

MARCIN WAGNER

THE FIRST SEASON OF EXCAVATIONS AT TOPAZ GALA DEPE IN THE SARAKHS OASIS, SOUTHERN TURKMENISTAN

(PL. 216–218)

The fieldwork of the 2009 season lasted from 12 November till 30 November. Excavations were sponsored by Mr. Andrzej Bonarski.

Our work focused on a survey and excavations at a little mound, called Topaz Gala Depe. It is located east of the main road from Sarakhs to Merv (c. 12 km from Sarakhs), in the northern part of the Sarakhs Oasis, and one of a few mounds situated around Oyukly Depe – the largest site in this area and most probably its administrative centre at the beginning of the 1st millennium BC.

Topaz Gala Depe is 55 m wide north-south and 75 m wide east-west and 3 m high. The mound is surrounded from the south, the west and the north-west by two *arykh* water canals (Figs. 1, 2).

Topaz Gala Depe is one of a few mounds in Sarakhs Oasis (along with, e.g., Oyukly Depe, Ara Depe, Atsyz Depe 2, Atsyz Depe 3), where archeologists of the Polish Archeological Mission in Iran and Central Asia found artefacts dated to the Yaz I–III horizon during their survey in 2007–2008 (KAIM, WAGNER 2008: 3). All collected ceramic material from the survey on Topaz Gala Depe is dated to the earliest phase of the Yaz horizon, that is to the end of the 1st millennium BC. All forms of vessels are similar to the material appearing on sites in the Merv Oasis and at Ulug Depe in southern Turkmenistan (CATTANI, GENITO 1998: 75–76; LHUILLIER 2010).

The archaeological work on Topaz Gala Depe was conducted by two archaeologists from the University of Warsaw: Marcin Wagner as the director of this project, and Jakub Kaniszewski, who prepared the topographical map.¹ During the short excavation season, one trench (10×5 m) was opened in the highest point of the mound, in its western part (Fig. 3). The trench provided an insight into the stratigraphy of the site, where a c. 0.70 m thick layer of Islamic material overlies strata dating from the Early Iron Age.

During this excavation season, small features from the Islamic period were cleared, such as a pit, a tannur, an



oven with a ceramic cover made of an upended vessel as well as a pit burial in the north-western corner of the trench. It seems that below these late vestiges we encountered the top of a layer containing buildings from the beginning of the 1st millennium BC. In the centre of the trench, small mud-brick walls were encountered; the bricks were rectangular and measured 30×60×10 cm.

About 20 cm above this wall, a thick, light brownish-green layer occurred. It contained ashes and grains of lime. Close to the northern section of trench, we found a tannur, as well as an oven, which consisted of the lower part of a vessel body placed on four baked bricks. The vessel was standing upside down (Fig. 4).

We excavated a huge pit (diam. 2 m) that had destroyed earlier buildings in the eastern part of the trench. In its upper part, the pit was filled with light-brown soft soil mixed with Islamic potsherds. Only in the northern part two thin layers of ashes cut the brownish soil.

¹ I owe special thanks to Prof. Barbara Kaim, who supported and motivated me in my excavations on Topaz Gala Depe. I would also like to highlight the help of our friends from Turkmenistan, who have worked with us for the past 10 years (Director of the

National Department for the Protection, Research and Restoration of Historical and Cultural Monuments, Dr. M. Mamedov, and Director of the archaeological park *Köne Sarakhs* – A. Amanberdiev, as well as historian T. Artykov).

Most of the ceramic material found during the two seasons of survey and excavations can be dated to the Yaz II period (**Figs. 5, 6**). Some glazed and incised pottery fragments found in the upper layer and in the big pit date from the Early Islamic period.

After a scrupulous analysis of the topography of the mound, and an analysis of a micro-contour map of the

site, we concluded that the site had a rectangular external wall with a building or buildings inside.

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PIERWSZY SEZON WYKOPALISK NA TOPAZ GALA DEPE W OAZIE SARAKHS W POŁUDNIOWYM TURKMENISTANIE

Pod koniec 2009 roku grupa archeologów z Instytutu Archeologii UW pod kierunkiem autora rozpoczęła badania na stanowisku Topaz Gala Depe. Badania były finansowane przez prywatnego sponsora, Pana Andrzeja Bonarskiego.

To niewielkie wzgórze (55×75 m i wys. 3 m), skrywające pozostałości zabudowy z cegły suszonej, było jednym z satelitarnie rozmieszczonych osiedli, obsługujących największe stanowisko w tym rejonie – Oyukly Depe. Oba stanowiska są datowane – na podstawie znalezionej na powierzchni ceramiki – na początek I tys. p.n.e.

Na szczycie wzgórza, w jego zachodniej części, otworzyliśmy wykop sondażowy (5×10 m) w celu określenia stratygrafii stanowiska. Wkrótce okazało się, iż we wschodniej części wykopu znajduje się duża jama, wypeł-

niona jasnobrązowo-zielonkawą luźną ziemią, datowana na podstawie licznych fragmentów ceramiki na okres wczesnomuzułmański. Niestety zniszczyła ona w tym miejscu zabudowania z interesującego nas okresu kultury Yaz.

W centralnej części wykopu, ok. 70 cm poniżej powierzchni gruntu, został odsłonięty naprawdopodobniej mur bielony od zewnętrznej strony, wykonany z dużych prostokątnych cegieł suszonych (30×60 cm), charakterystycznych dla wczesnej epoki żelaza.

Na podstawie obserwacji ukształtowania terenu i analizy planu mikro-topograficznego stanowiska, wykonanego przez Jakuba Kaniszewskiego, możemy zauważyć, że osada została założona na planie prostokąta i otoczona murem.

PLATE 216

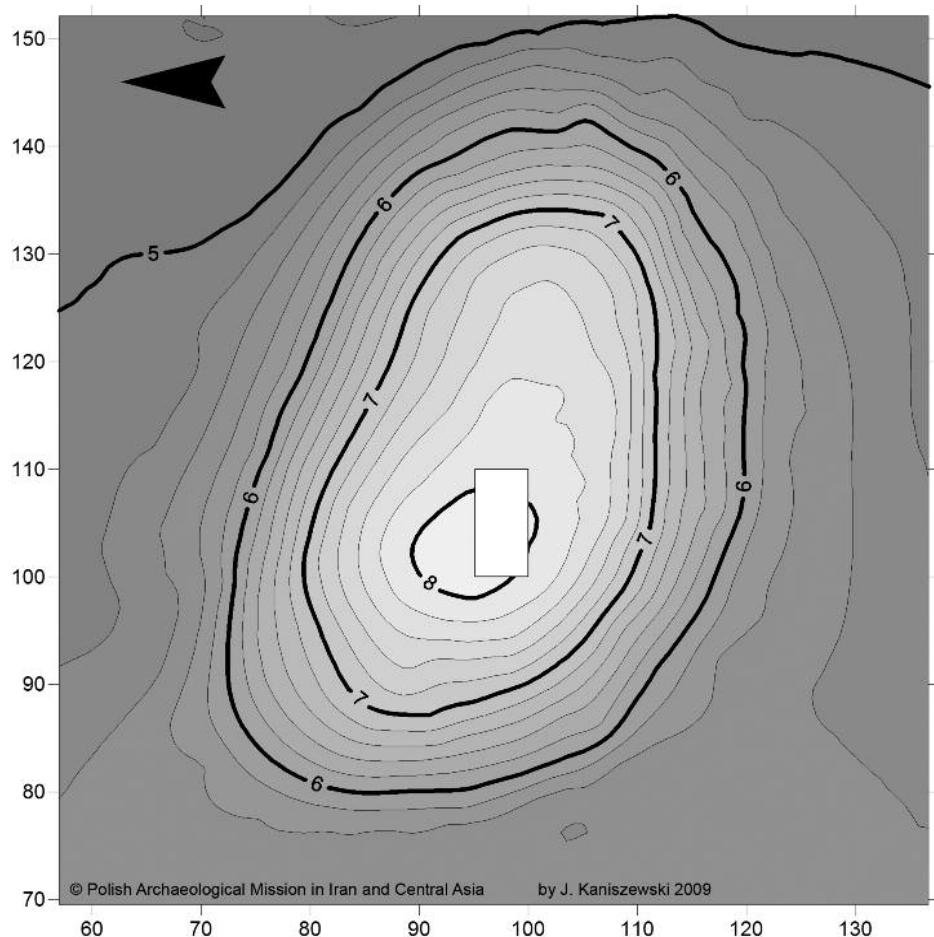


Fig. 1. Topaz Gala Depe: topographical plan (Drawing J. Kaniszewski).

Ryc. 1. Topaz Gala Depe: hipsometryczny plan stanowiska.



Fig. 2. Site, view from the east (Photo M. Wagner).

Ryc. 2. Widok stanowiska od wschodu.



Fig. 3. Trench explored in 2009 (Photo M. Wagner).

Ryc. 3. Wykop przebadany w 2009 r.



Fig. 4. Modern pit and tannur (Photo M. Wagner).

Ryc. 4. Współczesna jama i tannur.

PLATE 218

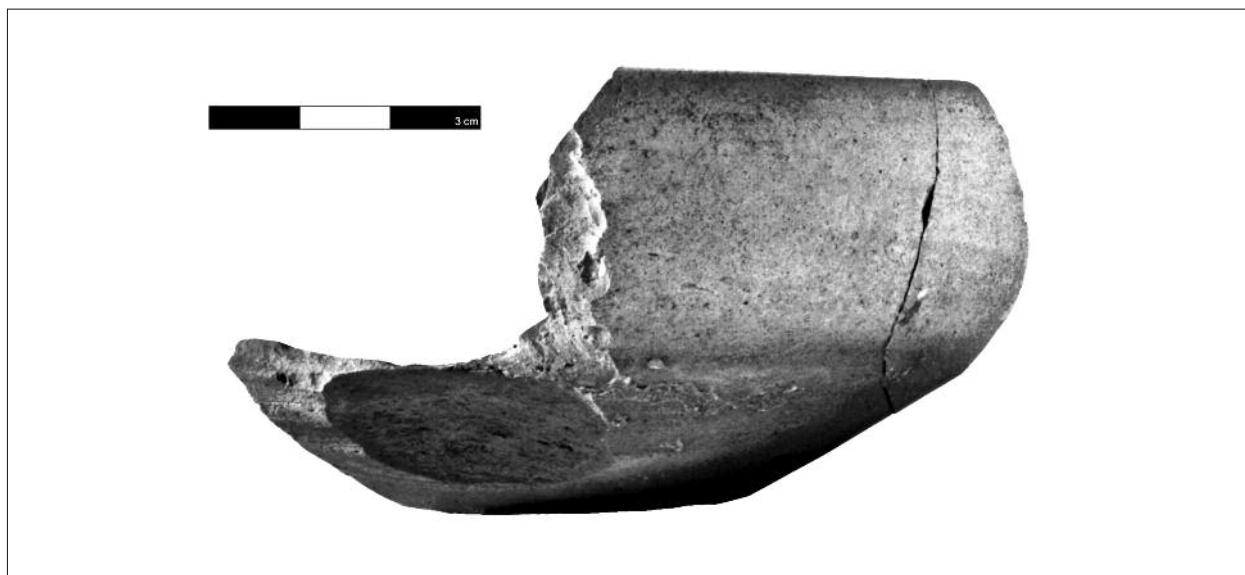


Fig. 5. Hemispherical bowl of the Yaz II–III period (Photo M. Wagner).

Ryc. 5. Półkulista czarka z okresu Yaz II–III.



Fig. 6. Cylindrical jar of the Yaz II–III period (Photo M. Wagner).

Ryc. 6. Cylindryczny garnek z okresu Yaz II–III.