

The first ICOMOS mission to Kabul and Bamiyan (12–21 July 2002)*

The participants of the first ICOMOS mission to Afghanistan were Dr. Jörg Faßbinder (geo-physicist, Bavarian State Conservation Office), Prof. Dr.-Ing. Michael Jansen (RWTH Aachen), Prof. Dr. Michael Petzet (President of ICOMOS International), Dipl.-Ing. Mario Santana Quintero (M.Sc. of Conservation, member of ICOMOS Venezuela), Dr.-Ing. Zou Yazou (geo-engineer, University of the German Armed Forces, Munich). The ICOMOS group was looked after by Mr Jim Williams, representative of UNESCO. The Swiss expert on Afghanistan, Paul Bucherer-Dietschi (Foundation Bibliotheca Afghanica, Switzerland), participating in the mission as an observer, arranged a dinner on 14 July with the Afghan Minister of Urban Development and other members of the cabinet. In Kabul, we were also taken care of by colleagues from the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (Leslie Julian, A. Hasib Latifi, Abdul Wassay Najimi), with whom ICOMOS also worked in the Babur Park. On the day of our arrival in Bamiyan (15 July) our delegation was given a warm welcome by the governor/mayor who informed us about the local situation and the urgent wish to ‘reconstruct’ the Buddha.

The Babur Park

The Babur Park, fortunately cleared of mines some time ago, has become a major attraction for the people of Kabul despite the considerable damages during the war and the strongly neglected state at present. After initial visits and talks at the end of May there was opportunity to investigate the progress of repair made in the meantime, particularly with regard to the surrounding walls with their towers. Further possible steps of restoration were discussed. The ruins of the palace, the former German embassy, were inspected with representatives of the AKTC. It was important that the presence of Ratish Nanda, member of ICOMOS India, could be coordinated with our visit. With Mr Nanda, in charge of a park in Delhi designed by the son of Babur, we could discuss the choice of plants for the Babur Park and the questions of the historic water system.

The conservation concept for the Babur Park should refer to the state around 1640 when the mosque was built and the gardens were remodelled. This state is documented in a contemporary description, and in some details is still recognisable. In this context a number of old photos showing the park before the alterations of the 20th century were also of importance. Nevertheless, the restoration concept had to accept certain later additions, such as the pavilion from the 19th century. A relevant prerequisite for the planned excavations was the magnetometer prospection made on five test surfaces by Jörg Faßbinder. In spite of iron remains spread all over the gardens, which made magnetic field measurements difficult to implement, interesting results were achieved. On the other hand, the three-dimensional survey of the entire gardens with a total station (Prof. Jansen and Mario Santana), provide an important basis for future planning.



First ICOMOS mission to Bamiyan in 2002

Repair of historic residential buildings

Although Kabul was badly destroyed during the war a historic quarter (Ashekan wa Arefan) has survived with an abundance of important building fabric threatened by decay. Here there was a chance to implement various pilot projects together with the AKTC in the necessary urban repair. The undersigned and Professor Jansen visited a number of buildings in that quarter together with the architect Abdul Wassay Najimi.

With the funds at our disposal it was originally intended not just to launch pilot projects to repair urban architecture, but also vernacular architecture in Bamiyan. Visits to villages and farmsteads in Bamiyan, some of the latter resembling fortifications, proved however that in many places reconstruction had already begun. This is mostly repair work with traditional materials and techniques, as modern materials are not available. From a conservation point of view it is good to know that vernacular architecture is preserved in that traditional way. Under these circumstances, some of the funds made available for vernacular buildings in Bamiyan could be used for initial stabilisation measures to save the remains of the Buddhas in Bamiyan.

The Buddha statues in Bamiyan

The condition of the rock surfaces after the blowing-up of the Buddhas by the Taliban in March 2001 needed to be investigated by experts so that methods to stabilise the historic remains could be developed. The ICOMOS team started comprehensive measurements and investigations during the first mission in July, which – in contrast to public speculation about the necessary steps to “reconstruct” the Buddhas – resulted in a reasonable conservation concept (cf. pp. 46–51). The geo-engineer Dr. Zou Yazou, with whom the undersigned already worked in the 1990s on a concept for the stabilisation of the Great Buddha of Dafosi (Der Große Buddha von Dafosi/The Great Buddha of Dafosi (ICOMOS – Journals of the German National Committee XVII), Munich 1996), made first analyses of the state of

CHAKALAQ IX, IX.3, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BALKH, X.1, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.1, BALLIWEH



11. (not to scale) (see notes)

CHAKALAQ TERE, IX.1, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BALKH, X.2, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.11, BALLIWEH



8.10. Larger section (sketch)

197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.2, BALLIWEH



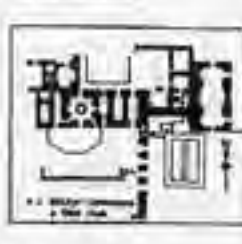
8.6. (not to scale) (see notes)

BALKH, PRODUYREH



197 Bal

BALKH, X.2, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.2, BALLIWEH



8.1. Sanctuary A—upper level

197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.2, BALLIWEH



8.2. Sanctuary C

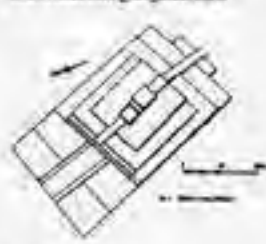
197 Bal

ARBAU, X.1, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BACHHAZERGAN, IX.1, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BALKH, X.1, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.2, BALLIWEH



8.3. Sanctuary A—lower level

197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.2, BALLIWEH



8.7. (not to scale) (see notes)

197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.2, BALLIWEH



8.8. Sanctuary I

197 Bal

197 Bal

BAMIYAN, X.2, BALLIWEH



8.9. Sanctuary XII

197 Bal

197 Bal

KOH-FIRAKA, X.2, BALLIWEH



197 Bal

conservation of the fragments and the two Buddha niches (see p. 52 ff.). The main aim is to stabilise the rocks around the niches and the remains of the Buddha statues, being aware that not the whole cliff with its innumerable caves that have been in a process of weathering and decay for centuries can be consolidated, but instead only special areas and cracks which have become dangerous due to the explosions. The measurements with the total station (Mario Santana, see figs. pp. 51, 56–59) are a new basis for the future work. The magnetic field measurements by Jörg Faßbinder on a surface of c. one hectare in front of the Great Buddha have revealed architectural structures in the subsoil so far unknown. Although the ground was covered with iron scrap documenting the combat operations of the past years, the measuring surface could be cleared completely of this iron scrap. The result of this magnetometer prospection proves the existence of house ground plans as well as of building structures in the area of the Great Buddha. Clearly recognisable in the magnetic picture are also paths leading towards the statue as well as a boundary wall with entrance running along parallel to the rock. In a measuring campaign of

a few days it would have been possible to measure the entire area between the two Buddhas – possibly the monastery area? – if this area had not been so contaminated by mines (Concerning magnetic prospection see Helmut Becker, Jörg W. E. Fassbinder, *Magnetic Prospection in Archaeological Sites, Monuments and Sites VI*, Munich 2001).

As far as the stabilisation of the most dangerous parts threatened to fall off and the safeguarding of details such as historic plasters on the Small Buddha are concerned, there is an urgent need to react quickly. The heaps of rubble reaching into the side caves of the niches would have to be fenced off to protect visitors and the clearing of material should only be done by experts and by no means as part of a general ‘tidying up’. It was also observed that heavy helicopters of the American forces fly much too low over this region, thus causing dangerous vibrations.

M. Pz.

*Abridged version of a report by Michael Petzet, 29 July 2002.



DATA BANK CENTER Afghanistan

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◁ Databank of monuments and historic sites in Afghanistan, established in cooperation with RWTH Aachen ▷