

Excavation report of C-IV (Sq. 6642, 6742)

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Squares 6642 and 6742 are situated in the southern part Area C (Fig. 1) where the extension of the Middle Assyrian architecture was expected to be found in connection to the previously excavated architectural features in the northern Squares 6643 and 6743. While operations in the western Square 6642 started from the flat surface of the western terrace, diggings in the eastern Square 6743 were conducted into the slope of the Tell where already in 2007 a small sounding, supervised by our Syrian colleague Fehed Hsen, had uncovered parts of a mud-brick wall and grave of apparently Roman date. In 2009 excavation in Squares 6642 and 6742 was headed by Drahošlav Hulínek in cooperation with the SAHI archaeologist Jana Stehlíková and German and Syrian students of archaeology – Friedrich Wilhelm Weigel and Ramy Chamseddin.

Remains of the Byzantine and Roman period were significantly represented in both squares, from which as many as three chronological phases of settlement could have been distinguished.

To the latest phase belongs an inhumation in a rectangular and covered mud-brick grave in Square 6743 (Fig. 2). The corps of the apparently female adult was buried in north-south orientation. A bracelet made of different beads at her left wrist and a massive golden earring which was found close to right side of the skull are among the most remarkable finds associated with the skeleton. The excavation of a contemporaneous grave in the southern part of the same square, which had been partly uncovered in 2007, was also completed. In the end it was ascertained that most probably as much as three persons were buried there. Probably the skeletons were moved from its original placement, as they were found not in anatomical position.

To the next phase, which was clearly cut by the graves, belong remnants of mud brick walls with stone foundations and floor pavements from smaller stones which abut to the walls. An oven (tannur) with three distinguishable phases of utilization seems to relate to these domestic building structures.

The earliest phase of the Roman-Byzantine sequence in this area yielded the stone foundations of a rectangular, but so far only partly excavated room in which three oven-like installations were embedded (Fig. 3). Two of them have the typical shape and size (c. 0.50m in diam.) of an oven but one is remarkable bigger with a diameter of 2.20m. A thick layer of whitish chalky ash may indicate that this installation served for lime production.

The earliest Roman-Byzantine occupation level was directly built over and partly cut into the remains of Middle Assyrian architecture. Thus the excavation in these squares confirms what has been already documented by the stratigraphy in the northern part of Area C: A significant hiatus exists between the end of the Middle Assyrian occupation and the beginning of a Late Antique settlement phase. For example, in Square 6642, in the southern section of the explored area, a Roman-Byzantine wall made of massive limestone blocks runs directly above the upper

edge of the Middle Assyrian wall. Both have the same south-north orientation and are thus in line with the outer facade of the Middle Assyrian Houses I-II. We therefore propose that the Middle Assyrian architectural remains in Squares 6642 and 6742 already belong to a third house which fits in its orientation with the other houses situated further north.

As for the Middle Assyrian sequence in Squares 6642 and 6742, most likely remnants of brick walls of two structures from consecutive time phases come from this period (Fig. 1). The two phases can be also distinguished by different types of paved floors which stretch north and south from an east-west running wall in Squares 6642 and 6742, a cobbled floor for the older phase and a remarkable solid floor made of bigger flat stones for the younger phase (Fig. 4). Many shards of Middle Assyrian standard type pottery, mostly used as filling of the floors, help to date both phases.

At the end of the season, a double-pot grave for a child was discovered in the southern edge of Squares 6742 and 6642. One of two pots forming the container for the skeleton was bigger and the other one smaller and precisely that one covered the opening of the bigger one. The grave was oriented north - south. The child skeleton was preserved in a very bad condition, but two massive iron bracelets at the wrists of the child provide an interesting find.

The grave may be dated to the Neo-Assyrian period, even if it is not completely out of question that it could be linked to the Middle Assyrian period when Iron artefacts were already common in the northern Syrian regions.



Fig. 1: Area C-IV, Overview.



Fig. 2: Mud-brick grave in Square 6743.



Fig. 3: Three oven-like installations.



Fig. 4: Floors of different phases.