

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND



The New
Memorial of Moses
on Mount Nebo

Inauguration and Blessing - October 15-16, 2016

The Memorial of Moses to this days the memory of the place where Moses was offered a complete view of the Promised Land and then died in the hands of God.

It is one of the most important Holy Places in Jordan and is the property of the Custody of the Holy Land.

The new Memorial is intended to enable pilgrims, visitors and academics alike to appreciate to the full the rich religious and historical heritage of this site.

Work Phases

First Phase (2008-2010)

Supervisors: Fr. Michele Piccirillo, then Fr. Carmelo Pappalardo

Conceptual Design: Prof. Arch. Roberto Sabelli

Geological consultant: Prof. Geol. Piergiorgio Malesani

Structural Consultant: Ing. Riccardo Papi

Site supervision: Gianfranco Micallizzi

Second Phase (2010-2016)

Supervisors: Fr. Ibrahim Faltas and Fr. Eugenio Alliata

Executive design and site supervision

Chief Engineer and Structure: Prof. Ing. Roberto Scotta,
with Ing. Andrea Perin

Architecture: Prof. Arch. Sandro Pittini
with Andrea Bozzo and Arch. Luisa Boschi

MEPs: Ing. Renato Zanatta with Ivano Bressan

Technical supervision

Architectural aspects and Management: Arch. Osama Hamdan

Structural Aspects and Management: Ing. Shadi Qumseya

Structural Aspects and Management: Ing. Leonardo Di Marco

Archaeological Investigations: Fr. Eugenio Alliata and Dr. Davide Bianchi

Supervisor of the restoration: Franco Sciorilli

Mount Nebo is certainly one of the most important historical sites in Jordan today, important both from a religious and artistic aspect point of view. The view of the Holy Land that God wanted to offer to Moses in the last moments of his life is the most effective sign of the particular closeness and friendship between God and the prophet. The same Christian presence and the ancient monuments here have arisen from the desire to perpetuate and relive this experience, one that is offered to different cultures and different religions.

Testimony to the interest that Mt Nebo has attracted over time, has been in particular the visits and in-depth investigations carried out by our Studium Biblicum Franciscanum of Jerusalem and the constant attention of the Custody of the Holy Land to its maintenance and enhancement, all begun with courage and determination and despite great difficulties eighty four years ago. Indeed, it is only recently that a stable community has been established in the small monastery on the side of the sanctuary, ensuring that it has now become a place of life, of prayer and hospitality.

The building that is now being opened today, constructed for the protection and enhancement of the ruins of the sanctuary, is not the first one to be built on the spot. Yet this present structure retains features that we hope will be of long lasting benefit.

In fact, as expressed in the letter addressed to the architects invited to submit their initial design the sanctuary naturally possesses a dual function that needs to be preserved and highlighted. It has to be first and foremost a place of prayer for pilgrims and the local Christian community, but at the same time it is also offered as a place for all to visit, given the extraordinary appeal and beauty of its mosaic floors.

A long series of problems involving the construction work, especially following the sudden death of Father Michele Piccirillo, which occurred exactly eight years ago has led to many delays. But by the grace of God and with the help of many friends we have been able to arrive at this joyful moment when it is possible to resume its normal daily use.

We hope that those who come on this day to this mountain, may be open to the voice of the Spirit and so experience the grace and mercy of God.

Fr. Francesco Patton
Custos of the Holy Land

Moses is present more than any other biblical prophet in the pages of the Holy Books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Below are just a few quotes:

Deuteronomy 34,1-7

¹ Then **Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo**, the headland of Pisgah which faces Jericho, and the Lord showed him all the land ... ⁴ The Lord then said to him, "... I have let you feast your eyes upon it, but you shall not cross over."

⁵ So there, in the land of Moab, Moses, the servant of the Lord, died as the Lord had said; ⁶ and he was buried in the ravine opposite Beth-Peor in the land of Moab, but to this day no one knows the place of his burial. ⁷ Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated.

Gospel of John 3,14-15

¹⁴ And just as **Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert**, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Quran, sura 19,51-52 (Maryam)

⁵¹ Also mention Moses in the Book: for he was specially chosen, and **he was a messenger, a prophet**. ⁵² And we called him from the right side of the Mount, and made him draw near to Us, for conversation.

Madaba, Jericho, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Moab, Mount Nebo, Pisgah where are they in the world?



Mount Nebo is located on one of the western ridges of the el-Balqa plateau (the ancient Plains of Moab) overlooking the northeastern part of the Dead Sea. The farthest spur towards the Jordan Valley is called today **Siyagha**, a name of ancient aramaic origin meaning “monastery, community of monks”. Siyagha is no doubt the biblical Pishgah.

The choice of this site for such a memory has most likely been due to the marvellous view that, mostly during clear days in winter, can be enjoyed unobstructed down the western slopes of the oriental plateau, across the plain (the ancient Steppes of Moab) through which the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea, and up the opposite deserted lands, which can be followed by the eye as far as the **Holy City of Jerusalem**.

Mount Nebo and the Memorial of Moses have been visited by pilgrims for many centuries, and still are today. The Pilgrim Egeria and Peter the Iberian are two of these early witnesses.

1. Soon we had the prayers and the other things which were usual in a holy place, and we were about to leave the church. Then the presbyters and holy monks who were familiar with the place asked us: “Would you like to see the places which are described in the Book of Moses? If so, go out of the church door to the actual summit, **the place which has the view**, and spend a little time looking at it. We will tell you which places you can see.”

This delighted us, and we went straight out. From the church door itself we saw where the Jordan runs into the Dead Sea, and the place was down below where we were standing. Then, facing us, we saw Livias on our side of the Jordan, and Jericho on the far side, since the height in front of the church door, where we were standing, jutted out over the valley. In fact from there you can see most of Palestine, the Promised Land and everything in the area of Jordan as far as the eye can see.

(Egeria's travel, XII, ca. 400 A.D.).



2. And so, since they were convinced that the (shepherd's) vision was a true one, all the inhabitants of that region together hurriedly brought building material, and this temple was built in the name of the great prophet and lawgiver. And he (Moses) publicly proclaims to everyone his goodness and power by means of signs and wonders and cures, which since that time have occurred at this place without interruption. For it is a place of cure both for the souls and for the bodies, and **a place of refuge for all those, who come here from all places** and are afflicted in soul and affected with many kinds of suffering of the body.

After we had prayed there and as a viaticum, had received the prayers of the great prophet, we reached the town mentioned above (namely Madaba). (J. Rufus, The life of Peter the Iberian, ca. 430 A.D.)

Below. Panoramic view over the Jordan Valley and The Dead Sea as can be seen from Mount Nebo.

Right. The head of an ancient monk on a clay fragment discovered under the mosaic floor of the sanctuary in 1965.



During the 19th Century the Land beyond the Jordan attracted the attention of the first explorers coming up from the Dead Sea shores to the Moabitic plateau.

The identification of biblical Mount Nebo with the mountain, today visited to the west of Madaba, is based primarily on the discovery of the name (Jabal Nebo) still in use among the Bedouin tribes. It was noted by the explorers who came here: Félicien de Saulcy (1853 – first regional map), Le Duc de Luynes (1864 – first photo and sketch of the ruins), Henry B. Tristram (1864 and 1872), John A. Paine (1873), Selah Merrill (1876), Claude R. Conder (1881 – first detailed survey East of the Jordan), Gottlieb Schumacher (1891), Alois Musil (1901) and Nelson Glueck (1932). To them we owe the rich information and the precise descriptions of the territory in relation to the biblical page narrating the last days of Moses.



DJEBEL-MOUSA

SAINT-JEAN DE MARS-LEZ-LYONS

The first photo of the ruins of the basilica, by Le Duc de Luynes in 1864.







Above. Bro. Jerome Mihaic is at the origin of the Franciscan presence on Mount Nebo.

Right. King Abdullah I of Jordan. From an old photograph preserved in the Franciscan Monastery.



The genuine interest of the Custody of the Holy Land in Mount Nebo is owed to the exuberant personality of brother Jerome Mihaic, as well as to many other Franciscans.

The presence of the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land on Mount Nebo has been made possible thanks to the enthusiasm and spirit of enterprise of **Brother Jerome Mihaic**, a Croatian by birth, an Argentinian by adoption. Besides being responsible for the upkeep of the garden of the Custody at Jericho, he was also a friend and benefactor of the Bedouin families living both to the east and west of the Jordan River. In 1932, with the consent and collaboration of the Amir Abdullah bin Hussein, the Custody of the Holy Land acquired from members of the Wukhyan tribe the two main archaeological sites on Mount Nebo, Ras Siyagha and Khirbet al-Mukhayyat. They didn't know which of the two would be the correct one: later excavations were to reveal Siyagha as the Memorial of Moses and Mukhayyat as the City of Nebo.

THE MOUNT N			
1500000 years B.P.	Pre-historic	First humans living in Mount Nebo area	
3000 years B.C.		Stone monuments erected on the mountain	
13th Cent. B.C.		Israelites wandering in the desert Moses dies on Mount Nebo (Dt 34:5)	
9th Cent. B.C.	Historic	King Mesha of Moab conquers the City of Nebo (Kh. al-Mukhayyat)	
2nd Cent. B.C.		Asmonaeans settle in Kh. al-Mukhayyat	
2nd Cent. A.D.	Roman	Roman Emperors establish Provincia Arabia, restore its main routes	
3rd-4th Cent. A.D.		Samaritans leave funerary inscriptions	
4th-5th Cent. A.D.	Byzantine	Christian Monasticism develops near the Springs of Moses Christian pilgrims start visiting the place A church is built where Moses was believed to have been buried	
6th Cent. A.D.		The Basilica is surrounded by a large monastic compound	
530 A.D.		A beautiful mosaic adorned the Northern Diakonikon-Baptistry	
597 A.D.		The Southern Baptistry replaces an earlier funerary room	

NEBO TIMELINE

604 ca. A.D.	The Chapel of the Virgin Mary (Theotokos), is built and decorated	Arab
638-642 A.D.	Islamic armies conquer the Levant	
749 A.D.	A deadly earthquake strikes the Jordan Valley including Mt. Nebo	
8th Cent. A.D.	The Church and Monastery is rebuilt as a fortified compound	Modern
9th-10th Cent. A.D.	The site is permanently abandoned	
19th Cent. A.D.	Mt. Nebo identified by Western explorers	
1932 A.D.	Ras Siyagha and Kh. al-Mukhayyat acquired by the Franciscans	
1933-1937 A.D.	Archaeological investigations directed by Fr. Sylvester J. Saller	
1964 A.D.	A shelter is built by Fr. Virgilio Corbo, who excavates its interior	PERIODS
1976 A.D.	Diakonikon-Baptistry mosaic uncovered by Fr. Michele Piccirillo	
2016 A.D.	The ancient Memorial and renovated site is re-opened	



Fr. Sylvester Saller (the franciscan seated on the left) and Bro. Jerome Mihaic (the Franciscan standing on the right, with some visitors from the Bedouin tribes.

On July 14, 1933, the systematic clearance of the site was begun under the direction of **Fr. Sylvester Saller**, who was a young Franciscan archaeologist belonging to the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem, itself still in its infancy. In fact, the Mount Nebo expedition was its very first such enterprise, and served as a good training ground also for Fr. Bellarmino Bagatti and Fr. Hillary Schneider, whom Saller associated to himself also in the publication of the findings from Siyagha (in 1941 and 1950) and from Mukhayyat (in 1949).

Dozens of local workers were employed with different tasks, both Moslems from the local Wukhyan Bedouin tribe as well as Christians from Madaba, the nearest town. Members of the same families still work on the site.

A great monastic complex, incorporating an area of about 6640 sq. meters, was brought to light. The center of the complex was occupied by a basilica, three chapels, a narthex and an atrium surrounded by cells. Around this central group there are arranged many other buildings, only some of which have been excavated. Below the eastern end of the basilica were discovered remains of an older building, which from its three opposite apses received the name of “Cella Trichora”.

Fr. Saller’s excavations of the Mount Nebo basilica and monastery have been seminal and led to the first thorough archaeological investigation of the whole mountain.

In 1963 it became necessary to restore and protect with a permanent shelter the most important remains including those of the Trichora, of the basilica and of the lateral chapels. **Fr. Virgilio Corbo** who had experience as an archaeologist as well as a builder, was put in charge of the work. A prefabricated iron shelter was put in place. It was designed as a very strong structure, to resist the easterly wind, but the instability of the mountain top would later lead to its replacement.

After having covered the place with the new roof, Fr. Corbo initiated a thorough excavation of most of the area down to the bedrock. He discovered some new mosaic floors like that of the braided cross, a very early mosaic inscription under the baptistery and some other important elements enriching the early history of the site.

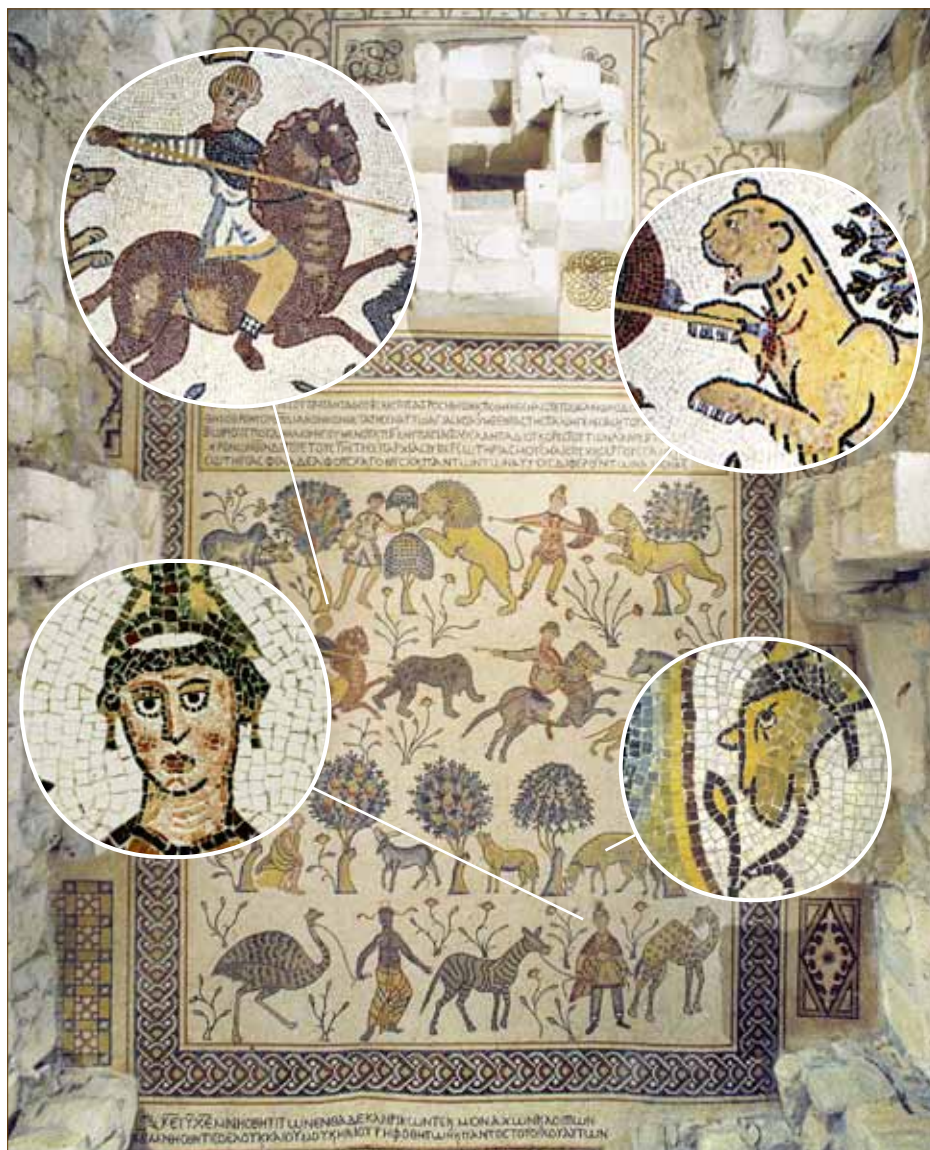
The 1967 war interrupted these investigations, Mt Nebo having become a fortified military area. In 1973, **Fr. Michele Piccirillo** was named as Corbo's successor and was sent from Jerusalem to take care of the site.

With the construction of the first shelter over the ruins, built by Fr. Corbo in 1963, the opportunity was presented to remove the mosaic floors and explore the monument's early history.



Left. The mosaic of the braided cross (5th Cent. A.D.), one of the earliest in the basilica of Mount Nebo. Below. Fr. Virgilio Corbo.





The most beautiful, large and intact mosaic of Jordan, with two Greek inscriptions full of historical details, was discovered in 1976 by Fr. Michele Piccirillo. He then turned his attention to the monastery surrounding the basilica and the many hermitages down the valleys.

In 1976 Fr. Michele Piccirillo was able to restart Corbo's excavations from where they had been interrupted. In the northern hall, about one meter below the level of a simple mosaic floor, which had been previously removed, **the most beautiful, large and intact mosaic** of Jordan came to light. Hunting and pastoral scenes are shown within a colourful, braided border.

The Greek inscriptions give us all the historical details and a precise dating of August 530 A.D. The function of the building is specified as a "diaconicon", its liturgical furnishing being said to be a "holy pool of rebirth" embellished by a most graceful "ciborium". A cross-shaped baptismal font was actually found on the hall eastern end.



Above. Fr. Michele Piccirillo.



Right. Detail of an inscription from Umm er-Rasas - Mayfaa with the memory of Kayoum, a monk and priest of Phisga, the biblical name for Siyagha.

Once the work on the basilica was completed, attention turned to the exterior. This led to a systematic investigation of the ruins of the Byzantine monastery. There is evidence that the rooms surrounding the church and the western courtyard were related to **the first presence of monks** who looked after the place. Moreover the monks adapted as habitations the natural cavities on the sides of the summit, surrounding them often by a built up area. Most of these hermitages remained beyond the boundary of the monastery when it was rebuilt as a smaller fortified complex soon after the big earthquake that shook all of the Jordan Valley, including Mount Nebo, in 749 A.D.

Several Abbots' names are recorded in inscriptions found on site, in Ayoun Mousa, in Ayn al-Kanisah and in Umm er-Rasas. From the Umm er-Rasas inscription can be inferred that **the monastery was known as "Phisgah"**. All these inscriptions attest to the wide influence exerted by the monastery of Nebo during the Byzantine and Early Arab periods.

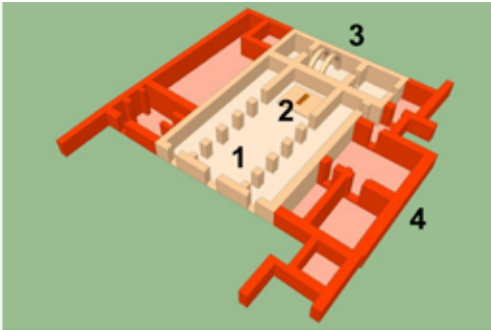
With the help of God, the Custody of the Holy Land has brought the construction of the new Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo to a conclusion and wishes to thank all those who in great or small ways, worked on this project.

Throughout the years the original shelter had been improved to present a dignified appearance for the Sanctuary of Moses, as well as an adequate environment for the treasures preserved inside it. However the proved geological instability of the mountain top led to the decision **to replace the old shelter with a new one**. Several architect studios were contacted to present their ideas for the new Memorial and the project prepared by Arch. Roberto Sabelli was finally chosen. All the preliminary geological and structural studies were made by the University of Florence, Italy. The sudden death of Fr. Michele Piccirillo, in October 2008, created a difficult situation that led to a succession of unanticipated delays. Finally in 2012 the central administration of the Custody of the Holy Land took over and the work was brought to the end under its direct supervision.

Clockwise. Raising the wooden structure over the Sanctuary (2010). - The Coenotaphium is found in the middle of the central nave (2013). - Covering the external walls with white stone slabs (2014).



During the construction of the new Memorial Fr. Eugenio Alliata and Dr. Davide Bianchi were appointed to take care of the **archaeological evidences** coming to light. New and interesting hypotheses regarding its early development are presented by means of the following sketches.



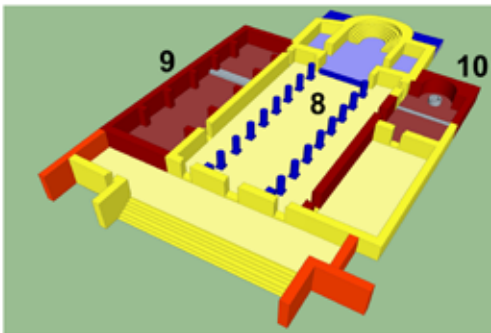
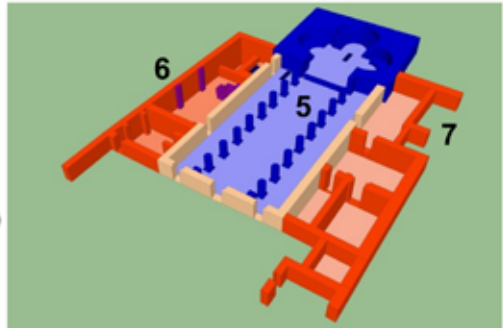
DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEMORIAL

5th Cent. A.D.
(tan and red)

1. The first church
2. *Coenotaphium*
3. Funerary chapels
4. The early monastery

Between 5th and 6th Cent. A.D.
(blue and violet)

5. Large basilica ending in a *Cella Trichora*
6. *Diaconicon-Baptistry* (530 A.D.)
7. Southern Hall

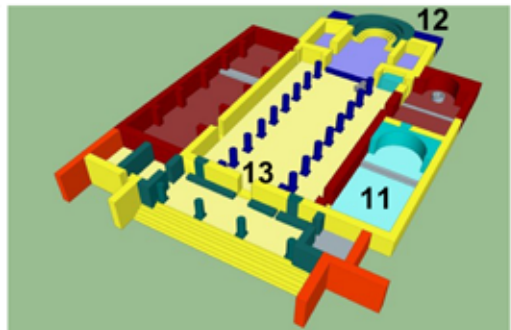


End of 6th Cent. A.D.
(yellow and brown)

8. New basilica with square *pastophoria*
9. The Northern Hall
10. The Southern Baptistry (597 A.D.)

7th and 8th Cent. A.D.
(turquoise and green)

11. Chapel of the *Theotokos* (circa 604 A.D.)
12. The apse is rebuilt (after the earthquake of 749 A.D.)
13. Side doors are blocked





*Clockwise. Antonino Vaccalluzzo at work.
- The team of local workers with Fr. Eugenio Alliaia and Dr. Davide Bianchi.
- Franco Sciorilli restoring ancient mosaics. - Expert hands documenting finds from the excavation.*



A careful restoration of the ancient wall structures and all the mosaic floors has been performed by a local team instructed and co-ordinated by Italian masters.

A great deal of attention has been devoted to the **methodical and careful restoration** of wall structures and mosaic floors under the responsibility of the experienced Italian restorer, Franco Sciorilli. The mosaics were mainly replaced on the original floor levels, except when they belonged to a space from where different superimposing mosaics originated. In that case one is mounted on the wall next to its original place.

The restoration work has been carried out with the help of a team composed of **local workers**, instructed and co-ordinated by Franco Sciorilli himself. Invaluable work was conducted also by the renowned Italian master, Antonino Vaccalluzzo, who spent many months fine tuning the mosaic restoration.

Objects found in the course of work were treated and prepared for publication by **dedicated volunteers**.

The presence of the Franciscans on Mt Nebo guarantees the accessibility of this archaeological, religious and historical patrimony for the thousands of visitors and pilgrims who visit each year.

For some years now, the Custody of the Holy Land has established a stable religious community on Mt Nebo with the purpose of welcoming these pilgrims and facilitating their celebration of the Christian Liturgy. A small friary situated to the west of the Memorial, with a chapel houses this community.

Here too, are welcomed those who, on request, seek a place of prayer and quiet, and who wish to enjoy some time of peace and spirituality far from the hectic pace of twenty first century life.

The **Friary at Mt Nebo** has also become a point of reference for international and diplomatic institutions (Embassies, Cultural Centers, NGOs etc) who often request the friars to welcome and to guide important international guests during their visits to Jordan. In the near future the community hope to expand cultural activities here.

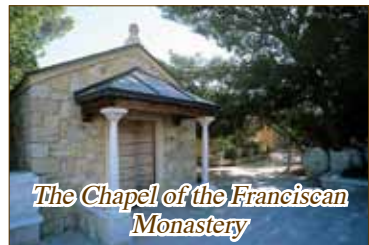
However, the works of the Custody of the Holy Land in Jordan are not limited solely to those connected with Mt Nebo. **Terra Sancta College in Amman** was founded in 1947 and today is host to over one thousand students. It is highly regarded among the educational institutions of Jordan both for its facilities and for the quality of its teaching.



Interior view of the new Memorial of Moses



The Terra sancta College in Amman



The Chapel of the Franciscan Monastery

CELEBRATIONS FOR THE RE-OPENING OF THE MEMORIAL OF MOSES MOUNT NEBO – JORDAN

Saturday, October 15, 2016 at 4:00 pm

Civil Ceremony to inaugurate Restored Memorial of Moses (Admission with invitation only)
Solemn opening of the door of the Memorial
“Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith” (Is 26,2)
افتحوا الابواب لادخل الامة البارة الحافظة الامانة

Sunday, October 16, 2016

Religious Ceremony in Basilica presided by H.Em. Card. Leonardo Sandri, Special Envoy of His Holiness Pope Francis (The memorial area is accessible for the mass and the concert only)

6:00 pm: Solemn Mass

all priests are invited to concelebrate – please, confirm your attendance (please, bring alb and stole) The celebration is open to all

9:00 pm: Concert

Terra Sancta International Organ Festival
Inauguration of the new small and prestigious Italian pipe organ “Nicola Puccini”
Eugenio Maria Fagiani (Italy), organist.
Soloists of the Fountain of Love Choir (Jordan)
Tareq Al-Jundi, oud; Nasser Salameh, raq In collaboration with the Embassy of Italy in Amman - Admission Free

OTHER EVENTS OF THE PROGRAM

Monday, October 17, 2016 - 11:00 am

Workshop on the restoration and new discoveries of the basilica to Tourist Guides
Prof. Fr. Eugenio Alliata, scientific director of the restoration, Architect Osama Hamdan, construction manager Franco Sciorilli, responsible for the restoration of mosaics

From 2:00 pm: Guided tours in Arabic & English

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

From 10:00 am to 2:00 pm: Guided tours in Arabic & English
“Precious Water”: archaeological Seminar organized by the Italian Embassy in Amman in collaboration with Mount Nebo Franciscan Monastery

10:00 am

AMMAN - University of Jordan: Seminar

4:00 pm

MOUNT NEBO Presentation of the Memorial of Moses to the scientific community.
Speaker: Prof. Fr. Eugenio Alliata (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum – Jerusalem)

November

Guided visits for schools (reservation required)

December, date to be announced

4:00 pm Seminar

“The Prophet Moses and Mount Nebo”
organized by Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, Italian Embassy in Amman, Mount Nebo Franciscan Monastery
Under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal

Friday, December 23, 2016

6:00 pm: Christmas Concert
The first Jordanian “Christmas Oratorio” composed and conducted by Tomeh Jbara – Fountain of Love Choir and Orchestra

Saturday, December 24, 2016

10:00 pm: Solemn Christmas Mass in the Basilica