

A DROP FALLS FROM THE SKY

Nāgara Architectural Metre and Two Ontario Hindu Temples

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Among the Sanskrit instructional texts classified as *Śāstras*, that hand down what Sheldon Pollock has called “authentic knowledge,”² a subset, the *Śilpaśāstras* and *Vāstuśāstras*, convey instructions for building temples. The extant written records date back as far as the sixth-century *Bṛhatsamhitā*, though a good deal of what they have to say about the architecture of temples doubtless derives from much older written and oral traditions. Working from both the written accounts and extant temple examples, contemporary scholars generally associate the *Nāgara* temple style with northern India and the *Drāviḍa* style with southern India. As Madhusudan A. Dhaky has remarked, the archival heritage of India’s western region, notably Gujarat and Rajasthan, includes numerous Sanskrit *Śāstras* concerned with the northern *Nāgara* tradition.³ A “comprehensive compendium” of this work, to use Dhaky’s phrase, the “late 12th- or early 13th-century” *Aparājitaṣṭhā* [Aparājita’s Questions] dramatizes a dialogue about architecture between the eponymous son and his father, Viśvakarman, “Maker of Everything,” the divine architect.⁴

In the *Aparājitaṣṭhā*, Aparājita has many concerns, including “the origin of temples, their 14 classes and other sub-species.”⁵ The answers Viśvakarman gives to his son are wide-ranging: they draw on materials from multiple texts and serve as a thorough presentation of classical architectural theory as it applies in northern India, encompassing domestic, civic, and religious structures. When we reach chapter 67, however, the text seems to change topics to inquire into the matter of poetic metre, or *chandas*. The following chapter



FIG. 1. FOLIO FROM THE BRITISH LIBRARY’S MANUSCRIPT OF THE PINGALĀMATA, AN EARLY ŚAIVA MANUAL FROM NORTHERN INDIA. | BRITISH LIBRARY OR 2279.PNG.