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an 8th-century church (NWC) in
Hippos (Sussita), Israel**

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Elements of the Liturgical Furniture in an 8th-century church (NWC) in Hippos (Sussita), Israel

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The remains of the ancient city of Hippos are situated on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel (about two kilometers to the east of the kibbutz Ein Gev), on the top of a flat diamond-shaped hill which rises to about 350 m above the level of the lake (il. 1). The city, founded probably at the beginning of the Hellenistic period (3rd century B.C.) was known under the Greek name of Hippos or, during the period of Seleucid rule, as Antiochia Hippos. After Pompey's conquest of the area in 63 B.C. the city became one of the group of semi-autonomous cities known as *Decapolis* (the Ten Cities), important centres of Greco-Roman civilization in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*.

One may ask why such an important and big city has never been mentioned in the Gospels, unlike several minor sites around the See of Galilee such as Capernaum or Chorazim. However, taking into consideration the topography of this area and the characteristic location of Hippos on a high hill, this is the only city that exactly fits the mention in Matt 5: 14 of 'the city set on a hill that cannot be hid'.

At least from the middle of the 4th century A.D. Hippos had been known as an episcopal see, as confirmed by the presence of Petros, the bishop of Hippos, at the council of Seleucia in 359.¹ During the Byzantine and Umayyad periods the city was known both as Hippos and Sussita (the Aramaic version of Greek Hippos), the latter spelled by the Arabic sources as Susiya. After the devastating earthquake on 18 January, 749 ('Sabbatical

* The research was supported by the Polish State Committee for Scientific Research (KBN), grant no. 1 H101 B0009 29 for 2005–2007.

¹ B. Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles in Palestine. History and Archaeology* [= *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum. Collectio Minor*, vol. 4], Jerusalem 1971, p. 56.

Year Earthquake’),² the town was never rebuilt and the site remained uninhabited.

Gottlieb Schumacher was the first scholar in the modern times to survey the site at the end of the 19th century, and to draw its general plan based on the still visible ruins (a city gate, the main street, sections of fortifications, domestic buildings).³ After the Israeli Independence War in 1948, the site became a frontier outpost facing the Syrian border, and only small-scale rescue excavations were occasionally conducted there on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities.⁴ It is only few years ago that Sussita was declared one of the National Parks of Israel and fully opened to archaeologists.

A short urban survey in July 1999 started the joint Israeli-Polish archaeological expedition to Hippos headed by Arthur Segal (Zinman Institute, University of Haifa), with Jolanta Młynarczyk (Polish Academy of Sciences and Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University) and Mariusz Burdajewicz (National Museum in Warsaw) as co-directors. In 2002, the Polish and Israeli teams were joined by an American team with Mark Schuler from Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota.⁵

² D.H.K. Amiran, E. Arieh, T. Turcotte, ‘Earthquakes in Israel and Adjacent Areas: Macro seismic Observations since 100 B.C.E.’, *Israel Exploration Journal*, 44 (1994), p. 267.

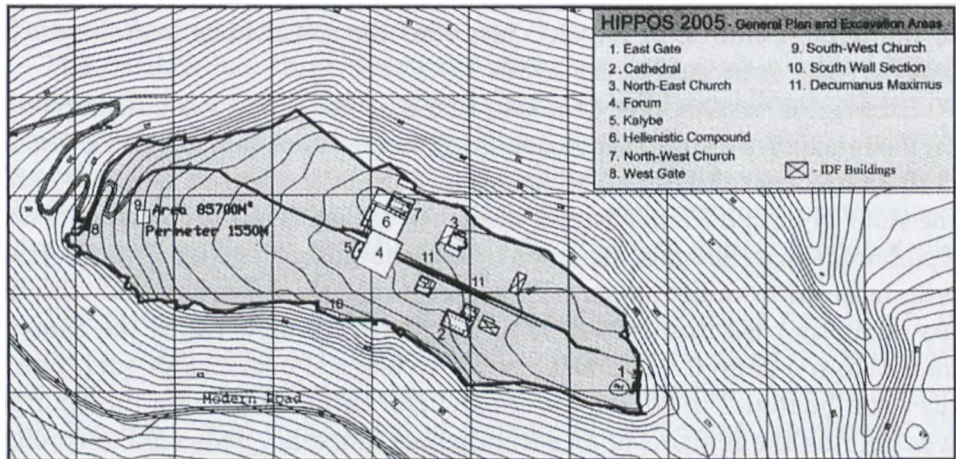
³ G. Schumacher, *The Jaulan*, London 1888, pp. 184–206.

⁴ C. Epstein, ‘Hippos (Sussita)’, in: *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. by E. Stern, Jerusalem 1993, p. 635; Z. Meshel et al., *The Water Supply System of Sussita*, Tel Aviv 1999; V. Tzaferis, ‘Sussita Awaits the Spade’, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 16 (1990), 5, pp. 50–58.

⁵ Preliminary archaeological reports: A. Segal, J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, *Hippos (Sussita). First Season of Excavations, July 2000*, Haifa 2000; A. Segal, J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, *Hippos (Sussita). Second Season of Excavations, July 2001*, Haifa 2001; A. Segal, J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, M. Schuler, *Hippos (Sussita). Third Season of Excavations, July 2002*, Haifa 2002; A. Segal, J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, M. Schuler, M. Eisenberg, *Hippos-Sussita. Fourth Season of Excavations, June–July 2003*, Haifa 2003; A. Segal, J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, M. Schuler, M. Eisenberg, *Hippos (Sussita). Fifth Season of Excavations, September–October 2004 And Summary of All Five Seasons (2000–2004)*, Haifa 2004; A. Segal, J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, M. Schuler, M. Eisenberg, *Hippos (Sussita). Sixth Season of Excavations, July 2005*, Haifa 2005. Other articles: J. Młynarczyk, ‘Na tropach tajemnic antycznego Hippos’, *Archeologia Żywa*, 2000, 3–4 (15), pp. 11–14; J. Młynarczyk, ‘Polsko-izraelskie wykopaliska w Hippos (Sussita) 2000–2001: Kościół Północno-Zachodni (NWC)’, *Światowit*, 3 (44), Fasc. A, 2001, pp. 133–141; J. Młynarczyk, ‘Hippos (Sussita): Exploration of the North-West Church Complex (Areas NWC and OPB) in 2002’, *Światowit*, 4 (45), Fasc. A, 2002, pp. 73–78; J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, ‘Co nowego w Hippos?’ *Archeologia Żywa*, 2002, 2 (21), pp. 20–25; J. Młynarczyk, ‘Odkrycia w Hippos nad jeziorem Galilejskim. Polsko-izraelskie badania archeologiczne’, *Polska Akademia Nauk, działalność naukowa, wybrane zagadnienia*, 13 (2002), pp. 35–37; J. Młynarczyk, ‘Hippos i Dioceza-rea. Stolice biskupie *Palestinae Secundae* w źródłach archeologicznych’, *Sympozyta Kazimier-*



1. Geographical situation of Hippos (left) and aerial view of the site (right)



2. Areas excavated between 2000-2006

From the beginning of the regular excavations as started in 2000, Polish activity has been concentrated in the centre of the city, in the place which is presently known as the North-West Church complex (hitherto NWC) (il. 2). The area so far excavated includes the following archaeological/stratigraphical contexts:

- a part of an early Roman *temenos* with its *cella*, the remains of which extend further to the south, below the area of the so-called Hellenistic Compound (HLC) excavated by the Israeli team;

skie poświęcone kulturze świata późnego antyku i wczesnego chrześcijaństwa III, Lublin 2002, pp. 193–207; see also the web site: www.susyam.webpark.pl.

- scanty remains of pre-temenos constructions;
- remains of the basilica (NWC), sealed by the earthquake debris of A.D. 749;
- industrial area: series of rooms and compartments constituting a complete winery from the Umayyad period, sealed at the same time as the church.

In the present paper, we are going to discuss the North West Church only, and specifically, the question of its liturgical furniture. Before that, some general remarks about the topographical setting, architectural design and development of the church should be provided for the readers.

The NWC, which was one of at least seven churches whose remains have so far been detected at Hippos, is located in the very centre of the city, about 25 m north of the main public square (*agora* or *forum*) (il. 2). Such a location may be indicative of the important role that the church played among the Christian community. Moreover, it seems that the NWC was the second largest church in the city, just after the so-called cathedral, which was partially excavated in the 1950s.⁶

Excavation results have demonstrated that the NWC was built directly on the remains of a pagan sanctuary. Such practices are confirmed elsewhere both by literary sources and archaeological finds. It is worth recalling here the story of Joseph from Tiberias, described at length in the *Panarion* of St. Epiphanius from Salamis. We learn from it that Joseph was a converted Jew who received from the emperor Constantine the title of count, and who in his own city tried unsuccessfully to transform a temple called the *Hadrianeum* into a church.⁷ The clearest archaeological evidence of such practices can be found in coastal Dora (Tell Dor of today), where the church was built on the remains of an earlier pagan sanctuary dedicated to Apollo and later to Asclepius.⁸

⁶ C. Epstein, V. Tzaferis, 'Baptistery at Sussita-Hippos', *Atiqot*, 20 (1991), pp. 89–94.

⁷ PG, 41, pp. 425–428; Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles*, pp. 71–72; cf. also F. Manns, 'Joseph de Tybériade, un judéo-chrétien du quatrième siècle', in: *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land. New Discoveries*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 36, ed. G.C. Bottini, L. Di Segni, E. Alliata, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 553–559.

⁸ C. Dauphin, 'From Apollo and Asclepius to Christ. Pilgrimage and Healing at the Temple and Episcopal Basilica of Dor', *Liber Annuus, Studii Biblici Franciscani*, 49 (1999), pp. 397–430.

The phasing of the North-West Church

The exact date of the construction of the church is not known. It must have happened after the pagan temple went out of use, but the date of this event also remains obscure. Moreover, the destruction and/or abandonment of the temple need not necessarily have been followed by immediate construction of the church. Having very few points of reference for absolute dating, we must rely on relative chronology and comparative analysis of the church architecture.

Architectural analysis indicates that the church was planned as a mono-apsidal basilica (inner dimensions: 20.80 m x 13.70 m) flanked by two slightly trapezoid sacristies (*pastophoria*). A small passage connected the apse with the northern sacristy. There were two rows of columns, six columns to each row. The sanctuary contained within the nave was two column spaces (*intercolumnia*) deep, with a rectangular, elevated *hema* accessible from the floor level of the nave by two (?) steps.⁹

The basilica had three doorways in the western wall: a wide central doorway leading to the nave and two lateral, slightly smaller doors to the aisles. Each aisle also had an inner lateral doorway communicating with the adjoining annexes, the northern and the southern one respectively. While the original function of the northern wing remains undetermined (due to later extensive modifications), the southern annexe undoubtedly served as *diaconicon*.

The closest parallel to this plan is undoubtedly that of the church at Kursi, ca. 5 km north of Hippos, whose construction is dated to the late 5th century.¹⁰ The resemblances between the two churches make us believe that the NWC was constructed at roughly the same date, in the late 5th century or early 6th century. Indeed, a stratigraphical probe under the atrium demonstrated that the atrium foundations were connected with pottery and coins of the latter part of the 5th century.¹¹

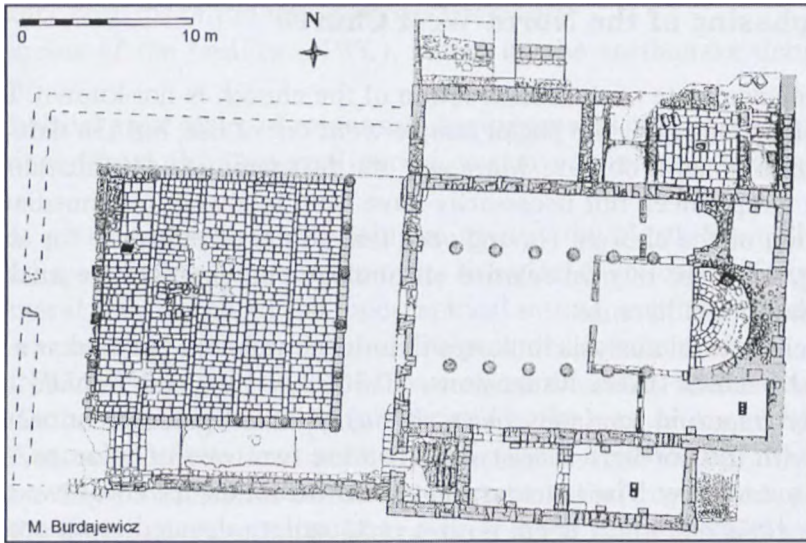
During the second architectural phase, tentatively dated to the last quarter of the 6th century,¹² some important changes were introduced in the

⁹ Like in the church of bishop Malechius at Mukawir, Jordan (M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman 1993, fig. 418) and in the Cathedral at Elusa (A. Negev, 'The Cathedral of Elusa and the New Typology and Chronology of the Byzantine Churches in the Negev', *Liber Annuus, Studii Biblici Franciscani*, 39 (1989), p. 131, plan 2).

¹⁰ V. Tzaferis, 'The Excavations at Kursi-Gergesa', *Atiqot* 16 (1983), plans 4–5.

¹¹ Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'North West Church Complex (NWC)', in: Segal et al., *Hippos-Sussita. Fifth Season of Excavations*, p. 46.

¹² J. Młynarczyk, M. Burdajewicz, 'North-West Church in Hippos (Sussita), Israel', *Eastern Christian Art*, 2 (2005), p. 55.



3. North-West Church Compound

church plan. The northern sacristy was cut off from the aisle by a wall. In this way a small room was created, accessible only through a low narrow passage from the central apse, where a *synthronon* was constructed, consisting of three to four rows of seats. This small room probably served as a *skeuophylakion* or treasury. On its western, outer side a small apse was built. Probably also during this phase the atrium achieved its final form: a spacious square courtyard (13.70 m on each side), paved with rectangular and square basalt flagstones, was surrounded by four porticoes with six columns to a side (il. 3).

During the third phase (presumably in the early part of the 7th century),¹³ the chancel area was extended across the two aisles creating a T-shaped sanctuary.¹⁴ In consequence, the doorway once connecting the northern

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The transformation of mono-apsidal churches with two pastophoria into bi-apsidal or tri-apsidal churches as well as the extension of the sanctuary across the lateral aisles is a well-known phenomenon which occurred in the Levant between the 6th and 8th cc. According to a common view this process was due, among others, to the development of the cult of the saints and martyrs. More on this subject: A. Negev, 'The Churches of the Central Negev. An Archaeological Survey', *Revue Biblique*, 81 (1974), pp. 400–422; Negev, 'The Cathedral of Elusa', pp. 129–142; S. Margalit, 'On the Transformation of the Mono-Apsidal Churches with two Lateral Pastophoria into Tri-Apsidal Churches', *Liber Annuus, Studii Biblici Franciscani*, 39 (1989), pp. 143–164; S. Margalit, 'The Bi-Apsidal Churches in Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus', *Liber Annuus, Studii Biblici Franciscani*, 40 (1990), 40, pp. 321–334.

aisle with its annexe was blocked. The base for the chancel screen and posts in the northern aisle was placed directly on the top of the mosaic floor,¹⁵ while that of the southern aisle was inserted deeply into the mosaic floor. A slightly trapezoid room behind the screen, on the southern side of the apse, undoubtedly functioned as a *martyrion* chapel. Such identification is based on the fact that a large reliquary was found inserted into the mosaic floor, originally with four marble colonnettes supporting an altar table above it.

The fourth phase of the church, which probably had begun around the end of the 7th century, is marked by severe damage to the church (by an earthquake?). The Christian community in those days must have already been much pauperized, since the restoration works were clearly limited to the *martyrion* chapel, which must have happened at some time after A.D. 690.¹⁶ There is also enough archaeological evidence to indicate that the nave was left unrepaired and probably unroofed. It is obvious that in such case the nave could not have been used for liturgy anymore and probably assumed the functions of an inner atrium. The liturgical service must have been restricted to the lateral chancels: the northern apse, in which an altar and a reliquarium were found, and the southern *martyrion* chapel with two exposed reliquaries, standing one upon another.

In turn, the atrium was divided into smaller units, and apparently served domestic purposes, mainly food processing. We cannot even exclude the possibility that the atrium served as a monastery for a few monks who would be taking care of the church. However, this continued worship by a poor local Christian community in Hippos was dramatically stopped by the devastating earthquake of 18 January, A.D. 749.

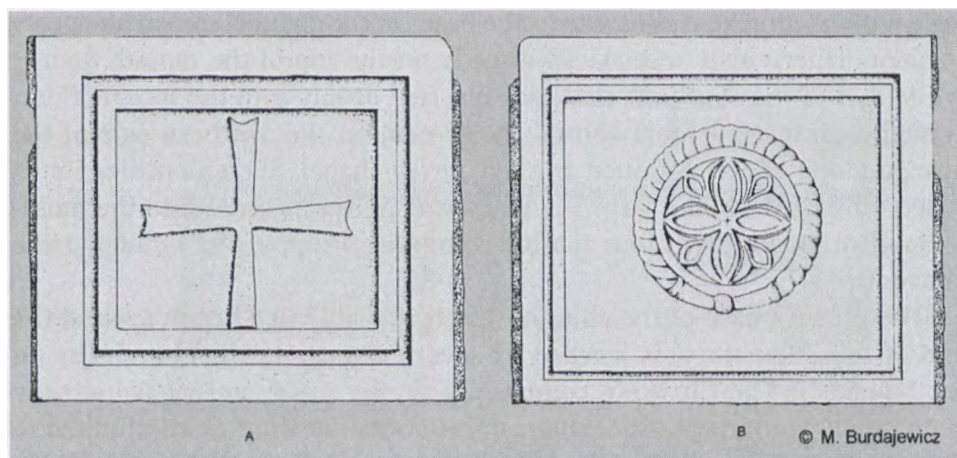
Architectural and mobile furniture connected with the liturgy

Northern Chancel Screens

Near the eastern end of the northern aisle, the chancel screen was found, installed on the mosaic as the final arrangement of the church. The marble

¹⁵ Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'The North-West Church Complex (NWC)', in: Segal et al., *Hippos-Sussita. Second Season of Excavations*, Fig. 28.

¹⁶ Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'North-West Church in Hippos (Sussita), Israel', p. 55.



4. The northern aisle: two sides of a marble screen; the eastward side (A) and the westward one (B)

screen was set in a base built of limestone, and consisted of two panels (*plutei*) and two screen posts (each 1.09 m preserved height). The southern panel, broken into three restorable parts (dimensions: 0.80 x 0.95 m), has a cross in relief on its eastward face, and a rosette in a wreath on the westward one. The wreath is rendered in a schematic style common to the churches of the Byzantine period, while the rosette is combined with a fleur-de-lis (il. 4). A similar motif, in which, however, the cross is more clearly accentuated, appears on the panels from the church at Horvat Hesheq,¹⁷ from the Temple Mount excavations in Jerusalem,¹⁸ from Nessana¹⁹ and from the church of the Deacon Thomas at 'Uyun Musa in the Mount Nebo region'.²⁰

Of the northern panel in the northern aisle only a corner remains. The inner sides of the chancel posts have iron rings fixed to them to hold a chain(?) closing off the entrance to the sanctuary. It seems that the posts used to carry two colonnettes, comparable to those found in the southern aisle.

¹⁷ M. Aviam, 'Horvat Hesheq – A Unique Church in Upper Galilee: Preliminary Report', in: *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land*, Fig. 20.

¹⁸ O. Peleg, 'Decorated Chancel Screen Panels and Posts from the Temple Mount Excavations', in: E. Mazar, *The Temple Mount Excavations in Jerusalem 1968-1978 directed by Benjamin Mazar. Final Reports Volume II. The Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods*, Qedem 43, Jerusalem 2003, Pl. I.21. 6.

¹⁹ H.D. Colt, *Excavations at Nessana 1*, London 1962, Pl. XIX: 5.

²⁰ A. Acconci, 'Elements of the Liturgical Furniture', in: M. Piccirillo, E. Alliata, *Mount Nebo. New Archaeological Excavations 1967-1997* [= *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum. Collectio Maior*, vol. 27], Jerusalem 1998, p. 515, 534, cat. nos. 125, 127, 169.

Southern Chancel Screens

The southern aisle is closed by a marble balustrade belonging to a lateral chancel. It consists of two panels and four posts fixed to their bases with pieces of lead (il. 5). The base is built of reused marble blocks originating from a monumental building of Roman date (2nd century A.D.?), to judge by the remains of relief decoration on the eastern faces of two long blocks. Of these, the southern one still preserves a deeply drilled ornament of acanthus scrolls (il. 6).

The southern panel (0.90 m high) was found standing *in situ* between its two posts. Its western face has a 'Maltese' cross with grooved arms inside a simple ring and a wreath composed of a triple row of laurel leaves tied with a ribbon (il. 5). Such a laurel wreath surrounding a cross (*stephanostaurion*) is common on chancel screens in the churches of the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*. Just to mention some examples: the church of the Monastery of Lady Mary, Tel Iztabba;²¹ Khirbet el-Mird²² as well from the Temple Mount excavations in Jerusalem;²³ Mampsis²⁴ and in the Petra Church.²⁵ The panel's eastern face bears a similar cross (its arms, however, left ungrooved) surmounting the tripartite Golgotha mound; the left-hand side of this panel was left unfinished, with traces of chiselling (il. 6). A close parallel to this representation is found on chancel screens from Tabgha,²⁶ Horvat Bata (Carmiel, where it is dated to the 6th century),²⁷ and Khirbet ed-Deir.²⁸ In another church at Hippos, the so-called South-West Church, a fragmentary chancel screen was found adorned with the cross on Golgotha flanked by rams lowering their heads.²⁹ It is an almost exact replica of

²¹ *Cradle of Christianity*, ed. by Y. Israeli, D. Mevorah, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 73–74, 130.

²² Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles*, Fig. 115.

²³ O. Peleg, 'Decorated Chancel Screen Panels and Posts from the Temple Mount Excavations', in: Mazar, *The Temple Mount Excavations in Jerusalem*, pp. 135–139.

²⁴ A. Negev, *The Architecture of Mampsis. Final Report*, Vol. II, *The Late Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Qedem 27, Jerusalem 1988, Fig. 9.

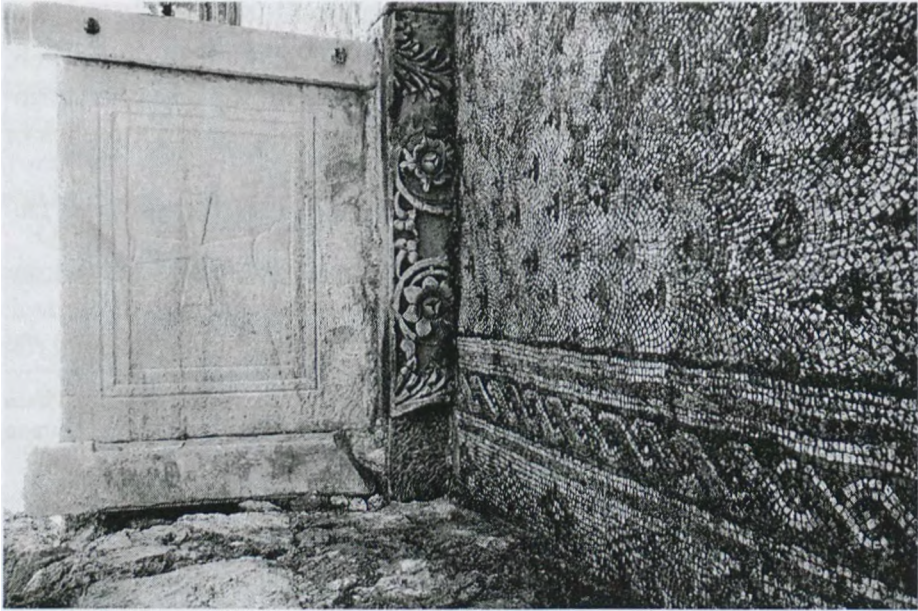
²⁵ Ch. Kanellopoulos, R. Schick, 'Marble Furnishing of the Apses and the Bema, Phase V', in: Z.T. Fiema, Ch. Kanellopoulos, T. Waliszewski, R. Schick, *The Petra Church*, Amman 2001, pp. 195–197, Figs. 5 and 10.

²⁶ B. Bagatti, *L'archeologia cristiana in Palestina*, Sansoni-Firenze 1962, p. 121. Fig. 16: 5.

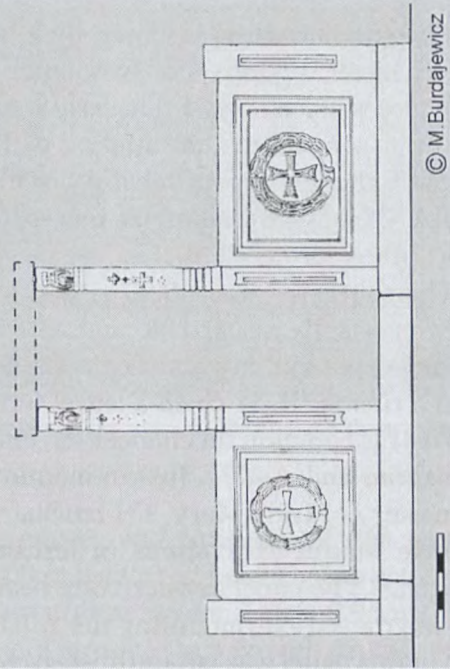
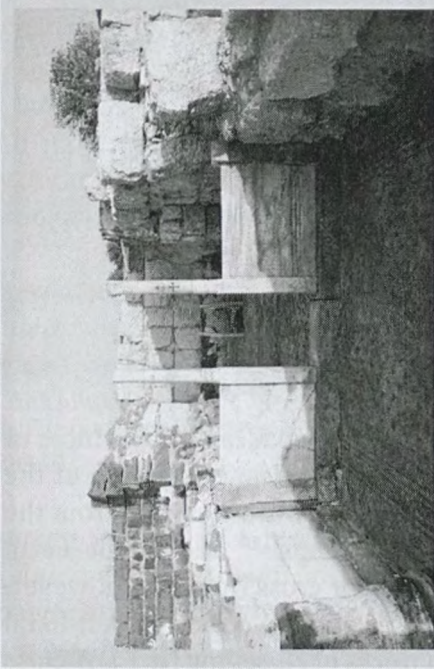
²⁷ *Cradle of Christianity*, p. 42.

²⁸ L. Habas, 'The Marble Furniture', in: Y. Hirschfeld, *The Early Byzantine Monastery at Khirbet ed-Deir in the Judean Desert: the Excavations in 1981–1987*, Qedem 38, Jerusalem 1999, Pl. 3:3–4.

²⁹ Segal, Eisenberg, 'The South-West Church (SWC)', in: Segal et al., *Hippos-Sussita. Sixth Season of Excavations*, p. 22, Figs. 8, 46.



5. Chancel screen of the southern aisle



6. Eastern side of the southern chancel screen in the southern aisle

a chancel screen from Beit Ras (Capitolias).³⁰ A small fragment of the same representation comes from Horvat Karkara, Galilee.³¹ Finally, a third version of the cross on Golgotha is depicted on a chancel screen from the 6th century church of St. Lazarus in Nahariya; there, the cross is flanked by gazelles.³²

The northern chancel screen (0.90 m high) was found broken into several pieces by stones tumbling from the southern wall. On the western face there is a representation of a 'Maltese' cross in a bound wreath, differing from the other screen only in the cross arms not being grooved and the wreath lacking a ring inside (il. 5). The screen's back (eastern) side had never been decorated.

The outer chancel posts (0.92 m high) are reused small pillars with vertical flutings on one face and stylized acanthus capitals. The inner monolithic posts were considerably higher and of a different form. Their upper parts, from slightly above the level of the screen top, were shaped as colonnettes with moulded bases and quasi-Corinthian capitals. Similar capitals of the chancel screen post are known from the church at Horvat Hesheq, Upper Galilee³³ and, rather more elaborate, from the Theotokos chapel on Mount Nebo.³⁴ Together with a horizontal bar (of wood?) which they used to carry, they formed a sort of doorway, its total height amounting to 2 m (0.18 m for the chancel base and 1.82 m for the inner post-colonnettes) above the level of the mosaic floor. All parts of the broken colonnettes were found in the debris, together with small votive silver crosses still affixed to their shafts with bronze pegs: three crosses (and holes to mount the fourth one) on the southern colonnette, two crosses (plus holes for the third one) on the northern colonnette (il. 7). Evidence for fixing metal crosses on chancel screen posts comes also from the churches at Horvat Hesheq³⁵ and Mount Nebo.³⁶ From the eastern faces of the inner posts there protrude iron rings fixed to lead pegs, intended to mount a low wooden door: two rings for hinges in the southern post, and one for a hook in the northern post.

³⁰ M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici della Giordania settentrionale*, Jerusalem 1981, photo 27.

³¹ *Cradle of Christianity*, pp. 73–74.

³² C. Dauphin, G. Edelstein, 'The Byzantine Church in Nahariya', in: *Ancient Churches Revealed*, ed. by Y. Tsafir, Jerusalem 1993, p. 51.

³³ Aviam, 'Horvath Hesheq', Fig. 7.

³⁴ Acconci, 'Elements of the Liturgical Furniture', p. 507, cat. nos. 99–102.

³⁵ Aviam, 'Horvath Hesheq', pp. 358, 370, Figs. 8 and 27.

³⁶ Acconci, 'Elements of the Liturgical Furniture', p. 509, cat. no. 105.



7. Detail of the columnettes of the southern aisle

Tabletop (*mensa*)

A large part of the *mensa*, doubtlessly an altar, broken into smaller pieces, was found in the northern apse. The *mensa* was rectangular, with external frames of different widths (narrow band, fillet and *cyma reversa*) and a wide sunken surface in the centre. The altar table represents a type very common in the Byzantine period. The best parallels with identical or similar mouldings are known from the monastery at Khirbet ed-Deir in the Judean desert,³⁷ Mount Nebo,³⁸ and Petra.³⁹

³⁷ Habas, 'The Marble Furniture', pp. 119-123, pl. 1.

³⁸ Acconci, 'Elements of the Liturgical Furniture', p. 489, cat. no. 61.

³⁹ Kanellopoulos, Schick, 'Marble Furnishing of the Apses', Figs. 6-7, 21.

Table Legs

The *mensa* from the northern apse was supported by four colonnettes which could be restored to their full height; their shafts are oval-sectioned, while the capitals are decorated with schematic vegetal elements (stylized lotus flowers) and terminate in a cubic abacus. The bases of the colonnettes are square, and right above them, there are three parallel incisions. Comparable colonnettes are known from the church at Horvat Hesheq,⁴⁰ Khirbet ed-Deir,⁴¹ Mt. Olive in Jerusalem,⁴² Mamphis,⁴³ Mount Nebo/'Ayn al-Kanisah⁴⁴ and Petra.⁴⁵

Similar, although taller colonnettes once supported a table (not preserved) above the large reliquary in the *martyrion* chapel (il. 10). Two of the legs were reconstructed from smaller fragments to their total height of 1.10 m. Two others are only partially preserved. All of them are carved in a similar way: they have cubic bases, above which there is a simple decoration consisting of horizontal incisions forming three strips. The shaft, which is slightly ellipsoidal in section, is crowned with a capital decorated on all four sides with a sort of schematic lotus flower; the leaves, two on each side, curve inward forming a mandorla-like ornament. The decorative motif is frequent on the capitals of altar legs in the Byzantine period. However, the execution can vary from a naturalistic style, as in Nessana⁴⁶ and the Mount Nebo region,⁴⁷ to a very schematic one, as in the monastery at Khirbet ed-Deir⁴⁸ and Mount Nebo.⁴⁹

Reliquaries

Two types of reliquaries were found in the North-West Church. The first type is represented by a reliquary found inserted into the mosaic floor

⁴⁰ Aviam, 'Horvath Hesheq', Fig. 7.

⁴¹ Habas, 'The Marble Furniture', pp. 119–123, pl. 1.

⁴² Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles*, Fig. 123.

⁴³ Negev, *The Architecture of Mamphis*, photo 98.

⁴⁴ Acconci, 'Elements of the Liturgical Furniture', p. 534, cat. no. 173.

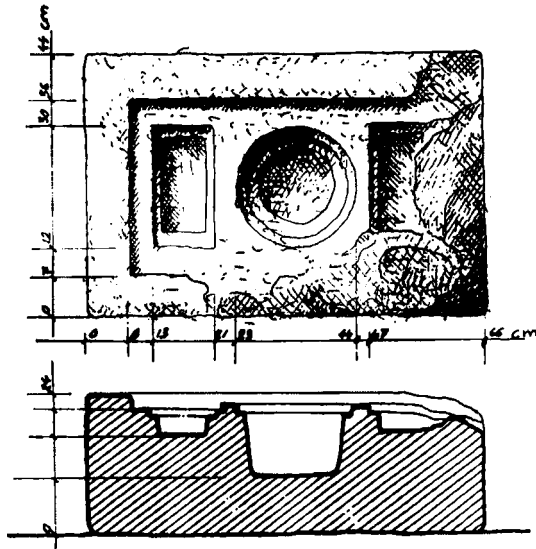
⁴⁵ Kanellopoulos, Schick, 'Marble Furnishing of the Apses and the Bema, Phase V', Fig. 23.

⁴⁶ H. D. Colt, *Excavations at Nessana 1*, London 1962, pl. XVIII: 3.

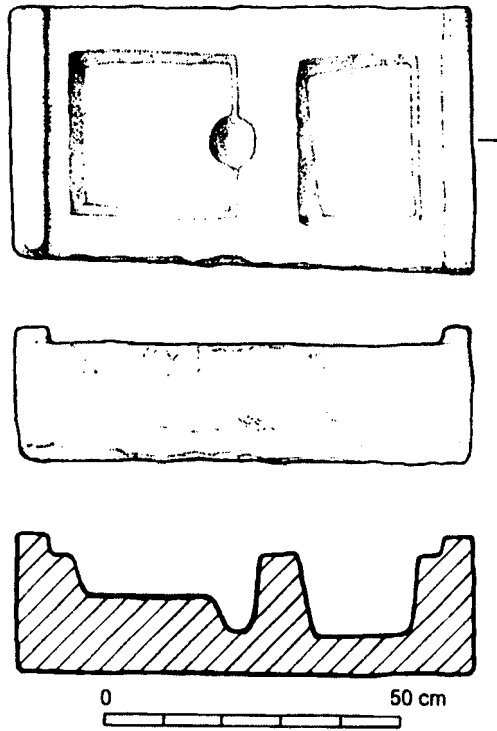
⁴⁷ Acconci, 'Elements of the Liturgical Furniture', cat. nos. 99–101.

⁴⁸ Habas, 'The Marble Furniture', p. 119, Pl. 1.

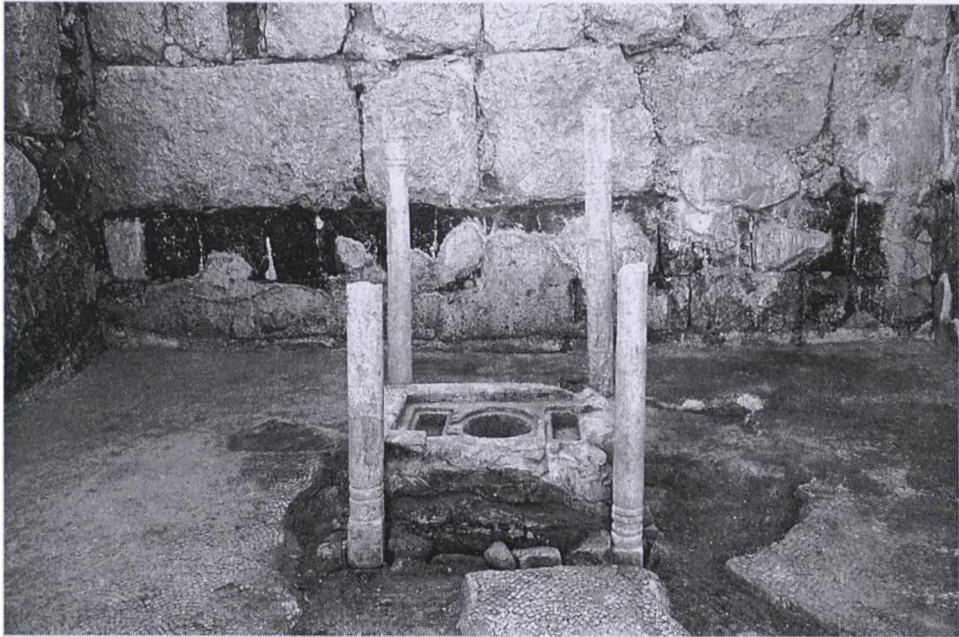
⁴⁹ Acconci, 'Elements of the Liturgical Furniture', cat. no. 173.



8. The lower reliquary of the martyrion chapel



9. Chest of the hard limestone (reliquary?)



10. Limestone reliquary inserted in the floor of the martyrion chapel

in the eastern part of the southern sacristy, which apparently functioned as a *martyrion* chapel (ils. 8 and 10). The reliquary is made of a pink limestone block (L. 0.56 m, W. 0.45 m, H. 0.24 m) and has three compartments: a round, bowl-shaped depression in the centre, flanked on its both sides by two rectangular compartments. Each of them was originally covered with its own close-fitting lid. While the lateral lids were made of the same limestone as the reliquary, the central one was made of raw beige clay and additionally had a central opening. Under this lid, fragments of another circular lid with an opening in the centre were found. In addition to this, there was also an upper lid of the same soft pink stone, which had originally covered the whole upper surface of the reliquary.

The front (western) side of the reliquary is decorated with a 'Greek' cross executed in relief. The grooved square marking the centre of the cross has a circular hollow, possibly for inserting a gem. At the four corners of the reliquary, square posts for marble colonnettes apparently supporting an original *mensa* were sunk into the mosaic floor. Unfortunately, no fragments of such an altar table were found; possibly an original marble table was later replaced by a wooden one.

An exact parallel for this type of reliquary has been found in Hippos itself. In 2005 the Israeli team began excavations of the so called South-West

Church. In the centre of the apse of the church a reliquary was found inserted into the mosaic floor. Although smaller in size (0.40 x 0.50 m and about 0.20 m above floor level) than the one from the NWC, it was made of the same material (soft pink limestone) and represents an identical design: a central round hollow flanked by two rectangular compartments. Similarly to the NWC, at the four corners of the reliquary basalt posts were found to hold up an altar.⁵⁰

The type of reliquary found in the churches in Hippos, of relatively large dimensions, inserted into the floor, is rather rare in Palestine, and the closest parallels can be found in some churches in Jordan, for example in Gerasa, in the church of SS. Peter and Paul and in the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian.⁵¹

To a related type could possibly belong an empty reliquary (?) discovered in the *diaconicon* (Room 209E), between the piers of the eastern arch. This is a rectangular chest (L. 0.79 m, W. 0.44 m, H. 0.20 m) of hard whitish limestone, containing two rectangular compartments, of which one is smaller but deeper (0.13 m), while the other is bigger and shallower (0.07 m), with a funnel-like cavity in its bottom close to the partition wall between the two compartments (il. 9). It should be noted that these cavities lack any opening that would connect them to each other, and thus its function remains obscure. The object was apparently not found *in situ* because it was lying on a thin layer of dust covering the floor, so its original situation is not known.⁵²

The second type is represented by two small portable reliquaries. One of them was found on top of the bigger pink reliquary in the eastern part of the *martyrion* chapel, described above. This reliquary is a sarcophagus-like chest of white marble (L. 0.25 m, W. 0.16 m, H. 0.10 m), divided into three rectangular compartments, and covered with a gabled lid finished

⁵⁰ Segal, Eisenberg, 'The South-West Church (SWC)', pp. 17–18, Fig. 42.

⁵¹ A. Michel, *Les églises d'époque byzantine et umayyade de Jordanie (Provinces d'Arabie et de Palestine) Ve-VIIIe siècle. Typologie architecturale et aménagements liturgiques (avec catalogue des monuments)*, Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité tardive 2, Brepols 2001, pp. 74, 257, Figs. 237 and 238; C. H. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis*, London–New Haven 1938, pp. 254, 253, Pl. I.I: a; see also M. Burdajewicz, 'Relikwiarze prowincji Palestyna (Palaestina) w okresie bizantyjsko-omajjadzkim' ('Reliquaries of the province of Palestine (Palaestina) during the Byzantine-Umayyad Period'), in: *Symposium Kazimierskie poświęcone kulturze świata późnego antyku i wczesnego chrześcijaństwa IV*, Lublin 2004, p. 280.

⁵² Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'North-West Church Complex (NWC)', in: Segal et al., *Hippos-Sussita. Fourth Season of Excavations*, p. 30, fig. 54; Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'The North-West Church (NWC)', in: Segal et al., *Hippos-Sussita. Fifth Season of Excavations*, p. 54, Fig. 24.



11. Marble reliquary from the martyrion chapel with bronze pin

with four acroteria. In the top of the lid there is a circular opening into which a bronze pin was inserted (il. 11). It served to distribute the blessing (*eulogia*) *ex contactu*. Inside, in one of the compartments, a few tiny bones were found.

Another nearly identical reliquary, also made of white marble, was found on the floor of the northern apse. One of its three compartments contained a small glass bottle with tiny pieces of bones.⁵³ Both chests belong to the most widespread type of sarcophagus-like reliquary. Numerous examples of this type are known from the Byzantine-Umayyad churches in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*.⁵⁴

⁵³ Segal, Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, *Hippos (Sussita). First Season of Excavation*, Figs. 47–48.

⁵⁴ Burdajewicz, 'Relikwiarze prowincji Palestyna (*Palaestina*) w okresie bizantynsko-omajjadzkim' pp. 278–279, Il. 3–5; see also Michel, *Les églises d'époque byzantine et umayyade*, pp. 72–78; Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles*, p. 253.

Lighting devices

It is obvious that the natural daily light that penetrated the interior of the church through the windows and entrances would not be sufficient. Moreover, it is well known that some religious ceremonies were also performed in the evening and early morning,⁵⁵ thus the problem of providing additional artificial light was very important from both a liturgical and practical point of view. The excavations in the NWC have yielded examples of different lighting devices, such as bronze, glass and terracotta lamps as well as chandeliers (*polycandela*).

Bronze lamp

On the mosaic floor of the chancel area in the northern aisle, a beautiful bronze oil lamp in the shape of dove was found (ils. 12 and 13). Apparently, the lamp used to hang between the chancel screen and the altar. It seems very probable that the shape of this particular lamp symbolized the Holy Spirit. Several examples of dove lamps, dated to between the 4th and 6th centuries, are known from Coptic Egypt; however, our lamp differs from them in a number of morphological details as well as is the style of execution, suggesting it originated in Syria rather than in Egypt.⁵⁶

Glass lamps

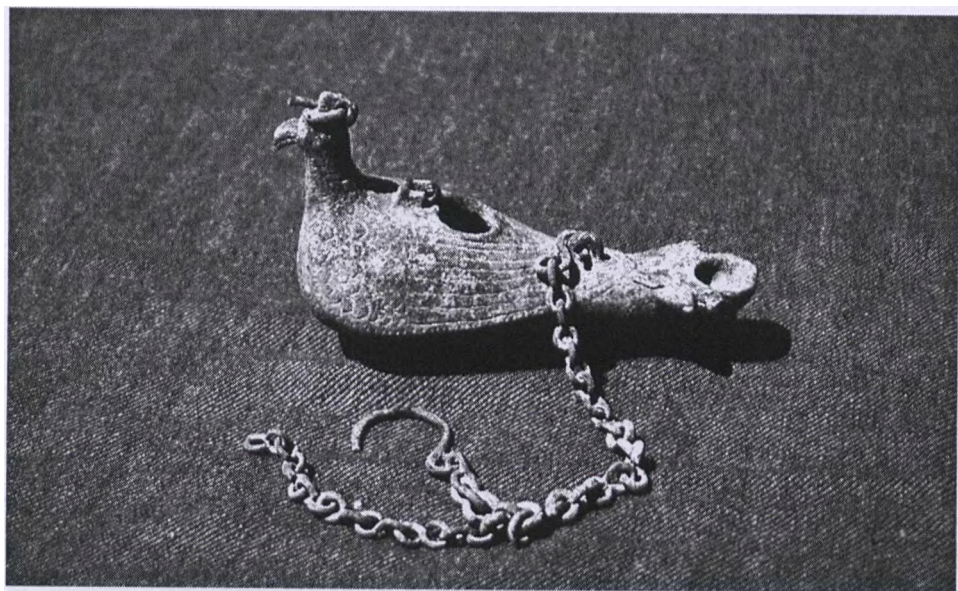
Among the glass finds from the church, several lamps were found. Although all of them are very fragmentary, two types can clearly be identified: suspended lamps and stemmed bowl lamps.

Suspended lamps

Characteristic of this type is a bowl with sloping wall, the rim thickened and folded out, and three loop handles extending from the edge of the upper

⁵⁵ It is enough to recall the liturgy of the Holy Week described in detail in *Egeria* 29.1–38.1.

⁵⁶ For more parallels and comprehensive discussion of bird-shaped lamps, see J. Młynarczyk, 'The fading lights of a Church...', *Acts of the ILA Table Ronde: Ancient Lamps of the Bilad esh-Sham, Amman, November 2005* (in press).



12. Bronze lamp found in the chancel area of the northern aisle



13. Bronze lamp - drawing

rim and sloping downward to the wall; the bottom usually is convex. In the NWC, a fragment of only one such lamp has been identified with confidence (il. 19:16). However, because this type of lamp is usually difficult to recognize among small glass fragments, we cannot exclude the possibility that they were more numerous. It seems that suspended oil lamps made their first appearance in the Syro-Palestinian region during the first half of the 5th century and continued into the Early Islamic period.⁵⁷

Stemmed bowl-lamps

This type of lamp has the general shape of a deep bowl, with rounded rim and thickened edges, and bell shaped body curving below into a hollow stem. At least two examples of hollow stems belonging to this type of lamp have been discovered in the North-West Church (ils. 19:18 and 20). Both of them were found close to the bronze chandelier and apparently belonged to it.⁵⁸ Stemmed bowl lamps were introduced around the 5th century and continued for centuries. Like the suspended lamps, they were very common throughout the East and there is no need to quote parallels.

Chandeliers (*polycandela*)

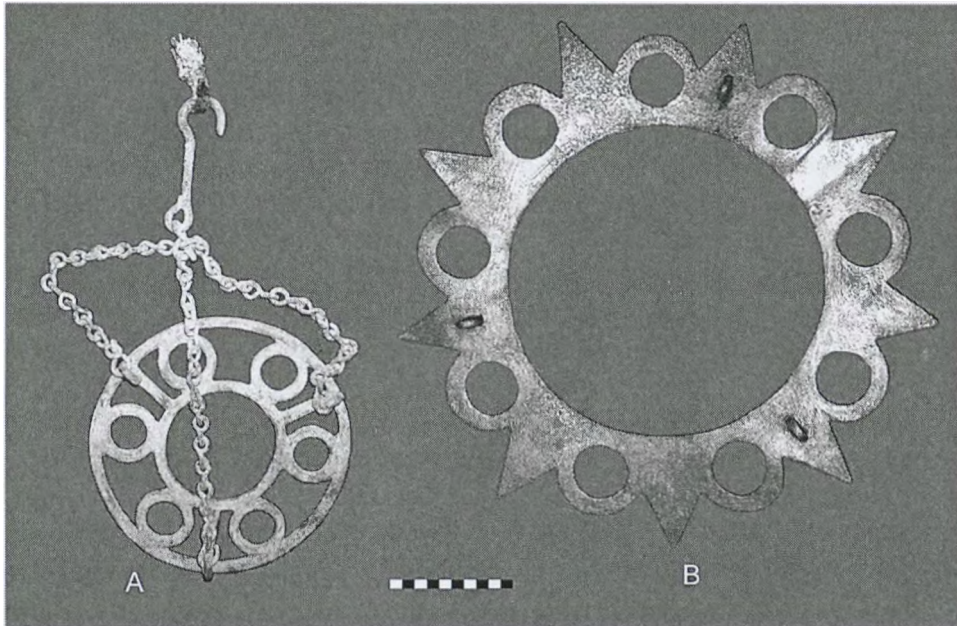
Stemmed bowl-lamps as described above were usually placed in bronze chandeliers (*polycandela*) suspended from the ceiling (ils. 14 and 15). The excavations in the NWC have yielded two beautiful examples of such objects.

One *polycandelon* was discovered under the blocks of a fallen arch of the *martyrion* chapel.⁵⁹ It used to hang from an iron rod once installed across the opening of the arch, and provided a wider spread of light to the interior of the holy space of the *martyrion* chapel. The *polycandelon* has the form of a circular openwork frame (outer diameter 20.5 cm, diameter of the central opening 8.9 cm) with six round openings (2.8 cm in diameter) alternating with hour-glass-shaped ones. Three cross-bars are provided each

⁵⁷ N. Katsnelson, 'Glass Objects', in: *Korvat Karkur Illit*, Beersheva Archaeological Monographs I, Beersheva, ed. by P. Figueras, Beersheva 2004, p. 269.

⁵⁸ Młynarczyk, 'The fading lights of a Church'.

⁵⁹ Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'North-West Church Complex', in: Segal et al., *Hippos-Susita. Fourth Season of Excavations*, p. 24, Fig. 44.



14. Two bronze *polycandela* from the martyrion chapel (A) and the *diaconicon* (B)

with a loop symmetrically fitted at the outer frame and holding three chains (each 24 cm long), which meet at a looped hook (il. 14).

Two identical *polycandela* come from a church in Khirbat ad-Duwayr in Jordan⁶⁰ and the collection of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem respectively. One can mention also two similar *polycandela* found in Bet Shean in the Jordan Valley⁶¹ and one from Sepphoris in the Galilee, dated to the 6th century.⁶²

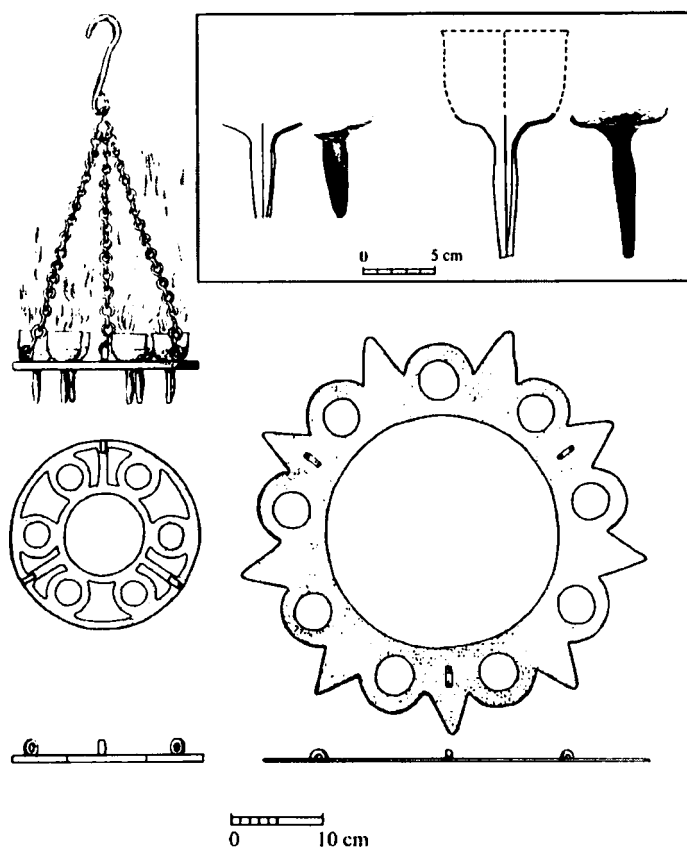
The second *polycandelon*, approximately twice as large as the first one (45 cm outer diameter, 25 cm inner diameter), designed to hold nine glass oil lamps, was found (lacking its chain) in an upright position at the very end of the *diaconicon*, against its eastern wall.⁶³ It was cut out of bronze sheet and represented a different form: the circular openings for the lamps alternate with solid triangles, a suspending loop attached to every fourth

⁶⁰ I. Melhim, 'The Excavation of the Khirbat ad-Duwayr Church/Jinin as-Safā', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 42 (1998), p. 35, Fig. 23 (Arabic section).

⁶¹ G.M., FitzGerald, *Beth-Shan. Excavations 1921–1923. The Arab and Byzantine Levels*, Philadelphia 1931, Pls. XXVII:4 and XXXVII:4

⁶² Z. Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue. Deciphering an Ancient Message through its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts*, Jerusalem 2005, pp. 302–303.

⁶³ Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'The North-West Church', in: Segal et al., *Hippos (Sussita), Fifth Season of Excavations*, p. 52, Fig. 58.



15. Bronze *polycandela* and steamed lamps

triangle (il. 15). The parallels to this *polycandelon* come, again, from Khirbat ad-Duwayr in northern Jordan⁶⁴ and from Beth Shean.⁶⁵

Polycandela of various shapes and dimensions were very common in the Eastern Mediterranean, starting with the Byzantine period, and they could have been used both in sacred and secular contexts. However, the analysis of geographical distribution of the *polycandela* similar to those from the NWC suggests that these particular models were being manufactured in northern Palestine/Arabia (the Galilee and Transjordan) and that these simple forms should be considered as relatively late ones, Byzantine/Umayyad and later.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Melhim, 'The Excavation of the Khirbat ad-Duwayr Church, p. 35, fig. 22.

⁶⁵ FitzGerald, *Beth-Shan*, pl. XXXVII:1

⁶⁶ J. Mlynarczyk, 'The fading lights of a Church...'

Terracotta lamps

The excavations of the church have also yielded several terracotta lamps of the types known from other Byzantine-to-Umayyad period assemblages in Palestine.⁶⁷ What is really of interest, however, is the respective contexts of their discovery, as there can be no doubt that most of the lamps were found *in situ*. Two lamps, representing a well-known Byzantine/Early Islamic type, were found in identical positions in front of each balustrade of the lateral chancels. We can assume that they were originally placed on some sort of lamp-stands (*candelabra*) or on the top of the balustrade. Their presence reflects a very old custom typical of the faithful in the East: that of leaving ex-votos and lighting the candles and lamps in the church.

Another group comes from the *diaconicon* in the southern wing of the church, where six terracotta lamps were found deposited on a plastered bench (il. 16). They were brand-new, probably just purchased for the church and never used. Five of them, their shoulders decorated with vegetal scrolls, were probably made in the same mould. Their type appears to be characteristic of the sites in the western Decapolis area.

Varia (decanter, bell, incense burner)

Of interest is a group of bronze objects uncovered in the *diaconicon* in the southern wing of the church. It includes a bronze jug or decanter typical of the Umayyad period (il. 17); closely similar vessels are known from Pella (dated to the second quarter of the 8th century),⁶⁸ from Beth Shean (dated to around A.D. 749)⁶⁹ and from the monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim.⁷⁰ Another object, a bronze censer (il. 17:C), is of a common Byzantine type, shaped as a bowl with ribbed body and three loops on the rim destined to hook onto a suspension chain (which was not found).

⁶⁷ For discussion of the lamps, see J. Młynarczyk, 'Umayyad-period Terracotta Lamps from Hippos (Sussita), Jund al Urdunn', *Acts of the ILA Table Ronde: Ancient Lamps of the Bilad esh-Sham, Amman, November 2005* (in press).

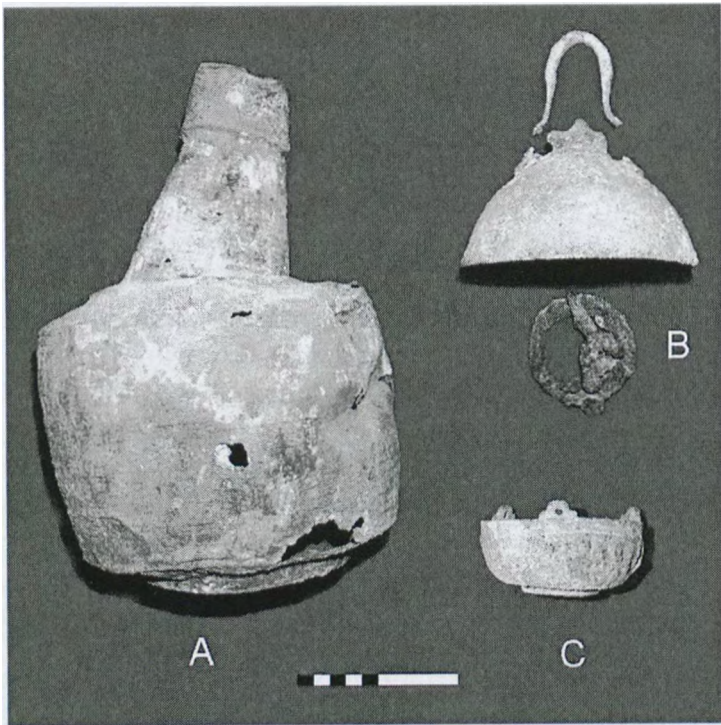
⁶⁸ R.H. Smith, L.P. Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, vol. 2, *Final Report on the College of Wooster Excavations in Area IX, The Civic Complex, 1979-1985*, The College of Wooster 1989, p. 118, Pl. 62.9.

⁶⁹ Y. Tsafir, G. Foerster, 'Bet Shean Excavation Project - 1988/1989', *ESI 1989/1990*, vol. 9, no. 2, Jerusalem 1991, p.127, fig. 117.

⁷⁰ Y. Magen, 'The Monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim', in: *Ancient Churches Revealed*, p. 193.



16. Pottery lamps found in the *diaconicon*



17. Bronze objects found in the *diaconicon*

A parallel censer comes from Jericho;⁷¹ other examples of the type are known, among others, from Saqqara in Egypt and from Amman in Jordan.⁷² The third bronze find is a medium-sized bell with an iron heart (il. 17:B), similar to a bell from Beth Shean.⁷³

All these objects, temporarily stored in the *diaconicon*, undoubtedly played their own specific roles in liturgical ceremonies. The bell could have been used to call the faithful to the religious service and to emphasize with its sound important moments of the liturgy. In a similar way, the censer was indispensable in the liturgy where the burning of incense played a most important role. The censer could have been suspended somewhere in the church or swung during religious ceremonies.⁷⁴ The decanter was apparently used to store some liquids like wine or water, both of them necessary in celebrating the Eucharist.

Pottery and Glass Vessels

Two other categories of items should be briefly mentioned, namely pottery and glass vessels. In both cases the most spectacular finds come from the *diaconicon*, whose two rooms yielded no less than 104 pottery items⁷⁵ and some of the best preserved examples of glass vessels.

As to the pottery, some of the vessels like jar lids and terracotta lamps were unused objects, probably commissioned for the church. The pots, however, clearly contained offerings brought, according to the Syrian tradition, by the faithful to the church.⁷⁶ The variety of foodstuffs is reflected by different forms of the vessels: jars for wine, olive oil and cereals, many cooking pots and casseroles with lids for meals cooked on the basis of meat and vegetables. The offerings were so numerous that part of

⁷¹ *Cradle of Christianity*, p. 98; Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles*, fig. 135.

⁷² D. Bézaneh, *Catalogue général du Musée Copte du Caire. I. Objects en métal*, Cairo 2001, pp. 292–294, nos. 249–251.

⁷³ G. M. FitzGerald, *A Sixth Century Monastery at Beth Shan*, Philadelphia 1939, Pl. XXXVIII: 2.

⁷⁴ See for example, a representation on mosaic in the church of SS. Cosmas and Damian in Jerash (Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles*, Fig. 136; M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Fig. 507).

⁷⁵ Preliminary reports on pottery are published by J. Młynarczyk in yearly excavations reports from Hippos–Sussita (see n. 5).

⁷⁶ I. Peña, *Lieux de pèlerinage en Syrie*, SBF Collectio minor 38, Jerusalem 2000, p. 77.



18. Pottery vessels from the *diaconicon*

them had to be left outside the door, against the wall of the southern aisle.⁷⁷

During the excavations in the area of the NWC several hundred fragments of glass vessels were found. Owing to their very fragmentary state of preservation, it is difficult to identify all of them with certainty. Nevertheless, it seems that most of them are parts of open vessels such as lamps, drinking vessels (cups and goblets), dishes etc. Closed vessels are represented mostly by bottles and by some jars and flagons. In the context of our present discussion some of them deserve a short commentary.

Wineglasses/beakers

The vessels are characterized by flat bases, more or less concave in the center, and solid straight stems. The body shape can vary: in one case, it is rounded at the bottom with nearly vertical sides and out-turned rim (bell-shaped type) (ils. 19:7 and 20), in another the sides are straight and markedly flaring (conical-shaped type) (ils. 19:10 and 20). Such drinking vessels

⁷⁷ Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz, 'The North-West Church Complex (NWC)', in: Segal et al., *Hippos-Sussita. Second Season of Excavations*, p. 11.

were introduced in the 5th century and soon became widespread in the East for several centuries.

Large bottles

Two fragments (il. 19:1,2) belong apparently to one vessel, characterized by a concave base, a globular body with rounded shoulder, and a neck the lower half of which is cylindrical, while the upper half is funnel-shaped, flaring toward a simple rounded rim. Below the rim there are several horizontal threads. Such bottles were widespread throughout the Mediterranean area from the Roman period and continued into the Islamic period.

Small bottles

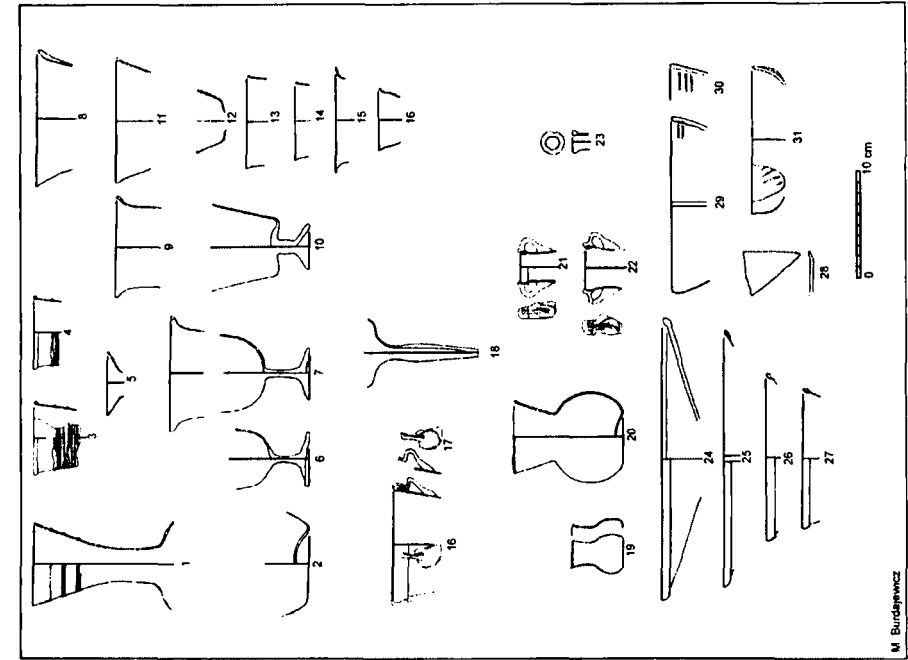
An intact small bottle was found *in situ* in one of the compartments of the reliquary from the northern apse. It has a flat base, globular body and cylindrical neck (il. 19 and 20:A). The bottle at the moment of discovery was filled with earth and chips of human (?) bones. A very similar bottle was found in a synagogue in Tell es-Sultan (Jericho).⁷⁸

Another interesting discovery was made in the easternmost part of the *diaconicon* room, where a few cooking pots were standing against the wall. One of them contained a small, almost intact glass bottle (il. 19:20 and 20:C) as well as three iron knives, probably for cutting grapes. The bottle is a larger version of the tiny bottle retrieved from the reliquary of the northern apse: it has the same flat base, globular body and cylindrical neck.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the reason why the bottle was deposited together with the knives in a ceramic pot remains unclear.

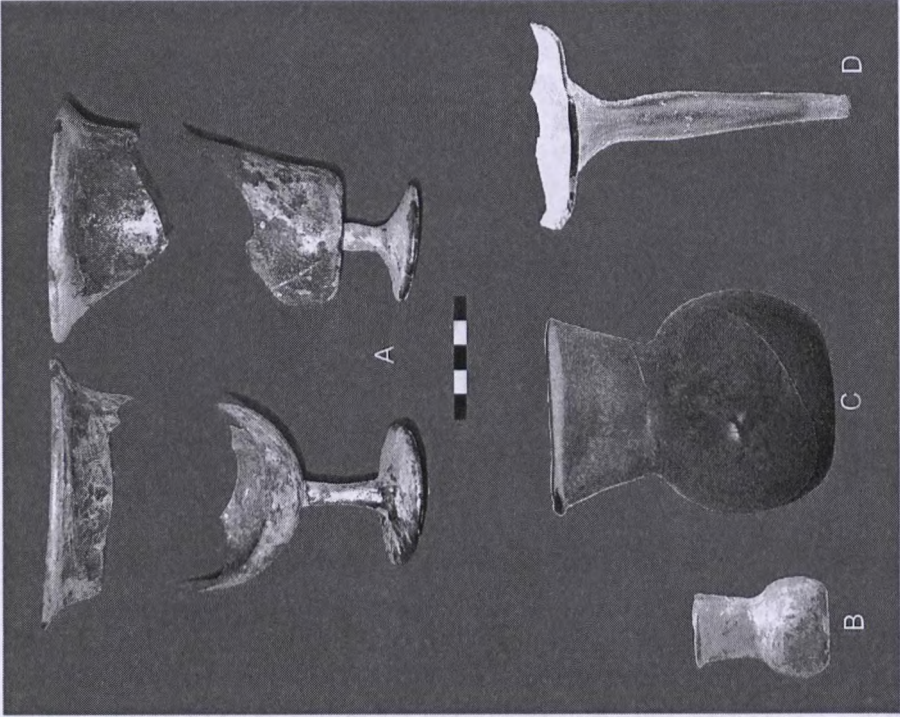
It is obvious that glass vessels of the types discussed were absolutely commonplace in the daily life of the period in question. However, the discovery context of the examples mentioned above, that is, the *diaconicon* of the church, indicates that they might have been used for sacred purposes, and that they constituted a part of the liturgical equipment of the church.

⁷⁸ D. Baramki, 'An Early Byzantine Synagogue near Tell es-Sultan, Jericho', *QDAP* VI, p. 76, Pl. XXI.

⁷⁹ Compare similar shape from Jerash: O. Dussart, *Le verre en Jordanie et en Syrie du Sud* [= *Bibliothèque Archéologique et Histoire*, vol. 152], Beyrouth 1998, Pl. 34:2.



19. Glass finds from the North-West Church



20. Glass finds from the North West Church

The fact that they were grouped together in one place of the *diaconicon* suggests that this was the permanent place of their storage when they were not in use in religious ceremonies. The exact role they played in the liturgy still remains to be explained.

Summary

The ongoing exploration of the North-West Church has already proved to be crucial for the better understanding of Christian life in eastern Galilee/south-western Golan on the eve of the Islamic conquest and during Umayyad rule. The six seasons of excavations (2000–2005) have yielded many finds which contribute significantly to our knowledge of the church architecture, art and liturgy in Palestine during the Byzantine-Umayyad periods. The furniture of the church such as the marble screens and posts of the lateral chancels, the three or four reliquaries, the altar table, bronze lighting devices and many other objects of metal, glass and pottery, were found *in situ* in sealed destruction deposits of A.D. 749. The detailed analysis of their spatial distribution plays a crucial role in identifying the function of particular rooms as well as in reconstructing the characteristics of worship performed in the church in the final years of its existence.