CAIRO

FUNERARY COMPLEX OF AMIR KEBIR QURQUMAS

FROM JANUARY 1 TO APRIL 31, 1995

Jarosław Dobrowolski

The Polish-Egyptian Mission for Islamic Architecture in Cairo, organized jointly by the Egyptian Supreme Council for Antiquities and the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University, operates on a year-round basis (previous report in *PAM* VI, pp. 21-28). The following report covers the period from January 1 to April 31, 1995, at which time the present Author's involvement in the Mission's work ended.[1]

RESIDENTIAL PART (*ARAWAQA*)

The work, which is a continuation of previous season's tasks, aimed at rendering the ruined building structurally sound and safe for visitors (Fig. 1:1). A partial reconstruction of the western outer wall was necessary to restore the collapsed parts of the walls and vaulted ceilings, so that in future the structure can be properly protected from rain. Approximately 35% of the wall was reconstructed, including two decorated doorways which were patterned on the remnants surviving in the southern and northern ends of the wall (none of the original doorways had been preserved in full).

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[1] The Polish members of the Mission were: Mrs Agnieszka Dobrowolska and Mr. Jarosław Dobrowolski, architects, on year-round basis (until May 1995); Mr. Jacek Zwoniarski, sculptor-restorer (January 12-March 30, 1995), and Dr. Maciej Witkowski, archaeologist (since April 1995).

The Mission was supervised by the General Director of the Foreign Missions Department in the Islamic and Coptic Sector of the SCA, Mr. Medhat Husein al Minnabawi. SCA inspectors included Mr. Muhammad Othman and Mrs. Fatima Hasan. Mr. Wahid al Barbari and later Mr. Nazmi Daoud worked with the Mission as engineers of the SCA. Sincere gratitude is due to all the people whose efforts and friendly cooperation have helped the Mission in its work.

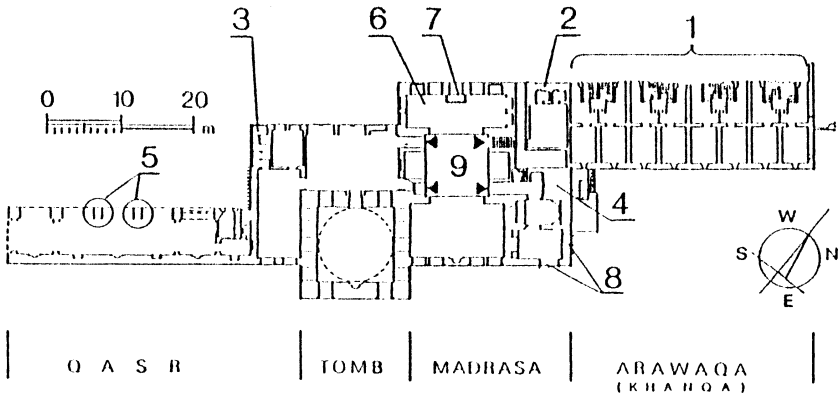

Fig. 1. Funerary complex of Amir Kebir Qurqumas in Cairo: key plan (consult the text for descriptions).

Original lintels, reused as doorsteps, were recovered and reinstalled. The only surviving original section of the much-rebuilt wall was in disintegrated condition and dangerously inclined outwards. Its facing was dismantled and the original stone blocks were reassembled in their proper positions (Fig. 1:2).

By the end of April 1995, the walls and vaults of the ground floor were completed. Work began on building up the modest remnants of the upper storey walls (only two stone courses preserved) to enable proper protection from water.

ROOFS

Replacement and repairs of defective roofs continued. A small openwork brick vault over the toilet area in the founder's residence (*qasr*) was repaired and covered with waterproof plast-

er. An identical vault was reconstructed over an adjoining room (Fig. 1:3).

MINARET

Six out of ten of the minaret's marble columns (Fig. 1:4), which had been broken in the October 1992 earthquake, were braced with 15 cm-wide brass rings made of 6 mm sheet and bound with brass bolts. A new marble column shaft was installed to replace the one that was destroyed completely in the earthquake. The original capital was retrieved and reinstalled. With these operations completed, the provisional wooden propping installed in 1992 was removed.

To protect the *muqarnas* friezes under the minaret's galleries from damage caused by rainwater, the galleries were covered with a layer of waterproof mortar and provided with a water draining system.

FOUNDER'S RESIDENCE (*QASR*)

Reinforcement of the pillar foundations in the ground floor arcade of the *qasr* was started in April 1995, following designs prepared by Dr. G. Bogobowicz in 1993 (Fig. 1:5). The work proceeded under the supervision of Eng. Nazmi Daoud. Reinforced concrete banks were introduced around the pillars to widen the foundations. Steel anchors remain to be added in the upper storey walls and the defective roof cover still needs to be replaced.

Small-scale structural repairs continued in various parts of the complex: eroded stone blocks were replaced in walls, lintels and vaults; plastered surfaces were repaired; loose masonry in the minaret's stairwell was fixed, etc.

CEILING OVER THE WESTERN LIWAN IN THE *MADRASA*

In the *madrasa* (Quranic school and mosque), decorated wooden ceiling panels from the western area, which had been taken down for conservation in 1992 (cf *PAM* VI, p. 23), were reinstalled in their original positions (Fig. 1:6).

MUEZZIN GALLERY (*DIKKA AL MUBALLAGH*)

The gallery, which is accessible through a passage inside the upper storey walls, is set upon the western wall in the western *liwan* of the *madrasa* (Fig. 1:7). This arrangement, which was rare when the complex was built in the early 16th century, became fairly popular later on in Ottoman times. Considering the gallery's importance for the general layout of the building, hardly apprehensible while the *dikka* was missing, the decision was made to reconstruct it. Plans prepared in 1993-1994 were based on an examination of preserved remains and a comparative study of relevant material from contemporary monuments (Fig. 2). The wooden cantilever beams of the reconstructed gallery have been anchored with a steel I-beam concealed in the wall. The surviving fragments of original palm wood beams were infused with a solution of Paraloid B72 in toluene. New parts were treated with linseed oil and stained with natural pigments.

WINDOW GRILLES IN THE *SABIL*

Grilles were installed in the large windows of the *sabil* (public fountain dispensing water as charity: Fig. 1:8). Wrought-iron grilles (dating to the19th/20th century and originally used probably elsewhere within the same complex) were placed inside the wide frames for turned-wood grilles. This restoration followed the solution applied in the neighboring complex of Sultan Farag Ibn Barquq.[2] The new grilles conform with the general style of the

[2] Restored in the early 20th century by the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe.

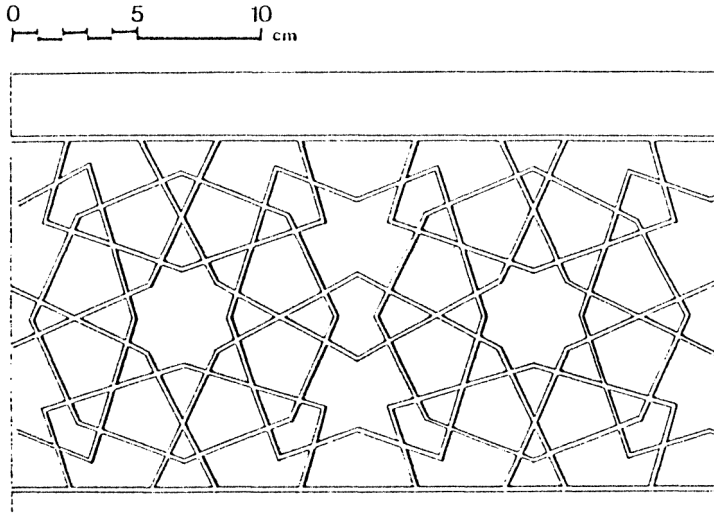

Fig. 2. Side view of the muezzin platform reconstructed in the western liwan of the madrasa.

building, but they do not suggest a reconstruction of the medieval originals in a room which has not retained its function. The grilles are clearly discernible as replacements, they lack, for example, the larger openings in the lower parts.

THE DOORS OF THE *MADRASA*

Double-leaf doors with turned wooden grilles above them were installed in the four corners of the courtyard (originally covered with a wooden roof) in the *madrasa* (Fig. 1:9). Although original doors have not survived, the new ones follow the general design, based on information in the foundation deed, examinations of on-site evidence and comparative studies of a similar door preserved in the tomb of Sultan al Ashraf Qait Bay.[3] An incised geometrical pattern replaced the deep-carved decoration

[3] This is the only comparable example that could be found in Cairo.

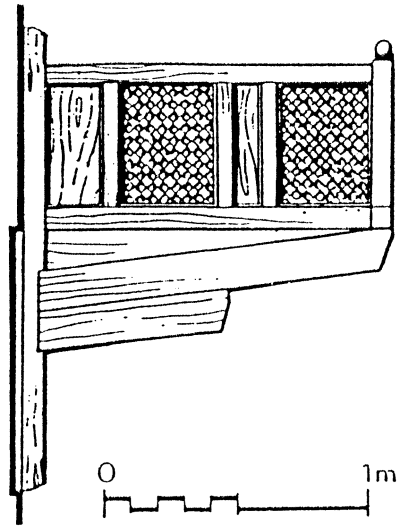

Fig. 3. Pattern used on newly introduced wooden elements: part of the design for a frame around the doors in the madrasa.

typical of late Mamluk woodwork on the wooden frames around the doors and on the corner panels of the window grilles in the *sabil* (Fig. 3); the incised design is meant to distinguish the modern reconstruction from original parts, while conforming to the overall style of the monument. This is adapted from the works of the Comité in the late 19th-20th century. Installing doors and window grilles continued also in other parts of the complex.