

IMTO – Italian Mission to Oman
University of Pisa

Salut

PRELIMINARY REPORT (JANUARY-MARCH 2013)



The first field season of 2013 on the site of Salut took place from January 26th to March 7th, with the aim of clarifying a series of stratigraphical and architectural issues that remained open after previous campaigns' results.

Works focused on the upper part of the site, which was also the area where major restoration works took place. This effort was meant to conclude investigation and restoration activities in the whole north-west area of the site, in order to leave it ready for future presentation to the public.

Investigations on the top mud-bricks platform

Among the goals of this campaign was the investigation of the building technique of the large platform contained by the stone wall M26. In fact, according to the restoration project, a wide area on the upper part of the site had to be protected, thus necessitating interventions that would have sealed the original structures below newly laid down deposits.

The platform, first exposed during 2005 and 2006 campaigns, appeared badly damaged by Islamic pits (e.g. US670-671) and by water erosions. Nevertheless, it has been possible to survey its main features.

The platform was built using mud-bricks – laid down along different alignments and defining different patterns, usually comprising more than one row – as a capping for various kinds of lower fillings which directly covered the bedrock. In many instances, these deposits were actually filling some sort of compartments defined by small mud-bricks walls. Originally the platform was most probably covered by a sort of mud-surface or trampled floor.

In order to gain a more exhaustive picture of the building technique of the platform, two trenches were excavated within its perimeter.

The first one, opened in correspondence with a gully that had eroded part of the upper stratigraphy, was located in the south part of the area (1x1,80 m in size). A series of superimposed, intentionally laid deposits, covered the bedrock. Top to bottom, one row of squared mud-bricks (0,35x0,32x0,5 m) covered: a medium soft dark brown loam mixed with mud lumps and including sparse animal bones and few Iron Age potsherds (US658); a layer of small stones mixed with brown-grey soft loam (US659); a thin medium compact layer of stone chips and mud lumps with few animal bones (US660).

The second trench, located further west, was dug in correspondence with a mud-bricks compartment (2,62x2,56 m) close to wall M26. Here, the well preserved fillings best showed one of the main building technique of the platform. Before reaching the bedrock, three different layers of superimposed compact fillings were exposed inside the compartment (from top to dawn): an irregular pattern of three rows of mud-bricks, both squared (0,35x0,32x0,5 m) and rectangular (0,68x0,33x0,65 m and 0,45x0,33x0,7 m), separated by thick mud layers, mainly extending on the north side of the compartment; a thick layer of mud lumps mixed with mud-brick fragments (US679); mud lumps mixed with medium size stones (US680).

Further investigation on the top part of the site

The excavation in the area immediately north east of the pillared room of the Burnt Building, already investigated during previous campaigns (see Preliminary reports 2012A), was carried further on.

The main architectural features – mud-brick walls M202, M203, M204, M85 – all resting directly on bedrock, were now completely exposed. The latter, in particular, revealed to be standing over a large flat surface, indicating that originally there was a sort of plateau on the top of the hill (as the presence of the Bronze Age grave makes also evident). The removed deposits (US674, US676) related with these features and covering the bedrock, showed a similar composition of soft loam mixed with ashes and lumps of mud, with presence of Early Iron Age potsherds.

Further investigation along the western side of the external wall

A deep sounding was opened in the western area of the site, with the aim of clarifying the Earliest Phase of Iron Age occupation. The cleaning of the mud-brick platform along M4 allowed the identification of a second building phase for wall M233, which was cut and restored using large stone slabs set vertically (formerly interpreted as a niche in M26). To the same building phase belong also the erection of M227. The removal of this latter wall revealed a yellow-greenish stone chips filling used as a foundation level for it as well as for some small containment walls running towards M9. On its south side US653 cuts the massive mud filling US5 related to the rebuilding of the external wall and chronologically dated to the Late Iron Age.

In order to verify the relation between walls M4 - M9, a small trench was open west of M4, reaching its foundations. As previously showed (see Preliminary report 2004B), the stone wall M4 was built partly on a compact mud layer (US677) and partly on the bedrock. The latter outcrops in this area as shaly superimposed multi-colour layers ranging from yellow to red. This geological formation is typical and clearly visible on the hills surrounding Salut. The medium compact fill of big and medium stones mixed with loam and lumps of mud (US681), covered by US5, is related to the Late Iron phase and with the build of wall M9.

Moving to the northeastern area a few walls, exposed in the 2006 campaign, have been cleaned. Except for M66, which is related to the Islamic period, they can be related to a probable occupation during the Late Iron Age. A well preserved floor-surface (US667) is delimited by walls M230 and M226; a section clearly shows that the latter wall covers a layer of greenish stone chips which is sloping northeast.

In the north western part of Area 4 the excavation of three small trenches located alongside the external wall shows a sequence of intentional deposits. The massive fillings comprising yellow-greenish stone chips (US601, US662, US664) are interspersed with layers of mud (US639) and wash deposits (US663, US602), showing the same use of this kind of filling in different periods. In particular the oldest filling US664 serves as a foundation of wall M208, one of the containment walls. The last layer rests on a surface (US666) linked to the internal mud-brick wall M232, related to the Early Iron Age period.

In the same area, Structure 24 is one of the later Islamic structures which were part of a sort of hill-top village, which had already been previously (Salut, Preliminary report (february-march 2006), p.3-4). It is an oval structure with slightly sunken floor delimited by big stones.

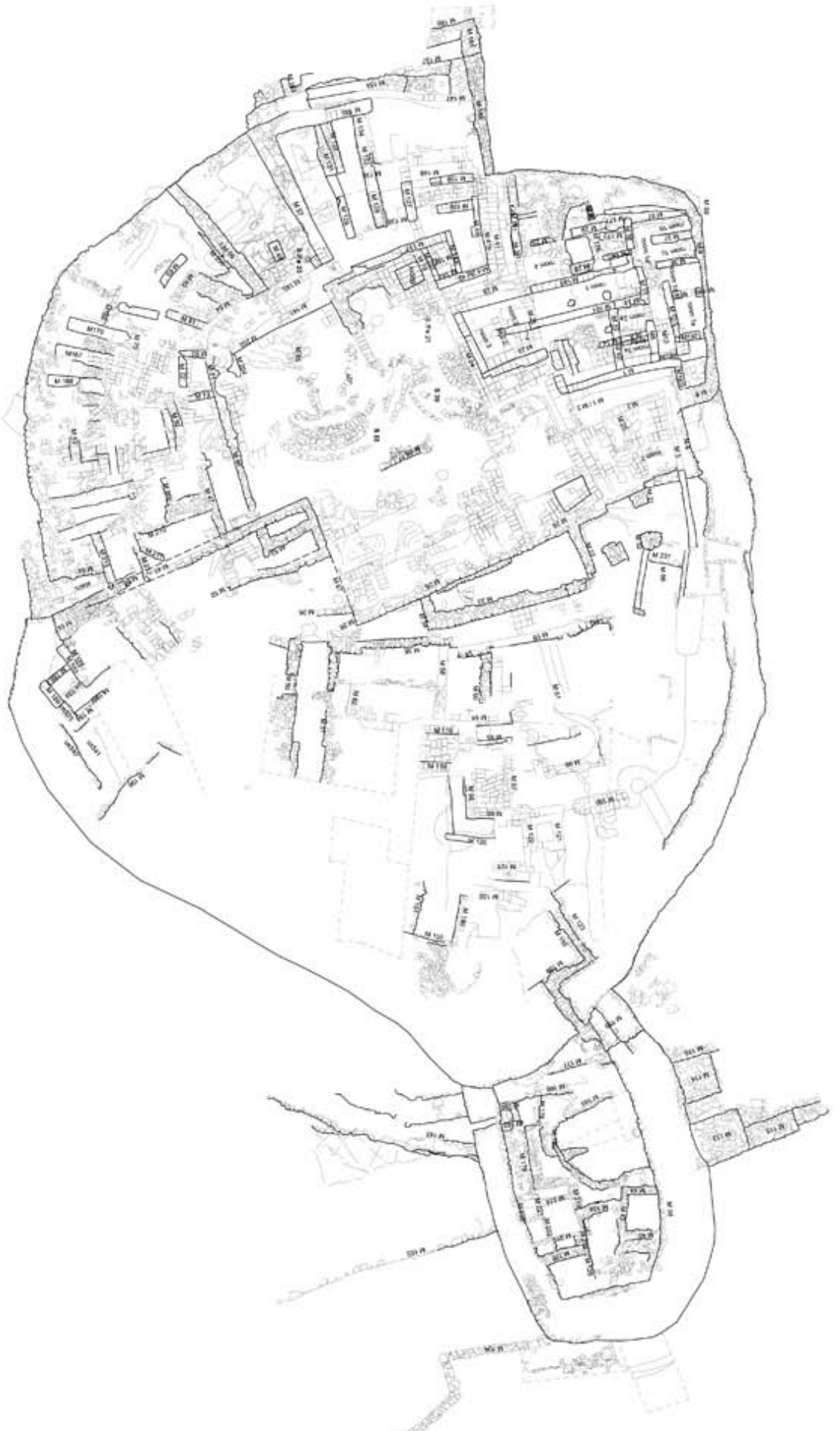
The deposit inside its perimeter was a sandy layer mixed with some charcoals and bones and with potsherds, mainly Islamic. (US661). A first level made by washed deposit was found, with a fire-place in the north side of the structure. Five post-holes, for the support of the roof, were located on a mud-bricks level (probably part of the Iron Age wall M232), which was partially cut and reused during the Islamic period.

The data collected during this campaign allow us to clarify the chronology of some of the massive fillings, partially excavated during the previous campaign. The use of the yellow-greenish stone chips as a filling seems to be recurrent over different periods and phases, as such not being a dating evidence per se. The construction technique involving the use of the same yellow-greenish stone chips but contained by small walls, conversely clearly dates from the Late Iron Age. This is indicated by the presence of the distinct type of pottery known as Burnished Maroon Slipped Ware (BMSW).

As a result of the latest excavations we can more confidently distinguish between the Early and Late Iron Age architectural phases at Salut. It now seems more certain that the stone outer wall that surrounds the site can be dated to the late Iron Age (c. 7th-3rd century BC). Unfortunately no clear floor / surface related with this phase has been discovered yet, but a significant part of the area behind the outer wall remains to be excavated. That said, a positive side-effect of the construction of the outer stone wall is that it protected the mud-brick walls of Early Iron Age date that lie hidden behind. In some places these are extremely well preserved and remain to a height of 3.5 meters. The further clarification of these walls and their relationship to each other will enable a clearer picture of the Early Iron Age architecture in Area 4 to be revealed.



Salut 2013 A



General plan



Fig.1. The mudbrick platform, view from West.



Fig.2. The mudbrick platform, view from East.

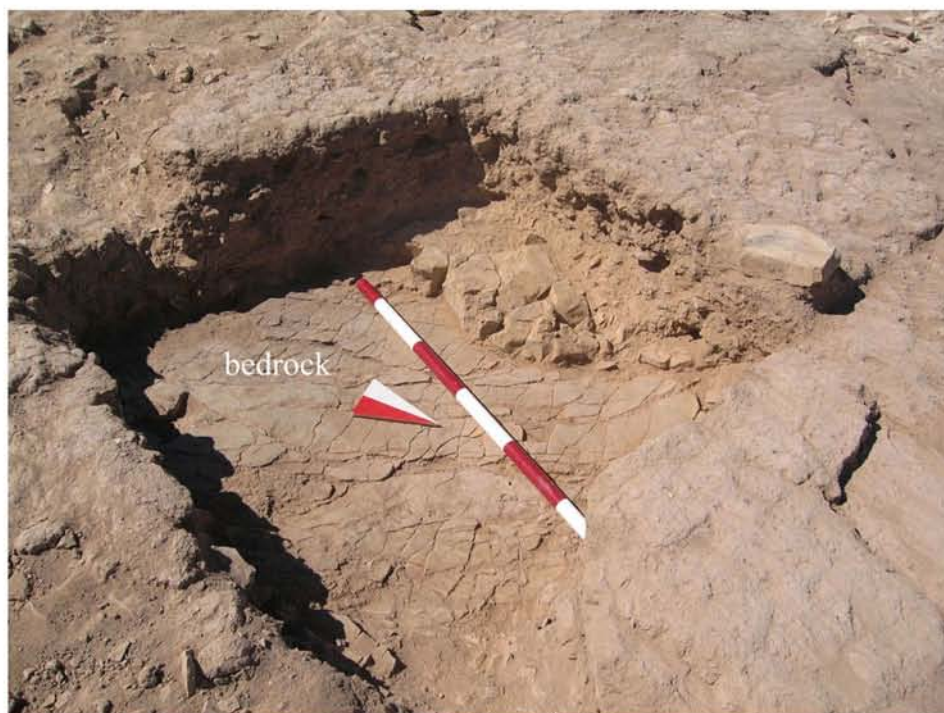
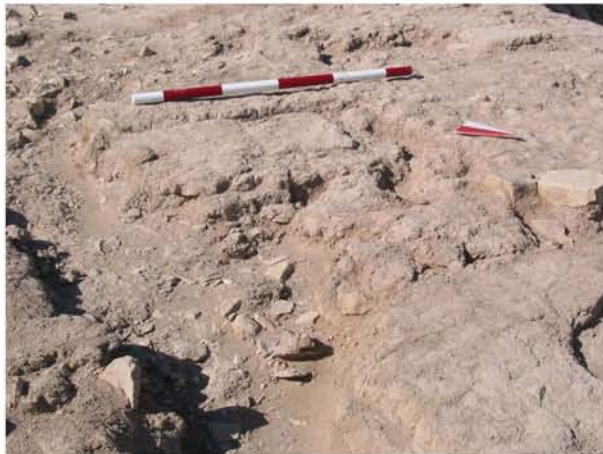


Fig.3. Trench 1 through the mudbrick platform: stratigraphic layers.

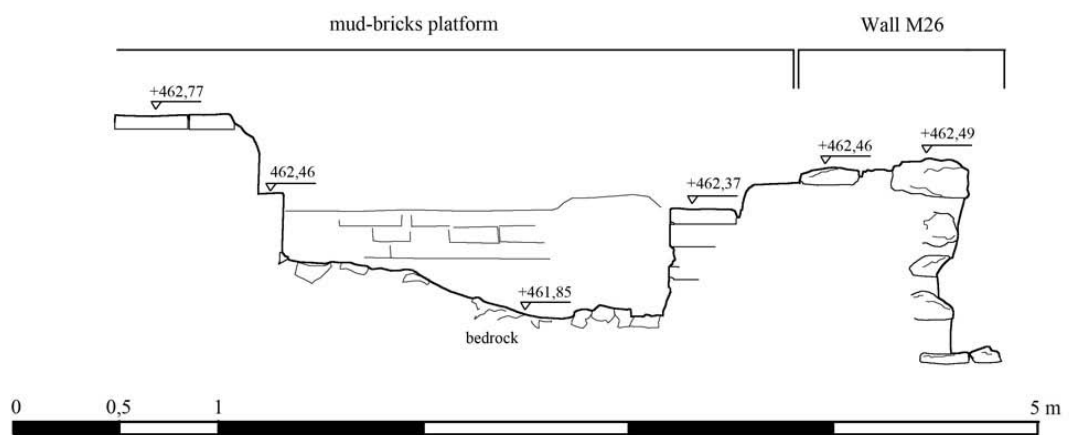


Fig.4. Trench 2 through the mudbrick platform: stratigraphic layers and SE/NW section.



Fig.5. Top part of the site before 2013A campaign.



Fig.6. Top part of of the site after 2013A campaign



Fig.7. The wall M3 and related stratigraphy, view from SW.



Fig.8. The wall M3 and related stratigraphy, view from N.



Fig.9. The two phases of wall M233 which contains the west side of the platform.

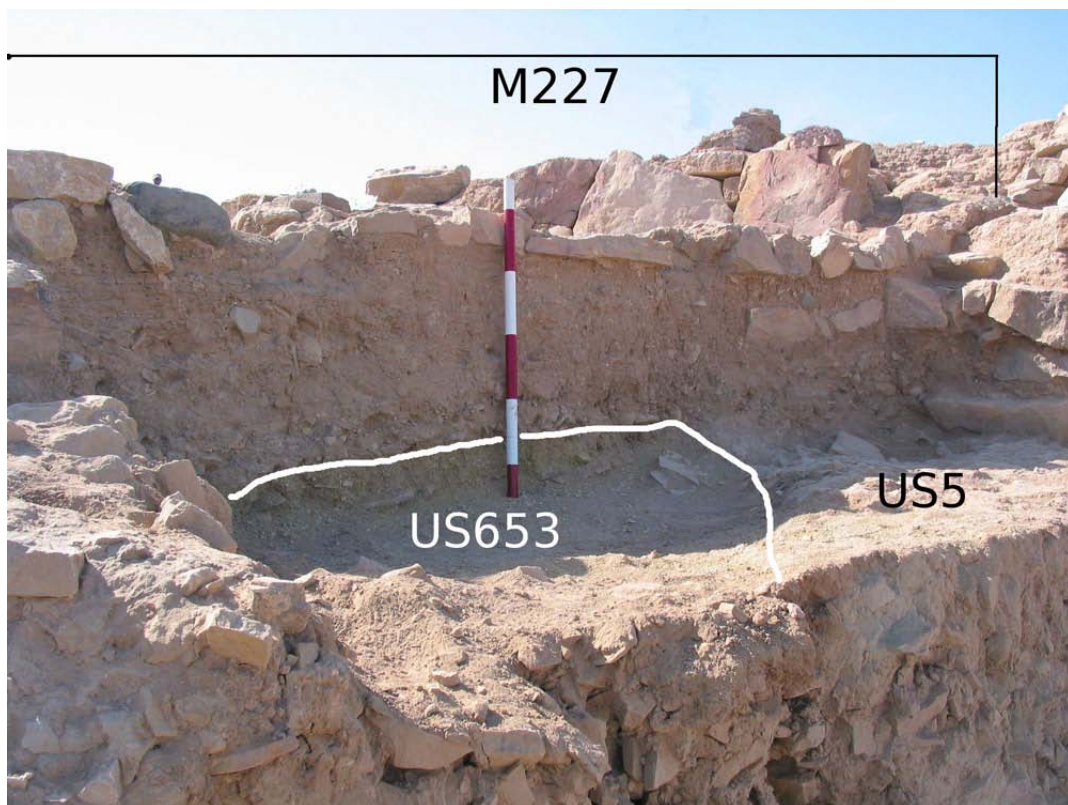


Fig.10. Foundation of wall M227.

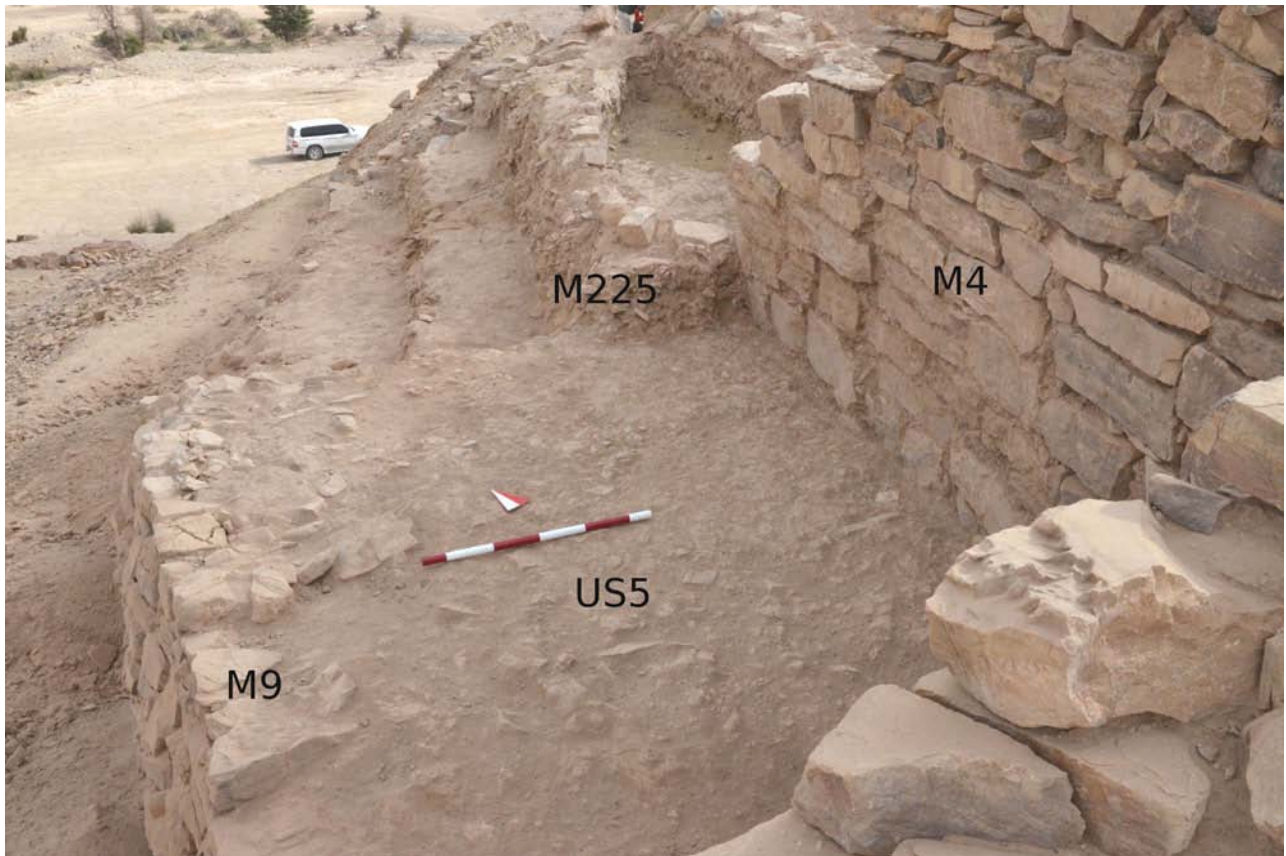


Fig.11. The Stone walls M4-M9, view from SW.



Fig.12. The Stone walls M4-M8-M9, view from NW.



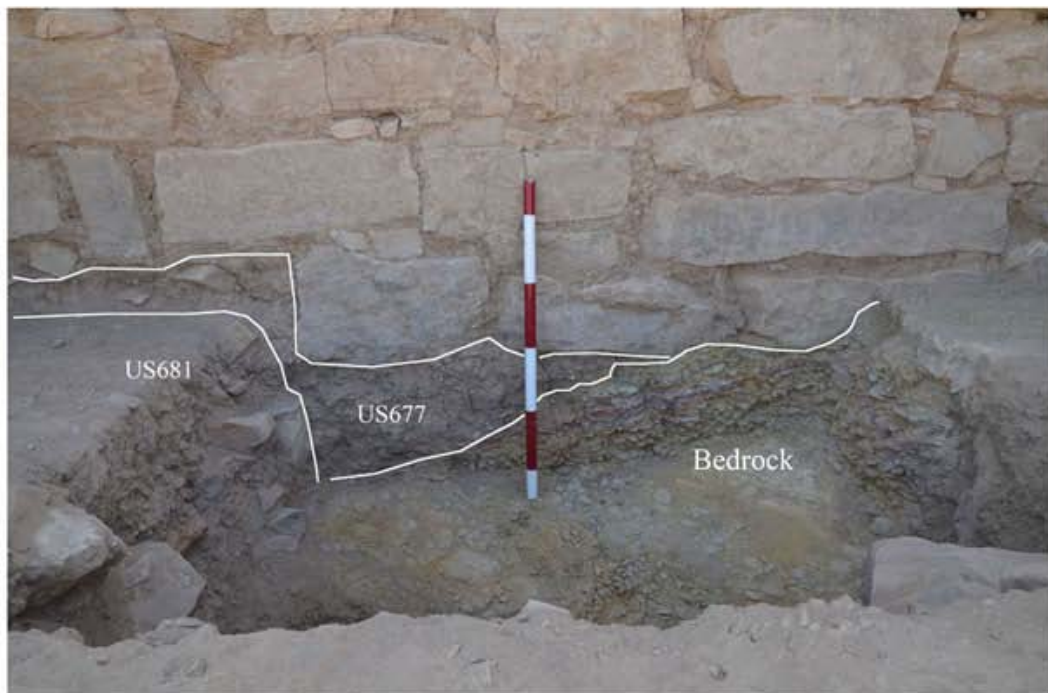
a



b



c



d

Fig.13. Trench west wall M4: a) before excavation; b) after excavation, the bedrock; c) walls M4 and M8 and the bedrock, view from NE; d) M4 foundation.



Fig.14. Area 4 before excavation.



Fig.15. The wall M230 was built on the top of the yellow chips US653.



Fig.16. The Late Iron wall M226 was built on the top of the yellow chips US653.



Fig.17. The wall M226 has been built on the yellow chips US601.

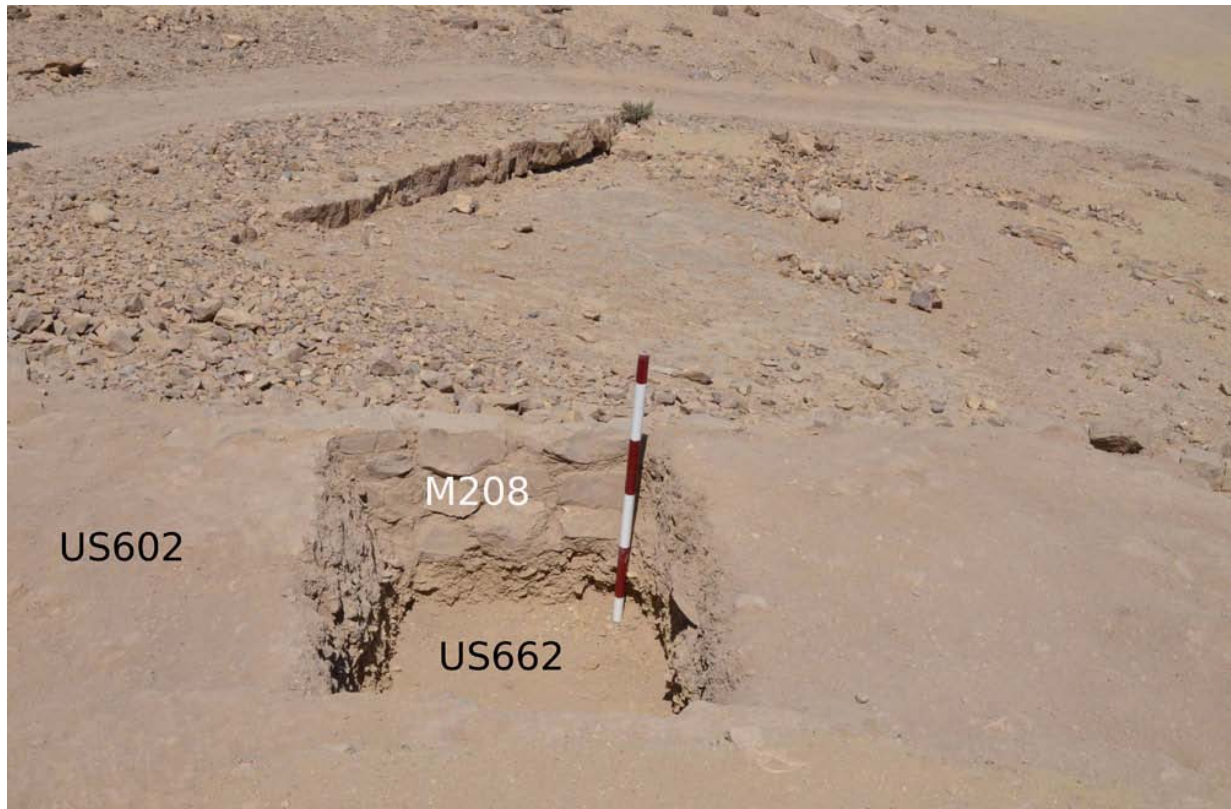


Fig.18. Small trench across M208. The wall covers the yellow fill.

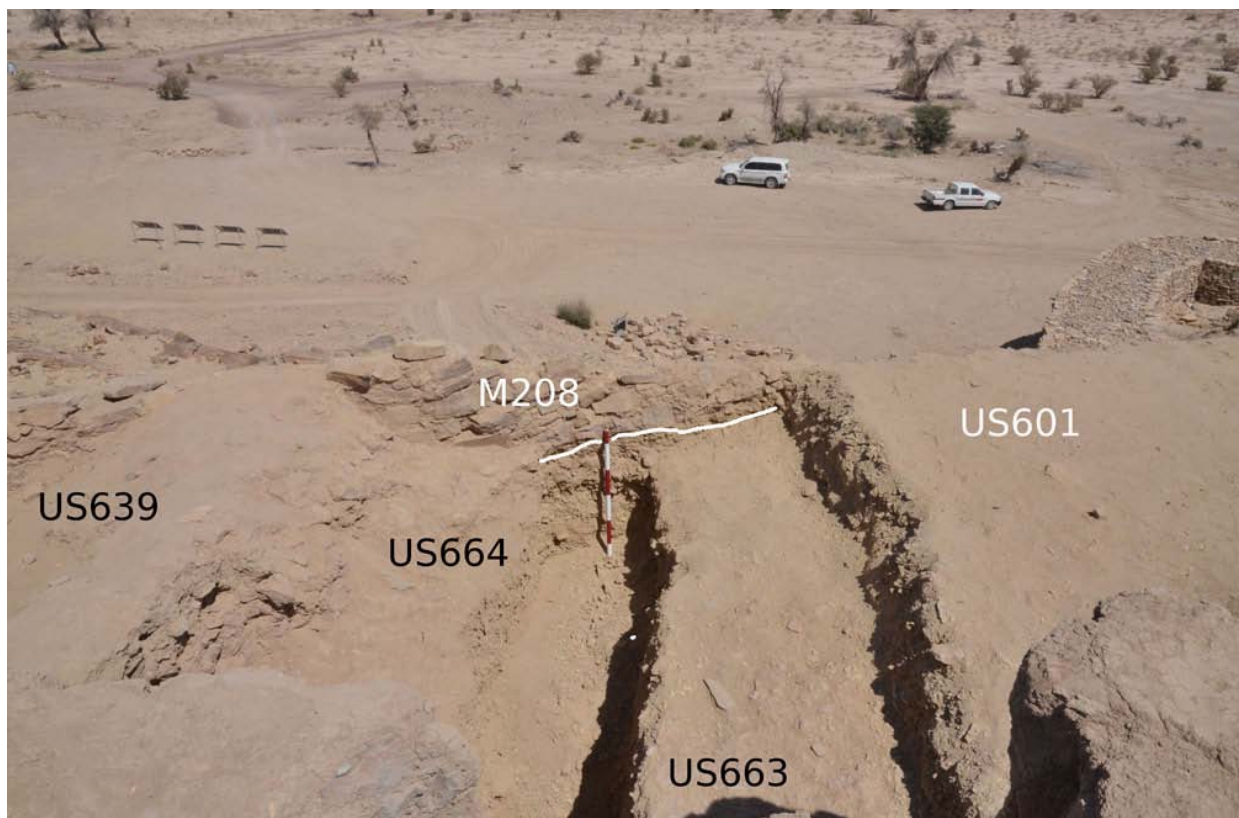


Fig.19. Trench across M208 and M232. Note the two yellow fills US601 and US664. The wall M208 covers US664.



Fig.20. Early Iron age mud-bricks wall M232 covered by the yellow chips fill US664 and by US663.



Fig.21. The Islamic Structure 24.

