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## **ABOUT THE UNIQUE EARLY BYZANTINE IONIC IMPOST CAPITAL OF THE “RAM’S HORNS” TYPE**

*Abstract:* The paper singles out and analyzes the unique and distinctive design of the identical Ionic impost capitals discovered in Caričin Grad (Ivstiniana Prima), in the Church of St. Petka in Rudare village, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century church in Mrveš village near Bojnik, in the Early Byzantine basilica in Čurlina village near Niš and in the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Kuršumljija, where they were placed by the 14<sup>th</sup> century builders. This type of the Early Byzantine capital, after analysis that included tectonics of the capital, type of stone, manner of carving the relief, presence of vegetal motif, the manner the cross was designed, especially how volutes were designed and their origin, was singled out as a special variant of the early Byzantine Ionic impost capitals defined as the volute capitals of the “ram’s horns” type. Capitals of the “ram’s horns” type represent a special variant discovered only in the mentioned localities in southern Serbia. We pointed out the existence of the Paleo-Byzantine Niš sculptor’s workshop from the Justinian period, where the capitals of the “ram’s horns” type were created and from where they were distributed for churches in the southern Serbia region, which were used as spolia in the Middle Ages.

*Key words:* Ionic impost capitals, volutes, “ram’s horns”, Early Byzantine period, Justinian.

There was recognized the unique and distinctive design of identical Ionic impost capitals that were discovered mostly in Caričin Grad (Ivstiniana Prima), two of them in the unexplored church of St. Petka in Rudare village, then, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century church in Mrveš village near Bojnik, in the early Byzantine basilica in Čurlina village near Niš and two capitals at the entrance of the Holy Mother of God Church in Kuršumljija, where they were placed by the 14<sup>th</sup> century builders. This type of the Early Byzantine capital requires exhaustive analysis that would consider tectonics of the capital, type of stone, manner of carving the relief, presence of vegetal motif, manner the cross was solved, especially how volutes were designed, as well as their origin. It represents the uniquely simplified tectonic form of the Ionic impost capital which skillfully unites into one whole the Ionic part with distinctive volutes and the impost block. This particular vari-



Fig.1 Ionic Impost capital, Caričin Grad, view from above, 6<sup>th</sup> century (photo by: I. Bugarski)

Сл. 1. Јонски импост капител, Царичин град, поглед одозго, VI век (фото. И. Бугарски)

ant of the capital is known only at the aforementioned southern Serbia localities, which are prominent early Byzantine church centers but also significant medieval churches and monasteries. By using the building materials from the Early Byzantine buildings, the latter intended to point out the historical duration and spiritual continuity of the chosen place and newly built church. The presence of spolia from the old respectable buildings on the newly built Serbian medieval temple increased its reputation many times over in the eyes of that time believers. Description of one capital also means description of all that typically belong to a separate unit, so that one may conclude that they were carved by the same hand in the same workshop for the same customer at the same time. (Fig.1)

Bigger number of the whole and fragmented Ionic impost capitals of this type, made of andesite, was discovered in 1937 in Caričin Grad, where they adorned the atrium interior of the basilica with the crypt<sup>1</sup> and the episcopal Paleo-Byzantine basilica (baptistry, front gallery, west porch).<sup>2</sup> These capitals, there is every chance, were specially made in the 6<sup>th</sup> century for the buildings of Ivstianiana Prima. A completely identical capital was found in the Serbian medieval church (14<sup>th</sup> century) at the Crkvina locality near by the Mrveš village, in the vicinity of Caričin Grad.<sup>3</sup> Two identical capitals, which are now

<sup>1</sup> Without going into analysis of the discovered five Ionic impost capitals, N. Spremo Petrović states: "All the capitals are Byzantine, typical of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, with volutes, cross and acanthus leaves." - Н. Спремо Петровић, *Базилика са криптом у Царичином Граду*, Старинар н.с. III-IV/1952 – 1953, Београд 1955, 175, сл. 5,12. В. Кораћ и В. Поповић само бележе да је откривено „пет јонских импост капитета“ - В. Кораћ и В. Поповић, *Царичин Град утврђено насеље у византијском Илирику*, Галерија САНУ 33, Београд 1977, 77, сл. 56,57.

<sup>2</sup> J.P. Caillet, N. Duval, M. Jeremić, *Catalogue des éléments d'architecture: les chapiteaux ioniques-impostes*, in: Caričin Grad III - l'acropole et ses monuments (cathédrale, baptistère et bâtiments annexes), éd. Noël Duval et Vladislav Popović, Rome - Belgrade 2010, 350. At Caričin Grad there are ten more fragments that belong to this type. All capitals have approximately same dimensions: 87x77; 75x90; 78x89; 80x87 cm.

<sup>3</sup> С. Јовић, В. Стојановић, Ј. Пешић, В. Стевановић, *Мрвеш*, in: Археолошка

in front of the museum building in Leskovac, stood in front of the Church of St. Petka in Rudare village, which, in all probability, was built on the site of the Early Byzantine monumental basilica,<sup>4</sup> as can be observed today at the base of the church. Two Ionic impost capitals that belong to the same type can still be seen in the entrance part of the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Kuršumlija, built above the Early Byzantine church. The Church of the Holy Mother of God is located not far from the Early Byzantine three-nave basilica, and it seems that they together represent another church center from the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the Justinian epoch.<sup>5</sup> For the needs of the nunnery, Stefan Nemanja built the Church of the Holy Mother of God just above the remains of the Early Byzantine triconchal church, using its architectural framework and found plastic that was also used by the church restorers in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 2,3,4)

Ionic impost capitals of this type are uniquely designed and stand out from similar contemporary designs from the empire.<sup>7</sup> The type of capitals that are subject of our interest are

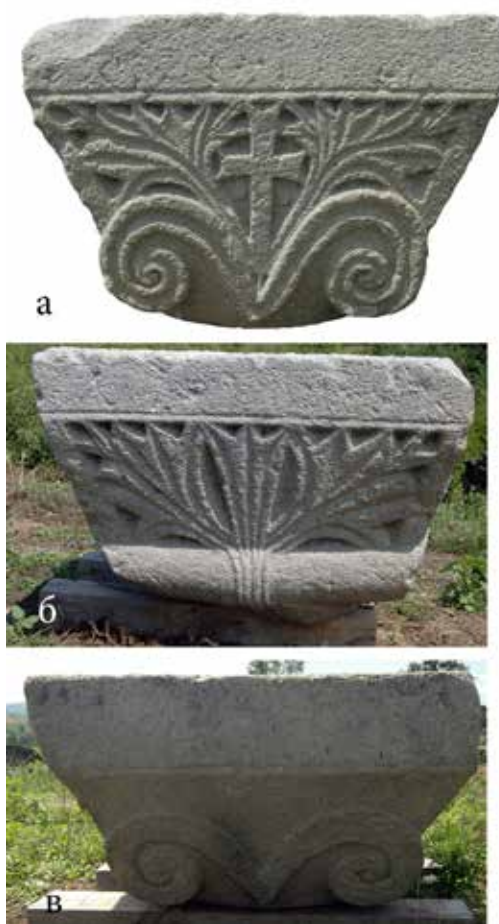


Fig. 2 Ionic Impost capital, Caričin Grad, a) front side, b) lateral side, c) back side (photo by: I. Bugarski)

Сл. 2. Јонски импост капител, Царичин град, а) предња страна б) бочна страна в) задња страна (фото. И. Бугарски)

налазишта на територији општине Бојник, Лесковац 2020, 50, 199-202.

<sup>4</sup> "There is every chance that they are remains of the old church that existed there, and judging by them it must have been spatially much bigger church, while according to the beauty and richness of architecture, it must have been much more beautiful than the today's one." - М.М. Васић, К. Јов. Јовановић, *Извештај с археолошке ескурзије по јужној, источној и североисточној Србији*, Старица н.р. IV, Београд 1909, 32/3, сл.17, 18.

<sup>5</sup> М. Ракоција, *Манастири и цркве јужне и источне Србије*, Ниш 2013, 107.

<sup>6</sup> М. Чанак Медић, Ђ. Бошковић, *Архитектура Немањиног доба I*, Београд 1986, 39-52, 15-36.

<sup>7</sup> И. Николајевић Стојковић, *Рановизантијска архитектонска декоративна пластика у Македонији, Србији и Црној Гори*, Београд 1957, 52.



Fig. 3 Ionic Impost capital, Rudare: a) front side, b) back side, c) d) lateral sides (photo by: V. Prokopović, Leskovac National Museum)

Сл. 3. Јонски импост капител, Рударе: а) предња страна б) задња страна в,г) бочне стране (фото. В. Прокоповић, Народни музеј Лесковац)

tectonically realized in a single conical stone block where the Ionic part and the impost block are unified in a relief, with a low rectangular abacus above them. From the echinus part, there remained the relief massive Ionic volutes unusually joined at the other end at the bottom of the capital, so that they most resemble the twisted ram's horns, thus moving away from the ancient classical Ionic volutes which develop in a straight line under the abacus forming a canal. These are not the usual Early Christian Ionic impost capitals with unified impost block, which were discovered throughout the empire, as well as in the Basilica of Martyrs in Niš.<sup>8</sup>

We have pointed out the uniqueness of this type of capital, which is reflected in its unique architectural solution, specifically shaped volutes and unified relief decoration that preserved the memory of the Ionic impost capital. Therefore, this type of capital should be singled out as special variant of the Ionic impost capital which was discovered only in the area of southern Serbia. Detailed analysis of the capital, as well as an effort to grasp the origin of its relief decoration, is necessary.

On the *front side*, the segments of arches of the two-band massive volutes go into the impost space. The impost is filled with symmetrical acanthus leaves that spring from the spot below where the volutes join and bend to the

<sup>8</sup> On evolution of the Ionic impost capitals please see: M. Rakocija, *Место импост капитела из базилике у Ђурлини у еволуцији јонских импост капитела и делатност палеовизантијске скулпторске радионице у Нишу*, Ниш и Византија XV, Ниш 2017, 87-102; M. Rakocija, *The Constantine's city – ancient Christian Niš*, Niš 2013, 166/7.

side around a Latin cross carved into the empty space between the volute and the bended acanthus leaves. The Latin cross is with extended arms of incised ends with two convex button-shaped points (2cm) below the horizontal arm, which flank the vertical hasta. Dry and sharp ends of acanthus leaves on the front and on the sides of the capital deliberately form a series of triangular dents (denticules) in the form of a toothed band that, together with a narrow band, visibly separates the massive abacus without decoration.

Decoration of the *back side* of the capital is without acanthus leaves and a cross, and is reduced only to bas-relief volutes in the form of massive “ram’s horns” made of one band on completely flat surface of the back side of the impost capital, on which only the abacus is still pointed out by a shallow semi circular horizontal bas-relief band. Only the cushions of their volutes laterally protrude slightly from the impost mass, so that the sides have preserved most of the classical Ionic impost capital.

The volute spirals go out into the space establishing visual connection between the front and *lateral sides* of the capital and accept the usual volute cushions (*pulvinus*). On volute cushions with leaves or without embossed leaves, always with quadruple binding (*balteus*) that tightens the cushion in the middle with slight deformation of its cylinder. From the balteus bands, symmetrically designed acanthus leaves sprout and develop, the tips of which also here form a series of denticules that separate undecorated rectangular space intended for the abacus. On the lower side, balteus is integrated with a hemispheric circular plinth, the diameter of which is smaller than the rectangular base of the capital that supported the trunk of the column.

Presentation of *vegetal design decoration* is rather rough and simple. Veins of the acanthus leaf are made of a single groove down the middle. Vegetal relief decoration on the sides of this type impost capital is designed in a way



Fig. 4 Ionic impost capital, Crkvina locality, Mrveš (Bojnik), photo by: M. Rakocija

Сл. 4. Јонски импост капител, локалитет Црквина, Мрвеш (Бојник), фото. М. Ракоција



Fig. 5 Comparative analysis of the Ionic impost capitals of the “ram’s horns” type  
Сл. 5 Упоредно сагледавање јонских импост капитета типа „овновски рогови“

that the five-leaf bundles of stylized curved and sharp densely packed acanthus leaves develop on the left and on the right of the central trefoil bundle. Dry, sharp, curved, densely packed acanthus leaves used for decoration of capitals are of Eastern, Syrian and Asia Minor origin, and dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> The lanceolate leaves are equally arranged on the group of this type of Ionic impost capitals from Caričin Grad, where the largest number was discovered.<sup>10</sup> As working examples, we will single out the impost capitals from the episcopal basilica,<sup>11</sup> then the newly discovered capital from the basilica in Donji grad,<sup>12</sup> as well as the one from the Basilica with a crypt.<sup>13</sup> Identically performed vegetal design decoration can be observed on the impost capitals from the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Kuršumlija, on the capital from the church in Rudari near Leskovac,<sup>14</sup> in Mrveš near Bojnik and on the well-known drawing of the impost block from the Early Byzantine basilica in Ćurlina near Niš.<sup>15</sup> (Fig.5)

The above mentioned capitals with equally embossed acanthus leaves, dated to the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century by I. Nikolajević-Stojković and Đ. Stričević, were singled out into one group united by arrangement of masses and acanthus leaves, material, cutting technique, and style.<sup>16</sup> Taking into account

<sup>9</sup> In the time period from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, stylized sharp acanthus leaves are often used in Armenia: P. Donabédian, *Les métamorphoses de l'acanthé sur les chapiteaux arméniens du Ve au VIIe siècle*, L'Acanthe dans la sculpture monumentale de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance, Oct 1990, Paris, France. СTHS, (Paris-Sorbonne 1993), 147-162, fig. 1-10; Ђ. Бошковић, *Архитектура средњег века*, Београд 1976, 93. Impost capitals decorated with lanceolate acanthus leaves often appear in the early Christian period and were continuously in use until the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century: С. Филипова, *Архитектонска декоративна скулптура во Македонија 5-6 и 11.12 век*, Скопје 1997, 68/69; В. Лилчић, *Македонскиот камен за боговите, христијаните и за живот по животот*, I том, Скопје 2001, 47.

<sup>10</sup> About all discovered capitals with description please see: N. Duval, M. Jeremić, *Catalogue des éléments d'architecture: les chapiteaux ioniques-impostes*, in: Caričin Grad III - l'acropole et ses monuments (cathédrale, baptistère et bâtiments annexes), éd. Noël Duval et Vladislav Popović, Rome - Belgrade 2010, 350-367

<sup>11</sup> Ђ. Мано-Зиси, *Ископавања на Царичином Граду 1949-1952. година*, Старинар, нова серија III-IV/1952-1953, (Београд 1955), 136/137.

<sup>12</sup> V. Ivanišević, *Arhitektonska dekorativna plastika u Caričinom gradu*, у: Francusko-srpska saradnja u oblasti arheologije (La coopération franco-serbe dans le domaine de l'archéologie), in: Francusko-srpska saradnja u oblasti arheologije, ed V. Ivanišević, Beograd 2008, 82, sl. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Н. Спремо-Петровић, *Базилика са крипом у Царичином Граду*, 175, сл.12.

<sup>14</sup> Kosta Jov. Jovanović drew attention to the capital. In front of the Church of St. Petka in Rudare, he recorded two capitals made of limestone (0,95x0,75x0,65) that could belong, and he attached a photo of one of them - М.М. Васић, К. Јов. Јовановић, *Извештај с археолошке ескурзије по јужној, источној и североисточној Србији*, Старинар н.р. IV, Београд 1909, 32, сл.18. Impressive dimensions of the church indicate that it was built above the old church, to which the altar space belongs today – М. Ракоција, *Манастири и цркве јужне и источне Србије*, Ниш 2013, 120.

<sup>15</sup> И. Николајевић-Стојковић, *Рановизантијска архитектонска декоративна пластика у Македонији, Србији и Црној Гори*, Београд 1957, 52, 56; М. Ракоција, *Место импост капитела из базилике у Ђурлини у еволуцији јонских импост капитела и делатност палеовизантијске скулпторске радионице у Нишу*, 87-102.

<sup>16</sup> И. Николајевић Стојковић, *Јонски импост капители из Македоније и*

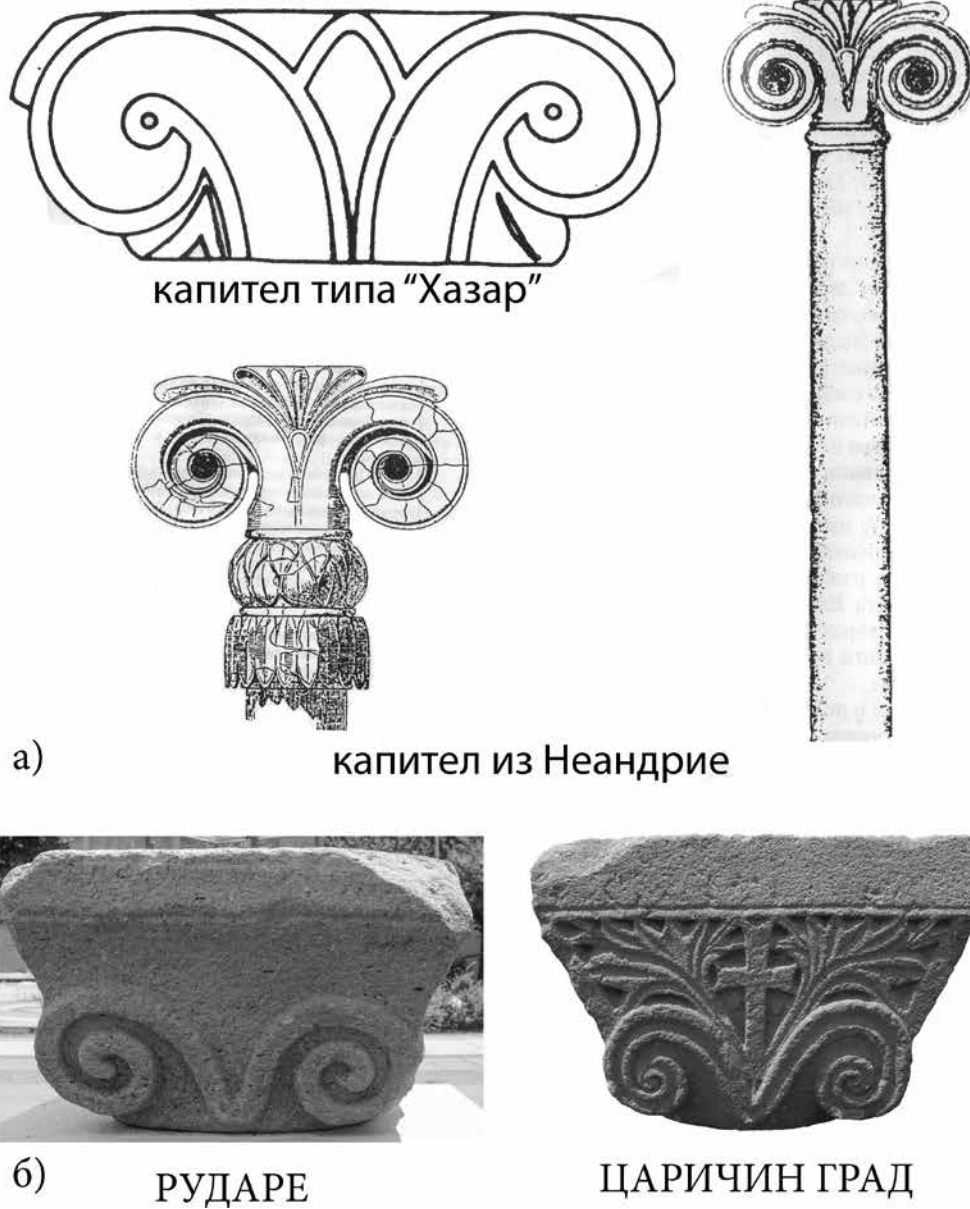


Fig. 6 a) Proto-Ionic Palestinian volute capitals, 8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, according to S. Petrova, *quoted work*, 14,15; b) Ionic impost capitals of the "ram's horns" type from Rudare and Caričin Grad, 6<sup>th</sup> century AD

Сл. 6 а) Протојонски палестински волутни капители, VIII – VI век пре Христа, према С. Петрова, *нав. дело*, 14,15; б) Јонски импост капители типа „овновски рогови“ из Рудара и Царићиног Града, VI век после Христа.



identical construction of the capital, one can conclude that also this specific tectonic solution was designed and created in the same sculptor's workshop, which, Nikolajević rightly suggests, was located in Niš as the largest city in this region with well-known stonemasonry tradition. This type of Ionic impost capital with its distinctive design belongs to the same stonemasonry school. For I. Nikolajević-Stojković, they represent one of the final stages of evolution of the analyzed classical capitals.<sup>17</sup>

*Volutes* on this type of Ionic impost capital from the south of Serbia are not formed in the classic antique way. The taut massive volute spirals made by the two relief bands twist from the center called the "eye", from where their curves arise. The other end of the volute does not develop horizontally towards the opposite volute below the abacus, forming a canalis in the ancient manner typical of Ionic capitals. With our capitals, the other end of the spirals of both volutes are slightly unwound, descending to the middle of the echinus and joining at the place where an egg used to be (kimation). More precisely, the volutes do not originate from the "eye" as in ancient Ionic capitals, but spring out from the joint point of connection at the bottom, from the middle of the former echinus and creating the shape that most closely resembles ram's horns. These unique capitals can also be defined as the Early Byzantine volute impost capitals of the "ram's horns?" type.

For the early Byzantine period, the unusually designed volutes of the "ram's horns" form deserve putting an effort into finding out their origin. Volute joined together in this manner have the most similarities with the Palestinian volute capitals of the "Khazar" type, which developed from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. These North Syrian (Babylon, Assyria, North Syria) volute capitals represent a stage in development of the Proto-Ionic capitals. The contemporaneous capitals from Neandria (Neandros, ancient Greece, Anatolia, Turkey, 7<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> BC)<sup>18</sup> are scientifically recognized as Proto-Ionic capitals. Almost identical volutes with Palestinian capitals (8<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century BC) we see, after eight centuries, in the localities of southern Serbia (6<sup>th</sup> century AD). (Fig.6)

The fact that in the old way joined volutes of the "ram's horns" form have not been forgotten is confirmed by a big number of smaller capitals from the hippodrome in Sirmium, which are assigned to the so-called Asia Minor type.<sup>19</sup> This type of capital from the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, on now reduced decoration of Corinth capitals, was found in Sirmium. Here are somewhat more el-

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Србије, Зборник радова, Византолошки институт, књ. 1, (Београд 1952), 170, 176-7; Ђ. Стричевић, *Рановизантијска црква код Куршумлије*, ЗРВИ XXXVI, књ. 2, (Београд 1953), 185. They are described in more detail by N. Duval: N. Duval, *Le problème des chapiteaux de Kuršumlja*, in: Caricin Grad III. L'Acropole et ses monuments, 347.

<sup>17</sup> И. Николајевић Стојковић, *нав. дело*, 52; An effort has been made to confirm this idea with new findings - М. Ракоција, *оп. cit.*, 98/9.

<sup>18</sup> Similar capitals were discovered in Larissa, the island of Lesbos, Athens. - С. Петрова, *Римско-ионийски капители от мизия и тракия (I-IVв)*, Софија 1996, 13-15, обр. 2, 3а, 3б, with literature.

<sup>19</sup> В. Поповић, *Sirmium – град царева и мученика*, Сремска Митровица 2003, 160/1, Т-1,2; В. М. Јерemić, *Sirmium grad na vodi. Razvoj urbanizma i arhitekture od 1 do VI veka*, Београд 2016, 248, sl. 170.



Fig. 7 Corinthizing Asia Minor capital type, Sirmium, 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, M. Jeremić, *quoted work*, fig. 170.

Сл. 7  
Коринтизирајући  
малоазијски  
тип капитета,  
Сирмијум, V век  
н.е., М. Jeremić,  
*nav. delo*, sl. 170.

egant but equally formed volutes that resemble “horns”, as on our Ionic impost capitals.<sup>20</sup> (Fig.7) The type of capital represented in Sirmium is called the Asian Corinthizing capital, which indirectly points to our elaboration on the possible originating of such unified volutes in the form of “horns”, from the Palestinian volute capitals.<sup>21</sup> Close to them is the impost capital made of white marble from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century that is kept in the City Archaeological Museum in Milan, and it, again, originates from Palestine, from Caesarea, in which theater it was discovered. The sides are decorated in deep relief with two large symmetrically placed curved acanthus leaves on each. From the frontal side center, two gentle “horn”-like volutes curve towards the upper corners, between which a trefoil is placed.<sup>22</sup> Almost identical decoration is found on the smaller capitals on which rested the architrave of the outer partition of the church in Konjuh from the 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> Similar relief decoration design can be found on the slightly older capitals of pilasters that flanked the domus entrance in Augusta Traiana (Stara Zagora, Bulgaria). The capital is made of two pairs of volutes in the form of small “horns” that rise above the curved sharp acanthus leaves with an egg (cumin) at the base above which is the monogram of Christ

<sup>20</sup> J. Brunšmid, *Kameni spomenici Hrvatskog narodnog muzeja u Zagrebu*, Antikni spomenici I, Zagreb 1904-1911, 280-283, sl. 527-533; И. Николајевић Стојковић, *Рановизантијска архитектонска и декоративна пластика у Македонији, Србији и Црној Гори*, 62, сл. 19.

<sup>21</sup> A. Maver, H. Müller, I. Rižnar, *Roman capitals from Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia)*, *Starinar* LIX/2009, Beograd 2010, 121, 129-130, fig. 3, 11, 12.

<sup>22</sup> M. Flamini, *Opere d'arte bizantina in lombardia lineamenti per un catalogo (secoli iv-xv)*, Tesi di dottorato di ricerca, Università degli studi di Milano, Milano 2012/13, 157-158. - file:///C:/Users/Rax/Downloads/phd\_unimi\_R09336.pdf

<sup>23</sup> С. Радјичић, *Црква у Коњуху*, ЗРВИ 1, Београд 1952, 161, сл. 32,33.



Fig. 8 More elegant variants of the “ram’s horns” type capitals and their distribution  
 Сл. 8 Елегантнија варијанте капители типа „овновски рогови“ и њихова  
 распрострањеност

in a circular medallion, and is dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> For all the aforementioned capitals, as well as for those from the southern Serbia region, it was noted that they were of relatively rough workmanship, sometimes with vaguely defined shapes.

Such archaically shaped volutes move away from the Ionic volutes and are closer to the volutes on the Corinth capitals, which, in order to support the abacus, two of each come out of a small stylized stem - the cauliculus (*cauliculus*), which is omitted here. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, on reduced decoration of the Corinth capitals from Sirmium,<sup>25</sup> Caesarea, Conjuh and Augusta Traiana, we

<sup>24</sup> Ю. Вълева, *Елитна жилишна архитектура и декор в диоцеза Тракия (IV-VII в.)*, у: Изследвания в чест на Стефан Бояджиев, София 2011, 51/2, обр. 34.

<sup>25</sup> И. Николајевић – Стојковић, *Рановизантијска архитектонска декоративна*

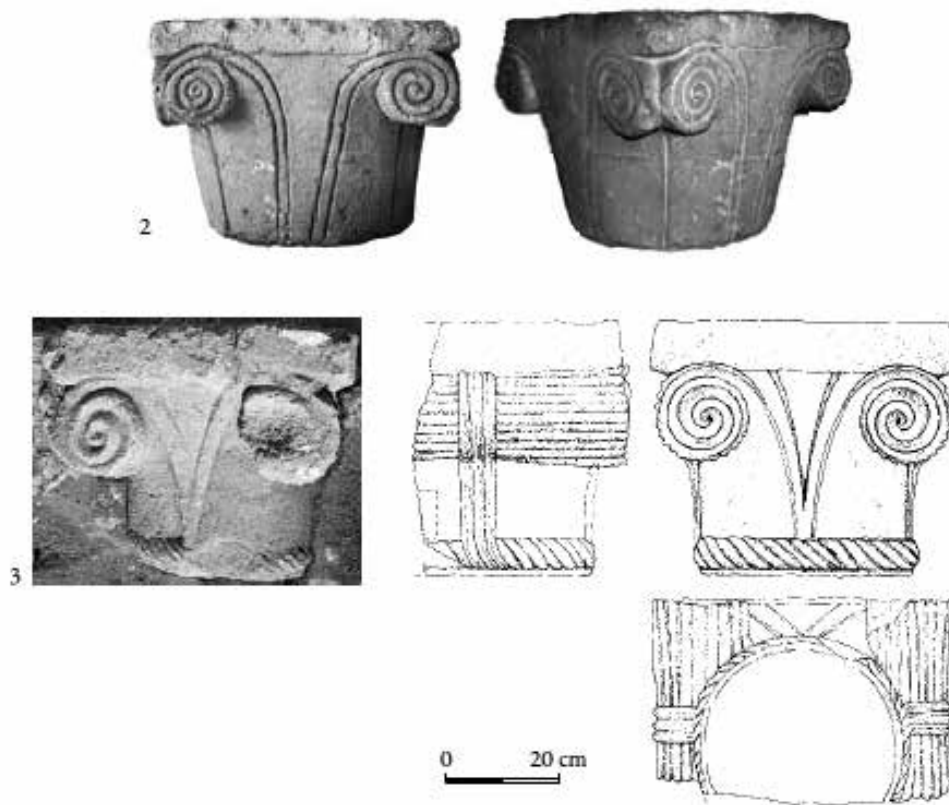


Fig. 9 Palestinian type 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, I. Taxel, *quoted work*, fig.4

Сл. 9 Палестински тип III, V-VI век н.е., I. Taxel, *nav. delo*, fig.4.

observe similarly shaped volutes like on our Ionic impost capitals. This type of capital represented at Sirmium has been called the Asian Corinthizing capital,<sup>26</sup> while the capital from Milan is of Palestinian origin, which supports our efforts to indicate that the possible origin of volutes of the “ram’s horns” form may be from the Palestinian volute capitals. (Fig.8)

In support of this, we should add the visible similarity of our Ionic impost capitals, with reduced massive volutes in the form of “ram’s horns” and a cross on the echinus between the volutes, to the capitals from Palestine which, as well as ours from southern Serbia, were created 800 years after the capitals of the “Khazar” type appeared. This variant of the capital from Palestine has been identified as Type III and dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.<sup>27</sup> Just like our

*пластика у Македонији, Србији и Црној Гори*, 62, сл. 19.

<sup>26</sup> A. Maver, H. Müller, I. Rižnar, *op. cit.*, 121, 129-130, fig. 3, 11, 12.

<sup>27</sup> I. Taxel, *Late Antique Ionic Column Capitals in the Countryside of Central Palestine between Provincial Trends and Classical Traditions*, Studies in Late Antiquity (2018) 2

Fig. 10 Caričin Grad,  
cross with circles,  
detail

Сл. 10 Царичин град,  
крст са круговима,  
детал



contemporary capitals, the Palestinian capitals were also produced by the same workshop and even by the same craftsmen. It should be noted that the Greek cross is carved on the capitals from Palestine, while the Latin cross is carved on the volute impost capitals from southern Serbia. In support of the Eastern origin, now is the moment to recall the above discussed, sharply worked densely packed and curved stylized bundles of acanthus leaves, the so-called “thorny shape”, in a manner that belongs to the Eastern type of capital decoration, of Asia Minor origin.<sup>28</sup> This is significant for correct understanding of this type of Ionic impost capitals discovered only in the southern Serbia region. (Fig.9)

We mentioned the cross with two convex button-shaped points (2cm) below the horizontal arm flanking the vertical hasta. It is not clear why some researchers consider that presence of two round bulges in this place is “difficult to explain”.<sup>29</sup> (Fig.10) In the early Christian and Paleo-Byzantine periods, in various techniques (mosaic, relief, fresco), small circles that flank vertical hasta of the cross, above or below the cross arm, can be often found. We will state a few examples: in the destroyed tomb no. 1 in Niš, a cross is drawn, flanked by two circles filled with chrsmn. On the capital in Nerezi (6<sup>th</sup> century), the cross is flanked by a circle within a circle (for the first Christians, the circle, like the cross, signify the Kingdom of Heaven and God).<sup>30</sup> Like on the relief icon from the Byzantine Museum in Thessaloniki (6<sup>th</sup> century) with circles flanking the cross above horizontal hasta, with engraved first letters, in the left circle the letters ΦC (φος Χριστού – the light of Christ), and in the right circle there could have been letters HS, or some other Christian teachings and messages. We see that there are numerous parallels and their possible meaning is - the

(1), : 99–104, fig.4.

<sup>28</sup> P. Donabédian, *Les métamorphoses de l'acanthé sur les chapiteaux arméniens du Ve au VIIe siècle*, *L'Acanthe dans la sculpture monumentale de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Oct 1990, Paris, France. CTHS, (Paris-Sorbonne 1993), 147-162, fig. 1-10. Ђ. Бошковић, *Архитектура средњег века*, Београд 1976, 50,93.

<sup>29</sup> J.P. Caillet, N. Duval, M. Jeremić, *op. cit.*, 353.

<sup>30</sup> J. Chevalier, A. Gheerbrant, *Rječnik simbola*, Zagreb 1983; M. Rakocija, *The Constantine's city – ancient Christian Niš*, 273-278.

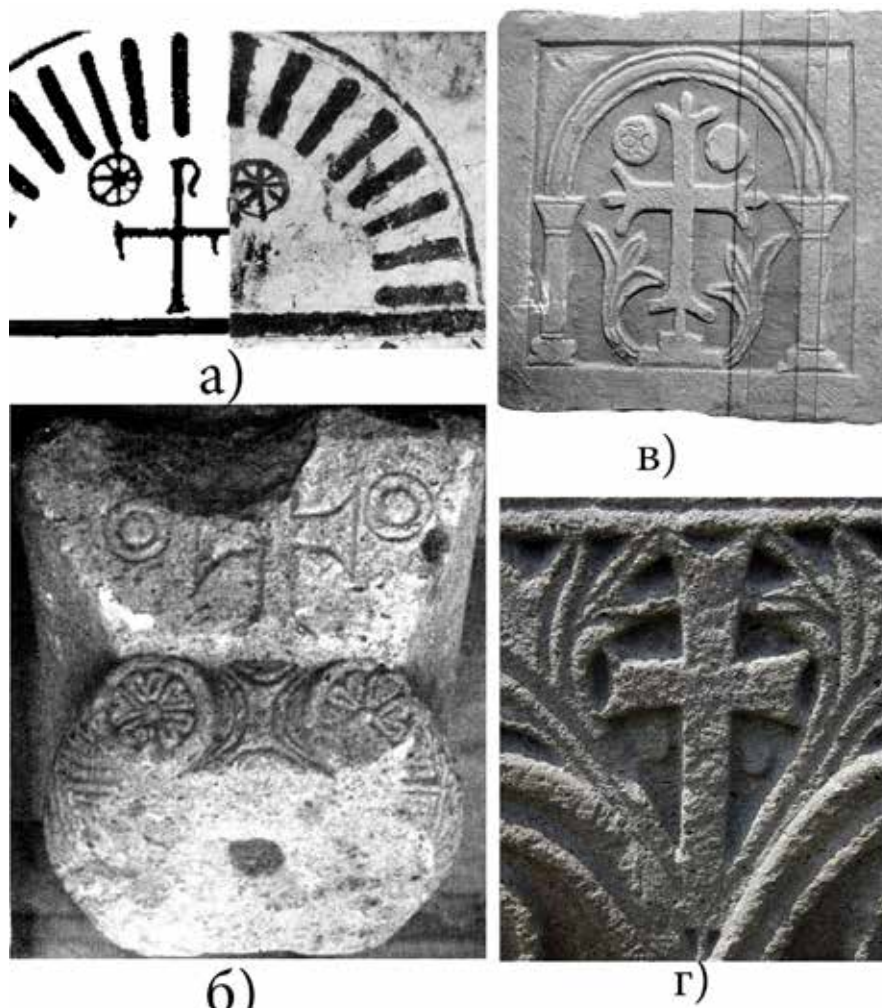


Fig. 11 Cross with circles: a) Niš, fresco from tumb no. 1, 5<sup>th</sup> / 6<sup>th</sup> century; b) Nerezi, Ionic Impost capital, 6<sup>th</sup> century; c) Byzantine Museum, 6<sup>th</sup> century; d) Caričin Grad, 6<sup>th</sup> century

Сл. 11 Крст са круговима: а) Ниш, фреска из гробнице бр. 1, V/VI век; б) Нерези, јонски импост капител, VI век; в) Византијски музеј, VI век; г) Царичин Град, VI век.

sun and the moon - which, although pagan symbols, were accepted as constant companions of the cross. In later Byzantine iconography, the sun and the moon regularly accompany Christ in the composition of Crucifixion, and sometimes appear in the scenes of the Resurrection and the Vision.<sup>31</sup> This is sufficient for understanding the appearance of button-like bulges around the cross that we see on our capitals. (Fig.11)

<sup>31</sup> С. Ђурић, *Христ Космократор у Леснову*, Зограф 13, (Београд 1982), 65-71.

The described decorative scheme is known only on the capitals discovered at the mentioned sites located around Niš. Integrated variant of the Ionic impost capital in a conical stone block represents statically stable and inspired creation. For this Ionic impost capital model, based on the current knowledge, it can be stated that it is unique, original and typical for the southern Serbia region and Niš area from the Justinian period. If we consider that the workshop was in Niš, then it is undoubtedly a recognizable product of Niš.

Nikolajević-Stojković's observation which was based on leaf decoration and workmanship method, led her to learn about existence of a local sculptural school that, in the Paleo-Byzantine period, in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, worked in the Niš region and which nucleus could have been in Niš, as its center.<sup>32</sup> Accuracy of the Niš stonemason's workshop existence is especially confirmed by particularly outdated relief decoration design of the capital of the "ram's horns" type.<sup>33</sup> This way of tectonically and relief-united Ionic and Impost part is known only in this region and can be seen as a distinctive feature of the Niš workshop. This type of local impost capital, known only in the mentioned localities of southern Serbia, represents one of the local final stages of evolution of the analyzed classical Ionic capitals.<sup>34</sup> In the last stage of the Ionic impost capitals transformation, the Ionic part disappears completely, and returns to the beginning when the impost was separated from the Ionic part. Such is the impost block without the Ionic part and with a flat abacus in the Early Byzantine basilica in Ćurlina, which uniform leaf decoration made of sharp acanthus leaves distances it from the appearance form of the impost from the 4<sup>th</sup> century and dates it to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

The capitals from Caričin Grad, Rudare, Mrveš, Kuršumljija, despite of the relatively rough workmanship in cheap material, are perfectly sculpted, with exact proportions and symmetrically realized, from tectonics to the relief decoration. This was performed on the basis of previously calculated module, the application of which is recognized during production of all known capitals, which are generally of the same dimensions and cut in the same way. Their common

<sup>32</sup> I. Nikolajević Stojković, *Les monuments de la decoration architecturale en Serbie d'un atelier local du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Actes du V<sup>e</sup> Congrès intern. d'archéol. chrétienne, 1954, 467-469. The nucleus could be in Niš as the center due to its long stonemasonry tradition, while short duration of Caričin grad may be the reason why the stonemasonry was not developed there. However, it should be noted that large number of the whole and fragmented capitals of this type were discovered in Caričin grad and its surroundings, while not a single example of this type is known in Niš itself, except in the nearby village of Ćurlina. The known specimens from the wider surrounding of Niš indicate the accuracy of I. Nikolajević's conclusion that the stonemasonry nucleus was in Niš, from where it was distributed to the surrounding church centers in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>33</sup> A compositional capital from Caričin Grad (second third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century) with four ram's heads was also seen as an outdated type and product of local stonemasons that was abandoned by the leading architectural centers. – R. Krathajmer, S. Ćurčić, *Ranohrišćanska i vizantijska arhitektura*, Beograd 2008, 267.

<sup>34</sup> И. Николајевић Стојковић, *Јонски импост капители из Македоније и Србије*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> М. Ракоција, *Место импост капитела из базилике у Ћурлини у еволуцији јонских импост капитела и делатност палеовизантијске скулпторске радионице у Нису*, 95,101.

stylistic features, iconographic details and carving methods indicate that they belong to the same stonemason's local workshop. Also, Dj. Mano-Zisi believes that these capitals are work of the local stonemasons and states: "*The local masons were satisfied by decorating the capitals with hard relief of crosses with leaves and potentized volutes*".<sup>36</sup> Slobodan Ćurčić agrees with him and notes that on those capitals from Justiniana Prima, the local artisans' <sup>37</sup> contribution can be clearly observed.

The stone carving is rough but accurate, the poor quality of plastic and different decoration than usual (volute in the "ram's horns" form), indicates the inspired work of a local craftsman – stonemason, perhaps also his origin. This type of original capital production of the "ram's horns" type can be seen as generally accepted sculptural genre in the Niš region, but not as a standard one, in wider sense. It is unknown to us that Paleo-Byzantine capitals designed in this way have been discovered elsewhere in the empire. The stonemason's workshop in Niš, with its long tradition, was able to offer a new capital design with still Early Christian compositional scheme, which consists of well-known reshaped elements as one of the variants that was distributed from Niš in the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the southern Serbia region.

If we cannot claim for other known sculptural works that they came out of the same atelier, the workmanship manner of our capitals, dimensions and shape of the Ionic impost capitals from the south of Serbia unequivocally indicate that they were carved in the same workshop, at the same time or, on the other hand, within a short period of time. The method of comparison leads us to opinion that we will not make big mistake if we assume that they are made by the same pair of hands, surely according to the same model. Taking into consideration where the capitals of the "ram's horns" type were discovered, there is no doubt that the Paleo-Byzantine stonework production of the provincial workshop was as great as its reputation in the Niš region, where today it is revealed to us in the area from Caričin grad, via Rudara and Mrveš, to Kuršumljija.

It is assumed that capitals from Caričin Grad were later transferred to the medieval churches in Rudare, Mrveš and Kuršumljija. If so, then it could have happened in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the buildings in Mrveš and Kuršumljija are dated, while the old church in Rudare has not been explored. For the 14<sup>th</sup> century church in the village of Mrveš, it was not difficult to bring a capital from the nearby Caričin Grad.

There are many unknowns related to the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Kuršumljija. One is the issue of whether the capitals belonged to the triconchal Early Byzantine church above which Nemanja built the Church of the Holy Mother of God or they were brought from some Early Byzantine building, maybe from the nearby Early Byzantine three-nave basilica (the Mark's Church). It is assumed that they were transferred from Caričin Grad during construction of the "new nartex" in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Duval believes that this particular type of Ionic impost capital was brought from the acropolis of Caričin

<sup>36</sup> Ђ. Мано-Зиси, *Царичин град*, in: *Велика археолошка налазишта Србије*, Београд 1974, 86.

<sup>37</sup> S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans. From Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent*, New Haven and London, 2010, 212, fig. 220.



Fig. 12 Church of the Holy Mother of God in Kuršumlija, columns on the capitals at the entrance (documentation of the Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation Niš)

Сл. 12 Црква Св. Богородице у Куршумлији, стубови на капителима на улазу (документација Завода за заштиту споменика културе Ниш)



Grad from the episcopal basilica and basilica with the crypt. He rightly notes that they were used in the Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup> The capitals could have been carved in the 6<sup>th</sup> century in Niš, for the newly created buildings of Justiniana Prima, maybe also for other churches of that time in the Niš area, and perhaps also for early Byzantine Kuršumlija churches that were found by medieval builders. (Fig.12)

It was noticed that at one point of secondary use, one vertical groove each was subsequently carved on lateral side of two capitals from Kuršumlija and on one from Rudare. In Kuršumlija, the grooves on the capitals face each other, and as such are ideal for a stone partition to be wedged between them, according to Medić and Bošković.<sup>39</sup> This is an unconvincing conclusion because in this way the central entrance would be unnecessarily closed and the temple would be entered only through lateral openings, which is unknown in the history of church architecture. The vertical grooves carved later on the side of the capital could have been used to wedge the stone threshold or to secure the wooden jambs for the door leaves. As the result of secondary use, an equal vertical groove was

<sup>38</sup> Ђ. Стричевић, *Средњовековна рестаурација рановизантијске цркве код Куршумлије*, ЗРВИ 4, Београд 1956, 199-211; N. Duval, *Le problème des chapiteaux de Kuršumlija*, 343-347.

<sup>39</sup> М.Ч. Медић, Ђ. Бошковић, *op. cit.*, 43.

carved in the same place on the capital in front of the Museum in Leskovac, which was brought from the Rudare monastery. Three capitals of the same type with subsequently carved grooves, indicate that secondary use of the capitals from Rudara and Kuršumljija was the same, perhaps at the same time, in order to strengthen the wooden door frame and attach the leaves to it.<sup>40</sup> (Fig.13)

Dimensions of these monolithic functional capitals reveal that they belonged to the supporting roof or gallery structure of some monumental Early Byzantine building. Despite the modest stone craftsmanship, symbolism of their relief decoration with a cross clearly implies their apotropaic character, which again indicates that they were located in a special and well-visible place. They were purposely and deliberately placed by the medieval builders at the entrance to the Church of the Holy mother of God in Kuršumljija with a visible cross.<sup>41</sup> This is the reason why two identical capitals were found in front of the unexplored old church in Rudare.<sup>42</sup> In the ruins of the 14th century church in Mrveš village, we find the identical type of capital due to the same reasons, today in the place of the holy table. If they originate from Caričin Grad, then their apotropaic role is the reason why medieval builders opted for them, and not for the representative compositional marble capitals which they had at their disposal in Justiniana Prima. For that time observer, the presence of this type of capital was primarily a testimony of the presence of God and his protective power. Perhaps this is the answer to the question of why exactly these capitals were brought and installed in the 14th century churches.

In the 14th century, a change in the attitude towards Byzantium<sup>43</sup> occurred. It is clearly observed in that time architecture, which changed its attitude towards the monuments of Early Byzantine architecture.<sup>44</sup> This is confirmed by a special variant of the Early Byzantine capitals found in the narthex of the triconchal church in Kuršumljija, which was additionally built in the 14th century, and by the same type of capital that serves as a holy table in the church in Mrveš, which also originates from the 14th century. Now, in the glorious time of

<sup>40</sup> Presence of subsequently carved groove on the capital from Rudare indirectly indicates that the church was active here in the Middle Ages as well. That the grooves (notches) were intended for the bases is also confirmed by discovery of two column bases from the atrium colonnade in the cruciform church in Caričin Grad, which have a similar notch (groove). One base was found in situ in the east atrium colonnade with wedged stone slabs above a threshold-like stylobate: – N. Duval, V. Popović, *Caričin Grad I*, Belgrade-Rome 1984, 56/7, fig. 35, 54,55.

<sup>41</sup> It is difficult to explain why they placed it as the base of the column so that the cross is unimaginably turned upside down, unless it is due to technical reasons and impossibility of mounting the massive capitals on the top of the column. About that: M. Ракоција, *О рановизантијским јонским импост капителима из Богородичине цркве у Куришумлији*, зборник радова са научног скупа: 825 година пострига свете Анастасије – манастир Пресвете Богородице у Куршумлији, 26-28. новембар 2021. године, Ниш 2022, 113-135.

<sup>42</sup> М.М. Васић, К. Јов. Јовановић, *Извештај с археолошке ескурзије по јужној, источној и североисточној Србији*, 32/3, сл.17, 18.

<sup>43</sup> В. Мошин, *Византијски утицаји у Србији у XIV веку*, Југословенски историјски часопис III, Београд 1937, 147-160.

<sup>44</sup> Ђ. Стричевић, *Средњовековна рестаурација рановизантијске цркве код Куришумлије*, 211.

Fig. 13 a) Church of the Holy Mother of God in Kuršumlija, grooves on capitals; b) Rudare, groove on a capital

Сл. 13. а) Црква Св. Богородице у Куршумлији, жлебови на капителима; б) Рударе, жлеб на капителу



a)



b)

the Serbian state and art, wishing to raise reputation and importance of the newly built temple, the builders brought architectural elements from the old Early Byzantine churches which, together with the builders' concord, indicate that the Serbian state is a part and continuation of legacy of the great Roman empire.

Different attitude towards Byzantium, as well as spiritual condition and political aspirations in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Serbia, are illustrated by the typical and unique Early Byzantine capitals of the "ram's horns" type discovered in the trikonchos in Kuršumljija and in the one-nave church in Mrveš village. Through unknown paths, capitals of the same type arrived to the former Rudare monastery (now placed in front of the museum in Leskovac), which Church of St. Petka is insufficiently explored but is undoubtedly built over an older building and which could have been rebuilt in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup>

We emphasized the existence of the Paleo-Byzantine Niš sculptor's workshop with recognizable product in the form of a distinctive Ionic impost capital of the "ram's horns" type, which bears the hallmark of the Justinian period<sup>46</sup> provincial art. Work of the Paleo-Byzantine Niš sculptor's workshop has recently been recognized in design of the marble statue of emperor's wife from the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup> In the pre-Justinian era, there was active stonemason's workshop in Niš, which activity was recognized in the wider Niš area.<sup>48</sup>

Let this reflection on the Late Antique and Paleo-Byzantine architectural plastic be a modest contribution to the efforts to confirm existence of a local sculpting school in Niš, recognized by Ivanka Nikolajević Stojković, which before and during the time of Justinian, until the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, met the needs of the wider city surroundings, Caričin Grad and Ćurlina for sure, and maybe Rudare and Mrvoš, to Kuršumljija. As for the closer dating, we should take into account the established fact that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate capitals from the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century from those of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, from Justinian I to Phokas (602-610).<sup>49</sup>

In Paleo-Byzantine art, the way of designing and changes in the shape of capitals is rightfully used by certain authors as measure of changes in artistic requirements and aesthetic aspirations of the entire epoch.<sup>50</sup> This is especially

<sup>45</sup> А. Еман, *Рударска црква, храм Св. Параскеве у општини лесковачкој*, Лесковачки зборник XVII, (Лесковац 1977), 223-248; М. Ракоција, *Манастери и цркве јужне и источне Србије*, 120.

<sup>46</sup> Ђ. Мано-Зиси, *Ископавања на Царичином Граду*, 137; И. Николајевић-Стојковић, *Рановизантијска архитектонска*, 56,59; М. Ракоција, *О парпетној плочи из Ниша*, 106-107; М. Ракоција, *The Constantine's city – ancient Christian Niš*, 167.

<sup>47</sup> М. Ракоција, *Тајна мермерне статуе рановизантијске царске жене из Ниша*, Међународни научни скуп Ниш и Византија XX, Ниш 2022, 59-72; М. Ракоција, *A marble statue from Niš of an early byzantine imperial woman*, Nouvelle série volume Starinar LXXII/2022, (Belgrade 2022), 253-266.

<sup>48</sup> И. Николајевић Стојковић, *Јонски импост капители из Македоније и Србије*, 177; Eadem, *Les monuments de la decoration architecturale en Serbie d'un atelier local du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Actes du Ve Congrès intern. d'archéol. chrétienne, 1954, 467-469; М. Ракоција, *Место импост капители из базилике у Ђурлини у еволуцији јонских импост капители и делатност палеовизантијске скулпторске радионице у Нишу*, 89-104.

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Pierre Sodini, *La sculpture Byzantine (VII<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Athènes 2008, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making: Main Lines of Stylistic Development*

related to specific space and time to which the known capitals belong, the design of which indicates the artistic aspirations and spiritual mood of the client who ordered them, and thus the general cultural climate of the Niš area in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The capital that we designated as the “ram’s horns” type is product of historical circumstances, spiritual condition and artistic inclinations, which conditioned its formation as regional specialty recognized for the Niš area. In the early Byzantine period, there is obviously significant influence of the East on these regions belonging to provincial trends that still preserve memory of the classical tradition. Distinctive capital of the “ram’s horns” type is between the provincial achievements and the classical tradition.

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О ЈЕДИНСТВЕНОМ ТИПУ РАНОВИЗАНТИЈСКОГ  
ЈОНСКОГ ИМПОСТ КАПИТЕЛА

Јединствено и особено решење идентичних јонских импост капитела начињени од андезита откривени су у највећем броју у Царичином Граду (Ivstiniana Prima), два код цркве Св. Петке у селу Рударе, затим у цркви из XIV века код Бојника у селу Мрвеш, у рановизантијској базилици у Турлини код Ниша и два капитела на улазу у Богородичину цркву у Куршумлији где су их поставили градитељи из XIV века. Овај тип рановизантијског капитела после исцрпне анализе која је обухватила тектонику капитела, врсту камена, начин израде рељефа, присуство биљног мотива, начин на који је решен крст, посебно како су осмишљене волуте и њихово порекло, издвојен је као посебна варијанта рановизантијских јонских импост капитела опредељени у тип „овновски рогови“. Капители типа „овновски рогови“ на простору раног Византијског царства знани су само на наведеним локалитетима јужне Србије, који су угледна рановизантијска црквена средишта али и значајне средњовековне цркве.

Тип капитела који су предмет нашег интересовања реализовани су једном конусном каменом блоку где су рељефно обједињени јенски део и импостни блок са ниским правоугаоним абаком (*abacus*) који их надвисује. Од ехинусног дела остале су рељефне масивне јонске волуте неуобичајено спојене другим крајем при дну капитела, тако да највише подсећају на овновске рокове. Тако решене волуте удаљавају се од античких класичних јонских волута које се праволинијски развијају испод абакуса формирајући каналис. Овакви капители могу се дефинисати и као рановизантијски волутни импост капители типа „овновски рогови?“.

Посебност овог типа капитела која се огледа у јединственом архитектонском решењу, особено обликованим волутама и обједињеној рељефној декорацији која је сачувала сећање на јонски импост капител. Опис једног капитела значи и опис свих досад откривених.

На *предњој страни* сегменти лукова двотракастих масивних волута, залазе у простор импоста. Импост је испуњен симетричним акатусовим листовима који ничу одоздо из места спајања волута и повијају се у страну око латинског крста који је уклесан у празан простор између волута и повијених акатусових листова. Латински

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*in Mediterranean Art, 3rd–7th century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1977, 76-80, са напоменама 33, 34, 36 и 40; E. Dauterman Maguire, *Range and repertory in capital design*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41, Washington, 1987, 351.

крст је са проширеним крацима засечених крајева са две конвексне тачке у облику дугмета (2см) испод хоризонталног крака које фланкирају вертикалну хасту. Суви и оштри завршетци акантусових листова на предњој и бочним странама капитела, смишљено формирају троугласта удубљења (дентикуне) у виду зупчасте траке која заједно са уском траком видно одваја масиван абакус без декорације.

*Декорација задње* стране капитела је без акантусовог лишћа и крста и сведена је само на барелефне волуте у облику масивних „овновских рогова“, начињени од једне траке на потпуно равnoj површини задње стране импост капитела на којој је још само плитком полуобличастом хоризонталном барелефном траком издвојен абак. Једино јастуци њихових волута на бочним странама незнатно излазе из импостне масе, тако да су бочне стране највише сачувале од класичног јонског импост капитела.

Спирале волута излазе у простор успостављајући визуелну везу између предњих и *бочних страна* капитела и прихватају уобичајене волутне јастуке (*pulvinus*). На волутним јастуцима са лишћем или без рељефно изведених листова, увек са четвороструким повезом (*balteus*) који у средини стеже јастук уз малу деформацију његовог цилиндра. Из трака балтеуса ничу и развијају се симетрично осмишљени акантусови листови, чији врхови и овде образују низ дентикуне које одвајају недекорисан правоугаони простор намењен абакусу. Са доње стране балтеус се интегрише са полусверним округлим постолем, пречника мањег од правоугаоне основе капитела, које је прихватало стабло стуба.

За рановизантијско раздобље необично решене волуте у облику „овновских рогова“, заслужују напор да се докучи њихово порекло. Овако обједињене волуте имају највише сличности са палестинским волутним капителима типа „хазар“ који се развијао од VIII до VI века пре Христа, као и једновремени из Неандрије.

Да овако спојене волуте у облику „овновских рогова“ нису заборављене потврђује већи број мањих капитела са хиподрома у Сирмиуму који су одређени у такозваном малоазијски тип. Њима је близак импост капител од белог мермера из друге половине VI века који се чува у Градском археолошком музеју у Милану пореклом из Палестине из Цезарије у чијем позоришту је откривен. Скоро идентичну декорацију затичемо на мањим капителима на које се ослањао архитрав оларске преграде цркве у Коњуху из V-VI столећа и у Августу Трајани (Стара Загора, Бугарска). Наведено доприноси нашим напорима да укажемо на порекло волута у облику „овновских рогова“ од палестинских волутних капитела.

За овај модел јонског импост капитела, на основу досадашњих знања, може се рећи да је јединствен, оригиналан и типичан за простор јужне Србије и област Ниша. Ако прихватимо да је радионица у Нишу, онда је упитању препознатљив нишки производ. Овај тип оригиналне производње капитела типа „овновски рогови“ може се посматрати као опште прихваћен скулптурски жанр у нишкој области. Настали су једновремене у истој радионици, можда и од исте руке, по истом узору сигурно. Није познато да су овако дизајнирани палеовизантијски капители откривани још негде у царству. Клесарска радионица у Нишу са својом дугом традицијом могла је да понуди нови дизајн капитела са још увек ранохришћанском композиционом схемом, коју чине знани преобликовани елементи као једну од варијанти која је била дистрибуирана у VI веку на простор јужне Србије.