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 mainstream 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
the famous shrine of the double-headed eagle and the Dharmavarkika stupa at Taxila (Fig. 2). The Chinese pilgrim, Hiian Tsang, visiting Gandhara in the 7th century ΑD, noted hundreds of Hindu structures along with many Buddhist sites then in decline (Watters 1984-45). 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 Lāladāya in the 6th century ΑD (Fig. 5), the other an independent tradition in Gandhara itself. Our project focuses on the consequences of this second tradition.

We find perhaps the earliest example of the Kashmir tradition in two small 6th-century temples at Lāladāya (Meister et al. 1988 [hereafter ΛΕΙ]): 161-65) and of temples related to the second tradition in several 6th-century Masonry sub-shrines at the Hindu pilgrimage site of Kāta in the Salt Range (Fig. 6). The square Lāladāya shrine has a circular interior space and had a hemispherical dome under a peaked roof, for which a Gandhāran prototype—a masonry structure at Guñati in Swat—is sometimes cited (Kāl 1933-35: 36; ΣΕΕ: 34-36). 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” niches 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 Lāladāya’s powerful Kashmir dynasty in the 6th century. Well-preserved examples from the 6th to 8th centuries, survive on temples at Nānūnits, Pandrāthāra (Fig. 5), and Patrā.

The type of temple found at Kāta, while sharing with Lāladāya the formula of a simple square plan, plain masonry walls, and cantoned corner pilasters, formed its superstructure by quite different means. The Kāta sub-shrine’s elevation can be reconstructed as a series of cornices with tiny, intermediate rows of pillars and a crowning ribbed stone (āmataka) (Fig. 6). This early type of simply storted structure has parallels in coastal western India at Sānulik (Buddhist) and elsewhere across northern India and the Deccan in the 6th century ΑD (see Meister 1986: 114). It is represented by multiple more stories, the Kāta sub-shrine’s elevation can be reconstructed as a type of proto-Nagara tower. However, local experimentation with the full Nagara formula—the typical curved temple form of northern India—had already begun at Kāfrī (“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 Gātika or Mātrika dynasty temples in Saurashtra at sites like Bānasi and Dāthik, from the 6th and early 7th centuries ΑD, and Sānvhāra dynasty temples from the same region in the 8th century (see ΕΕΕ ΕΕΕ). Even the name of the little understood Sānvhāra dynasty seems to indicate a link with the Indus (Śindu 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-Isamic contact,” that is, after the 7th to 8th century ΑD, 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 acentant 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 chambers on the Kashmiri tradition.

Nineteenth and early 20th-century scholars, including Auren Stein (1937), Alexander Cunningham (1872-75), 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 Karnataka at a time of mental alliance between the Utpalas of Kashmir and the Hindu Shālik Kings of Huns in Gandhara (Relman 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-Nagra temples at other 10th-century Hindu Shālik sites, such as a pair of temples in a second important fortress, Biolo (north Kāfrī), near Dera Ismail Khan (Figs. 1, 11).

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 ferments of Nāgara formation in other areas of north and western India (Meister 1981) than in Kashmir. Whet the in the Indus region compounds at Tikhe-i- bai the or the 6th-century masonry facing the Dharmavarkika stupa at Taxila (Fig. 2), Gandhāran antecedents are close at hand. Certainly the basic masonry sequence of Candhāra-Nagāra temples begins as early as Taxila. The typical slender pseudo-Corinthian pilasters at Kāfrī (Fig. 10) as well as are arches can be seen also in the 2nd-century Buddhist stupa at Gūḍhāra in Afghanistan (Harle 1986: 153). The characteristic sloping batter of niches and doorways (and sometimes walls) on these temples has clear antecedents in Kanghāran conventions. Much of the architectural ornament in

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**Fig. 2.** Five-century facing added to the earlier Gandhāra Buddhist Dharmavarkika 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 southeast, 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 Pandrethāra in Kashmir offers a well-preserved example of a gabled pent roof.

**Fig. 6.** Kāta, reconstruction of the superstructure of the southern sub-shrine. Similar reconstructions are being prepared for temples at Kāfrī and Bilot. Reconstruction by the author; drawing by Patrick George.
**Fig. 7.** Site map of the fort and temples at Kafirkrot.

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

**Fig. 8.** Kafirkot, temples A and B from southeast, ca. 6th/7th century. Note the slightly battered (dimpled) walls and central niche and the stepped formula for the superstructure.
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 incorporates a Nāgara tower on a square base, much like the pre-Nāgara temple at Bilewa in Surashtra in the 7th century (1968:181–84), and incorporates a model of a proto-Nāgara shrine on its walls (Fig. A in box on Shrine Models). Later 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 Māni-Indus—which I would date in the 8th century—continue and refine this...
Fig. 12. Marî, on the east bank of the Indus near Kalaşgur. Temples A and B, ca. 9th century.

Fig. 11. Marî, temple B from the south, ca. mid-8th century.

Fig. 14. Amb, near Sêkevar on the southern edge of the Sê Sri 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. Bîlos, temple D and northeast sub-shrine (temple E). Temple E shows greater complexity than the central temple, both in the central aisles, 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).
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 Nandana on the eastern flank of the Salt Range fell to Muhammad of Ghazni, who sought to control the significant routes across the Punjab leading toward Multan and Delhi. The Hindu Shahtāli kings then took refuge with their cousins in Kashmir. In this sequence of Salt Range temples, only the last one, built at Nandana, suggests corners turrets on its single-spired tower (Figs. 19, 20a). These turrets remind us, however, of the multi-spired Nāgra 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 (UGC).

Across northern India, this multi-spired (šikhar) 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 Śahtāli temples in the Panjāb.

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 begin to reappropriate 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 9th-century temples already discussed (Fig. 12), there are also two mounds higher up the hill to the west, badly ravaged by treasure hunters, that post reports have labeled primarily as places of residence (Coningham 1875; Mumtaz and Siddiqua-ahkar 1999). 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. 5 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.

A DISTINCTIVE NEW TURN

In the 10th century, larger temples were built under the patronage of the Hindu Shahtāli kings in the spectacular fortress at Amūn (Fig. 18), at Bilot (Figs. 1, 17), and at Nandana (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 Nāgra temples in India.
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 Mārī, on the other hand, uses curvilinear Nāgara models with ornamentation placed across single cornice layers (Fig. B). In this respect the models at Mārī resemble the superstructure actually built in the 7th century for Bilot's temple D rather than either superstructure built at Mārī 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 towers (Fig. D). Mārī's remarkable temple C, on the other hand, had central niches marked by a split pent-roof pediment framing a trefoliate arch (Fig. E) that suggests the gabled pent roof that once actually crowned the temple at Malot (Fig. 4). The trefoliate arch pattern can be seen at Bilot, Mārī, 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.
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The Integrated Salt Range and Indus Archaeological Project

The 6th to 11th century forts, temples, and archaeological sites associated with the Turk Shahi and Hindu Shahi 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 Kafirkot.

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