

Umamahesvar Temple of Kirtipur

-Sukra Sagar Shrestha

The temple of Umamahesvar is located at the highest elevation of Kirtipur lowering over the whole valley of Kathmandu. This is one of the imposing temples in Kirtipur after Baghbhairav. The elevation of the temple rises little over 16 metres.

The temple houses one of the finest examples of medieval stone sculptures of Umamahesvar in the valley. But in the copper-plate inscription attached to the wall behind the

main image, he is addressed to as Bhavani Shankar, the other name of Umamahesvar.

Hari Ram Joshi writes that the temple was constructed by the *Pradhans* of *Dathu Tajhya Tole* Mangal Bazar from Patan and gives the supporting document as the copper-plate inscription attached to the temple.¹ Only copper-plate inscription on the wall behind the god does not mention the *Pradhans* of Patan as the builders.² Rather it mentions

1. Joshi, Hari Ram, "Kirtipur Umamahesvarsthit Sarasvati-Ek Adhyayana", *Prachin Nepal*, Nr. 21 (Kartik 2029) p. 56

2. Copper-plate inscription attached to the wall behind the main image of Umamahesvara.

१. ॐ नमः श्री भवानी शंकराम्यां ॥ अद्यश्वेतं बालाहकल्पे वैवश्वत म(त्वं)त रेकायु...चरणे जम्बुद्विपे भरत-
खण्डे आर्यावर्तं पुण्यदेशे हिमवत्या दे प
२. शुभति सन्निधाने वाशुकिक्षेत्रे वाम्हाम्यां दक्षिणकुले नेपालदेशोन्तर्गत ललितपट्टने इहैव पुण्य भूमौ । श्रेयोस्तु
सम्बत ७७५ वैशाख मासे शुक्ल पक्ष एकाद
३. श्वातिथौ हस्त नक्षत्रे सुद्वियोगे आदित्यवासरे एतस्मिन् दिवसे पद्मकाष्ठगिरिस्थाने त्वं वाहारया पात्रवंश
राजर्तं विश्वनाथ वायुसन स्वष्ठ देवता प्रिति नं
४. भवानी शंकर मूर्ति स्थापनायाडा दिन जुरो ॥ श्वयात अर्थन बुं दुंता रवि सान्ह १० लगलाअफल रोव गु
९ पांगक्षर रोवल्लभ षु ६ चोवाहार
५. क्वथेल छि १ चोगलत्यंजन बार्तिका श्वते बुया वरसानन वुसाधन आदिन मालको हने जुरो ॥ पुजा जो १
चेत स्वान, अला नसि २ जाकि निस्ला बजि नसि २ माथेता नसि २
६. मेतयात चेकन कुड छि १ रसप्र छि श्वते न्हिन यात जाकेफं पियडा ४५ देवपुजायाक ब्राह्मणजुस्तं बजी
फं खु ६ घेल कुड स्व ३ साषर कुड स्व ३ श्वते वंशगोपाल

Raurta Vishvanath Babu who established the God Bhavani Shankar and offered rich endowments to the temple in April 1655 A. D. (Vaisakh Suklapachhya 775 N. S.) during the reign of King Siddhi Narasingh Malla.

Dr. Ronald M. Bernier gives the date of the temple as one of 1673 A. D. without any supporting document and writes the temple

was originally of four storeyed.³ This is quite unlikely that the temple was built eighteen years after the installation of the image. The sketch of temple drawn by Oldfield in 1855; and close and detail measurement study of the author reveals the temple to be of three storeyed only.⁴ Therefore the temple was originally of three storeyed and the top roof should have

- ७ यात दक्षिणं तीर्थके जुरो ॥ देवया निश्ला ब वजी जोको जोनसिया घरिसह पुजावारि ब्राम्हण पात जुरो ॥ माथेजुको देवयात वछि काय जुरो । देवया कोश माध्यता नसि
८. २ श्री वावुजुयात, ता नसि २ यजमान यात ता नसि २ वेशयात ध्वते माथे वेशतन सछिस विय मार, परशेषले कोमा . मियाव देवयात तय जुरो । पुन भाषा
९. इन्द्रजात्रा पेन्हु ४ तो न्हिन फछिन चावध्य श्री श्री श्री भवानी शंकर देव देवरस चाक्रमत छायके माल बलषु मण्डलयात चायातकुन्हु चाक्रमत छोयके माल मत
१०. ध्वान डापोरन प्वाठ चयडा ८५ दयक छोयके जुरो ॥ भुर्यशेव षु ६ लव ला अफलय ध्व वुया वरसानन अवालूसिस दयका मण्डप जलधेनुस दान विय मेष सं
११. क्रान्ति कुन्हु जुरो ॥ भुय शं व स्व ध्वया वरसानन वोसाधन कुन्हु चाक्रमत प्वात चयछि ८१ श्री ३ धुंवाहारस्के छोयके कितकि स्वान (सूण्ड) किछि
१२. जुरो ॥ ध्वया चिन्ता याक गोष्ठी मधुराज भारो वैकुण्ठ राम भारो तेकुलसिह भारो (राम) कृष्ण भारो रामकृष्ण क्वाठनायक भवानीदाश ध्वते गुथि (भोदे)
१३. न चौस्यतको अविछिन्न निस्त्र (पंथ) जु माल ॥ मनिभ्रंपरोपा या कार पन्च महा पातकि ॥ ध्व तेया साछि खनिम्ह श्री विश्वनाथ
१४. उपाध्याय सर्म जुरो ॥ ध्वते ह्म्यन रिमोट सान्ह १० रेनकेमार सेल्हायात ॥ स्वद (त्त) परदत्ता वा हरेत्सु विप्रयो ॥ वृत्तिस जायते (विष्णु कुलर्षणामुक्ष) तायु
१५. तं ॥ द्वेषण लोम र पसङ्गहपात कोटी शिवलिग मोचकाया पाप राक जुरो ॥ भुय झ पुन भाषा खुत्वालया नायक पनि प्रजा
१६. सुधा प्रषा () जगात सेल्हा मारक्य याये मार जावय फं सतछि १०० व्याहा न गुथि न विय माल ध्व जावय (दे) शं पति ६ त्वार न नये सेल्हा मा ...
१७. न य य (पुत्वा) लया त्वालनायकन ल्होने सेनकसं स(फ) पति चिन्ता घड सेल्हासे देवस्या मालसा

3. Bernier, Dr. Ronald M, *Temples of Nepal*, Second Revised Edition, New Delhi, S. Chand & Company Ltd., 1978, p. 145.

4. Oldfield, H. Ambrosia, *Sketches from Nepal*, Vol I, London; H. W. Allen & Co., 1880, p. 96.

been most probably collapsed in the great earthquake of 1833 which shook the valley tremendously destroying many houses and killing numerous laity. It was already in dilapidated condition when Oldfield visited the town in 1855 A. D. and made the sketch of it, almost twenty two years after the tremor. The temple remained in same ignored condition for almost a century.

However the temple was renovated after the second great earthquake of 1934 using corrugated-iron sheet roof. On fourth day *Jestha 2004 B. S.* a storm caused the upper portion and pinnacle fall to the ground. Again the temple remained without repair and pinnacle for more than thirty years being brought into present shape only in 1982 by the local authority *Layaku Village Panchayat* in collaboration with Local Development and Panchayat Ministry HMG/Nepal at the cost of 60,000 Nepalese rupees plus free labour donated by the local people.

The temple is standing over four successive plinths. The fourth plinth supports the entire weight of the temple and has twenty big pillars supporting varandah. The varandah could be reached from rear using a ladder. The present pillars and struts are just plain and uncarved. The original pillars and struts were carved as shown by the two struts used now in the Surya shrine at the bottom of Umamahesvar temple. There were also half a dozen of the carved struts in a *Falecha* at the bottom the temple, of which were lost a decade before. Similarly pillars had also intricate carvings which were

replaced somehow during the renovation activities in first half of this century.

Two elephants stand on either side of the lower plinth erected in 1662 (N. S. 782) seven years after the installation of the main image.⁵ The image of Kubera and Bhimsena are installed just behind the elephants on the third plinth. It was customary in those days to install the icons of Bhimsena and Kubera as guardians in a Shiva temple. A stone slab of N. S. 651 now in collection of Bhaktapur Art Gallery also shows the same motif. Likewise Vishesvara temple of Patan Durbar Square has two figures of Bhimsena and Kubera on the plinth. The temple was erected in 1627 A. D.

As the main entrance leading inside the sanctum is in eastern facade, remaining three facades have the figures of different Gods and Goddess. Among them north, west and southern facades house the figures of Sarasvati, Mahismardini Durga and Ganesh respectively. All those images are considered as finest examples of Malla stone craft. No image of Sarasvati like the one in this temple have come to light so far in Nepal.⁶ But the image of Ganesh in southern facade is not presently in its original place but housed in a *Falecha* in Layaku. The original place of Ganesh is replaced by an image of Devi.

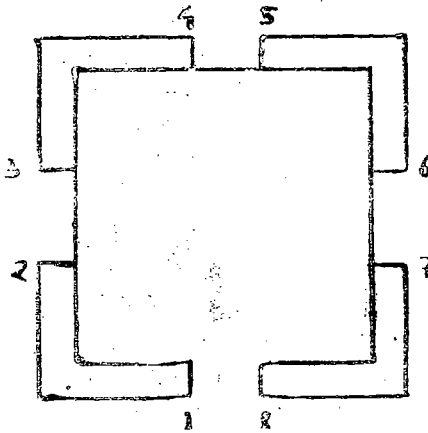
All four facades of the temple in ground level has an intricately carved doors, the upper and lower lintels of which are extended far out into the brick walls presumably for added strenght. These parts are further decorated with the figures of Gods like Indra, Surya, Chandra,

5. Inscription below right foot of an elephant of 1662 A. D. (782 N. S.). Only the year is inscribed.

सम्बत ७८२

6. For detail of the Sarasvati image, refer to op. cit. no. 1.

Vishnu, Brahma and so on. The further lengthy portions of the same lintels are decorated with *Astamangalas* (eight auspicious symbols) and some forest scene providing a feeling as if the carnivorous animals chasing their prey. In between the door-frames and door-wings, the fine example of wooden images of *Astamatrikas* (eight mother goddesses) are depicted in following order:



- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Rudrayani | 5. Indrayani |
| 2. Kumari | 6. Chamunda |
| 3. Vaisnavi | 7. Mahalaxmi |
| 4. Barahi | 8. Brahmayani |

The lower section of the lintels have the figure of Astabhairav and the doorwings here are carved with the Gods emerging out from the month of *Makaras*. To the best of our knowledge, this level no doubt, is an original one and could be regarded as the best example of wooden art so far preserved in Kirtipur.

The complex wall as we could say retaining wall with a door leading to the main complex was raised in 1717 A. D. (837 N. S.)⁷ and two years later the three level podium of the main temple was also renovated as well.⁸

On ground level in South is the symbolic shrine consisting of a colossal stone *Trishula* and twelve niches carved six in each side of *Trishula*. The shrine is considered as *Talezu*. During the festival day of *Fulpati* in Dasain, the *Fulpati* is brought here escorted by musical band and local authority. A buffalo is sacrificed here by the government.

The bell hung now in this temple was originally in *Ghantaghar* (Clock-tower). This was one among the four quarter striking bells of the tower. After the great earthquake of 1934 which shook all Nepal and destroyed many thousand houses did not spare clock tower also. Then the ruling Prime Minister of

7. Inscription above main entrance to the complex of 1717 A. D. (837 N. S.)

ॐ सम्बत ८३७ आश्विनी शुक्र

तृतीया श्रवणवार श्रवणकुण्ड

जायका दिन जुरो ॥ शुभ ॥

8. Inscription on the wall of an elephant base in Umamahesvara temple of 1719 A. D. (839 N. S.)

सम्बत ८३९ फाल्गुण कृष्ण त्रयोदशि शनिश्चल वार-१

श्रवण देय गुणि न देवर या मगलि,

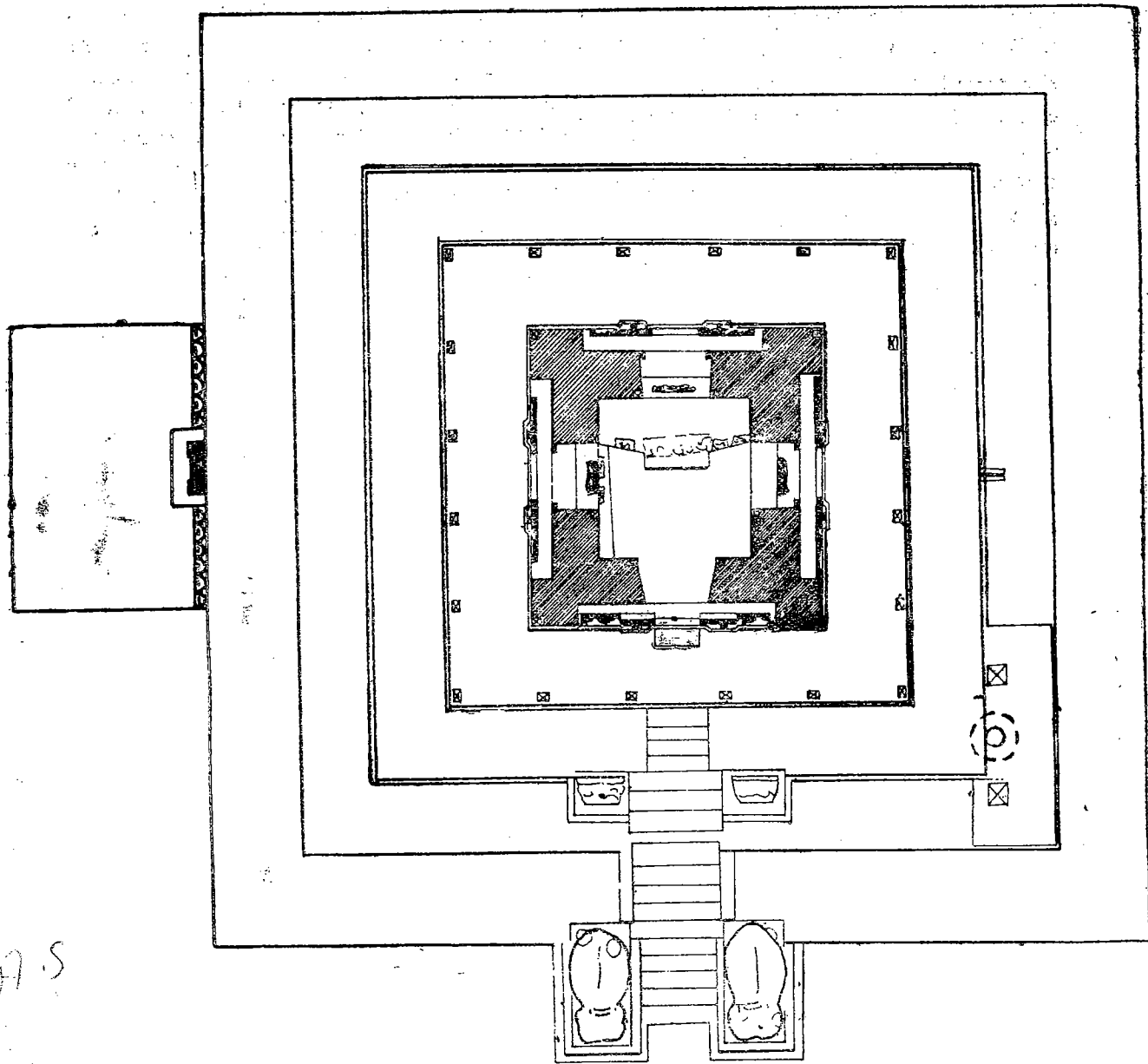
घरोल स्वत ल्होडा - २

जुरो ॥ शुभ ॥ - ३

Umamahesvar...

the time Juddha Shamsher offered the bell to this temple on the request of the local authority *Dvare Jagat Bahadur Pradhan*. The bell is casted by Jillette and Johnston Founder Croydon England in 1895. The original bell of this temple as is said, was stolen by the King of Bhaktapur. The bell was already absent when Oldfield visited the town in 1855.

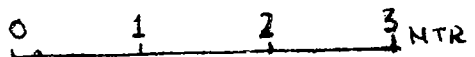
The temple can be reached in few minutes walk from Baghbhairav Temple towards west and small climbing of steps immediately before the temple. Owing to its elevations of 1418 m. from sea-level, when one stands on the foreground of this temple, the entire valley of Kathmandu and distant views of Himalayas as far as hundred miles can be seen from here on clear days.

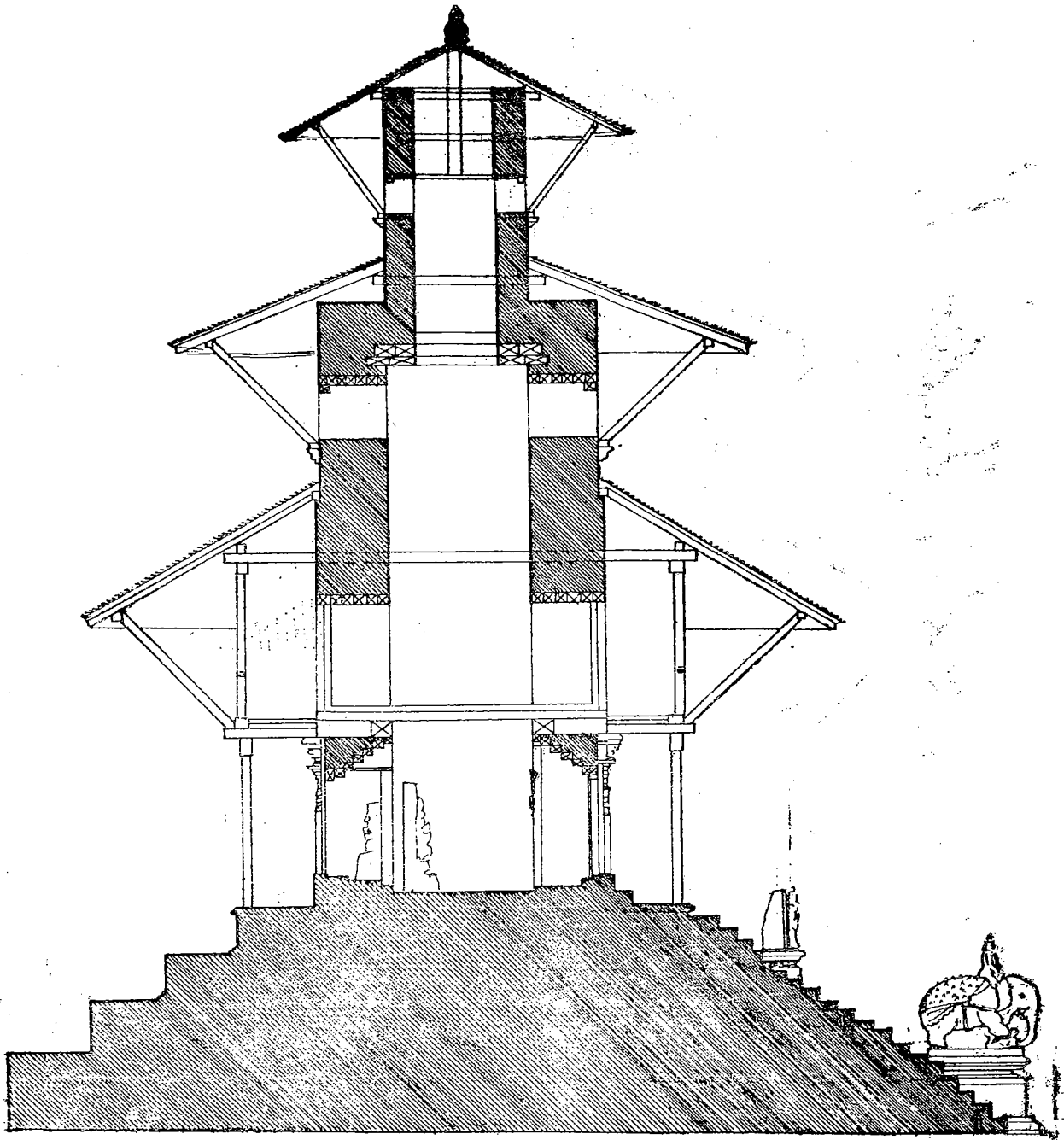


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Uma Maheswar

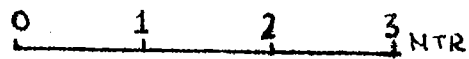
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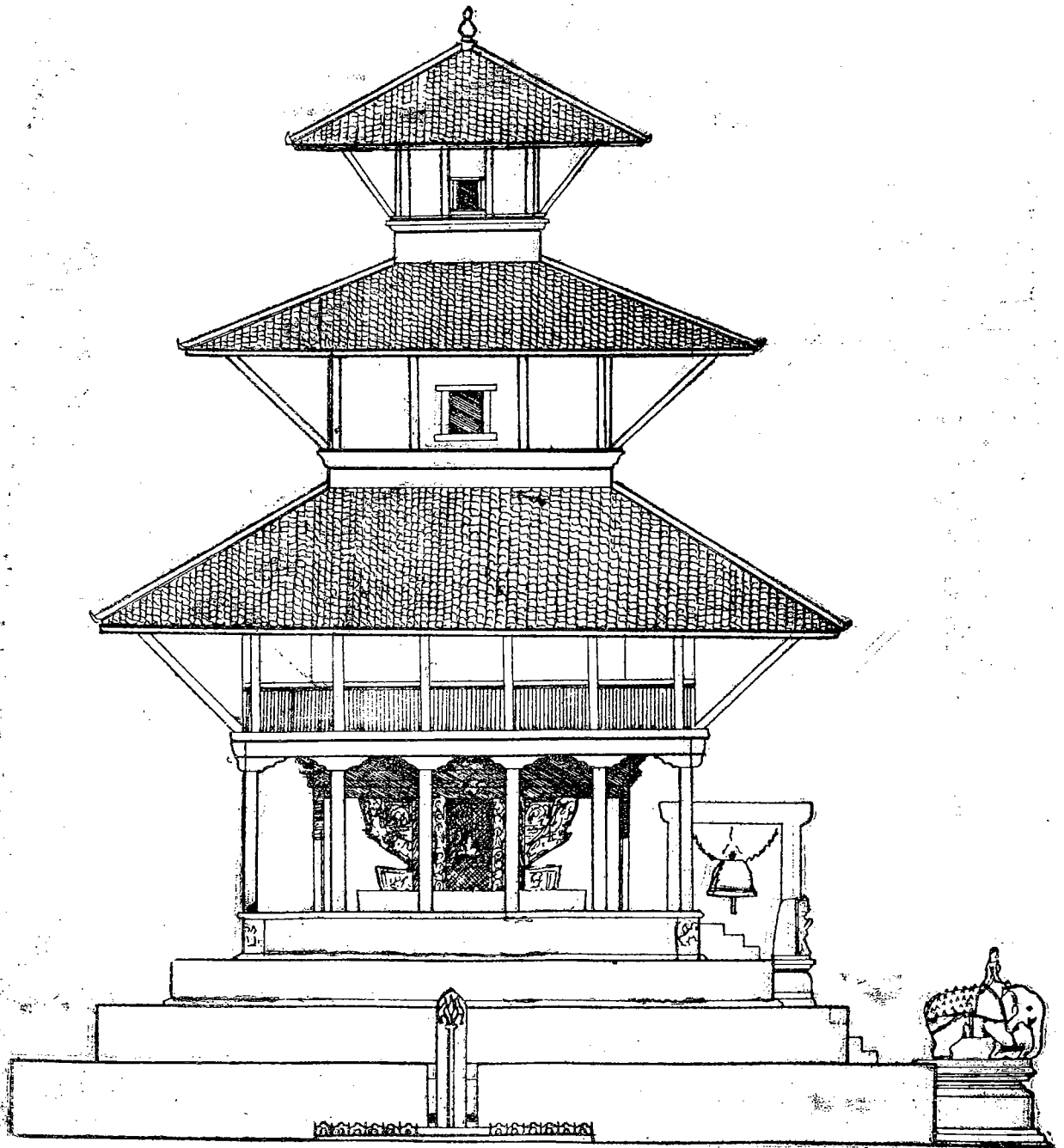




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