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Mount Nebo - 1997 Campaign. Khirbat al-Mukhayyat

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► **To cite this version:**

Anne Michel, C. Sanmori, M. Varvesi. Mount Nebo - 1997 Campaign. Khirbat al-Mukhayyat. *Liber Annuus*, 1997, *Ricerca in Giordania*, 17 (47), p. 463-465, pl. 39. hal-01757329

HAL Id: hal-01757329

<https://hal.science/hal-01757329>

Submitted on 9 Dec 2021

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RICERCA STORICO-ARCHEOLOGICA IN GIORDANIA XVII-1997

a cura di M. Piccirillo

I. RELAZIONI DELLE SPEDIZIONI ARCHEOLOGICHE

1. Mount Nebo – 1997 Campaign. Khirbat al-Mukhayyat (Pl. 39) ^{OK}

The main scope of the third campaign in the church of Saint George in Khirbat al-Mukhayyat was to ascertain the chronological sequence in some rooms of the complex. We proceeded to carry out various probes mostly in areas A and C.

Probes in area A

In area A (the Church) a probe (about 1.75 × 3.80 m) was opened in the central nave against the west wall of the church (USM 24a) to control and to identify the termination point of wall USM 50/15 that continues under the wall of the church and to determine the chronological relation between these two walls. When the bed of the mosaic (SU 51) was removed, a very thin brown layer (SU 52) that contained very few sherds to be dated to the beginning of the VIth century came to light. The layer beneath it (SU 53) was composed of soft clay mixed with ash and ceramic sherds, most of which are datable to the Hellenistic period and some to the Iron Age. The layer was very thick (about 1.90 m), which was completely removed and as a result a new yellow layer appeared (SU 55) which we did not excavate. In the south-west corner of SU 55 a pit had been hewn (SU 56/57), which contained almost exclusively Iron Age sherds.

These layers were related to the walls upon which the west wall of the church (USM 24a) was built. The first wall (USM 65) consisted of three courses of roughly squared big blocks that appeared to be the external face of the eastern wall of the cistern in front of the church. This wall had been built upon a former one (US 66) of which four courses have been identified; it could be established that it goes further down, but we did not reach its foundations. The layer SU 53 did not give significant chronological information to allow us to date the walls US 65 and US 66. But according to the similar sequence already observed in area D, wall US 65 may be presumably attributed to the Hellenistic or Early Roman period and wall US 66 to the Iron Age period. On the northern edge of the probe an east-west wall (USM 70) appeared immediately under the bed of the mosaic and the north-western pillar of the nave. It

can be identified as the stylobate of the north colonnade of the church. It consisted of two courses of medium-sized fairly squared stones and its foundations (USM 71) consisted of four courses of very rough stones laid in a coarse manner (see stratigraphy). At the end of the campaign the probe was refilled.

In the same area A, the USM 68 in the western part of the south aisle was cleaned to try to understand its nature. The structure is now in a very bad state of conservation compared to that observed by Bagatti: it is made of only one 10 cm high course of four stones and we were able to establish that the mosaic closes in exactly against it. The structure is therefore part of the liturgical installations of the church, but it is now quite impossible to determine its nature.

In the eastern part of the south aisle the structure near to the door of the sacristy was also cleaned. It was composed of a column drum and two other blocks between it and the wall of the sacristy. It was determined that the drum lays on the mosaic of the church and is therefore a later addition.

Excavation in area C

In area C west of the church three probes were opened. The first one (C1, 2.50 × 2.90 m) was carried out in the northern half of the west basin of the cistern. Superficial cleaning brought to light a layer, about 30 cm thick, made of gray dusty clay mixed with stone (SU 60) that contained some byzantine sherds. The layer is identical to SU 49 identified during the 1996 campaign. The following layer (SU 61, in fact the same as SU 62 in C3) consisted of yellow-brown clay and huge architectonic blocks. Very few sherds were found. The probe was stopped here and a second one was opened in the eastern basin of the cistern (C3); for security reasons, so as not to weaken the east wall of the cistern, it was limited to the west half of the basin. The same stratigraphical sequence appeared: the removing of SU 49 was completed and the following layer (SU 62, identical to SU 61) was excavated to a depth of 3.65 m without reaching the bottom. The layer consisted almost exclusively of huge stones from a collapse. At a first glance, it has been impossible to establish if it is the collapse of the vault of the cistern, that of the church or of a former building, because there was very little ceramic evidence. The probe was stopped here for technical reasons.

A small trench was dug at the eastern end of the wall USM 17a, against its southern face (C2) to try to understand the reason of the change in direction of the wall and its relation to walls 17b (west wall of room B) and 24a (west wall of the church). Clearing the area we were able to identify a small east-west plastered water channel running along the south wall of the church ending at its south-west corner. This channel seems to be contemporaneous to the west wall of room B. The following stratigraphical sequence could be identified in the area: 1. the wall USM 17a (south wall of the cistern) was erected;

2. the same wall was subsequently cut at its eastern end to build wall USM 17b (west wall of room B), that seems to lean against the south wall of the church at the foundation level; 3. the last wall to be built in the area was wall USM 67 which was erected upon USM 17a and that leans against the plaster that covered the west wall of the church.

Works in areas B, F and I

Superficial cleaning was performed in room B. The collapse of the southern wall of the room was removed. It consisted mostly of big stones and brown clay. The westernmost pillar leaning against the south wall of the room (USM 19) was brought to light. A small trench was opened along USM 21; in its western part we found the continuation of the plaster that covered the bottom of the water channel. The appearance of another column drum about one meter to the west of the southern door of the church and aligned with the pillar we have just mentioned, prevented us to ascertain the continuation of the canal's course.

To the east of the same door the upper part of several irregular aligned stones appeared, but we were not able to understand their nature.

Two other minor probes were performed in Area F and I. The scope of the first was to clarify the relation between structure USM 5 and courtyard H; it revealed that the auspicious door between room F and courtyard H does not exist.

The trench opened during 1995 campaign in room I was continued in order to make sure of the foundations of wall USM 8. In fact wall USM 8 was built on a foundation which consists of one course of irregular stones, at the same level as the paved flooring US 4 in room F. The wall is therefore to be dated in the Byzantine period, while USM 6, against which it leans to the south, goes further down and should be older.

Studium Biblicum Franciscanum

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2. Il restauro del mosaico nella chiesa dei Santi Lot e Procopio (Kh. al-Mukhayyat)

Il mosaico della chiesa fu scoperto costruendo la casa di una famiglia giunta sull'acropoli di Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, la cima di sud est della montagna di Nebo nel 1912. La chiesa era già stata identificata da Alois Musil nel 1901. Le tre iscrizioni e una rapida descrizione del mosaico furono pubblicati nella *Revue Biblique* 1912. Il mosaico risultava messo in opera al tempo del Vesco-

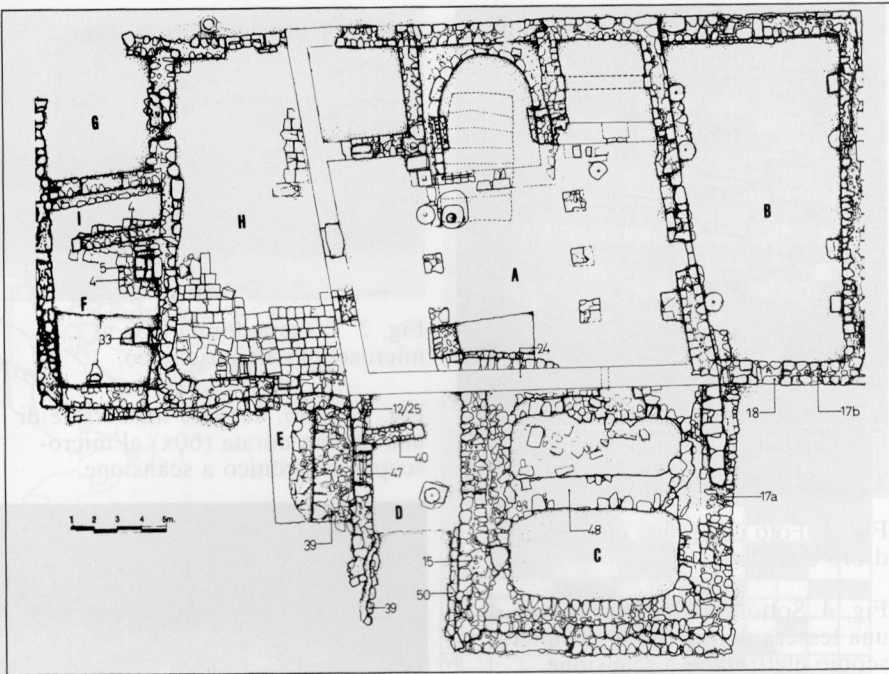


Fig. 1 Kh. al-Mukhayyat. Plan of the excavations of St. George church.



Fig. 2 Kh. al-Mukhayyat. General view of the excavation area.