

AREA G.12

B. MICHAEL BLAINE
Glendale, California

The location of G.12 was southwest of the *tell* on a small ridge or saddle of land which lay between the *tell* and the present village of Ḥesbân. The Square was laid out at the foot of the *tell* partly in a depression which appeared to be surrounded by traces of ancient walls. Emphasis was placed on stratigraphic identification and sequence.

Initially the Square was set 3.00 m. x 3.00 m. but because of the discovery of a large cistern in the northeast corner during the early stages of excavation, the Square was extended 1.00 m. northwards to facilitate operations.

Stratum I: Modern (A.D. 1870-present)

G.12:1 was a layer of topsoil containing occupational debris attributed to the modern settlement of Ḥesbân.

Stratum III: Early Mamlūk (A.D. 1260-1400)

Stratum III was represented by somewhat inferior construction. Wall G.12:2 was 1.30 m. wide and passed through the center of the Square north to south. Foundation Trench G.12:7 was dug against the east face of Wall G.12:2 to allow rebuilding or repair of the wall. Large field stones were used, and these contrasted with the partially dressed stones of the earlier phase of wall construction. Locus G.12:3 was a 6.00 m. deep, square-shafted cistern located in the northeast corner of the Square. Sherds from the upper soil layers inside the cistern indicated that the cistern had been abandoned through the Early Mamlūk period before it was sealed.

A compacted clay surface (G.12:6) sloped downward toward the north and the east at 10°, and served as a catchment for

ground surface water which was directed to a break in the fractured millstone forming the mouth of the cistern. The break in the millstone had been held open by fist-sized stones to allow ground surface water to run into the cistern. Ceramic data from this prepared surface, and from the soil layers (G.12:4, 6, and 9) around the mouth of Cistern G.12:3 indicated that the millstone was set in place in the Early Mamlūk period. This modification was contemporary with Phase *b* of Wall G.12:2 construction.

Stratum VI: Umayyad (A.D. 661-750)

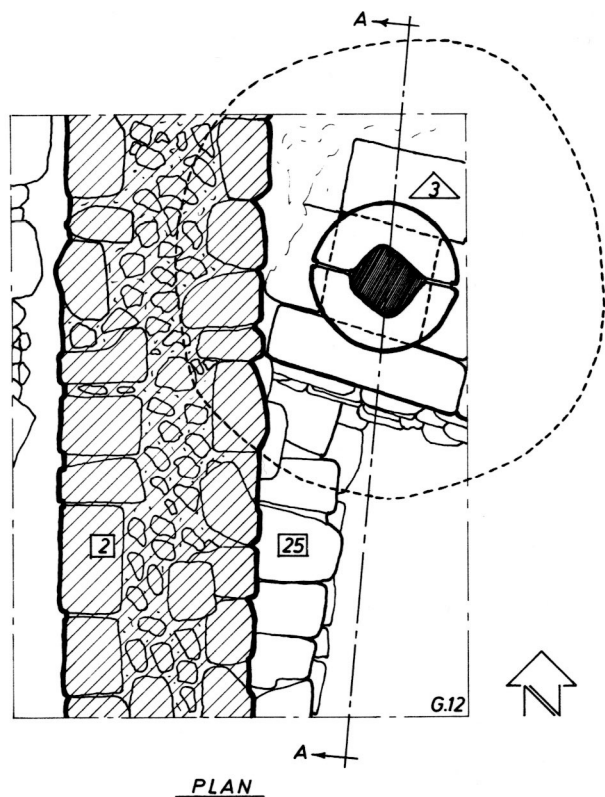
A gap in occupation was indicated between Strata III and VI. Stratum VI (soil Layer G.12:13) was the continuation of accumulation of debris in a pit which had been dug in Stratum VII. This shallow pit was located in the southeast corner of the Square.

Stratum VII: Late Byzantine (A.D. 614-661)

Stratum VII soil Layers G.12:14 and 15 contained ceramic evidence which dated the early use of the pit as Late Byzantine. This shallow pit had been dug into Early Byzantine soil layers. The specific purpose for which the pit was dug was not indicated by materials from these loci. Nor did the pit appear to have any particular relationship to structures within the Square.

Strata IX-XIV: Early Byzantine I-III (A.D. 324-450)

Strata IX-XIV materials were characterized by construction. Wall G.12:2 was founded on top of an earlier wall (G.12:25). However, it was not a rebuild of this earlier wall nor oriented precisely the same as the earlier wall. Materials for construction of Wall G.12:2 were collected in the vicinity of the *tell*. Most had been partially dressed and had at least one smooth face. However, they were not fitted closely together as they would have been if prepared exclusively for this project. Small stones had been used for chinking. One stone had been marginally drafted. Soil Layers G.12:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 23 had been filled in against the east face of Wall G.12:2 and represented a



HESHBON 1976

AREA G SQUARE 12

DRAWN JULY 8 1976 BY
BERT DEVRIES, DAVID PIPER, HENRY
KUHLMAN & DANIEL SALZMANN

CISTERN 3, WALLS 2 & 25
0 .40 .80 1.20 1.60 2.00 M.

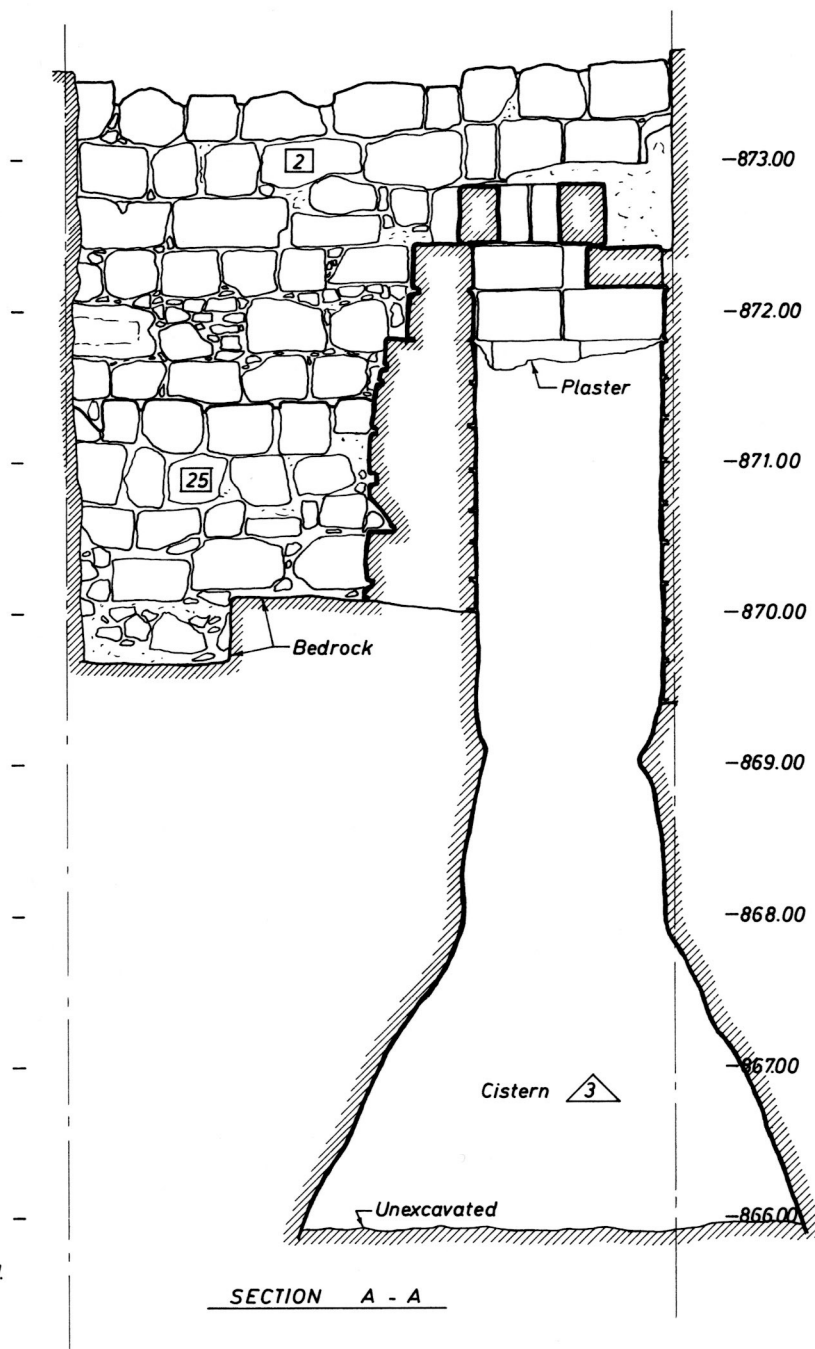


Fig. 17. Plan of G.12 with section of Cistern G.12:3.

backfilled cut into the soil layers of Strata VI and VII for a foundation trench for the construction of Wall G.12:2.

Other construction which occurred during this period was the extension upward of the shaft of Cistern G.12:3. The lower five courses of stone in the south segment of the shaft walls were constructed with a vertical exterior face. The level of the fifth course from the bottom would have corresponded to the level of the ground surface used in the Late Roman period (soil Layer G.12:16). Sherds from soil Layer G.12:12 indicated that a foundation trench had been cut through the Late Roman and Early Roman soil layers of Strata XV and XVII-XVIII against the south wall of the shaft in order to extend the cistern shaft upward in the Early Byzantine period. The thickness of the shaft's south wall up to the 872.00 m. level was approximately 0.75 m. This indicated shaft walls constructed two rows thick. The next course of stone above this level (6th course from the bottom) was set in toward the north and narrowed the shaft wall to approximately 0.30 m. The upper portion of the cistern shaft wall (three courses) was attributed to the Early Byzantine stratum.

The construction of Wall G.12:2 was related to this phase of cistern modification. A large stone in Wall G.12:2 was deliberately offset during construction so that its north end was made to abut against the next-to-the-top course of the shaft's south wall. A fill of large rocks and soil was placed against this extension of the cistern shaft and then sealed over by the thin (ca. 0.04 m. deep) *huwwar* Surface G.12:11 which ran about 0.40 m. wide against the cistern shaft's south wall between Wall G.12:2 and the east balk. The *huwwar* surface just covered the top of the offset stone in Wall G.12:2. Ceramic material dated this *huwwar* surface as Byzantine, and comprised the ground surface connected with the use of the cistern in the Early Byzantine period. The interior faces of the cistern shaft had been plastered, but an examination of plaster samples failed to provide any datable evidence. Because the plaster of the interior of the cistern shaft

reached up to the uppermost course of stone under the top, the cantilevered course, it was reasonable to include the most recent plastering of the interior of the cistern shaft as a part of the Early Byzantine cistern modifications.

Stratum XV: Late Roman II-IV (A.D. 193-324)

Stratum XV was represented by Wall G.12:25, which was founded on bedrock and extended from the south balk to the shaft of Cistern G.12:3. Because the west faces of Walls G.12:2 and G.12:25 were not exposed, the precise width of Wall G.12:25 is not known. The top surviving course of Wall G.12:25 was probably not the original top at the time of its construction because the present top course lay below the Late Roman soil layers. The original height of Wall G.12:25 was not apparent nor was the reason for its construction. It may have formed part of an adjoining domestic structure. It should also be noted that the interior face of the west wall of the Cistern G.12:3 shaft was not aligned with Wall 25 (see Plate XV:A). Because a stone of the top surviving course of Wall G.12:25 formed an integral part of the south wall of the shaft of Cistern G.12:3 they must have been of contemporary construction. This indicated the upward extension of two courses of the cistern shaft south wall in the Late Roman period. A foundation trench for the construction of Wall G.12:25 had been cut through the soil layers of Strata XVII-XVIII, XX, and XXII. Backfill in this trench (comprising Loci 28, 30, 32, 34a, 35a, 36a, 37a, and 38a) was dated Late Roman II-IV from ceramic evidence, as were also soil Layers 16, 22, and 24.

Stratum XVII-XVIII: Early Roman II-IV (31 B.C. - A.D. 135)

Evidence for this stratum came from Locus 27, a soil layer 0.25 m. thick of debris which contained some animal bone fragments as well as sherds.

Stratum XX: Late Hellenistic (198-63 B.C.)

Stratum XX was represented by the 0.95 m. deep soil Layers G.12:29, 31, 33, 34b and c, and 35b and c.

A 0.10 m. wide strip of soil adjacent to the south shaft wall of Cistern G.12:3 was excavated separately from the soil layers further south to check for possible foundation trenching. The ceramic evidence from this 0.10 m. wide strip was dated consistently the same as for the soil loci adjacent to the south. Visual examination also showed that these Late Hellenistic soil layers sealed against exterior faces of the lower courses of the Cistern G.12:3 shaft south wall, indicating that the lower courses of the cistern shaft were constructed sometime prior to the Late Hellenistic period. The bottom of the lowest Late Hellenistic soil layer (G.12:35) touched and lay over the top of a bedrock bench adjacent to the Cistern G.12:3 shaft which bench had been left from apparent quarrying.

Stratum XXII: Iron II/Persian (800-500 B.C.)

A gap in occupation was indicated between Stratum XX and the next lower materials of Stratum XXII. Stratum XXII was attested by 0.40 m. of soil layers and rock fill (G.12:36b and 37b) which yielded datable Iron II/Persian sherds. These soil layers filled in the quarried sector of bedrock south of the bench and east of the foundation trench for construction of Wall G.12:25. The south wall of the shaft of Cistern G.12:3 was not founded on the bedrock bench but continued on downward. The bedrock bench had been carefully cut to allow for stability of the shaft wall. How far the stone courses of the shaft continued down could only be determined either by removal of the plaster from the inside faces of the shaft or by dismantling the shaft walls.

Cistern G.12:3

The evidence indicated that this cistern was created some time prior to the Late Hellenistic period and then kept in use through-

out the cited stages of occupation until it was closed in the Ayyūbid-Mamlūk period. To indicate an ethnographic observation, it should be noted that even now in modern times Arif, the man who lived in the house closest to the cistern, wanted to put it into use again as a watering place for his sheep. In the past, as the level of the ground surface had been raised by the accumulation of debris, the walls of the cistern shaft were extended upward. The shaft for Cistern G.12:3 therefore represented construction by stages over a period of at least 1400 years. If Arif is to use the cistern, he will have to raise the level of the cistern shaft to the level of the present ground surface to accomplish his intent, or build a stair or other access to the level of its surviving shaft mouth.



A. Square G.12. View to north.
Wall G.12:2 is on the left
and Cistern G.12:3 at the top.
Photo: Paul H. Denton and
Loren Calvert.

B. Square G.14. View to south.
The apse of the North
Church with Wall G.14:4 on
the left, Wall G.14:33 at bot-
tom center, and Surface G.14:
37 at right bottom. Photo:
Paul H. Denton and Kaye
Barton.

