

Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

Τόμ. 25 (2004)

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 25 (2004), Περίοδος Δ'



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doi: [10.12681/dchae.408](https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.408)

Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

YALÇIN, A.-B. (2011). Νέα παλαιοχριστιανικά γλυπτά από την Ταρσό. *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 25, 57–62. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.408>



ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ
ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

Some Recent Early Byzantine Sculptural Finds from
Tarsus

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Τόμος ΚΕ' (2004) • Σελ. 57-62

ΑΘΗΝΑ 2004

SOME RECENT EARLY BYZANTINE SCULPTURAL FINDS FROM TARSUS

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 city¹. Many of these finds are sculptural and date from the Byzantine period, despite the fact that no Byzantine monuments survive in Tarsus². Most of these have come out in the excavations at Cumhuriyet Square in the city centre, which began in 1994³. 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 lo-

cations around the city; these were found in occasional excavations and during the construction of public and private buildings⁴.

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 These finds, almost all of Proconnesian marble and still unpublished, are important given that they testify to the large diffusion of Constantinopolitan models and products in this far-away province of the empire⁵.

The most significant find from 2002 in the city of Tarsus is a

1. The history of Tarsus goes back to the Neolithic period: at the hill of Gözlü Kule settlements of that period have been found. After the Hurr-ite, Assyrian and Lydian dominations it became autonomous under Persian rule, and with the Seleucids its prosperous and cultured lifestyle is mentioned by Strabo. The Roman presence possibly began with Sulla and Tarsus soon became the centre of the province of Cilicia. It was the birthplace of Paul and it was visited by the emperor Hadrian. Under Antoninus Pius it became the regional capital of Cilicia, Isauria and Lycaonia. Fought over by Byzantines and Arabs in the seventh century, it was fortified by the latter in the late eighth century. It returned to Byzantine rule in the tenth century, to pass later to the Cilician Armenians, then to the Mamaluks, and finally to the Ottomans. L. Zoroğlu, *Tarsus tarihi ve tarihsel anıtları*, Adana 1995.

2. For sculptural pieces around Tarsus and from the Cilician area see: J.-P. Sodini, Sculpture architecturale, briques, objets métalliques d'époques paléochrétienne et byzantine, *Inscriptions de Cilicie* (ed. by G. Dagron - D. Feissel) (TM, Monographies, 4), Paris 1987, 231-256; O. Feld, Bericht über eine Reise durch Kilikien, *IstMitt* 13/14 (1963-1964), 88-107; id., Beobachtungen an spätantiken und frühchristlichen Bauten in Kilikien, *RQ* 60 (1965), 131-143. For the history and monuments see F. Hild - H. Hellenkemper, *Kilikien und Isaurien* (TIB, 5), Vienna 1990, 428-439.

3. The excavations, of which I am a participant, are under the direction of Prof. Dr. L. Zoroğlu of Konya-Selçuk University. For the excavation

reports see L. Zoroğlu, Tarsus Cumhuriyet Alanı Kazı Çalışmaları, *Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı*, XVII-XXIV (1994 until 2001).

4. Some of these pieces have been published by the author of this short article: A.B. Yalçın, 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.

5. For Proconnesian marble see: R. Gnoli, *Marmora Romana*, Rome 1971, 227-228; D. Monna - P. Pensabene, *I marmi dell'Asia Minore*, Rome 1977, 147-174; *Marmi antichi* (a cura di G. Borghini), Rome 1989, 252; P. Pensabene, *Le vie del marmo. I blocchi di cava di Roma e di Ostia: il fenomeno del marmo nella Roma antica* (Itinerari Ostiensi VII), Rome 1994, 291-297; *I marmi colorati della Roma imperiale* (a cura di M. De Nuccio - L. Ungaro), exhibition catalogue, Venezia 2002, 203-205. For the production and distribution of Proconnesian architectural sculpture in early Byzantine period see in general: P. Pensabene, La decorazione architettonica, l'impiego del marmo e l'importazione di manufatti orientali a Roma, in Italia e in Africa (II-VII d.C.), *Società romana e impero tardoantico. Le merci e gli insediamenti* (a cura di A. Giardina), III, Rome 1986, 285-429, 825-842; C. Barsanti, L'esportazione di marmi dal Proconneso nelle regioni pontiche durante il IV-VI secolo, *RLSA*, s. III, XII (1989), 91-220; N. Asgari, Proconnesos çalışmaları, *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı*, IX-XII (1989-1994), Ankara; ead., The



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

little pier of chancel screen, of Proconnesian marble (Fig. 1), that was found during the construction of a home in the city centre. Today it is preserved in the area of the so-called Well of St Paul.

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

Stage of Workmanship of the Corinthian Capital in Proconnesus and its Export Form, *Classical marble: geochemistry, technology, trade* (ed. by N. Herz - M. Waelkens), Dordrecht-London-Boston 1988, 115-126; ead., *Objets de marbre finis, sémi-finis et inachevés du Proconnesse, Pierre éternelle du Nil au Rhin. Carrières et préfabrication* (ed. M. Waelkens), Bruxelles 1990, 106-126; ead., *The Proconnesian Production of Architectural Elements in Late Antiquity, Based on Evidence from the Mar-*

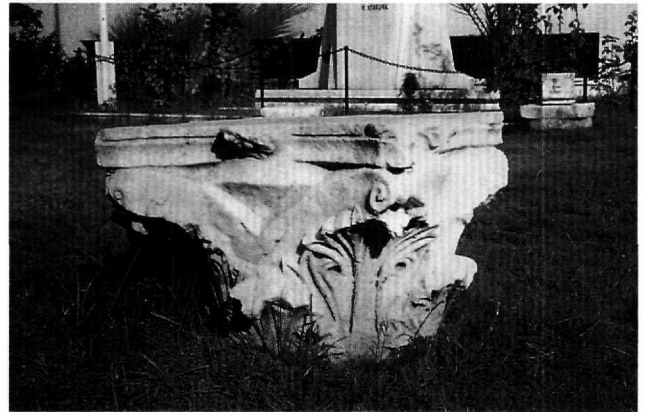


Fig. 2. Tarsus, Teachers' Club. Corinthian capital.

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

ble Quarries, *Constantinople and its Hinterland* (ed. by C. Mango - G. Dagron), Variorum, Aldershot 1995, 263-288; J.-P. Sodini, *Le commerce des marbres à l'époque protobyzantine, Hommes et richesses dans l'empire byzantine, I: IVe-VIIe siècle*, Paris 1989, 163-186; id., *La commerce des marbres dans la Méditerranée (IVe-VII s.)*, *V Reunión de Arqueología Cristiana Hispanica*, Cartagena 1988, Barcelona 2000, 423-448.

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 abacus 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)⁷. 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 Muse-

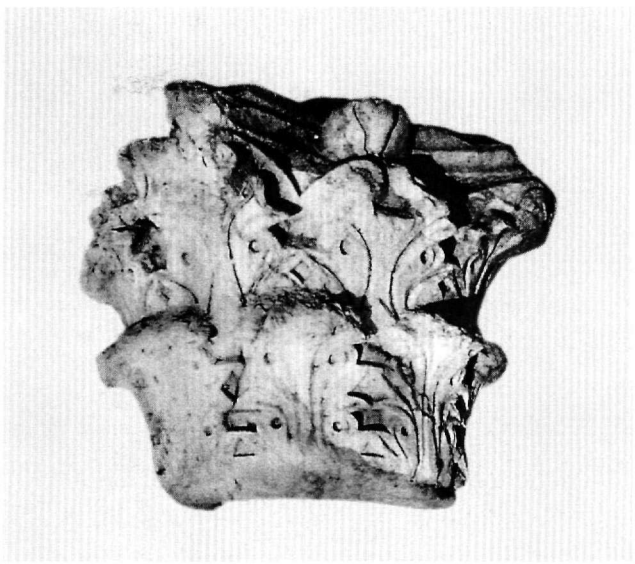


Fig. 3. Tarsus, Teachers' Club. Corinthian capital.



Fig. 4. Tarsus, Teachers' Club. Corinthian capital.

6. R. Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien. Beiträge zu einer Geschichte des spätantiken Kapitells im Osten vom vierten bis ins siebente Jahrhundert* (StSpKG, 9), Berlin - Leipzig 1936, 59-61.

7. R. Olivieri Farioli, *Corpus della scultura paleocristiana, bizantina e altomedievale di Ravenna*, III, Rome 1969, 24-26, cat. 20 and 25. W.F. Deichmann, *Ravenna. Hauptstadt des spätantiken Abendlandes*, II, 1: *Kommentar*, Wiesbaden 1974, 64 fig. 29 and 131-135 fig. 90.

8. W.E. Betsch, *The History, Production and Distribution of the Late An-*

tique Capital in Constantinople (Univ. Pennsylvania, Ph. D. Fine Arts, 1977), Ann Arbor 1979, 217 ff. Barsanti, op.cit. (n. 5) (125-135 for the Constantinopolitan and different provincial examples). T. Zollt, *Kapitellplastik Konstantinopels vom 4. bis 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr., mit einem Beitrag zur Untersuchungen des ionischen Kämpferkapitells*, Bonn 1994 (AMS, 14), Bonn 1994, 176-197, pl. 41-42. C. Barsanti, *Capitello bizantino*, EAA, Secondo Suppl. 1971-1994, Rome 1994, 867.

9. Sodini, *Sculpture architecturale*, op.cit. (n. 2), 234, pl. LIII.1.



Fig. 5. Tarsus, Church of St Paul. Corinthian capital.

ums¹⁰. Two examples were discovered during the excavations of Cumhuriyet Square, in the city centre¹¹, 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 classification¹² 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"¹³, present in the capitals from the Hellenistic period but with survivals to later times¹⁴. On the other hand how-



Fig. 6. Tarsus, Archaeological Museum. Corinthian capital.

ever, 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 locally¹⁵: 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 century¹⁶.

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 Silifke¹⁷. They were

10. Op.cit., 232-34 pl. LII.2-3 and LII.4-5. For Adana see also R. Avruscio, *Sculture inedite in Isauria: i capitelli di Mut-Claudiopolis*, *Milione 1, Studi e ricerche d'arte bizantina*, Rome 1988, 64-64, pl. V.3.

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

12. Kautzsch, op.cit., 53-59.

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. I 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.

14. For the later examples in Greece see: V. Déroche, *L'acanthé de l'arc Hadrien et ses dérivés en Grèce propre*, *BCH* 111 (1987), 427-453. A. Pralong identified examples of the early Byzantine period from Istanbul; see: A. Pralong, *Recherches sur les chapiteaux corinthiens tardifs en marbre de Proconnése* (Ph.D. Thesis), Paris 1987, 99, n. 23. They are pre-

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*, *IstForsch* 12 (1947), pl. 15.1 and 16.1 and p. 11 (Pralong, n. 258, type II/a); inv. n. 83, *ibid.*, pl. 15.2 and 16.2 (Pralong, n. 259 II/a); another without inventory number (Pralong, n. 286, type II/b); 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 II/c), 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 II/a).

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

16. A. Pralong, *La typologie des chapiteaux corinthiens tardifs en marbre de Proconnése et la production d'Alexandrie*, *RA I* (2000), 83.

17. Sodini, *Sculpture architecturale*, op.cit. (n. 2), 231-232, pl. LII.1.

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 amongst 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 peopled 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 ex-

ample 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.

18. Op.cit., 232; in the basilica A and E of Philippi and in the basilica C of Amphipolis.

19. Barsanti, op.cit. (n. 5), 113-115.

20. Pralong, op.cit. (n. 13), 100-101.

21. Sodini, *Sculpture architecturale*, op.cit. (n. 2), 232. M. Gough, *The Emperor Zeno and some Cilician Churches*, *AnatSt* 22 (1972), 203-210. Zeno was from a village near Coropissos (Dağ Pazari); R. M. Harrison, *The Emperor Zeno's Real Name*, *BZ* 74 (1981), 27-28.

22. Zollt, op.cit. (n. 8), 110-112, pl. 36/287.

23. A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines de Constantinople (IVe-Xe siècle)* (BIFAI, XVII), Paris 1963, 76-80, pl. XXVI-XXXIII. N. Firatlı, *La sculpture byzantine figurée au Musée Archéologique d'Istanbul* (Catalogue révisé et présenté par C. Metzger, A. Pralong et J.-P. Sodini) (BIFAI, XXX), Paris 1990, 142-148, cat. 281-294, pl. 87-91. U. Peschlow, *Zum Tempel in Konstantinopel*, *Αρχμός. Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Κ. Μουτσόπουλο*, Thessalonica 1991, 1449-1475 (the last two publications

with relevant bibliography).

24. Inv. n. 4191. Grabar, op.cit., 77-80, pl. XXX.1-4. Firatlı, op.cit., 147-148, cat. 294a. Peschlow, op.cit., 1474, cat. 12.

25. H. Tezcan, *Topkapı Sarayı ve çevresinin Bizans devri arkeolojisi*, Istanbul 1989, 353-354, fig. 507.

26. F. Guidobaldi - C. Barsanti - A. Guiglia Guidobaldi, *San Clemente. La scultura del VI secolo*, Rome 1992, 97-98 cat. 2e, 108 cat. 20i, figs. 138 and 175.

27. Hild - Hellenkemper, op.cit. (n. 2), 436-437.

28. Theophylaktos Simokattes, *Historiae* 109, 311, (ed. C. de Boor, revised by P. Wirth), Stuttgart 1972.

29. *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Hastings 1924, vol. 4, “Tarsus”, cols. 686-689 (W.M. Ramsay).

30. *RE* IV A2, 1932, “Tarsos”, cols. 2413-2439 (W. Ruge). *ODB*, III, “Tarsos”, 2013 (C. Foss).

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. Μεταξύ των ευρημάτων περιλαμβάνονται κιονόκρανα, πεσσοί και κίονες, τα περισσότερα από μάρμαρο Προκοννήσου.

Ένας ενδιαφέρων πεσσός φράγματος πρεσβυτερίου, με προσεκτικής εκτέλεσης και υψηλής ποιότητας διά-

κοσμο (Εικ. 1), παρουσιάζει μεγάλες ομοιότητες με κωνσταντινουπολικά έργα του πρώιμου 6ου αιώνα. Κορινθιακά κιονόκρανα (Εικ. 2-6), προερχόμενα από την Κωνσταντινούπολη, χρησιμοποιούνταν μαζί με άλλα, των οποίων η επεξεργασία ολοκληρωνόταν σε τοπικά εργαστήρια. Η παρουσία προϊόντων της Προκοννήσου κατά τον 5ο και τον 6ο αιώνα σε μία τόσο μακρινή επαρχία της αυτοκρατορίας μαρτυρεί για μία ακόμη φορά τη μεγάλη διάδοση κωνσταντινουπολικών προτύπων και προϊόντων κατά την παλαιοχριστιανική περίοδο.