

Art and Architecture in Ladakh

*Cross-Cultural Transmissions in
the Himalayas and Karakoram*

Edited by

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Introduction

Erberto Lo Bue and John Bray

Ladakh's particular interest to scholars lies in its status as a region with close religious and cultural affinities with Tibet that at the same time looks west to Kashmir, south to the Indian plains and north to Turkestan/Xinjiang. At times the Tibetan influence has seemed to predominate to the extent that a collection of wedding songs recorded in the early 20th century in the eastern Ladakhi village of Hanle (Wam le) refers to "us Tibetans" (Filibeck 2009:197–199). However, the transmission of religious and artistic ideas has not been solely in one direction. Between the 11th and 13th centuries CE Ladakh occupied a particular place in the history of geo-cultural Tibet, representing a bridge between India and the Land of Snows, as exemplified by the painting, sculpture and architecture of Alchi (A lci) in the Indus valley. Today Alchi serves as the best surviving testimony to the highly evolved Buddhist culture of mediaeval Kashmir.

In more recent centuries the flow of Buddhist ideas and artistic styles has been more from Tibet to Ladakh rather than in the reverse direction. The tradition of sending Ladakhi novices to Tibet for their higher studies started as early as the 13th century, and Tibet's spiritual pre-eminence is reflected in later Buddhist monastic art in the region. However, Ladakh at the same time remained subject to multiple cultural influences from the west and the south as reflected, for example, in its musical traditions.¹ Nearly half its population is Muslim and its architectural inheritance includes an extensive network of mosques as well as monasteries.

An earlier volume in Brill's Tibetan Studies series, *Ladakhi Histories: Local and Regional Perspectives* (Bray 2005 and 2011), discusses the impact of these competing influences on the region's political and cultural history. A second volume, *Modern Ladakh*, reviews the contemporary processes of social change. This book, which is largely drawn from contributions to the 13th, 14th and 15th International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) conferences in 2007, 2009 and 2011, celebrates the region's artistic and architectural inheritance.

1 On this point, see Trewin (1990:273–276), who discusses both Tibetan and Kashmiri/Islamic influences on Ladakhi folk music.

Central Themes

The papers in the collection range widely over time, from prehistory to the present day, and the subjects for analysis extend from rock art to castle architecture, monastic murals and silk brocades. Amidst this diversity, it is possible to identify three underlying themes, perhaps best expressed as questions.

- The first is to do with the region's connectedness. Ladakh lies across the great historical communications routes linking the Indian subcontinent with the regions north of the Karakoram as well as Tibet. So how are these manifold external influences on the region expressed in its material culture?
- The second question, which follows immediately from the first, concerns local particularity. Anthropologists working on Ladakh have emphasized the distinctive local roots of many aspects of village-level ritual, and contemporary Ladakhis are keen to assert their own regional identity, distinct from Tibet and from other parts of South Asia. So how far should we see Ladakh as a subset of a civilization that has come from somewhere else—whether from Central, South or even West Asia—and how far is it the result of a synthesis?
- The third question concerns change, evolution and decay. In the Tibetan monastic world it has long been customary to repaint ancient murals in new religious and artistic styles. In Ladakh as elsewhere, ancient buildings are often composite constructions of different layers and styles. As will be seen, these complexities lend themselves to extensive debate on the dating of particular buildings or paintings. Meanwhile, the question whether to replace or discard old structures has taken on a new urgency in contemporary Ladakh: how far is it possible to preserve the region's artistic and architectural inheritance in an era of rapid social, economic and cultural change?

None of these questions lend themselves to simple or definitive answers. In contributing to a greater understanding and appreciation of the region's artistic and architectural past, we hope that this book will provide a clear basis for fresh scholarly enquiry, and perhaps for practical decisions on the conservation of its cultural inheritance.

Scholarly Foundations

The contemporary study of Ladakh is itself built on older scholarly foundations and all the papers in this collection build on them. As discussed in *Ladakhi*

Histories, the beginnings of a critical historical analysis date back to the 19th century. The single most important source is the *La dvags rgyal rabs*, the royal chronicle of Ladakh, which dates back to the 17th century. At the same time literary sources need to be supplemented by evidence from inscriptions on rocks and wall paintings as well as the buildings themselves.

Many of the early researchers on these topics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were either missionaries or colonial officials. The two-volume study *Antiquities of Indian Tibet* by the Moravian missionary August Hermann Francke marks an important early 20th century landmark. In 1909 Francke embarked on an extended research expedition under the auspices of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), travelling from Simla to Kinnaur and then via Spiti to Ladakh. The first volume of the *Antiquities*, which was published in 1914, includes a description and a preliminary analysis of the paintings in Alchi in Ladakh. The second volume (1926) contains a critical edition of the *La dvags rgyal rabs*. On his research expedition, Francke was accompanied by a skilled photographer, Babu Pindi Lal. His photographs themselves constitute an important part of the historical record, as discussed in the papers by Howard and Khan, Bray, Devers and Vernier in this volume.

Tucci's four-volume *Indo-Tibetica*, published between 1932 and 1941, marks the next major scholarly landmark. For Ladakh, the first two volumes are of particular importance in that they focus on the architecture of the chorten (*mchodrtan*) and the biography of the Buddhist scholar and translator Rinchen Zangpo (Rin chen bzang po, 958–1055). In the same period, Tucci's student Luciano Petech followed up Francke's earlier work on the *La dvags rgyal rabs* with his 1939 Ph.D. thesis, published under the title of *A Study on the Chronicles of Ladakh (Indian Tibet)*.

The outbreak of the Second World War (which Petech spent in an internment camp near Dehra Dun because his Italian nationality made him an 'enemy alien') marked the beginning of an extended hiatus in scholarly research on Ladakh. In 1947 and 1948 Ladakh was caught up in the India/Pakistan conflict over Kashmir. From the mid-1950s until 1974 Ladakh was closed to foreigners because of its status as a sensitive border area. Poor road communications and limited flight connections meant that it was scarcely accessible even to scholars from other parts of India.

However, in 1974 Ladakh was opened up to tourism, and the period since then has seen rapid social and economic change as well as a proliferation of new research by both local and international scholars. Significant contributions by Ladakhi scholars include three historical studies: Joseph Gergan's *Bla dvags rgyal rabs 'chi med gter* (1976), Tashi Rabgias's *Mar yul la dvags kyi sngon rabs kun gsal me long zhes bya ba bzhugs so sgrig pa po* (1984), and Kacho Sikandar Khan's *Qadim Laddakh tarikh va tamaddun* (1987). The first major new

contributions by international scholars were Petech's *History of Ladakh* (1977), which revised and greatly expanded his earlier work, and the two volumes of *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh* (1977, 1980) by David Snellgrove, Tadeusz Skorupski and Philip Denwood. The first volume of the latter work, *Central Ladakh*, focuses on the murals in the temples of Alchi, which are widely agreed to be among the most outstanding of all Ladakh's historical monuments. This initial study paved the way for further research by scholars such as Roger Goepfer, notably including his lavishly illustrated *Alchi. Ladakh's Hidden Buddhist Sanctuary* (1996).

Meanwhile, Erberto Lo Bue (1983, 2005, 2011) has documented contemporary Buddhist artists in Ladakh, while Neil Howard (1989) pioneered the study of Ladakh's ancient fortresses. Major contributions in the art-historical field by Christian Luczanits include *Sculpture in Clay* (2004), which examines sculptures dating from the late 10th to the early 13th centuries in Kinnaur and Spiti as well as Ladakh. Monisha Ahmed and Clare Harris presented a valuable collection of papers on Ladakh's material culture in *Ladakh: Culture at the Crossroads* (2005).

The research of the last 40 years has therefore greatly extended the knowledge that was inherited from Francke, Tucci and Petech. However, there are still several lacunae to be filled before it is possible to write a comprehensive new history of the region's art and architecture. This collection highlights a selection of the most important new research findings.

Historical Perspectives

The papers in the collection are presented in rough chronological order, starting with Ladakh's prehistory. The themes of international influence and local particularity combined with evolution and decay recur at every stage.

Early Petroglyphs and Rock Sculptures

Petroglyphs in Ladakh have been the object of research since Francke's time, and over 20 years ago Giacomello Orofino published an article illustrated by an important set of photographs of rock art taken during Tucci's visit to the region in the 1930s. However, it is only in recent decades that scholars have come to appreciate the full extent and the sheer diversity of the thousands of petroglyphs scattered all over Ladakh and neighbouring regions.

Tashi Ldawa Tshangspa has made an important contribution in mapping out and recording these petroglyphs, and in this volume he presents a small selection of his findings, categorizing them according to their subject

matter. Petroglyphs reflect the local fauna and economy, for example in the depiction of animals that were hunted by the region's earliest human inhabitants. However, they also suggest that Ladakh was far from isolated even in the prehistoric era. Images of human 'masks' from the third and second millennia BCE have analogies in what is now northern Pakistan and as far afield as southern Siberia. Later images of animals standing on 'tip-toe' point to a historical connection with the Scythian cultures of Central Asia in the first millennium BCE.

Ladakh was incorporated into the Yarlung dynasty's Tibetan empire in the late seventh or early eighth century CE, and research by Philip Denwood has shown that the first Tibetan settlement in the region may have taken place during that period. However, at that time as in the following centuries, the most significant religious and artistic influences came from Kashmir rather than Tibet. The gigantic Maitreya rock relief at Mulbek (Mul bhe), on the Leh-Srinagar road, is a prominent example. Phuntsog Dorjay's article examines this and other less well-known Buddhist rock reliefs found mostly along ancient trade routes in the Kargil, Leh and Nubra regions. He attributes most of them to the period between the ninth century and the early 11th century, and shows that their style closely resembles that of bronze images produced in Kashmir during the same period.

Art and Architecture during the Second Diffusion of Buddhism

The history of Ladakh's art and architecture entered a new phase after the fall of the Tibetan empire in the mid-ninth century and the establishment of a Tibetan dynasty in western Tibet, known as Ngari Korsum (mNga' ris skor gsum), in the first half of the tenth. After the death of King Skyilde Nyimagon (sKyid lde nyi ma mgon) in c. 950, his kingdom was divided among his three sons. One of them, Palgyigon (dPal gyi mgon), inherited Ladakh and may be regarded as the founder of the Ladakhi kingdom. In practice, however, the region remained politically fragmented, with a number of larger and smaller principalities exercising a high degree of local autonomy.

The rulers of the Ngari Korsum kingdoms came to play an important role as the patrons of the second diffusion of Buddhism (*bstan pa phyi dar*) in geo-cultural Tibet. In the second half of the tenth century King Yeshé Ö (Ye shes 'od), sent 21 young noblemen to Kashmir to study the Buddhist scriptures. One of the two survivors was Rin chen bzang po, who was to become one of the greatest protagonists of the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet, famous both as a translator of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Tibetan and as the founder of temples and monasteries in Western Tibet across Purang, Kinnaur, Spiti and Ladakh.

This political and religious background sets the context for Neil and Kath Howard's contribution on the archaeological remains in and around the little studied district of Gya (rGya), in eastern Ladakh. Following up on Neil Howard's earlier study of Ladakhi fortresses, they first examine the castles at Rumtse (Rum rtse) and Gya, both located along the main trade route from India and on a branch of a route leading from Kashmir to Tibet, before turning to the nearby field of chortens, which they attribute to the time of the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. The third part of their paper discusses Gya's historical significance as one of the more powerful local principalities within the wider Ladakh region. The authors attempt to set the surviving ruins in a proper historical context suggesting that Gya was an important area about one thousand years ago and that a re-examination of references to it in historical sources might contribute to define major issues for the purpose of further research on the topic. An appendix by Philip Denwood discusses a reference to Gya in the chronicles of Guge Purang. Supporting his case with a careful analysis of the written sources, he argues that this refers to eastern Tibet and not to the settlement in Ladakh as suggested earlier by Roberto Vitali (1996:95).

Quentin Devers, Laurianne Bruneau and Martin Vernier develop a related archaeological theme with a carefully illustrated study of ten examples of painted chortens, dividing them into three types: 'plinth', 'Lotsawa' and 'gateway' chortens. They note that all have the external appearance of a chorten while their cores shelter paintings that are similar to those of a shrine. The three authors argue forcefully for greater recognition of these chortens' significance in the history of Buddhism in Ladakh, while emphasizing the urgent need to preserve them before they fall into decay.

In a similar vein, Gerald Kozicz presents a detailed examination of a chorten in the area of Nyarma (Nyar ma), the only monastery founded in Ladakh by Rin chen bzang po according to historical sources, which today lies in ruins. In spite of its importance, the Nyarma area has not been the subject of a detailed monograph until now. Jampa Panglung (1983) devoted an article to the monastery and later Kozicz (2007a, b) himself devoted two contributions to its neighbouring area. Here he analyses the architectural structure of what he calls the "Chorten with the Secret Chamber", together with the iconography of its interior. He compares it with roughly contemporary chortens from elsewhere in the Nyarma area and at the site of Alchi, and concludes by dating it to the late 11th or early 12th century.

Alchi and Lachuse

The Choskhor (Chos 'khor) monastic compound in Alchi (A lci) is among the most closely studied of all Ladakh's historical monuments. However, there is

still no consensus on the dating of the most important buildings in the compound. Denwood (in Snellgrove & Skorupski 1980) examined the inscriptions on the site and concluded that the Dukhang ('Du khang) was founded in the early to mid-11th century while the Sumtsek (gSum brtsegs) belonged to the last third of the century. Goepper (1996:212 and 216–217; 2003:14–24) subsequently published further important inscriptions from the top storey of the Sumtsek, and argued that its founder “must have been active around the end of the 12th to the beginning of the 13th century”. In his contribution to this volume, Philip Denwood restates his opinion and amplifies his hypothesis, based on epigraphic and palaeographic evidence, that the Sumtsek was founded in the last third of the 11th century, arguing that some paintings and inscriptions were added at a later date. He suggests that a later generation of monks resorted to obliteration and rewriting in order to claim a Drigung ('Bri gung) inspiration for the foundation of the temple after it was taken over by the order of that monastery.

The most puzzling scene painted in the assembly hall of the monastic site of Alchi portrays a ruler being offered a cup by a woman. Here Marjo Alafouzo relates this painting to its historical context, pointing out that the characters depicted in the mural were instrumental in the founding of the temple. By analysing its iconography and comparing it with art historical material from Tibet as well as from pre-Islamic and Islamic Central Asia, she argues that such scenes are attested to in Turkic literary records and suggests that it depicts a marriage between a Tibetan woman and a foreign ruler, possibly Turkic.

Several chapels were built in the wake of Rinchen Zangpo's followers' activity in Ladakh. One of the least known is a chapel with a fine carved wood door-frame in the village of Lachuse. Heinrich Poell's paper relates the carvings to the Indian traditions prevalent in the regions of present-day Himachal Pradesh as well as Kashmir during the 11th and 12th centuries.

The 14th to the 18th Centuries

With the Islamization of Kashmir from the 14th century, Tibet became Ladakh's only external source of Buddhist learning. From the following century the Geluk (dGe lugs) religious order joined the Drigung one in renovating existing institutions, and building new temples and monasteries. Just as the Drigung school had taken over foundations such as Alchi and Lamayuru (Bla ma g.yu ru) starting from the 13th century, so the Geluk order took over foundations such as Spituk (dPe thub) two centuries later. In this volume Chiara Bellini deals with the statues and fine murals fashioned presumably in the early 15th century in the *mgon khang* near the monastery of Spituk. Resemblances between the paintings in Spituk, Thikse (Khrig se) and Phugtal (Phug tal) reveal the

existence of a school of painting, very likely of Tibetan origin and associated with the Geluk order.

The ruined castle in Chigtan (Cig gtan or Cig ldan) stands as testimony both to political turbulence in Ladakh and to the skill of its builders. The castle is thought to have been built on an earlier site at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries on the orders of a local ruler named Tsering Malik (Tshe ring ma lig). During this period Chigtan was caught up in the conflicts between Ladakh and Baltistan, and the need for fortifications is readily apparent. The paper by Kacho Mumtaz Ali Khan (a descendant of Chigtan's ruling family), John Bray, Quentin Devers and Martin Vernier examines the castle's history and its archaeological remains, drawing on the evidence of photographs taken by Babu Pindi Lal in 1909.

The castle looks in two directions culturally as well as politically. According to local tradition, Chigtan was founded by a migrant from Gilgit. One of the inner buildings of the castle complex made extensive use of timber lacing in a style reminiscent of the older mosques and castles of Baltistan. By contrast, the front building with slightly tapering walls is firmly rooted in Tibetan architectural tradition. On a similar note, Tsering Malik is understood to have been the first member of his family to adopt Islam and his name is a composite of Buddhist and Muslim elements. The small mosque at the foot of the castle incorporates a 'lotus' design in its doorway, as well as hybrid dragons carved on the capitals of the central pillars. Careful examination shows that the capitals must have come from an earlier building, possibly the castle itself. The dragons show features that are reminiscent of the Central Asian steppe cultures' animal style as seen in some of the most notable petroglyphs discussed in Tashi Ldawa's paper in the beginning of the volume.

The 19th and 20th Centuries

In 1834 an army led by Zorawar Singh invaded Ladakh on behalf of his master, Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu. The invasion marks a definitive turning point because it led to Ladakh's incorporation into the dominions first of Jammu and then of the combined princely state of Jammu & Kashmir within Britain's Indian Empire. From now on Ladakh's political alignment was with South Asia even though it retained its cultural and religious connections with Tibet.

The Dogra invasion was a profound shock for Ladakh's Buddhist leaders, not least because it was accompanied by widespread physical destruction and looting. In Lamayuru, according to a chronicle by Bakula Rangdröl Nyima Rinpoche (Ba ku la Rang grol nyi ma), the original buildings of the monastery were all but destroyed. As abbot, Bakula Rangdröl Nyima was responsible for supervising the monastery's reconstruction and rebuilding the Chenrezik

Lhakhang (sPyan ras gzigs lha khang) in the northern section of the monastic compound was particularly dear to his heart. As Kristin Blancke explains in her paper, the temple contains a mural representing the visions one encounters in the intermediate state between death and rebirth (as described in the *Bar do thos grol chen mo*, known in the West as the “Tibetan Book of the Dead”). These murals appear to be without parallel elsewhere in geo-cultural Tibet.

Another iconographic theme seldom represented on Tibetan murals is the saga of Kesar of Ling (Gling Ge sar).² Here, John Bray discusses a set of Kesar paintings that formerly existed in the house of the Kalon (bKa’ blon) family at Changspa, near Leh. The first Western references to the paintings appear in a footnote to an article by the Moravian missionary Karl Marx in 1891 and Francke’s assistant Babu Pindi Lal was able to photograph them in 1909. At that time the owner had already begun to whitewash the paintings and they have since disappeared completely, to the extent that the Kalon family now has no memory of them. Pindi Lal’s photographs are therefore all the more important as a testimony to a lost art work.

Despite the destructions of the past, the aesthetic quality of much of the more recent Buddhist painting and sculpture in Ladakh is often of a high quality. Filippo Lunardo’s paper analyses a particular mural in the new assembly hall of Spituk monastery, built and decorated during the second half of the 20th century. That painting is a visualization of the “assembly field (*tshogs zhing*) of gurus and deities according to the *bla ma mchod pa* liturgy, a practice aimed at the accumulation of merits necessary to achieve the final goal of the union of emptiness and great bliss, as expected in Vajrayāna praxis. It serves as evidence of the continuing vitality of Buddhism in Ladakh in recent decades.

Monisha Ahmed’s paper examines the trade and use of silk brocade in Ladakh, skilfully drawing a link between the art-historical evidence and contemporary practice. She notes that the murals of the Alchi Sumtsek reproduce textiles made with various techniques: some would have been produced in Ladakh itself while others—including brocade—would have come in through trade. When the English traveller William Moorcroft and his companion George Trebeck travelled to Ladakh in 1820, they found that Chinese brocade was among the merchandise that they saw arriving on caravans from Central Asia. However, in more recent times Benaras (now Varanasi) has replaced China as a source for high-quality brocade. The article discusses the role of a

2 During his fieldwork in eastern Tibet (1997) Erberto Lo Bue recorded one instance of a cycle of murals devoted to the Kesar saga, painted on the walls of a cloister in the Sa skya monastery of Wara (Wa ra) in. Whereas the latter survived the destruction caused by the Cultural Revolution, the Ladakhi paintings were not so fortunate.

Benaras Muslim family, the Kasims, in preserving and developing the tradition to the present day.

Contemporary Conservation Challenges

The last three papers in the collection confront the problems of conservation. Ladakh is rich in historical monuments from monasteries, mosques and chortens to castles and palaces. Many of them are rapidly falling into disrepair. So what can and should be done to preserve them?

The Old Town of Leh is a prime example both of the challenges of conservation and of potential solutions. In their contribution André Alexander and Andreas Catanese report about the challenges of conservation as well as the discoveries they made during the work they carried out implementing the Leh Old Town Project. They pay attention not only to the original structure and urban development of historical Leh, but also to the planning of homes and temples in the town, where they discovered ancient murals under a coat of whitewash in the Maitreya Temple below the royal palace. As explained by the authors, the Old Town has considerable importance as one of the few surviving examples of historical urban architecture in the wider Himalayan and Tibetan world. However, in recent years most of the richer families who used to live there have moved to more comfortable dwellings in the outskirts of Leh. Many of the remaining inhabitants live off low incomes and their lives have been blighted by the lack of such facilities as a modern water supply.

Alexander and Catanese's paper argues that there is no realistic prospect of preserving the old houses of the town unless they can be adapted to the changes in lifestyle of their owners and occupiers. Working with the local community, the Tibet Heritage Fund (THF) has set up a programme to revive traditional crafts and building skills in order to restore the buildings while at the same time making them more habitable. Among other techniques, the craftsmen sponsored by THF have revised the use of a kind of clay known as 'markalak' (*mar ka lag*) to waterproof roofs rather than resorting to concrete or corrugated iron. Tragically, Alexander died suddenly in January 2012 at the early age of 47. As his obituarists pointed out, he was in all respects a 'master builder'. It is to be hoped that both the buildings themselves and the THF's wider initiatives will prove to be sustainable long into the future.

Hubert Feiglstorfer's contribution complements Alexander and Catanese's with a detailed examination of the use of earthen building materials in traditional buildings in Ladakh. He includes a scientific analysis of the different kinds of soil as well as additives such as the pulp of Ladakhi apricots that were used to improve their cohesion. Pointing out that many buildings made with these materials and techniques have survived for hundreds of years, and that

now few local people know about types of soil traditionally used as building material, Feiglstorfer emphasizes the importance of recording ancient surviving knowledge in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of traditional buildings. Furthermore, the author argues that it is essential to understand the strengths and weaknesses of traditional building materials and techniques when developing new approaches to architectural conservation.

The concluding paper by John Harrison looks at heritage conservation questions from a wider perspective, raising basic issues such as what the Ladakhi “heritage” is supposed to be and how it ought to be preserved in a changing society. Like several others in this volume, this paper was originally presented in 2007 at the IALS conference in Rome, where its author observed that even the ‘Eternal City’ had passed through a constant process of adaptation and rebuilding in which ancient monuments were often quarried to provide the raw materials for new constructions. The contemporary significance of ancient buildings has often been contested, both in Europe as well as in other parts of India. Reviewing a series of recent initiatives in Ladakh, Harrison notes that much of the restoration work has been undertaken by outsiders from elsewhere in India and from the West. He suggests that this may be acceptable in the short term, but concludes that Ladakhis must be involved to a much greater extent if the region’s architectural heritage is to “survive and become an essential part of the future”.

Looking Ahead

Taken together, the papers in this book serve as a guide to the insights of recent scholarship while helping to define an agenda for the future. The challenges are formidable.

The contributors to the book come from a range of academic backgrounds: history, art history, architecture and archaeology. Looking ahead, it is essential to draw on the insights from all these disciplines while ensuring that they are firmly rooted in historical scholarship, including an understanding of the Tibetan-language written sources. This task demands a willingness on the part of both international and local scholars to cross interdisciplinary boundaries, and to make extensive personal investments in acquiring the requisite linguistic and other skills.

The still greater challenge concerns the future of all aspects of Ladakhi culture, including its built heritage. A recent publication by the Namgyal Institute for Research on Ladakhi Art and Culture (NIRLAC 2008), a Ladakh-based NGO, highlights both the scale of the problem and the potential opportunities.

Starting in 2003, NIRLAC set out to prepare an inventory of Ladakh's cultural resources, a term which it defines broadly to include both religious and secular constructions as well as features of the landscape that are considered to be sacred. The inventory lists new and restored buildings as well as older ones: it covers 400 villages in Leh and Kargil districts and records 4,250 sites. Even this extensive list is far from comprehensive. For example, it covers no more than a small selection of the hundreds of petroglyphs in the region. All too many of the chortens in NIRLAC's listing are listed as being in poor condition or even "danger of disappearance" and in recent years many of the most important petroglyphs—for example a historic inscription near Khalatse—have been destroyed in road-building programmes. In rural Ladakh as in the Old Town of Leh, many of the more impressive secular buildings are no longer inhabited because their owners have chosen to move to newer, more comfortable modern constructions.

For the architectural historian, restoration may pose its own problems. For example, NIRLAC's inventory shows that mosques all over Ladakh have been rebuilt in 'Turco-Iranian' style in the last twenty years, and there is no indication that the earlier buildings were properly documented before they were pulled down. In other cases insensitive restoration using concrete and other modern materials may have destroyed the aesthetic integrity of older buildings without solving major structural problems. The preface to NIRLAC's inventory rightly highlights the contemporary religious and social aspects of 'cultural heritage'. For instance, it cites the example of a distinguished lama who queried the purpose of restoring a ruined temple with exquisite wall paintings if there were no monks to carry out daily rituals there (NIRLAC 2008a, vol. 1:v.). The various components of Ladakh's cultural heritage have little hope of survival—except perhaps as museum pieces—unless they are valued and form part of the lives of the region's contemporary inhabitants.

A Note on Personal and Place Names

In historical references most authors in this book have given the Wylie transliterations of personal names and place names, in some cases accompanied by a modern phonetic rendering. The spelling of place names has often proved problematic. In many cases there is no consensus among Ladakhi scholars either on their etymologies or on their correct rendering in Tibetan script. Similarly, there is little uniformity in the Romanized spellings used for phonetic renderings in contemporary Western-language publications. We have therefore had to make a series of pragmatic choices without being able to claim

complete consistency or uniformity across the papers, some authors showing preference for phonetic transcription, others for transliteration.

A few examples illustrate the point. The name of the modern capital of Ladakh is rendered as *Sle* or *Gle* in Tibetan script (using the Wylie transliteration), with the latter becoming more common in recent times. Its English pronunciation should more plausibly be rendered as ‘Lé’, but ‘Leh’ has been the most common spelling in European texts since the 19th century and authors in this book follow what they regard as an established convention. In the many cases where there is still no consensus, we have had to make a series of somewhat arbitrary choices, adopting the version that seems to be in most common usage, for example ‘Thikse’ rather than ‘Thiksay’ or ‘Tikse’ for the place name *Khri gse / Khri rtse*.

It would be a welcome step forward if Ladakhi scholars and administrators could agree on a set of standard Romanizations for place names in accordance with a consistent set of linguistic rules. In principle, the task of standardizing existing English phonetic transcriptions of Ladakhi words should not prove too difficult, since there are already two Ladakhi dictionaries (Norberg-Hodge and Thupstan Paldan 1991:188, and Hamid 1998:277) including entries in Tibetan script with the corresponding English phonetic transcriptions and translations. According to such dictionaries, for instance, the English phonetic rendering of the vowel sound in a place name like *Shel* is not ‘Shey’ as in ‘grey’, which would include a final diphthong hardly ever found in Ladakhi pronunciation, but simply ‘Shel’, in this case actually identical with the transliteration of the word.

Nevertheless, realistically, we may have to accept that there is unlikely to be a consensus on these matters for some time to come: even these two dictionaries report different phonetic transcriptions for the same term, one giving for instance ‘markalak’ and the other ‘markalag’ (cf. Norberg-Hodge & Paldan 1991:132 and Hamid 1998:194).

Future scholars working in this area might draw inspiration from the “THL Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan” of the The Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library,³ for instance adopting ‘é’ endings for place names such as *Tiksé* and avoiding inaccurate English phonetic renderings such as ‘Tiksay’ or ‘Tiksey’. However, it should be noted that the transliteration and pronunciation rules that apply to Central Tibet cannot simply be transferred to Ladakh. For example, the descendants of the kings of Ladakh reside in a village whose name is written and transliterated as ‘Stog’ or ‘sTog’ (again using the Wylie system). A Central Tibetan reading the written version of this place

3 See: www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/#!essay=/thl/phonetics/.

name would pronounce it as 'Tok', but Ladakhis say 'Stok', and presumably have done for centuries.

In many cases the search for a Tibetan etymology may be misleading anyway. The *La dvags rgyal rabs* writes 'dKar skyil' for the site now known as 'Kargil' (Francke 1926:128), and this certainly looks 'Tibetan' even if its precise meaning is unclear. However, local oral tradition suggests that a 'Dard' named Kargi founded the original settlement and that it was earlier known as 'Kargilo' (dKar gyil lo), using the 'Dard' suffix '-lo' to mean 'Kargi-place'.⁴ As this example shows, the favoured Tibetan literary spelling of a place name at any one time does not necessarily bear any direct relation to its historical or linguistic origin: in geo-cultural Tibet, as well as in many other regions, bogus etymologies have often been created to suit shifting cultural, religious and political fashions. In this as in other respects, contemporary Ladakh reflects diverse linguistic and cultural influences rather than a single source.

4 The etymologies of Ladakhi place names are among the many topics that merit further investigation. We are grateful to Rebecca Norman for her observations on this topic, and to Bettina Zeisler for her own views and the information on 'Kargilo' which draws on local sources in Khalatse and Kargil. On this point, Francke (1926:253) cites the spelling 'dKar gyil lo' in a Khalatse villager's account of the Dogra wars. He adds that the 'munshi' who wrote down the villager's oral testimony "contrived to embellish it with as many classical Tibetan words and phrases as he thought necessary, to make the account acceptable to educated men". In Ladakh, Western writers have applied the term 'Dard' to the inhabitants of villages of Dha and Hanu who speak a dialect of Shina. On the issue of the 'Dard' presence in Ladakh see Clarke (1977).