



## THE PORTRAYAL OF DAILY LIFE – HARVEST OF FRUITS AND TRANSPORT (MOUNT NEBO-JORDAN)

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### ABSTRACT

The site of the Mount Nebo-Madaba area has two main locations are included a scenes of a Portrayal of daily life- harvest of fruits and transport in mosaic pavements from Byzantine period. The first one is in Uyun Musa and the second from in the Mukhayyat area both located near the springs. This area very important, the artist made him work from the scenes of agriculture daily life. The study will examine here a selection of visual arts in order to detect certain important aspects of ancient society in Jordan from the Byzantine era, such as scenes of Portraits of the harvest of fruits and transport. The study wishes to found that the respective artist was able to implement his drawings on those floors in accordance with the principles and rules relating to the technical work. This led to a highlighting of the aesthetic side of these works, where in the images depart from the war iconoclasms during the 8th century AD, frequently found in some of the churches in the region. Additionally, the artist was able through these scenes to give an idea of some of the devastation suffered by farm animals and trees and fruits during attacks on agricultural lands. These scenes are an important historical document of the daily lives of members of Byzantine society, especially given the scarcity of records documenting daily life during this period.

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**KEYWORDS:** Portrayal of daily life, harvest of fruits, mosaic, Madaba, Mount Nebo, Uyun Musa, Mukhayyat, Byzantine.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The visual arts play an important role in highlighting daily life in societies in generally. It can also be applied to ancient societies; particularly those dating back to the prehistoric period beginning with drawings such as were implemented on cave walls. Drawings have played an important role in highlighting the social, economic and cultural development of ancient societies, particularly given the lack of written material relating to those aspects; hence the decision to study drawings prevalent during the Byzantine era in Jordan so as to get an idea regarding Byzantine society at the time. In addition to providing information regarding the community's technical progress, through their technical analysis, these drawings provide a witness to daily life in the community. This study deals with the historical aspect of the region during the Byzantine period, based on which we have an understanding of the technique used in carrying out the drawings. They provide important scenes from everyday life reflective of agriculture and hunting, considered as characterizing Byzantine society. The drawings feature settings from everyday life related to agriculture and hunting, considered the letter ruling and the task in Byzantine society in this area. Thus, we address this craft through the drawings that embody this craft. The views generally relate to agriculture and contain trees and the fruits, as well as the vehicles used to transport fruit. We also describe the drawings and analyze them, and then compare them to similar models in the region belonging to the same period, so as to give us an idea regarding the society's progress. It seems that the spread of Christianity during the Byzantine era and especially during the the fifth and sixth centuries, a period during the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-65 CE).

## 2. LOCATION OF THE STUDY

The city of Madaba, located 30 kilometres southwest of Amman and the study located in Area of Madaba (Mount Nebo – Uyun Musa and Mukhayyat), as shown in Fig. 1.( Piccirillo 1986).

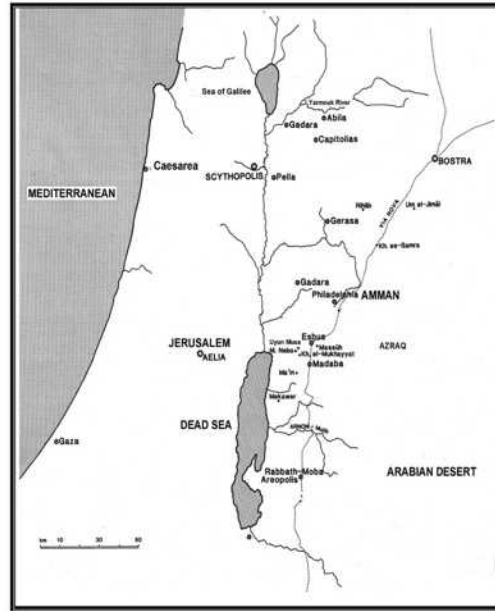


Figure 1, Map of the Study Area,

## 3. HISTORY OF THE SITE

The Madaba as part of the Arab province, through of the writings of the Romans and the Byzantines philosophers, like Roman Ptolemaic and Byzantine Asitvans (Spijkerman 1978, 180). Madaba was visited by many travelers, they describe the plan of the city, including Tristram, Schumacher, Musil, and Father Manferdi (Tristrm 1873, 311; Schumacher 1895, 113; Manfredi 1899, 150; Musil 1907, 329, 330, 332-333). The city of Madaba during the Byzantine period, were fully active in religious architecture in order to spread the Christian religion in the region that was part of the province of Arab (Devreesse 1940, 220).The writings that appeared in the floors of churches in Madaba and the surrounding area indicate that Madaba was very important in religious architecture and wide and that the

oldest known church history up to now is the Church of Saint George in Nebo, dated to AD 535/536 and then we find many other churches after.

#### 4. THE TECHNIQUES USED IN THE MOSAIC FLOORS

In general most of the mosaic pavement was used in the byzantine churches in Jordan in the same techniques. As is usually the case with large mosaic pavements, each consists of a bed composed of different layers. The first layer consists of soil settled using a compacted layer of local red earth. On top of this layer is another layer, of small round pebbles packed closely together and covered with a layer of ash and lime mortar. This smooth bed covered the whole area, to a thickness of 13 cm. A layer of wet lime plaster, on average 1 cm. thick, was spread over. This was done in stages, then sketches of drawing also laid in then depending on the area, and the mosaicist had to work before the plaster dried.

Normally, the mosaicist would draw outlines of the composition in red or black. He would then start laying the tesserae into the wet plaster. The tesserae were usually cubes 1 cm square, cut from local limestone, basalt and jasper. Sometimes glass tesserae were used in order to achieve brighter colours, such as green, blue, and gold (Ling 1994, 77-89; Neal 1976, 241; Piccirillo 1986, 40; Nassar and Turshan 2011, 44). Much the same technique was used on the floor of the Madaba churches.

#### 5. THE PORTRAYAL: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

##### 5.1 *The scenes of agriculture*

This study deals with agricultural scenes; here, we focus on the scenes of gatherers if they used their hands or some special tools and those featuring the vehicles used to transport fruits.

***Fruit gatherers:*** Through the study, we can see that fruit-gatherers focused on fruit, grapes and pomegranate, which also functioned as religious symbols, something we touch on later. We focus here on scenes of gatherers cultivating grapes, because it is the most prevalent relative, to say, scenes featuring pomegranate.

***The scenes of peasants collecting grapes:*** Grapevines were fairly common among past civilizations, particularly the Roman civilization. Here we focus on scenes of harvesting of the fruits of the vine. The artist could be from the Byzantine era as he gives us scenes from everyday life during that period. The focus was not only on figures representing scenes of harvesting of the fruits of the vine, but also on related religious symbols, which are the main highlights of these scenes. Notably, these scenes were found in places of worship (i.e., churches). The religious significance is evident in passages of the Bible (the Psalms, for instance), which describe vine trunks loaded with grapes and scrolls showing the people of God. The scenes also reveal the kingdom of God and Jesus himself in a close relationship with believers.

We find scenes of peasants harvesting grapes in some of the churches in Jordan dating to the Byzantine period. There are locations in Mount Nebo, the first one is in Mukhayyat and the second one is in the Uyun Musa. There are two example from Mukhayyat location both are similar, the first one is in the floor of the nave of the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius at Mount Nebo – Mukhayyat (fig. 2) dated to 557 AD (Musil 1907; Saller and Bagatti 1949, 39-41, 55-67; Piccirillo 1997, 164, Pl. 204).

Here, the peasant stands between a scroll of leaves and the fruits of the vine. He is wearing a gray *chiton* with a dark black outline. His face is oval, and his wide and dark eyes are looking at the grapes. His dark hair is somewhat combed and wavy.



Figure 2. Peasant cutting grapes, Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius Mount Nebo-Mukhayyat

He holds in his right hand a sickle to be used for cutting off a bunch of grapes. His left hand is holding a bunch of grapes. Behind the peasant there is a basket full of dark red and black grapes; the basket is colored red and dark black, while the center of the basket, features vertical slides painted dark yellow. The inner of the center is horizontal and is colored red and dark black. The peasant, basket and scroll of leaves and grapes are all featured against a white background. The second example from Mukhayyat is on the floor of the nave of the lower Chapel of the Priest John at Mount Nebo-Mukhayyat (Fig. 3), which dates to the second half of the fifth century AD (Piccirillo 1988, 297-315; 1997, 176, Pl. 235). Here, we find more curvature with the peasant than with the one in the Church of Saints Lot and Procopius and in the Church of the Deacon Thomas. The peasant is looking forward; also, the configuration of the sickle is different from that in the other examples, it is at the head to right foot of the peasant, whereas the left hand, which is holding a bunch of grapes, drops partly within the basket. Additionally, here, the basket is filled with dark red and black grapes.

The second locution (Uyun Musa – Mount Nebo) has two Churches are included a scenes of peasants harvesting grapes, the first example is on the floor of the nave of the Church of the Deacon



Figure 3. A grape cutter, the lower chapel of the Priest John, Mount Nebo-Mukhayyat.

Thomas (fig. 4) dated to the Byzantine period (Piccirillo 1989, 216-223; 1997, 187, Pl. 253); here, however, there is no basket as in



Figure 4. A grape cutter, Church of the Deacon Thomas at Mount Nebo-Uyun Musa.

the previous scene.

The second example from Uyun Musa was found on the floor of the West panel of the nave of the Lower church of Kaianus (Fig. 5), which dates to the beginning of the sixth century AD (Piccirillo 1984, 307-318; 1989, 536-586; 1997, 189, Pls. 271, 275). The peasant is looking upwards and the basket in front of him, as in the previous example.

## 6. THE SCENE OF HARVESTED

### 6.1 Collecting pomegranate

Pomegranate is no less important a motif than the tree vine, and is also common,



Figure 5. A grape cutter: The Lower church of Kaianus-Uyun Musa

dating back to ancient periods. It was used in the arts, especially in frescos during the Roman era. The study is focusing here on the use of pomegranate figures used in harvest scenes. Byzantine artists incorporate pomegranate scene in these drawings. In general, the researchers find the existence of such scenes to have greater significance than scenes of the fruits of the vine, as they highlight everyday life. There is also the religious significance based on the Bible where the pomegranate symbolizes charity, as it spreads seeds when it blooms. Scenes of peasants cutting pomegranates are generally less common than similar scenes of the fruits of the vine, although we do find scenes featuring pomegranate in many churches, both in Jordan and in nearby areas; one site from our study contains a scene featuring the harvesting of pomegranates.

There are only one example in the area, is on Mount Nebo was found on the floor of the Church of the Deacon Thomas at Uyun Musa (Fig. 6), and dates to the Byzantine period (Piccirillo 1989, 216-223; 1997, 187, Pl. 256), here, a peasant stands between a scroll of leaves, grapes of the vine, and a pomegranate tree. He is wearing a dark red *chiton* with a dark black outline. His face is oval, and his wide and dark eyes are looking at the pomegranates. His dark hair is somewhat wavy. In his right hand, he

holds cut pomegranates, while in his left hand, he is carrying a basket. The basket is colored red and dark black; the peasant, basket, scroll of leaves of grapes, and the pomegranate tree are all set against a white background.



Figure 6 Peasant cutting pomegranate

In general we find one example from Syria similar to those found in Mount Nebo, is on the floor of the Church of Saint George at Deir el- Adas, dated to AD 722 (Dunbabin 1999, 185, fig. 199).

### 6.2 Scenes of the transportation of fruits

The study find two manners of transporting fruits on the floors of churches in Jordan dating to the Byzantine period; one where they are transported by humans and the other by using the animals.

### 6.3 Scenes of animals transporting fruits

After harvesting the fruit, there must have been a means for helping farmers to transfer them. It could be that artists from the Byzantine period, through the images of scenes from daily life, are highlighting the role of animals in helping farmers to transfer crops, which gives an idea about the nature of rural life during that period. These scenes highlight because of its focus on the means of transportation from this historical era. Its presence on the floors of some of the churches is common.

There are two locations from Moun Nebo has a scenes of a peasant carrying the grapes on the back of a donkey, the first

location in Mukhayyat and the second location from Uyun Musa. The first, has two examples, the first one is on the floor of the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius (fig. 7), dated to 557 AD (Saller and Bagatti 1949, 39-41, 55-67; Piccirilo 1997, 152, 164, Pl. 203).



Figure 7. Peasant carrying the grapes, Church of Saint Lot and Procopius, Mukhayyat/ Mount Nebo.

Here, the peasant is dragging a donkey; each is standing between a scroll of leaves and fruits of the vine. The peasant is wearing a gray *chiton* with a dark black outline. The face is oval, his wide and dark eyes looking towards the donkey; his dark hair is somewhat wavy. His right hand is holding a rope leading to the donkey, while his left hand is holding a long stick. The donkey is walking behind the peasant, is looking forward, and is carrying a basket, decorated with a slant in dark yellow and red and filled with grapes. The images of the peasant and donkey are drawn against a white background made up of mosaic pavements.

The second example also from Mukhayyat, is on the floor of the nave of the Lower Chapel of the Priest John (Fig. 8) dated to the second half of the fifth century AD (Piccirillo 1997, 176, Pl. 240). Here, the peasant is looking forward, and is wearing a yellow *chiton* with a dark black outline. His belt is dark red and he is wearing shoes on his feet. He holds in his left hand a rope leading to the donkey; in his right hand, he is holding a long stick, black in color, which he places against his chest. The donkey is

walking behind the peasant, is looking forward, and is carrying a basket decorated with horizontal and vertical lines in dark red and black and with a white outline; it is filled with grapes. The images of the peasant and donkey are drawn against a white background of mosaic pavements, as in the previous example.



Figure 8. Peasant carrying the grapes, The Lower Chapel of the Priest John Mount Nebo- Mukhayyat

The second location is in the Uyun Musa, there are only one example from this location was found on the floor of the Church of the Deacon Thomas Musa (fig. 9), dated to the Byzantine period (Piccirillo 1989, 216-223; 1997, 180, 187, Pl. 253). Here, the peasant is looking at the donkey; he is wearing a grey *chiton* with a dark black outline, and his belt is red and a dark red outline. This peasant is without shoes on his feet. He holds in his left hand a rope leading to the donkey. In his right hand, he is holding a long stick, which he puts on his chest. It is colored light red. The donkey is walking behind the peasant, and is looking forward; it is



Figure 9. Peasant carrying the grapes, The Church of the Deacon / Mount Nebo- Uyun Musa ,

carrying a basket filled with grapes; it is decorated with a slant consisting of dark red lines against a dark red, black and white outline. The images of the peasant and donkey are drawn against a white color background made up of mosaic pavements, as in the previous example.

#### 6.4 Scenes of humans transporting fruits

The transporting of agricultural crops by humans existed even prior to the domestication of animals and their use in transporting agricultural crops. We find examples of modes of transportation for fruits used by humans on drawings appearing on the floors of three churches in the area. These scenes are no less important than those depicting animals in transferring fruit as per the previous examples.

There are two examples from Mukhayyat location at Mount Nebo, the first on the floor of the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius (Fig.10), which dates to AD 557 (Saller and Bagatti 1949, 39-41, 55-67; Piccirillo 1997, 152, 164, Pls.202, 205). Here, the old peasant standing between a scroll of leaves and fruits of the vine. He is wearing a gray *chiton* with a dark black outline. His face is oval, and his wide and dark eyes are looking forward; his bald head is hairy and hoary, as is his chin. Finally, he is wearing slipper and his fingers are appeared on his feet. The peasant carries on his back a basket filled with grapes that are grey with



Figure 10. Peasant carrying grapes, Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius Mukhayyat/ Mount Nebo

a dark outlines. The basket is dark red and yellow. The peasant, basket, scroll of leaves and grapes are against a white background.



Figure 11. Woman carrying grapes, Upper Chapel of the Priest John Mount Nebo-Mukhayyat

The second example also from Mukhayyat at Mount Nebo, is on the floor of the Upper Chapel of the Priest John (Fig. 11) dated to AD 565 A. D (Piccirillo 1997, 174, Pls. 229, 230).

Here though, scenes of a woman carrying a basket of pomegranates and stands between scrolls of leaves of pomegranates. She is wearing a gray and dark red *chiton* with a black outline. The face is oval, her wide and dark eyes looking forward; her head is covered with dark yellow and red scarf; under the scarf she appears to be wearing a crown colored white and black. A black necklace wraps around her neck. Her left hand is carrying a basket filled with dark yellow and dark red pomegranates, while her right hand is stretched forward. The basket is colored dark red and yellow. The peasant, basket and scroll of leaves of pomegranates are against a white background.

## 7. ARTISTIC ANALYSES OF THE DRAWINGS FOUND ON THE MOSAIC FLOOR PAVEMENTS

The analysis of the drawings found on the mosaic floors pavements has an important role in our knowledge of the extent to which artists used certain elements and the criteria governing works of art.

Correspondingly, we study these images as found on the drawings executed on the mosaic floors in certain churches in Jordan, such as reflect the daily life of peasants during the Byzantine era

**Lines:** The lines are the basic elements in the artwork. They have an important role in building a work of art; we find this is same wonderful role exists in nature. As we note, lines come in all forms, whether a simple straight line, or in as curved lines, italics, refractor parallels, orthogonal lines, and so forth. Through a descriptive study of the drawings, we have shown that many fonts were used by the artists in drawing scenes of daily life from the Byzantine era.

**Curved lines:** The artist was able to form from these lines many motifs, particularly in images representing scenes of daily life, especially where plant elements are concerned. These curved lines emerge prominently in some of the sub-branches of the twigs and the leaves of the vines, acanthus leaves and flowers (figs. 2-10). We also find that knife forms came use curved lines (figs. 2, 3 and 5).

**Semi-circular lines:** Semi-circular lines are used in the formation of many motifs. Most of them are found in the scrolls as parts of vine tendrils (figs. 2-10). We find semi-circular lines used in the formation of the scrolls of acanthus leaves.

**Circular lines:** Circular lines are employed by the artists in the pictures; these lines can be seen in the formation of the scrolls, in the vine tendrils (figs. 2-5, 7-10). In addition, we find that circle scrolls made up of acanthus leaves are used as borders for the images on some of the floor mosaics. Additionally, the artists use circular lines in drawing some of the armor worn by some of the farmers and soldiers as protection against the animals they are trying to catch.

**Sharp or broken lines:** Sharp lines are an important type of line employed by the artist in creating these scenes, and are evident in the forms of twigs and leaves.

They appear on the vine leaves and acanthus leaves, though the lines of the acanthus (fig. 11) leaves are sharper than those of the vine leaves (figs. 2, 6, 7, 10).

**The form:** The form is one of the important elements governing works of art. It is no less important than fonts and others elements. It constitutes an important aspect of works of art. Here, the artists employed scenes of daily life on mosaic pavements. The dominant form is of drawn images of peasants and animals used in agriculture, also images of hunting. These are well distributed in these decorative circles. The artists used scrolls of twigs, grapes and acanthus leaves in the design as well; these are explained through the images of farmers and animals.

**The Texture:** The texture played an important role in shaping artistic works. Here, texture was determined through the use of lines and contrast between surfaces so as to create a sense of texture. The scenes representing daily life as found on the mosaic floors are of polished stones, which give a sense of texture beautifully. The role of texture is evident with all of the drawings.

**Shadow and light:** Shadow and light depend mainly on the color. We find here that good colors have emerged, ranging from light to dark, and with differences generally delineated by lines. In this way, the artist was able to create the sensation of three dimensions. The scenes depicted here indicate a strong knowledge of how to use color and to distribute it, which helps to highlight shadow and light effectively.

**The space:** we find that the artists don't make much use of space in these scenes, which feature distributions of motifs of plants interspersed with the images of humans and animals very little space exists between them, and what vacuum there is here is deliberate. This is also what distinguishes these drawings that were executed on mosaic floors during the Byzantine era.



**Unit:** Here we find a significant degree of unity, whereby the artist was able to form a thread between the different parts of the drawings and form of them a single unit in a consistent manner. This indicates the Byzantine artist's ability to distribute multiple motifs in a coherent and logical way. He creates the sense of a single unit through the distribution of motifs involving the rolls of twigs, vine leaves and acanthus in a coherent manner; the same is evident with his images of human, animal, which exist inside the scrolls. He employed the idea of integration with respect to the decorative elements so as to create a sense unity in this work of art.

**Balance or equilibrium:** We find that the balance in nature evident in these images is wonderful; the artist benefitted from this balance, and he certainly emphasized it in his art. We see this in these drawings; the artist expressed this balance through his paintings, and sought to gain access to a configuration of an integrated professional, combining the old distribution of elements and units with a consistency and in a manner demonstrating the relationship between each and with the surrounding spaces. They included most of the spaces and surfaces. This balance is also evident in the implementation of decorative units. Particular forms of scrolls and the content of human and animal elements suggest to the viewer a sense of psychological well-being, indicating the experience and broad access enjoyed by the artist during the Byzantine era.

**Rhythm:** The rhythms of the important elements in these works were employed in a coordinated manner on the mosaic floors, and are reflected in the scenes of daily life. Among the elements the artist uses for inspiration are rhythm and repetition. This rhythm is highlighted through the repetition of scrolls of twigs and grapes, and acanthus leaves. Additionally, the artist used a gradient, both with respect to colors and shapes; continuity of domains is

evident in the scrolls.

**Sovereignty:** The role of color in the drawings that appear on the mosaic floors in the scenes of daily life is strong. In these works, it is clear, for example, that the artist focused on images of humans, animals and visibility, as evidenced in the scrolls of grape leaves and twigs, and the acanthus. Thus, we find that the artist, in these drawings, found it necessary to pay attention to certain, important elements for instance, that of sovereignty played an important role and was employed in order to highlight the aesthetics.

## 8. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The examination of the role of the images of everyday life as they appear on the mosaic floors in some of the churches in Jordan dating from the Byzantine era provided interesting remarks. a) The diversity of decorations on the mosaic floors, the living elements, inclusive of humans, animals, birds and plant elements, the leaves and twigs, and the grapes and pomegranates, show the diversity in the artistic taste of the artist's aesthetics, b) The artist appears to have been interested in realistic art, inasmuch as he painted scenes from everyday life as was lived on farms during the Byzantine era with precision and clarity, and thus has given us some idea regarding the daily lives of farmers. This means that in some of his topics, the artist was drawing heavily from everyday life. Such scenes are few in neighboring areas relative to the mosaics here. This means that the artist in Byzantine Jordan had a strong understanding of daily life as represented on the mosaic floors, c) where the artist did his drawings appears to be in accordance with this place, most of the drawings are well-thought out and are reflective of the location, d) The artist repeated certain motifs, in particular, when implementing the picture scrolls of daily life, which are reflective of the humanitarian situation as

represented in the forms of animals and plants, and sold items. He in fact tries to highlight images that are an important part of the topic he is dealing with through these drawings, e) The artist took a particular interest in areas with water, as represented in the diversity of decorative units, for example, we find images, whether human or animal, drawn within the frames of grapes and acanthus leaves, along with fruits and flowers. We find that the artist dealt carefully with the vacuum to give the landscape an aesthetic quality, f) The influences reflect a dimension of the Byzantine civilization and cultural heritage such as prevailed in the region. Particularly

noticeable is the Roman influence, which we observe in bite motifs, such as the scrolls on twigs, and the leaves and fruits of grapes and acanthuses, which were prevalent earlier in Roman art and architecture, particularly in the cities of the Decapolis; the art here benefits from Byzantine artistic traditions, which is evident in the motifs he employed in his paintings in general, g) It seems that the main aim of these scenes is to convey some of the suffering experienced on the farm in connection with attacks on agricultural lands, its impact on the fruit harvest, the transportation of goods, and on animals, trees and fruits.

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