CHAPTER FIVE

ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

For over a decade I have divided my research in the field between two projects. In Pakistan, as this monograph records, in collaboration with the Pakistan Heritage Society, we surveyed, documented, and analysed temples along the Indus and in the Salt Range. We excavated in the fort at north Kāfirkoṭ for two seasons, finding evidence for several phases of construction for the fort’s temples—one when temples were built first in the sixth-to-eighth centuries, and a second in the ninth and tenth centuries when Uḍī-Śāhi rulers reclaimed sites of ancient importance, reformulating temples and expanding their compounds. Critical to these conclusions was recovering a previously unknown Temple E (figs. 76–86). We could compare activity at this site to phases found at Bilot Kāfirkoṭ and elsewhere. We also surveyed the fortress at Amb in the Salt Range, finding fortifications of an early period, with overlapping layers of rebuilding, and coins of the Kuśāna and Uḍī-Śāhi periods exposed by a recent road cut, but were unable to carry out further excavation. We did record stories from later periods that culturally remapped the landscape of the site (Meister 2005a).

Restoration and Transformation

I have also approached restoration, reoccupation, and redefinition of temples as a process of self-preservation of sacred sites, ethno-graphically (or ethnohistorically) through a multi-disciplinary project sponsored by the J. Paul Getty Trust on “Continuities of Community Patronage, Pilgrimage Temples of Western India” (Meister 2008; Babb/Cort/Meister 2008). A team that consisted of an historian of religion, John E. Cort, a sociologist and anthropologist, L. A. Babb, and me as art historian focused in part on two of the many temples at Osiāñ, 58 km west of Jodhpur in Rajasthan. That site has a number of shrines still standing that were first built in the eighth century, at about the same time as the archaeological remains I have studied in Pakistan. I should like briefly to compare results of these two projects.
The temples at Osiāñ have been well known since D. R. Bhandarkar’s 1912: 100–115 visit in 1904 and publication of his archaeological report on them. Scattered across the desert, these monuments are framed by two living shrines: the Mahāvīra Jain temple—the oldest structural Jain temple in India (Dhaky 1968)—and the Sacciyāmātā temple, built on a hill at the center of the site. The Sacciyāmātā temple was dedicated to a local goddess who, according to Jain hagiography, converted to Jain ways, although a number of other communities continue to worship her in differing fashions (Meister 1995). The orientation of the site links another hillock, that known as Luṇādri in the Oswal Jain myth of the goddess’s conversion, which speaks of a Jain sage who settled there eighty years after the death of Mahāvīra, leading to the building of a Jain temple (Babb 1993).

That hillock has a small modern structure sheltering two plaques of Jain sages’ footprints, one inscribed 1189 C.E., A line of largely abandoned eighth-century Vaisnava temples on the desert below the Luṇādri hill stretches west toward the north-facing Mahāvīra shrine and its neighboring Jain school, established early in the twentieth century. The temple complex on the Sacciyāmātā hill to the north is oriented to the southwest, as if in deference to the location of the Mahāvīra temple. In the catchment area between the Mahāvīra temple and Sacciyāmātā’s hill, a large compound step-well—part of a larger system to capture and retain water—was constructed at the end of the eighth century, shortly after the Sacciyāmātā and Mahāvīra temples were first built.

One part of our research involved reconstruction of phases in the lives of these temples, both in the distant and the recent past. To illustrate this, I worked with two young architects in Jodhpur, had drawings scanned, and then finished drawings and added new ones in Philadelphia. A small shrine to the northwest of the Sacciyāmātā temple’s compound, for example, was a gateway shrine in the eighth century, in ruins at the time of Bhandarkar’s visit, remade into a ‘Shri Satya Narayan’ temple in the 1920s, and had its archaeologically important entry pavilion dismantled in the 1970s.

On the Sacciyāmātā hill, another shrine built in the eighth century survives—the ‘Sūrya’ temple just to the south of the present Sacciyāmātā temple’s sanctum. This shrine had partly collapsed in Bhandarkar’s day, was rebuilt by the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of priests and workmen still active at the site today, and is now fully incorporated into the temple’s expanding compound. Three additional sub-