

AFGHANISTAN

Bamiyan: Reinforcement of the Lower Gallery in Front of the Eastern Buddha Niche

Since the removal of the scaffold in 2010 to the site of the Western Buddha the totally stabilised niche of the 38-metre Eastern Buddha presents the silhouette of the former relief with its conserved original remains on the rear side. Here in the niche and the lower caves, thanks to funds from the German Foreign Office in 2010 and 2011, a small “site museum” or “site interpretation centre” (fragments, exhibition of posters, etc) with lapidarium was installed. The successful “opening” of this area, which in future will be accessible to visitors together with the lateral stair cases of the Buddha niche, was highly welcomed on 19 June 2012 by the participants of a stake holder meeting in Bamiyan.

The chances of partial reconstruction of the famous Buddhas of Bamiyan – in the sense of a “reassembling of existing but dismembered parts” (anastylosis, article 14 of the Venice Charter) has been discussed since 2002 in the Expert Working Group Meetings for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley World Heritage Property (for example, recommendation of the meeting in Tokyo, December 2011, point 10: *feasibility study be undertaken to determine whether or not a partial reassembling of fragments of the Eastern Buddha could be an option...*) and representatives of the Afghan Government have strongly supported this idea:

- *I believe that if we are to undertake any sort of remedial measures to rebuild or partially rebuild the statues of Bamiyan, it should be for this higher goal of the site of Bamiyan as a symbol of memory of the tragedy of war and conflict in Afghanistan and as a statement of peace and hope for a better future* (H. E. Omar Sultan, Deputy Minister of Information and Culture, 2 March 2011 at the Forum in UNESCO).
- *We saw last year that the Eastern or Small Buddha has been stabilized and repaired. I therefore think it is an appropriate time to return to the question of the reconstruction or the so-called ‘anastylosis’ of the Small Buddha. There is still strong support in Afghanistan for the reconstruction of at least one of the Buddha sculptures destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. Reconstruction itself is a common practice at sites all around the world destroyed by war and natural disasters and so we should find a way for Afghanistan to repair this damage also* (H. E. Minister Dr. Sayed Makhdoum Raheen, speech in Aachen, 11th Expert Working Group Meeting, Aachen, December 2012).

Also under measures in terms of site security the ICOMOS reports since 2011 have several times presented the reinforcement of the lower gallery of the Eastern Buddha as a matter of priority: *The lower gallery in front of caves 2–4 should be protected by means of a horizontal cover against particles that*

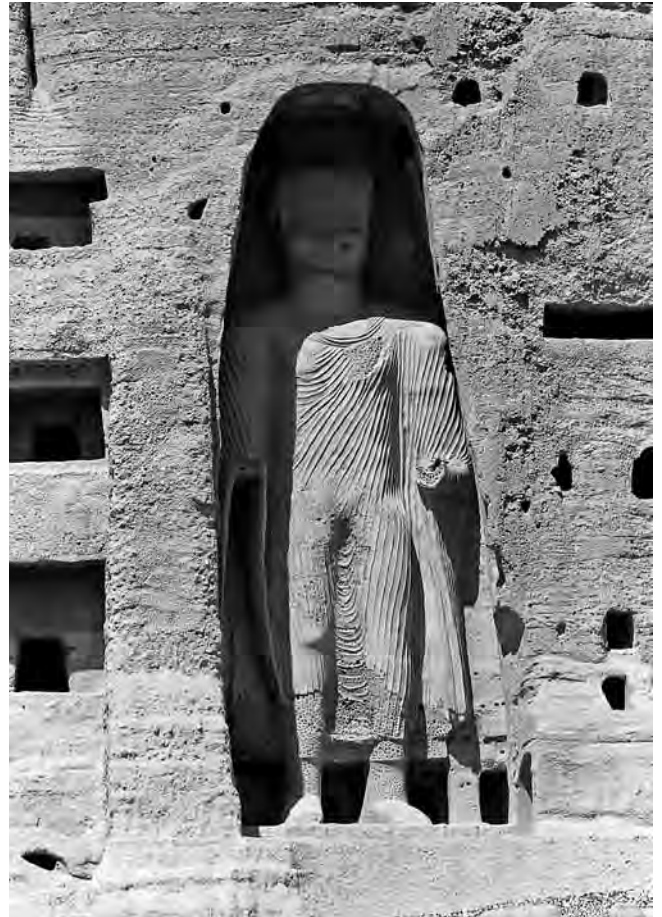
might fall down, following the front line of the former relief, – a solution with two pillars to commemorate the feet of the statue that were already reconstructed in the 1970s during the restoration campaign carried out by the Indian-Afghan team (Technical and Financial Report, 14 December 2012). For further details see www.icomos.de/bulletin.php; compare also H@R 2008–2010, pp. 16–18 and *Anastylosis or Reconstruction – Considerations on a Conservation Concept for the Remains of the Buddhas of Bamiyan*, 2002, Monuments and Sites XIX, pp. 46–51, and the contributions to the meetings of the Bamiyan Working Group, e. g. to the 10th Expert Working Group, Tokyo, December 2011: *Preserving the Fragments of the Bamiyan Buddhas and their Future Presentation*.

Since 2002 the safeguarding measures of ICOMOS Germany have contributed considerably to the history of the Bamiyan Buddhas by a wealth of insights and outstanding findings – for instance, the Buddhist relics from the time the Eastern Buddha was erected, discovered by restorers Edmund Melzl and Bert Praxenthaler in 2006 and 2008 (Monuments and Sites XIX, pp. 85, 142). In connection with the lower caves and the lower gallery largely destroyed by the blowing-up in 2001 the historic condition of the lower zone with the feet of the Eastern Buddha had to be taken into consideration: the condition around 1886 handed down in drawings and engravings (Monuments and Sites XIX, p. 22, figs. 7, 8); illustrations showing buildings for habitation and stables, involving the feet, probably erected in the first decades of the 20th century (Monuments and Sites XIX, p. 24, figs. 15, 16, photos by DAFA, 1928 and 1933); and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) photo documentation of the restoration measures carried out by the Indian-Afghan team since 1969. Of particular relevance in this context is the condition after the demolition of the annex buildings and the visible historic remains of the feet that were included in the restoration (Monuments and Sites XIX, p. 31, fig. 33, 34); finally, the photo documentation of ICOMOS Germany of the lower caves with lower gallery after the removal of the rubble. In the latter case, the largely destroyed enclosing walls and partition walls, partly already heavily rebuilt by ASI, had to be reconstructed for structural reasons, as base for the rear side of the Eastern Buddha niche. Besides, the very solid and conscientious work of ASI since 1969, which certainly contributed a lot to the survival of the rather fragile Eastern Buddha niche with its caves and the lateral accesses to the upper gallery during the disastrous attacks of 2001, was included as far as possible and maintained for structural reasons in the work of the ICOMOS team during the past years and, as far as necessary, completed with corresponding materials and technologies.

Part of this concept, which to a certain extent considers the restoration carried out by the Indian-Afghan team as the most recent “historic” condition, is the reconstruction of the lower gallery. In connection with the partition walls of the caves, safeguarding the enormous crack behind the surface of the rear side with the



The Eastern Buddha, engraving after P. J. Maitland, in:
The Illustrated London News, Nov. 13, 1886



The Eastern Buddha after the Indian-Afghan restoration, 1977
(photo: Blume, 1977)

original fragments of the statue, leading from the lower vaults up to the height of the statue's head, the lower gallery is part of a structural system which will not only protect future visitors from falling particles but also facilitate in future, step by step, a reassembling of individual salvaged fragments of the figure.

The fact that the reconstruction of the lower gallery in connection with the already completed partial reconstruction of the lower caves, as well as of the lateral accesses to the Eastern Buddha niche and of the upper gallery, stabilised by massive replacements are necessary becomes evident when looking at the similar situation in the lower zone of the Western Buddha niche. Here, where the lower caves with their original decoration in clayplaster (in parts already conserved by Bert Praxenthaler) are much better preserved than at the Eastern Buddha, the accesses to the caves are threatened by massive rock fall: The consolidation of the rear side, already begun in 2013 with the scaffolding and the consolidation of a rock part at the access to the upper gallery in danger of falling off, remains one of the most urgent concerns. Should it become possible to consolidate the entire rear side, similar to the Eastern Buddha niche, it would of course also be necessary to have similar safety measures in terms of a "lower gallery", also imaginable as a modern construction, including the gigantic feet uncovered under a big rubble heap in years of work (see H@R 2008–2010, p. 16). During the ASI restoration these feet were completed by reinforced parts (lower legs of the statue), including considerable parts dating back to earlier centuries. At the Eastern Buddha, the presently unfinished and there-



The cliff with the Eastern Buddha niche
(photo: Maynard Owen Williams, 1931)

fore interim condition of the lower gallery with its brick structure, only meant to serve as supporting layer for the traditional clay plaster, allows different variations: not only the planned reconstruction of the condition around 1970 created by the restoration of the Indian-Afghan team, but also solutions in commemoration of the severely fragmented condition after the demolition of the later buildings for habitation and stables.



The lower gallery before the beginning of the Indian-Afghan restoration, legs partially cleared of the former additional buildings



Feet of the Eastern Buddha after the Indian-Afghan restoration



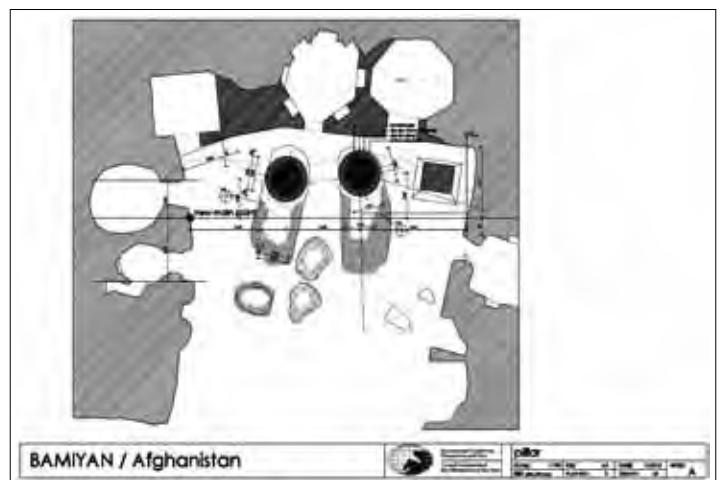
Eastern Buddha niche, the ground level with the destroyed caves in the background

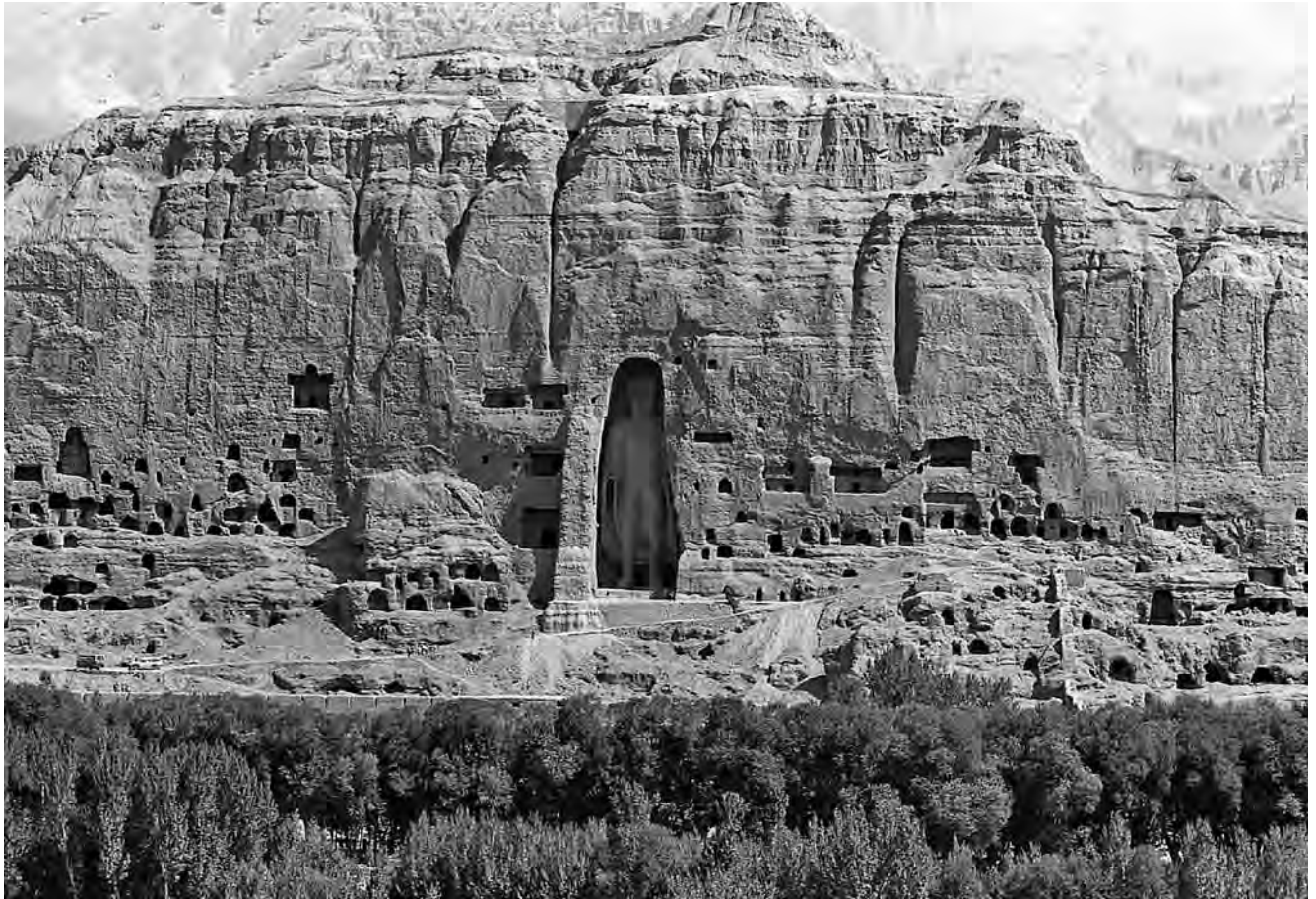
Unfinished pillars commemorating the feet of the Indian-Afghan restoration during the reconstruction, August 2013



Parts of the niche's back wall had to be supported as stone slabs kept falling down

Eastern Buddha niche, ground plan with reconstructed partition walls and pillars





Cliff with the Eastern Buddha niche (Foto: Blume 1977)

In the end we would like to repeat some central aspects for the concept of reconstructing the lower gallery in the niche of the Eastern Buddha on the basis of the well documented conditions before and after the restoration about 1970:

- Starting point of the ICOMOS concept was the question of safety for future visitors to the “site museum” that includes the rearward lower caves, i.e. protection against particles falling from the cliff, also protection against rock fall in the case of severe tremors.
- In combination with the already reconstructed partition walls of the lower caves (see ground plan), the lower gallery can be seen as part of a structural system stabilising the rear side of the Eastern Buddha niche with the remains of the statue. In view of the enormous crack behind the surface of the rear side this stabilisation system is indispensable.
- The lower gallery as stable foundation allows a step-by-step reassembling of salvaged fragments at their original site (reassembling in accordance with article 14 of the Venice Charter) that will emphasise the outline of the statue without hiding the condition of destruction. The lower gallery integrates the existing pillar on the right side with fragments of the ancient vault of the gallery into the overall appearance of the rear front with the original lateral layers of clay plaster still preserved in situ. Under these circumstances the concept of the lower gallery improves the overall appearance in terms of integrity and authenticity of the World Heritage site considerably.

- What’s more, in future the lower gallery, which to a certain extent is “reversible”, will facilitate partial reconstructions in accordance with the statements by representatives of the Afghan government and open up possibilities for future generations to enhance the maintenance, conservation and presentation of the historic and aesthetic values of the Eastern Buddha niche under new perspectives.

ICOMOS acting as advisory body to UNESCO can only give advice within the framework of the international principles of preservation and its experts can only evaluate the different technical possibilities. The necessary decisions on all further steps are a matter of the Afghan government within the framework of the Afghan monument protection law. Saving the fragments of the Buddhas of Bamiyan will only be possible in cooperation and under the guidance of our Afghan colleagues, and we wish to express our gratitude for the close cooperation in former years to the responsible Ministers and Vice Ministers and to the colleagues of the Afghan Conservation Department, most of all to Abdul Ahad Abassi (Dept. of Historic Monuments).

Abridged version of a report by the authors of 24 January 2014

Mes Aynak

In *Heritage at Risk 2008–10* the critical condition of the Mes Aynak archaeological site threatened by a huge copper mining project was already described. Since then the situation seems not to have improved. Rescue excavations have been carried out to salvage as many archaeological objects as possible. Here are some extracts taken from a recent article on the current situation, published by ARCH (Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage):

of geology, mining engineering, archaeology, history and economic development to study the specific situation in Mes Aynak. The experts met at SAIS in Washington, D. C. to develop realistic strategies to ensure real economic benefit to the Afghan population, safeguard their environment and health, consider livelihoods during and after the mining, and preserve the cultural treasures at Mes Aynak. The meeting was co-chaired by ARCH's founder Dr. Cheryl Benard and CACI Silk Road Program Chairman, Fred Starr. Other experts included Philippe Marquis, an archaeologist with DAFA, the French Government's archaeological mission in Afghanistan. (...)



General view of the site of Mes Aynak, on the left the central part of the archaeological site (photo: DAFA)

Experts Show How to Preserve Ancient Mes Aynak Ruins While Safely Mining Copper Near Kabul, Afghanistan

Mes Aynak is one of the largest copper deposits in the world, located 20 km south of Kabul in Logar Province. The huge site looms as major revenue source for Afghanistan, a country deeply in need of economic growth. Mes Aynak is also a vast complex of over twenty ruin locations, including numerous 5th–6th century Buddhist monasteries, a fortress, and evidence of even older Bronze Age settlements buried beneath the rubble of ancient copper mines. Archaeologists from around the world hold that Mes Aynak represents a cultural heritage site of immense importance. The Aynak region also sits on top of the underground water sources serving agricultural areas and population centers, most notably Kabul and Jalalabad but extending into Pakistan.

Mes Aynak's unique cultural heritage, coupled with its strategic environmental characteristics and its vast mineral wealth under contract to be mined by the MCC Corporation of China, make it a complex international issue where the potential for economic growth abuts the huge risk of an environmental catastrophe and the irreparable loss of Afghanistan's world-class cultural heritage.

On June 4 and 5, 2012, ARCH International and the Central Asia Caucasus Institute's Silk Road Program at SAIS/Johns Hopkins, convened a group of highly experienced experts in the fields

What the experts discovered is provisionally encouraging – but only if certain key provisos, currently not in place, are met. Their key findings: Mining, environmental protection and heritage preservation can and must be part of one integrated plan and effort, with shared and transparent planning and information. Openness, transparency, and information sharing amongst all parties is absolutely critical. With current dearth of information, it is not possible to evaluate the scope of the project and connect the dots between mining operations, environmental protection, and respect for cultural heritage sites.

A realistic timetable for mining operations, environmental impact assessment, and protection of heritage sites is needed. This timetable must clearly spell out MCC's plan on infrastructure, opening blocks of site, etc for conserving all other resources, particularly the heritage sites.

It is also crucial that MCC play a more active role engaging with different stakeholders, especially those focused on the environmental and cultural dimensions of this project.

This includes MCC dedicating long-term financial resources to the effort to protect cultural heritage sites. It also includes similar long-term financial support to establish a local museum to house and protect artifacts recovered from the Aynak site. Such funding represents a very small percentage of overall revenue expected to flow from this immense mining project and reflects international best practices.

ARCH's Cheryl Benard summarizes the group's over-all focus on the issue: "The dominant narrative has it that Afghanistan

needs resources right away, that mining can commence immediately and money will begin to flow into government coffers shortly and in large amounts. Because the need is so great, some believe that losses to cultural heritage unfortunately have to be accepted.”

Currently in Mes Aynak, mining operations are temporarily on hold while a salvage archaeology effort rushes to remove the most valuable artifacts that can be carried away.

The experts’ 30-page meeting report is in preparation. In it, they balance keen interest with caution – Mes Aynak has the potential to become a positive model for mineral extraction that respects and preserves cultural heritage, but it can also become a costly and irreparable failure.

ARCH Summary

As the United States and NATO prepare to scale down their mission in Afghanistan, and with it the massive international funding that has essentially been subsidizing the country and its government for the last ten years, the country has appeared to face a tragic choice. It truly possesses rich mineral resources. But due to its ancient history, these typically lie under priceless archaeological remains. Mes Aynak, where the Chinese company MCC obtained the contract to mine copper, perfectly represents this dilemma. Copper is extremely lucrative – but how do you put a price on a 5000 year old buried city containing multiple monasteries and settlements possibly going back to the Bronze Age, a site at least as significant as the tragically lost Buddhas of Bamiyan?

All of this historical material is in imminent danger of destruction by the mining endeavour, although a plan for minimal salvage archaeology was put into place. This plan still foresees the destruction of the site and everything still buried beneath it, but

it does allow for removal of whatever smaller statues and artifacts can be carried away by a small archaeological team lead by DAFA, the French archaeological mission to Afghanistan.

ARCH International’s mission is to achieve a partnership of cultural conservation, economic interests, and national development that can rescue and restore Mes Aynak and become a model for the many projected future situations where archaeological remains and mineral deposits share the same physical location.

www.archinternational.org



Architectural remains of the Buddhist monastery (photo: M. Jansen)