

The Bhutan-Swiss Archaeology Project 2014: strengthening institutional structures and scientific cooperations

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1. Introduction

After three years of intensive exchange and collective work, the teaching phase¹ of the Bhutan-Swiss Archaeology Project came to an official end in November 2014 with an award ceremony under participation of all involved partners and stakeholders. Certificates for the Continuing Education Program (CEP) of the University of Zurich were handed out to nine trainees in the cooperation project.

This last year of phase II activities also saw the completion of the Chubjakha Dzong ruin survey (see separate report in this volume), the teaching of the remaining modules in the educational program, and the publication of vol. 3 of the Heritage Sites Journal «Archaeology in Bhutan», an initiative by the Ministry of Culture. The volume offers a comprehensive documentation on phases I and II of the project, including an introduction to the project by Eberhard Fischer (2006–13), reports on the Drapham Dzong excavation (2008–10), Sangkha rescue excavation (2011), Bumthang valley survey (2012), Obtsho Dzong inventory and documentation (2012), Chubjakha Dzong documentation (2013–14) as well as several smaller site visits and object surveys.

The setup of a national Archaeology Section under the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites (DCHS) in 2014 is an important step in the institutional cooperation and towards the strengthening of local structures and future partners in development and research. We see it as a great success in the institutionalization of archaeology in a country that until recently held but few concepts of archaeology and history as scientific approaches to the past.² Herewith, the declared goals of phase II are to be considered as achieved.

¹ See SLSA annual reports 2011, pp. 173–218; 2012, pp. 145–186; 2013, pp. 23–64.

² Karma Phuntsho 2013: *The history of Bhutan* (Noida and London).

Fig. 1 Burial mound heavily damaged by farming in Phobjikha valley. The burial chamber stones are already laid open (Nov. 2014).



Fig.2 Modules of the Continuing Education Program by the University of Zurich.

Appendix: CEP "Practice in Archaeology" – Overview of Modules

Background and Context Modules	Methodical and Management Modules
<p>1) Introduction to Archaeology 3 days class teaching, 1 day site visit / workload 20h (CEU 2) Themes: history of archaeology, concepts, definitions, and applications</p> <p>2) Legal Aspects in Archaeology 2 days class teaching / workload 10h (CEU 1) Themes: international conventions and national laws</p> <p>3) Early Cultural History 2 days class teaching / workload 10h (CEU 1) Themes: concepts of history, sources, state of knowledge</p>	<p>7) Concepts of Archaeology 2 days class teaching and discussion / workload 10h (CEU 1) Themes: methodical approaches to dating, material culture, settlements, graves, and ritual sites</p> <p>8) Databases and Data Management 3 days class teaching and practice / workload 20h (CEU 2) Themes: data bases, data management systems, zoning plans</p> <p>9) Reports, Archives, Public Outreach 3 days class teaching and practice / workload 20h (CEU 2) Themes: scientific reporting, conservation and storage, museum, public relations</p>
Field Practice Modules	Proficiency Module
<p>4) Excavation Field School 4 weeks excavation, 2 days field teaching, 1 week post-excavation / workload 140h (CEU 14) Themes: documentation, techniques, tools, skills, reporting</p> <p>5) Field Survey, Mapping, Data Modeling 8 days field survey, 2 days data modeling / workload 50h (CEU 5) Themes: survey techniques, documentation, data handling</p> <p>6) Site Inventory and Documentation 2 weeks field practice, 1 week post-inventory and documentation / workload 60h (CEU 6) Themes: site inventory, architectural survey and documentation</p>	<p>10) Thesis Written home work, 10 pages / workload 60h (CEU 6) Themes: final thesis on a topic relevant to archaeology, supervised by teaching staff</p>
<p>General rules: Workload is given in hours (10 hours attendance = 1 CEU / Continuing Education Unit) Teaching and teaching documents are in English; the participants are expected to write the Thesis in English. Modules are taught in participating countries.</p>	

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2. Completion of the Continuing Education Program «Practice in Archaeology» by the University of Zurich

Over the last three years, a broad variety of themes relating mostly, but not only, to practical approaches in archaeology were taught within a modular education program run as an official Continuing Education Program (CEP) of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Zurich. This program included an overview of the basics of archaeology, its legal frameworks, an introduction to the cultural history of the Himalayas, and a series of field trips such as rescue excavation, survey, mapping, site inventory, and data management. Further topics were reports, archives and public outreach.³

The last module on concepts of archaeology was realized in a two-day workshop in the national library of Thimphu (November 17 and 18, 2014). The topics ranged from archaeological sources to material and immaterial culture, chronology, and the building of frames of reference.

In order to obtain their certificate of attendance and a record of achievement and expertise, the trainees also completed a written thesis on a specific topic related to archaeology and selected by themselves. The themes addressed were: visual reconstruction of Chubjakha Dzong in Paro Dzongkhag (Karma Tenzin), literature survey on Chubjakha Dzong (Sumjay Tshering), report on Samkhar Dung ruin in Sarpang Dzongkhag (Pema Wangda), field survey and mapping of ruins in Trashi Yangtse Dzongkhag (Sonam Tenzin), survey and mapping of ruins in Gasa Dzongkhag (Tshering), field survey and

³ See SLSA annual reports 2011, pp. 173–218; 2012, pp. 145–186; 2013, pp. 23–64.



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Fig. 3 Dasho Penden Wangchuk (cabinet secretary, right) in conversation with Eberhard Fischer, Philippe Della Casa and Christian Bader at the award ceremony in Thimphu.

Fig. 4 Front page report on the award ceremony in KUENSEL (November 17) with Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay launching the «Archaeology in Bhutan» volume.

Fig. 5 Peter Fux and Christian Bader examining a wooden lintel at Chubjakha Dzong ruin, Paro district.

mapping of archaeological sites in Lhuentse (Tashi Dawa), oral history and rescue excavation in Lhuentse and Thimphu Dzongkhag (Tenzin Wangchuk), oral history of Drapham Dzong (Ugyen Norbu), and design of an information panel and flyer for Drapham Dzong (Sangay Kinga). These papers show a remarkable level of knowledge in approaches and execution, and witness the advances of the trainees over the last years.

Posters of all the theses and outcomes of the major field projects realized within the program were presented at the award ceremony on November 16, 2014 at Taj Hotel in Thimphu, attended by the new Prime Minister of Bhutan, H. E. Mr. Tshering Tobgay, as well as several ministers of the Royal Government, members of the parliament and official representatives. This was also the opportunity to launch vol. 3 of the Heritage Sites Journal «Archaeology in Bhutan», an initiative by the Ministry of Culture coordinated by the DCHS team. The ceremony and book presentation was very well received and obtained successful media coverage (KUENSEL frontpage, Nov. 17, 2014).



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3. New Archaeology Section under DCHS

In a letter by the new Director of the Dept. of Culture in May 2014, the SLSA Secretary General was informed about the successful institutionalization of a national Archaeology Section under DCHS in the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. With this important achievement, one of the major goals of the phase II cooperation agreement has been realized, and a very important step forward taken with regard to sustainable archaeological heritage management in Bhutan.

This new situation does not only form a sound basis for an operational preventive and rescue archaeology in the country, it also considerably strengthens DCHS as a national institution and as a partner in international research cooperation. In order to follow up on these developments, further assistance by Swiss experts during phase III has been agreed upon in the new project plan.

This new agreement for phase III underlines the importance of a policy of sustainable development and cultural valorization in which strong attention is paid to the preservation of archaeological and cultural sites, many of which are already endangered by looting (e.g. Küensel statistics on looted chorten; Kuensel online, Oct. 24th, 2014; SLSA annual report 2013, pp. 29–40), intensified land-use, infrastructural development, and uncontrolled building activity. In addition, the national Heritage Sites Bill to be passed through parliament in 2015 should be expected to become an important reference for the new Archaeology Section.⁴



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⁴ See SLSA annual report 2013, pp. 29–40.



Fig. 6 Series of small burial mounds in Phobjikha valley.

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4. Towards new cooperations

During the autumn 2014 meeting in Thimphu, SLSA, Helvetas and DCHS set up a detailed project plan for a phase III (2015–17) within the overall project agreement. Again, institutional cooperations on themes of capacity building, awareness, publication and outreach as well as field projects in survey and documentation are the key issues of the project plan. Besides activities in awareness building such as e.g. workshops with participation of national and regional stakeholders, two geographical areas of particular interest were selected for field work: the holy site of Dochotey in one of the upper valleys of Paro Dzongkhag, and the Phobjikha valley in Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag which were already briefly visited by some project members the year before.⁵ A second visit to Phobjikha valley in November 2014 confirmed the highly appropriate setting of the area for a longterm project including the aspects of mapping, inventory and protection of cultural and natural heritage sites, monitoring and rescue of endangered sites, understanding of landscape developments, and awareness building in stakeholders and also local communities, with possibilities of sustainable added value. The latter themes seem to be very well set in order to deepen the cooperation with the NGO Helvetas which has been an important partner in the project for many years.

⁵ See SLSA annual report 2013, pp. 29–40.