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Volume 2

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Egypt and Ancient Near East – Perceptions of Alterity
Edited by Susanne Bickel

Ancient Near Eastern Traditions
vs. Hellenization/Romanization
Edited by Bruno Jacobs

Reconstructing Ancient Eco-Systems
Edited by Jean-Marie Le Tensorer

Islamic Session
Edited by Denis Genequand

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Giulio Maresca

Echoes of Regional Traditions plus Western Typological Influences: Some Notes about the Post-Achaemenid Pottery Assemblage from the Italian Excavations at Qal'a-ye Sam (Iran, Sistan)

In 1964 some trenches were excavated at Qal'a-ye Sam (Iran, Sistan) by an Italian team of IsMEO. The reappraisal of the unpublished ceramic assemblage reveals a pottery production which, despite Hellenistic morphological influences, still holds strong ties with the ceramic tradition attested in the region during the Achaemenid period.¹

In the autumn of 1959, IsMEO (Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente) started its archaeological activities (1959–1978) in the eastern Iranian region of Sistan with a survey carried out by its Co-founder and President, Prof. Giuseppe Tucci². After two preliminary campaigns in 1960 and 1961³, from 1962 the attention of the IsMEO focused on the site of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, in the vicinity of the village called Qal'a-ye Now, at about 30 kilometres south-east from the city of Zabul. At Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, the late Prof. Umberto Scerrato⁴

- 1 The present reappraisal of the ceramic assemblage from the Italian excavations at Qal'a-ye Sam is centred on the preliminary results of an ongoing research carried out in the frame of a wider scientific project based at the Università degli Studi di Napoli «L'Orientale» (UNO) under the direction by Prof. Bruno Genito (Chair of Iranian Archaeology and Art History). This project, *Archaeo.Pro. Di.Mu.S (Archaeological Project Digital and Multimedia Sistan)*, aims at implementing a WebGIS to store and manage the chartaceous photographic dataset and (together with it) the huge amount of related archaeological information produced by the Italian archaeological activities of the 60's and the 70's at the sites of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, Qal'a-ye Tepe and Qal'a-ye Sam (Genito/Maresca et al. 2013; Genito i. p.; Maresca i. p.). For this reason, this paper has to be considered strictly connected with the contribution by Genito et al. 2016.
- 2 Briefly hinted at by IsMEO (Anonymous 1959).
- 3 Reported in the IsMEO Journal (Anonymous 1961a: 82; 1961b).
- 4 This paper is dedicated to the memory of the late Prof. Umberto Scerrato, Director of the Italian IsMEO Archaeological Mission at the historical sites of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, Qal'a-ye Sam and

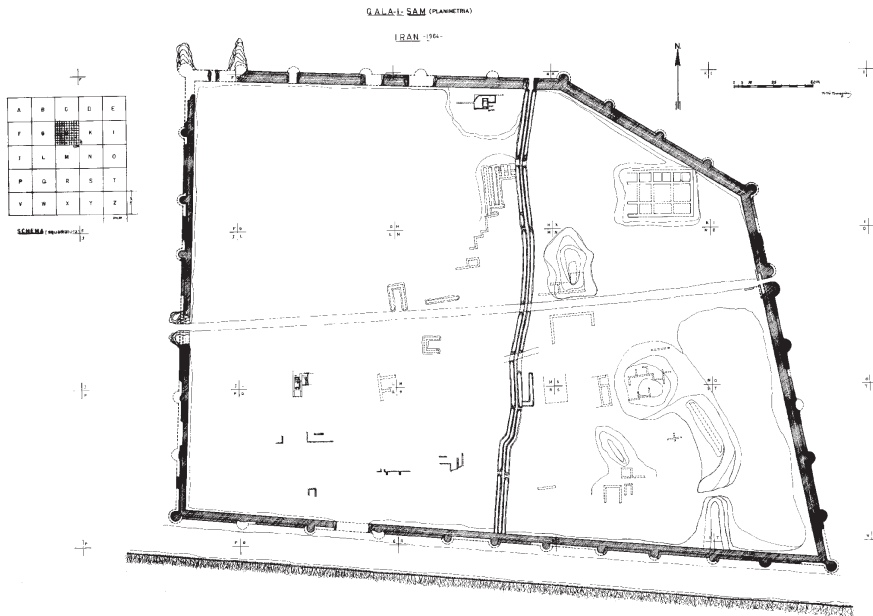


Fig. 1. General plan of Qal'a-ye Sam drawn by Mr. Tullio Tamagnini in 1964 (IsMEO/IsIAO drawings archive; inventory no. 1330). Not to scale.

directed several seasons (1962–1965 and 1975–1977) of excavations and restoration activities⁵, revealing a noticeable complex of buildings of a possible Achaemenid period.

Beside the main archaeological activities at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, the scientific interest of the IsMEO team headed by Scerrato in Iranian Sistan was attracted by two other smaller sites. In 1961 and 1962 soundings were carried out at the citadel of Qal'a-ye Tepe (about 15 kilometres north-east of Zabul), while in 1964 some trial trenches were excavated at the fortified site of Qal'a-ye Sam (located at about 20 kilometres west of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān). The activities at Qal'a-ye Tepe and Qal'a-ye Sam had the aim to investigate the development

Qal'a-ye Tepe in Iranian Sistan, in the year of the 10th anniversary of his demise (2004–2014). For this reason, all the pictures and the drawings shown (Figs. 1–6) are part of the IsMEO/IsIAO archive enriched also thanks to his scientific efforts.

- 5 The results of those activities were published until the IsMEO Mission was active on the field (Scerrato 1962; 1966a; 1966b; 1970; 1972; 1979; Mariani 1977; 1979). Nevertheless, the attention of the IsMEO (later IsIAO, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente) and (from 2003 onwards) of the Chair of Iranian Archaeology and Art History at UNO towards those archaeological excavations never ceased during the following decades, as testified by the publication of several contributions regarding various issues related to those scientific activities, as recently summarised (Genito 2012: 365–366; Genito/Maresca et al. 2013: 183–184; Genito i. p.).



Fig. 2. Detail of a segment of the mudbrick wall at Qal'a-ye Sam as seen from the exterior (IsMEO/IsIAO photographic archive; inventory no. 4328/3).

both of the settlement patterns and the ceramic sequence during post-Achaemenid phases of the historical period in that area.⁶

6 The results of those soundings, unfortunately, were never published in detail; they were just hinted at in the publication regarding building QN3 at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān (Scerrato 1966a: 466–467), in the communication written by Scerrato for the Dante Alighieri Society in Florence (Scerrato 1970: 136–139) and in the brief communication on the IsMEO archaeological activities in Sistan read during the Fifth International Congress on Iranian Art and Archaeology held in April 1968 at Tehran (Scerrato 1972: 202–203). In recent years, nevertheless, the writer carried out a preliminary synthesis of the results from the excavation trenches at Qal'a-ye Sam (Maresca 2008: 68–70) as well as a preliminary reappraisal of the pottery brought to light during those activities (Maresca 2008: 135–139). Also the data from the soundings at Qal'a-ye Tepe and the related pottery fragments were object of some preliminary studies (Maresca 2008: 70–72, 123–130; Olimpo 2009).



Fig. 3. The monumental entrance at Qal'a-ye Sam as seen from the exterior (IsMEO/IsIAO photographic archive; inventory no. 3067/2).

Located at about 27 kilometres south-west of Zabul, towards the western limit of the present-day Hilmand delta, in the vicinity of Sekuhe, the citadel of Qal'a-ye Sam⁷, whose ancient name remains unknown, was founded on the top of a slightly elevated alluvial deposit. The perimeter of the wall surrounding the citadel (**figs. 1–2**) has a sub-quadrangular shape, with a blunted north-eastern edge, following both the natural conformation of the terrain and the course of an ancient canal, which was still partially in use at the time of the excavations by the IsMEO team. A monumental entrance defended by two towers (**fig. 3**) gave access into the citadel by means of a street having a ENE-WSW orientation.

After a brief survey in 1960, the IsMEO Archaeological Mission carried out some trenches in 1964, together with the drawing of a preliminary plan (**fig. 1**) including the structures visible inside the perimeter of the citadel. According to the extant information⁸, the excava-

7 The site had been already reported by other scholars (Tate 1910–12: I, 238; Fairservis 1961: 39, site no. 6).

8 If we exclude the already mentioned brief reports by Scerrato (see note no. 6) and some information given by the excavator of Kuh-e Khwaje (Gullini 1966: 303–304, figs. 231–235), no further details



Fig. 4. Structural remains excavated at Qal'a-ye Sam in 1964 (IsMEO/IsIAO photographic archive; inventory no. 4334/6).

tions discovered structural remains (**fig. 4**) pertaining to at least two different chronological phases (each of them divided in several sub-phases). A third and more ancient phase, indeed, was detected and partially investigated only in one of the trenches and, on the basis of the ceramic evidence, was dated to the late-Seleucid/early-Parthian period. Unfortunately, further excavations were not carried out in the following years to confirm such a chronological attribution⁹.

about the excavations at Qal'a-ye Sam were published. New data are expected from the ongoing reappraisal of the documental archive at our disposal in Italy (since the year 2003 progressively transferred from IsIAO in Rome to CISA – Centro Interdipartimentale di Servizi di Archeologia – at UNO, in order to be entirely digitalised), made up mostly by photographic material and excavation drawings (Maresca i. p.).

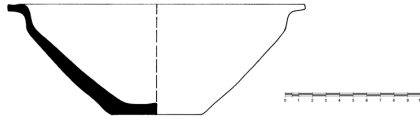
9 In 1973 Scerrato carried out a brief survey, probably in order to plan new soundings (Anonymous 1973: 418), but the excavations were never resumed.

The corpus of ceramics coming from the excavations at Qal'a-ye Sam has never been published in a complete way.¹⁰ The assemblage representing the main object of this paper is made up by about two hundred ceramic fragments transferred to Italy in the late 60's of the last century, on the basis of an agreement between IsMEO and the former Imperial Service for the Antiquities of Iran. While some objects were stored at MNAOr (Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale) – presently MNAO (Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale «Giuseppe Tucci») – in Rome, the great bulk of the fragments were stored at the Centro Scavi of the IsMEO (later IsIAO, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente), in Rome. Since 2011, nevertheless, the fragments previously at the Centro Scavi are stored at the CISA (Centro Intedipartimentale di Servizi per l'Archeologia) at UNO (Università degli Studi di Napoli «L'Orientale»), in Naples.

Despite the limited number of ceramic fragments in the assemblage from Qal'a-ye Sam at our disposal in Italy, it has been possible to distinguish several different ceramic fabrics on a macroscopic level¹¹, even if the most frequently attested are the ones labelled as Fabric QS1¹² and Fabric QS2¹³.

- 10 However, preliminary information was given in some papers by Scerrato (see note no. 6), in a general work on the pottery from the Parthian Period in Iran (Haerincx 1983: 214–222, figs. 36–37 and Pl. XIV: 1–6), in a review-article of the latter monograph (Vogelsang 1985: 167–169), in the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome (D'Amore 1999) and in a preliminary article by Genito (2010: 104, n. 3, fig. 5).
- 11 Fabrics have been named after the first letters of the site name (QS), followed by a progressive numeration; the fabrics sharing some common features have been named as belonging to the same «family» (e.g. Fabric QS1, QS1.1 etc.). It is possible, however, that this number will increase or decrease in the light of further archaeometric analyses on the ceramic fragments at our disposal, clarifying if fabrics presently retained as different at a macroscopic level should instead be considered as numerable among the existing ones or *vice versa*.
- 12 Fabric QS1 has a light red (2.5 YR 6/8), quite compact clay body and presents a fracture of slightly granular appearance. A series of quite frequent inclusions are distributed with uniformity; the most characteristic of them present a small or medium size, a rounded morphology and a white-yellowish colour; small and round dark-grey inclusions are also present but with lower frequency. Quite small pores (both bladed and circular) are uniformly distributed in the ceramic body. Surfaces are usually covered by a quite thick slip, almost always red (similar to 10 R 4/8).
- 13 Fabric QS2 has a reddish yellow (5YR 7/6), compact and very well refined clay body; the fracture presents a very neat even if slightly granular appearance. At a macroscopic level there are only traces of extremely small and sporadic inclusions having round shape and white-yellowish or dark-grey colour. The external surfaces are sometimes covered by a thin light slip (similar to 10 YR 8/4). Very often, moreover, surfaces can present a quite thick slip of a lacquer-red (similar to 10 R 4/8) or dark-orange (similar to 5 YR 7/8) colour.

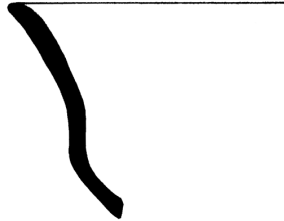
Inv. 204
scale 1:5



Inv. 234
scale 1:5



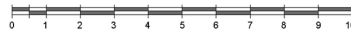
Inv. 235
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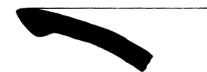
Inv. 236
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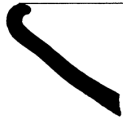
Inv. 8
scale 1:2



Inv. 140
scale 1:2



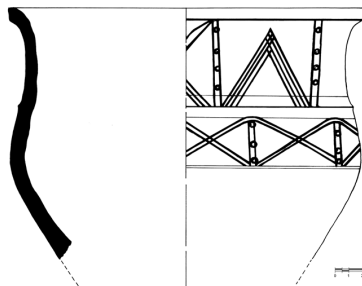
Inv. 106
scale 1:2



Inv. 107
scale 1:2



Inv. 81
scale 1:5



Inv. 147
scale 1:5

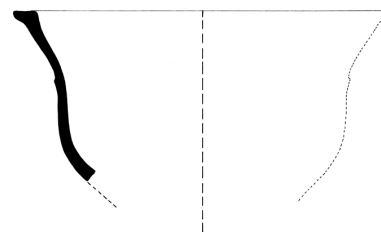


Fig. 5. Main vessel forms discussed in the text (photographs and drawings from the IsMEO/IsIAO archive). Not to scale.

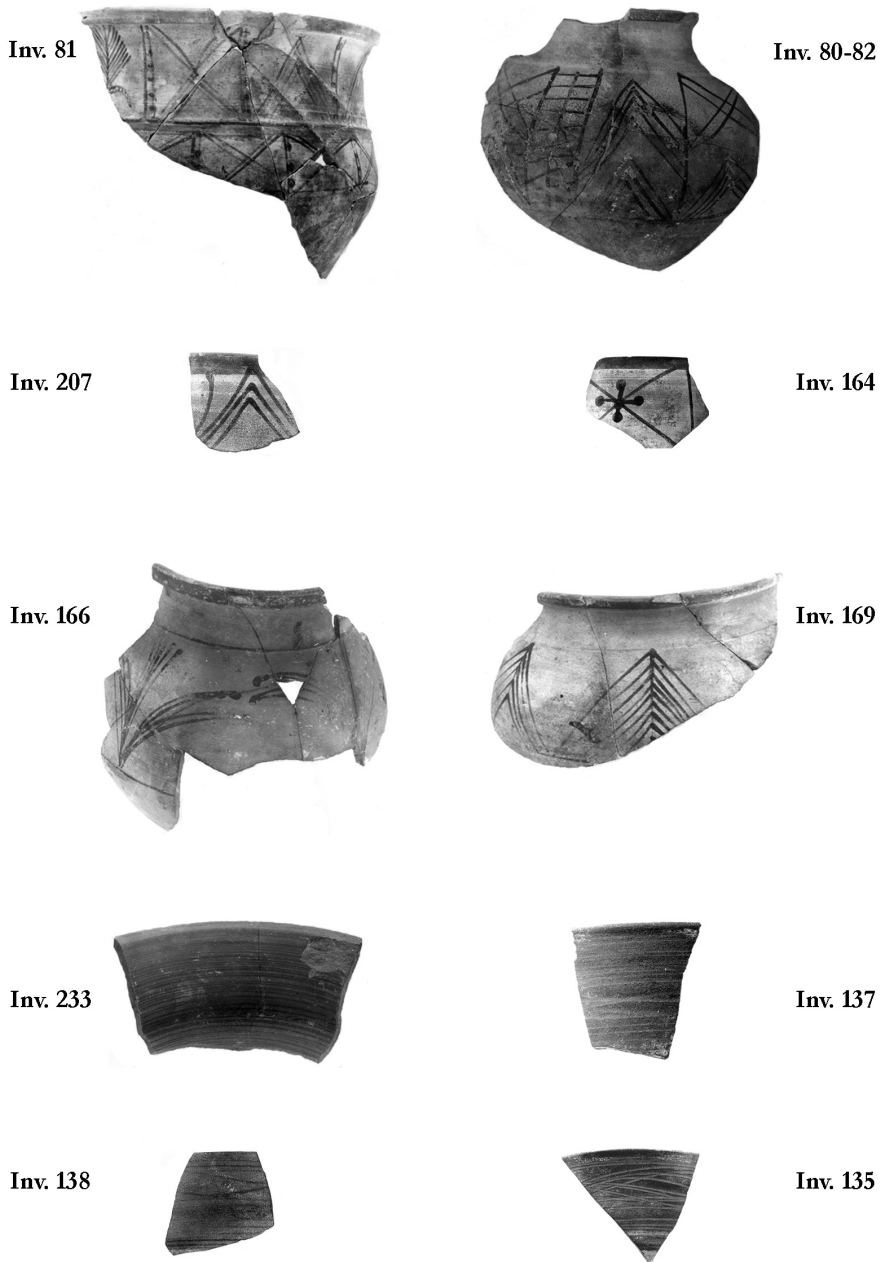


Fig. 6. Examples of *Dipinta Storica Sistana* and of burnished wares (photographs from the IsMEO/IsIAO archive).

As already pointed out in the case of the Achaemenid pottery production attested at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān¹⁴, also in the post-Achaemenid pottery production at Qal'a-ye Sam a substantial morphological uniformity in the ceramic repertoire despite manufacturing differences in the fabrics (and/or in the decoration techniques) of the vessels is a clear indication of a low morpho-typological specialisation of the fabrics detected.

From the morpho-typological point of view, the Achaemenid heritage (represented by – but not limited to – the ceramic production at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān), seems to be still quite strong and very well detectable in the ceramic assemblage at the issue (at least at this preliminary stage of the research), principally in the case of the carinated cup with horizontal rim (**fig. 5**: nos. 204, 234)¹⁵ and in the case of the so-called «tulip bowls» (**fig. 5**: nos. 235, 236)¹⁶.

At the same time, particularly evident is the innovative morphological contribution of the Hellenistic tradition, notably in table wares such as «fishplates» (**fig. 5**: nos. 8, 140) or the bowls with incurving rim («echinus bowls»; **fig. 5**: nos. 106–107)¹⁷ and in some medium size «krater-like» vessels (**fig. 5** nos. 81, 147).

Burnished pottery¹⁸ (**fig. 6**: nos. 135, 137–138, 233), attested in the same fabrics of the common or painted vessels, usually displays on the external surface (in some case the internal or, sometimes, both on the internal and the external) a series of burnished lines, almost always horizontal and parallel, at quite regular intervals of 0,2–0,3 centimetres. Less frequently, burnished lines run vertically on the vessels or, in some cases, they can cross each others in the vicinity of the rim in a zig-zag pattern.

But the most characteristic class of ceramics attested at Qal'a-ye Sam is certainly the one which at the time of the excavations was named «*Dipinta Storica Sistana*»¹⁹ (**fig. 6**: nos. 81, 80–82, 164, 166, 169, 207), in order to be distinguished from the proto-historic painted pottery

14 The degree of morphological and functional specialization of the eleven fabrics distinguished at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān is indeed very low (Maresca 2010: 430).

15 These vessels are frequently attested in the region at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān (Scerrato 1962: fig. 13 nos. 7–15, fig. 15 no. 14; *Idem* 1966: figs. 52, 53, 58, 59, 61; Genito 1990: 592–593, fig. 1e; Maresca 2010: fig. 2 no. 52, fig. 3 nos. 66, 86, 18, fig. 6 nos. 99, 74, fig. 7 no. 53, fig. 8 no. 56, fig. 9 nos. 102, 102) and also at Nad-i Ali (Dales 1977: 53, 97, Type F2).

16 The so-called «tulip-bowls», a category of vessels variously labelled by scholars, have been since long time recognized as one of the most characteristic vessel forms of the Achaemenid period in Iran (see e.g. Cattenat/Gardin 1977: 235, Type E, fig. 5).

17 These vessel forms are considered as «leitfossils» of the Hellenistic period, even if, particularly in the case of fishplates, Hannestad has stressed that they often continued to be manufactured into the Parthian period (Hannestad 1983: 30).

18 Published examples of this class of pottery from the region come from Kuh-e Khwaje (Gullini 1964: 224–239, figs. 168–175), but this class of pottery seems to be more widely attested in Afghanistan (Haerinck 1983: 220–222).

19 Fragments from the region belonging to this class of pottery were published from Kuh-e Khwaje (Gullini 1964: 229, 231–232, 234–237, 239, figs. 169, 175), where it was erroneously dated to the Achaemenid period (Gullini 1964: 240), and from Nad-i Ali (Dales 1977: pl. 24).

widely attested in the region. This ceramic class is characterised by a peculiar painted decoration in red, wine-red, ochre, brown and dark brown, sometimes limited to the rim but more often covering also the shoulder or the upper portion of the vessel. Almost always monochromatic, the decoration consists mostly of geometric patterns (multiple superimposed upside-down «V», rectangles divided in four portions by diagonal lines, cross-shaped motifs, single or multiple rows of traits or dots, sometimes set within metope frames) but also, quite rarely, of stylised phytomorphic motifs (sheaves of wheat or hydrophytes).

The *Dipinta Storica Sistana* has to be dated back to the post-Achaemenid period (Parthian, possibly starting from late-Seleucid), by virtue of its stratigraphic connection with several ceramic fragments bearing Greek letters incised and with some *ostraka* with inscriptions in cursive Greek²⁰. In addition, fragments of this ceramic class were found at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān in some layers to be related to a very late, post-Achaemenid chronological phase of the site²¹.

In the frame of the *Archaeo.Pro.Di.Mu.S.* project, having at our disposal both Achaemenid ceramic materials from Dahāne-ye Gholāmān and post-Achaemenid fragments from Qal'a-ye Sam, preliminary mineralogical and petrographic analyses were undertaken in collaboration with the DiSTAR (Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra, Ambiente e Risorse) at the Università di Napoli «Federico II»²². The aim was to evaluate elements of technical continuity and/or discontinuity in the ceramic production in that area of Sistan between the Achaemenid and post-Achaemenid period. At this initial stage of the research, the intriguing similarity shown at a macroscopic level between two of the most frequently attested pottery fabrics in the assemblage from Qal'a-ye Sam (Fabric QS1 and QS2) and three pottery fabrics attested in the assemblage from Dahāne-ye Gholāmān (Fabric DG1.2, DG3, DG3.8²³), was one of the first issues to be analysed.

Thin section microscopy of the selected samples revealed that Fabric DG1.2 and DG3 are characterised by a strongly birefringent ceramic matrix, indicating a relatively low firing temperature. Moreover, poorly sorted inclusions would suggest that no particular care was paid for the preparation of the ceramic pastes. Higher firing temperature was instead evaluated for the sample of Fabric DG3.8, since the isotropic matrix observed indicates

20 One of them, in particular, in a quite good state of preservation, carrying an inscription consisting of thirteen lines, today stored at the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome (D'Amore 1999: 80 and Pl. XI, cat. no. 100), was dated to the middle III century (Pugliese Carratelli 1966: 34 and fig. 6).

21 Probably when the city had already been abandoned by its inhabitants (Scerrato 1962: 188, no. X; Scerrato 1966: 464–465, n. 20; Scerrato 1972: 203).

22 I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Vincenzo Morra, Dr. Alberto De Bonis and Dr. Vincenza Guarino of the DiSTAR for their precious collaboration and scientific advising.

23 The macroscopic features and the main vessel forms so far attested for DG1.2, DG3 and DG 3.8 have been already discussed by the writer (Maresca 2008: 113, 115, 119–120 and figs. 3a, 3b, 5, 9a, 9b; Maresca 2010: 426–429 and figs. 3, 5, 9).

that vitrification of the ceramic body was achieved during firing. By contrast, the samples from Qal'a-ye Sam both reveal a relatively high firing temperature, being characterised by an isotropic (Fabric QS2) or weakly birefringent (Fabric QS1) ceramic matrix. Moreover, abundant and well sorted inclusions, mostly represented by coarse, angular quartz grains, were carefully selected and crushed to be used as temper. Both samples from Dahāne-ye Gholāmān (DG1.2, DG3 and DG3.8) and from Qal'a-ye Sam (QS1 and QS2) showed a similar petrographic composition, characterised by inclusions mostly represented by abundant quartz and minor feldspars (alkali feldspar, plagioclase), and lower amounts of sandstone, micas (biotite and muscovite), and amphibole. This means that similar raw materials, widely available in the area, were likely used for a long period, thus representing an element of continuity for the investigated ceramic productions. The main differences observed, instead, are due to the optical activity of the ceramic matrix and to the sorting of the inclusions. This would suggest that some technological features changed over time, testifying a certain discontinuity between the ceramic productions attested at the two sites and, probably, on a more general level, between the ceramic production in the area during the Achaemenid and the post-Achaemenid period.

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