

Amman Roman Baths Rescue Excavations

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Fig. 1. The burning chambers, part of the hypocaust system. (Photo by Asem Asfour.)

While the Greater Amman Municipality was implementing a project to establish a rainwater drainage system to reduce the risk of flooding in the Amman downtown area (on Al-Hashemi street from the beginning of the Hashemite Square to the Al-Husseini Mosque), the work uncovered significant archaeological remains. The initial intent was to construct a reinforced concrete culvert, but work was stopped when architectural elements, such as bricks and ashlar blocks, appeared. The area was then inspected and evaluated by the Amman Antiquities Directorate of the Department of Antiquities. The result was an agreement to carry out a salvage archaeological excavation to verify the archaeological remains.

Excavations began on September 12, 2020, and ended on January 15, 2021. The excavation was carried out by the Amman Antiquities Directorate, and the initial results revealed the remains of burning chambers (boilers), which were built of bricks/refractory bricks. These chambers were used to heat water and represent the lower part of a Roman public bath, consisting of a group of burning chambers with a length of 20 m and a width of 11 m (Fig. 1). There are thirteen of these chambers on the northern façade, twelve in the southern façade, and eight on the western façade, while the those on the eastern side were too damaged by





Fig. 2. Top plan view of the Roman bath. (Photo by Asem Asfour.)

bulldozing to properly interpret. The burning chambers are about 1.75 m in height, and their widths range between 43 cm and 55 cm. Excavations also revealed the ignition chamber and the main burner of the bath room (with a length of 6.35 m, a width of 55 cm and a height of 1.45 m), in addition to the gates that were used to supply these burning chambers with the materials needed for ignition and burning and to remove the remains of the fuel.

The work also revealed rectangular pottery pipes sticking to the walls of the bath room from the inside; these pipes worked as a smoke evacuation system and supplied the burning rooms with oxygen. The excavations revealed some internal walls related to the rooms of the Roman bath; the height of the walls from the floor of the furnace to the level of the modern asphalt street was 4 m (Fig. 2).

Excavations were also carried out in a part of the work area that was not subjected to bulldozing, as the asphalt layer of the public street was removed. The results of the excavation in this area revealed a number of walls dating back to the Umayyad period, in addition to pottery bricks and a white plaster floor installed over the ceiling. These excavations revealed a group of ceramic lamps, coins, and an incense burner, most of which dated to the Umayyad period. Ceramic fragments of Roman, Byzantine, Umayyad, Fatimid, Abbasid, and Ottoman periods were also found, in addition to marble fragments and metal remains that were used to install marble slabs on the stone walls.

The results of the excavations showed that a number of burning chambers in the Roman bath had been destroyed during the Byzantine period and that the building was reused during the Umayyad period, although its function was changed to residential purposes (i.e., not used as a bath). The discovery of this bath has contributed an integral part of the plan of the Roman city of Philadelphia that now joins other archaeological remains such as the Roman theater, the Nymphaeum, and features of the Citadel.