



Western Buddha niche with shelters constructed in 2004 and a group of buildings, including the ICOMOS office and a mosque (right), repaired in 2002

2005

In 2005, the salvaging and safeguarding of fragments, which had begun in June 2004, were taken up again thanks to funds provided by the German Foreign Office. After the winter break, which the provisional shelter erected the previous year had survived in good condition, the team had to focus on organising the work, receiving active support from representatives of the Afghan Central Government and the Governor of Bamiyan. The works, continued until October 2005 and involving up to 50 workers from Bamiyan and its surroundings, were managed and supervised by the small ICOMOS team, consisting of Dipl.-Ing. Georgios Toubekis (RWTH Aachen) and restorers Edmund Melzl and Bert Praxenthaler (supported in September by restorer Ernst Blöching). For without permanent control an adequate handling of the fragments would not be guaranteed despite

the support from our Afghan colleagues. Under these circumstances, in 2005 it was possible to salvage almost two thirds of the fragments of the Western Buddha and also to make considerable progress at the site of the Eastern Buddha.

Works in the area of the Buddha niches, accompanied by a de-mining team, were delayed time and again by ammunition findings. In order to move large rock fragments a crane as well as a fork lifter were hired. At the site of the Western Buddha more than 100 fragments with sculpted surface could be salvaged. These rocks weighing up to 30 tons were deposited in the new shelters. The salvaging situation is much more difficult at the site of the Eastern Buddha, because the slope drops quite steeply there, thus only allowing a small platform of little depth immediately in front of the Buddha niche. However, by means of a crane placed further down the access road about 160 rock fragments could be salvaged here as well. For depositing these fragments further shelters were laid out inside the encircling wall to the left and right of the gateway.



View of the Bamiyan valley with the former bazaar in the foreground

Special attention was given by the restorers to the small salvaged fragments originating from the surfaces of the two giant statues: several layers of clay plaster, wooden pegs and ropes used for forming the folds of the Buddhas' robes, also plaster fragments with polychrome remains. Countless fragments were documented and deposited in the shelves of the ICOMOS office. Not only can these remains, made up of organic material, be dated by means of the carbon 14 method (see the summary on carbon dating, p. 235); they can also answer questions concerning the original colouring of the Buddhas and the different treatment of the two giant statues' surfaces. Dr. Michael Urbat (Palaeomagnetic Laboratory at the Geological Institute of the University of Cologne) accompanied the mission in September to evaluate the possibilities of assigning the rock fragments by geological methods (cf. report p. 90). The geological methods allow a precise indication of the original position of the stone fragments, which can then be integrated into 3D models of the niches developed by the RWTH Aachen (see report

Toubekis, pp. 117–121) – a crucial prerequisite for future measures in accordance with an anastylosis, for which Prof. Dr.-Ing. Fritz Wenzel (Büro für Baukonstruktionen, Karlsruhe) developed suggestions (see figs. p. 81).

The Fourth Expert Working Group on the Preservation of the Bamiyan Site (Kabul, 7–10 December 2005, see below) discussed, among other things, a laser beam project “for the projection of the artist's images of Buddha in Bamiyan”, apparently costing more than 60 million dollars, – a gigantic light-show with no less than 13 Buddhas by the Japanese media artist Hiro Yamagata who lives in California. The Working Group showed some interest in a future development of tourism and in the equipment for generating power. However, the group noted that ‘the solar panels and cables should not interfere with the Bamiyan landscape’.

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