

Tibet Heritage Fund Leh Old Town Initiative

Intermediate Project Report Summer 2006

by André Alexander



Detail of recovered 15th century wall-painting on the north wall of the Red Maitreya temple: face of a Bodhisattva flanking a Buddha image.

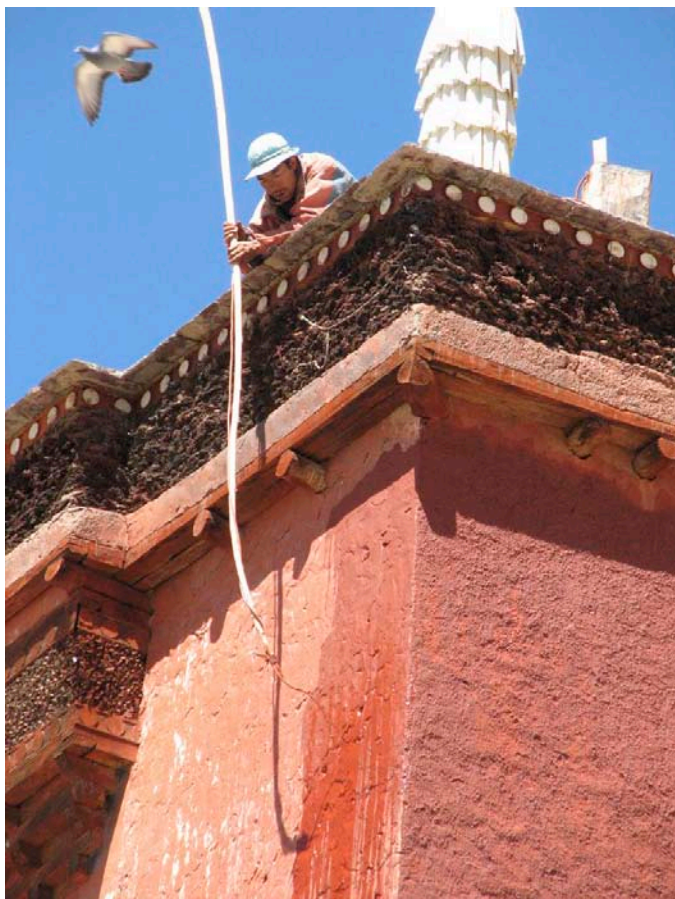
Red Maitreya Temple

The Red Maitreya temple (Byams pa dmar po) was built by king Tragspa Bumde (r. ca. 1400-1440). It was damaged during the Dogra invasion of the 1840s but restored soon after.

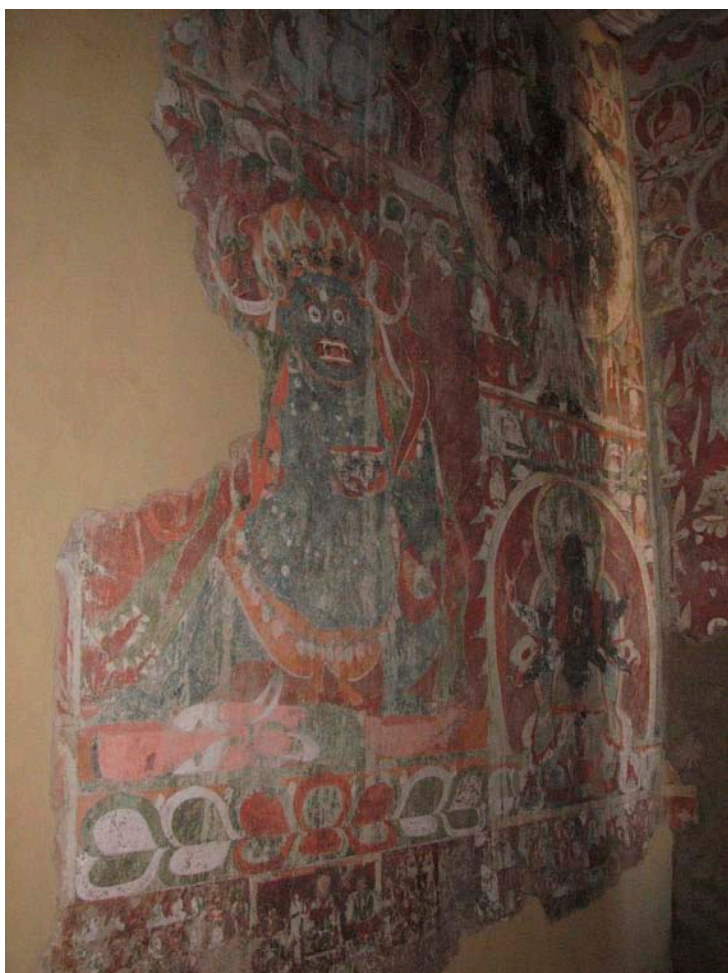
In the late 1950s, because of water damage to the north wall, the Ladakh Buddhist association rebuilt the main hall to smaller scale, leaving only the original north and west walls standing to form an outer corridor around a new hall (with the original 15th century Maitreya image). The wall-paintings were painted over with white-wash at the time. In late 2005, while surveying the building for some minor roof repair, project manager André Alexander rediscovered the 15th century wall-paintings underneath the white-wash. Together with Romanian restorer Anca Nicolaescu and students from the conservation department of the Technical University of Erfurt, the wall-paintings were successfully recovered and stabilized. More recovering work will be necessary on the north-eastern section next year. THF and Erfurt have now formalized their cooperation with an MOU, and Erfurt will regularly supply students and equipment.



From top: four restoration students from Germany, one from Belgium and two from Ladakh worked with the professional Romanian restorer on scaffolding with three levels to uncover the 15th century murals; Ladakhi trainee Yangchen Dolma has learnt how to remove the thick, clay-based layer of white-wash without damaging the paintings; a german student cleans detail of a Garuda image that forms the uppermost detail of the traditional painted throneback decoration of a large Buddha image.



The work on the roof and on the wall-paintings was complimented by a restoration and regilding of the three-storey tall clay Maitreya image sponsored by local Ladakhi Ngawang Rigzin and executed by local artisans (right); THF master builder Jamyang Tarchin applies the traditional natural-pigment red colour to the sanctum walls of the temple; below: the recovered wall-paintings showing Mahakala and a black 11-faced Avalokiteshvara (left) and a large Buddha image with entourage (right).



Leh Heritage House - Sankar House at Manekhang

The Sankar House was formerly the home of a monk who served as caretaker of the White Maitreya temple nearby. However, several decades ago, caretakership was given to the Goba family who also live nearby. Since then, the house stood abandoned. In recent years, Sankar monastery developed the plan to demolish this house and construct a modern, concrete-frame shop building on the site. THF/L.O.T.I. persuaded the monastery to lease us the building cheaply. We have turned the house into a "Heritage House", with a permanent exhibition room dedicated to the history of Leh, the architecture of the old town and the on-going conservation projects. The house will serve as entry point for visitors to the old town.

The rehabilitation work entailed: replacing the wooden roof structure which was leaking and replacing most of the internal timber frame on the upper floor. On the ground floor is a shrine room where five stone carved Buddha images stood forgotten. This room was restored, and made accessible to the public through the back entrance of the house, while the non-profit exhibition space is accessible through the main gate.



Top: Sankar House at Manikhang, work in progress May 2006; new ceiling structure for the exhibition room.
Bottom: Sankar House 1931; same view September 2006.





Clockwise from top left:

interior exhibition space with access stairway;

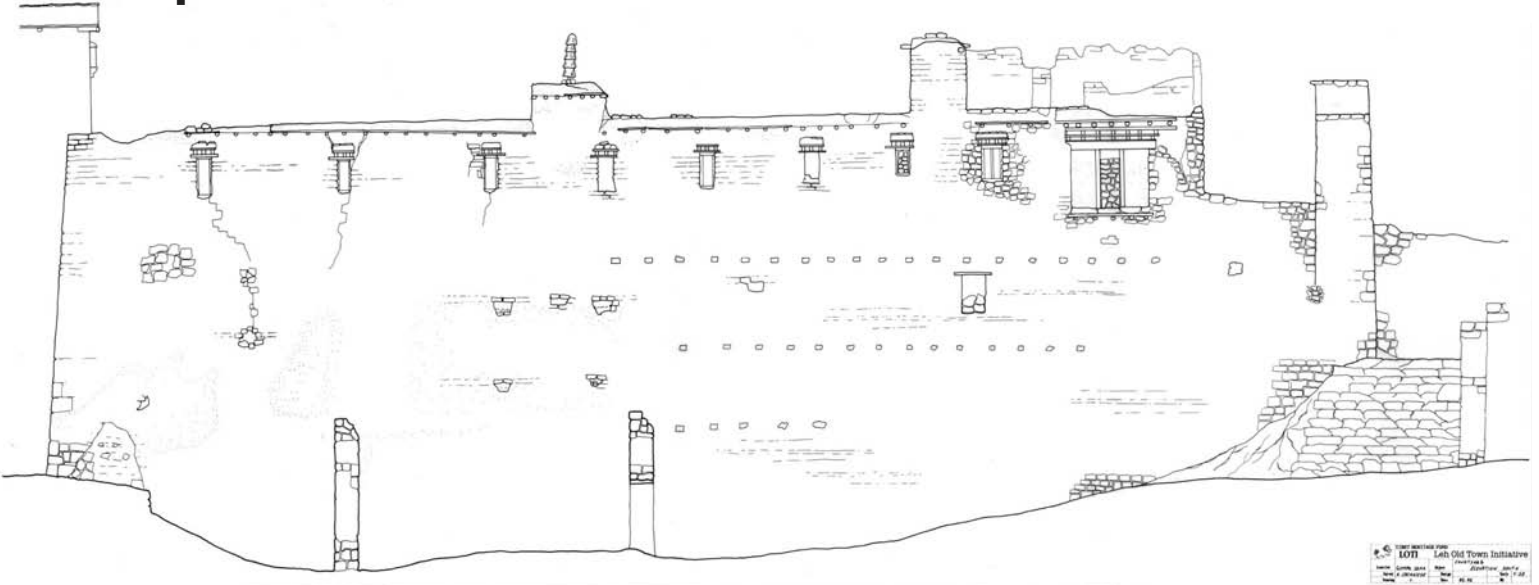
interior exhibition space with ladder to roof.

the restored shrine room with five ancient stone Buddha images;

the THF/L.O.T.I. team 2006.



Gonpa Soma Chamra



Gonpa Soma was built in 1840 by Lama Tashi Tenpel above the old royal stables. Since a new monastery was built on main bazaar in the late 1950s, Gonpa Soma lost importance and patronage and fell into disrepair. The owner, Hemis monastery, requested THF for help to restore the building, with funding provided by Ladakh government, Hemis, private donations and THF.

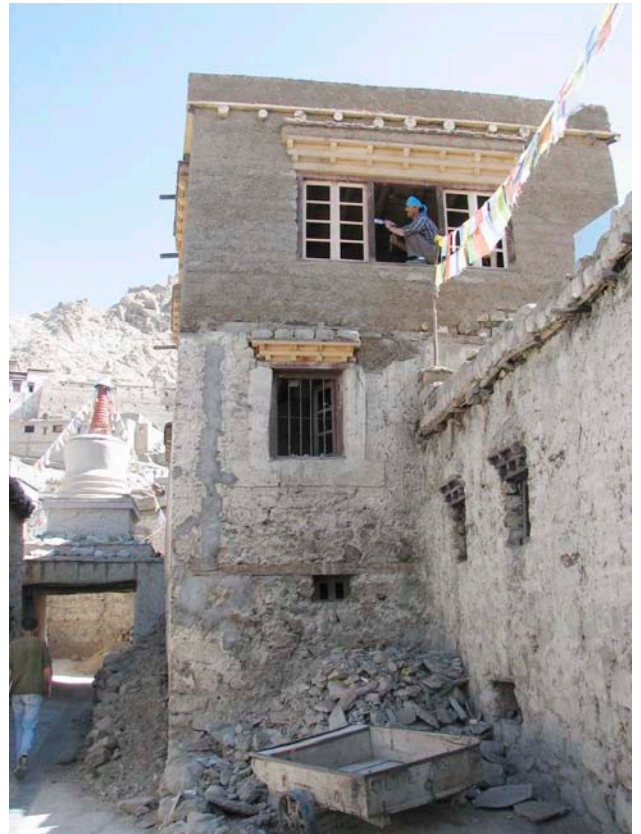


From Top: Gonpa Soma chamra, south elevation (A. Catanese/THF); monks perform puja for start of the restoration work; the badly dilapidated south-western corner of the chamra courtyard needed to be partly taken down; reconstruction of the corner in progress (2x).

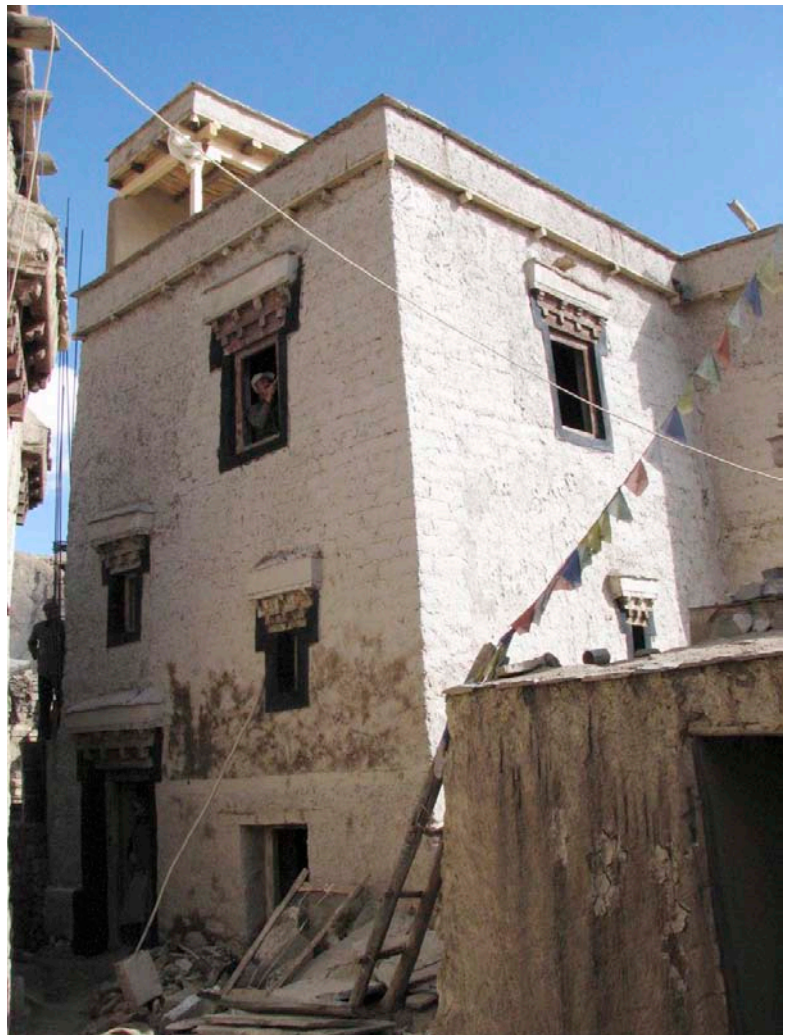


Hor Yarkandi House

This mid-20th century house is located in our Stagopilog model conservation street, and is rehabilitated with 50% co-financing by the owner, a family that migrated into Ladakh from Yarkand in China over a 100 years ago. Because the house was built taller than the nearby Stupa gate, people believe a curse befell the family and the house was abandoned. It is now rehabilitated minus the top floor.



Clockwise from top left: reconstruction of the collapsed third floor (the fourth will not be rebuild so the house is not taller than the stupa gate); carpenter Tsering Dorje working on the windows of the reconstructed third floor - view of the south elevation next to the Stagopilog Stupa gate; north elevation with entrance shortly before completion of the work September 18 2006; mason Sonam Dorje taking a break from plastering the characteristic Tibetan-style black window frames.





Top: In August 2006, THF signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding with Ladakh's local autonomous government. The MOU regulates how the two sides will work together for the rehabilitation of the Old Town of Leh.

Bottom: THF's Leh Old Town Project was one of the winning entries in the UNESCO 2006 Heritage Awards

2006
UNESCO
Asia-Pacific
Heritage
AWARDS
for
Culture Heritage Conservation

Honourable Mention

Leh Old Town Conservation Model Area Stagopilog Street, Leh, Ladakh, J&K, India

Owners: Mr. Namgyal Shayshan, elected representative of the residents of the alley; the joint caretaker committee of the Guru Lhakhang shrine; and Mr. Abdul Kadir, owner of the Sofi house

Individuals responsible for the project:

André Alexander, Tibet Heritage Fund; Diskit Dolkar and Ms Lharigtso, local community coordinator; Mr. Namgyal Shayshan, local residents representative; Mr. Dawa Lonpo; Mr. Rigzin Spalbar; and Mr. Dorje Lakruk, local government representatives; Konchok Raftsan, local site manager; John Niewoehner, project engineer; and Jamyang Tarchin, local building technology consultant

Architect/Designer: André Alexander and John Niewoehner
The project was executed by local artisans

