



# "The Enigmatic Martanda Sun Temple: Exploring Architectural Marvels Amidst Ruins"

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## Abstract

Situated within the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir, the Martanda Sun Temple stands as a rare example of a solar place of worship within India. Despite its current state of dilapidation, the temple manages to preserve its magnificence and regal appearance. The chronicles surrounding the temple's past encompass a variety of narratives, spanning from ancient myths to documented historical accounts within literary traditions. This study endeavors to delve into the architectural accomplishments of the Martanda Temple, amalgamating verbal legacies with findings from on-site archaeological exploration.

**Key words:** Sun god, Martanda, Art and Architecture, Kashmir, Ruin, Magnificent, ASI.

## Introduction:

The magnificent ruin of Martand is the most impressive structure remaining from Kashmirian splendor in terms of its size and location. At the northern end of the Karewah of Mattan, 5 miles from the town of Anantnag, is where this exquisite temple may be seen. Martand, which today refers to the abandoned temple of the Sun that sits atop the high plateau of the similar name and offers a stunning view of the valley below, is named after the Sun, which in Sanskrit is known as Martand. Even the blindest tourists are consistently moved by the majesty of these remains because of their stunning location, which plays a significant role in that. Without a doubt, this is the best location in Kashmir. Fergusson notes: "it is the architectural lion of Kashmir, and all tourists think it necessary to go into raptures about its beauty and magnificence comparing it to Palmyra or Thebes or other wonderful groups of ruins of the old world<sup>1</sup>". Presently, the temple enjoys safeguarded status as a designated monument under the guardianship of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), in accordance with the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958. Adjacent to the temple, an expanse of land has been transformed into a recreation park, garnering popularity among local residents as a favored destination for picnicking.

## Building Specifications

Martand, unparalleled in its magnificence and standing as the most impressive among ancient temples, unquestionably commands the most exquisite location within the region of Kashmir. This majestic vestige stands out prominently, surpassing all others in both its expansive scale and its strategic placement. The temple's physical height does not exceed 40 feet, yet its robust walls and prominent contours, which rise above the intricately designed columns of the encircling colonnade, bestow upon it a commanding presence. Within its structure, there is a notable absence of intricate intricacies; instead, each element is well-defined and substantial, harmoniously aligning with the overall essence of the edifice. Similar to the prevailing design of medieval temples in Kashmir, Martand comprises a central courtyard housing the primary sanctum, surrounded by a covered colonnade or peristyle<sup>2</sup>. The architectural ensemble is primarily comprised of a tall central structure, flanked by two smaller detached wings at the entrance. This entire complex is situated within a spacious quadrangle, encircled by a colonnade featuring fluted pillars and recesses adorned with trefoil arches. The exterior side of the wall that lacks ornamentation spans approximately 90 yards, while the front side measures about 60 yards in length. On either side of the gateway, robust fluted columns, reaching a towering height of 17 feet, surpassing the ones within the quadrangle by 8 feet, provided support for the pediment. Presently, one of these pillars on the southern side of the entrance remains preserved<sup>3</sup>. While I speculate that the pillars of comparable dimensions possibly upheld the pediments at the front and rear of the entrance, the square-shaped elements evident on the façade may well be the vestiges of a winged stockade for a staircase, serving a utilitarian purpose. The apex of the crown was unmistakably in a pyramidal form, as evidenced by the discernible section of molding from the slanting pediment on one facet. The partitions of the passage boast lavish embellishments both on the interior and exterior surfaces, featuring distinctive double-pedimented columns that have supplanted plain rectangular panels as the predominant ornamental motif.



### Ruin of Martand Temple

The remarkable precision with which these massive stones were stacked to achieve considerable elevation is truly astonishing. Among them, the central edifice stands out as the most impressive structure. Moreover, like other temples in Kashmir, it boasts not only a sanctuary or cella but also a square nave measuring 18 feet in dimension. Only the sanctuary remains completely unadorned, while the other two chambers are adorned with intricate paneling and adorned niches. It has been speculated that the roof likely took on a pyramidal shape, with a similar carved design extending to the opening compartment and wings. Consequently, there would have existed four separate pyramidal structures, with the one above the inner chamber presumably being the tallest. The pinnacle of this pyramid would have risen approximately 75 feet above the ground level. The temple's precise measurements reveal a length of 63 feet and a width of 36 feet at its eastern extremity, while narrowing to 27 feet at its western or entrance end. Internally, the temple is divided into three distinct chambers: the ardhmandapa, with a square floor plan measuring 5.51 meters on each side; the antarala, which spans approximately 5.48 meters in length and 1.37 meters in width; and the garbhagriha, encompassing dimensions of approximately 5.63 meters by 4 meters. The initial chamber is unobtrusively adorned and exhibits intricate decorations. The middle chamber boasts a similar ornamental style, while the inner chamber maintains a plain appearance and is enclosed on three sides. In contrast to the internal width of the edifice, the parapets of the temple measure 2.7 meters and 1.37 meters in thickness, with the walls of the entrance chamber being comparatively slimmer. The initial chamber is uncluttered and extensively embellished. The middle chamber showcases decorations in a matching manner, while the inner chamber is unadorned and enclosed on three sides. In relation to the internal width of the structure, the parapets of the temple measure 2.7 meters and 1.37 meters in thickness, with the walls of the entrance chamber being comparatively thinner. Among the carvings adorning the walls of the antarala and the vestibule, a striking depiction of the river goddess Ganga graces the left side of the former. Seated upon her mount, the crocodile, her gaze is directed upwards and is clearly discernible. Beside her, on the right, stands a female attendant wielding an umbrella, while on her left, a chauri-bearer is positioned. She holds her customary symbols: a watering can in her left hand and a lotus flower stalk in her right. On the opposite side of the antarala, we encounter Yamuna, a prominent Hindu goddess, seated alongside her mount, a tortoise. It becomes evident that the figures adorning the western walls of the antechamber depict Vishnu, contrary to Mr. Fergusson's mistaken interpretation of them as snake hoods. In reality, they represent coronet points. The visage on the left portrays a boar, while the one on the right depicts a man-lion (Narasimha), resembling the three-faced Vishnu idol found in the Avantivami temple. Similar to other depictions of Vishnu found in the valley, each figure is adorned with eight arms, with their lower hands positioned on the heads of chauri bearers. Regrettably, the majority of the hands in these depictions have suffered damage and weathering, obscuring the symbols they once held, which now remain unidentified. The fourteen seated figures depicted beneath the helmet on the walls of the antechamber remain challenging to definitively recognize. Among them, there are a total of twelve individuals—six each on the north and south walls, and two on the east wall. Of the two panels on the eastern partition, the one situated on the right side seemingly



represents Aruna, the charioteer of Surya, grasping the reins of his seven horses<sup>4</sup>. Unidentifiable depictions are encompassed within the pilasters of the antechamber's expansive trefoil bend. The distinctive pyramidal architectural design commonly seen in Kashmiri temple roofs seems to have been employed here as well. This colossal edifice, towering at a height of 75 feet and measuring 33 feet in both length and width, inclusive of the added wings, was originally dedicated to the worship of the Sun. A substantial staircase, which provided access to the interior, was previously obscured by debris. Robust pilasters, adorned with segmented panels, flanked the incline of the structure on either side of the entrance. These pilasters were ornamented with intricate representations of the Aryan temple style. These pilasters served as the support for the entablature, imparting a robust and sturdy appearance to the walls—an imperative factor for upholding the massive and lavish roof. Segmented into two portions and adorned with an embellished band, the imposing stone pyramid gained a more graceful and refined demeanor. Furthermore, the incorporation of petite niches featuring pointed rooftops and trefoiled recesses adhered closely to the overarching style of the edifice<sup>5</sup>. The most sizable illustration of its kind in Kashmir, the peristyle features a substantial pair of fluted columns, each measuring 13 feet in height and spaced 8 feet apart. Situated at the midpoint of the larger facets of the structure, these columns possess a slight elevation, setting them apart from the alignment of the adjacent chambers. The lengthwise carvings on the pedestals featured diminutive birds facing forward, whereas the humanoid figures positioned atop the impostes (rearward) engaged in an exchange of glances with one another. Owing to the imprecise nature of Kalhana's statement, there exists substantial divergence regarding the exact recognition of this temple. Nonetheless, the most plausible hypothesis, bolstered by the temple's architectural style and construction attributes, suggests that King Lalitaditya likely erected the existing sanctuary during the mid-eighth century A.D.

Recent archaeological endeavors within the temple's courtyard led to the extraction of a considerable quantity of debris and debris. Among the noteworthy portable findings from these excavations are several large earthenware jars that were unearthed from the floor of the central chamber. The removal of centuries-old debris from the temple's foundation has unveiled a highly significant revelation: the presence of a slightly smaller temple at this site predating the construction of the current edifice. The coexistence of both foundations, situated adjacent to each other on the eastern side of the sanctuary, serves as confirmation that the earlier temple's foundation was not eradicated during the construction of the newer one. Instead, it was encompassed by a new, larger foundation. Indeed, it is clear that the ancient temple at this location was indeed constructed by Ranaditya.

### Conclusion

The Martand Sun Temple holds great reverence as a profoundly awe-inspiring and unforgettable creation that was built during the rule of King Lalitaditya, who governed this area in times long past. The king commanded the construction of this expansive and breathtaking temple dedicated to the Sun God, also known as Surya, in the picturesque region of Kashmir. In his era, the Sun, Moon, and revered spiritual beings held immense importance and were revered for their perceived spiritual and otherworldly capabilities. Crafted as a symbol of the Surya Dynasty, the Martand Temple was constructed by the King to honor Bhaskar, who was then revered as the Sun God. The architectural style of the ancient temples in Kashmir undeniably showcases a notable Greek influence. This impact is distinctly evident in the utilization of stone pillars, columns, trefoil doors, decorative screens, geometric patterns, particularly rectangles and triangles, as well as the depiction of deities intricately carved into stones and pediments. The stone craftsmen of Kashmir incorporated certain modifications to adapt to the challenging winter conditions. This influence is prominently displayed in the architectural designs of the Martand and Awantipora Stone temples. Regardless of the specifics, what remains undisputed is that the Martand Temple stands today in ruins, with only fragments of its former architectural grandeur. The site continues to be a significant archaeological and historical landmark, attracting visitors and researchers interested in the cultural heritage of the region.

### REFERENCES

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