

'SHADOW-COVERED' *DEVĀLAYAS*¹

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Reported in the *Si-Yu-Ki*, Fa-hsien, a Chinese pilgrim to South Asia's Buddhist dominions ca. 400 CE, observed a location where Buddhist and Brahmanical places of worship stood side-by-side (Beal 1906, I: xlvii).

To the east of the road is a temple (*Dēvālaya*) belonging to the heretics, which is named 'Shadow-covered'. It is opposite the *vihāra* ... and of the same height. It has received the name 'Shadow-covered' because when the sun is in the west, the shadow of the *vihāra* of the Lord of the World covers the temple of the heretics; but when the sun is in the east, the shadow of the latter is bent to the north, and does not overshadow the chapel of the Buddha. The heretics constantly appointed persons to sweep and water it, to burn incense and light lamps for religious worship; towards the approach of morning their lamps disappeared and were discovered in the middle of the Buddhist chapel. On this the Brāhmans, recognizing the greatness of Buddha's spiritual power, forsook their families and became his disciples.

For many centuries, plural populations with a multitude of beliefs built structures both for civil use and religious worship. In the Buddhist heartland, near the Buddha's Jetāvana-garden shrine, the pilgrim reported (ibid. xlviii):

In this country of Mid-India there are ninety-six heretical sects, all of whom allow the reality of worldly phenomena. Each sect has its disciples, who beg their food, but do not carry alms dishes. They also build hospices by the side of solitary roads for the shelter of travelers, where they may rest, sleep, eat and drink and are supplied with all necessities. The followers of Buddha, also, as they pass to and fro, are entertained by them, only different arrangements are made for their convenience.

The trope of a shadow bending away to respect the Buddha also can be found in the story of his First Meditation, where the shadow of the Jambu tree, beneath which the youth Siddhartha sat, deferred to his entrancement (Herold 1927: 16).

That Brahmanical temples have at times seemed 'shadow-covered' in the Northwest should not obscure their shared roles in the sacred landscapes of South Asia. Like 'hospices', they have served multiple populations and shared the accomplishments of Pakistan's early history (Babbet *al* 2008; Meister 2010c). In the seventh century, when the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang travelled through Gandhāra, the Punjab, and the Gangetic plains, he found that many Buddhist chapels and monasteries had fallen into disrepair and shrines of other sects were flourishing (Beal 1906: 91, 119n, 179). That these were built in an intricate dance with other communities, exploiting the technologies and peculiarities of their locations, should not surprise us (Meister 2010b).

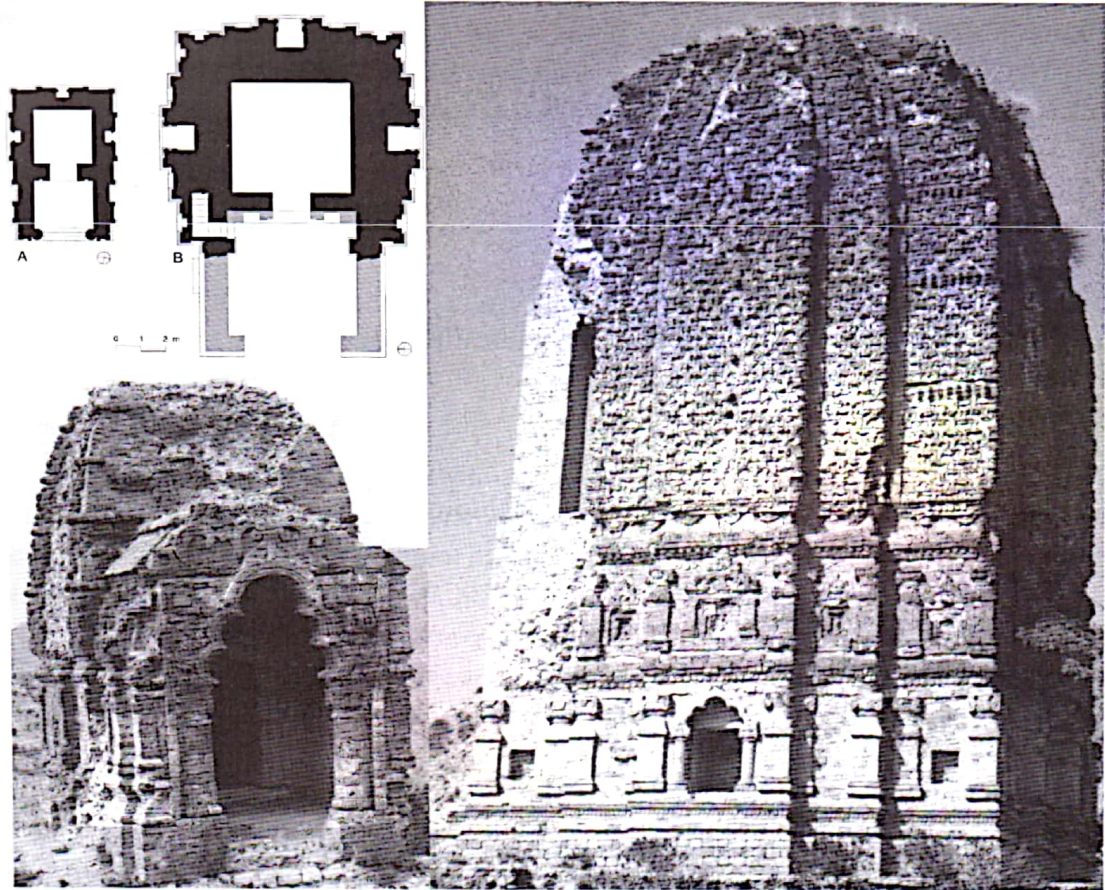


Fig 1. Amb, Salt Range, Punjab, Temples A & B, ca. 9th–10th c.

In the Salt Range, along the Indus, and north into Gandhāra and Swāt, a style of temple rooted in this region—building on a regional past, but modelled as well on the *latina* Nāgara formula with curvilinear tower developed in middle India—evolved from the sixth to tenth centuries (Meister 2010c; 2011). In this region in the tenth century, a most remarkable and original development was a multi-storeyed *latina* temple, a stairway in the outer wall to the left of the sanctum leading up to a vaulted ambulatory corridor surrounding an interior domed chamber (Figs. 1,2). This unique regional type is best represented by temple remains at Amb, Nandana, Bilot, Katas, and Gumbat (Dir) (Meister 2000; 2005; 2010c). Nothing surviving in today's India places an ambulatory and upper chamber within a *latina* tower in this way.

Domed and vaulted chambers, however, can be traced back through the four-century-long history of 'Gandhāra-Nāgara' temples in the Northwest, their sources local conventions of construction shared with even earlier Buddhist monuments (Fig. 7) and with sources in Central Asia and Iran; these were applied to temples and inflected in distinct ways. Mortimer Wheeler (1950: 58) observed that 'incipient use of voussoir-construction, combined with the employment of mortar throughout the masonry, may be interpreted either as evidence for an (early) post-Islamic date, *i.e.* a date not earlier than the beginning of the eleventh century, or, as seems more likely, a pre-Islamic infiltration of Iranian methods through the adjacent passes from the Iranian plateau.'

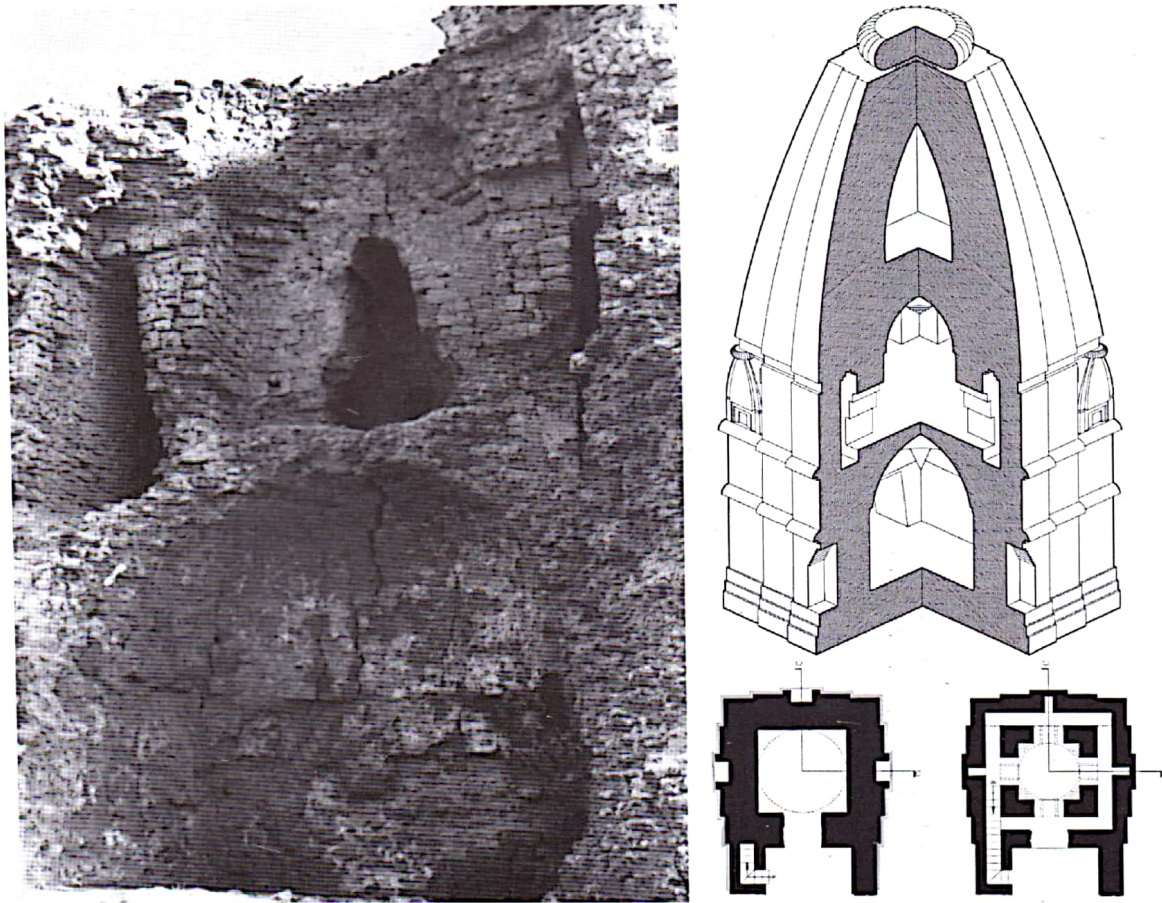


Fig 2. Nandana, Salt Range, Punjab, Temple B, 10th c. (left); Amb, Temple B, axonometric section, ground- and upper-level plans (right).

Abdur Rahman (1984), writing about the Buddhist *vihāra*-chapel found at Gumbat-Balo Kale, near Barikot (Swat), suggested that by comparison with the construction of Hindu-Śāhi-period temples that he had studied previously (Rehman 1979), a date of eighth–ninth century might be suggested. He noted stonework of a relatively late Gandhāran type and vaulted corridors surrounding Gumbat's nearly square sanctum. Sir Aurel Stein (1930: 12–13) first documented the *vihāra* at Gumbat-Balo Kale, publishing two photographs and appending small measured sketches of Gumbat's plan and section at the end of his report (Fig. 3).

The Italian Archaeological Mission in Swat also surveyed this monument and made section and elevation drawings in 1964 (Faccenna 2006: 191–192). These need some correction, but help to clarify the high podium and floor level left ambiguous in Stein's sketch (Fig. 4). Faccenna (*Ibid.*: 191) took Gumbat-Balo Kale — 'with its tall platform and staircase, with single cell with corridor around all four sides, large double-dome roof' — as 'a valid reference' to explain the foundation of a building he had excavated at Butkara I, which he labeled 'Great Vihāra (GB)' (*Ibid.*: 190, fig. 9). He also observed that 'Images of this type of building are depicted in Gandharan reliefs. In the Mardan relief in particular [Foucher 1905: fig. 41], we find an exact reproduction [*sic*] of GB enhanced with balustrade and corner columns: with large platform, staircase, *vihāra*, double dome.' In a footnote he also remarked 'The upper dome of the Gumbat *vihāra* is quite large. It does not appear to belong to the late period.'

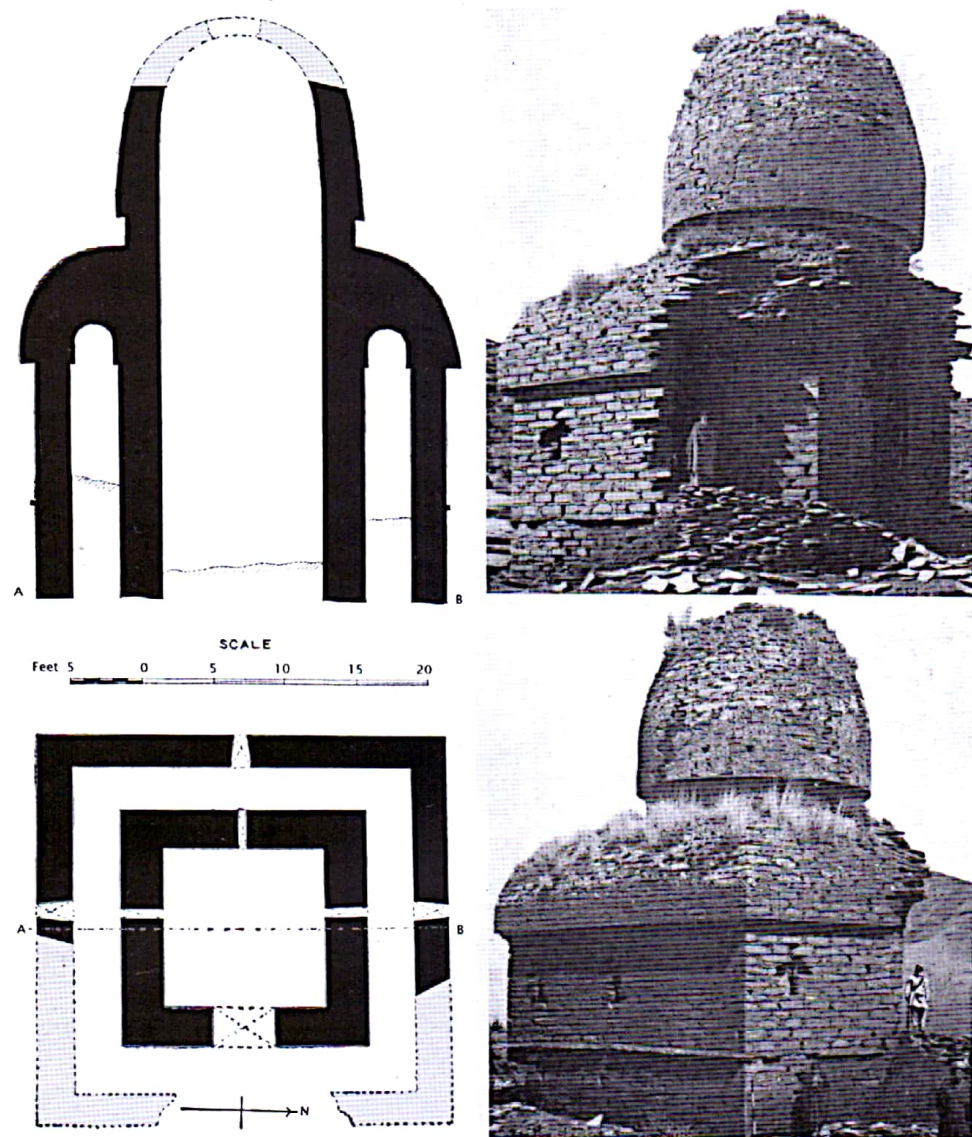


Fig 3. Gumbat-Balo Kale, Swat, KPK, photographs and sketches of elevation and groundplan (after Stein 1930).

By 'double-dome roof' in his description, Faccenna meant the upper dome over the sanctum and the ambulatory' scurved cap below (not the hollow chamber above the sanctum's interior dome, indicated in the sectional drawing published by Faccenna) (Fig. 7, left). Thanks to the 'quick intervention protocol' conservation carried out by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan, ACT Project, in collaboration with Army authorities in spring 2011, we now know much more about this inner dome and construction of the Gumbat-Balo Kale monument than before (Meister and Olivieri, in press): 'The typology of the intervention focused on cleaning and conservative reconstruction, dealing particularly with the filling of all the structural parts that were at risk of collapse.'

The inner hemispherical dome above the square sanctum was constructed above a ring of cantilevered stones (as in Fig. 7, upper left), supported during the original construction by wooden planks inserted above masonry indentations and fitted across the upper corners of the chamber (Fig. 5, left, inset), of which four remained before the recent conservation. Above this ceiling was a hollow chamber, apparently intended to reduce the tower's weight and increase its height. The external ovate dome was thus formed by a superimposed double vaulting, a major architectural peculiarity of this monument.

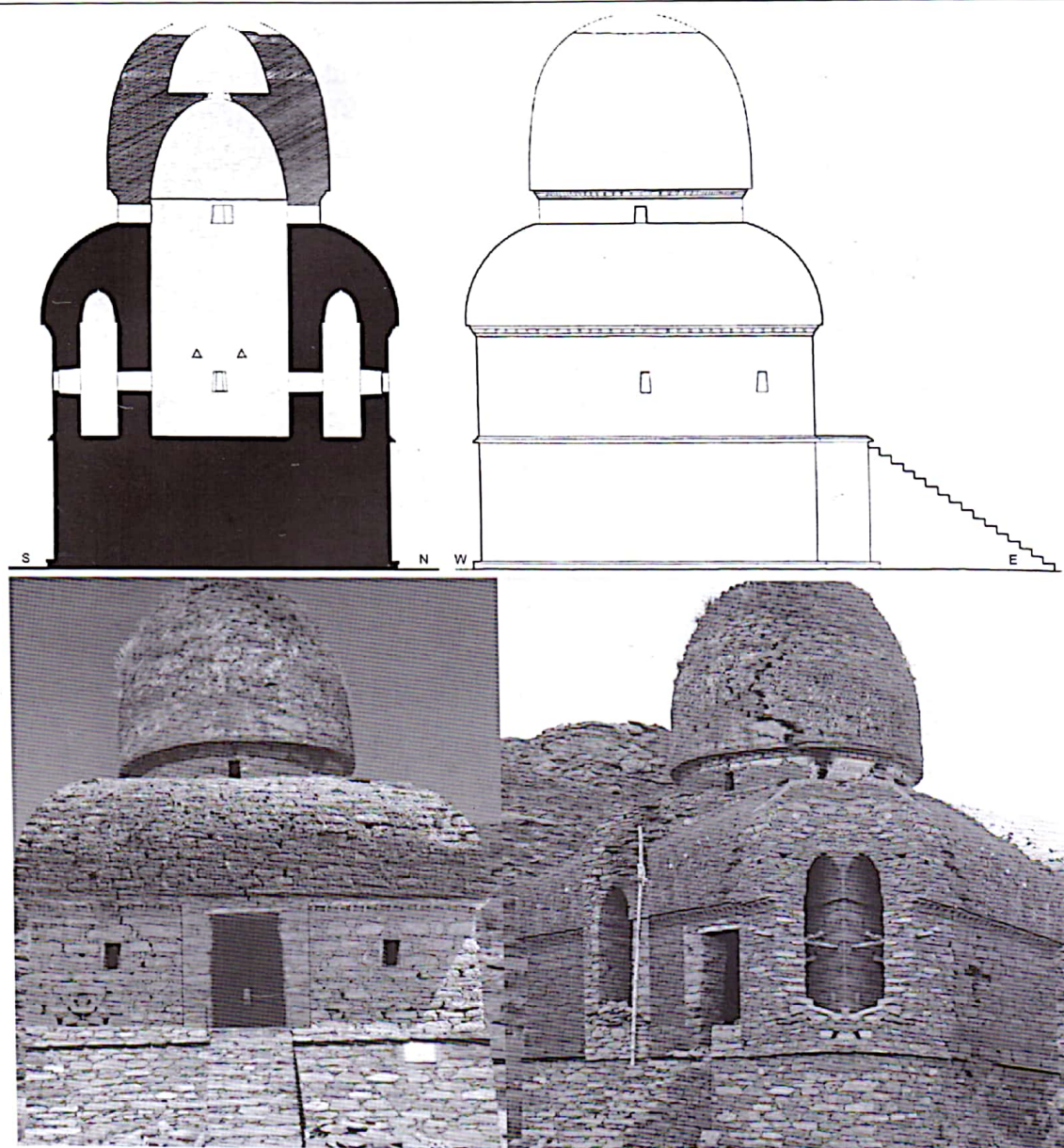


Fig 4. Gumbat-Balo Kale, section and elevation (based on drawings by P. Gui and A. Cimmeno, 1964) (after Faccenna 2006: figs. 10, 11) (top); tentative E and NE hypothetical reconstructions (Meister) (based on conservation photographs, courtesy L. M. Olivieri) (bottom).

Few other *vihāra* can be noted with a hemispherical interior domed ceiling fitted within a taller ovate tower: Abbasaheb-china, *vihāra* F (Tucci 1958:fig. 33) and a small clay model found at Pir Pai (Nasim Khan 2009: pls. 18.1–2) are examples. No other, however, has survived with a vaulted interior ambulatory corridor as at Gumbat-Balo Kale (Fig. 4). Gandhāran stone reliefs do show both hemispherical domed *vihāras* with lower side awnings and taller ovoid towers over time (Behrendt 2004: figs. 118–119).

The question remains what the relation between Balo-Kale's structure and that of Udi-Śāhi temples in the tenth century — with their upper domed chambers and vaulted corridors within an ovate *latina śikhara*— might be? Rahman (1987) was correct to ask. The answer can now perhaps more clearly be defined. A sample of wood from one of the surviving constructional planks under

one corner of the Gumbat-Balo Kale's interior dome was sent for Carbon-14 testing, producing a '2 Sigma calibrated result [that] gives a range from 90–240 CE with a 95% probability' (Meister and Olivieri, in press, Table 1).² So firm a Gandhāran-period dating for the *vihāra* of Gumbat-Balo Kale can reinforce my assessment in our report (ibid, in press) that 'Gumbat-Balo Kale's mouldings, ashlar masonry, sloping window slits, and interior dome — constructed above a cantilevered stone ring and corner beams, with no squinches — seem compatible with the Gandhāran constructional techniques analyzed and documented by Foucher [1905] many years ago.'

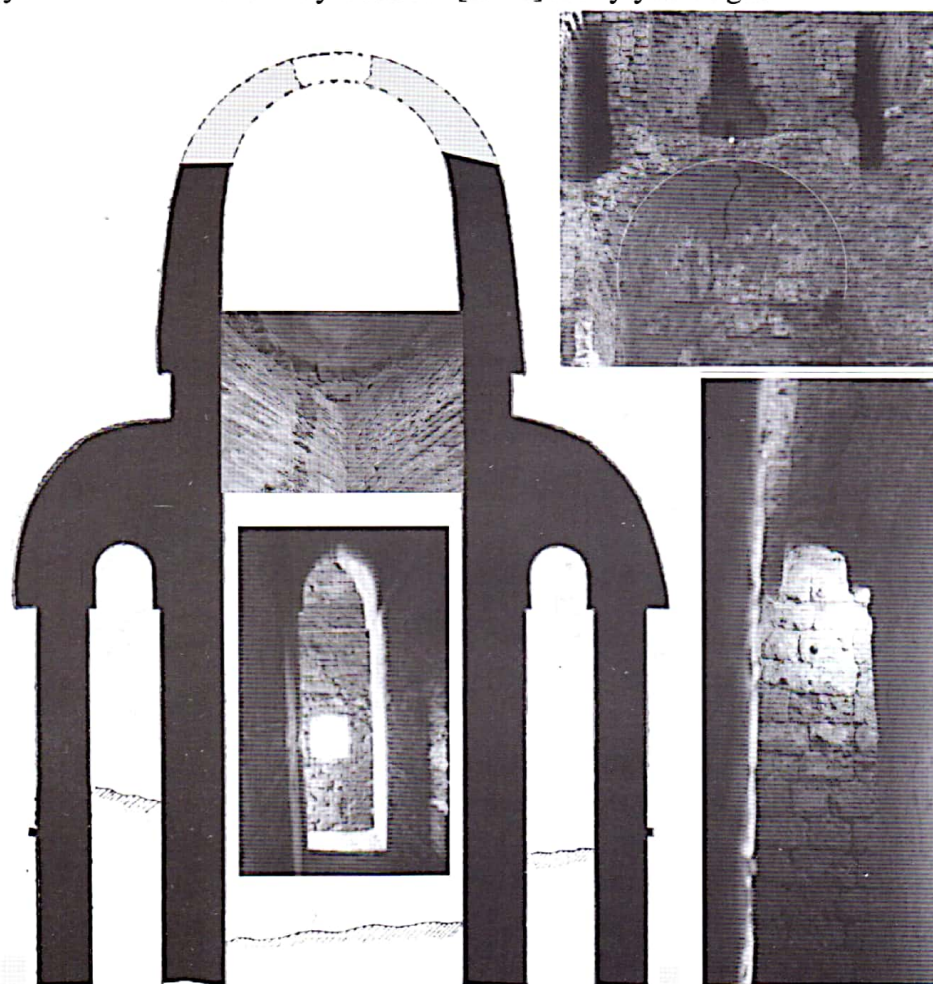


Fig 5. Gumbat-Balo Kale, Stein's section, inset photographs of ambulatory and inner ceiling (left); Nandana, Temple A, domed sanctum, upper domed chamber, vaulted ambulatory corridor (upper right); Amb, vaulted corridor (lower right).

Such construction is anterior to that of domes with corbelled squinches, whether in Gandhāra or in later Hindu-Śāhi temples (Figs. 6–7) (Meister 2010a, 2010c). Comparing the plan of the *vihāra* at Gumbat-Balo Kale to the upper-level plan of the tenth-century 'shadow-covered' Gumbat in Talash Valley, Dir, however, I would still suggest that constructional conventions locally contributed to the unique configuration of later temples in the region (Figs. 5–6). What their cultic interactions may have been, however, — whose lamps remained in which sanctums — is beyond the scope or capability of this paper.

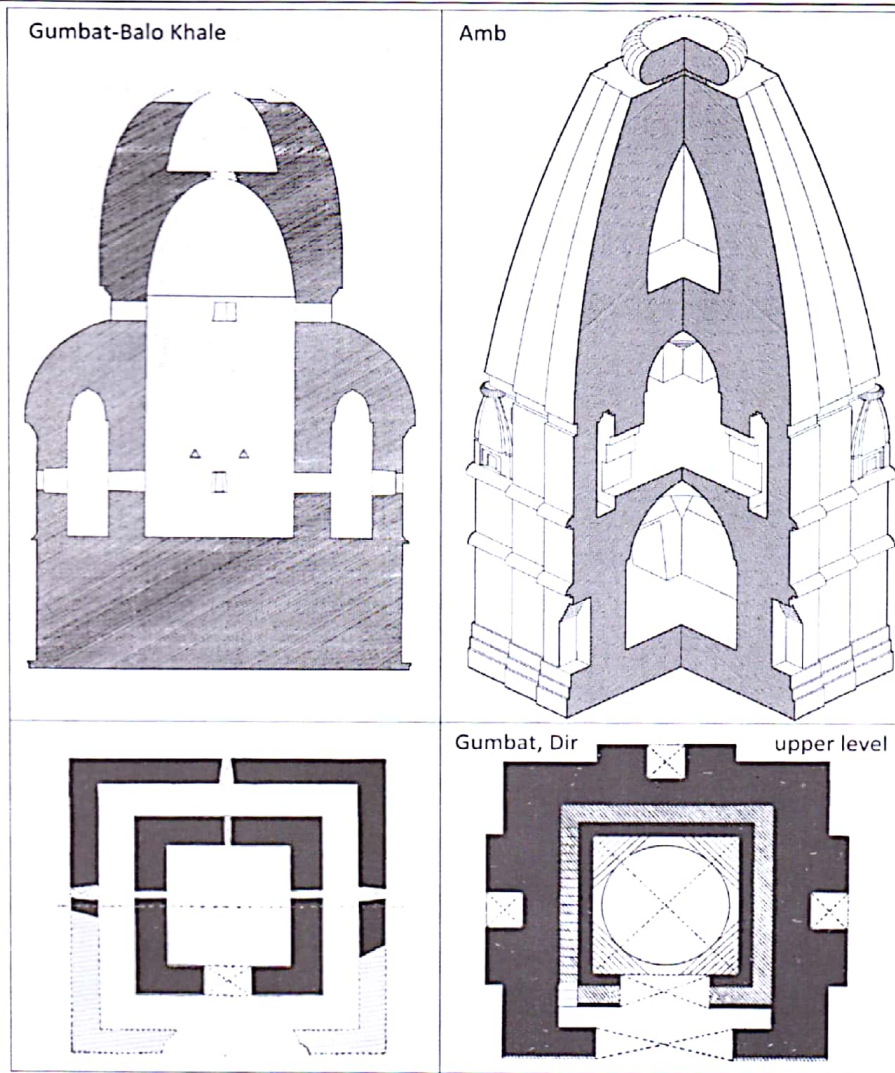


Fig 6. Gumbat-Balo Kale, N-S section, drawing by P. Gui, 1964 (Faccenna 2006, fig. 11) (left); Amb, Temple B, axonometric section with interior chambers (right).

Aurel Stein (1937: 50, 57) intuited that the pilgrimage *tīrtha* at Katas in the Salt Range retained ‘remains older than Hsüan-tsang’s time ... [and that] “Continuity of local worship” would help to account for the use made of the same spot for Hindu shrines during the centuries immediately following’; and that the nearby ‘built-up mound on the Mūrti hillock which ... can represent only a much decayed *stūpa*, and the ruined shrine by its side correspond exactly [*sic*] to the “tope and Deva temple” mentioned by Hsüan-tsang in close proximity to each other.’

Monuments of many sects of course are scattered across the northwest ‘in close proximity’, differentiating themselves by ways to crown the domes of their interior chambers. How these were constructed, however, followed local knowledge within a common dominion. Overlapping communities co-existed, sharing technologies, the landscape, and even ‘the reality of worldly phenomena’. How they coexisted, building and living side by side — how they interacted — needs better to inform our understanding.

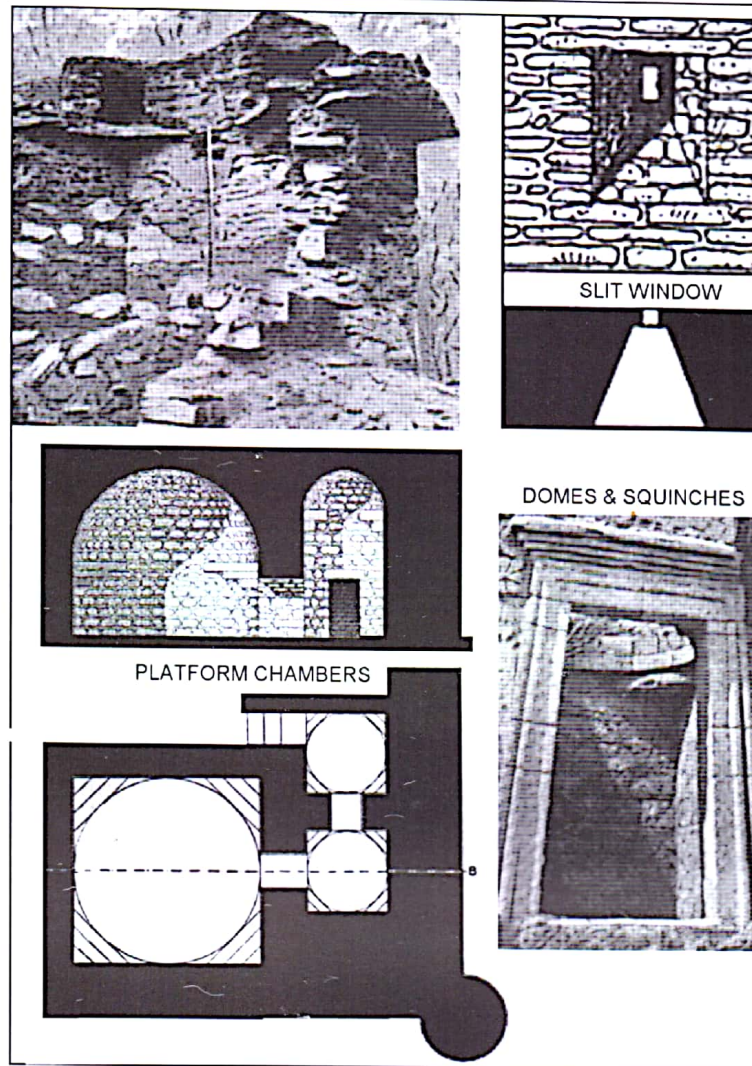


Fig 7. Examples of Gandharan construction, (after Foucher 1905: figs. 30, 32, 36, 37): example of slit window, plan and elevation, Takht-i-bāhī (upper right); door and dome, *vihāra* near Chakdarra (lower right); domes on square bases, chambers in basement, underground cellars, Sanghao (lower left); example of corbelling, ruined chapel, upper monastery, Nathou (upper left).

Notes

1. This essay derives in part from a presentation for the Symposium 'At the Foothills of the Hindukush: Art and Archaeology of the Swat Valley, Pakistan', organized by Pia Brancaccio, Drexel University, Philadelphia, May 2011.
2. C14 analysis was done by Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory (Miami, FL., USA).

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