

AREA G.6, 7, 9

W. HAROLD MARE

Covenant Theological Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri

Sounding G.6

Description. Sounding G.6 was opened to the west down from Area C on the east bank of the Wadi el-Majarr (see Fig. 1) to investigate the significance of a wall (G.6:8) extending north-south in the sector and examine its relationship, if any, with classical-type column drums and capitals visible about 25 m. to the north. Square G.6 was 2.00 m. (north-south) \times 2.70 m. (east-west) on the east of Wall G.6:8, and 3.74 m. west of it. The highest level was 848.02 m. at the south-east corner and the lowest, 845.91 m. at the southwest corner.

All loci except one or two in G.6 were dated Ayyūbid/Mamlūk, with inclusion of Umayyad, Byzantine, Roman, and some Iron Age materials.

East of Wall G.6:8 the loci ranged in content from natural deposits to ash pockets and pits such as those for fires and cooking. G.6:15, 18, 20, and 21 were pits in this sector. G.6:16, 0.30 m. deep, was probably a natural erosion deposit, and G.6:17, loosely packed brown soil but harder near the balk lines, was probably a surface into which Pit G.6:18 was cut. This roughly square pit, an oven with ash pockets, showed remains of plaster lining and contained a large fragment of a heavy coarse baking dish. In a small pit (G.6:20) at bedrock were found Byzantine sherds; and G.6:21A and B consisted of deposits of brown soil with Byzantine sherds located in the weathered pit and in cracks in the bedrock. The sector produced very few bone fragments.

Wall G.6:8, surviving five courses high and built of biomicrite and *nari* stone, had a well dressed east face but was left rough on the west. The wall was exposed only 2.00 m. long, but was 0.41 m. wide and 2.03 m. high, with the bottom course set on bedrock.

G.6:24-26, 29, and 30 constituted fill between and under the stones there. G.6:30 yielded predominantly Byzantine sherds with, however, some possible Umayyad fragments.

Vault G.6:9, of rough hewn blocks of *nari* and biomicrite, 0.90 m. west of Wall G.6:8 (with subsidiary Wall G.6:32 between them), and 1.42 m. east of the west balk, was an arching course of stones beginning from a line of springer stones (G.6:27) on the south and arching up northward to its peak, then extending into the north balk (top level, 846.87 m.; bottom, 845.57 m.). The subsidiary Wall G.6:32, extending south of Vault G.6:9, produced Byzantine and Roman sherds. Below Wall G.6:32 and between Vault G.6:9 and Wall G.6:8 were G.6:28, 31, and 33, natural deposit layers, G.6:33 being a deep layer of soil, limestone, cobbles, and flintstone that helped fill up a bedrock shelf back of Vault G.6:9. West of Wall G.6:8 was G.6:27, the springer stone formation for Vault G.6:9, extending 1.00 m. west from the vault, being 0.50 m. wide. Layer G.6:35 over bedrock, in the northwest of the sector west of Wall G.6:8, consisted of a small stone cobble surface over a hard packed brown soil.

Interpretation. The east sector of G.6 produced evidence of Ayyūbid/Mamlūk habitation, although Loci G.6:20 (a small pit), 21A, and 21B showed Byzantine sherds. The same Ayyūbid/Mamlūk date was posited for the material in Wall G.6:8, except for Locus G.6:30 with its Byzantine sherds around and under the lowest course of Wall G.6:8 on bedrock. This Byzantine material seemed to indicate a limited amount of Byzantine habitation in this sector before the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period.

The material in Vault G.6:9 and the loci probed west of it produced evidence of Ayyūbid/Mamlūk habitation. Vault G.6:9 in its lower segment was built almost up against a shelf of bedrock, which shelf was filled in with small stone rubble (G.6:33), probably at a time later than the vault's construction. (Evident tip lines showed the way the rubble was put in at a steep angle.) Comparing modern use of other vaulted structures for animal shelters and storage purposes as seen on the west slope of the

wadi, west of G.6, it seemed likely that Vault G.6:9 was used in the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period as some kind of storage or shelter facility, with the small bedrock shelf at the back, or east, of Vault G.6:9 being used for small storage items.

Certainly there is no evidence that the classical columns and capitals lying on the ground surface soil some 25 m. north of G.6 had any connection with materials excavated here.

Sounding G.7

Description. Sounding G.7, 3 m. (east-west) \times 6 m. (north-south), at a top level (southeast corner) of 843.33 m., was located westward down the slope from Area C about 100 m. north of Sounding G.6. It was undertaken because of some visible walls there.

Excavation proceeded chiefly in the north half of the Square, northward from the north face of Wall G.7:6. This wall, 0.40 m. wide, extending east-west the 3 m. width of G.7, was exposed to three of its courses (0.32 m. high) of dressed stone. Wall G.7:4, 0.30 m. wide, was exposed to two courses (0.30 m. high) of dressed stone, beginning at a point 2 m. south of the north balk and extending west from the east balk for 1.60 m. before a turn south for 0.90 m. to meet Wall G.7:6. Wall G.7:7, 0.20 m. wide, survived three courses high of poorly dressed stone, beginning 2.50 m. south of the north balk, extending west from the east balk for 0.70 m., but with no visible connection with other walls. Vandalism hindered the further analysis of these walls, and without foundation trenches located yet, dates for the walls could not be determined. However, G.7:5, a soil and rock tumble layer between Walls G.7:4, 6, and 7 indicated a Byzantine deposit, with Late and Early Roman sherds also appearing.

Interpretation. Wall G.7:4 and the rubble fill south of it to Wall G.7:6 indicated that this structure possibly enclosed a manger or other animal installation. No surface or floor was found. Wall G.7:6 extended in rectangular shape farther south in G.7, but the nature and function of this structure was not detected.

The sherds found north of Wall G.7:6 dated the sector to the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period, except for Byzantine G.7:5, which needs further investigation.

Sounding G.9

Description. Sounding G.9, 2 m. (east-west) \times 4 m. (north-south), was located near the wadi southwest of the *tell* about 100 m. south of G.6. It was undertaken for a few days to see whether this location might produce evidence of a Roman road that might have connected with a Roman road that ran nearby down to Livias in the Jordan Valley.

G.9:1-4, the loci probed, were all dated to the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period, except possibly for G.9:4, which showed Byzantine sherds and only one possibly Ayyūbid/Mamlūk piece. G.9:2 also contained sherds of the Umayyad, Byzantine, and possibly Late Roman periods, along with a Roman coin (Constantine I, A.D. 306-309), arrowheads, and other objects. G.9:3 included sherds of those and the 'Abbāsīd periods and a Byzantine coin fragment. G.9:1-3 produced a number of sheep-goat bone fragments.

Interpretation. Probing G.9, 0.75 m. to 1.00 m. deep, produced no firm evidence for a Roman road, so the sounding was stopped. G.9 had produced only field soil, a few small stones, and sherds from the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period, together with 'Abbāsīd, Umayyad, Byzantine, and Late Roman material.