GIRDI QALA TRENCH B

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Trench B is located in the western part of the flat top the Main Mound of Girdi Qala, across its SW edge (Fig. 1). The aim of the trench is to study the stratigraphic sequence of this high mound (14m), down to its base if possible. In 2017, we enlarged the trench and discovered a monumental building dating from the Hellenistic period (late 4th-early 3rd century BC) 1 . In 2018, during our 4th season, we decided to focus work on this building, extending its excavation. Two new squares were thus opened: C3 (5 × 6 m), east of C1, and C4 (5 × 5 m), north of C1 and C3 (Fig. 2). These two new squares helped to better understand the sequence already observed in the first two squares, that we widened to 6 × 6m to get clear sections, the erosion having badly damaged their berms. The following lines give a brief description of the vestiges encountered, level by level

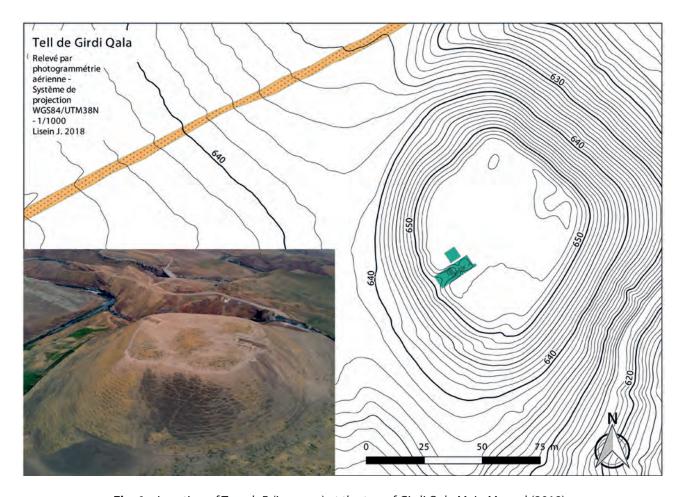


Fig. 1 – Location of Trench B (in green) at the top of Girdi Qala Main Mound (2018).

^{1.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2017.

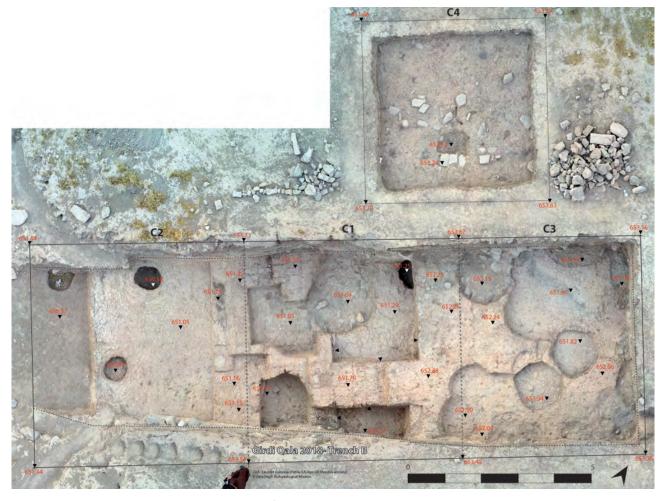


Fig. 2 - Squares of Trench B (drone picture, October 16th).

Level 0

Subsurface – Modern agricultural use

Excavation in the squares on the flat top of the site have exposed numerous furrows (c. 20 cm deep) just below the surface of the mound. The current surface in Trench B is located between 653.71 m and 653.40 m. Ploughings have been observed down to 653.15m (in Square C1: alt. 653.36 m, Square C3: alt. 653.30 m to 653.15 m and Square C4: alt. 653.67 m). The site has been used for agriculture until its excavation in 2015 and the agricultural works damaged the archaeological levels below, especially Middle Islamic levels.

LEVEL 1

Middle Islamic domestic settlement

In Square C3, level 1 is characterized by a series of external floors with small fire-places/ovens: Oven 181 in North corner area (alt. 653.13 m – 652.97 m), 183 in NW area (alt. 653.12 m – 653.01 m), 186 in NE area (alt 653.17 m - 653.16 m), 188 in NE area (alt. 653.11 m - 652.88 m) and a *tan-nur* (221) in the SE berm (ø 60 cm: alt. 653.28 m – 652.85 m). In the northern part of the square, several flat stones were lying (180, 182, 184; alt. 653.11 m – 653.02 m).

In square C4, a structure of three rectangular stones associated with a complete globular Amphora (Fig. 3), with combed decors on superior part and knobbed handle, was found (229: alt. 653.24 m - 652.92 m) 2 . This type of Amphora is well known in the region for this period. A similar amphora was found in Kani Shaie (but the handles do not have knob), dated to Middle Islamic period (11^{th} - 13^{th} century AD) 3 . This structure could represent a floor (alt. 652.95 m) within a house. Excavations stopped at this level in Square C4.





Fig. 3 – In situ ovoid pottery GQB.TC1251.1 with combed decors.

A series of small fire-places/ovens already identified in the NE part of Square C1 (46, 47 and 48, alt. 652.94 m –652.89 m, and 49 with vertical stones laying on edge, alt. 653.09 m – 652.97 m)⁴ and various stone alignments found in 2015 (12, 16, 19, 20, 25, alt. 653.41m – 652.95 m) belong to the same level.

In the new squares C3 and C4, this level produced a significant quantity of small finds, objects of daily life most of which are very fragmentary due to the poor preservation of the level. Among these objects is noteworthy: (i) a beveled upright rim lid with a lug in the middle (Fig. 4), used to cover the cooking pots; a parallel can be found in Tell Basmusian5; (ii) a deformed medium size pot with two handles on sides and made of common ware clay. Its paste contains an amount of vegetal inclusions (chaff) very visible on the surfaces of the pot (Fig. 5). The form of this pot is very similar to the cooking pot found in 2016, the so-called Kurdish ware pot6; (iii) many large potsherds of combed and unglazed vessels, an indication to the presence of many daily life vessels forms but without associated rims found; (iv) a light green glazed miniature vessel that might be used to keep liquids like oils. The glaze was applied on both surfaces of the vessel (Fig. 6); (v) iron pins or iron rods (Fig. 7).

^{2.} See Ahmad 2016 for an overview of the Islamic pottery of Girdi Qala.

^{3.} Personal Observation (Mustafa Ahmad).

^{4.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2016.

^{5.} Abu al-Soof 1970. Pl. XXXV:5.

^{6.} Ahmad 2016. Fig. 12.





Fig. 4 – Cooking pottery GQB.18.1238.33.







Fig. 5 – Small jar GQB.Tc1236.1.







Fig. 6 – Glazed miniature pottery GQB.Tc1205.1.





Fig. 7 – Iron pins or iron rods GQB.Met1239.1 and GQB.Met1236.2.

Level 2

Middle Islamic pits

Level 2 is the digging level of a series of pits in Square C3: 194 (ø 1,30 m, alt. max 652.85 m, NV 1212), 198 (ø 1,50 m, alt. max 652.71 m, NV 1211), 203 (NV 1226), 204 (NV1225) and 205 (NV 1229). These pits disturbed the small stone walls of level 3, and produced pottery that can be assigned to the early Middle Islamic period.

Levels 3-4

Early Islamic domestic settlements

Due to the number of pits dug from the level 2, levels 3 and 4 characterized by domestic structures have been strongly disturbed. In Square C3 as it was difficult to differentiate the two levels, easier to distinguish in Square $C1^7$.

In the western part of Square C3, a small SW-NE stone wall (wall 200/231, alt. 652.89 m - 652.66 m) has been identified, similar to other identical walls (with the same orientation) already known in the eastern part of Square C1 (walls 27 and 55, alt. 652.78 m and 652.84 m respectively), belonging to level 3A and associated with a small fire-place (29: alt. 652.71 m)8.

In the southern part of Square C3, a floor was found a little bit deeper (floor 199: alt. 652.56 m), with flat potsherds and ashy areas (NV 1220). Among potsherds collected on this floor are several fragments of burnt cooking pots and handles of cooking pots (Fig. 8). This type of cooking pots is



Fig. 8 – Fragments of cooking pot GQB.18.1220 from floor 199.

^{7.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2015, 2016.

^{8.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2015, 2016.

common in the region for this period. A parallel of it was found in Tell Basmusian. It has a typical globular form with two horizontal handles on sides that have deep finger impression on each side of the handle.

We assign this floor to level 4, as it seems to be associated with other vestiges of this level in Square C1: a mud-brick NE/SW wall 59 (alt. 652.65-652.55 m) and its associated floor 62 (alt. 652.64 m), and another floor (64) characterized by traces of djuss/gypsum, north of Square C1 (alt. 652.50 - 652.48 m)¹⁰. Between levels 3A and 4, an intermediate level of pits (3B) was observed in both squares C1 and C3 (pits 223, 216, 211, 219, 225 and 224). These pits have badly damaged levels 5 and 6 below.

Level 5

Sassanian House

In Square C3, mud-brick-walls 234 (alt. 652.26m), 215 (alt. 652.08 m) and 236 (alt. 651.94 m) belong to the « Sassanian House » which the entrance has been found during the previous seasons in Squares C1 and C2 11 . Because of the destructions done by the pits from level 2 and 3B, an intelligible plan of level 5 architecture cannot yet be produced at this time. The walls are built with square mud-bricks (0.35 × 0.35 m) quasi similar to the bricks used for the Hellenistic building just below. In the north corner of Square C3, two *tannur* (210 and 235), one nested in the other, have been identified, marking two levels of floor (Fig. 9): floor 1 (green on fig. 9), with tannur 201 (alt. 652.10

9. Abo al-Soof 1970. Pl. XXV: 5.

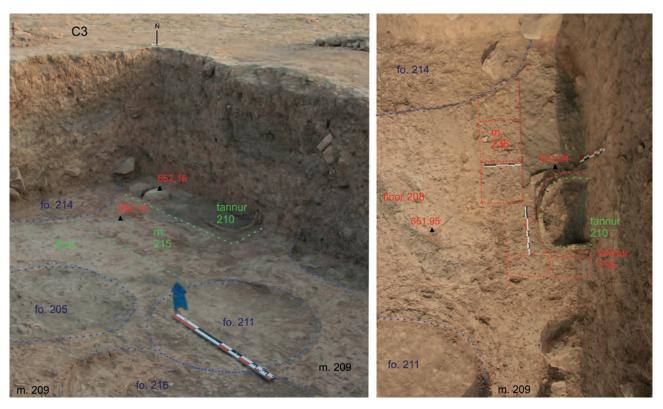


Fig. 9 – Level 5, phase c (green) and d (red); in blue, pits from levels 2 and 3B.

- 10. Colonna d'Istria et al. 2016.
- Colonna d'Istria et al. 2017.

m) and two isolated stones (alt. max 652.16 m), linked to wall 215; and floor 2 (red on fig. 9), with tannur 233 (alt. 651.94 m) and mud-brick wall 236 (an earlier phase of the same wall).

The entrance to the "Sassanian house" has indeed revealed four successive phases of occupation and remodeling of the building, each with its own threshold of stone and door socket, directly superimposed¹². According to the respective altitudes of the structures, Wall 234 belongs to phase 5b and probably also 5c and 5d. Floor 1 belongs to phase 5c and floor 2 to 5d.

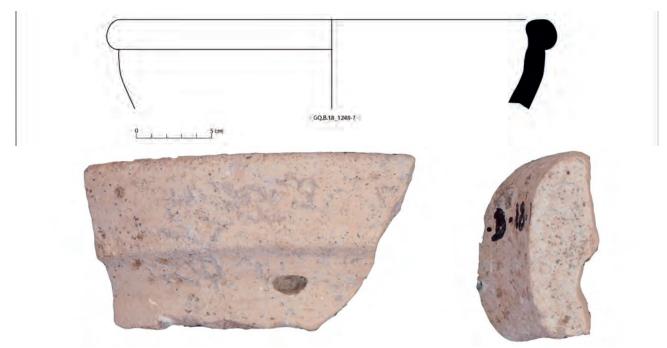


Fig. 10 - Girdi Qala Trench B, Sasanian pottery from Level 5 (Drawing M. Ahmad).

The pottery of this level was slightly mixed with Hellenistic and Islamic pottery, due to the pits. Few new forms are present. A thick-walled basin with round folded rim was found (Fig. 10), along with many other forms of jars, bottles, bowls and pots.

LEVELS 6A AND 6B

Hellenistic occupation – monumental building followed by small scale domestic activities

During the previous seasons, we determined two successive Hellenistic levels, 6A and 6B.

Level 6A, heavily leveled to accommodate the Sassanian building of level 5, is defined by various kind of small installations, most of them set in the ruins of the monumental building of level 6B, partly levelled (its outer wall): Oven 113 partially in wall 130 (=222) and Oven 119 set into wall 116; an alley (137) of flat stones and a pebble floor (159) with potsherd (alt. 651.50-651.45 m) in the south corner of Square C1 and along the south-east berm of Square C2; ashy floors 156 (alt. 651.40 m) and 135 (alt. 651.48 m) in the central part of Square C2¹³. In the slope of the tell (Square C2), a Pit 153, spotted in 2017, have been emptied this year and produced unbaked weights completing the set of last year¹⁴ (Fig. 11).

^{12.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2017.

^{13.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2017: 84-85.

^{14.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2017: 85.



Fig. 11 – Unbaked weights from pit 153 - GQB.T1156 (2017) and GQB.T1185 (2018).



Fig. 12 – Team at work in Trench B (drone picture).

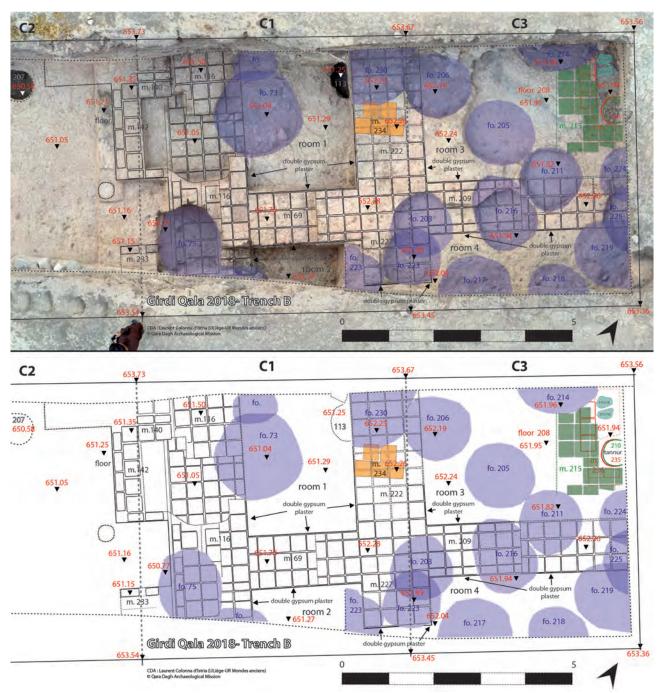


Fig. 13 – Plans of Levels 5 and 6 and drone picture of Trench B (October 2018). Blue: pits from Early-Middle Islamic period; Orange: Level 5 phase b; Green: phase 5c; Red: phase 5d; Black: Level 6B.

Level 6B corresponds to a monumental Hellenistic building, the oldest occupation layer reached so far and the best documented (Fig. 12 and 13). Some of its walls are preserved on more than a meter high (in Square C1) and covered with at least two fine gypsum plasters. Walls are built with square mud-bricks $(0.35 \times 0.35 \times 0.13 \text{ m})$ pressed in thick clay mortar (joints of 3 to 5 cm). Despite being disturbed by pits from later levels, particularly in the south part of Square C1 (pit 75), the plan available this year is clear thanks to the massive walls (but sometimes without visible joint due to the erosion: 140/142, 154, 233)¹⁵. Beside a probable recessed façade (116, with buttresses 140/142 and 233) set near the edge of the mound to the west, we have a long E/W wall (69/209) crossed by a perpendicular N/S wall (222/227) dividing four rooms, the two to the south (Room 2 and 4) connected by a passageway.

^{15.} Colonna d'Istria et al. 2017: 85-86.

In Squares C1 and C2 to the west, the excavations have increased our understanding of the remains discovered in 2017. The outer wall (116) of the building towards the slope is four bricks and a half wide (1.6 m, alt. 651.78 - 651.05m), the half brick disposed on an opposite face from one layer to the other. In foundation, bricks are arranged in quincunx pattern. Abutting the wall 116, two mud-brick rectangular piles, 142 (alt. 651.35 m) and 233 (alt. 651.20 m) could be buttresses (1.05m deep), heavily leveled by the level 6A. South of buttress 142, that could extend more to the west, an ashy floor could be followed. Inside the building, Wall 69 has a width of three bricks (1.15 m), alternating layers of three bricks with layers of two bricks flanked on each side by half bricks.

In order to extend the clearing of the plan of the building, Square C3 was opened to the east, where new walls could be identified: Wall 209 is the extension of Wall 69 (oriented NE-SW) and has the same characteristics, with a width of 3 bricks; Wall 222/227 (oriented NW-SE) perpendicu-

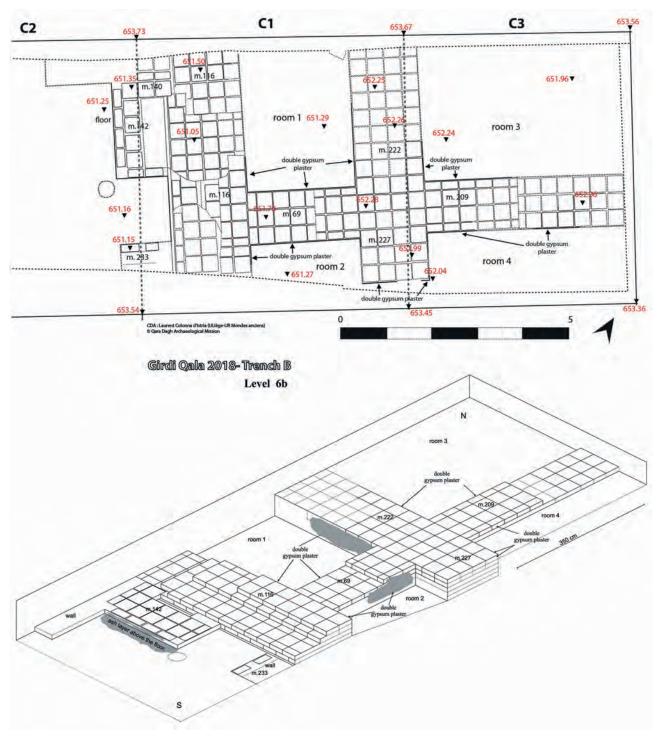


Fig. 14 – Plan and Axonometric reconstruction of the official Hellenistic building of Level 6B.

lar to wall 69, is 4 bricks wide (1.4m). Both are plastered with a thick double layer of gypsum plaster, which helped to immediately identify the passage between Rooms 2 and 4. The passageway is partly in the berm, so its width is still unknown.

We thus have four distinct spaces, whose limits are not completely known: Room 1 measures 2.70 \times 3.05 m at least; Room 2 2.70 m \times 1.05 m at least; Room 3 more than 4.20 m \times 2.90m at least, and room 4 more than 4.20 m also \times at least 1.05m. The floors of Room 1 and 2 have been reached at 651.25 m., without any material found for the moment. The floors of Rooms 3 and 4 have not been reached.

The plan of this important Hellenistic building begins to come out of the ground (Fig. 14). However, we do not yield enough of it, and of its possible content, to have an idea of its precise functions. We plan consequently to continue its extensive excavation, while going deeper in the places where possible, to fulfill the stratigraphic goal of the trench.

Regarding the pottery found in the filling layers, many forms were present, the majority of them having similarities to those found during the last seasons. Among these forms (Fig. 15), an open shape form of a plate made of common ware fabric (GQ.B.18_1214-1). Another form of pot was also found, of light brown color (GQ.B.18_1214-2). It has a grooved over-rolled rim with an indentation on the inner face to receive a lid. Few rims of amphora were found as well, including an amphora with a triangular folded rim with a slight groove on the exterior lip (GQ.B.18_1214-4).

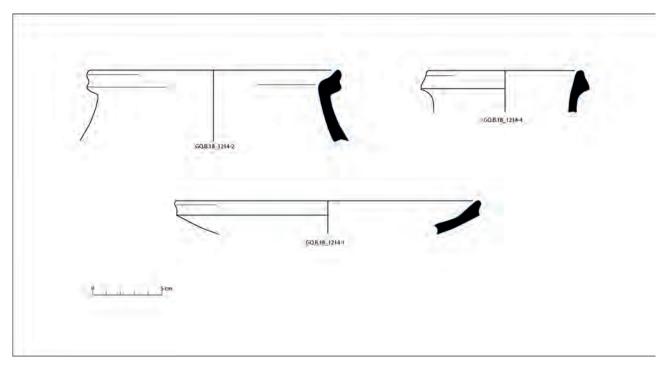


Fig. 15 – Girdi Qala Trench B, Hellenistic pottery from Level 6 (Drawing M. Ahmad).



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