

2006

In 2006, the ICOMOS activities in safeguarding the Bamiyan Buddha statues continued from mid-June to end of October thanks to funds provided by the German Foreign Office. In the same year the Trevi Company used funds from the Japan Fund in Trust to carry out the most urgent emergency interventions in the upper corridor on the rear side of the Western Buddha niche and in some minor lateral parts, based on a concept developed by Claudio Margottini. By stabilising the rock above the niche and on the upper west side Trevi also completed the stabilisation of the Eastern Buddha niche, where the company had already secured the most dangerous part on the upper eastern side in 2003/2004 (see report Margottini, pp. 175 ff.). Three Russian aircraft bombs found under the rubble on the floor of the east side of the Western Buddha niche delayed the salvaging work considerably. The first bomb, containing 2/3 TNT and 1/3 Napalm, was blown up on 8 September thanks to the help of the New Zealand garrison. The ICOMOS team recovered all material from the Eastern Buddha niche and once the niche had been cleared work started on putting up the scaffold made available by the Messerschmitt Foundation. Supervised by Georgios Toubekis and in cooperation with the building research department of the Technical University of Vienna the cleared niche was completely examined in preparation for a CAD model. The aim was to carry out a documentation by means of a 3D laser image scanner: a three-dimensional recording of the Eastern Buddha niche



Restorer E. Melzl and the bomb

(see also report Toubekis, pp. 117–121) serving as a basis for future consolidation measures and also for a virtual reconstruction. In addition, in October 2006 Prof. Fecker made in-depth investigations of the rock mechanic aspects in the Eastern Buddha niche. Also, the geologist Dr. Michael Urvat (institute of geology and mineralogy at the University of Cologne), after his short missions in October 2003 and September 2005, used the results of his third geological mission for a comprehensive analysis (see report, pp. 89–102). A highlight of this salvaging work was the sensational find of a relic in the rubble next to the right foot of the Eastern Buddha on 20 July 2006. The ICOMOS activities were also presented at UNESCO/ICOMOS workshops in the Afghan Foreign Ministry in Kabul on 31 July and in Bamiyan on 2 August 2006.

Blowing-up of an aircraft bomb on September 8, 2006





Relic with manuscript on birch bark found in the rubble near the Eastern Buddha's feet

A sensational find in the rubble of the Bamiyan Buddhas on 20 July 2006

During the work to save the remains the giant statues revealed one of their secrets: Quite miraculously a relic that can be linked to the creation of the Eastern Buddha had been preserved in the sand under the stone rubble. In the summer of 2006 the floor level of the Eastern Buddha was reached, the cave rooms badly damaged by the explosions were exposed and most of the fragments were salvaged. In the course of this work Edmund Melzl and his Afghan team made a completely unexpected find on 20 July 2006. Under the rubble, between the remains of the Eastern Buddha's feet, fragments of writing on birch bark were found wrapped in a plain textile pouch. Two copper sheets, one of them gilt and with a floral decoration and a copper ring, could come from a wooden receptacle. The seal on the textile wrapping probably shows the bird Garuda and the snake Naga. In addition, two clay pellets, thought to contain ashes from the cremation of Buddha, were found.

The manuscript written on birch bark is supposed to be a canonical Buddhist text, which as the quintessence of the Buddhist teachings was used in reliquaries and in connection with consecration rituals. One may therefore assume that the find, which under the given circumstances is quite sensational, is part of a votive offering hidden inside the giant statue since its consecration and that it may originally have included more pieces. In any case, the writing seems to match a possible date of creation for the statue in the 6th century AD. Fragments of a leaf turned out to

come from a *ficus religiosa* or Bodhi tree. According to the legend, Buddha achieved enlightenment under a Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya. The original Bodhi tree was destroyed in 600 AD by King Sesanka. The event was recorded by Xuanzang, along with the planting of a new Bodhi tree sapling by King Purnavarma in 620 AD. The leaf thus could have come from the original Bodhi tree. Furthermore, in one of the rear caves a number of so far unidentified fragments of writing were discovered. The relics were handed over to the Governor, Dr. Habiba Surabi.

M. Pz.

Handing over the relic to the Governor, Dr. Habiba Surabi

