

Report on Salvaging Rock Fragments, 2005

Western Buddha

So far, at the Western Buddha more than 100 rock fragments with clearly recognizable sculpted surface have been recovered. These stones weighing up to 30 tons were deposited in the shelters. The large pieces were put on scantlings, the smaller ones on wooden pallets made by carpenters in the Bamiyan bazaar. The smaller stones without any recognizable surface as well as the sand are deposited at

an acclivity in the north-western area of the fenced-off terrain, to the left of the Buddha niche. After the recovery the rock fragments are numbered, documented photographically and in writing and – if appropriate – stored in one of the shelters. Depending on the weight of the rocks polyester heavy-duty belts and steel ropes with wooden interlayers are used for the transport with a crane. The Afghan workers exposed the rock fragments layer by layer by putting one shovel of sand after the other into a wheelbarrow. In this process the material was always checked for finds, such as parts of the clay surface, wooden pieces, etc. These special finds were collected and stored in the shelves of the ICOMOS office.



Recovery of rocks by means of a 35 t heavy-duty-crane at the Western Buddha

The shelters at the Western Buddha from above. The roof is partly open to lift Buddha fragments into the shelter by means of a crane.

Shelves in the ICOMOS office for the storage of finds





△ ▽ Progress made in salvaging the fragments of the Western Buddha in 2005





△ The crane lifting fragments from the upper platform of the Eastern Buddha niche ▷



▽ The Eastern Buddha niche from above



Eastern Buddha

In 2005, the salvage of fragments also began at the Eastern Buddha. The situation at the Eastern Buddha is much more difficult as the slope drops relatively steeply, only leaving a small bricked-up platform of three metres depth in front of the Buddha niche. A wheel loader can only just drive on that platform. The access road is narrow and unpaved. In the niche manual work was therefore predominant.

It was not possible to position the crane in the centre immediately in front of the niche. West of the platform the base for the crane was enlarged and levelled. Half beams put under the crane arms improved the stability of the crane. Thus, the crane could almost reach the entire platform surface in front of the Buddha niche.

So far, up to 160 rock fragments have been recovered from the Eastern Buddha niche. Another problem at the Eastern Buddha was the lack of shelter space. For the storage of the sand drain fleece was laid out six metres beneath the path on a terrace, and with the gravel material of the surrounding area an enclosing wall on the valley side was erected. Using a chute the recovered sand could be stored here. In the west, inside the enclosing wall and to the left and right of the gateway additional storage space was laid out. As an interim depot a widening of the path to the west and beneath the platform and the niche was chosen. These areas were fenced off, walled in and roofed.

Support of the geological investigation

Dr Michael Urvat from the Palaeomagnetic Laboratory of the Geological Institute at the University of Cologne joined the mission for several days (in Bamiyan from 31 August to 7 September) to evaluate the possibilities of spatialising the rock fragments with geological methodologies. At the Western Buddha measurements of a relatively high resolution were carried out from a ladder in the lower area of the back wall. In a vertical distance of 10 cm a Kappameter was used to define the susceptibility of the back wall and analogously the values of the rock fragments. At the Eastern Buddha comparable measurements could be carried out at a height of about 30 metres in the area of the left shoulder by using the means of abseiling.

Bert Praxenthaler

State of the Eastern Buddha niche on 6 September 2005: more and more rock fragments appear in the rubble

