

## A Faction Acclamation Incised on a Pithos Found Near the North-West Church at Hippos (Sussita)

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**Abstract:** In one of the domestic rooms attached to the North-West Church at Hippos (Sussita), at least three ceramic *pithoi* were found, all of them in secondary use, possibly for the processing (storing?) of lime. One of them bore an inscription in Greek, scratched into its surface, which turned out to be an acclamation for the circus faction of the Blues. This interesting addition to the corpus of the factions' inscriptions from Syro-Palestine is also lending the dating to the original period of the pithos' use, which cannot be later than the Islamic conquest of the region in AD 636/638.

**Keywords:** circus factions, inscription, ceramic pithos, Hippos-Sussita, late Roman period, Byzantine period, early Islamic period, Syro-Palestine

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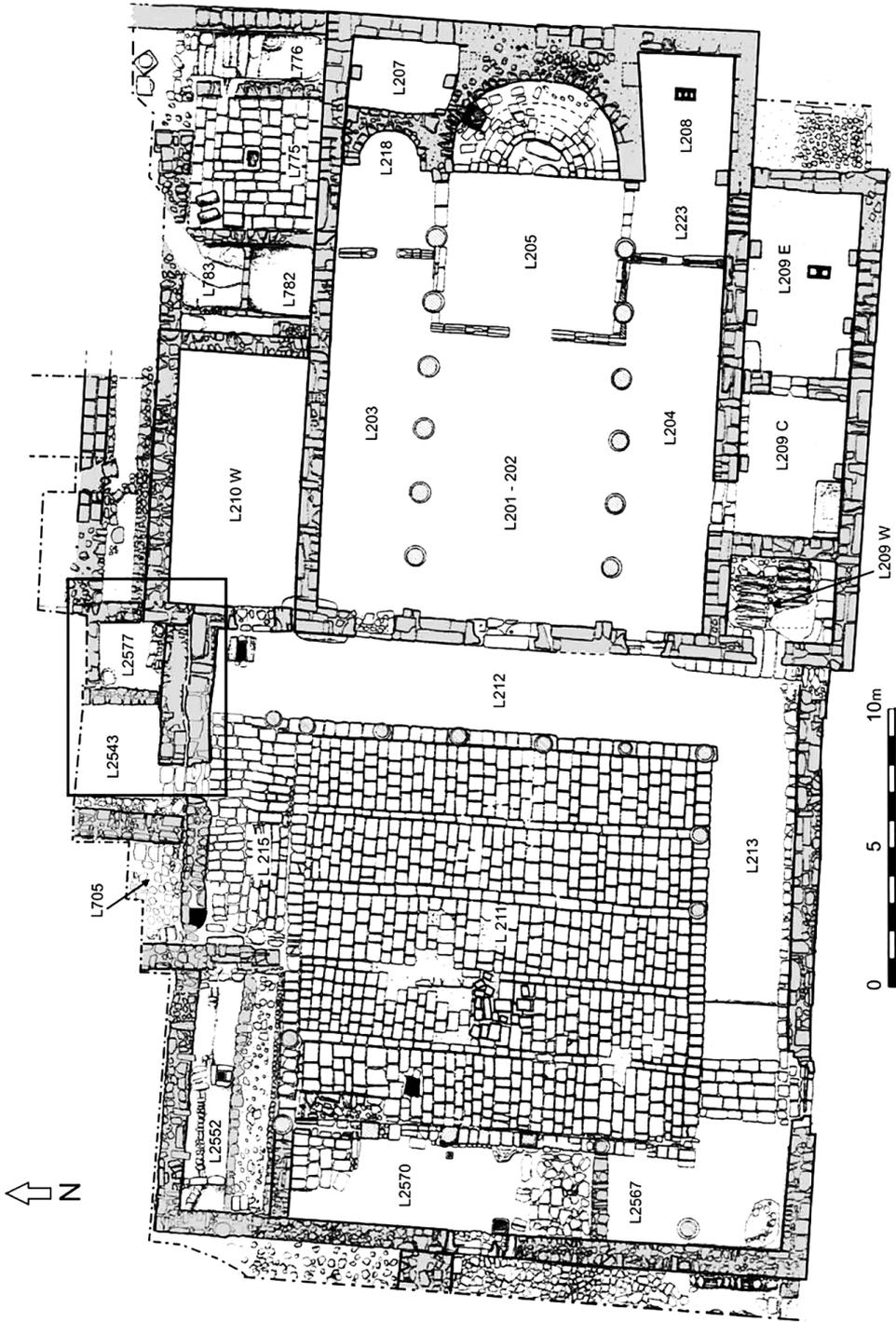
In the framework of the exploration project of the North-West Church (NWC) compound in Hippos (Susita, Sussita),<sup>1</sup> two final field seasons (2007–2008) were devoted, among other things, to the unearthing of the area outside the northern entrance to the *atrium*.<sup>2</sup> The entrance in question was reached by two basalt steps leading from a passage (L2543) with a simple earthen flooring (F708).<sup>3</sup> The passage, c. 3.30m wide, was flanked by two rooms of a domestic character: room L2577 (containing three ceramic *pithoi*) on the east, and room L705 (of unknown purpose) on the west (**Fig. 1**).

A nearly square room L2577, measuring c. 2.40 by 2.30m, must have been a late addition to the church compound (**Fig. 2**). The eastern wall of the room (W793) was constructed as to abut on the north-western corner (W245/W792) of the northern annex of the NWC,

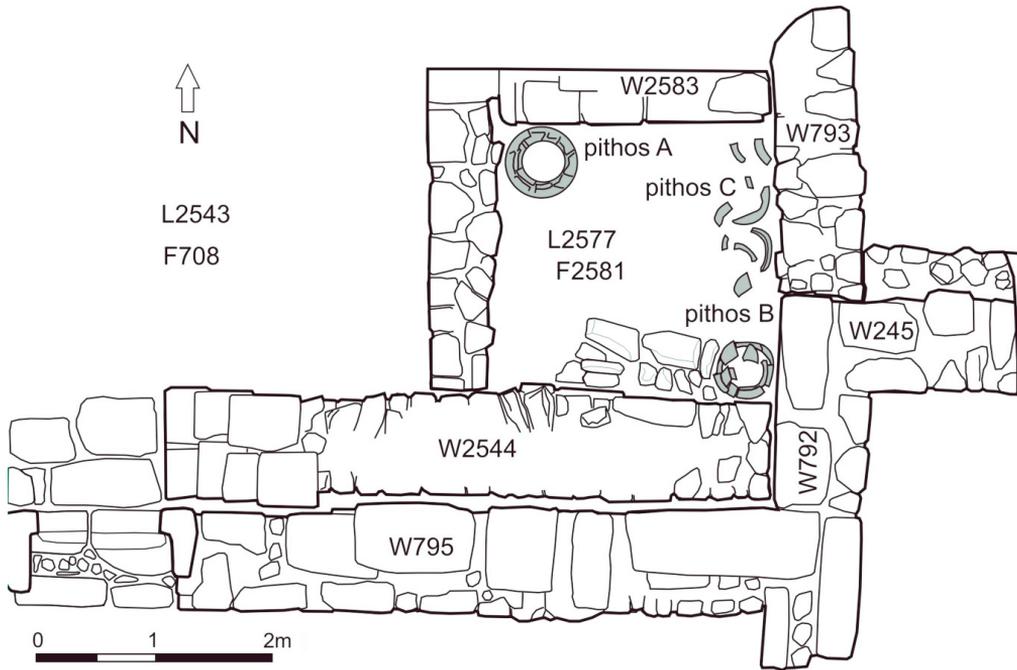
<sup>1</sup> See: Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz 2013. The correct transliteration of the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek 'Hippos' is 'Susita' rather than 'Sussita'; however, the latter has been commonly accepted in the publications issued by the Zinman Institute, University of Haifa, with whom the Polish team collaborated in the years 1999–2009.

<sup>2</sup> Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz 2007: 64–65, Fig. 91/100–101; 2008: 36–37, Figs 51–54.

<sup>3</sup> On this earthen floor, a golden *solidus* of Heraclius was found, minted in Constantinople between AD 629 and 631; cf. Berman 2008: 145, no. 40:C 08.01.



1. North-West Church compound in Hippos in the final period of its existence (Drawing: M. Burdajewicz).



2. Situation of the room with the *pithoi* (L2577) outside the north-western corner of the church *atrium* (Drawing: M. Burdajewicz).

while the western wall (W2576) abutted the outer northern wall of the *atrium* (W2544). The floor of tamped earth mixed with lime mortar and tiny limestones (F2581) was bearing traces of burning. The room apparently served as a storage area equipped with two partially preserved ceramic *pithoi in situ*: in the north-west (pithos A) and the south-east (pithos B) corner respectively (Fig. 3). With a maximum diameter of 0.60 and 0.50m, each of them was encased in a frame of stones. In fact, the south-eastern corner pithos B (Fig. 4a) seemed to be placed on a sort of a stone bench, c. 0.25m high, constructed along W2544. At this level, large patches of orange-coloured clay were noticed inside the room and initially mistaken for a walking level. Displaced sherds of a third pithos (C) were collected by the eastern wall (W793) of the room.

The contents of the *pithoi* cannot be ascertained; however, the one standing in the north-west corner of the room (pithos A) had a layer of pure lime on top above what looked like a compact earthen fill (Fig. 4b). The presence of lime lumps in the pithos itself and on the walking level, as well as traces of burning noted on the latter, seem to suggest the proximity of a lime-burning installation, as did the layer of lime found during the season 2001 on the mosaic floor in the western end of the northern aisle of the basilica.<sup>4</sup> However, the location of the lime kiln itself has never been identified; perhaps it would be found on the northern side of W2583, in the spot which could not be explored for the reasons of

<sup>4</sup> Młynarczyk, Burdajewicz 2001: 8.



3. Room L2577 with remains of two *pithoi in situ*, view from the north-west (Phot. J. Młynarczyk).

excavation logistics. The kind of roofing of the *pithoi* room, if any, could not be determined either. Even if rather many small fragments of roof-tiles were found in the fill, it is not ruled out that it was an open-air room.

During the exploration of the remains of the *pithoi* it became clear that those preserved *in situ* (pithos A and B) were placed upside down after their bases had been removed. The installation of the *pithoi* in the open-air(?) room should doubtlessly be dated to the final period of the church's use, that is, the first half of the eighth century. However, this date is not necessarily the same as the date of their manufacturing, considered that at least two *pithoi* (A and B) must have been in secondary use.

## THE TYPOLOGY

The three discussed *pithoi*, all of them made by hand, fall into two types, slightly differing in their body profile, but more distinctly in the ware (the fabric plus the exterior surface treatment), both of which are well-attested at Capernaum (see below).

One type is represented by pithos A, which is the main subject of the present paper owing to the acclamation in Greek scratched onto its exterior.<sup>5</sup> It is made of a light pinkish

<sup>5</sup> Jolanta Młynarczyk is responsible for the archaeological and ceramological part of the present article, Adam Łajtar for the epigraphic one.



4a. Fragments of pithos B (1277B) *in situ* in the south-eastern corner of the room;  
 b. remains of pithos A (1277A) *in situ* in the north-western corner of the same room  
 (Phot. J. Młynarczyk).

brown, ‘spongy’ (due to numerous voids) fabric, with many pale grey and occasional dark grey grits; the exterior is covered with a smooth red slip. The rim is rounded, just very slightly out-turned and the body gently oval in profile (Fig. 5). The same form and fabric are encountered elsewhere at Hippos, e.g. in a destruction deposit at the so-called HLC area to the east of the Forum.<sup>6</sup> One of two fragmentary items found there preserves its base, proving that this type of pithos had a tall base ring (a ‘footed’ base). The same type

<sup>6</sup> Młynarczyk 2009: 109, 122–123, Fig. 4:55, 56a-b.

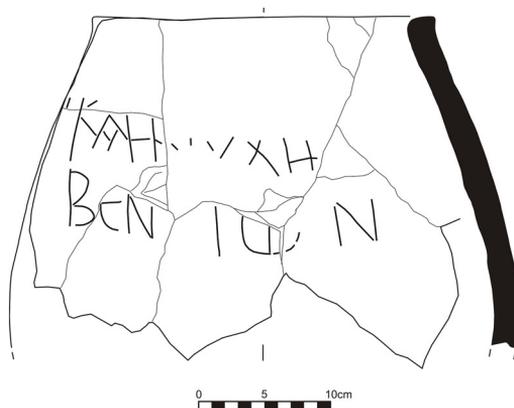


Fig. 5. Restored fragment of pithos A/1277 A with the Blues' faction inscription (Drawing: M. Burdajewicz; Phot. J. Młynarczyk).

(both the form and ware) are present in Capernaum, its examples allegedly coming from contexts dated between AD 500 and 800.<sup>7</sup>

The other type is represented by pithos B and pithos C (**Fig. 6a-b**). Unlike pithos A, they share a pronouncedly carinated body profile, and represent a different ware. Their fabric is equally 'spongy' (very porous), but fired to light yellowish brown with sizeable white and black grits, while the surface is un-slipped, very porous, fired reddish yellow to light brown. However, these two objects differ from each other in that the wall of pithos B is plain, while that of pithos C bears grooved ('combed-style') decoration, at least on its upper half.

Pithos C has many parallels, both at Hippos<sup>8</sup> and elsewhere: Capernaum and Khirbet Karak, all of them situated on the Sea of Galilee. In Capernaum, classified as ANF 61,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Loffreda 1974: 54–55, Fig. 13:6–7, type D2; 2008a: 150, type ANF 62; 2008b: 109, DG 111.

<sup>8</sup> Młynarczyk 2007: Figs 3:30 and 10:156; 2009: Fig. 11:217.

<sup>9</sup> Loffreda 2008a: 149–150. In Loffreda 1974: 54–55, Fig. 13, and 133, Fig. 47, it was classified as type D1.

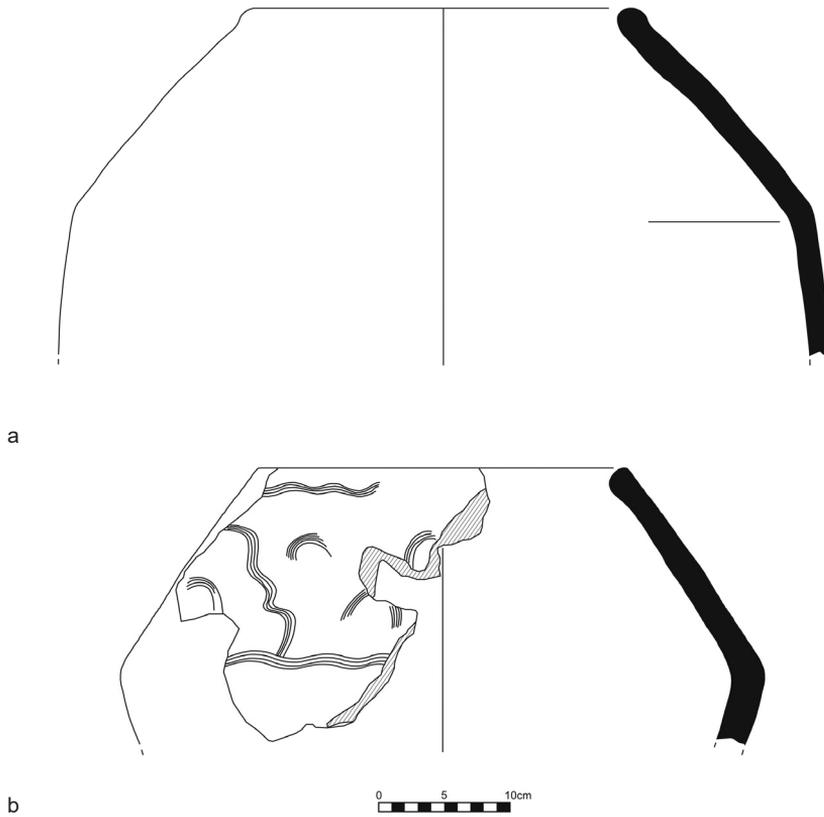


Fig. 6. Fragment of pithos B/1277 B (a) and C/1277 C (b) (Drawing: M. Burdajewicz).

this type was definitely more frequent than the type represented by our pithos A, equal to Capernaum type ANF 62.<sup>10</sup> However, the attribution of the fragmentary Capernaum examples of ANF 61 to one and the same type may seem disputable, as they include a pithos standing on a flat base alongside two *pithoi* on tall ring bases.<sup>11</sup> Actually, as ANF 61, one should consider only those *pithoi* which stand on tall ring bases, like an example found in Hippos;<sup>12</sup> in this respect, they parallel Capernaum type ANF 62. Also at Khirbet Karak, a complete jar of this type (grooved decoration, tall ring base) was found.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 278 examples of ANF 61 *versus* just 68 examples of ANF 62; see: Loffreda 2008a: 150, with references to several examples of ANF 61 from other sites in Israel and from Pella in Jordan.

<sup>11</sup> Loffreda 2008b: 108, DG 110, flat based no. 24 *versus* 'footed' nos 32–33.

<sup>12</sup> Młynarczyk 2009: Fig. 4:57.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Delougaz, Haines 1960: Pl. 38:12 = Pl. 58:8; for other possible parallels, namely from Bet Shean, Pella, Yoqne'am and perhaps Sepphoris, see: Loffreda 2008a: 149–150.

## THE CHRONOLOGY

The traditional utilitarian storage vessel such as pithos is extremely difficult to date because, unlike the other kinds of pottery vessels, its shape was changing very slowly with time. It is obvious that the large, hand-made *pithoi* from Hippos (as in other centres) were manufactured on site, while the raw material (the clay) may theoretically have been brought from another locality. In terms of archaeological contexts, Capernaum type ANF 61 (corresponding to our pithos C, and as regards the shape and the ware also to pithos B) is defined as ‘forma tipicamente bizantina (350–650 dC)’.<sup>14</sup> Also in Bet Shean, it is said to have occurred in a late Byzantine-period stratum.<sup>15</sup> However, in some cases the type’s dating is extended to the early Islamic period, e.g. in eastern Capernaum, where a rim fragment was attributed to a stratum of AD 650–750<sup>16</sup> or Khirbet Karak.<sup>17</sup> Among the Hippos finds of this type, a rim fragment comes from a context containing ceramics of late Roman and Byzantine periods, mid-fifth to early seventh century.<sup>18</sup>

As to apparently less common pithos type Capernaum ANF 62 (corresponding to our inscribed pithos A), there is less dating evidence. Actually, it comes only from Capernaum, where fragments of the type were recovered from contexts described as Byzantine, late Byzantine and ‘periodo arabo’ with some residual Byzantine material.<sup>19</sup> It seems reasonable to ascribe this type of pithos with red external slip to not later than the Byzantine (and before early Islamic) period. The faction inscription of our pithos A, apparently ante-dating the Islamic conquest of AD 636/638, is in favour of such dating. It is after a century or so from the time of its manufacturing that the pithos was placed upside down in a subsidiary room outside the *atrium* of the North-West Church to be re-used for the storage of the lime(?).

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Pithos A carries an incised inscription in Greek on its external side, in the upper part of its body, not far from the rim. The inscription must have been executed during the use of the pithos as suggested by the technique of execution and the position of the writing. The text is *c.* 24cm wide and *c.* 9cm high, with letters ranging in height between 3.5 and 4cm. The letters are carved lightly and freely. Palaeographically they resemble upright epigraphic majuscules; note especially *alpha* in line 1 which is of the type ‘*alpha à barre brisée*’, characteristic of the monumental script. The hand is definitely well trained although not very careful while writing on that occasion, which is especially evident in line 2 where the letters are first tightly arranged and then widely spaced, and they do not form a straight

<sup>14</sup> Loffreda 2008a: 149; 1974: 54–55 and 133, Type D1 (late Roman-to-Byzantine).

<sup>15</sup> Avshalom-Gorni 2004: 102, Fig. 10:1–3.

<sup>16</sup> Peleg 1989: 92–93, Fig. 61:6.

<sup>17</sup> Delougaz, Haines 1960: 37.

<sup>18</sup> Młynarczyk 2007: 113, no. 156.

<sup>19</sup> Loffreda 2008a: 150.

line. A note should be taken that *iota* at the beginning of line 1 is marked as a short vertical stroke at the top of line height. Perhaps this is not *iota* at all and the first syllable of the word νικᾶ was inscribed much to the left, in the part of the pithos that is now lost. This could have been the case also with the article τῶν before Βενέτων, otherwise we have to assume that the article was omitted (as in the text printed below).

The inscription can be transcribed as follows:

[ν]ικᾶ ἡ τύχη  
Βενέτων.

*The fortune of the Blues triumphs.*

2. The article τῶν is omitted before the name of a faction in some further factions' acclamations (however, see description of the inscription above).

What we have before us is a faction acclamation constructed according to the well-known pattern: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη + the name of a faction in genitive plural. Acclamations of this type are attested by inscriptions coming from throughout the Byzantine world<sup>20</sup> including such places as Constantinople,<sup>21</sup> Ephesos,<sup>22</sup> Didyma,<sup>23</sup> Stratonikeia in Caria,<sup>24</sup> Aphrodisias,<sup>25</sup> Phoenicia,<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For a collection of factions' inscriptions see: Cameron 1976: 314–317. Note, however, that his list includes not only acclamations of the type νικᾶ ἡ τύχη + the name of a faction, but also other inscriptions mentioning Blues and Greens. On inscriptions mentioning factions see also: Roueché 2007a: 62–64.

<sup>21</sup> Cameron 1973: 74: Δάζις λέγω νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων (inscription on the Porphyrius' monument raised up in the hippodrome in Constantinople). Another circus acclamation from Constantinople is *CIG* IV 8788 = Cameron 1973: 75: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη Κωνσταντίνου μεγάλου βασιλέως τοῦ συστατικοῦ νικητοῦ καὶ Βενέτων τῶν εὐνοοῦντων.

<sup>22</sup> Grégoire 1922: no. 112 = Cameron 1973: 74 = *I.Ephesos* 1193 = Roueché 1999: 168, no. 17: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν {νβ} Βενέτων; *I.Ephesos* 1194 = Roueché 1999: 168, no. 16: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Βενέτων; *I.Ephesos* 1198 (1) = Roueché 1999: 166, no. 10: [νικᾶ] ἡ τ[ύ]χη Πρασίνων; *I.Ephesos* 1198 (2) = Roueché 1999: 167, no. 14: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη Πρασίνων; *I.Ephesos* 1198 (3) = Roueché 1999: 168, no. 18: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρα[σίνων]; Roueché 1999: 167, no. 13: (νικᾶ ἡ τύχη) (τῶν Πρασίνων); for the latter inscription, see also: Roueché 2007b: 231–232, Fig. 2. Generally on factions' acclamations in Ephesos, see: Roueché 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Grégoire 1922: no. 226 *ter* = *I.Didyma* 609 = Cameron 1973: 74: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη Πρασίνων; *I.Didyma* 610 = Cameron 1973: 74: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη Πρασίνων.

<sup>24</sup> Grégoire 1922: no. 243 bis = Cameron 1973: 74 = *I.Stratonikeia* 1020: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη Π[ρ]ασίνων.

<sup>25</sup> Roueché 1993: 16, no. 1, iii: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων κ(αὶ) τῶν μίμων τοῦ Πρασίν(ου); 37, no. 8 e: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων; 38, no. 10: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῆς πόλεως κὲ τῶν Πρασίνων; 101, no. 46 B 1: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν [Πρασίνων]; 105, no. 46 E 9: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων; 105, no. 46 E 11: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Πρασίνων; 108, no. 46 G 12 i: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Βενέτων; 112, no. 46 J 13: τόπο τῶν μακελλίτων νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Βενέτων; 115, no. 46 X 4: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τ[ῶ]ν Πρασίν(ων).

<sup>26</sup> Seyrig 1950: 248, no. 8 = *IGLSyr* VI 2836 = Cameron 1973: 74: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Βηνήτων (from Baalbek [Heliopolis]). Rey-Coquais 2006: no. 127: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῆς π(ρωτο)μητροπόλεως καὶ τῶν Βενέτων (mosaic inscription in the hippodrome of Tyre; note that the reading π(ρωτο)μητροπόλεως is not certain; it can also be τῆς Τ(υ)ρί(ων) μητροπόλεως); no. 131: νικᾶ ἡ τύχη τῶν Βε[νέτων] (graffito on the base of a column in the hippodrome of Tyre). The two latter inscriptions are also available as *SEG* LII 1601 and 1605 respectively.

south Syria,<sup>27</sup> Arabia,<sup>28</sup> Palestine,<sup>29</sup> Alexandria *ad Aegyptum*,<sup>30</sup> Antioch in Middle Egypt,<sup>31</sup> Thessaly,<sup>32</sup> and Crete.<sup>33</sup> Inscriptions with the  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta$  acclamation are generally dated to the sixth-seventh century AD. The oldest known item seems to be the acclamation inscribed on the Porphyrius' monument that was set up in the hippodrome in Constantinople c. AD 500,<sup>34</sup> the youngest – the acclamation of the Emperor Constantine (perhaps Constantine V [better IV], AD 668–685) and the Blues, also from Constantinople.<sup>35</sup> This nearly two-centuries period of occurrence of the  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta$  acclamations corresponds with the period of the highest rioting activity of the factions after the fusion of the circus and the theatre fan clubs towards the end of the fifth century AD<sup>36</sup> and the more formal involvement of Blues and Greens, within the seventh century AD, into the court and church ceremonial

<sup>27</sup> Littmann, Magie, Stuart 1921: no. 804 = Cameron 1973: 74:  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \epsilon\upsilon\tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{Βενήτων}$  (from Taff in the Ledja).

<sup>28</sup> Littmann, Magie, Stuart 1921: 148–149, nos 256 and 266 = Cameron 1973: 74 = *IGLSyr* XXI 5 147 and 148:  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \epsilon\ \tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\eta\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{Βενέτων}$  and  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\epsilon\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{Βενήτων}$  (from Umm el-Jimal in present-day Jordan, not far from the Syrian border). Another inscription from the same site may preserve an acclamation of the Red; cf. *LBW*, no. 2425 = Littmann, Magie, Stuart 1921: 148 = Cameron 1976: 72 and 316. The text reads:  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{Κοχ}(\ )$  and the last word is likely to be expanded as  $\text{Κοχ}(\chi\acute{\iota}\nu\omega\nu)$ , i.e.  $\text{Κοκκίνων}$ .

<sup>29</sup> Syon 2004: 14 with Fig. 17 (*SEG* LIV 1678; read by R. Tybut on the photograph):  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{Βενέτων}$  (inscription of a mosaic set in the sidewalk at the entrance to one of the shops in Bet Shean; note that the dating of the inscription to the fourth/fifth century suggested in *SEG* on the basis of archaeological criteria is too early by at least one hundred years).  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta$  formula ought not to be restored in an inscription from Jerusalem mentioning the Blues (*SEG* VIII 213; Cameron 1976: 316; *CIIP* I 2, 1026).

<sup>30</sup> A collection of factions acclamation was found inscribed on the seats of the theatre-like building found by the Polish archaeologists on Kom el-Dikka. They were published in Borkowski 1981. Those with the formula:  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta$  + the name of a faction are: Borkowski 1981: 81–82, inv. no. 39 (*SEG* XXI 1492):  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \text{Καλοτύχου καὶ τοῦ νέου Δόρου}$ .  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \text{Πρασίνο[ν] γεννεωτάτων}$ ; 86, inv. no. 24 (*SEG* XXXI 1493):  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ (\nu)\acute{\epsilon}\omega\nu\ \text{Πρασίνο}$ ; 87, inv. no. 47 (*SEG* XXXI 1494):  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \text{Εὐτοκίου καὶ Βενέτων, κακὰ τὰ ἔτη τοῦ Λαχανᾶ}$ . Another circus acclamation from Alexandria is: Lefebvre 1907: no. 37 = Cameron 1973: 75:  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \text{Εὐτοκίου καὶ Βενέτων καὶ τοῦ γράψαντο[ς]}$ . Eutokios was probably a charioteer.

<sup>31</sup> Dain 1933: 186–187, no. 217 = Cameron 1973: 74:  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \text{Ἑλλαδίας καὶ Βενέτων, ἀμήν}$ . The inscription stands on two sides of a comb. Helladia could have been a dancing-girl. For this object, see more recently Rutschowscaya 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Lazaridis 1969: 21 with Pl. 23a = Cameron 1973: 276 = Cameron 1976: 149 and 314; republished in Kiourtzian 2005: 398, no. 5 (*SEG* LV 615):  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ \text{Πρασίνο}\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{ὀρθοδόξων}$  (from Phthiotic Thebes).

<sup>33</sup> *I.Cret.* IV 513 = Bandy 1970: no. 20 = Cameron 1973: 75:  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta\ [\eta]\ \text{Πρασίνο}\ [\dots\dots\dots]\ \text{καὶ Ἰωάννης}$  (from Gortyn). Ioannes and a colleague whose name is lost could have been charioteers.

<sup>34</sup> Equally old is the acclamation to the metropolis and the Blues in a mosaic in the hippodrome of Tyre, dated to AD 502; for reference, see above, n. 26.

<sup>35</sup> For reference, see above, n. 21. The identity of the emperor in question is a matter of controversy. For a recent discussion see: Missiou 1985.

<sup>36</sup> See Cameron 1976: especially 193–229, chap. VIII. Cameron (1976: 193), calls attention to five facts that are important in connection with the inscription here discussed. 1) *In the early Empire, up to and including the fourth century, the factions (partisans and professionals alike) were solely concerned with the circus – that is to say with chariot-racing. By the late fifth century we find that both partisans and professionals of the theatre and amphitheater too are regularly called by the name of the four circus colours.* 2) *From the late fifth century on virtually every demonstration or riot in circus, theatre or amphitheater is expressly or implicitly ascribed to the two major colours: Blues and Greens. Before that date not one such disturbance is ascribed to circus partisans.* 3) *It is from this same date again, the late fifth century, that we first begin to hear of regular and violent confrontations between Blues and Greens throughout the eastern cities.* 4) *Before (once more) probably the late fifth century, Blues and Greens simply did not exist in the eastern cities, except for Alexandria and Constantinople.*

that tempered their rowdyism.<sup>37</sup> Our inscription from Hippos should undoubtedly be placed within this chronological framework, however a more exact date is difficult to establish due to the lack of safe dating criteria. One can only suppose that it is older than the Arab invasion of Syria and Palestine in AD 637, which must have impeded the functioning of Byzantine social institutions in this area.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that this date refers only to the fact of inscribing the acclamation on the pithos. The secondary use of the pithos in a room adjacent to the North-West Church could have occurred much later, in the second half of the seventh or the first half of the eighth century AD.

Among the factions' inscriptions featuring the  $\nu\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta$  acclamation two well-defined groups can be distinguished. The first group, best represented by the finds from Ephesos, Didyma and Aphrodisias, contains well cut texts placed in public spaces, often in connection with acclamations of state and civic institutions. These should be considered as formal and official inscriptions testifying to the involvement of the Blues and the Greens in public ceremonial, as Charlotte Roueché has demonstrated recently.<sup>39</sup> The second group, of which the best representatives are the inscriptions on the seats of the theatre-like building on Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria,<sup>40</sup> consists of casual graffiti left most probably by the partisans. Our inscription undoubtedly belongs to this second group. It must have been executed by someone who had direct access to the pithos and was eager to express his factional sympathies.

It is difficult, and even dangerous, to draw conclusions of a general nature from this modest text. As is well known, circus and theatre spectacles played a prominent role in social life during the period of late Antiquity. Circuses existed in all major cities of the then empire,<sup>41</sup> while theatres must have been still more common as they require less space than circuses. Theatrical spectacles could have been organized with lesser expenditures than chariot races since a troupe of travelling actors could have performed almost everywhere, even on an open square. The professional performers along with a certain number of the most devoted among the fans, commonly referred to as 'young men' in contemporaneous sources, were organized in clubs called factions by modern scholars.<sup>42</sup> Of the four existing factions named after the colours of the jackets worn by the charioteers – Greens, Blues, Reds,

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5) *Circus partisans should not be recorded in the eastern cities before then, because (contrary to popular opinion) chariot-racing itself (in Roman style) was virtually unknown in the East.*

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Cameron 1976: 297–308, chap. XI.

<sup>38</sup> The question is a matter of discussion, however. Some scholars suggested that the Byzantine factions survived the Arab invasion and influenced the Islamic *futuwwa* organizations; cf. Vryonis Jr. 1965: 46–59 with rather sceptical remarks by Cameron 1976: 341–343, Appendix G.

<sup>39</sup> Roueché 1984; 1983: 143–156.

<sup>40</sup> In earlier works by Polish scholars involved in the publication of the results of Kom el-Dikka excavations, this theatre-like building was identified as a gathering place for members of the Green faction (so in Borkowski 1981). Recently it was brought into connection with some 20 auditoria discovered in the neighbourhood and considered as the main lecture hall of the Alexandrian university; cf. Derda, Markiewicz, Wipszycka (Eds) 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Humphrey 1986. For the period in question (sixth–seventh century AD), the circuses are attested in Beirut, Tyre, Caesarea, Bostra, Gerasa, and perhaps also Gadara; cf. Humphrey 1986: 438–539, especially 461–505. For the circus in Gerasa, see especially: Ostrasz 1989.

<sup>42</sup> We use the term 'faction' here and throughout the article although we are well aware of its conventional and not technical character. For the factions the most seminal study still remains Cameron 1976.

and Whites – the two former played a dominant role. The sources constantly present them as fervent rivals to one another, and their rivalry undoubtedly evoked an echo in society, although Procopius is probably exaggerating when he writes in a much-quoted passage, that the whole population of the Empire was divided into the Blues and the Greens.<sup>43</sup>

When seen in this light, the inscription under scrutiny hardly testifies to more than the presence of the partisans of the Blues, perhaps organized in a faction, in Hippos in the sixth/seventh century AD.<sup>44</sup> It is even not proof that the city possessed a circus in which chariot races in Roman style were organized,<sup>45</sup> although the existence of a circus within the area of Hippos was suggested on the basis of other premises.<sup>46</sup> The partisans of the Blues in Hippos could have found nourishing substance in chariot races in one of the neighbouring cities with circuses or in the theatre activity.<sup>47</sup> Our inscription can in no way be considered as proof of the social or religious tensions of the period. Such considerations, common in scholarship from the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century AD, are completely unfounded, as Alan Cameron demonstrated in his seminal study on the circus factions.<sup>48</sup> Neither can the inscription be connected with the Jews, who are known to have had sympathy for the Blues<sup>49</sup> and surely inhabited Hippos in the Byzantine period. To exclude such a possibility it suffices to say that the object was found in an immediate vicinity of a church and even if it was used there in a secondary context it was surely not brought from a Jewish entourage.

A strange phenomenon can be observed while looking at the  $\nu\iota\kappa\tilde{\alpha}\ \eta\ \tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta$  acclamations from the Syro-Palestinian area, including the acclamation discussed herein. With the exception of one unclear item from Umm el-Jimal in Arabia, which may be for the Reds, all of them are for the Blues. This is undoubtedly a matter of pure coincidence. There must have been the Greens where there were the Blues and the partisans of both factions surely had the same behaviours in the matter of leaving written acclamations, but strangely only the acclamations of the latter faction have survived to the present day.

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<sup>43</sup> Procopius, *De Bello Persico* I 24, 2; *Anecdota* VII 1.

<sup>44</sup> For the presence of the Blues and the Greens in Byzantine Palestine see: Dan 1981 (*non vidimus*).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. a remark by Cameron 1976: 196: *It must be recognized that from the fifth century on a reference to Blues and Greens in a city need not imply that the city in question had a hippodrome.*

<sup>46</sup> According to Arthur Segal, an elongated depression in the valley neighbouring the Hippos *acropolis* from the east may be a remnant of a hippodrome. The hypothesis needs field research to be proven positively.

<sup>47</sup> For the world of public spectacles in Roman and late Antique Palestine, see: Weiss 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Cameron 1976: 126–153.

<sup>49</sup> Van der Horst 2003; reprinted in: 2006: 53–58.

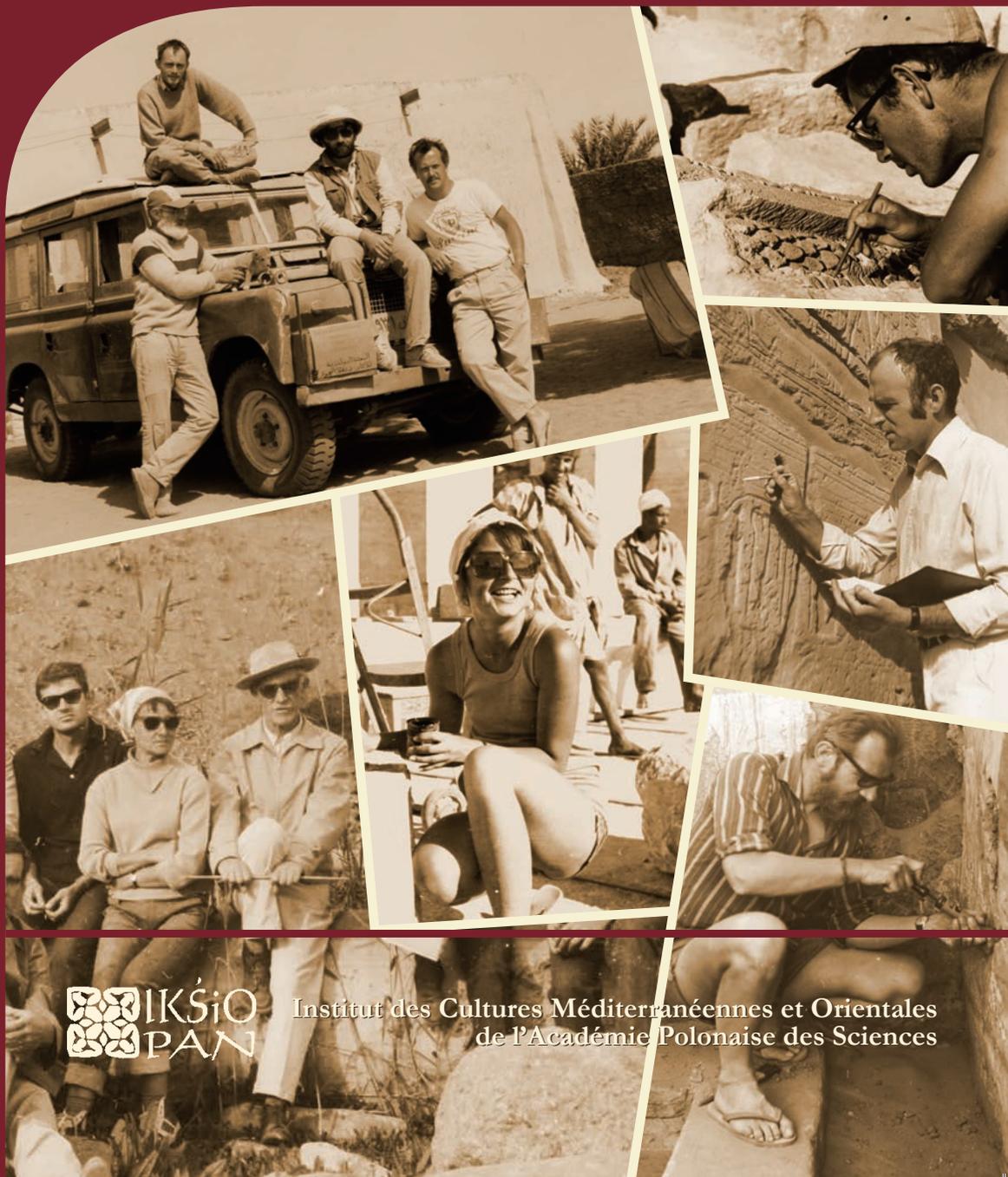
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