

## BERLIN'S "TURFAN COLLECTION" MOVES TO THE CENTER

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The permanent galleries showing South, Southeast and Central Asian art in the Asian Art Museum in Berlin (Museum für Asiatische Kunst) closed on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2016 [Fig. 1]. Large parts of the material will not be available to view until 2019, when a new exhibition will open in the Humboldt Forum, in the reconstructed Hohenzollern Palace (also known as the Berlin Palace) in the middle of the city next to the Museum Island, which is to serve as an innovative center for the arts.<sup>1</sup> The Asian galleries of the Asian Art Museum and the Ethnological Museum (both National Museums of Berlin / Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) will be located on the third floor of the Humboldt Forum.<sup>2</sup> Neil MacGregor, who has just retired as the Director of the British Museum, is going to spend about ten days every month in Berlin for the next few years as the leader of the "Gründungintendanz" of the Humboldt Forum. The other two members of this group of intendants are Hermann Parzinger, archaeologist and President of the Prussian Cultural Foundation (Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, which includes

the National Museums of Berlin) and art historian Horst Bredekamp (Professor at the Humboldt University, also a partner in the Humboldt Forum).

Central Asia is presently at the heart of the exhibition in Dahlem, with the "Cave of the Ringbearing Doves" (Kizil Cave 123, ca. 7<sup>th</sup> century) [Fig. 2, next page; Color Plate V] forming the very center. This unique reconstruction of an entire cave temple is the main reason why this gallery in Dahlem has to close almost four years before the opening of the Humboldt Forum. The cave has to be taken apart very carefully, fragment by fragment, prior to further conservation and reassembly in the Humboldt Forum. Luckily the same team of excellent conservators who performed the reconstruction and restored the paintings in 1998–2000 are going to do this work again.<sup>3</sup> The dome of this cave is supported by a steel frame, and this cannot be taken apart again. This large part will have to be transported and be moved into position in the new gallery before the façade of the building can be closed.

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The decision to reconstruct the "Berlin Palace" as the Humboldt Forum was passed by the Bundestag in 2002.<sup>4</sup> When I came to the Asian Art Museum as Curator of Central Asian Art in December 2007, planning was already in full swing. In 2008 we visited all relevant collections in the Asian Art Museum and in the Ethnological Museum as a large team of curators, conservators and specialists, and discussion on how

Fig. 1. View of the Central Asia Gallery in Dahlem in January 2016



Fig. 2. Cave of the Ringbearing Doves (Kizil Cave 123) as reconstructed in Dahlem.

to present the collections differently in the Humboldt Forum followed.<sup>5</sup> The Asian Art Museum was both praised and criticized for the beautiful galleries in Dahlem, which opened in 2000 (then still as the Museum of Indian Art, designed under the leadership of then Director, Marianne Yaldiz) after a two-year closure. Emphasis has been on the beauty of the objects, and without the catalogue or an audio guide the average visitor might find it difficult to understand the background to the complexities of languages and religions of the vast areas of the world represented in these rooms. On a personal note however, I shall miss the possibility to look into neighboring displays from the Central Asian gallery, for example on the origins of the Buddha figure in Gandhara [Fig. 3]. In the galleries in Dahlem, emphasis has been on the opening of space – causing anticipation – in contrast to corridors and separated rooms



Fig. 3. View from the Central Asia Gallery towards Buddhas from Gandhara.

with dark walls and spots highlighting the wall paintings and objects until 1998. That display (originally planned under Director Herbert Härtel before 1971) had an element of the unexpected, which made a deep impression on me in 1987, when I visited as an undergraduate student of European art history. This might have been the first step on my personal journey to Central Asian art (which strengthened of course after transferring to SOAS and getting to know the Stein Collection in the British Museum after 1989.)

In the Humboldt Forum we shall also strive to evoke the idea of travelling on the Silk Road. The partial reconstruction of Kizil Cave 8 (known as the “Cave of the Sword Bearers”) will form the focus of the permanent display of the objects from the northern Silk Road in a room situated directly under the dome of the Berlin Palace, thereby allowing a greater height than in the surrounding galleries [Fig. 4].<sup>6</sup> Due to its central location, this room will also form the link between the Asian Art Museum’s East Asian and South and South-

Fig. 4. Rendering of the future Central Asia Gallery in the Humboldt Forum.

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Fig. 5. Stupa, found in Kocho (Gaochang), stone, 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, III 6838

east Asian galleries. Visitors can imagine that they are on an imaginary journey from India to China or the other way round: there will be two entrances to the exhibitions. Coming from the South Asian galleries visitors will be able to learn much about the origins of Buddhism and Buddhist iconography. Key themes such as the stupa will be familiar to them by the time they arrive in this room, where the famous stone stupa found in Kocho will be a key object [Fig. 5]. Coming from the other direction visitors will be perhaps surprised to find Chinese manuscripts and recognize the



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Fig. 6. Sculptures from Central Asian sites as exhibited in Dahlem

influence of Tang Dynasty Chinese art in remote areas, such as Kumtura in the Kucha region. The visitors will also have just seen Buddhist sculptures from East Asia in the adjoining gallery. Uygur art -- wall paintings from the Turfan area and paintings on silk and paper as well as embroideries -- will be shown in the two corners closest to the East Asian galleries, with a special section devoted to the unique Manichaean collection. In the corners closer to the South Asian galleries wall paintings from Kizil, demonstrating Indian influence, will be shown, thus continuing the idea of a journey on the Silk Road.

On the two large side walls important unbaked clay sculptures from Shorchuk on one side, and a group of about 50 heads from Kucha and Turfan on the other side will be shown -- most of these are currently not on display [Fig. 6]. These faces will also represent the main topic of the gallery: "Begegnungen" = "Encounters" -- a fitting subject for perhaps the most central room in this new establishment, the Humboldt Forum, which aims to demonstrate the vibrant coexistence of many religions, languages and cultures from the distant past to the present day. The Silk Road with its network of unique oasis cultures combining the local and the global can be a good model for this. A frequently changing selection of manuscripts, illustrating the variety of languages and scripts will be in the center of the room. As the Turfan Collection is a closed, archaeological collection, this exhibition will concentrate on the early medieval times (ca. 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries with just a few later objects). The Islamic period of Xinjiang will be shown in a gallery in a similar position on the same floor on the other side of the building, occupied by the exhibitions of the Ethnological Museum.

It is interesting to note here that the German expeditions were also collecting ethnographical material. Especially Albert von Le Coq was interested in observing and documenting life in Xinjiang, brought back objects including embroideries and pottery, and

recorded folk songs on wax cylinder. Most important however, are the historical photos that they took not only of the sites, but also of the people. Although these photos have been available on the IDP website for some time, they have been largely unknown until now. Caren Dreyer, who has worked in the archives of the museum for fifteen years, has just published a new book about the Turfan Expeditions, illustrating it with a large number of hitherto unpublished photos.<sup>7</sup> The book is in German, but we are currently exploring ways to translate it into English.

The Turfan Expeditions and the conservation and research aspects will be presented in a new facility in the Humboldt Forum, in an open storage room situated next to the South Asia galleries. The centerpiece will be the reconstructed Kizil Cave 123, which will have to be completed by 2018 for an opening in 2019. Around the cave, which will be housed in a steel structure, in large display cases far more objects will be shown than hitherto possible, including sculptures, wooden artefacts and archaeological objects. Changing “Windows” focusing on specific topics, such as the technology of sculpture making, or the regional arts of Khotan, are also being planned. On the walls further wall paintings from Kizil will be presented.

Using media stations, the visitors will be able to explore aspects of research and conservation work, as well as the history of the Turfan expeditions, the history of the collection in Berlin, including the large-scale damage suffered during the Second World War, the geography of the area and the large historical photo collection. Our official collaboration with China will form an important part of this documentation. Zhao Li, Deputy Director of the Kucha Research Academy spent eighteen months researching in our museum, and this year we shall be hosting Cao Hongyong, Deputy Director of the Turfan Research Academy, and Chen Aifeng, a researcher of the Turfan Research Academy. Chen Aifeng will spend three months doing research in our collections, supported by the “Connecting Art Histories in the Museum” program, our collaboration with the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence. The research of Satomi Hiyama, a doctoral fellow in the same program and now postdoctoral fellow in Florence, will be shown on one wall of this room: Grünwedel’s drawings will be shown at full scale with the original fragments set into the right areas – thus reconstructing a wall of the “Painters’ Cave” (Kizil Cave 207, Fig. 7; Color Plate VI).<sup>8</sup> This is

*Fig. 7. Detail of a preaching scene from the Painter’s Cave (Kizil Cave 207, ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century CE), III 9148 b.*

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just one example of how current research will directly influence the display. Another example is our project on “Medieval wooden architecture from Kocho” supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, which is just coming to an end. A publication and a small display in the special exhibition rooms of the East Asian galleries in Dahlem is being planned for July-December 2016. In December 2016 the East Asian galleries will also close, and then we shall devote all our energies to reopen on time in the center of Berlin in 2019. Good bye Dahlem! [Fig. 8].



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Fig. 8. Final section of the Central Asia Gallery in Dahlem with view towards the Southeast Asian gallery in January 2016.

### About the author

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### Notes

1. The part-closure was officially announced at a press conference on 1 December 2015. During the closure we aim to grant access to specialists by appointment only whenever this is possible, especially for the study of smaller objects and manuscripts. Large parts of the wall painting collection will be in conservation and therefore not available for viewing. If you need an appointment please contact me at least four to six months in advance.

2. A large exhibition of the Silk Road objects was first shown in the center of Berlin in 1926–1938. The extent of the tragic loss of material in the Second World War is still being researched today. After the partitioning of Berlin, suburban Dahlem became the home of the West Berlin museums; a new exhibition of the Museum of Indian Art, which had been founded by Herbert Härtel in 1963, opened there in 1971. For the history of the collection up to the reopening in 2000 see Marianne Yaldiz, “The History of the Turfan Collection in the Museum of Indian Art,” *Orientalism*, November 2000, pp. 75–82. The Museum of Indian Art and the Museum of East Asian Art became the Asian Art Museum in 2006. Information on the Humboldt-Forum may be found at <<http://www.smb.museum/en/museums-and-institutions/humboldt-forum/home.html>>.

3. For the documentation of the conservation and reconstruction work 1998–2000 see Barbara Hausmann et al., “The Conservation and Reconstruction of the Cave with the Ring-bearing Doves,” *Orientalism*, November 2000, pp. 83–88; Ulf Palitza and Barbara Hausmann, “Restaurierung und Rekonstruktion ‘Höhle mit den Ringtragenden Tauben,’” in Toralf Gabsch, ed., *Auf Grünwedels Spuren – Restaurierung und Forschung an Zentralasiatischen Wandmalereien* (Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 2012), pp. 56–73.

4. For the history of this project see <[\[ussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en/humboldt-forum/history.html\]\(http://www.humboldt-forum.de/en/humboldt-forum/history.html\)>.](http://www.pre-</a></p>
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5. Subsequently experimental projects were made possible within the framework of the Humboldt Lab (2011–2015), a completely new initiative to encourage experimentation including exploring ways how to exhibit sacred artifacts and how to show ritual in the galleries. Central Asia was present in one very interesting project organized by Martina Stoye, Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art. Waseem Ahmed, a contemporary miniature artist from Lahore, became artist-in-residence and chose to paint contemporary interpretations of three wall paintings: one from Kocho and two from Kizil. See an article by Martina Stoye <<http://www.humboldt-forum.de/en/humboldt-lab-dahlem/project-archive/probeuehne-5/waseem-ahmed-dahlem-karkhana/project-description/#c4420>> and documentation including a film <<http://www.humboldt-forum.de/en/humboldt-lab-dahlem/project-archive/probeuehne-5/waseem-ahmed-dahlem-karkhana/pictures/#c4626>>.

6. A four-year project (2008–2012) has investigated the cave and also resulted in developing a new method of conservation with the help of print technology. (See Toralf Gabsch and Ulf Palitza, “Forschung und Restaurierung an Wandgemälden im Rahmen des KUR-programms,” in Gabsch 2012, pp. 56–73). The advantage of this method is the adding of the lost color with the help of a roller resulting in hundreds of small dots: this way the specialist can see exactly which parts are later reconstruction, whilst viewing from a distance, the museum visitor can enjoy the original beauty of the painting (Cf. Fig. 7 in this article). Only wall paintings copied in detail by Albert Grünwedel or documented by photographs taken by the German expeditions can be restored with this method.

7. Caren Dreyer, *Abenteuer Seidenstraße – Die Berliner Turfan Expeditionen 1902–1914*, Berlin: SMB – E A Seemann, 2015.

8. See Satomi Hiyama, “The Wall Paintings of the ‘Painters’ Cave’ (Kizil Cave 207),” unpublished dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 2014; Jana Bulir and Satomi Hiyama, “Zum Leben erwacht: Die Wandmalereien der Malerhöhle,” in Gabsch 2012, pp. 142–51.

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Plate V – [Russell-Smith, “Berlin’s ‘Turfan Collection,’” p. 154]

Cave of the Ringbearing Doves (Kizil Cave 123) as reconstructed in Dahlem.



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*Detail of a preaching scene from the Painter's Cave (Kizil Cave  
207, ca. 6th century CE), III 9148 b.*