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Franco-Indian archaeological mission in Ladakh.

Activities for the year 2019.

Laurianne Bruneau and Martin Vernier.

On the French side, medical issues prevented the director to carry out activities. The mission's deputy director, Martin Vernier monitored the mission's day-to-day activities. For 2019, this responsibility was carried out informally without any real decision-making power or access to the allocated budgets¹.

On the Indian side, the mission's partners with whom multi-year scientific cooperation agreements had been signed, the situation also became complex. Prof. Vinod Nautiyal from HNB Garhwal University retired in December 2018. His designated successor, Prof. P. M. Saklani, who was to have taken over leadership of the mission on the Indian side in Summer 2018, passed away in spring 2019.

As for the University of Kashmir, it is no longer in a position (temporarily?) to work in Ladakh following the region's loss of constitutional autonomy on August 5, 2019. As of October 31, 2019, Jammu and Kashmir on the one hand and Ladakh on the other officially become two 'Union Territories', totally independent of each other and placed under the direct authority of New Delhi and therefore of the central government.

This sudden change in policy had several direct implications for the mission, starting with a breakdown in communication with our colleagues at the University of Kashmir, following the interruption of internet access and all telephone lines in Kashmir.

In addition, the administrative procedure to be followed to obtain the necessary authorizations for the mission has been called into question and will have to be reviewed in consultation with our contacts at the French Institute in India (IFI). Ladakh, for its part, does not currently have a regional institution that can approve or reject archaeological operations on its territory.

For all the reasons mentioned above, there was no field mission in 2019. Mr Vernier did, however, meet our Indian partners from the University of Kashmir in Ladakh in July 2019, and the willingness to cooperate remains intact.

Only time will tell whether field activities remain possible in Ladakh in this new political configuration.

¹ Mr Vernier's role as temporary director was validated in a videoconference on May 7, 2020, by members of the Commission Consultative des missions de recherche archéologique, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères.

In the absence of a field campaign, Mr. Vernier has ensured that the Himalayan Rock Art Database project (HiRADa - Himalayan Rock Art Database) continued in 2019². This work, carried out in collaboration with the engineers of the CRCAO and researchers involved, was the subject of three work sessions (of 10 days each) between December 2018 and October 2019, thanks in part to co-financing obtained:

-the 2nd [Prix Clio pour la recherche archéologique](#) (2018 Awards). The mission was represented by Marion Poux (MAFIL member since 2016) at the awards ceremony at the end of January 2019.

-a research grant from IRIS (Initiatives de Recherches Interdisciplinaires et Stratégiques) [SCRIPTA. Histoires et pratiques de l'écrit](#) from the PSL University for the [Paysages rupestres](#) project.

In autumn 2019, Laurianne Bruneau was awarded a grant from the [Dispositif de soutien à la recherche 'Emergence\(s\)' de la Ville de Paris](#) for the project "Himalayan archaeology: material culture and networks of the past" (AAP 2018-2019), which draws largely (but not exclusively) on the results of MAFIL. This project, which provides co-financing for the mission for the period 2020-2023, is the subject of an agreement between the [Ville de Paris](#) and the [EPHE-PSL](#) and is hosted by the [Centre de Recherche sur les Civilisations de l'Asie Orientale](#) in Paris.

The year 2020 will therefore be a year of reflection for MAFIL, whose research orientations and results have been strengthened by these various grants, but whose field activities (outside Ladakh?) are taking shape.

² See the 2019 report for a presentation of this project as well as its objectives and achievements.