

Nebo, Mount: II. Hebrew Bible / Old Testament

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baptistry, the whole complex underwent a radical transformation. The church itself was enlarged, incorporating an area of the courtyard and becoming a church with three naves with the *cella trichora* acting as a raised presbytery. A subsequent phase dated to 597 CE involved rearrangements of the ecclesiastical complex. These rearrangements included building a new baptistry to the south of the basilica and replacing the old northern baptistry with a large rectangular mosaic hall. Even later, during the first decade of the 7th century CE, a new chapel was built to the west of the southern baptistry in a space where a room with similar functions had previously been. Some minor alterations date back to the 8th century and testify to the Memorial Church's last phases of use before its final abandonment, which probably occurred during the 9th century, a period where many residential settlements in the region were abandoned (Piccirillo/Alliata: 15–191, 265–310). During the restoration and new covering over of the basilica in 2012, archaeologists found a completely empty tomb in the central aisle built during the refurbishment works of the mid 5th century CE. Archaeologists have interpreted it as a cenotaph in memory of Moses (Bianchi 2019). Four churches were built at Kh. al-Mukhayyat in the Byzantine era. On top of the acropolis, one of these churches was the irregularly shaped church of St. George, built in 536 CE, which has rich and elaborate mosaic floors (Michel). The church of Saints Lot and Procopius is located closer to the road, and has one of the most beautiful and best preserved mosaics in the Madaba region. The dedicatory inscription of these mosaics dates the work to the time of Bishop John (mid 6th cent.). A short distance away, the Church of Amos and Casiseos is perhaps the oldest church in the village. Behind its northern wall is a chapel called “of the priest John” where archaeologists have found two floor levels. The lower one can be dated to the end of the 5th century CE, while the upper one dates back to the second half of the 6th century (Piccirillo/Alliata: 310–19).

In the valley northeast of Siyagha, near the ‘Uyun Mousa, monks initially occupied the numerous caves in the area. Archaeological excavations have also uncovered the church of Deacon Thomas and that of Kaiano there (Piccirillo/Alliata: 244–61). In the Wadi ‘Afrat, there is the small monastic complex known as al-Kanisah. Further west in the Wadi ‘Ayn al-Kanisah, near one of the natural springs south of Nebo, archaeologists discovered another monastery with a mosaic chapel. In addition to Abraham, hegumen and archimandrite of the whole desert, the inscription near the step of this chapel's presbytery shows the names of Abba Longinus stylite and Abba John. A second inscription near the entrance door, dating back to a restoration of the building, dated to 762–63 CE, demonstrates that monastic life still

persisted beyond the mid 8th century in the region of Nebo (Piccirillo/Alliata: 209–19, 359–64).

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Carmelo Pappalardo

II. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

The name of the mount comes from *nēbō* (= “height?”; cf. Arab. *naba’a* “to be high”), and is most probably not related to the name of the Assyrian deity Nabu. It is the name of a mountain in Transjordan where Moses went up to see the promised land. There he died and was buried nearby (Deut 34:5–6). Mount Nebo seems to belong to the Abarim ridge (Deut 32:49) and is identified with the top of Pisgah (Deut 34:1) so that Nebo might be the summit of Pisgah. Balak took Balaam to the summit of Pisgah in order to curse Israel (Num 23:14). The camp of the Israelites is located west of the Pisgah in the Jordan valley (Num 21:20). Elsewhere the tribes of Israel sojourned in the Abarim ridge “before” Nebo (Num 33:47). Jeremiah has hidden the cultic paraphernalia of the Jerusalem temple (tent, ark, and altar of incense) in a cave on the slopes of Mount Nebo (2 Macc 2:4–5).

Mount Nebo has to be differentiated from the Reubenite town of Nebo (Num 32:3, 38) conquered by Mesha, king of Moab, in the 9th century BCE (KAI 181:14: *nbb*). The copper scroll from Qumran mentions a waterfall near the village of Nebo (*kpr nbw*), which matches the one at Khirbat ‘Uyūn Mūsā (3Q15

IX, 11). The nun Egeria (late 4th cent. CE) might have been referring to this water source when she visited this site departing the road from Livias to Heshbon at the 6th mile (*Itinerarium of Egeria* 10.8–11.2). According to Eusebius the desolate city of Nebo is located 8 miles to the south of Heshbon (*Onom.* 136.12–13). Peter the Iberian (5th cent. CE) knows the village on Mount Nebo as well (*Vita Petri* 85).

Egeria ascended Mount Nebo and visited the Memorial of Moses, i.e., the earlier, much smaller church of the 4th century CE (*Itinerarium of Egeria* 11.3–12.1). Peter the Iberian tells about a local legend that legitimates the traditional identification of the burial place of Moses. According to this legend, a shepherd from the village of Nebo had a vision and found the grave of Moses in a cave (*Vita Petri* 85–86). The pilgrim Theodosius (early 6th cent. CE) located the death place of Moses near Livias (*De Situ* 19; see Wilkinson). The pilgrim of Piacenza (late 6th cent. CE) gives an exact distance from the Jordan to Mount Nebo where Moses died: 8 miles (*Itinerarium of Antonius of Piacenza* 10; see Wilkinson).

Eusebius looked for Nebo on the Abarim ridge on the ascent from Livias to Heshbon. He maintained that the region around is called Pishgah (*Onom.* 16.24–18.3). Elsewhere he added that Mount Nebo is located beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho in the land of Moab at the 6th mile west from Heshbon (*Onom.* 136.6–8). Jerome translates Nabau literally as verb “we will come” or as “in conclusion” (*Nom. hebr.* 19.18–19).

The Nebo massif is delineated in the north by Wādī ‘Uyūn Mūsā, in the south by Wādī el-Gudēde and in the east by Wādī el-Afrīt, a tributary of the former. This massif has three important peaks: Ġebel Nebā (835 m above sea level) with southeastern peak Khirbet el-Muḥayyīṭ (790 m above sea level) and northwestern peak Rās es-Siyāga (710 m above sea level). From the Nebo massif one gets a perfect view of the Dead Sea, the Jordan Valley, the Judean Desert and the Samaritan mountains. Biblical Mount Nebo is usually identified with Rās es-Siyāga (2188.1307), the northwestern promontory of Ġebel Nebā (2207.1300), which has preserved the biblical toponym in the modern name, with the change of *ō* to *ā* attested elsewhere as well. The name Rās es-Siyāga could be related to Aramaic *sy’t* which the Targum identified with “the house of the burial of Moses” (TO on Num 32:3). The town of Nebo should be equated with Khirbet el-Muḥayyīṭ (2206.1286), about 3 km southeast of Rās es-Siyāga. Therefore, Khirbet el-Muḥayyīṭ matches the information of the desolate village of Nebo given by Eusebius (12 km from Heshbon via Mount Nebo, since Rās es-Siyāga is about 9 km southwest of Heshbon).

The Moses Memorial at Rās es-Siyāga deserves special mention. The first sanctuary with three apses (*cella trichora*), a vestibule and two funeral chapels, dates to the 4th century CE. Maybe the

sanctuary is built on an earlier mausoleum used for burials. In front of the sanctuary there was an open court. In the 6th century CE, the diaconicon-baptistry north of the court was embellished by elaborate mosaics. The eastern part of that diaconicon-baptistry had a cruciform basin for baptismal service. At the end of the 6th century CE, the Memorial of Moses was changed to a three-nave basilica. The first sanctuary became the presbytery of the basilica whereas the old northern baptistry was changed to a long diaconicon chapel. A new baptistry south of the basilica and a narthex at the western facade of the basilica were added. In the 7th century CE, the Theotokos chapel was built west of the new baptistry. The monastery with large residential blocks around courtyards was used until the 9th century CE. The monastery consists not only of simple cells for monks but also of large community rooms used for pilgrims since Mount Nebo was an important Christian pilgrimage center.

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III. Judaism

■ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ■ Rabbinic Judaism ■ Medieval and Modern Judaism

A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

In the HB/OT Mount Nebo is Moses’s final vantage point to view the promised land and the divinely-ordained location of his death (Deut 32; 34). Despite Moses’s prominence in post-biblical texts of the Second Temple period, references to the end of Deuteronomy reinterpret the events on Mount Nebo and rarely allude to the mountain itself.

Two Hellenistic texts exhibit a tendency to deny Moses’s death on the mountain. Josephus (ca. 1st cent. CE) relates how Moses ascended Mount Abaris, which mirrors Mount Nebo’s location in the larger Abarim range (Deut 32:49), yet claims that Moses did not die there. Instead, while speaking to Eleazar and Joshua, Moses disappears in a cloud (*Ant.* 4.325). Philo (ca. 1st cent. CE) also denies Moses’s