



BOGD KHAN PALACE

WMF RESTORES AN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY BUDDHIST MASTERPIECE

THE NAIDAN TEMPLE, ABOVE, ONE OF THE MOST ORNATE BUILDINGS IN THE BOGD KHAN PALACE COMPLEX; ALTAR PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE OF MANY GODS, RIGHT; AND GUARDIAN FIGURES ADORN THE PEACE GATE, BELOW.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN STUBBS FOR WMF

The Bogd Khan Palace in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, represents a last vestige of a way of court life that had prevailed in Central Asia for centuries, until the brutal Stalinist purges of the 1930s. The residence of the eighth and last Bogd Khan (Living Buddha), head of state and religious leader of the Mongolian people, the ten-building palace complex lies along a north-south axis. Its wooden structures—several of which were constructed using a complex system of interlocking joints—are arranged symmetrically within two rectangular enclosures. At one time there were a number of such palaces in Mongolia, each Bogd Khan having constructed his own. Today only four survive.

When the last Bogd Khan died in 1924, the line of succession ended and regular maintenance of the palace ceased. Over time, rain-water has penetrated its interiors, destabilizing the structures and washing away paintings and decorative finishes. Even in their poor condition, the buildings continue to function as a palace museum. A rich array of objects, representing religion and rule in Mongolia since Buddhism was adopted as the state faith in the sixteenth century, have been put on display. Among the most remarkable items is a rich collection of fine bronzes representing various religious figures and both woven and painted thankas produced during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries under the patronage of the first Bogd Khan, Zanibazar.

Although monies collected from museum admissions have allowed for minor restoration work, it has proceeded at a pace too slow to ensure the palace's survival. This past summer, WMF undertook a technical mission to the Bogd Khan Palace to assess its conservation needs. Following a series of meetings with local officials, architects, and the director of the Bogd Khan Palace Museum, a memorandum of understanding was adopted, which calls for the development of a detailed conservation plan. A first phase of work will include emergency repairs to leaking roofs and foundations, and the restoration of the Library Pavilion, which recently suffered a partial roof collapse. Techniques refined during the Library Pavilion restoration will guide future work on the palace complex. A second phase of work will entail the restoration of three buildings that compose the primary courtyard. Preservation of these buildings, which appeared on WMF's 1996 and 2000 Watch lists, will take an estimated three years to complete. To follow the restoration, slated to begin in June 2003, visit our website at: wmf.org.



BUILT BETWEEN 1912 AND 1919 IN CELEBRATION OF THE EIGHTH BOGD KHAN'S CORONATION, THE PEACE GATE, TOP, WAS CONSTRUCTED WITH 108 DIFFERENT FORMS OF INTERLOCKING JOINTS. A DEDICATION PLAQUE, ABOVE, WAS PLACED ABOVE THE ENTRANCE TO THE LAVRIN TEMPLE, PICTURED BELOW. A CARVED LION, RIGHT, GUARDS THE ENTRANCE TO THE NAIDAN TEMPLE.

