



Figure 1: Group photo at the occasion of the closing ceremony at Lo Gekhar.

Seismic Strengthening and Restoration of Lo Gekhar

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

Project Report, Fourth Year, First Quarter – October to December 2023

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Mustang District, Gandaki Pradesh, Nepal

Kunjon Thakuri, Chairman

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Report Overview

Originally, a month of extension was requested for October to complete the restoration works. Major finishing works were completed within the scheduled time by hiring additional manpower with extended working hours. The remaining period before all the workers left for home for Dashain festival, was utilized for the maintenance of the protector deity room and conducting a thorough cleaning of the entire premises.

Further, a formal closing ceremony was organized at the occasion of the visit of the US Ambassador to Nepal, Dean R. Thompson, and his entourage on October 7, 2023. The ceremony was further attended by Member of Parliament Mr. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, other local government representatives, as well as the Marang community.



Figure 2: The US Embassy delegation inspecting the work along the circumambulation path.



Figure 3: Members of the US Embassy examining the installation of the stone panels in the Guru Lhakhang.



Figure 4: The US Ambassador to Nepal, Dean R. Thompson and Kunjon Thakuri in the Chenrézik Lhakhang (Avalokiteśvara Chapel).

Since project funds remained, it was suggested to ask for an extension of the project by one year to enable further aesthetic improvements. To finalize this proposal, Kunjon and Sonam visited Lo Gekhar in December and met the Marang village committee chairperson Mr. Kunga Tenzing Gurung along with the caretaker. Following the visit it was proposed to improve the overall lighting, to paint the lower walls in the assembly hall and the main shrine area, and to replace the main entry curtain fabric as main activities to be carried out in spring or summer 2024.

Purchase of Material

Materials purchased in this quarter mainly concerned items to complete the caretaker's area and included room heaters and battery backup systems. Four heaters were purchased for the VIP rooms and the retreat rooms. A set of new batteries and an inverter were purchased to improve the lighting of the temple and the caretaker's residence when the grid is off.

Further, the fabric of three victory banners on the roof had worn out and was replaced with new ones purchased from Kathmandu.



Figure 5: The temple roof with the worn-out cloth on the victory banners.



Figure 6: One of the victory banners with the new cloth.



Figure 7: The temple roof after replacing the cloth of the victory banners.

Works on the Temple

Works reported in the previous quarter, such as the stone panels along the pathway around the temple and the floor of the uppermost roof were completed in early October. Works newly undertaken are mentioned below.

Gönkhang

The protector deities' room, the Gönkhang, to the right of the Assembly Hall also received a thorough cleaning and the walls were given a whitewash. The walls had collected soot over a long time and the mud floor had numerous rat holes. The soot and the spider webs were all removed using a broom. Two coats of white chalk were applied over the walls. The mud floor with rat holes was compacted with aggregates and mud mortar. The front area of the room where the caretaker makes the butter lamp offering was completed with flagstones. The rest of the floor was plastered with mud mortar.

During the plastering of the floor, it was observed that the surface was covered in oil and butter from years of butter lamps offering creating a waterproof layer. This did not allow

the mud plaster to stick to the floor surface. Hence, some remaining flagstones were provided to the caretaker as he wanted to have them installed on the floor later.



Figure 8: The soot covered walls of the protector deity room before cleaning and painting.

Figure 9: The protector deity figures covered with plastic sheets during the cleaning.



Figure 10: The protector deity walls after the cleaning and fresh paint. The image also shows the old column replaced with a new square one.

Wooden rail in the staircase

A wooden staircase in the caretaker's atrium leading to the upper floor was originally conceived without handrails. However, it was suggested afterwards to add a handrail to the stairs to assist the elderly during their visits. Once added, the handrail was sanded and linseed oil was applied to complete it.



Figure 11: The wooden staircase leading to the upper floor in the caretaker's residence completed with a wooden rail.

Going Forward

In the meantime, the extension of the project by one year has been approved and required materials will be purchased when the work commences in May 2024.

After closing the site for the year, all the remaining construction materials and tools have been transported to the office warehouse in Jharkot. The rental contract of the community hotel ends in April 2024, if it can be used for the work in spring or summer is uncertain.

Lopsang Dorje Lama has resigned from his role as accountant. We have decided to employ Dawa Tsering Gurung on probation to take over accounting after training by Lopsang, who also agreed to assist Dawa four days a month. Dawa has an academic background in

accounting and worked in auditing. The actual work at the site will take place from May to August with limited funds and pre-defined activities.

Book

There are also funds in the budget for a book to be published on the site that includes the restoration activities. This book is slowly taking shape and will contain the following parts:

- A short historical introduction to the site and its mythology by Christian Luczanits
- A study on the architecture of Lo Gekhar by John Harrison
- An analysis of the paintings, sculptures and stone panels by Christian Luczanits
- And a report on the restoration work undertaken based on the final report by Sonam Dorjee Gurung.

The book will be designed and edited by Christian Luczanits in the format of the publication on Gönpa Gang. After collection approximate cost quotations from three printing presses, it was decided to print the book with Vajra Books due to the exceptional quality of their recent publications and the relationships already established with that enterprise.

Planned Activities

The extended period of the project will focus on the following activities.

- Sealing Cracks and Painting the Wall

These works will be limited to the assembly hall and the lower parts of the main shrine to reach uniform coat of the paint. This work will not touch areas with murals, which would need to be attended to by a conservator.

- Lighting Improvements


This includes the replacement of the existing lighting in the assembly hall and the main shrine. The bright flood lights installed will be replaced with track lights to create a more dimmed ambience.

- Finalize the Panel Frames

It was always planned to mask the gaps between stone panels in the Guru Lhakhang and Neten Lhakhang (Arhat Temple). This work will now be completed.

- Replace the Entrance Curtain

The white curtain at the main entrance to the temple will be replaced by a new one.

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- Install Labels and Descriptions

The rooms with stone panels and potentially other parts of the temple will be equipped with boards informing about their content and history.