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From the emergence to the abandonment of an urban district in the oasis town of Dadan through 2500 years of occupation

Fabien Lesguer, Elora Chambraud, Régine Hunziker-Rodewald, Sterenn Le Maguer, Hervé Monchot, Paul Picavet, Shadi Shabo, Abdulrahman Alsuhaibani, Jérôme Rohmer

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Fabien Lesguer, Elora Chambraud, Régine Hunziker-Rodewald, Sterenn Le Maguer, Hervé Monchot, et al.. From the emergence to the abandonment of an urban district in the oasis town of Dadan through 2500 years of occupation. The 57th Seminar for Arabian Studies, Jun 2024, Paris, France. hal-04630020

HAL Id: hal-04630020

<https://hal.science/hal-04630020v1>

Submitted on 2 Jul 2024

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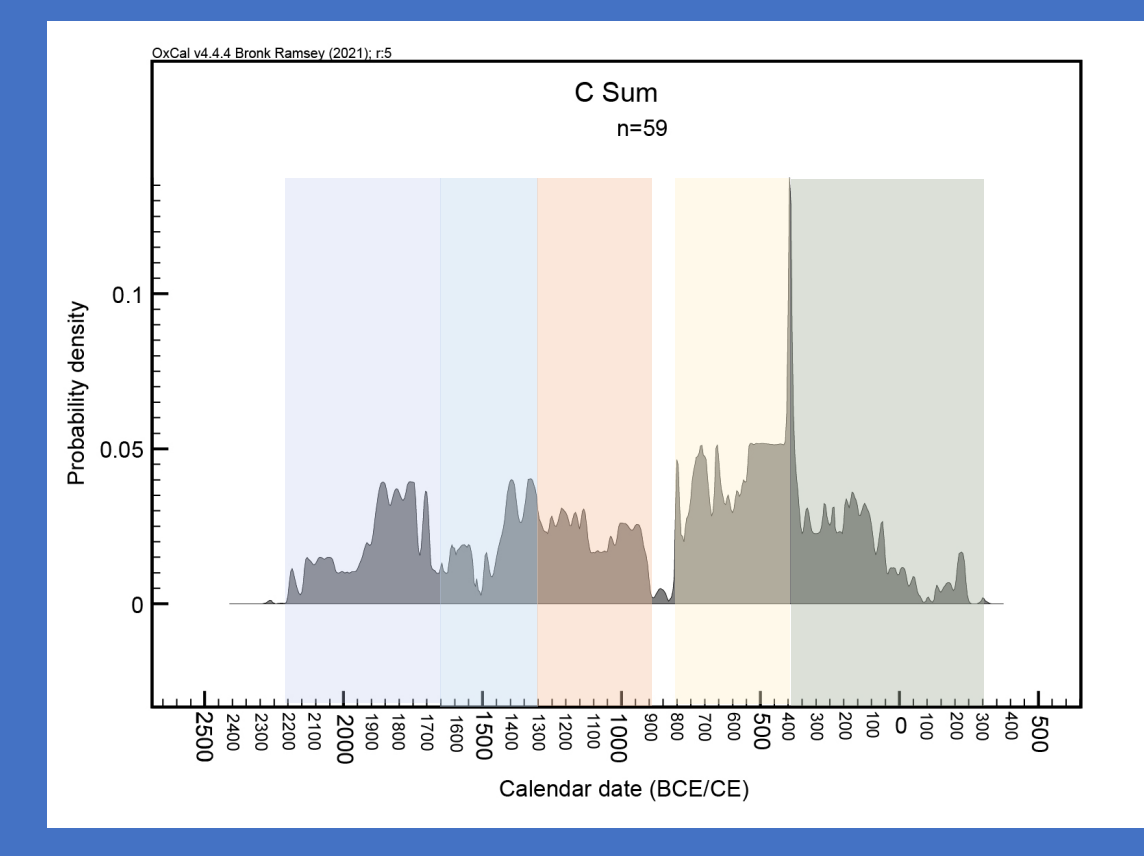
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F. Lesguer¹, E. Chambraud², R. Hunziker-Rodewald³, S. Le Maguer-Guillon⁴, H. Monchot¹, P. Picavet⁵, S. Shabo¹, A. Alsuhaibani⁶, J. Rohmer¹
¹Orient & Méditerranée (UMR 8167), ²Archéozoologie, Archéobotanique, Sociétés, Pratiques, Environnements (UMR 7209), ³Université de Strasbourg - Freie Universität Berlin, ⁴Archaios- Université de Lausanne, ⁵PETRA - pierre et techniques, recherche archéologique (UMR 8164), ⁶King Saud University.

The Dadan Archaeological Project (CNRS/RCU/AFALULA) conducted excavations in an urban quarter of ancient Dadan (Area C) in the valley of al-'Ulā (north-west Arabia) between 2020 and 2023. The findings revealed a virtually continuous occupation of the area over 2500 years. The assistance of a multidisciplinary team, comprising specialists in fauna and flora and various specialists in artefacts, has enabled the identification of five major chrono-cultural phases associated with the architectural sequence of the excavated area. This poster presents the evolution of the architecture, material culture, and plant and animal consumption through this occupation sequence.



Video presentation of Area C



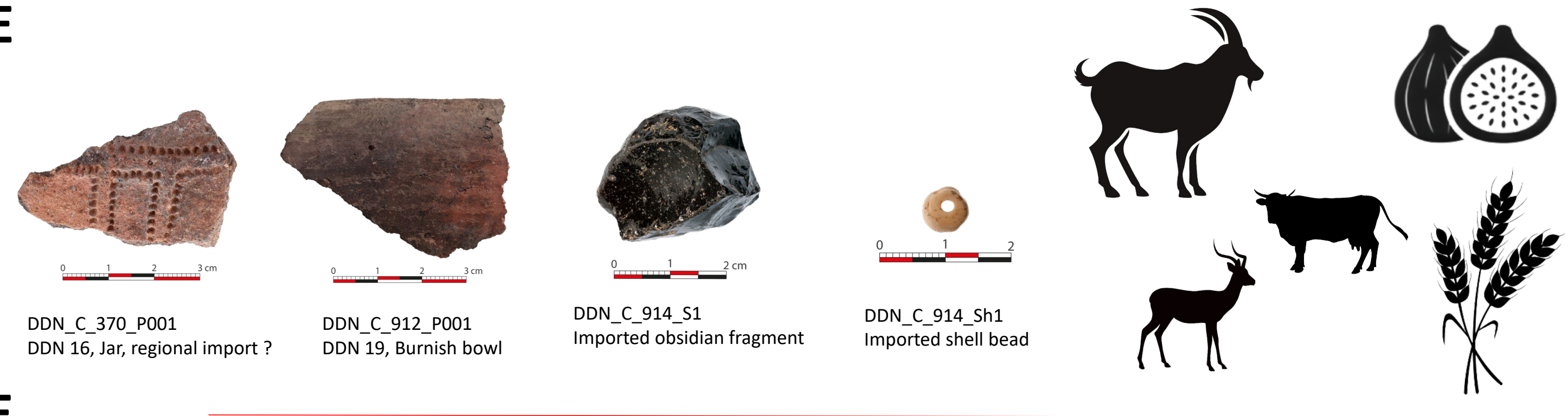
Bronze Age: emergence of an oasis settlement



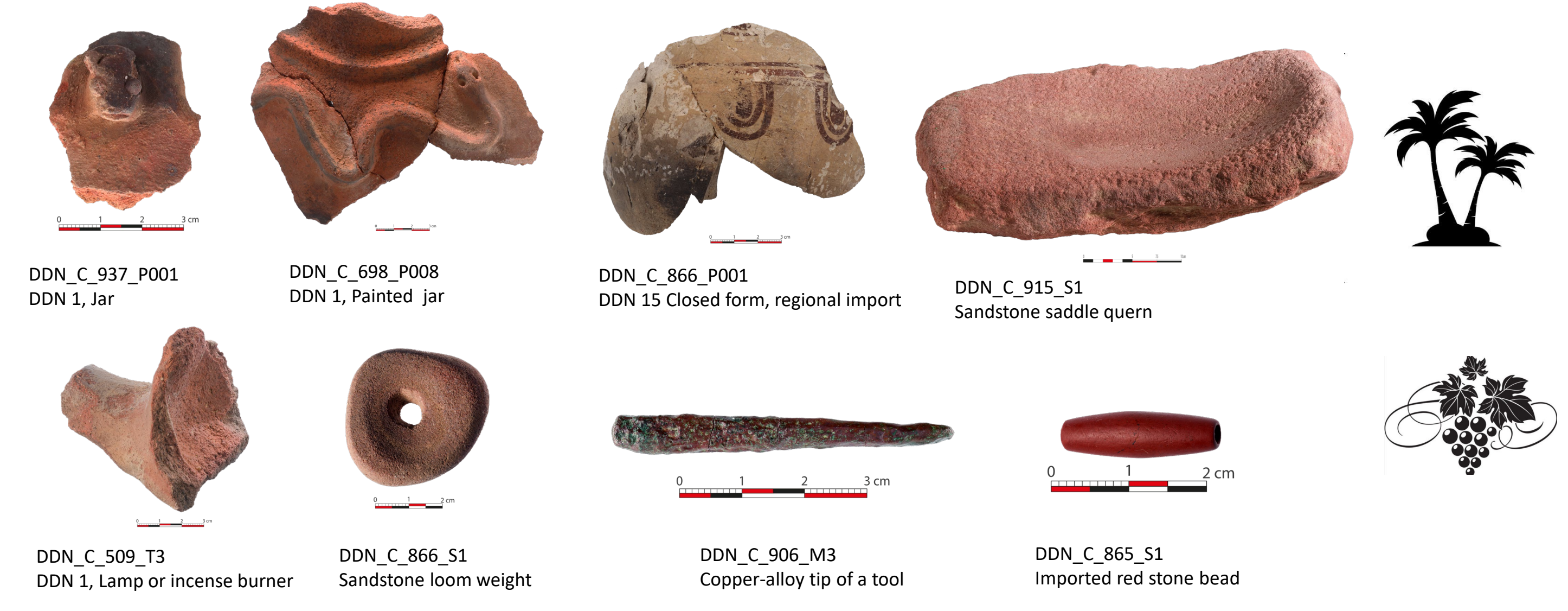
Following a period of minimal habitation at the close of the Early Bronze Age, a mud brick domestic building emerged in the Middle Bronze Age. This development coincided with the first local ceramic production (macrofabric DDN 19) and consumption patterns corresponding to an agropastoral economy based on cereals and caprine.

The appearance of the date palm both for consumption and as fuel during the second half of the Middle Bronze Age (after 1650 BCE) marks the advent of a new chronocultural phase. The old quarter was razed to the ground, and new structures were erected in a new architectural style combining the use of mudbricks and sandstone blocks. The use of bronze artefacts, particularly cutting objects, seems to have increased. Concomitantly, new ceramic wares were manufactured locally (DDN 1).

2200 BCE



1650 BCE



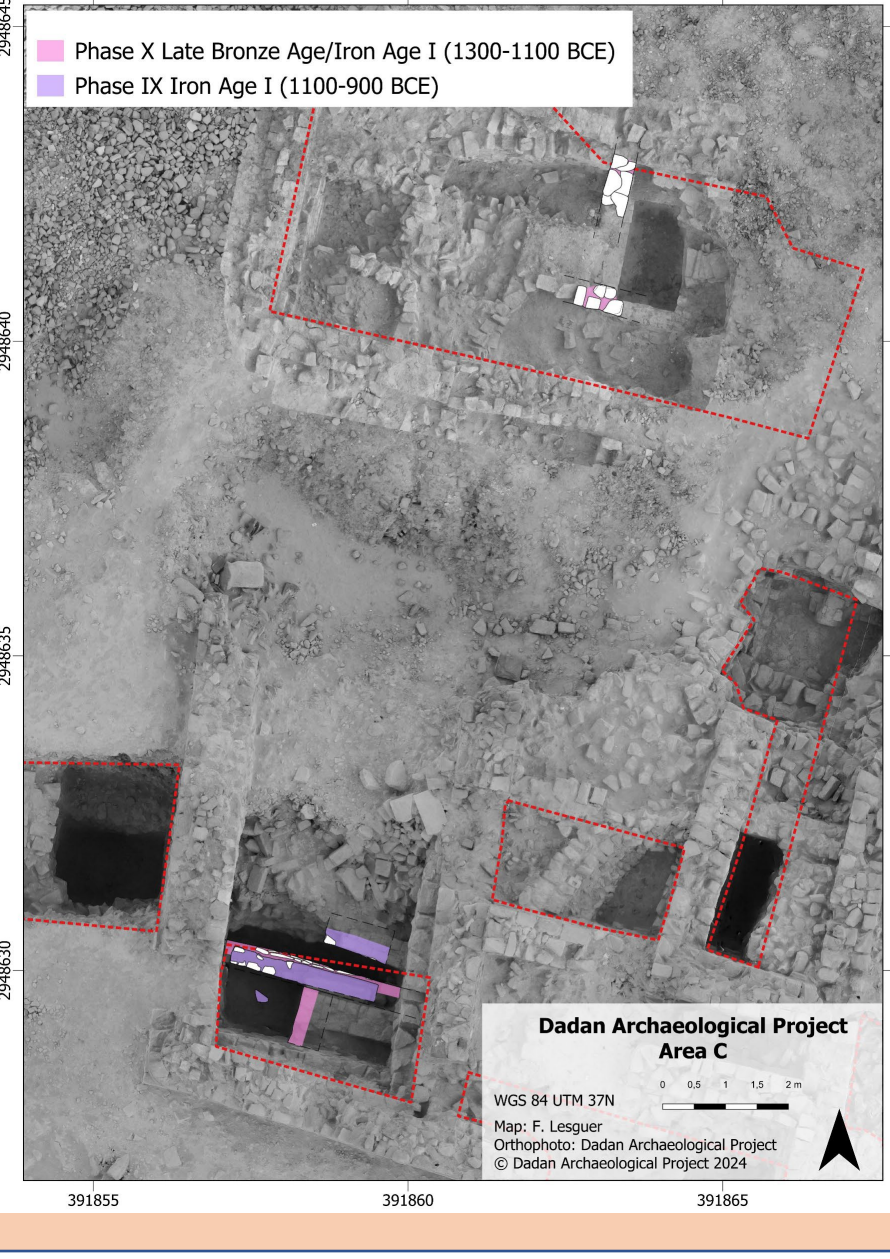
1250 BCE



900 BCE

? 800 BCE

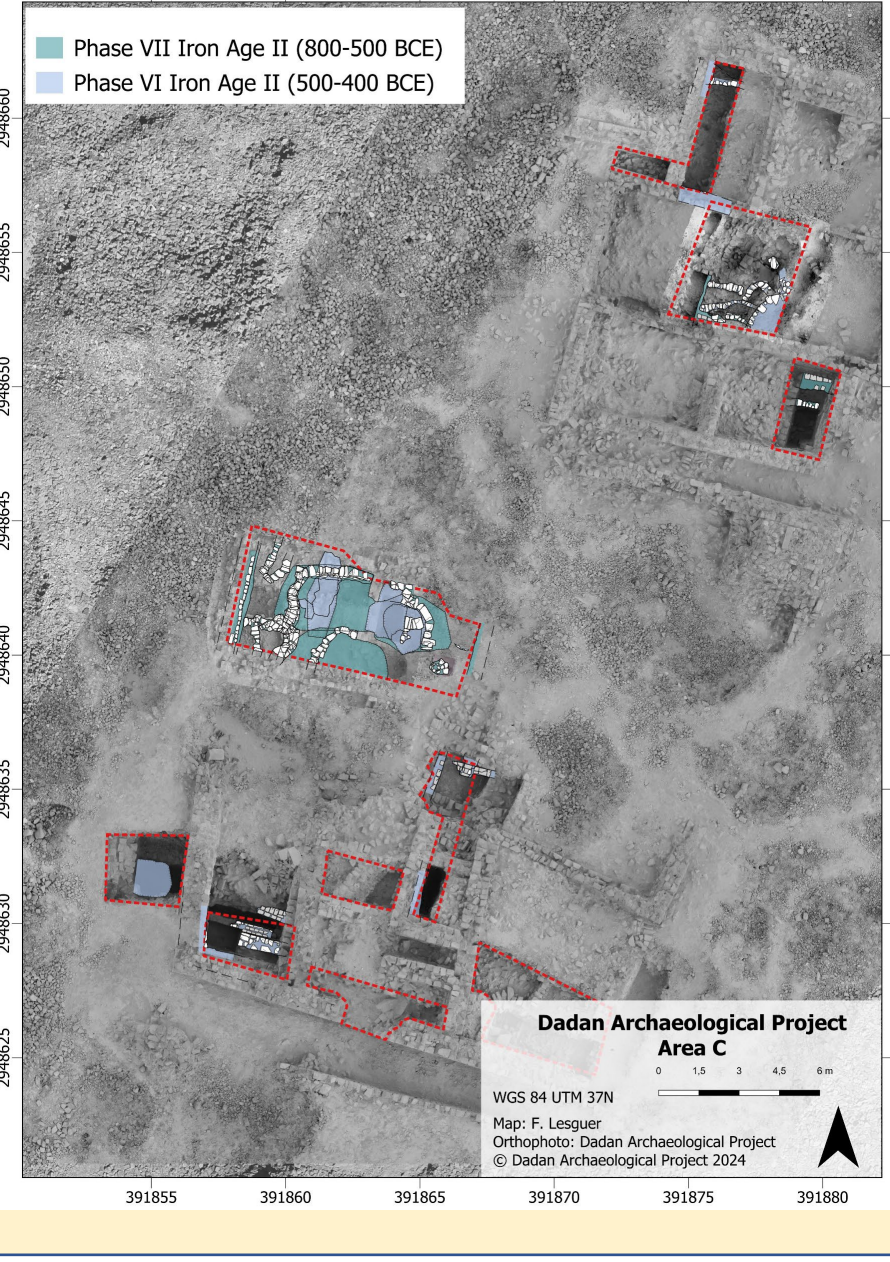
Late Bronze Age/Iron Age transition



Only a limited number of levels and architectural remains dated between 1250 and 900 BCE have been identified in the excavations (corner of a building made of mudbrick and stone in the SW part of the area, remains of walls with the same construction technique further north). From an architectural perspective, continuity is evident but, from a cultural perspective, significant changes may have taken place during this period, such as the appearance of a new ceramic production (macrofabrics DDN 3-5) and the appearance of camel in the diet – two evolutions that will continue in the next phase. However, the chronology of these two major cultural developments still needs to be confirmed with ¹⁴C dates.

The end of this period is marked by a gap in archaeological data, as no structures could be ascribed to the 900-800 BCE period. Two explanations for this gap can be put forward: either the area was abandoned and occupation shifted to another place, or the remains of this phase were obliterated by later construction works.

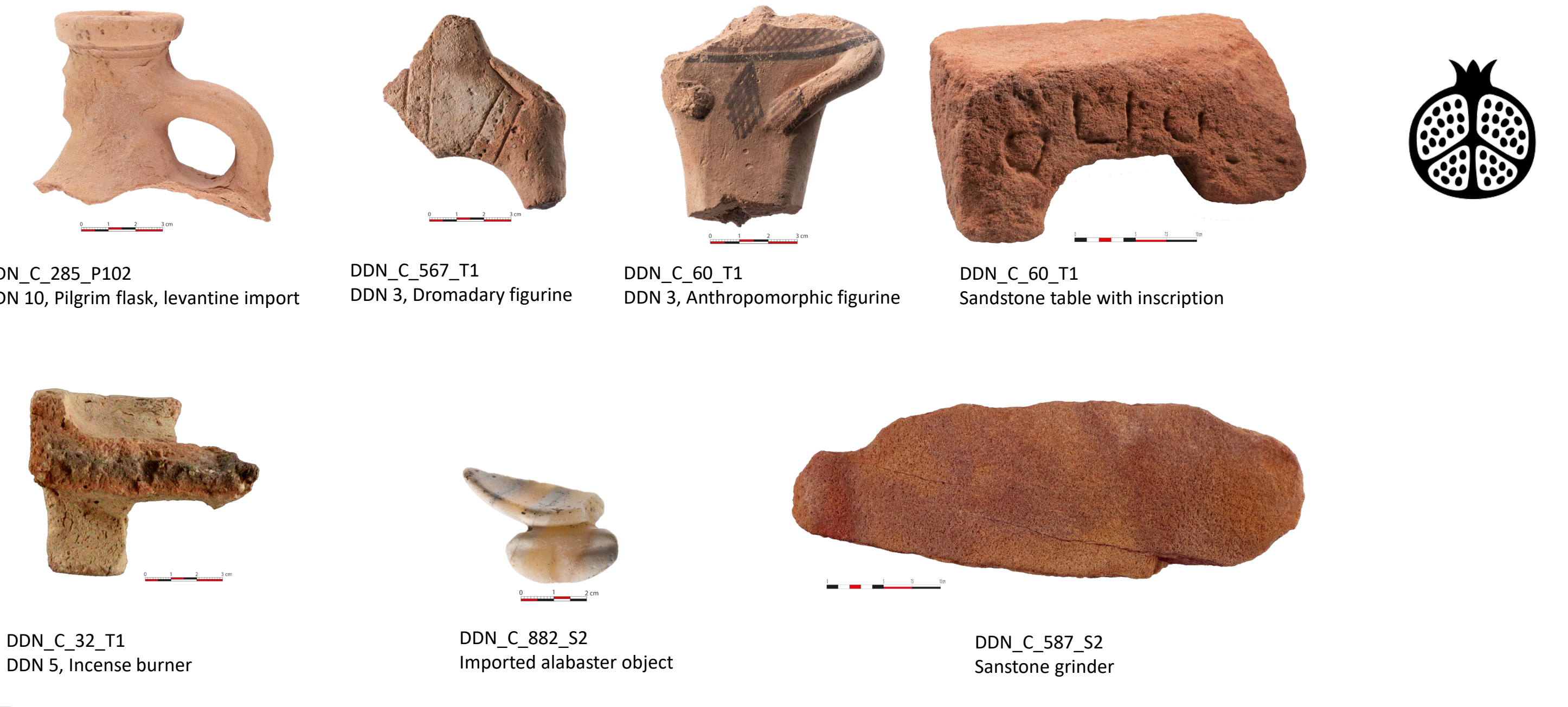
Iron Age II: architectural renewal and rise of long-distance trade



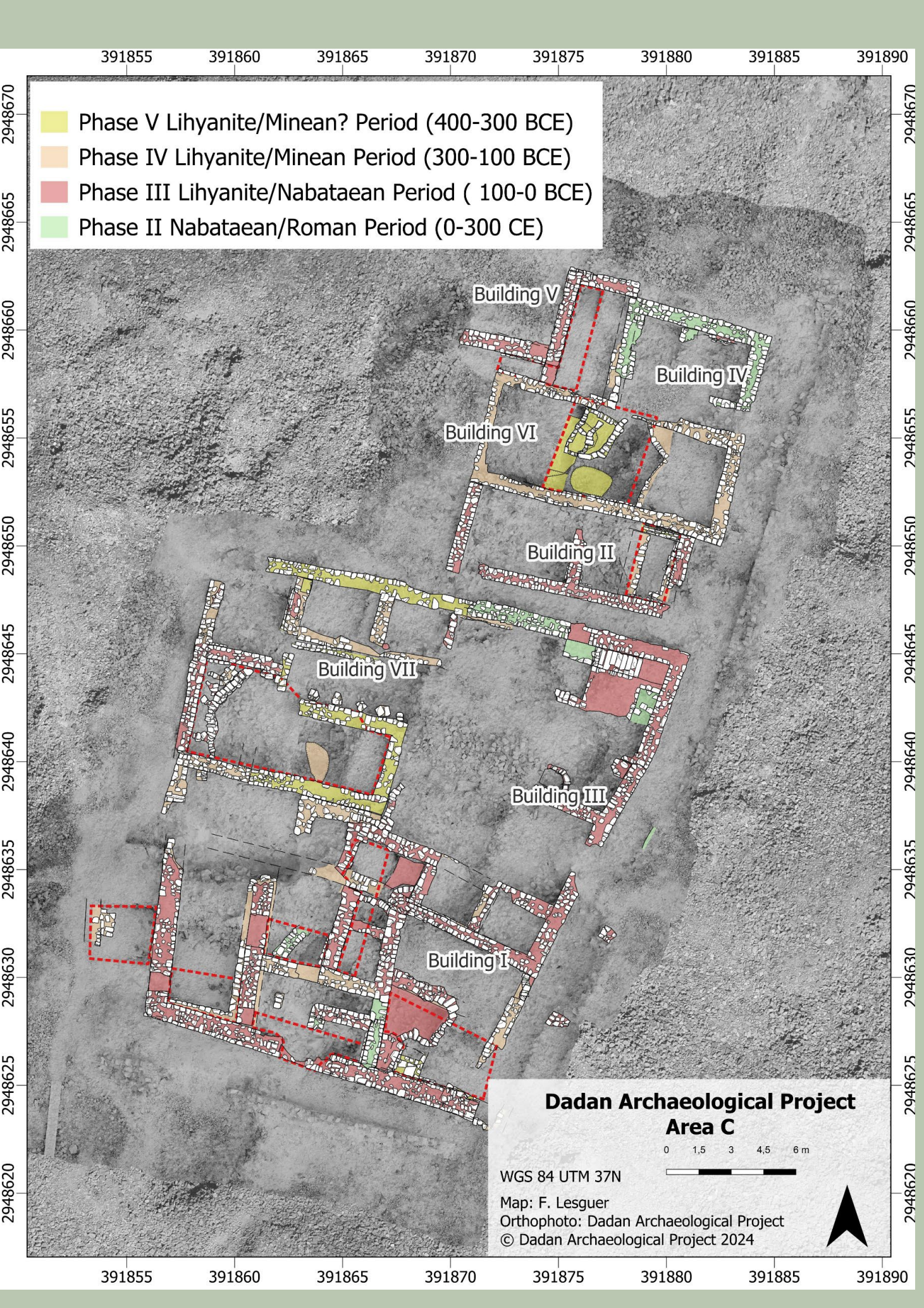
The 800-400 BCE period corresponds to the rise of long-distance trade along the "Incense Route". It is marked by a renewal of the district. Many structures were built, widely destroying the older levels. The state of the excavations makes it difficult to estimate the spatial organization of this period. However, it can be observed that the use of mudbricks in the architecture greatly decreased in favor of stone. One of the best-preserved remains is a semi-excavated structure, possibly a cellar, in the center of the area.

From a cultural point of view, in addition to the production of local ceramics DDN3-5 (often painted) and the use of camel, many new features appear, such as writing or long-distance imports from the Levant (pilgrim flasks) or southern Arabia. New types of terracotta objects were also created locally, such as cuboid incense burners and camel and human figurines, which reflect the rise of aromatics trade. In the archaeobotanical record, new taxa appear (e.g., pomegranate) but the agricultural system remains characterised by palm cultivation.

400 BCE



Lihyanite & post-Lihyanite period: increasing connectivity, and decline



The final major architectural phase of the district spans a period of 700 years, until its abandonment. It is associated with numerous technological advances and the increase in long-distance imports (Mesopotamia, Eastern Mediterranean, South Arabia).

Two distinct clusters of buildings have been brought to light, including seven buildings constructed entirely of sandstone blocks. They are included in an orthonormal street pattern. The abandonment of mudbricks in construction may reflect a technological change, particularly the spread of iron tools. Indeed, marks of a new type of iron tool appears on sandstone objects such as statues, incense burners or offering tables. In the middle of this period, numerous sandstone cult objects were found reused in masonries or in fills: this suggests that a place of worship was destroyed in the area around the end of the first millennium BCE. This could reflect a cultural and/or change in the ancient city.

In terms of artefacts, the period is marked by a new type of ceramic production (DDN 6-9), marked by the systematic use of the potter's wheel, and by the appearance of terracotta horse figurines. Numerous fragments of textiles and a shoe sole have also been discovered in the levels of this period.

The archaeozoological record shows that fish from the Red Sea appeared for the first time in the local diet.

300 CE

