

Progress Update February 2014

Staffing: the international team still consists of 12 foreign specialists: 9 archaeologists, 1 architect, 1 geomatic officer and 1 conservator. In addition, on 11 Feb 2014 a new conservator, Mr Fabio Colombo, joined the team for a time. His work will be aimed at preparing a general program of removal of stupas, sculptures and wall paintings (see below). The Tajik archaeologists are still the bulk of the team – as in the previous months, most of them are continuing excavation work in the field, while the Western specialists at the present moment are more committed to post-ex activities such as standardizing field records, producing plans and reports, sorting and reorganizing finds in the camp etc.

With terminating employment by Imam Khan Rajabi (he is going to undertake work with the MoIC) in early February the number of Afghan trainee-archaeologists currently working on the project has been decreased to 11, of them three are performing their duties as self-reliant site supervisors (Sites Mes052, Mes046 and Mes004).

Intermittent strikes of winter weather and heavy snowfalls resulted in relatively moderate progress of fieldwork this month. As per decision undertaken by the MoICs, work was being ceased a few times immediately after snowfalls occurred and the site have remained closed for 10 days of February.

As weather continued to influence fieldwork, most of the time was occupied by desk-based work in the camp, although a small detachment of the graduates and supervising internationals with a limited manpower were continuing daily 3-hours shifts of removal of snow heaped on shelter roofs and in those areas where excavated structures have been exposed to snow, freeze and wet factors.

With a view to more effective coordination of the work the team is continuing weekly progress strategy meetings with staff. Essential supervision on the staff through individual written reporting on the monthly basis is still being improved, this month the team has implemented “Consultant’s Activities Reports” issued by PMU HR.

Common regular meetings of the MoIC and MAAP staff were carried out for discussing ad hoc issues on several aspects of daily cooperation. Moreover, on 13 Feb 2014 both teams visited Site Mes064 where Mr. Aziz Wafa presented results of his up-to-now excavation. Similar site meetings will be continued in the coming months on a biweekly basis. As per order of Afghan Institute of Archaeology, in late February Mr. Aziz Wafa replaced Mr. Rohoullah Ahmadzai on the post of Head of the MoIC team and in-charge officer responsible for the site. Regular working co-briefings with the Afghan Head took part regularly in order to discuss daily cooperation, supplies procurement and the arrangements of work strategy being currently prepared.

A series of organizational meetings (11 Feb 2014, 19 Feb 2014) was organized by HE DM Nasir A. Durani for PMU, MAAP, GAF-AG and MoIC representatives as well as for other project stakeholders. MoMP is not going to accept any further delay caused to mining project by archaeology. In view of this preparing a new, complete coordination plan for logistic resources and archaeological work (including conservation removal program) has been requested.

On MAAP request, MCC representatives are demanded by HE DM to make accessible for archaeologists detailed plans of mining operations and infrastructure facilities planned by the Chinese contractor.

All required resources are to be increased, re-evaluated and will be allocated.

The MAAP leads were also given a card blanc from HE DM to upgrade the project staffing according to actual needs, including re-instating former team members as well as hiring more Afghan graduates and archaeologists from Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, a question of an access to ISAF field storage was raised at the meetings as well as 3D-scanning, perhaps combined with aerial imaging, required prior to removal of the stupas and sculptures.

Between 17 and 18 Feb 2014 the project was visited by HE Mr. Omar Sultan, PMU/MAAP Senior Interlocutor. The main aim of the visit was to coordinate preparing conservation master strategy with Fabio Colombo. During this visit a working technical briefing was organized in Afghan Camp with participation of representatives of MAAP and MoIC as well as of GAF-AG. Details of procurement list were the matter under discussion as well as objectives of the working program.

Some details of possible mining activities and transport infrastructure, brought by Mr. Vaughan Smith, may indicate that a few features, previously not taken into consideration, may have a direct impact on Kafiryat Tepe and some other sites that so far have been considered as the low or medium priority areas. In view of this an option was debated to continue completing the Red Zone within sequential stages, i.e. starting from the Mt. Aynak, then continuing down the slope base area and the Lower Town consecutively. This solution based on smaller sub-zones should allow the MCCs to initialize enabling earthworks within the western end of the Red Zone whilst simultaneously final phase of excavation and recording would be carried out by the archaeological teams along the opposite perimeter of the Zone.

MAAP and PMU started cooperation with Dr. George Herbst (archaeologists from NAVFAC, currently working for US DoS) and Mr. Don Maraska (US DoD, Task Force for Business and Stability Operations), acting as advisors to HE DM. On 17 Feb 2014 a working briefing was organized at PMU with participation of HE Omar Sultan as well as Director and Coordinating Archaeologist of MAAP and Team Lead of GAF-AG. A goal was to discuss various aspects of the archaeological project with a significant focus on deadline for completing Red Zone and possible sequential phasing fieldwork.

Also on 23 Feb 2014 Mes Aynak was visited by delegation of MCC/MJAM and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples Republic of China.

High-resolution, geo-referenced and rectified satellite images of Mes Aynak, provided by Mr. Vaughan Smith (GAF-AG) on MAAP's request, are a great advantage for future planning archaeological activities.

After over four months of efforts undertaken by M. Lemiesz (including support provided by Embassy of Poland) and long-time purchase and transport procedures, on 26 Feb 2014 the shipment of chemicals and other equipment for MAAP conservators was delivered by Polish Armed Forces to Bagram Airbase. In early March cargo shall be delivered effectively to Mes Aynak.

Field Work

Regular excavation is currently ongoing on 8 active sites under the direct supervision of the MAAP. These are as follows: Mes004, Mes038, Mes045, Mes046, Mes049E, Mes052, Mes058 and Mes059. As a consequence of temporary suspended work (10 days) due to snowfalls followed by melting and softening mud bricks, either the site was entirely inaccessible or work was conducted on a limited scale, mostly within sparse rooms. Critical staff shortage allows us neither to cover any further vacancies (at least 7 team members will be absent from mid-March) nor to include any other nearly excavated sites into our fieldwork. Understaffing may lead to situation that the project will be soon close to be not manageable.

- **Site Mes004:** due to weather conditions and machinery shortage work was mostly aimed at handy removing baulk of topsoil in the western extend of excavation. Excavation in Rooms 2 and 4 (where phases of occupation concurrent to each other have been revealed) could not be continued this month. Guidance provided to Ali Shah in technical skills (using context record forms, photo recording etc.) brings some effects. An interim site plan has been completed and all context and find registers have been nearly updated.
- **Site Mes038:** excavation was focused on further clarification of the complex plan to the west and the north of Room 21. In the southern complex extent further exploration of a bedrock-cut cistern ctx 020+012, cut into consolidated bedrock and filled with ash and slag backfill, was continued.
- On **Site Mes045** further exposing outer terrace walls along the steep southern escarpment was carried out, however the most time consuming activity this month was continuing removing snow. Numbering system for stupas, rooms, courtyards and other architectural features has been reorganized but needs some changes.
- Excavation work on **Site Mes046** was aimed at completing Room 18 in the central building. Moreover, disposal of backfill in Room 14 in the southern part of the complex was accomplished and work in Rooms 6 and 8 (adjacent eastern premises) is advanced.
- As in the past month, work on **Site Mes049E** on the Kuh-e Aynak hilltop was carried within a large area to the west of Room 37, up to the mountain slope.
- **Site Mes052:** at the end of February excavation within Room 4/08 was completed. A large, well preserved *tandoor* bread maker (initially presumed to be a storage jar) was found in situ. A baulk section for recording stratigraphy has been left along the southern wall.
- On **Site Mes058** excavation on the terraces in the western part (along a wall of possible Courtyard No. 61) was continued. A series of eastern premises (Rooms 15+16+29+40) was cleaned.
- Fieldwork in area **Mes059** on the southwestern slope of Shah Tepe was continued within Rooms AA2 and AA1. Additionally, a central trial trench was expanded towards the south that revealed further wall structures defining a complex of several rectangular premises on the hill slope.
- A light excavator and one dumper are available on the site. Removal of spoil heaps dumped between areas Mes063, Mes064 and Mes054 is almost accomplished, but several other areas are awaiting machine excavation. It must be emphasized that permanent lack of sufficient machinery support calls into question any further efficient earthworks on the site.

Post-ex Work

- GIS, digitizing field plans and production of final site plans:** in February Roberta Marziani has completed plan of Site Mes005, moreover she digitized several plans of the stupas, particularly those located in Courtyard 21 of the Kafiryat Tepe monastery (Mes003), for which putting together numerous 2x2m plans from 2012 was necessary (because of their poor quality and incompleteness, some details were added using geo-rectified drone photos). Furthermore space numbers and other information on areas Mes045 and Mes038, submitted by the Tajik archaeologists, was implemented in relevant site plans. Making final corrections on the plan of Mes028 was accomplished by Sayed Rahim Hussainkhil (this task was aimed at proving effectiveness of training provided to him in an entire process of the map production according to the international standards). Digitizing site plan of Mes033 is currently in preparation (ca. 15% for the time being).
- Master Site Plan updated for the end of January was compiled, as well as several basic site plans for each area, which are to be used for estimating scope of necessary excavation and record activities framed in our work program for 2014. Two pdfs for areas Mes038 and Mes048 were created for purpose of the conservators.
- Architectural studies:** preparing final general plans, site cross-sections and phasing study plans (in order to clarify common stratigraphic and structural relations between individual architectural features) of the Sites 038, 042, 046 and 049E. Around 20 sheets have been prepared so far.
- Paul Murray is continuing working on reports on Sites Mes032, Mes043 and Mes055
- Several “**site action schedules**” (detailed scope of fieldwork and recording for each particular area) were prepared as an attachment for future work program: Sites Mes032, Mes055, Mes43, Mes030, Mes052 (Paul Murray) as well as Mes046, Mes046N and Mes029 (Marek Lemiesz). Moreover, Paul has begun preparing work schedules for areas Mes003 and Mes004.
- Basic conservation, studies on dating and attribution of coins are being continued this month ca. 80 coins were processed.
- In February transfers of movable finds from the site to Afghan Camp (ca. 20 bags of ceramic material, stone querns, large assortment of small finds as well as wood fragments) was arranged on 05 Feb 2014.
- Agnieszka Dolatowska, assisted by a team of the graduates who are acquainting with standards of pottery processing is continuing reorganizing the baulk ceramic material and small finds currently stored in the camp. The aim is preparing easily accessible storage space for collecting and systematic storing movable artifacts recovered during consecutive months of extensive field excavation. In February over 100 bags of ceramics from Sites Mes030, Mes043 and Mes035 were manhandled, sorted by context numbers and dates, repacked and distributed to respective storerooms, presently Agnieszka is working on materials from Mes046 and Mes055. A larger storage (formerly: laundry building) was finally uncluttered, furnished and reorganized to fit in the materials from three other sites.
- Over 130 small artifacts of various categories (some of them from 2011 or 2012) were recovered from bags which should contain only pottery materials, they will be soon registered and handed over to the MoIC.
- Installation of **the wooden shelter** in the yard between the lab and the office was completed by the MoIC carpenters at the beginning of February, afterward stone objects and other finds that do not require special storage conditions were removed to this new facility.

- A catalogue of ceramics from site Mes004 is nearly accomplishing with implementation of inventory forms translated into Russian and pottery diagnostic templates prepared in 2013.
- A significant progress in training junior staff of MAAP was noted this month: seizing an opportunity of bad weather, an additional training session in using level machine as well as on archaeological hand-draw mapping and preparing find inventories were provided for the group of graduates. This is aimed at improving junior archaeologists' skills for spring/summer field season.
- We started digitizing plans, hand drawings of ceramics and other records done in the past by our Tajik colleagues (documentation from Mes045 as first) in order to backup it both on our desk data computer and on the external disc.
- Memo on staffing for the 2014 season was prepared for PMU Management. Work on a general fieldwork strategy for the 2014 season is still ongoing, several changes in up-to-now prepared assumptions had to be encompassed and new resources measures have been integrated. Updated list of current 76 sites of the Red Zone (including areas identified during a field walking survey) was prepared.

Conservation

Reconstruction of a few vessels from Sites Mes038 and Mes033 as well as on wood fragments from Mes045. Further fragments of wooden timbers from Mes045 were consolidated and drawing documentation was prepared.

A series of introductory site visits and preliminary prospection in most important building complexes was organized for the new conservator. He begun working on preparing "Project conservation and removal procedure of the objects and architectural features of the Mes Aynak archaeological site".

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 (single or partial block lifting, multiple section subdividing or an entire disassemble) along with a work schedule developed for each conservation procedure. A comprehensive database of the stupas and other objects of art, including their dimensions and total weight extrapolated from square meter surface, is being prepared. Work program shall be completed by early March.

The conservation equipment and chemicals purchased in Poland were delivered this month to Bagram Airbase.