

BANGANARTI

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION OF THE SITE IN 2007

Bogdan T. Żurawski

In 2007, the season lasted from January 5 to February 25. The archaeological part of the program included testing of the structures of the Lower Church at Baganarti (eight trial pits uncovering more murals) and large-scale excavation of the outer fortifications aimed at a general reconstruction of the layout and chronology in relation to the churches and other structures intra muros. This was coupled with air photography of the outer fortifications and the site surroundings. Newly excavated parts of the curtain wall were surveyed topographically. The topographer also took time to prepare a contour map, which includes the Nile paleochannel [Fig. 1].

The conservation effort was centered on taking down the murals of the 'Anastasis' and 'St. Sisinnios trampling a female demon' from the Lower Church and general conservation of the plastered walls, both inside and outside the church (see below, Appendix B). Modern roofing over the western part of the church complex was introduced to protect murals and graffiti recorded in the previous season. Work also proceeded on preparing the building of the Raphaelion for covering with a 1:1 replica of the vaulting (central dome included) constructed of iron piping. This framework model (designed by architect P. Malec in 2004) will be installed over the actual roof made of corrugated steel sheets riveted to a welded iron frame.

In addition to the regular work, the team excavated a probe on the central kom at Selib, a site nine kilometers upriver from Baganarti, and undertook salvage excavations of a post-Meroitic tumulus found by local clay diggers in Tanqasi village.

- 1 The mission was headed by Dr. Bogdan T. Żurawski, archaeologist, and comprised: Dr. Tomasz Stępnik; Mariusz Drzewiecki, Magdalena Woźniak, Elżbieta Szewczyk (pottery documentation), archaeologists; Anna Błaszczuk, archaeologist-documentalist; Dr. Magdalena Łaptaś, iconologist; Dorota Moryto-Naumiuk, Lucyna Piekacz, conservators. After completing their work with the mission at Shemkhiya, the team from the Fourth Cataract: Roman Łopaciuk, topographer; Anastazja Stupko, archaeologist-documentalist; Magdalena Włodarska, Alicja Płaskowska, archaeologists, joined the mission. The National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums was represented by El Montser Dafaala Mohammed Elamin, conservator.

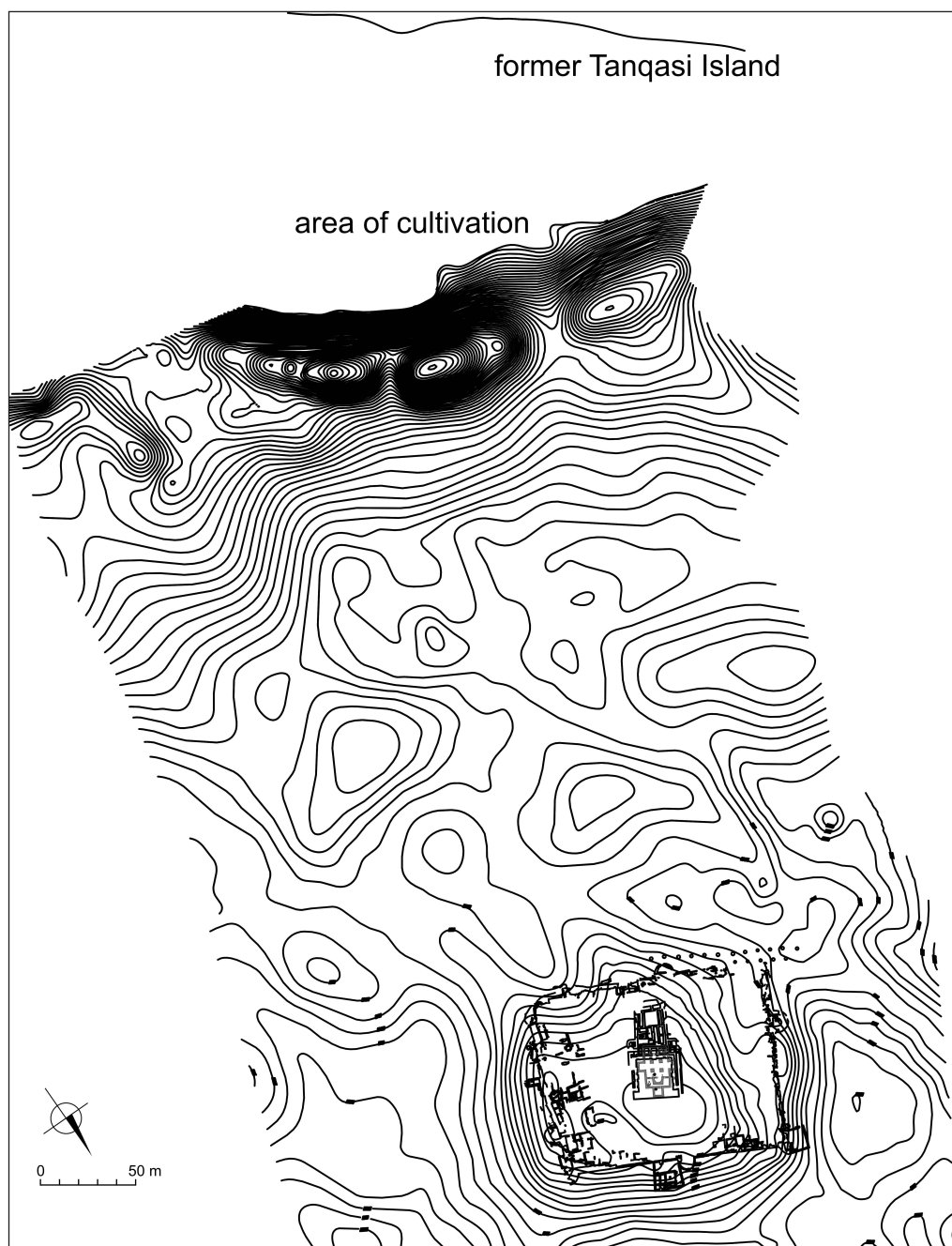


Fig. 1. Geodesic plan of the archaeological site of Banganarti and the region between the site and the Nile by the former island of Tanqasi; plan of the fortifications and sacral complex at Banganarti (site 1) after fieldwork in 2007 (Mapping R. Łopaciuk)

EXCAVATION OF THE CURTAIN WALL AND
STRUCTURES INSIDE THE WALLS

Investigation of the curtain wall² was topmost on the agenda and included some of the structures found *intra muros*, abutting the inside face of the defenses. In the southern part (Sector S) there was a round structure of mud brick, which the builders of the defense wall apparently had to bypass. To the west of it, explorations covered a series of kitchen, domestic and habitational units

built alongside the enclosure wall [Fig. 2].

Excavations concentrated on the southwestern corner of the curtain wall (for details, see below, contribution by M. Drzewiecki in this volume), which could not be traced on previously made aerial photos of the site, nor did it appear in surface brushing of the area and in the shallow trenches. Considering the known extent of



Fig. 2. Aerial (kite) photo of the site after the end of excavations in 2007 (north is as in Fig. 1)
(Photo B. Żurawski)

2 Supervised by Mariusz Drzewiecki and Magdalena Woźniak.

the damages, it is only natural that the former village of Sinada which had existed on the flat bank of the Nile to the south and southwest of the Baganarti enclosure, must have mined mud brick and silt from this particular area. In some parts of the fortifications, the wall was plundered right down to the foundations, sometimes even 5 m below the ground surface.³

Excavations revealed the earliest fortifications, which were repeatedly enlarged and reinforced, but no tower, similarly as in the case of the northwestern corner of the fortifications (see Żurawski 2009; Drzewiecki 2009). The western stretch of the curtain wall is also thinner, reinforced in the center with a semicircular tower that should be linked rather with the later set of fortifications protecting the Upper Church (Raphaelion). It seems thus that this side of the complex was less endangered. Even so the walls of the earliest, roughly rectangular fort reached 4.50 m in thickness. They are

dated to the 6th/7th century, contemporary with the building of the Lower Church.

Clearing work along the northern curtain wall uncovered two new towers, one in the northeastern corner and another one, a gate, in the western section of the wall. Exploration of the tower gate revealed the earliest defensive architecture built partly of red brick. The doubled wall (after rebuilding) of the tower gate revealed rectangular sockets that may have housed a trebuchet, which the Nubians first saw during the raid of Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh in the middle of the 7th century (Vantini 1975: 639). The device could have been used as protection for the flanks of the northern wall. A similar installation was documented in the oldest wall of the Dar el-Arab fort on the Fourth Nile Cataract. A late example of the use of a trebuchet in Sudan was evidenced in the 17th century *Seyahatname* [Books of Travel] by Evliya Çelebi (fort of Sese [modern Sesebi?], cf. Prokosch 1994, 124–125).

TESTING IN THE LOWER CHURCH

Eight test pits were dug,⁴ some of them continued from the previous season [*Fig. 3*]. The datum point for all the trenches was the threshold in the southern entrance to the Upper Church (Raphaelion).

TEST PITS 1 AND 7

The test pits were located on the axis of the southern entrance to the Upper Church, test pit 1 next to the southwestern pillar of the Raphaelion, west of the trench with the *Anastasis* mural, test pit 7 in the entrance against the inner face.

The footing of the foundation of the lower church was recorded in the first of the pits, as well as layers of fill, the western face and wall pilaster of the Lower Church and floor level connected with the earliest phase of the basilical church accumulation layer. The most important discovery, however, is a wall, which turned out to constitute the foundation on which a wall of the Lower Church and the said floor was erected. This wall was approximately 0.20 m wider than the wall of the basilical church and it was not interconnected, demonstrating clearly that it

3 Modern Chinese enameled bowls used to dig Nile silt and *maroq* were found in robbers' pits even 1.20 m below the ground surface.

4 Supervised by Dr. Tomasz Stepnik with assistance from Magdalena Łaptaś and Magdalena Woźniak.

belongs to the earliest phase of the Lower Church, one which had so far not been recorded archaeologically. The bottom of the foundation of this oldest wall is consistent with measurements taken in the other trenches, that is, 4.35 m below the datum point. In test pit 7, the depth of the oldest remains was only 3.60 m, but nothing of any structural importance was discovered.

TEST PIT 2

Situated in the eastern part of the church. Apart from documenting the explored tomb, the pit was meant to uncover the bottom of the foundation of the basilical phase of the Lower Church. This level was recorded at approximately 4.40 m below the provisional datum point. The remains of a niche for mounting a funerary stela were noted in the eastern face of the west wall [Fig. 4].

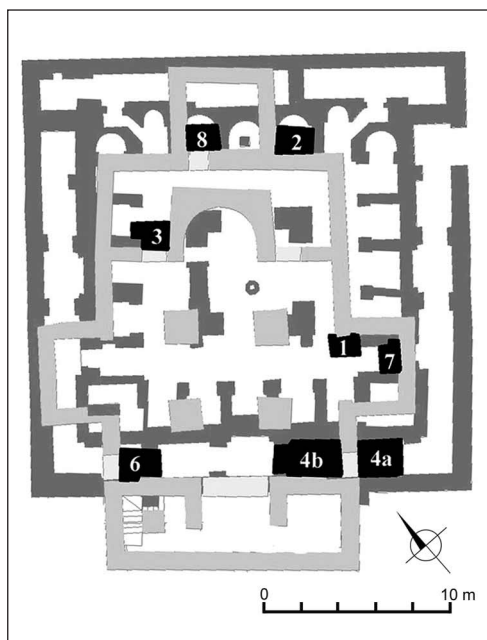


Fig. 3. Plan of the Upper and Lower Churches with the localization of the trenches excavated in 2007

TEST PIT 3

The ceramic floor of the Lower Church was discovered in the test pit situated in the northern part of the church. There were two clay pipes sunk into the floor. A blocked entrance to the northern sacristy was

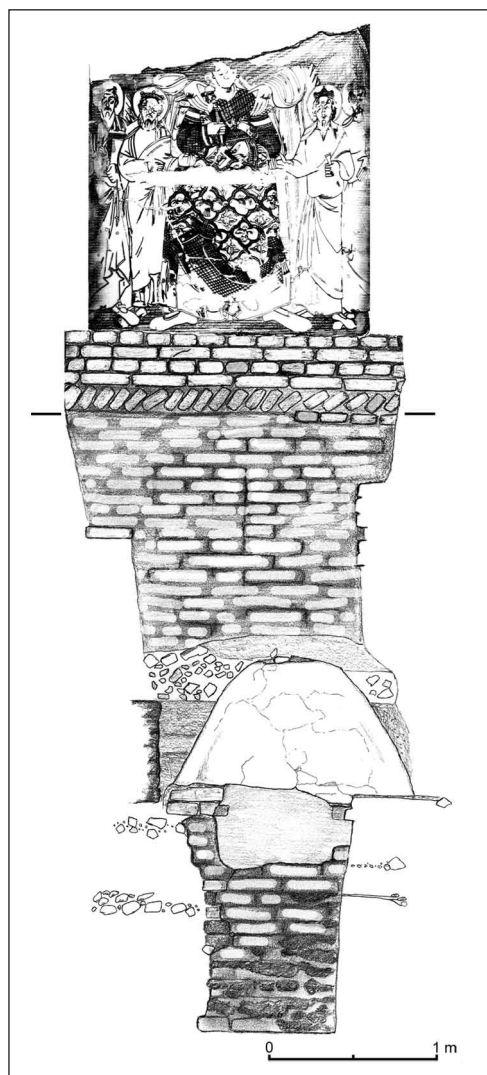


Fig. 4. Test pit 2. East wall of the eastern mastaba tomb with superposed east wall of Chapel 3 of the Upper Church (Drawing T. Stępnik and A. Błaszczuk)

recorded, as well as the eastern section with accumulations inside the Lower Church and the foundation footing of the Upper Church [Fig. 5]. The bottom of the foundation of the Lower Church was hit at approximately 4.40 m below the datum point.

TEST PIT 4

The test pit was enlarged when traces of murals were noted on the eastern face of the west wall. Test pit 4a covered a 2.50 m section of the wall in front of the entrance to the Lower Church. The blocked southern entrance to the Lower Church was discovered [Fig. 6], as well as two levels of brick and stone-and-brick pavement. The upper floor was connected probably with an

early phase of the Upper Church from before the construction of the West Portico (0.50 m below the top of the portico foundation (relics of a drainage(?) channel destroyed by the foundation of the said portico, were discovered in the southern part). Its bottom stood on a layer of mud bricks and the channel was covered with stone slabs.

Below this floor there was a mud-brick buttress which did not close off the entrance. The buttress seems to have been erected during the functioning of the Lower Church, presumably to reinforce an unstable outer wall of the Lower Church.

The stone-and-brick pavement was recorded on the level of the entrance to the Lower Church. The sandstone slabs were

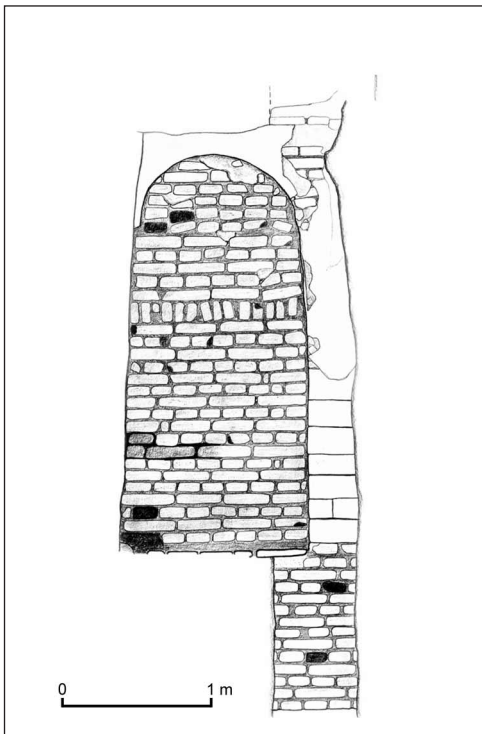


Fig. 5. Test pit 3. View of the blocked entrance to the northern sacristy (Drawing T. Stępnik and A. Błaszczuk)

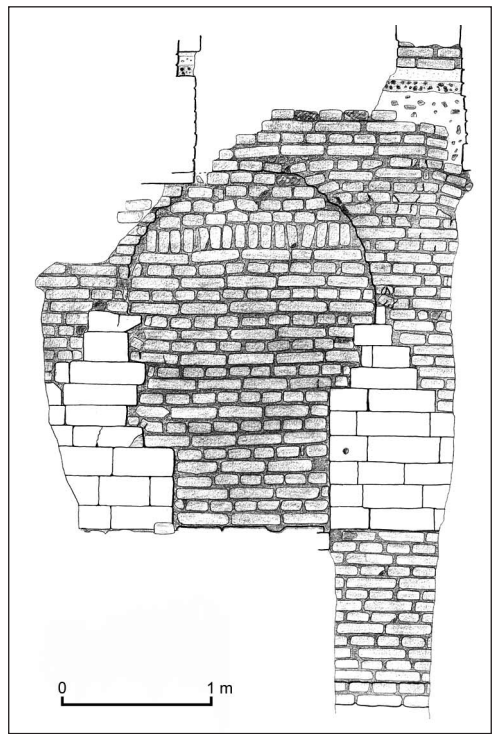


Fig. 6. Test pit 4a. View of the blocked southern entrance to the Lower Church (Drawing T. Stępnik and A. Błaszczuk)

from 4 to 12 cm thick and varied in size. On top of these slabs a floor of ceramic tiles was laid (tile dimensions 15/17 x 20/21 cm).

The foundation of the Upper Church was erected on top of the wall of the Lower Church. The load was such that the walls of the Lower Church subsided and cracked in the southern face of the wall. The bottom of the foundation of the Lower Church was reached at approximately 4.40 m below the datum point.

The other part of the enlarged trench, test pit 4b, was excavated on the other side of the blocked southern entrance to the Lower Church. Poorly preserved traces of a wall painting were uncovered on the eastern face of the west wall next to the doorway [Fig. 7].

TEST PITS 6 AND 8

The last two test pits constituted a continuation of previous work and concentrated on completing the documentation. The bottom of the foundation of the Lower Church in test pit 8 was recorded at approximately 4.50 m.

THE OLDEST PHASE OF THE LOWER CHURCH

The overall conclusion from the test trenches is that the bottom of the foundation of the oldest phase of the Lower Church is found approximately 4.40 m below the provisional datum point, the only exception being test pit 7, where it was recorded at only 3.60 m. In all cases, the culturally sterile layer underlying these remains consisted of yellow sand.

Relics of some pavements from the Lower Church were recorded (test pits 1, 2, 3, 4a). They were made of typical red brick, ceramic tiles (small in test pit 4a, big in test pit 3) or slabs of sandstone of different size and irregular shape.

The walls of this oldest phase show the same bondwork: course of stretchers and

course of headers, with sporadic deviation (test pit 8). The blocking of the entrances follows the same bond, although with less consistence; usually, there are one or two courses of stretchers on end. The blocking in test pit 8 (as in test pit 6) appears to have a rubble deposit in the central part, possibly suggesting two phases of blocking. The bricks used for the blocking come from dismantling; they are chipped and sometimes bear traces of plaster, including murals, and whitewashing.

The entrances to the church and all arched doorways inside the building were blocked in the 11th century, as was also the



Fig. 7. Orant, wall painting on the west wall in test pit 4b (Drawing L. Piekacz)

western part of the building with the staircase and southwestern room. The ruins were leveled to the walking level of the period which was already 3 m above the floors of the oldest phase. The fill inside the structure is two-layered: red brick rubble in the lower parts, containing an abundance of potsherds representing a limited repertoire of forms: mainly amphorae and big flasks, and mud containing some crushed red brick, mud

brick and lime particles, but little if any pottery, in the upper parts.

The purpose of these activities was to prepare a stable ground for the Raphaelion which was to be constructed on top of the older structure. Even so, there is plentiful evidence, from test pit 4, for example, for uneven subsidence of the upper building which resulted in the final collapse of the central part of the structure.

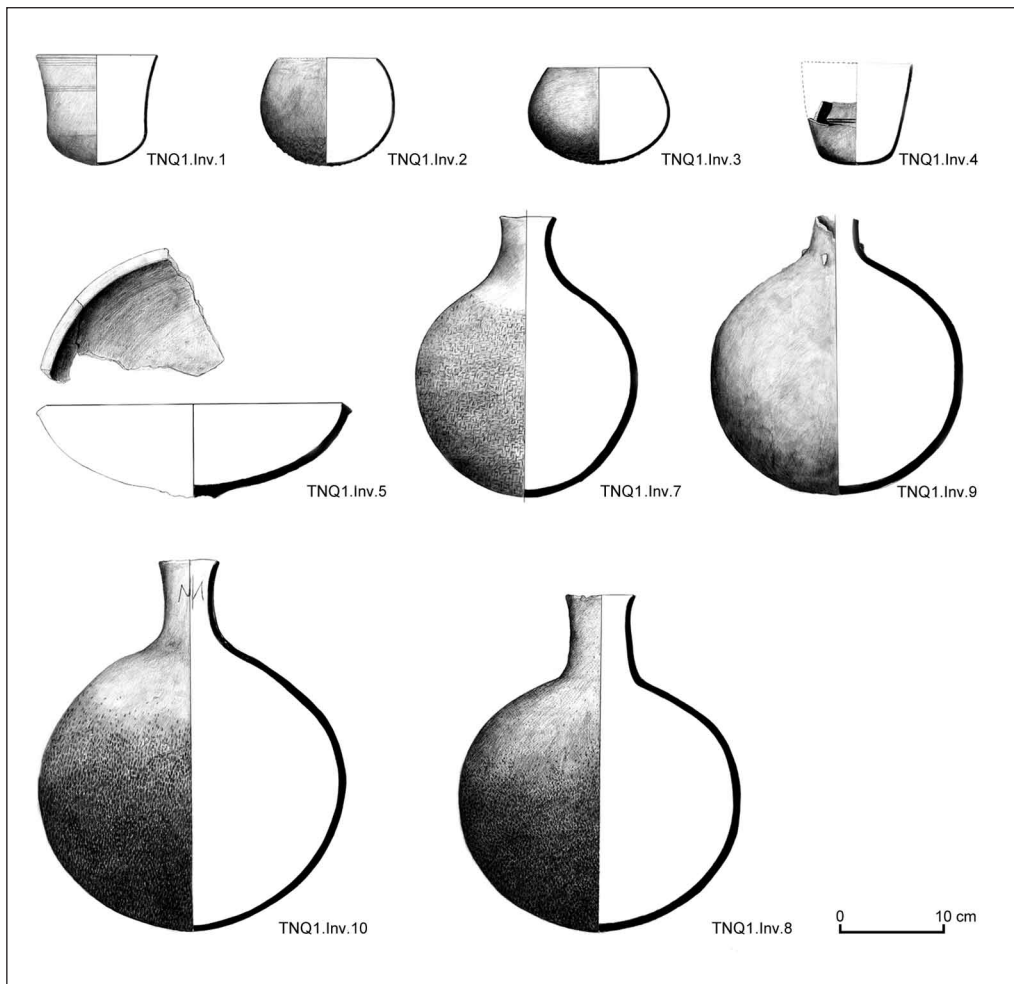


Fig. 8. Clay vessels from the burial chamber of tumulus TNQ1
(Drawing. A. Płaskowska)

EXPLORATION OF TUMULUS TNQ 1/07

An accidental discovery of the pottery furnishings from a post-Meroitic tumulus tomb in the village of Tanqasi, including eight complete bowls — four *qullal*, a cup and two bowls [*Fig. 8*] — necessitated salvage explorations (supervised by A. Pląskowska). There were no traces of a superstructure. The shaft and the burial chamber, which was 1.70 by 0.60 m, the two separated by a row of large stones, were excavated 0.80 m into a hard silty ground. A shallow cavity at the southern end contained the skeleton of a woman aged

about 40, inhumed in a contracted position (for anthropological examination of the skeleton, see below, Appendix 1). The body had been wrapped in a shroud tinted violet-brown; apparently owing to the humidity, the bones were discolored in effect. The presumed position of the body is with the head to the east. The chamber had been blocked with sandstone; some blocks were preserved *in situ*, one block even in the blocking, 0.40–0.50 m above the bottom of the chamber. The tomb was backfilled after completing the exploration.

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