

SOUNDINGS — AREA G

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Square G.1.—There was some evidence to indicate that early periods of ancient towns often saw occupation on the eastern side of the mound. Since no Squares had been opened on that side of *Tell Hesbân*, it seemed wise to have a sounding there to check the occupation sequence and compare it with data elsewhere on the mound. Square G.1, a probe 3.00 x 3.00 m., was opened on a terrace about 44 m. southeast of D.4 (see Fig. 1).

Considering the purpose of the sounding, the site selected presented some early inconveniences because of a series of superimposed walls and cobblestone surfaces in the north half of the Square, all the way from topsoil to bedrock. Portions of these served as a built-in stairway for the excavating crew, but the limited working space south of them provided too little evidence to explain adequately their context and functions. The nature of a sounding did not permit sufficient scope to work out precisely the more complex relationships among the various loci. Nevertheless, the broad outlines of the occupation history of this sector of *Hesbân* were clearly identified.

A number of layers and wall fragments attested a substantial Islamic settlement during the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period. Though Byzantine occupation was clearly evident in other Areas of the mound, yet for some reason few Byzantine sherds and no clear-cut structures appeared in G.1. Late Roman was definitely represented, but the peak of activity seems to have been in the Early Roman period. Fill with Iron I sherds covered bedrock (4.15 m. below topsoil) where it sloped downward in the southeast corner; but this layer was probably Hellenistic fill (from Iron Age occupation layers nearby) which served as a base for a lime-

stone surface. This evidence witnessed to the Hellenistic propensity to build on bedrock whenever possible.

In general, the evidence from G.1 indicated that the east side of the mound shared the same range and sequence as found in the four major Areas opened on the *tell*. Bone finds showed that throughout these various periods sheep, goats, and cattle were the animals most evidently basic to the life and economy of the people. The gaps in occupation were another story. When the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk occupation began, the mound had lain silent for several centuries after it had been a bustling hub of activity in the Transjordan plateau. Then after being active again for about two centuries, it fell into another long silence lasting almost five hundred years.

Cistern G.2.—Excavation of a cistern in *Hesbân* village was labeled G.2. Since its clearance would have taken many days, and two days' digging was unproductive, the project was discontinued.

Sounding G.3.—Southwest of the acropolis, in the northwestern part of the village of *Hesbân*, were the ruins of an Islamic *Qasr*, "Castle." In order to date this substantial structure, soundings (1.50 x 2.50 m.) were opened inside and outside the south exterior wall and set perpendicular to a window ledge mounted at an angle in the wall.

Although the north (interior) sounding did not reach bedrock, it was dug to a depth of two meters. Some of the layers of fill contained Early Roman and earlier ceramic material, laid down during the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period from earlier occupation accumulations in the vicinity. The south (exterior) sounding reached bedrock 2.61 m. below ground surface. All the layers of fill showed Ayyūbid/Mamlūk pottery. The lack of readable coins from most of the layers, plus the inability to distinguish and date the various types of pottery used during the two and a half centuries of these periods, made it impossible to determine the precise dates for the phases of the *Qasr* complex. But the sounding

settled one thing—the south exterior of the Castle does not date from the Umayyad period as had occasionally been claimed.

Cave G.4.— On the basis of information from some villagers, Donald Wimmer and Timothy Smith inspected an extensive cave-cistern complex under the terrace west of the *Qasr*. Since the tomb excavation was nearing conclusion, they were assigned to make top plans, minor probes, and descriptive reports. From a large cave a partially filled passage led into a large, plastered cistern. This unplastered entryway was cut when the cisterns were used for human occupation, not water storage. Probes in the cistern produced Ayyūbid/Mamlūk and Byzantine sherds. Beyond the cistern was a central chamber from which three other cisterns had branched. The plastered complex may have been constructed in either Late or Early Roman times, but the early accumulations of silt layers had been removed to make the chambers habitable.