

Excavation report of C-I (Sq. 6746-6846), 2009

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Excavations were carried out in Squares 6746 and 6846, located in the northwestern sector of the main mound, in 2009. The work was supervised by Brian Brown in cooperation with the German and Syrian students Stefanie Janke and Shirin. The work in these areas had several goals. In Square 6746, the main project was re-excavating the northern part of the so-called House I, a Middle Assyrian-period house originally uncovered by the American excavation in 1940, and investigating the area immediately to the north to see how this structure articulated with its surroundings. Three rooms of the house were exposed: Room 5, a small, nondescript chamber; Room 7, a long, narrow hallway; and Room 6, the domicile's bathroom, complete with a toilet.

The area to the north yielded several interesting finds. Two rooms of a Byzantine structure, oriented east-west, were excavated. The function of the eastern room is unclear: the area was disturbed by later activities and no objects (apart from pottery) were found in conjunction with the architecture. The smaller western room, however, housed a well. The well, covered up by a later floor, consisted of a shaft surrounded by roof tiles built into a kind of dome, also constructed of roof tiles. Underneath this installation, what appeared to be an earlier shaft, square in shape as opposed to the upper round shaft, was also discovered.

Below the Byzantine room a large quantity of ash was excavated. The lining of a badly degraded oven was recovered as well; however, not much evidence for the materials being manufactured in this apparently industrial area was found. It may have been an area where plaster was made by burning limestone. The pottery indicated that this area was in use in the very late Middle Assyrian/early Iron Age periods.

After the ashy deposits were cleared away, we were able to excavate more of the house complex to the north and the east. The most interesting find was that House I did not end at the limit of the American excavation (Rooms 6 and 7); rather, an exterior wall demarcated the limits of the complex. Between this wall and the northern wall of the house proper was located a large, flat stone that seems to have been a cover for a septic tank connected with the toilet in Room 6.

North of the wall was located a succession of streets. These surfaces, consisting of hard-packed earth with a relatively small quantity of stones mixed in, were rather different than the well-paved monumental street discovered in Square 6645 and may indicate non-centralized initiative in building and maintaining thoroughfares in this area. One interesting feature of the street was that two large stones were laid onto it to apparently help regulate cart traffic. Furthermore, the exterior compound wall of House I was protected by two structures, a "curb" of bricks and, later, by a small glacis.

Inside the wall and to the east of the house proper we excavated an area with what appeared to be a hearth or oven. This may have been the domicile's main kitchen area. Further work needs to be carried out here to clarify this space's function and properties.

Just to the south of this area, in what may have been another room, the latest floor level of the Middle Assyrian period was found with a heavy concentration of smashed but complete or largely complete vessels resting upon it. Underneath this rich collection of pottery, a succession of floors was uncovered, testifying to the lengthy lifespan of House I. Here, a quantity of sealings and a small cuneiform tablet were discovered.

Excavation in Square 6846, immediately to the east of Square 6746, was not carried out as long or as intensively as in the latter, but some important finds were nevertheless made. At the uppermost level, approximately 1-2m below the modern surface of the Tell, a large building, apparently dating to the Islamic period, was found. Beneath this, some rooms dating to the Byzantine period were excavated. Again, it was not possible to ascertain the function of these structures – this area, in particular, was heavily disturbed by later pits and a later large stone well.

Underlying the Byzantine level were the poorly preserved remnants of a room that almost certainly belongs to House I. We were not able to fully investigate this area in 2009, but we did manage to document its basic shape. The discovery of this room indicates that House I, already recognized as a large structure belonging to one of the wealthy ruling families of the ancient Assyrian site, was even more massive than previously thought. Further work will be needed to clarify the full extent of this structure and the function of this newly excavated area.



Fig. 1: Room 6 with toilet.



Fig. 2: Well cover of roof tiles.



Fig. 3: Exterior wall and street with traffic stone.



Fig. 4a: Sealings from this area and the tablet.



Fig. 4b: Sealings from this area and the tablet.



Fig. 5: Middle Assyrian wall in Square 6846.