



1. View of Lo Gekhar in April 2021 with the new surrounding wall in the foreground, photo Kunjon Thakuri.

Seismic Strengthening and Restoration of Lo Gekhar

U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, Award No. SNP40020GR0042

Project Report, First Year, Third Quarter – April to June 2021

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Mustang District, Gandaki Pradesh, Nepal

Kunjon Thakuri
Chairman

July 25, 2021

Report Narrative

The spring campaign was hindered by COVID-19, but with Thomas Schrom agreeing to help at the planning stage as John Harrison could not come to Nepal, planning could go ahead to a good extent. The three spring months were predominantly used to:

- Visit the site with Thomas Schrom to improve on the existing plans in terms of detail,
- Create a draft restoration plan by Thomas Schrom in cooperation with John Harrison and other project members and supporters,
- Explore the options under the continuation of Covid related hindrances.

Visit

As it was not possible for John Harrison to come to Nepal due to the spread of the pandemic, we requested Thomas Schrom, who was then in Kathmandu to take over the architectural planning process. He agreed and from April 12 to 14 Thomas Schrom and Kunjon Thakuri stayed at Lo Ghekar to verify the existing plans and take note of all problematic architectural issues in the entire Main Temple complex. They were accompanied by Ben Ayers, who volunteered to help with measuring and other work on his own costs.



2. Thomas Schrom taking notes in the upper floor of the Main Temple, photo Kunjon Thakuri.

During the work the key holder (konyer) and villagers of Marang were consulted again for their suggestions, a consultation that continued via phone during the rest of the quarter. Together with travel this resulted in a six day engagement.

Draft Restoration Plan

Based on the visit above a more detailed restoration plan was created by Thomas Schrom which is attached separately. This plan was mostly created during six days of work in June, the delay due to personal issues Thomas Schrom had to deal with.

Issues noticed are the haphazard nature of historical addition to the monument resulting in many of the problems the architecture faces today. First and foremost among them are issues of drainage, superficial roof repairs, walls and wooden supports affected by water exposure, and poor quality material used in emergency repairs. Concerning waterproofing the structure, not only will the roof levels have to be aligned, but also the implementation of a waterproofing membrane is being considered.

In terms of seismic stability, a full evaluation will only be possible during the restoration work itself, when areas inaccessible without intervention can be fully evaluated. This makes the presence of a structural engineer during early stages of the restoration work necessary. Remedies will then be implemented on an at need basis.

For details, see the draft plan attached to this report.

Continuation

Based on the visit and the plan, discussions have ensued between different Norbusum members concerning the different restoration options. Important premises for the restoration are the priority of the actual temple area, the preservation of as much of the original architectural heritage as possible, consistent and efficient usage of the available space, and simplification of the roof drainage.

This quarter the draft plan will be used for

- further discussions on site with the Konjer and villagers especially regarding future space usage,
- for finalising the restoration plan for restoration permission at the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal,
- for starting to purchase materials, in particular wood, some building materials, scaffolding, some electricity supply.

John Harrison has put together a list of questions that need further evaluation. Further, it is hoped that all artefacts on site can be documented during an upcoming visit in August as well.

Evaluation

The project continues to face uncertainties due to the circumstances and work continues on an whenever possible basis:

- The biggest factor for this is the situation around Covid-19, which continues to change continuously and affects the travels of project members both internationally and nationally.
- During the monsoon season the road situation towards and in Mustang also affects travel. Currently it is uncertain if the site can be visited for discussions and documentation in August as planned.
- There is still no agreement on site and within the Norbusum board on the involvement of international parties in such a committee. In this regard, a statement by the US embassy recommending such a committee would be very helpful.
- This year privately funded work at Lo Gekhar has replaced the building in front of the main structure. This work started in May, that is after the last visit of a Norbusum member. The uncoordinated nature of works undertaken at the site thus continues to be a concern.
- Local politicking as outlined previously continues. In other words, it will be extremely hard if not impossible to maintain the site's integrity without establishing the committee suggested in the project application.

Going Forward

For August a visit was planned to check details that remained unclear, and discuss the restoration plan. This will enable the plans being finalised and the actual restoration being approved by the Department of Archaeology. Further, it is planned to document all portable artefacts not yet documented as well as the current condition. Finally attempting to set up a broader committee overlooking the work at the site remains a priority.