

# Marble as votive offering? Social agency in the post-Classical Levant



**Abstract:** This paper combines archaeology and written sources to examine the ways in which marble was used in the churches of the southern Levant in Late Antiquity. In particular, by analyzing the displays of these offerings within the church, and the types of texts engraved on them, it focuses on how, and to what extent, marble donations reflected social position, patronage, and identity. Most of the objects considered here bear inscriptions expressing devotion to saints, martyrs, and prophets, as well as a few quotations from Scripture, but overall, most reflect prayers and invocations by community members. The study therefore attempts to identify the genre of these texts and the objects they adorn to establish the relationship between donation and donor and to provide an analysis of the distribution of these objects within the church proper in the broader regional context of the Late Antique Levant.

**Keywords:** marble, votive inscriptions, Byzantine churches, southern Levant, patronage, donation

## INTRODUCTION

In Late Antiquity, and especially in the second half of the 6th century, inhabitants of the provinces of the southern Levant invested heavily in church construction projects (Ashkenazi and Aviam 2014: 172–175; Aviam and Ashkenazi 2014; Ashkenazi 2018; Aviam and Ashkenazi

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2018). Over time, churches became the most important features of the Christian landscape, eclipsing pagan temples and secular public buildings in status and becoming spaces for community building, as well as displays of rank, wealth, and piety (Ashkenazi 2018: 726–727; Hamarneh 2021: 464). In addition to financial participation in construction projects, the contributions of lay donors in urban and rural communities in the Levant are most visible in inscriptions that register forms of veneration, devotion, and self-celebration in various media (especially mosaics and stone) (Hamarneh 1996; 1998; Jacobs 2020: 35). From a chronological point of view, the 6th century alone provides the most significant data, since more construction projects documented by inscriptions can be dated to this century than to any other. However, this number is not evenly distributed across the decades, and some fluctuations can be observed: significant building activity, mostly in cities, is recorded in the first half of the 6th century, followed by a suspension of building projects between AD 541 and AD 550;<sup>1</sup> thereafter, a resumption of activities related to church building is documented for the last

two decades of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century.<sup>2</sup> Most of the buildings belonging to the latter group were built in the countryside, testifying to the spread of interest in church building across a wide stratum of eastern Byzantine rural society (Di Segni 1999a: 162; 2017b: 293; Hamarneh 2022b: 88).

Church buildings and their decoration were likely modeled on or inspired by the lavish imperial foundations that had largely transformed the landscape and the topography of the Holy Land by the 5th and 6th centuries, significantly influencing the aesthetic tastes of the local provincial elites (both lay and ecclesiastic).<sup>3</sup> This shift, in turn, triggered an increasing demand for and importation of sophisticated decorative materials.<sup>4</sup> Among these, marble certainly stood out. Marble had a significant material and symbolic value in the architectural decoration and embellishment of buildings from a very early stage; its surface luster, smooth texture, and pleasing soft tones found great appreciation and visual appeal among various social groups.

The choice of a particular marble as a raw material depended on its intended

1 This notion has been rejected by Mordechai et al. (2019: 25548–25549). However, in the southern Levantine provinces, the fluctuation is evident from the dedicatory inscriptions of churches. See Hamarneh 2022b: 88.

2 Several factors had an impact on the fluctuation of settlements, such as periodic plague outbreaks, earthquakes, and climatic downturns which alternately contributed to recession or floruit, causing a gradual transformation of the social and economic fabric of the Levant (Hamarneh 2022b).

3 Church inscriptions document a large involvement of clerics of various ranks in the process of building and endowment of churches. Among the lay donors attested in inscriptions are merchants, estate administrators, soldiers and provincial officials (Hamarneh 2003: 230–238; Jacobs 2020: 43; Hamarneh 2022a: 613–616).

4 Especially consistent was the early contribution of senior female members of the imperial household and of members of the aristocracy (Whiting 2014: 73–75; Hamarneh 2021: 560–562).

use, since fine-grained and dolomitic marbles were preferred for sculpture, while coarser-grained marbles were used for architectural decorations and wall and floor revetments.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the degree of elaboration, design and style were determined by the intended placement and the level of proficiency of the workshop that was expected to finish the product. In terms of provenance, it is worth noting that several marble quarries, such as the renowned Prokonnesos, were effectively in imperial possession from the 1st century AD onwards; as such, the imperial authorities fostered and monopolized the marble trade, perhaps even nurturing the high demand for large quantities of marble all around the Mediterranean basin (Habas 2009: 104; Karagianni 2011–2012: 17–18). This centralized control ensured the availability of unfinished and semi-finished products of standard sizes for ecclesiastical projects, a large labor force, and advanced transportation methods. It cannot be ruled out that ecclesiastical authorities were encouraged by imperial middlemen to purchase marble, and that some later became personally involved in what proved to be a highly profitable business.

In fact, the marble found in excavated contexts in the Levant, at least that of the 6th century, seldom displays signs of reuse, which suggests that these pieces were not spolia but were deliberately purchased as new items. Other observations support the theory that marble elements were imported, since the types fall into categories

with standard dimensions that are easy to obtain, given the “production line” principle practiced in the few workshops associated with marble quarries (Habas 2009: 104). Such pieces include: chancel screens, bema lateral slabs, altar and offering tables, small columns, chancel screen posts, reliquaries, small basins, as well as floor slabs, and components for *opus sectile*. However, field surveys on the island of Prokonnesos and the findings of roughly worked marble elements in shipwrecks (for example, at Marzamemi) strongly support the idea that these elements were most likely imported, sometimes finished and sometimes requiring refinement *in loco*.<sup>6</sup>

Such a working procedure is corroborated by the evidence provided by an inscription found in the northern corner of the eastern nave of the Hebron mosque. The reused inscription probably came from the earlier Byzantine church that had stood on the same spot. The text, engraved within a *tabula ansata*, was originally preceded by a cross, which was erased after the inscription was incorporated into the mosque. It invokes St. Abraham to “help his servant Nilus, the foreman of the marble workers, and Agathemerus and Hygia, and Omabis(?) and Thomasia, and Abdala and Anastasia” ([⊕] Ἅγιε Ἀβραάμα, βοήθι τὸν δοῦλόν σου Νίλον τὸν (πρῶτο) μαρμαράρην καὶ Ἀγαθήμερον καὶ Ὑγίαν καὶ ΩΜΑΒΙΣ καὶ Θωμασίαν καὶ Ἀβδᾶλα καὶ Ἀναστασίαν (Newbold 1846: 336–337; Vincent, Mackay, and Abel 1923: 160–161, Fig. 68). An inscription on a large limestone reliquary of unknown provenance,

5 Especially wall and floor *opus sectile* (Hamarnah 2018: 83–84).

6 Artisans may have also traveled on the vessels transporting marble across the Mediterranean. See Gargallo 1962: 196–197, Figs on p. 198; Kapitän 1969: 125–133, Figs on pp. 123, 127–131; McCormick 2001: 404–410; Habas 2009: 104; Karagianni 2011–2012: 21; Leidwagner, Greene, and Donnelly 2021: 297–299.

now kept at the Museum of Biblical Lands, mentions an offering to St. Sergius by Peter the marble worker:

† Θήκη τοῦ ἁγίου Σεργίου· ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας Ἀνύσωνος τοῦ φιλοχρίστου τοῦ ποι(ή)σαντος

[? Μνήσθητι Κ(ύρι)ε Μαρτί]ας κ(αὶ) Δανιήλ [κ(αὶ) – κ(αὶ) Ἀθ]α[να]σίας κ(αὶ) Σεργίου κ(αὶ) Πέτρου τοῦ μαρμαραρίου κ(αὶ) Ἀναί[α] (or Ἀνάγ[ου])<sup>7</sup>

(Di Segni 2007: 132–133, no. 75; SEG 57 – 1860).

The existence of specific organized workshops is mentioned in the Life of St. John the Almsgiver, written by Leontios

of Neapolis and dated around 610:

*When an emperor is crowned, first of all the members of the guild of tomb builders have access to the royal presence while the whole Senate and the army are in attendance; directly after the crowning the builders of the imperial tomb come in and bring with them four or five small pieces of marbles of different colors and say to him: “Of which mineral does Your Majesty desire his tomb to be made?” thus suggesting to him that, as a corruptible mortal who soon passes away, he should take thought for his own soul, and govern his kingdom righteously. (Life of John the Almsgiver 19 [Dawes and Baynes 1977: 228–229]; Barry 2020: 149).*

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

A multidisciplinary study of some collections of ecclesiastical marble, especially in the northern part of the province of Arabia and in Palaestina Tertia, allows to limit the provenance of such elements to Asia Minor, and in particular to Prokonnesos (Marmara, Turkey) as one of the major sources of marble<sup>8</sup> at least until the end of the 8th century (Al-Bashaireh 2021: 4). In particular, Prokonnesos-1 (Saraylar) marble was the most commonly used marble for church furnishings and the primary choice of stonemasons during the Byzantine period (Karagianni 2011–2012: 18–19), in contrast to the more limited use of Prokonnesos-2 (Çamlık) marble (Al-Bashaireh and Al-Housan 2015; Al-Bashaireh and Lazzarini 2016; Al-Bashaireh, Abudanah, and Driessen 2020: 26; Al-Bashaireh 2021: 4).

In terms of its placement, most of the marble was used for the interior decoration of churches, and especially for emphasizing the area of the bema or the presbyterium, where the enactment of the miracle of the Eucharist was performed. The bema was usually enclosed by a chancel screen that symbolically delimited the sacred space within the church and was usually made of marble panels, although less precious local materials (such as oil shale) were also employed. To ensure its visibility, the bema was raised by a few steps above the level of the nave; the uppermost step has generally preserved traces of the chancel screen structure, such as square sockets and grooves to secure the posts and panels of the screen (Michel 2001: 51–54) [Fig. 1]. In some cases, the walls of the apse and the columns of the

7 The reliquary is dated to the 6th or the 7th century.

8 Provenance from other regions, such as Paros, Miletos and Naxos, is also attested but in small quantities.



eastern colonnade of the nave were similarly grooved to hold the screen panels (Habas 2009). A closer look at the marble panels, and especially at their prominent position in the church, reveals that workshops began to produce entire series of liturgical furnishing elements, up to several dozen thematically related iconographic patterns, apparently to satisfy the demand of many private donors, both lay and ecclesiastical.

A considerable number of marble objects in churches received carved inscriptions reflecting personal agency; these fall roughly into two main categories: donations and votive offerings consisting of petitions and expressions of prayer and devotion to saints and martyrs. These texts share a number of features, such as placement in prominent locations within the church, even *ad sanctus*, in order to attract attention and ensure visibility.



Fig. 1. Presbyterium of the Church of Wa'il of Umm er-Rasas (SBF Jerusalem | photo M. Piccirillo)

Such texts were engraved on either the upper or the lower surface of the outer band of the moldings of chancel screens, offering tables, and ambos, and thus facing the nave (Michel 2001: 61–66, 70–72). In some cases, a cross would be placed at the beginning and end of the text for clearly apotropaic purposes.

The epigraphic formulas allowed for the acknowledgment of a donation, the identification of the donors, the self-promotion of the sponsor within the community, and the establishment of a close interaction between the readers of the text, the visitors to the church, and the Sacrum.

The texts often followed a standardized, concise formulation such as *Κύριε μνήσθητι* (“Lord, remember”), *Κύριε βοήθει* (“Lord, help”), or *Κύριε ἐλέησον* (“Lord, have mercy on”) (Di Segni 2017a: 63). The wording as such cemented a dual function: on the one hand, it signaled the benefactor’s involvement in the donation or construction of the sacred space and its decoration (as may be the case with some similarly worded inscriptions installed in public spaces); and, on the other hand, it served a mnemonic function, fixing the person’s name in the sacred space to ensure his or her perpetual remembrance, similar to the apotropaic function of pilgrims’ graffiti. Given the importance of this large category, it should be noted that the origin of such invocations seems to be rooted in the pagan or Jewish Septuagint tradition; according to Di Segni (2017a: 63–64), both *μνήσθη* and *βοήθει* formulations were merely adopted by Christians.

An additional category of inscriptions includes prayers that mention a votive

offering, such as *προσφορά* or *καρποφορία*, or the phrase “Lord, Saint, Martyr, accept the offering of”, followed by a petition formula that explains its purpose: for salvation, succor, the remittance of sins, repose, remembrance, etc. (Di Segni 2017a: 65–66).

Various donor inscriptions were often introduced and concluded with a cross, the most appropriate apotropaic symbol meant to “seal” the intention and ensure its value within the sacred space of the church. The proximity of an inscription to the bema (or sanctuary) gave assurance that the plea would be accepted, a measure that Di Segni effectively called a “prayer-cum-contract” (Di Segni 2017a: 66; Leatherbury 2019: 245). As a result, the internal space of the church was shaped by a variety of offerings from members of the community.

## EPIGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

In this regard, one of the two 6th-century inscriptions, recently uncovered during the excavations of Horvat Beth Shemesh, dated to 543, is a *unicum* of its genre. It states that Malchos, priest and abbot, in “giving thanks to God and to the Glorious Martyr” for his own salvation and memory, made “the mosaic pavement and the buildings and all the marble work [*καὶ πᾶσαν μαρμάρωσ(ι)ν*] in the most holy martyrion and the bronze gates of the crypt” (Di Segni in Storchan 2021: 36). As far as marble is concerned, the donation effort of this presbyter and *hegumenos* was consistent: it comprised wall revetments, chancel screens, and probably the marble reliquary. Indeed, during the excavation, Benjamin Storchan identified dotted bands of small holes in the walls,

vaults, and staircase of the main hall, as well as marble wedges and iron rods that were used to secure the revetment slabs on the walls (Storchan 2021: 33–34). This qualitatively and quantitatively significant investment was certainly befitting to celebrate the glory of the anonymous martyr to whom the church was dedicated and, in a broader sense, to ensure the *fama et memoria* of its main benefactor.

A comparable pattern of donation is described in a Greek inscription of the church at Bargylia (Karia, western Asia Minor) commemorating the fulfilment of a vow to the Apostle Peter by Auxibios, probably a prominent member of the city council. The vow was fulfilled by the benefactor also on behalf of his children and consisted in the paving of an aisle and the construction of a chancel screen [τὸν κανκέλλου], although the inscription itself was written on a local stone rather than on marble (Traina 1990: no. 2, SEG 40 – 953; Feissel 2006: 95, no. 305).

The excavation of the monumental triconch church at Beer Sheva, dated to 552/553, revealed several dedicatory inscriptions in marble, both on liturgical furniture and on pavement slabs. The marble material is not homogeneous, suggesting different production phases or even the use of inscriptions from other buildings. However, according to Fabian and Ustinova, at least three incised marble slabs belonging to the pavement of the church are coeval in form and style and can be dated to the last decades of the 6th century, when the mosaic pavement was substituted with a marble floor. The texts, enclosed within oval medallions, were written in fine and evenly spaced characters. The first, arranged in

six horizontal lines, refers to the works undertaken by Stephanos the *oikonomos* (Fabian and Ustinova 2020: 235); the second refers to other works during the time of Eulalios the priest (Fabian and Ustinova 2020: 236); and the third mentions a collective donation preceded by the words “Lord, remember all those who offered”. Similar wording appears incised on a partially preserved large rectangular marble slab set in the pavement, referring to “those who donated and those who intended to donate”. The text concluded with an olive branch and a cross (Fabian and Ustinova 2020: 239).

Additional evidence reflecting specific liturgical meaning is found in the quotations from Psalms found on an engraved marble slab that has been tentatively reconstructed as a part of a chancel screen. The incomplete marble slab contains, in large and well-designed letters carved along the edge of its upper frame, the first part of Psalm 25 (26:8), “O Lord, I have loved”, originally followed by the words: “the beauty of thy house / and the place of the tabernacle of thy glory” (Fabian and Ustinova 2020: 237). However, one has the impression that this *pluteum* was intended to be reworked, since the fields of the molding are only incised. The wording from the psalm may allude to the liturgy performed during the consecration of churches and may have been prepared for such an occasion (Feissel 1983: 176; Felle 2006: 264). A good parallel is found in the 5th–6th century marble slab reused in the monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, which features the same psalm, the name of the bishop and some ornamental work (Fabian and Ustinova 2020: 237).



Inscribed *plutea* from the triconch church also carry written petitions, such as the one set on the inside of the upper molding of an openwork chancel screen, its text in a square script and skilfully rendered letters. The inscription, flanked on both sides by crosses, is offered for the repose of Serapion. Another inscribed fragment of a chancel screen features a partially preserved inscription engraved on the upper frame, defining it as a gift for the salvation of a donor whose name is lost (Fabian and Ustinova 2020: 240). Offerings for salvation and repose are quite common as they largely reflect the expectations of the community. Such words are engraved on the lower edge of a slab found in the Horvat Karkur church in the northern Negev desert [Fig. 2]. One of the fragments includes the usual formula “for the salvation of”, while at least two refer to an offering by a priest from ancient Malatha in Idumea, and are possibly dated around 554/555 (Figueras 2004b: 125–126, no. 2); other texts written on the chancel screen, including one mentioning a bishop, are incomplete (Figueras 2004b: 128–130, no. 6).

Smaller offerings of parts of liturgical furnishings reflect the consistent participation of the community at large in bearing the financial burden of the interior decoration of church buildings. Such offerings may include altar tables, marble legs, chancel posts, and columns.<sup>9</sup> The donations were duly designated as such in the

inscriptions. However, since the space for text was limited due to the small surface area of these objects, they only bore the proper name of the donor or the person to be commemorated. The papyri of Nessana mention a column donated to the church of St. George by George the *hegumenos* and his wife (P. Nessana III: 7).<sup>10</sup>

This *modus operandi* is confirmed by several other examples, such as a small table leg found in the northern church of Oboda with two names, John and Elijah, carved on its sides (Negev 1978: 117–118, no. 37, Pl. 17.33; 1981: 40, no. 37, Pl. 14.33); a chancel post found *in situ* in the southern church of St. Theodore of Oboda with the name of Ennios (Negev 1978: 105, no. 15, Pl. 12.17; 1981: 28–29, no. 15, Pl. 7.17); an altar table donated for the salvation of Kasiseos and Viktor, son of Stephanos (Negev 1978: 116–117, no. 32, Pl. 16.32; 1981: 39, no. 32, Pl. 13.32); and a chancel screen with invocations to St. Theodore, to whom the church was dedicated (Negev 1978: 116, no. 31, Pl. 16.31; 1981: 38, no. 31, Pl. 13.31). Further evidence has been uncovered at the Monastery of Severianus at Khirbet el-Deir: an inscription carved on the long edge of a marble offering table, dated to the second half of the 6th century, attests the donation of the altar table by Alephaeos the deacon and Aianos the monk (Di Segni and Hirschfeld 1987: 373–377, 386, no. 2; Di Segni 1999b: 99, no. 2). At the Horvat Susiya synagogue, an Aramaic inscription carved on two adjacent sides of a chancel

9 Piecemeal donations are an additional confirmation of the high price of marble; mosaics were the more popular decorative and inscription medium, as they were less costly. According to Baumann, a small surface of donated mosaic would have cost between 0.25 and three solidi (Baumann 1999: 303–307; Jacobs 2020: 41).

10 This donation may also reflect an *ex voto* to the saint bearing the same name as the donor.

screen post shows a similar attitude towards minor donations. The text reads: “and Lazar | donation of | [the] sons of” (Yeivin 1974: 207).

A rectangular marble slab from the central church of Nessana was used as a platform on which a four-legged altar stood, as evidenced by the small unpol-

ished squares near the two surviving corners. A small hole in the center of each square would have held an iron pin that secured the base of the colonnette to the platform. The platform is inscribed on two opposite sides. The inscription on the upper edge reads “[Lord, remember?] those who have donated, and Gadimos”.

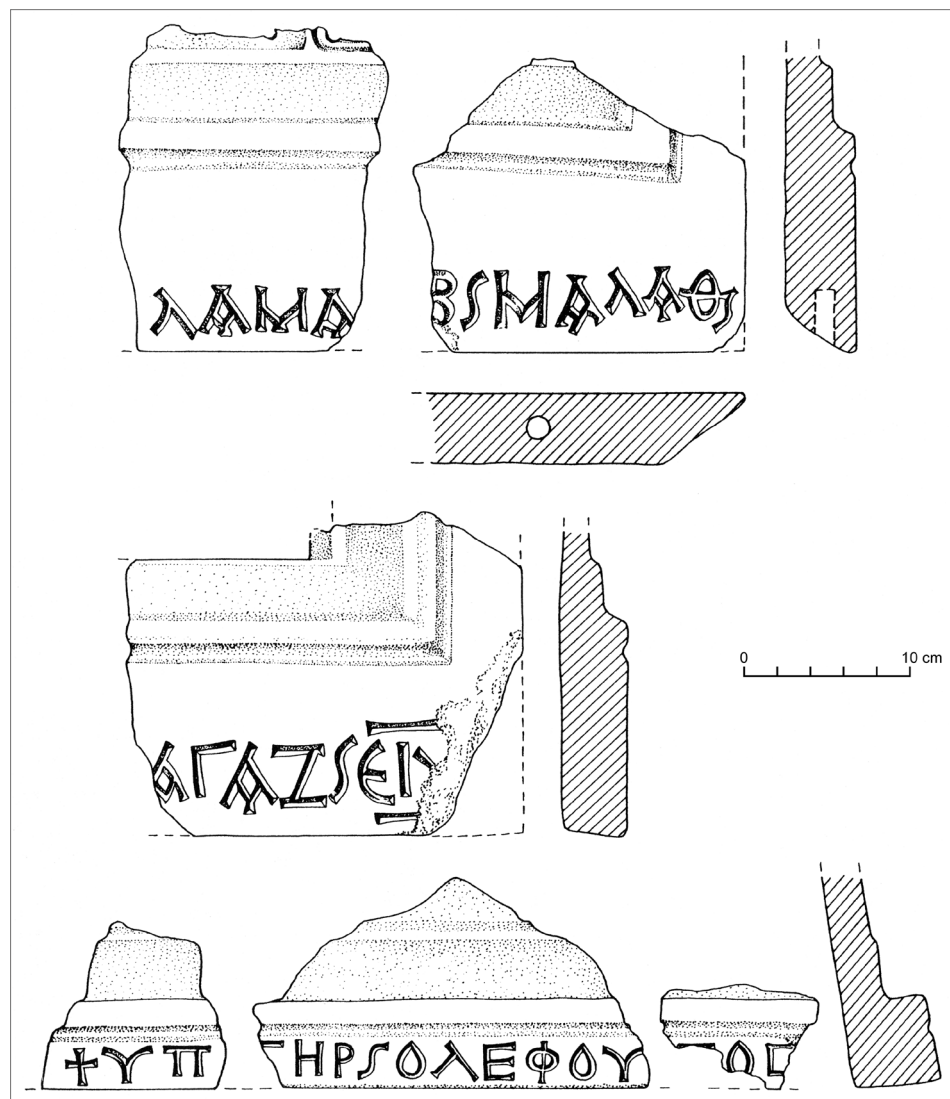


Fig. 2. Horvat Karkur, general view of the inscriptions (After Figueras 2004a: 124, Fig. 23)

According to Figueras, Gadimos can be identified as the stonecutter. The text on the lower edge, preceded by a cross, mentions that it was made “During the time of the most holy bishop Victor and Pau[lus? ... ]” (Figueras 2004a: 232–235, no. 6, Fig. 6; Feissel and Gatier 2006: 737, no. 480). At Khirbet Beit Sila, a similar marble altar base with an inscription was gifted “For the memory and repose of our Christ-loving brothers [and sisters] Peter, John, Mary, Anastasia, Mary, and Andrew”, possibly in commemoration of members of the village community or as a family donation (Batz 2012: 383–385; Di Segni 2012: 412–416; Ashkenazi 2018: 721). The altar table itself was offered “for a vow of Chrysippus”, ⲕ Ⲯⲡⲉⲣ ⲉⲛⲭⲏⲥ Ⲭⲣⲱⲥⲧⲡⲱⲥ? --] (Batz 2012: 383–385; Di Segni 2012: 413–414).

The practice described above was extremely common, as evidenced by coeval examples in Arabia, such as a panel from

el-Deir at Ma'in bearing the incised dedicatory inscription: “+ Lord, remember in your mercy John, your servant, the sinner. +” (Piccirillo 1989: 246). The excavation of a synthronon in the Monastery Church of Moses on Mount Nebo yielded more marble fragments with inscriptions in Greek capital letters, allowing the inscription, first identified in the 1930 excavations, to be completed. The text, preceded by a cross, mentions an “offering by ... priest and by Maximus” (Saller 1941: 268–269; Gatier 1986: 96, no. 85; Acconci 1998: 525–527, no. 150; Di Segni 1998: 435, no. 17; Bianchi 2021: 85, no. 84).

Votive invocations to saints are also attested on chancel screens, although the texts are seldom preserved completely. Examples include invocations to: St. Theodore in the southern church of Oboda (Negev 1978: 116, no. 31; 1981: 38, no. 31); St. Sergius in the church of al-Tuweiri on the northern plain of Akko (Acre) (Smithline 2007: Fig. 6); and at the monastery of Aaron on Jabal Harun (Lehtinen 2008: 201–202, Fig. 5a) [Fig. 3].

This pattern is common in synagogues of the same date, for example at Horvat Susiya. The chancel screen, made of Prokonnesian marble, bears a dedicatory inscription in Aramaic, incised on the upper part of its inner border, below a decoration consisting of a two-strand guilloche: “Remembered be for good Lazar and Isai sons of Simeon, son of Lazar”. Most of the remaining parts of the slab show clear signs of efforts to deface the decorated relief. Only remnants of the intact relief at the upper right allow the scene to be reconstructed as that of Moses receiving the Law (Yeivin 1974: 207; Gutman and Yeivin 1981). Several other fragments of marble

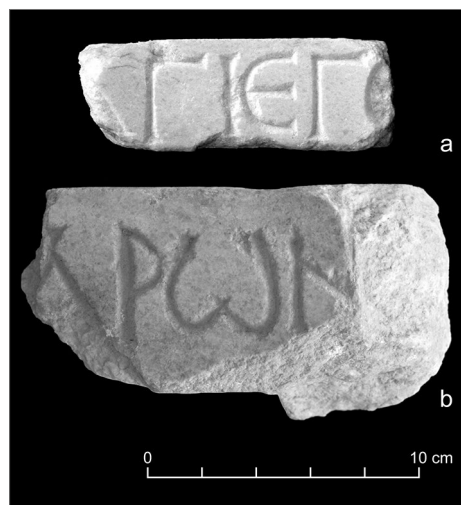


Fig. 3. Marble fragments from Jabal Harun: a – table slab with an invocation to St. George; b – upper edge of a chancel screen with an invocation to St. Aaron (Courtesy of Z.T. Fiema)

chancel screens found at Horvat Susiya mention collective and private donations by the community (Yeivin 1974: 204).

The last category I wish to consider is ambo platforms, such as the one made of Prokonnesos marble, possibly from the Negev, preserved in the Terra Sancta Museum in Jerusalem. The hexagonal base bears a Greek inscription, preceded by a cross, running along four sides, most probably the sides visible from the nave. The text reveals its purpose: “For the salvation

and the offering of Stephen, (son) of Valens, and the repose of the most blessed Arrobebos, (daughter) of Zenobios” (Pierri 2021: 367–371). Another hexagonal ambo base, formerly installed at the northwest corner of a chancel screen in the church of St. Theodore at Khirbet Beit Sila, now in the Good Samaritan Museum of Ma’ale Adumim, contains an inscription asking the Lord to “accept the offering of thy servant Peter the Priest” (Batz 2012: 383–385, Fig. 15; Di Segni 2012: 413–414, no. 4).

## CONCLUSION

Economic prosperity and the rise of the provincial aristocracy, especially in the second half of the 6th century, led to intensive investment in church buildings, which is reflected in the use of imported marbles of various types and qualities. Inscribed liturgical furniture in marble had an important function, not only because churches were the main places where epigraphic practice found its new primary domain in Late Antiquity, but also as a reflection of personal agency. Lay donors were seldom recorded by title or profession (Ashkenazi 2018), which was certainly not necessary given the placement of the offering and its display in strategic locations of the bema and nave.

Further consideration should be given to the organizational dynamics and the distribution of inscribed marble liturgical furnishings in the regional context of the Levant, especially the methods of procuring the stone from various quarries, in particular from the island of Prokonnesos, which accounted for the majority of imports. The raw marble was undoubtedly collected in storage facilities, which must have been located near a port, a *statio marmorum* like the Roman Marmorata;

although their existence is conceivable, no archaeological evidence has yet been found. The fact that most of the inscribed fragments have been discovered in Palaestina Tertia and the Negev area may suggest that the port of Gaza was one such *statio*. However, marble originating from the same quarries, sometimes with mason’s marks but without inscriptions, has been identified on other sites in Arabia, especially at Mount Nebo, Hayyan al-Mushrif, Rihab, Gerasa, Umm el-Rasas, Humayma, etc., suggesting a regional circulation from the coast inland via the *cursus publicus* or secondary routes. Once the material reached its destination, it was probably refined and then fitted within a church space.

In conclusion, the use of marble in ecclesiastical settings cannot be viewed in isolation from its broader social and votive function. In this regard, the degree of involvement of ecclesiastical and imperial authorities in promoting the use of marble, given the great economic benefits they derived from it, cannot be overlooked and should be an important topic of discussion in the future.

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