

A rural Settlement at Sangkha under Sarpang Dzongkhag in Southern Bhutan

Report on the Rescue Excavation Training Programme 2011

Karma Tenzin

Introduction

Following the successful implementation of Bhutan-Swiss Archaeology Project Phase I (2008–2010) which was mainly focused on carrying out the first ever archaeology project (Drapham Dzong) in Bumthang, the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs in cooperation with the Swiss Liechtenstein Foundation of Archaeological Research Abroad (SLSA) and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan will be carrying out phase II of the Bhutan Swiss Archaeology Project (2011–2013). The following are the expected outcomes of phase II:

1. Presentation of Drapham Dzong ruins as a model for display and conservation of archaeological heritage in Bhutan.
2. Institutionalisation of archaeology in Bhutan.
3. Professional management of diverse and fragile archaeological sites in Bhutan.

Phase II of the Bhutan Swiss Archaeology project was successfully launched by conducting the first part of an Educational Awareness Workshop on Archaeology from 27th March to 1st April 2011. During this workshop, the Cultural Officer of Sarpang made the workshop's participants aware of the fact that the Dzongkhag had recently come across an archaeological site while laying the foundation for a new lhakhang at Sangkha under Gakiling gewog. Since the Dzongkhag had no clue on how to handle such a site, the Department of Culture firstly verified the importance of the site, which was followed by requesting the Dzongkhag to postpone the new construction work until we find experts to establish the importance of such a discovery. Since the discoveries of archaeological sites have occurred more frequently over the last few years mainly due to the large number of new construction and developmental activities, it has become highly necessary for the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites office under the Department of Culture to establish a standard procedure of reporting, documenting and facilitating (rescue excavation, presentation of site, etc.) the relevant individual/local community/Dzongkhag to ensure that important archaeological sites in Bhutan are protected.

Therefore, the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites office in coordination with SLSA decided to carry out an ad hoc rescue excavation cum training programme at Sangkha to work towards establishing procedures of reporting, documenting and excavating sites that are discovered in the process of executing developmental activities.

The Training Programme was jointly funded by SHARE Foundation, SLSA, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Bhutan and the Royal Government of Bhutan.

The following are the two main objectives of the Rescue Excavation Training Programme.

1. Archaeological Training Programme
 - a) Standard method of reporting
 - b) Basics of excavation engineering
 - c) Documentation techniques
2. Archaeological Research of the Site

Archaeological Training Programme

The field Archaeology in Bhutan is very new and still at the grass root level. Yet with the successful implementation of the first-ever archaeology project (Drapham Dzong), it has brought greater impact on the awareness to the people of Bhutan and the nation as a whole regarding the importance to protect archaeological sites. Since the discoveries of archaeological sites have occurred more frequently over the last few years mainly due to the large number of construction and developmental activities, the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites under the Department of Culture and the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs in coordination with SLSA decided to give hands-on archaeological training to the participants. The results from this excavation will act as a role model in the future.

The Rescue Excavation-cum-Training Programme was held in Sangkha village under Gakiling Gewog, Sarpang Dzongkhag for a period of 28 days (Oct 16.–Nov 12, 2011). The training programme was led by Mr. Christian Bader, Cantonal Archaeology Department, Zurich.

Here is the list of people who participated in the training programme.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Chimi Yuden, CO Tsirang | 8. Pema Wangda, CO Sarpang |
| 2. Tshering, CO Gasa | 9. Sangay Kinga, DCHS |
| 3. Tashi Dawa, CO Lhuentse | 10. Karma Tenzin, DCHS |
| 4. Kelzang Jamtsho, CO Samtse | 11. Geduen Jamtsho, DCHS |
| 5. Sangay Tashi, CO Samdrupjongkar | 12. Damchu Wangchuk, DCHS |
| 6. Thinley Dorji, CO Zhemgang | 13. Tenzin Wangchuk, DCP |
| 7. Sonam Tenzin, CO Tashiyantse | 14. UgyenNorbu, Technician Drapham |



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The overall training programme was mainly concentrated on the following three outcomes:

1. Standard method of Reporting
2. Basics of Excavation Engineering
3. Documentation Techniques

- Fig. 1 Participants of the training programme
- Fig. 2 Archaeological discovery report
- Fig. 3 Cutting of Profile
- Fig. 4 Cleaning of Profile

1. Standard method of Reporting

Until now there has been no standard method of reporting of archaeological sites in Bhutan. Therefore, besides the hands-on training given to the participants, this training programme was focused on understanding and to developing a standard method of reporting of archaeological sites in the future. With a thorough study and discussions with Mr. Christian Bader and all the participants, the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites has come up with the standard archaeological discovery reporting form as shown below. The reporting form consists of two pages and it has been kept as simple and user friendly as possible. From now on, the forms will be distributed to all the districts and will be used as a standard procedure for the reporting of archaeological sites. This reporting form is the so-called «Archaeological discovery reporting form», and is one of the fruitful outcomes of the training programme (Fig. 2).

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2. Basics of Excavation Engineering

Since it was a hands-on training, the whole excavation and documentation was carried out by the participants under the guidance of Mr. Christian Bader. The participants were taught about the basics of excavation engineering, right from setting up a local reference grid to the cutting and cleaning of profiles and sectors. We were also taught how to use different kinds of excavation instruments such as drawing grids for detailed stone by stone drawings, using the surveyor's level to determine the altitude of the plane or profile, etc.



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Fig. 5 Taking measurements

Fig. 6 Troweling Sector

Fig. 7 Using the surveyor's level to determine the altitude

Fig. 8 Stone by stone drawing using a grid

3. Documentation Techniques

During the course of the training, the participants thoroughly learned about the different methods of documentation techniques. The introduction and the theory part of the documentation techniques was taught during the two days of field schooling, which was jointly conducted by Mr. Christian Bader, Prof. Della Casa, University of Zurich and Peter Fux M. A, Museum Rietberg, Zurich on 21st and 22nd October 2011. The following are the different documentation techniques that were taught during the training period.

3.1 The paper documentation/Forms and Registers

The main principle of the paper documentation is to assign an explicit record entry of the information. There are different forms and registers viz

- Register of Find complexes
- Register of Samples
- Register of Photos
- Register of Position numbers
- Register of Drawings
- Description of Position numbers
- Description of Plane or Profile

During the training programme we were made familiar to all the above forms and were taught how to fill them systematically.

Fig. 9 The Register of Find Complexes

Fig. 10 The Register of Samples

Fig. 11 The Register of Photographs

Register of Find Complexes

In this register, each find is registered with a specific number assigned to the particular finds (Fig. 9). The position from where it was found is also mentioned with its field coordinates (local grid), and a short description of the finds is given under its column. The date of finding and the person/group who found it are also mentioned in the register so that it becomes easier to trace during the post excavation work if any misunderstandings should arise.

Register of Samples

This register is very similar to the register of find complexes (Fig. 10). The only difference is that every samples is registered like the find complexes and is then assigned to its particular sample number.

The form is titled "Register of FIND COMPLEXES" and includes a header with a logo and text in Burmese. It features a table with the following columns: "Date", "No.", "Location/Field Grid", "Short Description/Comments", and "Other". The table has approximately 20 rows for data entry.

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The form is titled "Register of SAMPLES" and includes a header with a logo and text in Burmese. It features a table with the following columns: "Date", "No.", "Location/Field Grid", "Short Description/Comments", and "Other". The table has approximately 20 rows for data entry.

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Register of Photographs

In this register every photograph taken for the documentation purpose is registered and is assigned to a particular number (Fig. 11). Like all other registers, the date, name of the photographer and the localisation (field coordinates) are mentioned in the register for future references. In the register of photographs the additional information being recorded corresponds with the drawing number or the drawing information of the photograph taken. Further, the orientation of the photograph taken is recorded in the register.

The form is titled "Register of PHOTOS" and includes a header with a logo and text in Burmese. It features a table with the following columns: "No.", "Date", "Location/Field Grid", "Orientation", "Short Description/Comments", "Drawing", and "Photographer". The table has approximately 20 rows for data entry.

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Register of Position Numbers

Each particular feature, be it a wall, floor, pit, soil stratigraphy, etc. is assigned to a particular position number and is recorded in the register of position numbers (Fig. 12). This register is also very similar to the rest of the registers with the provision of date of recording, localisation (field coordinates) of the positions, short description of the feature and the name of the editor.

Register of Drawings

Each drawing documentation made for the profile, plane or any features is registered in the register of drawings (Fig. 13). The scale of the drawing and the corresponding photograph number are also recorded for easy future references along with the date, localisation (field coordinates), short description and the illustrator's name.

Fig. 12 The Register of Position Numbers
 Fig. 13 The Register of Drawings
 Fig. 14 Setting up the local reference grid

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Description of Position numbers

In the form of the description of position numbers, each feature assigned to a particular position number is carefully observed, and discussions are held amongst all the participants. After thorough discussions, the description and the interpretations of the features are recorded in this form.

Description of Plane or Profile

Similar to the description of the position numbers, here the descriptions and interpretations are made after thorough discussions amongst all the participants by visually observing the plane or the profile.

3.2 Survey and Measurement

Under this section of documentation techniques, the participants were taught about the installation of the local reference grid. We were taught that, by principle, each archaeological excavation is always geo-referenced in a survey grid. The picture below shows the participants seriously involved in setting up the local grid for the present excavation site. The participants were also taught how to use different kinds of survey and measurement instruments for fixing the axis, determining the altitude, etc.



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Fig. 15 Participants drawing profiles

Fig. 16 Participants drawing sectors (plana) stone by stone

Fig. 17 Plan of sector

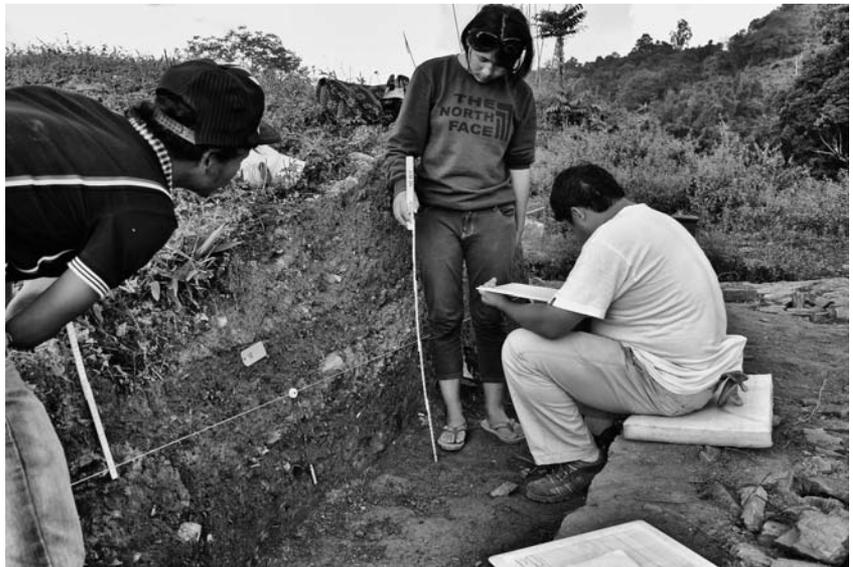
Fig. 18 Drawing of finds

3.3 Documentation by drawing

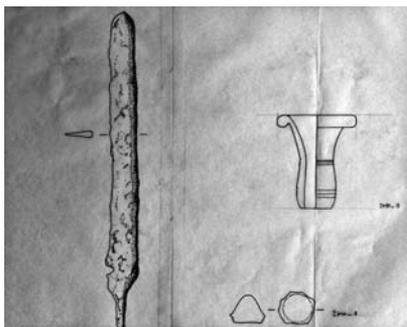
One of the important techniques in the excavation documentation is documentation by drawing, as this reflects an interpretation of structure and findings. During the course of training, the participants were taught how to draw profiles, plana, detailed stone by stone drawings and finds.



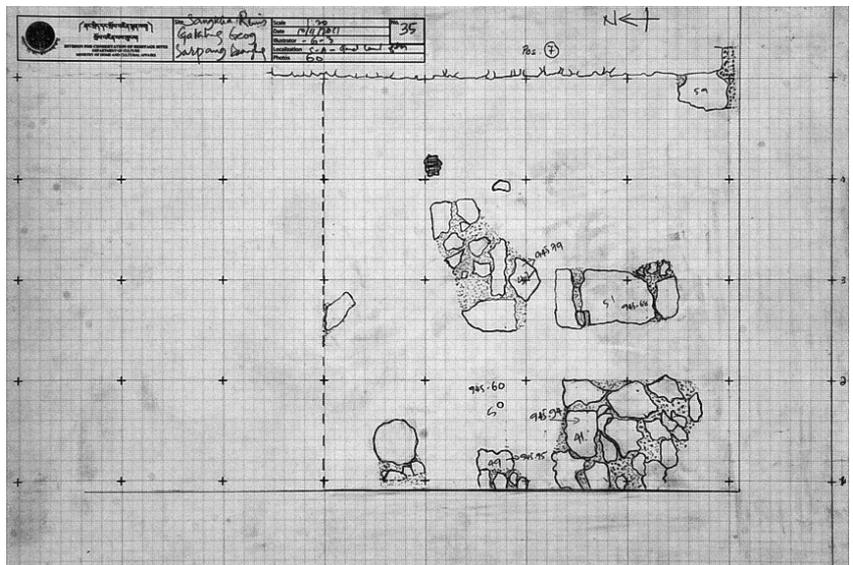
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Fig. 19 Photographic documentation, e.g. foundation Pos. 57 in sector E.

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3.4 Photographic documentation

In this section of documentation, the participants were taught the basics of how to hold a camera, use different camera functions and take photographs of profiles or planes. Before taking any photograph of a profile or plane, we were taught to always make sure that the photo board is prepared and placed correctly. Also a scale and a north point is placed for reference (Fig. 19).