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Summary of two campaigns of archeological fieldwork at the Gurukly Shaherri Caravanserai site in the Serakhs Oasis, Southern Turkmenistan, 2012

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MONIKA RÓŻAŃSKA-KARDAŚ

**SUMMARY OF TWO CAMPAIGNS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK
AT THE GURUKLY SHAHERI CARAVANSERAI SITE IN THE SERAKHS OASIS,
SOUTHERN TURKMENISTAN, 2012**

In 2012, as part of an ongoing research project titled “Reconstruction of the process of the formation of Central Asian urban settlements during the Early Islamic Period,”¹ archaeological fieldwork started at the site of the early Islamic settlement of Gurukly Shaheri,² situated in the Serakhs oasis in southern Turkmenistan.³ From the archaeological viewpoint, Gurukly Shaheri is a complex of several man-made elevations scattered within an area of approx. 5 ha. Field survey and satellite imagery analysis, which were performed last year, made it possible to locate the best preserved and the best prospective remains of the settlement. A large rectangular building situated in the south-east of Gurukly Shaheri was selected as the object of study. The performed geophysical survey and initial excavations allow a preliminary reconstruction of the building (Figs. 1, 2). The floor plan of the building comprises two adjacent courtyards with three coaxial gates. The first and westernmost is the main gate, which protrudes slightly from the face of the wall. The second is an interior gate, which, together with several rooms, partitions the yards into two independent courtyards. The third gate closes off the east courtyard and completes the arcade named *rivaq* that surrounds that courtyard. The courtyards and rooms are surrounded by a 1.5 m thick wall, reinforced in sections by semicircular buttresses (Figs. 3, 4). Unfortunately, the northern section of the building and all corners of the building were destroyed during military exercises held in that area in the second half of the 20th c. Accordingly, at the current stage of work, the presence of additional reinforcements of the building in the form of corner turrets can only be speculated.

The monumental early Islamic architecture relatively frequently featured a floor plan that involved coaxial



gates opening into one or two courtyards. Mosques, madrasas, palaces as well as caravanserais (inns for travelling caravans) were built according to that model (FRAZIK 1999). In the light of the above facts and of the peculiar location of the studied building, i.e. its vicinity to Serakhs, a large city, and the presence of a trading route from Nishapur to Merv that passed through the oasis, it can be stipulated that the studied remains in Gurukly Shaheri were one of caravanserais built along the famous Silk Route. Insofar, only two early Islamic caravanserais built on a similar floor plan have been discovered. One is Ribat-Sharif in south-east Iran, situated approximately 60 km from Gurukly Shaheri and dated to the 12th c. (HMEL'NICKIJ 1996: 296). The other is Akcha-kala, dated to the 11th/12th c., situated in eastern Turkmenistan, nearly 160 km from Gurukly Shaheri (PUGAČENKOVA 1967: 111).

¹ The project (No. 2011/01/N/HS3/02735) is funded by the National Science Centre and realised by the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw.

² The fieldwork's timeline was: March 5 – April 3, and September 14 – October 21.

³ As a result of a surface survey performed in 2007–2008 as a part of the “Settlement pattern in Central Asian oases in the pre-Islamic period: a spatial analysis of settlement in Serakhs oasis in southern Turkmenistan” project under the leadership of Professor B. Kaim, ceramic artefacts were found which unambiguously show that the settlement was an early Islamic one.

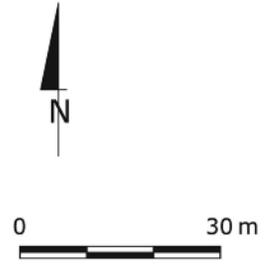
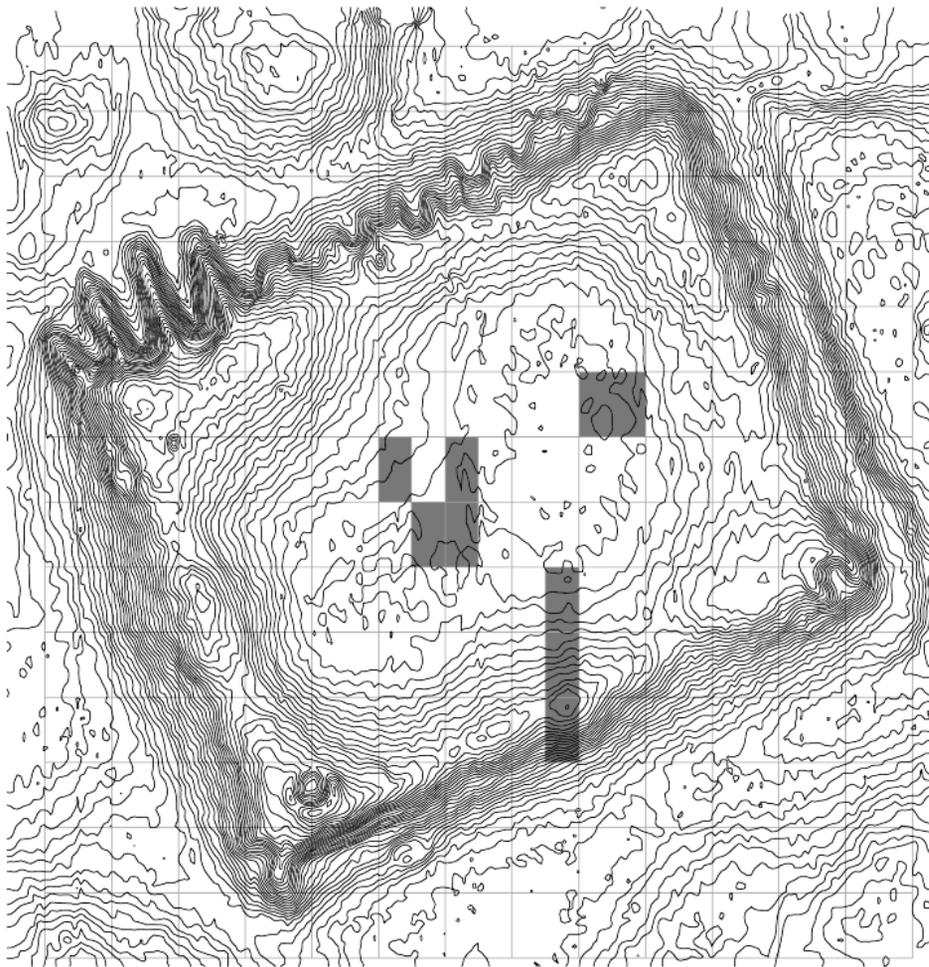


Fig. 1. Topographical map of Gurukly Shaheri with examined sectors (Drawing K. Misiewicz, W. Małkowski).

Rys. 1. Mapa topograficzna Gurukly Shaheri z przebadanymi sektorami.

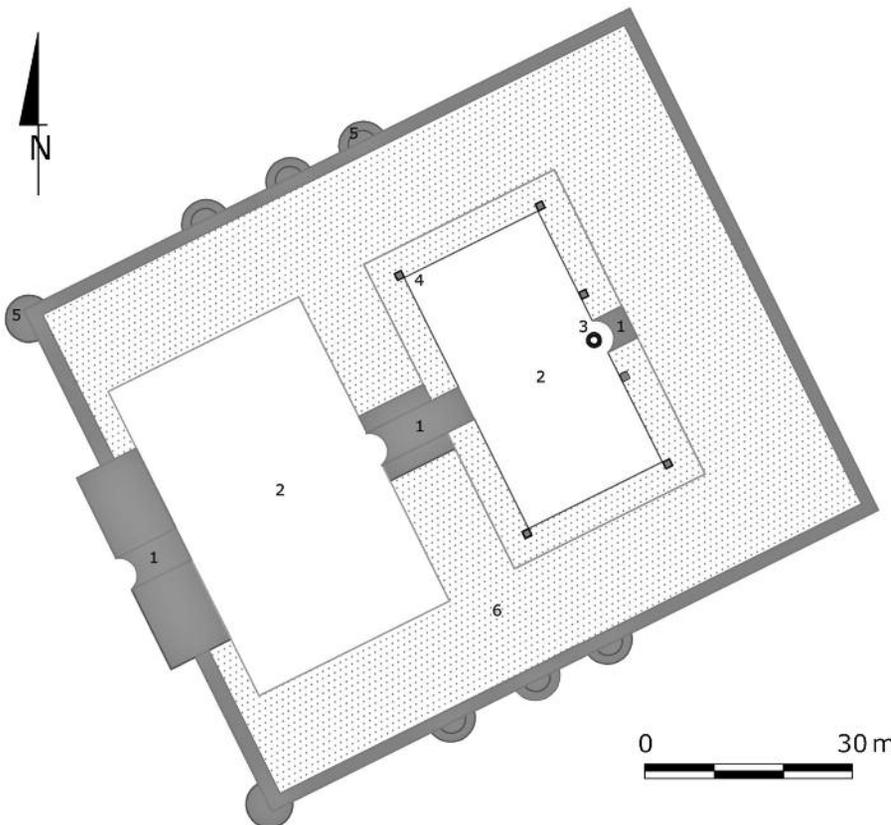


Fig. 2. Floor plan of the studied caravanserai at the site of Gurukly Shaheri – reconstruction (Drawing M. Różańska-Kardaś). 1 – gates; 2 – courtyards; 3 – well; 4 – arcade named *rivaq*; 5 – buttresses; 6 – rooms.

Rys. 2. Plan karawanseraju na stanowisku Gurukly Shaheri – rekonstrukcja. 1 – bramy; 2 – dziedzińce; 3 – studnia; 4 – arkada zwana *rivaq*; 5 – przypory; 6 – pomieszczenia.



Fig. 3. Uncovered part of the wall with a buttress (Photo M. Róžańska-Kardaś).

Rys. 3. Odsłonięty fragment muru z przyporą.

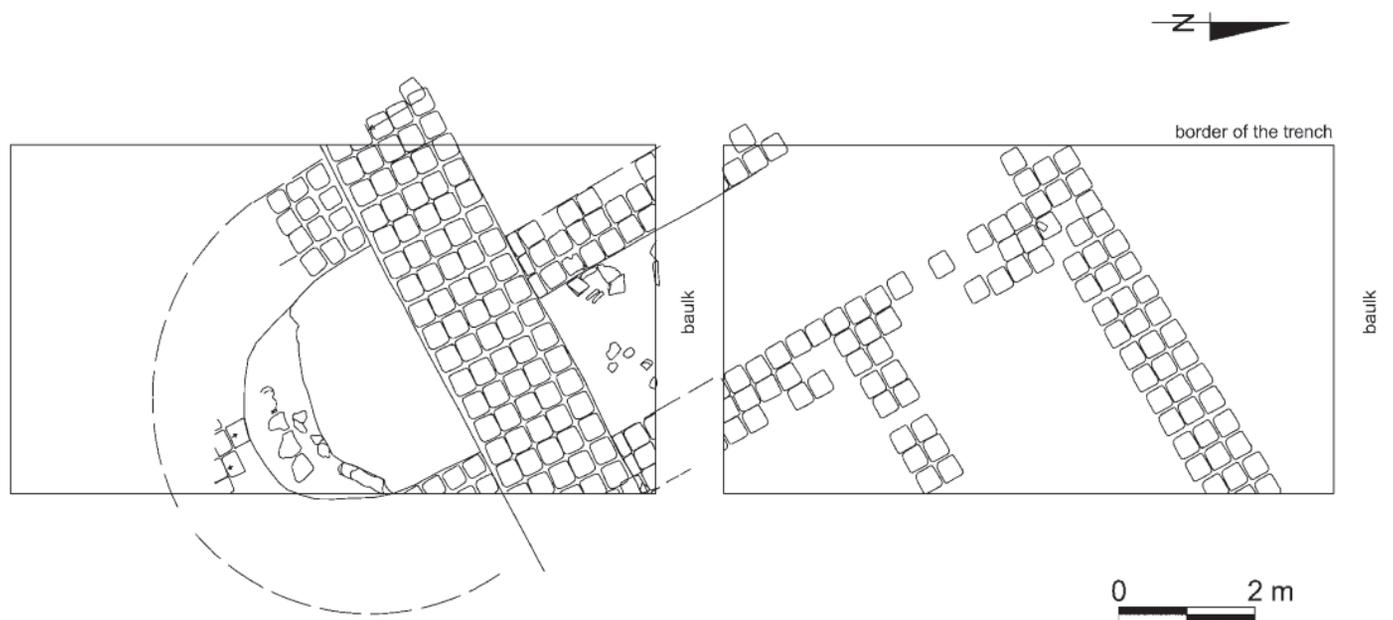


Fig. 4. Plan of the uncovered part of the wall with a buttress (Drawing M. Róžańska-Kardaś).

Rys. 4. Plan odsłoniętego fragmentu muru z przyporą.

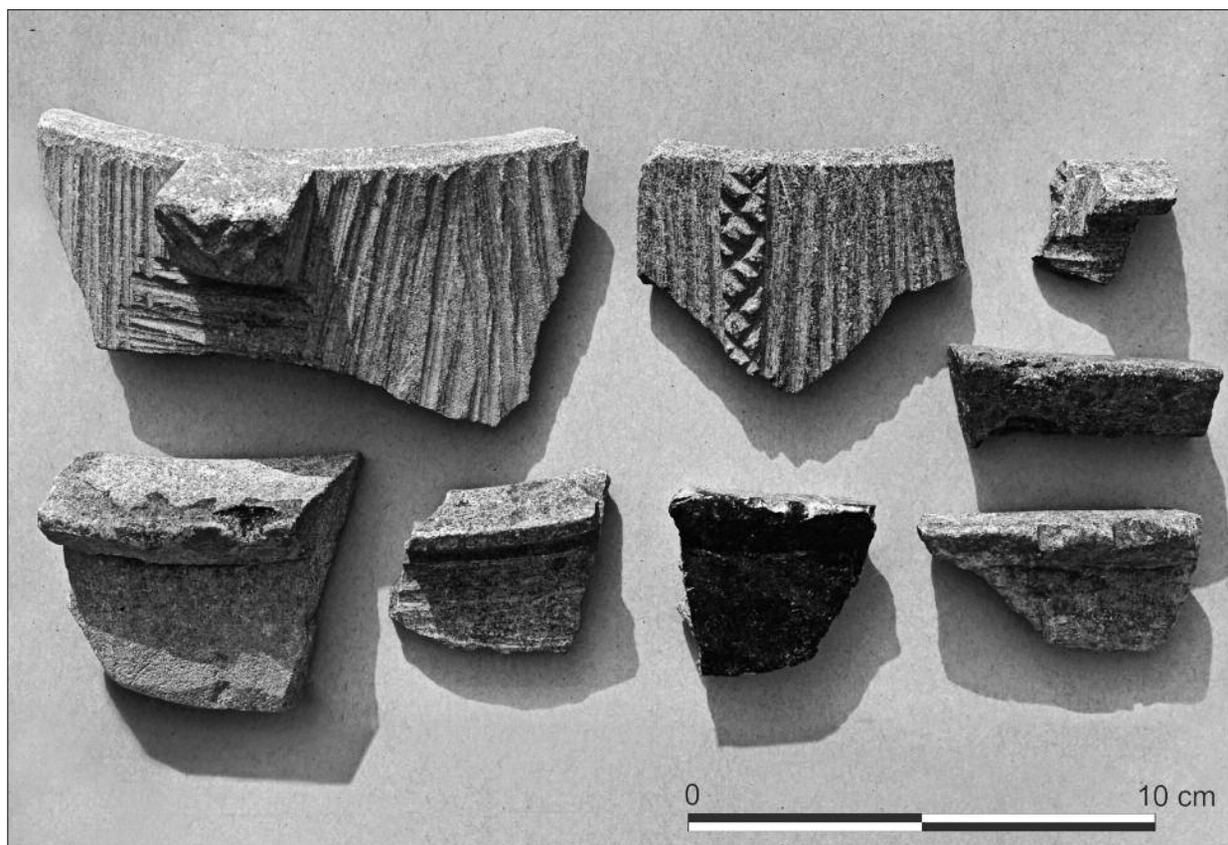


Fig. 5. Examples of early Islamic cooking vessels of stone from Gurukly Shaheri (Photo M. Różańska-Kardaś).

Rys. 5. Przykłady wczesnomuzułmańskich naczyń kamiennych z Gurukly Shaheri.

The two-storey Ribat-Sharif caravanserai used the most durable and advanced construction technology, using only high-quality fired bricks (HMEL'NICKIJ 1996: 295). Akcha-kala in turn was built of fired bricks (walls of rooms surrounding the courtyard) as well as pressed mud bricks (main perimeter wall) (ĚSENOV 2001: 274–275). The excavations at Gurukly Shaheri show that buttresses, pillars, interior walls and the upper section of the perimeter wall were built of sun-dried bricks while the base of the perimeter wall and the footing of the main gate were built with fired bricks. Ceramic artefacts found during the excavations (sherds of impressed glazed and unglazed pottery) and stone

vessels typical for the period (**Fig. 5**) (NAMDAR, STACEY, SIMPSON 2009: 2507–2516) prove that the caravanserai in Gurukly Shaheri was in use at least from the 11th to 13th c. So if further archaeological fieldwork at the site determines the accurate date of construction at Gurukly Shaheri, then it will be possible to decide which of the three caravanserais was a prototype for the rest of this period.

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MONIKA RÓŻAŃSKA-KARDAŚ

**PODSUMOWANIE DWÓCH KAMPANII BADAŃ ARCHEOLOGICZNYCH
NA STANOWISKU GURUKLY SHAHERI – KARAWANSERAJ W OAZIE SERACHS
(POŁUDNIOWY TURKMENISTAN), 2012**

Stanowisko Gurukly Shaheri, znajdujące się na terenie oazy Serachs, pod względem archeologicznym stanowi zespół kilku sztucznych wzniesień rozproszonych na obszarze ok. 5 ha. Jako obiekt badań wybrano dużą prostokątną budowlę znajdująca się w południowo-wschodniej części Gurukly Shaheri (**Ryc. 1**). Biorąc pod uwagę charakterystyczny prostokątny plan budowli, z osiowym układem bram otwartych na dwa dziedzińce (**Ryc. 2**), a także uwzględniając szczególne położenie badanej budowli, tj.

sąsiedztwo z dużym miastem Serachs oraz przechodzący przez oazę szlak handlowy łączący Niszapur z Merwem, można uznać pozostałości badane w Gurukly Shaheri za jeden z karawanserajów, które wybudowano wzdłuż słynnego Jedwabnego Szlaku. Zgromadzony w trakcie prac wykopaliskowych materiał ceramiczny oraz odkryte naczynia kamienne (**Ryc. 5**) wskazują, że karawanseraj w Gurukly Shaheri użytkowano w XI–XIII w.