

A BYZANTINE-PERIOD PENDANT FROM THE BURIAL CAVE AT ‘EN YA‘AL, JERUSALEM

ROBERT KOOL

The object is a cast-bronze, double-sided medallion, oval in shape (11 × 14 mm), with two flat loops for attachment, each 6 mm in diameter, protruding at opposite sides (weight 3.83 g). The loops were not welded, but appear to have been cast in the mold as one piece together with the elliptical centerpiece. The position of the loops suggests that the medallion could have been the central element of a larger chain or pendant hung around the wearer's neck (Gonosová and Kondoleon 1994:106–107). The pendant was found in the standing pit of the rock-hewn burial cave (L10, B123), which was filled with human skeletons, oil lamps, potsherds and glass vessels (see Abu Raya and Weissman, this volume; Abu Raya 1999:67*).

*Symbols and Inscriptions*¹

A cross and a monogram were incised or engraved on the flat surfaces of the medallion (Fig. 1). An inscription (Fig. 1:c, d) was engraved with miniscule characters on the edge encircling the elliptical medallion.

The Cross (Fig. 1:a).— A cross pattée with slightly flaring arms set within a dotted border, engraved into the oval surface. The cross is devoid of ornamentation and decorated with only simple transecting incisions, dividing its arms into smaller sections. These are reminiscent of the carved decorations on a similar, small cross pendant allegedly found in Lebanon and dated to the sixth century (Gonosová and Kondoleon 1994:113). Its rough style and linear proportions appear to be the work of a simple craftsman.

The Monogram (Fig. 1:b).— A cruciform Greek monogram is incised into the oval surface. All the letters, except the one attached to the left arm, are clearly legible: right leg K, lower leg A, upper leg OY. An attempt to read the left leg as a B seems futile, since both the upper and lower segments lack closures. More convincing is to read it here as a poorly incised P, in combination with the letter C. The cross could comprise the letter I.

Thus, possible readings include: AKPISIOY ([of] Akrisios), or APCAKOY ([of] Arsaces).²

The name *Akrisios* was a fairly common name in the Byzantine period (*SEG* XXXV:1302), also in Byzantine Palestine and Syria (*SEG* XXXVIII:1652, from Gerasa). Another possibility is *Arsaces*, a name of Armenian/Persian origin (*SEG* XXVI:1839; XXX:1508; XLI:1799). Three officials, among them the Patriarch of Constantinople (404–405 CE), are documented with this name in the fifth century (Martindale 1980:151–152).

The monogram was engraved in retrograde, which certainly eliminates its use as a seal matrix for sealing purposes. Similar pendants/medallions were usually religious or amuletic in character (Hamburger 1959:43–45). The simplicity of the monogram and the use of the possessive genitive (OY), may indicate that this is the name of the pendant's owner.

From Justinian's reign onward (mid-530s), cruciform-type monograms largely replaced the earlier box-type monograms, in use from the end of the fourth century until the mid-sixth century (Dodd 1961; Zacos and Vegler 1972:1, 367).

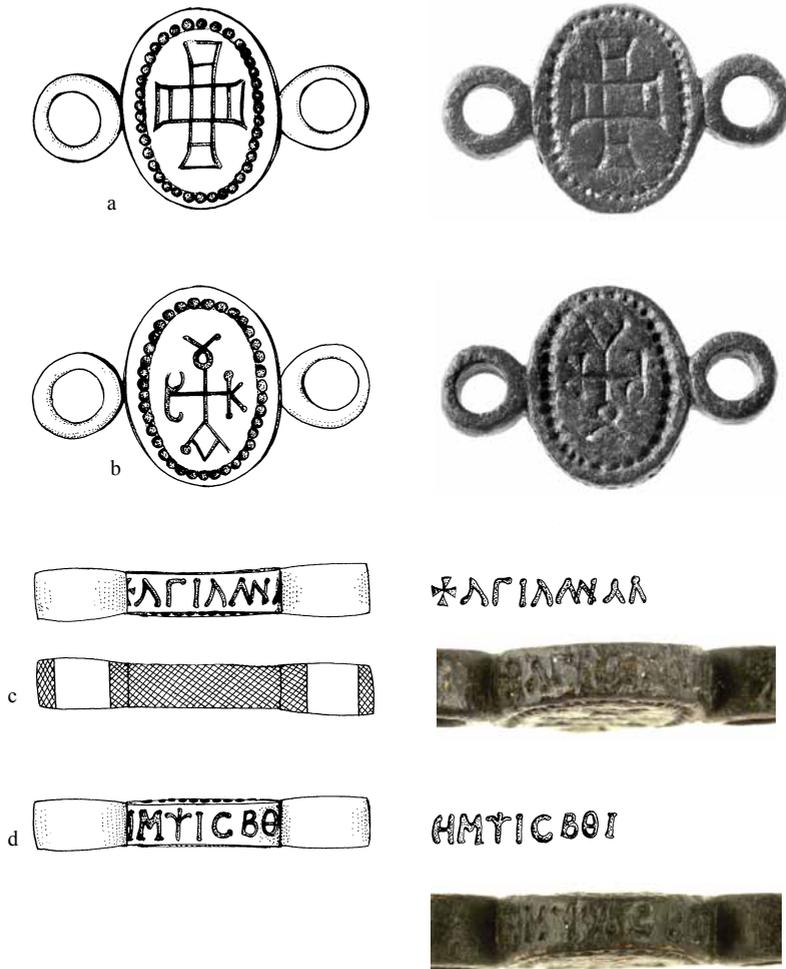


Fig. 1. The pendant.

The Inscription (Fig. 1:c, d).— This inscription of 2 mm high characters was engraved on the encircling edge (height 3–4 mm) of the medallion. Under a powerful microscope one can observe that each individual letter consists of minute dots drilled into the metal, which were then connected to form the letter. A number of the letters are almost completely effaced, rendering the inscription difficult to read. Our reading is as follows:

AGIAMAR(IA)HM(H)T(HR)I(H)C(OU)B(OH)Q(E)I

+ Ἁγία Μαρία ἡ μη(ή)τερ(η) Ἰ(η)σ(οῦ) β(οή)θ(ε)ι

Holy Maria Mother of Jesus Help (your servant)

The inscription is a simple invocation, similar to those found occasionally on common rings and

bracelets from Byzantine Palestine (Piccirillo 1981:26, 32), in which the owner invoked the

name of a saint or holy person for help or good fortune.³

NOTES

¹ The pendant was cleaned by Lena Kuperschmidt of the IAA metals laboratory and photographed by Clara Amit (IAA). I would like to express my thanks to Leah Di Segni (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and Donald T. Ariel (IAA) for their assistance in reading and deciphering the inscription and the monogram.

² Support for commencing the reading of the name with the letter A is found in a virtually identical monogram (lower leg A, left leg P, upper leg OY, right

leg K), but without the C, which reads ΑΡΚΑΡΙΟΥ, documented by Zacos and Veglery 1972: Pl. 248, No. 510.

³ An inscription on a bracelet, allegedly found in the village of Beit Ras, Jordan, reads: αγιε θεοδορε βοηθη καρτερων αμην (Piccirillo 1981:32); a finger ring from Irbid (ancient Arbela), with a cruciform monogram on the medallion, has inscribed on its circular shank: + Θεοτοκε βοεθη τη δουλι σου (Piccirillo 1981:26).

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