



Discoveries in Western Tibet and the Western Himalayas: Essays on History, Literature, Archaeology and Art. Piats 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, vol. 10/8 by Amy Heller; Giacomella Orofino

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Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 129, No. 3 (July–September 2009), pp. 503–505

Published by: [American Oriental Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20789426>

Accessed: 25/02/2015 03:51

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Reviews of Books

Discoveries in Western Tibet and the Western Himalayas: Essays on History, Literature, Archaeology and Art. Piats 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003. Edited by AMY HELLER and GIACOMELLA OROFINO. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, vol. 10/8. Leiden: BRILL, 2007. Pp. x + 240, maps, plates, and figs. \$107.

Recent research increasingly establishes the distinctiveness of the cultures in the Western Himalayan regions within the Tibetan cultural sphere. This is not only true for the historically largely independent region of Ladakh, or currently peripheral regions of Tibetan culture such as Kinnaur, but also for those on the West Tibetan plateau itself and thus within the present-day Autonomous Region of Tibet. The contributions to the volume—resulting from a panel organized by the editors at the 2003 Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies at Oxford University—represent a further step in defining this distinctiveness in greater detail. The three sections in which the essays are organized, namely archeology and art, literature, and history, convey the wide range of subjects covered. The distinctiveness of the Western Himalayan region may well go back to the enigmatic kingdom of Zhang zhung, which is the subject of Mark Aldenderfer, who had the chance to excavate archeologically in West Tibet. On the basis of the meager finds at a site called Dindun, in the vicinity of the well-known cave sites of Piyang and Dung dkar (as spelled by the author), Aldenderfer attempts to define Zhang zhung ethnicity from an archeological perspective. The site comprises an area of village houses and three graves and is datable to the period of 500–100 B.C. Taking it as representative of Zhang zhung, and comparing the house and grave typologies found there with those reported from other sites—from the trans-Himalayan region, e.g., the German excavations in Mustang, to the Byang thang plateau, the latter extensively surveyed by John Vincent Bellezza—the resulting definition is still a very narrow one, but it may well provide a nucleus for a better understanding of the early archeological evidence in the region, especially once more of the archeological sites can be dated.

With the establishment of the Purang Guge kingdom in the second half of the tenth century the region became a center of Buddhism. Three articles focus on the architectural and artistic evidence of the first flourishing of Buddhism in the region from the tenth to the thirteenth century. In a methodologically highly problematic paper, Gerald Kozicz analyzes two temples of the Nyar ma ruins in Ladakh. Founded in the late tenth century but abandoned some centuries later, only a number of architectural shells remain of the once flourishing monastery. Kozicz focuses on what is arguably to be considered the earliest structure within the complex and a second monument of unspecified age with the remains of a *mchod rten* in its niche. The geometry of these temples is studied under the assumption that they reflect the geometry of a mandala. Although his study reveals a number of interesting proportional relations, it lacks the foundations for its premises. The geometry of “the mandala” used is not defined—in fact, the two temples are actually based on two proportionally different “cosmograms” (figs. 6 and 10)—nor is the construction process the analyses are supposed to reveal comprehensible as such. Concerning the latter, it is remarkable that the analyses do not consider the thickness of the walls at all. Further, the study ignores the fact that grid systems of different varieties were used and well known in Indian architecture, even as the artistic style in which these temples once were decorated clearly derived from the Indian subcontinent.

Somewhat later are the newly discovered caves of Byang rtse mkhar phug, a site north of Tholing in the Guge region, which are introduced for the first time by Huo Wei from Sichuan University. One of the caves contains highly interesting and fairly well-preserved murals of three mandalas covering a wall each. Curiously here the Vajradhātu mandala on the main wall (plate 3) is flanked by a Cakrasaṃvara mandala on the left wall (plate 4) and the main mandala of the *Sarvadurgatipariśo-dhanatantra*, which is only partly preserved, on the right wall (plate 5). This arrangement subordinates

a prominent Anuttarayogatantra mandala to the main mandala of the Yogatantra class and thus differs from the arrangement visible in one of the Dunkar (Dung dkar) caves, where the Guhyasamāja mandalas takes precedence (see Luczanits, *Buddhist Sculpture in Clay: Early Western Himalayan Art, Late 10th to Early 13th Centuries* [Chicago: Serindia, 2004], 113–14, 119–22). On the other hand, the emphasis on the main mandala of Buddha Vairocana conforms to the earliest representations of the Cakrasaṃvara in the Tibetan tradition, datable to around 1200, where Vairocana was still considered the primary Buddha and not Akṣobhya, as was the case later. Although the descriptions of the cave mandalas are incomplete (pp. 26–27) and sometimes erroneous—e.g., the eight cemeteries of the Cakrasaṃvara mandala are not recognized (p. 26) and the offering goddesses in the corners are called *pāramitā* (p. 27)—the mandalas are rightly identified. The second cave, said to contain a *mchod rten*, sadly is not illustrated at all, although the shape of the *mchod rten* may well give a clue for an approximate dating. Although a general date in the twelfth century is clear for the painted cave, a more detailed attribution will only be possible once better pictures are published (see below).

Spanning a bow from an architectural depiction on the east *torāṇa* of Sanchi 1 (plate 1) to monastery and palace depictions of the last century (plates 14–16), Marialaura Di Mattia's observations on architectural frames in Western Himalayan art are too general and unsystematic for a focused and specialized volume such as this one. In fact, besides describing a selection of fairly well-known examples, the aim of this study remains unclear.

Founded contemporaneously with Nyar ma, and counting, with Nyar ma and Tholing, as the three major foundations of the Purang-Guge Kingdom, the monastery of Khojarnath (Khor chags) in Purang yielded a surprising discovery during restoration work. In her contribution Giacomella Orofino reports the discovery of a hoard of loose manuscript leaves, eight standing clay figures, and thousands of *tsha tsha* in “three walled hollow rooms” of the Assembly Hall (*du khang*). Neither the clay sculptures nor the *tsha tsha* are illustrated in the article, although they may well give an idea concerning the date of the concealment. Instead, after giving a short historical survey of the Khojar temples, Orofino focuses on the philological analysis of a *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* fragment and concludes that it likely dates back to the earliest phase of the monastery. No further report on the find at Khojar has come to my notice since.

An even greater discovery is the subject of Amy Heller. At Gnas gsar dgon pa in the small village of Bi cer in Northern Dolpo, Nepal, a whole library consisting of 642 volumes with approximately 150 illuminations was temporarily sealed away behind a recently constructed altar. In her contribution the author focuses on the historical information contained in the preserved dedication pages of these manuscripts, which range from the twelfth to the fifteenth century and reflect the political and religious history of the place. Their information is complemented by historical sources in the same library. At the end of the study three exemplary dedication texts of different periods are translated, demonstrating their wealth of information. An earlier article, written the year the find was surveyed comprehensively, already conveyed the art-historical significance of this find (Heller, “Terma of Dolpo: The Secret Library of Pijor,” *Orientalia* 32, no. 10 [2001]: 64–71). Together with the historical information extractable from the prefaces and texts found in the library, the book illuminations will provide a first more detailed picture on the early art of western Nepal and its relationship to the surrounding areas.

That western Himalayan manuscripts occasionally feature such dedication pages had already been shown by Giuseppe Tucci, whose manuscript collection was catalogued by Elena De Rossi Filibeck. In her contribution to this volume, she collects all prefaces in the Tucci Tibetan Fund, all dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, either summarizing them and referring to an earlier study or reproducing them in text and translation. Such prefaces actually are poems or songs and have a peculiar structure summarized by both De Rossi Filibeck and Heller in different words (pp. 134, 153).

Certainly a highlight of the volume is Erberto Lo Bue's detailed analysis of the murals and inscriptions in the Gu ru lha khang at Phyi dbang, Ladakh, which results in its attribution to the mid-fifteenth century. The temple is one of a large group of early Ladakhi, Bka' brgyud pa affiliated monuments ranging in date from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, which still await more detailed analyses and the establishment of their interrelationship. Critically surveying the paintings and their captions, which name secular and religious dignitaries, Lo Bue can convincingly establish a sound basis for the context in which this temple was established. What is lacking in his study, however, is an appendix with the unedited versions of the captions found in the temple.

The Nepalese region of Dolpo was and is also an important center of Bon. Marietta Kind narrates the history of the “hidden valley” of ‘Jag ‘dul, a remote side valley in the westernmost part of Dolpo. Once housing a village with a Bon monastery, the valley was eventually abandoned and “reopened” in 1869 as a place of pilgrimage. The local scholar, ‘Gro mgon Bstan ‘dzin nyi ma, responsible for the reopening also wrote an outline (*dkar chag*) of the holy sites in the valley, which is summarized as well. Sadly the study on the foundation of nearby Bsam gling monastery, which the local Geshe Wangyal intended to contribute to the seminar, never came about because of his untimely demise and is only represented in the form of the original abstract delivered for the seminar (p. 197).

The final contribution, by Christian Jahoda, also focuses on the recent past. On the basis of two register books from Tabo monastery and of English reports from the nineteenth century, he clarifies and summarizes the socio-economic organization between the village communities and the monasteries of the Spiti valley. Particularly interesting is the so-called “Religious Administrative Unit” (*chos gzhis*), which appears to have been independent of the political divisions of the valley and assured the income of the major monasteries. Although similar direct support of the monastery must have existed from the Purang-Guge kingdom onwards, it is to be doubted that the complex picture that emerges for the Spiti valley indeed reflects an organizing principle established already at that time, as the author suggests by including some quotations from the Mnga’ ris rgyal rabs on the support of Tholing monastery (pp. 220–21). The map on page 240 is not based on the one published in Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, *Tabo, a Lamp for the Kingdom: Early Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Western Himalaya* (Milan; New York: Skira; Thames and Hudson, 1997), 22, 33, as stated, but clearly utilizes the original file of my drawing prepared for that publication.

The range of subjects the volume covers illustrates the growth in the field. Although the volume is not interdisciplinary as such, each contribution necessarily had to resort to results and methods of diverse disciplines. Consequently, the division into the three sections appears arbitrary and somewhat misleading. The most important paper on art history is in the history section (Lo Bue), the literature section is equally concerned with history (in particular Heller and De Rossi Filibeck), and the final studies are as much anthropological as historical. While most papers present new discoveries and insights definitely worth publishing, a considerable part of them are said to be or have to be considered preliminary, often providing only a first glance on the subject at hand.

There is plenty of material on art history, but those contributions suffer the most from the very poor quality and small size of the illustrations. While an attractive and well-done volume otherwise, the picture quality is that of color pictures reproduced on a black and white consumer laser printer without any adjustment at all. In the present-day scholarly publishing world, authors and editors have become used to preparing the texts for publications themselves, but this should not be the case for illustrations, which should remain in the responsibility of the publisher. An hour of picture adjustments by an expert would have benefited the publication enormously.

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On the Cusp of an Era: Art in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa World. Edited by DORIS METH SRINIVASAN. Brill’s Inner Asian Library, vol. 18. Leiden: BRILL, 2007. Pp. vi + 402, plates. \$264.

All but one¹ of the fourteen essays in this volume are based on papers delivered at a symposium at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri (November 11–14, 2000) by a distinguished gathering of international scholars convened and organized by Doris Srinivasan. The title and introduction would lead one to expect much more of an emphasis on art history over a broader

1. The chapter by Jason Neelis, “Passages to India: Śāka and Kuṣāṇa Migrations in Historical Contexts,” appears in the book, but was not presented at the symposium.