

# CARAVANSERAIS IN THE GOLDEN HORDE

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The creation of the postal relay (*jam*) service was one of the unquestionable achievements of the Mongol Empire. The written sources tell us how, for rapid travel of emissaries, Khan Ögödei ordered, "We shall...provid[e] post-station masters [*jamučin*] and post-horse keepers [*ula'ačin*] from the various units of a thousand of different areas, by setting up a post station at every stage, by not allowing the messengers to move freely among the population unless on urgent business, but instead by having them ride in haste through the post stations." His brother Chagadai, responsible for the Mongol territories in the center of Asia, responded: "I shall have post stations connecting with yours. Also, from here I shall send messengers to Batu [in the Golden Horde–EZ], and Batu shall have his post stations connected with mine... Of all the measures, the one concerning the establishment of post stations is the most appropriate that has been proposed" (*Secret History*/de Rachewiltz 2004, I, pp. 214–15; *Sokrovennoe skazanie*, 2002, p. 153).

Travelers in the 13<sup>th</sup> century noted the existence of *jams* along the entire route from the Itil (the Volga region) to the Mongol capital Karakorum. The Franciscan John of Plano Carpini writes (Dawson 1980, pp. 60–61; Carpini and Rubruck 1957, p. 74):

We made the whole journey at great speed.....And so we started at dawn and journeyed until night without a meal, and many a time we arrived so late that we did not eat that night but were given in the morning the food we should have eaten the previous evening. We went as fast as the horses could trot, for the horses were in no way spared since we had fresh ones several times a day, and those which fell out returned..., and so we rode swiftly without a break.

As William of Rubruck noted, the post stations were not always the same distance apart (Rubruck/Jackson 1990, p. 140; Carpini and Rubruck 1957, p. 123):

On occasions we changed horses two or three times in one day; on others we would travel for two or three days without coming across habitation, in which case we were obliged to move at a gentler pace.

Thanks to the availability of such road stations, Carpini managed to traverse a distance of some 5000 km in 105 days and Rubruck in 101 days (including stopping for 12 days) (Dolbe 2010).

The postal stations established by the Mongols did not require stationary dwellings. Marco Polo writes of this when describing the journey of his father Niccolò and uncle Maffeo from Ukek to Bukhara: "...They found no towns or villages but only Tartars with their tents, living off their beasts" (Polo/Latham 1958, p. 35; Polo 1955, p. 45). The institution of the Mongol postal system survived almost unaltered into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Russian explorer and traveler Petr K. Kozlov, who visited Mongolia in 1908, described the postal stations then (Kozlov 1948, p. 30):

The Mongol stations...were established in this manner: along roads at certain points, primarily in settlements, are five to six yurts with Mongol postal riders who have no other occupation than the post. An official with a red ball on his cap is the supervisor along the Urga route, which includes eleven stations and extends 335 *versts* [ca. 357 km]. Each station in its turn has a manager, the *tzan-gin*, and his assistant. The Mongol postal station is provided with several dozen or even hundreds of horses and eight to ten postal riders. When necessary, both the personnel and horses are relieved or augmented; however, as a rule only the number of horses might be increased. The positions of the manager and the riders of the station usually are hereditary...These Mongols have no other responsibilities.

The situation was quite different in those parts of the Mongol Empire where there already existed traditions of sedentarism. Here caravanserais were built in which travelers could accommodate themselves in comfort. Marco Polo described in detail and with admiration the route stations in China (Polo/Latham 1958, pp. 150–51; Polo 1955, p. 121):

When one of the Great Khan's messengers sets out along any of these roads, he has only to go twenty-five miles and there he finds a posting station, which in their language is called *yamb* and in our language may be rendered 'horse post.' At every

post the messengers find a spacious and palatial hostelry for their lodging. These hostelries have splendid beds with rich coverlets of silk and all that befits an emissary of high rank. If a king came here, he would be well lodged. Here the messengers find no less than 400 horses, stationed here by the Great Khan's orders and always kept in readiness for his messengers when they are sent on any mission. And you must understand that posts such as these, at distances of twenty-five or thirty miles, are to be found along all the main highways leading to the provinces of which I have spoken. And at each of these posts the messengers find three or four hundred horses in readiness awaiting their command and palatial lodgings such as I have described. And this holds good throughout all the provinces and kingdoms of the Great Khan's empire.

The Mongol Empire was a unique bridge connecting the countries of East Asia and Europe: it encompassed almost the entire length of the Great Silk Road. The expansion of international trade under the protection and sponsorship of the central authority necessitated the restoration of existing and the construction of new post houses in all the lands drawn into this process. In the pre-Mongol period in Iran, Central Asia, Asia Minor and Transcaucasia there was already a developed system of caravanserais; in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries many of them continued to function and new ones were also built.

First as part of the empire and subsequently as an independent state, the Golden Horde was an active participant in the international trade. Its territory was the connecting link between the countries of the Mediterranean and the East. Goods from the Mediterranean lands entered through the Black Sea ports of Caffa (Feodosia), Soldaia (Sudak), Azak (Azov) and Akkerman-Montecastro (Belgorod-Dnestrovskii). The caravan routes extended eastward to the lower Volga and especially to Sarai. There were several routes from Azak to the Volga. One went through the steppe to Madzhar with a branch to Derbent, then to Hajji-Tarkhan and beyond along the Volga and Akhtuba to Sarai. Another went up the Don to the point closest to the Volga, then downriver along the Volga. There also were routes along the Kuma and Kuban rivers (Fedorov-Davydov 2001, p. 205). From Sarai and Hajji-Tarkhan caravans crossed the steppe to Saraichik and thence to Khwarazm and further east and south, all the way to China and India.

While there is evidence in various written sources, it is archaeological finds which reveal most about the trading connections of the Golden Horde. Goods from India, China, Iran, Central Asia, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and Transcaucasia all came to the Golden Horde. Wares from Western Europe traveled through Venice

and Genoa to the Crimean ports and Azak. The Volga trade route connected the region along the river with the Bolgar polity and the Russian principalities (Fedorov-Davydov 2001, pp. 203-25; Nedashkovskii 2009, 2016; Schamiloglu 2009). The policies of the khans facilitated the development of trade, creating the most favorable conditions for it to flourish. Ata-Malik Juvaini, the Persian administrator and historian of the Mongols, wrote about Batu: "And merchants from every side brought him all manners of wares, and he took everything and doubled the price of it several times over" (Juvaini/Boyle 1958/1997, p. 267; Tizengauzen 1941, p. 22). Contemporaries also noted the safety of the trade routes in the Golden Horde and more generally in the empire. The Florentine merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti wrote: "The road you travel from Tana [Azov] to Cathay is perfectly safe, whether by day or by night, according to what the merchants say who have used it" (Yule 1913-1916, 3, p. 152; also quoted in Fedorov-Davydov 2001, pp. 203-04). German A. Fedorov-Davydov (2001, p. 224) has eloquently characterized the position of commerce in the Golden Horde:

...It would be no exaggeration to say that the Golden Horde was a great trading power of the Middle Ages and that its trade was carried out mainly in cities and via cities. For all of the weighty consequences of the Mongol invasion and the creation of the Mongol state, including the Golden Horde, doubtless the huge significance of these events lay in the establishment of contacts between East and West. The first transcontinental journeys connected the Mediterranean with Central Asia and China. The Golden Horde was positioned between the world of the European states of the West, the Slavic world, Central Asia and the lands of the Far East. The Turko-Mongolian ethnos was the connecting link. The dialog of the West and East received a powerful new impulse in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Caravanserais should have existed in the Golden Horde, which was such a mighty trading power, and through the lands of which caravans passed in an unending procession. To date though, not many are known and those almost exclusively in its Asian territories.

Long before the coming of the Mongols caravanserais existed on the territories of Khwarazm and Southern Kazakhstan which then in the 13<sup>th</sup> century became part of the Golden Horde. Some of them were abandoned on account of the Mongol conquests, but some were restored and used in the period of the Golden Horde. Certain of these structures were studied by the Khwarazm Expedition. Located on the trade route between Urgench and Bukhara, the caravanserais of Ishan-Rabat, Saratash and Dash-kala, active from

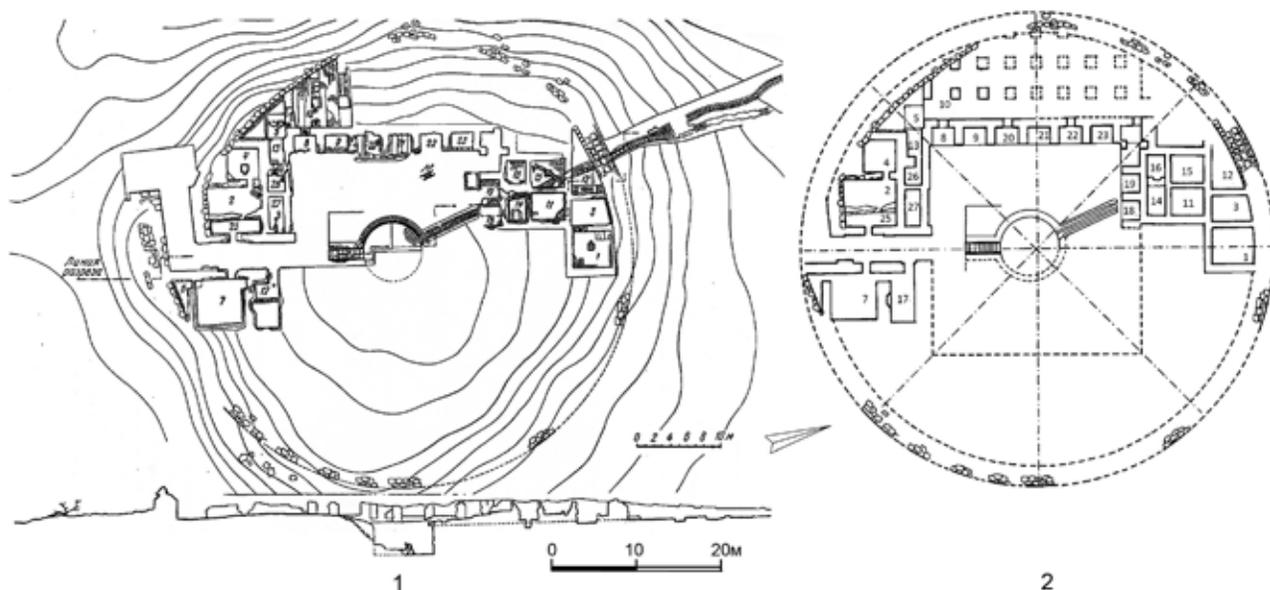


Fig. 1. Caravanserai Talaikhan-ata: 1) Plan and section (by M.S. Lapirovo-Skobko); 2) Reconstruction of plan (by S. G. Khmel'nitskii).

the 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries, no longer functioned under the Mongols (Lokhovits 1975, 1979). The expedition also examined the post stations along the caravan route connecting Khwarazm with Southern Turkmenia and Iran (Tolstov 1958, p. 31–33, 36; Vishnevskaja 1958, pp. 431–66): the sites of Dev-kala, Orta-kuiu, Talaikhan-ata and Ak-Yaila, all of which were built under the Khwarazm shahs and belong to the group of circular caravanserais typical for Khwarazm. The excavations showed that two of these caravanserais, Talaikhan-ata and Orta-kuiu were restored in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and were actively used for their original purpose (Vishnevskaja 1958, p. 440). The excavated structures of the inner part of Talaikhan-ata date to the period of the Golden Horde.

The building of this caravanserai is a perfect circle 60 m in diameter [Figs. 1, 2]. The exterior walls are made

of square slabs of shell-limestone approximately 2.5 m thick. The entrance, a corridor 3.7 m wide, was located in the southwestern part of the building. It goes from west to east, tangential to the exterior wall and at about 10 m turns in a right angle and then goes north to its exit into the courtyard. The walls of the corridor are made of shell-limestone and fired brick and bridged with a vault. In the center of the building is a square (24 x 24 m) courtyard, whose surface is covered with finely crushed brick. In the center of the courtyard is a round (7.1 m diameter, 3.55 m deep) cistern (*sardob*) [Fig. 2.5], whose walls are made of fired brick set in alabaster mortar. From the south a stairway entered the cistern and from the north a water channel [Fig. 2.4] whose walls were made of brick and covered with lime mortar. Built to collect rainwater for the cistern, the channel began 80 m from the wall of the caravanserai.

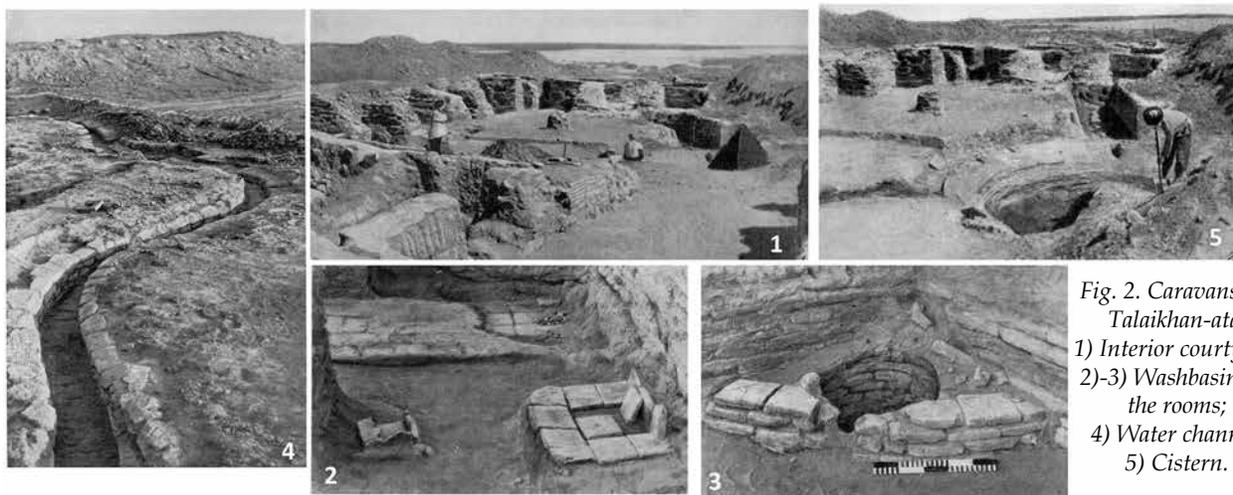
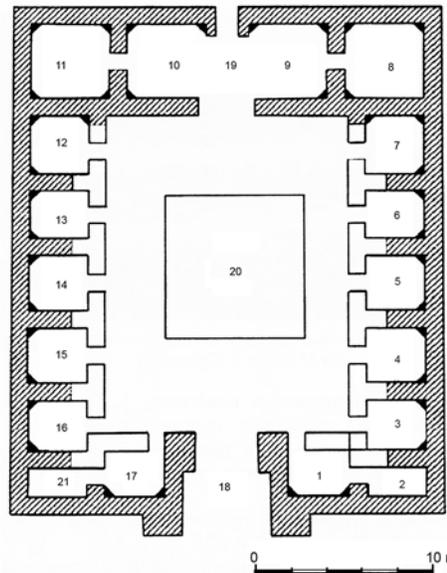


Fig. 2. Caravanserai Talaikhan-ata: 1) Interior courtyard; 2)-3) Washbasins in the rooms; 4) Water channel; 5) Cistern.

Fig. 3. The suburban caravanserai at Jend (after K. M. Baipakov).

Along the western and northern sides of the courtyard were iwans measuring 2.75 x 2.1 m. The lower parts of their walls were made of limestone slabs, and the upper parts rubble-filled masonry of fired and sun-dried brick, with fired brick sheathing the wall. The iwan walls were plastered with alabaster mortar, the floors paved with brick, and the ceilings were vaulted. Behind the iwans, the rooms were arranged in two to three rows. The entrance into the inner chambers were through a single iwan, not one for each of them. The chambers were small, with the largest measuring 5.4 x 5.5 m. The round shape of the building dictated that the rooms had either a triangular or trapezoidal plan. Flanking the entrance were units consisting of three rooms. Some of the rooms, probably work space, were absolutely empty. In the living quarters were stoves, tandoors, and wash basins (Fig. 2.2-3). Unfortunately, this interesting building has been only partially excavated, so that its layout is known only in its most general features. Next to the caravanserai were kilns for firing the brick used to build the rooms from the period of the Golden Horde.

Individual structures of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries have been studied as well at other locations in the Asian part of the Ulus Jöchi. In Jend, a major urban center of the Blue Horde which existed prior to the Mongol period, are three buildings which scholars have indicated were caravanserais (Baipakov 2016, pp. 402-03). Two of them are located on the territory of the city and so far have been studied only *de visu*. These are small (19 x 19 and 17 x 17 m) square buildings with an interior courtyard in the center. The suburban caravanserai, located outside the exterior wall of the



shahristan, is rectangular and measures 30 x 25 m [Fig. 3]. In the front wall is an entrance ca. 3.2 m wide, framed by a massive (8.8 x 3.3 m) portal (*peshtak*). It leads to the inner courtyard (18 x 14 m), around the perimeter of which are the living quarters and work and storage chambers. On both sides of the entrance and attached to the façade wall are units of square (3.3 x 3.1 m) rooms, connected with small rectangular chambers in the corner of the building. They have a single exit into the courtyard. Along both side walls are five square rooms identical in size, each of which has a doorway into the courtyard. In the wall opposite the main entrance is a second, narrower exit from the building, ca. 2 m in width. Attached to this wall are four large (ca. 4.3 x 4.3 m) square chambers, grouped in pairs. Each of the square chambers was roofed with a cupola. In the center of the courtyard is a square raised platform, probably intended for the unloading of goods.

The shrinking of the Aral Sea has revealed new discoveries: at the beginning of the 2000s on the dry seabed was discovered a settlement of the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century which was dubbed Aral-asar (Baipakov 2016, pp. 403-04). Scholars have hypothesized that this settlement had arisen next to the walls of a caravanserai built on a route which connected the southern and eastern Aral littoral with the northern one. However, only extensive excavation can confirm this hypothesis.

The best studied route is that between Khwarazm and Saraichik, which had a network of caravanserais and, according to the written sources took from 20 to 40 days to traverse (Tizengauzen 1884, pp. 242, 307-08; Fedorov-Davydov 2001, p. 214) [Fig. 4]. This

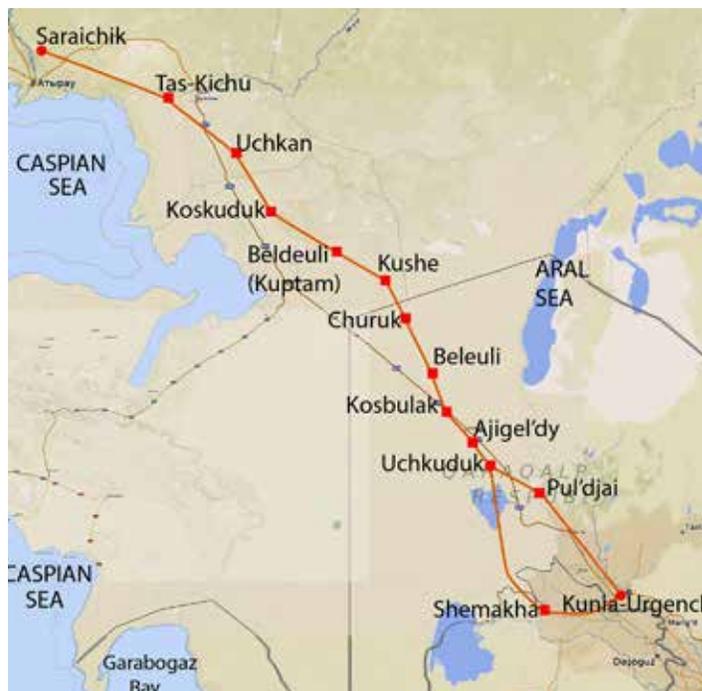
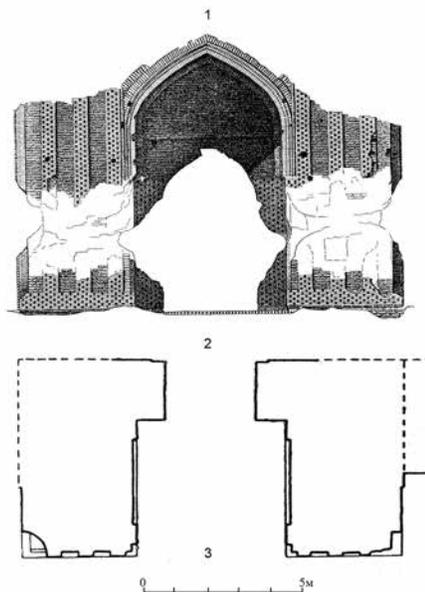
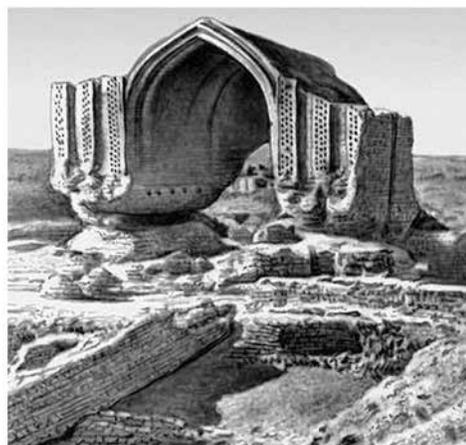


Fig. 4. The locations of the caravanserais along the route across the Ustiurt plateau from Khwarazm to the north end of the Caspian Sea.

Fig. 5. The portal of the caravanserai of Urgench:  
 1) Overall view;  
 2) Drawing of the façade;  
 3) Plan (according to M.S. Lapirov-Skoblo).



route began in Urgench. No building of what unquestionably was caravanserai in Urgench has been studied, but for the well preserved large portal with a pointed arch which the local population has dubbed the “gate of the caravanserai.” This structure was briefly described by Aleksandr Iu. Iakubovskii in his book *The Ruins of Urgench* (1930, pp. 63–64); in 1952 excavations were carried out there by the Khwarazm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition and the results published (Tolstov 1958, pp. 224–29; Vakturskaia 1958, pp. 467–94; Lapirov-Skoblo 1958, pp. 529–42). The portal is made of fired brick set in lime mortar. It is a massive, rectangular-plan structure with a large pointed arch—i.e., a typical Central Asian *peshtak* [Fig. 5]. Two pylons, measuring 3.74 x 5.93 m each, support the 4.5 m-wide vault. On the front, the vault was open, and its height up to the crown was 8.1 m. On the rear it is enclosed by the vault wall, in which was cut a 3 m wide opening also topped by a pointed arch. The upper part of the portal, including the spandrels of the arch, has not been preserved. The portal was lavishly decorated by unglazed polished brick and majolica [Fig. 6]. The façade of each pylon is divided by three pilasters, whose surface is embellished with designs: the bricks formed a decorative pattern, each pair laid lengthwise separated by the insertion of a terracotta tile. These projecting pilasters form three Pi-shaped frames; the spaces between them were filled with terracotta tiles with carved ornament and turquoise glaze. The tiles had fallen off and were found in the rubble at the base of the portal (Fedorov-Davydov 1958, pp. 519–20). The decoration of the vault of the niche was reasonably well preserved. Geometrical ornament was created from unglazed yellowish-rose color terracotta tiles of various sizes.

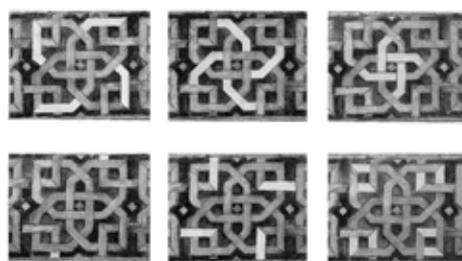


Fig. 6. The architectural décor of the Urgench caravanserai: 1) The facing on the vault of the arch; 2-3) Majolica tiles (according to M. S. Lapirov-Skoblo).

The cells between its bands were filled with a mosaic of carved turquoise, deep blue and white majolica.

The excavations revealed that the portal (probably as well the entire building) was built in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A trading street with many shops led up to it (Fedorov-Davydov 1958). These trading stalls came later but their location and long-lasting existence (to the 17<sup>th</sup> century) on this spot is indirect confirmation of the fact that the building to which the portal belongs indeed could have been a caravanserai.

The next location where a caravan could stop for the night is the ancient settlement site of Shemakha-kala, located 60 km west of Kunya-Urgench on a projecting spur of the Ustiurt Plateau (M.-Sh. Kdynniazov 2015, pp. 40–43). Sergei P. Tolstov wrote that “in the first instance it is an early medieval fortress-town, enclosed at some point by a rectangle of strong walls with huge towers” (Tolstov 1948b, p. 311). In his opinion, the town was destroyed by the Mongols, but in the 14<sup>th</sup> century it again began to flourish and continued to exist to the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Iu. P. Manylov considers that Shemakha-kala is the same as the Zamjan *rabat*, “the gate of the Turks,” mentioned by the 10<sup>th</sup>-century

author Ibn Fadlan (Manylov 1979, p. 95). There were several routes leading beyond through the Ustiurt. Ibn Fadlan mentions as the last stop before the plateau a place called Jit, which probably is to be identified the caravanserai of Kulanly (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries), located 30.5 km northwest from Shemakha (Manylov 1979, pp. 95-97).

Then we kept a straight course and plunged deep into the realm of the Turks through a barren, mountainless desert. We met no one. We crossed for ten days. Our bodies suffered terrible injuries. We were exhausted. The cold was biting, the snowstorms never-ending. It made the cold of Khwarazm seem like summer time. We forgot all about our previous sufferings and were ready to give up the ghost.

Such was Ibn Fadlan's dramatic description of his crossing the Ustiurt (Ibn Fadlan/Montgomery 2014, p. 201; Kovalevskii 1956, p. 125). As this description indicates, there was no habitation along the entire route. The caravan traveled by the shortest route (ca. 400 km), which took 10 days. One can reconstruct the entire route of Ibn Fadlan across the Ustiurt as follows: it began in Jurjania (Urgench), passed through Zamjan (Shemakha-kala), Jit (Kulanly), skirted the Barsakelmes basin on the west and came out at one of the northwestern exits descending from the Ustiurt plateau (Manylov 1979, pp. 95, 99).

The Arab traveler Ibn Battuta, who crossed the Ustiurt in 1333 also fails to mention any caravanserais (Ibn Battuta/Gibb 1958-2000, 3, pp. 539, 541; Tizengauzen 1884, p. 308):

From this place [Saraichik] we went on for thirty days by forced marches, halting only for two hours each day, one in the forenoon and the other at sunset. The length of the halt was just as long as the time needed to cook and sup *duqi*, and this is cooked with a single boiling...Everybody eats and sleeps in his wagon while it is actually on the move... It is the custom of travelers in this wilderness to use the utmost speed, because of the scarcity of herbage. Of the camels that cross it the majority perish and the remainder are of no use except a year later, after they are fattened up. The water in this desert

Fig. 7. The catchbasin at Kokty-kudyk.

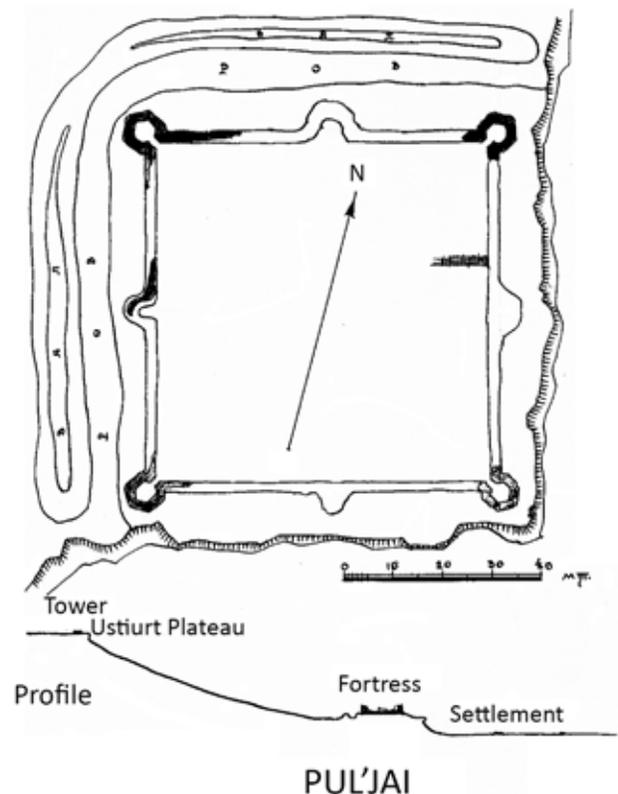


is at certain known waterpoints, separated by two or three days march, and is rainwater [in surface pools] and shallow wells under the sand.

Referring to Ibn Battuta's description of shallow wells with rainwater, M. D. Kalmenov suggested that these are the "diggings" known down to the present, artificial cone-shaped catchbasins 15-20 m in diameter [Fig. 7]. Since they could exist only in sandy areas, that scholar has been able partially to reconstruct the route of Ibn Battuta from Saraichik to the area to the north of the river Emba, and then after crossing the Emba at the ancient ford of Bokashi, through the Sam sands already on the Ustiurt and finally through the plateau to Khwarazm (Kalmenov 2012, pp. 65-66).

There was another route through the Ustiurt in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. North of Shemakha is a convenient natural ascent, Shibindy, 12-15 km from which is the settlement of Pul'jai (Manylov 1972, p. 119; Manylov and Iusupov 1982, p. 180). The site includes a fort from the pre-Mongol era [Fig. 8], an unfortified settlement of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries and a cemetery (O.-Sh. Kdyrni-iazov 2016, pp. 81-83). A caravanserai located in the unfortified settlement has been partially studied. Its walls are constructed of dressed limestone slabs set in lime mortar. The building is rectangular, measuring

Fig. 8. The fortress of Pul'jai: plan drawn by V. I. Pentman (Nauchnyi arkhiv Instituta etnologii i antropologii im. N. N. Miklukho-Maklaia Rossiiskoi akademii nauk, f. 142).



33.75 x 16.8 m. Its western and northern corners are flanked by round towers (*gul'dasty*) 1.5 m in diameter which had been erected at the same time as the walls and whose masonry is tied in with that of the walls. The eastern and southern corners were strengthened at a later date by rectangular buttresses (1.2 x 1.3 and 1.5 x 2.0 m). In the middle of the northwestern wall, 10.8 m from the western corner, is the entrance, framed by a portal which projects from the line of the walls. The rectangular pylons which were uncovered flank a 2.2 m wide space, in the middle of which is a 1.5 m wide passage paved with stone slabs. Nine chambers were cleared inside the structure, among them a hall and vestibule with stone foundations, a grain storage compartment, and living quarters with heating ducts (*kany*). Alabaster lattices (*pandzhara*) were found within the chambers, which indicates there had been windows. Scholars believe that in its plan the building at Pul'jai is analogous to caravanserais of the eastern shelf of the Ustiurt dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Archaeological material indicates that it could have been built in the pre-Mongol period, then rebuilt and actively used in the Golden Horde era (M.-Sh. Kdyriniazov and O.-Sh. Kdyriniazov 2015, pp. 130–31; 2016, pp. 82–83).

At the same time there were square or almost square Ustiurt structures with rooms arranged around a courtyard. In Pul'jai we have an elongated rectangular building which might have been entirely roofed over. The existence of windows suggests as much. However, it is premature to reach any conclusions until the completion of excavations and the publication of a plan of the entire structure.

An entire chain of caravanserais which were actively functioning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century supported the caravan route that began approximately 30 km from Pul'jai [Fig. 4]. Beginning then, communication between the states of Central Asia and the Golden Horde and subsequently the Russian state was almost uninterrupted, as is evidenced from the official letters of Central Asian rulers to Russian tsars and documents which reflect trading connections (Kalmenov 2012). There were two routes: maritime and overland. The sea route traversed the Caspian from Mangyshlak to Hajji-Tarkhan, then to Astrakhan, and the overland route passed through the Ustiurt to the Ural and Volga rivers (Bizhanov and Lokhovits 1969, p. 52; Astaf'ev 2010, pp. 77–96, 132–44). Judging from archaeological material, both routes were operating in the 14<sup>th</sup> and probably in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, only the maritime route was used, since the steppe route was unsettled due to raids by the Kalmyks. Starting in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, embassies and trade caravans began to use the overland route (Kalmenov 2012, pp. 67–68).

The first written information about the route through the Ustiurt describing its wells and structures is that by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century historian and regional specialist Petr I. Rychkov (1762). This route continued to exist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was dubbed the "old Nogai road." Many scholars, military and civil officials, and travelers have noted the wells and remains of ancient structures along the caravan route. All of those who studied the region were especially impressed by the caravanserai of Beleuli with its beautifully preserved portal. In 1899, a member of the Imperial Russian Technical Society, the well-known photographer Mikhail N. Chernyshevskii, took the first photograph of the Beleuli portal (Zhukova and Levteeva 1976).

The first archaeological study of the monuments of the Ustiurt was carried out in 1946 by the Khwarazm Expedition. Aerial survey revealed the locations of caravanserai ruins at Uchkuduk, Bulak, Kosbulak, and Beleuli (Tolstov 1947, p. 178; Vakturskaia and Vorob'eva 1952, p. 629; Arzhatseva 2016, p. 202). At that time the architects Vadim I. Pentman and Mark A. Orlov drew a plan of the caravanserai of Beleuli, made drawings of the façade with its portal and cross-sections of the portal and towers. Sergei P. Tolstov dated the structures on the Ustiurt to the period of the Khwarazm shahs, that is the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Khwarazm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition continued to work on the Ustiurt in 1950. Having departed from Saraichik, the expedition studied the caravanserais at the Tas-kichu (Tashkeshu) ford on Sagyz River, and Koskuduk, Churuk, Beleuli, Kosbulak and Uchkuduk on the Ustiurt Plateau (Tolstov 1958, pp. 14–18; Arzhatseva 2016, p. 204). Tolstov summarized what was accomplished (1958, pp. 18–19):

The result of the exploratory trip was to reveal the character of the most important structures (caravanserais, wells, fords, etc.) of the medieval caravan road from Khwarazm to Eastern Europe, to determine more precisely the direction of that road and date its individual structures, among which were discovered previously unknown first rate examples of Central Asian architecture. The study of the caravanserais enabled us to collect material which demonstrated the common characteristics of all these structures at the same time that they varied in building techniques and construction. The general uniformity of planning, layout and individual details of construction is evidence of the approximately simultaneous building of the structures as a single complex for the infrastructure along the route. Their creation, it seems, occurred at the beginning of the flourishing of the Khwarazm state in the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the commercial and political interests of Khwarazm connected it with the Volga region and Eastern Europe.

In other words, this detailed study dated the buildings a century later than had previously been assumed.

Excavations in the caravanserais on the Ustiurt were carried out in the 1960s–70s by Ermek B. Bizhanov. At the caravanserais of Bulak and Kosbulak the excavations uncovered ceramics and numismatic material from the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, Bizhanov was unwilling to abandon the previous conclusion about the earlier date of the buildings and concluded that, while built in the era of the Khwarazm shahs, the caravanserais were used most intensively in the period of the Golden Horde (Bizhanov and Lokhovits 1969, pp. 54–59; Bizhanov 1970, p. 56).

In 1975–78, an expedition organized by the archaeological section of the Institute of History, Language and Literature of the Karakalpak branch of the Uzbek SSR Academy of Sciences studied all the caravanserais of the central Ustiurt located within the boundaries of Karakalpakia. This work, published in detail, demonstrated conclusively that they must date to the Golden Horde period (Manylov 1982; Manylov and Iusupov 1982).

The sites are located in a chain along an almost straight line leading from the southeast to the northwest starting at the northern edge of the Barsakelmes salt waste. The distance between caravanserais Uchkuduk and Koskudik is about 170 km. Uchkuduk is the caravanserai closest to the eastern shelf of the Ustiurt; it is an almost square building measuring 31.7 x 28.45–65 m [Fig. 9.1]. Its walls are 75–85 cm thick, constructed with a facing of dressed stone slabs cemented by alabaster mortar. The space between slabs is filled with stones and the cement. The corners of the southern façade wall have decorative round towers 1.85 m in diameter. The exterior of the towers is plastered with alabaster mortar. In the center of the southern wall is a passage 4.7 m wide which narrows down to 3.9 m. A portal whose pylons protrude somewhat (40–50 cm) from the surface of the wall frames the entrance. The passage leads into an inner courtyard measuring 18–21 m, in the center of which is a well (diameter ca 1.5 m) faced with stone slabs.

The rooms are in a single row around the entire perimeter of the courtyard. On each side of the entrance is a nearly square chamber (4.2 x 3.9 m) with an adjoining small open room resembling a narrow corridor, which, as the excavations at Beleuli showed, was a stair-well. Seven residence rooms each are arrayed along the eastern and western walls. The corner rooms nos. 1 and 15

have somewhat larger measurements (4.2 x 3.8 m), while the size of the remaining rooms is 3.75–3.90 x 2.9–3.0 m. All of them connect with the courtyard via smooth passageways. The interior of all the rooms is more or less uniform: in them is a wide low (20 cm) bench along two or three walls and a stove (stove pit). The floors are dirt. Some rooms were heated by braziers, as evidenced by traces of calcification (*prokalenosti*) on the floor.

Attached to the northern wall of the building is a narrow elongated chamber measuring 26.9 x 3.8 m. In the center of its southern wall is a passage 1.1 m wide, which seems to have been framed by a portal whose pylons projected 25–35 cm from the surface of the wall. Inside the chamber were the remains of arch springers ca. 60 cm wide which protruded 40 cm from the surface of the wall and a pile of stone blocks of trapezoidal shape from which the arches had been constructed. Iurii P. Manylov suggested that the chamber was covered by seven cupolas (Manylov 1982, p. 98; Manylov and Iusupov 1982, p. 172). However, it seems to me that the given chamber, which unquestionably was a stable for animals or a storage area, more likely had a vault resting on supporting arches.

In all of the excavated chambers were piles of small (23–18 x 20–17 x 7–5 cm) tiles of shell-limestone with which, it has been suggested, the cupola and vault roofs were constructed. Some rooms contained fragments of unglazed terracotta tiles with carving, which could have decorated the vault of the portal niche (Manylov and Iusupov 1982, p. 172).

West of the caravanserai is a stone quarry, and to the southeast are three wells which had been described by earlier scholars. Now the wells have been filled in,

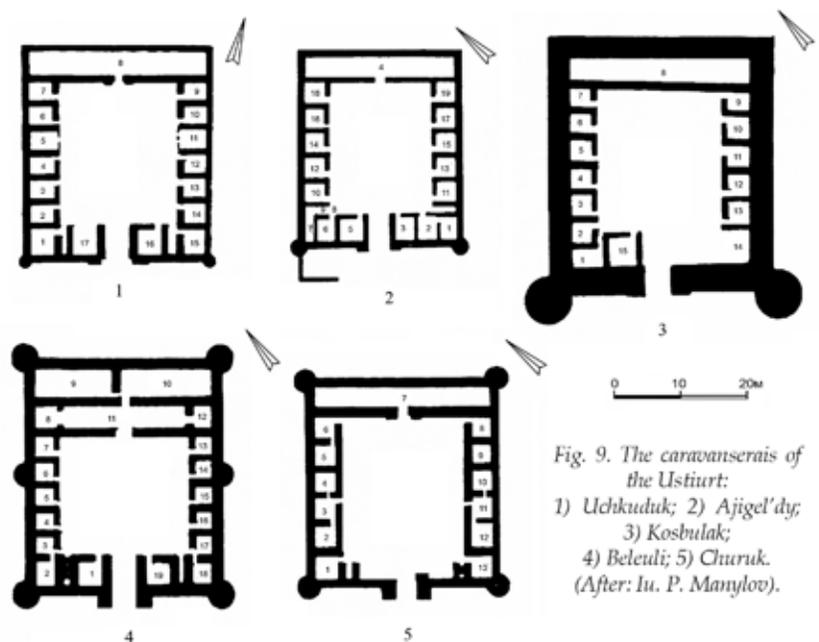


Fig. 9. The caravanserais of the Ustiurt:  
1) Uchkuduk; 2) Ajigel'dy;  
3) Kosbulak;  
4) Beleuli; 5) Churuk.  
(After: Iu. P. Manylov).

though the depth of one of them measured prior to its filling was 21 m (Manylov 1982, p. 98).

The next caravanserai is 25 km to the northwest, located at the bottom of a large basin. It is called Ajigel'dy after the name of the basin and the wells located there, but the publications by the Khwarazm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition call it Bulak. Ajigel'dy has a plan that is almost identical with that of Uchkuduk, but it is constructed of brick [Fig. 9.2]. The building measures 29.3 x 24.3 m. The corners of the façade wall are flanked by round towers 1 m in diameter; in the middle of the wall is an entrance 3.8 m wide. The pylons of the portal, 1.2 m wide, project 60 cm from the wall. Inside the building, the chambers are arrayed around the inner courtyard (19.3 x 15.3 m) and open out into it through smooth passages 0.8–1.2 m wide. The rooms built against the southwestern façade wall have somewhat larger measurements (2.7–3.2 x 3.4–3.5 m), while the rest of the rooms are almost square and measure ca. 3 x 3 m. In the living quarters are benches and stoves, and two of the rooms have wash basins. Attached to the northern wall is a long narrow chamber (22.5 x 3.8 m), which in all likelihood was a stable for animals. It is connected with the courtyard by a passage 1.3 m wide. Attached to the exterior of the western wall of the caravanserai is a  $\Gamma$ -shaped wall, which encloses an additional area (for goods or animals).

The next caravanserai, located another 33 km along the route, is Kosbulak. It is also made of brick; its walls are 2.8–3.8 m thick [Fig. 9.3]. The diameter of the towers attached to the corners of the façade wall reaches 6.4 m. The entrance in the middle of the southwestern wall is 3.7 m wide, framed by pylons (2.95 x 0.4 m). The plan of Kosbulak differs very little from the caravanserais already described: in its center is a courtyard measuring 18.6 x 27 m containing living quarters and work or storage chambers attached to the exterior walls. Left of the entrance is a square room of somewhat larger size (no. 15) and a narrow rectangular chamber which was a stairwell (no. 1). The other rooms along the side walls are square, measuring ca. 3.5 x 3.5 m. Inside the rooms are benches and stoves, and some walls have clay plastering. Opposite the entrance, along the northeastern wall is a stable measuring 26.4 x 3.6–4.2 m.

In a large basin, 54 km to the northwest, is the best known archaeological complex Beleuli, which consists of a caravanserai, a cistern, wells, quarries and cemeteries. What survives to this day of the caravanserai's portal can be seen at a distance of 10–12 km (Manylov 1982, p. 100). The site made an impression on all who have studied it and on travelers who described it in their notes. Petr I. Rychkov in 1762 was the first to describe it. Sergei P. Tolstov also noted the unusual

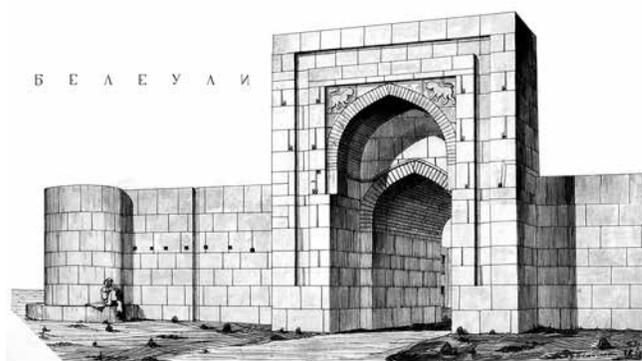


Fig. 10. Beleuli, drawing by V. I. Pentman (Arkhiv IEA RAN, f. 142).

nature of the structure and considered it to have been built at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century, thus making it the earliest monument of medieval stone architecture in Central Asia.

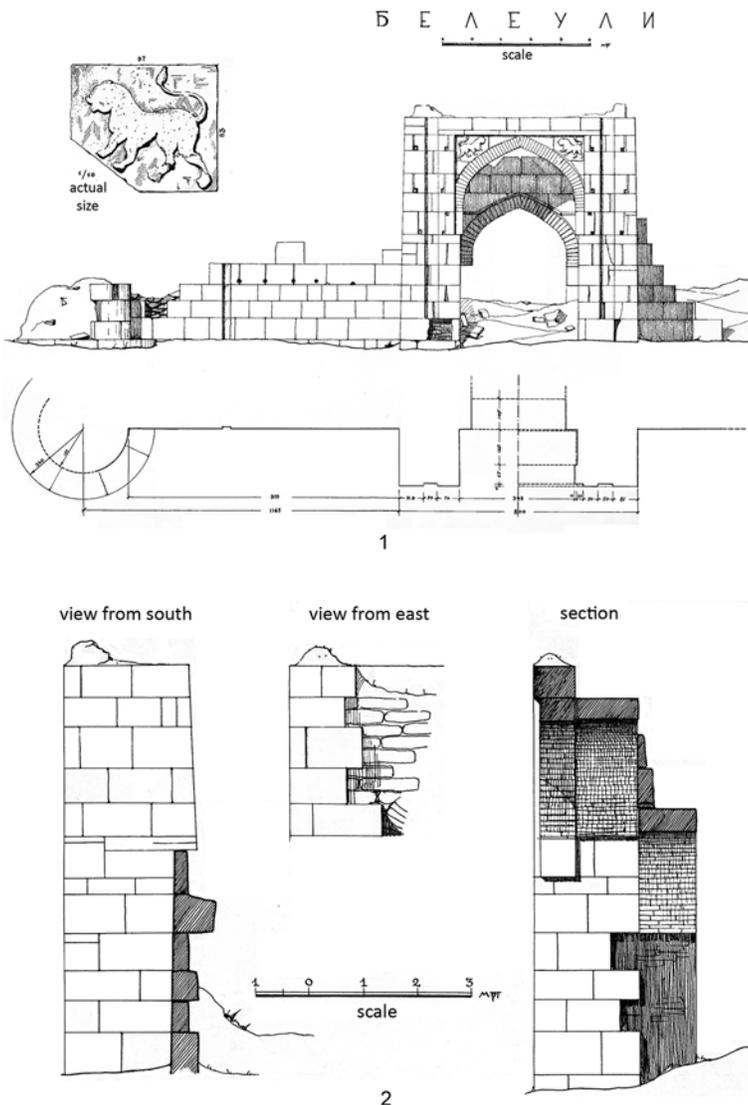
The building of the caravanserai is rectangular and measures 35.3 x 29 m [Fig. 9.4]. The walls are 1.0–1.2 m thick, erected from limestone slabs of various sizes, with the facing sides of the slabs carefully smoothed. The spaces between the slabs are filled with crushed stone and lime mortar. All four corners of the building have been strengthened by round solid towers 3.2 m in diameter. In the middle of the northwestern and southeastern walls are two semi-towers 2.7 m in diameter whose masonry is not integrated with that of the wall. All the towers are constructed of specially worked curved slabs. A portal preserved at present to a height of 7.66 m frames the entrance to the caravanserai in the middle of the southwestern wall [Figs. 10–13]. According to the measurements obtained by the Khwarazm Expedition, the height of the portal was 9.6 m (Manylov 1972, pp. 102, 104; Manylov and Iusupov 1982, pp. 174–75). The high, pointed arch rests on pylons measuring 2.0 x 1.9 m and covers an area of 3.9 x 1.9 m. The height of the crown of the arch is 6.66 m, and the rise from its impost is 2.8 m. On the inner side it is bounded by a gable wall in which was a passage, also roofed by a pointed arch ca. 4.6 m high. On the spandrels that flank the arch were stone bas-reliefs of lions, which were still there until 1972 but now have been lost. The vault of the portal niche apparently was decorated by underglaze-painted polychrome majolica tiles forming a design of straight and braided lines in white, turquoise and ultramarine colors.

The plan of the building in many ways repeats the plan of the other caravanserais of the Ustiurt, but with some distinctive features. In the center is a courtyard measuring 19.3 x 17.8 m. On each side of the entrance is a square (3.7–3.8 m<sup>2</sup>) chamber, attached to which is a narrow (1.2–1.3 m) stairwell with remains of a stone stairway. In the southern and western corners are living quarters consisting of two joined rooms. Beyond,

along both the northwestern and southeastern walls are five separate rooms which open only into the courtyard. All the rooms are square, measuring 2.9 x 2.95 m. In some rooms are the remains of door lintels 1.6 m high. The height of the walls of the chambers has been estimated to have been about 2 m (Manylov 1972, p. 102; Manylov and Iusupov 1982, p. 174). In the living quarters were benches, stoves and a system of heating ducts.

Along the northeastern wall, as in the other monuments, is a narrow workroom, which at Beleuli is divided in two by a perpendicular wall. Between it and the courtyard is another such corridor-like chamber (no. 11), into which doors open from the side rooms nos. 8 and 12. Keeping in mind that all of the caravanserais were built following one and the same plan,

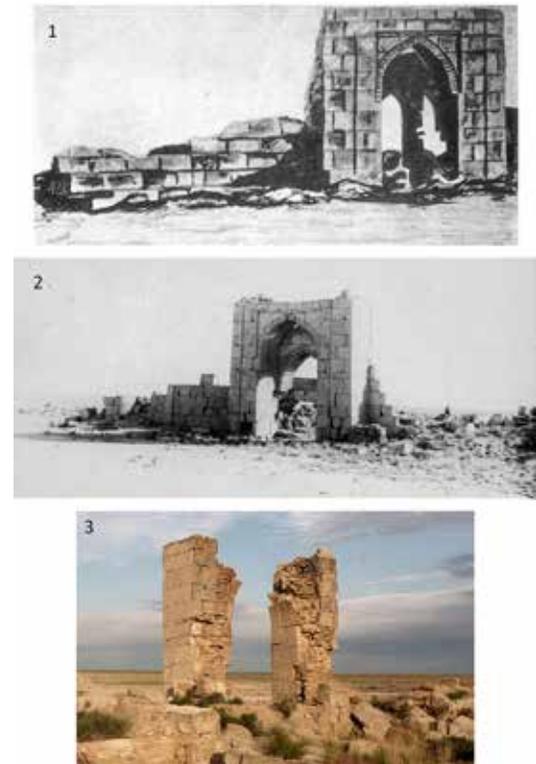
Fig. 11. Beleuli: 1) Façade and outline of the portal wall; 2) Views from the side and section of the portal; drawn by V. I. Pentman and re-captioned here (Arkhiv IEA RAN, f. 142).



one can propose that chamber 11 is a later addition, serving as additional storage space. For that reason, it is connected to the living quarters.

The excavations of the 1970s demonstrated that there had been many mistakes in the original interpretation of this monument. First of all, the ceramic and numismatic material found there reliably dated it to the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, not earlier, as had been suggested previously. In describing the reliefs on the portal, Tolstov proposed locating analogies in Sasanian Iran, an interpretation that has been repeated in later studies. Iurii P. Manylov and Nariman Iu. Iusupov cite as closest analogies the panels depicting lions on the portals of the Ak-Sarai palace in Shahrasiabs (1380-1405) and the Shir Dor medrese in Samarkand (1619-1639) (Manylov 1970, p. 102; Manylov and Iusupov 1982, p. 175). However, both of those monuments were built later than Beleuli, and the panels on them are mosaic of glazed tiles. In my view, closest stylistically are reliefs of carved stone that originated in Armenia. Animals—a sheep and a bull—are depicted on the spandrels of the Armenian caravanserai Selim. The southern *han* at Ani, built by Tigran Onenets in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is decorated with snakes and lions. A well-known drawing by Grigorii G. Gagarin shows a caravanserai of the 17<sup>th</sup>-

Fig. 12. Photographs of Beleuli: 1) 1899, by M. N. Chernyshevskii; 2) 1950, taken during the Khwarazm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition (Arkhiv IEA RAN, f. 142); 3) contemporary view.



18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Erevan, on whose spandrels are lions (Khalpakhch'ian 1971, pp. 187, 201–08). Thus the suggestion of Galina A. Pugachenkova that “some master invited from Armenia or Azerbaijan participated in its [Beneuli's] construction” seems to have some basis in fact [Pugachenkova and Rempel' 1958, p. 33].

Citing the presence of stairs, Tolstov describes (1948a, p. 347; 1948b, p. 264) the Beleuli caravanserai as a two-story building. But in this case, one instead can agree with Manylov, who proposed that the stairs lead onto the roof of the chambers, and the building was a single-story one (Manylov 1972, p. 104; Manylov and Iusupov 1982, p. 176). Similar stairs to the roof are known on other monuments, for example, in the completely preserved caravanserai Sultan-khan in Asia Minor, and also in the caravanserais Daia Khatyn and Al Asker (Pribytkova 1953, pp. 92–106; Pugachenkova 1958a, pp. 230–41, 223–25; Khmel'nitskii 1992, pp. 182–87; 1996, p. 293; Stierlin 1998, pp. 73–75).

Other objects to be associated with the caravanserai Beleuli were located around it. Four wells, lined in the upper part with stone slabs, had been dug in front of the façade wall, their depth reaching 43 m (Vialov 1934, p. 157). During the study by the Khwarazm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition in 1946,

stone water channels were found at the wells [Fig. 13.4] (Tolstov 1948b, pp. 263–64). Fifty meters to the northeast were eight cisterns for collecting rainwater. Five stone quarries, the source of the building material, were found not far from the monument. Also nearby was an extensive cemetery.

Fifty-four km to the northwest of Beleuli is the caravansaray of Churuk, which had been mentioned by Rychkov. It measures 31.7 x 29.5 m. On all four corners are round towers 2.8 m in diameter [Fig. 9.5]. The walls and towers are constructed of limestone slabs in the same technique as at Beleuli. The 3.5 m wide entrance is in the southwestern wall. Pylons of the portal are rather substantial, measuring 2 x 2 m. Along both the northwestern and southeastern walls are 6 residence rooms, two of which were isolated from the others with an entrance only onto the courtyard, while the others form units of two or three connected rooms each. The rooms measure 3.7 x 3.3–3.8 m. The interiors of the living quarters are like those in the other monuments.

Along the northeastern wall is a storage room or stable measuring 27.3 x 3.4 m. Its entrance, in the center of the wall, also had a small portal. In the center of the building is an open courtyard measuring 24.8 x 19 m.

In all of the rooms were heaps of small tiles of shell-limestone and also fired bricks. The scholars who have studied the site suggest that the vaulted ceilings of the rooms were constructed of this material (Manylov 1972, p. 110; Manylov and Iusupov 1982, p. 179). In the southern and western corners of the building are the remains of stairs 1.1–1.3 m wide. Several wells, a quarry and a cemetery were found in the vicinity of the caravanserai.

At 46.5 km to the northwest on the border with the Sam sands in a small depression are the Kiushe (Kushe) wells. On the northeastern edge of the depression are the remains of a caravanserai (Astaf'ev 2010, pp. 78–79). Its walls were made of fired brick, which then was entirely pillaged for the construction of structures placed atop graves in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The exploratory trenches made in the walls enable one to discern approximately the shape of the building, which was square and measured 25 x 25 m. The next well along the route, Turush, is 36 km from Kiushe, and in another 17 km are the wells of Beskudyk (Bel'deuli). At the bottom of the depression there were a caravanserai and five wells, two of them filled with sand but three still retaining water (Astaf'ev 2010, p. 79; Kalmenov 2013, pp. 48–49).

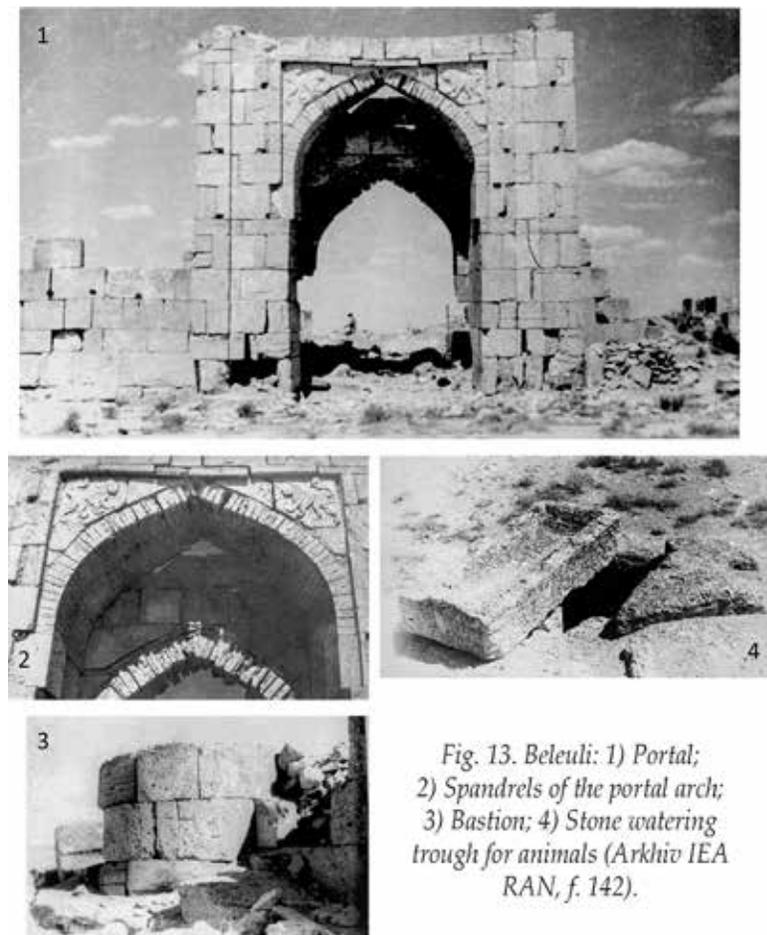
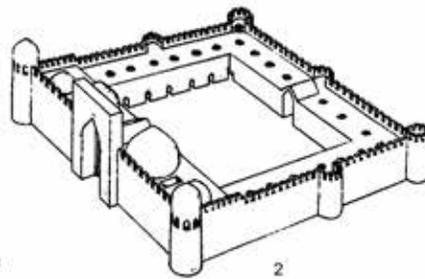
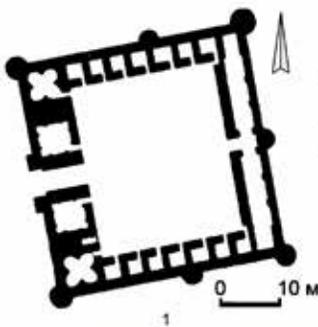
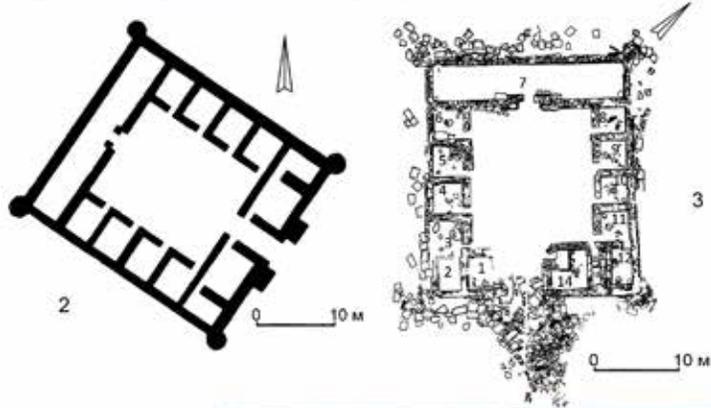


Fig. 13. Beleuli: 1) Portal; 2) Spandrels of the portal arch; 3) Bastion; 4) Stone watering trough for animals (Arkhiv IEA RAN, f. 142).

Fig. 14. Caravanserai Bel'deuli: 1) Aerial photo; 2) Plan drawn by A. E. Astaf'ev; 3) Excavation plan by Z. Samashev and M. Kozha; 4) Carved terracotta; 5) Overall view following excavation.

The caravanserai Bel'deuli (Koptam) was examined by the staff of the Mangistau Historical-Cultural Reserve and a plan of the monument and its description compiled on the basis of the walls visible at the surface (Astaf'ev 2010, pp. 79–81; Kalmenov 2007, pp. 280–81; 2013, pp. 48–49). The building was entirely excavated in 2011 (Kozha and Samashev 2014, pp. 486–98). It is rectangular, measuring 27 x 24 m [Fig. 14]. Its exterior walls are sheathed in large dressed slabs and blocks of limestone, joined by alabaster mortar. The masonry of the walls of the chambers is composite, making use of unfired and fired brick and faced with stone slabs. The corners of the building have round towers 2 m in diameter. An entrance ca. 3.65 m wide is in the middle of the southeastern wall. Remaining from the portal is the foundation of a pylon 2.1–2.2 m wide which projected 80 cm from the surface of the wall. In the heap of stones from the portal were found terracotta revetment tiles with Arabic letters and vegetal ornament.

In the center of the building is a broad (13.7 x 14.9 m) courtyard, around whose perimeter are rooms. On each side of the entrance are square chambers measuring 4.4 m. The one on the right was residential; that on the left was occupied by a mosque. Its floor is paved with stone slabs and covered with a layer of plaster. Along the lateral walls were located residence rooms, five to a side. The corner rooms nos. 2 and 12 are somewhat smaller than the others and connected with rooms 3 and 11, forming two-room units. The remaining cham-



bers, which have a standard size of about 3.2 x 3.3 m, open only onto the courtyard. In the living quarters are remains of benches and stoves. Attached to the rear wall is a storage room or stable (no. 7) measuring 22 x 3.7 m. Its entrance probably was framed by a portal arch. Between chambers 12 and 14 at the southeastern wall is the narrow chamber 13 with stairs leading to the roof. As with the other caravanserais, Bel'deuli dates to the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Koskuduk is the last of the caravanserais along this route within the bounds of the Ustiurt, located on the edge of the plateau at its northwestern extremity. The Khwarazam Expedition studied Koskuduk in 1950 (Tolstov 1958, p. 16), and subsequently the staff of the Mangistau Historical-Cultural Reserve drew a plan of it (Astaf'ev 2010, pp. 83–86; Kalmenov 2007, pp. 279–80; 2013, pp. 50–53). The building is nearly square and measures 41.6 x 40.8 m [Fig. 15]. The walls are

Fig. 15. Caravanserai Koskuduk: 1) Plan; 2) Reconstruction by A. E. Astaf'ev; 3-4) remains of rooms.

constructed of rubble-fill masonry using large dressed slabs of limestone. The exterior walls are 1.2–1.5 m thick. All four corners of the building are flanked by round towers, and semi-towers have been built in the center of the lateral and rear walls. The towers on entrance façade and the three intermediary ones have a diameter of 3.3 m, and the corner towers on the back of the building a diameter of 4 m. The entrance is 3.8 m wide, located in the center of the western wall. There are remains of pylons of the portal, 2.7 m side, which protrude from the façade wall 1.2 m. The distance between the pylons is 4.8 m, the depth of the arch 2.5 m. The entrance passage is 7.2 m long and leads into a wide courtyard measuring 30.5 x 25.5 m.

Flanking the entrance are two large square rooms (5.7 x 5.7 m) whose plans are mirror images of each other. The walls of these chambers have been preserved up to the height of 2.5 m, which made it possible to determine the nature of their roofing. Up to a height of 1.5–1.7 m from floor level, the walls are composed of massive slabs, set vertically. Above them begins the vaulted roof, made of small limestone slabs, dressed to resemble bricks. The chambers have arched niches in the wall and the squinches on which the cupola rested. The corner rooms are cross-shaped. They were also covered with cupolas but of a smaller size. The cupolas rested on the semi-domes of the bays in the corners of the rooms. Between the rooms attached to the façade wall were stairwells 1.2–1.3 m wide. The steps which have been preserved make it possible to calculate the probable height of the roof as 5.5–6 m (Astaf'ev 2010, p. 86; Kalmenov 2013, p. 52). Attached to the eastern wall is a storage room (or stable?) 3.6 m wide. Leading into it is a central passage (2.5 m), beyond which is a vestibule separated from the left and right wings of the chamber by arched doorways. The springers of the arches are 1 m wide and protrude from the wall 50 cm; the span of the arches was 2.8 m. Those side chambers in turn are divided into four parts by arched bays. The authors of the excavation report suggest that the room was covered with cupolas (Astaf'ev 2010, p. 86; Kalmenov 2013, p. 52). However, it seems to me that the given chamber might have had a vaulted roof on supporting arches. Several stone structures are located next to the Koskuduk caravanserai.

The next point along the given caravan route is the springs of Uchkan (Ushkan), lo-

cated beyond the edge of the Ustiurt Plateau 86 km from the Koskuduk caravanserai (Tolstov 1958, p. 16; Astaf'ev 2010, p. 88). In the opinion of Andrei E. Astaf'ev (2010, p. 88), there should be one intermediate caravanserai on that route, but to date it has not been located.

The next caravanserai, Tas-kichu (Taskeshu), is located on the Sagyz River at a man-made stone ford. The Khwarazm Expedition studied the building in 1950 (Tolstov 1958, pp. 14–15); in 2008–2010 the Atyrau Regional Center of History and Archaeology undertook partial excavations there and published the results in a very general way (Kol'tsov et al. 2010, pp. 25–33; Kol'tsov and Kol'tsova 2016, pp. 49–51). The building is constructed of fired brick that measures 30 x 30 x 5 cm. The thickness of the exterior walls is 1.25 m, the interior walls 0.95 m. Its plan is a square 55 m on a side [Fig. 16]. The corners are fortified with massive round towers. On the exterior in the middle of the western wall is the foundation of an attached semicircular tower. It appears that not only the corners but also the walls were fortified with towers constructed of trapezoidal-shaped bricks. The entrance to the building was on the southern side. In the center is a 30 x 30 m courtyard. The excavations uncovered 7 residence chambers along the western wall. The rooms are 3.7

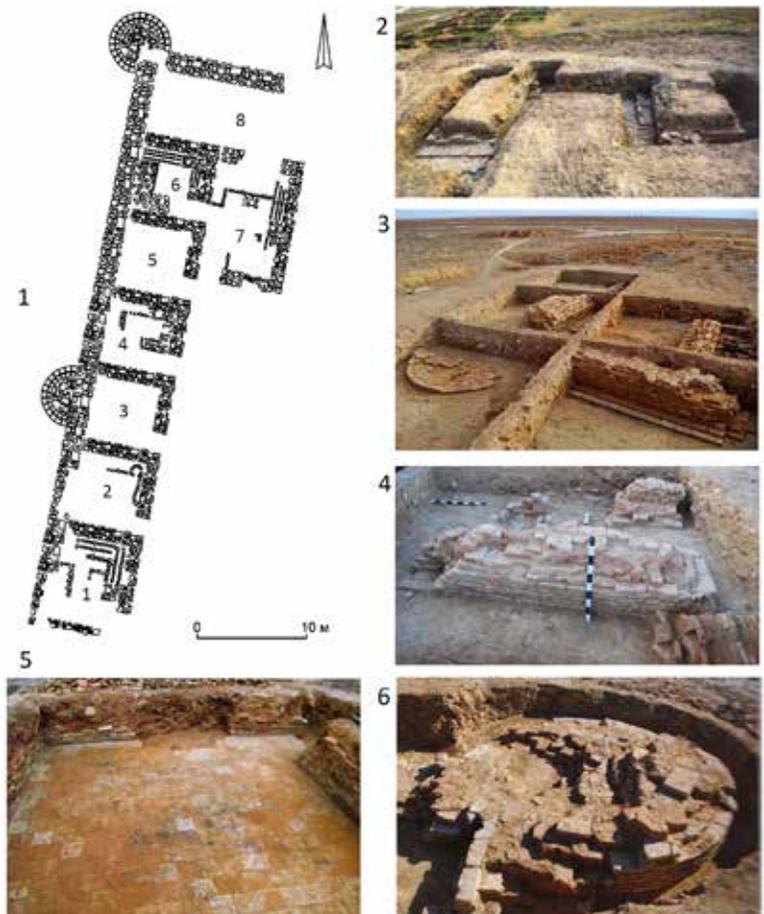


Fig. 16. Caravanserai Tas-kichu: 1) Plan; 2) Portal; 3) Excavation of bastion; 4) A residence room; 5) A floor; 6) Corner tower.

x 3.7 m squares, all of them opening out to the courtyard. In these living quarters are benches and stoves of varying configurations; in some of the benches are heating ducts. A long narrow chamber for work-related activity was attached to the northern wall. Thus, in spite of the fact that the caravanserai Taskeshu has been excavated only partially, one can be confident that it had the same plan as all the analogous structures on the Ustiurt caravan route. The building is securely dated by ceramic and numismatic material (coins of the 1330s–1390s were found).

Thus, the survey of the caravanserais of the Ustiurt route so far studied provides evidence that they all have a single type of plan (see Table 1 for a statistical summary). These are single-courtyard structures, square or nearly square in shape, with a single entrance. Along all four walls is a single sectioned row of chambers. Beleuli alone had two rows of structures along the northwestern wall, but in my opinion that is the result of a later addition. The caravanserai Koskuduk is distinguished by the presence of four large, probably communal chambers roofed with cupolas which were attached to the front wall. Otherwise there is minimal difference. Some of the buildings were constructed of stone (Uchkuduk, Beleuli, Churuk, Koptam, Koskuduk), the rest of brick (Azhi-gel'dy, Kosbulak, Kushe, Taskeshu). They differ in the number of towers: Uchkuduk, Azhi-gel'dy and Kosbulak have towers only along the main façade; at Churuk and Bel'deuli, there are towers fortifying all four corners; and at Beleuli, Koskuduk and Taskeshu there are semi-towers in the center of the lateral walls and (at Koskuduk) in the rear. Thus, one can certainly agree with Sergei P. Tolstov, who considered that these structures were built at the same time as a single complex (Tolstov 1958, p. 19).

The (eastern) caravan route just described was not the only one on the Ustiurt in the Golden Horde period. The western route, leading from Urgench to the Mangyshlak Peninsula, had been known at least since the Khazar period. It also had caravanserais, but all the structures that are known date to the pre-Mongol

period (Astaf'ev 2010, pp. 56-60, 132–40). One should note that this route has been less well studied.

Caravans went on to the Volga region from Saraichik. Ibn Battuta covered that route in 10 days (Ibn Battuta/Gibb 1958-2000, 3, p. 539; Tizengauzen 1884, pp. 307–08); according to Pegolotti and the Anonymous Tuscan, the route from Sarai to Saraichik took 8 days by land and water (Fedorov-Davydov 2001, p. 214). However, on this stretch to date no remains of caravanserais have been located. Surprisingly not a single such rest house is known either on the Lower Volga or in the towns or in their surrounding areas, although undoubtedly such existed there. The explanation for this can be the still insufficient research concerning all the monuments of the Golden Horde along the Lower Volga. The density of Golden Horde remains along the shores of the Volga and Akhtuba in that region is very large. All of them seem to be settlements of larger or smaller dimensions, but the specific purpose of such settlements so far has not been established. It is entirely possible that among them are to be found suburban caravanserais.

To date no caravanserais have been found on the Don, Kuban or Kuma rivers. Most likely this is to be explained by the still insufficient study of Golden Horde monuments in those regions. However, contemporaries frequently noted the security of the roads in the Golden Horde, as we have noted in citing Pegolotti. Ibn Arabshah also wrote: "There used to advance convoys of travellers from Khwarizm making the journey in wagons, securely without terror or fear, as far as the Crimea—a journey of about three months" (Ibn Arabshah/Sanders 1936, p. 77; Tizengauzen 1884, p. 460). Thus one can propose that rest facilities in the Golden Horde would not necessarily have had the appearance of forts as was the case in Iran, Central Asia, Armenia and Anatolia. Caravanserais could consist of several small houses with chambers for pack animals and goods, and in the steppe, they could simply be yurts.

On the western end of the caravan route, in the Crimea, only one building is known which tradi-

Table 1. Comparative Features of the Caravanserais on the Ustiurt Caravan Route

Caravanserai	Measurements	Wall material	Wall thickness	Number of towers	Tower diameter	Measurement of courtyard	Number of living and utility rooms	Number of storage rooms
Uchkuduk	31.7 x 28.45 m	stone	0.75-0.85 m	2	1,85 m	18.0 x 21.3 m	16	1
Ajigel'dy (Bulak)	29.3 x 24.3 m	brick	0.65-0.9 m	2	1,05 m	19.3 x 15.3 m	16	1
Kosbulak	39.0 x 33.5 m	brick	2.8-3.8 m	2	6,4 m	18.6 x 27.1 m	14	1
Beleuli	35.3 x 29.0 m	stone	1.0-1.2 m	6	3,2 m	19.2 x 17.8 m	16	3
Churuk	31.7 x 29.55 m	stone	1.1 m	4	2.7-2.8 m	24.8 x 19.0 m	12	1
Bel'deuli (Koptam)	27.0 x 24.0 m	stone	1.0-1.2 m	4	2.0 m	13.7 x 14.9 m	16	1
Koskuduk	41.6 x 40.8 m	stone	1.2-1.5 m	7	3.3-4.0 m	30.5 x 25.5 m	18	1
Tas-kichu	55 x 55 m	brick	1.25 m	6 (?)	4.0 m	30 x 30 m	17	1

tionally has been considered a caravanserai from the Golden Horde period. The structure is on the southern edge of Solkhat. Vasilii D. Smirnov (1886, pp. 273–302) was the first to advance this idea. He proposed that the ruins of a huge structure, which the local population called the “Han-Serai” was the remains of a posthouse or *han*. Indirect confirmation of this was its location not far from a village named “Tamgadzi”, i.e., “customs house”. It is possible that this is the only *han* which Evlia Chelebi encountered in “Eski Kyrym” (Evlia Chelebi 2008, p. 118).

In 1925, Il’ia N. Borozdin undertook some excavation there, which provided what is to date the most complete description of this site (1926, pp. 287–92). The building has a pentagonal shape (a rectangle with one corner cut off) [Fig. 17]. Its walls are made of badly worked local limestone set in lime mortar, with wooden frames inserted for greater stability of the masonry and proper alignment of the various parts of the building. In their upper parts can be seen hollowed out areas into which the ends of wooden beams had been inserted to support the roof of the first-floor chambers. In Borozdin’s opinion, the chambers along

the walls might have been two-story; in which case the beams served as the underpinning for the floors of the second-level rooms. At the corners of the monumental walls were tower-like appendages. The overall area of the building was about 2500 m<sup>2</sup>. The structures found in two excavated trenches suggested that the courtyard was paved with slabs, and along the perimeter of the walls was a colonnaded gallery (foundations for the bases of columns were found). A water channel which lay below the pavement possibly led to a fountain in the middle of the courtyard. Smirnov, citing the evidence from the old inhabitants of the area, located the gate in the southwestern corner of the building. He believed that it had been decorated with carved doorjambs. Indirect evidence that the entrance could have been framed by a richly decorated portal was the discovery not far from the site of a huge “one sazhen or more, stone entirely inscribed by carving” (Smirnov 1886, p. 283). Later descriptions of this site (Iakobson 1964, p. 106; Kirilko 2013, pp. 92–93) contain no new information.

Thus, even though the Golden Horde was a great medieval trading power, such an important element of international and domestic trade as rest houses or caravanserais is only minimally in evidence across its large territory. One can speak only of the structures on the Ustiurt caravan route, which are connected with the Central Asian (Khwarazmian) architectural school. As far as the other regions of the Ulus Jöchi are concerned, locating caravanserais in them and studying this type of building is one of the important future tasks of Golden Horde archaeology.

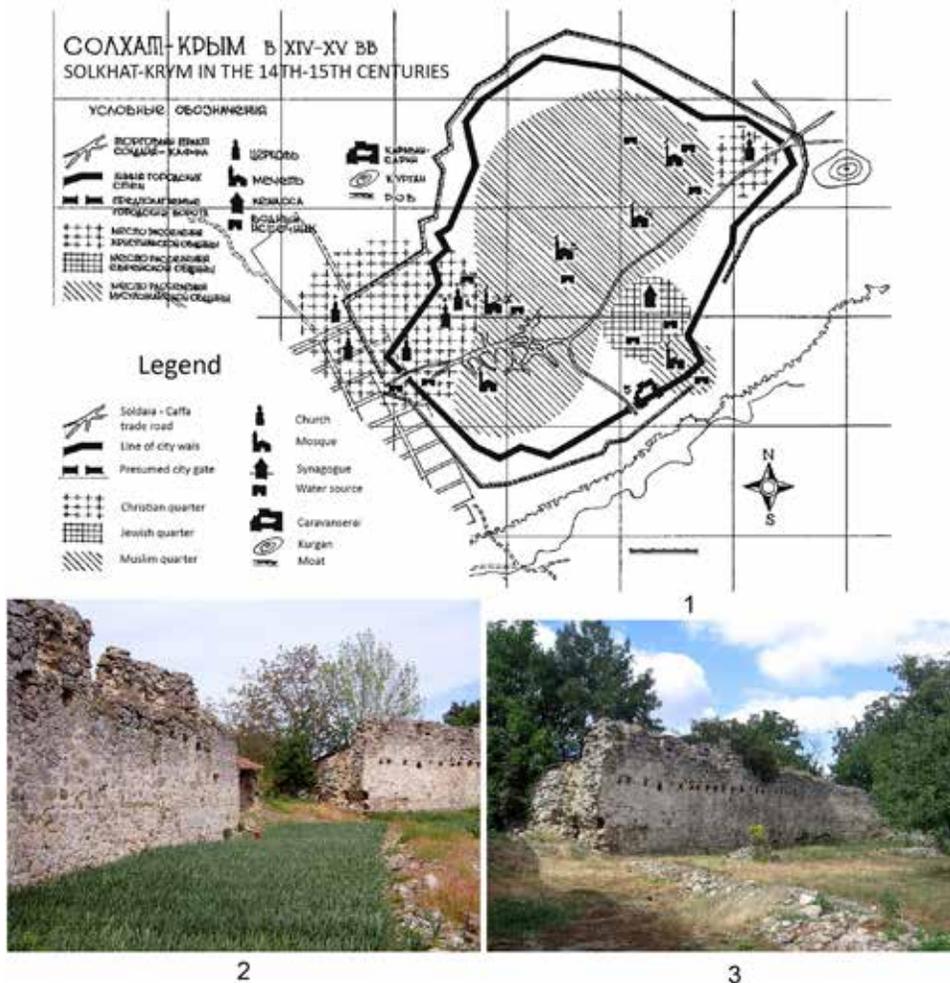


Fig. 17. The caravanserai in Solkhat:  
1) Plan of Solkhat (after M. G. Kramarovsii);  
2-3) Walls of the structure.

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### List of abbreviations

IGGO *Izvestiia gosudarstvennogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*

KhAEE *Khorezmskaia arkheologicheskaiia i etnograficheskaiia ekspeditsiia*

VKF *Vestnik Karakalpakskogo filiala AN UzSSR*

ZRGO *Zapiski Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*

ZVOIRAO *Zapadno-Vostochnoe otdelenie Istoricheskogo Rossiiskogo Arkheologicheskogo obshchestva*, Vol. 1, vyp. IV. 1887.

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