

Temple as Ritual Center

Tenth-Century Traces of Ritual and the Record in Stone

A diffusion of artistic style in stone leaves a trace of the production of Guhila dynastic identity in tenth-century northwestern India. Both in the twenty-first century and in the premodern period, boundaries are spaces of negotiation—fruitful places of contestation in the multivalent production of culture. Homi Bhabha has described this interruption of binary division as “a liminal form of social representation, a space that is internally marked by cultural difference and heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense cultural locations.”¹ Out of fewer than a dozen temple sites that share a cultural affinity in the Mēdapāṭa region, Jagat and Ekliṅgī offer a complex web of competing interests in the nascent phases of Guhila cultural production. Art historians of South Asia used to rely on dynasty to define entire periods of cultural production. This study seeks to probe the birth of a regional style to move beyond dynastic style into some of the complex political, religious, and social negotiations in the initial making of Guhila hegemony and contemporaneous competing identities in the medieval period.

In the wake of imperial Pratihāra overlordship, the Guhila dynasty used architecture to define the center of its kingdom, but not all temples in the Mēdapāṭa region or stylistic cluster made reference to any dynasty at all. Described as impenetrable in later Mughal chronicles, the Aravalli mountain range sheltered a small temple site where ash-covered ascetics met Jains and Buddhists to debate. The inscription on the Śaivaite temple—not surprisingly—claims victory for the Śiva-worshipping Pāśupata sect, while inside, a larger-than-life schist sculpture of their patron saint, Lakulīśa, stares back at those who cross the threshold into the dark, empty hall of the stone building today. This inscription and temple cluster



FIGURE 5.1. Woman pours wine into a cup held by a man Ambikā temple, Jagat (detail). © Deborah Stein.

at Ekliṅgī is exceptional in its dynastic reference to the Guhila lineage in tandem with the sectarian prowess of the Pāśupatas.

At least two hundred kilometers southeast of this ancient Pāśupata center lies a tenth-century goddess temple. Tantric iconography reveals one of the most important goddess temples in regional style—that is not a yoginī shrine but a temple dedicated to the goddess in the form of other Śaivaite and Vaiṣṇavaite shrines. The tenth-century inscription does not refer to a dynasty; it was through regional style and iconography that the architects articulated power in the hilly tracts of the southern Chhapa territory. Circles of ferocious yoginīs—found throughout middle and southern India in the eighth to twelfth centuries—yielded to the square order of North Indian *nagara* temple style in Mēdapāṭa and Upamāla regions along the east–west flow of the Banas and Mahi Rivers. There, on the three outer walls of temple sanctums, powerful tantric goddesses such as Cāmuṇḍā and Kṣēmaṅkarī were often paired with each other or with Śiva in the form of the dancing Nateśa. Tantric references to sacrifice abound, especially at the Ambikā temple in Jagat, where libations flow freely in stone reliefs (fig. 5.1),² and the importance of sacrifice is underscored in the multiscenic way the Devī Māhātmya story has been told in a repetitive sequence on the three exterior walls of the sanctum.

Tenth-century data reveals striking parallels in political uses of sites that nevertheless spent centuries at a time abandoned. The history of ritual and renovation both foreshadows future constructs of the temples and yet distinguishes the unique historicity of the period in which they were made. The Guhilas sought to reify their power at Ekliṅgī, just as unknown patrons canonized regional practices in stone iconography and architecture in the heart of Chhapa at Jagat, a religious nexus of Śaiva-Śakti tantra. Comparative examples from the Mēdapāṭa region

(where the Ekliṅgī temple lies) and from Chhapa (where the Ambikā temple is situated in the village of Jagat) suggest a budding regional style used both for the Guhila dynasty's medieval projects and for sectarian legitimacy for newly emerging forms of populist worship of Śiva in the Pāśupata forms of Nateśa/Bērujī, four-faced liṅga, and Lakuliśa; in the mantric and tantric forms of Kṣēmaṅkari and Cāmuṇḍā; and in the Purāṇic form of Durgā-Mahiṣāsura-mardini represented particularly in her role as sacrificer.

The Lakuliśa and Takṣakēśvara temples at Ekliṅgī and the Ambikā temple at Jagat are just a few of the many temples built in Mēdapāṭa in the second half of the tenth century CE. Despite the rich architectural record, the inscriptional record leaves many questions. A lintel incorporated into the Saranesvara temple next to the *chhatra* (dome-shaped pavilion) of Ahar records the building of a Viṣṇu temple between 951 CE and 953 CE, during Allaṭa's reign.³ This record cements a difference of approximately 290 years between Aparajīta's rule, recorded at Nāgadā, and Allaṭa's reign in the same region. Over the course of almost three centuries, only ten rulers are recorded in Allaṭa's inscription, none of whom seem to have left their own mark for the historical record. Some of these rulers are recorded in later inscriptions, such as the reference to Simha found in an inscription dating to 1258 CE at Chittorgarh. Guhila ties with the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty to the south of Mēdapāṭa through a marriage alliance of Allaṭa's predecessor reflect Guhila freedom from Pratihāra overlordship.

Ritual practice in Mēdapāṭa in the late tenth century precedes almost all of the surviving tantric manuscripts, and no texts dating to the tenth century can be traced to any temples in Mēdapāṭa. The earliest known tantric text in South Asia dates to the ninth century—a powerful parallel to architectural changes begun in the eighth century.⁴ The extensive artistic production that marks this era parallels the expansion of tantric forms of worship subsequently recorded by famous theoreticians such as Abhinavagupta, who was born in 960, within a year of when the Ambikā temple in Jagat was completed in 959 or 961, depending on how one reads the inscription.⁵ The pattern of ritual, then temple, then text must have been repeated multiple times across millennial India as the continent shifted toward the intimate method of using sequences of gesture (*mudras*) and voice (*mantras*) to awaken deities in various parts of the body or in a stone icon. Visualizing corporeality became a quintessential element of worship across any sectarian or regional divide, and these methods traveled east along syncretic pathways that leave traces geographically as far as Japan and temporally as far as the present day.

A fifty-year period of intense building recorded political information on Guhila identity and self-definition through style and iconography, and artistic production left traces of how worship took place. The stone provides a record of animal sacrifice, mantric worship, *pūjā* (especially for Śiva liṅga), and the inclusion of local tantric cults into the brāhmanical mainstream. The shift toward more complex temple programs also suggests a move toward a wider more popular audience and away from the Vedic sacrificial tradition of the Brahman elite.

The decline in Pratihāra power led to a flurry of Guhila-sponsored building activity during the second half of the tenth century CE.⁶ The Surya temple at Tūṣa, the Pippalāda Mātā temple at Unwās (959 CE), the Ambikā temple at Jagat (961 CE), the Lakuliśa temple at Ekliṅgī (971 CE), the Datoresvara Mahadev temple at Śobhagpura (c. 950–75 CE), the Chaturbhuj temple at Īswāl (c. 975 CE), the Sās-Bahu temples at Nāgadā (c. 975 CE), and the Mirāñ temple at Ahar (c. 975 CE) provide a strong link between political dominion and the desire to build monuments to power in the form of religious charity.⁷ But evidence of Pratihāra projects suggests a tantric regional shift across Mēdapāṭa and Upamāla in the tenth century. It is possible that the Guhilas drew on a regional iconographic paradigm rooted in ritual shifts across northwestern millennial India to boost their legitimacy. Many parallels between the Pratihāra site of Bādoli and the Ambikā temple in Jagat are most striking in a tenth-century context. Beyond any direct Guhila record, no fewer than ten kilometers from the Ambikā temple in Jagat, the previously unknown Śaivaite site of Āaṭ not only remaps past understandings of these regions along fluvial nondynastic lines, as seen in chapter 1, but this incredible temple cluster also yields fascinating data about tantric Śaivism in millennial northwestern India.

We have long thought of the Mēdapāṭa cohort as Guhila temples, but not all of the temples built in the span of c. 950 to c. 975 bear dynastic inscriptions—despite a relatively small geographic area for these stylistically similar stone monuments. The Pāśupata-Śiva saint Lakuliśa was not the only source of power for the Guhilas. This dynasty sought to underscore its growing autonomy through multisectarian architecture. So how did the temples in Mēdapāṭa leave traces of ritual and renovation as a permanent record in stone?

Whether or not the Guhilas served as the god Ekliṅgī's diwāns in the tenth century is uncertain. The Śri Ekliṅgī temple and the four-faced icon it housed had not yet been made. Four old thousand-faced liṅga called *sahasraliṅga* may well date to the tenth century and are currently housed behind the Śri Ekliṅgī temple in an inconspicuous spot (fig. 5.2). They are similar to this image of a *sahasraliṅgaṃ* found at Āhar (fig. 5.3), which suggests this was a common iconographical depiction in this time and place. These liṅga also resemble *sahasraliṅga* found at Achalgarh, a prime site for the construction of Sisodia/Guhila dynastic legitimacy. The architecture and inscription of the Lakuliśa temple at Ekliṅgī suggests that the dynasty had already defined its power via Pāśupata-Śaivism from the location of Ekliṅgī/Nāgadā in the second half of the tenth century.⁸ In contrast to the Guhila relationship between dynastic and Pāśupata lineage established in an inscription near the seat of their power, a tenth-century inscription at Jagat makes no direct reference to the elite power of dynasty, clergy, or deity.⁹

Ornamentation in the tenth century was often a direct reflection of kinesthetic uses of the early medieval temple. This idea that the cadence, rhythm, speed, distance, and experience of iconography can be so tightly controlled by the temple



FIGURE 5.2. Old thousand-faced *līṅga* called *sahasralīṅgas* may well date to the tenth century and are currently housed behind the Śrī Ekliṅgī temple in an unnoticeable spot (yoni modern era), stone, Śrī Ekliṅgī temple compound lower level. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 5.3. *Sahasralīṅga*, c. tenth century, Āhar.

wall requires a discussion of ornament specifically in relation to the temple wall. Many theories abound for why and how temple walls look the way they do. Here I would like to return to ritual to focus above all on the relationship between the wall and its physical impact on the kinesthetic experience of circumambulation. What was the relationship of tantra, mantra, and *yantra* in the tenth century? Does it have any relation to the complex twenty-first-century *pratiṣṭhā* (installation) ceremonies



FIGURE 5.4. *Sadāśiva* head, stone, c. 500–600 CE, *thakur*'s compound, Rawala, Jagat. © Deborah Stein.

witnessed at the Ambikā temple or the Śrāvan rituals at the Śrī Eklingī temple? Rather than rely on the point of origin as a mythic space of temporal authenticity, the history of ritual and the record in stone in tenth-century Mēdapāṭa reveals multiple resonances with the present—echoes, rather than unbroken chains of continuity, that can be used and enjoyed or misused and abused by any person in the present who visits, experiences, or reimagines these archaeological sites.

VISUALIZING LOCAL LIṄGA IN EARLY MEDIEVAL MĒDAPĀṬA

A Sadāśiva head dating approximately to the sixth century found in the *thakur*'s compound at Jagat (fig. 5.4) suggests that the four-faced liṅgaṃ was popular in Chhapa even before the Guhilas of Kiṣkindā created the famous four-faced (and four-bodied) liṅgaṃ from Kalyanpur (fig. 5.5) in the eighth century.¹⁰ In addition



FIGURE 5.5. Four-faced (and four-bodied) lingaṃ from Kalyanpur, black schist, c. eighth century. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 5.6. Stone *lingaṃ* at Ahar, c. tenth century. © Deborah Stein.

to sculptural programs on the exterior architecture of temples, some interior icons point to a desire to make certain aspects of worship permanent. Several smaller forms of *linga* surround a four-faced, tenth-century stone *lingaṃ* at Ahar (fig. 5.6). Four stone *yoni* platforms provide bases for different groupings of miniature *linga* placed below each face of the main *lingaṃ*. Seen as the viewer is facing the sanctum, four spheres with a fifth sphere on top share a common iconography with other tenth-century sites such as Khajurāho. The idea of four visible faces of Śiva complemented by the invisible fifth face on top is already articulated in the large stone *lingaṃ*. Years of worship have worn an indentation where the flower petals sit atop the *lingaṃ* in the photograph (fig. 5.7). On the opposite side of the *lingaṃ* the five-sphere form is repeated seven times on a platform. The remaining two platforms display further miniaturized multiples of the same theme. The placement of multiple *linga* on alternating scales suggests meditational practice, more specifically the worship of Sadāśiva with four distinct manifestations and the fifth omnipresent emanation on top issuing forth infinitely upward.

Representation of these philosophical ideas and ritual practices in stone implies a desire for permanence and the exteriorization of meditational practice. During the month of Śrāvan the priests at Ekliṅgī make tiny clay *linga* very similar to these forms. The tenth-century sculpture could be understood as a record of ritual since it makes permanent in stone what is ephemeral in clay. This tenth-century example does not yet exhibit the desire to defy death through the production of



FIGURE 5.7. Detail flowers atop Stone linga at Ahar. © Deborah Stein.

historical posterity. This desire, produced through the self-conscious production of memory, begins in the thirteenth century. The lack of any written labels implies that practitioners already know the sculptures' identities, and the sculptures are not an intentional record for future generations. Nevertheless, this stone residue of ritual does leave a record—a stone link between past ritual and present practice.

Although we have neither a *sahasralinga* nor five-faced linga in situ in the village of Āaṭ, the fragments of Śaiva tantra found there are fascinating to say the least. A five-faced clay Śiva linga is housed in the *thakur's* compound in Jagat, but there are no original linga in Āaṭ. South of Eklingji, just a few kilometers away from Jagat, the famous five-faced and five-bodied black schist Śiva linga icon in Kalyanpur remains perhaps the most impressive and earliest of this genre, dated to the eighth century and linked to an off-branch of a fledgling branch of the Guhilas of Kiṣkindā, a dynasty that subsequently petered out long before the Guhilas of Eklingji.

At a distance of no more than ten kilometers from each other, and more than two hundred kilometers north of Arthuna, a cluster of Śaiva-Śakti sites suggest that there was something different about goddess worship around AD 960 in Chhapa and Mēdapāṭa from that in the yoginī shrines found all over North India from the same period. The archaeological remains of a (Pāsupata? Śaiva?) maṭha and no fewer than thirteen temples at Āaṭ and the unexcavated southern wall of what I presume to be the only remaining example of an early medieval Śakta maṭha in Jagat reveal a place where tantric worship was supported by large, two-story

monasteries architecturally similar to those founded by the Mattamayūras in Madhya Pradesh. Rather than Śaiva-Siddhanta as the main sectarian orientation, it appears that the Āaṭ/Jagat tantric center was interested in both the practice of the five Ms, as depicted on the column in figure 5.8 that depicts a woman drinking blood or wine in the upper register and two people engaged in rear-entry intercourse while leaning on a bed in the lower register (fig. 5.8), and a Śakta focus on the personification of mantric worship in the form of Kṣēmaṅkarī.

We can read architecture for ritual, as we have with temple programs, but can we read iconography as narrative of practice, myth, or metaphor? What can we glean from the archaeological record when the walls no longer stand? In the absence of a temple program we are often left with style and, if we are lucky, a ground plan. At Jagat we find references to tantra in the ritual bowl of blood or wine (fig. 5.1); how then should we interpret what we find at Āaṭ? Limited resources, such as a figure identifiable as either Jain or Lakuliśa, can be strung together with copious tantric imagery and the remains of a multicelled building to suggest the site may have been a retreat for Pāśupata-Śaiva tantric practitioners. Differences between Jagat and the site of Āaṭ hint at a cultural border for the Guhilas of Mēdapāṭa. The subsequent inclusion of Jagat within the southern territory of Mewār centuries later implies the importance of this site for Guhila dominion at the time of a dynastic split. The storage of Āaṭ's inscriptional evidence by the House of Dūṅgarpur suggests the site's ties to the south in Vagada and its importance for this offshoot of the Guhila dynasty.

The highly inaccessible archaeological site in the nearby village of Āaṭ has never been published in English.¹¹ The well-preserved *torāṇa* (gate) contrasts with the temples, which are reduced to their foundations, with the exception of one that has been very heavily reconstructed with modern materials. To the side of the main complex are the ruins of a monastery (fig. 5.9). In addition to these architectural remains, a few exquisitely preserved examples of ancient sculpture remain along with some fragments of stone inscriptions.

At Āaṭ the plump Gaṇēśa in *tribhanga* (three-bend) pose (fig. 5.10) dates roughly to the late tenth century but differs stylistically from a mid-thirteenth-century sculpture from Jagat, not even ten kilometers away (see fig. 4.21). Historically linked by a river, these two sites from the same era nevertheless differ in some interesting ways. Whereas the Ambikā temple at Jagat seems to fit stylistically rather squarely into the Mēdapāṭa School of architecture, Āaṭ's remains share much with the site's southwestern counterparts in Anarta. Gaṇēśa's torso is even shorter and stockier than expected at a site such as Jagat or even Tūṣa. Jagat was probably built by a guild different from the Tūṣa-Nāgadā-Ekliṅgī guild. Āaṭ may have been built by the same guild responsible for Jagat, despite the fact that Āaṭ shares even less than Jagat with tenth-century buildings of Mēdapāṭa to the northwest. There is not enough evidence to argue that Jagat was considered part of Guhila territories or that Āaṭ was not. What we do discover at Āaṭ is in the tenth-century region of



FIGURE 5.8. Upper register of *torana* column detail: eating or drinking something. Wine? Blood? Lower register couple turn to kiss during intercourse from the rear, c. tenth century, Aat. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 5.9. Monastery, c. tenth century, Āṭa. © Deborah Stein.

Chhapa, more than one style coexisted within a distance easily traveled on foot in less than a day.

The differences with Jagat are not limited to style. Many have suggested that the Ambikā temple is tantric, yet the references to tantra at Āṭa are not limited to rumor of “bloody ritual” or small-scale figures holding a fish or a bowl of wine.¹² The gateway at Āṭa makes sex explicit, as seen in figure 5.11, a frieze of a woman with two men, located exactly in the middle of the base of the doorframe, where one would lift one’s leg to cross over into the temple compound. Whether or not one is to understand the open gate of the woman welcoming two men as an architectural pun or as a literal depiction of temple activity will remain buried in history.¹³ This explicitly sexual scene is not the only one depicted on the *toraṇa*. The small frames of sculpture include couples kissing or engaging in intercourse standing up, a man on top of a woman lying in a bed, and a woman simultaneously having oral and vaginal intercourse. The form of the *toraṇa* is more similar to one found at Tērahī in Madhya Pradesh than to the *toraṇa* at Nāgadā. The content is also similar to the tantric series of ferocious *dākinī* (tree spirit) depicted at Tērahī. As evidenced by *sūtradhāra* inscriptions and descriptions of *yatras* (pilgrimages) in texts, we can safely assume that religious pilgrims, ascetics, teachers, masons, scribes, and others responsible for the creation of temple carving could travel, as well as have access to several prototypes available in manuscripts.¹⁴



FIGURE 5.10. Gaṇeśa, c. 950–960, quartzite, Āaṭ. © Deborah Stein.

The remains of a vernacular piece of architecture suggest there was a maṭha at Āaṭ (see fig. 5.9). The largely unexcavated structure could also have been a *dharmśālā* (guesthouse). Either way, a residence such as this one suggests guests could have rested on their journeys whether traveling by waterway or by land. Similar structures remain standing as far as Madhya Pradesh and as close as Menāl in the Upamāla territories.¹⁵ Many of these monasteries were Śaiva-Siddhanta centers, whereas the closest well-preserved monastery found at Menāl shared the Guhila dynasty's sectarian orientation of Pāśupata-Śaivism.¹⁶

Fragmented inscriptions, ruined architecture, and few remaining sculptures do not leave enough behind to determine whether Āaṭ was Śaiva-Siddhanta or



FIGURE 5.11. Sexual intercourse. Woman astride two men on a bed, faces outward on the doorstep over the threshold *torāṇa* gate into the site of Āṭṭ. © Deborah Stein.

Pāsupata. Sculptures of Śiva and Pārvatī as well as Cāmuṇḍā to the left of the main sanctum of the main shrine suggest a Śaiva/Śakti site (figs. 5.12 and 5.13). A large Durgā-Mahiṣāsura-mardīnī covered in foil provides a theological link to the Ambikā temple, if not a stylistic one (fig. 5.14). Sculptures such as a Narasimha in the *torāṇa* and the foundations of no fewer than eight or nine temples suggest the site was very likely multisectarian. Āṭṭ's site plan resembles the extensive plan of Nāgadā on a much smaller scale. Sculptural fragments corroborate the idea that the site may have been multisectarian. Inside the sanctum, sculptures of Viṣṇu, Saraswatī, and Pārvatī sitting on Śiva's lap are propped up next to black stone images of Kagil, the folk snake deity.

Outside the compound remain two important pieces of sculpture and an inscription. The inscription is quite worn, but Vikrama-Saṃvat 1235 or 1285 dates the inscription to the late twelfth to early thirteenth century CE. A large lion base and serpent-hood awning (fig. 5.15) may have framed the main icon. The lion base is similar to the one that once supported the main icon at Jagat. If we accept Dhaky's argument, then we would have yet another example of Kṣēmaṅkarī as seen at Lodravā, Bāḍoli, Unwās, Jagat, and on a smaller scale at Tūṣa.¹⁷ The lion pedestal may be a stylistic feature of deity pedestals in this period rather than the marker of a particular god. Saraswatī and a male figure holding a lasso and an elephant goad also grace the bottom of the pedestal. This form of lion pedestal



FIGURE 5.12. Śiva and Pārvatī, c. tenth century, quartzite, Āraṇyaka. © Deborah Stein.

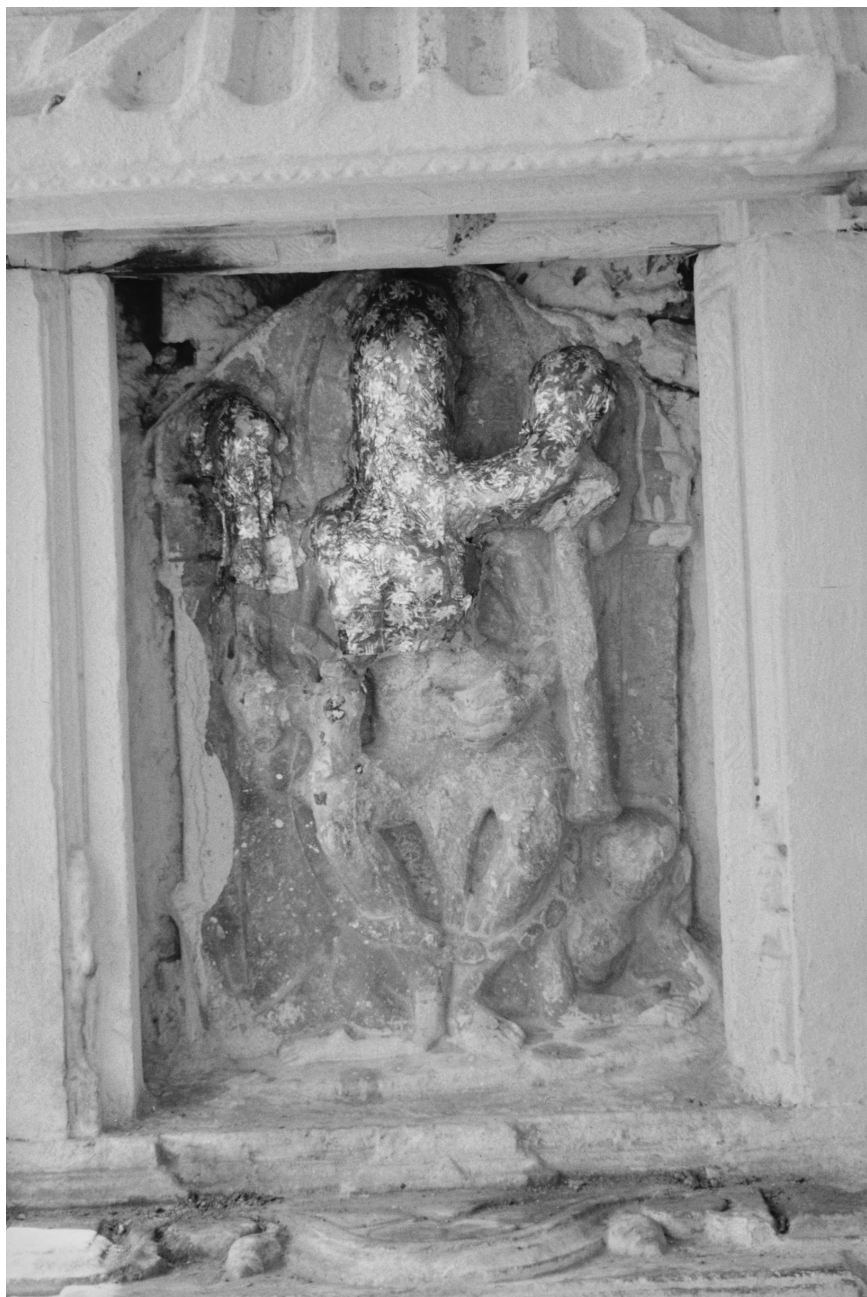


FIGURE 5.13. Cămuṇḍā in situ, c. tenth century, quartzite, Āṭa. © Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 5.14. A large Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardīnī covered in foil provides a theological link to the Ambikā temple, if not a stylistic one, c. tenth century, Āṭ. © Deborah Stein.

with a wheel at the center is typical both in Mēdapāṭa and Chhapa, as well as to the south in Vagada. The regional choice of the two-lion pedestal is fairly common.¹⁸ The lion pedestal is found at both Jagat and Āṭ. These sites share this motif in the form of pedestal fragments separated from their stolen icons, so there is no way of knowing whether Kṣēmaṅkarī originally topped these pedestals or whether it was a standard form used for various deities.¹⁹ A sculpture of Kṣēmaṅkarī from Lodravā proves she was a popular manifestation of the goddess in the tenth century outside Mēdapāṭa as well (fig. 5.16).



FIGURE 5.15. A large lion base and serpent-hood awning, [Jaina frame for Pārśvanāth? Gaja-Lakṣmī? Or Kṣēmaṅkarī], pedestal with two lions and a suggestive diamond lotus framed in the center. © Deborah Stein.

Given their squared shoulders and triangular torsos, these two figures appear to be Jain. In the second sculptural fragment, the empty hood of a multiheaded serpent may indeed suggest the piece once housed a sculpture of the Jain *tīrthaṅkara* (saint) Pārśvanāth. Unfortunately, the figures display none of Lakuliśa's attributes, such as a staff or an ithyphallic representation, to confirm Pāśupata identification. This same figure is found twice on the lintel and again on an inscribed fragment of a doorframe nearby. Fragments leave traces of style, bits of broken iconography, only to frustrate the gaze on the programmatic whole.

Sculptural fragments and a grid of temple bases in Āaṭ sit as a reminder of a tantric cult that once flourished south of the well-traveled border of Mēdapāṭa and the stylistic limits of the Guhila legacy. One can imagine both Āaṭ and Jagat as waypoints for travelers and monastic residential centers with a regional religious focus distinct from the maṭhas of Madhya Pradesh and Menāl yet potentially in a pilgrimage network with other monastic sites.

ALAMKĀRA: RITUAL, ORNAMENTATION, AND THE TEMPLE WALL

The liminal region of Mēdapāṭa demonstrates a hybridity that does not reflect a model of evolution or progress. In Mēdapāṭa two forms coexist, with the logically



FIGURE 5.16. Kṣēmaṅkarī, c. tenth century, Lodravā. © Deborah Stein.

earlier type—characterized by sparse sculpture limited to *bhadrās* and the lack of auxiliary sets of generic semidivine forms—postdating the more “advanced” formula, which included *dikpālas*, *surasundarīs*, and *vyālas*.²⁰ This earlier type subsequently eclipses the later one (Takṣakēśvara and Śivēśvara at Eklingī, Śobhagpura, Tūṣa, and Jagat) when the female attendants are left out at Unwās, Nāgadā, and Ahar. The increase in semidivine occupants of the exterior protrusions that correspond axially to the corners of the inner sanctum and to the vulnerable corners of the temple exterior in need of protection articulates a type of practice also found in prayer manuals.²¹ These texts describe mantras and mudras used to invoke deities. Some of these mantras are semantic, and others are *bīja* mantras (seed syllables), with numinous power but no literal semantic meaning.

While the secret prayer manual used by the Pāsupata priests at Ekliṅgī in 2002 may be different from Śaiva-Siddhanta eleventh-century texts from South India, such as the *Somaśambhupaddhati*, the structure and goals of this type of worship remain quite similar, as does the sequence of action.²² Food rites play an important role in defining the narrow relationship between the physical body and the subtle body. In fact, most tantric texts also prescribe satiation with food and drink before any further physical action or philosophical meditation takes place.²³ The order of ritual at Ekliṅgī and in ancient texts consists of ablutions, food, study, and sleep. Like the official prayer manual at Ekliṅgī, the ancient *Somaśambhupaddhati* prescribes the following:

1. Preparation, consisting of mantras to prepare the instruments of worship
2. *Upācāryas*, or homage rendered
 - a. Make a throne for the god
 - b. Invoke Śiva on throne, construct a body for Śiva's spirit
 - c. Give him organs and instruments of power: this is Sadaśiva
 - d. Offer him water and flowers
 - e. Offer oil massage, sandalwood, dress him with flowers, clothes, jewelry, ending with incense and lights
 - f. Then construct a *darbar*, or court, with three circles
 - g. Once the court is established, offer incense and light, then food
 - h. *Japa*, mantras, bow down, then circumambulate²⁴

This embodied approach to worship allows the practitioner to use the icon as a focus for the mental invocation of the deity in a concrete material location. Medieval temples in India reflect this shift toward the growing importance of contextualizing deities and their environments corporeally within the worshipper, the icon, and by using architecture as a focal point for these inner experiences during circumambulation. Of course, not all practitioners would have known these texts, would have circumambulated with such detailed practice, or would even have been initiated into some of the tantric rites prescribed in texts we can easily read in translation today; but one can easily imagine that the team of architects, masons, and patrons would have had access to religious texts—especially at monastic sites like Ekliṅgī and Jagat, where clergy may have resided just steps away from the temple under construction.

Medieval written works, such as the *Somaśambhupaddhati* quoted above, as well as many others, seem to follow a formal transition in the northern Indian temple program beginning in the eighth century. The increased figuration of the temple wall suggests a syncopated gait in circumambulation parallel to the ritual rhythm of becoming one with a god. The auxiliary figures do not belong to an iconographic program of divinity alone. Medieval texts and current worship both emphasize the treatment of Śiva as a king through a ritual coronation and the mental invocation of his court. Already on the eighth-century Mahā-Māru temple wall

we begin to see figures that complement the main deity. The *dikpālas* who guard the corners of the building are the courtliest figures. These guardians are also featured in *vāstupurusha mandalas*. The other two main types are *surasundarīs* (celestial maidens) and *vyālas* (composite lion-like figures), neither of which appear in *vāstupurusha mandalas*.

These celestial beings do become standardized into specific sets; however, they do not correspond to the types of deities one might evoke to produce a mental court for a god. Attendant figures suggest those who would serve a king and not the political hierarchy of nobles one might expect of a *darbar* assembly. Beautiful *surasundarīs*, such as those found at Jagat (fig. 5.17), may represent *nayikas* (independent women). An increase in royal and ritual representation of servants of lords (*devadasis*) characterizes the medieval period. Daud Ali has argued that these heroine figures originally represented a courtly alternative of independence to servitude and labor; “however, in the discourses of the Śaiva Agamas, this category of *nayika*, unattached independent woman, comes to be linked to the service of Śiva, as a courtesan in his service, *rudragnayika*.”²⁵ In turn, this transformation from courtly to religious definitions of the independent woman makes servitude a condition for pleasure, especially in relation to the god. The alluring, curvaceous twisting of erotic women punctuating the temple wall may in fact cast the medieval viewer, male or female, in the role of a servant of the god, more literally, as the divinity’s courtesan—ready to derive great pleasure from subjugation to a higher power.²⁶ These seductive figures, which often eclipse all other forms in the minds of modern viewers, may have originally served as the personification of desire, as tools to derive pleasure from subjugation to the divine.²⁷

On the one hand, the increase in figural form in the tenth century, and then again in the sixteenth century, may indicate the need for more bodies onto which practitioners could project increasing numbers of deities and attendants. On the other hand, since many bodies lack fixed identities, could they then serve as meditational aids rather than as didactic iconography, as is seen in European medieval church programs? Some may protest that such a reading is speculative because it assumes too much about the inner experience of a tenth-century practitioner. A multifigured system of constructing a temple program simultaneously functioned on two levels. Whereas *ṛṣis* (sages) at a temple like Eklingji may have had specific deities of a particular mandala in mind when circumambulating a temple, the general public may not have had such a sophisticated practice. Aside from initiated tantric practitioners, the lay public may have experienced the rhythm of worship created by a secret prayer manual without having to be initiated.

By using architecture to manipulate the viewer’s body in space and sculpture to manipulate the viewer’s body in time, artisans, masons, and *sūtradhāras* may have organized the temple to evoke a structured response from the viewer. The nonsemantic structure of the clergy’s worship, as set out in medieval texts and current practice, would have been paralleled by the nonnarrative experiential knowledge



FIGURE 5.17. *Vyāla* leonine figure next to a *surasundarī* (celestial maiden), quartzite, c. 960, temple, Jagat. © Deborah Stein.

gained from the lay public's circumambulation. At Ekliṅgī we find increased architectural protrusions and recesses and a paralleled increase in semidivine figural sculpture, except at the Lakulīśa temple. At Jagat the Ambikā temple exemplifies a trend begun two centuries earlier at Osiāñ, where increased architectural texture and subsequent figuration changed the relationship of the viewer's body to the temple wall. The coexistence of more than one programmatic style in tenth-century Mēdapāṭa questions previous stylistic models based on notions of progress. The epitome of the tenth-century Mēdapāṭa temple replete with auxiliary figures, such as *vyālas*, *surasundarīs*, and *dikpālas*, is the Ambikā temple at Jagat.

In addition to three framed niches on the back wall of the Ambikā temple, each recess and protrusion is accented by unframed sculptural form. These statues unfold symmetrically to either side of the central protrusion. In the two recesses directly to either side of the central protrusion, composite lions (*vyālas*) raise their paws away from the main niche in a protective stance.²⁸ Small warriors bend precariously from their powerful haunches while two more fighters seem to creep up from behind each of the mythical lions' arched backs. In their identical composition, they mirror each other to create a sinuous frame for Durgā in the main niche. This mirroring of the *vyāla* figures continues in the composition of the protruding square pilasters and the other two recessions. Containing the action of the two mythic lions, two female figures ride elephants. They are dressed in elaborately girdled skirts with bare chests and heavy breastplate ornaments that sway seductively with the line of their bodies. They pose serenely behind the elephant drivers and remain oblivious to the small figures, who pull at their legs. Beneath each elephant a small figure is caught under the trunk and between the legs, giving the impression the elephants are advancing out of the picture frame toward the viewer. These thin pilasters pull the eye directly out from the surface, creating a form of punctuation for the outward movement of the *vyāla* figures.

More than a simple framing device, the increased number of figures of the medieval temple wall direct the viewer's gaze according to his or her circumambulatory movement.²⁹ In contrast to the perfectly mirrored movement of the *vyāla* figures, a slight difference in the female figures' position indicates the direction from which they were meant to be seen. If circumambulation is clockwise with a person's right side to the temple, then the figure on the right faces forward but twists back slightly toward the advancing viewer. On the left, her counterpart twists in toward the advancing viewer and toward the main niche. So while the composition remains parallel to either side of the main niche, the female figures on the elephants' backs and the beautiful maidens in the niches to either side of them direct the viewer's gaze to the main niche.

The viewer is made to preview, view, and review the main niche by these framing figures. First the women who greet with their heads and urge the viewer on with their bodies draw the viewer's attention to the main niche. Then, once viewers encounter the main niche, their eyes are drawn back as their own body advances. The heads and bodies of the female figures confront the viewer by pointing back to the main niche.

The importance of repetition in ritual is well known. The introduction of visual repetition into the viewer's movement multiplies the opportunity for the temple wall to impact the viewer's mind. Some temples of the Mēdapāṭa group (Takṣakēśvara and Śivēśvara at Ekliṅgī and Śobhagpura, Tūṣa, and Jagat) suggest an inherent shift away from the more sedentary devotion before a single icon or scene (Unwās, Nāgadā) and toward a rhythmic experience of unfolding deities and texture. This emphasis on repetition is particularly notable at Jagat, where the three sides of the

Ambikā temple depict the same deity—a repetitive sequence found only in Jagat and at Tūṣa, where Surya is found on all three walls. Only at Jagat, however, does the repetition of the same iconography seem to reveal the progression of a ritual sacrifice—potentially with covert tantric underpinnings.

The repetition of the same deity is an unusual feature of the Ambikā temple, found also at Tūṣa but not produced in the same way. The repetition of an emanation three times on the exterior of a temple wall is found at temples that also display a hierarchy of secondary, semidivine figures who punctuate the temple wall. At Jagat the small base shrines depict three different goddesses, but the eye-level representations show the same goddess killing three different depictions of the buffalo demon. The climactic moment of the same story is repeated six times in monoscenic fashion.³⁰ The repetition of two sets of three versions of the buffalo sacrifice suggest a reference to the animal sacrifices associated with the festival of Navratri and with goddess worship in general.

The temples and shrines at Unwās and Nāgadā, sites that limit figural representation to deities in the niches found on the bhadra wall protrusions, all have different deities on exterior walls, with the tutelary deity located at the back. In contrast, the evolving Durgā-Mahiṣāsura-mardini triptych at Jagat is repeated once again in the small shrine connected to the third wall of the temple. Unlike the repetition of Surya at Tūṣa, the three representations of Durgā-Mahiṣāsura-mardini move from purely zoomorphic to hybrid to purely anthropomorphic representations of Durgā-Mahiṣāsura-mardini on the exterior walls of the main temple, whereas on the small side shrine the evolution of forms is reversed.

The syncopated rhythm of the recesses and protrusions, as well as the accompanying figural iconography of the temple wall, changes ritual practice, which suggests something about the audience who used the building and how they practiced ritual in this period, as opposed to five hundred years earlier. The process of circumambulating a building brings into view a repetitive series of deity emanations that invoke hierarchy on a grid and create a meditative state. In the past, eminent scholars such as Stella Kramrisch have argued for an emanation theory based on the *vāstuśāstra* (architectural manuals).³¹ The *vāstu* grid reflects both the geomantic spirit and fractal geometry of Indian temple architecture, but the fact remains that the deities named in each of sixty-four squares of any particular grid do not directly correlate to the figural sculpture of the temple wall, which includes humans engaged in everyday activities and formulaic female figures.

Well-known medieval texts such as the *Agnipurāṇa* call for circumambulation, an observance found at all Hindu temples today (fig. 5.18). Pūjā-paddhatis (ritual manuals) are useless without the praxis of the performer. They are like recipe books without ingredients, delineating the syntax of ritual for an initiated expert familiar with the mantric ingredients. The basic structure of embodied worship contained in these secret ritual manuals helps us to imagine the process of visualization that would take place when circumambulating this new, more elaborate



FIGURE 5.18. Circumambulation with priests and women carrying waterpots filled with the ontological person of the goddess Ambā Mātā during installation rites. © Deborah Stein.

form of temple program. A temple priest can animate an icon for temple worship or even awaken a deity within his own mind through meditation and the repetition of mantras. The sequence of animation creates a divine *darbar* in which the deity resides. This *darbar* includes both the architectural space signified by the animation of the threshold by worshipping the doorpost and the calling to mind of deities who may be present in the architectural space of the court. The final aspect of this form of worship involves the equivalent of a coronation ritual for the deity himself. This *abhiṣeka* (coronation ritual) includes bathing, dressing, adorning, anointing, and feeding the deity.³²

Darbar courts do not regularly grace the complex figural formulas of the temple wall, such as the one from Śobhagapura shown in figure 5.19. We do find the guardian figures that safeguard the four directions and that might be found at court, but we are left with the question of what purpose the *vyālas* and *surasundarīs* serve. They are not found in the *mandala* grids of deities prescribed in *vāstu mandalas*.³³ The search for a fixed semantic meaning may be missing the mark if the goal is to become the deity one worships through a structured path of mediation.

The mental process of going through a *pūjā-paddhati* involves a sequential repetition meant to animate an icon and become the deity in question. For a priest reading this type of elite Sanskrit text, the process could be quite complex. In contrast, even the increasingly complex temple walls of the tenth century usually include only three extra types of figures beyond the main deities in the *bhadra*



FIGURE 5.19. Śiva temple, c. tenth century, Śobhagpura. © Deborah Stein.

niches. Two of these forms, the *vyālas* and *surasundarīs*, are not even necessarily divine but seem more ornamental. These figures do change the pace, orientation, and relationship of the viewer's body in space. The ornament of the temple wall dictates the speed and experience of the circumambulator. Whether or not she is consciously digesting each aspect of a visual sequence, the viewer is forced to confront visually an unfolding series of figures. The repetition reinforces a hierarchy leading up to and then away from the main niches. Repetition creates a meditative state. The circumambulation of a temple with a complex, formulaic, iconographic program does for the layperson what the reading of a *pūjā-paddhati* does for a

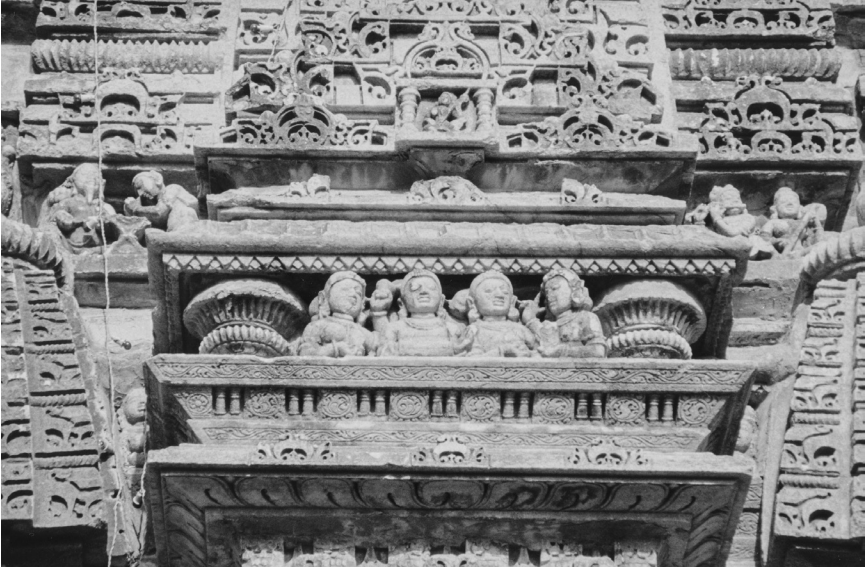


FIGURE 5.20. Devotees staring out of veranda, c. tenth century, Ambikā temple, Jagat.
© Deborah Stein.

priest. If one watches priests repeating passages from a *pūjā-paddhati*, one does not seem to witness an empirical examination of a series of deities and their meaning. The priest seems to be in a meditative state as he transforms himself mentally into a deity.

In general, the public is not and most likely never was involved in such a conscious endeavor to become a deity, but circumambulation may be a way of consciously or unconsciously invoking the deities through action rather than word.³⁴ This is a physical, performative tradition, not a textual one. For this reason, architecture surpasses text in its ability to suggest the evolution of worship by people other than the clergy and ruling elite, who had the means to leave their record in written inscriptions. The temple wall in some ways is a more democratic document that captures the ritual process of pilgrims, villagers, women, and *Ādivāsīs*, who may have used the building on a regular basis. The local style of an art region can indeed yield information about social organization available through no other means.³⁵

At Jagat, miniature pavilion depictions above each niche create harmony between the protrusions (fig. 5.20). From these verandas, tiny devotees play music and engage in other forms of leisure. Small architectural quotations translate architecture into sculpture for the consumption of the viewer. This architectural convention is found contemporaneously at the tenth-century *Pratīhāra* site of *Bāḍoli* in the *Upamāla* region as well. A real devotee may later spend many an afternoon sitting on the actual veranda of the temple. The temple wall can be

neither an exclusively cosmic representation nor an outer figural projection of the metaphysical grids of the *vāstuśāstra*.³⁶ The interjection of temple activity into the temple program serves to break the distinction between deities, mythical beings, beautiful women, tantric practitioners, and the real-life human devotees who casually socialize in the temple space both in the medieval period and today. This continuum of temple characters in the program is quite similar to the variety of people who might be found making their way around the temple.³⁷ This miniaturization serves as a method to personify and to make meaningful to the lay viewer the cascading aedification of the temple so beautifully and technically carried out by architects at Jagat.³⁸

Whereas the Lakuliśa temple may have been meant for the initiated few, buildings like the Ambikā temple and the Takṣakēśvara temple had more complex programs that made physical much of what was previously metaphysical. These programs made the circumambulator meditate both consciously and subconsciously in specific ways. At Jagat, in the southern peripheral region of Chhapa, the emphasis of the exterior program was a rhythmic reenactment of ritual sacrifice. Both the complex formulaic temple program and the subject of sacrifice suggest that whoever built this temple was trying to appeal to a population with indigenous customs not found in any ritual manual.

MANTRA AND TANTRA: KṢĒMAṆKARĪ AND CĀMUṆḌĀ IN MILLENNIAL NORTHWESTERN INDIA

The program of bidirectional circumambulation at the Ambikā temple in Jagat suggests fascinating links between myth and ritual in the form of sacrifice. This type of program promotes embodied viewing particularly suited to the tantric aspects of Devī worship and of Pāśupata-Śiva worship in this region from the tenth century onward. Tantric worship entails an embodied approach, a form of worship where the devotee attempts to progressively become one with the deity he or she worships. This collapse of the subject-object relationship creates a very powerful form of knowledge that completely surpasses the false duality of mind and body. Thus, an embodied approach allows the devotee to know with his or her senses.

The sculptural program at Jagat suggests a desire to use emerging medieval forms of architecture to advance a specific new type of viewing experience not specific to any particular deity or religious sect. Not only do we find the only example of a Devī temple where three forms of the same deity are repeated twice (as found with the male Sun God, Surya, at the temple in Tūṣa), but we also encounter the earliest example of a goddess temple exhibiting the new medieval style as opposed to the many circular and rectangular *yoginī* shrines found across northern India in this same time period. In contrast to this sectarian architectural form, the Ambikā temple built in regional architectural style does not represent Devī as part of a set of goddesses. Instead, the creators have chosen to emphasize the temporal aspect

of the *Devī Māhātmya* myth in a monoscenic way. We see three versions of the sacrificial moment when the goddess beheads the demon.

The Ambikā temple program presents neither an icon nor a story but, rather, a rhythm through which the climax of Durgā's cosmic battles is repeated again and again in the form of the buffalo sacrifice. At contemporary circular and square yoginī shrines such as those at Bhērāghāṭ and Khajurāho, this rhythmic punctuation of the temple wall is not present. The icons are presented one after the next in a line at the same eye level, and the viewer's progress is steady and linear, similar to what is experienced in many modern-day museum displays.

The depiction of Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardinī on the walls of the Ambikā temple suggests an interesting parallel with current ritual in Chhapa. The martial depiction of the goddess often takes the form of Kālī, who is born in the heat of battle from the Ambikā's tongue, as seen in the fortresses of Chittorgarh and Jodhpur. Otherwise, Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardinī is also represented as the sum of the male deities whose weapons she yields, as seen at Mamallapuram in southern India. This ultimate representation of *śakti* (female power) often takes the form of a frieze depicting the heat of battle. Instead, the iconic form of Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardinī almost always focuses on the climactic moment of the slaying of the demon Mahiṣā—a direct quotation of the sacrificial act.

The exterior forms of Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardinī cast the goddess in a decidedly independent role as a supreme sacrificer. The sequential representation of the slaying of a buffalo and the ensuing spirit rising from the neck follows the form of the actual buffalo sacrifice where the animal is decapitated. Blood squirts from the neck of the shaking corpse and steam rises where the blood soaks into the hot earth. The vapor rising from the neck of the shaking animal on the threshold between life and death suggests a life leaving the body in quite graphic visual form. This form is made explicit on the back of the Ambikā temple, where the human demon emerges from the neck of the decapitated buffalo. Sculptural form parallels ritual. Just as the *Devī Māhātmya* text may have been a way of integrating local deities into a brāhmanical pantheon, the architectural program canonizes ritual practice in a local architectural style.³⁹

In Chhapa, as in many parts of India, the concluding rite of the most important goddess festival, called Navratri or "nine nights," is the sacrifice of a buffalo. Similar to texts, architecture integrates buffalo sacrifice into the brāhmanical story of the *Devī Māhātmya*.⁴⁰ Whether royally in the eighteenth century in Udaipur or locally in Jagat, animal sacrifice and, more specifically, buffalo sacrifice clearly sets the stage for the visual depiction of the goddess's weapon sinking into the buffalo demon Mahiṣā.⁴¹ Three moments of decapitation are depicted together with an increasingly figural representation of the "spirit" escaping the neck in the stone of the temple wall. The creation of a canon became an important way of preserving the power of Brahmins in an era after Vedic fire sacrifice. The same move toward sculptural representation on temple walls led to a popularization of ritual. Two key

goddesses help us to understand the history of tantra and mantra in this region's architectural and sculptural records. In the tenth century, texts such as the *Kālikā Purāṇa* both parallel and diverge from Cāmuṇḍā and Kṣēmaṅkari goddess iconography in Upamāla, Mēdapāṭa, Chhapa, and Vagada to the north of Malwa.⁴² In the villages of Jagat and Unwās, Cāmuṇḍā becomes an independent force—a goddess partnered with no god, apart from any set of yoginīs—more than one of a set of mother goddesses. Texts such as the *Devī Māhātmya*—where *Durgā's killing the Buffalo Demon myth occurs*—give us the basic background of Cāmuṇḍā's story.⁴³ Her name appears in lists of yoginīs.⁴⁴ Her skeletal frame never fails to punctuate sets of *sapta-mātrikās*.⁴⁵ Cāmuṇḍā's emaciated form can illuminate ritual practice beyond the reading of medieval tantras and *purāṇas* at two specific temples. Over a short, fifty-year period in the small area of Mēdapāṭa—located in present-day southern Rājāsthān within a two-hundred-kilometer radius of Udaipur—two significant temples were built that leave a trace of medieval goddess tantra previously overlooked. For hundreds of years prior to this time and well into the medieval period, sets of *mātrikās* (the seven mothers) included the skeletal Cāmuṇḍā as one of the mothers. At times she remains rather voluptuous—which suggests she is not starving—but her skeletal nature is evoked through a tracing of bones over the roundness of her flesh. Her pinky held to the corner of her mouth in a typical gesture to evoke the tantric drinking of blood draws attention to her face, where her skin seems to reveal age in the etched lines indicating wrinkles. She can seem like the end of youth that concludes a fertile set of mothers—perhaps a representation of the life-cycle truth of the onset of menopause contrasted with previous more rotund states of pregnancy, lactation, and postpartum motherhood.

A later and more famous example from millennial North India suggests that the mothers, and specifically their sequential unfolding, may have held tantric meaning when understood in terms of architectural placement. As Devangana Desai has famously argued, the placement of Cāmuṇḍā at the beginning and Gaṇēśa at the end of the traditional *pradakṣinā* order at Khajurāho implies an architectural bid to travel with one's left side to the temple walls—an esoteric reversal of proper circumambulatory rights.⁴⁶ Even while still contextualized with the other mothers, Cāmuṇḍā sets the stage for tantric practice beyond her textual role in the *Devī Māhātmya*.

As we move closer to Mēdapāṭa, from modern Madhya Pradesh into southern Rājāsthān, we find that millennial goddess temples begin to bend to regional architectural style. The rectangular temple begins to eclipse both circular and rectangular yoginī shrines in this area. While there remains the foundation of a massive rectangular yoginī shrine at the Paramāra stronghold of Arthuna, near the modern-day capital of Dūngarpur, it is a smaller temple located near a tank within the main architectural cluster that draws our attention to a different millennial representation of Cāmuṇḍā—a programmatic twist that would pave the way for the hybrid iconography of the Mēdapāṭa temples of Jagat at Unwās.

On the exterior of the temple sanctum, each of three *bhadras* houses a key sculpture on axis with the main icon. Cāmuṇḍā is paired with Nateśa as a mate, the emaciated goddess and the dancing emaciated Śiva forming a foundation for the Bhairava/Bēruji-Cāmuṇḍā combination worshipped so prevalently throughout the tribal tracts between Dūngarpur and Udaipur today. And here, in millennial Arthuna, Cāmuṇḍā is paired with Nateśa—a dancing form of Śiva found throughout Madhya Pradesh and Rājāsthān during this millennial efflorescence of tantra. In his work on *mātrkāś* Michael Meister has revealed the spread of this iconography, whereas Tamara Sears has alluded to the potency of Nateśa's ecstatic dance in the inscriptions found on Pāsupata maṭhas at Menāl just to the east of Mēdapāṭa in this same millennial era.⁴⁷

Her iconographic and programmatic depiction differs at Unwās and at Jagat; however, both sites use similar architectural foils to display her in an iconographic relationship with other female divinities. Even at smaller, less important temples such as a small subshrine at Nāgadā, Cāmuṇḍā is represented with Durgā and other goddesses with no reference to Nateśa, yoginīs, or *mātrkāś*. At larger, more important temples dedicated uniquely to the goddess, both sites of Jagat and Unwās reference the *Devī Māhātmya* story of Durgā's cosmic battles, from which Cāmuṇḍā draws her name as well as the phonic elements of mantric worship. In a synesthetic reversal, sound is represented visually through Kṣēmaṅkarī relationship to Cāmuṇḍā at both Jagat and at Unwās.

Kṣēmaṅkarī, recognizable from her stance atop two lions and—more importantly—from her rosary beads, stands above the temple entrance to greet the visitor and to imply a dedication to her mantric form at Jagat in Mēdapāṭa but also at the Ghaṭeśvara Mahādeva temple in Bāḍoli in Uparamāla (figs. 5.21 and 5.22)—a site that shares the unusual detached śubhamaṇḍapa architectural element with Jagat. The goddess Kṣēmaṅkarī is the emanation of the syllable “kṣē” and references the power of nonsemantic syllabic speech in tantric worship. Each bead of the rosary she holds could be used to voice the sound of a different syllable, and her placement above the entrance of the temple suggests a visual reminder of the potential of architecture and sculpture to serve as a mantric tool in support of personal, intimate, multisensory forms of worship at the turn of the first millennium in Mēdapāṭa. Surprisingly, then, the three exterior walls of the sanctum display the goddess Durgā killing the buffalo demon Mahiṣā. Usually these *bhadra* locations correspond axially, as well as symbolically, to the central icon, often as a direct emanation of the central icon. What does a program of a tripartite repetition of the sacrificial moment have to do with an invitation for mantric worship from a beatific and abstract goddess like Kṣēmaṅkarī?

M. A. Dhaky has used the frontal position of the Kṣēmaṅkarī image and an armless sculpture cast aside in the inner sanctum to suggest that the Ambikā temple in Jagat was originally dedicated to Kṣēmaṅkarī.⁴⁸ Based on the double lion pedestal, now no longer in situ, Dhaky's theory suggests a tantric relationship between the



FIGURE 5.21. Kṣēmaṅkarī, lintel above front entrance, c. 960, Ambikā temple, Jagat.
© Deborah Stein.



FIGURE 5.22. Ghaṭeśvara Mahādeva Temple, Bāḍoli in Uparamāla. © Deborah Stein.

three images of Durgā killing the buffalo demon and Kṣēmaṅkarī that somehow sacrificial action and syllabic speech are equated in the original iconography. A second sculpture cast aside in the main sanctum reveals a different, but equally tantric, interpretation.

If one imagines the serial unfolding of Durgā killing the buffalo demon in proper circumambulatory order, the demon is first a buffalo, then half animal and half human, then finally the human form. A second sculpture cast aside in the inner sanctum depicts Durgā killing the buffalo demon yet again; this time she is emaciated. It is now Cāmuṇḍā who is killing the buffalo demon. If this sculpture were indeed the original icon, we can imagine that the illusory voluptuous Durgās who kill the buffalo demon on all three exterior walls are emanations of the emaciated truth of Durgā that lies within. Bonds drawn from corporeal attachment must evaporate as the auspicious, fertile goddess is reduced to skin and bones, maintaining nevertheless all of her divine powers.

Because of doors on either side of the sanctum, the innermost icon can be included in a circumambulation of the sanctum's exterior. Either Dhaky's theory or mine produces compelling visual examples of tantric practice in millennial Mēdapāṭa. If we choose to follow Dhaky's Kṣēmaṅkarī theory, ritual action and ritual speech collapse in the iconographic program. And if we choose to follow my Cāmuṇḍā reading, the viewer's devotion becomes clouded with *maya*—the illusory attachment to form, to youth, to beauty—and the one who walks the *pradakṣiṇā* path must succumb to the truth of the ephemeral nature of sexual pleasure, beauty, and youth and submit to the lasting power of divinity. The order could unfold in standard right-handed circumambulatory order, from the voluptuous Durgā sequentially sacrificing the buffalo in time toward the nonfigural power of the goddess Kṣēmaṅkarī as speech incarnate or toward the truth of the illusory nature of attachment, youth, and sexual desire in the boney corporeal reality of the goddess Cāmuṇḍā. Alternatively, the order could unfold in an opposite tantric order, where mediation on the power of speech or the ephemeral nature of human existence could precede the display of sacrificial action and youth on the temple exterior.

At Unwās, built within one decade of the Ambikā temple at Jagat and fewer than two hundred kilometers away, Kṣēmaṅkarī graces the back wall of the Pippalāda Mātā temple, joined by Cāmuṇḍā on the first side and Durgā-Mahiṣāsura-mardini on the third side in proper circumambulatory order. There, one moves from skeletal truth to speech to sacrificial action or, esoterically, backward from sacrifice to mantric speech to skeletal truth. These two temple programs suggest that the rise of tantra exceeds what we can understand from text or practice in millennial Mēdapāṭa. The visual examples of iconography and architectural placement suggest that the ordering of images served to correlate multisensory forms of practice into a somatic revelation of philosophical beliefs.

Emaciated precedents in South Asian iconography suggest that, independent of gender or sectarian orientation, bony depictions of the body often symbolized

time.⁴⁹ Examples as diverse as the emaciated Buddha from Pakistan or the depiction of Bhairava as Kāla at Ellora suggest that images of the body—male and female alike, Buddhist and Hindu alike—caught the interest of premodern artists in South Asia. We are left, then, with the question of why the female form was considered most effective for the iconographic linking of sacrificial action, speech, and the illusory bonds of *maya*. Was there a greater tantric immediacy offered by the female form? At the turn of the first millennium in northwestern India, was the subversion of the female form as an object of sexual desire more effective than similar maneuvers for a male body? Can this tell us anything about the role of real women in early medieval society?

A few different methodological approaches may be taken to explore the answers to this fascinating yet ultimately unanswerable question with intellectual agility, albeit inconclusively. If we take an ethnohistorical approach, one could imagine Cāmuṇḍā as a female Bērujī (Bhairava/Nateśa), either as his consort or his female manifestation. In a Western feminist approach, one could fantasize that the personification of this sagging, wrinkled goddess is a subliminal celebration of postmenopausal female power—with potential parallel readings for live women in millennial India that would differ greatly from the projection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial ideas about women's disempowerment historically. Narrative studies, whether visual or textual, may choose to focus on Cāmuṇḍā as starving, perpetually bloodthirsty, and chronically insatiate both literally and philosophically. A more anthropological model found in excellent contemporary fieldwork on widows by Sarah Lamb might help us to imagine medieval Cāmuṇḍā as the archetype of a widow, an inauspicious woman, or simply the opposite of prosperity (in Sanskrit “a” prefix to signal a direct opposition).⁵⁰ Was this goddess malnourished, uncared for, unfed, and famished in the absence of a living mate to take care of her? Many of our contemporary questions remain unanswerable, but further inquiry into the material culture coupled with forthcoming textual stories may begin to paint a clearer picture.⁵¹

Whereas the exterior program of the Ambikā temple is devoted to Durgā-Mahiṣāsuramardini, some have argued that the lion pedestal of the original icon suggests that the Kṣēmaṅkarī form of the goddess graced the temple interior. Dhaky reinforces this pedestal theory by noting the prominent position of the goddess above the temple entrance (fig. 5.21).⁵² Kṣēmaṅkarī is also found on contemporaneous buildings at Tūṣa and Unwās (see fig. 0.5). Early remains from Jagat suggest that the site was originally devoted to the worship of the *sapta-mātṛkās*. Gupta-period figures in schist, such as a sculpture of Aindrī in the Udaipur museum, indicate the site was already a center for goddess worship a few hundred years before the temple was built. If the temple was indeed dedicated to Kṣēmaṅkarī, the exterior program suggests an emphasis on the independent ferocious form of the goddess, whereas the main icon would have reiterated her role as the beatific

domestic partner of Śiva. At Unwās, Kṣēmaṅkarī occupies the central protrusion on the exterior back wall of the sanctum.⁵³ In light of this contemporaneous example, it is surprising that the main icon and the emanation depicted in the same position on the Ambikā temple would be different.

An icon cast aside inside the sanctum displays an emaciated form of Durgā in the act of killing the buffalo demon (see fig. 1.10). On the one hand, this iconography is quite unusual since the emaciated form is usually reserved for Cāmuṇḍā, a *mātrkā* associated with Yama, the god of death. On the other hand, Durgā would correspond to the back wall of the temple and makes sense as a depiction of Ambikā, the “little mother” of the Devī Māhātmya story and an epithet for the buffalo slayer, Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardini. Why, then, would Kṣēmaṅkarī—and not Durgā—grace the tutelary position above the entrance?

In addition to an enticing beatific form of Śiva's mate, Pārvatī, Kṣēmaṅkarī offers an advertisement for a specific type of tantric worship rooted in mantras. According to M. C. Joshi, “the rosary [held by the goddess Kṣēmaṅkarī] represents the Sanskrit alphabet from *A* to *kṣa* and is the same as the *varṇamālā* (the universal creative energy in the form of sound); the book symbolizes all kinds of codified knowledge including *dharma* (righteous law) and *adharma* (unrighteous law), *vairāgya* (detachment) and *avairāgya* (non-detachment), *jñāna* (knowledge) and *ajñāna* (ignorance).”⁵⁴ Kṣēmaṅkarī is thus associated with a tantric reference to sound. Kṣēmaṅkarī suggests that mantric worship was a powerful tool at this site in the last half of the tenth century. The syncopated circumambulation guided by the punctuated architecture and targeted sculptural ornamentation of the temple wall found at Jagat follows the phonic rhythm of mantras referenced by the iconography of Kṣēmaṅkarī—the first deity one sees on approaching the temple, and the personification of the seed syllable *Kṣa* as the goddess herself. The kinetics of this architecture thus reflect the performance of a fashionable and powerful form of worship in tenth-century Mēdapāṭa—a possible synesthetic link to Guhila tastes and aspirations farther north at Nāgadā and Ekliṅgī.

The Pippalāda Mātā temple at Unwās was built in 959 CE during Allaṭa's reign. This temple does not share the sophisticated temple wall of the Surya temple at Ṭuṣa or the Takṣakēśvara temple at Ekliṅgī. The Pippalāda Mātā temple seems closest in form to the rather austere Lakuliśa temple; however, three cardinal wall protrusions do have niches with deities. Unlike Ṭuṣa and Jagat, the deities differ. At Unwās, this circumambulation is rather straightforward, with one main niche on each side of the sanctum of the Pippalāda Mātā temple (see fig. 0.4). The Durgā temple at Unwās shares this simple design of one niche on each wall. The program of the Pippalāda Mātā temple unfolds with an image of Durgā slaying the buffalo demon followed by a rare image of Kṣēmaṅkarī on the back wall (see fig. 0.5) and finishes with a ferocious, emaciated Cāmuṇḍā. This tripartite program is not interrupted by any guardians of the corners or by any *surasundarī*s punctuating the circumambulatory design.

The Pippalāda Mātā temple is rare in that the back niche indicates the temple's dedication to Kṣēmaṅkarī.⁵⁵ This form with the two lions at her feet depicts a rather passive goddess standing still and holding a bell, a pot of water, and a trident to associate her with her mate, Śiva. Although the two sculptures of Durgā-Mahiṣāsuramardini and Cāmuṇḍā on the sides of the temple occur in the text of the *Devī Māhātmya*, Kṣēmaṅkarī is better known among sets of yoginīs.⁵⁶ The goddess Kṣēmaṅkarī seems to be popular early in the history of Mēdapāṭa, whereas this tenth-century sculpture is the latest surviving example.⁵⁷ This Kṣēmaṅkarī may be the only example of a shrine devoted uniquely to this goddess.

If we look more closely at the order of the program (Durgā, Kṣēmaṅkarī, and Cāmuṇḍā in clockwise circumambulatory order, or backward as Cāmuṇḍā, Kṣēmaṅkarī, and Durgā in reverse esoteric circumambulatory order), we find even greater affinities with the Ambikā temple in Jagat constructed fewer than three years later and fewer than two hundred kilometers to the south: young, cosmic, victorious goddess who quells demons with the weapons of the male gods meets serene, erect, powerful goddess atop regal lions, followed by emaciated old or starving insatiable goddess. Alternately, the sagging skin of Cāmuṇḍā is revealed to possess the power of the erect Kṣēmaṅkarī, followed by the martial perfection of Durgā. Either way, to pass from Durgā to Cāmuṇḍā and back again, one must focus on the mantric goddess in the prime position on the back wall of the temple.

One can imagine some of the early medieval aural syllables—"Hṛīm"—that may have resonated on the lips of a circumambulator or even silently as part of a secret meditation in a disciple's head. Was this utterance learned clandestinely in the closed corner cell of a maṭha from a guru? Or, perhaps, it was repeated as a group while looking at a guru on a platform in the main hall?⁵⁸ The idea of dissolution or transmutation from one bodily state to another metaphysically through mediation seems to bear weight in the iconographic record in stone. One passes from one kind of goddess (Cāmuṇḍā or Durgā) to another via mantra (personified as Kṣēmaṅkarī at Unwās). At Jagat, one either tantrically realizes the dissolution of the body through the goddess Durgā's sacrificial acts (culminating in the emaciated Cāmuṇḍā in the sanctum) or melts away the Purāṇic narrative of the Devī Māhātmya into the truth of mantric worship if the goddess Kṣēmaṅkarī graced the inner sanctum instead. Iconographic programs illuminate much about the visual relationships of different deities philosophically, especially when considered in terms of the characteristically early medieval syncopated punctuation of the temple wall, and the kinesthetic traces of ritual left behind in the record in stone.

Two stone clues to the tantric and mantric communities at Jagat about the Ambikā temple. To the south we find that the wall of the compound is quite high, with steps leading up to modern-day street level. There we find the village school, most likely built unknowingly atop the earliest Śakta monastery in India just

waiting to be excavated. To the north, several *chhatris* postdate the Ambikā temple by a few hundred years but point to that location as an ancient burial ground. In Jagat, future excavations could reveal one of the earliest and most important centers of goddess worship in India, complete with a period maṭha dating to the era of Abhinavagupta, as well as a burial ground adjacent to one of the earliest examples of a medieval goddess temple in regional style.