

**AN UNKNOWN CHURCH WITH INSCRIPTIONS
FROM THE BYZANTINE PERIOD
AT KHIRBET MAKKÛS NEAR JULIS**

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Recent cataloguing in the archives of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) has brought to light information about a number of archaeological discoveries made in the 19th and early 20th centuries which for various reasons were never brought to the attention of the scholarly public. Among these is a letter with drawings with previously unpublished data about a Byzantine-period church with Greek inscriptions from a site called Khirbet Makkûs, located north-east of Ashkelon (Fig. 1).¹

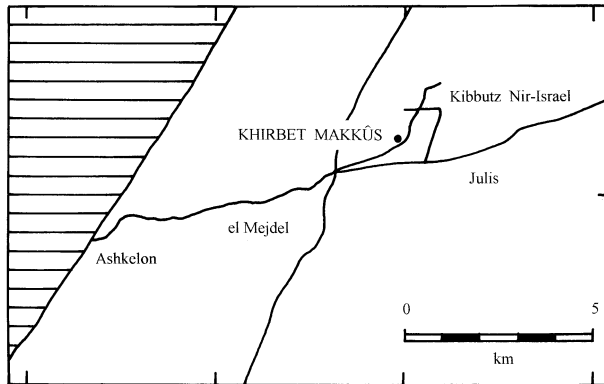


Fig. 1 General location map of Khirbet Makkûs (north-east of Ashkelon).

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1. The description of the archival materials, the site and the analysis of the church were made by S. Gibson and F. Vitto, and the discussion of the inscriptions by L. Di Segni.

The Letter from Lieut.-Comdr V.L. Trumper

The letter which was received at the offices of the PEF in London in 1918, was written by Lieutenant-Commander Victor L. Trumper of the Royal Navy (retired), who was Honorary Secretary of the PEF in Port Said. It was addressed to Miss Estelle Blyth, who was the temporary Assistant Secretary of the PEF at the time, replacing the permanent Secretary George Ovendon who was away serving in the army.²

The letter had been sent from Port Said in Egypt on 21 March 1918 but was only received in London in June of that year; the typed version of the letter in the PEF archives indicates that the original had been “damaged by immersion in sea water”. The letter may have been brought to the attention of members of the PEF Executive Committee but there is no evidence that this matter was actually raised officially and nothing appears in the minutes of the committee meetings held subsequent to the date of the receipt of the letter.³

At the time he wrote the letter, Lieut.-Comdr. Trumper was actively promoting the activities of the PEF and publicizing its *Quarterly Statement* among the British soldiers serving in Palestine. He mentions, at the beginning of the letter, that he had “about six weeks ago sent a man’s subscription along, which I hope was not torpedoed on the way.” He also refers in his letter to a booklet he had written entitled *Historical Sites in Palestine* and that 10,000 copies of these had so far been sold.⁴

In 1918, British soldiers serving in the Middle East were encountering numerous archaeological sites during their military manoeuvres and there was significant concern among archaeologists back in England that these antiquities were being harmed as a result of military fortification and

2. Estelle Blyth was the daughter of the last British Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem. He was consecrated Bishop on 25 March 1887, proceeded to Jerusalem shortly afterwards, and retired from his post sometime in 1914. We are grateful to Dr Rupert Chapman for this information.

3. The typed copy of the letter written by Lieut.-Comdr. Trumper (the original is not extant) and the original drawings were found while cataloguing of archival materials was underway in the PEF in 1994. The material is presently located in a box containing *PEFQS* material labelled “QS January 1931”. The original drawings which accompanied the typed copy of the letter showed clear signs of damage by sea-water.

4. V.L. Trumper, *Historical Sites in Palestine*, Cairo 1918, which is a revised version of an earlier publication: V.L. Trumper, *Historical Sites in Southern Palestine, with a Brief Account of Napoleon’s Expedition to Syria* Port Said 1899; see also *PEFQS* 51 (1918) 45.

trenching activities.⁵ Duncan Mackenzie, in a document from February 1918 entitled “Memorandum on Ancient Sites and Military Operations in Palestine,” which was submitted by the PEF to the British Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, wrote that

The injury [of an archaeological site] through military excavations prior to the arrival of our troops ought to be recorded and special regulations ought to be carried out for the prevention of further injury after such a site has been abandoned by the military.⁶

One of the best known discoveries made by Australian soldiers during the early stages of the war in 1917 was that of a Byzantine-period mosaic floor decorated with animals in medallions at the site of Shellal near Gaza.⁷ A lesser known mosaic of a church was also uncovered during military operations in the summer of 1917 at Um Jerar, south of Gaza.⁸ Yet another important discovery of a mosaic by Australian troops in 1918, was at the site of a synagogue at ‘Ain Duk near Jericho, which was first brought to the attention of the PEF Committee in November 1919.⁹ Harm to archaeological sites persisted and the PEF continued to urge the British Government that serious steps needed to be taken to safeguard the antiquities of Palestine; the situation only changing with the establishing of the Mandatory Department of Antiquities of Palestine in 1920.¹⁰

The letter from Trumper to Estelle Blyth incorporated a letter that he had received from an unnamed soldier describing the discovery of a mosaic floor on 23 January 1918 at a site called Khirbet Makkûs near Julis, about six miles from Ashkelon. Trumper reports replying by letter to the soldier asking for further details about the discovery. Trumper wrote that

5. S. Gibson, “British Archaeological Institutions in Mandatory Palestine, 1917-1948”, *PEQ* 131 (1999) in press.

6. D. Mackenzie, “Memorandum on Ancient Sites and Military Operations in Palestine”, Unpublished manuscript in PEF Archives 1918; N. Momigliano, “Duncan Mackenzie and the Palestine Exploration Fund”, *PEQ* 128 (1996) 137-170.

7. A. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic and Other Classical Antiquities in the Australian War Memorial, Canberra*, Canberra 1957; P. Henderson, “The Shellal Mosaic: A Reappraisal”, *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 12 (1988) 35-44. Previously unpublished photographs of the Shellal mosaic, taken *in situ* by Captain A.E.T. Rhodes, appear in an album donated by his daughter Mrs E. Anne Scarlett and deposited in the PEF archives: *PEQ* 125 (1993) 93.

8. F.M. Drake, “A Sixth Century Greek Mosaic at Um Jerar”, *PEFQS* 51 (1918) 122-124.

9. S.A. Cook, “The ‘Holy Place’ of ‘Ain Dûk”, *PEFQS* 53 (1920) 82-87.

10. Gibson, “British Archaeological Institutions” (see above, note 5).

the soldier “evidently thought that I should be able to despatch an excavating expedition next morning !” The soldier very much wanted to inform “the correct authorities” about his discoveries but evidently knew that this would not please his commanding officer. Hence, Trumper asked the PEF Committee to be discrete and “not to use the information in a way that would get my informant into trouble” (as a result the soldier’s name does not appear in the typed version of the letter sent on by Trumper). We may assume that the soldier was of Australian nationality, serving with the Anzac Mounted Division, judging by his request that if the mosaic was to be excavated then he would like parts of it to be sent to an Australian museum.¹¹ It is interesting to note that this soldier’s request was made at the same time when approval had been given to transfer the well publicised Shellal mosaic from its location near Gaza to Australia.¹²

Letter No. 1 from the Anonymous Soldier

Dear Sir,

I wish to inform the correct authorities of a mosaic floor that I have discovered, buried, about six miles from Askelon, and near Julis. I have unearthed an area of about 50 ft. square, and there are several fine inscriptions among the fine designs that are worked on the floor. The borders, which are of excellent designs, are in good preservation, but the central designs are badly broken. These are copies of the three best inscriptions.

The central one, is the only intact inscription. There is a fine border worked in five colours 18 ft. long, also marble tablets, which are however broken. I have not unearthed all the portions, and am afraid that pressure of duty will not allow of doing much more to the floor, and I would consider the Exploration Party will find the site worth excavating. Do not delay, however, as the mosaic is in danger of being damaged by weather, and men who walk on it. My C.O. does not wish (for a reason known only to himself), this news to reach those who would care for it. I have decided on the bold step of taking matters into my own hands, so trust you will treat the matter with the utmost discretion, for my sake. As it is not a military matter, I believe I am justified in doing so, though I should no doubt

11. For general information about Australian troops in Palestine between 1914-1918, see H.S. Gullett, “The Australian Imperial Force in Sinai and Palestine, 1914-1918”, in *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, VII, Sydney 1923, 368-407.

12. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic*, 12 (see above, note 7).

have things made unpleasant for me, were it know (sic.) that I have mentioned this matter. Trusting you will do something at an early date.

I remain, yours faithfully,

Trumper immediately responded with a letter asking for further information as to the position of walls, bearings, copies of additional Greek inscriptions, an exact description of the locality, and with the plea that the soldier "cover up again what he had excavated."

Letter No. 2 from the Anonymous Soldier

Dear Sir,

I was pleased to receive your letter of the 20th inst., and have taken particular note of the contents. I am enclosing herewith a sketch of the floor (rough of course), and a few of its constructional details; the locality is a little difficult to explain by letter, but I shall give a description that I think will enable you to pick it up fairly well (see Plan). The hill marked X is rather unique, shewing a coarse tiled floor over the whole hill-top, about 10 [inches] to 14 [inches] under the surface, also a curved arch or vault that is rather interesting. There are also a lot of small coloured mosaic stones lying about on the N.W. side of the hill.

The hill with the genuine Mosaic is 400 yards N.E. by N. from these hills. XX marks the spot where the Mosaic lies, on the North side of the hill. There is a road from Medjel, or Mejdél, which runs from the base of the hill about forty yards from the floor. The hill itself is about 60 ft. high, and is marked by a small square ruin at its base on the road. I do not think you can miss the spot very easily with this description, and trust that you will see to it as soon as is possible, as although I have covered it with several inches of earth, one does not know but that the Bedouins would interfere with it, as they are interested in digging &c. If I had any right to make such a suggestion, I should very much like to see at least a small portion of the floor or border eventually arrive in Australia, the South Australian Museum for preference.

Yours &c.....

P.S. The top of this hill is also worthy of mention. It has six natural depressions in the top, formed apparently by earth sinking between the walls of six rooms. (This is only a theory). But the depressions are so regular that they attract attention. (Do not mistake Turkish dugouts with these, which are also alongside). Several tiles found were made in a peculiar manner, a block of red or yellow glass 1/4 [inch] square, a thin leaf of gold on this, and a thin glass face on top, very solidly stuck together; only 16 have been found so far.

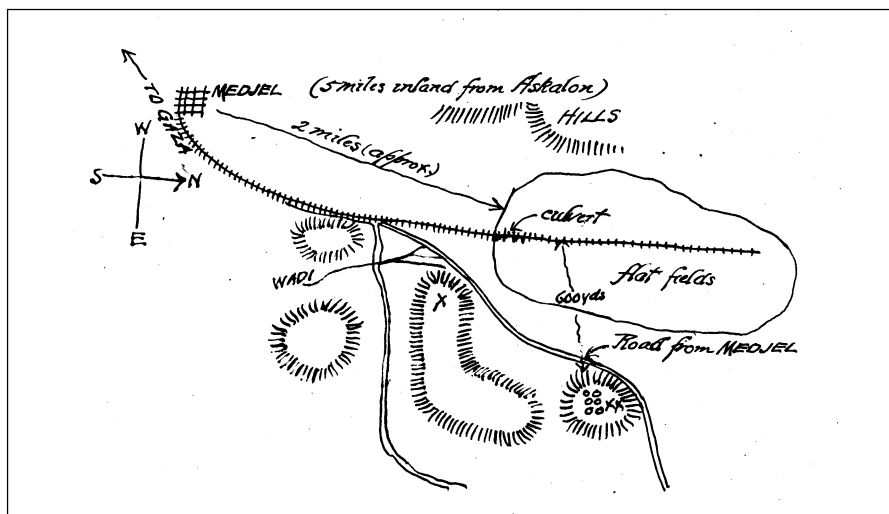


Fig. 2 Map of site which accompanied Trumper's letter (uncatalogued drawing, courtesy of the PEF archives).

The Site

According to the map which accompanied the letter (Fig. 2), the site was located approximately two miles to the north-east of Medjel / Majdal, close to a road and about 600 yards east of the tracks of the railway line. The map indicates that the site with the mosaics (marked by an X) was located on the western side of the largest of four hillocks.

The site, known as Khirbet Makkûs or Horvat Mokkes (Israel Grid map ref. 114-115 / 121-122), had been explored and investigated on a number of occasions since the 19th century.¹³

The site was briefly visited by members of the *Survey of Western Palestine* in the 1870s and was described in the survey memoirs as follows: "Khûrbet Makkûs. Ruined cisterns of rubble, pottery, and fragments of stone."¹⁴ The site is located not far from Julis which was described in the same memoirs as "an ordinary mud village. There are, however, ruined rubble cisterns, which suggest some antiquity. It has a well to the south and a pool with gardens to the

13. C. Dauphin, *La Palestine byzantine: Peuplement et Populations* (BAR Int. Series 726), Oxford 1998, 870: Site No. 10:173.

14. C.R. Conder - H.H. Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine. II: Samaria*, London 1882, 424: Sheet XVI: Fu.

north-east.”¹⁵ Victor Guérin had passed through the region as well, during his survey of the hills of Judaea, but did not mention the site.¹⁶

The site was visited on a number of occasions by J. Ory, an Assistant Inspector of Antiquities on the staff of the Palestine Department of Antiquities.¹⁷ On 23 May 1928, he visited the site on horseback and described it as having “cisterns, rubble and foundations,” adding that the area at that time was under cultivation. On 19 February 1940, he again visited the site, this time by car, and mentioned that it was close to the kilometre 48.4 marker on the Gaza road. The aim of this visit was to demarcate the limits of the antiquities for the Government’s Land Claims settlement, noting that the site was located in the cultivation lands belonging to Majdal and that the antiquities covered a considerable area, with mainly Roman and/or Byzantine remains. He wrote that “all surface rubble was cleared to (sic) military camps for use in foundations (otherwise no damage was caused).” This clearly shows that he was unaware of the presence of an ancient church with mosaics at the site, which, by that time, had probably been destroyed or covered over.

The site was also investigated during more recent times by Ariel Berman while he conducted his survey of Map 88 for the Archaeological Survey of Israel but the results have not yet been published.

Today, the site is located within the agricultural lands belonging to Kibbutz Nir-Israel, which was founded in 1949.¹⁸ The site itself consists

15. Conder - Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine*, 410: Sheet XVI: Fu.

16. V. Guérin, *Description géographique, historique et archéologique de la Palestine. Judée II*, Paris 1869, 125-126; Guérin arrived in the area from the east, from the site of Hatta, eventually reaching Julis, where he mentions a *wely* dedicated to Sheikh Mohammed, and several stone ashlar, as well as shafts of marble columns near the opening of a well. He then continued in a south-westerly direction towards Beit-Thimeh, but did not actually pass Kh. Makkûs, which is located to the north-west of Julis.

17. Gibson, “British Archaeological Institutions”, note 70 (see above, note 5).

18. E. Hareouveni, *The Settlements of Israel and their Archaeological Sites*, Tel Aviv 1974 (Hebrew), 235. The site was also settled in the Ottoman period. In tax registers (*dafters*) of the late 16th century AD, information is given about a site called Maqûs which appears under the fiscal unit Z84 (W.-D. Hütteroth - K. Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late 16th Century*, Erlangen 1977, 146; cf. D. Grossman, *Expansion and Desertion. The Arab Village and its Offshoots in Ottoman Palestine*, Jerusalem 1994 [Hebrew], Map 11). It was a *qarya* (i.e. a village) with 36 heads of family. The site was later abandoned and was no longer inhabited during the 19th century; cf. W. Khalidi (ed.), *All that Remains. The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Washington D.C. 1992, which lists all the villages which existed in the region up to 1948, including nearby Julis; see also Grossman, *Expansion and Desertion*, 157, who confirms that the site had been abandoned by the 19th century.

of a number of separate hillocks all of which are covered by the citrus groves of the kibbutz. Clear evidence of late Byzantine period pottery workshops is visible on the eastern slope of the central hillock in the near vicinity of a wadi. At this location there are high concentrations of sherds (approximately 375 sherds per square metre) belonging to amphorae of Gaza / Ashkelon type, and scattered ceramic slag (averaging between 3 to 20 cm in size). According to the rims and bases, the amphorae manufactured here were exclusively of the type referred to by Johnson as the *Gaziton*.¹⁹ This industrial / kiln site can now be added to the growing number of manufacturing sites of the Gaza / Ashkelon amphorae which have been surveyed and excavated in recent years in the surroundings of Ashkelon.²⁰

Low density scatters of pottery were visible across the rest of the site but building remains were not visibly preserved, except for a few building stones of sandstone, and a few tesserae. Concentrations of tesserae could not be detected and so it was not possible to locate the relative position of public buildings underground. The site has clearly undergone substantial landscape modifications since 1918 and the citrus groves have blurred its exact boundaries and surface features.

Although there has been general recognition that the site has archaeological remains dating from the Byzantine period, it is significant that a church has not hitherto been identified at the site.²¹

19. B.L. Johnson - L.E. Stager, "Ashkelon: Wine Emporium of the Holy Land", in S. Gitin (ed.), *Recent Excavations in Israel: A View to the West* (Archaeological Institute of America, Colloquia and Conference Papers No.1), Dubuque 1995, Fig.6.1A.

20. A survey by Allen with two dozen industrial / kiln sites referred to in Johnson - Stager, "Ashkelon: Wine Emporium of the Holy Land", 99, note 10; and another survey (with excavations) by: Y. Israel, "Survey of Pottery Workshops, Nahal Lakhish-Nahal Besor", *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 13 (1993) 106-107, with map showing a distribution of about 20 industrial / kiln sites in Fig. 111; Y. Israel, "The Economy of the Gaza-Ashkelon Region in the Byzantine Period in the Light of the Archaeological Survey and Excavations of the '3rd Mile Estate' near Ashkelon", *Michmanim* 8 (1995) 119-132 (Hebrew).

21. A. Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land*, Bonn 1970; R. and A. Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman, and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, Rome 1987; Y. Tsafirir (ed.), *Ancient Churches Revealed*, Jerusalem 1993, map between pages 6 and 7 showing the location of all the church remains found up to that date in the Holy Land; Y. Tsafirir - L. Di Segni - J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani. Iudaea. Palaestina*, Jerusalem 1994.

Plan of the Church

From the sketch of the site plan provided by the anonymous soldier in 1918 (Fig. 3), the building would appear to have been basilical in plan with an orientation towards the east (this based on the direction that the mosaic inscriptions were to be read), with a nave and two aisles, and, without doubt, an apse in its east wall (see reconstruction in Fig. 4). However, only portions of the nave and of the southern aisle were actually unearthed by the soldiers.

On the basis of details relating to the inscriptions, it would appear that the mosaics of the church are to be dated to the 6th century AD.

The central nave probably had a breadth of about 8.6 m based on the assumption that the breadth of the nave had to have been at least double

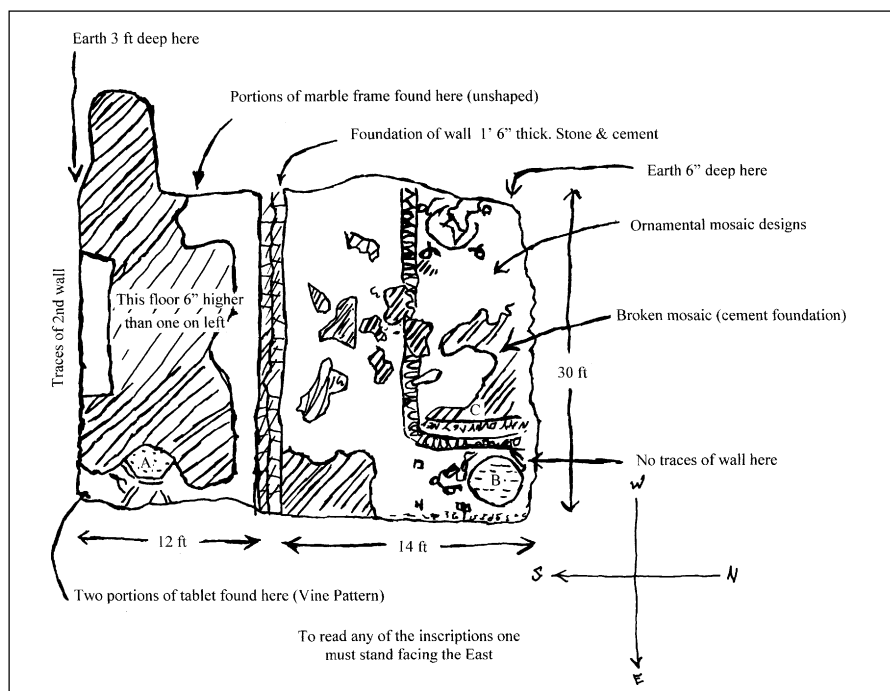


Fig. 3 Plan of the church made by the Anonymous Soldier (uncatalogued drawing, courtesy of the PEF archives).

that of the aisles,²² as well as on the suggestion (see below) that Inscription B was the second of two medallions which were side-by-side in front of the apse. The building most likely had two side aisles but only part of the southern aisle is represented on the sketch. Each aisle probably had a breadth of 12 feet (approximately 3.70 m). The width of the external walls is unknown. The stylobate wall which separated the central nave from the southern side aisle had a width of 1 foot and 6 inches, i.e. about 0.50 m. The whole area was apparently paved with polychrome mosaics, with Greek inscriptions, which, as the sketch testifies, could

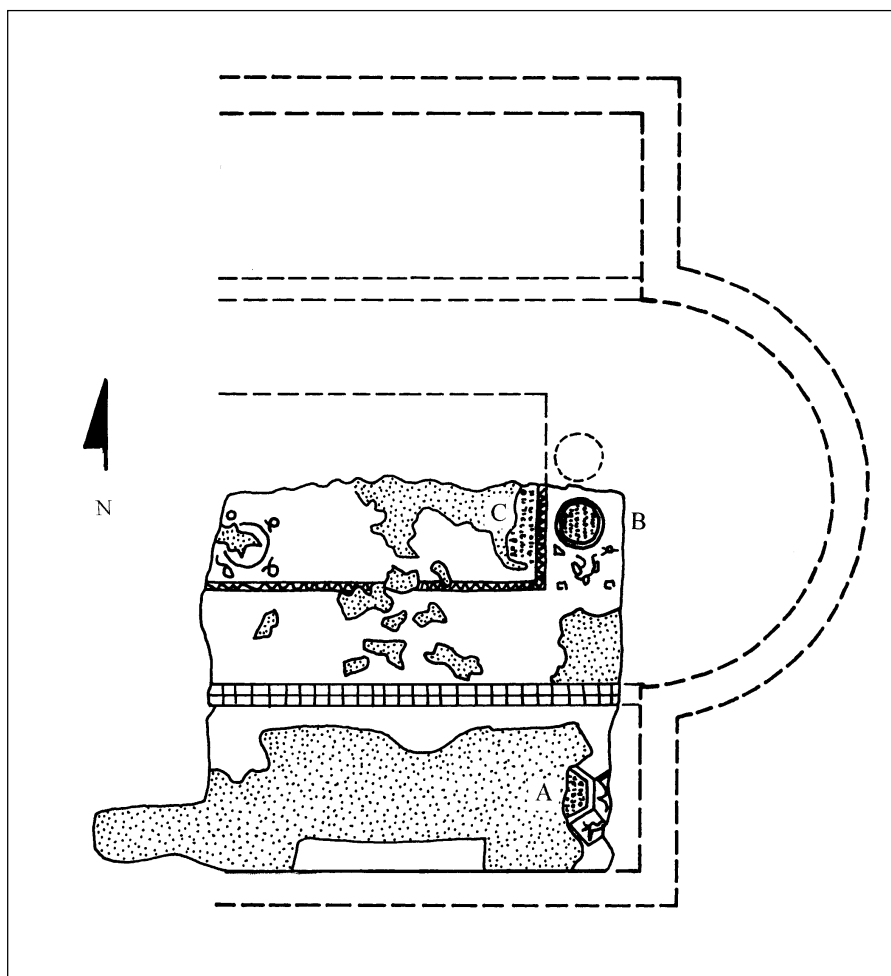


Fig. 4 Suggested reconstruction of the plan of the church.

only be read facing the east. The southern wall of the church was visible at a depth of three feet (c. 0.90 m) below the surface, while the earth above the floor of the nave itself was only 6 inches (c. 0.15 m) thick, clearly indicating that the walls of this building had been substantially robbed out in antiquity.

The Mosaics

According to the soldier's sketch, the eastern end of the mosaic pavement preserved in the southern aisle was decorated with an octagonal composition composed of octagons surrounded by squares, triangles and lozenges, each one of which was surrounded by a double fillet (Figs.5-6).

The extant octagon was surrounded (from the outside) by a double fillet, an outlined wave pattern,²³ and another double fillet. It contained a Greek inscription (labelled on the sketch as Inscription A) which possibly gave the date of the construction of the mosaic floor. One of the squares contained a depiction of a sitting bird with its head missing.²⁴

The decoration of the pavement in the central nave included an external border (approximately 2.10 m), surrounding a central panel. Nothing is known about the decoration of the external border except that in the central part of its eastern side, apparently directly in front of the apse, there were two circular medallions with Greek inscriptions, one of which was preserved (Inscription B). The first probably gave the names of donors who paid for the mosaics mentioned in the second extant medallion.

The central panel, with an approximate breadth of 4.4 m, was "ornamented by mosaic designs" according to the anonymous soldier. The sketch indicates a circular medallion surrounded by four unclear loops at the western end of the preserved panel. The soldier indicated that wherever the mosaic itself was missing a "cement foundation" was visible, clearly referring to the lower bedding of the mosaic pavement which was made of plaster on a foundation of pebbles and ashes. The central panel

23. C. Balmelle *et al.*, *Le Décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine* Paris 1985, 101d.

24. Birds sitting on the ground frequently appear in mosaics, see M. Avi-Yonah, "Mosaic Pavements in Palestine", *QDAP* 3 (1934) 65; Y. Chaver, "Birds in Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel", *Israel-Land and Nature* 12 (1987) 110-114.

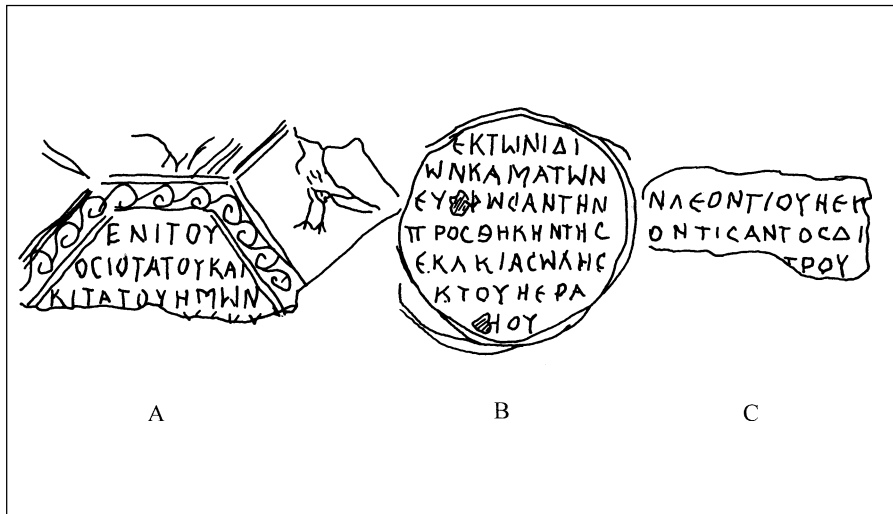


Fig. 5 Drawings of the Greek inscriptions - Version 1 (uncatalogued drawings, courtesy of the PEF archives).

was surrounded by a border apparently decorated, at least on its southern and eastern sides, with a pattern of triangles. Within the eastern border was a rectangular frame containing a Greek inscription (Inscription C) set in three long lines.

The Inscriptions

Three Greek inscriptions were visible in the floors of the building, all of which could only be read when facing east. Two sets of drawings of the inscriptions made by the soldier were included with Trumper's letter to the PEF (Figs. 5-6). On one of them, he wrote: "Tracings from plans sent me by the discoverer. I have a photograph of [Inscription] 'B', and judging by the accuracy with which that is copied, I should say that all the rest were reliable." A search was made in the PEF archives for the photograph mentioned by Trumper but none was found. In the letter sent to the PEF, Trumper mentions that he showed the tracings of the Greek inscriptions from the site to a chaplain of his acquaintance who thought that one of them "refers to the church as a votive offering by two people".

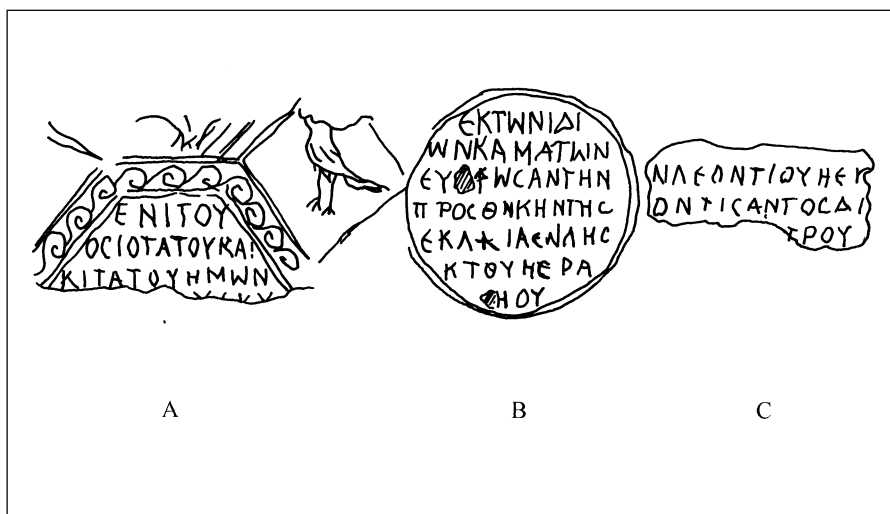


Fig. 6 Drawings of the Greek inscriptions - Version 2 (uncatalogued drawings, courtesy of the PEF archives).

Inscription A

Three lines, and the upper part of some letters of a fourth, are all that remains of an inscription framed within an octagon, at the eastern end of the mosaic pavement in the southern aisle. Judging by the surviving portion of the frame, originally the inscription must have had at least eight lines and possibly nine; therefore it is clear that most of the text is missing.

Comparing the photograph (now lost) of inscription B with the copy, Trumper vouched for the reliability of the copyist, so we must credit his drawings with all the accuracy that was possible in the circumstances, as to the text, and in some measure, also with regard to the shape of the letters. At least, he could not have imagined the angular *omega*, which is a not very common variation of this character in the square alphabet, or, in inscription B, the peculiar ligature of *eta* and *sigma* in line 5. On the other hand, even a first glance at inscription A forces us to emend the anonymous soldier's copy in order to establish the correct reading. The letters are clearly set out in the drawing, but the resulting text is incorrect. One might suppose that broken letters were faultily repaired in antiquity, but more likely the dust and patina

on the surface of the mosaic were to blame for the incorrect rendering of some letters.

Here follows the text: on the left is the soldier's copy, on the right the emended text, in capitals and in minuscule.

	ENITΟΥ	ΕΠΙΤΟΥ	Ἐπὶ τοῦ
2	ΟCΙΟΤΑΤΟΥΚΑΙ	ΟCΙΟΤΑΤΟΥΚΑΓ	δοσιοτάτου κ(αὶ) ἁγ-
	ΚΙΤΑΤΟΥΗΜΩΝ	ΙΩΤΑΤΟΥΗΜΩΝ	ιωτάτου ἡμῶν
4	- - - - -	- - - - -	ἐπισκ(όπου) - - - -

Under our most saintly and holy [bishop ...]

In dedicatory inscriptions of this kind, the formula ἐπὶ τοῦ may introduce either the name of the clergyman in charge of the sacred building, or that of the bishop in whose diocese the church was located. In this case, we can confidently restore ἐπισκόπου – probably in the usual abbreviated form ΕΠΙCΚ – at the beginning of line 4, for only a bishop would be referred to with the attributes ἁγιώτατος (most holy) and δοσιώτατος (most saintly).²⁵ The part of the inscription that is lost must have contained the bishop's name, and a formula commemorating either the erection of the building, or more likely – since its location shows that this was not the main inscription of the church – some repairs, renovations or structural additions made to the building or to its southern wing. Possibly a date also followed, but this is by no means certain, since the mention of the bishop in charge at the time would have been a sufficient chronological indication.

Kh. Makkûs was within the boundaries of the bishopric of Ascalon. A second bishopric was admittedly created in the vicinity in the early sixth century, for a bishop of Maiuma Ascalonitis, Stephen, is mentioned among the participants at the synod of Jerusalem in AD 518.²⁶ But this diocese, carved out of the large territory of the city and bishopric of Ascalon, included in all likelihood only the harbour city of Maiuma, as in the case of Maiuma Gazae, and did not extend inland. Therefore, after the word ἐπισκ(όπου) we should expect the name of an Ascalonian bishop, of which the tops of some letters

25. L. Di Segni, *Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, PhD Diss., Jerusalem 1997, 122-126. The epithet "most holy" could be given to members of the lower clergy, but only after death, i.e., in epitaphs.

26. E. Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, III, Berlin - Leipzig 1940, 79; G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiae Orientalis*, II, Padova 1988, 1026.

remain. If we can trust the accuracy of the copy in this case, the partly surviving characters can be recognized as the sequence ΥCIOY (with the *omicron* broken on the right side), and the name may therefore be reconstructed as Διονυσίου. Dionysius succeeded Antonius as bishop of Ascalon between AD 518 and 536, and was among the Palestinian bishops who signed the acts of the synod of Jerusalem on September 19, 536.²⁷

It would of course be rash to base any palaeographical remarks on a drawing, the accuracy of which cannot be vouched for. The copy shows consistently oval letters, with the exception of the square *omega* and possibly the initial *epsilon* of line 1, but the draughtsman's rendering of the *alpha* is completely at fault: such an *alpha*, with a straight bar, never occurred in the Byzantine period, when the *alpha* was traced either with a broken bar or with a sloping one. However, the draughtsman may have neglected to mark an *alpha* with a moderately sloping bar, or one whose broken bar has a very wide angle: such shapes appear in dated inscriptions – one from Gaza of AD 509, another from Beersheba of ca. 522, a third from Shellal, dated 561/2 – which also show the peculiar *omega*.²⁸ Therefore, a dating in the first half of the 6th century, which would be required by the suggested identification of the bishop as Dionysius, would not be inconsistent with the shape of some of the letters, as reflected by the copy.

Inscription B

This inscription was framed within a round medallion and apparently located in the external border – or rather, in the eastern carpet – of the mosaic in the central nave, in front of the apse. The inscription is complete, except for some broken letters in lines 3 and 7, and the copy was rightly judged accurate by Trumper. However, it is clear from the sense that the medallion did not contain a complete dedicatory inscription, for the subject is missing. Clearly the full text was contained in two (or more?) medallions, of which only one has

27. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, III, 188. Dionysius is also mentioned by John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, 176: PG 87iii, col. 3045. Cf. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiae Orientalis*, II, 1017.

28. A. Ovadiah, "Excavations in the Area of the Ancient Synagogue of Gaza (Preliminary Report)", *IEJ* 19 (1969) 193-198, Pl. 15 B (*SEG* XXVIII, no. 1407); N. Schmidt - B.B. Charles, "Greek Inscriptions from the Negev", *AJA* 2nd Ser. 14 (1910) 66, Fig. 1 (*SEG* VIII, no. 281); A.D. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic* (above, n. 7), pp. 12-13, Fig. 2 a-b (*SEG* VIII, no. 279).

survived.²⁹ Inscription C, which was also located somewhere in the eastern part of the nave, does not seem to be part of the same text.

The inscription reads:

	EKTWNIΔI	Ἐκ τῶν ἰδί-
2	WNKAMATWN	ων καμάτων
	ΕΨ.ΦWCANTHN	ἐψ[ή]φωσαν τὴν
4	ΠΡΟCΘΗΚΗΝΤΗC	προσθήκην τῆς
	EKAHCIACWΛHC	ἐκκλησίας ὅλης
6	ΚΤΟΥΗΕΡΑ	καὶ τοῦ ἱερα-
	. ΗΟΥ	[τ]ήου.

(They) paved with mosaic the addition of the whole church and of the presbytery by their own efforts.

The copy shows a ligature of *eta* and *sigma* in the word ἐκκλησίας in 1.4. The text has some phonetic spellings: twice *eta* for *iota* in the word ἱερατ(ε)λον, *omega* for *omicron* in ὅλης (ὄλης). Ἐκκλησία with a single *kappa* is almost the rule in Palestinian inscriptions.

Who were the persons who “made the mosaic by their own efforts”? Though their names and qualifications, if any, are irretrievably lost, they were no doubt benefactors who paid for the pavement, not mosaic layers who carried out the work. The expression ἐκ τῶν καμάτων – here strengthened by ἰδίων and parallel to ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων – always appears in Byzantine inscriptions of this region in a context that indicates financial involvement.³⁰ Even when the person or persons involved were members of the clergy, their “efforts” were those of donors, not of supervisors or executors.

The meaning of the phrase “the addition of the whole church and of the presbytery” is unclear. The term προσθήκη is common in the sense of “addition, increase,” even in the financial sense of “interest,” but is much less obvious in its application to the context of ecclesiastical architecture. Does

29. For a similar arrangement, see for instance the two medallions on both sides of the font in the baptistry of the church on Mount Nebo: S. Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo* (SBF Collectio Maior 1), Jerusalem 1941, I, pp. 247-251, no. 1; II, Pl. 114, 1-2.

30. See the case of the room paved by a priest “by his own efforts” in the church at Kh. Beiyudat and the examples collected there: L. Di Segni, “Khirbet el- Beiyudat: the Inscriptions”, in G.C. Bottini - L. Di Segni - E. Alliata (eds.), *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land: New Discoveries* (SBF Collectio Maior 36), Jerusalem 1990, 267, 272, n. 10.

it mean simply a building addition, or an annex, and if so, a specific part of a church? The Liddell - Scott lexicon has no example of such usage. Lampe's lexicon of patristic Greek explains this particular meaning of the term as "that part of the church which is additional to the sanctuary" and quotes an inscription from Shaqqa (Sakkaia-Maximianopolis in the province of Arabia), which reads: Οἶκος ἁγίων ἀθλοφόρων μαρτύρων Γεωργίου καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ ἁγίων· ἐκ προσφορ(ᾶς) Τιβερίνου ἐπισκ(όπου) ἐκτίσθη ἐκ θεμελίων τῷ ἱερατίῳ καὶ τὴν προσθήκην τοῦ ναοῦ, that is, "House of the holy victorious martyrs George and his fellow-saints: with the offering of Bishop Tiberinus, the presbytery and the addition of the temple were built from the foundations."³¹ An unclear date in the 6th century follows.³² From this example, however, it is not clear if the προσθήκη fully corresponds to the ναός – in the restrictive sense of 'prayer hall,' i.e., that part of the church accessible to laity, as opposed to the ἱερατεῖον, reserved for the clergy – or is an annex of the ναός, which, together with the ἱερατεῖον and the ναός, constituted the whole οἶκος τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων.

The term occurs three more times in our region in a similar context:³³ once, in an early 7th-century Greek inscription in the chapel of the Armenian monastery excavated near the Third Wall in Jerusalem,³⁴ a second time in an inscription of the second half of the 6th century – not yet published – in a church at Khirbet el-Khan (Horvat Hanot, map ref. 154/124) on the Jerusalem-Eleutheropolis road; and the third occurrence is in the inscription discussed here. The Jerusalem inscription says that [Ἐπὶ Κυ]λουανοῦ θεοφιλε(στάτου) διακ(όνου) καὶ ἡγουμέ(νου) ἢ παροῦσα [ψήφωσι]ς ἐγένετο καὶ ἡ κόγχη καὶ ἡ προσθήκη του ναοῦ, "Under Silvanus, God-loving deacon and hegumen, were done the present mosaic and the apse and the 'addition' of the church," of which the inscription gives the length in cubits (the figure is lost) and the height: six cubits (about 3 meters). The

31. *CIG*, no. 8603; W.H. Waddington - P. Le Bas, *Voyage archéologique en Grèce et en Asie Mineure: Inscriptions et explications*, II, Paris 1870, 505-506, no. 2158., and cf. G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1968, s.v. προσθήκη, 5.

32. For the date (566/7 or 564/5?), see Y.E. Meimaris, *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia. The Evidence of the Dated Greek Inscriptions* (MELETHMATA 17), Athens 1992, 326-327, no. 4.

33. Interestingly enough, a similar usage is not attested in other regions rich in Christian buildings and epigraphy, for instance in Egypt or Asia Minor.

34. D. Amit - S.R. Wolff, "An Armenian Monastery in the Morasha Neighborhood, Jerusalem", in H. Geva (ed.), *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, Jerusalem 1994, 293-298: photograph of the inscription on p. 295, and see text in *SEG* XLIII, no. 1063.

chapel was built above earlier burial vaults, and consisted of a nave paved in mosaics, a stone-flagged apse, and a narrow entrance hall paved with mosaic that ran along the southern side of the chapel. Again, it is not quite clear whether the inscription commemorates the erection of the chapel from the foundations and enumerates its main parts – mosaic pavement, apse and nave – or whether a structure already existed and the inscription describes the new parts made under the hegumen Silvanus, i.e., mosaic pavement, apse, and an addition to the nave, namely, the southern annex. The participle *παροῦσα* – implying that an earlier mosaic existed before this one – and the measurements – length, no width, and rather a low height for a church – would seem to point to the latter interpretation.

The inscription at Kh. el-Khan is located in front of the presbytery in a basilica which was not completely excavated: only the nave and part of the aisles and of the central apse were uncovered.³⁵ The inscription says that under Theodorus, priest and hegumen, ἐγένετο τὸ πᾶν ἔργον τῆς προσθήκης τῆς κόνυχης καὶ ζωγραφίας καὶ πλακόσεως τῆς πέριματος τοῦ ἱερατίου σὺν τοῦ διακονικοῦ ἐκ θεμελίων, that is: “was done all the work of the προσθήκη of the apse and of the painting and of the facing with marble slabs of the end-wall³⁶ of the presbytery, together with the diaconicon, from the foundations.” Again, if we follow Lampe’s definition we should interpret προσθήκη τῆς κόνυχης as the main hall of the church or *ναός*, and read the inscription as a commemoration of the erection “from the foundation” of the whole church, whose parts are enumerated as follows, προσθήκη τῆς κόνυχης or *ναός*, decoration of the walls of the presbytery, diaconicon. But “addition of the apse” seems an odd way to refer to the main body of a church, and the parts enumerated do not make up the entire church. It seems preferable to explain προσθήκη in the basic sense of “addition.” If so, the church was already in existence when Theodorus added new elements to it: either a new apse or an annex to the apse (a lateral room or apse?), paintings in the half-dome of the apse and a marble facing on its end-wall, and a diaconicon which was built *ex novo*.

Considering what has been said above, in the inscription of Kh. Makkus the interpretation suggested by Lampe may be acceptable: in this case, the text means that the benefactors paved with mosaics all the main parts of the sacred building, namely, the προσθήκην τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὅλης (probably a

35. E. Shenhav, “Horbat Hanot (Kh. el-Khan)”, *ESI* 5 (1986) 46-47. We wish to thank E. Shenhav for permission to mention this inscription.

36. Πέριμα is another uncommon architectural term, and possibly a *hapax*.

hypallage for προσθήκη ὅλην τῆς ἐκκλησίας) and the presbytery, and nothing is said of other parts of the church. But again, we cannot exclude the possibility that what they paved was “the entire annex of the church” (with hypallage) and the presbytery. In this case, the “annex” must have been a room or wing added to the eastern part of the church, where the inscription was located. One must keep in mind that the term προσθήκη may have a different meaning in different occurrences, in spite of the similarity of the contexts examined above.

Inscription C

This inscription was located within the eastern border of the main carpet in the nave. Only part of three lines remains, all lacking the beginning and the end.

The extant text reads:

- - - ΝΛΕΟΝΤΙΟΥΘΗΙ - - -
 2 - - - ΟΝΤΙCΑΝΤΟCΔΙ - - -
 - - - - - - - - - ΥΡΟΥ - - -

[? Κ(ύρι)ε πρόσδεξει τὴν προσφορὰν Λεοντίου ἡερ[έως?]
 2 [- φροντίσαντος ΔΙ - - -
 [-] ΡΟΥ [- - -

The text might have begun with an invocation of the type: [Lord, or Saint – , or God of Saint - , accept the offering] of Leontius the priest (?). In the second line we can restore “by the care of Di” – possibly the name of a cleric who supervised the works. The third line cannot be restored. Unlike the others, this inscription was probably set in long lines within a rectangular frame.

Marble Objects

Indicated on the sketch and mentioned in the letter are “portions of tablets” seen in the rubble, presumably fragments of marble chancel screens, including two fragments decorated with a “vine pattern” which were seen south of Inscription A, and a fragment of a “marble frame” (a chancel post?) found in the western part of the southern aisle.

Wall Decorations

The letter from the soldier mentions the finding of sixteen small tesserae, “very solidly stuck together”, 1/4 inches (approximately 7 mm) square, gilded and covered by a “thin glass face,” which gave them a “deep red or yellow” colour. They were reportedly found in the “depressions.” These tesserae suggest wall mosaics in the building.³⁷

Shimon Gibson - Fanny Vitto - Leah Di Segni

37. For a general discussion (with bibliography) of wall mosaics in churches see F. Vitto, “The Interior Decoration of Palestinian Churches and Synagogues”, in S. Efthymiadis - C. Rapp - D. Tsougarakis (eds.), *Bosphorus. Essays in Honour of Cyril Mango*, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995), 283-300.