

THE PROBLEM OF PLATFORM EXTENSIONS AT KAFIRKOT NORTH

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Excavations at north Kafirkot (Pl. 1) in the NWFP led by Abdur Rehman and Farid Khan of the Pakistan Heritage Society, in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania, have revealed significant new evidence for architecture in the Śāhi period (Khan, Rehman, Meister 1998; Meister 1996). Not only was the base platform of an unknown temple uncovered in the fort, next to Temples A and B (Pl. 3, Temple E), but substantial evidence was gathered to suggest two phases of construction, one in a pre-Hindu Śāhi period, ca. sixth-to-eighth century, and a second beginning with Hindu-Śāhi occupation of the site in the ninth century (Meister, Rehman, Khan 2000; Meister 2000).¹ Characteristic of this second phase under Hindu-Śāhi hegemony was a reshaping and expansion of the original shrines. Both Temples C and E at Kafirkot had their *jagatī* platforms enlarged by limestone extensions. Mouldings and pilastered walls of these platforms mimic those of the earlier period. Both temples were enclosed within large compounds during this second phase (Pl. 2) and coins of the Hindu Śāhi king Sāmanta (ca. 850-870) were found at floor level in both compounds (Meister, Rehman 2005).

These platform extensions had clear stratigraphy in the process of excavation; that is, each extension was built against the finished front face of an existing platform, and in both cases – Temples C and E – sub-cellas in this front wall were filled in with rubble.² In the case of Temple C, the flight of kanjur steps up to the original platform was retained, with new limestone masonry added to either side.³ Temple E, on the other hand, embedded its original kanjur stairway in the limestone extension, a new flight of stairs added above the older one (Pl. 2).

In the second season, preliminary excavation was also done around Temples A and B, to the north of the newly discovered Temple E, sufficient to reveal the existence of shallow entry stairs that project from what seem to me to be extensions in front of the original stone foundations (Meister and Rehman 2005) (Pl. 3). To either side of the entry stairways in these extensions were discovered chambers with earthen floors, their back walls the rough masonry of the original foundation (Pl. 4).⁴ Neither Temple A nor B in their present condition preserves remains of a moulded *jagatī* (platform). Their sancta stand above substantial masonry underpinning, but with no indication of any prior ornamented cladding.

The large cloistered enclosure added to Temple E in the second phase was built against the mass of this foundation underpinning Temple A to its north (Pl. 3). Its tight proximity necessitated, it has seemed to me, the removal of part of any moulded *jagatī* Temple A and its ambulatory hall may have had. On the northeast, where the extension of Temple A's platform was exposed, Rehman observed that "the cloistered platform of Temple E runs under the platform of Temple A" (Meister, Rehman 2005). The two chambers unearthed in front of Temple A are unequal in dimension (Pl. 3), that on the south built directly against the extended wall of Temple E's cloister, with its kanjur doorframe mortared to the rough stones of Temple E's compound much as limestone pilaster bases were inserted at the front of Temple C (Pl. 2). Rehman's field notes report that

"in one of these chambers associated with Temple A was found a coin of Sāmanta" (Meister, Rehman 2005).

Temple B's extended platform, as presently partly excavated, seems to show similar anomalies (Pl. 3). A rare stone sculpture, broken into two pieces, was discovered anterior to the steps excavated in front of Temple B (Rehman 1996 [1998]). This image seems of the first phase, but removed from the sanctum of Temple B, broken and discarded some time after the second-phase expansion of the site.⁵

A further season of excavation might have been able to bring greater clarity to this situation, but that has not yet proved possible. I do suggest, however, that the expansion of Temple E and its compound intruded on Temple A; and that the platforms of Temple A and B were adjusted, in a somewhat haphazard way, to make them fit into the grouping created by Temple E's enlargement. Both re-utilized kanjur stones of their earlier entry stairs, but these were possibly moved forward sufficiently to give these temples some presence comparable to that of the entrance to Temple E's new compound (Pl. 2). The south chamber excavated in front of Temple A had a kanjur entry – battered, as are niches on the temple's walls – built directly against the masonry of Temple C's expanded compound (Pl. 4). If the stair platforms of A and B are remnants of the early phase, one may question whether they have they been reconfigured.

Rehman reported that "beam sockets in the eastern walls of Temples A and B indicate that these were fronted by open wooden vestibules which in each case could be approached by a flight of steps" (Meister and Rehman 2005). Smaller sockets also appear around the walls of Temple A, which suggest there was once an enclosing wooden ambulatory.⁶ Temple B, on the other hand, uses cantilevered stone brackets to support central projections (*madhyalata*) in the tower (*śikhara*), and would not have had a covered ambulatory.

Both Temple C and the now-missing Kanjari Kothi at Kafirkot and Temple A at Bilot Kafirkot do not have sockets between the *śikhara* and wall, but instead have a recessed ornamental band with decorated bosses, suggesting that the tradition of a covered wooden ambulatory had been abandoned (Meister 2000: 1326-1327, figs. 5–7).

Temple building at Kafirkot North in the first phase coincided with early building at Bilot Kafirkot (Meister 2000), and we may be able to learn something of what we have found at Temples A and B at Kafirkot North by comparison, in particular, with Temple D at Bilot, which also has evidence for an expanded compound (Pl. 2, site plan). Unfortunately, here too further archaeological excavation would be needed to fix phasing of structures firmly.

Temple D was the crowning temple at Bilot in the seventh century, but seems to have had its *jagatī* platform extended to accommodate two, east-facing, domed and vaulted chambers to either side of the platform's entry stairway (Pls. 7-8). The niches on the sides of this extension (Pl. 7) have a developed *udgama* pattern⁷ quite unlike the simple rows of *candraśālās* and half *candraśālās* that make up the *jāla* patterns of Temple D's original superstructure. These niches' interlinked web-pattern can better be compared to Temple A at Bilot and the sub-shrine (Temple E) added above the northeast corner of Temple D's platform (Pl. 7).⁸ A cloister to surround the compound was also begun by early in the eighth century (the three conjoined shrines to the northeast corner of this compound are designated Temple F).

As an art historian – and archaeologist – the serration of such patterning, as also the evolution and complexity of plans and elevation (Pl. 5), are a necessary kind of 'stratigraphy' in the reconstruction of a site's history. Neither it nor the stratigraphy of excavation can be discarded, but both must be reconciled by forming hypotheses that can be tested.

The reconfiguration of Temples C and E at Kafirkot, with limestone additions that covered over east-facing cellas in their platforms, and their augmentation by cloistered compounds, happened in the ninth century, supported by the evidence of excavation. This is not the case, however, for Bilot, where Temple D was augmented by early in the eighth century by an extension of its platform to accommodate larger east-facing cellas; by the addition of sub-shrines with Nāgara *śikhāras*, constructed above the cellas in the platform, but facing each other north and south (Pls. 7, 8); and by the start of a cloistered compound.

This analysis of Temple D at Bilot is a working hypothesis, supported by the stratigraphy of ornament, but requiring further archaeological work. Let me use this hypothesis, however, to clarify what may have happened to the two early temples A and B at Kafirkot North (Fig. 3). Whereas the ninth-century extensions to Temples C and E cover up east-facing sub-cellas, those that expand Temple B at Bilot enlarge and enhance them. In Pl. 8 I have equalized to scale of shrines to make the particularity of their proportions obvious. Temples C and E at Kafirkot North, before extensions were added in the ninth century, had similarly proportioned platforms with stairs extending in front. When extensions were added, covering up the sub-cellas, their new proportions again seem comparable.

Temples A and B at Kafirkot, enlarged by the remnants of side chambers that face east, do not resemble the proportions of A and B, but rather take on proportions comparable to those of Bilot's Temple D, as extended by the eighth century (Pl. 8). What we may be seeing is an intermediate period of expansion, at Bilot and Kafirkot North, before the rise of the Uḍi Śāhis, when a cult requiring front-facing sub-cellas was still in vogue. Only dirt archaeology may tell us. We know from living temples elsewhere that the praxis and body of shrines in use change often over time.⁹ It is the intermediate lives of these monuments that further archaeology at both Bilot and Kafirkot North may help us define.

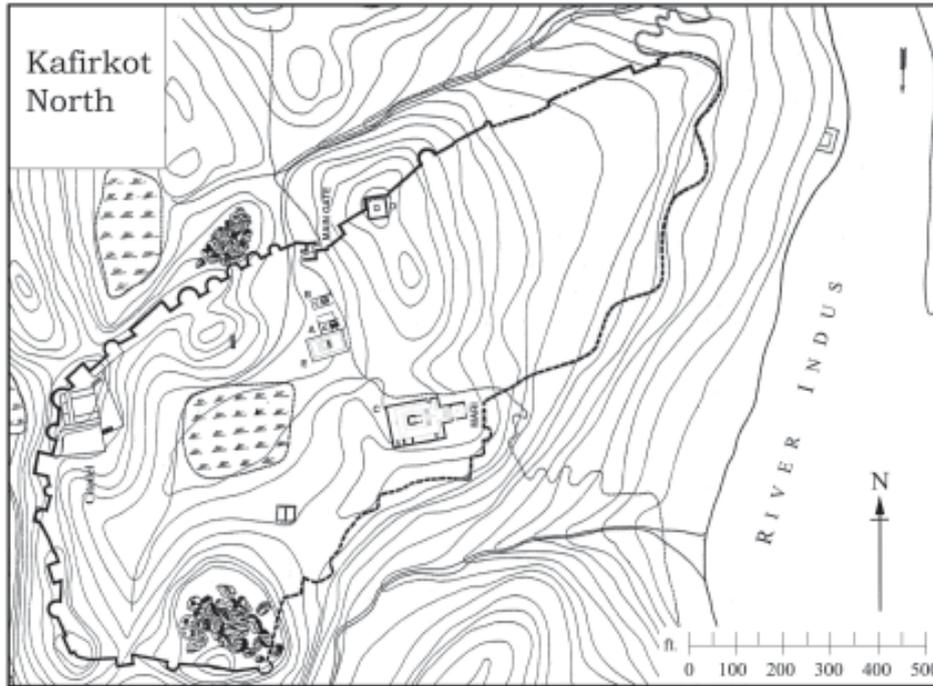
Notes

- ¹ Rehman (2002: 41) makes a good case for calling the Hindu Śāhis by a more accurate name, "Uḍi Śāhis."
- ² The platform for Temple D at Bilot Kafirkot also had chambers in its front face, now badly damaged, over which more recent sub-shrine towers were added, facing each other rather than to the east, early in the eighth century (Meister 2000: 1328, fig. 8).
- ³ Temple A at Bilot seems also to have had chambers added to either side of the stairs to its platform, now removed. Ground plans, sections, and elevations published here are based on my own measurements. Excavation plans have been made based on measured sketches prepared at the site by the team's chief draftsman.
- ⁴ A common practice from the Gupta period onwards was to prepare a solid foundation for the sanctum of a shrine separate from that of the surrounding ambulatory hall or platform; I thank R. Sengupta, past Director for Conservation, Archaeological Survey of India, for his description of such a foundation uncovered when the 7th-century *latina*-style Saṅgameśvara temple at Kudaveli in Andhra Pradesh was dismantled and moved to Alampur to protect it from flooding from a hydroelectric project.

- ⁵ The first piece of the sculpture was excavated in soil above the extension's stairs; the second further in front of these stairs. Both were protected from robbers before excavation by the presence of a rough stone wall that had to be moved forward to make excavation possible.
- ⁶ Sockets for such an ambulatory appear elsewhere only on Temple D at Bilot (Meister 2000: 1325, figs. 3–4). The triple shrines (F) at Bilot have sockets for a common vestibule. For a later stone parallel, see the Jain Temple no. 12 at Deogarh (Meister 1978).
- ⁷ *Udgama* is a "pediment of interconnected caitya-dormers (candraśālās)" (Meister, Dhaky, Deva 1988: 413).
- ⁸ A critical shift in the development of this ornament is when candraśālā window motifs begin to interlock. This is not true for Kafirkot North Temples A-C, or Bilot Temple D. It is true of Bilot Temples A, E, and F (and the forward niche pediments on Temple D's platform extension). Ninth-tenth century temples (Kafirkot North Temple D; Bilot Temples B-C; Amb) have elaborately interlocked patterning (Meister 2000). For a pioneering discussion of this evolution, see Coomaraswamy 1992: 47-57.
- ⁹ Meister 1995; *idem* in press.

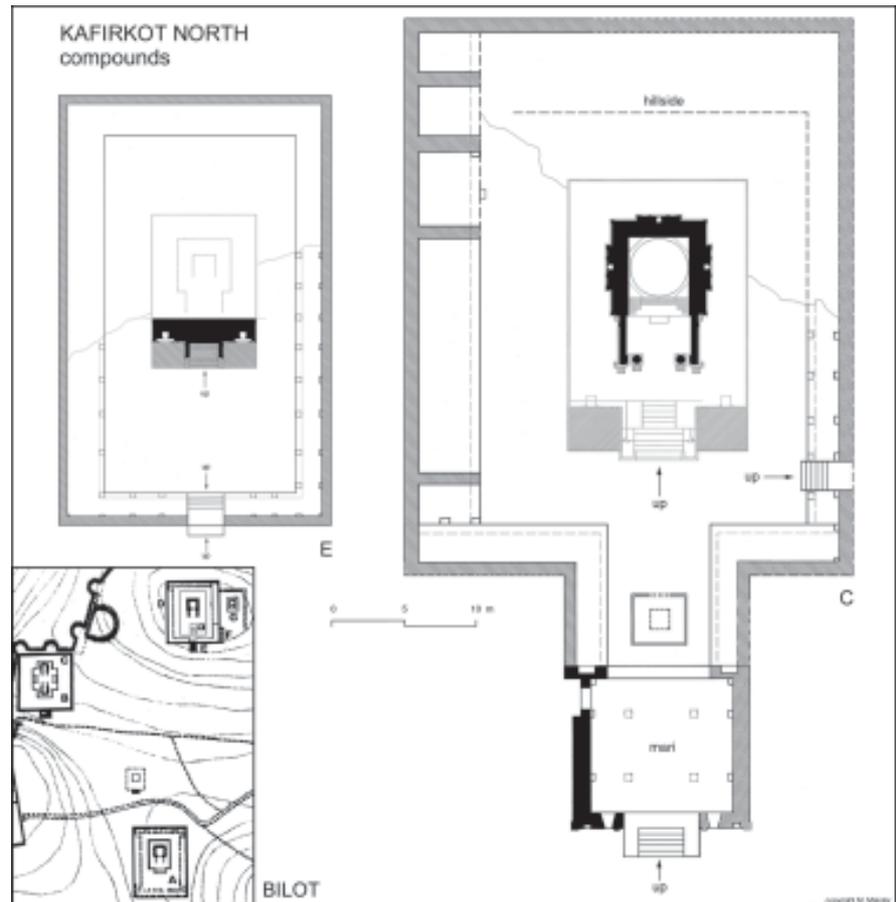
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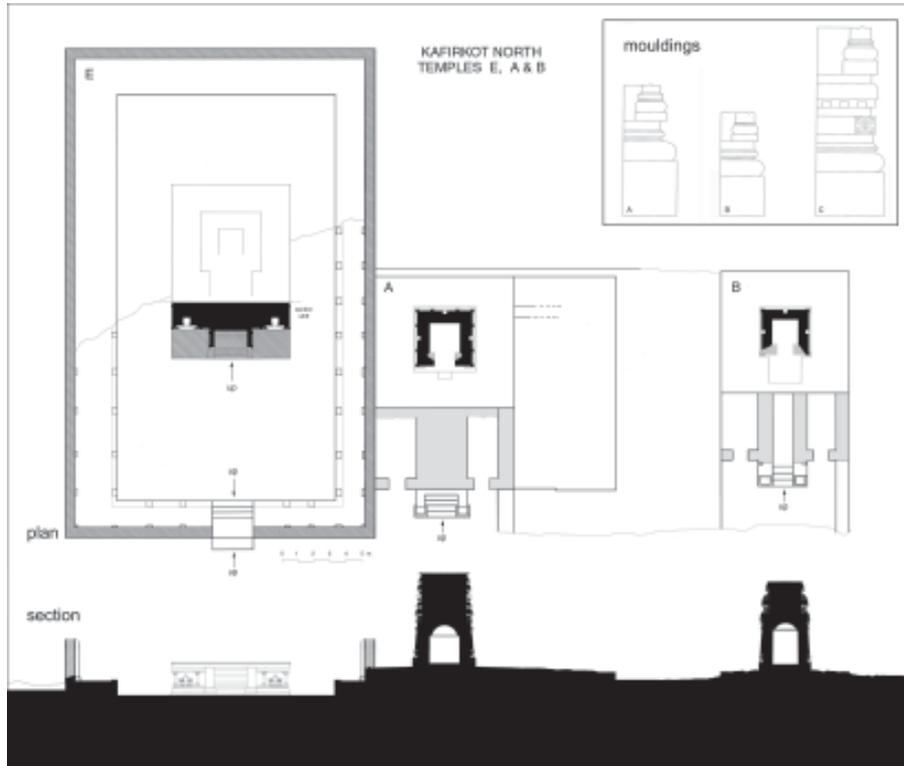
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Pl. 1: Kafirkot North, site map.

Pl. 2: Kafirkot North, Temples E and C, excavated compounds; Bilot Kafirkot, site map.

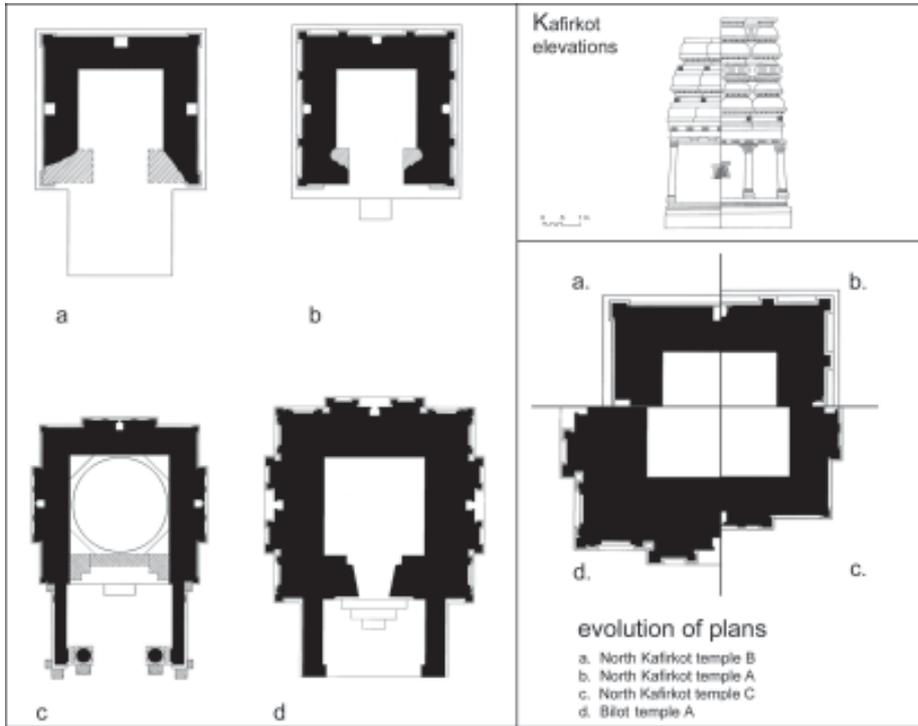




Pl. 3: Kafirkot North, Temples E, A, and B, site plan and section; Temples A-C mouldings.

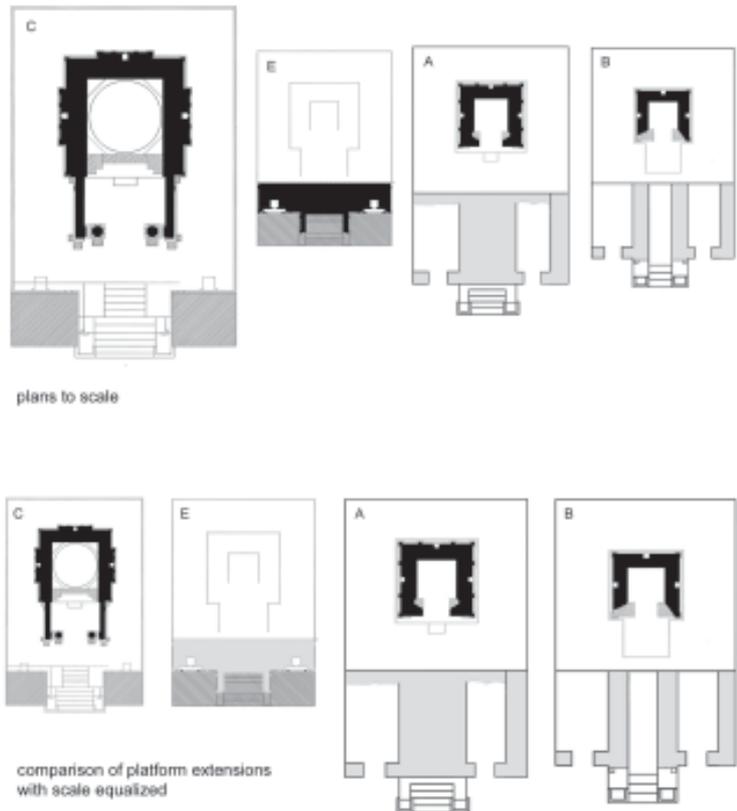
Pl. 4: Kafirkot North, Temple A, excavated south-east chamber set against compound wall of Temple E.





Pl. 5: Salt Range temples: evolution of plans, seventh-eighth century.

Pl. 6: Kafir Kot North temples, ground plans to scale and comparison of platform extensions with scale equalized.





Pl. 7: Bilot Kafirkot, Temple D, southeast chamber in platform extension. Temple E subshrine is visible to the northeast.

Pl. 8: Bilot, Temple D platform compared with platform extensions at Kafirkot North. It is the intermediate lives of these monuments that further archaeology at both Bilot and Kafirkot North

