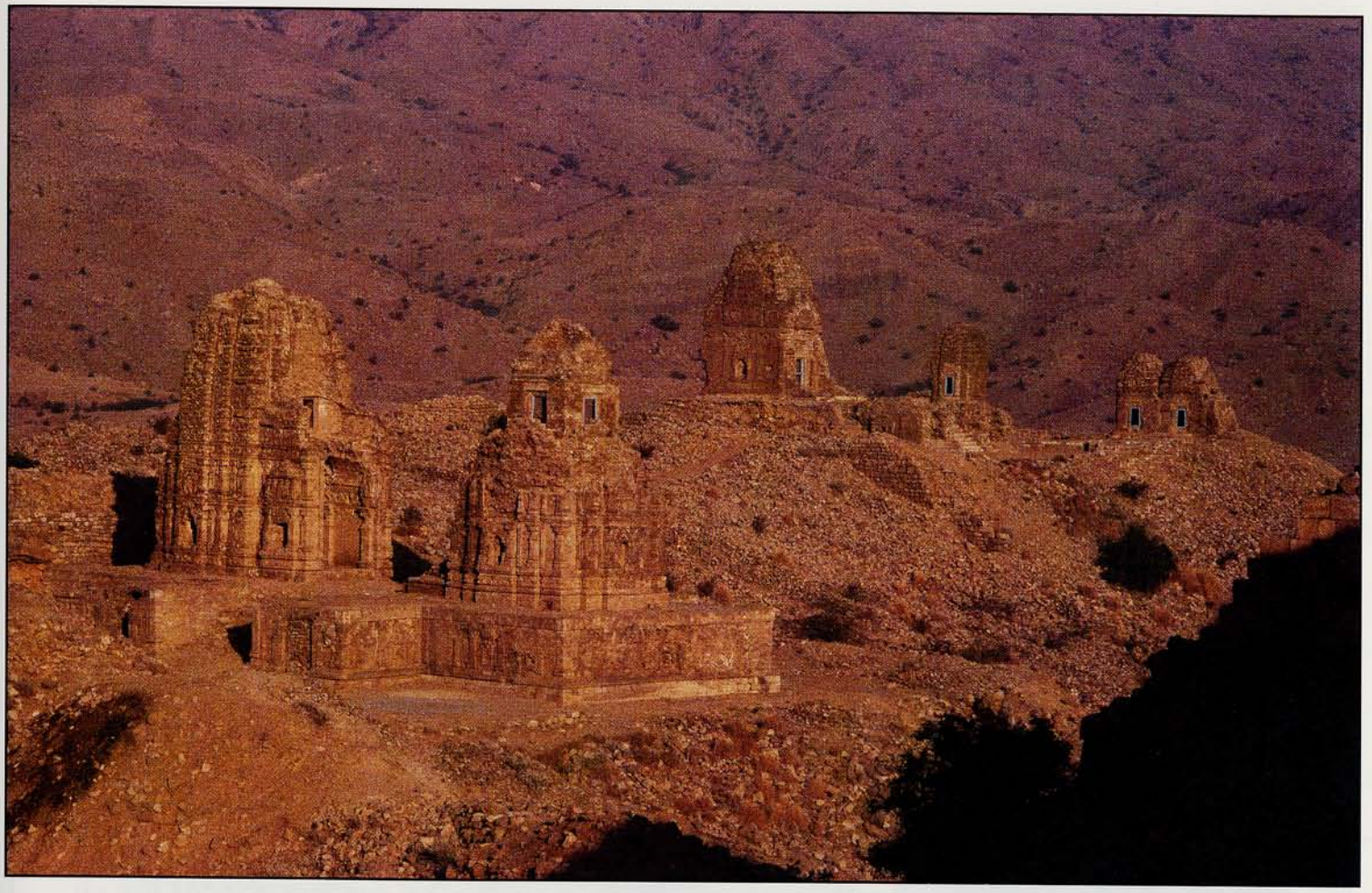


FIG. 1. Two groups of temples in the fort at Bilot, North West Frontier Province. The paired temples in the foreground (temples B and C) are of the 10th century. The cluster in the background (temple D in the center) is of the 7th century.

Temples Along the Indus

Michael W. Meister

High above the mighty Indus, on hills commonly called the Salt Range, stand important remains of forts with citadels and temples (Fig. 1). Built from the 6th to the 11th centuries AD, these structures lie in what was ancient India's far northwest (Fig. 3), now in the Panjab and North West Frontier provinces of Pakistan. Largely ignored by scholars in this century, and orphaned from the main stream of architectural scholarship since the partition of South Asia in 1947, these remains form an important link in the history of South Asian architecture. Remarkably, this region preserves an almost continuous record of temples that can define the evolution of a distinctive school of Gandhāra-Nāgara architecture. An integrated archaeological study of these sites, undertaken by the author with colleagues in Peshawar, has begun to reveal new aspects of this important period of South Asia's antiquity. What follows is a preliminary report and stylistic analysis of the region's temples.

Archaeologically, the area is best known for the massive numbers of Buddhist sculptural and structural remains associated with the region of Gandhāra from the 1st century BC to the 5th century AD. These Gandhāran remains already show a local visual vocabulary in which architectural traditions from India, Central Asia, and the classical world appear side by side. This mélange of traditions is evident on many Gandhāran Buddhist narrative steles, as well as monuments such as

FIG. 2. Fifth-century facing added to the earlier Gandhāran Buddhist Dharmarājikā stupa at Taxila. Moldings, niche forms, and other architectural ornaments are carried over into the Hindu temple tradition that follows.

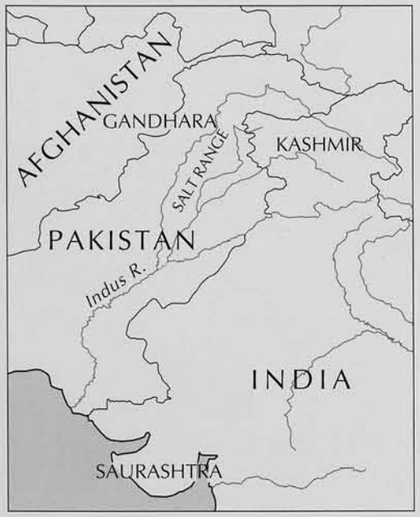


FIG. 3. Map showing the Salt Range and other regions mentioned in text.

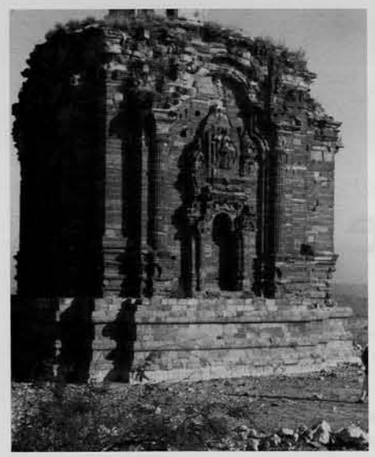


FIG. 4. Malot, near Kalar Kahar in the Panjab Salt Range. Main temple from the southwest, ca. 10th century. The roof of this structure would have been a pyramidal pent roof in Kashmiri fashion, but the shrine models on its walls are curvilinear and multi-spired.

FIG. 5. This 10th-century temple at Pandrethan in Kashmir offers a well-preserved example of a gabled pent roof.

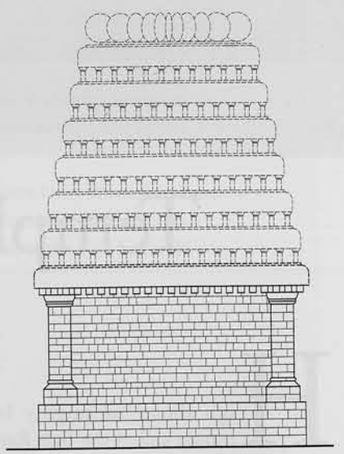


FIG. 6. Katās, reconstruction of the superstructure of the southern sub-shrine. Similar reconstructions are being prepared for temples at Kāfirkot and Bilot.

Reconstruction by the author; drawing by Patrick George

the famous shrine of the double-headed eagle and the Dharmarājikā stupa at Taxila (Fig. 2).

The Chinese pilgrim, Hsüan Tsang, visiting Gandhāra in the 7th century AD, noted hundreds of Hindu structures along with many Buddhist sites then in decline (Watters 1904–05). If there is a Gandhāran legacy in the Hindu temple architecture of subsequent centuries, it takes two paths: one, a unique tradition of temples with pyramidal roofs built in Kashmir from before the reign of Lalitāditya in the 8th century AD (Fig. 5), the other an independent tradition in Gandhāra itself. Our project focuses on the consequences of this second tradition.

We find perhaps the earliest example of the Kashmir tradition in two small 8th-century (or earlier) temples at Lāduv (Meister et al. 1988 [hereafter *EITA*]: 361–63) and of temples related to the second tradition in several 6th-century masonry sub-shrines at the Hindu pilgrimage site of Katās in the Salt Range (Fig. 6). The square Lāduv shrine has a circular interior space and had a hemispherical dome under a peaked roof, for which a Gandhāran prototype—a masonry structure at Guniār in Swat—is sometimes cited (Kak 1933:55–56; *EITA*:362). The whole was once covered by a pyramidal roof, as indicated by the frame surrounding its doorway. Gandhāran antecedents for this type can be seen in the "classical" niche pediments represented on the 1st-century-BC shrine of the double-headed eagle at Taxila, or the split pyramidal pediments in Gandhāran sculpture and on stupas such as that shown in Figure 2. This distinctive gabled pent roof became the signature for Lalitāditya's powerful Kashmir dynasty in the 8th century. Well-preserved examples, from the 8th to 10th centuries, survive on temples at Narastān, Pandrethan (Fig. 5), and Payār.

The type of temple found at Katās, while sharing with Lāduv the formula of a simple square plan, plain masonry walls, and cantoned corner pilasters, formed its superstructure by quite different means. The Katās sub-shrine's elevation can be reconstructed as a series of cornices with tiny intermediate rows of pillars and a crowning ribbed stone (*āmalaka*) (Fig. 6). This early type of simply storied structure has parallels in coastal western India at Sarnath (Saurashtra) and elsewhere across northern India and the Deccan in the 6th century AD (see Meister 1986; *EITA*).

With its representation of many multiple stories, the Katās sub-shrine can be considered a type of proto-Nāgara tower. However, local experimentation with the full Nāgara formula—the typical curved temple form of northern India—had already begun at Kāfirkot ("foreigners' fortress" in local parlance) west of the Indus in the North West Frontier Province (see Figs. 7, 8). The two earliest temples in this fort can most closely be related to early Garulaka or Maitraka dynasty temples in Saurashtra at sites like Bhānasarā and Dhānk, from the 6th and early 7th centuries AD, and Saindhava dynasty temples from the same region in the 8th century (see *EITA*: plates). Even the name of the little understood Saindhava dynasty seems to indicate a link with the Indus (Sindhu is an ancient name for the river).

STYLISTIC SOURCES FOR THE SALT RANGE TEMPLES

Scholars have tended to date this whole group of temples now in Pakistan to "post Islamic contact," that is, after the 7th to 8th century AD, because of their use of mortar, rubble-fill between masonry walls, arches, and squinched interior domes (Archaeological Survey of India *Annual Report* 1920–21:6–7). They have also tended to locate them as a branch of Kashmiri architecture, because of one aberrant temple (Fig. 4). Both Percy Brown (1942) and James Harle (1986), for example, in their volumes on Indian architecture, place the Salt Range temples in chapters on the Kashmiri tradition.

Nineteenth and early 20th century scholars, including Aurel Stein (1937), Alexander Cunningham (1872–73), and Ananda Coomaraswamy (1927), focused their attention on the 10th-century temple at Malot in the Salt Range (Fig. 4) and its formal links to the architecture of Kashmir, thus setting the direction for later scholarship. The temple at Malot does indeed mimic pent-roofed temples in Kashmir at a time of marital alliance between the Utpalas of Kashmir and the Hindu Shāhī kings of Hund in Gandhāra (Rehman 1979). It differs from the Kashmir temples, however, in placing the curvilinear Nāgara shrine models on its walls (see box on Shrine Models). These shrine models mimic local Gandhāra-Nāgara temples at other 10th-century Hindu Shāhī sites, such as a pair of temples in a second important fortress, Bilot (south Kāfirkot), near Dera Ismail Khan (Figs. 1, 17).

The Kashmiri form found at Malot, however, is an exception. Better sources for this Indus group of temples can be found in the Gandhāran substrata and in the ferment of Nāgara formation in other areas of north and western India (Meister 1981) than in Kashmir. Whether in the domed Buddhist compounds at Takht-i-bahi or the 5th-century moldings facing the Dharmarājikā stupa at Taxila (Fig. 2), Gandhāran antecedents are close at hand. Certainly the basic molding sequence of Gandhāra-Nāgara temples begins as early as Taxila. The typical slender pseudo-Corinthian pilasters at Kāfirkot (Fig. 10)—as well as true arches—can be seen also on the 2nd/4th-century Buddhist stupa at Guldhara in Afghanistan (Harle 1986:73). The characteristic sloping batter of niches and doorways (and sometimes walls) on these temples has clear antecedents in Gandhāran conventions. Much of the architectural ornament in

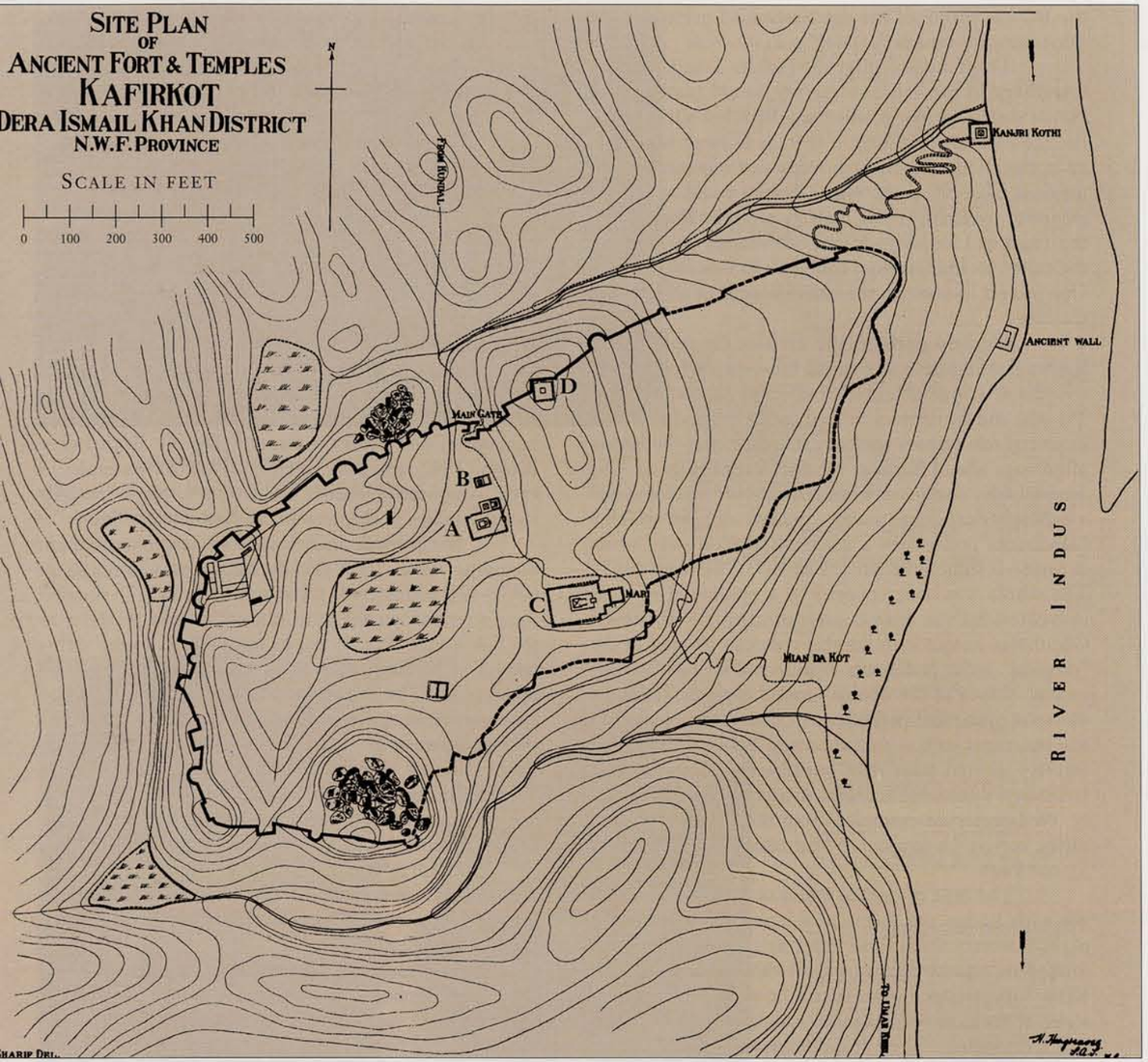


FIG. 7. Site map of the fort and temples at Kāfirkot.

From the Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1921–22: *pl. 26*

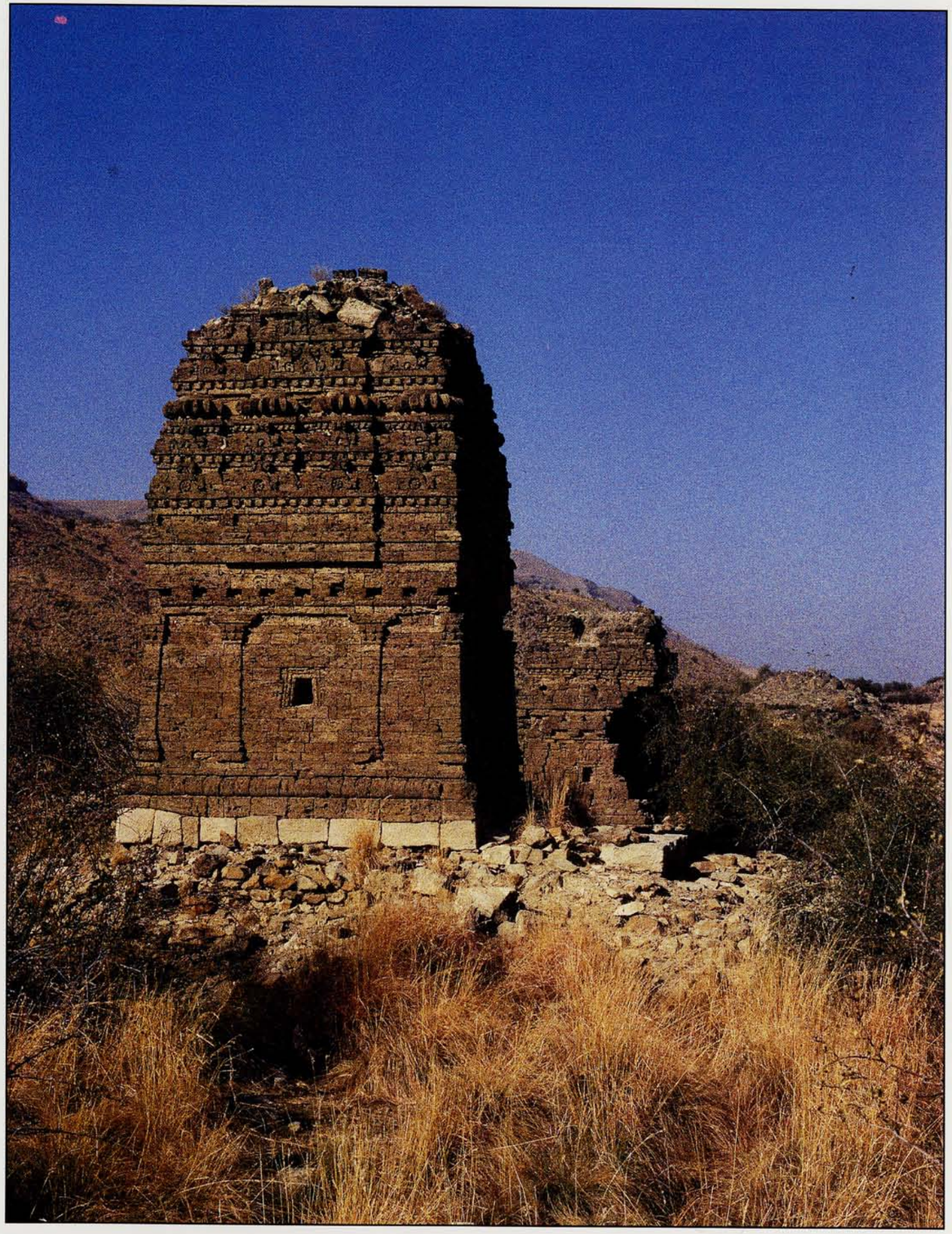


FIG. 8. Kāfirkot, temples A and B from southeast, ca. 6th/7th century. Note the slightly battered (sloped) walls and central niche and the stepped formula for the superstructure.

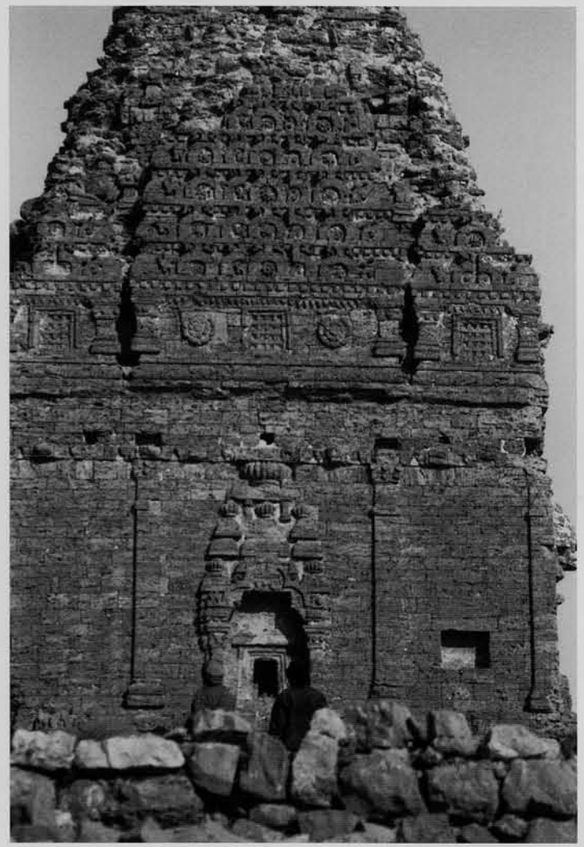


FIG. 9. Bilot, temple D from the south, ca. mid 7th century. Note the simple proto-Nāgara shrine model used to frame the central niche and the unlinked horizontal arrangement of its superstructure's ornament.

these temples is familiar to the Gandhāra region and even the use of interior squinches and masonry domes is not new.

What *is* new to the region is the Nāgara modality of superstructure as it had developed in north India for the first time in the 5th and 6th centuries AD (Meister 1986, 1989). The shrine model on the wall of temple D at Bilot (Fig. A in box on Shrine Models) bears close resemblance to the much better known proto-Nāgara shrine model represented on the early 6th-century doorway to the "Gupta" temple at Deogarh in central India, for example, or one on a brick stupa base at Nalanda in eastern India (Meister 1986:46–47).

A WALK THROUGH THE SALT RANGE TEMPLES

To frame this local and continuous craft tradition of the Salt Range and upper Indus, let me briefly review the remains in chronological order. At north Kāfirkot (Fig. 7), temples B and A represent the earliest experiments in this region with the developing Nāgara formula (Fig. 8). At Bilot (south Kāfirkot) the much larger temple D awkwardly formulates a Nāgara tower on a square base, much like the pre-Nāgara temple at Bileśvara in Saurashtra in the 7th century (*EITA* 1986: 181–84), and incorporates a model of a proto-Nāgara shrine on its walls (Fig. A in box on Shrine Models). Late in the 7th century, temple C at Kāfirkot (Fig. 10) and temple A at Bilot (Fig. 11), both with damaged Nāgara towers, project one central offset on each wall and modulate ornamental elements of their superstructures in a more integrated way compared to Bilot temple D (Fig. 9). These temples display a new confidence in and knowledge of Nāgara formulas. Temple C tentatively introduces for the first time a version of north India's common vase-and-foliage capital for its corner pilasters, while retaining the local neo-Corinthian type for the central offset.

Two striking temples, located on hills east of the Indus opposite Kalabagh at Māri-Indus—which I would date in the 8th century—continue and refine this

FIG. 10. Kāfirkot, temple C, late 7th century. Here, perhaps for the first time, the walls of the temple step out, forming central offsets from an otherwise square plan.

FIG. 11. Bilot, temple A from the southwest, ca. late 7th century. This structure places framed niches at its corners, as well as on each central offset.

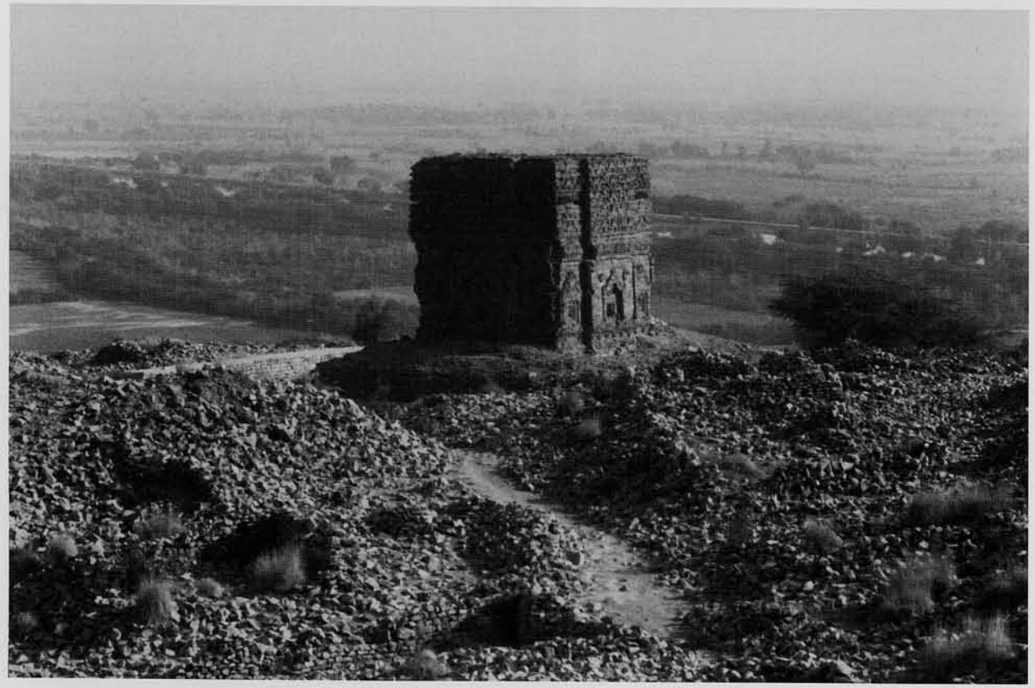


FIG. 12.
Māri, on the east bank of the Indus near Kalabagh. Temples A and B, ca. 8th century.

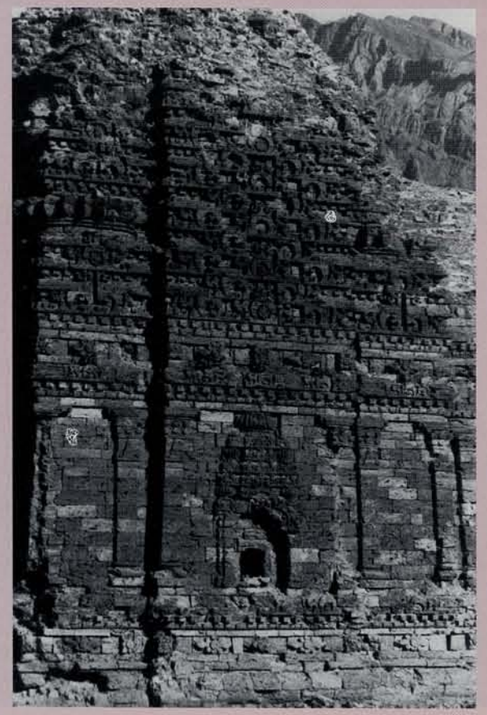


FIG. 13.
Māri, temple B from the south, ca. mid-8th century.

FIG. 14. Amb, near Sakesar on the southern edge of the Salt Range; temple A from the southeast, ca. 9th century. Only in this temple are an entry hall and its roof preserved.

FIG. 15. Kallar, brick temple from the south, ca. late 8th/9th century. The wall is divided into five parts, and all pilasters show a simplified vase-and-foliage patterning.

FIG. 16. Bilot, temple D and northeast sub-shrine (temple E). Temple E shows greater complexity than the central temple, both in the central offsets, with elegant false doorways, and in the complexity of the superstructure's ornamental patterning. Temple E stands above a domed chamber sunk in the temple's platform, but is oriented to the south instead of to the east (see Fig. 1).

local Nāgara tradition, but still with only a single central offset on their walls (Fig. 12). Temple A places thin pilasters on the corners of each offset, while temple B pairs pilasters for the first time on its corner buttresses (Fig. 13). Temples in this sequence in turn seem to provide a central shrine model on each wall to represent a slightly earlier local experiment with the formula for a Nāgara temple (see box on Shrine Models). Each also seems to carry forward some architectural element, as in the trefoil arched niches at Bilot (Fig. 9), the trefoil doorway at Māri-Indus, and the five-cusped entry to the smaller 9th-century temple at Amb (Fig. 14).

The first temple in this tradition that can have its date confirmed by any evidence other than style and decorative context is the elegant fired brick structure at Kallar (Fig. 15). Its walls of five offsets (a central one with two on each side), and its developed ornamentation with vase-and-foliage pilasters and other distinctive details, place it parallel to temples in central and western India from late in the 8th and early in the 9th century AD. This date is supported by a single coin found near the foundations struck in the reign of the first Hindu Shāhī ruler, Kalar, whose dynasty has recently been dated by an inscription as beginning in AD 821 (Rehman 1993:31). Only further archaeological explorations, however, and perhaps carbon-14 dating of wood beams used to support the interior domes of some of these temples, can fix more firmly the dates and historical frame suggested here.

Early in the 8th century, perhaps, sub-shrines were added above the eastern corners of the platform supporting temple D at Bilot. These echo but reorient two domed cells sunk into the front corners of the temple's platform (Fig. 16). The small temple D at Kāfirkot, built near the north gateway to that fort late in the 9th century, mimics some distinctive details of these sub-shrines.

A DISTINCTIVE NEW TURN

In the 10th century, larger temples were built under the patronage of the Hindu Shāhī kings in the spectacular fortress at Amb (Fig. 18), at Bilot (Figs. 1, 17), and at Nandanā (Fig. 19) on the eastern escarpment of the Salt Range. Like earlier ones of the region, these still were Latina temples (that is, they had single curvilinear spires), but within their walls were stairways leading to an upper story where an interior ambulatory corridor surrounded an upper chamber embedded within the tower (Fig. 20a). In this respect they are unlike all other Nāgara temples in India.

This remarkable regional experiment with multiple levels, folded within a Latina tower (Figs. 17, 19–20), came to an end early in the 11th century. At that time the great fortress at Nandanā on the eastern flank of the Salt Range fell to Muhammad of Ghazni, who sought to control the significant routes across the Panjab leading toward Multan and Delhi. The Hindu Shāhī kings then took refuge with their cousins in Kashmir. In this sequence of Salt Range temples, only the last one, built at Nandanā, suggests corner turrets on its single-spired tower (Figs. 19, 20a). These turrets remind us, however, of the multi-spired Nāgara shrine models represented on the walls of the 10th-century Kashmir-related temple at Malot (Fig. 4), even as they reflect a multi-spired convention that became common in central and western India by the 9th/10th century (*EITA*).

Across northern India, this multi-spired (*śekharī*) temple type sets a new standard in the 11th century at such famous sites as Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh, but its origins lie in experiments carried out in western India (Gujarat and Rajasthan) in the century before—experiments marked and reflected in these late Shāhī temples in the Panjab.

That these forts and temples survive along the Indus must be a reminder to us of how untouched many of India's traditions are; of how severely partition has truncated our understanding of South Asia's multiple civilizations, both Islamic and Hindu; and of our task as scholars to mend that historical wound, even as we have begun to reproblematize colonial scholarship and its assumptions.

I end this preliminary report with a footnote to demonstrate the mighty weight of finding a new monument in the field. At the site of Māri, in addition to the two 8th-century temples already discussed (Fig. 12), there are also two mounds higher up the hill to the west, badly ravaged by treasure hunters, that past reports have labeled primarily as places of residence (Cunningham 1879; Mumtaz and Siddiq-a-Akbar 1989). These in fact are ruins of two large temples placed on high platforms. One, Temple C, still preserves remains of an inner sanctum and an enclosing ambulatory wall. On the north side, this wall preserves a central niche with a distinctive "Kashmiri-style" pent roof (Fig. E in box on Shrine Models), but the shattered remains of the temple's superstructure suggest instead a complex multi-spired tower with curvilinear Latina spirelets. This temple seems, in fact, to have been almost a reverse response to the unique local experiment with Kashmiri style found at Malot (Fig. 4), and an answer to it. Let scholars beware.

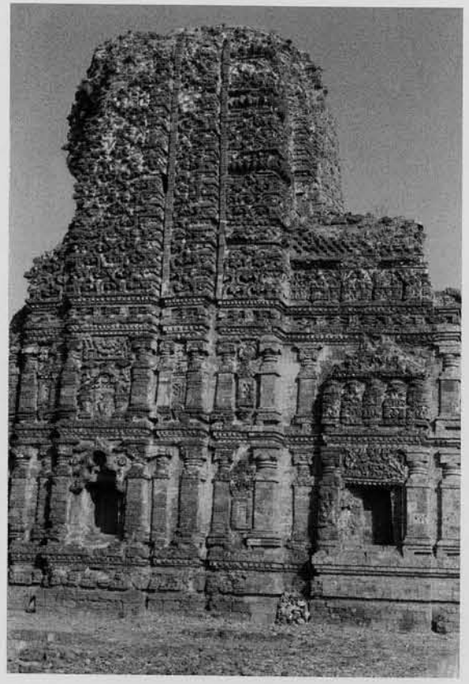


FIG. 17. Bilot, temple C from the south, ca. mid-10th century. From the outside, this is single spired. On the inside, however, is an upper chamber and ambulatory path.

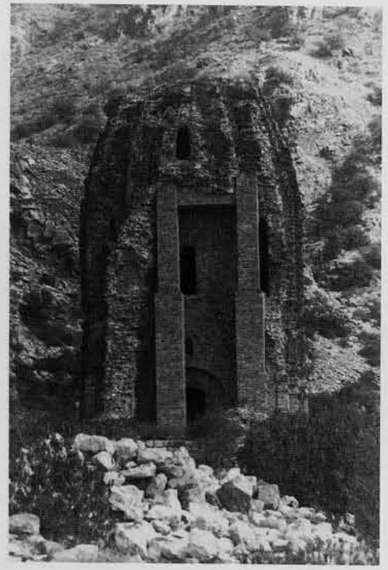
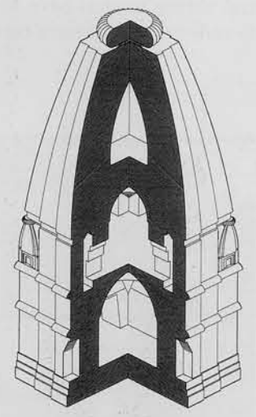
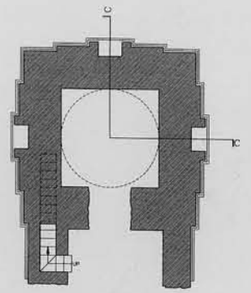


FIG. 18. Amb, temple B from the west, ca. early 10th century. British conservation early in the century has kept this three-chambered structure from collapse.

FIG. 19. Nandanā fort, temple from the southwest, ca. AD 1000.





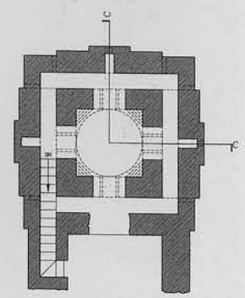


FIG. 20 A, B. Axonometric drawing and plans of the Nandanā temple showing stairway, upper ambulatory, and chamber.

Reconstruction by the author; drawing by Hasina Choudhury

GROUND FLOOR PLAN (RESTORED)
NANDANA TEMPLE
0 2 4m

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Shrine Models as Signatures of Architectural Experimentation

The architects of these temples in the Salt Range and along the Indus knew that they were working within a variety of options. Architecture could engage their creativity, and through their creative actions, temples could evolve in multiple ways. They seem consciously to have left a record of their architectural experiments by placing shrine models as niches on the walls of many temples. These often seem to represent slightly earlier local experiments with the formula for a Nāgara temple, focusing on the nature of the temple's superstructure. Temple D at Bilot, for example, uses a proto-Nāgara model (Fig. A). Temple B at Māri, on the other hand, uses curvilinear Nāgara models with ornamentation placed across single cornice layers (Fig. B). In this respect the models at Māri resemble the superstructure actually built in the 7th century for Bilot's temple D rather than either superstructure built at Māri in the 8th century for temples A and B (Figs. 12, 13).

On the 10th-century temple at Malot, the central shrine models have developed curvilinear Nāgara towers flanked by extra turrets (Fig. D). Māri's remarkable temple C, on the other hand, had central niches marked by a split pent-roof pediment framing a trefoil arch (Fig. E) that suggests the gabled pent roof that once actually crowned the temple at Malot (Fig. 4). The trefoil-arch pattern can be seen at Bilot, Māri, Amb, and Malot in association with either pent-roofed or curvilinear formulas (Figs. A, C–E).

Marking temple walls with images of past architecture provides an historical locus for architects working within a system of meaning which sees each niche as an expansion of the temple as a whole (Meister 1993). The rhetoric of architectural representation in South Asia more often relates to an ahistorical rather than historical reality, yet from time to time the two overlap (Dhaky 1977). In Gandhāra sculpture, for example, the variety of recognizable Buddha types seems sometimes to point to specific places of pilgrimage. So also in the Salt Range, architectural experimentation gave contemporary expression to how the minds of its architects worked as well as providing a model of God's creation.

A

◀ FIG. A. Bilot, temple D.

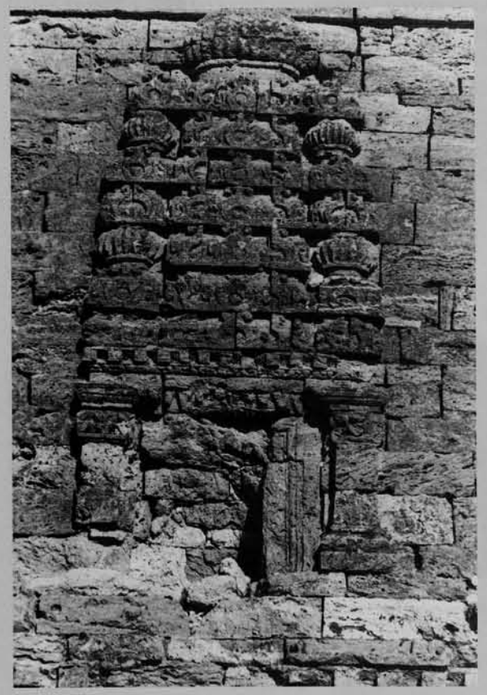
Bottom, left to right:

FIG. B. Māri, temple B.

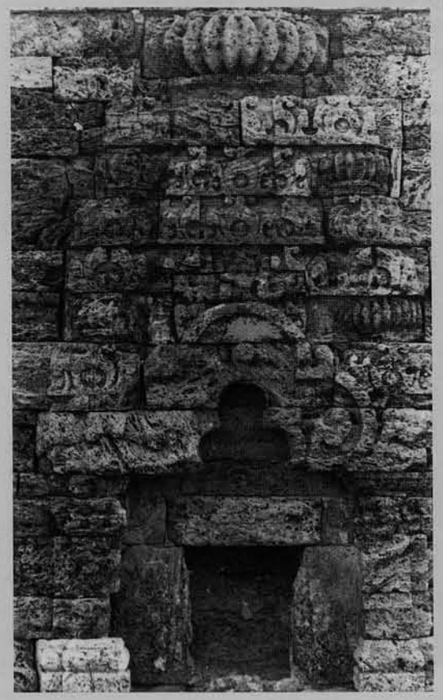
FIG. C. Māri, temple B.

FIG. D. Malot temple.

FIG. E. Māri, temple C.

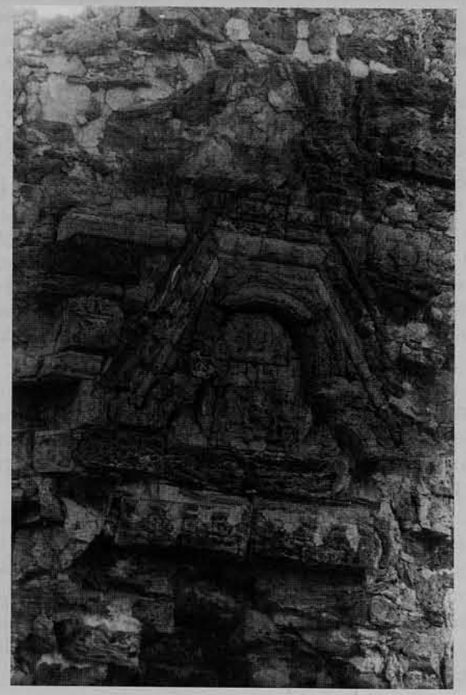


B



C

D



E

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Support for this project has come from the University Research Foundation and the Middle East Center at the University of Pennsylvania, the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, and the Lenkin Faculty Research Fund of the History of Art Department. I would like to thank Professor Farzand Durrani, past Vice-Chancellor of Peshawar University, for encouragement; the Department of Archaeology, Peshawar, for early support; Dr. M. Rafique Mughal, Director General of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan; Shabaaz Khan, Director of the Panjab Department of Archaeology; and especially my colleagues Professors Abdur Rehman and Farid Khan of the Pakistan Heritage Society, with whom carrying out this work continues to be a pleasure.

The Integrated Salt Range and Indus Archaeological Project

The 6th to 11th century forts, temples, and archaeological sites associated with the Turk Shāhī and Hindu Shāhī kings will be investigated over the next three years by a team led by Professors Abdur Rehman, Farid Khan, and Michael W. Meister under the auspices of the Pakistan Heritage Society, Peshawar, with a license from the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan. Preliminary excavations have begun this season in the fort at north Kāfirkot.

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