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BUILDING INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE MARTYRION OF THEODOROS
AT THE ‘BURNT CHURCH’ IN HIPPOS ABOVE THE SEA OF GALILEE

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BUILDING INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE MARTYRION OF THEODOROS AT THE ‘BURNT CHURCH’ IN HIPPOS ABOVE THE SEA OF GALILEE

Two Greek inscriptions on a mosaic floor bearing a building dedication for a μαρτύριον were exposed in summer 2019 during the excavations of the Southwest Church (the ‘Burnt Church’) at Antiochia Hippos of the Decapolis.¹ The mosaic floor of the Byzantine church, dated to the 6th century, was almost fully excavated allowing for a full reading of the two new inscriptions. The church was destroyed most probably in the early 7th century while its roof burnt and sealed the entire floor.

The Church

The Southwest church (later named the Burnt Church due to the thick burnt roofing covering its inner space) was firstly dug in 2005 and 2007 when mainly its eastern part was unearthed: the apse, bema and a small part of the nave.² In summer 2019 the entire inner space of the church was exposed and the church plan became clear. The building is a rather small, mono-apse one with a typical plan of its inner space, divided by two rows of columns into a central nave and two aisles to its north and south. The church has a room or chamber (*pastophorium*) to the north of the bema of which only the single doorway was excavated.³ In the middle of the bema a red limestone reliquary was found empty and in-situ fixed in the mosaic floor; around it are the bases of the four-legged altar table. The church has three main doorways at its western wall, corresponding to the three spaces, the nave and two aisles. Its inner dimensions are 15 × 10 (W-E and N-S) m.⁴ Two additional doorways at the southern church wall probably lead to a southern wing, which has not been excavated yet. A single column drum, probably in-situ, is partially exposed to the west of the church, indicating most probably the portico of an atrium, which has not been excavated yet either. The southwest church belongs to the seven known Byzantine churches of Hippos.⁵ Among these, it is the most western one, situated on the most southwestern insula of the city, overlooking most of the Sea of Galilee. Its small size, simple construction and location within the living quarters make it a local residential church surrounded by houses and streets.

The construction of the church is dated to the second half of the 5th – early 6th century. The paving of the main mosaic floor is of the first half of the 6th century whereas its second phase and the blocking and reordering of the church’s space belong to the mid-second half of the 6th century.⁶ The church roofing burnt and collapsed during the late Byzantine period, most probably not later than the early 7th century.⁷ A thick ash layer covered the entire inner space of the building allowing for a better preservation of the mosaic floor. The church destruction might have been the result of the 614 AD Persian invasion of the Land of Israel. Following this, the church was never rebuilt nor was its space ever used for another function.

¹ Hippos excavations are directed by Michael Eisenberg and Arleta Kowalewska on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology, University of Haifa, Israel. The 2019 excavation season at the Southwest Church was supervised by Jessica Rentz. The 2019 excavations were conducted under the Israel Antiquities Authority license number G—16/2019 and Israel Nature and Parks Authority permit number A007–19 (Hippos-Sussita is a national park). Asher Ovadia visited the site during the excavations and we are grateful for his insights.

² Cf. Segal/Eisenberg 2005; Młynarczyk 2011: 269–271.

³ The room’s roofing and the doorway lintel are about to collapse and do not allow excavations of the space until it is stabilized.

⁴ The excavations, including the mosaic floor and the inscriptions, were documented by ground- and drone-based photography and photogrammetry conducted by M. Eisenberg.

⁵ For an overview of the history of Hippos see Dvorjetski 2014. For a short updated overview of the churches at Hippos see Eisenberg/Iermolin/Shalev 2018: 77–79; Schuler 2017.

⁶ Segal/Eisenberg 2005; Segal 2007; Łajtar 2014: 272–273.

⁷ This dating for the collapse of the roofing and the church final stage were supported during the last excavation season, July 2019. Initial pottery reading was made by Nofar Shamir, expedition pottery expert.

The mosaic floor and the inscriptions

The mosaic floor which covers the entire space of the church was almost fully exposed except for about 20% of its most western part which has neither been fully excavated nor cleaned yet.⁸ The mosaic was almost fully preserved due to the thick burnt layer that covered it. It is the best-preserved mosaic floor so far excavated in Hippos. The mosaic is multi-coloured, containing geometric decorations as well as birds, fishes, fruits, flora and perhaps loaves. The decorations are very dense, allowing just for small empty space on the carpet. Three inscriptions in Greek were exposed on the mosaic floor (Fig. 1).

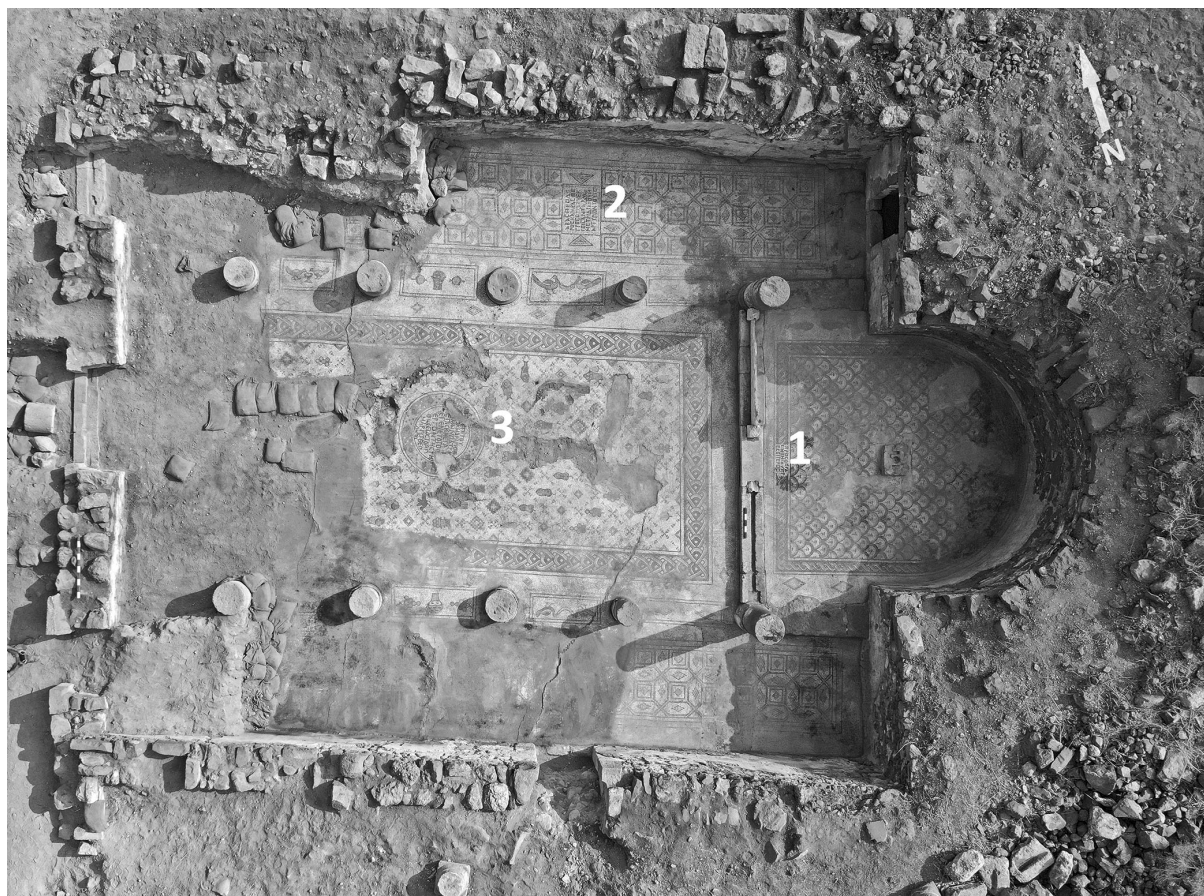


Fig. 1

No. 1 Offering of the priest Simonios

The first inscription was uncovered during the conservation work of the mosaic in 2007 and fully published by Adam Łajtar.⁹ It is located in the middle of the western border of the bema and adjacent to the main gate, between the chancel screens (Fig. 2).

With the text προσφορά Ἰ Σιμονίου πλεσβίτερος (“Offering of Simonios, the priest”) the inscription marks something that was donated by a priest named Simonios. This rare personal name is a secondary formation of the Greek name Σίμων used as an equivalent of the Hebrew *smwn*.¹⁰ As the display of the inscription interrupts the border ornament, Jolanta Młynarczyk, followed by Adam Łajtar, assumed that the text was inserted later into the floor and did probably not refer to the mosaic, but to another nearby

⁸ The mosaic exposure was halted in order to allow a full conservation treatment. Its exposure and conservation will continue during the next excavation season.

⁹ Łajtar 2007; Łajtar 2014: 272–273 no. 21.

¹⁰ Łajtar 2007: 57f.; Łajtar 2014: 272.

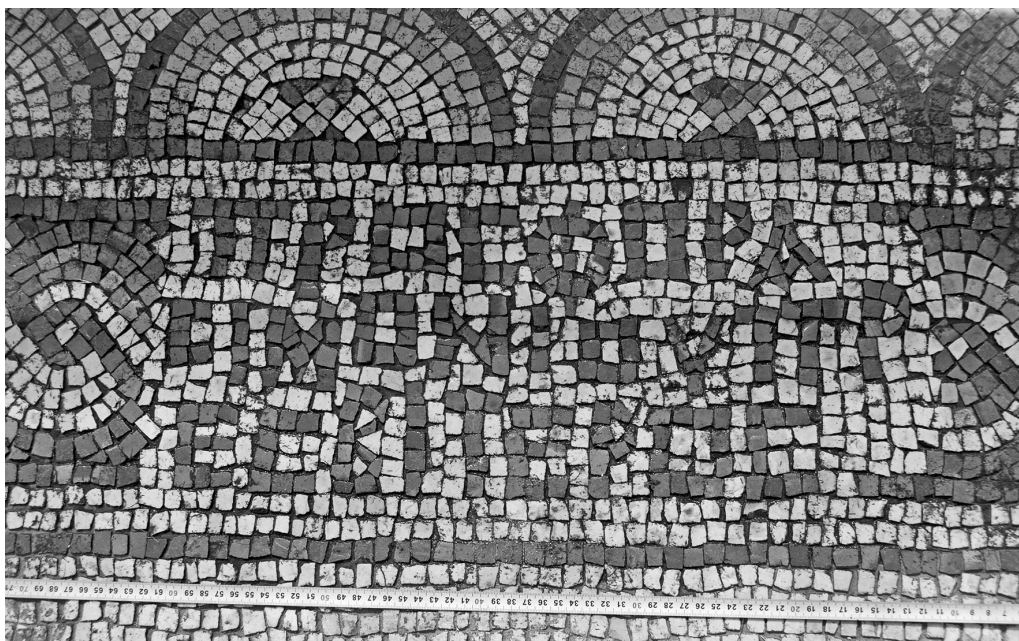


Fig. 2

object such as the altar, the chancel screens, the reliquary or something else.¹¹ Recently Werner Eck refused those speculations and stressed that the priest's προσφορά pertains to the mosaic itself like in many parallels where a particular item is not specified in the text.¹² Especially noteworthy, however, is the fact that the short inscription contains an astonishing grammatical error. Beside the quite normal confusion of the vowels (ι for υ in πρεσβύτερος; and perhaps ο for ω in Σιμόνιος), it was not considered necessary to add the priesthood of Simonios to his name grammatically congruent in genitive (πρεσβυτέρου). Using the nominative instead of oblique cases could provide a clue to a Semitic linguistic habit.¹³

The other two inscriptions of the Southwest Church, both found during the 2019 season and presented hereafter, show a similar inexperience in the Greek language and seem to confirm what Łajtar already suspected from the Simonios inscription, i.e. “that the redactor of this inscription or the mosaicist, or both of them, used Aramaic in everyday communication”.¹⁴

The new inscriptions

No. 2 Inscription within a tabula ansata in the northern aisle

The inscription is situated within a *tabula ansata*, 4.40 m west of the chamber (*pastophorium*) doorway at the eastern edge of the aisle. The inscription of six lines, fully preserved and laid in black *tesserae*, is facing east. This means that the reader had to turn his back on the sanctuary. The odd orientation of the inscription might be due to liturgical convention, assuming that the priest entered the church in some procession, stepping out of the adjoining room and first ambulating through the side aisle around the nave. A sealed doorway was found in the eastern part of the northern church wall, 2.40 m east of the inscription. The doorway belongs to an earlier building phase and could have been used for such a procession.¹⁵ The inscription would have been oriented towards the direction of the priest's gaze during this liturgical act.

Dimensions: *Tabula ansata* – 1.20 × 0.65 m; inscription maximum dimensions – 0.54 (h) × 0.71 (w) m; average letter height – 6.3 cm (4–5 *tesserae*).

¹¹ Młynarczyk 2011: 270; Łajtar 2014: 272.

¹² Eck 2019: 154f.

¹³ Łajtar 2007: 59; Łajtar 2014: 272, after Lewis 1989: 97 on no. 21 l. 8–10, where the genitive κήπων (“of gardens”) is resumed by nominatives.

¹⁴ Łajtar 2007: 59; Łajtar 2014: 272.

¹⁵ Cf. Patrich 2006: 350. 357f.

ΑΒΑΣΘΕΟΔΟ
 ΡΟΣΚΑΙΑΒΑΣΠΕ
 ΤΡΟΣΟΤΙΑΤΥΕΚ
 ΤΕΙΣΑΝΤΑΔΥΩ
 5 ΜΕΤΡΙΔΙΑΤΟΥΜ
 ΑΡΤΥΡΙΟΝΤΟΥΤΟ



Fig. 3

Ἀβ(β)ᾶς Θεόδολρος καὶ ἄβ(β)ᾶς Πέλτρος, ὅτι α(ὐ)τὸ ἐκτείσαν τὰ δύο ἢ μετρίδια (?) τοῦ
 μάρτυριον τοῦτο.

“Father Theodoros and father Petros (sc. are remembered here), because they themselves founded/built the two μετρίδια (?) of this sanctuary.”

1. 1f. Ἀβ(β)ᾶς: Deriving from the Aramaic ‘abba’ (“father”) the term primarily expresses respect and is used as a honorary title applied to all ecclesiastical functionaries;¹⁶ cf. e.g. an inscription of the year 618 AD from Eboda (‘Abda) on a tombstone in a μαρτύριον of St. Theodoros, where a priest (πρεσβύτερος) is called ἄββᾶς (Meimaris 1986: no. 1197¹⁷); in CIIP 3846 from Anab near Eleutheropolis an ἄββᾶς Ὀλπιανός appears in a bilingual Greek-Aramaic mosaic inscription.

There is no further evidence here to suggest that the designation ἄββᾶς results from a monastic context as in Azotos (CIIP 2297) or Kissufim (578 AD; CIIP 2534, Meimaris 1986: no. 1196): in the former instance the ἄββᾶς, whose name remains uncertain, built a monastery probably with a church, metaphorically expressed by ἡ ληνός (“winepress”) on the basis of the contemporaneous psalm exegesis;¹⁸ in the latter the ἄββᾶς Theodoros, denoted as “deacon, monk and leader” – διακό(νου) μοναχ(οῦ) ἡγουμ(ένου) –, turns out to be the current abbot who donated an aisle.

The honorific form of address usually reserved for respectable persons of advanced age might support the assumption that the “fathers” were remembered here after their death. However, the archaeological findings cannot confirm that the mosaic marks the burial place of the two men (see on l. 3 ὅτι).

1. 1–3 Θεόδολρος ... Πέλτρος: The spelling of the first name (-δορος instead of correctly -δωρος) shows that the quantities of the vowels have already been ignored.

¹⁶ Meimaris 1986: 235–239 no. 1177–1199.

¹⁷ Negev 1981: 36f. no. 27.

¹⁸ Cf. Lampe s.v. 1; this interpretation has not yet been expressed.

The two names are common in the Christian context and it is a mere coincidence that two of three Hippos bishops known from the acts of the Ecumenical Councils bore these two names, one Petros present in Seleucia 359 AD and in Antioch 363 AD, the other a Theodoros representing Hippos at Jerusalem in 536 AD.¹⁹ In general, the popularity of the name Theodoros may reflect the high reputation the holy martyr Theodoros enjoyed, to whom the Southwest Church at Hippos was consecrated (see below on no. 3 l. 8f.).

1. 3 ὅτι: Regarding the syntactical structure, in which the conjunction ὅτι (“because”) follows directly after a mere mention of personal names, the question arises what the reader should add by thought in the first part. Are the two persons buried there or are they simply mentioned – “because they founded or built” some parts of the church? For the former case, a burial place in a church, one would expect some indication in the inscription, as in CIIP 2833 (Hiericho), where the founder of a chapel Kyriakos, a priest and probably abbot of a monastery, owns a burial place (θήκη) inside the building he donated; another example for a tomb of a higher-ranking person in a church marked with a mosaic is CIIP 3313 (Socho I) over the grave of Ioannes. Tombs within a church building have also been found in the Northeast Church at Hippos.²⁰ But as long as no remains for a tomb can be identified in the Southwest Church, the assumption that Theodoros and Petros were buried there has to be excluded.

The simple mention of the personal names could imply an invocation of god, who is asked by these people for his care or for acceptance of their offering. For in some instances such appeals precede similar causal clauses with ὅτι-construction; cf. CIIP 2673 (Archelais): Κ(ύρι)ε, μνήσθι(τι) Λούκα (...), ὅτι (...); CIIP 2675 (in the same church; Madden 2014: no. 16): Κ(ύρι)ε Ἰ(ησο)ῦ Χ(ριστ)έ, πρόϝδεξε τὴν καρποφορίαν τῶν δούλω(ν) | σου Ἰωάννου (...) καὶ | Ἀββοσόβου, ὅτι ἐξ ιδίων κόλπων ἤγισαν τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον [mosaic: ΠΠΟΕΔΕΞΕ].

α(ὐ)τού: Read αὐτοί. For the interchange of υ for οι in mosaic inscriptions of this kind compare CIIP 2814 (Nuseib, 3 km southwest of Jericho) ὑκοδομήση for οἰκοδομήσαι; CIIP 3326 (Herodion) perhaps τῶς for τοῖς, where, however, the grammatically correct form would have been τῶν. The word αὐτοί may replace a common formulation as ἐκ τῶν ιδίων (καμμάτων), “with private means”.

1. 3f. ἐκτίσαν: Read ἔκτισαν, from κτίζω “to found, to build”, as often in this context. The term suggests that the “things” or “components” built or founded by the two persons were of fundamental importance to the building which they are parts of (l. 5f.).

1. 4f. τὰ δύο | μετρίδια (?): What the two μετρίδια are is hard to say. Therefore, we set a question mark and tentatively provide some possible approaches to its understanding. The formation μετρίδιον is unparalleled. In the present context the term should mean something material that is part of the building or at least equipment of the sanctuary (but see the previous note). Basically, two different possibilities are to be considered: Either we accept and register a new hitherto unknown word τὸ μετρίδιον or we assume a wrong orthography misled by the late antique pronunciation of Greek and, if so, an existing word behind it:

In the first case, the neuter τὸ μετρίδιον would be the diminutive form of μέτρον. Its composition and meaning could be influenced by μερίδιον (“small part”) which is an existing, though unusual (LSJ s.v. two references), derivative of μερίς.²¹ At any rate, the mosaicist or the initiators obviously did not regard the word as a mistake. If we acknowledge the individual and unique morphological composition μετρίδιον as a new lexical entry, we are in a linguistic-lexical grey area. The word would very generally mean any “small measured thing/space” (like Latin *loculus* ?) and we would only be able to conclude from the material context what is exactly signified by this unspecific term. Maybe for the contemporary readers the general hint was sufficient since they simply knew (and saw) which things the two “fathers” built or founded.

In the second case, we should take the common suffix -ίδιον as granted, so that a deviant spelling would appear most likely in the first part μετρ-. The only word that sounds similar and occurs in LSJ or LBG, is τὸ μιτρίδιον in LBG (for -ι- instead of -ε- cf. Gignac I 211), registered there from a text of the 14th century

¹⁹ Cf. Di Segni/Tsafrir/Green 2015: no. 18, no. 19, no. 48 § 44, respectively.

²⁰ Cf. Młynarczyk 2011: 265–268, 282 fig. 5; Schuler 2014: 226–229, 239; Jastrzębska 2018.

²¹ Cf. other derivatives, sounding similar, such as μεπτικόν, also in the form μεπτικόν, and μεριδικόν “portion, part”, Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität (LBG) *sub verbis*.

with the meaning “Querbalken, Stützbalken” (“cross-beam, supporting beam”) and referenced to μήτριον. According to LSJ the latter is a diminutive of ἡ μήτρα (“bond”) which can mean (after Lampe s.v. 4) “in building, tie-beam; bonding, bond-stone”. It already occurs in earlier texts of the 4th and 5th century (Cyrill and Nonnus). Following this line of explanation, μετρίδια could be read μητρίδια, perceived as a kind of supporting building parts serving as “bonds” for its stability, maybe two main beams of the construction or the two rows of columns adjoining the aisles. This interpretative approach of the term seems to be no less uncertain than the first one and further thoughts are urgently needed.²²

In any case, one should be aware that exquisite architectural terms are not uncommon in these actually simple texts; see a recently published mosaic inscription from central Syria (Jaghnoun 2019:²³ 10 no. 3): ἐνήφωσαν τὴν στοὰν ἅμα τοῖς + μεσάστυλοις. The μεσάστυλον (in this variant previously known from a single scholion²⁴) is the translation of the Latin *intercolumnium*. An unknown word occurs in a new inscription from the early northern church at Shiloh: ζηλάρια. According to Di Segni (2012: 212f.) it is a Greek formation of the Latin stem *sella* and pertains to the “benches” that skirt the wall of the church, if not from Latin *cella* that leads to Greek words such as κέλλιον or κελλάριος, the former of which means “monastic cell” (cf. SEG 60, 1888).

1. 5f. μάρτύριον τοῦτο: Grammatically incorrect form instead of μαρτυρίου τούτου; the genitive construction introduced by τοῦ is not continued. The misspelled -ov for -ou is only acceptable as a mere phonetic inaccuracy if we presuppose that -ov as well as -ou was pronounced with the same nasal o-sound. If not, the ending is to be considered a strong morphological mistake, and an evidence of the creeping decline in mastering the Greek language in this region; cf. the barbarism ἀρχιμανδρίτην for genitive ἀρχιμανδρίτου in a mosaic from Syrian Ḥeīt, about 20 km east of Hippo, IGLS XIV 1 331 d. For the interchange of -o and -ou cf. IGLS XIV 2 p. 688; Lehmann/Holum 2000: 27.

For μαρτύριον as “sanctuary, church” in this region: IGLS XIV 1 no. 245 (al-Deir/Adraa; 473/4 AD); 2 no. 562a (Aire, Şanamein).²⁵ In these samples the name of the martyr to whom the building was dedicated is missing, as often: cf. IGLS XV 1 no. 162f. (Shaqrā) and 2 no. 455 (Umm az-Zeitūn); with names e.g. IGLS XV 1 no. 261 (Harrān, 568 AD) μ. τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου; Nr. 274 (al Jāj) μ. ἁγι(ο)ς Ἡλίας.

Generally, the people knew from worship practice to which martyr or saint their church was dedicated. Nevertheless, the concretisation of the name, in our case St. Theodoros, given in the central mosaic (no. 3), was necessary to document the patron on whose memorial days the main feasts of the church were celebrated.

No. 3 The central inscription

The main inscription of the church is set within a medallion almost in the centre of the nave. It contains nine lines facing west towards the main portal of the church, located 5.5 m to the west. The inscription is almost fully preserved, missing few of its upper left and upper right letters. It is laid in black *tesserae* in the middle of a double concentric medallion.²⁶ Dimensions: outer medallion diameter – 1.45 m; inner medal-

²² Highly speculative would be a reflection that takes the stem μήτρ- (“mother”) as a basis and yields a new word μητρίδιον (wrongly written μετρίδιον): Here the connective factor would be ἡ μήτρα, which, according to LSJ s.v. IV, can mean “bolts for locks” (in BGU 1028, 20.26 [II AD]) or “*repagulum*” of a door (after a *glossarium*). Thus, the invented (!) term μητρίδιον would signify smaller objects, not well in line with the semantics of the predicative ἔκτισαν (“they founded”). – Assuming that single letters were written superfluously, further speculation opens up, e.g. {M}ἐτρίδια for αἰθρίδια (cf. Orlandos/Traulos s.v. αἰθρίδιον, τό “μικρὸν αἶθριον, μικρὸς πρόδομος, P Ryl. 312” and the entry αἶθριον).

²³ We thank D. Koßmann for the hint to this publication.

²⁴ Cf. Orlandos/Traulos 1986: 175 s.v. μεσάστυλον, where reference is made to the regular formation μεσόστυλ(ι)ον (p. 176).

²⁵ For μαρτύρια privately funded on the Golan Heights cf. Gregg/Urman 1996: no. 164 (Jueîzeh, without specification) and no. 174 (Mumsiyye, 486 AD) μ. τοῦ ἁγίου Γεοργίου.

²⁶ The medallion and its inscription received the maximum conservation treatment once exposed due to its instability and cavities on the one side and importance on the other. Conservation was headed by Yana Vitkalov. At the end of the July 2019 season the entire mosaic floor was covered in order to protect it until it will be further excavated and treated.

lion diameter – 0.94 m; inscription maximum dimensions – 0.82 (h) × 0.77 (w) m; average line height – 8 cm (4–7 *tesserae*).



Fig. 4

ΕΠΙΤΟΥ
[.]ΓΓ Κ ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΤ[.]
ΙΜΩΝ ΠΑΤΡΚ[.]
ΕΠΙΣΚ ΜΕΓΑ[Λ]Ο[.]
5 ΕΓΕΝΕΤΟ ΤΟ Π[.]
ΕΡΓΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΨΗ
ΦΩΣΕΩΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ
ΜΑΡΤΥΡΘΕΟ
ΔΩΡΟΥ

Ἐπὶ τοῦ [ἀ]γ(ίου) κ(αὶ) μακαριοτ(άτου) | ἡμῶν πατρ(ός) κ[(αὶ)] | ἐπισκ(όπου) Μεγά[λ]ο[υ] |
ἐγένετο τὸ πᾶ[ν] | ἔργον τῆς ψηφώσεως τοῦ ἀγ(ίου) | μαρτυρ(ίου) Θεοιδώρου.

“Under our holy and truly blessed father and bishop Megas, the entire work of the mosaic in the holy *martyrion* of Theodoros was executed.”

1. 2 μακαριοτ(άτου) = μακαριωτ(άτου), confusion of the o-vowel quantity, as often.

1. 3 ἡμῶν: The genitive of the personal pronoun ἡμῶν (“of us”) needs a syntactical reference word, which normally precedes (see the instances in the following comments). The exception is explainable by the intention to refer the possessive genitive to both πατρ(ός) and ἐπισκ(όπου). And since a further genitive was added behind the junction πατρ(ός) κ[(αὶ)] | ἐπισκ(όπου) – most likely the name of the bishop (see on 1. 4) – the only possible position for ἡμῶν was before the whole expression.

1. 3 πατρ(ός) κ[(αὶ)]: An abbreviation ΠΑΤΡ for πατρ(ός) (“father”) might seem unusual. However, an explanation of the letters ΠΑΤΡΚ[.] as the bishop’s name previous to ἐπισκόπου, which is a well parallelizable word order,²⁷ would imply that the author of the template or the mosaicist risked a misapprehension just

²⁷ For the name at this position cf. CIIP 2674 (Achelais, 6 c. AD): Ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀγιωτ(άτου) καὶ ὁσιωτ(άτου) | ἡμῶν Πορφυρίου ἐπισκόπου ἐψηφώθη ὁ ναὸς οὗτος; the name previous to ἐπισκόπου also in CIIP 3083 (Emmaus, 5/6 c. AD).

at the most important point of the inscription. A regular abbreviation of a certain personal name should not be assumed; otherwise a reader would have been compelled to puzzle over whether the bishop was called Πατρ(ί)κ[ιός] or somehow different.

By contrast, the solution proposed in the edition is to be favoured. The appellation πατήρ for a bishop is not unusual in these inscriptions; cf. Madaba, 767 AD [Di Segni] (Michel 2001: 318 no. 120, Meimaris 1986: no. 1062): Ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁσίου(τάτου) πατρὸς ἡμῶν Θεοφάνους ἐπισκόπου | ἐ[γένε]τω τὸ πᾶν καλὸν ἔργον τοῦτο τῆς ψιφώ[σεως τοῦ ἐ]νδῶξου κ(αὶ) σεπτοῦ ὕκου; Ras Siyagha, 6 c. AD (IGLS 21 no. 78, Meimaris 1986: no. 1067) εὐχῇ τοῦ ἁγίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Λεοντίου ἐπισκόπου. The honorary title πατήρ for someone who enjoys authority and deserves respect sounds more reverent and is better applicable to the bishop than the familiar expression ἀββᾶς referring to lower officials (see no. 2). On the other hand, it needs not to be assumed that the designation πατήρ indicates the bishop to be an abbot. Such cases are usually explicitly clarified: In CIIP 3140 (cf. 3141) a mosaic in the monastery of Martyrius in Kh. Murasas mentions the abbot in the formulation Ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν | Γενεσίου πρεσβυτέρου κ(αὶ) ἀρχιμανδρίτου, in CIIP 3291 (Kh. el-Makhrum) can be read τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Αἰγλῶνος ἡγουμένου κ(αὶ) τῆς ἐν | Χ(ριστῷ) συνοδίας | αὐτοῦ. In these instances, additionally to πατήρ the function of an abbot is confirmed by ἀρχιμανδρίτου (“of monastic rank”) and ἡγουμένου (“leading”), respectively.

Concerning the word order, in the present text there is a conspicuous deviation. Unlike the majority of comparable inscriptions, the word πατρ(ός) is not only abbreviated and the normal sequence reversed to ἡμῶν πατρός, but also the conjunction κ(αὶ) seems to interrupt the normally coherent form πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐπισκόπου.

For that variant a remarkable parallel from Nebha/Beqa’a (Lebanon) of 539 AD featuring the same characteristics can be cited (IGLS VI 2945 [Donceel-Voûte 1988: 397] l. 1–6): Ἐν χρόνοις τοῦ ὁσίου(τάτου) π(ατ)ρὸς ἡμῶ(ν) καὶ ἐπισκ(όπου) Μιχαὴλ ἐψηφόθη ἡ μέση τῆς ἀγ(ίας) | ἐκκλησίας μ[ετὰ] καὶ τῶν | δύο ἐμβό[λων] καὶ τοῦ νάρθικος.

l. 4 Μεγά[λλ]ο[υ]: At the end of the line a space of about two letters is broken out of the mosaic. Right in front of the hole, which is now stabilized with mortar for conservation, there is the left part of a rounding the lower part of which is slightly pushed up, probably due to the damage. These remains suggest some round letter, such as epsilon, omicron, omega or theta. What is noted with [λλ] in the edition seems to be the original position of a lambda; it is still recognisable that its original black *tesserae* have been replaced with white stones in a second step. This correction may not have been made long after the mosaic had been created, possibly at its final completion.

An attribute μεγάλου (“the great”) to ἐπισκόπου additionally to [ἁ]γ(ίου) κ(αὶ) μακαριοτ(άτου) in line 2 would be redundant and unbalanced, and an honorary title such as μεγα[λλ]ο[πρ](επεστάτου)²⁸ (“the most magnificent”) is never applied to a bishop. Besides, those reconstructions would entail the consequence that the inscription did not contain the name of the bishop under whose direction the mosaic pavement was laid.²⁹

Considering the word order (very similar to the parallel from Nebha/Beqa’a, IGLS VI 2945 given above on l. 3) it is most likely the name of the bishop that appears in this position; for the name after ἐπισκόπου compare also CIIP 2542 (Kissufim, 576 AD; Madden 2014: 99 no. 135) ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου καὶ ὁσιωτάτου | ἡμῶν ἐπισκόπου Μισαηλός; SEG 37, 1512 (‘Evron/Galilee, 442/3 AD; Madden 2014: 179 no. 259) [ἐπὶ] τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου καὶ θεοσεβ(εστάτου) | [ἡμῶ]ν ἐπισκ(όπου) Παύλου.

²⁸ The Greek word is the regular translation of the Latin title *magnificentissimus*, frequently related to high functionaries of Roman administration; see recently Zellmann-Rohrer 2019: 131f., in a text from Skythopolis mentioning an administrator Φίλιππος.

²⁹ Though this is not impossible in itself; the restraint of naming benefactors reminds of the formulaic phrase ὃν κύριος γινώσκει τὰ ὀνόματα (“whose names the Lord knows”), that occurs also at Hippos in a mosaic inscription of the so-called cathedral (Łajtar 2014: 266f. no. 16; baptistery, probably 591 AD). This wide-spread concealment of names in Christian inscriptions may be regarded as an expression of modesty; cf. Roueché (with Feissel) 2007: 225–234.

The name Μέγας is well attested in that time and region; cf. CIIP 1513 (Caesarea Maritima, 3–6 c. AD; epitaph) μημόριον Μεγάλου; CIIP 1514 (Caesarea Maritima, 6 c. AD; epitaph) [θή]κη (...) Μεγάλου ἐ]παρχικοῦ³⁰; CIIP 2221 (Ioppe, 3–6 c. AD) a tomb.

A bishop from Maximianupolis participating in the synod at Jerusalem 510 AD (Di Segni/Tsafrir/Green 2015: no. 33 § 31), and another one of the 6th century from Meiros in *Phrygia Salutaris* also bore the name Μέγας (cf. Destephen 2008: 658); a further Μέγας is mentioned as father of an ecclesiastical οἰκονόμος in a Byzantine inscription at Cilician Diokaisareia (MAMA III 98; Dagron/Feissel: 222; cf. *ibid.* no. 55, uncertain testimony of a Christian sarcophagus); cf. <https://papyri.uni-koeln.de/papyri-woerterlisten/wort/wl-grc-22456>; PLRE IIIb 870f. provides three men of the 6th and 7th century with this name.

The samples of Palestine provide the name in genitive Μεγάλου, so it cannot be decided whether the normal nominative Μέγας is underlying or the later name form Μέγαλος/Μέγαλλος, which also exists according to the evidence in the Egyptian papyri and in Asia Minor (cf. J. Price on CIIP 2221), though to a much lesser extent. In the Hippos mosaic inscription, the secondary removal of the lambda in the genitive form ΜΕΓΑ{Λ}ΟΥ was perhaps a clumsy attempt by ignorant people to rule out the possibility of deriving the genitive from a basic name form Μέγαλος.

l. 5f. τὸ πα[ν] ἔργον: The formula with and without ἐγένετο is widely spread in foundation mosaics. A similar wording related to the funding of a mosaic (ψήφωσις) occurs twice at Asor in CIIP 2313 of the year 512: ἐτελιώθη τὸ πᾶν ἔργον τῆς ψηφώσεως, and in CIIP 2314: ἐγένετο τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο ἰ τῆς ψηφώσεως. A further instance is CIIP 3899 from Iethira: ἐγένετο τὸ π(ᾶν) ἔργον τῆς ψ(η)φώσεως.

l. 8 μαρτυρίου “of the *martyrion* (building)” or μάρτυρος “of the martyr”. With a resolution μάρτυρος the mosaic would appear to be owned by Theodoros himself (“the holy martyr’s Theodoros mosaic”). The simple name of a certain holy figure can indicate the building itself, in which the character is revered, cf. IGLS XIV 411 (Neapolis) l. 1–3 Θεόδωρος οἰκοδόμησεν τὸν ἀρχάγγελον ἰ Μιχαήλ, “Theodoros built the archangel Michael” instead of “built the church of the archangel Michael”; Madden 2014: 153 no. 222 (Kafr Kama) ἐψηφόθη ἡ ἁγία Θέκλα, “Saint Thekla was decorated with mosaic floors”. There is, however, at least one parallel with the same abbreviation and mark that has to be resolved into μαρτύριον in the sense of the building, cf. IGLS XIV 1 245 (near Adraa) l. 3f. ἐψηφώθη τὸ ἅγιον ἰ μαρτύριον.

l. 8f. Θεοδώρου: Meimaris (1986: 131–132 no. 695–702) gives a list of eight cult places in Palestine, to which Di Segni (2012: 409–411; Madden 2014: no. 220) added a church at Khirbet Beit Sila where a certain Petros built the main parts of the church by money that “Saint Theodoros granted him” (ἐξ ὧν παρίσχευεν αὐτοῦ ὁ ἅγιος Θεόδωρος); this implies that the saint was the patron of this church. In her notes on this inscription Di Segni (2012: 415 note 12) supplements Meimaris’ list with a church in Jizeh west of Bostra (IGLS XIII 2 no. 9714), more testimonies from ‘Avdat and ‘En ‘Avdat (Eboda)³¹ and one example from Madaba, ὁ πανάγ(ιος) τόπος τοῦ ἐνδόξου μάρτυρος Θεοδώρου, a chapel beside the cathedral (562 AD; IGLS XXI 1 no. 133³², Michel 2001: 307f. no. 117).³³ Another testimony is CIIP 3183 from Kh. Deiry (SEG 60, 1722 [Di Segni], Madden 2014: 114f. no. 156 without edition), where God is called κ(ύρι)ε ὁ θ(ε)ός [τοῦ ἁγίου] Θεωδώρου, as in Negev 1981: no. 26 (Eboda). At Khirbat al-Samra (Michel 2001: 199–201 no. 65,

³⁰ The restoration of the name is uncertain here; if right, a connecting line could be drawn to inscriptions from an Emesan monastery (IGLS V 2358f.; 495/6 AD), where Feissel recognised epitaphs of the son and the daughter of a Caesarean Μέγας (Feissel 2006: 205 no. 650 with 244f. no. 789; D. Feissel in W. Ameling’s comment on CIIP 1514).

³¹ From Negev 1981 whose no. 17 Meimaris 1986 already cited, also the numbers 26, 31, 44d (“43” erroneously); cf. Negev 1981: 31 on no. 17: “I am inclined to believe that Theodore could have been a local martyr, although a martyr by this name is mentioned at Gerasa, in a dedicatory inscription of A.D. 496 (Gerasa, no. 300, pp. 477–480), whereas a saint of that name is referred to in another (Gerasa, no. 336, p. 487).” – Negev gives no reasons for his doubt. Cf. also a graffito from Eboda, SEG 41, 1542.

³² Cf. P. L. Gatier, following ed. pr. Piccirillo 1981: 306, in IGLS XXI: “le saint régional supplicié à Philadelphie”, referring to Milik 1960: 164–166 who summarized an otherwise unattested martyrdom of a St. Theodoros and his companions, who were killed under Diocletian at Amman/Philadelphia, published from a Georgian manuscript of the 11th century at the earliest, by Blake/Peeters 1926: 88–101. Most probably a chapel at Khirbat Yājūz (cf. Michel 2001: 286–288 no. 107) near Philadelphia was dedicated to this martyr; for the text D. Feissel, BE 2000: no. 682.

³³ See also Di Segni/Tsafrir/Green 2015: 408, 15 churches dedicated to St. Theodoros.

cf. Sartre-Fauriat 2000: 307f.) the genitive [τοῦ ἁγίου | Θε[οδώρου] is a possible supplement in an uncertain context; even more uncertain is CIIP 2561 (Abasan el-Kabir, 606 AD) [– – – τοῦ ἁγίου] Θεοδώρου.

For the Syrian-Arabic region Sartre-Fauriat (2000: 307f. and on IGLS XIII no. 9714) provides further references to cults of a martyr Theodoros: Waddington IGLS no. 2327 (Suweida; cf. IGLS IV 1750); no. 2159 (Shaqqa, 596 or 611 AD; cf. Feissel, BE 1997: no. 665). While Waddington thought of the martyr Theodoros, who suffered martyrdom with his more famous companion Mauritius and Photinus at Apameia in Syria,³⁴ Sartre-Fauriat is of the opinion that the testimonies almost always refer to Theodoros Tiro.³⁵ And indeed, even though in the Oriental churches at least 20 different martyrs and saints of the name Theodoros are known for the first six centuries AD,³⁶ Theodoros “the recruit” (lat. *tiro*, in Greek transliteration ὁ τήρων) who suffered martyrdom at Amaseia in Pontus (north Asia Minor) under Maximinus Daia (311–313 AD) was by far the most famous of all these.³⁷ In his honour, Emperor Anastasios (491–518) elevated the town Euchaita 45 km west-south-west of Amaseia to the status of an episcopal see and made it a place of pilgrimage under the new name Θεοδώρου Πόλις, “city of Theodoros” (cf. SGO 11/10/01). According to Delehayé’s fundamental study on the soldier-saint Theodoros of Amaseia, another fictitious saint called Theodoros the “commander” (στρατηλάτης) emerged in the 9th century AD from the original Theodoros tradition.³⁸

The earliest literary source for the fate of the martyr Theodoros of Amaseia is the ceremonial speech by Gregory of Nyssa (*Panegyricus in Theodorum*, ed. J. P. Cavarinos, Gregorii Nysseni Opera X 1/2 [1990]). The saint’s veneration spread throughout the Eastern world at the latest after the first church was consecrated to him in the capital Constantinople on 5 November 452 AD. In addition to this day, the Orthodox tradition celebrates his main commemoration day on 17 February and knows some other feasts related to the saint.³⁹ For the expansion of his cult in the Syrian-Palestine region⁴⁰ the large sanctuary at Gerasa next to the cathedral (Meimaris 1986: no. 699; I. Gerasa no. 300 (535/6 AD; SGO 21/23/04 [epigram]; cf. 21/23/03; cf. Michel 2001: 233–240 no. 85b) may have been influential,⁴¹ as well as the high esteem the saint enjoyed in Jerusalem. There, a μαρτύριον τοῦ ἁγίου Θεοδώρου existed in the year 532 AD when saint Sabas died (Cyril of Scythopolis *vit. Sabae* 78). According to Di Segni (2012: 415 n. 11) the Georgian calendar of Jerusalem published by Garitte 1958 attests that Theodoros was commemorated on at least eight days in the year.⁴² It is easily conceivable that figures, such as the provincial governor in *Palaestina Secunda* of the

³⁴ Waddington on IGLS no. 2159: “Saint Théodore fut mis à mort à Apamée de Syrie, avec saint Maurice et d’autres martyrs, sous le règne de Maximien; voyez *Acta Sanctorum* 21 Februarii.” Cf. the legend in *Acta Sanctorum Februarii*, vol. III (1658) 239–242.

³⁵ See also IGLS IV 1705 (Androna); 1750 (Umm al Halahil); IGLS IV 1339 from Apamea which mentions the relics (λίγωνα) of a Saint Theodoros and could well refer to the local Saint Theodoros of Apamea (differently Delehayé 1935: 238), just like possibly, but not necessarily, a martyrium in Jabal Zawiyā, near Apamea, with uncertain fragmentary inscription (D. Feissel, BE 2014: no. 503; SEG 63, 1493); IGLS IV 1570bis (Fa’lul); V 2155 (Ghur).

³⁶ According to a review of the relevant encyclopedias of saints: *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, vol. 12 (1969) 238–286 and *Bibliotheca Sanctorum orientaliū*, vol. 2 (Nadal Cañellas 1999) 1166–1209, for places like Alexandria, Antiochia, Kyrene, Eleutheropolis, Karthago, Armenia.

³⁷ Cf. Delehayé 1909: 11–43, 121–201 (appendices I–V); Peeters/Delehayé 1925; Amore 1969; Walter 2003: 44–66; see also in the Oxford database “The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity” under <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=S00480>, over 130 testimonies, certainly or possibly related to him.

³⁸ Cf. Delehayé 1909: 15 *passim*.

³⁹ Cf. Delehayé/Peeters 1925: 25 §53 and 27 §58, listing another four days in his honor, of which the first Saturday of Lent is recorded also in the Georgian calendar of Jerusalem, cf. Garitte 1958: 116 and 174f. his comment on March 10. – In the Roman liturgy the main feast of the saint is November 9, perhaps the inauguration date of St. Theodore’s church at Rome.

⁴⁰ Cf. Delehayé 1909: 13f.; Delehayé/Peeters 1925: 24f.; Walter 2003: 49f.; Fourlas 2008: 519–525 provides a catalogue of early byzantine depictions, of which 8 are from Middle East and Egypt, no. 1 (Sinai), no. 2 (Sinai), no. 3 (Egypt), no. 4 (Egypt); no. 5 (Aqaba, Jordan), no. 6 (Syria), no. 9 (Syria?), no. 24 (Sinai).

⁴¹ See also a μαρτύριον at Suf, north of Gerasa, Piccirillo 1993: 315, no. 651 (D. Feissel, BE 1994: 659; Michel 2001: 424).

⁴² We came across eleven days with 6 martyrs and 5 saints named Theodoros, which are to be taken into consideration, although it cannot be proven in every single case that it is the saint from Amaseia; but see note 38 and parallels such as the

year 506/7 Theosebios who came from Amaseia (cf. Di Segni 1999: 636), promoted the dissemination of the cult in their sphere of influence.

All in all, it is very probable that the saint, to whom the μαρτύριον at Hippos was dedicated and who was venerated there, has to be identified with Theodoros of Amaseia, the soldier-saint.

Conclusions

Three inscriptions were located at the mosaic floor of the Burnt Church in the south-west area at Hippos. The latter two exposed and discussed here are the longer and more important ones for understanding the history of the church and its community. Both mention the whole building as a μαρτύριον while the central inscription within a medallion provides the name of the church patron, the martyr Theodoros. In the sixth century AD this saint is well identifiable as Theodoros Tiron, the famous saint of Amaseia venerated throughout the Orient.

Furthermore, the central inscription tells of the laying of the mosaic by the bishop whose name most probably was Μέγας, unknown so far in Hippos. Unfortunately, there is no dating as it is contained in most of those main inscriptions. Perhaps this omission is a sign of the decline in traditional standards which at any rate is evident in the linguistic execution of the inscriptions. They endorse the impression Adam Łajtar gained from inscription no. 1. We are faced with a milieu in which the Greek language was only used very badly, just to somehow preserve the traditions. Even if the people still heard the Greek language in the liturgy of the service, they probably already used the Aramaic language to a large extent in their everyday life. However, this assumption requires further studying in the Hippos region and beyond.

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