

Excavation report of sounding D, 2006

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Position

Sounding D is situated ca. 15 metres NNW of the Islamic tomb of Mahmud Ibrahim Pasha, which, with lying at 363.40m a.s.l., marks the highest point on Tell Fecheriye. In the immediate surroundings of the grave there are a number of older Islamic graves; Sounding D has been placed in such a way that none of them were disturbed.

The trench measured 19 x 5 m and cut the slope of the tell at a place where this is relatively steep: at its south-eastern end, the trench begins at a height of 361.40m a.s.l., while its north-western corner lies 4.40 metres lower, at 357m a.s.l.

The trench was located on uncultivated, at times strongly eroded, terrain. An irrigation canal is located at the foot of the Tell.

The German archaeologist Anton Moortgat, who did some investigation at Tell Fecheriye in 1955, opened a trench, which he called "Türbe-Schnitt", just ca. 20m SW of Sounding D. The cut of the Moortgat trench is still visible and we decided to use it as a pit for our residual earth.

Aims

The sounding was planned as a classical step trench, with two steps of 5 m length and two steps of 4.5m length (Step 1 to 4). The primary aim was to have a deep sounding into the stratigraphical history of Tell Fecheriye. Based on Moortgat's findings, it was already clear that the chosen location was particularly promising. Indeed, Moortgat had documented 13 metres of cultural layers before reaching the water level. Since the water level has probably sunk since 1955, we hoped to have a chance to go even deeper.

Present situation

In the first days of archaeological work, a thick layer of Islamic building collapse, stretching over the whole trench and packed with stucco, tegolae, calcareous blocks and reddish mud bricks was observed. Shards with a green glaze among the pottery and no notable small finds came to light. Underneath this layer the remains of a poor limestone-and-mudbrick architecture were observed, connected with a walking surface in which a round pit installation (an oven?) was built.

At the end of our excavation season, after 29 days of actual excavation work, the situation in Sounding D had grown increasingly more complex. Three of the four "steps" were excavated - Step 1, Step 2, and Step 4 -, starting from a maximal height of ca. 361m a.s.l. at the upper edges of Step 1 and reaching a maximal depth of ca. 354m a.s.l. in the lowest levels of Step 4. In our, albeit partial, investigations of these cultural layers we believe we documented at least six main different building "events" or "phases", the dating of which must of course be seen as preliminary.

Early Islamic tegolae, stucco and mudbrick collapse (Step 1, 2, and 4)

This is the youngest settlement phase we were able to document (s.a.). The modern graves which can be seen on the surface around the sounding are probably directly dug into the ruins of this Early Islamic building, of which we could recover only the collapsed rests and no architectural outline.

Early Islamic stone-and-mud brick architecture (Step 1, 2, and 4)

The stucco collapse stretches over earlier Islamic ruins, which we documented in all three of the opened steps: architecture made of stone foundations with mud brick elevation. In Step 1 and 2 we found the rests of a 1-m-thick, relatively well preserved stone wall foundation (359m a.s.l.), while in Step 4 we found the rests of a hastily executed, thin stone wall socket (358m.a.s.l.) with a walking surface of grey loam and a pit oven connected to it.

Late Roman (?) mud brick architecture (Step 1)

The foundation pit of the Early Islamic wall of Step 1 and 2 were cut into an earlier mud brick wall, whose crest we met at more or less the same height as the cutting wall and which is preserved for a height of ca. 1m. Leaning against it we could document a walking surface of grey loam. The dating of this mudbrick architecture is still uncertain, but judging from its stratigraphical relations and from a first glance at the pottery remains, it is plausible that it dates from Late Roman times.

Roman (?) stone-and-mud brick building (Step 1 and 2)

The Late Roman (?) mud brick wall and its walking surface are built directly upon an earlier pebble pavement. This pavement probably belongs to a late phase of an earlier stone-and-mud brick architecture, which we were able to document on both Step 1 and 2. This "stone building", of which we uncovered the rests of four walls, might date to Roman times, since we recovered imitations of terra sigillata. At any rate, the building was certainly in use over a longer period, since we clearly recovered four superimposed pavements connected to it and we documented more building phases (i.e., the addition of a wall and walling-in of two doorways).

Pre-classical (?) mud brick architecture (Step 2)

In the lowest edge of Step 2, beneath the level of the "stone building", we could see the crests of two mud brick walls built at a 90-degrees angle from one another. We hypothesize a pre-classical dating for these features. Their investigation will certainly be one of the tasks for next year's campaign.



Fig. 1: Overview of the steps of sounding D.



Fig. 2: Pre-classical mud brick architecture.