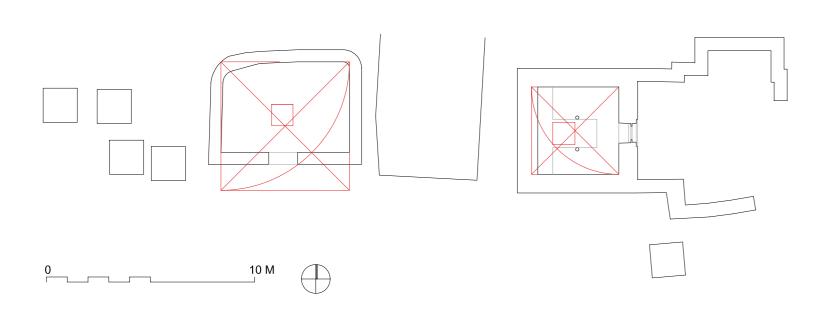
The Votive Stupas of Saspotse

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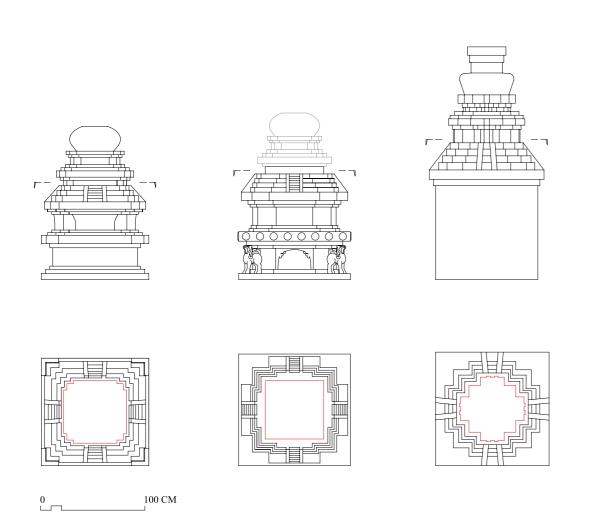
Western Stupa Temple

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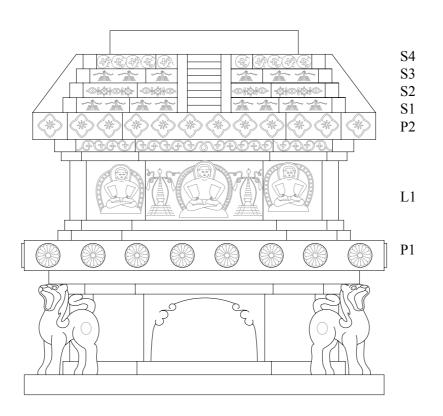
Topography _ Architectural Setting



Plan including the ,reconstructions' of the ideal, basic squares and the postion of the stupas in their spatial contexts.



Western Votive Stupa _ Eastern Votive Stupa _ Mangyu Inner Stupa All Saspotse monuments tentatively reconstructed.



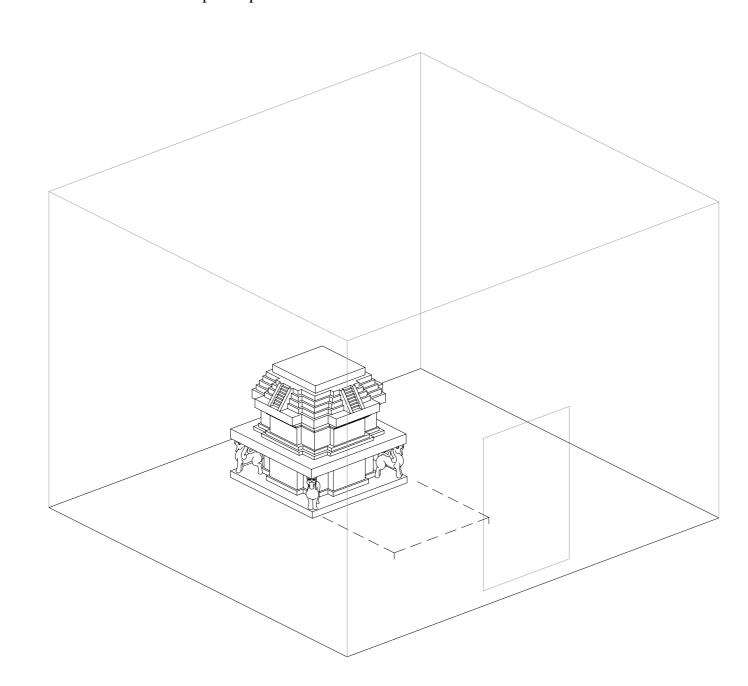
Facing side of the Eastern Stupa

Saspotse is a typical Western Himalayan hamlet. It is situated in a side valley of the Indus a few kilometres north of Saspol; the famous Alchi Choskor (Al ci chos-kor) is on the opposite side of the river. Some distance away from the settlement a cluster of comparatively small Buddhist monuments occupies a dominating position on a narrow plateau. Among those structures, all of which are in ruins today, two temples can be found. Some surviving murals inside the eastern temple allow for a 12th century dating of the decoration of both the temples. Both have massive votive stupas in their centres. In terms of structural components the stupa inside the western temple is in better condition. However, it is the stupa inside the eastern temple which deserves particular interest.

The stupa is the central object of veneration inside the temple's space, literally occupying the central position. It has been placed on a slightly elevated platform. This platform extends towards the entrance allowing any person wishing to perform a religious rite before the stupa to stand at the same level. It is this spatial relationship between the object and the practitioner that appears to have guided the whole iconographic conception of the temple.

Compared to the inner stupas of the stupas of the Alchi Group of Monuments, the Saspotse stupa was extremely delicately built. The form is much more fragile, the projecting levels are extremely thin. Stability had been achieved by the introduction of vertical, wooden posts that support the first upper platform of the stupa. These posts were incorporated into four lions placed at the corners of the lower platform. Thus structural support was secured both for the platform and the lions. Such a positioning of lion figures recalls the thrones of the four-fold Vairocana of the Tabo Main Temple and Lalung. Most noteworthy, the stupa was once completely painted with ornaments and figural depictions of yogins. Circular elements within the figures' nimbuses were done in silver high relief. Gilded high relief can also be traced on the upper steps where ornamental stupa motifs and floral scrolls decorate the vertical parts. The original colours have partly disappeared due to decay and white washing. The later is a practice that has also affected most of the Alchi votive stupas and blurred much of their original splendour. However, none of the Alchi stupas ever compared to the Saspotse stupa in terms of the quality and the complexity of decoration.

Unfortunately the upper part is completely lost. Only through comparison with the neighbouring stupa of the western temple that is almost identical in the lower sections, a tentative reconstruction can be done. The votive stupa of the western temple widely mirrors the structural composition of the eastern stupa, albeit lacking the sculptural support of the first plane and gilded, high relief ornaments. See also: http://stupa.arch-research.at



P1: Lotus motifs, identical moulded plaques can be found at the inner stupa of the Alchi Entrance stu-

L1 central: A yogin is depicted inside a mandorla, partly made in high relief, in a sitting position. However, the lower section including any traces of lower garments is completely gone. Both hands are placed next to the hips, but no mudras can be identified. The figure was originally flanked by two stupas identical to the 'Kashmiri' style stupa paintings of the Alchi Group temples and stupas. The background was completely gilded.

L1 / left and right flanking, recessed fields: Each field was occupied by another yogin similar to the central one.

P2: The decoration of platform 2 has completely vanished at the facing side of the stupa. Only at the northern side one field has survived displaying a floral pattern (blossoms with eight leaves inside a rosette-like frame). The intermediate, recessed plane below was originally gilded and decorated with a scroll motif (only to be found on the facing side above the yogins).

S1: Decoration of step 1 was probably similar to the stupa motif of step 3 (see below).

S2: The decoration of step 2 consists of a combination of round, eye-like and rhomboid forms, all of which were made in high relief and gilded.

S3: Step 3 was decorated with a stupa motif probably identical to the motif of step 1. The form is clearly different from the one flanking the central yogin below (L1) in terms of structural composition and proportion.

S4: The upper-most step displays a scroll motif.





