

# Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Ministry of Mines

Sustainable Development of Natural Resources Project

Project Management Unit

Mes Aynak Archeological Project

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## Archeological Rescue Excavation

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**Progress Report**  
January 2013

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**Mes Aynak Archaeological Project - MAAP**

Mes Aynak Archaeological Project

**Progress Report****Table of Contents**

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## **Introduction**

This report provides general information on Mes Aynak, Mes Aynak Archaeological Project including progress up to January 2013, nature of support by The World Bank and DAFA, National Support Staff, International Archaeologists and support staff, procurement and others.

## **About Mes Aynak**

Mes Aynak is a site 40 km southeast of Kabul, located in a barren region of Logar Province. The site contains the world's second largest copper deposit which looms as major revenue source for Afghanistan.

The Aynak is also a vast complex of over twenty ruin locations, including numerous 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist monasteries, as fortress and evidence of even older Bronze Age settlements buried beneath the rubble of ancient copper mines.

In 2008 MJAM-MCC a Chinese company was awarded a contract to recover the copper resources for the government of Afghanistan. It is a major project for Afghanistan in terms of employment, training, revenue and infrastructure development.

## **Mes Aynak Archaeology**

Mes Aynak Archaeological site covers an area of 450,000 square meters, encompassing several separate monasteries and commercial area. It appears that Buddhists who began settling the area almost two millennia ago were drawn by the availability of copper.

Archaeologists believe that Mes Aynak is a major historical heritage site. It has been called "one of the most important points along the Silk Road" by French archaeologist Philippe Marquis. In addition to the Buddhist monasteries and other structures from the Buddhist era that have already been identified, Mes Aynak also holds the remains of prior civilizations likely going back as far as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Historians are particularly excited by the prospect of learning more about the early science of metallurgy and mining by exploring this site. It is known to contain coins, glass, and the tools for making these, going back thousands of years. Archaeologists have already unearthed manuscripts that may provide evidence regarding the presence of Alexander the Great's troops.

The initial archaeological assessment of DAFA in 2011 is the starting point for references to the activities of the Mes Aynak Archaeology Project.

The work plan submitted by MCC is the basis for organizing a strategy and schedule for the archaeological operations at Mes Aynak. According to these their enabling works would be carried out in 3 staggered phases.

The first phase of works at Mes Aynak covers an area of approximately 230 000 m<sup>2</sup> (The 'Red Zone'). Within this 8 blocks of extensive archaeological remains have been identified covering 150 000 m<sup>2</sup>.

As stated above the first phase of archaeological operations are centred on 8 separate zones covering 150 000 m<sup>2</sup>. After some initial excavations it is possible to elaborate on the nature of these remains and the site can be divided into 3 archaeological zones from a functional perspective. The first two of these archaeological zones are contained within one the eight zones mentioned above. The remaining 6 are more peripheral to this central core. These three zones are:

- **Aynak Mountain**

A series of sites along the crest of Aynak Mountain, which generally speaking appear to be defensive in nature, focused on two complexes of building at a northern and a southerly flank of the mountain. The mid slope is dominated by terrace walls and probable mining galleries. This zone also includes a large area on the lower slopes of the mountain which are dominated by the slag heaps resulting from the copper production

- **Lower Town**

At the base of Aynak Mountain are found a distinct cluster of sites located on the tops of the tepe features in the area. These sites all consist of domestic mud brick architecture and can be generally classed as the settlement area of the site. A high density of coin finds and fragments of manuscripts found in this area may point to an administrative function for some buildings. Some examples of small scale metal working, or other elements of craft workshops at a domestic scale, are also found in this area. Smaller stupas are attached to some of these complexes.

- **Peripheral Monastic Sites**

This is a dispersed group of 6 sites that appear to be peripheral to the cluster of predominantly domestic sites of the Lower Town. These sites appear to generally either occupy higher very visible ground, or the lower ground to the north of Mes Aynak. Their function appears to be largely religious or monastic in nature. They form an arc from the north of Aynak Mountain (003 Kafiriat Tepe) through to Site 013 to Shah Tepe (006 – a possible fire temple) and Shahmar Tepe (007) and are separated by a distance of approximately 300m from each other.

One smaller site, 042 is included in this group as although it is smaller in scale and located in the vicinity of Baba Wali it fulfils the criterion of being intended for a religious or monastic use, and may indeed have served as a 'gateway' to the religious complex at Site 013 located on the hilltop above Site 042.

## **The Project**

Mes Aynak Archaeological Project is financed by The World Bank IDA-financed Sustainable Development of Natural Resources Project (SDNRP) and supported by the Delegation Archeologique Francaise en Afghanistan (DAFA) in coordination with Archaeology Directorate of Ministry of Information and Culture.

**The DAFA** is working on MAAP since April 2009 at the request of the MoIC and providing a constant technical support to the project. DAFA is intended to continue supporting MAAP in following areas

- Monitoring
- Restoration, conservation and Museum Project
- Scientific research and publications

**The World Bank** through IDA-finance Sustainable Development of Natural Resources Project (May 2011) supports the implementation of the Archaeological Recovery and preservation plan of the Aynak antiques for the recovery and preservation of the cultural resources of the Aynak with emphasis on integration of the artifact recovery plan with the Aynak mining plan, and ensuring recovery in high-priority areas.

## **National Support Staff**

The national support staff is a team consists of 23 people led by the Director of MAAP under direct supervision of the Executive Director of PMU.

## **International Staff (Archaeologist, Logistics/ Security Advisor and Documentarians)**

The Archaeological Team of MAAP consists of 25 International Archaeologist led by Archaeological Coordinator under the supervision of the Director of MAAP. The Logistics/ Security Advisor and Documentarians are also part of the International Team.

### **MAAP Coordination Advisory Panel**

The Advisory Panel is composed of members from different stakeholders whom shall meet once every month in Ministry of Mines/PMU or Mes Aynak International Camp.

The aim of the panel is to facilitate MoM implementing its legislative role in safeguarding Afghanistan's environment and the nation's environmental assets and encouraging, enabling and regulating extractive industries and associated infrastructure, while avoiding impacts on the archaeological resource.

***(Annex 3: MAAP Coordination Panel Term of Reference)***

### **Rescue Excavations and Resources at Mes Aynak**

Initial rescue excavations led by DAFA at Mes Aynak began in 2009 with the excavation of the monastic site at Gol Amid. In 2010 a second monastic site was excavated at Kafiriati Tepe.

Archaeological excavations increased in scale and intensity in 2011, when teams from the Institute of Archaeology and the Academy of Sciences were joined by a team of International Archaeologists. After 3 months stood down from site work (January – March 2012), excavation resumed towards the end of April 2012. At this point DAFA in cooperation with the international team were asked by the Ministry of Mines and the World Bank to supply a series of work plans detailing the projected results from a 9, 14, and 21 month excavation programme. The 9 month work plan was issued in conjunction with a proposal document detailing the resources needed to complete this schedule.

From May 2012 the workforce at the site has consisted of:

- 25 archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology
- 26 international archaeologists including 7 experts from Tajikistan, a Geomatics Officer and Assistant
- 20 recent archaeology and social science graduates from the University of Kabul
- Approximately up to 450 labors.

Typically the individual excavations are carried out under the supervision of an archaeologist, assisted by a recent graduate with up to 25 workmen. Hand digging is carried out by the workmen under the supervision of an archaeologist.



### Status - January 2013

Mes Aynak Archaeological Project is a large scale rescue project started in 2009. In 2010 an archaeological assessment of the site had been done and based on it a working plan had been proposed. Looking at the results of the excavation it is apparent that in terms of extent of the excavation we have more than completed the target set out in the work plan proposal in April 2012.

According to DAFA's recent explanation, "more than half of the red zone can be now considered as of very low archaeological value. It is mainly the periphery of the zone.

On the remaining half, two/third may be considered as poorly built during antiquity and deserve mainly a stratigraphical exploration which had been already done for part where the deposits are important.

The remaining part is the more densely occupied and heavily built we may consider that half of it had been already excavated and documented. The areas 6-13-45 had been already almost completely excavated and may start the removal of the elements worth to be removed. The more critical areas are the portion which is located on the slope of the mountain and the core zone the site."

During the last season the focus has been on excavation and recording of the archaeological remains. This has produced a vast quantity of data in the form of photographs, drawings, survey data and written records. Also an extremely considerable quantity of artifacts has been recovered. The majority of the artifacts recovered consist of pottery, but also a very significant number of coins and objects.

Below is the summary

- A high percentage of sites in the Lower Town area (**annex 4: Mes Aynak Lower Town Image**) are now nearing completion, from this area large amounts of data are being collected in the form of drawn plans and elevations, and photographs. *Archiving of this data is ongoing*
- A comprehensive digital plan of all the archaeological remains in the Red Zone has been carried out and is up to date (**annex 5: Mes Aynak Master Image**). This will form the basis for a Geographic Information System (GIS) where all digitized archaeological information will be presented.
- The digitization of individual site plans has begun. These will be used alongside site photography to illustrate the interim site reports which are in the process of being produced.
- Provision of protective roofing over rooms with fragile relics such as stupas, wall paintings and statuary has been completed.
- With a change in the weather work on site has mostly focused on removal of snow from the excavated areas of the site. This will help prevent any damage this might cause to the archaeological remains.

- A source of conservation chemical, tools and other items has been identified by a team composed of people from MoIC and MAAP traveled to India and the procurement process is underway.
- Experienced conservators identified, terms and conditions negotiated and will be soon on boarded. This will allow for the successful conservation and removal of the structural relics on the site.
- Work plan for each archaeological site and each individual archaeologist prepared which will be the base for checking the progress.

The winter months are an ideal opportunity to: quantify, organize, interpret and report on the archaeological discoveries to date.



## Future Plans

Each member of the team will produce interim site and finds reports for the 16 sites currently active. Other aims include the production of a database for each of the sites, Organising and editing of each of the sites written, drawn and photographic archives. The quantification, recording and research of the ceramics, coins and other objects will be carried out. The geomatics team will produce a master plan and a digital archive of site records.

The above work represents an essential part the archaeological process, especially considering the different recording methods used during the early history of the excavations.

The best way to indicate the scale of Mes Aynak is with the archaeological term, "context". A context is a defined archaeological unit, such as a wall or floor, each with drawings, photographs and written descriptions. I would estimate that upward of 10,000 contexts have been recorded so far. The surveyors estimate that around 15,000 points have been taken to map the site. A typical site produces around 4/500 unique contexts, 500 photographs and 100 drawings.

To complete the excavation process and clearing the Red Zone to the satisfactory point may need more work until July 2013, this involves:

- An extension of excavation areas to find the architectural limits of certain sites already begun.
- The excavation of 3 areas on the mid slopes of the mountain side where architectural remains are known to exist – not yet started due to the danger of material falling from excavations higher up the mountain.
- Some limited trenching between the individual excavations in the Lower Town to understand the inter-relationships between these sites.
- An investigation of the caves and galleries already encountered on the site

According to DAFA's recent work plan, heavy equipments specifically, excavators, trucks, loaders and bulldozer should be used more frequently on the site. Specially if we consider the enormous quantity of dumps which had to be removed.

DAFA proposes a strategy which indicates work to be determined in two phases

1. Phase I- from Med January 2013 up to end of March 2013
2. Phase II- from the end of March to July 2013

## Phase I

During this phase the team should focus on the mechanical removal of the dumps which are scattered on the site. As long as the weather is cold enough it will be possible to remove a substantial part of these dumps. As soon as it will be cooler these kinds of work had to be stopped as it's going to create a lot of mud.

During this period it is possible to clear a good part of the slag deposits in order to check what is left underneath. This also should be done with excavators. Excavation can go in the central area of the site and again it is suggested to connect the different area by trenches in order to have a good preview of what may be expected in those areas.

Removal of stupas is also possible as the use of chemical for this process is lower than for the clay status and the wall paintings.

## **Phase II**

Clearing of the unexcavated areas, documenting of the finds and removal of the left artifacts should take place during this period. By the end of May DAFA is planning an additional aerial survey to get the more precise topography of the site and of the remains.

During this period a team of conservationist should be permanently on the site in order to undertake the removal of the statues and the wall paintings.

## Annex 1: MAAP Coordination Advisory Panel

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mes Aynak Archaeological Project</b> <b>(MAAP)</b> <b>COORDINATION ADVISORY PANEL</b></p>
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### **Background**

The Mes Aynak Archeological Project is a project directed by Ministry of Information and Culture and Ministry of Mines of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The World Bank supports the project with the IDA-financed Sustainable Development of Mineral Resources Program. Other sponsors have contributed technical and financial support.

The company who acquired the lease for the exploitation of the mine at Mes Aynak is the MCC-Jiangxi Copper MJAM consortium. On site the MAAP coordinates closely with the consortium.

The archeological assessment of DAFA in 2011 is the starting point for references to the activities of the Mes Aynak Archeology Project

### **Goals of the Panel**

- 2: To facilitate MoM implementing its legislative role in safeguarding Afghanistan's environment and the nation's environmental<sup>1</sup> assets.
- 3: To facilitate MoM implementing its legislative role in encouraging, enabling and regulating extractive industries and associated infrastructure, while avoiding impacts on the archaeological resource – but when that is not possible then to minimize and mitigate the unavoidable impacts.

### **Mandate of the Panel**

- 4: The mandate of the Panel is purely advisory, and the power will derive solely from the quality of its advice and its relevance to the needs of MAAP and MoM.

### **Structure of the Panel**

Chairman – Senior official MoM (HE Minister or HE Deputy Minister)

Secretariat – MoM-based SDNRP- PMU

General Members – standing invitations by the Panel Secretariat to the following:

- (i) PMU Executive Director or Director of Operation
- (ii) MoM representative (Mes Aynak Unit)
- (iii) MoM archaeological Advisor (DAFA representative)
- (iv) MCC representative
- (v) WB representative
- (vi) USAID representative

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<sup>1</sup>Including social, archeological and paleontological assets in the strict context of the EIA/SEIA regulations.

- (vii) MoM archaeological Adviser (MAAP International Team)
- (viii) Institute of Archaeology Team Leader
- (ix) UNESCO Representative (Kabul Office)
- (x) Team Leader, Aynak Mine Compliance Monitoring Project
- (xi) Archaeological Adviser, World Bank Country Office
- (xii) Up to 2 additional member on the initiative of the MCC
- (i) Up to 2 additional member on the initiative of the MoM
- (ii) Observers may also be invited with the prior permission of the Chairman

Quorum – the Panel shall be considered quorate if 5 or more members attend

### **Panel Meetings and Duration**

1: Panel meetings shall be held In Mom/PMU or Mes Aynac International Camp every 1 month on (TBA), ending promptly at 4pm.

2: The Panel Secretariat shall ensure that a schedule for 6 consecutive meetings is maintained and circulated as routine attached to ‘Reminder of Meeting / Call for Agenda Items’ ‘Circulation of Agenda’ and ‘Circulation of Minutes’.

### **Specialist Advisory Groups**

The Panel shall establish a number of Specialist Advisory Groups to consider selected topics in more detail on behalf of the Panel. These groups are expected to include:

- ‘MAAP Scientific Advisory Committee’, which will contribute to issues such as a research agenda and conservation strategy for the Project and the procurement and use of specialist technologies such as 3D scanning.
- ‘Mes Aynak Museum Committee’, in order to begin to address the
- ‘MAAP Health and Safety Group’ covering issues of security (on site and in the International camp), demining, workers compensation/insurance.
- ‘MAAP Logistics Group’, to coordinate and facilitate the procurement and provision of equipment, logistical needs and human resources promptly as required.

Membership of each Group shall be decided upon by the Panel Chairman in consultation with the Secretariat.

Each Group shall meet as often as its member so decide, at a venue agreed with the Secretariat (e.g. MoM/ PMU, DAFA etc).

To ensure consistency and communication, the Secretariat (or his nominee) shall attend each meeting of each Group, and report verbally on progress to the next Panel meeting.

Each Group shall report back to the Panel at a special Panel Meeting every 2 months, at which all Groups shall make 10-minute presentations.

### **Panel Secretariat Responsibilities**

- 1: Circulate notification of meeting, one week in advance of each meeting, requesting attendance and items for Agenda.
- 2: Prepare and circulate Agenda 2 days in advance of each meeting.
- 3: Prepare and circulate Minutes (+ Action List) day after each meeting.

### **Minutes, Agenda and Attached Reports**

- 1: Minutes and Agenda shall be so written that they do not contain any information that is confidential, in the opinion of either the Chairman or the MoM/PMU.
- 2: Confidential material will often need to be circulated with the Minutes, Agenda or Attached Reports, and the Panel Secretariat will only do so in PDF, and the PDF shall be password protected, and each page shall be highlighted as CONFIDENTIAL in RED.

### **Appropriate Organizations**

The following entities shall be deemed “appropriate organisations” for considering inviting representatives to Panel or Group Meetings by the Chairman in consultation with the Secretariat, and additional organisations may be considered from time-to-time:

#### National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA)

Government organisation, supreme in all environmental matters, and approval of EIA before which mining projects cannot commence, and compliance with environmental monitoring, environmental management and mine closure.

#### Afghanistan National Standards Authority (ANSA)

Government organisation, supreme in preparing national standards on environment, health, safety etc.

#### Ministry of Mines (MoM)

Ministry responsible for mineral resources (including oil/gas and industrial minerals), and for encouraging investment in mining and associated infrastructure.

#### Afghanistan Geological Survey (AGS)

MoM Agency responsible for geological surveying of all types.

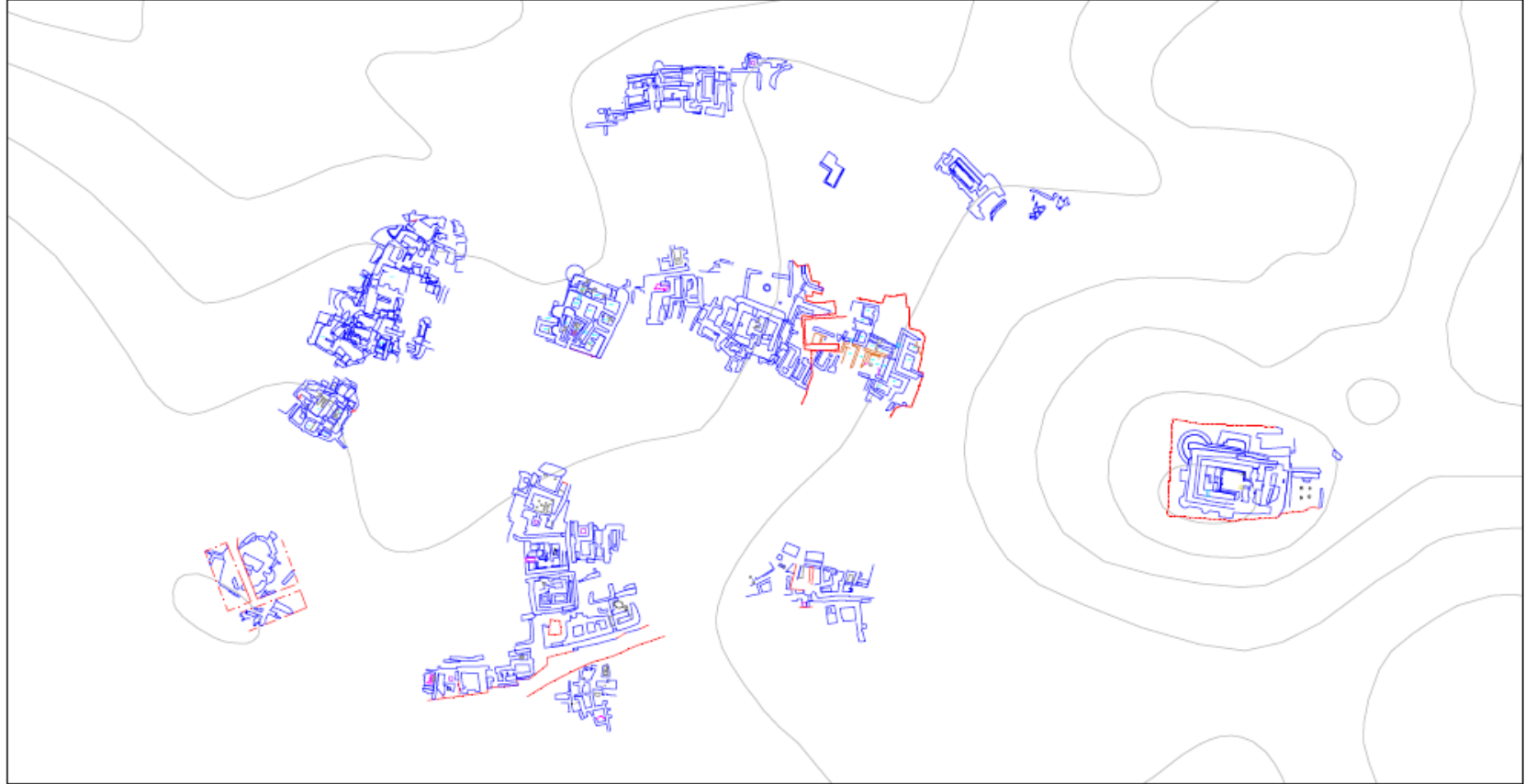
#### Institute of Archeology (IOA) of the Ministry of Information and Culture

Government organisation, supreme in all cultural heritage issues, including ‘chance finds’ and archaeological screening of mining and infrastructure sites.

#### Archeological Delegation of France (DAFA)

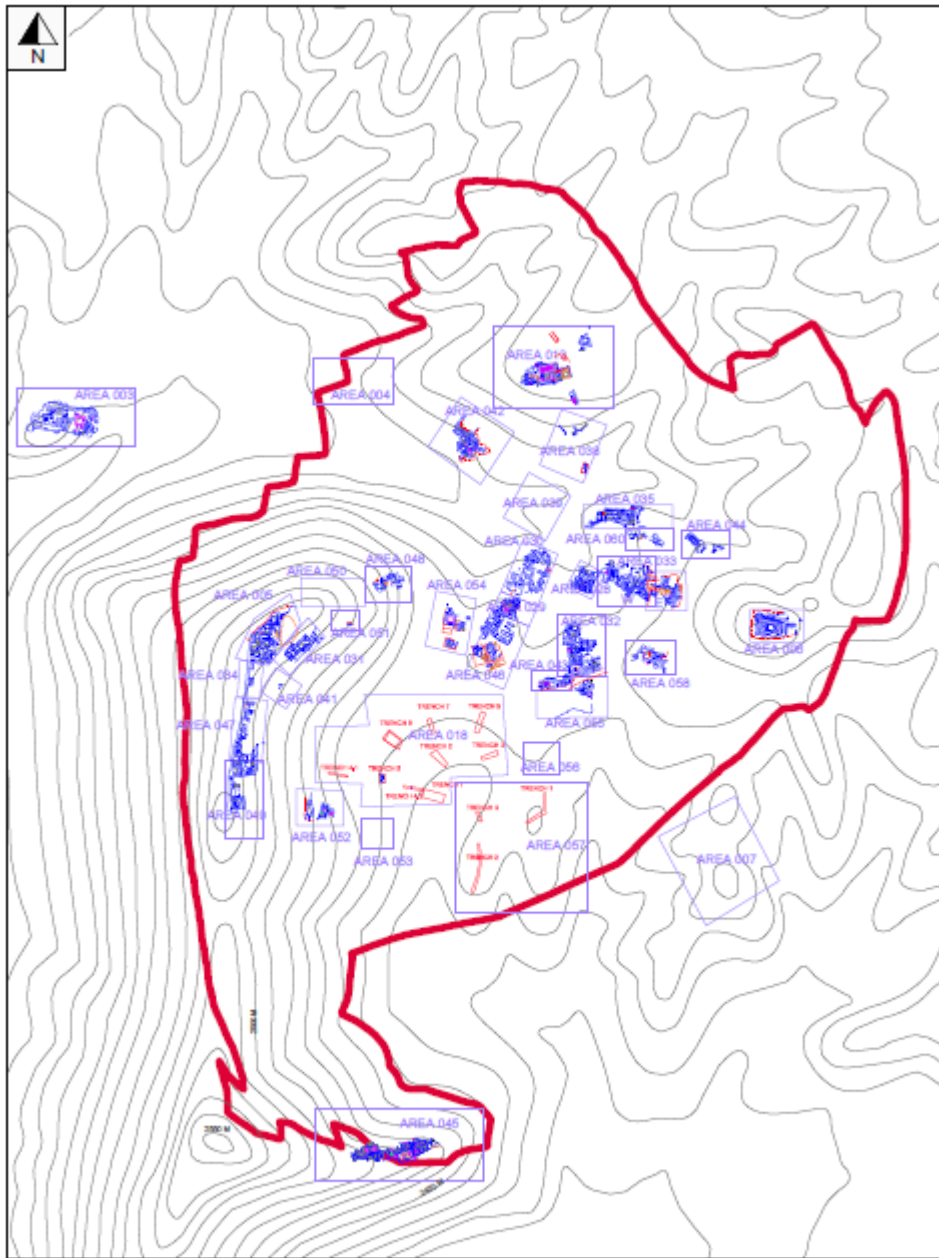
Donor expertise support for Government regarding cultural heritage over the last 90 years.

Annex 2: Mes Aynak Lower Town Image



MES AYNAK LOWER TOWN

Annex 3: Mes Aynak Master Image



**MES AYNAK**  
SURVEY DATA PROVIDED BY F. MARZJANI & K. ROMANTZI