The place of performance in a landscape of conquest: Raja Mansingh’s akhārā in Gwalior

Saarthak Singh

Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York, NY, USA

ABSTRACT

In the forested countryside of Gwalior lie the vestiges of a little-known amphitheatre (akhārā) attributed to Raja Mansingh Tomar (r. 1488–1518). A bastioned rampart encloses the once-vibrant dance arena: a circular stage in the centre, surrounded by orchestral platforms and an elevated viewing gallery. This purpose-built performance space is a unique monumentalized instance of widely-prevalent courtly gatherings, featuring interpretive dance accompanied by music. What makes it most intriguing is the architectural play between inside/outside, between the performance stage and the wilderness landscape. Why then did it make sense to situate a ‘fortified’ amphitheatre amidst forested hills, away from the city? And where does this cultural arena stand in relation to the pressing political concerns of the day, anchored in the very same landscape? This paper examines the performative structure of Mansingh’s akhārā and argues that performance – as evening entertainment, hunting sport and military campaign – occupied a crucial place in Gwalior’s resilience throughout the fifteenth century and its changing perceptions from an infidel’s jungle refuge (mawās) to the axis of a culturally-refined region (sudeśa).

KEYWORDS

akhārā; landscape; performance; performativity; dhrupad; rāsallā

Introduction

Thirty kilometres southwest of Gwalior Fort in the village of Barai are the remains of a circular amphitheatre (Figure 1). The performance space is located amid forested hinterlands of the famed fortress, and is enclosed by a rugged rampart punctuated by bastions (Figure 2). A simple portico on the east leads to an open-air arena with a circular stage in the centre (Figure 3). The stage is framed by curious pieces of stone furniture on four sides, comprising domed kiosks (chattrīs) atop eight squat towers that alternate with four lower platforms (Figure 4–5). A viewing gallery once surrounded the stage on all sides, elevated above a suite of rooms built along the circular rampart, and accessible by staircases from the inside (Figure 6–7). This amphitheatre bears no dated record but has been linked to the patronage of Raja Mansingh Tomar, who ruled over the Gwalior region between 1488 and 1518.¹

It is surprising that this structure has attracted so little attention, given its dual importance to the history of architecture and the history of performing arts in the Indian subcontinent. Such buildings are by no means commonplace in the surviving record. While Sanskrit treatises on architecture exhibit a truly capacious imagination in their descriptions of ritual buildings and robots alike,² the extant corpus is dominated by stone temples, monasteries, fortification, and hydraulic structures. Dramaturgical and sumptuary manuals provide specifications for a range of purpose-built performance spaces, including the playhouse (preksāgāra), dance hall (nātyaśālā), and music hall...
Figure 1. Topographic map of Barai and its environs in the hinterlands of Gwalior Fort. Based on Survey of India 1:50,000 scale maps 54J/4 and 54J/16 (1987) and © JAXA/METI ALOS-1 PALSAR L1.0 (2010), accessed through ASF DAAC 10 June 2019.

Figure 2. The amphitheatre at Barai seen from the west.
(sangitaśāla), yet only a handful of such spaces have been documented on the ground. The material traces of performance are no doubt difficult to read, given their ephemerality and their regional and historical variability, but this is also because of the lack of concerted textual and archaeological inquiry into questions of performance, performativity, ritual and spectacle. The field of performance studies, which takes the centrality of these issues to be axiomatic, is largely informed by modern contexts and ethnographic praxis, and has posited historical continuities based on literary references alone. Meanwhile, art historians and archaeologists, long trained in reading the
material record, have remained reticent regarding such cultural practices until very recently.\textsuperscript{5} The amphitheatre at Barai thus presents a unique opportunity to work across disciplinary divides, in order to examine both pragmatics and poetics of performance in relation to architectural space.

The hinterland setting of the amphitheatre, moreover, raises questions about the performativity of the building itself: why did it make sense to situate a fortified amphitheatre within a forested landscape, far from the city? And where does this cultural arena stand in relation to the pressing political concerns of the day, anchored in the very same landscape? It is to this double sense of place, as physical location and as conceptual position, that the title of my paper gestures. The complex interrelationship between architecture, topography, and performance assumes particular significance for the study of a strategic but fledgling polity that has fallen in the blind spot of Sultanate and Mughal historiography, despite its far-reaching implications for both. The Tomar kingdom of Gwalior was one of many regional principalities, including the sultanates of Bengal, Jaunpur, Kalpi, Malwa and Gujarat, which emerged after Timur’s sack of Delhi in 1398 and endured until its incorporation into the Mughal Empire in 1526. The absence of any contemporary accounts of Gwalior’s long fifteenth century presents a historiographic challenge, for while Persian chronicles of neighbouring sultanate courts convey only its geopolitical value in their litany of military campaigns launched against the recalcitrant rajas,\textsuperscript{6} it is only later in Mughal imperial histories that it assumes literary, musicological and architectural appeal.\textsuperscript{7} Consequently, modern historians have all too

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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{plan_of_amphitheatre.png}
\caption{Plan of the amphitheatre at Barai. Based on Dvivedi, ‘Mansingh’s Racch’.}
\end{figure}
simplistically tended to celebrate Tomar-era Gwalior as an age of cultural renaissance under Hindu kings, who maintained their independence against the constant threat of Muslim conquest. Only recently have scholars sought to situate Gwalior within a connected history of fifteenth-century northern India, underscoring the cultural linkages that knit together a mosaic of military aristocracies. Building on this scholarship, my inquiry examines what performance as an analytic framework can reveal about the practices of contending political elites in pre-Mughal sultanate north India.

Today, the amphitheatre at Barai stands heavily reconstructed by the Madhya Pradesh state archaeology department, after weathering the elements and being plundered for building materials.
It was first reported in the Gwalior State gazetteer in 1908 and then in 1965, but was only published by Harihar Nivas Dvivedi in 1976 and again in 1986 before being brought under state legislation. Dvivedi’s publications seem to have passed unnoticed in subsequent scholarship, but their photographs and schematic plan provide a crucial starting point, though not without limitations.

**Performative architecture: structure and setting of a dance arena**

The amphitheatre at Barai is made up of two main components: a performance arena in the centre and a viewing gallery around it. It has a circular plan, measuring 60 metres in diameter, with an open-air stage enclosed by two concentric walls (Figure 5). The circumference is uniformly divided into twenty sectors by semicircular bastions 8 metres apart, each sector between the outer and inner walls forming a trapezoidal room about 5 metres deep. The main entrance projects from the eastern sector as a small four-pillared porch. Surviving staircases attached to the inner wall lead to the flat roof of the rooms, which served as a viewing gallery running all along the perimeter (Figure 6–7). Pairs of stone hoops fixed into the inner wall probably held wooden poles to support a cloth canopy over the balcony (Figure 8). In the centre, about 10 metres across an open enclosure lies the circular stage, spanning 30 metres across and elevated on a half metre high plinth that was once bounded by a raised parapet. Centre stage was marked by a 2.75 metre-high monolithic column (Figure 9). And along the periphery of the stage, in the compass directions, were small domed kiosks (chattrīs) raised on circular towers alternating with those on low platforms, the latter having fallen off but still visible in the photograph published by Dvivedi.

One of the most striking features of this amphitheatre is its fortified façade. Built of rubble masonry set in lime mortar, the exterior wall is punctuated at regular intervals by twenty bastions (būrij, sg. burj). It is doubtful that these tower-like buttresses served a defensive function, given their shallow protuberance and the absence of strong battering or box-machicolations typical of Sultanate-era military architecture (Figure 6, 10). They are instead more closely related to the decorative bastions frequently applied to residential and ritual buildings of the time. Burton-Page has noted that under Firuz Shah Tughluq (r. 1350–88) ‘the burj is developed as an ornamental feature: mosque enclosures and ‘idgāh walls regularly show angle and end bastions, capped by
Figure 9. Monolithic column that stood centre-stage, with grooves on one end.

Figure 10. Bastion (*burj*) with crenelations and lotus-bud decoration.
circular or square chattrīs’ – features continued under the Lodi Sultans (r. 1451–1526). Similarly at play with a ‘defensive’ repertoire is the band of battlements displayed on the bastioned wall of the amphitheatre, which conceals a chemin de ronde, a continuous elevated walkway, above a series of rooms built into the rampart. The recurrence of this crenelated course on the interior façade should alert us to the fact that here architecture itself is deeply performative. It is as if the amphitheatre were a patrolled castle, not only for its visitors but also for its performers. This rhetoric of refuge is activated precisely because the mural gallery affords views both outside and inside the amphitheatre. Given its location near jungles where wild animals could be hunted until half a century ago, the elevated views would have invited comparisons between two very different kind of open-air performance spaces.

The double sense of watching and keeping watch would have been reinforced by the square domed kiosks (chattris) that originally surmounted the bastions and provided views of the landscape. Though long fallen out, these are identifiable by their platform slabs that still remain on some of the bastions (Figure 10). The square stone slabs are carved with the same schematic, lotus-bud decoration and have similar measurements (~1.20m) as those of the chattris girdling the stage (Figure 11), indicating that these are really modular units, raised upon the 6 metre-high rampart to afford elevated views. Such chattri lookouts are attested in both military and palatial architecture of the time, designed as defensive watch-posts and as belvederes (manzar) for surveying the surroundings. The chattrī-on-burj arrangement is best exemplified by the royal palace of Mansingh Tomar (r. 1488–1518) built on Gwalior Fort in the 1490s, where the main eastern façade is punctuated by circular buttresses capped by octagonal domed chattris (Figure 12).
This formal relationship, however, is all the more striking as it reinforces the spatial distinction between urban palace and hinterland retreat. Where the glazed-tile decoration of the palace makes its bejewelled splendour gleam from a distance, the austere treatment of the amphitheatre, rooted in Tughluq building materials and methods,\(^\text{18}\) imparts a ruggedness consonant with its countryside context. It is worth raising the possibility whether the rampart chattrīs of Barai on occasion served a ceremonial function, as with the balconied kiosk over the Elephant Gate of Raja Mansingh’s palace, where a drum-and-trumpet ensemble would have formally announced the prince’s presence.\(^\text{19}\) Though the entrance porch of the amphitheatre appears unassuming, the projecting ledges and sunken niches flanking the portal suggest that some ephemeral materials like earthen lamps, flowers, or painted images were used to enhance it on days of performance.\(^\text{20}\)

The transition from exterior to interior space is orchestrated to generate an element of surprise not easy to appreciate today. The low passage expands laterally into two oblong vestibules on axis to the entrance, creating a sequence of spaces that delay physical progress towards the stage even as they offer direct visual access to it. As such, the fortified façade would have heightened expectations as it gave way to a vibrant, enclosed space, only to quickly confound them with the realization that it was also open to the sky. Added to this is the strikingly self-referential interior design. Deliberately echoing the chattri-on-burj treatment of the exterior wall, the circular stage in the centre is also framed at regular intervals by squat circular towers (6.7 m. high) surmounted with chattris.

The elaborate structural arrangements for performance do not readily reveal whether the theatre was meant for musical concerts, dance displays, or play production. The stage floor, once coated with a thick layer of lime plaster (chunam) polished to produce a smooth reflective surface, would have been suitable for dance movements.\(^\text{21}\) The axial pillar in the centre may be linked to the ceremonial staff (jarjara) erected by the play director (śūtradhāra) as part of stage preliminaries in classical Sanskrit dramas, re-enacting Indra’s separation of heaven and earth.\(^\text{22}\) Grooves on the top, however, indicate that the pillar may have been ‘intended to fasten and secure a huge metal lamp placed above’ (Figure 12).\(^\text{23}\) The small domed kiosks (chattris) around the stage are wide and high enough to seat single individuals cross-legged. These were most likely to seat musicians accompanying the stage performance, for the rhythmic disposition of high and low chattris in the compass directions resolving into dominant cross axes was not solely with an eye for visual symmetry, but

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Figure 12. Mansingh’s palace at Gwalior Fort, with its distinctive burj-and-chattri facade. Mary Binney Wheeler Collection, University of Pennsylvania Library, mbwmp0137.
also for acoustic counterpoints across the stage. That acoustics was a key priority is underscored by a peculiar design feature of the eight chattrī towers, which all tilt slightly towards the centre of the stage. Each tower is equipped with projecting ledges, possibly to support a wooden stair, that would have facilitated ascent to the chattrī. Such a fourfold arrangement may correspond to descriptions of the classical orchestra (vṛṇḍa) in Sanskrit texts, combining vocals with percussion, string and wind instruments. It is doubtful, however, that any large instruments such as vīṇā could have been played within the rather restricted space of the chattrī.

As such, the amphitheatre at Barai is unique in its conception and does not seem directly related to any other architectural type. It stands apart from the mainstream tradition of theatre halls described in Sanskrit treatises on dramaturgy (nāṭya) and architecture (śilpa), where the predominant types are of rectangular, square, or triangular plan and are further distinguished as stages for performance to gods, kings, or citizens. Of course, it is entirely possible that it is simply a lithic translation of ephemeral theatre architecture, but an ethnohistoric inquiry into such temporary stage structures would still leave us to explain why the amphitheatre took the form of a fort punctuated by bastions and a circuit of rooms along the rampart. Turning to local architectural remains within the Gwalior region, intriguing parallels emerge in older monuments that were, however, renovated under the Tomar dynasty. One such is the yogini temple at Mitaoli, perched on a rocky promontory north of Gwalior Fort (Figure 13). Built in the twelfth century, this circular open-air shrine is enclosed by a circuit of sixty-four cells, originally occupied by statues of yoginis, that face inward to a circular pavilion dedicated to Shiva in the centre. The temple and the amphitheatre not only share a similar organization of interior space, but also have an equally austere treatment of exterior walls, punctuated only by vertical offsets.

Inscriptions at Mitaoli’s yogini temple indicate its continued importance throughout the Sultanate period, being restored in 1323 (V.S. 1380) following Khalji campaigns and frequented during Mansingh’s reign in 1503 (V.S. 1560). The performative dimension of the tantric mandala, however, seems to have been gradually transformed, for sixteenth-century inscriptions carved on the sandstone floor outside the temple quote several Sanskrit verses on amorous love and pleasurable pastimes. One actually refers to some dalliance in the ‘little circular temple’ (rāmagāṇa-nāṭya-māndapa), defined by an internal octagon of pillars supporting a circular corbelled ceiling (Figure 14). Such halls had become permanent fixtures of imperial-scale temple complexes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries for staging dramatic performances, as at the so-called Sas-Bahu temples of Gwalior Fort founded under
the Kacchapaghāta dynasty (c.950–1196).

The towering sanctums of these two temples were torn down probably when Gwalior was taken over in 1230 by the Delhi Sultan Iltutmish, so that only their rāṅgamanḍapas survived into the fifteenth century when the site had been reactivated under the Tomars. Is it possible that such freestanding dance halls inspired the countryside amphitheatre at Barai? At Gwalior Fort at least, where Kacchapaghāta legacy is writ large upon Mansingh’s palace facade, there lies a circular hall in its subterranean storeys where – like the temple manḍapa – an internal octagon of columns holds up a recessed circular ceiling carved with cusped mouldings and a lotus medallion in the centre (Figure 15). Much of the paraphernalia that enlivened this cool cellar is missing, but cavities for holding oil lamps and iron hoops for suspending swings between the pillars suggest that this too was a performance arena, ideal for the hot summer months.

In addition, the Barai amphitheatre can be situated alongside other palatial performance spaces built by Mansingh in Gwalior. One is the square courtyard of Man Mandir, which is entered through a vestibule featuring a spectacular stonework frieze pierced with images of female dancers and male drummers that gives a vivid foretaste of the entertainments (Figure 16–17). Similarly, there is a rectangular hall with balconies on all sides located in the cool basement of the Gujari Mahal, a palace built by Mansingh for his queen Mrignayani in 1512 (Figure 18).

Both palatial structures display a range of novel stone-carving and tile-working techniques that are entirely absent from the Barai amphitheatre where a Tughluqid repertoire is particularly strong, thus suggesting its construction quite early in Mansingh’s thirty-year reign.

What makes the amphitheatre at Barai all the more striking is its landscape setting, valuable clues to which were brought to light by Dvivedi. The Gopācalakhyān, a Hindi chronicle about the kings of Gwalior composed by Khargarāy around 1630, presents a lengthy panegyricon Mansingh Tomar in which the poet refers to an akhārā (lit. ‘arena’) located within the king’s hunting grounds:

Hunting was the king’s great love, the king staged new ways of rasa (nai rasariti).
Where he dammed hills and valleys, there the king would stage his hunt.
In dense jungle was a mahal, right there the king built his akhārā.
For miles and miles there were traps, snares sewn of silken thread.
Boars and tigers he hunted at will, no other creature did he injure.
Falcons, kites, raptors he did not trap, for eight such birds-of-prey were killed by no one.

Water creatures and birds were killed by no one, stream and lake became covered with lotuses.

The king being righteous by nature, ‘rained’ as Indra for all four months.

*Figure 15.* Circular dance hall in the basement of Mansingh’s palace at Gwalior Fort.

*Figure 16.* Southwestern courtyard of Mansingh’s palace at Gwalior Fort.
All four classes of women that there are, they are all part of Mān’s akhārā. Two hundred of them are like Padmini, unparalleled even by Urvaśī.36

[...] All four classes of women that there are, they are all part of Mān’s akhārā. Two hundred of them are like Padmini, unparalleled even by Urvaśī.36

This pithy poetic account is full of unusual topographic detail and makes use of local diction in ways that suggest we are dealing not with a generic literary theme, but with an evocation of a specific place within Gwalior.37 Barai’s topography and architecture correspond remarkably well to these details. The modern village is surrounded by extensive forested tracts covered by dense thornbush vegetation that harbour a wide variety of birds and wild animals.38 These jungles had served as the royal hunting grounds under the Mughals (1558–1761) and the Marathas (1781–1947), until they
were turned into state-protected forest reserves. The poet distinguishes the treacherous hilly jungle (dāṅg), laid out with traps for boars and tigers, from the stream (sarītā) and lake (<Skt. sarovara) that are covered with lotuses and are full of birds protected from hunters. The contours of a largely dried-up lake are still identifiable in the low-lying land near the amphitheatre that is used for cultivation. It is bounded by the natural slope of a hill on the west, and by earthen embankments on the north, east, and south (Figure 1). The lake was fed by streams from the Sānkḥ and Sonrekhā rivers, north-flowing tributaries of the Chambal that wind through the forested hills to the west and east of Barai. The mahal (lit. ‘halting place’) is most likely the small hilltop fort of Barai, whose four walls are punctuated by towering buttresses that echo the bastioned circuit of the amphitheatre’s exterior.

The akhārā itself can be identified with Barai’s open-air amphitheatre given its jungle location near a lake and a hilltop fort. Significantly, the word is used not only for the structure but also for the troupe of female performers associated with it. Its meaning is distinct from the word’s common association with a wrestling pit in modern Hindi (akhāṛā) and its older cognates in Prakrit (akkhāṛāga) and Sanskrit (aksavāṭa). Instead, Khargarāy’s usage is in accordance with early Hindi poetry where akhāṛā refers to a dance hall and the assembly therein. In the Chitāicarīt of Nārāyaṇadās, composed around 1520 for the Tomar warlord Silhadi at his court in Sarangpur, it appears as a temporary performance space set up for a specific occasion:

‘Courtesan!’ the Sultan called out, ‘I gave you the firman for an akhāṛā.’
At the sound of drums did the artful women dance, absorbed in the sentiment of love.

This is also the case in Jayasi’s Padmāvat (Awadh, c. 1540) and Keśavadas’s Kavipriyā (Orchha, 1601). Thus, where courtly entertainment remained by and large a pleasure of circumstance, Mansingh’s ‘akhāṛā’ – with its polished floor, orchestral platforms, and viewing balconies – provided a purpose-built monumental structure for more widely prevalent princely practices attested in early Hindi court literature.

The choice of siting a dance theatre near hunting grounds may be easily understood within the leisurely pursuits of kingship, but this is complicated when we take into account the Jain temples that mark Barai’s forested environs, for it brings together conflicting ideals of non-violence and warrior-kingship. On a hill south of the amphitheatre, there is a cluster of four shrines with colossal statues of Tirthankaras, one of which bears a donative inscription on its pedestal, dated samvat 1529, during the reign of Kirtisingh (1460–1480). In the same year, on Wednesday 15 April 1472 (samvat 1529 vaisākha śādi 7), twelve statues were endowed in a Jain temple at the neighbouring village of Panihar. Such concentration and prominence of pious activity in a remote, sparsely-settled area points to a fresh influx of the Jain community here in the 1470s, more than a decade before Mansingh built his amphitheatre. It is well-known that Jain monks, merchants and ministers exercised considerable influence under the Tomar dynasty (1398–1526) and placed Gwalior at the centre of interlinked networks of religious, economic, and political power.

This is most visibly expressed in the patronage of countless rock-cut statues of Tirthankaras carved into the scarped cliff face of Gwalior Fort, commanding images that demarcate salvific space as much as they address worldly affairs. The intense urban activity extended into the hinterland as well, as revealed by four 2-3 metre tall images of standing Tirthankaras accompanied by a ‘field guardian’ (ksetrapāḷa) that are carved on a hill at Ami village, overlooking the artificial lake north of Barai (Figure 19). One of the inscriptions flanking the images records their endowment on Wednesday 5 April 1497 by several members of a lay Jain community, under the guidance of an important monk named Jinacandra, in the reign of Maharaja Mansingh. These two dated records of 1472 and 1497 show that as at Gwalior Fort, the Jain community and Tomar kings were closely involved in reshaping the countryside.

The cultivation of Barai’s wilderness landscape involved the patronage of statues and temples, as well as the provision of water by damming Barai’s hills and turning the low-lying area into a reservoir. It also involved the production of betel vine, a water- and labour-intensive cash
crop whose leaf is folded with the areca nut, catechu and lime into a mouth-watering delicacy offered to guests and gods alike. Garden lands adjacent to the amphitheatre have long been dedicated to the cultivation of high-quality betel leaves for which Gwalior was famous in the Mughal era as it is today, and it is likely that the village Barai was itself named after the eponymous caste of betel growers. Given this layered landscape, Khargarāy’s reference to Mansingh forbidding the killing of birds and water creatures while simultaneously hunting wild animals must be seen in terms of good governance and overlapping values of righteousness (‘satadharm’) that need not be antithetical to Jain sensibilities. What Julie Hughes has written about ‘animal kingdoms’ of the nineteenth century may equally hold true for Gwalior of this earlier era: ‘an ideal Indian prince subjected his own wildness to a variety of self-imposed constraints,’ such as courtly etiquette and duties towards the local populace, so as ‘to maintain their reputations as good rulers and to shield their subjects from the raw powers of unrestrained sovereignty.

Thus, Mansingh’s akhārā was not an isolated structure, but was integrated within a landscape that had already been invested by Jain piety, hunting pleasures, and even military expeditions, as we shall see. Its hinterland location, on the edge of an artificial lake and near dense jungle, has significant implications for the kinds of performative moods evoked here.

**Placing performance at Mansingh’s akhārā**

The type of akhārā performances prevalent in the sixteenth century are described in quasi ethnographic detail by the Mughal scholar Abu’l Fazl in his Ā’in-i Akbarī (1595):

The akhārā is an entertainment held at night by the nobles of this country, some of whose (female) domestic servants are taught to sing and play. Four pretty women lead off a dance, and some graceful movements are executed. Four others are employed to sing, while four more accompany them with cymbals; two others play the pakhawaj, two the upang, while the Dekhan rabūb, the vīnā and the yantra, are each taken by one player. Besides the usual lamps of the entertainment, two women holding lamps stand near the circle of performers. Some employ more. It is more common for a band of these natwās to be retained in service who teach the
young slave-girls to perform. Occasionally they instruct their own girls and take them to the nobles and profit largely by the commerce.\textsuperscript{62}

This passage clarifies that the \textit{akhārā} was a customary form of entertainment (\textit{bazm, jashn}) organized within a specific nocturnal space referred to as \textit{shabestān}. Though this word is translated by Jarrett simply as ‘night’, it is in fact a Persian architectural term applied to a columned hall for use at night, and often built at basement level as a climate-controlled chamber appropriate for hot and cold seasons alike.\textsuperscript{63} Typically part of a larger palace, the \textit{shabestān} could also be built as a freestanding pillared pavilion within a garden.\textsuperscript{64} We are further informed that night-time performances staged within this structure were illuminated by oil lamps (\textit{cherāgh}) carried by women, in addition to those affixed on walls or pillars. The reference to lamp-bearers being stationed near a circle (\textit{gerd}) of performers indicates that the spectators too were assembled around the stage, rather than on one side alone. Characteristic of the \textit{akhārā} performance was a kind of interpretive dance accompanied by lyrical song and instrumental music. As such, this tradition would be distinguished from assemblies dedicated to narrative drama, music, and poetry.\textsuperscript{65} The sociology of the \textit{akhārā} is equally significant, for its patrons are described as a princely elite (\textit{buzurgān}) of the country’s provinces (\textit{marz}), and its performers as young attendants (\textit{parastār}) who are trained in singing, playing instruments, and dancing and retained as an integral part of the princely household.

A much more extensive description of courtly entertainment in pre-Mughal north India appears in the \textit{Mirigāvati} (1503), an eastern Hindi romance composed by the Sufi shaykh Qutban. The poet was attached to the court-in-exile of Sultan Husayn Shah Sharqi of Jaunpur (1458–1505), who was a close contemporary of Raja Mansingh. Because this narrative was itself meant to be performed, unlike the encyclopaedic entry of Abu’l Fazl, its descriptive sequence is aimed at a compelling evocation of the aesthetic moods and social milieu at a courtly dance:

The prince distributed betel-leaves (\textit{pān}) and dismissed the assembly, but chose few companions to be at his side.
He said, “Today you shall watch a dance!” He sent for all the accoutrements of a dance hall.”
Dancers, dancing girls, and leading men came, and drummers who played sweet sounds.
There were trumpeters determining the melody, producing deep rhythms, naming them as they played.

\ldots

They sang the six rāgas with their wives. All thirty were rendered together with their rāgas.
The instruments resounded, as many as they were, and the music enchanted everyone there.
Then the dancers came in, dressed in short saris. They put on many airs and graces.

\ldots

The dancers curtsied the prince, sought his permission. The prince ordered them to begin the performance.
The singers sang intensely, and they were accompanied by spirited dances.

The \textit{mānṭhā,\textsuperscript{66} dhruvā, jhāmara, and paribandha} – these were the songs, those the melodies.\textsuperscript{67}

Notably, the dance entertainment is presented as a spontaneous affair, as a direct extension of formal court assembly (\textit{sabhā}), yet one that is marked by the ceremonial protocol of handing out betel quid (\textit{pān}), an act that formalized the select, all-male gathering into an assembly of connoisseurs. Likewise, here the dance hall (\textit{natasāra}) appears not as a purpose-built dance pavilion, but as a portable space set up on the prince’s orders. The essential adornments of this performance space are of course the skilled performers listed out by Qutban, comprising dancers, both male (\textit{natvā}) and female (\textit{pātur}), leading male singers (\textit{nāyak}), accompanying drummers (\textit{pakhāvaji}), trumpeters (\textit{upāngi}), and musicians with various string and wind instruments.\textsuperscript{68} The performance itself is divided into two halves, a musical concert of melodic compositions (\textit{rāga}) followed by a dance display (\textit{nāca}) set to lyrical songs (\textit{gītā}).

The repertoire of musical forms enumerated by Qutban furnishes valuable data for understanding the performances likely hosted at Barai’s amphitheatre. Of the four song compositions mentioned as accompanying dance, \textit{dhruva} is a refrain from a four-line lyric poem (\textit{pada}) known as
According to Abu Fazl, the singing of the Dhrupad (sic) [is localised] in Agra, Gwalior, Bāri and the adjacent country. When Mán Singh ruled as Rājā of Gwalior, with the assistance of Nāyak Bakshū, Macchū, and Bhanū, who were the most distinguished musicians of their day, he introduced a popular style of melody which was approved even by the most refined taste. On his death, Bakshū and Macchū passed into the service of Sultān Mahmūd of Gujarāt where this new style came into universal favour.

The Dhrupad consists of four rhythmical lines without any definite prosodial length of words or syllables. It treats of the fascinations of love and its wondrous effects upon the heart.

In mapping out the universal acceptance of a localized vocal style within the Mughal Empire, Abu Fazl strategically captures the popularity of dhrupad, just as Mansingh’s dispersed musicians had been incorporated as symbolic jewels of Akbar’s court, and as Gwalior itself, the proverbial ‘pearl in the necklace of fortresses of Hind’, had been annexed to the imperial dominions. This narrative is read in a straightforward manner by scholars asserting Gwalior’s pre-eminence in the origin and spread of dhrupad, but Qutban’s account shows that dhrupad was already known in the Awadh region of eastern India by 1500, not as a privileged song-type but as part of a broader performance repertoire. What Abu Fazl’s narrative of dhrupad’s formation does suggest is that an akhārā was also a kind of conference that brought together distinguished musicians and learned scholars, whose syntheses of past and present, mainstream and folk traditions, laid the benchmark for future connoisseurial assemblies.

That dhrupad served as a basis for dance raises intriguing questions about its performance and its relation to Mansingh’s amphitheatre in Barai. While today it is established as an independent vocal form in Hindustani music, performed by a musical ensemble seated on a proscenium-style stage, in the past dhrupad was conceived specifically in relation to dance. This is singled out for attention in Qutban’s courtly performance, where female dancers wearing knee-length saris (kachani) and ankle-bells (ghāghara) sing and dance dhrupad. Such performances also feature in the content of some dhrupad lyrics composed by Bakhshu, a leading musician of Mansingh’s assembly in Gwalior, which were collected several generations later under Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58) in the Sahasras. Since dhrupad songs deal predominantly with the subject of love in its myriad forms, the accompanying dance must have similarly evoked the erotic rasa called śrṅgāra. Some sense of how dhrupad was meant to be performed in the sixteenth century may be gauged from an account given in the Nartanamīrṇaya, a dance manual produced for Akbar (r. 1562–1605) by Puṇḍarika Viṭṭhala:

While the dhruvapada is being sung, the danseuse should perform a dance with captivating gestures (hāva-bhāva), looking directly with amorous glances (kāntādṛṣṭi). Embracing different sentiments (bhāva) with different gait (gati), dancing with charmingly delicate body movements (lāṣyāṅga). The dance is dhruvapada when the assembly is illuminated by the teeth as the dancer sings in the intervals between verses, it is adorned with miming of each section (khandamāna) and interspersed with a quivering, it is replete with all forms of enactment (abhinaya), it is graced by charming lines created by the limbs (rekhā), and the face is adorned with emotive colour (mukhāṅga). Feminine grace (hāva), which is the indicator of erotic form (śrṅgāra) beginning with the contraction of eyes and brows, and the oscillating movement (recaka) of a beautiful neck, is the sentiment (bhāva) that springs forth in the mind.

As an evocation of śrṅgāra rasa, this dance is fundamentally concerned with delicate body movements of ‘lāṣyā’ dance, rather than the brisk, vigorous ones that characterize ‘tāṇḍava’. The choreographic repertoire presented here allows us to visualize distinct parts of this performance, from the dancer’s entry with coquettish glances, and her walking around in various gaits (that imitate such animals as a peacock, deer, or fish), to her miming of dhruvapada verses (abhinaya), and purely abstract movement of body parts that were to inscribe graceful lines in the mind’s eye (rekhā). As such, the rendering of poetic form and sentiment with expressive gestures belongs to a range of ‘interpretative dances’, performed by courtesans at both princely and temple courts.
the sixteenth century, dhrupad gained widespread popularity at Rajput, Sultanate and Mughal courts, as well as among devotional Bhakti saints and Chishti Sufi circles. It is significant that dhrupad is classified by Pundarika as a structured dance piece adhering to set rules (bandha), in contrast to other, relatively freeform compositions (anibandha). The structure of dhrupad dance must have been closely related to the structure of dhrupad vocal performance: an improvised prelude to establish the melodic characteristics (rāgālāp), singing of the four lines in four sections, repetition of the first line interspersed with variations of melodic words from the verses (lay-bāṃt), and finally, rhythmic improvisation with new melodic phrases (bol-bāṃt). Thus, both dancers and musicians begin by preparing the foundation of the prevailing rasa, before elaborating the composition, melody and rhythmic pattern. The excitement of such synchronized performance in dhrupad is vividly captured in a thirteenth-century account of the folk dance called Gauḍāli:

Then the voices and instruments both fall silent. Having performed various melodic phrases, she comes back to the refrain.

She should perform [these phrases] with the rhythm of the song and the syllables of the song and of the rhythm; [the phrases should be] not too long and not too low, pleasing with sweetness and dignity and full of charm. She should bring the phrases to a cadence at the refrain.

At the cadence (kalāse) the instrumentalists should strike the instruments [i.e. drums, cymbals] simultaneously. At the cadences the dancer should be motionless as if painted in a picture.

So doing, the procedure having been adopted again as before, the dancer should perform the dance while the refrain (dhruvamsaka) is sung.

Then she should also dance while the ābhoga [final section] is played by the instrumentalists. When the end is near the Gauḍāli should become vigorous.

The dancer’s return to the refrain after an interval of melodic elaboration is also a well-known principle in dhrupad vocal performance that follows a cyclic structure. Likewise, the dancer’s freeze on reaching cadence is emphasized by the simultaneous striking of musical instruments, a feature familiar from modern Kathak dance where it follows a series of rapid pirouettes. In imagining the performances at Barai’s amphitheatre, we must assume some such synchronic structure guiding both musicians and dancers.

While these accounts of dhrupad dance are given with reference to a solo female dancer, both Abu’l Fazl and Qutban speak of a group of dancers in the court assemblies they describe. Group dances in the dramaturgical literature are called pindibandha, where a number of female dancers group themselves together on stage in various emblematic formations. Pindibandha was a necessary feature of the rāsaka class of minor dance-dramas full of rhythm and tempo, which survives in modern Kathak and rāsalīlā performances. The rāsalīlā is an episodic enactment of dramatized acts from Krishna’s life that consists of two parts: the rāsa representing Krishna’s circular dance with the gopis, and the līlā, featuring an enactment of events from Krishna’s life at Brāj. The performance attained its final form in the early-sixteenth century, when new theological expositions were made on the rāsa dance based on its description in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and when its first surviving visualizations appeared in illustrated manuscripts (Figure 20). The climactic moment when Krishna meets the cowherdesses under the full autumn moon and sports with them individually is depicted in one Bhāgavata Purāṇa manuscript commissioned by two Vaiṣṇava merchants from Palam near Delhi around 1520. The gopis are seen with their linked hands dancing in a circle around the central figure of a fluting Krishna, against a red and yellow lobed back-drop. Moreover, the setting of the circular dance, on a moonlit night within a wooded landscape and next to a water body, bears striking correspondences to the performative structure and setting of Mansingh’s akhārā, and points to much deeper shared sensibilities.

The performance of the rāsalīlā is associated with the region of Brāj, Kṛṣṇa’s birth-place to the north of Gwalior, and is carried out on a circular stage called the rāsamandala. The oldest such stages are said to have been built on the forested pilgrimage trail around Vraṇḍavana by leading bhakti saints starting in the 1530s. The open-air platform, where the dancers perform, is extended
to one side by a throne for an icon of Krishna, and the musicians sit facing the icon with spectators on three sides. If there was such a throne at Barai’s akhārā for the patron deity, or perhaps the patron prince, of the arena, it has left no archaeological footprint whatsoever, even though other stage furnishings are built in stone. In local memory, however, the theatre at Barai is known as rāsalīlā-ghar, or simply rācch (< rās), a popular point of reference that is instantly evocative of living traditions in Braj, and is probably informed by enduring pilgrimage networks between Braj and Gwalior than by princely patronage of akhārās in some distant past.

Yet, given the closely spaced performance traditions of the akhārā and the rāsalīlā, both in their chronological and geographical proximity, it is tempting to posit a genetic link between the two. To Dvivedi’s mind, Mansingh’s patronage at Gwalior was a secular forerunner of the religious performances at Braj as the centre of power shifted northwards towards Agra under the Mughals. However, in the absence of firm chronological markers and reliance on later Mughal sources, it is easy to overemphasize the importance of Gwalior in the formation of the Braj rāsalīlā. Instead, it may be more fruitful to pursue these developments as part of a continuous horizon of aesthetic sensibilities that extended across evening entertainments and religious reenactments circa 1500, while also being attentive to their discontinuities. For instance, an inscription from Gwalior Fort, set up by a court noble to record the desilting of a tank, draws an implicit analogy between the child Krishna who raises Mt. Govardhan to shelter cowherds from Indra’s torrential rain and the youthful Mansingh who shelters Gopācala (lit. ‘cowherd hill’) from his rivals’ relentless raids. Dated samvat 1551 (1494 CE), this early Gwaliori document of emerging Braj bhakti, although focused on the devotional imagery of an adolescent Krishna, mobilizes mythology to fashion a political persona in a well-known practice of epigraphic composition in medieval India, thus confounding any straightforward distinction between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ performance.

Such skilful interweaving of worldly (svārtha) and spiritual (paramārtha) goals is particularly evident in

Figure 20. The rāsa dance from a dispersed folio of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Palam, c. 1520, 17.5 × 22.9 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 125th Anniversary Acquisition. Alvin O. Bellak Collection, 2004-149-7.
the literary and artistic production at the Bundela court of Orchha (founded 1531), which was in many ways a successor to Tomar patronage after Gwalior fell in 1526. Court poetry and palace paintings of the early-seventeenth century both present scenes of martial and musicological arts alongside Vaishnava devotional themes, pointing to a broader self-understanding of righteous kingship. No doubt this was qualitatively quite different from what shaped Gwalior’s courtly ethos a century earlier, yet there are significant continuities with practices cultivated at Braj and Orchha, not only in the prevalence of Gvāliyari language, dhrupad music, and interpretative dance, but also in the environmental engagement with pastoral trails, forested hills, and views of water expanses.

Landscapes of performance: refuge and refinement

Sudeśa is that part of the country with Gwalior at the centre, Mathura in the north, Itawah in the east, Orchha in the south and Bhusawar to the west. The language spoken in these areas is the most elegant and the most correct, just like the Persian spoken in Shiraz. In the preface to his Persian translation of Mansingh’s musicological treatise, the high-ranking Mughal officer Faqirullah situates Gwalior as an axis of cultural refinement and at the centre of a distinct language zone. In sharp contrast to Mughal memory of Gwalior as a ‘fine country’ (sudeśa), Sultanate chroniclers saw the area along the rivers Chambal, Yamuna and Betwa as a ‘place of refuge’ (mawās), a sanctuary for local chieftains and sultanate officers that remained outside empire’s administrative control because of its difficult terrain. Travelling through central India in the 1330s, the Moroccan jurist Ibn Battuta described mawāsāt as places where

the [infidels] fortify themselves in mountains, in rocky, uneven and rugged places as well as in bamboo groves . . . in those forests that serve them as ramparts, inside which are their cattle and their crops. There is also water for them within, that is, rain water which collects there. Hence they cannot be subdued except by means of powerful armies, who, entering those forests, cut down the bamboo with specially prepared instruments.

Such ‘rebellion’ was equally a feature of Mughal rule, compelling Akbar to send four punitive expeditions against the Bundela warlord of Orchha, Madhukar Shah, between 1573 and 1591, each time unsuccessful because the rebel ‘betook himself to the mountains and jungles.

How then are we to make sense of a performance arena situated amid the jungles of Gwalior? DVivedi presented it as the crucible of Mansingh’s contribution to Hindustani music and dance that made its mark on Mughal tastes no less. Here the young Rajput prince is said to have passed his time sporting in the countryside with village girls from the Gujar community, taking one to be his favourite consort for whom he built a new palace. Tales of this pastoral bride survive only in oral tradition, but she may have indeed played a crucial role in the network of associations between the Rajput king, cattle-keepers, and Krishna devotees. In addition to renewing alliances and ensuring assistance from the countryside, what certainly made the area attractive was the availability of wild game in the jungle-draped hills and glens, which integrated the akhārā into what Julie Hughes has termed ‘princely wilderness’. This was a habitat characterized by jungles and game animals that were closely connected to ‘the cultivation and expression of princely identity’. Moreover, hunting in the forested hinterland away from the strictures of palace protocol fostered greater conviviality and social cohesion among various military stakeholders. Like the personal retainers accompanying the prince on his hunt, the akhārā troupe was also mobile and private entertainments were equally spaces of solidarity within the prince’s circle. From the imperial perspective, however, akhārās came to be seen as gatherings of dissident elements, for in the 1540s, Sultan Islam Shah Suri is said to have ordered the dancing girls (pāṭurs) of amirs who maintained akhārās taken away – in the same way as he seized their elephants.

Enjoyment of hunting went alongside the connoisseurship of musicological matters, for we learn that Mansingh and his close contemporary, Sikandar Lodi of Delhi (r. 1489–1517) were not only
avid hunters but also patrons of treatises on music and dance. Similarly, a century earlier, Sultan Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351–1388) had built numerous hunting palaces (kushk-i shikār) that still stand along the Delhi ridge, and even ordered the Persian translation of Sanskrit works on pāṭurbāzī, a form of courtesanal entertainment. However, hunting was not just a pleasurable pastime, but was closely linked to the exercise of sovereignty, as we know from Akbar’s numerous hunting expeditions in central India. Closer to Mansingh’s reign were the annual marches by Sikandar Lodi towards the Gwalior-Chambal area upon the drying up of the monsoons between 1504 and 1508 (H. 910–914), ostensibly to fulfill his passion for hunting (shikār). As Simon Digby has argued, Sikandar Lodi’s hunting expeditions were most likely military manoeuvres aimed at preventing a concentration of the Pūrbiyā warband, which had been forced along a more southerly route by the dissolution of Jaunpur Sultanate in 1479, and would have been ‘uncomfortably close to the Delhi-Agra-Bayana heartland of his domain’. This is not an implausible scenario when we consider the geopolitics of this core zone of the Delhi Sultanate in the longue durée. Gwalior – like the other ‘problem tracts’ of Mewat, Etawah, Firozpur, and Baghelkhand – was organized around distinct ecological zones that were ‘bi-axial’ in nature and it is this configuration that accounts for the longevity of these fledgling principalities. Thus, Gwalior’s ‘impregnable fortress isolated on the summit of a lofty hill’ was closely connected to an alternative agrarian zone with intervening tracts of dense forest cover, providing remarkable resilience during long sieges. In this context, Mansingh’s construction of an akhārā and mahal in the mawās lands surrounding Gwalior Fort made good sense as a satellite outpost for gathering local intelligence, keeping watch over enemy movements, and safeguarding the kingdom.

Studies of Roman amphitheatres have shown that arena spectacles ‘served as a substitute for warfare and as a venue for political expression’. While the Barai akhārā was designed for dance performances rather than gladiatorial games, it was at such events that aspiring elites and trans-regional power brokers – like Silhadi and Ladkhan – were drawn into the raja’s war-band. The transaction of leisure and business in the akhārā would have assumed greater salience with the onset of the monsoon rains, which traditionally marked a break in military campaigning as well as hunting. From July to September, this ‘long period of waiting and preparation’ provided an opportunity to reassess one’s odds as lakes filled up, forests flushed green, animals and birds bred. At this time, akhārā performances of the rainy season may well have served as an alternative or prelude to the resumption of warfare and hunting, orchestrating emotive continuities through vigorous improvisations of dancers and drummers, rising in tempo to culminate in a climactic freeze. Of course, the rainy season gave rise to a range of emotions, from the established theme of longing for the absent lover expressed in bārahmāsā poetry, to the growing emphasis on joyful union between Krishna and Radha in the rāsalīlā, although whether or not these coexisted with the martial moods is impossible to determine. Nonetheless, attention to the seasonal rhythms of hunting and warfare can help make sense of dance performances in Mansingh’s candlelit arena, enclosed by a fortified facade, not merely as closed-club entertainment, but rather as a ‘discursive and dialogical’ exercise by its participants, ‘articulating the world in which they are situated and as articulated by it.’

**Conclusion**

The little-known amphitheatre in the countryside of Gwalior is a crucial site for understanding the ways in which performance shaped the practices of political elites. As a purpose-built venue for courtly entertainment, it affords insight into circumstantial pleasures that have left little more than a textual trace. And as a halting point on the princely itinerary between palace and battlefield, integrated with hunting grounds, hilltop temples, and an artificial lake, it presents occasions at which political authority was exercised and where decisions to wage war, offer tribute, or forge alliances might have arisen. While historical inquiry into these practices is generally guided by
distinct disciplinary protocols that result in a partial picture of the past, I have sought to demonstrate that the stage for spectacle and the performance of polity were mutually constituted.

Performance unfolded at the amphitheatre of Barai in a number of ways. Though the building’s metadata is missing, its architecture itself gives a foretaste of the performativity that was integral to this space. The exterior facade is punctuated with towers capped by little domed kiosks that give the appearance of a patrolled fort, but the entrance leads to an open-air interior with the same domed kiosks around a circular dance stage. It would have come to life at night, after a day spent hunting game in the forested hills, recouping at the hill fort, gazing at and strolling by the lake, and catching sight of monumental Jinas and their whitewashed temples. As such, performance was part of a ‘princely wilderness’ that served as an arena for the enactment of righteous kingship. The evening’s entertainment commenced and concluded with the king handing out betel quids (pan) to his close companions and distinguished guests, before musicians framed in domed kiosks sounded the melodies and dancing girls stepped onto a polished stage floor in the flickering lamplight. A synchronized performance of song and dance would ensue, marked by the periodic resolution of tension as the refrain is regained and by the improvisation of rhythmic patterns, culminating perhaps in a circular group dance. As a final display of the king’s patronage, the performers would have been furnished with royal largesse.

The location of new aesthetic interest (naï sararitī) in the cultivated wilderness of the country-side was not without an eye for the defences of Gwalior, a fledgling polity ringed by powerful rivals from Jaunpur and Kalpi in the east, Malwa to the south, Mewar and Bayana to the west, and Delhi in the north. The best line of attack against this principality was from the south, as shown by Sikandar Lodī’s repeated campaigns from this direction in 1504-08. The hill fort built near the amphitheatre at Barai was part of a circuit of fortalices built in the fifteenth century to secure Gwalior. The amphitheatre itself may have played a crucial role at this time, by providing a cohesive social space for the forging of alliances with Pūrbiyā warlords. This may have been more pronounced during the monsoons, which marked an intermission in the year’s military attritions and presented occasion to renew loyalties, while revelling in the pleasures of the rains. In this way, performance as an analytic framework can help meet the historiographic challenge posed by contrasting impressions of Gwalior’s political backwardness and cultural refinement offered by the official archive.

Notes

1. Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Racch,” 29–39. There is some confusion whether Mansingh’s reign started in 1486 or in 1488, though from Persian sources it appears that he was already paying tribute as the ruler of Gwalior before Sultan Bahlol Lodī’s death at Mitaoli in 894/1488. See the extended discussion by Gauri, Gvālīyar kā rājnaītīk evanī sanskritīk itīhaś, 105–30.

2. As in the Samarāngaṇa-sūtradhāra of Bhoja, on which see Salvini, “Themes and Contexts,” 35–55.

3. Raghavan, Sanskrit Drama, 117.

4. These include the Sitabenga and Jogimara caves of the 3rd century BCE., Rani Gumpha of the 2nd century BCE, and Nagarjunakonda amphitheatre 4th-5th century CE. See Varadpande, History of Indian Theatre, 207–67; and Dhar, “Theatre Architecture,” 78–82.

5. See for example Willis, Archaeology of Hindu Ritual, which presents an innovative reconstruction of royal rituals linked to the fifth-century sacred site of Udayagiri in central India.

6. The key Persian chronicles are Sirhindi’s Tārīkh-i Mubārokshāhi (Delhi, 1434), Bihāmād Khānī’s Tārīkh-i Muhāmmadi (Kalpi, 1438), ‘Alī b. Mahmūd al-Kermānī’s Mā’āthir-i Māhmūdshāhi (Malwa, 1467–68), Nizāmuddin Ahmad’s Tābqāt-i-Akhbārī (Delhi, 1592–93) and the Firishta’s Gulshan-i Ibrāhīmī (Bijapur, 1609–10). Following established templates, these narratives tell us of campaigns mounted by successive Sultans to coerce the rebellious rajas into submission, but who invariably retreat into their forts at which the armies can only lay waste to the territory before marching on.

7. Abu’l Fazl’s Aīn-i Akbarī of 1595 and Faqīrūllah’s Tarjumā-i Mānakutāhāla of 1670.

8. Dvivedi, Gvālīyar ke Tomar; and Gauri, Gvālīyar kā rājnaītīk evanī sanskritīk itīhaś.

9. Orsini and Sheikh (eds.), After Timur Left.

10. Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Racch,” writes that it was first reported in 1908 and cites from Luard and Sheopuri, Gwalior State Gazetteer without page number: ‘There is an old theatre known as Ras-Lilaghar with traces of
ruined rooms built round a circular open ground lined at intervals with lamp posts surmounted with small cupolas, resembling in style the cupolas of Man Mandir. I have been unable to trace this reference in the 1908 Gazetteer, but the same is reproduced verbatim in the 1965 Gazetteer, see Krishnan ed., Gwalior, 357–8.

11. Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Racch”; and “Gvaliyari dhrupad aur uskā raṅgamaṇī.”
12. As deduced by Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Racch,” 32.
13. In the recent rebuilding, four low platforms were added to the existing structure, altering the original scheme as documented in the photograph and plan published by Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Racch.”

14. Burton-Page, “The Tower in Islamic Architecture,” 1221–4.
15. Ibid., 1222.
16. See Shokoohy, “The Chatri in Indian Architecture,” 129–50.
17. See Tillotson, The Raiput Palaces, 56–62.
18. Characteristic features include rubble walls, plastered and whitewashed, with sandstone columns, doorjambs, and arches, and minimal surface ornament. For a concise survey, see Burton-Page, “Hind, vii. Architecture,” 440–8.
19. This practice is well known from the palace of Mughal Emperor Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri, where the imperial entrance was also called Elephant Gate (‘Hathiya Pol’) in emulation of Gwalior, and has a chamber used for sounding the ceremonial drums (naqqār khāna) (Asher, Architecture of Mughal India, 58). Sounding military instruments, like stationing ‘an elephant at the entrance of one’s own residence’, was a royal privilege common to Indic and Persianate honorific vocabularies, one that was awarded but also frequently usurped. See also Nizami, Royalty in Medieval India, 54.

20. Texts on theatre architecture frequently refer to the adornment of theatres with wall paintings. See Raghavan, Sanskrit Drama, 123–5.
21. Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Racch,” 34. Chunks of the chūnān floor are visible in Dvivedi’s photograph.
22. Kuiper, “The worship of the ‘jarjara,’” 241–68.
23. Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Racch,” 32. The pillar lies broken on the northern side within the open enclosure.
24. Raghavan, Sanskrit Drama, 126.
25. Dehejia, Yogi Cult and Temples, 121–4.
26. Willis, “Architecture in Central India,” 28, Figure 20.
27. The Mitaoli inscriptions have been transcribed in Singh, “Riddle of the Circular Temple,” 79–4.
28. For example, the following verse: krēṅkāraḥ smaraktāsmaysasya sukhakrīḍāpirnām ravav jhanākāra ratimāṅjarimadhulihākālīcakorīdhvāṃvanthi tantrāyāh kātucikāpasāranaahujākṣepakhulatānakānkvānahn prena tanotu va navavayolāsyā va āvenavanah// May the twang of Kāma’s bow, the clamour of female cuckoos in joyful sport, the buzzing of bees in the bouquet of love, the sound of partridge at play, the jingling of bangles of a slender girl as she moves her arms to prevent her bodice from being opened, the sound of flute that accompanies youthful dance, develop your love. A transcription is provided by Singh, “Riddle of the Circular Temple,” 87–8, but the absence of diacritics makes it nearly impossible to decipher.
29. Singh, “Riddle of the Circular Temple,” 90. This record awaits proper publication.
30. The foundation inscription of 1093 records the appointment of a contingent of musicians and dancers for regular ritual performances. Temples also hosted plays, for prologues of dramas frequently refer to their own performance at festivals of specific deities, but recent research shows that these were probably held in the courtyard and not in the rāṅgamandapas, which would have presented practical problems for both actors and spectators. See Leclère, “Performance of Sanskrit Theatre,” 50.
31. Willis, Inscriptions of Gopaksetra, citing three inscriptions from the Sās Bahū temples, dated samvat 1522 (1464 CE), 1540 (1483 CE) and 1547 (1490–91 CE).
32. Chakravarty, Gwalior Fort, 35.
33. Garde, Annual Administration Report, 1938–9, 6–7; and Patil, Quinquennial Administration Report, 1942–6, 5–6. The date is based on the abjad interpretation of a Persian inscription in coloured tilework at the entrance of Gujari Mahal, as argued by Gauri, Gvālīyār kā Rājānītik evānī Sāṃkritik ıtīhās, 109.
34. The text was composed in Classical Hindi and caupai metre for a member of the Tomar family, Kṛṣṇasāhā, when he had received the title of ‘rājā of Gwalior’ around 1630 not long after Mughal emperor Shah Jahan’s coronation (Dvivedi ed., Gopācalākhyaṇa, 27). It was part of a broader emergence of Classical Hindi historical writing at Raiput courts that projected a vision of local sovereignty within the Mughal imperium (Busch, Poetry of Kings, 88–89).
35. Khargarāy’s use of nāi rasarīti here is probably in keeping with seventeenth-century theorizations of Hindi rītī poets who sought to adapt ‘older Sanskrit practices, particularly courtly genres, to the vernacular literary culture of their own day’, as discussed by Busch, Poetry of Kings, 10, 33–38, 171–89.
36. Gopācalākhyaṇa ed. Dvivedi, 85–86 (no verse numbers are given in the published edition): rāṭi ahrāraṁ ṭūpar pṛtīti, khetāṁ bhūpat nāi rasarīti parbat ghati bāṃdhi jhaṁai, khelē bhūp aheraṁ taṁaṇi// dāṅga baddhāi mahal jū bhaye, tihaṭhāṁ bhūp akhārāi thēi// kosakoṅ kī bāṅgar bhāi, rēsam pāṭ phāḍa arūthaī// sīvār śīṁh aheraṁ caū, karai na aur jīu par gāhī/ bāj kūhī sikārā nāṁhī gahai, ath pāmchānī kau kou na bahāi// jalacar pāmchānī
hatai na koi, saritā sarabar purain hoî/ rājā ko satadharm subhau, cāri mās barasai surarāu/ [...] cārau jāti triyan ki kahiñ, te sab mān akhārāin rahinī/ dvaisai nāri padmini iśi, tini samān nahiñ urabasi/!

37. Note, for example, the use of the words dāṅg meaning ‘a jungle at the crest of a mountain’ and bāṅgur meaning ‘snare, trap’, which are distinguished as deśi, ‘vernacular’ in the Brajabhāṣā sūra-kośa (Gupta and Tandon, 714 and 1210).

38. See Luard, Gwalior State Gazetteer, 11–3 for an account of the flora and fauna of the Gwalior District.

39. A list of hunting lodges (shikārgāḥ) in the Gwalior State used by the Scindia rulers in the 19th-20th century can be found in The Motorist’s Road Guide, 71–9.

40. The word belongs to the local parlance of Gwalior, according to Hunter, Imperial Gazetteer of India, 227.

41. The embankments are clearly shown in the topographic Survey of India, Madhya Pradesh, 54/4. H.N. Dvivedi had access to the local land revenue records, where he found this low-lying land classified as a ‘tank’ (‘Mansingh’s Racch’), 33.

42. Locally known as gadhi, the fort has reinforced defences for mounting heavy artillery and an old well at its centre that still holds water, see Mishra, Gvāliyar evan Datiyā Jīle, 43–4. In their present form, the fort’s defence and residential structures date to eighteenth-century rebuilding campaigns when the region was contested between the Gohad Jats, Marathas and the British. But there is reason to believe that these came up under the Tomars in the fifteenth-century, because this period witnessed a wider militarization of the Gwalior landscape, through a circuit of hinterland fortalices that were built within striking distance of the Gwalior Fort, to defend it against siege by rival sultanates of Kalpi, Malwa, Jaunpur, and, most famously, of the Delhi Sultan, Sikandar Lodi. The phenomenon is attested by an inscription dated 911 H. (1505) that records the construction of a fort named Iskandarabad in Pawaya by the governor of Sultan Sikandar Lodi (Saxena, “Some Moslem Inscriptions”, 52–53). The full history of these military strategies has been studied in detail by Brigadier Mishra, Forts and Fortresses of Gwalior, 11, 140–2.

43. McGregor, Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary, 12 gives the standard Hindi meaning of akhārā as wrestling ground, on which see Alter, The Wrestler’s Body, 2–3; and Clark, “Akhārās: Warrior Asctetics,” 11–8. The word appears in the same sense as the vernacular equivalent of Sanskrit akṣavāta in Hemacandra’s 12th-century dictionary (Abhidhānacintāmaṇi, cited in Deva, Śābda-kalpadruma, vol. 1, 6) and features as the arena where Bhima and Jarāśandha fight each other (Bhimaparākrama, cited in Warder, Indian Kāvyā Literature, 130). Instructions for constructing a square wrestling arena called akkāḍakam, with a pavilion for its patron deity Krishna, are given in the Mānasollāsa, a Sanskrit mirror-for-princes compiled in 1130 for the Chaulukya King Somesvara III (ed. Shrigondekar, vol. II, 236–237, vv. 967–973).

44. Gupta and Tandon, Brajabhāṣā sūra-kośa, vol. 1, 17. However, it is worth noting that both usages are found in Viṣṇuḍas’ Pāṇḍavacarit (1435), a vernacular adaptation of the Mahābhārata, where akhārā refers to a wrestling ground in the Ādīparva 3.160 (ed. Dvivedi, 35) and to a dance arena in the Virāṭaparva 3.78 (ed. Dvivedi, 123).

45. Silhādi’s Tomar background is discussed by Kolff, 4auKar, Rajput and Sepoy, 88–9.

46. 4aRāyanandas, 89, v. 726: pātar hakārāvai sullātānā, diyō akhārā kau phurimānāl/ nāda mṛdanga kalā parabīnā, nācahiṅ catur premarau linā/.

47. Jayasi, Pādamāvat, v. 437: tabahā rājā hie na hārā, rāja pāvari par racā akhārā/ sānī sāhī jahān utarā āchā, āpar nāc akhārā kāchā/.

48. 4aKeśadas, Kaviśrīya, 4 as 4.

49. As noted by Babb, Asctetics and kings, 138, ‘Opposition between Rājpūt and Jain identity arises from the centrality to Jain life of the norm of ahimsā, nonviolence [which] is a crucial ingredient in the sense Jains have of who they are and how they differ from other communities.’

50. The inscription remains unpublished but has been listed several times, e.g. Willis, Inscriptions of Gopaksetra, 37. A short account of these temples can be found in Jain, Bhārāṭa ke Digambara Jaina, 73–5, where the author notes that they were entirely taken over by jungle and there were no Jains to be found in the village. Recently, these have been reclaimed by the Digambar Jain community and marked out as an atiśaya-kṣetra, ‘miraculous site’. Kirtisingh’s regnal dates are as deduced by Gauri, Gvāliyār kā Rājnaītik evaṁ Sāṃskritik itihās, 83–96.

51. All of these images were donated by members of a single family under the instruction of bhāṭṭāraka Sinhahikrī in the reign of Kirtisingh Tomar, see Singh and Jain, Inscriptions of Gwalior, vol. 1, nos. 348–359. For the temples, see Jain, Bhārāṭa ke Digambara Jaina Tirtha, 72–3. In contrast to Barai’s colossi, the stone images at Panihar are much smaller.

52. Granoff, “Mountains of Eternity,” 34.

53. De Clercq and Detige, “Colossi and Lotus Feet,” 306–15. The towering presence of these statues seems to have seriously challenged Babur’s imperial progress upon the recently conquered Gwalior Fort, for he ordered them destroyed even as he went about admiring the temples and gardens of Gwalior (Baburnama trans. Thackston, 397). Jain patronage of rock-cut images in such places has been interpreted as the demarcation of sacred space (Owen, “Demarcating Sacred Space,” 21) and of sectarian influence (Flügel et al., “Riddles of the Rock-Carved,” 29). Owen writes that “the remote location and difficult terrain likely added to the status of the site as the journey to Kalugumalai’s images would echo the arduous path leading from the phenomenal world to one of
ultimate release. Thus, the site and its imagery mutually reinforce themes of transcendence, release, and final liberation.'

54. The images have been noticed in a brief article by Jain, "Rock-cut Jain sculptures," 16.

55. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3355612 The inscription was missed by Garde, Annual Administration Report 1940–41, 22–3, and Jain, Bhārata ke Digambara Jaina Tirtha, 73–5 who otherwise reported on Jain inscriptions at Barai and Panihar. It is noted in Singh and Jain, Inscriptions of Gwalior, vol. 2, 307, without transcript or discussion, and in Singh and Jain, Jain Abhilekh Saṅgrāh, which I have not been able to access. My provisional reading is as follows: (1) {samvat 15}54 varṣe vaisākha-sudi 3 budha śri-mūlasangha-bhaṭṭaraka (2) śri-jinacandra-devāvà taddāmāyē mahārājā-śri-mānasīṅga-devāś-ṛāyē (3) bārāhah-ṛēṇī vamsē sādhudharmanī bhārājā-jādīṇī taputra-saṁy-prēmala-bhārājā-ṃa (4) tēḥ taputra-praṇyāṛ-yēṣṭha-saṁ-kaur-śrībharājā-mahāḥ taputra-saṁbharāśaṁjadhekah (5) ...samē-ḥaricandrā bhārājā...putra-saṁ-rāmā śaṁ-o-mahesu|rāsinkamān Samārṣe| (6) bhārā-jāyūdā-pūtra-saṁ-saṁy-sāraya-samś-bharaharī∥ ēṭēsam madhyē samē-dē (7) mala-pratīṣṭhāvīt∥ aṭi...aṭapā-hīpatinaitha...padā (8) paṃḍītā ||]. Here samē is used as an abbreviation for saṃghādhātipati, the 'leader of a congregation'. The bhāttaraka Jinacandra was a Digambara Jain sage (fl. 1450–1515) belonging to a branch of the Mūlasangha lineage based in Delhi (Johrapurkar, Bhāttaraka Sampradāya, 108). His residence at Gwalior Fort during Mansingh's reign is known from the colophon of a Nāgaśīramaracarita manuscript copied on 27 July 1501 (Ibid., 104). Jinacandra is 'reputed to have consecrated more than a thousand Jina images in 1492, to be sent to Digambara temples all over India to replace those, which had been destroyed by Muslim iconoclasts' (De Clercq and Detige, Colossi and Lotus Feet, 311). See also inscriptions dated 1514/1457 and 1531/1475 that record installation of Jina images at Gwalior Fort under his instruction (Willis, Inscriptions of Gopaksetra, 32, 38).

56. The acknowledgement of ruling authority by donors of Jain images, which is by no means a uniform feature in all inscriptions, must be seen as an act of participation in shaping the broader 'political culture' of Tomar-era Gwalior.

57. The close association of Jina images and waterworks at Gwalior Fort is described in the Baburnama: 'Around the two large reservoirs inside Urwahi have been dug 20–25 wells, from which water is drawn to irrigate the vegetation, flowers and trees planted there. Urwahi is not a bad place. In fact, it is rather nice. Its one drawback was the idols, so I ordered them destroyed.' (trans. Thackston, 397). See also, Sheikh, 'Languages of Public Piety', 198, who notes that 'Water architecture was not entirely distinct from religious architecture; although it served a practical need, it was also a merit-generating act of philanthropy.'

58. Russell and Hira Lal, Tribes and Castes, 197; and Jain, “The Culture of Tambula,” 85–92.

59. The high-quality pān of Gwalior was noted by the Mughal Munshi Nek Rai while passing through the city in the 1680s, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, Writing the Mughal World, 334. The cultivation of betel leaves at Barai in more recent times is noted in Luard & Sheopuri, Gwalior State Gazetteer, 198; and on Survey of India, Madhya Pradesh, map sheet 54 J/4.

60. Russell and Hira Lal, Tribes and Castes, 192–8.

61. Hughes, "Royal Tigers and Ruling Princes," 1227–8.

62. Persian ed. Blochmann, pt. 2 (1869): 144, trans. H.S. Jarrett, vol. 3 (1894):258.

63. Beigi and Lenci, "Underground and semi-underground," 198–209.

64. For an overview of Persian architectural terms that refer to different kinds of pavilions and garden spaces, see Gharpour, Persian Gardens and Pavilions, 22–7.

65. For instance, the akhāra-bāzī of the Hathrasi rasiya style in the Agra region documented by Manuel, "The intermediate sphere," 96–7, involves 'poetic duels' between individual vocalists who present folk song compositions often associated with Krishna.

66. It belongs to the category of sālaga sūda prabandha, a compositional form related to dhruva as are āhūmara and paribandha. See Widess, "Aspects of form," 166.

67. Behl, The Magic Doe, 131–3, based on the Avadai ed. Plucker, The Mirigāvatī of Kutubana.

68. Seen alongside Abul Fazl's account, the term parastār (slaves) are to be understood as both male (nātwaś) and female (zan), rather than the all-female cast indicated in Jarrett's translation above.

69. The patronage of dhūrpaṭ music by Mansingh is also recounted in a Tomar genealogical inscription dated 1631 that was found over a gateway at Rohtas Fort (Anon., "Sanscrit Inscription," 697): yasmin gopācalēndrē vijayinī vīvidhāṃ kīrtīm udgātākāmā/ prodhayasangitarāgā dhūrpaḍaṣaṭapadā bhārati samabhabhāvā/ 8cd/ Sarasvati was present in the victories of that king of Gwalior, wishing to sing his manish fame with hundreds of dhūrpaṭ verses in elevated musical melodies.

70. Ā'n-i Akhari, trans. Jarrett, vol. 3 (1894): 251, based on Persian ed. Blochmann, pt. 2 (1869): 138.

71. Nizami, Tāj al-Ma'āsir, British Museum Add. 7623, fol. 53a-54b, trans. Elliot and Dowson, The History of India, vol. 2, 227.

72. In his introduction to the translation of Mānakutūhal, Faqirullah explains the reasons for its compilation as follows: 'When these musicians assembled (at Gwalior), the Raja had an idea: an opportunity like this comes . . . only once in ages. Why not avail of it, learn and write down everything about every raga, complete with illustrations and practical hints.' (trans. Sarmadee, 11–13).
Several scholars have used such choreographic descriptions in medieval texts to trace the historic antecedents of modern classical dances (e.g. Manuel, *Thumri in Historical and Stylistic*, 39–52; and Bose, “An early textual source,” 49–59). Mandakranta Bose has argued that such dances which were consigned to the prologues of ancient dramas (rāpakas) became independent dramatic forms (upārūpakas) by the fourteenth century. See Bose, “Uparūpaka,” 289–312.

The latter exemplified by Swāmī Haridas and Pīr Buddha, respectively, see Orsini, “Krishna is the Truth,” 229.

Bose, *Movement and Mimesis*, 82–5. See, for instance, the acrobatics included within the dancers’ performance described in the *Mirīgāvati*, ed. Plukker 252g-j, trans. Behl, 133.

It appears in the *Sāṅgītarañākara*, a musicological treatise composed c. 1240 at Devagiri/ Daulatabad, the capital of the Yadava dynasty.

*Sāṅgītarañākara*, vv. 7.1289–94, trans. Widdess and Sanyal, *Dhrupad*, 246–47.

Widdess and Sanyal, *Dhrupad*, 234, 247.

Ibid., 247.

Bose, “Uparūpaka,” 303–4.

Swann, “Rās Lilā and the Sanskrit Drama,” 264–74.

See Gupta and Valpey, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Among the influential early re-tellings of this is Hariranyva’s *Rāṣa pañcādhāyāyi*, where the ‘majestic epithets’ are eschewed for more intimate names, for which see Pauwels, *Krṣṇa’s Round Dance Reconsidered*.

See Ehnbom, “An Analysis and Reconstruction.”

It has been suggested that the use of a flat red background ‘might perhaps reflect the use of such backdrops in the staging of the Rasilila dance dramas of Brāj and neighboring regions’ (Topfield, *Court Painting at Udaipur*, 33), although none such are used today (Mason, “Playing in the Lord’s Playground”).

The rāṣa stage is described in the sixteenth-century *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* (IV.28.12) as a circular space decorated with sandal, aloes, musk, and saffron: *parito vartulākāram tatraiva rāṣa-maṇḍalam/ candanāguru-kastūrī-kunkumena sansūskrtam//*.

According to the hettigraphical sources surveyed by Entwistle, *Braj*, the oldest rāsālīlā stages are the ones by Hariram Vyas at Kishoreban (p. 405) and by Hit Harivansh at Chir Ghat (p. 155), both no earlier than the 1530s. Several others dotting the Brāj area were reported in the 1550s by Nārāyan Bhatt in his *Vṛaja-bhakti-vilāśa* (Entwistle, *Braj*, 366, 369, 373, 383–84, 405–6). Mason, *Playing in the Lord’s Playground*, 53, writes that ‘circular stages are becoming less easy to find in Brāj. In Vrindavan and Mathura, where devotional funds have made permanent structures for performances possible, standard, proscenium-style stages are preferred. Nowadays, traditional circular stages are almost entirely isolated to performances taking place on the ban yatra trail itself, where the practicality of a simple circle better facilitates moving a company to a new countryside site daily.’

Swann, “Rās Lilā,” 195. It is not entirely unrelated that the wrestling arena (akkhādaka) described in the *Mānasollāsa* of Somesvara III (1129–30) is to be built facing a pavilion dedicated to Krishna, the patron deity of the wrestlers (ed. Shrigondekar, vol. 2, 237, v. 967).

The two local names are reported by Patil, *Descriptive and Classified List*, 14 citing the unpublished *Annual Report of the Archaeology Department, Gwalior State* for 1946–47, and Dvivedi, “Mansingh’s Rαcch,” 32.

Dvivedi, “Man Singh’s Rαcch,” 38–39; and “Gvāliyari dhrupad,” 65–6.

Srinivasan, “Five Gwalior Gangola Tank-Bed,” 310–2 with plate. A fresh reading is provided by Singh, “Gangola Tank of Gwalior Fort,” 277. The opening verse invokes blessings of the child Krishna who miraculously lifted Mt. Govardhan upon Mansingh Tomar, followed by a verse expressing hope that Mansingh may protect the earth for eternity. The following section in prose records in formulaic manner the date, place, ruler, court nobles, composer and engraver. The inscription was carved on the bed of the Gangola tank when it was cleaned, and thus intended to accomplish quite a different task than that accomplished by a public proclamation set up for everyone to view. Engraved into the sandstone rock of the Gwalior Fort, it is placed in geological time outside the purview of immediate historical time.
It is possible that the dhupad verses of Mansingh’s singer-composers (vāggeyakars) collected in the Sahasras contain more references to nascent Krishna bhakti (Personal communication, Nalini Delvoye, 17 Sep., 2017).

Busch, Poetry of Kings, 38, and her paper ‘Culture from the Cowherd’s Mountain’ which outlines the migration of literati from Gwalior to Orchha, and other suggestive links between the Tomar and Bundela courts. For architectural similarities, see Tillotson, Rajput Palaces, 27–8, 68–9, 84. I am grateful to Allison Busch for sharing her unpublished conference paper.

The opening chapter of Keşavadas’ Kavipriya (1601) gives a vivid account of Bundela court culture, moving from forts, kings and battles to Rājā Indrajit’s six courtiers (pāturs), which he later theorizes in chapter eight on the key ingredients of courtly description (Busch, Poetry of Kings, 40, 44). Likewise, the palace murals at Jahangir Mandir in Orchha and Govind Mandir in Datia, built during Bir Singh’s reign (c. 1605–1627), feature narratives from Krishna’s life with hunting, wrestling and dancing scenes, discussed in Rothfarb, Orchha and Beyond, ch. 6. It has been argued that the overlapping military and devotional ideals of the Bundela kings were articulated in their struggle for power and prestige under the Mughal Empire and other Rajput chiefs, through the sponsorship of temples at Braj and Orchha (Pauwels, “The Saint, the Warlord”).

Busch, Poetry of Kings, 8, 121, cites evidence showing that the literary language now called brajbhāsa was in fact known as zabān-i gvaliyar until late in the seventeenth century. The akhāra tradition at Orchha is referred to in Keşavadas’ Kavipriya (1601): kāro akhāro rāja kai sāsana saba sangīta/ tāko dekhata indra jyō indrajita ranajīta/1.41/(Mishra, Keşav-granṭhāvali, 97).

Ray, “Hydroaesthetics,” has put forward an interesting argument that the rise of pilgrimage practices at sixteenth-century Braj focused on venerating the riverscape and forested landscape was a response to a period of global droughts and famines, c. 1550–1850. Mansingh’s patronage at Barai may either point to earlier climatic events, or to entirely different imperatives in the evolving environmental aesthetic. Indeed, in the preceding fifteenth century we find not only a proliferation of step-well inscriptions (Fussman, Chanderi, pass., Sheik, “Languages of Public Piety,” 198–9) but also exquisite palatial waterworks such as those at Mandu, Sadalpur and Kalyadeh (Porter, “Jardins Pré-Moghols,” 41–51).

Faqirullah, Tarjuma-i Mānakutūhāl, ed. Sarmađee, 98–99.

Hodivala, Studies in Indo-Muslim history, 228.

Rehla of Ibn Battūta. Husain, 124.

Pauwels, “The Saint, The Warlord,” 192–6.

Divvedi, “Man Singh’s Racch,” 36; and Divvedi, Gvaliyar ke Tomar, 134–7 for dhupad verses on Mrignayani. The romance of Mansingh and Mrignayani was given new life in Verma’s 1955 novel, Mrīganayani. Note the parallels with the equally legendary story of Baz Bahadur and Rumpati set in Mandu of the 1550s, where the prince becomes captivated by the tunes of the country maiden while on a hunt.

Hughes, “Royal Tigers and Ruling Princes,” 1215.

Ibid., 1216.

Gommans, Mughal Warfare, 39 notes that ‘the basic social ingredient of the mawas was the inclusive warband consisting of people with shared interests. Of course, these open groups could take a tribal or communal identity, but in principle their recruitment was not ascriptive but conscriptive.’

See above for discussion of the passage from Mirīgāvati.

‘Another order was, that all the pāturs should be taken by force from those Amirs who kept Akhāras (these are well known in Hindūstān). He also seized the elephants in the same manner, and did not leave in the possession of any one any but a wretched female elephant fit only for carrying baggage, and gave orders that the red tent was confined solely to his own use.’ Bada’uni, Muntakhab al-tawārikh, trans. Ranking, vol. 1, 496.

The Mānakutūhāl of Mansingh Tomar, which survives in a Gwalīyari original (Oriental Institute Baroda acc. no. 2125, cited in Minar, “Raga,” 393) and in a Persian translation by Faqirullah (ed. Sarmađee), and the Lahajat-e Sikandar Shāhi of Yahyā al-Kābuli (ed. Husain).

Welch and Crane, “The Tughluqs,” 149, 152–4. They note how ‘Alif characterized the sultan as a “very cautious man,” who had three abiding interests: governing, hunting, and building. Although Muhammad had warned his cousin against his inordinate passion for hunting, both before and after he took the crown Firuz Shah spent much of his time pursuing game’ (p. 126).

Bada’uni, Muntakhab al-tawārikh, trans. vol. 1, 332, where he reports that these were among the 1300 books from the Jwālamukhi Temple Library that Firuz Shah ordered translated from Sanskrit into Persian upon the conquest of Nagarkot/Kangra in 762/1360–61, and that Bada’uni himself consulted these books at the Mughal imperial library in Lahore during the year 1000/1591–92.

Parpia, “Reordering Nature,” 44.

Digby, “The Indo-Persian Historiography,” 254.

Kumar, “Bandagi and Naukar,” 86.

Rehla of Ibn Battīta, trans. Husain, 224.

Such as the eleven-month long siege by Iltutmish in 1232 (Elliot and Dowson, History of India, 327–8).

Welch, The Roman Amphitheatre, 2.
119. Sreenivasan, “Warrior-tales at Hinterland Courts,” 242–72, attends to the literary patronage of precisely such ‘petty chiefs wielding significant political power’. Silhadi was related to the Tomar family, and was born at a village called Sojna that lay in a valley among the hills of Gwalior (see Figure 1), visited by Babur on 2 October 1528 while he was residing at Rahimidad’s chaharbagh (Baburnama, trans. Thackston, 399). Silhadi’s military career is discussed in detail by Kolff, Naukar, Raijput and Sepoy, 88–102. Ladkhan was an Afghan noble from Jaunpur who was granted refuge in Gwalior by Mansingh’s father. The freestanding Ladheri Gate perched on a hill outside Gwalior fort, a ruined mosque dated 1489, and the neighbouring Ladpura mohalla are believed to be associated with this warlord. See Gauri, Gvāliyar kā Rājnaītik evam Sanskritik itihās, 103–4, 110; and Nath, Islamic Architecture and Culture, 67–77.

120. This observance was on occasion flouted when circumstances demanded, as for instance by the northward advances towards Gwalior by Sultan Mahmud Khalji of Malwa in 1423, for which see Dey, Medieval Malwa, 109. On the seasons of soldiering and the theme of separation in bārāhmāsa poetry, see Kolff, Naukar, Raijput, and Sepoy, 74–6.

121. Gomman, Mughal Warfare, 174.

122. Inden, “Introduction,” 13. A telling example is Viṣṇudās’ literary epic Pāṇḍav-carit, which was composed in response to a challenge by the Tomar king Dungarsingh, who handed him a betel leaf (bīḍā) at the start of the military campaigning season in Kartika 1435, asking how the hundred Kaurava princes could be defeated by the five Pāṇḍava brothers. See Bangha, “Early Hindi Epic Poetry,” 365.

123. On the importance of open-air spaces like the battlefield, granary floor, and hunting grounds where ‘certain nuances, certain ambiguities, a certain elbowroom’ might have prevailed in transactions between Sultanate-era warlords, see Hardy, “Growth of Authority,” 237.

124. See Falk, “Wilderness and Kingship”; and Parpia, “Reordering Nature.”

125. Pāṇ is was given both as a token of welcome, as in Dungarsingh’s assembly described by Viṣṇudās (see n. 109), and as a token of farewell, as in Qutban’s Mirgāvati (see n. 66).

126. Here I have followed the narrative in Qutban’s Mirgāvati, trans. Behl, 133.

127. See note 42 above.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Heidi Pauwels and Eva De Clercq who provided the opportunity to present versions of this paper at the University of Washington in September 2017 and at the European Conference on South Asian Studies in July 2018. Thanks also to Nalini Delvoye for the many musicological references, and to Barry Flood, Dipti Khera, Francesca Orsini, and Michael Willis for their insightful comments and encouragement at various stages of the research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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