

## 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 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 Second Sustainable 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.