



THE WALL-PAINTINGS CONSERVATION IN A TIBETAN BUDDHISM MONASTERY DISKIT LADAKH, J&K, INDIA

Compiled by dr.Dalibor Lebloch

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Thiksey gompa

Ladakh is the most preserved oasis of the living traditional tibetan culture. The monasteries, their unique architecture and equipment are worthy of our effort and support.

Buddhist monastery **Diskit** (middle left) is spread above the valley where two rivers meet – Nubra and Syok in the verge of the Himalayas and Karakoram in the northern Ladakh. The valley is separated from the administrative center Leh by the Ladakh Range of Karkoram, in summer is accessible through the Kardung La pass (5600 meters above the sea, the highest traversible pass in summer).

The Diskit monastery belongs to the Gelug school playing the role of spiritual, cultural and educational center of the region.

The government of India provides full religious freedom to the inhabitants of Ladakh. On the other hand, the possibilities for the development are rather limited. The monastery buildings and murals, statues, books – all need the urgent rescue conservation. There are many Ladaki traditional painters, but there is no conservator.

Our project is focused to the education of the next Ladaki conservators.

Therefore we feel the need to engage in the support of this culture.



We believe that our effort will contribute to spiritual items preservation and also to the feeling of human solidarity regardless of race or religion.



For the first time we visited Nubra Valley during our cycling expedition in **August 1999**. They were asked by gelong Lobsang Khechok for help in the matter of making postcards of the monastery. Dr. Dalibor Lebloch made photographic materials and there 10 000 postcards were printed in Czech republic. Their topics were traditional musical instruments of Tibetan Buddhism. We delivered these postcards to the monastery in July 2000.

The first Conservation Mission

Our next mission came to Diskit with the donation of 3000 more of these postcards, PC with laser printer and a ceremonial picture for the main chapel in **September 2002**.



We decided to restore three old stúpa (chorten). We had prepared the restoration at home - we had trained the work with the clay and welded the brass top symbols. During a week we enjoyed the pleasant restoration work on three stúpa, which we called The Three Moravian Chortens.

After the resoration the monks celebrated a long sanctifying ceremony of the renovated chortens. Our group gained the trust and confidence of the monks.



The Civic ***Foundation for Tibet*** was established in **September 2003**. Its main goal is the specialized care for the monuments of the cultural heritage of Tibet in the region of Ladakh. One of the ways will be **the education of the local conservators** in the summer work-shops during the conservation missions led by the Czech conservators in the Ladakhi monasteries. Two missions had been realized in 2005 and 2006.

„ Let ´s save the Whitte Tara !“
It ´s the name of the present
phase of our project.

*Whitte Tara is the persnification
of Love And Compassion. She is
very endagered in the Lhachung
chapel in Diskit gompa;
nevertheless she keeps smiling.*



Tha Ladakh monasteries lost their economic power and self-sufficiency in 50-ties after the land reform in the newly independent India. The maintainance of monastery buildings almost stoped, including the flat roofs, which are the critical places of for the leaking of the rain water.

The devastating efect of the leaking water is the most noticeable on the degradation of murals. The murals are the oldest And the most valuable equipment of monastery buildings. Murals are the evidence of the mastery of antient artists-painters. Mural have not the decoratin function only, they are the living „schoolbooks“ of the iconography and the buddhist philosophy. The buddhist pilgrims pray and worship to the depicted gods, but they also touch them and rub against the walls. The murals are often damaged by the smoke from the oil lamps. The biggest damage of mural is couosed by the structural instability of buildings. The absence ot the bricks binding, to high weight of the mud roof layers, broken carpenter binding constructions (crown), trafic eroded walls, insufficient basements – all this may be the cause of the walls breaking.

The risk is increasing by the tectonic disorders, by the rough climate, by mass tourism.

For the resolution of such a complicated problems the modern know-how in monument preservation and conservation is necessary, together with the appropriate funding.





The second Conservation Mission to Diskit gompa was realized on July – August **2005** by a small professional team led by academic painter Jan Knor. Fixing, cleaning, conservation and partial renovation of the wall- painting of *Four Protectors* above the main staircase (between Gökhang and New Dukhang)

After a special blessing ceremony

the conservation work could start.



Academic painter Mr. Jan Knor is searching the state of murals before the conservation.

The plaster was cracked in all painting extent. Its fragments detached from the bricks. The mural was eroded by the leaking rain water from the non-maintained roofs.

In the lower part the painting was abraded by the long-term move of persons, in total it was polluted by the dust. There were two big defects in the left part, demaging also two of four figures.

It was necessary to fix the free fragments to the background and to clean the painting. The conservators covered the mural by so called Japanese paper before the filling the defects ,to protect teh painting itself.

The Ladakh pilgrims were quite surprised

After two weeks of the hard work the mural of Four Protectors looked like this.

The plaster fixed to the background, colors fixed to the plaster, painting cleaned, small defects retouched, big defects filled.



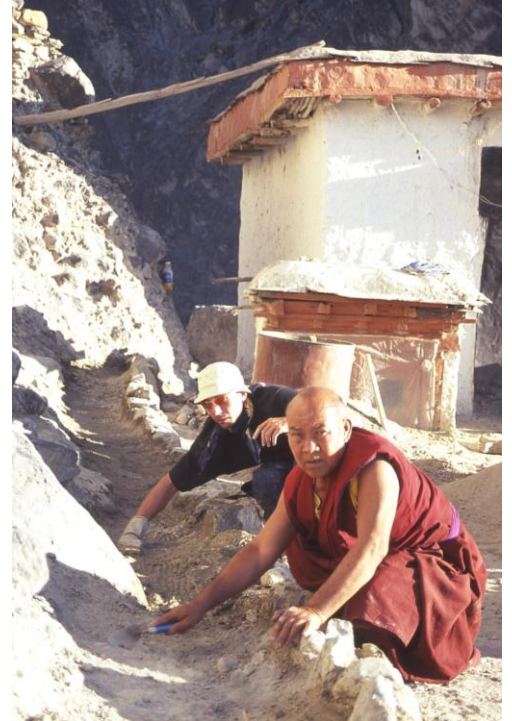
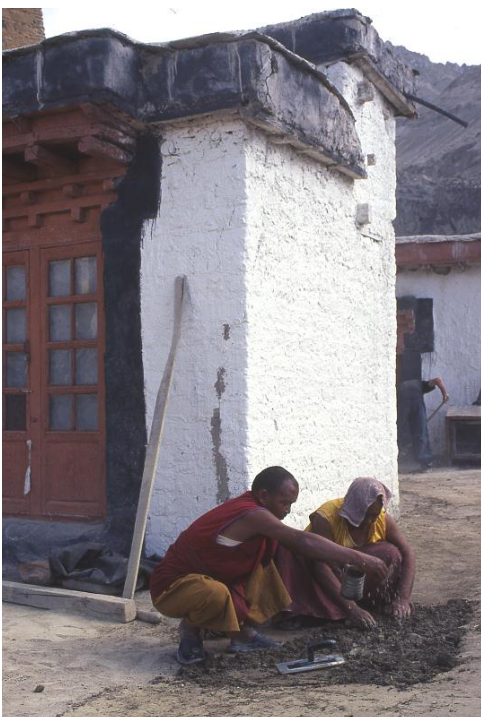
The third Conservation Mission, 2006



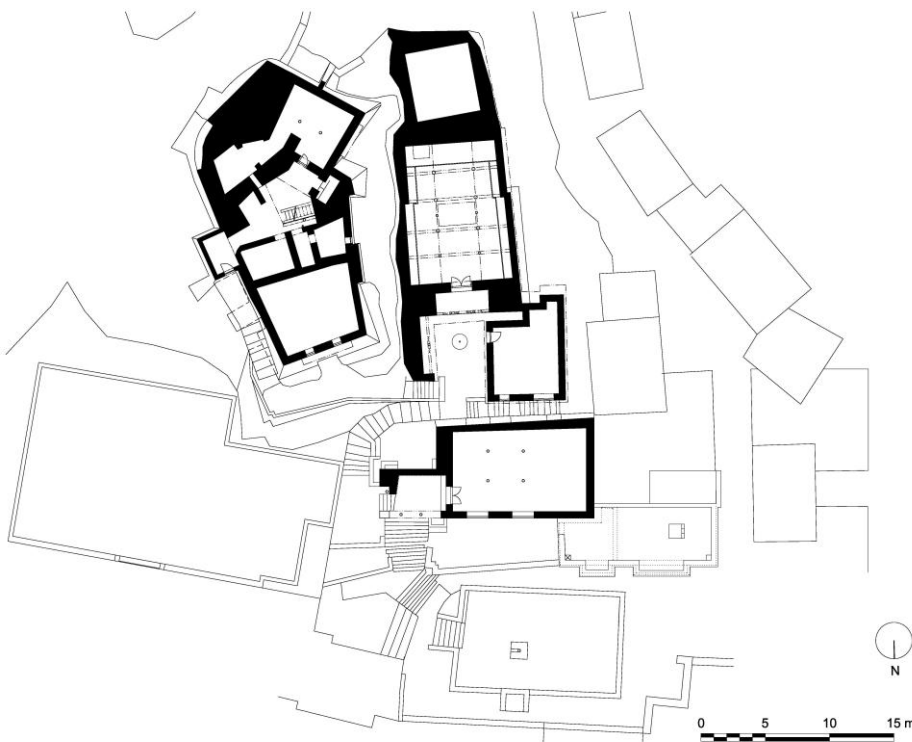
Most of the buildings in Ladakh have a flat roof, covered by layers of clay (*markalak*), mixed with sand, soil or dry grass (*busa*). These roofs are very often damaged - by people, by snow and ice, by stormy wind. The damaged roofs can not stop the water leaking down to rooms. In Diskit gumpa (and also in many monasteries here in Ladakh) the leaking water damaged the valuable wall-paintings.

So, the roof repair must be faster than any conservation works on murals. The basic problem in many monasteries in Ladakh is the absence of the basic maintenance of the flat roofs. The new small cracks should be filled immediately, the snow should be removed frequently (using a big canvas; the sweeping is not recommended - causing abrasion), the mouth of drainage tubs should be controlled and cleaned. Because the roof of Lhachung, Old Dukhang and of two skylight-wells were in a poor condition, we decided to make the renovation of them. Two weeks we excavated the sand, transported the bought clay (*markalak*) and dry grass (*busa*), we mixed these three components together and finally with water. We removed a layer of the old surface and replaced it by the newly mixed mortar.

Jan Svoboda removed temporary plastic sheets from the light-well door (*down left*). He cemented and cleaned up all glass bars. He also repaired the door. Now it is possible to watch on scenery from roof through the door. Moreover soft sand will not blow into monastery anymore.



PhDr.Petr Kroupa, art historian, elaborated the expert opinion of the monument value. The geodesic surveying was made by ing. arch. Jiri Drevikovsky.



On the second level you can see the old fort buildings *kabjima*, on the right atop is the small *Lhachung*, in the middle the Old *Dukhang* and down the Hall of Protectors *Gonkhang*.

Older buildings in Tibet are made from unburt bricks, separate walls are not bound together in corners. Ceilings are made from poplar rafters. Branches (instead of our desks), cortex, grass and clay bulky layer (30 cm or above) are overlying on them. Everything is covered by marl stripe for better water flow. Horizontal consistence is very poor.

Therefore we can find just vertical scratches mostly in he corners of buildings or under beams. It seems evolution of crackles is in consequence of roof load. We can see it from that disturbancies. If rainwater does not run into buildings, they will be not directly threatened. Larger Dukang is in a good condition. Crackles seem to be passive in the corners of building. Our last year reparation looks useful because our control points of rainflow indicators are negative. It looks like water does not run into Dukang.

Smaller sanctuary Lhachung is statically in very bad shape. First it seems there was a problem with building foundation as we thought from examination of lower building. But ing. Daniel's findings are that this situation is caused by a low consistence of the object. Moreover, cantilevers of ambit are improperly placed under the vertical wall. It makes situation worse. Just one straining circuit element "wooden bunch" which bearing attics is cracked in connections. So it is no more helpful for the building consistence. This bunch should be removed for a new one. Therefore we bought poplar bulks and beams..

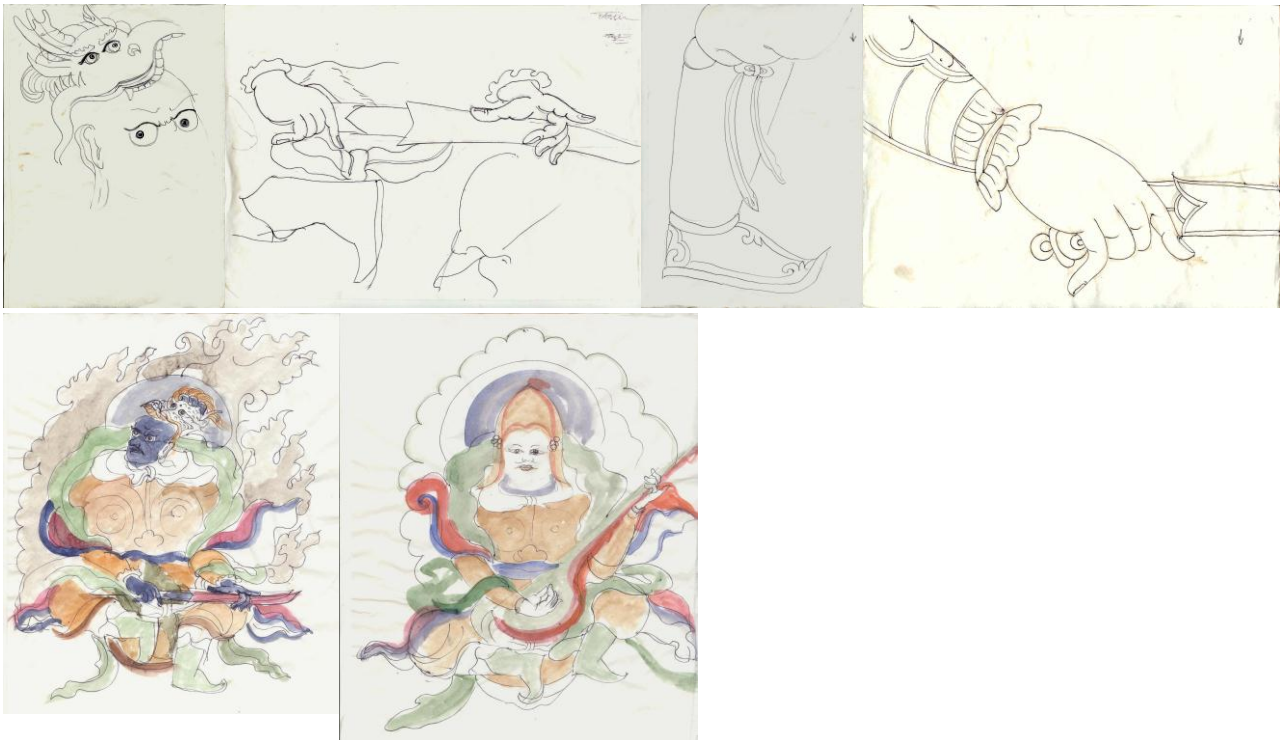
*Very erudite monk carpenter
Lobsang Norbu
helped us with the connection
preparation*





We began to save wall paintings of *Four Protectors* in 2005. Now, in 2006 we found out a perfect condition of murals after winter. Also retouched rightmost shape mingled together with rest of retaining section. We asked monks if they prefer saving work without filling out the whole painting (Ordinary for museum exposition spaces) or if they want to fill out whole

paintings (the area of approximately 15%). The monks made a decision to fill out the whole painting without any doubts because it will serve them for ancestral purpose. Our conservators have sketched the outlines of missing parts first according to the other murals of Protectors (in front of Dukhang and in other monasteries)



Dominika Dworokova took care of clearing and fixing smaller wall mural **Birth of Buddhism** in north jamb door case of the entrance.





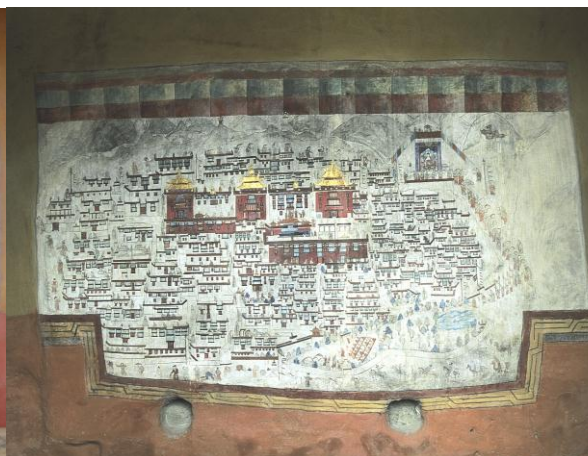
It took our experienced three-member team 4-week effort to retouch original paint and complete rest of paint. The monks evaluated the result as perfect and unbelievable - new filled places and retouch of damaged old pieces were fully mingled with the ancestral pattern of painting.



The Czech conservators repaired the paintings of the Tashilhunpo gompa in Zhikatse in patio of Old Dukang in few last days. Firstly they fixed unsettled plasters, then they fixed dusty paintings and got rid of surface dirt and leaks, then they cemented defects and scratches and finally they retouched the paintings.

It all has worked out. It would be a pity not to continue. Will you help us? Please do!

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The 4th Conservation Mission 2011

On July-September 2011 we came to renew our project in Diskit gompa, to search the situation in the historic preservation in Ladakh a to enter into partnership with the heritage funds and the other important organizations.

We came to make new plans for the rescue conservation and the general care for the monasteries in Diskit and Hunder.

Here are some brief conclusions:

1. The rescue conservation works are very urgent after the heavy rains in 2010.

The roof of Lhachung suffers from the water- leaking again. The general repair of the roof is necessary and will be the main goal of our next mission in 2012.

2. People in Ladakh now understand the importance of the monuments and their conservation much better.

It is due to the effort and the public teaching and lectures organized by *Archeology Survey of India, Central Institute of Buddhist Studies (CIBS), Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation (TCHF)* and others. The public associations were established, in Hunder for instance.



Our "patron" White Tara suffered from the new damage by leaking water. (Compare with the pictures on the site 3 and 4.)

3. Our colleagues from the foreign and international funds would very welcome the co-operation.

Several organizations are engaged in the monuments care and conservation in Ladakh. *Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation* – we hope TCHF with its founder and secretary dr.Sonam Wangchok will be our main partner in our project in Nubra Valley in future.



Tibet Heritage Fund (THF) has many experiences. We have visited Alchi Tsatsapuri temple and seen their perfect work on the conservation of the wall paintings. THF would like to participate on our project of the education of the local conservators.

Namgyal Institute of Research of Ladakhi Art and Culture (NIRLAC), ACHI Association (ACHI), Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) are some more potential partners.

4. The monk community in Diskit gompa now understand very well the need of the professional care for the valuable parts of the monastery. The monks cooperate much better, they are more active and they have their own plans and ideas.

5. During our short mission in 2011 we realized some visible actions. We realized the main goal - the photo-documentation of the valuable spaces and their wall paintings.

We documented the technical (static) status of buildings, electricity, water supply or the sewerage system.

Monks removed the new and unsuitable partition wall in Lhachung , so we could research the altar and its statues. We replaced the plastic gargoyles by the wooden ones, we partly repaired roof of Tanjurhakhang and Lhachung, with the help of monks we replaced the wire fence by the wicker one, we transported a amount of clay (*markalak*) to the monastery, we replaced about 50 pieces of broken or absent glass in windows, we made tidiness in the store, cleaned and painted the walls in the new kitchen, we replaced the plastic and metal rubbish from the monastery and its surroundings. All this work was realized with the unusual co-operation of Diskit monks.



We have made a rigorous photo-documentation of the monastery buildings and their decoration in Hunder village.

With Mr. Tsering Dordže, president of *Association Thundel Tsogspa Hunder* we have discussed the future co-operation on the rescue conservation.





Finally we proposed to Diskit monks and, of course, also to Venerable Kushok Tiksey Rimpoche our plan for the complex care for Diskit goma. The plan includes the professional help and guidance in

- reconstruction of the electric wiring, water supply and sewerage
- rescue conservation of buildings, wall paintings, statues etc.
- teaching of local people the basic technology of conservation
- improving the tourist services
- the gumpa museum founding

According to our meaning the present situation in Ladakh is convenient for the foreign assistance in the implementation of international principles of historic monuments care. Here are several reasons for it :

1. Many buildings are endangered by the climatic changes – the more frequent and heavier rains, leaking the wrong maintained flat roofs. The water than destroys the building and the decoration.
2. The attractive monuments are often used for commercial use, realized in the immediate closeness of monasteries. The spiritual atmosphere and the esthetic quality of monuments is spoiled. It is necessary to find the harmony between the care for tourism and the care for the original function of Buddhist monasteries.
3. The increasing popularity of the conservation may leads to amateurish unskilled intervention and injury of valuable monuments.

The project of our *Association for Tibet* (“Revitalisation or diskit gumpa”) is going to be a pilot program of the foreign professional assistance in the defense of Buddhist monasteries against some factors endangering them.

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dr. Dalibor Lebloch, the chairman of the Association for Tibet
Brno, Czech republic,

September 1st 2011



*We wish Ladakhi monks the success
in the care for their monasteries as well as for their own spiritual growth.*

The 5th Conservation Mission, DISKIT 2012

Team :

Lebloch Dalibor, Benda Jiří, Chunka Noori, Jedličková Hana; Ježek Ladislav, Kejík Radim, Kratochvílová Stella, Kubina Petr, Martan Martin, Pantělejevová Ivana, Stiebitzovi Liběna a Richard, Ševčík Roman, Urbanová Jana, Vargová Eva, Tabassum Wajeeda, Zelenková Karolína, Žižková Nikol

Realized :

1. 1st stage of the rescue conservation of wall paintings in Lhachung - the most valuable and the oldest sanctuary in Diskit monastery. 2. *1st Summer Conservation Workshop, Diskit 2012*
3. The reconstruction of the Gokhang sanctuary roof, with the implementation of a special membrane
4. 1st stage of the conservation of funeral stupa complex in Diskit gompa
5. Installing the Tourist Information Desk, the tourist visiting rules modification
6. documentation of three-dimensional liturgical artifacts (stateus, ccha-ccha, gau, ritual music instruments etc.)
7. professional video- and photo-documentation of our conservation project
8. electro-wiring, mason's and painter's works in the limited quantity
9. Association For Tibet and Diskyit Welfare Society made an agreement about continuation of the complex project from 2011, they stressed the importance of Lhachung conservation, including retouch and completing the paintings.



Ad 1., 2.

1st stage of the rescue conservation of wall paintings in Lhachung and *1st Summer Conservation Workshop, Diskit 2012*

As the building of sanctuary Lhachung is poor static condition and the very valuable wall paintings are in dire need of conservation, we decided to make steps toward the rescue of this monument.

Ing. Nikol Žižková and Ing. Petr Jandora used their experience from project and construction of „Sun School“ in Zanskar village Kargyak and they made a project of the reconstruction of the Lhachung roof, with the implementation of a special membrane.

The construction works could (by shakes, vibration etc.) endanger the stability of wall paintings inside the room. The loosen parts of painting were in danger of collapsing and crashing.

So, in the 1st stage it was necessary to realize the rescue conservation of wall paintings.

After it, in 2nd step, the membrane implementation into the roof was possible. Simultaneously with conservation works, our conservators were teaching their art to local students in *1st Summer Conservation Workshop, Diskit 2012*. Our trainee were Miss Noor Jahan and Miss Wajeeda Tabassum, both students of *Delhi institute of heritage research and management*.

In this document *The Conservation Report* by MgA. Academic Painter Roman Ševčík was used,

the building stage described by Ing. Nikol Žižková. Photo by Stiebitzova, Lebloch.

THE CONSERVATION REPORT 2012

Monument location : Buddhist *Monastery Galden Tashi Chosling Diskit Gompa* in the Nubra Valley, Leh-Ladakh(district), Jammu and Kashmir, INDIA

Subject of Conservation: The wall-paintings in the sanctuary LHACHUNG

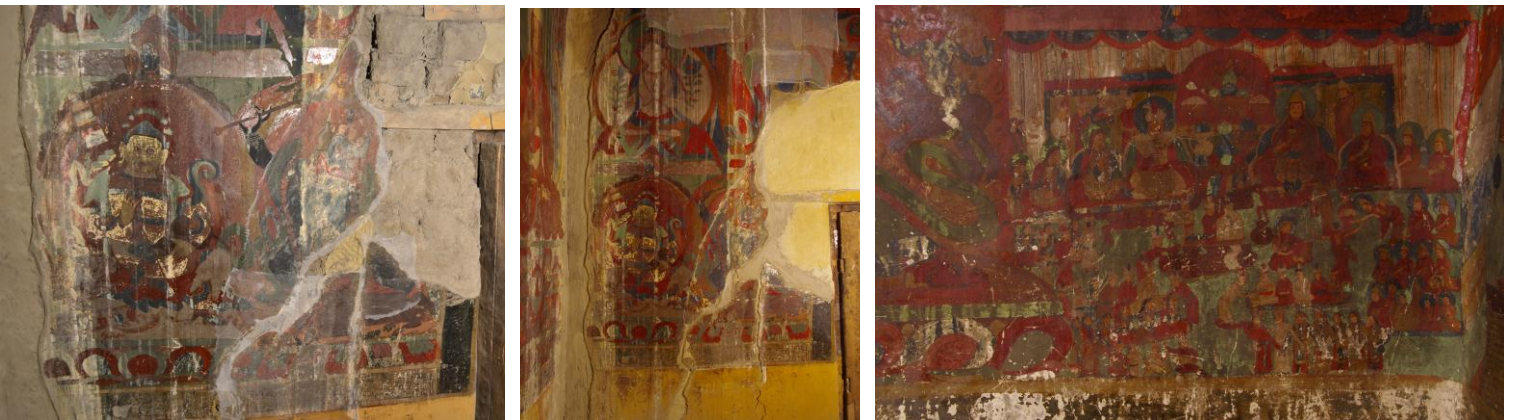
Investor: Association for Tibet, Czech Republic, Brno, Vesela 5

Conservators: restorers of fine arts MgA. Academic Painter Martin Martan,
MgA. Academic Painter Roman Ševčík

Subject of the work: Wall- paintings consolidation

Term: July- September 2012

The wall paintings in the sanctuary Lhachung are in dire need of conservation. The surface is covered by layers of dust and soot deposits, which has made the painting look dark. There are signs of seepage on the surface; the upper layer of dirt has been washed away, together with the color layer partly. On some places we found loss of the basic plaster material (i.e. clay, locally called *markalak*) which has transferred to the surface on paintings. Wall paintings have been damaged by the vertical static cracks through all the height of the walls.



Previous restoration works have been carried out unprofessionally. The newly added layers of clay are not similar to the surrounding paints by its structure. The added plaster protrudes just above the paintings' level and is segregated from the brickwork. The plaster layers around have been ripped off and the original valuable painting is now in danger of collapsing and crashing.

The plaster cracks can be seen all over the wall due to the wall shift. They are in corners and around the ceiling beams. The damage of paintings and basic plaster is quite evident around the ceiling beams, with the separation from the brickwork probably caused by the weight of the heavy roof construction. These parts are now endangered by the crash.

The fragments have shifted along the cracks. It is caused by the movement of all the wall materials in the sanctuary since the plaster on both edges of the cracks are fixed to the bricks.

In the side light we found places with the elevation of the color in thin layers and its separation from the plaster. It has started to crumble and the original painting has been destroyed.

In some places hollow cavities have appeared and the plaster has been separated from the brickwork. The most extensive damage is on the altar wall – the middle part of paintings above the Congchapa (tsong-kha-pa) statue is completely missing.

The lower plinth was repainted in ochre clay color, which looks strange and hard.

The conservation process:

We took photographs of the Lhachung and its surroundings and documented its status prior to carrying out the conservation work. We decided to remove the old repairs (fillings, seals) as they were done inefficiently and hindered the correct attachment of the paintings to the brickwork.

During this work we found that the new repairs were made only by adding a layer of rough clay, without filling the cracks in the wall. We cleaned the open defects and we consolidated their bottom by the 3% water solution of Primal gradually by spraying.

First of all we added the missing pieces of bricks or stones making the firm base for the new plaster by using rough clay with sand content to prevent the development of new cracks. New filling was done slightly under the level of original painting.



In some critical places we also used textile (cotton) bandage to prevent the cracks and to strengthen the seal. The bandage slightly overlapped the edges of defect and was integrated into the plaster by the thin clay solution with the Primal addition. The same solution fixed the bandage to the edges of original plaster.

After making a deep injection using the small plastic tube inserted into the defect during the new filling, we injected the solution (mentioned below) into cavities by the syringe. It was done slowly and gradually to prevent occurrence of any damage to the original.

For places with the separation of color layers from the fine clay plaster, we applied 3% water solution of Primal gently by a fine brush under the color scales and then pushed the scales to the wet plaster by a dry tampon. The edges of such a fixed colored layer were additionally fixed by the same solution.

Using the "Washup(wash-ab), soft" sponge we removed the surface impurities together with the strip layers of clay, which was washed out by the leaking water. The rest of these clay layers had to be removed from the top using a scalpel.



It was necessary to fix (overlap by textile bandage) the places, where the plaster had completely lost cohesiveness with the wall and was protruding out. Before overlapping we consolidated the color layer fixing it by Paraloid B 72 in mineral dissolving agent.

On the fixed color layer we did a test of cleaning. Using the dissolving agent we successfully removed the old dark soot deposits, which significantly changed the color of the paintings. In this manner it was possible to remove all of the soot depositions and restore the original bright color of the wall-paintings.



On the entrance wall there were several areas bulged totally out of the surrounding level. After consideration of the risk we decided to transfer these parts. We overlapped the color layer by the cotton bandage and then carefully extracted the paintings together with the plaster. We ground off the back side of fragment and then strengthened it by cotton bandage using a thin clay solution.

For the transfer mounting we prepared a new bed, which supported the original situation and continuity within the entrance to Lhachung. For the back mounting we slightly moistened the prepared bed and we applied thin solution of the very fine clay to the back side of fragment and then gently pressed the fragment to its original position. When the joint was dry, we moistened the surface of fragment and removed the bandage.

Material used:

For deep injections

Vapo-injekt, Aqua Bárta s r.o., Praha; Acylate disperse Primal ®SF016 3% water solution

For color layer fixation

Paraloid B 72 in mineral dissolving agent; Fungicide care; Pulvispray ST

For overlapping

Methyl-cellulose in water

For filling the defects in plaster layer

clay soil with the sand fraction; fine local clay "markalak"

The wall paintings were thus conserved and consolidated by these steps. Several conservation interventions should follow in the coming years to finish all the conservation of the precious wall-paintings and to restore them to their original beauty.

The monks of Diskit monastery as owners of the monument have repeatedly asked us to retouch and complete the missing parts of the wall-paintings.

We are ready to fulfill these requests as the Diskit gompa is a living monastery and the paintings have their essence in ritual practices. In completion of this task the co-operation of the local painters of traditional art, along with art historians is necessary.

Report by MGA. Academic Painter Roman Ševčík Přelouč, October 2012

The partial reconstruction of the sanctuary roof, Gokhang in Diskit monastery, Ladakh, India

The main problem : water-leaking to the sanctuary Gokhang as a result of the non-functional rain-water drainage and damaged external clay topping.



First step : During several hours (with the significant and fundamental help on monks) we removed irregular clay layers or the roof construction. The removed about 10 – 15 cm of these layers and also the clay plaster on the attic to the height of 30 cm.

We recycled the removed material for the manufacturing of a mixture, used for the gradient (sloping down) layer and for the final layer. There was only one suitable place for the gargoyle on Gokhang roof. So, we had to slope down the gradient layer just to these one place.

Second step: Sloping down the roof surface with the mixture of clay, sand and water in the depth of 5 – 15 cm. We lied down a semi permeable membrane TyvekSupro, DektenMulti Pro (Dektrade CZ), which allows vapors to escape from inside the sanctuary, but prevents the water leaking down through the roof. The membrane continues up on the walls of attic to the height of 30 cm. we fixed the membrane there in a chink.



Third step : We laid down two more layers of mentioned mixture (each with thickness of 4 cm) to the membrane, maintaining the slope of the gradient layer. We applied the plaster (in two layers) on the walls to cover the membrane.

We placed the final closing layer (in the necessary slope again) of the mixture of clay and the coarse-grained sand.

We add the missing protecting stones on the top of attic. And, naturally, we hanged out praying „lungta“ flags a celebrated our work by biscuits.



The 6th Conservation Mission, DISKIT 2013

Team :

Martan Martin, Prokopova Kateřina, Chunka Noori,
Pantělejevová Ivana, Tabassum Wajeeda, Vaněk Jiří, Hana

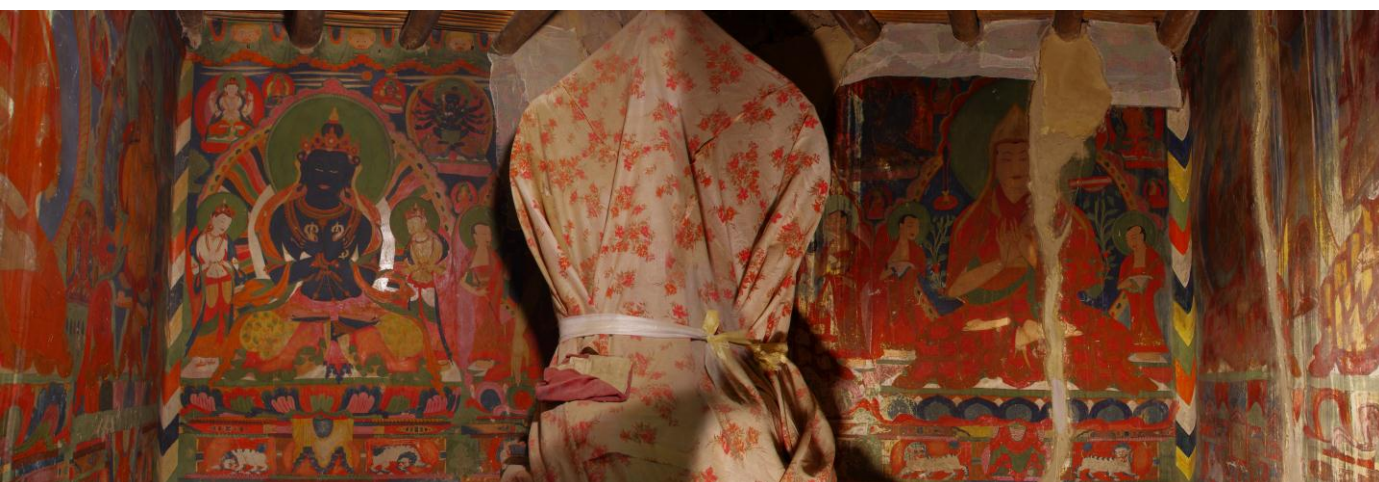
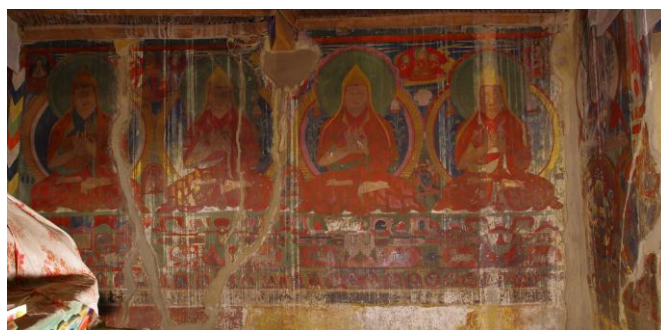
The conservation of wall-paintings in the sanctuary Lhachung continued in June-August 2013. The small team was led by academic painter and conservator Martan Martin; he used his experience from Diskit 2012.

The work was very similar to that described on pages 14 – 16, see.

Also the small Conservation Workshop for Ladakhi students continued successfully .



4 walls : entrance wall, eastern, western and altar wall



2014 – 7th RESTORATION MISSION (late July and early August.)

3rd stage of restoration of wall paintings in the sanctuary Lhachung led by ak.mal.rest.Lenka and Helfertová and ak.mal.rest.Markéta Pavlíková, RhD., both with experience of working in our monastery in r. 2006, guaranteeing the top professional level of work. Fresh magister of arts restorer mgr. Dominika Dworoková (also she has the merit of Diskit paintings from r. 2006) worked very hard, too. Three candidates for restoration Helfertová Anna, Anežka Pavlikova and Jonáš Rosůlek assisted the masters.



Visiting Alchi Tsatsapuri (in the care of Tibet Heritage Fund) and its supplier of thinners and pigments.

Young but experienced Sonia Pavlovičová (Slovakia) and Zofia Fabirkiewicz (Poland) worked hard to rescue dozens clay sculptures.



Namgyalmabefore restoration ,

Soňa a Zofi working hard,

Nagyalma after restoration

All the operations stabilizing layer walls were completed, cleaning the paintings from leaking water and from the oily smoke from butter lamps took a lot of time, too.



Subsequent retouching had been merrier, bringing a visible effect: figures began to appear ever more clearly. But only the future addition of missing parts of these wonderful paintings allows sanctuary to shine forth fully.



All our volunteers were active. Adrian installed exhibition of photographs, worked on the Info-stand, guided tourists, cooked. Radim and Hanka cooked, they did masonry, plastering; however biggest merit they earned by the reconstruction of an old stupa (*chorten*).

Monks were pleased, visitors were amazed, we were happy.

But even the 3 stages of work (2012-2014) did not completed the task completely.

The altar wall if Lhachung will be a big challenge.

We are looking for experienced conservators, willing to work for expenses and a small honorarium to contribute to the rescue of the cultural treasures of Ladakh.

