

JOINT SAUDI-ITALIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT AT DÛMAT AL-JANDAL. PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE 1ST EXCAVATION CAMPAIGN (2009)

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A first archaeological campaign has been carried out at Dûmat al-Jandal between April 23rd and May 7th 2009. The field work, which follows a preliminary visit of the site we could accomplish on June 2008, has been realized after the approval of an “Italian proposal of research at Dûmat al-Jandal” by the “Saudi General Organization for Tourism and Antiquities” (GOTA). The project is co-sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE/DGPC), the Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale” (UNO) and the Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente of Rome (IsIAO). The Italian Archaeological Mission carries on its researches under the patronage of the IsIAO. A formal Joint Cooperative Agreement for a five years period of activities was signed at Riyadh on May 5th at the presence of HH Prince Sultan ibn Salman ibn ‘Abdul ‘Aziz and the Italian Ambassador Eugenio D’Auria. The Italian team, directed by Prof. Alessandro de Maigret (UNO, ISIAO), included Dr Romolo Loreto (UNO), archaeologist, Dr Andrea Marcolongo, architect, and Mr Mario Mascellani (CNR, Rome), topographer. Members of the Saudi team were Mr ‘Abd al-Hadî al-Mu‘aykil, Head of the Antiquities of Jawf, Mr Thâmir al-Malîki and Mr. ‘Abdul ‘Azîz al-Dâyel, officials of GOTA. Mr Ahmad al-Qayyîd, Director of the Museum of Dûmat al-Jandal, participated to the excavations as well. Prof. Khalîl al-Mu‘ayqil took part to the works between April 28th and April 30th. The program of the first campaign was aimed at:

- 1) obtaining a first comprehensive map of the Archaeological Park around the Mârid castle (Fig. 1);
- 2) starting some systematic excavations in the same Archaeological Park (Figs. 2-3).

The survey (*M. Mascellani and A. Marcolongo*)

The topographic survey of the Dûmat al-Jandal “Archaeological Park” (Fig. 4) has been achieved with an electronic PENTAX R - 315N laser total station. The survey has been subdivided into two different tasks, one to achieve the environment morphology, one to describe and to georeference the archaeological structures and the excavation area. The morphological model of the site has been constructed through the survey of 2500 ground control points with a gradient of 26 m between a fixed topographic station, adopted as fixed bench mark and the surrounding plane. The bench mark has been located with his absolute DGPS coordinates, and polar coordinates have been adopted to acquire all ground control points. All data have been post-processed in order to achieve trough the triangulation method a first rough model of the ground with contours each 50 cm, then, trough the cubic spline processing, the final detailed one. The archaeological structures still *in situ* have been surveyed from the same previous bench mark stations so to georeference the two models together. 1350 points have been surveyed. All data related to the archaeological environment and of the excavation area have been processed with Geowin topographic software and finally CAD vectorialized in order to obtain plans and sections and to document the daily excavation phases. Elevation data have been acquired also trough a photogrammetric survey and vectorialization of orthorectified images. Finally 3850 points have been taken from a 26 topographic station network (Fig. 5). All the archaeological area has a perimeter of 1062 m and an area of about 45.000 sq m (Fig. 6).

The excavations

Two excavations have been opened this year near the Mârid castle: the first (Sector A) (Fig. 7) is a 10x10 m North-oriented square which is located NE of the Mârid castle, just at the foot of its colluvial hill. The second (Sector B), 5x5 m, is situated to the NW of the castle, just in front of the medieval village of Hayy ad-Dira‘ (Fig. 6).

Sector A

After having delimited a 10x10C sq m (which is the NE quadrant (quadrant **I**) of the 20x20 sq m **L6** of our grid map) (Fig. 8), we decided to begin the excavation on the western half of the area: 5x5 sq m **c** and **d**. A small stone wall (**M1**) was found near to the surface (*level 1*). The only two remaining courses of its foundations were fit in a thick level of aeolian sand (*level 2*). The sand entirely buried also another wall (**M2**), which was found in the south-eastern corner of the excavated area. Its irregular blocks are preserved for a height of about 70 cm over an earthen floor (**L1**). As proved by a nearby level of grey collapsed materials found (*level 2b*) inserted into the *level 2*, we knew that the upper elevation of M2 was made by mud-bricks (18x30x7 cm). Later on, when the excavations were extended to the nearby 5 x 5 sq m **b**, we saw that M2 turned with an obtuse angle toward E (**M2b**) to form northern part of a house (Fig. 9). Its structure, about 45 cm thick, was preserved for a height of 1,6 m over a greyish earthen floor (**L3**) with Islamic coarse pottery. Its elevation was made by stones of various sizes, which are not organized in regular and levelled rows. A window (or small door), complete with its lintel, was found in M2b. The wall of another construction (**L10**) comes from NE to join M2b 1m to the E of the window. L3 was the original floor of this Islamic house (even if it appears too high for the window) because it lies just on top of the earlier wall M5 (see below) and because the stones of M2 and M2b terminate at this level. The house was apparently in use also later with floor L1. A view of the eastern section of squares **c** and **d** shows us that the aeolian sand of *level 2* had banked up against the wall M2 for a thickness of about 1,5 m (Fig. 11). Certainly, a number of centuries had to be elapsed by the time the house and the floor L3 were in use. In square **c**, once the layer of L1 was removed and the digging went down, we found another stone structure in the SW corner of the trench (**M3**). It consisted of two rows of stones juxtaposed at the same level, which follows a lightly curved line, before disappearing into the western and southern sections. Only some traces of the related earthen floor (L2) was found. The collected pottery was always late Islamic and it is possible that M3 was contemporary of M2. A large mass of small broken stones (*level 3*) was found under the aeolian sand (*level 2*) (Fig. 12). This layer of stones, which was found on surface in the northern part of square **d**, descended gradually toward S, more and more covered by *level 2*. We don't understand

its origin (rejected items of stone working piled up in the area? remains of the disassembling of earlier structures?), but it is sure that this thick heap of stones developed before the deposition of the aeolian sand and before the construction of M2. As we will see, *level 3* plunged in the square c down to the level of floor L5, which, therefore, represents a *terminus post quem* for it. Two other structures, pertaining to an earlier Islamic period, were discovered at a lower level: **M4** (Fig. 13), which is a curving stumpy wall running E-W in the centre of the trench c, and **M5** (Fig. 14), a straight wall, 50 cm wide, which cuts the south-eastern corner of the trench, parallel to M2 and just 1,5 m ahead of it. Having M4 only one finished face (the northern one, which has a convex profile), we can presume it had a terracing function. M5 has both its faces worked, made by small stones (similar to M4), and it goes straight on toward NE for about 4m. Its upper surface was plastered with the clayey earth of floor L3. The building technique of M4 and M5 is very similar, as well as their level, so we assume that they were built in the same period (Middle Islamic?). Under M4 (which was removed) we found a strong curving wall (**M7**) in the northern half of square c (Fig. 15). It makes an arc of a circle with its centre to the N and disappears into the northern and eastern sections of the excavated area. This wall is about 80-90 cm thick and is made by a double curtain of stones filled with earth. Its convex face is badly worked, but the concave one is made with nicer squared blocks, even if not mounted in regular rows. As seen for M5, also M7 was probably a terracing wall built in order to retain the colluvial materials which slid down from the hill where the Mârid castle rises. M7 delimited an earthen floor to the N (**L5**), where ashes, charcoal and abundant pottery of apparently an early Islamic period were found. The stony *level 3* began to be heaped up on this floor. Wall M7 is conserved over L5 for a maximum height of about 1,4 m. A straight 50cm wide wall (**M8**) started radially from M7 and delimited L5 to the NW (Fig. 16). Its western end only touches M7. Being not structurally connected to it, it must have been built some time later. This wall, which goes straight for 4m toward NE and disappears into the eastern section of square d, must have been part of an early Islamic house built in the space kept free by structure M7. When the excavations went down in (**L4**), the space to the S of M7, we discovered a new stone wall (**M6**), 60 cm wide and oriented to N-NE (Fig. 17). Its building technique, with squared blocks mounted in pseudo-isodomic rows, is much better than that of the previous structures. Being its

northern end cut by the convex curtain of M7 and being its southern part surmounted by the foundations of M5, it is certain that M6 is more ancient than these two Islamic walls. Near M6 we found some broken, very hard grey mud-bricks, which clearly concerned the upper elevation of the wall. In deepening the space to the W of M6 (L4), only pre-Islamic pot-shards were found (Fig. 18). The collected pottery still has to be studied, but some analogies with the one from the site of Tuwayr¹ - not far from Dûmat al-Jandal - bring us to suppose that M6 and his stratigraphic context have to be dated to a post-Nabataean/pre-Islamic period (Fig. 19). A last curving wall (M9) appeared in L4: most probably it was a retaining structure build up against the foot of the hill to the SW (it has only its NE face worked out) (Fig. 20). This wall was built later than M6, because, going toward SE, it bends to SW at its meeting with M6, in order to respect its north-western face. We had to stop the excavation in L4 for lack of space. The maximum deepness we reached from the surface is 3,2 m (Figs. 21-22). For the next season we plan to enlarge our excavation area to the South (10x10 m quadrant **L6-II**) and to the East (5x5 sq m **L6-I-a, b**), in order to put in light the pre-Islamic house related to the wall M6, which was discovered this year, and, possibly, to go deeper in search of more ancient levels.

Sector B

This was a brief test excavation carried out in the area in front of the medieval village of Hayy ad-Dira' (5x5 sq m **G3-IV-b** of our map grid). Opened on April 29, the excavation was closed on May 3rd, when an intense sewage infiltration was found at a depth of 1,3 m. We had only the time to put on light two structures: M100, a wall in the SW corner of the square, and M101, a smaller wall, which, being orthogonal to M100, formed a door before joining it. As proved by some bronze coins, the two walls were built in recent times (20th Century).

¹ Kh. I. Al-Muaykel, *Study of the Archaeology of the Jawf Region, Saudi Arabia*, Riyadh 1994, pp.207-296.



Fig.1 - Mârid Castle



Fig.2 - a view of the "Archaeological Park"



Fig.3 - the minaret of the ‘Umar Mosque



Fig. 4 - satellite image of the “Archaeological Park”



Fig.5 - topographers at work

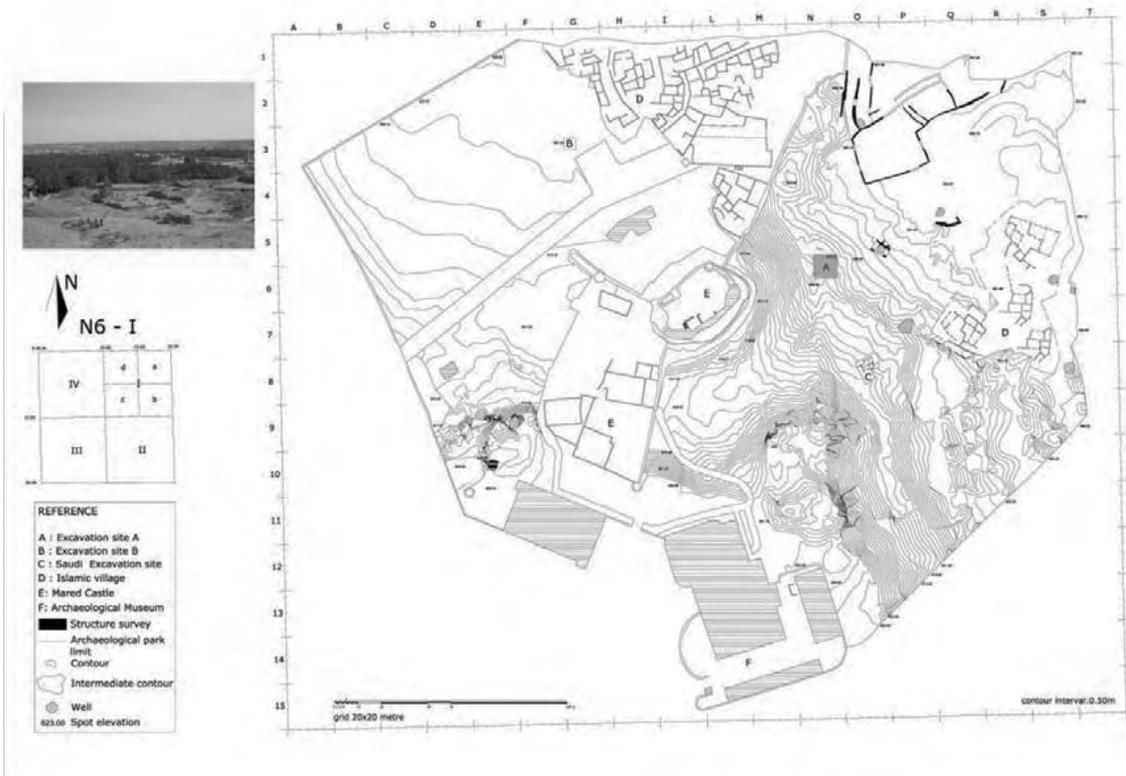


Fig.6 - general plan of the Dûmat al-Jandal "Archaeological Park"



Fig.7 - localization of Sector A



Fig.8 - beginning of excavations in Sector A



Fig.9 - excavations were extended from square c to square b



Fig.10 - the late Islamic house in square b



Fig.11 - a view of the eastern section



Fig.12 - the stony *level 3*



Fig.13 - the curved wall M4



Fig.14 - the walls M5 (to the left) and M4



Fig.15 - the retaining wall M7

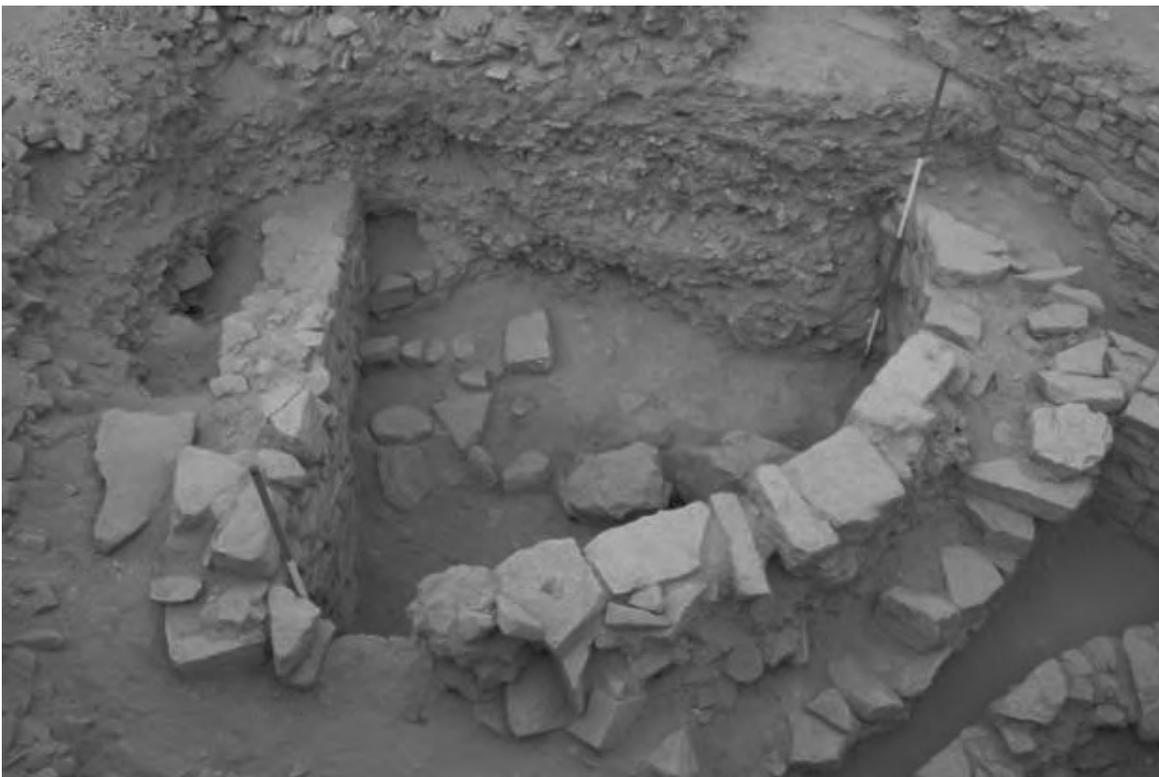


Fig.16 - the Islamic walls M8 (to the left) and M7



Fig.17 - the pre-Islamic wall M6

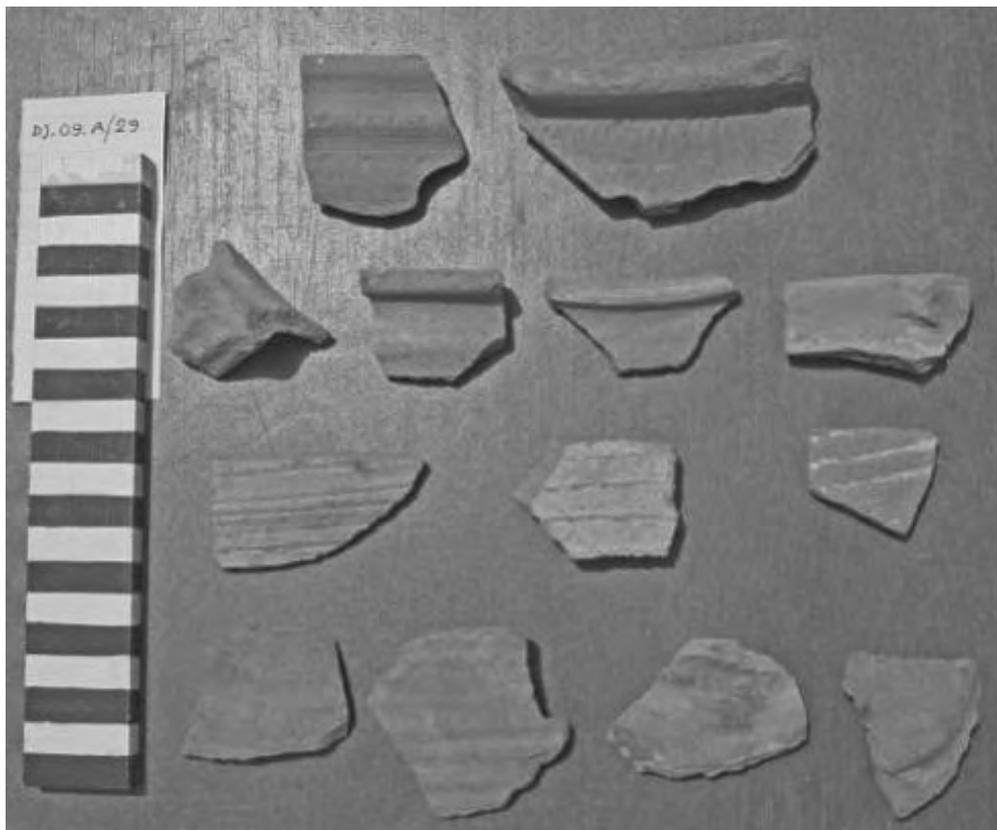


Fig.18 - Pre-Islamic pottery from L4

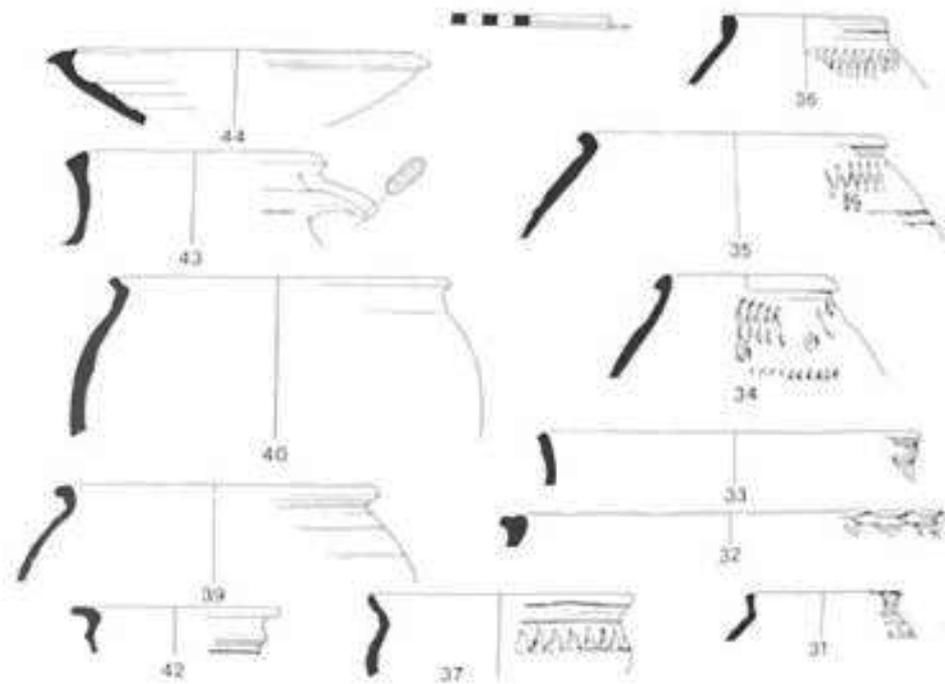


Fig.19 - Pre-Islamic pottery from Tuwayr



Fig.20 - the wall M9 (center left)

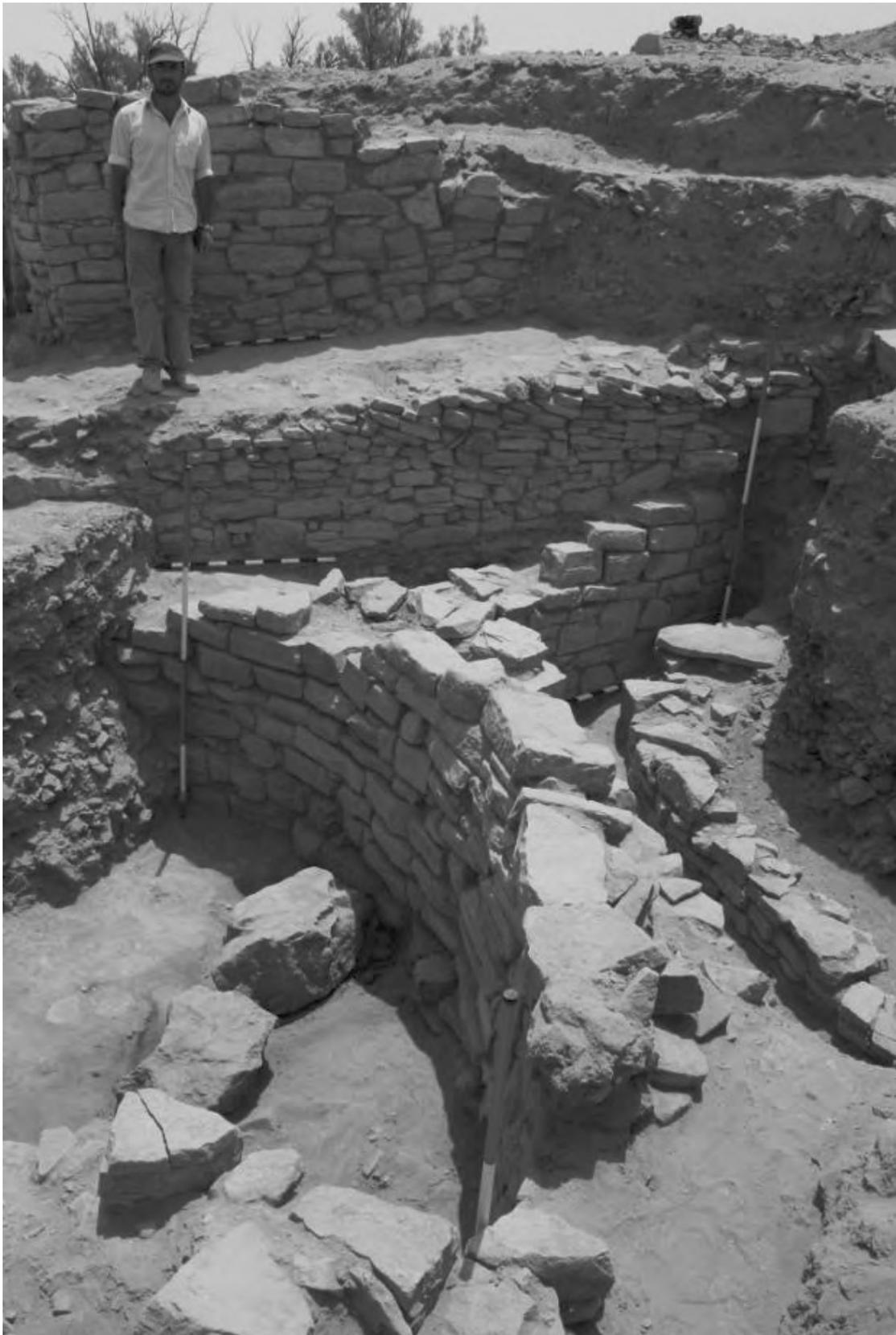


Fig.21 - general view of the excavated structures

