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HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
DEUTSCHEN ARCHÄOLOGISCHEN INSTITUT
ABTEILUNG ATHENEN

HEFT 1
JAHRESHEFT 1945

ARCHAEOLOGISCHE
MITTEILUNGEN
AUS IRAN

HERAUSGEGEBEN VOM
DEUTSCHEN ARCHÄOLOGISCHEN INSTITUT
ABTEILUNG TEHERAN

ERGÄNZUNGSBAND 9
PARTHIAN SITES IN HYRCANIA

PARTHIAN SITES IN HYRCANIA

THE GURGAN PLAIN

BY

M. Y. KIANI

1982

VERLAG VON DIETRICH REIMER IN BERLIN

CIP-Kurztitelaufnahme der Deutschen Bibliothek

Kiani, M. Yūsuf:

Parthian sites in Hyrcania: the Gurgan plain/

by M. Y. Kiani. — Berlin: Reimer, 1982.

(Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran: Erg.-Bd.;9)

ISBN 3-496-00191-7

NE: Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran/
Ergänzungsband

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Unter den Eichen 57
1000 Berlin 45

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CONTENTS

Geleitwort (von W. Kleiss)	6
Preface (A. D. H. Bivar)	7
Introduction	9
Chapter One: The Defensive Wall of Gurgan	11
Chapter Two: The Forts	39
Chapter Three: The Cities	45
Chapter Four: Pottery of the Gurgan Plain	63
Parthian Hyrcania: Conclusion	77
Bibliography	79
Plates	81

The maps (general map and figs. 1-8b; fig. 10. 12. 14. 30/31) are to be found in a folder at the end of the volume)

GELEITWORT

Die vorliegende Publikation seiner Forschungen am sogenannten Alexanderwall in Gorgan in Nord-Iran und an verschiedenen archäologischen Plätzen südlich dieses Grenzwalles durch M. Y. Kiani bringt zu verschiedenen Fragen die zum Teil lang erwartete Antwort. Das umfangreiche Plan- und Abbildungsmaterial der Arbeit ist für die weitere Forschung und Beurteilung des Geschichtsablaufes dieses Raumes von großem Wert.

Die Datierung des Grenzwalles in parthische Zeit, durch die archäologischen Ergebnisse und die Überlegungen zur Veränderung des Meeresspiegels des Kaspischen Meeres unterbaut, wird die Diskussion zur Frage der Entstehungszeit und der Funktion des sogenannten Alexanderwalles voranbringen, wobei vielleicht durch den sich aufdrängenden Vergleich des Walles in Gorgan nicht nur mit der chinesischen Mauer, sondern vielmehr mit den Limes-Konstruktionen der Römer im 2. Jahrh. n. Chr. in England und in Deutschland unter Hadrian und Antoninus Pius eine Datierung des Walles in Gorgan bei der für die Zeit bekannte wechselseitige Einflußnahme von Ost und West eher in spätparthischer Zeit als vor der Zeitwende in Frage kommt. Wir schätzen uns glücklich, diese Publikation in die Reihe der Veröffentlichungen der Abteilung Teheran aufnehmen zu können.

WOLFRAM KLEISS



Qaleh Kafar

PREFACE

The lands which adjoin the south-eastern shore of the Caspian Sea form an archaeological region of outstanding scientific interest. This fertile district of Hyrcania gives evidence of human habitation extending from the Palaeolithic occupation of the Elburz caves near Behshahr to the opulent Bronze Age cultures of innumerable mounds on the Gurgan Plain, of which mention may be made of Turang Tappeh, Shah Tappeh and Yarim Tappeh. During the second millennium B.C. this zone formed the strategic route of the Indo-European migrations. Pioneers in the utilization of the horse, these peoples introduced vital new elements into the populations of the Near East and South Asia, and for the first time brought the Iranians to Iran.

Through succeeding historical periods, during century after century, the spotlight of history falls repeatedly on Hyrcania. The Seleucid Antiochus III was to deploy here for the first time, in 208 B.C. the engines of organized siege-warfare. Here the Arsacid Parthians soon built up their strength to liberate Iran from Hellenistic tutelage—only to find their nomad neighbours from Central Asia, the Sacaraucae, Tochari and other hordes, pressing strongly on their heels. If the Great Wall of Ğurġan, running from the Caspian coast to the Pishkamar Mountain, was not, as legend assumes, the work of Alexander of Macedon, it was no doubt built, and at any rate refurbished, by Sāsānian rulers such as Firuz and Anushirvan during the 6th century A.D., to hold back the advancing Huns. As a feature of the landscape it can vie with the Wall of China (reputedly visible from the Moon), and with Hadrian's Wall in Northumbria. So vivid an impression did it make that it has achieved a mention in the Qur'ān, yet its historical role is not yet clearly known.

Even in Islamic times, this already ancient land remained the stage for great historical events. By this road the Samanid princes of Bukhara extended their rule into the Caspian Provinces. The philosopher king, Qābūs b. Washmgīr resided, debating with the prodigy al-Bīrūnī the progress of science, at the town to which his incomparable monument, Gunbad-i Qābus, has given its modern name. The nearby Muslim capital of Ğurġan, so brusquely overwhelmed by the Mongol invasion of 618/1221-2, all the more because of the abruptness of its fate has bequeathed innumerable treasures for the archaeologist, providing an unequalled picture of medieval civilization, and the manner of its end.

The relics of all these cities, superimposed dwellings, fortifications and works of engineering of every period lie scattered densely over the plain., Their investigation and explanation present a noteworthy challenge to the archaeologist, and provide a

task to occupy several decades. It is a great pleasure to welcome the first volumes of the report which records the first eight years of work by the Delegation for the Survey and Excavation of the Gurgan Plain (Ḥayyat-i Bar-rasā u Kāwush-i Dasht-i Gurgān) under the direction of Dr. M. Y. Kiani. The great task is of course far from being at an end, and all students of the Iranian historical past will await with keen expectation the continuing progress of an enterprise that over the years must shed light on every aspect of Iranian origins, and provide the explanation that human curiosity demands of the mighty and enigmatic works and monuments that cover this favoured land.

A. D. H. BIVAR.

INTRODUCTION

The land of Gurgan has been one of the most important centres of Iranian culture from the earliest times. This region, together with Parthia and parts of Khorasan, formed a satrapy which, according to the Bisutun inscription of Darius the Great, was named 'Parthava'. At a later date, the Greek historians called it Hyrcania. For a short period of time after the fall of the Achaemenids, this region was under Seleucid control; but soon afterwards the Parthians, whose native land was part of this area, came into power and established a dynasty which lasted for five centuries.

Both Arrian and Strabo described Hyrcania, the present Gurgan Plain, in glowing terms, and it became the earliest centre of Parthian power. As we know, the two satrapies of Parthia and Hyrcania, the earliest centre of the Arsacids, were very close to each other, but in general, from geographical, political, and, most important, agricultural points of view, the region of Hyrcania held the pre-eminent position. Consequently the Parthians first settled in Hyrcania, and throughout their dynasty they always tried to control this important region. Therefore, the most important remains of the Parthians, and especially those of the early period, should be found in this region, east of the Caspian, and mainly between the Gurgan and Atrak Rivers.

Unfortunately, the homeland of the Parthians has not previously been fully investigated, and except for a few early capitals of the dynasty such as Nisa and Merv, other important cities and capitals have not yet been identified, so that our knowledge of their architecture and fine arts in their homeland is not satisfactorily established.

The aerial and ground surveys, and excavations, of the present Gurgan Expedition resulted in the discovery of many pre-Islamic archaeological sites, most of which show signs of Parthian occupation. These sites, some of which were surely early capitals and major cities of the Parthians, will be briefly described for the benefit of those scholars interested in the art and architecture of the Parthian period. In the first chapter of this brief report, the important defensive wall of the plain—the so-called Alexander's Barrier—has been described. Chapter Two describes the forts constructed in old Hyrcania. In Chapter Three, an attempt has been made to identify the main cities and centres of the Parthian period. It should be mentioned that, from among the hundreds of sites surveyed by the Expedition, just a few examples have been given here, those selected being chosen according to their sizes, location, and survey and excavation material. Of these sites, some are believed to be defensive forts, and others large cities or capitals. In Chapter Four, the pottery of the Gurgan Plain has been briefly investigated.

The writer is most grateful to the following friends and colleagues who helped during the various stages of survey, excavation, and publication. Dr. F. Bagherzadeh, for his assistance and advice, during the seasons of survey and excavations. Eng. Mehryar, for preparing the plans of the defensive wall; Mr. M. Ingraham and Mr. Ziaei, for the preparation of the excavation plans; Mr. Nikkhab, Mr. Abedi, and Mr. Khalatbari, members of the Expedition; Mrs. S. Ayazi, for the drawing of the pottery; and Mr. M. Charlesworth, for correcting and editing the text of this report. To these people, and to all those others who helped in many other ways, I extend my warmest thanks.

M. Y. Kiani

Tehran
January 1981

CHAPTER ONE

THE DEFENSIVE WALL OF GURGAN

Introduction

During the seasons of excavations in the Islamic city of Gurgan, or Ğurġan, modern Gonbad-i Qabus, the Expedition had the opportunity of conducting a survey and excavations, both on the so-called 'Alexander's Barrier', and in the vicinity of Gurgan itself. This survey resulted in the discovery of many pre-Islamic sites, mainly belonging to the Parthian period. One of the most important constructions in the Gurgan Plain is the famous defensive wall, which is now generally known as 'Qizil-Alan' by the Turcoman, and as 'Sad-i Iskandar' by the Farsi-speaking population. This wall is also known by the names 'Sad-i Piruz' and 'Sad-i Anushiravan'. Despite some differences among historians and geographers, the wall is generally attributed to the Sasanian period.

Unfortunately, there are no written documents from historians or geographers of the classical period concerning the construction of the wall, but the following are some descriptions from Islamic sources.

Ibn-e Esfandiari, who wrote his book ca 613 A.H./1216 A.D., named it 'Firouz kande' (= 'Constructed by Firouz').¹ Mostowfi, in his *Nuzhat-al-Qulub*, called it simply 'Barrier', but also attributed it to Firouz, a king of the Sasanian period.² Siyâqi-Nizâm, in his *Fotuhât-i Homâyoun* dated 1007 A.H./1598 A.D., writing two centuries after Mostowfi, still calls it 'Sad', or 'Barrier', and attributed it to Anushiravan. He also, however, gives an account of the wall's construction.³ Most, there-

¹ Ibn-e Esfandiari, *Tarikh-i Tabaristan* [Persian text edited by A. Eqbal] (Tehran 1960) 72.

² Hamd-Allah Mostowfi, *Nuzhat al-Qulub* (Leiden 1913) 195.

³ Siyâqi-Nizâm, *Fotuhât-i Homâyoun* (Les Victoires Augustes), 1007/1598 = Ph. D. thesis of Dr. Sh. Adl, II volumes (Paris University 1976) I 418-419.—The writer is most grateful to Dr. Adl for the following information.

"As related by informed and trustworthy sources, the town of Astarâbâd is a relic of Nushiravân. The cause of its construction being that during the reign of Nushiravân there was a city called Tammisheh, now known as Kharâbe-Shahr/Ruined City, which was located within four *Farsangs* of Astarâbâd, and each year the army of Khazar sacked and plundered Tammisheh and the province of Tabaristan.

Nushiravân ordered a barrier to be built against the army of Khazar, and nimble experts and master architects built a wall one hundred *Farsangs* long, and each day five *Kharvâr* of gold was taken out of Nushiravân's treasury and put aside for the construction of the wall.

When construction neared completion, there was no more gold in the public treasury and so they borrowed sums from a man known as Âzar-Mâhân, an inhabitant of Kermân who, like Croesus, was distinguished amongst his contemporaries by his great wealth.

fore, of the medieval sources described the fortification as a defensive wall, and the name 'Alexander's Barrier' was probably applied to it during and after the 16th and 17th centuries A.D. by European travellers, when they began to visit Iran.

In the present century, Schmidt made an aerial survey and recorded 170 kms of the wall, in addition to locating 31 forts positioned along the south side of the wall. He dated it to the period between Alexander's conquest and the early Islamic period.⁴ Lester Thompson, in the geographical survey of the plain which he made some 40 years ago, mentioned it as an old construction.⁵ Rabino, in *Mázandarán and Astarábád*, writes: "Shortly after Áq-Qal'a we reached the Qizil Álán wall, which was first erected by Alexander the Great as a protection against the incursions of the wild tribesmen of the east. It was rebuilt by Núsharwán, the Sásánian monarch (530-578 A.D.)."⁶ Professor Arne, director of a Swedish expedition which has made a survey of this area, found Sasanian pottery, although only in one location near Gumish Tepe.⁷ Recently, Professor Frye, in an interesting article entitled "The Sasanian System of Walls for Defense", attributed it to the Sasanian king Chosroes I Anushiravan.⁸

In conclusion, notice should be taken of an account in The Holy Qoran of the construction of a wall in Persia. This account is worth quoting in full.

Maulana Muhammad Ali: *The Holy Qur'an*

Arabic Text, English Translation and Commentary. 6th edition, Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore, Pakistan, 1973.

Sura 18: The Cave

Section 11: Dhu-l-qarnain and Gog and Magog

83. And they ask thee about Dhu-l-qarnain. Say, I will recite to you an account of him.

Finally, Estakhriun of Fárs, a man who owned many people and increasing wealth, proved his zeal by asking of Nushiraván; 'What necessity causes the king to ask a far-off land for assistance? If Ázar-Máhán gives five *Kharvâr*, and when the king finds it within his power he will repay.'

Nushiraván liked the idea, and commissioned Estakhriun to complete the wall, and Estakhriun spent seven *Kharvâr* of gold a day and so it was completed.

Having finished the barrier, he left for Jorjân and crossed the territory now known as Astarábád, and finding a suitable location for development, he drew the plan of the woods, the sea and the mountains on a piece of paper and, taking it to Nushiraván, he said: 'The barrier is finished and there is some money left over. I have discovered such a location for development, and if you wish it I can build a town.' Nushiraván accepted, and commissioned Estakhriun to build Astarábád. Estakhriun began to build, and after it was finished it was named Estakhriabád, which gradually became known as Astarábád." (Translated from Persian and French by Miss M. Emami. For an explanation and further information, see *Adl. Ibid.*, II 786-788; 792-794.)

⁴ Erich F. Schmidt, *Flights over Ancient Cities of Iran* (University of Chicago Press 1940) 5.

⁵ S. Thompson, *Geological Evidence for Ancient Civilizations on the Gurgan Plain*, *Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology* 5, 3, June 1938, 196-200.

⁶ H. L. Rabino di Borgomale, *Mázandarán and Astarábád* (Luzac, London 1928) 86.

⁷ T. J. Arne, *Excavation at Shah Tepe, Iran = The Sino-Swedish Expedition*. Publication XXVII (Stockholm 1945) 7-11.

⁸ R. N. Frye, "The Sasanian System of Walls for Defense", *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*. Ed. Miriam Rosen-Ayalon (Institute of Asian and African Studies. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem 1977) 15.

84. Truly we established him in the land and granted him means of access to everything.
85. So he followed a course.
86. Until, when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it going down into a black sea, and found by it a people. We said: O Dhu-l-qarnain, either punish them or do them a benefit.
87. He said: As for him who is unjust, we shall chastise him, then he will be returned to his Lord, and he will chastise him with an exemplary chastisement.
88. And as for him who believes and does good, for him is a good reward, and We shall speak to him an easy word of Our command.
89. Then he followed a course.
90. Until, when he reached the (land of) the rising sun, he found it rising on a people to whom We had given no shelter from it.
91. So it was. And We had full knowledge of what he had.
92. Then he followed a course.
93. Until, when he reached (a place) between the two mountains, he found on that side of them a people who could hardly understand a word.
94. They said: O Dhu-l-qarnain, Gog and Magog do mischief in the land. May we then pay thee tribute on condition that thou raise a barrier between us and them?
95. He said: That wherein my Lord has established me is better, so if only you help me with strength (of men), I will make a fortified barrier between you and them.
96. Bring me blocks of iron. At length, when he had filled up the space between the two mountain sides, he said: Blow. Till, when he had made (it) as fire, he said: Bring me molten brass to pour over it.
97. So they were not able to scale it, nor could they make a hole in it.
98. He said: This is a mercy from my Lord, but when the promise of my Lord comes to pass He will crumble it, and the promise of my Lord is ever true.
99. And on that day we shall let some of them surge against others and the trumpet will be blown, then We shall gather them all together.
100. And We shall bring forth hell, exposed to view, on that day before the disbelievers,
101. Whose eyes were under a cover from My Reminder, and they could not bear to hear.

This wall was thus built of stone and iron, between two mountains, to protect the people of the plain against the attacks of the northern nomads. Although its exact location is unknown, scholars generally agree that it was in the Caspian Region.

There is also a problem over the identity of Dhu-l-qarnain. The name itself has many meanings. "the owner of continents", "The owner of horns", "The owner of long hair" and "The owner of centuries/generation". It does not refer to Alexander, since he did not stay long in the Caspian region. More importantly, Dhu-l-qarnain is here presented as a noble-minded person, whereas the Qoranic view of Alexander is here unfavorable. On the other hand many scholars believe that Dhu-l-qarnain must be either Cyrus or Darius the Achaemenid kings.

Description of the Wall
(Pl. 1-4; Figs. 1-9)

The wall begins in the south-east by the Caspian Sea, runs north of Gurgan, and continues to the north-west of the plain, ending at the vertical rocks of Pishkamar Mountain, a total distance of ca 175 kms. It is not clear whether originally the wall continued further, to Merv or to other cities in Central Asia, or not. It should be noted that some writers of the Islamic period were uncertain as to the exact distance and location of the wall. In the *Ġahan-Nameh*, which was written at the end of the 11th century A.D., in chapter sixteen entitled 'World Wonders', we read: "In the region of Gurgan, there is a wall constructed from baked bricks, from the top of Ali-Abad Mountain to the region of Siavashak, which continues to Abeskon Lake. Each brick weighs 30-40 *Mans* (= ca 90-120 kgs), and the length of this wall is 50 *Farsangs* (300 kms). This wall, which passes near the village of Baghudeh and through the valleys of Gas and Bavard, from below Baghudeh continues into the desert towards Sarakhs, but it is not known whether this is part of the same wall, or a separate wall. And that wall which is near Gurgan is known as 'Taġanbar'".⁹ The *Ġahan-Nameh* also contains interesting informing about the wall of Darband in Qafqaz.¹⁰

Dowlatshah, in his *Memories of the Poet*, states that the wall extended from Amol to Abivard and Merv, and from the other side of Ġowveyn to the border of Farghaneh and Khujand.¹¹ In the *History of Mazandaran*, which was written in 1044 A.H./1634 A.D., we read: ". . . Narsi, who was his eldest son, became king. Noushiravan paid more attention to his education than his father, and by the order of Noushiravan he built the Darband Wall in Shirvan, which the common people believe was built by Alexander."¹²

From the early sources, therefore, the location and exact extent of the barrier is not clear. As we know, in the Caspian region, because of its importance from both military and economic points of view, many defensive walls were constructed during different periods, of which the most important was this barrier, most recently studied by Frye.¹³ At the present stage of our investigations, we do not know whether this

⁹ Mohammed Ibn-Najib Bakran, *Ġahan-Nameh* [Persian text] Edited by Dr. M. A. Riahi (Tehran 1342/1963) 81-82.

¹⁰ The Bab al-Avab: *Ġahan-Nameh*⁹ 81:

"One of the great monuments is Bab al-Avab, the so called Darband of the Caspian region, on one side of which there is the mountain known as Qibiq Range (Qafqaz) and on the other side is the sea, that is the Sea of Ab Sikun. Two walls on either side of the town rise from the mountain and abut in the sea. These walls are made of stone and they say that what lies in the sea is melted metal which has been sunken in in order to make it even with the level of the water and later piled up with stones. As these two walls enter the sea, they narrow and come close to each other so that the distance between them is reduced and whoever approached from either side comes out between these two walls and close to the market place. There is a chain linking these two walls so that any ship arriving or departing must do so with their knowledge and permission."

¹¹ Rabino⁶ 153.—The writer apologizes for not being able to find the original text, which was not available at the time of printing.

¹² Mulla Sheikh Ali Gilani, *The History of Mazandaran*. Edited by Dr. M. Sutudeh = Entesherat Bunyad-i Farhang-i Iran N. LIX 32.

¹³ Frye⁸ 82 Fig. 1.

WALL OF GURGAN
Measurements of the Forts.

No	Measurements of the Forts	Distance of the Forts from each other	No	Measurements of the Forts	Distance of the Forts from each other
1	240 × 200	2 600	19	140 × 140	3 200
2	120 × 120	5 000	20	180 × 160	3 000
3	180 × 180	5 750	21	140 × 120	5 900
4	240 × 300	4 100	22	140 × 110	5 900
5	160 × 140	5 200	23	220 × 180	6 000
6	200 × 200	4 650	24	120 × 120	5 900
7	160 × 180	3 150	25	260 × 200	5 800
8	180 × 160	4 200	26	200 × 150	2 500
9	160 × 140	5 500	27	260 × 220	2 200
10	160 × 160	5 650	28	160 × 140	4 000
11	300 × 200	4 800	29	220 × 200	2 100
12	280 × 200	550	30	160 × 120	9 850
13	200 × 280	400	31	150 × 150	8 300
14	160 × 160	5 150	32	200 × 200	1 200
15	260 × 200	3 450	33	150 × 150	1 900
16	150 × 200	2 950			4 000
17	200 × 180	3 550			
18	200 × 180	3 050			

Fig. 9 The wall of Gurgan, measurements of the forts in metres.

barrier is part of a vast defensive wall, or was constructed only between the Caspian Sea and Pishkamar Mountain. For instance, both Mostowfi¹⁴ and Bakran¹⁵ record the length of the wall to be 50 *Farsangs*. We hope that further researches will enable us to determine the exact extent of the barrier.

From its eastern end, the wall crosses a dry river and runs in a northerly direction parallel to the Gurgan River, passing by the oldest site of the plain, Qara Shikh Tappeh. Other prominent sites in this vicinity include Malik Tappeh, Abadan Tappeh, Mullah-Ali Tappeh, Aman-Qoli Tappeh, and Qara Mohammad Tappeh. Reaching the north part of old Ğurġan (modern Gonbad-i Kabus), the wall changes its direction towards the west, while passing north of many historical sites such as the ruins of Jurjan itself, Qaleh Sultan-Ali, Qaleh Qazaqli, Qaleh Gug, and Bibi-Shervan. It is noteworthy that most of the wall's forts are situated between Qara Shikh Tappeh and Bibi-Shervan.

From Bibi-Shervan, the course of the wall changes to a more southerly direction, and passes by the important sites of Qarniareq and Altin Tappeh in the north, and Altin Tokhmaq and Saqez Tappeh in the south. The last part of the wall passes north of the city of Pahlavi Deġ, and from there continues to the city of Gumishan. At the present time, because of the fluctuation of level of the Caspian Sea in antiquity, the course of the wall near the Caspian is not clear, but it is hoped that future surveys and excavations in this area will determine this point.

At the present time, the wall has a height of between two and five metres. Its width is about ten metres, and there are forts at irregular intervals, the shortest interval being 50 metres, and the longest 10 kilometres. Generally, the shape of the forts is either oblong or square (Fig. 9). There are 40 forts, all located against the south side of the wall. In some places, along the northern side of the wall, there is a ditch, up to 30 metres wide and 3 metres deep (Pl. 4,1).

Finally, it should be noted that, in the middle of the Barrier, between forts Nos. 22 and 30, there are two more defensive walls, one located to the south, and the other to the north of the Barrier. The archaeological sites in this area are in considerable numbers, and are apparently more important than in the other parts of the Gurgan Plain. Although at this stage of the investigation it is difficult to determine the exact function of these two extra walls, it seems that the people of the land constructed that wall lying to the north first, and that to the south later. The first, northerly, construction apparently belongs to three different periods, of which the earliest goes back to before the Parthian period, perhaps even to the early 1st millennium B.C.; the second, main period is the Parthian; and it was finally repaired or reconstructed during the Sasanian period.

Survey and Excavation of the Wall

Unfortunately, in the past fifty years almost all parts of the wall have been destroyed by the people and farmers of the plain, who have taken the bricks for their

¹⁴ Mostowfi² 195.

¹⁵ Ğahan-Nameh⁹ 82.

own purposes. In some parts, especially at the Caspian end, new road constructions have been made on top of the old wall, while the middle and eastern parts of the wall have been converted into farms. Both aerial and surface surveys were made by the Expedition, both for measurements and to collect pottery and bricks from alongside the wall. In order to examine the method of construction of the wall and the forts, eight trenches were opened in the wall and in fort No. 12, which is located some 3 kms north of Ğurġan city (Fig. 10).

Trench A

Trench A measured 6.00×2.00 metres. After digging to a depth of 1 metre on the wall itself, only broken bricks were found, but continuing the excavations we came across a brick kiln on the south side of the wall (Fig. 11, Pls. 5,1–2). This kiln is oblong in shape, measuring 7.15×2.75 metres, with a depth of 2.00 metres. It had apparently been used many times for firing bricks, and to north and south of the kiln a number of brick wasters were found. On the south side of the kiln there was a ruined hole, which was probably the oven, and around this hole were found many broken and oxidised bricks. From the floor of the kiln we collected 16 complete bricks measuring $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cms. It seems that along the wall there must have been many such kilns for the purpose of producing material for the wall's construction.

Trench B

68 metres to the east of Trench A, Trench B was opened. The excavations here continued to a depth of 2 metres, and we found only irregular, broken bricks. It seems that this part of the wall, like other parts, has been dug by farmers for its bricks.

Trench C

30 metres to the east of Trench B, our third trench was opened, Trench C, measuring 14.00×2.00 metres. In this trench, at a depth of 1 metre, we found only two rows of bricks measuring $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cms, between which broken bricks were laid. It seems, therefore, that for the construction of the Barrier broken pieces of brick were also used (Pl. 5,3).

Trench D

Trench D was opened to the east of Trench C, and measured 13.00×9.00 metres. Here, 1 metre below the surface, we found part of the wall in better condition. In this part, the wall measured 10 metres in width, and was constructed in an interesting and unusual manner, with one brick set in a vertical position and two bricks set horizontally below it. The dimensions of the bricks were as before. It should be mentioned that this arrangement of bricks is comparable to that of the Parthian palace at Ashur (Pls. 6,1–2, Fig. 12).

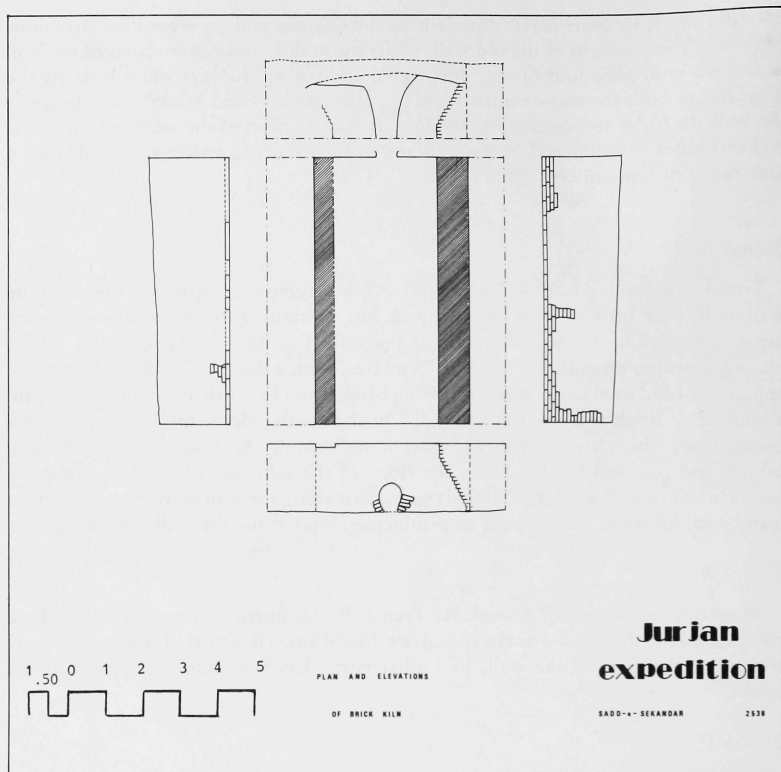


Fig. 11 Plan and elevation of the brick kiln

The northern part of the trench was extended so as to cover the area of the ditch along the north side of the wall. However, although other parts of the wall definitely possess a ditch, it was established that no ditch existed at this point. We concluded, therefore, that only some parts of the wall were equipped with a ditch.

A burial, however, was discovered in this area. The skeleton was in a bad state of preservation, and was lying with its face to the south-west. It was accompanied, in the northern part of the grave, by a few metal pins, a flint, and four grey ware pottery vessels. The style of burial, together with the pottery, were similar to burials discovered at Halimehjan, a Parthian/Sasanian site excavated by Professor Fukai¹⁶ (Pl. 6,3),

¹⁶ Shinji Fukai/Toshio Matsutani, "Preliminary Report of Survey and Soundings at Halimehjan, 1976", *Oriens* 13, 1977, 48-49 Figs. 5-6 (Graves SP-3 and SP-4, dated 3rd-1st centuries B.C.).

Excavations in Forts Nos. 12-13

As already noted above, there are forty forts located along the south side of the wall. In order to discover the construction of Fort No. 12, and also the connection of the wall with the forts, four trenches were opened at the junction of the fort and the wall, and inside the fort itself (Trenches E, F, G, H. Figs. 12-13).

Trench E

Trench E was opened at the junction of the western wall of the fort, and was extended into the fort. The excavations were first directed southwards along the western wall, of which 36 metres was cleared, constructed of mud bricks measuring $50 \times 50 \times 10$ cms. At a distance of 26 metres from the north, we located a semi-circular tower which projected 4.5 metres in front of the wall. The wall itself rose 3.7 metres above the level of the plain.

Inside the fort were found settlements of the Parthian and Sasanian periods. In the Parthian period, at a depth of 2.28 metres, were found ten bricks measuring $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cms, some broken bricks, and a very large jar (Fig. 12). The disturbed nature of the pottery, bricks, and other material, suggests that this level was perhaps destroyed in a war.

During the Sasanian period, this part of the fort was used as a temporary settlement, and ovens and buildings were constructed on top of the Parthian level (Pl. 7,1).

Trench F

To determine any interior constructions, Trenches F, G, and H were opened in three different parts of the fort. Trench F measured 10×10 metres, and resulted in the discovery of two rooms, Rooms A and B, which measured 5.50×3.35 metres, and 8.90×7.38 metres respectively.

In Room A, the walls were 90 cms thick, and were constructed of mud bricks measuring $39 \times 39 \times 10$ cms, $40 \times 40 \times 8$ cms, and $40 \times 40 \times 11$ cms. In the middle of the room there was an oven, measuring 25 cms in depth. There was also red and grey pottery of the Parthian period.

Room B lay to the south of Room A, and was somewhat larger. It, too, was built of mud-brick, and stood to a height of 2.30 metres, of which 1.50 metres was mud-brick, the remaining 0.80 metres being mud construction. The walls were 90 cms thick. Objects which were found in this room included a red ewer of the Parthian period (Figs. 13-14, Pls. 7,2-3).

Trench G

Trench G was located in the middle of the fort, and measured 5×5 metres. At a depth of 63 cms, we found sherds of red pottery together with burnt bricks measuring $39 \times 39 \times 10$ cms and $41 \times 41 \times 10$ cms. Continuing the excavation, at a depth of 2.80 metres, we found a skeleton in a very poor state of preservation, which was

buried facing to the east. An extension of the trench to the north reached the floor of the settlement at a depth of 2.30 metres. The floor was paved with mud and mud bricks. Continuing, at a depth of 2.80 metres, we found a second skeleton which, like the first, was poorly preserved. 70 cms to the north a third skeleton was found, in rather better condition than the first two. Its length was 162 cms; the hands were placed in front of the chest; and the legs were flexed. Continuing the excavation, virgin soil was reached at a depth of 3.90 metres.

During the excavations, we found several different types of pottery, a few metal rings, and baked bricks of varying sizes, e. g., $39 \times 39 \times 8$ cms, $39 \times 39 \times 9$ cms, $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cms, and $40 \times 40 \times 11$ cms (Fig. 15, Pl. 8, 1-3).

Trench H

Trench H was also opened in the west part of the fort, and measured 6.00×2.00 metres. After digging to a depth of 2.00 metres, only bricks had been found, and it seems that this part of the wall had been excavated before by farmers for its bricks.

It was unfortunate that the excavations did not, as had been hoped — if not expected, uncover any military constructions in this fort. We hope that further investigations and excavations in other forts will lead in the future to the discovery of such constructions.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the last trench of the last season of excavations was opened opposite Qaravol Tappeh, which is a very small mound some 50 metres north of the wall in a cotton farm. In this trench we did not uncover any traces of architecture, but a large quantity of grey pottery belonging to the early Parthian period was found.

Objects found from the Wall

During the three seasons of survey and excavations, both pottery and glass objects were found, as well as a few pieces of metalwork.

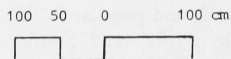
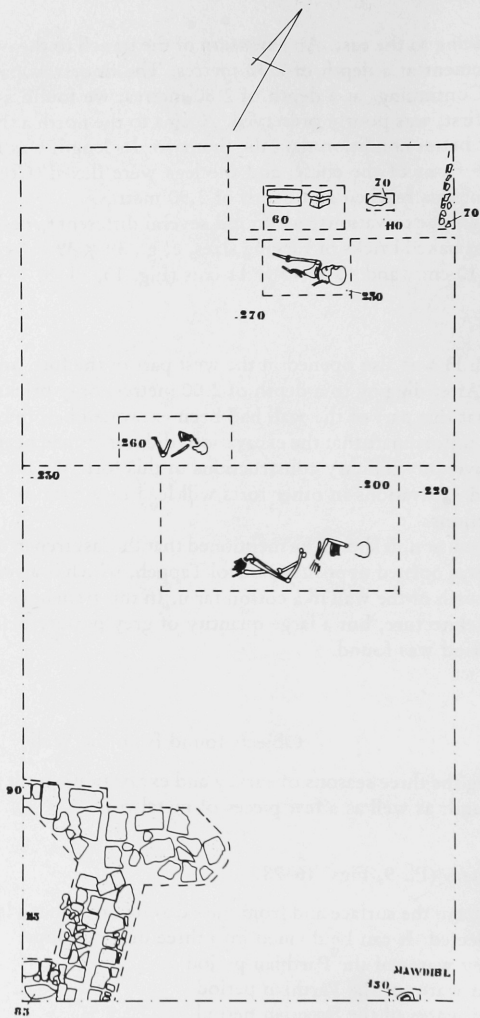
The Pottery (Pl. 9, Figs. 16-28)

Both from the surface and from the excavated trenches a large quantity of pottery was collected. It can be divided into three major groups:

- Grey wares of the Parthian period
- Red wares of the Parthian period
- Red wares of the Sasanian period

The production of the first group, grey ware, was common and popular in the Gurgan Plain even before the establishment of Parthian rule in this area.¹⁷ Similar pottery was also found in the Parthian cities of Sultan-Ali and Dasht-i Qaleh, not

¹⁷ During the survey, the Expedition found similar grey ware extending from north of Ġurġan to the province of Mazandaran.



JURJAN EXPEDITION
Defensive Wall of
Gorgan
SUMMER 1973

- LIMIT OF EXC
- - - PARTIAL EXC
- 200 LEVEL BELOW SURFACE
- DRAWN BY M. LINGHAM

Fig. 15
 Wall of Gorgan, trench G

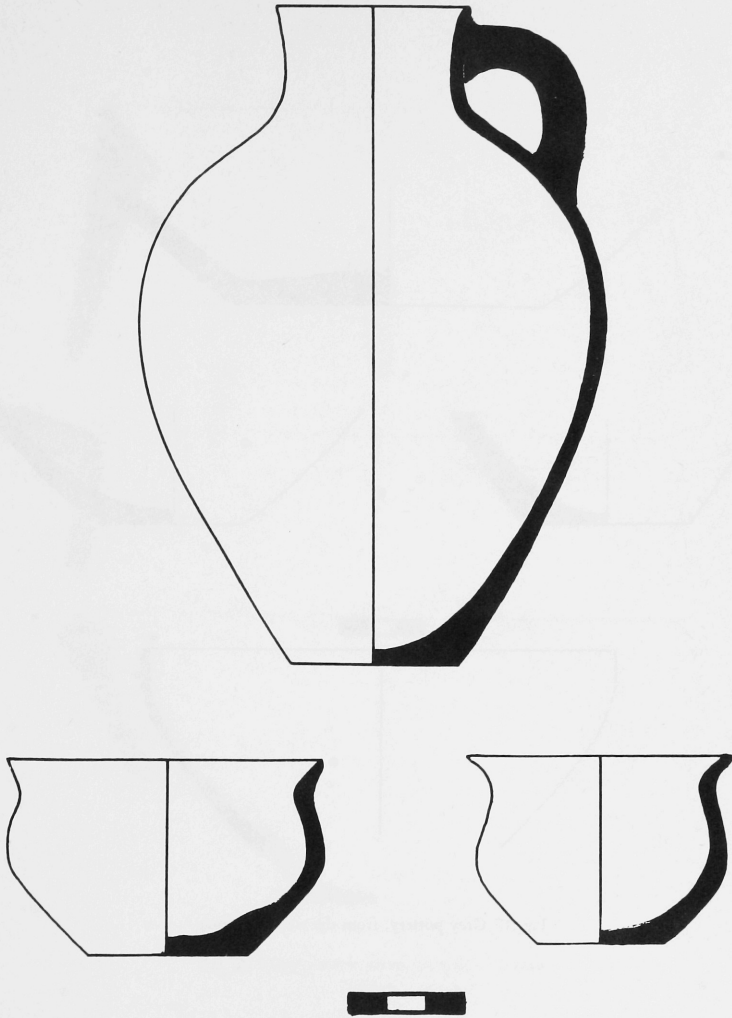


Fig. 16 Grey pottery, from the wall of Gurgan

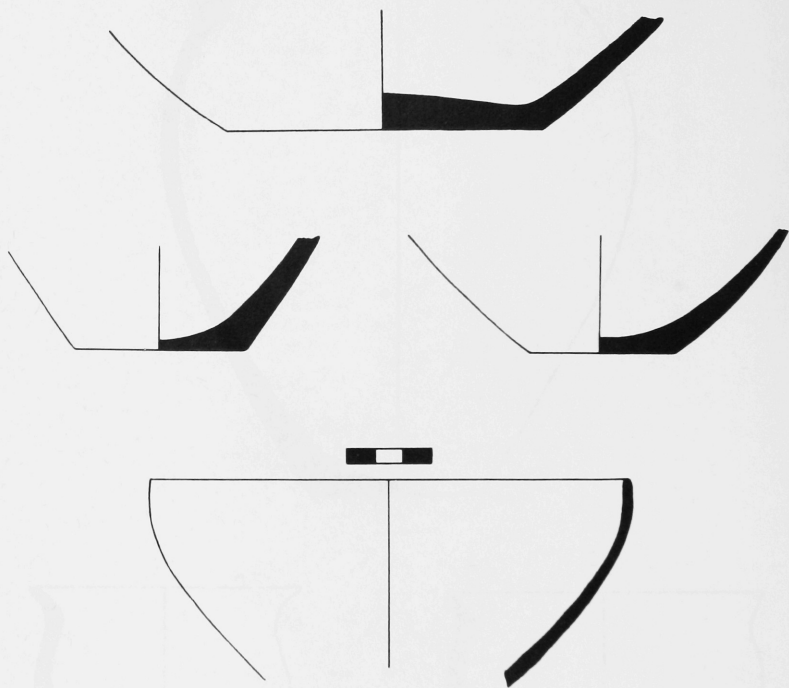


Fig. 17 Grey pottery, from the wall of Gurgan

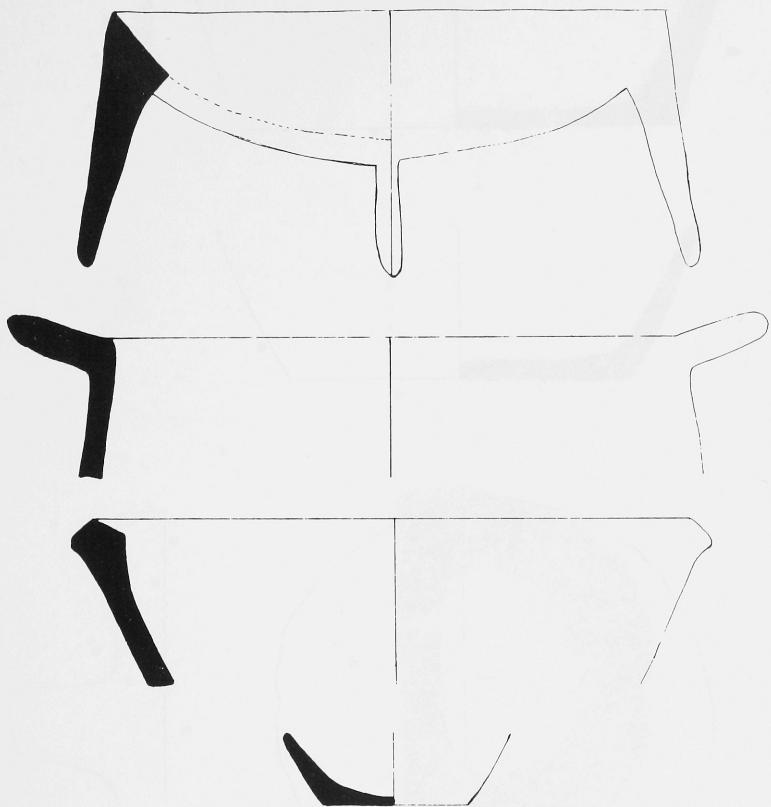


Fig. 18 Grey pottery, from the wall of Gurgan
1 : 3

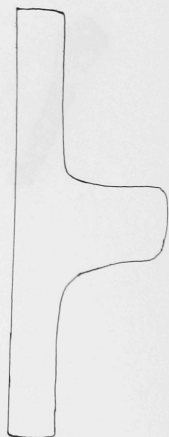
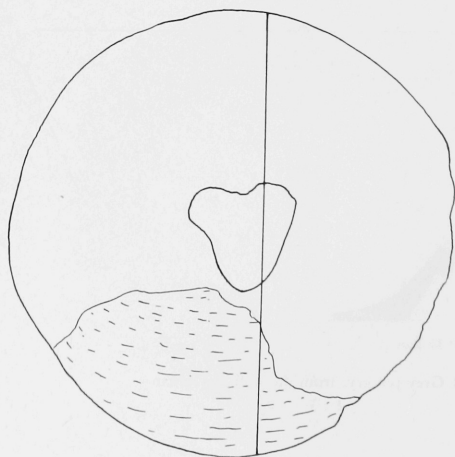
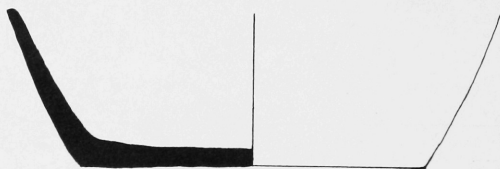
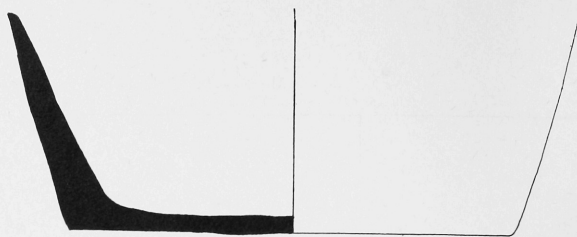


Fig. 19 Grey pottery, from the wall of Gurgan
1 : 3



Fig. 20 Grey pottery, from the wall of Gurgan

1 : 3

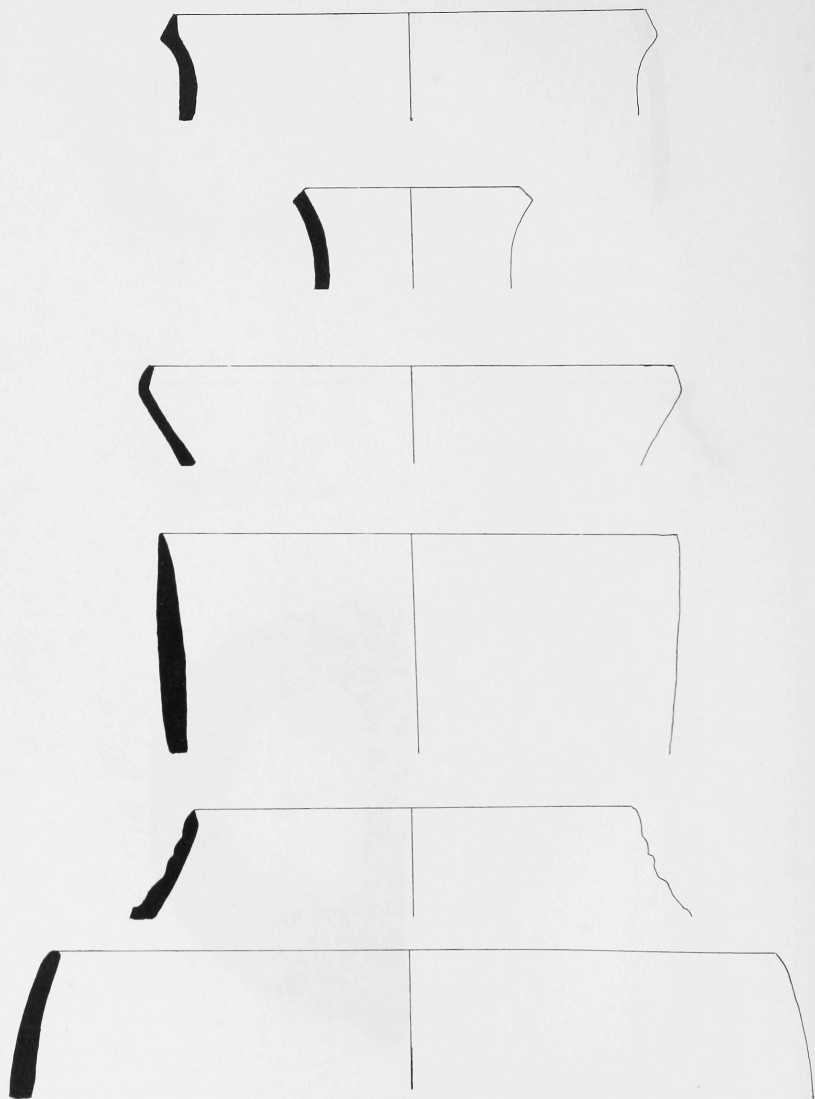


Fig. 21 Red pottery of the Parthian Period, from the wall of Gurgan
1 : 3

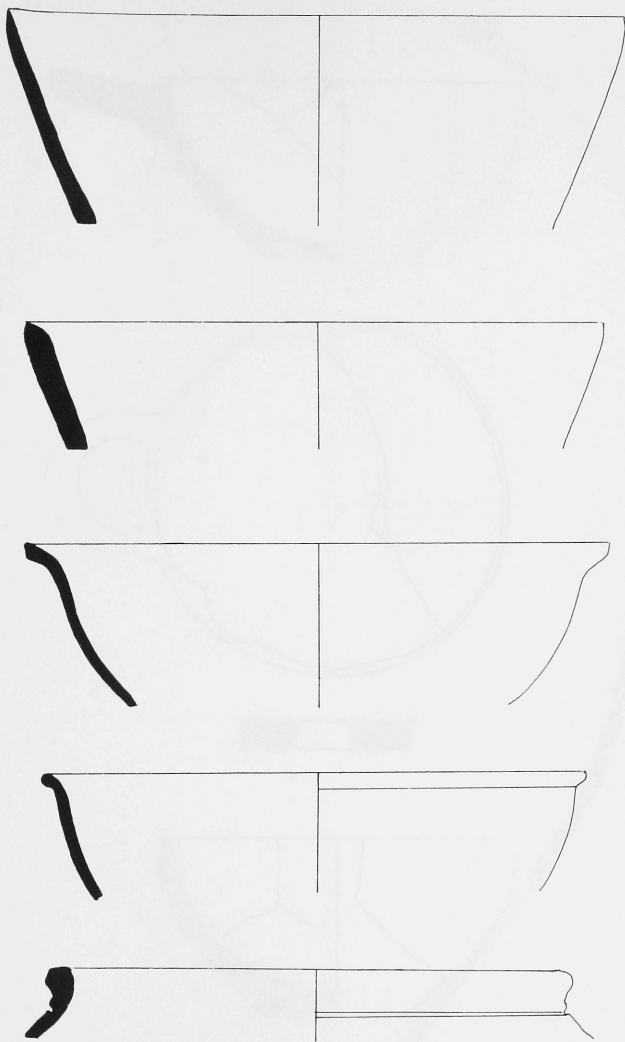


Fig. 22 Red pottery of the Parthian Period, from the wall of Gurgan

1 : 3

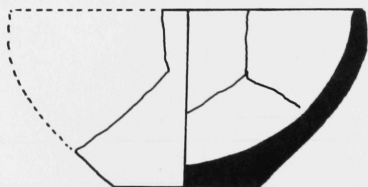
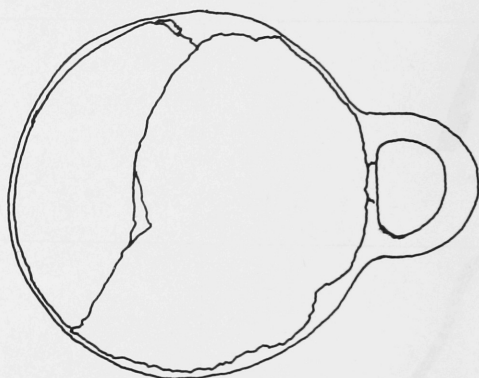
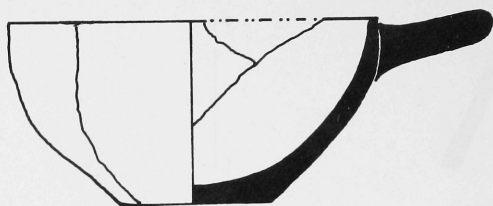


Fig. 23 Red pottery of the Parthian Period, from the wall of Gurgan



Fig. 24 A big jar, wall of Gurgan, trench D, Parthian Period
ht. 124 cm



Fig. 25 Red pottery of the Sasanian Period
1 : 3

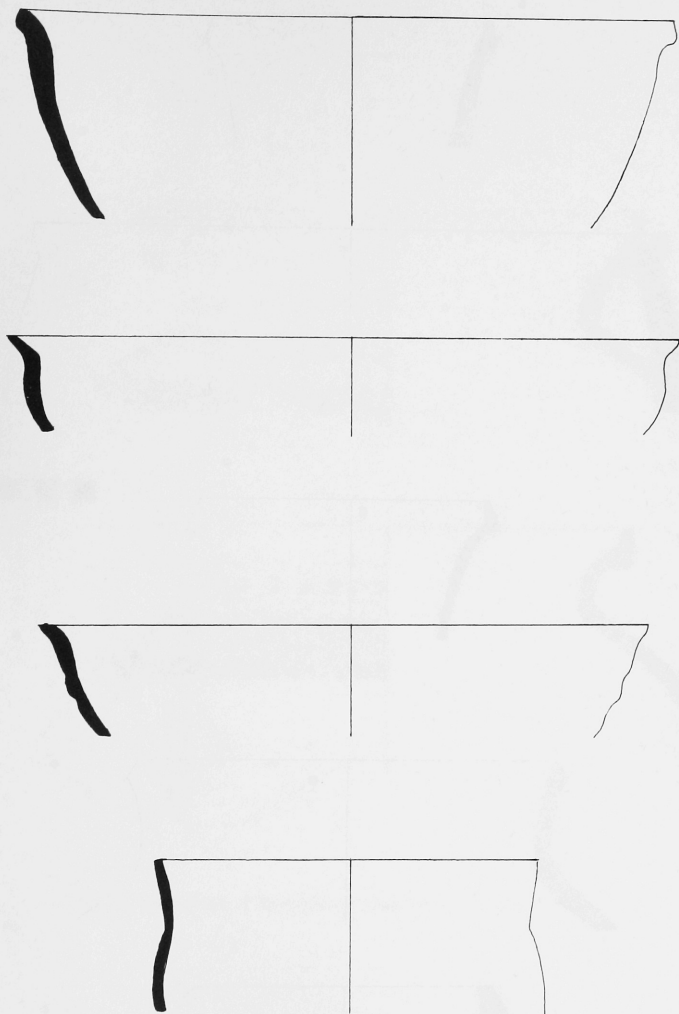


Fig. 26 Red pottery of the Sasanian Period, from the wall of Gurgan
1 : 3

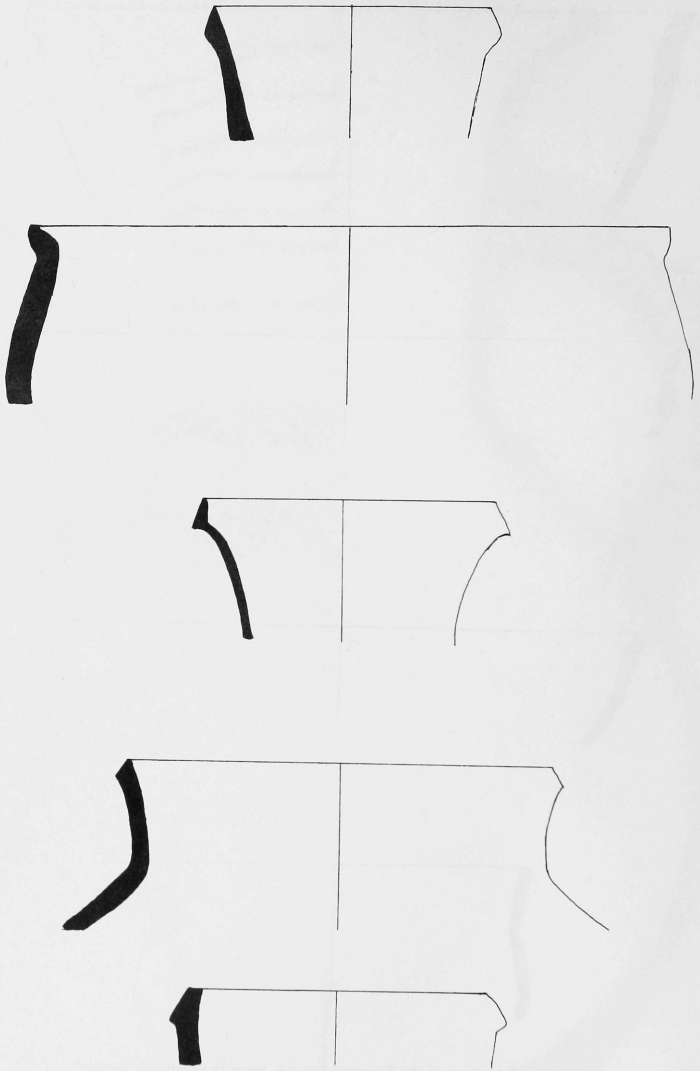


Fig. 27 Red pottery of the Sasanian Period, from the wall of Gurgan
1 : 3

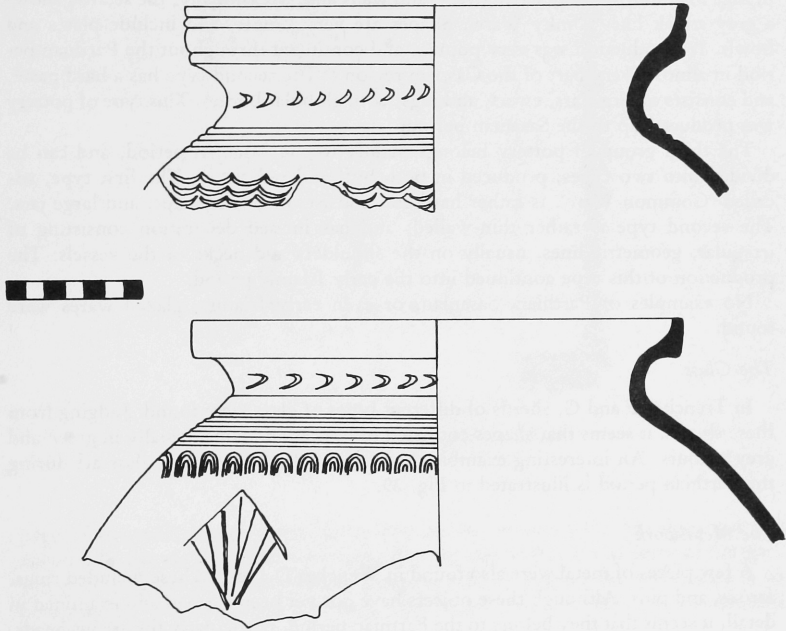


Fig. 28 Red pottery of the Sasanian Period, from the wall of Gurgan

very far from the wall.¹⁸ The paste of this pottery is very hard, and the colour is sometimes dark grey. It was found mainly in Trenches C and D. Shapes include cups with vertical and horizontal handles, ewers with globular bodies and flat bases, pear-shaped vessels, and tripod vessels. It seems that the production of grey ware continued into the middle Parthian period.

The second group of Parthian pottery is generally red in colour, and can be divided into two types. The first type consists of red burnished pottery, which is sometimes orange in colour, usually having very thin walls and, occasionally, the section shows a grey streak like 'Clinky Ware'. Shapes are very simple, and include plates and bowls. Its production was very popular and continued throughout the Parthian period in almost every part of the Caspian region.¹⁹ The second type has a hard paste, and consists of large jars, ewers, and jugs, with globular bodies. This type of pottery was produced up to the Sasanian period.

The third group of pottery belongs mainly to the Sasanian period, and can be divided into two types, produced in both buff and red wares. The first type, so-called 'Common Ware', is rather hard and consists of bowls, cups, and large jars. The second type is rather thin-walled, and has incised decoration consisting of irregular, geometric lines, usually on the shoulders and necks of the vessels. The production of this type continued into the early Islamic period.

No examples of Parthian, Sasanian, or even early Islamic, glazed wares were found.

The Glass

In Trenches F and G, sherds of different types of glass were found. Judging from these sherds, it seems that shapes consisted of bottles and cups, usually in green and grey colours. An interesting example showing the development of glass art during the Parthian period is illustrated in Fig. 29.

The Metalwork

A few pieces of metal were also found in Trenches D and F. These included rings, arrows and pins. Although these objects have not yet been cleaned and examined in detail, it seems that they belong to the Parthian period, particularly the arrow-heads, which were found in association with burials of Parthian type.

Conclusion

As a result of these excavations, some general conclusions can be drawn concerning the wall. First, not all parts of the wall were constructed using fired bricks: mud brick and broken bricks were also used, in addition to mud mortar. Second, not all

¹⁸ M. Y. Kiani, "Preliminary Report on the Survey in the Jorjan Plain, II" [in Persian], Proceedings of the IVth Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research, Tehran 1976) Persian section 1.

¹⁹ Similar pottery was found at Yarim Tepe, and also more recently at the Parthian site of Shahr-i Qomes. I am most grateful to Dr. Stronach for showing me the pottery of the two sites.

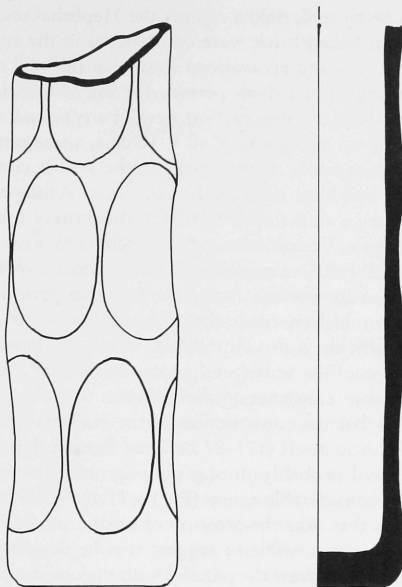


Fig. 29 A glass vessel of the Parthian Period,
wall of Gurgan, trench F, s. 1 : 1

parts of the wall were protected by a moat on the northern side, but this moat was apparently dug only on the western sections of the wall in the vicinity of Ğurġan. Third, brick kilns were constructed along the wall to produce the bricks used in its construction. Fourth, there are some indications that the wall was constructed somewhat hurriedly.

As has been mentioned above, most Islamic writers and modern scholars attribute the wall to the Sasanian period, but the archaeological evidence which has now come to light suggests a new date for its construction. We know from historical sources and from archaeological research that the Gurgan Plain has always been one of the most important centres of Iranian culture from an early date. During the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanian periods this plain was extremely important from a political, military, and economic point of view. There were two major periods of extensive building activity, both in the plain and in the areas north of Iran, prior to the Islamic conquest. The first was the Parthian, when many cities and forts were built, among them Nisa, Dara, Tambarax, Asak, and Syrinx. The second period was the Sasanian, particularly during the reign of Khosrow Anushiravan, when military construction

on a large scale was being undertaken against the Hephthalites. At this time, many walls and enclosures of baked brick were constructed in the region.

The results of the survey and excavations show that the wall of Gurgan must have been constructed during the Parthian period, for the following reasons. First, the bricks which were used for its construction were of a type and size common to Parthian bricks, measuring on average $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cms, a size not popular in Sasanian times. Second, the arrangement of the bricks in the wall is comparable to the construction of Parthian buildings such as the palaces at Ashur and Qaleh Zakhak.²⁰ Third, the pottery of the wall is similar to that of the pottery found at other Parthian sites, as mentioned above. Fourth, the burials discovered were also similar to those of other Parthian sites.²¹ Fifth, research by Russian scholars on the fluctuation of the level of the Caspian Sea shows that during the Sasanian period the water was at its highest level, which would have made the construction of the wall towards its western end extremely difficult, if not impossible. However, between about 200 B. C. and 300 A. D., the level of the water was the same as it is at present, so there would have been no problems in constructing the wall.²²

The writer believes that the construction of the wall may have been undertaken during the reign of Mithridates II (123–87 B.C.) of Parthia. Later, most likely during the Sasanian period, and probably during the reign of Khosrow Anushiravan, the wall was repaired to a considerable extent (Pl. 10–11, 1).²³ The reign of Mithridates II is suggested because at that time the pressure of northern invaders against Hyrcania had already begun, so it is possible to suggest that he decided to erect this barrier against them. It is natural to draw the parallel with the construction of the great wall of China, which started during the Chin Dynasty, contemporary with the Parthian. They may have been started in the same century for the same purpose: to protect the two countries from the northern invaders. The long reign of Mithridates II is also significant in that it was during his reign that Parthia first came into contact both with Rome and with China.²⁴

²⁰ Malcolm Colledge, *The Parthians* (London 1976) Fig. 40.

²¹ Fukai¹⁶ Pls. 10–11.

²² G. B. Fedorov/Z. A. Skiba, "Fluctuation of the Levels of the Black and the Caspian Seas in the Holocene Period" = Publication of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., Geographical Series No. IV (Moscow 1960) 24–34 [In Russian] — Compare D. Huff, *architectura* 11, 1981, 105 ff.; id., *IrAnt* 16, 1981, 125 ff.

²³ The Tammisha wall (Pl. 10–11, 1) was dated by the early Islamic writers to the Sasanian period, a date confirmed by archaeological evidence; see, A. D. Bivar/G. Fehervari, *The Walls of Tammisha*, *Iran* 4, 1966, 36–37 47. It is perhaps for this reason that the Islamic writers dated the Alexander Barrier too to the Sasanian period.

²⁴ A. J. Arberry, *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford), Clarendon Press 1953) 25.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FORTS

(Fig. 30–31)

The region to the east of the Caspian has, from an agricultural point of view, been very important from the earliest times. The richness of these lands has attracted invaders into the Gurgan Plain, mainly from the north and the north-east, from the pre-historic to the late Islamic periods. These invasions often resulted in great political and military changes, and it was to prevent such invasions that the Parthians constructed the great wall found in this region, together with several hundred forts. The forts of the Gurgan Plain thus mainly belong to the pre-Islamic period, but they were also used during the Islamic period. Islamic writers described many of them and also their function. Thus Ibn-Huqal²⁵ writes:

“Gurgan has plenty of water, expansive gates and large fortresses, and, with the exception of Rayy and Iraq, the east possesses no towns larger or more extensive than Gurgan . . . Most of the surrounding areas of Gurgan consist of mountains and strong fortresses inaccessible to Vushmigir Ibn-Ziyar and which are held by the occupants of these fortresses. According to the people there are more than a thousand fortresses each having one or two gates. The inhabitants of these fortresses, as though by contract, continue to pay tribute to the governor of Gurgan, but when they refrain from its payment they are dealt with in a compromising manner and they take what they can in a lenient and conciliatory fashion, and in case of harshness they become defensive and it is difficult to cope with them.”²⁶

In the *Futuh Al-Boldan* which was written in the early Islamic period, Baladhari, in a chapter concerning the capture of Gurgan, Tabaristan and its region, noted the importance of the forts and the difficulty of capturing them.²⁷ Some of the more than

²⁵ Ibn-Huqal, *Surat al-Ard* [Persian text] edited by Dr. J. Sha'ar (Tehran 1345/1966).

²⁶ *Ibid.* 124–125.

²⁷ Ahmad Ibn-Yahya Baladhari, *Futuh-al-Boldan*, edited A. Azarnoush, Tehran 1346/1967, 186. Baladhari gives the following story about the capture of one of the forts in the Gurgan Plain (pp. 186–7, para. 240).

“Mada'ini recounts: When Yazid heard of the deceit and trickery of the people of Gurgan, he once more left for that place. Marzuban, who was informed of this military expedition, departed for Vijar and prepared for war. That fortress was surrounded by lagoons and swamps covered with reeds. Yazid stayed there for seven months having achieved no victory. The Persians fought him several times and Yazid even used mangonels.

One day, a man showed them a path that led inside the fortress and said; ‘You must peel some bark off a few trees.’

Yazid put Hajam Ibn-Zahr Ju'afi in charge of the war and said; ‘If you succeed in life watch out, for you can never overpower death.’ Then he ordered the logs to be set on fire. The fire frightened the ene-

300 forts in the Gurgan Plain have been listed in the survey of the plain made by Arne.²⁸

Although a strong tradition of roughly rectangular enclosures with thick walls and towers at frequent intervals had grown up under Achaemenid rule,²⁹ during the Parthian period these forts were further developed and increased in numbers. In the early Parthian period a number of forts were constructed in various strong positions, and garrisons placed in them, the Parthians intending to make these their capitals.³⁰ According to their general plan, these forts can be divided into the following three types: (1) Forts with oblong or rectangular plans (2) Forts with polygonal plans (3) Forts with roughly circular or oval plans. It should be mentioned that originally these forts were located very close to each other. In the present century, however, as a result of agricultural activity, most of the sites and parts of the walls or citadels have been converted into farms, and without studying aerial photographs it is extremely difficult to determine the exact plan of the sites on the ground.

The following are some of the forts examined by the survey, with a brief account of excavations where these were carried out.

Qaleh Qarniareq

Location: 15 km west of Ğurĝan

Plan Type: Square

Pottery: Prehistoric to Classical Periods

Condition: Only the citadel is roughly preserved

Illustration: Pl. 11,2.

This fort is located some 15 km west of Ğurĝan and to the north of the great defensive wall, near to fort No. 29. It is oblong/square in shape, and the citadel is in the southeast corner, rising 15 m above the level of the plain. Unfortunately most parts of the enclosure have been destroyed. The citadel measures 200 × 200 m. This site is also listed in Arne's survey of the plain.³¹

The pottery of the site indicates that this was an important fort of the prehistoric, Parthian and Sasanian periods.

my. A group came out of the fortress and went back in. Jaham reached the gates of the fortress. The guards put up a fight, but Jaham overpowered them and took the gate.

By the afternoon the enemy was still unaware until they heard the cry of 'Allah-u Akbar' rising from behind them. The fortress was taken and the occupants surrendered to Yazid. Jaham took them to the Oasis of Gurgan and (having put a blade to their throats) killed till the blood flowed in that oasis, and it was he who built the town of Gurgan."

²⁸ Arne⁷ 16 Fig. 4.

²⁹ M. A. R. Colledge, *Parthian Art* (London 1978) 30.

³⁰ George Rawlinson, *The Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy (Parthia)*. New Edition (Tehran 1976) 52-53.

³¹ Arne⁷ 16 No. 118 (Qarinyarik); also 27.

Qaleh Altin

Location: 60 km west of Ğurġan.

Plan Type: Ellipsoid

Pottery: Mainly Islamic

Condition: Almost ruined

Illustration: Pl. 12,1.

Altin Qaleh is located to the south of the great defensive wall, near Fort No. 30. It is ellipsoid in shape, measuring 82×87 m, and rising 5 m above the level of the plain. Unfortunately, most of the fort has been converted into a farm and has a grassy covering. There are several ruined sites located in the vicinity of this fort.

Altin Qaleh is also listed on the Archaeological Map of the Gurgan Plain.³²

Qaleh Tokhmaq

Location: 57 km west of Ğurġan

Plan Type: Ellipsoid

Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian, Sasanian, and Islamic

Condition: Ruined

Illustration: Pl. 12,2

This fort is located 57 km west of Ğurġan to the north of the great wall. Most of the site is at present a Turcoman cemetery. Its shape is ellipsoid, and the citadel mound is located on the east side. It measures 700 m east-west by 350 m north-south, and rises 15 m above the level of the plain. The pottery of the site shows settlement from the prehistoric up to the late Islamic periods.

This site is also listed on the Archaeological map of the Gurgan Plain.³³

Qaleh Kafar

Location: 25 km south of Ğurġan

Plan Type: Polygonal

Pottery: Parthian and Il-Khanid periods.

Condition: Ruined, except for the citadel

Illustration: Pl. 13

Qaleh Kafar is located 25 km south of Ğurġan (Gonbad-i Qabus) and 10 km south of modern Shahpasand, in the village of Khan-be-bin. The shape of the site is polygonal, and the citadel is located in the centre, rising 10 m above the level of the plain. The site consists of two, roughly concentric circles, of which the inner is much better preserved than the outer. Although the site has not yet been excavated, it seems probable that the outer circle, which has a diameter of approximately 100 m, consisted of dwellings; and that the inner circle, approximately 50 m in diameter, was a temple or

³² Archaeological Map of the Gurgan Plain, Iran, No. 1 = Hiroshima University Scientific Expedition to Iran (August 1976) 1.

³³ Ibid. 112.

the main palace. This fort is very similar to the site of Koy-Krylgan-Kala in Central Asia.³⁴ There are also many other sites in the plain which are similar to Qaleh Kafar but which unfortunately, as a result of agricultural activity, have been substantially destroyed.

The pottery consists of Parthian grey and red wares, and Il-Khanid glazed wares.

Qaleh Gug A

Location: 4 km south of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Square
Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian, Islamic
Condition: Almost ruined, except for part of the citadel
Illustration: Pl. 14,1.

This fort is located 4 km south of Ğurġan (Gonbad-i Qabus). The entire site has been converted into cotton farms. Its shape is square, measuring 500 × 500 m, and it covers an area of 25 hectares. The citadel is located in the east corner of the site, and rises 10 m above the level of the plain. Unfortunately, this site has been excavated by the people of the area for its bricks.

Qaleh Gug B

Location: 70 km west of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Ellipsoid
Pottery: Prehistoric to Islamic
Condition: Only part of the citadel remains
Illustration: Pl. 14,2.

This second site named Qaleh Gug lies 70 km west of Ğurġan (Gonbad-i Qabus), close to and to the south of the great wall. It is in a very ruined state, most of the site having been taken over for agriculture, and only part of the citadel remains. The pottery indicates mainly prehistoric settlement.

Qaleh Aman Qarcheh

Location: 15 km north-east of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Circular
Pottery: Prehistoric
Condition: Ruined
Illustration: Pl. 15,1.

This fort is located 15 km north-east of Ğurġan (Gonbad-i Qabus). Its original shape is not clear, but the main citadel is circular, and rises 20 m above the level of the plain. The site has a moat and double wall around it, but without excavation it is difficult to determine its measurements and size. The pottery is mainly prehistoric, but Parthian pottery was found in the surrounding area.

³⁴ S. P. Tolstow, *Auf den Spuren der Altchoresmischen Kultur* (Berlin 1953) Abb. 24.

Qizil Qaleh

Location: 20 km west of Ğurĝan
Plan Type: Oval
Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian, Sasanian
Condition: Ruined
Illustration: Pl. 15,3.

Qizil Qaleh (Tappeh) is located 20 km west of Ğurĝan (Gonbad-i Qabus) and 2 km north of the great wall, near fort No. 19. The shape of the fort is oval, measuring 1,400 m north-south and 800 m east-west, and it covers an area of 100 hectares. There are two citadels, placed symmetrically on the east and west of the site, rising 5 m above the level of the plain. Although the site has been largely destroyed by agriculture, it seems that, as for other important sites in the plain, it was protected by a double wall and a ditch or moat. Pottery indicates that the site was important during the Prehistoric, Parthian, and Sasanian periods.

Qaleh Kharabeh

Location: 50 km west of Ğurĝan
Plan Type: Square
Pottery: Parthian and Sasanian
Condition: Reasonably preserved
Illustration: Pls. 15,2; 16,1.

Some 50 km west of Ğurĝan (Gonbad-i Qabus) and south of the great wall, this site presents an impressive outline on the aerial photographs. It is square in shape, measuring 750 m on each side, and covers an area of approximately 56 hectares. The citadel is located in the south-west corner, and rises 5 m above the level of the plain. The defensive walls of the site rise 2 m above the plain. Surface pottery indicates that the site was settled during the Parthian and Sasanian periods. Although the site has been converted into farms, it yet remains reasonably well preserved.

Qaravol Tappeh

Location: 3 km north of Ğurĝan
Plan Type: Circular
Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian, Sasanian
Condition: Reasonably preserved
Illustration: Fig. 32, Pl. 4,3.

Qaravol Tappeh is located in the village of Ğahan-Dideh, 3 km north of Ğurĝan, and between forts Nos. 10 and 13 of the great wall. Its circular walls rise 10 m above the level of the plain, and enclose an area of 1 hectare. A surface collection of the pottery shows that the site was settled from the Prehistoric to the Islamic period. This site has also been described by Arne, Sykes, and Rabino.³⁵

³⁵ Arne⁷ 10; Rabino⁶ 138; P. M. Sykes, A Sixth Journey in Persia, *The Geographical Journal* 27, 1911, 14.

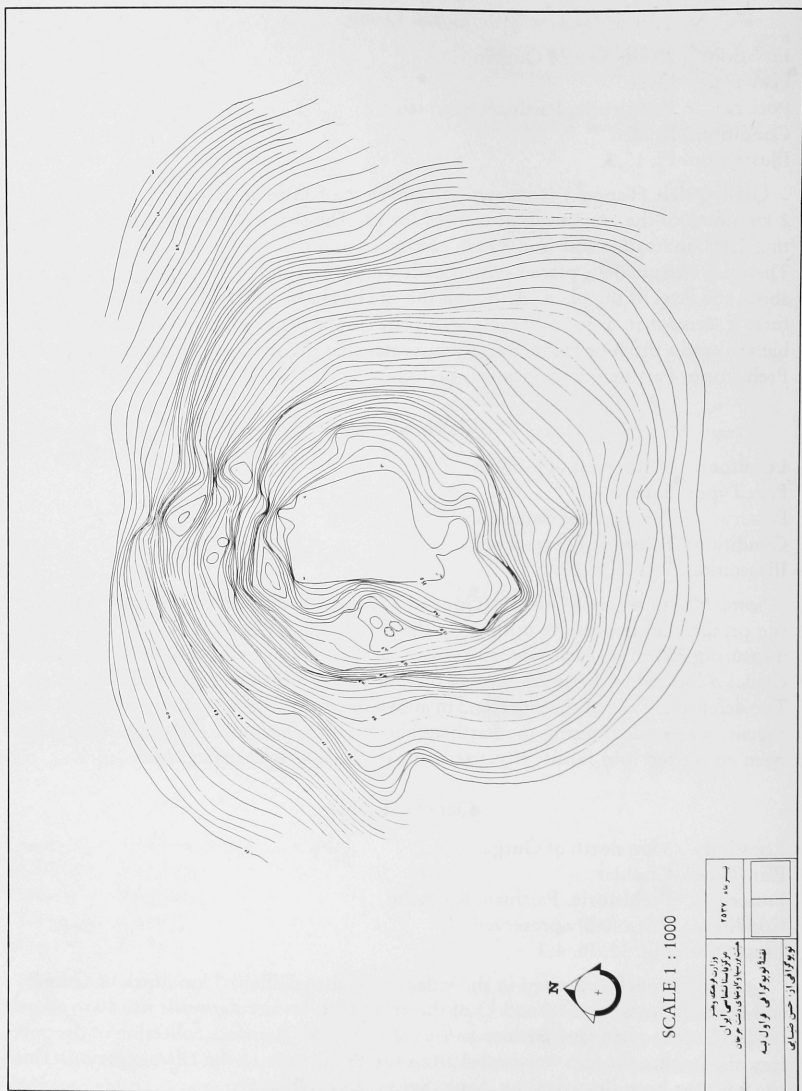


Fig. 32 Qaravol Tappeh

CHAPTER THREE

THE CITIES

(Fig. 30-31)

Since the middle of the present century, the art of the great dynasty of the Parthians has attracted the interest of many scholars from east and west. The architectural remains of the Parthian Empire, which stretched from India to Mesopotamia, show evidence of considerable building activity. In the east, archaeological research and excavation have resulted in the discovery of the remains of the early Parthian cities of Nisa and Merv, in addition to the early arts of the Parthians. In the west, similar research has uncovered the art and architecture of the middle and later Parthian periods, with the discovery of major Parthian cities at Hatra, Ashur, and Dura-Europos.

Unfortunately, the homeland of the Parthians, in Hyrcania, the present Gorgan Plain, has not yet been investigated thoroughly. In past years an aerial survey of part of this region was made by Schmidt, and a short season of survey and excavation was conducted by Arne. More recently, the area has been surveyed and excavated by several different nationalities, including the British,³⁶ French,³⁷ Italians,³⁸ and Japanese.³⁹

For almost a century, scholars have tried to discover the location of Parthian cities in the east part of the empire, but with the exception of a few, such as Merv and Nisa, their efforts have been unsuccessful. At various times, different places have been suggested by scholars as the sites of Parthian cities, but as there has been no archaeological evidence to support their claims, no exact identifications have yet been made. One of the objects of the present Iranian expedition is to try to identify the famous missing Parthian cities of Dara, Asak, Tambarax, Syrinx, Zadra-carta, and Hecatompylus.

According to the historical sources, most of the early Parthian capitals and cities were located in the province of Hyrcania. The first Parthian ruler, Arsaces, built a city called Asak, and he may have been crowned in this capital.⁴⁰ The city of Asak was prominent in the early history of Parthia. There, says Isidorus, Arsaces was pro-

³⁶ Storonach excavated the site of Yarim Tepe, 3 kms south of modern Gonbad-i Kabus, in 1960 and 1962.

³⁷ A French expedition, under the direction of Prof. Jean Deshayes, has carried out a lengthy series of excavations at the important site of Turang Tepe, near modern Gorgan.

³⁸ An Italian expedition under the direction of Dr. Invernizzi has been surveying since 1975 the Bojnurd area east of modern Gonbad-i Kabus.

³⁹ The Hiroshima University Scientific Expedition to Iran, under the direction of Professor H. Shiomi, has surveyed since 1974 the area west of modern Gonbad-i Kabus.

⁴⁰ N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Chicago 1938) 11.

claimed king and an eternal fire burned.⁴¹ The second Parthian ruler, Tiridates, built a new city called Dara in a strong defensible position, which he intended to make the capital of his kingdom.⁴² This city combined the advantages of being at once delightful and easily defensible. It was surrounded by precipitous mountains which enclosed a plain of extraordinary fertility. Abundant wood and copious streams of water were in the neighbourhood. To the town, Tiridates gave the name Dara, elongated by the Greeks and Romans to Dareium.⁴³

The city of Dara has not been identified, but most modern scholars believe that it must be located somewhere in the present province of Khorasan. Other capitals of early Parthia were Nisa and Merv, located in the northern part of Hyrcania, both of which have been surveyed and excavated.⁴⁴ These early capitals of the Parthians were either unsuitable or of insufficient size for later kings, so for the next capital the city of Hecatompylus was chosen.⁴⁵ It was about 217 B.C. that the Parthians adopted this city as a capital, and it remained an important city until 50 B.C. At that date the garrison village of Ctesiphon, facing Seleucia across the Tigris, was refurbished as a capital of eventually roughly circular plan.⁴⁶ The location of Hecatompylus was for long a matter of dispute among scholars, and different locations have been put forward for it. Rawlinson believed that this main capital of the Parthians must be located somewhere in the Gurgan Plain.⁴⁷ Sykes argued that Hecatompylus was located in Darah Gaz, north of Ğurġan (Gonbad-i Kabus).⁴⁸ Many others have suggested that it lay at or in the vicinity of modern Damghan. According to Dr. Hansman, the city is to be identified with the modern site of Shahr-i Qumis.⁴⁹

Apart from Dara, Asak, Merv, Nisa, and Hecatompylus, there are also the cities of Syrinx, Tambarax, and Zadra-carta. According to historical sources. Antiochus III, after occupying Hecatompylus, also captured the cities of Syrinx and Tambrax.⁵⁰ The Ğurġan expedition to the Gurgan Plain, during ten years of surveys and excavations, succeeded in discovering some fifty pre-Islamic sites. It is believed that most of these sites, which are known locally as-Qaleh or-Tappeh, can be attributed to the Parthian and Sasanian periods. All of them are located from between five to one hundred kilometres around Ğurġan; south, towards the old city of Astarabad (modern Gurgan); east to the region of Boġnurd; west to the Caspian; and north to the Russian border at the Atrak Valley. Most are located in close proximity to the great defensive wall of the plain known as Alexander's Barrier.

⁴¹ Colledge²⁰ 67.

⁴² Debevoise⁴⁰ 15.

⁴³ Rawlinson³⁰ 53.

⁴⁴ G. A. Pugachenkova, *Architectural Monuments of Nisa*, Trudi Lutake, 1 (Ashkhabad 1949) 201–259; *Idem.*, *The Gems of Marv*, *Izvestiya Akademi Nauk Turkmenskoi S.S.R.* (Ashkhabad 1957) 65–73.

⁴⁵ Colledge²⁰ 67.

⁴⁶ Colledge²⁹ 22.

⁴⁷ Rawlinson³⁰ 50.

⁴⁸ Sykes³⁵ 18.

⁴⁹ John Hansman, "The Problems of Qumis", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1968, 111–139.

⁵⁰ Debevoise⁴⁰ 17–18.

The sites all have a citadel at one of their respective corners, and huge external and internal walls separated by wide ditches. Their sizes vary from 20 to 500 hectares. The highest points of the citadels usually consist of a tappeh dating back to prehistoric times, but it seems that during the historical period these tappehs were used as the central forts, the sites as a whole being enclosed by walls and ditches and thus forming fortified towns. In the following pages, a number of these sites are examined in more detail, particularly those sites evincing occupation of the Parthian period. At the same time, an attempt has been made to identify some of these sites, on the evidence of their locations and remains, with the ancient cities of the Parthians. It is to be hoped that, while the work of this expedition is still in its early stages, future research will allow us to confirm the exact identity of these sites.

Qarah Shikh Tappeh (Qaleh)

Location: 100 km east of Ğurġan

Plan Type: Rectangular

Pottery: Prehistoric to Islamic

Condition: Rather well-preserved

Illustration: Pls. 16,2; 17,1.

This site is one of the most important sites on the plain, and rises 50 m above the surface of the plain. Its summit has been excavated by farmers for its bricks, but it is otherwise fairly well-preserved. During a brief survey carried out by the expedition, the pottery found showed that there were many settlements of different periods on this important site. This pottery belongs to four main periods:

1. Red painted wares of the 3rd millennium B.C., comparable to that of Shah Tepe III.
2. Grey wares of the 2nd millennium B.C.
3. Grey and red wares of the Parthian period.
4. Glazed wares of the Islamic period.

Although the first settlement at Qarah Shikh Tappeh dates to the Prehistoric period, it is probable that the site was an important fort during the Parthian period, and was perhaps one of the earliest capitals of the Parthian kings. As we know, one of the earliest cities of the Parthians was Dara, sought by many scholars since the early 20th century. Descriptions of the city in early historical sources encouraged Major Sykes to search for it in the vicinity of Ğurġan, and he discovered a fort—locally known as Qaleh Maran—on the top of a rather high mountain to the south of Ğurġan.⁵¹ The site of Qaleh Maran was visited by the present writer. Although the location of the site is indeed comparable with all that has been written concerning the city of Dara, we found no evidence, such as pottery, buildings, or building materials, which dated to the pre-Islamic periods. It seems, therefore, that Qaleh Maran was constructed and used as a defensive fort during the Islamic period.

Searching for Dara, during the survey, the Ğurġan Expedition came across Qarah Shikh Tappeh, located approximately at the beginning of the great defensive wall.

⁵¹ Sykes³⁵ 16.

The site is surrounded by rocks and mountains, and in its vicinity there are very fertile lands and streams. Although the fort has not been excavated, considering its location, pottery remains, layout, and, finally, the description of the city of Dara by early historians, which description conforms to Qarah Shikh Tappeh, this site can probably be identified as the early Parthian city of Dara.

Dasht Qaleh

Location: 15 km south-east of Ğurġan

Plan Type: Octagonal

Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian, Sasanian, Middle Islamic

Condition: Well-preserved

Illustration: Figs. 33-35, Pls. 17,2-22,1.

Dasht Qaleh is located some 15 kms south-east of Ğurġan, in a part of the Gurgan Plain where the beauties of Nature are fully displayed. Its magnificence and splendour are still much in evidence, after the passing of time. The site is extremely well-preserved, and presents an impressive outline in the aerial photographs. The shape is that of an irregular octagon, of which the two longest sides converge at right-angles. The outer perimeter of the enclosure is 7 kms, and the area enclosed 338 hectares. Each side of the city measures as follow: 1677.10 m, 1425.10 m, 851.68 m, 994.14 m, 707.22 m, 498.28 m, 346.89 m, and 238.64 m.

The city is surrounded by two huge external and internal walls which are respectively 4.00 m and 6.75 m high. Between the walls is a large ditch or moat, measuring 53 m to 60 m in width, in some parts of which running water can still be found. At the south-east angle, at the junction of the two longest sides, stands a high mound which rises 20 m above the plain and measures 824 m in circumference. This mound appears to have been originally a prehistoric Tappeh on which the keep of the later fortification was constructed.

Excavations were carried out in the defensive wall in order to ascertain the nature of these walls. A trench of 3×5 m was dug along the western arm of the wall. A wall of square baked bricks was revealed, the size of the bricks being $38 \times 38 \times 8$ cms, and the wall was preserved to a height of 2.00 m and measured 2.20 metres in width.

Excavations were also carried out on the citadel, where it was proposed to explore the tappeh at the south-east corner of the enclosure described above, in order to ascertain the nature of any underlying prehistoric deposits. In view of the presence of many prehistoric mounds nearby, the existence of such deposits was evidently probable. A grid of 10-metre squares was laid out on the mound, and trenches were opened in two of these squares.

Trench A

At a depth of 1.30 metres, piers of baked brick and plaster construction were found. These piers were traced down to the topmost level floor (Floor 1), which was obviously secondary, and which was paved with irregularly re-used broken bricks.

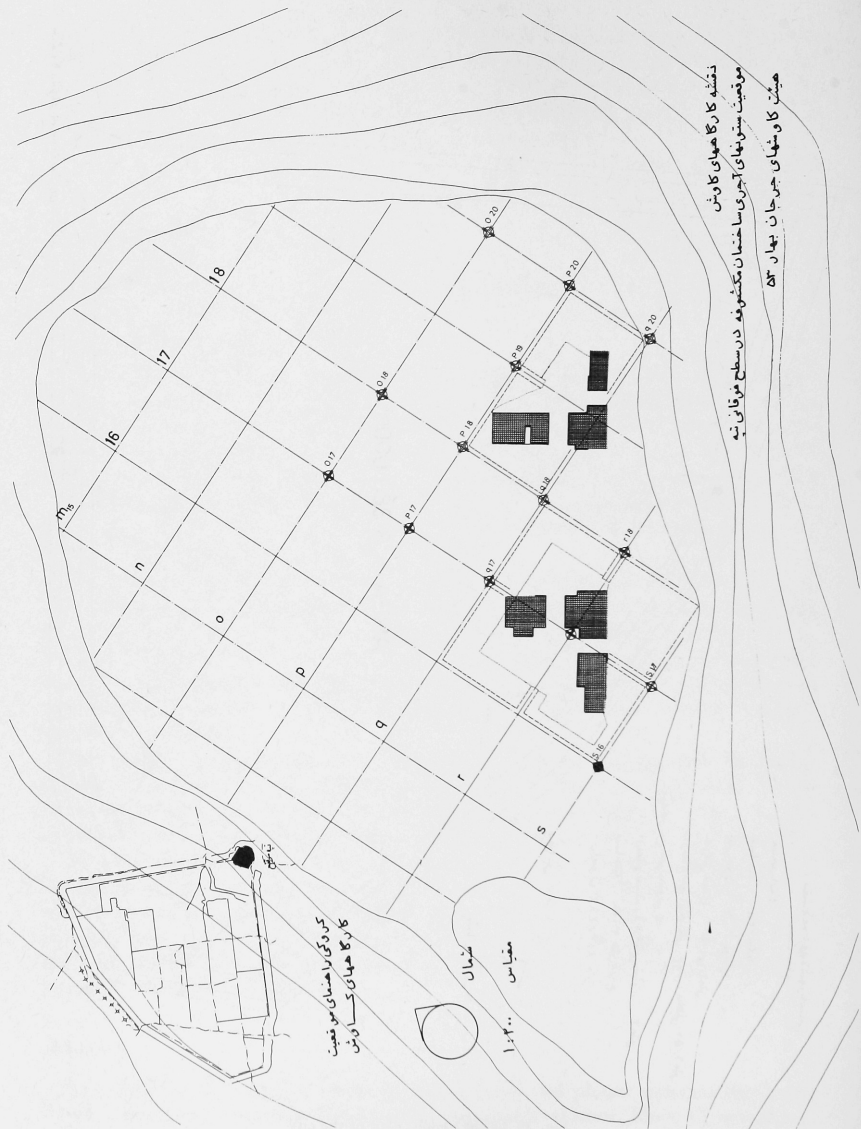
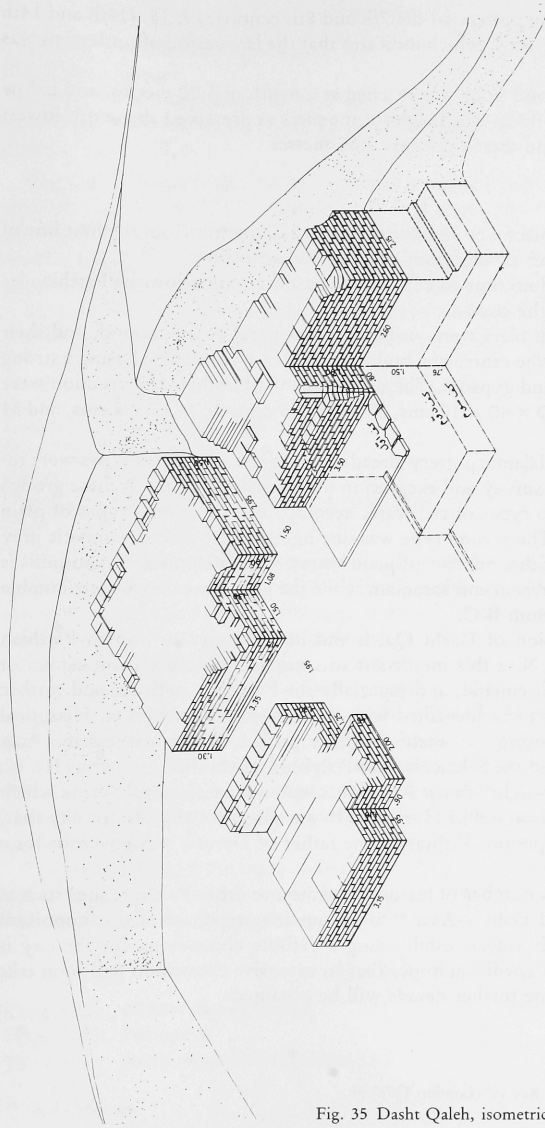


Fig. 34 Dasht Qaleh, excavated area



مستقل محل کاوش در کارگاههای غربی-تپه
 دایره شرقی ۴
 حیثت کارشهای جیحان بهمان ۵۳

Fig. 35 Dasht Qaleh, isometric drawing sektion of trench A

On this level, polychrome pottery of the 7th and 8th centuries A.H. (13th and 14th centuries A.D.) was recovered, which indicates that the last period of settlement was Il-Khanid.

Below this level, a second floor was reached at a depth of 3.20 metres, and below this a third, the Parthian floor. The height of the piers as preserved above this lowest floor was 4.16 metres, and their thickness 3.50 metres.

Trench B

In this trench similar piers were exposed, some 15.30 metres from the first line of piers and distributed in an arrangement symmetrical with them.

Unfortunately, we had no time to continue the excavations below the Parthian level owing to the end of the season.

Many other solid brick piers were visible in other parts of the mound, and their layout should determine the centre of a building. They are constructed using a strong mortar made with sand and gypsum. The brick sizes used in their construction were of various dimensions: $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cms, $37 \times 37 \times 9$ cms, $32 \times 32 \times 8$ cms, and $34 \times 8 \times 7$ cms.

In addition to the later Islamic pottery already mentioned, two other types were recovered during the brief survey and excavation of this site. The first of these groups was characterised by two types of red ware, accompanied by several types of plain ware, mainly Parthian. The second type was distinguished by its characteristic grey ware, again associated with a number of plain wares. Our preliminary hypothesis is that the red wares are Parthian and Sasanian, while the grey ware may be attributable to the early first millennium B.C.

Considering the location of Dasht Qaleh and its similarity to known Parthian cities such as Merv and Nisa this important site was probably the main capital of Hyrcania during the Achaemenid, and especially the Parthian, periods, and further that this site is probably to be identified with the ancient city of Syrinx. Historical sources confirm that during the early Parthian period Syrinx witnessed a war between the Parthians and the Seleucids, and Polybius writes that Antiochus III, on his march to Hyrcania to fight against Artabanus, entered a city called Syrinx which was considered to be the capital of Hyrcania. It was also probably in this city that, during the Achaemenid period, Vishtaspa, the father of Darius, was governor for a period.

Dasht Qaleh also has a number of features common to other Parthian sites such as Old Nisa,⁵² Hatra,⁵³ and Dahsty-Asar.⁵⁴ Since our investigations of this important site are still in their early stages, establishing a definite chronology for the city is rather difficult, but the Expedition hopes that an extensive excavation will soon take place and that at that time further details will be obtained.

⁵² Colledge²⁹ 23, Fig. 2.

⁵³ G. Herrmann, *The Iranian Revival* (London 1978) 59.

⁵⁴ Tolstow³⁴ Abb. 30.

Qaleh Yasaqi

Location: 40 km south of Gurgan
Plan Type: Square
Pottery: Parthian, Sasanian, Islamic
Condition: Almost ruined except for part of the citadel
Illustration: Pl. 22,2.

This fort is located some 40 kms south of the great defensive wall, to the south of modern Gurgan. At the present time it is occupied by cotton farms. The site is square, with each side measuring 500 m. There is a citadel situated in the north corner, rising about 20 m above the level of the plain. The fort is surrounded by double defensive walls, constructed of mud bricks measuring $45 \times 45 \times 5$ cms and $50 \times 50 \times 5$ cms. The pottery of the site shows settlement during the Parthian, Sasanian and Islamic periods. Its general plan is similar to that of Pil-Kala in central Asia.⁵⁵

Qaleh Sultan Ali

Location: 12 kms west of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Polygonal
Pottery: Prehistoric and Parthian
Condition: Walls and citadel mostly destroyed
Illustration: Figs. 36–37, Pls. 23–25,2.

The site of Sultan Ali is located in the village of the same name to the south of the great wall, close to Fort No. 14. Its shape is irregular, and the main citadel is at the north corner of the site. The city is surrounded by both internal and external walls, and the enclosed area covers 60 hectares.

In order to determine the type of construction used in the city, three 5×5 m trenches were opened in three different areas of the citadel. In Trench A, after digging to a depth of 1.30 m, a mud brick wall appeared which was probably part of the main construction of the citadel. In Trench B, a similar construction using the same size of brick was found. The dimensions of the bricks were $37 \times 37 \times 9$ cms, and $36 \times 36 \times 12$ cms. In this trench we also found a large jar and two broken jars in three different levels. In Trench C, we found only broken mud bricks and sherds of Parthian pottery.

During the limited sondages carried out here, pottery belonging mainly to two different periods was found; wares dating to the first millennium B.C., and grey and red wares of the Parthian period.

Qaleh Paras

Location: 40 kms east of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Polygonal
Pottery: Parthian and Middle Islamic

⁵⁵ Ibid. Abb. 66.

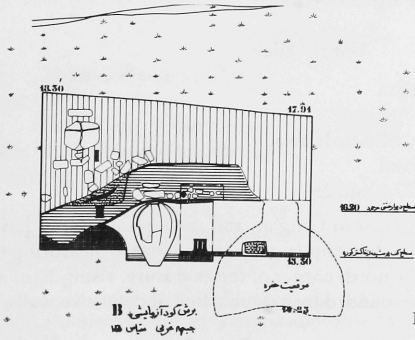
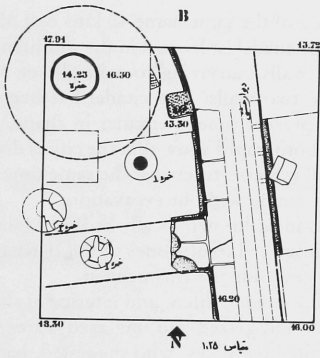
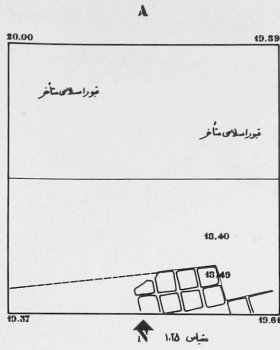


Fig. 37 Qaleh Sultan Ali, drawing of sections of trenches A and B

Condition: Ruined, except for citadel

Illustration: Fig. 38, Pls. 25,3–26,1.

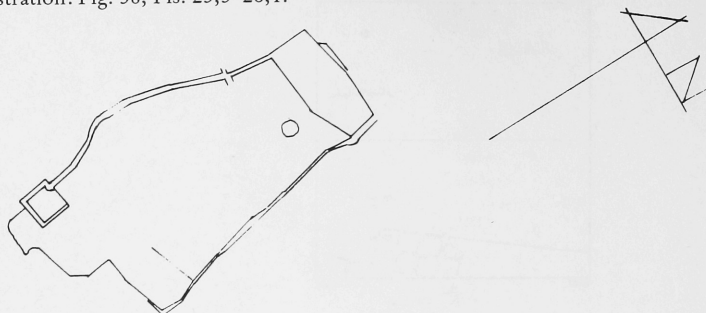


Fig. 38 Qaleh Paras

Qaleh Paras is located in the village of the same name 40 kms east of Ğurġan. The shape of this city is polygonal, and the citadel is located in the southern part. The city is surrounded by double defensive walls, surviving to a height of 3.50 m. There is a moat 6.60 m wide between the two walls. The citadel has been dug over by clandestine excavations, and at the present time is circular in shape, rising 8.84 m above the level of the plain. Aerial photographs show that the city is divided into two parts by a wall, but whether this wall was constructed at the same time as the city, or is a later addition, is difficult to determine without excavation.

Near the citadel there is an Imamzadeh, known locally as Bibi-Halimeh, which is almost destroyed. However, a few inscribed tombstones of the Il-Khanid period are still to be found around the citadel and near the Imamzadeh.

A collection of the pottery from the citadel, ditch, and interior of the city produced red wares of the Parthian period, and glazed and unglazed wares of the Middle Islamic period. This site was also visited by Sykes, who suggested that it was the capital of the region during the Parthian period.⁵⁶

Gabri Qaleh

Location: 15 kms east of Ğurġan

Plan Type: Square (650 × 650 metres).

Pottery: Parthian, Sasanian, Middle Islamic

Condition: Rather well-preserved

Illustration: Fig. 39, Pls. 26,2–27,2 and 28

Gabri Qaleh is located 15 kms east of Ğurġan, and aerial photographs have revealed a fascinating site. The site has the form of a square enclosure measuring 650 m on each side. There is a citadel at the north corner of the enclosure, rising 20 m above the level of the plain. The fort is surrounded by a double line of defensive walls, and bet-

⁵⁶ Sykes³⁵ 18.

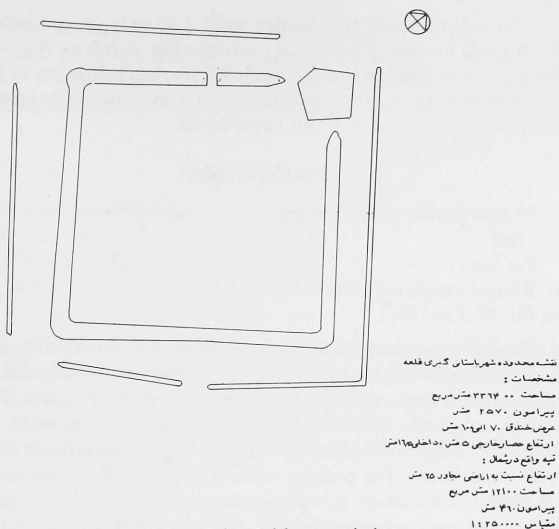


Fig. 39 Gabri Qaleh, ground plan

ween the two walls is a moat which varies in width from 60 m to 100 m. The height of the outer wall is 5 m, and that of the inner 20 m. Each wall is 16 m thick.

It seems that the citadel of Gabri Qaleh, as is the case with other sites in the plain, belongs to the Prehistoric period, and was converted into a fort during the Parthian period. A collection of the surface pottery shows that the site was settled in three different periods; Prehistoric, Parthian, and Islamic. No excavations were made, but its ground plan is comparable to Merv⁵⁷, and to other sites in Khwarezmia such as To-prak Kale⁵⁸ and Bazar Qaleh.⁵⁹

Qaleh Gawmishli

Location: 20 kms west of Ğurġan
 Plan Type: Oval
 Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian, and Early Islamic
 Condition: Ruined except for the citadel
 Illustration: Fig. 30.

Qaleh Gawmishli lies 20 kms west of Ğurġan in the village of the same name. The shape of the fort is roughly oval, and it covers an area of 33 hectares. The citadel is situated at the northern corner and rises 8.60 m above the level of the plain. The fort

⁵⁷ R. Ghirshman, *Honar-i Iran*. Translated by B. Faravachi (B.T.N.K. Tehran 1968) Fig. 46.

⁵⁸ G. Frumkin, *Archaeology in Central Asia* (Leiden-Köln 1970) Fig. 31.

⁵⁹ Tolstow³⁴ Abb. 25.

is surrounded by a double line of defensive walls 2.60 m high, and between the two walls is a ditch 11.25 m wide. The citadel measures 193 × 169 m. A collection of the surface pottery showed that the fort was settled from the Prehistoric to Il-Khanid periods. In the close vicinity of the fort are three other sites, but their relationship with the fort is difficult to establish without excavations.

Qaleh Kanizak

Location: 25 kms south-west of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Oval
Pottery: Parthian
Condition: Ruined except for part of the citadel
Illustration: Pls. 27,3 and 29,1.

Qaleh Kanizak is located in the village of the same name 25 kms south-west of Ğurġan, in a beautiful wooded area. The shape of the site is oval, and the citadel is located in the northern part, rising 7.72 m above the level of the plain. The site is surrounded by a double wall, with a ditch between them 13.60 m wide. The external walls still stand to a height of 4.32 m, but both these and the interior of the site have been converted into farms. The pottery consists of grey and red wares belonging to the Parthian period. Two other, ruined sites are located in the very close vicinity of Qaleh Kanizak, but their relationship with the fort is difficult to establish without excavations.

Guzgin Qaleh

Location: 10 kms north-west of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Polygonal
Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian, and Islamic
Condition: Ruined
Illustration: Pl. 29,2

Guzgin Qaleh lies to the north-west of Ğurġan, and at the present time the entire site has been converted into farms. Its shape is polygonal and covers an area of 160 hectares. The citadel is located in the west part of the site, and is roughly circular in shape, rising 10 m above the level of the plain. A collection of the surface pottery shows that the site was settled from the Prehistoric to Islamic periods.

Guzgin Qaleh is surrounded by a number of sites, the most part of which have been almost destroyed.

Qaleh Daland

Location: 25 kms south-east of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Square
Pottery: Parthian and Sasanian
Condition: Ruined
Illustration: Pl. 30,1.

Qaleh Daland is situated 25 kms south-east of Ğurġan in an area of 33 hectares. This site lies very close to Qaleh Kanizak, and was perhaps part of a larger complex of constructions in the Parthian period. However, this is at present impossible to determine owing to agricultural activity. The pottery belongs to the Parthian and Sasanian periods.

Qaleh Shah-Nazar

Location: 50 kms east of Ğurġan
Plan Type: Polygonal
Pottery: Prehistoric, Parthian and Sasanian
Condition: Ruined
Illustration: Pl. 30,2.

Qaleh, or Tappeh, Shah-Nazar is located some 50 kms east of Ğurġan. Because of agricultural activity and the construction of new houses, the actual shape of the site is difficult to determine without excavations. The citadel, however, is situated in the North part of the site, is circular in shape, and rises 15 m above the level of the plain. A collection of the surface pottery showed that this site was occupied from the Pre-historic to Early Islamic periods.

Qaleh Khandan

Location: In the modern city of Gurgan
Plan Type: Oval
Pottery: Prehistoric to Islamic
Condition: Only part of the citadel remains
Illustration: Pl. 31.

Qaleh Khandan is situated in the southern part of modern Gurgan (old Astarabad). Unfortunately, since the early 20th century the site has been badly damaged by the erection of new dwellings in different parts of the site, and at present only the main citadel remains. The shape of the fort is oval, and its measurements are 178 m east-west, and 300 m north-south. It rises approximately 40 m above the level of the plain.

According to Arrian, Alexander on his march advanced to a town in Hyrcania called Zadracarta.⁶⁰ Strabo says that Ecbatana and Hyrcania were the summer retreats of the Parthian kings, and that Hyrcania is distinguished by notable cities, among them Carta, and the royal residence of Tape.⁶¹ Stahl believes that the present city of Sari, the capital of Mazandaran, is ancient Zadracarta,⁶² but Mordtmann believes that Zadracarta is to be identified with present Qaleh Khandan.⁶³ Although no excavations

⁶⁰ Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander* = Loeb Classical Library (London 1976) III 23.6.

⁶¹ Strabo, *Geography* = Loeb Classical Library (London 1961) XI 7,2; XVI 1,6.

⁶² A. F. v. Stahl, "Notes on the March of Alexander the Great from Ecbatana to Hyrcania", *The Geographical Journal* 64,4 October 1924, 328.

⁶³ A. D. Mordtmann, *Hekatompylos. Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Geographie Persiens*, *Sitzungsberichte Ak. d. Wissenschaften* (1869) 497-536.

have been carried out at this important site, it is clear that during the Achaemenid and Parthian periods Qaleh Khandan was an important centre for the region. Whether the site is indeed the ancient city of Zadracarta or not requires scientific excavation to discover.

Bibishervan

Location: 100 km west of Ğurĝan
Plan Type: The ruins consist of several mounds and tappehs
Pottery: Mainly Sasanian
Condition: Ruined, except for the citadel
Illustration: Pl. 30,3 and 32,1.

The ruins of the famous city of Bibishervan are located 100 km west of Ğurĝan (Gonbad-i Qabus) to the south of the great wall. Although most of the city has been taken over for agriculture, the citadel remains. Covering an area of some 200 hectares, the site has also been extensively damaged by clandestine excavations. This site has not yet been scientifically excavated, but its size indicates that it must have been one of the most important sites of the Sasanian period, with much pottery and baked bricks of the Sasanian period being found during the short period of the survey.

Ğurĝan (Gonbad-i Qabus)

In the northern part of modern Gonbad-i Qabus there are many sites, such as Abadan Tappeh, Mulla-Ali Tappeh, and Qara-Mohammad Tappeh, which are locally known, and are recorded on the maps, as old cemeteries. At the present time, these sites consist of the ruins of old cities, and only using scientific excavations will we be able to discover the exact plans and measurements of these cities.

Abadan Tappeh

Plan Type: Polygonal
Location: north of Ğurĝan
Pottery: Prehistoric to Middle Islamic
Condition: Ruined
Illustration: Pl. 32,2.

Abadan Tappeh covers an area of approximately 100 hectares. The site has been converted almost entirely into farms, and only the citadel remains relatively unharmed. This citadel consists of two, roughly concentric, oval walls, of which the inner is better preserved than the outer. Since the early 20th century, this site has been extensively excavated by antiquities dealers, with the result that many fine Islamic ceramics have appeared on the market.⁶⁴ In 1976, the Ğurĝan Expedition was able to excavate in the ruins of Abadan Tappeh, but found only architecture and objects of the Selĝuk period.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ M. Bahrami, *Gurgan Faiences* (Cairo 1949) 16.

⁶⁵ The report of the Ğurĝan excavations is under preparation, and will be published at a later date.

Mulla-Ali Tappeh

Location: north of Ğurĝan
Plan Type: Polygonal
Pottery: Prehistoric to Islamic
Condition: Ruined
Illustration: Pl. 33, 1.

This site covers an area of approximately 50 hectares, and has a number of similarities with Abadan Tappeh, such as the citadel and pottery. It seems, therefore, that both were settled contemporarily.

Summary

Unfortunately, nearly all the sites in the Gurgan Plain have been ruined, mainly because of the agricultural activities of the people of the plain, but also by clandestine excavations. These activities make it extremely difficult to discover the actual plans and measurements of each site, and of their relationships to each other. Among the difficulties encountered by the Expedition was that it frequently appeared from the aerial photographs that many of the sites were originally physically connected to each other, but such connections cannot be definitely established without actual excavation. Many such sites were encountered by the Expedition, particularly in the vicinity of the Gurgan River and of old Ğurĝan (cf. Pls. 33, 2–36, 2).

In this brief report of the survey of the Gurgan Plain, among the hundreds of sites discovered belonging to the Prehistoric to Islamic periods, our intention was to present some of these sites which belonged particularly to the period of the Parthian dynasty of Iran, mainly from the architectural point of view. It is clear that the proper study, research, and excavation of such a large number of important sites will require considerable time. The expedition hopes in the future to be able to continue this survey, and to prepare a complete archaeological plan of the plain. As has been mentioned earlier in this report, nowhere in Iran can such an enormous number of sites be found in one place. As Schmidt noted many years ago, "The archaeological fertility of this patch of earth is amazing. The banks of the Gurgan River are covered with the contours of cities of ages past. Rectangular town inclosures . . . mounds of all shapes and sizes . . . and ancient citadel hills dot the plain. One is reminded of such centres of the ancient world as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria when seeing this abundance of ancient occupation in the plain of Gurgan."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Schmidt⁴ 57.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pottery of the Gurgan Plain (Pls. 36,3–40)

The production of pottery in the Gurgan Plain dates back to the Prehistoric period. Excavations at some sites, such as Shah Tepe, Turang Tepe, and Yarim Tepe; and the excavations of the Ğurĝan Expedition since 1970, show that the production of pottery was one of the important arts of the region. During our investigations along the Barrier and in the area around Ğurĝan (Gonbad-i Kabus), both from surface collections and from excavations, pottery was distinguished belonging to the following periods.

1. The Prehistoric period
2. The Achaemenid period
3. The Parthian period
4. The Sasanian period
5. The Islamic period

1. The Prehistoric period

A collection of the pottery from the region surveyed indicates that, from the 5th millennium B. C., the people of the area produced a type of hand-made pottery. This type of pottery is very hard and usually has a dark grey colour. Its decoration consists sometimes of incised patterns, and sometimes of lines simply scratched on the body. This type of pottery was found mainly to the west of Jurjan and south of the Barrier, e.g., at Gug Qaleh. The vessels have a low rim, low ring base, and globular body, and are probably dateable to the 5th millenium B.C. This type includes only hand-made wares.

A second group of prehistoric pottery are painted wares, usually black-on-red painted. Designs consist of geometrical patterns. Large quantities of this pottery are found to the north-east of Ğurĝan, close to the end of the Barrier, mainly at Qara Shikh Tappeh, and sometimes along the Gurgan River. The paste of these wares is red and rather thick, and the colour of the paint varies from black to dark brown. This pottery is comparable with that found in Shah Tepe III, dateable *ca* 3500 B.C.⁶⁷

These two prehistoric types of pottery are characteristic of the area mainly to the north-east of the Caspian Sea, and a clear classification of their development needs further extensive, scientific excavations at many sites in the region.

⁶⁷ Arne⁷ 22.

Around 1000 B.C., a new type of pottery, which is generally known as Grey Ware, appeared, and extended over the whole plain, also being widespread to the east. It continued in production until the end of the Parthian period. This ware, which is also known as Bronze Age pottery, has been found in many places in Soviet Turkmenia, and also at Yarim Tepe, Turang Tepe, and Shah Tepe.

2. Achaemenid Pottery

With the establishment of the Achaemenid satrapy in Hyrcania, in the 6th century B.C., great advances were made in the manufacture of pottery. Some prehistoric traditions survived, mainly in the production of grey wares, and continuing their shapes and designs, e.g., animal figures. New shapes were introduced which included the characteristic rhyton. The pastes of Achaemenid pottery are grey and red, and decoration includes incised and moulded patterns. Shapes include cups, jars with handles, and vessels with zoomorphic shapes. Although it seems that glazed pottery was common in the western territories of the Achemenids, the Expedition found none during the survey.

Achaemenid pottery was collected mainly in the vicinity of the Gurgan River and shows that, during this period, simple grey wares were common throughout the area. This ware is characterised by burnishing and by tripod bases, and has been found at Turang Tepe, in level VA.⁶⁸

3. Parthian Pottery

Before the establishment of the Parthian dynasty, the production of grey and red wares was popular among the people of the plain, but ca 250 B.C. the grey wares changed in some respects, for instance in the shapes of the vessels, and the red wares also went through some development. In general, the Parthian pottery of the Gurgan Plain can be divided into the following groups.

A. Grey Wares

The production of grey wares was already common in the Caspian region, and during the long Parthian period they have been found at almost every site investigated. The paste is rather hard, and the colour varies from light to dark grey. The light colours have a thinner paste. Shapes include bowls, pitchers, jugs, and 'teapot' vessels. Most vessels have convex bases, globular bodies, and lack surface decoration. This type of ware was apparently in common production around the middle of the Parthian period. Comparable wares from other excavated sites are found in Turang Tepe V C,⁶⁹ Yarim Tepe 1-4,⁷⁰ and Shahr-i Qumis.⁷¹

⁶⁸ J. Deshayes, Excavations at Turang Tepe [Persian Text] Bastanshenasi va Honar-i Iran 11, 1353/1974, 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁰ V. E. Crawford, Beside the Kara Su, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 21,5, April 1963.

⁷¹ J. Hansman/D. Stronach, Excavations at Shahr-i Qumis, 1967, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1970, 55-61 (Pottery). See also: Excavations at Shahr-i Qumis, 1971, JRAS 1974, 8-22.

B. Red Wares

Red wares were perhaps the most common and popular type of pottery, and appear almost everywhere in the Gurgan Plain. There are two characteristic types. The first type has thin walls, and uses levigated clay. It is sometimes highly burnished. This type of pottery, which is also known as 'Clinky Ware', is usually brown, red, and, sometimes, orange in colour, and is occasionally flamed inside. Shapes include bowls, jars, plates, and small cups with handles. A large quantity of this type of pottery was found during the excavations on the Barrier, at Dasht Qaleh, and at other surveyed sites. It seems that its production started in the 4th century B.C., and continued in the Gurgan Plain until the middle of the Parthian period. This would imply that the Parthians had arrived in Gurgan by the 4th century B.C.

The second type has a hard paste and its colour is usually dark red. It, too, was found in large quantities. Shapes include large jars, bowls, deep plates, and ewers. It appeared in the early Parthian period, and continued into the early Sasanian period.

One of the greatest advances in pottery-making during the Parthian period was the introduction of alkaline-glazed vessels. However, no glazed pottery of the Parthian period was found by the Expedition. Similarly, no examples of the equally-characteristic Parthian zoomorphic vessels were found at any of the sites investigated.

4. Sasanian Pottery

The Sasanian pottery can be divided into three types; Glazed, simple red, and red with incised decoration.

Glazed Ware

As for Parthian glazed pottery, this ware uses an alkaline glaze, the colours used being turquoise, green and blue. Shapes include pilgrim flasks, bowls, and large storage jars, with globular bodies and everted rims. It appears in the early Sasanian period, and continues into the early Islamic.

Simple Red Ware

This uses a red paste and is usually heavily pitted. Shapes include large jars, jugs, and different types of bowl, with thick bodies and everted rims.

Incised Red Ware

This pottery possesses either incised or stamped decoration, usually on the upper part of the shoulders of the vessels, and the designs used include heavy lines, geometrical patterns, rosettes, and sometimes Pahlavi inscriptions. Shapes include jars, deep bowls, and ewers with flat bases, globular bodies, everted rims, and vertical handles. This type seems to have appeared in the middle of the Sasanian period, and continued into the Islamic.

5. Islamic Pottery

At nearly every site investigated, the Expedition found various types of Islamic pottery. In general, pottery of the following periods can be distinguished.

1. Sasano-Arab
2. Early Islamic (8th–10th centuries A.D., the period of the Samanid, Ziarid, and Buyid dynasties).
3. Selġuq (11th–12th centuries A.D.).
4. Khwarazm-Shahid (13th–14th centuries A.D.).
5. Il-Khanid
6. Timurid and Safavid

During these periods, almost all types of Islamic pottery were produced, and the discovery of kilns alongside the different types of pottery enables us to study the ceramic arts of Islamic Gurgan as an integrated whole. The types of pottery found included black-on-white painted, polychrome, splashed, sgraffiato, carved and moulded, luster painted, underglaze painted, overglaze painted, and unglazed wares.⁷²

Drawings of the Pottery

During the survey and excavation in the Gurgan plain, a great number of different types of pottery were collected. These mainly belong to forts and cities, which have been described in chapters two and three. The following are the drawings of the pottery belonging to these sites. The scale of the drawings is $\frac{1}{3}$ of the actual size.

The writer is most grateful to Mr. F. Tohidi, for drawings of the pottery.

⁷² The Islamic pottery of the Gurgan Plain is to be published separately by the present writer in the near future.

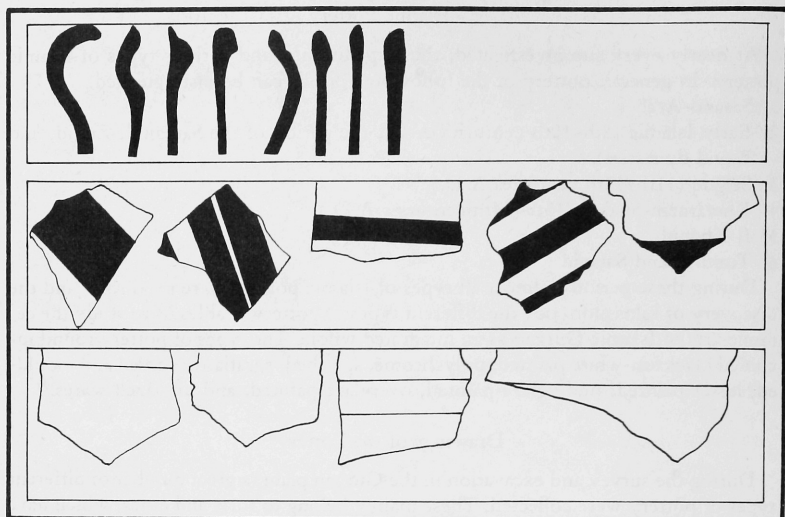


Fig. 40 Qaleh Qarah Shikh, black on red painted, ca. 3500 B.C.

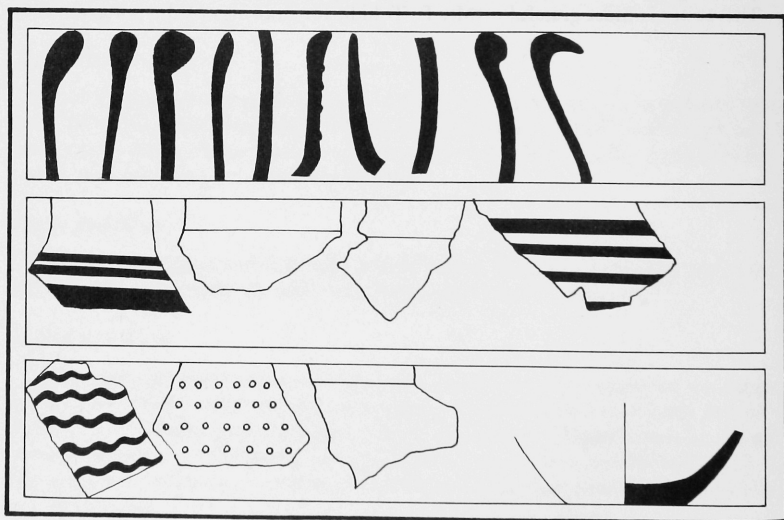


Fig. 41 Qaleh Gug B, black on red painted, ca. 3500 B.C.

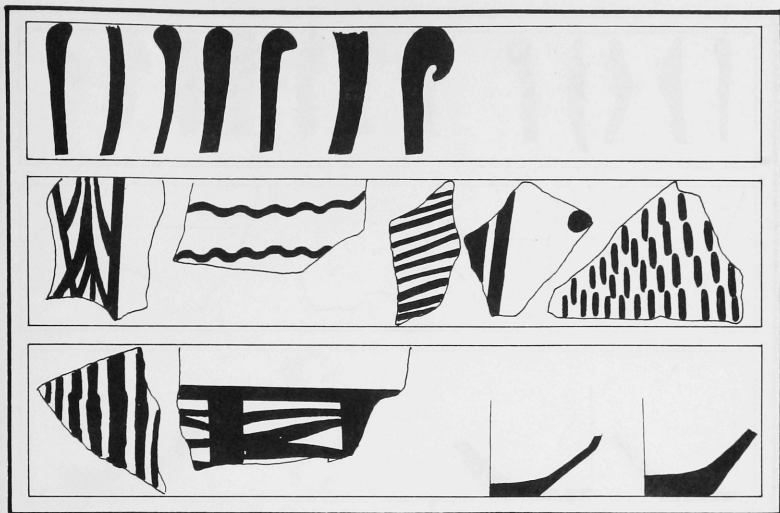


Fig. 42 Qaleh Qazaqli, black on red painted, ca. 3500 B.C.

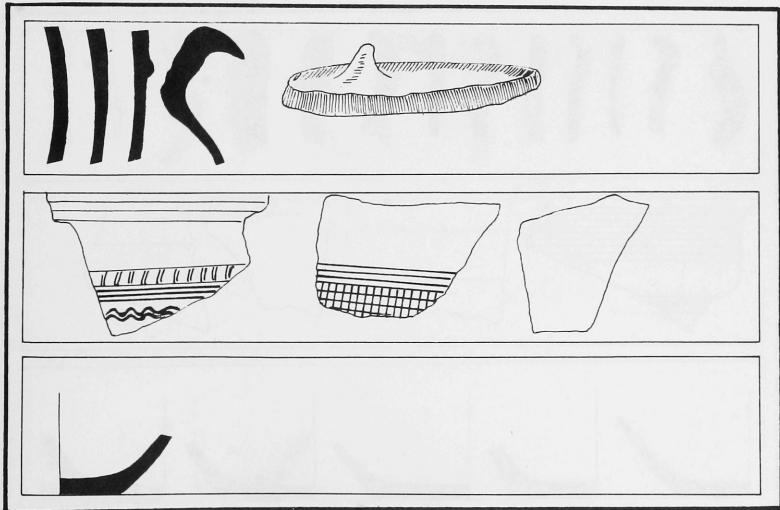


Fig. 43 Qaleh Bibi Shirvan, incised red pottery, Sasanian Period

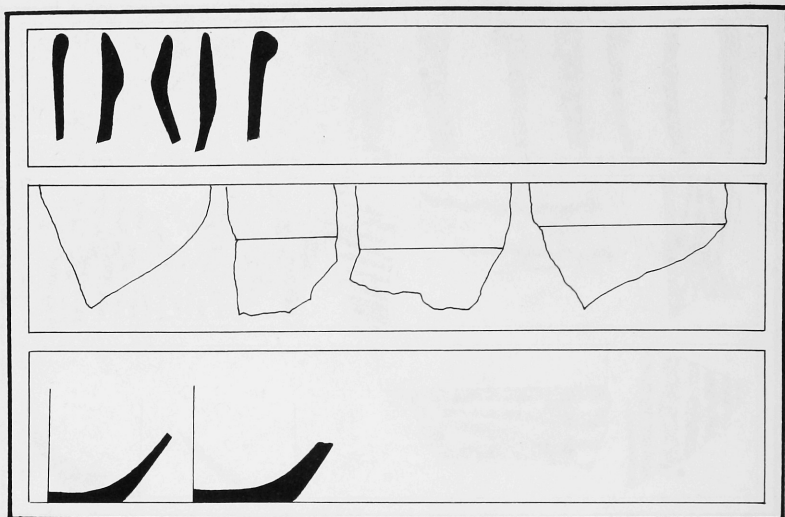


Fig. 44 Qaleh Kharabeh, red pottery, Sasanian Period

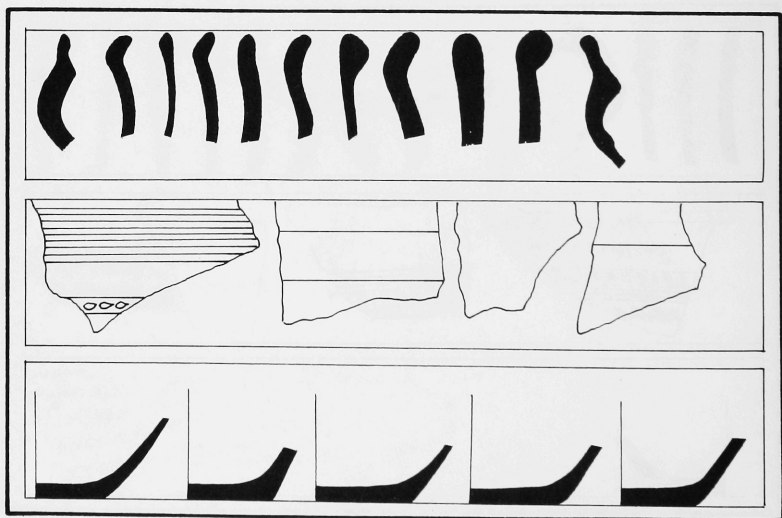


Fig. 45 Qaleh Kanizak, grey pottery, Parthian Period

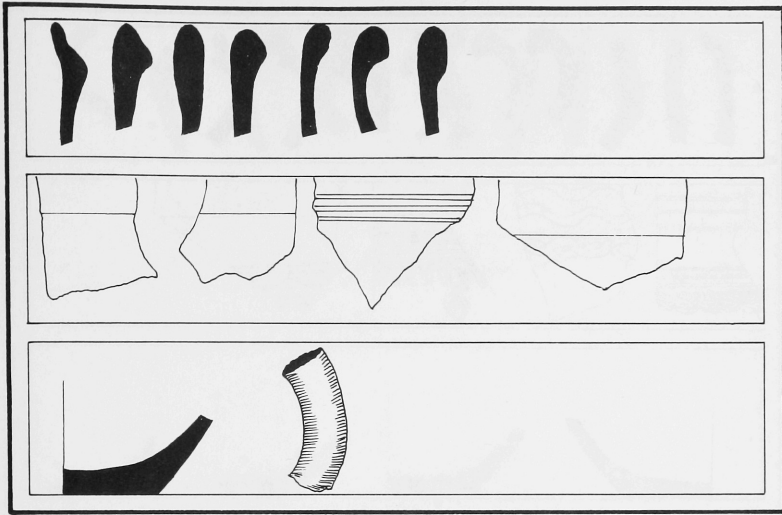


Fig. 46 Qaleh Tokhmaq, red pottery, Sasanian Period

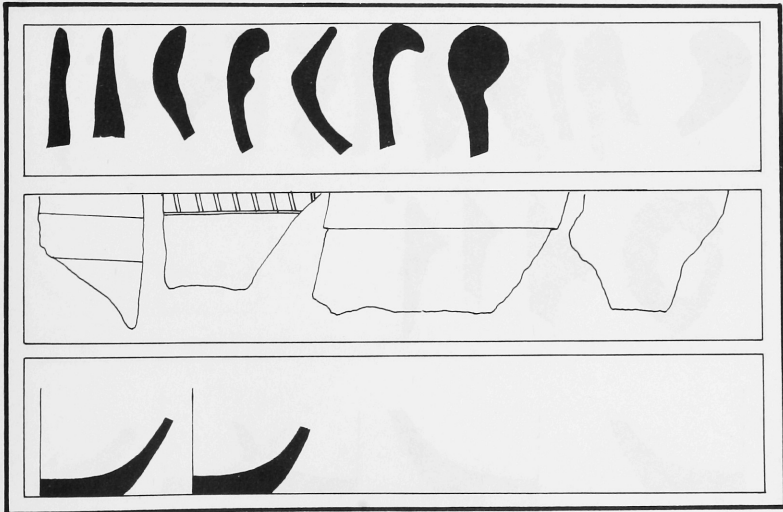


Fig. 47 Qaleh Gawmishli, grey pottery. Parthian Period

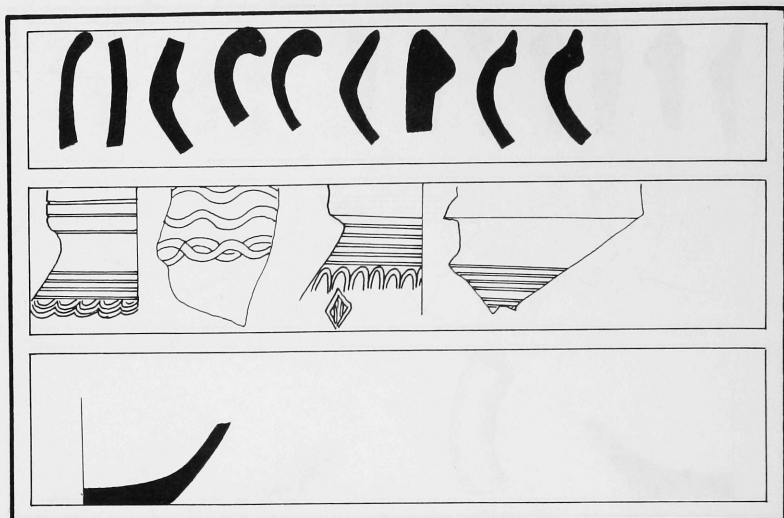


Fig. 48 Qaleh Kafar, red pottery, Parthian & Sasanian Periods

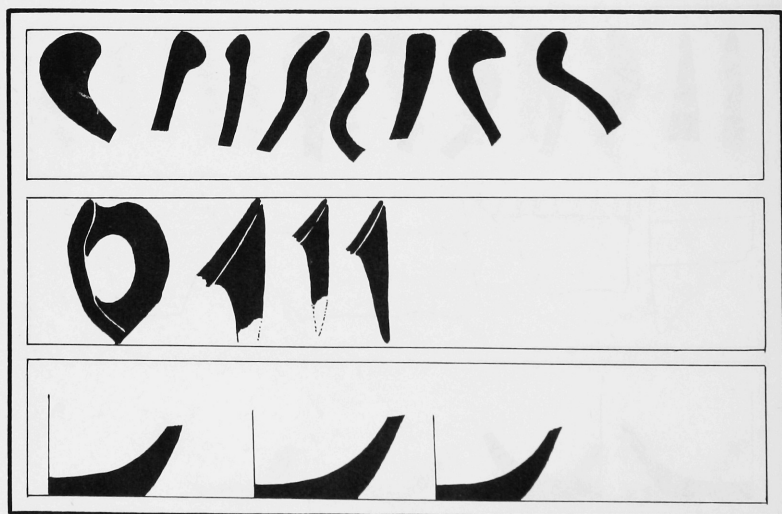


Fig. 49 Qaleh Yasaqi, grey pottery, Parthian Period

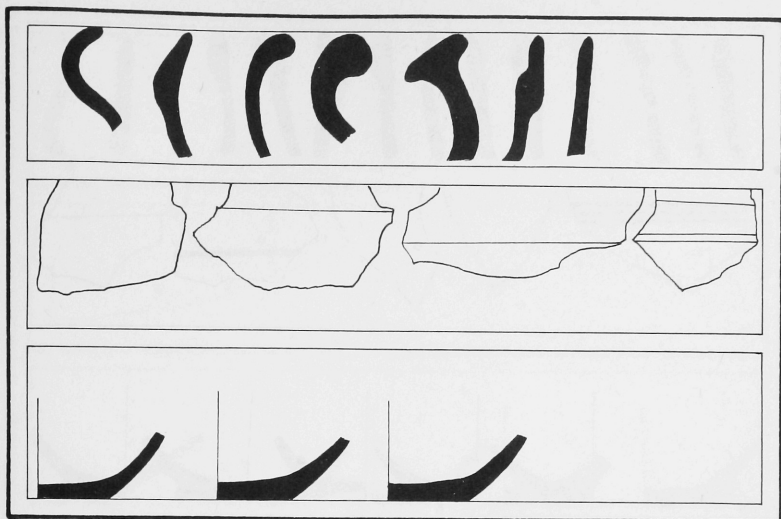


Fig. 50 Qaleh Paras, red pottery, Sasanian Period

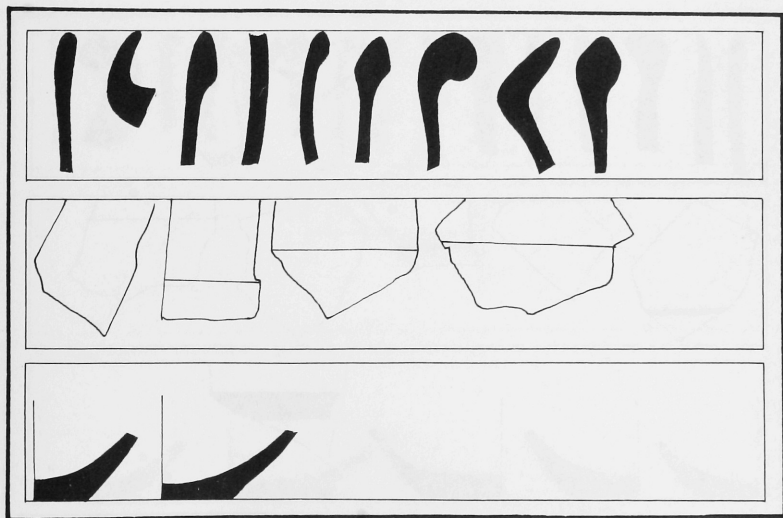


Fig. 51 Qaleh Gabri, red pottery, Sasanian Period

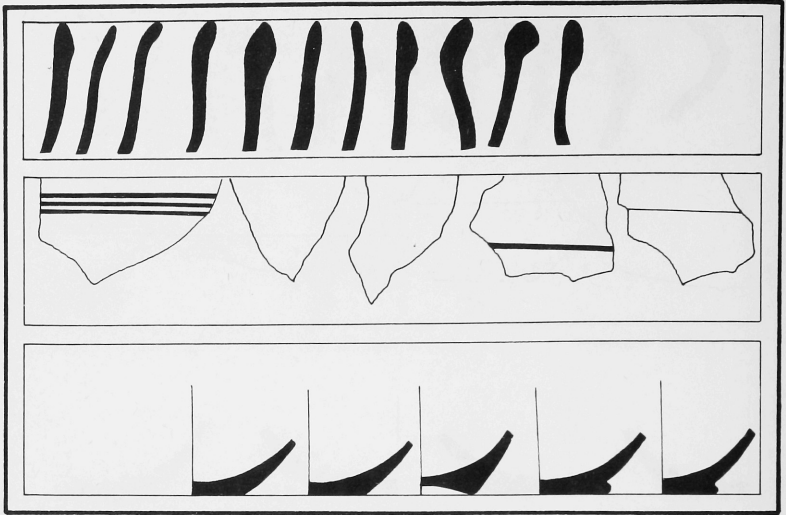


Fig. 52 Qaleh Sultan-Ali, grey pottery, Parthian Period

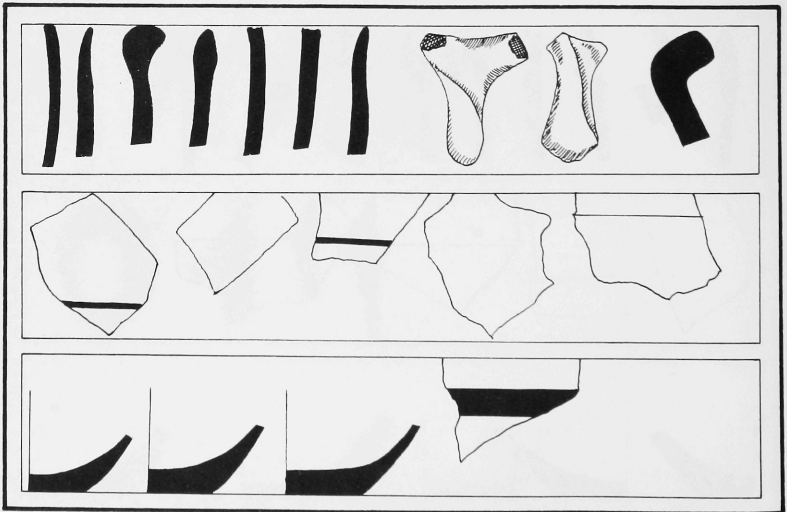


Fig. 53 Qaleh Abadan, grey pottery, Parthian Period

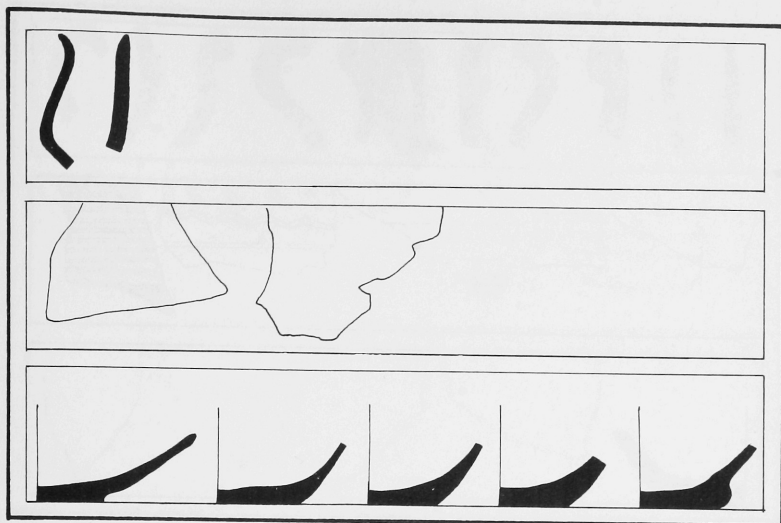


Fig. 54 Qaleh Qizil, grey pottery, Parthian Period

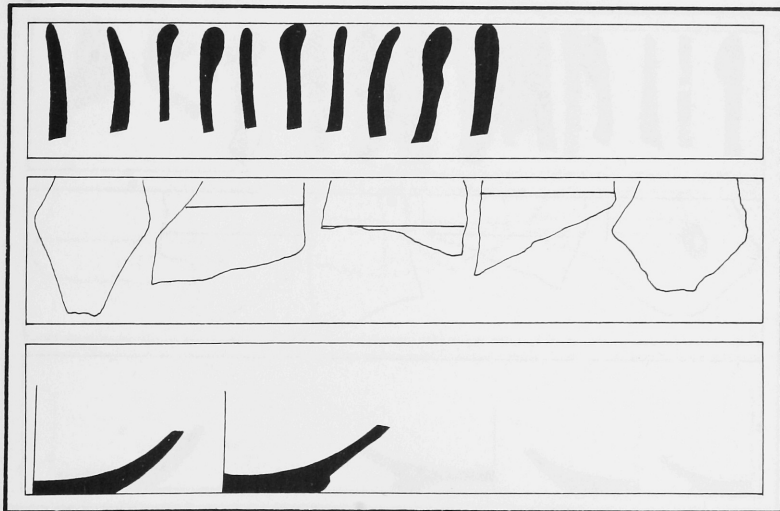


Fig. 55 Qaleh Qarah Mohammad, grey pottery, Parthian Period



Fig. 56 Qaleh Qabrestan, incised Sasanian pottery

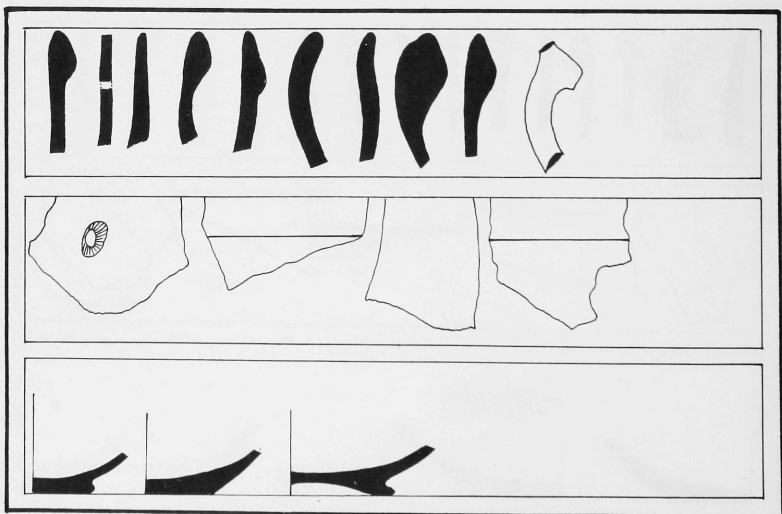


Fig. 57 Qaleh Qarniareq, grey pottery, Late Sasanian Period

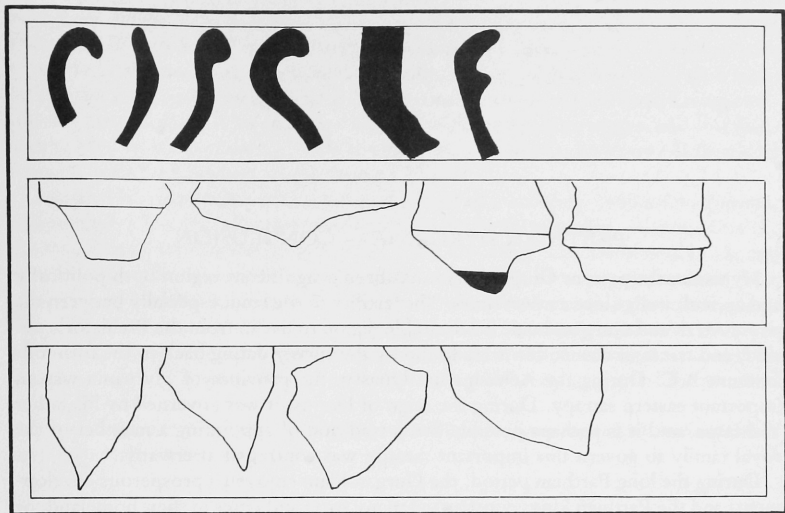


Fig. 58 Qaleh Polgunbad, red pottery, Late Sasanian Period

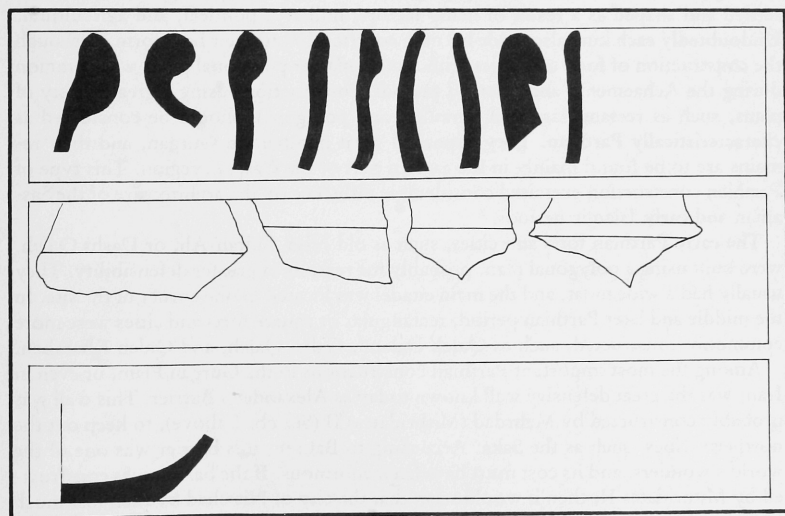


Fig. 59 Qaleh Altintokhmaq, red pottery, Late Sasanian Period

PARTHIAN HYRCANIA — CONCLUSION

Hyrcania, the present Gurgan Plain, has been a significant region both politically and agriculturally since earliest times. The fertility of the land, especially between the rivers Atrak and Gurgan, made it a desirable region to live in from the Prehistoric period, and traces of occupation were found by the survey dating back to the fifth millennium B.C. During the Achaemenid dynasty, the province of Hyrcania was an important eastern satrapy. During the reign of Darius, it was governed by his father Vishtaspa, and it is perhaps possible that a tradition of appointing a member of the royal family to govern this important satrapy was continued afterwards.

During the long Parthian period, the Gurgan Plain enjoyed a prosperous development, and the Parthian kings constructed many forts and cities in their homeland, or converted many earlier constructions to their own usage. Of these constructions, most appear to have had a military purpose. The forts and cities of Hyrcania were settled and shaped as a result of many factors; military, political, and agricultural. Undoubtedly each king also made his own contribution to their final form. Although the construction of forts and cities with rectangular or polygonal plans was common during the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods, constructions using a great variety of plans, such as rectangular, oval, circular, and polygonal, should be considered as characteristically Parthian. They appear in great numbers in Gurgan, and their remains are to be found mainly in the eastern part of the Caspian region. This type of Parthian construction exercised considerable influence on the architecture of the Sasanian and early Islamic periods.

The early Parthian forts and cities, such as old Nisa, Sultan-Ali, or Dasht Qaleh, were built using a polygonal plan, probably for reasons of greater defensibility. They usually had a wide moat, and the main citadel was located in one corner of the site. In the middle and later Parthian period, rectangular or square forts and cities were more commonly constructed, such as Qaleh Daland, Gabri Qaleh, and Qaleh Kharabeh.

Among the most important Parthian constructions in the Gurgan Plain, or even in Iran, was the great defensive wall known today as Alexander's Barrier. This wall was probably constructed by Mehrdad (Mithridates) II (See ch. 1 above), to keep out the northern tribes, such as the Saka. According to Bakran, this barrier was one of the world's wonders, and its cost must have been enormous. If the barrier was constructed by Mithridates II, then it would seem that the city of Nisa had by then lost much of its importance, and the main centre of Parthian power in this region, and the location of their important cities at that time, must be in the Gurgan Plain. Although by

no means all the sites described above have been excavated, it seems that most of them can be attributed to the Parthian period, and some can be identified with important Parthian cities. It is noteworthy that, in considering these sites, their similarity with forts and cities of Central Asia is considerable, many of them having comparable general plans. Our investigations are still in their early stages, and it is difficult to identify all the missing Parthian cities. Most probably, however, all should be located within the borders of the Gurgan Plain.

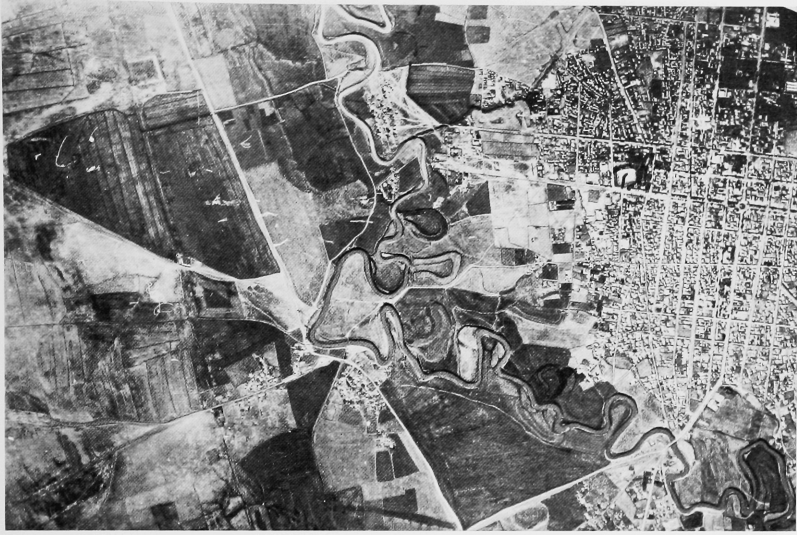
The building materials which were used consist of mud brick, fired brick, gypsum, and mortar. Clay was also used during the early Parthian period. It seems that the construction of forts and cities in the early period made greater use of mud brick; and the use of fired bricks, with varying degrees of hardness, became popular in the later period. The Parthian arrangement of bricks in their constructions is most interesting. They often set one brick in a vertical position, with two horizontal rows of bricks above and below. This arrangement was used, for example, in the construction of the defensive wall. The sizes of mud or fired bricks differ, but in general the standard size is $40 \times 40 \times 10$ cms.

Finally, the Parthian pottery of the Gurgan Plain is characterised by two main wares; grey ware and red ware.

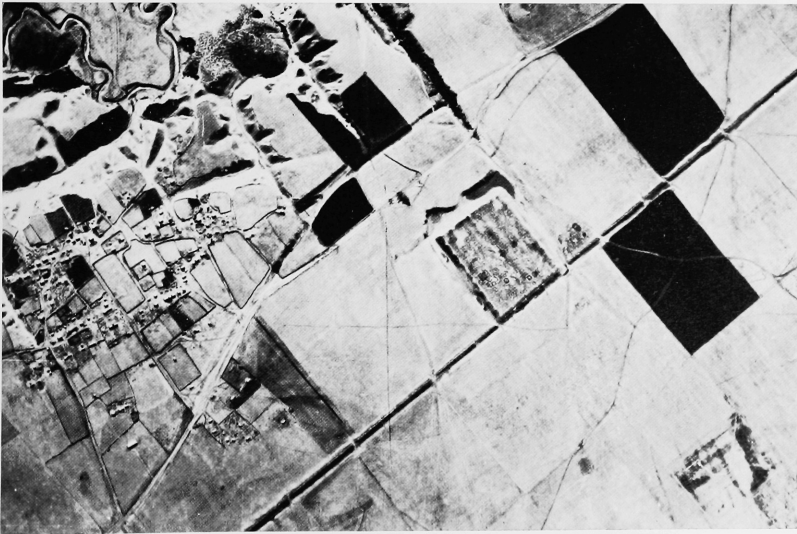
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PLATES



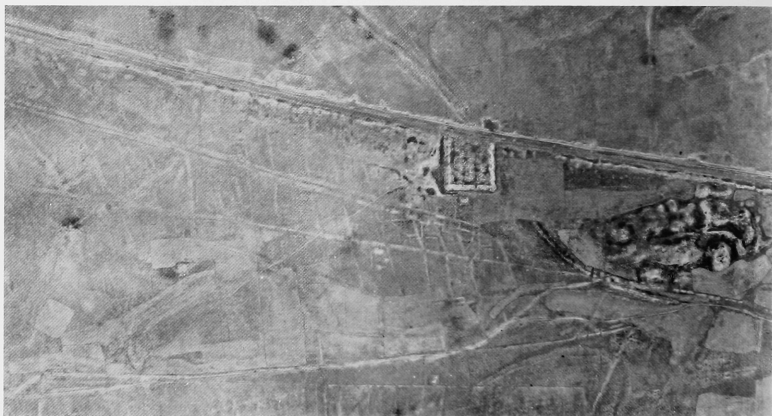
1,1. Wall of Gurgan in Northern part of Gunbad-Qabus



1,2. Wall of Gurgan in Eastern part of Gunbad-Qabus



2.1. Wall of Gurgan and its fort in Eastern parts



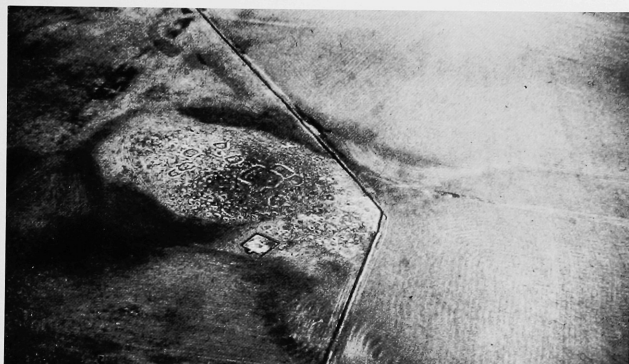
2.2. Wall of Gurgan, in middle part



2.3. New construction on top of the defensive wall



3.1. Wall of Gurgan, in its Eastern part



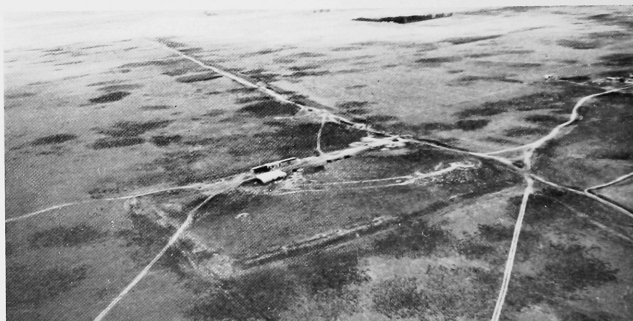
3.2. Wall of Gurgan, in central part



3.3. Wall of Gurgan in Eastern part



4.1. Part of the moat of the wall, near Gunbad-Qabus



4.2. Wall of Gurgan, shows forts no. 12—13



4.3. Wall of Gurgan, excavated area, and Qaravol Tappeh



5.1. Brick kiln, trench A



5.2. Brick kiln, oven



5.3. Wall of Gurgan, trench C



6.1. Wall of Gurgan, trench D



6.2. Wall of Gurgan trench D



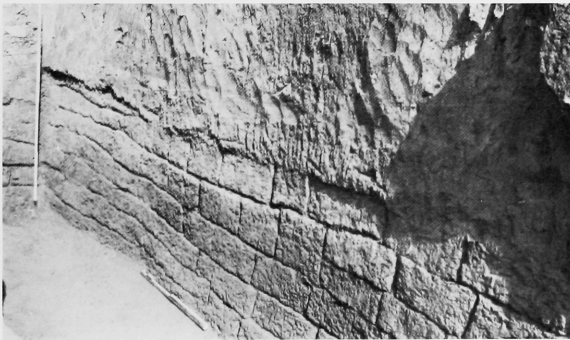
6.3. Wall of Gurgan, trench D, burial



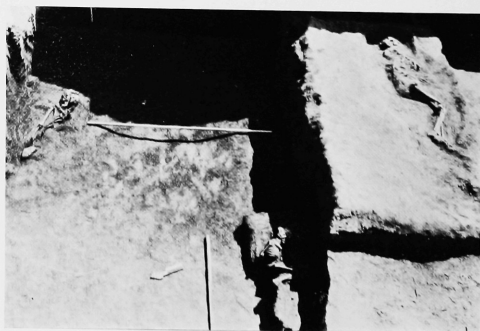
7.1. Wall of Gurgan, trench E



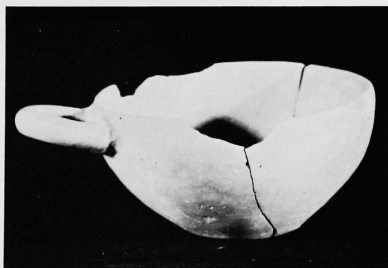
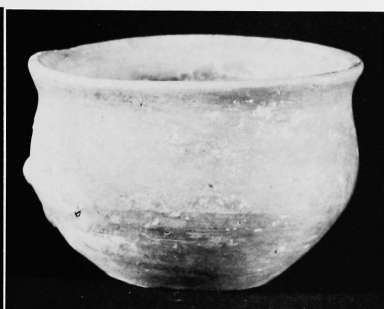
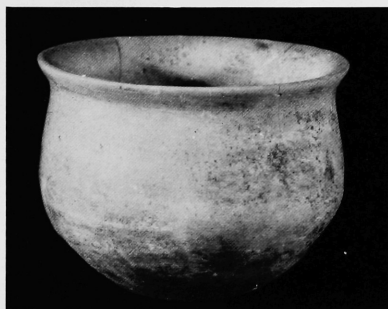
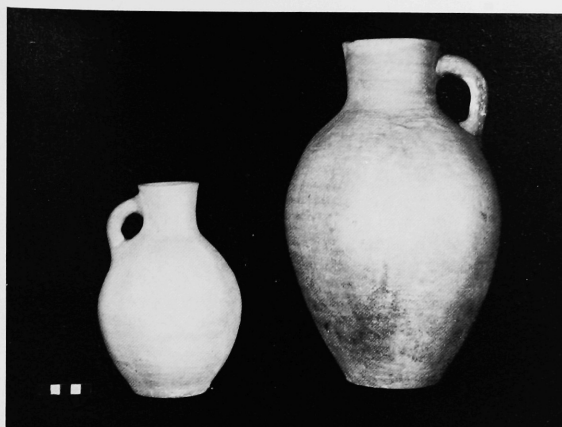
7.2. Wall of Gurgan, trench F



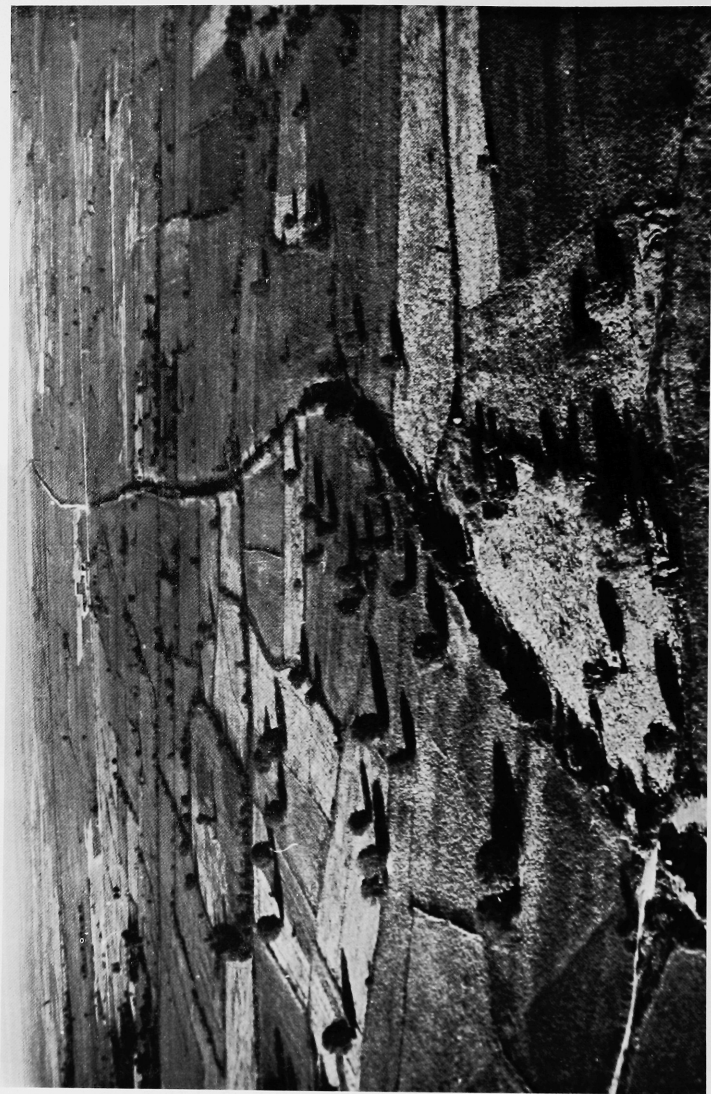
7.3. Wall of Gurgan, trench F



8,1—8,3. Wall of Gurgan, trench G



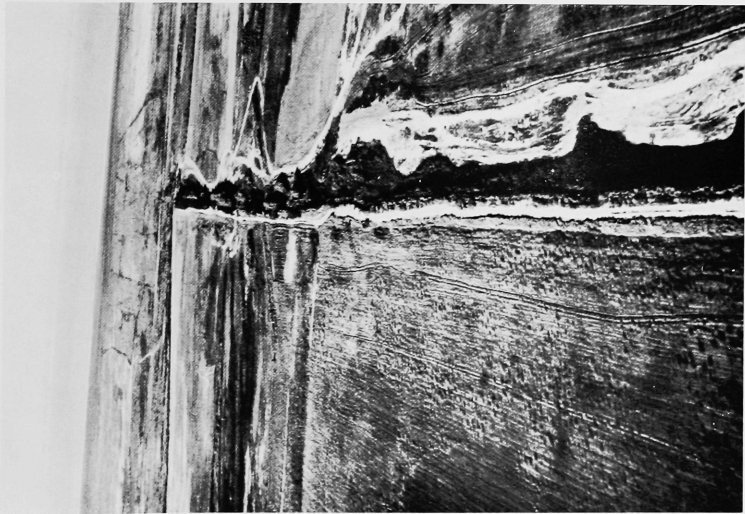
9,1—9,5. Wall of Gurgan, trench D, grey pottery and a brick mould



10. The wall of Tammisha, view from the mountain



11.2. Qaleh Qarniaraq



11.1. Wall of Tammisha



12.1. Qaleh Altin



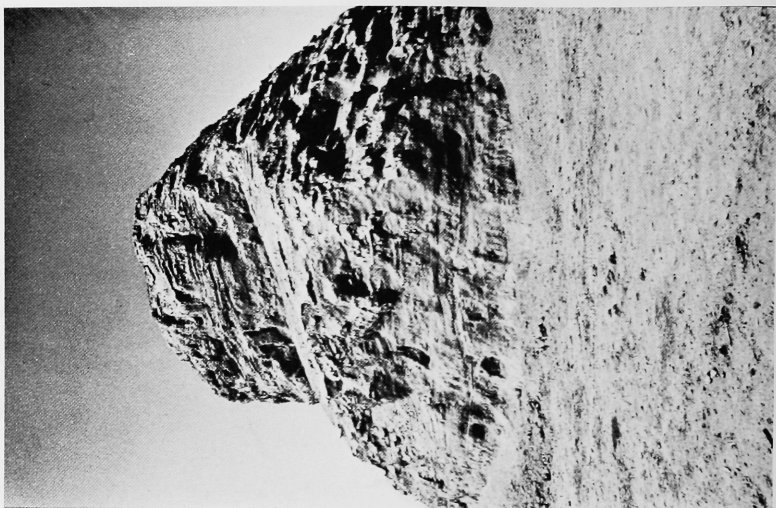
12.2. Qaleh Tokhmaq



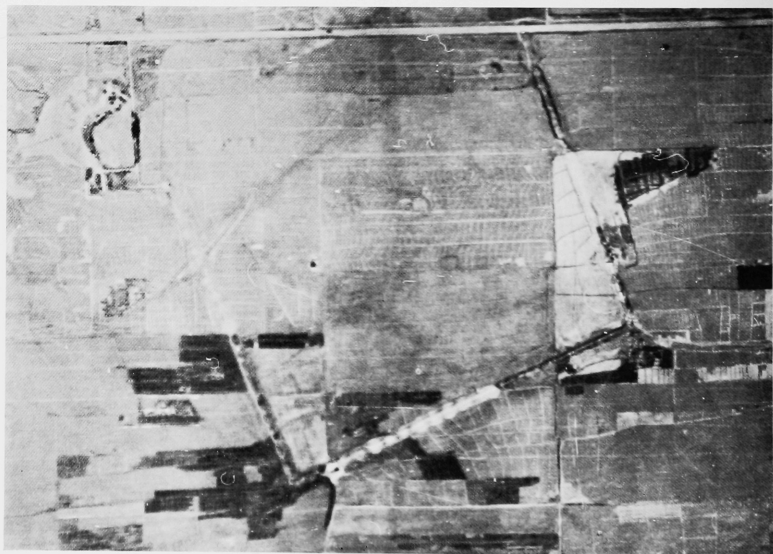
13,1. Qaleh Kafar



13,2. Qaleh Kafar



14.2. Qaleh Gug B, main acropolis



14.1. Qaleh Gug A



15.2 Qaleh Kharabeh



15.1. Qaleh Aman Qardieh



15.3. Qizil Qaleh



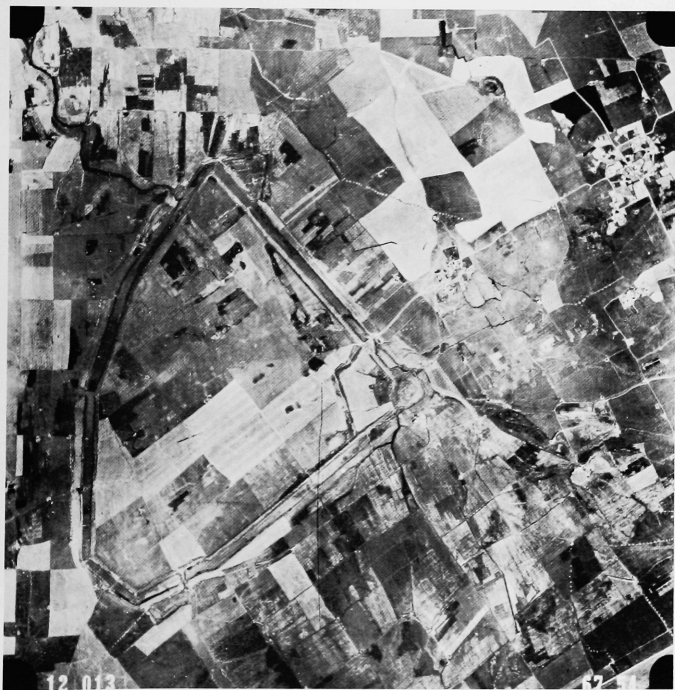
16.1. Qaleh Kharabeh



16.2. Qarah Shikh Tappeh (Qaleh)



17,1. Qarah Shikh Tappeh (Qaleh)



17,2. Dasht Qaleh, general view



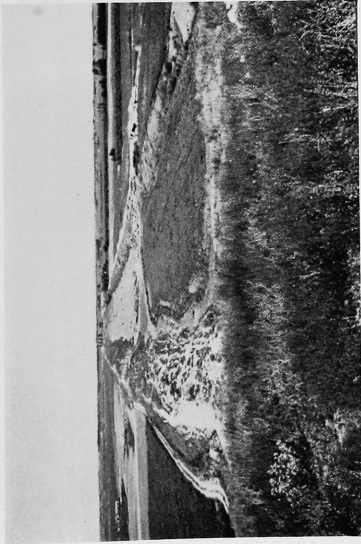
18. Dasht Qalch, general view



19.2. Dasht Qaleh, main citadel



19.4. Dasht Qaleh, trench A



19.1. Dasht Qaleh, North Wall



19.3. Dasht Qaleh, trench A



20,1. Dasht Qaleh, trench A, B



20,2. Dasht Qaleh, trench B



20,3. Dasht Qaleh, trench B



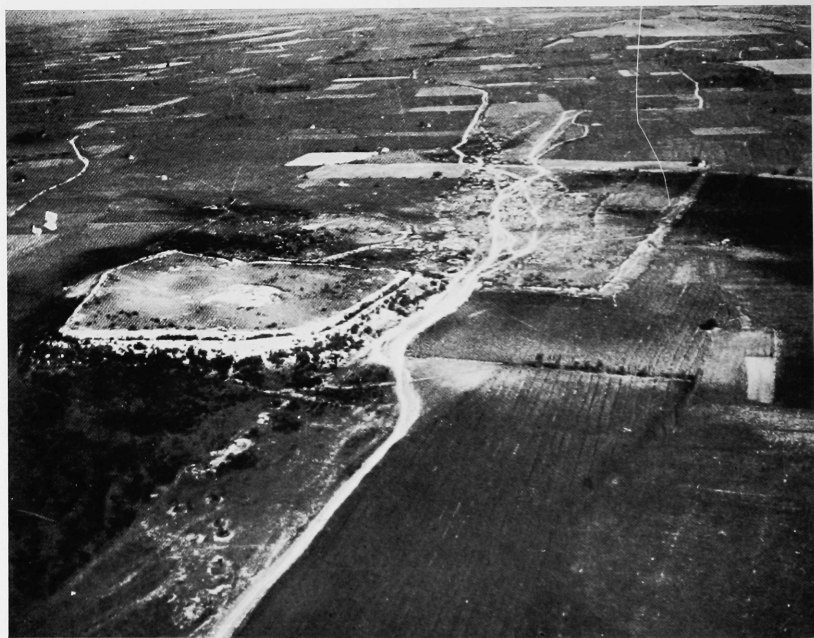
21.1. Dasht Qaleh, trench A, showing 3 levels of citadel



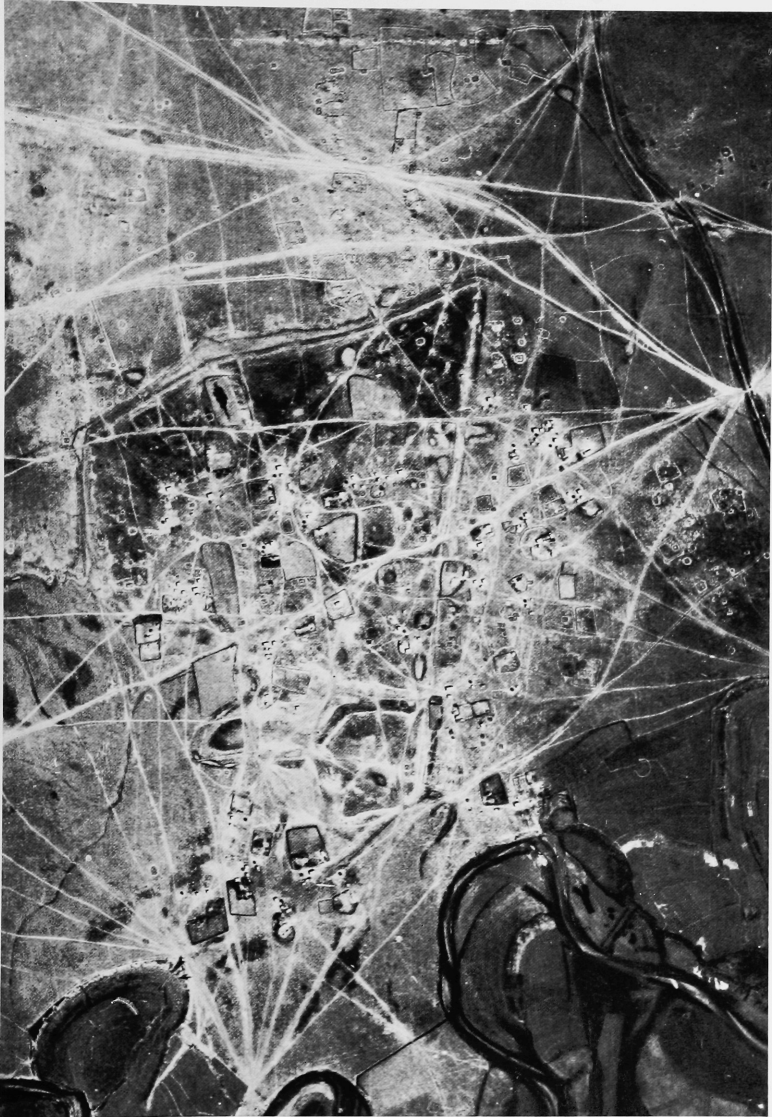
21.2. Dasht Qaleh baked brick used, in citadel construction



22,1. Dasht Qaleh, part of the excavated defensive wall



22,2. Qaleh Yasaqi, view from the East



23. Qaleh Sultan Ali



24.1. Qaleh Sultan Ali, North Wall and acropolis



24.2. Qaleh Sultan Ali, North wall



24.3. Qaleh Sultan Ali, excavated area, trench B and C



25.1. Qaleh Sultan Ali, trench A



25.2. Qaleh Sultan Ali, trench B



25.3. Qaleh Paras



26,1. Qaleh Paras, the acropolis



26,2. Gabri Qaleh, acropolis and Eastern wall



26,3. Gabri Qaleh



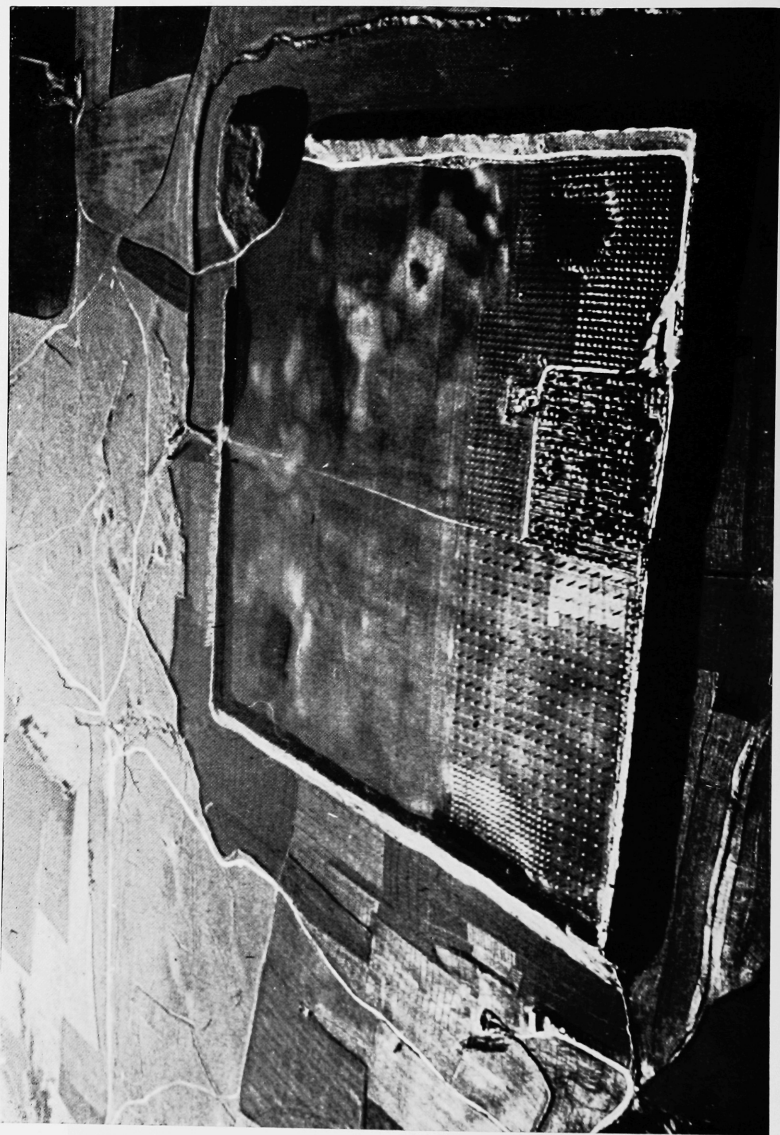
27.1. Gabri Qaleh, Southern wall



27.2. Gabri Qaleh, view from the South



27.3. Qaleh Kanizak, main acropolis



28. Gabri Qateh, general view (photography Dr. Huff)



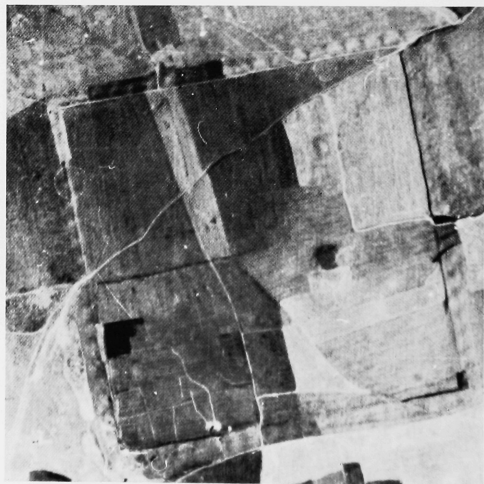
29.2. Qaleh Guzgin



29.1. Qaleh Kamizak, Eastern wall



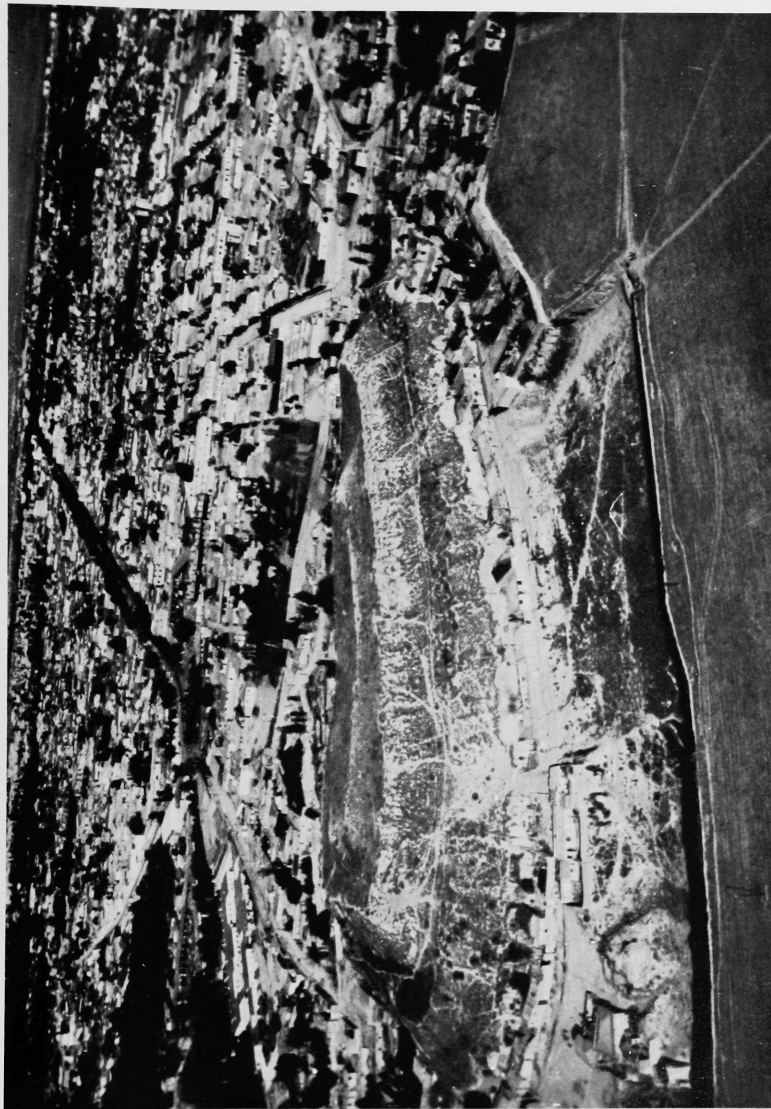
30.3. Ruins of Bibi Shervan



30.1. Qaleh Daland



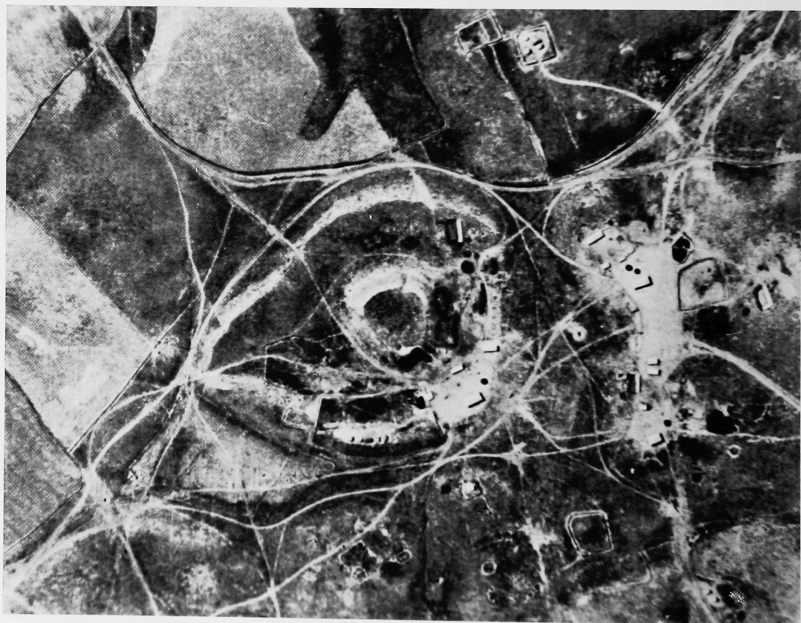
30.2. Qaleh Shah Nazar



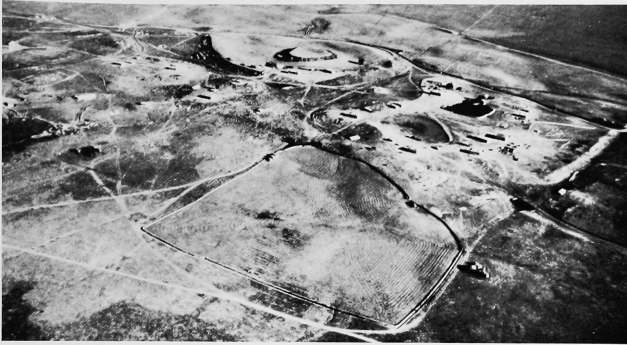
31. Qaleh Khandan, in the city of Gurgan



32,1. Bibishervan, main acropolis



32,2. Ruins of Abadan Tappeh



33,1. Ruins of Mulla Ali Tappeh, North of Gunbad Qabus



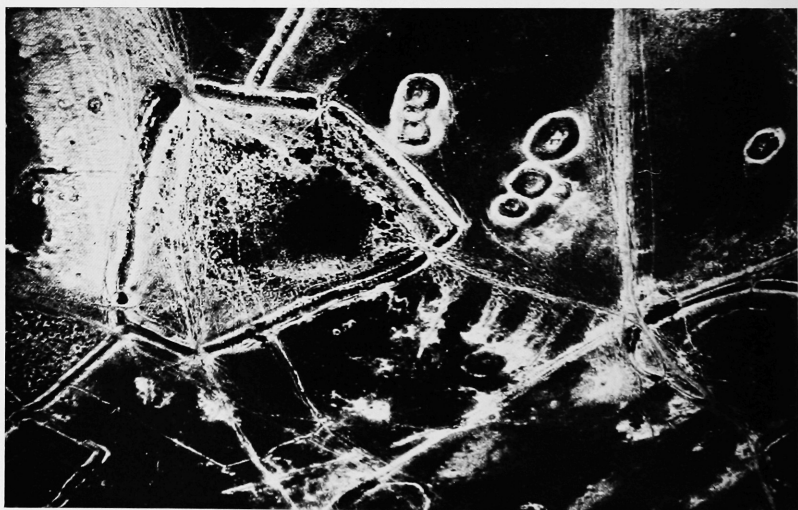
33,2. A circular city in Gurgan plain, which activities is almost destroyed by agriculture



33,3. An acropolis of a fort in the South part of defensive wall



34.1. Historical sites near Gurgan River



34.2. Ruins of a city near Gurgan River



35,1. Ruins of forts, which have been destroyed by agriculture



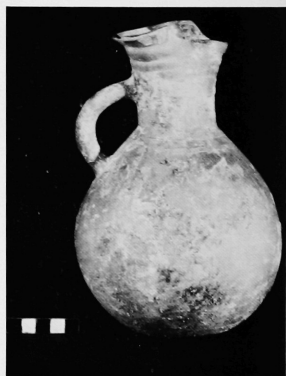
35,2. Yarim Tappeh



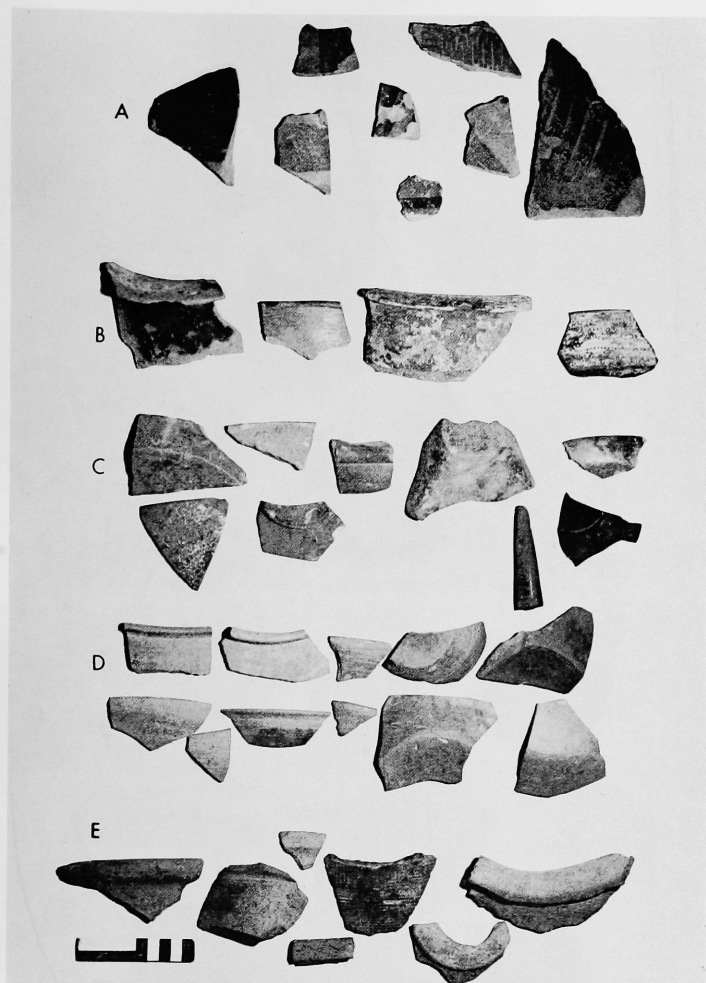
36.1. Turang Tappeh



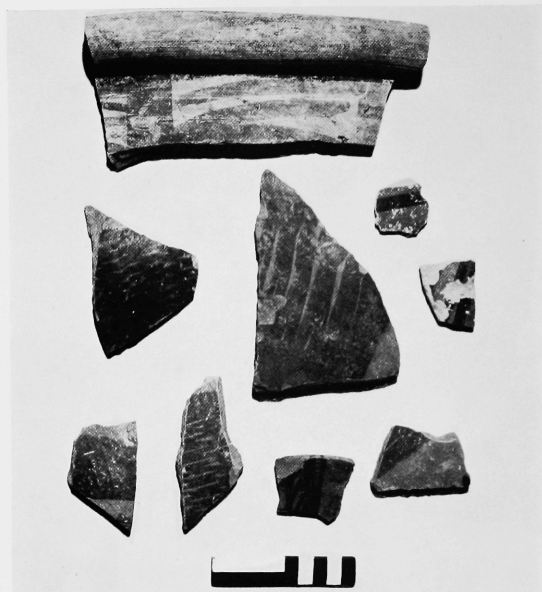
36.2. Qaleh Maran



36.3 Red Pottery from the Sasanian Period; jug Fig. 25



37. Typical pottery from the Gurgan Plain. A. Painted. — B. grey, 1st mill. B.C. — C. grey, Parthian. — D. Red, Parthian. — E. Red, Sasanian



38,1. Painted pottery from the Gurgan Plain



38,2. Grey pottery of the 1st mill B.C., mainly from around the Gurgan River



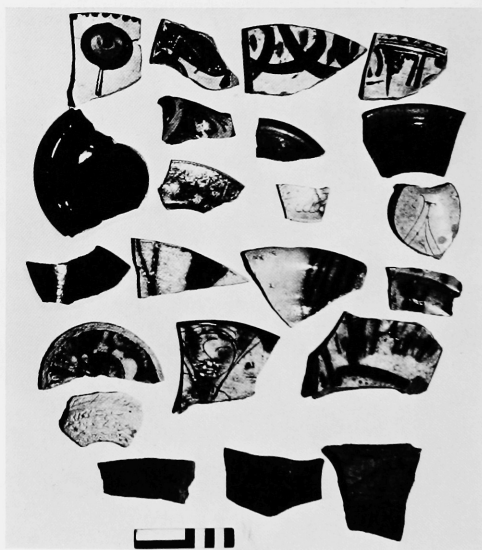
39,1. Common Grey pottery from the Gurgan Plain



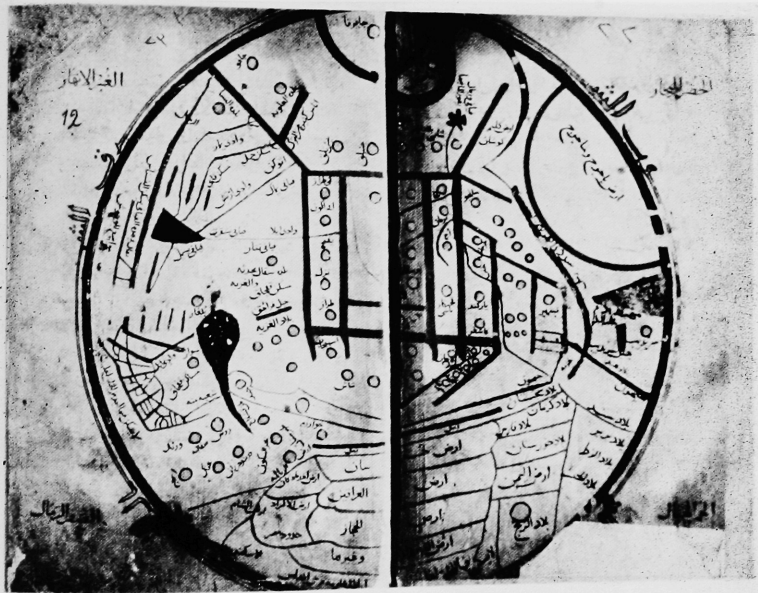
39,2. Red pottery of the Parthian Period



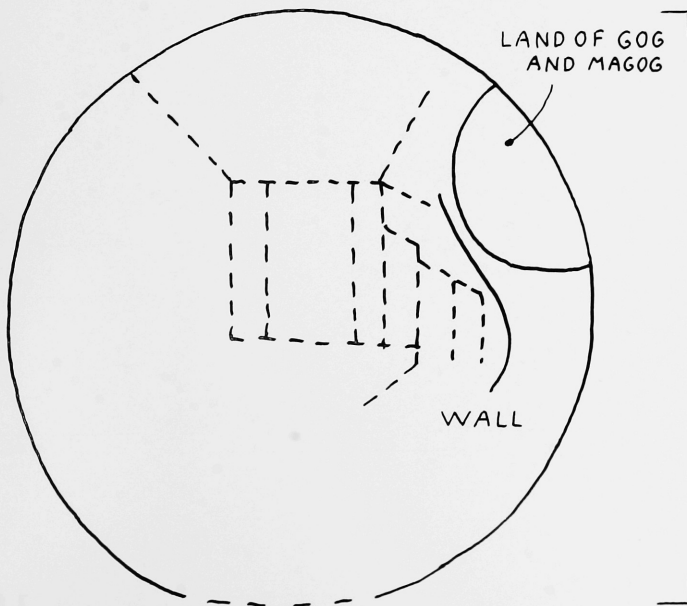
40.1. Red pottery of the Sasanian Period



40.2. Typical Islamic pottery from the Gurgan Plain



41. Wall of Gurgan in a manuscript of the 15th century
 (from: S. H. Nasr, Islamic Science, London 1976, Pl. 19)



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Fig. 1 Wall of Gurgan, at the Eastern end

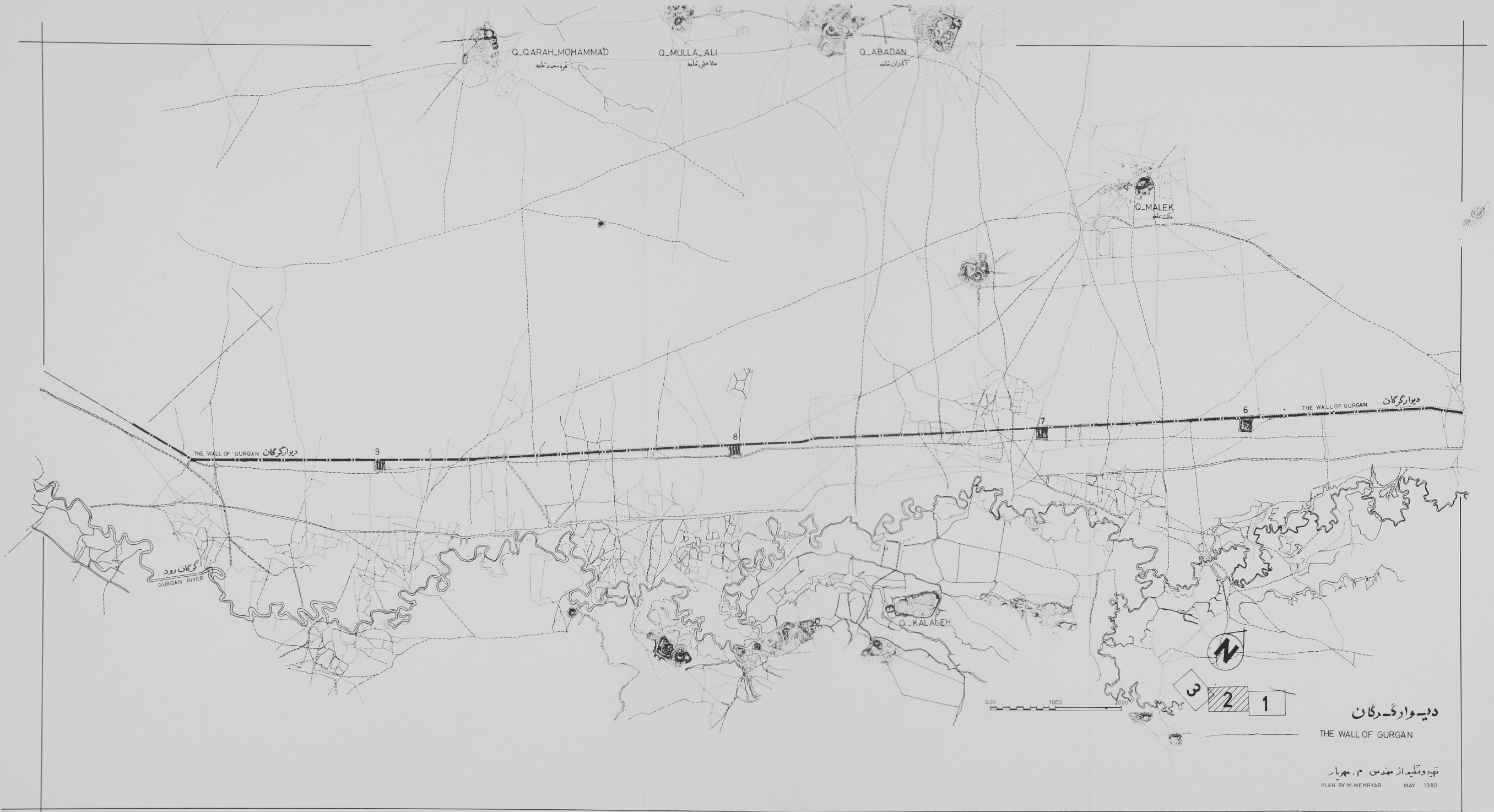
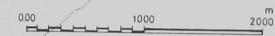


Fig. 2 Wall of Gurgan, Eastern part



Fig. 4 Wall of Gurgan, middle part



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دیوار گرجان
THE WALL OF GURGAN

تهیه و تنظیم: مهندس م. مهربار
PLAN BY: M. MEHRVAR 1981

Fig. 5 Wall of Gurgan, middle part



Fig. 6 Wall of Gurgan, middle part

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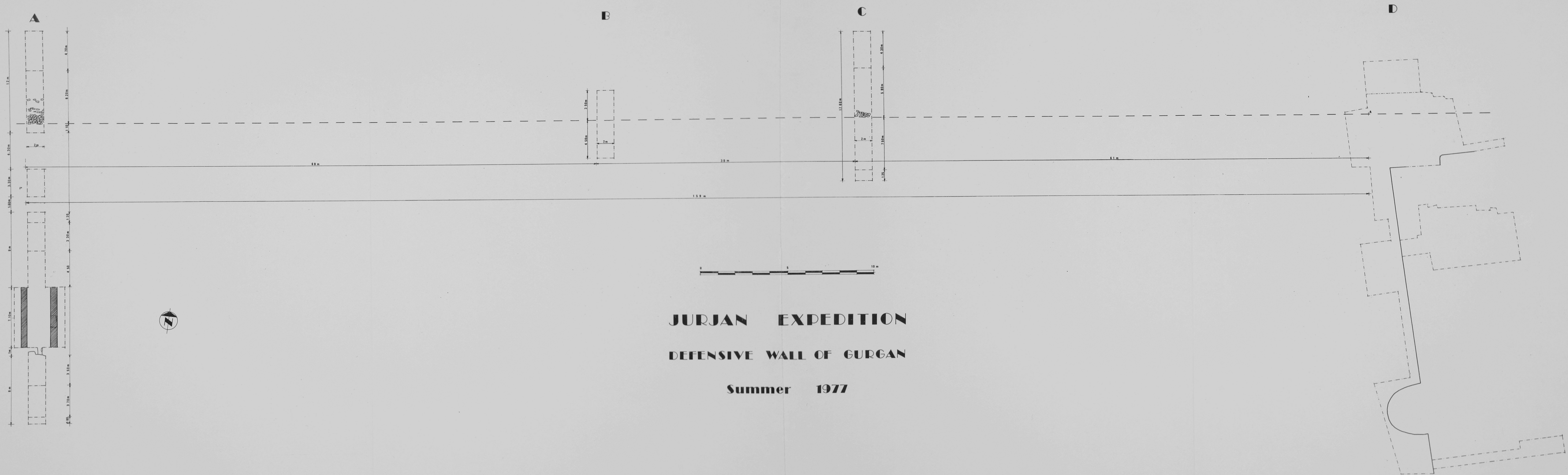
Fig. 7 Wall of Gurgan, middle part



Fig. 8a Wall of Gurgan, Western part

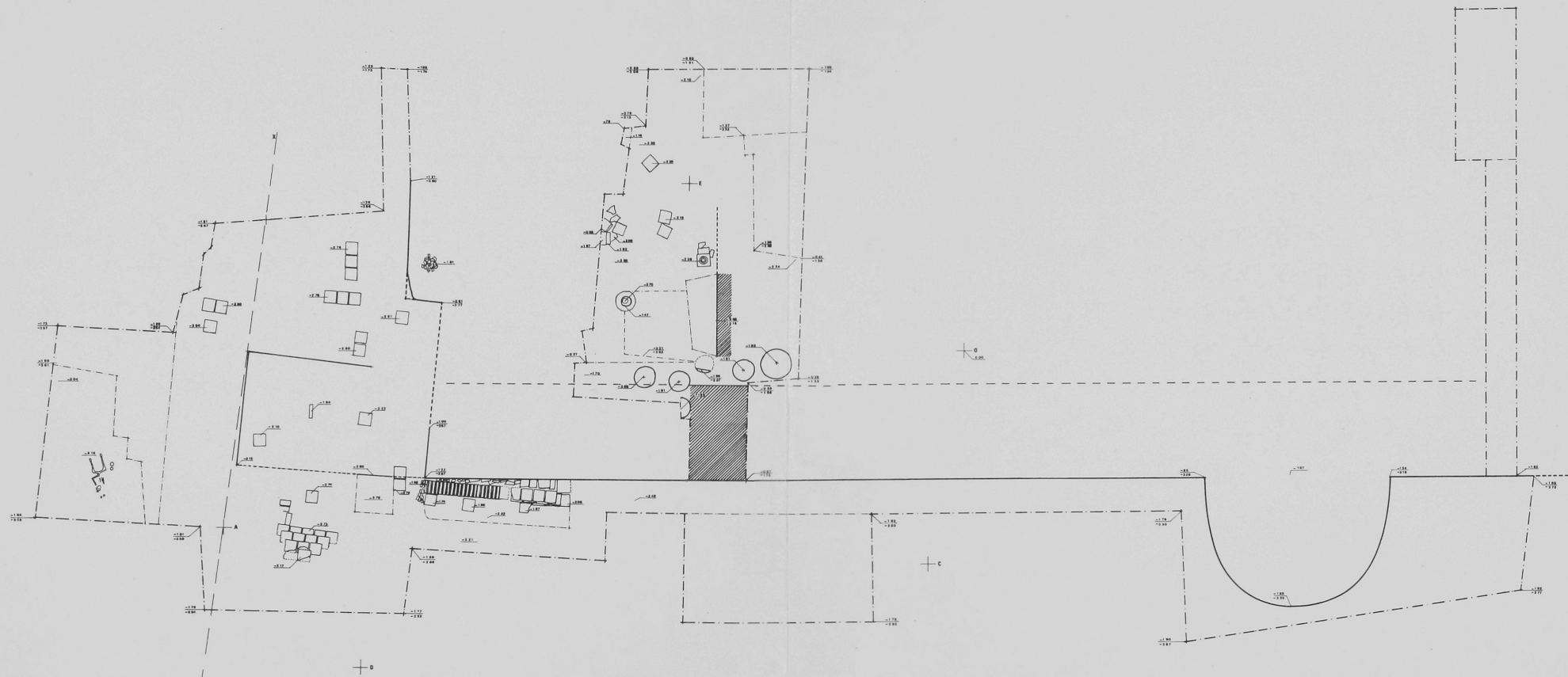


Fig. 8b Wall of Gurgan, Western part



JURJAN EXPEDITION
DEFENSIVE WALL OF GURGAN
Summer 1977

Fig. 10 Wall of Gurgan, shows locations of trenches A.B.C.D



JurJan expedition
defensive wall of Gorgan
summer 1977



SCALE 1:50

Fig. 12 Fort 12, Trench D

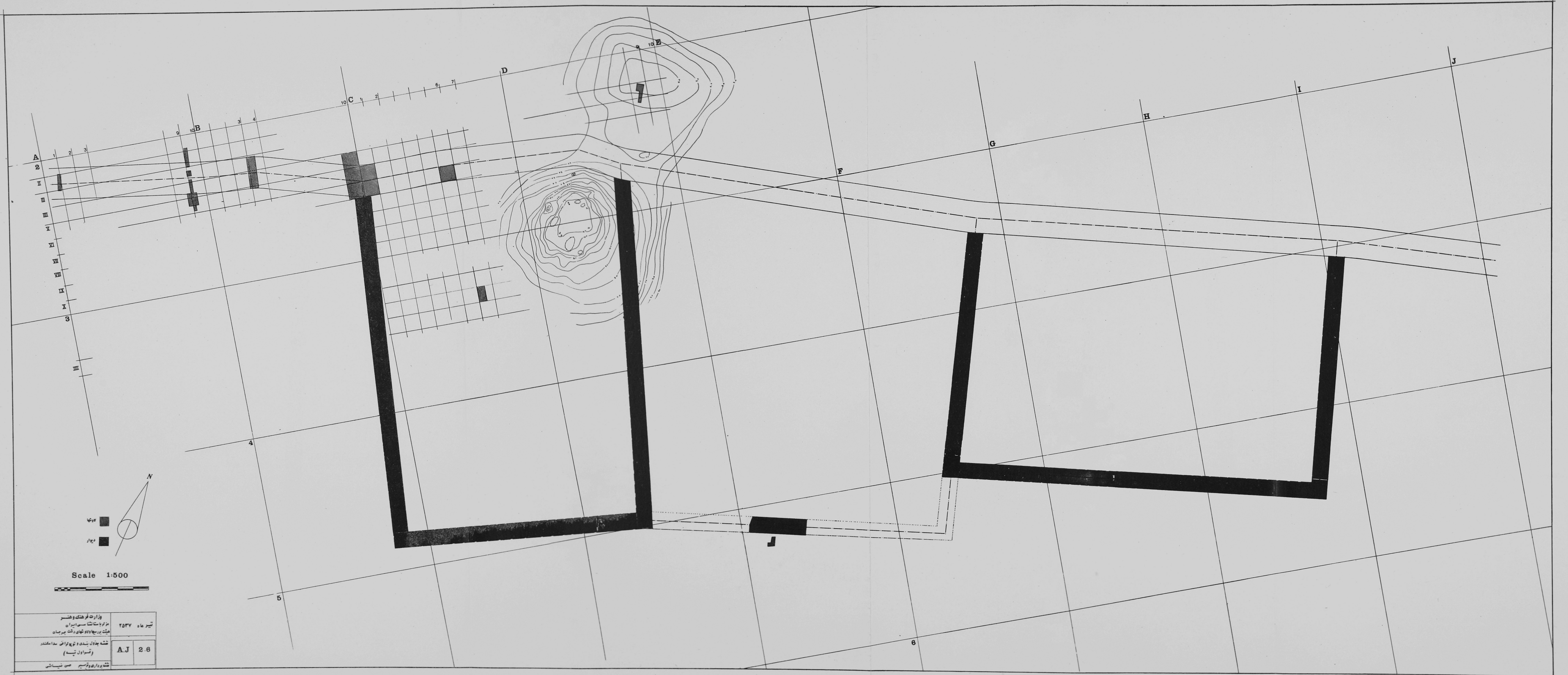
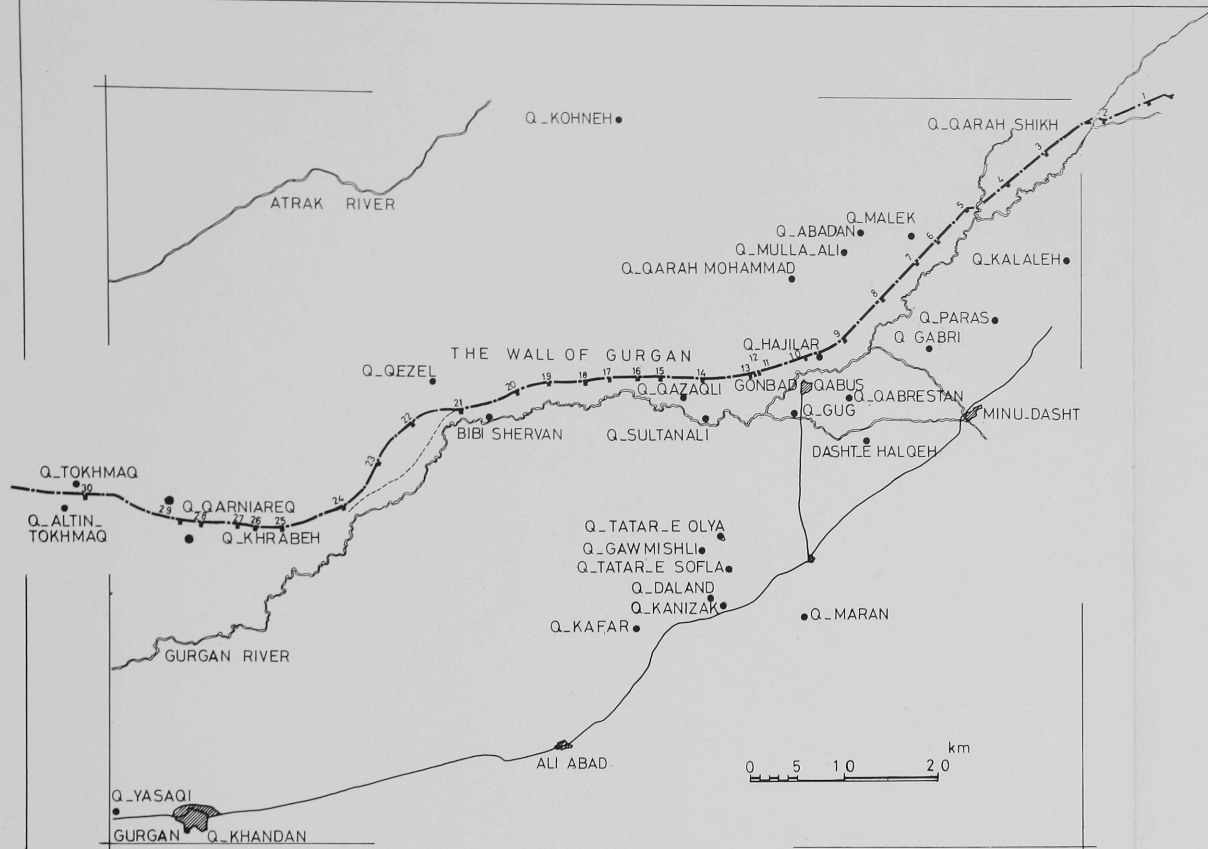
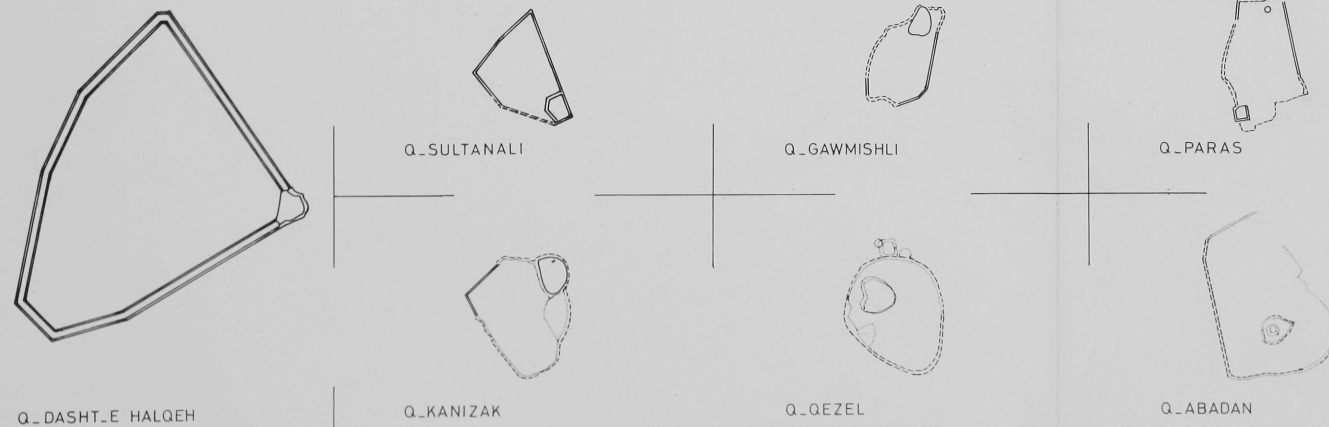
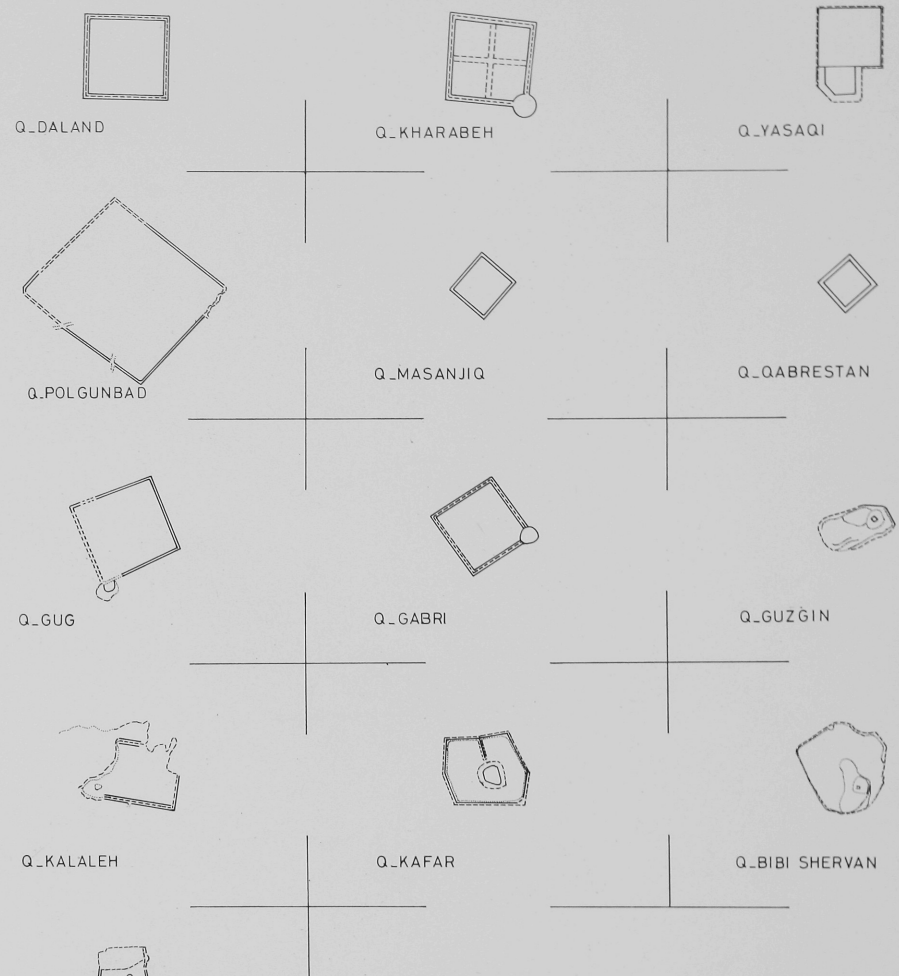


Fig. 14 Wall of Gurgan, excavation in fort. No. 12-13



**LOCATION OF FORTS AND CITIES
IN GURGAN PLAIN**



PLAN BY M.MEHRYAR 1980

Fig. 30-31 Location of forts and cities and plans of some of them

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