

The Future of Bamiyan: An open symposium for the public on 30 September, 2017

Concept Note and Programme

With a financial support from the Government of Japan within the framework of the UNESCO Phase V project of the *Safeguarding of the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley*, a one-day public symposium will be held in Tokyo, September 2017, to discuss the future of the Bamiyan statues in Bamiyan. The Symposium will provide a public platform for presenting arguments for and against revitalising the Eastern Buddha statue, and allow the Government of Afghanistan to reiterate its position on the matter.

1. Framework

- **Organiser:** The Government of Afghanistan
Tokyo University of the Arts
UNESCO
- **Date:** 30th September 2017
- **Venue:** Tokyo

2. Background

In 2001, the Taliban destroyed two giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, causing massive global public outcry and condemnation. Carved into a cliff face, the statues stood at 55m and 38m high, and represented the apotheosis of Gandharan and Buddhist art in Central and South Asia. Dating from the 6th–7th Centuries C.E. the statues were an iconic and intrinsic part of the wider cultural landscape in the Bamiyan Valley. Long after the decline of Buddhism in Afghanistan, the statues continued to be a focal point for community activities and a source of national pride. Their destruction in 2001 was a significant loss to the country and to humankind. During the 40th World Heritage Committee in 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey, the Government of Afghanistan has requested that at least one of the Buddha statues is reconstructed¹. At the 13th Bamiyan Working Group meeting in 2016 in Munich, Germany, the Government of Afghanistan, UNESCO and international experts agreed to discuss the feasibility of revitalisation for the Eastern Buddha statue, as stabilisation work on that niche has already been completed.

However, the reconstruction of destroyed monuments remains a contentious and polarising subject among heritage practitioners, and the case Bamiyan is no exception. Some think the Eastern Buddha statue should be reconstructed, while others think that the niche should be left empty as a testament to the tragedy of destruction.

¹ WHC 40th Session: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6641>, p.49

Given the high-profile nature of their destruction, the Buddha statues are symbolic of wider acts of iconoclasm sweeping the Middle East and North Africa. How the Afghan Government decides to act will set an important precedent for conservation activities around the world.

Funded by the Government of Japan within the framework of the UNESCO Phase V Project of the *Safeguarding of the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley*, the Government of Afghanistan, Tokyo University of the Arts and UNESCO are therefore organising a one-day public symposium in Tokyo 2017 to discuss the future of the Eastern Buddha statue. The Symposium will follow a three-day technical meeting in which proposals for revitalising the Eastern Buddha statue will be debated and discussed with the Government of Afghanistan and technical conservation architects and experts.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the Symposium are:

1. To present the context of heritage conservation in Afghanistan for the last 50 years;
2. To present a summary of the discussions from the technical meeting about the options for revitalising the Eastern Buddha statue;
3. To provide a public platform for the arguments for and against revitalisation;
4. To provide a public platform for the Government of Afghanistan to present its position on revitalisation.

4. Draft programme

Opening Session

Welcoming speech

13:00-13:30

- Tokyo University of Arts
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan
- Agency for Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Education , Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan
- Ministry of Information and Culture, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
- UNESCO

First Session

Key note speech

13:30-14:30 Preserving Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage in the past 50 years
By Kosaku Maeda, Visiting Professor, Tokyo University of the Arts, Japan

14:30-14:40 Coffee break

Second Session

- 14:40-15:00 Recent discussions of the revitalization of the Bamiyan Buddha niches in the recent World Heritage Committee sessions and a summary of a Scientific Technical meeting of the Eastern Bamiyan Buddha Statue on 27-29 September, 2017
By Masanori Nagaoka, Chief of Culture unit, UNESCO Kabul office
- 15:00-15:20 Government position on the potential reconstruction of the Eastern Buddha statue
by Rasoul Bawary, Minister for Cultural Affairs, Afghanistan Ministry of Information and Culture
- 15:20-15:30 break

Panel discussion

- 15:30-17:30 The future of the Bamiyan Statues
- Moderator Kazuya Yamauchi, Professor, Teikyo University
- Panellists Tahir Zuhair, Governor of Bamiyan
Deborah Klimburg-Salter, Emeritus Professor, the University of Vienna
Kosaku Maeda, Visiting Professor, Tokyo University of the Arts, Japan
Michael Jansen, Professor, GUTech University of Technology Muscat, Halban

5. Working language
English and Japanese

6. Timeframe

Date	Action
March-April 2017	Symposium participants confirmation
May 2017	Submission to the secretariat of presenters' registration form, passport copy, short bio (300 words), photo
June 2017	Symposium details on UNESCO website
June-August 2017	Selected participants to prepare PowerPoint

September 2017

A one-day symposium for the public in Tokyo

7. Secretariat

UNESCO Office in Kabul