

Crosses in the Mosaic Floors of Churches in Provincia Arabia and Nearby Territories, Against the Background of the Edict of Theodosius II

II. Theodosius'un Fermanının Arka Planına Karşı Arabistan Eyaleti ve Yakın Bölgelerdeki Kiliselerin Mozaik Tabanlarında Görülen Haçlar

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Abstract

Between the 4th and 8th centuries A.D., many churches were founded in Provincia Arabia and neighbouring territories (today's Transjordan). Most of the churches were paved with mosaics. The mosaics floors are decorated with geometric, vegetal and figurative carpets with a rich repertoire of scenes of daily life, sometimes accompanied by personifications. The floors were also decorated with symbolic heraldic arrangements and symbolic motifs, among them crosses. This research focus on a description of the different types of cross found in Byzantine churches in Transjordan, their position on the mosaic floors and in the church space, and the use of parallel motifs with equivalent significance as concealed crosses. The repertoire of crosses is rich, and crosses have been found of the equal-armed Greek cross type, the Latin cross, the Maltese cross, or a geometric interlace in the form of a Greek cross. There are also crosses of the crux clipeata, crux gemmata and crux decussate type. In some places the letters ΑΩ are shown between the arms of the cross, or suspended from the vertical arm. In other places the cross is shown on a graduated mound symbolizing the hill of Golgotha. The crosses in mosaic floors decorate the vestibules of church complexes, churches, chapels attached to churches, crypts, martyrion chapels, funerary chapels, and baptisteries. They are not hidden, and are not limited to a specific part of the church or chapel building; on the contrary, the crosses are open to view and appear in the apse, the bema, the sacristy, halls, panels between columns, the narthex, vestibules and passageways or entrances between spaces. The appearance of crosses on mosaic floors in churches is seemingly surprising, because it contravenes the edict issued in A.D. 427 by the Emperor Theodosius II. But this edict had scant influence on the mosaics of our region, and the archaeological finds testify to the existence of crosses carved in stone or incorporated in the mosaic floors of the churches in Transjordan and in the adjacent territories, despite the risk of desecration, due to the position of crosses along the path of entry into the church and the traffic route inside the church, where people might walk and step on them. The archaeological evidence testifies to the gap between the spirit of the edict and reality on the ground, and contributes to an understanding of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Cross, Letters alpha and omega, Hill of Golgotha, Edict of Theodosius II, Provincia Arabia.

Öz

İ.S. 4. ve 8. yüzyıllar arasında, Arabistan eyaleti ve komşu ülkelerde (bugünkü Transjordan) bir çok kilise kurulmuştur. Kiliselerin çoğu mozaiklerle döşenmiştir. Mozaik tabanlar, geometrik, bitkisel ve figüratif halı desenleri gibi günlük hayattan alınmış sahnelerle zengin bir repertuvara sahiptir. Bu desenlerin bazıları da kişileştirme şeklinde karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Mozaik tabanlar aynı zamanda sembolik hanedanlıkla ilgili

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düzenlemeler ve sembolik motiflerle süslenmiştir. Bunlar arasında haçlarda yer almaktadır. Bu çalışma, Transürdüin Bizans kiliselerinde bulunmuş farklı haç tiplerinin tanımı, bunların mozaik tabanlardaki ve kiliselerdeki konumu ve gizli haçlar olarak eşdeğer öneme sahip paralel motiflerin kullanımı üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Haç motifi repertuarı zengindir. Bu haçlar, eşit kollu Yunan haç tipi, Latin haçı, Malta haçı ya da geometrik geçişli Yunan haçı şeklinde bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, *crux clipeata*, *crux gemmata* ve *crux decussate* tipinde haçlar bulunmaktadır. Bazı yerlerde $\Lambda\Omega$ harfleri haçların kolları arasında gösterilmiştir ve dikey koldan askıya alınmıştır. Bazı yerlerde haç, yükselen bir tepe üzerinde, Golgotha Tepesini simgeler şekilde gösterilmiştir. Mozaik tabanlardaki haçlar, kilise komplekslerinin ön giriş odasında, kiliselerde, kiliselere eklenmiş şapelde, kriptalarda, martyrium şapellerde, mezar şapellerde ve vaftizhanelerde görülmektedir. Bunlar gizli değildir ve kilise ya da şapel binasının belirli bir kısmıyla sınırlı değildir. Aksine, haçlar görünürdür ve apsiste, bemada, kilise eşyalarının saklandığı odada, koridorlarda, sütunlar arasındaki koridorlarda, nartekste, ön odalarda ve mekanlar arasındaki geçiş ya da girişlerde görülmektedir. Kiliselerdeki mozaik tabanlar üzerinde haçların görünmesi oldukça şaşırtıcıdır. Çünkü, İmparator II. Theodosius tarafından İ.S. 427'de çıkarılan fermana aykırıdır. Ancak bu ferman, bölgemizdeki mozaikler üzerinde yetersiz bir etki yapmıştır. Arkeolojik buluntular, Transürdüin ve komşu topraklarda taşlara oyulmuş ya da kiliselerin mozaik tabanlarında yer alan haçların varlığını, kiliselerin girişindeki ve insanların yürüyüp adım attıkları ve üstüne bastıkları kilisenin içindeki haçların konumu nedeniyle, saygısızlık riskine rağmen, kanıtlamaktadır. Arkeolojik kanıtlar, fermanın ruhu ve gerçeklik temeli arasındaki boşluğu kanıtlamaktadır ve olayın anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Haç, Alfa ve Omega Harfleri, Golgotha Tepesi, II. Theodosius Fermanı, Arap Eyaleti.

Introduction

Between the 4th and 8th centuries A.D., many churches were founded in Provincia Arabia and neighbouring territories in Provincia Palaestina Prima, Secunda and Tertia (today's Transjordan). This construction reached a peak in the 6th century A.D., and continued into the Umayyad and Early Abbasid periods.

253 religious buildings have been excavated in Transjordan, among them 181 churches, 71 chapels and one synagogue. This impressive number attests to the abundance of settlements in the Byzantine and Muslim periods (Piccirillo 1981a; 1986; Michel 2001; Habas 2005).

Most of the churches were paved with mosaics, a few with *opus sectile*, marble, stone and plaster. The mosaics floors were decorated with geometric, vegetal and figurative carpets. Archaeological excavations have uncovered a rich repertoire of geometric and vegetal nets, elaborate interlacing, medallions, pseudo-embellata and populated vine/acanthus scrolls showing daily life and agricultural activities. Sometimes scenes of daily life were introduced within a framework of time and place, accompanied by personifications of the earth, sea, abyss, rivers, seasons and months.

The genre depictions also include symbolic heraldic arrangements of pairs of animals separated by an object or a vegetal motif, and symbolic motifs such as the eagle, phoenix, cross, or four rivers of the Garden of Eden.

This article focuses on a description of the different types of cross found in Byzantine churches in Transjordan, their position on the mosaic floors and in the church space, the use of parallel motifs with equivalent significance as concealed crosses, and depictions of crosses in architectural sculpture and liturgical furniture. The appearance of the crosses will be discussed against the background of the prohibition against depicting crosses on floors in the edict issued in A.D. 427 by Emperor Theodosius II, and the contribution of the crosses to an understanding of the iconographic meanings underlying the compositions decorating the mosaic floors¹.

¹ My deepest gratitude for pictures and cooperation to the late Father Prof. Michele Piccirillo (SBF).



Figure 1
The Church of Saint John the Baptist
(A.D. 639) at Khirbat al-Samra
(after: Piccirillo 1993a: figs. 592, 596)

The appearance of crosses in mosaic floors and their iconographic significance

Among the depictions of towns and churches in mosaic floors in Transjordan, we find towns encircled by a wall, and within the town, churches topped with crosses. One example is the depiction of two towns in the mosaic of the Church of Saint John the Baptist (A.D. 639) at Khirbat al-Samra. On the floor, which was destroyed by iconoclasts, the towns remain undamaged and are shown as encircled by walls and towers, with arched entrance gates between two towers. Within the walls are buildings with arched windows, and tiled pediment roofs. Among the buildings are depictions of churches with domed roofs carried on columns. The domes are tiled and topped with crosses (Fig. 1) (Humbert 1982: 499-500, Photo 1; Piccirillo 1993a: 304 figs. 592, 595-596, 598-599). These depictions belong to a repertoire that is common in mosaic floor and wall art in the Byzantine period, such as the depiction of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the basilicas, the centralized churches and the cross-shaped church found in the mosaic pavement of the Church of the Holy Martyrs at Tayibat al-Imam (A.D. 447) near Hama in Syria (Zaqzuq – Piccirillo 1999: 445, 447, 456-460 figs. 10, 36a-b, 42-43, 45, 47, 49-51 plan 1 pls. I, III-V, XIII). In the Church of the Lions (A.D. 574 or 578) at Umm al-Rasas there is a depiction of the city of *Kastron Mefaa*, identified by the inscription ΚΑΣΤΡΟΝ ΜΕΦΑΑ (Fig. 2). Around the city is a wall with towers and spires, and there is a broad, arched gate with stairs leading up to it. In this part of the city it is possible to identify two churches with tiled pediment roofs. The lower part shows a large courtyard surrounded by buildings and a wall with towers, and in the centre of the courtyard, a tall column. In this part of the city we see four churches, all of them having tiled pediment roofs. The column in the centre of the courtyard stands on a plinth with three steps, and is crowned by a capital bearing a large cross. The artist has depicted the churches both within and outside the fortified walls, and these were indeed discovered in archaeological excavations (Piccirillo 1992: 218 fotos 41, 51; 1993a: 236 figs. 337, 376; Duval 1994: 166 tav. II). These depictions, although formulaic, allow us to reconstruct the urban landscape.



Figure 2
The Church of the Lions
(A.D. 574 or 578) at Umm al-Rasas
(after: Piccirillo 1993a: fig. 337)

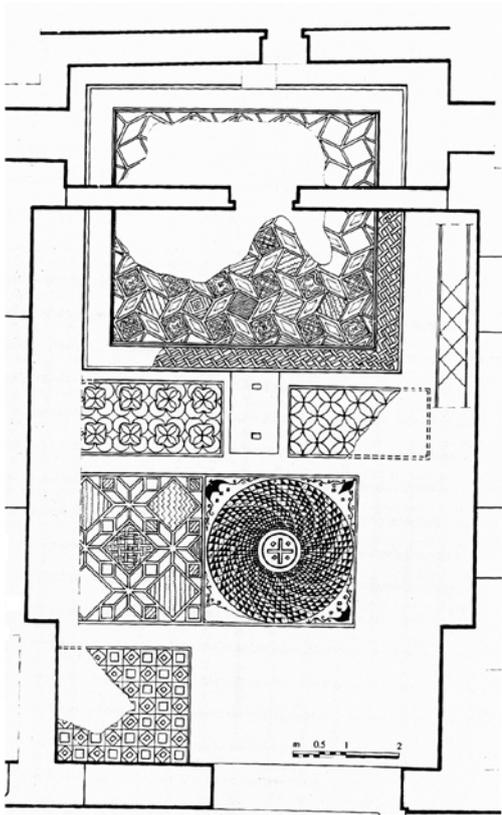


Figure 3
The 'Glass Court' (second half of the 4th century A.D.) in the Cathedral complex at Gerasa (after: Bieble 1938: pl. LVIII:b; Piccirillo 1993a: fig. 526)

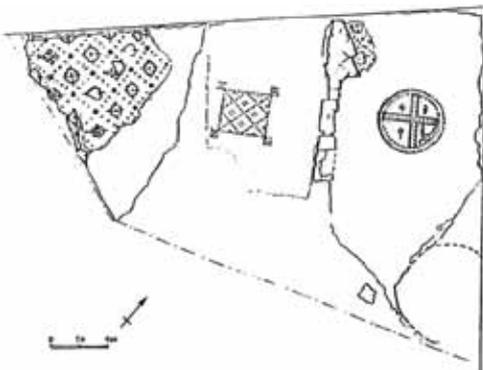


Figure 4
Private house in Tell Ma'in (after: Piccirillo and Acconci 1997: fig. 1; photo Lihi Habas)

Exposure of the mosaic floors in churches shows that crosses also adorned the inside of both secular and religious buildings. In a number of buildings, depictions of crosses have been found in the mosaic floors of the vestibule and near the entrances. In the 'Glass Court' (second half of the 4th century A.D.) in the Cathedral complex at Gerasa, a Greek cross is depicted within a circle/shield of harmony, with four diamonds between its arms (Fig. 3). The courtyard later served as the entrance to the complex. In the new plan, the cross is located on the entrance axis and at the front of the stairs leading to the portico of the Cathedral (Crowfoot 1931: 8-10 plan I; Biebel 1938: 309-312 pl. LVIII:a-b; Piccirillo 1993a: 284 fig. 526). A cross within a clipeus (*crux clipeata*) accompanied by the letters AΩ is mentioned close to the entrance in the mosaic floor uncovered in Tell Ma'in, apparently belonging to a private home (Fig. 4) (Piccirillo – Acconci 1997: 488-489 figs. 1-2).

The combination of the cross and the letters AΩ is very common in Christian art. The letters *alpha* and *omega* are an accepted abbreviation of ἄλφα (καί)

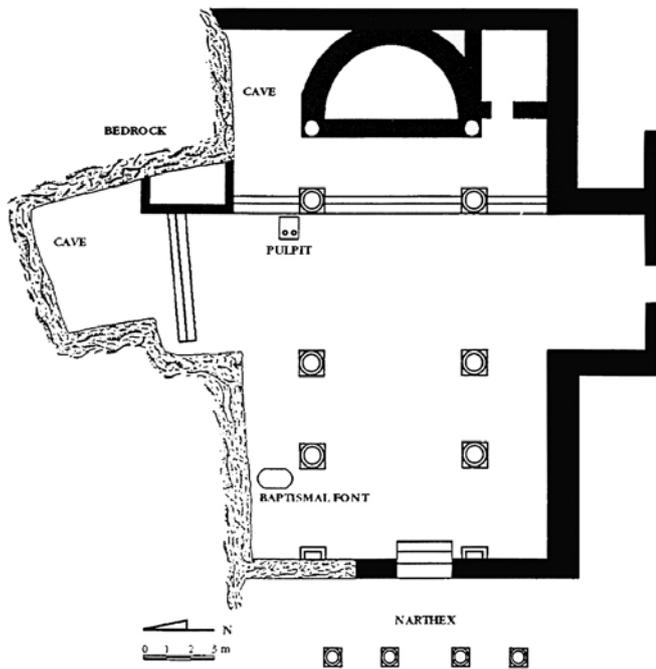


Figure 5
The Church of Saint George (late 6th century A.D.) at Darat al-Funun
(after: Bikai et al. 1994: fig. 3)

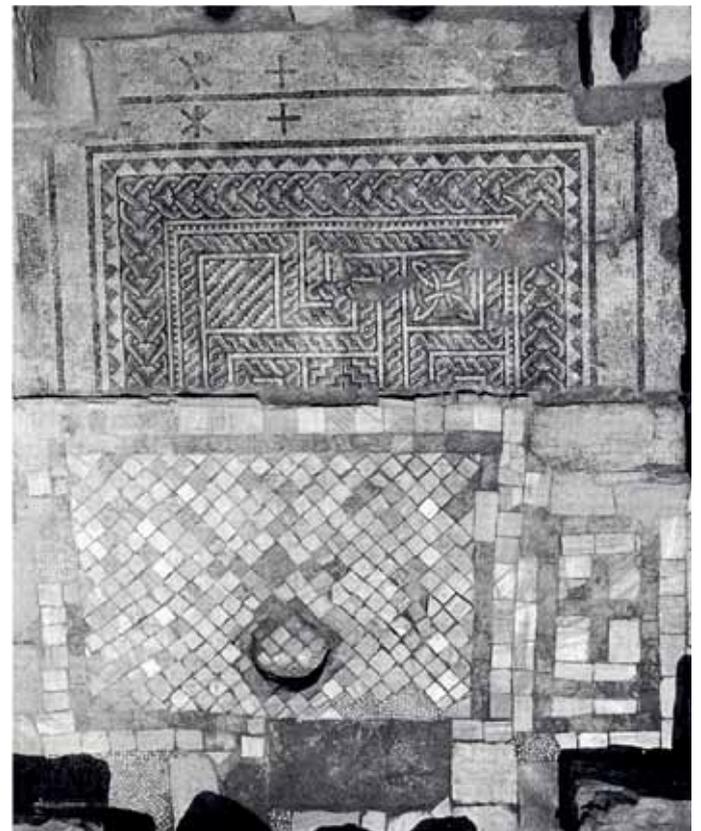
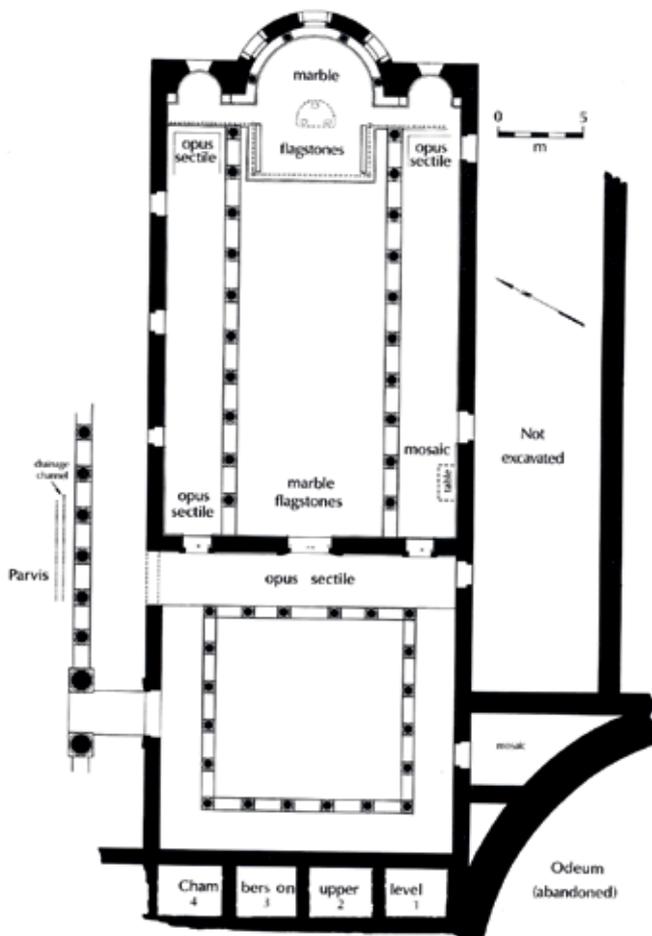


Figure 6
The Cathedral (5th-6th century A.D.) at Pella
(after: Smith and Day 1989: fig. 25 pl. 18:b)

ῶ(μέγα) (Avi-Yonah 1940: 53), referring to the words of Jesus: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelations 1: 8)².

The crosses are found in different areas of the church, especially in passages between one area and another. In the Church of Saint George (late 6th century A.D.) at Darat al-Funun, located in the Philadelphia-Amman area, the Greek cross incorporated in the floor of the northern aisle is positioned close to a cave adjacent to the church (Fig. 5) (Bikai et al. 1994: 404 figs. 1, 3). Crosses are frequently located at the eastern end of the halls (the nave and the aisles), and at the front of the liturgical spaces (bema and sacristies): in the chapel uncovered at Qalat al-Rabad (‘Ajlun Castle) there is a Maltese cross at the eastern end of the chapel hall and at the front of the entrance to the bema (Piccirillo – al-Qudah 2003: 315-316 figs. 16-17, 19). A cross engraved in the stone floor embellished the eastern end of the nave in the church of Shihan (Qusus – Schick 1994: 638). A Greek cross is depicted in the *opus sectile* floor at the eastern end of the southern aisle in the Cathedral (5th-6th century A.D.) at Pella, and two pairs of crosses and monograms are engraved in the threshold of the entrance to the south sacristy (Fig. 6) (Smith 1983: 369 pl. LXXIX: 1; Smith – Day 1989: 40-41 figs. 10, 25 pl. 18b; Piccirillo 1993a: 330 figs. 698, 706). The *chi-rho* monogram represents the Χριστός with the meaning of Jesus Christ (Avi-Yonah 1940: 112).

In the nave of Chapel B at Qam, the crosses appear in the complex composition enclosed in a geometric net of octagons, squares, diamonds and triangles, imitating the Roman *opus sectile* floors (Fig. 7). At the centre of the floor are two octagons. The eastern octagon, close to the bema and apse, is populated by the figure of a man wearing a cloak, his feet peeking out beneath the cloak. The rest of his body has been destroyed by iconoclasts, and repaired, and the outline of the figure has been preserved. To the right of the figure is an x-shaped cross (*crux decussate*) and candelabrum. Another identical cross is depicted to the left of the figure. Above the figure is an inscription in Christo-Palestinian Aramaic script. Although part of the inscription was damaged due to the mutilation of the figure, it can easily be read: “In memory of Aria the priest.” (Ta’ani 1997: 14-18 figs. 2, 7-8). It is therefore possible that the mutilated figure is the priest Aria, and that the chapel was built in his memory. Puech translated the inscription as: “Addai [Zenon] the priest.” and claimed that a bishop of this name was known in Bostra and was active between the years A.D. 539-553 (Puech 2003: 323-324 fig. 5). The other figurative motifs in the chapel have been mutilated. Since the vessels, including the candelabrum and the crosses, were not damaged it is reasonable to assume that the mutilators were Christian, and they were the ones who immediately repaired the floor with the original tesserae, laid in a random fashion.

Crosses are also depicted in liturgical spaces. A cross in a circle is incorporated in an *opus sectile* floor in the bema of the basilica in Umm al-‘Amad (Area DD) (5th-6th century A.D.) at Abila (Piccirillo 1993a: 332; Mare 1996: 264-265; 1999: 454-455). A similar composition was discovered in the Baptistery of the Complex of Saint John the Baptist at Gerasa (Fig. 8). The chapel area originally served as the north sacristy of the Church of Saint John the Baptist (A.D. 531), and included an apse and chancel screen arrangement. In the second stage, the room became a shared baptistery chapel for the Church of Saint John the Baptist and the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damianus (A.D. 533). Built into the apse is a circular baptismal font, with two flights of steps, and the chancel screen was

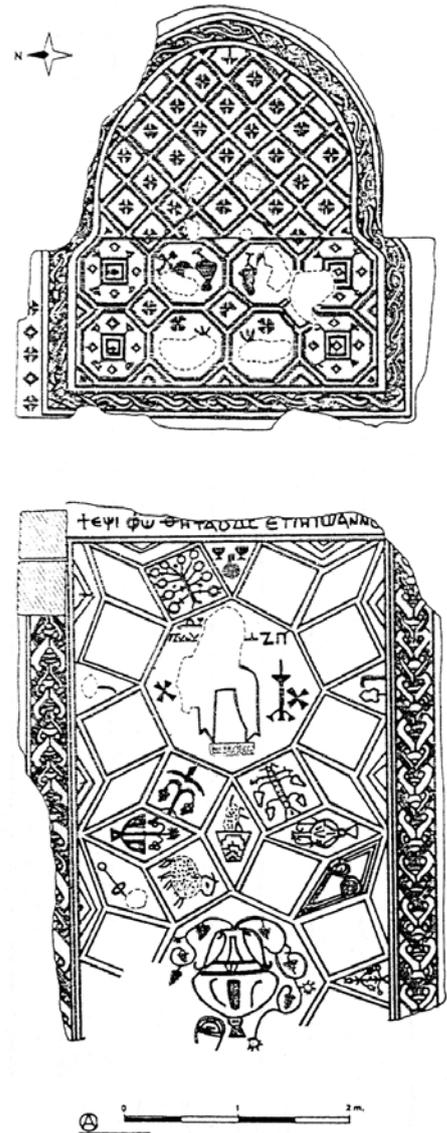


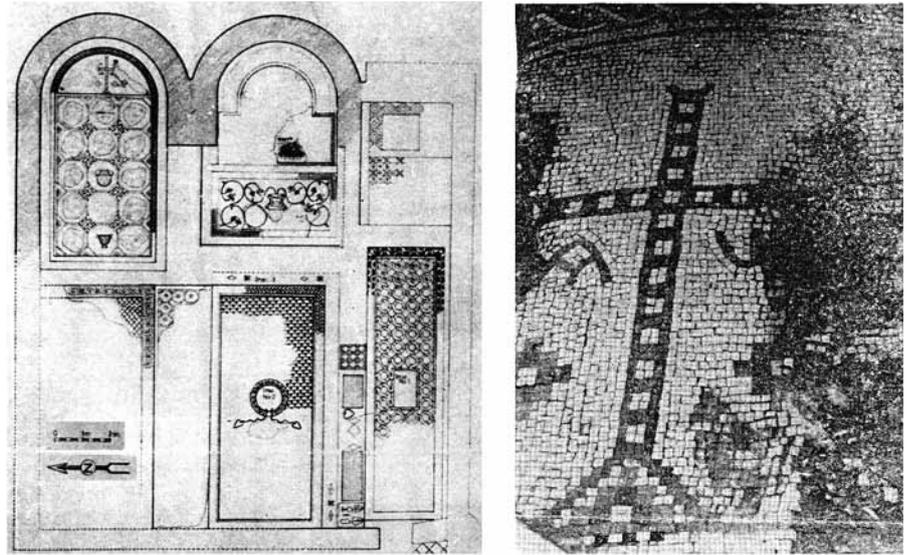
Figure 7
Chapel B at Qam
(after: Ta’ani 1997: fig. 2)



Figure 8
The Baptistery of the Complex of Saint
John the Baptist at Gerasa (A.D. 533)
(after: Crowfoot 1938: pl. XLVIII: a)

² New Testament, Authorized King James Version; <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>

Figure 9
The church in Hufa al-Wastiyah
(6th-7th century A.D.)
(after: Abu Dalu 1994: figs. 5, 11)



cancelled. An *opus sectile* floor embellishes the baptistery chapel hall, and at the front of the apse step and baptismal font is a large Greek cross inside a medallion. The arms of the cross are decorated with a zigzag pattern, and there are four triangles between them (Crowfoot 1931: 23 plan 4; 1938: 244 plan XXXVII pl. XLVIII: a).

In the liturgical spaces, compositions have been found that include crosses incorporated in a complex layout with deep symbolic meaning, appropriate to the liturgical space. In the centre of the northern apse lunette of the church in Hufa al-Wastiyah (6th-7th century A.D.), a Latin cross is depicted standing on a graduated plinth. The arms of the cross are decorated with white squares, imitating a cross decorated with precious stones (*crux gemmata*). Underneath the horizontal arm are the letters ΑΩ, and on either side of the cross are animals in heraldic pose. Despite the iconoclastic destruction, the animals can easily be identified as a pair of peacocks (Fig. 9) (Abu Dalu 1994: 5-19 figs. 5, 11).

This layout has deep symbolic significance. Churches in Transjordan have depictions in which a tree is shown instead of the cross, with animals in heraldic pose on either side. The composition is symmetrical, on a white background, without any landscape details. Among the many mosaics, I will mention the pair of sheep facing a pomegranate tree on the bema and the front of the altar table in the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius (A.D. 557) at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat (Piccirillo 1993a: 164-165 figs. 214-215; 1998b: 346 figs. 190-191); and the pair of goats moving towards a palm tree in the south sacristy of the Church of Saint George (A.D. 535/6) at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, with a pair of doves and a bilingual inscription with funerary meaning: the Greek inscription is *Caωλα*. The Christo-Palestinian Aramaic inscription is not clear. Saller interpreted 'In Peace', while Milik read 'Give rest and salvation' (Saller – Bagatti 1949: 171-172 fig. 8 pl. 30:1; Milik 1960: 159-160; Piccirillo 1993a: 178 figs. 244, 250; 1998b: 327-328 figs. 116, 136); There are also pairs of animals (deer, gazelles, lion and zebu) to the sides of an upward-climbing vine appearing on the front of the baptismal font in the hall of the Lower Baptistery Chapel (first decade of the 6th century A.D.) in the Cathedral complex at Madaba (Piccirillo 1981b: 313-315 fotos 47, 49-51; 1989: 32-33 figs. 32-33; 1993a: 119 figs. 121-123).

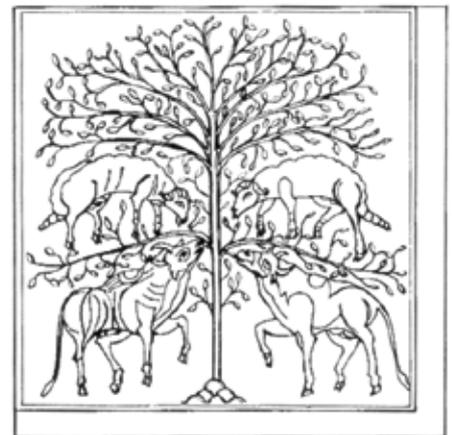


Figure 10
The house of Yusef Saleh
'Almat at Madaba
(after: Piccirillo 1989:
fig. on p. 139; photo Lihi Habas)

The connection between the motif of the tree and that of the cross was explained by the Church Fathers, who claimed that the 'tree of life' and all trees mentioned in the Old Testament were seen as a prototype of the cross³. According to Cyril of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 315-386), the cross is the tree of life⁴, and in fact, the tree and the cross represent Christ and the Christian faith. The animals were understood as allegorical creatures forming a symbolic composition. The sheep, rams and peacocks, facing the altar or placed in front of it, represent the Christian believers taking part in the Eucharist and attaining salvation, who are rewarded with eternal life when they embrace Christianity; this principle is especially reflected by the peacocks and lions, which were symbols of resurrection and eternal life in antiquity. The allegorical use of animals was already a feature of classical literature and art. The Church Fathers used the pagan and Jewish myths, but imbued them with a new Christian significance to explain and disseminate abstract symbolic ideas. Art, which offered a visual translation of religious ideas, used existing and familiar figures, metaphors and formulae.

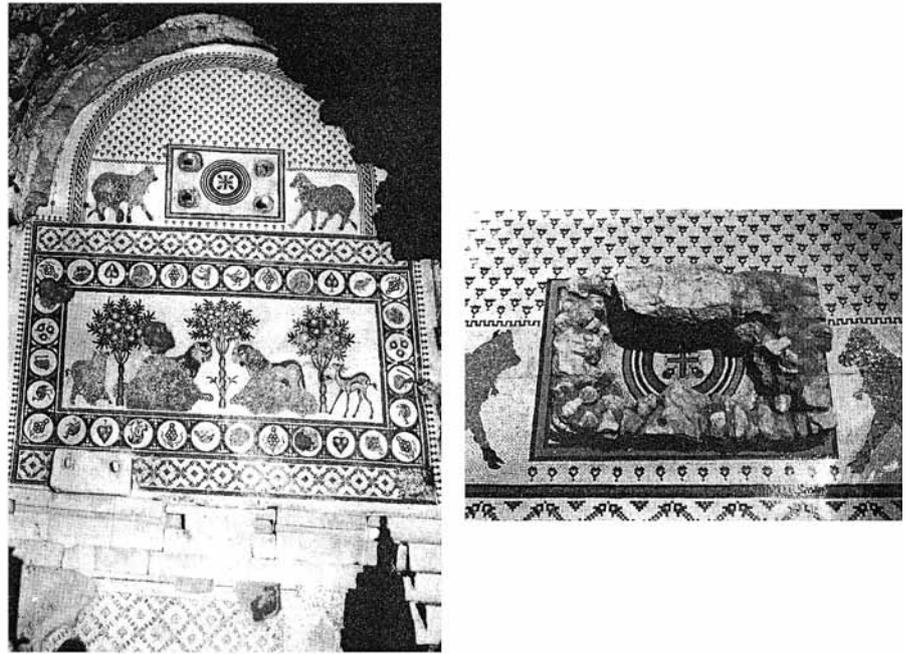
However, the depiction most similar to the cross appearing in the church in Hufa al-Wastiyah, which also helps us to understand it, is the depiction in the mosaic floor known as 'the mosaic of the tree', discovered in the house of Yusef Saleh 'Almat at Madaba (Fig. 10). The composition is symmetrical and vertical. In the centre is a tree, not planted in the ground but 'growing' from six mounds arranged as a triangle, reminiscent of the customary depictions of the hill of Golgotha. Two bulls are shown on either side of the tree trunk, and two gazelles by the leaves of the tree (Saller – Bagatti 1949: 236, 238-240 pl. 39:2; Bagatti 1957: 140 fig. 1; Piccirillo 1989: 139-140 figs. 139; 1993a: 132 figs. 160-161)⁵. From this we learn that the graduated base on which the cross in the church in Hufa al-Wastiyah stands is in fact a graphic representation of the hill of Golgotha. The cross and the letters ΑΩ represent Christ, and the peacocks, like the other animals shown in the mosaic pavements, represent the believers worshipping Jesus and his faith. The appearance of the peacocks emphasizes the aspect of salvation and redemption that Jesus brings to his followers, because the peacock, as mentioned, is a symbol of resurrection in pagan culture. Aristotle and Pliny attributed to the peacock the ability to preserve its body and not to

³ *Epistle of Barnabas* XIII.1; Ignatius, *Epist.* Tral. XI. 2; Justin. *Dial.* 138; *P.G.* VI, cols. 680, 793; Origenes, *Cont. Celsus* VI; *P.G.* XI col. 1348; Tzaferis 1971: 29.

⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* XIII; *P.G.* XXXIII col. 797.

⁵ The floor apparently belonged to a chapel that has not been completely preserved, and therefore the exact location of the panel in the building is unclear.

Figure 11
The Church of the Lions
(A.D. 574 or 578) at Umm al-Rasas
(after: Piccirillo 1992: fotos 13, 31)

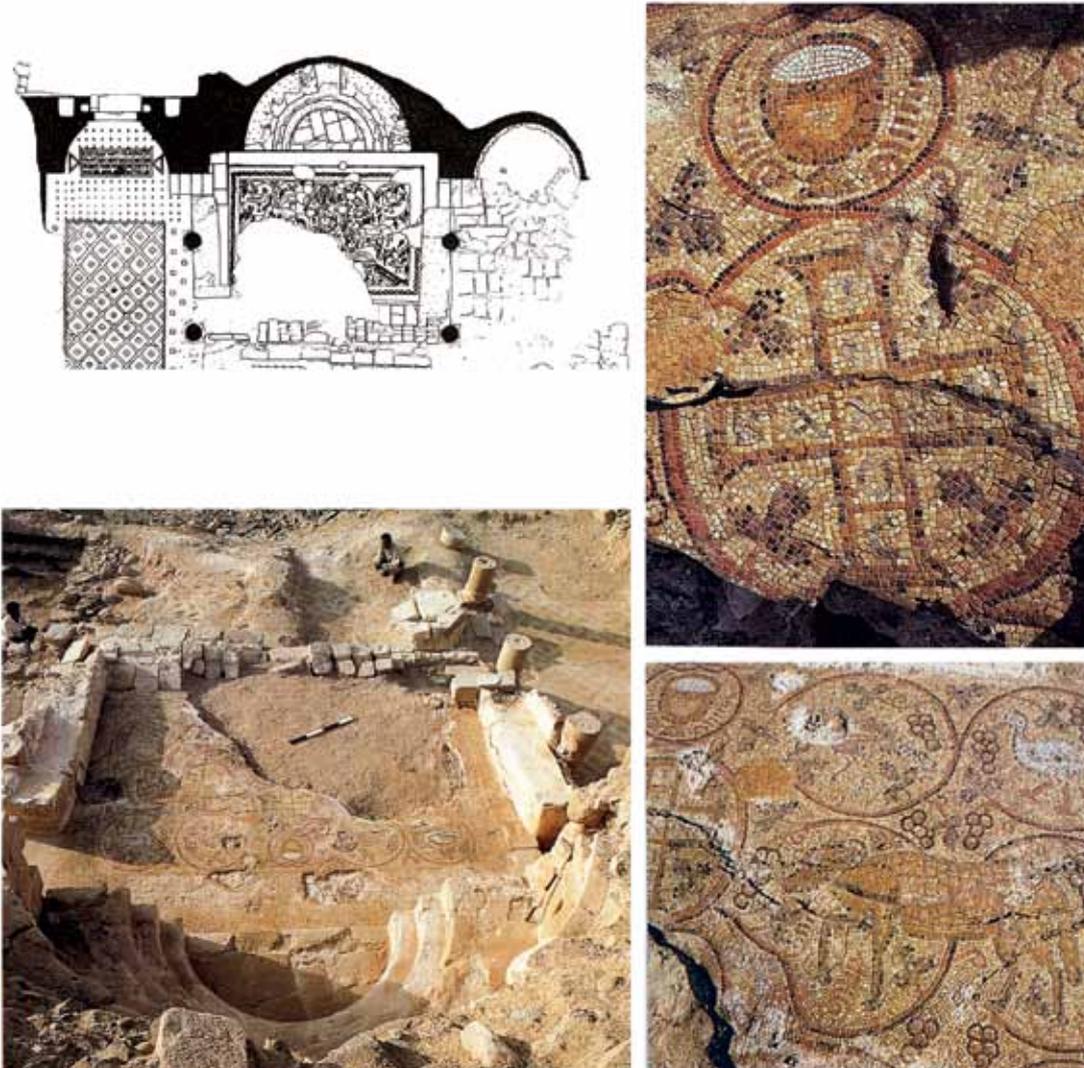


perish, and the peacock, which loses its beautiful tail feathers before the winter, grows them again in the spring and thus becomes a symbol of the resurrection of the dead (Leclercq 1937: 1075-1076; Blanchard-Lemée 1996: 255)⁶. In Imperial Roman iconography, peacocks accompany the souls of the Roman empresses to heaven in scenes of Imperial *apotheosis* (Charbonneau-Lassay 1974: 623; Dunbabin 1978: 166; Testini 1985: 1125). As mentioned, the pagan concept of the peacock as immortal and as symbolising resurrection and eternity passed into Christianity, and this symbolism was adopted in Christian iconography, so that in the depiction of the mosaic of the church in Hufa al-Wastiyah, the pairs of peacocks symbolize the yearning of the Christian believers for redemption and eternal life (Habas 2005: I: 443-447; 2014: 149).

Another complex depiction with deep symbolic significance appears in the apse of the Church of the Lions (A.D. 574 or 578) at Umm al-Rasas (Fig. 11). In the defined panel under the alter table (*sacra mensa*) is a Greek cross set in a clipeus (*crux clipeata*) designed in concentric circles. Between its arms are buds, and the panel is accompanied by a pair of sheep or bulls (Piccirillo 1992: Pianta I, Fotos 13, 31; 1993a: fig. 376). Here, the cross emphasizes the Eucharist ritual that takes place in the apse, the sacrifice of Christ, and the redemption granted to his followers, who are shown as sheep and who take part in the ritual.

The iconographic analysis is completed by the mosaic situated in the bema of the Church of Saint Lot (A.D. 606; 691) at Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata (Fig. 12), in the centre of which lies the key to understanding the entire composition. Despite the fact that the lower left quadrant of the rectangular panel has not survived, a symmetrical composition can be reconstructed. In the centre was an object that has not survived, probably an amphora or kantharos. Alongside the vessel, in heraldic array, was a pair of peacocks (of which the one on the right has survived). Developing out of the missing vessel are populated vine scrolls. In the central scroll and above the missing vessel is a medallion populated by a Greek cross

⁶ Aristot.hist.an. X, 7; Plin.nat. X, XXII, 43-44.



(*crux clipeata*). Written in the vertical arm of the cross are the letters ΤΕΛΟΣ, and in the horizontal arm ΚΑΛΟΝ, meaning ‘a good end’ (*telos kalon*). Above the cross, a small scroll containing a goblet is depicted. The goblet is positioned between the columns that carry the altar table. Above the peacocks are two sheep, on either side of the cross and facing towards it, with one foreleg slightly raised towards the cross (Politis 1991: 517 fig. 3; 1992: 281-283 fig. 2 pl. III: 3; 1999: 226 pl. IX; Piccirillo 1993a: 336 figs. 723, 725-726). The iconographic meaning of the panel is therefore clear: the four recesses marking the exact position of the altar help us to understand the scheme of the bema mosaic. The composition emphasizes the central vertical row of vine scrolls, and the clipeus containing the cross with the inscription. Above it is the goblet, positioned beneath the altar. The other prominent elements are the peacocks, on either side of the vessel, and the sheep alongside the cross. The heraldic, symmetrical and hierarchic arrangement enhances certain elements (the clipeus and the cross, the sheep and the peacocks) relative to other motifs, providing the emphasis. All these express the iconographic concept underlying the composition. The mosaic floor thus recreates the liturgy performed in the area of the bema, and the Eucharist ceremony. It emphasizes the cross as Christ, the goblet of wine as Christ’s sacrifice, the sheep and peacocks as the Christian believers worshipping the cross, and, as mentioned, the peacocks are also a symbol of the resurrection and eternal life

Figure 12
The Church of Saint Lot
(A.D. 606; 691) at Dayr ‘Ayn ‘Abata
(after: Politis 1991: fig. 3; 1999: pl. IX;
Piccirillo 1993a: figs. 723, 725)

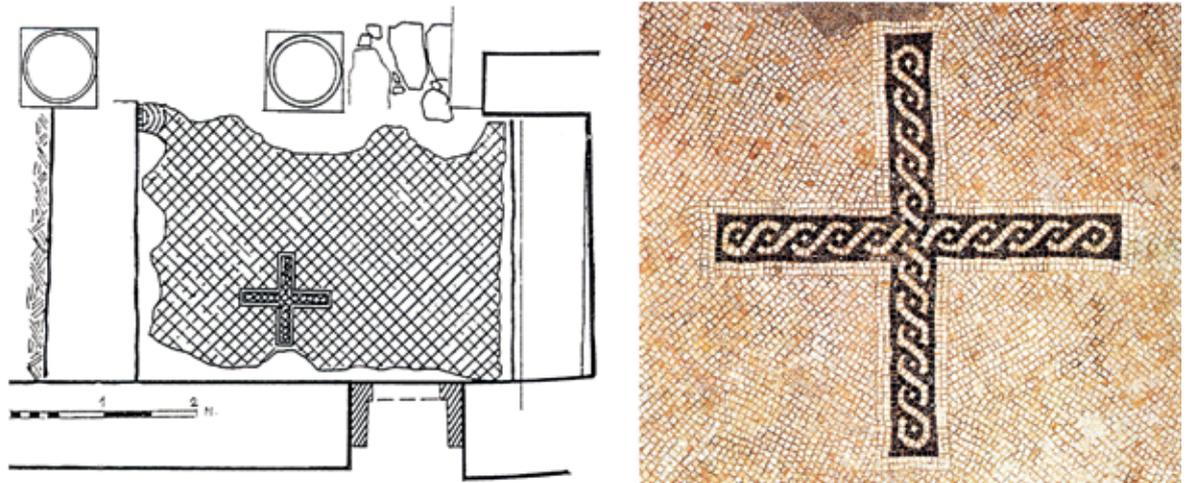


Figure 13
The funerary chapel (4th or beginning of the 5th century A.D.) in the Memorial of Moses complex at Mount Nebo (after: Piccirillo 1993a: fig. 175; Alliata – Bianchi 1998: fig. 22)

granted to Christian believers. The inscription on the arms of the cross sums up the believers' aspiration to a good end (Habas 2005: I: 368).

Crosses also appear in a funerary context, and they symbolize the deliverance granted to mankind by Christ's death (Roussin 1985: 65-66). A Greek cross was uncovered in the funerary chapel (4th or beginning of the 5th century A.D.) in the Memorial of Moses complex at Mount Nebo (Fig. 13) (Piccirillo 1993a: 144 fig. 175; 1998b: 267-272 fig. 5; Alliata – Bianchi 1998: 159 fig. 22). The arms of the cross are decorated with a rope and dots pattern, which may hint at a *crux gemmata* type⁷. Greek crosses are also found in the crypt (first half of the 4th century A.D.) located under the Upper Church at Gadara (Umm Qays). The crypt was dedicated to an important local saint, possibly Deacon Zachaeus, a native of the city Gadara, who was executed during Emperor Diocletian's persecution (A.D. 303) and became a martyr. A tomb can be seen in the apse of the crypt, which was seen as a sacred place, making it a site for pilgrimage. The remaining space in the crypt was used for the tombs of important residents of Gadara who wanted to be buried near the saint. One of the tombs was decorated in the 6th century with a mosaic panel containing an inscription giving the names of the deceased, Valentinianus, Eustathia and Protogenia, accompanied by four accentuated Greek crosses (Weber 1987: 531 pl. XCV; 1998: 445-446; Piccirillo 1993a: 328 fig. 689; al-Daire 2001: 553). In the funerary chapel at Jabal al-Akhdar located south of Jabal Amman, at the eastern end of the bema, the pattern is a flowery star, and in its centre an x-shaped cross. On the western side and in the front of the altar are two deer, facing each other (Piccirillo 1993a: 269 fig. 495).

To conclude this section of the discussion, I should mention the crosses decorating round shields held by hunters or soldiers in the hunting scenes appearing in mosaics in the Church of the Holy Martyrs (the Church of al-Khadir) (second half – late 6th century A.D.) at Madaba (Lux 1967: 171-172 taf. 30:c; Piccirillo 1993a: 129 fig. 143) and the Church of the Deacon Thomas (first half of the 6th century A.D.) in 'Uyun Musa Valley (Piccirillo 1988: 204 pl. XL: 2; 1990: foto 47; 1998b: 341 fig. 185), revealing the Christian identity of the hunters/soldiers. In the same way we can identify the iconoclasts in the Upper

⁷ It is possible that this floor with the cross belonged to a room of ritual significance, seen by Egeria during her visit. In the 6th century changes were made to the southern funerary chapel and the floor was embellished with a new mosaic. *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*, 12; trans. (Wilkinson 1981: 106-108).



Figure 14
The Upper Church of Kaianus
(second half of the 6th century
A.D.) at ‘Uyun Musa Valley
(after: Piccirillo 1993a: fig. 280;
photo Lihi Habas)

Church (first decades of the 6th century A.D.) at Massue by the immediate restoration process carried out on the damaged mosaic floors in the 8th century A.D., in which the mutilated figures in the nave were replaced by images of a Christian nature (a church and single cross), making use of the original tesserae. Piccirillo emphasized that introducing crosses in the restoration of the Upper Church at Massue testifies to the religion of the restorer, the artist, or the worker, enabling us to conclude that the repair was carried out by Christian mosaic artists (Piccirillo 1983a: 336-338 foto 20; 1993a: 252-253 figs. 437, 442-443). Crosses were also incorporated in dedicatory inscriptions set into the mosaic floors, sometimes at the beginning of the text, as in the Upper Church of Kaianus (second half of the 6th century A.D.) at ‘Uyun Musa Valley (Fig. 14): “+For the salvation of Fidus, of Thomas, and Elpidius the deacons, and of Kasiseus, the monk.”; “†For the preservation (and) offering of Matriona.” (Piccirillo 1984: 309-311 figs. 2-3, fotos 5-6; 1993a: 190-191 fig. 280), and sometimes at the beginning and end of the inscription, such as in the Church of Saint Stephen (A.D. 756) at Umm al-Rasas: “+By the grace of Christ, the mosaic of this holy bema was decorated at the time of our most pious father Bishop Job and of the priest John ... and of Iesse the steward in the month of March, the 9th indiction pf the year 650 [A.D. 756] +.”; “+Remember O Lord, your servant Staurachios, the mosaicist of Hesban, the son of Zada and Euremios his companion. Lord, remember your servant Elia (son) of Samuel of Lexou, of Constantine, of Germanus, and of Abdela+” (Piccirillo 1993a: 238-239 fig. 346; 1994a: 136-137 figs. 23-25; 1994b: 242-243 insc. 1a-b).

The cross and the eagle and their iconographic meaning

In a number of Transjordanian churches there are depictions of eagles in different locations in the church space. In certain depictions the eagle is accompanied by crosses, and by the letters ΑΩ.

In the Church of the Deacon Thomas (first half of the 6th century A.D.) in ‘Uyun Musa Valley, the eagle appears in the southern aisle and at the front of the doorway set in the southern wall of the church (Fig. 15). Against the background of a continuous carpet of bud diamonds, there is an ‘attached’ medallion showing an eagle with outstretched wings, its head turned to the east. To the sides of its head are the letters ΑΩ, and at its feet there is a name in Greek, ΘΩΜΑΔΙΑΚ, that is, Θωμᾶ διάκ(ονος) “Of Deacon Thomas.” (Piccirillo 1990: 232-240 fig. 5 foto 3, 50, 70; 1993a: 40, 187 figs. 259, 263, 269; 1998b: 330-343 figs. 150-51, 186; Di Segni 1998: 456-457 no. 71). The eagle is positioned north-south, so

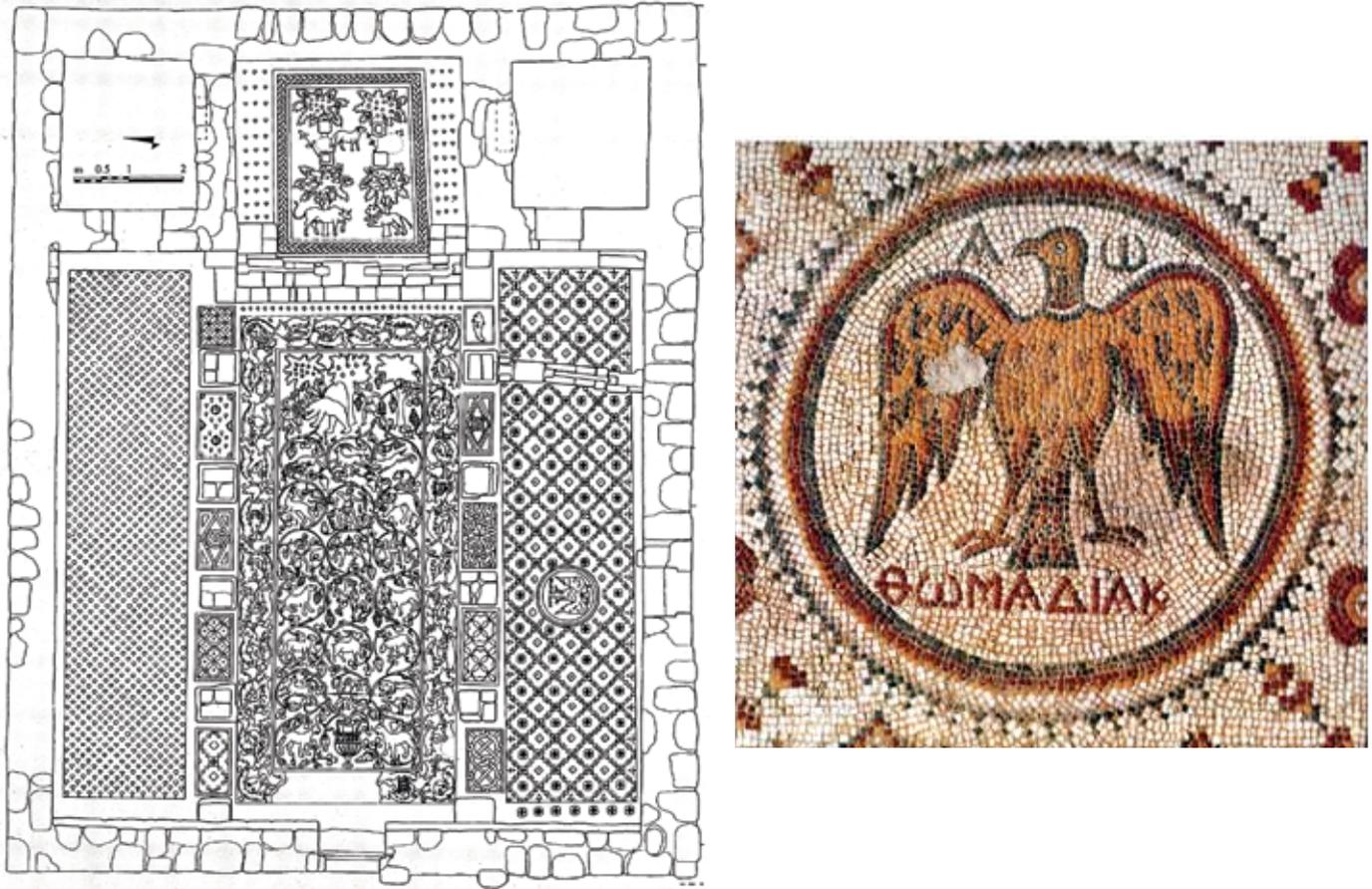


Figure 15
The Church of the Deacon Thomas
(first half of the 6th century A.D.)
at 'Uyun Musa Valley (after:
Piccirillo 1993a: figs. 259, 269)

that the believer would see it when he stood in the nave and turned towards the southern aisle on his way out of the church. At a later stage, the eastern end of the southern aisle became a space closed off by a chancel screen, serving as a vestibule for the south sacristy. This later change positioned the medallion and the eagle exactly at the centre of the southern aisle. A similar depiction appears in the narthex of the South Chapel of the monastery at Mar Liyas (second half of the 6th century A.D.; 775/6). Close to the entrance to the chapel is an eagle with outspread wings in an interlace medallion, with the letters ΑΩ (Piccirillo – al-Qudah 2003: 309-314 figs. 2-4). In the Church of Saint George (A.D. 535/6) at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, the front-facing eagle with outstretched wings appears twice (Fig. 16). In one place, the eagle is set in a panel between the columns in the northern colonnade. Only the feet, part of the tail, and the outstretched wings remain, and at its feet are three Greek crosses. Nearby, an eagle is set in a meander frame that encompasses the populated acanthus scroll carpet of the nave. Its head is turned east, towards the apse. The eagles are part of an iconographic program that includes scenes from everyday life, donors, personifications of Earth (ΓΗ) and the Four Seasons (Saller – Bagatti 1949: 72 fig. 8 pls. 23:3, 28:2; Piccirillo 1993a: 178 figs. 244-245; 1998b: 320-328 figs. 116-117).

The depiction of the eagle in mosaic floors in Transjordanian churches is of considerable significance, in particular when accompanied by crosses and by the letters ΑΩ. As a rule, in Christian art the letters ΑΩ appear alongside the figure of Christ or by the cross that appears in his place, so that the letters ΑΩ, denoting Christ, attribute Christological meaning to the eagle, making it a symbol of life and resurrection.

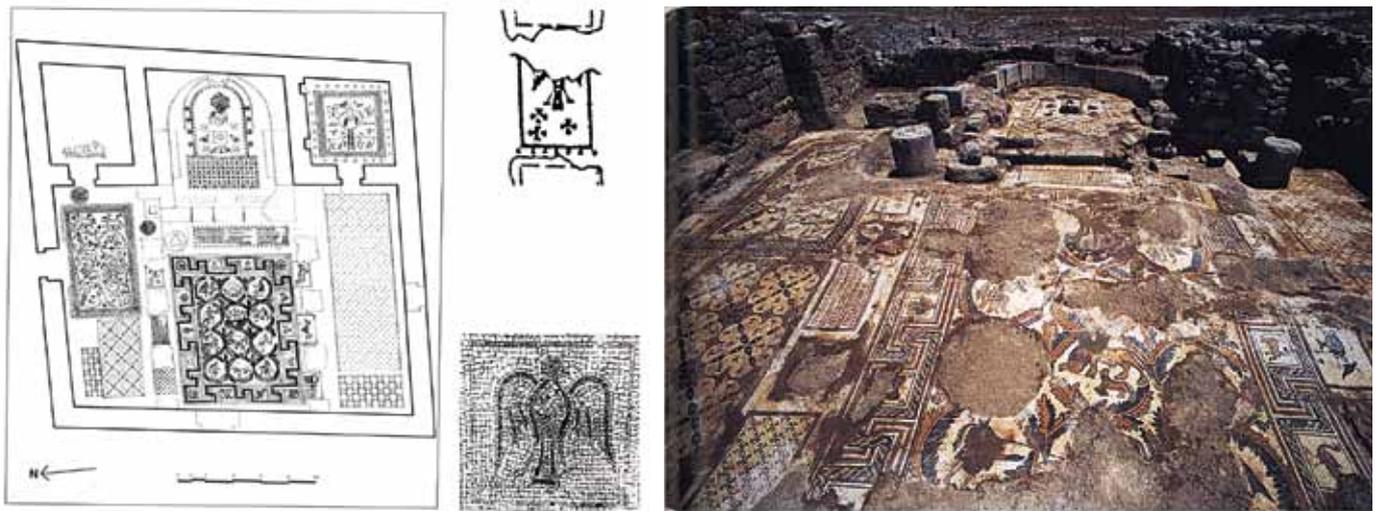


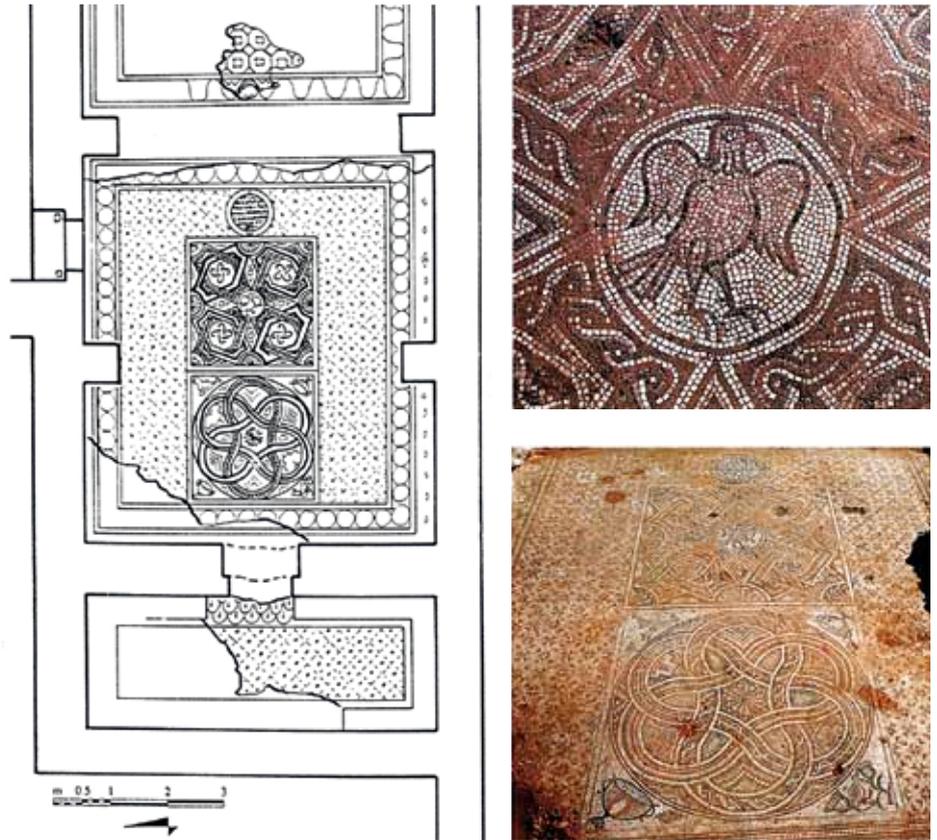
Figure 16
The Church of Saint George
(A.D. 535/6) at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat
(after: Saller - Bagatti 1949: fig. 8,
pl. 28:2; Piccirillo 1998b: fig. 117)

The symbolism of the eagle has a long cultural tradition (Habas 2014: 137-159). In Greek culture, the eagle was an attribute of Zeus (Jupiter), the father of the gods, and sometimes represented him. In eastern cultures, the eagle played an important role in taking the happy souls up to heaven. After the conquest of Syria, the Greeks and Romans adopted the oriental belief of the sacred eagle as *psychopompos*. In Rome, this was developed as part of the Emperor Cult, and the eagle was seen as taking the souls of the emperors to eternal life. In the practical realm, during the cremation of the emperor an eagle would be released into the skies. In Imperial Roman iconography, the eagle appears in scenes of Imperial *apotheosis* (Reinach 1912: 236 no. 4; Cumont 1917: 35-118; Charbonneau-Lassay 1974: 73 fig. 111; Grabar 1980: 20 fig. 62; Kleiner 1992: 189-190, 254, 285 figs. 157, 222, 253). With the conversion to Christianity of Emperor Constantine the Great, and after the Edict of Milan in the year A.D. 313, the eagle became a symbol of the victory of Christianity over paganism. Symbolism of the Messiah, son of God, and of universal Christian dominance, were attributed to the eagle (Kirsch 1924: 1036-1038; Charbonneau-Lassay 1974: 74-77; Testini 1985: 1145; Roussin 1985: 183; Wisskirchen 2005/2006: 159-163). Church Fathers such as Melito, Bishop of Sardis (d. c. A.D. 190), wrote explicitly: "...the eagle is the Christ", and Church Fathers John Chrysostom (c. A.D. 347-407), Augustine (A.D. 354-430), Ambrose (c. A.D. 339-397) and Gregory the Great (c. A.D. 540-604) wrote about the eagle as a symbol of Jesus and a symbol of his ascent to heaven⁸.

In the eagle resurrection myth from Antiquity, it is said that the eagle can draw close to the sun and to the divine star, and when the eagle grows old, its feathers are burned and its flesh dries up, but when it returns to Earth, the eagle dives into the spring three times and emerges young and new (Ferguson 1961: 17; Charbonneau-Lassay 1974: 79). Epiphanius Bishop of Salamis (c. A.D. 315-403), Isidore, Ambrose, Athanasius Bishop of Alexandria (c. A.D. 296-373), and Augustine all quoted a description of the eagle restored to life and renewed, and drew a parallel between the resurrection of the eagle and the resurrection of Christ. Ambrose wrote: "There is only one eagle. The eagle is the Christ, our God, whose youth is restored when he is resurrected from the dead, he puts

⁸ Melito, *Clavis*, VIII; Joannes Chrysostomus, *In I Cor. hom.* XXIV, 3; *P.G.* LXI col. 203; Augustinus, *In ps.* 66, 10; *P.L.* XXXVI col. 812; Ambrosius, *Sermo.* 46, 5-7; *P.L.* XVII col. 695ff; Gregory the Great, *In Ezech. hom. l. I*, IV; *P.L.* LXXVI col. 815.

Figure 17
The chapel at Khirbat Munyah
(‘Asfur) (after: Piccirillo 1993a:
figs. 584, 588-589)



off the disintegrating remains of his body, he flourishes and puts on splendidous flesh”; “...you came to the altar desiring to receive the sacrament...Finally, again, hear David as he says: ‘Thy youth will be renewed like the eagle’s’. You have begun to be a good eagle, which seeks heaven, disdains earthly things. Good eagles are about the altar, for ‘wheresoever the body shall be, there shall the eagles also be gathered together’. The form of the body is the altar, and the body of Christ is on the altar; you are the eagles renewed by the washing away of transgression”⁹. Against the background of the words of the Church Fathers, the eagle as symbol of the resurrection and of immortality is obvious (Maguire 1987: 65).

The geometric interlace as a hidden Christian symbol, and its iconographic meaning

Incorporation of the eagle in the geometric interlacing composition is found at Khirbat Munyah (‘Asfur) near Gerasa, where the eagle with outstretched wings is part of a geometric composition embellishing the hall of the chapel (Fig. 17). The eagle is in a circle, surrounded by four *scuta* populating simple interlaced patterns. The eagle is depicted in a three-quarters pose, its head turned to the left and its tail shown in profile, while its eyes and outspread wings face the front. The position of the eagle along the central axis of the chapel, within a cross composition, and its central position in the hall and alongside the inscription appealing to Lord Jesus Christ, found at the eastern end of the hall and in front

⁹ Ambrosius, *Sermo in Append; De sacram.* IV, 2,7; *P.L.* XVI col. 437; *De paenit.* II, 2,8; *P.L.* XVI col. 498; trans. Deferrari 1977: 299; Athanasius, *Exp. in ps.* CII, 5; *P.G.* XXVII col. 432; Augustinus, *Enarr. in ps.* CII, 9; *P.L.* XXXVII col. 1323ff.

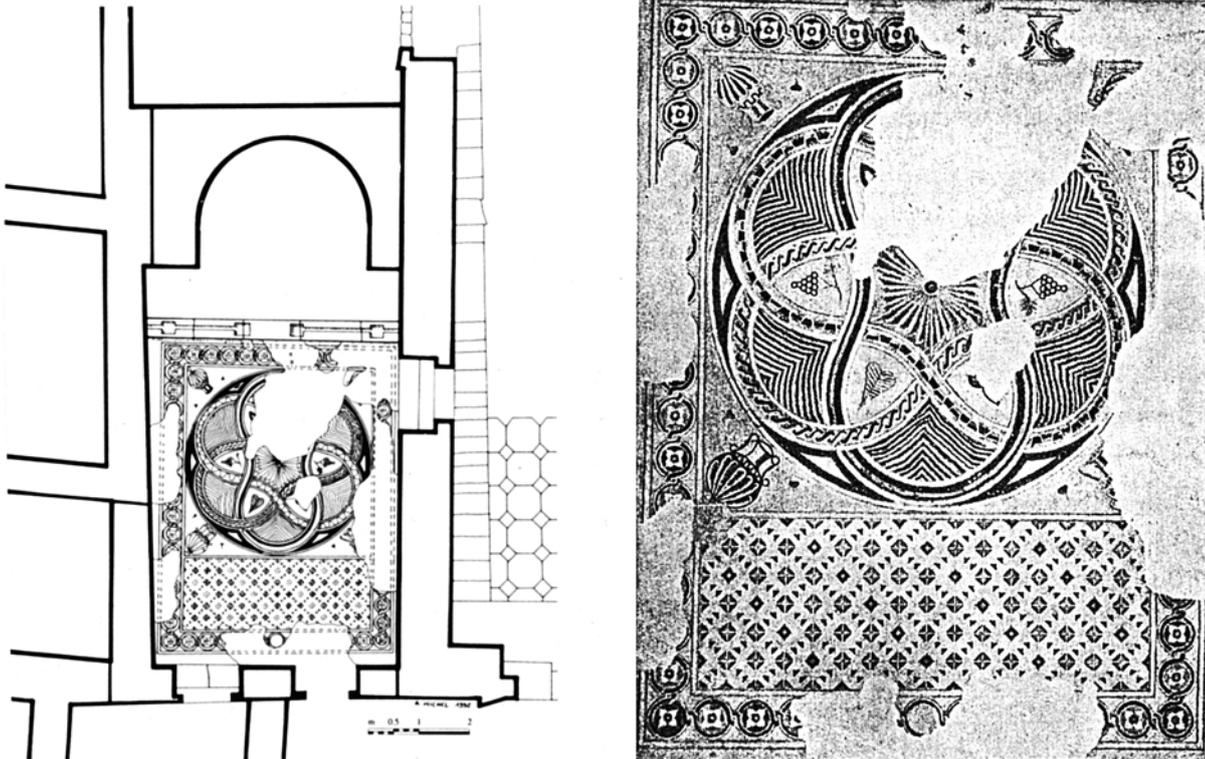


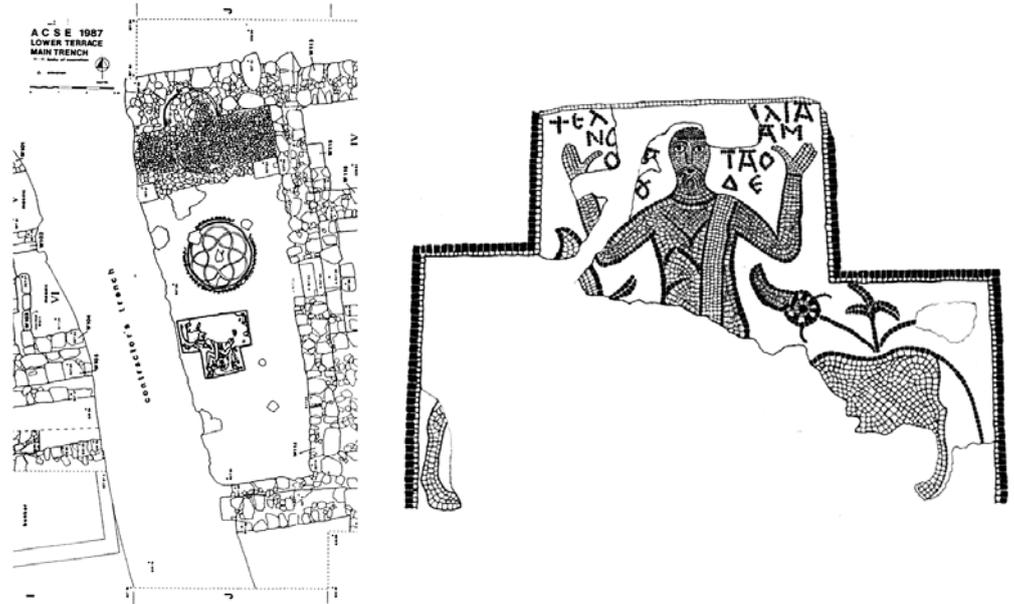
Figure 18
The North West Chapel of Saint
Theodore Church (A.D. 494/5) at
Gerasa (after: Biebel 1938: pl. LXI: a;
Piccirillo 1993a: fig. 532)

of the bema, mean that the eagle may be identified as a symbol of Jesus. The inscription testifies to the founder of the chapel: “Lord Jesus Christ, accept the offering of your servant Eutochius. Amen” (Piccirillo 1983b: 355-359, 361-362 figs. 1-2, 6, 11, 13; 1993a: 299 figs. 584, 587-589). The adjacent panel is decorated with an interlace designed as a knot of three figures of eight (D cor I: 43), which is also seen by some as a symbol of the Holy Trinity.

The position and/or incorporation with other depictions support the conjecture that this geometric motif of interlaced designs as a knot of three figures of eight has symbolic significance¹⁰. The same geometric motif appears in the North West Chapel of Saint Theodore Church (A.D. 494/5) at Gerasa (Fig. 18). The floor of the hall is divided into two panels within a single, unified frame. The panel in the eastern square, at the front of the bema, contains a big interlace designed as a knot of three figures of eight in a medallion. In the space between the circle and the corners of the square are four amphorae (Biebel 1938: 315-316 pl. LXI: a; Piccirillo 1993a: 284 figs. 527, 532). A variant of this motif is found in the bema of the church at al-Jubaiha village (6th century A.D.) in Philadelphia-Amman area. The bema carpet is divided into panels, one beneath the altar table, in which four diamonds are depicted laid out as a cross, and the second with a knot of three figures of eight, and within it an interlace of two squares creating a kind of square shield of David, in which there is a flower (al-Mhaisen 1976: 8-10 pls. 3, 4a-b; Piccirillo 1993a: 314 figs. 643, 645). A geometric interlace in

¹⁰ In the mosaic floors the interlace also appears as a filling motif in different compositions - and so should be understood as a decorative geometric motif with no symbolic meaning, such as in the panel between the columns in the northern row in the Church of Procopius (A.D. 526/7) at Gerasa (Crowfoot 1931: 33-34 pl. XIII: b; Biebel 1938: 338-340 pl. LXXX: b; Piccirillo 1993a: 292 fig. 560); in the geometric net of the nave in the Church of the Bishop Isaiah (A.D. 599) at Gerasa (Clark 1986: 303-307 fig. 4; Piccirillo 1993a: 294 fig. 566); and in the geometric net in the nave of the Church of Saint George (A.D. 637) at Khirbat al-Samra (Humbert 1985: 433 photo 2; Piccirillo 1993a: 306 figs. 600-602).

Figure 19
The chapel on the acropolis of Philadelphia (Amman)
(after: Zayadine, Najjar
- Greene 1987: fig. 2;
Piccirillo 1993a: fig. 460)



the form of a Greek cross is found in the centre of the bema panel and at the front of the altar table in the chapel that is part of the monastery complex of Dayr al-Qattar al-Byzanti (Zoara) (Holmgren et al. 1997: 323-324 fig. 4).

In the hall of the chapel on the acropolis of Philadelphia (Amman), this geometric motif is set in a large medallion at the front of the bema, and to the west of it is T-shaped panel with a depiction of a man facing to the east, raising his hand in *orans* pose - the prayer position. The figure is standing between a lion and an ox/zebu in schematic design. The man has a beard, wears a skullcap, and is dressed in a tunic, with a scarf or strap lying over his left shoulder and down the front of his tunic. It is possible that his dress indicates that he is a monk. In the background, between his hands and above his head, is a fragmentary inscription that starts with a cross, and may give the name of the man (Fig. 19) (Zayadine - Najjar - Greene 1987: 299, 304 fig. 2 pls. XLIX.1 LI: 1; Piccirillo 1993a: 262 figs. 459-460, 462)¹¹. Thus in the chapel at Philadelphia (Amman) we also find the geometric motif appearing in a complex and symbolic iconographic program, in which this motif symbolizes the Holy Trinity appearing together with the figure of the orant.

The lion standing opposite the ox/zebu represents the End of Days, as derived from the pagan Philia and the prophecy of Isaiah: "... and the lion shall eat straw like the ox." (Isaiah 11, 7)¹². The expectation is that the End of Days and eternal peace in the Kingdom of Heaven will be achieved through faith in Jesus and the Trinity.

The motif also appears as an entrance motif in a number of churches. In the crypt of Saint Elianus (A.D. 595) at Madaba, the interlace designed as a knot of three figures of eight in a medallion appears parallel to a depiction of a fruit tree within a medallion (Fig. 20). Two parallel flights of stairs descend to the crypt, and at the bottom of the stairs, at the entrance to the crypt, on one side is the fruit tree and on the other side, the geometric interlace (Séjourné 1897: 650-655 fig. 652;

¹¹ The chapel, possibly part of a monastery, was uncovered on the lower terrace of the acropolis of Amman.

¹² Old Testament trans. authorized King James Version; (<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>).

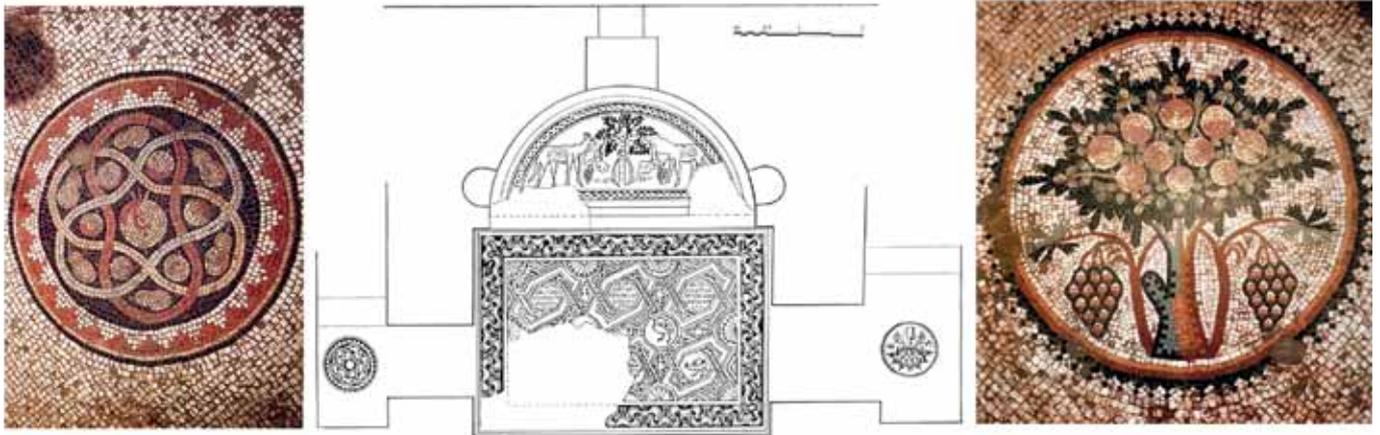


Figure 20
The crypt of Saint Elianus
(A.D. 595) at Madaba
(after: Piccirillo 1993a:
figs. 127, 132, 136)

Saller - Bagatti 1949: 236, 240-242 pl. 40.5; Piccirillo 1993a: 124-125 figs. 127, 132, 134-136). As mentioned, the tree symbolizing Jesus appears together with the geometric interlace symbolizing the Holy Trinity. In the apse lunette of the crypt is a depiction of a pair of sheep on either side of a pomegranate tree, symbolizing the believers revering the cross. The motif also decorates the vestibule/narthex mosaic of the Central Church (late 6th century A.D.) at Ma'in. The geometric interlace is set in a medallion within a square, and its corners are decorated with pairs of peacocks on either side of a flower (Piccirillo 1985: 349-350 fig. 4 foto 15; 1993a: 202 figs. 314-315). The geometric interlace also appears in the entrance panel of the annex room to the chapel at Khirbat Yazuz (A.D. 508), located on the road between Philadelphia (Amman) and Gerasa (Fig. 21). The panel is decorated with an interlace of a knot of three figures of eight, next to a dedicatory inscription identifying the room with the martyrdom of the martyr Theodore: "It was built from yours to You (God) and terminated the holy martyrion of the holy and victorious martyr Theodore and Kyriakos at the time of the beloved of God and the most pious bishop Theodosius by the care of the religious Elias the priest and John the curator at the time of the second indication year." (Suleiman 1996: 458; Khalil 1998: 460-464 figs. 6-7).

Crosses in architectural sculpture and liturgical furniture

In addition to the depiction of crosses on mosaic floors in the church complexes, crosses also adorned architectural sculpture and liturgical furniture and vessels. A Greek cross with four circles between its arms was carved in an arch of the western church at Umm al-Jimal (Piccirillo 1993a: 316 fig. 653), and crosses set in circles were carved in the architrave of the main entrance of the Church of the Lions at Umm al-Rasas (Piccirillo 1992: 202 photo 11).

In the relief art of the chancel screens surrounding the bema, the cross motif was the centre of the symbolic composition. If the chancel panels were decorated on both sides, a single cross decorated the panel on the side facing the liturgical space - where the members of the clergy sat, while the complex composition faced towards the nave and aisles - towards the laity, who stayed in the halls and were not permitted to enter the liturgical area. The compositions are varied: the simplest composition consists of a Latin cross in the centre of the panel, as in the back of the panel from the Cathedral at Pella. A more developed composition consists of a cross flanked by animals in a heraldic arrangement, as appears on the front of this panel. Sheep, defaced by iconoclasts, face the cross (Smith - Day 1989: 120-122 figs. 12, 33 pl. 27: a-c; Habas 1994: I: 33-34, 40 III: 7-8,

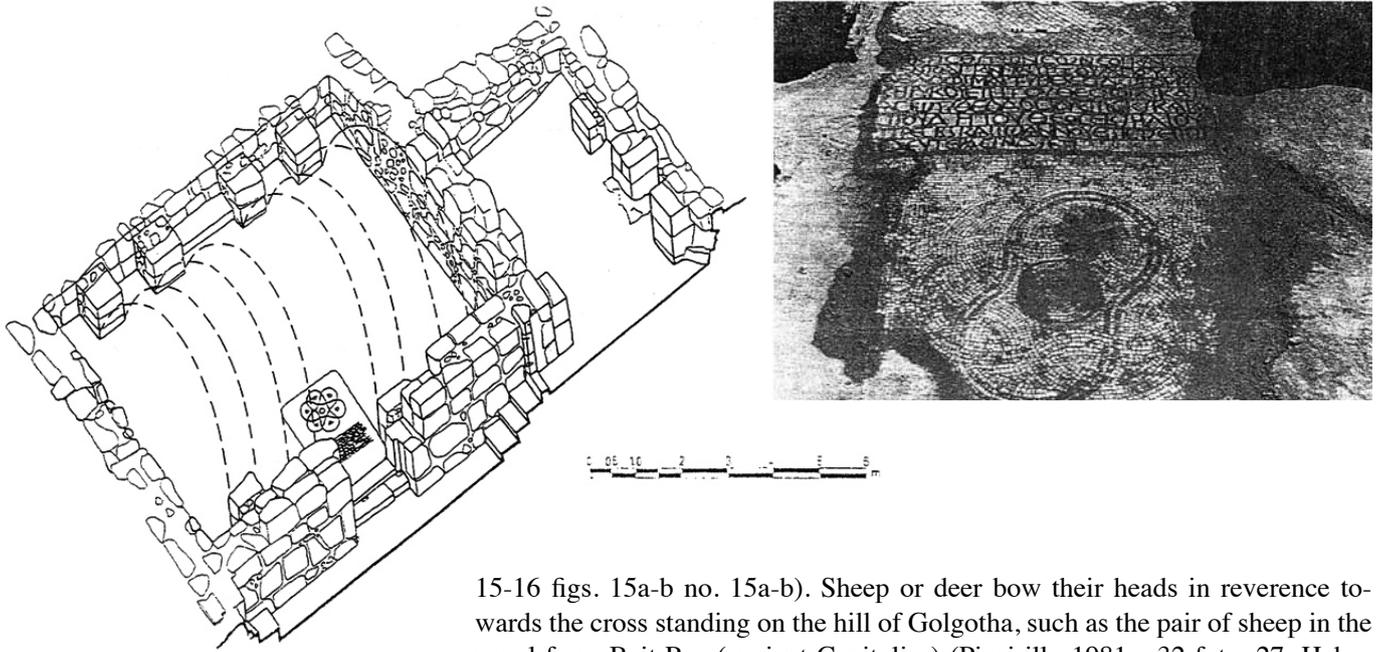


Figure 21
The annex room to the chapel
at Khirbat Yazuz (A.D. 508)
(after: Khalil 1998: fig. 6)

15-16 figs. 15a-b no. 15a-b). Sheep or deer bow their heads in reverence towards the cross standing on the hill of Golgotha, such as the pair of sheep in the panel from Beit Ras (ancient Capitolias) (Piccirillo 1981a: 32 foto. 27; Habas 1994: I: 42 III: 18 fig. 21 no. 21). In another group, a Maltese cross is placed in a circle or a wreath, with fleurs-de-lys between the arms of the cross, such as the panel from the church of ed-Deir at Ma'in, on which there is an incised dedicatory inscription: “+Lord remember in your mercy John your servant the sinner+.” (Piccirillo – Russan 1976: 61-70 fig. 1 pls. XXVIII: 2, XXX; Piccirillo 1989: 242-246 fig. on p. 246; Habas 1994: I: 57 III: 35-6 fig. 50 no. 50). The composition reaches a peak in a large group of panels bearing the motif of the *stephanostaurion* in their centre. In this type, the panel is decorated with a cross in a laurel wreath from which issue ribbons or tendrils ending in ivy leaves, as in the panel found in secondary use in a house in area IV at Pella (Hennessy et al. 1981: 307-309 fig. 20; McNicoll et al. 1982: 121 fig. 25a; Habas 1994: I: 60-61 III: 41 fig. 59 no. 59). In most cases fleurs-de-lys are depicted between the arms of the cross. The composition also exists in a more complex version, in which the ribbons wind and diverge again, ending in ivy leaves. One strand of the ribbons turns upwards, and on it are Latin crosses. Another strand of the ribbons turns downwards to the lower corners of the panels. Fine examples are the panels made of marble discovered in the Memorial of Moses complex at Mount Nebo (discussed below), and in local *bituminous schist* at the Church of the Lions at Umm al-Rasas (Piccirillo 1992: 208 fig. 5.2 foto 17). The cross sometimes has eight arms, as in the panels in the church at Petra (Habas 1994: I: 66 III: 54-5 fig. 79 no. 79; Kanellopoulos - Schick 2001: 194-198 figs. 4-5, 8-12). The motifs of the cross and the *stephanostaurion* symbolize the triumph of Christ over death, and the redemption and salvation that he brings to Christian believers, represented by sheep and deer (Habas 2000: 124-128 fig. 74a-b; 2009: 100-108 and *ibid* at length).

Crosses were also carved on the chancel posts: Maltese crosses set in a circle embellish two chancel posts made of limestone from the Church of Amos and Kasiseus at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, on which are also inscribed the names of the donors to the church (Acconci 1998: 534 figs. 170-171 nos. 170-171). Carved and recessed crosses, apparently serving as a background for small inset metal crosses, were found in the ball-shaped capitals of the two chancel posts from the chapel at Kirbet el-Kursi – Ammam (Piccirillo – ‘Amr 1988: 361-382 figs. 20-21; Habas 1994: I: 162 II: 34-35 figs. 74-75 nos. 74-75), and five holes

in a cruciform formation in the capitals of two marble chancel posts from the Theotokos chapel in the Memorial of Moses complex at Mount Nebo (Saller 1941: 93, 295 pl. 132:1-2 cat. nos. 154-155; Acconci 1998: 503-505 figs. 84-85 nos. 84-85; Habas 1994: II: 69-70 figs. 151-152 nos. 151-152) are also evidence of a cross made of precious metal set into the chancel post (Habas 1994: I: 162). High type chancel posts have also been found with holes laid out in a cross shape on the upper part of the column, such as the high chancel post made of *bituminous schist* from the Saint Stephen complex at Umm al-Rasas, where ten holes were found, for inseting two crosses, one above the other (Acconci 1994: 300 fig. 31 on p. 301 no 31).

Crosses were also carved in the context of the cult of saints. Engraved crosses or cross-shaped depressions carved in the plinths of altar tables (*sacra mensa*) marked the position of the reliquary boxes. In the apse of the chapel at Khirbat Yazuz (A.D. 508), a Latin cross is engraved in the floor of a circular depression in the centre of the plinth panel of the altar table (Khalil 1998: 460 fig. 5), and a rectangular plinth with a cruciform depression was found beneath the altar table in the apse of the Church of Saint George (A.D. 535/6) at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat (Piccirillo 1998b: 322 fig. 121). Crosses were also carved on the reliquary boxes: an engraving of a Greek cross decorates the narrow front of the reliquary lid found at the Church of Saint John the Baptist at Khirbat al-Samra (Piccirillo 1993a: 304 fig. 597). In the bema of the North Church at Esbus (modern Hesban), a marble reliquary was found *in situ*, designed as a miniature sarcophagus. Both of the sloping sides of the lid were decorated with raised crosses. The chest was divided into two compartments, the smaller of them containing an oval-shaped silver reliquary, with a Latin cross and ΑΩ beaten into its lid. The contents of the reliquary were an ashy material, human bone and tooth – evidence of the practice of depositing relics of saints under the altar (Lawlor 1979: 7 figs. 8-9; 1980a: 103 pl. LXII: 2-3; 1980b: 68 pl. IIa-b; Piccirillo 1993a: 250 fig. 432). Evidence of the custom of inlaying metal crosses can also be found in reliquary boxes, and of the wealth of finds, I will mention the lid of the reliquary box from the Church of the priest Wa'il at Umm al-Rasas, with holes for inlaying two crosses, of which the metal cross on the left side is still complete and in place (Piccirillo 1993b: 321 figs. 18-19); and in the Church of Saints of Peter and Paul at Gerasa, the lid of a reliquary box with a deep engraving of a Maltese cross with four holes at the ends of the arms (Crowfoot 1938: 183 pl. L: b; Piccirillo 1981a: 48 foto 40).

Baptismal fonts were sometimes designed in the shape of a cross, and of these I will mention the cruciform basin in the Upper Baptistery Chapel (second half of 6th century A.D.) in the Cathedral complex at Madaba (Piccirillo 1993a: 118 figs. 108, 116); and in the Memorial of Moses complex at Mount Nebo, the baptismal font in the form of a Greek cross in the Old Diakonikon - Baptistery (A.D. 530), and the circular basin with a trifoliate inner surface in the New Baptistery Chapel (A.D. 597/8) (Piccirillo 1998a: 168-171, 176-177 figs. 53, 68; 1998b: 274, 297 figs. 12, 14, 64-65, 70).

The next two sites express the prominent presence of crosses in church complexes, and in fact, their considerable distribution throughout the church building and also outside it. In the Saint Stephen complex at Umm al-Rasas (6th-8th century A.D.) architectural items carved with crosses originating in the churches and chapels of the complex were found, such as limestone architraves. Carved crosses are also found on various items of liturgical furniture made of marble and *bituminous schist*, originating in churches and chapels from the

complex, such as the chancel panel decorated with a *stephanostaurion* pattern, a holy water font, posts belonging to the *ambo* structure, and capitals belonging to the *ciborium* (Alliata 1994: 315 figs. 6-9 nos. 6-9 tav. XXVI.1; Acconci 1994: 296-297, 304, 306-308 figs. 22, 42, 60-61, 67 nos. 22, 42, 60-61, 67 tav. XXVI.1). A similar picture also emerges from the excavations at the Memorial of Moses complex at Mount Nebo (4th-7th century A.D.), where limestone capitals and fragments of marble chancel panels were found with versions of a *stephanostaurion* motif and a basin (*colymbium*) (Saller 1941: 51-52, 56, 162-163, 265-266, 288-291 fig. 10: 4a-c pls. 60, 124:3, 125:1-3, 6-8, 11, 13, 22-24, 26-29 cat. no. 3-11, 14-15, 19-20, 23, 25, 35; Acconci 1998: 511-513, 515-518, 530-532 figs. 121, 125-134, 162 pl. V: 3 nos. 121, 125-134, 162). In the Church of the Deacon Thomas (first half of the 6th century A.D.) in the 'Uyun Musa Valley, a reliquary made in marble was found *in situ* under the altar, its cover decorated with a cross, with a large hole in the middle for pouring in liquids, as well as two chancel screen panels made of *bituminous schist* with *stephanostaurion* composition (Acconci 1998: 532-534 fig. 166, 168-169 nos. 166, 168-169). In conclusion, I will mention the large processional cross discovered in the northern sacristy which flanks the apse of the Church of Bishop Malechius at Mukawir. On the vertical arm the chains remain, and from existing parallels it may be assumed that small crosses or the letters ΑΩ were suspended from them (Piccirillo 1993a: 246 fig. 416).

The broad distribution of the cross is not surprising, and was written about by the Church fathers in the 4th-5th century A.D.: John Chrysostom (c. A.D. 347-407), in his homily, said: "The Cross is found ... everywhere on governing and governed people, on woman and men, on virgins and married women, on slaves and free. We all constantly engrave it on the most prominent places of our doors and we bear it every day as a column on our foreheads. The Cross is shining on the holy altars during the consecration of priests and during the Eucharist. It may be seen everywhere on houses, in markets, in deserts, on roads, on cloths, on armies ... on silver and golden vessels, on jewellery, on wall-inscriptions ... We do not avoid the Cross, rather it is desirable and pleasing ... It is marked on house-walls, on ceilings, on books, in towns, in hamlets and in the entire world"¹³.

Crosses in mosaic floors and the edict of Emperor Theodosius II, and conclusions

As mentioned, archaeological and art historical research has shown the prominent presence of crosses. Crosses were carved and engraved on architectural sculpture outside and inside the buildings. Crosses decorated the liturgical furniture and vessels. Furthermore, metal crosses were incorporated both in architectural sculpture and in liturgical furniture and vessels.

Moreover, archaeological and artistic research has revealed that crosses and motifs equivalent to them in meaning (the *chi-rho* monogram, the letters ΑΩ, the eagle, the tree, and the geometric interlace representing the Holy Trinity) also appear in mosaic floors in ecclesiastical buildings, and in a few cases have also been found in the *opus sectile* floors. Crosses in mosaic floors decorate the vestibules of church complexes, churches, chapels attached to churches, crypts, martyrion chapels, funerary chapels, and baptisteries. They are not hidden, and are not limited to a specific part of the church or chapel building; on the contrary,

¹³ John Chrysostom, *Contra Judaeos et gentiles*; P.G. 48, I 2 col. 826; trans. Tzaferis 1971: 40-41.

the crosses are open to view and appear in the apse, the bema, the sacristy, halls, panels between columns, the narthex, vestibules and passageways or entrances between spaces.

The repertoire of crosses is rich, and crosses have been found of the equal-armed Greek cross type (\oplus) (*crux quadrata*), the Latin cross (\dagger), the Maltese cross (✠), or a geometric interlace in the form of a Greek cross. There are also crosses of the *crux clipeata*, *crux gemmata* and *crux decussate* type. In some places the letters ΑΩ are shown between the arms of the cross, or suspended from the vertical arm. In other places the cross is shown on a graduated mound symbolizing the hill of Golgotha¹⁴.

The appearance of crosses on mosaic floors in churches is seemingly surprising, because it contravenes the edict issued in A.D. 427 by the Emperor Theodosius II, prohibiting crosses on floors: “It being our concern to preserve by all means the faith in God Supreme, we hereby decree that no-one shall carve or draw the sign of the Lord our Saviour on the floor or on a slab of marble laid over the ground; those that are found shall be removed, and whoever dares to break this law shall be punished with a heavy fine”¹⁵. But this edict had scant influence on the mosaics of our region, and the archaeological finds testify to the existence of crosses carved in stone or incorporated in the mosaic floors of the churches in Transjordan, Israel, Syria and Lebanon. In fact, Latin, Greek and Maltese crosses are dispersed throughout the church (Habas 2005: 370-373, 378-384, where there is a detailed discussion and references).

They first appear in Syria in houses and on tombs, and towards the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th centuries A.D. the crosses come into the churches (Kitzinger 1970: 639-641 fig. 1 note 10). According to Lassus, crosses on the threshold were given religious significance. The cross and the Christogram on the threshold were seen to have apotropaic meaning. Kitzinger claims that the crosses and Solomon’s knot (an interlace of two ellipses creating a kind of hidden cross, which can serve as a substitute for an X-shaped cross) mark the entrance to an important place, and originate, in his opinion, in the secular world, in a kind of superstition that the edict attempted to suppress¹⁶. According to Christian interpretation (*interpretatio christiana*), the crosses were positioned prominently close to the entrances and windows of the church because of the belief that they would prevent the forces of evil from entering. The crosses in Syria are accompanied by inscriptions such as: “In the presence of the Cross the gates of Hell no stand.”; “This (the Cross) conquers and helps.”; “The Cross, horror to demons, victory to faithful.”; “The Cross, healer of the sick.” (Jalabert 1939: div. III A no. 746 div. III section B part 2 nos. 251, 944; Lassus 1947: 297). In Christian thought, the cross and the monogram symbolized victory over Satan, evil and death. The cross became a symbol of redemption, protection, health and good fortune. The cross is the powerful divine symbol, and the personal symbol of Christ. Support for this is found in the writings of the 4th and 5th century Church Fathers: in the sermons of Athanasius (c. A.D. 296-373), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 315-386), John Chrysostom (c. A.D. 347-407), and Nilus of Sinai (d. c. A.D. 430).

¹⁴ On the types of crosses and their origin, see: (Tzaferis 1971: 49-52, 57-60, 88-95).

¹⁵ *Cod. Just.* I, viii; trans. Mango 1986: 36.

¹⁶ Solomon’s knot appears with the word ΙΧΘΥΣ in a panel on the mosaic floor facing the north steps to the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, and again in the mosaic panel to the south of the steps – both guard the approach to the most sacred part of the buildings. Knot motifs had apotropaic significance, and the Solomon’s knot in the mosaic was given an apotropaic role. (Kitzinger 1970: 640-644 notes 21-23, 27).

Athanasius said that the death of Christ on the Cross had conquered death and abased the kingdom of Hades. The Crucifixion, therefore, is the symbol of victory, while the sign of the cross is the personal sign of Jesus. From the words of John Chrysostom it can be seen that engraving the cross on walls and windows was a commonly accepted custom in his days, while Athanasius and Cyril of Jerusalem encouraged the use of the cross everywhere and at every opportunity, because, as Cyril of Jerusalem said “it is only through this seal or through this royal sign that demons are dismissed”¹⁷. As mentioned, at first the cross was used to protect homes and tombs (Grabar 1946: II: 278-283), with churches quickly adopting this custom, and there are examples of crosses on the lintels of church doors in Syria already in the late 4th century A.D. and at the beginning of the 5th century A.D. (Kitzinger 1970: 640 note 10). But transferring the cross engraved on the door posts to the doorstep in mosaic or stone, despite the fact that the threshold needed apotropaic protection, created a conflict of desecration because some of the crosses were placed where people would walk and step on them. Kitzinger brought up the possibility that the edict may have been written against the background of the increased popularity of Christian symbols (*signa Christi*) in church floors, and related to the fear of desecrating the sacred symbol. Kitzinger’s statement, which may have been correct in its time, that overt crosses were not common in mosaic floors and when they appear, they are usually not positioned along the traffic route or path of entry into the building (Kitzinger 1970: 641 notes 12-13) no longer holds true in light of the discovery of many churches and mosaic floors as a result of the archaeological excavations of recent decades throughout Transjordan and Israel. Hence the opinion of those who consider the date A.D. 427 as the *terminus post quem* for the cross representations must be rejected.

In any event, the edict of Theodosius was not effective and crosses were indeed depicted on mosaic floors, and as Tzaferis wrote: “It seems very probable that the prohibition of Theodosius did not influence representations of the Cross as much as scholars tend to believe. In fact, from the second half of the fifth century on, Crosses are frequently depicted on mosaic pavements” (Tzaferis 1971: 63). The lack of compliance with the edict is attested in the archaeological finds and the survey of the appearance of crosses in mosaic floors in churches and chapels in Transjordan, all of which were built and embellished with mosaics after the edict was announced, thus testifying to the gap between the spirit of the edict and reality on the ground. Evidence of failure to comply with the edict can also be found in the fact that in A.D. 691 another edict was published, included in the canons of the Ecumenical Council in Trullo. Canon LXXIII renews the edict of Theodosius, and repeats the prohibition against presenting and depicting the cross in inappropriate places: “Since the life-giving cross has shown to us Salvation, we should be careful that we render due honour to that by which we were saved from the ancient fall. Wherefore, in mind, in word, in feeling giving veneration to it, we command that the figure of the cross, which some have placed on the floor, be entirely removed there from, lest the trophy of the victory won for us be desecrated by the trampling under foot of those who walk over it. Therefore those who from this present represent on the pavement the sign of the cross, we decree are to be cut off.”¹⁸ All these

¹⁷ Ioannes Chrysostomos, *Matthaeum Homil.* LIV, 4; *P.G.* LVII col. 537; Athanasius, *Or. De Inc.*; *P.G.* XXV, I, 144-145; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* IV, XIII, XV; *P.G.* XXXIII cols. 472, 772, 797, 800, 900; Nilus of Sinai, *Ep.* II.304, III.278; *P.G.* LXXIX cols. 350, 522; Tzaferis 1971: 21-41, 53-56; 1987: 50-52.

¹⁸ The Seven Ecumenical Councils. The Council in Trullo: Quinisext Council, ed. H.R. Percival, Published by P. Schaff, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886; Trans. (<http://mb-soft>).

are evidence of the continued existence of crosses in church floors in practice (Kitzinger 1970: 646-647 note 39; Tzaferis 1971: 61-63).

However, it is necessary to go back and examine the position of the crosses and symbols in the buildings, and clarify whether the position has special significance, and it has indeed been found that in the churches of Transjordan the crosses sometimes emphasized the apse, as was found in the apse lunette in the north sacristy of the church in Hufa al-Wastiyah, or that they marked the position of the altar table and reliquary boxes, as clearly seen in the Church of the Lions at Umm al-Rasas; in the Church of Saint Lot at Dayr 'Ayn 'Abata; in the Church of Saint George at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat; in the chapel at Khirbat Yazuz; and in the geometric interlace in the centre of the bema in Dayr al-Qattar al-Byzanti (Zoara). In places, a large and prominent cross is positioned on the front of the baptismal font, such as in the Baptistry of the Complex of St. John the Baptist at Gerasa, or at the front of the liturgical space, thus emphasizing the transition from the open space intended for lay worshippers to the enclosed space in which the ritual was held, intended only for the clergy, such as the cross depicted along the axis of the hall and the front of the opening leading to the bema in the chapel of Qalat al-Rabad ('Ajlun Castle), or at the front of the entrance to the south sacristy in the Cathedral at Pella. It has also been found that the interlace symbolizing the Holy Trinity is highlighted in the iconographic scheme, and is sometimes positioned on the eastern side of the hall and the front of the opening to the bema, such as in the chapel on the acropolis of Philadelphia (Amman), or alternatively, actually positioned on the western side of the hall close to the entrance, but parallel to the adjacent geometric net, in the centre of which is the eagle/Christ, such as at Khirbat Munyah ('Asfur) near Gerasa. For the most part, crosses were positioned at the entrance to the church complex, as in the 'Glass Court' in the Cathedral complex at Gerasa; at the entrance to the house, as in Tell Ma'in; the eagle/Christ with the letters ΑΩ at the entrance to the South Chapel of the monastery at Mar Liyas; and the geometric interlace symbolizing the Holy Trinity at the entrance to the crypt of Saint Elianus at Madaba and the Central Church at Ma'in. The motif also appears at the exit from the church, for example in the depiction of the eagle/Christ with the letters ΑΩ and the name of Deacon Thomas in the southern aisle and opposite the exit from the Church of the Deacon Thomas at 'Uyun Musa Valley. The cross and the geometric interlace are also positioned in the passages between one space and another in the church, for example the cross found in the passage between the church and the cave in the Church of Saint George at Darat al-Funun, and the geometric interlace in front of the dedicatory inscription in the passage between the annex room and the chapel at Khirbat Yazuz. In some places, the crosses mark burial sites in funerary chapels, such as the funerary chapel in the Memorial of Moses complex at Mount Nebo, the tombs in the crypt under the Upper Church at Gadara (Umm Qays) and in the funerary chapel at Jabal al-Akhdar.

The unusual position of the depiction of an eagle accompanied by three crosses in the panel in the northern colonnade of the Church of Saint George at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat can perhaps be explained by its situation adjacent to the north-south corner of the bema which it faces, but also by the fact that it is a corner panel and adjacent to the two dedicatory inscriptions. One of these is on the front of the bema, divided into three inscriptions: "Saint George, accept the offering and the toil of the people of this village and for the preservation and offering of the brothers Stephen and Elias, children of Comitissa; (This work) was completed in the days of the most saintly and holy bishop Elias; In the days of the most

God-loving [bishop John] this holy place was erected and completed in the consulate of the gloriosissimus Flavius, during the 14th indiction, for the preservation of Rabbus, [steward] of the most holy church, and of ..., priest and warden of (the Church of) Saint George [and Saint ?].” The second is set in the adjacent panel between the columns: “Offering of Ammonius and Epiphania and (their) children John and Sergius, and for the preservation of Saolas (son) of Kasiseus and his children, Mike Kalonike and Mary Kalonike.” The donor John, son of Ammonius, is again depicted in the adjacent panel in the northern aisle, opposite the entrance set into the northern wall of the church, and he is depicted in the vine scroll carpets, standing in *orans* pose, with his name written alongside him (Saller – Bagatti 1949: 66-67, 139-158, 162-165, 166-167 pls. 28, 31.1-3, 32; trans. Di Segni 1998: 439-442 nos. 36a-c, 38, 40; Piccirillo 1993a: 178-179 figs. 244-247; 1998b: 320-322, 327 figs. 116-118, 120). The eagle/Christ and the small crosses are near the dedicatory inscriptions mentioning the donors to the church, members of the clergy and laymen from the village, both anonymous and those mentioned by name. The appearance of the crosses thus underlines their charitable deeds and the appeal for God’s protection.

Although from a preliminary review and a quick glance it appears that crosses and motifs equivalent to them in significance appear all over the church and chapel, a more accurate analysis and study shows that their location is carefully chosen and meaningful. So, the crosses on the doorsteps protect the building. The crosses in passageways emphasize the differences between spaces in the church, and the increase in sanctity from the halls to the liturgical spaces or from the halls to the holy caves. The crosses in the liturgical spaces denote a sacred place and site of a Christian ritual, and symbolize redemption through the sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism. The crosses on the front of the tomb symbolize the deliverance granted to men by the death of Christ and by the Christian faith.

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