastion.



13. Bhongir: doorway and early fortification walls, west side, with alternating courses of headers and stretchers.



14. Bhongir: early fortification walls, crenellations.



15. Kaulas: early fortification walls, bastion.

A reexamination of the physical evidence at Golconda, however, reveals that the innermost walls on the citadel of the fort can clearly be attributed to the thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries. The walls in question are in fact quite distinctive from the later additions to the site, which are dated by inscription. They form two adjoining enclosures at the top of the *Bala Hisar*, and a third that includes the lower part of the hill (Figure 2). These walls are constructed from blocks of granite joined together without mortar. Where the terrain is level, the blocks are massive and have been carefully hewn into squares and rectangles of comparable size (Figure 3). Where the ground is more steeply inclined and uneven, the shape of the blocks is irregular, but even so, matching irregularly shaped stones are fitted together so that there are no spaces between them. These stones have also been skillfully shaped to conform to the contours of the numerous large boulders that cover the hill; instead of skirting them, the walls are built over and around them (Figure 4). The upper surface of the wall, where unmodified by later construction, is straight,

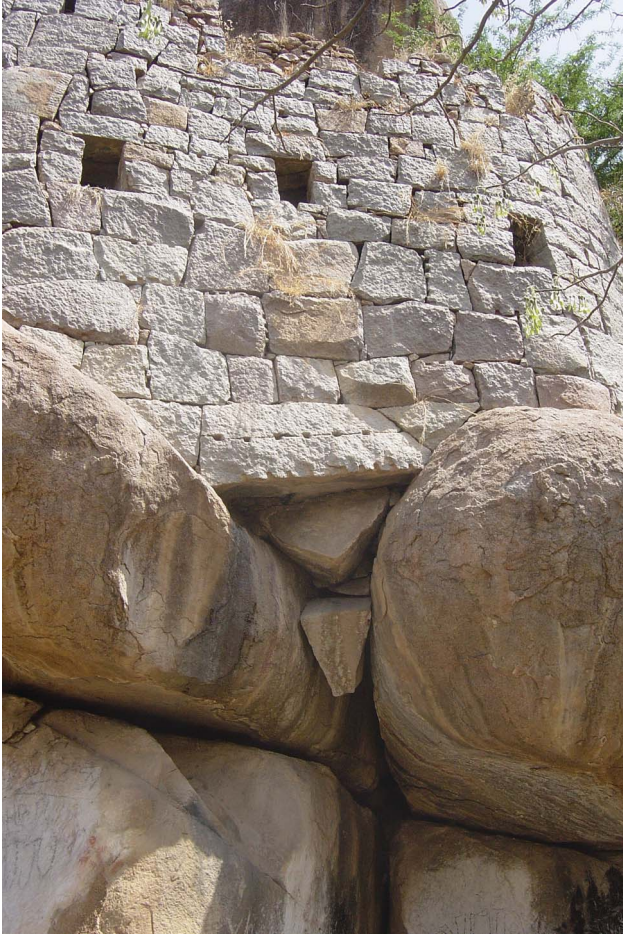


16. Kaulas: early fortification walls, with tool marks.

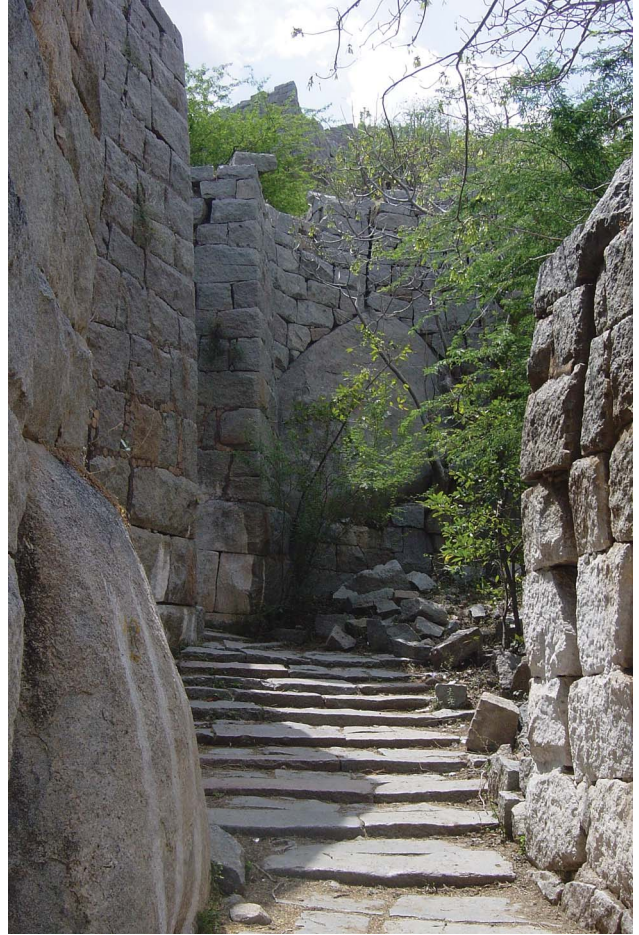
without any crenellations or merlons. Numerous rectangular bastions have been placed at irregular intervals along each side of the fort. These bastions have a distinctive appearance with sharply angled corners, battered profiles, and bases wider than their apexes (Figure 5).

Characteristic of the blocks used to construct these walls are the tool marks made during the process of quarrying and finely shaping them. On many of the blocks can be found lines of rectangular holes, where metal or wooden wedges were inserted to separate the blocks from the larger rock face. Several boulders on the citadel, from which blocks were evidently quarried to construct the wall, are marked with matching rows of wedge-shaped holes (Figure 6). Also common are parallel striations around the four edges of the block, where they were dressed with a chisel to fit more tightly with the adjoining blocks (Figure 7).

These features distinguish the walls at the top of the *Bala Hisar* from the other fortifications constructed at the site. Circling the Outer Fort, for instance, is a wall dated by inscription to the sixteenth century.¹¹ The walls



17. Koyilkonda: early fortification walls.



18. Koyilkonda: early fortification walls.

associated with this inscription are characterized by regularly-shaped, square granite blocks set in even courses and bonded with mortar. The top of the wall is in most places capped with a horizontal course of finely worked reddish stone, and large rounded merlons with machicolations at regular intervals. Bastions are round or polygonal, and there are no prominent tool marks.

It is clear that the walls on the *Bala Hisar* must be dated to the fourteenth century or earlier from the comparison of these features to those of other fourteenth-century Deccani forts, which as a group are characterized by the use of trabeate construction and the setting of large stone blocks without mortar. The scheme for identifying and dating the extant parts of the fort was developed through field work at Golconda and at other sites in the Deccan that have comparable contemporary remains, including Raichur and Warangal, securely dated to the thirteenth century, and several other forts which, like Golconda, are known to have existed in the fourteenth century because they are mentioned in historical accounts of the events of this era.¹² In approaching the study of these forts, an attempt

has been made to introduce dates and other historical data that firmly tie the forts discussed above to a specific period in time, which is uncommon in the typical surveys of Deccani forts. This study also attempts to move away from earlier discussions of these forts in terms of 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' methods of construction, framed as such because these were the religious affiliations of the rulers in the Deccan when each mode of construction was prevalent. In such discussions, 'Muslim' construction, of the fourteenth century and later, is characterized by the use of mortar and a rubble fill between the stone faces of the wall, as well as arched gateways and rounded bastions. Since the reason for which the fortifications of each period were constructed the way they were has little to do with religious affiliation, a chronological approach is favored here.

Raichur is a fort in the southeastern tip of what was the Kakatiya kingdom; it later had a long and storied history as part of the contested territory between the Bahmani and Vijayanagara empires (Figure 8). An inscription built into its inner wall states that in 1294



19. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, first and second enclosures, south end of the east side.*



20. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, north end of the east side.*



21. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, first and second enclosures, north side.



22. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, east-west wall next to the 'Ramdas Jail'.



23. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, third enclosure, south side.*



24. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, third enclosure, north side.*



25. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, third enclosure, north side, gate.

the general Vithalanatha, whose overlord was Gona Gamnayaraddi, a subordinate of the Kakatiya king Prataparudra (r. 1289–1323), captured the town of Raichur and ‘constructed a stone fort for the protection of all the people of all provinces’.¹³

The fort built by Vithalanatha is situated adjacent to a hill of boulders similar to Golconda’s, and includes part of the hill as well. The section surrounding the 1294 inscription in the lower area of the fort is constructed of cyclopean masonry: massive blocks of stone are fitted tightly together without mortar and laid in even courses (Figure 9). In many areas, headers (blocks turned perpendicular to the surface of the wall) alternate with stretchers (blocks parallel to the surface) in order to strengthen the fabric of the wall. Rectangular bastions with a tapering profile are situated regularly along its length.

Higher up, where the wall must contend with the steep slope of the citadel hill and its rocky surface, the construction method changes. Here the wall is composed of smaller blocks of stone laid in less even courses, with bastions at irregular intervals. These bastions retain the distinctive tapering profile with sharp corners typical of the lower

part of the fort, if not their regular placement and form. The stones here have been carefully hewn to fit the contours of the boulders to which they cling (Figure 10). The distinctive tool marks found on the blocks of the Golconda walls are evident here too, as well as the corresponding marks in the boulders from which material for the walls was evidently quarried (Figure 11). Interestingly, the parallel striations left in the stone from the dressing process also appear in an image carved onto the wall near the 1294 inscription. It depicts the method by which the immense blocks used to build the fort were transported, on the backs of beleaguered oxen, from the quarry to the construction site. The huge stone which is being hauled onto a wooden cart is itself marked by striations along its upper edge.¹⁴

Further additions were made to Raichur fort during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, as dated by inscription.¹⁵ Again, as at Golconda, these walls are constructed of smaller blocks joined by mortar, crowned by large merlons, and outfitted with rounded bastions, and are therefore distinguishable from the earlier works.

A second fort associated with the mid-thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries is Warangal, capital of the Kakatiya dynasty. There is no inscription embedded in the walls of this fort which can date it as definitively as Raichur, but corollary evidence indicates that the fort we see now has been there since at least the thirteenth century. For instance, inscriptions from two other sites confirm that Warangal was the Kakatiya capital by the late twelfth century: one is from 1195, and states that the Kakatiya king Rudra (r. 1158–1195) was ruling from Warangal;¹⁶ the second is dated 1231 and mentions that neighborhoods in his capital were named for towns that had been conquered by Rudra.¹⁷ In addition, both ‘Amir Khusrau’s description of the 1309–10 Khalji attack on Warangal and Barani’s account of the 1321 Tughluq siege of the site discuss the city’s fortifications at length, and both mention the outer wall of earth and an inner wall of stone that are still standing today.¹⁸ Finally, a sixteenth-century text called the *Prataparudra Caritramu* (‘Deeds of Prataparudra’, the last Kakatiya king) suggests that the stone walls were constructed between about 1200 and 1300, and gates and bastions added to them by successive rulers.¹⁹ Most twentieth-century scholars have accepted this dating scheme.²⁰

Warangal is situated on a plain, and the stone wall associated with the thirteenth century has been built in the same manner as that on the northern, level section at Raichur. It consists of cyclopean masonry laid in even rows, with courses of stretchers alternating with courses of headers. It is protected by square bastions located at regular intervals along the exterior, and somewhat crude crenellations cut from the topmost course (Figure 12).

Although, as at Raichur and Golconda, additional changes were made to the Warangal fort under its later occupants, its fifteenth- to seventeenth-century



26. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, third enclosure, north side, passageway preceding gate.

renovations are quite distinct from the Kakatiya core. These additions include barbicans protecting the gates in the stone wall, and four arched gates in the outer earthen wall, all constructed from masonry joined by mortar.²¹

Further information on the nature of forts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries can be gleaned from surveying other sites in the region which, like Golconda, are believed to have been built in about the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Most instructive are the forts of Bhongir, Kaulas, and Koyilkonda (all located in present-day Andhra Pradesh) (Figure 8). Of the many forts in the Deccan, these have been chosen because they are mentioned in historical chronicles as part of the events of the fourteenth century, and they preserve large portions of their early sections intact. In some ways these forts are even more useful comparisons for the remains at Golconda than Raichur and Warangal, for their smaller stone blocks and slightly battered and tapered bastions are most similar to what is found at Golconda. This may either reflect the fact that they were all built on similarly hilly sites or that they were built in a slightly later period than Raichur and Warangal, in the fourteenth rather than

the thirteenth century.²² In design these outlying forts were quite basic, and quite different in conception from Warangal, which, as the Kakatiya capital, was much larger and had a distinctive circular plan.²³

The fort of Bhongir, located to the northeast of Golconda, is situated at the top of a massive granite outcropping that rises some five hundred feet from the surrounding plain, with what appears to be the fourteenth-century fortification approximately halfway up the ascent. This wall is distinguished by the fact that its constituent blocks have been carefully joined without mortar in alternating courses of headers and stretchers, and that it is punctuated by square bastions and rectangular crenellations (Figures 13–14). The morphological similarities between this wall and that at Warangal are especially suggestive of an early foundation date for this part of the fort.

This corresponds to the historical record. According to the *Burhan-i Ma'asir*, a seventeenth-century text written at Ahmadnagar which includes a section on the history of the Bahmani period, Bhongir was captured in *c.* 1351 by Hasan Shah Bahmani (r. 1347–58) during a campaign into Telangana soon after his rise to the throne and



27. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, third enclosure, south side, door.

selection of Gulbarga as his capital.²⁴ The fort was lost to local chiefs in 1369 but reconquered by Ahmad Shah Bahmani I (r. 1422–36), who, near the end of his reign, conferred Bhongir upon a general whom he left in charge of continuing the campaign into Telangana.²⁵ Therefore, although an exact date for the fort at Bhongir's foundation is not known, the mention of its capture in the Bahmani period indicates an earlier date of establishment.

Kaulas consists of a fortified area located in the center of a long ridge that rises from the surrounding plains. It is an irregular oval shape with gates on the north and south sides. The walls here bear traces of various phases of occupation, but some sections – those that were constructed from blocks scored with parallel tool marks and laid without mortar, and which are still punctuated with tapering and rectangular bastions similar to those at Raichur and Golconda (Figures 15–16). The later additions are sections of wall characterized by the use of mortar, polygonal bastions, and rounded merlons above the uppermost course.

This matches what is known about the role of Kaulas in the fourteenth-century battles over Telangana. The *Tarikh-i Ferishta* states that soon after proclaiming his independence in 1347 Bahman Shah captured this fort from a local chief who had occupied it in the period of turmoil that followed the fall of the Kakatiyas.²⁶ Thus Kaulas too is thought to have been founded some time before this date.

The site of Koyilkonda encompasses parts of several adjacent hills, and buildings have been erected on flat areas situated along the rocky ascent to the innermost citadel. What appear to be the earliest walls at the site enclose a level area at the foot of the hills and defend access to the citadel. These walls perch on top of boulders, have rectangular bastions defined by sharp corners, and lack any kind of crenellation. Many of the blocks used in their construction are marked by wedge holes (Figures 17–18). Like Bhongir, Koyilkonda is known to have been captured by the Bahmanis in the 1420s.²⁷ In the mid-sixteenth century the fort played an important role in Ibrahim Qutb Shah's capture of the throne of Golconda, and soon after his coronation he rewarded its inhabitants by undertaking various public works at the site.²⁸ Thus, the long history of the fort implied in the written sources supports what is found physically at the site.

To summarize, the features characteristic of the thirteenth- or fourteenth-century parts of these forts include cyclopean masonry, trabeate doors and gateways, and rectangular bastions with tapering profiles. The later additions to these forts have arcuate gates, round bastions, and smaller building blocks joined together by mortar. From this comparison, it is clear that the inner fort at Golconda must date from before the fifteenth century, when a new type of construction was introduced into the Deccan.

The design of these forts must have evolved in response to defensive requirements, but information on warfare during this period is scarce and must be gleaned from auxiliary sources. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century inscriptions that list the titles *gaja-sahini* (commander of elephant troops), *rautu* (horse-riding warrior), and *bantu* (thought to be a foot soldier) indicate that contemporary armies consisted of three groups of soldiers: those on elephants, those on horses, and those on foot.²⁹ Jean Deloche's study of reliefs on Hoysala temples confirms this tripartite system and suggests that there was a great improvement in horse-riding equipment during these centuries. The weapons carried by soldiers can also be discerned in these reliefs, including lances, swords, maces, and shields.³⁰ The reliefs and inscriptions provide no information, however, on how forts were attacked, and the earliest written descriptions come from chronicles of sieges conducted by the Muslim armies of the fourteenth century, and reflect their methods. Deloche



28. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, first enclosure, south side, door.*



29. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, south side, stairs joining doors in the first and third enclosures.*



30. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, door in the middle of the east side.

suggests that the earlier forts must have depended greatly on the natural defenses of the site on which they were built, using the massiveness of their construction to resist any kind of siege engines, and that the battered bastions were developed in order to eliminate blind spots for those surveying from above.³¹

Returning to Golconda, it is now possible to identify several more of its earliest features. Like some of the other sites described above, the thirteenth- or fourteenth-century fort was actually a substantial settlement of which many traces remain. It appears to have consisted of an area on top of the *Bala Hisar* hill, encircled by two separate walls, as well as an additional settlement on the adjacent plain (Figure 2). On the top of the hill the first enclosure surrounds the southern end of the citadel (where a large hall, called the *baradari*, is now located) and extends north, where a seventeenth-century grain storage building has been inserted, before circling around to the west side (Figure 19). The second enclosure starts just below the first one on the south side of the citadel, but extends further east, incorporating an arched doorway in

the middle of its eastern side and a larger gate with plaster decoration (of a later date) near its northern end (Figure 20). Much of the northern end of the second enclosure has disappeared; the area to the south of the plaster-decorated gateway has been rebuilt, and wide swathes are missing on either side of a large stairway leading up to the summit of the *Bala Hisar* (the current tourist path) (Figure 21). Within the second enclosure a short wall situated to the north of the arched doorway in the middle of the eastern side runs from east to west. It includes two rectangular bastions on either side of a trabeate doorway and now connects to a rectangular building known as the ‘Ramdas Jai’, a later insertion (Figure 22).

The exact outline of the third enclosure on the lower part of the hill is difficult to determine because the eastern part of the wall was demolished when this zone was expanded to enclose the Qutb Shahi palace area. What does remain is a section of wall on the south side of the *Bala Hisar* that is protected by rectangular bastions, as well as another section on the north end of this same citadel with characteristic early bastions (Figures 23–24). The north side once continued down the hill (this section has now been completely rebuilt) and led to an eastward-facing gate (Figure 25). The gate as it now stands seems to have been heavily reconstructed and repaired, but may include fourteenth-century elements. The lintel carved with rampant elephants and a small postern door on the left may be original, although the appearance of figural carving on gateways of the fourteenth century is rare; it has only been attested at Warangal. Certainly the walled, turning passageway that extends in front of the gate has been built in the typical fourteenth-century fashion, and this entire structure may in fact be an early feature of the fort (Figure 26).

The east side of the fort was substantially developed at this time, as evidenced by its numerous doorways. A small doorway on the southern end of the third enclosure seems to have once led to a similar doorway in the southeastern corner of the first enclosure, just below the *baradari*. The stairs that once connected them are visible next to the stairway that tourists now use to descend the hill (Figures 27–29). An arched doorway in the middle of the eastern side of the second enclosure appears to have replaced an earlier one; stairs inside this entrance bear rectangular peg marks (Figure 30). These stairs curve around to the right, leading to a small trabeate doorway that faces north (next to the ‘Ramdas Jai’, seen in Figure 22), and then continue to the left, up to another doorway opening into the first enclosure (Figures 31–32). This arched doorway also seems to have been a later replacement for an earlier one; although the walls on either side of it have been repaired, the bastions flanking it are rectangular in form. On the northern side of the second enclosure is another small trabeate gate, now



31. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, stairs in the middle of the east side, and north-facing doorway next to the 'Ramdas Jail'.

enclosed within an arched opening in the wall (Figures 33–34). Stairs made of blocks with wedge-marks lead up to this doorway and to an adjacent gate (Figure 35). The west side of the fort does not appear to have had any gates. In fact, this side was never developed, even during the Qutb Shahi period.

Very little else remains from the settlement of this period. The only possible remnant from this era (unless it was brought here from another site) is a doorway of a type common to Kakatiya temples from the thirteenth century, such as the Kota Gudi temple at Ghanpur (Figure 36). Now located inside the domed entrance to the fort's congregational mosque (built in 1518), it is composed of three bands of decoration, the *stambha*- (pilaster), *valli*- (spiraling vegetation), and *ratna*- (diamond) *sakhas*, although it appears that the figural decoration often found at the base of these doorways was not included here. A shrine carved into a boulder near the summit of the *Bala Hisar*, refurbished by a minister of Abul Hasan (r. 1672–87) during the late Qutb Shahi period, is also said to have early origins,³² but nothing remains of its earlier phases. There is no evidence for residential or administrative buildings at Golconda, and

this is typical of the other early forts surveyed here – Raichur, Warangal, Bhongir, Kaulas, and Koyilkonda.

The foundation of Golconda can usefully be studied in relation to two patterns of development that arose in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in Telangana during the Kakatiya period: increasing urbanization and fortification. The Kakatiyas had been one of the four major feudatory families subordinate to the ruling Rashtrakutas of Manyaketa (modern Melkhed, 753–973), and then, after the Rashtrakutas' fall, to the Chalukyas of Kalyana (973–c. 1189).³³ But in 1158 Rudra, then head of the Kakatiya clan, declared war on his fellow feudatory chiefs, forcing them to acknowledge his supremacy.³⁴ As a result of the peace and prosperity engendered by Kakatiya rule and the active encouragement of development by these rulers, many new villages and towns were founded. These foundations occurred at a greater rate than in the preceding Rashtrakuta and Chalukyan periods: approximately one hundred and twenty of the known inscriptions from this period record the foundation of new settlements.³⁵

Golconda is probably a product of the other trend that characterizes this period, during which many new forts



32. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, first enclosure, door at the top of the stairs in the middle of the east side.



33. *Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, door on the north end of the east side.*

were established in the Deccan. The fast rate of fort foundation continued through the fourteenth century as the local political situation remained unstable. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Kakatiyas' main rivals for regional dominance were other kings based in the Deccan with whom they clashed from time to time. These were the neighboring Hoysalas of Dorasamudra (c. 1006–1346), whose realms extended to the south and west of the Kakatiya kingdom, the Yadavas of Deogiri (c. 1150–1317), whose lands were to the northwest, and the Eastern Gangas of Kalinga (c. 1050–1324), who ruled territories to the northeast.³⁶ However, once the Khalji dynasty (1290–1320) had firmly established itself in Delhi in the late thirteenth century, and had decided to expand further south into the subcontinent, the Kakatiyas were subjected to a new, extraregional pressure which eventually spelled the dynasty's demise. In 1310 King Prataparudra suffered his first defeat by the Khalji armies. After this time he was left in place to rule but was expected to pay a yearly tribute to Delhi. This arrangement lasted for several years, but the Khalji armies returned to Warangal in 1318 because Prataparudra had failed to send his tribute monies in a

timely fashion. In 1320 the general Ghiyath al-Din Tughluq (r. 1320–25) ousted the Khaljis from power in Delhi, established an eponymous dynasty, and assumed the Khaljis' tributary relationship with the Kakatiyas. By the following year the Kakatiya king had once again fallen behind in his payments, and the Tughluq sultan sent his son Ulugh Khan to the Deccan to collect them. This particular campaign was unsuccessful, but when Ulugh Khan returned with reinforcements in 1323 he was able to capture Warangal and its king.³⁷

Within a few years, however, the Tughluqs lost control of Telangana. Despite the fact that a governor had been placed at Warangal, the distance from Delhi was too great to maintain control of this distant province, and many found Tughluq rule quite harsh. The local chieftains – the heads of the families that had been prominent under the Kakatiyas – soon started to reassert their control. Prolaya Nayak of the Musunuri family emerged as the leader of this group, and his armies expelled the Tughluqs from the coastal portion of the former Kakatiya kingdom. From about 1325 Prolaya Nayak issued land grants, restoring rights to those whom the Tughluqs had disenfranchised. His actions inspired other



34. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, door on the north end of the east side, detail.



35. Golconda: Bala Hisar walls, second enclosure, stairs leading to the doors on the north end of the east side.

local chiefs to rebel, and by 1328–29 the Tughluqs had lost effective control of the region. Although they continued to hold on at Warangal at this time, by 1335 it too had been lost to the Musunuris.³⁸ By 1347 the independent Bahmani sultanate had been established in the Deccan, initially with a capital at Daulatabad (the former Deogiri) and later at Gulbarga. The Bahmanis struggled to maintain control of the area around Golconda for the next one hundred and fifty years.

The result of this turmoil appears to have been an increased militarization of the region, which manifested itself in various ways. As an analysis of Kakatiya inscriptions from the twelfth to the fourteenth century demonstrates, the Kakatiya political network included an increasing percentage of officers (rather than chiefs and princes of noble lineage), a development that was especially marked during the reigns of Rudramadevi (r. 1263–89) and Prataparudra.³⁹ In addition, Rudramadevi established the practice of granting *nayankaramu* rights over parcels of land to her subordinate officers. Whereas nobles had earlier held the position of administering

lands outside the capital and collecting the taxes from them, these new rights seemed to imply that some kind of ownership was granted from the Kakatiya monarch and was given to this class in particular, probably (as Talbot supposes) ‘[as] a means for recompensing warriors for their military service to the dynasty’.⁴⁰

Another form of change was that the fortifications of the region were increased and improved, the strengthening of Warangal (e.g. through the addition of stone walls with bastions and gates, as described in the *Prataparudra Caritramu* and discussed above) being one sign of this development. As indicated by the inscription at Raichur, Kakatiya *nayakas* or their subordinates also undertook the construction of new forts when they deemed it necessary.⁴¹

Golconda, Bhongir, Kaulas, and Koyilkonda were therefore probably amongst the many forts constructed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in response to political and military upheaval in the Deccan, if not during the Kakatiya period itself then probably in the time just afterwards, when so many entities were attempting to carve out their own area of control. For instance,



36. Golconda: congregational mosque, door in the east gateway.

the Musunuris, Reddis, and Recherlas, the local chiefs of the region who rose up at this time, are known to have occupied and strengthened the forts of Kondavidu, Rajakonda, and Devarkonda. The possession of fortified bases would certainly have improved their ability to maintain the power they wielded.

Thus, the identification of the earliest foundations of Golconda illuminates not only the history of this particular fort, but also the history of this part of the Deccan during a crucial transitional phase between the periods during which the region was ruled by three locally-based dynasties and the one in which it was ruled by newcomers to the region. The destabilization of the former system of rule stimulated the construction of many new forts, and – in relation to the subsequent physical history of the site – introduced new methods of construction.

The identification also reveals the extent of the site at the time that the first Qutb Shahi ruler, Sultan Quli, occupied it in 1495 and then slowly transformed it over the years before his death in 1543. In fact, the *Bala Hisar* area, first fortified in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, remained the core of the site throughout its history. This

is where the Qutb Shahi royal palaces were constructed, and despite numerous additions and other interventions to the structure of this area, the earliest walls were preserved and maintained throughout the period of this dynasty's occupation of the site.

NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are by the author.

1. H. Cousens, *Bijapur and its Architectural Remains* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1916), and A. H. Longhurst, *Hampi Ruins, Described and Illustrated* (Madras: Archaeological Survey of India, 1917), are among the many publications from this period.
2. T. W. Haig, 'Inscriptions in Hyderabad and Golconda', *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1907–08), 23–29; T. W. Haig, 'Golconda', *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 4 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1913–36), II (1927), 174–75.
3. Reports and plans of Golconda can be found in the *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department of His Exalted Highness the Nizam's Dominions* (hereafter *ARADND*) for the years 1915–16, 1916–17, 1918–19, 1920–21, 1924–25, 1927–28, 1931–33, 1936–37, and 1937–38. Inscriptions were published in *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (hereafter *EIM*) as follows: G. Yazdani, 'Inscriptions in Golconda Fort', *EIM* (1913–14), 47–59; G. Yazdani, 'Inscriptions in the Golconda Tombs', *EIM* (1915–16), 19–40; G. Yazdani, 'Inscriptions of the Qutb Shahi Kings in Hyderabad City and Suburbs', *EIM* (1917–18), 43–56; G. Yazdani, 'A New Inscription from Golconda', *EIM* (1923–34), 31–32; G. Yazdani, 'Inscription of Ibrahim Qutb Shah from the Pangal Tank, Nalgonda', *EIM* (1925–26), 23–24; G. Yazdani, 'Two Qutb Shahi Inscriptions from Hyderabad', *EIM* (1925–26), 25–26; K. M. Ahmad, 'Some New Inscriptions from the Golconda Fort', *EIM* (1937–38), 47–52. Many of these were republished and corrected in S. A. A. Bilgrami, *Landmarks of the Deccan: A Comprehensive Guide to the Archaeological Remains of the City and Suburbs of Hyderabad* (Hyderabad: Government Central Press, 1927; repr. Delhi: Manas Publications, 1984).
4. Information about the fort continued to accumulate, however; see Z. A. Desai, 'Qutb Shahi Inscriptions from Andhra State', *Epigraphia Indica* (1953–54), 23–33; Y. V. Rao, 'Gunupudi Bhimavaram Copper-Plate Grant of Mahammad Kutub Shah of Golconda (1612–26)', *Journal of the Andhra Research Society*,

- 22 (1954), 147–50; M. A. H. Khan, ‘Excavation of a Medieval Site near Qutb Shahi Tombs’, *Islamic Culture*, 44 (1970), 227–31 (this work is also discussed in *Indian Archaeology* (1971–72), 1–6; (1972–73), 1–2; (1973–72), 5; and (1974–75), 2–3); V. K. Bawa and others, ‘Architecture in the Deccan – The Kingdom of Golconda’, *Deccan Studies*, 1 (2002), 59–67; V. K. Bawa, ‘The Politics of Architecture in Qutb Shahi Hyderabad: A Preliminary Analysis’, in *Studies in History of the Deccan: Medieval and Modern: Kulkarni Felicitation Volume*, ed. by M. A. Nayeem and others (Delhi: Pragati Publications, 2002), pp. 329–41.
5. See, for example, M. A. Nayeem, *The Heritage of the Qutb Shahis of Golconda and Hyderabad* (Hyderabad: Hyderabad Publishers, 2006), p. 91, in which he concludes: ‘In view of the problem of identification of the palaces of a particular person where one lived and in view of the absence of historical data, it is not proposed to assign or attribute any palace to any one. . .’.
 6. As expressed by G. Yazdani when he first published inscriptions from the site in ‘Inscriptions in Golconda Fort’, p. 47.
 7. *Tarikh-i Ferishta*, translated by John Briggs in *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India*, trans. by J. Briggs, 4 vols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829; repr. Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1997), III, 188–89. Ferishta states this took place in 1371, but Sherwani, noting that Ferishta’s dates are often mistaken, corrected it to 1363 based on the dates of the surrounding events; this is the date now most commonly accepted. See H. K. Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan* (Hyderabad: Mannager of Publications, Saood Manzil, 1953; repr. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1985), pp. 67–68.
 8. Saqi Musta’id Khan, *Ma’asir-i-‘Alamgiri*, trans. by J. Sarkar (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1947), p. 183. The *Muntakhab al-Lubab* is translated in *Khafi Khan’s History of ‘Alamgir*, trans. by S. Moinul Haq (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1975), pp. 366–67.
 9. From the time of Yazdani, ‘Inscriptions in Golconda Fort’, p. 47, and Bilgrami, p. 108, to the time of G. Michell, ‘Golconda and Hyderabad’, in *Islamic Heritage of the Deccan*, ed. by G. Michell (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1986), pp. 76–85 (p. 77), and Pramod Shinde, ‘Architecture of Golconda Fort’, *Salar Jung Museum Bi-Annual Research Journal*, 17–18 (1982–83), 35–40 (35).
 10. See, for instance, Nayeem, p. 3, or H. K. Sherwani, *History of the Qutb Shahi Dynasty* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), pp. 47, 202.
 11. An inscription with the date 1559 is on the Mecca Gate of the Outer Fort; refer to Figure 1 for the location of this gate. Text published in Yazdani, ‘Inscriptions in Golconda Fort’, pp. 48–49, and Bilgrami, pp. 120–22.
 12. This is the operating method of Jean Deloche, who has produced the most extensive study of Deccani and southern Indian forts to date. His series of articles written for the *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* has been revised and reissued in the book *Studies on Fortification in India* (Pondicherry: Institut français de Pondichéry; École française d’Extrême-Orient, 2007).
 13. P. Sreenivasachar, ‘Note on the Raichur Inscription of Vithala-natha, dated Saka 1216 (c. 1294 A.D.)’, *ARADND* (1935–36), 32–35.
 14. A drawing of this image is published in *ibid.*, p. 35.
 15. A. A. Kadiri, ‘Bahmani Inscriptions from Raichur District’, *Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement* (1962), 52–66; A. A. Kadiri, ‘Adil Shahi Inscriptions from Raichur’, *Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement* (1963), 61–78.
 16. N. Venkata Ramanayya and N. Ramesan, *Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh, Warangal District* (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1974), no. 42.
 17. Cited in C. Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 129.
 18. ‘Amir Khusro, *Tarikh-i ‘Alai*, translated in *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, trans. by H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, 8 vols (London: Trübner, 1867–77; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1966), III, 82–83. Barani, *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi* is translated in *ibid.*, p. 202.
 19. *Ekamranathuni Prataparudra Caritramu*, ed. by C. V. Ramachandra Rao (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1984).
 20. See, for instance, G. Michell, ‘City as Cosmogram: The Circular Plan of Warangal’, *South Asian Studies*, 8 (1992), 1–18 (1, 17, n. 4).
 21. These have been dated by Michell to the Bahmani period, i.e. the fourteenth or fifteenth century. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–9.
 22. Phillip B. Wagoner helped me to clarify this point. A new survey of Deccani forts being prepared by him and Richard M. Eaton, *Power, Memory, and Architecture: Contested Sites in the Sixteenth Century*, will hopefully elucidate this chronology.
 23. On the symbolism of Warangal’s plan, see Michell, ‘City as Cosmogram’, p. 15, and P. B. Wagoner, ‘“A Dense Epitome of the World”: The Image of Warangal in the *Kridabhiramamu*’, in *The*

- Kridabhiramamu, A Lover's Guide to Warangal*, trans. by V. Narayana Rao and D. Shulman (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), pp. 85–103 (p. 99).
24. Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma'athir*, translated in J. S. King, 'History of the Bahmani Dynasty', *Indian Antiquary* ([June] 1899), 141–55 (152).
 25. Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma'athir*, translated in J. S. King, 'History of the Bahmani Dynasty', *Indian Antiquary* ([August] 1899), 209–19 (216); N. Ramesan, 'Reddi Kingdoms and Other Minor States', in *History of Medieval Deccan*, ed. by H. K. Sherwani and P. M. Joshi, 2 vols (Hyderabad: The Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1973–4), I, 536.
 26. Briggs, III, 180.
 27. R. Subrahmanyam, 'Vijayanagara', in Sherwani and Joshi, I, 111.
 28. G. Yazdani, '[Untitled preface to the report]', *ARADND* (1928–29), 1.
 29. Discussed in Talbot, pp. 151–52.
 30. J. Deloche, *Military Technology in Hoysala Sculpture* (New Delhi: Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Scientific Research, 1989); J. Deloche, *Horses and Riding Equipment in Indian Art* (Madras: Indian Heritage Trust, 1990).
 31. Deloche, *Studies on Fortification in India*, pp. 70–72, 85–86.
 32. Bilgrami, p. 109.
 33. P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, *The Kakatiyas of Warangal* (Hyderabad: The Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1978), pp. 51, 88–95; Talbot, p. 128.
 34. Parabrahma Sastry, pp. 88–95.
 35. Discussed in Talbot, pp. 90–99, and Sastry, pp. 197–245.
 36. See, for example, N. Venkataramanayya, *Early Muslim Expansion in South India* (Madras: University of Madras, 1942), pp. 2–11.
 37. P. B. Wagoner and J. H. Rice, 'From Delhi to the Deccan: Newly Discovered Monuments at Warangal-Sultanpur and the Beginnings of Indo-Islamic Architecture in the Southern India', *Artibus Asiae*, 61 (2001), 77–117 (77–78); see also P. Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 201–213.
 38. Ramesan, pp. 520–21, 534–35.
 39. Talbot, pp. 154–58.
 40. *Ibid.*, pp. 164–65.
 41. For the text of this inscription, see Sreenivasachar, pp. 32–35. Later, under the Vijayanagara Empire (1336–1565), subordinates in a similar relationship to the king were in fact charged with building and maintaining forts. See B. Stein, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 411–12.