The Transfiguration at Shivta: Retracing early Byzantine iconography*

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The Transfiguration constitutes one of the most important events in the New Testament. Yet, only few pre-iconoclastic examples of the Transfiguration scene have survived: S. Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna; St. Catherine Monastery, Sinai and Poreč in Istria, each has its unique iconography. Therefore, scholars have concluded that the Transfiguration scene became widespread only after the iconoclastic controversy. We aim to show that Transfiguration scene in Shivta, an early Byzantine settlement in the Negev desert, allows a glimpse into the early Christian iconography of the well-known scene, providing a missing link to its development in the post-iconoclastic period.

Keywords: Shivta, Transfiguration, Early Byzantine iconography, Negev

Shivta

Shivta (Sobotta/Soubaita/Esbeita) was a rural settlement in the Negev from the fourth-fifth to eighth-ninth centuries and then abandoned. It was not very large, with about 170 houses, some two-storied, housing approximately 2200 people.1 Shivta probably became Christian sometime in the fifth century.2 Its population was apparenenty quite rich, as attested by its three churches, built according to the practice current elsewhere in the Land of Israel; a monastic complex was possibly attached to the Northern church.3 That number of churches in a small place was not unusual for the Byzantine settlements in Palestine,4 but all three Shivta churches were much invested and painted, with geometric floor mosaics, while the three apses of the Northern church were clad in marble.5

Contrary to neighbouring Nessana and other Negev settlements,6 Shivta seems neither especially important nor situated on any important roads or trade routes.7 Hirschfeld suggested that Shivta could have been on the pilgrimage route from Jerusalem through Rehovot-in-the-Negev and Nessana to Sinai (the route taken by Antonius of Piacenza in 560).8 This source however is unclear, and probably refers to Mitzpe Shivta and to the hostel of St. George, as Figueras argues.9 Precisely these features make the Transfiguration scene found in the lateral apse of its Southern church so significant for this research, as it still preserves remnants of pre-iconoclastic iconography lost everywhere else.


2 The only existing account mentioning Shivta is the late fourth— to early fifth-century Narration by Pseudo Nilus. It tells the story of St. Nilus’ son Theodoulos, who was sold into slavery at the Sobota (Shivta) market and was eventually rescued by the bishop of Elusa. Analysing this story, Mayerson concludes that at the time of its invention Shivta was entirely pagan. But the date of the Narration as well as its attribution to St. Nilus (died after 430) are disputed by scholars. Cf. Ph. Mayerson, The desert of Southern Palestine according to Byzantine sources, Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 95 (1964) 166–167; D. F. Caner, History and hagiography from the late antique Sinai, Translated Texts for Historians 53, Liverpool 2010, 73–135.


6 Ibid., 39–40.


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The Transfiguration in Shivta. A missing link between pre-iconoclastic and post-iconoclastic iconography

Hardly anything remains of the earlier beauty of Shivta’s churches (fig. 1). Architectural ornaments, as well as small pieces of surviving paintings, suggest different styles and perhaps even dates. The Northern church deserves special attention, which is beyond the scope of the present study and will be discussed separately. It is also impossible to reconstruct the iconographic program of the Southern church as it has been ruined by the climate, natural disasters and the iconoclasm, or even several iconoclasms, down the centuries. Quite clearly, the wall paintings were deliberately destroyed; someone was at pains to scrape the paint off almost completely.

Apparently, the central apse was first plastered then painted, while paint seems to have been applied directly to the stones in the lateral apses, perhaps attesting to different dates. The state of preservation, however, does not allow any explicit conclusions. Some pieces of coloured plaster are still visible in the central apse, showing some use of blue and red pigments. An arrangement of red lines and tiny spots of colour still visible on the northern lateral apse may suggest the presence there of a large central motif flanked by some motifs on either side; but no further identification can be made. The image on the southern apse comes as a complete surprise. For whatever reason it has survived—to the point that it can still be recognized despite heavy damage. From that surface the scene of the Transfiguration emerges (fig. 2).

Earliest notice of the painting

The painting was first recorded by E. H. Palmer, an English explorer who visited Shivta in 1870. His adventures are colourfully described in *The desert of the Exodus*. The Shivta ruins are called the ‘most imposing and considerable of any which we had seen’. Palmer was accompanied by photographer C. F. Tyrwhitt-Drake, who photographed Shivta extensively; some of the photos were published in the book. These pictures are invaluable since they show the place in its original state in the nineteenth century, before the extensive reconstruction there from the 1930s onward. Palmer testifies to the existence of the wall paintings, but without identifying them: ‘some rude paint ornamentation still visible upon a small arched niche in the centre, and also some vestiges of a fresco.’

It was only in 1914 that the wall painting was described and identified as the Transfiguration by Leonard Wooley and T. E. Lawrence:

> On the central apse no more than a few faint trances of colour survived. In the southern apse alone could any coherent design be distinguished, and here the colours had faded under exposure to the light, most of the surface had been scraped away by iconoclasts, and rain-water had brought down lime from the upper ruins and left a thick white deposit over the whole wall-face. Only by wetting the stone were we able to make out and roughly to sketch the original painting. The subject was the Transfiguration. In the centre is Christ, full-face, with hands raised and brought together over the breast, The chiton was

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10 I am grateful to Dr. Ravit Linn for this observation.
seemingly of light pink edged with gold, the himation of dark blue; the halo was a plain yellow ring with white centre; the vestica of light pink. The figure was too much damaged to be copied. Below the feet is a semi-prostrate figure, probably of St. Peter, and beyond, on the spectator’s left, a kneeling figure identified by a fragmentary inscription ...ANNIC, in red paint, as St. John; turning half-round to the front, he raises his left hand, as if pointing to Christ. A few lines on the right of the vestica are all that is left of St. James. On either side of the apse, a little distance from the central group, a blurred mass of red colours seems to represent figures standing on a slightly higher level than the Apostles: these are probably Moses and Elijah. Below the feet of the figures is a broad red band. The tooth pattern around the arch of a small recess was picked out in red and blue, and its vault was roughly painted in red with a coarse network pattern, each mesh having a cross as a filling ornament.13

This somewhat lengthy description is not accurate and lacks many details. Although the figures’ identification is correct, the description of their postures and colours (e.g. Christ’s garments) was partly conjectured by recourse to knowledge of later Byzantine examples of the Transfiguration not necessarily visible in Shivta itself. Because of its poor condition, the painting could not be copied. Later it was almost forgotten, mentioned rarely and only in passing in any scholarly work or description.14

In the early 1930s Colt excavated Shivta.15 Despite several seasons of work, hardly any documentation has survived; most of the materials from this excavation were destroyed, looted, and lost. The photos taken during Colt’s excavations make it clear that the Southern church was then half buried in rubbish, and later cleaned and restored. Colt does not mention the painting but Baly, who was working with him, does:

The South Church is of the same triapsidal form as the North. In the south apse Woolley notes a scene which he suggests is the Transfiguration; it has suffered badly since his time, but there are still traces of paint including a fragment of the name of St. John. ... it is clearly to be seen where Woolley places it.16

The painting lay derelict for more than seventy years thereafter. The most recent and important study of the Transfiguration in Shivta was published in 2006 by Pau Figueras, who alone called attention to the scene itself, analysing its iconography and arguing for its early date (c. 500).17 Nevertheless, because of the scene’s state of preservation, its proposed reconstruction does not wholly coincide with the precise iconographic details of the Shivta Transfiguration. Only by using most updated

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17 P. Figueras, Remains of mural painting of the Transfiguration in the southern church of Sobata (Shivta), ARAM 18/2 (2006) 127–151.
photographic equipment could we recreate the scene to optimal precision. Our reconstruction is based, in addition to the observation in situ, on the analysis of high quality photographs of the apse in general and each stone in particular to turn remnants of lines and colours into forms and objects. It will be further shown that the scene that eventually emerges is extremely significant, in the local context but also in the context of the development of early Byzantine iconography in general.

**Description and style**

Here we describe the Shivta Transfiguration and the parts which can be reconstructed with certainty. The iconoclasts did ‘a very good job’ trying to erase utterly the holy images. They applied themselves to some details more than to others, suggesting that they were religiously important. We shall use this knowledge in our attempt to reconstruct the images. To better understand the scene, we conducted a comparative analysis with known representations of the Transfiguration that have survived in architectural decorations, illuminated manuscripts, and icons. Shivta’s Transfiguration is studied in comparison with the sixth-century mosaics in the apses in St. Catherine Monastery in Sinai (548–65) and with S. Apollinaire in Classe in Ravenna (c. 549), the only remaining examples of the scene from the pre-Iconoclastic period (figs. 11, 12). Middle Byzantine manuscripts, icons, and wall paintings, especially in Cappadocia (tenth – twelfth c.), as well as mosaics such as in the eleventh-century Daphni monastery near Athens (fig. 14), provide valuable comparative material, which is here critically scrutinized in the knowledge that it postdates Shivta’s Transfiguration. Descriptions of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, now lost, might also be useful in our context.

Despite its current state of preservation, the Transfiguration scene can still be recognized beyond any doubt as its general composition is in line with later examples of the same scene. In fact, it is most surprising to find a well-established iconographic scheme of the Transfiguration scene prior to the Iconoclasm, especially because it appears to be a unique survival of such a scheme, as we shall see. The central figure of Christ enclosed in a mandorla and the figures of the two apostles on the left are still clearly visible, as is part of the Greek inscription identifying one of the latter as St. John. Traces of a third figure on the left may be identified as Moses or Elijah.

We now turn to detailed analyses of the scene and its stylistic peculiarities.

Christ inside the mandorla is clearly visible in the upper part of the apse’s centre (fig. 3). His frontal figure predominates and is somewhat disproportional. He has a relatively small head, placed over a heavy short neck, and enclosed in a great halo painted in shades of light pink.18 Only a small fragment remains of Christ’s face, especially visible to the viewer’s left (right side of the painting) in the area of the upper part of an eye and an ear, where long wide strokes of yellow, brown, and dark brown overlap (fig. 4). Christ’s face was painted in shades of pink; above his only surviving eyebrow long white strokes of highlights are attested. Some dark curves of his curly hair are still detectable around his face and in the chin area, seeming to indicate a short curly beard.

Wooley and Lawrence indicated that Christ’s himation was dark blue, but it was more likely painted in shades of pink with white highlights, as traces of pink are attested along his figure. The colour of Christ’s chiton is also unclear, as traces of light purple in the area of his right leg

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18 I am unable to see ‘a plain yellow ring with white centre’ described by Wooley and Lawrence.
are attested among pink spots. Lines indicating falls help to reconstruct exact place of Christ's legs and draperies folded around his knees. In contrast to the heavy garments his legs seem disproportionately tiny.

From other remaining outlines Christ's right hand can be reconstructed (fig. 3). Proportionally enlarged, it extends from a heavy sleeve, raised up to the level of his chest. The gesture may well resemble that of Christ in the St. Catherine mosaics in Sinai (fig. 11): the inner side of a palm with fingers joined in the so-called Greek benediction. We can also follow the curve of his left hand, as well as a prominent round curve of drapery above his left palm. However, the palm itself was damaged beyond recognition, while a mixture of traces of red and dark blue extends beyond his garments. In Byzantine Transfigurations from Sinai mosaics, the ninth-century illuminated manuscripts (e.g., Paris, BNF, gr. 510, fig. 13), and later images, the position of Christ's right hand varies from image to image, but the position of his left hand, with minor variations, is the same repeatedly. Due to the iconoclasts' relentless effort to eliminate Christ's left hand and surrounding area, we may argue that it could have held a scroll or a book.

The mandorla surrounding Christ seems to be more round than oval and most probably was painted light pink (although in some places, dark red can be attested), its contour executed in white. No traces of gold described by Wooley and Lawrence have been identified so far. It is not clear if the mandorla was two circles of different colours or solid of one pink colour. In later examples of the scene both options can be seen, although the use of light pink is rare. The earliest known example is in Paris, BNF, gr. 510 (fig. 13). Some barely visible lines might suggest rays of light radiating from Christ's figure.19

Under the mandorla, on the left, two figures of the apostles are still visible, both lacking halos (figs. 5–6). John can be recognized by last letters of his name inscribed next to the lower part of his body. He is depicted prostrate, his right hand reaching forward (fig. 5). He too has a relatively small narrow face. A short dark beard is just traceable. John raises his left hand, probably to support his head. He is not pointing to Christ, as Wooley and Lawrence suggested; the hand is covered with a drapery, an iconographic detail which exists in many middle Byzantine examples – e.g., Daphni monastery (fig. 14); mosaic icon from the Louvre, twelfth century.20

To the left, behind John, is the figure of Peter, recognized by the remnants of a beard and white curly hair (fig. 6). The upper part of his body is still traceable, while the lower part has disappeared almost completely. He is most probably kneeling, as there is not enough room for a standing figure. His posture seems to resemble Daphni (fig. 14). Peter's figure is turned towards Christ but is not full profiled as in later examples. His right hand gestures towards Christ, remnants of fingers still visible close to the curve of John's back: two fingers extend forward while the little finger is in the direction of his knee; the fourth finger is bent. It is not clear if his left hand is also raised towards Christ or descends down the side his body. Some still visible lines can be associated with an elevated sleeve. The rest of the hand cannot be reconstructed. Later examples of the Transfiguration usually show Peter with his left hand down the side his body, at times holding the draperies of his dress (e.g., Paris, BNF, gr. 510 (fig. 13), ninth c.; Karanlık Kilise, Goreme, eleventh c.21; the Louvre icon, twelfth c.22). Nevertheless, in the ninth-century Chludov Psalter (Moscow, State Historical Museum, MS 129, fol. 88v)23 the left hand is depicted somewhat elevated as well. Traces of white, blue and purple of Peter's attire together with the colours of his beard suggest that these are the colours of his chiton. The colour of the himation cannot be determined with certainty.

The two figures have enlarged palms and narrow faces; their bodies are rounded with folds following the limbs, providing sense of volume and displayed in dynamic half-turns. Peter is depicted behind John, partly hidden by him, contributing to a sense of depth in the wall painting. Because Peter's figure is in a better state of

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21 C. Jolivet-Lévy, La Cappadoce Médévale, images et spiritualité, Paris 2001, fig. 80.

22 V. n. 19.

preservation than the rest of the painting, one gets a sense of volume in the rendering of his body and an illusionistic touch in the surviving fragments which preserve a mixture of colours (fig. 7). James's figure has been erased entirely and cannot be reconstructed, although its position on the lower right part of the apse can be determined. It would not be farfetched to propose that his appearance was not very different from other ninth- to twelfth-century Byzantine representations.

The apostles’ compositional arrangement differs from the well-known Byzantine scheme, where, their postures notwithstanding, all three apostles are portrayed separately, evenly placed around Christ’s figure. St. Catherine preserves the earliest example of this kind. An asymmetrical arrangement of the apostles is found in early Western examples of the Transfiguration. In general, in the West the Transfiguration did not enjoy much popularity. Its early (nineth- and tenth-century) examples show inconsistency. Most reflect Byzantine models (e.g., the Gospels of Otto III (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4453, fol. 113), ivory from Mets (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, ca. 870–880). But an asymmetrical compositional arrangement of the apostles, already attested in S. Apollinaire, where they are depicted symbolically as sheep (fig. 12), persisted into the tenth century, contrasting the more symmetrical one in Byzantium. In Shivta the apostles’ compositional arrangement recalls these Western examples, suggesting a common source: Peter and John are depicted together on the left, while James is on the right. This arrangement however is unique: usually Peter is depicted separately from other apostles.

Shades of green, barely visible today, surround the figures of the apostles as they are seen against a greenish landscape background which occupies all the lower part of the scene bordering on Christ’s mandorla (figs. 6–7). It is not clear if a single mountain is depicted under Christ’s feet. This green landscape, which was probably much more detailed, recalls S. Apollinaire without any mountain. In the middle Byzantine iconography of the scene, this hilly landscape survives in endless variations. However, in most cases Mount Tabor predominates in the landscape, becoming a necessary iconographic element.

The figure to Peter’s left is depicted full-length, standing, next to the border of the apse, his head surrounded by a huge pink halo (fig. 8). The figure’s overall appearance and the prevalent brown colours of his garments suggest that it is Elijah. Already in St. Catherine, Elijah is depicted in distinctive garments, in symbolic reference to his identification with John the Baptist (Mt 17,10–13). This iconographic element survives into later scenes of the Transfiguration (e.g., Daphni, fig. 14). Remnants of lines in the area of Elijah’s head suggest that he is bearded. His eyes, eyebrows, nose, and mouth are barely traceable due to the visibility of the initial sketch in ochre in a yellow tone. Elijah’s face seems painted in light pink, almost identical to the colour of his halo; however, the colours of his face or hair cannot be reconstructed with certainty. At least one of his hands seems to stretch upwards, toward Christ’s mandorla: remnants of colour extend far from his body toward it. Comparative analysis of the disposition of surviving small fragments of colours suggest that the figure might resemble that in Daphni, showing one of his hands stretched towards Christ, while his other (left) hand is either enclosed in heavy draperies or placed above draperies, as in Paris, BNF, gr. 510 (fig. 13).

The remains of the figure of Elijah show that he is depicted disproportionally huge. It is not clear if he is
slightly elevated or shares the same level with the apostles. Although in some later depictions of the Transfiguration the biblical figures are depicted larger than the apostles, their elevation is emphasized by their positioning closer to the celestial realm. The closest comparison to Shivta can be found in the sixth-century St. Catherine: huge figures of Elijah and Moses stand on the same green fore line as the apostles (fig. 11). Some similarity in positioning all the figures around Christ on the same level can be seen in the ninth-century mosaics in Rome: St. Nereo ed Achilleo (795–815)26 and S. Zeno Chapel in St. Prassede,27 or in the Old Tokali Kilise in Cappadocia.28 In all these cases, however, this compositional arrangement reflects adaptation of the scene to the architectural forms, as they are depicted on niches and arches.

At the two far edges of the apse there are traces of different colours (blue, green, and violet/dark red). Although the traces are scarce, they might be remnants of trees, seen in many Byzantine Transfigurations.

We can thus summarize our discussion by proposing a reconstruction of the Transfiguration scene at Shivta (fig. 10). Unlike previous descriptions and reconstructions, most evident in the present one is the placement of all the figures surrounding Christ on approximately the same level, without (or with slight) elevation of the prophets. Furthermore, Peter’s and John’s gestures differ from earlier proposals.

The entire painting gives a dynamic impression due to its asymmetrical composition, the figures’ movements and the vivid colours. Massive dynamic figures with volume and half-round turns, overlapping in space, heavy draperies, proportional distortions, merging of colours – all point to an early date of the wall painting. To this we may add a three-dimensional illusionistic imitation of an architectural strip of the dentils29 at the bottom edge of the apse (fig. 9). They are painted white where they project and tones of grey and red where they are shaded. Dark blue bands are painted above and below the dentils, terminating in wide red bands at its lower edge. The same architectural imitation is attested on the northern apse, suggesting that both wall paintings were executed at the same time. Although dentils can be frequently found on architectural imitations of niches and arches.

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Stylistically, Shivta’s Transfiguration shares significant similarities with St. Catherine’s mosaics, especially in respect of the figures’ proportions. Still, the huge, heavy palms and relatively small faces point to a connection with sixth-century Syriac manuscripts such as the Rabula Gospels.30 Christ’s depiction in a Syrian Four Gospel Book in Diyarbakir attributed to the early sixth century seems even closer.31 The two share disproportionately large halos, small heads, bold ears, facial details of Christ such as short beard and curly hair, and crude, dynamic, bold and heavy strokes to indicate eyes and eyebrows.

Unfortunately, we lack sufficient comparative materials from the Syro-Palestine area. Roman frescoes from Mamshit32 differ in style. Nor can the Shivta painting be paralleled to the frescoes of the fourth- to fifth-century Lochamei HaGetaot tomb33 or to the sixth-century saintly figures at Caesarea,34 which are much more flat and still, and have different proportions. Fragments of Peter’s beard painted gently with a wide range of interwoven colours, suggest that the painting was by a skilled artist, reflecting high quality elaborate work.35 This is in contrast to the rough and somewhat primitive style of the architectural carvings at Shivta or elsewhere in the Negev, which suggest a local, provincial workshop.36 To date there is not enough evidence to determine if the artist belonged to

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29 Dentils usually decorated the upper part of the entablature in ionic and Corinthian buildings.
35 The figures were sketched in yellow and further detailed in dark red. The heavy, somewhat rough strokes seen today give the false impression that the whole work is not highly professional. However, let us bear in mind that these lines were intended to remain as an under-painting covered with layers of paint now lost.
36 An extensive corpus of architectural decorations from Shivta and other Negev desert cities was published by Segal, Architectural decoration. Recently this subject was renewed by Karni Golan, The stone architectural decorations of the Byzantine Negev: Characterization and meaning, Beer Sheva 2014 (doctoral dissertation, Ben Gurion University of the Negev). She published an updated catalogue as well as an in-depth discussion of main motifs found on stone decorations in
The Transfiguration in Shivta and the sixth century iconography

Transfiguration is one of the formative events in the New Testament and is told in three synoptic Gospels (Mt 17, 1–13, Mc 9, 2–13, and L 9, 28–36). By the fifth century, Mount Tabor was accepted as the place where the Transfiguration took place, and by the sixth century, three churches had been built there to commemorate this event. By the eighth century, the feast of the Transfiguration had been introduced in Constantinople, probably deriving from the sixth-century Palestinian feast of Tabernacles.37 Early Church Fathers emphasize the significance of the Transfiguration as Revelation or Epiphany, and interpret it in eschatological terms, linking it to the mystery of the Second Coming.38 Despite the rich theological background, the history of the Transfiguration’s visual representation is not clear. Only in the tenth century did the scene start to be regularly depicted as a part of the Byzantine Christological cycle and as one of the twelve liturgical feasts.

In his study, Andreopoulos sets out to detail the development of the iconographic tradition of the scene of the Transfiguration from its beginning to the fourteenth century.39 By his analysis, the scene has five iconographic stages of development. Its pre-sixth-century depictions are scarce, and they differ from the later ones in having only three figures.40 This can be attested in the fourth-century wooden doors of St. Sabina and the fifth-century Brescia casket. The iconography of both can be connected to later Transfigurations only vaguely. Andreopoulos calls them pre-Sinaitic, thereby marking a definite borderline and even suggesting that it might actually be impossible to hypothesize about ‘the very existence of a pre-Sinaitic type of Transfiguration.’

The Transfiguration also appears in the sixth-century Rabbula Gospels, where it is the earliest surviving example of the scene in the illuminated manuscripts (fol. 7a). Here too it has only three figures, whose identities are disputed. Significantly, the scene appears on the margins and was not singled out as Crucifixion-Resurrection or Ascension, painted on separate folios. Rabbula was previously dated to A.D. 586, according to the colophon which appears elsewhere in the manuscript. It is clear today that the illustrations originally came from another manuscript and were added to the text later. Still, illuminations probably belong to the sixth century and in fact may be even earlier than previously thought.41

Judging from archaeological and written accounts, by the mid-sixth century the Transfiguration scene was already in use in monumental art, although surviving examples are scarce. One, in Porec (Parenzo) in Istria, is not visible today. It occupied the upper part of the church’s external eastern wall

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40 Ibid., 75–76.
and is done in mosaic. In a 1940s sketch, Moses and Peter stand at Christ’s right, together with the figure of St. Andrew who has no connection with the original scene and does not appear in any known depictions of the Transfiguration.

The ninth-century account preserves evidence of the existence of yet another sixth-century example of the Transfiguration, in Chiesa del Salvatore, Naples. No detailed description of it has survived. We are left with two survivals: apse mosaics in S. Apollinaire in Classe in Ravenna (fig. 12), and in St. Catherine Monastery in Sinai (fig. 11). In S. Apollinaire, Christ’s bust is depicted inside a huge cross, flanked by half-figures of Moses and Elijah in a celestial realm, while apostles symbolically depicted as sheep stand in a flowery garden. Although the Transfiguration occurred on Mount Tabor, no mountain is attested here, nor in Sinai or Porec. Beneath the Transfiguration scene, in the same garden with the apostles, S. Apollinaire, patron of the church, is depicted in an orans posture. Thus, the message of the mosaics is threefold: the Transfiguration is combined with Exaltation of the Cross and martyrdom. Andreopoulos concludes that the Transfiguration in S. Apollinaire has a distinctive iconography and ‘didn’t leave any artistic descendants’.

In Sinai, the frontal figure of Christ is flanked by standing figures of Elijah (to Christ’s right) and Moses, and the three apostles, all positioned against a gold background in a semicircle surrounding the central figure of Christ. John and James mirror each other on their knees with elevated hands in the orans position, while Peter is depicted below Christ’s feet, raising his head and turning his face upwards. Repeatedly, scholars insist that the Transfiguration in St. Catherine is a borderline in the scene’s iconography, deeming it closely comparable to the iconography of the post-Iconoclastic art in Byzantium. A symbolic connection of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and in Sinai was widely discussed by early Christian theologians, so the choice of the scene for the main apse of the church is not surprising. As Jas Elsner showed, the message of the Sinai image is better understood in the context of the entire arrangement of images, including Moses receiving the Law and Moses at the Burning Bush, on the arch. Thus, the iconographic program of the sixth-century church is well thought out and in harmony with the significance of the place where God revealed Himself to Moses through symbols and gave him the Law. God’s revelation through Christ overshadows the Old Testament revelations, stressing the power of Christianity.

Let us take a closer look into the Sinaitic mosaic. It seems to encompass most iconographic details associated with the Transfiguration, as we know them from later Byzantine examples, yet it differs from them in details. Being closer than S. Apollinaire to the Gospels’ narrative, it in fact rearranges familiar elements of the story to adapt it to the static hierarchic composition centred on the figure of Christ. John and James mirror each other in posture and gesture—contradicting the Gospel narrative, but also the depiction of Peter under Christ’s feet is unique and occurs

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43 Elsner, op. cit., 474.

44 J. Miziolek, Transfiguratio Domini in the apse at Mount Sinai and the symbolism of light, JWCI 53 (1990) 45.


46 Elsner, op. cit., 474–475.

47 Andreopoulos, op. cit., 101.

48 Elsner, op. cit., 475.
in no other scene of the Transfiguration. Peter's posture has been explained as a substitute for the mountain, as he symbolizes the rock upon which the Church is to be built. The figure itself is much distorted. The artist possibly tried to combine different motions in Peter's figure – he is 'heavy with sleep' (L 9:32) – as he struggles to awake. Peter turns his head, almost detached from his body, towards Christ, perhaps to represent speech. Elsner relates Peter's posture to the Heavenly ladder. Sleep can hinder prayer and must be combated. The dominant message of the scene involves not sleeping but hearing and seeing God... This aural and visual perception of the divine is shared with the two Moses scenes.

Weitzmann, who studied the Sinai mosaic thoroughly, was so impressed by its quality and complexity that it argued for Constantinopolitan craftsmanship, connecting it directly to Justinian. Later studies usually accepted this point of view. Some propose that it might be a copy of a well-known icon from Constantinople. Recently Cyril Mango pointed out that the quality of work in the Sinai mosaic is not uniform: while the figure of Christ is excellently executed, Peter has two left feet and only one hand, the other being unnaturally covered by draperies. His figure is dynamic, distorted, and lacking harmony.

The mosaic seems to be an adaptation of the renowned iconographic scheme to a specific overall mes-

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sage. Peter’s prostrate body looks like a reworking of John’s posture; however, the position of his head is different, looking upwards to accord with the words of the Gospel, while the legs are more stretched, compositionally bridging two other apostles to construct a visual circle around the central figure of Christ, echoing the mandorla’s shape. The drapery held by John becomes pointless here, not suited to the position of Peter’s head. Mango also challenges the date and the authorship of the mosaic, pointing out that no reliable information exists to argue that Justinian was in fact its patron. He posits that it could have been completed after the Church’s completion, which was a Justinian enterprise, but probably before the detachment of the territory by Byzantium in the seventh century. Thus, the date of the mosaics can vary: 565–566, 580–581, 595–596 or even later. Mango concludes that the mosaic was a local enterprise while the artist could have come from Alexandria or Palestine.

Of all the surviving examples, the Sinai Transfiguration is the only representative from the eastern part of the empire. Geographically, it is the surviving depiction of the scene closest to that at Shivta. It is not clear if the Shivta Transfiguration is slightly earlier than the Sinai, but the difference between their visual interpretations of the Transfiguration is remarkable. While Sinai uses the Transfiguration to emphasize the Church’s symbolic message, and thereby recedes from the Gospel narrative, Shivta’s Transfiguration is closely linked to it, clearly distinguishing the apostles’ gestures and movements.

Peter turns to Christ in a speaking gesture, as if saying ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here’ (Mt 17, 4). John is kneeling, not looking upwards indicating his awe, in keeping with the words of the Gospels. Although nothing remains of Moses’ figure except a partial sketch, it suffices to conclude that he was depicted extending his right hand to Christ. Presumably Elijah did the same. Nevertheless, the depiction of the prophets and the apostles on the same plane is similar to the sixth-century representations of the Transfiguration in Sinai and Porec, while in S. Apollinaire the prophets are moved to the celestial realm. The green background at Shivta is comparable to S. Apollinaire, and perhaps likewise can be interpreted as a vision of Paradise mentioned in the sources and especially developed in the Apocalypse of Peter. It was widespread in Palestinian churches up to the fifth century and even regarded as semi-canonical. We cannot conclude with certainty whether Mount Tabor was depicted at Shivta. However, if lines within the lower border of the mandorla referred to it, this would be the earliest example of Mount Tabor included in the scene, a motif which was to become inseparable from later Byzantine iconography of the Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration in the ninth-century Chludo psalter (fol. 88v) shows clear continuity of the earlier model but also may well reflect a change in the pre-
iconoclastic scheme of the portrayal. The motif of Mount Tabor is highly prominent here, as is the separation between Moses and Elijah flanking Christ inside a mandorla on top of the mountain, and the apostles below. The scene was apparently reversed in the copying: Peter appears on the right, and James on the left, differently from the apostles’ usual disposition. If we reverse the miniature we find a similarity to Shivta in the colours, the figures’ dynamics, their gestures and postures (John is especially close, even in the lines on his garments; likewise the colours of Peter’s beard and his chiton, his standing posture notwithstanding). The scene illustrates Ps 88,13, interpreted as a prophecy on Christ’s Resurrection.56

It can be concluded that both St. Catherine and S. Apollinaire, and perhaps other isolated examples, signify a chance of survival; they testify to a variety of Transfigurations, rather unique, left unfolowed in later representations. Apparently they actually constitute an interpretation of an iconographic scheme already known, and its adaptation to the unique messages of the mosaics. If indeed so, it can be further suggested that the iconography of the Transfiguration was already established by about 548–549, when these mosaics were executed.

Shivta’s Transfiguration and a possible Constantinopolitan parallel

Light pink and white colours attested in Christ’s halo, face, garments, and a mandorla in Shivta, may refer to the appearance of a bright (luminous) cloud of Divine glory, Christ himself becoming brilliant light.57 Yet a pink mandorla cannot be paralleled either to sixth-century Sinai or Ravenna or to the post-iconoclastic images of the Transfiguration. In fact, the best, if not the only, comparison to it appears in the Transfiguration scene in the ninth-century Homilies of Gregory of Naziansus (Paris, BNF, gr. 510, fol. 163, fig. 13) originating in Constantinople.58 According to some scholars, the iconography of the Paris Gregory reflects that of the now lost Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Built as early as the sixth century, this church was considered one of the most important and influential churches in Constantinople. Its decorative program was described on two different occasions, in the tenth and the twelfth century, leaving scholars in doubt as to whether the two descriptions referred to the same works of art and when exactly the church was decorated.

The tenth-century description of the church by Constantine of Rhodes gives a detailed account of the scenes of the pictorial cycle, including the Transfiguration. The description of the scene itself is brief:

Maayan Fanar E.: The Transfiguration at Shivta

Sixth, you may see Christ ascending that thrice-glorious mount of Tabor together with a chosen band of disciples and friends, altering his mortal form; His face shining with rays more dazzling than those of the sun, His garments a luminous white; the great Moses as well as Elijah standing by Him with pious reverence... the disciples, upon hearing the thunder like voice, falling, face down, to the ground...59

It is not possible to reconstruct the scene in detail from this general description; nevertheless, the apostles’ postures at Shivta seemingly contradict it, as only John is depicted with his face down. Alternatively, a detailed description of the scene was probably not the purpose of this text, which attempted to give a broad picture of the Christological cycle.

The twelfth-century description by Nikolaos Mesarites60 is much more detailed but also deeply emotional. Applying ekphrasis, the description is replete with expressions that do not necessarily describe the original works, but being true to the genre render a vivid description of the events through the works of art, complementing them with information from religious and liturgical texts adjusted emotionally. The symbolic value of the divine light and apostles’ reaction to it is emphasized dramatically. The apostles, blinded by the Divine cloud of light, fall to the ground, having never seen anything like it. Peter sees God most clearly, hears Moses and Elijah prophesying his end. The apostles are described prostrate, unable to bear the blinding light. Peter springs up from the ground speaking words,61 while two other apostles are struck by

Footnotes:
59 In the Paris Gregory, Peter is standing; in fact, the illuminated manuscript and the two descriptions contradict—especially as regards the apostles’ postures.

57 Leo VI describes the Transfiguration in the Church built by Stylianus Zaoutzas with the words: ‘His form shines forth as His mortal appearance is removed’ (Sermon 34) – after C. Mango, The art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453. Sources and documents, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1972, 204.
the thunder, too weak to rise. Each is described as showing a different posture:

Peter, the most vehement, springing up from the ground, since he could... seemed to speak words... James, partly rising with difficulty on his knee, and supporting his still heavy head with his left arm, still has the greater part of his body nailed to the ground, while his right hand he holds closely to his eyes... John however does not wish to look up at all, but... seems to lie there in deep sleep...

Iconographic details, which can be singled out from the description, clearly reflect contemporary Byzantine Transfigurations. Differentiation of the apostles’ postures, especially that of Peter, who is in the process of springing up from the ground, reflect the early scheme as found at Shivta. This posture is still found in a few middle Byzantine Transfigurations (e.g. Daphni, fig. 14).

It is not clear if the cycle described by Mesarites is a renovation by Basil I, or if both descriptions actually refer to the original sixth-century iconography. Epstein suggests that despite the different nature of the two descriptions, considering archaisms in choice of scenes and iconographic details, they actually describe the same sixth-century work which survived well into the twelfth century. She proposes that the church was first adorned with figural decorations during the reign of Justin II (565–578). The iconographic program was devised to oppose the teachings of Nestorius and Eutychius, stressing the divine and human nature of Christ. 62

Analysing Nicolaos Mesarites’ description of the Transfiguration mosaics in the Church of the Holy Apostles, Henry Maguire suggests that differences in the apostles’ postures and their adaptation to the text, already evident in the ninth-century examples, have become even more marked by the twelve century, when the description was written. Maguire holds that as neither the Sinai mosaics nor any other surviving Transfiguration scene prior to the ninth century shows any distinction among each of the three Apostles’ attitudes to the miraculous revelation of Christ—which is clearly apparent in post-iconoclastic versions of the Transfiguration, no such distinction has yet been made. 63 Shivta’s Transfiguration is clear proof of the availability of the visual scheme which distinguishes the apostles by their reaction to the miracle prior to the iconoclastic controversy.

For whatever reasons, eleventh- to twelfth-century Transfigurations seem even closer to Shivta than those of the ninth and tenth century, especially regarding the depiction of the apostles. However, unlike the earlier examples, the earthly and celestial spheres are contrasted. While movements of the apostles are emphasized, Christ and the prophets are depicted motionless. Analysing this feature in Daphni, Maguire suggests that it symbolically refers to the distinction between time and timelessness:

At Daphni...the composition of Christ and the two prophets above, set against an abstract gold background, is relatively motionless. The poses of the two prophets mirror each other. But the composition of the three apostles below, set against a flowering terrain, is more indicative of movement, for each is at a different stage of awakening. In medieval thought, motion was a sign of time, because time had been created by God along with the moving creatures of the creation. Therefore, the three apostles, with their varied postures, are a foil for the relatively motionless tableau of Christ, who is here seen transfigured, which is to say, outside time. 64

In Shivta, the depiction is more balanced: all five figures around Christ are united by a common background, a shared vision. No clear distinction between apostles and prophets exists. The Sinai mosaics show same attitude, organizing all five figures around Christ; all share the same ground. This attitude to space strengthens the hypothesis of the early date of the painting at Shivta, reflecting the theological argument that the apostles and the prophets together witnessed the full vision: the prophets, Elijah and Moses, witness the true face of God 65 —God in human form, the apostles Christ’s divine nature. 66

‘Positional meaning’ of the Transfiguration before and after iconoclasm

Transfigurations in Ravenna, Sinai, Naples, and Porec appear separately, disconnected from the Christological cycle and singled out in the architectural space; all but Porec are apse decorations, highlighting the special significance of the scene. This can perhaps be explained by the event of the Transfiguration standing apart from other miracles performed by Christ, but ‘a central act in God’s plan of salvation’ as it signifies the only revelation of His Divine nature to three disciples while still alive. 67

The apse location and the isolation of these sixth-century Transfigurations in architectural space, as well as their iconographic diversity, are not found in post-iconoclastic representations of the scene. On the contrary: middle Byzantine iconography displays its iconographic uniformity, which also became an integral part of the narrative of Christ’s life and passion. Spieser argues that this scene disappeared from the apse soon after its invention; by witnessing the miracle of Transfiguration the church congregation violated, in his words, Christ’s commandment that it should be kept in secret until his Second

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66 Ps.-Ephrem’s sermon on the Transfiguration, for instance, reads: ‘There was joy for the Prophets and the Apostles by this ascent of the mountain. The Prophets rejoiced when they saw his humanity, which they had not known. The Apostles also rejoiced when they saw the glory of his divinity, which they had not known...and they looked to one another: the Prophets to the Apostles and the Apostles to the Prophets. There the authors of the old covenant saw the authors of the new’ (after Bucur, op. cit., 19).
Coming (Mt 17, 9). 68 For Elsner, such a sharp contrast between pre- and post-iconoclastic Transfigurations, especially in their ‘positional meaning’—shifting to the vault from the apse, which therefore lost its special significance—is the ultimate proof that Christian iconography in Byzantium underwent significant changes after the Iconoclasm because the iconophiles needed to develop a response to the iconoclastic accusations. 69

If Constantine Rhodes’ tenth-century description of the Church of the Holy Apostles refers to its redecoration by Basil I, this, together with other descriptions of the now lost ninth-century churches (the church of Stylianos Zaoutzas, built 886–893; the church of the Virgin of Pege, repaired and redecorated 870–879), would confirm Elsner’s suggestion that the Transfiguration was included in the Christological cycle after the Iconoclastic controversy. 70

Alternatively, if at issue here is the reflection of the sixth-century cycle, the scene might have been introduced into Christ’s narrative cycle as early as the sixth century. However, two known sixth-century examples of illustrated cycles in churches suggest otherwise. Transfiguration is absent from S. Apollinaire Nuovo in Ravenna, while in S. Apollinaire in Classe it constitutes part of an apse decoration, therefore is excluded from the cycle and combined with the message of the apse. The Transfiguration is also absent from Choricius’ description of the highly decorated sixth-century churches of St. Sergious and St. Stephen in Gaza. 71

In the tenth century, the tradition of singling out the scene of the Transfiguration still persisted. It is depicted on arches or niches, as is evident in churches in Cappadocia such as Mustafapasha and Old Tokali Kilise. In the latter, dated to the early tenth century, the Transfiguration is separated from an extensive cycle of Christ covering the vault and set at the arch. In the New Tokali Kilise, built in the second half of the tenth century, the scene is depicted inside one of the niches. Only in the eleventh-century did the Transfiguration become fully integrated into the liturgical cycle and gain a place among the twelve liturgical feasts, thus becoming an integral part of Church decoration. The most prominent examples are Hosios Loukas, Daphni, and more. Thus, the process that started after the iconoclastic controversy came to an end.

The wall painting at Shivta may be an incredible discovery of a missing link to the later iconography of the Transfiguration, showing not just most of its iconographic elements, including postures and gestures, but also testifying to its early appearance as part of apse decoration. Once again, Shivta’s Transfiguration bridges these seemingly disparate trends. On the one hand it stands on its own, occupying the whole apse. On the other it is not wholly isolated, as the central and northern apses con-


tained religious imagery as well. If the Transfiguration was painted on the side apse, we can only wonder what subject could have been painted on the central one. 72

Date and concluding remarks

The date of the construction of the Southern church remains unclear. Some scholars suggest that it is the oldest of three churches, built in the already existing settlement and adapted to the area, probably on the ancient cultic site of the Nabateans (first c). 73 Another suggestion was that the Southern and Northern churches were built concurrently, in 505. 74 A later sixth-century date was also proposed.

The confusion in its dating arises from an inscription on the lower border of a decorated lintel which sup-

70 Ibid, 476.
72 We can speculate that if the northern apse could have been devoted to the image of Mary and child (traces of red colour reveal a prominent central motif), and the central one to one of the representations of the Glorification of Christ or of a cross (one of the favourite motifs depicted in the apse), they could have formed an iconographic program perhaps stressing the human and divine natures of Christ.
74 Rosenthal-Heginbottom dates Shivta’s Northern church to 505 at the latest, presumably the same date as the Southern church (op. cit., 219).
posedly belonged to the church, but was not found in its original place.

The inscription states: 'Under the presbyter Aedos in the year 3...' The date has survived but partially, nor is its chronological system clear.75 Going according to the Province Arabia era, the date falls between 415 and 435, or between 475/6 and 485/6. By the Diocletian era the date would be between 593 and 613. Thus, Kirk reads it as the first quarter of the fifth century (415–435), while Lea DiSegni suggests the later date of the lintel inscription — 508–528, according to the Eleutheropolis era.76 While neither the earlier nor the later dates can be dismissed, the dates between 475 and 528 seem to suit better the historical period in which the area enjoyed prosperity and widespread construction.77 Still, it is not clear if the lintel belongs to the earliest stage of the church or to one of its refurbishments, or if it is contemporaneous with the wall painting at issue. Several styles attested in architectural stone decorations of the church suggest continuous existence. These however deserve deeper comparative research to establish the proper chronology.78 Thus, we have no reliable, factual date of the Southern church, a circumstance that projects directly onto the date of its Transfiguration wall painting in its lateral apse. In addition, we lack almost entirely any materials comparable stylistically to the painting, as the surviving examples of wall paintings from the early Byzantine period in the area and elsewhere are scarce and mostly fragmentary.

The only secure fact is that the Southern church was still in use as late as 639, as ascertained from an inscription stating that the floor was laid anew that year— 'being the commemoration of a new paving of the church under Bishop George and the Archdeacon and economus Peter in 639 during the reign of Heraclius.'79

The date and causes of destruction of the Southern church and the settlement is also unclear. Describing their impressions of the ruins of Shivta, Wooley and Lawrence suggest that its end was violent:

It is clear that Esbeita came to a violent end. All the gates of the town have been blocked with roughly-built barriers of stone, and stone barricades have been piled across many of the streets; everything points to a desperate attempt to hold the place against an enemy who ultimately took it. Moreover, the whole evidence of the ruins is to the effect that the town’s occupation ceased suddenly and uniformly...80

‘Esbeita is a Byzantine town pure and simple, founded not very early in the Christian era and destroyed, not long afterwards, by the Arab conquest’, they concluded.

Modern scholars hold an entirely different if not diametrically opposite opinion, totally rejecting a violent end to the city. Avni and Magness suggest that the settlements in the area were continuously occupied well into the tenth century.81 They even argue in favour of a peaceful occupation of Shivta by a small community of Muslims who lived side by side with the original Christian community.82 Their conclusions are based on a small mosque attached to the baptistery of the Southern church without harming or ruining it. But the mosque, constructed from spolia, presumably from the church itself, was built some time in the eighth or even the ninth century, as analysis of the inscriptions there suggests.83 This still leaves us with no factual evidence that could confirm the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in Shivta. Even if Christians still lived in the city until the mid-ninth century, the nature of the settlement there and in other Negev cities after the Muslim conquest is not clear.84 Several Arabic inscriptions on the mosque’s walls are from Quranic verses highlighting, according to Moor, fundamental issues in Islamic belief.85 Presumably already ruined by then, visual images inside the church emphasized a core of Christian faith. The Transfiguration, the only survivor, is a powerful statement in this respect. I doubt whether these strong messages of faith could coexist side by side.

All in all, the evidence is inadequate to suggest when exactly and why the settlement came to an end.86 Although nothing points to a sharp violent termination there might have been a destructive seismological event or a series of such events,87 as several devastating earthquakes which could have befallen the area in the

85 Moor, op. cit., 87.
seventh and eighth centuries are documented in ancient sources. Social and economic reasons, together with over-taxation as indicated in the late seventh-century Nessana papyrus 75, could also have played an important role in the abandonment of the site. According to Edelson, the economy of Shivta, unlike other nearby settlements, was mainly based on agriculture, especially wine production. Reduction of wine export in the early Muslim period together with difficult living conditions in the arid region could have accelerated emigration from the settlement.

This analysis gives us rough brackets for the time of the Southern church decoration: between c. 450 and the third part of the seventh century. Yet a seventh-century date seems unlikely if we compare all the remnants of Shivta. It is not clear if the artist was local or came from afar, but the investment in the paintings reflects considerable wealth, more befitting the sixth century. Can we be more precise about the dating of the wall painting? As noted above, some stylistic features (and treatment of the figure of Christ) clearly indicate a relation to the sixth-century mosaics in St. Catherine in Sinai. Illusionistic traces of late antique rendering of the volumes, space, and architectural ornament may favour the earlier date over the later.

The Transfiguration as a choice for apse decoration may coincide with the Chalcedonian council (451) and opposition to its decision in Palestine. The debate was large scale, as evidence from Gaza attests. There is no evidence as to whether the Negev Christian community supported the Chalcedon Christology. However, the choice of the Transfiguration can be seen as a statement in this direction. Similarly, scholars have explained this choice in Ravenna and Sinai as anti-heretic statements in the Monophysite controversy. It was also argued that the mosaic on the apsidal arch in Ss. Nereo ed Achilleo (816–817) commissioned by Leo III (795–815) probably referred to anti-adoptianism in Visigothic Spain.

The Transfiguration in provincial Shivta reveals an ultimate link between early Byzantine and post-iconoclastic iconography. It is a unique piece of evidence of the existence of the scheme for the middle Byzantine iconography of the scene certainly in the sixth century, if not earlier. Its existence undoubtedly suggests that post-iconoclastic iconography was not invented but copied from early models, which existed on a much broader scale than we know. Shivta’s Transfiguration reflects such an early model, which was probably popular enough to be copied in the small provincial settlement, and on the other hand could be altered in order to adapt it to different messages in Sinai, Ravenna, and elsewhere.

The dead city in the Negev still awaits its awakening, and who knows what secrets are still lodged in its stones.

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Моге разазнати. Длан. Сам длан, међутим, толико је оштећен да се не подигнута у раван груди. Назире се и кривина леве звољавају да реконструишемо Христову десну шаку. Бели светлосни акценти. Друге очуване контуре до- ма, а изнад једине сачуване обрве могу се видети дуги, ол светлоружичастих нијанси, јасно се види унутар познати. Христос, главе смештене у веома велики оре- прадстава Преображења ипак се може поуздано пре-
ници да је десна страна слике готово сасвим страдала, у бочној апсиди Јужне цркве у Шивта.

Несправдани у Са Петрове леве стране, уз бордуру апсиде, на-
лази се пуна, стојећа фигура, чију главу обавија огро-
шерешевског. Једна контура у Јерусалему, погод-


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Преображење из Шивте.
Реконструкција рановизантијске иконографије
Ема Мајан Фанар
Универзитет у Хаифи, Одељење за историју уметности

Сеоско насеље Шивта у пустињи Негев постоја-
ло je од IV–V до VIII–IX века, када је напуштено. Три постава била су богато обдарене, али од неко-
лажу претворен у раван груди. Назире се и кривина леве звољавају да реконструишемо Христову десну шаку. Бели светлосни акценти. Друге очуване контуре до-
ма, а изнад једине сачуване обрве могу се видети дуги, ол светлоружичастих нијанси, јасно се види унутар познати. Христос, главе смештене у веома велики оре-
представа Преображења ипак се може поуздано пре-
ници да је десна страна слике готово сасвим страдала, у бочној апсиди Јужне цркве у Шивта.

Упркос стању у којем се сада налази, као и чиње-
ници који је десна страна слике готово сасвим страдала, представа Преображења ипак се може позната. Христос, главе смештене у веома велики оре-
ол светлоружичастих нијанси, јасно се види унутар мандорле у горњој зони средишњег дела апсиде. Хри-
стово лице било је насликано у ружичастим нијанса-
ма, а изнад једне сачуване обрве могу се видети други, бели светлосни акценти. Друге очуване контуре до-
зваљају да реконструишемо Христову десну шаку. Сразмерно увезена, она извире из широког рукава, подигнута у раван груди. Назире се и кривина леве шаке, као и изражено заобљена драперија изнад левог плана. Сам план, међутим, толико је оштећен да се не може разазнати.

Са леве стране, још се могу видети фигуре двојице апостола, од којих ниједан нема ореол. Јована базиле, ипак се могу разазнати на основу последњих слова тог имена на препознајемо на основу последњих слова тог имена. Јован је првобитна скица жућкастоокер бојом једва назире. Остаци Илијине фигуре показују да је његова пред-
представа Преображења ипак се може поуздано пре-
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ма, а изнад једне сачуване обрве могу се видети други, бели светлосни акценти. Друге очуване контуре до-
зваљају да реконструишемо Христову десну шаку. Сразмерно увезена, она извире из широког рукава, подигнута у раван груди. Назире се и кривина леве шаке, као и изражено заобљена драперија изнад левог плана. Сам план, међутим, толико је оштећен да се не може разазнати.

Са леве стране, још се могу видети фигуре двојице апостола, од којих ниједан нема ореол. Јована базиле, ипак се могу разазнати на основу последњих слова тог имена на препознајемо на основу последњих слова тог имена. Јован је првобитна скица жућкастоокер бојом једва назире. Остаци Илијине фигуре показују да је његова пред-
представа Преображења ипак се може поуздано пре-
ници да је десна страна слике готово сасвим страдала, у бочној апсиди Јужне цркве у Шивта.
Не можемо бити сигурни у то да ли је испод Христових ногу приказана планина, али чак и ако јесте, свакако не доминира призором као што је то случај на млађим приказима Преображења.

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