



Figure 1: Entry side of Gönpa Gang with reconstructed balcony and staircase to the left.

Architectural Restoration and Seismic Strengthening of Gönpa Gang

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Project Report, First Year – September 2022

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Norbusum Foundation (NGO)

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Kunjon Thakuri, Chairman
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Report Narrative

Work on this project began immediately after we heard that this project has come through, that is before its actual commencement of the project. August 13 and 14 Kunjon Thakuri and Sonam Dorjee visited the site to assess if recent rain fall has done any additional damage to the building and to talk with Binod Gurung and other villagers about the project. Later that month, on August 31, Kunjon met Thomas Schrom to plan his Gönpa Gang visit to finalise the planning of the architectural conservation, create a two-year work plan, and undertake emergency work as needed (Figure 1).

Thomas Schrom's visit was coordinated with the return of Kunjon Thakuri, Sienna Craig, and Christian Luczanits from Upper Mustang and thus planned for the last days of September. Unfortunately, Thomas caught Covid just before his planned departure and the visit had to be postponed.

Documentation



Figure 2: Clay sculpture of Katok Rikdzin Tsewang Norbu (kaḥ thog rig 'dzin tshé dbang nor bu; 1698–1755)

September 28 and 29 Kunjon Thakuri, Sienna Craig, Sonam Dorjee and Christian Luczanits returned from Upper Mustang and visited the site. While all the murals had been documented earlier and the sculptures had only been photographed as they are on display. This time the sculptures were documented in higher quality—smaller movable ones in a photo tent—from all sides and measured to have a detailed record of them (Figure 2).

Further, Sonam Dorjee learned to use a tool for assessing the quality of the wooden members of the architecture, which we could borrow for the winter months. He will go back to the site to check all pillars for potential faults that are not visible from the outside.

Indeed, a new issue noticed this year is the presence of termites in some of the wooden benches inside the assembly hall. Obviously, their presence must be considered in the planning work, also in terms of the wood used.

Associated Site

Led by Binod Gurung and another villager, Kunjon Thakuri and Christian Luczanits further visited a ruined cave site in the side valley behind the monastery, to assess its condition and potential for tourism. The cave is open on one side and filled with debris that covers much of the stupa inside. Further, the murals on the ceiling are extremely fragmentary. Nevertheless, the cave still has great potential for research, especially if the debris is excavated archeologically and the base of the stupa revealed. Remarkably, the upper parts of the stupa were made in papier mâché the fragments of which are still extant due to its durability. Further, the mural fragments allow for dating the cave to the fourteenth century (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Fourteenth century mural fragments in the stūpa cave above Gönpa Gang.

Christian Luczanits suggested to attempt to motivate the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal, to undertake an excavation there to fully assess the cave, and to make the cave accessible once that is done. Currently there is no path to reach the cave and access is extremely treacherous.

Purchase of Material

Given the difficulty in purchasing material from outside Nepal due to the new import rules, we have already ordered and purchased the Sika bitumen roles for Gönpa Gang, as they are unlikely to be available later this year or next year.

We also investigated the supply of wood, especially in the supply of round joists similar to the ones used at the site. For this purpose, Binod Gurung went to Gyakar village to check the wood available there. Similarly, we also looked for supplies of the round wooden pillars in case any of them would need to be replaced.

Planning Conversations

Kunjon Thakuri often passed through Chuksang in the past months, and consequently had many conversations about the project with Binod Gurung and other villagers.

Binod has been asking locals to come forward if anyone is interested to work for the project next year, and so far there is no interest in this regard from Chuksang villagers, but there may be a few villagers of Gyakar who want to work next year. We try to clarify this earlier than in Lo Gekhar to avoid personnel issues once the project commences.

There also were numerous conversations with current project members, Norbusum bord members and advisors on how to organise the actual project next year and the personnel needed.

Major part of the discussions were questions of transporting the material, as the road built earlier is interrupted by the footbridge anchored at its access. The local government agreed to finance a road access from a side valley at the back of the monastery.

Evaluation

Overall coordinating between the two restoration projects of the foundation as well as other needs turned out to be more challenging than expected. But neither the Covid infection of Thomas nor the heavy rains could be foreseen.

Going Forward

While the monastery only had some humidity problems at the usual spots over the summer, the heavy rains at the beginning of October did affect Gönpa Gang. The simple structure to the right-hand side of the building's entrance (Figure 1) has partially collapsed and it is said that the crack on this side of the wall got bigger. Further, inside the Assembly Hall, in the niche behind the big Maitreya Buddha image, water entered the interior of the building.

In figure 1 you can see the room on a right side that is the one which clops.

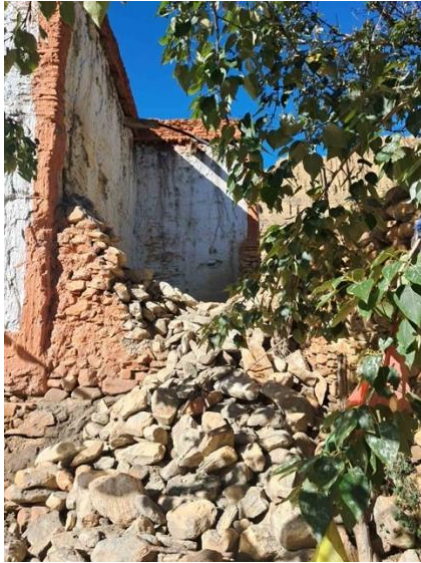


Figure 5: The structure to the right of the entrance partially collapsed in recent rains.



Figure 4: Water entered the building behind the main Buddha image as seen on October 15.

The planning work at the side has now been undertaken with a month delay and will be detailed in the next project report. In the meantime, we also learned that the monastery has not been registered with the Buddhist Association, but that this is a prerequisite for gaining permission from the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal, for the restoration. This registration is now in progress and a local committee has been formed for this process.