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Historians on the Foreign Influence of Martand Temple

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Abstract:

Martand is someone five miles from Anantnag to the eastern cart-road to Pahalgam. Martand literally means Sun, and is now convertible with the ruined temple of the Sun, standing on the top of the lofty plateau of the name, and commanding a superb view of the valley below. It is the situation of the site of the temple that has added to its grandeur and has excited admiration from all. Fergusson remarks: “it is the architectural lion of Kashmir, and all tourists think it necessary to go into raptures about its beauty and magnificence comparing it to Palmyra or Thebes or other wonderful groups of ruins of the old world”

Key words: Temple, Architecture, Martand, Kashmir, Motifs, Art

Introduction:

The sun temple of Martand is one of the most famous and interesting monument of medieval Indian art. At Bhavan (Matan) in Kashmir, six miles from Anantnag-islamabad, a spring wells out of the foot of a vast plateau, feeding a tank where, according to local priestly tradition, the sun god had been born. On the plateau, at a distance of more than a mile, the temple rises, at one time overlooking a strong town in the midst of irrigated gardens, and even today a vast vista over the whole Kashmir valley in the direction of the sun setting behind the ridges of the Pir Panjal. Illustrations of this ruin are found in most books in Kashmir, India or Indian art.¹

Sir Alexander Cunningham and James Fergusson have paid their tribute to it. The Kashmir Archaeological Department has excavated its court and saved the shrine from further collapse. R. C. Kak has carefully described it in his Ancient Monuments of Kashmir. Nevertheless the temple has never been critically studied and only P. Brown has realized the exceptional position which the Martand temple occupies in the history of Indian art. He has correctly pointed out its connection with Roman architecture.²

Like most medieval temples of Kashmir, Martand consists of a courtyard with the principal shrine in the middle and a colonnaded peristyle. The latter is 220' long by 142' broad and contains eighty four fluted columns facing the courtyard. The peristyle

is externally plain, except on the west side, which originally had a row of columns similar to that of the Avantipur temples.³

The entrance, or gateway, stands in the middle of the western side of the quadrangle, and is of the same width as the same temple itself. This proportion is in accordance with the ideas of Hindu architectural grandeur; for the rules laid down by them, as quoted by Ram Raz, give different proportions from six-sevenths to ten-elevenths of the width of the temple, for each different style of gateway from the most simple to the most magnificent.⁴

Outwardly the Martand gateway resembles the temple itself in the disposition of its parts and in the decoration of its pediments and pilasters. It was open to west and east, and was divided into distinct portions forming an inner and outer portico, by a cross wall with a doorway in the centre, which was no doubt closed with a wooden door.⁵

On each flank of the gateway the pediment was supported by massive fluted pillars, 17' in height or 8' higher than those in the quadrangle. One of these is still standing to the south of the entrance.⁶

This temple is 60 ft. long and 38 ft. wide, its height when complete must have been 75 ft. the courtyard that surrounds and encloses the temple, is a more remarkable object than the temples itself. Its internal dimensions are 220 by 142 ft. on each face is a central cella, larger and higher than the colonnade in which it is placed. The height is 30 ft. and the pillars on each side are 9 ft. high-not lofty but they have a Grecian aspect which is interesting.⁷

It is thought that the whole of the interior of the quadrangle was originally filled with water to a level up-to one foot of the base of the columns and that access to the temple was gained by a raised pathway of slabs supported on solid blocks at short intervals which connected the gateway flight of steps with that leading to the temple. The same kind of path way stretched right across the quadrangle from one side door way to the other.⁸

A constant supply of fresh water was kept up through a canal from the River Lidar, which was conducted along the side of the mountain for the service of the village close by.⁹

The date of this temple is favoured to be 8th century by some Archaeologists. Cunningham places date between 370-500 A. D. But Ferguson does not admit its foundation before the 8th century. Roughly speaking it is between 2,000 and 1,500 years old. The temple of Martand appears to be the ruins of a grand old temple 63 ft. long enclosed in a quadrangle of columns and arches forming cloisters all round it. It is about 200 ft. long and 142 ft. broad. There are about 84 carved pillars many of which lie prostrate on the ground.¹⁰

Martand with its beauty in desolation has stirred the poet's vision of a Heber and compelled the homage of the wisest critics of Indian art. It is a dream in stones designed by Titans and finished by jewellers. It only needed a glass case. Its

architecture is fairer than the site of the Parthenon, or of the Taj or of St. Peter, or of the Escorial.¹¹

The temple at Martand marks an attestation to the facts mentioned above. Equilateral triangles at the gables reveal a similarity with the early Byzantine buildings and ivories. Similar references of the trifoliate arches are observed in the early medieval European and Arab art. However this pattern may be a result of coincidence.¹²

For in the arches of the temple entrance and between its various halls these trifoliate arches grown to dimensions far beyond those which the Gandhara or Gupta artists had been accustomed to construct by means of corbelling. But here we find not only the use of the true arch, but also of cement and of steel dowels; method alien to Indian art, but customary in Roman and Byzantine art.¹³

Among the images carved on the walls of the antarala and the antechamber, we notice on the left wall of the former a well-executed of the river goddess Ganga, standing upon her vehicle, the crocodile, which is looking up towards her. A female attendant on her right holds an umbrella over her head, and a chaurt-bearer is on her left. She holds her usual emblems, a water pot in her left hand and the stalk of a lotus flower in her right. (She is crowned with a double conical tiara). On the opposite side of the antarala is the river goddess Yamuna, with her vehicle, the tortoise.¹⁴

Above the niche in the north wall is a relief consisting of a pair of Gandharvas in flight with an umbrella over them. The statues on the western walls of the antechamber are undoubtedly representations of Vishnu, and what Mr. Fergusson mistook for hoods of snakes are in reality points of their coronets.¹⁵

According to Dr. Goetz, “Martand stands not quite isolated. It has a smaller counterpart in the plains, the temple of Malot in the Salt Range. Malot raises the problems of the Martand temple even more acutely. For it has a façade of purely Roman Corinthian half pillars enclosing trifoliate archways crowned by a set of high Sikharas”.¹⁶

H. Goetz observes that, “The temple of Martand set the model for Kashmiri-Hindu art for all in the centuries to come. Thus Lalitaditya must be regarded as the founder not only of a short-lived empire, but also of six centuries of Kashmiri-Hindu art.”¹⁷

CONCLUSION:

The conclusion that I reach on the sources of interpretations made above is that the temple architecture of Martand signified a tradition of its own. The Martand Temple possess some inimitable features as compared to other parts of India, because the great ancient Kashmiri architects used many own styles, designs, and methods as well as local material from base to the top for the construction of this temple. But it is true that the architecture of Martand temple is greatly affected by many alien art styles like Bactro-Gandhra, Greco- Egyptian and Tibetan rudiments than the art flairs of other parts of ancient India.

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