

THE AUTHENTIC BAPTISM SITE OF JESUS CHRIST: “BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN”

White Paper



THE BAPTISM SITE COMMISSION

THE AUTHENTIC BAPTISM SITE OF JESUS CHRIST:
“BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN”

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Title Page Image: Aerial view of Bethany beyond the Jordan from the north-west (© The Baptism Site Commission)

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	5
INTRODUCTION	7
PART ONE: FIVE SOURCES OF AUTHENTICATION (THE BIBLICAL, EVIDENCE, THE TESTIMONY OF PILGRIMS AND TRAVELLERS, THE MOSAIC MAP, THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS, AND A GEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS	13
1. The Biblical Evidence	15
2. Pilgrims' and Travelers' Testimonies	18
3. The Mosaic Map of the Holy Land	22
4. Recent History and Archaeological Discoveries at Elijah's Hill	24
a. <i>The Rhetorios Monastery</i>	24
b. <i>The Pilgrims' Station</i>	30
c. <i>The Large Pool</i>	30
d. <i>The Caves (Hermit Cells)</i>	31
e. <i>Saint Mary of Egypt</i>	32
f. <i>The Authenticity of the Place where Jesus Christ was Baptized</i>	34
5. Archaeological Remains and Geological Analysis	41
a. <i>The Pillared Hall Church of St. John the Baptist "Church No.1"</i>	41
b. <i>The "Marble Steps"</i>	43
c. <i>The Four Piers and the Mantle Chapel "Church No.2"</i>	43
d. <i>The Lower Basilica "Church No.3"</i>	45
e. <i>The Basilica "Church No.4"</i>	46
f. <i>The Small Chapel "Church No.5"</i>	47
PART TWO: LETTERS OF AUTHENTICATION AND IMPORTANT VISITS	51
PART THREE: THE INSCRIPTION OF THE BAPTISM SITE ONTO THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST	67
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79
APPENDICES	83
APPENDIX I: <i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (ADAJ)</i>	85
a. <i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (2003)</i>	
b. <i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (2004)</i>	
c. <i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (2005)</i>	
d. <i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (2007)</i>	
e. <i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (2008)</i>	

APPENDIX II: Letters of Authentication	113
APPENDIX III: The Archaeoseismology Report of the Baptistry (Al Maghtas) Site, Jordan	133
APPENDIX IV: A Field Study of the Ground Deformation at the Baptismal Archaeological Site (Al Maghtas), Jordan	142

ABSTRACT

THE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED site of the baptism of Jesus Christ is in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Any other site that claims to be the baptism site of Jesus is without continuous historic traditions or archaeological evidence. This White Paper summarizes the historical, archaeological and religious importance of the authentic site of the baptism of Jesus Christ in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. “Bethany beyond the Jordan” is among the most important places for Christians on earth. It is in Jordan, the land of prophets, messengers and saints.

The White Paper concentrates on five main sources that prove the authenticity of the Baptism Site in Jordan beyond any doubt. These sources are The Bible; the unbroken testimony of pilgrims and travelers; the ancient Mosaic Map of the Holy Land; archaeological remains and geological analysis. The paper concludes that the uniquely-designed Byzantine churches and baptistery mark an important spot and event, the place where Jesus Christ was baptized by John, received the Holy Spirit and began his ministry. It is the place where Christianity began as a faith. It is important to note that three of the churches in the Baptism Site were built during Islamic periods and they provide powerful evidence that Christians and Muslims lived in harmony, as was demonstrated when the Caliph Omar bin Al-Khattab was handed the keys of Jerusalem by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Sophronious.

We also include letters of authentication from church leaders. These were issued immediately after the rediscovery of the archaeological remains. We include photographs of many who visited the Baptism Site during the last twenty years. Among the priorities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is the establishment of international charters for the preservation and restoration of historic religious places. The archaeological remains at the Baptism Site have been preserved with minimal invasiveness. Biodegradable shelters have been set up and simple trails have been formed to link various important archaeological sites while being sensitive to the surrounding environment and its spiritual atmosphere. The World Heritage Centre’s unanimous adoption of the Baptism Site onto the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2015 provided the recognition which ensured that the Site will be preserved for future generations. Anchored in its historic location, the Baptism Site looks forward as well as backwards. With its connection to faith and commitment, it has an important message to share with all people today.

INTRODUCTION

The Baptism Site is one of the most important places in the world for Christians. Unbroken traditions link it to many Biblical events. After the death of Moses in the area of Mount Nebo, according to Joshua (chapters 1–5), Joshua crossed over the river Jordan from the area of the baptism site to Jericho. According to 2 Kings (chapter 2: 1–22) Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal and stood by the Jordan.

Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. [NRSV]

And as they walked on together, a chariot and horses of fire appeared and Elijah went up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha took the mantle that fell from Elijah and went back and stood by the bank of Jordan and struck the waters and they were parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha crossed over. When Elisha arrived at Jericho,

The people of the city said to Elisha, ‘The location of this city is good, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful’. He said, ‘Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it’. So they brought it to him. Then he went to the spring of water and threw the salt into it, and said, ‘Thus says the Lord, I have made this water wholesome; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it’. So the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.

According to the Gospel of Luke (1:17), an angel prophesied to Zechariah about John the Baptist:

With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him [that is the Messiah], to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

John the Baptist came in the spirit and strength of Elijah. According to the Biblical tradition, he came to the very place from which Elijah was taken up to heaven, which is to the east of the River Jordan opposite Jericho and lived in a simple cave baptizing believers.

These three important Biblical events, Elijah’s ascension to heaven, Elisha receiving the mantle of Elijah, and the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist, all took place in a small place called Elijah’s Hill.



A view of Elijah's Hill from the south.

In the Gospel according to Matthew (11:7–8) we learn that:

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.’

In the Gospel according to Matthew (3:4), we are told:

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Both reeds and ‘yanbout’ plants, which provide a natural habitat for bees, surround Elijah's Hill to this day. Every effort has been made by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to preserve the Baptism Site in the way that John the Baptist and Jesus Christ saw it. This aim is written into the bylaws of the Baptism Site Commission.

Historically, many pilgrims described a spring next to the cave that John the Baptist lived in, and it is known that reeds grow where there is plenty of water. The spring next to Elijah's Hill cannot be seen today, but if you follow its trail along the Holy Valley towards the River Jordan, there can be seen the remains of many hermit cells and a pilgrims' station and a large baptism pool. If you continue along the trail close to the catchment area of the River Jordan, you can walk among the tamarisk trees and along the track of the spring to arrive at one of the holiest sites on earth for Christians, the place where John met Jesus and baptized him.

Unique churches built in memory
of the baptism of Jesus Christ



At that spot the remains of five uniquely-designed churches and a unique cruciform baptistery can be seen.

Throughout history, the occurrence of floods and earthquakes have necessitated the building of one church after another on this site. St. Mary of Egypt lived a life of penitence here for 47 years. And there is still a chapel dedicated to her which can be visited in the Greek Orthodox Monastery.

The site is important for Jews as it is commemorated as the place where Joshua crossed the Jordan, and it is of the utmost importance for Christians because Christianity as a faith started here just east of the Jordan. It is also of great importance for Muslims, because the Prophets and Messengers who lived in or traveled through the location of the Baptism Site are also mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

Last, but not least, the Baptism Site has immense importance for all people because it is from here that some of the world's great projects—such as *The Amman Message*, *A Common Word* and *The World Interfaith Harmony Week*—were launched. The Baptism Site, a holy place for the Abrahamic tradition, has become the place to build bridges of love and peace.



An aerial view of John the Baptist's wilderness from the west.





Part One

THE FIVE SOURCES OF AUTHENTICATION

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

THE TESTIMONY OF PILGRIMS AND TRAVELERS

THE ANCIENT MOSAIC MAP

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

THE GEOLOGICAL HISTORY SHOWING THE
HISTORIC COURSE OF THE JORDAN

Backpage: His Majesty King Abdullah II, Her Majesty Queen Rania, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad with His Holiness Pope Francis during his visit to the Baptism Site on the Jordan River on April 24, 2014. [© Royal Court, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan]

THE AUTHENTICITY OF ELIJAH'S HILL AND THE PLACE WHERE JOHN THE BAPTIST STARTED HIS MINISTRY

The easiest way to know that the Baptism Site is the authentic site where Jesus was baptized starts with a simple question: 'Where did John the Baptist start his ministry?' Using four major sources, the answer is very simple and straightforward.

I. THE EVIDENCE OF THE BIBLICAL TRADITION

A few verses in the Bible give us the answer. According to 2 Kings (2:1–22):

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal

Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan'. But he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you'.

.... they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water. The water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

.... As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.

.... [Elisha] picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, 'Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

[When Elisha arrived at Jericho] the people of the city said to [him], 'The location of this city is good, as my lord sees, but the water is bad and the land is unfruitful'. He said, 'Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it'. So, they brought it to him. Then he went to the spring of water and threw the salt into it, and said, 'Thus says the Lord, I have made this water wholesome; from now on, neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it'. So, the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke. [NRSV]

According to the last words of the Old Testament, Elijah will be sent once again.

We read in Malachi (4:5-6):

Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.

Moreover, the Gospel of Luke (1:17), along with other passages, clearly indicates that John came in the spirit and strength of Elijah. We read in Luke (1:13–17):

But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. [NRSV]

And in John’s Gospel (1:19–28):

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah’. And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not’. ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No’. Then they said to him, ‘Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”, as the prophet Isaiah said. This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. [NRSV]

Also, in John’s Gospel (10:40):

And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abodes.

The verses show clearly that John was living opposite Jericho, east of the Jordan because he came ‘in the spirit and power of Elijah’ who was taken up to heaven in a chariot and horses of fire. Details in other verses tell us that the site today remains similar to what was seen by John and Jesus Christ. In Matthew 11:7 Jesus asks the crowds:

What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? Someone dressed in soft robes? [NRSV]

And we read in Matthew (3:4):

*Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist,
and his food was locusts and wild honey. [NRSV]*

And in Mark (1:6):

*Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist,
and he ate locusts and wild honey. [NRSV]*

Yanbout plants (*Prosopis farcta*, the Syrian mesquite), which surround Elijah's Hill, are the natural habitat for bees that produce wild white honey, reminding us of what John ate. Both reeds and yanbout plants surround Elijah's Hill today. Jordan has spared no effort to preserve the Baptism Site so that it remains in the way that John and Jesus Christ saw it. This is among the priorities of the Royal Commission chaired by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, His Majesty King Abdullah II's Chief Advisor for Religious and Cultural Affairs and Personal Envoy of His Majesty.

The verses argue that the approximate geographic location is east of the Jordan and opposite Jericho. Other sources are needed to pinpoint Elijah's Hill and the wilderness of John the Baptist. For this closer identification, we can draw on the historic testimony of Pilgrims and point to distinctive archaeological remains.

An aerial view of Bethany
beyond the Jordan from the
north-west.



2. THE HISTORIC TESTIMONY OF PILGRIMS AND TRAVELLERS

Elijah's Hill was mentioned by many pilgrims during their visits to the Holy Land, and useful information may be drawn from accounts dating from as early as the 4th century AD. These accounts described Elijah's Hill ("Tell el-Kharrar") as it was at the beginning of the 4th century and the important Biblical events that happened on and around it. Their descriptions identify the traditional place of Elijah's ascension from a small hill at the entrance of "Wadi el-Kharrar", around 1800 meters east of the Jordan River in the "El- Kafrein" plain which is not far from the traditional place of the baptism in the Jordan River.

Among these pilgrims is the anonymous figure of a pilgrim from Bordeaux who was the first Christian pilgrim from western Europe to arrive in Palestine between 333-334 AD. In his journey from Jericho to the Dead Sea, the pilgrim from Bordeaux noted:

The water of it is very bitter, and in it there is no kind of fish whatever, nor any vessel; and if a man casts himself into it in order to swim, the water turns him over. From thence to the Jordan, where the Lord was baptized by John, there is a place by the river, a little hill upon the further (left) bank, from which Elijah was caught up into heaven.¹

Theodosius (530 AD) wrote:

Where my Lord was baptized there is on the far side of the Jordan the (Little hill) called Hermon where Saint Elijah was taken up. The tomb of Saint Elisha is there. It is five miles from the place where my Lord was baptized to the point where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea.²

Forty years later (570 AD), Antoninus Martyr, travelling this way with his companions, wrote after he left Piacenza:

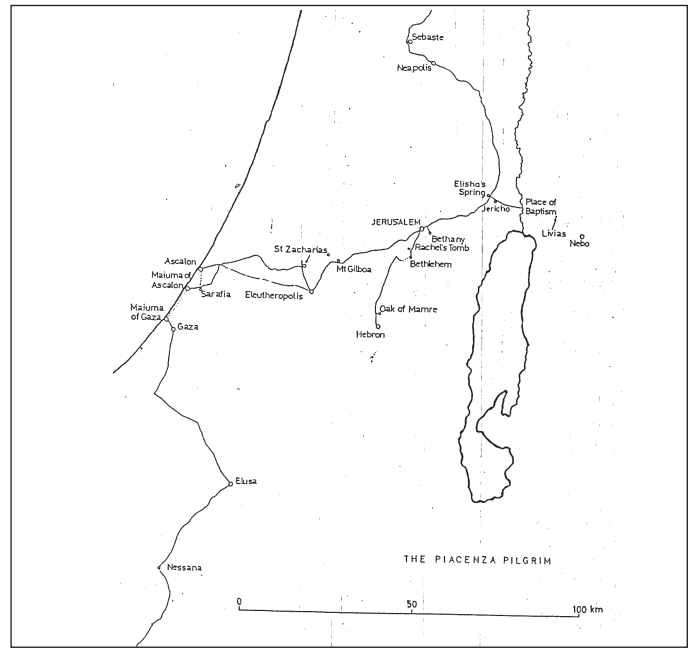
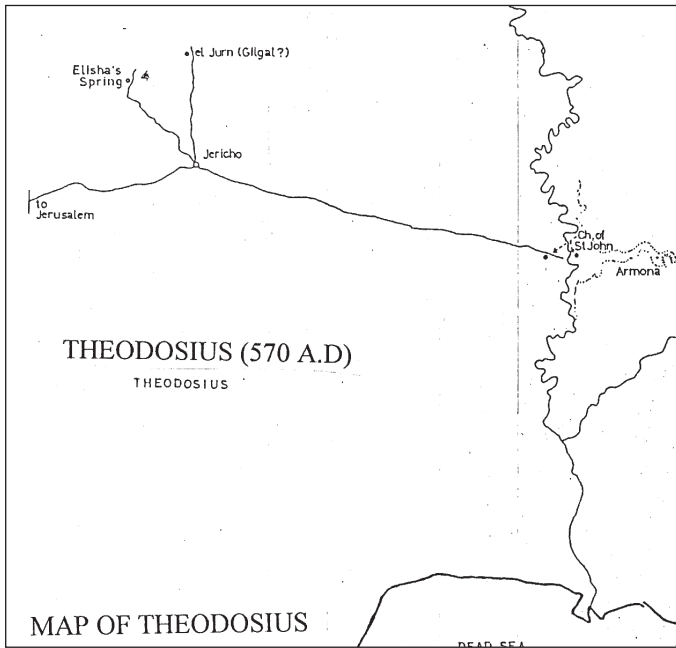
I will take care to explain in what parts I travelled, desiring to follow the footsteps of Christ, and to see (the sites of) the miracles of the prophets.

So, starting from Placentia (Piacenza), we came to Constantinople, from where we came to the island of Cyprus, to the city of Constantia, where St. Epiphanius rests.

When they arrived on the eastern side of the Jordan River, Antoninus wrote:

¹ Stewart A., 1887, *Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem*; Palestine Pilgrim Text Society; Vol.1; p.26.

² Bernard, J. H., 1893, *Theodosius on the Topography of the Holy Land*; Palestine Pilgrim Text Society: Vol.2; p.8f.



Thence we came to the place where the Lord was baptized. In that very place the children of Israel crossed over Jordan and the sons of prophets lost their axe; and from that very place Helias was carried up into heaven. There too is the little hill of Hermon, which is mentioned in the psalm.

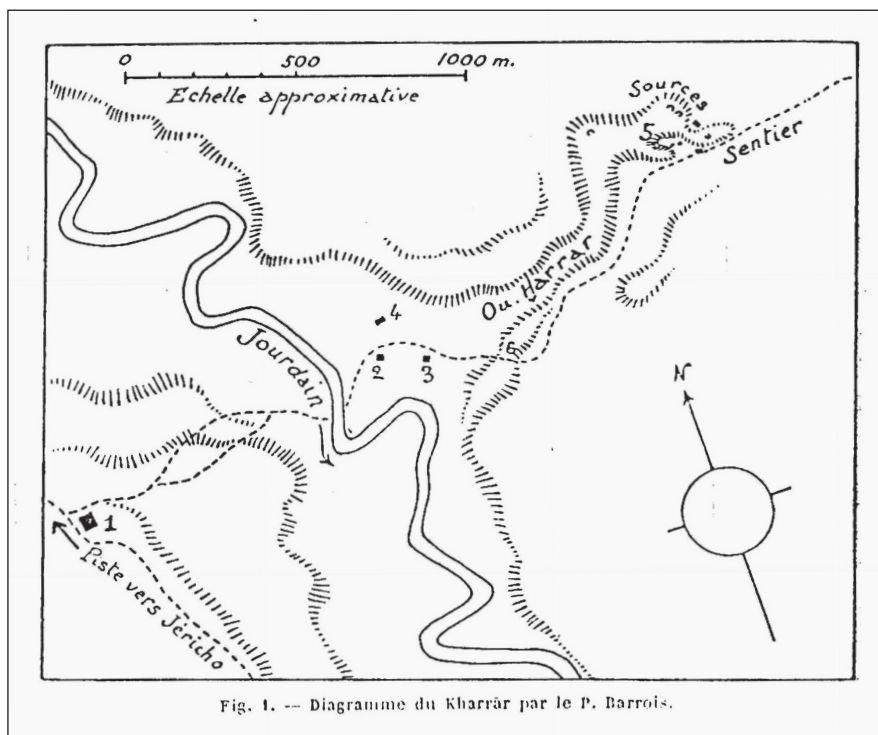
On that side of Jordan is the fountain where John used to baptize. From it to the Jordan is two miles. In the valley itself Helias was found, when the raven used to bring him bread and meat. On the side of the valley live a multitude of hermits.

At the place where the water returned to its bed, a wooden cross is fixed standing in the water; and upon the banks on each side marble steps descend into the water.³

John Moschos (619 AD) wrote:

There was an elder living in the monastery of Abba Eustorgios whom our saintly Archbishop of Jerusalem wanted to appoint higoumen of the monastery. The candidate however, would not agree and said: 'I prefer prayer on Mount Sinai'. The archbishop urged him first to become higoumen and then to depart for the mountain but the elder would not be persuaded. So the archbishop gave him leave of absence, charging him

³ Stewart A., 1896, *The Holy Places Visited by Antoninus Martyr*; Palestine Pilgrim Text Society; Vol.2; p.1-11.



to accept the office of higoumen on his return. The elder bid the archbishop farewell and set out on the journey to Mount Sinai, taking his own disciple with him. They crossed the river Jordan but before they reached even the first mile-post the elder began to shiver with fever. As he was unable to walk, they found a small cave and went into it so that the elder could rest. He stayed in the cave for three days, scarcely able to move and burning with fever. Then, whilst he was sleeping, he saw a figure who said to him: 'Tell me, elder, where do you want to go?' He replied: 'To Mount Sinai'. The vision then said to him: 'Please, I beg of you, do not go there', but as he could not prevail upon the elder, he withdrew from him. Now the elder's fever attacked him more violently. Again, the following night the same figure with the same appearance came to him and said: 'Why do you insist on suffering like this, good elder? Listen to me and do not go there'. The elder asked him: 'Who then are you?' The vision replied: 'I am John the Baptist and that is why I say to you: do not go there. For this little cave is greater than Mount Sinai. Many times, did our Lord Jesus Christ come in here to visit me. Give me your word that you will stay here and I will give you back your health'. The elder accepted this with joy and gave his solemn word that he would remain in the cave. He was instantly restored to health and stayed there for the rest of his life. He made the cave into a church and gathered a brotherhood together there; the place is called Sapsas. Close by it and to the left is the Wadi

⁴ Wortley, J., 1992, *The Spiritual Meadow*, Cistercian Studies Series: Nu.113; p.4-5.

Chorath to which Elijah the Tishbite was sent during a drought; it faces the Jordan.⁴

⁵ Abel, R., "Exploration Du-Sud-Est de la Vallée du Jordan": 237-263, In *Revue Biblique*; Vol. 41: 77ff.-82f.

At site No.3, he identified the remains of a modern house which was built on the foundations of an older structure. He recorded the existence of three fallen columns on the ground near this site. He provides the following additional details:⁵

1. At site No.5, on Tell el-Kharrar where there are some cisterns located on slopes of the Tell, he described a vault system used in building the cisterns.
2. At site No.6, he described a church apse with well-dressed stones and the bases of columns among the other remains scattered over the site.

Many pilgrims and travelers linked Elijah's Hill with the site where Jesus Christ was baptized. Their testimonies, references and maps are of great importance. As will be seen later on, their evidence matches the Biblical references, the archaeological discoveries and the ancient Mosaic Map of the Holy Land. The valuable testimonies and maps of pilgrims from the 4th to the 20th century and early photographs of Elijah's Hill (Abel / RB 1932) clearly mark the place where Elijah was taken up to heaven and link it with 'Shaphsaphas' which is depicted in the Mosaic Map of the Holy Land.

A photo of Elijah's Hill, 1932.



3. THE MOSAIC MAP OF THE HOLY LAND

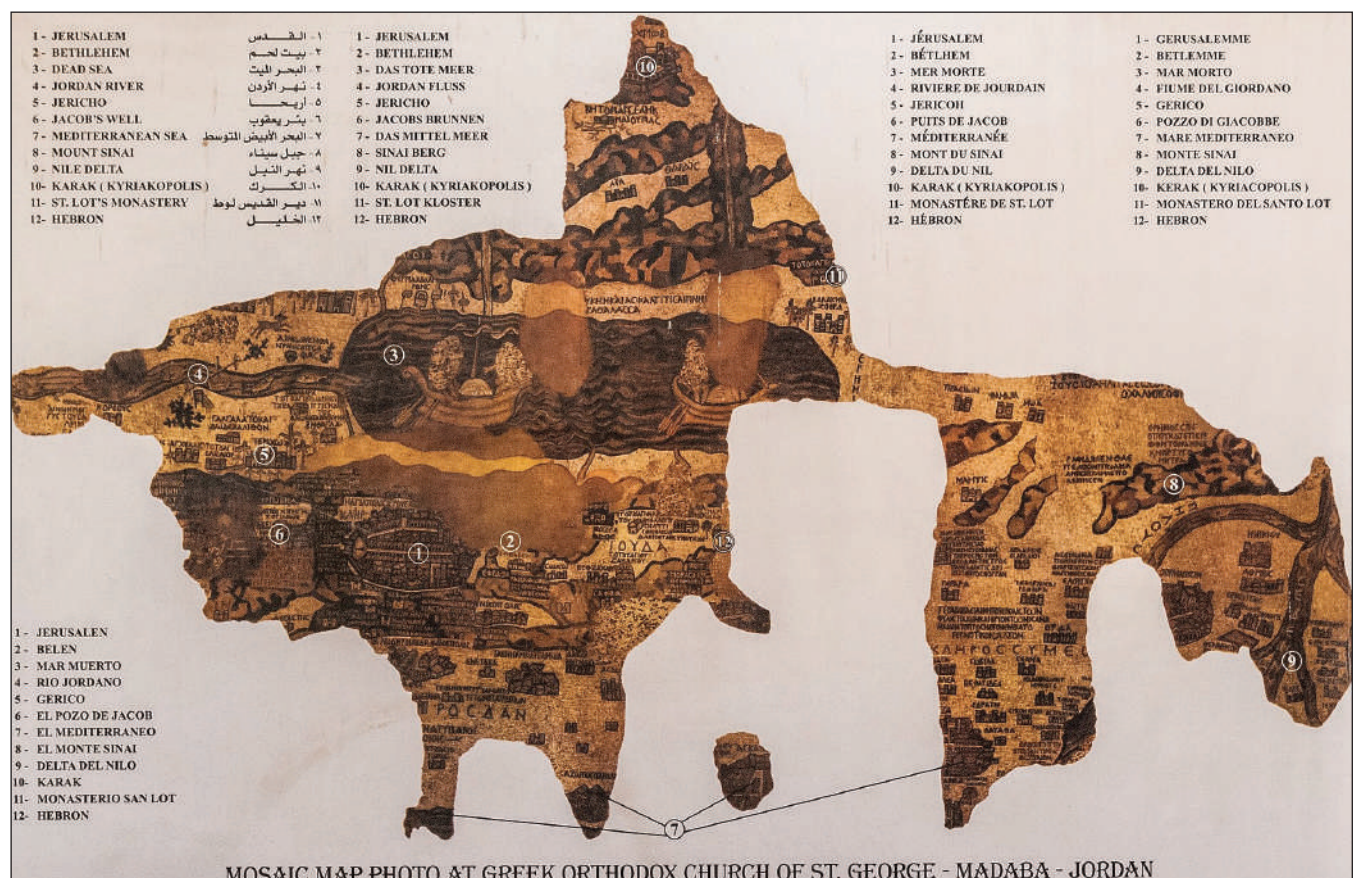
The ancient Mosaic Map of the Holy Land, which was made in 562 AD, is another important source that proves the authenticity of the Baptism Site. It is a priceless source and is beautifully depicted, very accurate and to scale. It includes over 150 sites that are mentioned in the Bible.

Zooming into the map we can see various locations around the Baptism Site. Among the most important landmarks that can be seen are the northern part of the Dead Sea, the southern part of the River Jordan, Jericho and Galgala. The two names 'Aenon' and 'Saphsaphas' are shown on the map at the location of the Baptism Site and there is an illustration of a deer chased by a lion. 'Betabara' is depicted on the opposite bank and there are two fish in the middle of the river.

It is important to note that animals are not depicted anywhere else on the map except for the Baptism Site area. It is reasonable to assume that this is because it was a wilderness connected to John the Baptist. Looking at the creatures that are depicted on the map in the area of Bethany beyond the Jordan, we see two fish, one going toward the Dead Sea while the other is going away. A logical explanation of this is that fish do not live in the Dead Sea so they move north into the Jordan.

Fish are frequently used as a symbol of Christianity. This is because the five Greek letters which spell the word “fish” are the initial letters of the five words: Jesus Christ

The Mosaic Map of the Holy Land, 562 AD.





Detail of the Mosaic Map of the Holy Land depicting the geographic locations surrounding the Baptism Site.

God's Son Saviour'. Fish are also used as a symbol for baptism, for just as fish cannot live except in water, a true Christian cannot live except by the waters of baptism.

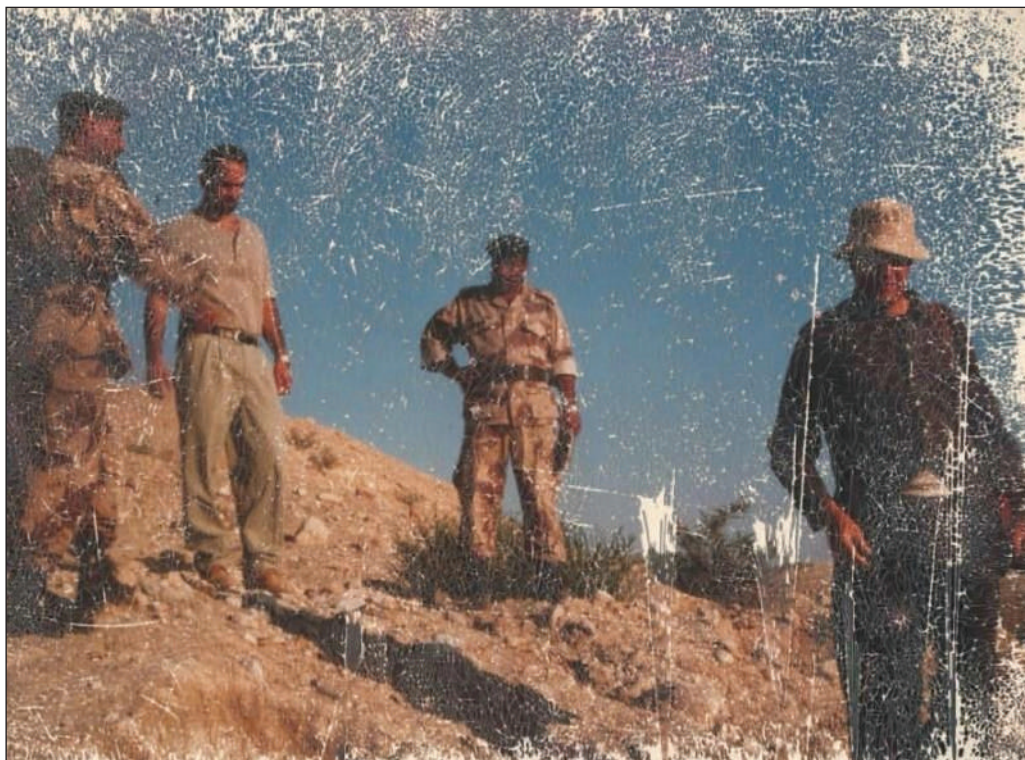
As for the deer that is chased by a lion, it can be seen as 'evil' chasing 'good' or 'the strong chasing or attacking the weak', or, even Herod the Tetrarch chasing or attacking John the Baptist who criticized his marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias. We know from the Gospel of Matthew that John had said to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have her' (Matthew 14:4).

On the basis, then, of Biblical sources and the testimony of pilgrims, we can conclude that the ancient Mosaic Map of the Holy Land, made in Madaba in the 6th century, is a reference of extraordinary importance.

4. RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES AT ELIJAH'S HILL

A. THE RHETORIOS MONASTERY

In 1995, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad and the Late Father Michele Piccirillo⁶ explored the area and finally stood on Elijah's Hill. From there they proceeded to the river Jordan. In doing this, they were risking their lives because there were still mine-fields in the catchment area of the River Jordan.

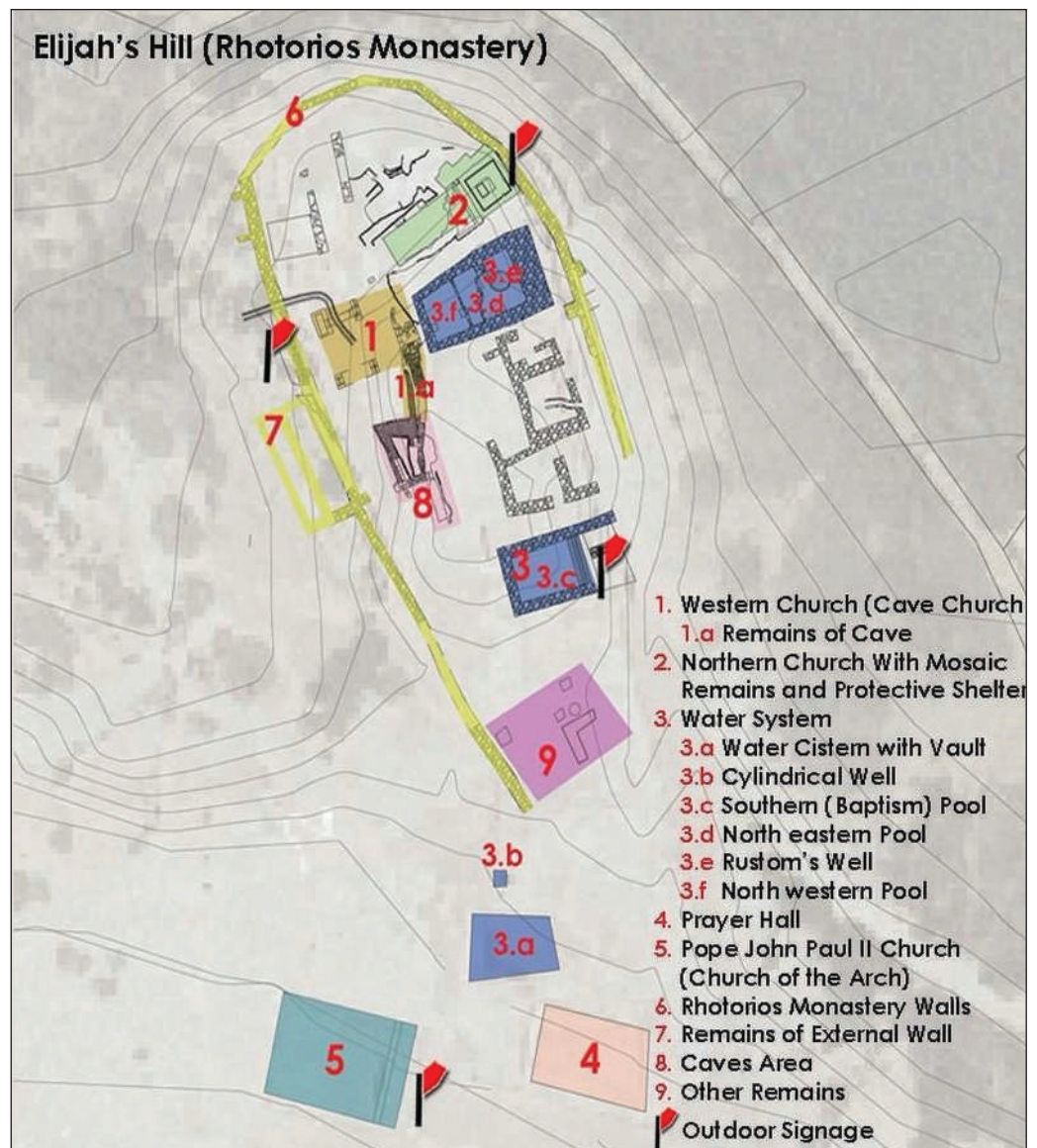


H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin
Muhammad at Tell Mar Elias,
1995.

Soon afterwards a programme to remove mines from the site began. This was followed in 1997 by an archaeological survey by a specialized team from the Department of Antiquities of Jordan headed by Dr. Mohammad Waheeb. Test trenches in specific locations starting with the small, low hill yielded significant results and a monastery was uncovered. In July 1998, Engineer Rustom Mhkjian led a restoration and preservation team to the area. Engineer Mhkjian carried forward the initial work and made more archaeological discoveries. He found a well, dug deep in a partially-

⁶ Father Piccirillo was a Franciscan father and professor of archaeology. He was an enthusiastic and dynamic character who furthered the study, conservation and protection of archaeological monuments of the early Byzantine period, particularly mosaics, in Jordan, Palestine and Syria. Father Piccirillo's reputation was unrivalled and he was invited to lecture all over the world. He wrote dozens of scholarly articles and numerous books, most notably the landmark *Mosaics of Jordan* (1993), in which he brought the corpus of Jordan's mosaic art together. But his volumes on *Mayfa'ah Umm al-Rasas* (1993), *Mount Nebo* (1998) and *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897-1997* (1999) were no less important. One of his lasting contributions to the academic field was to demonstrate through archaeological evidence the continuity of early Byzantine traditions into the Islamic periods, a theme now commonly accepted among most scholars of the subject. After his death in Livorno, Italy, Father Piccirillo was laid to rest on 1st November 2008 at Mount Nebo.

destroyed pool of the Roman period in the northeastern part of the hill. The upper western part (10 courses of sandstone that was tilting by about 10 degrees) was carefully dismantled and restored. The process was carefully documented. The location is seen in the plan that was produced by Mr. Franco Sciorilli⁷ (3.e) below:



Elijah's Hill
(Rhetorios Monastery)

Mr. Franco Sciorilli carried out a detailed assessment of the conservation of archaeological sites discovered at the Baptism Site. He was assigned by Dr. Rami Thaher, a renowned architect who specialized in the management and conservation of cultural heritage. Dr. Thaher was appointed by the Baptism Site Board of Trustees to prepare

⁷ Mr. Sciorilli studied at Sapienza University of Rome. He is an Italian restorer who came to Jordan in 1994 to work with Father Piccirillo as part of the 'Studium Biblicum Franciscanum' mission. Their efforts concentrated on Mount Nebo and the Madaba region but included mosaic restoration projects elsewhere. In May 2016, Franco Sciorilli was awarded the *Onorificenza dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia* (Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy) for his efforts in cultural heritage preservation.

a Management File to be used as part of a study to show the quality of the conservation of the archaeological remains for UNESCO purposes. As noted on the map, the main components and features of the monastery are as follows:

The Western Church (the Cave Church)

The Western church consists of two parts: There is the cave which is cut in the natural rock and was used as the apse and there is the nave to the west. Niches can be seen in the eastern and southern parts of the cave. Remains of the door of the chancel screen separating the apse and the nave were restored. The nave of the church consisted of the foundations of four bases built of well-dressed sandstone ashlar creating a nave and three aisles. Minimal parts of the remains of the colored mosaic floor of the nave area were discovered and were well-protected.



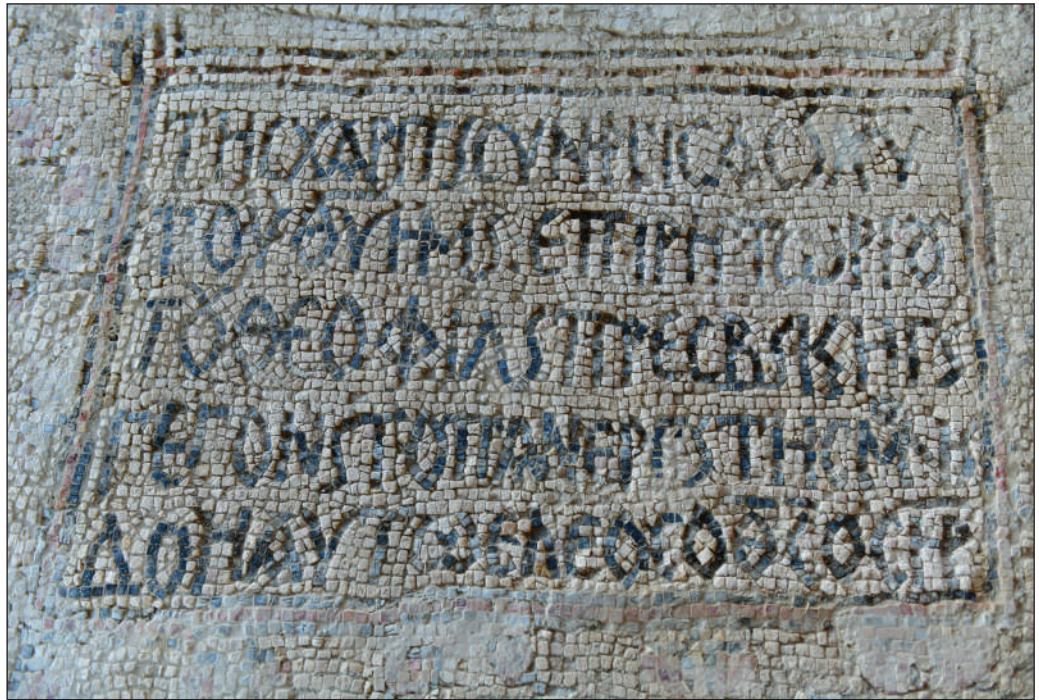
The Western Church (the Cave Church)

When churches are built around a natural cave, the cave is given particular significance. It indicates that either someone of great importance lived in it or that a very important event took place there, or both. From the testimony of pilgrims and Biblical references, it seems clear that John the Baptist lived there and that Jesus Christ visited him in the cave.

The Northern Church

The Northern Church, which was built in the Byzantine period, has a well-preserved mosaic floor and consists of two sections, a rectangular apse and a nave. The distinguishing feature in the centre of the apse area is a complete Greek inscription set in a mosaic floor. It is translated as follows: 'By the help of the grace of Christ our God the whole monastery was constructed in the time of Rhetorios, the most God-beloved Presbyter and Abbot. May God the Savior give him mercy'.

The Greek inscription in
The Northern Church



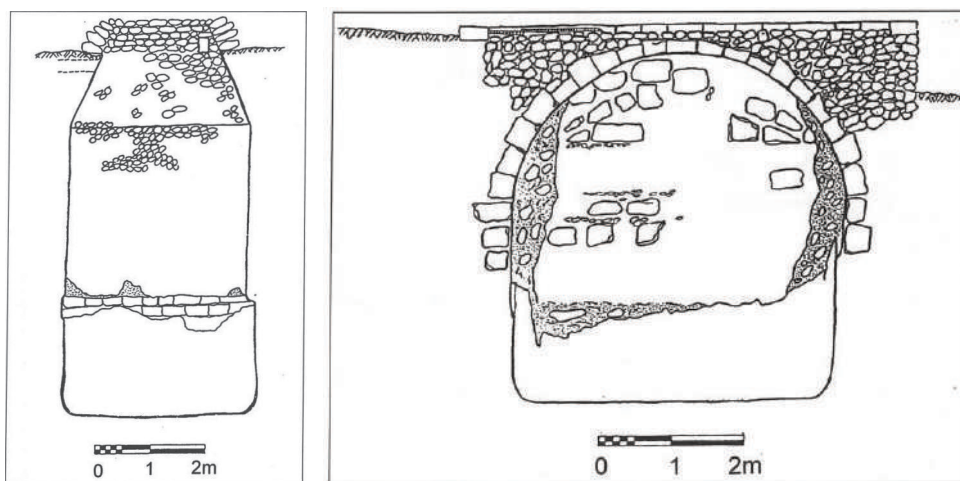
The entire floor of the church is covered by a colored mosaic with a frame and cross marks depicted at the corners and centers of beautiful geometrical designs. Some crack marks indicate that the church was destroyed as a result of an earthquake. Pillar foundations along the northern and southern walls of the church must have supported the roof. In some parts of the internal northern wall a smooth layer of white plaster can be seen. The church has two entrances, one in the northern wall, around 70 centimeters wide, and the other main entrance is to the west.

The remains of the mosaic floor
of the northern church



The Water System

A cistern (3.a) and a cylindrical well (3.b) are located in the southern part of the monastery. Ceramic pipes were discovered in the southeastern direction and were designed to get water into the monastery. Within the monastery wall, open canals transferred water through settling basins to make sure fresh water was available within the monastery for the service of both monks and pilgrims. The recovered well was dug in the natural Lisan Marl rock. Well-cut sandstone ashlar were used to build its inner sides. A thick layer of lime was added and covered by a smooth layer of plaster to prevent any seepage. The cistern was roofed by using a vault system since remains of the vaults are still visible on both the eastern and southern upper parts. It is reasonable to assume that the purpose of the roof was to reduce evaporation during the summer and to keep the water inside clean. Remains of the white mosaic floor of the cistern can still be seen in the southwestern corner.



(Left) Section of the cylindrical well. (Top) Section of cistern
(Rustom Mkhjian/2002)



An aerial photo of Elijah's Hill /
Rhetorios Monastery.

Major archaeological remains south of the Rhetorios monastery include a prayer hall with a white mosaic floor. They also include the remains of 'the arch church' of which a small part of its mosaic floor has been preserved. It was named 'His Holiness Pope John Paul II Church' after the Pope's visit to the site on the 21st of March, 2000 CE during which he held a mass in the church in the presence of around 15,000 believers.



H.H. Pope John Paul II, March 21, 2000 CE.

Thus, on the evidence of Biblical references, documented notes by pilgrims, archaeological discoveries and the Mosaic Map of the Holy Land, the following can be concluded and confirmed:

- The place of Elijah's ascension to heaven is where Elisha received the prophet's mantle and John the Baptist started his ministry. This is where he lived in a cave and baptized believers in the spring that flowed just east of the sacred hill.
- The site today is similar to what John the Baptist and Jesus Christ saw.
- A monastery (Rhetorios Monastery) was built in the Byzantine period.
- The history of the hill and its holiness go back around 2800 years.
- The presence of monks living in the monastery up to the early Islamic period is an indication of Christian-Muslim coexistence from the very beginning.

B. THE PILGRIMS' STATION

Throughout history, many Christian pilgrims following the trail of the prophets visited the region east of the Jordan River on their way from Jerusalem to Mount Nebo. They usually crossed the Jordan River near Jericho, visiting and sometimes carefully describing important sites and events that took place at some of the places they saw.

A pilgrims' station was built during the Byzantine period between the Jordan River and Elijah's Hill. It was located at a strategic spot from which the eastern parts of Jerusalem, Jericho and the catchment area of the River Jordan to the west, and Mount Nebo to the east can be seen. Pilgrims used the station along the old Christian pilgrimage route following the trails of the prophets and visiting places where important Biblical events took place. The pilgrims' station consisted of a number of rooms around an open courtyard.

Two Roman roads were built during the era of the Emperor Hadrian. Around 129 AD, a road was built to connect 'Hesban' or Esbus with 'Tell al-Rameh' or Livias, Jericho and Jerusalem. When Christianity was recognized officially, the same road was used by pilgrims and continued on to Mount Nebo. (Fr. Piccirillo)



A view of the remains of the pilgrims' station from the north-east.

C. THE LARGE POOL

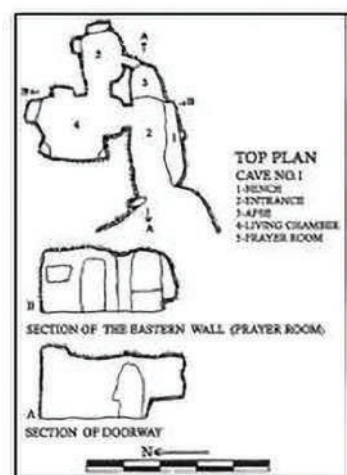
A large pool from the byzantine period was uncovered during the excavation in the lower area of Bethany beyond the Jordan flanking the Jordan River, called the 'Zor' area. This large stone-built and plastered pool measures around 25 meters x 15 meters, and might have been used for group baptisms in the Byzantine period at times when the river flooded. A well-built open canal directed water into the pool from the spring to the north- east. It could be emptied through an opening in its southern wall.

The large pool



D. THE CAVES (THE HERMIT CELLS)

Two caves or 'hermit cells' are located around 300m from the Jordan River and were carved into the Lisan Marl 'Qattar' hills overlooking the catchment area of the Jordan River and the western side of the Jordan Valley. These caves were accessible from the western or eastern sides by ladders or ropes. They both have semicircular niches for prayer carved in the eastern side. They are typical of Byzantine church design (Reuben and Taylor, 2010: 71). Moreover, both cells are divided into two chambers. Hermits used these caves as places for pious devotion, meditation, prayer and as dwellings. Many pilgrims mentioned hermits living in caves and cells in this area, and on either bank of the spring.



Drawing of cave No. 1

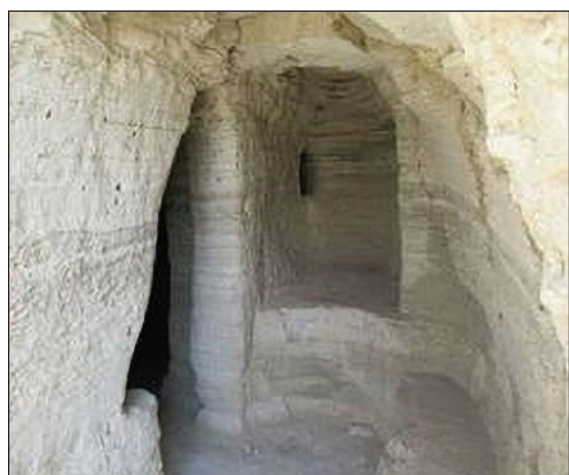
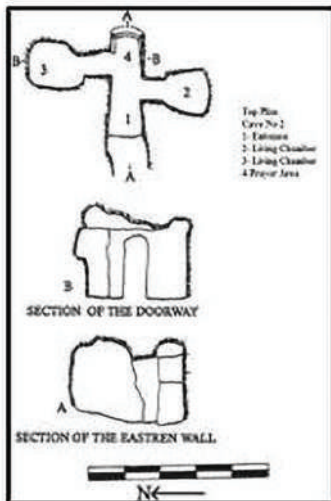


Photo of cave No. 1



Drawing of cave No.2



Photo of cave No.2

E. SAINT MARY OF EGYPT⁸

Saint Mary, also known as Maria Aegyptiaca, was born somewhere in the Province of Egypt. At the age of twelve she ran away from her parents to the city of Alexandria. There, she lived an extremely dissolute life. After seventeen years of this lifestyle, she travelled to Jerusalem for the Great Feasts of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. She continued her habitual lifestyle for a short time in Jerusalem.

Her Vita recounts that when she tried to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for the celebration, she was barred from doing so by an unseen force. Realizing that this was because of her impurity, she was struck with remorse, and upon seeing an icon of the Virgin Mary outside the church, she prayed for forgiveness and promised to give up the world. Then she attempted to go into the church again, and this time was enabled to enter. After venerating the relic of the True Cross, she returned to the icon to give thanks and heard a voice telling her: 'If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest'. She immediately went to the monastery of Saint John the Baptist on the bank of the River Jordan where she received absolution and afterwards Holy Communion. The next morning, she crossed the Jordan and retired to the desert to live the rest of her life as a hermit in penitence. She took with her only three loaves of bread, and once they were gone, lived only on what she could find in the wilderness.

About a year before her death, she recounted her life to Saint Zosimas of Palestine, who encountered her in the desert. When he had unexpectedly met her in the desert, she was completely naked and almost unrecognizable as human. She asked Zosimas to toss her his mantle so that she might cover herself. She asked him to meet her at the banks of the Jordan, on Holy Thursday of the following year and bring her Holy Communion. When he fulfilled her wish, she crossed the river to get to him by walking on the surface of the water and received Holy Communion. She told him to meet

⁸ The primary source of information on Saint Mary of Egypt is the Vita written of her by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–638). Most of the information in this section is taken from this source.



Zosimas giving communion to St. Mary in the wilderness of John the Baptist



Zosimas buried St. Mary with the assistance of a passing lion

her again in the desert the following Lent. The next year, Zosimas travelled to the same spot where he had first met her, some twenty days' journey from his monastery, and found her lying there dead. According to an inscription written in the sand next to her head, she had died on the very night he had given her Communion and had somehow been miraculously transported to the place he found her with her body preserved. He buried her body with the assistance of a passing lion. On returning to the monastery, he related her life story to the brethren, and it was preserved among them as an oral tradition until it was written down by St. Sophronius. This important tradition means that the Baptism Site is also a place of repentance.

F. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE PLACE WHERE JESUS CHRIST WAS BAPTISED

1. *The Biblical Evidence*

The Christian gospels are clear about the place where Jesus Christ was baptized and that the Holy Spirit descended on him before he began his ministry: Matthew (3:13–17) records:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness’. Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased’. [NRSV]

We also read in the Gospel of Mark (1:9–12):

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’. And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. [NRSV]

And in the Gospel of John (1:19–42):

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah’. And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not’. ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered. ‘No’. Then they said to him, ‘Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”, as the prophet Isaiah said’. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, ‘Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal’. This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me

because he was before me'. I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel'. And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit'. And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God. [NRSV]

And the Gospel of John tells us of Jesus' public ministry and first converts:

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see'. They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter). [NRSV]

The Gospel of Luke (3:21–23) says:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'. Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph's son of Heli. [NRSV]

Jesus Christ is believed to be the first person to have received baptism with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended on Jesus as he came out of the water and confirmed on him the authority and power of God. Immediately afterwards, followed by his disciples Andrew and Simon whom he called Peter, Jesus began his ministry and showed that power of God by casting out demons, healing the sick, and teaching with authority.

The gospels present John the Baptist's ministry as the precursor to that of Jesus and the Baptism of Jesus as marking the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

2. The Testimony of Pilgrims

The place of the baptism of Jesus Christ has been mentioned by many pilgrims who visited the Holy Land. These pilgrims carefully described the geographic location of

the site and some remains that they saw there during their journeys. As mentioned above, many of them linked it with the place of Elijah's ascension to heaven. Some of them are quoted below. Among them we have the anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux who was the first Christian pilgrim from western Europe and arrived in Palestine during the years 333–334 AD. In his journey from Jericho to the Dead Sea, the pilgrim from Bordeaux mentioned:

The water of it is very bitter, and in it there is no kind of fish whatever, nor any vessel; and if a man casts himself into it in order to swim, the water turns him over. From thence to the Jordan, where the Lord was baptized by John, there is a place by the river, a little hill upon the further (left) bank, from which Elijah was caught up into heaven.⁹

Theodosius (530 AD) wrote: 'From Bethsaida to Paneas is 50 miles. There the Jordan emerges from two sources the Jor and the Dan. These run into Paneas and meet under the city, whence the river takes the name "Jordan"'. Theodosius also described the church of St. John the Baptist on the eastern side of the Jordan River saying:

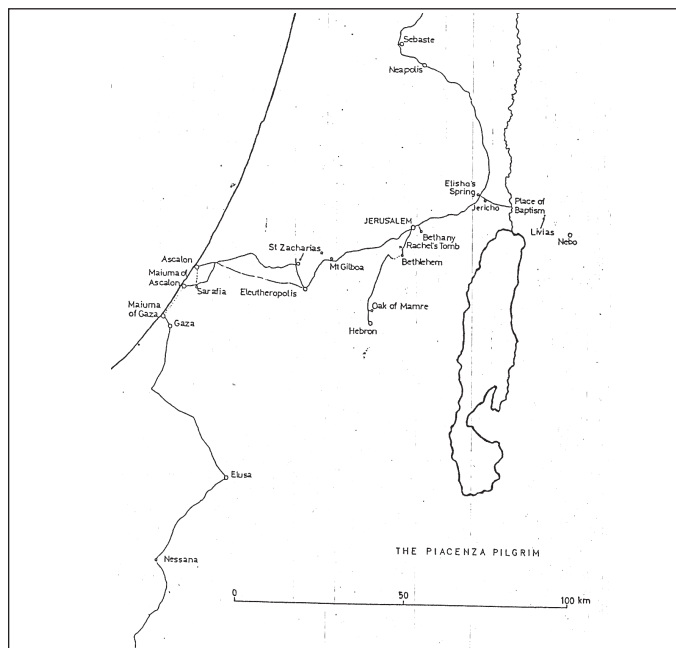
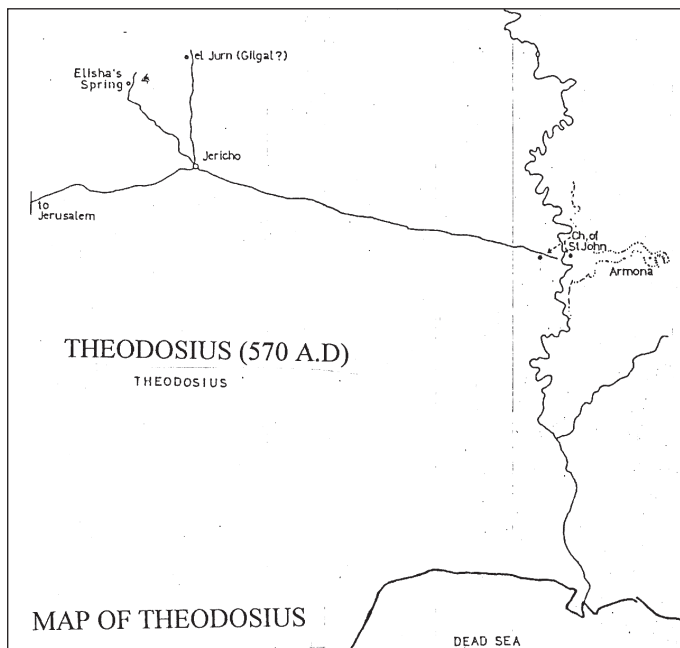
In the place where the Lord was baptized there is a single marble Pillar, and on the Pillar an iron cross has been fastened. There too is the church of St. John the Baptist, which the Emperor Anastasius built. This church is very lofty, as it is built above large chambers on account of the River Jordan when it overflows. Where the Lord was baptized beyond Jordan, there is a little mountain called Hermon (Mount Tabor in Galilee): there holy Elijah was caught up. The tomb of holy Elisha, where he blessed the fountain is there and above the tomb a church has been built. It is 5 miles from where the Lord was baptized to the place where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea.¹⁰

From these ancient and detailed notes of both the pilgrim from Bordeaux and Theodosius, some important conclusions may be drawn:

- Theodosius gives the distance of 5 miles from the Dead Sea to the place where Jesus was baptized and both records link it with Elijah's Hill east of the Jordan.
- The pilgrim from Bordeaux does not mention any churches because they had not yet been built. But Theodosius' accurate description of the St. John the Baptist Church and the map are very useful. As will be seen later when we discuss the archaeological discoveries, his account closely matches 'Church No.1'.

⁹ Stewart A., 1887, *Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem*; Palestine Pilgrim Text Society, Vol.1; p.26.

¹⁰ Bernard, J. H., 1893, *Theodosius on the Topography of the Holy Land*; Palestine Pilgrim Text Society: Vol.2; p.8–15.



Forty years later, (circa 560-70 AD), Antoninus, Martyr of Piacenza, travelling with his companions, said after he left Placentia:

I will take care to explain in what parts I travelled, desiring to follow the footsteps of Christ, and to see (the sites of) the miracles of the prophets. So, starting from Placentia, we came to Constantinople, from where we came to the island of Cyprus, to the city of Constantia, where St. Epiphanius rests.

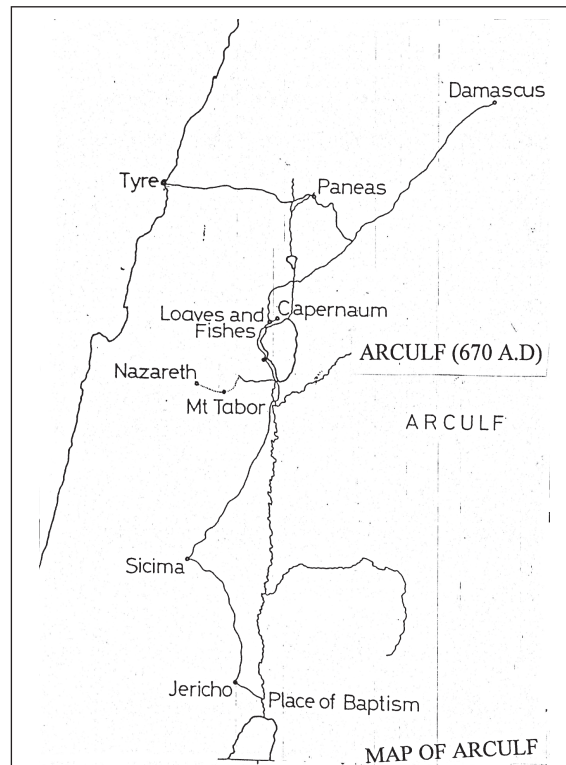
He then added:

Thence we came to the place where the Lord was baptized. In that very place the children of Israel crossed over Jordan and the sons of the prophets lost their axe; and from that very place Helias was carried up into heaven. There, too, is the little hill of Hermon, which is mentioned in the psalm.⁸

Antoninus Martyr added:

On that side of Jordan is the fountain where John used to baptize. From it to the Jordan is two miles. In the valley itself Helias was found, when the raven used to bring him bread and meat. On the side of the valley live a multitude of hermits.

He further added:



At the place where the water returned to its bed, a wooden cross is fixed standing in the water, and upon the banks on each side marble steps descend into the water.¹¹

The French pilgrim, Arculf, (670 AD) wrote:¹²

That sacred and honored place where the Lord was baptized by John is always covered by the waters of the River Jordan. In that sacred place a wooden cross of great size is fixed ... From the site of the above- mentioned cross a stone bridge is carried on arches to the bank, across which people go and descend by a slope to the bank, ascending as they return.

He also recorded:

At the edge of the river is a small square church, built, as is said, on the spot where the garments of the Lord were taken care of at the time when He was baptized.

This is raised, so as to be uninhabitable, on four stone vaults, standing above the waters which flow below. It is protected above by slaked lime,

¹¹ Stewart A., 1896, *'The Holy Places Visited by Antoninus Martyr'*. Palestine Pilgrim Text Society, vol.2, pp.1-10.

¹² Adamnan, trans. Macpherson J. R., 1895. 'Arculf's Narrative about the Holy Places', Palestine Pilgrim Text Society, vol.3, pp.36-37.

and below, as has been said, it is supported by vaults and arches. This church is in the lower ground of the valley through which the river Jordan flows.

St. Willibald (754 AD) noted:

A church stands there now raised up high on stone columns, and underneath the church is now dry ground where our Lord was baptized on this very spot. And where they now baptize there stands a cross of wood in the middle and there is a little channel of water there and a rope extending over the Jordan and secured on either side.¹³

This description of both Arculf and St. Willibald match 'Church No.2' and the cruciform baptistery.

Epiphanius (750-800 AD) described a huge church (the Church of the Trinity) being built on the bank of the river a mile west of John the Baptist Monastery (Elijah's Hill) where he stayed overnight.¹¹ This closely matches 'Church No.4' (ADAJ 2007 RM). Abbot Daniel (1106-7 AD), who came from Russia, noted:

The place where Christ was baptized is distant from the river Jordan as far as a man can throw a small stone. There is a small chapel with a small apse that marks the place where Jesus was baptized.¹⁴

This closely matches 'Church no.5'. Abel (1932) identified four archaeological sites in and near the area of Wadi el- Kharrar. He believed that these sites, which numbered (2), (3), (5) and (6) were among the most important remains in the area.

Regarding site No.2, he saw the foundations of a church built over an arch system near the Jordan River. At site No.3, he identified the remains of a modern house built on the foundations of a church built over an arch system near the Jordan River and also built on the foundations of older structures. He recorded the existence of three fallen columns on the ground near this site. He provided the following additional details:¹⁵

- At site No.5, Tell el-Kharrar where there are with some cisterns on the slopes of the Tell, he described a vault system which was used in building the cisterns.
- At site No.6, he described a church apse with well-dressed stones and column bases among the other remains scattered over the site.

¹³ Brownlow, C., 1895. *The Hodoeporicon of Saint Willibald*. Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, vol.3, pp.16-18.

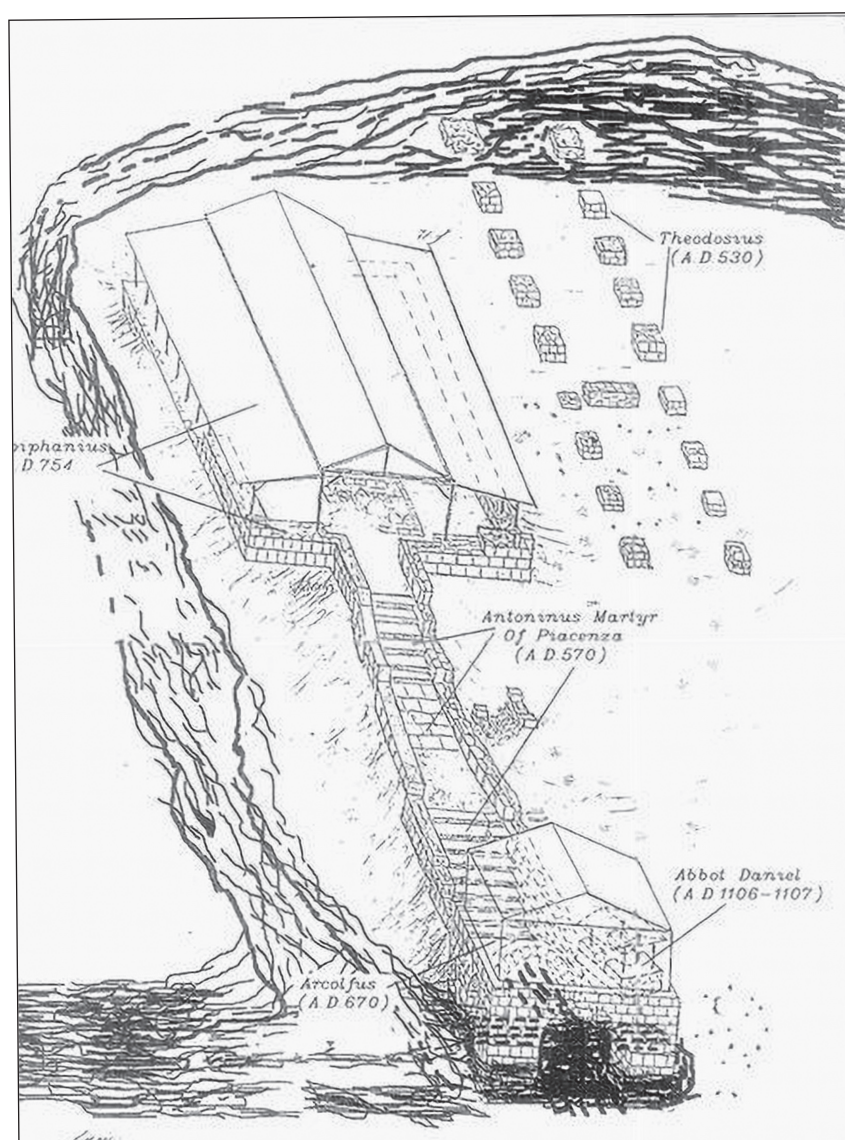
¹⁴ Donner, H., 1971. *Account of the Holy City and the Holy Places*, ZDPV, vol.87, pp.66-87.

¹⁵ Wilson, C. W., *Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel in the Holy Land* (circa 1106-1107). Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, vol.4, pp.27-60.

The testimonies, accounts and maps of some of the pilgrims mentioned above are very important, specifically because they all describe the place where Jesus Christ was baptized. Yet, because they visited the site on different dates, has a slightly different description depending on what they saw during their visits.

It is clear, however, that their descriptions of early churches match the archaeological discoveries on the spot, giving important clues about how believers continued to rebuild a new church after the destruction of the previous one because of either earthquakes or floods from the Jordan River. They reused the stones of destroyed churches, but fortunately they left enough of their foundations or parts of them for us to see the continuity.

Consequently, a careful map of the existing remains of the five churches was drawn and published in the Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (ADAJ), 2007.



Churches built just east of the river at the place where Jesus Christ was baptized.
(by Eng. Rustom Mkhjian)

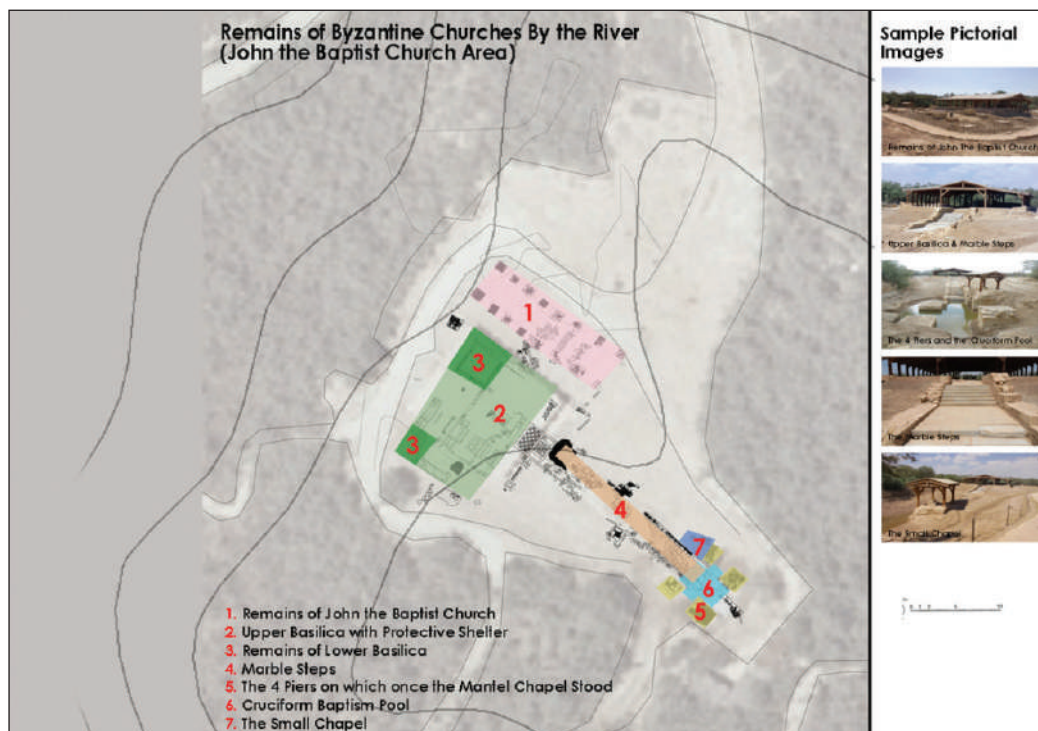
5. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

THE PILLARED HALL / CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, 'CHURCH NO.1'

The pillared hall is built on sandy soil at an absolute level of -394.81m, compared to the lowest level of the site at -385.00m and the level of the Jordan River on 15 January, 2003 of -402.00m. The remains of a set of stone pillars running east-west and north-south are evident. There are nine pillars in the east-west direction (total length of the church 25.15m), and possibly six in the north-south direction (total length 25.80m).

The existence of that many pillars is evidenced by:

- The remains of foundations for two pillars along the south wall of the Basilica;
- The distances between the north-south piers;
- The material and mortar used;
- The dimensions of the foundations;
- The level of the extant foundations.



Churches built in memory of the baptism of Jesus Christ.

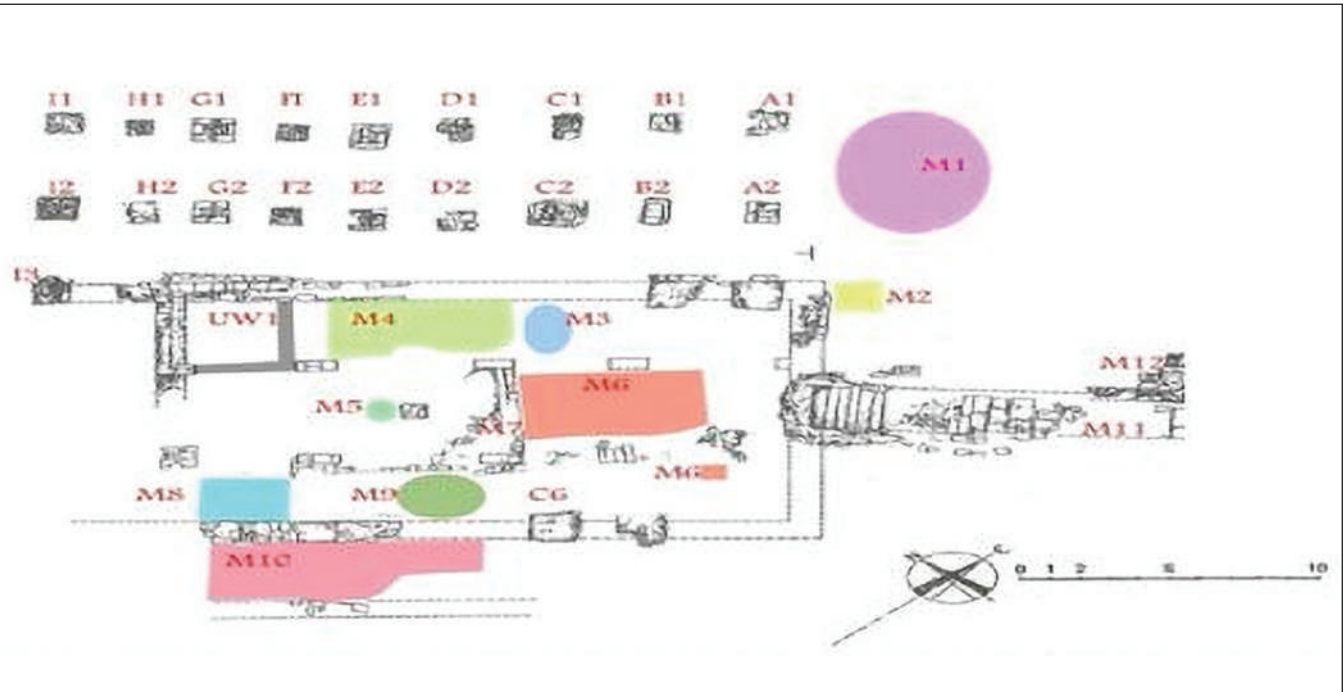
The foundations vary in size but they are constructed of fieldstones of average size bound together by a cementing material of gray color with plaster remains still evident on the surface of some of the foundations. The pillars also vary in size. Sandstone ashlars were used in building the outer sides of the pillars, whereas the core consisted of field stones and cementing material. The pillars were raised to a minimum height of 2.5m judging from the remains of one of them.

Some fragments of white medium-sized mosaic tesserae were also found. It is therefore concluded that these sets of pillars were designed to carry or support a large platform that, in turn, might have supported or formed the elevated floor of a monastery, basilica or other structure. The lack of a floor supports the identification of the set of pillars as the substructure for an elevated building. This seems to be the Church of St. John the Baptist built by the Emperor Anastasius (491-518 AD) and described by Theodosius.



Church of St. John the Baptist, 'Church No. 1'.

Plan of the remains of churches built in memory of the Baptism of Jesus Christ.'



THE 'MARBLE' STEPS

A flight of shale steps leads from the Upper Basilica down to a cruciform baptismal pool. They were probably constructed before 570 AD. The steps have been restored but the original parts are easily distinguished visually from the restored parts, in accordance with international charters for restoration and preservation. It has to be taken into consideration that the level of the Jordan River changes throughout the year, and during certain times of the year, this pool still has water in it. Two stone walls on either side of the stairs give it support. The southern wall has been restored.



The 'marble' steps

Although Antoninus Martyr (570 AD) mentions 'marble steps', the real material discovered was shale, but the rest of the discoveries match his description.

THE FOUR PIERS AND THE MANTLE CHAPEL, 'CHURCH No. 2'

The flight of marble steps leads down to a cruciform baptismal pool where four large piers were also constructed. The superstructure that the piers once supported is no longer extant, but it is assumed to have been the Chapel of the Mantle, commemorating the spot where Jesus took off his garments before being baptized. Three piers are extant. The fourth, southeastern pier had almost totally vanished, but could be assumed by reason of symmetry, so it was later restored. Excavations carried out in the summer of 2002 uncovered a few ashlars and fieldstones scattered in their presumed location (Mkhjian and Kanellopoulos 2003:14).

Sandstone ashlars, about 0.30m high, were used to construct the outer faces of the piers, which had a core densely filled with fieldstone and sandstone pieces well-cemented with a lime mortar. At the lower parts of the existing piers grayish plaster covering them was, and still is, well-attached (total thickness of 15–20mm) with hundreds of cross marks incised all over them. Inscriptions were also noted on the southern part of the northwestern pier.

'A study of the arch stones found in the center of the four piers indicated that they belonged to arches of about 1.8m in radius. Knowing that the distance between the piers is about 3.50–3.60, we could conclude that they belonged to arches and vaults

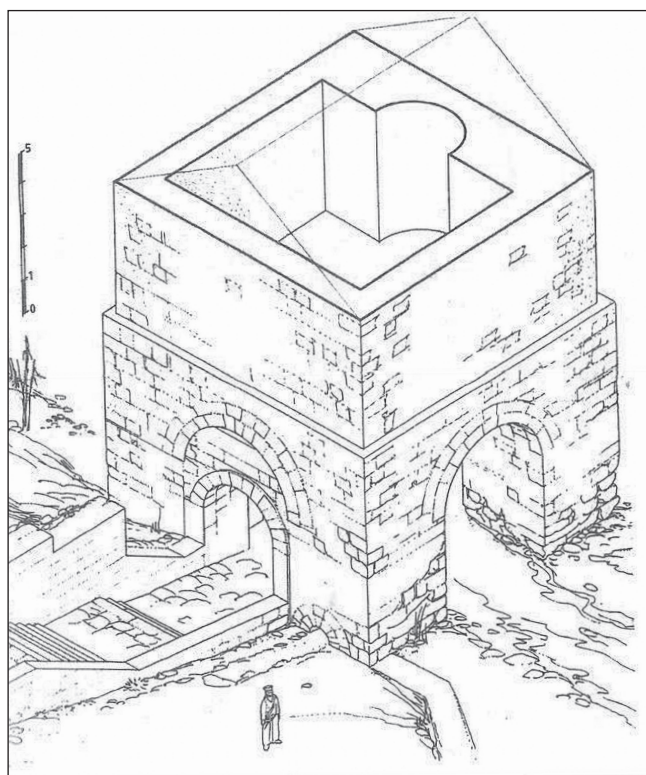
on top of the piers. The remains of a large arched gateway with doorjambs, each 1m wide, are in the western pair of piers. The clear opening of the gate is 2.50m, thus corresponding to the width of the staircase that leads from the four piers to the basilica ‘church No.3’ (Mkhjian and Kanellopoulos 2003:14.).

The French pilgrim Arculf, who came to the site at around 670 AD, wrote:

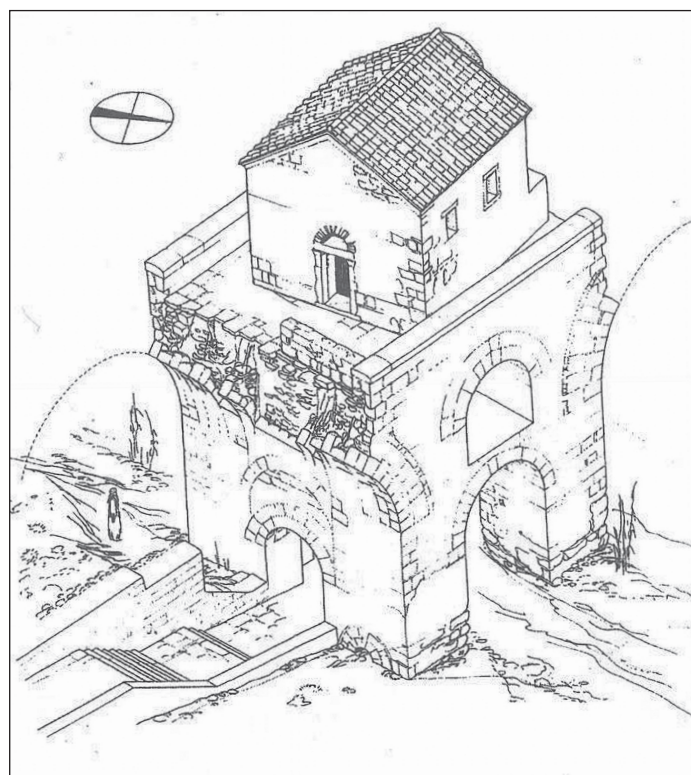
Right at the river’s edge stands a small rectangular church which was built, so it is said, at the place where the Lord’s clothes were placed while he was baptized. The fact that it is supported on four stone vaults makes it usable, since the water, which comes in from all sides, is underneath it. It has a tiled roof. This remarkable church is supported, as we have said, by arches and vaults, and stands in the lower part of the valley through which the Jordan flows.¹⁶

His description matches what has been found, confirming that a chapel was built on four stone vaults, above the water, and in the location where, supposedly, Jesus Christ left his garments before being baptized. Over 80 years later St. Willibald seems to have seen the same chapel, or the nearby basilica, as he speaks about a church built on stone columns (Wright 1848:17; Mkhjian 2005: 403).

¹⁶ Adamnan, trans. Macpherson J. R., 1895. ‘Arculf’s Narrative about the Holy Places’, Palestine Pilgrim Text Society, vol.3, pp.36–37.



Hypothetical reconstruction of the piers supporting a chapel (Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos).



Hypothetical reconstruction of the ‘Small Chapel’ built on the piers of an older, ruined bridge (Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos).



The 'marble' steps leading to the cruciform baptismal pool and the four piers over which the mantle chapel was built, 'church no. 2'

LOWER BASILICA 'CHURCH NO. 3'

Test trenches in the western parts of both the northern and southern aisles of the lower basilica uncovered marble floors of various geometrical shapes and colors, generally tilting towards the west with fallen ashlar directly over the southwest part of the marble pavement. Parts of the southern wall of the Lower Basilica could also be seen in those trenches. Since the sections formed by the difference in height between the floor levels of the third and the fourth churches is about 2m in its westernmost parts and included mixed material such as marble fragments, ashlar, pottery, etc., and since the walls of the Basilica were partly built from the remains of the Lower Basilica, it can be assumed that the Basilica overlaid the remains of the Lower Basilica and made use of those remains to strengthen its foundation.

Since the floor tilts to the west, floods from the west must have caused the destruction of the Lower Basilica by undermining its foundations. This is an indication that the main course of the river was probably just west of the Lower Basilica. Floods would also be the cause of the destruction of the Basilica itself, since most of its western parts have vanished. The Lower Basilica has not been completely investigated because it would have been inappropriate to excavate through the floor of the Basilica to expose the complete remains of the lower Basilica.



Remains of the Lower Basilica found in the test trench

BASILICA 'CHURCH No. 4'

The Basilica was built at a ground level higher than the surrounding remains, so relatively little remains of it. The building had a minimum length of 27m and a width of 15.80m. A plan of part of the Pillared Hall and of the Basilica shows an interior width of 13.38m (the interior dimension of 15.80m equals 50 standard early Byzantine feet measuring 0.315m each). Since the Basilica was partly built over the remains of earlier structures (the Lower Basilica and the Pillared Hall), its construction made use of those remains as foundations, especially for its northern and southern walls.

Elsewhere, the foundations are of fieldstones of medium size, well-cemented with a grayish lime mortar, the height varying according to the original topography. The existing external walls indicate that they were built of sandstone ashlar forming both the inner and the outer faces, with a mixture of fieldstones and sandstone pieces



The basilica from the east, 'Church No. 4'

cemented together forming the core of the walls. Those have an average width of 1.10m. Rectangular piers with sections measuring 1.30 x 0.58m and 1.42 x 0.58m supported the roof. The westernmost standing piers are spaced 3.42m apart. Certain blocks at foundation level can be interpreted as infrastructure for more piers. The clear width of the nave is 5.12m and the widths of the south and north aisles are 3.63m respectively. Features in the central aisle include the sandstone foundations for the chancel screen, a rectangular apse measuring 7.6m long (north-south) and in its center is the altar (0.80m²), made of sandstone. Remaining marble slabs on both its western and southern sides indicate it was riveted with marble. West of the altar are the remains of a mosaic floor of medium-sized colored tesserae.

Among the motifs, a vase with two handles and flowers can be noted. On the east corner of the vase, a rosette is depicted. To the east of the altar there was a marble floor of geometrical design (*opus sectile*). The marble has totally vanished but the underlying mortar (of grayish color) retains the impressions of the pattern. The remains of a wall foundation of an apse built of sandstone indicate the extent of the rectangular apse. In both the northern and southern aisles, only the floor bedding survives, with some remains of a mosaic floor in the eastern part of the northern aisle showing a geometric motif with large colored tesserae.

THE SMALL CHAPEL 'CHURCH NO. 5'

Around the 12th century AD, a small chapel was built on the remains of the northwestern pier. The existing remains of the chapel show that it was built using materials similar to all the other churches. There is only one course of sandstone wall remaining in its northern and northeastern parts (Mkhjian and Kanellopoulos 2003:14). However, these remains are enough to assume a chapel about 3.05m wide and 5m long. In the middle of the northern wall an entrance, 1.6m wide, led to the chapel of which only the whitish bedding of the pavement now remains. The northern wall is 0.60m thick and was built using sandstone ashlar (0.30m high) on the outer and inner faces. The core of the wall is densely filled with boulders and sandstone pieces that are well-cemented. The apse is enclosed within the rectangular external walls and is almost semi-circular (0.95m deep, 2.25m wide) with the eastern wall about 0.85m thick. The apse floor is around 0.15m higher than the floor of the nave. Again, only the whitish bedding of the floor remains in the apse.

In the center of the chancel screen, there is a reused white marble capital with sandstone ashlar around it. The architects made use of the best-preserved northwestern pier as the main foundation for the chapel. But it is important to note that the chapel was not built parallel to the pier walls. In other words, the chapel is oriented almost exactly east-west, and was larger than the pier (Mkhjian and Kanellopoulos 2003:15). Hence, the following can be deduced:

- After the destruction of the mantle chapel because of floods and/or earthquakes, a smaller chapel was built on the ruins of the northwestern base (pier).
- The baptistery area below the structure of the four piers was no longer in use.
- The staircase had partially collapsed and was covered by alluvial deposits.
- The Basilicas had also been destroyed; we can assume this because a reused marble capital at the center of the chancel screen and other reused stones can be seen in the southern section of the chapel.

Geological Analysis

A preliminary report of the field study of ground deformation at the Baptismal Archaeological Site by Dr. Tina Niemi and Alexander Dahne was submitted on the 25th of May, 2004 to the Department of Antiquities. It is another important resource because it answers many questions about the continued destruction of the archaeological sites, and takes account of the important question of the distance today between the Jordan River and the remains of the ancient churches built in memory of the baptism of Jesus Christ. An archaeoseismologic and tectonic geomorphic field study was initiated at the Baptism Site between May 11–25, 2004.

The field research was conducted through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DoA). Within the report Dr. Niemi notes:

The recent excavations of the Baptismal site along the Jordan River have exposed ruins of several churches, wells, pools, caves, birkehs, aqueducts, and a monastery. The site is located along the east bank of the Jordan River just north of the Dead Sea. Over the past 2000 years, the baptismal site and its ruins have experienced several major environmental and catastrophic changes. The river has experienced several episodes of incision and infilling as the level of the Dead Sea changed and flooded the site. The river has also meandered away from the site [my emphasis] and has induced bank slumping. On top of these fluvial geomorphic changes, the site is located along the seismically active Jordan Valley fault. This fault is a segment of the Dead Sea Transform fault system that periodically produces strong to major devastating earthquakes. ... The John the Baptist Church site is built over highly unstable late Holocene (<2000 years) alluvium deposited from the Jordan River that is inter-bedded with at

least two distinct white-colored lacustrine deposits from the Dead Sea. These sedimentary sections were first described by Nikos Mourtzas during his visit to the site in January 2003. The geologic section exposed at the site is predominantly fine-grained silts and clay. The inter-bedding of silt and clay suggest that the sediment was deposited from slack waters ponded in a low-lying area similar to an 'oxbow lake' (a meander curve that has been hydraulically disconnected from the main river flow and receives water during flood stages of the river). Several inter-bedded sand horizons denote periods of higher stream velocities moving past the site.

All these references, including the Biblical references, testimonies and maps from pilgrims, the ancient Mosaic Map of the Holy Land, the archaeological discoveries and the geological report, clearly answer a question of the utmost importance: Churches were built from the early Byzantine period up to the Islamic periods to mark a very important spot and event just east of the Jordan River where Jesus Christ was baptized by John who lived in a simple cave having come in the spirit and strength of Elijah.





ΑΙΝΩΝΕΝ
ΝΥΝΟCΑΤΟ
ΠΑΙ

ΒΕΘΑΒΑΡΑ
ΤΟΤΧΑΤΙΧΙ
ΤΥΒΑ

ΓΑΓΑΛΑΤΟΚΑΙ
ΔΩΔΕΚΑΛΙΘΟΝ

ΑΛΩΝΑΤΑ
ΒΗ

ΚΕΑΔΙCΤΟΙΧΑΤΙΧ
ΕΛΛΑΙΟΥ

ΤΕΡΙΧΩ

ΕΡΧΟΝΤΕC
ΑΝΘΗΚΕC
ΤΟΝ ΡΕΜΜΟC

Part Two

LETTERS OF
AUTHENTICATION
AND IMPORTANT VISITS

LETTERS OF AUTHENTICATION AND IMPORTANT VISITS TO THE BAPTISM SITE

LETTERS OF AUTHENTICATION

In 1995, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad visited the Baptism Site with the late Father Michele Piccirillo. Once the Prince was convinced of the importance of the site for Christians and for the Hashemite family, a Royal Decree was issued by His Majesty the late King Hussein bin Talal to form the Board of Trustees for the Baptism Site. This board was, and still is, chaired by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad.

As a result of continued cooperation between the Royal Commission of the Baptism Site and the Christian community, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Baptism Site, received letters of acknowledgment of the authenticity of the Baptism Site from the heads of major churches in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Jerusalem, and later from others throughout the world.

Letters received are included in Appendix II. These include letters from:

- H.E. the Roman Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem, January 18, 2003.
- H.B. the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Erinius I, October 2, 2003.
- H.E. the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch, September 12, 2005.
- H.E. the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, September 17, 2005.
- H.H. the Coptic Pope Shenouda III, December 2, 2005.
- H.E. the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexy II, November 15, 2006.
- His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams, January 18, 2008.
- H.B. Lutheran Bishop Dr. Mark S. Hanson and Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, April 23, 2008.
- H.E. Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey, September 1, 2008.
- Pastor Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church in California, USA, March 18, 2009.
- The Romanian Patriarchate, Daniel Ciobotea, June 25, 2012.

IMPORTANT VISITS BY CHURCH LEADERS TO THE BAPTISM SITE

Before any visit by church leaders, a very important event took place. Arbor Day was celebrated at the Baptism Site on January 16, 2000 under the patronage of their Majesties King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein and Queen Rania Al-Abdullah. Palm trees were planted about half a kilometer east of Elijah's Hill.



H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein planting a palm tree at the Baptism Site, January 16, 2000



His Majesty King Abdullah II
and Her Majesty Queen Rania
near Elijah's Hill

On the same day, Their Majesties, accompanied by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, visited Elijah's Hill where they were briefed about the archaeological remains and the religious and historical significance of the site. Thereafter, church leaders of many different denominations started their visits to this very important site:



H.B. Karekin II, Catholicos and
Supreme Patriarch of All
Armenians January 17, 2000



H.H. Pope John Paul II, March 21, 2000



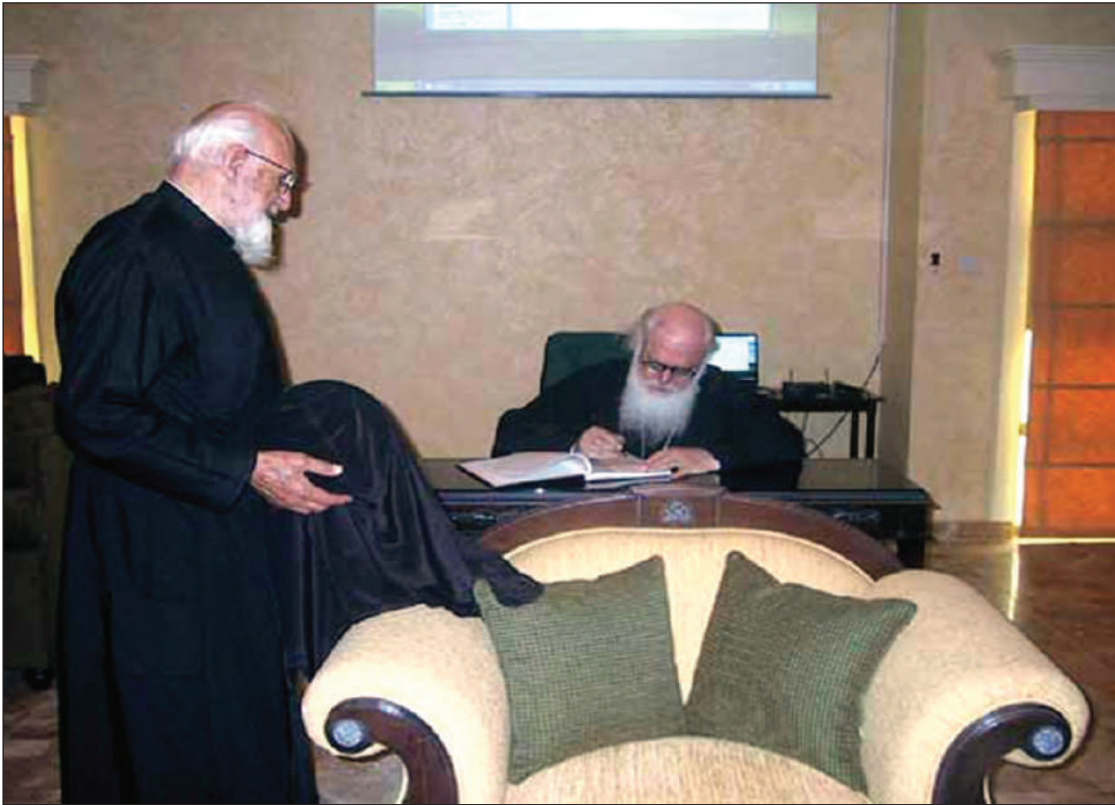
The Rt. Revd. Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams January 27, 2004



H.H. The late Coptic Pope, Shenouda III March 6, 2005



H.B. (Catholic) Greek Melkite Patriarch of Antioch Gregorius III May 21, 2005.



H.B. (Orthodox) Archbishop Anastasios of Albania May 21, 2005



H.B. Assyrian Patriarch of Antioch and the Whole East, Zakka I November 30, 2005



H.R.H. Prince Ghazi; (Catholic) Archbishop Fuad Twal of Jerusalem; Cardinal Theodore McCarrick; (Catholic) Bishop Salim Sayegh of Jordan, March 13, 2006



H.B. Latin (Catholic) Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah January 12, 2007



H.B. Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III March 20, 2007



H.E. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Munib Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) March 15, 2008



Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, March 28, 2008



H.R.H. Prince Ghazi and H.E. David Coffey, President of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), May 27, 2008



H.R.H. Prince Ghazi and H.E. Cardinal Angelo Scola, the Patriarch of Venice, June 22, 2008



H.E. Metropolitan Vladimir, Metropolitan of ChiÅŸinÅŸu and all Moldova, February 24, 2009



King Abdullah II and H.M. Queen Rania with, H.H. Pope Benedict XVI May 9, 2009



American Baptist Delegation with H.R.H. Prince Ghazi December 8, 2010



H.B. Ignatius Zakka I, Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, October 23, 2011



Maronite Church Patriarch Mar Bechara Al-Rahi March 10, 2012



World Orthodox Church leaders pray for peace at the Baptism Site May 28, 2014



H.H. Pope Tawadros II and his delegation with H.R.H. Prince Ghazi at the Baptism Site November 3, 2016



The Church of Scotland, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Derek Browning, Moderator with H.R.H. Prince Ghazi April 30, 2018

In January 2021, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, reaffirmed the location of the baptism of Jesus Christ as on the eastern side of the Jordan River, in Jordan. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa told the Catholic News Service:

It is clear from the historical, archaeological, and indeed all the points of view that the actual site of Jesus Christ's baptism (in the Jordan River) is on the Jordanian side. Traditionally, historically and according to the Bible, it is on this side ... "Bethany Beyond Jordan" was excavated more than 25 years ago, revealing church foundations from the Romans and Byzantines. It is believed that these buildings were constructed to commemorate the site of Christ's baptism. Since then, "Bethany Beyond Jordan" has become a hotspot for pilgrims, welcoming over 100,000 visitors per year.

Part Three

THE INSCRIPTION OF
THE BAPTISM SITE
ONTO THE WORLD
HERITAGE LIST 2015

THE INSCRIPTION OF THE BAPTISM SITE ONTO THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST 2015

The preparation of both the Dossier and Management Plan for the inscription of the Baptism Site onto the World Heritage List was initiated by H.R.H Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan in 2013. The purpose was to preserve the religious, spiritual, historical, archaeological and natural values of the Site for generations to come.

A specialized Jordanian team of experts was formed and it prepared the files for both the Dossier and Management Plan which were required by the World Heritage Center for evaluation. Having received the files, an expert was sent to examine the site and see whether it matched their requirements and aligned with the files which had been sent. His first response was very positive, saying that all issues were very well taken care of at the Site. He noted that the Baptism Site was among the best-preserved sites he had personally examined. The authenticity, integrity, preservation works and outstanding universal values were very well maintained.

H.R.H Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad's foreword in the dossier conveyed a clear message. It indicated the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's tremendous interest in supporting the establishment and preservation of the Site. Despite Jordan's economic challenges, every single Jordanian government (from Prime Ministers, to Ministers of Tourism and Water and Irrigation, to parliamentarians) has spared no effort or expense over the last two decades to support the establishment of the Baptism Site. Indeed, no other country in our times has gone so far out of its way to protect the heritage of another religion for that other religion. In his foreword, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi underlined:

Adding the Baptism Site to the UNESCO World Heritage List will thus not only afford it an extra layer of international protection that will ensure its continuity in the future, it will also support a culture and heritage of world interfaith harmony, in sha' Allah.

In 2015 the Jordanian delegation went to Bonn, Germany to participate in the meeting of the World Heritage Committee for its 39th session to nominate the Baptism Site onto the World Heritage List. The delegation was headed by His Excellency Mr. Nayef Al- Fayez, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities and he was accompanied by His Excellency Mr. Makram Al-Qaisi, Jordanian Ambassador to UNESCO. The delegation also included His Excellency Dr. Monther Jamhawi, Director General of the Department of Antiquities, and Engineer Rustom Mkhjian, Assistant Director General of the Baptism Site Commission and other experts.

During the discussion sessions, the delegation was determined to enhance their efforts to register the Baptism Site on the World Heritage List with strong support from members of Arab countries (Lebanon, Algeria and Qatar) and all 92 member states of the World Heritage Committee. All twenty-one members unanimously supported the inscription of the Baptism Site on July 3, 2015. They also thanked the Jor-

danian government for its crucial role in the preservation of such an important site for Christians and in building bridges between all religions and all humankind.



Jordanian delegation members of the World Heritage sessions in Bonn-Germany 29th June, 2015



The moment the Baptism Site was inscribed on the World Heritage List, 3rd July, 2015

DECISION: 39 COM 8B.10
BAPTISM SITE ‘BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN’
(AL-MAGHTAS), JORDAN

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC-15/39.COM/8B and WHC- 15/39.COM/INF.8B1,
2. Inscribes Baptism Site ‘Bethany Beyond the Jordan’ (Al- Maghtas), Jordan, on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (iii) and (vi);
3. Takes note of the following provisional Statement of Outstanding Universal Value:

Brief synthesis

The Baptism Site ‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’ (Al-Maghtas) is located in the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea. The site contains two distinct archaeological areas, tell el-Kharrar, also known as Jabal Mar Elias, and the area of the Churches of St. John the Baptist. ‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’ is of immense religious significance for the majority of the denominations of the Christian faith who have accepted this site as the location where Jesus of Nazareth was baptized by John the Baptist. This reference encouraged generations of monks, hermits, pilgrims and priests to reside in and visit the site, and to leave behind testimonies of their devotion and religious activities, dating from between the 4th and the 15th century CE. At present, the site has regained a popular status as a pilgrimage destination for Christians, who continue to engage in baptism rituals at the site.

Physical remains associated with the commemoration of the historic baptism of Jesus include a water collection system and pools as well as churches, chapels, a monastery, hermit caves and pilgrim stations which were built later. These archaeological structures testify to the early acceptance of this as the authentic site. This early authentication led to the construction of churches and chapels, the habitation of hermit caves and pilgrimage activities. Beyond its key significance, the site is also associated with the life and ascension of Elijah (also called Elias) and the prophet Elisha, who are of common relevance to the monotheistic religions.

Criterion (iii): ‘Bethany beyond the Jordan’ represents in an exceptional way the tradition of baptism, an important sacrament in Christian faith, and with it the historic and contemporary practice of pilgrimage to the site. This tradition is illustrated by the archaeological evidence, which references the practice of baptism since the 4th century. The majority of Christian denominations accepted that Bethany beyond the Jordan is the authentic location of Jesus of Nazareth’s baptism, a conviction which strongly characterized historic and present practice of the cultural tradition.

Criterion (vi): The Baptism Site, ‘Bethany Beyond the Jordan’ (Al-Maghtas) is directly associated with the Christian tradition of baptism. The property is of highest significance to the majority of Christian denominations as the baptism site of Jesus

of Nazareth and for millennia has been a popular pilgrimage destination. Its association to this historic event, believed to have taken place at this location, and the contemporary rituals which are continued at the Baptism Site illustrate its direct association with the Christian tradition of baptism.

Integrity

The area proposed for inscription corresponds to the area administered by the Baptism Site Commission. It is maintained as a wilderness area and located within all the known archaeological remains which are considered to be of Outstanding Universal Value. All the elements necessary to read and understand the significance conveyed by the Site are still present and are encompassed by the area. The size of the property allows the whole valley to be viewed and appreciated by visitors and in most directions integrates with the wider setting of the Jordan Valley. The property is well protected through heritage legislation but a construction moratorium should be issued to prevent any new constructions within the property.

Planned new structures in the buffer zone should be subject to construction guidelines which will be defined, and these would apply in particular to the churches and the planned pilgrimage village which should be considered under comprehensive Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA) before any approval were granted for construction.

Authenticity

The site of 'Bethany Beyond the Jordan' (Al-Maghtas) is considered by the majority of the Christian Churches to be the location where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. The continuing veneration of the site and pilgrimage to it is a credible expression of the spirit and feeling attributed to it and the atmosphere which the property conveys to believers. As the location of Jesus' baptism is described as 'wilderness', the preservation of the Zor, the green wilderness along the Jordan River, is essential to maintain this attribution. Despite the large volume of visitors to the site, a wilderness feeling still exists, which is enhanced by the natural materials and simple local construction methods that were used to build the shelter structures and visitor rest areas.

As it is such an important religious site, several Christian Churches wish to have a presence in chapels for veneration. Accordingly, locations just outside the property have been and continue to be allocated for the construction of churches. Although these modern structures could be seen as compromising the authenticity of the setting of the site, they do not impinge on or negatively impact the central area containing the archaeological remains.

The archaeological areas have been preserved in their original materials, but have in many places been restored by adding similar materials from the area to allow for easier interpretation or use of the structures. In some cases, archaeological fragments have been reassembled and at times restoration work could be seen as reducing the authenticity in material and workmanship.

Protection and management requirements

The property is designated as an antique site according to Antiquities Law 21/1988, art. 3, par 8. This law prohibits destruction, damage or alteration of the antiquity itself and regulates development works around it, so as to avoid major impact on the antiquity and on its contextual perception. The property and its buffer zone are likewise protected by the Jordan Valley Authority Laws and at the site level by the By-Laws of the Baptism Site Commission. The objective of these laws is to protect the property from potential future threats, focused mainly on development and tourism projects that might jeopardize the nature and character of the Site and its immediate surroundings. It is recommended that a construction moratorium be issued for the property to prevent any new constructions except those exclusively dedicated to the protection of the archaeological remains.

The veneration of the place, the presence of several church communities and continuing pilgrimage adds a level of traditional protection. It is not in the interest of the Christian communities that the property loses its character and accordingly visitation is arranged which pays respect to the site's significance.

The protection measures at both the national level and in particular by the Baptism Site Commission are effective and will, if consistently implemented, prevent negative impact to the property. The World Heritage Committee further encouraged all concerned State Parties to ensure the protection of the western banks of the Jordan River to preserve important vistas and sightlines of the property.

The authority responsible for the management of the Baptism Site, Bethany Beyond the Jordan is the Baptism Site Commission, which is directed by an independent board of trustees appointed by H.M. King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein and chaired by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad. Revenues generated on site are utilized for the administration and management of the property. As a result of these financial resources, the management team is well staffed and qualified.

The management is guided by a preliminary management plan of January 2014, which is to be revised and completed to cover the aspects of risk preparedness, maintenance and visitor management. It should also integrate regular reviews to evaluate achievements and revise objectives. The current management arrangements already in place are largely adequate. Visitor access is controlled at one single entrance gate, which allows not only for the control of visitor numbers but also for the distribution of information. Specific paths which protect the remaining wilderness character of the site are laid out for visitor walks and pilgrim processions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The official baptism site of Jesus Christ is in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Any other site that claims to be the baptism site of Jesus is simply an invention for tourists and lacks the authenticity provided by an unbroken historic tradition and archaeological remains.

Within the small geographic location of the Baptism Site today, many important Biblical events took place. The small, low hill was given various names throughout history, including Mount Hermon, 'Tell Mar Elias' or Elijah's Hill. The rediscovery was initiated by the visit of H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad accompanied by the late Father Michele Picirillo in 1995. Excavations led to the discovery of the Rhetorios Monastery that is associated with three important Biblical events: Elijah's ascension to heaven, Elisha receiving his commission as a prophet and John the Baptist starting his ministry. John had been living in a simple cave that was turned into a church. Continuing along the spring where John the Baptist baptized believers towards the River Jordan to the west, many hermit cells are on either bank of the valley. Midway between Elijah's Hill and the River, a pilgrims' station served by a large baptismal pool was discovered, clearly indicating that pilgrims visited the site and stayed there on their pilgrimage route following the trails of the prophets in the Holy Land. Amidst the tamarisk trees, surrounded by the River Jordan, the most important location is that of the remains of five uniquely-designed churches and a unique cruciform baptistery. These had been built during the Byzantine period and up to the Islamic periods. They also mark a very important spot and event, namely the place where John met Jesus Christ and baptized him. It is the place where Jesus Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit, marking the beginning of his ministry and the beginning of Christianity.

The Baptism Site is protected to preserve the way John and Jesus Christ saw it, enabling visitors today to experience the spirituality of the place at each and every stop they make and link them with the important Biblical events that took place there. This small geographic location is known by many different names. According to different editions of the Bible, it is known as either 'Bethany beyond the Jordan' or 'Bethabara beyond the Jordan'. The locals call it 'Al-Maghtas', and it is also known as the Baptism Site. It might be small in area, but it has been part of the inspiration of some of the modern world's great messages such as The Amman Message, the A Common Word initiative and The World Interfaith Harmony Week. These are messages of peace and love much needed by humanity today.

Jordan and its Royal Hashemite Family's custodianship, care, protection and love for the Baptism Site is a shining example of a country that has spared no effort to protect the heritage of another religion.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I : REPORTS OF THE ANNUAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES OF JORDAN (ADAJ)

1. ADAJ 2003: John the Baptist Church Area / Architectural evidence.
2. ADAJ 2004: John the Baptist Church Area / New evidence regarding the basilica and four piers.
3. ADAJ 2005: Preliminary report / Rhetorius monastery / Bethany beyond the Jordan.
4. ADAJ 2007: Bethany beyond the Jordan where Jesus was baptized.
5. ADAJ 2008: Bethany beyond the Jordan “The heart of the Holy Land”.

JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH AREA: ARCHITECTURAL EVIDENCE

*Rustom Mkhjian and Chrysanthos
Kanellopoulos*

Introduction

Bethany beyond the Jordan is located in al-Kafrayn region, east of the Jordan River, about 8 kilometers north of the Dead Sea. Important architectural remains along the Wfidi at-Kharrâr (عُيُود)

i) include memorial churches and monasteries, hermit cells, a caravanserai, a large pool and a site associated with Mary the Egyptian; these were excavated under the direction of Mohammad Waheeb of the Department of Antiquities (see Waheeb 2001; 2002). The Department of Antiquities requested assistance from the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) for the documentation phase of the project. In the first phase, Engineer Fawwaz Ishaqat of Hashemite University carried out a survey of the entire site, which made it possible to link all of the structures. The ground plans and elevations are in part based on material created by draftsman Safinaz Kubagah. Her plans and sections were updated and connected following the results of Ge survey.

The present study focuses on the memorial churches 300 meters east of and 70 meters north of the present course of the river (Fig. 1). The site is called the "John the Baptist Church Area" (Fig. 2) and includes the following structures (the descriptions in parentheses are those used by M. Waheeb (2001)): Pillared Hall (the first church); Lower Basilica (the second church); Basilica (the third church); Room South of the Basilica (Mosaic Pavement); Staircase; four piers; Chapel (the found church); and Later Structures (Late Islamic Structures).

Pillared Hall (the first church)

The pillared hall is built on sandy soil, at an absolute level of -394.810m, compared to -400.000m on the lowest floor of the site and compared to the level of the Jordan River on January 15, 2003, -402.000m. The remains of a set of stone pillars (Fig. 3) running EW and NS are evident. They consist of nine in the EW direction (total length of

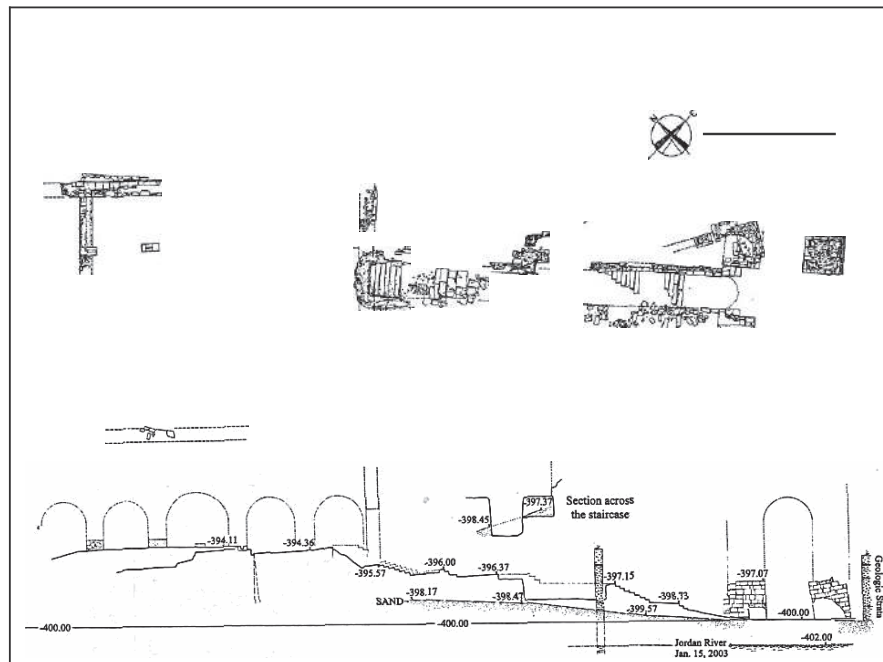


1. Aerial photograph of the area of the John the Baptist Church (center of picture) and the meandering river (Photo produced by the Royal Geographic Centre).

25.15m), and possibly six in the NS direction (total length 25.80m). The existence of that many pillars is evidence by: 1. The remains of foundations for two pillars along the south wall of the "third church" (B6 and C6 in Fig. 3); 2. The distances between the NS piers; 3. The material and mortar used; 4. The dimensions of the foundations; and 5) The level of the extant foundations.

The foundations vary in size (A, C, E, G, and I

-9-



e. Elevation of the site; section across the Basilica (the third church) and the staircase and the structure with Stour piers (drawing by Chrysanthos Kanellakopoulos).

ere larger than B, D, F, and H), but they are constructed of fieldstone of average size bound together by a cementing material of gray color with plaster remains noticed at the surface of some of the foundations. The pillars also vary in size. Sandstone ashlar were used in building the outer sides of the pillars, whereas the core consisted of fieldstone and cementing material. The pillars were raised to a minimum height of 2.5m judging from the remains of one of them (E2).

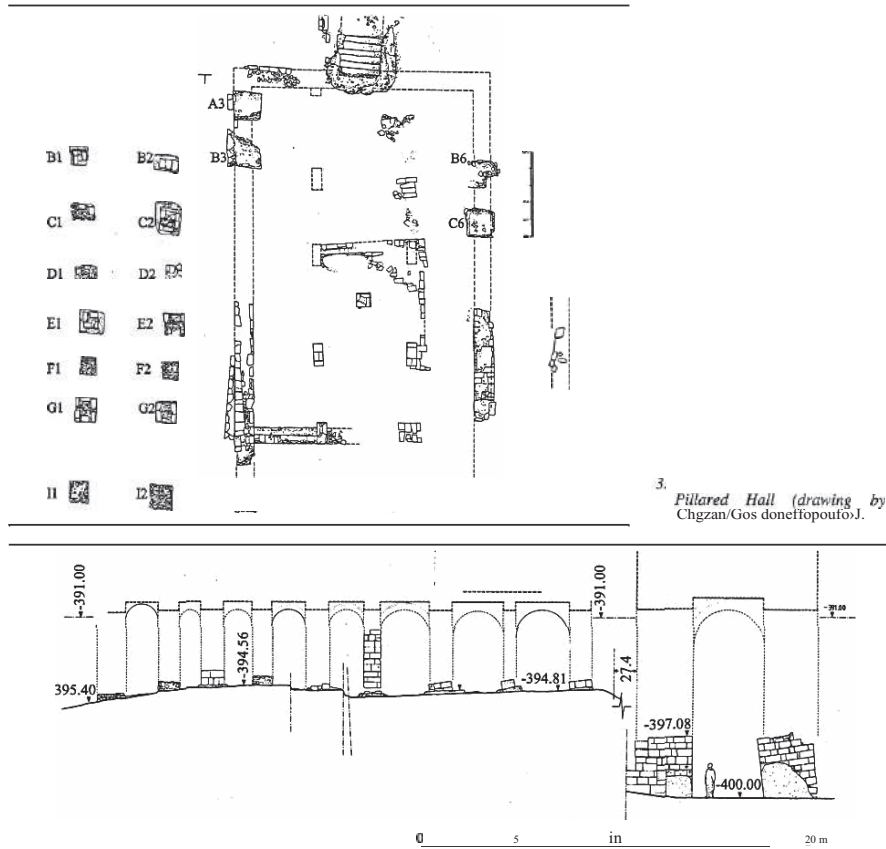
A large number of sandstone ashlar were found between the set of piers E and F, 1 to 3: some of these ashlar were covered with a whitish plaster. Some fragments of white, medium-sized mosaic tesserae were also found just to the east of piers A2 and A3.

We can therefore conclude that these sets of pillars were designed to carry or support a large platform that, in turn, might have supported or formed the elevated floor of a monastery, basilica, or any other structure. The lack of a floor supports

the identification of the set of pillars as the infrastructure for an elevated building.

Power Basilica (the second church)

Test trenches in the western parts of both the northern and southern aisles of the Basilica uncovered marble floors of various geometrical shapes and colors (Wabeeb 2001: 421, fig. d), generally tilting towards the west with fallen ashlar directly over the SW pan of the marble pavement. Pans of the southern wall of the Lower Basilica could also be seen in those trenches. Since the sections formed by the difference in height between the floor levels of the "the second and the third churches"—about 2m in its westernmost pans— included mixed material such as marble fragments, ashlar, pottery, etc., and since the walls of the Basilica were partly built of the remains of the Lower Basilica, it can be assumed that the Basilica overlaid the remains of the Lower Basilica and made use of those remains to strengthen its foundations.



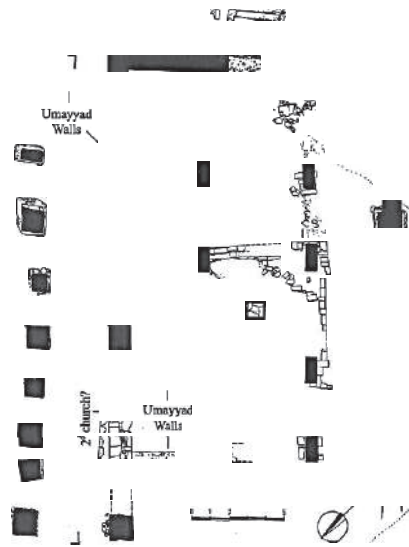
Since the floor tilts to the west, floods from the west must have caused the destruction of the Lower Basilica, undermining its foundations. This is an indication that the main course of the river was probably just west of the Lower Basilica. Floods would also be the cause of the destruction of the Basilica itself since most of its western parts have vanished. Because it would have been inappropriate to excavate through the floor of the Basilica to expose the complete remains of the Lower Basilica, not much more can be said about it.

An oblique wall (see Fig. 5) against the north

wall of the Basilica (the third church) incorporates a reused pilaster capital with a cross. This wall is identified by Waheeb (2001: 420, fig. 3) as a feature of the second church. This oblique wall is founded on high ground, is almost deprived of foundations, and could be attributed to a later phase of development.

Basilica (the third church)

Although it was built at a ground level higher than the surrounding remains, relatively little remains of the Basilica. The building (Figs. 2, 4) had a minimum length of 27m and a width of 15.80m.



5. Plan of the Pillared Hall and of the Baptism site (6th century) with the remains of the Umayyad walls noted (drawing by Chrysanthos Kanelopoulos).

interior width of 13.38m); the floor was at —394.11m. The interior dimension of 15.80m equals 50 standard early Byzantine feet measuring 0.315m each (Underwood 1948; Chen 1989: 203). Since the basilica was partly built over the remains of earlier structure (the Lower Basilica and the Pillared Hall), its construction made use of these remains as foundations, especially for its northern and southern walls. Elsewhere, the foundations are of fieldstone of medium size, well cemented with a greyish lime mortar, the height of the walls according to the original topography. The existing external walls indicate that these were built of sandstone ashlar forming both the inner and the outer skins, with a mixture of fieldstone and sandstone pieces cemented together forming the core of the walls. These have an average width of 1.10 meters. Rectangular piers with section dimensions of 1.30 x 0.58m and 1.42 x 0.58m supported the roof. The western most, standing piers are spaced 3.42m apart. Certain blocks at foundation level can be interpreted as infrastructure for more piers. The clear width of the nave is 5.12m and that the south and north aisles are 3.45 and 3.63m respectively.

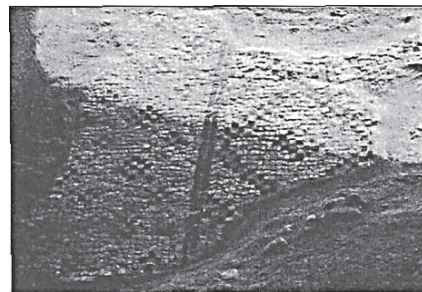
Features in the central aisle include the sandstone foundations for the chancel screen, a rectangular apse measuring 7.6m long (N-S) and in its center the altar (= 0.80m), made of sandstone (remaining marble slabs on both its western and southern sides indicate it was revetted with marble). West of the altar are the remains of a mosaic floor of medium size, colored tesserae; among the motifs, a vase with two handles and flowers can be noted. On the east corner of the vase a rosette is depicted.

North of the altar there was a marble floor of geometrical design (*opus sectile*). The marble has totally vanished but the underlying mortar (of grayish color) retains the impressions of the pattern. The remains of a wall foundation of an apse built of sandstone indicate the extent of the rectangular apse.

In both the northern and southern aisles, only the floor bedding survives, with some remains of a mosaic floor; in the eastern part of the northern aisle (Fig. 6) is a geometric motif with large colored tesserae. These fragile remains need special attention and that is one of the reasons why the eastern part of the northern wall has been restored; the western part of its southern wall has been restored; and the eastern part of the southern wall will be restored in the future. A reversible shelter to protect the Basilica was also installed (Fig. 7).

Most of the western parts of the Basilica are totally destroyed to the level of the foundations, an indication again of the continuous flooding in the area.

A hall, 4m wide and about 6m long, exists just east of the sanctuary wall. Its floor has settled to the west (just as the staircase has settled). The remaining fragments of marble of various geometric shapes and colors and the mortar underlayment exposed where the marble is missing show that the



6. Remains of the mosaic floor in the eastern part of the northern aisle of the Basilica (photo by Rustom Mkhjian).



7. The shelter protecting the remains of the Basilica (photo by Rustom Mkhjian).

hall was totally paved with marble.

The Basilica is in line with the staircase to the east that leads to the lower structure with the four piers.

Room South of the Basilica (Mosaic Pavement)

A room, 3.60m wide, is attached to the south wall of the Basilica. The southern, eastern and western ends of the room are not defined, but it is paved with a mosaic floor. The floor has a geometric motif with large colored tesserae, similar to the remains in the northern aisle of the Basilica (Fig. 8).

It is important to note that the room suffered from settlement in its western parts; the settlement was probably caused by water flowing directly to the west, which undermined this room. The function of this room is not very clear, but it appears to be auxiliary to the Basilica.

Staircase

A staircase (Figs. 2, 9) with a total length of ca.



8. The mosaic pavement adjacent to the southern wall of the Basilica (photo by Rustom Mkhjian).

31m runs from the floor of the Basilica (the third church) and descends 5.89m eastward towards the lowest point uncovered, a pavement found among the four piers (the pavement is not shown on the plan). The width of the staircase is 2.4m, with side-walls 0.7m wide to the north and south sides. The whole staircase is settled in its western part by about 4 degrees (Fig. 10). The inclination of the entire staircase is roughly homologous to the original slope of sandy soil upon which the steps were built.

The stairs and sidewalls had a strong foundation about 1m thick in which average sized boulders were used with grayish lime cement. Well cut rocks (oil shale), dark gray in color and having relatively large dimensions, covered the foundations to form the steps and ramp (it may be that the steps and ramp were partially covered with water during some periods of the year).

The northern wall seems to have functioned as a retaining wall at its lowest, easternmost end, holding back the natural soil. It was constructed of average size sandstone ashlar joined with a thin layer of mortar, whereas the backfill consisted of average size boulders joined by lime cement. Some cross marks are observed at its lowest end, near the area of the four piers. The western parts of this wall, which seems to have been higher than the topsoil at



9. The western part of the staircase from the west (photo by Rustom Mkhjian).



10. Western part of staircase from the south with the western wall collapsed to a lower depth (photo by Rustom Mkhjian).

the time of its construction, is almost totally destroyed and indicates strong flooding of the river. A high risk of floods still exists; the area was inundated on February 24th and March 27th, 2003.

Enough remains of a side entrance to the staircase to the north to show it had a width of 1.30m with sidewalls that were 0.70m thick. This was also built of sandstone ashlar.

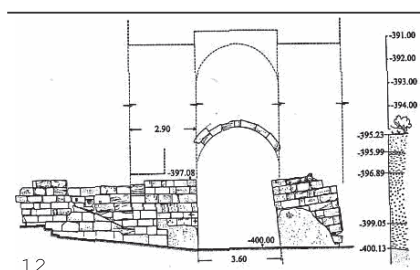
The south wall of the staircase has totally collapsed southward to a depth lower than the staircase itself. This indicates that the natural level south of that south wall was of a lower level than the steps at this point along the descent (Figs. 9, 10). Therefore, water may have raised that high at some point in time, thereby undermining the foundations.

The Four Piers

The remains of three massive, well built piers are at the lowermost end of the staircase (Figs. 2, 11). Two of them stand to a height of 3m and there are the poor remains of a third pier to the SW. It appears that these belong to an original arrangement that consisted of four piers. The fourth (SE) pier has almost totally vanished, but can be assumed by symmetry, and excavations carried out in the summer of 2002 uncovered a few ashlar and field stones scattered in the presumed location of the SE pier.

Hence there were at least four piers at the eastern end of the staircase, and they were built to carry or withstand great pressures. Because of their location at the point where the Wadi al-Kharrar met the river or one of its offshoots, the piers suffered great damage: the southern piers have all but vanished; the CIE pier tilts about 4 degrees (from the vertical plane) towards the west, while the NW pier tilts about 1 degree to the east (Fig. 12).

The NE pier is almost square in plan (2.70 x 2.80m), while the NW pier has a length of 2.25m but its other sides cannot be measured because it



12. Section through piers and the piered structure (drawing by Chrysarhas Karralopoulos).

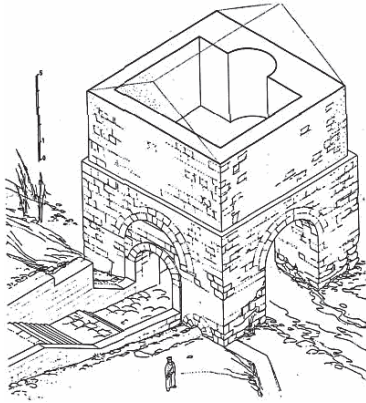
was not excavated as a chapel lies over it. The distance separating the piers at the top is 3.38m and at the bottom is 3.60 to 3.65m.

The overall arrangement is 9.25 x 9.25m*. The area inside the piers is paved with large flagstones, and is about -400.000m to -400.013m, thus about 2m above the water level of the Jordan River (which was 402.000 m on January 15th, 2003).

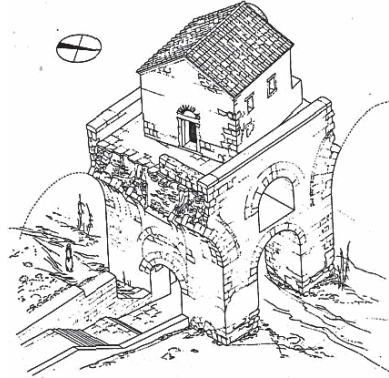
Sandstone ashlar, about a foot high, were used to construct the outer skins of the piers, which in turn had a core densely filled with fieldstone and sandstone pieces well cemented with a lime mortar. At the tower parts of the existing piers grayish plaster covering them is still well attached (total thickness of 15-20mm) with hundreds of cross marks incised all over them. Inscriptions were also noted on the southern part of the NW pier.

A study of the arch stones found in the center of the four piers indicated that they belonged to arches of about 1.8m in radius. Knowing that the distance between the piers is about 3.50 — 3.60m, we could conclude that they belonged to arches and vaults on top of the piers (Figs. 12, 13).

Remains of a large arched gateway with door-jambs, each 1.1m wide, are in the western pair of piers. The clear opening of the gate is 2.50m, thus



13. Hypothetical reconstruction of the piers carrying a Chapel (drawing by Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos).



14. Hypothetical reconstruction of the "small square" church built on the piers of an older, ruined bridge over Wādī al-Kharrār (drawing by Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos).

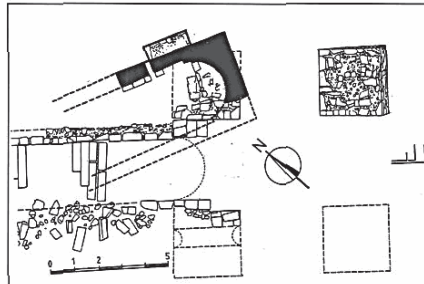
corresponding to the width of the staircase that leads from the four piers to the Basilica (the third church). In situ arch springers are found at a height of 1.80m above floor level, allowing for reconstruction of the arched gate. Thus the overall height of the latter can be calculated to be 3.00 to 3.05m.

During the documentation project, consideration was given to whether the four piers could in fact be the remains of a bridge over Wādī al-Kharrār. William Francis Lynch's 1848 map of the Jordan River documents the ruins of two Roman bridges, both considerably north of this site. At this site, Lynch marks "Pilgrim's Ford" (Rook 1998 "Sketch Map of the River Jordan": 17, illustration "Ruined bridge of Semakh"). According to this scenario, the "small square church" that is described by Arculfus as standing on four vaults, would in fact be built on the standing piers of an older, ruined bridge (see below, conclusions and Fig. 14). However, examination of the excavated area and extant remains did not identify any features, either — in sequence or in correspondence with the extant set of piers, — that could be interpreted as bridge elements. The mere existence of a gate leading to the banks underneath the piers structure would be somewhat unusual for a bridge. The piers structure is closely associated with the Staircase and the axial approach to the Basilica, thus allowing for a Byzantine date for the massive piers.

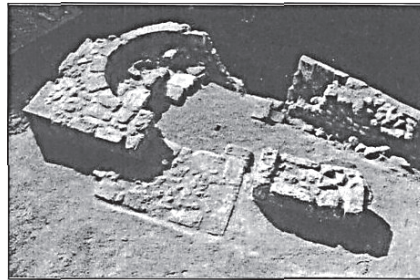
Chapel (the fourth church)

At some point, after the destruction of the four piers, a small Chapel was built on the remains of the NW pier. The existing remains of the Chapel show that it was built using materials similar to all the churches mentioned above. There is only one course of sandstone ashlar remaining in its northern and northeastern parts. However, these remains are enough to assume a Chapel of about 3.05m wide and 5m long (Figs. 15, 16). In the midst of the northern wall an entrance, 1.6m wide, led to the Chapel in which only the whitish bedding of the pavement now remains. The northern wall is 0.60m thick and was built using sandstone ashlars (0.30m high) on the outer and inner skins. The core of the wall is densely filled with boulders and sandstone pieces that are well cemented. The apse is incorporated within the rectangular external walls and is almost semicircular (0.95m deep, 2.25m wide) with the eastern wall about 0.85m thick. The apse floor is around 0.15m higher than the floor of the nave. Again, only the whitish bedding of the floor remains in the apse. In the center of the chancel screen there is a reused white marble capital with sandstone ashlars around it.

The architects made use of the best-preserved pier (the NW pier) as the main foundation for the Chapel. But it is important to note that the chapel was not built parallel to the pier walls. In other words, the Chapel is oriented almost exactly east-west, and was larger than the pier. Hence the fol-



15. Plan of the Chapel (drawing by Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos).



16. The Chapel from the north (photo by Rustom Mkhjian).

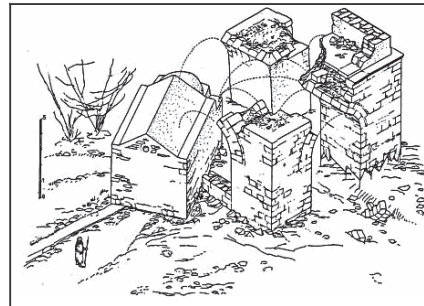
lowing can be deduced:

1. Floods and/or earthquakes had destroyed whatever superstructure the four piers carried, and debris filled the area.
2. The baptistery area below the structure of the four piers was no longer in use.
3. The staircase had partially collapsed and was covered by alluvial deposits.
4. The Basilica had also been destroyed; reused marble capital at the center of the chancel screen and other reused stones seen in the southern section of the Chapel are evidence of this.

It therefore appears that this small Chapel was a later memorial at a location held sacred, perhaps as a reminder of the original function of the four piers or of the structure that had been supported on those piers (Fig. 17).

Water Structures (Late Islamic Structures)

M. Wafieeb refers to a late Islamic layer in the Basilica (2001: 423, fig. 9; 2002; Abu Shmeis and Waheeb 2002). The plan of the related walls are incorporated in figure 5 and a hypothetical re-



18. Umayyad room built between the wall and the north colonnade of the Basilica (the third church) with the ruined Pillared Hall in the foreground (drawing by Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos).

construction is shown in Figure 18.

Conclusion

A comparison of the architectural remains with the historical texts is enlightening. For a prior discussion of a number of the texts see Waheeb (2001: 424-25). Although a great number of pilgrims visited the site, only a few described what they saw in any detail. In AD 530, *Theodor iiis* (14-15) said:

"In the place where the Lord was baptized there is a single marble pillar, and on the pillar an iron cross has been fastened. There too is the Church of S. John the Baptist, which the Emperor Anastasius built: this church is very lofty, being built above large chambers, on account of the Jordan when it overflows".

The connection between this account and the Pillared Hall has already been noted by Waheeb (2001: 425). The traveler of AD 670, *Arctic* (37-38) said:

"a stone bridge is carried on arches to the bank,

across which men go to the cross and descend by a slope to the bank, ascending as they return. At the edge of the river is a small square church, built, as is said, on the spot where the garments of the Lord were taken care of at the time He was baptized. This is raised, so as to be uninhabitable, on four stone vaults, standing above the waters, which flow below. It is protected above by blacked lime, and below, as has been said, is supported by vaults and arches. This church is in the lower ground of the valley through which the River Jordan flows".

Waheeb (2001: 425) associated this description with his third or fourth churches. However, it is more likely, given Arculfus's description of the church being "on four stone vaults", that what he saw was a structure carried on the four piers (Fig. 13 or, much less likely, Fig. 14). Arculfus' description of a slope might fit well with the staircase. His mention of a stone bridge, however, is more difficult unless there was once such a bridge out to the place where the cross was and there is now no trace of that structure.

Dating to AD 754, the text of St. Willibald (18) describes what is at the place where Jesus was baptized: "A church stands there now, raised up high on stone columns, and underneath the church is now dry ground, where our Lord was baptized in this very spot". This text would seem to be too late to be referring to the Pillared Hall, but might refer to the four piers and the presumed church above those piers. This theory would be reinforced by the fact that hundreds of cross marks were found in the lower parts of the piers. Pilgrims who were baptized in the place where they believed Jesus had been baptized presumably left these. A traveler in AD 1106-1107, A66or *Daniel* (27-28) said:

"It is a couple of good bow-shots from Hermon to the ancient Monastery of St. John, where there was a large church dedicated to St. John the Forerunner. Not far from the altar of this church, upon an elevation on the east side, there is a little chapel with an altar. This marks the place where John the forerunner baptized our Lord Jesus Christ. In the place where Christ was baptized is a tank from the river Jordan as far as a man can throw a small stone".

Given the date of this text it is probable that what he saw was the Chapel built on the ruins of the four piers.

The succession of structures at this site is testimony to the forces of nature and to the determination of file believers to build memorials at what they believed was the original site of the bap-

tisma of Jesus. had the structures been built in a less precarious location, they would probably have survived, albeit with modifications, into modern times. Floods and earthquakes, however, eventually destroyed the memorials until, at some point, the site was abandoned.

Acknowledgements

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JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH AREA NEW EVIDENCE Regarding The Basilica and Four Piers

Rustom Mkhjian

Introduction

The report published by the author and Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos in ADAJ 47/2003 focused on the analysis of the Architectural Evidence in an area of unique importance concluding that memorial churches were built in the original site of the Baptism of Jesus (John The Baptist Church Area).

Further investigation and excavations associated with the intended restoration works for 2004 have brought to light new evidence as regards the basilica and four piers (Mkhjian and Kanellopoulos 2003: figs. 2, 7, 9, 12, and 13) that in turn suggested a unique design of the basilica connected through a staircase to the east with a cruciform baptistery (4 piers) (Fig. 1).

The present study focuses on the validity of this theory concentrating on the recent finds, comparative studies and pilgrims' accounts.

Results of Excavations/ June 2003

Excavations were carried out at the eastern end of the Basilica to investigate its eastern end before its restoration, in order to protect the inner floor remains and arrive at a better understanding of the basilica and its plan.

The most important results were:



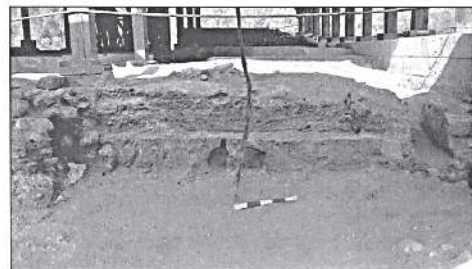
1. The remains of the four piers (Cruciform Baptistery), staircase and basilica (from the east).

¹ A field research through a cooperative agreement between DoA. and ACOR conducted by Dr. Tina Niemi and Alexander Dahne /University of Missouri (May 2004).

1- The discovery of the original mortar with clear indications of the stones that had disappeared at the eastern end of the northern aisle, hence leading to a more precise end of the basilica's eastern walls for both the northern and southern aisles. (Fig. 2)

2- The discovery of two relatively large masses of the bedding of the central aisle disconnected from its original floor by 20 centimeters (horizontally) and settled by about 30 centimeters (Figs. 3, 4).

Hence indicating devastating earthquakes¹ that disconnected the central aisle from the staircase.



2. The original mortar at the eastern end of the northern aisle (from the east).



3. The bedding of the central aisle disconnected by 20 centimeters horizontally.



4. The bedding of the central aisle settled about 30 centimeters (from the south).

- 3- The discovery of the original mortar at the northeastern corner of the central aisle running eastward (at 90 degrees to the above mentioned mortar of the northern aisle). Hence showing that the central aisle did not stop where both the northern and southern aisles ended, but extended further east (Fig. 5).

Comparative Studies

Basilicas

Many different forms of basilicas evolved throughout history. Whereas early Christians had different ground plans for their basilicas, (St. Stefano Rotondo in Rome / round building; St. Vitale in Ravenna / octagonal building; Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem / octagonal central space over the Cave of the Nativity on to a five-aisles basilica, and many other forms), today a basilica is understood to be a church building which has the following main properties:

- It must be longitudinal and must have several aisles.
- The nave must be raised, with a clerestory, an area with windows.



5. The northeastern corner of the central aisle running east (from the northeast).

- The main entrance must be at one narrow end and the sanctuary at the other.

Baptisteries

Baptisteries had different sizes and shapes too. Originally baptism could take place anywhere that running water could be provided, but later, as baptisms were performed in groups and for adults, they had to be of a certain minimum size and varied in shape and design (octagonal, round, square, cruciform, etc.).

In centralized buildings the baptismal font was set into the floor, frequently being cruciform having steps at the western and eastern ends. However, baptisteries could also be independent buildings, free-standing, or attached to a church, (S. Giovanni in Fonte / Rome; Hagia Sophia/ Constantinople, Qal'at Sam'an/ Syria, etc.).

Pilgrims Accounts

Arculfus (AD. 670, PPTS Vol. 3: 36- 38) said: "... a stone bridge is carried on arches to the bank, across which men go to the cross and descend by a slope to the bank as they return. At the edge of the river is a small square church, built, as is said, on the spot where the garments of the Lord were taken care of at the time He was baptized. This is raised, so as to be uninhabitable, on four stone vaults, standing above the waters, which flow below. It is protected above by slacked lime, and below, as has been said, is supported by vaults and arches. This church is in the lower ground of the valley through which the river Jordan flows..."

Epiphanius (AD 675, p. 74) said: "To the East of Jericho about eight miles away is the Jordan, and there is a small fort containing a large church, The Holy Trinity. On the riverbank is a church of The Forerunner".



6. The remains of the mosaic floor in the apse of the basilica just to the west of the altar.

St. Willibald (AD 754, PPTS Vol. 3: 27) said: "A church stands there now, raised up high on stone columns, and underneath the church is now dry ground. Where our Lord was baptized in this very spot".

Abbot Daniel (AD 1106-1107, PPTS Vol. 4: 27) said: "...upon an elevation on the east side, there is a little chapel with an altar. This marks the place where John the Forerunner baptized our Lord Jesus Christ. The place where Christ was baptized is distant from the river Jordan as far as a man can throw a small stone ...".

Conclusion

- The description of Arculfus of a slope, and a small square church built on four stone vaults standing above the waters which flow below might fit well with the four piers, staircase and ramp that was used as a cruciform baptistery at the place where the Lord was baptized. This theory would be reinforced by the fact that hundreds of cross marks were found in the lower parts of the two Northern piers that survived.
- The large church (the Holy Trinity) on a small fort described by Epiphanius might fit with the Basilica (the only piece of mosaic remaining in the apse area depicts a vase out of which 3 Palmette leaves appear, that might resemble the Holy Trinity/ Fig. 6). The Church of The Forerunner on the riverbank also fits the description of Arculfus.
- The church described by St. Willibald being raised up high on stone columns, with dry ground underneath at the spot where our Lord was baptized, also fits well with the descriptions of both Arculfus and Epiphanius adding that there is dry ground underneath, an indication, perhaps, that the river had moved away.
- Abbot Daniel's reference to a little chapel with an altar at the place where John the Forerunner baptized our Lord might well fit the Chapel located over the northwestern pier. But it is interesting to note the distance from the river being as far as a man can throw a small stone. Because it is a clear indication that the river constantly changed its course. This was also documented through the floods in February and March 2003. At the same time, the persistence of the believers to build churches in this specific point (the four piers) and to use it as a baptistery shows that they believed

it was the spot where Jesus was baptized by John.

- All the above leads us to suggest that a unique monumental cruciform baptistery was built with a church on top linked through a staircase with the Basilica to allow believers to descend with their sins to be baptized with running water at the spot they believed Jesus was baptized.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to H.R.H. Prince Ghazi Ben Mohammad, Head of the Royal Commission for The Baptism Site, for his support for the scientific works carried out by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan at the site. Her Excellency Dr. Alia Boran, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities for her trust in the team. His Excellency Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, Director General of DoA, for his continued guidance and support, Salt Office for their Co-operation in the excavations, and for the editorial board for their patience and assistance.

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PRELIMINARY REPORT RHETORIUS MONASTERY BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN

Rustom Mkhjian

Introduction

Rhetorius monastery is considered one of the most important sites in Bethany Beyond the Jordan chronologically and historically speaking. Since it is related to Elijah the prophet "with whose spirit and power John the Baptist came to the site from where Elijah ascended to the heavens to make ready a people prepared for the Lord". According to the description of some pilgrims and travelers. (Fig. 1).

As a result of continued cooperation between the Department of Antiquities (DoA) and the American Center for Oriental Research (ACOR) in the documentation and preparation of restoration plans for the Baptism site, the second phase took place in January – February 2005 concentrating on the monastery, where Engineer F. Ishaqat of the Hashemite University carried out the survey of the entire site.

The present study focuses on some pilgrims' accounts, descriptions of monasteries next to memorial churches, and the architectural remains of the monastery.

Pilgrims Accounts

Pilgrims and historians visited the site throughout history and carefully described what they saw, leaving us with their precious notes.

Among them were Theodosius, Antoninus, John Moschos, Willibald, Abbot Daniel, Theo-

derich and Abel.

Theodosius (530AD), said " ... Where the Lord was baptized beyond Jordan there is a little mountain called Hermon. There holy Elijah was caught up ... It is 5 miles from where the Lord was baptized to the place where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea".

Antoninus (570AD), added " ... On the far side of Jordan is a spring where St. John baptized. It is 2 miles from the Jordan. Elias stayed in this valley when the raven brought him bread and wine ... one and quarter miles from the river is the mountain of Elias. ... A host of hermits in the vicinity of the valley".

John Moschos (619AD), said " ... A monk called John wanted to set off from Jerusalem and visit Sinai. After he had crossed the Jordan, a fever gripped him and he was forced to rest in a cave. John appeared to him in this place, exhorting him not to continue any further on his journey, for this cave is greater than the whole of Mount Sinai. Our Lord often walked in it when he visited me. The monk obeyed and transformed the cave into a church, and gathered brethren about him. The place was called Sapsas, and to the left of it was the brook Chorath (Cherith) where Elias lived during the drought in Israel. So much for the story. Sapsas is an abbreviation of Sapsaphas of the map of Madaba, which marks this place and the monastery of the Baptist ...".

Willibald (754AD), said " ... the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, where there are about twenty monks. One night they remained there, and then went on above a mile to the Jordan, where our Lord was baptized ...".

Abbot Daniel (1106AD), said " ... not far from the river, a couple of bow-shots to the east, is the place where the prophet Elias was carried to heaven in a chariot of fire; and here, too, is the cave of St. John the Baptist. A beautiful stream of water, which flows over pebbles into the Jordan, is found here; the water is very sweet and very cold, and it was drunk by John, the Forerunner of Christ, when



1. Rhetorius monastery from north west (Rustom Mkhjian / 2005).

-403-

3. ADAJ 2005: Preliminary report/Rhetorius monastery/Bethany beyond the Jordan. [vol 49, pp. 403-410]

he inhabited this sacred cavern”.

Theoderich (1172AD), visited the place on the banks of the Jordan where our Lord was baptized, and went back to Jericho. He said “... more than sixty thousand men standing thereon, almost all of them carrying candles in their hands. ... there was a still larger number of pilgrims in Jerusalem who had recently visited this place. ... In the very place where our Lord was baptized by John there is a great stone”.

Abel (1932AD), visited the site carefully describing it, leaving us with precious notes and pictures; such as his picture on Elijah’s hill (Fig. 2).

Monasteries Next to Memorial Churches

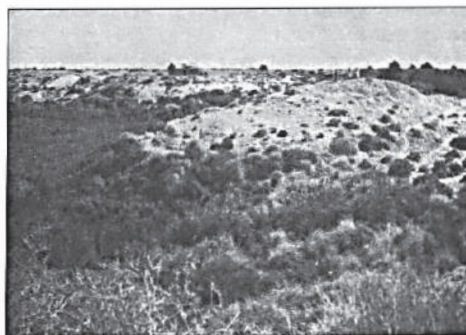
Various types of monasteries are noted in the Holy Land, such as the *Laura*, the *Coenobium*, the *Fortress Monasteries* and the *Monasteries next to memorial churches*.

Monasteries next to memorial churches were all coenobia, and were generally situated along the pilgrims’ route intending to serve the needs of pilgrims coming to holy places from all over the Byzantine Empire.

The monastery of St. Peters Church (Qasr ‘Alt), the monastery of St. Adam’s Church (Khān Ṣaliba), the monastery of Galgala (Ghallghals) and the monastery of St. Thon the Baptist (Qasr al-Yahūd) were all situated on the pilgrims’ route from Jerusalem to the traditional site of Jesus’ baptism. The distance between these monasteries being 5 to 10 kilometers.

The dominance of the church building and its separation from the other elements of the monastery is noted. And it is important to note that they also served as resting stations for pilgrims.

The Rhetorius monastery is one of the most important monasteries on the pilgrimage route, being the closest to the memorial churches where Jesus was baptized on the eastern part of the river Jordan.



2. A picture of Abel on Elijah’s hill from the west /1932.

Rhetorius Monastery (Figs. 3, 4)

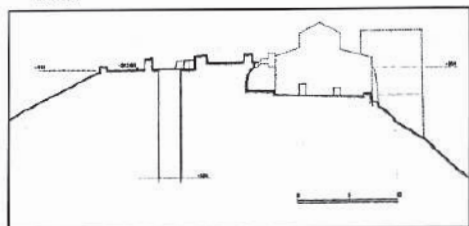
The monastery was named after Rhetorius the abbot who headed it. The inscription was found at the apse of the northern church at the monastery.

The monastery is located on a little hill about 5 miles north of the Dead Sea, constructed at the western edge of Wādī al-Kharrār that connects the monastery with the place where Jesus was baptized just east of the river Jordan today, at a distance of a mile to the west.

It is also on the pilgrimage route from Jerusalem and Bethlehem to Mount Nebo through Bethany beyond the Jordan, providing services to the visitors of the place where Jesus was baptized and many important biblical events took place.



3. Plan of Rhetorius monastery (Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos / 2005).



4. Section of the Rhetorius monastery EW (Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos / 2005).

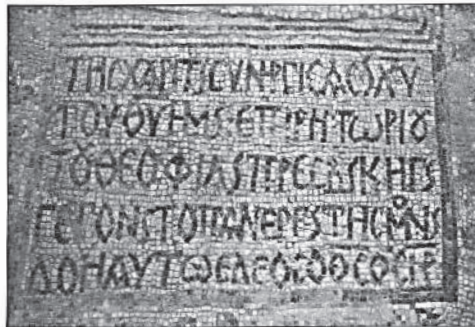
The Construction

As in the case of many archaeological sites, material available at or near the site were utilized for its construction; fields stones, sandstone ashlars, mud brick were used as the foundations and walls of the structures whereas reeds, bamboo and willow was likely to have been used in some cases as the ceiling of a structure.

A lime mortar was used between ashlars and to join the fieldstone used as foundations. It was also used as a base of mosaic floors and plaster of the inner walls and floors of some architectural elements (churches, cisterns, pools, etc.).

The monastery that was built in the fifth century AD on a small, low hill is surrounded by a wall from its eastern, northern and western sides and it consists of important archaeological and architectural elements:

- *The monks' living quarters:* that covers most of the northern area of the monastery and was badly damaged through natural causes.
- *The northern church:* is well preserved consisting of a rectangular apse (4.60m long x 4.22m wide) and a nave (9.65m long x 4.00m wide getting narrower at its western end). It has two entrances, in the northern and western walls leading into the nave. A colored mosaic floor includes geometric designs with the cross marks at their corners and center, within a surrounding frame. A Greek inscription set in the apse area reads: "By the help of the grace of Christ our God the whole monastery was constructed in the time of Rhetorius, the most God-beloved Presbyter and Abbot. May God the Saviour give him mercy" (Figs. 5, 6). The cave church: the cave church consists of two parts. A semi-circular apse was cut into the natural rock of the north-western edge of



6. The inscription in the apse of the northern church (Rustom Mkhjian / 2005).

the hill. Two lamp niches carved in its southern and eastern walls can be seen today with a chancel screen in front of the apse (2.30m wide x 1.85m long). The second part of the church consists of a nave and two aisles (9.65m long x 14.55m wide), separated by columns. Still in place are only the four column bases built of well-dressed, square-cut sandstone blocks, a few tesserae of the colored mosaic floor found *in situ* are well preserved and protected until today (Fig. 7).

- *The western part:* the western side of the hill, that is formed of lisan marl, was cut and the foundations of a retaining wall can be seen. A long corridor (4.0m wide x 28.0m long) extended from the south to the northern area leading into the cave church from the south. Part of the area found between the corridor and the retaining wall might have been used as a storage area.
- *The pools:* two pools rectangular in shape (3.80m x 3.00m and 4.30 x 2.30m) from the Late Roman period are located on the top of



5. The nave of the northern church from the east (Rustom Mkhjian / 2005).



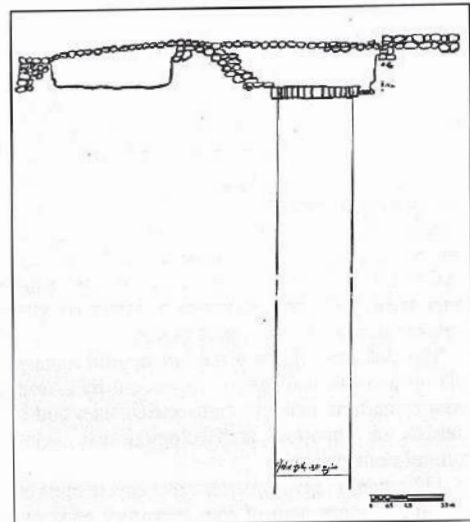
7. The cave church from the west (Rustom Mkhjian / 2005).

the northern edge of the tall overlooking the northern church. Excavations under the damaged floor of the north-eastern pool revealed a well dating from the Early Roman to Late Byzantine periods. Circular on top (2.10m in diameter), it is built of well-cut sandstone ash-lars, having a depth of 10 meters, hence arriving at the aquifer of the holy valley (Figs. 8, 9).

A third pool on the southern slope is rectangular in shape (5.30m long x 3.70m wide) has a staircase on its eastern side extending the full width of the pool (Figs. 10, 11).

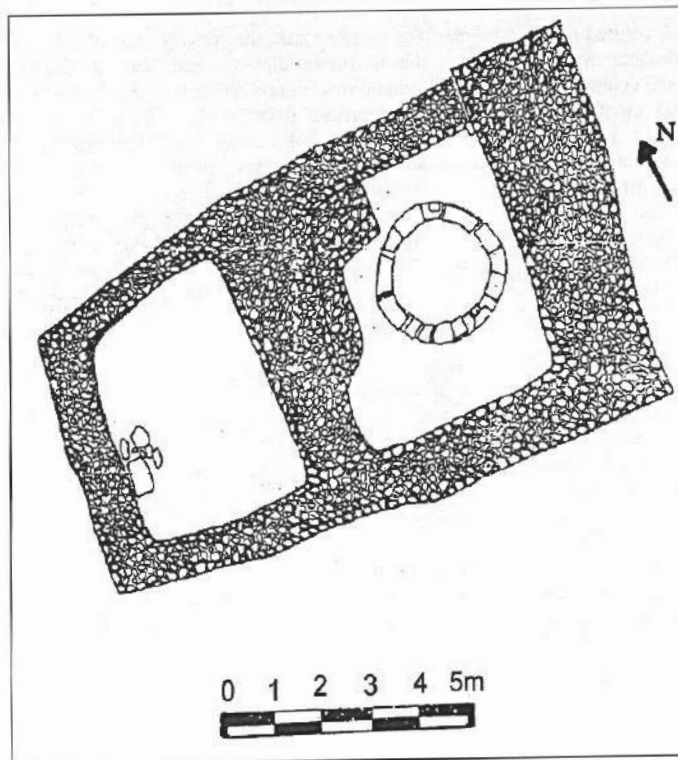
The southern part of the monastery consists of a water system, a chapel and a prayer hall:

- **Water system:** The water system is located between the prayer hall and the nearby small chapel. The water was carried to the system in ceramic pipes through settling basins before emptying into a cistern and a well connected with water channels. The cistern (6.30m long x 4.30m wide with a total capacity of approximately 100m cube) was dug out of the natural lisan marl rock, it is the largest reservoir discovered at the site, built during the

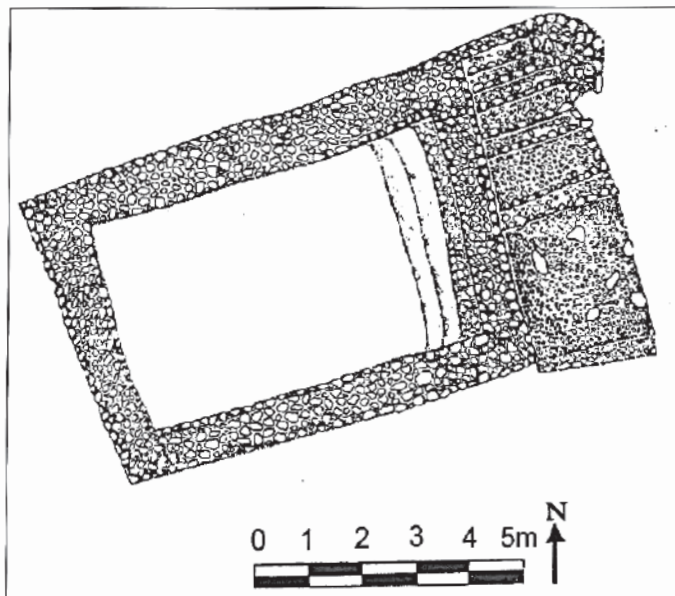


9. Section of the northern pools (Rustom Mkhjian / 2002).

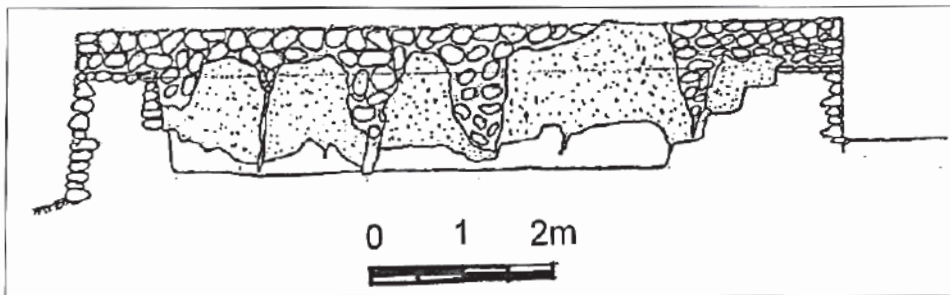
fifth and sixth centuries AD. Well-cut sandstone ash-lars were used to build its inner sides, while a thick layer of lime was added and cov-



8. Plan of the northern pools (Safinaz Kubagah / 2002).



10. Plan of the southern pool (Safinaz Kubagah / 2002).



11. Section of the southern pool (Rustom Mkhjian / 2002).

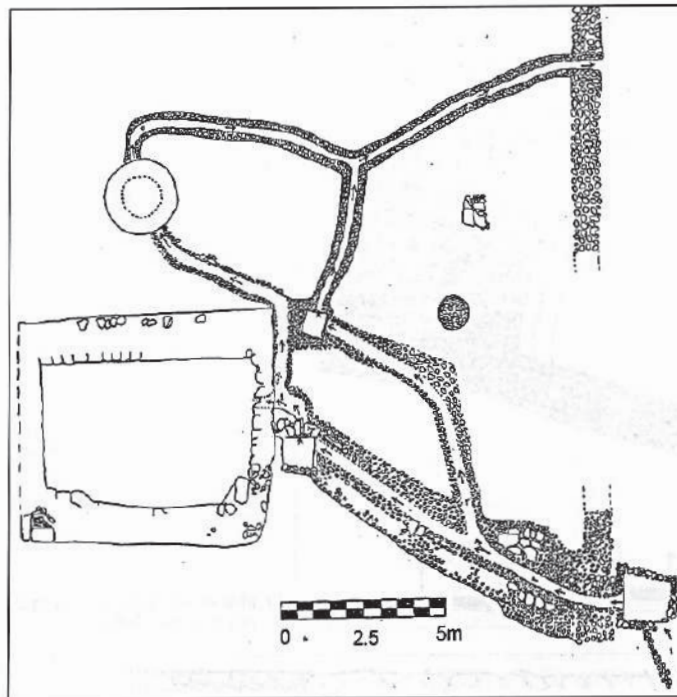
ered by a smooth layer of plaster to prevent any seepage. The cistern was roofed by a vault system and carried a white mosaic floor on top. A canal feeds a cylindrical well (3.25m in diameter x 5.40m deep with a total capacity of approximately 45m cube), is located near the northwestern corner of the cistern dating from the Byzantine period (Figs. 12, 13, and 14).

- **The chapel:** A rectangular chapel (13.65m x 9.45m) is located south of the main site, connecting it with the surrounding plain. It was built during the fifth – sixth centuries AD. It had a mosaic floor with cross decorations and arches supporting the roof, of which one has been restored (Fig. 15).

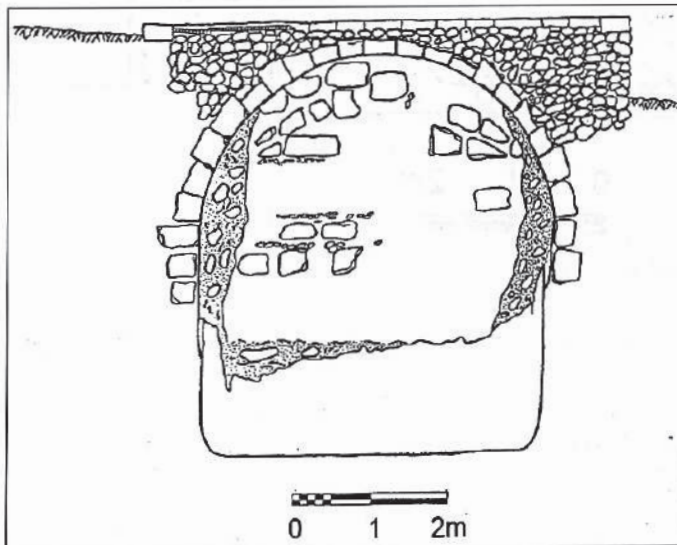
- **The prayer hall:** (10.70m x 7.40m) this presumed prayer hall dates from before the fourth century AD. It is a rectangular structure built of undressed fieldstones, a plain white mosaic pavement covers a large part of the floor. The ceiling was probably wooden (Fig. 16).

Conclusion

The Gospels verified Bethany beyond the Jordan as a site where many important prophetic actions took place, the pilgrims and historians visited and carefully described the site and its importance, the archaeological and architectural discoveries along with the mosaic map of Mādabā and the local community all together reassure the Holiness of



12. Plan of the water system (Safinaz Kubagah / 2002).



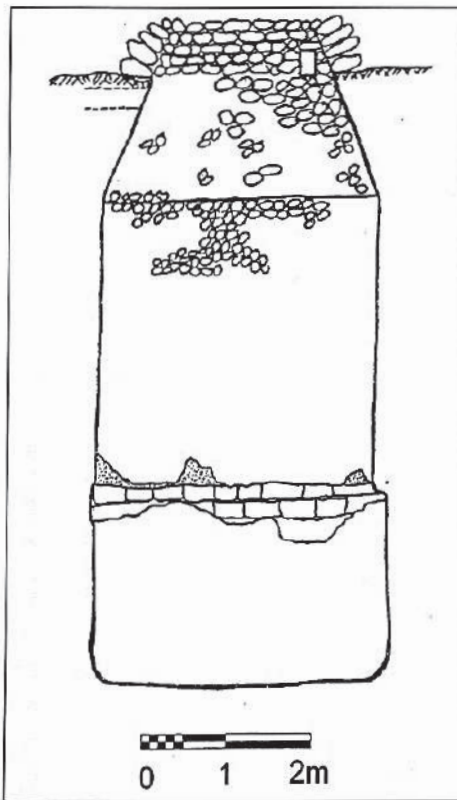
13. Section of the cistern looking west (Rustom Mkhjian / 2002).

this site.

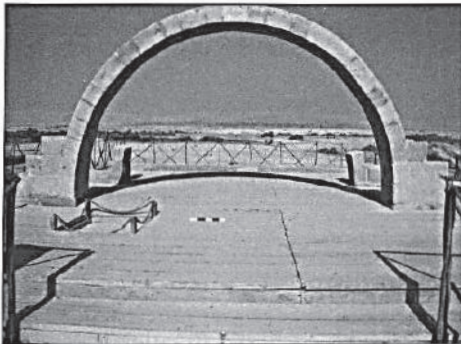
The Rhetorius monastery is unique in many ways too, although most of the pilgrims did not concentrate on its architecture, most of them linked it with the site from where Elijah ascended to the heaven and specified its distance from the place

where Jesus was baptized. It is one of the most important monasteries on the pilgrimage route, being the closest to the memorial churches where Jesus was baptized east of the river Jordan where large numbers of pilgrims arrived.

Although major parts of the monastery were de-



14. Section of the cylindrical well (Rustom Mkhjian / 2002).



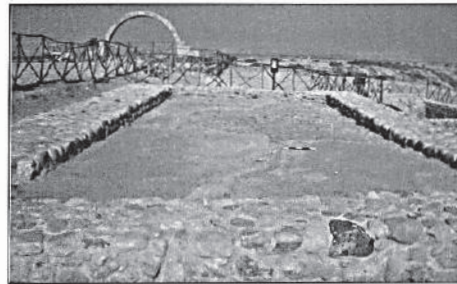
15. The chapel from the east (Rustom Mkhjian / 2005).

stroyed through natural causes, enough architectural remains allow the reconstruction of the monastery on paper.

For all this it took the attention it deserves as a site of unique importance for humanity.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to H.E. Dr. Fawwaz al-



16. The prayer hall from the east (Rustom Mkhjian / 2005).

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الربيع، هديل

٢٠٠٢ تقنية النظام المائي في وادي الخوار خلال العصر البيزنطي. رسالة ماجستير، الجامعة الأردنية، عمان.



BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN WHERE JESUS WAS BAPTIZED

Rustom Mkhjian

At this site, the past, the present, and the future meet. God and man meet in the path of salvation where the Old and New Testaments meet in an everlasting salvation path. Time will become one. A reality of soul and faith emerges stronger in the hearts of the believers as time goes on. The Gospels were clear to mark the place where Jesus was baptized and John the Baptist lived (the place had to be east of the Jordan River and opposite of Jericho city).

The mosaic map of the Holy Land, shows the former location of Aenon. Now Aenon is called Saphsaphas. Bethabara is depicted just west of the river; it is the place where John was baptized (That could be a mistake. Since it means "the house of crossing", the exact spot did not make much difference as long as it marked the place of crossing, proximity to the Dead Sea and surrounding cities).

It is interesting to analyze the animals that are depicted on the map in the area of Bethany beyond the Jordan. We note two fish: one goes toward the Dead Sea while the other faces away. The logical explanation is that fish do not live in the Dead Sea so they move north in the Jordan River. Fish were commonly used as a symbol of Christianity and baptism.

The presence of fish specifically at this point in the river Jordan signifies the spot where Jesus was baptized. This is where Christianity started. As for the deer that is chased by a lion, one might see the scene as "evil chasing good" or "the strong threatening the weak". In other words "Herod threatening John the Baptist who criticized his marriage with his brothers' wife"(Mathew: chapter 14).

The Pilgrims' and travelers' accounts and the archaeological discoveries are among the above mentioned sources of information that

enable us solve the "jigsaw puzzle" and form a comprehensive view of the important events that took place at the site. The crowning event is the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Memorial Churches at the Place Where Jesus was Baptized (Fig. 1)

Five uniquely deigned churches were built at the spot where Jesus was baptized. It is very important to note that the river Jordan arrived here at the time Jesus was baptized. This is the same time that the churches were built.

This sacred spot was visited by pilgrims who used the pilgrimage route between Jerusalem and Bethlehem up to Mount Nebo where Moses died. Among the Pilgrims who carefully described the spot are:

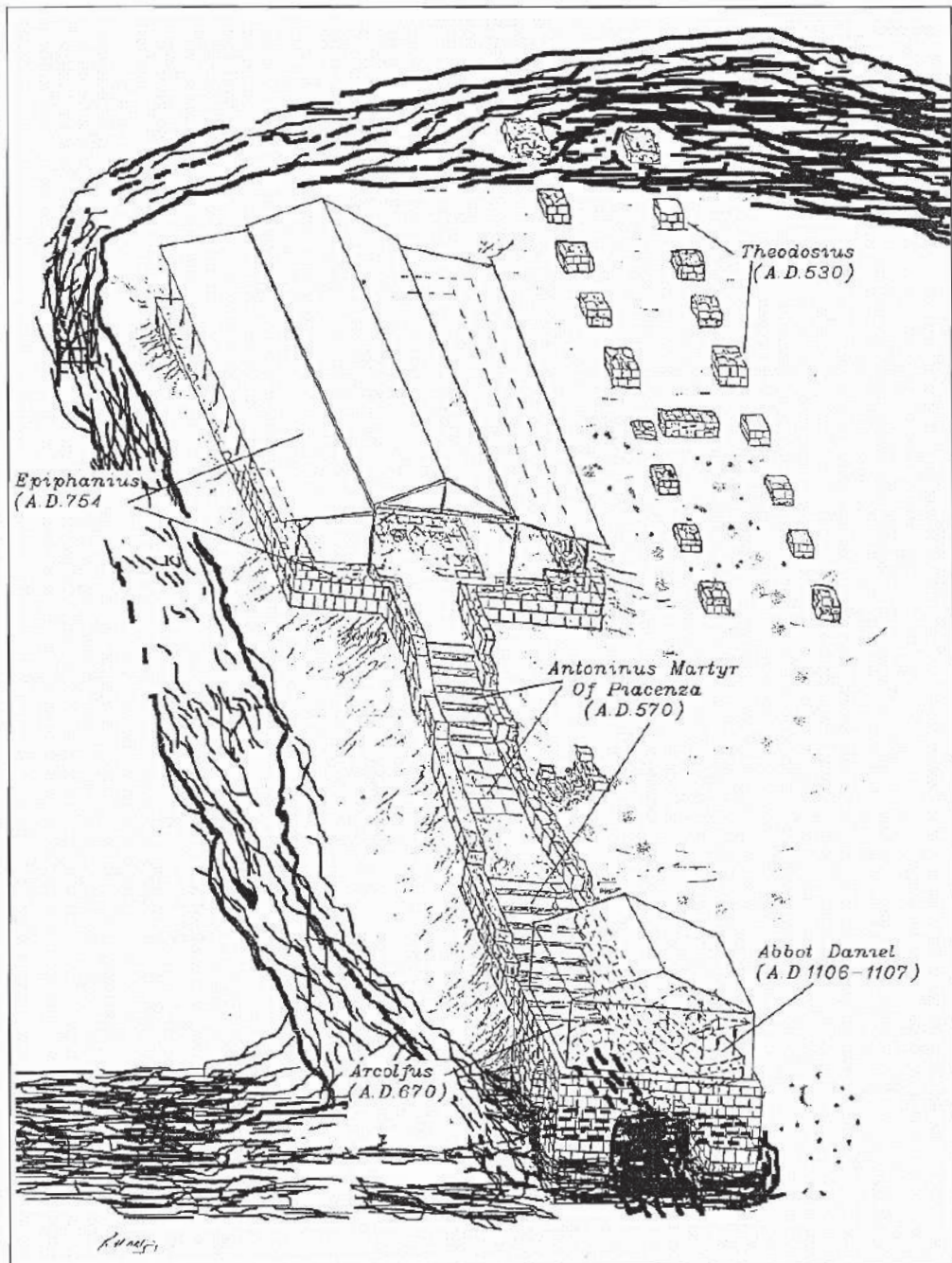
Theodosius (AD 530) wrote: "5 miles north of the Dead sea ...in the place where the Lord was baptized there is a single pillar and on the pillar an iron cross has been fastened, there too is the church of S. John the Baptist, which the Emperor Anastasius built: this church is very lofty, being built above large chambers, on account of the Jordan when it overflows".

Forty years later (AD 570) Antoninus of Piacenza added: "By the side of the Jordan,... where the Lord was baptized, at the place where the water returned to its bed, ... marble steps descend into the water".

One hundred years later Arculfus of France (AD 670) gave important notes, saying "At the edge of the river is a small square church, built, as is said, on the spot where the garments of the Lord were taken care of at the time when He was baptized. This is raised, so as to be uninhabitable, on four stone vaults, standing above the waters which flow below" (*We can see the 2 northern piers; the foundations of the southern*

4. ADAJ 2007: Bethany beyond the Jordan where Jesus was baptized.

[vol 51, pp. 239-241]



1. A drawing of the five memorial churches built at the place where Jesus was baptized. By Engineer Rustom Mkhjian.

piers were discovered recently. We have a huge cruciform baptismal pool, where pilgrims would descend through the marble steps to be baptized. In fact this is the only cruciform baptismal font on earth that used the river Jordan water, "running water", for baptism).

Important remains were also found at the same spot. We can now identify the remains of two basilicas, partly built on the remains of John the Baptist Church and uniquely designed. The basilicas are linked by marble steps to the east linking them with the monumental cruciform baptistery that used running water for baptism. Here the mantle church was built.

Epiphanius (AD 750-800) mentioned a huge church (the church of the trinity) being built at the bank of the river, a mile west of John the Baptist Monastery (Elijah's Hill) where he stayed overnight.

After the destruction of the 4 churches mentioned above, a chapel was built on the remains of the northwestern pier. **Abbot Daniel** (AD 1106-1107) wrote "The place where Christ was baptized is distant from the river Jordan as far as a man can throw a small stone. There is a little chapel with an altar. This marks the place where John the Forerunner baptized our Lord Jesus Christ".

The succession of uniquely designed churches at the edge of the river is a testament to the forces of nature and to the determination of the believers to build memorials at the place where they believed Jesus to have been baptized.

It is also worth mentioning that these remains were used by pilgrims from the 5th century until the beginning of the 12th century. This is a sign of Christian-Moslem tolerance and coexistence still found in Jordan today.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks and gratitude go to H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed for his continued support and encouragement of scientific work and research at the site.

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BETHANY BEYOND JORDAN “THE HEART OF THE HOLY LAND”

Rustom Mkhjian

The Authenticity of the baptism site is as pure as the testimonies of the Gospels, the pilgrims' accounts, the mosaic map of the Holy Land, and the archaeological discoveries at the site since 1997. All of these sources are crowned by official documents sent to the Royal Commission of the Baptismal Site by heads of churches throughout the world saying that Jesus was baptized east of the Jordan and the baptism site is one of the holiest sites for Christianity, asking for pieces of land to build their new churches, monasteries, and pilgrims' houses at the site; giving the site back its spirit after having been abandoned for a considerable amount of time. In other words, history is being written again; one generation after the other will understand the reason why the monastic life continued at the site and how the site became once again a pilgrimage site for believers who wanted to follow the trails of the prophets and be in physical contact with holy sites.

Important Biblical Events in Bethany Beyond Jordan

Many important Biblical events took place at our cherished site, among the most important chronologically speaking after the death of Moses, are:

- Joshua crossing the Jordan River from this land towards Jericho with the 12 tribes of Israel after the death of Moses in the area of Mount Nebo (Joshua Chapters 1 to 5).
- Elijah dwelling in John the Baptist's spring (Brook Cherith), when the ravens brought him flesh and bread morning and evening (First Kings Chapter 17).
- Elijah and Elisha' coming from Jericho, crossing the Jordan River, and the ascension of Elijah to the heavens in a chariot and horses of fire (Elijah's Hill). Elisha' taking Elijah's mantle,

and going back towards Jericho the same way he had crossed it with Elijah (second Kings Chapter 2).

- John the Baptist coming in the spirit and power of Elijah to the place where Elijah ascended to the heavens (Elijah's Hill / Bethany beyond Jordan) (Luke Chapter 1:17)
- Jesus coming to Bethany beyond Jordan where John was baptizing and being baptized at the site (John 1:28 / John 3:26).

Examples of Sites Closely Related with Bethany beyond Jordan

Mount Nebo and Livias (Tall ar-Rāma)

After the death of Moses in the area of Mount Nebo, Joshua took over, rested in the area of Livias, hence from the plains of the area of Bethany beyond Jordan led the 12 tribes of Israel toward Jericho crossing the Jordan River (Exodus and Joshua Chapters 1 to 5).

We note that Mount Nebo, Livias and Bethany beyond Jordan were important stops by many pilgrims following the trails of the Prophets in Holy Land. Parts of the pilgrimage route, a few stations, and some Milestones were discovered by a team of the Department of Antiquities during the last few years.

Listib / Tishbe / Tall Mār Ilyās (Prophet Elijah)

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word".

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there". So he did what the Lord told him.

-231-

He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land (First Kings 17:1-7).

That is the reason why a large basilica is built at the top of the hill overlooking Listib having an inscription, which includes the name Elijah.

In short we can say that Elijah was born in Listib and ascended to the heavens from the area of Bethany beyond the Jordan. For this reason we have two sites in Jordan having the name (Elijah's Hill / Tall Mār Ilyās).

Mukāwir / Macharius (John the Baptist)

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask Him "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11:1-6).

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him". Now Herod had arrested John and bound him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "it is not lawful for you to have her". Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist". The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus (Matthew 14:1-12).

We can therefore conclude that John the Baptist started his ministry in Bethany beyond the Jordan, Baptized the people in the spring formed

at Elijah's Hill, Baptized Jesus on the eastern bank of the river Jordan, and was beheaded after being imprisoned at Mukāwir/Macharius.

Umm Qays / Gadara (Jesus Christ)

Jesus calms the storm while crossing to the eastern bank of Lake Galilee. When He arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs".

He said to them "Go!" so they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what happened to the demon-possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region (Matthew 8:18-34).

From Umm Qays Lake Galilee can be seen and the entire story of Jesus sending the demons into the herd of pigs, healing the demon-possessed men can be remembered.

N.B. The same story mentions the region of the Gerasenes (Luke 8:26) instead of the Gadarenes.

Therefore we can link many sites with the Baptismal Site as pilgrimage stations from where they can visit other sites spiritually linked with Bethany beyond the Jordan where Jesus was baptized, turning it once again into a pilgrims station as it once was.

Pilgrims throughout history paid attention, visited, and described the Holy Land. Following the trails of the prophets, many of these sites were discovered east of the Jordan and can be effectively used to encourage religious tourism starting from Bethany beyond the Jordan, enabling us to build the bridges of love and peace between different religions and cultures.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks and gratitude to H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed for his continued support and encouragement of scientific work

and research at the site.

Thanks also for the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Mrs. Maha al-Khatib for her support for this article.

Thanks must also go to H.E. Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities for his guidance and support of preservation works, H.E. Engineer Dia al-Madani, Commission Director for his personal support of documentation and different suggested works at the site, and for the editorial team for their patience and assistance.

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Bibliography

The Holy Bible



1. A helicopter view of Bethany beyond the Jordan (Mr. Zohrab Markarian).



2. A helicopter view of Mount Nebo from the east (Rustom Mkhjian).



3. A view from Mount Nebo to the Jordan valley plains (Rustom Mkhjian).



4. View of Listib from the east (Rustom Mkhjian).



5. The large basilica built in memory of Elijah (Rustom Mkhjian).



6. The peristyle area at Macharius (Rustom Mkhjian).

ADAJ 52 (2008)



7. A general view of Macharius (Rustom Mkhjian).



8. A view from Umm Qays with Lake Galilee in the background (Rustom Mkhjian).

APPENDIX II : LETTERS OF AUTHENTICATION

The overwhelming biblical, archeological, and historical evidence has led many religious leaders throughout the world to recognize this location as the authentic site of Jesus' baptism.

On this page you'll find letters of authentication from top religious leaders and archeologists as well as uncover the primary evidences that lead authorities to confirm this site's authenticity.

THE EVIDENCE

BIBLICAL

Wadi al-Kharrar is the modern name for the site of "Saphsaphas", which is depicted on the 6th century mosaic map of the Holy Land in Madaba. The site lies east of the Jordan River, just west of the village of Al-Kafrayn and within sight of the famous town of Jericho west of the river.

ARCHEOLOGICAL

At the beginning of Wadi al-Kharrar, near the monastic complex, or "Laura", Christian pilgrims have traditionally been shown a hill (known as Jabel Mar Elias in Arabic) where the Prophet Elijah ascended into heaven. Here, you can see a sanctuary that attracted pilgrims well into the medieval period.

HISTORICAL

The Russian pilgrim Abbot Daniel was impressed by the place and in 1106 he wrote: "Not far away from the river, at a distance of two arrow throws, is the place where the Prophet Elijah was taken into Heaven in a chariot of fire. There is also the grotto of Saint John the Baptist. A beautiful strong fast stream (torrential rain) full of water flows over the stones. The water is very cold, has a very good taste and is the water that John drank.



بطريركية الأرمن

سمو الأمير غازي بن محمد المعظم
رئيس مجلس أمناء هيئة موقع المغطس - الأردن

تحية و دعاء وبعد،

يُشرفنا، يا صاحب السمو الملكي، و يسعدنا جدا، أن نرفع إليكم خالص التقدير والاحترام، سائلين الباري تعالى، عز وجل، أن يحفظكم و يغمركم بوافر الصحة و الهناء و يمد بعمركم لتبقىوا ذخرا و دعامة للأردن الحبيب في كنف سيد البلاد جلالة الملك عبد الله الثاني بن الحسين المعظم، حفظه الله بألف خير و سلام.

و نرجوكم، يا صاحب السمو، أن تنقلوا إلى جلالته، خالص حبنا و عييق ولائنا للعرش الهاشمي، و نحن و جميع أبنائنا، نرافق جلالته دوما بلاء عينا و صلواتنا.

اجل لقد جسدت جلالته مفهوم القيادة في أبسط معانيها، و هي قدرة القائد على أن يستشرف الظرف التاريخي و مكانة بلده في لعب دوره. و جلالته قد أثبت مرارا و تكرارا أنه يملك مقومات القيادة الواعية لحركة التاريخ من خلال قدرته الحكيمة على فهم مكونات النظام الدولي الراهن، الذي يشهد حاليا تحولات جذرية تجاه الكثير من القضايا و المحاور. ففي لقاءاته و حواراته مع قادة العالم و زعمائه، قدم جلالته المقترحات العملية و الناجعة لمعالجة بعد التحديات و المعضلات بما يقوي و يعزز مكانة الأمة العربية و يجعلها قادرة على المشاركة في صنع التاريخ ضمن الحق و العدل، أخذ الله بيده و أمد بعمره لمنين كثيرة.

إننا يا صاحب السمو، لفي غبطة و ارتياح، كونكم، على رأس مجلس هيئة الموقع "المغطس"، و نقدر عنايتكم الكبيرة و جهذكم المتواصل لكل ما تبذلون في سبيل تعزيز هذا الموقع التاريخي و المقدس، و إعطائه ما يستحق من الرعايا و الاهتمام.

و لقد أثبت تقليدنا الكنسي و أكدت الأبحاث الأثرية و الدراسات العلمية، و بخاصة ما تم اكتشافه حديثا في الأراضي الأردنية من أن هناك ما يقارب الـ 46 / كنيسة قديمة في الأردن تعود إلى ما قبل الإسلام و حتى العصر الأموي، و منها موقع "المغطس".

و لقد تأكد لعلماء الآثار أنه سنة 333 / ميلادية، قد بنى، أجدادنا المسيحيون الأولون، ديرا كبيرا على اسم القديس يوحنا المعمدان > النبي يحيى < على الضفة الشرقية من نهر الأردن، و على بعد ما يقارب الثمانية أو عشرة أميال عن بحر الميت، و ذلك تخليدا لذكرى عمادة السيد المسيح، عليه السلام، على يد يوحنا المعمدان في هذا الموقع بالذات المعروف باسم "المغطس"، الذي يعتبر ثالث أقدس موقع ديني مسيحي بعد كنيسة المهد و كنيسة القيامة.

فيا صاحب السمو، كان المسيحيون و ما يزالون و سيظلون، بعونه تعالى، و بخاصة في الأردن الحبيب، جزءا لا يتجزأ من الأمة العربية و حقيقتها التاريخية و الحضارية و كيانتها القومية، و شركاء في صنع واقعها و حياتها و نهضتها و مصيرها و في الدفاع عن وجودها و مصالحها و قيمها و ثقافتها.

و ها نحن نشهد، هذه الأيام، وقوف المسيحيين العرب إلى جانب أشقائهم المسلمين العرب في الدفاع عن الوطن ضد العدوان النيريري الصهيوني الذي لا يميز بين شيخ و قسيس و راهب و بين مسجد و كنيسة و دير، فالكل في نظره أعداء...

و نؤكد لسموكم إننا كنا و سنبقى، إن شاء الله، لسان و طنفا الأردن العزيز، في حلنا و ترحالنا، نذكر و نعلن ما نعيشه، نحن العرب المسيحيون، من حياة مشتركة آمنة و استقرار قل نظيره، و ما تحيطنا به العائلة الهاشمية المباركة من رعاية أبوية و أخوية سامية، نفتخر بها و نعتز.

و كونكم تراسون مجلس أمناء هيئة موقع " المغطس " فكلنا أمل و امتنان و شكر لسموكم، إنكم ستخصصون لمطائفتنا نحن بطريركية الأرمن الأرثوذكس، قطعة أرض نقيم عليها كنيسة و ملحقاتها تتيح لنا أن ننعم، أسوة بغيرنا، كأخوتنا اللاتينسي مثلاً، الذين ملكتموهم أرضاً فاعتبروها لهم فقط، و هذا ما أعلنته طائفة اللاتين في وسائل الإعلام، أن تخصصونا نحن طائفة الأرمن الأرثوذكس أيضاً بمكان نحيا فيه حياتنا الكنسية، محتفلين بصلواتنا و طقوسنا الشرقية و خاصة سر العباد المقدس و يتاح لنا أن نستقبل الحجاج و زوارنا الآتين من كل صوب و خاصة من الدول العربية المجاورة و أرمينيا، من أجل تشجيع السياحة في الأردن و على زيارة هذا المكان المقدس، كما استقبلنا و زار موقع المغطس و بتاريخ 2000/1/15 قداسة الكاثوليكوس كاركين الثاني، كاثوليكوس كافة الأرمن الأرثوذكس في العالم.

و ختاماً، م نحن كلنا ثقة إننا سوف نحظى بعطفكم و حسن التفاتتكم، نسأل تعالى، أن يحفظكم، يا أصحاب السمو بألف خير و سلام و بركة، و ليبقى الأردن العزيز و الغالي على قلوبنا جميعاً، مزدهراً بالمجد و الشموخ و الأنفة و العزة في ظل العرش الملكي الأبي.

و دمت يا سيدي بحفظ المولى و رعايته.

بطريرك طوركوم مانوكيان
بطريرك الأرمن الأرثوذكس
في القدس و الأردن



نائب البطريرك الأرمن الأرثوذكس
المطران فاهان طوبيليان
عمان - الأردن

عمان في 2005/9/12



BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE

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His Majesty King Abdullah bin Al Hussein
Of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

1 September 2008

Your Majesty

We extend to you the warm greetings and gratitude of the global family of the Baptist World Alliance.

It was a privilege for us to receive the news that you have generously designated a plot of land for the building of a Baptism Centre at the much-visited Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan site, where, according to tradition, Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist.

In our Baptist faith and order, the baptism of Jesus is of central importance to our understanding of the baptism of Christians (Romans 6:3-4). We believe baptism rests on the command of the risen Lord (Matthew 29:18-20) and is integrated with his command to preach the good news to the world and this command is given authority by his own example at the beginning of his messianic ministry (Luke 3:21-22).

Our President has visited the Baptism Site at Bethany beyond Jordan and was privileged to have a comprehensive guided tour by Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammed. Having studied the relevant scriptures and examined the extensive archaeological work being done, we can affirm the Baptism Site on the eastern bank of the River Jordan, honoured by generations of Christians, as the location for the baptism of Jesus, referred to in the Bible as Bethany-‘the other side of Jordan’ (John 3:36).

We have shared the news of the proposed opening of the Baptism Centre with our world family of 43 million baptised believers in nearly 200 countries, and their representatives expressed warm support this year at our summer Gathering in Prague. We assure you there is a strong commitment to encourage Baptists to visit the Baptism Centre as a place of prayer and spiritual pilgrimage.

Your Majesty, we continue to pray for the peace and prosperity of the ruler and people of the Hashemite Kingdom.

With our warm greetings

David Coffey
BWA President

Neville Callam
BWA General Secretary

BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

Jerusalem

His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammad
Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Baptism Site

Your Royal Highness,

The Baptism site holds great importance to the Ecumenical Church especially Jerusalem's Patriarch of Orthodox. Patriarchate Our liturgical understanding derives its inspiration from the River Jordan, and our church, which approved the baptism of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is linked to Jordan's riverbed spiritually and historically.

Since our Orthodox tradition was supported by monks and hermits across Jordan in the early centuries, we believe, as Chrysostomos indicated in The History of Jerusalem's Church, that Bishop of Venis (Transjordan), Saeed Al Wafidi, participated with Patriarch Evangelios in the fourth ecumenical council in the year AD 451, where he determined to promote Jerusalem's Church to an independent Patriarch. The monks of the River Jordan together with Saint Saba also played a major role in strengthening and consolidating the Orthodox belief and returning Patriarch Elijah from his exile in the year AD 516 to assume his patriarchal position. As a show of gratitude and honor to Jordan's monks, Patriarch Elijah requested that Saint John the Baptist Monastery be built under the patronage of Emperor Justinian , who in the past built luxurious churches and monasteries including the Monastery of Virgin Mary in Karak. During the Crusades, the monks of Jordan refused to deal with the crusaders and their principles and devoted themselves to reproducing the Arabic Church Books (Shihada and Nicola Khouri in The History of Jerusalem's Church).

With time, we recognized Christianity's interest in this holy site, and the expansion and prosperity of monastic activity at the banks of the Jordan. Saint Helena built a

GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, ERINIOUS I

church at the banks of the Jordan in AD 327, and Peter, bishop of the Arab tribes, also built a church on the east bank of the river, known later as the Church of Arches, which was mentioned by pilgrim Egeria in her book *Journals of a Journey* (4th century). The flourishing of monasticism and the building of churches and monasteries at the banks of the River Jordan are indications of the importance and the sanctity of the site. We must also remember the association between the Old and New Testaments, for this site witnessed the passage of Moses' ecclesiastical law (Joshua 15:3), the crossing of Prophet Elijah to the east bank and rising up to the heavens, the crossing of Prophet Elisha to the west bank, and the washing of Nu'man the leprous (Kings IV). All these point toward the significance of Jesus Christ's baptism and transition to the salvation and paradise of the New Testament. The Holy Bible also mentions that John the Baptist used to perform baptism at this site. Throughout history, several saints and the pious lived and prayed in this place such as Saint Mary of Egypt. In the ninth century, Patriarch Thomas I rebuilt the monasteries around the River Jordan at the recommendation of the Abbassid Caliph, Harun Al Rashid. These monasteries included John the Baptist Monastery, the Church of Arches, Saint John the Gold Mouth Monastery, Kiryakos Monastery, and many more.

Undoubtedly, in the heart of the liturgical concept of our Orthodox Church life, Jordan is an inspiration for writers of glorifications and rituals. The tradition of our Church, which approved Jesus' baptism from John the Baptist, derives from the waters of the River Jordan. Many people recited the saying: "Oh, River Jordan why are you surprised when seeing Jesus naked? It answers saying: I looked and then shivered, how could I not shiver and fear ... for Jesus came to the River Jordan to sanctify the water."

From this point we understand that the Jerusalem patriarch, Mother of Churches, assigned a bishop responsible for this area under the name of "Archbishop of the River Jordan." Owing to its importance, and for the first time in history, Patriarch Dorotheos I (AD 1376) was titled Patriarch of Jerusalem, Syria, the Arab world, and Transjordan. This title remains to this day.

Jordan's liturgical and spiritual significance rendered our ancestors, the Patriarchs of the Sacred Orthodox Apostolic See, to own what exceeds as 1000 dunums of land at

the Holy Baptism site.

Your Royal Highness,

Determining Jesus Christ's baptism site is not an easy task today, but we are taking guidance from the verses of the Holy Book, as well as the history and holy tradition of our Orthodox Church. Hence, we believe that Jesus Christ came to John the Baptist to become baptized; that place was at "Bethany Beyond Jordan" (John 19:1). We also believe that Saint Kerless the Jerusalemite's complaint regarding the difficulty of completing Christmas and baptism prayers (as both festivals were celebrated together in the past)-- in the west of River Jordan, the birthplace of Christ, and in Bethlehem and the Baptism site (The History of the Church in the Holy Lands – Dr. Fredrek Hayer)-- proves the site's place. This situation later prompted Patriarch Evangelios to separate the holidays. Patriarch Dositheos II indicates in his book, The History of Jerusalem's Patriarchs (17th century) that the celebration of the Lord's existence (baptism) used to take place in the river on a small boat. Shihada and Nicola Khouri wrote in their above-mentioned book that Ibrahim Pasha allowed the rebuilding of John the Baptist Monastery that was on the west bank of the river and cancelled the fee on Jordan's pilgrims. Gradually and for historical and political reasons, the celebration moved to the west side of the river.

Your Royal Highness,

From what has already been mentioned, we can identify that the baptism area of the Lord Jesus Christ, the place where John the Baptist baptized Him in Transjordan, is on the east bank of the river facing Jericho and about seven miles from the watercourse flow of the river in the Dead Sea. From this, we show that the Baptism site of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ lies in the lands of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, exactly on the east bank of the river.

Your Royal Highness,

We are enormously delighted and reassured over your assignment by our King as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Baptism Site. We acknowledge and are familiar with your continued discretion and care in portraying the Holy Baptism site

in the utmost appropriate and correct spiritual path, as it is the spiritual starting point for all Christians in the world.

The church has devoted itself, under Your Highness' directions, to build Saint John the Baptist Church at the Baptism site during the reign of Jordan's King Abdullah II, to facilitate visits from all believers from across the world in the Baptism site, and to fulfill the hearts of believers as "the wilderness, earth, and land joy ... at that moment the eyes of the blind and ears of the deaf open ... and becomes a path called: the Holy Path." (Elijah 35).

We pray before God Almighty to keep you, Your Highness, a generous person to the country, and bestow on you health and a life of comfort and determination to prosper with your generosity and work to raise and flourish our beloved Jordan under the reign of our Hashemite King Abdullah II.

From Holy Jerusalem 2/10/2003

(19/9/2003)

My Constant Prayers

Erinious I

Patriarch of the Holy City

ΕΛΛΗΝΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΟΝ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΕΙΟΝ

ΙΕΡΟΣΟΛΥΜΩΝ



بطريركيسة اورشليم القس
القدس

الرقم : 211

صاحب السمو الملكي الامير غازي بن محمد المعظم
المبعوث الشخصي والمستشار الخاص لجلالة الملك المعظم
رئيس مجلس أمناء هيئة موقع مغطس السيد المسيح

أبعث إلى سموكم بصادق المودة والتقدير والاحترام وبعد ... ،

فإنه ليسعدني أن أبغكم بأنه استجابة لطلب سموكم الكريم ، وتنفيذاً لتوجيهاتنا قام المجمع المقدس
لبطيريكيتنا الأرثوذكسية المقدسة بإدراج طلبكم بخصوص موقع المغطس على جدول أعماله ، وقد جرى
التداول في هذا الأمر من قبل المجمع في اجتماع يوم الأربعاء الموافق 19 كانون الثاني 2006 وفي الجلسة
الثانية المنعقدة يوم الأربعاء الموافق 26 كانون الثاني 2006 . وبعد الدراسة قرر مجمعنا المقدس
وبالإجماع وإستناداً إلى التقاليد الشريفة الطويل الأمد لكنيستنا الأرثوذكسية المقدسة اعتبار ضفة نهر الأردن
الشرقية كضفة شرعية لمكان العماد المقدس (Eastern Baptismal site).

وننتهز الفرصة لنهنئ المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية بهذا القرار الهام الصادر عن مجمعنا الذي يكرس قداسة
هذا الموقع مما يجعله موقعاً هاماً للحج المسيحي ونثمن الجهود التي قامت بها المملكة لتطوير موقع
المغطس على الضفة الشرقية لنهر الأردن بصفته مكان عماد السيد يسوع المسيح ونبارك الإحتفال السنوي
الذي يتم بالتنسيق مع الدوائر في الحكومة المعنية لتقديس المياه في الخامس من كانون الثاني من خدمة
الحجاج والقادمين إلى النهر المقدس الذي تقديس كامل مياه ضفتيه لما تعمد المسيح فيه من القديس يوحنا
الصباقي والذي زينته جموع التماسك القديسين من الرجال والنساء في القرون الأولى .

وإننا إذ نستعطر نعم وبركات الثالوث القدوس المعن في هذا المكان المقدس على الأردن ملكاً وحكومة
وشعبه وأرضه وضيوفه وحجاجه الأتقياء ، ندعو لسموكم بالتوفيق والسداد في ظل صاحب الجلالة الملك
عبدالله الثاني ابن الحسين أيده الله ورعاه .



Θεοφιλος Τριτος
بطريرك المدينة المقدسة

القدس الشريف : 2006/4/10

GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, THEOPHILOS III



ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein
of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

18 January 2008

Your Majesty,

Warm greetings to you from London.

Our Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, the Rt Revd Suheil Dawani, has informed me of your generous offer to grant the Anglican church some land on which to build a church at the site of the baptism of Jesus.

In our Christian tradition this site is linked to a very important moment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, marking the beginning of his public ministry. The Baptism Site is, therefore, a very holy site to which pilgrims have been drawn since the earliest times. The accounts of these pilgrims show that, guided by the words "beyond the Jordan" in the Gospel of St John (Ch3, v.26), the eastern bank of the River Jordan was venerated as the site of the baptism. The extensive archaeological work being done at the Baptism Site supports these accounts.

Anglican pilgrims from around the world will certainly wish to join their prayers and worship at the Baptism Site with those of other pilgrims, taking their place in the continuous witness of Christians throughout the centuries to the importance of the site. I am, therefore, most grateful for the proposed grant of land, on which our diocese would expect to build a church to facilitate and enhance the pilgrims' experience. We are most keen to encourage the faithful to visit the holy sites and experience for themselves the warm welcome that we have always received in Jordan and throughout the Holy Land.

Your Majesty, please be assured our continued prayers for you and the people of the Hashemite Kingdom,

*With every blessing & good wish,
+ Rowan Williams:*

Lambeth Palace, London SE1 7JU

HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY DR. ROWAN WILLIAMS

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate

FROM H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III

Deir Anba Rousi, Ramess Avenue, ABBASSIYA.

CAIRO, EGYPT.

CABLE : ELANBARUEISS, CAIRO.



Date { / / 19
/ / 17

صاحب السمو الملكي الأمير غازي بن محمد
رئيس مجلس أمناء هيئة موقع الطغفان نهر الدردنة النذكم

تحية طيبة مع صغاره الدعاء، وبعد:

بعدنا بزيارتنا مملكة الدردنة الهاشمية في شهر يونيو- حزيران
الماضي، وسررنا كثيرا بزيارتنا لموقع الطغفان حيث كان عماد
السيد المسيح حيا مررد في البوخليل. وكان موضع اهتمامنا الى حد بعيد
الزيجات والكتشافات الفخرية في موقع الطغفان، مما يضمن على
هذا المكان قيمة كبرى بين النماكة التاريخية التي وطأتها اقدام المسيح.

وبعدنا أنه يسمح مسوكم بأنه تقيم كنيسة القبطية الارثوذكسية
في منطقة الطغفان المقدسة كنيسة وديرة على أرضه تخدمنا لئلا
تصبح موضع جذب للزبناء الكنيس القبطية في عصرنا الشرع الذي
رعى سائر بلد المجر.

مع خالص شكرنا على روحكم الطيبة، وما يلقاه أبناءنا في
بلد الدردنة المحبوبة من عناية ومعاملة صفة برعاية صاحب
المجلة الملك عبد الله الثاني بن الحسين حفظه الله.

شوه

٢٠٠٥/١٠/٢٠

البابا شنودة الثالث
بابا الإسكندرية وبطرك الكرازة المرقسية



HIS HOLINESS THE COPTIC POPE SHENOUDA III



الكنيسة الإنجيلية اللوثرية في الأردن والأراضي المقدسة
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Jerusalem on April 23rd, 2008

His Royal Highness

Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammed

Personal Envoy and Special Advisor of H.M. King Abdullah II

Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Baptismal Site, Jordan

Amman

Subject: **The Baptismal Site of Jesus Christ – Jordan River.**

Your Royal Highness,

Salaam and grace to you in the name of the Almighty God.

We want to thank your Highness for the hospitality you have extended to the Rt. Rev. Dr. Munib A. Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), and for the fruitful talk at your residence on Sunday, March 30, 2008.

As a result of this friendly exchange, we respectfully approach Your Royal Highness with an official request to kindly grant a piece of land for building a place of worship, prayer and a pilgrimage house at the Baptismal Site. These facilities would be an encouragement to the global Lutheran community of faith, which numbers over 70 million Christians, to visit this Holy site in addition to the sites of Christian pilgrimage in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Indeed, in our Christian tradition this Holy Site is linked to a most essential moment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth: his baptism, marking the beginning of his public ministry. The site of the Baptism of Jesus of Nazareth must be thus considered one of the three principle holy sites of Christianity in the world, together with Bethlehem and Jerusalem which saw the beginning and culmination of Jesus' earthly mission respectively.

Our scriptures show that this Baptismal site of Jesus was "beyond the Jordan" (St. John 1:28 and 3:26), that is, on the East Bank of the Jordan River. Evidence from pilgrims' accounts, dating back to the earliest times, also shows that for 1000 years until the Ottoman Empire, Christian Pilgrims venerated and built monasteries and churches on the East Bank of the River Jordan. The historical evidence of early pilgrims accounts and descriptions, combined with renewed archeological excavations -- and with the Biblical evidence mentioned -- show that Baptism of Jesus of Nazareth by John the Baptist truly occurred inside what is now the protected area of the Jordanian Baptism Site of Jesus Christ. It is thus that we request a piece of land in this site to build a church and special facilities for Lutheran Pilgrims.

Tel.: +972-2-6266800

Fax: +972-2-6285764

P.O. Box 14076 – Muristan Road – Jerusalem 91140

E-Mail: administration@elcjh.org

هاتف رقم: +٩٧٢-٢- ٦٢٦٦٨٠٠

فاكس رقم: +٩٧٢-٢- ٦٢٨٥٧٦٤

ص.ب ١٤٠٧٦ - شارع المارستان - القدس ٩١١٤٠

Website: www.elcjh.org

LUTHERAN RECOGNITION OF THE BAPTISM SITE

Pastor Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church in California, USA
March 18, 2009

Message of Greeting from Pastor Rick Warren,
Pastor of Saddleback Church in California, USA
and author of The Purpose Driven Life,
al salaam alaykum,

I want to express my deep joy and gratitude to all of you who has been involved in the planning and building of this Baptism Center. This is an historic day that we have all dreamed of, talked about, and planned for years. I congratulate my dear friend, King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, and also my dear friend, Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammed, for their vision for this site, and for King Abdullah's generosity in making the site possible.

The opening of this authentic site where Jesus (Peace be upon him) was baptized, will be a place of Peace. It is my prayer that all who visit will have a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, what God sent him to do, and will experience the compassion and mercy of God in this place

Although I cannot be with you today, my heart is with you, and I thank all of the world leaders who have graced this site with their presence as we celebrate today. Just as His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI intends to visit the site this May, I also intend to make a pilgrimage to this site in 2010, during my next visit to several Middle Eastern nations.

May God bless all of you this day.

Rick Warren
Dr. Rick Warren
Saddleback Church
Purpose Driven Network
P.E.A.C.E. Coalition

PASTOR RICK WARREN



بطريركية انطاكية وسائر المشرق المارونية
بكركي

الخط المائل

بكركي ، في ٢ ايلول ٢٠٠٩

م ر - ب ٢ ٢٠٠٩/١٥٩

صاحب السمو الملكي الأمير غازي بن محمد المعظم
المستشار الخاص لصاحب الجلالة الملك عبدالله الثاني المعظم،
رئيس اللجنة الخاصة لمنطقة المغطس ، مكان عماد السيد المسيح
المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية ، عمان

صاحب السمو الملكي، الأمير غازي بن محمد المعظم

نشكر لكم تلتفكم باستقبال اخوينا صاحبي السيادة المطرانين بولس مطر، رئيس اساقفة بيروت وبولس الصياح ، نائبنا البطريركي العام في القدس والمملكة الاردنية الهاشمية، موفدين من قبلنا إلى سموكم المعظم .

كما نشكر لكم ولصاحب الجلالة الملك عبدالله الثاني المعظم تكرمكم بتخصيص قطعة ارض لكنيسة المارونية في منطقة المغطس حيث اعتمد السيد المسيح في الاردن العزيز ، وذلك لإقامة كنيسة تكون مزارا لأبنائنا الموارنة كافة ، في الاردن وفي أقطار العالم قاطبة ، يتوافدون إليها للتبرك والصلاة وإقامة الاحتفالات الدينية.

ومن المعلوم ان اعتماد السيد المسيح الذي تم في هذا الموقع من شرق الاردن على ما جاء في انجيل يوحنا ٢٨: ١ و ٢٦: ٣ ، يشكل ، بالنسبة لنا ، بدء انطلاق رسالة العلية، ما يجعله احد أهم المراكز المسيحية الثلاثة ، مع بيت لحم حيث ولد السيد المسيح والقدس حيث كان موته وقيامته من بين الاموات .

وبسبب ما يتميز به موقع المغطس من قدسية وأهمية تاريخية، سنحت جميع أبنائنا الموارنة في الاردن ولبنان وبلدان العالم قاطبة للحج إليه. ومن اجل ذلك فإننا سنوجه رسالة إليهم نعين فيها يوما خاصا لحجهم إلى المغطس، ومتمنين عليهم ان يتبركوا من هذا الموقع المقدس في كل مرة يحجّون بها إلى ارض الاردن العزيز .

**PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH FOR THE MARONITES, PATRIARCH MAR NASRALLAH
BOUTROS SFEIR**

FIGURE :

FIGURE NO. 1

Aug. 01 1995 04:33PM P2

አባ ዳዊት ሥርዓተ ስርዓት
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ARBA PAULOS
Patriarch of Ethiopia, Archbishop
of Axum, Echegor of the See of
St. Tekle Haimanot and
President of World Council of Churches

Ref. No. 8151/567/98
Date 13/7/2006

To His Royal Highness
Prince Gazi Bin Mummammed The Great
Head of council of the custodian committee
Of baptism location
Amman

Greetings in the name of the Almighty God!

Your Highness! After the location of the Lord Jesus' baptism was confirmed to be on the East Bank of the Jordan River, and as Your Highness knows that the Ethiopian community in Holy Jerusalem and the world has had always a big role and part in the Christian pilgrimage to Jordan and Palestine, and we possess a large number of monasteries and Churches in the Holy Land. Stemming from our caution to preserve this historical tie and kind care for the community from His Highness the Late king Hussein Bin Talal, we hope that Your Highness will allow us to construct a monastery and church in the baptism location for the sake of serving over eight thousand Ethiopian pilgrims annually who arrive to the Holy Land.

We kindly ask your Royal Highness to have all correspondence carried both from official and unofficial bodies with our Ethiopian representatives Mr. Eskender Gebre Kidan and that is to have all processes executed and followed by him.

Note: Attached is the draft design of the building.

May the Almighty bless us all
ARBA PAULOS
Patriarch of Ethiopia, Archbishop of Axum and Echegor of the See of St. Tekle Haimanot
President of W.C.C.

251-011-111 19 89
251-011-155 05 77

Pax : 251-011-155 22 11
D-1285 A.A.O. Addis Ababa

E-mail : arbaulalos@yahoo.com
Website : WWW.ootclibrarymuseum.org

PATRIARCH OF ETHIOPIA, ARCHBISHOP OF AXUM



ПАТРИАРХ МОСКОВСКИЙ И ВСЕЯ РУСИ
АЛЕКСИЙ

« 16 » июня 2006 г.

119034 Москва, Чистый пер. 5

№ 4184

ЕГО КОРОЛЕВСКОМУ ВЕЛИЧЕСТВУ,
КОРОЛЮ ИОРДАНИИ АБДАЛЛЕ II

Ваше Величество!

Сердечно приветствуем Вас, желая Вашему Королевскому Величеству доброго здоровья, а дружественному иорданскому народу - мира и процветания.

От Нашего представителя в Святой Земле архимандрита Елисея Мы узнали о том, что Ваше Королевское Величество имеет богоугодное намерение развивать международное паломничество к месту Крещения Господа нашего Иисуса Христа на священной реке Иордан. Мы восприняли эту весть с радостью и глубоким удовлетворением, ибо для каждого христианина евангельское событие Крещения Господня имеет важное значение как свидетельство Его Божественного посланничества и начало Его общественного служения.

В Евангелии от Иоанна говорится, что Крещение Господне происходило «в Вифаваре при Иордане, где крестил Иоанн» (Ин. 1, 28). Тот же евангелист повествует, что спустя некоторое время Господь, уклоняясь до времени от преследования иудеев, «пошел опять за Иордан на то место, где прежде крестил Иоанн, и остался там» (Ин. 10, 40). Христиане глубоко почитают все места, связанные с земной жизнью Иисуса Христа. Поэтому освященные стопами Господа берег и воды Иордана так же дороги нам, как вифлеемский Вертеп и Гроб Господень в Иерусалиме.

Русская Православная Церковь готова тесно сотрудничать в организации такого паломничества с властями Иорданского Хашимитского Королевства при содействии российского государства и во взаимодействии с православным Иерусалимским Патриархатом. Полагаем, что расширению потока паломников во многом способствовало бы наличие на берегу священной реки помещений для

размещения странников.

Выражаем надежду, что плодом нашего взаимопольного сотрудничества станут благодарные сердца многих тысяч паломников, которые будут прибывать сюда для поклонения этому святому месту.

С глубоким уважением

ПАТРИАРХ МОСКОВСКИЙ И ВСЕЯ РУСИ

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA, ALEXY II



Latin Vicariate

Al - Amceerah Aliyah Street 28 - Sweifieh - P.O.Box 851379 Amman 11185 Jordan
Tel. 962-6-5929546 - Fax. 962-6-5920548

Amman, 18.1.2003

His Royal Highness
Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammad
Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Baptismal Site

Warm and sincere greetings.

We have the honour to extend to Your Royal Highness our sincere appreciation and distinct loyalty and invoke God Almighty to endow your goodself the enjoyment of ample good health and a happy long life under the protection of the Sovereign of the State and Master of all Jordanians. We are overwhelmed with joy for your generous granting of continuous and endless attention with the objective of shedding light upon the Baptismal Site, the virtuous place in which Jesus Christ was baptized by John the Baptist, and the Holy Site which embodies the magnanimous life, whose place is the dwelling of the Spirit eternally bestowed thus giving life to the believers in Jesus Christ throughout the ages. This Site has become the meeting place of God and the human being, in which interpenetrate the past with the present and the future, transforming all periods of history into spiritual breaths of faith which become deep-rooted in the hearts of the faithful throughout ages and generations.

The Christian tradition has always linked the baptism of Jesus Christ with the river Jordan, as mentioned in the Holy Gospel and a large number of pilgrims have written memories of their pilgrimage to holy places, some of which have come to our knowledge. We mention as an example the writings of Meliton, the Bishop of Sardis, in the second century after Christ, saying: "... I went to the East and saw the places mentioned in the Holy Bible; thus everything has become clear and meaningful". At the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea, the famous ecclesiastical historian mentioned in the Onomasticon dictionary, described the biblical sites and said that numerous faithful brethren who desired the second birth were baptized in Jordan and submerged themselves in the riverbed following the example of Jesus Christ who was baptized in the same place. The pilgrim coming from the city of Bordeaux in the year 333, - who did not mention his name, like other pilgrims who mentioned theirs - said that the Baptismal Site of the Lord in the river Jordan is eight miles beyond the Dead Sea. The pilgrim arriving from Piacenza in the year 570 added another information which is that the Baptismal Site was opposite the convent of Saint John the Baptist in the East Bank of the river.

In the fifth century in the era of Patriarch Elijah, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Emperor Anastasius ordered the construction of three churches, one in the West Bank of the river, the second the baptismal church in the East bank of the river. It was constructed on arches to avoid damages, which may be caused by the overflow of the river. The third was constructed in honour of Saint John the Baptist in the convent of Safsafa, on the hill of Prophet Elijah near Al-Kharrar fountain, and in commemoration of Beit Anya across the Jordan which John the Evangelist has mentioned in the twenty eighth verse of chapter one.

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, ROMAN CATHOLIC PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

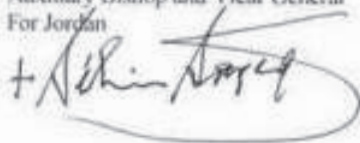
Until the fourteenth century, the pilgrims used to arrive from Jerusalem and the neighbouring towns and villages to the river and cross it to the East bank in order to pray and worship God in the baptism church of Jesus Christ - known as the church of the robe or gown, and in the church of John the Baptist, on the hill of Prophet Elijah, near Safsafa - Al-Kbarrar fountain.

The antiquities which were recently discovered in the Jordanian territory date back to the first Christian tradition and give it historic value.

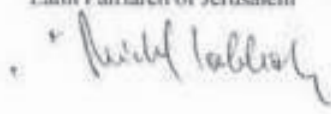
The tongues of the faithful will constantly keep praising with gratitude and thankfulness the sublimity of your exalted vision by your gracious allocation of a piece of land to us in the Baptismal Site to construct a church and its annexes for the glory and commemoration of the Baptism of Jesus Christ to offer the fragrance of spiritual service to Christian pilgrims arriving from different parts of the world to this Holy Site in which Jesus Christ was baptized. Your Highness is certainly aware that the majority of Christian pilgrims are affiliated to the Catholic Church and to the traditional established Protestant Churches. We are prepared to receive in the church, the sons of all Christian Churches who desire to celebrate mass and ritual worshipping in this Holy Site. We and our population are citizens who dedicate ourselves to serve our homeland and are proud of our Hashemite leadership and boast of our homeland and our Christian and Islamic Holy Places. This is our duty and obligation and a right for our invaluable land. We invoke God to grant your goodself good health and a long life to bestow liberally upon your Highness his profuse blessings.

With all our esteem and our deep gratitude.

Signature
+Bishop Selim Sayegh
Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General
For Jordan



Signature
+Michel Sabbah
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem



ܡܨܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܨܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܨܚܝܬܐ
SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE
OF ANTIOCH & ALL THE EAST
BAR TOUMA, P.O. BOX 22880
DAMASCUS - SYRIA



٢٠٠٩/٩/١٦
٢٠٠٩/٩/١٦

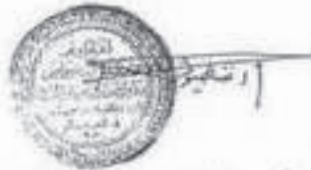
صاحب السمو الأمير غازي بن محمد حفظه الله ورعاه
رئيس مجلس أمناء هيئة موقع المغطس - نهر الأردن - الأردن
عجل - الأردن

تحية عربية طيبة وبعد:

يهيئنا أن نكتب إليكم لتتكرموا بمنح كنيسة السريانية الأرثوذكسية في المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية والقدس وسائر الديار المقدسة قطعة أرض في موقع المغطس، وذلك لبناء كنيسة ودير عليها بهدف استقبال آلاف الحجاج السريان القادمين من أوروبا والولايات المتحدة الأميركية والشرق الأوسط، وخاصة من الأردن وفلسطين وسورية ولبنان والعراق وتركيا.

وقد سررنا بالتكثيف موقع المغطس الحالي، وهو المكان الصحيح الذي اعتمد فيه السيد المسيح له المجد استناداً إلى ما جاء في الإنجيل المقدس والتاريخ والأبحاث والاكتشافات الأثرية. ونظراً لما لهذا الاكتشاف من أهمية كبرى نعتبر موقع المغطس هو ثالث مكان مقدس من الناحية الدينية لدى المسيحيين بعد كنيسة المجد في بيت لحم وكنيسة القيامة في القدس، وسوف نختل لبناء كنيسة السريانية الأرثوذكسية المنشترين في العالم على ضرورة زيارة موقع المغطس على الضفة الشرقية من نهر الأردن لينالوا البركات والسلم الروحية.

فلنأمل السماح لكنيسة لبناء كنيسة ودير على قطعة الأرض التي متفحصوها لكنيسة السريانية الأرثوذكسية في موقع المغطس. مع خالص شكرنا وامتناننا لتعاونكم وجهودكم المشكورة لما يعود بالفائدة والقائدة على المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية بقيادة حامي البلاد وبنائها جلالة الملك عبد الله الثاني حفظه الله، ونتمنى بالصحة والتوفيق.



اغناطيوس زكّا الأول عيواص
بطريرك أنطاكية وسائر المشرق
الرئيس الأعلى للكنيسة السريانية الأرثوذكسية في العالم أجمع

SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST

ROMANIAN PATRIARCHATE

DANIEL

PATRISTIC, ST. JOHN'S, BAPTISM SITE, JORDAN

Ref. No 4708/18.05.2012

His Royal Highness Prince GHAZI bin MUHAMMAD,
Special Advisor and Personal Envoy to
His Majesty King ABDULLAH II,
Director of Board of Trustees, Baptism Site Commission,
Amman, Jordan

Your Royal Highness,

It is with deep esteem that we greet Your Royal Highness wishing You good health and prosperity.

As it is well known, Jordan – the biblical land and cradle of the Islamic civilisation – has always played a crucial role in building bridges of understanding, respect, and acceptance between different civilisations and religions of the world. Thus, the vision of its wise leadership – beginning with its founder, King Abdullah I, and developed later on by the late King Hussein I, though the *Amman Message*, and completed by the present King, His Majesty Abdullah II, through his valuable initiative *The World Interfaith Harmony Week* – was put in practice by making the Baptism Site at Jordan River a multi-Christian area, where Christians from all over the world will be hosted and welcomed to experience the hospitality, warmth and spiritual life of the people of Jordan.

The place of the Baptism Site situated "*beyond Jordan*" was a refuge of the Prophet Elijah who lived close to Al-Kharrar fountain (2 Kings 2:6-7 and 13), and where Saint John the Baptist, later on, baptised Jesus Christ, as it is recorded in the Gospels. Our Church considers this place is important as other holy places where Jesus Christ lived and preached, such as Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem.

Moreover, the Baptism of Jesus Christ, as a crucial historical and spiritual event, which took place in the Jordan River in the area called Bethany "*beyond Jordan*" (John 1:28 and 3:26), is confirmed by numerous Christian historians and pilgrims throughout the centuries, such as Bishop Meliton of Sardes (+180), Eusebius of Caesarea (+339), Egeria or Aetheria (often called Sylvia), who visited the Holy Places between 381-384 and others.

THE ROMANIAN PATRIARCHATE, DANIEL CIOBOTEA

**APPENDIX III: THE ARCHAEOSEISMOLOGY
REPORT OF THE BAPTISTRY (AL-MAGHTAS)
SITE, JORDAN**

Report to the
Department of Antiquities of Jordan

**Archaeoseismology of the Baptistry
(Al Maghtas) Site, Jordan**

July 17, 2004

By:
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Alexander Dahne
Field study of Ground Deformation at the Bethany Site

Ground ruptures in the Jordan valley causing visible evidence in building structures has become an important source of information in the field of Archeoseismology. Not only being the first ones to study the geology but also having the chance to work at this specific site was an amazing challenge. The goal of the field study at Bethany beyond Jordan from 05/6 to 05/27 was to investigate the occurrence and pattern of fractures at the Bethany Site in Jordan. Numerous visits at various locations in the area revealed fractures with different orientations and offsets.

Three sites have shown strong evidence of earthquake induced ground deformation, taken place in the last 15'000 years. The occurrence of the spring of Wadi Kharrah itself indicates a zone of structural weakness passing to the east of the wadi. Thank to DOA representative Rustom Mkhjian, whose professional support enabled a well-organized research throughout the three weeks, the research proceeded successfully. Not only that he provided transportation and study material as well as maps and photographs, he also managed to provide reliable staff to ensure the personal security and help at any time. Aerial photographs provided through ACOR by the Jordanian Royal Geographic Centre were useful for remote sensing and made further geological field work in the Wadis necessary. The two East – West trending Wadis (Wadi Kharrah and Wadi Gharaba) were studied first after gaining a general impression of the geological structure at the site.

Cutting into the underlying formations and therefore well displaying geological history Wadi Gharaba and Wadi Karrah have been surveyed to find fault traces and indicators for seismic shaking. Even though the natural bedding in the riverbed underwent serious structural damage due to the extensive use of heavy machinery for moving fluvial gravel, examples for tectonic movements were found and documented (Fig. 1). Offsets between 20 cm up to 1 m and the general north north – northeast trend of the fault planes strengthened the assumption that the Dead Sea Transform might extend into the area. It would be useful to run geophysical tests such as Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) and High Resolution Seismic Reflection (HRSR) to investigate this possibility. Unfortunately, not the entire Wadi Gharaba was accessible since the military restricts the walk into the western part. In order to fully understand the structural deformation we have to be able to also survey the western part and the confluence between the Wadi and the Jordan River. The Lake Lisan marls in Wadi Kharrah were showing signs of seismic shaking and a weathered contact to the alluvium, which was already studied at Wadi Gharaba and requires also to run geophysical applications, especially because it is very close to the spring.

Not far away to the south of Wadi Gharaba a recently excavated Birkeh was studied and surveyed with the total station. A remarkable bend that could be a potential offset caused by an earthquake was observed in the aqueduct connected to the Birkeh extending towards the east (Fig 2). The possibility for an earthquake-induced offset is high and it can be suggested to use heavy machinery to trench an outcrop in the closer area in order to collect evidence in the Lisan and alluvial deposits for that. It would be interesting especially, since there has no material been published about the site, yet.

The study of the two sites of John the Baptist Church and Elijah's Hill once more revealed major damage through flooding and earthquakes. On both locations the total station was set up in order to collect survey points for mapping the structures into base maps. The archeological plans and drafts of John the Baptist Church and Elias Hill were helpful for referencing the fractures, but also require further work and thereby will be submitted later with a final version of this report. A look into the well next to the northern baptism pools
John the Baptist church

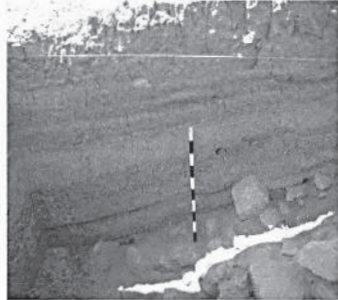
Severe flood damage in the western and South - Western Part - Protection?



Mosaics floor in Southwestern part evidence for destruction



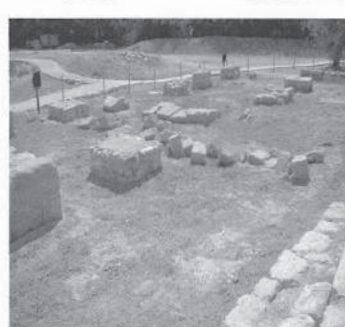
Alluvium, Dead Sea deposits=high levels useful for earthquake dating
Southern Outcrop: Section drawing – Riverbed, fluvial sediments



Northern Outcrop: Sandblowing Liquifaction?



Original excavated churchfloor NS trending fault offset between 0.3m



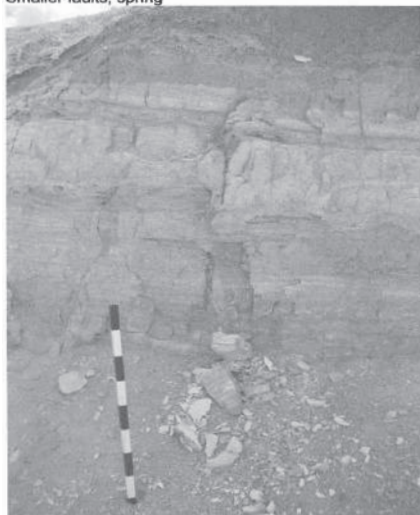
Pillars of the first church inclined towards northeast(7-11°)



fault north of church trending east - west

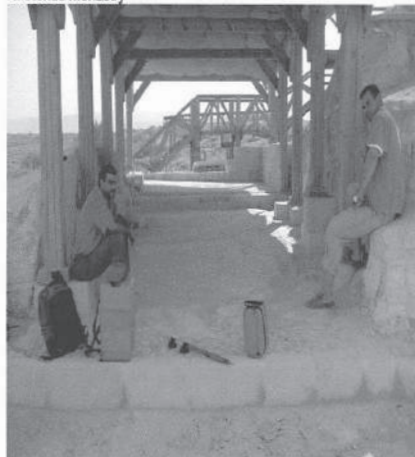
Wadi al-Kharrar

Smaller faults, spring



Tell Elias

Rhotorios Monastery



+Northern Church mosaic floors surveyed with Total Station



Faults with slip between 3 and 25cm

Origin slump failure especially northern church due to its proximity to the slope

General trend north south, but also east west striking fissures

Ground penetrating radar could reveal more detailed fault propagation

Wadi Garaba

Unconformable contact red white Holocene



Some faults



Birkeh

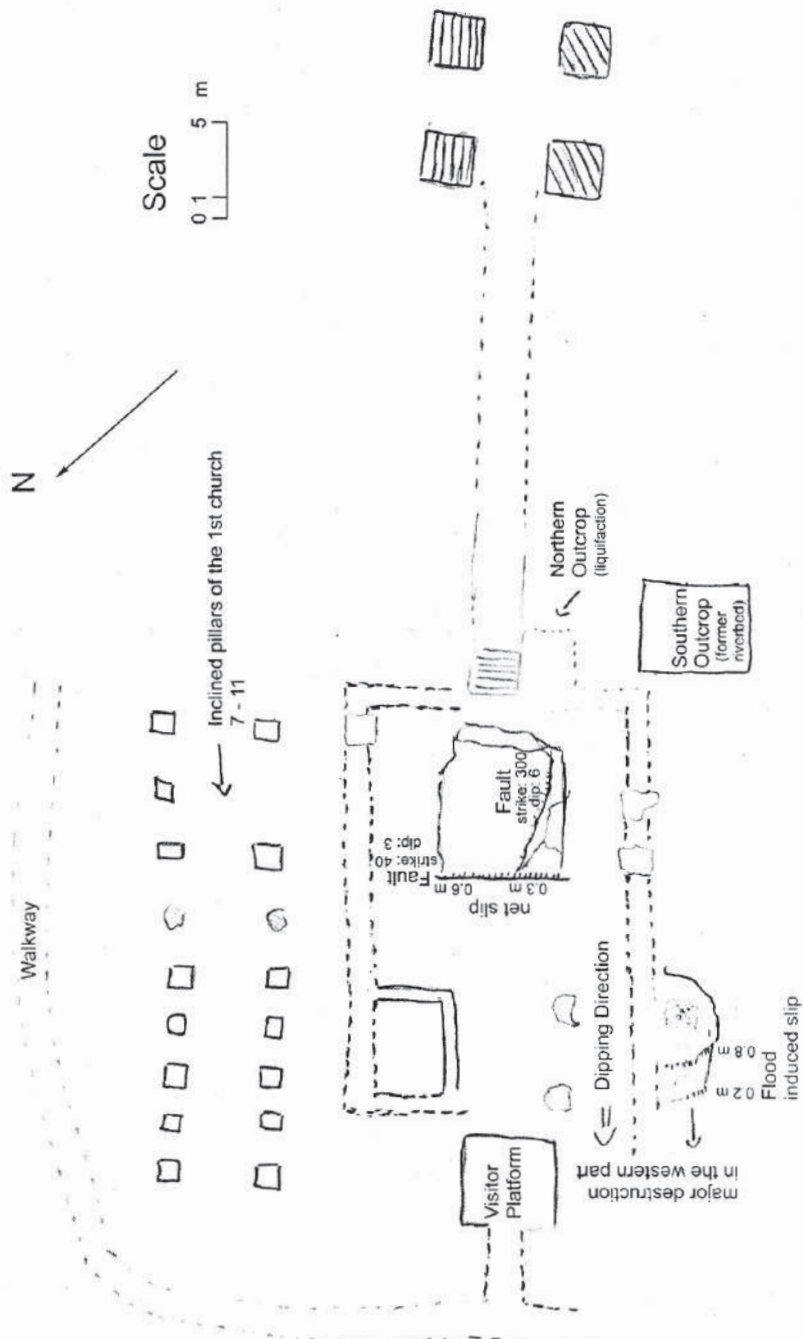
Faultscarp

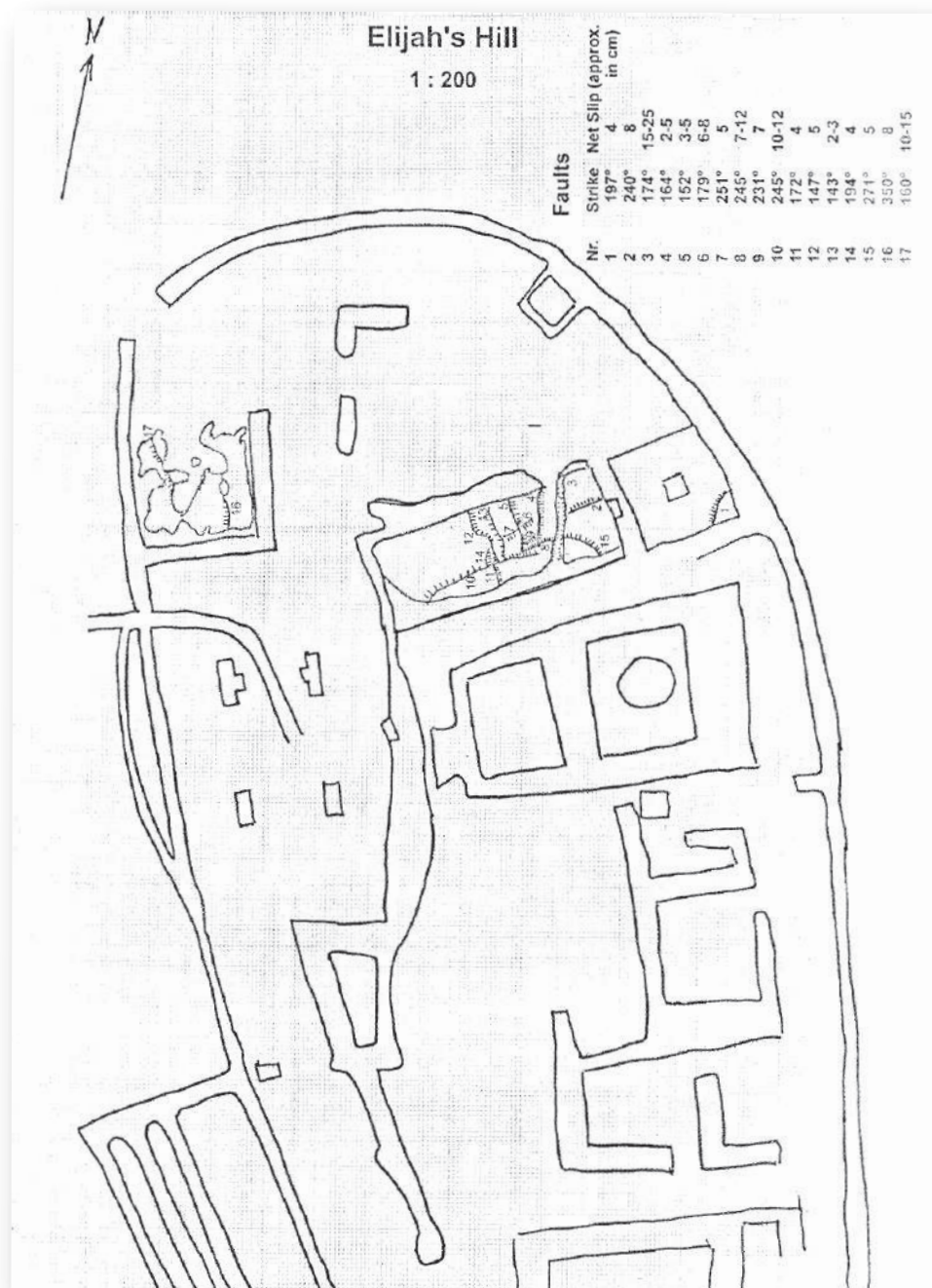


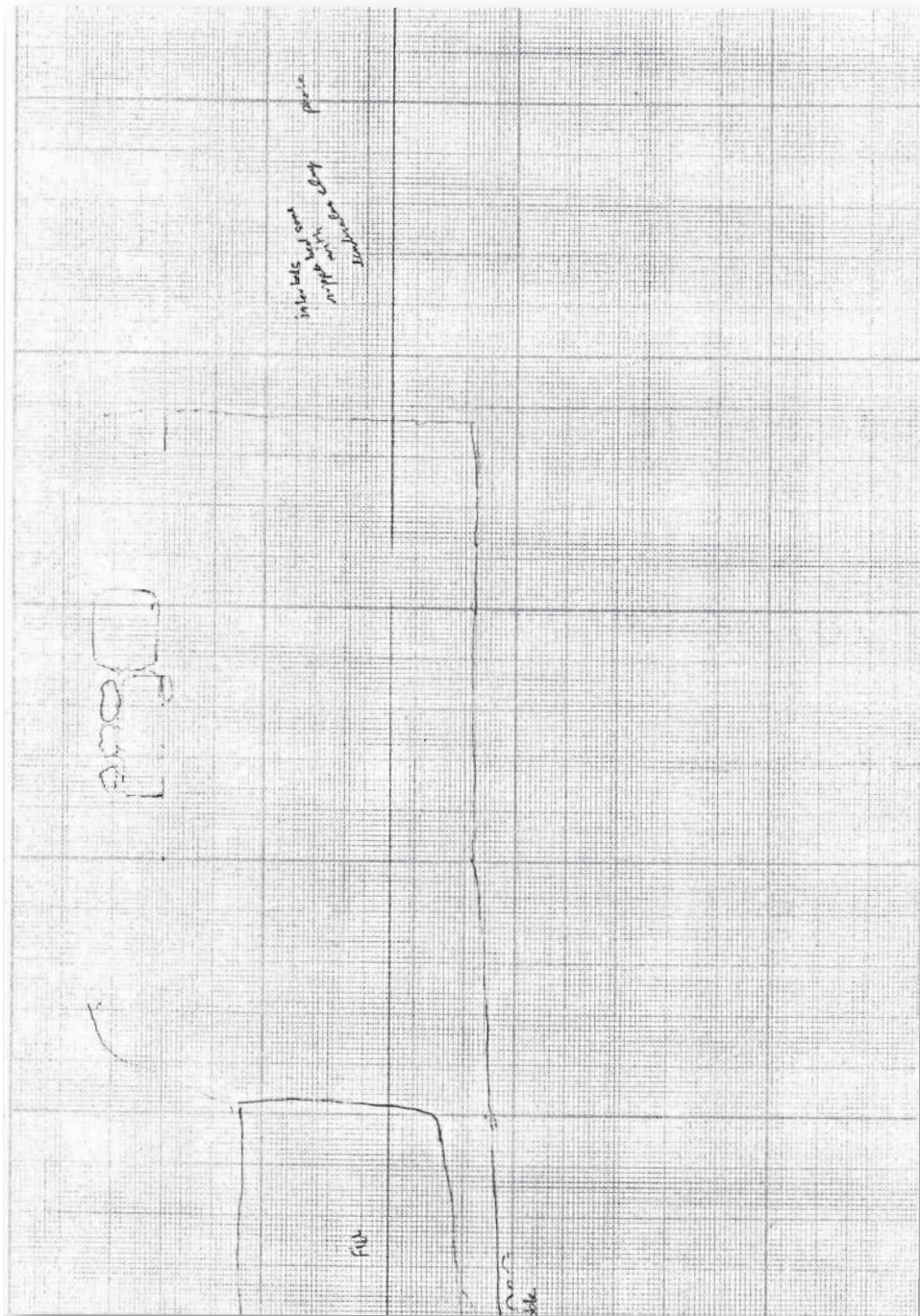
bend



John the Baptist Church







APPENDIX IV : A FIELD STUDY OF THE GROUND DEFORMATION AT THE BAPTISMAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (AL-MAGHTAS), JORDAN

Field Study of Ground Deformation at the Baptismal Archaeological Site (Al Maghtas), Jordan

Preliminary Report to the Department of Antiquities of Jordan

Submitted By:
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25 May 2004

I. Introduction

During the period of May 11 to 25, 2004, an archaeoseismologic and tectonic geomorphic field study was initiated at the Baptismal (Al-Maghtas) site near the Jordan River. This field research was conducted through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DoA) that was generously granted by DoA Director General, Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh. We wish to thank DoA representative Eng. Rustom Mkhjian, whose professional and logistical support greatly facilitated our field research, and Hasan Al Edwan and Asem Asfour from the DoA for their assistance. The study was also conducted in collaboration with Drs. Patricia and Pierre Bikai from the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan.

The recent excavations of the Baptismal site along the Jordan River has exposed ruins of several churches, wells, pools, caves, birkehs, aqueducts, and a monastery. The site is located along the east bank of the Jordan River just north of the Dead Sea. Over the past 2000 years, the baptismal site and its ruins have experienced several major environmental and catastrophic changes. The river has experienced several episodes of incision and infilling as the level of the Dead Sea changed and flooded the site. **The river has also meanderd away from the site and has induced bank slumping**. On top of these fluvial geomorphic changes, the site is located along the seismically active Jordan Valley fault. This fault is a segment of the Dead Sea Transform fault system that periodically produces strong to major devastating earthquakes.

The goal of this study is interpret the environmental and earthquake history of the archaeological site through detailed mapping of the structural failures and the sedimentary deposits at the site. Faults, fractures, collapsed and deformed structures are pervasive across the site. These structural failures at the baptismal site need to be mapped in detail and compared to the surrounding geologic conditions. Our objective is to interpret the origin of the structural

damage at the archaeological site and to differentiate the earthquake-induced damage from slump failures induced by fluvial base level changes.

II. Geologic Field Investigations

We investigated three separate locations within the greater Al-Maghtas site. These include: 1) the John the Baptist Church, 2) Tell Elias, and 3) the West Birkeh site south of Wadi Gharaba. At each of these locations, we surveyed ground failures using a Wild T2000 Total Station connected to a Sokkia data collector. The purpose of the surveys was to collect the orientation and offset across each of the fractures. In addition to surveying, we also conducted a geological reconnaissance within the incisions of Wadi Karrar and Wadi Gharaba to determine the nature of the geological materials and to map any faults at the site. At the John the Baptist church location, a section drawing of the geological materials overlying the collapse horizon in a new excavation was drawn.

Three different types of geological formations are found at the Al Maghtas site – the “white” Lisan formation, the “red” Holocene (<10,000 yrs) alluvium, and the “brown” historical alluvium interbedded with Dead Sea lacustrine sediments. The Lisan formation was deposited from a saline lake that filled the Jordan Valley to a maximum elevation of –280 msl approximately 60,000 to 15,000 years ago. The formation consists of thin-bedded to finely laminated deposits of marl (calcareous mud) and gypsum. Overlying and incised into the Lisan formation are fluvial gravels, sands, and silt from ancestral channels of the Wadi Gharaba. The John the Baptist Church is built on historical alluvium (<2000 yrs) of the Jordan River consisting predominantly of clay, clayey silt, and sand. The alluvium is interbedded with laminated white lacustrine sediments from the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is documented to have reached two historical highstands (at an elevation of approximately –380 msl) during the Roman and Crusader periods (Frumkin *et al.*, 1992). Further detailed study of these young geologic deposits in stratigraphic relationship to the John the Baptist Church would shed invaluable light on the history and paleogeography of the site.

At Tell Elias and at the Wadi Gharaba birkeh locations, we found the contact between the Lisan formation and Holocene (<10,000 yrs) alluvium within the incisions of the adjacent east-west trending wadis. The contact appears to be a fault but may also represent a buttress unconformity between an ancestral incised stream and the Lake Lisan deposits. Clearly, additional geological and geophysical investigations (including Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) and High Resolution Seismic Reflection) are needed in order to verify these observations by imaging the deeper geologic structure.

The occurrence of the spring in Wadi Kharrah strongly suggests that a zone of structural weakness (a fault?) crosses the Tell Elias site and the Wadi Gharaba site to the south. During our field reconnaissance within the two wadis, we were able to document primary tectonic fracturing and faulting. The zones of fracturing are highly localized and trend perpendicular to the wadi flow direction

and incision. This suggests that the fracturing and faulting is associated with tectonic movement of the Jordan Valley fault system. Offsets between 20 cm up to 1 m along fault planes that both trend NNE and NW were found. Even though the Wadi Gharab has been extensively modified by the use of heavy machinery to remove fluvial gravels from lower terraces in the wadi, we were able to observe sufficient evidence of earthquake faulting to warrant a more thorough geologic mapping study. In order to fully understand the structural deformation of the Al-Maghtas site, we hope to also survey the western part of the Wadi Gharaba to its confluence with the Jordan River.

III. Ground Deformation at Al-Maghtas

West Birkeh Site

Just south of the Wadi Garaba site, we surveyed the West birkeh and the feeder aqueduct (Figure 1). The walls of the rectangular West Birkeh stand 4-5 courses high with a plastered interior face and an unfaced exterior. The birkeh appears to have been constructed by excavating into the underlying Lisan marl. The reservoir was fed by a long aqueduct extending to the east. This aqueduct has a conspicuous 10 m gap and bend in its orientation close to the birkeh. The birkeh has two outflows—one to the west and one to the south—that are ornamented with ashlar blocks. The construction style of the west birkeh differs from that of the east birkeh suggesting that they were built during different occupational phases. We noted several locations where the aqueduct had been repaired indicating perhaps that the west birkeh predates(?) the east one. Our one day survey was not sufficient to clearly document the relationships of the west and east birkeh to the excavated domestic structures (caravanseri?) in the area. In addition, plowed up mudbrick on the surface suggest that the site may be larger than what has been excavated.

South of the birkeh there is a small topographic scarp (~2m high) that crosses the land surface and trends toward the aqueduct. This scarp is highly suggestive of features formed along active earthquake faults. The location of this scarp is coincident with the break in the aqueduct. For this reason, we hypothesize that the rupture in the aqueduct may be due to fault motion. In order to conclusively determine the origin of the scarp and the break in the aqueduct, a subsurface investigation should be carried out. This could be accomplished by conducting a geophysical survey (GPR and seismic reflection) and by excavating a trench across the scarp.

Tell Elias Site

The Tell Elias site is located adjacent to the spring of Wadi Kharrar. The site is built predominantly over the Lisan formation. Excavated ruins at the site include several churches, pools, wells, water conduits and drains, and caves (monastery). We mapped the fractures that cross the mosaic floor of the Rhotoris Church and the West Church. Fractures show a general trend of slope failure with movement toward the wadi to the NW and W. However, fractures within the

Lisan marl show trends to the NNE. Also, evident in the wall of the tributary incision extending from the John Paul II Church into Wadi Kharrar is the contact between the Lisan formation and the Holocene alluvium. This may be indicative of faulting at this location, but further investigation is needed to confirm this observation.

Evidence of seismically-induced ground deformation is found at the Tell Elias site. The horizontal shift in the wells suggests lateral ground acceleration forces that were probably caused by seismic shaking in an earthquake. The wells may be cut by a fault or failure plane that is listric (the dip of the plane curves from high angle at the surface to nearly horizontal at depth). Full documentation of the mode of origin of all of the ground deformation at this site is beyond the scope of this preliminary field report because we have yet to analyze the data.

John the Baptist Church Site

The John the Baptist Church site is built over highly unstable late Holocene (<2000 years) alluvium deposited from the Jordan River that is interbedded with at least two distinct white-colored lacustrine deposits from the Dead Sea. These sedimentary sections were first described by Nikos Mourtzas during his visit to the site in January 2003. The geologic section exposed at the site is predominantly fine-grained silts and clay. **The interbedding of silt and clay suggest that the sediment was deposited from slack waters ponded in a low-lying area similar to an "oxbow lake" (a meander curve that has been hydraulically disconnected from the main river flow and receives water during flood stages of the river). Several interbedded sand horizons denote periods of higher stream velocities moving past the site.**

The archaeological remains at the site include several phases of church construction and a main stairwell down to a lower church or chapel. Collapse of the southern supporting wall of the stairs several meters down to the south indicates that an ancient channel existed to the south. This latest phase (?) of the stairwell collapse apparently rests on sand. The collapse layer is overlain by laminated clayey silt, a sandy silt, and alternating layers of clay and clayey silt. Several distinct, thin (< 5cm) ash and organic rich horizons are prevalent in the upper clay section (Section exposed at the eastern end of the basilica in May 2004).

At this site, we again surveyed deformation features that cross the site with a Total Station. We mapped the fractures that extend across the basilica floor where stone pavers had been robbed. We also mapped the fractures along which the mosaic floor along the western side of the structure. The arcuate trend of the fractures crossing the western mosaic floor suggests that this portion of the structure has slumped toward the west. Other fractures across the basilica and the northern exposed supporting wall of the stairwell indicate a northern trend. We mapped a series of open fractures that extend in a general east-west direction north off the site. These seem to connect with a fault exposed in the

Lisan formation in Wadi Kharrar. At one location in the baulk section under the eastern edge of the basilica, we think there may be a liquefaction dike and sand blow. The sand blows form when seismic shaking over-pressurizes saturated sand that is capped by clay. The pressure causes the water and sand to shoot up to the surface forming a small sand "volcano" (sand blow). Further investigation of the structural deformation, fractures, and associated geological layers is needed to clearly determine the timing and origin of the failures at this site.

Furthermore, it should be noted that repeated submergence of the site by flood waters will undoubtedly cause irreversible loss of vital archaeological data and damage to this very important site. The force of sudden high velocity flood water will cause erosion. The clays (smectite) at the site appear to be the swelling type that expand with the addition of water and shrink when dried. This process can cause movement of the overlying structures. Efforts should be made to minimize these processes, especially considering that archaeological excavations at the site are still in progress. Many fascinating and important questions about the environment at the site in antiquity are yet to be answered.

IV. Summary and Future Research

We are very grateful to Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khrayshe and Eng. Rustom Mkhjian of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and Drs. Patricia and Pierre Bikai of ACOR for supporting this reconnaissance study and for providing plan maps of previous work. The goal of this field study at "Bethany beyond the Jordan" site was to investigate the occurrence and pattern of the fractures at the site and to determine their origin. Our field reconnaissance of the geological materials and deformation at various locations in the wadi and at the site revealed fractures with different orientations and offsets. Our initial mapping results suggest that both slope instability and earthquakes have caused the destruction visible at the site.

An understanding of the topography, geomorphology, and hydrology of the John the Baptist Church site is crucial for the ultimate conservation of the site as a long-lasting tourism location. Detailed study of the geological deposits in stratigraphic context with the archaeological ruins is also invaluable for reconstructing both the historical use of the site and its environmental setting.

We hope to continue our work at the Al-Maghtas site in a second field season in May 2005. We are ready to apply for financial support from the National Geographic Society to support a more thorough investigation of the structural damage and ground deformation of the Al-Maghtas site. We would like to propose making a geologic map of the entire region including Wadi Karrah, Wadi Gharaba, and the Bethany beyond Jordan site. For this future study, we would hope to gain access to the entire Wadi Gharaba through careful planning with the Jordanian military. Our study would be greatly facilitated by obtaining

aerial photographs of the site. Two series of photographs are needed—ones from the 1970s prior to excavation, and ones from 2000s showing recent developments. Plan maps and detailed topographic maps of the sites would be needed for this research.

Our planned future research at Al-Maghtas include:

1. Mapping the geomorphology and geology of the region using aerial photography.
2. Mapping the geological materials, fractures, and faults within the Wadi Gharab and Wadi Karrar to their confluence with the Jordan River.
3. Using geophysical methods (ground penetration radar and high resolution seismic reflection) to image the deeper geologic structure of the site.
4. Excavation of a mechanical trench across the scarp south of the birkeh site to determine if this feature is a fault.
5. Detailed study of the stratigraphic relationship of John the Baptist Church and Tell Elias ruins to the surrounding geologic materials.
6. Continue mapping the exposed fractures across the archaeological site.

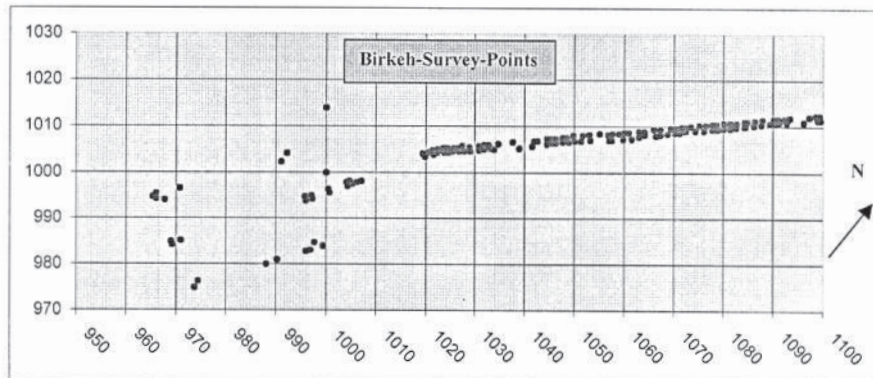


Figure 1: Survey points of the West Birke and aqueduct. The gap and bend in the aqueduct may be due to surface faulting during an earthquake.

**Memorandum of Understanding between the Baptism Site Commission
and the Baptism Site Development Zone**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَبِهِ نَسْتَعِينُ

Monday, March 22, 2021

Memorandum of Understanding between the Baptism Site Commission and the Baptism Site Development Zone

The Baptism Site Development Zone (BSDZ) is to be developed over a land area of (1,370) dunums adjacent to the Baptism Site. This land will include (1,000) dunums that are currently owned by the Baptism Site Commission (BSC) which will be transferred ASAP to be owned by the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) in return of around (1,133) dunums of treasury lands that were recently registered under BSC. In addition, the land includes an additional (370) dunums owned by JVA. BSDZ, working with JVA, will continue to put best effort in soliciting additional land for BSC south of the existing BSC site.

- A. Should the BSDZ fail to materialize within 10 years, the previously mentioned 1,000 dunums will be returned by the JVA to the BSC.
- B. BSC agrees that all visitors' traffic, excluding VIP visits and BSC staff, churches staff and visitors, will go through the BSDZ design traffic flow to maximize commercial value of the development zone once the BSDC buys the rights from it for a mutually agreed annual fee (see item 7).

Furthermore, the Advisory Board for the BSDZ is overseeing the development of a masterplan for the BSDZ. The masterplan account for the following items:

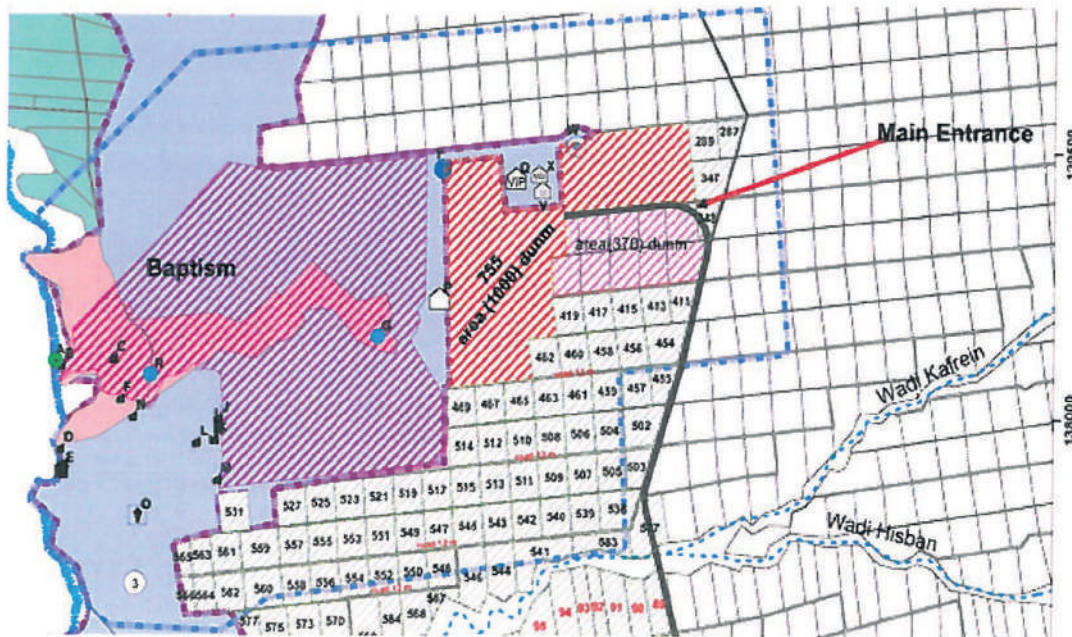
1. The creation of a service road that connects Baptism Site with the main road outside the BSDZ.
2. The creation of a VIP road that connects the Baptism Site site with the main road outside the BSDZ.
3. The creation of an access road that connects the BSC Site with the currently existing buildings within the previously mentioned (1,000) dunums of the Development Zone. Should the masterplan indicate the need for using the location of the buildings for other purposes, alternative buildings will be provided with an access road to the BSC after a mutually agreed upon arrangement.
4. An annual purchase fee agreement BSDZ from the BSC will be made for the usage of the wells owned by BSC, existing within the previously mentioned (1,000) dunums of the Development Zone or within whatever lands maybe transferred in the future along with a new building and equivalent land (see item 3).

KW
3.22.21

Maver
22.3.2021

Abuzib Muhammad
22.3.21

5. The development components of the masterplan, within the BSDZ area only, will be determined by the management of the Development Zone.
6. JVA will attempt its best to resolve the issue of lot 531 and transfer it to BSC ASAP.
7. The entry fee and its ticketing is owned by the BSC. The BSDZ may purchase the ticketing amount based on a mutually agreed upon yearly amount.



The maps do not include recent acquisitions done by BSC in the north of UNESCO site.

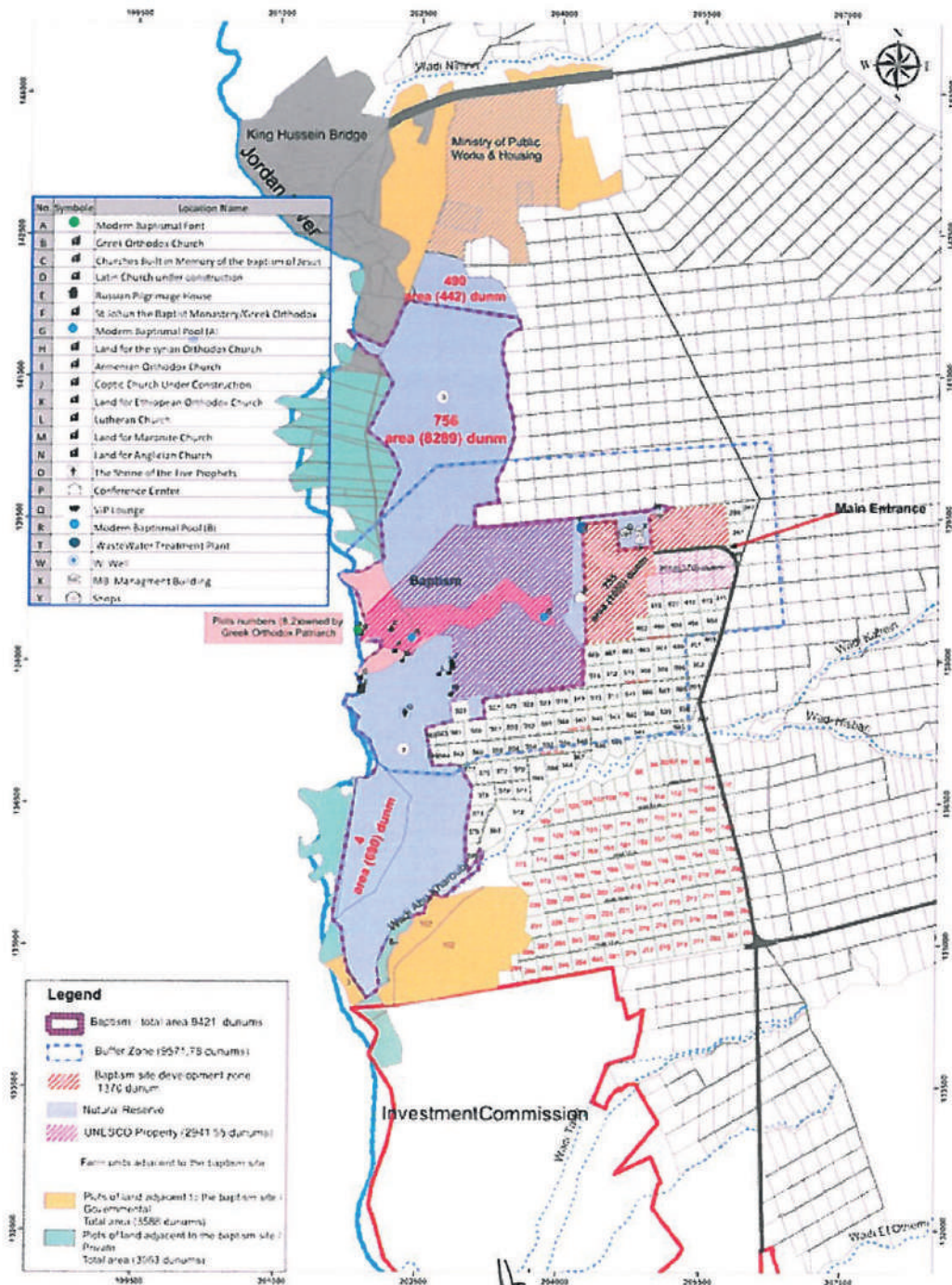
Amr bin Muhammad bin Tahir

 22.3.21

16N
 3.22.21

Mary
 22.3.2021

الحمد لله وحده



Authorized Signature for JVA/ BSDZ

Authorized signature for BSC

22-3-21

22-3-21

Mahe

3.22.21