In the winters of 2002–03 and 2003–04 I tried to visit all the medieval temples surviving in Maharashtra. With the help of earlier publications by Cousens (1931), Naik (1947), Deglurkar (1974) and Deo (1993), and of the photo-archive of the American Institute of Indian Studies in Gurgaon, I found about 120 of them. Many are discussed only superficially in the earlier publications, and others mentioned only in passing. I have therefore started writing a monograph that will discuss and illustrate all the important architectural features of each of the 120 monuments.

Of the earlier publications, the monograph by Cousens is the best known and also the best. The work of Naik is published in a journal, but has the character of a monograph. Many new sites are presented, but it also includes much repetition, notably on the Chalukya temples found in Karnataka. The publications of Deglurkar and Deo are both a little chaotic, but have great value for the finding of sites.
Figure 2: Akola, Siddheshvara temple, lateral view. Left: the hall. Right: the shrine, south.

Figure 3: Akola, Siddheshvara temple, full plan.
CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENTS
The body of old monuments found in Maharashtra has a character of its own. As all over India, the temples are decorated with architecture. In ornate temples, figure sculpture can be added to the architectural decorations, but, perhaps more than in other parts of India, ornate temples in Maharashtra can be decorated with architecture alone. They have even become infamous for this characteristic, because intricate architectural decorations often tire the visitor. A characteristic example is the Maheśvara temple, Patne (Figure 1). In this temple and many others, architectural decoration is not limited to mouldings, pilasters and the depiction of miniature towers on the elevations. Added to these are stepped and stellate plans, which themselves can be considered decorations: the walls of square structures are enlivened with projections and recesses in intricate patterns. Structurally, both the shrines and the halls of Hindu temples are very simple, but this is compensated for by an intricate architectural dressing that I call ‘architectural articulation’. This architectural articulation does not need figure sculpture to produce an extremely rich and ornate look and, because numerous variations are possible and because temple-building is strongly affected by fashion, it gives the temples of each region and each period a character of their own. For this paper I have selected the Siddheśvara temple, Akola, to illustrate all this. But before examining the architectural details of just one temple, I will present a few observations on the present use of the temples.

THE PRESENT USE OF THE TEMPLES
As all over India, medieval temples in Maharashtra are often still in use for worship. Contrary to the custom in many other regions, the cells of most temples are entered by the devotees themselves. Moreover non-Hindus can enter the cella freely. I myself have no Hindu look at all, but entering has not
been a problem. Of course, I have always shown respect for the idol, for instance by touching it gently and closing my eyes for a moment. The devotees nearly always perform *puja* themselves; in other parts of India often a priest is needed for that. The caressing of the idol by every visitor himself creates a very relaxed atmosphere. Quite often the floor of the cella is lowered; it can be a pit of two metres deep, and especially in such cases the atmosphere in the sanctum can be very moving.

THE SIDDHESVARA TEMPLE, AKOLA
This temple has been selected because it shows many features characteristic for Maharashtra. Akola lies about 70 km south of the city of Nashik (150 km north-east of Mumbai). The Siddheśvara temple stands near the Pravara river, but does not face it; both the river and the temple run east-west. Figure 2 gives a side view from south, the river runs behind. At first glance the temple does not look very attractive, because of the absence of any superstructure and the presence of a later porch (left of the photograph). But the elevations of both hall and shrine show a pattern of heavily decorated projections and recesses, conserved without damage, that is characteristic for the times and the region.

THE PLAN OF THE TEMPLE
Figure 3 shows the plan of the temple. This plan, with about 25 others, was published by Cousens (1931), but I did not succeed in finding his original drawings. Figure 3 therefore is my remaking of his work. The temple consists of a shrine and a hall. Both are square in plan but their plan outlines are nevertheless different; this difference is important and will be discussed in detail. Other remarkable features are the shrine having two entrances, the oblong look of the plan of the shrine, and the two additional bays of the hall.
Figure 6: Ganji Bhovare, two-shrined temple, interior of the eastern shrine, cela with two opposite entrances
Figure 7: Cutting off stepped diamonds. Left: the shrine of the siva temple, Ambarnatha. Right: the same plan with one more cut.

Figure 8: Akola, Siddhesvara temple, interior of the closed hall, one of its open bays.
Figure 9: Akola, Siddhesvara temple, corner of the closed hall, south-east
Figure 10: Akola, Siddhesvara temple, lateral side of the shrine, south

Figure 11: Schematic plans. Above: one side of a ‘square of projections’. Below: one side of a ‘diamond of corners’
A SHRINE WITH TWO ENTRANCES

The shrine can be entered from the hall, as usual, but also directly from outside by an open porch. The temple is still in daily use but the hall is not; it is the direct entrance that is in daily use. It is not clear which entrance is the principal one. The hall gives the western entrance importance, but east is the usual orientation for an entrance of a Saiva shrine. The anomaly found here, a shrine with two opposite entrances, is found more in the region. In Ratanvadi, about 25 km west of Akola, a very well preserved medieval temple has approximately the same plan. Figure 4 shows the hall to the left and the direct entrance to the right. In Ganji Bhovare, about 100 km south of Akola, an entirely renovated...
medieval temple has two shrines, and one of them has two doorways opposite one another and two small, opposing halls. In all three these cases, the floor of the cella is lowered. Thus each cella has two opposite flights of steps leading down (Figure 6). In Ratanvadi and Ganji Bhovare we found the shrines with both entrances open at the same time. On a festival day in Ratanvadi the numbers of devotees going down in the shrine was very large and on that occasion the two entrances proved very practical: one-way traffic established itself. The devotees entered from the west, after crossing the hall, and left by the eastern entrance. On other days, however, the eastern doorway is often used to enter, as shown by the large number of bells hanging there.

A SQUARE SHRINE THAT LOOKS OBLONG
The second remarkable element is the oblong look of the shrine in plan. The cella inside is square but the stepped outline of the shrine is oblong. This anomaly, however, is a matter of appearance only. Often shrines are a stepped diamond in plan, and in such cases one tip of the stepped diamond is cut-off by the adjoining hall. A well-known example is the temple in Ambarnatha (Figure 5, left). In Akola the same happens twice. The opposite tip of the diamond is cut-off by the second entrance and its porch; but the rest of the outline is entirely regular, and the whole is clearly a square with two parts missing, rather than an exotic oblong composition. In Figure 3, it is not the wall-projections marked B that are the corners of the shrine, but those marked A. One full side of the shrine runs from A to A.

A CLOSED HALL WITH OPEN LATERAL BAYS
A third remarkable element in the plan is the presence of two lateral projections from the hall. In plan they look like porches to lateral entrances into the hall. In fact they are two additional open bays with parapet-walls, and serve a functional purpose by providing the hall with light and fresh air much more effectively than an entrance does (Figure 8). Other solutions to the same problem met with in Maharashtra are giving a closed hall three unencumbered entrances, and giving a closed hall an entirely open front.

CONTRASTING OUTLINES OF THE SQUARE HALL AND THE SQUARE SHRINE
Finally, a fourth element visible in the plan is the difference in outlines between hall and shrine. It is this difference that is important for understanding the architectural articulation of temples.

The outline of the hall is square with projections and recesses. In elevation, each projection is articulated as an embedded square pillar (Figure 9). Only the front of each pillar is fully exposed. At the corners of the hall, however, there is one embedded pillar with two sides fully exposed and visible.

The outline of the shrine is also a square with projections and recesses, but nevertheless it is fundamentally different because the projections are very deep – as deep as they are wide. Thus the outline of the whole becomes a stepped diamond. The recesses are affected by this: now they consist of a pair of recesses, perpendicular to one another and separated by a re-entrant corner. As a consequence, each projection here has exactly the same character as the corners of the hall. Each is articulated as a square pillar with two sides fully exposed, far less than half embedded. The re-entrant corners are also provided with pillar mouldings, and as a result represent pillars that are almost entirely embedded.

It may seem natural to call the kinds of plan found here a ‘stepped square’ and a ‘stepped diamond’, but I propose clearer names for them. The first can be called a ‘square of projections’, the second a ‘diamond of corners’. The differences between them are visible in Figure 1 and two of them
Figure 14: Akola, Siddheśvara temple, decoration of the elevation, lower part of the hall, east.
Figure 15: Ratanvadi, Amrteśvara temple, a corner of the shrine, south-east
are fundamental: (1) each projection in the diamond plan is like the corner of the square plan, and (2) each recess in the diamond plan consists of a pair of recesses, whereas in the square plan the recesses are simple. Figure 12 shows the corresponding elevations. The two kinds of plan give rise to very different elevations: elevations consisting of largely embedded pillars versus elevations consisting of almost free pillars. Stellate plans also give rise to elevations of almost free pillars because they derive from the diamond of projecting corners, simply by rotating the projecting corners one by one. In Maharashtra this is done in steps by 11.25 degrees, and the rotations are interrupted in the centre of each side (Figure 13).

ORNATE ELEVATIONS WITHOUT FIGURE SCULPTURE

In conclusion, attention is drawn to the beautiful decorative pattern on the elevation of the Siddheśvara (Figure 14). Both hall and shrine are decorated with embedded pillars with the same details. In the hall these pillars are wide and largely embedded. In the shrine these pillars are narrower and only embedded to a slight degree, so they look far more like actual pillars. In between each pair an almost entirely embedded pillar is found. If the pattern now indicated is kept in mind, the description of the elevation becomes quite easy. In Ratanvadi, the superstructure survives and underlines the pattern: each projecting corner of the shrine is crowned with a small roof-tower, each re-entrant corner with just a corner of an embedded roof-tower (Figure 15). Thus, each projection of the walls is an embedded but complete depiction of a shrine.
REFERENCES


