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The Forgotten Citadel of Stok mon mkhar¹

By Martin Vernier²

Naving spent over ten years of my research exploring Ladakh in search of historical remains, I can testify that there are ruins of all sorts scattered throughout the landscape of this country, among them, many and diverse remains of buildings of a defensive type. The sites, for the greater part attributable to the medieval period, are mainly located on almost inaccessible rocky outcrops that sometimes really challenge the extravagances of the surrounding terrain. I find them particularly attractive, since despite the years that have gone past since they were last in use, they retain their strong evocative power.

One of the fortified sites I find most impressive consists of some ruins located a couple of hours walk upstream from Stok (*sTog*) village. There, perched high up on the rocks, stands an amazing ancient fort, locally known as Steng Lagar Khar (*sTeng la gar mkhar*, the military castle above) or, more commonly, Stok mon mkhar (*sTog mon mkhar*, the castle of the “mon” people).

This paper is a compte rendu of the repeated visits I have made to Stok mon mkhar. It should be noted that this site stands in territory that is part of the Hemis National Sanctuary, freely open to tourists. All the evidence reported here is taken from observation of the structures standing above ground or visible on the ground surface. No excavation or disturbances of any kind have been carried out. This paper does not claim to analyse the defensive features of the fortified settlement, nor to propose a complete architectural and technical survey of the place. That would require further investigations using more elaborated methods.

¹ An extract from this paper was published in J.V., Bellezza’s newsletter: “The flight of the kyung”, September 2012 issue, in addition to his own remarks on this fortified site.

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The comparisons I am attempting to make with other sites, the resulting dating proposal and the general description of other historical remains from Stok valley are the result of my field experience. I am sharing my findings here in the hope they will lead to further debate and discussion.

About the name of the site

I surveyed the ruined fort of Stok several times, in 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2012. To my knowledge it has not yet been studied nor published with the exception of a mention in the recent NIRLAC inventory under the name of "Steng Lagar khar"³. When I first surveyed and documented the site, people from Stok village mainly referred to it as "*Mon* mkhar". This name, even if rather vague and indeed common all over Ladakh when people try to attribute an origin to remains that predate local records, has our preference as it refers to the "*Mon*"⁴ people and thus assumes an older connotation, while the Steng Lagar khar name is subject to various interpretations⁵. Indeed, on the subject of these ruins, the NIRLAC inventory states that "the kings of Ladakh built this fort to protect them from enemy attacks and they retreated here during the mongol invasion". The local tradition retains this historical memory, most probably referring to the 17th c.

³ NIRLAC 2008, p 449.

⁴ When people in Ladakh refer to the "*mon*" or "*mon-pa*", they allude in a very general and vague manner to the people who lived in Ladakh prior to its tibetanisation around the 7th c. The question as to who were the first inhabitants of the area remains an open question. Bronze Age petroglyphs found throughout the country suggest, through stylistic comparison, that their authors were people of Central Asian steppic origins (Bruneau, Vernier, 2007, p 27-36). Petech and Dainelli assume for their part that a Dardic population later on fused with or replaced these earlier Indo-European inhabitants "often known as 'mon' " (Crook, Osmaston, 1994, p 437). Joseph Gergan the first modern Ladakhi scholar gives a rather vague definition of the *mon* while trying to answer the question regarding their identity, which can be translated as follows: "To those wondering who are the *Mon* we can reply like this: the *Mon* people are those living on the borders of India and Tibet, from the Tawang Mon of the eastern valleys of the Himalayas (North East Frontier Agency) up to the Kashmiri ones in the west, with the exception of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan" (Gergan 1976, p. 630). Clarke for his part goes beyond the purely geographical attribution to give "*mon*" a kind of identity meaning: "(...) the word '*mon*' refers in a general way to people from the wooded regions on the southern slopes of the Himalaya, and that in Tibetan *mon* is a rather classification, not a proper name." (Clarke 1977, p.340-41).

⁵ J.V. Bellezza proposes 'military' as the most obvious meaning for *gar*. If this later is the most likely, the spelling of it being not asserted other meanings might as well be possible. (private communication: e-mail form Aug 31st 2012).

A.D. Mongol invasions or other invasions made from Central Asia. Local tradition seems to classify as “Mongol” (*hor*) anything that emanates from beyond the Central Asian oasis of Yarkand and Khotan. It is clear to those of us who have studied the site, as we hope we will demonstrate below, that this complex predates by far the Mongol invasions (at least those of the end of the 17th century) although it does not exclude a reuse of the site at that particular time in the local history. For us, the construction of the site is more likely to be associated with the other ancient remains of the valley that we list and briefly describe below, dating back to the second diffusion of Buddhism or a little earlier, sometime around the 10th c. A.D.

General description of the site

Stok mon mkhar ruins are part of a complex, which, besides the ruined fort itself and its incredible setting, includes petroglyphs. As in almost all such complexes, the ground of the site is dotted with terracotta shards of various sizes and types. Unlike most other Ladakhi fortifications, however, there are no religious structures such as Lhatho-s⁶ or chorten-s present on the site.

Approaching from Stok, one has to look high up above the path to see the ruins of the fort as they are located on a crag, roughly orientated North-West South-East, in an almost perpendicular manner to the valley that runs along a South-West North-East axis. The South-Western slope of the crag on which the fort stands consists of a vertical wall that provides it with an impregnable natural protection. [Fig.1]. The North-Eastern slope, towards Stok valley, is steep but quite regular and still accessible [Fig.2]. The ruins stand about 180 meters above the valley at the highest, and are surrounded on three sides by a stream.

The ruins extend along the summit of the crag. They start on the lowest side to the South-East with two round towers and surrounding walls [Fig. 3], and extend up to the top-most part of the rock to where are what obviously were the main buildings, the heart of the complex. Further North-West, and separated from the main complex by a ravine and some 120 meters, stands another tower surrounded by low walls.

From the valley, the fort could be accessed in two manners. A first and obviously main approach, located on the Stok village side, was a hillside trail ascending the steep slope and reaching the complex at

⁶ *lha.tho*, an altar, residency of a local spirit, a construction crowned with branches of juniper.

its largest section after passing between two rocky escarpments at the feet of the outer walls. Today, it is hard to know if this meandering path, based on its slope and the width on some of the portions that remain, was ever accessible to horses. The slope is spotted with various remains made up of unrecognizable piled stones, sections of low walls and traces of terracing work. The second access was through a much more concealed path, and is located on the other side of the complex, i.e. its South-Eastern side. This path was obviously built to secure the water supply from the stream. It connects the lower third of the complex, and descends perpendicularly into a funnel-shaped rocky formation. The path then winds between two great rock pillars - where part of a postern gate still stands and, about halfway, reaches a high rocky ridge. **[Fig.4]** Turning to the east, the path is then contiguous to the ridge; buried partly in the land rubble and partly covered by large stone slabs. This stepped corridor, still almost entirely covered in its lowest section, reaches the foot of the cliff, a few meters only from where the stream flows nowadays. Today, the last portion of this concealed path is crumbling dangerously. This part of the complex stands as a magnificent example of ancient stone architecture with all stone corbelled structures, lintels and stairs, all executed in a skilful manner.

Description of the ruins

The fortified complex is almost entirely built of mud-mortared stone structures of a random texture. Only some of its chambers and small parting walls are built in dry stone. It is not clear whether some of the stones have been hewn or not.

The complex is 200 meters long. It is divided into three main and distinct parts (lower, medium and upper) and is composed of three types of buildings.

The first category, mostly present in the lower and medium part of the complex, is most numerous. There are approximately eighty room-like structures that can be identified within this first group. They consist of rectangular room-like structures about one and a half to two meters high, interconnected to each other by walls of various shapes. The construction follows the edge of the ridge and the contour lines or other constraints of the topography. Among these, some retain small structural details pertaining to their functionality. There are small wall niches or floor arrangements that divide up the floor space in various manners (paving slabs, parting lines). Some of these small structures presumably had stone corbelled roofs and even if none are still extant some still clearly show remains of stone

corbels. Some might have had temporary roofing such as tents. There are several stone lintels of doors and windows still standing. In this first category of smaller structures, the division into compact groups of contiguous buildings and lesser-built areas seems to be imposed by the terrain and its topography, thus main groups of buildings are located on larger and flatter areas, while narrower escarpments that interconnect them include surrounding walls, sections of parting walls and paths.

The second type of construction is made up of five (possibly six) round towers. They are located throughout the entire length of the complex and at both ends. Their construction along the outer wall of the North-Eastern side, towards Stok and the Indus Valley, clearly indicates which side of the fort was to be defended. These towers, built of mud-mortared stone masonry, had at least two floors, but none remain. The lower section of a stone staircase set in the walls with an ensuing curve to reach a second floor is still in place, half covered by debris. Some of the round towers still standing have loop holes of a size designed for the use of bows and arrows.

The third type of building consists of the edifices of the central body located on the topmost part of the complex. They are of a much larger size and have obviously been built with better care and workmanship. Three of the main buildings had their outer walls, together with their inner walls, mud plastered. The sockets that once held the beams supporting the floor together with those for the roof are still clearly visible. These buildings had roofs supported by wooden beams. The ground floor of these main buildings uses a box-like building technique, a feature that is also present in some of the less elaborate buildings of the first type in the medium part of the complex. Laying the ground floor of the main buildings was carried out by erecting large stone pylons and/or walls at regular intervals, taking advantage of already existing natural rock outcrops, thereby creating a level grid-like pattern, which was topped by stone lintels.

[Fig.5] This was surely a way to create a flat surface on which to build large buildings, avoiding too much terracing work that would have been quite arduous due to the steep and rocky nature of the terrain. The stone covering of these floors that today has almost totally crumbled away, probably due to the collapsing of the upper storeys, looks like rows of small compartments partly filled with rubble. It is important to note how in one building facing the main and tallest one, one of these box-like basements had its inner walls mud plastered. **[Fig.6]** This plastering work seems to have been executed very conscientiously which might indicate their use as stores, maybe grain silos. In fact the location of these stores as well as

their general aspect and size, strongly reminds us of similar ones, documented elsewhere, in Nubra valley for instance⁷.

The largest building in the central space at the top of the site forms the core of the complex. It consists of two adjoining buildings, altogether measuring 4.5 x 5.5 meters, accessed by a stone staircase. On the South-Western façade of this "main" building, on the second floor, is a large rectangular opening built into the wall, the size of which recalls that of a balcony-like structure (Ladakhi *rab gsal* style structure) [Fig.7]. The orientation and location of this opening, overlooking the eastern side of the complex tends to indicate that the building was used to protect the leading authority of the fort. Unfortunately, there is no significant architectural detail in the inner space to provide clues as to its original use and function. The building is surrounded on one side by what might well have been a paddock for large animals (horses, yak or dzo). It is built on the very edge of the abyss that surrounds this central body of buildings on three sides.

In front of the main buildings where the main access is reached from the North-West side, there is a large open space of about fifteen meters wide that looks like a central square. It contains a rectangular-shaped flat engraved cobble. On one side of the cobble there are twelve small rounded shallow hollows, set into two rows of six facing each other. These small bowls, each a few centimetres wide, are well weathered. This stone, the only such one known to us in Ladakh, remains a mystery as to its possible use: was it a game, an instrument used to count or calculate, or a device used for some specific ritual? It is interesting here to note that similar cup-marks with hatched wheel of various sizes and organized in various ways, mostly in rows but also in circles, have been documented in areas adjacent to Ladakh and in other locations in the Himalayas⁸.

⁷ Similarly mud plastered grain store of similar size were documented in Sumur-Mal ruined castle first by Q. Devers in 2010 then by our team (Bruneau Vernier Devers) in 2011. For a description of this site see: Bruneau L., Devers, Q. and Vernier, M., forthcoming 1. (See also Nyima 2010, fig 13, showing a granary, partially dug into the ground and embedded in the walls of Brag mkhar-monastery in Spiti). Similar plastered grain stores built of mud bricks are still in use in many ancient houses across Ladakh (on the house grain stores see for example: Kaplanian, 1981, p146).

⁸ See Olivieri and Vidale 2004, pp. 121-2 for an account of J.H. Rivett-Carnac's researches on cup-marked rocks in the 1870s as well as for the authors' recent finds of similar artefacts in the nearby Swat region of Pakistan. See also P. Pohle 1999 for Mustang area of Nepal and Zoller 1993, pp. 119-161 on Kumaon area. In his paper Zoller presents a table showing the different ways in which "cup cuttings on stone" are organized in the Kumaon area. Some perfectly match those of Stok mon mkhar.

Even if within the two main types of building there are several categories of construction that can be defined, depending on the technique and care with which they have been built, nothing indicates a later redevelopment of the site. Here and there, several dry-stone parting walls were clearly added subsequently between two mud-mortared ones, but these are likely to be contemporary additions made to the rest of the complex. Indeed Stok mon mkhar site appears more as a coherent whole, most probably arising from a single building impulse.

The antiquity of the site

The general defensive features, or more specifically the round towers and stone building techniques used at the site, tend to indicate an early date. In his article about the fortresses of Ladakh, when referring to the period ranging to the foundation of the kingdom of Ladakh up to the end of the 14th c., and even slightly before, Howards notes that even if “no clear single pattern of fortification type dominates (...) we may suggest some common practices”⁹. Among these he lists the “defensible town”. His definition, matching our case, deserves to be quoted here in full: “A town or large village whose dwellings are placed so close together, and with contiguous outer walls at the perimeter, that an attacker would find it very difficult to gain entry. The outer walls have few windows and there is usually only a single narrow entrance to the town (...)”. Indeed the situation of the fort itself reminds us of the one at Hankar which also stands on a crag¹⁰, its walls are similarly built on the very edge of a precipitous rock. However the architectural characteristics of Hankar are much more advanced than those of Stok mon mkhar (higher walls, use of timber lacings, wooden carved frame elements, larger rooms, systematic use of mortared masonry, wider use of mud-coating, etc.), and the ruins in Hankar are in a much less advanced state of decay.

To our knowledge the closest architectural example, as far as the stone corbelled technique is concerned, is that of Nyarma fort, located a day’s walk away. This fort is said to be at least 900 years old¹¹. Nyarma contains sections of brickwork, built with bricks of an early size¹² (40 x 25 x 10cm), a component missing at Stok. Regarding

⁹ Howard, 1989, p 256, (40)

¹⁰ Devers, Vernier. 2011, p 22

¹¹ Sharma, 2003, p 144.

¹² Although a systematic study on the topic is missing, it is clear through repeated observation and measurement that the size of the mud brick of the oldest still

Nyarma fort, Howard noted the stone corbelled roofing technique as being a potential sign of great antiquity¹³. Another building, also at a distance of a day's walk to the South-West across the Stok pass, is the Rumbag tower. **[Fig.8]** This all-stone corbelled structure, that still has most of its stone corbelled roof, is also linked by the local tradition to Mongol invasions¹⁴, and, like Stok mon mkhar, Rumbag clearly shows signs of antiquity. Contrariwise, these two sites, Nyarma and Rumbag, are both topped by a lhatho, a religious element surprisingly missing at Stok mon mkhar and that tends to point to an even earlier date. Indeed a lhatho presupposes an existing link between the builders or at least the occupants of the fort and a specific deity identifiable under the generic term of "lha", a lhatho being the residency offered to the lha-s. The fact that a big lhatho is actually found at the foot of the fort instead of being located at its top-most part tends to indicate that the construction predates the habit of building lhathos¹⁵, which would take us back to a greater antiquity.

Other remains of the complex

There are various petroglyphs, engraved on the rocks' surface all around the fort. In fact petroglyphs in the vicinity of ancient defensive sites is a recurrent feature throughout Ladakh and this, in our view, is linked to the highly defensive location of the sites more than to the fortifications themselves. The fact that rock art is located inside the complex itself, some at its very heart, is noteworthy.

Rock art is located at different spots, three in and around the fort's vicinity, a fourth one a kilometre downstream on the way to Stok and a fifth one near the tower located at the valley's turn.

standing buildings in Ladakh (Nyarma temple, Basgo, Zgang and Kardong Choskor "lotsawa" ruined temples) is radically different to those built later. On the size of early mud bricks see: Howard, 1989, p 219 and Devers Q., forthcoming,

¹³ Howard, 1989, p 269 (53) - 271 (55). And Bellezza, 2008, p 32-37, 56-57 among others.

¹⁴ NIRLAC. 2008. p 300

¹⁵ Two Lhatho style structures are located down the crag, next to the path, clearly outside the ancient fortified complex and nothing indicates a contemporary origin with the remains on the crag. They most probably are later additions built there as a way to stave off remains foreign to the known tradition. This way of warding off ancient evidence is a recursive feature in a Ladakhy rock art context in which it is expressed through the superimposition of Buddhist symbols, most often chorten-s, over hunting or fighting scenes.

The first group of petroglyphs, and obviously the most ancient, is located at the eastern-most end of the cliff on which the fort stands, near the stream and today almost on the pathway. It consists mainly of very dark animals, drawn in a basic way, and also two footprints of realistic size. [Fig.9] The patina of these later motives is as dark as the original stone surface making them difficult to see, and it tells us of their antiquity¹⁶. This supposed antiquity tends to be confirmed by the style of the motive represented¹⁷ and by the type of hammering¹⁸. There is also a chorten motif with a lighter patina colour engraved among this first group: it is of the lhabab (*lha bab*) style and has two eye circles engraved in its dome part, a rare feature in the early depiction of chorten-s in Ladakh¹⁹.

A second group of motives is engraved on an almost vertical stone wall on the southern side of the site. It consists of chorten designs of a basic stair-style type with a rounded dome topped by a trident pole. A few ibexes are also depicted as well as a human figure holding a kind of fringed standard or banner. This second group of petroglyph is less dark than the first one but one has to take into account the fact that the rock wall here is much less exposed to the elements and the sun than the slabs of the first group.

The third group of ancient engravings is located inside the fort, at three different spots. A first rock, located in the semicircle formed by the buildings at the arrival of the southern stepped path is engraved with three chorten designs. Another chorten is engraved on the rock on which the main building of the central body stands. These four chortens are very similar and consist of a series of four or five stairs of decreasing size posed on a square base, the whole topped by a circular dome. A last group of petroglyphs documented by Bellezza and depicting chorten-like motives that he describes as “geometric motifs that appear to be highly stylized shrines of the *chorten* or *sekhar* class” is located within the fort complex²⁰.

There is a group of sixteen engraved chortens on the left bank of the river located about a kilometre downstream from the fort, just opposite the group of ancient buildings and terraced fields standing on the other bank and described below. Several types of chortens are represented. Some are similar to those described above and others

¹⁶ Even if not a proof in itself, the patina has to be taken into consideration as a mean of relative analysis.

¹⁷ Jettmar and Thewalt 1985.

¹⁸ About a chronology of the petroglyphs in Ladakh see : Vernier, 2007.

¹⁹ About the “eyed” chorten-s in Ladakh, see Kimmert and Kozicz 2012, p 46.

²⁰ In the account of his “visit to Stok mon khar”, Bellezza cautiously points out that these chorten-like motives might date back to the Imperial period. For a photograph of these: Bellezza 2012, fig 12.

are of a more elaborate type comprising a compartmentalized central mast topped by a crescent moon and a circle. Some motives have obviously been retraced over. [Fig.10] Seeing these various types of engraved chorten motifs at various points in the valley around the site, it is interesting to note that there is no built chorten to be found.

The final group of petroglyphs is located at the feet of the hillock a few kilometres downstream on which the tower described below stands. We are nonetheless including them here as part of the whole because of their proximity with the tower that is so obviously linked with the remainder of the ruins.

Indeed in addition to petroglyphs, Stok mon mkar obviously has secondary sites with buildings connected to it.

The round tower guarding the turn of the valley leading to Stok mon mkhar is one of these. It stands on a small hillock about one kilometre upstream from the last irrigated fields of Stok village. It stands on the left side of the valley with a view over the top-most part of Stok village as well as a section of the path leading to the fort ruins. It features the same building technique and material as the fort with similar loopholes and stone corbelled elements. [Fig.11]

Between the tower and the fort itself are other remains that might be linked with the latter as well. They consist of a cluster of small ancient buildings set in the middle of ancient terraced fields. The buildings are in an advanced state of decay. They have obviously been reused and adapted over the years to serve as stable and barns but their original appearance remains. They were entirely built of stones using the same technique as for the fort. The terraced land extends over about two hundred meters along the river with a width of about one hundred meters. More than twenty crescent moon-shaped fields of various sizes are still visible, following the contour and lines of the terrain. The site is divided into two in its lowest third by what is nowadays a dry stream that descends from the nearby mountain. Ancient irrigation channels are still visible in places on the upper-most edge of the fields.

During the summer of 2012, J.V. Bellezza documented another site featuring both archaic and recent structures located on a ridge above the uppermost fields of Stok. "Of special interest is a single building consisting of five small rooms. It appears to have been an all-stone corbelled structure, as evidenced in its heavily built walls (now reduced to 1.5 m or less in height), buttressing partitioning rooms, three small window openings with stone lintels, rough alignment in the cardinal directions, possibly one or two small in situ corbels, bowed walls, and overlapping upper wall courses."²¹

²¹ Bellezza, 2012.

The location of the watchtower, the proximity of the ruins with the fort complex surrounded by ancient fields, together with the site most recently documented by Bellezza, raise several yet unanswered interesting questions about the history of this upper part of the valley and the possible links between these different remains. The distribution of the various ruins clearly indicates that the fort was part of a whole advanced defensive system.

Proximity alone is of course no proof, but as other evidence is not yet available, the existence of further remains within the valley seems to us a possible fruitful approach in ascertaining more clearly the range of Stok mon mkhar's possible dating. Thus let us briefly look at the valley's other remains.

Neighbouring remains

Apart from its well-known and very recent royal palace (built in the early 1820s) and surrounding buildings such as the Lonpo mkhar (*blon po mkhar*) or Gur-phug monastery (*bsKur phug dga' tshal gling dgon pa*), ancient monuments are located within or on the edge of the cultivated zone of Stok valley²².

Starting on the left bank of the valley, upstream of the monastery, is an ancient fortified structure on the craggy part of a hill next to the cultivated area. This now very much ruined fort is built in mud mortared stone masonry and has several stone lintels and a triangular loophole. At the foot of these ruins is a group of old derelict houses clustered together around the small newly built Zamlingang (*'dzam gling sgang*) temple. A little further up, on the edge of the cultivated area, is a group of three massive wall sections aligned in parallel and built of bricks of an early size²³ on top of a mud stone masonry base and standing near some rock shelters. From their size and technique, these highly ruined remains strongly recall early temple structures found elsewhere in Ladakh²⁴. Slightly higher is located what are undoubtedly the ruins of an ancient temple,

²² Over time, the agricultural activities have certainly demolished the ruins of lesser importance which might have been distributed here and there on the arable land. This does not exclude the fact that other remains might well have been located, and maybe still are, within the large irrigated zone of Stok village.

²³ c. 42 x 20 x 10 cm.

²⁴ We refer here for example to the ruined temples at Basgo (Institut für Architekturtheorie, Kunst und Kulturwissenschaften Technische Universität Graz : www.archresearch.tugraz.at/results/Basgo/basgo1.html), Zgang (personal observations) or the better known ones of the Nyarma complex (Howard, 1989 p 63, Devers Q., forthcoming).

locally known as “gom gog” (*dgom gog*), featuring a ground plan²⁵, thickness of walls and brick size (36 x 26 x 8 cm) that find parallels in other early religious buildings as well. The last remains of importance on this side of the valley are of the old Zamling temple, a modest building built on the hill overlooking the last upper fields of the village. This single storied temple includes a walled courtyard and is surrounded by chortens, many of which are believed to date back to the Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo's period (*lo tsa ba rin chen bzang po*, 958-1055). The original dukang (*'du khang*) is also said to date back to the translator's period. At least two other ruins of ancient temples are located on the other bank of the valley. The first one, nowadays reduced to a ruined entrance hall, is located next to an ancient painted chorten²⁶ at the Ramoshong (spelling unknown) hamlet. This temple, like the previous, is locally said to be a “Lotsawa Lhakhang”, i.e. to have been built by Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo, or around that time. Another ruined structure of a large size stands a few kilometres downstream in the middle of an alfalfa enclosure. The ruins of both temples are again made of the early brick size²⁷ and show the typical general feature (implantation, size, ground plan) of the category we link them to. Furthermore, these structures are in a very decayed state of conservation, pointing to their antiquity.

The village area is dotted with numerous chortens, some grouped some not, some of them of considerable size and antiquity. There is a ruined row of a hundred and eight chortens built on a common basis. Among these very numerous chortens built in and around the village some are believed to date back from the translator's time. Three Buddhist stone stele have been documented as well: one represents a bodhisattva carved in deep relief²⁸. The figure, even if it has now eroded considerably, obviously dates back to an early Buddhist art period. This stele can be compared to those in Leh (Changspa, Skara, Shey)²⁹. It bears a mantric inscription on the side. Two other such engraved stones are located on a mani wall facing the entrance

²⁵ See Vitali's typology of temples built during the 10th and 11 th c. in West Tibet, Vitali 1996, p. 94.

²⁶ The existence of this chorten was first mentioned to us by Andre Alexander in 2011. It is locally known as “Lotsawa chorten”. A publication including it is in process by our team: Devers, Q., L. Bruneau and M. Vernier, forthcoming 2. See also NIRLAC, 2008 p 468 and Kozciz 2012.

²⁷ Ramoshong ruined temple bricks' size: c. 36 x 23 x 12 cm. The “alfalfa enclosure” ruined temple : 42 x 20 x 10 cm. I am grateful to Q. Devers for sharing his notes about bricks measurements with me.

²⁸ This stele was long located next to a main wall, down at the palace complex, but was removed in 2010 and relocated to the front of the Palden Lhamo gompa. See also: NIRLAC, 2008 p 472.

²⁹ About stele in Ladakh see : Dorje, 2007.

chorten of the palace. A particularly square one depicts the figure of the four-armed and single-headed form of Avalokiteshvara while the other stone, much more elongated in shape, depicts the figure of a bodhisattva wearing a multi pointed crown. Its identity is uncertain.

Conclusion

The Stok valley is indeed a place full of hidden treasures, and as several of these remains are on the verge of disappearing, one can only hope for its ancient remains to be properly studied in the near future. The description and identification of all these other sites and the links they might share with each other as well as their possible connection with the ruined complex we are discussing here, is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, we believe these ancient monuments have a potential and are pieces of importance in the puzzling history, not only of the valley but beyond it to Ladakh itself at the turn of the first millennium AD. This is why we chose to briefly draw up a list here and to highlight the potential clue their study might bring to Stok mon mkhar complex itself.

In view of the historical richness of this valley, the fort of Stok mon mkhar appears more like the keystone to an entire historical heritage than simply to isolated ruins, lost in a side valley. Indeed, the study of Stok valley as a whole demands for further investigation.

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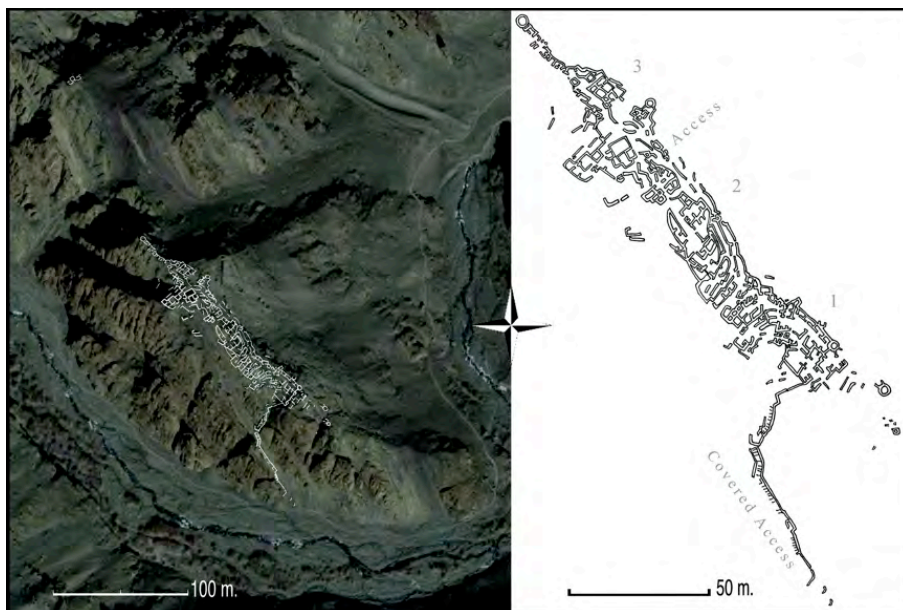


Figure 1 : Sketch plan of Stok Mon khar superimposed on an aerial view of the site (left), closer view standing alone (right). Aerial view: Google Earth (November 2012). [Credits Vernier 2012]



Figure 2: The north-eastern slope, towards Stok valley. [Credits Devers 2010]



Figure 3: General view of the southern part of the side, facing south-east.
[Credits: Devers 2010]



Figure 4: Protected stairways on the southern side.
[Credits: Devers 2010]



Figure 5: Detail of a box-like floor structure. [Credits: Devers 2009]



Figure 6: A larger box-like floor structure, possibly used as a storage silo.
[Credits: Devers 2009]



Figure 7: Building at the core of the complex. [Credits: Vernier 2004]



Figure 8: Tower at Rumbag. [Credits: Vernier 2003]



Figure 9: Petroglyphs at the feet of the fort. Here, two foot print motifs.
[Credits: Vernier 2012]



Figure 10: The group of engraved chortens located about a kilometre downstream from the fort. Some have obviously been retraced over. [Credits: Vernier 2012]



Figure 11: The watch tower at the valley's turn.
[Credits: Vernier 2012]