

### 3. HISTORY OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE

#### *Editorial introduction*

Research into Ladakh's artistic and architectural heritage constitutes one of the most exciting aspects of contemporary scholarship in the region. Recent findings have opened up important new lines of enquiry which shed light not only on Ladakh's artistic development, but also on the wider religious and political history of the region.

The presentations at the colloquium highlighted both the many new discoveries that are still being made, but also the dangers to the physical survival of some of the most important historical monuments. The monasteries and the communities that they serve will always remain the prime custodians of Buddhist religious art. At the same time, the task of studying and preserving Ladakh's artistic heritage calls for a spirit of close cooperation between religious and government leaders, as well as local and international scholars.

As yet, there is no single, generally accepted institution to coordinate the preservation and documentation of the region's cultural heritage. Such coordination is all the more important because of the rapid pace of change, and the widespread destruction of older buildings and monuments.

Rock art provides one of the most readily available surviving sources of evidence for Ladakh's ancient history and *Tashi Ldawa Tshangpa's* paper presents a preliminary overview of the petroglyphs of Nubra. He relates his own observations to recent research in the neighbouring areas of Pakistan. Both the paper and the discussion at the conference itself underlined the need to raise awareness of the importance of this rock art: in recent years some of the most valuable art has been destroyed, for instance in road-widening schemes.

*Christian Luczanits* takes a new look at one of Ladakh's most famous buildings: the Three-Storeyed Temple or Sumtseg (*gSum-brtsegs*) in Alchi. Traditionally, the foundation of Alchi monastery is ascribed to the famous translator Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055 AD), but

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art historian Roger Goepper attributes the Sumtseg to 1200-1220 at the earliest. Luczanits' analysis supports this dating and discusses the temple's relationship with Central Tibetan art of the same period.

*Wolfgang Heusgen* also examines the Sumsteg, but from the perspective of an architect concerned with the structure of the building. Currently, despite objections from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), there are plans to erect a dam for a hydropower project only 1.5km north of the Sumtseg. Construction will require rock-blasting on the banks of the Indus, which in turn will trigger a series of seismic shock waves. Heusgen explains the potential implications for the structure of the Sumtseg, and argues that in the worst case the seismic waves could damage or even destroy the building. He concludes his paper with a call to respect and preserve the Sumtseg "with all our might".

On a happier note, *John Harrison* reports on the role of the Achi Association—a Swiss-based cultural organisation—in repairing the Tsuglagkhang temple at Kanji, using traditional methods and materials. The temple has important 14<sup>th</sup> century paintings but, as Harrison notes, the skills of the temple's builder were less advanced than those of the artist. In recent years, the temple has suffered from rain damage inflicted by a leaking roof. His paper discusses the careful repair work that has served to reinforce the temple's foundations and restore its roof.

Finally, *Erberto Lo Bue* turns to Ladakh's living artistic tradition, focusing on the lives and work of the two greatest living artists in Ladakh. These are the painter Tse-ring-wang-dü, born probably in 1944 at Nye-mo; and the sculptor Nga-wang-tse-ring, born in 1936 at Tia, not far from Ting-mo-gang. Both teach classes at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies at Choklamsar; and both represent the great Buddhist artistic tradition of Ladakh as well as its links with Tibet. Lo Bue shows that the work of 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Buddhist artists has been deeply rooted in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. The quality of their work is of a very high standard, and they have played a crucial role in preserving Buddhism in the region.

*Editors*