

Bhoja, Bhojpur And The Bhumija

● Adam Hardy

In the history of temple architecture in India, one conspicuous phenomenon in the eleventh century is the appearance of gigantic royal temples such as the Brihadishvara of Rajaraja Chola at Tanjavur (*circa* 1000 CE, 66m high) and the Lingaraja at Bhubaneshwar (*circa* 1060 CE, 55m). Giant temples were the exception, however, and there are aspects other than inordinate size that characterise temple architecture at this time: a proliferating typology of temple forms, and a growing awareness, particularly in the Deccan and neighbouring parts of central India, of temple forms from other regions. In Malwa, temple architects brought out a new form from the northern or Nagara matrix, while incorporating details of southern or Dravida origin. This was the Bhumija, the temple mode favoured by the Paramara rulers.¹

These characteristics of the temple architecture of this period are reflected in the extraordinarily ambitious architectural endeavours of the great Paramara king Bhoja (ruled *circa* 1010 to 1055 CE). If it had been completed, his Shiva temple ('Bhojeshvara') at Bhojpur, towering over a vast artificial lake ('Bhoj Tal', or 'Bhim Tal'), would have been the biggest Hindu temple in the world (*see map, fig. 1.2*). The temple as it stands (*fig. 3.1*) is not obviously Bhumija, but its detailing – and ample other evidence at the site – show it to be the creation of those craftsmen who were specialising in Bhumija temples. On the rocks surrounding the temple is the one coherent and substantial set of medieval Indian architectural drawings to have come down to us, with Bhumija forms figuring prominently, but also showing Phamsana designs and Dravida-inspired compositions. Bhoja's other most significant architectural achievement is in the textual realm: his great compendium of architectural knowledge, the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*. Just as Bhumija temples display knowledge of other kinds of temple, this famous Vastu Shastra incorporates material dealing with different temple-building traditions: Nagara (several chapters, apparently from different sources), Vavata and Bhumija.

The Bhumija seems first to have appeared around the end of the tenth century. In its general form it springs from the single-spined Latina mode of Nagara temple. The spines (*latās*, 'creepers') of the Latina *śikhara* remain, rising above cardinal projections that take the form of emergent barrel-roofed shrines, Dravida-esque in detail. The remaining segments become *kūṭastambhas*, miniature *śikharas* on pilasters or *stambhas*, arranged in tiers (*bhūmis* or "grounds", hence "Bhumija"). Composite

(*anekāṇḍaka*) temple forms had already become established within the Nagara traditions, including the fully-fledged Shekhari mode, in which minor *śikhara* forms emerge sequentially along the cardinal axes.

In overall formal terms, the Bhumija, notwithstanding its Dravida elements, may be seen as another composite mode created from the architectural language of the Nagara, springing from a Latina matrix at a time when the *anekāṇḍaka* possibilities of the Nagara were being brought out. This Nagara character must be qualified, however: the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra* (hereinafter SSD) treats Bhumija temples quite distinctly from Nagara ones, and stylistic nuances evident in actual Bhumija monuments indicate that they were almost invariably built by separate guilds specialising in that mode.

In contrast to the Shekhari, the Bhumija does not represent a stage in a continuous process of transformation, but appears to have been invented, or rather drawn forth all at once. And its nature did not lend itself so easily to a further, gradual blossoming, as its range of underlying shapes was inherent in the basic idea. For any of its three alternative plan forms, a specific type can be defined simply by the number of projections and the number of *bhūmis*. The three classes of plan do seem to have appeared in successive stages: first the orthogonal (*caturaśra*) plan, stepping forward; then the stellate plan (*vr̥tta*, 'circular'), generally maintaining the cardinal projections (*bhādras*), but otherwise based on a star-shape; finally a further stellate class with eight *bhādras* (*aṣṭaśālā*), four orthogonal and four diagonal. All three plan forms are dealt with in the SSD.

The earliest surviving remains of Bhumija temples are probably those now lying in hundreds of fragments at the little-known site of Ashapuri, only 6 km from Bhojpur. This would once have been the major urban settlement in the area, and is important for understanding Bhojpur because it was almost certainly mainly from here that Bhoja brought the craftsmen to work at a vastly bigger scale on his new royal complex. The remains at Ashapuri attest to continuous activity in temple construction from at least the ninth to twelfth centuries, spanning the Pratihara and Paramara periods. We can see that the school of Nagara temple architecture that worked there built luscious Latina temples and experimented with *anekāṇḍaka* forms, and among the debris of Bhumija shrines one can witness a new knowledge of Deccani Dravida forms, and a transition from sensuous plasticity to a new linear elegance. Figure 3.2 illustrates this stylistic shift, which is more than simply a matter of the shape of the *gavākṣa* motifs making up the *jāla* patterns.

The Bhumija in the Bhojpur line drawings This love of line in the works of the new Bhumija school is palpable in the beautiful drawings engraved on the rocks at Bhojpur, which can be appreciated as works of art even though it is clear that they were made for practical purposes of design, quarrying of suitably sized stones, and construction. The rockface of the site became both the drawing board and the quarry for the building project, as elephants hauled gigantic mouldings and pillars up the long earthen ramp still visible a thousand years on. When work stopped, the temple stood as the massive cube of masonry we see today, a little over 19m square on plan. The west façade is dominated by great doorway, while the remaining three

sides are smooth, relieved only by simple string courses and blind balconies. Within, four twelve-metre pillars define nine bays, the large central one covered by a weighty corbelled ceiling and housing the huge, gleaming Shiva *liṅga*. The platform in front of the temple, not formally integrated, seems to belong to a slightly later stage, when work must have resumed; but the temple itself, except for some recent renovations, remains as it appeared at the first interruption, perhaps at the death of Bhoja.

Of the twenty or so significant drawings at Bhojpur, here we shall examine just five: those relating to the Bhumija temple form. The illustrations in this paper are redrawn from a measured survey on site. Three of the examples are plans. The small drawing D1² (fig. 3.3) is a clear half plan, with five projections, of which the intermediate ones are merged with the *bhadra* to create a central cluster corresponding to the *garbhagrha* width. It is a typical size for a minor temple, and doubtless intended for a lesser shrine at the site. It may well be the plan for the small Bhumija temple of which the remnants lie just a few metres to the west. The drawing conforms to the prescription in the SSD for the ratio of walls to *garbhagrha* in Bhumija temples: divide the initial square (defining the corners) into ten, and make the *garbhagrha* six parts and the walls two parts each. The Jamaleshvara temple at Jamli in western Malwa is very similar in plan form and virtually the same size (figs. 3.4 and 3.5).

Drawing G1 (fig. 3.6) is the smallest of the plans at Bhojpur, and represents a stellate form of the Bhumija mode. With three points between each pair of *bhadrās*, constructed on the basis of a rotated square, this kind of plan is the stellate equivalent of the *pañcaratha* orthogonal plan seen at Jamli, and suggests an equivalent five-tier (*pañcabhūmī*) elevation (fig. 3.7). The drawing is probably not from the initial phase of Bhojpur. Less than a metre across, the plan has certainly been drawn at a reduced scale, and is possibly the demonstration of an idea rather than a blueprint for a specific building. The well-preserved line is more thinly chiselled than most of the other drawings at the site. Despite the clarity of the line, the construction of the drawing is not as regular as it might appear at first. The underlying star diagram is of sixteen points, but the match is approximate. The proportion of *garbhagrha* to wall (measured to the corner) is more or less 4:1, rather than the 6:2 prescribed for all Bhumija temples in the SSD.

Drawing A1, by contrast, is some 25m across, yet represents only part of a plan (fig. 3.8). It shows four deep and frenetically faceted projections: corner element (*karṇa*), half the central projection (*bhadra*) and two intermediate projections (*pratīkarṇa* and *pratibhadra*), so the complete side corner-to-corner would have seven projections (*saptaratha*). As in a stepped-diamond or a stellate plan, small *nandi* projections emerge in the re-entrant angles between the main ones. In the interior of the plan can be seen the positions of pilasters and pillars.

Turning to elevation and section drawings, it is here rather than in plans that the curvaceousness of the Bhojpur line drawings can be enjoyed. Drawing B2 (fig. 3.9) is a large drawing of base mouldings, of a

style redolent of the new 'Bhumija tradition'. It shows a lofty *pīṭha* surmounted by the lower portion of a *vedībādhā*. The design is essentially like the platform of the Bijamandal, Vidisha, the only other Paramara monument approaching Bhojpur in scale, and also incomplete (fig. 3.10, see also figs. 4.1 and 4.2). This drawing has lovely, foliated, voluted excrescences, drawn neither in section nor elevation in modern terms, but conveying the spirit of a widespread kind of carved fringe. Despite its flowery character, drawing B2 is the full size detail for some of the cyclopean moulding pieces lying forlorn around the site. Before work was abandoned, numerous pieces had been cut for just the lower two layers, the *jādyakumbha* and the *karṇaka*, and a few for the *khura* base with its frieze of leaves and pearl swags.

Drawing J1 (fig. 3.11) is engraved on a large, irregularly shaped, shiny slab in the floor of the Bhojpur temple platform, just in front of the temple entrance. This is the largest and most complete and detailed medieval drawing of a *śikhara* surviving, and shows a *pañcaratha* (five-projection), *pañcabhūmi* (five-storey) orthogonal Bhumija elevation like that of Jamli, up to the level of the *skandha* (shoulder). At the top is a tall *vedīka*, with *stambhas* in it. The line of this drawing is thin and dotted, and a similar economy rules the information that the drawing gives. The *kūṭastambha* profiles are very freely drawn in the available spaces between the main framework. It is not the details but the nature and proportions of the framework that are conveyed meticulously: the overall curvature, the diminishing widths of the *rathas*, the *bhūmi* heights, centre lines, and the horizontal divisions on the *latā*, evenly spaced for construction of the *gavākṣa* grid. This could be a working drawing, a reference for setting-out the main dimensions at the different levels as the tower construction rises, or it could be a theoretical diagram. In fact, the modular proportions found in this Bhumija elevation at Bhojpur correspond closely to the principles given for Bhumija temples in the *Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra*.³ It is also the drawing that comes closest to the text in its succinct communication of an underlying design framework to be fleshed out by somebody familiar with the architectural language in which it has been conceived.

Bhumija Temples in the Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra (SSD)

Chapter 65 of the SSD, on Bhumija temples, stands out for its coherence and its complexity. The argument is tightly woven, with its own mathematical logic. It does not explicitly classify a temple type in terms of the number of projections, or of the number of points of the underlying diagram of a stellate plan, and of the number of *bhūmis*, but has a brain-teasing character demanding that these things should be deduced from its instructions. As the Bhumija form did not evolve gradually but was invented, albeit through a re-casting of existing forms, the text did not need to incorporate passages from venerated earlier texts, nor account for a myriad of designs created through practice. Rather, without many built examples to draw upon, it could lay out the possibilities inherent in the system. Surviving Bhumija temples are relatively close to the prescriptions of the SSD, perhaps because the theory and practice developed side by side in a way that would not have been possible in older and more disparate traditions.

The chapter describes four types of orthogonal temple, seven stellate, and five *aṣṭaśālā* types. Most of the types described are not found among built examples, but are convincing and eminently buildable. Here we briefly illustrate three of the types found in actual practice, beginning with the second orthogonal one, the Malayadri (fig. 3.12; SSD, Ch. 65, verses 24-37). This is the *pañcaratha* and *pañcabhūmi*, like the temple at Jamli and the *śikhara* drawing at Bhojpur, each of which comes close to the proportional prescriptions of the text, with certain notable differences. The text has already explained that the initial square should always be divided into ten *bhāgas* (parts), of which six are occupied by the *garbhagrha*. Now we learn that for this type, and most of the others, the original division into ten should be re-divided to give a new *bhāga* size for the exterior divisions of the plan. The *bhadra* is always five of the *bhāgas* derived for the exterior divisions. The *śikhara* height (measured here from the top of the second storey up to the *vedī*) is given as twelve of the original ten *bhāgas*, and we are now told that this height is to be re-divided to give yet another *bhāga* size for the vertical divisions within the *śikhara*. On the basis of these *bhāgas*, the ascending *bhūmis* are to be reduced from stage to stage by one quarter of a *bhāga*. This principle is followed for all the Bhumija temple types, and the respective *bhūmi* heights can be worked out from the overall height that is given.

For the Malayadri, we are told that the *śālā* (i.e. the shrine image in the *bhadra*), which as already noted usually has Dravida detailing, should be Nagara. In the drawing (fig. 3.12) I interpret this to mean that it is crowned by a Nagara *gavākṣa* pediment (*śimhakarṇa*) instead of the usual Dravida *mahānāsī*, and Nagara rather than Dravida *kūṭas* on the corners.

The third of the stellate types in the text is the Kamalodbhava (fig. 3.13; SSD, Ch. 65, verses 89-100), the stellate equivalent of the Malayadri in terms of the number of projections and levels. A built example close to this type is the Mahakaleshvara, Un (fig. 3.14). The underlying geometry implied by the text is a 20-point star, allowing the *bhadra* to be five out of the fourteen *bhāgas* of the re-divided exterior. A 16-point star, as in drawing G1 at Bhojpur and which we might expect to be typical, yields an unacceptably narrow *bhadra*. Similarly, a thirty-two point star would seem a likely basis for a plan with seven projections corner to corner, as in the superb Udayeshvara (or Nilakantheshvara) temple, Udayapur (fig. 3.16), dedicated in 1080 by Paramara king Udayaditya. However, the instructions for the Shatashringa temple in the SSD, Chapter 65 (fig. 3.15; SSD, Ch. 65, verses 109-120) result in a star of twenty-eight points. Careful measurement of the Udayeshvara reveals that a twenty-eight point star is indeed the basis there. The ratio between the *garbhagrha* width and the corner-to-corner width, 6:10 in the text, is about 5.7:10, while the ratio of the *bhadra* and the square of the plan is about 5:18, as opposed to the 5:19 prescribed for the Shatashringa type. In terms of vertical dimensions, the Udayeshvara has a proportionately shorter *jaṅghā* and a considerably loftier *śikhara* than the Shatashringa, and the *bhūmi* heights diminish faster towards the top. The proportions of Bhumija temples do deviate to some extent from the prescriptions given in the SSD, but in general principles

they are surprisingly close. One might never know how to look for these principles without the clues provided by the text.

The Design of Bhojpur

Returning to Bhojpur, the clues to the intended design of Bhoja's temple are not textual ones, but lie in the line drawings and abandoned mouldings scattered around. Earlier writers have suggested that the present stark surfaces were the intended treatment of the exterior, and that this would have been a funerary shrine crowned by a pyramidal Phamsana or Samvarana roof.⁴ This is plausible, until the evidence on the site falls into place. Several of the larger drawings are full-size details of parts of the temple as actually built: the giant pillars, the pilasters of the interior and the doorway, the plan of the façade, the balconies. Not surprisingly, some of the other drawings turn out to be full-size designs for parts never completed. Drawing B2 (fig. 3.9) is indeed the design for the base of the temple, as shown by the corresponding size and detail of some of the huge mouldings at the site.

Drawing A1 is one of two part plans that seem, at some point, to have been alternative options for the *mūlaprāsāda* of the temple itself.⁵ There may have been plans for an attached *maṇḍapa*, or more likely the temple was intended to have four entrances leading directly into the *mūlaprāsāda* (making it 'sarvatobhadra' in the present-day scholarly terminology). A perfect correspondence becomes apparent between the temple as existing and drawing A1. Not only does their respective column spacing coincide, all bound together by grid of 18 x 18 squares, but the corner of the shrine as built has actually been drawn. The existing cube, then, was to be the *garbhagrha*, encased by a generous, pillared ambulatory (fig. 3.17). In effect an ambulatory *maṇḍapa*, this space has no known equivalent other than a few prodigious Nagara conceptions of the SSD, as far as we know never realised. It would have been truly awe inspiring, a great, lofty cavern enfolding the mighty inner core.

At this time, and given the style of everything remaining at Bhojpur, this kind of plan can only imply a Bhumija temple, even if no other Bhumija temple is *sāndhāra*, i.e. with *andhārikā* or internal ambulatory. Externally, the projections of the plan indicate *kūṭastambhas* clustered with unprecedented density, jostling one in front of the other on their overlapped plan projections, with *nandi kūṭastambhas* strangely hidden inside dark slots, their imaginary shafts deeply embedded within the temple body, and with only the corners of their spires poking out in the heights above. Seven projections imply seven *bhūmis*, so the probable composition can be sketched, with a *pīṭha* and a *vedībāndha* scaled to drawing B2. Even if the *jaṅghā* (wall zone) is kept as low as possible, it is difficult to arrive at a convincing elevation less than 100m high, taller by a third than the Brihadishvara at Tanjavur. If completed, the *śikhara* of the Bhojeshvara would have ranked, as the centuries passed, with the loftiest monuments the world over. Mirrored in its lake, doubled up like an expanding Shiva *liṅga*, there could be no profile more suitable than a Bhumija one for the architectural pinnacle of Bhoja's great project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Deva, Krishna. "Bhumija Temples". In *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture*, ed. Pramod Chandra. New Delhi, 1975. Pp. 90-113.

References :

1. This paper draws on a larger study: Adam Hardy, *Theory and Practice of Temple Architecture in Medieval India: Bhoja's Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra and the Bhojpur Line Drawings*, with translations from the Sanskrit by Mattia Salvini (New Delhi, forthcoming). For the first overview of Bhumija temples, see Krishna Deva, "Bhumija Temples," in *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture*, ed. Pramod Chandra (New Delhi, 1975), pp. 90-113.
2. The numbering system that I have adopted is based on letters given by the ASI to the different zones of the site, with numbers allocated individual drawings.
3. See Hardy, *Theory and Practice*, p. 256 and fig. 6.1.
4. Kirit Mankhodi, "Scholar-emperor and a 'Funerary' Temple: Eleventh Century Bhojpur," in *Royal Patrons and Great Temple Art*, ed. Vidya Dehejia (Bombay, 1988), pp. 101-112; endorsed by K. K. Chakravarty, *Bhojpur Temple: a Vision of Harmony* (Bhopal, 1991), p. 32.
5. The other is drawing B1, which yields a slightly smaller temple design: see Hardy, *Theory and Practice*, figures 2.13, 2.73, 2.74.



Fig. 3.1 Bhojpālās: ur (Dist. Raisen). The site today, with temple and earthen ramp, eleventh century.



Fig. 3.2 Ashapuri (Dist. Raisen). *Gavākṣa* left, from the Nagara tradition, *circa* early-tenth century; right, from a Bhumija temple, *circa* early-eleventh century.

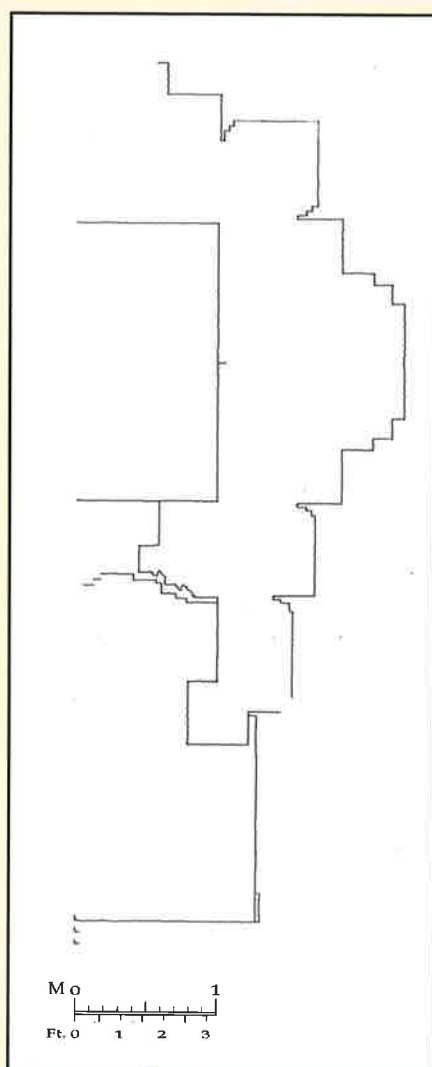


Fig. 3.3 Bhojpur (Dist. Raisen). Drawing D1.



Fig. 3.4 Jamli (Dist.Dhar). Jamaleshvara temple, a *pañcaratha*, *pañcabhūmi* Bhūmija temple, south-west side circa second half of eleventh century (photo: Doria Tichit).

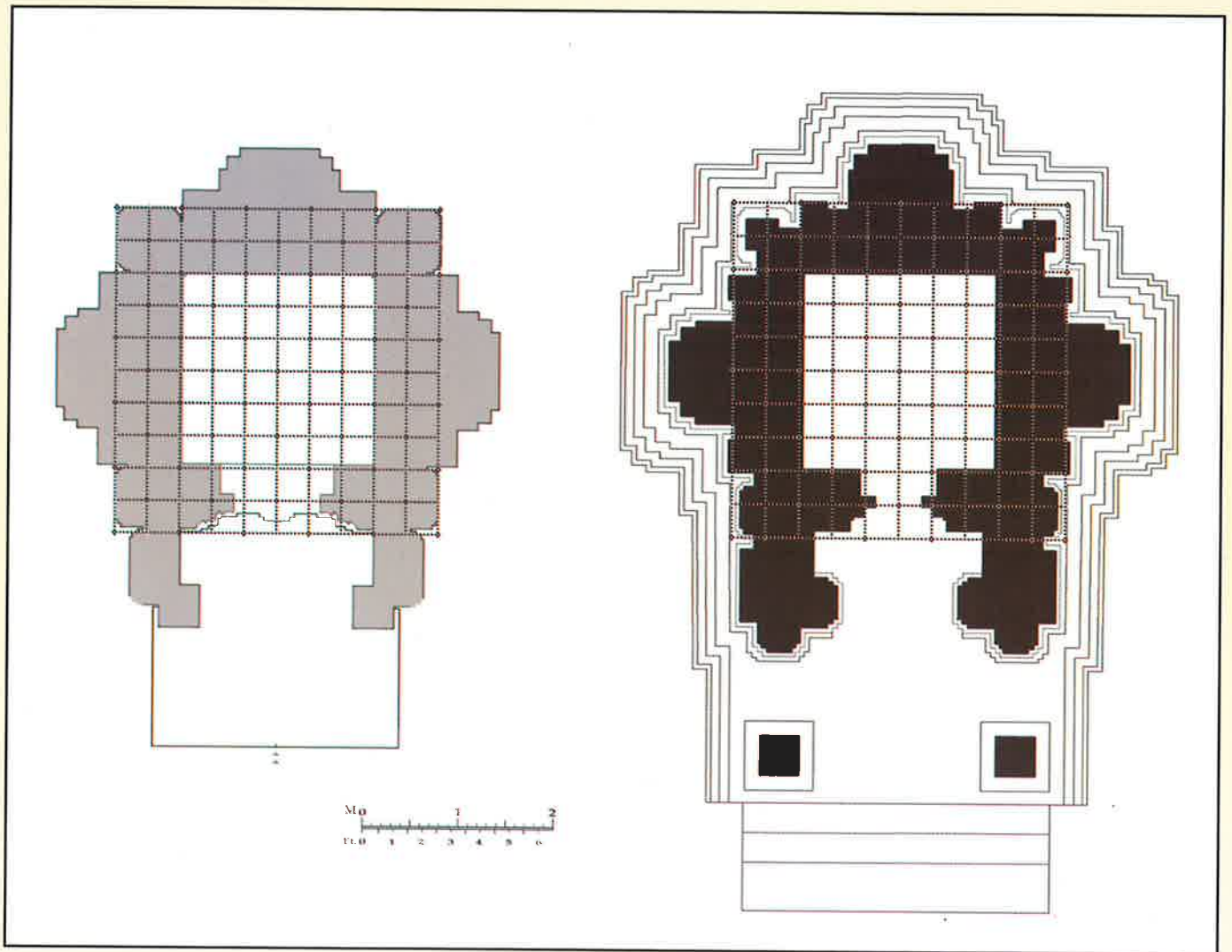


Fig. 3.5 Analysis of drawing D1 and comparison with plan of Jamaleshvara, Jamli, *circa* late-eleventh century.

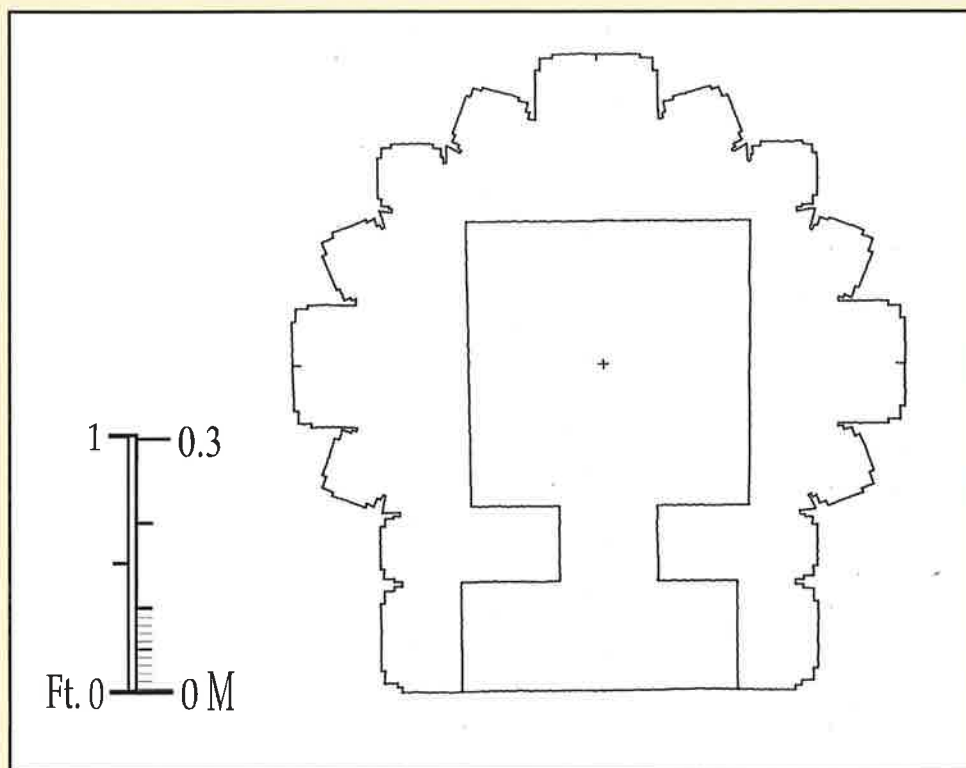


Fig. 3.6 Bhojpur (Dist. Raizen). Drawing G1.

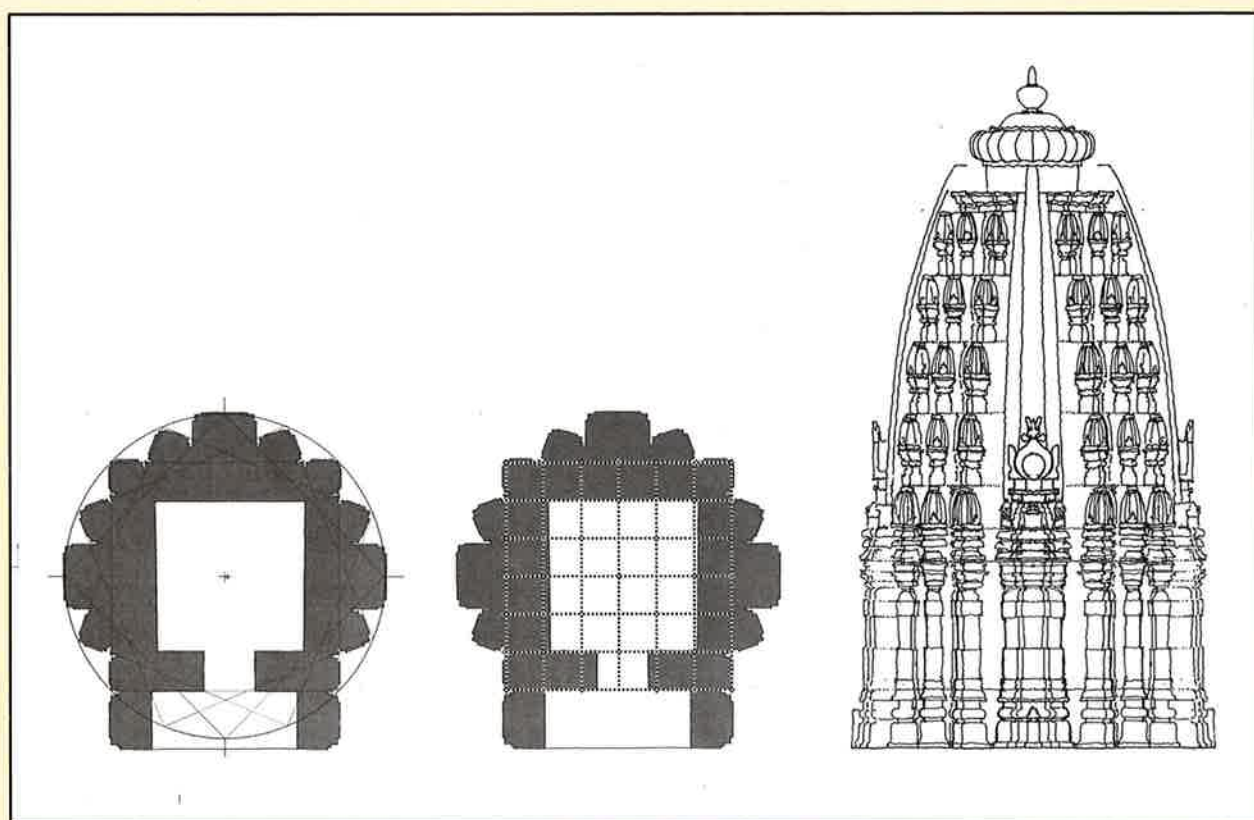


Fig. 3.7 Bhojpur (Dist. Raizen). Analysis of drawing G1, with probable corresponding elevation.

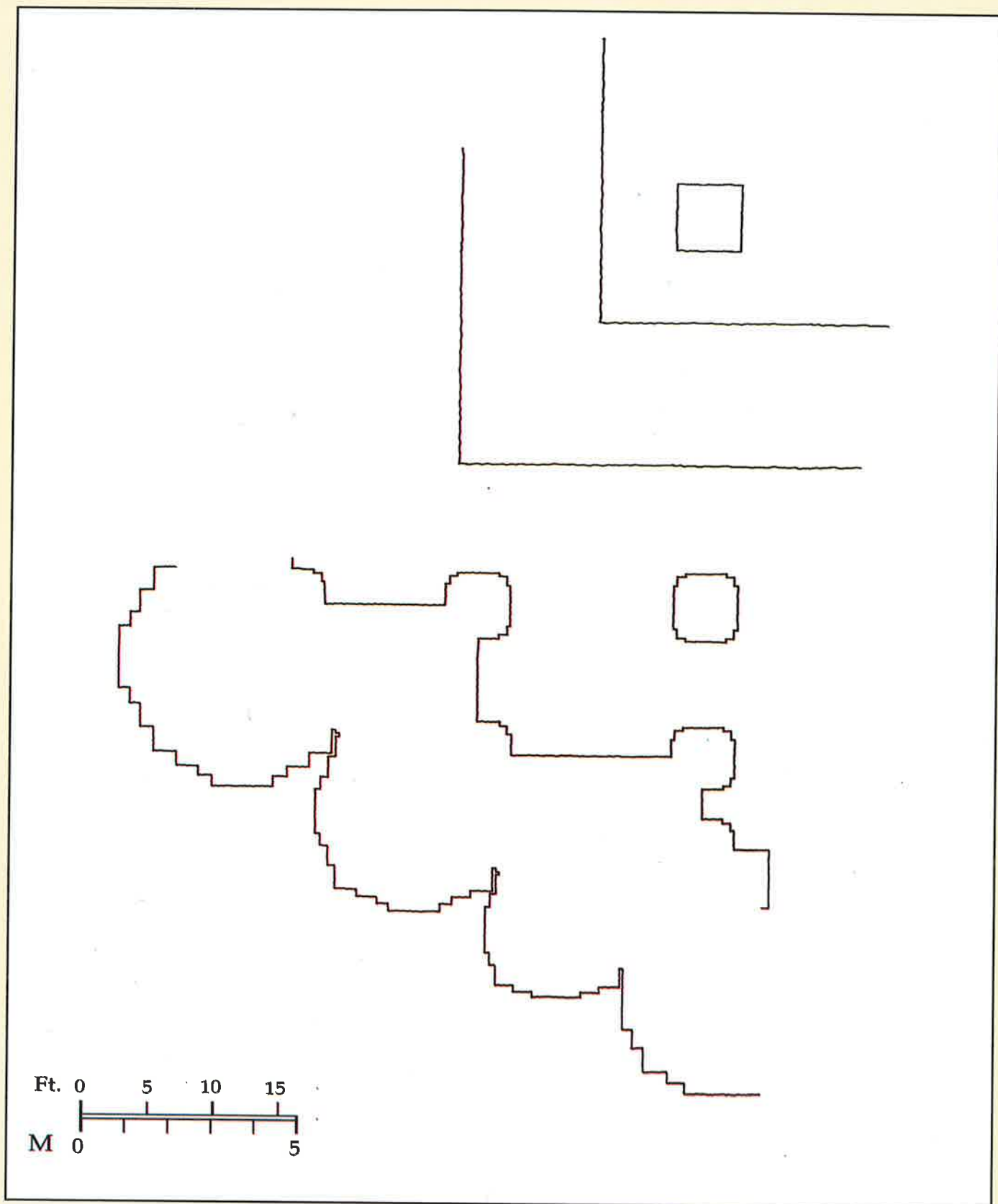


Fig. 3.8 Bhojpur (Dist. Raizen). Drawing A1.

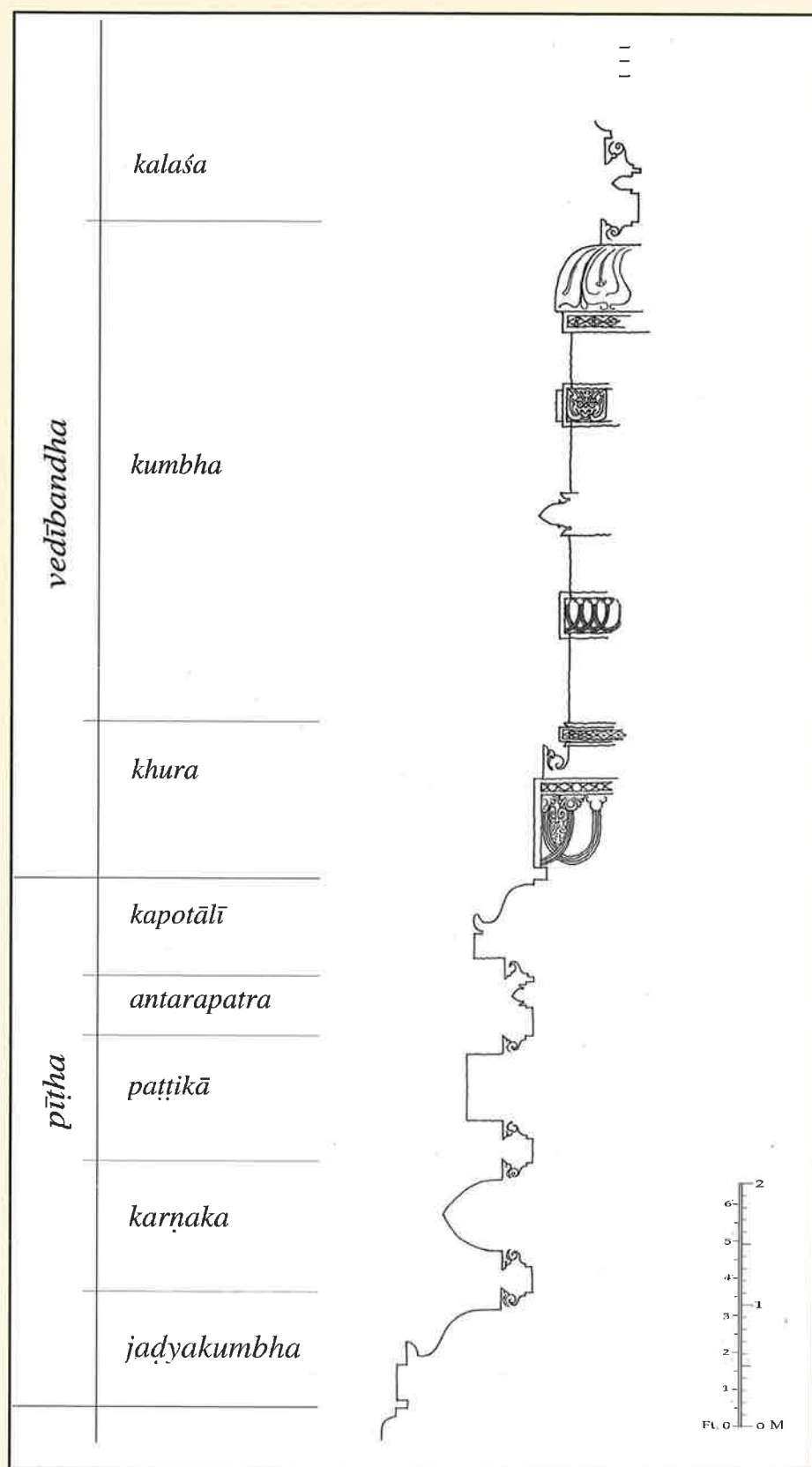


Fig. 3.9 Bhojpur (Dist. Raisen). Drawing B2.



Fig. 3.10 Vidisha (Dist. Vidisha). Plinth of the Bijamandal, south side, *circa* second half of eleventh century.

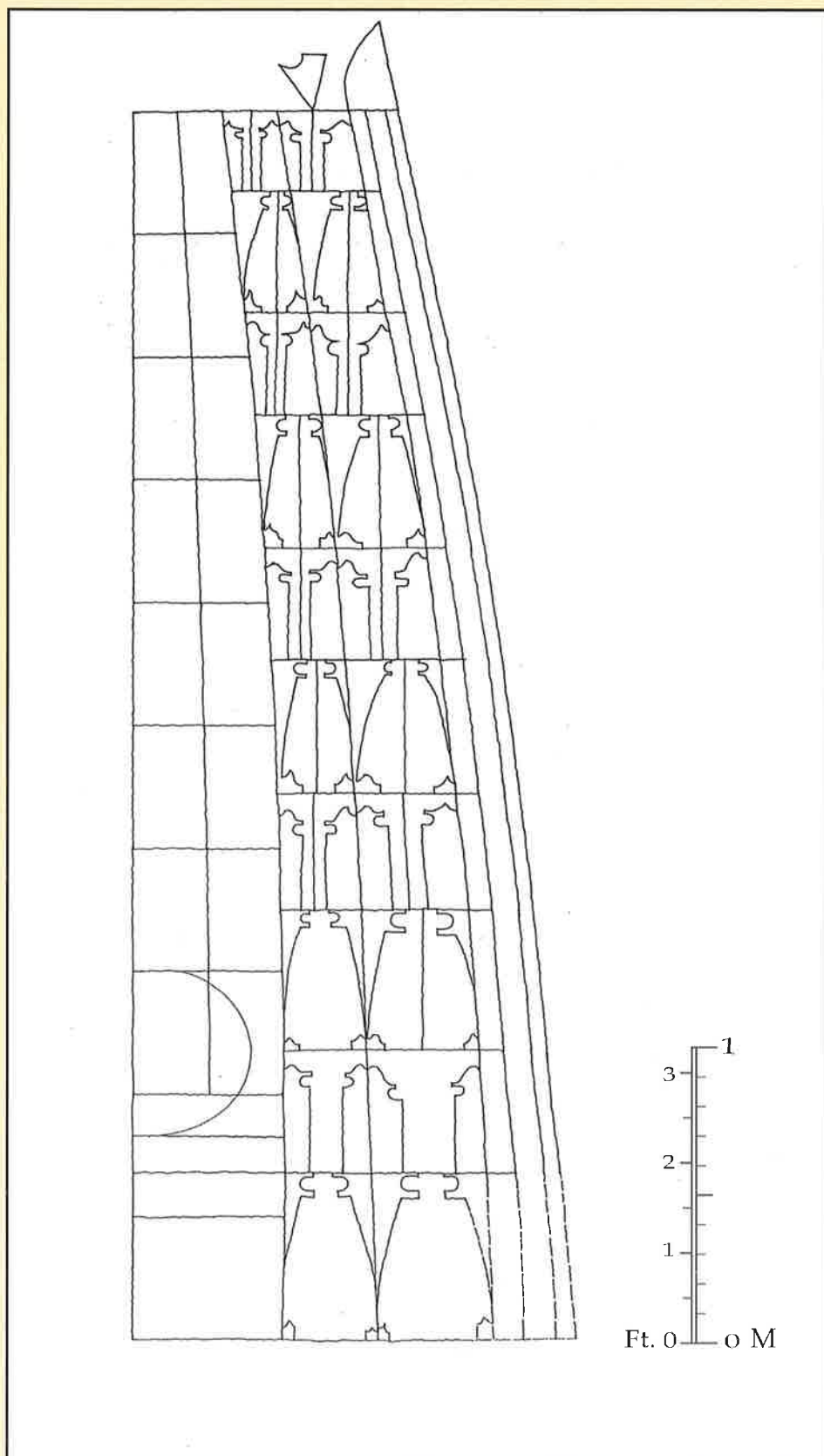


Fig. 3.11 Bhojpur (Dist. Raisen). Drawing J1.

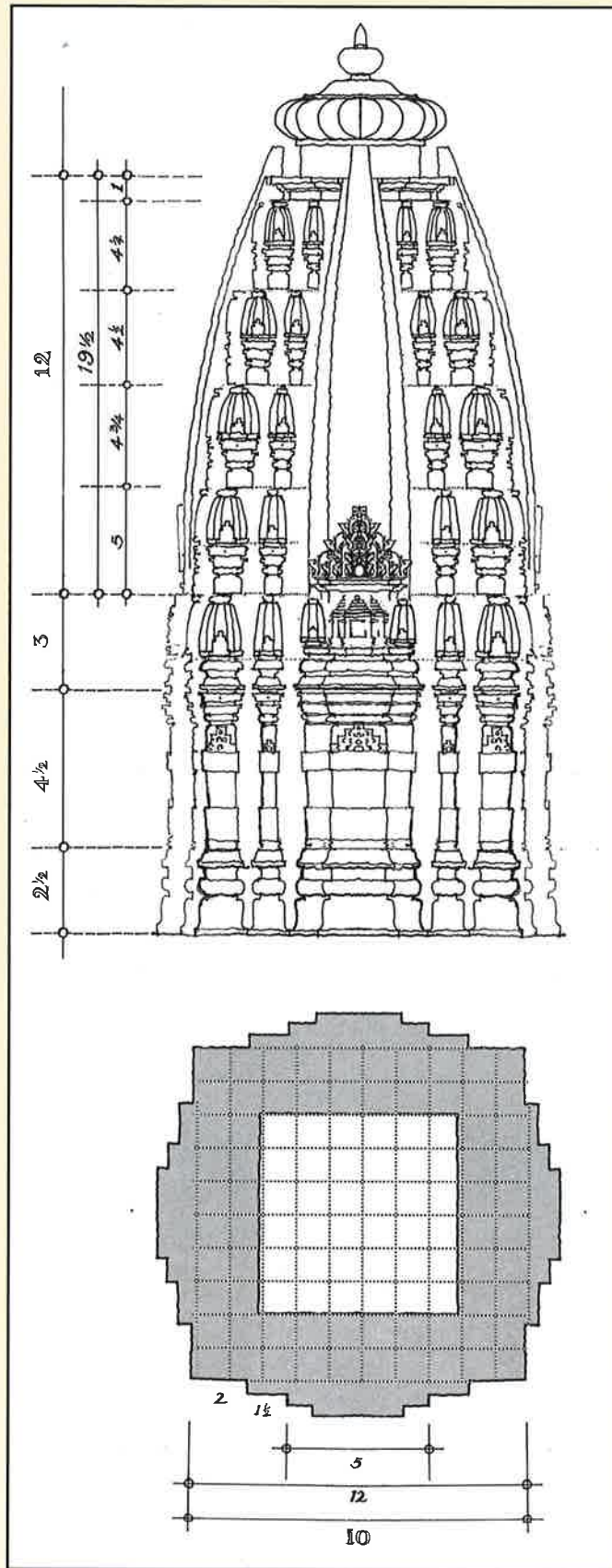


Fig. 3.12 The Malayadri temple, drawn from the instructions in SSD, Chapter 65.

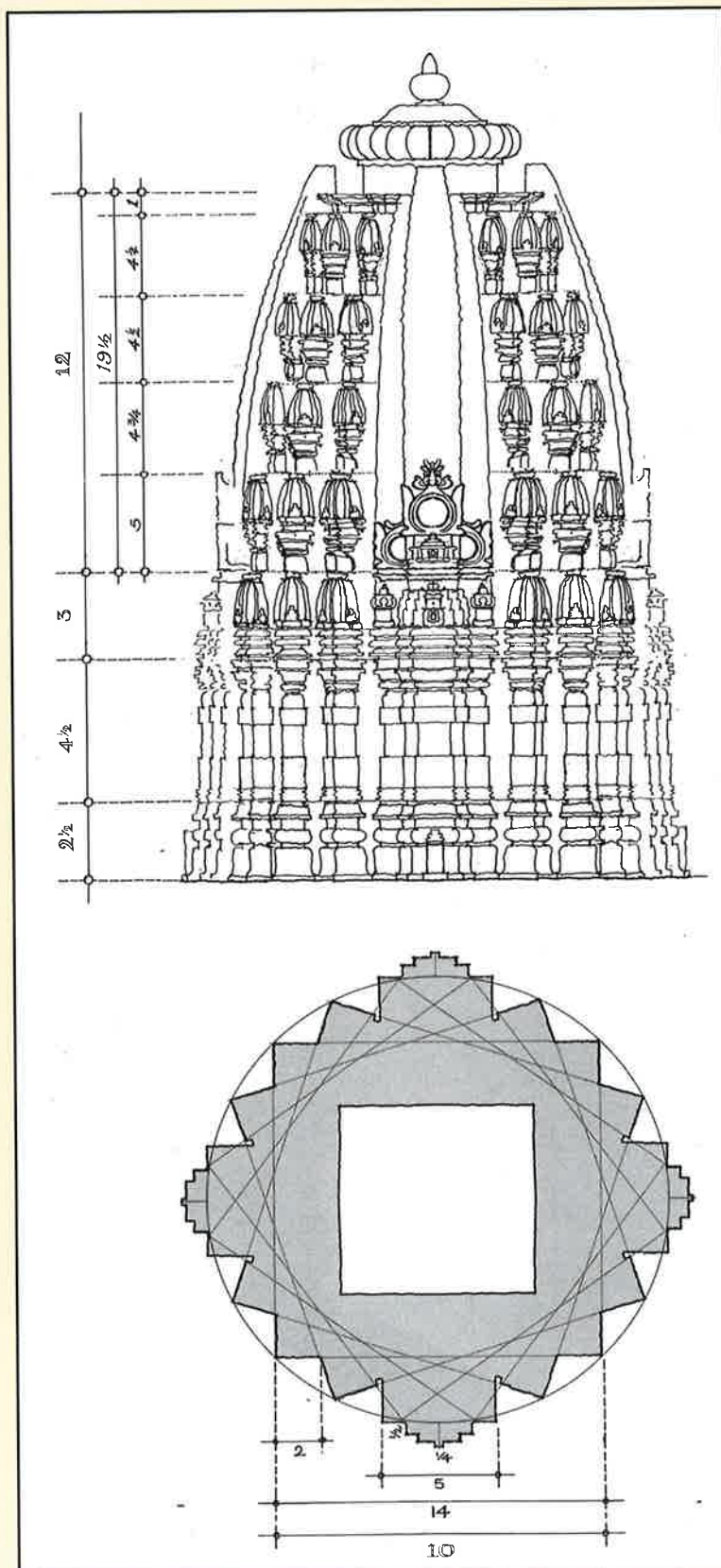


Fig. 3.13 The Kamalodbhava temple, drawn from the instructions in SSD, Chapter 65.

Fig. 3.14 Un (Dist. West Nimar). Mahakaleshvara (no. 2) temple, stellate equivalent of *pañcaratha*, *pañcabhūmi*, south-east side, eleventh century.



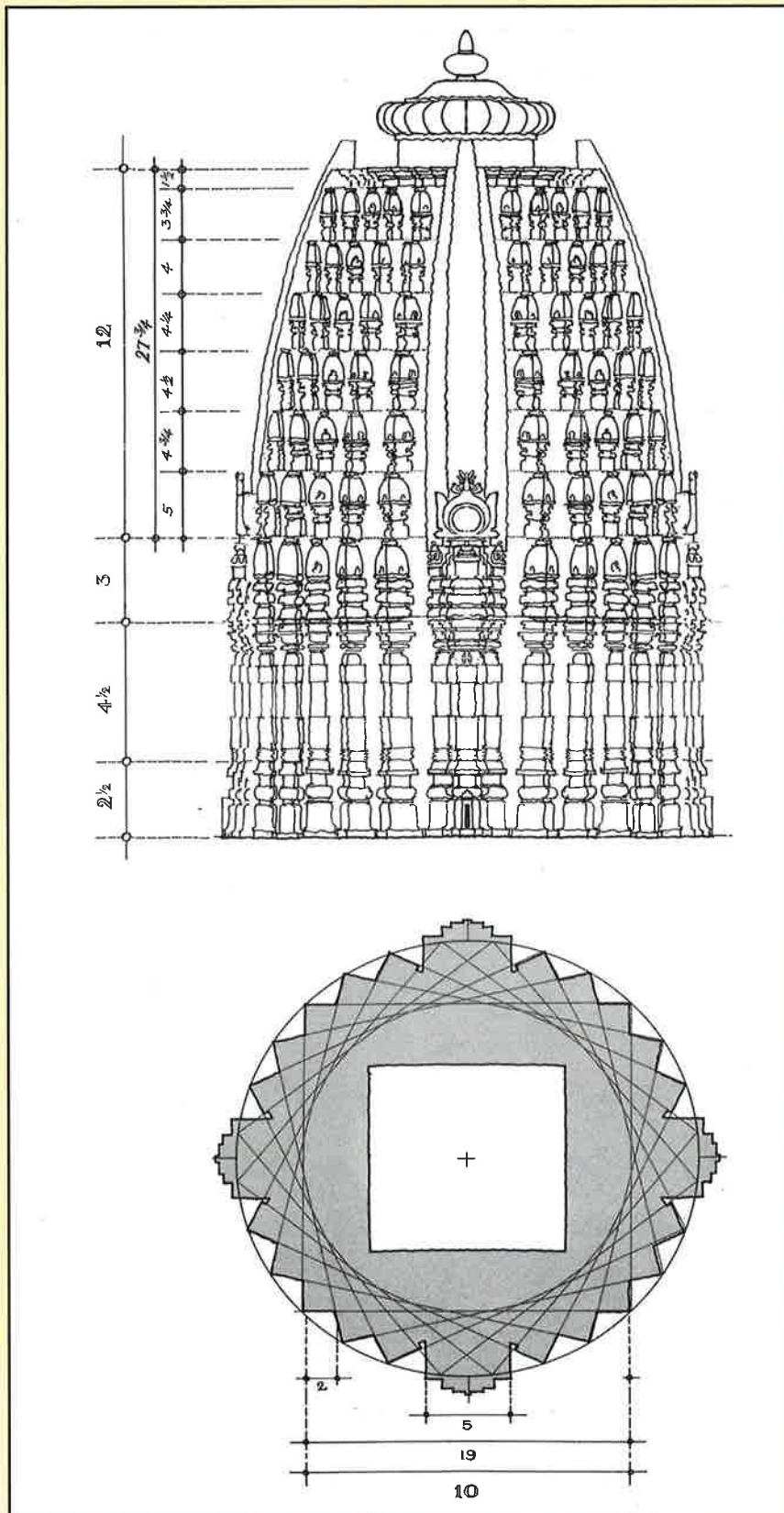


Fig. 3.15 The Shatashringa temple, drawn from the instructions in SSD, Chapter 65.



Fig. 3.16 Udayapur (Dist. Vidisha). Udayeshvara temple, stellate equivalent of *saptaratha*, *saptabhūmi*, south-west side, circa AD 1080.

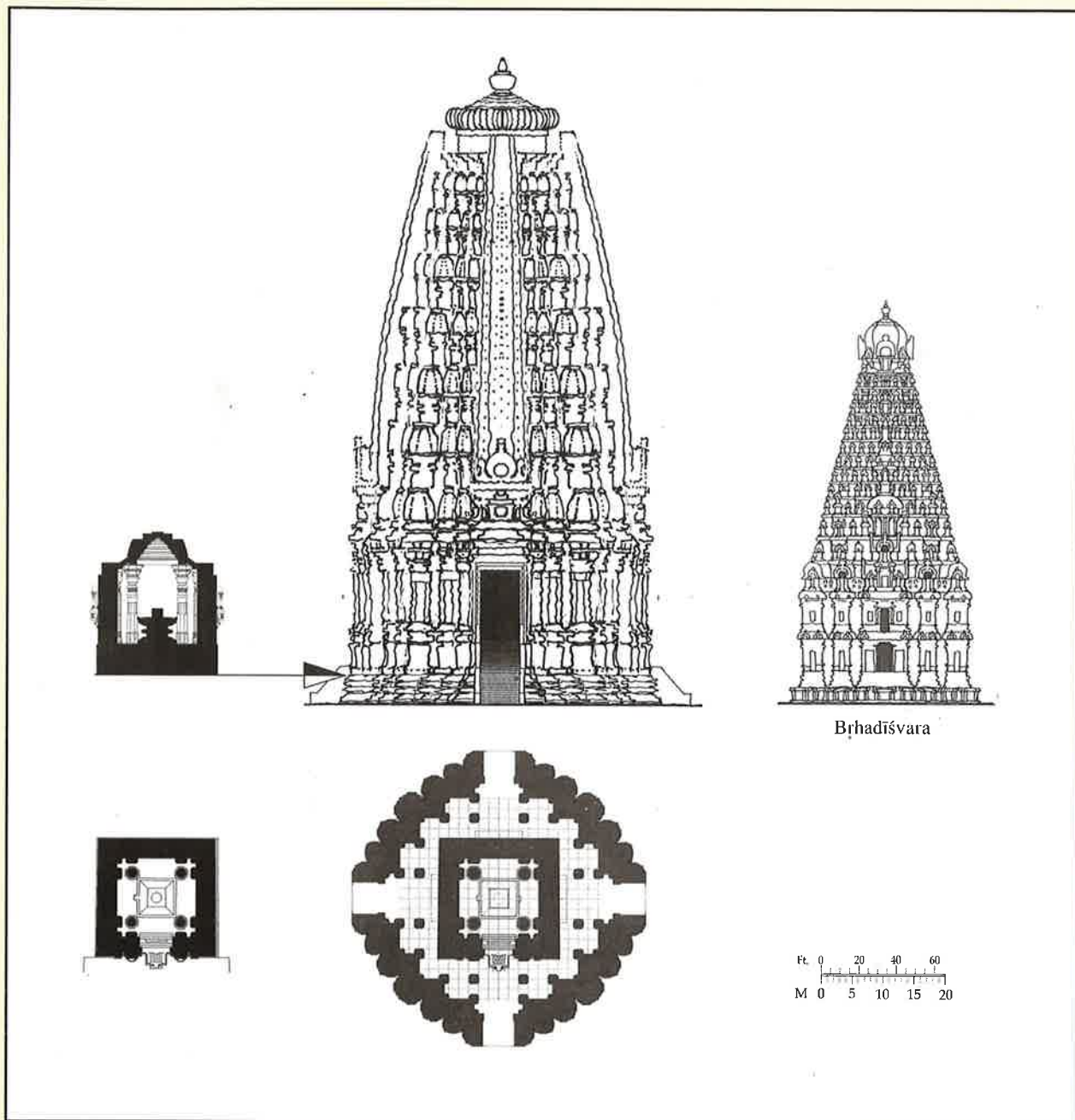


Fig. 3.17 Centre: reconstructed plan and sketch elevation of the Shiva temple, Bhojpur; left: plan and section of existing; right: Brihadishvara temple, Tanjavur, eleventh century, at the same scale.