

Pakistan - Preservation of Endangered Moveable Cultural Assets of Gandhara Art

Consultant's Report

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This report analyzes the documents and data available and includes discussion on some of the points outlined in Terms of Reference of the Consultant's draft contract for the postponed mission to Pakistan.

Considerable information has been provided in early project proposals and more was gathered in preparation for the mission. An analysis based only this information will not be able to address some issues, such as specific needs for staff training and the appropriateness of current conservation practices in the museums, which would be better address in conversations on site. Nevertheless, the report will address many other points that can advance the development of the project.

Specifically, this report will re-examine the project objectives stated in the previous project documents and suggest a reformulation of these objectives; recommend the initial scope of the activities to launch the project; provide guidance for the preparation of a work plan with clear, sequenced activities; and discuss the nature and content of a conservation assessment in the Pakistani context.

1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project for the *Preservation of Endangered Moveable Cultural Assets of Gandhara Art* is part of the *Unesco Programme for the Preservation of Endangered Moveable Cultural Assets and Museum Development* initiated in 2004. The objectives of this Programme were stated in a proposal by the Director-General to the General Conference in 2003.¹ That document explains that "the programme focuses on sites and collections in danger through the preservation of otherwise endangered cultural objects and artefacts. It seeks to make them accessible to local populations as elements of their tangible cultural heritage. In addition, the proposed activities will increase the number of catalogued objects, so that they can be better protected against theft... Action will focus on the following main area: preservation of movable heritage, with special emphasis on study and publication, inventories, capacity-building and training of staff in protecting cultural property and assets, museology and conservation, as well as manuscripts."²

¹ UNESCO, 32 C Proposal by the Director-General Concerning the Use of the Contribution of the United States of America for the Period 1 October to 31 December 2003, General Conference, 32nd Session, Paris 2003.

² Ibid, p.6.

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The proposal to the General Conference also mentions that the programme activities will consist of the elaboration of national inventories and databases; improvement in museology and conservation; and building of capacities and training of staff for the protection of cultural property.³

In line with these directives, the Pakistan project identified the following objectives⁴:

- Inventory and documentation of the dispersed collections of endangered Gandhara art in Pakistan.
- Preservation of endangered Gandhara objects in selected museums of Pakistan
- Increased knowledge and appreciation of the Gandhara collection among scholars and the general public.

These objectives are reasonable and achievable through a well-planned and carefully implemented project. In terms of priority among these objectives, it is recommended that the project focus initially on the first two since their achievement will then facilitate the third one - access to the collections for scholars and the general public.

Initially, the biggest challenge in launching this project was the large number of institutions involved and of activities expected to start simultaneously. Those elements required extensive consultation and strict coordination with several governing authorities, a difficult task at the start of a complex project.

As a result of several reviews and discussions between Pakistani authorities and the staff of the Unesco Paris and the Islamabad office, the number of museums participating in the initial phase of the project was reduced to three. The smaller number of participants (and governing authorities) will allow for easier decision-making and coordination.

A re-formulation of the project objectives and activities could read as follows:

The project seeks to increase the protection of Gandhara objects in Pakistan through:

- the registration of these objects in a standardized inventory system
- the establishment of proper conservation conditions of the objects in display and storage

The first phase of the project will include the Peshawar Museum and its storage facilities; the SSAQ Museum Archaeology & Ethnology at the University of Peshawar, and the Swat Museum and storage facilities in Saidu Sharif. Work in subsequent phases will extend to other museums that house Gandhara collections.

³ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

⁴ Unesco-Islamabad, Preservation of the Endangered Buddhist Gandhara Art of Pakistan (file called PAKISTAN 260105 final DG.doc)

2. PROJECT SCOPE AND ACTIVITIES

With these changes, the scope of the project will be focused on registration and conservation of Gandhara collections in three museums.

As activities are developed in these two areas, some factors must be taken into consideration:

- The three museums involved in the project belong to three different governing authorities, and this requires consultation, consensus-building, and coordination.
- The collections of Gandhara objects will continue to grow in the future from discoveries made in archaeological excavations and accidental findings. The project design should take this continuous increase of Gandhara collections in consideration.
- All three museums have objects that are not part of the Gandhara collections and that also need attention. Any conservation and registration work done needs to consider this. While these other collections are not part of the project, all decisions taken must also consider their care and preservation.
- All the museums involved in the project have stated that, in general, their usual resources (both human and financial) would not permit funding of the work proposed without the support of the UNESCO programme. This means that all decisions taken must take into consideration that the work needs to continue in the future and thus, the methods chosen must be in line with the resources that will be available.
- All objects in the museums are threatened by natural decay caused by environmental conditions, improper handling, theft, and natural disasters such as earthquakes. All these must be considered by the project.

Therefore, it is recommended that a certain number of principles be observed when designing the activities and actions of the project:

- All museums and governing authorities involved in the project should sign a formal agreement in which the objectives of the project and the responsibilities of each partner are explained, and the activities and modes of operation are detailed.
- The project should have a Director whose responsibility is to manage all the activities of the project in consultation with the partners. In addition to coordinating the work of the project, this person's responsibilities should also include, inter alia, verifying that the objectives are being achieved, monitoring the work and the budgets, assuring communications among the partners, acting as liaison with the authorities and UNESCO, and preparing of all required reports.
- All the activities of the project should be designed with a strong training component for local staff. If foreign specialists are used as consultants, their TORs should include training of local staff and the development of written guidelines or protocols for work to be carried out.
- All techniques or methods introduced by the project (whether for registration/inventories or conservation) should be appropriate to the local conditions and resources.

In a project of this nature, the activities of conservation and registration cannot be developed completely separately. At times, particularly in the early stages, they will

need to be closely coordinated. For example, registration activities require access to the objects, which assumes some previous work in the storage areas to provide this access. At the same time, the final arrangement of the storage areas will be determined to some extent by the needs of the objects, something that will be established through assessment and as part of the inventory process.

The rest of this section deals separately with the activities of conservation and of registration. A more specific sequence of activities will be given in the Work Plan section below.

Conservation

The feasibility study⁵ carried out a year ago by UNESCO Islamabad in cooperation with the Directorate, Archaeology and Museums, Government of NWFP highlighted that the conservation conditions in the sites involved in this project required immediate attention. The report concluded that the most endangered Gandhara objects were the stucco, terracotta and schist stone sculptures. However, the Gandhara collections - as well as other collections housed in the same institutions - also include bronze objects, stupa models, toilet rays, inscriptions, coins, jewellery, ceramics and architectural elements. The information provided by the institutions indicates that humidity, water filtration and pests are common problems, all of which have a harmful effect on many materials.

Without questioning the conclusions of the feasibility study with respect to the most endangered objects, it is recommended to start the project with a general assessment of existing conditions. Such an assessment will identify all the major conservation problems in each site, and provide elements for a comprehensive conservation work plan. For example, in some cases, the situation might call for a storage area to be reorganized with some new shelves, separating the objects by types and materials, and other cases might involve finding new storage facilities, fixing the roof or sealing the windows. However, a prioritized work plan cannot be made until the results of an assessment are available. What would constitute appropriate assessments for this project is discussed below.

The first action to be undertaken in this area is bringing in a conservator who has experience carrying out assessments. Two names have been suggested:

1. Mr. Rohit Jigyasu, an architect and planner, specializing in risk assessment for cultural heritage. His contact information is: #105, 16-A, Chandigarh-160015 India. Office: 91 981 554 9478; Mobile phone: 91 935 053 8835; email: rohitjigyasu72@yahoo.com
2. Dr. Vinod Daniels, Head of the Research Centre for Materials Conservation and the Built Environment, Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia. Office: 61(0)2 9320 6115; Mobile phone: 61 (0)411 021 600; e-mail: Vinodd@austmus.gov.au Please note that, as mentioned earlier, Dr. Daniels plans to travel to India during the month of February.

⁵ UNESCO and the Department of Archaeology and Museums, *Feasibility Report Preservation of Endangered Moveable Cultural Assets of Gandhara Art*, Islamabad, 2005.

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The reports of the assessments will identify the main threats to the collections in each site, the specific approaches and actions to take in each of the facilities to improve the conservation conditions. It will also establish the environmental conditions required by each type of material and the priorities in term of conservation interventions.

It cannot be stresses enough that the first step of this project should be a conservation assessment, to be carried out as soon as possible. The information obtained through this assessment will determine many of the subsequent steps.

Registration & Inventory Activities

One of the aims of this project stated early on was the establishment of a registration system for all Gandhara objects in Pakistan. With this in mind, there are several milestones for this area of the project.

The three museums involved in the project have indicated that some form of registration records exist. The Peshawar Museum provided the most information (included a sample registration form)and indicated that it has been working with a member of the Harappa Archaeological Research Project (HARP) to adapt the registration form used in that project for use in the Museum. As mentioned below, this seems a line of work worth pursuing.

The actions are recommended:

1. Establish a registration system to be used by all museums in the project. This system could be either one already in use in Pakistan or created anew. The system should be:
 - a. Simple and streamlined. It should not attempt to be a comprehensive collections management system at this point since this would make it too complex for use initially. However, the selection of software database should allow for future expansion of the functions of the system.
 - b. Suitable to the Gandhara collections, but also for other types of objects in museum collections in Pakistan.
 - c. Use, if at all possible, data management software that is readily available, such as FileMakerPro (already used for inventory and registration in the HARP project). This will provide on-going support for the software and allow future “upgrades”.
 - d. Any system that is selected must allow for the easy export of data to the **Object ID** form, currently used widely to track stolen objects in the international market. (For more information about Object ID see <http://www.object-id.com/>). The form used in the Peshawar Museum already contains most of the fields recommended in Object ID.
2. Bring a consultant to assist with the selection of a system and the development of the registration forms. One person who has worked in this area in Pakistan is Sharri Clark of HARP and Harvard University. The consultant should also be asked to assess the training needs for the staff of the three museums, design a training module to be used once the inventory system is ready for use, create a written manual for the use of the system, and determine the equipment necessary in each museum to carry out the work.

3. Consult with all museums involved in the project in the design of the form and obtain their agreement to use the form selected.

3. FIRST STEPS OF A WORK PLAN

1. Establish an agreement among the institutions involved in the project. This agreement should specify the objectives of the project and the expected outcomes, and outline the general responsibilities of the partners, the working methods of the projects and include a tentative schedule and work plan. The schedule and work plan should be revised and discussed periodically with all the partners. To assist communication and coordination, a group of representatives of all the institutions should be constituted as a steering committee. Any questions or disagreements on methods or approaches should be brought to this group for resolution.
2. Determine the responsibilities of the project Director and name the Director. Clarify to whom does the director report and what are his/her responsibilities vis-à-vis the Federal Secretary, the various authorities, the directors of the museums, and the director of UNESCO Islamabad.
3. Do a realistic estimate of the number of pieces in each of the museums. This will be important information in the preparation of the conservation assessments and the registration work.
4. Contract a consultant to do conservation assessments of all the facilities included in this project. The assessment of each facility should be done with the collaboration of one or two members of the staff so that the assessment process can be used as a training opportunity. The consultant's responsibilities should include an evaluation of the training needs in preventive conservation of the staff of each of the museums.
5. Contract a consultant to design the database for the inventory and registration of the collections. Suggestions for the characteristics of this database were discussed above. Obtain the necessary equipment for the registration work.
6. Investigate the possibility of bringing a specialist in storage re-organization to work hand-in-hand with the staff of the museums. This could be the person who carried out the assessment or a specialist from ICCROM. Obtain the equipment necessary for the re-organization of the storage facilities.

It is only after the above actions have been taken that a definitive work plan for the implementation of the project can be developed. This plan should be worked out with the collaboration of the storage specialist, the database expert and the project director.

The final work plan should establish the sequential order of the activities, the time required for each of them; identify the people involved in each activity and the resources needed.

7. CONSERVATION ASSESSMENTS IN PAKISTAN⁶

Why should a museum do a conservation assessment?

A conservation assessment (or survey) is a tool for identifying the conservation needs of a museum. For many years, museums have been analyzing the conditions of their collections, usually by doing a “condition report” of each object. That particular approach examines the individual objects and determines their state of conservation. It is generally used to establish treatment priorities. While these examinations identify those objects in most need of attention, usually they do not address the conditions in the museum that had often contributed to the deterioration and damage of the objects in the first place.

In recent decades, museum and conservation professionals have come to emphasize that the “condition report” approach, if used alone, leads to an endless round of conservation treatments. In search for more efficient ways of dealing with conservation, a new approach emerged that looks at the collections, the environment in which they are housed, and all the factors in the operations of a museum that can have an impact on the physical condition of objects. These factors include the condition of the building, the existing training and knowledge of the museum staff, the storage and exhibition conditions, and the policies and procedures regarding the use of collections. This approach is now commonly called “a conservation assessment”. “A conservation assessment identifies and describes the problems that affect the preservation of collections, analyzes the causes of these problems, and suggests a plan of action.”⁷ A good conservation assessment provides a museum with the information to set conservation priorities, select the most appropriate solution and develop an institutional conservation policy.

How is a conservation assessment done?

In practice, a conservation assessment has three phases: gathering of information, interpretation, and reporting of information. All three phases require the involvement of the conservation specialists and the museum staff.

1. The information gathering phase can have several steps.
 - Generally, the conservation specialists provides the museum with a detailed questionnaire covering areas such as museum’s structure and governance, staffing, composition of the collections, environmental controls, building maintenance and collections policies, and others. This information is very important and is gathered before the conservation specialist’s visit because the amount of time the specialists spends on site is limited.

⁶ The sources of much of the general information about conservation assessments in this section are The Conservation Assessment: A Tool for Planning, Implementing, and Fund-raising, published by The Getty Conservation Institute and Heritage Preservation (1990) and The Getty Conservation Institute’s The Conservation Assessment: A Proposed Model for Evaluating Museum Environmental Management Needs (version 9/99). These documents can be found in <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/PDFS/2002%20Tool%20for%20Planning.pdf> and http://getty.edu/conservation/publications/pdf_publications/assessmodeleng.pdf respectively.

⁷ Conservation Assessments: A Tool for Planning.... p. 2

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- In some instances, the conservation specialist can ask the museum to monitor the environment in the exhibition and storage areas in preparation for the site visit.
 - The actual visit to each museum by the conservation specialist last a minimum of 2 to 3 days, and can be extended depending the requirements of the assessment (for example, reasons to increase the length of the visit could be to do part of the analysis and writing of the report on site, or provide staff training). At the start of the visit the specialist and the museum director should have an open discussion about the resources available to the institution, any issues that the specialist should take into consideration when making recommendations, and establish a plan for the visit. Subsequently, the specialist will visit the museum and storage areas - always accompanied by staff members who can provide information and answer questions. At the end of the visit, conservation specialist generally meet again with the director to discuss in general terms the findings and to talk about the preparation of the report.
2. The information analysis is done by the conservation specialist, generally after leaving the site.
 3. The final phase is the preparation and presentation of the report, discussed next.

What will be the results of the assessment?

The final report should have enough information to serve as the foundation for a long-range conservation strategy. It will not merely enumerate problems but it will identify the most urgent one and suggest priorities. However, the final setting of priorities is the responsibility of the institution. A good assessor will be careful to suggest solutions in line with the museum's financial and human resources, and it is important that these be frankly discussed by the museum director with the assessor.

In addition to "technical" solutions involving the environment or the organization of exhibitions and storage, a good assessment report will touch upon policies and practices of the museum. For example, in their absence, the final report will recommend the establishment of written conservation policies, protocols for the handling and moving of objects, access to storage areas, etc.

An architectural caveat

The expertise of a conservation specialist usually lies on objects, and not buildings. While this type of specialist can identify problems with a building (such a leaking roofs, defective windows, cracks, poor insulation, etc.), a full structural evaluation is beyond his or her expertise. A responsible assessor will call attention to the problems, but will not draw conclusions or make recommendations to resolve them.

The three institutions involved in this project report problems with the building, which include leaks, percolation of water, stained walls, condensation inside the museum, etc. Any of these can be serious problems affecting the condition of objects. If the problems reported with the buildings are serious or on going, it is recommended that the assessment be carried out by a team of specialists - one focused on the collections and the other on the architectural/engineering problems. The use of a specialist team is particularly important in cases where the museum is housed in a historic structure requiring special considerations.

A conservation assessment in Pakistan

It has been asked whether a conservation assessment in Pakistan should be different from one in the United States or Great Britain. The answer to this question is no and yes.

No, it should not be different in terms of the approach, the areas covered (environment, practices and policies, etc.) or the procedures. All these elements have been tested in different situation, not only in North America and Europe, but in North Africa, India and the Middle East. All these elements are essential to a complete and comprehensive assessment.

And, yes, it will be different in the extent of scientific monitoring of the environment and the solutions at the end of the process. An experienced assessor will make sure that any solution proposed is appropriate to the local conditions and circumstances.