

# GIRDI QALA, A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LATE PERIODS' CERAMIC

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The excavation in Girdi Qala yield a collection of pottery that dated to the last occupations' periods in the site; i.e. Hellenistic, Sasanian and Islamic periods. The pottery that are related to the last periods has been obtained from the excavation of two trenches on the top of the main mound (Trenches A and B) in addition to the intra-site survey that has been conducted for Girdi Qala. The amount of pottery collected from the site is still not sufficient to build a complete picture about the pottery production and traditions in Girdi Qala and its region in general. However, it gives us some indicators related to the ranges of dating and the nature of fabrics of each period that can ascribe to this area of the region.

## HELLENISTIC PERIOD

The Hellenistic pottery forms the principal collection of ceramic among the whole corpus. The amount of pottery obtained from the excavation is sufficient to know the pottery traditions, typology and techniques used for this period.

The types and fabrics of the pottery dated to this period indicate that the site of Girdi Qala was one of the major cities in the network of Hellenistic sites in the region. The reason is that all the types of the sherds are, in general, the typical Hellenistic pottery types that are found mainly in all the Hellenistic sites in Iraq and Syria.

Some forms such as the **fish plate** form have parallels with sites located in the south and middle of Iraq such as Larsa<sup>1</sup> and Uruk<sup>2</sup> (No. 1030-1; fig. 1:A) and in Tell Beydar<sup>3</sup> (No. 1062-20; fig. 1:B), and sites located in the west; in Syria. It indicates the expansion of Hellenistic pottery traditions in the region, and the role of the network of Hellenistic cities or the strong influence of the Hellenistic culture in this spot of Land.

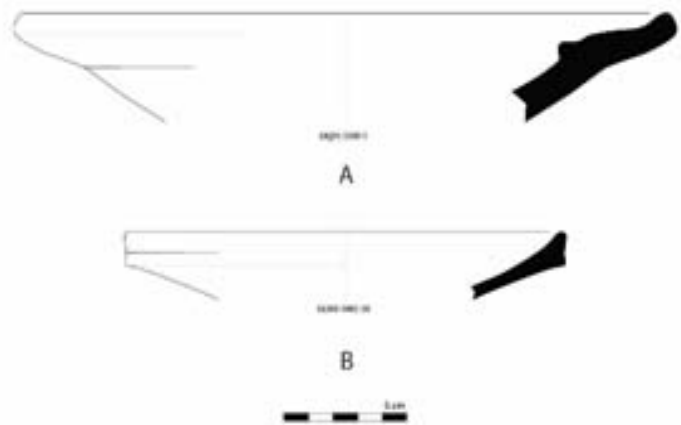
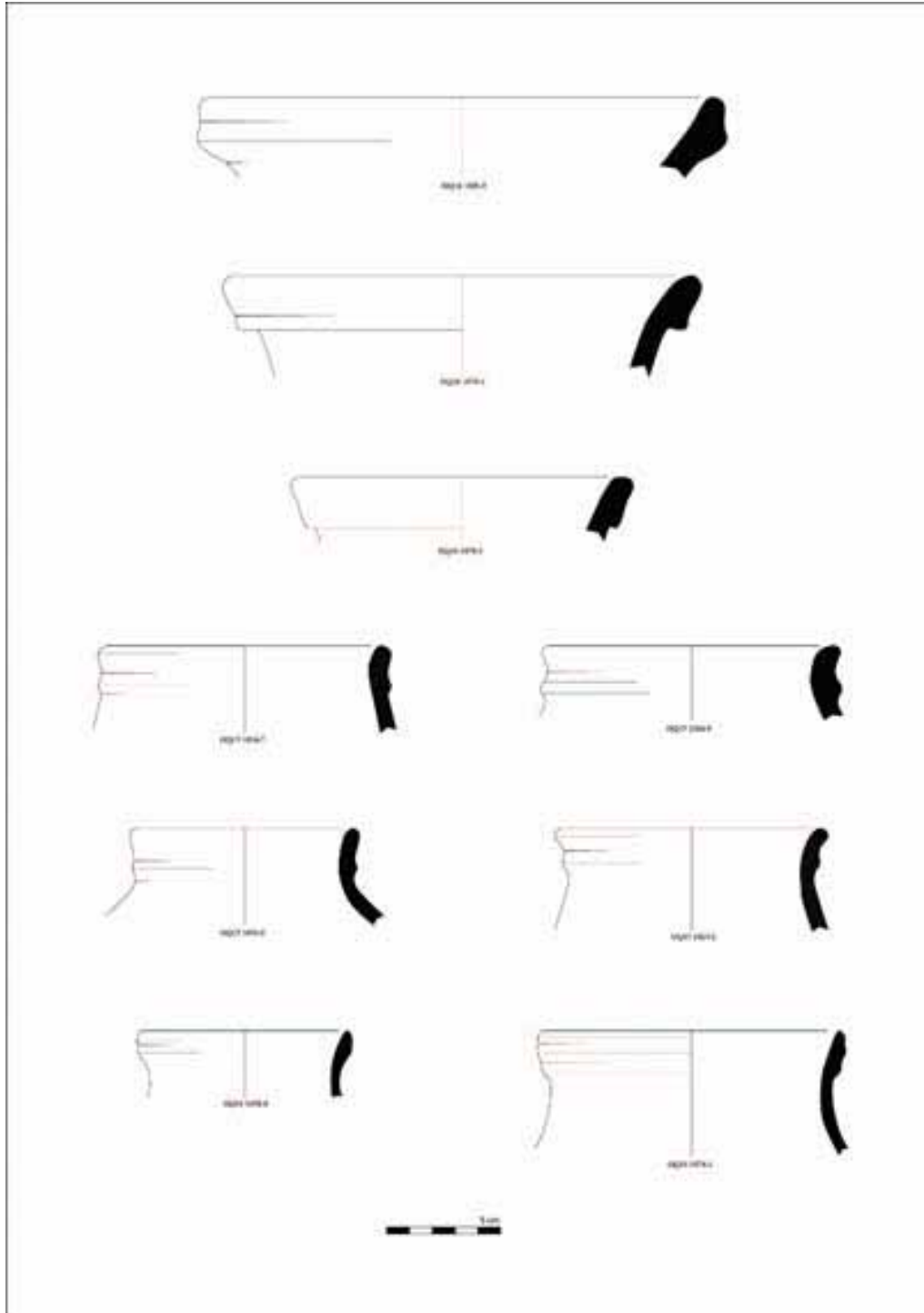


Fig. 1 - Fish Plates.

1. Lecomte 1993, fig 5:16:19.
2. Petrie 2002, fig. 6:1.
3. Katzy 2015, Pl. 55:6.

Many common unglazed pottery sherds collected from trench B dated to this period. Through checking and tracing the techniques used in forming the rims of the pots, it is remarkable that the potter intended to impose his expertise in forming the rims. This is clear in the modeling of the lips on the exterior face of the rim of the **grooved over-rolled rim** type, where we can see many sub-types of the main type (fig. 2). This feature was observed in Tell Arbid,<sup>4</sup> in Jebel Khalid in Syria that was one of the Greek colonies in Syria<sup>5</sup> and in Hatra in Iraq<sup>6</sup>.



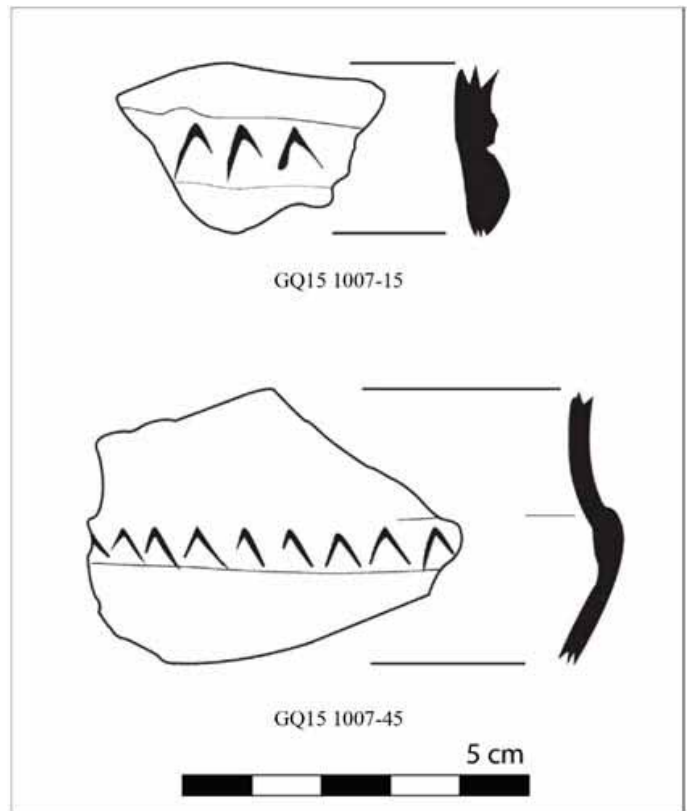
**Fig. 2** - Hellenistic Pots.

4. Momot 2011, Pl. IX.

5. Jackson and Tidmarsh 2011, fig. 59-60.

6. Venco-Ricciardi 1997, fig. 4, 6-7.

One of the most important decorations found on the sherds is the **dog-tooth décor** (No. GQ15 1007-15 and GQ15 1007-45; fig. 3). This decoration is found usually on the Hellenistic pottery dated to 4th-3rd century BC. The presence of this decoration on the pottery sherds confirm the date that was proposed for this phase of occupation during the Hellenistic period in Girdi Qala. Many parallels for this type of decoration was found, whether in sites located to the west, in Syria for example, such as Tell Beydar,<sup>7</sup> Tell Arbid,<sup>8</sup> Jebel Khalid<sup>9</sup> and Sheich Hamad<sup>10</sup> and in Nimrud in Iraq<sup>11</sup>, or to the south in Iraq such as in the Hellenistic city of Uruk<sup>12</sup> or to the north in Duhok Region<sup>13</sup>.



**Fig. 3 - Dog-Tooth Decoration.**

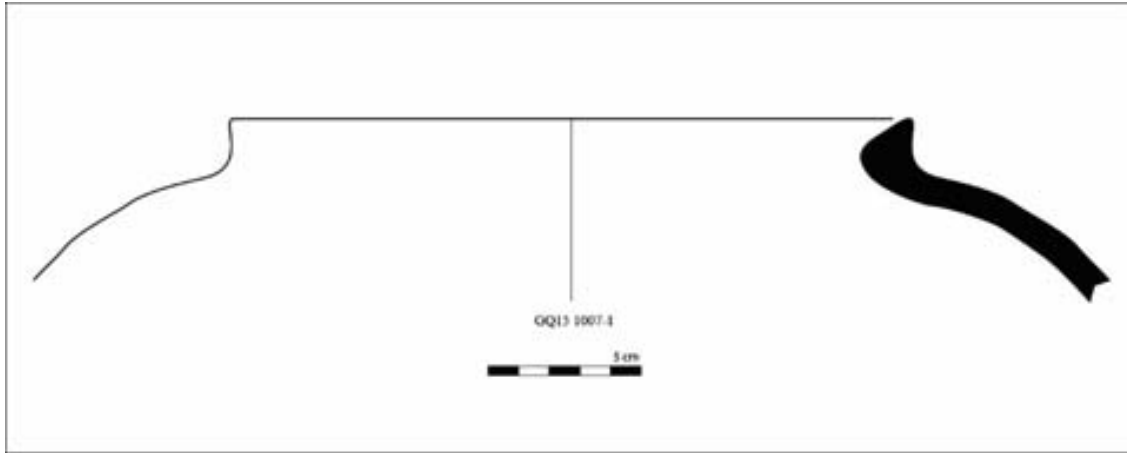
Another decoration found on the sherds, is the **stamped crescent décor**. This decoration again was well spread in the region during this period (fig. 4). Parallels are to be found in Jebel Khalid<sup>14</sup>, in Sheich Hamad<sup>15</sup>, in Nimrud<sup>16</sup>.



**Fig. 4 - Stamped Crescent Decoration.**

7. Martín Galán 2003, fig. 4:28-29. ; Martín Galán 2007, fig. 1:14-15; 6:25.
8. Momot 2011, Pl. XIV-XVI.
9. Jackson and Tidmarsh 2011, fig. 71:8.
10. Kreppner 2006, fig. 61:45.
11. Oates and Oates 1958, pl. XXI:17.
12. Petrie 2002, fig. 9:V2a.
13. Gavagnin, Iamoni and Palermo 2016, fig. 22:9-11
14. Jackson and Tidmarsh 2011, fig. 71:5; 169:3.
15. Kreppner 2006, fig. 61:15, 35-36.
16. Oates and Oates 1958, pl. XXVII:4.

Few pottery shards of cooking ware have been found during the excavation. The fabric is mainly hard compact fires in high temperature degree and full of fine to medium size white and gray minerals. A **triangular folded rim type** (QD16 1007-1; fig. 5) comes from trench B. This type of cooking ware's rim is well known in the Sulaymaniah region. Many parallels can be found in Rania<sup>17</sup>, Peshdar and the Sharazur plains.<sup>18</sup>



**Fig. 5** - Hellenistic Cooking Pot.

Further excavation is needed in order to have more information related to the Slipped wares, and glazed ware pottery. Few sherds of cooking ware have been found during the excavation, but the amount of the sherds do not reveal the pottery traditions related to this ware of ceramic.

## SASANIAN PERIOD

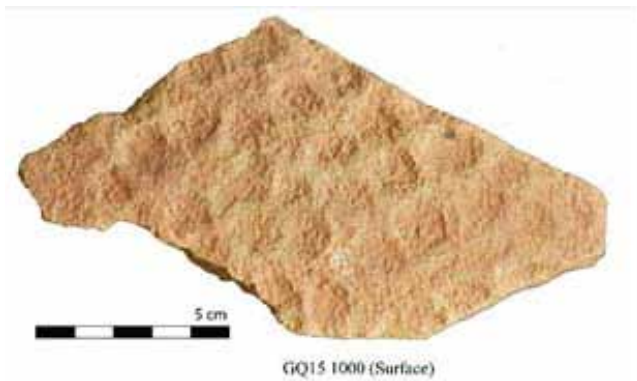
The pottery sherds that are dated to this period are very recognizable in Girdi Qala. That is due to the fabric of the pottery in addition to the typical Sasanian rim forms. The fabric of the Sasanian pottery is usually sandy to gritty, with different colors ranged from Reddish Buff and reddish brown to greenish buff color. The Sasanian pottery of Girdi Qala is divided into two main phases; first is the typical Sasanian pottery period (SAS) dated to 4/5th-6th centuries AD and the second is the last phase of the Sasanian period that is called Late Sasanian period (LSAS) dated to 7th-8th centuries AD.

In Girdi Qala, the Late Sasanian pottery is very recognizable due to its gritty fabric and the typical forms of this period, while the Sasanian period's pottery needs more investigation. The future excavation will enrich our knowledge about this period (i.e. SAS). The Late Sasanian period refers to the last phase of the Sasanian rule in the region beside of the beginning of Islamic period (Rashedi and partially Umayyad periods). In This period, some modifications could be traced in the production of the pottery. After the advent of Muslims to the region, the pottery production's traditions did not changed directly to be Islamic (until Early Abbasid period). The remarkable feature was the continuation of the Sasanian pottery tradi-

17. Many parallels found in Qalatga Darband, a Hellenistic site located in Rania. (Personal observation).

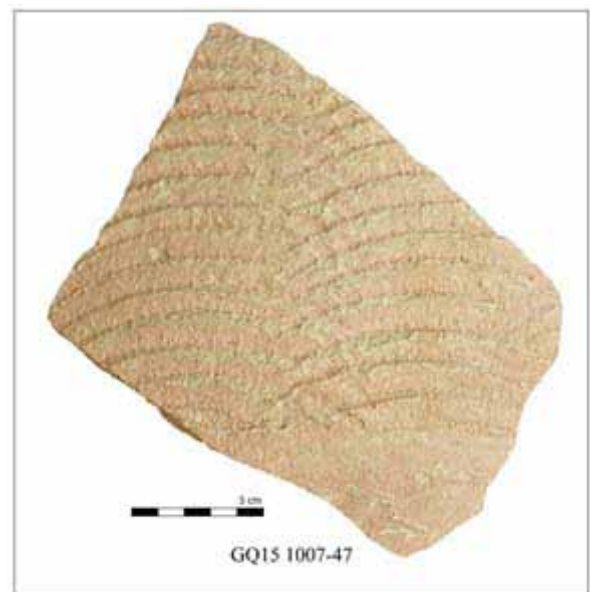
18. Personal observation.

tions in the production of pottery during this period with some modifications and alterations in forms and fabrics.



**Fig. 6** - Honey-comb Decoration.

Another decoration has been found during the excavation (Nv. 1007-47, fig. 7). The decoration consists of **connected bows** covering the entire outer surface. This type of decoration in addition to the honey-comb decoration are very important for this period, where we they can be used as good tools for dating related to this period.



**Fig. 7** - Connected bows decoration.



**Fig. 8** - Sasanian stamped decoration.

A piece of pottery found in trench B has a **stamped decoration** on a gritty greenish buff fabric (Nv. 1019-1, fig. 8). The depiction represents a standing ram with a scorpion on its right side. A good parallel for this stamp was found in Saddam Dam Salvage project<sup>23</sup>.

19. Finster and Schmidt 1976, pl. 60:b; 61:a.

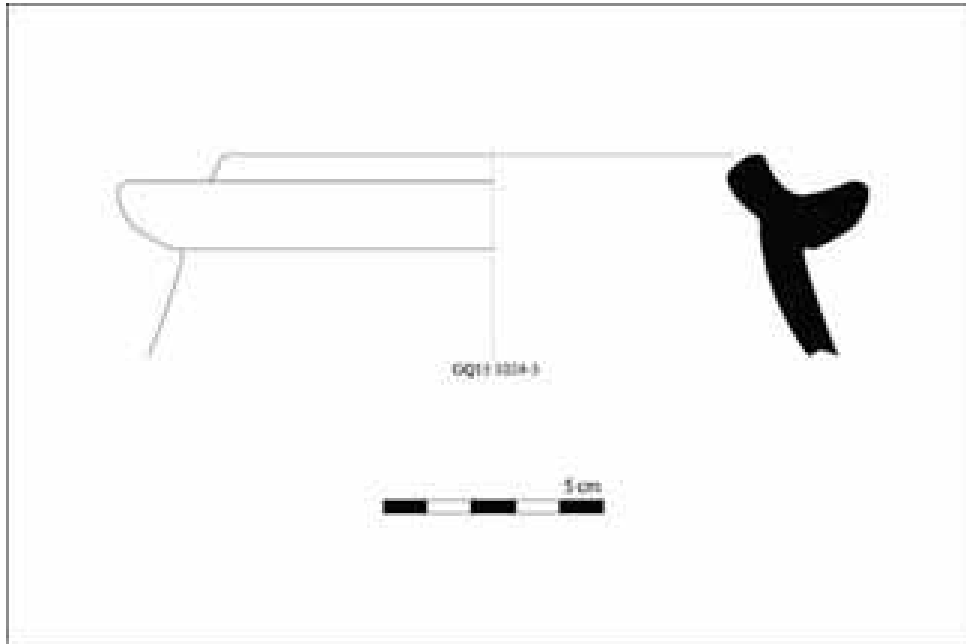
20. Finster and Schmidt 1976, pl. 55:a.

21. Finster and Schmidt 1976, pl. 52:e-f, 53:h-i.

22. Personal observation.

23. Simpson 1996, fig. 1; Simpson 2013, fig. 1-2.

A typical rim of **double rim** type found in this trench is dated to this phase of LSAS (GQ15 1024-5; fig. 9). Many parallels for this type have been found in Bestansur in Shahrizor plain<sup>24</sup>, in Saddam Dam Salvage project<sup>25</sup> and in Qal'eh-i Yazdigird in Iran<sup>26</sup>.



**Fig. 9** - Double rim pot.

## ISLAMIC PERIOD

The excavation in Girdi Qala Trench B did not yield a good amount of pottery dated to Islamic period. The last levels of occupation were not well preserved; therefore, the results are not sufficient yet to establish a good typological and fabric study. Nevertheless, despite the paucity of the pottery collected, some features can be pointed out.

Through checking the whole collection of Islamic pottery, a remarkable feature is noticeable, the nature of the pottery of Girdi Qala ascribes to the well-spread and well-known ceramic in Iraq and Syria during the period that is dated to the 10/11th-12th centuries AD. Except some local pottery of Handmade ware, beside of the cooking ware that is widely known in Northern Iraq namely Sulaymaniah region.

Few **Glazed ware** sherds were found during the excavation. A **polychrome sgraffito base** was found in Locus 63 (No. 1053-8, fig. 10) dated to 10-11th century AD. The glaze of light yellow and green colors have been implemented directly on the surface of the base without a usual white slip in-between. The fabric is well lavigated buff color paste with



**Fig. 10** - Polychrome Glazed base.

24. Cooper, Rajab and Ahmad 2012, fig. 3:13.

25. Simpson 1996, fig. 3:6.

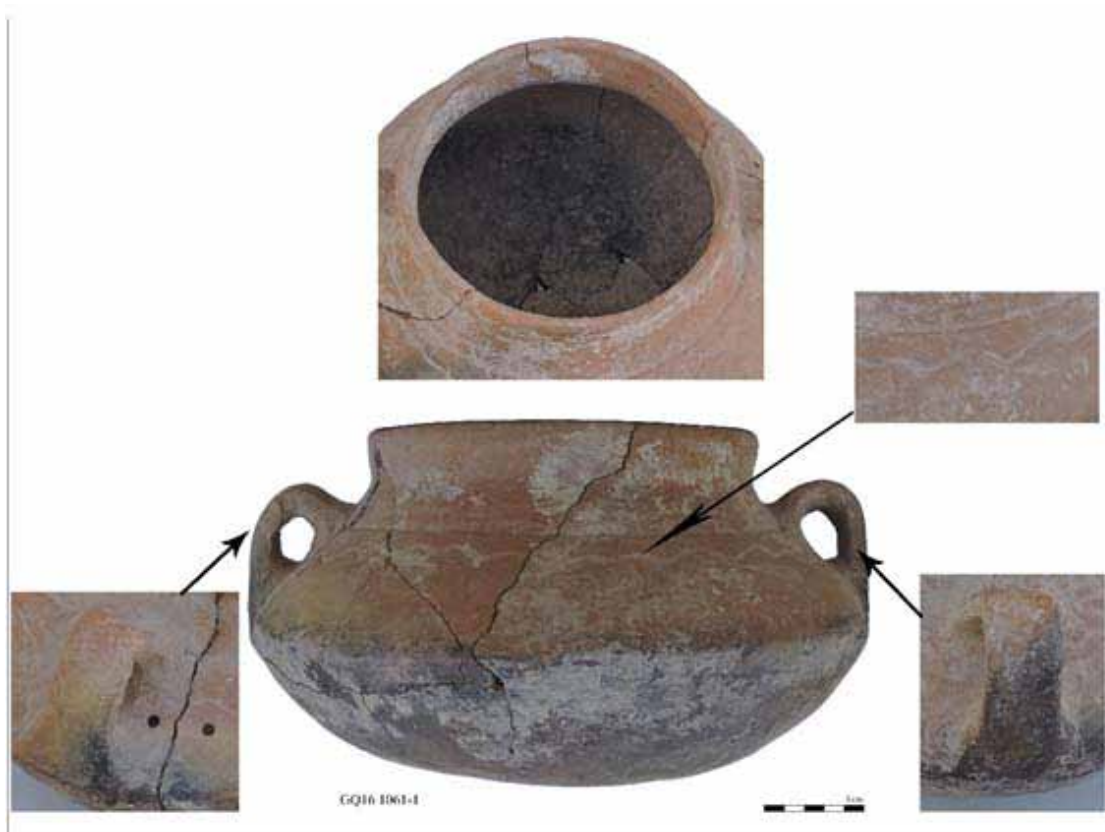
26. Keall and Keall 1981, fig. 10:3, 10.

tiny black minerals. Another Square grooved on top rim of sgraffito ware has been found during the survey and can be dated to 10-12th Century AD.

A collection of **cooking ware** handles (No. 1040-18, 1045-2 and 1048-16; fig. 11) beside of a complete pot (1061-1, fig. 12) dated to 11-12 Century AD were found in the upper levels. This type of pottery is well spread in Sulaymaniah particularly in Shara-zur, Bazian and Tanjaro regions.<sup>27</sup>



**Fig. 11** - Cooking ware handle.



**Fig. 12** - Complete cooking ware pot.

The existence of this type of ware in Girdi Qala confirm the expansion of it to Chamchamal region. This type of pottery ware shares many common features; the fabric is mainly formed of hard compact clay containing fine to medium size grits essentially white and gray color grits, the surface finishing on exterior usually polished or well smoothed and the decoration is almost the same on all the pots of this ware that has mainly a wavy wide incised line.

27. Personal observation.

The **common ware** ceramic is mainly predominant on the pottery collected during the excavation. The fabric has fine to medium size minerals of black, white and occasionally reddish color grits. The color vary from buff to light greenish buff colors. Few sherds have **wavy or horizontal incised comb decoration** (fig. 13).



**Fig. 13** - Common ware sherd with incised combed decoration.