

Mission Report

*International Technical Meeting for the Conservation, Presentation and
Development of Mayadevi Temple Remains, Lumbini World Heritage
Site, Nepal (5-9 April 2001)*

Gamini Wijesuriya
May 2002

1. THE MISSION

On a recommendation made by Ms Junko Taniguchi, Programme Specialist of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, I was invited by the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu to the International Technical Meeting for the Conservation, Presentation and Development of The Mayadevi Temple, Lumbini, held from 4-10, April 2001.

The World Heritage site of Lumbini, Birth-place of the Lord Buddha has continuously been a place of pilgrimage by the Buddhist all over the world. It was declared a World Heritage Site in 1997. The place has changed considerably under the development plan prepared by the Japanese architect Tange Kenzo in 1978. The core zone of the Tange plan, the area protected under the World Heritage Convention, however, remain relatively unchanged except for the excavation work of the Mayadevi Temple undertaken by the Japanese Buddhist Foundation (JBF). This excavation work has removed the 1930's Mayadevi temple which existed on the spot but has exposed the foundation of a relatively old structure. Within the foundations, archaeologists have identified an object known as the Marker Stone. The Marker Stone is believed to have been laid on the spot where the Buddha was born, according to some scholars who interpret the inscription on the pillar erected close-by the Emperor Asoka.

Of the Mayadevi temple which existed above ground, only a portion of the wall to the western sites facing the Asokan pillar is left. The Mayadevi (Nativity) sculpture that was inside the temple had been removed to a different location. Conservation of the excavated materials and structures, provision of a shelter for the Mayadevi sculpture, overall protection and presentation of the site had raised a number of important conservation issues.

Two international technical missions, one by UNESCO (Dr. Robin Coningham & Mr Jean-Francois Milou) and the other by ICOMOS (Prof. Mohammad Rafique Mughal) had already been undertaken in April and June 2000, respectively. Their recommendations raised a number of relevant points in connection with the above issues, and the present Meeting was a result of these recommendations, endorsed by the World Heritage Committee, to seek possible solutions. The meeting was convened jointly by UNESCO and the Government of Nepal to assess the conservation needs of the excavated area.

1.1 Terms of Reference

UNESCO Kathmandu Office had indicated the objectives of the mission as to assist the national authorities in my capacity as a South Asian archaeologist, site management expert and a Member of ICOMOS in,

- (i) assessing the conservation needs of the Mayadevi Temple;
- (ii) determining appropriate guidelines to follow for the conservation measures to be undertaken;
- (iii) and in discussing proposals for the restoration, conservation and presentation of the Mayadevi Temple following international conservation standards to determine the most adequate conservation methodology to be followed and the most favourable presentation of the site following international conservation norms.
- (iv) and to report on the possible conservation options taking into account the needs of the stakeholders and on the possible solutions for conserving and

presenting the Mayadevi Temple without endangering its authenticity and integrity and World Heritage values.

1.2 Methodology

During the mission, there were formal meetings, workings sessions in groups, discussion with the local and national authorities including the Prime Minister in Kathmandu and in Lumbini. A site visit to Lumbini was also undertaken. A plenary session was held in Kathmandu to conclude the meeting.

The following individuals/representatives of authorities made presentations and/or participated in discussions.

- The Prime Minister
- The Minister of Youth, Sports, Culture and Tourism
- Lumbini Development Trust (officials, archaeologists, conservators)
- Architect on behalf of Japan Buddhist Foundation
- Japanese archaeologist who was responsible for excavation of the site on behalf of JBF
- Nepalese architectural consultants
- Department of Archaeology (officials, archaeologist, conservators)
- Five international expert participants (from Japan, Sri Lanka, France, UK) on religious site management, heritage site management, South Asian Archaeology, archaeological conservation, heritage site presentation.
- The UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Asia-Pacific Region & Special Projects for Cities.

2. OBSERVATIONS

2.1 Conservation Issues

- Conservation of the brick structure exposed by the archaeologist of JBF (presently covered with earth).
- Conservation of the remnants of the alcove, which is a mix of brick and mud.
- Placement of the Mayadevi sculptor in a suitable place.
- Presentation of the site highlighting the three main elements: Asokan Pillar. Mayadevi Sculpture and the Marker Stone and the remains of the brick structure.

2.2 Other relevant conservation issues

- Importance of the sites as a prime place of worship by the Buddhist all over the world.
- As a place of worship/significance to the local Buddhist/non Buddhist community.
- Conformity with the Kenzo Tange Master plan adopted by the Government of Nepal.
- World Heritage Status (authenticity etc.)

- Nepalese national sentiments.
- Provision of space for religious observances and practices.
- Urgency of the conservation work

2.3 Proposals

It was observed that a great deal of emphasis had been placed on the protection of the entire site (brick structure and the Pillar) in the form of a massive shelter. On behalf of JBF, architect Mr. Y. Kumagai presented a detailed proposal for a shelter to cover the entire Mayadevi site.

At the request of LDT, local Architects led by Prof. Tiwari also presented a proposal to reconstruct part of the alcove to place the Mayadevi statue and also to provide cover for the Marker Stone. Marker Stone was to be seen by the public from a distance. Conservation of the brick structure was also incorporated into this.

Developing the same concept, a local group of architects/ developers had proposed a massive shelter in the form of a Nepalese *stupa* (apparently a structure built for EXPO exhibition in Germany) to cover the entire Mayadevi temple. In addition, they had introduced a multilevel space for various activities with the *stupa*.

During the discussions, the need to maintain the core area as a sacred garden was expressed by the local architects, supported by international experts. A review of the Master Plan had been proposed by the World Buddhist Summit but no action seems to have been taken since December 1999. It was observed that the time had come to review the Master Plan in the light of the changes that have occurred over the last decade, particularly taking due consideration of the recent attribution as World Heritage.

2.4 Excavation report

The final report of the excavation of Mayadevi Temple was not available although there is a legal contract agreement between LDT and JBF for this report to be submitted. Mr S. Uesaka, the archaeologist who was responsible for excavation was present. However, his brief presentations served very little purpose.

2.5 Site visit

The site-visit clearly revealed the need for urgent conservation measures to be undertaken. The fragile nature of the remains of the alcove was also noted. These were out of bound for the public. The Mayadevi sculpture is placed in a small building creating much discomfort to the users. Some people visit the site once only in their life-time, and as such, opportunity to see the remnants of the Mayadevi temple and the Marker Stone should be provided.

The site visit took place on a full moon day where hundreds of thousands of people gathered at site. This seems to be a regular occurrence on full moon days. Interestingly, they had posed less pressure on the area near the Asokan pillar. However, the reorganisation of these activities and organising the physical space for the massive human movement at site is an urgent necessity.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Conservation management of living cultural sites of this nature poses considerable challenges. Complexity of living cultural sites is reflected in their diverse interests among the users. The interests and the values of such sites reach far beyond the materials values of the archaeological remains. Cultural, spiritual and associated values together with local and national sentiments all play a vital roles in the management and development of living cultural sites. The remarks of the Buddhist monk that 'not a single brick should be added' to the ancient brick structure, the demand to incorporate some elements of Nepalese heritage in the proposed structures and the demand for space in the vicinity of the ruins to perform religious observances, (i.e. to light lamps, to offer flowers etc.) are not common only to Lumbini Site. They are constantly recurring issues which need to be seriously addressed when planning and implementing the conservation of living cultural sites, regardless of the fragile nature of the archaeological remains. These needs and sentiments are underpinned by the actions of the national governments as well as the international community. We noted the initiatives already taken by the national government to utilise the full potentials of Lumbini to promote the Buddhist philosophy, practices and world peace, formation of the Lumbini Development Trust and many other actions in this direction. We also noted the expectations and desires expressed by the World Buddhist Summit and other international Buddhist conferences. Archaeological values have to be sustained within them.

On the other hand, the World Heritage values placed on the site mutually agreed by both UNESCO, and the Government of Nepal and the international community at large need to be taken into account. Our task is to achieve a balance between the different values. The only way to achieve acceptable results in this case is through fullest possible consultation and compromises with the local/national representatives who are familiar with the needs and constantly exposed to the national and international pressures. In this context it was felt highly desirable to place our emphasis on the recommendations of the Nara Document on Authenticity in handling conservation issues of this nature. Its principles have placed due recognition of local needs in deciding on authenticity. UNESCO and local/national representatives should arrive at decisions acceptable and realistically available for the stakeholders concerned. Following conclusions were adopted bearing in mind these values and leaving flexibility for further discussions, dialogue and compromises with the local authorities concerned whom we trust represent the needs of the public and the international community.

- Large shelter to cover the entire site seems inappropriate considering the simplicity and the garden nature expected of the site, in addition to possible technical issues that could accelerate the deterioration process.
- The *stupa* with multi-level activities could have the same effect as above. In addition my personal view is that the sacred *stupa* form should not be utilised for any purpose other than to build a *stupa* or a reliquary.
- Partly reconstructed alcove to place the Mayadevi statue and to protect Marker Stone was a proposal that could be improved.
- Need to maintain the garden like character and simplicity of the site is emphasised.
- Conservation of the archaeological remains of the Mayadevi temple (brick structure) using familiar practices in Nepal and this part of the world is desirable.

- Extra care to be taken to protect the remains of the alcove. The archaeological investigations failed to submit concluding remarks about the remains of the alcove particularly its age. This would have decided the fate of the remains of the alcove, which forms a relatively prominent feature of the site. Compared to the objects of greater importance namely the Marker Stone, the Asokan pillar, the Mayadevi sculpture and the foundations of the temples, prominence given to the remnants of the alcove is not justifiable if it is of recent origin. However, since giving due respect to all the historic periods as far as possible being an accepted principle, it is recommended that the alcove remains are protected and exhibited as part of the history of the place. Also, it can serve as a place for Mayadevi sculpture and provide some sort of security for the Marker Stone.
- Three elements of significance namely Asokan pillar, Marker Stone and Mayadevi sculpture to be given their due place.
- Accessibility to major elements should not be restricted to any privileged groups.
- Space required for rituals and religious observances to be provided away from the three elements mentioned above.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on above observations and conclusions the following the recommendations were made. They were discussed and agreed upon under two headings:

- (i) Consolidation of the ruins of the temple and the remnants of the alcove is to follow the principle of minimum interventions and accepted local and international practices. For this purpose a series of recommendation were formulated and discussed at the final session (Annexe1).
- (ii) A simplest form of modern shelter was proposed for the protection and presentation of the Marker Stone and to place the Mayadevi sculpture. For this purpose too, a set of guidelines together with a conceptual design was proposed at the final sessions (Annexe 2).

2. Finally, it is also recommended that WHC maintain a close dialogue with the local authorities to arrive at acceptable solutions.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Ms Junko Taniguchi, Programme Specialists of the World Heritage Centre for recommending me to participate the meeting. I appreciate her recognition of my experience in conserving sensitive living religious sites and the opportunity given to share them with other neighbouring countries having similar issues. I am particularly indebted to her commitment to the protection of the World Heritage Sites in the Asian region.

Chief of the UNESCO Kathmandu Office Mr. Y. Kithamura and his Programme Officer Miss Hilmalchuli Gurung deserve a special thank for being our host amidst many tasks and numerous difficulties currently faced. Officials of the

Department of Archaeology, Lumbilni Development Trust, many of whom were close friends and colleagues, and the international participants offered a very cordial environment for discussions. I pay my deepest respect to all of them.

Finally I wish to express my deep gratitude to my manager, Mr. Simon Kelton, for the permission granted me to carry out this mission.

Annexe 1

Conclusions of the International Technical Meeting for the Conservation, Presentation and Development of the Maya Devi Temple Remains, Lumbini World Heritage Site, Nepal (5-9 April 2001)

A. Conservation Issues

A.I. Marker Stone

The International Technical Meeting decided that :

1. The Marker Stone should not be moved.
2. A stone conservator should be engaged to examine the condition of the stone and to prepare a report on the state of conservation of the stone.
3. The water table should be monitored and if deemed necessary, the use of a water pump should be considered as an emergency response, should it be deemed necessary for the protection of the Marker Stone.
4. The “cell” containing the Marker Stone should be covered by a dome or cone-shaped bullet-proof transparent cover. This cover should be reversible and removable with surface drainage to permit for roof-coverage, and should provide adequate ventilation.
5. The sides of the “cell” should be consolidated utilizing non-intrusive material, and upon consultation with international and national conservators.
6. Appropriate conservation and presentation measures should be planned and implemented to ensure that religious practices and rituals do not alter material stability of the marker stone.

A.II. Nativity Image

The International Technical Meeting decided that :

1. The Nativity Image should be moved from its current temporary shelter to the alcove situated on the “alcove remains”.
2. Prior to reinstallation to the alcove, the Image should be examined closely by a stone conservator and a report on its state of conservation should be analyzed.

3. Any conservation measures taken to enhance the state of conservation of the Image should be carried out before re-installing the Image within the alcove. The degree to which the image will be cleaned should be advised by conservators only after the state of conservation of the stone is examined and analyzed.
4. Any conservation measures taken to enhance the state of conservation of the Image should be carefully monitored after completion, and the monitoring report should be regularly examined by a stone conservator.
5. Appropriate conservation and presentation measures should be planned and implemented to ensure that religious practices and rituals do not alter the material stability of the Image.
6. A Nativity Replica should be installed in an area of low archaeological vulnerability to act as a focus for religious practices and rituals.

A.III. Ashoka Pillar and Its Capital

The International Technical Meeting decided that :

1. The state of conservation of the Ashoka Capital, the Ashoka Pillar and its ring should be closely examined by a stone conservator and this report should be analyzed.
2. Appropriate conservation and preservation measures should be planned and implemented based upon the state of conservation report to ensure that religious practices and rituals do not alter the natural stability of the Ashoka Pillar and its Capital.

A.IV. Artifacts from Excavations

The International Technical Meeting decided that :

1. All artifacts excavated from the Sacred Garden area (the designated World Heritage core and buffer zones) should be conserved, inventoried, documented and displayed in a site-interpretation centre on-site within the Lumbini Museum, in order to enhance the experience of cultural visitors, pilgrims and scholars.

A.V. Archaeological Remains of the Mayadevi Temple

Taking into due consideration that the most favourable conservation measures for protecting the fragile Mayadevi Temple archaeological remains is reburial with consolidation;

Recognizing that the current “false” building up of protective bricklayers must be avoided to mitigate inaccurate interpretation of the archaeological remains;

The International Technical Meeting decided that :

1. The authentic building plan of the Maya Devi Temple should be presented by consolidating “in-situ” walling by using clearly differentiated brick in mud mortar to the current ground level, as already practiced by Lumbini Development Trust, while also re-utilizing ancient brickwork (from stores / heaps) set in lime mortar to prevent water penetration damage to the visible upper most causes.
2. The “cells” between the ancient walls should be filled with gravel, dried sand and brick grit up to ground levels.
3. Drainage should be provided from the “cells” by installing pipes in reconstituted brickwork below visible surface. De-silting processes should be adequately considered in designing the surface drainage.
4. Adequate measures should be taken to ensure substantial run-off of rainwater from the shelter provided for the Marker Stone, Nativity Image and Alcove Remains.
5. Direct access onto the archaeological remains should be forbidden to avoid wear of structures from visitor-traffic. This principle should apply for all archaeological remains within the Sacred Garden including the Mayadeve Temple remains.
6. Access around the archaeological remains should be controlled by the authorities concerned provided by the use of a narrow circum-ambulatory path with short timber fencing. This path should be of *lime-surkhi* and footwear should be removed.
7. Access to and visibility of the objects of worship (i.e. Nativity Image, Marker Stone) should be provided by the installation of a lightweight bridge which should remain in place throughout the year but can be removed without causing irreversible damage to the archaeological remains. Access to this bridge should be controlled with reference to the load capacity of the bridge.

8. Weekly monitoring (i.e. conservation check-ups) on the state of conservation of the archaeological remains should ensure that damage and vegetation growth is controlled. Weekly monitoring of visitors should be analyzed.

VI. Alcove Remains

Recognizing the religious and historical significance of the remains of the Alcove dating from 3rd century BC to 20th century AD and the need to present these remains as an integral part of the World Heritage core zone;

Noting the unstable condition in which the Alcove Remains are today and the need to consolidate the Alcove Remains upon urgently scientifically analyzing the character of the structure;

The International Technical Meeting decided that :

1. International and national brick and earth structural conservation experts should be urgently engaged to examine the character and structure of the Alcove Remains.
2. Upon careful examination of the character and structure of the Alcove Remains, preparation of a consolidation and stabilization plan with minimal intervention should be elaborated.
3. In carrying out consolidation work, care should be taken to maintain the current height of the Alcove Remains (i.e. do not increase the height significantly) to prevent increase in the load and sub-surface material compaction.
4. Brick and earth conservators should identify the degree of consolidation of the Alcove Remains whilst preventing the creation of a micro-environment within the structure.
5. To prevent direct exposure of the Alcove Remains to rainfall, the structure should be covered by a shelter which covers the Marker Stone and the Nativity Image. This shelter should be free-standing and above the Alcove Remains.
6. The Nativity Image should be placed directly on the cardinal east-west line of the Marker Stone on the Alcove Remains. Reconstruction limits of the Alcove Remains should be identified by brick and earth conservators to ensure that there is no danger of collapse. Structural load details should be provided to brick and earth conservators before any interventions are taken.

Annexe 2

B. Presentation and Development

The International Technical Meeting decided that the following guiding principles should be followed in designing and conceptualizing the protective shelter for the Maya Devi Temple remains, in particular the Marker Stone, Nativity Image and the Maya Devi Temple Alcove Remains;

1. Respect and follow the Lumbini Master Plan developed by Kenzo Tange and adopted by the national authorities, in particular, respect and elaborate the notion of the “Sacred Garden of Lumbini, Birthplace of the Lord Buddha”.
2. Conserve and present the archaeological remains of religious, historical and cultural significance with minimal intervention and following the conservation guidelines elaborated and adopted by the International Technical Meeting, especially the notion of surface drainage.
3. Respect the “holy” character of the place and the simplicity of the natural setting of the site.
4. Reflect accurately the “intangible” significance (i.e. the precious, unique, and spiritual character) of the site.
5. Ensure adequate accessibility to the heritage areas and objects of worship without discrimination, while managing the security and movement of pilgrims and visitors.
6. Ensure the Ashoka Pillar and its Capital are given due emphasis to adequately present their value.
7. Take into due consideration the three main objects of worship (i.e. Marker Stone, Nativity Image, Ashoka Pillar and its Capital)
8. Aesthetically place emphasis on the “jewel” like precious character of the place instead of adapting “traditional architectural styles”, (i.e. retain simplicity and avoid over-decorating to mitigate the possibility of diverting attention away from the spiritual character of the place).
9. For the necessary decoration of the shelter, however, utilize Buddhist iconography adapted from artifacts excavated from the site.

Finally, taking into account all of the above, the International Technical Meeting recommended the adoption of the concept of the “Golden Pavillion within the Sacred Garden of Lumbini, Birthplace of the Lord Buddha”, as illustrated in the following drawings (Ill. 1~3).

Kathmandu, Nepal

9 April 2001