

## Progress Update January 2014

Currently the international team consists of 12 international specialists (9 archaeologists, 1 archaeologist-architect, 1 conservator, 1 geomatic officer), assisted by 11 Afghan trainees.

The bulk of staff is still comprised of Tajik archaeologists – 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. Four Afghan graduates are working currently as self-reliant site supervisors (areas Mes046, Mes004, Mes052 and Mes054 - the latter site officially under the MoIC supervision).

Despite of intermittent returns of winter weather in January, no long-time snowfalls or extremely low temperatures were observed. As a result the team was able to continue work in the field according to a previous schedule and our activities were not markedly limited by decreased weather factors.

With a view to more effective coordination of the work progress strategy meetings with MAAP team have been continued on a weekly basis as well as briefings with the graduates (held every two weeks). Essential supervision on the staff through individual written reporting on the monthly basis is being improved and the management is reported on the weekly basis. On January 30, 2014 common weekly meetings of the MoIC and MAAP staff were launched which are meant to be a platform for discussing ad hoc issues on several aspects of our daily cooperation. As previously, regular co-briefings with Head of the MoIC team took part in the field or in the MoIC camp.

On 20JAN2014 a meeting on safety situation at Mes Aynak was held by Mr. Arib Aziz (MoMP) with participation of the representatives of MAAP, PMU, MoIC, MoMP, MCC and ANP. The current status of security was briefly discussed, including handing over responsibility for the Afghan Camp to Commander of ANP Mes Aynak after accomplishing procedural formalities between MoMP and MoI.



A new medical aid ambulance was delivered to the camp in January to provide an emergency transportation for the staff if needed. Health and Safety on the project has been upgraded significantly.



An organizational meeting with the representatives of the MoIC and the Afghan Institute of Archaeology was put through this month (25JAN2014). At the meeting, chaired by HE Omar Sultan, following issues were discussed: preparing a common procurement for the project; monthly reporting activities of the internationals to the MoIC; delivery small finds to the MoIC on a daily basis, registration and regular transfers to the MAAP camp; re-suming monthly working meetings on Mes Aynak for the project stakeholders; the problem of ineffective cooperation between the MoIC conservators and their international counterpart, reported several times in the past. We believe that the most important and urgent issues have been clarified beneficially for the project.



On 08JAN2014 three of our graduates took part in prerequisite tests for newly advertised posts in the Institute of Archaeology. One of the candidates was successful and soon he is going to begin working with the MoIC as a professional archaeologist.

The manpower and staffing were preliminarily estimated (total 500 workers, 60 new employees to be provided by the MoIC and 250 by PMU). The MoIC have confirmed that the team of 17 archaeologists and 8 conservators will be deployed for work at Mes Aynak.

A question of the nearest procurement of equipment and materials for the fieldwork at Mes Aynak has been resolved. After evaluation of our reliable requirements and capabilities for the forthcoming fieldwork season one common and comprehensive order was compiled (and then submitted to PMU/MoMP in late January) that includes all resources requested by the international team as well as those required by the MoIC. This should help us to avoid uncoordinated lapping the same needs and duplicate purchases. Besides managing of resources consumption and their economic distribution should be better controlled when overseen by the MAAP logistic staff.

## Field Work

Regular archaeological excavation is currently ongoing on **8 sites supervised by MAAP**, they are as follows: Mes004, Mes038, Mes045, Mes046, Mes049E, Mes052, Mes058 and Mes059. Present staff shortage did not allow us to cover some vacancies that appeared in January, therefore work on some of the sites (Mes059, Mes049, Mes052) was being provisionally suspended and resumed respectively. In addition, some minor works were carried this month on Mes055.

- **Site Mes004** (Agnieszka Dolatowska and Firuza Abdulwahidova, assistance: Sayed Ali Shah Payeez and 9 workmen): having regard to standardize documentation, at the beginning of the month A. Dolatowska began supervising fieldwork. Guidance was provided to Ali Shah to learn some technical skills such as using record forms, photo recording etc. Context register has been established and is being updated, also preparing provisional site plan is currently ongoing. This work, aimed at an experimental unifying the records done by the Tajik colleagues with documentation produced by the Western archaeologists, has already started achieving first results. Fieldwork carried out on Mes004 in January was concentrated on entire exposing architectural remains (especially expanding excavation on the western extend, where further wall structures continue) as well as on clarification of features and stratigraphy sequence within formerly exposed buildings: in Room 3 a trial trench has revealed the earlier occupation level, moreover stratigraphic sections were prepared for recording in Rooms 4 and 2 where phases of occupation concurrent to each other have been revealed.

- **Site Mes038** (supervisor: Farrukh Safoyev, assisted by Sayed Hussain Burkhani, 12 labourers): excavation was focused on further clarification of the complex plan in the western extent of the site. Work in Room 27 was completed this month (on 22JAN2014 a possible hoard of 29 copper coins and fragments of a metal container were found) and Room 21 is almost accomplished. In the southern base of terraced slope exploration of a cistern (or a well?) ctx. No. 20/12, cut into consolidated bedrock and filled with ash and slag backfill, was carried out. Thanks to removal of spoil previously dumped to the west it has been confirmed that up-to-now excavated premises do not define yet its western limit. Among most interesting artifacts there is a small terracotta statuette of Zoroastrian goddess Ardokhsho.

- On **Site Mes045** (Dr. Usmon Eshonzada, assistant: Mohammad Ali Amiri, 5 workers) exposing outer terrace walls along the southern escarpment was continued this month. Three rectangular rooms were fully exposed, one of them with remains of plastered torus in the centre. Re-numeration of all stupas, room, courtyard spaces etc. was begun by Dr. Eshonzoda along with drawing a detailed site plan. Absence of the MoIC co-archaeologist resulted in undisturbed collecting and registering small finds, including 84 Kushan or Kushan-Sassanid coins.

- Excavation work on **Site Mes046** (Sultan Masoud Muradi, 12 workers) was aimed at completing the main 'tower' building. Previously unexcavated parts around the southwestern limit of the building were removed, particularly in Room 16 (completed) as well as in Rooms 5 and 14 (still continued). In the central Room 18 backfill is being disposed in order to expose all features. So far a very unique and well preserved schistone window has been revealed in the western room wall.

Moreover, excavation was carried out in small Rooms 6 and 8 within the adjacent eastern premises.

- Djumakhon Saydaliyev (with 12 workers): work on **Site Mes049E** on the Kuh-e Aynak hilltop was resumed on 15JAN2014 and was carried within Room 37 as well as in the area extended to the west, up to the mountain slope. Several small finds were recovered such as spindle-whorls, clay tuyeres, fragments of glassware and stone beads. Wooden roof shelter was built over Rooms 35 and 36 to provide protection from snow and rain.

- **Site Mes052** (trainee-archaeologist Hussain Ali Haidari, 7 workmen): this month work in this area was continued with several lapses. After consultation with the MAAP conservator it was confirmed that numerous small plaster fragments that were registered in Room 4/01 are simply displaced architectural material. Subsequently excavation was completed and the room has been prepared for photo recording and mapping. Also excavation was continued in Room 4/08 to the north.

- On **Site Mes058** (Dr. Dowlatkhoja Dowdy assisted by Mirwais Qaderyor, 13 workers, in early January temporally upgraded up to 23) excavation was continued on the terraces in the western and the north-western part of the site, where a wall of Space 61 (a possible room) to the west of Room 52 was exposed along with the north-south oriented corridor no. 65-66. It seems that several architectural structures cover the slope very densely. Excavation in Room 56 (above Site Mes058NW) has been nearly completed. In Room 59 a deposit of 10 coins was registered. Additionally work was initiated in several premises (no. 49, 62, 67 and 69) in the southern limit of the complex.

- Fieldwork in area **Mes059** (Dr. Rahmatsho Mahmadsheev, from 20JAN2014 assisted by Khair Khairzada (MoIC) and 10 workers) on the south-western slope of Shah Tepe was resumed on 18JAN2014. In Room AA2 in the northern part of excavated area corner walls with remains of painted plaster were exposed, in addition some decorated fragments (presumably figural presentation?) were registered in situ on the floor. Moreover work was also continued within the central trial Trench 03 where further parallel stone walls were revealed accompanied by some presumable traces of melting activities. Up till now revealed architectural relics seem to prove a relatively high density of features covering the slope down to its base.

- At the beginning of January Paul Murray (accompanied by 3 workers) completed general cleaning-up of **Site Mes055**. Then a major external terrace wall ctx no. 378 that defines the southern extent of Sites Mes055 and Mes043 was recorded (over 70 contexts distinguished), including a series of photos for further rectification and surveying reference points.

A light excavator and one dumper track were available this month on the site. **Removal of spoil heaps** in the south-western limit of Site Mes058 was completed (including preparing an embankment for the dumper track) as well as most of spoil dumped in area Mes038 has been disposed.

Despite of bad weather conditions in January **survey mapping** (Roberta Marziani assisted by Sayed Rahim Hussainkhel) was updated accordingly on the following sites: Mes046N, Mes004, Mes038 and Mes062. In addition on Mes046N, Mes029 and Mes030 taking levels was completed by Sayed Rahim. In the second half of the month mapping up-to-now exposed architecture on Site Mes007 (Shamar Tepe) was reinitiated,

although due to complexity of structures there it will be continued in the next weeks. On Site Mes055 geo-rectified points were surveyed.

## Post-ex Work

- **GIS, digitizing field plans and production of final site plans** (Roberta Marziani, assistance: Sayed Rahem Hussainkhel): as the most of current excavation has been updated in the past months, more focus was given to digitizing and data entry. Roberta worked on digitizing site plan of area Mes005 (about 95% completed until the end of the month) and a provisional printing version was prepared in order to be reviewed in the field and to add all missing contexts and other archaeological features. Sayed Rahem completed digitizing area Mes028 including all necessary corrections and edition – this work has proved effectiveness of training provided to him so far in order to make him fully skilled in an entire process of the map production according to the international standards. Moreover, as every month Master Site Plan (updated as for mid-January 2014) was produced as well as some gridded site plans were prepared at the individual archaeologists' request (Mes045, Mes043+Mes055, Mes004).

- **Architectural studies** (Rahmatjon Salamov): work is ongoing on preparing final general plans and phasing study plans of the **Sites 038, 042, 046 and 049E**. R. Salamov is using Auto-Cad files handed over by our GIS team for preparing digitized versions as well as cross-sections through selected areas of Sites Mes049 and Mes058 in order to clarify common stratigraphic and structural relations between rooms, courtyards, altars and other architectural features.

- Paul Murray is continuing working on **final reports on Sites 043, 032 and 055** (26 plans were re-drawn, 447 context sheets had to be reviewed and corrected due to inadequate quality of previous records).

Apart of that, several small finds from areas 006, 055 and 054 were photographed.

- **Basic conservation, studies on dating and attribution of coins** are being continued by Dr. Dawlatkhoja Dowdy and Farrukh Safoyev – in January ca. 100 coins were processed.

- Firuza Abdulwakhidova (with guidance provided by A. Dolatowska) is working on a **catalogue of ceramic materials from Mes004** with implementation of catalogue forms translated into English and pottery diagnostic templates prepared in 2013 by Rafael Sequeira.

- In January **transfers of movable finds from the site to Afghan Camp**, such as baulk ceramics material (over 70 bags), stone querns, random assortment of small finds as well as a series of vessels, were organized relatively regularly: on 02JAN2014, 06JAN2014 and again on 20JAN2014. However it must be emphasized that several artifacts were misplaced by the Afghan conservators in the course of registration which resulted in frequent postponing previously arranged transport.

- **Report on field walking survey** in December 2013 and **“Provisional winter schedule”** were being prepared by M. Lemiesz.

Agnieszka Dolatowska is reorganizing **the baulk ceramic material and small finds currently stored in the camp**. This work is aimed at preparing easily accessible storage space for collecting and systematic storing movable artifacts recovered during consecutive months of extensive field excavation. Hundreds of bags of pottery (currently from areas Mes046, Mes035 and Mes030) are being manhandled, sorted by context numbers and dates, repacked and distributed to respective storerooms accordingly.

In addition, a wooden shelter has begun to be erected for storing stones and other categories of finds that do not require special storage conditions.

## Conservation

Preliminary assessment inspections to Sites Mes038, Mes046, Mes052, Mes054 and Mes058 were carried out on 13-14JAN2014 by Amanda Watts, Marek Lemiesz) in order to establish timeframe of activities in the coming weeks.

Afterward (20JAN2014) several vessels from Sites Mes038, Mes046 and Mes054 were excavated, wrapped and lifted from excavation and transferred to the Afghan Camp laboratory.

Emergency lift of a highly friable wooden gate lock mechanism (?) from the complex Mes045 was carried out on 22JAN2014. The object was covered with plastic sheeting, wrapped in foam padding and secured to a wooden board to prevent damage. Two other fragments of wooden doorframe were also collected.

In January A. Watts, with an occasional assistance of Imam Khan Rajabi, continued work on reconstruction the vessels brought from Mes029, Mes046 and Mes038 (using 30% paraloid B72 in acetone, joins cleaned with swabs of acetone) and two large storage jars from Mes033 (30% B72 adhesive used, high quality reconstruction impossible due to an incrustation of soluble salts on the surfaces). Upon completion of reconstruction drawing documentation was prepared. Additionally, the team completed surface cleaning of a carnelian seal (Mes054) with 50% ethanol aqueous solution. The surface of the wooden mechanism was cleaned and the surface was consolidated with 10% B72 in acetone.

Conservatory monitoring conducted in January: visit to Room 30 on Mes058 aimed at controlling the deteriorating condition of surfaces of the exposed Buddha statue) and a rapid assessment of painted surfaces and sculptures at Shamar Tepe (area Mes007).

Consultation on the excavation of room fills that contain several plaster fragments was provided on Site Mes054 (ctx 401) and in Room 4/01 in area Mes052. Additionally: winter covering of a painted plaster remains in Room 38 on Mes054 was accomplished (the absorbent paper followed by a few layers of cotton cloth and plastic foil).

**Preparing MAAP sites for winter period:** building a provisional roof (covered with plywood and a water-resistant tarpaulin) over Rooms 35 and 36 on Site Mes049E.

**Procurement of conservation chemicals:** purchase contract with the supplier was signed on 10JAN2014. All items were completed by the supplier and delivered to one of military airbases in Poland. Marek Lemiesz liaised with relevant military authorities and the Embassy of Poland in Kabul in order to organize air transport to Afghanistan. It has been confirmed that the shipment shall be delivered to Bagram on 26FEB2014.

A common **procurement list of equipment, materials and other resources** for the Mes Aynak Project (both for MAAP and MoIC) was compiled and submitted on 27JAN2014 to and sent to MoIC for further processing

On 21JAN2014 **preliminary demining inspection** to the area of the south-western and the western slope of Kuh-i Aynak was carried out by representatives of MDC Aynak detachment accompanied by the MAAP and MoIC specialists. Scope of future demining activities was discussed in the field as regards re-search of area Mes068 as well as full demining the terrain around the western slope of Kuh-i Aynak with 300-strong staff. An official enquiry letter, issued by the MAAP Director, should resolve some problems with an effective cooperation with the MDC which appeared lately (assigning a few de-miners for clearance of the Aynak mountain was refused).