



1. Lo Gekhar in early March 2022.

Seismic Strengthening and Restoration of Lo Gekhar

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

Project Report, Second Year, Second Quarter – January to March 2022

Compiled by Christian Luczanits

Norbusum Foundation (NGO)

Himali Hotel, Jharkot, Ward no. 1, Baragung Muktichhetra 33107
Mustang District, Gandaki Pradesh, Nepal

Kunjon Thakuri
Chairman

April 27, 2022

Report Narrative

The second quarter of the second year was largely dedicated to planning and purchasing materials for the actual restoration to commence shortly after the report period early April 2022.

January and February Kunjon Thakuri was travelling and most project related work consisted of discussions and the exploration of suitable scaffolding and building materials. Most importantly, it needed to be assured that John Harrison can come to Nepal to guide the restoration in April. For this, numerous communications resulted in a meeting in Liverpool on February 15 to finalise planning in this regard and encourage him to provide more details about materials needed.

After her return to Nepal later in February, Kunjon Thakuri met Sonam Dorjee to discuss his potential role as on-site project coordinator during the actual restoration. They agreed on the role and responsibilities and Sonam Dorjee commenced to work for the project on the first of April.

Kunjon also visited Lo Gekhar in early March in the hope to be able to establish where the materials will be stored and where the team will be living during the restoration. Unfortunately, the situation around the nearby accommodation structure remained unclear, but the caretaker's house turned out to be a viable alternative for living.

Sonam Dorjee

While the Norbusum board members can take on shorter project related tasks, the actual restoration work requires a permanent presence on site who coordinates the work, keeps a record of the workers and materials, records the activities per day translates for John Harrison. With Sonam Dorjee we found an ideal on-site coordinator in this regard who already has experience in project work. Accordingly, he proactively influenced the planning process through his suggestions, e.g the supply of equipment like helmets for the workers or the medical kit on site.

Permission with DoA

While Kunjon Thakuri was travelling, Laxmi Gurung was regularly following up with the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal (DoA), to obtain the permission for the actual restoration work. From January to March 11 she visited the DoA offices eight times, the last two visits joined by Kunjon Thakuri.

Finally, they received the permission for the work under the condition that a representative of the DoA, Prakash Khadka, is supported financially to join the team during the restoration.

Purchase of Material

Much of the project period was dedicated to explore different options available in terms of materials and to purchase the most suitable ones. Many of the main items, such as the scaffolding, the marine grade plywood, and the waterproof membrane to be used needed considerable research before a solution could be decided on. As scaffolding a flexible solution with bars of different length and clamps has been chosen. Regarding the plywood sheets, fully waterproof thinner sheets were preferred over thicker ones that are water resistant on the surface only, and thus not where they are cut. For the waterproof membrane the team decided on Sika bitumen sheets with a rough outer surface that is ideal for attaching to the plywood at the bottom and making the clay adhere at the top. All of these items were purchased late in March with bills often dating to early April.

Documentation and Masterplan

To document the stone panels when they are out of the frames during the restoration, it was decided that Christian Luczanits joins the restoration team for the first three weeks. This also made the Upper Mustang permit process for John Harrison easier, as a minimum of two persons are normally required (resulting in additional costs if only one person travels alone). Christian will also work on the arrangement of the panels in the new spaces.

In addition, it is planned to make a last push for establishing a Masterplan for the site when Christian is on site.

Evaluation

In the past months considerable efforts have been made to discuss the details of the architectural restoration. Thereby, the lack of consensus on the most suitable materials for traditional clay sculptures posed a particular challenge along with the availability of suitable materials in Nepal. We expect that the combination of marine grade plywood and bitumen sheets not only enhances the seismic stability of the roof structure but also makes it waterproof and less affected by poor maintenance.

Part of the planning process included the setup on site during the restoration commencing in early April. Thereby both, the storage of the material to be sent to the site and arranging the accommodation of the workers turned out to be challenging, as commitments by the village community in this regard were not forthcoming. In particular the usage of the village owned hotel building could not be secured, but alternative solutions were found.

Going Forward

In early April work commenced as planned, materials and workers arriving on site almost at the same time and on-site solutions to be found on an ad hoc basis. The actual restoration began well but proceeds at a slower pace than originally hoped. Also the acquisition of local workers and materials, such as clay and stone slates, turned out to be more challenging than expected. On the worker's side, the local villagers and carpenters expressed their interest to work, but often are not available due to other commitments. This and the difficulty to find good carpenters willing to work permanently resulted in a slower than expected progress.

Even though the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal, insisted on having a representative present during the restoration, Prakash Khadka has delayed his arrival several times and has not yet reached Lo Gekhar by the end of April.

Given the slow progress so far, we are considering working with a contractor for the residential side of the complex to speed up the work. Negotiations in this regard are in progress. Equally, different solutions are considered to get a carpenter for the new frames housing the stone panels in the three upper temple spaces, as this is delicate and complex work.

The progress of the restoration can be followed through the images uploaded on Google Drive

(<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NDoa4iLtpDQ1JbBCHzkaVvkDP1-4Ae1u?usp=sharing>) and occasional Facebook posts

(<https://www.facebook.com/norbusumfoundation>).