

Mes Aynak Archeological Project

Archeological Progress Update

March 2014





Staffing

The international team currently consists of 12 specialists: 10 archaeologists (including 1 Architect-archaeologist), 1 Geomatic Officer and 1 Conservator. Due to Nawroz (New Year) break and expected high threat profile during the elections most of the team decided to use these days for holiday. As a result, as for the end of March we have only 6 expat specialist on the ground in Logar. This shortage in staffing will last until late April.

10 Afghan trainee-archaeologists working on the project one is still remaining on long-term sickness leave due to health problems.

Deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan may cause terminating employment by some of the westerners working on the project, which might bring our total number down to 10 or even less, below any minimum to maintain a basic quality of excavation and documentation required by international standards. In view of the above quick reinstatement of a few former team members is a matter of urgency.

Over all progress

Consecutive strikes of winter low temperatures followed by snowfalls that happened a few times in March resulted in repeated suspending fieldwork. As a consequence, as per decision undertaken by the MoIC the site was remaining closed for the most of this month and the team was focused on post-ex activities carried out in the camp, while some minor on-site work was mostly limited to removing snow. Moreover, further off-days were announced this month due to Nawroz celebration and an

official national mourning after death of Marshall Mohammed Qasim Fahim. In fact, the team was active in the field for only 9 days of March (1-2MAR2014, 5-6MAR2014, 8-10MAR2014, and 26-27 MAR2014). Thereupon March fieldwork progress was even less than moderate.

Coordination

With a view to more effective coordination of the work we are continuing weekly progress strategy meetings with staff. Essential supervision on the staff through individual written reporting on the monthly basis is still being improved. PMU management is reported on the weekly basis (MAAP Weekly Reports) and "Monthly Brief Report on Activities" is submitted to the Institute of Archaeology.

Meetings

Several working meetings on the project were held in March.

On 02MAR2014 working briefing on technical issues of archaeological work, sequential phasing fieldwork, possible deadlines etc. took place at MoMP. The participants were representatives of US DoS and US DoD.

On 08MAR2014 working group meeting for the project representatives and stakeholders took place at the Ministry of Information and Culture. The meeting, chaired by HE Minister of Culture Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, was attended by HE DM of MoMP Nasir A. Durrani, HE DM of MoIC Sayed M. Khalili, HE Omar Sultan (Senior Advisor/Interlocutor of MAAP), the Director of Institute of Archaeology Qader Temuri, George Herbst (NAVFAC/USDoS), Don Maraska (USDoD),



Vaughan Smith (GAF-AG). MAAP was represented by Dr. Farhad Yavazi (Director), Marek Lemiesz (Coordinating Archaeologist), Amanda Watts and Fabio Colombo (conservators). A possible deadline for accomplishing archaeological work at Mes Aynak was initially discussed by representatives of both ministries. Moreover, sequential phasing fieldwork and aims of conservation/preservation work were briefed to the participants.

On 18MAR2014 next working meeting took place at the office of HE Sayed Musadiq Khalili, the cultural deputy to the Ministry of Information and Culture. The meeting was attended by HE Omar Sultan, Qqader Temuri, George Herbst (USDOS), Phillipe Marquis (DAFA), Sara Noshadi (UNESCO Kabul as well as by Dr. Farhad Yavazi, Marek Lemiesz and Amanda Watts (MAAP). Once again a possible dividing fieldwork into three sub-zones and three subsequent phases was presented and discussed, as well as a scope and timeline of removal of sculptures and stupas and 3D scanning of architectural complexes.

On 23MAR2014 and 24MAR2014 two working meetings at DAFA were chaired by HE Omar Sultan with participation of MoIC, DAFA and MAAP. Program of future 3D scanning was the matter of discussion. Some issues (scope of work required, timetable, deliverables) were debated with Mr. Sekandar Seradj (an owner of Seradj Architekten Company specializing in 3-dimensional recording) and – via Skype video conference – with Mr. Yves Ubelmann (ICONEM).

Furthermore, on 25MAR2014 a summative council was called by DM Khallili for all permanent participants (MoIC, MAAP, DoS, UNESCO). A new and final version of the work program, based on three subsequent phases of fieldwork) was briefly presented and all aims were accepted. The MAAP Coordinating Archaeologist has been committed to complete and submit the definitive copy of Work Program to Ministry of Culture for formal approval. A real timeframe and resources for conservation and removal operation were a subject of concern, so it was decided that a conservation schedule will be covered by a separate document formulated when the total number of stupas and other objects for removal is determined. With these principles in mind, a commission led by H E DM Khallili and HE Omar Sultan visited the site of Mes Aynak on 31MAR2014. The goal was inspection of the sites where removal of architectural objects and sculptures will be conducted. The final decision for the monuments for export to Kabul will be undertaken by the MoIC Archaeological Committee that is the only legal body to determine the scientific and cultural value of the monuments. The MAAP was requested to prepare a comprehensive documentation for that meeting.

Work suspending influenced on ceasing our 'weekly teams' meeting. Only on 06MAR2014 Dr. Usmon Eshonzada gave a short lecture to the Moic and MAAP staff on his excavation of the Buddhist complex on Site Mes045, complemented by an interesting presentation of field records.



De-mining

At the end of March a 30-strong detachment of MDC de-miners started searching an area on the western slope of the Aynak Mountain. Their work is scheduled for at least four weeks period.

Conservation Chemicals

Process of arranging ISAF permission to receive shipment of conservatory materials delivered to Afghanistan by Polish Armed Forces took almost three weeks due to some unexpected obstructions and visit to Bagram was rescheduled a few times. Finally, on 19MAR2014 Amanda Watts, Aimal Hakami and Marek Lemiesz received shipment of chemicals for conservation. After checking the cargo contents with the purchase list and signing protocol the transport was brought to Mes Aynak and it is temporarily stored in MAAP laboratory in the Afghan Camp.

Field Work

In March regular excavation was currently ongoing on 8 sites under the direct supervision of the MAAP: Mes004, Mes038, Mes045, Mes046, Mes049E, Mes052, Mes058 and Mes059, however later on due to several annual leaves that began before Nawroz this number was reduced to 6 and sites Mes052 and Mes049E had to be temporarily suspended. Due to weather conditions in March only very limited work was carried out on the site with a small detachment of the graduates and a limited manpower. We mostly spent this time for spot removal of snow heaped on shelter roofs and on structures exposed to freeze and wet factors and for cleaning architectural remains after rainfalls.

Site Mes004

(Temporarily supervised by Agnieszka Dolatowska and Sayed Ali Shah Payez, 6 workers): handy and machine removal of topsoil baulk in the western part of excavation was accomplished. Drawing site plan was continued.

Site Mes038

(Supervised by Farukh Safoev, 12 workers): limited scale work along the southern extent of the complex.

Site Mes045

(Supervisor: Dr. Usmon Eshonzoda, assistant: Mohammad Ali Amiri, 7 workers): exposing structures at the top of the steep southern escarpment.

Site Mes046

(Supervised by Sultan Masoud Muradi, 10 workers): continuation of work in Room 18 (in a central building) and in the southern part of the complex.

Site Mes052

(Supervised by Hussain Ali Haidari, 6 workers): excavation has been expanded to the eastern extent - space 4/09 and possible Room 4/10.

Site Mes58

(Dr. Dowdy Davlatkhoja, assisted by Mirwais Qaderyar, 11 workers): continuation of excavation clarification of extent of terraces in the western part of the site (Space no. 61) as well as cleaning the premises 15+16+29+40.

Site Mes059

(Dr. Rahmatsho Mahmadshev, 10 workers): continuation of work in Rooms AA2 and AA1 in the northern part of the site. The central trial trench has



been extended towards the south, fieldwork revealed a series of terrace-like rooms.

In addition, Agnieszka Dolatowska and Marek Lemiesz began photo-recording best preserved stupas on the site. This work is aimed at preparing a full dossier for the MoIC Committee.

Bad weather conditions and absence of GIS specialists resulted in limited on-site mapping activities: only taking levels on Site Mes003 (Kafiryat Tepe) was continued by Sayed Rahim Hussainkhil.

Post-ex work

- **GIS, digitizing field plans and production of final site plans:** Roberta Marziani has continued digitizing plan of the Kafiryat Tepe monastery as well as several plans and elevations of stupas drawn by Damian Podlinski on Site Mes045. Besides graphics for Work Program and report on field walking survey were prepared. Prior to her departure Roberta updated the rest of site plans and printed out their copies for multi-purpose use. Moreover, she completed the folder of records of the stupas and Master Site Plan update for February. Sayed Rahim is continuing digitizing site plan of area Mes033 (up to now: ca. 15% completed).
- **Architectural studies** (Rahmatjon Salamov): drawing up cross-sections through architectural complexes Mes046 and Mes049. All Rahmatjon's drawings were scanned and archived accordingly, moreover he has started preparing their AutoCad versions. In addition, an entire backup of field records produced by Tajik team was completed this month.

- Paul Murray was working on reports on areas Mes043 and Mes055, moreover he supervised cataloguing coins from area Mes055 (by Ali Shah Payez) and completed 'site action schedules' for areas Mes004, Mes013, Mes067, Mes038 and Mes062.
- **Basic conservation, studies on dating and attribution of coins** are being continued by Dr. Dawlatkhoja Dowdy and Farrukh Safoyev.
- Agnieszka Dolatowska is continuing **reorganization of ceramic materials** from previous fieldworks on Mes046 and Mes055 (with collaboration of the graduates: Sultan Massoud Muradi and Hussain Ali Haidari), moreover she catalogued over 200 small finds from areas Mes048, Mes043, Mes035, Mes030 and Mes032 (seasons 2012 and 2013).
- Firuza Abdulwakhidova finished work on a **catalogue of ceramic materials from Mes004** with implementation of inventory forms translated into Russian and pottery diagnostic templates prepared in 2013.
- A new, updated and comprehensive version of **Work Program for 2014** was elaborated by Marek Lemiesz (with consultation from Paul Murray and Rohoullah Ahmadzai) and will be presented to the MoIC for approval.
- **A volume on archaeology of Mes Aynak**, prepared last year by the Tajik specialists under direction of Prof. Yusufsho Yakubov, has been published in Kabul in late March.



Conservation

At the beginning of March Amanda Watts and Fabio Colombo were working on conservatory assessment of areas Mes013, Mes060, Mes003 and Mes045. **“Project conservation and removal procedure of the objects and architectural features of the Mes Aynak archaeological site”** was completed on 07MAR2014. The plan includes calculation of time, workforce and technical resources, as well as details of primary investigation, on-site pre-conservation and consolidation,

technical preparation of sites prior to closing conservation activities and description of various removal methods along with a work schedule developed for each conservation procedure.

Amanda assisted by Imam Khan Rajabi (currently: MoIC) continued work on **reconstruction of vessels** from Site Mes038 and large storage jars from Site Mes033.

On 19MAR2014 **shipment of chemicals** for conservation was **delivered to Mes Aynak** – see above.