

Excavation report of C-II (Sq. 6645, 6745), 2009

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Squares 6645 and 6745 are situated on the western slope of the site on a small terrace that has been the centre of archaeological investigations throughout the whole season. Here the results of previous season's investigations have been enriched by the results of investigations in 2009 in all levels present. The excavation in these squares was supervised by Peter Bartl in cooperation with the German and Syrian students Anika Hotzan-Tchabashvili and Assad Alaw.

The aims of research in Squares 6745 and 6645 were manifold: After the results of the 2007 season in Square 6745 it became clear that more of the Middle Assyrian House I and the monumental mudbrick structure had to be exposed in order to better understand their layout and function, as well as their exact chronological classification and date. Moreover it was an aim of the field-season to reach levels below the mudbrick structure and complete the stratigraphic sequence at this area of the site.

The Middle Assyrian House I, re-excavated in 2007 and its re-use as graveyard in the area of the former American sounding VI is the focus of research not only in Squares 6746, 6846 and 6845, but as well in the yet unexplored part west of 6745 – in Square 6645. Here the western façade of the building is situated and a possible continuation of street levels or an open space as could be observed in Square 6644 west of House II was to be investigated.

House I was first excavated by the American expedition under McEwan in 1940 and has been re-excavated by Alexander Pruß in 2001 as part of the Syrian-German expedition to Tell Fecheriye. Since 2007 research in and around this building continued with an anew excavation of the remaining walls, which were badly eroded and have collapsed in parts due to the prolonged exposure to the elements. A reassessment of the results of McEwan's and Pruß's excavations, in combination with our own investigation allowed for a more detailed picture of the building's internal stratigraphy and a revised allocation of finds. The remains of this building in Square 6745 have been removed in the 2007 campaign. The western façade however has not been excavated yet and thus became one of the research aims, as well as defining the exact location and extend of the American sounding VI in this area. Further to the south, in Square 6643/6644, west of House II a paved canal or drain was exposed as well as several floor levels. Their continuation towards the north was object of investigation, as well as how far it can be traced towards the western slope of the Tell.

Observations confirmed that this area was an open space – probably an alley or plaza – bordered by the aforementioned façade of houses to the east (Fig. 1). The street was covered by an accumulation of several superimposed layers of debris, containing the typical Middle Assyrian pottery assemblage, which started directly under the modern yet eroded surface on that part of the Tell at approximately 353.70m absolute altitude. The packing of the floor at a level of 352.50m was made up of pebbles, large amounts of broken pottery, clearly Middle Assyrian in date, mixed with countless animal bones, antlers and several small fragments of bronze, beads, as well as one complete gold-plated bronze earring, that has presumably been

lost by its owner in the street over 3000 years ago. This floor level seems to have accumulated over a considerable amount of time as it is up to 20cm thick in some places.

Close to the east section of Square 6645 the western wall of House I could be exposed, which is abutted by the aforementioned street. The wall formerly described as single phased can now be subdivided into several stages of construction, giving a detailed insight into the building phases: A building joint between Room 1 and Room 7 is clearly visible – the western wall of Room 1 and the wall separating the latter from Room 7 were erected separately on a lower level than the continuation of the wall towards the north, which is not only built on a higher level, but also has a foundation of large sherds, bones and river cobbles (Fig. 2). Yet another change can be observed further to the north, where slightly smaller mud bricks were used than the usual 38x38cm sized bricks. However it is not clear wherefore this change occurred since no structural reason is given or cognizable so far.

In Square 6745 the remains of House I were already removed at the end of the 2007 campaign. However not all graves set into the abundant building's rooms have been excavated so far. Additional to a very rich double-pot burial discovered in room 4 in 2007 and the one already excavated by the McEwan expedition in 1940 another grave could be investigated (Fig. 3). It is dug in the north-western corner of the room and contains a double-jar burial of an adult male equipped with several semi-precious stone beads. This burial is evidence for the importance of the ritual context already observed in other Middle Assyrian burials at the site: two skulls of rams with their extremities and shoulderblades were found in the fill of the grave (Fig. 4). Another huge double-jar burial was found close to the eastern end of Room 1. It contained the remains of two individuals – one adult and one infantile. Additional to the head of a sheep contained within the fill of the grave pit, a jar with handle was found. The exact date can momentarily only be established via stratigraphic observations which place them at the end of the Middle Assyrian Period after the abandonment of House I – a date conform to those of the other graves.

The aforementioned monumental mudbrick structure, situated below several floor and debris levels separating the Middle Assyrian building levels from the architecture below (Fig. 5), was first identified as a monumental building with two east-west running walls built in an agglutinating manner. One room to the north and another one to the south of this double wall were recognisable and a sounding was dug in the southern one in order to reach a floor level (Fig. 6).

The aims in season 2009 were to complete this sounding and excavate the southern room as well as the northern room in order to be able to give an accurate dating, moreover to expand the area excavated and better understand the structure's character and its extend towards the north, south, east and west.

When excavating the fill of the southern room another wall was discovered being the room's western limit. Thus the room now measures approximately 4.30m in width, about the same size as the room north of the double wall. The north-south extension can be measured at neither of them since both have not been excavated completely. It can however be noted that the floor is on different levels in both rooms: the floor level in the northern one is at 352.15m absolute

altitude, the one in the southern room about 1.50m below that, at 350.70m above sea level. In addition to this, a continuation of the mud brick structure to the east could be observed when excavating underneath the levels of House I in Square 6746. In the west the mudbricks however end right in front of the section of Square 6745. Here the wall is abutted by a series of street levels that continue further westwards in Square 6744 under the aforementioned Middle Assyrian street. The material culture contained within the packing of the floors changes gradually towards the lower levels with an increasing number of pre-Middle Assyrian pottery, like red-edged bowls, fragments of Nuzi vessels and materials comparable to Mittani-Period levels at other sites. Thus we have an almost complete series of successive floors containing large amounts of material for study covering the Mittani and Middle Assyrian period until the abandonment of House 1 somewhat after the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. (1233-1197 BC).

The purpose of this mudbrick structure is not yet entirely clear. It was founded in the levels below, its foundation pits have been filled with very compact and homogeneous mud and brick material, and the unevenness of the terrain has been compensated by mudbricks simultaneously forming the floor for both rooms described above. The building seems to be result of a planned and centralised construction, resulting in structural uniformity and standardised building techniques. The structure and its purpose as such are hard to explain – it might belong to a monumental building whose rooms are yet to be discovered or it could have served as a massive fortification or substructure for another building. However, the investigation in that square led to the understanding of the whole architecture as, after a phase of utilisation, being filled up intentionally as can be seen by the homogeneous fill in the rooms and than being sealed by a floor level right underneath the Middle Assyrian House I. Some of the small finds from this fill give a good terminus post quem for the abandonment and refill of the rooms during or at the end of the Mittani period: a clay sealing with seal impression that can be ascribed to the so called Mittani Dynastic style (15th/14th century BC) and one of the North-Mesopotamian and Syrian Group after Salje (Salje 1990, 166) (15th/15th century BC). A rich assemblage of sherds from the Middle Jazirah IA and IB ceramic tradition confirms this date (Figs. 7a & 7b).

Underneath the floor of this room the sounding was continued in order to investigate yet another stratigraphic unit that has been sealed and partly cut by the monumental mudbrick structure. This phase's architecture has a totally different character and deviates slightly from the north-south axis. In the small area excavated so far a wall with projection was found, dividing the space into two rooms. Both have a floor level at about 349.60m absolute altitude one of which is paved with unbaked mud bricks. The rich and homogenous assemblage of materials from the fill is, no doubt, Middle Jazirah I in date and includes a pot stand and two bone needles with parallels in Tell Brak level HH2 (Brak vol 1, no. 618), Sabi Abyad levels 5 and 4 (Pots and Potters, p. 638, 676).

Thus in the are of Squares 6745 and 6645, due to their former exposure to archaeological research, we were able to investigate the complete stratigraphic sequence of the main mound from the Islamic era down to levels of the early Late Bronze Age. The natural soil, however, has not yet been reached. The stratigraphy shows that at least from the late Bronze Age to the beginning of the Iron Age this area was settled more or less continuously, even if the character of the architecture changes drastically in the different periods.



Fig. 1: Eastern Wall of House I and the remains of sounding VI of the american expedition.



Fig. 2: Foundation of Eastern Wall - at the right the building joint is clearly visible in the planum and section.



Fig. 3: Three grave pits of Middle Assyrian double jar burials - the pit to the right was already excavated in 1940 - the other two in 2007, respectively 2009.



Fig. 4: Double jar burial with ram's head and extremities in the fill.



Fig. 5: Mudbrick structure seperated from House I by Middle Assyrian debris.



Fig. 6: Mudbrick structure and small rooms north and south of the trench sections.



Fig. 7a: Seal impression.



Fig. 7b: Seal impression.