# A Wooden Jain House Temple from the Berlin Museum of Asian Art and its Tradition

# JOHANNES SCHRÖDER johannes.germany.berlin@gmail.com

# Introduction

The wooden Jain house temple in the collection of the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin is an exceptional example of a late devotional sacred practice in Northwestern India. Looking at other domestic shrines in several art collections around the world reveals that the 'Berlin-Temple' is stylistically and architecturally unique. In general, these temples display modes of Indo-Islamic art while the one exhibited in Berlin reflects distinctly indigenous temple architecture. How might this be explained?

The teak-wood temple (Fig. 1) was acquired by the Berlin Museum of Indian Art in 1967 (Yaldiz 2000: 73). According to the commercial gallery, which sold the temple to the Museum in Berlin, it originates from Gujarat and dates to the eighteenth century. Notably, the museum catalogs adopted this data (Cf. Wormit 1976: 16, fig. 58; Härtel 1976: 56, 187, fig. 165; Härtel 1986: 54, 214, fig. 140; Yaldiz 2000: 73, fig. 114). Also, at the Conference of Directors of the National Museums in Berlin on February 22, 1968, the piece was dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, taking a closer look at the 'Berlin-Temple' and its atypical features opens up questions about the validity of this dating.

While the beginning of the tradition of domestic Jain shrines is unexplored, it is known that they all originate from the urban areas in Gujarat. The presumption is that the development of the tradition is connected to the modern urbanisation of Northwestern India. The shrines were cult objects of mercantile Jain Shvetambara-families. This community developed their economic strength by trade. They lived in the important cities of Gujarat,<sup>3</sup> which were mainly led, founded and expanded by Muslim rulers. V.S. Pramar considers the urbanisations of

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Western India in the fifteenth century as a primary merit of the Muslim rulers (Pramar 2005: 28-45). According to Pramar, the Muslim administration allocated confined residential enclaves (Pramar 2005: 46-68), the so called Pols, to the Jain merchant community (Pramar 2005: 39-40). The Jains had the duty to perform the Devapuja, the veneration of the saints. Because of the limited and the restrictive living enclaves and the urban space, this religious duty could not be performed adequately, as intended. Probably due to this, it evolved into a form of private devotion, which could be executed through the small nicheshrines.



Fig. 1: Gujarat; Jain house temple; Teak partially painted; Museum für Asiatische Kunst Berlin, Germany. $^4$ 

This is why the niche-shrines are designed as facades and decorated with numerous style characteristics, according to the individual taste of their owners. The believers had neither to leave their residential enclave nor the city. They could continue their business, ensuring their economic existence and at the same time fulfill their religious duties. Therefore, they were inconspicuous and neutral in the city states and provinces, which were politically dominated by Muslims.

A famous hypothesis of Goetz assumes that there was a tradition of wooden house shrines and temples in pre-Islamic times, more specifically before the Sultan and Mughal periods (Goetz 1949: 33). However, this assumption is contradicted by the Prakrit text Vastusara-Prakaranam from the thirteenth century. The text is a major source for West Indian Jain architecture (Amar 1975: vol. III, 495; Dhaky 1975: 125). It describes the form and shape of medieval temple architecture in the thirteenth century and states: "a wooden temple [...] is not worthy of worship in a house and should not be kept in a (house)." The text also mentions that it is irrelevant whether these constructions are designed like real temples (Vastusara-Prakaranam: ch. III, verse 61, 99). Consequently, there is an argument to be made for the unlikelyhood of a tradition of wooden domestic Jain shrines before the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in India. It seems most likely that the facade-like shrines are a result of limited living space in the cities of West India.

# Overview of the morphological and stylistic features of domestic Jain niche-shrines

The 'Berlin-House-Temple' presents a curious case in the already uncertain history of Jain house temples. Its artistic and physical shape is an example of an allegorisation of classic indigenous temple architecture. The 'Berlin-Temple' is stylistically peculiar in its lack of Indo-Islamic influences. In contrast, other related objects in various collections around the world, which are discussed in detail below, reflect a stylistic eclecticism with mainly Indo-Islamic features. Furthermore, they all are constructed as tiny facades without any possibility of a ritual surrounding (Pradakshina), unlike the 'Berlin-Temple' which is bypassable. For a better understanding of the concept of wooden Jain shrines and the piece in Berlin, it is necessary to have a closer look at a few other shrines, highlighting the main stylistic features and the typology of the shrines.

The niche-shrine (about seventeenth - eighteenth century, cf. Guy 1995: 108-9: inv.no. IM. 342-1910) from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 2) in London was constructed as a small-sized facade, or a false-front. The cornice shows the sculpture of a goddess. Celestial winged beings and musicians cite Christian-Muslim imagery that emanated from Mughal art at the end of the sixteenth century (Cf. Okada: 23, fig. 25; 31, fig. 161; Mitter, 2001: 124, fig. 77).



Fig. 2: Ahmedabad, Gujarat; domestic Jain niche-shrine; Teak with traces of pigment, ca. seventeenth-eighteenth c., height 169,5 cm; Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Great Britain.<sup>5</sup>



Another niche-shrine (ca. eighteenth century, Jain 1989: 80–9, inv.no. 5/270) from the National Crafts Museum in New Delhi (Fig. 3) is a miniature facade. Its architrave bears a Mangala-Cihna-Relief and above the portal appears, among others, the sculpture of Abisheka-Lakshmi. The garments and the crowns of the sculptures are based on the fashion of that time (Goetz 1950: 13; Goetz 1949: 36-9). Little winged cupids reveal modes of Western art. The Mangala-Cihna-Relief is a typical subject of wooden Jain shrines (Cf. Dwiwedi 1975: figs. 291-2). It represents the fourteen auspicious symbols, which occurred in the dreams of the Brahmin wife Devananda and then queen Trishala, the mother of the twenty-fourth Jina Mahavira, accordingly to the Kalpa-Sutra, one of the sacred books of Jain-Religion. Unlike the Shvetambara tradition the Digambara tradition of the Jains knows sixteen dreams (Bhattacharyya 2010: 25–33).

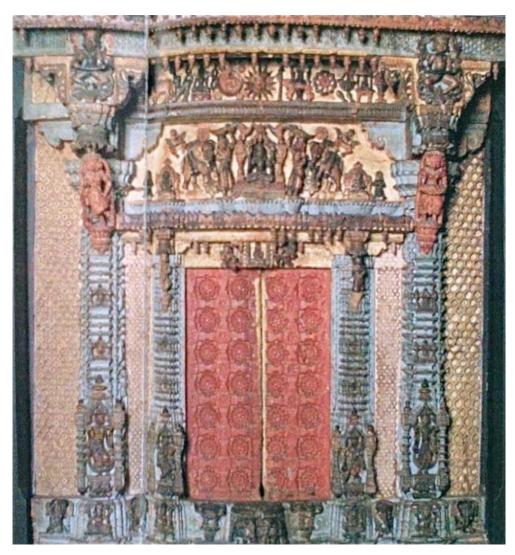


Fig. 3: Gujarat; domestic Jain niche-shrine; wood painted, ca. eighteenth c., ca.  $145,00 \text{ cm} \times 141,00 \text{ cm}$ , National Museum of Handicrafts and Handlooms Delhi, India.<sup>6</sup>



A shrine (ca. eighteenth century) of the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem Massachusetts, USA (Fig. 4) shows the Tolla-Construction of Western India (Cf. Pramar 1989: 211, fig. 31). Projecting piers and cross beams are visible in the upper part. These constructions were meant for windows and doors (Cf. Pramar 1989: 211-3, fig. 31; Pramar 2005: 216-22, fg. 79 a, b). The cornice bears the figure of Abisheka-Lakshmi. The architrave has a Mangala-Cihna-Relief. It displays fourteen symbols from left to right: elephant, bull, lion, Lakshmi, flower garland, sun, moon, flag, kalasha, lotus-lake, milk-ocean, heavenly vehicle, mountain of jewels and a smokeless fire. The miniature shrines at the pilaster are equipped with round domes in seemingly Moghul style. The crenellated architecture of the cornice recalls architectural models of the Sultanate- and Moghul times.



Fig. 4: Gujarat; domestic Jain niche-shrine; front view, wood painted, ca. eighteenth c., ca. 170,18 cm x 127,00 cm; Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, USA. $^7$ 



A structural development can be found on the niche-shrine (CE 1600) from the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg in Florida, USA (Fig. 5). Here two pillars carry a canopy-like roof and form a porch. The frontal architrave bears the Mangala-Cihna-Relief. The decorative domes of the Dvarapala-Shrines (Fig. 10) reveal a hybrid late Mughal style. The curious mixture of capital sculptures, musicians, claded guardians and elephant riders with turbans originates from the art of Marathas (Cf. Dwiwedi 1975: vol. III, 431-2, fig. 286).



Fig. 5. Photo: Patan, Gujarat; domestic Jain niche-shrine; wood painted, ca. CE 1600, size n.a; Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg, Florida, USA. $^8$ 



Similarly, the shrine from the Cincinnati Art Museum (ca. beginning seventeenth century) (Fig. 6) (Cf. Smart & Walker 1985: 79–81, no. 57) reflects structural changes, specifically, a change in terms of an increase in size to almost 2 m. Consider in contrast, the tiny and modest niche-shrines described above! At the shrine of the Cincinnati Art Museum the roof is supported by baluster pillars, a famous element of Mughal architecture (Cf. Asher 1992: 169–251, 310, fig. 208). The tympanum shows a setting with indigenous style miniature shrines and a central deity. The Mangala-Cihna-Relief is located at the frontal architrave.



Fig. 6. Patan, Gujarat; domestic Jain niche-shrine; carved wood partially painted and gilded, ca. early seventeenth c., ca.  $216,90 \times 168,00 \times 84,50$  cm; Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio, USA, the William T. and Louise Taft Semple Collection.<sup>9</sup>



The shrine reflects a fusion of indigenous design paradigms and hybrid Indo-Islamic elements. A sculptural mannerism is displayed here. The architectural forms and the figurative representations cite medieval sacred Jain art. However, this design exaggerates these role models. The Cincinnati-Shrine combines the numerous iconographical and stylistic elements and symbols new and applies them to the technical requirements of a facade like niche-shrine, which is overloaded by allegorical sculptures and decorative programs. It could be called a lavish eclecticism of Northwest India.

The niche-shrine (ca. late eighteenth - early nineteenth centuries, cf. Bromberg 2013: 114–5) in the collection of the Dallas Museum of Art in Texas, USA (Fig. 7) clarifies the constant changing from simple flat niche-shrines starting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through sumptuous pavilion-like structures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



Fig. 7. Gujarat; domestic Jain niche-shrine; front view, silver over wood, late eighteenth-nineteenth c., ca. 2,00 m 28,60 cm x 1,00 m 75,26 cm x 81,28 cm; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, USA. $^{10}$ 



Its craftsmanship follows the style of elaborated Mughal Art. However, the visual and structural focus changed. The plane wall with a gate and a decorated cornice is given up. The enclosure with perforated Jali windows creates an intimate sacred space. The silver applications emphasize the statements of Dwiwedi and Guy that the level of the shrine-ornamentation reflects the status of its founder (Dwiwedi 1975: vol. III, 431; Guy 1995: 109; Trivedi 1943: 201) All niche-shrines are constructed as facades and display eclectic forms of various styles, mainly Indo-Islamic. Peculiarly, there are no typological and stylistic similarities with the Berlin-House-Temple.

# The 'Berlin-Temple': A Curious Case

What then are the unique typological and stylistic features of the Berlin-House-Temple and how can these be explained? The 2009 restoration documentation of the 'Berlin-Temple' indicates that the first construction of the temple was made of wooden tenon-dowel-joints, which was exposed and suffered from dampness. The humidity damage resulted from ritual bathings of the venerated sculpture of a Jain saint (Tirthankara), inside the sanctuary and because the temple stood outside in a courtyard (Yaldiz 2000: 73). After this period, it was disassembled and modified, as many fractions and spike-settings demonstrate. The polychromy is painted on the wood, with its late rotten parts and damages. Inferentially, the present-day appearance it is not the original state, because the shrine was changed several times.

The flank of the base measures around 202.00 cm. The width of the front and the back scales circa 122.00 cm (Yaldiz 2000: 73). The height is approximately 235.00 cm. Architecturally, the temple is divided into three parts, a base, a cella and a dome area. The base follows a square aligned plan. The interior of the cell has a square basic plan. The central porch, rather gateway area, shows a sculpture of Abisheka-Lakshmi, the Indian goddess of wealth and prosperity. The cella and the numerous domes repeat the forms of indigenous Northwestern India architecture of the Middle Ages, for example, those of the shrines of Osian from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. These shrines have only one cella, with a square-apsidal ground plan and a threefold structure of each wall. There is also an addition of a portal area. Area of the square of the squar

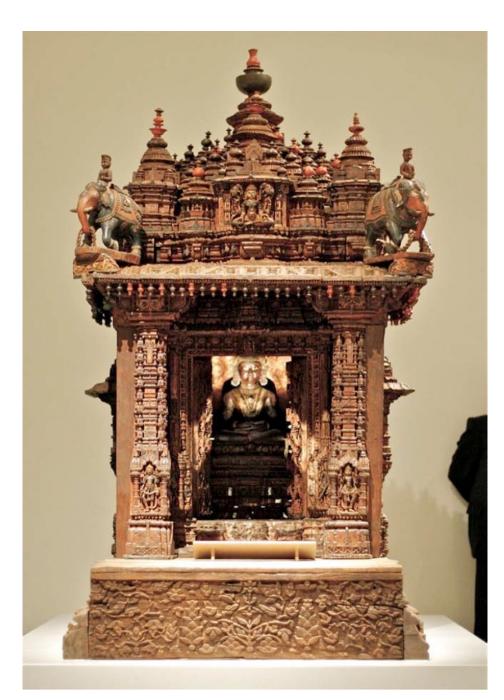


Fig. 8: Gujarat; Berlin-House-Temple, front view, wood partially painted; M.f.A.K. Berlin, Deutschland.  $^{\rm 15}$ 

The gateway, the cella and the frontal area differ structurally and stylistically from each other. For example, the ritual area (Figs. 8, 13) is distinguished from the cella, recognisable by different technical and artisanal treatments. It is modifed and removable (Cf. Restoration documentation of Jain Temple I 10037, 2009: 4. 3.). The pilaster of the cella and the gateway area (Figs. 1, 13) show distinguishable proportional and craftsmanship compositions, an indication that the

gateway area is an independent construction – a fact which may explain the singular style of the Berlin piece.

Photos of the restoration (Figs. 14, 15, 16) from 2009 show that the gateway area and the cella are two different constructions, which are put together as one house temple. The grand cella shows clear stylistic features of medieval times without Indo-Islamic influences. Apparently, it integrates intentionally the much older gateway, which was perhaps created at a time when Indo-Islamic and indigenous features were not inseparably amalgamated. And hence, they show structural and stylistic varieties among themselves. Therefore, the gateway area is a classic niche-shrine, which was built-in a bypassable cella. In this way, the gateway area fits in the typology of the facade like nicheshrines described above. Despite the typological classification, there are no stylistic matches between the shrine from Berlin and the other niche-shrines. For example, a comparison between the sculptures of the gateway area from the Berlin shrine (Fig. 9) with those of the piece from St. Petersburg Museum (Fig. 10) is not instructive.



Fig. 9: Berlin-Shrine, gateway, detail guardian sculptures.



Fig. 10: Patan, Gujarat; domestic Jain shrine, detail pillar sculpture; wood painted, ca. CE 1600, size n.a; Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg, Florida, USA.



The front of the ritual area of Berlin-House-Temple displays the image of a cypress, a famous Mughal period motif of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Fig. 8). In Islam cypresses and fruit trees symbolise immortality as they are found in the eternal paradise garden. The cypress is a popular motif of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, also in the art of wood carving. It can be found in the numerous opulent tombs of the Mughals, for instance, in the tomb of I'timad Ud-Daulah (built CE 1622-28, Okada 2004: 16). The image of the cypress in contrast to the otherwise distinctly indigenous look of the Berlin-Temple raises questions about dating. According to the restoration documentation, the ritual area is a late supplement (Cf. Restoration documentation of Jain Temple I 10037, 2009: 4.3). Assuming that it is a later addition, the rest of the Berlin-Temple can be assumed to originate from a previous period. Consequently, the dating of the entire Berlin-House-Temple to the eighteenth century is questionable. When it was purchased in 1967, the temple's dating should have been considered more critically.

These considerations on the stylistic classification and dating of the Berlin-House-Temple inspire alternative explanations. The guardian sculptures of the big wooden Shantinatha temple in Ahmedabad demonstrate similarities with the guardian figures of the Berlin piece. The temple was founded in 1390 (Fig. 12). The common elements appear in the elaboration of the sculptures, the miniature architecture and the decor (Cf. Trivedi 1965: pl. LXXXVII). The sculptures of both objects (Figs. 9, 11) show a unique plasticity, the almost naked appearance, the indigenous pantaloons, the Akshamals, the jewels and the conical headgears. In conclusion, it is probable that the gateway area of the Berlin shrine and its carved sculptures are datable before the eighteenth century, before an epoch when Indo-Islamic and indigenous features became inseparably amalgamated.

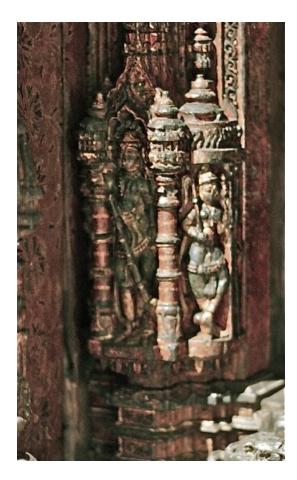


Fig. 11. Gujarat; Berlin-Shrine, detail inner gateway, left-side pillar. Dvarapala-Sculptures; wood painted; M.f.A.K. Berlin, Germany. 16



Fig. 12. Ahmedabad, Gujarat; Haja-Patel-Pol Kalupur, Shantinatha temple, detail Dvarapala-Sculptures; wood; temple founded in CE 1390.<sup>17</sup>

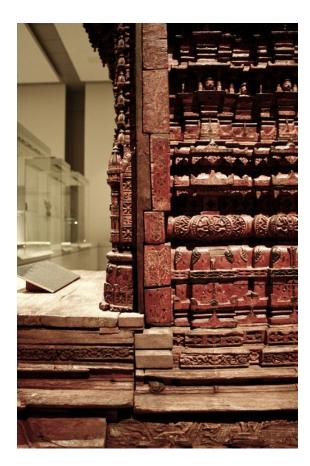


Fig. 13. Berlin-House-Temple. Detail, righthand side. Structural and stylistic differences between cella and ritual area. State after the 2009 restoration.<sup>18</sup>

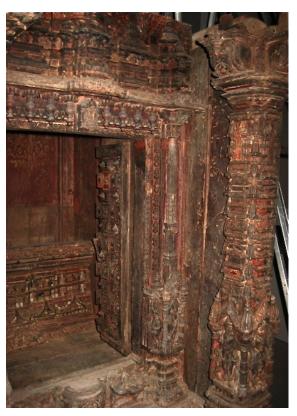


Fig. 14. Photo: Dismantling of the Berlin-House-Temple for the 2009 restoration. Gateway, right-hand side. The different constructions are exposed. Clearly visible are the plane and unpainted rear wall inside the cella — a proof of modifications in the past.  $^{19}$ 

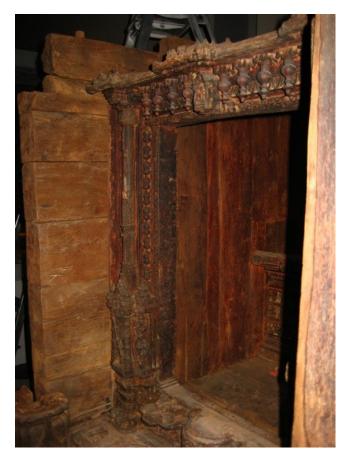


Fig. 15. Berlin-House-Temple with the exposed niche-shrine in 2009. Gateway, left-hand side. The inner frame is observable as an independent construction.



Fig. 16. Berlin-House-Temple with the exposed niche-shrine in 2009. Gateway, left-hand side. The inner frame is exposed.<sup>20</sup>

# **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Zentralarchiv (Central Archive) der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, General Correspondence: St-7, 1958-1969, (SMB-ZA, II/ VA 14674): receipt copy of Stolper Galleries of Primitive Arts, Lobo Braakensiekstraat no. 58, Amsterdam, Holland, from Robert L. Stolper to the department for Indian art, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1 Berlin, 33-Dahlem, Arnimallee 23, West-Germany, attn. Dr. Härtel, Director: 20.04.1966: inventory no. R229: The receipt describes the shrine as follows:

"Gujarati Wood Temple: This temple of the eighteenth century was made of wood in many parts and assembled with interlocking joints of diferent types. The Temple is ornately carved with a small shrine in the center; moveable doors; carved pillars; a front platform; carved niches set into ornate wood sides; and elaborate and complex cupulos for the roof. Price includes delivery to Museum. Price: \$ 9,000.00 U.S. Send payment to: Stolper Galleries, Bankers Trust Co., 415 Madison Avenue, New York City, N.Y."

<sup>2</sup> Zentralarchiv (Central Archive) der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SMB-ZA, II/ VA 9102): Transcript of the Directors' Conference: 22/02/1967, (-2) 3: The transcript contains a note, which says: "Indische Kunstabteilung Stolper Galleries of Primitive Art, Amsterdam/ Holland 1.hölzerner Holzschrein, Gujarat, Anfang 18. Jh. 9.000,-US-\$ = 36.000, -DM"; An accurate age determination by a dendrochronology has not been done, Information by Mr. Toralf Gabsch, principal conservator at the Museum of Asian Art Berlin, E-Mail 24.09.2013.

<sup>3</sup> Pal 1995: 18; Goetz 1949: 33: Goetz describes that the Jain culture has been the connection between the Late Middle Ages and the modern era. Especially in the confrontation of Islam and indigenous cults, the Jains went on to become the keepers of medieval Indian art. Rothermund (1985: 16) writes that a middle class of merchants evolved in the urban areas, but they lived in dependency to the Muslim military feudalism. Furthermore, he describes a trade capitalism that developed, which was adapted to the political conditions.

<sup>4</sup> Inv.no. I 10037. © Johannes Schröder. Further Figs.: Wormit 1976: 16, Fig. 58; Härtel 1976: 56, 187, Fig. 165, old inv.no. MIK I 10037; Härtel 1986: 54, 214, Fig.140, old inv.no. MIK I 10037; Yaldiz 2000: 73, fig.114, inv.no. I 10037.

<sup>5</sup> Inv.no. IM.342-1910. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Great Britain: http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O58665/architectural- facade-unknown/ (10.07.2012). Further Figs: Guy 1995: 108, fig. 5, inv.no. IM.342-1910.

<sup>6</sup> Inv.no. 5/270. © National Museum of Handicrafts and Handlooms Delhi, India: Jain 1989: 80–89, inv.no. 5/270.

<sup>7</sup> Inv.no. E28297 (Gift of Margaret Langmuir Jager from the estate of Isabel Anderson, 1949.) © Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, USA. Further Fig.: Internet: http://explore-art.pem.org/object/south-asian-and-korean-arts-and-cultures/E28297/ detail (28.08.2013).

<sup>8</sup> Inv.no. 1966.18. (Gift of Louis E. Seley and sons Hervey and Elliott, Jr.) © Photograph by Thomas U. Gessler & Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg, Florida, USA.

<sup>9</sup> Inv.no. 1962.459. © Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio, USA. Further Figs.: Schoelkopf 1985: 50; Smart & Walker 1985: no. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Inv.no. 1995.77.A-GG © Dallas Museum of Art, gift of David T. Owsley via the Alvin and Lucy Owsley Foundation.

<sup>11</sup>Telephone conversation (26.09.2013) with Mrs. Katrin König, one of the restorers of the shrine.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dipl restorers König, Katrin / Klinger, Martina: Restoration documentation of Jain Temple I 10037 February –July 2009: 4.3) Object history, part 86 d: The documentation states that the wrought-iron spikes are not original to the shrine. For example, the polychrome painting was applied on the timber and the spikes after the shrine was disassembled and reassembled. Above

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all, the shrine shows numerous damages and outbreaks that had already been generated before this process.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Cf. Guide sheet of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Indische Kunst: Carved domestic shrine, no. 632 (1). According to this document the total height is 270.00 cm (probably with the base). Cf. Figs.: Wormit 1976: 16, fig. 58; Härtel 1976: 56, 187, fig. 165, height ca. 270,00 cm, old inv.no. MIK I 10037; Härtel 1986: 54, 214, fig. 140, height ca. 235,00 cm, old inv.no. MIK I 10037; Yaldiz 2000: 73, fig. 114: (inv.no. I 10037).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> For identification and naming of the architectural elements see: Sompura (1968), Amar (1975), Chandra and Dhaky (1975), Master and Dhaky (1991, 1998), Gupta and Vijayakumar (2010) as well as Adam Hardy (2007). The publications deal with the structural and stylistic features of temple architecture of Western India.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Inv.no. I 10037. © Johannes Schröder.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Inv.no. I 10037. Fig.: © Johannes Schröder.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> © Trivedi 1965: pl. LXXXVII.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> © Johannes Schröder.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> © Katrin König.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> © Katrin König.



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