

Vigla: Excavation Unit 6

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I. Introduction, Location, Purpose, Previous Work in the Area

The plateau of Pyla-*Vigla* (henceforth *Vigla*) is a promontory circa 55m above sea level jutting out towards the sea, located immediately above the coastal plains of the Late Roman harbor city of *Pyla-Koutsopetria*, north-east of modern Larnaka and just within the western boundary of the British Sovereign Base Area. The plateau, the surface of which is densely covered with artifacts, is encircled by the heavily eroded remnants of a wide stone built perimeter wall, and it is this important construction that Excavation Unit 6 (EU6) was set out to elucidate through excavation. At this post excavation juncture, we can now provide preliminary answers to the chronological research questions posed about this wall, as well as providing important new insights into both this vital feature and its relationship to the wider site as a whole.

Although *Vigla* has not been previously excavated, earlier Department of Antiquities of Cyprus investigations have found dedicatory inscriptions located in the plain immediately below the site, which have caused the prominent plateau to be identified with the site of a Hellenistic and earlier sanctuary. Furthermore, sling bullets dating to the Hellenistic period were looted by metal detectorists from the *Vigla* plateau and are now located in the Cyprus Museum, Lefkosia. More recently, *Vigla* and its surrounding slopes were intensively surveyed by PKAP in the summer of 2007, and a majority of the plateau was also explored using electrical soil resistivity during the same season. Ceramic analysis of this survey indicated pottery from the Cypro-Archaic to the late Roman periods, with a strong preponderance of Hellenistic wares on the plateau itself, with Late Roman types becoming more common (though by no means in the majority) on the slopes surrounding the plateau. Electrical soil resistivity also indicated the presence of similarly oriented rectilinear features over the plateau, with one particularly distinctive grouping towards the center of the area interpreted as the remnants of a Late Roman period Basilica. Finally, a pedestrian features survey identified a number of heavily eroded architectural entities around *Vigla*, the most visible being a regularly cut dry moat interpreted as a Late Roman period *Taphros* separating *Vigla's* northern extremities from the surrounding plateau, and the eroded remnants of a wide (1.7m) stone rubble-cored wall, interpreted as a perimeter or defensive structure, extant immediately atop at least three of the plateau's four slopes, and with two associated corner constructions interpreted as watch towers showing distinctive Late Roman building techniques.

It was in this context of this seemingly paradoxical evidence, particularly relating to the paucity of Late Roman ceramics in relation to perceived contemporary architectural features, that EU6 was founded with the aim of providing a foundation date for the perimeter wall, providing information related to the use and possible re-use of the structure, and definitively clarifying the wall's impressive girth and potentially chronologically telling method of construction. EU6 was originally planned to bisect a section of what is interpreted as a continuation of the perimeter wall on the Plateau's north-west corner, visible on the surface and within the site's sloped access road. This area of wall visibly abuts a large feature of stone rubble cemented with Late Roman type mortar, which has been interpreted as a corner bastion or look-out point. The wall in this

region is apparently primarily built with large and irregularly sized rectangular cut blocks, unusual when compared to the bulk of extant perimeter wall areas, which are faced with much smaller angular local stones and filled with a clutter of similarly sized and shaped rubble. This region, however, was abandoned in favor of a particularly well preserved faced section of perimeter wall on the plateau's east side, seen as both more representative of the wall's construction methods over a wider area, and with a lesser chance of complicated stratigraphy that could detract from the EU's primary research goals. As the key research objective of this EU was to understand through excavation a specific known feature visible on the ground surface, the unit was laid out in a way to gather the most data from the smallest possible area. Thus the EU was aligned at a 90° angle to the visible line of this wall, extending upslope three meters from the visible exterior face, past the similarly visible interior face, and onwards into the slope of the hill. In addition to easing excavation by providing a right-angled area adjacent to the wall in which to work, this approach was designed to yield the greatest coverage of the chronologically important depositional levels abutting the wall's interior face. True to the EU's role as a sounding to answer specific research questions, the EU extended only 1.5m beyond the wall's proposed visible interior face, allowing a buffer to catch associated depositional and foundation levels should the wall have been wider than originally thought, whilst not overstretching the team's resources by linking the wall into the potentially complicated stratigraphy of the wider site, itself a compelling further research question for future seasons.

II. Method of Excavation

The excavation of EU6 proceeded stratigraphically, that is, a bounded unit of soil was dug down at a uniform rate (and importantly all artifacts within were grouped and bagged by corresponding Stratigraphic Unit (SU) number as an identifier of provenance) until a change in the type of soil being excavated was reached. This was identified primarily by a change in color, texture and stoniness. In general, SUs deemed younger, i.e. laid down after those below themselves, are as a rule of thumb excavated before those deemed older. EU6 necessarily diverged from this methodology only twice. In the case of the perimeter wall (5601_F1) and associated upslope wall (5601_F2), this methodology would have required the removal of these walls after their base courses were discovered and planned. As these features are seen as important to the site's overall integrity, it was decided that they would be left intact, and an arbitrary scarp (the cut walls of an EU or trench) created beneath them. At any rate, the retention of these features did not seriously hamper the understanding of the earlier levels of fill and rubble on which the walls are based. In addition, the soil composition, color and stoniness of all SUs were ascertained using established geological methodologies, and 100% of soil was sieved for artifacts, with the exception of small amounts of mixed-context material created through cleaning. All ceramic, bone, metal and shell materials were collected for study, while representative fragments of non-diagnostic plaster and mud brick were also collected for future sampling. Important finds or finds with particularly important locations (an *in situ* fragment of plaster facing the mud brick wall 5613 for example) had their exact coordinates and levels documented before removal and study.

Overall, PKAP's excavation methodologies performed extremely effectively in the field, although the author would suggest a more rigid approach to the definition of features in future seasons, as there is considerable room for overlap, particularly with elements such as the substantial mud brick wall found within EU6 (5603_F1 or SU5604/SU5613), which is a feature

of the SU in which it was first identified yet can also be (and was) excavated as a SU. Similarly, as features may span multiple SUs, the way in which features are identified after the level in which they are first identified, rather than that in which they are stratigraphically based, also has the potential to cause confusion.

EU6 was excavated by Matthew Neale Dalton (MD) and Dimitri Nakassis (DN) between the 7th and 17th of June 2008 with occasional assistance with planning and soil sieving provided by students. All SU records were kept by MD (archived and digitized by William Caraher), while DN kept a detailed narrative notebook of excavations in the EU. Finally, MD acted as primary photographer of the EU and illustrated all plans and sections.

III/IV. Stratigraphy and Features

5601: EU6's first SU was 5601, which encompassed artifacts collected from the ground surface of the EU, topsoil removed until the soil change of 5602, and a thin dirt wash covering wall 5601_F1, which was removed to highlight this feature's construction method. The soil was loose and clumped, with a high density of organic matter and root disturbance consistent with the SU's location close to ground level, while both the starting and termination levels of the SU were sloped at 15°, consistent with the general angle of the hillside in this area. These factors are both indicative of the SU's nature as a soil wash from higher areas of the site settling over more *in situ* regions of the EU previously truncated to this 15° slope through erosion. Accordingly, we deviated from the usual practice of collecting surface artifacts with the first SU and removing top soil with the second SU in this trench, since the surface artifacts could be assumed to have no meaningful relationship with sub-surface deposits. A medium density of ceramic artifacts representing a wide chronological period (primarily Cypro-Classical to Hellenistic) was present in this soil. Two features were also recorded within this SU, 5601_F1 and 5601_F2;

5601_F1: The portion of the stone built feature interpreted as a perimeter wall with fortification function present within EU6, with a maximum girth of 1.7m from preserved exterior to interior faces. The relatively straight exterior face is formed from wide and generally flat horizontally oriented angular local limestone of (on average) 30cm wide x 10cm, preserved to a maximum extant height of 40cm from the lowest course's base on bedrock. The interior wall face is formed of larger uncut limestone rubble with a much courser and un-finished appearance. This is particularly true of the wall's lower courses, suggesting it may have originally sat in a foundation trench. It is preserved to a height of 78cm from its lowest course. The rubble fill of the wall is composed of a variety of sizes of angular limestone rocks generally smaller than those found in both faces, with no visible incidence of sherdage or other cultural material included. No evidence of plaster facing or any form of mortar was found associated with this wall. Stratigraphically, the wall is abutted by the washes and fills 5601, 5602, and 5603/5605/5606; and is cut into floor 5607, parts of fill 5608, and the top half of mud brick wall 5613. This wall is therefore the most recent of the wall features within the EU, and is stratigraphically older only than SUs 5601, 5602, 5603, 5605 and 5606.

5601_F2: This wall, which runs on a similar orientation to 5601_F1, was unexpectedly discovered in EU6 at a depth of between 5 and 30cm below ground level. Once the wall's existence was confirmed, however, we discovered that it could be faintly observed on the surface

continuing at the same orientation at least 5 meters to the south, indicating a substantial architectural feature. The face exposed through excavation was flanged outwards towards the base, and constructed of randomly shaped stones in a manner reminiscent of the adjacent interior face of 5601_F1, with a similar lack of apparent bonding plaster or mortar. Where this wall differs markedly from 5601_F1, however, is in its significantly flatter face and presence of a preserved white facing plaster (as opposed to structural bonding mortar), suggesting an aesthetic emphasis and degree of visibility. 5601_F1 is based upon the top surface of fill 5608, and is abutted by floor 5607 which is presumably primarily associated with this wall, as the feature's plaster facing starts from the floor surface. As floor 5607 is cut by the construction of the perimeter wall, it seems likely that 5601_F2 represents the interior wall of a larger room or area later significantly truncated by this building work, although this hypothesis would certainly benefit from further excavation in the immediate vicinity.

5602: This unit's top, which followed the slope of the hill, was identified directly below 5601 as a more compact though essentially similar soil, thus representing a probable older slope wash episode. The SU was heavily affected by the action of shrub roots, and contained many pockets and lenses of softer and harder soil within its matrix, making testing of this hypothesis and identification of potential features difficult. Due to this disturbance, 5602 was excavated reasonably deeply in the higher west area (c. 34cm down from 5601) until the distinctive 5603 SU was discovered and interpreted as the first definite non-slope wash associated context.

5603, 5605, 5606: 5603, a distinctive loose reddish brown soil with flecked white inclusions and angular dark red mud brick fragments, ran from the top limit of the preserved interior of wall 5601_F1 on a slight upslope angle towards wall 5601_F2, immediately below 5602. This angle suggests that the deposit was truncated, like wall 5601_F1, by hill surface erosion post abandonment, while the nature of the soil was interpreted as representing the collapse of hypothesized mud brick superstructure from nearby walls. It was during the excavation of 5603 that a mud brick wall orientated 90° and apparently abutting 5601_F1 was identified and given the feature number 5603_F1. As this feature also represented an excavatable entity (being composed of mud and able to contain artifacts), it was also given an SU number, 5604. This mud brick wall would eventually be found to continue almost to the bedrock of the EU, and eventually all different recorded instances of this feature (5604, 5610, and 5603_F1) were grouped under a single SU, 5613. 5603 was excavated down to 5605, a bounded lens of highly distinctive course sterile uncemented white plaster material, interpreted as the collapse of plaster facing from the mud brick superstructure of a nearby wall, most probably 5601_F2, which lays upslope and contains extant plaster of a very similar appearance still adhering to its lower stone courses. The size and preservation of this fragment is particularly interesting, implying the fast collapse or destruction of 5601_F2's hypothesized associated mud brick wall rather than the slower but more fragmentizing process of gradual erosion. Once 5605 was identified and exposed over much of the area under excavation, an end to 5603 was called at the level of the plaster feature in order to give chronological control to the feature. After 5605 was removed, 5606 a thin level of soil identical to 5603, which laid directly under both 5605 and the arbitrary termination of 5603 at the edge of 5605, was excavated down c. 4cm to the stony floor surface of 5607. Due to their extreme similarity and contiguous position, 5603 and 5606 (and by extension 5605 which they surround) have been interpreted as a single episode of mud brick and facing collapse, and are thus represented as chronologically contemporary on EU6's Harris Matrix.

5603_F1: Mud brick wall. See 5613 for full information.

5604: Mud brick wall. See 5613 for full information.

5607: This extremely flat and cemented level, consisting on the surface of dense course gravel pieces mixed into a greenish yellow soil matrix sitting on medium sized foundation stone, was found directly under 5606, and has been interpreted as a well prepared floor surface associated with the construction of wall F601_F1, which is based at the lowest level of 5607. The cobbled foundation stones underlying the floor (see 5607_D1) were treated as a feature of this SU, and were labeled as 5607_F1. No artifacts except for one bone found pressed into the floor surface were recorded within the SU. The SU was later cut through to form a foundation for the perimeter wall; presumably the floor and associated architecture lost their original purpose at this time.

5607_F1: A level of flat angular stones spanning the excavated area of EU6, most probably acting as foundations for the hard overlying floor surface, found sitting upon the possibly artificially flattened underlying fill of 5608.

5608: A yellowish brown fill level representing a mixed accumulation of eroded mud brick debris, ash, and other soils located below floor level 5607, which could be interpreted as either the erosional build up of material from nearby or as a concerted effort by later builders to raise local ground levels in preparation for the construction of the building associated with floor 5607 and wall 5601_F2. During the excavation of this SU, scraping at the lowest courses of 5604 failed to reveal any distinctive mud brick material; it was thus assumed that the mud brick wall was built at this level and, like 5601_F2, founded in association with floor 5607. 5604 was thus excavated and all finds recorded at this time, and 5610 was created to excavate the area interpreted as below 5604 but contemporary with 5608 down to the latter's finishing level above 5609.

5610: During excavation this SU, located immediately below the then proposed base course of mud brick wall 5604 (5613), was mistakenly thought to represent a continuation of SU 5608. As further excavation revealed this feature's continuation, 5610 was reinterpreted as a constituent component of the mud brick wall 5613, and has now been presented as such in the Harris Matrix.

5609: This SU, located directly under both 5608 and 5610, consisted of a mixed yellowish brown fill very similar to 5608 containing ample plaster flecks and evidence of eroded mudbrick, and was at first mistakenly thought to span the entire excavated area between walls 5601_F1 and 5601_F2. Shortly into excavation of the SU, however, the mud brick wall previously named 5604 was rediscovered in the same position as the overlying segment. After this continuation was recognized and excluded from excavation, digging continued down until the discovery of a possible clay floor, 5612, over roughly one third of the SU's surface area. A small conglomeration of disassociated stones was also found within 5609 here but in absence of any continuation or recognizable bounding was interpreted as part of a wall tumble or other amorphous feature. Excavation then halted here to give chronological control to these possible features should they continue.

5612: This SU represents a distinct bounded thin lens of light olive brown homogenous clay found primarily in the south western corner of the excavated area. When first excavated, this SU was interpreted as a truncated clay floor associated with mud brick wall 5613. If this is the case, the proceeding SU, 5611, would represent either an earlier wash cut by a foundation trench for mud brick wall 5613, or a fill abutting the mud brick wall which overlays an earlier surface and was then floored over. Another interpretation, more appealing in light of the large flat clay mudbrick (5613_F2) found within 5613, is that the 5612 represents tumble from this wall of either one or several of a similar type of brick which became lodged within the fill of 5609/5611.

5611: This SU is a mixed fill composed of a yellowish brown soil matrix very similar to 5608 and 5609, with an increased incidence of eroded pale green/yellow and dark red mudbrick fragments and plaster pieces ranging from fleck to fine gravel size. The SU was excavated from the arbitrary termination of 5609 until the distinctive sterile red soil 5614, and most probably represents mud brick erosion associated with wall 5613.

5613 (5603_F1, 5604, 5610): 5613 was the final SU given to the mud brick wall present within EU6, which spans from 20cm below ground level down to its base on 5614 4cm above bedrock. First identified as 5604/5603_F1, this feature was then left intact as contiguous SUs were excavated, before being removed in SU 5608 (please see 5608 for description of why). The texture of the wall was loose and crumbly, with clumped pieces easily broken to reveal imprints of plant fibers. The soil within the wall was also evenly levigated with obvious dark red mudbrick fragments, perhaps included in the original bricks as a filler. The wall was otherwise similar in appearance in most respects to the eroded fills abutting it, which made identification and excavation difficult. Due to this similarity, and as no plaster or other facing was found except near the wall's base, exposing the wall's face was extremely difficult, and in line with PKAP field methodology, overcutting was thus preferable so as not to contaminate the context with later artifactual material. After re-identification in 5609, the wall was excavated to its base on top of 5614, a thin layer of natural hard packed soil immediately over bedrock. Eventual removal of 5613 revealed a natural depression in the bedrock and overlaying soil running generally perpendicular to the line of the wall; it seems plausible that this natural feature may have been utilized by the wall's builders. The mud brick wall shows a particularly interesting relationship to wall 5601_F2, which is built around 5613 instead of by simply cutting through it; a complete argument concerning the feature's relationship to other phases can be found in this report's concluding interpretations. Several features associated with this wall shed interesting light on its methods of construction; *in situ* plaster found adhering to the wall's lowest courses (5613_F1) can be seen as evidence that the entire wall was originally coated in such a way. Secondly, a homogenous clay mudbrick (5613_F2) shows evidence for a variety of bricks from presumably different sources being brought together into single constructions.

5613_F1: During excavation of 5613 after documentation, a vertically orientated *in situ* fragment of fine hard white plaster was found slightly to the north of the projected face of the mud brick wall. In addition to confirming the true face of wall 5613, which would otherwise have remained approximate due to the inherent difficulties in defining mud brick from similar abutting fills, this find is important as it not only informs us of building technologies of the time,

but in its fineness reflects a high degree of craftsmanship and hints at a strong aesthetic function, forming a decorative mask for the mud brick wall.

5613_F2: Also found during the excavation of 5613 was a large flat homogenous clay mudbrick, discovered *in situ* 25cm above the wall's base. Dimensions could unfortunately not be definitively recorded due to the brick's position near the scarp, although the feature's height, 3cm, indicate that it was extremely thin in relation to its larger surface area which must exceed c. 30cm x20cm. Following photography the feature was removed for future study.

5614: was the final SU excavated in EU6, and was constituted by a red, extremely cemented level of soil directly overlaying bedrock and completely sterile of artifacts. The SU, probably associated with bedrock erosion and bedrock iron deposits leaching into the soil, also formed the strata on which mud brick wall 5613 was based. This SU also constitutes the oldest of two possible floor level associated with mud brick wall 5613, although the uneven surface of the SU and lack of evidence of leveling makes this hypothesis unlikely. Upon removal of this SU, bedrock was exposed, revealing an eroded and uneven shallow depression dipping approximately under the line of 5613's exterior face, perhaps representing a natural channel utilized as a foundation during construction of the mud brick wall.

V. Finds

A wide range of ceramic wares and types were found, including cooking pots, fineware painted pots, and other small to medium fine and plain ware vessels. Course ware storage vessels or transport amphorae were underrepresented, perhaps indicating a more domestic or ritual as opposed to mercantile use of the plateau. As of preliminary ceramic study, the chronological character of most levels ranges predominantly from Cypro-Classical to Hellenistic, with some evidence of ceramics as early as the Cypro-Archaic in some contexts. No obviously Roman or Late Roman period potsherds were found during the excavation of EU6. The presence of sealed contexts, such as those underlying floor 5607, may help to elucidate the nature of the distinct phases of EU6 upon further analysis of the EU's ceramics. This should be particularly true of the diagnostic potsherds found within mud brick wall 5613, which have the important potential to provide a *terminus post quem* for the construction of this, the EU's earliest feature. A single truncated though well preserved bone trodden into floor 5607 and other mammal bone samples may shed light on animal husbandry and food production in the area, a theme also evinced by the presence of several well preserved bivalve shells within the EU's cultural deposits. Further analysis of plaster finds may also further improve our knowledge of technology and raw material sourcing within the context of the site's wider environment.

VI. Interpretive Conclusions

EU6 has raised a number of extremely important issues relating to the fortification wall and its context within the *Vigla* site, most tantalizingly the existence of three distinct architectural phases in the area excavated, which shed extensive light on the circumstances surrounding the founding of this feature. The earliest of these phases within EU6 is the originally fine plaster faced mud brick wall 5613, which predates all other features excavated, and is interpreted as the earliest manifestation of buildings in the region under investigation. Although the area excavated

is too small to provide concrete analysis of this phase's function and abandonment, it can certainly be linked into the next phase of construction as intriguingly, the mud brick wall must have still existed and retained some degree of structural integrity when wall 5601_F2 was constructed, as the builders of this stone wall incorporated a portion of the mud brick wall into their construction instead of cutting it away. The remnants of this wall, which are abutted by the hard packed floor 5607, must also have played some role in the function of the later constructions, perhaps as an interior dividing wall or casemate style reinforcement wall, as it presumably would have been no difficult task to cut it away should it not be needed. Another factor to consider is the fragility of this material and its liability to erosion unless properly maintained; this could be interpreted as an indication of relatively short periods of time between these phases. On the other hand, the presence of eroded mud brick fragments below floor 5607, interpreted as associated with the erosion of this mud brick wall, could certainly indicate a short phase of abandonment before subsequent building of wall 5601_F2. Certainly if one takes the apparent overbuilding of the top courses of wall 5601_F2 above the mud brick, it would indicate a degree of degradation by the time the stones were laid around it. At any rate, the wider context of the original purpose of this mud brick construction must remain for now a mystery; further excavation, especially in the area behind wall 5601_F2, in which 5613 appears to continue, would undoubtedly further elucidate the nature of this wall and its role within a larger construction. The plastered wall remnants 5601_F2 and its associated well constructed floor, 5607, forms the next architectural phase. We interpret the related features as an interior space, particularly by virtue of its distinctly flat floor and the aesthetic implications of its non-structural white plaster facing. Whatever this building's original function, however, it appears that its location atop the prime defensive position of *Vigla's* east bluff doomed it to an early fate; the structure was cut through by builders of the fortification wall, leaving barely 80cm of the original floor intact between the original plastered wall and the massive new feature adjacent. While the fortification wall has cut into this hard packed floor, it is also abutted by the same levels of mudbrick collapse as the floor itself, meaning that the floor must have been visible when the larger wall was installed. This implies no period of abandonment and wall collapse in the 5607/5601_F2 construction before it was significantly cut into by the fortifications. This mudbrick collapse is also pertinent in that the ceramics found within these abutting SUs have the potential to provide a definitive *terminus post quem* for the construction of the fortification wall. Archaeologically, the stratigraphic phase evidence noted here points towards a relatively fast paced program of construction and renewal in this area of *Vigla*, and calls for the founding of the main fortification wall within the recent history of the stratified first and second phases, that is at this stage Hellenistic or Cypro-Classical. If this is the case, then the two proposed Late Roman architectural features visibly abutting the original wall must surely be additions, indicating a level of potentially defensive later reuse of, if not the earlier defensive features, then at least the plateau's natural strategic position over the late Roman town of *Pyla-Koutsopetria* and its fine view out to sea.

VII. Appendix

Photographs

5601_P1, P2, P3: 5601 top and EU6 prior to excavation

5601_P4, P5, P6: 5601 bottom, 5602 top

5601_P7, P8: 5601_F2

5602_P1, P2: 5602 bottom, 5603 top

5603_P1, P2, P3, P4, P5: 5603 bottom, 5604 (5603_F1) top, 5605 top, 5606 top
5604_P1: 5604 (5603_F1) top
5604_P2: 5604 (5603_F1) bottom, 5609 top, 5610 top
5605_P1: 5605 bottom, 5606 top
5606_P1: 5606 bottom, 5607 top
5607_P1, P2, P3, P4, P5: 5607 bottom, 5608 top
5608_P1: 5608 bottom, 5609 top
5609_P1, P2: 5609 bottom, 5612 top, 5611 top
5610_P1, P2: 5608 bottom, 5610 bottom, 5609 top
5611_P1, P2: 5611 bottom, 5613 top, 5614 top
5613_P1: 5613 in progress, 5613_F1
5613_P2, P3: 5613_F1
5613_P4: 5613_F2
5614_P1: 5613 bottom, 5614 top
5614_P2: 5614 bottom
EU6: Final Photographs

Drawings

5601_D1: 5601 top, 5601_F1 top, 5601_F2 top
5602_D1: 5601 bottom, 5602 top
5603_D1: 5604/5603_F1 top, 5606 top, 5603 bottom, 5605 top, FS5603_1001
5606_D1: 5604/5603_F1 top, 5606 bottom, 5607 top
5607_D1: 5604 in progress, 5607 bottom, 5607_F1 top, 5608 top
5609_D1: 5610 bottom, 5609 top
5611_D1: 5613 top, 5612 top, 5611 top, 5609 bottom
5613_D1: 5613 in progress, 5614 top/bottom, BEDROCK top
EU6_D1: Scarp W elevation
EU6_D2: Scarp E elevation
EU6_D3: Scarp S elevation
EU6_D4: Scarp N elevation