

Temple as Palimpsest

Icons and Temples in the “Sultanate” Era

Little is known about the history of the roughly triangular region between Ajmer, Delhi, and Ahmedābād during the sultanate period prior to the fifteenth century. What was happening before fifteenth-century constructions of Mewāri glory but after the flurry of temples and inscriptions in Mēdapāṭa between c. 950 and 1000 CE by Guhilas and in Upamāla after the Pratihāras; or in sultanate-era Chhapa, where the Ambikā temple in Jagat lies; or in Vagada in the wake of the Paramāras, where a subsidiary branch of Guhilas sprouted? Where is the “record in stone” architecturally, inscriptionally, visually, and historically?

We could cull the iconography and style of columns incorporated into the Adhai din ka Jhopra mosque in Ajmer to look for fragments that had been made in sultanate-era Mēdapāṭa, Upamāla, Chhapa, and Vagada. Using a more ethnohistorical approach, we could trek to the town of Galiakot (known to Dawoodi Bohra Muslims as Taherabad), where a large Muslim fair is held every year at the medieval tomb of Babji Moula Syedi Fakhruddin Shaheed, who was sent to western Rājāsthān from Gujarat as a representative of the Dai’I in Yemen to convert the Bhils to Islam at the behest of his father, Moulai Tarmal, and met his untimely end in the process. Historically, we could search for inscriptional and architectural records at fortresses of Chittorgarh and Ranthambhor in an attempt to read through all of the colonial and nationalist rhetoric surrounding Rājput glory based on the earliest records that are, nevertheless, post-1500. Architectural palimpsests and inscriptional evidence in this region highlight what left permanent records in stone and what ephemeral traces were lost to history.

I do not wish to reiterate two centuries of architectural historians’ careful study of Ghurid works (often categorized as “Pathan” beginning with James Fergusson,

Ernest Havell, and Percy Brown)¹ or sultanate historians and art historians' decades of work on the Delhi sultanate.² Nor do I intend to recapitulate the *a priori* legends surrounding Alāuddīn Khiljī's 1303 sack of Chittorgarh, critiqued most recently in Ramya Sreenivasan's work on Rani Padmini and my visual critique of popular oral and internet histories.³ Instead, this chapter simply puts forth the largely unpublished fragmentary traces that the period between 1150 and 1400 left on the landscapes of Mewār, Chhapa, and Vagada.

This chapter questions the geographic space in between, which was not part of any solidified dynastic stronghold in this period and remains, for the most part, architecturally unknown. In better-known Upamāla we have traces of active Pāsupata centers, where temples and maṭhas attest to the continued worship of Śiva along the Banas River. In Mēdapāṭa we imagine that the capital was moved from Ahar to Nāgadā sometime in the eleventh century owing to its strategic protection in a natural gorge of the Aravalli Mountains.⁴ At Eklingī in the thirteenth century, the Vindhyaśiṅgi temple was quietly built, and we can assume that the conveniently underground Pāsupata maṭha was still in use. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Jāwar and at Chittorgarh, the Jains, Bhils, and Mers actively ran zinc mines on an industrial scale and began to build temples and temple fortresses. The Jains built wealth and left behind the majority of architectural and inscriptional evidence in sultanate Upamāla, Mēdapāṭa, Chhapa, and Vagada.

Relative silence in the material record from sultanate Mēdapāṭa was met with further production in Chhapa and Vagada to the south and nondynastic production in Upamāla. The fortress temple of Rishabdeo in Delwara near Dūngarpur was used as a place of prayer, a sheltered hideaway, a bank, a community center, and a waypoint in the heart of Bhil country (see fig. 3.20). Twelfth- and thirteenth-century temples dot the landscape of southern Mēdapāṭa, Chhapa, and Vagada. The town of Vatpaḍrak, according to an inscription of c. 1295, was a functioning capital in Vagada before the capital was moved to Dūngarpur. There, in Dūngarpur, the Juna Mahal palace of the thirteenth century still stands as a tribute to the Guhila branch that passed through Jagat, leaving behind the first royal inscription at the site.

If asked to draw a map of twelfth- to fourteenth-century southern Rājāsthān, a cartographer would, I imagine, represent Upamāla by a Pāsupata Śaiva wash; northern Mēdapāṭa would remain relatively gray and unknown; Chhapa and southern Upamāla, including Jāwar and Chittorgarh, would reflect Jain centers of economic influence across a primarily tribal landscape; and Vagada would reflect a buffer zone between the Malwa plateau and the northern branches of the Som and Mahi Rivers, where a lesser Guhila branch flourished. In Vagada, hemmed in from Gujarat, Malwa, and Delhi by sultanates, the Guhilas no longer needed to bicker as often with Solankis, Rāṣṭrakūṭas, Paramāras, Chāhamānas, and other large northern Indian rivals.

During the sultanate period, art, architecture, and inscriptions suggest a primarily tribal zone with the occasional Jain mercantile or tantric monastic communities at waypoints along routes of travel. In contrast to the dramatic tales of generic “Muslim invaders” and the romantic recapitulation of Solomon and Sheba in the Alāuddīn Khiljī and Padmini myths, one can imagine these two decades as a time of relative peace and prosperity for the common people over a wide and sparsely populated area protected in many places by the natural terrain. Political, royal, and imperial powers crossed through these territories, at times with dire consequences, but did not really stop to rule them. English-language histories focus primarily on the infamous raid of the Somnāth temple (in modern Gujarat) and the siege of Ranthambhor/Jālōr (in modern Rājāsthān) between 1290 and 1330. Whereas Alāuddīn Khiljī and Ulugh Khan did pass through Jālōr, Vāṭpaḍrak, and Chittorgarh, they were in transit and did not lay utter waste to large regions since they themselves needed supplies to restock on their way between Delhi and Gujarat.

Many of the temples, palaces, mines, and small fortresses that remain today lie in a smaller region between Jagat and Dūṅgarpur, and between Jālōr and Chittorgarh, with further evidence of building north of Chittorgarh in Uparamāla and south of Chittorgarh right at the confluence of the Mahi and Som Rivers—a sacred *tīrthas* (crossing point) for tribals to this day. At the twentieth-century Mahi dam, with all the modern conflict that arises about tribal rights to natural resources usurped by the state across India, one can imagine the corner of a tribal region where the blood of a Bhil king would literally be required to anoint the southern Guhila to rule from the newly established city of Dūṅgarpur.

Sultanate-era inscriptions on earlier architecture, as well as sultanate-era architecture with later paintings, help to tell the story of what we may loosely call the Mewār Triangle—a geographic gray region in the middle of the red wash of sultanate powers that covered the rest of northern India from ocean to ocean in this period. Between 1200 and 1400 the temples in this region served as catalysts for ritual but also as palimpsests for collective memory and the construction of history. The last of the Guhilas and first of the Sisodias—their dynastic breaks and subsequent legitimacy—can be traced to this murky time and region.

GUHILA AND NON-GUHILA INSCRIPTIONAL EVIDENCE IN THE SULTANATE ERA

Some evidence of Guhila dynastic overlordship does remain in the Nāgadā/Eklingjī region during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries.⁵ Near Udaipur, in 1116, the Paldi inscription makes no reference to the Guhilas (where have they gone? Nāgadā? Jagat?) and names a Solanki (Gujarati) officer as a sponsor of ceremonies. Could the Solanki link indicate a Sompurā-style architecture spreading north into Mewār? Jaitra Singh's Abhilek of 1026 CE at Eklingjī attests to Guhila

dominion at the site of the infamous Pāśupata debates of c. 971, in the heart of the Nāgadā/Eklingī/Ahar seat of their royal tenth-century power. The Kadmal Plate of Guhila Vijaysimha suggests that Guhilas were still powerful enough to be giving land grants as of 1083 CE. East of Chittorgarh, almost directly north of Udaipur in Jaswantgarh, close to Guhila territory in Mēdapāṭa, an inscription of 1167 links the place to the Guhila king Sanwant Singh. Then, in 1222, an inscription on the pillar of the Sūrya temple in Nāgadā lists Jaitra Singh as a Guhila ruler, with an officer Dūṅgar Singh in his service.

A brief overview of post-tenth-century inscriptions confirms a wide variety of dynastic interests in a relatively small geographic region. In Bhīlwāra, directly north of Chittorgarh, we have the Dhanop Abhilek of 1006 CE, which lists a second branch of Rāṣṭrakūṭas. An inscription from c. 1150 mentions the Chālukya Kumarapala at Chitrakoot (Chittorgarh) and is affixed to Sisodia Mokal's temple in Chittorgarh. Prithviraj II ruled over Menāl, according to an inscription of 1169. Nearby in Bijoliā, a Jain inscription of 1170 lists the genealogy of Śākambharī Cāuhāns. At the close of the eleventh century, to the south in Arthuna (Banaswara District), the Paramāras of Vagada held both Vagada and Chhapa in their sway; they were probably feudatories of the Paramāras of Malwa. A Jain temple *praśāsti* from Arthuna foreshadows the mercantile power of Jains in the region and mentions three Paramāra rulers of Vagada, one of whom was named "Chamundrai"—a possible reference to the regionally popular goddess Cāmuṇḍā in 1109 CE. Meanwhile, to the west, on the border of modern-day Gujarat, the Achaleshvar inscription references Paramāras. The Ābū inscriptions of 1208 CE and 1230 CE still list the Paramāras as the rulers in that location.

By the thirteenth century, references to Guhilas seem to record some strife. The Neminath temple *praśāsti* from Ābū gives a genealogy of Paramāra rulers but also explains that in a fight between Guhila Sāmanta Singh and the Solanki ruler Ajayapal, the Paramāra ruler Dharavarsha sided with the Solankis (Gujarat). Further evidence of Guhila strife comes from Chittorgarh, where an inscription of 1265 CE records fighting with the Taruṣkas of Gujarat (to the west) and the Cāuhāns of Śākambharī (near Menāl in upper Upamāla). Nāgadā/Ahar had become a small space squeezed between Ābū to the west and Menāl to the north-east by the multisectarian rivals of the mid-thirteenth century. The exploits of Jaitra Singh are listed along with the mention of a *pratiṣṭhā* in the Kumbhesvara temple in Chittorgarh, where the Guhila king installed a *trimūrti* liṅgaṃ (fig. 4.1). Another Guhila inscription of 1274 CE links the dynasty to the Nagar Brahmins and boasts of Guhila achievements.

In the mid-thirteenth century the Rasia Chhatri Abhilekh lists Bappa as having received a golden staff from Harit Rashi and Guhadatta as the son of Bappa. If we are generous for the time period and assume twenty-year generations, and with approximately ten rulers before the 971 CE Lakuliśa inscription at Eklingī, we are left with a maximum of two hundred years unaccounted for prior to the



FIGURE 4.1. *Trimūrti* lingaṃ, Kumbhēśvara temple, Chittorgarh slide 329. © Deborah Stein.

construction of the Lakuliśa temple. This would place Bappa one generation before Guhadatta, whose earliest reign date could have been 771 if generations were as long as twenty years in political reign dates (most likely they were significantly less). On the inner column of the Ambikā temple in Jagat in 1259 CE, a Guhila lineage of Sāmanta Singh, Jayat Singh, Sihad, and Vijaysing shifts this century of Guhila dominion south from the Nāgadā/Ahar enclave and implies the thirteenth-century importance of the Dūṅgarpur branch of Guhilas.

In this same period an inscription of 1250 CE on a stone pillar of a tenth-century temple in Khamnor, north of Eklingjī in the Mēdapāṭa heartland, suggests that it was one Maharaj Kumar Prithviraj who was sponsoring the worship of Someśwar from a camp at Santavali (fig. 4.2). This crown prince uses neither the title mahārāṇā (Mewār Sisodias) nor mahārawal (Dūṅgarpur, Vagada Guhilas), which suggests

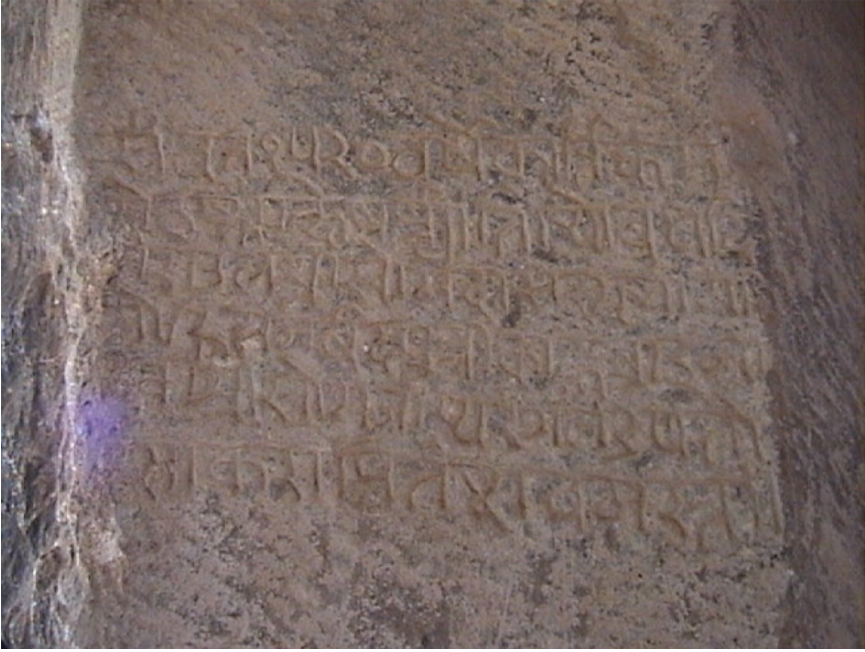


FIGURE 4.2. Inscription on the Chaturbhuj temple, Khamnor. © Deborah Stein.

that he may have been a Cāuhān (a dynasty dominant in Chhapa), although there is no way to confirm this from the brief inscription on the temple. A tenth-century temple with a stylistic affinity to the Mēdapāṭa architectural cohort of temples serves as a palimpsest for dynastic legitimation in the thirteenth century and reiterates iconography found at Āhaṛ and at Ekliṅgī (fig. 4.3). This tenth-century temple is relatively simple in its ornamentation but nonetheless employs auxiliary figures such as guardians of the corners, celestial maidens, and leonine figures to punctuate its recesses and protrusions. The basic architectural style is in keeping with other Māru-Gurjara temples as far south as the Ambikā temple in Jagat and as far north as Ghāṇērāo; however, the style and execution is not on a par with those covered in the chapter on the Guhilas of Mēdapāṭa in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture*. Neither the Ambikā temple to the south in Jagat nor the Cārbhujā temple in Khamnor nor the Jain temple at Ghāṇērāo to the north of the small Guhila area around Ekliṅgī/Nāgadā/Ahaṛ had dynastic inscriptions at the time they were built. The first marks of dynastic rule (Guhila or otherwise) postdate their construction by two centuries.

One can easily imagine part of the appeal of Khamnor to the Guhilas in the sultanate period, beyond its location and antiquity. A four-faced Śiva liṅgaṃ there closely resembles the black schist icon that was installed in the Śrī Ekliṅgī temple



FIGURE 4.3. Four-Faced Śiva icon, c. 975, Khamnor. © Deborah Stein.

in the fifteenth century (see fig. 0.3). Could the Khamnor stone icon—similar but less elaborate than the Ahar icon of the same era—have served as a model for the Śrī Ekliṅgī icon, just a few kilometers south in Kailāśpurī? Dashora Brahmin priests working at the Śrī Ekliṅgī temple today can trace their lineage to Mandasor in Malwa. My close friends and Indian surrogate family once brought this priest's wife's family idol out of storage to show to me in their home in Kailāśpurī.⁶ Her icon, no more than a foot high, was an eight-faced black stone liṅgaṃ—two stories of faces, looking in four directions. My friends told me that in the twenty-first century this style of liṅgaṃ—the same as that preferred by the Newari royals descended from Mewār—is linked to Dashora Brahmins from Mandasor and that this form dates to the eighth century (simultaneous to the Kalyanpur liṅgaṃ made from the same materials). This family claims that Dashora Brahmins have always been the clergy at Ekliṅgī, even before the recent break in lineage at the Ekliṅgī maṭha. Could the Guhila use of tenth-century Khamnor as a sultanate-era palimpsest evoke the same desire to tie dynasty to Pāśupata practices through specific iconographic conventions? Many scholars argue that these four-faced liṅga are too common regionally and temporally to be tied down to a specific branch of Pāśupata Śaivism. Indeed, precedents abound. But it is interesting, in the context of ritual and the record in stone, to imagine the ways in which specific visual forms of icons served as heritage to different constituencies in different eras, whether in the sultanate period or the twenty-first century.



FIGURE 4.4. Chaturbuj icon in mirrored hall, twentieth-century mirrorwork, Khamnor. © Deborah Stein.

The mirrored interior of the inner sanctum at Khamnor (fig. 4.4), with a modern solar clan motif found in the palace calendar in Udaipur, reflects the popularity of this tenth-century site for yet another reason. It is next to Nathdwara and the pilgrimage site of the Battle of Haldighāṭī. Pregnant with meaning and fertile for the construction of Sisodia heritage, these empty grassy fields with tourist signs and small stone markers evoke the story of the infamous horse Chetak, which brought Mahārāṇā Pratap to safety in the sixteenth century. A tenth-century palimpsest of Rājput glory, the temple in Khamnor is just one example of how each sultanate inscription may sit in a site diachronically layered in meaning.

Talawara and Chinch are two early sultanate-era temples in Vagada (modern Banaswara) that attest to the use of temples as palimpsests in fifteenth-century Mewār as well. Although the inscriptional record does not reveal any Sisodia existence, let alone any northern branch of Guhila survival, Sisodia Rājputs did not hesitate to mark the architectural heritage of the region with inscriptions. On a pillar of this *śekhārī*-style temple in Talawara we find a record of how Hammīr Singh died nearby (fig. 4.5). Touted today as the “only Brahma temple in India” by local tourism departments, the brightly painted temple in Chinch references royals in an inscription of 1536 (fig. 4.6). A second inscription, photographed in the field, pushes the date of this temple’s incorporation into Mewār history back to 1463—the height of when Mahārāṇā Kumbhā sat on the throne in Chittorgarh, three years after the completion of the Kīrtistambha.

Inscriptions at the turn of the fifteenth century draw a picture of an enlarged political dominion that was to become Mewār as we know it. An inscription dated



FIGURE 4.5. Śekhārī-style temple, c. eleventh to thirteenth century, Talwara. © Deborah Stein.

to 1418 CE in the town of Desuri, north of Udaipur and southwest of Rajsamand Lake (fig. 4.7), connects Rāṇā Lakha with this town, which spreads the territorial reach of his rule from Jāwar in Chhapa (near Jagat) in the south to farther north in Mēdapāṭa than had previously been recorded under Guhila rule. A Jain inscription of 1421, together with a vigorous temple-building campaign subsequently in Jāwar, suggests that the seeds of Jain financing of the Mewāri state had been sown when this Chhapa region passed from the Mers to the Mewāri rulers. Continued fighting stretched into the early fifteenth century in Mewār.



FIGURE 4.6. Brahma temple, c. twelfth century, Chinch. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.7. Raisamand Lake, c. fifteenth/sixteenth century, south of the Desuri inscription. © Deborah Stein.

ARCHITECTURE, SECT, AND DYNASTY ALONG THE
BANAS: UPARAMĀLA AND MĒDAPĀṬA REGIONS

In northern Mēdapāṭa and northern Upamāla, north of the perpetually contested fortress of Chittorgarh, several iconographic and architectural features found at Menāl, Bāḍolī, and Bijoliā echo some of the improvements found at Ekliṅgī and Jagat in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. These concrete examples suggest a much larger sweep of dynastic affinities, religious praxis, and continuity than previously imagined. Although new building projects waned as the eleventh century unfolded, the Guhilas continued to produce inscriptional records. The Pāśupata sect continued to play an important role in the legitimization of multiple dynasties' rule in this period. In Upamāla a Pāśupata monastery had been thriving for hundreds of years, and a second one had been built at Menāl. Śiva temples were erected at Bāḍolī, Bijoliā, and Menāl. The tantric gods Nateśa (Śiva Lord of Dance) and Cāmuṇḍā (the emaciated stone version of the goddess Kālī) grace multiple walls of these sites along with Lakuliśa, the patron saint of the Pāśupatas, who had manifested in a black stone icon in the Lakuliśa temple, where he had already resided in Ekliṅgī for two hundred years. Beyond the sectarian affinities for the classic tantric couple, found in the widespread Bērujī/Cāmuṇḍā folk worship to this day throughout all regions discussed in this book, architectural features suggest that even though different styles, guilds, or carvers may have been operating in different regions, some basic changes may, in fact, reflect changes in use.

Three case studies from Upamāla suggest that the religious, artistic, performative, visual, kinesthetic, and architectural experiences of viewers from the eleventh to the thirteenth century may have several uncanny affinities to contemporary experience at tantric sites built in the tenth century farther south, at Hita, Jagat, and Āaṭ in Chhapa. The twelfth-century revival in Upamāla at Menāl suggests an important Pāśupata Śaivaite center that had garnered enough political clout to attract royal patronage in much the same way the Lakuliśa temple in Ekliṅgī had done for the Guhilas in c. 971. Monasteries mark this Pāśupata center in Upamāla with images of the Pāśupata saint Lakuliśa—believed to be an incarnation of Śiva—on the lintels of important rooms in the monastery. Holding his signature club, Lakuliśa sits in ithyphallic mediation in a representation no more than a few inches tall (fig. 4.8).

Along the northern east–west axis of Upamāla and Mēdapāṭa, a strong Pāśupata current has already begun to be documented by Tamara Sears and textual scholars.⁷ Some of the iconography found at the temples in Menāl begins to set the visual stage for religious experience in the twelfth century, beyond the boundaries of dynastic powers, who seemed to follow rather than create these centers and movements.

Within a century of when this temple was built, the powerful twelfth-century Cāuhāns were using Menāl as their retreat. The eleventh-century iconographic



FIGURE 4.8. Ithyphallic Lakuliṣa, Menāl. © Deborah Stein.

program of the Mahanaleśvara temple in Menāl displays a fascinating pairing of three deities in relation to Nateśa, the dancing form of Śiva referenced in the infamous tantric Pāśupata inscription from Menāl (fig. 4.9). The maṭha inscription, published elsewhere, focuses on the tantric dissolution of the body to become one with God. One can imagine that the circumambulatory programs established at the site in the same era suggest how that process of syncopated circular movement was supposed to transpire for the average person, who may or may not have been a tantric initiate with a guru.⁸ What impact was the sequence of a tripartite *bhadra* (niche) program supposed to have on the circumambulator? To imagine, let us put ourselves in the position of a *pradakṣinā*, right-handed, clockwise circumambulation.

First in this series we would encounter Cāmuṇḍā (fig. 4.10). Her skeletal form, sagging breasts, trident, and skull staff are easily recognized. The chopper knife in her lower right hand recalls the chopper and blood bowl found in the black schist icon from tenth-century Jagat. This iconographical form was readily found throughout northern India from the ninth century through the twelfth at many famous yoginī shrines, but in the large region of what was to become Mewār, she began to strike out on her own—independent of any particular set of yoginīs or even mother goddesses.⁹ This Cāmuṇḍā raises her pinky to her lips, a tantric



FIGURE 4.9. Mahanaleśvara temple, c. eleventh century, Menāl.
© Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.10. Cāmuṇḍā, Menāl,
slide 390. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.11. Nateśa, Menāl, slide 391. © Deborah Stein.

gesture made to evoke the drinking of blood. All of these elements suggest that Cāmuṇḍā haunts the tantric spaces of cremation grounds, where she has easy access to blood and decaying flesh. Ongoing research is revealing new textual and artistic information about these practices, specifically in millennial India.¹⁰ What is significant at Menāl is how Cāmuṇḍā fits into a tripartite iconographic program. Cāmuṇḍā, Nateśa, and a third figure, possibly Kubera or Andhakāntaka, grace the three main niches on axis with the temple sanctum.

The back *bhadra* niche features the dancing Nateśa, holding his trident and skull staff, akin to the icon from the inner sanctum that was stolen in 1998 and is known from an American Institute of Indian Studies archival photograph (fig. 4.11). Nateśa graces the back wall, the prime space on axis with the main icon, while an unusual form of Śiva digs his trident into a small personification of misknowledge, who in turn seems to plead for mercy. Meanwhile, Andhakāntaka takes a powerful stance, lifting his left leg to stomp on yet another figure of misknowledge (fig. 4.12). The empty sack swings above the head of this fanged, ferocious manifestation of Śiva. Nateśa mediates between these two forms on the temple walls—paired with Cāmuṇḍā (as seen at Arthuna in Paramāra territories in Vagada, far to the south, and in Hita, between Jagat and Chittorgarh on the Uparamāla/Mēdapāṭa east–west border). The divorce of these two key deities from the mothers and the yoginīs is significant. To this day Cāmuṇḍā and Bērujī are widely worshipped by Ādivāsis throughout the Chhapa region. Could the twelfth-century regal Menāl record a trickle down of brāhmanical iconography and tantric practices stemming originally from tribal practices in the region?

Those who had access to the temple may not have had access to even the most public spaces of the adjacent maṭha pictured in figure 4.13. If they did, they may have



FIGURE 4.12. Andhakāntaka, stone,
Menāl. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.13. Maṭha, c. tenth century,
Menāl. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.14. Column detail, c. eighth century, in monastery in Menāl. © Deborah Stein.

spent time appreciating the intricate eighth-century carving of columns reused in the ground-floor courtyard (fig. 4.14). There, visitors may have mingled with clergy and each other, stopping to gaze and appreciate art for art's sake. Here, tucked under a pot overflowing with abundant foliage, an elephant's tusk is sharply carved. The head of the elephant, with his delicate ear, hides in a recess of the deep carving just above the never-ending knots. Iconographic meaning alone was not the didactic singular experience of this or any site; humor, tenderness, and love of ornamentation also leave a record in stone.

At Bijoliā, even though we have a later date of circa the twelfth century, we are luckier in that much of the iconography remains in situ on the Śiva temple (fig. 4.15). Encased in the sparsely spaced, highly aediculated recesses of this intensely detailed architecture, Cāmuṇḍā and Nateśa are paired yet again (figs. 4.16 and 4.17). Similar to the pairing found at Menāl nearby and Paramāra Arthuna far to the south, the style of the Cāmuṇḍā icon resembles the skinny, sinuous depictions of this goddess found across northern India farther east. The dancing Nateśa, however, replicates almost exactly the style, form, and figure of icons found at Menāl, Hita, and Bāḍoli. This suggests a very strong north–south axis for this Nateśa imagery, whereas the sculptural style under the Cāhūhāns shows an affiliation with the east in the goddess sculpture. In contrast, at Hita the affiliation seems



FIGURE 4.15. Temple, c. twelfth century, Bijoliā, Uparamāla. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.16. Cāmuṇḍā on south side, like at Jagat, Bijoliā. © Deborah Stein.

to go west, to Jagat, in the handling of the female form. Bijoliā remains firmly along the Banas corridor. Artistically, we could argue for a second east–west axis to the south along the Mahi and Som Rivers instead. Together these two routes would cut across Uparamāla and Mēdapāṭa to the north and Chittorgarh to the south.



FIGURE 4.17. Natesa (as found at Menāl, in Madhya Pradesh, and at Hita, and in māṭrkā series), Bijoliā. © Deborah Stein.

Moreover, we have an inscriptional record from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that suggests that Jain pilgrims, merchants traveling from Ujjain, and rulers with links to the Cāuhāns of Ajmer all may have laid eyes on this stone building and its iconography. A *liṅgaṃ* contemporaneous with those at Ekliṅgjī and Ahar demonstrates that the *sahasraliṅga* may have been the standard multitude of a thousand faces looking every direction across a wide region in the sultanate era (fig. 4.18). Furthermore, evidence of sacrificial ghee labels in stone provide a tenuous link to fire worship there (fig. 4.19).

In the eleventh century, as the Guhilas continued building at Nāgadā, the Paramāras took Ahar away from them.¹¹ Chittorgarh also came under the dominion of Paramāra king Bhoja. In the twelfth century CE the self-conscious Sisodia construction of history had not yet taken hold, since Guhadatta, not Bappa, was still considered the founder of Mewār and the Guhilas were still in a direct lineage. The Paldi inscription of Guhila Arisimha dates to 1116 CE and was found in front of the Vamesvara Śiva temple in Mewār.¹² This inscription describes poetically the ruler of Mēdapāṭa, named Arisimha; his father, Vijaysimha; and his grandfather Vairisimha in martial terms. The consecration of a Śiva *mūrti* is recorded and the early lineage of Lakuliśa ācāryas is given. Most inscriptions link dynastic lineage, martial exploits, and consecration of religious sites in this way. Another inscription, dated to 1150 CE, describes a ruler's charity to a religious institution as part of his military campaign. According to this inscription, Chittorgarh was an object of



FIGURE 4.18. *Sahasralinga*, c. twelfth to thirteenth century, Bijoliā. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.19. Traces of ritual made permanent in stone, Bijoliā. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 4.20. Vindhyāvāsini temple, c. twelfth century, Kailāśpurī (across from Ekliṅgji).
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victory for the Chālukya king Kumarapala over the ruler of Śākambharī (Sambhar) and the Sapadalakṣa country in the twelfth century.¹³ This Chālukya ruler—much in the same vein as the Guhila leaders—invokes Śiva, names his lineage, and then commemorates his victory in battle. As a celebration of his military success, King Kumarapala donated a village to the Samiddhēśvara temple (later known as the Mokajī temple) at Chittorgarh.¹⁴

One of the only architectural records left by the Guhilas in the twelfth century is the Vindhyāvāsini temple at Ekliṅgji (fig. 4.20). This goddess temple was repaired in 1234 CE.¹⁵ Repair may indicate a Guhila desire to solidify power in the Nāgadā/Ekliṅgji area while threatened by the Paramāra dynasty, which reigned as close as Ahar. The sculptural style suggests the repair involved a significant amount of new carving. A squared and flattened facial type—as if split and opened along the bridge of the nose—breaks with early medieval modes of representation to display one of the earliest examples of what was to become high medieval style in Mewār. Like the Ambikā temple, the Vindhyāvāsini temple is a goddess temple in local style dedicated to a single deity rather than a group of mothers. Her name means “she who dwells in the Vindhya Mountains”; thus, she is named for her geographical location.¹⁶ Ancient texts suggest goddess worship involved animal sacrifice at least as early as the twelfth century and probably centuries earlier.¹⁷ The patronage of this goddess suggests a martial interest in the immediate outcome of events at the dawn of the thirteenth century.¹⁸ Not only was Vindhyāvāsini apotropaic; like

the Purāṇic Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardini and the Gupta-era mātṛkās, she could have served as a metaphor for military victory.

During the thirteenth century, the Guhilas had taken control of Chittorgarh, and the nature of memory had changed. If the precarious power of fortresses, gods, and rulers left its record in stone at Chittorgarh in earlier centuries, the thirteenth century marked a continued struggle for Guhila power and a shift in their memory-making from recording somewhat immediate events to a flourishing of bardic revivalism at Chittorgarh and Kumbhalgarh in the fifteenth century. The same impulses that inspired the archival labeling of every image in the fifteenth-century Kīrtistambha are foreshadowed by the myth of Bappa as the founder of Mewār, replacing the record of Guhadatta as the progenitor of the Guhila line. This moment, marking the transition from the creation of lineage to the reification of lineage, set the stage for history when Bappa was eulogized as the founder of Mewār. He had become the guru who received a sacred right to rule continuously from the eighth century into the present.¹⁹ It is during the late thirteenth century that the earliest record of Guhila dominance over Chittorgarh, dating to 1274 CE, is found.

The thirteenth century was a tumultuous period of many battles with the Solankis of Gujarat, with the Paramāras of Malwa, and with the most powerful ruler of the period, the great Sultan Alāuddīn Khiljī. Mahārāṇā Jaitrasingh Mewār shifted his capital to Chittorgarh and conquered Vagada. The Paramāras of Malwa invaded Vagada and were defeated near Arthuna.²⁰ Jaitrasingh's son, Teja Singh, succeeded before 1252 CE.²¹ One of the only sultanate-era Islamic architectural projects to survive in this region was a bridge built by Khizr Khān (son of Alāuddīn Khiljī) over the Gambhīrī River near Chittorgarh in 1267. The inscription yields some of the only concrete information about Afghan incursions around Chittorgarh.²² In addition to Tejsingh's Jain queen Jayatalladevī, who constructed a Śyam Pārśvanātha temple at Chittorgarh in 1278 CE, many of his Jain ministers also patronized Jain sites at Chittorgarh in the thirteenth century. Tejsingh's son, Samar Singh, came to the aide of the Paramāras of Mount Ābū, where he repaired the maṭha and installed a golden staff in the Achaleshvar temple.²³

The Guhilas were inscribing their hegemony west of Mēdapāṭa at the site of the *agnikūla* origin myth and simultaneously to the east, in the Upamāla region at Chittorgarh. Alāuddīn Khiljī invaded Mewār more than once at the turn of the century. In 1303 CE he set his sights on Chittorgarh, having already devastated Delwara, Ekliṅgī, Ahar, and other parts of Mewār.²⁴ He held a long siege, captured the queen, and tried to blackmail the king. These breaches of honor allegedly led to a veritable bloodbath of mass suicide and murder until Chittorgarh fell under Khiljī and subsequently Tughluq rule until Mahārāṇā Hammīr Mewār was able to return Chittorgarh to Guhila rule by the second quarter of the fourteenth century CE.²⁵ Hammīr's son Kheta seems to have extended the sphere of Mewāri influence at least as far east as the Śaiva center of Menāl by the end of the fourteenth century.²⁶

ARCHITECTURE, SECT, AND DYNASTY ALONG
THE MAHI AND SOM RIVERS: CHHAPA AND
VAGADA REGIONS

From the eleventh century to the fourteenth, Vagada grew in importance and power, leaving an initial trace of contestation on the inner column of the Ambikā temple's maṇḍapa in Jagat. The Vagada region slowly came under Guhila dominion with the eventual outcome of a Guhila branch ruling from Dūṅgarpur.²⁷ With time Mēdapāṭa had become known as Mewār. The southern region of Chhapa changed hands more than once. The region south of Mewār came to be known as Vagada and is distinguished by its own dialect, called Vagari. Vagada comprised conquered Paramāra territories, as well as Chhapa (annexed from Mewār by Sāmanta Singh of the Guhilas of Mewār). According to Mahesh Purohit, the royal historian of the Dūṅgarpur royal family, the Vagada Empire included the present districts of Dūṅgarpur, Banaswara, the southern part of Mewār now known as Chhapa, and a small portion of the Rewa Kantha and Mahi Kantha agencies of Gujarat.²⁸

Leaving traces of new dynastic sources of interest in Sompurā architecture, the Sompurā guild may well have begun to think of the Ambikā *devī* temple in Jagat as the temple of their *kūldevī* in the sultanate period. Several Pāsupata and a few *devī* temple sites dating from the eighth century to the fifteenth fell under the rule of the Vagada Empire, including the Ambikā temple at Jagat. The capital of Vagada was originally at Vaṭpaḍṛak, modern-day Baroda in Dūṅgarpur district.²⁹ Sculpture dating to the eleventh century suggests the Paramāras originally built Vaṭpaḍṛak.³⁰ The Guhilots of the Bhartṛpaṭṭa branch ruled over this territory as feudatories of the Solankis—a dynastic link that may partially account for the rise of the Sompurā architectural guild in Mewār. Mahārawal Sāmanta Singh, of the Guhilots of the Ahir clan, ruled Mewār from 1172 to 1179 CE. He gave his kingdom (Mewār) to his younger brother, Kumar Singh, and went south to rule Vagada. According to Purohit, he killed Surpaldeva of the Guhilots of the Bhartṛpaṭṭa branch and took control of Vaṭpaḍṛak. This new dynasty was founded in 1168–69 CE. On the periphery of two empires, Jagat served as a perfect political marker for Sāmanta Singh to stage his power in 1171 CE.³¹ But the region was hotly contested, and Sāmanta Singh was ousted by Solanki Bhimdev II of Gujarat in 1183–84 CE.³²

The first mention of a ruler in an inscription from Jagat is that of Sāmanta Singh in 1171 CE, a mere two to three years after the founding of his southern empire, having left Mewār to his younger brother. Sūtradhāra Rake tells us that Maharaja Singh fought so bravely in Chhapa that “enemies were shivering and suffering with fever at his mere sight.”³³ In honor of his heroic exploits in battle, this ruler placed a golden finial atop the Ambikā temple. This inscription suggests that Durgā-Mahiśāsūramardini was associated with victory in battle already in the twelfth century.³⁴ The account in the *Devī Māhātmya* of this goddess's cosmic battle served as a metaphor for the battles the Guhilas waged with Afghan, Solanki, Rāṣṭrakūṭa, Paramāra, Cāuhān,

and Mer forces and with each other. Dating to the tenth century CE, the earliest inscription is the first of many to make reference to Ambikā, another name for Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardinī in the *Devī Māhātmya*. By the tenth century, this warrior goddess had gained enough popularity to merit her own stone temple.

The worship of a single martial goddess contrasts with the earlier shrines to the *mātrkā* (mother goddess) Kṛttikās or to the yoginīs that were seen as near as Chandrabhaga and Āmjhara in Rājāsthān and as far as Bhērāghaṭ and Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh.³⁵ Dating to the sixth century, the sculpture of the goddess Aindrī in the Udaipur Archaeological Museum is evidence of early *mātrkā* worship at Jagat. It is possible that sometime between the sixth century and the tenth century a shift took place at Jagat from *mātrkā* worship to a focus on devotion to the more martial Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardinī. This trend continues throughout Rājāsthān over the centuries with many warrior goddess temples being constructed or reconsecrated within actual fortresses.³⁶

The Ambikā temple became a site of highly differentiated feudal rule by the mid-thirteenth century. In 1220 CE Mahasamanta Velhankara of Runija village, the vassal of Ari Sinhadadeva's state, donated a club in the maṭha of Ambikā. The reference to Ari Sinhadadeva is important since it shows that Jagat was considered part of Vagada in the thirteenth century.³⁷ The temple was already being used to stage political power—more specifically, to tie a monastic Śakta community to the Dūṅgarpur branch of the Guhila dynasty. The reference to a maṭha suggests a monastery existed as part of the Ambikā temple compound. No remains of a monastery have been unearthed at present in Jagat, but the southern wall is a prime candidate. Āaṭ (ten kilometers from Jagat) and many other tenth-century sites do have some remains of maṭhas in proximity to the temples. It would be interesting to know how Jagat's Śakta monastery may have compared to Pāśupata monasteries at Āaṭ, Achalgarh, Menāl, or Ekliṅgī; unfortunately, the archaeological record does not yet permit such analysis.

Sinhadadeva's son, Jayat Singh, established a Gaṇeśa in the Ambikā temple in the name of the Guhila dynasty in 1249 CE (fig. 4.21). He also is said to have founded a *vatak* (garden) at the site. The inscriptions from Vatpaḍṛak referencing the rule first of Sinhadadeva and then his son Jayat Singh reveal that the Solankis of Gujarat took control of this capital in 1183–84. Perhaps Mahasamanta Udayakdeva of 1220 CE was a vassal of the Solankis, or else the reference to Sinhadadeva would suggest he was ruling over Vatpaḍṛak at the time. The 1249 CE inscription by Jayat Singh falls fifty-nine years before the capital was moved from Vatpaḍṛak to Dūṅgarpur for safety from powerful Muslim forces in Gujarat, Malwa, and Delhi.

The establishment of a Gaṇeśa statue in the name of the Guhila dynasty suggests a desire to solidify their dynastic right to rule the Chhapa region in the form of a new beginning or fresh start offered by Gaṇeśa, the god of beginnings (fig. 4.21). After alternating periods of plundering and prosperity on the route between Mewār and Malwa or Gujarat, the capital of Vatpaḍṛak was transferred to Dūṅgarpur in 1308 CE. This new capital took the name of the Bhil chieftain,



FIGURE 4.21. *Gaṇeśa*, Ambikā temple, Jagat. © Deborah Stein.

Dungaria, who handed the town over to Mahārawal Bhuchand. Among the archaeological remains in the village of Vaṭpaḍṛak is a lion pedestal very similar to those found at Jagat and at Āaṭ. This piece of sculpture is also missing an icon. An inscription dates the image to 1295 CE, a little more than a decade before the capital was moved. This date corresponds to the time Ulugh Khan's troops were moving through the region on the way to and from Somnāth. Vagada was neither a conquest destination nor a site chosen for iconoclasm nor a rich capital waiting to be looted. It was a largely tribal area with increasing Jain mercantile presence en route between Gujarat, Malwa, and Delhi.

It is difficult to know when the icon from Vaṭpaḍṛak may have been stolen, destroyed, or removed (quite possibly within the past half century—when theft of ancient sculpture has become increasingly problematic as appetite and value have risen on the international art market). None of these pedestals have remained in worship. The frame that once held the main icon in the Ambikā temple continued to be worshipped even after the main icon was stolen, whereas the ancient lion pedestal was split in half by thieves in 2000 and then left behind. Badly damaged, the pedestal was then left outside the temple “for the archaeological department.” At Āaṭ, too, the pedestal was found far outside the compound under a tree, next to one of the many stone *liṅga* and *yoni* that had been put into worship; however, the sculpture was pristine and lacked any vermilion, ghee, or other ritual residue. Hopefully, these sculptures will remain outside the temple precincts, safe (for now) from twenty-first-century looting. The 1295 CE pedestal from Vaṭpaḍṛak is currently cemented in place in a makeshift gallery to the left of a temple entrance. These remains consigned to the archaeological record either are reborn as art in museums or simply cast aside in archaeological sheds.

The physical residue of sultanate-era turmoil on the shifting border regions of Vagada, Chhapa, and southern Mewār gave way to a full-blown fifteenth-century desire to define Sisodia hegemony through quotation of Guhila architecture—whether or not that record matched the histories from the battlefields. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Mewār conducted intense self-fashioning both at Chittorgarh and in Ekliṅgī, marking important loci of military and spiritual powers. Meanwhile, a relative vacuum of power in Chhapa to the south left room for the growth of a multisectarian sacred center owing to innovative industry, a wealth of natural resources, and a relatively safe tract of desert land.

VISUAL NONINSCRIPTIONAL PALIMPSESTS IN THE SULTANATE ERA

Both architecture and painting leave behind traces of links between the visual culture of modern Mewār and this era during the Guhila-Sisodia dynastic rupture and after. A brief look at one painted example and one architectural example demonstrates fascinating links toward the Ekliṅgī temple in Mewār and the Sompurā guild temples of Gujarat and Malwa. Both the Junah Mahal palace and the Deo Somnāth temple are located in Dūṅgarpur, capital of Vagada—led since the twelfth century by an offshoot of the Guhilas of Mewār. I conclude this chapter with these two examples, one painted and one architectural, to see how visual examples can create ties in similar ways to inscriptional evidence found on buildings across a landscape. The importance of Dūṅgarpur and Vagada during the sultanate era is paramount, as is evident in both the inscriptional and the visual evidence found there. The presence of a major Jain temple at Delwara points to a multisectarian situation similar to Chittorgarh to the northeast, one that predates the major Jain



FIGURE 4.22. Śrī Ekliṅgī painting, c. 1700, smaller than four inches square, Juna Mahal, Dūṅarpur. © Deborah Stein.

building campaign at Jāwar in the fifteenth century, and Rāṇakpur subsequently. Secular palaces, such as the sultanate-era Junah Mahal, also served subsequently as palimpsests, and further research could yield an entire study exclusively on this region between Mewār and Malwa in this era.

The thirteenth-century Juna Mahal palace is one of the earliest instances of secular vernacular architecture in this region. Pāśupata maṭhas, tantric Śaivaite maṭhas, and possibly a Śakta maṭha already dotted the landscape from the tenth century on in Āaṭ, Jagat, Ekliṅgī, and Menāl. In the sultanate period Jain fortress temples and community centers were added to the landscape from Delwara (also known in the Bhil community as Keśeriyajī) in Vagada to the south, to the mining town of Jāwar in Chhapa, and to the grand scale of Rāṇakpur to the north in Mewār. Two striking small-scale paintings in this thirteenth-century palace probably date to the seventeenth century and mark this piece of secular vernacular sultanate architecture as a palimpsest for post-fifteenth-century ideas about Guhila identity in Dūṅarpur.

The first painting clearly depicts the four-faced black stone god Śrī Ekliṅgī just as he appears today at Ekliṅgī (fig. 4.22). A haloed mahāraval of Dūṅarpur holds a three-flamed lamp as he performs *arṭhi* (lamp ceremony) while a priest wafts



FIGURE 4.23. Harit Rashi painting, c. 1700, smaller than four inches square, Juna Mahal, Dūṅgarpur.
© Deborah Stein.

this *achi hawai* (lucky air) over the devotees with a flywhisk. Of course, in the painting the viewer is cast as the recipient of the god's open-eyed gaze. How do we know this is Eklingji and not, for example, the four-faced, eighth-century statue of the same color from Kalyanpur, located much closer to Dūṅgarpur than it is to Eklingji to the north? The Kiṣkindā branch of the Guhilas sponsored that statue with four entire bodies. In addition, the text above the painting seems to say "Śrī Eklingji." Based on style alone, the date of the painting seems to be very roughly c. 1700. It is clearly post-1600, because painting prior to that time in this region had significantly less volume and three-dimensional architectural space. For example, the Mewāri-illustrated *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the illuminated *Nīmāt Nāmā* from neighboring Malwa both share this flattened style. The flattened profiles, fish-shaped eyes, and sallow color palette, however, seem to evoke a period before Mughal, early modern European, and colonial painting had been introduced, with their proclivity for volumetric and naturalistic portraiture. Could this painting have served as a tool for Dūṅgarpur Guhila *darśan* with the ruler of Mewār? Can a painting be a "portrait" of a deity, or does a reproduction clone the ontological being of the icon? Either way, this small image clearly references Śrī Eklingji in the sultanate-era home of the Dūṅgarpur branch of the Guhila dynasty.

Even more captivating in the reconstruction of the Mewār-Dūṅgarpur relationship at the sultanate-era Juna Mahal palace is a second painting that seems to date to the same period as the first and may quite possibly even be by the same hand (fig. 4.23). This time a specific shrine with icons of the folk deity Kagil in the form of



FIGURE 4.24. Deo Somnāth temple, c. twelfth century, near Dūṅgarpur. © Deborah Stein.

a snake outside the gates of Ekliṅgī is referenced. There, to this day, stands a small spot where the indexical trace of the Bappa Rāwal–Harit Rashi story is said to have transpired. How fascinating to find an illustration of this specific site from Ekliṅgī, together with a traditional depiction of the sage Harit Rashi in his Sanskritic boat and Mahārāṇā Bappa, his hands clasped in prayer to the patron sage of the dynasty—a Pāśupata ācārya (teacher), and probably a Nagar Brahmin, a Dashora, at that. A label in a yellow lozenge makes one wonder if these two paintings were sent as a gift from Mewār to Dūṅgarpur and then were affixed to the sultanate-era marker of the founding of the town of Dūṅgarpur for posterity. Perhaps, then, c. 1700 is too early a date. This kind of visual narrative may well date to the same era as local historians Nainsi or Śyāmaladās Sr. and their famous early modern histories of Mewār.

A second piece of architecture on a grand scale near Dūṅgarpur may predate the Juna Mahal palace by as much as a century. The monumental two-story architecture of the Deo Somnāth temple may date to the twelfth century and has served as a Sompurā architectural guild model over the years (fig. 4.24). This is one of the largest, if not the largest, Śiva temples in this region—larger than any other temple discussed in this book, with the exception perhaps of the Jāwar Mātā temple, which it resembles. Both the Śrī Ekliṅgī temple and the Jāwar Mātā temple seem inspired by the maṇḍapa gallery, nine bays wide and three stories high. The rear of the temple is crowned by a *nagara* spire, which, from inside the temple, leaves a visible trace of its construction. A cavernous *garbhagrha* (womb chamber) where the original icon would have once stood lies beneath an open vault, towering above as overlapping lintels increasingly diminish in diameter, soaring upward. The deeply carved underground level of the inner sanctum further emphasizes this ascendance. Although the scale and design of the temple seem to indicate the

larger-scale congregational temples of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, perhaps the open three-story design could have served an added benefit of defense. With the height of a watchtower and enough open galleries for an entire army to hide within and to shoot from, perhaps this design reflects a post-Vatpadṛak construction date—a time when one capital had just fallen and Dūṅgarpur was just being founded. But with no other records of military incursion, this design more likely reveals a certain stylistic indebtedness to local Gujarati idioms, such as the already exuberant and impressive architecture of the Solankis found in nearby Modhera, where the temple was built in 1024 CE.

Because none of the inscriptions in the Deo Somnāth temple seem to predate 1424 CE, a time when Jāwar was bustling nearby, this Śaivaite shrine may have a date later than the twelfth-century one proposed on the website of the Archaeological Survey of Jaipur Circle.³⁸ The interior seems so intricate, so delicately carved, so large, that the early date is initially hard to believe architecturally. Even large tenth-century monasteries never seem to have exceeded two stories. This site seems to evoke the scale of the coastal five-story, sixteenth-century Viṣṇu temple in Dwarka (Gujarat), whereas the twelfth-century Jain architecture at the sultanate-era Mount Ābū does not begin to accomplish the same structural feat as the Śaivaite Deo Somnāth temple. But carving at Mount Ābū seems to surpass that found at Deo Somnāth in both depth and intricacy. Although the exact dating of the Deo Somnāth temple remains beyond reach without ample time to translate and sort through a vast amount of largely unpublished epigraphy that covers the temple interior, the temple does suggest a Gujarati link to Sompurā masons at a time when Vagada was under the control of a lesser Guhila branch in the very beginnings of the sultanate era. The later Guhila-Sisodia appropriation of Sompurās as state architects could suggest inspiration from sultanate-era time spent along the southern stretches of the Mahi and the Som in areas linked to geographically nearby Solanki architectural heritage.