

Michael W. Meister

Temples of the Indus: Studies in the Hindu Architecture of Ancient Pakistan

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MUHAMMAD FAROOQ SWATI

The author, Professor Michael W. Meister, has produced this book after his long experience and deep study into ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Jain architecture in South Asia. Hindu temples in Pakistan attracted the attention of only a few surveyors and scholars who described superficially the monuments standing in ruins at various sites, in the Salt Range and along the Indus. The author has not only linked architectural history with visual observation, but, also, has supported his study with the latest archaeological data retrieved from excavation and highlighted the evolution of the Hindu temple in Pakistan from the sixth through to the tenth century CE. The book has 85 pages of text divided into five chapters, Glossary, Bibliography and Index, and 149 figures in black and white including maps, photographs, plans and sketches. It is published in 2010 by Brill from Leiden and Boston.

Professor Meister reviews the history of the survey of temples conducted in the Salt Range and along the Indus since the last quarter of the nineteenth century and highlights the need of the present archaeological and survey work, which provided missing links of the evolution of the Hindu temple in the above-mentioned time frame.

Although the construction style of these temples varies, pioneer surveyors and scholars invariably related them to the Kashmiri style. A.H. Dani, Abdur Rahman, Farid Khan, Farzand Masih and others took interest to study these temples to some extent; however, a turning point came from Michael W. Meister, Farid Khan and Abdur Rahman who excavated some of these ruined temple sites and published the reports jointly or individually. Using archaeological data along with stylistic, architectural and comparative study with the Nagara style temples of northern India, the author of the book has concluded that these temples were situated in a free zone of the Salt Range and the Indus that was open to cultural interaction with India much more than with Kashmir. He has pointed out all those architectural and decorative features used and evolved from the seventh to the tenth century and established their affinity with Nagara styles as well as interaction with Kashmir. He has exhaustively illustrated his hypothesis with typical examples of temples and other ancient monuments from Pakistan, India and Afghanistan in support.

This work has provided criteria for classification of all ruined temples of the Salt Range and those built along the Indus, as well as one example from Swat. The architectural and decorative elements along with plans and sketches of selected temples at Kafirkot, Bilot, Amb, Malot, Katas, Mari and others in Pakistan are compared with those at Sarnath, Deogarh, Dhank, Bhanasara in India. The author, having a multi-perspective vision as a specialist of Hindu architecture, fine arts, archaeology and art history, has keenly analysed these temples. He has developed a chronological table showing evolution of various

architectural and decorative features that shall be of great help to the scholars for future research in the concerned field.

The author is of the opinion that, although some elements derived from ancient Gandhara were combined with the developing Nagara architectural style of early post-Gupta period, this present group of 'Gandhara-Nagara' temples developed independently, reflecting the creative potential of local artisans and the given environment. This publication is the outcome of collaborative field research conducted in Pakistan as well as scholarship the author gained from the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture* project. The author claims that all these temples, situated in different geo-political zones, are closely integrated within one South Asian architectural tradition, however. The book is recommended to students and scholars conducting teaching and research at the university level.