

FOREWORD

The aims of the research

This book, based on the thesis for my Ph.D. conducted at the University of Milan, examines a peculiar aspect of monasticism which emerged in the territories of Jordan in Late Antiquity.

The research questions underlying this study were defined during the archaeological investigations at the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo between 2012 and 2014. The excavations inside the Basilica and in some rooms of the monastery provided new outcomes on the architectural phases of the church and the development of the monastic complex between the Byzantine era and the Umayyad period. The lack of a unitary corpus dedicated to the monasteries linked to Biblical figures suggested I develop this topic. In doing so, I wanted to focus the research not only on the archaeological and architectural elements of the monasteries, but also on their religious, social and economic aspects. In particular, daily life in the monastery of Mount Nebo, its management, and devotional practices were taken into consideration. Moreover, the study of the Memorial of Moses was extended by means of comparison to the other monastic shrines beyond the River Jordan, also reflecting on the possible causes of the abandonment of these religious complexes.

The scientific purpose of the book is not a general discussion on monasticism, but a detailed analysis of these peculiar monasteries, which were characterized by shrines recalling specific Biblical episodes.

The goals of the research can be summarized in three major points:

1. Examination of the monastic complexes which were built in connection with Biblical memories
2. Investigation of the cultural and socio-economic aspects of monastic life in the monastery of Mount Nebo
3. Research on the processes and causes which had a possible impact on the abandonment of monasteries beyond the Jordan River.

Methodology

The methodology follows the criteria of a holistic approach. In the first part, special attention is paid to the archeological and architectural investigation in the church, some rooms and facilities of the Mount Nebo monastery. The archaeological materials (pottery, glass, metals) were examined analytically and graphically documented. To summarize visually the new interpretation of the architectural phases of the basilica, three-dimensional reconstructions were drawn and added by the author.

Literary sources, particularly the travelogue of Egeria, were also taken into account. For linguistic consistency with the text, the sources are cited in their critical English edition. Given their recurrence and importance in support of the text, the original passages of the Greek and Latin sources have been quoted in the footnotes.

Considering the limited recurrence of Arabic names and terms, it was decided to transliterate them without diacritical marks.

The analysis of the four monastic shrines was based on the re-examination of the historical and hagiographic sources in their original languages concerning the monasteries, as well as the archaeological evidence.

The socio-economic analysis of the monastery of Mount Nebo was conducted using epigraphical and papyrological sources and considering the numismatic finds from the excavations.

Structure of the book

The monograph is divided into two parts for a total of five chapters and an introductory chapter devoted to anchoritic and coenobitic monasticism in the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina*. The introduction addresses the history of the research conducted on the ecclesiastical foundations in the region including the dwelling patterns of the monks. A summary of the excavations at the Memorial of Moses and the occupation timeline of the place conclude the chapter.

The book is then divided into two thematic sections: the first is analytical and dedicated to the archaeological data of the monastery of Mount Nebo, whereas the second takes a diachronic approach to the aspects associated with the creation, development and the decline of the monastic shrines. In this way, moving from the latest data from the most recent excavation campaigns and a critical discussion on the various monasteries beyond the River Jordan, it was possible to define not only the material aspects of the Memorial of Moses, but also its religious and economical aspects for the local society.

The excavation surveys carried out in the basilica are described in Chapter One, while the excavations conducted in room no. 103 and in cistern no. 8 are presented in the second chapter. The analysis of the ceramic, numismatic and epigraphic finds, supplemented by a useful list of stratigraphic units, appears in the first two chapters for better internal thematic coherence. On the other hand, the plates of the drawings were placed at the end of the monograph to facilitate their consultation. Given the numerous excavation campaigns conducted in the basilica of Nebo, the references to literature are shown in the footnotes (in some cases summarizing briefly the information already published) to emphasize the new discoveries and original interpretations by the author and make the text precise and concise.

The first chapter focuses entirely on the archaeological research carried out in the basilica. After a brief historical introduction of the site, the results of the excavation are presented, specifying not only the stratigraphic contexts, but also the connections with the published data on the monastic rooms built around the church. Particular attention was paid to the study of the pottery from the excavation which allowed many typological parallels with other finds in the region. The results of the pottery studies, combined with the monetary analyses conducted by B. CALLEGHER, have made it possible to frame the construction phases chronologically. Particular attention was paid to the study of the architectural elements of the privileged tomb due to its interesting elements of reuse (*spolia*) and their possible origins. Some marble fragments, found in the levels under the *synthronon*, have expanded the knowledge of the liturgical furnishings of the basilica of Nebo and enriched the onomastic repertoire of donors.

The second chapter focuses on the *coenobium* and shows the archaeological data from the latest excavations in room no. 103 and in cistern no. 8, which was built under the atrium of the basilica. The analysis of the pottery found in these structures provides new outcomes on the architectural development of the monastery in the last phases of its occupation.

The third chapter deals with the monastic shrines, reflecting on their origin and their diachronic evolution. The devotional and liturgical practices that characterize the *coenobia* and the wider practice of pilgrimage to Biblical places are taken into consideration, focusing on the sacred topography of the region. The four Biblical sanctuaries are framed historically and archeologically with the addition of a rich graphic and photographic documentation, in many cases produced by the author during the surveys in the area.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the aspects of daily life in the monastery of Mount Nebo. An examination of the epigraphic, iconographic and monumental data from the various monasteries in the Nebo valleys helped to outline the economic and social components related to the

monastic movement in this region. In particular, the chapter is devoted to agricultural production, the relationship between the Memorial of Moses and the hermitages, the acts of secular and religious euergetism and the coin finds.

The final issue concerns the changes affecting monasticism and more generally the local Christian community in the transition from the Byzantine era to the Umayyad and then Abbasid periods. The fifth chapter extends the discussion to the continuity and decline of all monastic complexes beyond the River Jordan, while some references to the entire corpus of church foundations in the province of *Arabia* have also been included. The monumental, epigraphic and papyrological data suggest that the cause of the abandonment of the monasteries cannot be attributed solely to the Persian invasion or to the transition to the new Islamic rule. Indeed, devotional practices and pilgrimages were in fact only marginally affected by these phenomena. The factors that contributed to the slow decline of monasticism are therefore highlighted in the chapter, analyzing both the external elements (political, cultural, social, economic) and those internal to the monastic communities.

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