

A BREAD STAMP FROM ḤORBAT MA'ON

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A pottery bread stamp was discovered in an installation (L296; Basket 1466/1) in Area A2, Stratum IV, dated to the end of the Byzantine period, at Ḥorbat Ma'on (see Nahshoni and Seriy, this volume). The stamp (Fig. 1) is made of well-fired brownish clay with small and medium black-and-white grits. It has a disk-shaped base (diam. 8.5 cm, c. 1 cm thick) and a round knob handle (c. 2.5 cm high). The handle top (diam. c. 5.5 cm) is decorated with a cross and two rows of dots set between its arms. The base of the stamp bears an incised decoration of letters and symbols. At its center is a large dot surrounded by six smaller dots. A narrow band skirting the edge of the disk encloses an inscription, which in turn runs around the central pattern.

The cross-and-dots design on the handle is a common device, possibly representing the sparkles of supernatural light surrounding the cross. Although less frequent than the usual pattern of four dots, one between each of the arms of the cross, this configuration, with a second, outer circle of dots, is not unknown (e.g., Israeli and Mevorah 2000:96–97, 126). The pattern of dots at the center of the base may reflect the early Jewish-Christian theology, which viewed Christ as the greatest of the seven archangels. The dots may represent Christ surrounded by the six companion-archangels believed to be prefigured in Isaiah's (11:1–2) prophecy about the son of David.²

THE INSCRIPTION

A cross marks the beginning of the inscription. The inscription characters, about 2 cm high, are rounded and include some cursive forms:

a V-shaped *ypsilon* and an *alpha* open on top, forms that are typical of the fifth–seventh centuries CE (Thompson 1912:193–194, Tables 3–4). The second mark after the cross is an interesting ligature that joins three letters, inverting the order of the first two: *sigma*, *ypsilon* and *tau* instead of *ypsilon*, *sigma* and *tau*. The inscription reads:

+ECVTEΦAN
Εὐ(λογία) Cτεφάν(ου).

Translation:
Blessing of (Saint?) Stephen.

DISCUSSION

The shape of the object indicates that it was a stamp specifically manufactured for marking bread buns. By pressing the stamp on an unbaked loaf, the pattern was impressed in relief on the soft dough and remained visible on the baked crust. The inscription indicates that the stamp was used for preparing buns that were handed out at a church as a memento of a visit to that church rather than used in the Eucharist rite.

Stamps used for the Eucharist bread often had a cruciform pattern that facilitated breaking the bread. They are either anepigraphic or inscribed with abbreviated formulas such as A W, Ἰ(ησοῦ)C Χ(ριστό)C, Χ(ριστός) N(ικῆ) (Bagatti 1955–1956:256–257, Fig. 9; Hübner 1990; Feig 1994; Israeli and Mevorah 2000:96, upper photo). In patristic literature, the term εὐλογία (*eulogia*), ‘blessing’, can indicate the Eucharist, if so clarified by the context (e.g., John Chrysostom, *Hom. in I Cor.* 24:1, PG

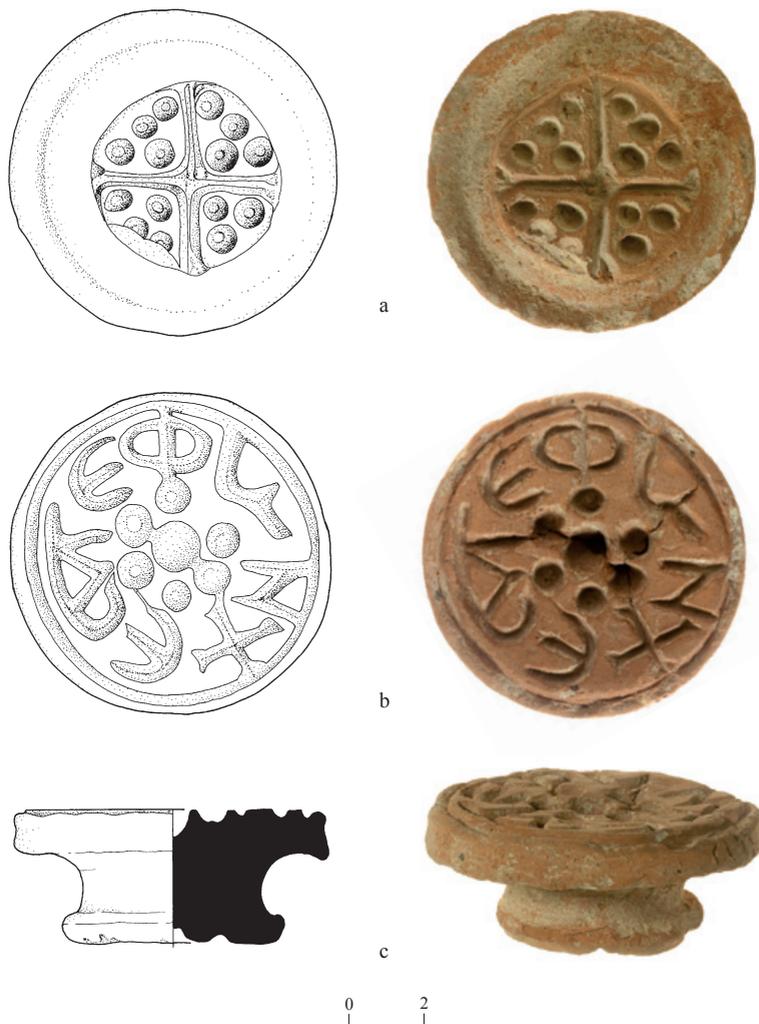


Fig. 1. Bread Stamp: (a) handle top; (b) base; (c) section and side view.

61:199–200), or the Eucharistic bread before consecration (e.g., John Moschus, *Leimonarion* 26, PG 87, iii:2870–2872).³ However, other terms were usually employed to denote the bread distributed to the faithful at communion, for example, μερίς, ‘particle’, i.e., Host; προσφορά, ‘offering’; or κοινωνία, ‘communion’ (John Moschus, *Leimonarion* 29–30, 42, 79, PG 87, iii:2876–2877, 2896, 2936–2937).

More often, the term *eulogia* was used specifically to denote the bread distributed to the faithful after the liturgy.⁴ The term *eulogia*

was also often used to refer to bread or other eatables, such as fruit, water and oil, that were handed out as alms or as mementos to pilgrims at holy places.⁵ Monks also used to bestow such ‘blessings’ onto their visitors or send them to their acquaintances as a token of Christian love.⁶ The term *eulogia* could also refer to artifacts made of imperishable material, such as flasks for holy oil or water (*ampullae*), flask molds, small clay cakes, tokens and lamps. *Eulogiae* of this type could be marked to indicate where, or on what occasion, they were offered to the faithful.

Thus, bread or an *ampulla* stamped with a saint's name, especially if accompanied by the term *eulogia*, would have meant that it was given out at a sanctuary dedicated to that saint or on his feast day, wherever it was celebrated.

Whenever a bread stamp or another artifact of this type bears a picture or an inscription indicating its provenance, it always refers either to a memorial place related to a New Testament tradition, e.g., the Holy Sepulchre (Grabar 1958), the 'Refuge of St. Elizabeth' at 'En Karem (Di Segni 2003:121–123) and Mount Tabor (Manns 1975), or to a sanctuary dedicated to a figure with a well-attested cult, such as those of Mary Mother of God (Rahmani 1970; Loffreda 1989:123–128), Elijah (Loffreda 1989:123), Abraham and Daniel (Piccirillo 1994), the apostle Paul (Di Segni 2002), the healers Cosmas and Damianus (Loffreda 1989:131–132)⁷ or St. Menas in Egypt (Lambert and Pedemonte Demeglio 1994). Furthermore, to my knowledge, there is no evidence in Israel and its vicinity of such a *eulogia* bearing the name of a simple monk. Therefore, the name 'Stephen' in our stamp inscription most likely referred to a church dedicated to the Protomartyr.

Indeed, there is evidence that a church dedicated to St. Stephen did exist at Ḥorbat Ma'on (Nirim). The site is identified with Monois or Menois, a small town, a military base and an episcopal see during the fifth and sixth centuries CE (Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green 1994:183). The church is attested to by an inscription on a marble capital discovered in the fields of Kibbutz Nirim. It reads as follows: (cross) Ἀγ(ίου) Στεφάν(ου) Μωναειτῶν, 'Of St. Stephen of the people of Monois' (Figueras 1996:271–272, No. 7; *SEG* 46: No. 2027). As the inscription was engraved on the upper surface of the capital, it was obviously destined to remain hidden. This suggests that the capital was sculptured for a church of St. Stephen at a workshop located at some distance from the site. The words 'of the people of Monois' indicate that St. Stephen was not a private (family) church, but rather the parochial church

of the town, and most likely the bishop's seat as well.

In late antiquity, the cult of St. Stephen was widespread across the empire, in the west as well as in the east (Gordini 1968:1382–1385). In our region, the evidence of St. Stephen's cult is sparse in the north, and most of the epigraphic and literary data relates to the central, southern and eastern parts of the provinces of Palaestina and Arabia.⁸ Probably because of the vast popularity of the saint in southern Palestine, Stephanos seems to have been the commonest male name among the Christians in this area, or at least in the Negev.

If our stamp came from a church dedicated to St. Stephen, the inscription could be expected to have included the attribute ἅγιος, 'saint', which usually precedes the names of venerated figures. However, not a few exceptions are known. For instance, in the Madaba map, the tomb of the patriarch Joseph, on which a church was erected, is labelled simply τὸ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ, 'The (shrine) of Joseph', and the memorial of the Egyptian martyrs in front of Ascalon is marked [τὸ τῶ]ν Αἰγυ[π]τίων, 'The (shrine) of the Egyptians', while all the other sanctuaries dedicated to figures of the Old and New Testament and to Christian saints—Lot, the prophets Elisha, Zechariah, Micah and Jonah, John the Baptist, Philip the deacon, the martyr Victor and the father of Palestinian monasticism, Hilarion—are marked with the formula τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου..., 'The (shrine) of saint...'.⁹ In mosaic inscriptions in the churches of St. John the Baptist and Saints Cosmas and Damianus in Gerasa and on the lintel of a chapel at el-Boberiyeh in Samaria, John the Baptist is simply called ὁ Πρόδρομος, 'The Precursor' (Welles 1938:497, 482, Nos. 306, 314; *SEG* 8: No. 119). Last but not least, in a mold for *eulogiae* of the sanctuaries of Abraham and Daniel (Piccirillo 1994) and in a lamp of the Anargyri (Loffreda 1989:131–132), the names of the saints are not accompanied by the attribute ἅγιος. Thus, it is not surprising that the epithet ἅγιος was left out on our stamp, as space was very limited, so much so that even the word *eulogia* was abbreviated.

CONCLUSIONS

Whereas *eulogiae* tend by their very nature to be dispersed far from their place of origin, the artifacts used to produce them, if they survive, can be expected to be found near the place of production. Thus, when such artifacts are discovered within the ruins of a sacred building, it is reasonable to assume that they

belonged in it. The excavators have tentatively interpreted the remains of the building where the bread stamp was discovered (Area A2) as a monastery, and identified a church c. 140 m to the northwest (Area C). In my opinion, the excavated complex included a church of St. Stephen and possibly the residence of the bishop of Menois.

NOTES

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² For this theological concept, see Hermas, *Visio Pastoris* 3:4 [12, 1]; *Similitudines pastoris* 9:6 [83, 1–2]; 9:12 [89, 7–8] (Whittaker 1956:11, 80–81, 86); Irenaeus, *Demonstratio* 9 (Ter-Mekertschian and Wilson 1919:666). Testa (1983:276–277, 292–293) deals with visual representations of this theological concept.

³ However, in Anthony of Choziba's version of the same story, the loaves for the Eucharist are called *προσφορά* even before consecration (*Miracula Beatae Virginis in Choziba* 5, Houze 1888:366–367). Cf. also ps. Sophronius: “what is brought to the altar is called by many names: blessing, offering, first-fruit, bread: blessing, as a cancellation of the curse of the first-created (Adam and Eve)...” (*Commentarius liturgicus* 9, PG 87, iii:3989).

⁴ According to Galavaris (1970:141), bread stamps bearing the inscription *Εὐλογία Κυρίου ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς*, ‘The blessing of the Lord upon us’, served in preparing loaves for this use, for the formula echoes the dismissal of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

⁵ See, for example, *Itinerarium Egeriae* 3:6; 11:1; 15:6; 21:3 (Franceschini and Weber 1965:40, 51, 56, 65); *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 27, 46 (Geyer 1965:143, 152); Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 39 (Schwartz 1939:130). On ‘blessings’ of water and oil in ampoules, see *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 11, 20, 39, 42 (Geyer 1965:135, 139, 149, 151). On different kinds of *eulogiae*—eatables and objects—obtained at holy places in Palestine, see Bagatti 1949; Maraval 1985:237–241.

⁶ See, for example, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Cyriaci* 16 (Schwartz 1939:232); John Moschus, *Leimonarion* 42 (PG 87, iii:2896). Moschus clearly

differentiates between *προσφορά*, denoting the eucharistic bread, and *εὐλογία*, denoting the bread handed out in charity.

⁷ The inscription *Ἀναργύρω(ν)*, ‘[Blessing] of the Silverless’, was not recognized by Loffreda as a reference to Cosmas and Damianus the healers who cured without asking for money. On their cult, see Meimaris 1986:120–122.

⁸ Meimaris (1986:134–136, Nos. 706–718) presents a collection of epigraphic and papyrological evidence for churches dedicated to the saint, or invocations to St. Stephen, from Bahan in western Samaria, Be'er Sheva', Nizzana (Nessana), Rihab in Transjordan, as well as from St. Catherine Monastery and Wadi Haggag in the Sinai. Additional epigraphic evidence for churches dedicated to the Protomartyr is found in Be'er Sheva' (Alt 1921:14, No. 8), at Ḥorbat Be'er Shema' (*SEG* 46: Nos. 2010–2011), at Shivṭa (*SEG* 31: No. 1448), at Umm er-Rasas in Transjordan (*SEG* 37: No. 1553) and at Namer in the Hauran (Dunand 1950:159, No. 356).

More evidence comes from literary sources. In Jerusalem, besides the great basilica and monastery of St. Stephen built by Eudocia north of the city and dedicated on June 15, 460 (Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii* 35, Schwartz 1939:54), there were chapels of the Protomartyr at St. Sion and in the portico of the Church of Ascension; St. Stephen was also the patron of churches along several roads leading out of the Holy City toward Bethlehem, Eleutheropolis, as well as Jericho and the Jordan River (Milik 1960:361, 558–59, 566–67, 572, 577, 580, Nos. 8, 26, 45, 55, 65, 71). The burial chapel of the founding fathers of the monastery of St. George in Choziba was dedicated to St. Stephen (*Miracula Beatae Virginis in Choziba* 5, Houze 1888:366). Bishop Marcianus

of Gaza dedicated a church to St. Stephen in his city, and the saint appeared prominently in the apse mosaics of St. Sergius, which were also decorated by Marcianus (Choricus, *Laudatio Marciani* I:30; II:21–75, Foerster and Richtsteig 1929:10, 33–47). Eudocia also founded a church of St. Stephen in her estate at Yavne-Yam (John of Beth Rufina, *Vita Petri Iberi* 166, Horn and Phenix 2008:241–243).

⁹ See Alliata 1999:52, No. 11 (Elisha); 55, No. 18 (John the Baptist); 58, No. 23 (Lot); 65, No. 39 (Joseph); 77, No. 77 (Philip); 78, No. 80 (Zechariah); 79, No. 82 (Micah); 82, No. 91 (Jonah); 86, No. 102 (Egyptians); 93, Nos. 125 (Victor), 126 (Hilarion). The label pertaining to St. Hilarion's tomb is almost completely destroyed, but it probably contained the word 'saint'.

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