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The Second Season of Excavations at Gurukly Depe, Southern Turkmenistan : 2011

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BARBARA KAIM

THE SECOND SEASON OF EXCAVATIONS AT GURUKLY DEPE, SOUTHERN TURKMENISTAN, 2011

The second season of excavations at Gurukly Depe took place from 23 September to 17 October 2011 and was a continuation of the excavations started here in 2010.¹ The excavations were financed by Research Grant No. N N109 092639 from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and conducted by the Polish team in cooperation with the Archaeological Park *Köne Serakhs* headed by Director Anamurat Amanberdiev. The participants were: Barbara Kaim, Monika Róžańska-Kardaś, Maja Rzeplińska (University of Warsaw), Piotr Piekarz (State Archaeological Museum, Warsaw), Atamurat Ödäyew (Archaeological Park *Köne Serakhs*) – archaeologists, and a group of students from the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw: Weronika Andrzejewska, Anna Babiarz, Jacek Hamburg, Marta Höffner, Dominika Kossowska and Andrzej Romaniuk.

The morphology of the site seems to suggest here a distinctive type of Central Asian oasis settlement, usually referred to as a *qala* or large fortified complex containing houses of several families and a seat of a local landowner, *dikhhan*. The latter is usually set off from the rest of the buildings by a defensive wall. The *qalas* are considered as reflections of a traditional Central Asian form of socio-political organisation, *khanate*. Their autocratic sovereigns, *khans*, ruled through regional landlords or *dikhkans*, who controlled a particular canal and agricultural lands from a fortified *qala* of their own. The system of *dikhkans* ruling from *qala* is first mentioned in medieval texts, however the results of the relatively recent archaeological investigation in Central Asia oases indicate that the earliest form of *qala* appeared already around 2000 BC.² The plan of these buildings corresponds closely to the plans of medieval *qala*. The main aim of the excavations carried out at Gurukly Depe is to trace the site's development from its origins (not established yet) to its abandonment and thus the reconstruction of the history of a *qala* which functioned here at least from the 1st to the 8th c. AD. In the western part of the site, two (11 I and 12 I) of four trenches



excavated during the first season were extended from 3×10 m to 10×10 m and a new trench (6 J) was opened. In the eastern part of the site two new trenches (7 N and 5 R) were opened and the excavations in Trench 6 N were continued during the Autumn 2011 field season (Fig. 1).

The work in the new trench (5 R), opened in the middle of the eastern side of the defensive wall which surrounds the settlement, was supervised by Piotr Piekarz. We expect to find here a main access into the *qala*. Two phases of the defensive wall were exposed till now. Remains of a poorly preserved solid wall built of square mud bricks were unearthed directly beneath the surface. The date of the wall's construction is still uncertain. However, the bricks which were used here, mainly 32–34 × 32–34 × 7–9 cm, are comparable with those used in walls of a large building partially unearthed in trenches located to the west of the wall (6 N and 7 N) and preliminary dated to the Middle Sasanian Period (5th–6th c. AD).

¹ B. KAIM, *The First Season of Excavation at Gurukly Depe, Southern Turkmenistan, 2010*, "Światowit" VIII (XLIX)/A (2009–2010), 2011, 207–208.

² C.C. JAMBERG-KARLOVSKY, *The Bronze Age Khanates of Central Asia*, "Antiquity" 68/295, 1994, 398–405.

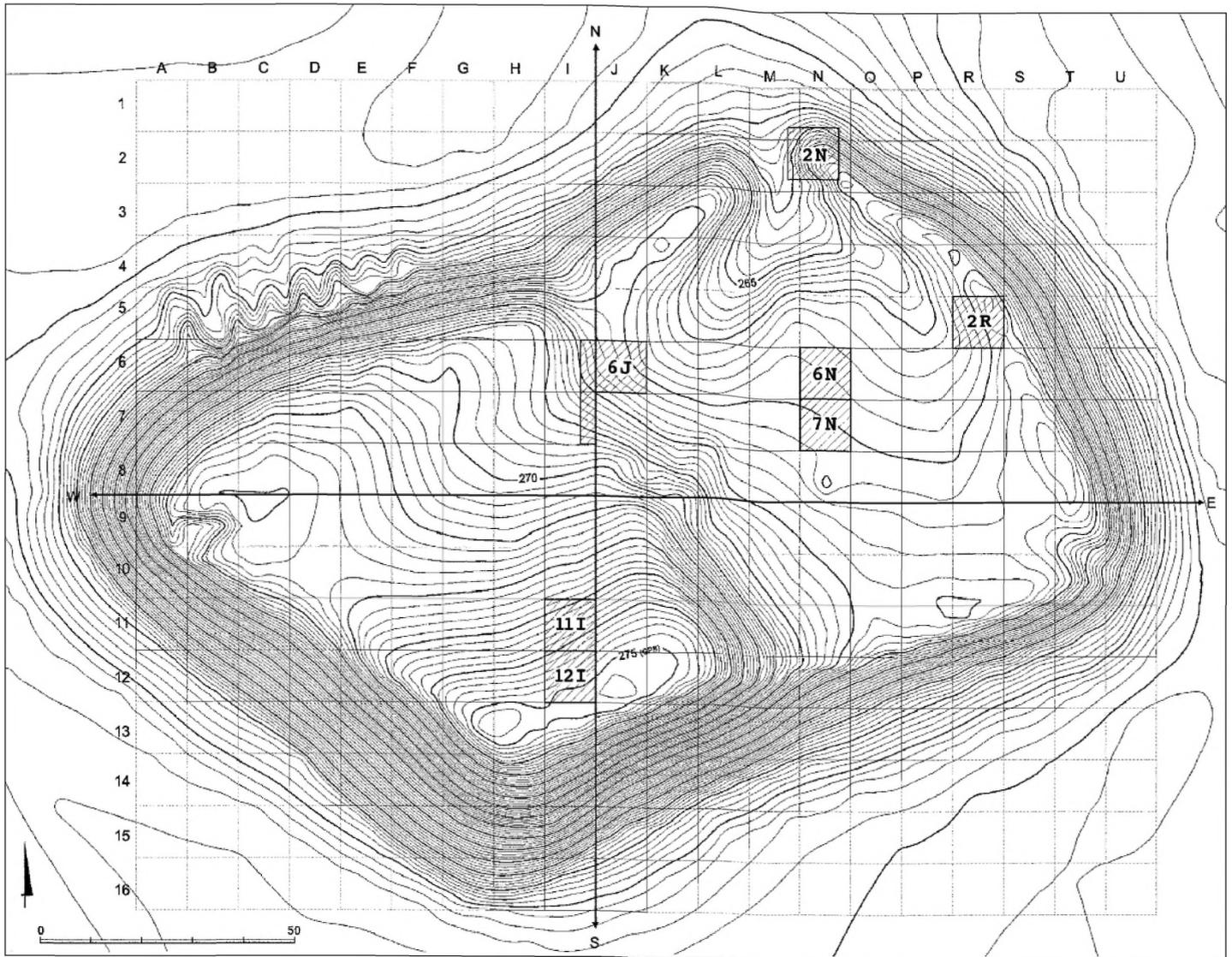


Fig. 1. Topographical map of Gurukly Depe with the location of the trenches (Drawing J. Kaniszewski, M. Róžańska-Kardaś).
Ryc. 1. Mapa topograficzna Gurukly Depe z lokalizacją wykopów.

Some hearths which at times were accompanied by complete ceramic vessels dating to the Late Islamic Period (Fig. 2) and by animal bones, seem to suggest that after the abandonment of the site, its walls were occasionally used probably by shepherds as a convenient vantage point for the observation of grazing herds. It is not excluded that there were shepherds who used the chipped pottery sherd discs which were found here and which may belong to race-games, such as backgammon.

Uppermost parts of a semicircular structure, perhaps a tower, exposed in the lower part of the trench, suggest an earlier defensive wall. However, since work in Trench 5 R has not yet been completed, little can be said about it at present.

Explorations in the new trench (7 N) located south of Trench 6 N (Fig. 3), both supervised by M. Róžańska-Kardaś, where the excavations started during

the 2010 season, should allow to reconstruct the plan and to define a function of a large mud brick building (Fig. 4). An interesting small find came from the fill of one of the rooms explored in Trench 6 N: a terracotta mould of the upper part of a *bodhisattva* (a person who aspires to Buddhahood or enlightenment) figurine (Fig. 5). The mould seems to indicate the presence of Buddha's followers in Gurukly Depe or in the nearest area.

The excavation in Trenches 11 I and 12 I, supervised by B. Kaim, gave evidence of a large building, constructed at the highest point of the *qala* and overlooking the settlement as well as the surrounding fields. Due to the limited size of our trenches, only a minor part of the building has been excavated so far. The exact dimensions of the building are unknown at present, however, when we combine the excavation evidence with the contour map of Gurukly Depe, it is evident that the building may easily be



Fig. 2. Late Islamic ceramic vessels found in the remains of the defensive wall (Photo B. Kaim).
Ryc. 2. Naczynia okresu późnomuzułmańskiego znalezione w ruinach muru obronnego.



Fig. 3. Exploration in Trenches 6 N and 7 N (Photo B. Kaim).
Ryc. 3. Prace w wykopach 6 N i 7 N.



Fig. 4. Eastern face of the main wall unearthed in Trench 6 N (Photo B. Kaim).

Ryc. 4. Wschodnia fasada ściany budowli odsłoniętej w wykopie 6 N.

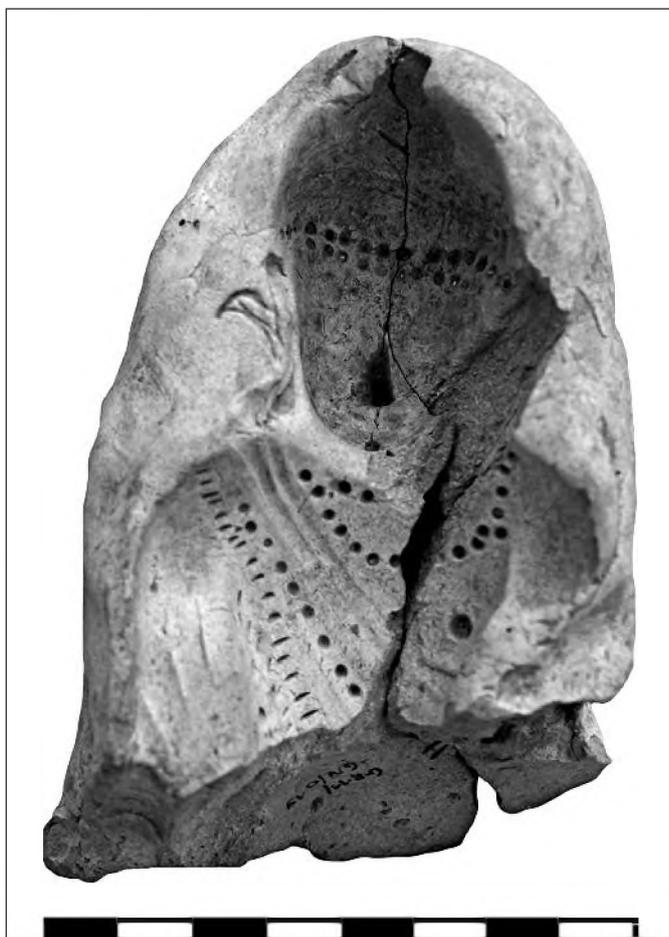


Fig. 5. Terracotta mould of the upper part of a *bodhisattva* figurine (Photo B. Kaim).

Ryc. 5. Terakotowa forma górnej partii figurki *bodhisattwy*.

as large as 30×40 m. Its large circumference as well as the thickness of some walls demonstrate that it was more than a domestic unit. More likely it served as a manor house of a local land-owner.

The situation in the area of Trench 6 J located north of the supposed manor is less clear although some wall lines were identified during the 2011 excavations supervised by M. Rzeplińska. The surface of this part of the site is so highly eroded that some parts of structures constructed here during the final phase of the site's occupation,

dated by ceramics to the 6th–7th c. AD, completely disappeared. Here, as in the other trenches, excavations will be continued next year.

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DRUGI SEZON PRAC ARCHEOLOGICZNYCH NA STANOWISKU GURUKLY DEPE, W POŁUDNIOWYM TURKMENISTANIE. 2011

Jesienią 2011 roku Polska Misja Archeologiczna w Iranie i Azji Środkowej przeprowadziła drugi sezon wykopalisk na stanowisku Gurukly Depe, w południowym Turkmenistanie. Dwa spośród sześciu wykopów, w których prace rozpoczęto w ubiegłym sezonie, rozszerzono do wymiarów 10×10 m, rozpoczęto też prace w trzech nowo otwartych wykopach. Badania prowadzone w nowo otwartym wykopie (5 R), w miejscu, w którym spodziewamy się głównej bramy prowadzącej do wnętrza osady, wykazały istnienie konstrukcji obronnych. Jednolity mur stanął na pozostałościach półokrągłej budowli – wyjaśnienie jej funkcji wymaga dalszych prac. Za wcześniej też jeszcze na

interpretację budowli, której fragmenty odsłonięto we wschodniej partii stanowiska (wykop 6 N i 7 N), natomiast kilka pomieszczeń eksplorowanych w jego południowo-zachodniej części (wykopy 11 I i 12 I), należało zapewne do zbudowanej prawdopodobnie w V wieku rezydencji lokalnego właściciela ziemskiego.

Do najciekawszych znalezisk tego sezonu należy niewątpliwie terakotowa forma figurki *bodhisattwy*, osoby dążącej do osiągnięcia stanu buddy czyli oświecenia. Obecność tego zabytku wydaje się wskazywać, że na terenie osady lub w jej okolicy mieszkali wyznawcy Buddy.