Göbekli Tepe, Turkey

2012 Project Progress Report
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Above: Sculptural detail on one of the Early Neolithic monoliths at Göbekli Tepe.

Executive Summary

2012 was a very good year at Gobekli Tepe, with many achievements in planning, documentation, conservation and community development. A meeting was held with the Turkish General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums in Ankara, where the Turkish officials expressed their wish to develop a Site Management Plan in cooperation with the DAI / BTU Cottbus teams based on a collaboration protocol. As an integral part of that plan, the first draft of a Master Conservation Plan has been completed by GHF’s Senior Technical Advisor John Hurd, which will guide all conservation intervention at the site. At the same time, Hurd has also worked to establish a conservation laboratory in partnership with nearby Harran University in order to analyze and test the most appropriate materials and methods to employ during conservation at Göbekli Tepe as well as to organize for an onsite conservation lab.

Meanwhile, the immediate protection of Göbekli Tepe’s monuments is being secured by a temporary shelter structure, the plan for which was prepared in 2012, to be executed in such a way that it will not only not obstruct the construction of the final, permanent shelter but also facilitate it by being used as a working platform. The site’s security has further been improved by the construction of a fence surrounding the excavation area for protection.

Documentation of the site continued in 2012 using ground penetrating radar and electrical resistivity to interpret the archaeological features still under the ground as well as 3D laser scanning to create extremely precise models of the excavated features. Conservation work onsite has also been maintained, with a focus on protecting the prehistoric walls, massive monolithic pillars and floors from damage by rain, wind and other environmental factors.

In terms of community engagement and development, the project continues to provide employment to approximately 60 local community members, and the project team has implemented an education program for the local children to raise awareness of cultural heritage and the significance of the archaeology in their midst. Finally, construction has begun on a visitor center for Göbekli Tepe, which will allow for a richer and more informed visit to the site. None of this would have been possible without the support of the project’s partners and other collaborators, and to them we extend our gratitude.
2012 Project Progress

Planning and Documentation
A great deal of work on planning for the site’s management and conservation as well as documentation occurred in 2012:

*Site Management and Conservation Planning*
A feasibility report has been completed and attests not only to Göbekli Tepe’s potential as a World Heritage Site, but forms the basis for further precise work on a Site Management Plan as well. Based on this evaluation, a meeting was held with the Turkish General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums in Ankara, where the Turkish officials expressed their wish to develop a Site Management Plan in cooperation with the DAI / BTU Cottbus teams by means of a collaboration protocol.

DAI and BTU Cottbus met subsequently in Berlin and agreed on the text of a proposal to be submitted to the Turkish authorities and the allocation of work packages to the persons involved. Plans were detailed further during an on-site visit of GHF members during the spring campaign and at a meeting in London in early December.

A key component of the Site Management Plan will be the Master Conservation Plan, which will cover all aspects of conservation at Göbekli Tepe and is now advanced with initial analyses of the original mortars used at the site during its construction more than 11,000 years ago. To further conservation, a partnership has also been established with Harran University to aid with analysis and testing of materials both on site and at the university itself.
Site Documentation: Geophysical Prospection and 3D Laser Scanning

Prior geophysical survey work was complemented in Fall 2012: Using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), the unexcavated areas were examined to get a more detailed picture of the structures still hidden under the surface. In addition, geoelectrical measurements were done for the first time in 2012. 3D Laser scanning also continued in 2012 to provide high precision documentation of the enclosures and the monoliths which are situated inside of them.

Preparation for a Protective Shelter

Of paramount importance to preservation of the site and its exposed remains - while also allowing for a good visitor experience - is installation of a shelter over the numerous structures and the impressive decorated monoliths that they contain. Planning for this protective structure has been going on since GHF began funding work at the site, and designs have now been prepared so that implementation can begin.

The strategy decided upon and started in 2012 calls for first preparing footings to support the shelter structure, and these were dug by archaeologists to ensure no damage was done to the site. The next stage is to construct a temporary shelter to immediately protect the exposed archaeological features while careful preparations are being made to install the final, permanent shelter. Critically, the foundations of the temporary shelter will also serve to support the permanent shelter, so no additional impact will be put on the site when that construction work is conducted.
Above: Top view of proposed shelter over core excavated area.

Above: Side view of proposed shelter.
Conservation
In addition to the preparation of the Master Conservation Plan described above, a number of actions have been taken to protect the in situ remains:

Preliminary Protection of Walls against Rainfall
As in earlier years, protection against wind-driven rain was made by erecting stone walls in front of the prehistoric stone walls to assure that the clay mortar would not be washed out. Spots with especially well preserved mortar have further been protected by wooden casings with plastic foil coatings. Stone wall protections were made intensively already in 2011 in enclosure A, B, C and D and in front of all other walls with a preserved height of more than 20 cm, and the stones used for the walls had been collected during the seasons from the dump of the excavation. The effect of these installations has been very satisfying. The unusually strong winter of 2011-12 caused a lot of damage to the artificial bulks and to some degree to protective walling - but fortunately no damage at all was done to the Stone Age architecture.

Protection of Pillars
In 2011 a waterproof protection against rainfall using plastic foil fixed to a cover made of timber to assure that wind can not destroy or remove it was put into place. Such a cover was made for the protection of the remains of clay plaster on the northwestern wall section of enclosure D and the protection of the heads of pillars with cracks against frost weathering of layers II and III. The installations were repaired and reinforced in 2012 where necessary.

Above: Protective cover over Pillar 35 in Enclosure C.
Protection of Terrazzo Floors
In 2011 the terrazzo floor of enclosure B (layer III) and all the other rectangular buildings of layer II with such a floor had been covered by a layer of sterile (sieved) soil in order to protect the floors against heavy rainfall and mechanical damage. To improve this preventive measure, in 2012 a new layer of sieved soil was added to the existing protection layer.

Perimeter Fence for Site Protection
A main problem in controlling access to the site and the prevention of vandalism and looting was its easy accessibility from all directions, with some entry points being hard to control even by the now more numerous guards. It is thus a big step forward that funding could be secured by GHF from the J.M. Kaplan Fund for a security fence and CCTV. Its installation started in October 2012 and is expected to be completed early in 2013. A group of 12 local workmen, who have been employed for 15 years at the excavation, is constructing the fence under the lead of Mustafa Gönen, GHF Turkey Manager, thus involving the local community in site protection. Originally a length of 4.4 km was projected for the fence, but this was subsequently enlarged to 5.9 km to make it invisible from the site.
Above: The protective fence being installed around the site by local community members.

Above: Map showing the location of the site perimeter (yellow) and protective fence (blue).
Conservation Facilities at Harran University and Onsite Field Laboratory
A formal agreement with Harran University to establish a stone conservation laboratory was prepared in 2012. Apart from the advantages of a nearby restoration facility, this will intensify the local collaboration and involvement of the project. Samples of clay mortar collected by John Hurd have been transferred for analysis in Harran University’s laboratories, the results of which will be used to build test walls in the spring season of 2013. These test walls, erected in the safe environment of the Harran campus away from potential negative influences of visitors at Göbekli Tepe, will be used to explore methods of best protecting the original clay mortar on-site. Additionally there will be a field laboratory on site.

The Turkish commission responsible for Göbekli Tepe (Koruma Kurul) agreed that two office containers could be installed at the site in autumn 2012: One for the security equipment, especially the additional CCTV monitors for cameras to be put on the new fence guarding the excavation area, and the second to house a field laboratory and provide storage for the equipment which will be needed for conservation work.
Community

Community development will be an integral component of the Site Management Plan and, as such, included in the overall framework of that plan. Research will be done on the concrete circumstances and issues in the local area and will involve close collaboration with the surrounding communities to determine their needs. Based on the outcome of this research, the development of a separate ‘Community Development Sub-Plan’ should be considered. Nevertheless, the excavations already have a considerable impact on local community development. For many years approximately 60 local community members have been employed on-site, mainly as workmen during the excavations, but also as drivers and site guards.

In the economically underdeveloped Urfa region, this means a big potential for development in the village of Örencik, where most of the workmen come from. An education program for the local village children started years ago, with project team members teaching at their school and visits to the site and the museum in Şanlıurfa. Public lectures by the project director and team members in Şanlıurfa and other towns in the region inform the public about the progress of work.

Close cooperation has also been established with the experts sent by the Ministry of Culture to prepare the exhibition of the Neolithic sites in the new museum of Şanlıurfa, which will be built in November 2013 (and will then be one of the largest museums in Turkey).
Finally, construction has begun on a visitor center along the access road to the site but outside of the archaeological zone in order to avoid any negative impact on Göbekli Tepe itself.

Above: Exterior view of the new visitor center.

Above: Interior view of the new visitor center.
Partnerships and Collaborations
The Göbekli Tepe project and GHF are working in collaboration with a number of organizations in Turkey and internationally to preserve this site of supreme importance to the global community, including the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Şanlıurfa Municipal Government, the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), the German Research Foundation (DFG) and Harran University. In addition, the project has benefited enormously from collaboration with the Vehbi Koç Foundation, the Downing Foundation, the John Templeton Foundation and J. M. Kaplan Fund. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.

Above: President of Turkey Abdullah Gül (right) visiting Göbekli Tepe in 2012.