

EARLY BYZANTINE ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS FROM LYUTIBROD AND ITS REGION

At the northern end of the Iskar Gorge, near today's Mesdra town decades ago has excavated one of the most interesting early Christian churches in Western Bulgaria – the so-called “Basilica of the vicinity of Lyutibrod village”¹. Most striking is the rich architectural decoration of the church. In that direction this Christian religious complex is not an isolated phenomenon in the region.

In the area of so-called “Koritengrad” have already been identified: two Early Christian churches (basilicas A and B) and the remains of a temple-building from a pagan sanctuary of the Roman era² – in this research see: fig. 1. Most likely, they also contained orders architectural elements.

On the archaeological site “Mesdra-Kaleto”, excavated in the 70s, and especially in recent excavations, started since 2005, were registered many monumental Roman and Late antique architectural structures³. Around the area of the Basilica of Lyutibrod also been found other late antique buildings, some of which we can analyze using the partially preserved architectural details.

¹ Г. Джингов, С. Машов, *Археологически проучвания край Лютиброд, Врачански окръг*, Известия на Музеите от Северозападна България, 1985, 10, 39-70, обр. 6.

² *Ibidem*, 39-45, обр. 4-6.

³ Цв. Дремсизова-Нелчинова, *Находки от крепостта край Мездра*, In: *Thracia Antiqua*, 10 (Studia in memoriam magistri prof. Georgi Michailov). Sofia 1996, 254-263; Сп. Машов, *Мездра и нейният регион през Античността*, в: Библиотека „Български северозапад”, 15 (Научна сесия „100 години Община Мездра”. Гр. Мездра, 18 май 1998 г.). Враца, 1998, 16-26; Кр. Лука, *Антични паметници в община Мездра*, Мездра 2003; С. Торбатов, Г. Ганецовски, *Археологически проучвания на многослоен обект „Калето” край гр. Мездра през 2006 г.*, в: Археологически открития и разкопки през 2006 г. София 2007, 392-395; С. Торбатов, Б. Иванова, *Проучвания на античния пласт на многослоен обект „Калето” край гр. Мездра*, в: Археологически открития и разкопки през 2007 г. София 2008, 433-434; С. Торбатов, Б. Иванова, *Археологически проучвания на многослоен обект Калето в град Мездра*, в: Археологически открития и разкопки през 2011 г. София 2012, 274-275; С. Торбатов, *Мездра през римската епоха и късната античност*, в: Л. Крумова (ред.) *Мездра, Кратък исторически очерк*, София 2009, 33-51.

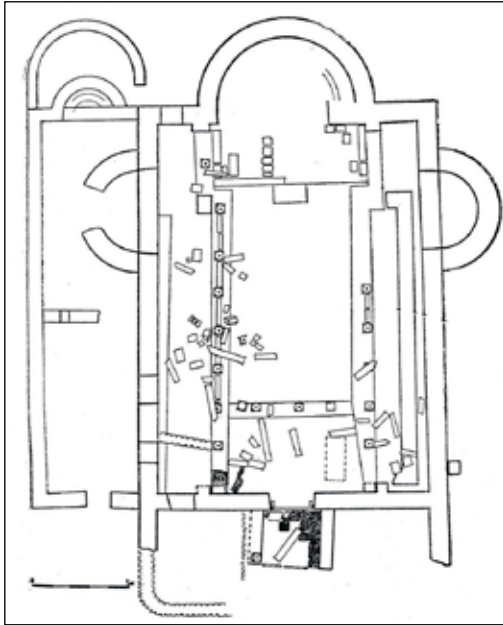


Fig. 1. General plan of the archaeological complexes in the vicinity of "Koritengrad" – pagan sanctuary and two early Christian basilicas (plan after: Джингов, Машов 1985);

Сл. 1. Генерални план археолошких комплекса у близини „Коритенграда“ – паганско светилиште и две ранохришћанске базилике (план по: Джингов, Машов 1985);

Problems and prospects of the study

Previous studies commented, analyze and give a complete catalog information for architectural decorations, especially Kämpfer capitals from basilica⁴, but today we needed some minor adjustments in the architectural descriptions, general typology of details and chronology.

Over the past two decades have found many new architectural details of the region – Roman and Early Byzantine⁵.

After excavations of the Basilica in Lyutibrod and especially after recent studies of Mesdra-Kaleto⁶ archaeological picture of the region has changed dramatically.

Nowadays we have opportunity to complete architectural and decorative analysis of the Basilica "Lyutibrod". Also there are excellent opportunities to search and explore new Roman and Early Byzantine complexes in the valley of Iskar river, especially near Lyutibrod, Rebarkovo village and Mesdra.

There is certain possibility for *anastylosis* and full reconstruction of the interior of the Basilica in Lyutibrod, according and using the details, preserved in *lapidarium* of RMH-Vratsa and in National Museum in Sofia. Other pieces are on the terrain, in the

ruins of church. Architectural analysis that will present here is only a beginning to the studies of trends in development of architectural sculpture from the Roman era to the Early Byzantine period in the whole region of the valley of Iskar. The study has potential to cover huge chronological framework - from the era of Antonine and Severan dynasty to the Justinian' period.

Architectural decoration of the Basilica "Lyutibrod":

A. *Analysis of the architectural details of the basilica in the village of Lyutibrod.*

It can be structured in two main criteria:

1. Details, studied according to their construction (plate 1).
2. Details, studied according to their architectural decoration (plate 2-5).

⁴ Джингов, Машов 1985, *op.cit.*, 53-63, табл. I-IV

⁵ Торбагов 2009, *op. cit.*, 43-45; 3. Димитров, *Акантово-канелирани капители от Римска Тракия*, Археология, XLVII, 2006, 1-4, стр. 26.

⁶ Торбагов, Ганецовски 2007, *op. cit.*, 392-395; Торбагов, Иванова 2008, *op. cit.*, 433-434; Торбагов, Иванова 2012, *op. cit.*, 274-275.

Details that are today in RMH Vratsa are three types - capitals, pillars of the altar construction (so-called: *Kanzel*) and parts of the altar table. On the field, in the ruins are preserved bases, columns, pillars, part of an altar slabs.

1. Capitals are from Kämpfer type. They are divided into three types according to their construction (plate 1):

- 1.1. Ionic Kämpfer capitals of free-standing columns;
- 1.2. Ionic Kämpfer capitals of semi-columns, facing the walls semi-columns;
- 1.3. Unadorned Kämpfer, but with Christian symbols (like Crosses) of freestanding piers.

2. As decoration *Kämpfer* capitals are extremely diverse. There are five leading architectural and decorative types (plate 2):

- 2.1. Unadorned Kämpfers with Christian symbols - Crosses;
- 2.2. Decorated Kämpfers with plant decoration, acanthus leaves;
- 2.3. Unadorned Kämpfers in Ionic order with Christian symbols - Crosses;
- 2.4. Completely unadorned Kämpfers in Ionic order – only one single monument.

But the most richly decorated Kämpfers from Lyutibrod basilica are those carved in Ionic order. They could be classified as follows:

3. Decorated Kämpfers in Ionic order, with several subtypes – 9 subtypes, each of these capital is unique (plate 3 and 4):

- 3.1. With acanthus plant decoration and horns of plenty (*cornucopias*);
- 3.2. With acanthus plant decoration and zoomorphic themes - like lamb;
- 3.3. With Christian symbols - Crosses, combined with floral decoration of ivy leaves;
- 3.4. With fully cleared floral decoration – typical for *the pulvinuses* of the Ionic capitals across the Byzantine Empire – smooth leaves, probably lotus;
- 3.5. With fluted decorative – style typical for the roman times in this region;
- 3.6. With combined zoomorphic (two lambs) and floral (ivy leaves) decoration and with Christian symbols - Cross in the center;
- 3.7. With zoomorphic decoration, subject to earliest Christian symbolism – birds around the Crater;
- 3.8. With Christian symbols - alternating crosses that form stylized geometric ornaments;
- 3.9. Even we could see a decoration transmissioned architectural interior decoration of the altar construction of the temple.

An important feature in the decoration of the Kämpfer capitals in Ionic order is the level to which is given the canonical form of the Ionic capital. On this very important criterion Kämpfer Ionic capitals of Basilica Lyutibrod are divided into four types (plate 5):

Ionic Kämpfers follows the scheme of the Ionic capital but without any decoration;

Ionic Kämpfers also follows the general scheme of the Ionic capital, but with volutes whose curves are delivered well and even in some places with performed the Ionic cyma on the echinus;

Ionic Kämpfers where cyma is strongly modified and reduced, but the idea of its implementation is quite straightforward;

Ionic Kämpfers with fully canonical modeled Ionic capital, but with replacing of the cyma on the echinus with floral ornaments – like, acanthus scrolls and ivy leaves.

Besides the mentioned architectural details from the Basilica in Lyutibrod in the region we could find a great number of earlier architectonical monuments. They are from the Roman era. There are also other Late antique details, some of which should also be of Lyutibrod vicinity and now they are stored in the Municipality of Mesdra and in the lapidarium of RMH in Vratsa.

B. Details of the region from the Roman era.

These monuments give rise to the tradition of fluted decoration that we see so strongly expressed in the early Christian complexes near Lyutibrod. Fluted decoration is widely practiced in Mesdra and is represented by the Roman-Doric capital with fluted neck as well as with one example of Acanthus-and-Fluting capital.



Fig. 2. Column capital with fluted decoration from the region of Lyutibrod: III-IV c. AD – now in stored in Mezdra.

Сл. 2. Капител стуба са канелурама из области Љутиброд: III-IV в. – сада ускладиштен у Мездри.

In the museum of Vratsa is preserved Roman-Doric capital from the same region, which belongs to the so-called “Figural capitals” of the Antiquity. The detail is decorated with the Head of Medusa and with the figure of an eagle, all placed on the abacus plate.

C. Details of the region of Mesdra and unknown complexes around Basilica of Lyutibrod, which are also Roman or Early Byzantine in their chronology. Now all they are stored in the municipality of Mesdra.

A few years ago in Mesdra were harvested very beautiful and perfectly preserved architectural details from the region, some of them from the village of Lyutibrod.

Probably from Lyutibrod’s vicinity is very beautiful column capital in with fluted decoration (fig. 2). It is column capital, used in free-standing column construction. In chronology the details is earlier then capitals from basilica in “Koritengrad”. But in the region the late roman complexes are also well known (III-IV c. AD). This capitals could be one of the examples of these architectural structures, build before two early Christian basilicas – probably from pagan sanctuary or from architectural structures somewhere around it.

In Mezdra town are preserved also two anta capitals, again with fully made fluted decoration (fig. 3). They are from the temple building found in the archaeological complex “Kaleto”. Today we could see the temple reconstruction and the place of the complex on the terrain⁷.

In RMH-Vratsa are preserved also some other Early Byzantine architectural details of the interior of a church building, but today it is not sure whether they are of the basilica near Lyutibrod or from other Early Christian temple.

These are two double piers – so-called *bifori*, and a Foot of the altar table.

As architectural decoration the capitals of Lyutibrod basilica are largely unique. But consider general architectural and decorative types, especially those of the Ionic Kämpfer capitals, they are typical for the Early Byzantine architecture of the 5th/6th century. If we look at the region of Naissus - in the valley of Morava are also available such magnificent Ionic Kämpfer details. They are from the Basilica at Bregovina - Kämpfer Ionic capitals with lush plant decoration on the *pulvini* ⁸.

Conclusion

1. Architectural decorations from Early Byzantine era in the village of Lyutibrod are very highly developed and in some aspects – unique;

2. The data about the decoration are not only from the famous basilica, but also from the different unknown complexes in the region of the village;

3. Early Byzantine details are available mainly from the vicinity of Lyutibrod, but also from the site of Mesdra-Kaleto;

4. The main reason for this strong development of Early Christian architecture in the area of the Iskar Gorge is a long tradition of execution of ornate details and order monumental complexes - since late II – early III century to the Justinian period;

5. The strongest evidence of this is the preservation of tradition to fulfill the fluted details – both, in Doric and Ionic order – and it is for more than two centuries;

6. Another very strong architectural and decorative tradition is in so-called “figural decoration”: preserved in Roman-Doric capital of type II, deco-



Fig. 3. Fluted capital from Mesdra region. Anta capital from the temple building in Mezrda-Kaleto. Roman Imperial Era.

Сл. 3. Канелурирани капител из области Мездра. Анта капител са зграде храма у Мездра-Калето. Период римског царства.

⁷ Торбагов 2009, *op. cit.*, 43-45.

⁸ M. Jeremić, *La sculpture architecturale de l'église de Bregovina (VI-e s. ap. J.C.) en Serbie du sud*, In: Старинар (Starinar), vol. LIII-LIV, 2003/2004. Belgrade 2004, 111-137, fig. 13.

rated with an image of Medusa and Eagle, and continued even better with early Christian symbols in the Ionic Kämpfers from Basilica of Lyutibrod. These capitals are also very important annex to the Corpus of E.v. Mercklin "Antike Figural Kapitelle"⁹.

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РАНО-ВИЗАНТИЈСКИ АРХИТЕКТОНСКИ ЕЛЕМЕНТИ ИЗ ЉУТИБРОДА И
ЊЕГОВОГ ОКРУГА

У близини садашњег града Мездра, дуж реке Искар, регистровани су велики археолошки комплекси верског карактера. Они се налазе у области такозваног „Коритенграда“, близу села Литиброд. Током седамдесетих година, откривене су две ранохришћанске цркве (базилике А и Б) и остацима храма-зграде римског паганског светишта које су идентификовани као две ранохришћанске базилике и светилиште из паганског периода. Са ових комплекса, као и из суседних архитектонских комплекса који нису проучавани путем ископавања или истраживања, потиче велика група архитектонских детаља.

Међу њима се налазе капители из ранохришћанских комплекса. Они су јединствени по својим украсима. Најважнији и најимпресивнији су Кампфер капители јонског реда.

Могу се поделити у неколико архитектонско – декоративних група. То су јонски Кампфери са украсима у облику акантуса и рога изобиља (cornucopias); са украсима у облику акантуса и зооморфних тема - попут јагњета; хришћански симболи – крстови у комбинацији са флоралним украсима попут лишћа бршљана; чисти флорални украси – типични за pulvinose јонских стубова широм византијског царства – глатких листова, вероватно лотоса; канелуриран декоративни стил – типичан за римски период у овом региону; комбиновани зооморфни (два јагњета) и флорални украси са хришћанским симболима – крстом у центру; зооморфни украси, као предмет најранијег хришћанског симболизма – птице око Кратера; хришћански симболи – различити крстови који сачињавају стилизоване геометријске орнаменте; украси, унутрашњи архитектонски украси пренети са олтарске конструкције храма.

Поред ове групе сасвим јединствених рано-хришћанских јонских капители у области Литиброда, познати су нам још неки детаљи. Они се налазе сакупљени у садашњем музеју на археолошком налазишту Месдра-Калето као и у згради општине. Архитектонски комплекси са којих су потекли нису познати али се сигурно налазе на терену и требало би их тражити у археолошким ископавањима. Детаљи су углавном дорског реда: Римско-дорски капител са канелурираним вратом као и један пример капители са акантијусом и канелуром.

Из ранохришћанског периода такође је сачуван капител са канелурираним calathos, који следи традицију римског периода у овој области. На основу анализе архитектонских украса сакупљених у овом региону, може се закључити да се у области Мездра и дуж реке Искар, нарочито око села Љутиброд, налазио археолошки комплекс култног карактера из римског периода као и ранохришћански. Ови комплекси били су богато украшени различитим врстама детаља: римско дорски капители, акантуси, канелурирани капители, потпуно канелирани детаљи ранохришћанских Кампфер капители. Будућа проучавања овог региона могла би да открију нека од ових важних и очигледно веома богатих археолошких комплекса.

⁹ E. v. Mercklin, *Antike Figural Kapitelle*, Berlin 1962.



1.1



1.2.



1.2.



1.3

PLATE 1



2.1.



2.2.



2.3.



2.3

PLATE 2

