



Banganarti fortifications in the 2008 season

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BANGANARTI FORTIFICATIONS IN THE 2008 SEASON

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Abstract: Excavations primarily in sectors II, VII and IX of the Banganarti defenses were designed to collect sufficient data for a preliminary phasing and functional analysis of the fortifications. Evidence was also recorded for human activity next to the defenses, including the presence of layers of burning at the foundation level of the curtain wall.

Keywords: Banganarti, fortifications, 7th century

The principal research issues addressed in the autumn season of fieldwork in 2008 were, on one hand, the physical appearance of the Banganarti fortifications in different periods and, on the other, evidence for human activity immediately next to the line of defenses. Different excavation techniques were applied appropriately, either testing down to bedrock in small-

area trenches or surface sweeping of the line of defenses. The humus layer was cleared wherever the sweeping did not uncover the run of the walls and there was reason to believe that the plan was not straightforward. Four deep trenches were excavated: IX/2, Unit 16, VII/2, II/1 [*Fig. 1*]. Sweeping of the walls took place mainly in sector VII.

TRENCH IX/2 AND UNIT 16

The mutual proximity of the trenches justifies their joint examination. Trench IX/2 (1.60 m x 1.30 m) was situated by the outer face of the wall, directly opposite the trench in Unit 16 (2.30 m x 3.00 m), which adjoined the inner face of this wall. The two trenches were dug to a depth of 3 m, uncovering the following occupational phases [*Fig. 2*]:

Phase 1. Human made layers (0.40–0.70 cm thick) accumulated before the building of the fortifications, containing

organic material and vessel pottery, especially on the outside of the wall. Traces of burning and ashes concentrated near the top of the deposit, as remains of open fires as well as spread horizontally over the surface [see *Figs 2 and 3–4*]. Pottery from these layers was dated from the 7th century (D. Bagińska, personal communication).

Phase 2. The foundations of the first wall (wall I) were documented 2.37 m below the level of the threshold in the upper church (152.06 m a.s.l.). The wall was

approximately 2 m thick and stood to a height of about 2 m [Fig. 2]. Unit 16 was erected at this time, adjoining the inner face of the wall with its longer side, taking advantage of the wall to spring one side of the unit's barrel vaulting [Fig. 4]. Meals

were prepared in this unit. Most of the pottery from the unit consisted of hand-made vessels and bore evidence of burning. Eleven pots on different levels were found still standing in place [Fig. 5], on layers of burning and ashes; some of them still

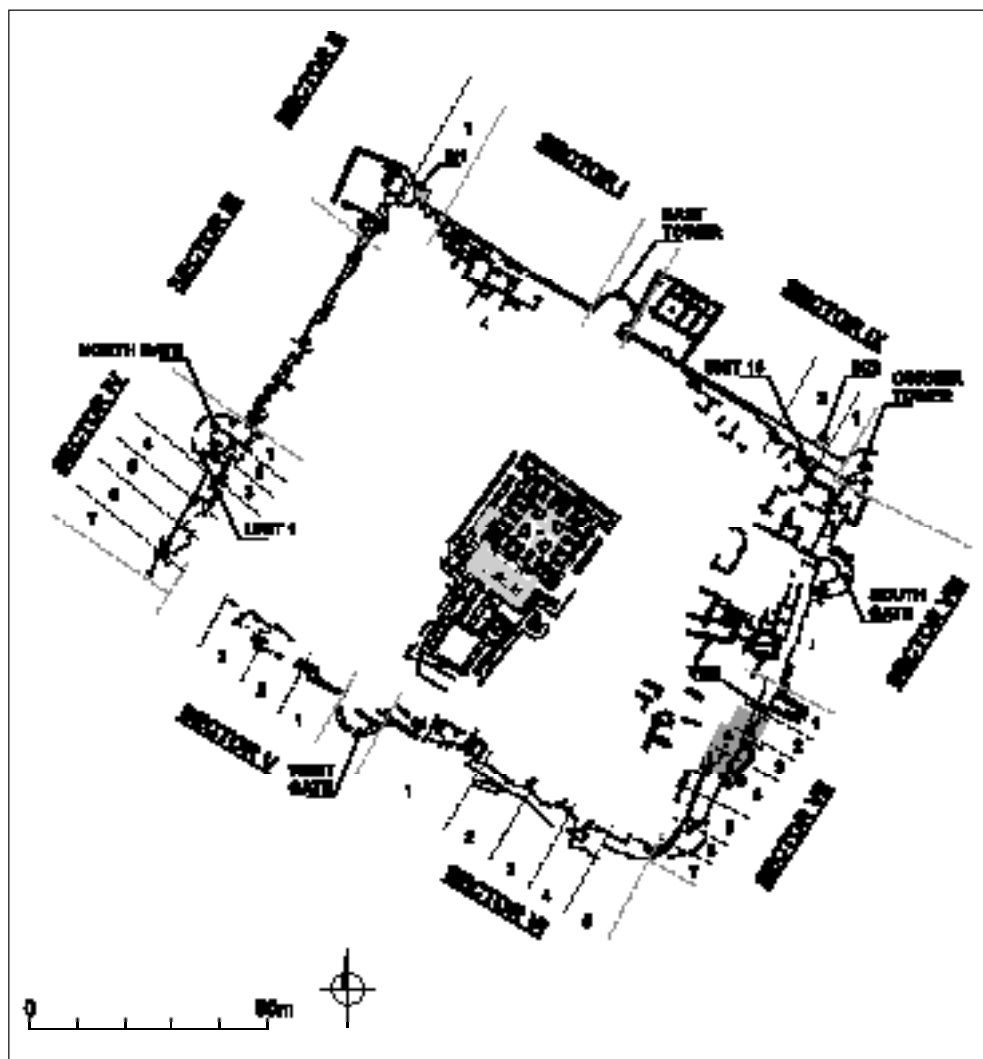


Fig. 1. Banganarti 1, plan of the site with marked location of excavations carried out in the winter season of 2008 (R. Łopaciuk, M. Drzewiecki).

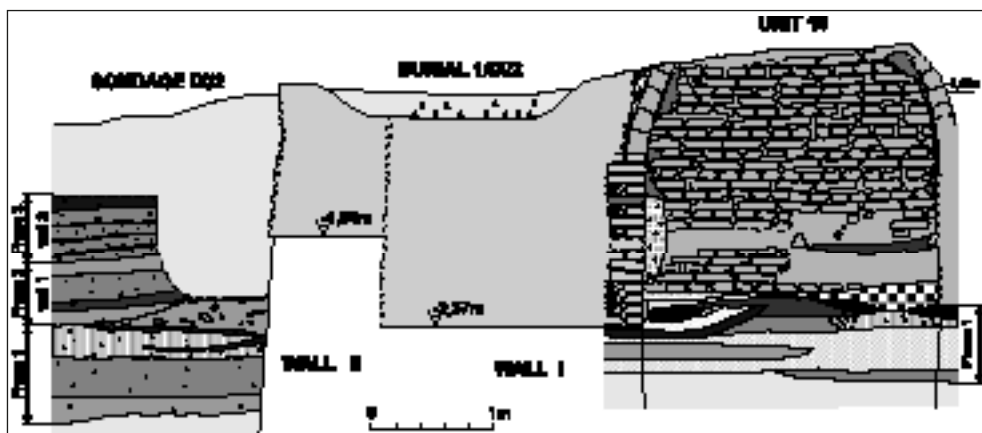


Fig. 2. Banganarti 1, section through the curtain wall and trench IX/2 and Unit 16 looking southeast (All photos and section drawings in this article by the author)



Fig. 3. Trench IX/2. Outer face of curtain wall (Wall II), view from the southeast

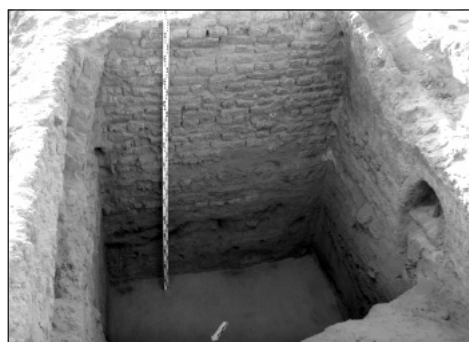


Fig. 4. Trench in Unit 16 with accumulations underlying the foundations and opening in southeast wall



Fig. 5. Two of the cooking pots and glass bottle in Unit 16

contained remnants of organic substances. Other finds connected with meal preparation included stone grinders and the rim of a glass bottle most likely for storing condiments. A narrow opening in the southeast wall led into another unit or more probably a small courtyard. The opening must have also acted as ventilation. At some point it appears to have been blocked with dried brick, creating a small niche [see *Fig. 4*].

Phase 3. Building works carried out on the curtain wall in the 11th–12th century (Żurawski 2004: 223; Bagińska 2008: 421) consisted of a thickening of the wall structure by approximately 0.90 m on the outside [*Figs 2, 3*]. Wall II had its foundations 0.73 m above the level of the first wall foundations. The existence of this wall is correlated with a highly regular structure of the layers outside the walls [*Figs 2, 6*]. It could be due to a regular deposition of refuse connected with meal preparation, that is, ashes, burning, seeds and other. Meal preparation could have continued, among others, in Unit 16, which remained in use throughout the functioning of this second phase of the curtain wall.

Phase 4. The last recorded phase can be connected with the use of the ruined fortification for burial purposes. A small pit (2.80 m x 2.10 m and approximately

0.20 m deep) was found filled with yellow sand containing human bone remains (inhumation burial 1/XI/2) [see *Fig. 2*], too fragmented however for a determination of body position and orientation.



Fig. 6. Trench IX/2. Deposits from Phase 3 against the outer face of the wall, view from the northwest

TRENCH II/1

Trench II/1 (2.50 m x 1.80 m, depth reached 4 m) was traced by the outer face of the curtain wall at the junction with the northeastern corner tower [see plan in *Fig. 1*]. The wall face uncovered in this trench belongs to the second phase of

the fortifications (wall II) [*Fig. 7*]. The following phases were distinguished:

- accumulation of earth layers below wall II, approximately 1.20 m deep, included two concentrated layers of burning and ashes sampled for lab analysis.

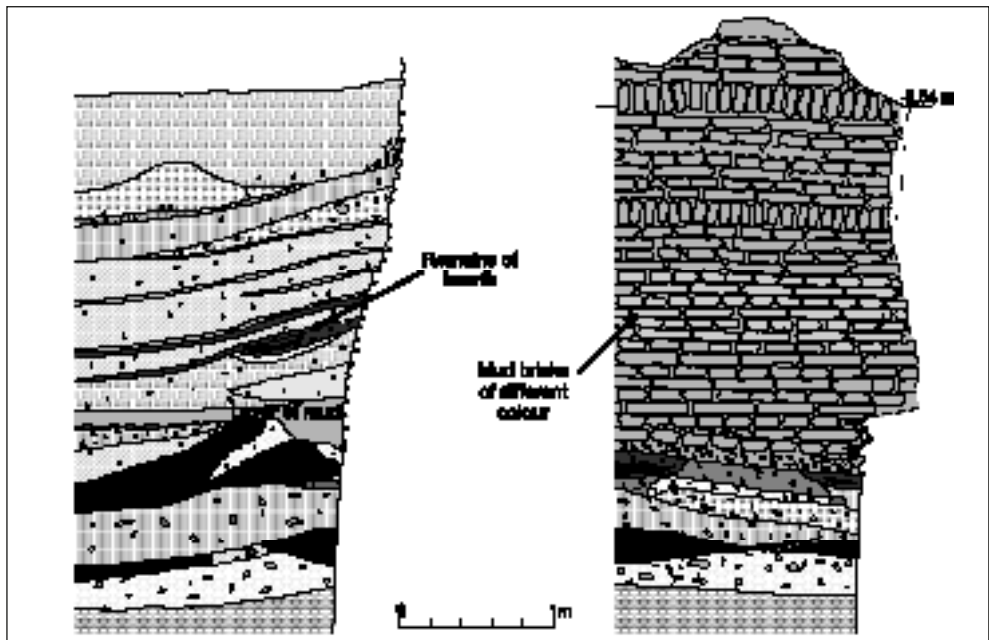


Fig. 7. Trench II/1, sections in line with the south and east trench wall

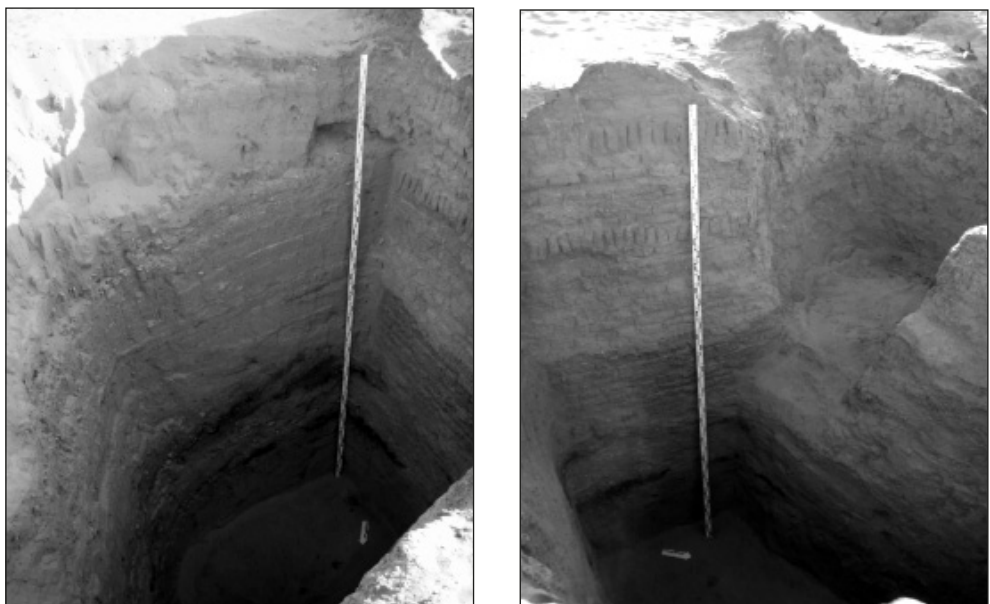


Fig. 8. Trench II/1, the outer face of wall II (left) and the eastern trench wall

Corresponding with the foundation of the curtain wall was a layer of compact mud about 10 cm thick. It may have been the walking level during the construction of the wall and immediately afterwards.

— Wall II. The outer face of the curtain wall featured a header–stretcher bond separated on two levels with a course of upright headers. Six courses of bricks in the central part of the wall differed from the other bricks in color and overall state of preservation [Figs 7, 8], as if they had been made of different source material. A modern pit has destroyed almost entirely the interface of the curtain wall and tower. The only remaining

interconnected courses are four courses in the foundation part, indicating that the tower was built together with the curtain wall in the same phase around the 11th–12th century. The earlier set of defenses was screened completely by the new structure. Remains of hearths sampled for lab analysis were documented by the outer face of the wall. The deposits accumulated with regularity above the hearths. Potsherds were recorded in number, but not one complete pot. The layers also contained organic material like seeds, charcoal and ashes. It is likely that the accumulation represented a rubbish dump.

TRENCH VII/2

The trench (2.20 m x 1.50 m) was dug to a depth of approximately 2.75 m by the outer face of the wall in sector VII, section 1 and 2. In this part of the fortifications [see Fig. 1] the process of accumulation was extremely intensive. The layers that accumulated from the building of wall I to its rebuilding and the construction of wall II measured approximately 2.50 m.

Layers associated with the building of the fortifications, apparently in the 7th century, were the earliest to be documented in the trench. The foundations appeared at a level of 3.02 m below the threshold of the Upper Church. They were built of large dried bricks (averaging 42 x 21 x 9 cm in size) and reinforced with a dried brick structure, which was 0.80 m wide, running alongside the outer face of the curtain wall [Fig. 9]. A course of mud bricks documented flush with the foundations of the wall could represent remains of a walking level. The layers deposited against the wall were very regular right

from the start. Sometime between the 7th and the 11th century structures were erected against the outer face of this wall in this part of the site [Fig. 10]. The walls of these structures were coated with mud plaster. The outer face of the curtain wall was already severely damaged when they were plastered. The fill produced some potsherds, mostly belonging to thick handmade pots. A layer of rubble was documented, referred most probably to a phase of destruction when the structures attached to the wall fell into ruin. In the 11th century the curtain wall was in considerable disrepair; in this period an extensive program of rebuilding and refurbishment was implemented on the whole site.

In this place, the new wall (wall II) was erected on top of the remains of the old one (wall I) and was thicker by about 0.90 m. Wall II, dated to the 11th–12th century, was preserved here in residual form, that is, three courses of mud bricks in the top layers of the trench [see Fig. 9].

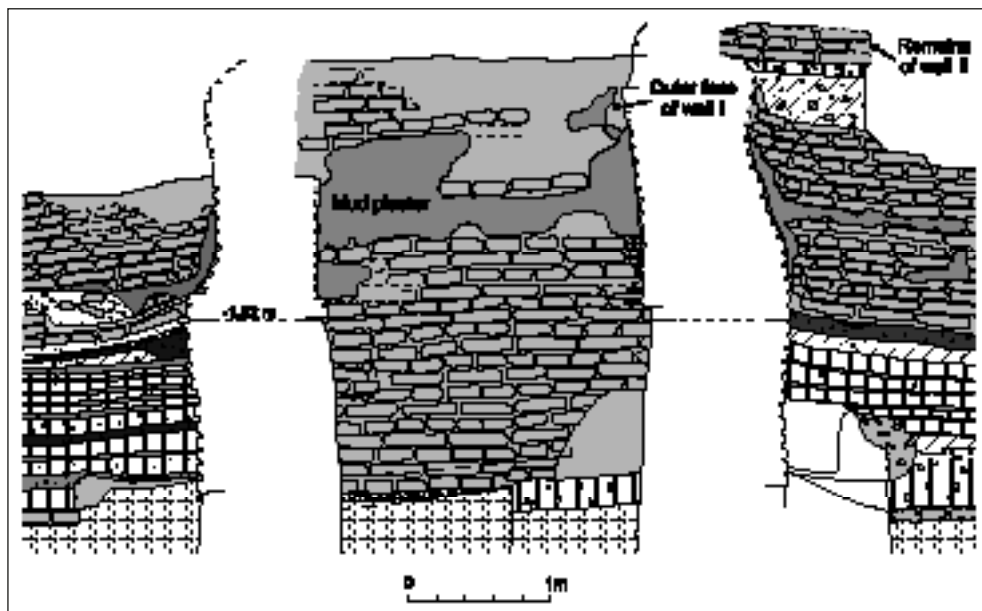


Fig. 9. Trench VII/2, face of wall II (middle) and sections of trench walls perpendicular to the wall (Drawing M. Woźniak, M. Drzewiecki)



Fig. 10. Trench VII/2, outer face of wall II (right) and remains of structures erected against the outer face of this wall

SECTOR VII

Work in this sector called for sweeping surface layers in an effort to trace the course of the curtain wall. Wall II in this sector has been preserved only in residual form.

After cleaning it turned out that wall I was in a good condition [Fig. 11].

A semicircular feature, measuring about 4 m x 3.50 m, was fitted into the wall

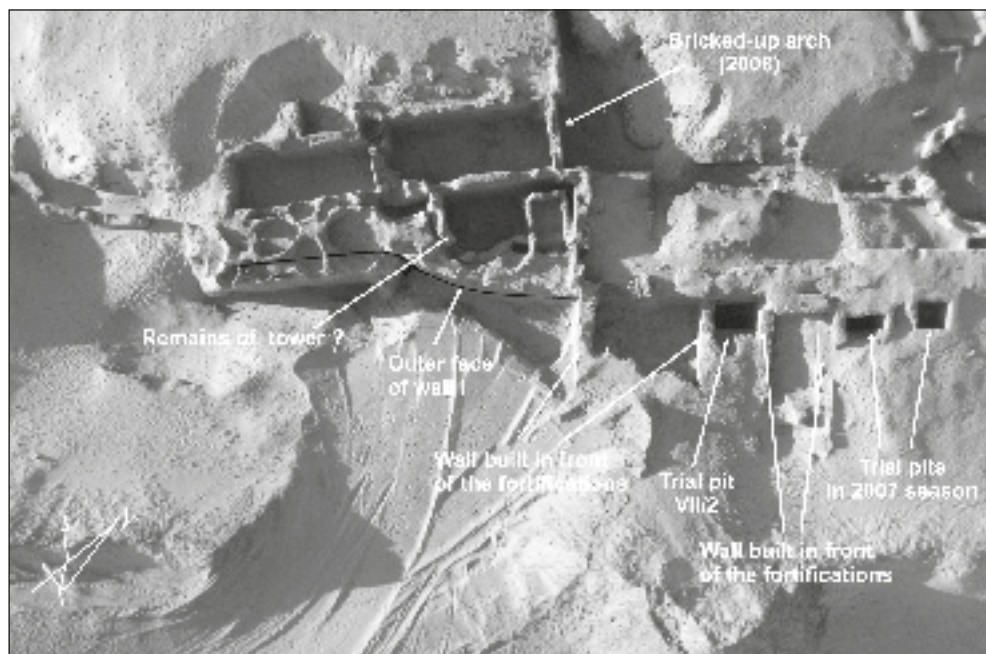


Fig. 11. Aerial view of sector VII, winter 2008
(Kite photo B. Żurawski)

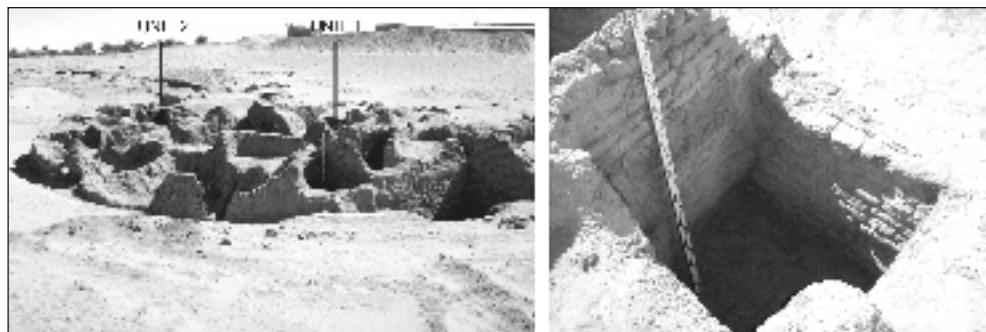


Fig. 12. Units 1 and 2 in the North Gate (on left) and state of preservation of Unit 1

structure. It represented most probably the remains of a tower. The preserved structure was part of the ground floor of a bigger complex. The upper part of the semicircular unit appears to round off toward the top, suggesting it had been roofed with a half-dome, constituting good support for constructing an upper floor. A similar feature was observed in the monastery of St Simeon near Aswan in the south of Egypt where a complex of this type had an upper floor and a parapet wall.

Remains of structures attached to the outer face of the wall were documented in this sector as well [Fig. 11]. These structures resemble those documented in trench VII/2 (see above).

UNIT 1

Two discontinuous sections of the semicircular wall of the North Gate uncovered in 2007 [see Fig. 1] were designated as Unit 1 (SE wall 1.27 m, SW wall 1.32 m, NE wall 1.00 m, NW wall 1.22 m; 1.90 m deep) and Unit 2 (NE wall 1.17 m, SE wall 0.80 m, SW wall 1.15 m, NW wall 0.95 m; 1.95 m deep). These two features were distinguished on the ground by fill, composed of burning and pink-shaded ashes(?) (sampled for analysis). This color of the fill was not documented anywhere else on site. Unit 1 [Figs 12, 13] was situated close to the blocked outer passage and was less well preserved than Unit 2 (for work here, see Drzewiecki 2010: 342–346).

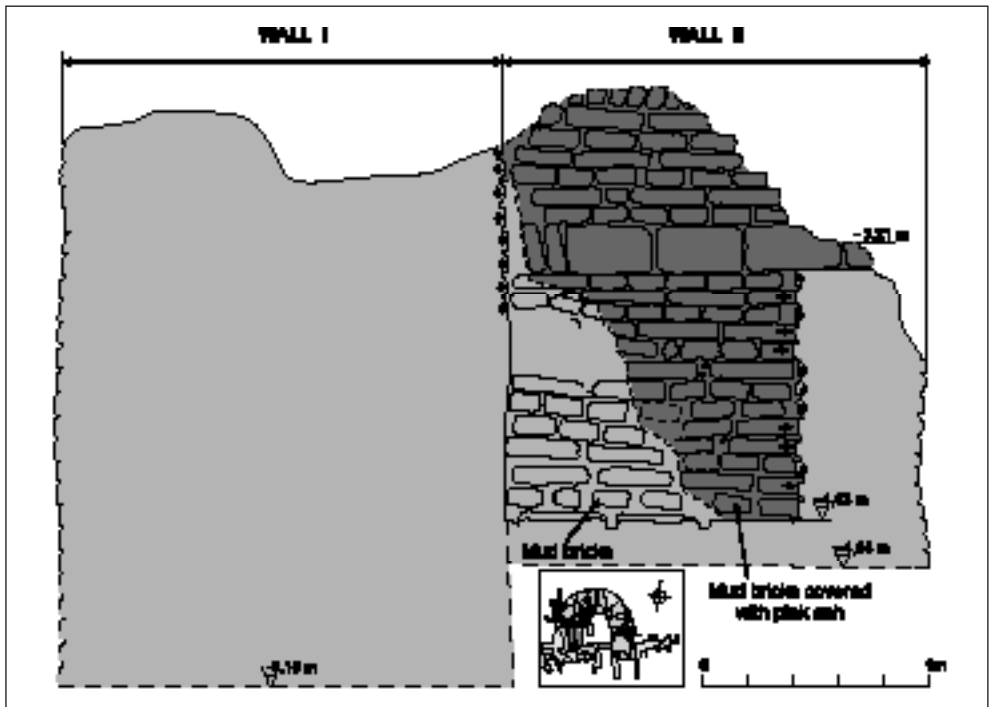
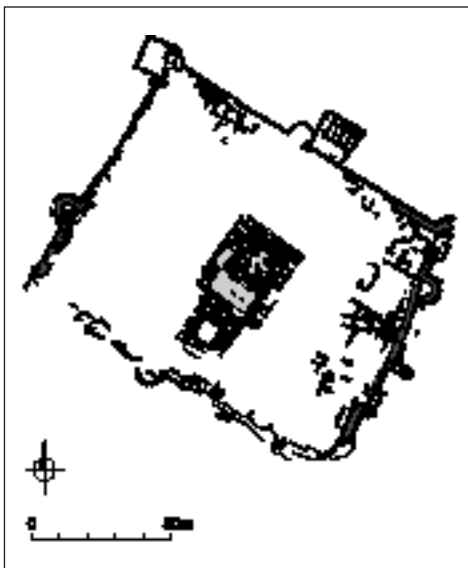


Fig. 13. Cross-section through outside wall of the North Gate presenting phases of construction and Unit 1

SUMMARY

The autumn season in 2008 provided sufficient data for a preliminary phasing and functional analysis of the Banganarti fortifications. The course of the earliest defenses (wall I) was traced [Fig. 14]. An interesting point to consider is the presence of layers of burning at the foundation level of the curtain wall. Synchronizing the layers documented in various trenches could answer questions about major conflagrations, which were either separate events or had consumed most of the complex (Drzewiecki forthcoming).

Fig. 14. Defenses of Banganarti in the earliest phase, preserved sections of Wall I marked in gray (Drawing R. Łopaciuk, M. Drzewiecki)



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