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Cairo: Funerary Complex of Amir Kebir Qurqumas : Restoration Project Progress Report, 2000

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MUZEUM HISTORII POLSKI

CAIRO

FUNERARY COMPLEX OF AMIR KEBIR QURQUMAS

Restoration Project Progress Report, 2000

Jerzy J. Kania

In view of the Polish-Egyptian Mission's continuous character, the period covered by this report extends from January 1 to December 31, 2000. During this time the mission[1)] *proceeded with the restoration of the complex of the Amir Kebir Qurqumas, following a specially updated program prepared on the request of the Egyptian side. Work was carried out in all of the constituent parts of this big multifunctional complex. The intensity of execution of particular tasks varied, depending on the financial resources provided by the Egyptian side, and to a much lesser degree on the funds granted by the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University.*

Building-conservation and reconstruction activities, as well as research were carried out in the Khanqah (Sufi monastery), Qubba (mausoleum) and Tahuna (ancient mill), but also the so-called Rab'a (located in the southeastern part of the complex at the edge of the protected area).

1) In 2000 the staff included, on the Polish side: Mr. Jerzy J. Kania, M.Sc.Eng., architect-restorer and head of the Mission (all the year except July); Dr. Maciej G. Witkowski, archaeologist-epigraphist (January-May), Mr. Krzysztof Ciuk, archaeologist-consultant (May-June); Mr. Ireneusz Nieduziak, architect-consultant, former chief of the Project (September); Prof. Dr. Maciej Pawlikowski, geologist-mineralogist, consultant (November); Mr. Wiesław Kuczewski, civil engineer, Site Chief (all the year except July); Mr. Michał Smoła, architect (April-May, October-December); Mr. Aureliusz Pisarzewski, architect (October-December); Ms. Katarzyna Wodarska, student of archaeology-volunteer (February), Ms. Anetta Łyżwa, archaeologist-volunteer (November); Ms. Eliza Jaroni, student of archaeology-volunteer (December), Ms. Ewa Kuciewicz, student of archaeology-volunteer (December), Mr. Michał Bieńkowski, student of al-Azhar University-volunteer (December); Mr. Mariusz Dybich, technical auxiliary services-volunteer (all year except August-September). The Egyptian side was represented by Mrs. Fatin Hassan el Fayyez, archaeologist, Chief Inspector; Mr. Nazmi Daoud Attiya, engineer architect; Mr. Abdallah Saad, archaeologist, site inspector; Mr. Ibrahim Farag Ibrahim, conservator-chemist; Mr. Mustafa Anwar Khalifa, archaeologist-consultant, Chief of the Area; Mr. Medhat al Minabbawy, archaeologist-consultant, former Chief Inspector of the site.

Fig.1. Khanqah. Upper part of the northwestern elevation crowned with a safety balustrade between newly reconstructed Mamluk-like sections (Photo J.J. Kania)

Fig. 2. Khanqah. Upper floor of the southeastern outer wall. Safety balustrade viewed from the interior (Photo J.J. Kania)

KHANQAH

The last phase in the execution of the conservation formula of a "permanent ruin" was achieved. The main objective of the building-reconstruction and adaptation works was to open the monument to tourist traffic. This required the execution of protective structures in places where the safety of tourists could be endangered. Most of the task was carpentry work. The upper floor, which was meant to have only the functional division of the residential units delineated, was fitted out with wooden balustrades and safety grasps, installed along the top of the outer walls of the entrance facade (northwestern). In view of the fact that parts of the reconstructed wall, having received the form of Mamluk times, were now raised in certain sections of the facade, the level of the balustrades was also varied accordingly. Between the "Mamluk" stretches, a double-level balustrade, 1.10 m high for adults and 0.60 m for children, was installed (*Fig. 1*). A similar principle was followed along the

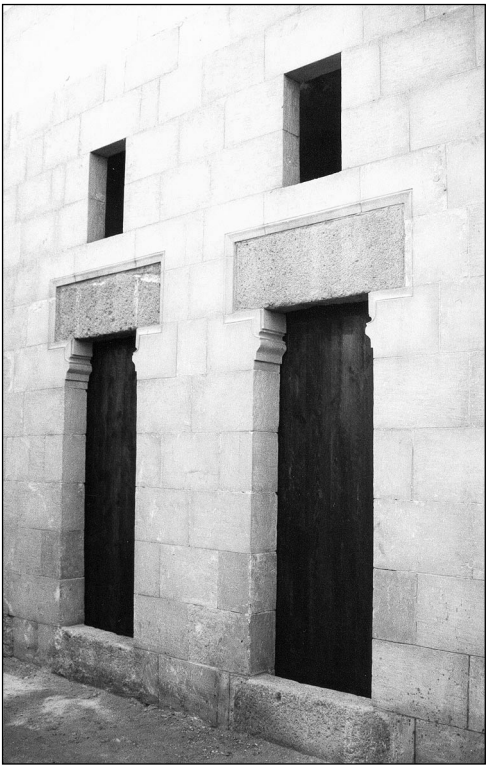

Fig. 3. Khanqah. Lower part of the restored northwestern elevation. Two entrances leading to the separate residential units. State after mounting the wooden shutters (Photo J.J. Kania)

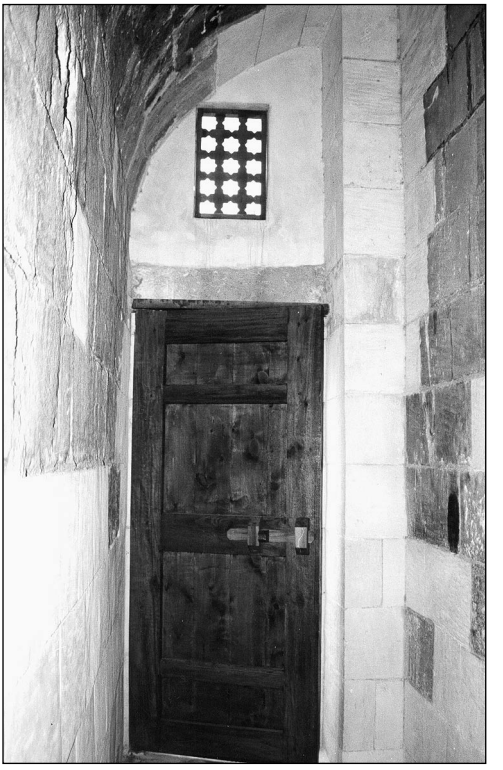

Fig. 4. Khanqah. Outer door with transom window and wooden lock in place (Photo J.J. Kania)

front elevation with the dominant window openings on the upper floor. The vertical wooden elements permitting the horizontal balustrades to be installed were concealed on the inside of the structure and attached to the pillars between the walls (*Fig. 2*). The predominant horizontal articulation of the modern safety elements is intended to achieve their visually neutral character. Tourist traffic flow will be channeled through four (of eight) staircases, which have been reconstructed with historical accuracy and only these have been equipped with vertical ladder-like safety grasps in the inner spaces between particular flights. The ground floor part of the building, which served both now and in the past as the entrance to the particular residential units, was fitted out as much as possible with reconstructed door carpentry. Two outer entrances were fitted with wooden doors mounted in appropriately shaped frames in the reconstructed parts of the elevation (*Fig. 3*). Barred window openings also reappeared in this fragment of the facade, the windows provide light for the vestibule from which there is access to a staircase and a vaulted storeroom. Following the Egyptian sides' suggestions to adapt these rooms for non-troublesome forms of usage, single-wing wooden doors have been installed in all the storerooms. The doors are fitted with wooden bolts reconstructed on the basis of parallels (*Fig. 4*). The six external openings without frames will be protected with one-piece openwork grids of steel.

QUBBA

The stone-domed mausoleum is being returned to its former architectural glory in view of its sepulchral and religious function. One of the elements reconstructed this year were the so-called *qammariyyat* or window screens. Very modest remnants of wooden frames and stucco edging had survived in the oculuses alone, flush with the transitional zone of *muqarnas* (*Fig. 5*). The surviving pieces of the *qammariyyat* still in place were studied. The loose, broken pieces of stuccowork and colored glass found in the debris on the lower part of the window reveal were preserved. After the surviving frames had been taken down, a study of the *qammariyyat* composition was carried out, identifying precisely the colors and ornament, as well as important technical guidelines for the designing work. The conceptual and technical designs, approved by the Egyptian side, were executed in the spring (*Fig. 6*). By end December all the openwork stuccowork for the openings situated above the ceiling-roofs of the neighboring *madrasa* and the adjacent side roofs of the funerary courts had been completed. The *qammariyyat* will be installed once the glass elements have been restored.

TAHUNA

The eastern building of the old “mill” was investigated archaeologically and architecturally. During the excavation work[2)] earlier installations were revealed under the stone flagging from the Ottoman period, thus providing evidence of the functional

2) M.G. Witkowski, Excavations in the ruins of the Tahuna (preliminary draft), February-May 2000, in: Report 2000 - Appendix 6 (Cairo, December 2000), typescript in Polish Center archives.

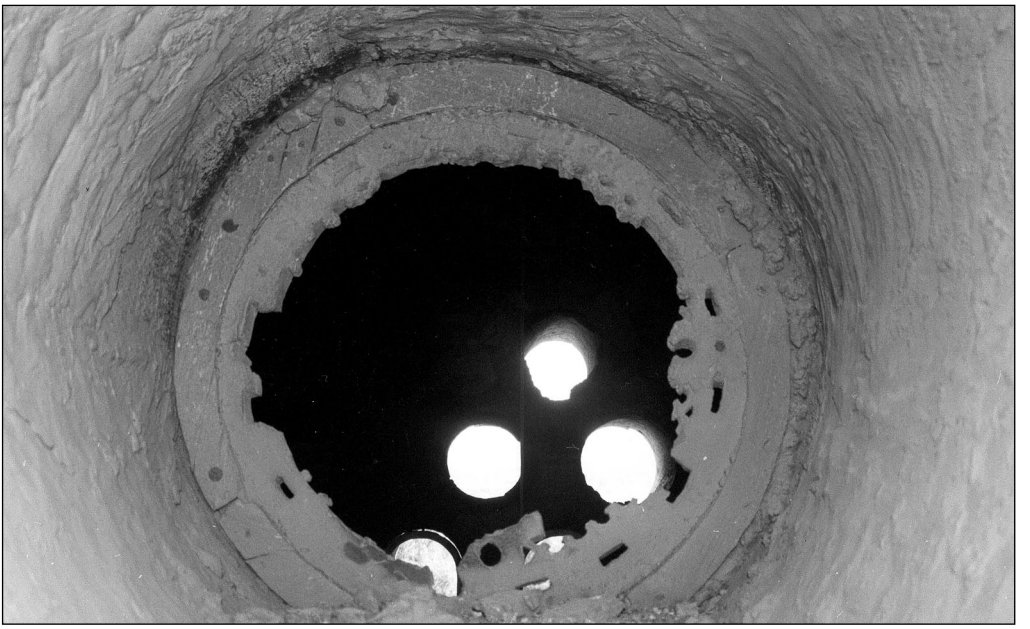

Fig. 5. Qubba. Northwestern outer wall. Oculus in the transitional zone of the dome. Relics of the original qammariyya (Photo J.J. Kania)

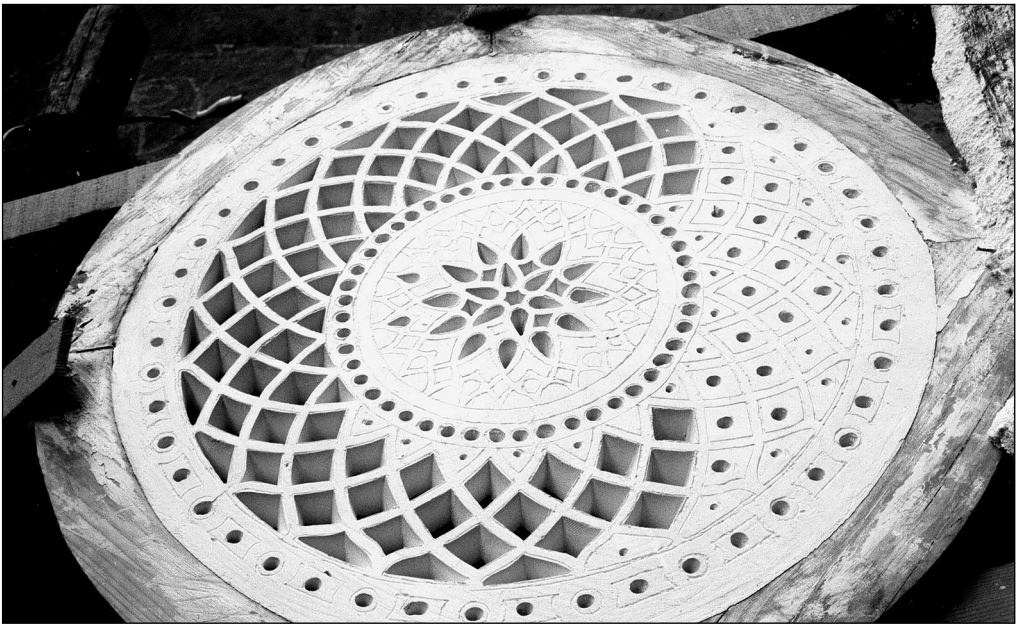

Fig. 6. Qubba. Qammariyyat workshop. Detailed view of a round qammariyya being prepared for the oculus in the mausoleum dome (Photo J.J. Kania)

diversity of this structure over the ages (*Fig. 7*). The internal division into habitation units, domestic and industrial, the latter in the form of brick furnaces of unidentified function, has been delineated. The explorations brought to light chiefly kitchen pottery and skeletal material originating from domesticated animals.

The outcome of archaeological research did not modify in any way the architectural-conservation conception adopted for the *tahuna*. Relics of the discovered interior walls were fully recorded and then they were protected with a layer of sifted sand, which was at the same time the bedding for stone flagging of the Ottoman period, which is to be reconstructed in the future. The outer walls of the structure, especially the tops, were reinforced to support the thrust of the wooden ceiling, which was reconstructed based on research and parallels (*Fig. 8*). Detailed attention was devoted to the zone bordering the court of Guirbash Qashuq, the so-called *hawš*, where in the north-western corner of the *tahuna* a reconstruction of the window opening of the old *sabil* was executed. This part of the *tahuna* is being reconstructed to serve as a stuccowork workshop producing reconstructed *qammariyyat* for mausoleums and madrasas of the Northern Cairo Necropolis.

Fig. 7. Tahuna. Eastern building. General view of the architectural discoveries made during excavations in 2000 (Photo J.J. Kania)

Fig. 8. Tahuna. Eastern building. The main structural timbers. State during roofing works (Photo J.J. Kania)

RAB'A

The foundations of residential units and industrial installations discovered in 1993 were now protected. Fortunately, part of the foundations were included within the limits of the conservation zone established earlier and hence on the inside of the modern fence surrounding the complexes of Inal and Qurqumas. The layout of the walls can be traced on the ground; the remnants have been protected from the elements (*Fig. 9*). This architecture is proof of the existence of a road for merchant caravans and a pilgrims' road to Mecca.

OTHER WORKS

The grounds of both funerary complexes, that of Sultan Inal and of Amir Kebir Qurqumas, have been turned into a single joint conservation zone. A consequence of this step is the anticipated restoration program to be executed in the funerary complex of Sultan Ashraf Inal. In preparation for this stage, the mission has conducted some preliminary studies of the *madrasa* and mausoleum. A preliminary mineral and petrographic investigation was carried out in 2000, the results to be used for technical purposes at a later stage of building-conservation works.

Fig. 9. Rab'a. Uncovered foundation courses of habitation units. State during preservation works. View from the roof of the madrasa (Photo J.J. Kania)