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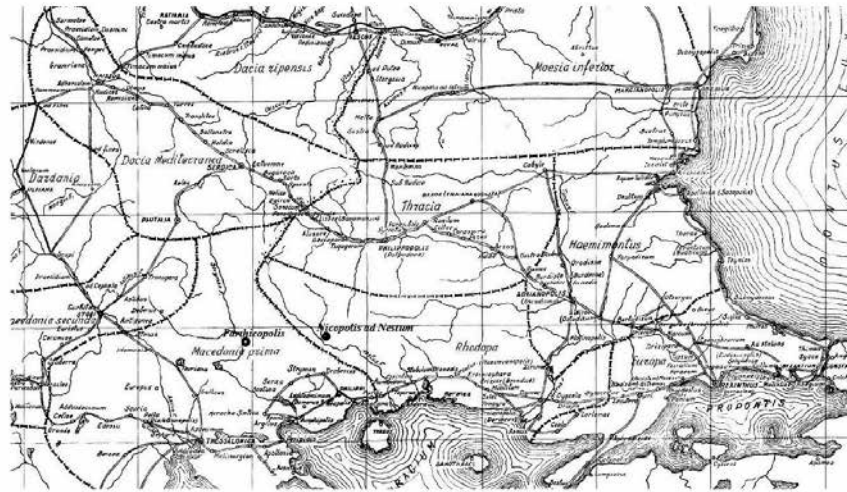
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**FEATURES OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN  
ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION IN PARTHICOPOLIS  
AND NICOPOLIS AD NESTUM**

*Abstract:* The peculiarities of the architectural decoration in two neighboring Roman and early Christian cities were investigated. Although the two cities are adjacent, they show differences in their architectural decoration. Firstly, they belong to two different provinces: Parthicopolis is situated in the province of Macedonia Prima, diocese of Macedonia, while Nicopolis ad Nestum is in the province of Rhodope, diocese of Thrace. The established differences in terms of decoration in Parthicopolis consist in reused details from the time of the Principate, supplemented with architectural details from the early Christian era; as well as with details ordered especially for early Christian buildings, having in mind the baptistery in the complex of Episcopal basilica, the colonnade of Basilica No 2. In Nicopolis ad Nestum, a large part of the architectural details were made specially for the early Christian buildings. In addition to the local production, the import of decorative elements for furnishing of the basilicas was established in Nicopolis as capitals, columns and mensa sacra, and in Parthicopolis as the unique chancel screen from the first construction period of the Episcopal basilica; its columns, the pyramidal imposts placed on Corinthian capitals, and in another construction phase – the pulpit.

The presence of types of details, non-characteristic and unique so far for the architectural decoration, along the middle course of the Struma and Mesta rivers; and the other differences in their architectural decoration are also associated with the differences in the ecclesiastical affiliation of the two cities: Parthicopolis to the vicariate in Thessaloniki, respectively to the Pope in Rome, and Nicopolis ad Nestum to the Church and the Patriarch of Constantinople. The latter fact has led to a new and different liturgical planning of the basilicas here, as well as to their architectural decoration.

*Key words:* architectural-decorative elements, bases, columns, capitals, chancel screens, pulpit.



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Pl. I. 1. Map of the early Christian provinces. Parthicopolis in province of Macedonia Prima, and Nicopolis ad Nestum in province of Rhodope (after S. Petrova); 2. Tomb stele of Hermogenos from Nicopolis ad Nestum (IGBulg, V, # 5928); 3. Inscriptions: of the sub-deacon Crispinus, of the psalmist Andrey and his wife Eudochia, of the candle-bearer Demetrios (AM Sandanski, archive); 4. Donation inscription of Antimos (AM Sandanski, archive)

### Introduction

The architectural details discovered in the early Christian buildings at Parthicopolis and Nicopolis ad Nestum show significant differences and peculiarities. Parthicopolis<sup>1</sup>, is located in the diocese of Macedonia, in the

<sup>1</sup> Known to Phlegon of Tralles as Paricopolis, probably until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (See: Ф. Папазоглу, *Македонски градови у римског доба*. Скопје, 1957, 278). In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the city is mentioned by Claudius Ptolemy under the name Παρθικόπολις / Παρουκόπολις, one of the three cities in the strategy of Sintica. (Ptol. Geographia III, 13, 30). In the various editions of Claudius Ptolemy's „Geography“ the name of the city is spelled

northeastern part of the province of Macedonia Prima. Nicopolis ad Nestum is situated in the diocese of Thrace, in the southwestern part in the province of the Rhodope. It is mentioned for the first time in the “Geography” of Claudius Ptolemy<sup>2</sup>.

Both cities have a similar story: they are announced as cities with Roman right at the time of Trajan<sup>3</sup>; their most flourishing period has happened during the rule of the Antonine emperors and the Severan dynasty (**Pl. I, 1**). Both cities perished during the big invasions of the Slavs in the first quarter of 7<sup>th</sup> century, but before that they have suffered and have been totally destroyed by several mighty earthquakes at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. In the middle ages over a part of the ruins of Parthicopolis and Nicopolis ad Nestum, the villages have been formed, known as Sveti Vrach (today, the city of Sandanski) and Hissarlak (today Zagrade district, Garmen village).

During the early Christian period Parthicopolis and Nicopolis ad Nestum were episcopal centers, whose bishops or their representatives have taken part in the local and ecumenical councils. Parthicopolis belonged firstly to the Exarchate, later to the Vicariate of Thessaloniki, respectively to the Pope in Rome. Nicopolis was submitted to the Metropolis of Trajanopolis, respectively to the Patriarch of Constantinople after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Christianity was gradually reaching the interior of both provinces after the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD due to the activity of apostle Paul and his pupils (the two churches founded by the Apostle Paul, the one in Philippi and of Thessalonica). Because of its closeness to Philippi, Nicopolis was influenced by this *ecclesia*. At the beginning, Parthicopolis also belonged to the same church, but later, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it belonged to the the exarchate of Thessaloniki, turned in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century into a vicariate subordinate to the pope in Rome<sup>4</sup>. The bishopric of Parthicopolis was already under the influence of the south ecclasiae of Amphipolis, Thessalonica and Berœa.

The tomb stele to Hermogenos<sup>5</sup>, his wife Matrōna, his son Demostenos and his daughter Thecla, the name of the first martyr Saint Thecla, reveals the existence of early Christians in Nicopolis already at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (**Pl. I, 2**). The inscription shows not only the change in the ethnic

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as Parthicopolis and as Paroicopolis (F. G. Wilberg, *Claudii Ptolemæi, Geographiæ*. Libri octo. Essendia 1838, 223& Παρθικόπολις; and the note 17: Παροικόπολις). See more: K. F. A. Nobbe. *Claudii Ptolemæi. Geographia*. Ed. Carolus Fridericus Augustus Nobbe. Rector Schol. Nicol. et in Univ. Litt. Lips. Professor. Tom I, Lipsiae 1843, 197).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Νικόπολις ἡ περὶ Νέσσον’ (Nobbe, Op.cit., 190: Ptol. Geographia, III, 11, 13).

<sup>3</sup> S. Petrova, On Early Christianity and Early Christian Basilicas of Parthicopolis. – *Studia sull’Oriente Cristiano 161*, Roma 2012, 96; S. Petrova, Nicopolis ad Nestum/Mestum. – *Roman cities in Bulgaria* (ed. R. Ivanov), I. Sofia, 2012, 306.

<sup>4</sup> The rise in the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries of the Thessalonica church before the other churches in eastern Illyricum allowed it to stand at the head of the churches and be elevated to an exarchate at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. At the time of the Council of Nicaea (325), the Thessaloniki Exarch was the autocephalous hierarch only of the diocese of Macedonia. His power over eastern Illyricum expanded in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the Thessaloniki exarch was already not only an autocephalous hierarch, but also a vicar of the Roman throne.

<sup>5</sup> IGBulg V, 424 № 5930.



Pl. II. 1. Modern map of Sandanski with marking of the basilicas and necropolises; the fortress wall (according to S. Petrova); 2. Ancient Cadastre of Parthicopolis (according to S. Petrova); 3. Parthicopolis. Plan of basilicas No. 1 – 3 (by A. Milčeva, R. Pillinger, D. Serafimova) ; 4. Parthicopolis, Episcopal Basilica – plan (according to S. Petrova)

composition of the city, the Christianization of individuals and the possible existence of a Christian municipality. Later epitaphs confirm the Christianization of the city; and some of them indicate the Asia Minor origin of part of the city's population. Most of the Early Christian inscriptions from Parthicopolis are dated to the period 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. (Pl. I, 3). From them are known the names of the

earlier Christians as well as their rank in the church hierarchy: the sub-deacon Crispinus, the psalmist Andrey and his wife Eudochia, the only witnessed in the epigraphic monuments primikiry, the candle-bearer Demetrios, the presbyter Cyril, participant in the council of Chalcedon. Another presbyter Cyril is known from a tomb inscription from the village of Petrovo, also belonging to the territory (bishoprics) of Parthicopolis, related to the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>.

### *The Early Christian architecture in Parthicopolis*

The acts of the councils of Serdica (343-344) and of Chalcedon (451) give the names of two bishops of Parthicopolis – Iona and Ioannes, the successor of a bishop whose name begins with the Greek letters ‘O’, ‘C’ or ‘Θ’<sup>7</sup>. Presumably, the name of the fifth bishop – Antim (**PI. I, 4**). In the inscription, Antim identifies himself as the donor (*ktitor*) of the most lavishly decorated basilica in the city – No 4, Episcopal (Cathedral). From all the ten studied to a different degree basilicas<sup>8</sup>, six of them are situated in the city, alongside one late antique street (**PI. II, 1-2**). All of them have three aisles, some with one apse, the apses of some other not excavated and only one of them is of the so-called Syrian type – hidden in an additionally made wall, formed from outside as rectangular. It has been made in the second building period of basilica No 4, which is the Episcopal one, with *synthronon*. ‘Greek Synthronon’ is the one in Basilica 4, Episcopal. It is found in the early Christian basilicas of present-day mainland Greece<sup>9</sup>. According to practice, the ends of the synthronon project to the west and outside the nose of the apse, a feature found only in this basilica. Two of the basilicas (No 1 and No 4) possess atriums; basilicas No 2 and 3 have exonartex; and basilica No 3 – a tribelon (**PI. II, 3-4**). The basilicas have been decorated with mosaic pavements (No 2, 3 and 4), wall paintings (No 1, 3, 4 and 7),

<sup>6</sup> В. Велков, Нови епиграфски данни за античната история на град Сандански. – *ИИИ*, 24, 1961, 250 ff.; V. Beševliev, Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien. – *Berliner byzantinische Arbeiten* 30, Berlin 1964, No. 241-243.

<sup>7</sup> At the end of the text, the inscription is destroyed, so the first letter of the name is only conjectural. T. Ivanov suggests a name with letters ‘O’ or ‘C’. See: Т. Иванов, Д. Серафимова, Н. Николов, Разкопки в центъра на Сандански през 1960 г. – *ИИИ* 31, 1969, 105-209; V. Popova, The Pavement Mosaics of Bishop Ioannes’ Basilica in Sandanski. – *Spartacus symposium rebus Spartaci gestis dedicatum 2050a.*, Sofia 1981, 173-181. Given the destruction of the inscription with a partially preserved arch of the letter, I consider it possible that the name also began with the letter ‘Θ’.

<sup>8</sup> The early Christian basilicas and their complexes that have been fully or partially discovered so far; their plan and their place in the town planning plan have been discussed more than once, so we will not go into detail here. See: S. Petrova 2012, *Op.cit.*, 93-139; S. Petrova, The Early Christian Basilicas in the Urban Planning of Parthicopolis. – *Niš and Byzantium* (ed. M. Rakocija), XIII, 2015, 161-184; S. Petrova, The Baptistery of the Episcopal Basilica of Parthicopolis. – *Niš and Byzantium* (ed. M. Rakocija), XV, 2017, 133-152; S. Petrova, The Semicircular piazza of Parthicopolis in the Development of the Late Antique City Planning. – *Niš and Byzantium* (ed. M. Rakocija), XVI, 2018, 103-120.

<sup>9</sup> See: Δ. Παλλάς, Η παλαιοχριστιανική νοτιοανατολική, Αττική. Β’ Επιστημονική Συνάντηση ΝΑ. Αττικής (Καλύβια Αττικής 1985). – *Πρακτικά* (Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του αρχαιολόγου Δημήτρη Λαζαρίδη), Καλύβια 1986, 43-80.

and rich architectonic decoration: bases, columns, capitals of different order, some reused from the Roman buildings of the Principate<sup>10</sup>. For some of them the architectonic decoration have been especially carved, like in the case of the *baptisterium* of the Episcopal basilica (No 4). The architectural-decorative elements belong to several building periods and are different in their kind and quality.

In the Early Christian period Parthicopolis has changed its urbanistic plan<sup>11</sup>. Alongside the Roman *cardo maximus*, two basilicas have been erected (No 1 and 2), with a bishop residence between them. The central new street of the city is the first *cardo* western of the Roman *cardo maximus*, with six basilicas erected alongside it (in the light of the discovered ones so far), as well as a colonnade for the covered sidewalks, and a new piazza with semicircular or round(?) form, also covered with colonnade. In this way the new main street at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century is the street for liturgical processions (*via sacra*). The longitude of it is limited with a round piazza at the south end and with a semicircular (possibly also round) piazza at the north end (**Pl. II, 2**).

#### *The Early Christian architecture in Nicopolis ad Nestum*

From Nicopolis we know only the name of Bishop Polycarpus, who was transferred from Sexaginta Prista 'to Nicopolis in Thrace' in 431<sup>12</sup>. According to Epiphanius of Cyprus, in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, in the Diocese of Thrace there was a well-organized ecclesiastical organization by a patriarch (in Constantinople), five Metropolises with 18 bishoprics. Nicopolis was among the 15 autocephalous archbishoprics. The insufficient archaeological survey of the area of Middle Mesta, as well as of the area of the ancient city, does not give us direct evidence of built churches earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The only archaeological evidence for the existence of a basilica, possibly a domestic church in a citizen's home, are the discovered fragments of the *mensa sacra*, dated to the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>13</sup>

Several basilicas have been found in the surroundings of Nicopolis, excavated to a different degree, some of them with uncertain plan<sup>14</sup>. One-nave Early Christian church<sup>15</sup> was discovered northeast of the city, determined to be part of an early Christian monastery complex. Three-nave basilica near the

<sup>10</sup> S. Petrova, The Roman Architectonic Decoration Reused in the Early Christian Buildings of Parthicopolis. – *PATRIMONIUM.MK*, 2017, 137-176.

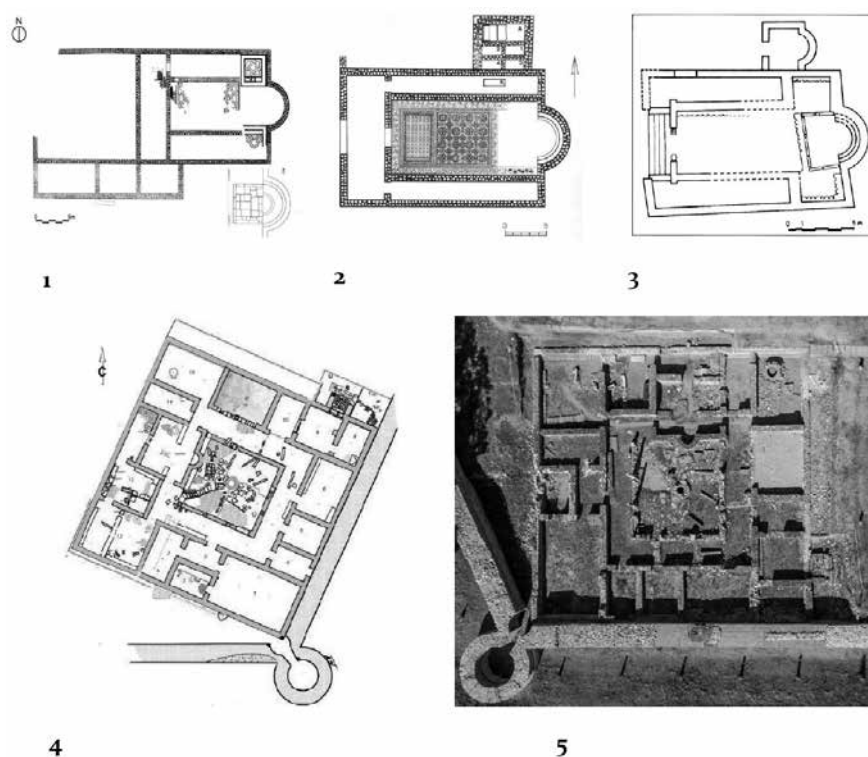
<sup>11</sup> S. Petrova, The Urban ... 2015, 161-184.

<sup>12</sup> Socr. Hist. VII, 36; P. Soustal, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* (ed. H. Hunger), Bd. 6, Wien 1991, 376.

<sup>13</sup> М. Чичикова, *Mensa sacra* от Nicopolis ad Nestum. – *ИИИ*, 33, 1972, 245-258; S. Petrova, Nicopolis ad Nestum/Mestum. – *Roman Cities in Bulgaria. Corpus of Ancient and Medieval settlements in Modern Bulgaria* (ed. R. Ivanov) I, Sofia 2012, 289-361.

<sup>14</sup> Early Byzantine basilicas have so far been found mostly in the vicinity of Nicopolis.

<sup>15</sup> К. Николов, По горното течение на р.Места. – *Минало*, 2/5-6, 1909, 162-172; В. Иванова, Стари църкви и манастири в българските земи, IV-XII в. – *ГНМ*, 4, София 1922/25, 558 1909, 558.



Pl. III. 1. Nicopolis, basilica 1 – plan (according to V. Popova); 2. Nicopolis, basilica 2 – plan (according to V. Popova); 3. Plan of the basilica near the village of Oreshe (according to A. Milčeva); 4. Nicopolis. Plan of building I (according to M. Vaklinova, Ts. Komitova) 5. Building I, Nicopolis. View from above (according to M. Vaklinova, Ts. Komitova)

village of Debren has been found, but unfortunately it was not excavated completely and was therefore partially published<sup>16</sup>. Another basilica, Basilica No 1, also identified as a monastery, has a three-stepped *synthronon*<sup>17</sup> (Pl. III, 1). Basilica No 2, with two-stepped *synthronon* was discovered next to an Eastern Roman and Early Christian necropolis. This basilica is interpreted in the publication as *Capella memoria of a martyrium*, with added after that function of a martyrial and cemeterial basilica, with a martyrium and five tombs inside the basilica and the martyrial part itself<sup>18</sup> (Pl. III, 2). The fourth basilica is found in the village of Oreshe, with three-aisled and well preserved chancel screen and

<sup>16</sup> С. Георгиева, Археологически проучвания в Родопите през 1960 г. – Археология, 4, 1961, 15; С. Михайлов, Средновековни църкви в Родопите. – Родопски сборник, II, 1969, 169-172.

<sup>17</sup> В. Попова, Спасителни разкопки на базилика № 1 в с. Гърмен, окръг Благоевградски. – АОР през 1978, София 1979, 96-97.

<sup>18</sup> В. Попова, Спасителни разкопки на базилика № 2 в с. Гърмен, окръг Благоевградски. – АОР през 1978, София 1979, 97; В. Попова, Две раннохристиянски базилики в околностите на Никополис ад Нестум. – *Studia in honorem Stephani Boiadjiev*. София 2011, 263-294.

*synthronon*<sup>19</sup> (Pl. III, 3). There are found architectural details in the monastery, named 'The Holy Mother, Life-Giving source', circa 2 km south of the town of Gotse Delchev, showing that in the 5<sup>th</sup> century there existed one more Early Christian basilica. Other architectural decorative elements are found also in the villages of Mosomishte and Screbatno.

The discovered „church“ in the fortified part of Nicopolis, dated initially to the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century, later to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and finally identified as an oratory<sup>20</sup>, has not yet been published or proven as such (Pl. III, 4-5). The 'church' is a room to the east with an apse that cuts through the west wall of the peristyle. The apse has a diameter of only 1.65 m. There are entrances, a meter from the eastern wall in the western direction, in the northern and southern walls extremely uncharacteristic of church architecture. Room 13 is considered to be a baptisterium because of the found two stone troughs, one with the text of psalm 28 on its bottom, and a pithus dug<sup>21</sup>. Such pithuses were unearthed also in the next room No 12. The researchers' interpretation is that a church was built at the west side of the peristyle and room 13 is its baptisterium<sup>22</sup>. In room 14, under the roof structure, 'pithuses, other vessels, crosses and chains, related to the liturgical practices, coins and several *exagiums*, seals and others' were found<sup>23</sup>. A biphore column (in Greek 'Αμφικίονας') and other still unpublished architectural details, show the reuse of Early Christian architectural details, which is why it is difficult to imagine that the 'church' was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, or even in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible that a church has been built here, but we believe that these details were reused quite later, namely at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the settlement was revived for a new period of life. The architectural and decorative details reported by the researchers, were brought here from the near – destroyed Early Christian basilicas. Until now, the researchers have not proved in any way that the architectural decoration found in the western part of room 12 and in room 13, were part of the decoration of its Early Christian 'church'. The large fragment of chancel screen slab found in room 13, erected as a support for the placement of a huge bench block in the room, identical in the marble appearance

<sup>19</sup> A. Milčeva, Eine frühchristliche Basilika aus dem Dorf Oreše im Gebiet von Nikopolis ad Nestum (Westrhodopen, Bulgarien). – (R. Harreiter et al., eds.). *Acta XIV Congressus internationalis archeologiae christianae (Wien 19-26.9.1999)* I. Città del Vaticano – Wien, 2006, 527-535, Taf. 186-189.

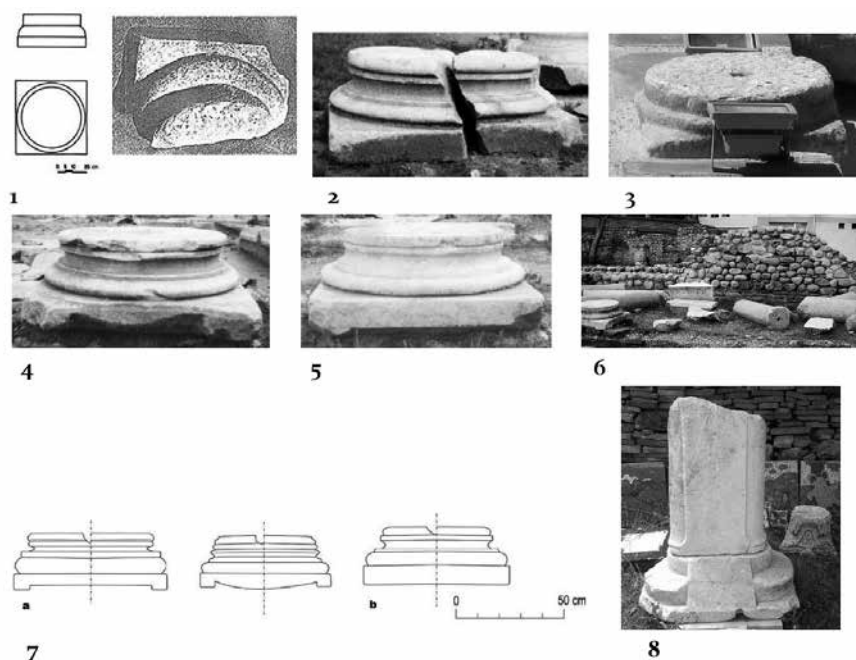
<sup>20</sup> The complex in which it is housed continues to be called by its researchers 'Public Building I'. The building was originally determined as a church. In 2019, the church was specified as an oratory. See: М. Ваклинова, Ц. Комитова, Античен и средновековен град Никополис ад Нестум, с. Гърмен, Благоевградска област. – *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2012 г.*, София 2013, 312-313, обр. 1-3; The same, Античен и средновековен град Никополис ад Нестум, Сграда I. – *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2019 г.*, София 2020, 755.

<sup>21</sup> М. Ваклинова, Ц. Комитова, Сграда I в античния и средновековен град Никополис ад Нестум, с. Гърмен, област Благоевград. – *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2016 г.*, София 2017, 516.

<sup>22</sup> М. Ваклинова, Ц. Комитова, *Op.cit.*, 2017, 517.

<sup>23</sup> Ваклинова, Комитова, *Op.cit.*, 2020, 755.





Pl. IV. 1. Roman-Dorian capital, Nicopolis, basilica 2 (according to V. Popova, 2011); 2 – 5. Parthiopolis, Episcopal basilica. Attic-Ionian bases on a flat plinth and on a plinth on legs (photo S. Petrova); onic bases (photo S. Petrova); 7 a-b. Attic-Ionian bases, variant ‘a’ and variant ‘b’ ; 8. Bifor base and column above it. Parthiopolis, Episcopal basilica (photo S. Petrova)

and decoration to the small chancel screen slab of the basilica at Oresche<sup>24</sup>, clearly shows that ‘the baptistery’ was not built neither in the 4<sup>th</sup>, nor in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries (Pl. XIII, 3, 4a, 4c). It can be seen that the embedding of the altar slab under the bench in the so-called baptistery came later and this raises the questions ‘is this an Early Christian church’ and ‘is room 13 an Early Christian baptistery’?

In our opinion, it should be defined as *Episcopaeion* (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c.); inheriting the *villa urbana* the residence of a member of the urban elite during the Principate<sup>25</sup>. This building is not a church, but a late antique house, reusing the central peristyle in a new way. It is known that in Late Antiquity in the centers of Asia Minor a new mode can be observed in the development of the peristyle houses<sup>26</sup>. Niches were built under the colonnade of the peristyle and

<sup>24</sup> See in the text for a chancel screen from Oresche.

<sup>25</sup> S. Petrova, *Nicopolis...* 2012, 324-326.

<sup>26</sup> L. Özgenel, *Between Public and Private: Re-thinking Architecture and Use in Late Antique Houses in Asia Minor*, *ABITARE NEL MEDITERRANEO TARDOANTICO*, *Atti del II Convegno Internazionale del Centro Interuniversitario di Studi sull’Edilizia abitativa tardoantica nel Mediterraneo (CISEM) (Bologna 2-5 marzo 2016)*, a cura di Isabella Baldini e Carla Sfameni, Bari (Edipuglia), 2018, 541-547; J. des Courtils&L. Cavalier, *The City of*

new premises-atriums erected additionally. That's why the so-called apse in Building I of Nicopolis can hardly be identified with the apse of a church. The west wall of the perystyle with niche is additionally built and the small niche formed for a special subject to be put it (icon?), protecting the whole house. The pithuses have no place, if room 13 was a baptisterium. Instead, we can suppose that the troughs and the pithuses maybe were brought here and reused with another purpose than baptism, for instance dyeing or washing some products. Initially they could be used because of the text of psalm 28 in some church or basilica intra or extra muros of the city. Also the inscription can play the role of a blessing in everyday life and in working activity.

*The Early Christian Architectural Decoration  
in Parthicopolis and Nicopolis ad Nestum*

This decoration is characteristic with its richness and diverseness. Here there are found bases, columns, capitals, elements of chancel screens and of an ambo. The found details<sup>27</sup> give the possibility of making its typology in correlation of its functions. The order of investigation follows its place in the architectural order: from its carrying part, to the chancel screens and ambo, formed in the architectural-decorative aspect.

*Bases and Columns*

**In Parthicopolis:** The **bases** are intended for monolytic and carved in the Roman period free standing columns. They reveal stylistic and chronological peculiarities. Most of them are reused with the same function in the colonnades of basilicas NoNo 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7, in the colonnade of the atrium of basilicas NoNo 1 and 4, in the colonnade of the main / the processional street, and the colonnade of the semicircular piazza<sup>28</sup>. They are carved of local marble and belong to the type of the Roman Attic-Ionian bases. They represent two basic types:

1. *With a plinthus, two toruses, trochilos and three listels (leaflets) that separate the toruses from the trochilos.* There are two variants. The first one represents an even plinthus (**Pl. IV, 2 and 7b**), and the second - with a plinth on legs up to 5 cm high (**Pl. IV, 4-6 and 7a**). Largest number of bases with plinthus on legs; have been found in the colonnades of the Episcopal basilica where they prevail. The bases with plinthus on legs are typical for the period of

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Xanthos from Archaic to Byzantine Times. – *Urbanism in Western Asia Minor: New Studies on Aphrodisias, Ephesus, Hierapolis, Pergamon, Perge and Xanthos*, (ed.) D. Parrish, (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 45), Portsmouth, 148-171.

<sup>27</sup> During the survey in 1978/79, part of the architectural decoration from the basilica No. 1 and 2 (Nicopolis) was taken to the schoolyard in the village of Garmen, from where it was later stolen. Therefore, for many of them there is no illustrative material, and for some details the available material is not of good quality.

<sup>28</sup> S. Petrova, *The semicircular...* 2018, 103-120. For bases, columns and capitals reused in the Early Christian era and their parallels see: S. Petrova, *The Roman ...* 2017, 141-145.

Hadrian mainly in the provinces of Asia Minor. In the Bulgarian historiography such bases are not published so far, but they are known from the province of Macedonia and in the centers of Asia Minor<sup>29</sup>.

**2. Reduced Attic-Ionian bases.** There are lacking elements from the classic Attic-Ionian base, and the plinthus is always even (**PI. IV, 3**). There can be distinguished two variants: The first one has a square plinthus, torus, listel and trochilos. The second one is higher or equal to the first listel, simplified and has only a square plinthus, with a torus and listel, related chronologically to 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century. Analogies can be found in some clearly defied architectural complexes, mainly in the close or far situated sites of Macedonia (Philippi and Stobi), of Thrace (in Philippopolis, Serdica and Pautalia), and of Moesia Inferior (in Nicopolis ad Istrum, Ulpia Oescus, Marcianopolis, Odessus, etc.<sup>30</sup>)

**The columns** are monolithic and with a plain body<sup>31</sup>. They are found in the Early Christian complexes and in basilicas NoNo 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 (**PI. IV, 6; PI. V, 1-3**). They are made of grey-white coarse-grained marble or granite. The height of the marble columns varies from 3.60 m up to 2.97-2.60 m; while these from granite is from 3.60 m up to 2.30 m. The lower diameter varies from 0.52 m up to 0.46 m, and the upper one – from 0.41 up to 0.36 m. The athesis (αφεσις) and apothesis (apophigus in Vitruvius) have different profile and are often noncanonical. The columns of the Principate have profiled apothesis and athesis. The columns from the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century are carved especially for the Early Christian buildings. They possess apothesis and athesis, and high even and plain listels. The double columns (bifores, in Greek Αμφικίονας) also have listels for apothesis and athesis. Its bases are placed on even plinthus with schematically formed torus. The bifore columns belong to the windows of the Early Christian basilicas and to the baptisterium. They represent a double column with ellipse form evened from both (inner) sides (**PI. IV, 8**). They support mainly Dorian impost capitals<sup>32</sup>.

In **Nicopolis** only one marble 'base' is unearthed in basilica No 2. It belongs to type 'I' of the Roman Dorian capitals from the second half- end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, reused as a base (**PI. IV, 1**). Its relatively large size points that it descends from a representative public building. It is considered that this type has

<sup>29</sup> So far, only one fragment of a base found at the Forum of Heraclea Syntica is known to us (author's observations). See also: S. Petrova, *The Roman ...* 2017, 141 ff.

<sup>30</sup> S. Petrova, *The Roman ...* 2017, 141-145 and cit.lit.

<sup>31</sup> For more details and parallels, see: S. Petrova, *The Roman ...* 2017, 145-147.

<sup>32</sup> In the Bulgarian scientific literature, there is no study of this type of columns so far, although they are often found in the ruins of early Christian basilicas. See: E. Μηλίτση-Κεχαγιά, *Παλαιοχριστιανική Γλυπτική Κω: συμβολή στη μελέτη της αρχιτεκτονικής γλυπτικής στην Κω κατά την παλαιοχριστιανική περίοδο (4ος -7ος αι.)*, Διδακτορική Διατριβή, Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, 2008, 206; Α. Ορλάνδος, *Τα Γλυκά Δομής των Αρχαίων Ελλήνων*, Τόμος Β', Αθήνα 1960, 426-427; Μ. Σκλάβου-Μαυροειδή, *Γλυπτά του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών*, Αθήνα, Έκδοση του ταμείου αρχ. Πόρων και απαλλοτριώσεων, 1999, 66; Χ. Μπούρας, *Κατάλογος αρχιτεκτονικών μελών του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου, άλλοτε στις αποθήκες του Εθνικού Αρχαιολογικού Μουσείου*, Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 13(1985-1986), 65; *Salona I., Sculpture Architectural. Recherches Archaeologiques Franco-Croates* (Dirigees par N. Duval et E. Marin), Rome, Split, 1994, Pl. VIII.



1



2

3

Pl. V. 1-3. Parthicopolis. Episcopal Basilica, atrium colonnade. Roman-Dorian capitals  
(photo S. Petrova)

been in continuous usage in the Roman period under the influence of the classical Greek architecture in the province of Thrace (in Hissar/Diocletianopolis, Plovdiv and the Rhodopes)<sup>33</sup>.

From the found columns in Nicopolis none is completely preserved, but one fragment shows that the lower diameter is 46 cm. This means that the height of the column is very impressive, at least between 4 and 4.15 m<sup>34</sup>. Due to the colour and texture of the marble, all the large and small columns found in ba-

<sup>33</sup> С. Петрова, Типология и особености на римско-дорийския капител в Мизия и в Тракия. – *Археология*, 3, 1990, с. 8–16 and cit.lit.

<sup>34</sup> The required height of the column in the Corinthian order is 9 times the diameter, and in the Ionic order 8-9 times and more.

silica No 1 are believed to be imported<sup>35</sup>. The rest of the columns found in the basilicas of the city area are made of marble, which is associated with the local quarries. The bases and columns were free-standing.

### Capitals

Parthiopolis shows a preferential reuse of capitals from the Principate: in Doric, Ionic and Corinthian order, impost capitals in Doric and Ionic order<sup>36</sup>. In Nicopolis, capitals from the early Christian era predominate. The capitals discovered in the two cities are examined here according to their order and chronological sequence.

### The Roman-Dorian Capitals

From *Nicopolis ad Nestum* capitals of this order, with the exception of the capital reused for the „base“ in Basilica No 2, have not been found so far<sup>37</sup>. At Parthiopolis they were found in situ reused in the colonnade of the atrium and in Room 1 of Basilica No 4, Episcopal. The capitals have an elongated neck decorated with flutes: *type II, variant 'A'* and *variant 'B'*<sup>38</sup>. Some of the capitals have intricately profiled abacus (**PI. V-2**). The capitals of this variant are associated with Hellenistic examples of Asia Minor and Attic architecture. They mark the way of their penetration into the city – through the Asia Minor masters-immigrants, possibly also through veterans<sup>39</sup> who helped ‘Roman import’ of models of architectural decoration. Two of the capitals from the colonnade of the atrium present Type II, Variant ‘B’: with non-projecting fluted tongues (**PI. V-3**). The option is simplified and exists simultaneously with option „A“. Capitals from variant „B“ were also found in the ancient settlement close to Parthiopolis near the town of Melnik, identified with the ancient Garescos<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> В. Попова, *Op.cit.*, 2011, 288-289.

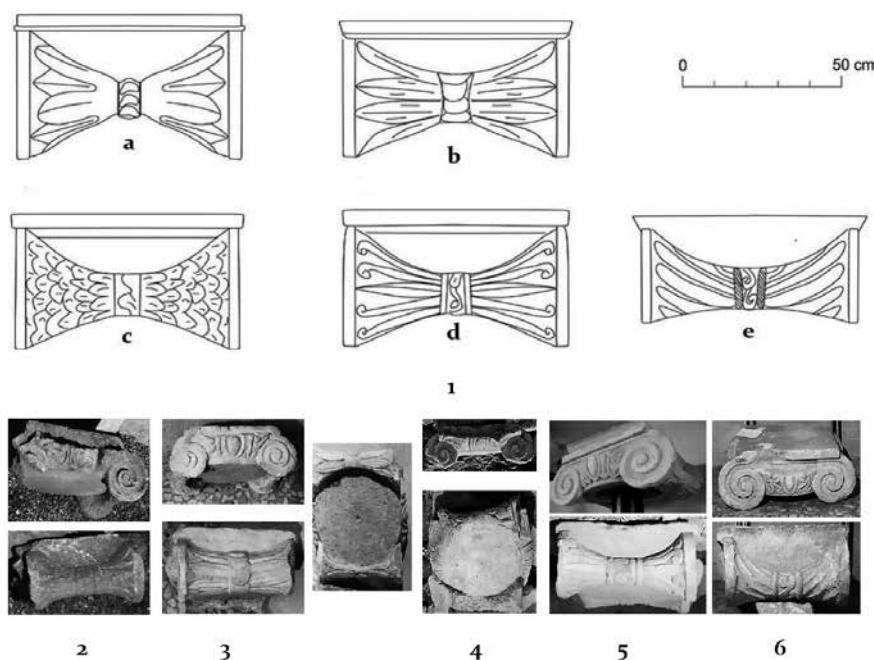
<sup>36</sup> So far, the use of composite capitals in the architectural decoration of the city has not been established, but this does not exclude their application.

<sup>37</sup> Such were found already in the 80s of the last century during the study of the bath and its adjacent colonnade from the north. They belong to type II, variant B. Unpublished.

<sup>38</sup> Of these, 11 wholes and fragments of capitals in the Roman-Doric style have been found so far. Five of the capitals were included in the restoration of the north portico of the atrium. For the typology, see: С. Петрова, *Типология...* 1990, 8-16. The development of the type was mainly in the East, already in the Hellenistic era. For the description of the capitals and their parallels see: S. Petrova, *The roman architecture ...* 2017, 148-152 and *cit.lit.*

<sup>39</sup> М. Манов, *Селищният живот в долината на Средна Струма според античните епиграфски паметници. – Разкопки и проучвания, XXXVIII, София 2008, 105 and cit. lit.*; S. Petrova, *Unique Roman Corinthian Capital from the ‘Quarries of Trajan’ Near Parthiopolis. – Folia Archaeologica Balcanica IV, Skorje, 2018, 257-269*; В. Герасимова-Томова, *Паметник на преторианец от района на Средна Струма. – МПК, 1973, 4, 9-11*; С. Петрова, В. Герасимова, *Осуарият на Клеопатра. – Нумизматика, сфрагистика и епиграфика, 2008, 4, 191-196.*

<sup>40</sup> В. Нешева, *Мелник. Богозиданият град. София 2008, 21, 37 ff.*



Pl. VI. 1 a – e. Roman-Ionian capitals. Types of decoration on the *pulvinus*. Parthicopolis, basilica No. 1 (according to S. Petrova); 2 - 6. Roman-Ionian capitals from Basilica No. 1, Parthicopolis (photo S. Petrova)

They are also common in the province of Thrace (colonnade on the north side of the baths in Nicopolis of Mesta<sup>41</sup>), under the influence of the Greek and Asia Minor ateliers.

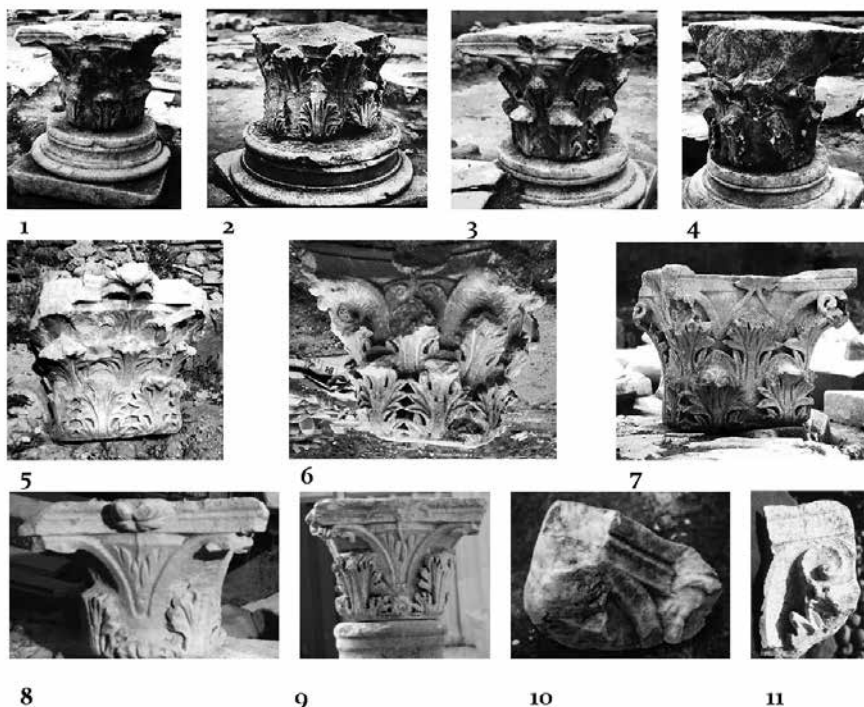
#### *Roman-Ionian capitals*

There are no promulgated capitals of this order from *Nicopolis*<sup>42</sup>. At *Parthicopolis* they were found in Basilicas Nos. 1 and 4 (Pl. VI). In terms of composition and decorative scheme, they belong to regular Roman-Ionian capitals. They have an echinus decorated with an Ionic cyme, flanked on either side by a differently represented palmette. The curled volutes end in a round eye. The face (echinus) of the capitals is a separate group<sup>43</sup>. The articulation of the *pulvinus* of the capitals is varied: *classical* (Pl. VI, 1 d-e; 5, 6), with *balteus*

<sup>41</sup> Capitals are unpublished.

<sup>42</sup> According to the author's personal observations, several unpublished capitals were discovered in Villa Urbana, later Episkopaeion.

<sup>43</sup> For the terminology, classification and typology of Roman-Ionic capitals during the Roman era in the Bulgarian lands, see: С. Петрова, *Римско-ионийски капители от Мизия и Тракия* (I-IV в.). София 1996, 22 ff. On the grouping and chronology of the capitals from Parthicopolis see: S. Petrova. The roman architectonic 2017, 152-160.



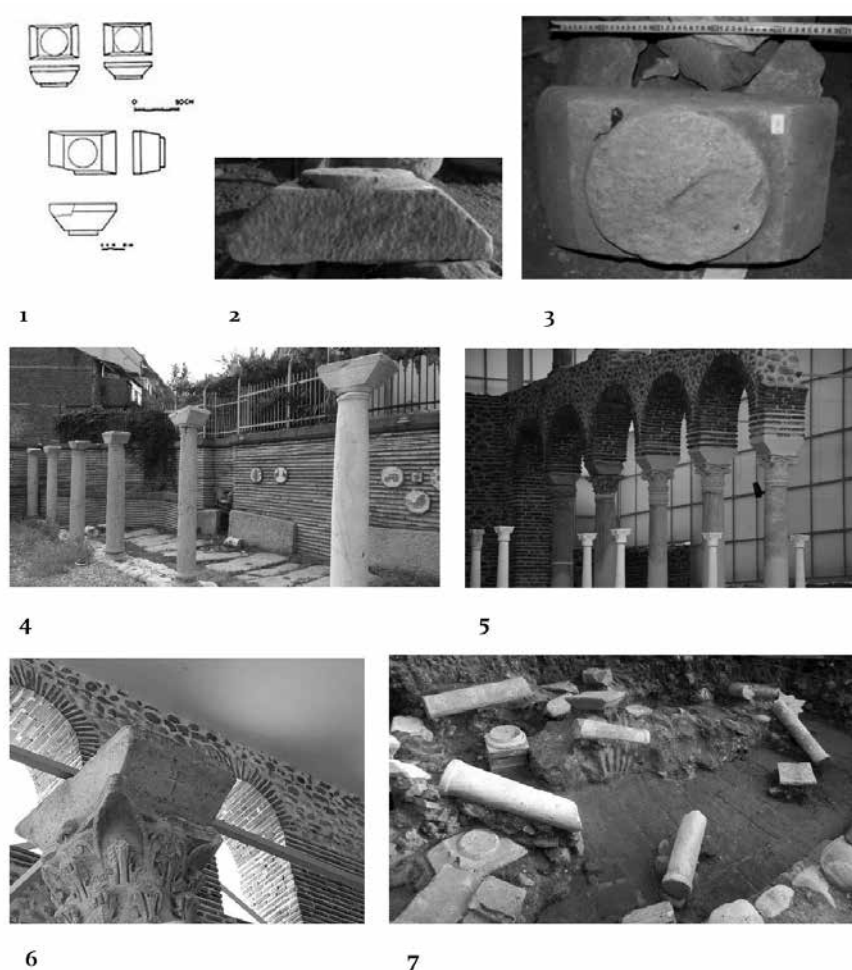
Pl. VII. 1 - 6. Roman-Corinthian capitals from the Episcopal basilica. Parthicopolis (archive of AM Sandanski); 7. Anta Roman-Corinthian capital from the Episcopal Basilica. Parthicopolis (archive of AM Sandanski); 8. Four-leaved Roman-Corinthian capital from Basilica No. 2. Parthicopolis (archive of AM Sandanski); 9. Four-leaved Roman-Corinthian capital – colonnade on the semicircular piazza. Parthicopolis (archive of AM Sandanski); 10. Nicopolis, Basilica 1. Fragment of a Roman-Corinthian capital (by V. Popova 2011); 11. Nicopolis, Basilica No. 1. Fragment of a pilaster capital (by V. Popova 2011)

(bandage) with borders<sup>44</sup>, and Roman – in place of the *balteus*, various decorative motifs are depicted<sup>45</sup> (Pl. VI, 2-4). According to the decoration of the *pulvinus*, the Roman-Ionian capitals have horizontally placed leaves in two layers (Pl. VI, 1a, 2) – type I; with horizontally placed leaves with a central vein and *pulvinus* division of the Roman variant – type III (Pl. VI, 1b, 3). A capital of type IV (Pl. VI, 1c, 4) was discovered from the colonnade on the second floor of the Episcopal Basilica, with a decoration on the *pulvinus* of horizontally placed leaves (scales). With a decoration on the *pulvinus* of an anthemion presented horizontally on both sides of the *balteus*, type V<sup>46</sup> is a capital from Basilica No 1 (Pl. VI, 1d, 5). The *balteus* is bordered and decorated with an S-shaped orna-

<sup>44</sup> A variant 1 according to C. Петрова, 1996, 22 ff.

<sup>45</sup> A variant 3 according to C. Петрова, 1996, 22 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Typology of C. Петрова, *Op. cit.*, 1996.

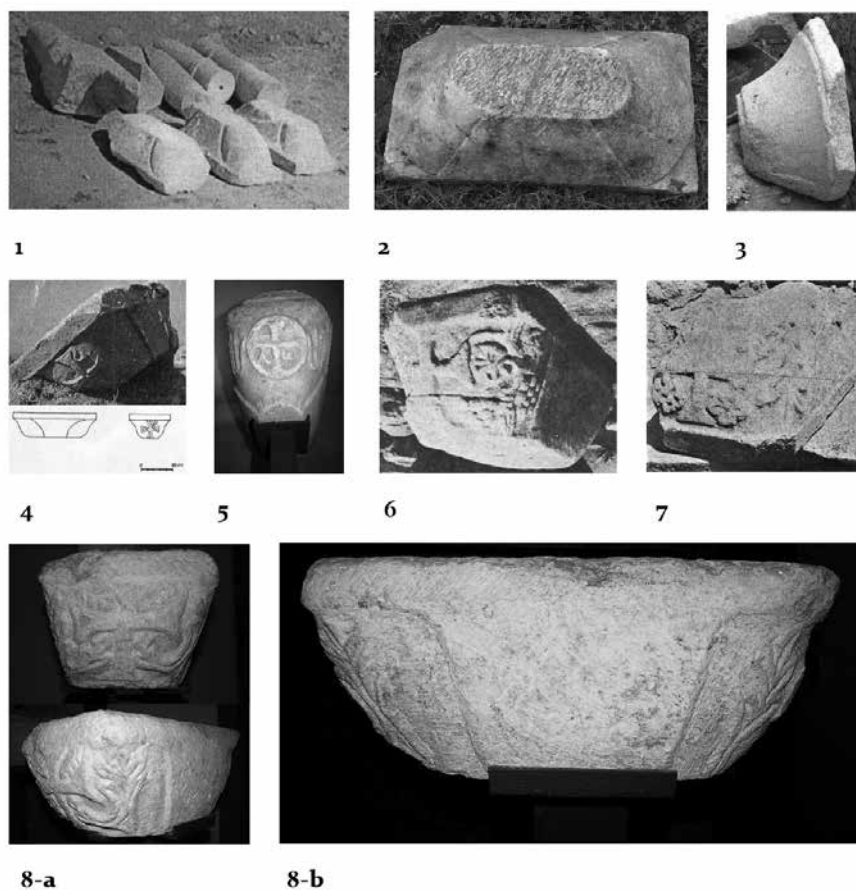


Pl. VIII. 1. Nicopolis, Basilica No. 2. Pyramidal capitals with a short neck (according to V. Popova 2011); 2 – 4. Parthicopolis. Basilica No 1 and *Via Sacra*. Pyramidal capitals with a short neck (photo S. Petrova); 5 – 6. Parthicopolis, Episcopal Basilica, pyramidal capitals with a flat base (photo S. Petrova); 7. Parthicopolis. Semicircular piazza, pyramidal capitals of both types. (archive of AM Sandanski)

ment. In Basilica 1, a capital with a rare fluting decoration on the *pulvinus* (type X), unknown so far from the other Balkan provinces, was also found (Pl. VI, 1e, 6). The compositional schemes of the capitals, the echinus and the decoration on the *pulvinus* are associated with the Asia Minor masters; in the manner of the Proconessos and Thasos ateliers, which developed their activities also under the influence of the Eastern schools. They show production in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, under the influence of models from Asia Minor<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> See S. Petrova, *The roman architectonic...* 2017, 150 ff. and cit.lit.





Pl. IX. 1. Nicopolis. Dorian impost capitals (M. Vaklinova, 1984); 2 - 3. Parthicopolis, Episcopal Basilica. Dorian impost capitals (photo S. Petrova); 4. Nicopolis. Dorian impost capital with staurogram (M. Vaklinova, 1984); 5. Basilica in Old Debreň. Dorian impost capital with chrisim inscribed in a triumphal wreath (photo S. Petrova); 6. Basilica in Old Debreň. Dorian impost capital with a cross, twigs, leaves and grapes (after M. Vaklinova, 1984); 7. Basilica in Old Debreň. Dorian impost capital with a cross, stylized leaves and rosettes (after M. Vaklinova, 1984); 8 a, b. Basilica in Old Debreň. Dorian impost capital with a cross, stylized oak and acanthus leaves (photo S. Petrova)

#### *Roman-Corinthian capitals*

They were found reused in Basilicas 2, 4 and 7 at Parthicopolis and in Basilica No 1 at Nicopolis. In *Parthicopolis* the amount of capitals used as *spoliae* is considerable<sup>48</sup>. From the Episcopal Basilica, six columns and an anta capital have been found, as well as numerous fragments. Several four leaves Roman-Corinthian column capitals were found in Basilica No 2 and one in

<sup>48</sup> The capitals have been published and analyzed, see: S. Petrova. The roman architectural ... 2017, 160-171 and cit.lit. and the indicated parallels.

Basilica No 7; from the outer colonnade of the semicircular square. The capitals are made of local marble, in local workshops, which worked under the influence of different stonemasonry schools – Pergamon-Ephesian and Aphrodisian. They are dated between the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> and the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. They are of **two types**: 1. *Capitals with incomplete apparatus*; 2. *Four-leaves capitals*.

According to the representation of the acanthus leaf, the capitals belong either to the normal/canonical type, or to the Asia Minor Corinthian capital<sup>49</sup>. Four capitals from the Cathedral basilica refer to the canonical Corinthian ones (**Pl. VII, 1-4**). The capitals have two rows with acanthus leafs with five palms, with four or five cutouts in the palms, with three cutouts in the palms at the capital's base. For the *Asia Minor type of the Corinthian capital* is characteristic the sharp acanthus divided into five palms, with longer and more narrow with sharp cutouts with sharp edges (**Pl. VII, 5-7**). They illustrate the influence of the traditional Hellenistic form<sup>50</sup>. The closest parallels can be found in the production of the Eastern stonecutting workshops, namely the Pergamon-Ephesian one. Their decorative scheme has been established in the practice of the workshops from the Flavians up to the Severans (up to 30-s of third century). Two of the capitals are forming a 'tear' at the place of touching, typical for the examples from the end of first century (**Pl. VII, 1-2**). Other four normal Corinthian capitals should be defined as made in the last decade of first up to the middle of second century. The anta capital is analogical to the capital from Philippopolis<sup>51</sup>, dated in the last quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, connected with the Pergamon-Ephesian school (**Pl. VII, 7**).

The *four-leaf Roman-Corinthian capitals* are spoliae taken from basilica Nos 2 and 7, and from the outer colonnade of the semicircular piazza (**Pl. VII, 8-9**). The production of such capitals has begun in Late Hadrianic period and is total at the Severans (end of second – beginning of third century). Both schools, the Pergamon-Ephesian one and the Aphrodisian one, are represented in Parthicopolis.

In basilica No 1 of *Nicopolis ad Nestum* are found fragments of Corinthian capitals and of pilaster capital, in unclear context<sup>52</sup> (**Pl. VII, 10-11**). Preserved is a part of the abacus, the volute and the stem of the abacus flower. The marble is white, with small-grained structure, with a precise carving by a qualified

<sup>49</sup> E. Weigand, *Vorgeschichte des Korinthischen Kapitells*, Würzburg 1920, 5 sqq; E. Weigand, Baalbek und Rom. Die Römische Reichskunst in ihrer Entwicklung und Differenzierung. – In: *Jahrbuch DAI* 29, 1914, 37-91; F. D. Heilmayer, *Korinthische Normalkapitelle. Studien zur geschichte der römischen Architekturdekoration*. Heidelberg, 1970, 12-13; С. Н. Бобчев, Римско-коринтски капители от Югозападна и Северна България и мястото им в развитието на римскокоринтския капител, *Известия на Археологическия Институт*, 1970; P. Pensabene, Scavi di Ostia. I capitelli. VII, Roma 1973, 201 sqq; H. v. Hesberg, Lo sviluppo dell'ordine corinzio in eta tardorepublicana. – In: *L'art decoratif a Rome. Ecole Francaise de Rome*, 55, 1981, 35, fig. 2; 43, fig. 20; 41-42, fig. 14, 17; M<sup>a</sup> G. Behemerid, Sobre la sistematizacion del capitel corintio en la peninsula Iberica, *BSAA*, XLVIII, 1982, 25 sqq.

<sup>50</sup> P. Pensabene. Scavi di Ostia, VII, 1973, № 347, 256, 361, 364

<sup>51</sup> С. Петрова, Антонови римско-коринтски капители от Мизия и Тракия. – *Археология* 2-3, 1996, 45-52.

<sup>52</sup> В. Попова, Две ... 2011, 285.

master, well known with the compositional scheme during the Principate. This type of abacus and its flower are typical for the period of the Late Antonines – the Early Severs, with parallels from all the Roman Empire. The fragment of a pilaster capital belongs to type III, with ‘lyre form’. It is carved of white small-grained marble with dense structure. In the composition it can find closest parallels in the pilaster capitals of villa Armira, Augusta Traiana, Serdica and Philippopolis<sup>53</sup> from the first half of second century.

#### *The capitals from the Early Christian period*

The design of the capitals from the architectural decoration of early Christian basilicas differs substantially in form and decoration from those of the Principate. The only few in number published capitals from the territory of Bulgaria, related to the period between the Tetrarchy and sixth century do not allow the creation of a detailed typology and classification. These capitals have been described in the Bulgarian scientific literature as ‘imposts’ or ‘kämpfer’ capitals<sup>54</sup>. Sometimes both terms are used in the publications: impost for the pyramidal or Dorian impost capital, and ‘kämpfer’ for the impost with volutes, which is not correct. The genesis of the ‘kämpfer’ capital is in the Ionian capital therefore it should be defined as an Ionian impost and shows the amalgamation of the pyramidal impost capital with the elements of the Roman-Ionian. Ionian and pyramidal imposts are usually applied to freestanding columns. They are visible from all four sides.

#### *The Pyramidal Imposts*

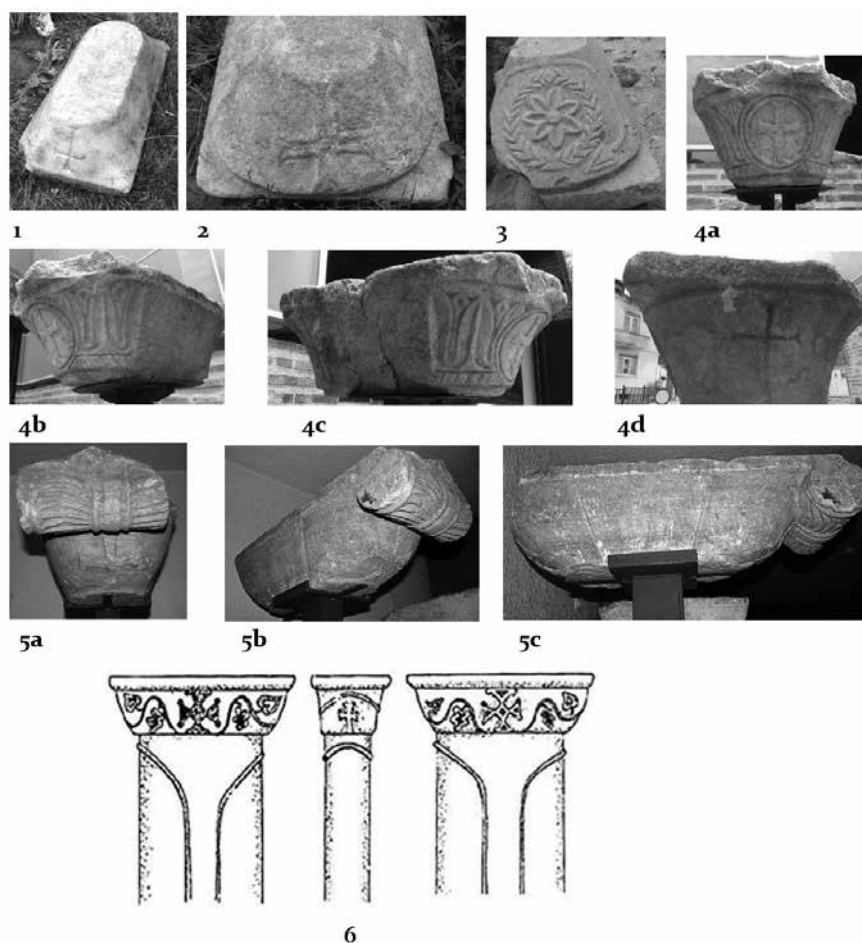
The pyramidal imposts have a provisional abacus with form of a turned down crossed truncated pyramid. They are used in the column-arcade system of the Early Christian architecture of fourth century. There are two variants: with a thin listel-neck, through which is realizing the transition from column to capital (variant 1); with on even base (variant 2). The pyramidal capitals with even base have been placed on reused Roman Corinthian capitals (Parthicopolis). Their narrow visible sides are plain or with decoration. Both variants were used simultaneously in the period – in the 4<sup>th</sup> and the first half of 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Capitals of both variants have been found at **Parthicopolis**. The pyramidal imposts of variant 1 are first used in the earliest basilica No 1 and its atrium, in the colonnade of the Late Antique main (processional) street, or *via sacra* in the outer colonnade of the semicircular piazza<sup>55</sup> (**Pl. VIII, 2-4, 7**).

<sup>53</sup> С. Петрова, *Капителът ...*, 1988.

<sup>54</sup> Impost: *incumbo* (лат.), *imposto* (итал.). In the Roman architecture it is part of the entablature. It appears independently in the Early Christian/Early Byzantine architecture as a truncated pyramid – an impost capital. It is also applied on other capitals as the base of an arch in a colonnade or on double (biforous) columns when forming the sides of the window frames, also arched, as well as on free-standing columns.

<sup>55</sup> In the colonnades of the semicircular piazza, both versions of the pyramidal impost are applied. In the inner colonnade, which is tangent to the eastern wall of the atrium,

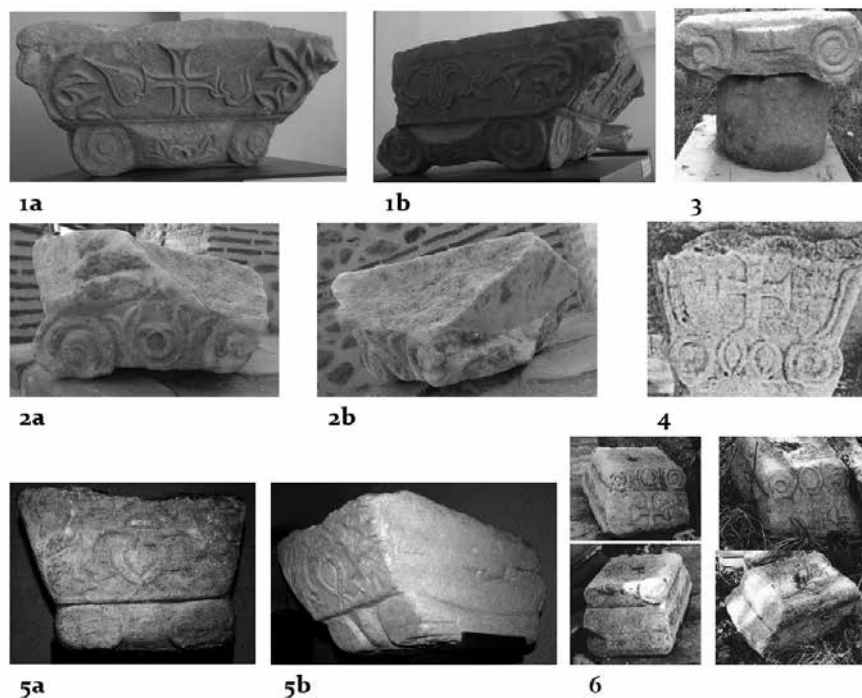


Pl. X. 1 – 4. Parthicopolis, Episcopal basilica. Dorian impost capitals with decoration with crosses, wreaths, leaves (photo S. Petrova); 5. Dorian impost capital decorated with cross and Ionian *pulvillus*. Old Debren basilica (photo S. Petrova); 6. Mosomishte. Dorian impost capital with decoration on the short and long sides (according to S. Paskova, I. Valchev)

The pyradimal capitals on even base (variant 2) are placed on the Roman-Corinthian capitals of the colonnade of basilica No 4 (the Cathedral one), and in the outer colonnade of the semicircular piazza (Pl. VIII, 5-7). The imposts in basilica No 4 reveal that they were a special order. The marble is identical to the marble from the colonnettes of the chancel screens from the first building period of the altar barrier<sup>56</sup>. In the center, on top of one narrow trapezoidal side,

pyradimal imposts of variant 1 are applied independently, and in the outer colonnade – on reused four-leaf Roman-Corinthian capitals – pyradimal impost capitals of variant 2.

<sup>56</sup> S. Petrova, The chancel screen of the Episcopal basilica (No 4) in Parthicopolis, Bulgaria (Preliminary observations). – *Niš and Byzantium* (ed. M. Rakocija), 2020, 189-222.



Pl. XI. 1-2. Parthicopolis. Ionian impost capitals from Basilica No. 2 (photo S. Petrova); 3. Parthicopolis. Episcopal Basilica. Ionian capital with incised cross on *echinus* (photo S. Petrova); 4. Basilica in Old Debren. Ionian impost capital with a cross and *teniae* (according to M. Vaklinova, 1984); 5. Nicopolis. Ionian impost capital with chalice and peacocks (photo S. Petrova); 6. Two Ionian impost capitals with cross. The monastery 'The Holy Mother, Life-giving source', town of Gotse Delchev (photo S. Petrova)

facing the central nave is a carved Latin cross, with an elongated south shoulder and flared ends (Pl. VIII, 7), equal to the cross carved on the collonnettes of the chancel screen.

Two pyramidal capitals with a short neck (variant 1) are excavated in the colonnade of the northern aisle of basilica No 2 in *Nicopolis ad Nestum* (Pl. VIII, 1). The established differences in the size of the impost capitals suppose that the architectural-decorative sculpture of this basilica comes from several workshops, and /or from two different orders. Their usage proves that the basilica has been built in the second quarter of fourth century in the period of Emperor Constantine the Great and his direct heirs.

The usage of the pyramidal impost capitals begins in 30-s of 4<sup>th</sup> century and lasts till the first quarter-the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> century. Their narrow sides are not decorated, with the exclusion of the imposts in the colonnade of the Cathedral basilica. The second peculiarity, again registered in Parthicopolis, is the usage of both variants pyramidal imposts in one and the same structure like the semicircular piazza. The pyramidal capitals are followed by the so-called Dorian imposts, always for double (biphore, in Greek 'Αμφικίονας') columns.

*The Dorian Impost Capitals*

They serve as lateral and dividing window frames which are crowning the upper part of the double columns, the so-called biphore ones. The capitals have an elliptical shape and an echinus in the visible narrower part. The echinus of some capitals is decorated with various motifs: a plastically cut relief cross, a cross or rosette inscribed in a wreath, etc. We separate them into two groups: Doric impostes with smooth echinus and Doric impostes with decorated echinus.

- **Smooth Dorian impostes in Parthicopolis** have been found in basilicas 1 and 4 (PI. IX, 2-3). In *Nicopolis ad Nestum* they have been found in basilicas 1 and 2 (PI. IX-1).

- **The Dorian impostes with a decoration on the echinus** can be distinguished for their rich decorative motifs: cross with equal arms, with flaring ends (basilica No 1 in *Nicopolis*) staurogram or Christogram in a wreath with double delineation of cross elements made with chisel and drill (PI. IX, 4, 5). The impost capitals decorated with crosses have been found also during the partly excavated basilica in Old Debren. Here the Greek cross is plastically represented, equal-armed with widened ends and edging at the end<sup>57</sup> (PI. IX, 6-8 a-b). The Latin cross on the capitals of *Parthicopolis* is either carved or in relief (PI. X, 1-2). It is free-standing or inscribed in a circle, surrounded by straight leafs with a protruding central vein, differently from those in *Nicopolis ad Nestum* where the acanthus leaves or vine leaves are represented together with the grapes (PI. IX, 6-8). The echinus is also decorated with a wreath, with also inscribed the many leaf relief rosette, or the wreath is bound with teniae (PI. X, 3).

There is an exclusive composition on two capitals from the region of *Nicopolis*, the first one from the basilica of Old Debren, and the second one from Mosomishte. The capital from Old Debren has echinus, decorated from both sides with a plain cross with equal arms with flaring ends (PI. X, 5 a-c). Above the echinus, in the upper part of the capital, the characteristic Ionian *pulvinus* is made, only one of which is now preserved, represented transversely on the narrow side of the capital / echinus, viewed from the front. The *pulvinus*, decorated with flutes, has a *balteus* with borders. The flutes are twisted in the same way that the flutes on the columns, found in Basilica 1 at *Nicopolis ad Nestum* were twisted<sup>58</sup>. Such a model of decoration over the impost capital is not known to us and we have not discovered a parallel to it so far. We have flutes on the *pulvinus* of a Roman-Ionian capital so far only at *Parthicopolis*. Such a type is not known from the published examples of the Early Christian architecture neither in Thrace, nor in Macedonia. Therefore, we consider that

<sup>57</sup> С. Михайлов, Средновековни църкви в Родопите. – *Родопски сборник*, II, 1969, 170-172, обр. 24,25; М. Vaklinova, Ateliers de décoration architecturale au V<sup>e</sup> et VI<sup>e</sup> siècle dans la région de *Nicopolis ad Nestum* (Bulgarie). – *Actes du X<sup>e</sup> congrès International d'archéologie chrétienne*. Vol. II. Tessalonique, 1984, p. 645, fig. 3, 5, 6-в, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12. Now, some of the capitals are exposed in the Regional Historical Museum of Blagoevgrad, while others have been stolen at the end of 70s of last century.

<sup>58</sup> Now several more fragments from the twisted collonettes are kept in the Historical Museum of the town of Gotze Delchev. The data for them reveals their provenance from the basilicas in the environs of *Nicopolis ad Nestum*, quite possible from the basilica in Debren.

the capital is an artistic invention of a local stonemason who has borrowed some Roman decorative models reproduced in the second half of 4<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century.

The occasionally found in Mosomishte Dorian impost, together with a biphore column, illustrate the unknown to the moment type of decoration. It is placed fully on the echinus and the longitudinal sides of the capital, an indication that the biphore column and its adjacent impost capital were placed in a colonnade, from where the capital was visible from all four sides (Pl. X, 6). The decoration on the echinus is a Latin cross with prolonged southern arm and flared ends. In its center on the long side is carved a Greek cross with equal arms with a double profile on the edges and a convex round center of the intersection of the shoulders. A vine branch, a leaf and grapes are represented from both sides. The vine and the cross also show the symbolic load of the capital, like the rest of the images on the Doric imposts: the triumphal wreaths and the crosses associated with the symbolism of immortality and the spirit of God.

A large amount of impost capitals is found in the complex of the Episcopal (Cathedral) Basilica in *Parthicopolis* from the windows of the baptistery and the basilica. The Dorian imposts with a smooth echinus here differ in the form of the echinus from those in Nicopolis ad Nestum. In Nicopolis it is rounded, slightly protruding, while in Parthicopolis it is slightly convex, forming an elegant well polished rainbow. The decoration on the echinus of the capitals from Parthicopolis is also different from the one in Nicopolis ad Nestum. Although crosses are represented, the difference consists in their iconography and in the added motifs. For example, instead of a cross, in a wreath it is represented a multi-leaved rosette<sup>59</sup>; also leaves shown vertically, wreaths, etc. Difference is also the form of the cross: in Nicopolis it is the Greek, embossed, while in Parthicopolis it is the Latin cross. Also different is the form of the crosses: in Nicopolis the arms are of equal length and in relief, while in Parthicopolis this is the Latin cross with prolonged southern arm. There lacks the specific carving with a molded plastic center at the point where the cross lines cross, with one so far attested exception (Pl. X, 2); also the wreath with staurogram or Christogram is lacking, the grape and the vine, and the others motifs on the capitals of Nicopolis ad Nestum. Here can be established the decorative motifs typical for the Roman period: the vertical palm leaves surrounding the cross, shown in the central field of the echinus (Pl. X, 4 a-d). These motifs can be discovered on the capitals from Mainland and Island Greece in the diocese of the vicariate of Thessaloniki<sup>60</sup>. These peculiarities of the echinus' decoration

<sup>59</sup> There are found two Dorian imposts with a wreath and inscribed decoration which shows that their number was greater than that of one order, probably especially done for the baptistery of the Cathedral basilica. Their provenance is unknown.

<sup>60</sup> Β. Γραμμένος - Γ. Κνιθάκης, *Κατάλογος των αρχιτεκτονικών μελών του Μουσείου Θεσσαλονίκης*, Θεσσαλονίκη, Εταιρεία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών Μακεδονικής Βιβλιοθήκης, 1994, 87 (αρ. 207-208), πιν. 24 και σελ. (αρ. 211), πιν. 25; Ε. Μηλίτση-Κεχαγιά, *Παλαιοχριστιανική γλυπτική Κώ: συμβολή στη μελέτη της αρχιτεκτονικής γλυπτικής στην Κω κατά την παλαιοχριστιανική περίοδο (4ος -7ος αι.)*, διδακτορική διατριβή, πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών, 2008, 192, αρ. 82; Β. Συθακάκη-Κριτσιμάλλη, *Ο ανάγλυφος αρχιτεκτονικός διάκοσμος στη Θεσσαλία και Φθιώτιδα*, *Παλαιοχριστιανικά και πρώιμα μεσαιωνικά χρόνια*,

are added also by the size of the Dorian impost. In Nicopolis ad Nestum they are higher, more massive, while in Parthicopolis they are lower more narrow and very elegant, not fussy by motifs and ornaments. The best examples of the Early Christian Dorian imposts in Nicopolis ad Nestum with decoration on the echinus are the pieces from the basilica in Old Debren. Their predominant decoration consists of crosses shown in a various way. Different elements are represented in the visible field: plastically modeled cross in relief or staurogramme; cross inscribed in triumphal wreath with plastic decoration from both sides of the wreath; a cross between grapes' brunches, leaves and grapes; a cross between acanthus leaves and rosettes from its both sides (to the abacus); a cross with stylized oak leaves in the upper part and stylized acanthus leaves on both sides of the cross. All the cross representations possess flared ends of the Greek or Latin cross. The cross next to which are represented two acantus leafs with a central vein at the corner of the echinus is different from the most frequent usual Dorian impost with a more even echinus (**Pl. IX, 8 a-b**). In our opinion, this type of capital has been developed chronologically in later times, in the last quarter of 4<sup>th</sup> – middle of 5<sup>th</sup> century. It illustrates the transition to the Ionian impost, having in mind the shortening of the length of the capital almost to a square, and the change of the echinus to angle forms (see **Pl. IX, 6, 7**).

#### *The Ionian imposts*

The Ionian impost capital most frequently named by the German name for impost capital „kämpfer Kapitel“, is connected initially with the Ionian capital. It represents the synthesis between the pyramidal impost (with an equal base) and an Ionic capital located below its base. Both elements are united in one whole, creating the Ionian impost capital. At the base, the Ionian impost also has stylized volutes and echinus. This type can be observed from four sides. Because of this, sometimes there is decoration on all sides of the pyramidal part, and between the volutes – a decoration similar to the Ionian kyma, or another decorative element or cross. Very often the elements or motifs decorating the pyramidal part of the Ionian impost are also decorating the chancel screens. The Ionian imposts are made monolithically from one block – the pyramidal and volute shapes. Their base is round. And if the Dorian impost was applied mainly in windows and, so far, only in the case of Mosomishte – in open arcade structures of biphore columns, the Ionian impost was applied on free-standing round columns.

In *Parthicopolis* have been found only two Ionian impost capitals very precisely carved. The first one is of the corner type<sup>61</sup>, and the second one is of the row type<sup>62</sup>. They differ from the capitals from Nicopolis ad Nestum in

Βόλος, έκδοση ταμείο αρχαιολογικών πόρων, 2012, 514, αρ 89, πιν 38, εικ.237-238.

<sup>61</sup> Found probably in basilica No 2, the so-called ‘Bishop Ioannes’ basilica. Supposedly, there were 4 pieces, mounted on the small columns of the *ciborium* over the *Mensa sacra* in the altar space, having in mind their small dimensions.

<sup>62</sup> Also with small dimensions, probably they come from the baptistery of the Cathedral basilica, probably supporting the *ciborium* (*tegurium fontis*) over the piscine.



its form and decoration. The decorative form on the longer side of the Ionian impost copies the symbolics of 'The Tree of Life', but with richer plant ornaments. The Ionian corner impost found in basilica No 2 in Parthicopolis, has a decoration on its long and short sides of the pyramidal part, as well as on the four visible echinuses. An acanthus leaf is represented at both ends of the short pyramidal side, whose second half transfers also over the longer side. The uppermost carving of the acanthus is going out of the outlines of the truncated pyramid, turning to the outside, similarly to the acanthus from the second row of the Roman-Corinthian capitals, supporting the corner volute. The acanthus palms have three cutouts. In the middle of the short side is an equal-shouldered profiled a Greek cross with flaring ends and an omphalos in the center of the crossing of the arms of the cross. An ivy (hedera) leaf is growing out from the eastern and western arm, also with profiled ends. Below the cross, on the echinus are two oppositely presented stylized acanthus leaves with three cutouts, touching in the center of the echinus, forming a circular 'eye'. A profiled chalice on a conus-like leg is represented in the center of the long side, with two coming out directions to the outside plastically modelled stylized leaves with three cutouts. In the same way like a leaf with three cutouts (similarly to a stylized lily) is forming the mouth of the chalice.

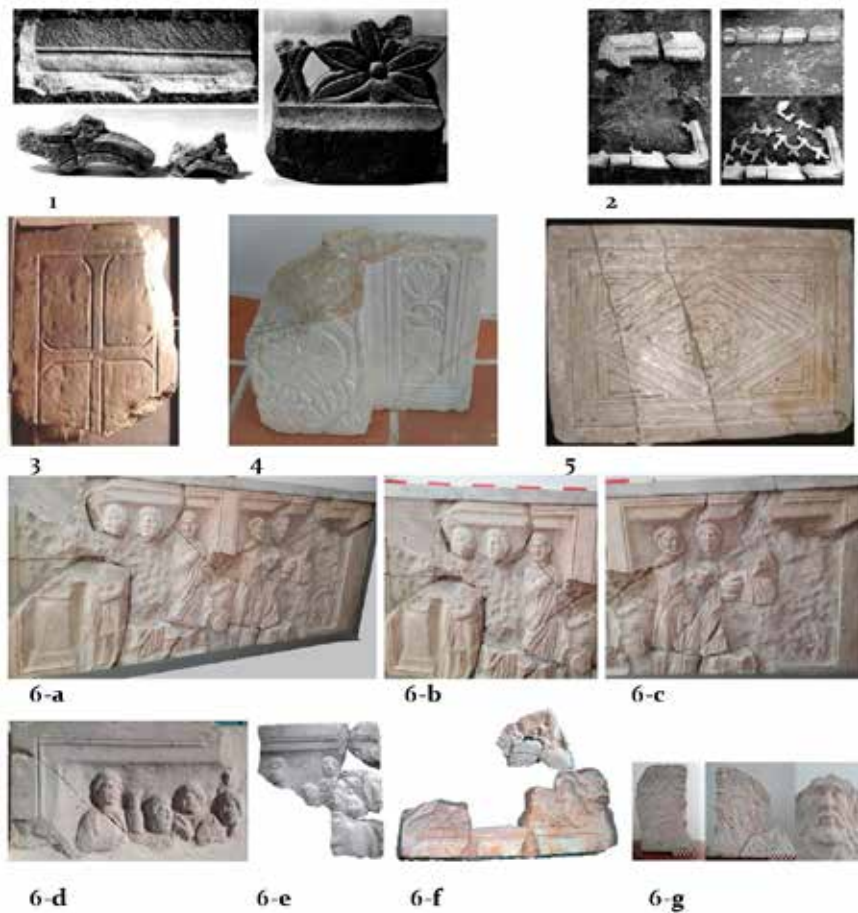
Parthicopolis is demonstrating one more peculiarity. After the reuse of the Roman-Ionian capitals in the colonnade of basilica No 1 the applying of the classical form of the Ionian capital, but with smooth *pulvinus*-es, with a carved Greek cross on the echinus (Pl. XI, 3). Such capitals have been used in the colonnade on the second floor of the Cathedral basilica and in its baptistry. The capitals is made of small-grained shining marble, very well polished, with perfectly made details, import from the Thessalian workshops, where can be found their analogies<sup>63</sup>.

The Ionian impost capitals of Nicopolis ad Nestum are part of the architectural decoration of the basilica in Old Debren, and the basilica in the locality the Small Monastery (in Bulgarian Manastircheto) named 'The Holy Mother, Life-giving source'. The decoration on the narrow side of the pyramidal part is a Latin cross with flared ends or with tenia from both sides (Pl. XI, 6, 4). One of the capitals copies the motif of the decoration, of the big plate of the altar screen from Oreshe, with peacocks and chalice between them (Pl. XI, 5 a-b). Its volutes are so schematic like the representation on the narrow side of the pyramidal impost that give the impression of a manufactured item, most probably mounted in the colonnade, but left non-finished<sup>64</sup>.

The capitals have in their base the Ionian kyma consisting of one or two ovuli, in schematically represented shells. Its volutes are turning 1.5 times around the not-well formed eye. The presented images have a symbolic meaning related to the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist - instituted by Christ at the

<sup>63</sup> X. Τσιούμη – Δ. Μπακιρτζή, *Κιονόκρανα της συλλογής της Ροτόντας Θεσσαλονίκης, Μέρος Β', Ιωνικά κιονόκρανα*, Μακεδονικά 20, 1980, 218- 220, πίν. 1-2; E. Μηλίτση- Κεχαγιά, *Παλαιοχριστιανική*. 2008; V. Vemi, *Les Chapiteaux ioniques a l' époque paleochretienne, BCH Supplement XVII*, Paris, 1989 , 117, Pl. 86, fig. 30

<sup>64</sup> See: V. Vemi, *Les Chapiteaux ioniques a l' époque paleochretienne, BCH Supplement XVII*, Paris, 1989, 178-179, 173-178, fig. 53



Pl. XII. 1. Parthicopolis, basilica No. 1. Fragments of the altar barrier (archive of AM Sandanski); 2. Nicopolis, Basilica 1, fragments of the altar barrier (according to V. Popova 2011); 3. Slab from the altar barrier of basilica No. 2, Parthicopolis (photo S. Petrova); 4. Slab from the altar barrier, together with the column. Parthicopolis (photo S. Petrova); 5. Slab from the altar barrier of basilica No. 7, Parthicopolis (photo S. Petrova); 6. Fragments of the altar barrier of the Episcopal basilica, Parthicopolis (photos A. Pültz, S. Petrova)

last supper, through the chalice. The cross in combination with other motifs represents the various ideas embedded in its image. The joining of the vine branches to the cross illustrates the „Tree of Life“, i.e. the blossoming of the cross tree and the Resurrection. All the symbolic images on the capitals are related to the doctrine of salvation and immortality through communion with Christ.

*The Altar chancel screens*

The apse with the altar, the bema with the chancel screens, the ambo and the solea, the entrances, the furniture and the decoration from the area of Middle Struma and Middle Mesta rivers are planned according to the liturgy either to Rome or of Constantinople. The most important elements among them are the apse with the chancel screens, followed by the appeared at the beginning of fifth century ambo and solea, changing the form and type of the chancel screens from low to a high one. The latter are part of the architectural decoration and the furniture of the basilica. The found parts and elements of the chancel screens in Parthicopolis and Nicopolis ad Nestum reveal both similarities and differences. The chancel screens of the Cathedral basilica (No 4) in Parthicopolis, is considered as unique for the Balkans and the Early Christian world. In both cities are used two types of chancel screens: in the fourth century a low one, replaced in the fifth century by a high chancel screen<sup>65</sup>.

Remains from such screens in *Parthicopolis* have been found in basilica Nos 1, 2, 4 and 7. The composition and decoration on the screens is different from those in Nicopolis. Basilica 1 has been found to have had a low altar partition of slabs with openwork decoration of scaly ornament and openwork rosettes. The altar barrier is with the solea. (Pl. XII, 1). The openwork screens from the first type, was also found in Nicopolis ad Nestum<sup>66</sup> (Pl. XII, 2). The second type is to be met more often also in 4<sup>th</sup> century in Athens and Ravenna<sup>67</sup>. In basilica No 2 has been found a fragment of non-profiled plate decorated from both sides in the center by a Latin cross inscribed in rectangle<sup>68</sup>. Another similar element carved monolithic with the colonnette is kept in the Archaeological museum of Sandanski, with unclear provenance (Pl. XII, 3, 4). In basilica No 7 has been found a small by size chancel screen. The profiled frame with four triangles in the corners is forming a big profiled rhombus with decoration of a wreath a rosette in the center (Pl. XII, 5). It is carved of a extremely white fine-grained and dense marble, possible import.<sup>69</sup>

The richest and unusual is the decoration of the chancel screens of the Cathedral basilica of Parthicopolis. Scenes from the Old and the New Testament

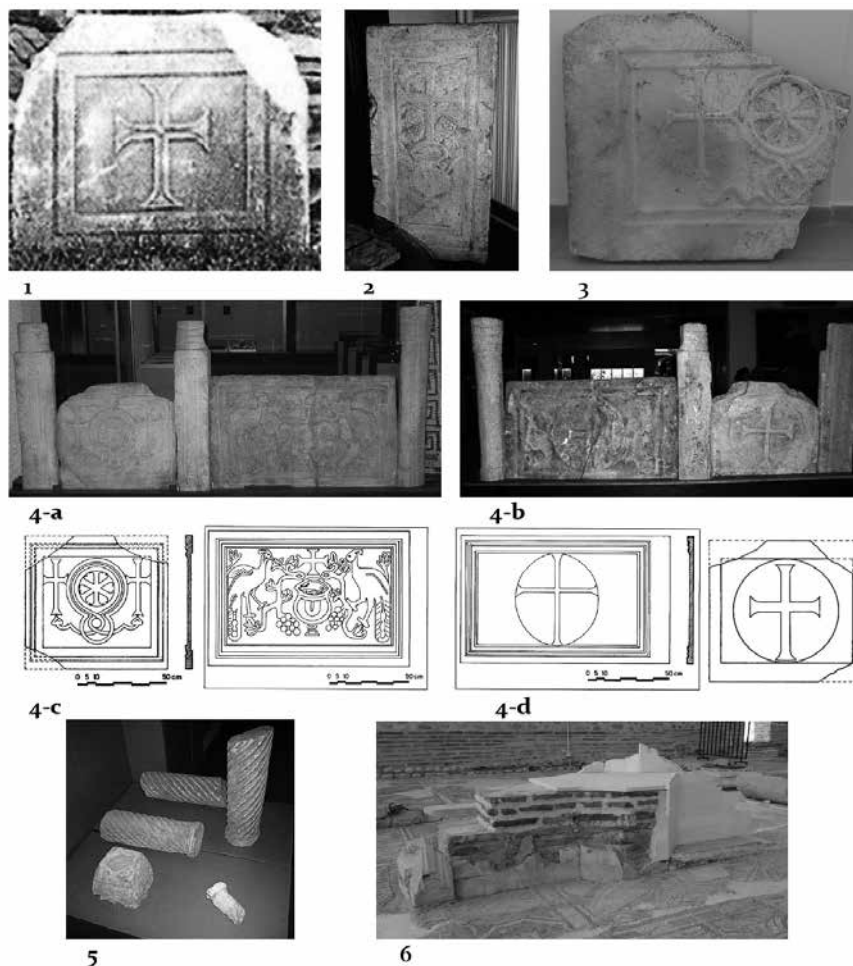
<sup>65</sup> Орландос 1994, 527 ff.; И. Досева, Конструкция и декорация..., 21 and cit.lit.

<sup>66</sup> See: В. Попова, Две .... 2011, 263-294.

<sup>67</sup> Орландос 1994, 487, Еικ. 478-6.

<sup>68</sup> With parallels from: В. Δ. Γραμμένος - Γ. Κνιθάκης, *Κατάλογος των Αρχιτεκτονικών Μελών του Μουσείου Θεσσαλονίκης, Θεσσαλονίκη*, Εταιρεία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών, 1994, 188, No 501, πιν. 64; Α. Орландос, *Η ζυλόστεγος Παλαιοχριστιανική Βασιλική της Μεσογειακής Λεκάνης*, Αθήνα, Δεύτερος τόμος, Έκδοση Βιβλιοθήκη της εν Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας, 1954, 524. For the frame and shape of the cross: Ε. Μηλίτση- Κεχαγιά, *Παλαιοχριστιανική Γλυπτική Κοω: συμβολή στη μελέτη της αρχιτεκτονικής γλυπτικής στην Κοω κατά την παλαιοχριστιανική περίοδο (4ος -7 ος αι.)*, 2008, 239 (№ 221), 55; Χ. Μπάκιρτζής, *Ανασκαφή Χριστιανικής Αμφιπόλεως, ΠΑΕ*, 1991, 217, πιν. 144 a.

<sup>69</sup> Similar marble is extracted in the deposit Solishte of the quarries at the village of Petrovo, in the territory of Parthicopolis. With parallels from: Α. Μέντζος, *Συμβολή στην έρευνα του αρχαιότερου ναού της Αγίας Σοφίας, Μακεδονικά* 21, 1981, 219, πιν. 2 β; Ε. Στίκας, *Ανασκαφή παλαιοχριστιανικών βασιλικών Αμφιπόλεως, ΠΑΕ* 1971, Amphipolis.



Pl. XIII. 1. Altar partition plate from Mosomishte (according to S. Paskova, I. Valchev);  
 2. Altar partition slab from Screbatno (photo S. Petrova); 3. Altar partition slab from  
 Nicopolis ad Nestum (photo S. Petrova) ; 4 a – d. Altar barrier, face and back. Basilica in  
 Oresche (photo S. Petrova, drawing by A. Milčeva); 5. Twisted columns. Nicopolis, basilica  
 in Old Debren (photo S. Petrova) ; 6. Parthicopolis, Episcopal basilica, ambo (photo S.  
 Petrova) ;

are represented on them.<sup>70</sup> The both existing constructions of the chancel screens

<sup>70</sup> According to A. Pülz, this author considers that the screens from First building period of the chancel are coming from sarcophagi, reused for the chancel screens. He points to the examples from Constantinople and Asia Minor from end of fourth - beginning of fifth century. See: A. Pülz, Some Considerations on the Relief Panels from the Bishop's Basilica (Basilica Nr. 4) in Sandanski, Bulgaria. – *Sandanski and its Territory during Prehistory, Antiquity and Middle Ages: Current Trend in Archaeological Research. Proceedings of an*

reveal two separate building periods situated closely chronologically. The first one (with terminus ante quem 388) represents a low and straight chancel, and the second one (erected with terminus post quem 425) is a high chancel with solea in front of it<sup>71</sup>. We can grasp from the scenes on the screens the existence of axial symmetry, which fact allows to reconstructing on the base of the analogies those scenes which have not survived and reached to us.

In the First building period, the low and even chancel has an entrance from the west. The chancel tangents to the north and south the *matroneum* and the *senatorium* of the basilica, both rooms connected with the Roman liturgy and the bishops guided by the vicarius in Thessaloniki<sup>72</sup>. The colonnades that separate the slabs of the altar partition have an incised Latin cross on their front side and end with a hemisphere in their upper part (**Pl. VIII, 6**); as well as the pyramidal capitals with Latin cross from the side of the central nave of the basilica, are sculpted by the same imported white marble, dense and small-grained. The surviving from this building period fragments demonstrate, that a screen long 2.08 m has been placed on both sides of the entrance. The left one is covered with scenes from the Old and New Testament. It is right to place the big screen namely on this place (north side of the west wall of the chancel) because of the poses and the direction of the heads, the eyes' look and the turns, gestures and movements of the bodies and of the upper and lower limbs of the participants in the scene. Two scenes are depicted on the left screen of the entrance. From the left is placed the scene from the Old Testament 'The Sacrifice of Isaaq (Genesis 22: 1-12), with the preserved representation of Abraham's body and an altar (**Pl. XII, 6 a, b, c**). On the right scene is shown a subject from the New Testament, namely the communion with bread. The preserved figures are the central one of Apostle Peter, and left to him most possibly of Apostle Paul. The representation of Christ, which should be shown at the utmost right side, is not preserved and missing. It is obviously that the main action is pointed to the right side of the screen, i.e. to Christ and the entrance to the altar. The second big screen, again divided in two panels, was placed from the right (south) side of the entrance. This scene reveals the communion with wine (**Pl. XII, 6 d, e**). Only some parts of several figures are preserved, with the gesture of orants. In this way, this scene with its axial symmetry copies the extremely popular scene of the Eucharist with wine and bread, divided in two symmetrical panels. For paral-

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*International Conference at Sandanski, September 17 – 20, 2015. Papers of the American Research Center in Sofia*, 3, Veliko Tarnovo 2017, 231-241. A. Milcheva is of the same opinion, but she but only expresses her supposition, without studying the screens themselves (А. ДимитроваМилчева. Сандански (Свети Врач). – (Р. Иванов, ред.) *Римски и ранновизантийски градове в България*, София 2002, 281-282). In the opinion of I. Dosseva the screens' provenance are also from a sarcophagus placed immediately next to the chancel screen. See: И. Досева, Паметта за мъртвите: структуриране на сакралните пространства в ранновизантийските некрополи и градове (според паметниците от територията на съвременна България). – (ред. И. Гергова, Е. Мутафов) *Герои Култове Светци*, София 2015, 37-38.

<sup>71</sup> For the building periods of the basilica, of the chancel screens, the subjects and figures represented on the screen, the type and the provenance of the marble see Petrova, The chancel ... 2020, 189-222, with lit.

<sup>72</sup> S. Petrova, The chancel ... 2020, 195 ff.

lets it should be pointed to the same symmetrical left and right compositions of the Riha paten (564-578) and Stuma; with the double Communion with bread and wine (after Age of Spirituality)<sup>73</sup>; the scenes from Codex Rossanensis<sup>74</sup>. As an analogy, and following the iconography of another similar theme on the screens, the right panel should include the image of Moses receiving the laws/tablets from God (Exodus 24:12-18).

The form and the size of the chancel screen are changed during the second building phase of the chancel. The solea is added, while the senatorium and the matroneum stopped their existence. The changes have caused the scenes to be added by new plates, in order to fill the new length and the enlarged surface of the altar space. The additional screens following the previous subjects and trying to copy the iconography and the models of scenes and figures from the First building phase of the chancel screen are already made of a different local large-grained marble with grey colour. It can be observed the preparing for the Eucharist in the Last Supper on one of the survived although fragmented panel. On the base of another one, on the base of the represented figures and following the New Testament (John 12:2), can be established the scene of the supper in the house of Simon the Leper, after the Resurrection of Lazarus (**Pl. XII-6-f**). Maria can be seen in the left lower corner of the screen after the profile, wasing with myrth the legs of Christ and drying them with her hair. At the opposite end to Maria may be depicted a servant from the house of Simon the Leper, wich should be identified with the bearded man with ring on his right hand, a sign for his higher social status. Around the stibadium, from the right to the left, one can see the preserved, to a different degree, figures of the lying to the right Simon, after that a part of the body and one of the legs of Ioannes placed on the stibadium. To the right of him Christ is represented lying on his left side, also with placed arm on the stybadium. But it is lacking the figure of serving Marta, who probably was shown behind the back of Christ. Naturally, after examining in details of all the survived fragments, may be collected together, interpreted and added also other scenes from the Old and the New Testament, represented of the I-phase and II-phase of chancel screen. The observation and comparison between the scenes, iconography and style from both periods show the difference in the structure of the second chancel, but also the desire to preserve the subjects and the manner of the representations and scenes from the first building phase of the chancel. We should also underly the artisty and significance of the face of an elder man with short beard in the preserved corner element (**Pl. XII, 6 g**) from the high chancel of the second phase period of the chancel. This face is flanked from both sides by many leaves, maybe as symbol of a forest. A lamb is also depicted to the right. This symbolic representation is often to be seen in the Early Christian / Early Byzantine art, for instance in a sarcophagus from St.

<sup>73</sup> Ed. by K. Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality...*, 1979, 611–612, no. 547 (Riha), 593, fig. 82 (Stuma).

<sup>74</sup> E. Hixson, Forty Excerpts from the Greek Old Testament in Codex Rossanensis (Rossano, Museo Diocesano, S.N.), A Sixth-Century Gospels Manuscript. – *The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 67, Iss. 2, October 2016, 507-541.

Peter's basilica in Rome, as the sacrifice of Christ. The male face depicts the image of Abraham (the sacrifice/lamb); or some prophet, for instance Isaiah, shown in some mosaics of Ravenna<sup>75</sup>.

The screens from the second period when the chancel has been reworked from a low to a high one, copying to some extent and adding to the subjects from the first phase, by leaving the two front plates from the first chancel and sculpturing the new screens installed at the side entrances of the chancel. The difference between both chancels is expressed in many things: in the grey local marble used instead of the imported white one; in the wider frames and profiles of the screens, although keeping almost the same general dimensions of the first period (longitude and height); the slight differences in some iconographies, in the style and the treatment of the representations. In the first chancel, the eyes are quite closed, with heavy upper and lower eyelids, the chins are slightly raised and the hair is arranged in equal supple deep grooves. The representations made of grey marble from the second chancel reveal their widely opened eyes, with pupils, hidden under the heavy arched eyebrows, related to the post-Theodosius' I time. The hairstyles are with uneven grooves in its depth and direction, although there is an effort of the sculptors to approximate the mastery of the iconography on the first chancel screens<sup>76</sup>.

Also two types of chancel screens are established in the basilicas of *Nicopolis ad Nestum*: low and high. The only almost entirely preserved screen is from the basilica in Oreshe, which can be reconstructed<sup>77</sup>. Few elements from the chancel have been discovered in basilica No 1 in the environs of Nicopolis, and mainly fragments are found in basilica No 2 as well<sup>78</sup> (Pl. XII, 2). The same is the situation with the basilica in Old Debren, because in the publications it is only mentioned, that the fragments of marble altar screens have been found among the numerous fragments of architectural decoration. One of the preserved screens has plant decoration<sup>79</sup>. This screen or similar has been reused as a pavement in one of the village fountains (according the photo in the article) indicating that these screens were dense. Two similar plates are coming from the villages of Mosomishte and Screbatno, and a third one is found in so-called Building 1 in Nicopolis ad Nestum itself (Pl. XIII, 1-3).

Small colonnettes dividing the chancel screens have been excavated in basilica No 1 in the environs of Nicopolis and in the basilica of Oreshe. The crowing parts with spherical form are found in basilica No 2 in Garmen and in the basilica of Old Debren. They point to the existence of a chancel of the low

<sup>75</sup> J. Dresken-Weiland, *Mosaics of Ravenna: Image and Meaning*, Schnell & Steiner 2017.

<sup>76</sup> The reliefs of these transennas are studied in details and analyzed, see S. Petrova, *The chancel screen ...*, 2020, 189-222.

<sup>77</sup> A. Milčeva, Eine frühchristliche Basilika aus dem Dorf Oreše im Gebiet von Nikopolis ad Nestum (Westrhodopen, Bulgarien). – (R. Harreiter et al., eds.). *Acta XIV Congressus internationalis archaeologiae christianae (Wien 19-26.9.1999)*, I. *Cita del Vaticano* – Wien, 2006, S. 527–535, Taf. 186–189.

<sup>78</sup> В. Попова, Две .... 2011, 270 ff.

<sup>79</sup> С. Михайлов, Средновековни църкви в Родопите. – *Родопски сборник*, II, 1969, 171.

type, similar to the ones in Macedonia and Greece<sup>80</sup>. But small collonnettes belonging to a high chancel have been discovered in basilica No 1 in the environs of Nicopolis and in the basilica of Oreshe<sup>81</sup>.

**The low chancel screens** mounted on plinthus consist of plates, separated by small columns, with a height almost of the screen. This type is represented by the fragments of basilica No 2 in the village of Garmen, and by the fragments from the basilica in Debren. Three types of screens can be distinguished in the screens from basilica No 2 in the village of Garmen<sup>82</sup>: two of them are openwork while the third one is a dense plate. The frames of the first two plates are profiled, in one case the openwork decoration begins with dense initial parts and in the second one the openwork made scales begin immediately from the frame (**Pl. XII, 2**). This kind of decoration on all the found fragments of screens reveals the fish scale, the earliest decorative scheme in the area<sup>83</sup>. It is established that this scheme was widely spread in the Early Christian world in 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century, and the early variant is openwork, while in the later the scales are shown in reliefs on a dense plate<sup>84</sup>. Similar decoration of a plate with openwork made fish scales, also without profiled frame, but with a Christogram in the panel's center is made in Marcianopolis<sup>85</sup> and in the basilica of St. Ambrosius in Milan<sup>86</sup> built in 4<sup>th</sup> century. The fragments demonstrate two-side modeled openwork decoration of scales on the façade and on the interior side. Similar plates are found in the basilicas of the neighbouring Greece – on the island of Thassos, and in Olympia, in Afenteli, and on the island of Lesbos<sup>87</sup>. The profiled frame of the dense plates from basilica No 2 in the village of Garmen has a classical structure of the plain field with Greek cross<sup>88</sup>. The cross as decoration

<sup>80</sup> В. Попова, Две раннохристиянски ... 2011, 271. С. Петрова, Архитектурната украса ..., 2017, 239-243; В. Лилчиќ, Македонскиот камен за боговите, христијаните и за живот по животот. Античка камена архитектонска пластика во Република Македонија, т. II. Доцна антика, Скопје 2002, с. 1035, VII: 114; Орланџос 1994, 526, Еќ. 490, 491.

<sup>81</sup> С. Петрова, Архитектурната украса ... 2017, 205-224.

<sup>82</sup> В. Попова, Две раннохристиянски ..., 2011, 271.

<sup>83</sup> И. Досева, Конструкција и декорација на ранновизантијските олтарни прегради в контекста на църковния интериор (според паметниците от територията на съвременна България през IV–VI в.). – *Проблеми на изкуството*, 3, 2005, 22.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Ορλανџос, *Op.cit.* 1994, 515–527; J-P. Sodini, La sculpture Architecturale a l’Epoque Paleichristienne an Illiricum. – *Actes du X<sup>e</sup> Congres international d’Archeologie chretienne*, Thessalonique – Cità de Vaticano, 1984, 85.

<sup>85</sup> И. Досева, Конструкција ..., 2005, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Орланџос, *Op.cit.*, 1994, 514, Еќ. 475-2.

<sup>87</sup> Орланџос, *Op.cit.*, 1994, 515, Еќ. 476-β; 526–527, Еќ. 491, 492.

<sup>88</sup> В. Попова, Две ..., 2011, 271, обр. 6-1.



can be observed also in the chancel screens of the basilica in Oreshe<sup>89</sup>, in the scene from Mosomishte<sup>90</sup>, and from other sites in Nicopolis ad Nestum, found occasionally, and now lost<sup>91</sup>.

The chancel screens of basilica No 1 in the village of Garmen and the basilica in Oreshe belong to the *type of the high chancel*. The only several fragments of small columns are preserved from the first monument, also a capital with a part of the column, with general height of the chancel is between 2.30-2.70 m, similarly to a row of monuments from the Balkans with provenance in Macedonia, Albania, Greece, and the provinces Moesia and Dacia Ripensis<sup>92</sup>. The chancel of the basilica of Oreshe, totally devastated by an earthquake, is one of the best preserved examples in Bulgaria<sup>93</sup> (Pl. XIII, 4 a-d). We have at disposal two screens and several small columns. The columns between the altar slabs are square in section, with profiled in rectangle fields in their height. They continue in height as round columns and end in three rings, like the columns of Basilica 1, to form the high chancel.

The plates are double-faced, solid, with richly profiled frames on the front and less profiled on the back. On the reverse of both plates a cross is depicted on a convex disk, with a slightly elongated southern shoulder and flaring ends. This is one of the basic and most widely spread decorative schemes, established on the chancel screens to the holy altar. It is accepted for this scheme, that it has been spread through Constantinople, the cross being incised over the disc<sup>94</sup>. In the case of Oreshe, the cross is protruding as relief over the disc in both screens. Similar protruding should be considered as a characteristic peculiarity in the church to the Roman throne, since it is observed in Macedonia, mainly in the Small basilica of Heraclea Lyncestis, and the Episcopal basilica of Stobi; in basilica 'B' in Orman in Dardania; in Studenchishte in Ochrid, in Epirus Nova, etc., all related predominately to 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>95</sup>. The appearance of this feature in Nicopolis shows us the influence of the Roman throne in the decorative practices in the most southwestern part of the province of Thrace.

The bigger screen is decorated from the façade with two peacocks and a chalice between them<sup>96</sup> with rising up vine twigs with leaves and grapes. A fish

<sup>89</sup> A. Milčeva, *Eine ...* 2006, 527–535, Taf. 86-189

<sup>90</sup> С. Паскова, И. Вълчев, Ранното християнство в Никополис ад Нестум и градската му територия (IV–VI в.). – Известие на Регионален исторически музей Кюстендил, Кюстендил, 2007, 369–380, обр. 7.

<sup>91</sup> M. Vaklinova, *Ateliers ...*, 1984, 642–649, fig. 3, 5, 8.

<sup>92</sup> B. Aleksova, *Loca Sanctorum Macedoniae. Култът на мартириите во Македонија од IV до IX век*. Скопје, 1995. обр. 95; В. Лилчиќ, Македонскиот камен...; И. Досева, Конструкција и декорација..., 21; И. Досева, Ранновизантијските олтарни прегради в Тракия и Дакия. – *Проблеми на изкуството*, 3, 2002, 13. В. Попова, Две ..., 2011, 272.

<sup>93</sup> А. Димитрова-Милчева, К. Вачева, К. Рабаджиев, Спасителни разкопки на раннохристиянската базилика в с. Ореше, Благоевградски окръг. АОР за 1985. Велико Търново 1986, 97; A. Milčeva, *Eine ...* 2006, 527–535, Taf. 86-189.

<sup>94</sup> И. Досева, Конструкција и декорација..., 26 и бел. 104.

<sup>95</sup> В. Лилчиќ, Македонскиот камен..., 654–657, 723, 1119; В. Битракова, Стара християнска споменица во Охридско. Охрид, 1975, с. 1-109, сл. 1-48.

<sup>96</sup> In the publication it is wrongly described as crater. See: Milčeva, A. *Eine*

is represented on the surface inside the chalice. A Greek cross with flared ends is placed over the vessel. The façade of the plate symbolizes the Celestial Paradise and the Fountain of Life. The basic decorative scheme of the façade of the bigger screen is of the type 'compositions in reliefs with zoomorphic motifs'. The principle of the axial symmetry has been applied in this composition accenting on the idea of the ever lasting life in the Paradise. It is considered that this kind of iconography is inspired by psalm 42 with the deer, accepted officially after 313<sup>97</sup>, which is quenching its thirst with running water. The second plate has an almost square form and a profiled frame. Its scheme is also among the basic decorative ones: it is a relief with a cross in a triumphal wreath<sup>98</sup>. A stylized Christogram, consisting of eight rays with flared ends, is placed inside the wreath. A ribbon intertwined in the lower part, is passing in the inner circle of the wreath. The ends of the ribbon are passing under the southern cross' arm, the latter stepping on the top of an ivy leaf, crowing the ribbon. The described decorative scheme is known also from another altar transenna found on the terrain of the Episcopaeion (the episcopal residence) (**Pl. XIII, 3**). It can be met in the chancel screens of the basilicas in contemporary Mainland and Island Greece. The decorative scheme with a wreath and crosses similarly to the screen with peacock is submitted to the principle of the axial symmetry, the wreath being in the center with the first plate, and the chalice with the second one.

The screen from the village of Screbatno is dense and reveals a similar subject (**Pl. XIII, 2**). Again a chalice is represented with a leg in the form of a disc, stepping on a solid conus-like base. The body and the leg of the chalice are plain. On both sides of the chalice, vine sticks, bunches, leaves and two shoots twisted like „eyes“ are placed slightly diagonally in the upper corners of the plate. The same „eyes“ are depicted near the mouth on either side of the chalice, along with vine branches, and at first glance they give the illusion of handles to the chalice. A Latin cross with flared ends is 'growing up' from the chalice. The southern arm of the cross is crossed by the back edge of the widely opened mouth of the chalice<sup>99</sup>. The screen is carved of white small-grained dense marble.

The chancel screen from Mosomishte is dense and represents the fourth architectural decorative type of decoration in Nicopolis ad Nestum. The field for representations begins from the ends of the screen and has a thin prominent strip of a frame, with represented profiled Latin cross with flared ends. A small semisphere is shown in the center of the crossing of the cross' arms, and dense triangles in relief in the interior of the flared ends. The closest parallel of the cross comes from impost capital in basilica No 2 from the village of Garmen. Similar construction of a screen decorated with a cross, but this time plain, comes from basilica B in Davina kula, Orman<sup>100</sup>, in North Macedonia. The

*frühchristliche Basilika...*, 531.

<sup>97</sup> See the details in V. Popova, *Liturgy and Mosaics: the Case Studi of the Late Antique Monuments from Bulgaria*. – Niš and Byzantium (ed. M. Rakocija), XVI, Niš 2018, 147 ff.

<sup>98</sup> Досева, И. *Конструкция и декорация...*, 25 and cit.lit.

<sup>99</sup> In a similar way are represented the cross and the chalice on a screen with unknown provenance, supposedly from southwestern Bulgaria. See: Досева 2004, 3-9.

<sup>100</sup> В. Лилчиќ, *Македонскиот камен...*, 658, № 4.

greater number of monuments with crosses, whose inner fields are decorated, are found in the Rotunda (the Round church) in *Konjuh*<sup>101</sup>, unique in its plan and architectural decoration, dated in 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century. The two occasionally discovered plates from Srebatno and Mosomishte supply us with data of the type of the altar chancel screens, to which they belonged. The date of its carving in the first half of 5<sup>th</sup> century allows the supposition that they are part of a high chancel.

Several fragments of twisted columns belong to the architectural decoration of the basilicas No. 1 and of the basilica in Old Debreu (Pl. XIII 5). Their size are significantly smaller than the standart ones in the colonnade of the altar screens and suppose their applying rather as legs of *mensa sacra*, or of *cyborium*, which practice can be met also in other sites<sup>102</sup>. The twisted columns have been found only in Nicopolis ad Nestum, in southwestern Bulgaria so far. In the Balkan provinces, they are rarely met, like in the complex of the emperor Galeus in Felix Romuliana (Gamzigrad)<sup>103</sup>. Such type twisting decoration has in the so-called Theodosian palace in Stobi, dated in the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>104</sup> and on the *pulvinus* of an Ionian capital from Parthicopolis.

The only found ambo so far is the one in the Cathedral basilica of Parthicopolis (Pl. XIII 6). It has octagonal form, installed in the second building phase (phase B). It is two-armed and five-stepped, replaced to the south from the central axis of the nave. Its transennas are richly decorated, and the octagonal form covered by marble plates, import from the Proconessos quarries<sup>105</sup>.

### Conslusions

New principles of the architecture and building of churches have been announced in 313, when the Christianity became equal to the other religions of the empire. They obtain their final look at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century. The canon of a plan and architectural decoration of the Christian church has been established, being at the exterior quite modest, but with a rich decoration in the interior, consisting of marble, wall paintings, mosaics, gilded architectural elements, etc. The main peculiarity of the plan connected with the Roman liturgical planning and the sacrament of baptism is the *senatorium*, the *matroneum* and the round *baptisterium* in the complex of the Cathedral basilica in Parthicopolis.

The Early Christian buildings in Parthicopolis and Nicopolis ad Nestum possess a very rich architectonic decoration of *spoliae*, reused, or elements

<sup>101</sup> В. Лилчиќ, Македонскиот камен..., 571–590.

<sup>102</sup> J. Jeličić-Radonić, Liturgical Installations in the Roman Province of Dalmatia. – *Hortus artium medievalium* 5 (1999), 133–145, figs. 13, 14, 18.

<sup>103</sup> М. Чанак-Медић, Гамзиград. Касноантичка палата. Архитектура и просторни склоп. – *Саопштења*, XI, 1978, Каталог, 182, №№ 145 и 146.

<sup>104</sup> С. Филипова, *Рановизантиските капители во Република Македонија*. Скопје, 2006, 112–118.

<sup>105</sup> This is the only import of marble in Parthicopolis so far from the quarries of Proconessos.

especially carved with very elegant shown motifs, very purified and simple, but executed with a lot of semantics. In their plan and architectural decoration, they demonstrate the closeness mainly with the Aegean and Macedonian architectonic-decorative circles, to the local workshops and centers; in the interior of Thrace, Macedonia, western Epirus and some Italian workshops. Together with this, we can establish that the decoration on the Dorian and Ionian impost capitals in its greater part is taken from the compositional elements shown on the chancel screens from the last quarter of 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards. These are the Latin crosses with flared ends, and many other Early Christian symbols like the vine, the chalice, the fish, the peacocks, the triumphal wreath with inscribed Christogram, etc.

The architectonic decoration of the basilicas in Nicopolis ad Nestum and its environs reveal equality in the compositions on the chancel screens, and in the impost capitals, by reconstructing models known in the Early Christian world. So far, from the studied basilicas in Nicopolis no massive reuse of architectural details-*spoliae* from the Roman era has been identified. On the opposite, it is established a special production of architectonic decoration, in connection with the erection and furnishing of each separate Christian building. In our opinion, this is one of the reasons, for the existence of such tremendous quantity diverse as decoration architectural details of one type. All the known and preserved so far details demonstrate a very high level of knowledge of the architectonic sculptural decorations of the architects and the stonecutters, their initiative and desire of uniqueness of the Christian building, lead by the maxim, that the temple is the place, where 'dwells all the fullness of the Godhead' (Colossians 2:9).

Parthicopolis lacks the vine branches, the peacocks, the rich plant decoration, the chalices and others found in Nicopolis. We see clean, simple and elegant crosses, wreaths and reed leaves; a local production of local stonemasons. In Nicopolis ad Nestum and its environs, this is a rich decoration, import of items brought through the harbour of Philippi-Neapolis, of items from the Eastern, and maybe of Thessalonian workshops as well. The only import in Parthicopolis are the pyramidal imposts with Latin cross, the small columns on the altar barrier, also with Latin cross, the chancel screens of the first chancel, and finally the ambo, all they from the Cathedral basilica of the city. In our opinion, the white marble is imported by the Italian workshops or workshops under the Italian influence. Its structure and fracture is not identical to any of the white marbles extracted in Attica, Thessalia, on the island of Thassos, in Macedonia, or among the marbles coming from Asia Minor, where dominating are the very dense types. That's the reason and base to compare the colour and structure of the white marble of the first chancel screens, and to connect it with the Italian marble workshops, or eventually with the Adriatic quarries, supported by the iconography, style and technique and treatment of the reliefs with scenes from the Old and New Testament of the first low chancel of the Cathedral basilica. This fact allows to suppose that the screens and the other architectonic elements have been carved either in Italian, or in West Illyricum's workshop. The connection most probably has been realized by the help of the vicariate in Thessaloniki as its favour to the see of Parthicopolis. The variants and differ-

ences in the iconography of the scenes in comparison to the traditional art species most probably are due to the local development of liturgy and the adequate choice of scenes, of the interference of the church elite of Thessaloniki, of the bishops and the clergy of Parthicopolis, maybe also with the desire of the donator/ktitor Antim to erect the basilica, compared poetically by him to the beauty of the Solomon's temple. The sculptors of the first chancel are Italians or artists under the Italian influence in the western part of Illyricum. The masters of the figural decoration of the second phase-period chancel are more provincial and their level is lower. Nevertheless, they again are copying some Italian models, especially following the style and iconography of the first chancel. But both models of the court liturgical art of Constantinople and of the Roman apostolic and biblical tradition were created for the Balkan churches in the same period of the Theodosian dynasty in the Eastern Roman Empire between the pontificates of Siricius (384-399) and Xistus Tertius (432 -440) in Rome. This means generally the last quarter of 4<sup>th</sup> and the first half of 5<sup>th</sup> century, with the choice of scenes from the Gospel and the Bible, connected with definite texts read during the liturgical sacraments, rituals and services.

We should also compare the usage of spoliae in the architectural decoration of both cities Parthicopolis and Nicopolis ad Nestum. In the first one, in the colonnade we see Roman spoliae used in the same function, but with addition of pyramidal impost capitals. In Nicopolis ad Nestum and its environs there are also Roman spoliae, but the number of them is quite insignificant. Here can be observed a special order of columns and capitals for each colonnade of the Early Christian basilica; established is also some import of capitals and twisted small columns. The capital from Mosomishte demonstrates unknown to far decoration on the whole surface. Each detail and element of the decoration is made especially for the basilica.

Also differently is formed the altar space and the decoration of the chancel screens, although both cases of the low and high type have been applied. Different are also the spheres of influence in both cities. For Parthicopolis more often the parallels can be found in the architectonic decoration of Stobi, Thessaloniki and the Western Balkan Adriatic provinces. The elements in Nicopolis are much nearer to the decoration in Philippopolis, Constantinople, and the North Aegean Coast.

On the one side, these differences can be explained by the inherited Roman architectural richness, which can be reused again in the same function. But on the other side, they can be explained by their different belonging to the local church and civil administrative structures. Parthicopolis for a certain period belonged to the Exarchate of Thessalonica and later a Vicariate subject to Rome, while Nicopolis ad Nestum – to the bishopric, and from 451 to the patriarch in Constantinople.

Along with this, these two centers had a certain direct or indirect influence both on the plan of the basilicas and their liturgy, and on the architectural decoration and the formation of its local features.

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ОСОБЕНОСТИ РАНОХРИШЋАНСКЕ АРХИТЕКТОНСКЕ ДЕКОРАЦИЈЕ  
У ПАРТИКОПОЛИСУ И НИКОПОЉУ НА МЕСТИ

Партикополис и Никопол на Мести налазе се у долинама средњег тока река Струме и Месте. Оба града се налазе на граници две покрајине. Никопол у југозападном делу Тракије, и Партикопол у североисточном делу Македоније. Током ранохришћанске ере, ова два града су административно припадала не само двома различитим провинцијама, већ су се налазила у две различите епархије. Партикополис, црквено потчињен викару/егзарху у Солуну, односно папи у Риму, а Никопол митрополиту и касније (451) цариградском патријарху. Оба града су у границама Источног римског царства. И ако се зна да је Партикополис одувек био епископија, онда је Никопол променио статус црквеног административног центра, уздигавши се од епископије до аутокефалне епископије.

Као ранохришћански центри, ова два града имају сличну планску архитектуру, претежно тробродне, једноапсидне базилике, типичне за архитектуру Балкана. Међутим, разлике у њиховој архитектонској декорацији се јасно разликују. Ранохришћанска архитектонска декорација Партикополиса заснована је на поновној употреби архитектонских детаља – база, стубова и капитела у најранијим базиликама, с обзиром на примену аркадне структуре за преграду наоса базилике, примењивани су и најранији импости. Досадашњи подаци говоре да је само приликом изградње крстионице (код Епископске базилике), грађевине јединствене по плану и декорацији за наше крајеве, посебно урађена архитектонска декорација. Карактеристично за ранохришћанску архитектонску декорацију Партикополиса је намера поновног коришћења архитектонских детаља из римског доба у ранохришћанским базиликама, а истовремено и примена импост капитела. Разлике постоје и у обликовању олтарског простора и декорацији олтарских зидова.

Међутим, то није случај са изградњом базилика у Никополу, провинција Тракија. Археолошко проучавање више базилика, као и спорадична појава појединих архитектонских детаља везаних за ранохришћанску архитектуру, показују да је сваки детаљ, сваки елемент ранохришћанске архитектонске декорације изведен посебно за сваку појединачну базилику.

Иако је архитектонска декорација ова два града везана за исту религију, она показује разлике карактеристичне за два града. С једне стране, ове разлике су последица наслеђеног градитељског богатства, али, с друге стране, и различите административне подређености која је постојала све до 787. године, када је на Седмом васељенском сабору дошло до формалног помирења између Цркава св. Рима и Цариграда, уз присуство солунског егзарха на сабору у својству обичног провинцијског митрополита Цариградског патријарха.