

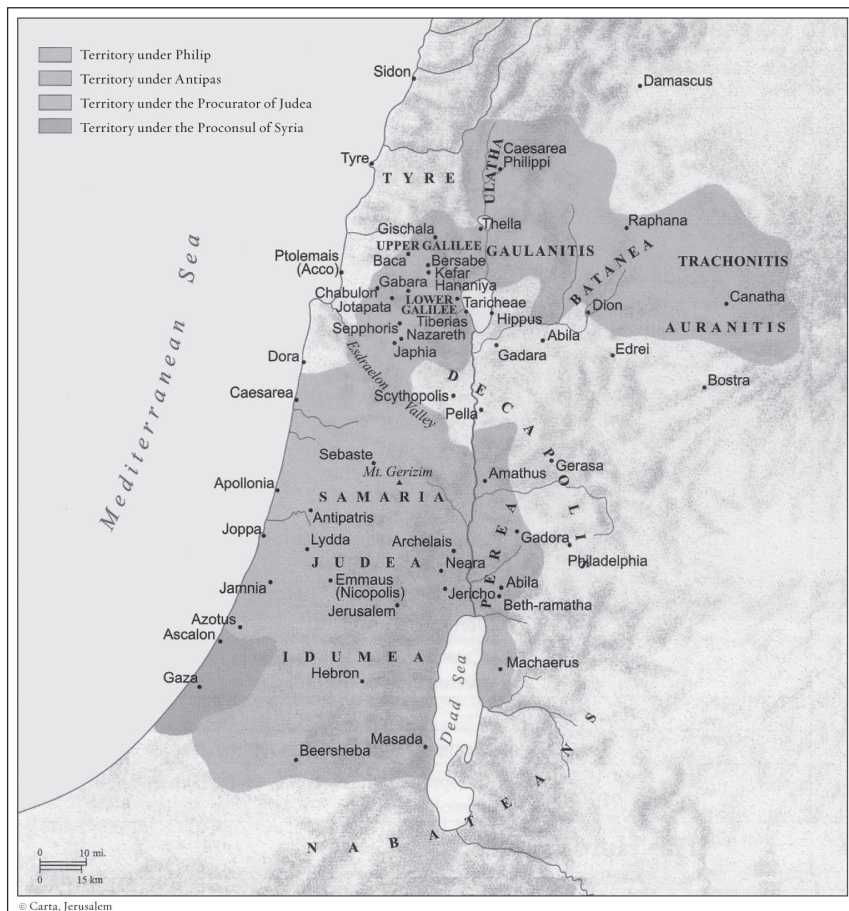
The History of the Archaeological Missions to Machaerus

Introduction

The Gospel according to John informs us that the baptism of Jesus “*happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising*” (John 1:28). The historical place in the Transjordan Wādī al-Kharrār is commemorated by five Byzantine churches, and called today as the “Baptism Site” that became with the wise decision of UNESCO one of the World Heritage Sites in 2015. It is not simply the historical place of the baptism of Christ, but the birthplace of Christianity as well: Jesus had collected his first five disciples on this sacred place (John 1: 35-51), the Apostles Andrew, Simon (Peter), Philip, Nathanael and an unnamed disciple. The dramatic re-discovery of the historical place after the 1994 Jordan-Israeli Peace Treaty led to the unexpected tsunami of new pilgrims, headed by the three consecutive popes of Rome: John Paul II (2000), Benedict XVI (2009) and Francis (2014). The historical place of the Baptism Site has been excavated by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities since 1996. Serious quantity of Early Roman material came to light, but their publications still not have seen the light of the day during the past

20 years. Meanwhile, there is another archaeological site connected to John the Baptist in the Kingdom of Jordan, one of the historical scenes of the Gospels: the Herodian royal castle and city of Machaerus, overlooking the Dead Sea (FIG. 1), where Salome danced and the Baptist was beheaded. The first two excavation final-report academic-monographs were published by the Edizioni Terra Santa in Milan, as Nos. 53 and 55 volumes in the *Collectio Maior* series of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem (Vörös 2013 and 2015).

Josephus, the official Roman historian of the first century Imperial Flavian Dynasty gave a detailed report on “*John that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him [...] he was sent a prisoner; out of Herod’s suspicious temper; to Machaerus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death*” (*Antiquitates Judaicae* XVIII 5,2). The historical fact of the imprisonment of John the Baptist is attested by all the Gospels, and their accounts are consistent with and complement that of Josephus. The fortified Biblical citadel and city of Machaerus in the Trans Dead Sea area were destroyed by the Legion X Fretensis of the Flavian Emperor Vespas-



1. The map of the Holy Land in the world of the Gospels, after the division of Herod's Kingdom. The Byzantine ruins at Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan can be found on the east bank of the Holy River, between Jericho and Beth-ramatha.

sian in 71 AD, and later turned into oblivion. In the meantime, the *Church History* of Eusebius in ca. 324 confirmed Machaerus, as the authentic and historical scene of the imprisonment and beheading of the Baptist (*Ecclesiastical History* I. 11. 4-6). However, the forgotten historical place, one of the most important scenes of the Gospels, was rediscovered only in 1968, and is being excavated under the direction of the present author of the Hungarian Academy of Arts since 2009, in an excellent collaboration with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. The archaeological site is 1100 meters above the Dead Sea, meanwhile the Government of HM King Abdullah II Ibn al-Hussein erected a magnificent motorway in 2011-2013 to provide a direct access for the Dead Sea pilgrims to the hilltop royal castle ruins of Machaerus.

HRH Prince El-Hassan bin Talal, Founder and Chairman of the Royal Scientific Society

of Jordan, wrote about the historical place of Machaerus with the following words: “*The evocative Citadel of Mukawir, or Machaerus to the ancient world, is a site that is redolent with the narrative and wonder of history and faith. It is one of those very special places that seem to exist beyond time and in its own space. It sits in a deeply imbued landscape that brings to life the resting chronicle of belief, devotion and struggle. This abandoned hilltop site with its faded but once-magnificent fortified royal palace, occupies a strategic point overlooking the Dead Sea in the modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. [...] This story of death for faith and for love of an ideal makes Mukawir so much more than a fascinating archaeological site. It sits in the landscape of religious memory as a testament and place of pilgrimage, not only for Muslims, but for Christians too. In our country, our beloved Prophet Yehya is Saint John*

the Baptist by another name. He is the valiant predecessor of Jesus Christ and, indeed, he is rightly considered to be the Patron Saint of Jordan.” (Vörös 2015: 13)

In the following study, the archaeologist-architect author will give an overview, how the archaeological researches developed during the last half a century, for the better understanding of the historical landscape and its architectural and archaeological legacies. Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council of Culture, and of the Pontifical Academies in the Vatican, wrote the following observation on Machaerus: *“those like me, who had the privilege to climb up to the Machaerus citadel to admire the magnificent and breathtaking panorama, will properly understand that King Herod the Great built a magical eagle’s nest for the destiny, to become a guardian of the last hours of the last prophet, John the Baptist, who had been put to silence by a sword.”* (Ravasi 2013). As in Machaerus there are no antiquities older than 90 BC, and nothing later than 71 AD, we can rightly consider the precious historical place as an ancient archaeological time capsule, the only surviving one from the scenes of the Gospels. The dramatic events in 29 AD on the Golgotha of Saint John the Baptist that are encapsulated among the remaining walls of Machaerus, will be celebrated through its bimillennia in 2029.

The German Identification and Surveys of Machaerus, and the Discovery of its Roman Circumvallation Monuments (1807, 1965-1973)

It was on 17 January 1807, after 1735 “lost years” since the 71 AD Roman siege and final destruction of Machaerus, when the German Rediscoverer of the ancient Biblical cities of Gadara and Geraza, Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (FIG. 2a) arrived to the little Muslim hamlet of Mukawir near the Dead Sea, and the name reminded him for the ancient Greek word of “Machairos” (meaning “sword”, *i.e.* Lat. Mach-

aeus, It. Macheronte). At the border of the little village he discovered an isolated hilltop, overlooking the Dead Sea, which geographical place and geomorphological formations properly fitted the ancient descriptions of Strabo, Pliny the Elder and especially Josephus, concerning the Hasmonean-Herodian royal castle of Machaerus. The limited surface ruins and the visible geographical evidences met the first century literary references. A hypothesis was born (Seetzen 1810 and 1854).

Meanwhile, the 1807 discovery had been made only with a retrospective view. The contemporary academic world was not completely satisfied, and they considered the linguistically based etymological-identification only a hypothetical one. They were right: there were several hilltops with ancient ruins in the area of modern Mukawir village, and without archaeological excavations of the mountain-top that has been visited by Seetzen, it was still a simple academic guess: a theory. Was Machaerus discovered in 1807? Yes, it was, however, it was not proved yet by archaeological evidences. There were



2. a. Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767-1811), German explorer, alumnus medical doctor of the University of Göttingen, who discovered and identified the ancient ruins of the Machaerus citadel on 17 January, 1807.

b. August Strobel (1930-2006), Professor of the New Testament in the Augustana Divinity School of the Lutheran Evangelical Church in Neuendettelsau (1964-1984), and Director of the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology in Jerusalem and Amman (1984-1992). He discovered the Early Roman circumvallation wall at Machaerus in October 1965, and directed its architectural, archaeological and geographical surveys in 1973.

still scholars, who identified ancient Machaerus with other places in the area of southern Perea.

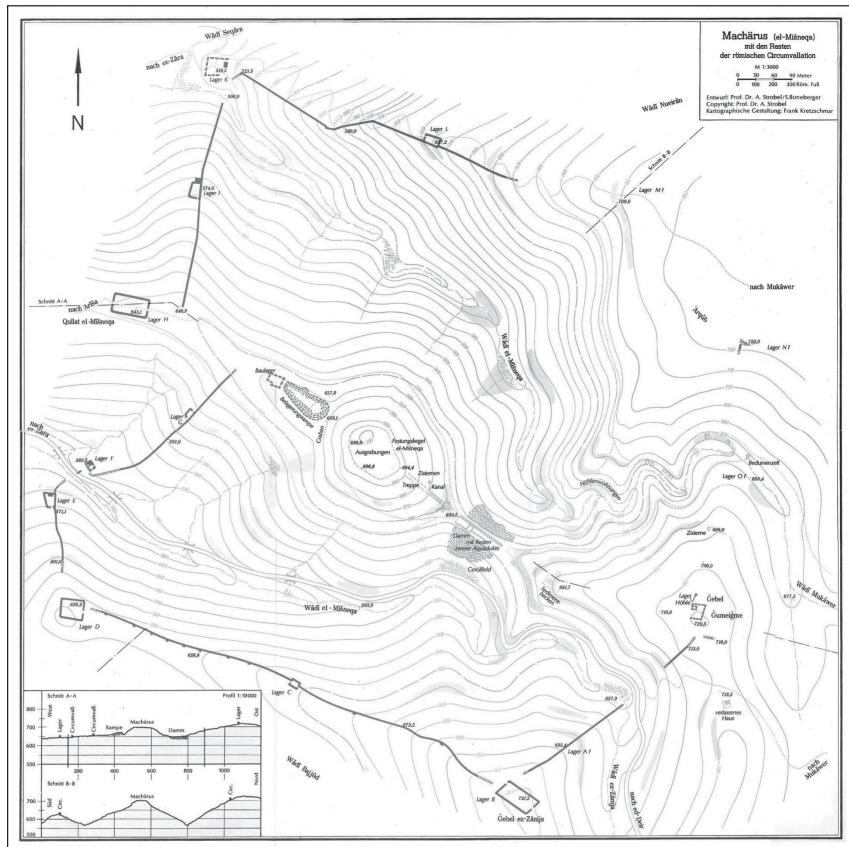
The *opus delicti* to identify the conical hill near Mukawir village with its hilltop ruins as the ancient citadel of Machaerus, has been discovered only 158 years later, and by another German scholar, a compatriot of Seetzen, called August Strobel (FIG. 2b). He visited the abandoned hilltop ruins near Mukawir village in October 1965, and published his academic observations in 1968 (Strobel 1968). Strobel discovered an Early Roman 3.5 kms long circumvallation wall, a very similar one than that around Masada, in fact its parallel twin-monument-structure, and arrived to the brilliant scientific conclusion that in Antiquity, the Herodian walls of ancient Machaerus had to stand in the epicenter of this long Early Roman siege wall with 16 military camps! The unfinished agger-ramp gave further evidence to identify these unexcavated ancient ruins with those described by Josephus: the 71 AD siege of Machaerus by the same Legion X Fretensis, which captured Masada in the next years. As during the Early Roman period the only military siege in the Transjordanian area was executed at Machaerus, the circumvallation wall was undoubtedly the *opus delicti* to identify the ancient site.

The scientific discovery was really extraordinary. Meanwhile, as it happened already several times in the history of scientific research and especially in the history of archaeology, there was a parallel discovery of this circumvallation wall during the same years (1965-1968), by the American-Baptist scholar, Anson Rainey, however, he published his results three years later, only in 1971. Rainey correctly acknowledged the discovery and the three years scientific publication-primacy of Strobel: “*The surface remains were noted in the vicinity of Machaerus by the present writer and several colleagues while on visits to the site during Easter 1965 and 1966, and Greek Orthodox Christmas, 1967. The similarity of these remains to the Roman siege camps and circumvallation wall at*

Masada led the writer to review the relevant passages of Josephus’ description of the fall of Machaerus, as well as the previous literature on the site in the history of Transjordanian exploration. Credit is given to A. Strobel, who made a similar survey in October 1965, the results of which were published in 1968, though they became known to the present writer only in January 1971.” (Erets Yisrael 1971, p. xix).

Furthermore, Strobel did not stop with his Machaerus research in 1968. Five years later he led the best Machaerus survey project ever executed on the ruins of this 3.5 kms long circumvallation wall (FIG. 3). He examined in details the 16 Roman military siege campuses as well, and published his detailed scientific results and academic evaluation in German and in English (Strobel 1974). In the meantime, we need to emphasize that Strobel has never received permit from the Jordanian authorities for the excavations at Machaerus, thus he only made professional surface-surveys. He was the great discoverer of the Roman circumvallation wall of Machaerus, and published it with high academic standards for the first time. Through his excellent scientific evidences over the comparison of the matching architectural and archaeological analogies and similarities of Machaerus with the twin circumvallation siege-monuments of Masada, he discovered the *opus delicti* confirmation for the identification of ancient Machaerus.

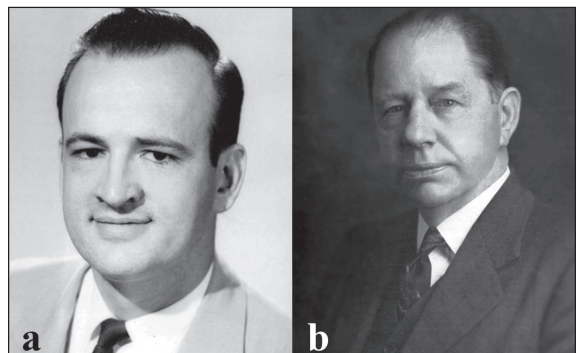
Who identified and rediscovered Machaerus for the first time after 71 AD? The German Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, on 17 January 1807, and he published his hypothesis three years later in Gotha (near Erfurt), on his map of Palestine (Seetzen 1810). And who was able to prove with an archaeological *opus delicti* for the first time after 71 AD that the hilltop ruins at the Dead Sea village of Mukawir (called in Arabic nowadays by the local villagers as Qal’at al-Mashnaqah) are unquestionably identical with the Biblical citadel of ancient Machaerus, and the 1807 hypothesis of Seetzen was right? The



3. The March 1973 Machaerus survey of August Strobel, documented the complete Early Roman circumvallation wall of the Legio X Fretensis, with its 16 siege campuses and the agger-ramp. In the center, on the top of the hill, a German word signals the 1968 American-Baptist archaeological mission: “Ausgrabungen” – Excavations.

German August Strobel, in October 1965, and he published his discovery three years later in Berlin (Strobel 1968).

Nevertheless, the unpublished American-Baptist survey drawing of Rainey, executed on the ruins of this above mentioned Roman siege wall, in an unpublished manuscript form, already in 1967, reached on the other side of the Globe the hands of the American multibillionaire press magnate, Cully A. Cobb (FIG. 4b), a 32nd degree freemason and a high profile Baptist (Vörös 2015: 124-133). He gave a handsome fortune to a Baptist Minister, called E. Jerry Vardaman (FIG. 4a), and sent him to Jordan in January 1968, with the mission to get the research concession and the excavation permit from the Jordanian authorities for the untouched and virgin archaeological hilltop site of Machaerus, overlooking the Dead Sea. Cobb had no doubts that in the center of this circumvallation wall, next to its surviving unfinished agger-ramp, they would discover the sacred



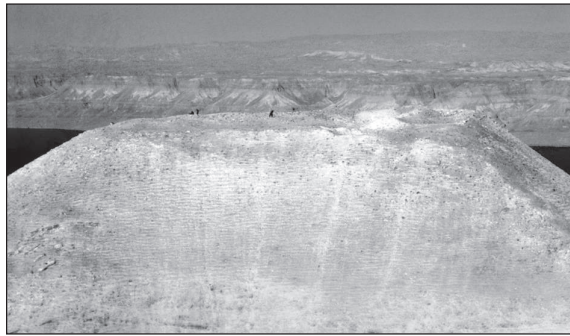
4. a. E. Jerry Vardaman (1927-2000), Professor of Archaeology and Religion at the Southern Baptist Theological and at the Hong Kong Baptist Seminaries, an ordained Baptist minister, founding director of the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State University. He was the first director of the Machaerus excavations, in 1968, who unearthed and discovered the ancient Herodian ruins and objects of the Biblical citadel.

b. Cully Alton Cobb (1884–1975), the Initiator and benefactor Patron of the 1968 Machaerus excavations and surveys, and Founder of the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State University. He was a multibillionaire press magnate, a high profile Baptist religious-society figure, and a 32nd degree freemason as well.

ruins of the fortified Herodian royal palace of Antipas, where Princess Salome danced. The Jordanians were still not aware of the extraordinary, but unpublished discovery of the 71 AD circumvallation monuments, so they gave the excavation permit for an abandoned hilltop site overlooking the Dead Sea, only “believed to be” ancient Machaerus, with very limited visible ruins on it. However, five months later, when the American-Baptists started their excavations, the royal Herodian wall-ruins with colorful wall-paintings, luxurious glass- and tableware, mosaics and imported marbles from its once magnificently decorated palace-floors came to the Dead Sea sunshine, after 1897 years...

The American-Baptist Archaeological Excavations of the Machaerus Citadel in 1968

The archaeological excavations and surveys, conducted by the American E. Jerry Vardaman, in June 1968, lasted only for three weeks, but under the supervision of 14 highly professional archaeologists and a lot of local workmen (FIGS. 5-7). In the meantime, they transport-

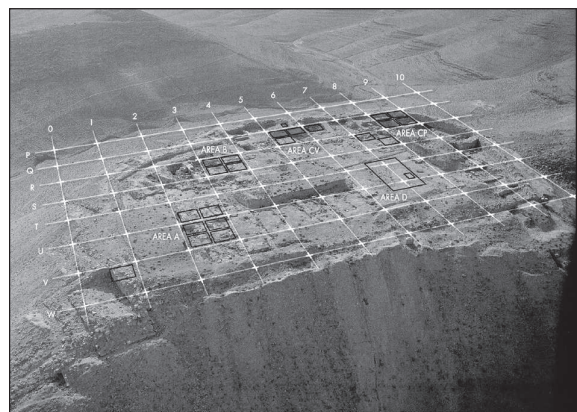


5. The untouched, virgin archaeological hilltop site of Machaerus in 1968, just before the American-Baptist excavations began on 5 June. The average thickness of the accumulated debris above the *ca.* 5000m² Herodian floor levels of the Biblical citadel was *ca.* two meters. The total number of archaeological finds (including the small pottery sherds and the over 300 kilograms Herodian capitals) was around 50 000 fragments during the last close to 50 years. It is an enormous size scientific Lego-puzzle archaeological-work that resulted executed-restoration-accomplishments in different dimensions: from a small five-centimeter complete Herodian lamp, up to a colossus-size close to five-meter-high complete Herodian column as well.

ed all their 4,973 archaeological objects from Machaerus, with the permission of the Jordanian Government, to the United States. These Machaeriaca archaeological objects were treasured in 13 large-size unopened boxes in the basement of the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State University, until the present author started to study them in the company of their original and extremely professional excavation archives in 2013. The American scholars have never published a word on their very



6. As it is well visible on the above photograph, the American-Baptist excavations used a professional quadrat-balk excavation system, and executed first-class vertical and horizontal stratigraphical drawings as well. View from the east, the Dead Sea is visible on the left.



7. As it can be seen on this 2014 reconstruction drawing, superimposed on a 1981 aerial photograph, the 1968 American-Baptist archaeological excavations opened “windows” (archaeological trenches) into every parts of the Herodian royal palace of Machaerus.

successful Machaerus excavations that seems today, to hear it for the first time, as a mystery. What could have happened? Why could not they have been able to continue their extraordinary discoveries?

By the end of June 1968, only after the inter-continental transportation of the close-to-five-thousand Machaerica objects, the Jordanian authorities considered that the archaeological concession, granted to the American-Baptists, is consisting a tremendously important historical place, sacred to both: Christianity and Islam. However, in the previous year the Kingdom of Jordan lost its West Bank, including the holy cities of Jerusalem and Jericho, and the war was far not completed yet (the Arab-Israeli War has only finished in 1973). Excavating the ruins of a Herodian royal palace that had been described in antiquity as "*Machaerus was next to Jerusalem, the most strongly fortified place in Judea*" (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, V. 15, 16), became a real political issue. The Israeli politicians were full with patriotic feelings, and with the works of Josephus in their hands. To understand the political atmosphere of these years, we would like to give only one archaeological example. Yigael Yadin, the excavation director of Masada (during 1963-64) and the future Deputy Prime Minister of Israel (1977-1981), had special interest on the skeletons of the 73 AD "victims" of Masada. The rabbinical establishment of Israel concluded that they were remains of the Jewish defenders, and in July 1969 they were reburied as national heroes in a state ceremony. Although the Baptists planned to continue their excavations exactly during this period on Machaerus, from 12 June to 8 August 1969, the Jordanian authorities declared the Dead Sea historical site as a military danger-zone, and the excavations were stopped.

After the Arab-Israeli October 1973 War, the situation in Jordan had changed, business started to operate as usual, and the Jordanian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities in Amman,

Ghaleb Z. Barakat made an official excavation-offer to Cully A. Cobb with his 20 January 1974 letter, that the American-Baptists may continue their archaeological work. However, in the prepared three-page-long contract there were two paragraphs as pre-conditions for the excavations of the Americans: "*a minimum of one million (1,000,000) American dollars, for five (5) years*" have to be invested, and "*within 40 days from the signature of this agreement, and in a Jordanian local bank, a sum of equal of ten percent (10%) of the sum defined in article (3) that is a sum of one hundred thousand (100,000) American dollars to be deposited as guarantee for the fulfillment by the 2nd party of his obligation according to this agreement*" (Vörös 2015: 253-255). As Cully A. Cobb was already in his death bed, he did not sign this unprecedentedly baffling offer in the history of the archaeology of Jordan.

The Italian-Franciscan Legacy of the Machaerus Excavations and Surveys, During 1978-1981 and 1992-1993

After the Americans did not accept the conditions of the contract provided to them by the Jordanian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, the Hashemite authorities were waiting four more years. As it was the regulation of their Department of Antiquities at that time, excavators had 10 years to publish their scientific results. The Jordanians counted the 10 years from 26 June, 1968 promptly, as the Americans have not continued their excavations in Machaerus. Today, this copyright-period became only five years. Accordingly, if the excavators would run out from this timeframe, they will lose their copyrights, and all their scientific achievements will be published by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities or by its appointed academic. However, there was a serious concern with the ten-year-old cold case of the Machaerus concession for the Jordanian authorities, as the Baptists transported in 1968 the complete corpus of the Machaerus archaeological mate-

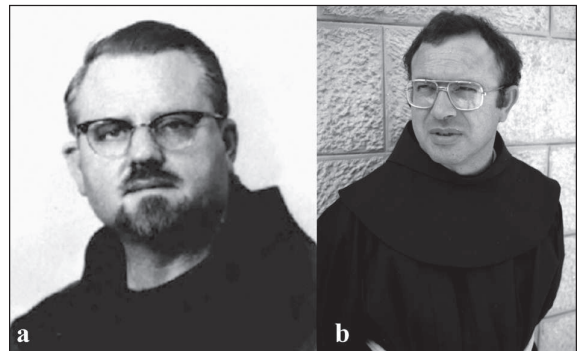
rial they excavated to the USA, with the official permission of the Jordanian Government (sic!), and they became owners of these Machaerus objects.

Consequently, the newly authorized 1978 excavator of Machaerus lost a lot of archaeological information, and had the academic risk that the Americans will not publish their serious quantity of excavated archaeological materials and information, or they will only do it after the new excavation is already published, thus having an academic position to say the last word, and correct their followers with treasurable archaeological information that was inaccessible for them. The final academic result was quite sad: the Americans never published anything, and their followers were balked in their academic plans to publish final reports on the Machaerus excavations. They all had to die before the first final-report volume of the Machaerus excavations could have appeared (Vörös 2013). The present author, as the current Machaerus excavator, received publication rights and academic appointments from both, the Americans (Mississippi State University, Honorary Senior Research Fellow) and the Italian-Franciscans (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Research Professor), for all of their unpublished archaeological materials.

The second and the third Machaerus excavations were led (during 1978-1981 and 1992-1993) by two well-known professors of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem: Fathers Virgilio Canio Corbo, and six months after his death, by his former student, Michele Piccirillo (FIG. 8). Although the scientific results of their excavations could not have been included in evaluative academic final reports (as they were waiting in vain for the publications of the 1968 American-Baptist mission), however they had published several remarkable preliminary articles (Corbo 1978, 1979, 1980 and Corbo-Loffreda 1981). Nevertheless, a summarizing monograph and an article were published on the 1978-1981 ceramic and

the 1978-1980 numismatic inventories, by the Franciscan members of the Corbo-team, Stanislao Loffreda (Loffreda 1996) and Michele Piccirillo (Piccirillo 1980), respectively. From the architectural point of view, Father Corbo concentrated primarily on the excavations of the citadel, and his final result was a sketched layout: the first ground plan on the interior of the fortified Herodian hilltop palace.

The Corbo-headed Italian archaeological mission was also the first to prove *in publications* that the castle of Machaerus was unquestionably one of the mosaic-decorated fortified royal palaces of King Herod the Great in ancient Judea. They were also the first to confirm in preliminary reports the accounts of Josephus, regarding the Hasmonean and First Jewish Revolt presence at the citadel, by means of architectural, ceramological and numismatic evidences. (FIGS. 9-12).



8. a. Virgilio Canio Corbo OFM (1918-1991), Professor of Archaeology at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem, and director of several important excavations in the Holy Land, including the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City, and the place of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, both in Jerusalem; he was the excavation director of Magdala, Capernaum, Mount Nebo and Herodium as well. From 1928 he lived in the Holy Land, died and was buried in Capernaum. He was the director of the Machaerus excavations from 1978 to 1981.
- b. Michele Piccirillo OFM (1944-2008), Museum Director and Professor of Biblical Geography and History at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem. Director of several important excavations in Jordan, including Mount Nebo, Mādabā and Umm ar-Rašās. From 1960 he lived in Jerusalem and is buried on Mount Nebo. He supervised the Machaerus excavations and restorations during 1992-1993.



9. A helicopter shot on Machaerus from 1979: the Italian-Franciscan mission have not continued the professional quadrat-balk excavation system of the Americans, but gradually uncovered the walls, mostly on the level of the Herodian floor levels, discovered by their Baptist predecessors.



10. A moment of the 1979 excavation season: uncovering the ancient ruins of the Herodian royal bathhouse. On the left of the photograph Father Michele Piccirillo is supervising the work.



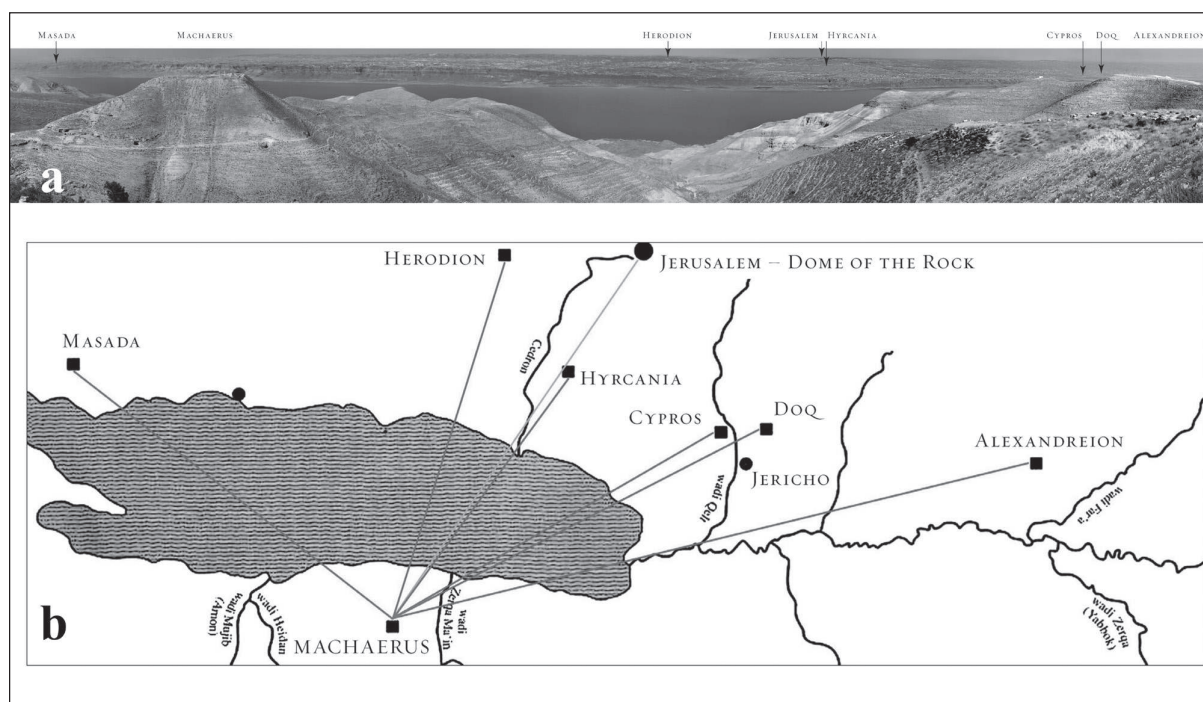
11. The physical status of the archaeological site of Machaerus in 1981, after the completion of the First Italian-Franciscan Excavations (directed by Virgilio Corbo OFM), view from the east.



12. Aerial photograph of the Machaerus citadel in 1993, after the two seasons of the Second Italian-Franciscan Excavations (supervised by Michele Piccirillo OFM), view from the north. The two previously unexcavated central parts (to the south-east and to the north-west from the Doric peristyle courtyard) were revealed, the Herodian cistern was completely emptied from its ancient detritus, and was covered with a concrete roof.

New Discoveries and the Latest Excavation Results of the Archaeological Field Work, Conducted by the Hungarian Academy of Arts, Since 2009

Eight years ago the Hungarian Academy of Arts is excavating Machaerus, the Herodian royal castle of Antipas, overlooking the Dead Sea in the Kingdom of Jordan, where Princess Salome danced and Saint John the Baptist was beheaded. The archaeological site is today a pilgrim destination for Christianity and Islam, and also an important historical place for Judaism: one of the memorable scenes of the Gospels. The royal courtyard of Machaerus gives one of the best archaeological parallels for the Herodian Lithostrotos-Gabbatha in the Jerusalem Praetorium, where, according to the Gospel



13. a-b. Panoramic photograph and map of the Herodian Fortresses of Judea, from south to north: Masada, Machaerus, Herodion, Hyrcania, Jerusalem, Cypros, Doq and Alexandreion. The photograph was taken from the hill, rising to the east from Machaerus, that is proving the direct optical connection between the West Bank Herodian fortresses and the Trans-Dead-Sea Machaerus. With the help of this illustration-pair, the words of Pliny the Elder are becoming very clear: “Machaerus was next to Jerusalem, the most strongly fortified place in Judea” (Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* V. 15, 16).

of John (John 19:13), Pontius Pilate made his historical judgment of a death-sentence on Jesus from Nazareth.

Josephus described in details the citadel of Machaerus and its lower city (*Bellum Judaicum* VII, 6), – the rediscovery of the previous was the achievement of the German Explorer Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1807), and the latter of the French Dominican Father Felix-Marie Abel (1909). We should not forget though that Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land had only been initiated by the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, and by that time, Machaerus was already a deserted place two-and-a-half centuries ago. It became a destination for the pilgrims only after its archaeological excavations in the 20th century. The memory of its geographical location had been completely lost for 1735 years.

Following the unexpected death of Father Piccirillo in 2008, the Hungarian team resumed the

excavations exactly where the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, led by two generations of Franciscan-Italian academics, had left off in 1993. As it was already mentioned above, the current author received full access to all the archaeological material and scientific archive legacies of his American and Italian Machaerus-field-director predecessors, and the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum even offered the possibility to publish the long-awaited Machaerus final-report excavations-series among its distinguished, Jerusalem Collectio Maior academic monographs.

Our excavation tools and survey facilities already included 21st century archaeological equipment and technologies. The Research Team of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, following detailed archaeological surveys and excavations, prepared the first theoretical architectural reconstructions of both, the Lower City (πόλις) and the Herodian Royal Fortified Palace (βασιλειον) of Machaerus.

Reconstructing the Architectural Legacy of the Machaerus Herodian Royal Palace

One of the greatest results of our ongoing excavations are the discovery of the previously unexpected vertical dimension of the citadel's dead monument. For example, we unearthed the interior of the western bastion to find that its walls, previously believed to be less than 1.5 meter high, included intact walls that were 8.75 meters in height. In another case, we discovered and fully excavated the 15.5-meter-deep Hasmonean cistern of the citadel, and it can be proven that it was used even during the Herodian period. (FIG. 14) Very rich archaeological material came to light at this location as well. In total, we opened more than 50 research trenches so far, for the better understanding of the groups of monuments in Machaerus' citadel and its lower city.

Regarding our architectural surveys, one of the most important fruits of our scientific investigations, until today, were the determinations of the three historical periods of Machaerus city, as well as the detailed analysis of the architectural space development of the buildings –individually, and in the context of building-complexes– and the preparation of their theoretical reconstructions. The complete architectural descriptions of the ancient monuments (with graphic and photographic documentation) were extended as well to all those building elements that were no longer *in situ* on the archaeological site. Following the architectural surveys, we prepared three-dimensional digital monument-models, so as to provide a foundation for the later theoretical architectural reconstructions. The computer visualizations of the anastyloses reconstruction of the Doric and Ionic columns for restoration, before their technical implementations, and the illustrations on the theoretical architectural reconstructions of the fortified Herodian royal palace, may give to the Reader a taste on the nature of our modest work (FIGS. 15-17). Beside detailed building-diagnostic and archaeological-strati-

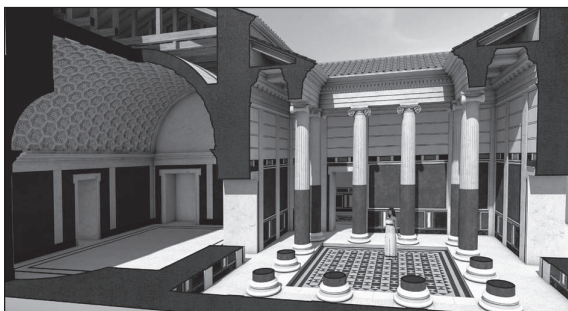
graphical field- and wall-examinations of the monuments, our research method followed the so-called comparative archaeological and architectural inspections. The Machaerus castle



14. The author finishes the archaeological excavations of the 15.5-meter-deep Hasmonean cistern of Machaerus citadel. The full water-harvesting-capacity of the artificial cistern was *ca.* 110.000 liters.



15. The accomplished Ionic column-anastylosis in the context of the tentative architectural visualization: the colors are based on the archaeological evidences. The artistic vision of the Machaerus bathhouse in cutaway architectural reconstruction-model, as viewed from the north-east.



16. This 3D architectural model is not simply incorporated the surviving colors of the royal Herodian courtyard, but the Lithostrotos-pavement-stones are also authentic reconstructions of the original ones.



17. The two re-erected complete Herodian columns of Machaerus with the Dead Sea and Masada in the background. These two restored columns are the largest surviving archaeological “objects” of the Gospel scenes in the Holy Land, and the very first Herodian columns ever re-erected with complete anastyloses on an archaeological site.

had been a member of a military fortress-network aimed at the defense of Jerusalem from the east during the first centuries BC and AD. After Jerusalem itself, these fortresses (Masa-

da, Herodion, Hyrcania, Cypros, Doq and Alexandreion) represent the closest Late Hellenistic (Hasmonean), Herodian and Early Roman architectural parallels and archaeological analogies in ancient Judea. Therefore, our research team spent extensive periods on the West Bank to conduct comprehensive archaeological and architectural examinations of these important fortifications, and studied all the other known Hasmonean and Herodian archaeological sites, so as to be able to understand the ancient monuments of Machaerus better. Subsequently, in the light of their built legacy and archaeological material-heritage, we were able to create the authentic, theoretical-architectural reconstructions of Machaerus (see FIG. 13 a-b).

The royal courtyard of this precious Gospel scene with its apsidal throne-niche in the symmetry-axis was unambiguously the most important architectural space of our Herodian castle on the east bank of the Dead Sea. The tragic birthday-party of the freshly remarried Herod Antipas was celebrated with Princess Herodias in this courtyard. Many people were invited, even from Galilee, from the northern half of his tetrarchy: *“An opportunity came on Herod’s birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee.”* (Mark 6, 21).

It is not simply the largest architectural place in the fortified palace of Machaerus, erected on the summit of the hilltop: but the only space, where the Tetrarch was able to receive the large gathering of these official guests. The royal courtyard of Machaerus had to be the very place, where, according to Josephus, Antipas made his historical judgment of a death-sentence on John the Baptist. Machaerus was the Golgotha of the Baptist, as Jesus himself put his future death in parallel with that of John the Baptist with the following statement: *“they did not recognise him but treated him as they pleased: and the Son of man will suffer similarly at their hands. The disciples understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist.”* (Matthew 17, 12–13).

The archaeological remains of the Jerusalem Praetorium, where Jesus condemned to death by Pontius Pilate are probably lost. However, we have here, on Machaerus, one of the closest architectural and archaeological parallels of its courtyard, in the former palace of King Herod. On the *Gabbatha* “elevation” of the Machaerus palace even the *in situ* Herodian *Lithostroton* “stone pavement” survived in parts in the royal courtyard. After detailed architectural and archaeological studies on the field, conducted by the Research Team of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, we were able to reconstruct the original Doric architectural space that was designed by the classical Early Roman canon with the Alexandrian-Greek module of 34.5 cms.

The architects of King Herod the Great established his Machaerus fortified palace in *ca.* 30 BC on the ruins of the Hasmonean fortress of the Jerusalem high-priest-king Alexander Jannaeus. The heart and the center of the hill-top castle became the royal courtyard. Its alignment was accomplished on the mountain-top summit-peak, by using the Pythagorean triangular set ratio of the 3:4:5 triple, for the good-angle alignment scale of the architectural space. With the same so-called *pygme*-unit, that is the Greek-forearm module (34.5 cm or 13.6 in, called *Pygmaioi*, from *pygmê*, the length of the forearm, much smaller than a cubit: it is only the length from the elbow to the wrist-joint of the knuckles) they designed not only the courtyard, but also the colonnade of the Doric *terastyle*-porticus (1 column-base radius = 1 module). The intercolumniation on the short side was two (*Systyle*), on the long side three (*Diastyle*) column-diameters, respectively. The contemporary Vitruvius, the chief architect of Emperor Augustus in Rome warned that when columns are placed three column-diameters apart or more, stone architraves break (Vitruvius, *De architectura* III 3.4). As no architrave-stones survived on the Machaerus, most probably the Herodian builders used Lebanese cedars instead of stones.

The surviving Doric column drums were deriving from similar columns, and not only from one column. In the Doric peristyle courtyard there were originally 24 similar columns (plus the 4 heart-shape-form ones at the corners), of which 11 column-prints survived on the *stylobate*. Furthermore, the Herodian royal bathhouse was Ionic in style, while the courtyard was Doric. It was confirmed not only by the *in situ* column-bases, but by the archaeological artifacts as well, that came to light during the excavations of the two different places in the royal castle. Inside the *Apodyterium* hall of the Herodian Bathhouse there could have been originally (most probably) 12 similar Ionic columns on the *Crepidoma* (with much smaller diameters than the Doric drums). In the meantime, from the surviving architectural elements we were able “*to Lego*” together only one-one Ionic and Doric complete columns. We re-erected in 2014 these Herodian columns on the two identical, very places, where the First Franciscan Archaeological Mission found the only two *in situ* column-bases of the castle, in 1979 and 1980 (led by the late Father Virgilio Corbo), respectively (FIG. 17).

Our complete column-re-erectments are fulfilling the legal requirements of the monument-anastylosis in international conventions of monument-presentations, as we used (i) exclusively the original architectural elements, (ii) re-erected on the original places, (iii) as they originally appeared. Their heights fit the classical Early Roman architectural canons: the Doric column is 11 modules: 380 cm; the Ionic column 19 modules: 475 cm. We had serious difficulties during the puzzling in-space with the individual drums, because of the two column-entases. The Doric entasis is conical-shape form in the column-shaft; however the Ionic entasis is cigar-shape form (like a pregnant column). The Doric column even fit the classical 11-module-standard of the Greek *pygme*-unit of the courtyard perfectly: the building-module was the same horizontally and vertically in the

principal royal Herodian architectural space of the palace. Both re-erected columns were originally decorated with plaster, thus giving the finish-coat appearance as they would be white marble monoliths, like in Alexandria or Rome!

Machaerus, this very important scene of the Gospels, was always a site of imaginations for Bible, Gospel, religious- or history-book illustrators. In 2014, when the opera fans celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of Richard Strauss, we could also propose the historical scenery-decor presentation, instead of the imaginative stages of his “*Salome*” in the opera houses of the world, based on the text of Gustave Flaubert and Oscar Wilde, who described Machaerus in their artistic imaginations. (FIG. 15) As a result of our archaeological excavations and architectural Lego-puzzle works, the historical place and its architectural spaces were revealed by elucidating the blurred scene of this Gospel site. Among the walls of this royal castle four figures of the Gospels were living: King Herod the Great, his son Tetrarch Herod Antipas with his second wife Princess Herodias, and their daughter Princess Salome, from the previous marriage of her mother. Today, we cannot simply visit the archaeological place, but virtually we can also see the space of the Calvary of Saint John the Baptist.

Epilogue

The archaeological mission of the Hungarian Academy of Arts is currently working on the excavations of the Lower City of Machaerus, erected in *ca.* 30 BC, where (according to Josephus) the political house arrest of Saint John the Baptist, in the company of his disciples (according to the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke), historically had to happen. Among our great discoveries we uncovered the largest mikveh (a ritual plastered pool-bath with 12 steps), ever found in Jordan, inside the fourth (and “lost”) fortification tower of the Herodian citadel (FIG. 18).

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this

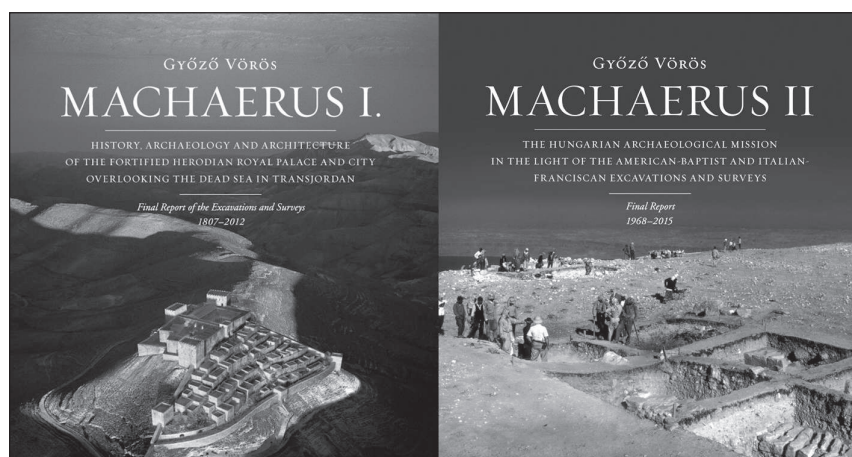
study, the present author published the first two scientific excavation-final-report academic-monographs on the history, archaeology and architecture of Machaerus as the 53rd and 55th volumes in the *Collectio Maior* series of the Jerusalem Pontifical Faculty of Biblical Sciences and Archaeology (known formerly as *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*), and published by Edizioni Terra Santa and titled: *MACHAERUS I and II* (Milan, 2013 and 2015) (FIGS. 19-20).

Since the beginning of the Machaerus excavations, started by the Americans, but before the launch of the current ongoing excavations in 2009, the following seven years were dedicated to the excavations of Machaerus: 1968, 1978-1981, 1992-1993. Consequently, 2016 was the 15th excavation year of this precious Gospel scene. The scientific results and the information that came to light through these archaeological investigations on the Machaerus citadel, have been accumulated, complemented



18. The beautifully preserved royal mikveh in the previously unknown north-eastern fortification tower of the fortified Herodian royal palace of Machaerus.

THE HISTORY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSIONS TO MACHAERUS



19. a, b: The covers of the first two volumes of the Machaerus excavation final-report series.



20. Their Royal Highnesses of the Royal Scientific Society of Jordan, Prince El-Hassan bin Talal (Founder and Chairman), and his daughter Princess Sumaya bint El-Hassan (President) are receiving from the author *MACHAERUS II* in the Amman Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Jordan.

each other, and the academic generations are standing on the shoulders of each other, like the circus artists.

The intention of the present author unbrokenly remained the same since 2009: to elucidate this lost, blurred, but rediscovered historical scene of the Gospels, and present it as authentic as possible for the future generations. The Reader through these pages could have been convinced that since the spring of 1968, when Machaerus was still a virgin, untouched archaeological site (FIG. 5), the development of the excavation field work can be tracked consistently, the uncovered sacred monuments in the archaeological site are genuine and reliable, and all deriving from the archaeological time capsule from *ca.* 90 BC to 71 AD.

Machaerus Timeline

Late Hellenistic (Hasmonean) Period

ca. 90 BC

Machaerus fortress was founded by King Alexander Jannaeus as one of the royal treasuries of the Hasmonean rulers until 57 BC.

57 BC

Its demolition by the Roman general and Syrian provincial governor Aulus Gabinius. King Aristobolus II tried to seek protection for his one thousand soldiers, consequently he reinforced the walls of Machaerus, but the Romans seized and destroyed the Hasmonean fortress two days later, for the second time.

Herodian Period

ca. 30 BC

King Herod the Great erected a city on the Machaerus hill, surrounded it by walls and towers, and provided large cisterns to it. On the top of the hill, within its citadel, by replacing the ruins of the Hasmonean fortress, he built a magnificent royal palace for himself that could be reached through a road leading up within the city. As a result, "Machaerus was next to Jerusalem, the most strongly fortified place in Judea" (Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, V. 15, 16). Following the death of King Herod in 4 BC.

4 BC

His son Herod Antipas inherited this fortified city together with the territories in Perea and Galilee, and according to Josephus he imprisoned and executed John the Baptist among

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its walls. Mark and Matthew gave detailed descriptions on the circumstances of the imprisonment and the execution. During the confinement of the Baptist, there was a message-exchange through his disciples between himself and Jesus from Nazareth. According to Luke we can date the event *ca.* 29 AD.

36 AD

The Nabataean King Aretas IV Philopatris, the earlier father-in-law of Tetrarch Herod Antipas, defeated the troops of his former son-in-law, and destroyed the Herodian Machaerus.

Early Roman Period

44 AD

After the death of King Herod Agrippa I in 44 AD, when the ruined Machaerus together with Perea, became under the control of the Roman Prefectus Judaeae in Jerusalem, and a garrison was formed for the Roman army on the ruins of the original Machaerus citadel.

66 AD

The citadel was taken over by the citizens of its lower city, and later reinforced by the Zealot rebels. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Romans for the third time, conquered the Machaerus in 71 AD.

71 AD

For the order of Emperor Vespasian and his son commander in-chief Titus, by the Legion Xth Fretensis, under the commandship of Lucilius Bassus, the Roman Legatus of Judea Province, and the fortress of Machaerus was destroyed and vanished into the oblivion of human history.

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