



RESTORATION
OF
MUL COK GOLDEN DOORWAY SCULPTURAL ENSEMBLE

PATAN ROYAL PALACE RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION PROJECT



KATHMANDU VALLEY PRESERVATION TRUST



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The river goddess Ganga, carried by a makara, guards the entrance to the shrine. The pair of goddesses is thought to date from the expansion of the courtyard during Srinivas Malla's reign (1661-1684 AD), or from the reign of Yoganarendra Malla (1684-1705).

The Patan Royal Palace Complex and the adjacent Royal Square are perhaps the most significant and intact urban ensemble in South Asia. The Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust is fortunate to have been asked to partner with the government of Nepal to restore and bring back to life this exquisite and neglected historic ensemble.

At the center of the palace, this courtyard building, called Mulcok or 'main courtyard,' is one of the three principal historical courtyards of the 16th-18th century palace complex and was probably the ritual center of activities during the reign of the Malla kings. It has been a redundant monument since it was abandoned at the change of dynasty in the late 1700's. After a century of misuse and neglect by government agencies using the structure for storage and offices, increasingly rapid deterioration now makes conservation urgent.

In the spirit of Nepal's two thousand year history of votive architecture, this private restoration is the renewal of a relationship between monument and donor. Supporters of the Patan palace restoration rally to this project as a memorial to Mr. Vishwa Shah, leading businessman and patron of the arts, social activist and spokesman for Nepal.

The southern courtyard façade is a magnificent example, an intact 17th-century carved-timber facade treatment, with the addition 100 years later of the flanking sculptural figures of Yamuna and Ganga, and then the elaboration of the carved wooden doorway with gilt copper repoussé sheathing. The sculptural copper ensemble constitutes the entry to the Taleju Agamchhe, which is marked above at the urban scale by a tiered roof tower.

Images of Ganga and Yamuna were established in the Mulcoks of Bhaktapur and Kathmandu in 1641 and 1708 respectively, as dated by



The river goddess Yamuna, astride a tortoise, stands guard at the west side of the shrine entrance. The two gilded copper repoussé figures, their backs to the brick facade of the shrine, are hollow and are cracked or dented in many places and have lost much of their gilding.



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Entrance to the Taleju Shrine in 1962.

Although the photograph is not very clear it appears that the sculptures and door details were intact. Icons were also present in the niches in the door jambs.

Photograph by Ranjit Gupta.

inscription. In Patan, where no inscription exists for the goddesses, precise dating is difficult but they are believed to have been created by King Srinivas Malla (r. 1661-1684 AD) when he expanded the Mul Cok, or during the reign of his successor Yoganarendra Malla (r. 1684-1705), one of the great builders of the Malla dynasty.

The layer of repoussé on the doorway, dated by inscription to between 1707 and 1716 AD, is a votive offering made by King Riddhinarasingh Malla or his predecessor, Indra Malla. One can distinguish the two layers—the gilt metal sculpture literally is layered over the earlier wood-carvings, which survive intact. Most sadly, the international art world has since the 1970's preyed on this fantastic ensemble of artistry and stolen elements of the sculptural composition.

The restoration work will be based on the study of historical documentation to allow us to restore the original iconographic configuration. We are very lucky to have photographs from the 1960's from two key advisors to the Trust, Board member Mary S. Slusser of the Smithsonian, and Dr. Neils Gutschow, South Asia Institute/University of Heidelberg.

We are likewise fortunate that the traditional metal crafts, passed down from father to son, are still alive. The historical technique of fire gilding survives in Nepal and will be undertaken, with necessary safety and environmental precautions, to restore this ensemble to its original magnificence.

The restoration of this important sculptural group will be a major contribution to the ongoing work to restore the Patan Royal Palace Complex, one of South Asia's most significant architectural ensembles, bringing it back to life and ensuring its place in the 21st century and beyond.



Entrance to the Taleju Shrine in 2006.

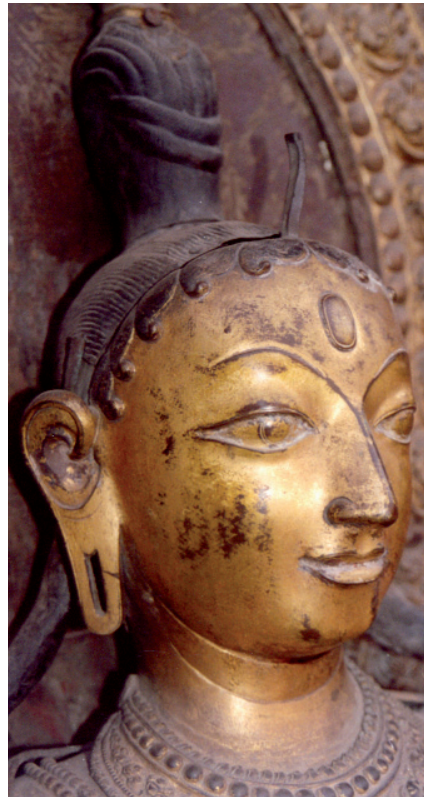
The central panel of the torana was stolen in the 1970s, many other parts have been broken off or damaged, including figures on the door beader; repousse elements covering the carved wood elements surrounding the doorway have been removed.

Photograph by KVPT.



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Top left: **Lost images of the Torana.** Almost all of the images of the tympanum have been stolen in recent decades; only a lion and a bull, the vehicles of the figures flanking the central image, remain.

Centre: **The gilded copper head of Ganga.** Gilding has been lost from many areas, including parts of the face.

Top right: **Lintels and door jambs.** Elements of the gilded copper repousse covering the carved wood have been lost.

Bottom left: **Ganga Image.** The lower portions of the figure are dented and cracked in a number of places. Some of the copper survives on the flat plaque behind the goddess

Bottom right: **The foot of Yamuna on the tortoise.** The tortoise has been dented and most of the gilding has been lost.

All photographs are by Neils Gutschon, April 2006.