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DISSERTATION 2011 / ABSTRACT English

PRESENT / MATERIALITY / CULTURE / PRESERVATION

MATERIAL: CLAY

PLACE: NAKO VILLAGE, WESTERN HIMALAYA

Summary:

The dissertation is dedicated to the clay building tradition of the village of Nako in the Western Himalayas under the aspects of contemporary culture and material culture. The fundamental question is whether the material clay, which is losing its relevance in vernacular building due to modernisation and progress in the isolated high-mountain village, will be handed down as one of the authentic cultural carriers. The present of the place is marked by increased building activities with modern building materials - signs of cultural upheavals and expressions of the progressive departure. What does preservation and tradition mean in this context? What is special, locally authentic, the heritage of Nako? What is the significance of clay as a material? Is it a cultural carrier? Will the clay heritage be preserved and further developed by the community, handed down? How sensible is this - Western-style - desire for preservation? And, learning from the critical field of postcolonial studies, can a museumisation of tradition and the traditional be avoided? The historical starting point of the discussion is clay as a carrier of images and settings for the artistic interior decoration in the Tibetan Buddhist temple complex from the 11th/12th century CE in the village. With regard to the necessary conservation and preservation, these important interior decorations were the subject of research from 2007 to 2011 in the FWF project „Scientific Study of the Artwork at Nako, India“; the dissertation was also written within this framework. Investigations into the damage situation and material technology of the earthen building materials of the temple buildings as well as the local building clays and the earthen building techniques that have been handed down to the present day formed the analytical basis for the attempt to discuss the current issues precisely and in a well-founded manner with regard to material culture and contemporary culture. Clay and Nako exemplify „Learning from Things“. This research approach of learning from objects and their meanings holds future potential for the understanding of tradition: as the persistence of diversities and the preservation of the authentic subject to change.