GREEK INSCRIBED MOSAICS FROM THE CHURCH FLOOR
IN ’UQERBAT, CENTRAL SYRIA

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2018, an archaeological discovery took place in the village of ’Uqerbat (عقيربات) located in the Syrian Badia (steppes or semi-arid zones), some 65 km to the east of the provincial capital city of Hama (حماة), and 35 km east of Salamia (سلمية). A large 5th-century floor mosaic from a church complex was uncovered measuring 37 x 18 meters within an area approaching 670 square meters. The discovery was made by accident, and it includes a wealth of Greek inscriptions placed inside fourteen panels. Photos of nine panels were provided to the author by the Syrian General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums (GDAM), Damascus, which requested decipherment and Arabic translations. The readings and translations published in the present article are meant to provide wider dissemination.

TEXTS

1) Tabula ansata DIMS, measuring 85 x 49 cm.

1. Η ΕΥΓΕΝΕΣΤΑΤΗ ΔΟΜΝΙΑ
2. ΛΑ Η ΚΑΙ ΚΥΡΑΓΑΜΕΤΗ

1. Η ΕΥΓΕΝΕΣΤΑΤΗ ΔΟΜΝΙΑ
2. ΛΑ Η ΚΑΙ ΚΥΡΑΓΑΜΕΤΗ
3. ΤΟΥ ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΥ ΘΕΟΔΟΤΟΥ
4. ΑΚΤΟΥΑΡΙΟΥ [ΕΥΓΟΥ] ΜΕΝΗ
5. ΕΨΗΦΩΣΕΝ ΤΟΝ [ΘΡ]ΟΝΟΝ
6. ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΕΙΣΟΔΙΝ ΜΕΤΑ ΚΑΙ
7. ΤΗΣ ΚΟΝΧΗΣ
8. ΤΟΥ Θ Μ Ψ Ε Τ Ο Υ Σ


“(It was) the most noble Domnilla who is also the lord's (esteemed) wife of the most blessed Theodotos the account book-keeper who laid the mosaic of the throne and the entrance behind the niche in the year 749 (= 437 AD).”

Line 5: The term ‘throne’ also refers to the bema.
Line 6: Greek inscriptions from the Middle East use the Seleucid computation system, which began in 311 B.C. To obtain Gregorian years, 311 should be subtracted from the dates given in the inscriptions.

2) DIMS, measuring 63 x 42 cm.

1. ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ
2. ΔΑΝΙΗΛΟΣ
3. ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΗΣ
4. ΕΨΗΦΩΣΕΝ Π ΙΕ.

Εὐξάμενος Δανιήλος ἄναγνώστης εψήφωσεν πιε.’

“In fulfillment of a vow of Daniel the (scripture) reader this mosaic was laid.”

Line 3: The reader is the person to whom the task of reading the scripture aloud is normally assigned during church services.
3) Tabula ansata DIMS, measuring 130 x 80 cm

1. ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟΙ ΒΙΚΤΩΡΙΝΟΣ
2. ΚΑΙ ΟΥΡΑΝΙΣ ΓΑΜΒΡΟΣ +
3. ΑΥΤΟΥ ΑΜΑ ΣΥΜΒΙΩΝ +
4. ΚΑΙ ΤΕΚΝΩΝ ΕΨΗΦΩΣΑΝ
5. ΤΗΝ ΣΤΟΑΝ ΑΜΑ ΤΟΙΣ +
6. ΜΕΣΑΣΤΥΛΟΙΣ. ∫ . ΕΤΟΥΣ. Η Κ Ψ

Εὐξάμενοι Βικτώρινος καὶ Οὐρανίς Γαμβρός + αὐτοῦ ᾗμα συμβίων + καὶ τέκνων εψήφωσαν τὴν στοὰν ᾗμα τοῖς + μέσαστυλοῖς. ∫ . ἔτους ἡκψ´.

“In fulfillment of a vow of Victorinos and Ouranis Gambros + for themselves together with their wives + and their children this mosaic of the stoa with the + area between the columns was laid with mosaic . ∫ . the year 728” (= 416 AD).”

4) DIMS, measuring 92 x 53 cm

1. ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΘΩΜΑΣ
2. ΓΕΝΝΑΔΙΟΥ ΑΜΑ +
3. ΣΥΜΒΙΩ ΚΑΙ ΤΕΚΝΩΝ
4. ΑΥΤΟΥ ΕΨΗΦΩΣΕΝ ΠΛΕ.

Εὐξάμενος Θωμᾶς Γεννάδιου ᾗμα + συμβίω καὶ τέκνων αὐτοῦ εψήφωσεν πλε(υρα).

“In fulfillment of a vow of Thomas Gennadios with + his wife and children this si(de) was laid with mosaic.”
5) DIMS, measuring 80 x 56 cm

Εὐξάμενος Μαρκέλλος Ἀδριάνου ἡμᾶς συνβίω καὶ τέκνοις καὶ πάντος τοῦ ὀίκου αὐτοῦ ἐψήφωσε πόδας ἑκατόν [καὶ] (ε)ἴκοσι.

“In fulfillment of a vow of Marcellus Adrianos with his wife and children and all (members) of his house the area of one hundred (and) twenty feet was laid with mosaic.”

6) Tabula ansata DIMS, measuring 130 x 60 cm

Ἐπὶ τοῦ οσειοτατοῦ καὶ θεοτιμῆ καὶ Σάμμου περιοδεύτου ἐκλήσεια ἔτους ξάνδικο.ι´.

‘Επὶ τοῦ οσειοτάτου καὶ θεοτιμήτου ἐπισκόπου ἡμῶν Ἀλεξάνδρ.υ καὶ Σάμμου περιοδεύτου εὐηφῳθῇ ἐγιοτάτη ἐκ(κ)λησ(ε)ία ἐτουεζζεχκς μηνός Ξανδικοῦ . ῆ.”
“Under the most pious and God-honored our bishop Alexandros and Sammos the periodeut (this) most holy church was laid with mosaic (in the year) 726 (on the) 10\textsuperscript{th} of the month of Xandicos” (= March-April 414 AD)

Line 1: Misspelling for δσιωτάτου.
Line 3: “Periodeut” refers to a travelling preacher or priest, representing the bishop. He was a sub-bishop whose main task was to preach the parish of nomads who lived in the Syrian Badia (steppes or semi-arid zones), outside the towns and/or the small outlying villages with insignificant Christian presence.

7) Tabula ansata DIMS, measuring 52 x 36 cm

1. . . . . ? . . . . . .
2. . . . . ? . . . . . .
3. E . . . . ? . . . . . .
4. ΧΙΔΙΑΚ ΕΨΗΦΩΘΗ
5. ΜΗΝΙ ΔΥΣΤΡΟΥ ΤΟΥ
6. Θ Μ Ψ Ε Τ Ο Υ Σ

. . . . . (Missing) . . . . E [ αρ] ξίδω(κονου)
Εψηφώθη μηνὶ Δύστρου τοῦ θμψ´ έτους.

“ . . . . . (Missing) . . . E? (ar)chdeacon was laid with mosaic (in the) month of Dys-tros (the) year 749” (= 437 AD).
8) DIMS, measuring 120 x128 cm

ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ
ΙΟΓΑΘΗΝΟΣ ΤΡΙΒΟΥΝΟΣ
ΝΟΥΜΕΡΟΥ Ο ΚΑΡΕΙΒΩΝ
ΑΜΑ ΣΥΜΒΙΩ ΚΑΙ ΤΕΚΝΟΙΣ
ΕΔΩΚΕΝ ΝΟΜΙΣΜΑΤΑ ΤΡΙΑ
ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΜΟΝΙΜΟΣ ΤΡΙ
ΒΟΥΝΟΣ ΑΜΑ ΣΥΜΒΙΩ ΚΑΙ
ΤΕΚΝΟΙΣ ΕΔΩΚΕΝ ΝΟΜΙΣ
ΜΑΤΑ ΠΕΝΤΑ ΕΝ ΤΑΙ ΣΠΟΥΔΗ ΣΑΜ
ΜΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΕΥΛΑΒΕΣΤΑΤΟΥ
ΠΕΡΙΟΔΕΥΤΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΕΠΛΗΡΩΘΗ
ΤΟ ΠΑΝ ΕΡΓΟΝ ∫ ΕΤΟΥΣ ΗΚΨ.

"In fulfillment of a vow of John son of Gatinos the dear Numerius praefect together with his wife and children who endowed money three (times?)."
In fulfillment of a vow of Monimos the praefect together with his wife and children who endowed money five (times?) (and) by virtue of the mettle of Sammos the pious and devout periodeut\(^4\) under whom the whole work was accomplished in the year 728” (= 416 AD)

Line 2: Misspelling for Γατήνου, which corresponds to Latin tribunus, which in turn means magistratus, tribunus, praefectus, militaris.

Line 3: Misspelling for Νουμέριου, Numerius Latin for a Roman name of honor of the nobilities; καρεβον is misspelled for ἀκριβον.

Line 6: Μονιμος is a Greek name meaning “stable, with stability.”

9) DIMS, measuring 93 x 93 cm

1. ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΚΑΣΤΡΙΚΙΣ
2. ΑΚΤΑΡΙΟΣ ΝΟΥ ΜΕΡΟΥ ΠΡΟ
3. ΜΩΤΩΝ ΥΠΕΡ ΕΑΥΤΟΥ +
4. ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΟΙΚΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ.
5. ΕΨΗΦΩΣΕΝ ΠΟΔΑΣ .∫. Τ
6. ΕΥΞΑΜΕΝΟΣ ΜΑΡΚΕΛΛΟΣ
7. ΘΕΟΔΟΣΙΟΥ. ΥΠΕΡ ΕΑΥ
8. ΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΝΤΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΟΙ
9. ΚΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΕΨΗΦΩΣΕΝ
10. ΠΟΔΑΣ .∫. Σ .∫. ΕΤΟΥΣ ϛΚΨ.

Εὐξάμενος Καστρίκις ἀκτάριος Νουμέρου προμότον ύπερ ἑαυτοῦ + καὶ τοῦ οἴκου αὐτοῦ ἐψήφωσεν πόδας .∫. Σ .∫. ἔτους ϛκψ’.

“In fulfillment of a vow of Castrikis the Numerius promoter account book-keeper for himself + and the (members) of his house the area of two hundred feet was laid with mosaic the year 726” (= 414 AD)

Line 2: ακτάριος is Greek for Latin actarius; short hand writer, clerk, account book-keeper, secretary.

Line 3: Greek προμότον is for Latin promoter.
CONCLUSION

These represent but a sample of the mosaic inscriptions found at ῾Uqerbat. It is anticipated that with further stability within the region more archaeological findings will be discovered and made available to the international community.