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## Tepe Bardeh-Konte: A Mannean Site in Mahabad, Northwest Iran

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### Abstract

North western Iran is one of the main focal points of Mannaeen sites for reconstruction of this historical period. Discovery of the sites such as Tepe Qalaichi, Zendan-i soleiman, Tepe Rabat, Qal'e Bardineh and others in this region prove this claim. Tepe Bardeh-Konte, on the southern side of Uremia lake watershed, is located in Mahabad. This site with rock-cut structures including stairs, tunnel, pits and cut-walls is situated near the Fakhrigah rock-tomb. Studying and analyzing the pottery data from this region demonstrate that the site belongs to an Iron Age III settlement; the pottery collection from the site is similar to those from Mannaeen sites such as Tepe Qalaychi, Tepe Rabat, Tepe Ziwiye, Qal'e Bardineh, Zendan-i Soliymān and Kul Tarike. This article is to report the first archaeological investigation results from the first season of survey and stratigraphy of Tepe Bardeh-Konte which yielded a Mannaeen settlement period.

**Keywords:** Tepe Bardeh-Konte; Mannaeen; Uremia lake; Iron Age; Pottery.

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## Introduction

Along with archaeological investigations to study and reconstruct the Mannaeen society, written historical documents from the region as well as from adjacent societies, including Assyria, Urartu, Babylonia, and the Genesis, are of the main resources of study, among which Assyrian plays an important role. We know Mannaeen thanks to the inscriptions attributed to Assyrian kings such as Šalmanser III (858- 824 B.C.), Šamši- Adad V (823- 810 BC), Adad Nirari III (809- 782 B.C.), Sargon II (721- 705 B.C.), Senakhrib (704- 681 B.C.), Assarhadon (680- 669 B.C.) and Assur- Banipal (668- 628 B.C.) as well as Urartian kings, Menua (son of Ispuini ca. 804- 790 B.C.), Argiši I (son of Menua (789- 766 B.C.), Sarduri III (son of Aršišti I ca. 765- 733 B.C.) and Rusa II (son of Argišti II ca. 678- 654 B.C.) (Boehmer, 1964: 11).

Mannaeans were a Hurrian speaker tribe. Their administration, since the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., played a special part in the region (Mollazadeh 1390: 53). The first reference to Manna is in an Assyrian inscription attributed to Šalmanser III campaign report to Manna in 843 B.C (Lukenbill 1926: 209). Šalmanser annual report in 829 B.C. and the Šamši Adad V (824- 810 B.C.) inscriptions provide essential information on Mannaeans. Then Manna had been influenced by Urartian kings such as Išpuini, Menua and Arghišti I (785- 765 B.C.) (Hasanzadeh, 1390: 54). Shortly after Mannaeen independence from Urartu, they could never be subjugated or made Mannaeans their absolute obedient since then. This may be interpreted as the result of the Mannaeen political power in the region at time, which was corresponding to Tiglat-Pilasar III, the Assyrian king as well as the reign and the political weakness of Urartu. The harsh

defeat of Urartu by the Assyrian army during Tiglat-Pilasar III reign in 743 B.C. ended their supremacy over Manna, and Mannaeans came to power in the region (Diakonof, 2007: 163- 65). In Sargon's 8<sup>th</sup> campaign report, Manna has been mentioned as an Assyrian ally who is representative of the Mannaeen King's place promotion in comparison to previous texts (Lukenbill, 1927: 77).

The exact date of the Mannaeen collapse by Media is still not clear but this event more likely took place within 610- 590 B.C. The Median king not only ended the Assyrian dominance in the region but also ended the Mannaeans', Sekka and the Urartian's as well (Diakonoff, 2007: 290).

## Archaeology of Manna

Archaeological studies concerning the Mannaeen culture and civilization started with the clandestine excavations of Tepe Ziwiye. In 1946, a precious treasure of art works was discovered by illegal excavations in Ziwiye most of which are now scattered in various museums and private collections in America and Europe. The first publication on Ziwiye hoard was published by Andrea Godard in 1948 in Iranian fair catalogue in Sernochi Museum (Godard, 1948: 10).

The Zendan-i-Soleiman site is the next Mannaeen site excavated during 1960- 64 by German archaeologists. The main settlement in this region had been abandoned in the middle of the seventh century B.C. following the drying up of the lake and the spring. Following which, the site was used by local Mannaeen people as refuge which, seemingly finished at the late 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. as a result of their enemies attack. Actually it seems that the site had been settled some time before the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and had been abandoned at about 600 B.C. That is



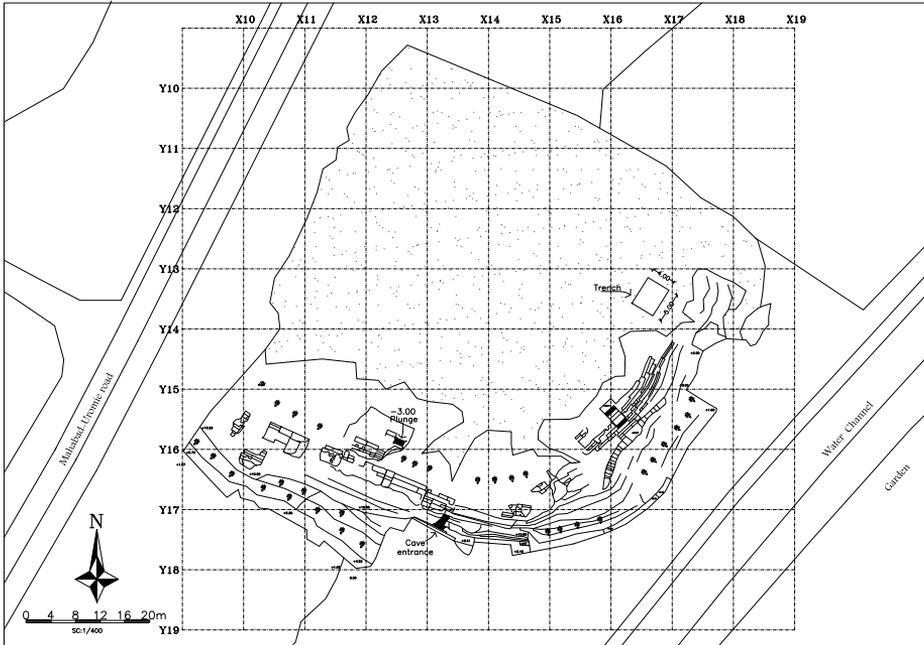


Fig. 2 Map Showing the Quadrant of Tepe Bardeh-Konte Site

while Ziyiye and Hasanlu settlements were earlier and lasted more. Young proposed a later date at about 750 B.C. for Zendan-i-Soleiman and for its last main settlement about 650 B.C (Muscarella, 1973: 22).

Qalaychi, as one of the most prominent Mannaeen sites, had been discovered in 1985 and had been excavated under the direction of Esmaeel Yagmayi. The first excavation season yielded a cruciform columnar temple with interior painted walls. Moreover so many painted glazed bricks, in various sizes, were discovered (Yagmati, 1985). The discovery of part of a stone stele with an Aramit inscription, measuring 150× 80 cm and weighting about one ton, and containing 13 lines was one of the most important findings from the first season at Qalaychi. The inscription had been deciphered by Bashash for the first time (Bashash, 1996) and then had been read and interpreted by Anrea Lemaire. This inscription refers

to Hadad god, as well as Haldi Izirtu as the Mannaeen capital (Lemaire, 1988). Continuing new fundamental archaeological investigations under direction of Bahman Kargar in 1999 aiming to “study the Mannaeen kingship culture” had put some new horizons in front of Mannaeen studies.

The first archaeological studies on Tepe Rabat as one of the ancient sites in southwestern West Azarbaijan during 1965- 66 had been conducted by Babak Rad, the archaeology expert of that time. Then Bahman Kargar resurveyed the region in 1986 (Heydari, 2009: 204). Kargar interpreted the site as a Mannaeen city in 2004 and started the first archaeological investigation one year later. This region yielded plain bricks comparable to the Qalaychi bricks. These investigations resulted in discovery of two architectural periods in this site (Kargar, 2004: 230). Studied potteries from this region, are considerably comparable to the potteries

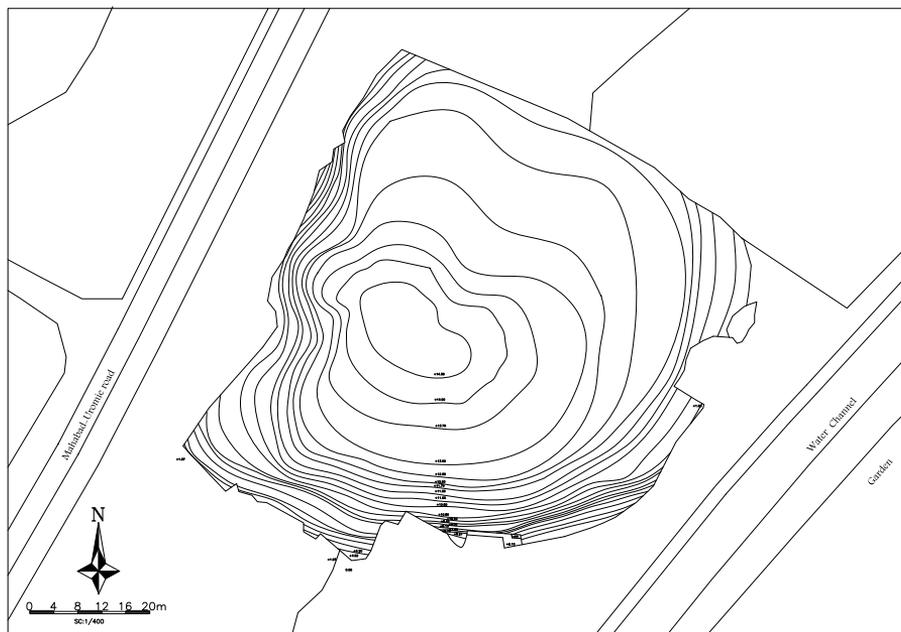


Fig. 3. Topography Plan of Tepe Bardeh-Konte

form sites attributed to Mannaeans (Qalaychi, Ziwiye, Zendan-i-Soleiman Site and Kul Tarike cemetery) (Heydari, 2009: 214).

Kul Tarike, as a Mannaeian site, had been discovered during surveys of the first season of archaeological excavations under Hasan Rezvani's direction near Karaftu cave in autumn 2000. The cemetery area had been investigated by a team from a Research Institute under the guidance of Hasan Rezvani in 2001-03. The result of this investigation was the discovery of burials and grave remains attributed to the Mannaeian period (Rezvani, 2004: 81-82).

Qal'e Bardineh as one of the Bukan ancient sites, located at a rather near distance of Qalaychi, until now there are no more publications except one report and an article. First, a brief report on surface survey conducted by Babak Rad and Shamlu in 1976 and belongs to ICHO archive (Hassanzadeh, 2009: 271). And

the next article, by Yousof Hasanzadeh, concerning his survey of the region in 2002. His article entitled "Qal'e Bardine, a Mannaeian local chieftdom in the Bukān Area, North-Western Iran" was published in *AMI Archaeological Journal* No. 41 in 2009. Among the discovered potteries from this site, more than 57.4 percent belong to Iron Age III and are parallel to Hasanlu III potteries and those from Ziwiye and Zendan-i-Soleiman. Regarding the latest potteries belonging to Iron Age III, the date of the site could not be attributed to earlier than 900- 800 B.C (Hassanzadeh, 2009: 274).

#### Geographical Location and Tepe Bardeh-Konte Structure

At about 7 km from Mahabad and about 1 km from Yousof Kandi, there is Tepe Bardeh-Konte by the side of a pass running from Mahabad to Urmieh. The mound is standing within geographical longitude of  $45^{\circ}.44^{\circ}.56^{\circ}$  and width of



Fig. 4. Pictures from the Mound, Up to Down: a. Western, b. Eastern and c. Southern Sides

$36^{\circ}.49^{\circ}.42^{\circ}$  (Fig. 1). The site is located between two non-natural phenomena, the road at the west and the water channel at the east. The road actually destroyed the mound, passing through its side and dividing it into two parts (Fig. 2). This site is composed of two mounds; in a south-north orientation, the main

mound which is containing the rock-cut structures is higher. The main mound has a rock-soil structure and is covering an area of about  $81 \times 75$  and reaching altitude of about 1300 meters above sea level (Fig. 3). Its rock structure is made of a kind of travertine (lime stone) (Fig. 4).

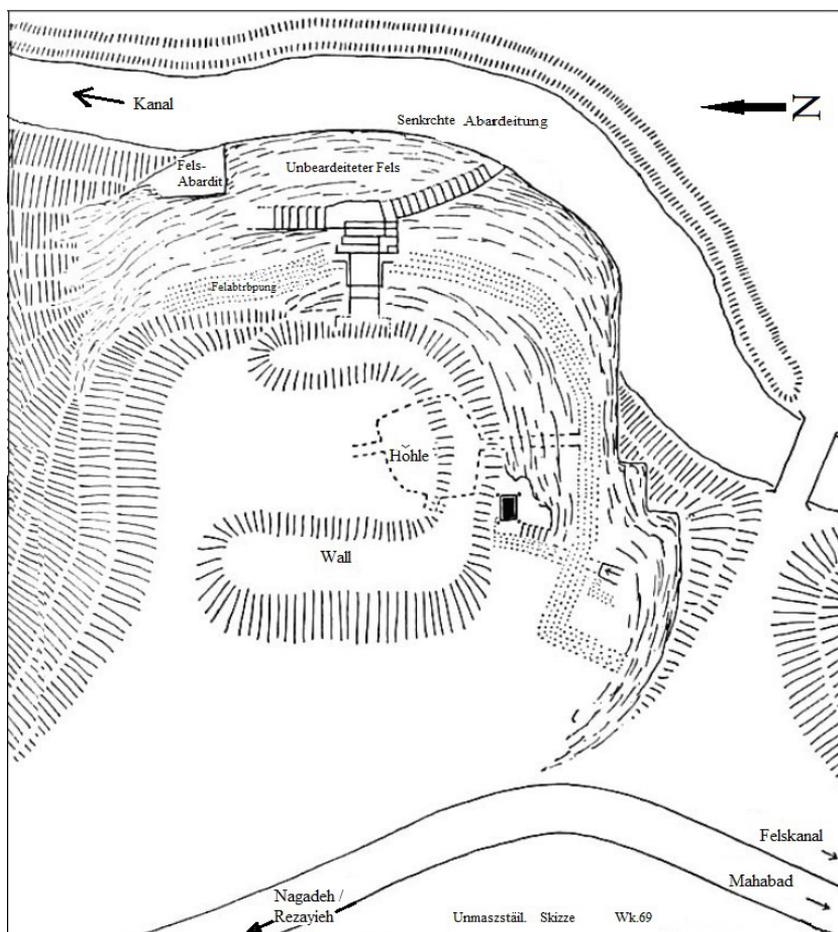


Fig. 5. Map and Sketch of the Mound by Kleiss

### Background Study of Tepe Bardeh-Konte

The first archaeological study on Manna in Bardeh-Konte was conducted by Kleiss in 60s as an Iranian northwestern survey in order to discover Urartian sites. Since then, there were no specific archaeological studies in the region except the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization had introduced it as a 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. site.

Kleiss published his study results in 1970 in *AMI Archaeological Journal*. He had attributed the site to a non-pottery data one. He had prepared a manual

map and sketch of the tepe, demonstrating its position to the non-natural phenomenon (road and water-channel), and pointing out to rock-cut architectural elements of the site (Fig. 5). Kleiss referred to the site as Sheytan Abad (whose proper name is Tepe Sheytan) (Kleiss, 1970: 117). Actually, Tepe Sheytan was the name of a settlement area contemporary to Tepe Bardeh-Konte at about 1km. away from it (Fig. 6). The reason of such nomination could be due to the similar pottery assemblage from the two sites. The last archaeological investigation at Tepe Bardeh-Konte was conducted in summer

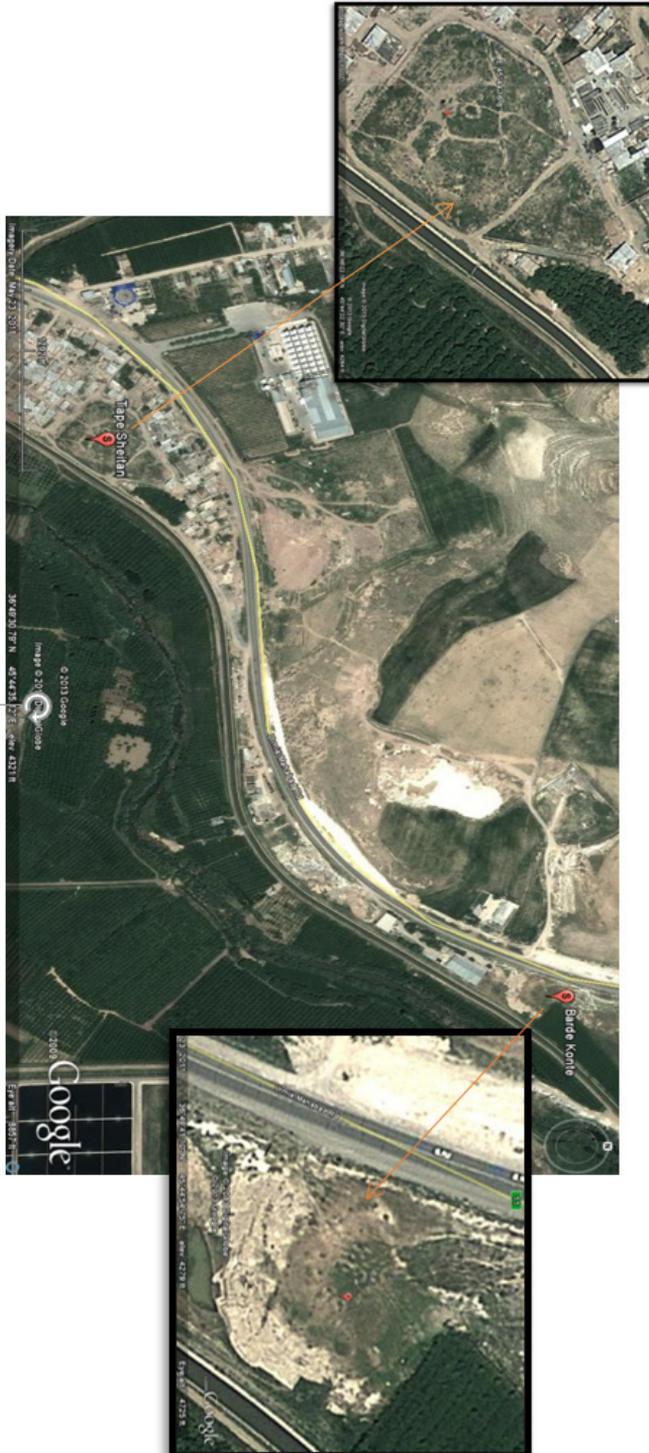


Fig. 6. Satellite Images of Tepe Sheyran and Tepe Bardeh-Konte

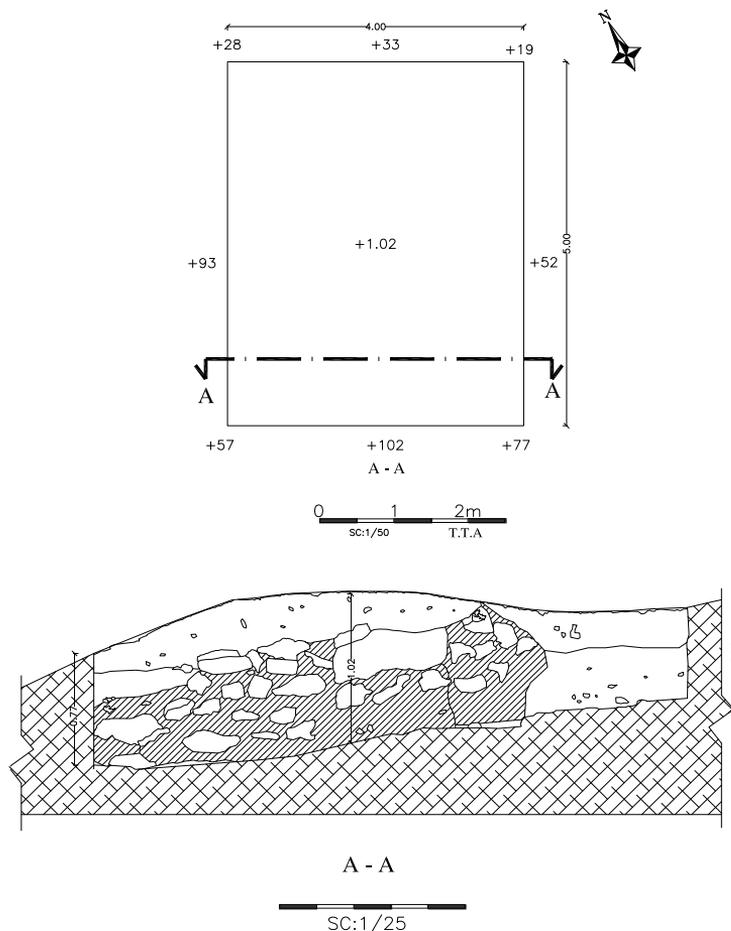


Fig. 7. Stratigraphy Trench of Tepe Bardeh-Konte

2012, during which the site was surveyed and stratified under Mohammad Gorbani's direction.

#### Architectural and Pottery remains from Survey and Stratigraphy

A trench covering of about 5×4 was dug in the north western side of the mound. The only architectural remain from the stratigraphy trench, is the foundation of a wall built of stone and mortar (Fig. 7). In its construction, foundation stones of various shapes and dimensions are used. This is about 270 cm. in length and about

one meter thick.

The potteries from this site included surface gatherings, those from stratigraphy trench and potteries from foundation tracking, pits and tunnels. The whole recovered potteries include pot shreds of rim, handle, neck, body and base, and no more complete vessel was recovered. The pottery from this region could be classified base on three factors: form, color, and pattern (Diagrams 1, 2, 3). These pottery assemblage consists of about 64 (32.1%) fine shreds, 108 (54.2%) medium fine shreds, 25 (12.5%) coarse potsherds



Fig. 8a. Pictures of Potteries form Tepe Bardeh-Konte

and 2 (1.0%) very coarse shreds. 9.2% of the total shreds are painted which are consisted of just one fine and very coarse potteries while the remaining 90.7% are plain. Based on these three factors; we could propose following classification:

1. Fine ware: Red ware, buff ware, reddish buff ware, cream ware, painted ware.
2. Medium fine ware: Reddish buff ware, buff ware, cream ware, black ware or kitchen ware, red ware, brown ware.
3. Coarse ware: Buff ware, red ware.
4. Very coarse ware: Red ware, brown ware, painted ware.

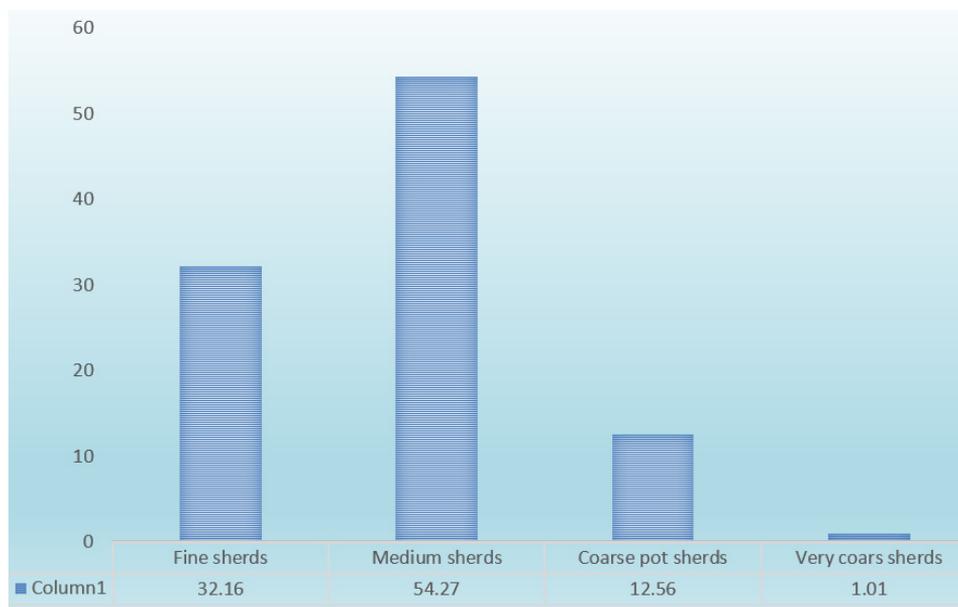


Diagram 1. Classification of First Survey and Stratification Season at Tepe Bardeh-Konte

The pottery collection from this site is based on their quality and techniques all belonging to the same historical period. They are from Iron Age III and are comparable to those from Mannaeian sites such as Qalaychi, Tepe Rabat, Ziwiye, Qal'e Bardineh, Zendan-i-Soleiman and Kul-Tarike (Table 1). These potteries morphologically are composed of small and big pots, scaphoid vessels, bowls, plates, jars and beakers (Fig. 8a-d). It's noteworthy that the potteries from Tepe Bardeh-Konte are parallel and comparable to those from Tepe Sheytan.

### Rock-cut Structures

The access to the top of the mound is by a rock-cut staircase developed at its southwestern side (Fig. 9). Among these stairs, the main locating on the eastern side is of particular importance. The two group of stairs in northeastern and southwestern sides are composed of two flights which are ending to a rather vast landing, ending to a smaller landing by three

other stairs along the mound top (Fig. 10). Descending these stairs one could get to the side of Mahabad-rud River, which once passed through the mound. Of the staircase on the southeastern side, only 11 stairs remain in various dimension due to erosions. The largest is measuring 120×100×20 cm, and the smallest 100×40×14 cm. Of the northern stairs, only 6 stairs are remaining, the largest is measuring 110×90×14 cm and the smallest 63×85×13 cm.

The main landing dimensions is about 270×170 cm a series of other stairs, had been cut on either and upper side of the main staircase, leading to the top of the mound. The second landing is smaller than the main landing and is measuring 197×100 cm. and at last the third stairs which had been left unfinished is measuring 240×117 cm. the stairs and landings leading to the top of the mound had finely been cut to the top where the natural rock ridge is evident (Fig. 11).

At the top of the rock in the south-

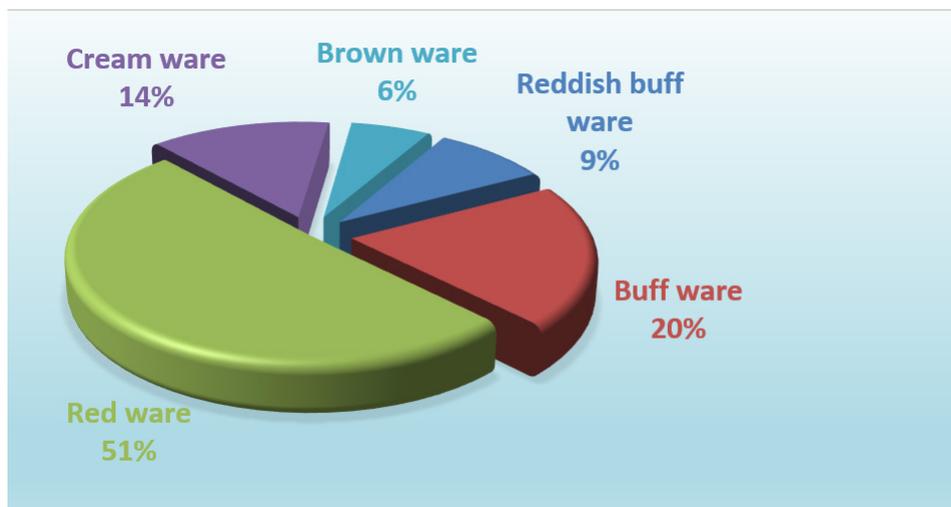


Diagram 2. Classification of Oottery Based on Color

ern side, there is a pit, cut in the rock to the depth of 3 meters which measures 140×70×300 cm. (Fig. 12). Within this pit some pot shreds parallel to the shreds from stratigraphy trench was discovered. In the four corners of this pit there are four round holes with the same size to the diameter of 10 cm. and depth of 7 cm. the pit's rim have been cut to the width of 15 cm and the height of 15 cm confirming the idea that this pit had a bung.

In the southern side of the mound at about 2 meters above the earth level, there appear a rock-cut wall measuring 5/50×3/60 m comparable to the façade wall in Fakhriyah. The depth of the wall is about 90 cm (Fig. 13). It should be noted that the rock-cut wall is lacking any inscriptions or reliefs. In the rock cape in the southern side, there is a rock-cut tunnel. Regarding the rock's material construction it is likely that the interior of the tunnel had been naturally developed by water penetration and the stone-cutter had fully took the advantage of this natural condition. Based on the existing data, we cannot define the proper function of this rock-cut tunnel; it needs more archaeological investigations, how-

ever this is likely that this rock-cut complex functioned as a ceremonial or ritual place for the Mannaeans people settled in Tepe Sheytan while this still requires more studies.

The only access to the entrance of the tunnel is through the mound top (Fig. 14). About a meter away from the tunnel entrance there is no ceiling; then its dimensions limit to 100×80 meters. The length of the tunnel entrance corridor is about 5 meters and has a slight deviation to west which makes it somehow impossible to take a direct view to the interior space. The tunnel ends in a vast space measuring 4.56×4 meters with no specific geometrical shape (Fig. 15). The eastern wall of this space had been scratched carefully and architectural elements such as corners, pillars and a tablet between these two pillars had been cut. The ceiling in this part had been cut flat, reaching to the height of about 1.65m from the floor to the ceiling. The beginning of the eastern wall had been developed by cutting an angle of 40 degrees, to the length of 2.50m and width of 1.30m with the first pillar has been cut in the wall with the 1.30 m length. This rectangular

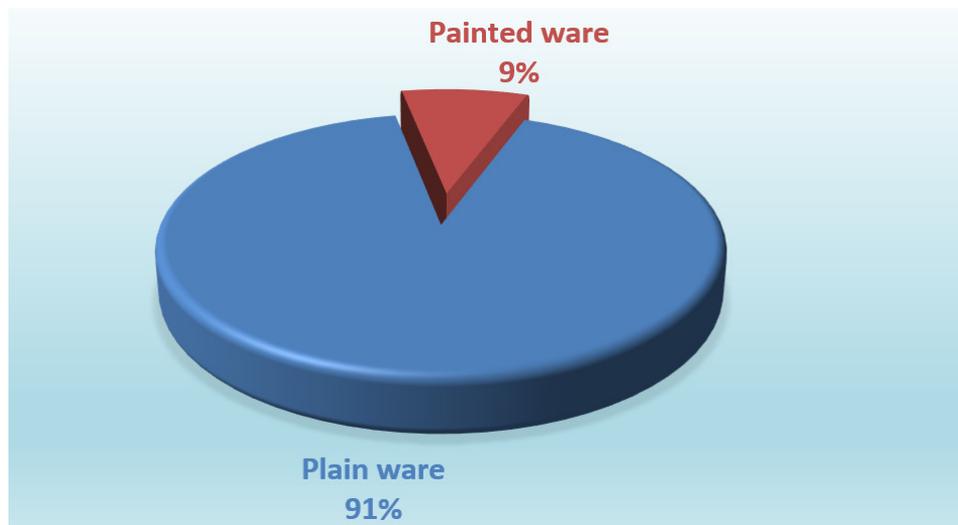


Diagram 3. Classification of Objects Based on Series of Painted and Plain Pottery

Table1. Bardeh-Konte Pottery Comparison With Other Mannaeen Sites

Number of Pottery	Form of the Pottery	Type of the Pottery	Color	Build Technique	Temper	Decoration	Coating	Reference
2	body	ordinary	beige	wheel-made	sand	en-graved	glazed	Rezvani, 1383, 102, figure 5
7	bottom	ordinary	Buff-colored	wheel-made	sand	Not en-graved	No glaze	Hasanzade, 2009, 277, figure 174
13	edge	Fine	brown	wheel-made	sand	Not en-graved	No glaze	Local form
15	edge	Fine	Buff-colored	wheel-made	sand	Not en-graved	glazed	Local form
16	edge	ordinary	Redish buff-colored	wheel-made	fine sand	Not en-graved	No glaze	Noman, 1382, 189, figure 7
18	Edge	Ordinary	Red	wheel-made	sand	Not en-graved	glazed	Molazade, 2008, 124, figure 27

25	handle	rough	red	wheel-made	sand	Not engraved	No glaze	Molazade, 2008, 125, figure 9
26	Handle	ordinary	Redish buff-colored	wheel-made	sand	Not engraved	No glaze	Noman 1382, 198, figure 16
28	Edge	ordinary	red	wheel-made	fine sand	Not engraved	glazed	Hasanzade 2009, 276, figure 234
29	edge	rough	Buff-colored	wheel-made		Not engraved	No glaze	Noman 1382, 189, figure 10
32	edge	Ordinary	red	wheel-made	sand	Not engraved	outer glaze	Noman., 1382, 198, figure 11
33	Handle	Ordinary	Reddish buff-colored	hand-made	Sand	No engraved	No glaze	Molazade, 1383, 234, figure 17
34	Bottom and body	Ordinary	Buff-colored	Hand-made	fine sand	No engraved	No glaze	Molazade, 2008, 125, figure 11
35	Handle	Ordinary	red	hand-made	sand	Not engraved	Not glaze	Hasanzade, 2009, 276, figure 106
37	bottom	fine	Buff-colored	wheel-made	sand	Not engraved	glazed	Noman, 1382, 196, figure 4
38	Edge	Very rough	Red	Hand-made	fine sand	Not engraved	No glaze	Molazade, 2008, 124, figure 11
45	Edge	Ordinary	red	wheel-made	sand	Not engraved	glazed	Molazade, 2008, a28, figure 19
50	Handle	Rough	Buff-colored	Hand-made	fine sand	Not engraved	No glaze	Molazade 1383, 305, figure 26

51	Edge	Very rough	Red	hand-made			No glaze	Local form
54	Handle	ordinary	Buff-colored	Hand-made	Sand	Not engraved	No glaze	Hasanzade 2009, 276, figure 251
55	Handle	Ordinary	Reddish buff-colored	wheel-made	Sand	Not engraved	Outer glaze	Molazade, 2008, 121, figure 1
56	Bottom	Ordinary	Reddish buff-colored	wheel-made	Sand	Not engraved	Outer glaze	Kargar, 1383, 245
61	bottom	Rough	Buff-colored	wheel-made	fine sand	Not engraved	Outer glaze	Hasanzade, 2009, 277, figure 166
63	Bottom	Fine	red	wheel-made	sand	Not engraved	glazed	Noaman 1382, 196, figure 3
64	Edge	Ordinary	Buff-colored	Hand-made	sand	Not engraved	glazed	Rezvani 1383, 101, figure 149
67	Body	Rough	Red	Hand-made	Sand	Not engraved	Outer glaze	Molazade 2008, 121, figure 28
71	Handle	Rough	Red	Hand-made	fine sand	Not engraved	No glaze	Hasanzade 2009, 276, figure 251
76	Bottom	Ordinary	Red	wheel-made	Sand	Not engraved	No glaze	Molazade 2008, 122, figure 35
79	Bottom	Ordinary	Red	wheel-made	Sand	Not engraved	glazed	Hasanzade 2009, 276, figure 149

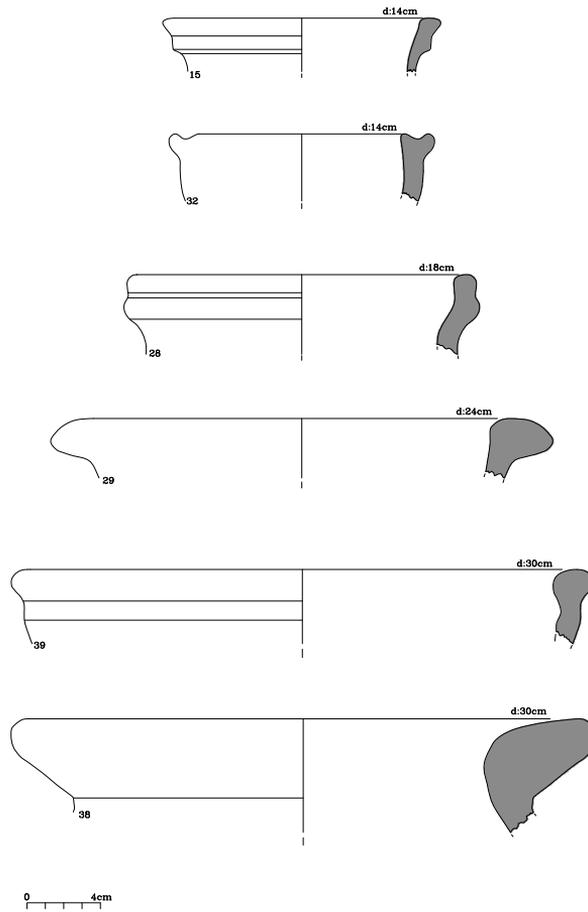


Fig. 8b. Drawing of Potteries Form Stratigraphy Trench and Rock-cut Complex at Tepe Bardeh-Konte

shaped pillar is measuring  $155 \times 30 \times 20$  cm. The space between these two pillars had been cut to the shape of a tablet measuring  $190 \times 160$ . On the wall against this space there are two corridor shaped spaces developed by natural erosion. In fact the western wall is without any human intervention. After second pillar there is a framed entrance to another tunnel measuring  $70 \times 67$  cm. The length of this corridor is  $11.15$  m and its width in the narrowest part measures  $67 \times 64$  cm and in the widest part measures  $74 \times 84$  cm. preceding this corridor we enter a

space with a total height of  $1.74$  m and width of  $1.14$  m the ceiling in this part had been cut in canonical shape. Passing through this part there is another framed entrance measuring  $64 \times 60$  cm. the space behind this entrance, to the depth of  $1$  m and height of  $1.60$  m is the last part of this tunnel and rock-cut structure (Fig. 16).

### Conclusion

Regarding Assyrian kings constant and multiple Campaigns to the north western Iran in the first millennium B.C., they were directly involved with the issues re-

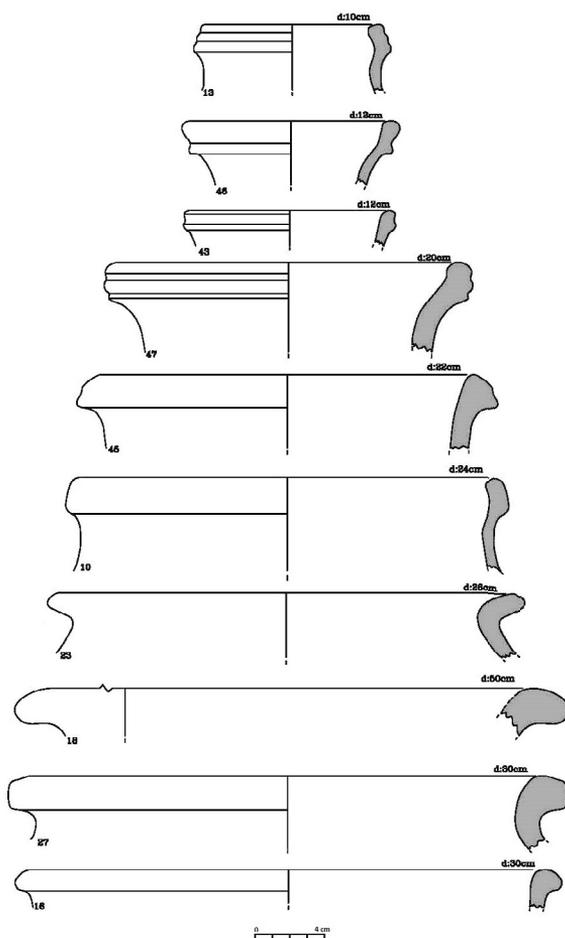


Fig. 8c. Drawing of Potteries Form Stratigraphy Trench and Rock-cut Complex at Tepe Bardeh-Konte

lating to these regions. Urartians as the next political and military powers in the region took an important part in region political changes. Present inscribed documents all are indicating the fact that Mannaeans, at any time regarding the dominant political power in the region made various relations with them while each of them had its own consequences. In fact Mannaeans, taking into account their own benefits, played an important role in outbalancing powers in the region

by being ally of one of Urartian or Assyrian powers. This could be representative of their acceptance as a state by great powers, Urartu and Assyria, in the region in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Manna had took a higher status in region political relations compared to other ethnic groups.

In northwestern area of Iran, political borders between Urartian and Mannaeans had been identified based on various recovered settlements in the region. Knowing this fact along with the pottery

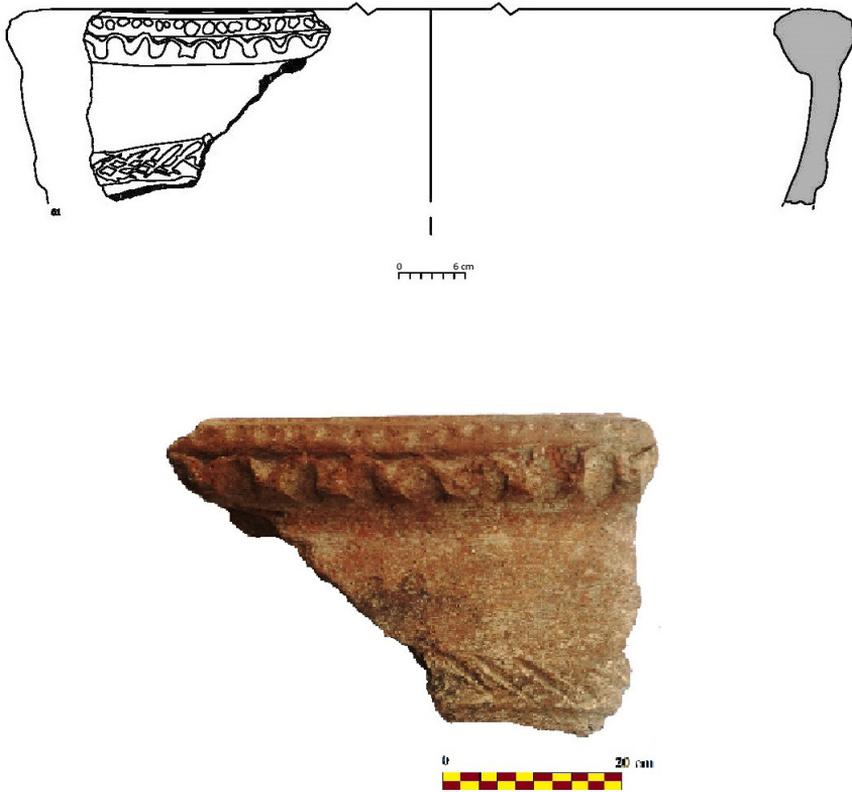


Fig. 8d. Drawing of Pottery Form Stratigraphy Trench at Tepe Bardeh-Konte

data from Bardeh-Konte site, it's obvious that the whole pottery data from this site belongs to the same cultural and the historical period. Relative chronology base on the pottery comparisons with other Iron Age III sites in the region demonstrate that the site and the rock-cut complex belong to Mannaeans, settled in the region; which disproves Kleiss theory that attributed the site to Urartians. This indicates the Mannaeen territory limits in Mahabad region.

Regarding the existence of Tepe Sheytan settlement, the Bardeh-Konte small size in comparison to Tepe Sheytan and as it is a single-period settlement this could be less probable that Bardeh-Kon-

te was a dwelling settlement. Meanwhile the abundance of the site after the Mannaeans political collapse, also weakens the probable that Bardeh-Konte served as a fortification or any other military or governmental monument; because if that was a strategic site in the following periods that must have been considered as an important place.

The above mentioned reasons represent that the Bardeh-Konte site could have been used as a religious or ceremonial place for the Mannaeen people settled in Tepe Sheytan; although that requires more and border studies and investigation.

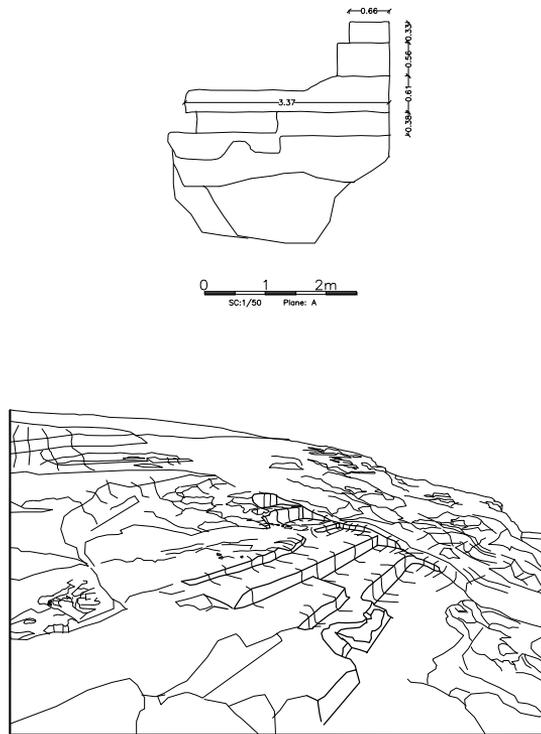


Fig. 9. The Plan of stairs in First Part and its Perspective

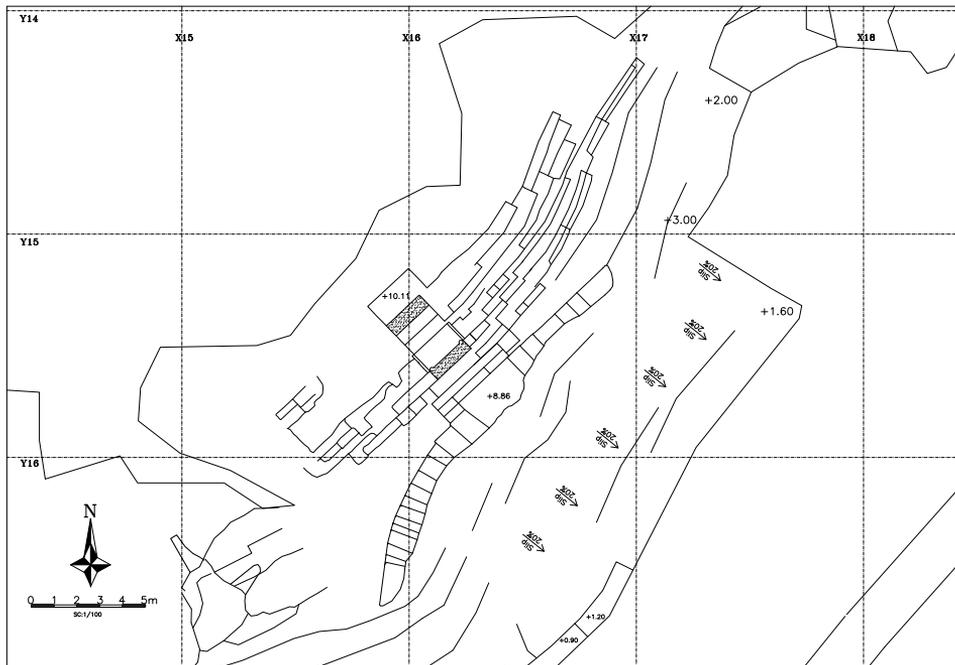


Fig. 10. Plan and Side Sections of Main Stairs at Tepe Bardeh-Konte

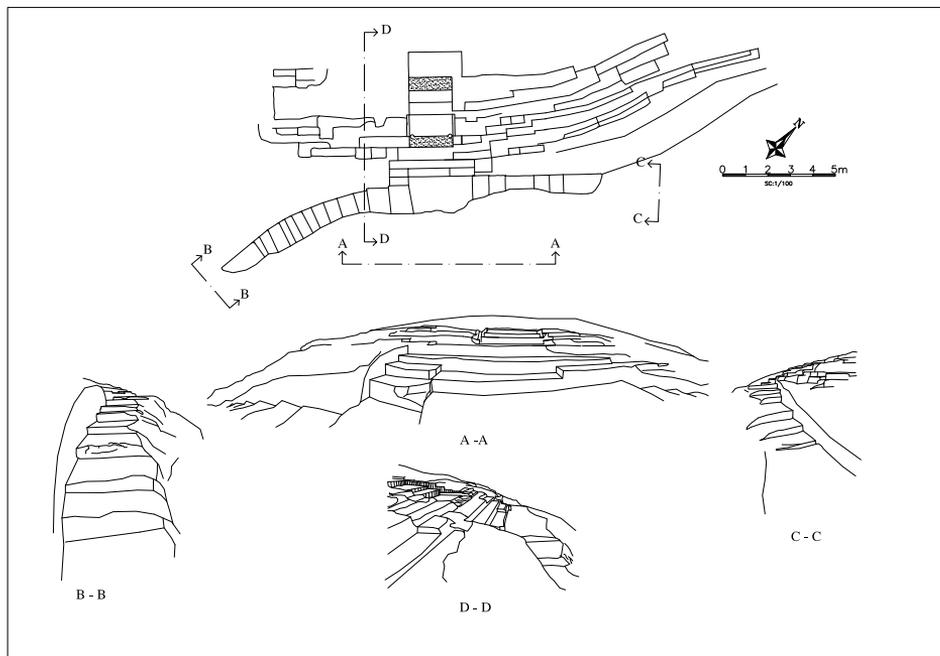


Fig. 11. The Picture of Landings and Unfinished Stairs to Top of Mound, Main Stairs

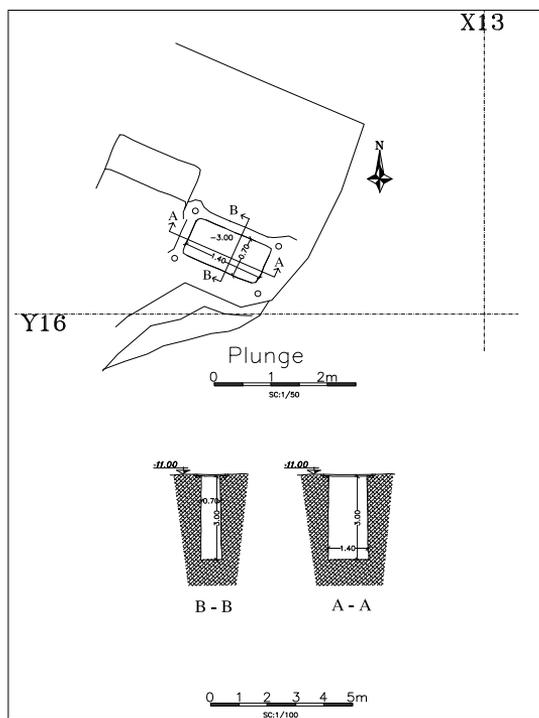


Fig. 12. Position and Plan of Rock-cut Pit at Tepe Bardeh-Konte



Fig. 13. Picture of Carved Wall at Southern Part of Tepe Bardeh-Konte

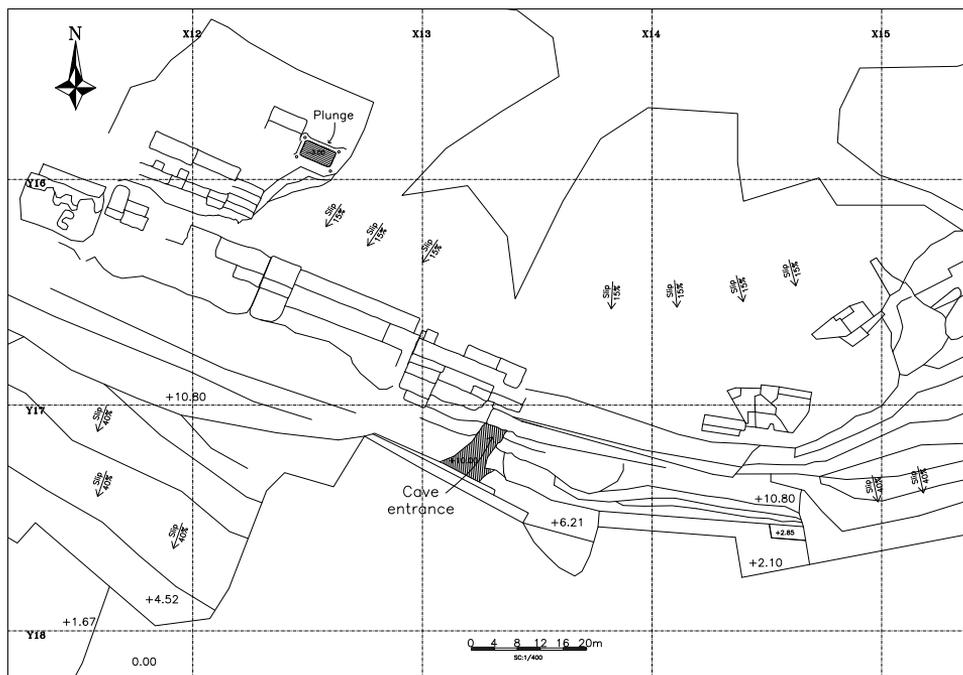


Fig. 14. Plan and the Section of the Rock-cut Tunnel Complex in the Site



Fig. 15. Interior Image of Rock-cut Tunnel

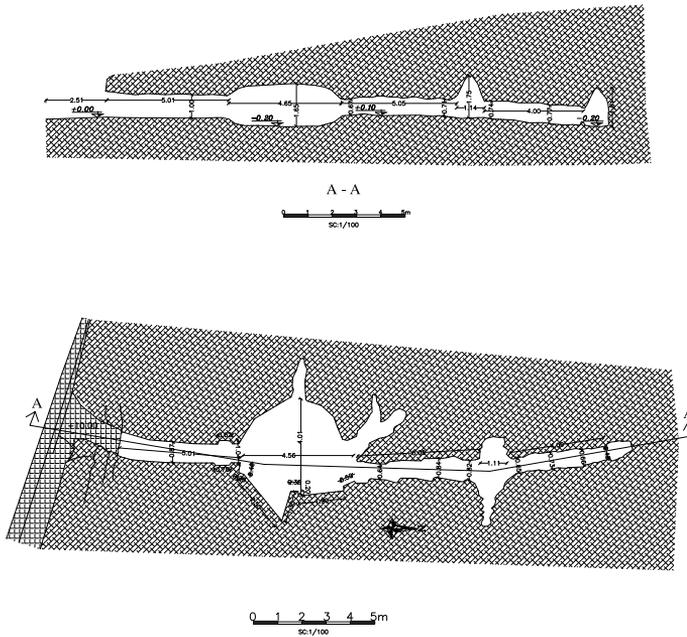


Fig. 16. Plan and the Section of the Rock-cut Tunnel Complex in the Site

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