Indus Temples and Saurashtra
Michael W. Meister

By the beginning of the sixth century CE, Saurashtra saw the rise of the Maitraka kings of Valabhi, under the suzerainty of the Gupta dynasty in Central and Northern India. Dronasiriha (ca. 520–50) was the first to use the Gupta Era in his charters. At the time, Gärulaka chieftains ruled as Maitraka vassals in western Saurashtra. According to M. A. Dhaky's summary of their patronage and rule, the Maitrakas' ascent "as an eminent power begins from the reign of Guhasena (ca. 555–570), ... by whose time the power of the Guptas had considerably declined." During Maitraka rule, distinctive stone temples began to be built in Saurashtra; many were Śaiva but also Saura (Dharapati, ca. 520–550, had declared himself a "Parama-Āditya-bhakta") and other sects. Dhaky commented that, with few exceptions, "temples of the Maitraka period fall in areas which incidentally had been within the reign of the Gärulakas. Only near the middle of the eighth century do the Saindhavas appear as rulers in the same territory." Dhaky modified his much earlier view of these temples, writing that

If lower western Suraṣṭra is accepted as having been under Gärulaka, and not direct Maitraka rule, Varāhādāsa’s claim, in A.D. 549, that he had founded many temples would suggest that we might reconsider the date of the stylistically earliest structures in western Suraṣṭra, previously placed between c. 575–650. ... Suraṣṭra buildings are quite austere, weatherworn, and the chronological discussion presented here must therefore remain somewhat tentative.

Temples in the Salt Range and along the Indus in Pakistan, built under the hegemony of Turk Śahis ruling from Kabul and Hund in the seventh and eighth centuries, represent a regional school of architecture, evolving from an earlier ‘Gandharan’ construction, that gave local expression to a new ‘Nāgara’ temple vocabulary developed in Gangetic India to house Hindu, Jain, and occasionally Buddhist images for worship. Kuwayama has argued that the preceding Kinghal dynasty had extended its reach to the west bank of the Indus by the seventh century — to Hund, which became its winter capital, but also to Bannu and possibly even Dera Ismail Khan — a region with a large Brahmanical population.


3 Dhaky, “Maitrakas ... Gärulakas,” p. 170.

4 Nanvati and Dhaky, Maitraka and Saindhava, passim.

alongside Buddhists. Cultic and architectural expressions in both regions might suggest that there had been some connections between the distinctive early temples in Saurashtra and those of the Northwest, through north–south links along the Indus River (Pl. 4). If so, these likely would have been weakened by the end of the seventh century, leaving both schools of temple architecture to find their separated ways. Sixth- and seventh-century temples in these regions, however, offer rare examples of experiments widely disbursed across the subcontinent that contributed to the foundation of the *latina* Nāgara temple as the preeminent symbolically charged architecture of its day.

Some comparable elements in early temples in both regions include plinth-and-torus underpinnings of moulding typologies; courses of ‘brick-like’ stone masonry (laterite or tufa) finished in plaster, even making up each of the roll cornices in the superstructure (*vide* figs. 4–6); some pilaster types; experiments compacting *kūtīna* elements of the *sikhara*; and, initially, square-based plans, often within ambulatory halls, with central projections (*latās*) only in the tower above. These are suggestive, not definitive, comparisons that faintly shadow a connection; the presence of Sun temples in both regions may be another.

I wish to focus especially on the compound of Temple D at Bilot (Pl. 2), perhaps the most complex sacred monument along the Indus. The earliest temple in Bilot’s fort, Temple D was built on a large rectangular plinth, now stripped of most of its surface cladding. Square in plan, the walls of the sanctum have pilasters cantoning the corners; paired central pilasters flank chambers framed by shrine models on each wall (Pl. 3, right). Above these pilasters are sockets and a broad fillet that suggest beams and the ceiling of an enclosing ambulatory hall, possibly wooden. A landing and flight of steps gave access to this plinth from the east (Pl. 4, lower left).

Temple D’s compound was expanded in several phases. Extensions enclosing domed, ground-level, east-facing chambers were added to either side of the access stairway by late in the seventh century at the same time Temple A was built lower down the mountainous slope to the east and Temple H (Pis. 1; 5, bottom) to the north. South-facing chambers with conjoined Nāgara *sikharas* (F/G) were built on the

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6 Shoshin Kuwayama, “Historical Notes on Kāpiśī and Kābul in the Sixth–Eightth Centuries.” *Zinbun* 34 (1999): 25–77. According to Kuwayama, the Kingal Dynasty “came into existence in parallel with the political weakening of the Hephthalites toward the middle of the sixth century and lasted until the rise of the Turks in Kābul in the middle of the seventh century.”

northeast corner of an enlarged compound, with a steep flight of steps on the east climbing up from below (PL. 2). Perhaps half a century later, Temple E, a south-facing Nāgara shrine, was built on the northeastern platform extension, above the east-facing domed chamber below (Pls. 4, lower left & 5, top).

At Kāfirkot North, the two earliest temples that survive, Temples B and A, are also square in plan, with chamfered walls, cantoning pilasters, sockets and recess for an ambulatory roof, a projecting central latā only in the superstructure. Temple B has three cornice levels that survive, but no corner ribbed markers (āmalakas), making it more of a bhūmi-prāśāda. Temple A (Pl. 3, left), on the other hand, advertises its latina Nāgara connections with a first level in the sikhara marked by bhūmi-khaṇḍa units on the corners that consist of two cornices, thin ‘vedī’ slab, and an āmalaka directly above with no necking. The broad central projection on this level also pairs two bhūmi-khaṇḍas, which are not, however, repeated up the next storeys.

Bilot’s larger Temple D is both more complicated and earlier (Pl. 3, right). Square in plan, its mouldings include a broad recess with sparsely spaced floral bosses and puspapranas (floral diamonds). The roll cornice (kapota) that tops these mouldings and those of the sikhara above have bold bands of beam-ends below. At the center of each wall is a small sunk chamber framed by a scale model of a temple (Pl. 4, upper right). Its vestibule is represented as having a trefoil vault that extends up into a central latā of roll cornices (kapotā) crowned by a small āmalaka. To either side, corners of the slightly curvilinear tower are marked by two levels of paired cornices crowned by āmalakas; between three āmalakas at the top are two pillarets supporting an upper platform (uttaravedi) from which the necking supporting the upper āmalaka appears. Together, these parts make an appropriate schema for an early or proto-Nāgara temple.

Above the sockets and seating for beams and an ambulatory roof at the top of the sanctum’s walls, the temple’s sikhara has a basal storey marked by corner pillars and ‘perforated’ ‘screens’, the one on the broad central projected section flanked by lotus medallions (Pl. 3, right). Between the modillion brackets of the cantoning pilasters is a shallow ‘saw-tooth’ fringe. The tower above consists of a series of roll cornices (kapotās)—each made up of several courses of kanjur ‘bricks’ (Pl. 7, top)—each underpinned by a band of beam-ends. Each cornice has a central candraśālā motif, flanked by a conjoined one-and-a-half candraśālā motif on either side, with small ‘florets’ filling their cavities; this pattern is adjusted in scale on each cornice to allow for a slightly curved ascent.

The corner faces of the base storey of the sikhara are defined as small pillared pavilions, each with a superstructure—consisting of two cornices (the lower ornamented with split candraśālā, the upper a central candraśālā with flower infill), ‘vedī’ platform, and āmalaka—separated from the cornices of the central latā. Between these corner āmalakas and corresponding cornices of the madhyalatā, small pillarets are placed that correspond in part to the pillarets supporting the uttaravedis at the top of shrine-models on the sanctum walls (Pl. 4, upper right). Similar pillarets form

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part of the superstructure of Temple A at Kāfirkoṭ and a loose pillaret was found in the
calvenation of Temple E. My deconstruction of
Temple D’s ‘compacted’ superstructure (Pl. 7,
bottom) makes it possible to see these as parts
of pavilions that make up the corner ‘kūṭas’ of
the next storey.

The square plan of the walls of Temple D, with
central offsets only in the šikhara above,
suggests that an ambulatory hall once
surrounded the sanctum; sockets for wood
beams are visible above the wall, as is a broad
fillet for positioning the roof, as also is the case
for Temple A at Kāfirkoṭ (Pl. 3). Such an
enclosed sanctum, set on a platform
approached by a projecting flight of stairs (Pl.
4, bottom), can be compared to the plan of the
sixth/seventh-century Bilvanātha Temple,
Bileśvara, Saurashtra. Of the superstructure
of the Bilvanātha temple (Pl. 6), Dhaky wrote

The clearly demarcated storeys, independent
Karṇakūṭas and gavākṣas that show no
suggestion of integration into jāla ... , and the
heaviness of the āmalaka itself suggest that the
temple represents, if not a stage in the formal
development of Nāgara, at least one of the
experiments that preceded the emergence of
Nāgara form.

The Bilvanātha temple has narrow pilasters and
branching on its outer walls, roll cornices in
the šikara underpinned by heavy bands of
beam ends, rows of non-intertwined
candrāśālās, and a fixation on corner aedicules
(kūṭas) comparable in part to those in the
Northwest (Pl. 6). Archaic as Temple D’s
experiments at Bilot may seem (Pl. 7), they
suggest a somewhat greater—if still distant—
connection to the ‘kūṭina’ experiments of early
Nāgara temples elsewhere in the seventh
century (Pl. 8).

At Bānqasārā in Saurashtra, Dhaky classified a
further group of early stone temples as
‘pseudo-Drāviḍic’ and ‘proto-Nāgara’. Temple I is square in plan, without an
ambulatory hall; its superstructure consists of
roll-cornice ‘storeys’ marked by abbreviated
corner pedestals with tiny āmalakas but with
no central projecting latā. A series of
candrāśālās, with the central candrāśālā
flanked by half candrāśālās, on each corner
storey, however, gives the suggestion of
consolidation toward the center (Pl. 9). Dhaky
saw these ornamental changes as “a new trend
of far-reaching significance ... the gradual
transformation of the superstructure into the
Nāgara šikhara form” determined by the
“coalescence of the tiers or storeys into one
total form,” “transmutation of the candrāśālā
motif by a coalescence into jāla,” and
“integration of the corner aediculae.” These
changes, as an organic and self-conscious
transition, may more clearly be seen at Bilot’s
Temple D than in these examples from
Saurashtra. To leap from Bileśvara’s
Bilvanātha Temple and Bānqasārā’s Temple No.
1 to a Nāgara structure such as the Sun Temple
at Akhodar required knowledge assimilated
from other regions of India (Pls. 6, 9). But
what a transition it was.

The Sun Temple at Akhodar is sāndhāra, its
square sanctum set within an ambulatory hall;

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11 Dhaky, “Maitrakas ... Gārulakas,” p. 184, while
wondering “Is the temple of the Gārulaka period,
and could Varāhādāsa II [A.D. 549] have been its
builder ... ?”, chose to conclude that “parallels
sensed with other architectural styles might hint at
a date no earlier than the end of the sixth or early
in the seventh century.”

12 Nanvati and Dhaky, Maitraka and Saindhava,
pp. 28–29.

13 Ibid., p. 30.
the śikhara above the ambulatory roof, however, has central, flanking, and corner offsets (a tripartite scheme seen for the first time in the Salt Range on the brick temple at Kālar\textsuperscript{14}). Paired pillars and awning, a khanḍa of two kapotas, with candrāsālāś facing, and a crowning āmalaka suggest kūta pavilions on the corners that extend up the tower as a venkośa sheath. The flanking offsets shift half-khanḍas down, staggering their āmakalas for only a couple of storeys, faced by partial candrāsālāś clasping the central lata with its larger candrāsālāś, suggesting an incipient jāla (Fig. 9, upper right). Dhaky concluded that the “general disposition of the śikhara favours a date in the second quarter of the seventh century A.D. A date around A.D. 650–675 seems safer, however, keeping in mind the archaism peculiar to this area.”

Further consolidation of this local latina formula can be seen on the Sun Temple at Dhāṅk (Pl. 10, bottom).\textsuperscript{15} We still are sorting out the sixth and seventh centuries, the period in which Nāgara architecture first took firm shape; Saurashtra and the Indus region offer exceptional evidence for the resilience of the form, and the intensity of the search for its architectural expression. If the fifth century had perhaps provided a rationale and ‘set of parts’,\textsuperscript{16} the sixth century ‘engineered the machine’.

If the many widely disbursed sites we now identify as representing proto-Nāgara explorations—such as those of Bileśvara, Bilot, Bhāṅasarā, Kāśirkt, Rajim, Sirpur, Ālampur, Akhodār, and Dhāṅk—had one central reference point, it would have been the ‘Gupta’ Temple at Deogarh, M.P. (ca. 525–550), among the first fully formed Nāgara temples surviving. Its architects marked both door jambs with representations of two earlier experiments from the previous century (Pl. 10, right), but built a much more successfully integrated tower following a newly reasoned architectural form. We can now reconstruct its proto-Nāgara śikhara, in relation to remains at the site, but with much greater confidence gained from the history of comparable experiments scattered widely across the Indian sub-continent (Pls. 6–10).\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Meister, “Chronology,” pp. 1329–1330 & Fig. 12.
\textsuperscript{15} M. A. Dhaky, “Maitrakas of Valabhi,” \textit{EITA} II.1, 202–204.
\textsuperscript{17} M. S. Vats, \textit{Gupta Temple at Deogarh} (Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 70), Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1952, provided a much different reconstruction based on the limited evidence available to him at the time of his excavation. My reconstruction of the lower level of the Deogarh superstructure was first published in \textit{EITA} II.1, Fig. 21a. My tentative reconstruction of the full tower published here uses Vats’ drawing of the east face of the sanctum as foundation.
Pl. 2. Bilot Kāfirkot, Temple D: site and sanctum from southeast; plan of compound with modern designations for Temples F-H.
Kafirkot A and Bilot D

Pl. 3. Kāfīrkoṭ North, Temple A, west, and Bilot Kāfīrkoṭ, Temple D, south, and ground plans.
Pl. 4. Map: Indus River and Saurashtra; Bilot, Temple D, shrine model on south wall; Temple D, ground plan with extended platform (domed sub-chambers and Temple E above); Bileśvara, Saurashtra, Bilvanātha Temple, ground plan (after *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*).
Pl. 5. Bilot, Temple D compound: (top) Temple E & SE extension, south; Temple E, east façade above platform chamber (Temple F in background); (middle) SE extension and chamber, southeast; (bottom) Temple H (north of Temple D); Temple A, south.
Pl. 6. Bileśvara, Bilvanātha Temple, corner kūtas, 1st to 5th storeys (after Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture)(top). Bilot Temple D, Sanctum, southeast, and Bileśvara, Bilvanātha Temple, east, with enclosing hall (below).
Pl. 7. Bilot, Temple D, śikhara, detail of southwest corner; drawing to suggest consolidation of kūțina forms

Bilot Temple D consolidation of kutina forms
Pl. 8. Kūṭīna origins of Nāgara, summary comparisons: deconstruction of ‘kūṭīna’ Nāgara śikhara at Rajim, Chhattisgarh (upper left) and ‘latina’ Nāgara śikhara at Alampur, A.P. (lower left); axonometric drawing of Alampur Nāgara temple, ca. late 7th-century (right).
Pl. 9. Bilot, Temple D reconstruction; Akhodar, Saurashtra, Sun Temple, early Nāgara śikhara; Bhaṇyasara, Saurashtra, Temple No. 1, pre-Nāgara śikhara.
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Photographs and drawings of Indus and Central Indian temples are by the author; plan and photographs of Saurashtra temples and Deogarh jambs, courtesy American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon.