

AREA A*

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The fifth season of excavation in Area A completed a stratigraphic section along the east-west axis joining Area A and Area C. Previously a similar section along the north-south axis had joined Area A and Area D. Work in Area A in 1976 concentrated on the western part of the acropolis in order to ascertain the stratigraphy and architectural remains of the Islamic bath, the west end of the Byzantine basilica, the Roman building, and pre-Roman installations. Two new Squares (A.10 and 11) were opened and further work (excavating to bedrock) was done in Squares 6 (west balk), 8, and 9. By the end of this season a complete occupational history of Area A had been recovered. The following description will delineate the various strata identified in Area A during the five seasons, with special emphasis on the Squares opened in 1976.

Since Squares 8 and 9 both contained extensive evidence from the Mamlūk period—portions of the bath complex (Square 8) and hallways and rooms (Square 9)—it was felt that excavating Square 10 west and south of these Squares would provide some materials to integrate the various architectural features. The main feature found in Square 10 was a large paved courtyard which linked the architecture of the two surrounding Squares. Since this pavement was intact, it was not possible to excavate deeper because the Department of Antiquities desired to preserve and restore the Islamic remains in this sector.

* *Editor's Note:* This brief report does not conform to the general format for Area reports primarily in that description and interpretation are mixed.

Square 11 was excavated directly west of Square 9 for two principal reasons. First, its north balk was on the east-west axis and therefore the Square became a link joining Areas A and C in completing the stratigraphic section along the east-west axis. Furthermore, the Square cut the western edge of the acropolis where it was presumed the defense wall of the acropolis would be located. Such a wall, partly visible before excavating, was fully exposed and its construction identified as Hellenistic. Surfaces and other features were identified with the various phases of the wall.

Strata II-III: Mamlūk (ca. A.D. 1260-1456)

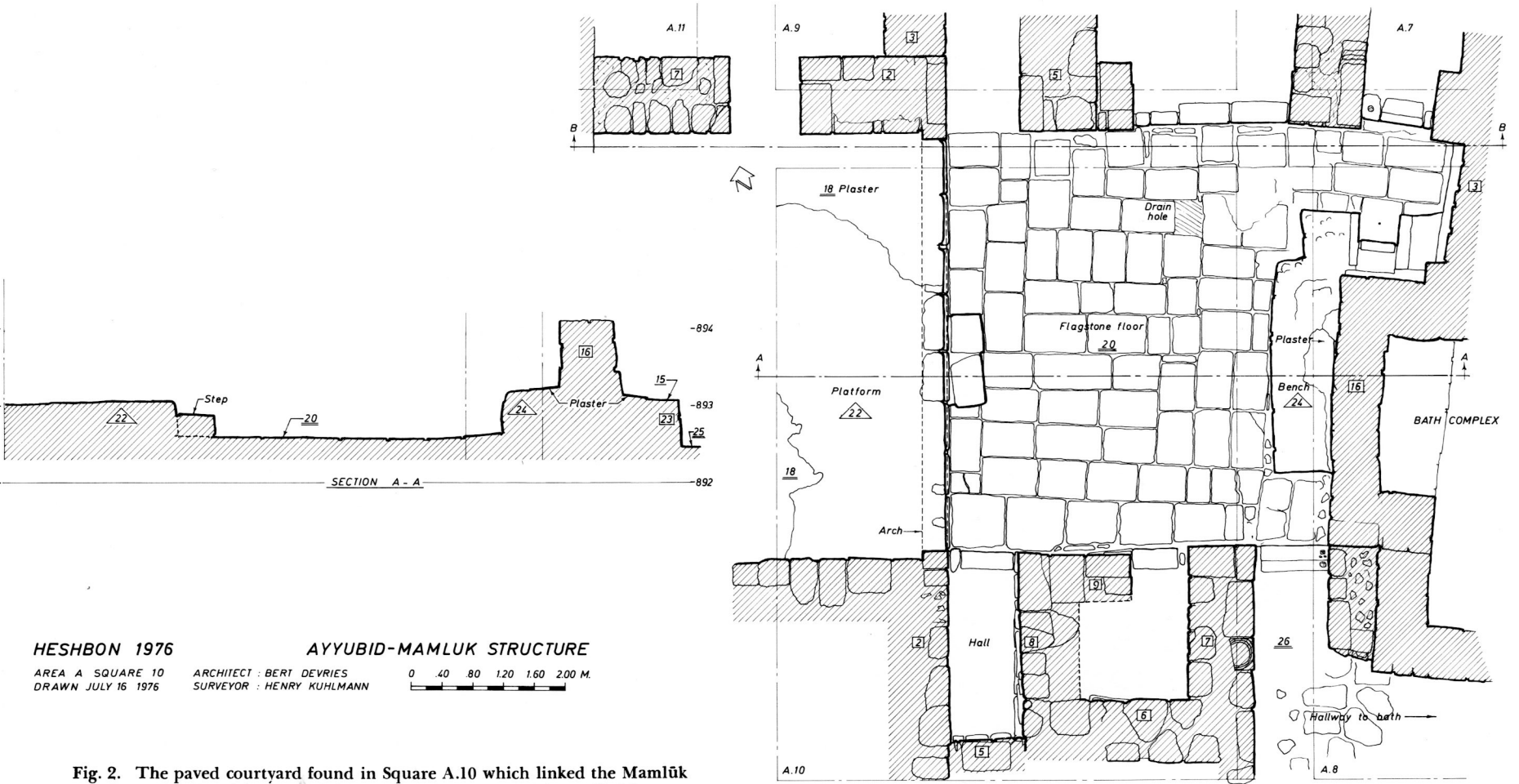
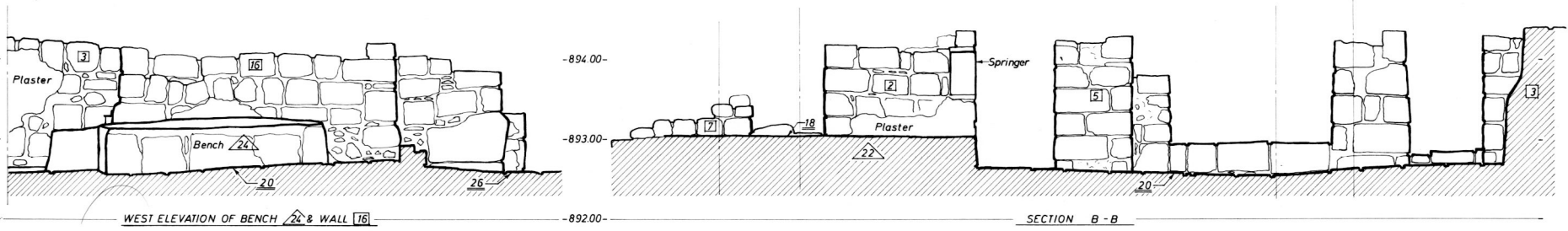
The previous four seasons had yielded clear evidence of Mamlūk occupation of the acropolis. It is now possible to reconstruct the general architectural layout of the summit in this period. Buildings were constructed on the south, west, and north sides of the acropolis. This U-shaped complex formed a large open courtyard in the middle, which appeared to have been open on the east side. A drainage system in this courtyard, evident in the water channels in Squares 2 and 4 (A.2:4, 5, 6, 9, 10; A.4:4) drew off the rain water into a large cistern (A.2:11) located between the pillar bases 2 and 3 in the north row of the basilica of an earlier stratum.¹ Although no surface of this courtyard was intact, it lay almost directly above the mosaic floor of the last phase of the basilica.

The most intricate architecture of the Mamlūk period was the bath complex, first identified in 1973² and further excavated in 1974.³ In 1973 two water tanks, bathing room, and hallway were uncovered along with the furnace chamber for the heating of the bathing room and the larger water tank. In 1974 in Square 8 the lounging room and entrance hallway with the main entrance were

¹ *AUSS* 7 (1969): 146-148, 152.

² *AUSS* 13 (1975): 117-122.

³ *AUSS* 14 (1976): 18-20.



HESHBON 1976 **AYYUBID-MAMLUK STRUCTURE**
 AREA A SQUARE 10 ARCHITECT : BERT DEVRIES 0 .40 80 1.20 1.60 2.00 M.
 DRAWN JULY 16 1976 SURVEYOR : HENRY KUHLMANN

Fig. 2. The paved courtyard found in Square A.10 which linked the Mamlūk Strata II-III architecture of the surrounding Squares (cf. pp. 19, 22).

uncovered. Sizeable portions of the plaster on various walls of the complex were still preserved; the tile floor of the bathing room was intact for the most part; and the pavement stones in the hallways were still in position. Directly north of the heating chamber was a room which served as the furnace room. In 1971 in Square 6 directly east of the main entrance to the bath complex, a room contemporaneous with the complex was identified.⁴ The architecture consisted of walls and a platform made of large architectural members: bases, column sections, architraves. This room served as a porch or vestibule of the bath complex.

The west wall of the bath complex was a solid wall with no openings, windows, or doorways. This feature (with the entrance on the east side) sealed off the bath from both the drafts and the dust occasioned by the west winds that blow almost daily across the acropolis. Likewise, the afternoon sun was kept out—just as the buildings on the west side of the acropolis provided shade and protection from dust and wind for the large open court.

Excavation in Square 9 in 1974 exposed a north-south hallway with related rooms contemporaneous with the bath complex.⁵ The western wall of this set of Mamlūk rooms was the outer perimeter wall of the acropolis exposed in Square 11 in 1976. The upper two courses of this perimeter wall (A.11:23) were dated in the Mamlūk period and were built upon the remains of the Hellenistic perimeter wall (A.11:49). A vaulted room, partially excavated in Square 9 in 1974, continued into Square 11. Although the vaulted roof was no longer intact (as partially in Square 9), evidence of the springer stones and collapsed arches (A.11:21) was found. The dirt fill in the room contained numerous Mamlūk sherds.

Another room in Square 11, located in the southeast part and formed by Walls A.11:7 (continuation of A.9:2), A.11:23, and A.11:3 (continuation of A.9:33), was the west portion of the room

⁴ *AUSS* 11 (1973): 19-20.

⁵ *AUSS* 14 (1976): 20-21.

identified in the southwest part of Square 9 in 1974. The latest sherds in the debris and dirt fill (A.11:2) in the room dated it to the Mamlūk period. Below this a plaster floor (A.11:8) was found also dating from the Mamlūk period. Later, with the removal of the north balk in Square 10, the doorway into this room was uncovered.

Extensive Mamlūk evidence was uncovered in Square 10. The ground surface contained scattered building stones from the superstructure, and the latest sherds dated from the Mamlūk period. In the southwest corner a 2.40 x 3.00 m. room was identified. This was not completely excavated but clearly was dated to the Mamlūk period on the basis of its association with other architectural features in the Square. East of this room a hallway containing a number of surfaces (A.10:11, 12, 13, 17) and a small room (Walls A.10:6, 7, 8, 9) were uncovered. These also dated in the Mamlūk period. The main feature uncovered in Square 10 was the intact pavement (A.10:20) in the northeast sector of the Square measuring 5.00 m. (east-west) by 5.30 m. (north-south). On its west side was a platform (A.10:22), .40 m. above the pavement on which some traces of plaster (A.10:18) were preserved. Another similar installation (A.10:24) on the east side of the pavement was found. This was built against the west wall (A.8:16) of the bath complex and stood about .60 m. above the pavement. The latest sherds in all the debris above the pavement and platforms dated from the Mamlūk period (see Pl. II:A).

The presence of the springer stones (A.10:27) of an arch in the walls on the north and south side of the west platform indicated that there was an arch or vaulted roof over the platform. The removal of the north balk of Square 10 (necessary to expose the entire Platform A.10:24) uncovered a hallway along the east side of the southeast room.

Squares 10 and 11 contributed significantly to the understanding of the Mamlūk occupation of the acropolis. The bath complex, although completely sealed off from the Mamlūk remains

in Squares 9 and 10, was an integral part of the total Mamlūk occupation of the site. On the north and south sides of the small paved courtyard in Square 10 were rooms, possibly domestic quarters, lying between the bath complex and the west perimeter wall. These rooms on the north side in Square 9 were connected by two hallways. A similar arrangement appeared on the south side, although that was not as extensively excavated. When these architectural features on the west end of the acropolis were related to Mamlūk remains on the south side of the acropolis identified in Area D, one half of the U-shaped Mamlūk building complex on the acropolis was recognized. The Mamlūk occupation of the acropolis was not only extensive but also impressive.

Stratum IV: Ayyūbid (ca. A.D. 1200-1260)

It was possible to identify distinct Ayyūbid occupation in certain layers excavated in 1976. In Square 8 it was possible to probe below the level of the Mamlūk bath complex between the south balk and the entrance hallway of the bath. It was in the upper part of a soil layer (A.8:14) that Ayyūbid sherds were the latest and predominant evidence. In the southeast room in Square 11 below the Mamlūk level, Surfaces A.11:9, 10, 22, 26, and 27 were all dated to the Ayyūbid period. In the vaulted room in the northeast part of Square 11 a *ṭabun* (A.11:31) and its use surface (A.11:32) were clearly dated to the Ayyūbid period.

These evidences of Ayyūbid occupation in Squares 8 and 11 were discovered because the Mamlūk occupation level could be removed since it did not involve significant architecture to be preserved. However, since Ayyūbid occupation has been detected in these two Squares at some distance apart, it may be concluded that the Ayyūbid occupation on the western part of the acropolis was relatively extensive.

Stratum V: 'Abbāsīd (ca. A.D. 750-969)

The 'Abbāsīd evidence was found in the same sectors as the

Ayyūbid evidence in Squares 8 and 11. In Square 8 this evidence was found successively in Soil Layer A.8:14, Surface A.8:30, Surface A.8:32, Surface A.8:33, Cobble Layer A.8:34, and Surface A.8:35. In Square 11 'Abbāsid material was identified in Surface A.11:34 and Soil Layer A.11:41 in the southeast room. As with the Ayyūbid evidence, these were the only places where such penetration below the Mamlūk remains was possible. Similarly, the scattered evidence suggested extensive 'Abbāsid occupation of the western part of the acropolis.

Stratum VI: Umayyad (ca. A.D. 661-750)

The major evidence for Umayyad occupation of the acropolis was the large *ṭabun* in Square 7 (A.7:73), uncovered in 1973 and fully excavated in 1974.⁶ The size of this installation certainly suggested a major occupation of the site at the time. In Square 8 along the south balk, Surface A.8:36 was dated in the Umayyad period. Between it and the *ṭabun* (A.7:73) lay the bath complex. Hence, again the extent of the Umayyad occupation can only be measured by these scattered evidences.

Strata VII-VIII: Late Byzantine (ca. A.D. 450-661)

The major Byzantine structure uncovered in Area A was the Christian basilica whose east, north, and south walls were identified. The major section of the east wall was semicircular and enclosed the apse of the church. Two courses of this wall were preserved above the foundation level. On both sides of the apse were small chambers whose precise features had been extensively disrupted by later building operations.

The eastern half of the north wall was the header-stretcher type and the western half was the reuse of an earlier Roman wall made of tightly-fitted and well dressed stones. The south wall was well constructed. An arch was constructed in its eastern part where it passed over a large cistern. By this means the strain on

⁶ *AUSS* 13 (1975): 123-124; 14 (1976): 22-23.

the cavity was reduced. The western half of this wall lay outside the excavated part of Area A.

The western wall of the basilica could not be positively identified. Above the western part of the church the Islamic building complex with the bath (described above) was constructed in Squares A.7, 8, 9, 10, and 11. Since the Jordanian Department of Antiquities desired to preserve this Islamic architecture, it was not possible to excavate extensively below it. A few small probes revealed some traces of the basilica, but these were inconclusive to locate the western exterior wall of the basilica.

Numerous sections of the basilica pillars were in evidence—some lying on the surface, others uncovered in the course of excavating, and others found reused in later buildings. Likewise, numerous pillar bases were found—some in situ and some dislocated or reused. Portions of four bases in the north row were visible on the surface and found to be in situ. Two bases in situ in the south row were uncovered in Squares 4 and 6. These bases were resting on stylobate walls.

Traces of the mosaic floor of the basilica were found in various places along with numerous loose tesserae—indicating that the entire floor area was a mosaic pavement. The presence of a mosaic floor superimposed on an earlier floor in Square 6 and in the south aisle in Squares 3 and 4, and of the mosaic and lower surface in the apse (Square 3) establishes two phases for the basilica. A sizable portion of the upper apse mosaic (A.3:3) was uncovered in 1968.⁷ Its similarity to other dated mosaics in the Madaba area suggests a mid-sixth-century date for this phase (Stratum VIII). Other traces of this upper mosaic in the basilica proper were found in the nave in Square 4;⁸ in the south aisle, in Squares 3 and 4;⁹ in Locus A.6:47;¹⁰ and in the north aisle

⁷ *AUSS* 7 (1969): 148-149.

⁸ *AUSS* 7 (1969): 152-153.

⁹ *AUSS* 13 (1975): 128-130.

¹⁰ *AUSS* 13 (1975): 124-126.

(south of Walls A.7:12 and A.9:33), in A.7:76 and 9:99. This consisted of white tesserae, perhaps indicating a utilitarian rather than decorative function in the western part of the church.

In 1973 evidence of an anteroom north of the basilica from this later phase was found in Squares 5 and 7.¹¹ The exact size of the room could not be ascertained because of reuse in Umayyad times when the central part of the mosaic was removed for the installation of the *ṭabun* (see above).

Extensive traces of the mosaic floor in the south sacristy were uncovered in 1968 and 1971. It appears that the doorway from the south aisle into the room was blocked during the latter part of the second phase of the church.¹² From these scattered traces of mosaic floors in all parts of the basilica it is evident that this sixth-century building was beautifully decorated.

The earlier phase of the church is evidenced by the extensive *huwwar* surface (A.3:7) in the apse¹³ and by the lower mosaic in Square 6 (A.6:48).¹⁴ Further work on this was done in 1976 with the removal of the badly eroded balk between Squares 6 and 8. This work substantiated the judgment in 1973 from the design of the mosaic with its border, that the west wall of the earlier basilica was located here. This indicates that the earlier basilica was shorter than the later one. Similarly, no trace of an earlier mosaic was found in the western end of the north aisle in Squares 7 and 9, nor under the mosaic of the anteroom in Squares 5 and 7.

The date of this earlier phase of the church, as suggested by the typology of the mosaic and the potsherds, is late fifth to early sixth century. This would correlate with the evidence of similarly dated churches in Madaba, Mt. Nebo, and environs.

Strata XV-XVI: Late Roman (ca. A.D. 135-324)

The occupation of the acropolis was extensive during the

¹¹ AUSS 13 (1975): 122-124; 14 (1976): 24.

¹² AUSS 13 (1975): 130.

¹³ AUSS 7 (1969): 149.

¹⁴ AUSS 13 (1975): 126.

Roman period, although the remains are not extensive since the large basilica covered the major part of the Area and also reused some of the earlier architecture. The latest Roman evidence was found in the cave complex in Square 1 (Loci A.1:44 and A.1:67).¹⁵ However, the major Roman occupation can be dated to the transition period from Early Roman to Late Roman on the basis of work in Square 11 in the 1976 season. This could be correlated with data in Square 9 and in Square 6 providing evidence of a major structure on the acropolis in that period.

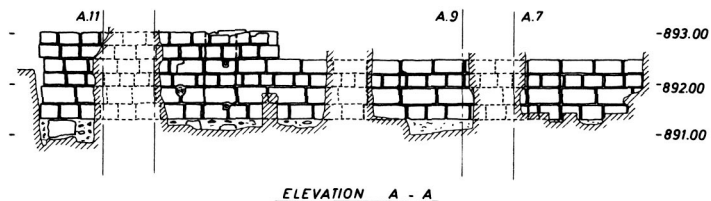
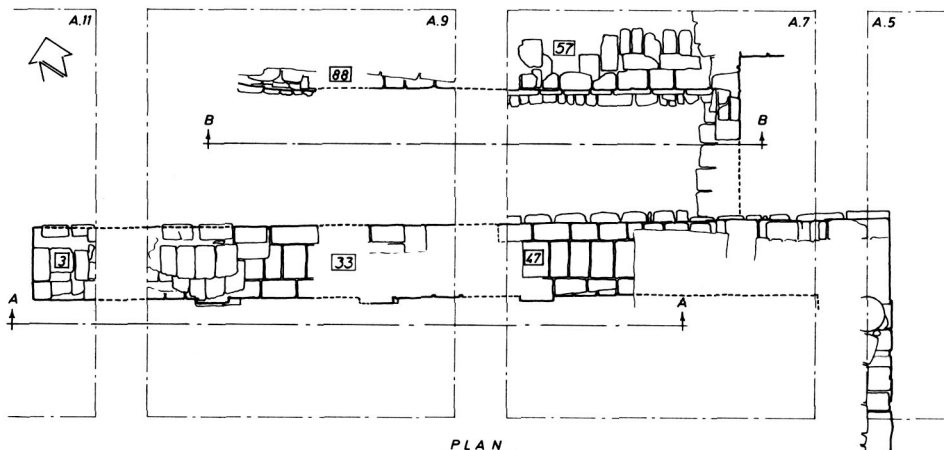
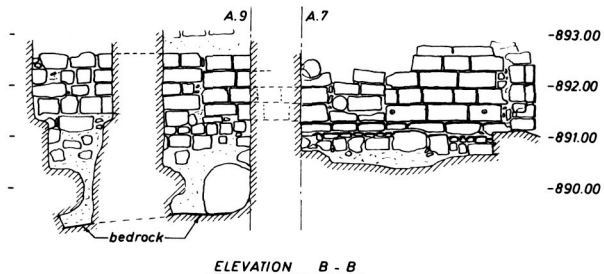
Strata XVI-XVII: Early Roman IV to Late Roman I
(ca. A.D. 70-193)

Earlier seasons had indicated that the basilica reused a well-constructed Roman wall for its north wall. This east-west wall began in Square 7 (Locus A.7:47), continued in Square 9 (A.9:33), and ended in Square 11 (A.11:3) against the perimeter wall on the edge of the acropolis. Another wall parallel to and north of this wall was Wall A.7:57 = 9:88 = 11:48. These walls could be dated precisely on the basis of foundation Trenches A.9:89 and 108 for Wall A.9:88, and A.9:110 for Wall A.9:33.

The massive size and impressive masonry of these parallel walls suggest some major structure. This is further indicated by similarly constructed platforms running north-south in Square 6 (A.6:65) which may have been the foundations for pillar bases. A north-south wall (A.6:69) parallel to these platforms but located west of them may have been the east wall of the main structure. Unfortunately, this lies below the bath complex and could only be partially exposed.

The perimeter wall along the western edge of the acropolis was reinforced with a sloping stone layer (A.11:15). A drainage channel (A.11:16) was identified in this layer. In the rooms formed by the massive parallel walls a dirt fill (A.11:42) and a surface (A.11:44) were identified and dated to the Early Roman period by the sherds. The storage complex uncovered in 1974 in

¹⁵ AUSS 11 (1973): 29-30.



HESHBON 1976

AREA A SQUARES 5-9, 11

ROMAN STRUCTURE

0 80 160 240 320 400M.

DRAWN AUGUST 1976 BY BERT DEVRIES, DANIEL SALZMANN & MERLING ALOMIA

A.8

A.6

Fig. 3. The foundation of a major Roman Strata XVI-XVII building on the acropolis (cf. p. 27).

Square 5, lying north and east of these Roman walls, also dates in the same period.¹⁶

It is evident that much of the Roman occupation of the acropolis was cleared away for the Byzantine architecture. Nevertheless, those Roman features remaining certainly point to a major Roman building on the acropolis—perhaps a government building or temple.

Stratum XX: Late Hellenistic (ca. 198-63 B.C.)

The Hellenistic evidence on the acropolis was found in Square 11 in 1976. The lower part of the north-south perimeter Wall A.11:49 along the west side clearly dated to the Late Hellenistic period. Bonded to it was a Late Hellenistic wall running east-west. The Roman Wall A.11:3 was built on this Wall A.11:50. Associated with both of these Hellenistic walls were clearly identified Surfaces A.11:45, 47, and 54. Mixed in and between these surfaces were many large stones—suggesting intervening destructions. The last Hellenistic Surface (A.11:54) was on bed-rock (see Pl. II:B).

The Hellenistic evidence in conjunction with the western perimeter wall correlates very well with similar evidence regarding the southern perimeter wall uncovered in Area D. Whatever Hellenistic architecture there was on the acropolis was completely destroyed in the subsequent Roman and Byzantine constructions.

Summary

The acropolis in Area A was a natural location for major buildings. The five seasons of work here have confirmed their presence. In Mamlūk times a central court was surrounded on the north and south with buildings (the north side was not excavated but the accumulation of debris certainly suggests such a construction). On the west side was the bath complex and other rooms with a paved open courtyard. During the Byzantine period

¹⁶ *AUSS* 14 (1976): 27-28.

an impressive basilica graced the acropolis. In the Roman period there was a major building with imposing walls and possible pillars. The perimeter wall identified on the south and west sides pointed to a fortified acropolis in the Hellenistic period whose buildings have disappeared.

This is the extent of the history of the acropolis that can be recovered. Some Iron Age sherds suggest it may have been occupied in earlier periods, and, of course, Hellenistic and Iron Age occupations are known from elsewhere on the *tell*. However, the Roman architects apparently removed all of this earlier evidence as they built their structures on the bedrock.



A. Squares A.7-10. View to north. Mamlūk courtyard in center surrounded by rooms with arched entrance to left and bath complex to right. Photo: Paul H. Denton.



B. Square A.11. View to south. On left, Wall A.11:3 (upper courses, Mamlūk) above Wall A.11:50 (lower courses, Late Hellenistic) abut acropolis perimeter Wall A.11:49 (Late Hellenistic) on right. Photo: Paul H. Denton.