# Archaeological Research in Qala'-e Ekhtyaruddin

## Excavations in the Upper Citadel – Trenches 1a and 1b

When searching for the roots of the ancient city reflected by a long archaeological stratigraphic sequence, the upper citadel is the predestined locality for starting excavations - due to its elevated position. In addition, it is one of the few areas within the citadel where larger grounds for an excavation are accessible (Figs. 93–95). This elevated portion, enclosed by the citadel wall with towers and catwalk, is marked by the ruins of mud, brick and mudbrick architecture. Some of the delapidated buildings are just indicated by rubble heaps, others still have walls rising to a certain height.

Prior to the Unesco-project conducted by A. Bruno from August 1976 to March 1979, the upper citadel was completely covered with soil and debris, which had accumulated after the abandonment of this area and the removal of bricks and other building material by the military in the 1950ies (Fig. 96).

While the Unesco-project focussed on the consolidation of the perimeter wall and towers and on the buildings in the lower courtyard, archaeological excavations and some subsequent consolidation and restoration work were also carried out in the eastern part of the upper citadel. The excavated space was gradually backfilled in the subsequent decades, yet, as a consequence of these excavations, the contexts in the eastern area are disturbed to at least 1.5 m below the present surface (Figs. 97; 98).

The western space of the upper citadel, limited by the fortifications that today separate the upper from the lower citadel, is covered with crumbled remains of masonry built on top of large vaulted subterranean halls and a vaulted pathway that connects the lower-situated gateways with the upper citadel. Allegedly the treasury was located in the utter west, while the lower halls contained barracks, magazins and a dungeon, connected to the upper area by an air shaft. Excavations in that area would therefore only have led to the ceilings of the halls below (Fig. 254).

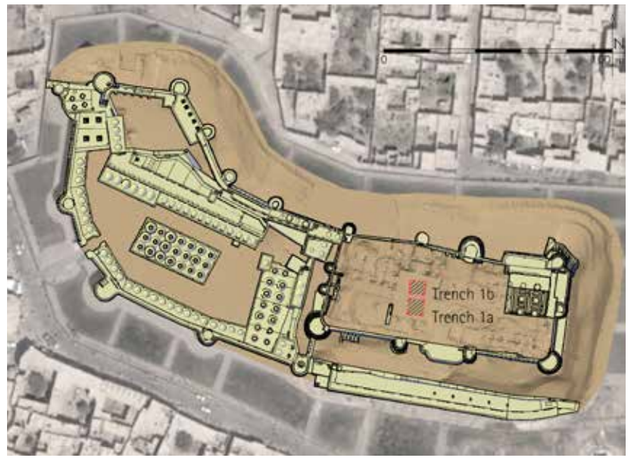


*Fig. 93 Plan of the upper and lower citadel, with fortifications and buildings*

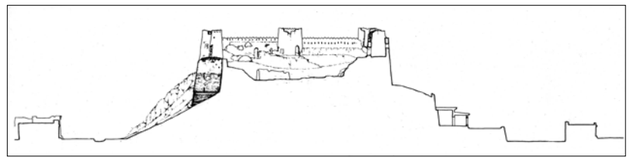

*Fig. 94 Transverse section of the upper citadel before the Unesco restorations of 1977-1980 (Bruno 1976, 26)*

*Fig. 95 View over the western upper citadel, vaulted pathway in the centre (Photo: U. Hallier, 1989)*

Several phases of building, destruction, rebuilding and conservation of the buildings have formed an uneven topography marked by mounding and pits with substantial height differences of up to 2 m. Some of the height variations along the inner perimeter wall are caused by ruins of the walkway. In the north, however, the catwalk was integrated into or destroyed by the most recent buildings attached to the fortification walls in the central area (Fig. 98).

◀ *Trench 1a, Excavations 2007; general view from west*

*Fig. 96 Eastern courtyard, before restoration; from west, 1977 (courtesy Bruno/AKTC)*

*Fig. 97 Eastern courtyard, remains of trenches (front), 2006; from west*

*Fig. 98 Eastern upper citadel, restored walls and remains of Unesco-trenches, towards the courtyard with the vaulted pathway and western enclosure, 2008*

*Fig. 99 Courtyard, with roof construction above Trench 1a, vaulted pathway and western area, with military scrap, 2008*

*Fig. 100 Courtyard, clearing before excavations, to the north the ruins of the bath house, 2005; from south*

*Fig. 101 Courtyard pavement and partly restored enclosure walls, 2005; from north*





*Fig. 102 Wall paintings in the ante- and main room of the bath, 2004*

*Fig. 103 Wall paintings in the ante- and main room of the bath, detail, 2004*

This building, the elevated western parts and the defences running along the perimeter walls and its towers are accessed via a central courtyard located just in front of the landing of the vaulted pathway connecting the lower-located gate and the elevated area (Figs. 99; 100).[1] The courtyard, measuring 16 x 20 m, is paved with burnt bricks and enclosed by a plastered wall with arched niches. At the northern end of the courtyard, a small bath complex with a bath tub is located that was installed in an oval-shaped room in Tower XIX. These rooms are built with clay and were in a very bad condition in 2005, but have still retained wall paintings in a typical late 19th-century style (Figs. 102; 103). Their floors are located at a lower level than the courtyard. The courtyard and the surrounding buildings belong to a 'palace' attributed to Abdur Rahman Khan, who ruled Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901.

Since the courtyard provided the best-suited area for an excavation, it was decided to open a trench there in August 2005 (Fig. 104). As work of our team in Kuhandaz, in Herat City and in Herat Province was still ongoing, staff and resources were limited, but a first test sounding was conducted to explore the archaeological potential and excavation perspectives of the

1 Area XXII in Bruno´s plans (Bruno 1981, Plans 2 and 3). In his relative height system, measured from street level, the height of the courtyard is 14.60 m or 14.80 m (illegible in the plans).

*Fig. 104 Trench 1a, cleared pavement (eastern part) and extension of the trench towards west, 2005*

area. This implied the removal of a part of the brick pavement, approved by the authorities in charge. The excavations also hampered access to the eastern citadel, as we gradually extended the trench towards west and north and dug our way down into the citadel mound to a depth of 12 m until 2008.

While we temporarily backfilled the trench in 2005 in order to provide secure access towards the popular viewpoints on the eastern towers, this was no longer possible later on, since the volume of soil and rubble that had to be shifted back and forth had become too large. Therefore, from 2006 onwards, we secured the trenches by low brick enclosures, which also drained the water, and covered them with a roof built of scaffolding pipes and tarpaulins at the end of each season (Fig. 107). At the closure of the excavations, in 2007 for Trench 1b and in 2008 for Trench 1a, the trenches were backfilled and the pavement put back into place with the original bricks.

In 2009, the AKTC extended its consolidation measures to the upper courtyard in order to protect the collapse of the subterranean halls and of

*Fig. 105 Rebuilt 'palace' and other buildings, AKTC 2010 (Photo: C. Gütschow)*

*Fig. 106 Trench 1a with compact clay structure and Pit 18, Trench 1b backfilled; from southwest, 2007*

crumbling walls, which also posed security threats to the numerous visitors. By 2010, the palace and other buildings in the western part were restored and rebuilt to a large extent (Fig. 105).

In this chapter, first, the progress of the excavations in Trenches 1a and 1b, their documentation and analytical framework, and the major archaeological contexts and findings are mentioned, followed by the description of the stratigraphic sequence and the phases defined accordingly. Subsequent to the description of small finds and ceramics, the pottery catalogue concludes this chapter.

## The Excavations: Documentation and Findings

### Excavation History

Excavation began on August 28th, 2005, and lasted until September 9th, 2005.[2] Trench 1a was laid out as a 7 m by 7 m square with a north–south oriented baulk in the centre. When the brick pavement and, underneath, a drain (Units 1 and 2) came to light at c. 931.90 m asl, excavation was continued only in the northern parts (5 x 3.30 m). Although the appearance of brick architecture (Phase 7)[3] – which needed to stay in place in 2005 for further excavation and documentation in 2006 – and of large pits left little moving space, the upper part of a compact clay or mud structure was unearthed in parts. In relation with its appearance a change in the pottery assemblage was noted. Hence, the results obtained from that preliminary exploration were promising for further excavations.

At the beginning of the subsequent season on August 1st, 2006[4], the baulk and the southern parts of the trench were removed in stratigraphic units for enabling work on a larger area and obtaining better contextual information. However, the discovery of subsequent phases of brick architecture, the presence of a compact clay structure and disturbances caused by large pits soon required a further enlargement of the space in order to understand the building phases and various episodes of use and abandonment. Therefore, Trench 1b was opened to the north, on a 6 x 7 m large area, the largest possible size in the courtyard - separated from Trench 1a by a two metres-wide pathway. In addition, the steps into Trench 1a were shifted from the northwestern to the southeastern corner to obtain continuous western and northern resp. southern sections in the two trenches. As in Trench 1a, the deposits in Trench 1b were sealed by a brick pavement just below the surface, at a level of c. 931.80 m asl (Fig. 199). At the end of the season, on September 13th, 2006, the massive clay structure was also

2 Supervised by Ute Franke and Nadjib Siddiqui, with six members of the Afghan staff.

3 See below, Tab 3.

4 Supervised by Ute Franke, Stella Bickelmann and Nadjib Siddiqui, with up to 25 workmen.





*Fig. 107 Closure of the trenches in 2006*

exposed and partly excavated in this area. At the same time, it already extended all over the space in Trench 1a, where it was excavated to a depth of 928.00 m asl (Fig. 106).[5]

Trench 1b was closed and backfilled after documentation in 2007[6], when it was confirmed that the clay structure continued in the same way as in Trench 1a and also covered the entire area. The deepest level exposed there was at 927.75 m asl in the northwestern corner.

Excavations in Trench 1a continued until September 5th, 2007, and were closed at 925.00 m asl, still in the compact clay structure.

In 2008[7], at a depth of 924.50 m asl, a change in the substrate marked the base of the clay structure. The less compact, loamy silt deposits below were further exposed in a sounding on a smaller area, extending the overall depth by another 3.5 metres to 921.00 m asl. Working 11 m below the present surface, the removal of soil was difficult and access to the trench hazardous, despite a supporting scaffolding (Fig. 108). A geological drill (*Pürckhauer*) provided the opportunity to obtain soil samples from two further metres, to an additional depth of 919.00 m asl. After completion of documentation, the trench was backfilled and the pavement put back into place.

5 Trench 1b: Unit 73; Trench 1a: Units 68; 70; 71.

6 Supervised by Ute Franke, Maruchi Yoshida and Nadjib Siddiqui, with up to 22 members of the Afghan staff.

7 Supervised by Ute Franke, Stephanie Langer and Nadjib Siddiqui, with up to 25 members of the Afghan staff.

*Fig. 108 Trench 1a, aid for removal of debris, 2008; from southeast*

### Methodological Approach and Documentation

Excavations in both trenches were, as far as possible, carried out following natural layers defined by the matrix and colour of the substrate. Layers and features, designated as find units, were numbered consecutively, as in all trenches. The finds were recorded within these units. Due to the enlargement of the sounding from 2005 in 2006, the evidence obtained in Trench 1a had to be re-evaluated and correlated when the baulks were removed and the area was excavated down to the corresponding levels. Therefore, the sequence of unit numbers is not directly related to the sequence of excavation or the location of features: in the enlargement architecture came to light, which postdates the older architecture found in the lower parts, but has higher unit numbers.[8]

In many cases, the nature and composition of the substrate posed a problem for the definition of units. In case of deposits of substantial thickness and/or without distinct spatial limitations, the excavation proceeded in artificial removals of layers with different unit numbers, defined by x-, y-, z-values[9], in order to maintain stratigraphic control and a precondition to separate the associated finds, if required. In the documentation, connected units within one feature or deposit are marked by a backslash; for superimposed units in this format: $^{5}/_{6}$; for horizontally adjacent units: 21/61.[10] The location, extension and nature of all units were noted in unit sheets, transferred into a database, lists and the diary along with daily sketches, measurements and descriptions documenting the progress of excavation.

8 For example, walls in Units 24, 25 and 27 are younger than Walls 11 or 13.

9 Altitudes were taken with a level, but plana, all structures as well as important findings were also documented with an electronic tachymeter from 2006 onwards.

10 References to the stratigraphic relations of the main units are provided on Figs. 230–233; 248–251.