

GIRDA QALA NORTH TRENCH D: STRATIGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURE

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The excavations of Trench D have been carried out during seventeen days, from the 8th to the 25th of October 2016. The team was composed of four members, Clélia Paladre, Rateb al Debs, Adel Hama Amin and Régis Vallet plus a team of four workers. The aim of these excavations was to obtain southern Uruk stratified contexts in order to achieve a better understanding of the Uruk presence in the Qara Dagħ area. We decided to open a trench of 10 x 5 m in the northern slope of the mound, oriented more or less north-west south-east. The emplacement of the trench was based on the results of the geomagnetic and archaeological surveys. Indeed, during the surface survey, we were able to observe a high concentration of southern Uruk material (ceramics -and animal bones) in the centre of the zone III (the richer zone of the prospection, cf. *supra*). This high concentration was associated on the geomagnetic plan with an imposing anomaly (Fig. 1). These excavations allowed us to recognize five successive levels of occupation, all of them dating back from the Middle Uruk period¹ (Fig. 2 and 3).



Fig. 1 - Plan of Girdi Qala North Mound with the location of the presumed Uruk site, Trench D and the results of the geomagnetic survey.

1. See the pottery study, Baldi, *infra*.

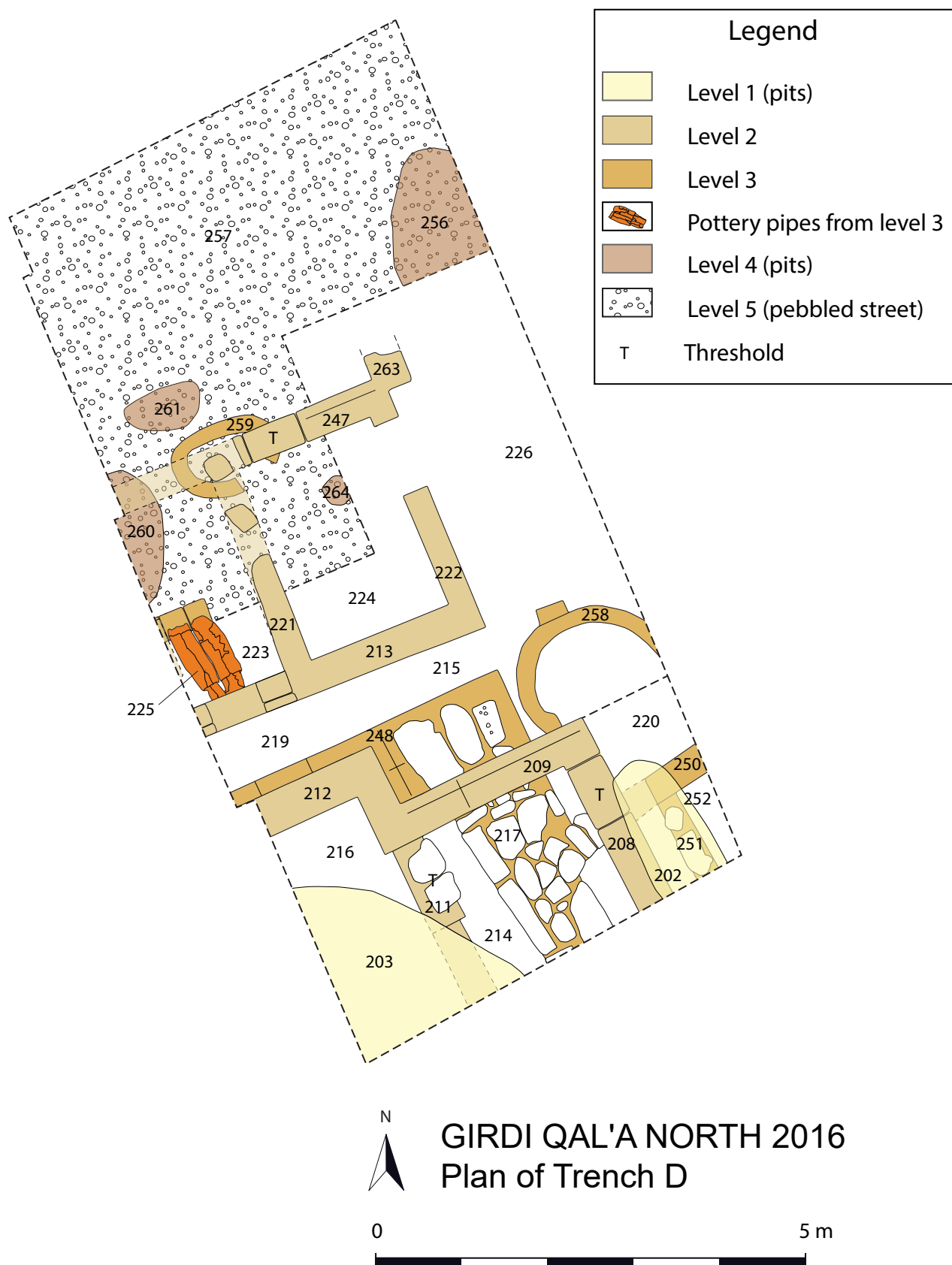


Fig. 2 - General plan of the Trench D.



Fig. 3 - Trench D, view from the North.

LEVEL 1

Two imposing pits (202 and 203) represent this earliest level. It was very close from the surface, thus heavily damaged by ploughing. It explains the amount of material observed there during the survey. Pit 202 is around 0.80 m width, its length is still unknown (it continues through the southern section of the trench). It is around 0.15 m deep, thus it is the bottom of a pit. 203 is a larger pit, sub-circular in shape, excavated on 2.20 m width and 2.80 m length. It was especially full of material (bones of animals and ceramics) and particularly of BRB's (153 fragments and 54 forms) (Fig. 4). At this day, the bottom of the pit is still unreached since the high quantity of material obliged us to postpone its excavation. It has to be noted that a thin white layer



Fig. 4 - Pit 203 with its complete ceramics.

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was visible in the southern section of the trench (Fig. 5), maybe the original floor of the pits. However, it was impossible to catch it in plan. Both of these pits have disturbed the deeper levels (level 2 and 3).



Fig. 5 - South section of Trench D, detail.

LEVEL 2

Level 2 is represented by two buildings, probably tripartite (at least for the southern one) in plan, and likely with residential functions. The first building is located at the top of the trench whereas the other one is located to the north, lower in the slope.

Building 1 is oriented north-south (according to the orientation of the main room). Only a part of a lateral vestibule (214) and a small part of a (probable) central hall (216) are present in the trench. The main mudbrick walls of this building (208, 209, 211 and 212) are 0.45m wide, with one brick and a half side by side (only the width of the bricks could be identified, 0.28 m, and the half bricks about 0.14 m wide). Wall 212 is oriented east west and shows a coat of around 0.14 m on its north face, a façade of the building. It is built on wall 248 from level 3 which is much wider (Fig. 6). Wall 211 is oriented north-south and is cut by pit 203 from level 1. Two stones of medi-



Fig. 6 - Superposition of walls 212 (level 2) and 248 (level 3).

um calibre, possibly reused from level 3, were forming a probable threshold (0.80 m wide, Fig. 7) which slipped into the vestibule 214. Wall 209 is oriented east-west and is partly built on wall 217 of level 3, which explains why it has stairs-like foundations. Thus, we can see three “stairs” of one brick each. Wall 208 is oriented north-south and shows a mudbricks threshold of 0.75 m width, with



Fig. 7 -General view of the southern building of level 2).

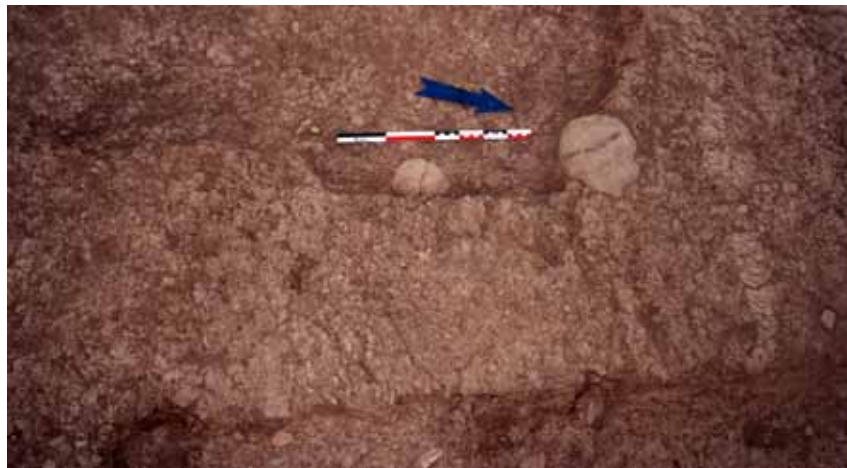


Fig. 8 - Threshold of the wall 208.

two side projections slightly rounded (Fig. 8). As wall 209, wall 208 displays stairs-like foundations of three “stairs” of one brick each, because it is built partly on wall 250 of level 3 and partly on the slope. Thus, the foundations are deeper to the north but also on its west face. A foundation trench was visible along the east face of the wall. This trench partly cut wall 250 of level 3. Two internal (228/229 and 235) and one external floors (262, in the external space 220, east of the building) were associated with this building. Floor 229/228 was located in the lateral vestibule 214 and yielded a terra cotta spindle whorl (Fig. 9), whereas floor 235 was located in the central hall 216. Both were easily identifiable by their grey colour and white inclusions. It rested on a layer of sterile brown sediment that probably corresponds to a backfill.

The second building, located lower in the slope, to the north, is probably oriented east west according to the remains of its main room, poorly preserved. The mudbrick walls (213, 221, 222, 247 and 263) are wide of one brick and a half, around 0.45 m (the bricks were about 0.35 x 0.28 m, and the half ones about 0.14 m wide). It composed three rooms. The eastern one is a

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Fig. 9 - Spindle whorl from the floor 228 (GDQ Tc 1215.1)

vestibule (224) of about 2.5 x 1.8 m, provided with an access in its east wall 222 (without threshold), of 0.9 m width. The western room (223) is very fragmentary and only partly excavated. Finally, the northern room is larger and slightly projecting to the east, but almost nothing remains of it because of the erosion. Wall 213 is oriented east-west and shows a coat of 0.05 m. As walls 208 and 209, it is built with stairs-like foundations of three “stairs” of one brick each. In its west part, it recovered the terra cotta pipes of level 3 (225, Fig. 10), which were interlocked into the wall and cut in the alley between the two buildings of level 2. The building rested on a mortar layer (grey with white inclusions). Walls 221 and 222 are oriented north-south. Wall 221 is heavily damaged in its north part. Wall 247 is oriented east-west and presents a threshold of 0.65 m width, allowing access to the main room from the vestibule 224. In its west part, its traces were visible until the west section of the Trench D. In its east part, we were able to follow it until wall 263, a row of mudbrick slightly recessing beyond wall 222, and corresponding to the east facade of the building (Fig. 11). We identified a possible additional thin east-west wall, whose trace was visible in the west section of the trench, which could have partitioned room



Fig. 10 - Pipes 225 (level 3) at the base of wall 213 (level 2) .



Fig. 11 - Vestibule 224, view from the east

223 (a staircase?). Two floors were associated with this building, one (245/246) in room 224 (Fig. 12) and one external (236) in the space 226 to the east, which displayed a considerable amount of material *in situ* (Fig. 13).



Fig. 12 - Floor 245-246 in the vestibule 224.



Fig. 13 - Floor 236 in the external space 226

In the alley between these two buildings, several floors were identified, 234/237 to the west (219) and 232/233 to the east (215), that yielded a spindle whorl (Fig. 14). The alley 215/219 along with the spaces 220 and 226 composed the outdoor activities areas of the two residential buildings. This observation is corroborated by the presence of *in situ* material and by the reutilisation of a level 3 stone slab (of wall 217) as a millstone



Fig. 14 - Spindle whorl from floor 232 (GQD Tc 1210.1).



Fig. 15 - Floor 232-233 (in the external space 215) with circular knob associated with the millstone of 217

during the level 2 phase. Many circular depressions were visible on the flat surface of this stone and several cylindrical knobs were lying on the connected floor 232-233 (Fig. 15). This reuse proves continuity in the occupation mode of the area, despite the levelling of level 3 and the changes in the nature of the constructions.

LEVEL 3

A large building showing two distinct architectural phases, level 3A (late) and 3B (early), attested only in the south part of the trench, represents level 3. It is an imposing and high quality building. Its first phase is represented, at this day, by only one mudbrick wall (248), two ovens, two terra cotta pipes (the oldest known of this type) and its associated floors. The later phase is represented by additional walls in the south part of the Trench.

Phase 3B :

Wall 248 is oriented east-west. Its size is unknown since the level 2 installations (left in place) are partly sealing it, but it seems imposing with a width of at least 0.90 m. Its face presents to the east an opening (filled by the level 2 masonry) in order to pass the pipes 225 (Fig. 16). The stone foundations of wall 217 were laid upon its east part since it was present during phases



Fig. 16 - Pipes 225, aligned with the opening into wall 248.

3A and 3B. It was associated with kiln 258 (a mortar blockage between these two architectural elements was put in place during the 3B phase), a circular domestic kiln with a diameter of 2 m and walls of 0.20 m width. A small mudbricks platform was abutting the north face of the kiln. The filling of the chamber was full of shells that certainly served for the combustion. Three complete vessels were still on the kiln floor: a BRB and a jar with a small bowl upside down upon the jar opening (Fig. 17). The collapse of this kiln had created a steep slope recovered by level 3A (and then level 2) floors. Wall 248 and kiln 258 were associated, to the north, with the floor 253 in the external spaces 215 and 219.



Fig. 17 - Kiln 258

Farthest north, it is possible to identify another external domestic activities area. A small mudbrick kiln (259) which is more or less ovoid with a size of 1.30 m length and 0.80 m width represents it. Its walls are about 0.20 m width and only one bricklayer was preserved. Its opening is around 0.40 m wide. An long bone of animal was lying on the kiln floor (Fig. 18). It was associated with a series of burnt and ashy exter-



Fig. 18 - Kiln 259



Fig. 19 - Terra cotta bead from floor 242/243/244 (GQD Tc 1242.1).

nal floors (240, 242/ 243/ 244 and 249) which yielded a terra cotta bead (Fig. 19). All these installations prove the use of this zone as an external domestic activities area, as it still will be the case later. This series of external floors were also associated with the pipes 225 and thus with the original building. The pipes are made of terra cotta and oriented north-west south-east, following the slope. Each pipe is composed of two tubes. It was about 1.25 m length (2m from the wall 248). The south tubes have a size of about 0.20 m of diameter and 0.50 m length and were snap into the north one which have a size of about 0.30 m of diameter and 0.80 m length (Fig. 20). The north extremities of the tubes were broken



Fig. 20 - Pipes 225



Fig. 21 - Mudbricks platform at the north extremities of the pipes 225.

and lying on a small platform that reduced the slope. It was made of two mudbricks preserved on two layers (Fig. 21). This platform itself rested on the floor 249 associated with kiln 259. These pipes were used to discharge sewage water from the imposing building of level 3, as corroborated also by the presence at the pipes northern extremities of a thin layer of potsherds upon the floors, which helped the drainage system (Fig. 22). The south extremities of the pipes were disassembled (and not destroyed) near the south face of wall 213 from level 2. Thus, it was not present in the level 2 alley but the original opening devoted to pass the pipes



Fig. 22 - West section of Trench D showing the potsherds layer at the north extremities of the pipes .

was still visible into the masonry of wall 248 of level 3. We removed the pipes and noticed that they were lying on a thick mortar layer applied on the floor 240. A BRB fragment was found at its end (Fig. 23) and an animal bone was stuck into the north-west tube (Fig. 24).



Fig. 23 - Disassembly of the pipes 225.



Fig. 24 - Disassembly: animal bone in the north-east tube of the pipes 225.

Phase 3A

Four walls (217, 248, 250 and 251, Fig. 25-26) represent it. Wall 217, oriented north-west/south-east, is 1m wide in its north part and 0.80 m in its south part. It is made of imposing slabs (0.80 to 0.40 m in average) that constitutes the substructure of the wall. It was



Fig. 25 - Wall 217 (at the centre), beneath level 2, view from the west.



Fig. 26 - Walls 250 and 251 (at the forefront), view from the east.

partly lying on the wall 248 to the north. This last one was made of mudbricks and covered with a compact pinkish mortar layer full of gravels in order to install the slabs at its junction with wall 217. Further east, wall 250 is made of mudbricks lying on stone foundations. It is oriented east-west and has a size of about 0.50 m width. It is not bonded with the perpen-

dicular wall 251 to the south. Wall 251 oriented north-west south-east, is made of stones, mudbricks and mortar. It has a width of about 0.35 m. It is clearly not a supporting wall but maybe a (late?) low partitioning wall (Fig. 27). As wall 250, it was partly cut by the foundation trench of wall 208 from level 2.

In this entire sector, no internal floor associated with this building phase was discovered. It can be explain by the fact that the building was levelled by level 2 builders and thus we are here in a foundation level. However, 3A phase external floors were identified in the slope to the north, above the 3B phase floors previously described. First, in the external space 220 (north of 250), floors 230 and 231/238 were associated with walls 250 and with the corner of 217 and 248 (Fig. 28). It is clearly dating from level 3A since it sealed kiln 258 (floor 230 have been reused during the level 2 phase, as the stone slab of 217, cf *supra*). Second, further west, floors 227/239 were associated with wall 248 in the external spaces 215 and 219. Here again, these late floors have been reused during level 2.



Fig. 27 - Walls 250 and 251, detail



Fig. 28 - Floors 230 and 231/238 in the external space 220.

LEVEL 4

Level 4 yielded no architecture and was excavated only in the north part of the trench since the level 2 remains were left in place (except part of the north building). It is represented by a series of external floors preserved on 0.17 m of thickness (255) which were partly burned and ashy (that could imply the presence of nearby kilns) and that passed beneath level 3. In the centre of these floors, we can observe a high concentration of material including a grinding tools kit (Fig. 29) and a little sheep in terra cotta (Fig. 30). Three pits were identified (256,



Fig. 29 - Grinding tools kit from floors 255
(GQD P 1266.2)



Fig. 30 - Terra cotta sheep from floors 255
(GQD Tc 158.1) the east.

260 and 261) with little material and filled by the same thin brown sediment. Pit 256 is located in the south-east part of the trench partly in the east section. It has a size of 1.20 m length, 0.80 m width and 0.25 m deep. It cuts floor 257 of level 5 (Fig. 31). Pit 260 was located in the south-west part of the trench partly in the west section. It was around 0.80 m length, 0.40 m wide and 0.30 m deep. As pit 256, it



Fig. 31 - Pit 256 (level 4) which cut the street 257.

cuts 257. Finally, pit 261 was located in the middle south part of the trench and has a length of 1 m, 0.50 m width and 0.11 m deep. Thus, this level illustrates external domestic activities, a function that locally continues until level 2 at least

LEVEL 5

Level 5 was excavated in a limited area in the northernmost part of the trench. It yielded no architecture but was represented by a magnificent floor (257) covered of potsherds, stones (medium and small calibres) and bones (Fig. 32). This unexpected discovery can be interpreted as the surfacing of a street, conceived as such and showing the importance of the area. This



Fig. 32 - Street 257 (level 5).

floor was in an opposite dip compared to the natural slope of the mound, in the exact opposite way than all the other layers. Thus, the street was deeper near the south berm. Moreover, it has to be noted that just above 257, and thus under the soft floors from level 4, the sediment was compact, clayey and full of mudbricks, especially along the south berm (0.35 m of thickness). Therefore, we deal here with a destruction layer, which yielded three terra cotta cones (Fig. 33). All these facts suggest the presence of an imposing building hereafter the south berm, probably just beneath the building of level 3.



Fig. 33a - Terra cotta cones from level 5
GQD Tc 1203.1.



Fig. 33b - Terra cotta cones from level 5
GQD Tc 1203.2.



Fig. 33c - Terra cotta cones from level 5
GQD Tc 1241.1