




**M A F I L**

20

16

## Mission Archéologique Franco-Indienne au Ladakh



Mission archéologique au  
Ladakh, Inde.  
Du 15 août au 15 septembre 2016.

Martin Vernier, Carnet de mission 4  
avec les contributions de :  
L. Bruneau, S. Broglia, M. Poux et  
E. Shingh





Laurianne



Martin



Marion



Samara



Stella



Ekta



Gombo



Rigzin



Spalzing

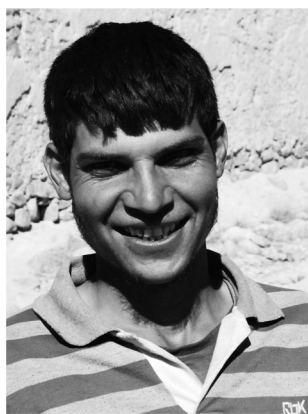


Spaldon





Mohamad



Jagdish



NattanLala



Rajender



Sanjay



Sabjad

## Les membres de la campagne 2016

### Direction:

- Mme. Laurianne Bruneau, archéologue.
- Mr. Martin Vernier, archéologue/directeur adjoint.

### Membres:

- Mme. Stella Bickelmann, archéologue/chef de fouille.
- Mlle. Samara Broglia, doctorante EPHE.
- Mlle. Marion Poux, doctorante EPHE/ Anthropologue.
- Mlle. Ekta Singh, doctorante HNB Garhwal University.

### Equipe locale :

- Mr. Tsewang Gombo, tour operator, responsable logistique.
- Mme. Tsetan Spalzing, cuisinière.
- Mr. Rigzin Phalgon, aide de camp.
- Mme. Tsering Spaldon, cuisinière adjointe.

### Ouvriers :

- Mr. Nattan Lala Sharma.
- Mr. Mohamad Iqbal.
- Mr. Sabjad Ahmed.
- Mr. Rajender Sharma.
- Mr. Sanjay Sharma.
- Mr. Jagdish Raj.

## MISSION BACKGROUND

The Franco-Indian Archaeological Mission in Ladakh (Mission Archéologique Franco-Indienne au Ladakh, hence MAFIL) was established in 2012 after 5 years of informal contacts between the two co-directors: Laurianne Bruneau and Simadri Bihari Ota. The MAFIL mission was approved in autumn 2012 both by the ASI and the Advisory Commission for Archaeological Research Abroad of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development.

The MAFIL is the first large scale-research oriented archaeological mission in Ladakh. Noticeably the ASI has rarely worked in collaboration with a French team. Keen to develop archaeological research in this Himalayan region, the ASI opened an independent local office in Leh, the cultural capital of Ladakh, in 2011. In 2016, Mr Tsering Phunchok, Deputy Superintending Archaeologist, was appointed head of the Leh Mini Circle and co-director of the MAFIL project. Martin Vernier (associate researcher, ArScAn/UMR7041) acted as joint director on the French side.



Zicac 21

## THE 2016 CAMPAIGN

# 016

MAFIL's fourth campaign ran from 15th August to 15th September 2016.

Fieldwork at Khardong Choskor was carried out on a daily basis by French members of the team only. Assessment visits by the representatives of ASI (Mr S.B. Ota, Mr Tsering Phunchok and DG, Dr. Rakesh Tewari) took place during the excavations.



## THE SITE OF KHardong CHOSKOR

The Khardong Choskhor site (choskor: religious enclosure, literally: religious site for circumambulating) was chosen for fieldwork in 2015 because of the importance of its Buddhist remains and its location, north of Leh oasis, just below the present-day Khardong pass leading to Nubra.

M. Vernier has explored the site many times over the past 15 years (in 2003, 2004, 2007 and 2008) as well as recently with L. Bruneau during the 2014 season.

The archaeological area measures about 800 m by 300 m (located between 3790 m and 3910 m asl): 137 built structures were inventoried and mapped (on a 1/100 scale topographical map and on a detailed insert plan at the scale of 1/100). Among these are 3 ruined temples and about 50 ancient stupa.



These ruined monuments indicate that Khardong Choskor was an important religious compound. This site is quite unique for Ladakh since among Buddhist monuments are traces of potential residential buildings, irrigation works and burials along with petroglyphs. During 2015 fieldwork, a systematic collection of surface pottery was carried out (about 1200 sherds) and samples for C14 dating collected from the 3 temples. A detailed documentation of temple 1 was done and a trial pit was opened into that same temple.

Based on the evidence of the architectural plan of temple 1 as well as its building technique and material, in comparison with other ancient Buddhist temples in Ladakh and in the Western Himalayas (Himachal Pradesh, Kinnaur and Tibetan Autonomous Region), the site of Khardong Choskor was most certainly in use at the beginning of the 2nd millennium AD.

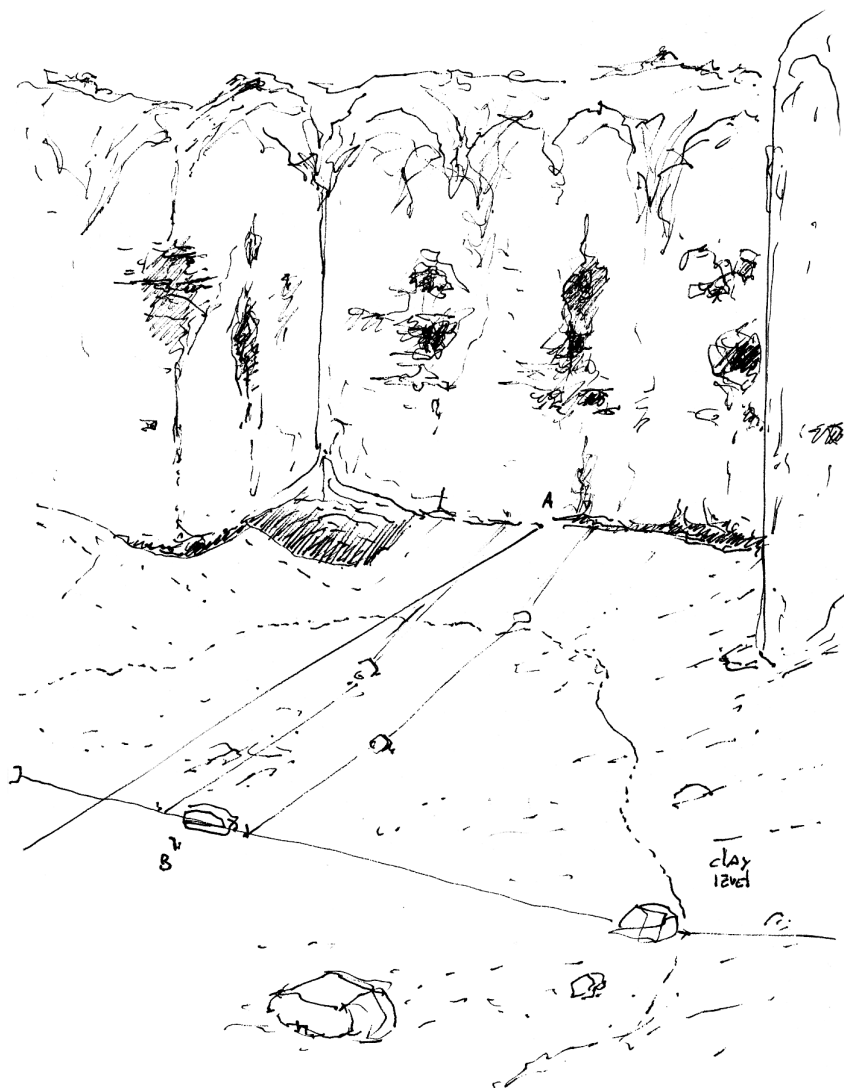
However, at the present state of research, it is not possible to say whether all remains on the site are contemporary of this temple or if there were successive occupations.



## WORKS CARRIED OUT IN 2016

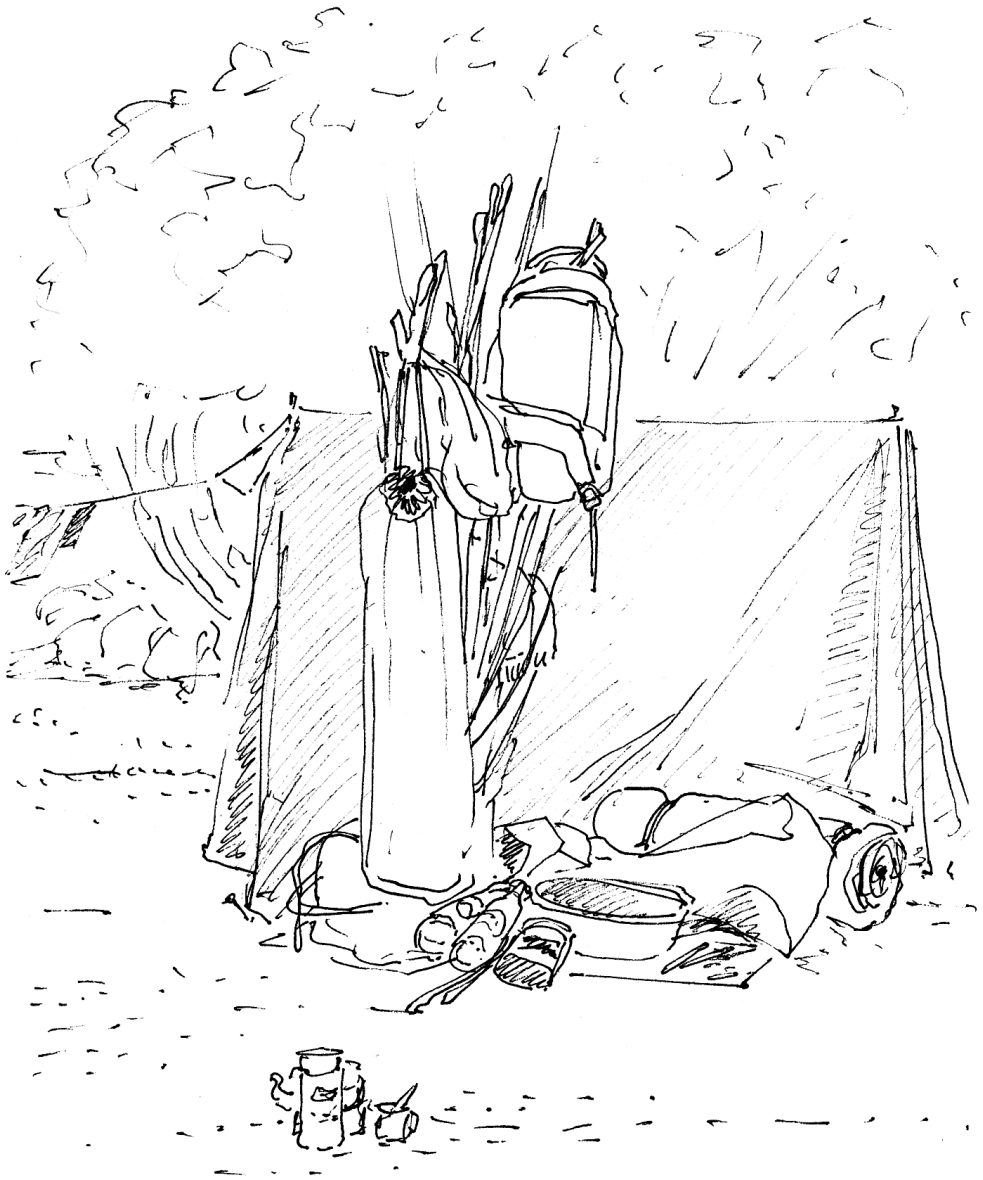
In agreement with the representatives of ASI and CIBS, three areas were chosen for excavations:

- temple 1: L-LEH-Bu2-Co1
- a room within structure 84: L-LEH-Bu2-Co84-Lo4
- a buried stone structure within built area 69: L-LEH-Bu2-Co69-Lo17

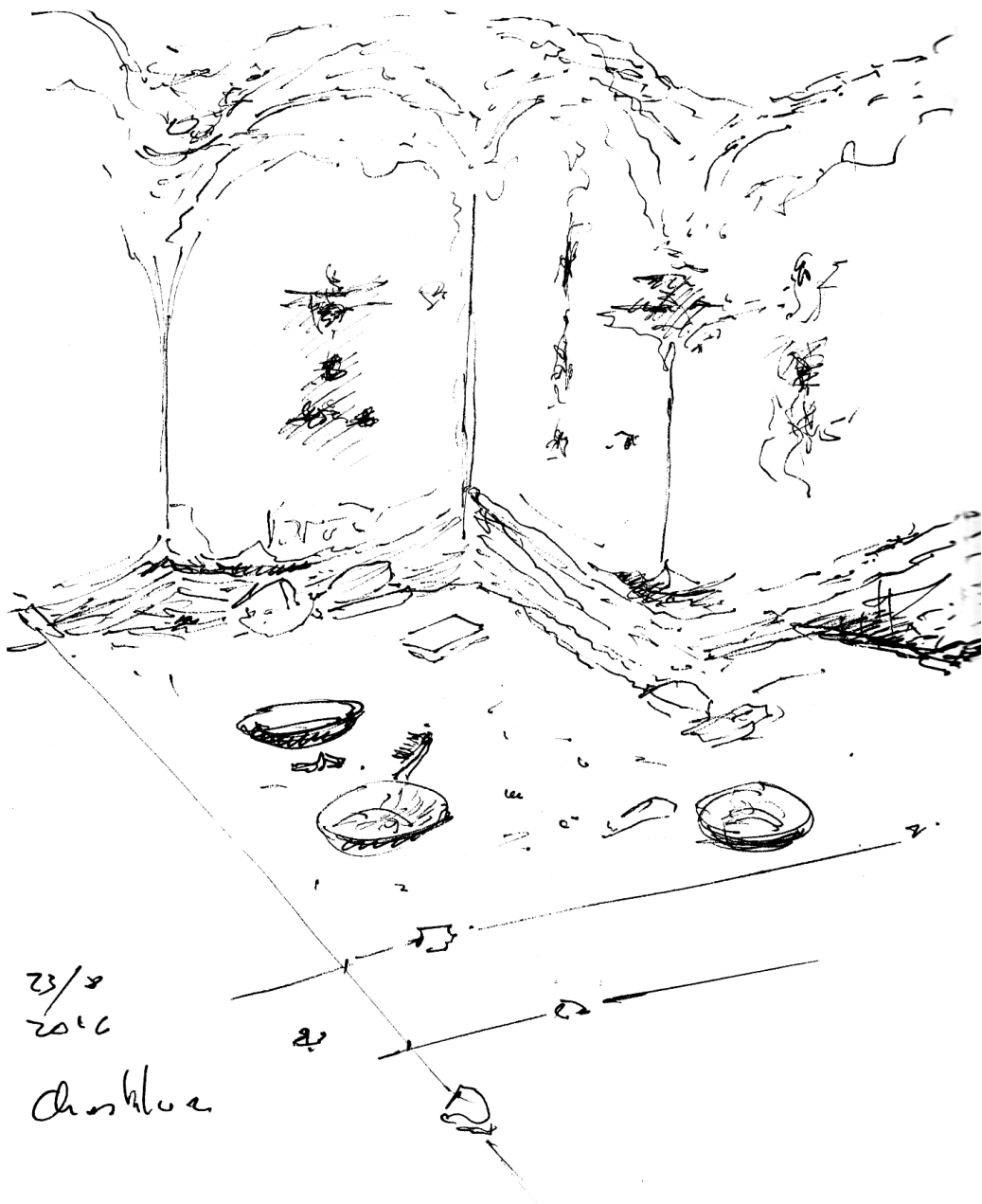








22/2 choklor camp





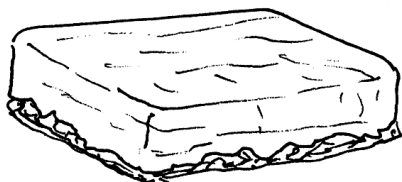
## DOCUMENTARY FILM

In August and September 2016, a team of French journalists, working for the Delhi office of France 2, having obtained the necessary permission from the Tourism Department of J&K, filmed the excavations conducted by the MAFIL team at one of the Buddhist temples of the Khardong Choskor site. The MAFIL's work will be part of a documentary dedicated to Buddhism in South Asia that is scheduled to go on air in January 2017.

29/8  
2016

France 2  
on site





coulé le 25/08 17.00  
 pilé le 26/08 09.30 → transporté au  
 camp 12.00

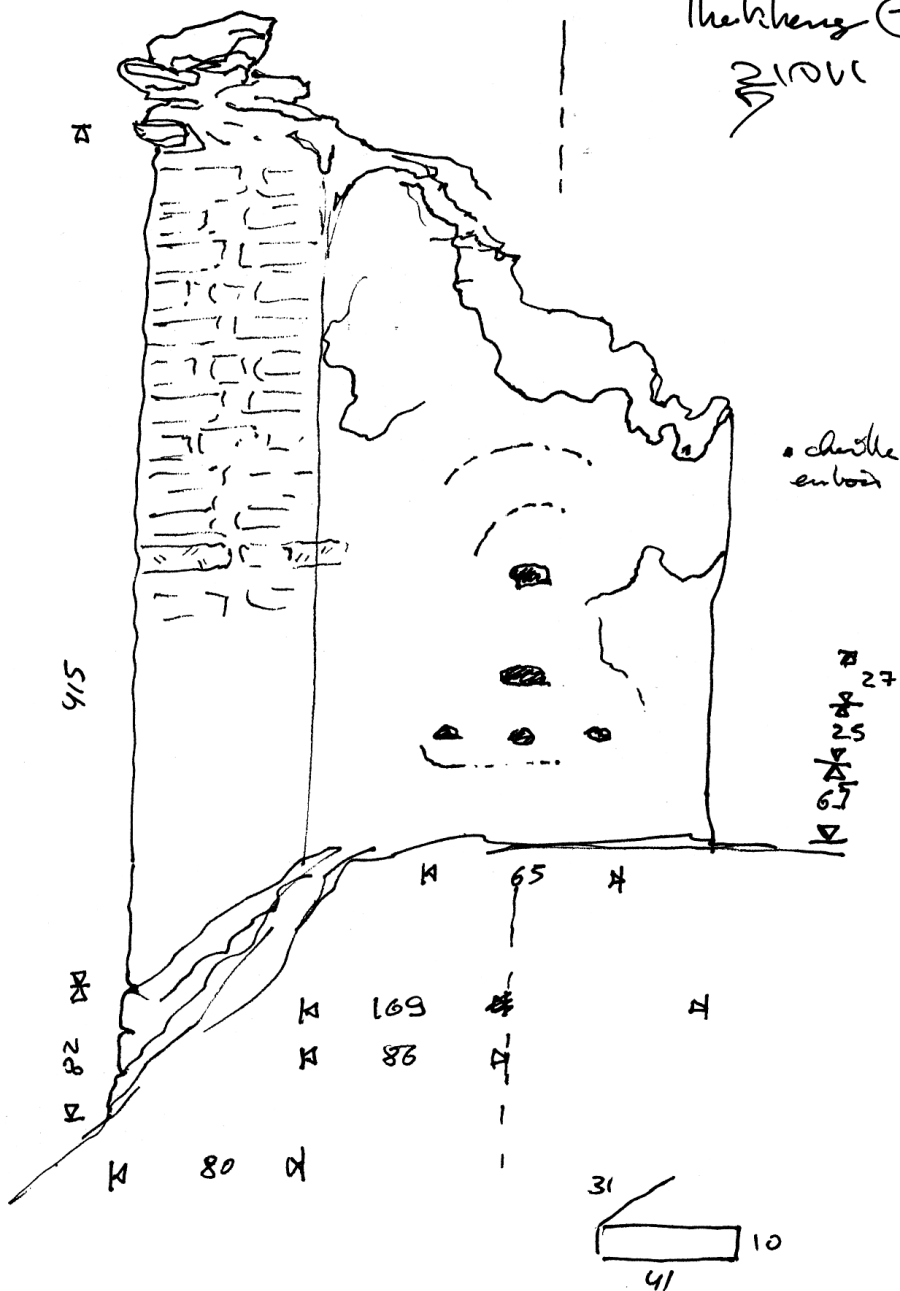




Chesham  
Jan 2006 AB N-5



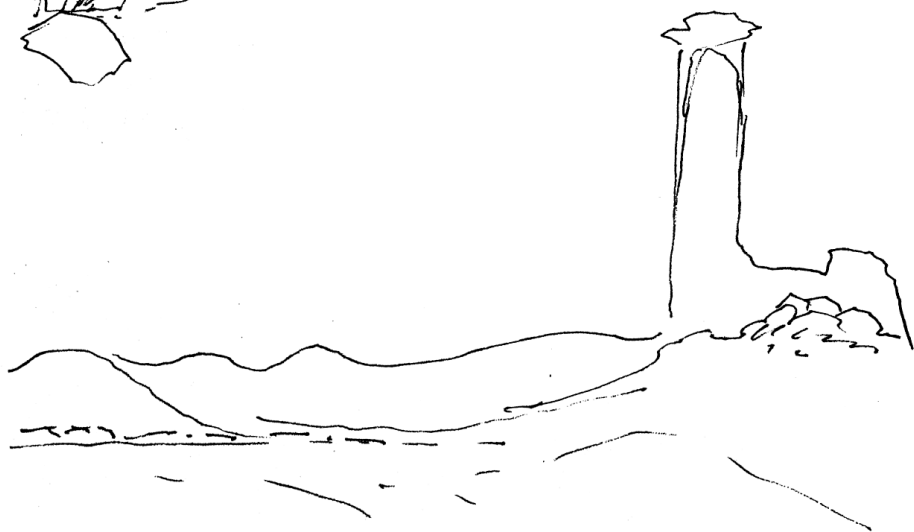
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2100







alipimentu ab  
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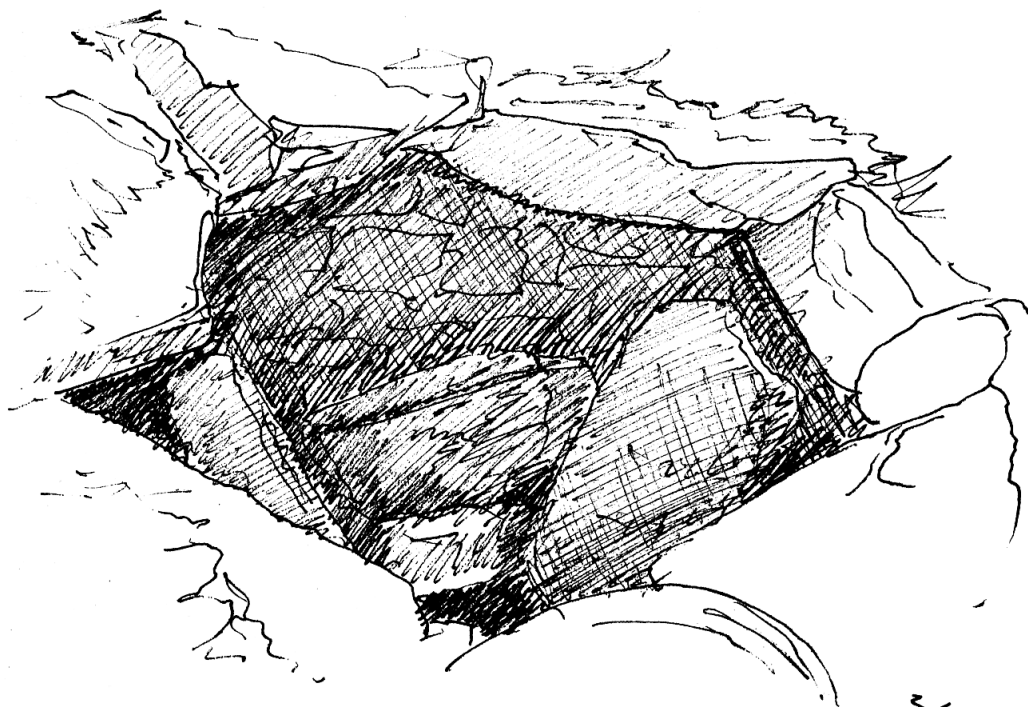


tipu de "mondale" ab de clauca de  
trăas de cotus cîrîbl.

7 cherille ramanie in rita dans la  
magomerie

The diversity and quantity of remains at the site of Khardong Choskhor are remarkable. Evidently the site was mainly religious in nature (with 3 ruined temples and about 50 stupas). At the present state of research, it is not possible to assign a final function to any of the other built structures documented at the site. Also we are unable to say whether the Buddhist site was built on an already existing site or if the Buddhist site was reoccupied, or both.

During 2016 campaign we focused on the central area of the site arranged around temple 1. Preliminary excavations conducted in structures 69 and 84 in vicinity of the latter did not enable us to comprehend their function nor their relation (if any) to the temple. We are unable to state whether or not these are contemporary or if they result from an anterior or posterior (or both) occupation(s) at the site.

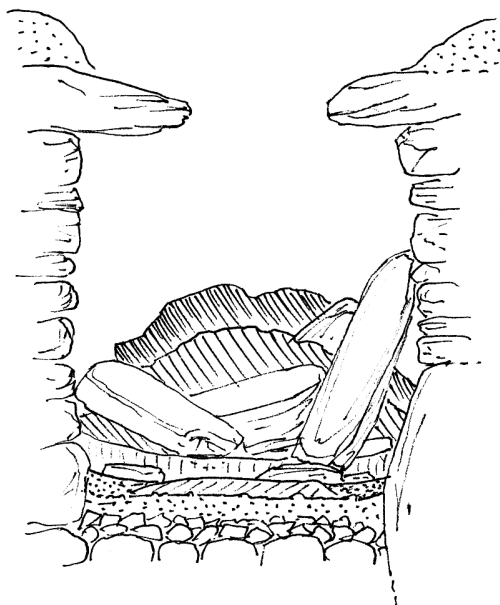


avant  
dégagement 3/9/2016

diable femelle  
 des déchets  
 de la fosse  
 "tante?"



3/09  
 2016



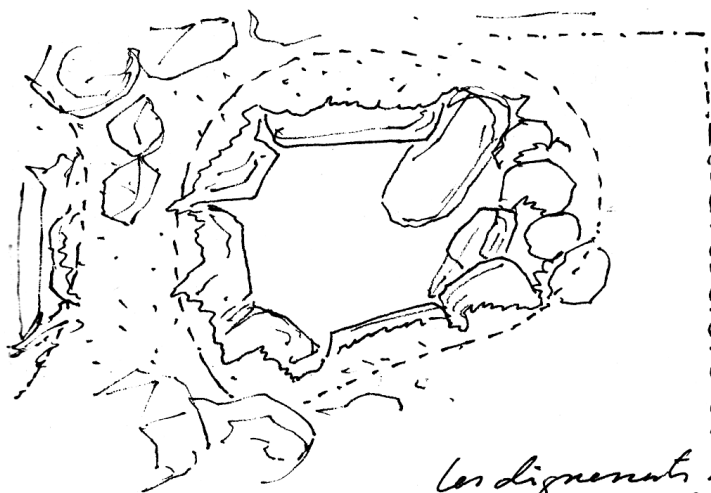
L-LEH-BaZ-Cobg

1018

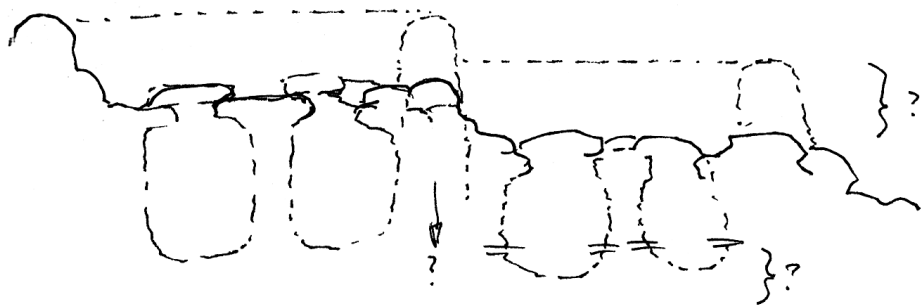
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Coups

6/9.2016

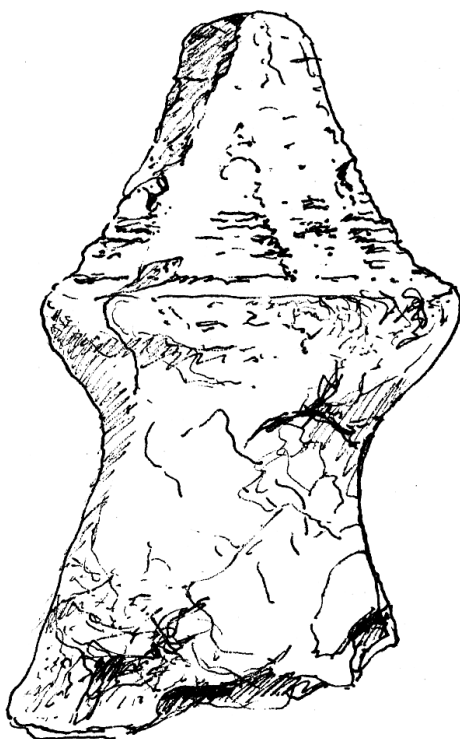


Les dignitaires semblent  
imposer les structures par  
des murs-traces.  
Pent-ôtre au en surface?

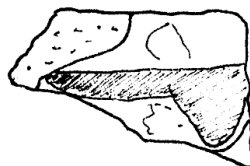


We reach firmer ground when dealing with temple 1. Its ground plan (rectangular with an apse and addition of a verandah) and building technique (mud bricks on a stone foundation) can be compared to preserved early Buddhist temples (11th-13th centuries) in the Western Himalayas, in Ladakh as well as in Himachal Pradesh, Kinnaur and the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

The flat stones exposed in the middle of Khardong Choskor's temple have been interpreted as pillar bases. However, since only half of the inner surface of the temple was excavated it is not yet possible to state whether it was four or six pillared.



fragment  
" motifs  
accolis ? "



albre  
nir  
blanc



perles ?



roll  
design.  
fragment.

from the  
05/09  
2016.

Concerning the iconography and style of the clay decoration of early Buddhist temples in the Western Himalayas we can rely on the in-depth and reference study carried out by C. Luczanits.

He writes: "Constituting the main images of many early western Himalayan monuments, the clay sculptures represent the main iconographic topics, and an examination of them is indispensable for the identification and analysis of the iconographic programme of the temples." Nine seated deities, made of clay, were occupying the apse and side walls of the temple of Khardong Choskor. This particular arrangement of life-size deities hanging on the walls at eye level and seating on lotus thrones, strongly recalls the decoration of the Assembly Hall of Tabo's main temple, in Spiti.

Presumably, a mandalic configuration once also adorned the walls of Khardong Choskor's temple. The fragments of lotus petals excavated in the latter are identical in style and colour to the ones ornamenting the thrones of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Tabo's Assembly Hall.

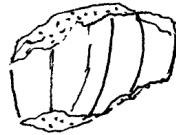
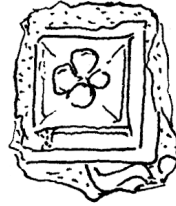
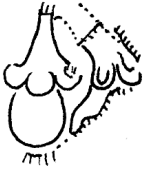
Since only 1m<sup>2</sup> was excavated at the base of the inner walls (where most of the sculptural remains are to be found) it is not yet possible to identify the deities displayed in Khardong Choskor's temple. "The most crucial factor for the identification of the figures is the body colour used for each of them." Fragments of faces painted red, blue, white and green were found in the rear niche with remains of hairline painted black.

Numerous single, double and triple string of pearls were recovered: they were part of the jewellery once adorning the deities, Jinas and Bodhisattvas but also possibly goddesses and protectors. Double strings of pearls are for example used for bracelets, necklaces and jewelled belt of the deities of Tabo's Assembly Hall. Triple strings of pearls are characteristic of the mala hanging from the shoulders of the deities. Single strings of pearls recovered at Khardong Choskor could have been part of jewelled crowns.

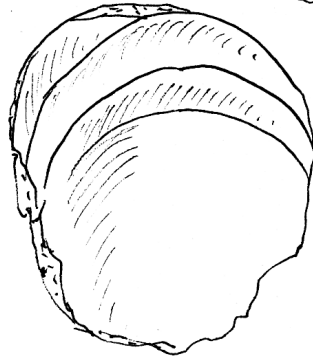
Most ornamentation fragments excavated at Khardong Choskor were painted red, blue, black and white. This same range of colours is found on the murals' fragments recovered at the Khardong Choskor.

sketches 2-3

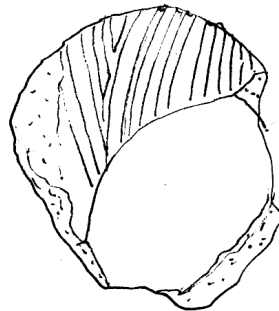
23
68
16



plus petal?



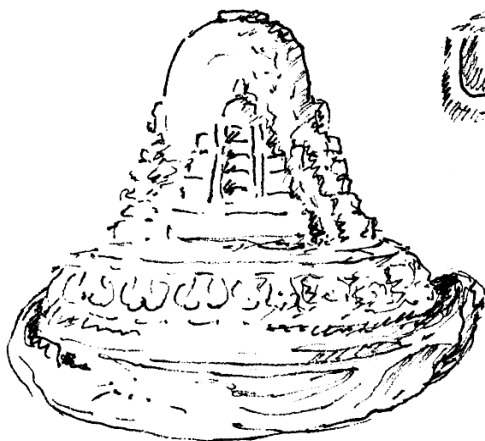
→ from the  
lobes  
thru.



Once more, this corresponds to the colours in use at Tabo Assembly Hall.

The stylistic parallels we are able to draw between the material excavated at Khardong Choskor and Tabo Assembly Hall are very significant. Thanks to two inscriptions painted inside Tabo Main temple we know that it was founded in 996 and renovated in 1042, making it the earliest extant Buddhist temple of the Western Himalayas. Based on a preliminary stylistic comparison, we propose that the temple excavated at Khardong Choskor was in use in between the end of the 10th century and the middle of the 11th century.

7/9 |  
2016

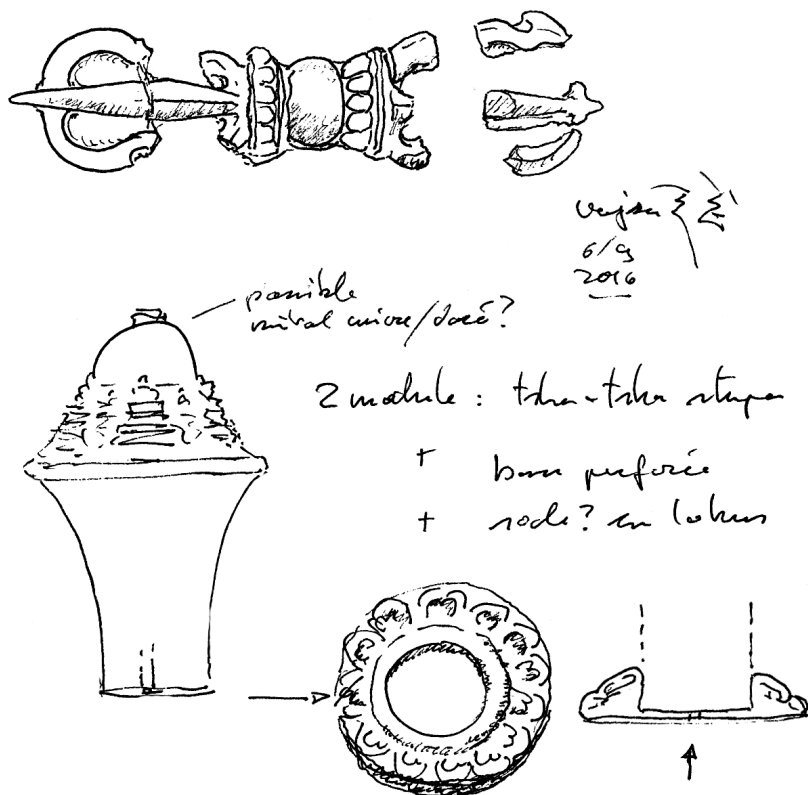


leskhar  
manb.c.a





Such a dating seems to be supported by the tsha tsha recovered within the temple. Stupa shaped tsha tsha with long conical bases are in found in an extensive area, from Afghanistan in the west to Tholing in the east passing through Gilgit (northern Pakistan) where they seem to have been in use from the 8th to the 12th century AD. Although such tsha tsha were recovered from excavations in Afghanistan it is the first time that they are recovered in situ for the Western Himalayas. The clay elements discovered along the tsha tsha (pearls, discs, small elongated conical elements and round dishes) were once part of the tsha tsha, forming an upper structure and a base: all elements originally being held together by a stick, most probably wooden. Such lavish decoration, along with the extensive use of colour on the various clay elements, point to tsha tsha created using the bodily remains from one (or several) important figure(s). The fact that most of the tsha tsha were found inside or around the square structures located at the centre of the temple confirms their importance.

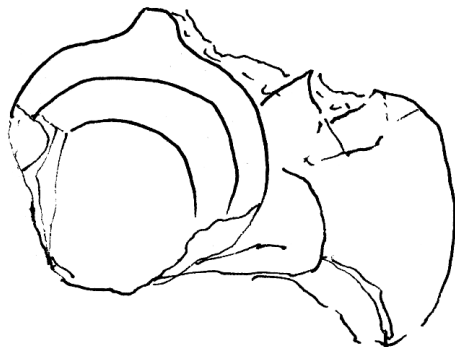


As stated above, three central square structures were exposed in the centre of the temple. They are lined up on a north-south axis and face the entrance of the temple: one has to go around them to access the apse. They each consist of a stone basis with a mud brick surround. An opening, facing west and thus accessible once in the apse, was identified into the central structure where tsha tsha were deposited. No material originating from a possible upper structure was identified in course of excavation. It does not seem likely that votive stupa or statues in clay were built on top of the square structures. Of course we cannot rule out the possibility that such elements were made of more perishable (wood) or transportable (metal for instance) material. Also it is not clear if the central structures were part of the original mandalic programme of the temple or a later addition, since we know about at least a second architectural phase (addition of the verandah). Further excavations in the temple are needed to answer these questions.





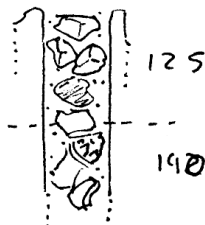
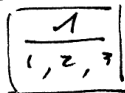
Sunday  
 Laundry,  
 4/8  
 2016  
 S.E.



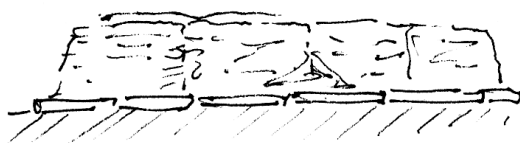
lobe horse / prong  
 fragment.

L-CEH-BuZ-Co1

central structure



{ stones  
Bag for earth  
+ filling  
{ pottery shards  
tscha-tscha (red)

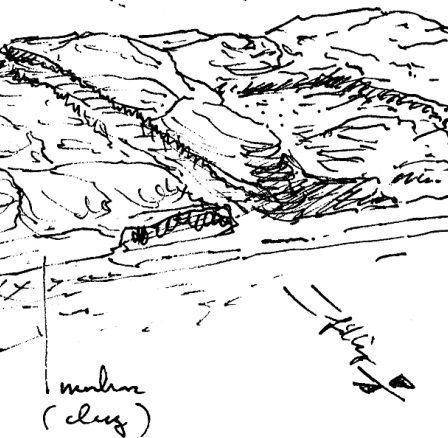


central feature  
(X)\*

(1) 143

(2) 144

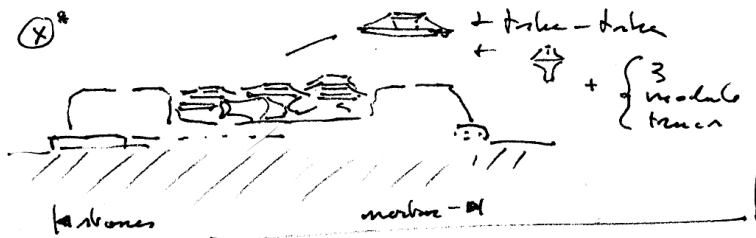
? entrance / gap



mudstone  
(clay)

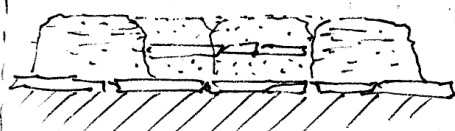
mudbrick stone layer | mud layer

(X)\*



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2016

141



(3) 125

metal object  
take-take with bones



masonry  
(red)

masonry  
(white/grey)

masonry on stone  
(concrete empty) | stone layer

1-CEH-Ba2-107  
central structure

filing { take take (2nd)  
 ceramic

take-take

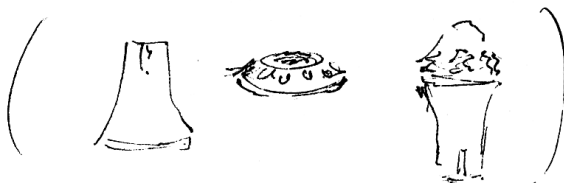


stone layer

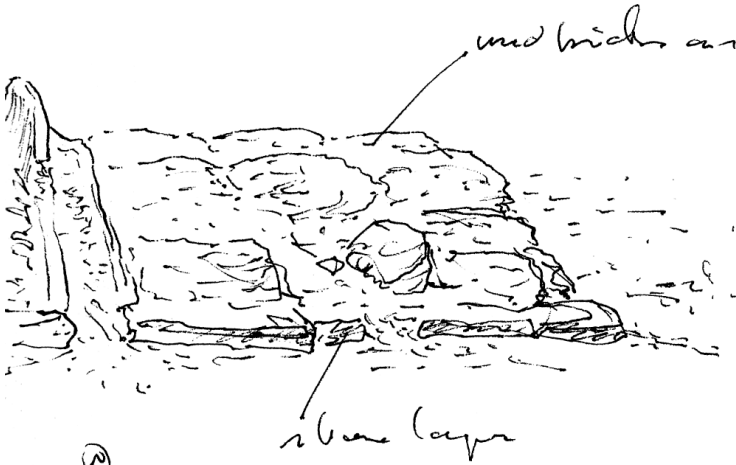
metal  
 object

⊕  
 filing

metal



2/9  
2016



filling ②  
meh  
meh





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Dessins réalisés par Martin Vernier durant la mission MAFIL,  
entre le 15 août et le 15 septembre 2016.  
Textes tirés du rapport final rédigé par Laurianne Bruneau en octobre  
2016.

