CB 5.6: Final Report 2000

The 1999 Kedesh excavations in squares CB 4.7 and CB 4.8 revealed that the corner stones of the interior walls of the Hellenistic building had fallen victim to later robbing episodes. Because of the presence of the Roman temple at the base of the tel and the literary testimony of Josephus, it is certain that Kedesh had a significant Roman-period occupation. So far, however, this has not been echoed in the archaeological record. Acting under the supposition that these corner stones had been robbed by the Romans, and that were not likely taken for an account of their size, a trench was laid out for the area to the immediate north of the Hellenistic building with the expectation of revealing evidence of Roman occupation.

As the building covers nearly the entire eastern half of the south tel, the first issue to be decided was where to place the trench along the east-west axis. Three 10 x 10 squares were cleared (CB 5.8, CB 5.7, and CB 5.6), and a surface survey was undertaken. Using the presence of Roman ceramics as the principal criterion, CB 5.6 was selected as the square to be pursued. Within this square, the southeast portion (5 x 5 m) was chosen as the site of the excavator’s trench. This quadrant was thought to be significant not only due to the presence of Roman occupation, but also a means of determining the nature of the area to the north of the building during the Hellenistic period. In both cases this research design was realized, but the results were not what was expected.

The excavation took place through session 1 of the 2000 season, and afterward the different units were grouped into 14 separate loci. 6 of these were architectural, the rest were different episodes of fill. What follows is a brief locus-by-locus account, with concluding interpretive remarks.

CB 5.6: Locus 000

This locus is the topsoil of the 5x5 trench. It is characterized by gray-brown soil, which has a tendency to form into medium and large clods. All periods of pottery were represented, unsurprisingly dominated by a large amount of Ras-al-Furqah wares. Most sherds were badly worn and broken into small pieces, most likely as a result of Arab plow activity. 48 tesserae were also found in this locus, which raised hopes that a Roman or Byzantine mosaic floor would be found.

A soil excavation progressed deeper, rubble began to appear. This formed a dense layer, and covered most of the square except for the NE corner. The rubble layer marks the boundary between Locus 000 and Locus 002, with the notable exception of Unit 009. Pottery densities for units in the topsoil ranged between 4.65 g/l and 2.05 g/l, averaging 3.72 g/l. Unit 009, despite being the first layer to appear, had a similar density, 4.24 g/l. The rest of the rubble layer had a much higher density of pottery, 7.57 g/l. Unit 009 was thus associated with Locus 000 rather than Locus 002, even though its soil and latest dateable material align better with the latter. In this circumstance, it is felt that density is a more compelling indicator than soil or pottery type, and can be explained as topsoil that accumulated between the individual stones in the rubble as fill.

The NE corner, which never had more than a sprinkling of stones (quite different from the rest of the quadrant) directly overlies Locus 003. The most significant criterion for separating the loci was the change in soil from dark greyish-brown to an orange-brown color that indicated different deposit events.
CB 5.6 Locus 001

This locus designates the plaster floors in the south of the trench. They were discovered during the excavation of Locus 005, and seem to represent three separate flooring episodes. The highest in elevation (which only extends into the trench a short distance) is the best constructed of the three, with uniform thickness (ca. 4 cm) and a smooth surface. In appearance it seems to resemble the interior floor of the Hellenistic building (CB 4.7), but too little survives to make this a certainty. This layer of flooring, like those beneath it, has a sharp northern edge that suggests a later cut.

The middle floor is by far the largest, spanning most of the way across the southern end of the trench. It runs along a NW/SE axis, with three main patches. Like the floor above it, it seems to have been cut at some point - possibly an activity related to the early Roman dumping revealed in Locus 008. The thickness of this floor varies, ranging from 1 to 5 cm. It is much more worn than the plaster above it, perhaps evidence of a different quality of construction. Beneath it there is another floor, which is similar in appearance.

The floors were not taken up during excavation; it was thought better to preserve what little survives intact than to remove it in order to determine an absolute date. Acting on the assumption that this plaster floor is related to the Hellenistic building, it is hoped that the 2nd session excavation in CB 4.6 will answer the question of absolute date less destructively. In the meantime, the floors are thought to be Hellenistic on the basis of their similarity to other floors in dateable contexts elsewhere on the tel.

CB 5.6 Locus 002

This was a thick rubble layer, averaging 18 cm in thickness. It was comprised mostly of small and medium sized stone (fist to basketball sized), which densely covered all but the extreme NE corner of the trench. This corner never had a significant rubble deposition, and is thus a separate Locus (003) directly under topsoil. Locus 003 is next to 002, and also below it.

Ras-al-Fukrah is the latest dateable material in the rubble layer, but most of the pottery is of Byzantine or earlier date. A single piece of Ras-al-Fukrah was found in the locus beneath it (005), which gives a terminus aterius to the rubble layer. This seems uncomfortably late, and may owe partly to the presence of an animal hole. (See discussion in Locus 003.) Other than this shard, the pottery from beneath the rubble is no later than the Ummayad Period. Tasseus continued to be found in the soil (28 in total), but this number is far less than that from the topsoil and dampened expectations of finding a mosaic floor in this quadrant. However, they do testify to the presence of one such floor somewhere in the vicinity.

CB 5.6 Locus 003

This locus is comprised of orange-brown soil, and is focused mainly in the northern corner of the trench. In addition to soil color, the boundary between the rubble layer was used as a determining criterion, as it emphasizes the separation between this locus and 002. The pottery here had a density of 8/13, and was generally larger and better preserved than that in the rubble layer. (However, its condition was still worse than that of the pottery in Locus 008.) During excavation, a single course of medium-
large flat stones (Locus 006) was discovered running from the NW corner to the center of the E wall. They appeared too regular to be naturally deposited, and were deemed by the supervisor and directors to have been part of a manmade feature at one time. However, since the relation of this line of stones to any other architectural features could not be determined, they were noted and removed. The cleaning under these stones was the final unit of the locus.

As discussed above (see Locus 002), an animal hole was discovered next to the single course of stones. This was quarantined and removed with Unit 027, but perhaps not effectively enough. In the unit directly beneath it (030), a sherd of Ras al Fikrah ware was discovered. Given the contaminating nature of animal holes, it is tempting to consider this sherd as a possible anomaly. Doing so would push back the terminus post quem of the rubble fill to the Unnayiyd period. At present there is not enough information to make a certain evaluation, but since the rubble fill extends beyond the baulks into the surrounding squares, the question of the date can be answered definitively with further excavation. Until then, it is best to regard the terminus post quem as tenuous.

CB 5:6 Locus 004

This locus is a continuation of the excavation of the orange-brown fine-grained soil in the northern part of the trench, but is separated from 003. This is for a few reasons: the latest datable material is earlier (Byzantine), it is beneath the course of stones (Locus 006), and it never was in contact with topsoil (unlike 003). Its northern, western, and eastern extents were the respective baulks, and the southern extent followed the soil change that separated it from 005. It is over part of 008 (the probe) and under 003. The locus was closed not on account of a change in features, but rather because of a lack thereof. After several passes that revealed nothing remotely architectural, it was decided to stop taking trench-wide passes and instead focus excavation in a single 1.5 m wide-probe along the western baulk (Locus 008).

The pottery shards in this locus were generally medium to large, occasionally with crisp edges that suggested minimal disturbance since deposition. The density of pottery to soil is 8.08 g/l. Tesselae continued to be found, but in much reduced number. If they are associated with the latest datable ceramics, then they must be no later than Byzantine.

CB 5:6 Locus 005

This locus was to the south of the soil change that was initially noticed in conjunction with the single course of stones that bisected the trench (see Locus 006). It was quickly observed that Locus 006 (and, after its removal, the location that it had occupied) divided the soil between orange-brown to the north and ashy-grey to the south. Several pieces of plaster surfaced in the course of digging, and soon resulted in the discovery of a plaster floor (Locus 001). This locus lies beneath Locii 003 and 002, and above 001 and part of 008. It is contiguous to 005. A portion of the unit's excavation resulted in the pedestalizing of the plaster floor, with the result that it reaches a depth deeper than that of the floor itself.

The density of pottery discovered here was slightly higher than in Locus 004; the latter had a density of 7.90 g/l, compared to 10.77 g/l in this locus. Except for a single
fragment of an early Roman jar of unidentified type, the majority of the pottery (excluding Pre-Persian) here was of Hellenistic date. However, the finds of Roman pottery deep in the probe (Locus 008) suggest that this loci shares an absolute date in the early Roman period, although the eastern extent of the Roman dump found there is uncertain. Three tesserae were found, but whether they can help date the loci is unknown at present.

CB 5.6 Locus 006

This loci designates the first stone architectural feature found in the trench. During excavation, a single course of medium-large flat stones (Locus 006) was discovered running from the NW corner to the center of the E wall. They were in three principal patches, with possible additional segments to north and south. They appeared too regular to be naturally deposited, and were deemed by the supervisor and directors to have been part of a manmade feature at one time. However, since the relation of this line of stones to any other architectural features could not be determined, they were noted and removed.

CB 5.6 Locus 007

This loci marks the very large flue stones that were found in the excavation of the probe (Locus 008). They enclose the top of the 'cistern' (Locus 009), and are held in place by stones around them, for underneath there is an open space (ca. 20 cm deep) without any fill. The undersides of the stones appear water-worn. It was initially thought that this was a pavement, but the excavation of Loci 010 and 013 shows that it did not extend to the south. The northern, eastern, and western extents cannot be determined on account of haulls. The largest central stone seems to swivel up without much difficulty, whether this was meant as a means of access in antiquity is unknown.

CB 5.6 Locus 008

This loci marked a dramatic shift in the excavation of the trench; the eastern 2.5 meters were abandoned on account of a lack of notable features (Loci 004 and 005), and attention was instead focused upon a deep probe that would determine the extent of Early Roman pottery that continued to turn up. Doing so proved to be an arduous task; a Shikhin jar of early Roman date was found in Unit 022, over two and a half meters beneath the surface and over one meter deep in the probe. In addition, the amounts of bone and pottery more than doubled in comparison to the loci above. The density of pottery in Locus 004 was 21.73 g/l- the highest the trench would see. The majority was of late Hellenistic date (with a disproportionately large amount of fine wares and a surprisingly small amount of Pre-Persian pottery), but the presence of the Shikhin jar (found wedged between the rocks as it was), makes it unquestionably clear that the absolute date for this probe and the loci above it cannot predate the early Roman period. The sherds were large and in good condition, and yet few of the fine ware rims and bases could be said to come from the same vessel. In addition to ceramics, a carnelian bead and an alabaster bead (of different sizes) were found, as well as a fragment of blown glass. These finds suggest that the loci is evidence of an early Roman dump, which also likely involved the filling of the 'cistern' (Locus 009, unexcavated).
The soil in this locus was orange-brown and fairly powdery, with several brief rubble episodes made up of small stones. It lay under Loci 004 and 005 (along the western baullik), and above 007, 010, and 011. It was closed when the stone 'pavement' (Locus 007) was revealed in the northwest corner of the trench. Some of the soil from this locus and the surrounding baulliks (as a result of trimming) trickled into the holes that marked the entrance to the 'cistern' (Locus 009), and should this ever be excavated, must be noted as likely contamination.

The southern extent of the probe was the plaster floor (Locus 001), which was pedestalized and left for later removal. The floor was not taken up nor undercut, and so a date for its construction was not determined. The northern and western extents were the two baulliks, and the eastern extent was delineated 1.5 m from the western baullik.

CB 5.6 Locus 009

This locus is the pit that lies beneath the large flat stones (Locus 007). It is filled with powdery orange-brown soil, but not quite completely. This is thought to be a cistern or well of some sort, but as yet the depth, extent, and function are unknown. However, the stone rod was pushed into the soft soil to a depth of 91 cm before resistance became too great. Thus, we know that the pit is at least that deep, and perhaps much deeper. Excavation of this pit was not begun on account of safety concerns, and the entire probe was backfilled for the same reason.

CB 5.6 Locus 010

This locus was begun when the 'pavement' and 'cistern' were discovered during excavation. Locus 008 was closed when these were found, and this locus was begun as an exploration of the areas to the south. Initially, the aim was to understand the nature of the two courses of stone that ran roughly parallel along an E/W axis. In addition, it was expected that the 'pavement' would be reached here as well and would be thus defined. However, in both cases the results were surprising. First, the courses of stone turned out not to be walls, but rather single courses of stones set upon what appears to have been plaster and brick layers. These layers were preserved under the stones, but not in the areas between them, suggesting that they were destroyed during the dumping process. On both sides of the southern course of stones (Locus 012), the soil was quite damp and clayey. Whether this owed to decayed limestone or some activity of the water table is uncertain, but it was a marked change from the soil that characterized Locus 008 above. The northeast corner of the locus, however, revealed soil that resembled that of locus 008, and resulted in the decision to create a separate locus for the unit that never had any such soil (Locus 013).

Excavation of this locus revealed that the 'pavement' did not extend to the south of the course of stones designated Locus 011. These stones sat partially on the 'pavement' and partially on the clayey soil of Locus 010, and may thus have been a part of the construction of the former. Given the narrowness of the probe, it is impossible to make a determination of the role that these stones may have played.

There was a marked reduction in pottery density from the locus above, declining to less than half the former amount (9.66 compared to 21.73 g/l). There was, however, a small amount of Hellenistic pottery found, which serves and the latest datable material and the absolute date of the locus. It is expected, however, that this Hellenistic pottery
came from the northeast corner discussed above, and that the area under the plaster and brick layer was likely all Pre-Persian. The sample of pottery is quite small, as was the volume of soil excavated, and further exploration of the soil in the eastern 3.5 meters of the trench is required before one makes definitive statements with the data provided by this locus.

CB 5.6 Locus 011
This locus is a single course of stones that sits partially on the 'pavement' (Locus 007) and partially upon the clayey soil that characterizes Locus 010. These stones seem to be in a line, and not mere rubble. It is unknown what function they had; the probe was too narrow to determine their relation to other features.

CB 5.6 Locus 012
This locus is a single course of stones that sit entirely upon the clayey soil that characterizes Locus 010. These stones, like those in Locus 011, seem to serve some architectural function. It is unknown what this was, however, as the probe was too narrow to determine their relation to other features.

CB 5.6 Locus 013
This locus is quite small, represented by a single unit and only 400 liters of soil. As a result, the conclusions reached here must be regarded with caution; a larger sample is required before they can be used definitively.

The soil here was quite clayey, as it was in most of 010. It was a dark-brown color, damp, and packed down easily. At the lowest elevation, ash and charcoal began to appear in a regular layer. The pottery was sparse (a density of 3.75 g/l), and the sherds smaller and less well-preserved than they had been above. With the exception of a single fragment of a Byzantine cup (judged to be excavation-caused contamination), all identifiable pottery was pre-Persian. As a result, this locus is thought to signal the end of the Early Roman dumping phase in the area south of the 'cistern'.

The Byzantine sherd is thought to be contamination for several reasons. First, the unit matrix reveals that no Byzantine wares had been encountered for over one meter of excavation. Second, the depth of the balks of the trench here approached 3 meters from surface, and were 1.5 meters deeper than the rest of the excavated area (along the eastern wall of the probe). The locus was 1.5 m (east to west) x 62 cm (north to south), very small and difficult to excavate without brushing the balks. Both supervisor and director witnessed an episode in which the mere act of accessing the probe resulted in likely contamination, as an excavator used the eastern balk as a foothold. Thus, the Byzantine cup sherd is discarded as intrusion, and an absolute date in the pre-Persian period is used instead. This matter could be confirmed by an extension of the probe into the area beneath 004 and 005, but this does not accord with the research design of the current expedition and will be left aside for future exploration.

Interpretative Summary and Conclusion:
The 2000 excavations in CB 5.6, begun in search of Roman occupation, revealed not houses but trash. This seems abundantly clear from the high density of ceramics and bone shown in Locus 008, and also from the depth to which the Roman wares were
found. Nowhere else on the tel have Roman ceramics been found so far beneath the surface, and the fact that an earlier floor seems to have been cut to clear space confirms that these wares, despite being lower in elevation, were deposited later. The fact that such a large amount of unmatched fragments of fine ware were found in close proximity also suggests a secondary or tertiary deposit, perhaps associated with the clearing of some part of the Hellenistic building or the small house to the west for reoccupation purposes. The reasons for the dumping are not yet clear, but the archaeological record makes it clear that it did take place.

Of perhaps greater interest than the dump phenomenon is the discovery of the architecture associated with it. First, a plaster floor was unexpected in an area north of the Hellenistic building, and its presence remains unaccounted for. It is possible that it was some sort of courtyard, or perhaps part of an exterior colonnade or row of shops. Then again, it may have been related to the 'cistern' (Locus 009). To determine this, it would be necessary (and difficult) to evaluate whether the northern cutting took place in the Roman period or sometime before. If it was a Roman cutting, and the floor extended further north, then it would have covered the cistern and could not incorporate it in its function. If, on the other hand, it stopped beforehand, the possibility that the two were related rises in probability. While the archaeological record does not provide this answer directly, it does seem most likely that the Roman dump filled an existing, known pit (or 'cistern'), and that they did not happen upon it by chance. Given the steepness of the tel, there seems little need to dig a garbage pit when easier trash disposal can be accomplished by dumping over the brink. It seems then, that whatever structure or function to which the plaster floor was related, the 'cistern' remained visible and probably functional in the Hellenistic period.

This 'cistern' is somewhat puzzling and was certainly an unexpected find. On account of the large central stones (which appear water-worn on the underside) and the open space within, this is thought to be some sort of water installation. Acting on the previous assumption that it was visible in the Roman period (when it was filled in), one might hypothesize that it was related to the water supply of the large Hellenistic building. Given the height of the tel, it seems unlikely, as it would need to be quite deep in order to draw water. Then again, the presence of a perennial spring at the base of the tel seems to obviate the need for a major water supply above. It may also have been an emergency supply for stages, possibly a functioning relic of the Bronze or Iron Age. At present, however, the precise nature of the pit is uncertain, and the benefit of clarifying this is not presently thought to be worth the investment in labor and time necessary to carry out a safe and careful excavation.

A final mystery in CB 5.6 is the nature of the single courses of stones (Loci 006, 011, and 012). Several options exist, but none is very satisfactory. First, it may be that they are merely coincidental in placement, and are merely rubble. However, the singularity of stones of this size in the trench, and the similar height and orientation of the stones, makes this dismissal of their importance somewhat premature. In the case of the upper course, it is possible that it served as an outer trim to the plaster floor, marking its extent, but this also is problematic, as it conflicts with the argument given above for the visibility of the 'cistern' in the Hellenistic period. If the floor extended this far, it would have covered the 'cistern'.
The lower courses (Loci 011 and 012) are also confusing. They were initially thought to be some sort of drain, but upon excavation this was shown to be untrue. The stones in 011 were not particularly stable, although this was accepted by the nature of their pedestal. It is possible that they had some function related to the 'cistern', perhaps marking a path or even a stairway, but this cannot be determined without further excavation on account of the narrowness of the probe. At present, one must leave them as probable architectural features of unknown association.

Following the excavation in CB 5.6, a new trench was chosen in the southeastern quadrant of CB 4.6. This quadrant is bisected by the northern wall of the building, and it is hoped that exploration of the area directly outside the wall will serve to clarify some of the questions raised in this trench, specifically in relation to the nature and extent of the plaster floors.

Bjørn Anderson
6.26.00
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