

AREA G.14

JOHN LAWLOR
Baptist Bible College
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

In the sector just north of Tell Ḥesbân the remains of what appeared to be a Byzantine church came to the attention of the staff. Certain architectural features were visible above ground surface;¹ these gave an initial clue to the nature of the structure. Consequently, a sounding was carried out during the last four weeks of the season. Three primary objectives were set for this project: (1) to establish a founding date for the structure; (2) to establish the relationship between Walls 3 and 4 and identify the structure; and (3) to check the stratigraphy of this sector with the stratigraphy of the *tell*. The initial 3.00 m. x 2.00 m. probe (gradually expanded to 6.00 m. x 4.00 m.), was laid out in such a manner as to attempt to accomplish all three objectives. By the end of the season all three objectives had been achieved.

The soil layers, architectural features, and other installations corresponded well with the stratigraphic framework for the whole of Tell Ḥesbân. The data will be presented in top-to-bottom (late-to-early) sequence, corresponding to that stratigraphic framework.

Strata III-IV: Ayyūbid/Early Mamlūk (A.D. 1200-1400)

After the removal of the modern wall, rock tumble, and debris accumulated "inside" the apse (west of Wall 4), a layer of topsoil, Locus 2, was encountered. This averaged 0.10 m. in depth. Locus 2 yielded a span of sherds from Ayyūbid/Mamlūk to Byzantine, though they were predominantly Ayyūbid/Mamlūk. Fragments of four dif-

¹These architectural features included an apsidal wall, identified as Wall 4 throughout this report; a north-south wall, identified as Wall 3 throughout this report, which lay immediately east of Wall 4; column bases; one unbroken column drum in a horizontal position; and tesserae scattered over the region.

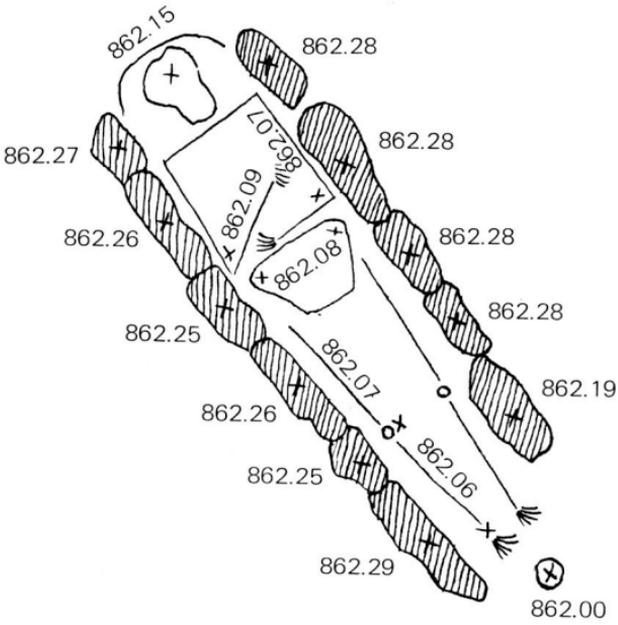


Fig. 18. Field sketch of cist Burial G.14:10 (scale: 1:25).

ferent skeletons were taken from Locus 2: one possibly male adult; one female adult; one infant, 1-2 years of age; one infant, less than one year old. The pottery taken from the context of these fragmented remains dated them very clearly to the Late Ayyūbid period (A.D. 1200-1260) or Early Mamlūk period (A.D. 1260-1400).

In the western two-thirds of the Square (west of Wall 4), Locus 8 lay immediately below Locus 2. Locus 8 contained the first fully articulated skeleton in an extended position. This burial differed from the other articulated burials in that it was not a cist burial. The orientation of the skeleton was head-to-west. The skeleton was that of a female, fifty years or older, whose height had been about 1.60 m. One of the distinguishing features of this skeleton was its mandible. "The mandible was singular in that all teeth had been lost early in life and a solid ridge of bone had formed with considerable lingual lipping."² Fragments of five other skeletons were also found in Locus 8.

At the western end of the probe was a series of cist burials, Loci 10, 13, 15, 17, 18, and 32. These cists were constructed of rough field stones set on edge in the general shape of an Egyptian mummy case; broader (ca. 0.40 m.) from the waist up, tapering slightly to the ankles (ca. 0.25-0.30 m.), with an average length of 1.80-2.00 m. These dimensions varied from one cist to another.³ An additional feature relating to these installations is the fact that there were three "layers" of them. The upper layer, from north to south, was arranged in the following order: Loci 13, 10, 15. Locus 17 was directly under 15 in the southwest quadrant of the Square and Locus 18 was directly under 13 in the northwest quadrant. Locus 32 was under Locus 17.

Four of these cists contained fairly well preserved articulated skeletons in the extended position. The other two contained major portions of skeletons, though not articulated. Fragments of from one to six additional skeletons were found in each of the cists. Locus 10 contained a skeleton of a male aged 40-45 with a probable height of 1.70 m. As the rib cage of this skeleton was being excavated, the arms and hands, folded across the chest, were exposed. It was noticed that a green patina covered the tip of the little finger on the right hand. It was carefully uncovered, revealing a ring on the tip of the right finger.

Locus 13 yielded parts of seven different skeletons. Some fragments belonged to an old male, some to a small young adult female; the

² R. M. Little, anthropologist's field report, in G.14 field notebook.

³ See Fig. 18.

rest were remains of children and infants (one twelve-year-old male, one five-year-old male, one infant approximately one-year-old and two fetuses). It was unclear whether all these were members of the same family, or whether some earlier burials were extensively disturbed by the process of cist construction. A small bronze necklace and bracelet were found in this cist, as well as a small bowl.⁴

Locus 15 contained representative fragments of one old adult and one infant. A fully articulated skeleton was discovered in Locus 17. It was in an extended position. On the basis of tooth wear and many other factors, it was determined that these were the remains of a 30-40 year old male. In addition, fragments of an adult male (possibly 40-50 years old) and one infant or fetus were found in this locus. The pottery suggested that the burials occurred during the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period.⁵

The next cist encountered, Locus 18, contained parts of three skeletons, two badly fragmented (one 17-25 year-old male and one old male); and the third, roughly articulated, had an estimated height at death of 1.70 m.

The last of these cists, Locus 32, yielded skeletal fragments of three male adults, one child four years old, and one probably premature infant. One of the three adult male skeletons was fairly well articulated. The skull was dislodged from its original position for it was not articulated with the rest of the skeleton. The pottery from this locus pointed to an Ayyūbid/Mamlūk date.

There were certain clearly discernible patterns in these cist burials. The cists themselves were all constructed in much the same manner and were all laid with the same east-west orientation. Each cist contained fragments of more than one skeleton, though not all contained articulated skeletons. In those cases where articulated skeletons were found, the remains all had the same head-to-west, feet-to-east orientation. All of the cists contained Ayyūbid/Mamlūk sherds as well as others dating to earlier periods.

The puzzling question about these burials is how to account for

⁴ This bowl continues to be something of a mystery. The base seemed to have traces of the Early Roman string-cut base; a ribbing around the body of the bowl that resembled Byzantine ribbing, and a ware that might have been either 'Abbāsīd or Ayyūbid. James Sauer suggested that its date was the most recent of these periods, in other words, Ayyūbid/Mamlūk. Of the 89 sherds taken from this locus, 3 were dated to the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period; the rest were probably Umayyad, Byzantine, Late Roman, and some unidentifiable items.

⁵ Pottery pail 31 was read: 2 Ayyūbid/Mamlūk; Umayyad; Byzantine. Pottery pail 33 was read: Ayyūbid/Mamlūk; Umayyad.

all the fragmented material, particularly in those cases where fully articulated skeletons were found. All of the fragments seemed to be evidence of disturbance which took place, perhaps at the time of forming the cists. The fragments would be secondary burials, therefore, while the articulated remains would be primary.

Strata III and IV were also represented at the east end of the probe, east of Wall 3. Beneath a layer of topsoil (Locus 2, averaging 0.07 m. in depth) was a layer of fine grayish soil, Locus 6, which sealed against the east face of Wall 3. It averaged 0.07 m. in depth and contained an abundance of tesserae. Of 32 sherds recovered from this soil layer, two were Ayyūbid/Mamlūk, the rest being Umayyad and Byzantine.

Strata V-VI: Umayyad/‘Abbāsīd (A.D. 661-969)

Immediately below the lowest of the three layers of burials a complex of three walls was unearthed. Wall 29 survived two courses high, constructed of some well-cut stone and some roughly hewn stone. Its orientation was generally east-west, extending westward out of the north balk. It was exposed to a length of 1.80 m. The height of the two surviving courses was 0.65-0.70 m. Wall 28 survived as a north-south of well-cut stone, two courses high wall. It ran perpendicular to Wall 29 and met it with a butted joint at the west balk in the northwest corner of the Square. Its exposed length was 3.65 m. and the height of the two courses was 0.70 m. The third wall, Locus 30, comprised three large stones lying in a north-south direction, running parallel with wall 28, 1.00 m. east of it and perpendicular to Wall 29, meeting it with another butted joint. It appeared that these three large stones had been reused here, having once been part of some other structure.

The plan of these walls suggested that this was a domestic complex⁶ and that it made use of the apse wall, Locus 4, at the northeast corner. In other words, Wall 4 would have served as the east, south-east wall; Wall 29 would have been the north wall; and Wall 28 would have been the west wall of the house. Wall 30 would have divided it into a two-room complex. This simple plan is still seen today in both the winter houses and summer tents of many of the residents of the village of Ḥesbân.

The only floor or surface associated with this complex was the cobble underlayer and plaster base for the mosaic floor of the Byzan-

⁶ See Fig. 19.

tine church which lay immediately beneath the complex. In fact, both Walls 28 and 29 were set directly on that mosaic floor.

The soil layer which filled the western room, Locus 39, showed clear Umayyad dominance, although several 'Abbāsīd sherds were mixed in also.⁷ A soil layer immediately above 39 (Locus 26), also sealed over Wall 30 and yielded predominantly Umayyad pottery, although some sherds were read "'Abbāsīd/Umayyad dominant." Coin 2877, dated Early Umayyad, was found in soil Layer 26.

There was correlation in the periodization of the material east of Wall 3 with that found west of Wall 4. Locus 12 was the first pure Umayyad soil layer encountered in that sector of the Square.⁸ This layer, 0.30-0.35 m. deep, sealed against the east face of Wall 3 and consisted of a powdery, gray ash with a few pockets of fine tan soil lensing in and out. This ash material was found over, around, and under a tumble of large limestone rocks, some of which appeared to have been well cut at one time. The pottery evidence unmistakably dated this ash layer to the Umayyad period. It had all the earmarks of a large destruction layer. The question was destruction of what? No clues survived.

Beneath Locus 12 a light gray, compact clayey soil, Locus 16, was found. It too sealed against the east face of Wall 3. The average depth of this soil layer was 0.05 m. Predominantly Umayyad pottery came from Locus 16, including a well-preserved zoomorphic pitcher spout. Locus 16 sealed over Locus 19, a brown, clayish layer, 0.09 m. thick.

Locus 23 was the first clear surface found in this corner of the Square. While it was badly broken in some places, it clearly sealed against the east face of Wall 3. In conjunction with this, a patch of mosaic (0.30 x 0.20 m.) protruded from the east balk. The whitish-gray surface, Locus 23, was not the usual type of underlayer for mosaic—at least of the Byzantine period. With this scant amount of evidence it was impossible to define clearly the function of the mosaic floor. It can be said that there was some type of Umayyad settlement outside Wall 3 which was apparently destroyed by fire, hence the thick ash layer of Locus 12. A fourth-century A.D. Roman coin was found in Locus 23.

The lowest of the Umayyad soil layers in this corner was Locus 25, which was composed of reddish soil with fist-sized limestone rocks. A fair amount of predominantly Late Byzantine pottery came

⁷ Approximately 10-15 sherds out of a total of 500 were 'Abbāsīd.

⁸ Because of the layout of the Square in relationship to Wall 3, this part of the Square formed a triangle, 1.45 m. east-west along the north balk by 2.50 m. north-south along the east balk by 2.90 m. along the east face of Wall 3.

from this layer, 0.06 m. deep, though a few possible Umayyad sherds were found also.

Further excavation extended from this end of the Square would perhaps give some answers concerning the functions of Surface 23 and soil Layer 12.

Stratum VIII: Byzantine (ca. A.D. 450-614)

As previously indicated, Walls 3 and 4 were visible above ground surface prior to the start of the probe, although the relationship between the two walls was not known. Wall 4, though not much of it was exposed, very clearly appeared to be an apsidal wall of a Byzantine church. Because of the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk and Umayyad/‘Abbāsīd strata that were encountered, excavation west of Wall 4 proceeded slowly, and major developments in exposing any further church architectural features were slow in coming. Six days before the end of the season, additional architectural data were uncovered which were structurally associated with Wall 4. Meanwhile, east of Wall 3 excavation was steadily progressing, thereby gradually exposing the east face of that impressive wall. Finally, on the last digging day in the field, bedrock was reached in this sector of the Square, demonstrating that Wall 3 had, in fact, been founded in bedrock. Each locus associated with the church structure is described below.

Wall 3 was a north-south wall located in the northeast corner of the Square. Exposure of a 2.70 m. long portion of its east face to bedrock revealed the fact that it survived as a five-course wall. The upper two courses were made of large stone blocks at least 2.00 m. long x 0.35 m. wide. The uppermost course was 0.60 m. high while the next course down was 0.50 m. high. The third course down was made of well-cut stone but of somewhat smaller dimensions, 0.35-0.50 m. long x 0.35 m. wide x 0.45-0.48 m. high. The fourth course down changed somewhat, in that the stones were not nearly so well-cut as those in the three courses above, and they were of much smaller size, 0.35-0.50 m. long x 0.30 m. high x ca. 0.55 m. wide. This course was about 0.20 m. wider than the surviving three above it. The founding course was of boulder-sized rocks (0.90 m. long x 0.80 m. high and smaller) chinked with baseball- to basketball-sized stones. The total exposed surviving height of Wall 3 was 2.66 m. The pottery evidence from just above bedrock showed Late Byzantine I-II dominance (ca. A.D. 614-61) with some Early Byzantine, a small amount of Late Roman, and one Iron II/Persian sherd. On the basis of excavation and projected reconstruction by the architect, it was

quite apparent that Wall 3 was the east exterior wall of a Late Byzantine church.

Wall 4 was an apsidal wall surviving at least four courses high, each course 0.50 m. in height. Though the size of the stones varied, the average size was 0.90-1.00 m. in length x 0.45-0.50 m. in width. They were well-dressed stones on the west face; some were even slightly concave on the west face. Several observable architectural features indicated this to be the apse wall of a Byzantine church. One of our primary questions, the relationship of Walls 3 and 4, was thus answered. Wall 3 was the east exterior wall of a Byzantine church and Wall 4 was the interior apse wall. On the basis of the architect's projections it was quite clearly established that the interior diameter of the apse at the widest surviving point would have been 6.00 m. (north-south).

As excavation inside the apse continued, six associated loci were exposed: Wall 33, Locus 34, Surfaces 35, 36, 37, and Floor 41. Wall 33 was another apsidal curve 1.00 m. west of Wall 4, of smaller dimensions, and surviving to a height of 1.68 m. below the uppermost preserved course of Wall 4. The individual stones comprising Wall 33 were smaller than those in Wall 4, the average size being 0.65 m. long x 0.35 m. wide. At its west end, Wall 33 turned south, presumably joining the west end of Wall 4. Thus it was structurally associated with that wall. The two walls together gave the appearance of an apse inside an apse.⁹ The west face of Wall 33 was nicely plastered, the plaster apparently still in a good state of preservation. A plan of these walls compared with similar structures¹⁰ suggests that Wall 33 was an elders' bench in the apse of the church, and thus provided seating for the *presbyteroi* (see Pl. XV:B).

Locus 34 was directly inside (west of) Wall 33 at the head of the apse. This installation was made up of two well-dressed stones 0.62-0.65 m. in length and 0.26 m. in width. Their precise function is unknown. It has been suggested that they served as either stepping stones to the elders' bench or perhaps as a bishop's seat. Further excavation is necessary to answer this question.

Surfaces 35, 36, and 37 were associated in one sense, yet distinct in another. Surface 37 was a cobble layer which characteristically served as an underlayer for Byzantine mosaic floors. Surface 36 was a thin layer of gray plaster which leveled the top of surface 37; thus 37 was sealed under 36. Finally, 35 was a slightly deeper layer of white

⁹ See Fig. 20 for a plan of the excavated loci related to the church structure.

¹⁰ Compare the Byzantine structure at Mt. Nebo, presently under excavation and restoration by the Franciscans.

plaster, sealing over 36, which formed the cement base in which the tesserae of the mosaic floor were set.

Locus 34 was set in place after the plastering of the west face of Wall 33. Surfaces 35, 36, and 37 all sealed against the west face and the north and south ends of Locus 34, and the plaster facing of Wall 33 (to both the north and the south of 34, but not east of 34). All of this indicated that Surfaces 35, 36, and 37 and mosaic Floor 41 represent a second phase of this church and that Locus 34 probably was set on an earlier floor of the church.

Floor 41 was a mosaic floor, remnants of which were exposed and shown to be in a poor state of preservation. However, as pointed out above, the 'Abbāsid/Umayyad Walls 28 and 29 sat directly on parts of Floor 41. Thus those portions of the floor are assumed to be in a fairly good state of preservation. Those walls were left *in situ*, so the presumably better preserved portions of Floor 41 were not exposed.

The overall size of this structure, based upon evidence from the Square as well as visible architectural fragments apparently still *in situ*, has been estimated to be 15.00 m. wide x 30.00 m. long. It lay on a near perfect east-west orientation, its east end being only three degrees, twenty minutes south of east. Its founding date was probably late fifth or early sixth century A.D.



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 bottom center, and Surface G.14:37 at right bottom. Photo: Paul H. Denton and Kaye Barton.

