

Beyond the Ashokan Edict: Prithvipur, Kalsi, and the Sacred Landscape of the Upper Yamuna Corridor in Pachhwa Doon

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Abstract: The archaeological and material history of Pachhwa Doon is most visibly represented by the Ashokan rock edict at Kalsi and the later ritual complex at Jagatgram. Between these better-known early historic sites and the more clearly documented medieval and early modern history of the region, however, the material record remains comparatively fragmentary. This paper examines this less visible phase through preliminary field observations at Kalsi and, more particularly, Prithvipur. The study focuses on architectural and sculptural remains presently preserved at the Kaula Devi temple and Prachin Shiva Mandir at Prithvipur, together with fragmentary early medieval material observed at Kalsi. Prithvipur forms the principal focus of the paper. The site contains a considerable assemblage of displaced and reused sculptural and architectural material, including āmalaka fragments, deity images, subsidiary figures and possible architectural members. Although their original contexts cannot presently be reconstructed, the concentration of this material suggests the presence of one or more earlier temple structures within the Prithvipur landscape. The paper also considers the later history of the Prachin Shiva Mandir, including its surviving murals, as a separate visual and chronological layer. Rather than proposing an uninterrupted sequence from the Mauryan to the early modern period, the study examines different phases through which political and sacred activity became materially visible in the Upper Yamuna region. These include the imperial *dhamma* of Ashokan Kalsi, the Vedic sacrificial environment represented by Jagatgram, the emergence of temple-centred traditions during the early medieval period, and the later sacred and political history of Prithvipur. The interpretations presented here remain preliminary because of the fragmented and displaced character of much of the material and the absence of systematic excavation at Prithvipur.

Keywords: Prithvipur, Kalsi, Pachhwa Doon, Upper Yamuna, early medieval, temple architecture, visual culture, sacred landscape, Kaula Devi, murals

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1. INTRODUCTION

The historical and archaeological narrative of Pachhwa Doon is comparatively clear at certain chronological points but considerably less visible at others. Kalsi occupies a particularly prominent

position because of the presence of the Ashokan rock edict, which places the Upper Yamuna region within the wider political landscape of the Mauryan Empire during the third century BCE (Hultzsich 1925). Several centuries later, Jagatgram provides another important archaeological horizon through the remains associated with Śīlavarman and the performance of Aśvamedha sacrifices (Archaeological Survey of India 1954; Altekar 1953–54). Beyond these better-known sites and periods, however, the history of the region becomes much more fragmentary, particularly during the early medieval centuries.

This apparent gap does not necessarily imply that Pachhwa Doon experienced an absence of cultural, political or religious activity during the intervening period. Preliminary field observations at Kalsi and Prithvipur suggest that material belonging to later phases survives within this landscape, although often outside its original archaeological context. Architectural and sculptural fragments at both locations raise the possibility of temple-building activity during the early medieval period. The evidence from Prithvipur is particularly significant because of the quantity and variety of material presently preserved at the Kaula Devi temple and the Prachin Shiva Mandir. Prithvipur has therefore been taken as the principal site of enquiry in the present paper. Although the place has received passing mention, the sculptural and architectural assemblage encountered during the present field visits has not been found by the author in any dedicated archaeological or art-historical site report consulted so far. The intention here is consequently not to provide a final reconstruction of the site, but to place these preliminary observations on record and consider their possible historical significance. The study also returns to Kalsi from a perspective that moves beyond its overwhelmingly Mauryan archaeological identity. Fragmentary architectural and sculptural material observed around Kalsi has previously drawn some scholarly attention, although its provenance and chronology remain uncertain (Thakur 2023). Material discussed by Y. S. Kathoch also raises the possibility of a later temple-building phase in the area (Kathoch 2003; Kathoch 2006). When these remains are considered alongside Prithvipur, the possibility emerges of a wider early medieval temple landscape within the Upper Yamuna region.

The historiography of this area has largely been shaped by the prominence of the Ashokan inscription at Kalsi, the archaeological discovery at Jagatgram, and broader studies of Central Himalayan history and temple architecture (Hultzsich 1925; Archaeological Survey of India 1954; Chanchani 2014; Chanchani 2019). Kathoch's work on the history and visual culture of the Central Himalaya also provides an important regional framework for considering material from this part of Uttarakhand (Kathoch 2003; Kathoch 2006). Yet Prithvipur itself remains comparatively absent from such discussions. The present study therefore approaches the site as an under-documented component of the historical landscape of Pachhwa Doon.

The methodology followed here is primarily based on preliminary field observation and visual documentation. Sculptural and architectural remains were examined directly at Kalsi and Prithvipur, particularly at the Kaula Devi temple and Prachin Shiva Mandir. Attention was given to the form, iconography, architectural character, present location and condition of the surviving material. These observations are considered together with published historical, archaeological and epigraphic material relating to Kalsi, Jagatgram and the wider Central Himalayan region. Stylistic comparison is employed only provisionally, particularly where objects no longer survive in their original architectural context.

The limitations of the present study are substantial. Prithvipur has not been subjected to systematic excavation or any other study method as part of this research. Much of the sculptural and architectural material is fragmented, displaced or reused within later sacred structures. Original temple plans cannot therefore be reconstructed. The patrons responsible for the earlier structures remain unidentified, and

secure epigraphic evidence directly associated with the Prithvipur assemblage has not presently been identified. The dating of several objects consequently remains provisional and is based largely on preliminary stylistic and iconographic observation. The present work should therefore be understood as an exploratory site study rather than a final archaeological assessment.

Within these limitations, the paper attempts to address two related questions. First, what can the fragmentary material from Prithvipur and Kalsi contribute to an understanding of the early medieval history of Pachhwa Doon in particular and of Doon Valley in general? Second, how might these remains be situated within the longer historical sequence of the Upper Yamuna landscape, from Ashokan Kalsi and Jagatgram to the temple-centred and later sacred traditions visible at Prithvipur?

2. HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING OF THE UPPER YAMUNA CORRIDOR

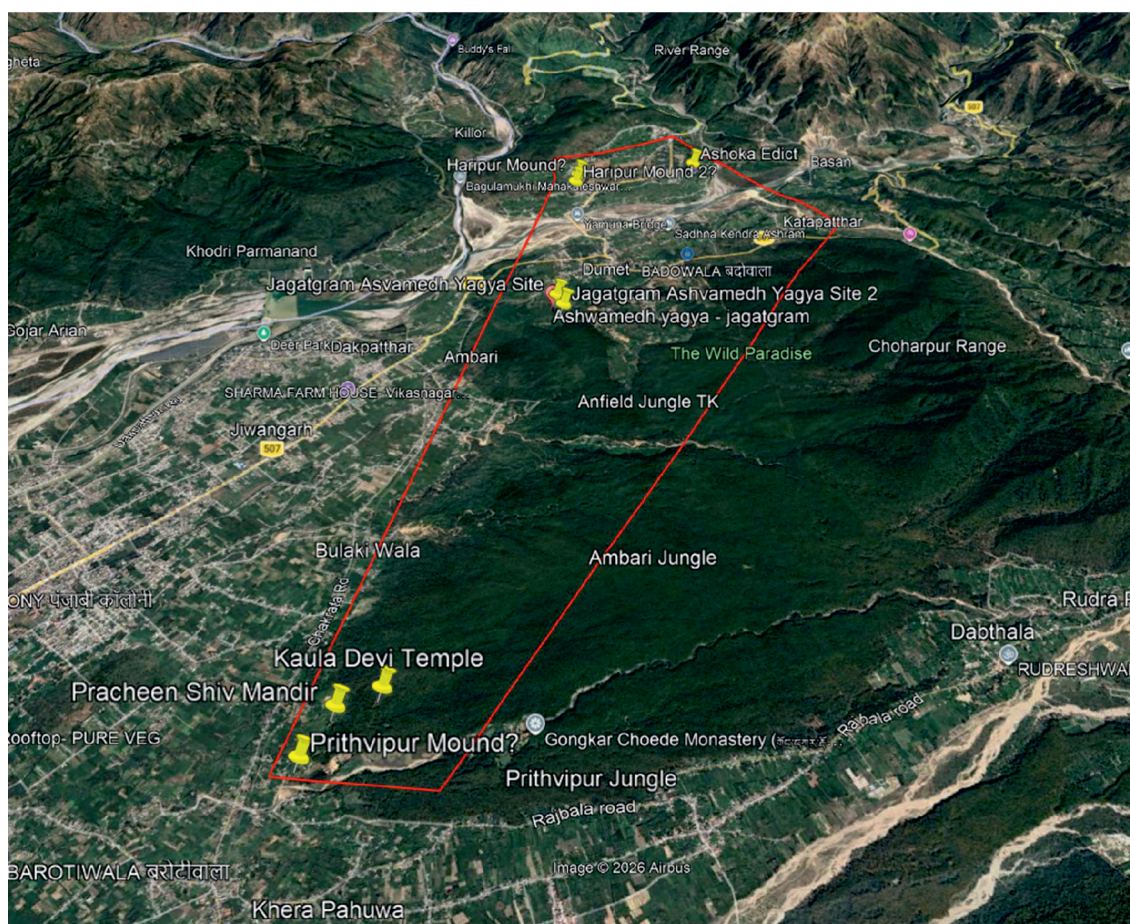


Figure 1: Principal Sites Discussed in the Upper Yamuna landscape of Pachhwa Doon, showing Kalsi, Haripur, Jagatgram and Prithvipur: approximate study area marked by the author.

Source: Google Earth imagery, annotated by the author.

The western part of the Doon Valley is closely associated with the Yamuna and with routes connecting the valley, the Siwalik foothills and the Himalayan uplands. Kalsi, Haripur, Jagatgram and Prithvipur occur within this broader geographical setting. Rather than treating these places as isolated sites, the present study considers them within an Upper Yamuna corridor in which different forms of settlement, political activity, ritual and sacred practice became visible at different historical moments.

The wider significance of routes between the plains and Central Himalayan landscapes has also been discussed in relation to the historical development of the region (Chanchani 2019).

Kalsi provides the earliest securely dated political and inscriptional horizon within the Upper Yamuna landscape through the Major Rock Edicts of Aśoka, engraved in the third century BCE. The Kalsi inscription forms part of the wider series of Aśokan Major Rock Edicts through which the Mauryan ruler communicated the principles of dhamma across different parts of the empire (Hultzs 1925). The edicts address a range of ethical, social and administrative concerns, including restraint in the killing of animals, welfare measures for humans and animals, respect towards parents and elders, generosity towards Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas, the appointment of officials concerned with dhamma, and the importance of restraint and mutual respect among different religious communities. Particularly significant is the emphasis following the conquest of Kalinga on the human consequences of warfare and on dhamma-vijaya, or conquest through dhamma, as a preferable form of imperial achievement. Kalsi therefore represents more than an isolated inscriptional monument. Within the present study it marks an early phase in which political authority in the Upper Yamuna region became materially visible through an imperial inscription and an ethical-political vocabulary intended for a wider social body. Its location also places the western Doon and Upper Yamuna landscape within the geographical reach of Mauryan political communication, providing the earliest firmly documented point in the longer historical sequence considered in this paper (Hultzs 1925).

A second major historical horizon is represented by Jagatgram, located only a few miles from the Aśokan rock edict at Kalsi. The Archaeological Survey of India's preliminary report records that subsequent excavation by the Exploration Branch exposed the remains of three sites associated with Aśvamedha sacrifices performed by King Śīlavarman. At the first site, specially designed bricks were arranged in the form of a śyena, described in the report as a hawk or eagle with spread wings. Inscribed bricks from the site carried Sanskrit inscriptions in third-century CE Brāhmī and recorded that Śīlavarman had performed the horse sacrifice for the fourth time. The second site produced further inscribed bricks in anuṣṭubh metre, describing the king as varṣagaṇya, yugeśvara or yugeśa, and ruler of Yugaśaila. The report interprets Yugaśaila as probably the name of his capital. Another inscription describes Śīlavarman as belonging to the Vṛṣagaṇa-gotra and as Pona-śaṣṭha, which the report cautiously explains either as "sixth in descent from Pona" or possibly as the sixth ruler named Pona within a lineage. A third sacrificial site also yielded remains associated with another Aśvamedha, including an inscribed brick bearing the king's name. Thus, the archaeological evidence does not indicate four separate excavated sites, but rather that Śīlavarman claimed to have performed four Aśvamedhas, while remains of three sacrificial sites were identified in the exploration. On palaeographic grounds, the ASI report placed Śīlavarman between approximately 250 and 300 CE, describing him as a post-Kushan and pre-Gupta ruler. It further suggested, more tentatively, that he may have belonged to the political circumstances accompanying the decline of Kushan power in northern India. Jagatgram therefore represents a markedly different expression of political authority from Mauryan Kalsi, with royal status and legitimacy now articulated through repeated Vedic sacrificial performance and the material construction of the Aśvamedha ritual space (Archaeological Survey of India 1954, 10–11).

Haripur which lays just south of Kalsi forms part of the wider settlement landscape associated with this western sector. Haripur is also associated with a local legend whose stronghold is believed to be buried under a tibree (mound), which according to G.R.C. William's maybe a probability for the existence of an old town. However, no field exploration or systematic study to find this mound has

been done so far. Irrespective of varying levels of evidence, together, Kalsi, Haripur, Jagatgram and Prithvipur indicate that the Upper Yamuna region remained a repeatedly occupied and historically significant zone, although the nature and intensity of activity changed over time.

Prithvipur lies within this wider landscape, not far from the better-known sites of Kalsi and Jagatgram. Its archaeological and art-historical importance, however, is much less clearly represented in existing historical narratives. The present landscape is characterised by later and living sacred places, particularly the Prachin Shiva Mandir and Kaula Devi temple, while older sculptural and architectural material survives around and within these functioning religious spaces.

The idea of an Upper Yamuna corridor is used here primarily as a geographical and historical framework. It does not imply that Kalsi, Jagatgram and Prithvipur belonged to a single political unit or formed an uninterrupted sacred network. Rather, their recurrence within the same broader geographical zone allows different historical phases of political, ritual and sacred activity to be considered together.

3. PRITHVIPUR: A PRELIMINARY SITE REPORT

3.1. Site Setting and Present Sacred Landscape

Prithvipur (30.4518836 Degree N, 77.799161 Degree) E occupies an elevated and forested setting within Pachhwa Doon and forms part of the wider landscape associated with Kalsi and Jagatgram. Williams noted the presence of ruins of a fort, temples, and *sati* monuments, which he associated with the Rajas of Garhwal. It appears that he was referring to the remains of an early modern settlement, possibly established during the reign of King Prithvipati Shah (1634–1664 CE) of the Panwar dynasty of Garhwal, perhaps for the *subedar* of Doon (Raturi 1928; Kathoch 2006).

The question, however, remains as to why this particular location was chosen. Its proximity to the Yamuna, earlier occupied sites, and a nearby river stream may have been among the reasons. Yet these factors alone do not fully answer the question, since several comparable locations existed in the surrounding region. One possibility is that an earlier settlement or sacred structure already existed at the site, and that the area was later reoccupied. The sacrality associated with the remains of an older temple may also have influenced the continued or renewed use of the location. In the absence of epigraphic evidence and more extensive documentation, however, little can be stated with certainty.

The present preliminary survey concentrated primarily on two sacred locations within Prithvipur forest, the Prachin Shiva Mandir and the Kaula Devi Temple. Both are living religious sites and have undergone later rebuilding, modification, and reuse. Consequently, the archaeological material presently visible at these locations cannot automatically be treated as surviving *in situ*. The significance of Prithvipur lies instead in the concentration of older sculptural and architectural fragments preserved within these later sacred spaces. The field visit was exploratory in character. Its objective was not excavation or complete architectural recording, but preliminary observation, photographic documentation, and the identification of material that may warrant more systematic investigation.

3.2. Prachin Shiv Mandir

The Prachin Shiv Mandir represents one of the principal sacred locations examined at Prithvipur. The standing temple has undergone considerable renovation and cannot presently be treated as an intact early structure. Nevertheless, older architectural material appears to have been incorporated into the existing sacred complex.

One particularly noticeable feature is a serpent or Śeṣanāga-associated arrangement in which a stone fragment resembling part of an amalaka appears to have been reused. The object would indicate the secondary use of an architectural component belonging to an earlier temple structure. Its present ritual context should therefore be distinguished from its possible original architectural function. A small square structure was also observed in the vicinity of the temple. It retains a whitish plaster or lime-like coating. Its original function and chronology remain uncertain, and no definite identification is proposed here.



Figure 2: Possible āmalaka fragment reused at Prachin Shiva Mandir, Prithvipur: (a) front view; (b) rear view. Source: Photograph by the author

Scattered ceramic material was also noticed during the preliminary survey. In addition, a heavily weathered square coin-like object was shown to us locally, together with photographs of several other coin-like objects reportedly recovered from the surrounding area. During a public presentation of the preliminary findings, a senior archaeological professional suggested that the square object might possibly be a punch-marked coin. This was an informal oral observation rather than a formal identification and therefore remains provisional. A local numismatics scholar similarly suggested that the Ram Darbar-bearing object may represent a pilgrimage token, possibly of the early modern period. Iron slag and other iron objects were also reported from the surrounding area. Taken together with the ceramic and coin-like material, these finds suggest some form of human activity within what is now a largely forested landscape around the temple. Whether this activity was connected with habitation, movement through the area, exchange, or another form of occupation cannot presently be determined in the absence of systematic archaeological investigation and secure archaeological contexts.

The Prachin Shiv Mandir is particularly important for another reason. Its walls preserve painted material representing a later visual phase of Prithvipur. These murals are considered separately below because they belong to a different chronological and artistic context from the early medieval architectural fragments.

3.3. Kaula Devi Temple

The Kaula Devi temple contains the largest concentration of sculptural and architectural material observed during the field survey. The present shrine is later, but numerous older stone fragments have been preserved within its compound and incorporated into its walls and surrounding structures.

Several amalaka fragments were observed at the site. At least five or six examples or portions appear to have been incorporated or deposited around the existing temple complex. Their number suggests that substantial architectural material once existed within the Prithvipur landscape. Their

secondary contexts, however, prevent the reconstruction of the original structure or structures from which they came.



Figure 3: Possible amalaka fragments embedded in walls of modern day Kaula Devi temple.

Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 4: Depiction of female figure on dwarsakha (doorjamb), possibly Ganga-Yamuna.

Source: Photograph by the author.

Other architectural fragments include carved members that may have belonged to doorways, lintels or related temple elements. Two fragments containing paired female figures may possibly represent doorway *dwarsakha* imagery, including a tentative identification with Gaṅgā and Yamunā. This remains provisional because the fragments are no longer preserved in their original position.

Much of this material survives in a secondary or displaced context within the temple compound and has also been subjected to continued ritual treatment, including the application of vermillion, sandal paste, oil and other pigments. Among the more identifiable fragments is a heavily weathered four-armed female figure, provisionally identified as *Siṃhavāhinī*. The sculpture appears frontal and is carved in high relief; a shield-like attribute survives in the rear left hand, while the remaining attributes are either damaged or indistinct. A possible lion and pedestal appear below the figure, although the

lower portion is considerably worn. The sculpture also seems to preserve traces of coiffure, earrings and drapery below the waist. The identification as *Simhavāhinī* remains provisional, but it finds a broad iconographic parallel in medieval representations discussed by J. N. Banerjea, who noted four-armed lion-mounted forms of the goddess carrying attributes such as the sword, shield and *śūla* (Banerjea 1974).

Another important fragment is provisionally identified as *Umā-Maheśvara*, adding a further Śaiva element to the assemblage. A separate image of *Gaṇeśa* was also observed within the modern *garbhagr̥ha*. Several additional fragments appear to have formed parts of larger sculptural backslabs or *prabhāvalīs* and preserve small subsidiary anthropomorphic figures. These may represent celestial attendants or *vidyādhara*s, although their exact identities remain uncertain. One fragment preserves a small figure beside a curved framing element, possibly belonging to a larger deity composition. Another sculpture depicts an anthropomorphic figure apparently supporting or bearing an overhanging object or figure above it; because of its fragmentary condition, its iconographic identity remains unresolved.



Figure 5: A female goddess, tentatively identified as *Simhavahini*.

Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 7: A divine couple, possibly *Uma-Maheshwar*.

Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 8: A figure apparently supporting or bearing an overhanging object or figure.
Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 9: Dwardevta/ celestial attendants?
Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 10: Possible fragment of a prabhavali.
Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 11: Possible attribute of a deity, Chakra?/Lotus flower?
Source: Photograph by the author.

In addition to these figural remains, the assemblage contains several decorative and architectural elements, including *āmalaka* fragments, *kumbha*-like fragments, *damaru* shaped object, lotus-medallion-like decoration and other carved fragments whose original architectural positions remain uncertain. The range of deity images, standing figures, subsidiary figures and architectural fragments demonstrates considerable variety within the surviving assemblage. At the same time, because much of the material has been displaced or incorporated into the present shrine, it cannot presently be reconstructed as belonging to a single securely identifiable temple structure.

3.4. Preliminary Chronology

The chronology of the Prithvipur assemblage remains provisional, but on preliminary stylistic and iconographic grounds much of the material may tentatively be placed within the **later early medieval period, broadly c. 11th–14th century CE**. Compared with some of the Kalsi fragments, several Prithvipur sculptures appear more angular and less rounded in treatment, suggesting a relatively later phase, although stylistic comparison alone cannot provide a secure date. The presence of architectural and iconographic elements such as possible Gaṅgā-Yamunā-related doorway imagery, miniature *gavākṣa*-like forms, and *āmalaka* fragments also supports an early medieval attribution. References to temple destruction in and around Kalsi may provide a broader historical context for the fragmented condition of regional material, but cannot directly date the Prithvipur assemblage. The proposed range of c. 11th–14th century CE should therefore be treated only as a cautious working chronology, with the possibility that some fragments may be earlier or later.

4. EARLY MODERN PRITHVIPUR

The material history of Prithvipur does not end with the fragmentary early medieval remains. The site also preserves indications of later medieval and early modern activity. The existing sacred structures preserve evidence of rebuilding and continued or renewed religious use. As mentioned earlier, the settlement named “Prithvipur” was possibly established during the reign of King Prithvipati Shah (1634–1664 CE) of the Panwar dynasty of Garhwal, perhaps in connection with the subedar of Doon. These later phases are important because they indicate that Prithvipur cannot be understood as an archaeological site belonging to a single period. Instead, the landscape contains several chronological layers, including fragmentary early temple remains, later sacred occupation and the surviving painted murals of the Prachin Shiva Mandir. These paintings were observed during the field visit and, within the published material consulted so far, no dedicated documentation or study of them has been identified. The murals appear to belong to a later phase than the early medieval sculptural and architectural material discussed above. They should therefore be studied independently rather than used to date the earlier remains.

4.1. Site report: Murals of the Prachin Shiv Mandir, Prithvipur

The interior of the Prachin Shiv Mandir at Prithvipur preserves a substantial but severely deteriorated programme of wall painting, particularly around the garbhagriha and its upper vaulted or domical surfaces. The paintings are executed predominantly in muted red, ochre, green, black and white, and are organised through painted architectural frames, floral borders and individual figural compositions. A broad distinction can be observed between the lower portions of the interior, where the decoration is largely vegetal, floral and geometric, and the upper zone, where narrative, divine and possibly

secular or courtly figures occur. Large flowering plants arranged within framed panels form an important component of the lower decorative scheme, while the upper surfaces contain at least twelve presently discernible anthropomorphic and animal figures. A large lotus-like composition occupies the uppermost part of the ceiling or dome, translating into paint a decorative motif familiar from carved ceiling lotuses and lotus medallions in temple architecture. Among the surviving figural scenes, a four-armed Gaṇeśa can be tentatively recognised, apparently accompanied by his mouse vehicle and approached by a female devotee holding or presenting an offering. Other panels appear to contain a multi-armed goddess, possibly Durgā, accompanied by a figure carrying what may be a standard or banner; an unidentified four-armed seated deity; a possible Vaiṣṇava or Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa composition; and a female figure associated with a bovine animal. Another damaged scene may represent a kneeling or deferential Hanumān before a male figure, although identification of the latter as Rāma, Bharata, or another personage cannot presently be established. Particularly noteworthy are the equestrian representations. One depicts an apparently high-status rider in light-coloured clothing with a prominent circular nimbus or solar disc behind the head. The figure could represent a ruler, noble or donor, but identification with Prithvipati Shah cannot presently be demonstrated. Another composition above the entrance shows two mounted figures apparently advancing towards one another. Their distinctive headgear may provide chronological evidence, but identification specifically as Maratha or Peshwa-style headgear should remain provisional until supported by closer comparison with securely dated eighteenth-century costume. Taken together, the palette, floral ornament, framed compositions, costume and treatment of the figures suggest a late pre-colonial phase of painting, with the later eighteenth century providing a plausible working hypothesis. Connections with the wider Garhwal school of painting tradition is apparent. The surviving programme nevertheless indicates that



Figure 12: Northwestern Wall, Prachin Shiv Mandir. Female and bovine figure on left, possible Radha-Krishna in centre and Ganesh with a female attendant on right.

Source: Photograph by the author.

the temple interior was conceived as an integrated painted space combining divine imagery, vegetal ornament, narrative scenes and possibly representations of patrons or members of the contemporary political elite. Its present condition, including extensive darkening, plaster loss, cracking, abrasion and later intervention, makes individual iconographic identifications necessarily tentative.



Figure 13: Closer view of different figure and elements. a) Sun and a noble/royal person b) Hanuman bowing before a person possibly Bharat c) Multi-armed Durga? d) Vegetal and Floral mural at ground level.

Source: Photograph by the author.



Figure 14: a) Two equestrian figures galloping at each other. Note the Maratha peshwa like headgear of figure on viewers right. b) A maratha figure?

Source: Photograph by the author

4.2. Tentative Iconological Programme

The disposition of the surviving figural paintings within the garbhagriha raises the possibility of a deliberate, though not strictly canonical, iconological programme. The clearest correspondence occurs in the eastern sector, where an equestrian figure of apparently royal or noble status is represented with a prominent circular nimbus or solar form behind the head. The placement may carry a solar implication through the association of the east with sunrise, while the elevated status of the rider could also have conveyed ideas of sovereignty and lineage. In the context of Garhwal, the possibility of a connection with royal or dynastic imagery may be considered, although identification of the figure with Prithvipati Shah, or with any particular ruler, cannot presently be established. The southern sector contains the multi-armed goddess tentatively identified as Durgā, accompanied by a standard-bearing figure. Her martial character may have provided a complementary expression of protection, sovereignty and

divine sanction, particularly if the paintings were produced under elite or royal patronage. In the north, Gaṇeśa forms another major composition, while the intermediate sectors appear to extend the programme through other devotional narratives. The north-western panel may represent Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, whereas the south-western scene appears to show Hanumān in a deferential posture before a male figure, possibly Rāma or another figure belonging to the Rāma narrative. No firm directional correspondence can presently be demonstrated for either scene, and their positions should not be made to conform artificially to the classical scheme of directional deities. Similarly, the four-armed seated figure in the south-east remains unidentified. Its location is noteworthy because the south-eastern quarter is conventionally associated with Agni, but the surviving attributes are insufficient to identify the figure as Agni. The western composition of a female figure with a bovine animal likewise remains unresolved. Taken together, the arrangement does not appear to reproduce an Aṣṭadikpāla scheme, but the placement of major divine, narrative and possibly royal images around the sacred interior may indicate a looser conception of directionally ordered space. The eastern solar and equestrian imagery, the southern martial goddess, the northern Gaṇeśa, and the surrounding Vaiṣṇava and Rāma-related scenes may thus have formed parts of an integrated visual programme combining kingship, protection, auspiciousness and devotion. This reading remains preliminary, particularly given the damaged condition of the murals, and should be treated as a working interpretation subject to revision following closer documentation and comparison with other painted temple interiors of Garhwal.

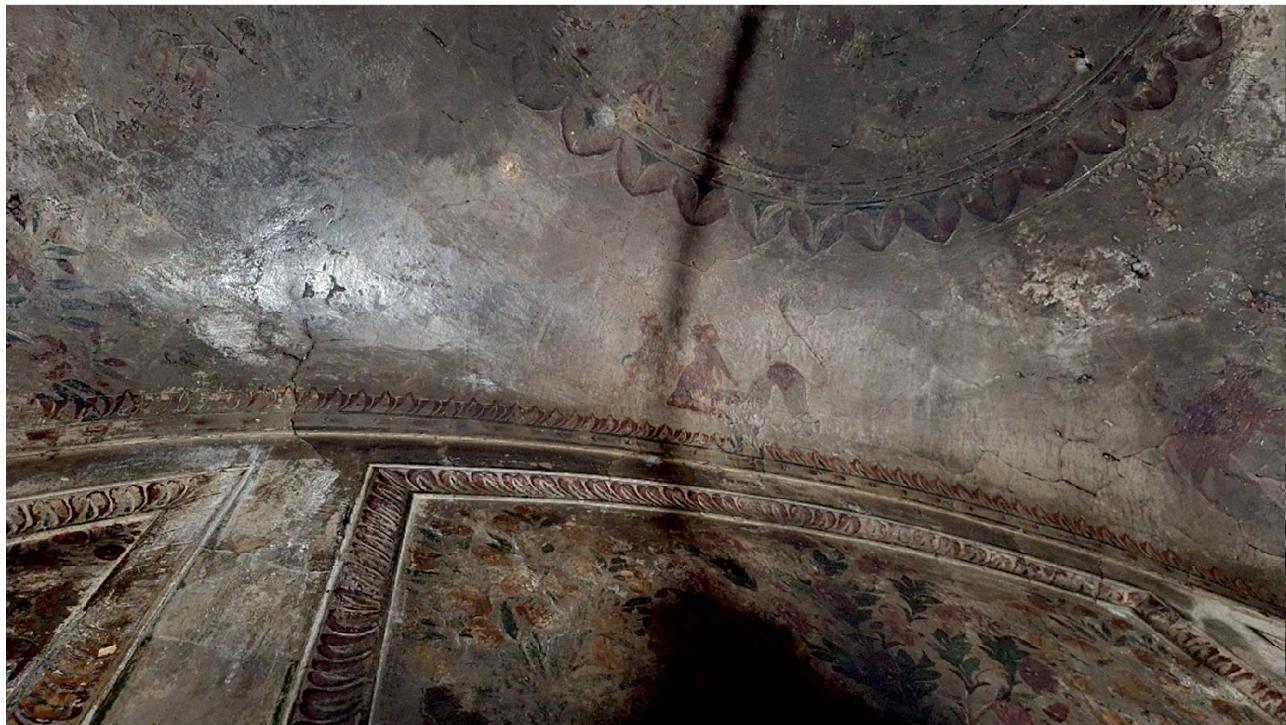


Figure 15: Southwestern section of the garbhagṛha roof and wall, showing a lotus motif at the roof apex, figural paintings, and floral-vegetal decoration below.

Their significance within the present paper lies in demonstrating another stage in the visual history of Prithvipur. The presence of both earlier architectural fragments and later wall painting suggests that the site acquired new sacred and visual forms across different historical periods. This need not imply uninterrupted institutional continuity between the early medieval structures and the later temple.

5. RECONSIDERING THE EARLY MEDIEVAL REMAINS OF KALSI

The prominence of the Ashokan rock edict has strongly shaped the historical identity of Kalsi (Hultzschi 1925). As a result, the site is generally approached primarily through its Mauryan inscriptional phase, while the material belonging to considerably later periods has received much less attention. The field observations considered in the present study, however, draw attention to a body of sculptural and architectural material that may indicate renewed or continued sacred activity at Kalsi during the early medieval period. Fragmentary stone reliefs from the vicinity of the Ashokan edict have previously been noted, although their chronology, provenance and original architectural context remain uncertain (Thakur 2023). The material observed during the present survey similarly survives in a fragmentary and displaced condition, making it difficult to reconstruct the form or number of structures to which it originally belonged. Among the architectural remains are fragments of *āmalaka*, together with carved *caitya-gavākṣa* elements. The presence of *āmalaka* fragments is particularly significant because these represent architectural members associated with the superstructure of a temple rather than independent sculptural images. Their occurrence therefore suggests the former presence of temple architecture within the wider Kalsi landscape, although the original structure cannot presently be reconstructed. The *gavākṣa*-like fragments likewise indicate the use of an architectural vocabulary associated with temple façades and superstructures. Some of these remains may have formed part of the upper architectural articulation of a temple, including the *śukanāsa* fronton, although their displaced condition makes their precise original placement uncertain (Kathoch 2003; Chanchani 2014; Chanchani 2019).

The sculptural material adds a further dimension to this evidence. One fragment preserves a three-headed divine figure placed within a *gavākṣa*-like architectural frame. It may tentatively be interpreted as a Trimūrti or three-headed form of Śiva, an iconographic conception that can be considered within the wider Śaiva visual traditions across Punjab, Himachal and central Himalayan region of Uttarakhand which was popular here till c.13th Century CE. The identification remains provisional, particularly because of the damaged state of the fragment, but its combination of divine imagery and architectural framing is important in considering the possible original temple programme. Another fragment has been provisionally identified as Lakulīśa, which, if confirmed, would provide another indication of a Śaiva context. These identifications should not presently be treated as definitive, but their recurrence alongside architectural material raises the possibility that at least part of the surviving assemblage belonged to a Śaiva sacred environment (Kathoch 2003).

Another fragment preserves a leonine form which has been tentatively considered in relation to a *gajakrānta-simha* or comparable lion motif. Such a fragment is important not simply for the identification of the animal form, but for the possibility that it formed part of the architectural decoration of the upper façade or *śukanāsa* of a temple. This particular element is also identified as one of the most important indicators of what Kathoch identifies as “Himadri style” of Central Himalayan region. In this respect, the Kalsi material should not be examined only as a collection of disconnected sculptures. The *āmalaka*, *gavākṣa*-like elements, possible Trimūrti, possible Lakulīśa and leonine fragment together raise the question of the architectural system which were was under influence of nor just central or North-west Indian art forms but also central Himalayan art forms. At the same time, because none of these remains survives securely *in situ*, it is not possible to determine whether they belonged to a single temple, several structures, or different chronological phases.

The archaeological observations become particularly significant when considered alongside the fragmentary inscription discussed by Y. S. Kathoch. Kathoch records a fragmentary pillar inscription



**Figure 16: Sculptural Remnants in vicinity of Kalsi Ashoka rock edict. a) Fragments including amalakas
b) Three headed figure within gavaksha possible Tri-murti c) Lakulisha?
d) Leonine figure / broken gaja-kranta simha?**

Source: Photograph by the author.

from Kalsi which was reportedly brought to the attention of the Archaeological Survey of India and subsequently read by K. V. Ramesh. On palaeographic grounds, the inscription has been associated with an early Nāgarī form developing from Kuṭīla and placed broadly within the early medieval period. Kathoch interprets the surviving text as referring to the construction of a temple by Śrī Prakāśa, described in association with devotion to Śiva (Kathoch 2023, 97). The inscription therefore provides an independent textual indication that temple construction associated with Śaivism was taking place at Kalsi during the early medieval period. The inscription, however, cannot be used to assign all of the surviving fragments to the temple mentioned in the text. Neither can the sculptural remains independently establish that they were produced under Śrī Prakāśa or belonged to the same establishment. The epigraphic and material evidence must therefore remain methodologically distinct. What is significant is their convergence within the same broader landscape. On one hand, there is an inscription referring to temple construction and Śaiva devotion; on the other, there are *āmalaka* and *gavākṣa*-like architectural fragments, possible Śaiva imagery and other sculptural remains. Together they strengthen the possibility that Kalsi possessed one or more temple establishments during the early medieval period without permitting the reconstruction of their exact form, patronage or chronology.

A preliminary stylistic comparison with the Prithvipur assemblage may also be relevant. Some of the Kalsi fragments appear softer and more rounded in modelling, retaining features closer to an earlier or post-Gupta visual idiom, while several Prithvipur sculptures appear comparatively more angular in treatment. This difference formed part of the reason for tentatively considering portions of the Prithvipur assemblage somewhat later than the Kalsi material. Such an observation remains provisional and should not be treated as a firm relative chronology until the individual pieces are

examined more systematically. It nevertheless raises the possibility that the surviving Kalsi material itself represents more than one phase and that temple activity in the Upper Yamuna landscape developed over a considerable span of the early medieval period.

Kalsi therefore presents a historical landscape considerably more complex than its identification with the Ashokan edict alone might suggest. The surviving material does not allow the reconstruction of a single early medieval temple, nor does it establish uninterrupted sacred continuity from the Mauryan period. Rather, it points towards a later phase in which temple architecture and Śaiva visual culture had become materially present within the same wider landscape. When placed beside the evidence from Prithvipur, these remains become important for reconsidering the apparent gap between the better-known early historic phases of Pachhwa Doon and its later phase of early medieval history. The question is thus not whether the Ashokan site itself continued unchanged, but whether the wider Kalsi landscape was repeatedly reoccupied and reconfigured through different forms of political and sacred expression.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Fragmentary Evidence and an Early Medieval Temple Landscape

When the material from Kalsi and Prithvipur is considered together, the apparent chronological gap in the history of Pachhwa Doon becomes less absolute. The evidence does not establish a complete or continuous early medieval temple landscape, nor does it allow the number or scale of temples to be calculated. It nevertheless indicates that temple-building and sculptural activity was taking place at more than one location within the Upper Yamuna region. Prithvipur provides the strongest concentration of such material within the present field study. The number of *āmalaka* fragments, deity images, subsidiary figures and architectural members suggests that the surviving assemblage represents more than an isolated object or accidental deposit. At the same time, the displaced condition of the material prevents a reconstruction of its original context. Kalsi provides a second body of evidence. Here, fragmentary sculpture and architecture, combined cautiously with the reported temple inscription, suggest another early medieval sacred phase (Kathoch 2006; Thakur 2023). The two sites need not have been contemporary, nor need they have belonged to a single religious or political network. The evidence therefore points less towards one unified temple landscape than towards multiple episodes of temple-building and sacred activity within the same Upper Yamuna geographical zone.

6.2. Regional and Wider Visual Idioms

The fragmentary material also raises questions concerning the relationship between Pachhwa Doon and wider Central Himalayan artistic traditions. Certain elements at Kalsi, particularly the leonine *gajakrānta-simha*-type motif and the three-headed figure associated with a *gavākṣa* or possible *śukanāsa*, appear relevant to Central Himalayan architectural idioms discussed in the regional literature (Kathoch 2003; Chanchani 2014). The Prithvipur assemblage may likewise be compared in future with material from Central Himalayan temple centres such as Lakhamandal, Jageshwar and Dwarahat. Such comparison should focus on individual architectural and sculptural features rather than assume that the complete Prithvipur temple belonged to any already defined regional style. The broader problem of architectural circulation and regional variation within the Central Himalaya has been addressed by Chanchani (2014, 2019). At the same time, the material indicates participation in a wider Puranic visual vocabulary. Images provisionally identified as Umā-Maheśvara, Gaṇeśa

and *Siṃhavāhinī*, together with possible doorway figures and attendant imagery, suggest that the sacred landscape of early medieval Pachhwa Doon participated in religious and visual developments extending beyond the valley.

This does not mean that the region merely received outside influence. The evidence from Kalsi also suggests regional peculiarities associated with Central Himalayan artistic traditions. Pachhwa Doon may therefore be understood as a landscape in which wider religious and artistic currents interacted with regional visual forms.

6.3. Changing Forms of Political and Sacred Expression

The wider historical sequence of the Upper Yamuna region also reveals changing forms through which political and sacred authority became visible. At Kalsi during the third century BCE, political authority is represented through the imperial inscriptions of Ashoka and the propagation of *dhamma* (Hultzsch 1925). In the interpretation followed in this study, this represents an ethical and political framework intended to address a wider social body through ideas of moral conduct, political order and social responsibility. By the third century CE, the material from Jagatgram represents a different ideological environment. The *Aśvamedha* sacrifices associated with Śīlavarman point towards Vedic royal ritual as a means of expressing authority, political legitimacy and influence (Archaeological Survey of India 1954). The wider political significance of the *Aśvamedha* as a ritual of kingship and sovereignty also provides a relevant comparative framework (Bose 2020).

This transformation may also be considered within wider political developments in the Central Himalaya. Jhanjh identifies the emergence of regional political formations followed by more consolidated monarchical powers, including the Pauravas between approximately the fifth and seventh centuries CE and the Devas or Katyuris between the eighth and tenth centuries CE (Jhanjh 2023). He also draws attention to the growing relationship between political authority, land grants and temple institutions, with grants to temples and deities forming part of wider processes of political legitimation (Jhanjh 2023). Under the Devas, such patronage extended across Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and solar cults, indicating the increasing institutional significance of temple-based religious traditions within the Central Himalayan political landscape (Jhanjh 2023). This provides a broader regional context for the gradual movement from Vedic sacrificial expression towards increasingly visible temple-centred religious institutions, without implying direct political continuity with Kalsi or Prithvipur.

From the Gupta and post-Gupta periods onwards, another change becomes increasingly visible through the emergence and expansion of Puranic religious traditions, anthropomorphic deity images and permanent temple-centred sacred spaces. Such developments form part of the wider transformations associated with early medieval northern India (Chattopadhyaya 1994). By the early medieval period, the fragmentary material at Kalsi and Prithvipur appears to belong within this broader environment of temple institutions and image-based worship. Śaiva and Śākta affiliations are particularly visible within the material provisionally identified at the two sites. Tantric and Āgamic influences may also have formed part of the later development of such religious traditions, although individual evidence will need to be examined more closely before specific affiliations can be established.

These different phases should not be read as a simple progression in which one religious or ideological system replaced another. Nor can direct continuity be established between Ashokan Kalsi, Jagatgram and the early medieval temples. What can be observed is that the same wider Upper Yamuna landscape participated at different times in different forms of political, ritual and sacred expression.

The evidence therefore also challenges the idea of Pachhwa Doon as an isolated valley landscape. From the imperial inscription at Kalsi to the Vedic sacrificial activity of Jagatgram and the later emergence of Puranic temple traditions, the region appears to have participated in wider ideological, religious, social and cultural movements. At the same time, the presence of Central Himalayan artistic idioms suggests that such participation was accompanied by regional forms (Kathoch 2003; Chanchani 2014; Chanchani 2019).

6.4. From the Early Medieval to the Early Modern Landscape

Prithvipur adds another dimension to this sequence because its material history appears to extend beyond the early medieval period. The later historical associations of the site, the continuing sacred occupation of the Prachin Shiva Mandir and Kaula Devi Temple, and the wall paintings preserved at the Shiva temple indicate later phases in the history of the landscape. The evidence presently available does not allow direct continuity to be established between the early medieval temple fragments and the later sacred structures. The earlier material may have been reused, relocated or incorporated within later religious spaces. Nevertheless, the coexistence of these different chronological layers at Prithvipur makes it possible to examine the site as a long-term historical landscape rather than as a monument belonging to only one period. The murals of the Prachin Shiv Mandir are particularly significant within this later phase. Their documentation provides evidence for the visual history of Prithvipur during the medieval or early modern period and adds another layer to a site whose earlier temple remains survive largely in fragmentary form.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has broader implications for the historical archaeology of the Doon Valley as a whole. The valley's ancient and early historic history has generally been anchored around the Ashokan inscription at Kalsi and the Aśvamedha complex at Jagatgram, while the historical record becomes more visible again with Guru Ram Rai and the emergence of early modern Dehradun. The intervening early medieval centuries remain comparatively underrepresented. The material examined at Kalsi and especially Prithvipur suggests that this apparent gap reflects, at least in part, problems of archaeological visibility and documentation rather than an absence of historical activity. Architectural fragments, deity images, *āmalakas*, subsidiary figures and the epigraphic evidence from Kalsi indicate that temple-building and image-based sacred spaces formed an important part of the early medieval landscape. The evidence does not establish a continuous sequence or permit reconstruction of the number and form of individual temples, but it does demonstrate that the early medieval period needs to be treated as a substantive phase in the history of the Doon Valley.

Pachhwa Doon and the Upper Yamuna may also be understood as more than an economic or political corridor. The region appears to have participated in wider ideological, religious and artistic processes operating across northern India and the Central Himalaya. The Aśokan edicts represent one form of imperial communication through *dhamma*, while Jagatgram reflects a later articulation of political legitimacy through Vedic sacrificial ritual (Hultsch 1925; Archaeological Survey of India 1954; Bose 2020). In the succeeding centuries, the growth of regional political formations, temple patronage and Puranic religious institutions provides a broader context for the architectural and sculptural remains at Kalsi and Prithvipur (Jhanjh 2023; Chattopadhyaya 1994). Possible Śaiva, Śākta and Pāśupata elements, together with wider Puranic imagery, place these sites within broader

religious developments, while the architectural forms also retain affinities with Central Himalayan visual traditions (Kathoch 2003; Chanchani 2014, 2019). These phases should not be understood as a simple linear progression or as evidence of direct continuity. Rather, the same wider landscape repeatedly became a setting for different forms of political, ritual and sacred expression.

Prithvipur further extends this history into the medieval and early modern periods. Its early medieval sculptural and architectural remains coexist with later sacred structures and the mural programme of the Prachin Shiva Mandir, suggesting successive transformations in the visual expression of sacred space. A possible movement from softer and more rounded sculptural forms to comparatively angular later reliefs, and eventually to painted surfaces, may provide a useful direction for future study, although sculpture and painting should not be understood as mutually exclusive media. The present conclusions remain preliminary because the study is based primarily on field observation, photographic documentation and stylistic comparison, while much of the material is displaced, reused or preserved within living religious contexts. Further archaeological survey, object-level documentation, epigraphic study and detailed examination of the murals will therefore be necessary. The principal contribution of the study is to bring the early medieval material of Kalsi and Prithvipur into the larger history of the Doon Valley and to situate the region within the wider political, religious and visual transformations of the Central Himalaya and northern India.

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