

Umayyad and Abbasid Period Remains at Ramla (White Mosque Street)

2011 and 2012 Excavations

Preliminary Report

Excavation Permits: B367/2011, B382/2012

Excavating Archaeologists: Miriam Avissar, Sigal Golan, Conn Herriott

Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd.

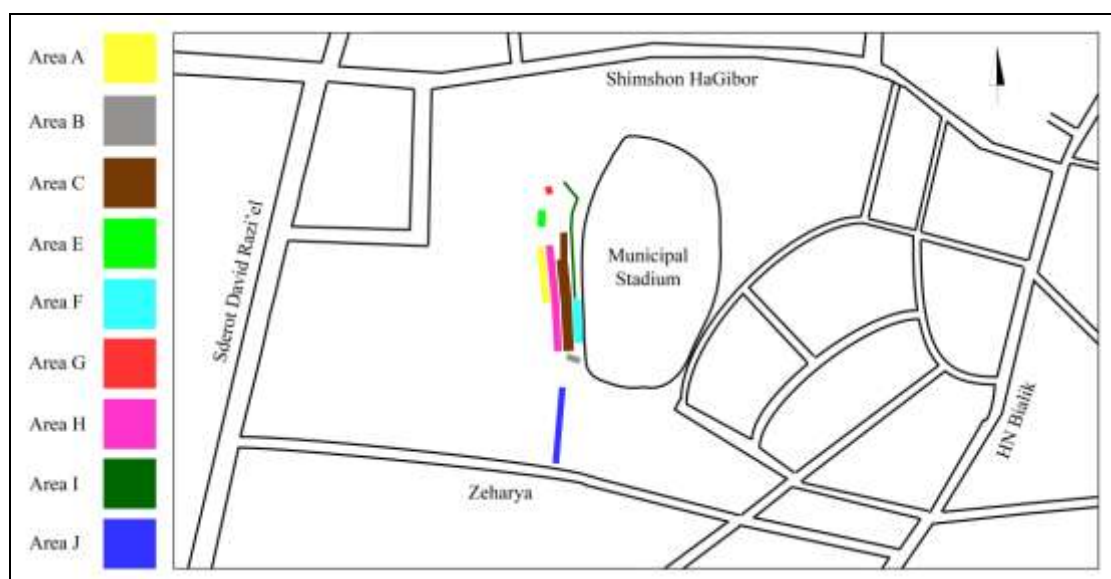
Academic Sponsor: Hebrew Union College

Author: Conn Herriott

This excavation uncovered a portion of the Umayyad/Abbasid city of Ramla, dug in 2011-12 (B.367/2011: Areas A-C, E-I; B.382/2012: Area J). The nature of this urban site was not identified, but it seems to have been domestic and habitational in nature. In the forthcoming final report, a more detailed interpretation will turn on consideration of this site in the context of nearby excavations and our understanding of ancient Ramla as a whole.

Any discussion of this site must also take into account two barriers to its understanding. Firstly, the ancient remains had been badly damaged by tractor work prior to our excavation, as well as many of the walls having been robbed of their stones some time after the abandonment of the site. And secondly, our investigations were restricted to a long narrow strip of land, which provided much useful information on a north/south axis but in terms of a second dimension—east/west—we were limited to ‘keyhole (or telephone box) archaeology’ in several areas.

With these limitations in mind, we offer the following provisional, basic and non-contextualised outline of our findings.



The Site

The greatest concentration of extant features—cisterns, walls, pits and intact floors—was in Area B and the southern portions of Areas C, F and H. Further south lay Area J, in which were found cist pits, other cut features, walls and occasional plaster or mortar surfaces, all relatively spread out. In the northern section of the dig—Areas E, G and I—a similar sparseness of features was identified, although whilst here also we uncovered walls, surfaces and cut features, no cist pits were found.

So far then we can make the following general observations about the spatial distribution of features:

- Cisterns and related features (pipes and basins) were concentrated in the centre of the dig site (Areas A, B, C, and F)
- Cist pits were concentrated in the south end of the site (Area J)
- The highest density of walls and surfaces was uncovered in the north end of the site (Area I), presumably because this was the highest part of the site, and least pre-excavated by machines
- There was a general east/west-north/south orientation of walls

Feature Types

Walls

These tended to be made from dressed or semi-dressed blocks, were bonded by white/grey mortar, were often plastered, and on followed a pattern of measuring ca. 1.0m wide in most cases. As said, the favoured orientation was east/west or north/south. Much of the wall pattern was lost due to ancient robbing of the blocks.

Examples of less refined wall types were also found, incorporating fieldstones and lacking regular courses or bonding. These walls appear to have served particular purposes—lining pits and other subterranean features, for example—rather than being used for larger structures, in which the above-mentioned dressed blocks were used.

Surfaces

One mosaic was found, but otherwise plastered or mortared surfaces were the norm, when identified in sections and in plan. Also found were rough stone surfaces.

Cisterns

These were universally dome-shaped, and appended to basins and pipes, which in some cases amounted to well-preserved water storage complexes. This will probably be the focus of the final report of the dig, in terms of its research contribution. In fact, a fairly impressive octagon-shaped fountain was also found, which is in itself praise of the successful management of water in early Ramla.

Amorphous built and cut features

A large number of small pits and several quadrilateral stone-lined features were found. These seem to fall into the category of waste disposal or storage of one sort or another, judging by the chemical staining of their fills in some cases, and in others by their sheer mundane and simple form as pits. The most elaborate and best-built waste disposal features were the cess pits which concentrated in Area J (the site portion furthest from the centre of ancient Ramla).

Conclusions

This site is quite a run-of-the-mill urban area, from all appearances. Just to what degree we can accurately identify it as 'habitational'—as opposed to 'industrial'—is yet to be determined, but that is our initial impression. We do have hopes of gaining further insights into Umayyad/Abbasid hydraulic technology practices, thanks to the considerable evidence which we recovered in the way of cisterns, basins, pipes and the octagonal fountain.