

PREFACE

The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo preserves the memory of the place where Moses was offered the vision of the Promised Land and where he died in the hands of God. It is one of the most important Holy Places in Jordan and the Custody of the Holy Land has the task of preserving and protecting this archaeological site for future generations.

The relationship between the Franciscan Friars of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem and the Memorial of Moses has roots far back in time. Fr. Sylvester SALLER's excavations of the basilica and monastery (1933–1937) have been seminal and led to the first thorough archaeological investigation of the place.

After him, research continued under the direction of Fr. Virgilio CORBO (1963–1967) and Fr. Michele PICCIRILLO (1976–2008). The latter discovered in 1976 the most beautiful, large and intact mosaic of Jordan, which bears a marvellous hunting scene and two Greek inscriptions full of many historical details. He then turned his attention to the monastery surrounding the basilica and the many hermitages down the valleys.

Throughout the years the original shelter had been systematically improved as a result of a desire to present a dignified appearance for the Sanctuary of Moses, as well as an adequate environment for the cultural and artistic treasures preserved inside it. However, the proved geological instability of the mountain top led to the decision to replace the old shelter with a new one. Several architectural studios were contacted to present their ideas for the new Memorial and the project prepared by Arch. Roberto SABELLI was finally chosen.

In 2012, after a first phase of restoration directed by Fr. Carmelo PAPPALARDO, I was appointed to oversee the archaeological investigations.

In these last archaeological seasons (from July 2012 to September 2014), Dr. Davide BIANCHI has been directly involved as my field assistant showing a great ability to adapt to new realities, and considerable leadership skills that have allowed him to run with exceptional disposition the topic of his doctoral dissertation, which he successfully defended at the University of Milan. After some presentations given in different venues, with this new monograph Davide BIANCHI is able to offer a larger and more complete description of his personal research which not only involves the monastic complex of Mount Nebo, but also extends to include the other Jordanian monasteries linked to the devotion of the Biblical figures.

The first two chapters of this book are dedicated to the excavations inside the basilica and in one of the monastery rooms. Of great interest is the discovery of an unpublished burial in the nave of the church. The archaeological investigation of the tomb, its framing in the broader archaeological and architectural context of the church as well as the literary testimony allowed Davide BIANCHI to understand its typology and function.

The careful re-examination of the results of the previous excavations combined with the new excavation data have also allowed him to define a clearer and more logical architectural development of the Basilica of the Memorial of Moses. In addition to the accurate graphic documentation of the excavated areas, the author provides useful 3D reconstructions of the architectural phases of the basilica, which thanks to their bright colours facilitate the reader's understanding.

For the first time in a thorough manner, the study of the Memorial of Moses also addresses the economic and social aspects of the monastic community that inhabited the Nebo Region. With the application of current approaches in landscape archaeology, the author focuses on the study of land use and its cultivation as well as on the water resources of the monastic complex.

Particular attention is paid to the social component of the monks and to the forms of secular and religious patronage towards the sanctuary of Moses.

It is also worth mentioning the publication of the pottery assemblages found in the cistern under the atrium of the church and in the last occupation phases of the *synthronon* as well as in the southern wing of the monastery. These data are included in the last chapter, in which Davide BIANCHI provides a new and critical view of the continuity and decline of monastic life in Jordan during the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphate through the study of pottery, architecture and information derived from ancient sources.

This monograph, delving into religious, human and material culture studies, greatly enriches the knowledge of some of the more crucial centuries in the history of the ancient provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina*.

We applaud his efforts carried on with wisdom and intelligence in such a difficult field.

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Fr. Eugenio ALLIATA