

# Report of the Project "Wadi Abu Dom Investigations III – El Rum Oasis" Thirteenth Season, 20.01.-15.03.2020

---

*Funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG)*

**Angelika Lohwasser/Tim Karberg**  
University of Muenster, Germany

## 1 Staff

Lohwasser, Prof. Dr. Angelika (Archaeologist, Project Director)

Karberg, Dr. Tim (Archaeologist, Field Director)

Eger, Jana M.A. (Archaeologist)

Mohammed el Toum, (Archaeologist/Inspector, NCAM)

Loai Shamsola (Archaeologist/Inspector, NCAM)

Haupt-Faria, Laura B.A. (Technical Archaeologist)

Stöckert, Laurin B.A. (Student of Archaeology)

Mohr, Fides B.A. (Student of Archaeology)

Abdo, Zeinab B.A. (Student of Archaeology)

## 2 Proposed work

As stated within the letter to the Director General of the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums from January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, two areas of interest inside the building complex of Umm Ruweim (Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary survey number: Site 400, Feature 1) were defined: Area A in the central courtyard, as well as area B in the western rooms of the middle casemate. Trenches at area A should clarify the stratigraphic (and therefore chronological) coherence between the middle casemate and the central building; trenches at area B should clarify the internal chronology and room functions at this part of the building complex. The field campaign was initially planned from January 20<sup>th</sup> until March 20<sup>th</sup>.

## 3 Realized work

Because of the worldwide outbreak of the COVID-19 disease and the subsequent announcement of the Sudan to close its borders, the campaign had to be stopped at March 15<sup>th</sup>. Nevertheless, all planned work was realized; additionally, already some trenches planned for the proposed autumn campaign 2020 were already started (cf. paragraph 3.1.2.1). Altogether, 13 trenches were opened (Figure 1).

## 3.1 Fieldwork

### 3.1.1 Excavations in area A

In order to clarify the stratigraphic connection between the middle room structure and the central building, a line of trenches was excavated, and a linear section documented. It turned out that both building structures are stratigraphically contemporary to each other. Prove of this by C14 dates is still pending.

#### 3.1.1.1 Trench 03

Trench 03 was set out around the former trench A of the architectural documentation campaign carried out in 2011.<sup>1</sup> Around the already excavated former small-scale sounding (Figure 2), the trench was excavated until the geological soil. It revealed that at least three utilization phases of the building could be reconstructed, corresponding to two phases of plastering of the internal wall, and at least one additional repair of the plastering (Figure 3). All different plaster layers were carried out with relatively soft mud and/or clay plaster. Within a fourth utilization phase, large amounts of goat faeces were found on a secondary floor layer, indicating that this part of the building was later used by herders, this can be interpreted as squatter occupation. The goat faeces were probed.

At the foot of the wall, the foundation layer of stones was set directly on top of the geological soil without any visible construction pit.

#### 3.1.1.2 Trench 04

This trench was set out directly prolonging trench 03. Besides its primary intention, generating a linear section towards the central building, it also revealed archaeological record for two utilization phases of the building. At the lower floor level immediately above the geological soil (corresponding to the oldest plaster phase, cf. 3.1.1.1), a set of post-holes was documented, indicating that inside the central courtyard during this early occupation phase lightweight vegetable architecture was used (Figure 4). The patterns of the post hole settings do not allow a reconstruction of the general layout of the lightweight architectural construction, but comparisons with recent *rakuba* constructions (some of them in the direct vicinity) show that small scale changes within these buildings over a comparatively short-time period may result in rather complicated post-setting patterns without significant stratigraphic differentiation in between.

At a younger floor level, large scale lenticular ash concentrations (stratigraphically corresponding to the later plaster phase) indicate fires affecting this utilization phase (Figure 5); the structure and dimensions of these ash concentrations indicate destruction incidents rather than kitchen fires.

#### 3.1.1.3 Trench 05

Trench 05 was set out immediately northeast of trench 04. It continues the direct line of sections towards the central building. Within the archaeological record, it shows strong

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Eigner/Karberg: W.A.D.I. 2011: Die Bauaufnahme in Umm Ruweim. MittSAG 22, 2011, pp. 69-84.

resemblances to trench 04: The stratigraphically younger large-scale ash concentrations as well as the older post hole settings at the initial floor level directly above the geological soil are also found here.

#### 3.1.1.4 Trench 06

This trench also continues the direct line of sections towards the central building. Similar to trenches 04 and 05, comparable ash concentrations and post-hole settings were documented at the same levels.

#### 3.1.1.5 Trench 07

This trench continues the line of sections until the edge of the southern wall of the central building. As the wall surface at trench 03 (cf. 3.1.1.1), it shows two different plastering phases (no additional repair phase is visible here). Compared to the plaster documented at trench 03, the plaster material shows remarkable differences: Lighter in colour and much harder, it most probably contains lime components. This corresponds to a significant hardness of the directly adjacent soil substrate. The plaster was probed in order to verify the assumption of lime components within the plaster.

As at trench 03, the foundation layer of the outer wall of the central building was set directly on the geological soil, without any traces of a continuous construction pit. Only at solitary spots the floor level was obviously smoothed with a *toria* or a similar construction tool. The comparison of the stratigraphy directly adjacent to the wall foots at the trenches 03 and 07 shows that the middle casemate and at least the southern outer wall of the central building are stratigraphically contemporary to each other.

### 3.1.2 Excavations in area B

The trenches inside this area were set out in order to clarify the general character of the filling of the casemate rooms, the internal chronology of the corresponding walls, and the functions of these rooms. It turned out that the southern part of the casemate structure was terraced intentionally (trenches 08-10), while its northern part was filled by regularly accumulating stratigraphy (trench 15).

#### 3.1.2.1 Trench 08

This large trench showed large assemblages of bulk material, clearly filled in intentionally. At the surfaces of the bulk assemblages, some ash concentrations were documented; they might be interpreted as remains of small-scale food preparation fires during the construction works.

Immediately above the geological soil, only small scale non-intentional stratigraphy was documented, indicating that before the filling the room was used only to a small extent. No clear utilization floor with any functional installations was found.

Investigation of the wall foots indicate that the (long) eastern wall and most parts of the (long) western wall were erected directly at the geological soil, while the (short) southern and northern walls were to some extent erected on thin anthropogenic strata. This indicates that the short walls are stratigraphically younger than the long outer ones. Nevertheless, the

structure of these strata points to an only short chronological interval between these construction segments. Therefore, these observations might be interpreted as changes within the planning and construction process rather than functionally differentiated building phases.

An interesting detail are some larger repairs close to the north-eastern corner of the room, carried out in pisé technique rather than mud brick (Figure 6).

#### 3.1.2.2 *Trench 09*

Similar to trench 08, the room of trench 09 was intentionally terraced with bulk material, and the primary floor level shows no installations hinting to any initial utilization of the room. Interestingly, two of the interior walls are plastered with relatively soft mud plaster. At the eastern wall, two small windows were closed intentionally prior to the input of the terrace filling material (Figure 7). The plaster of the eastern and the northern wall prolong below the edges of the southern and the western wall, indicating that these walls are stratigraphically younger than the plastered ones. Nevertheless, the structure of the stratigraphy at the foots of these walls (as well as the internal logic of the architectural layout) lead to the assumption that this is caused by changes within the planning and construction process rather than two different building (and utilization) phases.

#### 3.1.2.3 *Trench 10*

This trench was set out close to a platform in the western corner of the central courtyard in order to clarify possible connections of the terracing of this part of the casemate with the platform. It turned out that the surface of the terraced filling was still below the level of the platform and not directly connected with it. In general, the stratigraphy at trench 10 shows clear indications of intentionally filling with bulk material. As at trenches 08 and 09, only few indications of utilization of the primary floor level directly above the geological soil are visible. In this thin stratum, remains of the bones of a large mammal (probably bovid or equid) were documented, but without any further installations explaining the presence of these faunal remains inside a relatively small room.

At the topmost level of the trench's stratigraphy, an inclined setting of mud bricks was documented, maybe remains of a vaulted roof (Figure 8). If this interpretation is correct, the barrel vault would have been erected on top of the intentional terracing, and not represent an earlier construction phase connected to any primary utilization of the original floor level.

#### 3.1.2.4 *Trench 15*

This trench was set out to clarify the character of the filling of this room, and their connection to the intentional terracing of the rooms south of it. It turned out that – contrary to the rooms to the south – the stratigraphy inside this room shows no traces of the intentional input of bulk material, but regularly accumulated strata connected to anthropogenic utilization. Due to the abortion of the field campaign, the geological soil was not reached; the archaeological excavation shall be continued in the planned forthcoming autumn campaign.

An opening in the upper part of the wall between trenches 15 and 09 (Figure 9) might have granted access from the (lower) floor level at trench 15 to the (upper) terraced surface at trench 09.

### 3.1.3 Excavations east of area B

East of area B, additional trenches were opened in order to clarify architectural details at the eastern faces of some walls already investigated in area B.

#### 3.1.3.1 Trench 11

This trench was set out in order to clarify a wall segment documented in trench 08 and there interpreted as a blocking of an earlier opening. After it turned out that it was only a repair of the wall face (and therefore the questioned architectural detail was clarified), the trench was finished.

#### 3.1.3.2 Trench 12

This trench was intended to clarify the architectural and stratigraphic connection between the southern wall of the middle casemate and the platform construction in the western corner of the central courtyard. It turned out that the walls of the casemate and the platform construction are interlocked with each other, indicating a contemporary construction of both structures. Verification of this assumption at the wall foots is intended for the planned forthcoming autumn campaign.

Additionally, a stratum with large amounts of goats faeces was documented here, corresponding to the similar layer at trench 03 (cf. 3.1.1.1), indicating (squatter) use larger parts of the central courtyard by herders. The goat faeces were probed.

#### 3.1.3.3 Trench 13

This trench was intended to clarify the architectural and stratigraphic connection between the western wall of the middle casemate and the abovementioned platform construction, as well as the access to it. It turned out that access to the platform was granted via a large-scale staircase prolonging into the central courtyard at least 5,5 meters (Figure 10). The wall foot of this staircase was erected directly on top of the geological soil, and therefore stratigraphically contemporary to the casemate wall. The single stairs were made of stone slabs and reinforced by wooden beams still found in situ.

#### 3.1.3.4 Trench 14

This trench was set out at the eastern face of a wall already documented at trench 08 (cf. 3.1.2.1) in order to clarify the lower wall structure at the opposite face of the pisé repair. It turned out that at this face no traces of the repair are visible. This assumption shall be verified by excavating this trench until the geological soil in the planned forthcoming autumn campaign.

Additionally, also in this trench remains of squatter utilization by herders (larger amounts of goat faeces) were found, corresponding to similar layers at trenches 03 (cf. 3.1.1.1) and 12 (cf. 3.1.3.2).

### 3.1.4 Architectural documentation

For the drawing of a detailed plan (augmenting the already existing architectural ground plan), 7.000 photos of the walls were produced as well as about 450 measurements with the total station. The whole complex was documented in this way except the three rooms with running excavation.

## 3.2 Post-processing of archaeological finds

Since fieldwork at Umm Ruweim is still at its very beginning, the main focus of finds post-processing still was on the material collected at El Tuweina during the 2017 – 2019 campaigns.

### 3.2.1 Ceramics

The complete pottery of the excavation in El Tuweina was washed and sorted. Many pots could be partly restored and glued, thus the whole convolute is ready for study by a specialist in the next campaign.

The pottery of the recent excavation in Umm Ruweim was partly washed (due to daily shortage of water in Karima we could not complete this task during the spring campaign).

The new find magazine is established, and all finds from the excavation in El Tuweina and Umm Ruweim are stored on shelves.

### 3.2.2 Small finds

The catalogue of the small finds from El Tuweina is completed (excel list with measurements and description, photos). Some special small finds were drawn.

The bulk of the small finds consists of beads (more than 2000 disc-shaped beads made of ostrich eggshell as well as stone, nearly 200 beads of faience, most of them cylindrical). Additionally, few pendants of stone (mostly drop shaped) were recorded. Additionally, small finds made of metal, bone, and clay were recorded:

- Metal finds (iron and bronze): 3 arrow heads, 3 needles, 4 finger rings (Figure 11), 2 small hooks
- 2 fragments of archer's rings of stone
- 1 spinning whorl of pottery
- 1 gaming piece?
- 1 pendant or stamp, worked of a bone and pierced (Figure 12)
- Fragments of figures of unburnt clay: 1 torso, 1 head, several legs and horns as well as body parts of bovid figures
- 1 part of an udjat-shaped amulet made of faience
- 3 fragments of 1 small cup of fine clay with decoration (lotus flower?)

The small finds can be divided in four groups:

- Beads, abundant on all sites at any time: no specific meaning of site or context or any dating can be deduced

- Objects common in Meroitic settlements: archer's rings, arrow heads, needles, hooks, finger rings, spinning whorl, gaming piece
- Objects which may be common, but seldom published and therefore difficult to interpret, especially since they are abundant in Tuweina: figures of bovines of unburnt clay. This may hint to an extraordinary position of bovines at this spot, or to a generally high prestige of bovines.
- Imported objects, either from Egypt or at least from the elite settlements at the Nile: udjat, decorated cup.

#### 4 Proposal for future activities

Since some of the trenches intended to be opened in autumn 2020 were already started, re-opening of these trenches is now planned for the forthcoming campaign. This is the case for trenches 12, 13, 14, and 15. Additionally, excavation work can be started at the small building of Umm Ruweim 3, located approx. 390 m south-west of Umm Ruweim 1, at the edge between the flood terrace and the wadi bed, as well as at three ancient wells recorded during the Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary survey campaign in 2013.<sup>2</sup> The ceramics finds of the spring and autumn campaign at El Rum oasis as well as the remaining ceramics material of the 2019 campaign at El Tuweina will be documented and analyzed by specialists; therefore, the deployment of two ceramologists is planned for the forthcoming autumn campaign.

#### 5 Endangered sites

No fresh disturbances of cultural heritage sites were observed during the campaign. A new car track was marked outside the fence around the site leading from the main track along the wadi bed to the main entrance of the building (and the tourist information panel erected in 2015) in order to guide tourists to the site without disturbing the archaeological record at the flood terrace in front of the building. The new track was already used by tourists during the campaign.

#### 6 Final remarks

We would like to thank Mr. Mohammed el Toum and Mr. Loai Shamsola very much for all their indispensable help and smooth organization! They have acted as good mediators to the people in the Wadi Abu Dom as well as experts for organization and especially as good friends to us!

Berlin, 31.03.2020

Angelika Lohwasser/Tim Karberg

---

<sup>2</sup> Lohwasser/Karberg: Das Projekt Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary (W.A.D.I.). Kampagne 2013. MittSAG 24, 2013, pp. 39-50

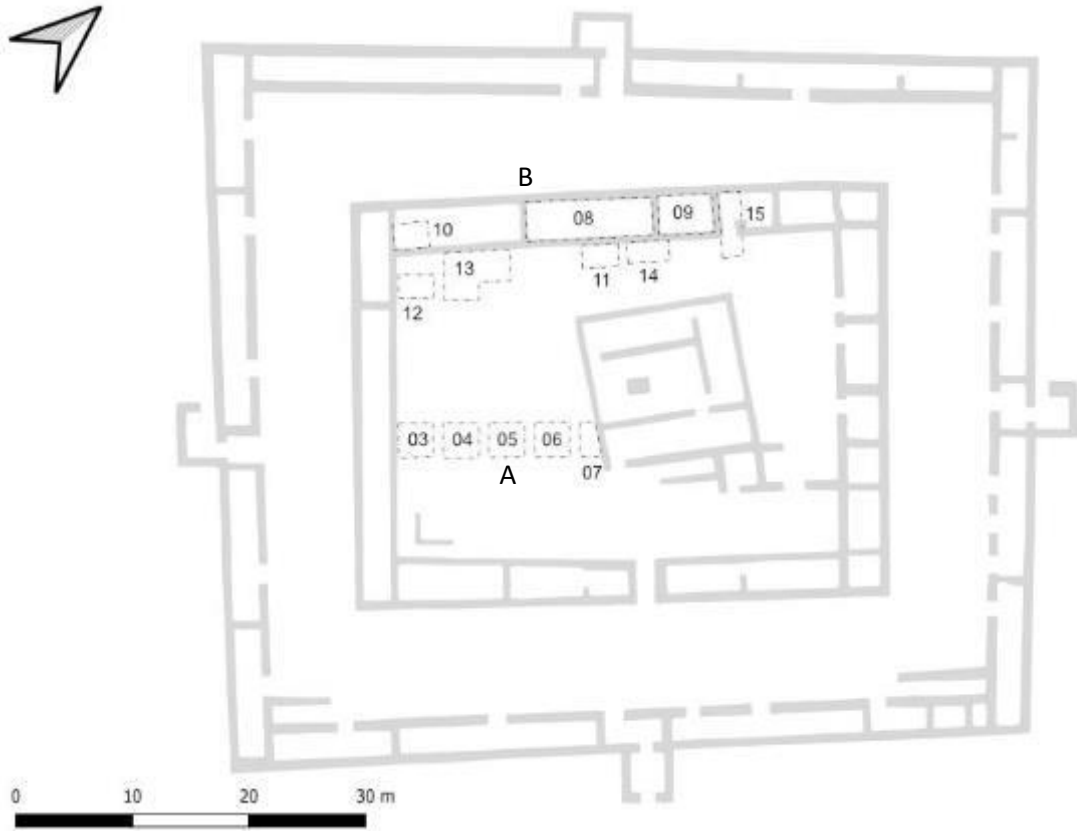


Figure 1: Trench plan (spring campaign 2020) with areas A and B as specified in the initial campaign plan

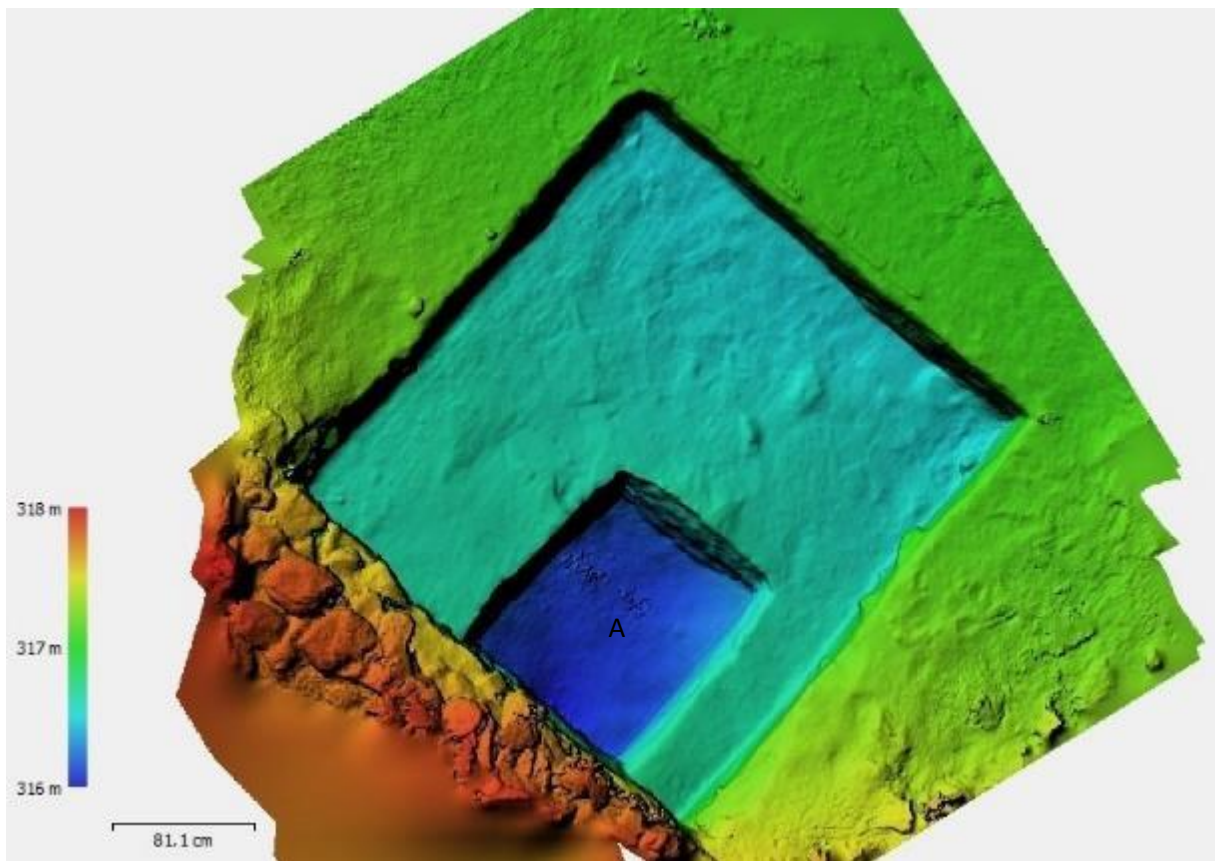


Figure 2: Digital elevation model of trench 03 (with former trench A) during excavation



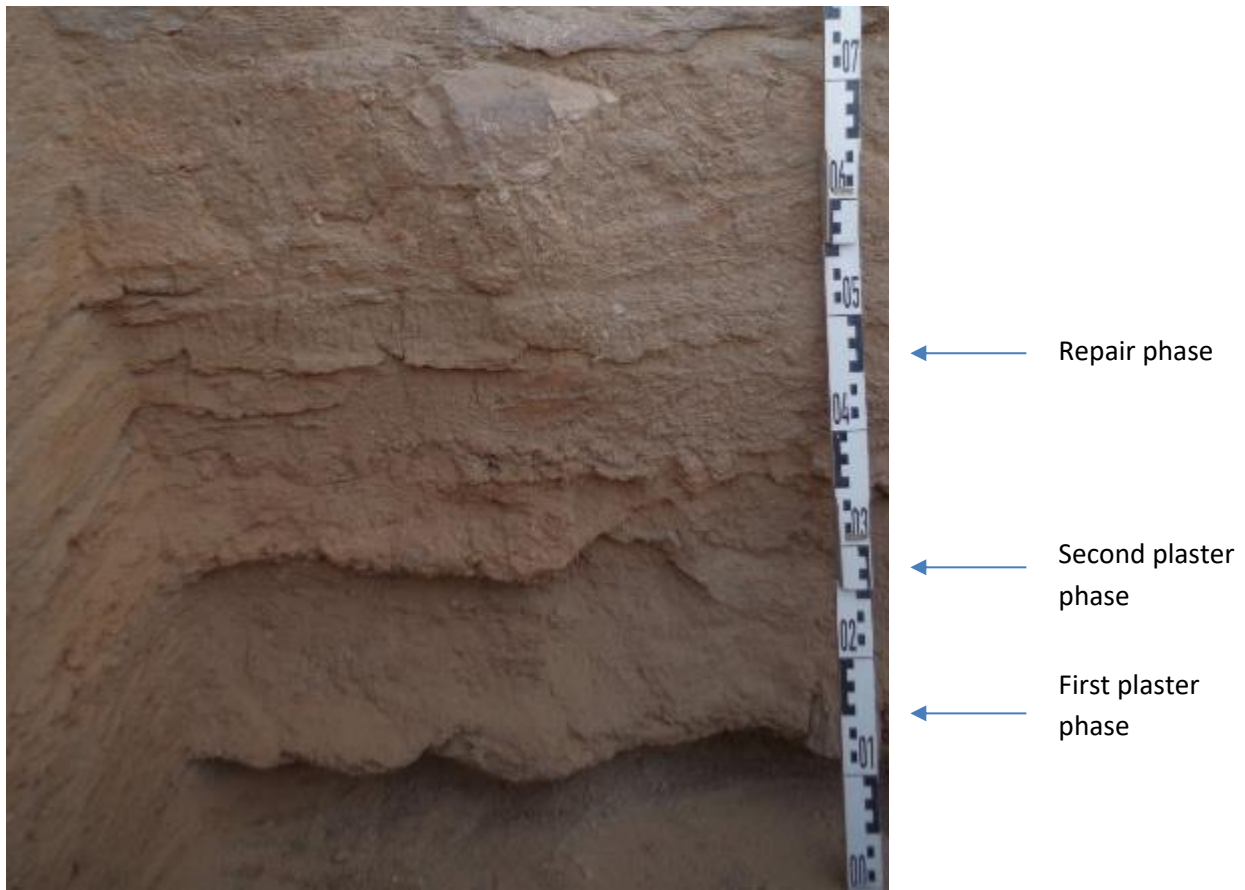


Figure 3: Plaster phases at trench 03

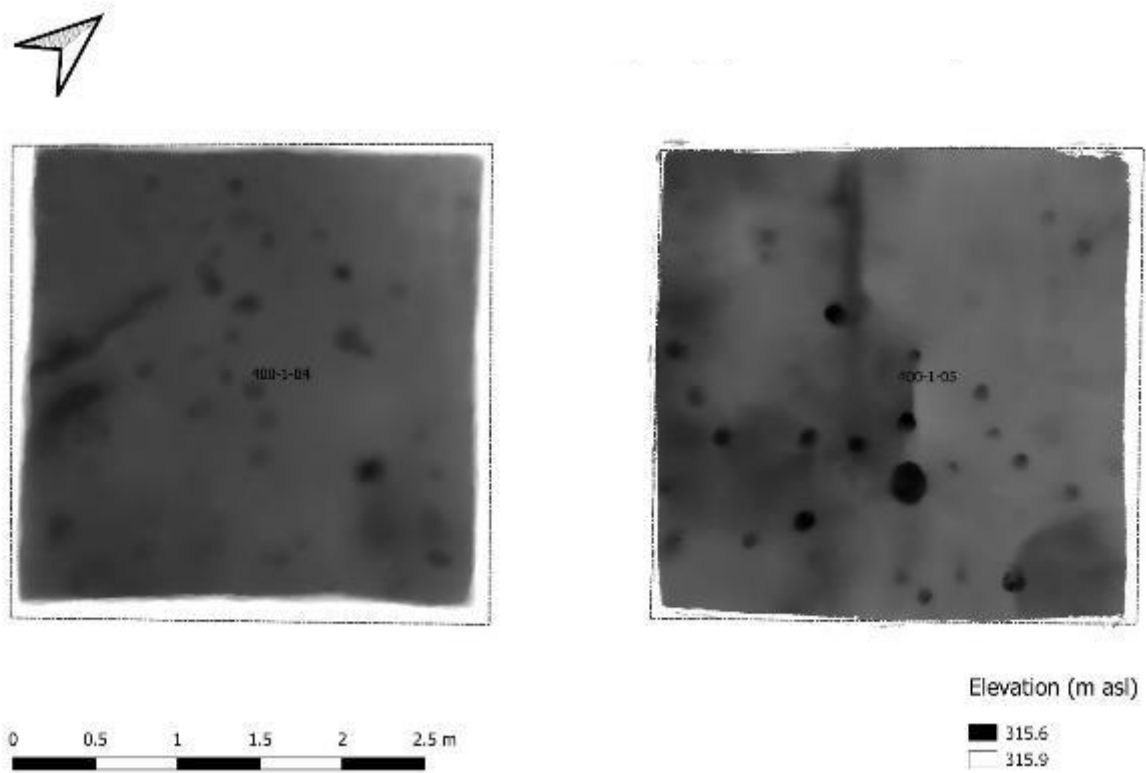


Figure 4: Post holes at trenches 04 and 05 (digital elevation model)



Figure 5: Trench 04 section east (with large lenticular ash concentration)



Figure 6: Pisé repairs at the eastern wall at trench 08



Figure 7: Plaster and small windows at the eastern wall at trench 09



Figure 8: Inclined setting of mud bricks, probably remains of the foundation of a barrel vault



Figure 9: Opening in the upper part of the wall between trenches 09 and 15



Figure 10: Staircase at trench 13 (assembled orthophoto segments)



Figure 11: Metal ring from El Tuweina (documented during the 2020 spring campaign)



Figure 12: Stamp made from bone