

## GIRDI QALA NORTH, TRENCH D: STRATIGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURE

Clélia Paladre, Régis Vallet, Rateb al Debs, Kamal Rahoof and Alain Gaulon

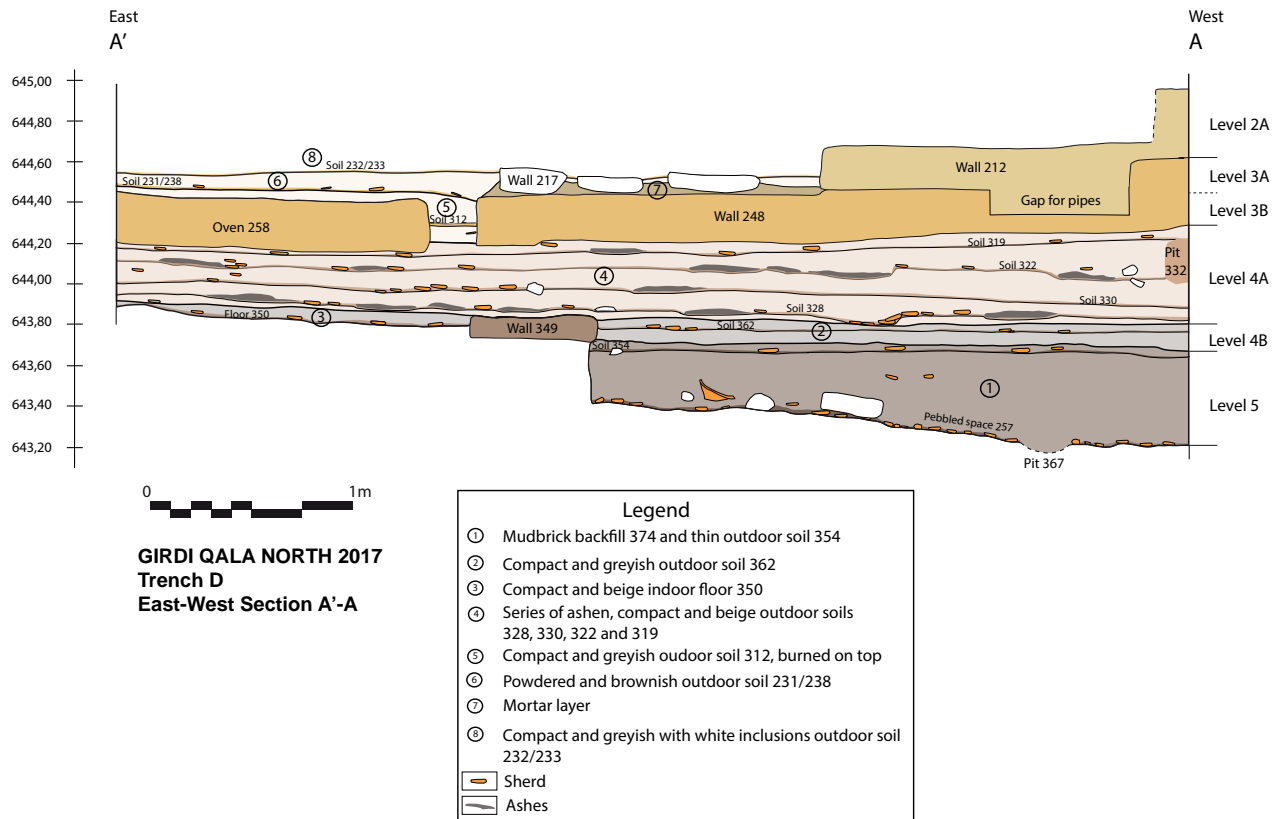
The excavations of Trench D have been carried out from the 16<sup>th</sup> of September to the 12<sup>th</sup> of October. The team was composed of five archaeologists: Clélia Paladre, Rateb al Debs, Alain Gaulon, Kamal Rahoof and Régis Vallet, assisted by four workers. The aim of these excavations was to extend the stratigraphic trench opened in 2016 in the northern slope of the mound. The trench was lengthened of one square (of 5m side) to the south and three squares to the north. Thus, the full size of the trench is now reaching the 30m length (Fig. 1). The excavations were not equally deep in every part of the trench; it goes from 1.8m in the center to only 0.1m to its north end. The total altitude gain is about 3.65m. These excavations allowed us to recognize about ten successive levels of occupation, all of them dating back from the Middle Uruk period<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 2 and 3).



**Fig. 1** - Trench D, view from the North and from the South.

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





**Fig. 3** - East-west Section A'-A in the middle of Trench D.

## LEVEL 1

An imposing pit (203) represents this latest level, already known in 2016. We finally define its limits; it is around 4.30m length and 3m width. The bottom of the pit is still unreached. It has disturbed level 2 (especially level 2B, another large pit and external floors, full of materials) and level 3. Thus, its materials were mixed with some material from the deeper levels. Pit 203 gave some Early Bronze Age pottery, showing that the occupation continued (or rather restarted) at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE. However, the much higher amount of Middle Uruk materials (Fig. 4) proves its origin at the end of the Uruk occupation, after level 2A. Therefore, it is still considered as the level 1 of our temporary occupation sequence.



**Fig. 4** - Material coming from pit 203 from level 1  
a : terracotta bead (GQD.Tc1308.1)  
b : fragment of a basalt weight (GQD.P1315.1)  
c : obsidian blade (GQD.Obs1382.1)

## LEVEL 2

This level has been recognized since the opening of the trench last year, but is now subdivided in two different levels: 2A (late) and 2B (earlier). Indeed, in 2016, level 2(A) was cleared in the northern part of the trench, directly above level 3. However, in 2017, the new square opened to the south revealed new layers (consequently 2B) in between levels 3 and 2.

### Level 2A

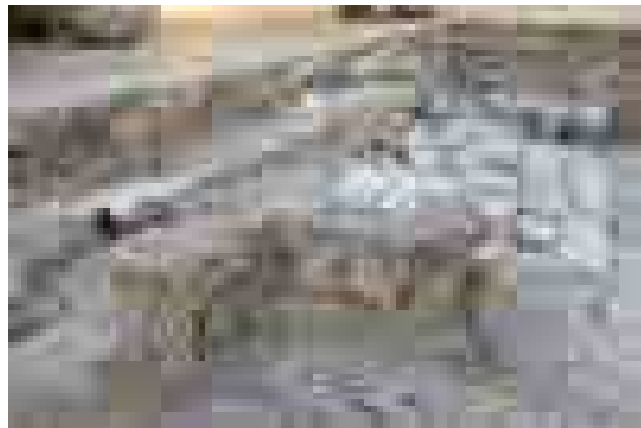
In 2016, two buildings represented this level. One was potentially tripartite in plan (oriented north-south) and we expected to get a complete view of its plan with the opening of a new square more to the south. Unfortunately, the state of preservation of its remains was extremely disappointing.

As already noted in 2016, walls have stair-like foundations, which rise to the south until they disappear. The tripartite plan is still possible but remains to be demonstrated (Fig. 5).

In the north part of our new square, we were able to follow wall 208 until wall 323, oriented east-west (Fig. 6) and preserved on 0.5m width and 1.2m length, cut by pit 203 from level 1. Wall 208 has stair-like foundations, with two steps of one brick height each. We identified a wide foundation trench for 353, of about 1.5m width. This dimension is surprising and it can be explained by the structure of wall 217 of level 3 just beneath. Indeed, wall 217 has large stone foundations slabs that builders of level 2A obviously removed, thus creating the oversized foundation trench.

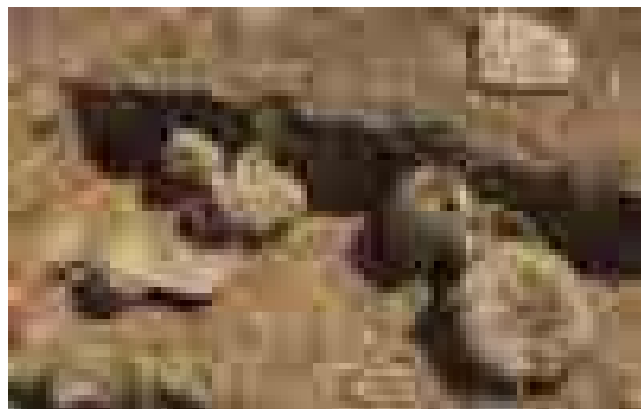


**Fig. 5** - General view from the south of the possible tripartite building of level 2A, damaged by pit 203 to the left



**Fig. 6** - Corner of walls 208 and 323 of level 2A with the composite wall 373 in the background

Wall 323 closes the vestibule 214 of about 2.5m width and 2m length. Vestibule 214 yielded an internal floor, the end of floor 228 identified in 2016, easily recognizable with its grey color and white inclusions. Eight complete ceramics (fragmented) and two stones (one of which was engraved) were arranged on this floor (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7** - Floor 228 of vestibule 214 (level 2A)

Wall 323 extends up to the east where it joins wall 373, oriented north-south and extending up to the south for about 2.2m before it disappears. It seems that wall 373 is located above 251, a late partitioning wall link to wall 250 of level 3A. However, walls 251 and 373 could be part of the same wall. In this case, wall 251 should be attached to level 2A. We need to extend the excavations more to the east to have the information.

Wall 373 has a size of about 4.3m length and 0.5m width. It is made of stones, mudbrick fragments and mortar. Its upper stone course has slipped to the east. As wall 323, it has stair-like foundations with at least two steps. In the corner of 323 and 373, wall 373's base was not cleared, whereas 1.5m to the south, we could see two base-courses. It steps across wall 217 of level 3. A last step is visible, with a large rectangular stone (Fig. 8), and then the wall disappears, without reaching the south end of the trench. In its northern part, a pipe is present in between two stones (wide of about 10cm). In the south part of the trench, we have no attestation of level 2A. First, because of the erosion (mainly because of the ploughing) and second, because of the stair-like foundations of its walls.



**Fig. 8** - Wall 373 with its stair-like foundations .

The second building of level 2A is located lower in the slope, to the north. It has been removed in 2017 (walls 213, 222 and 221). Walls 221 and 222 were bonded to wall 213, with one brick and a half laid as stretcher. The half brick was alternatively located on either face (Fig. 9). Bricks have a size of 0.3m length, 0.2m width and the half bricks have a width of 0.1m. All bricks share the same thickness, about 0.1m. The horizontal joints, made of mortar mixed with sherds, have a thickness of 2cm.



**Fig. 9** - Organization of the bricks of wall 213

## Level 2B

This level yields no architecture and is only represented by ashy layers, belonging to pits or external floors located in between level 2A and level 3. Indeed, these layers pass below wall 373 and above wall 217. We assume that it was also present north of wall 323, but removed with the foundation of level 2A. Level 2B is subdivided in two sub-levels: 2B1 (late) and 2B2 (early).

► Level 2B1 is represented by the large pit 326. Successive hollow-shaped layers filled it. It has a size of 0.7m deep and 3.8m in diameter. The deepest layers, very ashy, were especially rich in material (notably BRBs). This pit is cut in its north part by pit 203 from level 1, but it also cuts itself layers and architecture of level 3. Indeed, in the south-west corner of the

trench, it cuts hearth 358, stone wall 357 and their associated floor 372. In the east part of the trench, pit 326 cuts level 2B2 floors (335) and goes down to the foundations of wall 217. In the center of the trench, it goes down until level 4A floors (348/361).

► Level 2B2 is represented by a series of external and compact floors (335), which seals directly the level 3 and is mainly located in the trench south-east corner and along its east limit. In the west part of the trench, it is characterized by brown and clayey sediment, whereas in the east part, it is more ashy, white and powdery. All of the floors yielded a high quantity of material, especially complete ceramics. Grave 331 is also attached to this phase, dug from one of the 2B2 floors (Fig. 10). It is a pit-grave, obviously a primary burial, which cuts and partly removes wall 217 of level 3. Some of its stones were reused in order to maintain the body of

the young child. He or she is in a flexed position, oriented north-south. His/her head rests on a stone to the south, facing west. Bones are heavily damaged and the associated material consists in only two BRBs, located near the knees.

Level 2B is clearly representing a long phase of abandonment of that precise sector of the site, before its re-occupation at level 2A. It explains the voluntary and significant leveling of the imposing building of level 3.



**Fig. 10** - Grave 331 (level 2B2) cutting the wall 217 (level 3)

## LEVEL 3

This level has been recognized in 2016 and is represented by an imposing construction with two phases of occupation, 3A (late) and 3B (early). However, we still do not know if the main structures were rebuilt or not. Phase 3A was attested in the north part of the trench but it has been almost entirely removed in 2016.

To the south, we followed wall 217 in the new square. Its state of preservation was unfortunately not as good as we expected. Indeed, it has been leveled until its stone foundation layer and widely destroyed in number of places (mainly by pit 203 of level 1, the foundation trench of wall 323 of level 2A and by grave 331 of level 2B2). Nevertheless, two sections are still preserved that we followed until the south berm of the square.

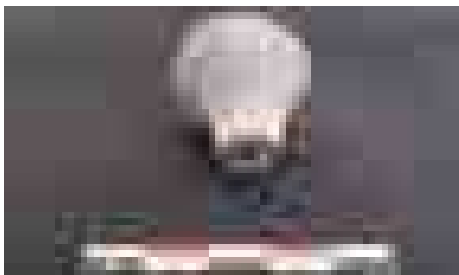
It has a size of 0.9m wide in its north part but is wider in its south part with a size of 1.2m (Fig. 11). Its west face is carefully made with long rectangular stones, very well carved, whereas its east face is made of rubbles. As we already noted in 2016, wall 217 rested on a thick mortar layer (about 0.15m). Another mortar layer was located above the stones in order to obtain a horizontal plan on which mudbrick courses were built (some rare and fragile remains were still visible in some places).

East of wall 217, Level 3 continues with two possible stone walls oriented east-west, 369 and 370, that could also form a stone pavement. The excavations are not large enough to

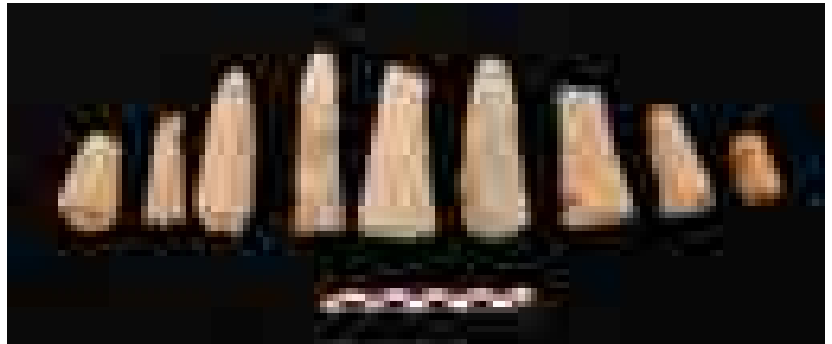
understand the exact nature of these structures. Five cones, coming certainly from the west face of wall 217, and two terracotta tokens have been discovered there. Four additional cones, that certainly rolled down the slope, were discovered further north (Fig. 12 and 13).



**Fig. 11** - Wall 217 of level 3, from the south.



**Fig. 13** - Middle Uruk token  
(GQD Tc1357.2.)



**Fig. 12** - Terracotta cones discovered in 2017 (GQD.Tc1305.1, GQD.Tc1338.1, GQD.Tc1362.2, GQD.Tc1369.1, GQD.Tc1363.2, GQD.Tc1368.1, GQD.Tc1383.1 et GQD.Tc1383.2).



**Fig. 14** - Wall 359 of level 3, from the south-east.

Level 2B pits, in the area directly west of wall 217, had destroyed level 3. However, we can find it again in the south-west corner of the trench. There, the mudbrick wall 359, oriented east-west, is certainly linked to wall 217 since both walls are perpendicular and have the same size (1.2m width). If wall 248, located further north, has also the same size (which is not certain since later layers are still in place above this wall), then the room defined (except to the west) would have a size of 4.2m from north to south (Fig. 14).

South of wall 359, we identified a rectangular hearth made of burned clay (358) and a stone wall (357). Both were associated to a floor (372), which extends until the south-west corner of the trench. Hearth 358 is cut by pit 326 from level 2B1; it has a size of 0.57m length and 0.35 to 0.12m width. Wall 357 has foundations made of small size stones. It is parallel to 217 and based at the same altitude (Fig. 15). It could be a simple partitioning wall and it is not certain that it joined wall 359. Thus, a passage could have been present in the north part. Wall 359 is based deeper than 357 and 217. Below floor 372, a brown and compact clayey layer was passing below wall 357 and continuing until wall 359's base. It is probably a backfill which was aimed at compensate the slope.

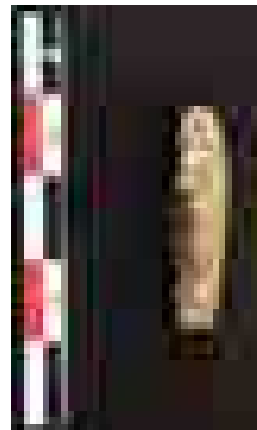




**Fig. 15** - Wall 357 and hearth 358.



**Fig. 16** - Floor 312 associated with oven 258, platform 314 and pipes 225.



**Fig. 17** - Tubular stone bead (GQD. P1372.1) from floor 312 (level 3).

In the north part of the trench, after removing the level 2 remains, we discovered a large rectangular platform (314). It was made of a clay and straw mortar and had a size of 1.8m length and 0,7m width. A burned floor 312 was associated with the platform 314, the oven 258 and the pipes 225 further west (prints were clearly visible on the floor), demonstrating the contemporaneity of all these structures (Fig. 16). Floor 312 yielded a small tubular stone bead (Fig. 17). In between oven 258 and platform 314, we were able to observe a blockage made of bricks and mortar (more or less the same than the one observed in 2016 between wall 248 and oven 258). It has to be noted that this blockage was wrongly identified as a possible small platform in 2016.

Oven 258 yielded a second utilization floor with a complete jar and a big animal bone. The base of the oven has been cleared this year; it was dug into level 4A layers to a depth of around 0,15m. We defined the size of the bricks: 0,15m length, 0,20m width and 6 to 8cm thick. Joints have a size of about 2cm and are made of mortar mixed with sherds (Fig. 18).



**Fig. 18** - Oven 258 and its first floor.



## LEVEL 4

The 2016 campaign yielded a level 4 represented by a series of external floors and some pits. The 2017 campaign reveals a subdivision with two successive levels, 4A (late) and 4B (early)<sup>2</sup>.

### Level 4A

This level yielded only external floors, very well laid, and pits.

In the two-thirds and center of the new square to the south, 4A floors (348/361) were present below level 3. This is our final stop there for this campaign. These series of floors were compact, greyish to light beige with ashy and coal inclusions. Some scattered stones were also present. Pit 360, dug from one of these floors (348), is also attached to this layer. It has a size of 1.35m length and 1.4m width but it continues to the south of the trench and below wall 217 of level 3, partly based upon the powdery filling of pit 360.



**Fig. 19** - Floor 328, first floor of level 4A.



**Fig. 20** - Material discovered on the floor 328 of level 4A – a: large perforated Middle Uruk cylinder (GQD.Tc1378.1) – b: stone beads (GQD.P1367.1 et GQD.P1377.2) – c: grinding tools kit (GQD.P1367.2)

The main part of level 4A is however located in the north part of the trench, at the vertical of remains of level 3B (oven 258 and wall 248) that were kept in place (except platform 314). Four successive floors of level 4A were identified (319, 322, 330 and 328), preserved on 0.9m to the west and 0.7m to the east. Each floor was carefully excavated and removed. As in the north part of the trench, it was compact, light beige to greyish with ashy inclusions and rich in material. Some scattered hearths were present. The first 4A floor (328, at the bottom) showed an especially high concentration of material (Fig. 19 and 20).

2. The small ovoid oven 259, removed in 2016, has to be reassign to level 4A (and not 3B). Indeed, we were finally able to follow further north the floor 319 associated to oven 259, and this one was passing below pipes 225 of level 3B.



**Fig. 21** - Green stone stamp seal (GQD.P1339.2)  
from floor 322 of level 4A

Floor 322, above, yielded a nice stamp seal<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 21).

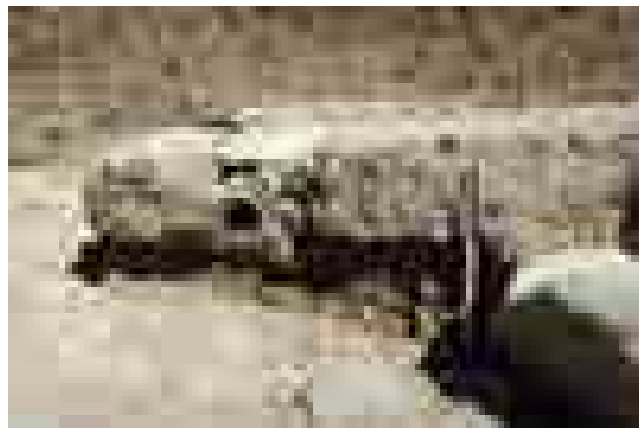
### Level 4B

This level, immediately below 4A floors, yielded mudbrick structures (Fig. 22) and two associated floors, external (362/305) and internal (307). This level is heavily leveled, 0.10m to 0.20m of elevation still exist.

The architectural remains consist in two perpendicular walls, which are certainly part of a large room. To the north, an east-west wall, 302, with a size of 0.5m width shows a coat of 5cm on its south face. It is preserved on 0.15m high. Bricks are melted and thus, we cannot define their size and layout. Two possible joints could define a layout of one brick and a half with a size of 0.7m length and 0.35m width for the complete bricks, 0.2m width for the “half” one. Wall 302 presents a pipe of 10cm in diameter, connected to a second pipe oriented east-west. It has a size of 6cm in diameter and leads to the west face of the perpendicular wall, 304. On top of wall 304, a large sherd was covering the pipe (Fig. 23).



**Fig. 22** - Structures of level 4B (walls 302, 304 and 359 and threshold 352, associated with internal floor 350).



**Fig. 23** - Base of wall 304. The extremity of the pipe, the animal's jawbone, the trace of wall 302 and the reused stone of level 5 are all clearly visible.

Perpendicular wall 304/349 presents an original aspect. Its north face was strengthened and trapezoidal. It could be explain by the presence of the above-mentioned pipes. 304/349 is 0.12m to 0.18m high and 0.5m width (to the south). As 302, bricks are too badly preserved to be defined. To settle the west face, builders based the wall on a large stone of level 5. The altitude of foundation of 302 is slightly variable from north to south (about 6cm). A mortar layer below the first course offsets this difference. Finally, an animal's jawbone was included in the masonry, certainly a propitiatory deposit. Wall 304/349 shows an especially wide (1.10m) mudbrick threshold (352). Its internal face, to the east, was quite well preserved, the west one heavily damaged.

3. See Paladre, *infra*.



**Fig. 24** - Posthole 351 (level 4A), section and plan .

External floors were associated to these structures, 305 to the north and 362 to the west, powdery and irregular. The west floor (362) yielded the bottom of a posthole (351) of 0.28m in diameter and deep of at least 0.15m (Fig. 24). In the excavated room, a floor (350) was also identified. It was well-laid, compact, light beige with ashy inclusions, and provided some material.

## LEVEL 5

Level 4B lies on a thick and compact dark brown clayey layer (374). In 2016, it looked like a destruction layer made of fallen mudbricks, located above a pebbled ‘street’ showing an opposite dip compared to the natural slope of the mound. Therefore, we were expecting a building in direction of the center of the tell (see Paladre et al. 2016). In 2017, we followed the pebbled street until a section A-A’ (Fig. 3) set directly below level 3 structures (the deepest point of the excavations, 643,26m), but no associated wall was discovered. Layer 374 seems to be a backfill, aimed at compensate the opposite slope of level 5, rather than a destruction layer. It yielded stones of medium caliber, some material, and a thin occupation layer was visible (354) in its upper part.

In any case, level 5 yielded absolutely no architecture and is still represented by the pebbled street 257, a very well laid floor, made of stones and sherds (it provided three beads in its center part, Fig. 25), covering a large area (almost the totality of the three new squares to the north of the trench). Thus, it has a length of 18m (north-south) for the

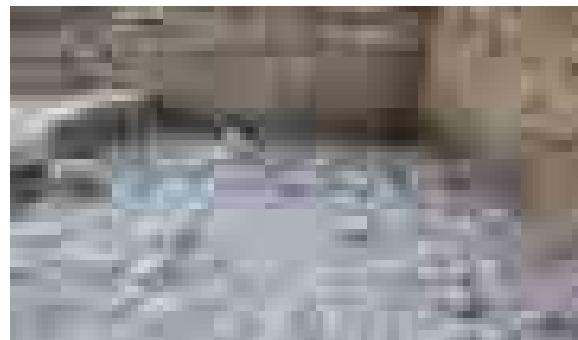


**Fig. 25** - Beads discovered in the pebbled street 257 of level 5  
a : cornelian bead (GQD.P1305.1) – b : terracotta bead (GQD.Tc1300.1) – c : terracotta bead (GQD.Tc1300.2)

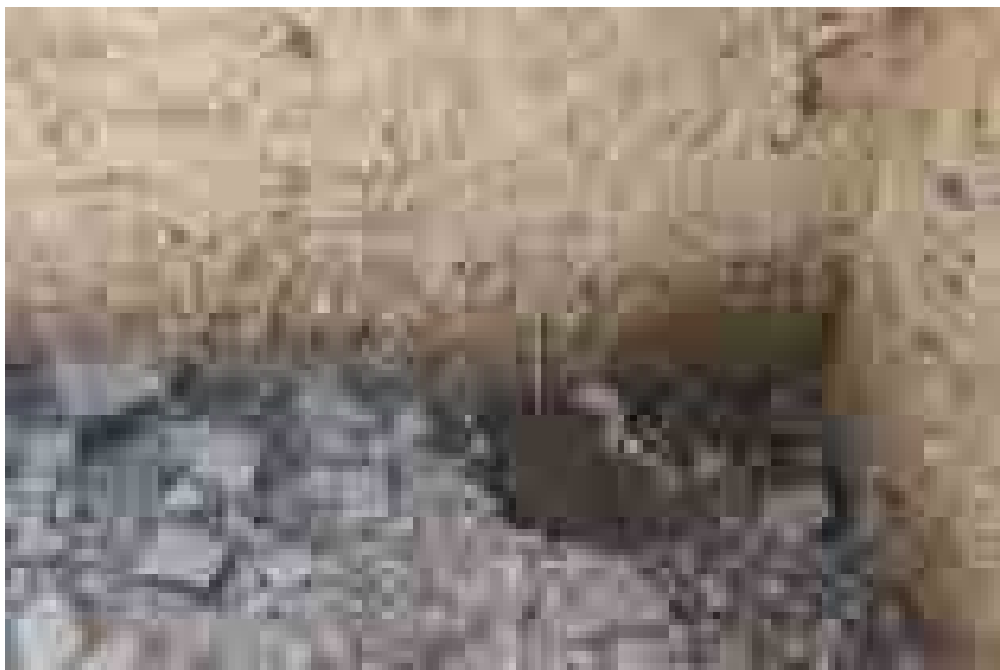
moment. To the north, it follows the natural slope of the mound and goes down regularly until an imposing pit (320). Pit 320 is temporary attached to level 5, as it could have very well been made during this phase, but its stratigraphic position is rather indecisive for the time being. It has a size of 8m length and 1.5 to 3.5m width and is oriented NNW-SSE. This pit was full of material (thousands of ceramics, many almost complete) and was sampled only, in front of the amount of material (Fig. 26). It is obviously a collective dump settled in the periphery of the site.



**Fig. 26** - South part of the pebbled street 257, pit 320 and the potential virgin soil.



**Fig. 27a & b** - Pebbled street 257 in the middle of the trench near Section A'-A, view of the high concentration of falling stones



**Fig. 28** - Pit 367 dug from the pebbled street 257 of level 5.

To the south, pebbled street 257 presents a high concentration of large caliber stones, that could come from a collapsed wall that remains to be found. A small pit (367), of 0.4m in diameter, was present (Fig. 27a and b) near the section. Finally, a circular arc of small size stones, slightly higher, was located near the west berm of the trench. It could cover some remains of level 6, just below the pebbled street (Fig. 28).

## LEVEL 6

North of the 4B remains that were kept in place, we opened in the last days of the campaign a small sounding of 7m length and 2m width along the east limit of the trench. This sounding revealed another occupation level, immediately below the pebbled street 257 (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 29** - Structures of Level 6, from the west.

This level 6 contains a building, which seems relatively important (Fig. 29). At this time, four walls are attested. Wall 337, oriented north-south, crosses the entire length of the sounding (7m). It is made of mudbricks based on stone foundations of 0.7m width. The mudbrick part is badly preserved, probably because of the leveling operated for the installation of the pebbled street 257. However, the upper mortar kept the brick prints. Bricks had a size of 0.6 length and 0.3m width. Thanks to the slope, we were able to observe that the successive courses show alternating layers of stretchers and headers. An especially wide joint (0.15m) could be the filling of a pipe. The stone foundations are made of two to three large size blocks sealed by mortar.

Wall 337 was bonded to the perpendicular wall 336, also of 0.7m width and crossing the trench (2m). Only its stone foundations are preserved. Two other perpendicular mudbricks walls were found, 364 and 368. All of these perpendicular walls defined small rooms, storage boxes-like (365, 366). It could mean that we are dealing with a granary or a warehouse, but this has yet to be demonstrated.

In both north-east rooms (338 and 341), the building yielded a floor. In the room 341, floor 344 was well laid, with an orange coat. On the other side of wall 337, no floor was left because of two pits (318 and 345, rich in material). These pits were located in between level 5 and level 6, but their stratigraphic attribution has to be better defined during the next campaign (maybe a level 6A).

Finally, the north-east corner of the main trench was occupied by a homogeneous ground, dark brown and compact, which could be the virgin soil. The relation between this matter and level 6 is unclear, since pit 318 lies in between. We still do not know if level 6 is the original foundation level of this small Middle Uruk colony or if there are any deeper levels. The next campaign should allow us to obtain a complete occupation sequence of the site. In any case, it is already obvious that this sequence is quite long and have probably filled the whole period.