

Gabrielle Kremer – Eduard Pollhammer – Julia Kopf – Franziska Beutler (Hrsg.)

ZEIT(EN) DES UMBRUCHS

Akten des 17. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum provinzialrömischen
Kunstschaffen
Wien – Carnuntum, 16.–21. Mai 2022



Veröffentlichungen aus den Landessammlungen Niederösterreich
Nr. 7

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MICHAEL EISENBERG – ARLETA KOWALEWSKA

THE FLOWERS MAUSOLEUM AT HIPPOS OF THE DECAPOLIS

A FIRST GLANCE INTO ONE OF THE FINEST ROMAN PROVINCIAL ARCHITECTURAL DECORATIONS IN BASALT

Abstract

The Flowers Mausoleum is the most elaborately decorated funerary structure of the Saddle Necropolis, the most representative of the three known *necropoleis* of Hippos of the Decapolis. The foundations of the mausoleum, built in the late 1st to early 2nd century AD, have been fully excavated, together with some of its architectural blocks, collapsed during the 363 AD earthquake. The basalt fragments collected until now give evidence of a building composed of five decorative segments, two rectangular and two circular, with a conical roof. The rectangular ground floor was decorated with a particularly interesting Doric frieze of unusually rendered triglyphs and metopes filled with flowers, which give the mausoleum its name. The meticulously sculpted architectural decorations are some of the finest examples executed in basalt, most probably created in a local workshop. The article introduces Hippos' *necropoleis*, and gives a preliminary description of the Flowers Mausoleum, considering the regional parallels as well as Hippos' timeline.

INTRODUCTION

Antiochia Hippos (Sussita in Aramaic), one of the *poleis* of the Decapolis, is located 2 km east of the shores of the Sea of Galilee, in modern Israel. Situated on Mt. Sussita, which rises to a height of about 350 m above the lake, the city was cut off from its surroundings by three streams and could only be accessed through a topographic formation of a saddle (fig. 1) in the south-east and a winding path in the west¹. The city's main construction materials were the two local stones: basalt and a soft calcrete/caliche (*nari*)².

Antiochia Hippos was founded after the Battle of Paneion (ca. 199 BC), either by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC), or most probably by Antiochus III the Great (222–187 BC)³. After Pompey's conquest in 64 BC, the city was incorporated into Provincia Syria. It flourished throughout the Roman period, being the only polis directly next to the Sea of Galilee from the east with a *territorium* expanding to all the southern Golan⁴. As early as mid-4th century AD, Hippos became the seat of a bishopric, and during the Byzantine period at least seven churches were built in the city. During the Early Islamic period, Hippos was replaced as a regional capital by Tiberias, situated on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee. In AD 749, just at the end of the Umayyad rule, Hippos was destroyed by an earthquake and never resettled⁵.

THE NECROPOLEIS OF HIPPOS

Three *necropoleis* served the city of Hippos (fig. 1)⁶. The Southern Necropolis included dozens of burial caves with a few preserved decorative basalt doors and hundreds of pit graves cut in the soft

¹ In Hippos, the saddle is the raised area that connects Mt. Sussita with the south-western hills of the Golan Heights.

² Shtober-Zisu 2014.

³ Eisenberg 2014; Eisenberg 2016; Eisenberg 2017a.

⁴ Pažout – Eisenberg 2021.

⁵ For the historical geography of Hippos, see Dvorjetski 2014. For an updated summary see Eisenberg – Segal 2022.

⁶ Eisenberg 2017b, 17–19; Zingboym 2018.

sandy rock and earth, all robbed out and undated⁷. The little-surveyed Eastern Necropolis, located on a small rocky hill, had multiple pit graves with basalt covering slabs. The most prestigious and the best-researched burial ground is the Saddle Necropolis located along Hippos' main approach via the saddle.

The Saddle Necropolis stretched for ca. 150 m from the south, where it met the Roman road (the modern site's parking lot)⁸, to the north, where it ended with a ditch cut in the middle of the saddle (a symbolic border between the necropolis and the polis)⁹. It incorporated dozens of limestone and basalt sarcophagi, numerous pit graves cut into the bedrock, burial caves accessed from the slopes, and a few more substantial funerary architectural creations. The location of *necropoleis* along the main roads has parallels not only in Rome, but also locally, most visibly in Tiberias on the western shores of the Sea of Galilee, just opposite Hippos¹⁰.

Sarcophagi from the Saddle Necropolis

So far, sarcophagi were identified only in the Saddle Necropolis and only on its eastern side. Most of them are concentrated in a section of the necropolis which begins ca. 13 m north of the Flowers Mausoleum and stretches to the ditch¹¹. Most of the sarcophagi were partly or fully inserted into pits cut in the *nari* bedrock, while a few were standing above ground¹². Most are made of the local *nari*, while some are of the local basalt and some of limestone. The more lavish sarcophagi were surely taken and reused already in antiquity.

Nine sarcophagi were excavated¹³: two of basalt and the rest of *nari* and limestone. Their average dimensions are 2.0 length × 0.65 width × 0.65 m height. Some of the sarcophagi and the pits they were placed in produced a small quantity of diagnostic finds (pottery sherds and two coins), all dated to the Roman period (1st–4th c. AD). Two of the *nari* and limestone examples can be dated by their relief decorations. The first depicts two lion heads that hold rings in their jaws (see below). The second includes reliefs of piers, arches, discs, and an empty *tabula ansata* (S15285). Sarcophagi with these exact set of motifs are very familiar around the Sea of Galilee and are labelled the »Tiberias Group«. The Hippos example is the first found in a non-Jewish context¹⁴.

Burial caves in the Saddle Necropolis

Dozens of burial caves were cut into the soft *nari* stone in the western and mainly in the eastern slopes of the Saddle Necropolis. The caves are aligned in rather straight lines along artificially cut rock steps. Unlike the sarcophagi field, which stops at the ditch, the burial caves continue further north-east along the slopes. A survey following a recent fire showed that many of the cave entrances have collapsed and the vast majority of the caves are buried and concealed from the eye.

⁷ Eisenberg – Staab 2021.

⁸ The exact course of the Roman road has not been archaeologically proven, but its presence can be confidently reconstructed based on descriptions of several scholars from the late 19th c., the location of the *necropoleis*, and several milestones (Pažout – Eisenberg 2021).

⁹ Eisenberg 2014, 91–96.

¹⁰ In a recent overview, Betzer describes the Northern Necropolis that was built along the main roads leading to the city from north and north-west and sums up the various burials: 378 pit graves, 29 sarcophagi, 14 stone doors (apparently from mausolea), remains of 7 mausolea, 4 ossuaries and a single burial cave (Betzer 2021, 85). See also Stepansky 1999, *84–*96. The bedrock at Tiberias is basalt, which may explain the lack of burial caves in contrast to Hippos.

¹¹ During his survey, Zingboym counted 31 sarcophagi within the Saddle Necropolis (Zingboym 2018, 40), but many more can be spotted on aerial photographs and during closer field inspection. Zingboym noted mostly limestone sarcophagi, with a few basalt examples, and one marble sarcophagus (reported by Schumacher but long since missing).

¹² The practice of burying sarcophagi (even the decorated ones) in specially cut pits is well attested in the Bekaa Valley (Newson 2015, 359).

¹³ For a partial list of the sarcophagi see Eisenberg – Kowalewska 2022, 6–8.

¹⁴ For the typology, see Aviam 2016, 4–10. None of the sarcophagi of the »Tiberias Group« is archaeologically dated, but a 2nd–3rd c. AD dating is proposed (personal communication with Mordechai Aviam).



1 Mt. Sussita and its environs with the three *necropoleis* and the Saddle Necropolis monuments indicated: 1) funerary podia, 2) Lion's Mausoleum, 3) Flowers Mausoleum, 4) Burial Cave A, 5) sarcophagi field, 6) ditch, 7) Burial Cave B; drone view towards north (photo M. Eisenberg)

Two burial caves were almost fully uncovered along the eastern saddle slopes (fig. 1–2). Cave A, located ca. 15 m east and below the Flowers Mausoleum, is poorly preserved, with four niches (*kokhim*) and a hewed stepped entrance corridor. Cave B is located ca. 50 m north-east of the ditch, at the same line as Cave A. Excavations at the cave began in 2022 after an *in situ* inscription in Greek was accidentally found just beneath the surface¹⁵. The inscribed *tabula* was cut above a stepped entrance corridor. The cave is almost fully preserved with three niches, and the excavations produced small finds dated only to the Roman period.

Funerary podia

A unique series of at least 13 funerary podia was excavated along the eastern side of the saddle road (fig. 1)¹⁶. All the funerary podia were similar in size (ca. 5.5 × 5 m) and originally reached the height of ca. 3.8 m. They were all built in dry masonry of large, well-made *nari* ashlar with drafted margins and protruding bosses. Their flat tops were designed for the display of freestanding sarcophagi. It seems that they were built by the city itself in the first half of the 1st century AD and sold to its wealthy inhabitants. They probably collapsed in the 363 AD earthquake.

Mausolea in the Saddle Necropolis

At least two mausolea distinguished the Saddle Necropolis¹⁷: the Lion's Mausoleum and the Flowers Mausoleum to its north, both fully excavated (fig. 1–2).

¹⁵ The 7–8 lines inscription has not been deciphered yet.

¹⁶ Eisenberg – Kowalewska 2022.

¹⁷ The term »mausoleum« tends to be used very loosely, especially in the scholarly literature pertaining to our region, so we want to include a proper definition here, even if somewhat strict: a mausoleum is a decorative funerary construction of more than one storey above ground.



2 Drone's view towards west looking at the Lion's Mausoleum (left), the Flowers Mausoleum (right), and Burial Cave A beneath them (photo M. Eisenberg)

The Lion's Mausoleum, named after a lion sculpture found in the debris, is located 18 m east of the saddle road¹⁸. What was preserved is the ground floor, covered with a vault and measuring ca. 7.5×7.5 m (25 Roman feet). The architectural fragments and two basalt lock boxes indicate that the mausoleum had two more storeys reaching a total estimated height of at least 13 m, including a pine-cone finial above a pyramid-shaped or conical roof. A perimeter wall, measuring ca. 15×20 m, surrounded the mausoleum. Based on the small finds and the architectural studies, the mausoleum's construction was dated to the early 2nd century AD (even though some architectural elements are more characteristic of the 1st c. AD) and its destruction to the 363 AD earthquake. The vaulted ground floor may have survived the earthquake as simple burials dated to the 380s were discovered within its plaster floor.

THE FLOWERS MAUSOLEUM

The Flowers Mausoleum was identified only in 2019, during the excavations of the northern wall of the Lion's Mausoleum perimeter. A concentration of well-dressed basalt architectural fragments was exposed here, and underneath them four walls of the new mausoleum were found. The walls of the mausoleum are now fully exposed, but since many of its decorative fragments are still buried down the slope, it is premature to finalize the report¹⁹. The building was named after the phenomenal pieces of its decoration – basalt-sculpted reliefs of flowers that filled the metopes.

¹⁸ Eisenberg 2021a.

¹⁹ The Flowers Mausoleum was excavated during one-day digs in between main seasons with a small volunteer team of Hippos enthusiasts. The excavations at Hippos are directed by A. Kowalewska and M. Eisenberg on behalf of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology, University of Haifa, Israel. Excavations at Susita National Park were carried out under Israel Nature and Parks Authority (NPA) permit number A004-20 and Israel Antiquities Authority license number G-22/2020. The research was partially supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant 722/17), headed by M. Eisenberg and M. Osband.



3 The Flowers Mausoleum and the perimeter wall of the Lion's Mausoleum at the end of excavations; vertical view from the photogrammetric model (photo and modeling M. Eisenberg)

Nothing worth noting was found inside the structure (only the foundations have survived) or around it, except for a sarcophagus made of *nari*. The eroded sarcophagus (S14948; external dimensions – $2.04 \times 0.65 \times 0.7$ m) was found *in situ* just below surface, 1 m west of the mausoleum. As the sarcophagus is not directly parallel to the mausoleum's western wall, it was probably placed parallel to a path that ran behind the funerary podia. Its long face fronting the path depicts two lion heads holding rings in their jaws (door knockers/pullers), with a simplified garland hanging between them²⁰. Most probably, it was placed there after the construction of the mausoleum and can be dated roughly to the 2nd century AD²¹.

Excavations and architectural description

What has been preserved and excavated of the Flowers Mausoleum is a rectangular frame (5.48 m E-W and 5.4 m N-S, so 15×15 regular Roman feet) of basalt foundations, only up to two courses high. No remains of a floor or an entrance were preserved (fig. 3). The two courses of the foundations survived because they were constructed mainly against bedrock. The east-sloping bedrock was somewhat levelled under the walls, but inside them was left unworked, protruding upwards. The whole upper part, filled up with stones and soil, was washed away after the mausoleum's collapse. There are no signs of a wider crepidoma or a podium. There is no hypogeum, which means that the burials were located inside the building. Both the foundations and the superstructure were built of basalt blocks with finely carved outer face. The masonry was seemingly dry, with the spaces between the blocks filled with smaller stones and the blocks arranged as headers and stretchers without a repeated rhythm.

²⁰ Eisenberg – Kowalewska 2022, 6 and fig. 6 b.

²¹ Similar lion-head decorations are known from sarcophagi at Jiyeh in the *chora* of Sidon (Gwiazda 2013, 58–60) and at Kedesh (Ovadiah – Mucznik 2011, 537–538). For 'door knockers' from Nysa-Scythopolis and additional references of their regional appearance in the funerary world, see Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2022.



4 The Flowers Mausoleum architectural fragment exhibition court on the gravel platform; some of the fragments are partly reconstructed on top of one another (photo M. Eisenberg)



5 The Flowers Mausoleum northern wall and architectural fragments at its foot during excavations; view towards east (photo M. Eisenberg)

A few dozens of the mausoleum's ashlar and some of the architectural fragments were uncovered on the ruined foundations, mainly at the side of them. Many other pieces have tumbled down the steep slope to the east. While some are almost inaccessible, others, which rolled all the way towards the Noa Stream, are occasionally salvaged with the expedition's ATV (e.g. the bumped-up frieze fragment A15426; fig. 6 a). There is a clear correlation between the position of the fragments in the building and the chances of their recovery – there are ten known engaged bases (of 12 that the mausoleum must have had), but only five fragments of capitals.

As of February 2023, there are 84 basalt architectural fragments that are assigned as belonging to the Flowers Mausoleum. Most of them are currently exhibited on a gravel platform to the north of the mausoleum and a few were documented but not yet salvaged from the slopes (fig. 4–6). The recovered fragments are only a small part of the building, yet their variety seemingly represents most of the architectural elements of the mausoleum. The fragments can be sorted into 13 groups (A to M below).

Group	Architectural fragment	Number of fragments found	Remarks
A. A moulded bottom of the ground floor	–	2	
B. Engaged Ionic corner columns (0.6 m max width)	Engaged Attic corner column base	3	One is only a ¼ preserved
	Engaged corner column shaft drum	4	Including 1 in the stream
	Engaged Ionic corner capital	3	One only ½ preserved
C. Engaged half-columns (0.37 m diameter)	Engaged Attic half-column base including a plinth	7	0.54 m max. width at the plinth
	Engaged half-column shaft drum	12	
	Engaged Ionic capital	2	
D. Doric architrave (0.4 m high, 1.3 m long)	–	1	Complete block bearing a <i>taenia</i> with three <i>regulae</i> hanging from it but lacking <i>guttae</i>
E. Doric frieze (0.46 m high)	Metope-triglyph block decorated with a flower	5	
	Triglyph	2	
F. Corinthian modillion cornice	–	10	
G. Plain Doric cornice	–	5	
H. Rounded Corinthian modillion cornice	–	4	Including 1 in the stream
I. Rounded base of the tholos	–	4	Including 1 in the stream
J. Elements of tholos (see M.)	–	–	
K. Plain rounded Doric cornice	–	3	
L. Rounded frieze	–	5	A horizontal decorative band probably placed above the upper short part of the tholos and immediately beneath the conical roof
M. Elements of tholos and conical roof (not sorted)	–	12	Including 3 in the stream

The quality of most of the architectural elements is very high, although they are sculpted in basalt. The diameters of the columns are very accurate, within the range of 1 cm difference. The quality is especially noticeable in the flower metopes and the engaged Ionic capitals (fig. 6). They are more meticulously worked than any other basalt architectural fragments from the city. Even the Corinthian capitals of the Roman basilica, built at the end of the 1st century AD as the largest roofed structure in Hippos, are of a lesser quality²².

Due to the limited scope of the present article and its preliminary nature, only the most curious of the architectural elements will be discussed further – the ground floor's Doric frieze.

²² Eisenberg 2021b, 164. 166.

Flowered metope and triglyph frieze

Five metopes bearing finely sculpted flowers in high relief have been located so far (fig. 6). All the flowers are different in design, and none seems identifiable with the local flora. They are probably imaginative, each flower sculpted in a unique shape. The flowers have six to eight petals, and one has a double row of petals. The sculpted flowers protrude from their designated metope area, partially overhanging the triglyphs. They are sculpted in high relief reaching up to 6–9 cm.

Metopes decorated with rosettes are a frequent phenomenon in the public and private, mainly funerary, architecture in free-standing and cut-rock facades in Judaea, Samaria, and the Decapolis, from Herod the Great's reign (mid-1st c. BC) to the end of the Early Roman period (early 2nd c. AD). However, they are mostly in low relief and carry simple rosettes. In more than a few of these examples a Doric frieze sits above Ionic columns, as in the Flowers Mausoleum²³.

Two blocks of basalt Doric friezes with metopes decorated with high relief flowers are exhibited in the Golan Archaeological Museum in Katzrin. Their exact find-spot is unknown but must be located in the southern Golan. The metopes are similar to the ones from the Flowers Mausoleum, yet not as finely executed.

In Hippos, several fragments of a large *nari* Doric frieze were found in the Hellenistic Compound. Their metopes are decorated with reliefs of discs, rosettes, or an amphora, and on two of the blocks the triglyph is replaced by a tetraglyph. This frieze could have been part of the temple, either of the late 2nd century BC or more likely of the late 1st century BC²⁴.

The design of the triglyphs from the Flowers Mausoleum is a point of particular interest. Instead of three protruding vertical bands separated by deep grooves, the triglyphs are made of a double sunken band with an inner frame. A ›drop‹ hangs from the cap of each sunken band (fig. 6 a–d)²⁵. An exact parallel for this triglyph design has not been found, but in southern Syria there are a few examples of Doric friezes that do not strictly adhere to the classical canon. The Doric entablature was used in the Hauran (Auranitis)²⁶ in southern Syria primarily during the Early Roman period and H. C. Butler assigned it to the Nabataean influence²⁷. These unusual Doric friezes decorated funerary architecture, mainly rock-cut tomb facades. Two examples, from Sweida and Kanawat (both ca. 90 km away from Hippos), are the most relevant. The Tomb of Ḥamrath in Sweida had a square plan (9 × 9 m) and was surmounted by a stepped pyramid with six engaged Doric half-columns set on each side²⁸. A bilingual Aramaic-Greek inscription indicates that this tomb was built for a woman named Ḥamrath at the end of the 1st century BC. The architrave has *regulae* but *guttae* are missing, as in the Flowers Mausoleum. Two rather crude basalt frieze blocks from the Hauran have a ›drop‹ hanging from the top of the glyphs, although the glyphs are carved as expected²⁹. The blocks come from Kanawat and Sweida but it is unknown to which buildings they belonged.

In general, the design of the Flowers Mausoleum frieze can be classified as a pure case of local provincial imagination of the Hauran area. The artisanship is superb, rendered in basalt as if it were marble, yet the provincial nature is evident due to the unusual details. The lack of datable examples from the Hauran, or elsewhere does not allow the dating to be pinpointed more accurately than to the late 1st century BC and the early 2nd century AD.

²³ For the list of the funerary monuments in Judaea, Samaria, and the Decapolis, bearing a Doric frieze, some with metope decorated with rosettes, see Peleg-Barkat 2011, 431–432; Peleg-Barkat 2014, 146–147; Peleg-Barkat – Chachy 2015, 323–324; Raviv – Zissu 2020.

²⁴ Młynarczyk – Burdajewicz 2005, 48–49 fig. 18; Segal 2014, 144–145 fig. 174.

²⁵ A photogrammetric model of two metopes and two triglyphs reconstructed on the original architrave is available at <<https://dighippos.org/app/3d-explorer/preview.html?models=NDA=>> (29.03.2023).

²⁶ The Golan (Gaulanitis) is a western continuation of the basaltic Hauran.

²⁷ Butler 1903, 316–317. 327.

²⁸ de Vogüé 1865–1877, 29–31 pl. 1; based mainly on Butler's description following de Vogüé. By Butler's visit the site has already been partly demolished: Butler 1903, 324–327; Dentzer-Feydy 1986, 263–265.

²⁹ Dentzer-Feydy 1986, 264.



a



b



c



d



e



f



g

- 6 Architectural fragments from the Flowers Mausoleum: a) triglyph-metope (A15426), b) triglyph-metope (A14943), c) triglyph-metope (A15361) and triglyph (A15370), d) triglyph-metope (A7173), e) engaged Ionic corner capital (A10900), f) engaged Ionic half-column base (A15425), g) round modillion cornice of the tholos (A14950) (photos M. Eisenberg)

Assembly marks

Some of the architectural fragments of the Flowers Mausoleum bear assembly marks (fig. 6 f). The marks are single Greek letters, sometimes accompanied by a line. They were most probably used to instruct the placement of the stones within the structure, and they indicate that the fragments were most likely sculpted at the quarry workshop and brought ready for assembly to the construction site³⁰. At Hippos and in the rest of the Decapolis, these and other types of masons' marks are dated within the period from the mid-1st to the early 2nd century AD³¹. No marks were noted on the ashlar blocks of the walls. Apparently, there was more freedom in their assembly and the whole project was small enough to work without the need for accounting marks.

Parallels

The building boom that characterized the Roman Near East from the early 2nd century AD is also noticeable in the funerary architecture. From the mid-1st century AD, regional styles started to evolve, reaching a peak of local monumental expression in the 2nd century, and a noted decline from the mid-3rd century³².



7 The Tomb of Absalom in Kidron Valley, Jerusalem (photo M. Eisenberg)

Most Roman-period mausolea in Syria were rectangular, some with a pyramid-shaped roof, which apparently was preferred to the conical one³³. The geographically closest examples to the mausolea from Hippos with conical roofs are found in Judaea and in the Decapolis city of Gerasa.

The Herodium mausoleum, the presumed tomb of Herod the Great, is the earliest, the largest and the most impressive. It was built of limestone. Only the square (9.95 m) podium was partially preserved, while the square structure above it, decorated with Doric pilasters and a Doric frieze, topped with a tholos of 18 monolithic Ionic columns with a conical concave roof are reconstructed from excavated fragments (estimated height: 25 m). The construction of this monument is dated towards the very end of the 1st century BC, and it too bears assembly marks on some of the stones³⁴.

The closest stylistically to the Flowers Mausoleum is the Tomb of Absalom in the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem (fig. 7). Its construction is dated by most scholars to the first half of the 1st century AD (and certainly before AD 70)³⁵. Its raised podium (7.9 m long) with the square ground floor (6.9 m long) is carved

³⁰ Kowalewska – Eisenberg 2020, 90–91 fig. 7 a–c.

³¹ Kowalewska – Eisenberg 2019; Kowalewska – Eisenberg 2021. Uscatescu 2022, 8–9.

³² de Jong 2017, 70–71.

³³ Butler, in his survey of Syria, describes several pyramid-shaped tomb roofs but no conical ones from northern Syria or the Hauran (Butler 1903, 109–110; 1920, 91. 93. 132. 139. 299. 300).

³⁴ Chachy 2015; Peleg-Barkat – Chachy 2015, 330–333.

³⁵ Avigad 1954, 127–133; Kloner – Zissu 2007, 243.

from bedrock, while the tholos above it (with a conical concave roof crowned by a flower/acanthus-shaped finial) is built of large, sculpted fragments (total height: 19.7 m). The lower cube is decorated with pilasters at the corners and engaged Ionic columns between them, crowned by an architrave with *regulae* and *guttae* and a Doric frieze of triglyphs and discs in metopes.

The mausoleum at Gerasa (ca. 60 km from Hippos) is constructed in the local *nari*. In 1993, 24 architectural fragments of a mausoleum were documented in the Southern Necropolis. They were first found in 1932, but have since been buried again and some could not be traced³⁶. The exact location of the structure is unknown, but the analyses of the fragments allowed a proposed reconstruction and a proposed dating for the mausoleum to the beginning of the 1st century AD³⁷. The mausoleum is reconstructed as a circular structure with a diameter of 6.47 m. The ground floor is decorated with engaged Ionic semi-columns with a Doric frieze, while the second storey was designed as a Corinthian portico with a Doric frieze and above it a conical roof, crowned with a finial (total height: 14.37 m)³⁸. The frieze blocks were of two sizes, corresponding to the two storeys, and the metopes were decorated with various motifs, among them wreath, rosettes, bird, and grapes. Assembly marks appear in this mausoleum on the Corinthian capitals of the second storey (a single letter in Greek, corresponding to the 12 columns of the portico) and the 23 blocks of the frieze-architrave.

Chronological framework

The Flowers Mausoleum belongs to the Roman period history at Hippos, the same as all the other parts of the Saddle Necropolis. Several points are considered below to try and pinpoint the dating.

Spatial correlation to nearby funerary architecture: The nearby Lion's Mausoleum was dated by small finds and architectural fragments to the early 2nd century AD³⁹. The Lion's Mausoleum perimeter wall was built directly adjacent to the Flowers Mausoleum, yet it is not aligned with it, which suggests that the two buildings were not planned and constructed at the same time. It seems that the Flowers Mausoleum was erected first, since it is closer to the road; later on the poorer quality perimeter wall of the Lion's Mausoleum was added (consequently removing any floor that might previously have existed on this side of the mausoleum and depriving us of a sealed dating context). The series of the funerary podia, located west of the Flowers Mausoleum, were built in the first half of the 1st century AD⁴⁰. Located directly next to the main road, the podia must be earlier than the Flowers Mausoleum. As for the destruction, the best candidate is the 363 AD earthquake that also toppled all other excavated funerary monuments of the Saddle Necropolis (none of them was rebuilt afterwards). The earthquake would surely have been strong enough to send the upper stones of the mausoleum rolling down to the stream below.

Small finds: The excavations of the Flowers Mausoleum revealed no sealed contexts, neither of the construction stage nor in the destruction layer. No coins were found in the foundations and the small number of sherds recovered from the debris and above bedrock were very small and widely dated, from types typical of the 1st century AD up to types of the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.

Raw materials: All the architectural elements of the Flowers Mausoleum are made of basalt and not of the local *nari* or an imported stone. At Hippos, as well as Gerasa (see above), the use of *nari* for architectural decorative elements seems typical for the late 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD, and more specifically for the early 1st century BC to the early 1st century AD. The use of basalt for fine architectural sculpture characterizes the large public constructions of the end of the 1st and the 2nd century AD (e.g. the Roman basilica).

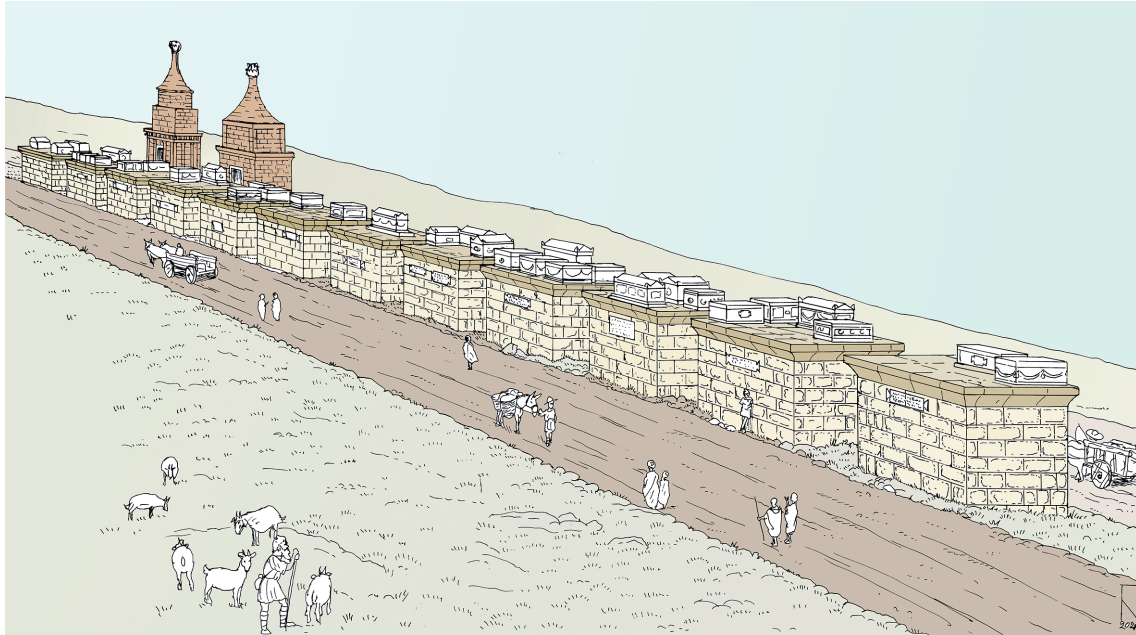
³⁶ As in Hippos, also in Gerasa the use of *nari* for construction ceases during the 1st c. AD. It was replaced by more durable raw building material, namely limestone (Seigne – Morin 1995, 179).

³⁷ Seigne – Morin 1995; Seigne 2006.

³⁸ Seigne 2006, 153–155.

³⁹ Eisenberg 2021a, 297.

⁴⁰ Eisenberg – Kowalewska 2022, 16–18.



8 An artistic reconstruction of the funerary monuments along the main road in the Saddle Necropolis with the funerary podia series and the two mausolea (Y. Nakas and M. Eisenberg)

Design of the architectural fragments: A preliminary analysis of the design of the Doric architrave and frieze with flowers metopes, the engaged Ionic columns, and the Corinthian modillion cornices (not described) points to the 1st century AD as the preferred date for the mausoleum's construction.

Mason's Marks: The assembly masons' marks noted on some of the stones of the Flowers Mausoleum suggest a dating not later than the early 2nd century AD. Masons' marks are generally known from the Decapolis only in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD⁴¹.

Altogether, the chronological parameters point to the conclusion that the Flowers Mausoleum was constructed somewhere between the late 1st century AD and the early 2nd century AD. The proposed exact destruction date is AD 363, when a strong earthquake hit Hippos and the whole region.

Suggested reconstruction

Based on the architectural elements at hand, especially the four different types of cornices, we may reconstruct the mausoleum as a structure composed of five segments: 1) a square ground floor decorated with engaged Ionic columns and Doric frieze with flower metopes, crowned with a Corinthian cornice; 2) a square upper floor with plain cornice; 3) a tholos with a Corinthian cornice; 4) a tholos crowned with a plain cornice; 5) a concave conical roof, probably finished with a finial, which has not yet been found.

Judging by the size of the remaining foundations (5.5×5.5 m, that is 15×15 Roman feet) and the recovered fragments, and correlating to the larger conical-roof mausolea in nearby regions, the height of the Flowers Mausoleum can be estimated at ca. 14 m⁴².

⁴¹ For details on marks from Hippos, see Kowalewska – Eisenberg 2019. For a compilation of regional masons' marks, see Kowalewska – Eisenberg 2020.

⁴² First square storey – 5 m, second square storey – 2 m, lower part of the tholos – 2 m, upper part of the tholos – 1 m, and a conical roof including a finial – 4 m. The reconstruction of the height of the shorter square storey and mainly the conical roof is only preliminary and requires further analysis.

No clear remains of plaster were found on any of the stones of the Flowers Mausoleum, yet the finds from other basalt pieces at Hippos (most noticeably the Corinthian capitals of the Roman basilica) and the general expectation of colours in Roman architecture suggest that the façades of the mausoleum were fully plastered in white, most probably with additional vivid colours decorating, for example, the flowers. A general artistic proposal of the Saddle Necropolis with its funerary monuments, including a simplified representation of the Flowers Mausoleum, is illustrated in figure 8.

CONCLUSIONS

The *necropoleis* of Hippos represent a full socioeconomic stratification of burials – from the poorest pit graves to the most lavish mausolea. The ca. 14 m high Flowers Mausoleum was, as far as is known at the current stage of excavations, the most elaborately decorated element of the funerary landscape of the city of Hippos. Its location on the upper part of the saddle, only a few metres from the main road leading to the city gate, made it a prominent mark in the landscape – it advertised not only the family of the deceased buried there but also the splendour of the polis of Hippos throughout the Roman period.

The mausoleum was built at the end of the 1st/early 2nd century AD and destroyed together with the other monuments of the necropolis in the AD 363 earthquake. The choice for this monument was to create a hybrid of all three classical architectural orders – the engaged columns are Ionic, the ground floor frieze is Doric, while some of the cornices have a Corinthian modillion. The unique execution of some parts of these classical orders suggests the work of a local Hippos workshop, which had mastered the art of basalt sculpting close to perfection. It is plausible that the artisans wished to compete with the new trend of exquisitely detailed imports of marble that appeared in the region from the early 2nd century AD and reached Hippos as well. The local workshop was successful in its effort of following the classical canons, but also created an original piece of architectural artistry.

With continued recovery of more architectural fragments, it may one day be possible to partially re-erect one or two of the mausoleum's façades as one of the most impressive examples of ancient funerary monuments preserved in modern Israel from its Roman provincial past.

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