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CONTENTS

STUDIES

REVIEWS

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Studies

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS ON CANONICAL CORINTHIAN CAPITALS IN SYRIA

Abstract: The Corinthian capital consists of several essential elements, and when all these elements are present, it is called a "canonical capital." Sometimes, one or more elements might be omitted, on the other hand, additional elements might be added to the canonical Corinthian capital. This research studies the various types and forms of elements added to Roman and Byzantine canonical Corinthian capitals in present-day Syria. These added elements can be a plant-like forms such as extra acanthus leaves, palmettes, stems, and tongues, or figural representations like anthropomorphic portrayals and animal figures. In addition, symbols reflecting cultural and religious influences can be used, like crosses. Regardless of the added element, it might carry symbolic meanings, or it could be used only for decorating reasons.

Keywords: *Canonical Corinthian capital, Axial motif, Tongue, Figure, Cross.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Corinthian capital consists of several essential elements. The earliest documented reference to these elements can be found in "*De architectura*", a work by the Roman architect Vitruvius, who lived between the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD. In his book, Vitruvius described the Corinthian capital as follows:

"*Omitting the height of the abacus, let the rest be divided into three parts, of which one should be given to the lowest leaf. Let the second leaf occupy the middle part of the height. Of the same height should be the stalks, out of which grow leaves projected so as to support the volutes which proceed from the stalks, and run out to the utmost corners of the abacus; the smaller spirals between them should be carved just under the flower which is on the abacus. The flowers on the four sides are to be made as large as the height of the abacus. On these principles of proportion, Corinthian capitals will be finished as they ought to be*".[1]

The terminology employed in this article to refer to these elements is illustrated in Fig. 1.

Vitruvius defined specific proportions for Corinthian capitals.[2] When these proportions are achieved in the Corinthian capital, it is known as a Vitruvian Corinthian capital. On the other hand, if these proportions were not followed, the capital is categorized as a canonical Corinthian capital. It

[1] Vitruvius, *De architectura*, IV.I. 11-12.
[2] Vitruvius, *De architectura*, IV.I. 11-12.

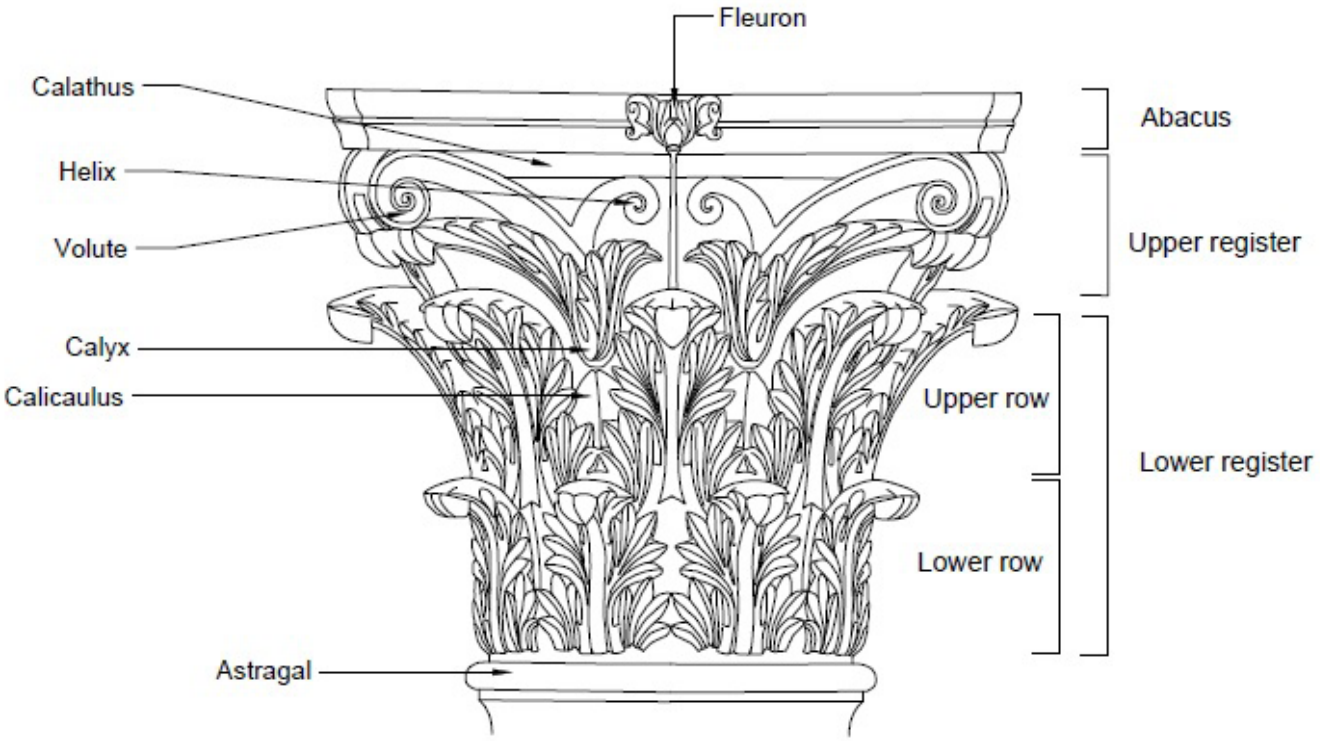

Fig. 1. Terms of the Corinthian capital (compiled by the author based on POLJAK/BOTIĆ 2018, 194).

is important to note that a Vitruvian Corinthian capital is considered canonical. However, the opposite might not always be true.[3]

Delbruck was the first to give a name to this certain Corinthian capital form, referring to it as "*Einzelformen*" in German.[4] However, it was Kautzsch who offered a more fitting name, describing it as "*Kapitelle mit vollem Apparat*," which translates to "capitals with complete elements," effectively describing the thorough nature of its components.[5]

The origin of this canonical Corinthian capital can be dated to the fourth century BC. It is regarded as a product of Hellenistic modifications done by the Athenians to various earlier versions of the Corinthian capital from the Archaic period.[6]

The canonical Corinthian capitals are believed to have reached Rome by the end of the second century BC. In Rome, they coexisted with various local Corinthian capital variations, but Romans preferred using this style of Corinthian capitals, making it the most widely employed form throughout the entire Roman Empire.[7]

However, in the Eastern regions, the origin of the canonical Corinthian capital remains a subject of debate. Some scholars claim that the canonical Corinthian capital was introduced to the East when the Romans first arrive here, in the first century BC.[8] On the other hand, other researchers are basing their arguments on the existence of older local Corinthian capital forms in the East to prove that this form was developed and originated within the Eastern Mediterranean region.[9]

As previously noted, the canonical Corinthian capital is recognized for its distinctive elements arranged in a specific order. Sometimes, one or more of these elements may be omitted or modified, in this case, the new capital falls into a different category and can no longer be referred to as canonical. Various terms have been employed to describe these non-canonical Corinthian capitals.[10]

The use of canonical Corinthian capitals continued across the Roman and Byzantine periods, and they can be also found in the Islamic buildings. When Muslims began constructing their buildings, they incorporated various architectural elements from the newly conquered regions, which included columns and capitals sourced from Roman and Byzantine older structures. As a result, it is quite common to observe a significant presence of *spolia*[11] in diverse Islamic architectural constructions.

Just as it was possible to omit one or more essential elements from the canonical Corinthian capital, it was also a regular practice to incorporate new decorative motifs into the canonical form. These additional elements may have held symbolic significance, or they could have been used only for ornamental purposes.

[3] SCHLUMBERGER 1933, 285,footnote 1; DENTZER-FEYDY 1990, 633, footnote 1.
[4] DELBRUECK 1907, 158.
[5] KAUTZSCH 1936, 5.
[6] ABRAMSON 1974, 285.
[7] ABRAMSON 1974, 6, 16.
[8] WEIGAND 1914.
[9] SCHLUMBERGER 1933, 316-317.
[10] Non-canonical: GINOUÈVS 1992, 95-96; Corinthianizing: MAVER/MÜLLER/RIŽNAR 2009, 120,129; Free: NEWCOMB 1921, 56; POLJAK/BOTIĆ 2018, 200.
[11] DEICHMANN 1975; GEYMONAT 2012, 47.

This article focuses on the exploration of these added elements integrated into canonical Corinthian capitals, which date back to the Roman and Byzantine periods in Syria.

AXIAL MOTIF

The first and most common element found on the canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria is what we shall refer to as the "axial motif." This name is based on the leaf location along the axis of the capital's faces, situated between the endings of the inner parts of the calices, above the central acanthus leaf of the second row.

This element takes various forms on the canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria. The first form is that of the acanthus leaf, a design dating back to the Hellenistic period and found in numerous Corinthian capitals in Asia Minor and the Eastern Mediterranean, and its presence continued in the East until the time of Trajan (89-117 AD).[12] This particular form is found on several capitals in Syria, for instance, a capital from Latakia Museum (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. An additional element in the shape of an acanthus leaf (Latakia Museum - Photo by the author).

Another form of this element found on Corinthian capitals in Syria is the three-partite leaf, which we will refer to as the "palmette".[13] This style existed on numerous capitals, such as a capital from Aleppo Museum (Fig. 3). It is positioned directly above the central acanthus leaf of the second row and comprises three parts - two on the sides and one on the top. This version is characterized by a smooth surface without any details or additional decorations. However, on a capital in Latakia Museum (Fig. 4), the palmette includes a midrib.

In some examples, the inner parts of the calices curve down until they reach the top-leaflet of the central acanthus leaf in the second row. In this situation, the axial motif is trying to occupy the space between the two segments of the inner calices. Since it is not possible to incorporate an entire acanthus leaf or palmette, the axial motif takes various forms.

[12] DENTZER-FEYDY 1990, 641; SCHLUMBERGER 1933, 303-304, 306.
[13] POLJAK/BOTIĆ 2018, 202.

Fig. 3. An additional element in the shape of "palmette" (Aleppo Museum - Photo by the author).

Fig. 4. A "palmette" with a midrib (Latakia Museum - Photo by the author).

One of these forms seen on the canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria is found on the capital from the colonnade of Jupiter gate in Damascus (Fig. 5). It resembles a flower, consisting of two petals on the sides, with one petal extending to create the stem of the abacus motif (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5. The colonnade of Jupiter gate in Damascus (Photo by the author).

Fig. 6. An additional element in the shape of three-petals flower (The colonnade of Jupiter gate - Damascus - Photo by the author).

Fig. 7. The lateral petals disappeared and only the uppermost one still exists (Homs Museum - Photos by the author).

In some cases, the lateral petals disappear, leaving only the uppermost one in place. This occurs due to the limited space between the ends of the inner calices, as seen in capitals like those at Homs Museum (Fig. 7).

TONGUE

This element is very simple, it takes the form of an unadorned and smooth piece that arises from the upper leaflet of the central leaf in the second acanthus row. It ascends vertically, gradually tapering as it moves upwards.

The most ancient examples of this element on Corinthian capitals can be dated to the second and third centuries AD, and its usage became more widespread in the fourth century AD.[14]

This shape of additional element can be observed on many canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria, like a capital from Tartous Museum (Fig. 8). Occasionally, a midrib and an outline on the tongue were added, as seen in the case of a capital at Latakia Museum, for example (Fig. 9).

Fig. 8. A tongue-shape axial motif (Tartous Museum - Photo by the author).

Fig. 9. The tongue has a midrib and an outline (Latakia Museum - Photo by the author).

The final point to note relating this style of additional element is that the tongue can be present on all sides of the capitals, or it may appear on only one, two, or three sides.[15] In the case of the canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria, each one was provided with a tongue on all sides.

FIGURE

The Corinthian capitals decorated with added figures are known as figural capitals, and there are several theories explaining their origin.[16]

[14] MAVER/MÜLLER/RIŽNAR 2009, 126.

[15] POLJAK/BOTIĆ 2017, 96; POLJAK/BOTIĆ 2018, 202.

[16] VON MERCKLIN 1962, 3; BOETHIUS/WARD-PERKINS 1970, 142; WARD-PERKINS 1965, 175-179.

Various figures depicting different subjects have been incorporated into the canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria. These figures can be categorized into anthropomorphic depictions and animal representations.

Anthropomorphic portrayals

Corinthian capitals introduce a wide variety of representations depicting Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.[17] There are numerous canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria having these types of depictions.

The first examples are the capitals attributed to what is known as the columns of the Bacchus in Latakia (Fig. 10).[18] These capitals have all the essential elements on three faces. Meanwhile, the fourth face of each capital presents a representation of Bacchus. The figures are badly destroyed, and only the outlines of the portray can be seen. But with looking carefully on one of the capitals, some features can be noticed, such as one hand holding a bunch of grapes, and on the other side, there is something looks like a spear. These symbols refer undoubtedly to Bacchus (Fig. 11).[19]

Fig. 10. The columns of the Bacchus in Latakia (Photo by author).

Another example with the same representation can be found in a capital from the Latakia museum (Fig. 12), where the portrayal of Bacchus is better than those of the temple's columns. In this representation, Bacchus is depicted as a young, unbeard face wearing a Roman toga, with the *thyrsus* carved behind him as his symbol.[20]

Animal representation

Various animals were commonly depicted on capitals. The portrayal of eagle was widespread on the Corinthian capitals during the Roman period.[21] Additionally, in the late antique era, numerous Corinthian capitals with eagle representations in the abacus motif position were also found.[22] However, eagle is the only representation of an animal has been discovered on the canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria. One example of these capitals is a capital from Aleppo Museum (Fig. 13).

Fig. 11. A bunch of grapes and a spear (Columns of Bacchus – Latakia - Photo by the author).

Fig. 12. Another representation of Bacchus (Latakia Museum – Photo by the author).

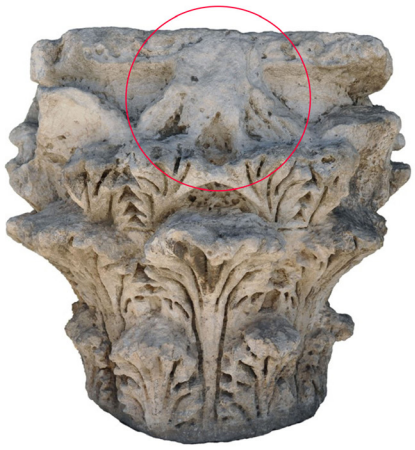

Fig. 13. A standing eagle (Aleppo Museum - Photo by the author).

[17] VON MERCKLIN 1962; PENSABENE 2007, 343-344; KAHWAGI-JANHO 2019, 315–316.
[18] TEXIER 1864, 86–87.
[19] GNECCHI 1911, 13.
[20] GNECCHI 1911, 13.
[21] KAHWAGI-JANHO 2014, 341.
[22] KAUTZSCH 1936, 30.

Fig. 14. A free-standing cross on one of the faces of the capital (Latakia Museum – Photo by the author).

Most parts of the eagle are damaged and difficult to notice. However, it can be realized that the eagle is depicted in a standing posture. The only distinctive parts are its legs, which seem to be rested on the inner parts of the calices, which meeting at the central axis of the capital's face. The wings of the eagle are barely distinguished on either side of its body, and the inner surface of the right wing is decorated with grooves representing elongated wing feathers.

The free-standing position of eagles on Corinthian capital is the less common representation of eagle's depictions. Only few capitals from Lebanon having this kind of eagle depiction were presented.[23] Consequently, it is possible to assume that this might be a regional form in the eastern Mediterranean, and perhaps a subsequent more in-depth study may more accurately answer this question.

These animal representations in general, particularly eagles, may carry symbolic significance, especially in temples, where they are directly associated with religious worship. On the other hand, these representations might serve only decorative purposes.[24]

CROSS

Some decorations that were used in Roman art and afterwards adopted by Christians in Byzantine art sometimes have different interpretations, and the cross is a notable example of this case.[25]

Numerous canonical Corinthian capitals in Syria are decorated with crosses. And while the Romans typically did not use crosses as decorative elements on their capitals, the presence of a cross on a Corinthian capital does not necessarily indicate that it is a Byzantine capital.[26] This is because the crosses may have been added to the capital at a later time. Therefore, when attempting to date a capital, all the elements present on the capital should be considered.

An example of this situation can be observed on a capital from Latakia Museum (Fig. 14). In this capital, a free-standing cross is incised onto a flat surface on one side of the capital. The features of the capital's components suggest a dating to the first or second century AD, particularly the presence of cylindrical fluted caulicoles.[27] It seems that during the Byzantine period, Christians reused this capital by including the cross.

As for the reason why Byzantines added such symbols to the capitals, it can be suggested that when Christians wished to incorporate pagan elements into their structures, they often included symbols like crosses on those elements. This was seen as a sign of purification and conversion to Christianity.[28]

There are various styles for the crosses were employed by Byzantines on the Corinthian capitals. One of the common forms of these crosses in Byzantine art in Syria is the cross-in-circle, which began to be used after the fifth century AD.[29] This design cab be found on capitals, such a capital from Aleppo Museum (Fig. 15), which, based on this information and the other elements of the capital, can be dated to the fifth or sixth century AD.

Fig. 15. A cross-in-circle shape (Aleppo Museum - Photo by the author).

[23] KAHWAGI-JANHO 2019, 323.
[24] KAHWAGI-JANHO 2019, 325.
[25] BIRK 2013, 168; ELSNER 2011, 7.
[26] KAUTZSCH 1936, 70.
[27] WEIGAND 1914, 58-61; DENTZER-FEYDY 1990, 640; SCHLUMBERGER 1933, 293; KAHWAGI-JANHO 2017, 95.
[28] SARADI 1997, 495.
[29] PETRIE 2015, 138.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the canonical Corinthian capitals present diverse additional elements. One of the common elements known as "axial motif". It is positioned along the axis of the capital's faces, and it takes various designs. the acanthus leaf is considered one of the oldest forms, it dated to the Hellenistic time, but it persisted in the Eastern Mediterranean until the reign of Trajan.

Another form of the "axial motif" is referred to as "the palmette." It is characterized by three parts situated above the central acanthus leaf of the second row. Typically, the palmette is plain, although in certain instances, it may have a midrib.

Sometimes, the inner parts of the calices curve downward to meet the upper leaflet of the central leaf in the second row, in this case, the "axial motif" adjusts to occupy the space between these inner parts, assuming diverse forms.

Another added element is the tongue, emerging from the upper leaflet of the central leaf in the second row. This element ascending vertically and gradually tapering as it ascends. The earliest instances of this feature can be traced back to the second and third centuries AD, it became widely prevalent in the fourth century. Although this element is usually plain, in some cases, it has a midrib and an edged outline.

Canonical Corinthian capitals can also feature figures as additional elements, earning them the name figural capitals. These figures include anthropomorphic portrayals and representations of animals.

The final addition to consider is the cross. Since Romans did not use crosses on Corinthian capitals, it is evident that this practice is exclusive to Christians. These crosses added into the Corinthian capitals had various forms, with one of the most common shapes emerging after the fifth century AD - the cross-in-circle. However, it is important to recognize that the presence of certain elements related to Christians on capitals does not necessarily mean that this capital belongs to the Byzantine period. For example, finding a Corinthian capital decorated with a cross does not indicate its origin in the Byzantine period, as the cross might have been added to an ancient capital at a later date.

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