

TWO FIGURAL CAPITALS FROM THE LATE ANTIQUITY IN NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM – SOFIA

Architectural monuments from the late antique epoch, found in nowadays Bulgarian lands, are some of the most impressible like decoration and variety of the forms. When we are studying architectural orders and their elements like growth of the decorative designs it's could to be said, that we enter in the most endless field of researches over the stone reliefs from the whole antique period. In this stage, the end of Antiquity, the level of development in stone-quarrying, stone-carving, stone-trade and the final using of the stone materials in monumental public and in private complexes is exceptionally high. Already more than few centuries in Thracian lands function town centers and well-built, organized system of settlements, created around them. The building techniques themselves are based on the almost millennium history, if we accept, that the first antique architectural models are adopted and reproduced in Thrace as far back to Classical and early Hellenistic era.

Nowadays in the exhibition of the National Archaeological Museum – Sofia, on the huge panel, are presented capitals from the late roman and early Byzantine epoch. The subject of this research of the late roman (IV c. AD) and early Byzantine (V-VI c. AD) stone reliefs are two of these capitals (see: fig. 1-16). They are from type “*antique figural capitals*”, direct continuation of the Hellenistic and Roman architectural decorative traditions in late antique architecture. With these main features in ornamental schemas they could be used like annex to the corpus of “*Figural capitals*”, published by E. von Mercklin in 1962. They are serial representatives of this huge antique cultural phenomenon from nowadays Bulgarian lands, and mainly – from the latest stage of development of the process.

The first of these capitals is found in the fields near Belo-popovtzi village, Sofia district – nowadays Belopoptzi, municipality of Gorna Malina¹ (Detail **Nr. 1**; fig. 1-7). The monument is ransomed by the National archaeological Museum in Sofia and described in the inventory books of medieval department under Inv.Nr. 2119. There is a possibility, that the region of finding is also the original place of using of the capital. The distance from the village of Belopoptzi to Sofia is less than 30 km., but exactly through this terrain of the Sofia's plain,

¹ See catalog Nr.1

eastern from the antique town of Serdica, has passed before the main Roman road on the Balkans – *Via Diagonalis*. Nowadays village Belopoptzi is situated in the most eastern point of the Sofia's valley, namely on the transition between the plains and the first hills of the Sredna gora mountain. The zone, from where the oldest roman road has started its climb in the mountain.

The architectural detail **Nr.1** falls in the type “Corinthian four-leaved capitals” (fig. 1). Except one row made, four-leaved, acanthus decoration, so often met in roman and late roman epoch, this capital shows us few other architectural-decorative elements, typical for the *principate*. These are mainly the way of carving of the volute's stems and replacement of the abacus blossom with figure – in this case: human face.

The four acanthus leaves, placed over the surface under the four edges of abacus plate, the volutes, which carry the same abacus edges and the other elements, like volute's stems and abacus figures, all they are very well calculated in their proportions. These main elements, carved precisely, follow the concrete decorative model. The leaves are long made, curved entirely under the lower end of the volutes. They are divided on the three parts (so called “thenars”, because of similarity between with this part of the human's hand). Each thenar has different number of cuttings (endings of the acanthus leave). The central thenar is bigger and carried up than the side two. It is divided on the eight cuttings (fig. 2). The side two thenars have only fictitious role because they have only three little cuttings each and it is well visible, that the whole leave is created mainly from the volume of the central thenar (fig. 3). Separate cuttings of the leaves are formed by deeply carved channels, which started from the bottom of acanthus leave. The cuttings are pointed only by the side, lower thenars. Partly it exists yet the idea for touch of the peaks of the cuttings from the thenars, but this idea here is very slightly expressed. This strong element in development of the acanthus during the roman epoch is well demonstrated only in the fundament part of the side thenars. Namely there we could see the only cleverly pointed cuttings and namely they have touch to the same peaks of cuttings from leaves in neighborhood (fig. 3).

The form of the whole acanthus leave is fan-shaped, especially in the upper part, by the central thenar. Like decorative schema whole acanthus leave copy without doubt typical roman pattern. This is visible not only by the described and commented already pointed and touched one each other cuttings from the lower thenars, but mainly by the full refraction of the lower cutting from the upper thenar (see: fig. 3). There we could see clear, even though it's very schematic made, replica of the strongest decorative particularity in the acanthus ornamentation on the Corinthian capitals from the middle of the II-nd c. AD in Serdica: so called “horizontal refraction” of the cuttings of acanthus leave². This is so well known and strongly developed in Serdica during the

² С. Бобчев. *Римо-коринтски капители от югозападна и северна България и мястото им в развитието на римо-коринтския капител*. – Известия на археологическия институт, XXXII, 1970, с. 96, 99, 122; З. Димитров, *Коринтски капители от Сердика през римската епоха – в: Югоизточна Европа през Античността. VI в. пр. Хр. – началото на VII в. сл. Хр.* – в: *Studia in honorem Aleksandrae Dimitrova-Milcheva* (под съставителството на Е. Генчева), Велико Търново 2008, 216-218, № 8-11, обр. 17-26



Fig. 1. Figural four-leaved capital in Corinthian order, cat. Nr. 1, from Belopotzi village, near Sofia – general view;

Сл. 1. Четворолисни капител Коринтског реда, каталожки бр. № 1, село Белопопци поред Софије, изглед;



Fig. 2. Figural four-leaved capital in Corinthian order, cat. Nr. 1, from Belopotzi village, detail of the acanthus leaf;

Сл. 2. Четворолисни капител Коринтског реда, каталожки бр. № 1, село Белопопци, детаљ акантовог листа;

Fig. 3. Figural four-leaved capital in Corinthian order, cat. Nr. 1, from Belopotzi village, detail of the leaf's thenars and their cuttings;

Сл. 3. Четворолисни капител Коринтског реда, каталожки бр. № 1, село Белопопци, детаљ



whole roman era (II-IV c. AD) main original of acanthus leaf for Corinthian capital, which origin could be found easy in the Asia Minor monuments from the flowering of the stone-carving art in *principate*.

Because of these arguments the main elements in the model of acanthus leaf by capital Nr. 1 (Belopotzi capital) orientate us to the direct analogies with roman architectural details. It is still visible the idea for executing of acanthus in fan-shaped form and well spread. There are pointed and lengthened one over other cuttings. Also preserved is the carving of deep narrow channels,

formed the separate thenars and cuttings of the leave. These channels start from the foundation of the capital. But mainly and most important is that we have still very well visible the ideas for touch of some peaks of the cuttings from neighbouring thenars and for making of some little figures in the uncovered, free places from *calathos* surface between them.

There is no doubt, that acanthus decoration of this capital copies exactly roman models in Corinthian order, but the execution is already more schematic and shows us the different chronology. The fact, that we have the typical example for translation of the roman architectural-decorative traditions on the one late antique monument is added also by the using of so called “lyre-shaped volutes”, the scroll of the volute motive itself and mainly after the including of the human face over the abacus plate (fig. 4-7).

Indisputably here we could see one very clear reproduction of some Serdica’s architectural elements from the *principate*. This is reproduction, made by using of examples, already existing and standing on the constructions. As we know well, during the late roman epoch, many of the capitals from roman period are reused in the new erected buildings. The capital of Belopoptzi, i.e. from the Serdica’s region, contains so many typical roman architectural-decorative features, so we couldn’t accede it to the early Byzantine monuments. Probably the capital has been made in IV-th c. AD, thesis, which is logical with a view to strong development of the architectural complexes in and around Serdica at this time.

The volutes of the capital are very interesting (fig. 5-7). They are from so-called “lyre-shaped” type³. These are the elements from the apparatus of Corinthian capital, which are distinguished with more flat, elementary made, carving of the volute stems, but with finishing by one connection in form like the *lyre* (antique musical instrument) in its lower end. The rest of elements from the apparatus also show us direct similarities with roman details – the volutes are triple scrolled over the eye in its centre (fig. 5); abacus is slightly profiled and divided on three sections (fig. 6); and finally, but may be the most important, abacus flower is replaced by the human face, carved in high relief (fig. 4).

The face presents bearded man with roughly made, but clearly visible, features (fig. 4). This face contains all the attributes – excellent made almond-shaped eyes; wide nose; projecting, very huge eyebrows; short forehead; two narrow lips and fine, little chin with pear-shaped form. The general form of the face is plump, with well seen cheeks, but the main feature is the short and thick beard, which covers all neck of the figure and in that way, the beard attribute, connects the face with *calathos* surface. Projecting of the head in the space forward in relief is very large. Over the other three façades of the capital are roughly made three more figures. Opposite to the described site we have the same human face and on the last two sites we can see the images of *cornucopias* (the horns of plenty) – see fig. 6.

The techniques of carving and general style of the whole motives by this capital are very different from the typical fine work of stone-workers from the

³ Св. Петрова, *Архитектурни детайли от I-III в. от Деултум*. – Археология, 2002, 3, с.39, обр. 5, 5



Fig. 4. Figural four-leaved capital in Corinthian order, cat. Nr. 1, from Beloptzi village, detail of the figure: bearded man's head;

Сл. 4. Четворолисни капител Коринтског реда, каталoшки бр. № 1, село Белопопци, брадато мушко лице;



Fig. 5. Figural four-leaved capital in Corinthian order, cat. Nr. 1, from Beloptzi village, detail of the volutes;

Сл. 5. Четворолисни капител Коринтског реда, каталoшки бр. № 1, село Белопопци, волута;



Fig. 6. Figural four-leaved capital in Corinthian order, cat. Nr. 1, from Beloptzi village, detail of *cornucopia* (horn of plenty)

Сл. 6. Четворолисни капител Коринтског реда, каталoшки бр. № 1, село Белопопци, „рог изобиља”



Fig. 7. Figural four-leaved capital in Corinthian order, cat. Nr. 1, from Beloptzi village, detail of volutes stems: "lyre-shaped" volutes

Сл. 7. Четворолисни капител Коринтског реда, каталoшки бр. № 1, село Белопопци, детаљ стабла волуте

principate. The carving is rough and oblique, especially by the face and its beard. The acanthus is very flat made, not in high relief technique and it is almost agglutinate for the background of *calathos*. The volutes itself are formed only by one relief line, while the profiled zones of abacus slab are barely divided from the stone. The only one seriously made projecting in high relief in all capital apparatus is by the figures – two human heads and two *cornucopias*. But, by the other hand the attributes of the human faces are traceable only by very shallow lines, which give us only the main outlines.

If we stop our attention over the most correct analogies in executing of the figure, according to the corpus of E. Mercklin, we can settle again indisputable fact, that this capital from the Serdica's region is product of direct copying of the old antique traditions from the roman era, but it has made already in the beginning of the late Antiquity.

There are a lot of analogies to this late antique Corinthian capital from the area of roman Serdica, if we take a look at the Mercklin's work. According to this research the capital falls in the group of figural capitals with human images: so-called "figural capitals with human heads and busts from *principate*" - "Kopf- und Büstenkapitelle der römischen Kaiserzeit⁴. They are the wealthiest group of the figural capitals, which are developed during the whole roman epoch, from I-st till IV-th c. AD, and they keep its presence in architectural decoration till the VI-th c. AD, despite of penetration of the new monotheistic religion⁵. Although in the beginning they are mentioned like "phenomenon, typical for the West" and namely in the Rhine river limes zone⁶, their reproducing also in the eastern roman provinces is not so rare. Here, in the East, in the borders of Balkan provinces, Asia Minor, Near East, Aegean zone and North Africa, we find as well as early roman, original examples of the figural capitals with human faces and busts (from I-st – till the beginning of the III-th c. AD), also the chronologically equal models of our Serdica's pattern from late roman time (second half of the III-rd c. AD – IV-th c. AD).

Similar original models of the bearded man's faces and mythological personages, executed like head, but also like the bust, are analyzed most seriously in the Rhine river region. Obviously their distribution there is exceptionally strong. The figural capitals are from the Reims and Strasburg, and they are dated back to the III-rd c. AD: severan and late severan epoch⁷. H. Kähler sets some of these four-leaved capitals in the group called "capitals without helices", i.e. where the element of helices is replaced with figure, mostly human face, like by the examples from Rheinzabern⁸.

In our Balkan provinces also there is no lack of analogies. One of the closest geographically to our Corinthian monument from Serdica's region is the example, dated in severan times, from Stobi, province of Macedonia. This

⁴ E. Mercklin, *Antike Figuralkapitelle*. Berlin 1962, S. 83

⁵ *Ibidem*, 83-84

⁶ *Ibidem*, 83-87; H. Kähler, *Die Römischen Kapitelle des Rheingebiets*, Berlin 1939

⁷ *Ibidem*, type K 6, K 7, Taf. 10; Mercklin, *op. cit.*, 110-111, Kat. Nr. 301, 306-311, Abb. 541, 548-553

⁸ Kähler, *op. cit.*, 58, Taf. 10; types J 11, J 12 and K 8

capital present namely the model of bearded men's face and it was found reused in early Christian basilica⁹. The examples from Macedonia are well studied and now they are collected in the separate decorative group: “четирилистни капители с антропоморфен лик на абакот и калатот” – “four-leaved capitals with anthropomorphic portrait on the abacus and calathos”¹⁰. Some of the monuments are dated back to the late antique epoch, like capitals from Manastiretz – V-th c. AD and Dolno Chichevo – IV-th c. AD¹¹. Also late roman (first half of the IV-th c. AD) are the capitals with connected lower end of the volute's stems, like “lyre-shaped” volutes in capital from Belopotzi, Serdica region. These analogies are from Midintzi and Knezhino¹².

A lot of examples of figural capitals with “human faces and busts” we find in one very strong local group in province Lower Moesia. At the moment this group is composed from nine monuments, which are from: Nucopolis ad Istrum; Roman mausoleum of a doctor near Liublen, Turgovishte region; Marcianopolis – three monuments; Odessos; Durostorum; Sexaginta Prista and an example from medieval church “St. Peter and Paul” in Veliko Turnovo¹³.

In the North Africa, in Tripolitania, we find the most precise like general decorative schema and chronology analog of the capital, published here under Nr. 1. This is Corinthian capital from the late roman mausoleum building (tomb C) in Ghirsa, today transported and preserved in Archaeological Museum in Tripoli¹⁴.

The total lack of information about the archaeological context of the monument prevents us to give the concrete chronology. But without any doubt this stone detail is the figural capital from the late roman epoch, direct continuation of the architectural traditions in Roman Serdica. Most likely it is the element of complex, erected in region of *via Diagonalis* – may be early Christian cult building, but also, and way not (!?), the huge private estate, probably *villa rustica*. According to all the analysis, mentioned in the rows above, we could

⁹ R. Egger, *Die städtische Kirche von Stobi*. – Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts, XXIV, 1929, S.65, Abb. 62; H. Goldman. *Archaeological Notes. Excavations at Stobi in Jugoslavia*. – American Journal of Archaeology, 37, 1933, p. 299, fig. 10; Mercklin, *op. cit.*, 95, Nr. 231, Abb. 438

¹⁰ В. Лилчиќ, *Македонскиот камен за боговите, христијаните и за живот по животот II*, Скопје 2002, 1052

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 907-908, Nr. 129 (1-3); 896-898, Nr. 123

¹² *Ibidem*, 914-916, Nr. 133; 913-915, Nr. 132

¹³ З. Димитров, *Архитектурна декорација в провинција Долна Мизия (I-III в.)*, София 2007, кат. № 197, обр. 203, кат. № 206, обр. 212, кат. № 221, 228, 256, обр. 237, кат. № 137, обр. 139-140, кат. № 209, обр. 216; З. Димитров, *Архитектурни детали от римската епоха в Сексагинта Приста*. – Известия на РИМ-Русе, XI, 2006, с.192-222, кат. № 8. The moesian monuments remained unknown about Mercklin and they aren't included in the catalog of the figural capitals. E.v. Mercklin hasn't had the chance to work in Bulgaria and also back to the 1960-ties all the moesian group was not published. The example from “St. Peter and Paul” is roman detail, reused in medieval ages, now in print by the author of this article.

¹⁴ Mercklin, *op. cit.*, 88, 113-115, Kat. Nr. 320, Abb. 585; O. Brogan, D. Smith, *The Roman Frontier Settlement at Ghirza: An Interim Report*. – Journal of the Roman Studies, 47, 1957, p.173-184, tab. V, 1

define relatively exact **date** of the Corinthian capital from Belopoptsi, Nr. 1 in this study. The decorative schema of this four-leaved Corinthian capital from the figural type can not be placed later than IV-th c. AD. The rule of Emperor Constantine the Great (307-337) and his successors (337-361), namely the first half of IV-th c. AD., is the stage with erecting of so many architectural complexes in Serdica's region. The capital with Nr.1 is exactly the product of this period.

The second capital from the exhibition of National archaeological Museum – Sofia, which I am studying here, is also between the monuments of the late antique architectural plastics. This is marble capital, found in medieval fortress Kozyak grad, near to the nowadays town of Obzor, Bourgas region (fig. 8-16). The detail enters in medieval fond of National Archaeological Museum in 1914. Today the capital from Obzor region has two references, but only with pictures and very short text about it¹⁵. Now in the scientific literature the full primary description, catalog information and exact analysis are missing.

The decorative schema of capital defines it like a representative of Composite order, but its apparatus is not full and it has also some very exciting changes, which make the whole detail unique (fig. 8). According to R. Kautzsch the capital is from so-called “double zoned capitals” – *Zweizonenkapitelle*¹⁶, which contain two sections: lower, with the acanthus leaves and upper, decorated with figures and different images.

The lower part of the capital, 1/3 of the whole volume in height, is canonically adorned. The *calathos* there contains exactly eight full-made acanthus leaves. But the upper parts of the detail, 2/3 of the capital's height, are totally modified. There the second acanthus range dues out and the elements of volutes and helices are missing. All they are taking place for the accent in decoration of whole capital – huge figures of animals. After the description in inventory books of the medieval fond of Museum from the time of the First World War (1914) they are listed like “mythological creatures”. But if we give the full and correct definition – there is no doubt that they are the huge, projected seriously in the space in front of the detail figures of four rams (fig. 9).

The animals are carved like *protomes* of the rams, and they take the whole place of the volutes. These ram's figures are so much big and projected forward and downwards in the space, that they take away even the little possibility for carving of the second acanthus range or same pieces of it. The last two elements of the capital's apparatus are abacus motives, formed here like huge, protruding horns of plenty (*cornucopias*) and profiled, three-sectioned abacus plate (fig. 14).

The most important in the execution of the abacus plate is the correct tracing of the original form used by the Corinthian capital from the *principate*. This element is made by the carrying out of its four angles, if we take a look

¹⁵ Д. Овчаров, М. Ваклинова, *Ранновизантийски паметници от България IV-VII в.*, София 1978, № 63; С. Barsanti, *L'esportazione di marmii dal Proconneso nelle regioni pontiche durante il IV-VI secolo.* – Rivista dell'istituto nazionale d'archeologia e storia dell'atre, serie III, anno XII, 1989, p. 151, fig. 77

¹⁶ R. Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien. Beiträge zu einer Geschichte des spätantiken Kapitells im Osten vom vierten bis ins siebente Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1936, S.152, 229, Taf. 30-32



Fig. 8. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, *Theodosian style* – found near Obzor (Bourgas region) – general view;

Сл. 8. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталoшки бр. № 2, „теодосијански стил” – откривен у близина града Обзор у Бугарској – изглед.



Fig. 9. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, general view from the site of the best preserved acanthus foliage;

Сл. 9. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталoшки број № 2, фасаде са најбоље очуваним акантовим венцем



Fig. 10. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, detail of acanthus foliage, spaces of *calathos* between the leaves and the *soffite* band in profile;

Сл. 10. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталoшки број № 2, детаљ акантовог венца



Fig. 11. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, detail of the acanthus leaf;

Сл. 11. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталoшки број № 2, детаљ акантовог листа;

over the upper surface of the detail in plan, and finishing of these angles like so-called “horns of the abacus plate, projected well in the space”. Abacus horns form also the absolutely clear and equal in dimensions diagonals of the whole upper surface of the capital. These “horns of abacus” are very well connected and strongly supported by the upper parts of the heads of the ram’s figures (fig. 12). The fact, also very important here, is transparency in carving, mainly on the place of the connection between animal’s figures and abacus horns (four abacus angles) – see fig. 15, 16. The ram’s head replaced here the volute motives not only decoratively but also constructively in the whole general system of the detail.

The acanthus leaves of Obzor’s capital are composed by the five huge thenars (fig. 10, 11). The lower thenars, placed in the foundations of the leaves, are divided on the seven cuttings, while the middle thenars have only five. The most upper thenar is large and compactly made. These supreme parts of the leaves are the most massive and they preserve partly one of the typical features for the *principate* carvings: the carrying out of the peaks of the leaves in high relief and three-dimensional form, and after that absolutely full made turning back towards to the lower parts and bottom of the leaves (fig. 16). This is “behaviour” so characteristic about the most supreme placed thenars of the Corinthian capitals from the roman epoch in the Balkans and Asia Minor. Over this central, supreme thenars are hinted separate cuttings, but they are marked only but the little hatches, without dividing from the whole body of acanthus leave. Thin traces it has also from the huge central, vertical channels, so well visible during the roman era. Here they are only hinted over the stone surface (fig. 11).

The general form of the acanthus leaves is already far away from the fan-shaped model, typical for the eastern roman provinces (including Balkans). Here the leaves are more long-made in height and the most characteristic general feature is very sharp form of the each cutting. Here the idea of touch between the peaks of the cuttings from each leaves in neighbourhood is totally abandoned (fig. 10, 11).

The style of acanthus decoration is typical for the V-th c. AD. This is so-called “*theodosian style*”, accepted and developed strongly in the architectural stone plastic in eastern Roman empire during the time of Emperor Theodosius II (408-450).

If we concentrate over the most important element of the apparatus of the Composite capital – the acanthus leave, we can see quite clear features of this architectural style of early Christian epoch. The acanthuses are totally different from the models in roman epoch (compare also with: capital Nr.1, from Serdica region). Their main signs are three: general compact form of the leave (not the fan-shaped, spread and disjoined form like in *principate*); clear *a jour-made* form of the stone surface of the whole leave, achieved here by using of small, fine cuttings, which make very little, but also very deeply carved, absolutely equal figures among them (this is the most typical sign of “*theodosian style*” in acanthuses) and, finally, huge free, undecorated spaces between the leaves.

Some other “*theodosian style*” feature manifest by this capital is strong emphasis of detail’s soffitt with using of little relief line under the foundation

of the acanthus leaves (fig. 9-11). By the richly adorned *theodosian capitals* it is the element seriously projected in relief, clearly visible in profile and even decorated sometimes with *cymatium* or deep oblique scratches.

The figural, double zoned capital from Obzor is one of the most important representatives of this type details from whole Antiquity in nowadays Bulgarian lands. It is because of enormous volume, taken from the figures in capital's apparatus. Today we don't know figural capital, neither from the roman, nor from the late antique epoch, with figures in such volume and with so strongly expressed carrying out from the stone surface. These are four examples of ram's *protomes*, made in three-dimensioned form and carried out far away from the *calathos* surface (fig. 8, 9, 12-14). As we mentioned before, they take the whole place of the volutes, helices and second acanthus row. They are so voluminous, that the same upper part of the capital body is enormous massive and wide. Ram's *protomes* execute the functions of the volutes, because they support the horns of abacus plate, strongly projected by the directions of two diagonal of the upper capital's surface. The images of the rams are very attractive and expressive. The noses of the rams are very sharply made, directed forward and downwards. But the most serious attention by the carving of the figures is taken for the animal's eyes. They are with almond-shaped form, marked with double relief line. In the upper part the heads of the rams have very thick coat and huge corns (fig. 12). Namely these pointed horns of the ram's heads give the *a jour*-made connection with the abacus's horns and connect the animal figures with the slap over them (fig. 15). The bodies of the rams are very huge and massive. There are presented the whole fore-parts of the animal's bodies (so-called "*protomes*"). They are with very smooth naked forms and the necks, the shoulders and the upper legs, bend and ready for jump, are visible absolutely in three-dimensioned form (fig. 16). Namely these smooth, but unadorned *protomes* of the ram's figures organize in practice whole the upper part of the *calathos* in this composed double zoned capital.

The other elements of capital's apparatus are the elements, placed over the abacus. Typical abacus blossoms are replaced here with huge abacus figures, which also like rams are very huge and projected in relief. It isn't difficult to define them. These are the clear models of so-called *cornucopia* (horn of plenty) – see fig. 14. From the spaces under the motives a few undercoated leaves come out in high relief. These little elements carry the whole huge and heavy figures of *cornucopias* (fig. 14).

The abacus plate of capital is dividing on the three sections in profile, just like is typical for the Corinthian and Composite capitals from Antiquity (fig. 8, 12, 14, 15). This is a very strong tradition in the era of *principate* (I-III c. AD). Here, by this monument from late antiquity in Obzor's region, three-sectioned abacus is well preserved like a model, but profile is already not so perfect carved. Only the middle section of abacus profile is weakly projected by a narrow relief line. One remarkable moment in the production of the abacus plate is strong carrying out of the four abacus horns, which formed the angles of capital. On the lower surface of the abacus horns, on the space between them



Fig. 12. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, detail of the ram's *protome*;

Сл. 12. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталошки број № 2, детаљ фигуре овна



Fig. 13. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, detail of the ram's figure, in front;

Сл. 13. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталошки број № 2, детаљ фигуре овна

and the ram's heads, are carved very schematic leaves (fig. 12, 14). These leaves are disjoined in form, made by many cuttings. Usually this place, between abacus horns and volute motives (here replaced by rams) is undecorated.

The techniques of carving on the stone surfaces, also with the style of the motives, by the Obzor's capital are typical for the beginning of the early Byzantine epoch. As I mentioned before, the general style of this Composite capital is "*theodosian*", modern and produced often during the first half of the V-th c. AD. The most characteristic are the acanthus leaves, while the combination between ram's figures and *cornucopias* are clear decorative schema from the early Christian architecture. They transform the detail in real masterpiece of the late antique architectural plastic. The stone carving of the capital itself is more qualitative the previous analyzed detail, that we dated in Constantine epoch (I-st half of the IV-th c. AD). This is not a surprise because the early Christian plastic from the first half of the V-th c. AD reaches phenomenal levels in the quality and value of the carvings. The clearest are the acts of this early Byzantine art by the execution of acanthus foliage, but also by the perfect figures of animals. Not so precise carving from our capital we could see over the surface of the *calathos*, abacus elements and motives of *cornucopias*, but all they are indivisible parts from the main capital's decoration. It is logical, because they are only the secondary architectural-decorative elements from the capital's apparatus. Their presence speaks about the wealth and diversity in general decorative schema. But it is absolutely sure, that the main decorative elements are the huge figures of the rams. They dominate over the whole composition.

When we turn round to analogies of ram's figures in Mercklin's catalog it's possible to see only the examples of the roman and late roman epoch¹⁷.

¹⁷ Mercklin, *op. cit.*, 201-203



Fig. 14. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, detail of the *cornucopia*;

Сл. 14. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталожки број № 2, детаљ мотива „рог изобиља“;



Fig. 15. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, detail of *a-jour* carving between the ram's heads and abacus plate;

Сл. 15. Фигурални дворедни капител у Композитном реду, каталожки број № 2, детаљ

The author mentioned exactly that the group of early Byzantine architectural plastic with the ram's figures and *protomes* are going out of the borders of the research. But Mercklin accented over the problem and marked that the phenomenon is strongly developed in the Balkan region and it is typical product of early Byzantine architectural sculpture¹⁸. More important in Mercklin's work are the assignments for the general type in the family of the figural capitals and for the prototypes of the capitals with ram's *protomes*. According to this basic research we can set our example from Obzor in the general type: "*Figural capital with beasts and fable (fantastic) creatures*" (*Kapitelle mit Tieren und Fabelwesen*), and in variant: "*ram's protomes*" (*Widderprotomen*). They have many examples from whole roman epoch, but the clear prototype of the double zoned capital with ram's *protomes* from early Byzantine epoch is without any doubt the perfect pattern used in interior of Concordia temple in Rome¹⁹. Also like direct prototype, descended from our Balkan region, we can stop on the late antique pilaster capital from Bizia in southeastern Thrace, also western pontic region like Obzor's area²⁰.

The double zoned figural capitals with ram's *protomes*, *cornucopias* between them and only one row of acanthus foliage, carved in so-called "*theodosian style*", are very well known in the settlements from the early Byzantine epoch along the western and north-western Black sea coast. These are our example from Obzor and its best analogies from Herson²¹. In province of Macedonia is the other completely precise analog of the Obzor's masterpiece. This is one

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 202, with citations about examples from Stobi, Philippi, Constantinople and Tessaloniki

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 201-202, Nr. 494, Abb. 493-495

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 201-202, Nr. 495, Abb. 496

²¹ Barsanti, *op. cit.*, 151-153, fig. 76, 77, 79



Fig. 16. Figural double zoned capital in Composite order, cat. Nr. 2, detail of *a-jour* carving between the ram's legs and upper part of the acanthus leaves.

Сл. 16.
Фигурални дворедни капители у Композитном реду, каталожки број № 2, детаљ

Composite double zoned capital from Heraclea Linkestis with absolutely the same decorative schema: one row of acanthus leaves, carved in “*theodosian style*”, ram's *protomes* on the angles and *cornucopias* between them. The monument is made also from white marble and it's dated relatively back to the V-VI c. AD²². One partial analog, but more popular and published earlier, is the double zoned figural capital (again “*theodosian style*”) from bishop's basilica II in Stobi²³. According mainly to the archaeological context of the bishop's basilica II the model is dated exactly in the first half of the V c. AD. Its decoration follows also absolutely the same schema like our example from Obzor, but with using of bull's *protomes* instead of rams and the figures of peacock instead of *cornucopias*.

If we take a special attention over the style and technique of carving by the acanthus foliage it will be possible to find more analogies and data about the exact chronology of the monument from Obzor. Perfectly made capital details in “*theodosian style*”, with using of the same general form of the leaves and the same shapes of their cuttings, are found and nowadays are preserved in the museum collections of Herson, Varna (Odessos), Obzor, Nessebar (Messambria), Pomorie (Anchialos) and Bourgas²⁴ along the Black sea coast, but also in many other museums in Bulgaria²⁵. In Macedonia we also could find some analogies. The main examples are again from the bishop's basilica II in Stobi and from Drenovo²⁶.

But the origin of the models, about the acanthus foliage, and also about the figural, double zoned decoration, is in the most beautifully carved monuments in the biggest town centers of the Byzantine empire – Constantinople,

²² Лилчиќ, *op. cit.*, 746-747, № 82 (38)

²³ Egger, *op. cit.*, 50, Abb. 33; Лилчиќ, *op. cit.*, 821-823, 1048, Nr. 114 (7)

²⁴ Varsanti *op. cit.*, 124, 147, fig. 33, 70

²⁵ More of the details are unpublished

²⁶ Лилчиќ, *op. cit.*, 821-823, 1047, Nr. 114 (3); 901-903, Nr. 128 (1-2)

Thessaloniki, Corinth and Alexandria²⁷. The examples are from the churches, like Saint Demetrius church and Saint George in Thessaloniki, and other early Christian cult objects, but today preserved in the biggest museum collections²⁸.

At the end of analysis of this monument, so important for the studies on the antique architectural plastic, we could mark its exact chronology. The capital from Obzor (Kat. Nr. 2 in this research) is without doubt the product of so-called “*theodosian architecture*”, developed strongly during the first half and right in the middle of the V-th c. AD. This capital is magnificent example of its epoch and it gives us the possibility to see and study, even in the early Byzantine times, the strong antique tradition for carving of the figures over the capital’s surface. Today we have not the direct evidences about the archaeological complex of the monument, because it was found in medieval fortress, situated 1,5 km. western from antique town under nowadays Obzor. But for me, there is no suspicion about the original complex, where this brilliant Composite capital has been used. Most likely the detail has been part of the interior decoration of some early Christian basilica in or around Obzor, Bourgas region.

In **conclusion** we can fix that both capitals from the exhibition of the National Archaeological Museum – Sofia are excellent models of the late antique stone plastic. These are two unknown masterpieces, direct successors of the examples of roman Corinthian and Composed capitals, bearers of one of the strongest traditions, the tradition of figural capitals, till the real end of the Antiquity.

Without doubt the capital Nr. 1 is earlier like chronology. It shows us direct data about inheritance from the roman architectural decoration in the region of Serdica, but it is exact the monument, which could be placed no earlier than IV-th c. AD. Execution of the human face by the capital is very interesting moment – subject of strong tradition for carving of the human and mythological personages over the abacuses of Corinthian and Composite capitals in Moesia and Thrace. This fact is amazing, but not surprising, in the dawn of the Christian era.

The second capital with Nr. 2, from Obzor region, descended from one strongly developed during the early Byzantine epoch cult center. Hardly to have doubt about that the detail has been just reused in the late medieval fortress near to Obzor. In reality this monument is typical representative of the strongest phase in the early Christian architectural plastic – theodosian epoch, first half of the V-th c. AD. Most likely the capital has been the product and important segment in some of the huge and very well adorned early Byzantine basilicas in and around Obzor. On the base of its decorative data we can bring out three very essential conclusions:

²⁷ Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, 126-127, 130, 134-136, № 395, 404, 405, 408, 431-433, 438, Taf. 25-27 (analogies about “theodosian style” of the acanthus foliage) and 156-160, № 490, 494, 496, 499, 508, Taf. 30-31 (analogies of the figural double zoned decoration)

²⁸ Nowadays the best example, also absolutely perfect analog of our capital from Obzor, is from the exhibition of the Byzantine & Christian Museum – Athens. The double zoned figural capital with ram’s protomes, figures of *cornucopias* and one row of acanthus foliage, carved in *theodosian style*, is from Thessaloniki.

Architectural decoration in early Byzantine cult complexes in Obzor is one of the wealthiest and most various in our lands during the late Antiquity, at all;

This monument is absolute masterpiece of the early Christian architecture, because of the fact, that the double zoned figural capitals with this height and volume of the images are visible only in the biggest town centers like Constantinople, Tessaloniki, Corinth and Alexandria;

The execution of the huge ram's figures is typical act of the phenomenon of the antique figural capitals in period of new boom in architectonical adornment – early Byzantine cult building, manifested so strong and large-scale in the lands of Thrace and Moesia.

The fact, that these two architectural elements have been preserved in the NAM-Sofia hundred years ago is not accidental. They are, also absolutely logically, some of the main points of exhibition of the Museum today. But exactly, their scientific value is no less than using in exhibition. The general researches over the figural capitals are developing very strong, mainly after the publishing of the corpus of E.v. Mercklin (1962). But in our science the investigations and studies are episodically made and because of that we have responsibility and obligation to correct this blank. The capitals from region of Serdica (nr. 1) and early Byzantine Obzor (Nr. 2) are direct evidences about strong continuity between architectural elements and rooted in them traditions from the *principate* to the late Antiquity. The figural motives apparently aren't thrown away from using in the architecture of the new monotheistic religion, or so it looks in the beginning of its development during the IV-V c. AD. The huge ram's figures, also like the face of the bearded man, are the motives, whose researches together with other similar antique figural capitals from the Balkan lands should to be continued in the next few years. The full publishing of these, possibly latest like chronology, antique figural capitals from nowadays Bulgarian regions, could to be only the beginning in this direction.

Здравко Димитров

ДВА ФИГУРАЛНА КАПИТЕЛА КАСНОАТИЧКЕ ЕПОХЕ
У НАЦИОНАЛНОМ АРХЕЛОШКОМ МУЗЕЈУ У СОФИИ

Први капител (Инв. бр. № 2119) пронађен је у селу Белопопци на источном крају Софијског поља, на траси пута Виа Дигоналис. Он је римско-коринтски капител непотпуног система, тзв. „четворолисни тип”. Ово су неке од најчешћих коринтских капителиа из касноримског периода: III-IV век. Њихов нарочито интензиван развој везује се за Сердику. Модел капителиа пронађен у селу Белопоптци суштински представља касноримску верзију из доба принципата. Карактерише га изразито снажно израђено људско лице у рељефу, које је заменило позицију абаковог цвета. Према истраживању Ф. фон Мерклин, капител из Сердике припада капителима „људским лицем и бистама,” групи која је највише развијана у западним провинцијама Римског царства, али такође и на Балкану: капител из Стоби, детаљима из Сексагинта Приста, Марцианополиса, Никополис ад Иструм, Дуросторума, Одесоса и Трговишта.

Хронологија коринтског четворолисног капитала, са фигуралним украсом из региона Сердице. Највероватније, овај камен споменик је производ интензивног развоја архитектонских комплекса цара Константина и његових наследника из прве половине IV века.

Друга капител (Ин. бр. № 1603) откривен је у месту Козијак, 2 км западно од града Обзора, у Варненској области. Капител је композитни декорисан у т.з. „теодосијанским стилем” који карактерише оштаро, скоро ажурно-шупљикаво извођење Акантусовог лишћа карактеристично у првој половини V века. Добро реплицира најбоље примере из доба цара Теодосија II (408-450), односно најбоље узорке из Цариграда и Солуна. У горњем делу калатоса смештене су четири велике фигуре овна. Декорација овог јединственог капитала не задивљује само огромним фигурама овнова и прекрасним Акантусом у теодосијанском стилу. Као замена за абакове цветове, између фигура су израђени велики мотиви. Декоративни образац при којем се комбинују стандардни елементи акантус декорације (производ Коринтског и композитног реда) са великим површинама, украшене фигурама и сценама у целости (производ раних античких фигуралних капитета) су врло типичне и високо развијене у процвату архитектонске декорације рановизантијског периода. Ови капители су дефинисани као нови тип декорације карактеристичан за касну антику – такозваних „двозонских капитета”. Хронолошки „двозони капител” из околине Обзора је опредељен у прву половину или средину V века.

Оба касноантичка капитета показују дуго трајање традиције римске архитектонске пластике.

Catalog of the architectural details

№ 1

Description:	Corinthian capital. Decorative type: <i>Four leaved capital</i> . According to E. Mercklin (1962): <i>Figural capital with human head</i> . Style typical for the late roman epoch: mainly in the acanthus leaves, human figure and profile of abacus plate.
Place of finding:	Belo-popovtzi – nowadays village of Belopoptzi, Sofia region (25 km. eastern from Sofia, antique Serdica)
Measurements:	Height (general) – 0,37 m; Diameter (soffitt) – 0,28 m; Height (acanthus leaves) – 0,23 m; Diameter (volutes) – 0,08 m; Height (figures): human face – 0,13 m; cornucopias – 0,13 m; Diagonal (abacus plate) – 0,45 m; Height (abacus plate) – 0,045 m.
Material:	Sandstone. Rough surface. Beige-yellow sectors somewhere, but main color – from whitish yellow till dirty white. Soft, very good for carving material.
Place in constructions:	Column capital.
Condition today:	Whole detail. Well preserved. Decoration motives are clearly visible. Only the edges of the abacus plate are broken.
Location today:	National Archaeological Museum – Sofia, in Exhibition. Late antique part of Central hall – plate with capitals from IV-VI c. AD
Inv. Nr.	2119 (from medieval fond: saved in the museum collection on the 12.09.1922).

Publications:	Unpublished
Chronology:	Late roman: IV c. AD (probably epoch of Emperor Constantine the Great and his sons; first half of the century)
Analogies:	Mercklin 1962: Kat. № 301 (Reims), 306-311 (Strasbourg), 320 (Ghirs, Libya), 231 (Stobi, Macedonia); Димитров 2007: Кат. № 197 (Nicopolis ad Istrum), № 221, 228, 256 (Marcianopolis), № 209 (Durostorum), № 137 (Odessos), № 206 (Люблен, Търговишко); Димитров 2006: Кат. № 8 (Sexaginta Prista); Лилчиќ 2002: № 123 (Долно Чичево), 129 (Манастирец), 132 (Кнежино), 133 (Мидинци); Egger 1929: S. 65, Abb. 62 (Stobi); Kähler 1939: type K – Nr. 6, 7, Taf. 10 (Strasbourg), type J – Nr. 11, 12, Taf. 10 (Rheinzabern).
Figures:	Fig. 1-7
№ 2	
Description:	Composite capital. Only one row of acanthus decoration, made by eight leaves. Decorative type: <i>Theodosian capital (but only according to the model of carving of the acanthus leaves)</i> . According to E.Mercklin (1962): <i>Figural capital with beasts and fable (fantastic) creatures</i> . Whole upper part of the capital is decorated with huge figures of the rams. They are made like ram's <i>protomes</i> , situated on the corners of <i>calathos</i> by the connection with abacus plate. The <i>protomes</i> replaced volutes in the apparatus of the capital. Between the ram's <i>protomes</i> , on the abacus plate, are made enormous, huge ornaments of <i>cornucopias</i> (horns of plenty), filled with the fruits. Style of carving: typical for the early Byzantine epoch, first half of the V-th c. AD.
Place of finding:	Village of Giozeken – nowadays Kozjak grad, medieval fortress placed just 1,5 km. western from Obzor town, Varna region.
Measurements:	Height (general) – 0,28 m; Diameter (soffitt) – 0,27 m; Height (acanthus leaves) – 0,11 m; Height (relief band of the soffitt, under the acanthus foliage) – 0,02 m; Dimensions (figures): ram's <i>protomes</i> – height 0,13 m, width 0,18 m, projecting relief 0,15 m; <i>cornucopias</i> – height 0,16 m, projecting relief 0,08 m; Diagonal (abacus plate) – 0,52 m; Height (abacus plate) – 0,035 m.
Material:	Marble. Sleek surface. Self coloured, white marble. Hard, durable material. Marble: probably <i>proconnesian</i>
Place in constructions:	Column capital (possibility: from interior colonnades of some of the early Christian basilicas in Obzor)
Condition today:	Whole detail. Well preserved surface. Some of the ram's <i>protomes</i> are broken, today restored.
Location today:	National Archaeological Museum – Sofia, in Exhibition. Late antique part of Central hall – plate with capitals from IV-VI c. AD
Inv. Nr.	1603 (from medieval fond: saved in the museum collection on the 15.12.1914)
Publications:	Овчаров, Ваклинова 1978: № 63; Barsanti 1989: 151, fig. 77.
Chronology:	Early Byzantine epoch: first half of the V-th c. AD. The time of Emperor Theodosius II (408-450).

- Analogies: Mercklin 1962: S.202, Kat. Nr. 494 (Rome, Concordia, but only like prototype); Barsanti 1989: 124, 147, 151, 153, fig. 33, 70, 76, 79; Лилчик 2002: № 114 (№ 3, 7, от Втора епископска базилика - Стоби), № 128 (№ 1-2, от Дреново), № 82 (№ 38, от Хераклея Линкестис); Kautzsch 1936: № 395, 404, 405, 408, 431-433, Taf. 25-27 (Constantinople, Tesseloniki, Corinth), № 490, 494, 496, 499, 508, Taf. 30-31 (Constantinople, Alexandria); Egger 1929: S. 50, Abb. 33 (Stobi).
- Figures: Fig. 8-16

