

GIRDI QALA MAIN MOUND, STRATIGRAPHIC TRENCH B

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Trench B is located in the western part of the summit of the main mound (15m) of Girdi Qala. It consists of two contiguous 5 × 5 m squares at the top of the slope: Square 1 to the east and Square 2 to the west, partly in the slope. This trench was aimed at exploring the stratigraphic sequence of the site, from its top till its base. After three work seasons (2015-2017), approximately 2.4 m of stratified layers have been excavated.

In 2017, work in the Trench B began on Tuesday, September 26th, and ended on October 12th. The team was led by L. Colonna d'Istria with two doctoral students from the University of Liège, Alisée Devillers and Claudia Venier. Mustafa Ahmad (University of Lyon II) is in charge of the study of the ceramic material. The excavations of 2017 were focused on levels 5 and 6 of our preliminary sequence (see 2016 report). In particular, in the NE part of Square 1, less disturbed by the erosion than near the slope, we cleared part of an official building, provided with massive brick walls, dating back to the Hellenistic period (Level 6).

LEVEL 5

In the last days of the previous season, a level of occupation attested by a mud-brick wall (m.85) crossed by a passageway provided with a door-socket (84, alt. max. 652.25 m) was discovered, constituting a Level 5 B, dating to the Sasanian period according to the associated pottery. A built structure (78), about 1.3 x 0.8m, made of flat stones on three layers, 10 to 15 cm each, was also cleared. It is oriented East-West with a slight inclination towards the slope of the tell (fig. 1 and 2). At the end of the 2016 season, this alignment of flat stones was not really understood, the level being largely cut by several later pits (28, 73, 75 and 58), but we could observed that it was connected with walls m. 85 (south of 78), m. 86 (north of 78) and with the door-socket 84. Structure 78 and wall 86 were especially disturbed by pit 73 of Level 3 B (see 2016 report). Our hypothesis was to recognize the elements of a powerful wall possibly belonging to a defensive system, close to the slope of the tell.



Fig. 1 - Square 1, Level 5 (78.2 and 78.3), to the SE

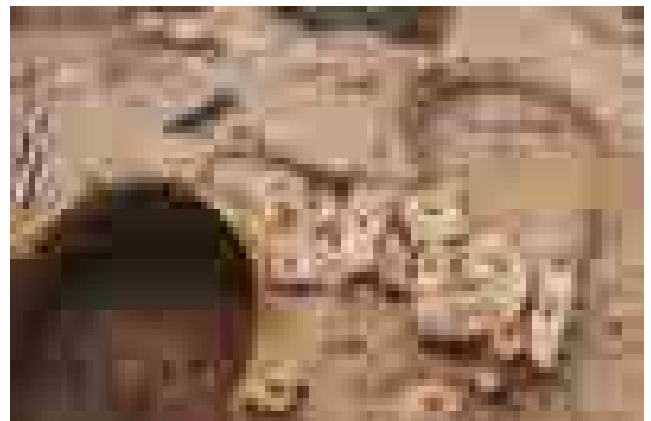


Fig. 2 - Square 1, Level 5 (78.2), to the SE

In 2017, structure 78 was carefully removed. Composed of three seats of flat stones, it is a succession of door thresholds. Indeed, two other door-sockets (122 and 117; see fig. 3), placed on top of each other, were found below door-socket 84. The altitudes of the different door-sockets and associated thresholds (78) suggest four successive phases of occupation, corroborated by the layers observed to the north-east of threshold 78. Therefore Level 5 has been divided into 4 phases, A to D from top to bottom (see Fig. 3), all dating to the Sasanian period.

► - *Phase 5A* (alt. 652.34 m):_door threshold 78 (recent phase = 78.1) + floor 71-rubified (alt. 652.34 m) + fire place 74 (alt. 652.28 m) + walls 77 (NW-SE), 65 (SW-NE) (mud brick: rectangular or square format). Remains of “djuss” between pit 88 and 73, and over wall 86 probably belong to this phase. Unfortunately, we did not find a wall aligned with wall 77 north of threshold 78.1.

► - *Phase 5B* (alt. 652.20 m): door threshold 78 (intermediate phase = 78.2) + floor + door-socket 84 (alt. 652.22 - 652.12 m) + walls 85, 86 (oriented N-S, mud brick: square format 35 × 35 cm) on both sides of threshold 78.2 + stones alignment 83 (E-S) topped with bricks 79 (rectangular format).

► - *Phase 5C* (alt. 652.10 m):_door threshold 78 (old phase = 78.3) + floor + door-socket 122 (alt. 652.12 - 652.04 m) + walls 85 and 86 (mud brick: square format 35 × 35 cm).

► - *Phase 5D* (alt. 652.02 m):_no door threshold, floor + door-socket 117 (alt. 652.04 - 651.93 m) + walls 85 (alt. min. 651.87 m) and 86 (mud bricks: square format 35 × 35 cm).



Fig. 3a - Levels 5A and 5B



Fig. 3b - Level 5B (78.2).



Fig. 3c - Level 5C (78.3).

As a preliminary conclusion, the remains are those of the entrance of a Sassanid domestic building, four times rebuilt as shown also by the raising internal floors. Moreover, the observations made on the floors associated to this entrance suggest that it led to an unroofed space, some kind of a forecourt.

LEVEL 6

Level 6, dating to the Hellenistic period, was also already identified in 2016: the top of wall 69 (alt. 652.34 m - mud brick: square shape 35 × 35 cm) and some filling layers in the northern part of square 2 and western part of square 1 (see 2016 report). At the end of the 2017 season, two levels must be distinguished. Level 6A is characterized by domestic or craft installations, whereas Level 6B below is a more monumental construction (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4 - Preliminary Plan of Levels 6A and 6B

Level 6A

This level, heavily leveled to accommodate the Sassanid domestic building of level 5, is defined by various kind of installations, most of them set in the ruins of the «monumental building» of level 6B. The stratigraphic relationship of some of them suggests that Level 6A can be split into at least two phases:

Some mud bricks (square shape) on stone slab 151 (itself belonging to level 6A, square 1).

Wall 138 is later than floor 156 and installation 144.

Fireplace 166 (alt. 651.24m) is later than floors 156 (alt. 651.40m) and 137 (alt. 651.46m) south and east of square 2.

The various installations are identified as follows :

Oven 119/127, lately reused as a waste pit, is intrusive into the monumental Hellenistic complex of level 6B. During the disassembly of this oven, unbaked small weights and spindle whorl were found (fig. 5).

An alley of flat stones (137) + pebble bed with small potsherd (159) (alt. 651.50 ~ 651.45 m), in the south corner of square 1 and along the south-east berm of square 2

Ashy floor 156 (alt. 651.40 m), disturbed by a small pit north-west of 138, associated with the installation 144 composed of several stones (one of them placed on edge, alt. 651.52 ~ 651.49 m).



Fig. 5 - Unbaked weights and spindle whorl from Oven 119/127, Level 6A

Another ashy floor 135 (alt. 651.52 m, square 2), east of 144.

Fireplace 166 (alt. 651.24m).

Tannour 36 (alt. 651.55 m), close to the NW berm of square 2, associated with floor 135 (alt. 651.52 m) characterized by small potsherd and ashen earth. A potsherd with 'crescent' and 'dog-teeth' motif has been found on the floor (NV-1135 - alt. 651.55m).

Stone slab 151 at the eastern limit of pit 75 in square 1, the bricks on this slab and wall 150 (alt. max. 651.75 m), perpendicular to wall 69, testify a new arrangement of the area south-east of walls 69 and 116 of Level 6 B.

All these installations can be interpreted as the result of a loose reoccupation, during the Hellenistic period, of the sector of the underlying monumental building of level 6B, partially leveled to accommodate them.

Level 6B

This level is currently the main object of the excavations, that we plan to extend due to its importance, and therefore its interpretation will be subject to change as a result of future works. This level consists of two contiguous architectural sets:

In the SW part of square 1 and in square 2, a large and compact set of mud bricks (154), without visible joint. However, several sets of bricks such as 140 and 142 could be distinguished. The disassembling of the intrusive oven 119-127 (loc. 162) has shown that at least three layers of brick were present, but without visible mortar (142, max. alt. 651.58 - min. alt. 651.24). The future work should provide a better understanding of this set that we understand as a possible rampart associated with a building located to the NE (fig. 4).

In square 1, a building was found, characterized by walls made of square mudbricks (35 cm × 35 cm, clay mortar joints of 3 to 5 cm). Walls 121 (top at 651.93m – followed down to 651.51 m and continues below), 116 (alt. max. 651.83 - alt. min. 650.82) and 69 (alt. max. 652.34 m) delimit a Room 1 in the north corner of square 1. The wall closing the room to the NE (130) was located exactly in our east berm. Two heavy coats of fine white plaster covered

the face of the walls in room 1. A single layer of the same plaster was applied on the south face of wall 69, where the associated floors has not yet been found (end of works at 651.62 m). The intrusive silo-pit 73 destroyed the western part of room 1, as pit 75 destroyed the angle of walls 116-69, but helped us to locate the foundations of wall 116 at an alt. of 650.82 m. (fig. 6).



Fig. 6 - Plastered east face of wall 116

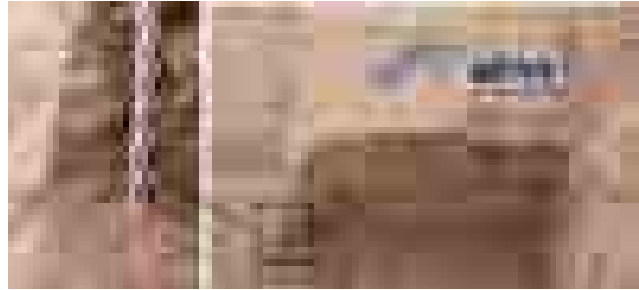


Fig. 7 - Plaster south face of wall 69

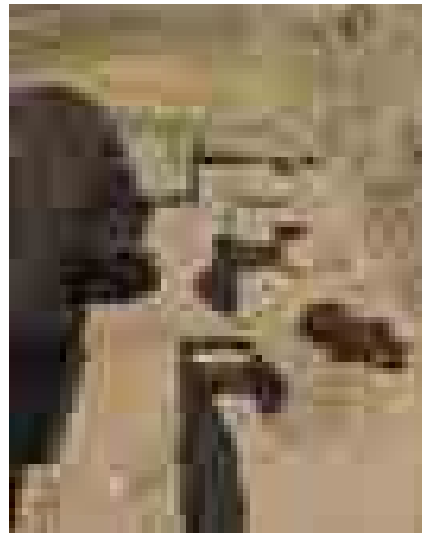


Fig. 8 - General View of Trench B, to the SW..

In room 1, a very clean floor (147) with very few potsherds, was found at 651.54 m. Among the few potsherds, a fragment with an applied decorative element (fig.7) is to be noticed.

The coming work in Trench B should focus on better understanding this official/monumental building of the beginning of the Hellenistic period (fig. 8) and continue to document the different occupations of the main mound of Girdi Qala.

THE POTTERY (MUSTAFA AHMAD)

The amount of pottery collected this season is not high but very informative. It shows the pertinence in the ceramic traditions and dating. The excavation has been done this season mainly in level 6, that has been divided into two phases (6A & 6B). The pottery sherds coming from this level are dated to the Hellenistic period.

Few forms of pottery jars, jugs and bowls have been identified. The implemented decorations on the pottery, in association with the fabrics and forms, demonstrate the strength of the Hellenistic ceramic traditions that is common and well spread in the region at this period.

Among these decorations, the dog-teeth motif is found on few sherds (GQ-B-17-1118-1, GQ-B-17-1118-2), very common in this period in the region. (fig. 9).

This décor was combined with a series of crescents motif implemented on a jar (GQ-B-17-1135-1; fig. 10). The combination of dog-teeth and crescent decors is not common in this period, but attested in other contemporary sites, Babylon (Cellerino 2004. Fig. 15:110) and Khirbet Khatuniyah (Curtis & Green 1997, fig. 68:541).

A barbotine applied circle with oblique incisions-on-top is also attested (fig. 11). This motif as well is not common in this period. It is attested in Khirbet Khatuniyah where it is dated to the Hellenistic period (Curtis & Green 1997, fig. 66:509) but exists since the Achaemenid period in Abu Qubur (Warburton RC & Warburton DA, 1991).

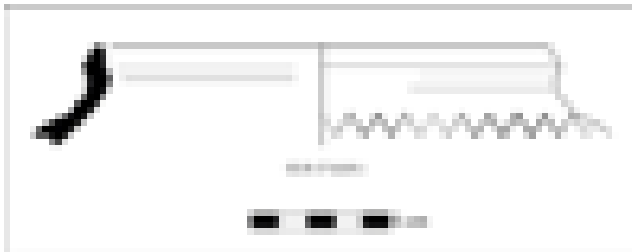


Fig. 9 - Dog-teeth decoration, Hellenistic period.

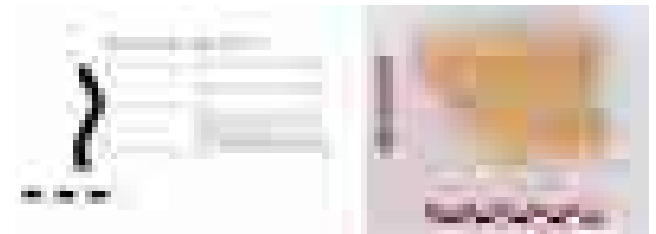


Fig. 10 - Potsherd GQB-17-1135-1 with 'crescent' and 'dog-tooth' motifs.

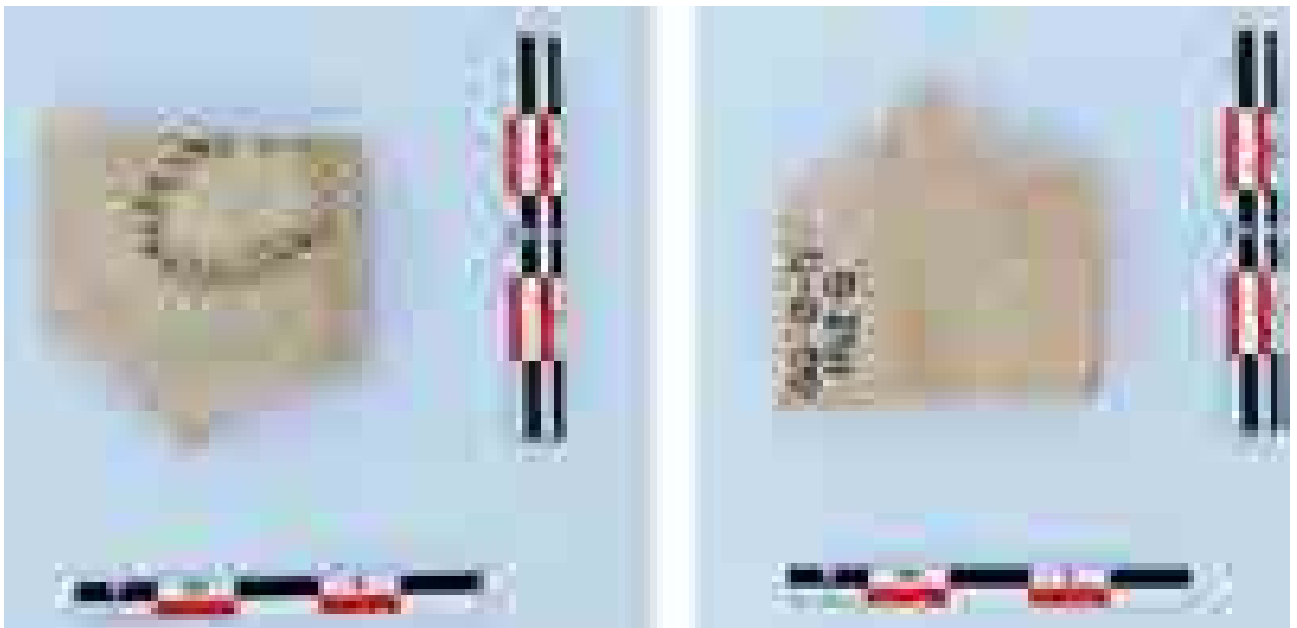


Fig. 11 - Potsherd GQB-17-1142-9 with applied decoration, from Room 1 of level 6B.

