

research. What we are left with is, in essence, a manifesto and road map for future research in this area.

This ambitious volume promises much, and for the most part it delivers on those promises. It provides the most up-to-date and holistic account of the archaeology and prehistory of north-east India; and in doing so it stands alone as the first such study in this area. It also stands apart as an excellent example of multidisciplinary research in a field where this is far from the norm. That in the end it is unable to provide many firm conclusions is not because of any limitations of the research. It is because this entire region is, as the author himself paraphrases, archaeological *terra incognita*; and it is here that the real value of this study in laying the foundation for future research becomes singularly apparent.

**Jason D. Hawkes**

Institut Français de Pondichéry

PETER VAN HAM, with AMY HELLER and LIKIR MONASTERY:

*Alchi: Treasure of the Himalayas, Ladakh's Buddhist Masterpiece.*

424 pp. Munich: Hirmer, 2019. £54. ISBN 978 3 7774 3093 5.

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This work is a comprehensive study of the internal wall paintings and sculptures and the early history of the Tibetan Buddhist temple complex at Alchi, Ladakh, Jammu, and Kashmir, presenting an encyclopaedic collection of photographs of the paintings and sculptures, together with description and discussion of their subject matter and of the temples' foundation.

The experience of entering what are small and inconspicuous buildings, to be overwhelmed by the number, variety, and richness of the murals within, is truly recreated. Their description and discussion is detailed, scholarly and informative throughout.

There is one small ground plan of the complex (p. 15), and a number of photographs and descriptions of the wooden components of the architecture, with an interesting though brief discussion (pp. 152 ff.) under the heading "Ancient Greece in the Himalayas" of the designs of wooden columns and entablatures in the Three Storeyed Temple. It would, however, be very useful to have more systematic information on the architecture of the temples – plans, elevations and sections, and diagrams – showing how the iconographic programmes relate to the structure of the buildings. This would add to the understanding of the meanings and relationships of the paintings, while the architecture itself would have much to tell about the historical context of the temples.

The dating and history of the temples' foundation and refurbishment have been vexed questions in the literature. Roger Goepfer (in e.g. "Clues for a dating of the Three-Storeyed Temple (Sumtsek) in Alchi, Ladakh", *Asiatische Studien* 44/2, 1990, 159–69) opted for dates in the thirteenth century, and this has often been accepted. Others, including the present reviewer, have preferred dates in the eleventh century, which has been accepted as most likely in this book. Discussion of the dating and historical circumstances is scattered through three separate chapters – "Founding the sanctuaries", "Dating the sanctuaries", and "Inscribing the sanctuaries", and it is not always easy to navigate through a continuous argument that is interrupted by pages of photographs, but finally (p. 404) we read that "... if this chronological scheme is

correct, the foundation of the Alchi complex occurred roughly during the last two decades of the eleventh century”.

This conclusion is based on detailed discussion of the historical context within the Kingdom of Western Tibet (Ngari Khorsum), comparison with parallel temples and paintings elsewhere, the iconography and subject matter of the paintings and, most importantly, the many inscriptions contained within the temples. Study of these inscriptions has advanced considerably with improvements in access and photographic techniques since the 1970s, when the present reviewer and his Ladakhi helpers struggled to decipher problematic readings by the light of a flickering candle. As a result of recent research, much of it by co-author Amy Heller, some of the persons named in the inscriptions have been plausibly identified or placed in a more secure historical context.

There is an interesting map of “Historical empires”, detailed endnotes, and a comprehensive bibliography (oddly entitled “Scriptures”). An index would have been a highly useful aid.

Altogether this book is a significant addition to the study of the temples at Alchi.

**Philip Denwood**

Emeritus Reader in Tibetan Studies in the University of London

CHARLES RAMBLE (in collaboration with NYIMA DRANDUL):

*Tibetan Sources for a Social History of Mustang, Nepal. Vol. 3: The Archives of Kun bzang chos gling Convent.*

(Monumenta Tibetica Historica Abteilung III, Band 19.) 159 pp. Andiastr: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2019. €73.50. ISBN 978 3 03809 135 6.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X20002724

This is the third volume in Ramble and Drandul’s series of monographs containing archival materials from Mustang, Nepal, that were photographed during the 1992–97 Nepal–German Project on High Mountain Archaeology. The volume presents 38 manuscripts from Kun bzang chos gling, an abandoned convent founded in the late seventeenth century in Shöyul, South Mustang. Most are clearly reproduced, albeit two are somewhat indistinct (e.g. HMA/KCh/Tib/12 and 34) which is understandable given the conditions under which they were photographed during the pre-digital era. Nevertheless, all are legible, and the reader is aided by Ramble and Drandul’s careful transliterations.

The concise and informative introduction describes the convent’s interior and exterior which are illustrated by Christian Luczanits’ photographs and John Harrison’s architectural drawings. The authors then provide a brief history of Kun bzang chos gling pieced together from various sources, summarize the life and accomplishments of its founder Kun bzang klong yangs (1643–97), and translate sections of his autobiography relating to the establishment of Kun bzang chos gling. They then describe the archive’s contents which, as they note, can be used to better understand the convent’s primary religious activities, rules and regulations, membership, and affiliations with nearby religious organizations, communities, and political powers. The introduction concludes with notes on transliteration conventions, and a brief but useful list of weights and measures.