

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LADAKH STUDIES

LADAKH STUDIES

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**Historical research and heritage conservation cooperation in Ladakh**  
**Two workshops to celebrate the opening of the Central Asian Museum Leh (CAML). 21st of May and 23rd of August 2011, Central Asian Museum Leh, Ladakh**

The opening of the Central Asian Museum Leh is planned for Summer 2011. In order to celebrate its opening, a workshop dedicated to historical research and heritage conservation in Ladakh is being organized. The idea is to bring together all actors (locals and international) together to enhance cooperation. Various initiatives are taken to document and protect the cultural heritage of Ladakh, and all actors could benefit from a greater communication.

The Central Asian Museum Leh appears as a great opportunity for this.

The event is organized in two distinct days:

\*A first meeting in May (Saturday 21st) with all the actors present at that time in Ladakh so that everyone gets to know each other actions and plans.

\*A second, more official meeting in August (Tuesday 23rd) right after the conference of the International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) so that international actors can take part.

This workshop will be the opportunity to discuss possible cooperations.

If you would like to attend or participate in the event please contact us at [bruneaulaurianne@yahoo.com](mailto:bruneaulaurianne@yahoo.com)

If you wish to participate and present your work the deadline for contacting us is 31st of April.

If you wish to attend only please inform us before 15th of May and/or 15th of August.

Please note that we have secured funding for both dates. We will offer tea and lunch. Unfortunately we cannot offer support for accommodation costs or flights.

The organizers:

Laurianne Bruneau, post-doctoral researcher, Centre for Archaeological Research on Indus-Baluchistan, Central and Eastern Asia, UMR 9993 of the CNRS, Paris;  
André Alexander, co-director, Tibet Heritage Fund (THF), associate researcher, Berlin University of Technology;  
Martin Vernier, independent scholar on Ladakhi archaeology and history, Switzerland;  
Quentin Devers, Phd candidate in archaeology, EPHE, Paris.



**Archaeological heritage at stake**

—M. Vernier, L. Bruneau & Q. Devers.

On the one hand Ladakh is the most popular Himalayan region for travellers in need of virgin landscapes and adventures. On the other hand it is one of the last Tibetan areas where art works are still preserved *in situ*. The trivialization of travels in distant countries as well as the development of local facilities has contributed to an ever-growing inflow of tourists. If most of the visitors get satisfied with walking around the country to bring back souvenirs (mainly photos and blisters), some feel invested with the mission of acting for the greater good. The 1980s are a good example of that associative zealous work, especially in the educational field. Nowadays private schools are plentiful and the pursuit of money they have induced within the population is commonplace. Lately tourists and ecological excesses (let us recall the recent creation of quad bikes tours in the Changthang area) are local concerns and attempts are made to find solutions.

For more than a decade now, the architectural and religious heritage of Ladakh has been the target of development assistance and good will. Thanks to this assistance the Leh old town has been preserved from destruction and many historical sites (such as Basgo, Alchi Tsatsapuri *lhakhang*, Wanla) have been documented and to a lesser extent restored. One can only hope that this 'cultural consciousness' will, in the future, include monuments other than religious, such as rock art sites and fortifications, that are indiscriminately destroyed on a daily basis.

However a lack of knowledge, dialogue or even proper competence has to be reported in some cases, leading to the total or partial loss of the heritage it is supposed to protect. For instance, the 'restoration' of Tissuru chorten above Leh or more recently that of Changspa using concrete has changed the shape of the monuments in irrevocable ways. The involvement of religious authorities in conservation issues is needed but it does not always result in professional restorations. Let us take as example the *svastikas* drawn using a ball-pen in Amitabha's mandala on the left wall of the *gSumtseg* at Alchi by the monk in charge of the temple. We can also mention the sporadic restoration of the Markha valley temples that resulted in the disappearance of murals and the removal of ancient architectural elements and religious objects. While these are only isolated instances, they put the issue of cultural conservation into a wider perspective. Actors in charge of restoration are ever more numerous in Ladakh and little besides financial means appears to limit their action. Some act with or for local authorities, others within professional or non-profit organizations. Some even act out of their scope or their field. The large engravings of lions that used to stand guard at Kaltse bridge for centuries are now reduced to decorative elements in the garden of a private restaurant! But what might have happened if they had been left *in situ*, facing bulldozers? And what about the temple of Pipcha village 'restored' by a Swiss association that supports the school nearby?

In 2009, a relatively new Italian organization (Stupa Onlus) completed the reconstruction of a painted *chorten* at the foot of the fort in Zangla, Zanskar. The reconstruction used concrete and destroyed the original design of the monument forever, threatening its inner paintings and thus annihilating any possible archaeological research. The organization's goal is to reconstruct *chortens* in Tibet, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, Ladakh, India, and Sri Lanka. In Ladakh their future projects include, among others, the reconstruction of the ancient *chortens* of Malakartse and Karsha Kadampa.

This is no simple issue: it involves religion, popular beliefs, conservation needs and wish for restoration, identity and identification, private and public domain, interference and impermanence. The disparate projects mentioned above stress the necessity for a coordinated action. It seems to us that the key actors of cultural conservation in Ladakh should sit together and discuss the possibility of a joint and planned programme that would guarantee the long-term preservation Ladakh's unique heritage do deserve.

***Modern Ladakh: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuity and Change.***

Martijn Van Beek and Fernanda Pirie, eds.

Leiden: Brill, 2008. Pp 311, 25 plates and figs. \$ 148.00. ISBN: 9789047443346—

—Kim Gutschow (adapted from a forthcoming review in *Himalaya*, vol 30)

This timely volume rewards the Ladakh specialist with thirteen innovative and original essays that explore religious, socio-economic, and historical phenomena within contemporary Ladakh. Two of the thirteen essays are in French and the volume is broken down into five sections: historical trends, regional identities, ritual, kinship and gender, and agriculture. The editors' introduction explicitly provides a broad overview of contemporary scholarship on Ladakh, whilst calling for more cross-cutting scholarship that recognizes the inter-disciplinary nature of many topics within Ladakh studies. This introduction also includes a historical overview that offers several reasons for why scholarship on Ladakh is yet to be fully integrated with other disciplines in the social sciences including South Asian studies. The reasons given for this disjuncture include, among others, the myopia of early research, the aversion against locating Ladakh in India rather than as an extension of western Tibet, and the problematic tendency to categorize Ladakh as primarily Buddhist when more than fifty percent of its current population is Muslim. The current volume successfully corrects many of these earlier biases; however, it does not engage with contemporary debates in South Asian studies or the social sciences as effectively as promised. The introduction alludes to the decision about which of two Brill series the volume would be located in—the Tibetan Studies Library or the Indological Library. Yet the choice between Tibet and India itself illustrates and unwittingly reinstates the very divide this volume is dedicated towards transcending.

Fittingly, the volume is dedicated to Nicky Grist, whose own work sought to break down a stereotypical and rather uncomplicated view of Ladakhi identity by deconstructing Muslim allegiances in the Suru Valley as well as the ongoing social fragmentation and contestation evinced by Buddhist polyandry in Matho. Sophie Day's eloquent appreciation of Grist's substantial contributions to Ladakh studies sits alongside a posthumous essay by Grist that nicely illustrates the shifting priorities among Sunni and Shia households in Suru away from agrarian and pastoral labor towards increasingly stratified and commodified occupations that marginalize both women and the poor. The historical section includes Monisha Ahmed's description of how Sonam Paljor helped develop the textile trade in relation to broader social currents in Ladakh and John Bray's essay on the system of forced labor known as *begar*. Bray skillfully elucidates the historical and economic relationships between the local headmen or monastics who served as middlemen for the European travelers as well as Ladakhi, Dogra, and British rulers that used and legitimated this system of forced transport. Isabelle Riaboff's careful analysis of kinship, marriage, and trading patterns among Paldar's symbiotic Bod culture—which draws from nearby Zangskari and Pahari models—nicely complements Grist's essay on Shia and Sunni subcultures within the Kargil landscape. However, none of these essays substantively engages with wider discourses on region, ethnicity, caste, and nation in Kashmir that have been heavily theorized by Aggarwal, van Beek, Bertelson, Bose, and Ganguly, among others.

The organization of the volume betrays an unconscious ambivalence towards contemporary and traditional formulations of Ladakh Studies. Although it foregrounds notable essays on regional and religious diversity and closes with an interesting section on agrarian practices, the bulk of the volume is devoted to traditional topics within