Chalcolithic ceramics from Girdi Qala northern mound (survey and Trench D): typological features

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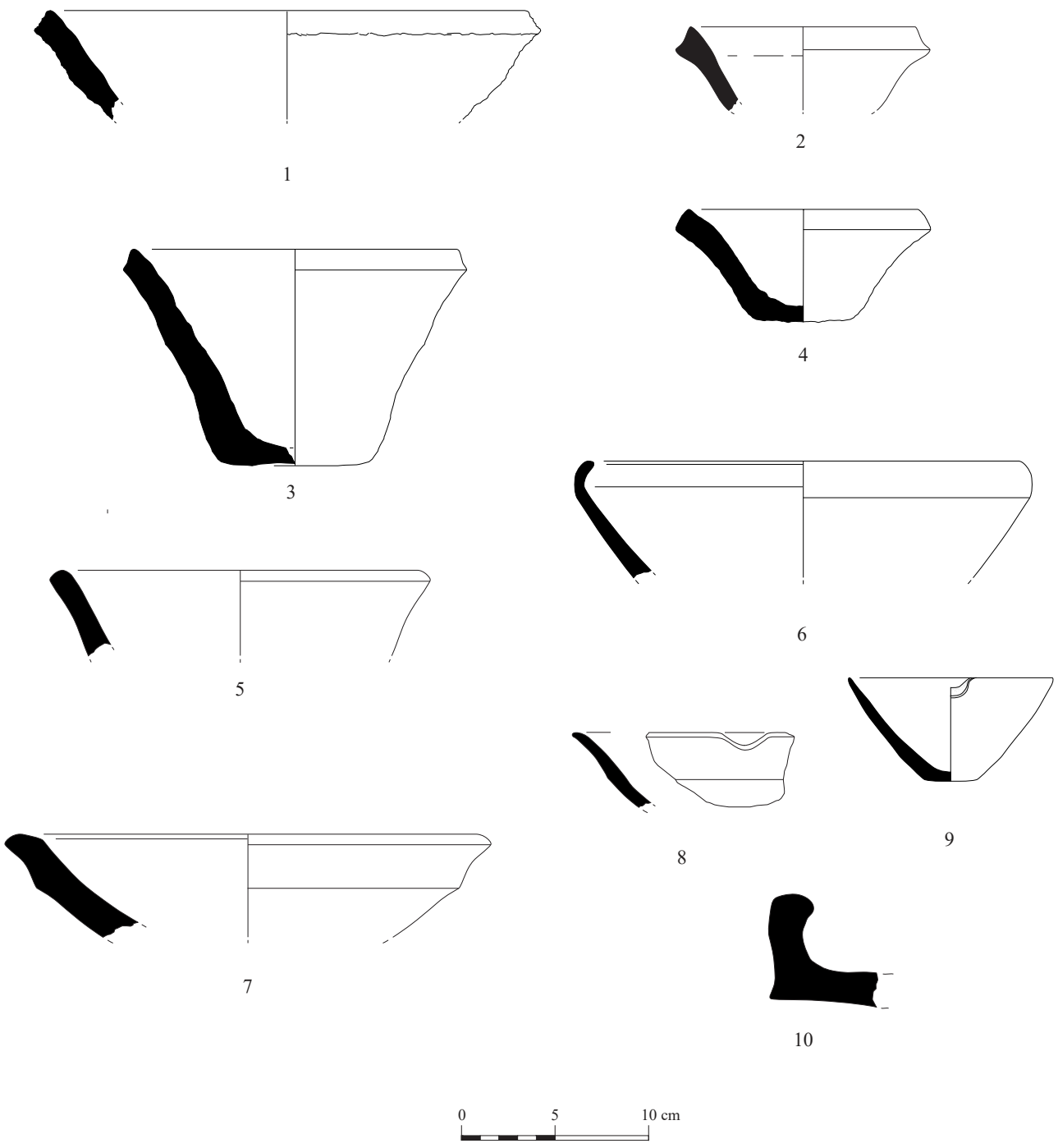
The excavations, carried-out from October 4th until the end of the campaign, were preceded by a survey. This preliminary investigation, based on a careful subdivision of the site in different zones according to the micro-topography of the northern mound, was aimed at recognizing the areas showing important concentrations of southern Uruk ceramics. These ones represent the majority of the surface materials in almost all the surveyed areas,[1] but some sectors have yielded non-negligible quantities of pottery dating back to other periods (see the survey in this volume).

In particular, several Islamic sherds have been noticed in Area I, while Sasanian fragments are present both in Areas V and VI. According with the results of the Trench B at Girdi Qala main mound, the existence of quite important occupations during these phases is not surprising at all. Moreover, the surface assemblage of the Areas V and VI is quite mixed, with a lot of Early and Late Bronze Age specimens[2]. Consequently, Areas III, IV, VII and VIII, whit their interesting features recorded by the geophysical survey, have appeared as the most promising zones as far as the Uruk phase. However, as already observed in the Trench C at Girdi Qala main mound, along with southern Mesopotamian materials, some local LC2 and LC3 chaff-faced ceramics are also attested. On the other hand, the presence of late Ubaid and LC1 sherds in the north-western sectors of the surveyed zone (Areas I, II, III and IV) represents a quite unexpected result. In addition to some generic black-on-buff samples with horizontal bands or wavy lines, some distinctive specimens with impressed crescent motifs and chevron incised decorations (Pl. II.8) show clear parallels with the Hamrin basin, the Erbil plain and the Mosul area.[3] Despite the little quantity of these sherds, their presence both in the surface collection and in several stratified contexts of the Trench D is quite constant. Therefore, it seems clear that some kind of late Ubaid-LC1 installation has existed at least in the north-western sectors of Girdi Qala northern mound.

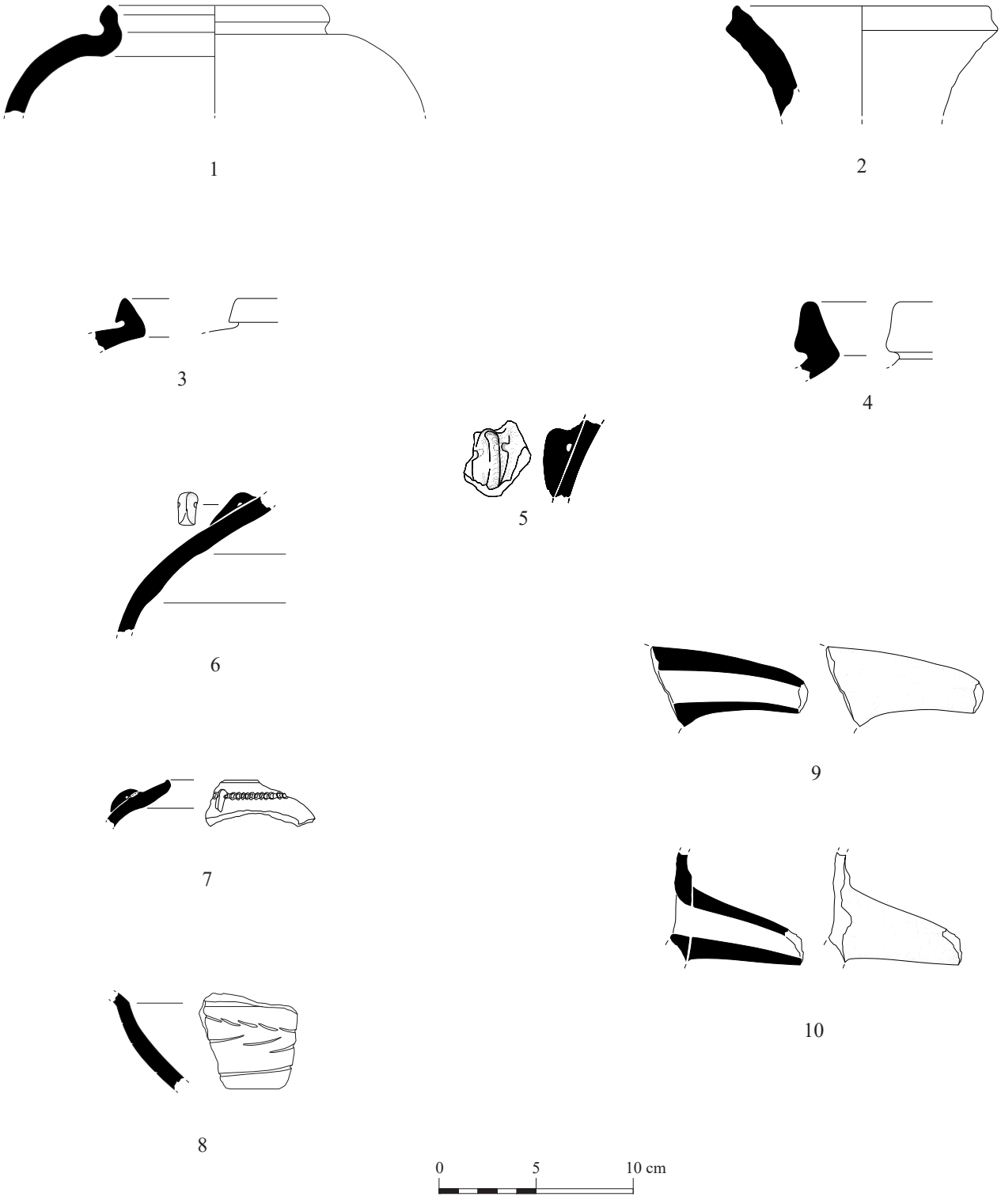
On the basis of these results, the choice of the location of the Trench D depends on the decision to look for southern Uruk stratified contexts, in order to achieve a better understanding of the Uruk presence in the Qara Dagh area. The 2015 campaign provided clear evidences for a very early Uruk presence at Girdi Qala main mound (with the large firing areas for pottery in the Trench C) and at Logardan (with the massive ramp to access the site).

1. An amount of 4395 sherds has been collected during the survey.
2. The quite important Late Bronze Age assemblage suggests a scattered occupation on both Areas V and VI. The most distinctive shapes are large- and medium-sized storage jars with rectangular rims and finger-impressed or incised appliqué cordons, but also knob bases and carinated bowls with flattened rims. This repertoire perfectly matches with the Late Bronze typologies of neighbouring regions, as documented at Yorgan Tepe (Starr 1937–39, pls. 63–68, 77, 95–96) or Gurga Chiya (Wengrow *et al.* 2016: fig .5).
3. See for instance at Tell Abada (Jasim 1985: fig. 214), Tell Abu Husaini (Chiocchetti 2007: fig. 2.d), Surezha (Stein and Alizadeh 2014: fig. 12) or Khirbet Hatara (Fiorina 2001).



1 : GQ 16 N III-1
2 : GQ 16 N III-6
3 : GQ 16 N 1201-3
4 : GQ 16 N 1200-2
5 : GQ 16 N III-3 GQ 16 N V-2
6 : GQ 16 N II-2
7 : GQ 16 N III-4
8 : GQ 16 N VII-2
9 : GQ 16 N 1201-1 GQ 16 N 1201-4
10 : GQ 16 N 1251-1

Plate I - Different shapes of Chalcolithic ceramics from Girdi Qala Trench D.



1 : GQ 16 N 1258-1
2 : GQ 16 N 1201-4
3 : GQ 16 N III-7
4 : GQ 16 N 1222-1
5 : GQ 16 N V-2
6 : GQ 16 N 1201-6
7 : GQ 16 N VII-2
8 : GQ 16 N II-2
9 : GQ 16 N 1262-1
10 : GQ 16 N 1201-9

Plate II - Different shapes of Chalcolithic ceramics from Girdi Qala Trench D.

Thus, the search for a residential area of the South-Mesopotamian settlers was amongst the main goals of the campaign 2016. Indeed, Uruk surface ceramics coming from Areas III, IV, VII, VIII – essentially medium-sized bowls, jars and cooking pots – belong to morpho-functional categories consistent with everyday activities carried-out on a domestic scale and have suggested the presence of living spaces.

No noticeable differences have been observed between the surface materials and the stratified ones. In the same way, the pottery collected in the Trench D at Girdi Qala northern mound is remarkably homogeneous and no typological, quantitative or qualitative differences have been observed between the levels identified during the excavations. Even in the pits of the more recent level – where the concentration of bevelled-rim bowls (BRBs) is slightly higher than in the other excavated contexts – the percentages of the diagnostic shapes does not diverge significantly from the average ratios. Therefore, the materials of the 2016 campaign must be considered as a unitary assemblage.

Amongst open shapes, the large majority of the specimens is represented by serially produced BRBs (Pl. I.1-5 – Fig. 1) whose diameter fluctuates between 12 and 24 cm. As main and ubiquitous hallmark of the Uruk assemblages, BRBs do not offer specific typological insights[4]. Their most compelling feature is rather linked to their dimensional variability, with three classes recognizable on the basis of the sizes: BRBs with diameters of 12-14 cm, 16-18 cm and 22-24 cm. On the one hand, no specimen seems to be aberrant with respect to this classification and, on the other, each of these dimensional groups is also homogeneous as regards the sizes of the bases (when they are conserved) and the thickness of the bodysherds. In other terms, three classes of BRBs show a remarkable standardization due to the modalities of the production (Roux 2003): a serial, repetitive (and probably recurrent) manufacture of batches of bowls having the same size and possibly intended to be used for the same function. Even if less abundant than BRBs, other open shapes are also well documented.

Fig. 1 - Middle Uruk BRB from Trench D at Girdi Qala .

4. The only noteworthy characteristic is that the rims of the BRBs from the northern mound of Girdi Qala (not only from Trench D, but also from the entire surface collection) are always sharply bevelled towards the exterior. In this sense, they match with the mature shape of these containers and are quite different than the Early Uruk proto-BRBs from Trench D at Logardan or from Levels 10-8 of Trench C at Girdi Qala (see Preliminary Report on the 2015 campaign).

Medium- and little-sized hemispherical bowls with plain rounded rims[5], carinated bowls (Pl. I.7)[6], in-turned rim bowls (Pl. I.6)[7] and V-shaped bowls with thinned rims[8] represent a consistent percentage (about 9%) of the assemblage from Trench D.

Fig. 2 - Middle Uruk pouring-lip bowl from Trench D at Girdi Qala.

Amongst the V-shaped ones, several samples with pouring lips (Pl. I. 8-9 – Fig. 2)[9] belong to a very distinctive Middle Uruk type. The same observation can be made about ovoid or rectangular shallow basins with thick walls and bases (Pl. I.10)[10]: these containers, used for cooking and presenting food, are a widespread hallmark of the Middle Uruk phase.

The whole range of the closed shapes constitute 36% of the assemblage from Trench D. The large majority of these materials is represented by medium-sized jars used as storage vessels in the domestic contexts exposed during the excavations.

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5. See Ahmad al-Hattu (Sürenhagen 1979: Abb. 10), Godin "late" VI (Badler 2002: fig. 7: N3 34 #26, B20 #251), Abu Salabikh 'Uruk *Mound*' (Pollock 1987: fig. 5: c, d), Nippur 'Inanna' XXXV (Hansen 1965: fig. 5), Sheikh Hassan 10 (Boese 1995: 41, Abb. 9: b, d; 42: Abb. 10: d; 85: Abb. 22: b), or Sheikh Hassan 7/6 (Bachmann 1998a: Abb. 7: n; Boese 1995: 50, Abb. 18: d).
6. See Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: fig. 28: 18), Sheikh Hassan 10 (Boese 1995: 85, Abb. 22: f, g), Abu Salabikh (Pollock 1987: fig. 5: f; 6: b), or Uruk/Warka "Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*' VI" (von Haller 1932: Taf. 19A: u').
7. See Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: 45; fig. 28: 10), Ahmed al-Hattu (McAdam and Mynors 1988: 45), Farukhabad (Wright 1981: fig. 41: e, f; fig. 46: i, j), Nineveh (Gut 1995: Taf. LVII.840), or Godin "early" V (Badler 2002: fig. 10: B17#132). In southern Mesopotamia, this same type is characterized by a more angular profile, as at Abu Salabikh "*West Mound*'" and "Uruk *Mound*'" (Postgate 1983: fig. 37-38; Pollock 1987: fig. 5: g, h).
8. See Sheikh Hassan (Boese 1995: 40, Abb. 8: f-k, 80, Abb. 17: d; 85, Abb. 22: a; Bachmann 1998a: Abb. 7: d-k), Uruk/Warka "Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*" VI (Sürenhagen 1986: T/20, Nr. S/32; von Haller 1932: Taf. 18C: y; 19B: g, h, i, q, o Taf. 19C: y'), Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: 44-45, fig. 28: 6, 11), Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound" (Pollock 1987: fig. 5: a, b; Pollock 1990: fig. 4: c), Nippur 'Inanna' XX-XVI (Hansen 1965: fig. 5), Susa "Acropole" I 18-17 (Le Brun 1978a: fig.: 19: 6; 1978b: 32: 7), Farukhabad (Wright 1981: fig: 40: e; 45: a, b, i, m), Hacınebi B2 (Stein and Mısır 1994: fig. 15, J-L; Pearce 2000: fig. 13: g).
9. See Sheikh Hassan (Boese 1995: 84 fig. 21; Bachmann 1998a: pl. 7.d-g), Hacinebi B2 (Stein 2001: fig. 8.6, J-L), el Kowm 2 (Cauvin and Stordeur 1985: fig. 6.2), Tell Brak TW 13 (Oates and Oates 1993: fig. 51.33-35), Susa "Acopole I" 18 (Le Brun 1978: fig. 32.7), Choga Mish Protoliterate (Alizadeh 2008: fig. 26.E).
10. See Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound" (Pollock 1990: fig. 5: I), Nippur "Inanna" XX-XVII (Hansen 1965: fig. 8), Uruk/Warka 'Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*' XI-VI (von Haller 1932: Taf. 18B: y; 19A: d' ; Sürenhagen 1986: Nr. T/99), Sheikh Hassan 10 (Boese 1995: 84, Abb. 21: f), Hacınebi B2 (Stein 2002: fig. 11: k), Godin "middle" and "late" VI (Badler 2002: fig. 7: B20 #252, P4 20 #4), Ahmad al-Hattu (Sürenhagen 1979: Abb. 10), Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: fig. 37: 140).

Some small samples with a diameter varying between 4 and 8 cm are characterized by the absence of the neck and rounded, thinned-pinched, or quite square flaring rims (Pl. II.1-2)[11]. But the most widespread jars belong to a medium-sized type with interior-angled rims. Actually, these neckless containers are typologically similar to the small jars, but their average dimensions are much bigger, with diameters varying between 18 and 26 cm. Their bevelled or rectangular section flaring rims display a sharp interior angle at the junction with the shoulder (Pl. II.3). These typically Uruk jars, often characterized by little pierced handles on the shoulder (Pl. II.5-7), are well documented over the whole Meso potamian alluvium, but also in south-western Iran and southern Anatolia[12]. Some other typically Uruk samples of interior-angled jars have rims with a triangular section and a sinuous or vertical exterior profile (Pl. II.4)[13]. Short necked jars are less frequent, but as much as distinctive of the Middle Uruk phase as the other categories of closed shapes. They are easily recognizable both for their thinner walls and for the flattened or pinched rims[14].

Spouts were often associated with all these categories of jars. Most of the spouts from Trench D (46 specimens) were fragmentary and separated from the vessels, but the absence of any kind of regularity in the association between spouts and specific types of jars is demonstrated by 16 elements recovered still connected to their vessels. Not only any kind of jar can have a spout, but these ones were also of different shapes: both upwards conical and drooping (Pl. II.9-10 – Fig. 3). These two forms probably matched with distinct functions, but from a typological point of view it is noteworthy that the drooping samples, typical of the Late Uruk phase, are extremely rare at Girdi Qala northern mound[15].

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11. Concerning the samples with rounded rim, see Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: fig. 32: 67) Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound" (Pollock 1987: fig. 7: e, i; 1990: fig. 3: d), Nippur "Inanna" XIX (Hansen 1965: fig. 13), Uruk/Warka 'Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*' VI (Von Haller 1932: Taf. 19B: s'), Sheikh Hassan 8 (Boese 1995: 77, Abb. 14: b, j, k) and Hacınebi B2 (Pearce 2000: fig. 15: b). About the variant with rectangular-section or square rims, see Godin "middle" and "late" VI (Badler 2002: fig. 8: B23 #366, B20 #239), Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound" (Pollock 1990: fig. 4: b) or Sheikh Hassan (Boese 1995: 78, Abb. 15: b).

12. See Hacınebi B2 (Stein 2002: fig. 10: e, fig. 11: g), Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: fig. 31: 66, fig. 34: 98-99), Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound" (Pollock 1987: fig. 7: m; Pollock 1990: fig. 3: e), Nippur 'Inanna' XVIII (Hansen 1965: fig. 14), Uruk/Warka 'Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*' VI (Sürenhagen 1986: Nr. T/48, 77, 93), Sheikh Hassan 7/6 (Bachmann 1998a: Abb. 12: a; Boese 1995: 172, Abb. 10: d, e), Susa "Acopole I" 18 (Le Brun 1978: fig. 32.13).

13. See Ahmad al-Hattu (Sürenhagen 1979: Abb. 10), Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: fig. 31: 57, 59; 32: 73; fig. 32: 78), Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound" (Pollock 1987: fig. 7: t, u, v), Uruk/Warka 'Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*' and '*Sagegraben*' VI (von Haller 1932: Taf. 19B: q', t'; Surenhagen 1986: Nr. S/9), Sheikh Hassan 8/9-12/13 (Boese 1995: 77, Abb. 14: i; 82, Abb. 19; 201: Abb. 13: l), Hacınebi B2 (Pearce 2000: fig. 15: e), Susa "Acropole I" (Le Brun 1978: fig. 32.2, 3), Choga Mish Protoliterate (Alizadeh 2008: fig. 28.C-D, F).

14. See Sheikh Hassan 13/12, 10 and 8 (Boese 1995: 45, Abb. 13: a; 75, Abb. 12: e; 79, Abb. 16: a, b; 201: Abb. 13: h), Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound" (Pollock 1987: fig. 7: o; 1990: fig. 5: f), Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: fig. 32: 76-77), Uruk/Warka 'Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*' VI (von Haller 1932: Taf. 19C: u'), Hacınebi B2 (Pearce 2000: fig. 15: c; Stein 2002: fig. 11: c, f).

15. Just 3 samples come from Trench D, while 1 specimen has been collected during the survey of the Area VI, where it is difficult to establish whether this late drooping spout, identified along with some sherds of Early Bronze goblets, dates back to the very end of the Late Uruk phase or rather to the Early Bronze Age. Moreover, all the samples from Trench D have a slightly curved shape, quite different from the strongly arched profile of the Late Uruk drooping spouts (see for instance at Susa "Acropole I" 17 – Le Brun 1978: fig. 34.8; Choga Mish Protoliterate – Alizadeh 2008: fig. 31.E, I-K).

Decorations are exclusively documented on closed shapes and they are also typical of the Middle Uruk period. In particular, besides finger-impressed or incised cordons (Pl. II.7)[16], decorative knobs[17], as well as herringbone and triangular incised motifs on the shoulder of the jars are quite regular, according to a general Uruk tendency towards the middle of the 4th millennium BC[18]. Moreover, two groups of respectively 17 and 35 bodysherds display a thick reddish-brownish or grey slip on the exterior surface. It seems very likely that these fragments have to be identified with the so-called Red and Grey Uruk Wares, typical hallmarks of the Uruk period in southern Mesopotamia as well as in the Hamrin Basin[19].

Fig. 3 - Middle Uruk slightly drooping spout from Trench D at Girdi Qala .

Although the ceramic typology of the different Uruk phases is controversial[20], the assemblage from the survey of Girdi Qala northern mound and from Trench D clearly belong to a "normative" Middle-Uruk repertoire. On the one hand all the forms and decorations are well documented during the central centuries of the 4thmillennium, while, on the other hand, it is remarkable the complete absence of some typical Late Uruk indicators, as banded-rims bottles and bowls, twisted handles, long and bandy-shaped drooping spouts, or reserved-slipped vessels. Morpho-stylistic parallels emphasize the matching with Middle Uruk stages of both south- (Uruk/Warka 'Eanna-*Tiefschnitt*' VIII-VI and Nippur 'Inanna' XX-XVII) and north-Mesopotamian sites (Rubeidheh[21], Abu Salabikh "Uruk Mound", Nineveh 'Uruk B', Sheikh Hassan 6-13[22], Hacınebi B2 and). Likewise, given the proximity of the Zagros range, it is not

16. See Susa "Acropole I" 18 (Le Brun 1978: fig. 32.2-3), or Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: fig. 30.46; 34.100; 36.122).

17. See Abu Salabikh (Pollock 1987: 133), Rubeidheh (McAdam and Mynors 1988: 44-48, 51), Sheikh Hassan (Boese 1995: 249-271), Tell Leilan (Schwartz 2001: 241, fig. 7.5; Wright 2001: 125-126; Brustolon and Rova 2007: 23).

18. See Sheikh Hassan 7-5 (Bachmann 1998: figs. 8, 10, 12-13), Nineveh "Norduruk B" -37-31 (Gut 1995: pls. 60-62, pl. 68: 952; Gut 2002), Hacınebi B2 (Pearce 2000: fig. 15: d-e), Choga Mish Protoliterate B (Delougaz and Kantor 1996), Habuba Kabira Süd (Sürenhagen 1974-1975: pl. 27.95, pl. 28.130).

19. Despite the impossibility to distinguish red or grey (sometimes slipped and sometimes plain) Uruk traditions on the basis of very sketchy descriptions (von Haller 1932: 39), it seems sure that during the Early and Middle Uruk periods (Eanna XIV-VI at Uruk – von Haller 1932: pl.17.D. c'-d', pl.18.B.r-s and d'-h', pl.18.C.p, q, s, t, u; Inanna XX-XVII at Nippur – Hansen 1965: 202-204) this kind of productions have been a quite rare but constant presence within the Uruk repertoires (see at Ahmad al-Hattu and Rubeidheh, where red and grey wares represent about 4% of the assemblage – Sürenhagen 1979 :47-50; McAdam and Mynors 1988: 49).

20. See the differences in the chrono-typologies of Hansen (1965: 202-204), Johnson (1973: 56-58) and Wright (1981: 165-172).

21. Despite the evident parallels with Girdi Qala northern mound, the occupation at Tell Rubeidheh dates back to a late stage of the Middle Uruk and to an early phase of the Late Uruk period, as indicated by the presence of reserved slip bottles, strongly arched drooping spouts and other later types.

22. These same levels are indicated by Bachmann (1998b) as 15/13-6/5.

surprising to observe the very close similarities between the assemblages from Girdi Qala northern mound and Godin VI. The most significant feature is that the whole assemblage from Girdi Qala northern mound belongs to the south-Mesopotamian Uruk tradition, while any kind of local shapes or wares are virtually absent. Even if a consistent south-Mesopotamian presence is well recorded in the western Qara Dagh since the Early Uruk (as demonstrated by Trench D at Logardan and by the lowest levels of Trench C at Girdi Qala), the domestic areas exposed in Trench D of Girdi Qala northern mound constitute the first evidence of a south-Mesopotamian Middle-Uruk settlement east to the Tigris River and north to the Hamrin basin.

The dating of the materials and structures from Trench D seems particularly relevant when considering the evolution of the south-Mesopotamian presence both in the Hamrin and at Godin Tepe at that time. The increase in number of the small Middle-Uruk agricultural settlements in the Hamrin region (Invernizzi 1986) matches with the growing contacts between Godin and the Uruk cultural sphere[23]. It is very likely that the valleys of the Zagros Piedmont in the Qara Dagh area were part of crucial exchange zone centred on a main road network: the so-called Great Road of Khorasan. In its southern sector, this system of connections between Mesopotamia and Iranian plateau followed the Diyala River and then cross the central part of the Zagros Mountains through a series of high fertile districts as the Mahidashat and the Kangavar Valleys (Henrickson 1994: 86). Similarly, in the northern sector, the main paths seem to have been the Shahizor Valley with its scattered Middle-Uruk installations (Wengrow *et al.* 2016) and the Sangao-Qara Dagh road, with south-Mesopotamian settlements as Girdi Qala northern mound.

23. Before the construction of the Late Uruk oval enclosure (phases Godin "middle" and "late" V), the so-called Godin "middle" and "late" VI (Badler 2002: 87; the same phases are named Godin VI:2 and VI:1b/a after the reassessment of the stratigraphy by Rothman and Badler 2011: 82-84) show a more and more important Uruk presence.