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Mount Nebo - 1996 Campaign. Khirbat al-Mukhayyat

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Concluding we can say that the existing plan by Fr. Saller can only give general points of reference about the original situation in the area studied by us (rooms 44-47) and it needs a revision especially regarding the different construction phases. (M. P. - A. S.)

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2. Mount Nebo - 1995 Campaign. Khirbat al-Mukhayyat (Figs. 7-8)

During the Archaeological campaign of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, 23th July - 14th August 1996, the work started in 1995 in the rooms surrounding the Church of Saint George was continued (see the preliminary report on the 1995 campaign, in *Ricerca in Giordania*, 15, LA, 45, 1995, p. 506-509). The main scope of the campaign was to finish the clearing of the different walls dated to the Byzantine period, as part of the new project of restudy of Mount Nebo, but some probes carried out in three different sectors brought to light new information.

The same as last year, the discharge of the excavation was set on the western slope of the hill. The probe in the south part of the so-called room E, to the west of the paved courtyard has been filled up with the discharge coming from the probe carried in the nearby room D.

The work was concentrated particularly to the north and to the west of the church, in four different sectors: in room F, the easternmost room to the north of the church, a probe was carried out under the level of the slab flooring discovered last year; in the so-called room D, a probe was undertaken in front of the door identified in the western wall of the paved courtyard, along the wall to the west of the church (USM 12/25); in room D, we carried some excavation works to clarify the relationship between the various walls of this sector; in room C, that appeared to be a cistern, the work was limited to the superficial clearing and identification of the main walls.

At the end of the campaign, a new plan of the church and surrounding rooms has been established.

Excavation in room F

During the 1995 campaign, we were able to identify in this room three layers containing Byzantine pottery (6th to the first half of the 7th century), which covered a slabbed flooring (USM 4). We decided to excavate in the western half of the room, where the slabs had disappeared. Here, a sort of pilaster (USM 24) subsisted on the flooring; it was made of two courses of irregular flat stones, held by some clay. Since it was difficult to dig around, we decided to remove it.

Under the slab flooring, we could identify three different levels, which go down from east to west. The first one (SU 30), only 10 cm thick, was made of grey clay and contained sherds of the Byzantine period, mostly dated to the 6th century (MK 1415-MK 1438, MK 1454-MK 1471). There were fragments of amphorae and cooking pots, some pieces of glass pertaining to some window and a roman (?) pestel of basalt (MK 1453). It covered a second layer, 36 cm thick, of yellow-brown clay containing numerous chipped pieces of calcareous white-red stone (SU 31). The little pottery present was mixed in origin (MK 1401-MK 1414) dated from the iron age to the 6th century AD, among which a neck of a pilgrim flask of the Hellenistic period. The next level (SU 32), 23 cm thick, was made of black hard clay, in some places very dusty, again containing chipped pieces of calcareous white-red stone. It contained homogeneous pottery dated to the iron age (MK 1552-MK 1560), among which dishes and craters with four handles. This level was very similar to the one later identified in room D (SU 44). Under this last level, we reached the SU 34, which consisted of a hard flaky calcareous layer, which we interpreted as being the natural rock of the hill.

Removing these layers, we could identify, in the south-east corner of the probe, a portion of a very badly preserved wall (USM 33), having a north-south orientation. Only one to four courses of the western face of the wall have survived (22.50 to 140 cm high); the core of the wall, which eastern side lies beyond the limit of the probe, consisted of a filling up with smaller stones. We were not able to date with certainty this wall; the scarce evidence of ceramic sherds gathered while uncovering its masonry is to be dated later than the iron age, but earlier than the church. It could also be noticed that the western wall of room F and paved courtyard (USM 10) are deeper than the slabbed flooring.

A stratigraphic sequence, similar to that which we identified in room F, could be noticed in the excavation under the flooring in the chapel of the Priest John near to the church of Amos and Casiseos (see E. Alliata, "La ceramica dello scavo della cappella del prete Giovanni a Kh. al-Mukhayyat. Gli ambienti e la loro stratigrafia", *LA* 38, 1988, pp. 317-360, pl. 39-42).

Excavation in the so-called room E

After clearing the various walls, we could notice that what S. Saller and B. Bagatti considered as being the room E does not in fact exist. However, it was decided to make some probes in the corner between the western end of the paved courtyard (USM10) and the wall to the west of the church (USM 12/25), looking for some flooring in relation to the door (USM11) found in wall 10. We were not able to find it, but a second door (USM 47; 1.21 × 0.70 m) with a cavity for the hinge was discovered in wall 12/25, quite at the same level as the first one.

While excavating, we met three levels. The first one (SU 35) was a dusty brown layer, very similar to the SU 38 identified in sector D. It contained tiles, mosaic tesserae, window glass and Byzantine sherds, to be dated to the middle

of the 6th century (MK 1611-MK 1514; MK 1564-MK 1588), among which fragments of oil lamps (MK 1561-MK 1563). At the bottom of this layer, about 0.60 m under the level of the door USM 11, a rough ionic limestone capital was recovered (37 cm high \times 68 cm \times 40 cm); it should be related to the doric capital discovered during the 1995 campaign. Under this first level, we came to a 20-40 cm thick yellow-brown granulous clay stratum (SU 36) containing huge stones, upon which rested the wall 12/25, without any other foundations. This layer contained some pottery to be dated from the 1st to 6th centuries (MK 1589-MK 1610). It was followed by a gray-brown dusty level, 37 to 50 cm thick, and very similar to the SU 42 found in sector D. It was difficult to date it because there was little ceramic evidence (MK 1615-MK 1621).

Under this last layer, about 1.15 m under the level of the door USM 11, appeared a very thick wall (USM 39) on an east-west axis. The portion identified was 1.15 thick \times 3.35 m long, but its western extremity was not brought to light. We also found its southern face, while excavating in room D, aligned to wall 12/25, we could therefore establish that wall 39 was originally about 1.85 m thick. It was made of two faces of rather large and well dressed stones, although irregular in shape and today slightly distant one from the other, which maintained a core made of smaller stones. In sector E, only two courses (about 80 cm high) were brought to light. Against the northern face of the wall, there was a collapse which we did not excavate, but that showed some ceramic evidence (MK 1629-MK 1641).

Excavation in room D

It was decided to enlarge the probe carried out in sector E, to try to clarify the chronological sequence of the various walled structures already noticed, and in fact, the excavation revealed a rich chronological sequence.

We first met a brown granulous level (SU 38), 30-40 cm thick, which corresponds to SU 35 already identified in sector E. It contained tiles, mosaic tesserae, sherds of the 6th century and window glass (MK 1653). This level laid against a small wall (USM 40) which had a north-south axis. It was rather small (0.60 m in width \times 2.20 m in length \times 0.50 m in height) and consisted of only two courses of small irregular blocks. It seems to link with wall 12/25, and similarly, does not have any foundations. No occupation level related to these two walls could be identified.

These walls rested on a level mostly made up of chipped pieces of calcareous white-red stone (SU 41) mixed with some yellow clay. It contained rare sherds, some of the Byzantine period (MK 1642-MK 1652, a small bowl MK 1641) and others from the iron age (MK 1671-MK 1674). This level was followed by another layer (SU 42), 80 cm thick, which covered wall USM 39 already identified in sector E. Like SU 37 in the latter area, it was made of granulous grey-brown soil mixed with small stones, bones, fragments of carbon

and sherds of minor dimensions (MK 1654-MK 1670, MK 1674-MK 1697) to be dated from the iron age to the 6th century. We were able to identify three further levels (SU 43, 44, 45) which very steep incline led us, in the first place to confuse the sherds they contained, but the greater part of them appear to be coming from the SU 45. These (MK 1733-MK 1890) are to be dated for the most part to the iron age, and some of them to the Hellenistic period. The iron age sherds were of two types: some were very roughly made and evidenced the same type of craters as already found in SU 32 in room F; the others were dishes of very fine red ware with a polished surface. From the SU 43, it was decided to excavate only the western half of the sector; the excavation of the eastern part should confirm the identification of the three different layers.

SU 43 appears at the same level as wall 39, which southern face could be recognized. At the same level, on the south side of the sector there appears a second east-west wall (USM 50), with a type of masonry similar to that of wall 39. Wall 50 was later used as the foundation for wall USM 15, showing evidence of various refurbishments in the area.

SU 43 was 13 cm thick, made of dusty grey soil, mixed with numerous stones; it laid against wall USM 39. It was followed by SU 44, a 27 cm thick very compact level, quite similar to SU 42, made of smaller white-red calcareous chippings. The third level (SU 45) was the thickest one (about 60 cm). It was a dusty grey level which lacked homogeneity: near to wall 39 it seemed like ash, while there was more brown clay and stones to the south, near to wall 50. This level also contained a great quantity of animal bones, some of them presenting traces of burning, many sherds and a small bronze object (a nail ?) (MK 1731). The aspect of this level is very similar to that of SU 32 found in room F. We could also identify a further level (SU 46) which was not excavated. It is a light brown level containing also iron age sherds (MK 1891-MK 1904), animal bones, teeth and stones.

We decided to stop the probe here, but the stratigraphic sequence clearly shows an occupation of this area as early as the iron age, probably followed by another one in the Hellenistic period, before the church was built. Further excavation of this area should give more information about the story of Kh. al-Mukhayyat.

Excavation in room C (cistern)

Further clearing of the walls in this area was necessary to complete the plan of the Byzantine building. We began with a small trench along the north wall of the room (USM 15); since a new north-south wall (USM 48) soon appeared in the middle of the room, it was decided to enlarge the excavation to a superficial cleaning of the entire room. The profile of the slope of the hill led us to begin the excavation of the first archaeological level in the eastern part of the room. This one (SU 49) was a brown soft clay level, containing few sherds (MK 1905-MK

1926); two fragments of red stone for the production of mosaics (MK 1927) and fragments of "bricks", perhaps belonging to window frames and similar to those found during the last campaign, were also discovered.

The work brought to light an approximately square room, limited to the east by the west wall of the church (USM 24), to the north, west and south by walls 15, 16 and 17a respectively, about 1.80/1.90 m thick. Each of these link together and consist, in fact, of two adjacent walls, the one on the outside being thicker (about 1.00 m). They were made of rather regular large stones, while the internal walls presented a hard grey mortar, which flaked very easily. A small basin could be seen near to the extremity of wall 15. To the east, the internal wall laid against the foundations of the west wall of the church. While clearing the area, we were able to identify wall 48, which divided room C into two basins of similar dimensions (6.50 × 2.45 m for the eastern one and 6.50 × 3.40 m for the western one). This wall, which was not noticed by S. Saller and B. Bagatti is in a bad state of conservation, especially in its central part, where it appears to have slightly fallen towards east. These two basins were covered by three to five superimposed layers of white plaster (all together about 10 cm thick), different from that used during the Byzantine period. While clearing the eastern basin, we found a collapse of well-cut squared-up stones, among which a door jamb, which apparently continues under the church itself. We were also able to notice that wall 15 continues under the west wall of the church and reappears inside the church near to the north-west pillar.

In the corner, north-west to door USM 18 of room B, we noticed against walls 17a and 17b, a hard yellow clay level, approximately at the same level as door USM 18, that could correspond to some occupation level. However, this should be confirmed by further investigations.

The results of the 1996 campaign: a summary

The 1996 campaign has given a lot of new information about the story of the occupation of the higher tell of Kh. al-Mukhayyat. Three periods of occupation of the area could be identified.

The plan of the Byzantine building could be precisely verified and a new drawing has been established. The excavation has confirmed the lack of ceramic evidence to be dated after the middle of the 7th century: no sherds corresponding to an Umayyad typology were discovered here, while they have been found very frequently in the other Christian settlements in the region. The occupation in room F appears to be related to two different phases, most probably both in the Byzantine period, as shown by the ceramic evidence found above and under the slabbed flooring.

The church appears to have been partly built on earlier structures, which we were not always able to identify precisely. The cistern in room C, that S. Saller and B. Bagatti did not identify, appears to be earlier than the church, as shown by

wall USM 15 going further under the walls of the church. The same can be said for the collapse in the eastern basin of the cistern, although it could have also been used in the Byzantine period. This would be confirmed only by further excavations. This cistern may be attributed to the Hellenistic period, because of the colour of the plaster that covers its walls and because of the ceramic evidence, to be dated to the Herodian period, which was found in deeper archaeological probes in the other areas, although in heterogeneous layers. It should be noticed that very few late-roman sherds have been found in the excavations. The evidence of an occupation of the area in the Hellenistic period is also given by the numerous fragments of column drums either in the church itself or in its masonry, but also by the doric and ionic capitals found during the excavations.

Furthermore, the 1996 campaign brought to light evidence of a settlement in this area already in the iron age. We are tempted to attribute to this period walls 39 found in areas D-E and wall 50 in area D. Wall 33 in room F should be dated either to the iron age, or to the Hellenistic period. These walls appear to be associated with apparently undisturbed levels of the iron age in room D (SU 43-46).

Further investigation should be continued in room G (north-east of the church) for the Byzantine period and cistern C (Hellenistic or Byzantine period); an accurate study of the iron age level will undoubtedly bring further information.

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3. Tell Madaba Excavations 1996 (Figs. 9-11)

The first season of the Tell Madaba Archaeological Project took place between July 28 and August 31, 1996. The project constitutes part of a larger ongoing study of the social, economic and political institutions developed by Bronze and Iron Age communities in the Madaba Plain region. By focusing on the central site of Madaba, the project aims to expand an emerging regional data base that will permit detailed analysis of the changing economic and socio-political organization of regional communities, thereby enhancing our ability to chart the dynamic development of social complexity in the region. The primary goals of the 1996 field season were to establish a stratigraphic profile of the Bronze and Iron Age levels on the tell, and assess the feasibility of conducting further, long-term excavations at the site.

An important accomplishment of the 1996 season was the creation of a topographic base map of the tell, utilizing geographic data gathered during a USAID-funded survey of Madaba in 1993. The data were coded in thematic layers (e.g. roads, modern architecture, topography) (using ARC/INFO), rendering it possible to separate and select specific types of information. This made it possible to create a topographic map that clearly defined the extent of the ancient tell,

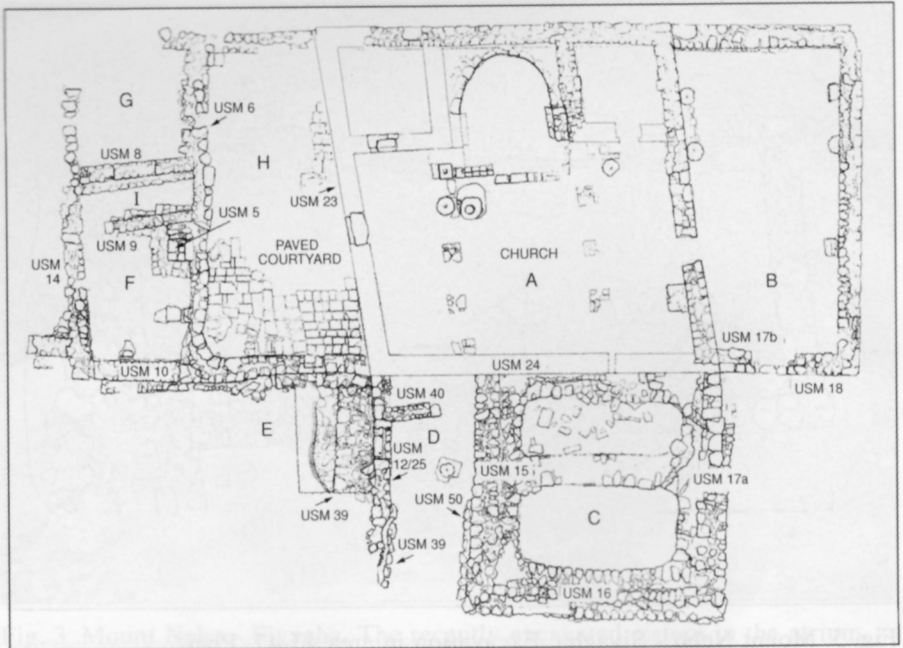


Fig. 7 Mount Nebo - Mukhayyat. General Plan of the excavations.



Fig. 8 Mount Nebo - Mukhayyat. Areas C and D (from the West).