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Cairo: Funerary Complex of Amir Kebir Qurqumas, 1999

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CAIRO

FUNERARY COMPLEX OF AMIR KEBIR QURQUMAS, 1999

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*The present report covers all of the 1999 season as the team works on a year-round basis.¹⁾
The work was continued in the various parts of the complex: the Madrasa, Khanqah, Qasr,
Tahuna, and Qubba.*

¹⁾ The staff included on the Polish Side: Mr. Jerzy J. Kania, M.Sc. eng., architect-restorer, director (all the year except August-September); Mr. Wiesław Kuczewski, civil engineer, Site Chief (January-February, April-June, October-December); Dr. Maciej G. Witkowski, archaeologist-epigraphist (January-April, December); Mrs. Barbara Wołosz, artist and fine arts conservator (January-April); Ms. Teresa Kaczor, architect (April-June); Mr. Maciej Boruta, architect (March-April); Mr. Stanisław Machała, photographer (October-December); Mr. Mariusz Dybich, technician (auxiliary services, all year). Volunteering for work with the team were Ms Csila Karsay and Ms Regina Mrowca, conservators (March-April); Ms Grażyna Bąkowska, archaeologist (April), Ms Joanna Szewczyk, Ms Anetta Łyżwa, students of archaeology (May-June).

Mr. Christopher Ciuk, archaeologist, Curator of the Islamic Art Department in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, kindly consulted the methodology of pottery studies on the site. Mr. Rajmund Gazda, specialist in stone conservation, prepared on request a detailed report on the state of the most endangered and eroded stone elements of the complex.

The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented on the site by Mrs. Fatin Hassan el-Fayez, archaeologist, Site Inspector, and Messrs. Nazmy Daoud Attiya, Eng., Site Architect, and Ibrahim Farag Ibrahim, chemist-conservator (January-May).

MADRASA

Conservation work in the eastern *sidella*

Conservation work in 1999 was concentrated on the ceiling of the eastern *sidella* of the Madrasa.²⁾ The same measures as applied in the previous season³⁾ were adopted for the work, although in this case the wooden structure of the ceiling could be approached only from below, the original Mamluk protective covering⁴⁾ having been preserved in good condition. As before, the missing elements of the *tiraz*-frieze had to be replaced with new ones, the entire ceiling had to be cleansed and saturated with insecticides and fungicides; finally, all the preserved, originally painted surfaces had to be reinforced and protected. Preserved traces of the ceiling decoration and the *tiraz* inscriptions in particular

allowed the text to be identified as Surah 62, 10-11.

The currently executed work raises occasionally controversial issues of the adopted conservation methodology, especially with regard to heavily decorated wooden ceilings. As the chief objective is to restore the Madrasa to its original religious function, it is only natural that the effects of the conservation should correspond to the aesthetic needs of future users of this place of prayer. Hence, the widely recognized puristic approach that has been adopted (in preparation for more advanced restoration), improving substantially the color and form legibility of the ceiling decoration (including epigraphic elements).

KHANQAH

The upper floor of the Khanqah has finally been completed with the restoration of partition walls in the "permanent ruin" formula (*Figs. 1, 2*). This required the restored stone pavements of the upper story, which now have taken over the function of a flat roof, to be properly insulated with efficient rainwater run-off facilities placed in the vertical shafts of the lavatories, which were cleaned out and repaired for the purpose. The solution

makes use of the main sewage canal that runs under all the khanqah units to discard waste water.⁵⁾

A layer of hydrophobic mortar on all the exposed walls constructed in *opus emplectum*, carefully modeled to ensure fast evacuation of rainfall, provides the final protective measure, preventing mortar from being washed out from between the ashlar blocks and thus removing the chief cause of damage to the structure of these walls.

²⁾ This project was concluded in the course of three months from February to April by a team of trainee conservation volunteers headed by B. Wołosz.

³⁾ Cf. J. J. Kania, *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 77-79, and detailed report in: M. Popławska, B. Wołosz, Restoration of the Funerary Complex of Emir Kebir Qurqumas in Cairo (No. 162): Conservation work on the painted wooden ceiling of the eastern *sidella* of the Madrasa. A purist-preservation approach. Report. January-April 1998, (Cairo-Warsaw 1998), mss.

⁴⁾ It comprises superimposed layers of loose reed matting, lime mortar mixed with ashes, bricks, all bonded and covered with a thick layer of the same mortar.

⁵⁾ Cf. I. Nieduziak, "La fondation 'waqf' de l'Emir Kebir Qurqumas au Caire", *ET XIV* (1990), 234-281.

The barrel vault adjoining the Khanqah on the west and covering the *dih-liz* leading to the main Madrasa staircase was also restored to its original shape.

Once some minor woodwork is accomplished (like mounting handrails and balustrades), this part of the complex will be ready to be opened to tourists.

QASR

The upper-floor pavement, which had cracked during the 1992 earthquake, was now removed. This provided the opportunity to reinforce all the domed structures of the underlying arcades. The spandrel space was filled with light foamed concrete after individual testing of different samples and their macroscopic examination. The floor was then reintroduced following the traditional *watr* ("bordered") pavement shape. The completely eroded *sharafā* elements of the crenellation were replaced with new ones.

The installing of wooden cupboards in their niches under the Qasr arcades (following the principles that were established already by the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe for the restoration of wooden elements, which have proven to be well adapted to Mamluk monuments) has recovered some of the original aesthetic appearance of this part of the complex, completely in keeping with the *habs* description.⁶⁾

TAHUNA

The western building of the Tahuna complex was completely rebuilt and repaired, the restored Ottoman wall structure having been reinforced by underpinning of the foundation courses. The outer structural walls were plastered (on both sides) leaving in view only the horizontal square-sawn timbers that reinforced elements built into the thickness of the walls.

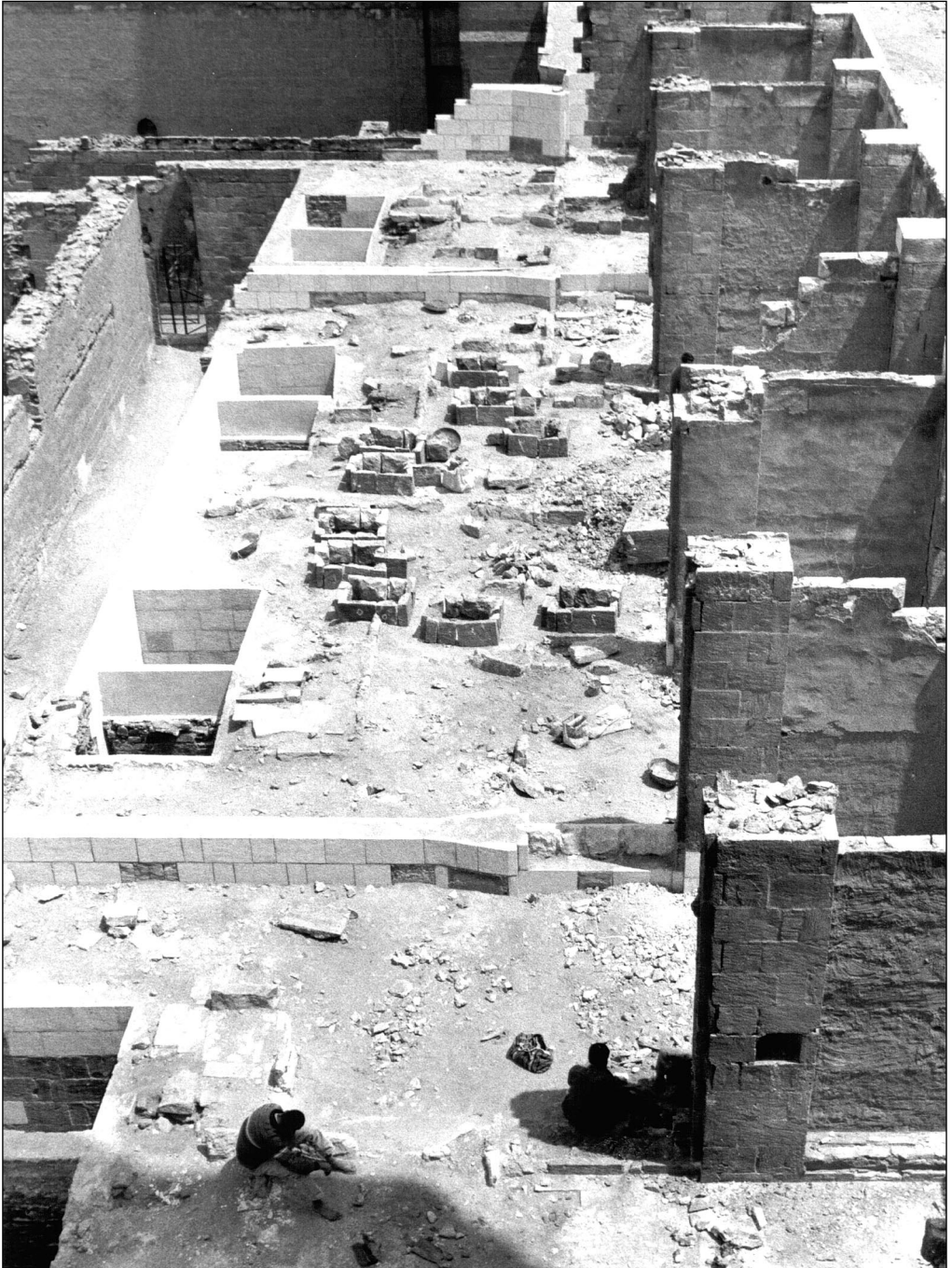
In the course of laboratory analyses and experimental applications,⁷⁾ it was decided to keep the traditional plaster composition (which includes *tebn* or chopped straw) only for the external walls of the Tahuna. The suitability of new plaster for restoration purposes was assessed on the grounds of macroscopic examination and comparison of test samples with preserved remains of original

Ottoman plaster, emphasis being placed on the physical and aesthetic properties (resistance to natural destructive factors, stability, color and external texture).

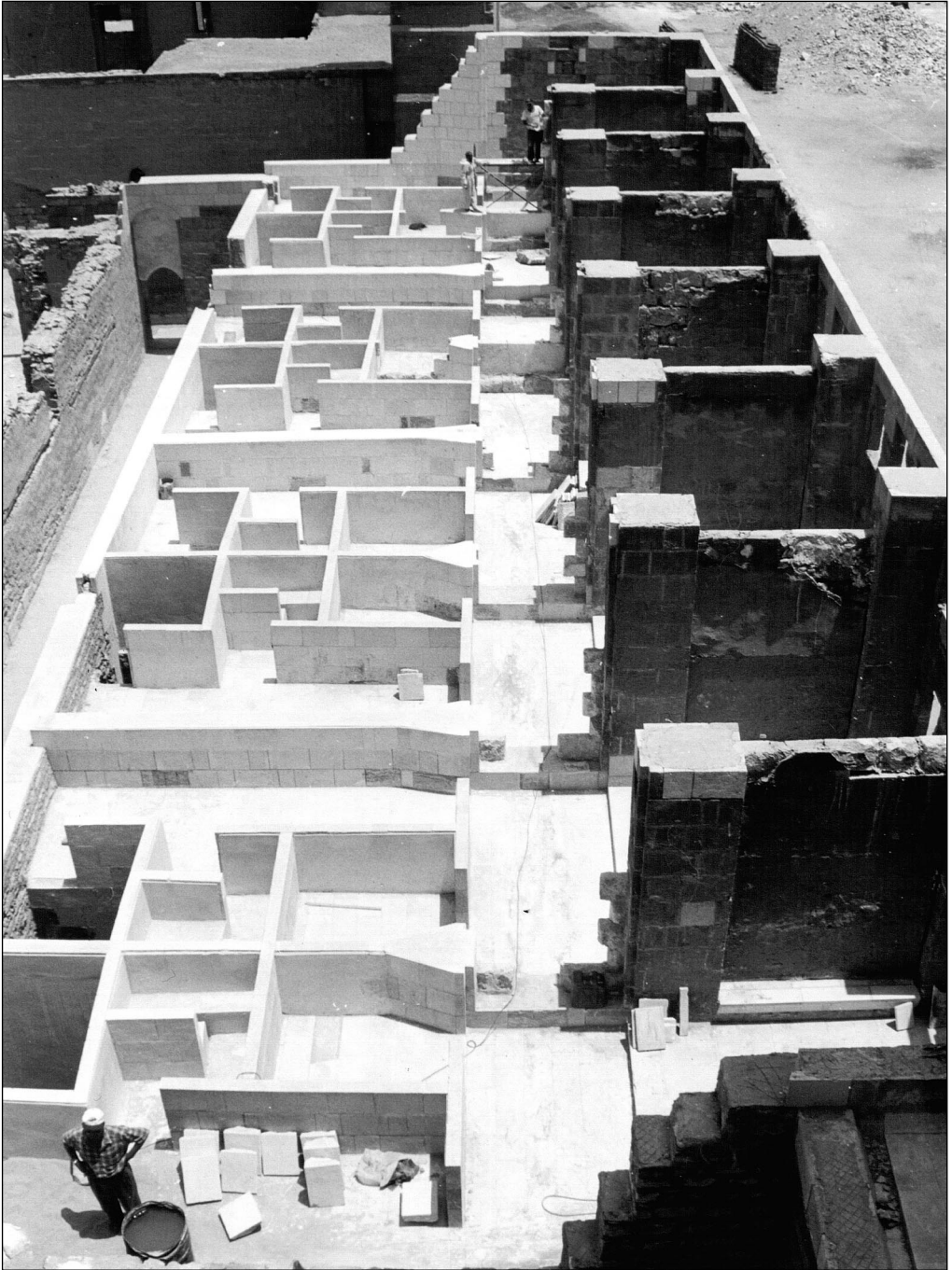
Current works have confirmed the results of the earlier stratigraphical and chronological studies carried out on this entire desert "urban" unit composed of the Funerary Yard (*hawṣ*) belonging to the Egyptian Fleet Admiral Guirbash Qashuq, the immense multi-functional complex of Sultan Al Ashraf Inal and that of the Great Amir Qurqumas to enumerate only the most important ones. The original bond of the wall of the Tahuna has been found to run well below the Ottoman pavement. It bears some secondary sculptured inscriptions of a funerary (?) nature on its surface, now

⁶⁾ Cf. *Wāqfiyya*, 48.

⁷⁾ Laboratory analyses of Ottoman plaster samples were conducted in 1995-1996, followed by experimental preparation of alternative versions of new plaster composition (1995-1996, 1998) tested on the extant walls (1996, 1998).



*Fig. 1. Khankah. View of the upper-floor living rooms before restoration in 1995
(Photo W. Jerke)*



*Fig. 2. Khankah. View of the upper-floor living rooms after restoration of partition walls in 1999
(Photo J. J. Kania)*

accessible – should anyone care to study them in the future – through a special shaft built in the floor, covered with removable limestone beams.

The roofing of the building has been completed except for the central (*mamraq* or "lantern") *kushk* area.

The western building of the Tahuna is already being used as a carpentry workshop (moved there from the Qubba) for heavy-duty works. This follows from the general conservation plan that requires these secondary installations to be turned into practical restoration workshops inside the complex.

QUBBA

Work has started on the wooden frames for the window openings of the Qubba. The process requires time, as each frame has to be individually fitted, tested for a season and then finished with *qamariyya* stucco and multicolor stained glass, in keeping

with the description in the *habs* document of the Great Amir⁸⁾ and based on preserved analogies from Mamluk times. The primitive wooden latticework preserved in some of the window openings is evidently a secondary element.

OTHER WORKS

The field recording of ceramic finds collected from the complex over the past 12 years has been completed. The material will now undergo further comparative study in preparation for a final publication, but its overall value should not be exaggerated, as it rarely comes from sound chronological contexts. Its main interest

lies in it representing mostly everyday "kitchen" ware.

The archaeological assemblage (mainly pottery and loose pieces of mosaics) collected while preparing new storage space for building materials in an area adjacent to the complex of Sultan Al Ashraf Inal will be studied in the future.

⁸⁾ Cf. *Waqfiyya*, 46.