

AREA G.5

LARRY G. HERR
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Ever since 1968 the Ḥesbân excavators had noticed a large rectangular (72×49 m.) depression in the valley east of the *tell*, across the Na'ur-Madaba road (Fig. 1). In 1974 it was arranged to attempt to date the remains and to test the hypothesis that it was a reservoir similar to others in Jordan such as those at Jerash, Umm el-Jamal, the various desert castles, and "Solomon's Pools" on the West Bank. For this purpose four Squares (each 2×6 m.) were laid out end to end (east to west) on the east side of the depression extending from the lowest part of the depression to two column drums lying on the upper bank about 10 m. east of the depression's lip. Later two other Squares were opened to confirm the nature of the structure's walls. In the end our hypothesis that the depression was a reservoir was confirmed, and we were able to isolate two phases of use: Ayyūbid/Mamlūk and Byzantine.

Phase 1

Ayyūbid/Mamlūk sherds were found in the soil inside the depression all the way down to the first cement layer, a beautiful light gray surface perfectly smooth and level except in one place where it was cracked and slightly decomposed (Pl. X:A). Near the reservoir wall the cement sloped upwards and was smoothed into the rise of the reservoir wall (see Fig. 18). Within the cement itself two or three Ayyūbid/Mamlūk sherds were found. In our limited section through the reservoir wall we could find no evidence for two phases, so it seemed possible that the Phase 1 builders simply re-used the walls they found standing from the earlier Phase 2. No architecture was found outside the reservoir wall (the columns must have come from elsewhere), but three layers of soil (unfortunately, no laid surface) which contained

Ayyūbid/Mamlūk pottery were found. It would thus appear that Phase 1 reflected a reservoir utilized at some time during the 13th to the 15th century.

Phase 2

Beneath the makeup for the cement surface of Phase 1 was another cement surface, darker and with a makeup bed laid on virgin soil. The reservoir wall, which must have been built originally during this phase, was somewhat problematic, but given the evidence from the two additional Squares it would seem that the wall's inner face of four courses and two to three rows was stepped inward much like an upside-down stairway (Fig. 18). We can cite no parallels for such a precarious construction. An alternate explanation would suggest earthquake damage. The east face of the wall (outside the reservoir) was apparently battered against the very hard red virgin soil of the region. In the soil layers outside the wall the layer just above virgin soil contained no Ayyūbid/Mamlūk pottery—only Byzantine, and one Byzantine sherd was found in the Phase 2 cement. It thus appeared that the reservoir was used in two periods, Byzantine and Ayyūbid/Mamlūk.

One other ground surface find should be mentioned. South of our Squares a large monolithic trough (for watering?) was found halfway buried in the earth. Unlike the columns, this may have been used with the reservoir.

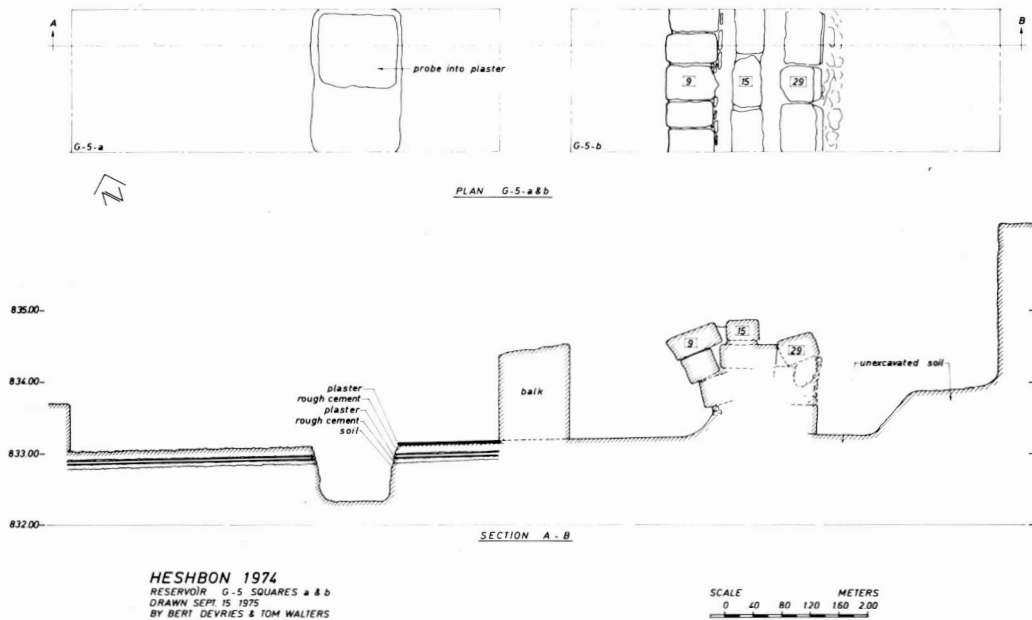
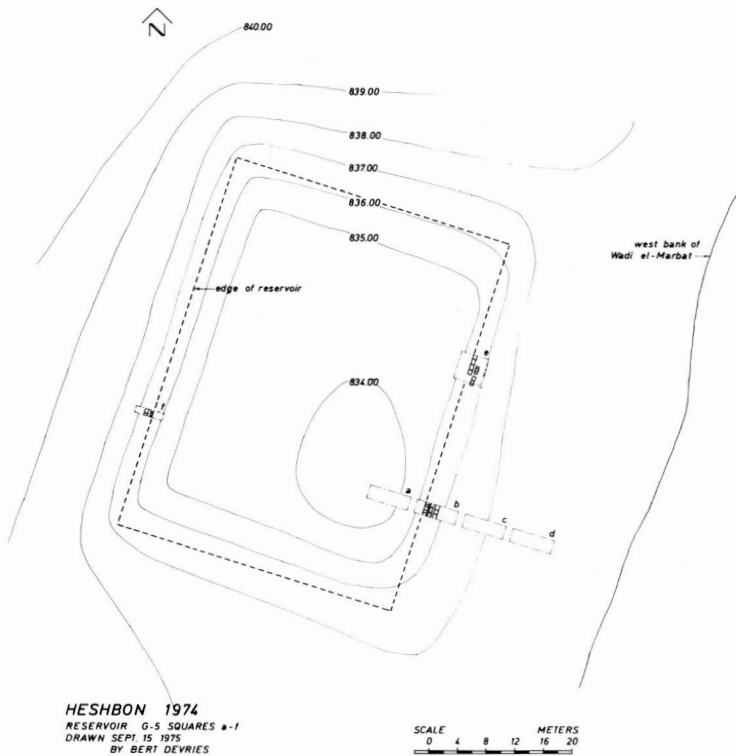


Fig. 18. Plan of Reservoir G.5 across the Madaba Road to the east from Tell Ḥṣbân, with plan and section of Squares G.5a and b.