

DOMES, TOMBS AND MINARETS: ISLAMIC INFLUENCES ON JAINA ARCHITECTURE

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As part of a large survey of Jaina temple architecture, I have been documenting Jaina temple buildings throughout the Indian subcontinent. Whilst focussing mainly on the structuring of space, distinctive features of the Jaina temple, and the connection between ritual and architectural space, I have frequently been struck by the strong influences Islamic styles and building concepts have had on Jaina temple architecture in India. Connections and fruitful exchanges between Hindus and Jainas, and Buddhists and Jainas have attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention, yet hardly anything has been written on the relationship between Jainism and Islam. For substantial periods of Indian history, contact between these two world religions has been tense and problematic, with large-scale destruction of Jaina sacred places by Muslims occurring throughout North, Central and parts of south India. From this point of view it might appear surprising to find such an apparent openness and a clear artistic and creative response to Islamic motifs and planning principles in Jaina temple architecture. Various reasons might account for this design choice.

The problem one encounters when comparing Islam, Jainism and Hinduism in India is that we are dealing with large, exceedingly diverse and ever changing religious traditions which have co-existed in close vicinity and influenced one another over long periods of time. Often craftsmen worked for different religious groups, which accounts particularly for the sharing of motifs and decorative features. Consequently, there is no such thing as a clear-cut ‘Hindu’ or ‘Buddhist’ style in South Asia, and it is generally more helpful to classify styles by geographical area and period than purely by religious association. The foundation of Islam, however, occurred outside the South Asian cultural sphere, and its art and architecture follows a more clearly distinct artistic tradition, stemming from Middle Eastern and Central Asian origins. When Islam settled more permanently in India from the late 12th century onwards, specific stylistic features, so far unknown to the architectural vocabulary of the Indian subcontinent, were introduced to South Asia, and for a considerable period of time remained identifiable as ‘Islamic’ forms of architecture. Over the centuries, these features became increasingly transformed, absorbed and widely used by other religious groups. Consequently, at least from the 18th century onwards, one can hardly speak of features unique to Islamic architecture, or a clear-cut Islamic style in Indian art, as various religious groups increasingly shared a common architectural vocabulary.¹

As part of this shared later Indian style, Jaina religious architecture displays a large-scale use of various kinds of pointed and cusped arched forms. True arches are not encountered in early Jaina temple buildings when trabeate



Figure 1: Bangala roof forms adorn the elaborate gateway structure as well as the shrine of the main Jaina Temple at Ajmer, Rajasthan

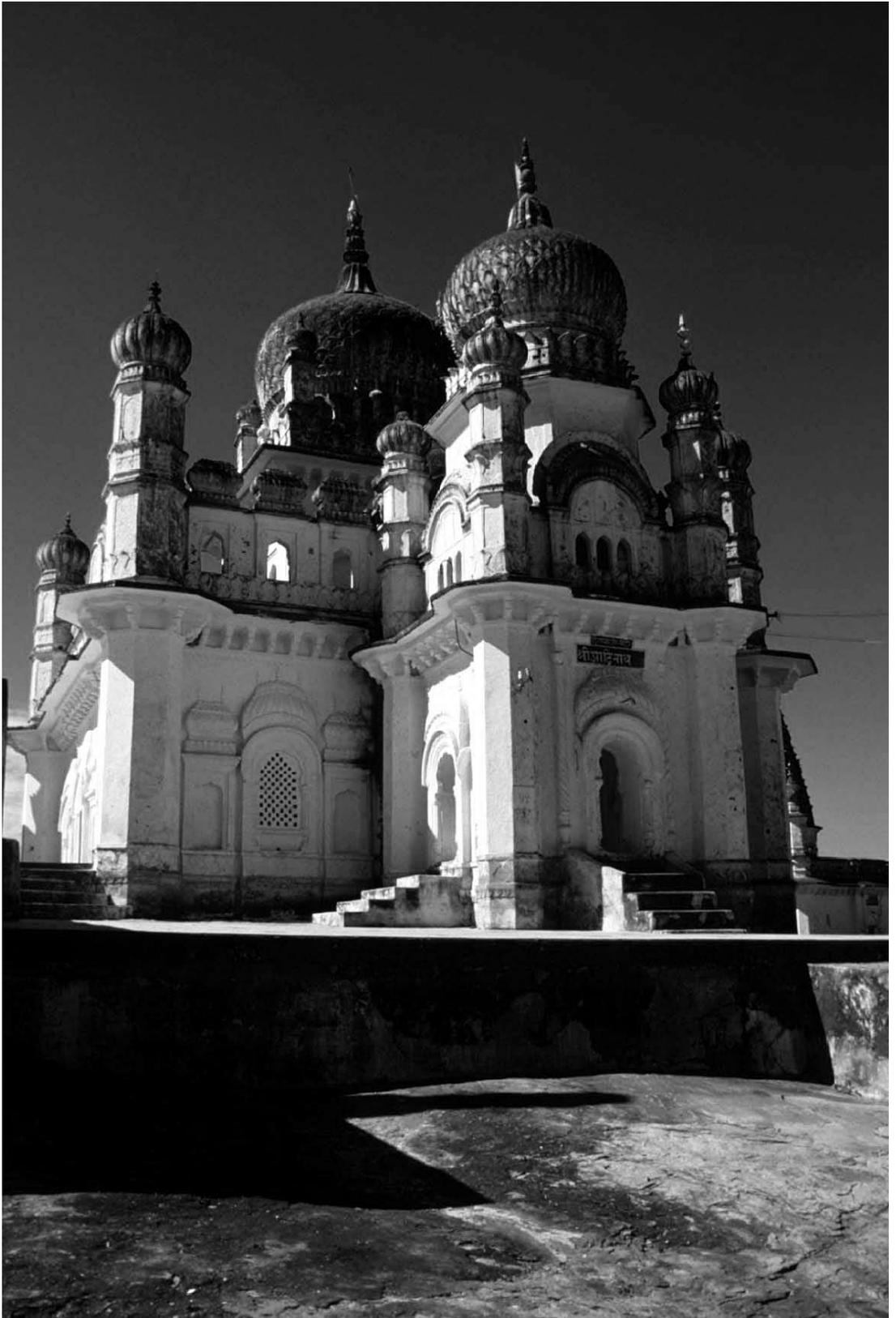


Figure 2: Maratha period temple on Mount Sonagiri, Madhya Pradesh, with minaret-like roof chatris

constructions were generally used. True arches, usually pointed or multi-cusped, are later associated with Jaina temple halls, doorways, arcades and gateways. They have also been employed as ornamental motifs adorning the outer and, in rare cases, also the inner walls of Jaina temples. In this context, domed and bangla roof forms have also been transformed into decorative features embellishing plain wall sections.² These elements, however, were not only employed as ornamental motifs, but also as proper three-dimensional architectural elements. Whilst domes are commonly found as roof elements covering halls and shrines,³ bangla roof forms are most commonly associated with gateway structures (*Figure 1*). Gateways providing access to Jaina temples and walled religious compounds often take on impressive dimensions in a Jaina context and play a significant role in the dynamics of sacred pilgrimage sites. Associated with gateways and other elements of later Jaina temple complexes is the frequent employment of a red and white colour scheme. Whilst this colour combination has a long indigenous tradition in India,⁴ it was introduced to North India in a different context by early Sultanate architecture, and popularised through the widespread use of this striking colour combination in Mughal architecture.⁵ Inserted into the walls are small pierced stone screens, so-called *jali* windows, admitting air but only muted light to the temple interior, creating a comfortable environment inside Jaina temple structures. On the roof, crenellations frequently adorn the walls of later Jaina temple constructions. These are not only an Islamic stylistic import, but also indicate the strong tendency in Jaina architecture to express ideas of defence and fortification, which seem to stem from a need to protect their religious sites and temple structures, which are still today storehouses for precious images in gold, silver and crystal.⁶ *Chatris*, small pavilions or tower-like elements, commonly adorn the rooftops of Jaina temples. Frequently, these roof elements have been elongated so as to resemble minaret-type structures. They are particularly typical of Jaina temples in central India, where they are associated with a centralised building type. Jaina temples following this style largely date from the Maratha period, and similar constructions are also common in a Hindu temple context. Ample examples of Jaina temples of this kind of construction can be seen at the central Indian sites of Sonagiri, Kundalpur, Papora, Dronagiri and Nenagiri, all five in Madhya Pradesh (*Figure 2*).

Inside, Jaina temples constructed or transformed after the 15th century have often been beautifully adorned with paintings and abstract, Mughal style decorations in gold. Hindu and Jaina temples from before this period regularly display paintings narrating religious myths and legends, usually involving ample representations of human beings and gods in anthropomorphic shapes. The painted decorations of later temple constructions, however, predominantly depict ornamental flowers, and, more rarely, animals, all motifs acceptable to Muslim observers. All the features listed here whose origins, or at least whose artistic reinvigoration, can be traced back to Islamic antecedents are also common to later Hindu temple architecture in the region. There are also examples of Jaina temples which clearly go beyond this generally accepted and widely used extended vocabulary of later Indian temple architecture, and show a clearer appreciation and adaptation of specifically Islamic building features.

An example of this is the use of large-scale *jali* screens in later Jaina temples, which are strongly reminiscent of Islamic mosque and tomb architecture, especially that of Gujarat.⁷ Clear



Figure 3: The jali-screens inserted into the upper floor level of the Vasupūjyasvāmī Temple in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, resembling Gujarati Islamic antecedents

examples can be seen in the Nandīśvara Dvīpa Temple at Palitana, Gujarat, and the Pārśvanātha Temple at Lodruva, Rajasthan, whose outer walls consist entirely of pierced stone screens displaying geometric designs. In the Mahāvīra Temple at Mahavirjee in Rajasthan, and the modern Vāsupūjyasvāmī Temple at Mylapore in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, *jālī* screens may have been used more sparingly, but their design patterns resemble Islamic antecedents even more closely (Figure 3). Despite this stylistic proximity to Islamic examples, the screens in these temples have been employed in a distinctive, Jain way. They have been used to create secluded and shaded temple environments removed from the noise and glaring sunlight of Indian villages and towns, a feature which is typical of Jain temple architecture throughout the subcontinent.

Another area where originally Islamic ideas and motifs seem to have entered and been further developed in a Jain temple context, are the decorations on later temple pillars, mainly *māna-stambhas* associated with Digambara Jain temples. Particularly in the south, the bases of *māna-stambhas* erected from the 15th century onwards have frequently been decorated with complex, geometric patterns, resembling intricate star and complex knot designs. The motifs displayed closely correspond to patterns known from an Islamic context and do not seem to have a specific religious significance in Jainism.⁸ Especially noteworthy are the motifs displayed on the pillars in the open front hall, the Bhairavdevī Maṇḍapa of the Candranātha Basti at Mudabidri (Figure 4), and on the lower part of its *māna-stambha*, located in front of the same hall. Other interesting examples of similar, stylised design patterns adorn the *māna-stambhas* at Guruvayanakere, and Venur, Śāntinātha temple complex in coastal Karnataka, and at Melsittampur in Tamil Nadu. Whilst there would have been figural representations on earlier examples of pillars of this kind, geometric design outlines have regularly replaced them in examples from the 15th century. The substitution of originally figurative motifs with abstract patterns



Figure 4: Decorated pillar in the Bhairavdevī Maṇḍapa of the Candranātha Basti at Mudabidri, displaying complex geometric design patterns



Figure 5: Line of symbolic representations of the Jinas in the form of their sacred foot-imprints (*padukas*), in the complex of the Anantanātha Temple at Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh

can be linked to similar aniconic tendencies in North and Central India at the same time.

Further north, a preference for symbolic representations of the Jinas by means of their sanctified footprints, the *pādūkās* or *caranās*, instead of figural representations, gained strongly in popularity from the 15th century onwards.⁹ Places with especially large numbers of *pādūkā* shrines and larger temples housing such abstract representations are Mount Parashnatha in Bihar and Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh (Figure 5). They are generally associated with temple sites which were founded during, or continued to expand and develop after, the 15th century. Temples constructed during this period also frequently have *pādūkās* or small figural images enshrined in wall recesses strongly resembling Islamic prayer niches. In the Puṇḍarīk Svāmī Temple on Mount Shatrunjaya at Palitana, such a niche is located in a side porch, which has been converted into an additional shrine, there are also Jain temples where the main icon of a temple, the *mūl-nāyaka*, has been presented in a *mīhrāb*-like niche. Clear examples are to be found inside Pārśvanātha Temple No. II on Muktagiri in Maharashtra, and at Patna in Bihar. At the latter site, both the Pārśvanātha and the Sudarśana Temples are representative examples (Figure 6).



Figure 6: The *mūl-nāyaka* of the Sudarśana Temple at Patna, Bihar, is a small set of abstract *pādūkās*, presented in a *mīhrāb*-like niche in the sanctum of the temple

Striking with regard to Islamic influences on Jain art and architecture is also the widespread and common use of the colour green inside later Jain temple constructions. Whilst white, yellow, orange and red are treated with a certain amount of reverence in Jainism,¹⁰ the colour green does not seem to have a specific religious or ritual association with the religion. Green, however, is the colour of the Prophet and is considered sacred in Islam. In certain temples only the Jina images carved onto the door lintels or the entire door frames have been coloured green. Green Jinas can be seen all around the door at the Anantanātha Basti at Lakshmeshvar, in Karnataka. However, in the majority of Jain temples that employ the colour green, the entire inside walls and at times also the ceilings have been coloured. Striking examples are found throughout the Indian subcontinent.¹¹ There are also temples which employ green on the outside, or show combinations of this colour with tile-work.

Ceramic tiles are another feature introduced into India with the advent of Islam. Whilst the use of glazed tiles in Indian architecture never reached the importance it acquired in an Islamic context in the near and middle east, Jain temples of later centuries regularly employ geometric and floral tiles inside as well as on the outside of temple constructions. From about the 16th century, it is also common to cover the roof constructions or entire temple buildings with a skin of tile fragments, arranged in a mosaic. Such mosaics usually display floral designs (Figure 7).¹² An unusual example of a Jain temple which seems to imitate or at least make reference to the prominent use of Arabic inscriptions adorning Islamic monuments is the Candraprabhu Temple at the summit of Mount Sonagiri, Madhya Pradesh. The courtyard of the temple is surrounded by an arcade with cusped arches on all four sides. Above the



Figure 7: Small pādukā shrine at the summit of Muktagiri, Maharashtra, decorated with tile-mosaics displaying floral motifs



Figure 8: The arcade surrounding the open courtyard of the Candraprabhu Temple at the summit of Mount Sonagiri, Madhya Pradesh, bears Devanagari inscriptions imitating the use of Islamic calligraphy



Figure 9: Centralised caturmukha temple with four doorways and a prominent dome at Patna, Bihar

arches, decorated with painted floral motifs in green, are bands of Devanagari inscriptions. The upper band on the front side of the court displays the Nokār Mantra, with further well-known prayers adorning the other sides. The band of inscriptions below consists of the painted names of an extended list of Tīrthaḥkaras (Figure 8). Other Jaina temples integrate *īmān*-related features into their façades, and the combination of minaret-like roof *chattrīs* with pronounced bulbous domes convey an exceedingly Islamic feeling.

Whilst the elements discussed so far have largely been building accessories and decorations, I would like to argue that Islamic theories on planning and the layout of Muslim buildings also had an increasing influence on the architecture of certain Jaina temples and that in these instances an even stronger Islamic message is conveyed. Akin to the planning principles of Islamic tombs, it became popular in Jaina temple architecture from about the 16th century, to construct clearly centralised building types in the form of small shrines topped by large domes. This design principle has for example been applied to the interlinked shrines (*devakulikās*) enclosing the courtyards of many Jaina temples, not just in North West India. Through the use of a prominent dome and the enlargement of one or more shrines, individual *devakulikās* could also be marked and emphasised, whilst at other places entire squares of interconnected shrines in the domed style surround secluded courtyards. Central temple buildings may also follow this style of a single square or octagonal chamber topped by a prominent dome.

It is worth noting that it is especially common for this type of structure to house symbolic representations of the Jinas in the form of *padukās*, and not figural images, a tendency in later temple constructions already mentioned above. The common association of anionic cult objects in connection with simple centralised domed structures might indicate a further level of Islamic impact and inspiration. In Jaina architecture, such centralised and compact



Figure 10: The Śāntinātha Temple on Vaibhara Hill at Rajgir, Bihar, strongly resembling the design of Islamic tombs

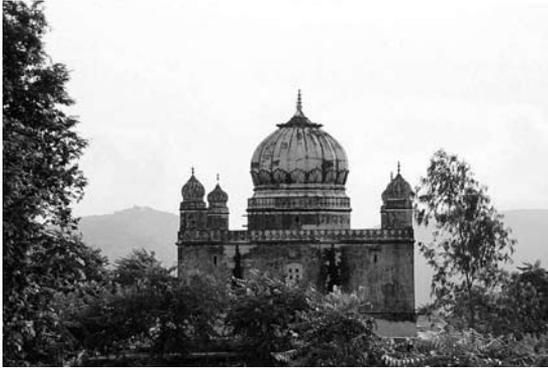


Figure 11: Small Jain courtyard temple at Bikaner, Rajasthan, with a prominent dome marking the shrine section of the temple



Figure 12: The Vāsūpūjyasvāmī courtyard temple at the summit of Mandar Hill, Bihar, strongly resembling Islamic constructions

building forms have traditionally been associated with the *caturmukha* (*caumukha*) concept and the veneration of a fourfold figural image, facing the cardinal directions. It is fascinating to note that the combination of large domes with *caturmukha* shrines, which like Islamic tombs have doors on all four sides, makes the arrangement even more reminiscent of Muslim architecture (Figure 9). Ample examples of this can be seen in the fortified temple areas (*tuiks*) on Mount Shatrunjaya. This kind of centralised Jain building could also be enlarged by adding a roofed arcade or corridor around the central shrine.

This can for instance be seen in the Pārśvanātha Temple No. II at Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and the Jala Mandir at Pavapuri, Bihar.¹³ In examples such as the Dādājī Temple in Calcutta, West Bengal, and the Śāntinātha Temple on Vaibhara Hill at Rajgir, Bihar (Figure 10), the Islamic message is so strong that these buildings could actually be mistaken for Islamic tombs.

Clear parallels, however, can be established not only between tombs and Jain temples, but also between Islamic mosque architecture and certain Jain temple buildings. Direct parallels can be established between Jain temple architecture and smaller courtyard mosques, commonly associated with the entire area of northern India, as well as with larger mosque forms associated with spacious stone flagged courts, more common to central and southern India. Jain temples, whose design is related to mosques with comparatively small courtyards, are commonly found throughout Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Bihar.

In these small courtyard temples, the worshipper enters an enclosed court, surrounded by arcades with pointed or cusped arches usually on all four sides. Usually, a prominent dome positioned on one side marks the presence of a wide hall, used as the shrine of the Jain temple (Figure 11). This sacred space corresponds to the prayer halls (*livāns*) of mosques and is rather untypical of Jain temples. Similar to Hindu temples, Jainas shrines are usually cubical chambers, which can be locked securely to

house the *mūl-nayaka* of the temple, however the openness and the availability of space on all four sides of the central image achieved through this temple layout provides the worshipper with ample space for the circumambulation of the central image. It also gives additional space for the accommodation of further religious icons, a common feature of a Jaina religious context. The creation of a large and spacious oblong shrine is therefore very suitable for Jaina worship.¹⁴ One might argue that small courtyard mosques, as well as Jaina temples following the same layout, might originally have been derived from the domestic courtyard house type of *havelis*, so common in northern India. However it is not only the layout of the buildings, but the combination of Muslim planning principles with Islamic design motifs which is so powerful. It is for example the prominent use of large central domes, playing such an important role in the imagery of mosque courtyards, combined with pointed and cusped arches, crenellations, minaret-like towers and *jali* stone screens, which amplify the Islamic feel of such later Jaina courtyard temples (Figure 12).

Large stone paved Jaina complexes with temple buildings resembling the prayer halls of mosques are particularly common in central and southern India. Similar to the shrine areas of the *haveli* temples, these Jaina temple buildings are oriented lengthwise and are wide and comparatively shallow constructions. They usually consist of a wide, elongated shrine room preceded by a broad open pillared porch, and do not follow the general tendency to elongate the axis of approach to the temple by adding more and more halls in one line in front of the shrine. The temple buildings usually have no pyramidal *mandapa* roofs and no *śikhara* or *vimāna* towers and have often been positioned at the end of open courtyards, surrounded by protective walls (Figure 13). In a Jaina context, where worship is usually conducted on an individual basis and ordinary worship is not congregational, the large stone flagged yards do not fulfil a ritual purpose and seem rather alien.¹⁵ In some instances, the temple



Figure 13: The Adinatha Temple positioned at the end of a spacious courtyard in Golakot, Madhya Pradesh, resembling contemporary Islamic mosque constructions in its layout and design



Figure 14: Prominent Islamic features in the design of the Adinatha Temple at Srirangapatnam, Karnataka



Figure 15: The use of tiles, large domes and prominent roof chhatris in the Bara Jaina Temple at Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, creating a strongly Islamic impression

constructions are much deeper than the typical *limans* of mosques. The impression of approaching an Islamic mosque and not a Jaina temple can, nevertheless, still be very strong owing to their flat roof design, the frequent use of the colour green, minaret-like *chatris*, crenallations, and spacious stone paved courtyards in the foreground. Prominent examples can be seen in Burhi Canderi and Golakot in Madhya Pradesh, and at Gogi and Srirangapatnam in Karnataka (*Figure 14*).

The discussion above has explored how, from about the 15th century, originally Islamic architectural features became more and more widespread and were absorbed by the architecture of other religious groups in India. Most of these features are decorative elements, such as domes, minaret-like *chatris*, pierced *jali* stone screens, pointed and cusped arches and floral decorations, to name the most common. Despite the many shared features, it is usually possible to differentiate between a mosque and a Hindu temple, an Islamic tomb and a Buddhist monastery. It is noteworthy, however, that in a Jaina temple context, widespread use of *jali* windows, a movement away from figural images to more symbolic representations of the Jinas, and the creation of *mihrab*-like imitation-prayer niches, along with the frequent and dominant use of green and the presence of tiles, inscriptions and other typical Islamic features, all seem to indicate a specifically Jaina openness towards Islamic stylistic features. In Jaina temple architecture there are ample examples where the basic differences between architectural types are no longer clearly delineated. Divisions between building types associated with Islam and Jainism become so blurred that certain Jaina temples look like tombs, whilst others clearly follow the layout of mosques (*Figure 15*). In relation to these specific examples, the question arises as to whether the similarities can simply be explained by a stylistic and aesthetic choice and a shared vocabulary of architecture.

In those instances where Jaina temples not only display decorative conventions originally associated with Islam, but actually follow an Islamic planning layout, which in a Jaina context makes little sense in relation to ritual, one has to ask whether the aim was not actually to look Islamic. Three reasons might account for such a desire. During the period of Islamic invasions in India, the Islamic appearance of a building might have been associated with a certain protection. A temple which looked like a mosque might have been mistaken by Muslims for an Islamic structure and consequently been spared, expressing a mimicry approach. If not actually mistaken for a mosque or tomb, the structures might have appeased Muslims as they clearly showed an adaptation and acceptance of Islamic forms of architecture. This could possibly by extension have been interpreted as an acceptance of Islam and of Islamic rule. Also, the avoidance of figural images would have pleased Islamic iconoclasts and prevented the desecration of the Jaina sculptures, whilst for a Jaina, *padukas* are as representative of the Jinas as complete figural representations. A further explanation, which might account for the continuation of an Islamicised style during the more peaceful 18th and 19th centuries, and to a certain extent to the present day, is the close association often established between Jainas and Hindus and the desire of the Jaina community to be distinct. By choosing more Islam-oriented than Hinduised motifs and imagery, the differentiation between Hindu and Jaina architecture becomes clearer.

Which of these issues – stylistic choice, mimicry, appeasement of the Muslims or differentiation from the Hindus – was predominant depends on each individual case. The discussion in this paper has drawn attention to a fascinating but so far widely neglected aspect of India's political and artistic past. Whilst the present paper presents the early results of a larger project in progress, it is planned to return to this topic in further detail in the future.

PHOTO CREDIT

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NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Dr George Michell for discussing this issue with me.
- 2 Such wall embellishments include bangla roof shapes, domes and niches flanked by pilasters and are very typical of temple architecture patronised by the Maratha rulers of central India.
- 3 In certain cases, domes have also been used during the reconstruction of earlier temple buildings as a cheaper and quicker way to reconstruct collapsed and probably originally trabeate mandapa roofs. Examples can be seen for instance in the architecture of Jaisalmer in Rajasthan and on Mount Girnar in Gujarat.
- 4 David Shulmann in particular has worked on the Hindu religious associations of the colour red, which stands for blood and is regarded as a heating substance, and white, associated with milk and considered a cooling material (Shulman 1980: 93-94). On this subject, see also Beck (1969: 553).
- 5 Whilst the colour white is closely associated with Śvetāmbara Jainism, especially in the white robes of Śvetāmbara monks and nuns and in the white marble widely employed in Śvetāmbara Jaina temple buildings, the colour red is commonly used to adorn the outer walls of Digambara Jaina temples. The prominent combination of red and white in Jaina temple buildings seems to be a later feature influenced by Mughal aesthetics.
- 6 As part of this tendency, most Jaina temple complexes are walled and frequently incorporate bastion towers and fortified gateway structures into their design.
- 7 India also has a pre-Islamic tradition of pierced stone screens, visible especially in the Hoysāṅga architecture of the Deccan and in Hindu temples from Orissa. These screens, however, are different in style from Islamic *jails* and frequently integrate depictions of human beings. Islamic stone screens and those found in a Jaina context are purely geometrical and devoid of the depiction of figural representations.
- 8 I am grateful to Dr Brigitte Majlis for suggesting that a more indigenous source for such abstract patterns might be found in *kolam* (*rangoli*) motifs. Using rice flower or coloured powders, Hindu women draw such designs on the ground in front of their houses, and Jaina women lay out similar auspicious drawings in Jaina temples. These serve as purifying agents and as a form of abstract veneration.
- 9 In this respect it is fascinating to note that Helmuth von Glasenapp and Vilas A Sangave suggest that the creation of non-image worshipping sects, such as the *Terāpanthi* and Sthānakavāsī groups of Jainism, which developed during the mid-15th and the mid-17th centuries respectively, can be interpreted as a Muslim influence on the Jaina religion (v. Glasenapp 1999: 506; Sangave 1980: 54-55).
- 10 The significance of the colours white and red for Jainism has already been discussed in footnote five in this paper. Yellow and orange are generally considered auspicious and holy in Indic religions. Yellow sandal wood paste is applied to Śvetāmbara icons as part of image worship, and *bhaṭṭārakas*, the pontiffs of Jaina *maṭhas*, as well as lay members who participate in Jaina religious ceremonies, for example, usually wear orange or saffron-coloured robes. This indicates their temporal or semi-ascetic status.
- 11 This can for instance be seen in the Candraprabhu Temple II at Candrapuri in Uttar Pradesh, the Pārśvanātha Temple at Bagalkot and the Neminātha Temple at Amminabhavi, the latter two in Karnataka.
- 12 Examples of this feature are for instance to be seen at Arrah and at Madhuban, both located in Bihar. During the reconstruction of the temples, mosaic coatings were also employed on Mount Girnar in Gujarat.
- 13 Pavapuri is celebrated as the cremation site of Mahāvīra. Because of the significance attached to the site and the temple structure associated with it, Mahāvīra water temples have been replicated throughout India, and it is noteworthy that in many cases, the Shāh Jahānī stylistic features of the original structure in Bihar have also been repeated. For further information on Pavapuri and the replication of sacred Jaina

sites, see Hegewald.

- 14 In this respect it is fascinating to note that elongated, but not such spacious shrines, are also common in Jaina temple architecture. These lengthwise oriented shrines do not usually permit the performance of the rite of *pradakṣiṇā*, but allow for a large number of images to be displayed inside the shrine room on lengthy pedestals or altars.
- 15 Such large open courtyards only fulfil a ritual purpose at prominent pilgrimage sites where annual or cyclic festivals attract large numbers of worshippers at the same time. Examples are for instance the open spaces surrounding the monumental images of Gommaṭeśvara, located at various sites throughout Karnataka. During the periodic ritual reconsecration of the colossi, large crowds of people have to be accommodated to view the spectacle.

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