



Excavations in Kuhandaz

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As outlined in the introductory chapter, the region of Herat and its capital *Artacoana* are mentioned in Achaemenid inscriptions. A new city, *Alexandria in Ariana*, was reportedly built by Alexander the Great and then passed on to the Seleucids and Parthians before becoming part of the Sasanian Empire. Scholars still discuss the location of these cities, which may either be buried beneath the present Old City with its squarish plan or be located at a small mound about 600 m to the north, Kuhandaz, also known as Tall-e Bangiyan.¹ Before the present project, there was no evidence other and older than these Achaemenid inscriptions and some stray finds, described as well in the introduction. Therefore, in 2005, one of the priorities was to explore these hypothetical vestiges - the roots of Herat.

Today, the mound of Kuhandaz more or less corresponds to a c. 37,000 m² large, enclosed cemetery, dominated by the shrines of Shahzade 'Abdallah bin Muawiyah (Fig. 691) and Shahzade Abo'l Qasem.² The mound slopes down from north to south and has significant differences in altitude (Fig. 692): the highest part is at c. 946 m amsl near the northern limit of the cemetery, it corresponds to the placement of a large earthwork, the so-called fortification described below. Most of the cemetery further south is situated at c. 935–933 m amsl, with the exception of two east–west oriented, slightly mounded elevations. The altitude drops considerably around 20 m south of Shahzade Abo'l Qasem, near the southern limit of the mound, at c. 928 m amsl (Fig. 692).

- 1 Kuhandaz-i MSRQ, Allen 1981, 33 no. 53; Allen 1983, no. 53. - Ferrier 1856, 170: Thaleh-bengy.
- 2 The names of the shrines are given differently. Shahzade 'Abd Allah b. Mu'awiyah b. 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far Tayyar (d. 129 or 134 H, Allen 1981, 167 no. 562; O'Kane 1987, Cat. no. 37), located in the west, was built in the early 14th and re-built in the later 15th century. Shahzade (or Emamzade) Abo'l Qasem b. Ja'far Sadeq (a descendant of Hosayn, d. c. 190 H (Allen 1983, no. 564), stands further east; it was probably 893 H / 1487.



Fig. 691 Aerial view of Kuhandaz showing the outlines of the mound (in red) and the location of trenches and areas (B. Mutin / Th. Urban)

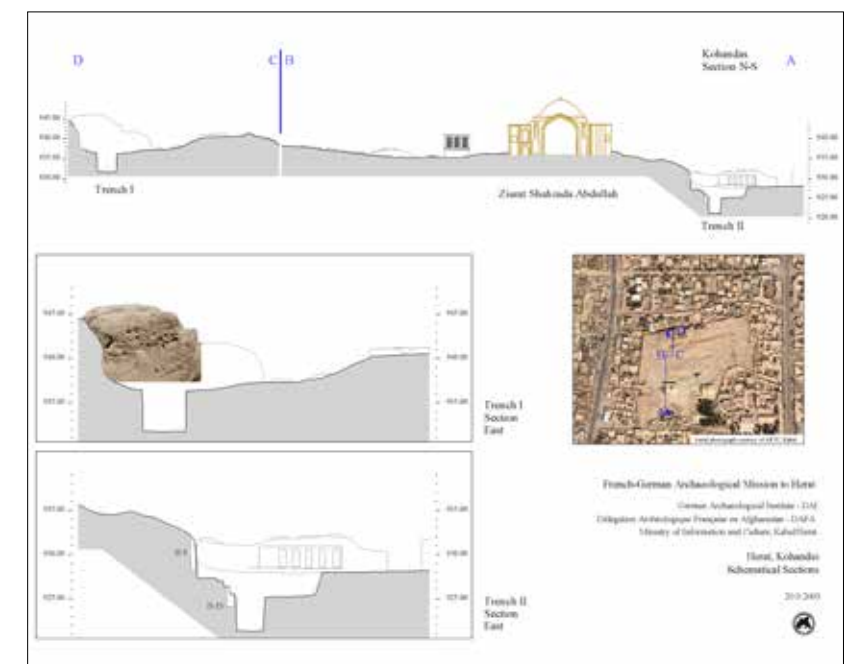


Fig. 692 North-South section of Kuhandaz (Th. Urban)



Fig. 693 View of the earthwork marking the northern fringe of Kuhandaz; from west



Fig. 694 View across Kuhandaz and the shrines, with the citadel in the background; from north (2005)



Fig. 695 Kuhandaz east, area of Trench IV, Shahzade Abo'l Qasem, the Friday Mosque and citadel in the back; from northeast (2005)



Fig. 696 Northern border of Kuhandaz, with the earthwork (right) and modern construction; from west



Fig. 697 Area D, western section, earthwork in a house at the northern edge of the mound; from east



Fig. 698 Area B: eastern section of bulldozer trench before cleaning (Trench I); from west

Ferrier, who was in Herat in the early 1840ies, describes the site as crescent-shaped.³ It is demarcated by the remains of a massive earthwork along its northern fringe (Fig. 693). This structure, which is deemed to be ancient, is considered to have been part of a hypothetical, larger circular or oval rampart that once extended to Qala'-e Ekhtyaruddin, where it was connected to the fortification wall of the Old City, located about half a kilometre to the south.⁴ Yet, no clear evidence for the fortification beyond Kuhandaz has been identified so far. However, it had been noted that the outline of the mound is slightly curved and tends to align with the neighbouring blocks and streets east of the cemetery, in total up to more than 200 m. Additionally, remains of an earthen massif along this outline, approximately 150 m to the east of the cemetery were detected.⁵ Altogether, these elements seemed to indicate that the fortification extended over a larger area in the past, following a curved trajectory.

Based on these observations, F. Grenet and other researchers have proposed that a circular or oval, fortified area existed, which included Kuhandaz in the north and Qala'-e Ekhtyaruddin in the south.⁶ This c. 1 km long area would have overlapped with the northern fortification wall of the Old City. While we had, at first, adapted this view, a closer study of the area on the ground of historic and modern maps, of historical descriptions and the results of the excavations led us to modify this perspective, as discussed in the concluding chapter.⁷

Numerous tombs present at the site leave almost no space for an excavation inside the enclosed area, while along the outer fringes many modern constructions, mostly houses are built onto the outer edge of the mound and into the cemetery (Figs. 694–696). Hence the only areas where excavations could possibly be conducted were near the northern and southern limits. Consequently, two main objectives for the

fieldwork in Kuhandaz were defined in line with these limited options and preliminary observations. First, we decided to focus on the fortification in the northern part of the site, since it had never been documented and dated in detail. Two areas were selected for excavation, Areas A and B (Fig. 691). They were chosen due to the presence of massive, slanted layers relating to the fortification; these deposits, just as additional architectural structures built on top of them, were relatively easy to access, and no tombs had been dug there. This fieldwork was supplemented by additional examinations of the earthwork in other areas along the northern edge of the cemetery and east of Areas A (Trench III) and B (Trench I), namely Areas C, D, E, and F (Fig. 691). The latter correspond to the backyards of modern houses encroached into the mound, where large sections of the mound and fortification could be observed (Fig. 697). The second spot selected for excavation was the low-lying southern part of the site, Area K (Trench II). Conveniently, no tombs were located on the surface and, furthermore, we hypothesised that an excavation at the lowest possible altitude would potentially enable us to access deposits representing the oldest chronological phases of the site.

In spite of the limited options for excavation, evidence on the history of Kuhandaz during the pre-Timurid era and information on the fortification, particularly its composition and size, and on later architecture in the northern part of the site were gathered. The material collected in the north consists mostly of ceramics dating from the 11th/13th to the 15th century and later. Work in the southern area provided a relatively rich ceramic assemblage dating to the same time span.

In 2008 this fieldwork was supplemented by an additional test-pit (Trench IV, in the east), in which Achaemenid and early Islamic deposits were reached.

Excavations 2005 – Fortification and Trenches I and III (Areas A–F)⁸

The 'Fortification'

The main objectives of the research on the earthwork rising in the north of the mound were to evaluate its size and limits, define its composition, establish its date and that of potentially associated structures, and to reach and study the oldest possible deposits. Cumulated work from Area A (Trench III) in the west to Area F in the east, enabled us to observe the fortification over a distance of c. 150 m. Through the more specific operations in Areas A and B we obtained more details as to its size and structure, recorded additional features and collected diagnostic materials associated with it. These materials date from the 11th to the 15th/16th centuries and later.

Trench I (Area B)

Area B is a c. 12 x 9 m large open area, sliced into the northern part of the mound. It seems to have resulted from a recent dig as part of a construction project that was later abandoned. The present surface of

³ Ferrier 1856, 181.

⁴ Grenet 1996, Fig. 8a.

⁵ Described below, see the report on the Old City survey, p. 735 and Fig. 774.

⁶ Grenet 1996, 378 Fig. 8a; also Allen 1981, 33; Allen 1983, 12.

⁷ See also Qala'-e Ekhtyaruddin, Trench 3, Résumé, pp. 448–463.

⁸ Fieldwork was conducted by Benjamin Mutin and Cécile Buquet-Marcon between August 16th and September 5th, 2005, including the days dedicated to the survey in the Old City.



Fig. 699 Trench I in Area B, western section and sounding; from northeast

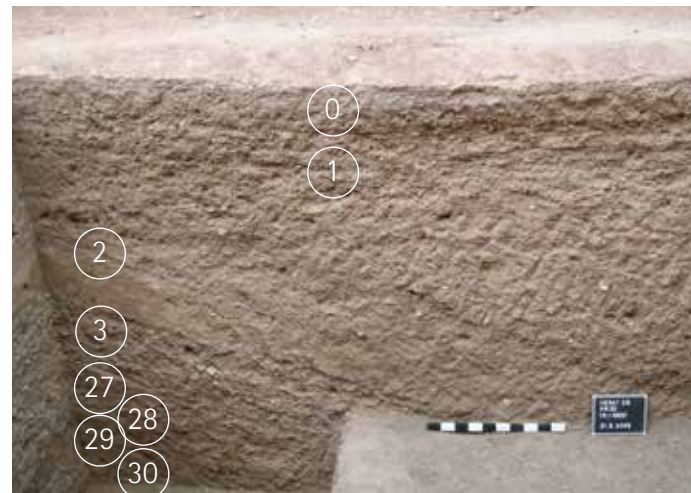


Fig. 700 Trench I, western section and sounding, slanted layers covered by horizontal gravel deposits



Fig. 701 Area B, western section, earthwork with slanted layers (Phase 2) and Phase-4 architecture built on top of gravel deposits and consolidation layers (Phase 3)



Fig. 703 Area A; from south (photo: B. Mutin)



Fig. 702 Area B, northern section, showing Phase-4 mudbrick architecture (photo: B. Mutin)

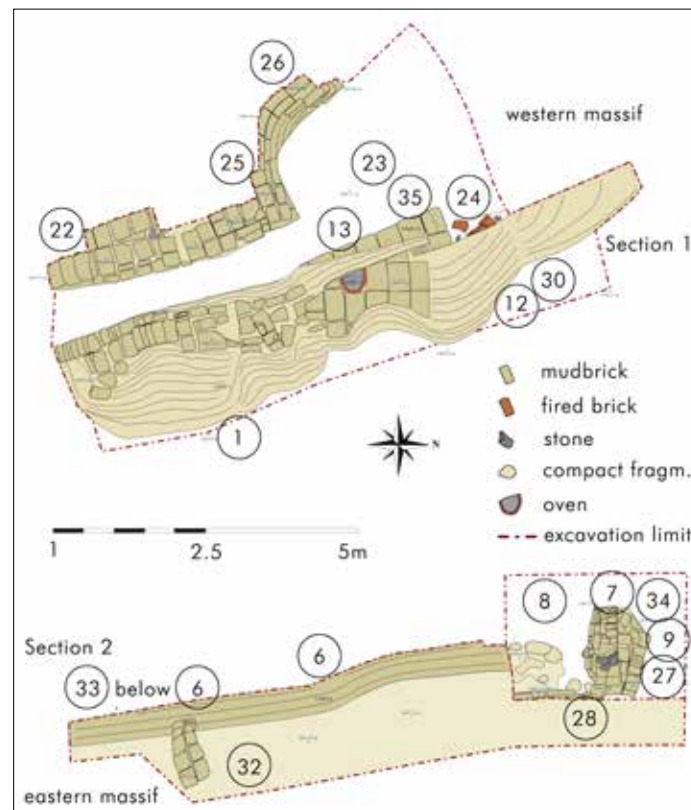


Fig. 704 Map of Area A (Trench III; drawing: B. Mutin)



Fig. 705 Area A, eastern massif; from west (photo: B. Mutin)

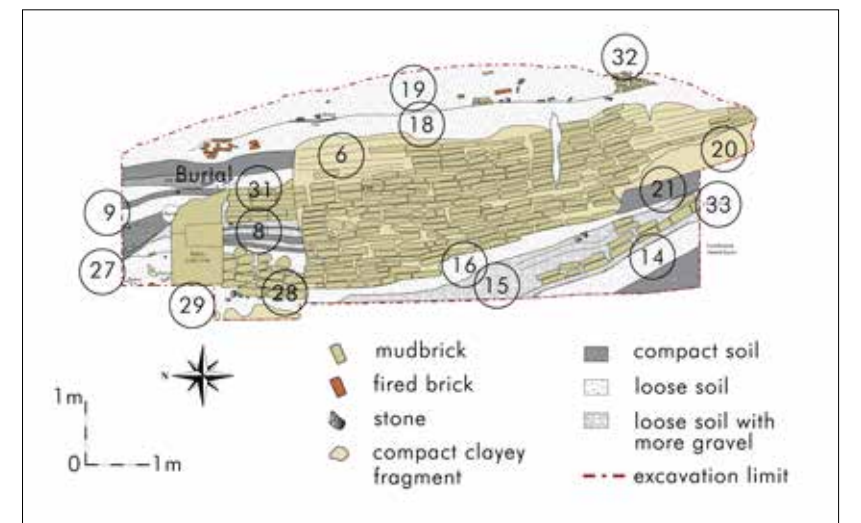


Fig. 706 Area A, eastern massif, western face, Section 2 (drawing: B. Mutin)

Area B is located in a bulldozer trench, around eight metres below the uppermost surface of the mound. This configuration saved us time and efforts, since it provided the opportunity to study directly a large portion of the section of the fortification without removing a huge mass of soil. We began fieldwork by cleaning the western, northern, and eastern sections of the trench. The western and eastern sections revealed massive, slanted layers sloping down from south to north (Units 17 and 35; Fig. 701). In the eastern section, these are visible over around eight meters from the present surface of the bulldozer trench to the top of the mound and for about ten metres from south to north (Fig. 698). The overall massif is composed of multiple, thick layers of loose sand-gravel deposits alternating with more compact layers. Instead of being an actual wall, this massif corresponds more specifically to the substructure of the glacis excavated in Trench 2 at Qala'-e Ekhtyaruddin.⁹

A 5 x 5 m trench (Trench I) was opened in the centre of Area B in order to reach the bottom of this structure and the deposits below it (Figs. 699; 700). In total, the excavation was continued down to 4.70 m below the present surface and had to be stopped at that point, as it became unsafe to continue digging. Expectedly, the slanted layers continued in this trench (Phase 2: Units 2; 3; 27 and 28; Fig. 700). The height of the structure could therefore be estimated to be almost 13 m. Just below, a compacted clayey surface, probably an occupation surface or old ground level (Unit 29), was exposed. The deposits below consist of a sandy soil (Phase 1: Unit 30) that was reached just before the excavation stopped.

Fieldwork in Area B also revealed ruined architectural structures and deposits posterior to the earthwork, particularly in the northern and western sections (Figs. 701; 702). In these sections we observed some rooms delimited by mudbrick walls (Phase 4: Units 4; 5; 7-9; 20; 21 and 25) as well as deposits of sediment, stones, and blocks of clay that were amassed to level and prepare the area before construction (Phase 3: Units 14-16 and 18). These constructions may

correspond to bastions attached to the 'fortification', while a gate (?) may have existed as well (Unit 12). The stratigraphic position and altitude of the mudbrick structures in the northern and western sections of Area B tentatively indicate that they belong to the same phase (Phase 4) as the main architecture, which postdates the massif in Area A (Units 6; 7/34; 28 and 1; Figs. 704; 706; 709). Other slanted layers sloping from the south, east, and west in the sections of Area B indicate the presence of additional structures above the earthwork.

Trench III (Area A)

Area A consists of a c. 10 x 6 m large, open area located directly west of Area B (Figs. 691; 703). The present surface of Area A is c. 3.50-3.75 m below the top of the mound, and thus higher in altitude than that of Area B. Consequently, the focus of the fieldwork in this area was mostly the study of the structures above the massif. Area A is delimited to east and west by two large, parallel north-south oriented earthen massifs which led us to believe that an opening or a large open space existed at

⁹ See Qala'-e Ekhtyaruddin, Trench 2, pp. 328-330. - Franke 2015, 239 Fig. 36.



Fig. 707 Area A, eastern massif, south; Phase 2: Unit 14; Phase 3: Units w33; 15; 16 (photo: B. Mutin)



Fig. 708 Area A, eastern massif, north; Phase 4: Units 6; 8; 28; 31; Phase 5: Unit 9 (photo: B. Mutin)

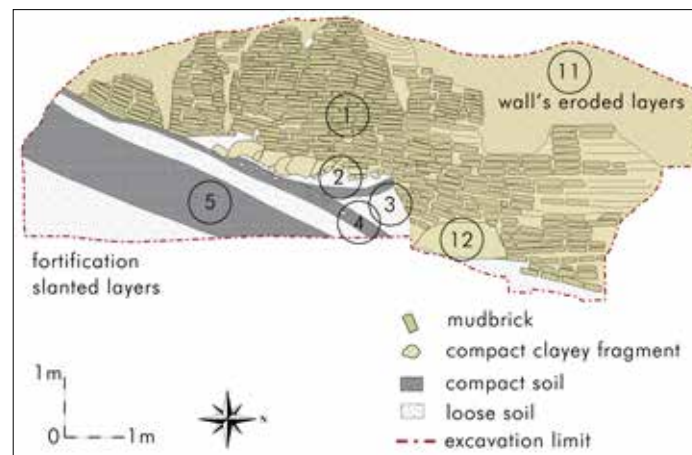


Fig. 709 Area A, western massif, eastern face, Section 1 (drawing: B. Mutin)



Fig. 710 Area A, western massif, eastern face (photo: B. Mutin)



Fig. 711 Area A, western massif, eastern face, detail



Fig. 712 Area A, room west of section; Phase 6: Units 25 and 26 (photo: B. Mutin)



Fig. 713 Area A, western massif, Units 1; 12 and 30 (Phase 4; photo: B. Mutin)

this location (Fig. 704). This hypothesis became even more credible after the structure was excavated and revealed that it incorporated two mudbrick walls built on top (Phase 4: Units 1; 6; Figs. 705–711). Excavations at the bottom and top of these walls revealed, as expected, the same slanted layers observed before in Area B as well as additional mudbrick constructions and deposits. As in Area B, the earthwork slopes down to the north and is composed of layers of sand and gravel as well as of more compact deposits (Phase 2).

In the eastern massif (Section 2), we observed a north–south oriented mudbrick wall (Unit 33; Figs. 706; 707) and sediment layers (Phase 3: Units 15; 16; 29) sloping to the north just above the glacis (Phase 2: Unit 14). The large and well-preserved massive mudbrick wall (Phase 4: Unit 6) was built on top of these

layers and constructions. The latter wall was studied in section over a length of c. 7.30 x 2.40 m height. It was preserved to a maximum of 17 mudbrick layers placed in thin beds of mud mortar. The bricks are unevenly sized, many broken; they measure c. 40 x 20 x 10 cm. Both sections of Area A show many additions and repairs. This is particularly clear in the east (Figs. 705; 706): in the north, a rather regular, one metre wide opening (door ?) between Walls 6 and 7/34 was blocked by a mudbrick setting (Unit 28), overlain by thin, banded deposits of use (Unit 8) upon which later another brick setting was added (Unit 31; Fig. 708). Wall Unit 7/34 possibly corresponds with, or connects to, the mudbrick architecture (Unit 6) that is younger than the earthwork, visible in the western section of Area B. Rubble layers, which also contained stucco fragments, accumulated along its southern face (Unit 27). As noted above, it is likely that the main building phase recorded in Area A is functionally related to the mudbrick architecture on top of the earthwork in Area B. When the large wall (Units 6; 7/34) was no longer in use, the area was re-occupied; this is indicated by two burials and several deposits including ash layers (Phase 5: Unit 9). This phase was followed by additional occupations on top of Units 6 and 9, marked by mud- and baked-brick structures (Phase 6: Units 18; 19; 32). The fired bricks, measuring c. 25 x 25 x 5 cm, are smaller than the mudbricks recorded in the previous levels.

In the western massif (Section 1; Figs. 709–711), as in the eastern one, a north–south oriented mudbrick wall (Phase 4: Unit 1) was visible on top of the massif (Phase 2: Unit 5, 4); it was excavated over a length of c. 9.80 x 4 m height. The fact that this wall has the same orientation as Wall Unit 6, the same stratigraphic position, a corresponding altitude and that it was built in the same way with bricks of the same size (c. 38–40 x 20 x 8–10 cm), indicates that these two walls were contemporary and functionally related. However, unlike in the eastern massif, we did not observe any other structure or deposit between the glacis and Wall Unit 1. The wall, however, shows various stages of building repairs and additions, and was constructed in part on a consolidation layer that founds on layers (Unit 3) running against the older earthwork (Phase 2). Collapsed mudbricks (Units 12; 30) found at the northern part of the wall (Fig. 713), may have come from a structure located further north, which was related at some point to Wall Unit 1, perhaps the equivalent to Wall Unit 7/34 in the eastern massif. The top of the western massif, above Unit 1, consists of eroded layers (Unit 11) that include very decayed baked-brick settings. The dimensions of the bricks correspond to those observed in the eastern massif. These layers were not excavated, but additional structures were noted to the west, behind the section and at the top of the massif. There, a quadrangular 'room' measuring c. 2 x 2 m and delimited by three mudbrick walls was uncovered (Phase 6: Units 25; 26; 35). Its northern part is eroded and slopes down to the north (Fig. 712). This room contains a compact surface (floor, Unit 23) and a small fireplace (Unit 13). It is connected to a north–south oriented alleyway placed between Unit 1 and an additional wall (Unit 22). The mudbricks used in these constructions are of larger size than those recorded in the section and have a higher gravel content. The date of these features located to the west of the section is unclear. This part of the 'fortification' of Kuhandaz is known to have been used as military outpost until the 20th century, and it is possible that these features were added to the older structures in the last century.