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AREA A

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The major architectural feature identified in Area A in the first season (1968) was the Byzantine church which dominated the acropolis. This was excavated further in the 1971 and 1973 seasons and the east, north, and south exterior walls traced. Completing the plan of the western end (narthex), entrance, and exterior wall, not yet identified, was one of the objectives of the 1974 season. The extensive Islamic deposits in this area precluded the achievement of this objective.

In 1973 portions of an Islamic bath complex were uncovered in Squares A.7 and A.8 (partially excavated). Additional features of this complex were exposed in 1974 in A.8. A large Islamic baking facility (*tabun*), pre-dating the bath complex was partially uncovered in 1973 in A.7. This was fully excavated in 1974. On the western edge of the acropolis west of A.7, Square A.9 was opened in 1974 and yielded further evidence of extensive Islamic facilities associated with the bath complex. In 1971 some puzzlingly small openings to subterranean chambers were found in A.5. These also were investigated further in 1974.

Square A.8

In 1973 a portion (4×2 m.) of Square A.8 was excavated in order to expose the south wall of the Islamic bath installation identified in A.7.¹ In addition to the south wall (A.8:2) of the bathing room, an east-west hallway with a doorway in its south wall was exposed. The presence of this doorway suggested the existence of additional features of the bath complex in A.8 to the south. During the latter half of the 1974 season these features were

¹ B. Van Elderen, "Heshbon 1973: Area A," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 117-20.

exposed as the remainder of A.8 was excavated.

After the removal of surface debris and a considerable number of fallen building blocks and miscellaneous stones on the ground surface, walls began to appear which could be correlated with walls and rooms of the bath complex uncovered in 1973 (see Fig. 2). An additional room and hallway of the bath complex were identified (see Pl. II:A). All the loci excavated in A.8 dated in the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period and this confirmed the use date for the bath installation that was determined in the 1973 season.

The doorway (A.8:6) in the south wall of the hallway uncovered in 1973 led into a rectangular room (3.50×2.00 m.) which functioned as an anteroom or lounge in the bath complex. This room was bounded by Walls A.8:17 on the south, A.8:4 on the east, A.8:5 on the north, and A.8:16 on the west. In the south wall of this room was a doorway leading into a hallway formed by Walls A.8:17 and A.8:19.

The floor of the room was raised about 0.50 m. above the floors in the hallways on the north and south sides. However, there was an aisle 1.25 m. wide between the doorways in the north and south walls. The floor (A.8:25) of this aisle was the same level as the floors of the adjoining hallways but sloped downward slightly to the south to compensate for a variation in level in the two hallways. The floor was paving of large rectangular slabs. On both sides of the aisle were retaining walls (A.8:22 and A.8:23) supporting the possibly raised floors on both sides of the aisle. The larger raised sector or platform on the east measured 1.50×2.00 m. A considerable portion of the plaster surface on this platform was preserved, and also its connections with the surrounding walls. In the face of the retaining wall (A.8:22) east of the aisle were three triangular-shaped slots approximately 0.35 m. wide at the base and 0.30 m. deep. Apparently these were storage places for personal belongings of those using the bath. The platform along the west wall of the room was smaller, 0.75×2.00 m., and its retaining wall had no slots. A sizeable portion of the plastered surface face of this platform was also preserved.

These features—raised platforms, plastered surfaces, storage receptacles—suggested that this rectangular room served as a kind of lounge for the users of the bath. Possibly pads and cushions were placed on the platforms. The bathing room was separated from the lounge by a hallway running 2.25 m. east-west between the two rooms. The entrances to the rooms were on opposite sides and at opposite ends of this hallway. This arrangement obviated a direct draft from the lounge into the bathing room and it also made it impossible to see directly into one room from the other.

The doorway through the south wall of the lounge led into another hallway running 3.80 m. east-west along the south side. The floor (A.8:20) of this hallway was paving of large rectangular stone blocks. At the east end of the hallway a doorway (A.8:18) was identified with threshold and doorstops *in situ*. The south wall (A.8:19) of this hallway was rather crudely constructed and varied in width from 0.70 m. to 0.95 m. The space between Wall A.8:19 and the south balk was 1.00 m. wide and was excavated only to the level of the floor of the hallway. In the southwest corner of this sector a layer of stones was found (Surface A.8:26), but the limited space for operations made it impossible to identify precisely. The determination of the nature of this feature must await the excavation of the next Square to the south.

The entire bath complex was bounded on the west by a wall running north-south through Squares A.7 and 8. There were no openings found in this wall of the bath complex, thus implying that there was no access to the bath from the rooms on the west in Square A.9 (described below). Since the lounge was about 1.00 m. longer east-west than the bathing room and the adjacent hallway, its Wall A.8:16 formed a corner with Wall A.8:5 in the northwest sector of the Square.

Outside the bath in the corner formed by Wall A.8:3 (the west wall of the hallway and bathing room) and Wall A.8:15, another installation was uncovered (A.8:27). The floor was tiled (just as in the bathing room). There were two upright stone slabs (0.60 m. high) with a small slab standing upright between them on the

south, leaving the north end open. Between the slabs, but slightly off center, was a small hole (0.035 m. in diameter) connected with a stone-covered drain channel running in front of the open end. The purpose of this installation could not yet be ascertained when the 1974 season ended. It appeared to be some type of water installation (washing facility?). Its location near a large doorway visible in the north balk of Square A.8 suggested that it may have been used by people as they entered through this doorway into some type of assembly room. The determination of its possible relationship to the room to the west must await further work.

Square A.9

Square A.9, located directly west of A.7, was opened at the beginning of the 1974 season. Its size, like that of all the Squares in Area A, was 8.00 m. north-south and 6.00 m. east-west.

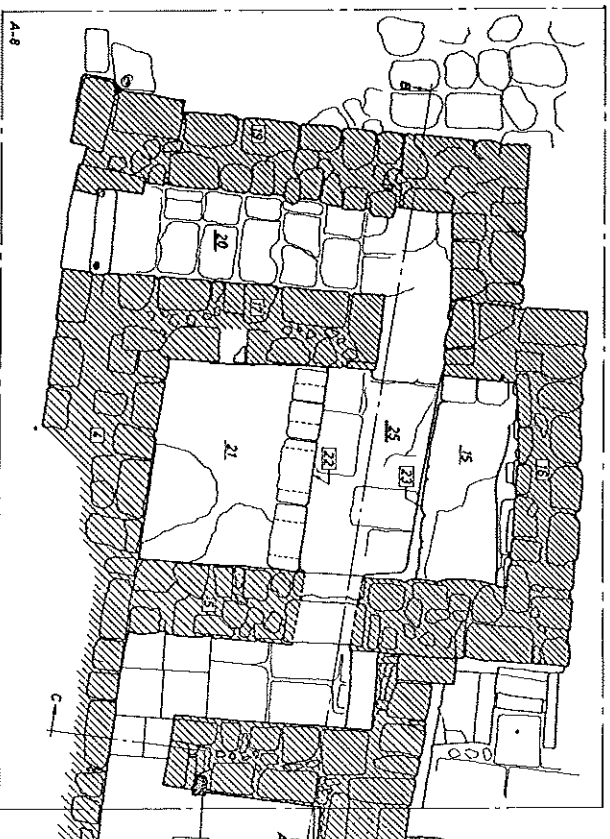
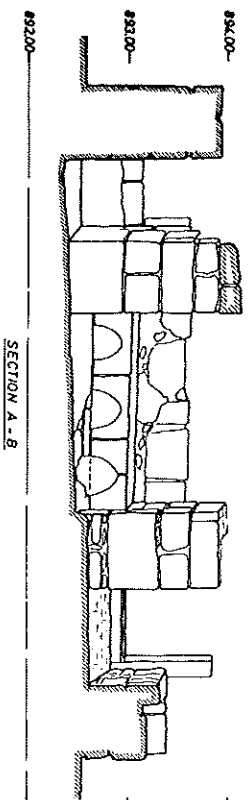
After the removal of the ground surface debris and top soil, various wall lines began to appear. A major north-south wall (A.9:5) averaging 1.15 m. wide extended from the south balk to Wall A.9:12 which was parallel to and near the north balk. As with the wall forming the west side of the bath complex, this wall had no openings or doorways. Excavation exposed an approximately 3.40 m. surviving height of both faces of this wall. Surfaces identified with this and the rooms formed by it and adjacent walls dated from the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period.

A short wall (A.9:11) with a doorway was found between Wall A.9:5 and the east balk. With a wall visible in the south balk and a wall partially exposed in the east balk, these walls in Square A.9 formed a small room in the southeast sector of the Square. Similarly, a room was formed in the northwest sector of the Square, bounded on the north by Wall A.9:12. Some of the plaster was found on the wall faces of both these rooms.

On the west side of Wall A.9:5 another north-south wall ran approximately parallel to Wall A.9:5 and formed a passageway between the two walls approximately 1.00 m. wide. Between Wall

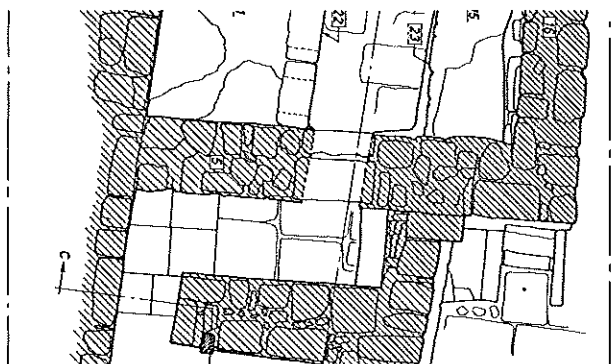
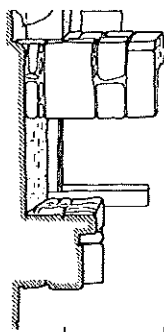
ISLAMIC BATH at TELL HESBÂN

DRAWN JULY 1975 BY BERT DEVERES
SCALE 1:20 0 40 80 120 160 200 240 280 320 360 400 METERS

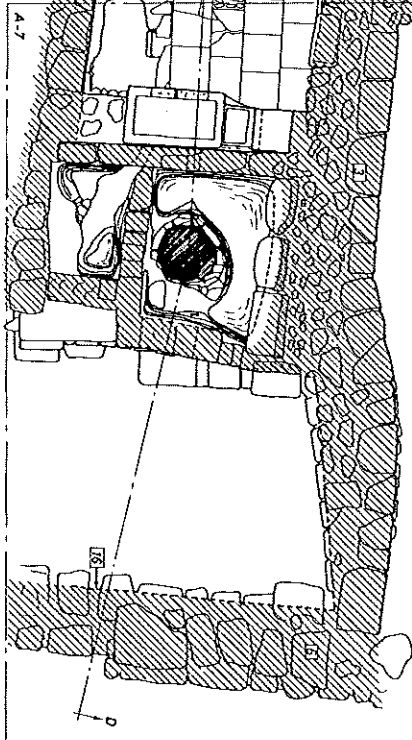


HESBÂN

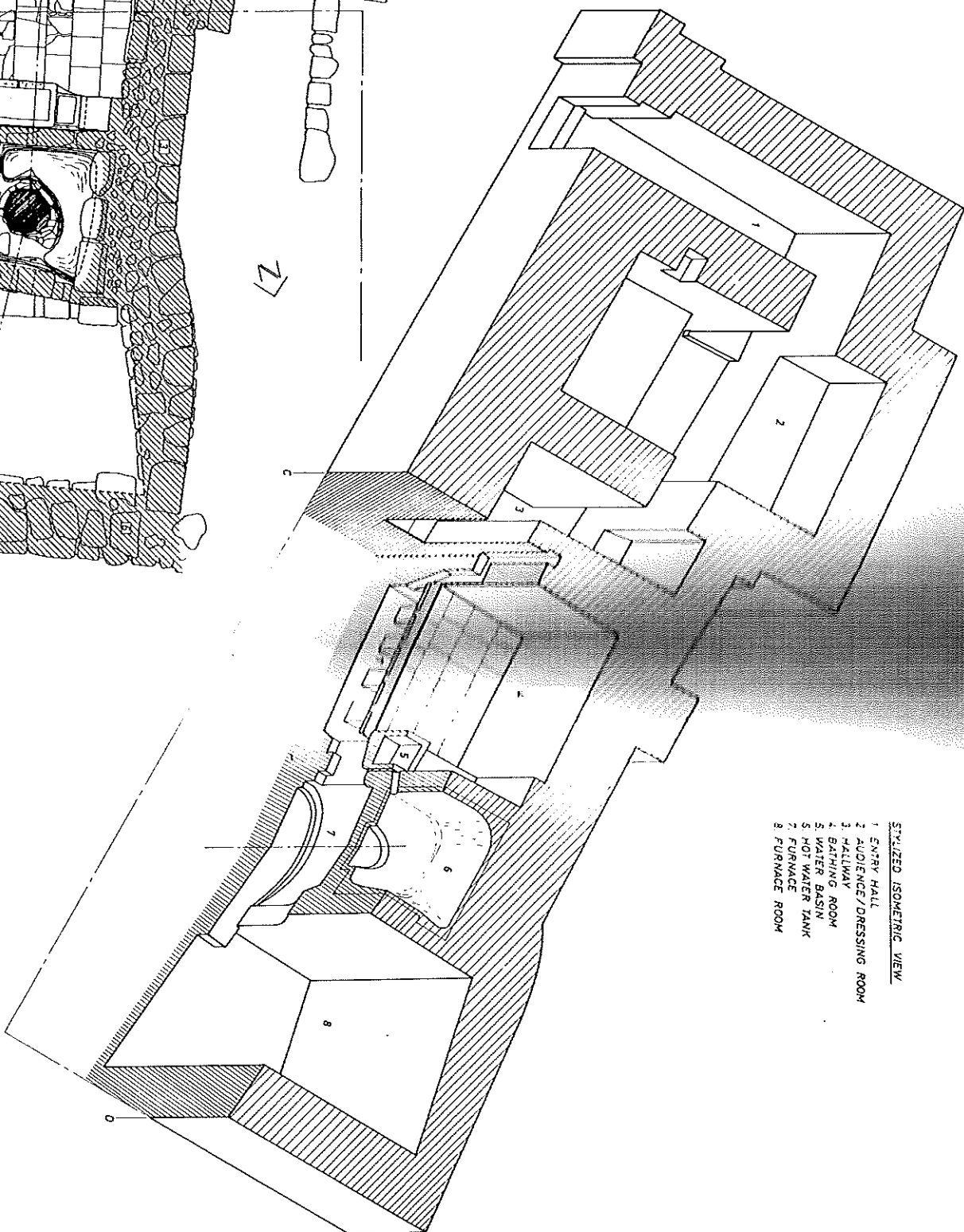
3
METERS
200 320 360 400



PLAN



27



STYLIZED ISOMETRIC VIEW

- 1 ENTRY HALL
- 2 AUDIENCE/DRESSING ROOM
- 3 HALLWAY
- 4 BATHING ROOM
- 5 WATER BASIN
- 6 HOT WATER TANK
- 7 FURNACE
- 8 FURNACE ROOM

Fig. 2. Plan, section, and cut-away drawing of Islamic Bath in Squares A/7 and 8. Features in the southern two-thirds of A/8 were exposed in 1974.

A.9:3 and the west balk along and partly in the south balk, Wall A.9:2 with its doorway was exposed. Wall A.9:4 lay between Wall A.9:3 and the west balk about 2.00 m. north of Wall A.9:2. This complex of walls formed a room in the southwest sector of the Square. A number of surfaces were identified at various levels to a depth of 3.40 m. in this room—all dating from the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period.

Between Wall A.9:4 and Wall A.9:12 was a construction with a vaulted roof of worked stone (A.9:29). The springers for the vault rested on an outer course of Wall A.9:12 and on an earlier wall (A.9:33) under Wall A.9:4. When the space east of the vaulted roof was cleared a crude wall set against the end of the vaulted roof was exposed and removed. A section cut inside the vault was removed, and the latest sherds in the layers identified (A.9:60, 61, 62) dated from the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period. It was not possible in the 1974 season to clear the vaulted area to its occupation floor level.

As Walls A.9:4 and A.9:11 were being exposed, it was observed that both had been built upon an earlier major wall (A.9:33). Wall A.9:5 had been built over and around this wall. The stone blocks in the earlier wall were well dressed and tightly fitted together—a striking contrast to the later walls made of undressed stones. This wall ran from the west balk across the Square and continued in Square A.7 as Wall A.7:47. Its width was 1.41 m. This wall had a small jutting pier in Square A.9 near the west balk (a similar pier was found in Square A.7). In 1973 this wall was dated Late Roman on the basis of evidence from connecting surfaces and in its foundation trench in Square A.7.

During the last week of the 1974 season a circular cooking installation (A.9:81) was uncovered in the southeast room. This installation as well as the loci covering it (A.9:77-79) dated from the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period. In the northeast room the lowest two surfaces removed (A.9:85 and 86) contained predominantly Umayyad pottery (but possibly some sherds from later periods). In the southwest room the lowest five surfaces removed during the season

(A.9:70, 76, 80, 82, 84) were dated to the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period.

All the loci in Square A.9 were dated to the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period with possibly some earlier Islamic material in Loci A.9:85 and 86 in the northeast room. This Mamlūk dating was supported by two coins found in these loci which date from the 14th century (Object no. 1735—An-Nāsir Muḥammad [1293-1341] and Object no. 1924—An-Nāsir Ḥasan [1347-1361]). In the southwest room a coin of Justinian I (527-565) was found in Surface A.9:76—a hard packed white plaster surface which contained 'Abbāsīd and Umayyad sherds with possibly some Ayyūbid/Mamlūk.

It appears that Islamic accumulations stood to a greater surviving depth in Square A.9 than in A.7, a question remaining to be resolved by further excavation in A.9.

Square A.7

The major installation in Square A.7 identified in 1973 was the Islamic bath. At the end of the 1973 season a *ṭabun* (A.7:73) was found in the sector north of the bath and extended partially into the east balk. Since it was only partially exposed in 1973, the *ṭabun* and the related layers were cleared to bedrock during the first part of the 1974 season (see Pl. II:B).

The removal of the destruction layer (A.7:82) in the *ṭabun*, consisting of roof tiles, brick fragments, tesserae, rocks, ash, soil and some charcoal, exposed an ash-layer (A.7:86) directly above the base of the *ṭabun*. The base was a layer of roof tiles, stones, and floor tiles laid in an irregular pattern. The latest pottery in A.7:82 was Umayyad, while the small amount of pottery (all body sherds) in A.7:86 contained nothing later than Umayyad.

The upper courses of the north-south wall (A.7:46) along the west side of the *ṭabun* were removed, and this exposed a curious channel (A.7:103) sloping down eastward to the *ṭabun* and fitted into the ceramic rim at the bottom. The purpose and function of this channel are unclear—possibly it served as a fuel feeder or flue but its opening in Wall A.7:46 with an "elbow" arrangement

would not allow a strong draft. Perhaps this arrangement could catch a back draft. Part of the fill material between the ceramic rim of the *ṭabun* and the edge of its foundation pit was removed. Pottery evidence here indicated an Umayyad date for the *ṭabun* construction.

Installation A.7:73 has been interpreted as some type of baking oven, *ṭabun*, or *kin*. Its size is rather large—2.05 m. diameter for the foundation pit and 1.39 m. diameter for the inner ceramic rim; however, such a large baking installation is not unparalleled.

West of the location of the *ṭabun* a room was identified in 1973 formed by Walls A.7:46 on the east, A.7:47 on the south, and A.7:57 on the north. Wall A.7:57 was constructed of well-dressed stones closely fitted together—similar to Wall A.7:47 described above (= Wall A.9:33). In 1973 the foundation trenches of these walls were identified. These trenches cut through a hard *ḥuwwar* surface (A.7:80) and were dated to the Late Roman period. Surface A.7:80 was removed in 1974 and dated in the Early Roman period. Under this surface an east-west wall (A.7:89) was found. This wall was 1.00 m. wide and extended from the west balk to the foundation trench of Wall A.7:46. Two surfaces were identified north of this wall—a dirt layer (A.7:88) and a thin irregular plaster layer (A.7:90). These loci contained predominantly Early Roman pottery with none clearly later.

The tile floor of the bathing room of the Islamic bath installation was extensively vandalized after the 1973 season. In a small sector along the south balk the material below this floor was removed. This consisted of a soil layer (A.7:85), a layer of medium-sized stones (A.7:87—the bottom of the heating passage under the bathing room floor), another dirt layer (A.7:91), and a hard packed earth surface (A.7:92). Loci 85, 87, and 91 were dated to the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period, whereas the material directly on A.7:92 was dated in the 'Abbāsīd period. Further work in this small space was not possible because lying on Surface A.7:92 was a section of a pillar—presumably lying where it fell.

Square A.5

In 1974 work in Square A.5 was done in two sectors—the portion along the west balk and the cistern in the southeast sector. The balk between Squares A.5 and 7 had been extensively removed in 1973 in order to expose the entire circumference of the *tabun*. In 1973 it was observed that construction of the *tabun* had cut through a mosaic floor in an anteroom of the Byzantine church identified in Area A. Traces of this mosaic floor were found in a perimeter around the *tabun*. Unfortunately, between the 1973 and 1974 seasons most of this mosaic floor was damaged by vandalism. However, in 1974 it was possible to examine closely the underlayment and foundation of this mosaic along the west balk of Square A.5.

The construction features of this mosaic were identical to those of the portions of mosaic pavement uncovered in Square A.6.² Such floors were constructed of a layer of small stones (A.5:76), over which a fill of brown clay was laid around the stones (A.5:74) into which the tesserae of the Mosaic A.5:73 were set. In the earth layer (A.5:77) below the foundation stones layer (A.5:76) of Mosaic A.5:73 there was found a coin (Object no. 1701) of Theodosius I (A.D. 378-395). The potsherds in this layer dated predominantly Late Roman, with some possible Early Byzantine sherds. In the corresponding layer in Square A.7 (A.7:97) was found a coin (Object no. 1702) of Maximian (A.D. 296-305). The pottery comprised Early Byzantine and predominantly Late Roman sherds.

A portion of the *tabun* extended into Square A.5. To avoid collapse of the *tabun*, only a portion of the fill between the inner ceramic rim and the outer foundation wall was excavated. This fill (A.5:81) contained Umayyad sherds, and the analysis of two soil samples identified seeds of wheat, barley, lentil, olive, and vetch. Some *tabun* fragments in the fill indicate that the *tabun* had been relined during the course of its use.

Along the east side of the *tabun* was a wall (A.5:82) with re-

² Van Elderen, "Heshbon 1973: Area A," p. 125.

lated installations (A.5:72 and 83) which had been cut through the mosaic floor and its underlayment. An earlier wall (A.5:85), upon which Wall A.5:82 had been built, was dated to the Early Byzantine period. In turn, Wall A.5:85 rested on Wall A.5:88, a row of stones set on bedrock. The sherds were dated consistently to the Early Byzantine, Late Roman, and Early Roman periods. The same dating sequence was found in the earth layer (A.5:77) below the mosaic floor.

These investigations when correlated with the data from Square A.7 provided the following sequence of occupation in these squares:

- Early Roman surfaces (A.7:80, 88, 90)
- Late Roman walls (A.7:46, 47, 57)
- Early Byzantine walls and surfaces (A.5:77, 85, 88)
- Late Byzantine mosaic (A.5:73)
- Umayyad *tabun* (A.7:73)
- Ayyubid/Mamluk bath complex

In 1971 small openings in the bedrock (A.5:61 and 62) were uncovered and a limited amount of excavation done in the chambers below. In 1974 these underground sectors were excavated extensively, although the work was impeded by small entrances (about 0.33 m. in diameter) and the limited working space below (see Fig. 3). Entrance A.5:61 was partly covered by east-west Wall A.5:10, whereas Entrance A.5:62 was just north of this wall. South of this wall near the west balk, removal of debris and soil Layer A.5:80 exposed a third opening (A.5:79) to underground chambers. Locus A.5:80 was dated to the Early Roman period and post-dated the use of the underground facilities since this layer sealed over Entrance A.5:79.

The underground chambers were only 2.00 m. deep. No clear stratification was discernible in the debris below the entrances (A.5:61, 62, 79). All spaces were connected by cut arched passageways. Later in the season a fourth opening (A.5:90) was found near the east balk, east of Wall A.5:11 and north of Wall A.5:51. This appears to have been cut by the quarrying which

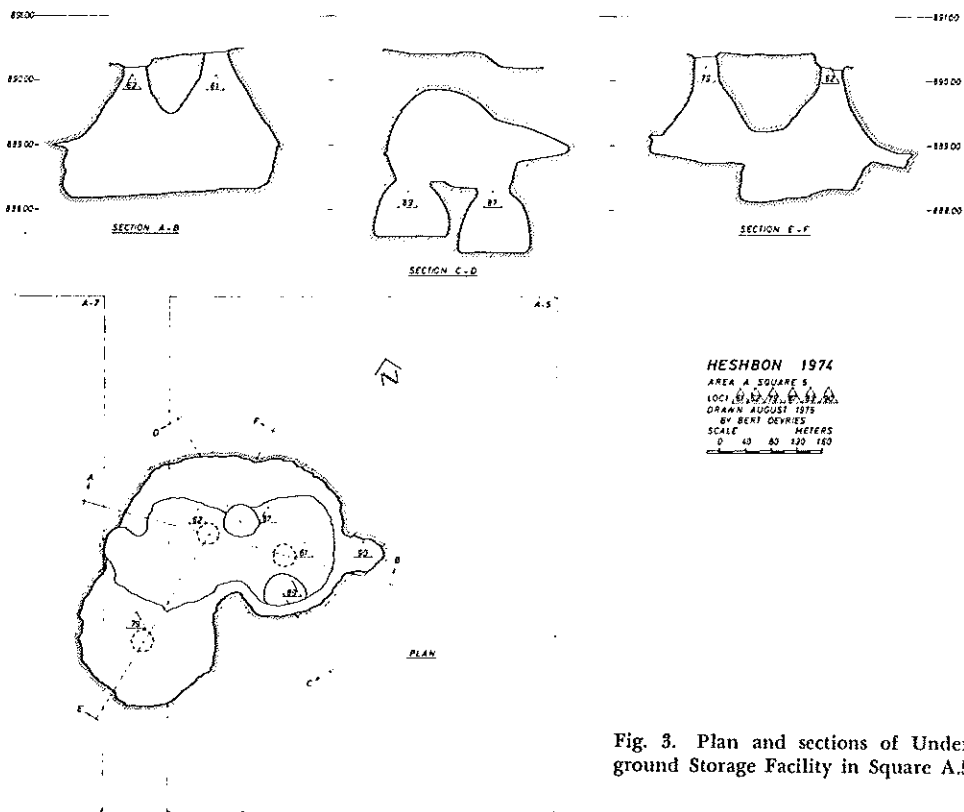


Fig. 3. Plan and sections of Under-ground Storage Facility in Square A.5.

was evident to the east. The space below this opening lay east of A.5:61 and was connected to it by a cut arched passage.

Two shallow pits (A.5:87 and 89) were found in the floor northwest and south of Entrance A.5:61 respectively. Their sides were too porous to hold any liquid. The underground complex consisted of three (and possibly four) circular spaces under Entrances A.5, 61, 62, and 79, each approximately 3.50 m. in diameter. The space under A.5:79 lies southwest of and overlaps slightly with the space under A.5:62 and the space under A.5:61 lies east of and overlaps slightly with the space under A.5:62.

The latest pottery found in all the loci in these underground spaces was from the Early Roman period. Since the walls of the pits, cavities, and chambers were very porous and there was no evidence of plastering, it seemed that these spaces could not have been used for the storage of liquids. As no evidence was found in the soil of any particles of grain, straw, or other organic substances, storage must have been in jars. The small openings, as described above, may have been intended to prevent dirt from falling in and to keep the temperature cool. A possible parallel to this type of storage facility with small entrances (averaging about 26 inches in diameter) was found at Gibeon. The chambers at Gibeon served as storage areas for wine kept in large jars which were stacked in tiers. The fairly consistent temperature in the underground spaces was ideal for the storage of wine. The chambers at Gibeon were dated to the Iron Age.³

However, the dates of the material removed from these underground chambers at Tell Heshbân has been consistently Early Roman. Some Hellenistic material came from the bottom layers under Entrance A.5:62. Furthermore, few traces of storage jars were found in these chambers. If these chambers were used for wine storage in the Iron Age, the area must have been cleaned out completely after that or later periods of its use and filled with a continuous sequence of debris during the Early Roman period.

³James Pritchard, *Gibeon, Where the Sun Stood Still* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 79-99.

In any case, the parallel with Gibeon must remain inconclusive at present.

Summary

The 1974 season in Area A provided further elucidation of the occupation of the acropolis, especially in the Islamic periods. No new light was thrown on the Byzantine period; the western end of the church was not identified. The gradual accumulation of evidence of the Roman occupation raised the question regarding the architecture on the acropolis in both Early and Late Roman periods. The well-constructed Late Roman wall identified in Squares A.7 and 9 suggested a major building of impressive construction. A platform and remains of a stylobate wall in Square A.6 (excavated in 1973) appeared to be part of the same Roman building. These Roman remains were set on bedrock on the acropolis. Sherds from earlier periods were found on and around the acropolis. It seemed probable that the Romans removed all prior structures on the acropolis so that they could build directly on bedrock. As more evidence of earlier occupations was identified on the *tell*, this denuding of the acropolis by the Romans seemed more plausible.

Other questions remained to be answered in a future season's work. Squares to the south and west of sectors excavated in 1974 could be opened to clarify the extent and nature of the Islamic occupation of the acropolis. If this Islamic occupation can be cleared one might identify the western end of the Byzantine church and ascertain more fully the nature of the Roman architecture on the acropolis. The history of Islamic, Byzantine, and Roman occupation is thus being elucidated by these excavations on the acropolis.