Νέα παλαιοχριστιανικά γλυπτά από την Ταρσό

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Some Recent Early Byzantine Sculptural Finds from Tarsus

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Tarsus had from old been a melting-pot of cultures and peoples whose cosmopolitan life is now evident in the artistic finds coming from around the city. Many of these finds are sculptural and date from the Byzantine period, despite the fact that no Byzantine monuments survive in Tarsus. Most of these have come out in the excavations at Cumhuriyet Square in the city centre, which began in 1994. These excavations dealt with a street from the late Hellenistic-early Roman period and, for what is of interest to us, they yielded capitals, small piers and various different pieces. Some of these were made from local limestone, while most were made of Proconnesian marble. Numerous other pieces are preserved in the local archaeological museum, and these are both from the city and from the surrounding area. A third group moreover is made up of pieces present in disparate locations around the city; these were found in occasional excavations and during the construction of public and private buildings.

The finds from Cumhuriyet Square are to appear very soon in a book dealing with all the finds from the excavation. This study will also include the museum pieces, for the sake of comparison. The “wandering” pieces are also important for comparison with all the rest. In this short article therefore we shall make a presentation of the most interesting finds amongst these, both old and recent. These finds, almost all of Proconnesian marble and still unpublished, are important given that they testify to the large diffusion of Constantinopolitan models and products in this far-away province of the empire.

The most significant find from 2002 in the city of Tarsus is a report on L. Zoroğlu, Tarsus Cumhuriyet Alanı Kazi Çalışmaları, Kazi Sonuçlar Toplantısı, XVII-XMIV (1994 until 2001).

4. Some of these pieces have been published by the author of this short article: A.B. Yağcı, Alcune sconosciute bizantine di Tarso, Atti del VI Simposio di Tarso su S. Paolo Apostolo (a cura di L. Padovese), Rome 1999, 325-334; ead., Le sculture bizantine di Tarso (2), Atti del VII Simposio di Tarso su S. Paolo Apostolo (a cura di L. Padovese), Rome 2002, 335-344.


Fig. 1. Tarsus, Well of St Paul. Pier of a chancel screen.

The little pier has a rectangular shape (h. 98 cm; width 21.5 cm; thickness 19 cm.) and presents decorations on the two opposite faces, which are lightly convex. In one of the short sides there is visible one groove for embedding, which is 7.5 cm wide, while on other side there are three degraded edges, probably because it is made from a previous piece of frame. On the main face the decoration is in a rectangular field and consists in a motive of two shoots, which are interlaced, forming six circles that contain two heart-shaped leaves. The two shoots, made by a fillet with a deep drill, are joined in the lower part. On top they end in two stalks that resemble open wings. Below are to be found the last two leaves, which are a little bigger than the others. These and the other two that follow inside the first circle are also carved internally, with a drop motive underlining the form. In the remaining five circles only one leaf is carved internally. The diagonal course of the plain and the carved leaves suggest that they are not unfinished but were planned with such a design. On the opposite side, the rectangular field is decorated with a lily-shaped flower with three lobes, of which two open into wings to touch each other. The little pier is well preserved and presents a good quality with careful carving.

In the excavations done last year in the area of the Well, there were found piers of windows in limestone and marble.

The other pieces are Corinthian capitals and they have been placed in the garden of the local Teachers’ Club. The first one

is a Corinthian capital in Proconnesian marble (Fig. 2), with two ranges of four acanthus leaves divided into large lobes, which cover most of the kalathos. The ribs are marked with deep drills, which follow the course of a single lobe, while the adjoining toothed leaves form buttonholes. The volutes, reduced and flattened, join with a large V-shape up until the out-turned point of the angular leaves. The triangular spaces between the volutes are not carved, while on top the abacus preserves the fleuron with a little four-petal flower. The second Corinthian capital, still in Proconnesian marble (Fig. 3), has two ranges of acanthus leaves that cover all the surfaces of the kalathos and with the limbs curved to the inside. The leaves present the same modelling as the ones on the previous capital, with the presence of inner helices under the fleuron of the abacus. The kalathos preserves its rim. The third example is a Corinthian capital in fine white local limestone (Fig. 4). It has two rings of acanthus leaves covering all the kalathos. These heavily foliated calyces push the volutes up into a narrow zone immediately below the abacus. In this capital the volutes and the abacuses are damaged; there only remains the prominent central fleuron which is transformed into a stylised bottom form. The comparisons for these capitals are innumerable and they belong to the most diffused classes. The first example belongs to the group of the so-called Corinthians with V or lyre volutes (types V-VI of Kautzsch6), which appear first in Ravenna in the church of S. Francesco, dated to the time of the bishop Neone (third quarter of the fifth century), but especially in the dated church of S. Apollinare Nuovo built by Theodoric (493-526). The comparisons with the capital in all its variations are numerous. In fact this type of Corinthian capital was one of the most widespread productions of the Proconnesian workshops between the second half of the fifth and the first half of the sixth centuries8. The best comparisons are from Tarsus and the neighbouring area of Cilicia; one example is preserved in the local Archaeological Museum9. Others are in Silifke and Adana Museums.
Two examples were discovered during the excavations of Cumhuriyet Square, in the city centre, and one example, which is unpublished, is preserved in the garden of the Church of St Paul that has been recently restored (Fig. 5).

In this capital, yet again in Proconnesian marble, the cylindrical projection at the middle of the abacus contains a cross.

The second capital is of the Corinthian type that seems close to the ones of the groups III-IV in Kautzsch's classification but is very difficult to assert even this. The typology of the capital is problematic: it seems to assemble features of late antique Corinthians (of third century) in the carefully designed abacus and in the presence of the internal helices. In addition, the middle and lower lobes of the leaves form buttonholes underlined by an elevated ridge, the “ringed void”, present in the capitals from the Hellenistic period but with survivals to later times.

On the other hand however, the presence of the so-called mask acanthus design between the leaves of the lower ring, the projected internal helices (not designed as in the classical examples) under the fleuron of the abacus, as well as the form of the upper corner leaves which become a whole with the flat volutes, are characteristics of the early Byzantine Corinthian capitals. In fact the capital has become more compact, losing the naturalness that is typical of the more ancient ones. Sodini describes a similar example preserved in the Silifke Museum as having been finished locally; it is possible that our capital of Tarsus had the same origins. Perhaps there was a local Cilician workshop which still used to produce examples with the design of the internal helices, which disappeared in the capital already from the beginning of the fifth century.

Close to the carving of the leaves is one example of the III-IV groups, from the Museum of Tarsus (Fig. 6), and with no fewer than one dozen in the Museum of Silifke. They were served in the Archaeological Museum, inv. n. 19, from the excavations of the atrium of St Sophia, in A.M. Schneider, Die Grabung in Westhof der Sophienkirche zu Istanbul, IftForsch 12 (1947), pl. 15.1 and 16.1 and p. 11 (Pralong, n. 258, type IIa); inv. n. 83, ibid., pl. 15.2 and 16.2 (Pralong, n. 259 IIa); another without inventory number (Pralong, n. 286, type IIb); inv. 3252, in Zollt, op.cit, 157 n. 426, or 161 n. 440, because the two capitals have the same inventory number and are published without photos (Pralong, n. 332 type IIc), and one capital in the west façade of S. Marco in Venice, in F.W. Deichmann, Corpus der Kapitelle der Kirche von San Marco zu Venedig, Wiesbaden 1981, 115, n. 502 and pl. 37 (Pralong, n. 237 type IIa).

Sodini, Le commerce des marbres, op.cit. (n. 5), pl. lb (lower capital).


11. Yalçın, Alcune sconosciute, op.cit. (n. 4), 328 fig. 2. Ead., Le scult­ture bizantine, op.cit. (n. 4), 338 fig. 4.


13. This term is given from the definition of R. Ginouvès, Dictionnaire méthodique de l'architecture grecque et romaine, II: Eléments constructifs, Paris 1992, 94 n. 299.1 would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Annie Pralong for the help she gave in understanding this special type and in suggesting terminology with a specific bibliography.

produced especially between the middle of the fifth century and the Justinianic age. As previously remarked by Sodini, types III-IV are not so diffused outside Constantinople, the Aegean18 and the Pontic area19. In the most recent research however, it has been found that they are numerous in the eastern Mediterranean areas (Antioch, Beyrouth, Cesarea, Cyprus and Egypt)20. Sodini has rightly pointed out the case of the Silifke pieces, to which we now add the ones from Tarsus. These are an interesting demonstration of the earlier diffusion of this type in a province far from the capital. All this can be explained also by the big building activities of the emperor Zeno (474-491) in his native region21, which is further testified by the great ecclesiastical complex of Meryemlik and Alahan. The third capital is of the classical Corinthian type of the earlier centuries (third-fourth)22.

The most significant piece among the “wandering sculptures” of Tarsus remains the little pier described above. This pier is an extraordinary testament to the high quality of workmanship of the Constantinopolitan ateliers and to the circulation of the Proconnesian products. Its lightly convex form, like a half-column shape, reminds us of the well-known group of piers preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul23. These piers, with their rich decorative repertoire (human portraits, scenes with figures and people scrolls) are generally dated to between the fifth and sixth centuries. The pier of Tarsus shows trends similar to them in terms of the conception of the forms and in the iconography. The design of scrolls containing two heart-shaped leaves is in fact visible in one of them24 and in one example from the Mangane area, in Topkapı25. More stylised forms and small scrolls instead of leaves are present in the piers of the chancel screen of the basilica of S. Clemente in Rome26. The style, form and iconography seem to indicate a date at the beginning or at most the first half of the sixth century.

It is difficult to determine the original context for these pieces, since we do not have any significant archaeological remains in Tarsus from the early Byzantine period to which these pieces can belong27. Regarding the ecclesiastical buildings of the earlier period the sources are unhelpful; only two churches are recorded28. One was dedicated to St Peter. It is mentioned in the context of the usurper Leontios in 485 and it was destroyed during the Arab attacks. It has in fact been mistaken with another one, dedicated to St Paul and built by Maurice (582-602)29. Nonetheless the history of the city in the Middle Ages is both very rich and turbulent; the emperors Maximus Daia and Julian the Apostate were buried here. Justinian (527-565) built a bridge over the river Cydnos and regulated its course. From 637 the Arabs continuously attacked the city until 965 when Nikephoros Phokas retook it. From the end of the eleventh century the city passed successively to Armenians, Crusaders and Turks30.

The city of Tarsus continues to offer numerous sculptural materials from the Byzantine period, especially in its earlier part. Nevertheless problems regarding its history, topography and architecture in the Middle Ages still remain unresolved.

22. Zollt, op.cit. (n. 8), 110-112, pl. 36/287.
ΝΕΑ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΑ ΓΛΥΠΤΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΤΑΡΣΟ

Μεταξύ των ευρημάτων που έρχονται στο φως στην πόλη της Ταρσού περιλαμβάνονται πολλά δείγματα γλυπτικής, τα οποία χρονολογούνται στη βυζαντινή εποχή, παρά το γεγονός ότι στην πόλη αυτή δεν σώζονται βυζαντινά μνημεία. Τα περισσότερα προέρχονται από τις ανασκαφές στην πλατεία Cumhuriyet, στο κέντρο της πόλης, υπάρχουν όμως και κάποια τυχαία ευρήματα. Τα περισσότερα περιλαμβάνονται κιονόκρανα, πεσσοί και κίονες, τα περισσότερα από μάρμαρο Προκοννήσου.

Ένας ενδιαφέρων πεσσός φράγματος πρεσβυτερίου, με προσεκτικής εκτέλεσης και υψηλής ποιότητας διάκοσμο (Εικ. 1), παρουσιάζει μεγάλες ομοιότητες με κωνσταντινουπολιτικά έργα του πρώιμου 6ου αιώνα. Κορνθιακά κιονόκρανα (Εικ. 2-6), προερχόμενα από την Κωνσταντινούπολη, χρησιμοποιούσαν μαζί με άλλα, τον οποίον επεξεργασία ολοκληρωνόταν σε τοπικά εργαστήρια. Η παρουσία προϊόντων της Προκοννήσου κατά τον 5ο και τον 6ο αιώνα σε μία τόσο μακρινή εποχή της αυτοκρατορίας μαρτυρεί για μία ακόμη φορά τη μεγάλη διάδοση κωνσταντινουπολιτικών προτύπων και προϊόντων κατά την παλαιοχριστιανική περίοδο.