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SELECTED POTTERY FROM
MOUNT NEBO – SIYAGHA

The Mount Nebo, which is mentioned several times in the Bible, is most known as the place where Moses died. „Leaving the Plains of Moab, Moses went up Mount Nebo, the peak of Pisgah opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole country (...) and said to him, «This is the country which I promised on oath to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying: I shall give it to your descendants. I have allowed you to see it for yourself, but you will not cross into it». There in the country of Moab, Moses, servant of the Lord, died as the Lord decreed” (Deu 34, 1-5).

On the Mount Nebo, the Christian community of the fourth century build a sanctuary in honour of Moses, commemorating the Prophet's death.

Today, Mount Nebo is in Jordan, north-west from the capital Amman, in the Transjordanian plateau 7 km west from the town of Madaba. The point farther west from all the mountain containing ruins of the Memorial of Moses is called in arabic Ras Siyagha.

Thanks to the records of travels to this region made by pilgrim visitors in the fourth and fifth centuries, it has been possible

to identify the ruins of the sanctuary. One of them was Egeria¹, and the second was the monophysite bishop of Gaza Peter the Iberian².

The archaeological investigations carried out by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem between 1933 and 1937 on the summit of Siyagha brought to light the basilica of Moses and the monastery which surrounded it.³ The second period of archaeological works was inaugurated in the 1960s. and was conducted by V. Corbo⁴ and later, from 1976 until today by M. Piccirillo⁵.

1. Excavations' results.

The Memorial church in honour of Moses on the Siyagha peak was probably constructed in the second half of the fourth century. It was a triapsidal church on the trefoil plan (*cella trichora*) with mosaic floor. A synthronon with five steps was added to the central apse. The church had a vestibule in front of it with a white mosaic floor. In the southern part of vestibule the floor is decorated with a large braided cross. There were two funeral chapels on either side of the vestibule. In front of the sanctuary's facade was a small court.

In August the 530, in the time of bishop Elias, abbot Elias and the Roman consuls Lampadius and Orestes a diaconicon-baptistery was built in the north of the court. The eastern part

¹ J. WILKINSON. *Egeria's Travel to the Holy Land*. Jerusalem-Warminster 1981 p. 103-108.

² J. WILKINSON. *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, Jerusalem 1977 p. 57.

³ S. J. SALLER. *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo*. Part I: *The Text*. Jerusalem 1941; H. SCHNEIDER. *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo*. Part III: *The Pottery*. Jerusalem 1950.

⁴ V. CORBO. *Nuovi scavi archeologici nella capella del battistero della basilica del Nebo* (Siyagha), SBF „Liber Annuus” 17:1967 p. 241-258; V. CORBO. *Scavi archeologici sotto i mosaici della basilica del Monte Nebo* (Siyagha), SBF „Liber Annuus” 20:1970 p. 273-298.

⁵ M. PICCIRILLO – E. ALLIATA. *Mount Nebo. New Archaeological Excavations 1967-1997*. Jerusalem 1998.

of the diaconicon-baptistery chapel contains a cruciform baptistery's basin. The central panel of mosaic floor is decorated with pastoral and hunting scenes, whereas the other two have flowering crosses and geometric patterns on them.

In the second half of the sixth century, at the time of the bishop Sergius and abbot Martyrius the three-nave basilica was built. The primitive church become presbytery. The old baptistery was covered with a new diaconicon. The basilica had a narthex at the facade and a new baptistery on the south-east. At the beginning of the seventh century, the chapel of the Theotokos was added on the south-western wall.

During all the time the adjacent monastery had been gradually expanding. The different sectors seems functionally specialized, developed from monastic units.

2. The pottery.

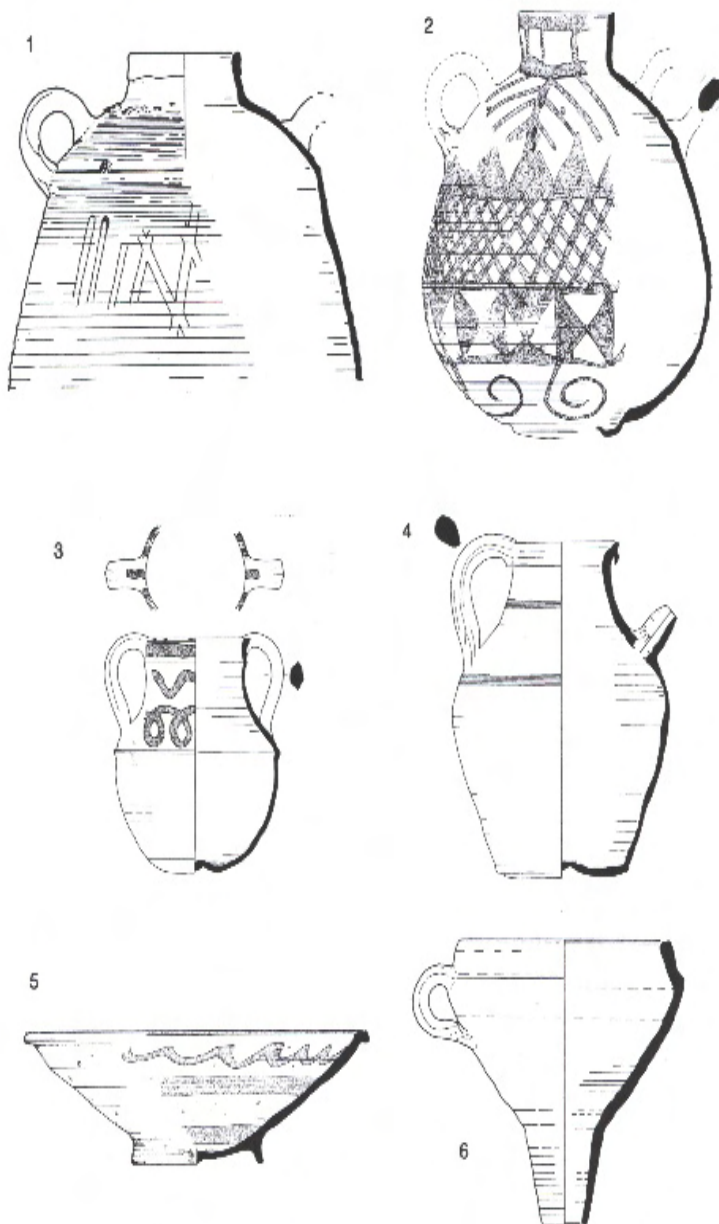
The pottery from Nebo – Siyagha is well known from the first publications by Saller-Schneider. We present the most interesting examples brought to light, during the excavations carried out in 1986 and 1987, from the vaulted long room to the western parts of the monastery (room 56)⁶, and from the cistern (locus 8) in the atrium excavated in 1996⁷.

The vaulted long room 56 to the western parts of the monastery was partially excavated in the first excavations by Saller in the 1930's⁸. The pottery is significant here because of the large quantity found. After the first excavations by Saller, Schneider wrote, „although only about half excavated (and one third of the material contained in this hall has been uncovered), the corridor

⁶ M. PICCIRILLO, *Campagna archeologica al Monte Nebo*. (Siyagha), SBF „Liber Annuus” 36:1986 p. 349.

⁷ E. ALLIATA, *The cistern in the Atrium of the Church*, SBF „Liber Annuus” 46:1996 p. 394.

⁸ SALLER, p. 155-160.



produced no less than twenty five baskets of pottery”⁹. Our hypothesis is that the use of this room as a dumping site indicates that the monastery had started its decline. The large quantity of pottery from the vaulted room is also important since it has given us the opportunity to obtain relatively completed restored forms. The pottery found here is also important because of the richness of the different forms found and the homogeneity of the single types. These are similar enough to indicate a well established limited period of time of origin and use of this pottery.

Complete vessels, mostly amphorae, were found lying directly on the beaten earth floor. This allows us to suppose that the room, set below dwelling level, was used as a cellar and a storage area. The amphorae found on the floor, dating to the last period of occupation, end of the sixth, beginning of the seventh century, were of a different type from that found in the higher strata. It is the well known bag-shaped type, having no painted decoration, with a simple vertical neck and featuring ribbing on the whole body.

In the later higher strata we found a different type of amphora, widely in use in the area during the seventh century: very well fired, carinated body (a clear crease between the shoulder and the body) with a very low neck, slipped and painted white; different ribbing is featured on the shoulder and body (Fig. 1). The smaller amphora, being presented here, is of interest for the paint work all over its body (Fig. 2).

The period of abandonment, and the dumping in the vaulted room, saw the production of buff ware pottery with red painted decoration. This red on buff painted pottery is known as Umayyad pottery and is dated to the seventh century. We could clearly identify two types of this pottery: one having a single line motif and another, from a later period with more parallel lines. This later pottery (eighth century) was discovered within

⁹ SCHNEIDER. p. 44; SALLER. p. 157.

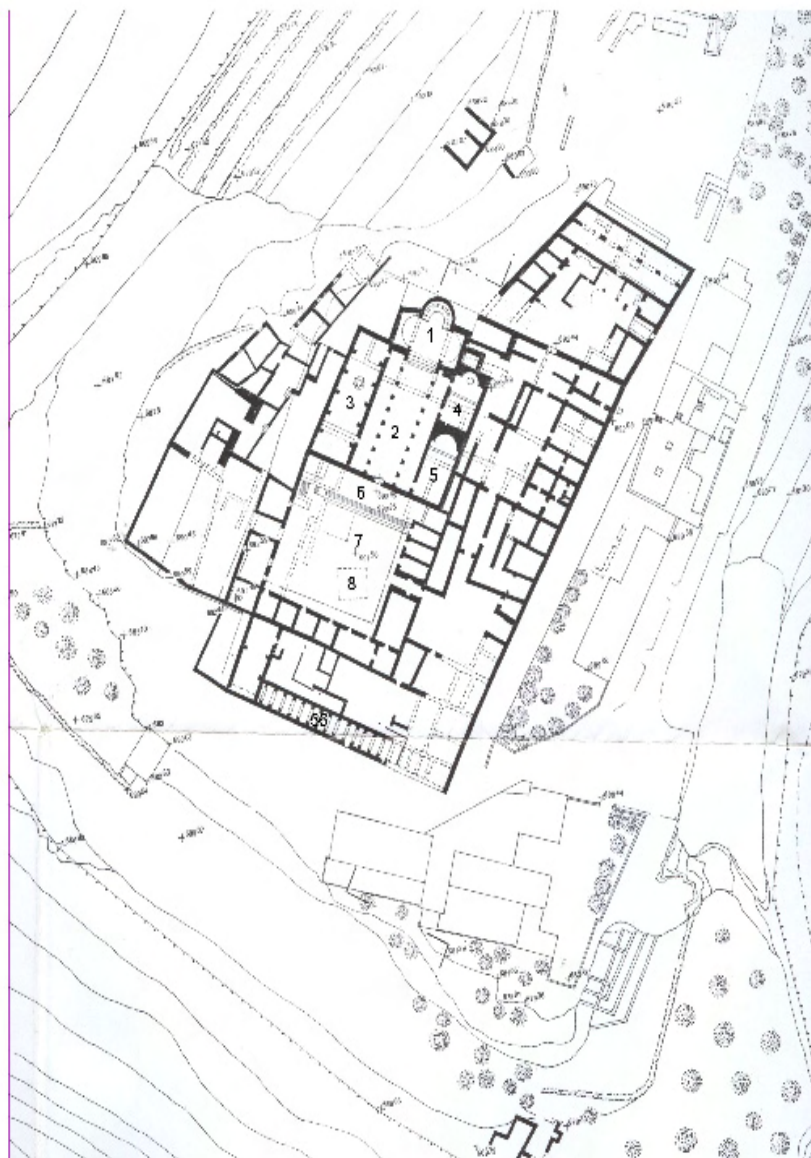
the cistern in the atrium of the monastery (locus 8). It is worth noting that in the later pottery the presence of painted decoration becomes more conspicuous. Earlier forms that had no painted decoration were now found to be decorated more and more.

The painted shards came from both large and smaller amphorae. The larger amphorae were impossible to reconstruct completely, whereas we could reconstruct the smaller ones from the shards recovered. This small painted amphora (two-handled juglet) is an example of a particular well-defined type, featuring a relatively large mouth, vertical neck and a more or less ledged rim (Fig. 3). Between the neck and the shoulders there is often a marked line in relief forming what could be described as a collar. The shoulders are always convex, with a proper distinction between the collar and the carinated body. The handles are attached on the rim and on the shoulders in the vicinity of the carination. The base is rounded, concave with button in the center.

A very characteristic type of juglets features one handle and spout set opposite the handle (Fig. 4). The ware is fine but with the occasional presence of granulous elements and has always a light coloured slip. The pottery is light coloured, rose or buff, light brown or pale yellow. The rim has an out-curved dropped ledge. Usually the body is plain with no ribbing (only one example is ribbed), decorated with incised combed or daubed (scrawled) lines. The base is flat but sometimes rounded with button, similar to the small amphorae above.

Of interest are the red painted plates. The relatively large number of these plates that were excavated is significant. The base colour is buff, rose or red. The painted decoration is dark red. The most common motifs used in the decoration of these plates were parallel straight or wavy lines (Fig. 5).

A rare form that is not often found in other periods is this funnel. It is rose-beige ware, well fired, slipped, with one perpendicular handle (Fig. 6).



The basilica of Moses and the monastery: 1. The primitive church (*cella trichora*); 2. The three-nave basilica; 3. The diaconicon-baptistery; 4. The new baptistery; 5. The chapel of the Theotokos; 6. The narthex; 7. The atrium; 8. The cistern; 56. The vaulted room.

The later pottery (eighth century) is from the cistern in the monastery's atrium. The greater part of the pottery is very similar, as regards ware, firing and colour to the ware discovered in the long vaulted room. Differences are noticeable regarding the general shape, particularities within the form; rim, neck, collar, belly, base and most notably in the painted decoration. The painted pottery is decorated not with a single line but with more parallel lines and on the whole body.

A definite period between the seventh and eighth century can be identified with the pottery from the long room 56 and the cistern 8 as a result of the well-defined homogeneous types and forms unearthed in these areas on Mount Nebo – Siyagha.

CERAMIKA Z GÓRY NEBO – SIYAGHA

Streszczenie

Na Górze Nebo w dzisiejszej Jordanii najbardziej znanej jako miejsce śmierci Mojżesza (Pwt 34), już we wczesnych wiekach chrześcijańskich powstało sanktuarium – jako Memoriał ku czci Mojżesza. Ruiny zidentyfikowano dzięki zapiskom pielgrzymów, zwłaszcza Egerii z IV-V w. i Piotra Ibero z V w. Wykopaliska archeologiczne przeprowadzone w latach 1933-1937 pod kierunkiem S. Saller'a, w latach 1960. pod kierunkiem V. Corbo oraz od roku 1976 – M. Piccirillo, odtworzyły historię sanktuarium. Pierwotne sanktuarium istniejące już w IV w. miało trzy absydy (*cella trichora*), przedsionek z krzyżem na mozaikowej posadzce, kaplice pogrzebowe i dziedziniec. W roku 530 od północy został dobudowany diakonikon-baptysterium z chrzcielnicą w kształcie krzyża i bardzo dobrze zachowaną posadzką mozaikową. W VI w. rozbudowano sanktuarium w trzy nawową bazylikę, rozbudowano diakonikon i dobudowano nowe baptysterium od południa. Później dobudowano kaplicę Theotokos. Jednocześnie wokół kościoła rozbudowywał się monastyr.

Prezentowana ceramika pochodzi z długiego pomieszczenia w zachodniej części monastynu (nr 56) oraz z cysterny w dziedzińcu (nr 8). Ważność materiału ceramicznego z pomieszczenia nr 56 podnosi bardzo wielka ilość ceramiki odzyskanej w trakcie prac. Prawdopodobnie pomieszczenie to służyło

jako wysypisko, a to świadczy, że materiał odzyskany pochodzi z początków schyłku kompleksu monastycznego. Charakterystyka i datacja tej grupy wskaże na ważny moment, na punkt zwrotny w historii sanktuarium.

W ostatnim okresie użytkowania pomieszczenia 56 używane były amfory charakterystyczne dla końca VI i początku VII w., w wyższych warstwach pojawiają się inne amfory (z VII w.) z wyraźnym załamaniem w kształcie korpusu, z niską szyjką i z białą malowaną dekoracją (fig. 1). Interesującym i rzadkim przykładem jest amfora cała pokryta białą dekoracją (fig. 2). W VII w. kiedy pomieszczenie było opuszczone w powszechnym użyciu była jasna ceramika dekorowana czerwonymi liniami – zwana ceramiką Omajjadów. Charakterystyczne dla tego okresu są niewielkie dzbanki z dwoma uszkami, ze stosunkowo szeroką szyjką, zawsze dekorowane na czerwono (fig. 3). W tym samym czasie często spotyka się dzbanki z jednym uszkiem i z dziobkiem, zamiast malowanej dekoracji są wryte równoległe linie (fig. 4). Często spotykane w tym okresie są talerze z czerwoną dekoracją (fig. 5). Rzadkim egzemplarzem jest lejek (fig. 6). Przykładem ceramiki następnej epoki jest materiał pozyskany w cysternie 8, czerwone linie dekoracji stają się coraz obfitsze. Bardzo jednolite typy omawianej ceramiki pochodzą z epoki Omajjadów.