

PRESS RELEASE

A tomb with a view

The joint restoration, on the job training and certification scheme instigated by German restorers for Vietnamese trainees at the An Dinh Palace in Hué is now being continued successfully at the tomb of the emperor Tu Duc on the former capital's outskirts. The huge mausoleum, a UNESCO World Heritage site, had deteriorated owing to the tropical climate, tourism and inadequate maintenance – and also the country's chronic shortage of restorers. The present scheme solves both problems in one: from 2009–2010, the gateway to the to the actual tomb and the spirit screen immediately behind it are being conserved and restored to UNESCO standards and, in parallel, local restorers now face a new task that offers quite promising prospects not only for them but also for their country's wealth of historical monuments. Moreover, the German–Vietnamese team is compiling data for a manual on materials and methods, which will later aid the conservation of the entire site and similar architectural monuments.

Tu Duc, the fourth emperor of the Nguyen dynasty, laid out his eternal resting place among rolling hills, pine forests, islands and lakes while he was still alive to enjoy it. The decorations found on the gateway and spirit screen of his sepulchre proper comprise glazed ceramics, porcelain mosaics, fresco painting and extremely stable mortars, all of which are now under restoration. Use of local materials is top priority for environmental reasons and also boosts the local economy. Thanks to the team's meticulous implementation of a critical restoration concept, the visitor can compare how things once were and what they have become.

The project is funded in the framework of the Cultural Preservation Programme maintained by the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany, and directed by the 'Society for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage' (GEKE). On-site work and the training scheme for Vietnamese artists and artisans are carried out under the aegis of the German Conservation Restoration and Education Projects (GCREP) team, led by Chief Restorer and Project Manager, Ms. Andrea Teufel. The Hué Monuments Conservation Center (HMCC) supports the project. Restoration of the gateway and spirit screen of Tu Duc's sepulchre represents an important first step towards preserving all the Nguyen emperors' tombs and monuments – and newly qualified restorers are now at work on other projects.

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