

## **Report on the Excavations at Merquly: The 2009 Season**

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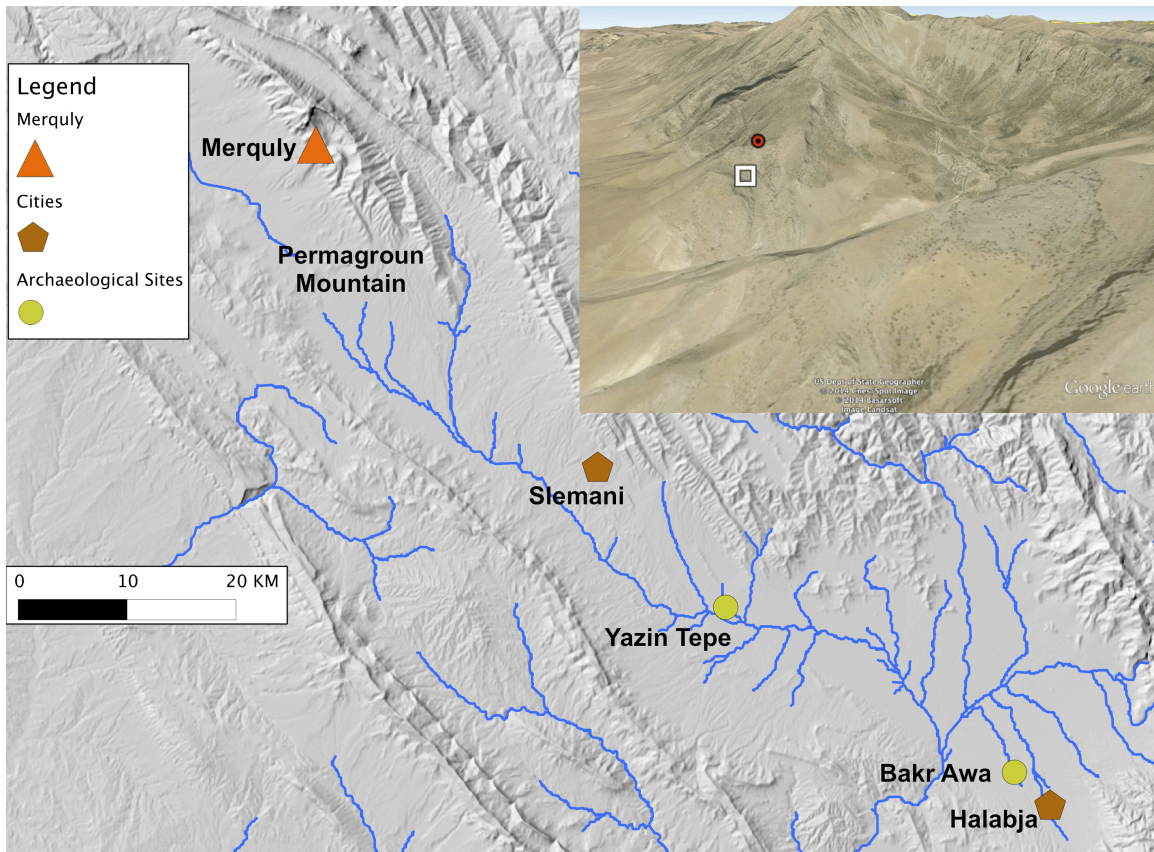
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### **Introduction**

The site of Merquly (ميرقولي; Merquli or Merculi; UTM 521432, 3955598 38N) is located on Permagroun Mountain, the mountain that has been associated with the Flood as described in the Epic of Gilgamesh (George 2003). Merquly is about 40 KM northwest of Slemani (or Sulaimaniyah), Iraq located near a pass to a small valley that is found within the mountain; this site likely guarded this pass as one would go through the Permagroun, suggesting the strategic nature of the pass as well as the site. Indeed, excavation of the site proved difficult due to the isolated location and high elevation that was not accessible by nearby roads. In June 2009, excavations commenced with the goal of uncovering relevant architecture associated with the site. This was prompted by the discovery of a nearby rock relief, about 200 m to the southwest and about 20 m below in elevation, and possibly indicating a local ruler or noble that may date from the late Parthian period (Zamu & Amedi 2011). In 2013, the primary author undertook a research trip to London in order to publish this and other archaeological excavations by the Directorate of Antiquities in Slemani. The author would like to express his deep felt appreciation to the British Institute for the Study of Iraq for supporting this trip under the Christie Mallowan Visiting Scholar program.

This report summarizes efforts from the 2009 season undertaken at Merquly. Fig. 1 indicates the location of the site in relation to Slemani, Iraq and the surrounding region, along with the position of the site and the nearby rock relief. Fig. 2 shows the nearby rock relief that has been published previously (Altaweel 2012:Fig. 5). In general, the site consists of large stone foundations, where there are possibly several structures that are interrelated, and a likely wall surrounding the settlement or fortification. A number of the stones associated with these features are visible on the surface. While there is some evidence of fire, the site was likely abandoned, as no extensive burning was found. In fact, relatively few artefacts are found on the site, with contents from the site having likely been removed in antiquity or even eroded. The site is found at an elevation of 1618 m above sea level.



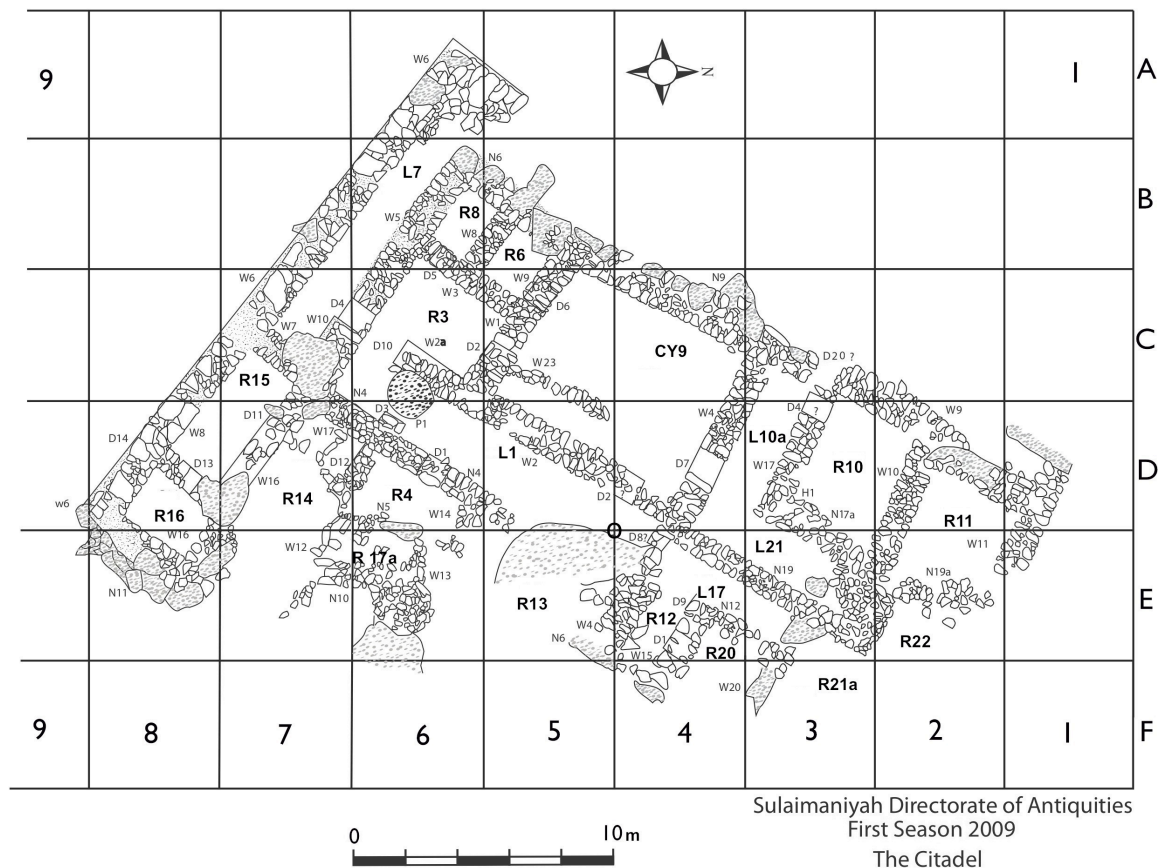
**Figure 1.** Map showing Merquly and nearby cities and known archaeological sites. The inset shows a satellite image overlaying elevation data that shows Merquly (red dot) and the nearby rock relief (white square) near the mountain pass. Imagery in the inset is provided by Google Earth (2014) using Cnes/Spot data.



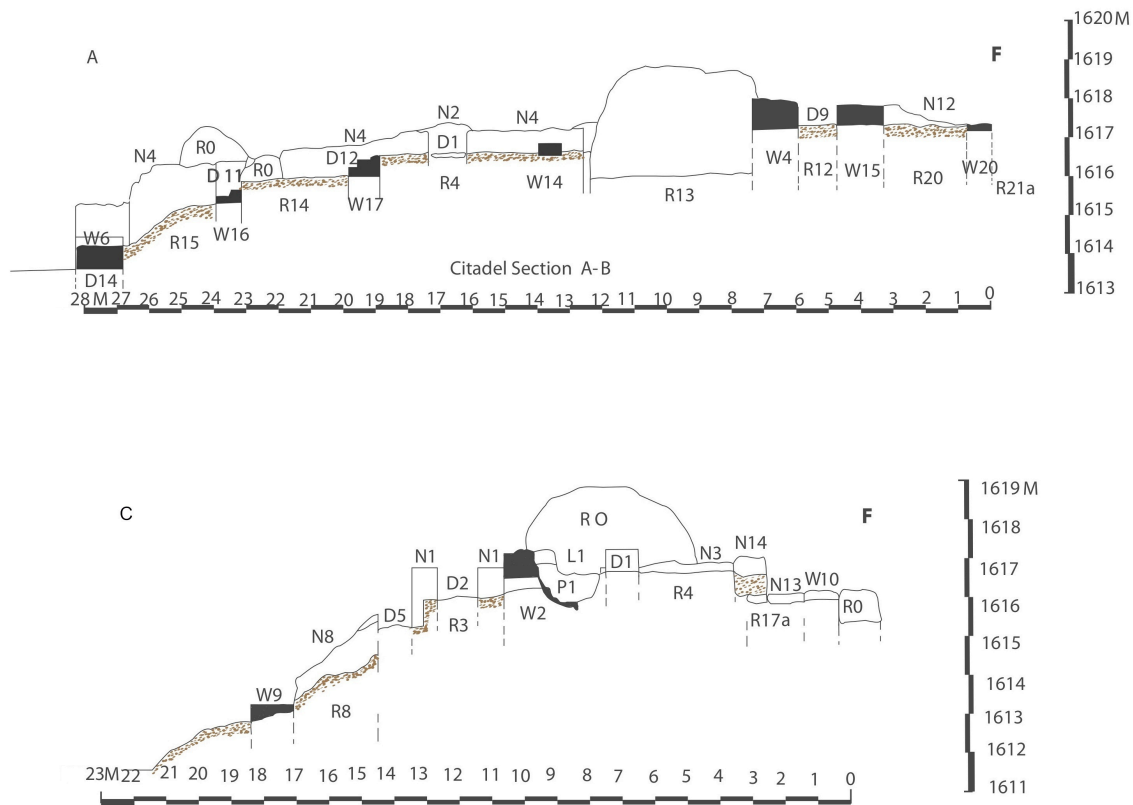
**Figure 2.** The nearby rock relief at Merquly.

## The Citadel

Excavation squares, measuring 5 x 5 m, were laid out along an area that is called the “citadel” by the excavators, which is a high point along the Permagroun that overlooks the pass mentioned previously and where structures from the site were found. Excavations began in these squares along the citadel (Fig. 3), with a fortress-like structure becoming evident as excavations began. The citadel's architecture and walls were built on different levels, following the general contour of the ridge the structures were built on, as indicated in Fig. 4, which shows different vantage points in squares A-F. One clear building level (Level 1) is evident for the site with at least two building phases present in some places; these early and late phases are discussed in the text below, where they are relatively clear. In addition, there are later intrusions on the structure, including at least one pit (P1) and other areas disturbed by later activity (R4, R17a, & CY9), which are recorded as part of Level 0. It is possible that the disturbances in R4, R17a and CY9 are more recent disturbances, while P1 is an ancient intrusion. The main benchmark used for Merquly is indicated as a large “O” in Fig. 3.



**Figure 3.** Plan of excavations that revealed structures in the citadel. The key for the plan is as follows: CY=courtyard, D=door, D?=possible door, L=lane/alley/corridor, H=hearth, R=room, W=wall, and P=pit. In cases where there is a north-south wall, N is used.



**Figure 4.** Elevation variation and walls of the structures in the citadel.

### *Main Excavations*

Large stone foundations and smaller stones are evident on the surface and along the main outer southeast-northwest wall (squares A6-D9), which measures 23 m in length, while the northeast-southwest wall extends nearly 30 m (squares B6-D1) in length. Another part of the fortress, extending in the north in D1, and likely having extended further in a northwest-southeast direction, is also evident. Further outer walls are likely present as well to the north, but these are not well preserved or not easily visible based on surface investigations. To the south, similarly, evidence of a second wall is apparent based on large tumbled stones, perhaps signifying a second outer wall facing this direction. The area also includes a large circular installation (P1), measuring approximately 1.5 m in diameter and 2.0-2.2 m in depth. The eastern walls of the installation are damaged, but evidence of paved walls are found in the installation. P1 is found intruding into feature D3, an entrance between L1 & R5, with part of Wall (W)2a partially collapsed due to the pit. Excavations were, in fact, begun nearby to P1 to clarify the walls and installations around this feature, with W2 & W2a being initially excavated and distinguished. From the evidence, P1 clearly seems to be a later intrusion into the main citadel structure; this feature is designated as belonging to Level 0.

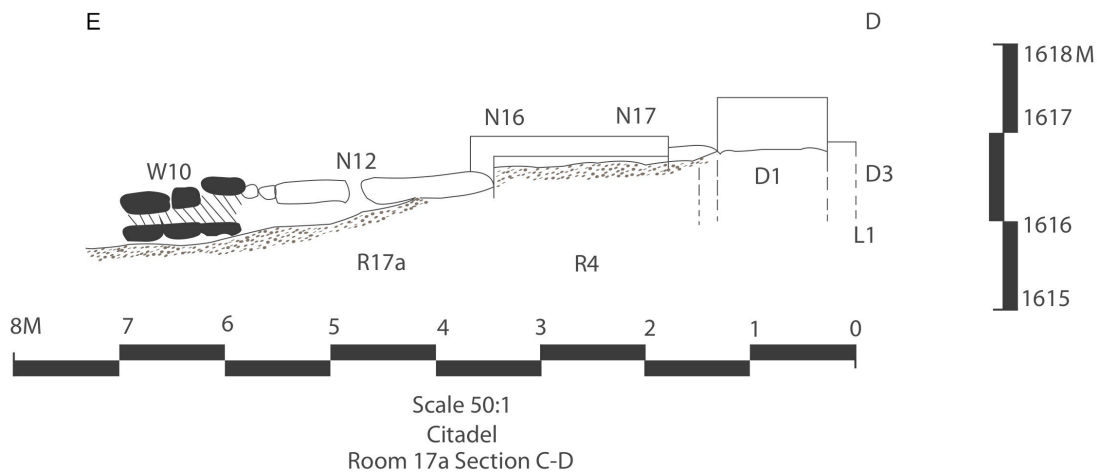
With the beginning of excavations, a room quickly became apparent (R3) that measures 4 X 7 m, with the floor descending in an eastward direction between 40-80 cm.



This structure is earlier than P1 and is designated as part of Level 1. Various limestone pieces were found, but none of which clearly show evidence of being used in any installation. In the middle of the room, another wall was exposed (W2a), which measures 90 cm in width. This wall extends from southwest to northeast. The wall reaches an area where more limestone rocks were found. Overall, the main north wall (W1) contains between 1-2 courses of stone, with widths in these stones ranging between 1.2-0.8 m. The west wall (W3) measures about 1.0 m in width and having worked stones measuring 40 x 35 x 64 cm.

Two nearby areas were then excavated, specifically Courtyard (CY)9 and Room (R)17a, which were found to be both disturbed by later Iraqi army activity. The army had likely used this area during the Iran-Iraq War and its conflict with the Peshmerga, with evidence of modern food and camping items found during excavations. Although heavily disturbed, the direction of the walls in R17a (i.e., W12 & W13) suggest the area was a later construction, with construction probably related to Iraqi army's activities in the area. Overall, we conclude there were two ancient phases, related to Level 1, for R17a, which was then subsequently disturbed by the Iraqi army (i.e., in Level 0).

To the west, W14 has an entrance (D2), with another room (R13) becoming apparent after excavations continued in the area. A group of fallen stones (N10), to the east of R17a, appear to be part of R17a. In the south part of W13, evidence of fire was found, with ash evident in the remains. Long stones in the southwest part of R13 suggest that these stones may have been used as part of the drainage, perhaps removing water from a nearby bathroom or helping to drain rainwater from the area. Fig. 5 shows a section between R17a & R4, helping to indicate the elevation differences encountered in the area.



**Figure 5.** Section between R17a & 4.

Areas surrounding this disturbed area appear to be from Level 1 and less disturbed. In W16, abutting rooms (R14 & R15) were uncovered; these rooms have an elevation difference of nearly 1.5 m below R17a. Here, a clear entrance (D11) connects R14 & R15. The entrance has two steps leading up into R14; this room utilizes the natural bedrock as the floor's pavement. In D12, which is at the level of the natural bedrock, and along W17 in R14, remains of stairs and steps are evident that lead about one-half metre higher than the level of R15.

Moving to the south and southeast part of the excavated area, L7 & R15-16 are found. L7 seems to have been accessible from R3, but no clear access is evident between L7 & R15. South and west of R15, the site descends steeply, suggesting this could be the last room of the structure in this direction. From excavations, it is evident that R15 & 16 are connected by D13. The difference in elevation between R14 & D14, which is a likely entrance to the fortress or citadel, is nearly 1.5 metres, with R14 being higher. This could suggest that there is a path that once connected to this side of the citadel. Evidence for stone stairs were, in fact, found in D11.

The next area uncovered is R4, which is a large courtyard affected by later disturbances or construction in R17a. R4 is about 30 cm higher than R14. D1 in W4 is likely the main entrance that leads into Lane (L)1. The main courtyard (CY9) is possibly connected to L1 by D2, which has a long stone foundation that could be the floor threshold; however, it is unclear if this stone is used in secondary context as part of W2. In fact, W2 appears to be a late phase construction for Level 1. Overall, there are at least three entrances (D1, D3, & D8) in L1, with a fourth possible entrance (D2) that connects CY9. In addition, out of context stones are observed to intrude into L1.

Rooms designated as R3, R6, & R8 could have been storage rooms. R6 seems to be accessible via CY9 through D6, which was closed in the later phase of Level 1. R8 (2.3 x 1.5 m) is seen to be accessible via R3 and through D5. In CY9, measuring 8 x 7.5 m, a later small wall (W23) extends northeast to southwest. The wall seems to block an earlier entrance (D2). The closed entryways (D2 & D6) and wall (W23) associated with CY9 suggest at least two phases for the structure, although the second phase incorporated relatively minor modifications. Overall, CY9 likely has four entrances, accessing L1, R3, 6 & 10a; however, the entrances to R3 & R6 were blocked in antiquity during the late phase of Level 1. In L1, the possible entryway (D2) may have also been blocked, but the fallen stones found could simply be wall collapse on the doorway.

L17 is a likely extension to L1, with D8 located between these features; a small room or hall is designated as R12. Overall, R12 & L17 seem to form another division within the citadel that is located on higher ground, perhaps a terraced area, that is made accessible via D8; there is about 1.2 m elevation difference between R17a & R12. W15 appears to have an entrance, called D1, although this is not entirely clear, as this entrance may have just been a part of the wall remains. Next to this is R20, a small rectangular room, which is at the edge of the eastern part of the excavated area. R21a is another room to the north, but the architectural remains here are poorly preserved.

L10a is a corridor that has an entrance (D4) leading to R10 (4.85 x 3.6 m), although this is not entirely certain. R10 does have a large number of pottery fragments found in it. The southeast corner of R10 has a small fireplace/hearth (H1). The fireplace has three courses of stone in a circular form, with evidence of ash extending 20 cm in depth; some of the sherds found within the room have evidence of burning and ash, with some of these sherds being likely cooking wares, suggesting the room was a possible kitchen. One very large storage sherd was found in the room, measuring 1.5 m in diameter. R11 (3.9 x 3.1 m) is another room, which does not have a clear entrance, but it is possible this doorway existed to the north and was not clarified during excavations. L21 seems to be a possible connecting corridor between R11 and the rest of the structure, but fallen stone debris hindered a clear identification of the relationship between L21 and R11. A rock used as a door socket was found in the debris area. Nevertheless, a possible entrance

(D20) may connect L10a to an outside area of the structure and to the northwest. Additional rooms and structures could be evident east of R11 & R22, but this is unclear from current excavations, as work had stopped in this area at the end of the season. To the northeast, remnants of stone and a possible foundation trench represent possible remains of an outer wall in the citadel structure, which are outlined in the plan (square D1; see Fig. 3).

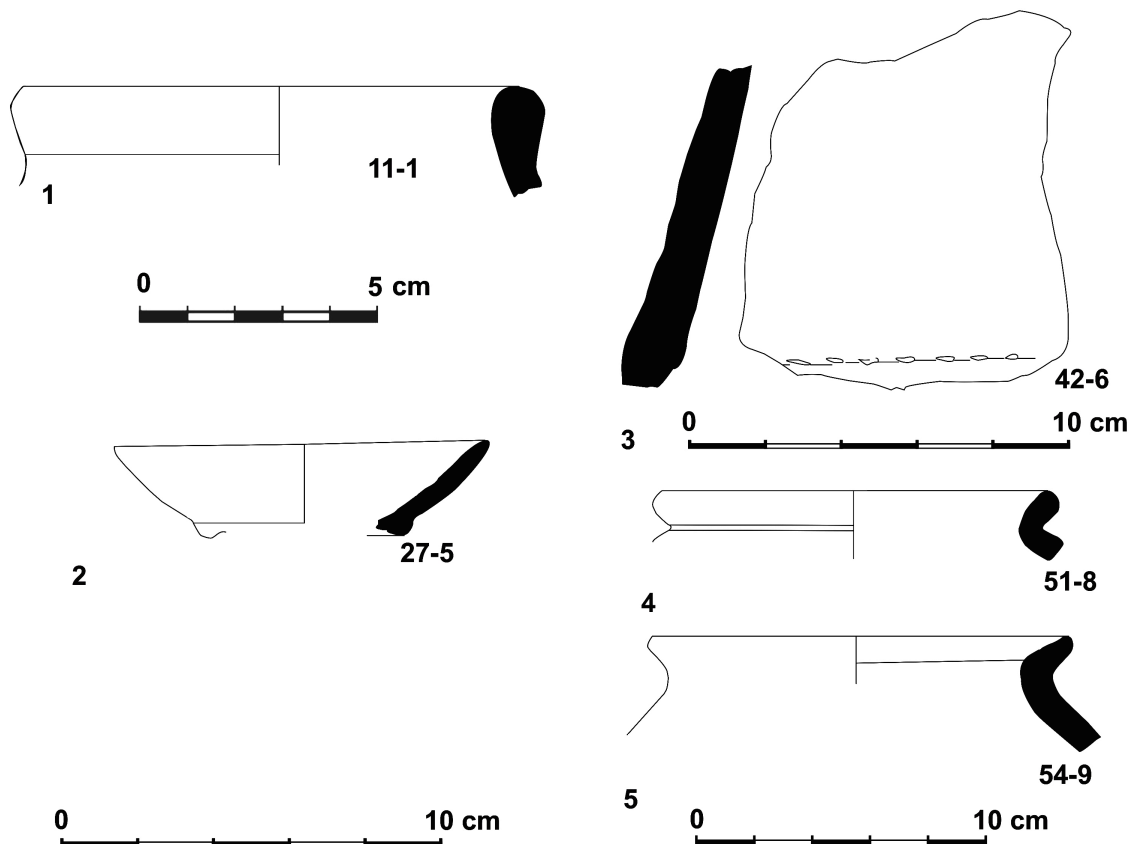
What is unclear is if there are other structures in the surrounding heights and elevated areas, as the excavation season was limited in time and could not properly uncover further features. Relatively few cultural remains were found in the structures, suggesting the buildings were simply abandoned or there has been significant surface erosion, given the steep elevation, that has led to ceramics and other small finds being washed away. Overall, the main walls (i.e., non-secondary construction) measure between 0.9-1.4 m in thickness. Most entrances are relatively wide, at about 1 m, but they are as narrow as 0.7 m (e.g., D5), with evidence of stairs at entrances such as D11 and along W16. The terraced structure likely conforms to the contour of the mountain, explaining the need for having elevated divisions covering the overall built area. In addition, all the clear entrances have thresholds made of large flat stones. To the south and west, remains of towers and defensive walls are apparent from field observation, suggesting that these remains likely formed part of a larger fortified structure surrounding Merquly and may represent the outer walls of the site. Future excavations in these areas could make the relationship of these remains to the citadel more evident. The construction of the site seems to have a primary phase of construction and a second phase that added or changed some of the features. However, this second phase seems to be relatively minor or largely a rebuilding phase of existing structures. Finally, the nearby relief of a standing figure, most likely an official or king, suggests the strategic nature of the site. Datable materials from the fortress suggest that the citadel may date to a later date than the relief; this discussion is given below.

## **Archaeological Finds**

While in general the excavations yielded relatively few object finds, ceramic sherds have been recovered within the excavated structures, allowing the site to be dated. Examples of finds are listed in Figs. 6-12, with descriptions and comparisons to comparable ceramics given in Tab. 1. In general, the majority of sherds appear to date to the Sassanian period, with stamped sherds and glazed ceramics (Figures 11-12) being the most diagnostic. Colours of the non-glazed ceramics range from white-pinkish, red, pink, light red, yellowish-red, brownish-red, pale brown, reddish-grey, and light brown; however, reddish colours were predominant. Glazed ceramics are green. Pottery temper incorporates small stones, grit, or sand, while relatively few have no inclusions. A large portion of the sherds appear to be from cooking or storage wares and are coarse tempered. Types of wares, however, include large storage jars, cooking wares, and cups. Overall, 25 rim sherds, 5 base sherds, and 6 body sherds are decorated; most of the body sherds are globular and rim sherds generally are everted. One stamped sherd shows a male figure possibly standing next to a tree (Fig. 7-11). While most of the sherds are plain or simply decorated, Fig. 12 (1-4) indicates stamped designs commonly found in the Sassanian period. One glazed ware is also diagnostic for this period (Fig. 11).

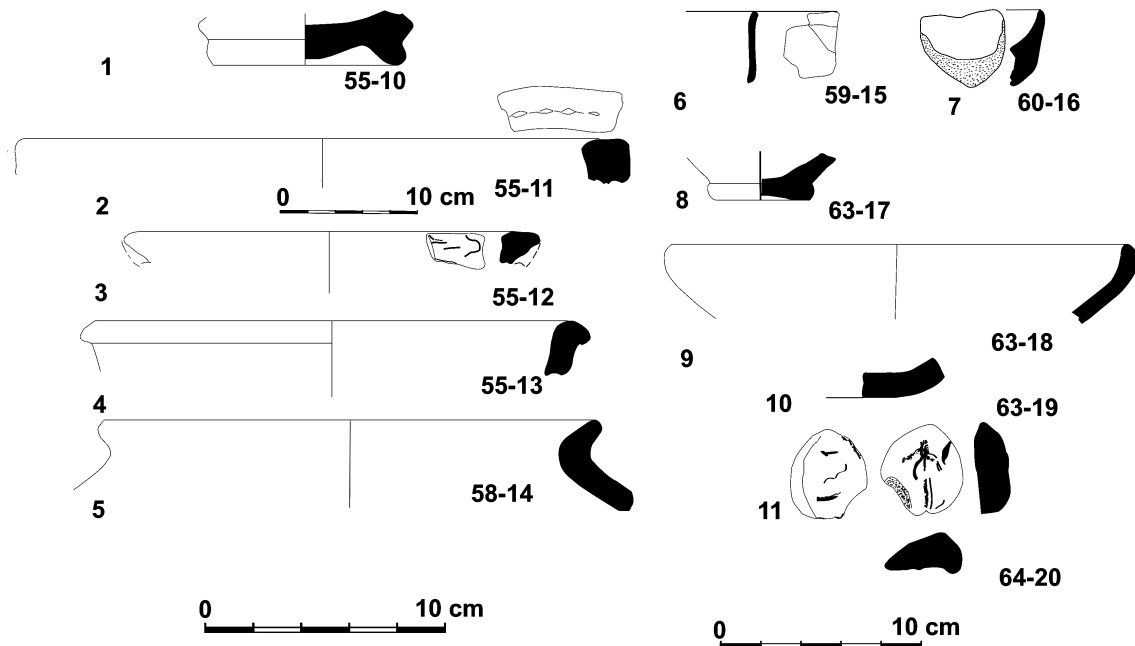
As for pottery bases, a total of six are found, with three being ring bases and the others being simple flat bases. All of the flat bases were likely used as cooking vessels, with evidence of burning (e.g., Fig. 8-5) found on these sherds, while the ring bases show evidence of being glazed (Figs. 7-1 & 7-8). As the pottery is found in one building level, although likely with at least two building phases, we conclude the site dates to one period, with differences in periods not distinguishable based on the ceramics from different phases.

Many of the diagnostic ceramic finds, including their context, description, and close parallels, are listed in Tab. 1, with Figs. 6-12 showing these key finds. While a few of the diagnostics could possibly be dated to the Parthian (e.g., Fig. 10-3 or 10-6) period, the predominant forms appear to be more clearly Sassanian and, in fact, many of the Parthian types could also be found in Sassanian contexts (Ricciardi 1970/71; Kennet 2004). Therefore, without clearer evidence, we suggest the site dates to the Sassanian period, possibly dating to the second half of the Sassanian period given the presence of the impressed crosses (Simpson 2013) that are found during this time in northern Mesopotamia. In fact, the best evidence for the Sassanian date are the Sassanian-style stamped sherds, with comparable finds found at Nuzi and elsewhere (Starr 1937:Pl 136, E ; Schmidt 1937:342, 344; Simpson 2013:114, Fig. 3), and green glazed sherds from Fig. 11 that are common to the period (Keal & Keal 1981:Fig. 23, No. 12, 27; Hill et al. 2004). Fig. 12-2 appears to be a slightly unusual impressed ceramic style from this period, as this design is more often found in decorated stucco in Sassanian buildings (Schmidt 1937:342, 344).

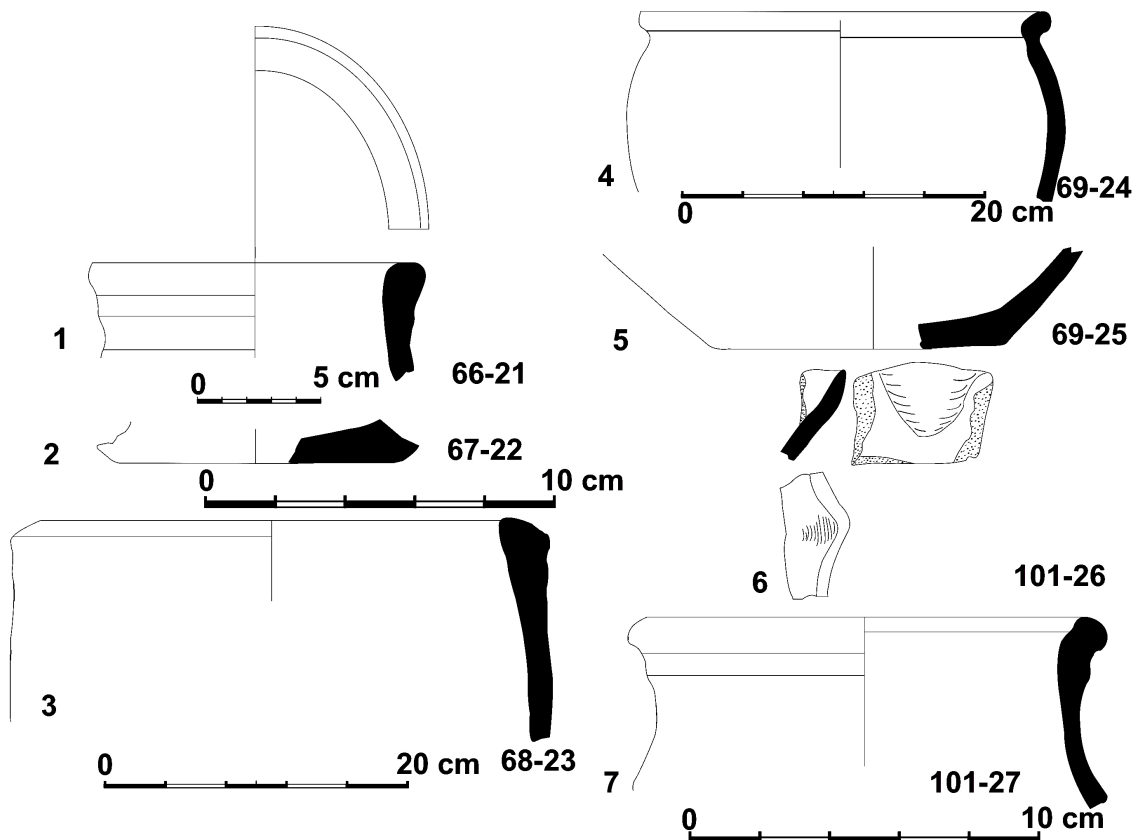




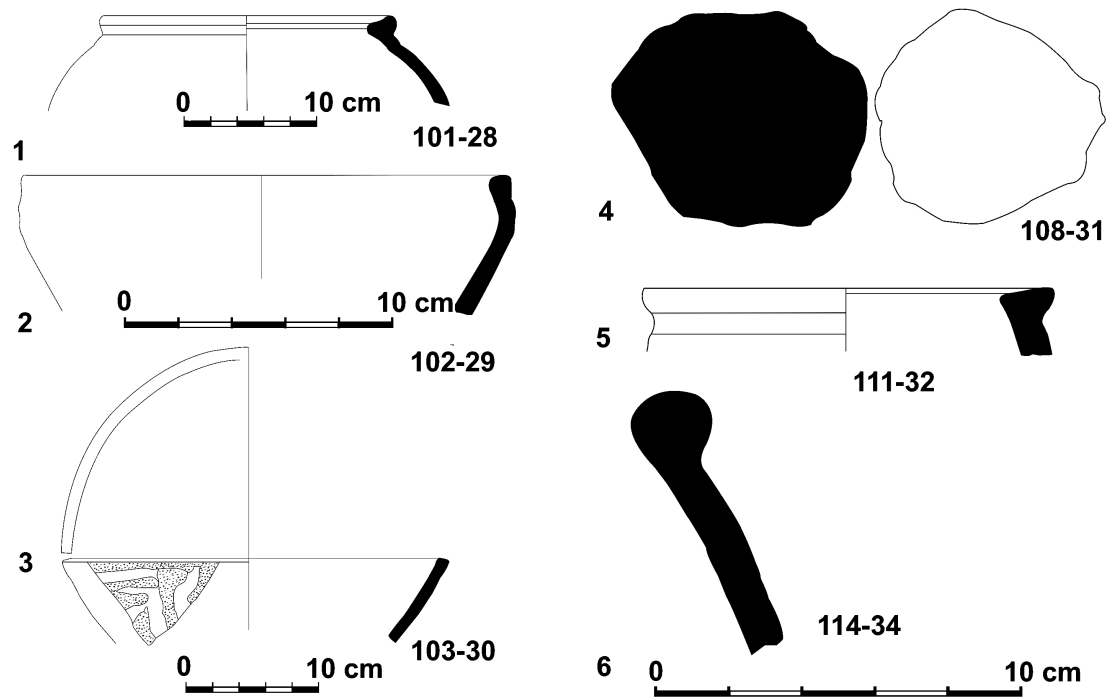
**Figures 6.** Ceramics from Merquly Level 1 (Field Numbers 11-1 to 54-9).



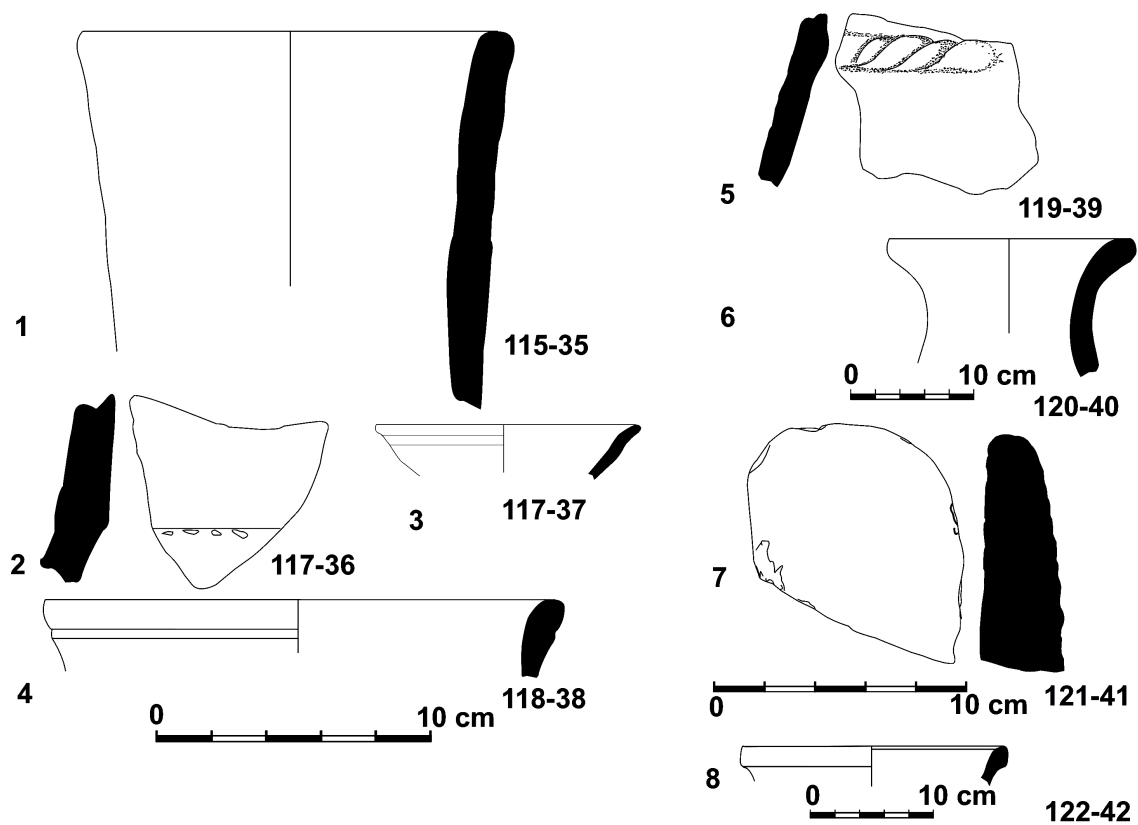
**Figure 7.** Pottery from Merquly Level 1 (Field Numbers 55-10 to 64-20).



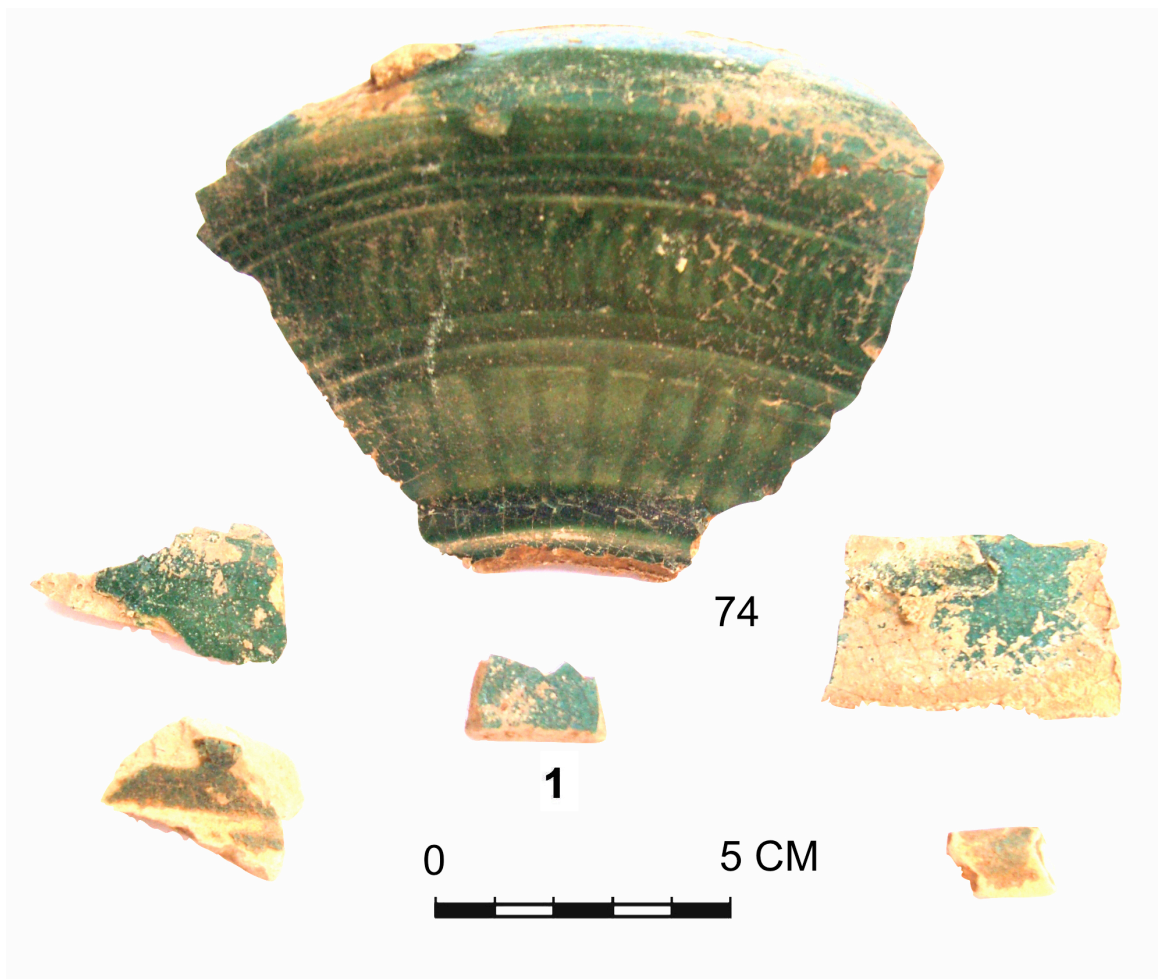
**Figure 8.** Pottery from Merquly Level 1 (Field Numbers 66-21 to 101-27).



**Figure 9.** Pottery from Merquly Level 1 (Field Numbers 101-28 to 114-34).



**Figure 10.** Pottery from Merquly Level 1 (Field Numbers 115-35 to 122-42).



**Figure 11.** Green glazed ceramic (Field Number 74) found in the citadel in Level 1.



**Figure 12.** Stamp-impressed clay objects (Field Numbers 8-53 to 113-33) showing crosses (1, 3-4) and a likely leaf design (2).

Fig. Num.	Field Num.	Level	Find Location	Description	Citations
6-1	11-1	1, floor	L1	simple jar rim sherd; small sandy inclusions and brownish colour	Wilkinson & Tucker 1995:218, Type 70
6-2	27-5	site surface	near citadel area	Reddish pottery with base and rim sherd; few sand inclusions	Kennet 2004:136, Fig. 9, Type 25
6-3	42-6	1	L17	yellow sherd with evidence of incised decoration; grit and sand tempered	Ricciardi 1970/71:Fig. 94, No. 76; Wilkinson 1990:Fig.B.16, No. 1 and B.25, Nos. 30-31



6-4	51-8	1	UP	greyish rim sherd; fine and few inclusions	Hermann et al. 2001:25, Fig. 19, No. 5
6-5	54-9	1	UP	reddish rim sherd with sand and grit inclusions	Sajjadi 1989:Fig. 12
7-1	55-10	1	L7	greyish and yellow ring base sherd showing evidence of glazing; sand and grit inclusions	
7-2	55-11	1	L7	greyish and yellow rim sherd; sand and grit inclusions	Sasaki & Sasaki 1996:119, Fig. 44, No. 95-111
7-3	55-12	1	L7	greyish and yellow rim sherd; sand and grit inclusions	Kenet 2004:134, Fig. 7, Type 46
7-4	55-13	1	L7	greyish and yellow rim sherd; sand and grit inclusions	Kenet 2004:149, Fig. 22, J2.1
7-5	58-14	1	north of W11	cooking pot blackened by firing; reddish colour with sand and grit inclusions	Sajjadi 1989:Fig. 12
7-6	59-15	1; early phase	R20	small rim sherd; reddish colour with grit and sand inclusions	Whitcomb 1987:320, Fig. E, a
7-7	60-16	1; early phase	L7	small rounded sherds; reddish/brown colour with sand and grit inclusions	
7-8	63-17	1; early phase	L7	reddish base sherd; coarse sand and grit inclusions with evidence of glazing	Whitcomb 1987:324, Fig. G, g
7-9	63-18	1; early phase	L7	reddish rounded rim sherd; sand and grit inclusions	Kenet 2004:139, Fig. 12, Type 32
7-10	63-19	1; early phase	L7	reddish sherd with sand and grit inclusions	

7-11	64-20	1	north of W19	stamped impression of a male figure	
8-1	66-21	1; early phase	R10 adjacent to W17	rim sherd with evidence of burning; reddish colour with sand and grit inclusions	Adams 1970: Plt. 2, Fig. 5, j; Ricciardi 1970/71: Fig. 92, No. 47; Ricciardi 1984:Fig. 1, No. 2
8-2	67-22	1; early phase	R10 adjacent to W17	base sherd; burned with grit and sand inclusions and reddish colour	
8-3	68-23	1; early phase	L7	large rim sherd; coarse sand, grit, and small stone inclusions with brownish colour	Kennet 2004:148, Fig. 21, CP2.1
8-4	69-24	1; early phase	R10 adjacent to W17	large body and rim sherd; tan/brownish colour with sand and grit inclusions	Kennet 2004:151, Fig. 24, CP4.4
8-5	69-25	1; early phase	R10 adjacent to W17	large flat base sherd with evidence of burning; tan/brownish colour with sand and grit inclusions	
8-6	101-26	1; early phase	R10 near W17	brownish buff; small sandy and grit inclusions	
8-7	101-27	1; early phase	R10 near W17	sherds from the same vessel as 101-26	Altaweel 2006:Fig. 10, No. 4; Kennet 2002:157, Fig.3
9-1	101-28	1; early phase	R10 near W17	sherds from the same vessel as 101-26	Kennet 2004:150, Fig. 23, CP4.1
9-2	102-29	1; early phase	R10 near W17	large body and rim sherd; brownish buff with sandy inclusions	Altaweel 2006:Fig. 25, No. 2
9-3	103-30	1; early phase	R10 near W17	sherds with slight glazing; few inclusions	Kennet 1997:292, Fig. 7, No. 13
9-4	108-31	1; early phase	R10 near W17	stopper or container cap; reddish/brown colour and grit/sand temper	

9-5	111-32	1	R11	rim sherd; reddish colour with sand and grit inclusions	Whitcomb 1987:318, Fig. D, j
9-6	114-34	1	R17a	tan/brown coloured rim sherd; sand and grit inclusions	Rutten 2009:365, Fig. 7, No. 3
10-1	115-35	1	R21a	pink coloured body and rim sherd; evidence of firing with sand and grit inclusions	
10-2	117-36	1	UP	body sherd with etched/notched surface decoration; reddish colour and with sand and grit inclusions	Ricciardi 1967:Fig. 140, No. 3; Hojabri-Nobari et al. 2011:107, Fig. 7, No. 1&3
10-3	117-37	1	UP	bowl rim sherd; reddish colour with sand and grit inclusions	Ricciardi 1970/71:Fig. 94, No. 76; Oates & Oates 1959:230, No. 5; Debevoise 1934
10-4	118-38	1	UP	rim sherd; reddish colour and coarse inclusions with small stones, grit, and sand	Oates & Oates 1959:231, No. 50; Ricciardi 1970/71:Fig. 90, No. 27; Adams 1970:Fig. 6, No. 14
10-5	119-39	1	UP	rope decoration body sherd; reddish colour with sand and grit inclusions	Keall 1981:Fig. 28, No. 6
10-6	120-40	1	UP	rim sherd; tan/brown colour with grit and sand inclusions	Ricciardi 1970/71:Fig. 94, No. 69
10-7	121-41	1	UP	large ceramic piece, unknown function	
10-8	122-42	1	UP	rim sherd; reddish colour with sand and grit inclusions	Oates & Oates 1959:233, No. 92; Adams 1970:Fig. 6, No. 48

11-1	74	1	citadel area	green glazed body sherds	Adams 1970: Ptl. 2, Fig. 5 & Fig. 6, bx; Keal & Keal 1981:Fig. 23, No. 12, 27
12-1	8-53	1, floor	R20	reddish/brown impressed cross on sherd; sand and grit inclusions	Simpson 2013:Fig. 5 ; Starr 1937:Pl 136, E
12-2	14-57	1	Near W11 and R11	rounded stamped ceramic showing a three-leaf plant design	Schmidt 1937:344
12-3	24-3	1, floor	R3	cross-shaped stamped ceramic	Simpson 2013:114, Fig. 3, No.23, Fig. 5; Starr 1937:Pl 136, E
12-4	113-33	1	R10 near H1	cross- or star-shaped stamped ceramic	Simpson 2013:114, Fig. 3, No.23, Fig. 5; Starr 1937:Pl 136, E

**Table 1.** Descriptions of pottery indicated in Figs. 6-12. In the find location column, UP is for unprovenanced.

## Discussion and Summary

Overall, the site of Merquly appears to be a fortress that dates to the late Sassanian period. This appears to be supported by the ceramic finds evident at the site. The presence of a nearby rock relief provisionally dated to the late Parthian could suggest the site was constructed after the relief had already been made. We cannot exclude the possibility that an earlier Parthian phase is present at the site, that might be associated with the relief found nearby, but a clear Parthian phase has not been ascertainable at this stage. Nevertheless, simply going with the finds, we have to conclude that Merquly is a Sassanid site, while the relation to the nearby rock relief is not entirely clear without further investigations.

From the ceramics, parallels, particularly from Figs. 11 and 12, are found in relatively nearby sites from northern and southern Iraq (Starr 1937:Pl 136; Ricciardi, 1967; Adams 1970; Ricciardi, 1970/71; Wilkinson & Tucker 1995; Altaweel 2006; Simpson 2013:114,



Fig. 3, No.23) and Western Iran (Keal 1969; Keal & Keal 1981). However, some of the general styles, as one might expect during a period when the Sassanian empire ruled a large region, show similarity to other regions, including other parts of Iran (Schmidt 1937:344; Whitcomb 1987; Sajjadi 1989; Kennet 2002; Hojabri-Nobari et al. 2011), Turkey (Wilkinson 1990), the Gulf (Sasaki & Sasaki 1996; Kennet 2004), and Central Asia (Hermann et al. 2001). Similarities to these regions suggest Merquly has likely cultural similarities with more distant regions, but as scholars have indicated (Boucharlat & Haerinck 1992) there is still much to learn regarding regional variations and understanding of ceramic styles within the Sassanian period.

As for architectural similarities with other nearby regions and citadels/fortresses from the Sassanian period, so far no similarities with other sites are overtly evident, although this might be due to Merquly's relatively less preserved architecture. While the location and known architecture suggest Merquly served as a type of fortress, the functional nature of the site is still unclear. Qal'eh-i Yazdigird is a site that is relatively near Merquly, located at about 120 KM southeast of Merquly, and seems to have a comparable location and setting to Merquly, with the fortifications at Qal'eh-i Yazdigird potentially resembling Merquly and being located on an uneven elevated area in the Zagros. In the case of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird, the preservation is better and clear fortress towers are present (Keall 1967 & 1982; Keall & Keall 1981), although in the case of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird one of the fortresses is dated to late Parthian period (Keall 1977). There also seems to be fortress towers at Merquly, similar to Qal'eh-i Yazdigird, but the towers are not preserved at Merquly and a simple surface examination was not sufficient to determine the plan of these towers. Kala Dawar, a site near Qal'eh-i Yazdigird, is dated to Sassanian and later periods (Keall & Keall 1981; Keal 1982). This particular site does show a plan with a courtyard layout surrounded by long L-shaped corridors similar to what is apparent at Merquly (Fig. 3).

Merquly could also be similar to Qasr-i Abu Nasr (Whitcomb 1985:94), located in Southwest Iran near Shiraz, which is a type of fortified town and fortress area, albeit Merquly would likely be at a smaller scale. As Whitcomb points out in discussing Qasr-i Abu Nasr, such citadel and fortress sites are difficult to discern architecturally since often they can be products of numerous architectural phases influencing what actually remains and is evident in excavations. While only two main building phases are known at Merquly, it is possible that other phases have been missed or are difficult to discern archaeologically since other parts of the site have not been investigated. Future excavations along the identified possible tower areas could clarify the architecture. Overall, architectural comparisons are still tentative without further excavations.

Further clarifying the history of the site will be the primary goal in any future excavations of this site, including if preceding Parthian evidence can be found and linked to the relief in the area. The site's strategic location, on a height next to a pass going into the Permagroun, would suggest the area should have been important to fortify or protect in many periods, as the more recent Iraqi Army disturbances in the area suggest. Overall, the presence of stone materials on the surface near the excavated area does suggest the citadel is probably part of a larger fortified complex.

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