

# SAVING MES AYNAK

SCREENING GUIDE



A GERMAN CAMERA AND KARTEMQUIN FILMS CO-PRODUCTION SAVING MES AYNAK A FILM BY BRENT HUFFMAN  
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EST. 1996  
KARTEMQUIN  
FILMS

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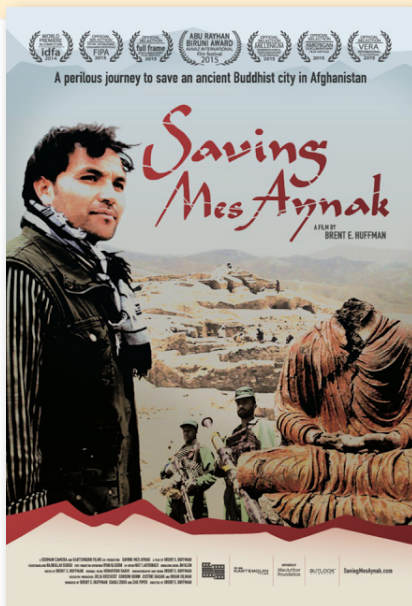
**“I feel like a mother whose child is going to die. We work so hard protecting artifacts, they are like children to me. Seeing the artifacts getting destroyed, it would be like a mother watching her child dying right in front of her.”**

*— Qadir Temori, Director of Archaeology in the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture*



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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE »

This screening guide is for diverse audiences who want to learn more about the beauty and importance of Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage, to understand the scope of loss and harm the planned open-pit mining could cause, and to undertake concrete actions that will build on the movement that has already begun to preserve Mes Aynak and other global heritage sites. It is not meant to be a comprehensive resource for understanding the many complexities involved in the situation. Rather, this guide is meant to provide context, spark dialogue, and encourage further research about and activism for the issues present in the fight to save Mes Aynak. At the end of this guide is a collection of discussion questions and suggested audience engagement strategies for using this film in a community screening setting.

### Letter from Filmmaker Brent E. Huffman

*Saving Mes Aynak* is ultimately a story of hope. It is a film that is optimistic for a better future for Afghanistan; a country plagued by over 30 years of perpetual war yet containing one of the richest cultural histories in the world. The documentary is dedicated to Afghan archaeologists like Qadir Temori who face constant threats from the Taliban, private industry, and their own government to preserve this ancient archaeological site. *Saving Mes Aynak* is not only a reflection of these courageous efforts to protect and preserve invaluable cultural heritage, but also represents a voice for the voiceless — a vehicle where Afghans can speak out on camera against the injustices happening all around them. Now these passionate, courageous voices will finally be heard.



I created *Saving Mes Aynak* to be a catalyst for change. My hope is the documentary can actually save Mes Aynak by rallying international support to stop the destruction of this cultural treasure. Mes Aynak, which is 5,000 years old and covers more than 500,000 square meters, is truly one of the unseen wonders of the world. Comparable to Pompeii and Machu Picchu, these sprawling ruins feature hundreds of life-size or larger Buddha statues, dozens of temples, hidden caverns and thousands of priceless artifacts like birch-bark manuscripts, gold and copper coins, jewelry and intricate hand painted murals. Mes Aynak is grand, awe-inspiring, and it has a magical ability to draw people in — to get people from all over the world to fall in love with its mysterious beauty.

Archaeologists estimate that only ten percent of Mes Aynak has been discovered — only the tip of an enormous iceberg. Who knows what still remains hidden, buried under a mountain of sand and earth? At the heart of the Silk Road, Mes Aynak was a melting pot of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures where travelers and pilgrims from many different religions could trade their wares, exchange cultural perspectives and even worship together at the same location. Ironically, Mes Aynak was also one of the earliest known copper mining centers in the world. Here, the precious material was mined and smelted using ancient techniques used in coin production and in the creation of ancient Buddhist artifacts.



If Mes Aynak were to be tragically destroyed, *Saving Mes Aynak* would be the only visual record that this wondrous city ever existed. As a civilized society, we cannot let that happen. When the towering Buddhas of Bamiyan were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, the world gasped in horror. People shouted, "Why did this happen?" and "Why didn't we stop it?" Mes Aynak will also be obliterated unless we take immediate action. We have the power to stop this senseless destruction. It is my duty both as a filmmaker and as a global citizen to ensure this film reaches a global audience and will spark a movement to pressure the Afghan government to stop mining and save this incredible site for future generations.



## Statement from Qadir Temori, Director of Archaeology in the Ministry of Culture

“Every country’s identity and culture is important to its citizens. Because we want to preserve our heritage, and show it to the world, we have started to do this. We started saving this ancient site because we do not want to lose our identity to the industrialization that Chinese have started here recently. They do not think about how many historical sites they destroy with their work. And the money that the Chinese have given our government will vanish, like all the money coming from the international community has vanished so far. I hope that the international community would help us protect our heritage as they have helped us gain our freedom and independence. We, the Afghan archaeologists who sacrifice our lives for the sake of Mes Aynak and our cultural identity, will remain as an example for the next generations, and to the world, that nobody should let anyone erase and misuse their cultural identity. We respect the people who support us in this. We appreciate those who show love and concern for our culture. We all are one. We will never forget their support at this crucial time. Hopefully, we can also support them in what they might be doing for their cultures. My message to the world is that they should preserve their cultural identity; raise their voice when necessary, so the people, who are not aware, get the message too.”



## Film Synopsis »

*Saving Mes Aynak* follows Afghan archaeologist Qadir Temori as he leads the effort to excavate and preserve Mes Aynak, despite threats to himself, his family, and his fellow archaeologists. Mes Aynak is an ancient Buddhist city, comparable in size to Macchu Picchu or Pompeii, only ten percent of which has been explored. The film details the complex interplay of international pressure, economic development, violent conflict, and corruption as the fate of this uniquely preserved global treasure is threatened by a Chinese state-owned mining interest that purchased the rights to the estimated \$100 billion dollars of copper in the ground in and around Mes Aynak.



**Qadir Temori** is an Afghan archaeologist committed to preserving his nation's rich cultural heritage. As the lead archaeologist at Mes Aynak's internationally funded rescue excavation, Qadir has to navigate the politics of international multilateral funding, corruption, and the needs of local villagers and workers at the site itself. This work endangers himself and his family, but despite the death threats he has faced, Qadir and his family remain in Kabul. As a result of the film, Qadir has been promoted to Director of Archaeology in the Ministry of Information and Culture. His role is to set a precedent for protecting Mes Aynak, as well as the thousands of other archaeological sites recently detected in Afghanistan by satellite imaging, many of which could be endangered in the future by mining, further development, and looting.<sup>1</sup>

### **Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture:**

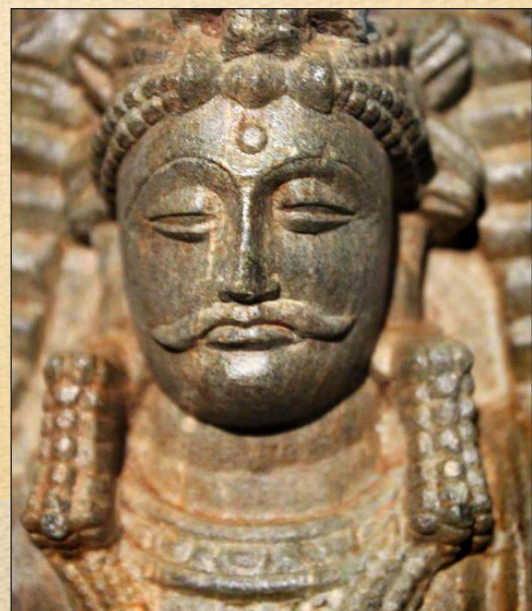
The Ministry of Information and Culture is charged with preserving and promoting Afghan culture. This includes maintaining historical sites like Mes Aynak as well as establishing modern efforts to build a robust domestic cultural life so that the people of Afghanistan can learn about, take pride in, and share their national heritage with the rest of the world.

### **Afghan Ministry of Mines and Petroleum:**

The Afghan Ministry of Mines and Petroleum is responsible for all aspects of mining and selling the nation's natural resources, including job development, attracting investors, negotiating leasing and sales contracts, and establishing revenue for the government. This office negotiated the 2007 contract for copper mining at Mes Aynak. This lease was sold at a time of intense political turbulence and rebuilding efforts by the Afghan government. A few years after the sale to MCC, the Minister of Mines, who authorized this lease, resigned in disgrace after allegations surfaced that he accepted a 30-million dollar bribe to ease the path for MCC to win the lease. During rescue archaeology, the Ministry of Mines supervised and employed their own crew of archaeologists at the site, speeding up the rescue archaeology, sometimes with disastrous results to the artifacts.

**The Taliban:** The Taliban is a militarized terrorist organization with political ambitions which emerged in Afghanistan after Russia was forced out in the early 1990s. They led Afghanistan from that time until 2001 according to their austere and often violent interpretation of Sharia law. Displaced by the American invasion in 2001, the Taliban are currently resurgent in Afghanistan, waging a war with many civilian casualties and working to destabilize the Afghan government.<sup>2</sup>

**MCC:** China's state-owned China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) who, in 2007, purchased a 30-year lease from the Afghan government to mine copper at Mes Aynak. Originally scheduled to begin mining in 2013, MCC agreed to halt mining operations until 2015 to allow for rescue excavation of Mes Aynak. Though the deadline passed, mining has not yet begun due to lack of infrastructure, security concerns and international interest in the archaeological site. To date, MCC has not developed an environmental impact plan, has remained secretive about feasibility studies of how economical mining can be, and has not released plans regarding the opening and closing of the mine. They have also not actively addressed any of the guarantees contained in the contract such as the relocation of people living in the surrounding villages that would be destroyed. Furthermore, due to delays caused by security concerns, in 2013 MCC renegotiated the contract in a way that removed some of terms that made the contract attractive in the first place, including benefits to the Afghan people and royalties to the Afghan government.<sup>3</sup> Still, mining could begin at any time.





**“Mes Aynak as a trading center would have had people coming from China, from the Mediterranean, from South Asia. It would’ve been a crossroads for everything that we know of the old world.”**

— Dr. Mark Kenoyer Archaeologist - University of Wisconsin, Madison

## About Mes Aynak

Mes Aynak, or “little copper well” in Pashto, is home to an ancient Buddhist monastic complex and settlement that lies near one of the primary trade routes between China, India and the Mediterranean region. For over two millennia these routes gradually linked up to form what now is referred to as the Silk Road, the multiple trade and exchange paths through Central Asia linking China, India and the Mediterranean region over land and sea. Although these routes were named the “Silk Roads” in the 1870s by German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen, silk was far from the only commodity of exchange. This vast network of interaction led to exchanges of many precious commodities and the exchanging of diverse ideas, beliefs, religions and cultures. Long before there was access to computers, cell phones or air travel, these roads of cultural and economic exchange sparked a never-before-seen amount of globalization, covering thousands of kilometers where cultures, religions and languages came together and influenced one another.



\*Source: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2015/09/mes-aynak/bloch-text>

Mes Aynak became an established cultural and economic center not only because it lay at the convergence of many routes from the east and west, but also because it sat on one of the largest copper ore deposits in the world, drawing multitudes to settle there and set up mining operations. Located in the Logar province of modern-day Afghanistan, the excavations at Mes Aynak reveal that, over the course of thousands of years, the site played host to active copper mining by many different occupations of the area. Each occupation and its relationship with the copper mines holds a deep historical, cultural and spiritual importance as the mining contributed greatly to the wealth of the Buddhist and secular communities of the area. “There is no doubt that the wealthy decoration of the monasteries is linked to the wealth that people living nearby derived from the mine. Monastic and secular settlements were clearly linked.”<sup>4</sup> This example of an economic center and monastic settlement coexisting in the same space is singular, and may change our modern understanding of Buddhist economic structures.<sup>5</sup>

As a Buddhist site, Mes Aynak flourished in relative peace and was at the peak of its prosperity between the fifth and seventh centuries CE, based on the artistic styles of and inscriptions on the sculptures, gold and copper coins, manuscripts,



temples, stupas, and thousands of artifacts that have been discovered there. Around 600 large Buddha statues and extraordinary oil paintings – similar in technique to those destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 at Bamiyan - have been uncovered as well. Archaeologists believe that evidence gathered from potshards discovered at the site point to the 13th century CE as the time of the last occupation of the site; however, later occupations are still possible because only a small fraction of the site has been uncovered and study of the area is still very much in progress.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, some of the oldest Buddhist manuscripts ever discovered come from Mes Aynak, inscribed in numerous languages, that could redefine the history of Buddhism.



## Economic Development, Corruption, and Copper

“The Afghan minister of mines accepted a roughly \$30 million bribe to award the country’s largest development project to a Chinese mining firm, according to a U.S. official who is familiar with military intelligence reports.”<sup>7</sup>

Since it was first explored in 1963, rigorous study has not been feasible at Mes Aynak because of political instability, the looming threat of violence, and significant looting. To date, archaeologists estimate that only ten percent of the site has been revealed, and no part of it has been fully excavated.<sup>8</sup>

The instability and violent conflict in modern Afghanistan has also severely impeded economic development. Now, the country is looking to its mineral wealth in Mes Aynak and elsewhere, including massive deposits of lithium, gold, oil, and diamonds, as a potentially major source of economic development. Yet, there has been little oversight as aid and investments flow into the country, allowing corruption to dominate the political landscape.<sup>9</sup> The World Bank, which funds economic development projects around the world, has been a leading advocate for mining in Afghanistan. In acknowledgment of the importance of the Mes Aynak site, the World Bank pledged funding for a “rescue” dig in advance of mining, though, as seen in the film, most of the pledged fund never reached the site, leaving workers without both pay and the appropriate technology.<sup>10</sup>

Mes Aynak is of further importance because it can set a precedent. There are hundreds of archaeological sites in Afghanistan on or near major mineral deposits. In a proactive measure, the Ministries of Information and Culture and of Mines and Petroleum announced a joint 2015-2016 program to collaborate on protecting heritage sites as mining begins, although the program does not name Mes Aynak as a protected site.<sup>11</sup> Destroying Mes Aynak could set a dangerous precedent that the short-term gains of mining have priority over cultural, historical and environmental preservation at other Afghan sites.<sup>12</sup>

A significant part of *Saving Mes Aynak*'s impact campaign has included outreach within Afghanistan to raise awareness of the site and its potential as a source for understanding history, promoting feelings of national pride and unity, and developing Afghanistan's reputation as a host of rich cultural heritage with global importance. Looking to the future, tourism at Mes Aynak and other archaeological sites may be a major driver for economic development in Afghanistan. For example, a planned cultural center close to the boundaries of the UNESCO World Heritage site at Bamiyan, is currently under construction.<sup>13</sup>

**Point:** Afghanistan needs economic development, and \$100 billion of copper seems like it could help.

**Counterpoint:** Modern experience in Afghanistan as well as in other countries has shown that in situations where there is violent conflict and a lack of oversight, corruption prevents this kind of development from benefiting the general population. Since signing the lease, MCC has made no effort to establish promised infrastructure or cultivate jobs for Afghans. This type of behavior by a Chinese mining company in a foreign country is well-documented. This case study details a Chinese iron ore mining project in Peru where the company fired Peruvian workers, replaced them with Chinese nationals, and reneged on promised infrastructure improvements and environmental considerations.<sup>14</sup>



## Open-Pit Mining: What It Means for Land and People



### WHAT MES AYNAK WILL LOOK LIKE WITH AN OPEN-PIT MINE

**“The Chinese have already done a study of the water tables, and based on that if they are going to be extracting water from the water aquifers, they are going to be affecting 174 villages around Mes Aynak. There are people, human beings living there that are going to be using that water for drinking purposes, for agricultural purposes. So they will be affecting the life of people in a very negative way.”**

— Javed Noorani, *Integrity Watch*

Open-pit mining is a relatively inexpensive mining method where ore is recovered by digging straight into the ground's surface in circular layers narrowing towards the center, which often requires significant amounts of blasting. This resulting pit, which resembles a spiraling ramp, remains open. By its very nature, open pit mining (also known as strip mining and opencast mining) is environmentally destructive. It alters and disturbs the Earth's surface and exposes buried rock. The blasting sometimes releases radioactivity, and often hazardous asbestos and metallic dust. Highly pressurized water separates ore from the rock, requiring significant amounts of water, and producing toxic slurry that can contaminate nearby water sources.<sup>15</sup>

If mining commences in Mes Aynak as planned, MCC will create an open pit mine that will destroy Mes Aynak, six surrounding villages, and the entire mountain range. In an already water deficient area, the open pit will drain the existing water table and pollute the water sources which serve the local villages, Kabul and nearby parts of Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> Experts say it will also leave behind a toxic crater that would render the valley forever uninhabitable, similar to the Berkeley pit in Butte, Montana. The Berkeley pit, where mining stopped in 1982, is now listed as a United States Superfund site, a federal classification for land too poisoned to sustain life.<sup>17</sup> In December, 2016, thousands of migrating geese who landed in the Berkeley pit's toxic lake died from the exposure.<sup>18</sup>



**Point:** Is there a different kind of mining that is more environmentally sound, or could leave Mes Aynak intact?

**Counterpoint:** In an ideal world, there would be an economically beneficial mining plan that created jobs and infrastructure for the Afghan people, protected the environment, and preserved cultural heritage. But MCC's proposed development of jobs and infrastructure has not been realized, and neither environmental concerns nor the preservation of cultural heritage have been addressed in a meaningful way.<sup>19</sup> There are less destructive mining methods, but they are far more expensive and most commonly used for metals more valuable than copper, which has decreased in value since the lease was signed in 2007.<sup>20</sup> Because of these circumstances, the most important priority is to stop MCC's current plan and protect Mes Aynak.



Every country's identity and culture is important to its citizens. We want to preserve and protect our heritage and present it to the world.

— Qadir Temori

## Preserving a Nation's Cultural Heritage

In the case of Mes Aynak, the environmental consequences of mining and the widespread corruption make it clear that the MCC mining lease will not benefit the Afghan people or government.<sup>21</sup> Though the MCC lease was supposed to create jobs and income for the country, to date only a handful of Afghans have been hired, with the majority of the jobs and wealth staying in the hands of MCC. Beyond Mes Aynak, Afghanistan's land is rich with many valuable minerals, and many hoped that mining would become a major source of economic development. But lack of transparency and oversight, widespread corruption, and theft by the Taliban have made many Afghans skeptical that mining will benefit the economy until better accountability measures are in place.<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, protecting Mes Aynak will set an important precedent for prioritizing the preservation of cultural heritage across Afghanistan and around the world.



Even without the stain of corruption, weighing the value of global and national cultural heritage sites against much-needed economic development is complex and requires stability, collaborative study, and input from multiple stakeholders. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has created international guidelines and policies to protect world heritage sites in recognition of their value to our global knowledge of human history. UNESCO recognizes that countries' heritage sites contribute to national identity and shared cultural pride. World heritage sites include archaeological sites similar to Mes Aynak, which also house manuscripts, cave dwellings, and other kinds of evidence of human history that contribute to our global understanding of art and science.<sup>23</sup> Though Mes Aynak is not currently listed as a UNESCO global heritage site, in part due to the international political complexities surrounding it, the UNESCO convention sets an important precedent for the value of preservation.

Roads, bridges, schools and hospitals can all be repaired, but if Mes Aynak were to be destroyed, it could not be rebuilt. Its loss would mean the destruction of not only a physically beautiful place which has been many people's home for generations, but also the possibility for profound historical research and any future potential to develop tourism and religious pilgrimage around the site. Along with all of that, the opportunity for Afghans and Buddhists around the world to learn about the origins of their cultural identity would be stripped away.





## Rescue Archaeology is Problematic

**“Excavation is easy... safeguarding is the hard thing to do.”** — *Omar Sultan, Afghanistan’s former deputy Culture Minister.*<sup>24</sup>

Qadir and other archaeologists estimate that a thorough and appropriate excavation of Mes Aynak would take at least twenty years. The short time allowed by MCC for the dig makes it necessary to forgo all standard archaeological practices and utilize rescue archaeology, a form of excavation meant to salvage as much as possible in a short time. Rescue archaeology presents a major risk to the structures and artifacts at the site. The unique array of fragile objects at Mes Aynak, including birch bark manuscripts and wood Buddha statues, and oil paint on murals and statues, require painstaking and detailed work to preserve their integrity.

The kind of internationally-funded rescue dig begun at Mes Aynak often results in the artifacts from the site being removed from the site’s home country, to be split among museums and/or private collectors worldwide. For now, most of the recovered artifacts from Mes Aynak are on display or in storage at the



Kabul Museum; however, the museum doesn’t currently have the capacity to catalog and display all of the artifacts and has also been historically unsafe as it has been the target of multiple Taliban attacks. Ultimately, without a secure permanent heritage site and museum developed at the site, the majority of the smaller artifacts will be shipped to museums around the country, while the entirety of the larger structures such as the temples and stupas will be destroyed. This would leave the people of Afghanistan with no remaining cohesive cultural understanding of the history of Mes Aynak.

Already, there has been significant looting of Mes Aynak. Some experts speculate that particularly heavy looting occurred while the site was used as a Taliban training camp in the 1990s, and the stolen artifacts may have been sold to support their efforts.<sup>25</sup>

It is the hope and goal of the Afghan archaeologists and the filmmaker that rescue archaeology stops and that the site is permanently preserved and protected, leaving the artifacts in Afghanistan, where they belong, ideally with Mes Aynak as a flagship heritage site for tourists and scholars alike.

## Mes Aynak’s Neighbors

**“I really admire these people. They are very courageous. They have lived here for hundreds of years, where their ancestors are buried.”** — *Qadir Temori*

In 2013, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, a policy think tank in Kabul, published a report about the perspectives and the experience of villagers around Mes Aynak. The local residents were originally supportive of the mining project, as MCC promised them jobs, schools, roads, improved water supply, and mosques, as well as reasonable compensation and resettlement for those villagers that would be displaced. According to the people, however, none of these promises have been kept.

For the village residents, countless generations of their family have lived exactly where they do today. Not only will the general cultural heritage of Afghanistan be lost by this mining, but also their specific family histories will be completely destroyed.

The environmental impact for these villagers has already been felt. Not only did the preliminary drilling at the site significantly deplete the water table the villages depend on, but new jobs went to Chinese workers and Afghans from elsewhere in the country, neglecting to help the people most affected by the mining. Furthermore, the promised resettlement village is in a flood zone, making long-term settlement there wholly unfeasible. It is apparent that the Afghan villagers will never see the promised infrastructural or economic benefits from the mining.<sup>26</sup>

**“We will have nowhere to live and will see no benefit from this company. This village will no longer cooperate because our government only lies to us. Now that we know MCC can’t be trusted we will never leave, even if they bomb us.”** — *Mula Merajan, resident in village near Mes Aynak*



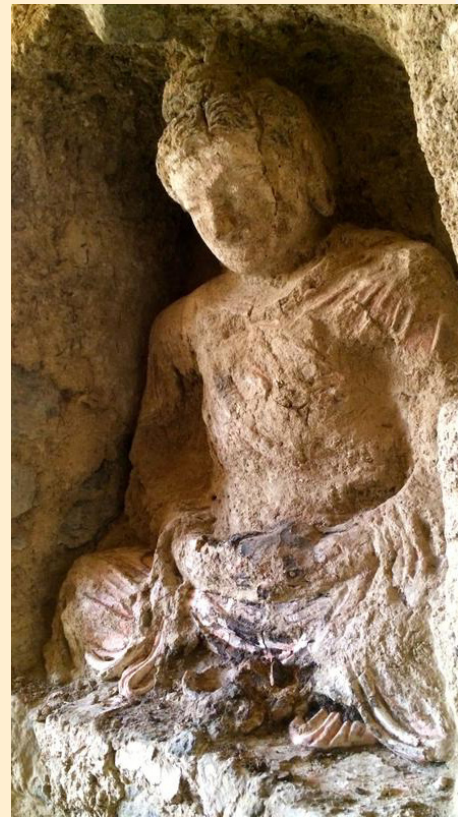
## Current Status of Mes Aynak

Today, there is limited excavation happening at Mes Aynak because of security concerns both for the site and for the archaeologists, as Qadir and other workers have received death threats from the Taliban. Additionally, there is a lack of available funds to pay them for their work. Despite these barriers, priceless discoveries continue to be unearthed including three life-size Buddha statues, one of which is complete and untouched by looters. At any point, because they own the lease to the land, MCC could choose to close the site to further excavation, even if mining hasn't begun. Furthermore after his election, U.S. President Donald Trump called for increased mining in Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup>

MCC's agreed-upon delay to allow for rescue excavation ended in 2015. Mining has still not begun for several reasons, most apparently because of security concerns. There are other challenges as well, including the lack of good roads or railway in and out of Mes Aynak. The global attention to the site has also played a significant role in delaying mining.<sup>28</sup>

In November, 2016, the Taliban offered to provide MCC and the Afghan government with security for the mine.<sup>29</sup> Their offer is problematic because the Taliban is a politically-motivated terrorist organization that is a direct threat to the Afghan government. Officials within the Afghan government are skeptical of this offer as the Taliban has consistently attacked infrastructure and economic projects created by the government. The Taliban is likely seeking funding to further its own political goals, and rumors suggest China may accept their offer, as it seeks to arm and fund enemies of the United States in response to the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Even before taking office, Trump has signalled he will reject the U.S.'s long-standing tradition of recognizing Chinese control of Taiwan.<sup>30</sup>

The Taliban may also benefit from offering the MCC security through the theft and sale of the priceless artifacts found at Mes Aynak. In the 1990s, the Taliban used Mes Aynak as a training site and participated in significant looting, which may have funded their political efforts. ISIS has begun to actively take a similar stance towards other non-Islamic cultural sites. ISIS now has a presence in Afghanistan and could potentially loot heritage sites in the country.<sup>31</sup> Protecting Mes Aynak against this kind of profiteering sets a critical precedent for other world heritage sites.



## Change is Possible

Though the circumstances seem grim, raising awareness about Mes Aynak globally is creating pressure on the Afghan government to preserve this global treasure. To date, *Saving Mes Aynak* and its accompanying impact campaign have created substantial results:

- **More than \$10,000 raised for the archaeologists, including payment for workers and technology**
- **Increased Global Awareness and Support:**
  - Over 200 screenings in 50 countries, at Universities such as Yale, Harvard, The University of Chicago, Northwestern, UCLA, and Stanford, and at museums such as the Louvre, the National Gallery Washington DC, Rubin Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago.
  - Over 1,000,000 viewers on television screenings around the world.
  - 100,000+ followers on Facebook and Twitter.
- **Political and Social Pressure**
  - Change.org petition with more than 84,000 signatures presented to Afghan president Ashraf Ghani.
  - Major art and academic institutions, including the Kabul National Museum, the U.S. State Department, The Smithsonian, the National Museum of the Czech Republic, The Global Heritage Fund, The MacArthur Documentary Fund, Reva and David Logan Grant, Buffet Institute Grant, Grants from Northwestern University and many others have pledged financial and other kinds of support for preserving Mes Aynak.
  - *Saving Mes Aynak* has been covered or cited by multiple international media sources, including Al Jazeera, The New York Times, BBC, TIME Magazine, LA Times, Washington Post, Newsweek, NPR, CNN, National Geographic, The Guardian, PBS NewsHour, Huffington Post, and many others.
  - An international database was founded by the Afghan Ministry of Culture, the US State Department, The Oriental Institute and the Afghan Institute of Archaeology to map Afghan heritage sites, track looting, and plan protection from future mining and other economic development projects.



## Ways You Can Get Involved to Protect Mes Aynak

- » Host screenings of the film for your community, learn more at [www.SavingMesAynak.com/requestascreening/](http://www.SavingMesAynak.com/requestascreening/)
- » Sign the Change.org petition asking Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, and others to preserve the site. <http://tinyurl.com/PresidentGhani>
- » Write letters to President Ghani and other Afghan officials expressing your support at <http://president.gov.af/en/form/contactus>
- » Contact your local U.S. embassy or your closest Afghan embassy to let them know that you support the protection of Mes Aynak: <http://www.USEmbassy.gov/>
- » Follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Use the hashtag #SaveMesAynak to tell your social network why Mes Aynak matters to you.
- » Contact your UNESCO office and let them know that you want to preserve Mes Aynak. (<http://en.unesco.org/countries/field-offices>)
- » Volunteer to translate our film into other languages to reach a global audience. [www.savingmesaynak.com/translate-the-film/](http://www.savingmesaynak.com/translate-the-film/)
- » Share your ideas via [savingmesaynak@kartemquin.com](mailto:savingmesaynak@kartemquin.com), or through our website, [www.SavingMesAynak.com](http://www.SavingMesAynak.com).



## For Organizers of Saving Mes Aynak Screenings

This film is intended to move audiences to take action to protect Mes Aynak, and to raise awareness about how corruption and conflict threaten cultural heritage sites around the world. Engaged discussion and activities planned around screenings help motivate audiences and give them concrete ideas for how to get involved. This section of the guide is designed to help facilitators, teachers, or other community leaders plan an event to deepen audience understanding and commitment to *Saving Mes Aynak*.

## Planning the Event

### State Your Purpose

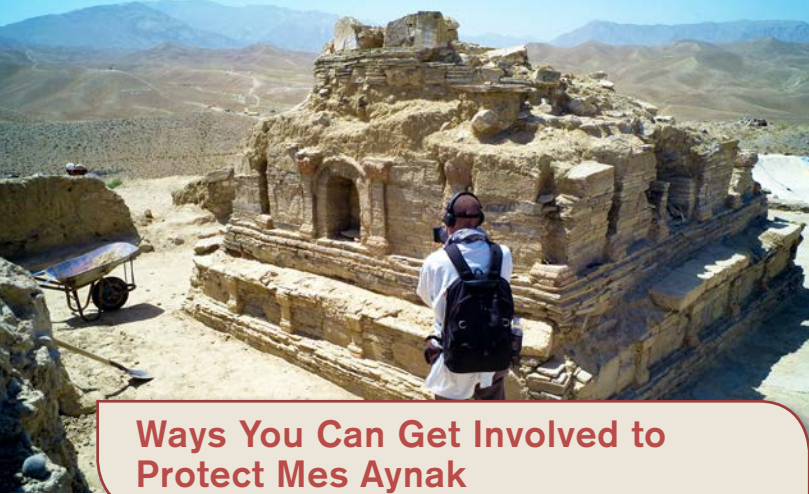
*Saving Mes Aynak* is a film with a specific point of view - namely that the cultural and environmental value of Mes Aynak is worthy of notice and protection. As the host of a screening event, it is helpful to make the purpose of your screening explicit, even in the invitation, for example, "Come learn about what you can do to protect this invaluable cultural heritage site."

**Educate Yourself:** The film touches on many complex and potentially controversial issues, such as the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban, mining, the environment, and other historical themes like the Silk Road and the history of Buddhism. It is unlikely that you or any one person is an expert in all of these areas. Familiarizing yourself with this guide and the resources available on [SavingMesAynak.com](http://SavingMesAynak.com) in advance of the event will help inform you, and also give you tools to direct audience members to in the event a question comes up for which you don't have the answer.

**Be Clear on Your Role:** Being a facilitator is a critical role for leading discussion. If opposing points of view come up from the audience, you can keep the event on track by staying calm, recognizing and validating that different views exist, and offering ideas and resources where individuals can go to learn more.

Discussing your decisions on these guidelines with community partners, fellow facilitators, and audience members will help ensure an atmosphere of safety, support, and mutual respect.





## Ways You Can Get Involved to Protect Mes Aynak

### Engagement Strategies for Saving Mes Aynak

Alongside raising awareness of Mes Aynak as an archaeological treasure, the following suggested engagement opportunities deepen critical themes and topics in the film and engage audiences in critical dialogue following any screening event.

#### *Pre-Screening Questions*

Consider projecting these pre-screening questions before the film begins to encourage thoughtful reflection.

For example, ask participants to turn to a person sitting near them and share their responses to these questions:

- Why does archaeology matter and what can we learn from studying the past?
- What is the importance of cultural heritage?

#### *Post-Screening Dialogue*

Before delving into other engagement strategies, it may be helpful to kick off the discussion with some general discussion questions like:

- What is the strongest message you'll take from this film? How will you describe it to your friend/spouse/colleague when you go home?
- This film was told from the point of view of Qadir Temori, an archaeologist born and raised in Afghanistan. How might the film have been different if it was told from the perspective of the French archaeologist? What does it mean to learn the story from the perspective of someone from the country?
- Talk about the most striking artifact, view, or other visual in the film that was particularly moving to you.
- Who do you think needs to watch this film and what would you want for them to learn?
- This is an independently made film, originally funded by a Kickstarter campaign with a production crew of one person. What does that mean to you? How might an independent film differ from one funded by government or corporate funding?

#### *Panel Discussion*

A panel discussion featuring experts is a great way to guide discussion and provide a larger context and details that couldn't be contained in a 60 minute film. To that end, when organizing a screening, consider finding experts to serve as discussion leaders for the post-screening conversation. It might also be helpful to find an Afghan person who is willing to come share their experience and talk about Afghan culture.

##### For example:

- Local museum curators specializing in Asian history, especially Afghan or Buddhist culture;
- Cultural historians of Afghanistan from a nearby university;
- Experts in the politics of present-day Afghanistan, from a local newspaper or university;
- Archaeologists, especially those working in Asia;
- Buddhist and Afghan Art Historians;
- Environmental scientists specializing on the impact of open pit mining;
- Journalists who cover Afghanistan, mining, or other relevant issue areas.





### **The Actions of Individuals**

*Saving Mes Aynak* centers around the work and leadership of Qadir Temori as he navigates complex politics and personal threats to excavate and protect Mes Aynak. This engagement strategy will inspire the audience to think about what inspires individuals to act, and how they go about doing so.

1. Invite a local activist or community leader to speak about their personal experience. For example, in the United States, there are many places where Native American individuals and/or communities have organized to preserve cultural heritage sites in the face of real estate or other kinds of development. Recently, individuals from all over the country went to Standing Rock, North Dakota to protect Sioux reservation land from an oil pipeline that would violate their sovereignty and threaten their water supply.<sup>32</sup> It may be possible to find a Standing Rock activist in your area by searching on Facebook or for stories in your local paper.
2. Alternatively, share [this case study](#) from Chicago, where controversy arose when construction of a major thoroughfare unearthed a 100-year-old city cemetery.<sup>33</sup>
3. Or, read the statement from Qadir Temori at the beginning of the guide. Ask audience members to reflect on the factors that influenced his commitment to fight for Mes Aynak.

### **For discussion:**

- What motivates individuals to act, even in the face of a potentially violent threat to themselves and their families?
- What do you imagine it is like to have a part of your history destroyed by outside forces?
- What is scary or challenging about deciding to act? What are the rewards of action?
- Are there any similar examples audience members can think of where a part of their own heritage was threatened? What happened?

### **Suggested Activity:**

Have audience members write a letter to Qadir about what his commitment means to them. Let them know the [SavingMesAynak.com](http://www.savingmesaynak.com) website features a form to submit their letters. <http://www.savingmesaynak.com/lettertoqadir/>

### **Sample letter:**

Dear Qadir,

I am writing this letter to express my deepest gratitude and support for all that you do to protect Mes Aynak and the other sites that represent your cultural heritage. When I watched the film and saw your father's face - his pride at your accomplishments, and his concern for your safety and well-being - I felt the depth of your commitment in my heart and it moved me. Without the work and actions of individuals like you, a piece of our humanity might be lost. Please know that your actions matter. From half a world away, here in Denver, Colorado, USA, I want you to know that I am inspired by your courage and leadership. I will do what I can to support your efforts to protect Mes Aynak and all the historical and cultural beauty Afghanistan has to offer.

With respect,  
*Jennifer Sarche*





## Learning from Art:

Have an art historian or expert in Buddhist culture come to speak, or use an article or pamphlet like [this one](#) published by the National Museum of Afghanistan to inform the audience about the images and artistic methods seen in the artifacts at Mes Aynak that can highlight what to look for and what is unique about the site.

Project an image of the map of the Silk Road at <http://www.savingmesaynak.com/photos/> and discuss the following quote from archaeologist Dr. Mark Kenoyer on the artifacts and structures at Mes Aynak:



**“Mes Aynak as a trading center would have had people coming from China, from the Mediterranean, from South Asia. It would’ve been a crossroads for everything that we know of the old world.”**

Then, project the slideshow of artifact images from the Mes Aynak website. Ask audience members to write about one of the images they saw.

- How does looking at the collection of images make you feel?
- What stood out to you about this image?
- How does learning about the art change or influence your ideas of Buddhist and/or Afghan culture?
- What is the value of art in society?
- If you were to share an image or structure that represents your cultural heritage with someone from Afghanistan, what would you show them?

## Place and Identity

Ask for a show of hands in the audience for who had heard of Mes Aynak before the screening. Ask a few of the people who raised their hands where they heard of it and in what context. Discuss why the people in the audience may not have heard of Mes Aynak before.

What do they know about Afghanistan? Afghan culture?

**\*\***For further exploration of assumptions about Afghanistan, use the Word Wall exercise that opens the **Teaching Saving Mes Aynak** classroom lesson below.

If an Afghan person's only exposure to U.S. culture was from their interactions with the military, what might their assumptions be about the United States?

Read aloud these quotes from people living around Mes Aynak:

**MOHAMMAD SALAM:** We are all upset and worried. Nobody can find anywhere else to live. Look at this cold weather. We won't have anywhere else to go.

**HAJI HASHIM:** If they force us out I will be very angry! Where will we live? Do you give me your house? Where should we bury our dead? Where should we go to mosque? Where do we get fresh water?

**MULA MERAJAN:** We will have nowhere to live and will see no benefit from this company. This village will no longer cooperate because our government only lies to us. Now that we know MCC can't be trusted we will never leave, even if they bomb us.

## Discuss:

What are the main messages you hear in these quotes? In what ways does living near Mes Aynak inform the identity of the villagers? Who does the land belong to? Should the government be allowed to lease the land to China? In what ways should these villagers' voices be included in the decision?





## Consequences of Global trade and Consumption

Read this quote from a Chilean mining executive about why China mines copper around the world, “China uses copper to build technological devices like tablets, mobile phones and cameras, which contain fine fibres of copper. Therefore, producing copper for Chinese clients requires more work and time.”<sup>34</sup>

Project and read through [this infographic](#) on how much copper and other precious metals are found in smart phones, tablets, and laptops.



- In what ways is global consumption of these devices and other similar technologies related to the conflict around Mes Aynak?
- How does the demand for technology influence the decisions about where and how to mine precious metals?
- How does this global economic perspective influence your thinking about how to act to save Mes Aynak and other sites like it?

## Teaching *Saving Mes Aynak*

This lesson outline is intended as an template for high school classrooms seeking to integrate the documentary film *Saving Mes Aynak* into their classroom. Given the interdisciplinary content, the film content can be aligned within many subjects.

**Duration of Lesson:** Two class periods, one for film screening and one for lesson.

**Subjects:** World History (including AP), Science, Art, Global Studies, Asian Studies

Possible Resources to have on hand (See Resource Section at the end of the lesson)

Map of Afghanistan

Map of Silk Road through this region

Overview of Buddhism in Afghanistan

Overview of Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan

### Opening: Word Wall

To introduce Mes Aynak and before screening the documentary, consider beginning the lesson with this opening activity.

#### **Step one: Preparation**

Identify a place in your classroom for your word wall and write the following terms on large sheets of poster paper or whiteboard.

#### **Step two: Creating a Word Wall**

Before watching *Saving Mes Aynak*, have students write words or ideas that come to mind for each of the following terms. If using poster paper it may be helpful to pass out Post-It notes for students to write one or more terms per slip.

Afghanistan

Taliban

Buddhism

Sacred Site

Archaeology

After students post their ideas, read one another's comments and discuss similarities, differences and address any stereotypes and questions that may surface in this exercise.

Students can also update their definitions on the word wall as they develop a deeper understanding of key terms through viewing the documentary.





## Activity: Film Screening and Jigsaw Learning

(1) Screen *Saving Mes Aynak* in class. Review this screening guide and the resources on the film's website located on the film's website for background information and helpful framing information prior to student viewing. (<http://www.savingmesaynak.com/>)

(2) Immediately after the film's conclusion, have students reflect in writing on the film. If helpful, post these post-screening prompts to invite further reactions.

- Whose perspectives were included in this film?
- What was new information?
- What questions remain?
- What recommendations would you propose to save Mes Aynak?

After allowing students 5-10 min for individual writing, break the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the different disciplines listed below. Each assigned group is to discuss and develop an argument in support of protecting Mes Aynak from the point of view of their assigned discipline.

For example, for Science you may consider the environmental consequences of open-pit mining on the local water source. What arguments would you make to preserve the site from this perspective?

- Art History: Why art matters
- Asian Studies: Complex relations from past to present
- Science: Environmental impact of mining
- History: Silk Road and the expansion of Buddhism
- Social Studies: Political situation in Afghanistan, Cultural Heritage

Allow groups 15-20 minutes to refine their arguments. Each group should assign a spokesperson to communicate their argument.

### Closing and Assessment

Large group discussion:

- Was there something you heard from another group that changed or strengthened your own argument?
- Are there any voices or perspectives that were missing from the presentations?
- What is the most powerful action to take to protect Mes Aynak?







## Resources for Lesson

- **The Taliban: Important Points for Teachers and Students**

National Geographic Society

<http://nationalgeographic.org/media/taliban-important-points-teachers-and-students>

- **Interactive Map of the Silk Road**

UNESCO

<http://en.unesco.org/silkroad/network-silk-road-cities-map-app/en>

- **Google Earth**

Use Google Earth to upload map of Afghanistan

- **History of Buddhist Afghanistan**

Buddhism and Bamiyan, University of Washington

<https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/cities/afghanistan/bamiyan.html>

### *Standards Addressed:*

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects (<http://www.corestandards.org/read-the-standards/>)

SL.7.2

SL.8.2

SL.9-10.2

SL.11-12.2

W.9-10.1

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (NCSS)

(<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards> & <https://www.mhschool.com/socialstudies/2009/teacher/pdf/ncss.pdf>)

Standard IV. Individual Development & Identity

Standard V. Individuals, Groups & Institutions

Standard VI. Power, Authority & Governance

Standard IX. Global Connections



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Kartemquin Films is a not-for-profit collaborative center for documentary media makers who seek to foster a more engaged and empowered society. In 2016, Kartemquin celebrated 50 years of sparking democracy through documentary. Best known for producing over 55 award-winning documentaries that examine and critique society through the lives of ordinary people, Kartemquin is recognized as a leading advocate for documentary media makers, and for its filmmaker development programs that help further grow the field, such as KTQ Labs, Diverse Voices in Docs, and the acclaimed KTQ Internship. For more information, visit [www.kartemquin.com](http://www.kartemquin.com).

The impact campaign was produced by the filmmaker and Kartemquin Films, with content support from Blueshift.

Design by Julie Milliken Creative.

## Endnotes

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