

Textual Fidelity in the Bhoja Corpus: A Measurement-Based Reading of Bhojeshwar and Udayeshvara Against the Bṛhat Saṃhitā: A Malwa Case Study, with an Explicit Account of Its Evidentiary Limits

Akash Bhushan Dubey¹

¹Mansevi Atithi Vidwan, Department of History, Institute for Excellence in Higher Education, Bhopal (M.P.)

Received: 02 February 2026
Accepted: 20 February 2026
Genre: History

ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a measurement-based comparison of two Paramara-period Malwa temples, the Bhojeshwar Temple at Bhojpur, ascribed to King Bhoja (r. c. 1000–1055 CE), and the Udayeshvara Temple at Udayapur, founded by King Udayaditya in 1059 CE and consecrated in 1080, against the proportional system set out in Chapter 56 of Varāhamihira's Bṛhat Saṃhitā. Drawing on a complete reading of that chapter, the paper extracts its explicit proportional rules and tests them against Bhojeshwar's published architectural dimensions, finding that its sanctum occupies a proportionally larger share of the temple's footprint (64.7%) than the text's general rule implies (50%), with correspondingly thinner walls. For Udayeshvara, no published metric dimensions could be located, but its documented plan geometry, a thirty-two-point stellate form with seven bāṛhūmi tiers, is itself compared against the Bṛhat Saṃhitā's considerably simpler square-plan system, revealing a structural elaboration the earlier text does not anticipate at all. The paper's original conception anticipated a direct comparison against the Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra specifically; this remains only partly possible, since the available copy of that text could not be fully parsed, and the paper states this limitation explicitly rather than substituting invented figures.

Keywords: Bhojeshwar Temple; Udayeshvara Temple; Bṛhat Saṃhitā; Paramara architecture; Bhūmija; temple proportion; measurement fidelity.

Corresponding Author
Akash Bhushan Dubey,
akashbdubey@gmail.com

Cite this article

Dubey, A. B., (2026). Textual Fidelity in the Bhoja Corpus: A Measurement-Based Reading of Bhojeshwar and Udayeshvara Against the Bṛhat Saṃhitā: A Malwa Case Study, with an Explicit Account of Its Evidentiary Limits, JESS, 1(1).

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Bhojeshwar and Udayeshvara are the two most substantial surviving Paramara-period

temple sites in the Malwa core of the dynasty's territory, alongside the now largely destroyed Bijamandal at Vidisha. All three are identified in the architectural-historical literature as the dynasty's principal imperial monuments, and all three are associated with the Bhūmija architectural mode the Paramaras favoured, reportedly in part to distinguish their patronage from rival dynasties who favoured the Śekharī mode instead. Bhojeshwar's own classification is more complicated than a simple Bhūmija label suggests: it has been described as possibly intended as a Phāṃsanā memorial shrine, carrying Bhūmija-style detailing rather than being a Bhūmija temple outright, a distinction this paper treats carefully rather than glossing over.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Its Limits

This paper was originally conceived as a direct comparison of both temples against the Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra, the treatise composed under Bhoja's own patronage. That comparison remains only partly achievable: a complete, verse-level digital copy of the Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra was not available for this study, though a partial table of contents was. Rather than substitute figures drawn from memory or paraphrase for what would need to be exact verse-level prescriptions, this paper uses the Bṛhat Saṃhitā, the direct textual precursor to the Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra, composed in the same Malwa region, as its primary comparative source, since a complete, readable translation of its temple-architecture chapter was available. This substitution is stated here, not concealed, and the paper's findings should be read as bearing on the region's general vastu tradition rather than on Bhoja's specific treatise.

1.3 Objectives

- ❖ To extract the explicit proportional rules given in Chapter 56 of the Bṛhat Saṃhitā.
- ❖ To test these rules against Bhojeshwar's published architectural dimensions.
- ❖ To compare Udayeshvara's documented plan geometry against the same textual system, in the absence of published metric dimensions for that site.
- ❖ To identify what further access or fieldwork would be needed to complete the comparison this paper's title originally proposed.

2. Literature Review

The genealogical relationship between the Bṛhat Saṃhitā and the Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra, and the latter's own considerable elaboration and scale, is established in related textual-historiographic work on this tradition. Adam Hardy's architectural survey provides the primary documented account of both Bhojeshwar and Udayeshvara used in this paper: it dates Bhoja's reign to approximately 1000–1055 CE, records Udayeshvara's foundation in 1059 and consecration in 1080 under King Udayaditya, and gives the temple's plan as a thirty-two-point star with seven bāṛhūmi tiers, a form Hardy identifies

as having no surviving architectural precedent. Hardy further complicates the simple attribution of Bhojeshwar to the Bhūmija mode, describing it as possibly a Phāṃsanā-type memorial shrine carrying Bhūmija detailing rather than a Bhūmija temple in the full structural sense. Published UNESCO tentative-list documentation of Bhojeshwar provides the dimensional data used in Section 4 below.

3. Methodology

This paper's method has two distinct parts, reflecting the two distinct evidentiary situations it encountered. For Bhojeshwar, published architectural dimensions were compared directly against the explicit proportional rules translated in Chapter 56 of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, itself read in full for this paper. Ratios were calculated directly from the published figures; no dimension used in Section 4 was estimated or assumed. For Udayeshvara, no comparable published metric dimensions were located, so the comparison instead proceeds at the level of plan geometry, the number of projections, points, and tiers documented in the architectural literature, set against what the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*'s considerably simpler system does and does not address. This asymmetry between the two case studies is treated as a genuine finding of the paper's research process, not an oversight, and is discussed explicitly in Section 5.

4. Findings

4.1 The *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*'s Proportional System (Chapter 56)

Chapter 56 of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, *Prāsādalakṣaṇa*, prescribes that a temple site be divided into sixty-four squares, with the main entrance on one of the four cardinal directions. It sets an explicit proportional system: temple height double its width; sanctum width equal to half the temple's overall width; door width one quarter the sanctum's width and twice as high as wide; and a cascading system of quarter- and eighth-part subdivisions for frames, thresholds, and images. A worked 'Meru' type example gives a width of thirty-two cubits and height of sixty-four cubits, matching the 2:1 rule exactly, though the text notes twenty temple types exist with differing dimensions, of which Meru is only one illustration. Nothing in this chapter anticipates a stellate, multi-pointed plan of the kind discussed in Section 4.4 below; its geometry is consistently square and single-tiered.

4.2 Bhojeshwar: Published Dimensions and Their Comparison

Bhojeshwar is documented as square in plan, with an exterior dimension of 20.1 by 20.1 metres, standing on a plinth reported in the range of approximately 32 to 35 metres long and 24 to 25 metres wide across published sources. The sanctum's interior measures approximately 13.0 metres per side, giving a wall thickness of approximately 3.55 metres on each side; the four interior pillars stand approximately 12 to 12.2 metres high. The shikhara was never completed, and no authoritative reconstructed total height exists. Of

the four Chapter 56 ratios, two can be tested directly: the height-to-width ratio cannot be tested at all, for the reason just given, but the sanctum-to-width ratio can, and Bhojeshwar's actual proportion (64.7%) is substantially larger than the textual rule (50%), with correspondingly thinner walls (17.7% of overall width against an implied 25%). These figures are summarised in the table below.

Table No. 01 Comparison of Bhojeshwar Temple Dimensions with the Brhat Samhitā

Element	Bṛhat Saṃhitā Ch. 56 rule	Bhojeshwar (published dimensions)	Observed ratio
Overall width	Reference unit (vistāra)	20.1 m (exterior)	—
Height : width	2 : 1 prescribed	Unbuilt / unknown (shikhara never completed)	Cannot be tested
Sanctum width : temple width	1 : 2 (50%) prescribed	13.0 m interior ÷ 20.1 m exterior	64.7% , sanctum proportionally larger than prescribed
Wall thickness (per side) : temple width	≈ 25% implied by the 50% sanctum rule	3.55 m ÷ 20.1 m	17.7% , walls proportionally thinner than the general rule implies

4.3 Bhojeshwar's Classification Reconsidered

Bhojeshwar's identification as a Bhūmija temple, treated as settled in earlier accounts, is more provisional in the architectural-historical literature than commonly assumed: it is described there as possibly a Phāṃsanā-type memorial shrine, carrying Bhūmija stylistic detailing without necessarily being a structural Bhūmija temple. This distinction matters for how the sanctum-proportion finding in Section 4.2 should be read: if Bhojeshwar's underlying structural type differs from Udayeshvara's, the two temples may never have been expected to follow identical proportional rules in the first place, and any observed difference between them is not necessarily evidence of differing textual fidelity so much as differing structural programme.

4.4 Udayeshvara: Plan Geometry Without Metric Data

Udayeshvara was founded by King Udayaditya in 1059 CE and consecrated in 1080. Its plan is documented as a thirty-two-point star, equivalent to seven orthogonal projections, rising through seven bāṛhūmi tiers , a design identified in the architectural literature as having no surviving precedent, appearing already as a fully realised, deluxe example of the Bhūmija mode rather than as the product of gradual local evolution. Comparable but less successful later attempts are documented at Nemawar, where a similar plan was pushed to nine bāṛhūmis and required an abrupt tapering to avoid excessive height, and at

Bijolia, where a podium and an additional tier of truncated pillar-forms were added to manage a disparity between superstructure and base.

No published metric footprint, sanctum dimension, or height for Udayeshvara was located in the sources available for this study, and this paper does not supply invented figures to fill that gap. A comparison is nonetheless possible at the level of geometric type: nothing in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*'s Chapter 56, which describes a single-tiered square plan throughout, anticipates a multi-tiered stellate geometry of this kind. Whatever proportional system governs Udayeshvara's thirty-two-point plan, it must derive from a textual or workshop tradition considerably more elaborate than anything in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, a structural argument, independent of any metric measurement, for the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*'s necessity as an intervening elaboration.

5. Discussion

5.1 What the Bhojeshwar Finding Suggests

Bhojeshwar's proportionally larger sanctum and thinner walls, relative to the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*'s general rule, admit more than one explanation. It may reflect a deliberate departure from the earlier text's proportional system in favour of the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*'s own, more elaborate ratios. It may equally reflect the structural demands of a colossal, unprecedented scale of construction. It may also, given Section 4.3's finding, reflect the temple's uncertain classification as *Phāṃsanā*-influenced rather than strictly *Bhūmija*, meaning it was never governed by the same proportional expectations as a temple like Udayeshvara in the first place. This paper cannot adjudicate between these explanations from proportion data alone.

5.2 Why the Udayeshvara Gap Still Matters, and What Fills It Partially

The absence of published metric data for Udayeshvara remains a genuine gap. What the plan-geometry comparison in Section 4.4 adds is a different, non-metric kind of evidence: a structural argument that Udayeshvara's design could not have been generated from the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*'s system alone, regardless of its actual dimensions in metres. This narrows, without closing, the evidentiary gap this paper set out to address.

5.3 The Missing *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* Comparison

A genuine test of textual fidelity in the Bhoja corpus specifically still requires the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*'s own verses at full length, not only its table of contents and the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* it elaborates. Until a complete, readable copy of that text is available for direct consultation, any claim about Bhojeshwar's or Udayeshvara's fidelity to Bhoja's own treatise specifically, as opposed to the broader Malwa vastu tradition it inherited, remains provisional.

6. Conclusion

This paper has tested the Bṛhat Saṃhitā's explicit proportional rules against Bhojeshwar's published dimensions, finding a measurable divergence in sanctum-to-width proportion, complicated by uncertainty over the temple's precise structural classification. For Udayeshvara, no metric comparison was possible, but its documented plan geometry demonstrates a level of structural elaboration the Bṛhat Saṃhitā does not anticipate, independently supporting the case for an intervening, more elaborate textual tradition such as the Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra. Rather than closing these gaps with invented figures, this paper reports them as genuine findings: a complete textual-fidelity comparison of the Paramara Malwa corpus against Bhoja's own treatise specifically still requires a full, readable copy of that text and, for Udayeshvara, fieldwork-based metric measurement, neither of which was available within the scope of this paper.

Author Contributions

Mr. Akash Bhushan Dubey – Ideation, Data Collection, Analysis and Writing

Funding Sources

No funding or support was received from organizations that may gain or lose financially through this publication.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude Institute for Excellence in Higher Education, Bhopal (M.P.) for their constant support.

Statement of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this review article. The authors have no financial, commercial, or personal relationships that could be perceived to influence the work reported in this paper.

References

1. Bhat, M. R. (Trans.). (1981). Varāhamihira's Bṛhat Saṃhitā (Chapters LIII and LVI). Motilal Banarsidass.
2. Deva, K. (1975). Bhūmija temples. In P. Chandra (Ed.), Studies in Indian temple architecture (pp. 89–113). American Institute of Indian Studies.
3. Hardy, A. (2007). The temple architecture of India. Wiley.
4. Hardy, A. (2015). Theory and practice of temple architecture in medieval India: Bhoja's Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra and the Bhojpur line drawings. Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts / Dev Publishers and Distributors.
5. Sastri, T. G. (Ed.). (1924). Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Vol. XXV). Oriental Institute, Baroda.
6. Sharma, S. K. (Trans.). Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra of Bhoja: Sanskrit text with English translation.
7. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). The Bhojeshwar Mahadev Temple, Bhojpur. Tentative Lists documentation.